



MONDAY, 23 AUGUST 2021
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32°C/26°C

INFLATION RISES TO 2.2% IN JULY
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Cloud seeding boosts rains by 18% in Oman

Our Correspondent
 Muscat

Cloud seeding has enhanced rainfall in Oman with an average increase of about 18 per cent in summer rains.

Oman's cloud seeding efforts have seen the installation of 12 stations on mountaintops in the Eastern and Western Hajar range, as well as in Dhofar governorate. In addition, a monitoring system comprising a total of 634 rain gauges have been installed in areas located within the project impact zone.

Cloud seeding is one of several initiatives of the government in support of the sultanate's goal to ensure sustainable fresh water supply and availability by 2030.

"The government has paid great attention to efforts of rain enhancement to support its underground water reserves. It was one of the solutions that received direct guidance from the Late His Majesty Sultan Qaboos bin Said to increase rainfall and groundwater level," said an official of the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Water Resources.

He explained that the sultanate has made concerted efforts for solutions and alternatives to confront drought. It has developed a strategic master plan for the management and development of water resources. These efforts include enacting laws and legislation, building dams of various kinds,

12 cloud seeding stations have been installed on mountaintops of the Eastern and Western Hajar range, as well as Dhofar

implementing programmes to evaluate and monitor water resources, and exploring alternatives such as desalination of seawater and wastewater treatment.

"Oman started its rain enhancement project in 2013 using emitter stations, which produce and spread negatively charged ions. These ions are transported by dust particles and rising air to the clouds to stimulate precipitation. For these stations to operate efficiently, certain climatic conditions - such as high humidity and rising air currents - are required," the ministry official said.

Of the 12 stations, ten are located atop mountains in the Eastern and Western Hajar range and two on mountains in Dhofar.

"Detailed and in-depth scientific research and statistics confirm the success of the ionisation technology in rain enhancement. This technology has proved successful in the sultanate in enhancing rainfall over the past years during summers when 15 to 18 per cent more rain was received."

Rainfall data is collected in various ways, including rain gauges that are installed around the rain enhancement stations in the governorates of the sultanate.

According to the ministry official, the cloud seeding stations are located atop mountains making access to these a challenging task. "A helicopter is required to reach half of these

sites. To get to the others, one needs to drive along difficult mountainous roads and hike over long distances," the official said.

The installation of rain enhancement stations at any site is done based on studies and data available on suitable climatic conditions such as high relative humidity, wind movement, appropriate altitude, and

the density of clouds in the area. "Studies are ongoing across all governorates to find suitable locations for installation of additional rain enhancement stations based on environmental, climatic and topographical factors," the ministry official said.



(For illustrative purpose)

Youth make up major part of private sector workforce

Our Correspondent
 Muscat

In ongoing Omanisation efforts, unlike a decade ago when young jobseekers preferred government jobs to private sector positions, current statistics indicate a change in the trend. Omani youth now constitute a significant part of the private sector workforce.

According to National Centre for Statistics and Information (NCSI) data for 2020, there were 549,969 Omani youth in the age group of 18 to 29 years, which was 20.1 per cent of the Omani population of 2,731,456.

NCSI has stated that the total number of employed youth in the sultanate in the 18 to 29 age group was 178,600 (79 per cent males and 21 per cent females), constituting 24 per cent of the total Omani working population in 2020.

Of the 178,600, close to 78,000 worked in private sector companies, 79,600 for the government and the remaining in other sectors.

According to the 2020 data,

the number of young Omani business owners in the 18 to 29 age group was 26,189, representing 17.7 per cent of the total Omani business owners in the sultanate. Of these, 77.7 per cent were males.

Additionally, among the Omani youth working in the public sector, 60.8 per cent held General Education Diplomas, 13.7 per cent had Bachelor's or higher degrees, 7.6 per cent with higher diplomas, and 17.9 per cent without General Education Diplomas.

In the private sector, construction businesses attracted the most number of youth - 23.5 per cent. It was followed by wholesale and retail trade of vehicles and motorcycles (14.5 per cent), manufacturing sector (12.8 per cent) and mining and quarrying (9.3 per cent). Financial and insurance activities had the least takers.

The largest number of young business owners in 2020 were concentrated in Muscat governorate (4,730), followed by Dhofar (4,570) and North Batinah (4,415).

Gender equality: Opportunities for women a work in progress

Our Correspondent
 Muscat

A study on female opportunities and achievements around the world has found that the sultanate scores high in the category of Women in Entrepreneurship (92.52/100 points), and Female Access to Education (89 points).

Overall, however, Oman is ranked poorly at 94 out of 100 countries in the Female Opportunity Index 2021, a study on female opportunities and achievements.

Commissioned by Germany-

based Digital Bank N26, the study aims at shining a light on gender equality in business, government and society. The research looks to uncover the many existing inequalities between men and women in the workplace and beyond.

It also highlights the incredible achievements of women in both professional and personal fields in a difficult and tumultuous year as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic.

The data shows levels of advancement in equality and career opportunities for women in 100

countries around the world, focusing on political and corporate leadership, gender wage gap, legal support, maternity leave and more.

Oman scores high in the Female Access to Education category, achieving 41st rank. The sultanate also gets a high score in Women in the Academic Disciplines of Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics (88.2).

The sultanate is however ranked 98th for Total Women in Government with a score of 57.03, 87th for Women in Man-

Oman scores high in the category of Women in Entrepreneurship (92.52/100 points), and Female Access to Education (89)

agement (78.9 points), and 92 for Salary Level and Gender Wage Gap (75.3 points).

Norway is the highest ranking



(For illustrative purpose)

country in the index, scoring highly on political representation, corporate leadership and women's legislation. Finland and

Iceland rank second and third.

Rwanda has the most women in government positions, followed by Spain and Finland. Al-

most half of the countries (46 per cent) in the index have had at least one female head of government in the last 50 years.

Sweden has the most women in top management positions, while the USA has the most female entrepreneurs, and Japan has the highest female access to education score.

"There are still many more obstacles for women who want to achieve the level of financial success that men take for granted," commented Adrienne Gormley, COO of N26, on the findings of the index.

In recognition of Omani talent

Industry leaders who have nominated their champions...

 AL BUSTAN PALACE A RITZ-CARLTON HOTEL	 ANANTARA AL JASAL AL AKHDAR RESORT	 هوليداي إن Holiday Inn MUSCAT AL 1000	 CROWNE PLAZA AL SHIB HOTEL MUSCAT	 Kempinski Hotel Muscat SULTANATE OF OMAN
 NOVOTEL HOTELS & RESORTS	 INTERCONTINENTAL MUSCAT	 Alila AL JASAL AL AKHDAR	 W MUSCAT	 CROWNE PLAZA AL SHIB HOTEL MUSCAT OMAN CONVENTION & EXHIBITION CENTRE

The second edition of this national competition is open to all Omanis working in the hospitality sector.

'Hospitality Champions 2021' will celebrate and reward those individuals who excel in varied roles in this field.

They are not just a shining example to new entrants to the industry but also a testament to the fulfilling career path the hospitality sector offers.



Dhahirah to get desalinated water from Sohar by year end

Our Correspondent
Muscat

An ambitious project of supplying potable water from Sohar to Dhahirah governorate over a 230km pipeline is nearing completion and will start trial operations by the end of the year.

The Oman Water and Wastewater Services Company (OWWSC) stated that the water transmission project is 81 per cent complete. The project will see potable water produced at Sohar's seawater desalination complex on the coast being supplied to consumers in Dhahirah - an area currently dependent on groundwater for its needs.

Ibrahim bin Hamad al Hasani, project manager, said that in meeting its drinking water needs, the governorate is supplied with water from the Al Masarrat basin.

"These underground sources have begun to be affected as a result of the population growth and the accelerated commercial and industrial activities in the region," he said.

He added that implementation of the project has faced great challenges as the pipeline passes through difficult geographical terrain, ranging from mountains, difficult slopes and wadis, as well as intersections with other pipelines, including oil



There is a need to conserve underground water sources, which will be done by this pipeline project. The underground water will be used for supply only in cases of emergency

IBRAHIM AL HASANI

and gas.

"In addition, the pandemic exacerbated the challenges resulting in delay of procurement of materials and equipment needed for the project."

Hasani said that OWWSC,

through the project, seeks to bring desalinated water to Dhahirah and reduce dependence on groundwater that is itself dependent on rainfall.

"There is a need to conserve underground water sources,

which will be done by this pipeline project. The underground water will be used for supply only in cases of emergency."

Apart from the 230km supply line, the project entails construc-

tion of 15 reservoirs with a storage capacity of 451,000m³ in Sohar, Ibri and Dhank, and construction of four pumping stations with a maximum capacity of 144,000m³/day.

The project also includes an additional pipeline that will run parallel to the current water line from Sohar to Buraimi governorate.

"This line will be used to meet the future water needs of Buraimi governorate by linking the two water transmission systems," Hasani said.

GCC states and Jordan hold meeting on public health

Muscat - The Ministry of Health (MoH) on Sunday participated in the third coordination meeting of the GCC countries and Jordan in the field of public health.

The virtual meeting aimed at following up the implementation of the recommendations agreed upon in the previous meetings of the specialised working groups.

During the meeting, a joint work plan was presented by the General Secretariat. Moreover, the meeting stressed on strengthening cooperation and partnership among the GCC, and the active countries and regional and international organisations to complete the implementation of joint action plans.

The joint committee of senior officials in the Ministries of Foreign Affairs between the GCC and Jordan recommended at the beginning of this year to extend the main work plan between the Gulf and Jordanian sides, and to update the detailed work plan, in addition to extending the main action plan approved previously by the Ministers of Foreign Affairs for a period of

The work teams will assign liaison officers from Jordan and the GCC and promote joint work among business sector representatives

five years till the end of 2025. The joint committee further recommended communicating through diplomatic channels to hold meetings for specialised work teams in the near future.

It was also agreed that the specialised work teams would update each detailed work plans as well as the mechanisms considering developments in their field of work, according to specific programmes and periods, focusing on achieving tangible outputs.

The work teams should assign liaison officers from Jordan and the Secretariat General of the Gulf Cooperation Council and promote joint work among the business sector representatives.

Municipality completes road project in Al Shuwaiyye village



Mudhaibi - North Sharqiyah Municipality has completed the design and paving of an internal road in Al Shuwaiyye village in the governorate.

The 10km road connects neighbouring villages in the wilayat of Mudhaibi to Al Shuwaiyye.

Eng Nasser bin Khamis al Hasani, director general of North Sharqiyah Municipality, said the road project is about 31km away from the centre of the wilayat of Mudhaibi.

"It comes within the framework of the municipality's keenness to fulfil the needs of the

villages by providing the necessary services and development projects."

Eng Hasani added that the project included paving an internal road with asphalt with a total length of 10km, constructing roadside rails of 2,747m, speed breakers at intersections, and the

installation of traffic signals.

"As the road connects places of residence, the project will serve the residents of the village and the neighbouring ones greatly. In the absence of a proper road, they had been inconvenienced for long," Hasani said.

BMW Motorrad hits Muscat's roads

Muscat - Al Jenaibi International Automobiles (AJIA), the official importer of BMW Group vehicles in Oman, has announced the launch of its brand-new BMW Motorrad showroom. The new 128sqm showroom is located next to the BMW showroom in Qurm.

Sabah al Zadjali, brand manager of AJIA, said, "We are delighted to announce the opening of BMW Motorrad in Oman. With six new Motorrad models launching in line with the showroom opening, we are looking forward to showcasing these awesome machines to existing and new customers."

Introduced in 1923, BMW Motorrad, BMW's exclusive motorbike brand, has contributed to



BMW's long legacy in motor-sport worldwide - taking home victories at the Dakar Rally six times.

Today, BMW Motorrad continues to enjoy intense brand affinity among motorbike enthusiasts in the Middle East as it

continues to grow across the GCC. Each year, the brand pushes the boundaries and dares to be different, with persistent innovation driving the introduction of new machines.

"The launch contributes to the ever-growing motorbike com-

munity in Oman, providing residents with the opportunity to connect with the renowned brand for the very first time. Our customers are fans, not just of BMW Motorrad, but also of the motorbike lifestyle: fast-paced and on the go," Zadjali added.

"Through our selection of motorbike accessories and services at our brand-new showroom, we are ensuring a one-stop-shop for all our customers' needs."

In line with the easing of government restrictions, the dealership is ready to welcome customers every day from 8.30am till 7.30pm, and will continue to apply the highest level of care and hygiene measures following guidance received from official Omani authorities.



Oman LNG to fund Sur Hospital staff training

Muscat - Oman LNG Development Foundation signed an agreement with Oman Medical Speciality Board (OMSB) on Sunday to train medical staff at Sur Hospital in South Sharqiyah governorate.

As per the agreement, several specialised training courses will be provided for employees of the hospital.

The courses will be provided remotely via video communica-

tion through the OMSB's Medical Simulation & Innovation Centre's Tebyan platform, while actual training will be held in person at the centre in order to develop the skills of trainees, a statement said.

The agreement was signed by Dr Hilal Ali al Sabti, executive president, OMSB, and Dr Amer bin Nasser al Matani, CEO of Oman LNG Development Foundation.

385 new COVID-19 cases, 11 deaths

Our Correspondent
Muscat

The Ministry of Health (MoH) on Sunday reported 385 new cases of COVID-19 and 11 people succumbing to the infection in the last three days.

"The total number of cases registered in the sultanate has now reached 301,299, including 4,031 deaths," MoH said.

"The total number of inpatients is now 183 including, 89 in intensive care units, while the total number of recoveries is 290,144, accounting for a recovery rate of 96.3 per cent."

INDIAN EXPATS CELEBRATE RAKSHA BANDHAN



The COVID-19 pandemic did not dampen the spirits of Indian expats who celebrated the festival of Raksha Bandhan on Sunday. On this day, sisters of all ages tie a thread, called a rakhi, around the wrist of their brothers, symbolically protecting them and receiving a gift in return. Srinivas and his friend Venkat travelled to Ruwi from Al Khoudh to buy rakhis, but had to wait for hours at Haridas Nensey as it was closed for lunch. Before the pandemic, a friend used to bring rakhis from India, Srinivas informed, and added that this year he and friends decided to buy the rakhis and tie these themselves on their wrists and share selfies with their sisters in India (Syed Fasiuddin/ Muscat Daily)

MoE conducts training to Omanise early education

Our Correspondent
Muscat

A specialised training programme implemented by the Ministry of Education (MoE), represented by the Specialised Institute for Vocational Training for Teachers, kicked off on Sunday. To run till February 3, 2022, more than 100 Bachelor of Education graduates will be trained through the programme.

It will enrol trainee teachers for kindergarten, pre-school and early education students in public schools within the framework of the National Employment Initiative.

The implementation of this specialised training programme is the result of His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik's keen interest to prepare Omani youth for employment, and his constant affirmation that they are the wealth of the nation and its resources.

This is also part of MoE's efforts to upskill citizens to profes-



(Supplied photo)

sional levels and prepare them for work and to replace non-Omani cadres, especially in the

teaching profession. 'Statistics of the past academic year - 2020/2021 - indi-

cate that there were 1,040 non-Omani female teachers and a shortage of qualified Omani

teaching competencies, while there is an increasing number of students registered for pre-pri-

mary education,' an MoE statement said.

'It is expected that 73,000 male and female students will enrol in Grade 1 in the academic year 2021/2022.'

The specialised training programme for graduates of Bachelor of Education to teach

In the second phase, training will be decentralised following which the educational directorates of the governorates will appoint the trainees as teachers.

The training programme aims to provide the graduates with effective teaching strategies for the classroom situation, as well

Statistics of the past academic year - 2020/2021 - indicate that there were 1,040 non-Omani female teachers and a shortage of qualified Omani teaching competencies

MOE STATEMENT

kindergarten, pre-school children and early education children will take place in two phases.

The first phase is a six-week training programme from August 22 to September 30. In the seventh week, training will be conducted remotely. In the eighth and ninth weeks, there will be field training in the appointed schools.

as to direct them to employ new platforms and educational tools.

It also aims to deepen the graduates' understanding of educational developments in the educational system, in addition to enabling them to apply assessment tools to provide them with professional self-development skills.

Effects of recent adverse weather in Sur reviewed



(Supplied photo)

Our Correspondent
Muscat

The Ministry of Housing and Urban Planning held a high-level joint coordination meeting on the impact of recent adverse weather in the wilayat of Sur, South Sharqiyah governorate, on Sunday.

The meeting reviewed the condition of the affected villages and their populations, the reasons for the floods, and how to avoid similar situations in the future.

The meeting was held in the presence of H E Eng Hamad bin Ali al Nazwani, Undersecretary for Housing in the Ministry of Housing and Urban Planning, H E Eng Ali bin Mohammed al Abri, Undersecretary in the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Water Resources, H E Dr Nasser

bin Rashid al Mawali, Undersecretary in the Ministry of Economy, H E Sheikh Rashid bin Ahmed al Shamsi, Undersecretary in the Ministry of Social Development, Dr Yahya bin Badr al Mawali, Governor of South Sharqiyah, Mohammed bin Ahmed al Barashdi, director general of budget in the Ministry of Finance, and a number of senior government officials.

The meeting discussed the effects of climatic conditions in the wilayat of Sur, proposed solutions for the damaged houses, appropriate measures to ensure the safety of the citizens affected by the Hajj Depression of July and future plans to avoid such situations.

During the meeting, a visual presentation was made jointly by the Ministry of Housing and Urban Planning and the Ministry

of Agriculture, Fisheries and Water Resources. Presented by Eng Issa bin Salem al Hajri, director of Urban Planning Department in the Directorate General of Housing in South Sharqiyah, it aimed to find sustainable solutions to protect citizens and the area from the dangers of inclement weather in the wilayat.

Hajri reviewed the affected villages - Sabakh, Al Batinah and Al Janah - by the depression and the extent of damage caused to the population of the area.

The Ministry of Housing and Urban Planning, a number of government authorities and charitable organisations had earlier conducted a field visit to the areas affected by the rains to assess the situation on the ground and listen to the inhabitants of the area.

H E Dr Rahma to preside over SQU graduation ceremony

Muscat - Assigned by His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik, Dr Rahma Ibrahim al Mahrooqi, Minister of Higher Education, Research and Innovation, will preside over the 31st batch graduation ceremony of Sultan Qaboos University (SQU), scheduled to take place at the end of September.



H E Dr Rahma al Mahrooqi

The two-day ceremony will be held for the first time ever via video-conferencing in a live stream from the grand hall of SQU's Cultural Centre. The total number of graduates this year are 2,956, comprising holders of Bachelor's, diploma and post-graduate degrees.

All other possible options for

the graduation ceremony were taken into consideration, closely following up on to indicators of the epidemiological situation to cope with directives of the COVID-19 Supreme Committee. This stems from the keenness of SQU administration to ensure the safety of all graduates.

ONA

DARSAIT BRIDGE OPENS FOR COMMUTERS



A long-awaited demand of Darsait residents has been met with the opening of a bridge over the wadi that often left people in the area cut off during rains. Muscat Municipality announced the opening of the bridge on Sunday. 'The project to construct a bridge with culverts over the wadi has been completed,' it stated. Following rains, the overflowing wadi inconvenienced residents and visitors to the area (Supplied photo)

Omran concludes interviews, evaluation stage of 'Midhyaf' programme

Muscat - Following the remarkable turnout witnessed by the 'Midhyaf' programme in its registration phase with 2,031 applicants, Oman Tourism Development Company (Omran Group), the executive arm of the sultanate for tourism development, has concluded the interviews and evaluation phase of the programme at Oman Convention and Exhibition Centre.

In the coming weeks, 300 people will be nominated for the final evaluation phase, and hence selecting 148 talents to join in the training programme

at Oman Tourism College (OTC) in early September, Omran said adding that upon completion of the training at OTC, participants will get the opportunity to commence on-the-job training in various hotels of the group.

As part of its efforts to provide professional training experiences following international standards to the participants of 'Midhyaf', OTC recently signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with British Butler Institute, and a training agreement with ZADK Culinary Academy,



(Supplied photo)

aiming to implement intensive training courses in specialised areas covered in the pro-

gramme. These include culinary, food & beverage, front office, hotel operations management,

accounting and procurement, sales and marketing, and house-keeping.

Hashil bin Obaid al Mahrouqi, CEO of Omran, said, "The extensive interest of Omani youth in joining the Midhyaf programme reflects their passion towards their future in the tourism and hospitality sector. During the coming period, we look forward to having all these passionate talents on-board, to be trained and developed comprehensively through a set of specialised courses at Oman College of Tourism in co-

operation with a number of prestigious international institutes in this field. The programme will work on enhancing the participants' practical and professional competencies and capabilities, along with providing them with an in-depth on-the-job training in different hotels of Omran."

The evaluation and interview phase witnessed significant interest, and applicants of various educational degrees, including General Education Diploma, university diplomas and Bachelor's degrees, showcased their

enthusiasm to participate in Midhyaf and compete for various hospitality jobs. The job interviews were conducted and organised by human resources teams at Omran and OTC, in the presence of the hotel managers of the participating hotels, under the supervision of the Ministry of Labour.

Midhyaf falls under the umbrella of the Oman Investment Authority's initiative that aims to create more than 4,800 jobs and training opportunities in its companies, in cooperation with the Ministry of Labour.

MARKET WATCH

MSX30	3,971.52
BSE Sensex	55,329.32

FOREX RATES
(RO1 equals)

Indian Rs	193.11
Pakistani Rs	426.72
Bangladeshi Taka	220.72
Philippine Peso	130.75
Sri Lankan Rs	517.43

*Rates as on August 22
Source: xe.com

BRIEFS

Toyota to cut Sept production by 40%

Toyota said it will cut global auto production by 40 per cent in September as the spread of coronavirus in Southeast Asia squeezes its supply chain.

It came after Japan's *Nikkei* daily reported that the global chip shortage was also behind Toyota's planned reduction in new vehicles.

The world's largest automaker announced suspensions in operations at multiple Japanese plants next month due to a 'parts shortage resulting from the spread of COVID-19 in Southeast Asia'.

"We plan to reduce our global production by some 40 per cent in September, from just under 900,000 originally planned," a Toyota spokeswoman told AFP.

The *Nikkei* said Toyota would also scale back production in North America, China and Europe from early September.

Microchips are essential for the electronics systems of modern cars, and have been in short supply since the end of last year.

Oman inflation rises to 2.2% in July

Our Correspondent
Muscat

Oman's inflation rate further increased in July as consumer prices rose after a surge in global prices of many commodities and the implementation of value-added tax (VAT) in April.

The sultanate's annual inflation rate, which is based on the consumer price index (CPI), increased to 2.2 per cent in July 2021 from 1.25 per cent recorded in the previous month, according to CPI data released by the National Centre for Statistics and Information (NCSI).

Consumer prices in July 2021 remained 0.75 per cent higher compared to June this year, the data showed.

A moderate increase in Oman's inflation rate was expected after the implementation



(Muscat Daily)

of VAT in April. Sharp price increases in transport group, non-alcoholic beverages and tobacco products largely contributed to the overall inflation growth in July.

The inflation rate in food and non-alcoholic beverages group, which has nearly 24 per cent weight in Oman's CPI, jumped to 1.18 per cent in July compared to the same month a year ago.

Consumer prices in food and non-alcoholic beverages group in July increased by 1.41 per cent compared to June, mainly due to a 6.6 per cent surge in prices of non-alcoholic beverages.

Within the food items, prices of fruits in July inched up 0.43 per cent year-on-year while vegetable prices decreased 0.77 per cent on year-on-year basis.

On the other hand, prices in the transport group jumped by 7.8 per cent in July compared to the same month a year ago. Furnishing, household equipment and household maintenance group also witnessed an year-on-year price increase of 1.32 per cent in July.

Prices in the group of housing, water, electricity, gas and other fuel items remained stable in July compared to the same month of 2020.

The sultanate's annual inflation averaged under 1 per cent over the six years to 2019 and was negative during the year 2020. The inflation rate returned to positive territory in April 2021

after remaining negative for more than a year.

The average inflation during the January-July period of 2021 stood at 0.48 per cent.

However, on the back of the 5 per cent VAT and rising commodities prices globally, Oman's average inflation rate is expected to rise above 3 per cent this year.

As per the International Monetary Fund's forecasts, Oman's annual average inflation is expected to rise to 3.8 per cent in 2021, mainly due to the implementation of VAT and increase in global prices.

Similarly, the World Bank in its latest economic outlook for Oman said the inflation is projected to pick up to 3 per cent in 2021, reflecting the recovery of domestic demand and the introduction of VAT.

AFDF board agrees to finance 12 projects

Muscat - The board of directors of the Agricultural and Fisheries Development Fund (AFDF) on Sunday held its second meeting of the year under the chairmanship of H E Dr Saud Hamoud al Habsi, Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Water Resources.

The meeting discussed the executive position of the funded projects and the AFDF's financial situation in the first half of 2021.

The AFDF board reviewed the new projects to be funded in 2021. The board agreed to fund 12 projects worth RO1mn, including five in agriculture and livestock sectors, six in fisheries



and one in food safety. These projects will contribute in generating income for the fund, in addition to developing and sustaining the related sectors. They will also support the food security system and create work opportunities.



UAE's Emirates Global Aluminium refinances \$5.5bn worth loan facility

Abu Dhabi, UAE - The UAE's Emirates Global Aluminium has successfully refinanced US\$5.5bn of its corporate debt, deleveraging and improving repayment terms to reduce costs and enable an optimal dividend policy in future years for shareholders.

The term loan facility reduces by US\$1bn the size of EGA's existing seven-year US\$6.5bn loan facility signed in 2019, as strong aluminium prices and EGA's operational performance drive liquidity at the company.

The new facility, which is a senior unsecured loan, reprofiles EGA's scheduled debt repayments and extends them by 2.5 years. The terms include a mechanism that delivers material reductions in the cost of debt to EGA as the company further strengthens its balance sheet and reduces leverage.

The transaction was well received by the market, and significantly oversubscribed by the 22 local, regional and international banks that participated in the deal.

Zouhir Regragui, EGA's chief financial officer, said, "2020 was a pivot year for EGA when, after delivering upon our upstream expansion strategy by completing our investments in bauxite and alumina, we have turned our focus to deleveraging to support EGA's ambitions to further strengthen our balance sheet and - if our shareholders wish it - become not only the UAE's largest non-oil industrial company but also one of this country's largest listed companies."

The institutions that acted as coordinators, bookrunners and mandated lead arrangers were Citi, Dubai Islamic Bank, Emirates NBD, First Abu Dhabi Bank, and Natixis. The other bookrunners and mandated lead arrangers were Abu Dhabi Commercial Bank, BNP Paribas, Export Development Canada, ING, Intesa Sanpaolo, MUFG, Societe Generale, and Standard Chartered.

Other banks that participated in the financing were Al Ahli Bank of Kuwait, Arab Petroleum Investments Corporation, Commercial Bank of Dubai, Kuwait Finance House, Mashreq Bank, National Bank of Kuwait, National Bank of Ras Al Khaimah, Sharjah Islamic Bank and State Bank of India.

First Abu Dhabi Bank acted as Global Agent and Conventional Facility Agent, and Dubai Islamic Bank acted as an Islamic Facility Agent for the transaction.

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RIGHTS ISSUE OF 789,473,685 SHARES AT A PRICE OF BAIZAS 95 PER SHARE

RIGHTS TRADING PERIOD	RIGHTS SUBSCRIPTION PERIOD
Opening Date: 5 September 2021	Opening Date: 7 September 2021
Closing Date: 12 September 2021	Closing Date: 16 September 2021

The contents of this advertisement are extracted from the unofficial translation of the Arabic Prospectus approved by the Capital Market Authority through Administrative Decision No. E/100/2021 Dated: 17 August 2021. Investors are advised to carefully review the Prospectus before deciding to subscribe to the shares offered.



Issuer	Bank Nizwa SAOG
Commercial Registration No.	1152876 (established on 15 August 2012).
Principal place of business	PO Box 1423, PC 133, Al Khuwair, Sultanate of Oman.
Bank's duration	Unlimited.
Authorized Share Capital	RO 300,000,000 (Three hundred million Omani Rials only) divided into 3,000,000,000 (Three billion) shares.
Issued Capital (pre-issue)	RO 150,000,000 (One hundred fifty million Omani Rials) divided into 1,500,000,000 (One billion five hundred million) shares.
Issued Capital (post-issue)	RO 225,000,000 (Rial Omani Two Hundred Twenty Five million) divided into 2,289,473,685 (Two billion Two Hundred Eighty Nine million Four Hundred Seventy Three thousand Six Hundred Eighty Five) shares after issuance of the Offer Shares (assuming full subscription).
Issue size	789,473,685 (Seven Hundred Eighty Nine million Four Hundred Seventy Three thousand Six Hundred Eighty Five) Shares offered at Baizas 95 per Offer Share, aggregating to RO 75,000,000 (Seventy Five Million Omani Rials).
Issue Price	Baizas 95 per Offer Share, consisting of issue price of Baizas 95 payable in full on submission of the Application Form, with the Issuer bearing all issue related expenses.
Purpose of the issue	The purpose of the Rights Issue is to increase the capital of the Bank by increasing its paid-up capital, so as to enable its business growth and capital adequacy compliance.
Rights Entitlement	Each Eligible Shareholder is entitled to participate in the Rights Issue pro rata based on their percentage shareholding in the Bank as on the Record Date, rounded down in the case of fractional entitlements (the "Rights Entitlement"). Accordingly, each Eligible Shareholder is entitled to approximately 52.63 Offer Shares for every 100 Shares held by them on the Record Date, duly rounded down, or to 1 Offer Share for approximately every 190 Shares held by them on the Record Date, duly rounded down.
Eligibility for Subscription	Subscription for the Rights Issue is open to Shareholders whose names appear in the Bank's shareholder register with the MCDG as on the Record Date. Persons who purchase the rights on the MSX within the Rights Trading Period are also eligible to subscribe for the Offer Shares before the Subscription Closing Date. The Rights representing ownership rights of Shareholders to subscribe to the Rights Issue may be traded on the MSX during the Rights Trading Period. A Shareholder has the option to either subscribe to the Rights Issue or sell its Rights Entitlement on the MSX. The eligibility to subscribe for Offer Shares shall lapse in case the Shareholder neither subscribes to the Rights Issue nor sells their rights on the MSX during the Rights Trading Period.
Application for Additional Shares	An Eligible Shareholder wishing to apply for Additional Shares shall complete the required details in the Application Form and submit it during the Subscription Period to the Collecting Bank together with the requisite subscription amount. A Shareholder who does not subscribe for their full Rights Entitlement during the Subscription Period or who sells their Rights Entitlement (either in part or in full) is not eligible to apply for Additional Shares. An Applicant that is not a Shareholder on the Record Date but that has acquired a Rights Entitlement is not eligible to apply for Additional Shares. The application and allotment of Additional Shares shall be subject to the terms and conditions stipulated in Chapter 14.
Record Date	29 August 2021
Start of Trading of Rights Entitlement	5 September 2021
End of Trading of Rights Entitlement	12 September 2021
Subscription Opening Date	7 September 2021
Subscription Closing Date	16 September 2021
Allotment	The Offer Shares shall be allotted against valid Application Forms, subject to the provisions of Chapter 14. The Offer Shares shall be allotted, and refunds will be made (if required) within 6 working days from the Subscription Closing Date, after obtaining CMA approval for allotment. The Applicant, after the announcement of the allotment, shall ensure that the allotted shares are appearing in its account with MCDG.
Refund of Application Money	Refund of application money, if any, shall be made to the Applicant's bank within 3 working days of the Allotment.
Listing	As the shares of the Bank are already listed on the MSX, the Offer Shares shall also be listed on the MSX.
Approvals for the Issue	• Board approval vide its resolution at its meeting on 28 January 2021 • CBO approval vide its letter no. IBD/BN/2021/199 dated 9 August 2021 • CMA approval vide its Administrative Decision E/100/2021 dated 17 August 2021
Issue Manager	Ubar Capital SAOC P.O. Box 1137, P.C. 111, CPO, Sultanate of Oman Tel: +968 24949010 Fax: +968 24949099 Email: ubar@ubarcapital.com
Legal Advisor to the Issue	Said Al Shahrly & Partners (SASLO) P.O. Box 1288, P.C. 112, Ruwi, Sultanate of Oman Tel: +968 24636 999 Fax: +968 24636 900 Email: mail@saslo.com
Statutory Auditor	KPMG P.O. Box 641, P.C. 112, Ruwi, Sultanate of Oman Tel: +968 24749 600 Fax: +968 24601570 Email: rpt@kpmg.com
Collecting Bank	Bank Nizwa SAOG P.O. Box 1423, P.C. 133, Al Khuwair, Sultanate of Oman Tel: +968 24645530 Fax: +968 24655570 Email: collectingbank@banknizwa.om

USE OF PROCEEDS

The purpose of the Rights Issue is to increase the capital of the Bank by increasing its paid-up capital, so as to enable its business growth and capital adequacy compliance.

OVERVIEW

The formation of Bank Nizwa came about with the CBO granting its initial approval to the licensing of the Bank as per issued letters dated 10 May 2011 and 29 January 2012 to Sheikh Saud bin Ali Al Khaili. Sheikh Saud and a further 92 other Omani individuals, companies and pension funds constitute the founder shareholders of the Bank.

The founder shareholders appointed a Founding Committee to represent them and to help manage the establishment of the Bank as a licensed Shari'a compliant commercial bank. The Founding Committee consisted of five individuals including the Chairman of the Founding Committee, Ahmed bin Saif Al Rawahi. The Founding Committee also liaises with the CBO during the formation of the IBRF.

The Bank under the supervision of the Founding Committee offered 40% of its capital of RO 150 million, RO 60 million to the public through Initial Public Offering in mid-2012. The IPO received an overwhelming response with IPO being oversubscribed manifold. Post-IPO the Bank commenced its operations in January 2013.

Bank Nizwa is Oman's first dedicated Islamic bank, with fully Shari'a compliant products and services.

The Bank holds an Islamic Banking License issued by the CBO, which enables the Bank to offer a comprehensive portfolio of Islamic banking services.

As a public joint stock company whose shares are listed and traded on the MSX, the Bank is also regulated by the CMA.

In addition, the Bank is required to conduct its operations in accordance with the Banking Law, the IBRF, and the Bank's policies and procedures.

For more information visit www.banknizwa.om.

BANK'S MAJOR SHAREHOLDERS AS OF 30 JUNE 2021

Name	Country of incorporation	Number of shares	%
Afag Financial Investment	Oman	324,564,930	21.64%
Al Ahli Employees' Pension Fund	Oman	138,398,078	9.23%
Al Ghadeer Investment	Oman	120,000,000	8.00%
Public Authority for Social Insurance	Oman	109,893,262	7.33%
Diwan of Royal Court Pension Fund	Oman	76,397,824	5.09%
Others		730,745,906	48.71%
Total		1,500,000,000	100.00%

HISTORICAL FINANCIAL STATEMENTS

The following information has been extracted from the audited financial statements of 2020 and 2019 and unaudited financial statement for six (6) months ending 30 June 2021. For full financial statements, please visit MSX website at www.msx.om or Bank's website at www.banknizwa.om.

BALANCE SHEET

In RO '000 and for the period ended	30 Jun 21	31 Dec 20	31 Dec 19
Assets			
Cash and balances with CBO	104,361	67,943	89,293
Due from banks and financial institutions	13,355	12,996	20,321
Sales & other receivables	228,798	208,909	210,558
Investments	117,007	116,194	82,727
Financing	831,743	779,249	618,465
Property, equity, intangibles, & other assets	26,166	20,968	12,500
Total assets	1,321,430	1,206,259	1,034,364
Liabilities			
Due to banks	74,601	91,833	66,825
Customer deposits	687,607	558,470	487,094
Equity of unrestricted investment accountholders	360,730	366,091	310,396
Share capital	150,000	150,000	150,000
Owner's Equity	164,166	159,688	147,907
Total liabilities	1,157,264	680,480	576,061
Total liabilities, equity of unrestricted investment accountholders, owner's equity	1,321,430	1,206,259	1,034,364
Book value per share (Baizas)	109	106	99

INCOME STATEMENT

In RO '000 and for the period ended	30 Jun 21	31 Dec 20	31 Dec 19
Sales and other receivables revenue	5,637	11,849	11,559
Interest and Financing Profits	23,043	38,999	33,396
Profit on Investments	2,337	3,904	2,424
Return on unrestricted investment accountholders	(3,583)	(7,603)	(7,504)
Profits paid on Wakala	(10,055)	(15,766)	(14,272)
Other income	5,012	7,871	7,415
Total revenue	22,391	39,254	33,018
Net impairment on financial assets	(5,202)	(6,700)	(2,595)
Operating expenses	(10,437)	(19,656)	(18,430)
Profit before tax	6,752	12,898	11,993
Tax expense	(703)	(1,831)	(1,814)
Net profit for the period	6,049	11,067	10,179
Earnings per share (Baizas)	4	7	7

UN-AUDITED RESULTS AS OF 30 JUNE 2021

The Bank's total assets grew by 25 per cent in 30 June 2021, reaching RO 1.32 billion, compared to RO 1.06 billion during the same period in 2020. Customer deposits went up by 25 per cent to reach RO 1.05 billion compared to RO 0.84 billion in 2020. Gross financing grew by 20 per cent, reaching RO 1.08 billion. The Bank's total revenue increased by 21 per cent, reaching RO 22.39 billion in June 2021 while operating expenses increased by only 15 per cent, driven by healthy activity across both our Wholesale and Retail businesses and dedicated cost management. This results from the successful execution of Bank's strategy 2025, which requires continued focus on growing the balance sheet in a controlled manner, diversifying revenue streams, controlling expenses, improving margins, enhancing its digital capabilities, and expanding products and client base.

RO '000	30 Jun 21	30 Jun 20	Growth %
Total assets	1,321,430	1,060,779	25%
Gross financing	1,081,802	898,273	20%
Customers' deposits	1,047,967	838,930	25%
Equity	164,166	154,137	7%
Total revenue	22,391	18,557	21%
Operating expenses	(10,437)	(9,038)	15%
Profit for the period	6,049	5,888	3%

DIVIDEND POLICY

The Bank's dividend policy complies with CBO and CMA guidelines. The Bank follows a conservative dividend policy and shall recommend the distribution of the dividends to the shareholders after due consideration of the regulatory guidelines, the future growth expectations, AGM approval and other factors. The historical dividend details of the Bank are given below:

For Year	Cash dividend	Stock dividend
2015	-	-
2016	-	-
2017	-	-
2018	-	-
2019	-	-
2020	0.00125	-

Source: MSX

PRICE JUSTIFICATION

AVERAGE SHARE PRICE

Period Ending 30 June 2021	Average Closing Price (RO)	Discount of Issue Price to Average Closing Price
1-month average closing price	0.097	21%
3-month average closing price	0.095	0.0%
6-month average closing price	0.096	10%
1-year average closing price	0.097	21%

Source: MSX, U Capital research

PEER COMPARISON

Banks	No. of Shares (RO Million)	M. Cap	EPS	BV	P/E	P/BV	ROE
Bank Muscat	3,574	1,508	0.048	0.569	8.77	0.74	8.5%
National Bank of Oman	1,626	325	0.014	0.259	14.57	0.77	5.3%
Bank Dhofar	2,996	378	0.010	0.181	12.80	0.70	5.5%
Sohar International	2,435	234	0.008	0.130	11.56	0.74	6.4%
Ahli Bank	1,950	214	0.004	0.161	8.03	0.68	5.8%
HSBC Oman	2,000	202	0.006	0.166	18.24	0.61	3.3%
Bank Nizwa	1,500	146	0.008	0.112	12.13	0.86	7.1%
Oman Arab Bank	1,669	311	0.015	0.221	12.19	0.84	6.9%

Note: Above calculations based on 30 June 2021

Based on the aforesaid factors and considering the Issue Price of Baizas 95 per share, the Bank believes that the Issue Price compares favorably with the peer average, and is at a discount to prevailing price of Baizas 98 per share and at a discount to the pre-issue one, three, six months and one-year average closing prices.

As of 31 July 2021, the market capitalization of the Bank is RO 147 million, and subject to full subscription of RO 75 million, the post-issue weighted average price is expected to be Baizas 97 per share approximately.

As of 5 July 2021

BOARD OF DIRECTORS

The Board comprises nine members, elected in the Annual General Meeting held on 28 March 2019. Details of the current Board members are as follows:

Name of Director	Category	Represents
Sheikh Khalid Abdullah Al Al Khaili	Non-Executive	Afag Financial Investment
Mr. Musabih Saif Musabih Al Murary	Non-Executive	Non-Representative
Sayid Amjad Mohammed Ahmed Al Busaidi	Non-Executive	Non-Representative
Mr. Hussain Yousef Dawood Al Shalwani	Non-Executive	Non-Representative
Sheikh Saif Hilal Nasser Al Mawali	Non-Executive	Non-Representative
Mr. Sami Yahya Hamed Al Dughaisli	Non-Executive	Civil Services Pension Fund
Mr. Ishaq Zayed Khalifa Al Mawali	Non-Executive	FAFI
Sheikh Majid Ali Majid Al Mamri	Non-Executive	Non-Representative
Mr. Afif Said Al Siyab*	Non-Executive	Non-Representative

*Mr. Afif Said Al Siyab has been elected on Board member on 28 March 2021. His term will end with rest of Board member by the next Annual General Assembly in 2022.

SUBSCRIPTION CONDITIONS & PROCEDURES

ELIGIBILITY FOR SUBSCRIPTION

The Rights Issue is open to all Eligible Shareholders and to each person who purchases all or part of the Rights Entitlement of an Eligible Shareholder.

Each Eligible Shareholder is entitled to approximately 52.63 Offer Shares for every 100 Shares held by them on the Record Date, duly rounded down, or to 1 Offer Share for approximately every 190 Shares held by them on the Record Date, duly rounded down.

The Rights Entitlement will be listed on the MSX and can be sold or purchased during the Rights Trading Period through the MSX.

RIGHTS SUBSCRIPTION PERIOD AND ISSUE PRICE

Issue opens on - 7 September 2021

Issue closes on - 16 September 2021

The Collecting Bank will reject any Application Form that reaches it after its official working hours on the Subscription Closing Date.

The Rights Entitlement, and any right to participate in the Rights Issue, will lapse if a valid application is not made during the Subscription Period. A failure to validly apply for Offer Shares during the Subscription Period will constitute a waiver of rights of participation in the Rights Issue.

Issue Price - Baizas 95 per Offer Share.

TRADING OF RIGHTS

The Rights Entitlement is tradable on the MSX in accordance with applicable laws/regulations of the CMA and the MSX. Such rights can be traded i.e. bought and sold during the Rights Trading Period. The purchaser of a Rights Entitlement shall contact and coordinate with the Issue Manager to collect the requisite Application Form, complete and submit the Application Form to the Collecting Bank, together with application money and required documents, in each case on or before the Subscription Closing Date in accordance with the terms contained in this Prospectus. An unexercised Rights Entitlement shall lapse at the end of the Subscription Period.

SUBSCRIPTION FOR ADDITIONAL SHARES

- Only Eligible Shareholders are eligible to apply for Additional Shares.
- An Eligible Shareholder who does not subscribe to their full Rights Entitlement or sells their Rights Entitlement (either partially or in full) is not eligible to apply for Additional Shares.
- A non-Shareholder as on Record Date who purchases a Rights Entitlement, is not eligible to apply for Additional Shares.
- Eligible Shareholders validly subscribing for their full entitlement of Offer Shares may apply for Additional Shares.
- Eligible Shareholders who wish to apply for Additional Shares should indicate this by writing the desired number of Additional Shares in their Application Form and making the required payment with submission of the Application Form to the Collecting Bank.
- The minimum Additional Shares that can be applied for is one Offer Share with the maximum up to a number such that the total application (including such Eligible Shareholder's Rights Entitlement, any Rights Entitlement purchased from another Eligible Shareholder, and Additional Shares) does not exceed the entire Rights Issue size.
- Additional Shares will be allotted simultaneously with the Offer Shares, subject to CMA approval.
- If the total Additional Shares applied for exceeds the under-subscription (before considering Additional Shares) in the Rights Issue, all eligible Applicants will be allotted Additional Shares on a pro-rata basis proportionate to the number of Additional Shares applied for, and the balance will be refunded.
- If the total Additional Shares applied by Applicants is less than the under-subscription (before considering Additional Shares) in the Rights Issue, all eligible Applicants will be allotted all of the Additional Shares applied for by them.
- If the Applicants do not subscribe for all of the Additional Shares within the specified period, then the Board of Directors shall offer such shares for subscription pursuant to the provisions of the Capital Market Law, or reduce the amount of the increase of the share capital to the level of the total received subscription amount, i.e. reduced by an amount equal to the value of the shares that have not been subscribed for, as per Article 140 of CML.

The decision of the Issue Manager, in consultation with the CMA, shall be final and binding in respect of the allotment of Offer Shares, including Additional Shares.

Note: Applicants should ensure that their post-rights issue shareholding is within the shareholding limits prescribed in the Bank's Articles of Association, Laws of Oman, and applicable regulatory requirements.

The following is a worked example using illustrative numbers to show the methodology for allocating Additional Shares:

Particulars	Shares
Rights Issue Offer	100,000,000
Subscription	90,000,000
Unsubscribed	10,000,000
Additional Shares applications received from Eligible Shareholders	15,000,000
Allotment of unsubscribed shares on pro-rata basis based on applications received from Additional Shares	10,000,000
Percentage allotment of Additional Shares (10,000,000/15,000,000=66.67%)	
Refund of amount to Shareholders applying for Additional Shares equivalent to	5,000,000

Based on this example, a person applying for 3,000 Additional Shares will be allotted 2,000 Shares.

SUBSCRIPTION ON BEHALF OF MINOR CHILDREN

- An individual of age less than 18 years as on the Record Date will be considered a minor.
- Only a father may subscribe on behalf of his minor child(ren).
- If a subscription is made on behalf of a minor by any person other than the minor's father, the person submitting the subscription shall be required to attach a valid Shari'a (Legal) Power of Attorney issued by the competent authorities authorizing him to deal in the funds of the minor through sale, purchase and investment.

MINIMUM AND MAXIMUM APPLICATION

The minimum application can be for one Share and the maximum application cannot exceed the Rights Issue size (including original Rights Entitlement, any Rights Entitlement purchased from another Eligible Shareholder, and Additional Shares).

PARTICULARS OF THE BANK ACCOUNT

- Each Applicant shall be required to furnish the particulars of their bank account (registered in the name of the Applicant). The Applicant shall not use the bank account number of any other person except in case of minor children only.
- If the bank account of the Applicant is registered with a bank other than the one receiving the Application Form, they shall be required to submit a document in evidence of correctness of the bank account particulars as provided for in the Application Form. This can be done by submitting any document from the Applicant's bank, which clearly shows the account number and name of the account holder (Applicant), such as an account statement issued by the bank or a letter / document issued by the Applicant's bank, containing the aforesaid information. The Applicant shall ensure that such evidence submitted is readable in a clear manner. The Applicant is not obliged to submit evidence of their bank account if they are subscribing through the bank wherein they maintain their account. In this case, the bank receiving the subscription shall verify and confirm the Applicant's account details in its specific system and procedure.
- The bank account provided in the Application Form would be used only for refunds.
- The Application Form containing the bank account number of a person other than the Applicant shall be rejected except with respect to applications made on behalf of minor children that contain the bank account particulars of their father.

DOCUMENTATION REQUIRED

- A copy of Applicant's Civil ID / Passport / Commercial Registration certificate, as applicable.
 - Submission of a document confirming correctness of the bank account details written in the Application Form, only if the application is made through a bank other than the one with whom the Applicant has their bank account.
 - A copy of a valid Power of Attorney duly endorsed by the competent legal authorities in the event the subscription is on behalf of another person.
 - In case of applications made by juristic persons (non-individuals), which are signed by a person in their capacity as an authorized signatory, a copy of adequate and valid documentation should be attached.
- MODE OF SUBSCRIPTION**
- The Collecting Bank has been instructed to only accept applications for subscriptions that comply with all the requirements as provided for in the Application Form and this Prospectus. It is the responsibility of the Applicant however, to ensure that the particulars and information contained in the Application Form are true, accurate and complete.
 - The Applicant shall be required, before submitting the Application Form, to peruse this Prospectus and read the conditions and procedures governing the subscription with care and importance.
 - Only the original Application Form (with pre-printed details) sent to Eligible Shareholders should be used. Photocopies of Application Forms will not be accepted. If any Eligible Shareholder does not receive the Application Form, such person must contact the Issue Manager sufficiently in advance of the Subscription Closing Date to obtain a duplicate Application Form duly stamped by the Issue Manager.
 - Those who validly purchase a Rights Entitlement in the MSX during the Rights Trading Period should contact the Issue Manager and submit a copy of their purchase invoice issued by their broker or statement of account issued by MCDG showing their holding of the Rights Entitlement. The Issue Manager will issue the Application Form to such Applicants. Only the Application Form issued by the Issue Manager should be used by such Applicants.
 - The Applicants are required to complete the Application Form for the subscription and furnish all their particulars including the shareholder number available with MCDG, civil number/passport number, and date of birth in case of minor children.
 - Applicants are required to sign the Application Form to confirm that the particulars and information contained therein are true, accurate and complete. In case of minor children, only the father or legal guardian may sign the Application Form, on behalf of his minor children.
 - The Applicant shall submit the Application Form to the Collecting Bank and make payment at the Issue Price for all Offer Shares (including any Additional Shares) that are the subject of such application. The Applicant shall make such application in accordance with this Prospectus and shall ensure that all documents in support of the information furnished (referred to above) are enclosed.
 - If any overseas investor or Shareholder wishes to subscribe to the Rights Issue, they must pay in the currency of the Sultanate of Oman, i.e., Omani Rial. Payment shall be made by cheque or bank transfer.
 - In case of payment of the value of the subscription by cheque, it shall be in favor of "Bank Nizwa Rights Issue".
 - In case of payment through bank transfer, the Applicant is responsible for ensuring the successful transfer of the subscription amount to the Collecting Bank within the subscription period and must attach a copy of the transfer acknowledgement copy to the Application Form. The transfers should be made to:

Bank Nizwa Rights Issue a/c

A/C No: 999-512-204903

Bank Nizwa SAOG

Swift Code: BNZWOMRX

AVAILABILITY OF DUPLICATE APPLICATION FORMS

Only the original Application Form (with pre-printed details) sent to Eligible Shareholders should be used. A photocopy of Application Forms will not be accepted. If any Eligible Shareholder does not receive the original Application Form, such person must contact the Issue Manager or the Collecting Bank sufficiently in advance of the Subscription Closing Date to obtain a duplicate Application Form. Applicants submitting a duplicate Application Form should not use the original Application Form, even if it is received/found subsequently. In case of violation of this requirement, both the Application Forms may be rejected.

COLLECTING BANK

Application Forms may only be submitted to the Collecting Bank - Bank Nizwa SAOG during its official working hours.

The Collecting Bank will only accept receipt of an Application Form if the Applicant has complied with the procedure and subject matter in line with the requirements as provided for in this Prospectus; hence, the Collecting Bank must instruct the Applicants to comply and fulfill all requirements stated in the Application Form and this Prospectus.

MSX falls 0.29% on weak activity

Our Correspondent
Muscat

The benchmark index of the Muscat Stock Exchange (MSX) fell by 0.29 per cent to close at 3,971.53 points on Sunday.

Trading activity deteriorated from the previous session as turnover declined 19.94 per cent to RO1.45mn and volumes fell 10.82 per cent to 7.22mn shares.

All the sectoral indices closed in red territory. Financial index fell 0.14 per cent, Industrial index declined 0.36 per cent and Services index fell 0.25 per cent. The MSX Shariah index closed up by 0.22 per cent at 595.15 points.

Market breadth remained negative as three companies closed up, while 15 companies closed down. The rest 23 traded stocks closed flat for the day.

The three gainers were Al Jazeera Services (2.53 per cent), Taageer Finance (1.25 per cent) and Renaissance Services

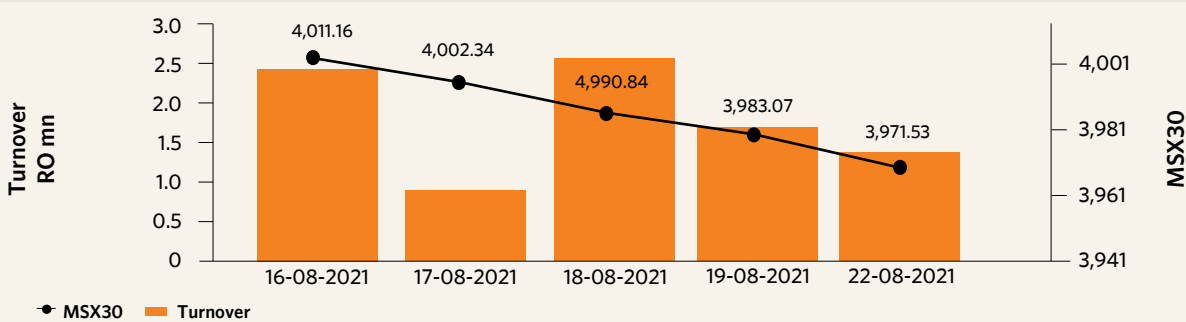


(0.45 per cent).

Top losers were Construction Materials Industries & Contracting Co (-3.33 per

cent), Oman Qatar Insurance (-3.23 per cent), Al Madina Investment (-3.08 per cent) and Phoenix Power (-2.17 per cent).

MSX INDEX AND TURNOVER OF FIVE TRADING DAYS



Lebanon fuel prices surge by 70% after new subsidy cut

Beirut, Lebanon - Lebanese fuel prices soared by up to 70 per cent on Sunday after yet another subsidy cut, official figures showed, heaping more pressure on people struggling to make ends meet in the cash-strapped country.

The cost of hydrocarbon fuels in Lebanon has now roughly tripled in the two months since the central bank started decreasing its support for imports.

The latest cut, which is expected to cause price hikes for other key commodities, comes as the Mediterranean country is mired in one of the world's worst economic crises since the 1850s.

Dire shortages have seen Lebanon's people struggle to find enough fuel to drive to work or power back-up generators during near round-the-clock electricity cuts.

Motorists have become caught up in long lines outside the petrol stations that have remained open.

The refusal of many petrol



Lebanese wait in a queue outside a petrol station in Beirut on Friday (AFP)

stations to sell what they do have saw the army deploy this month to seize hoarded fuel and distribute it to the needy.

Frustrations have boiled over in recent weeks, with scuffles repeatedly breaking out over scarce fuel, leaving at least three people dead.

The cost of 98 and 95 octane petrol rose on Sunday by 67 and 66 per cent, respectively, from August 11, according to prices posted by the National News Agency.

The cost of mazout, a widely

used petrol derivative, soared by 73 per cent over the same period. The price of a cooking gas canister shot up by more than 50 per cent.

All three types of fuel cost roughly three times what they did on June 23.

The central bank on Saturday agreed to support fuel imports at an exchange rate of 8,000 pounds to the dollar, up from a rate of 3,900 to the greenback set during a first de facto subsidy decrease in June.

AFP

Facebook unveils virtual reality 'workrooms' to collaborate better

Washington, US - Facebook unveiled technology for 'workrooms', allowing remote collaboration for people using its Oculus virtual reality gear.

The 'Horizon Workrooms' project allows users to switch back and forth from virtual reality to web conferencing to adapt to different situations.

'Workrooms is our flagship collaboration experience that lets people come together to work in the same virtual room, regardless of physical distance,' the company said in an Oculus blog post.

'It works across both virtual reality and the web and is designed to improve your team's ability to collaborate.'

This enables participants to join a meeting as an avatar in virtual reality or by video calling.

The announcement comes as



the social media giant moves to blend its hardware, gaming and virtual reality units to build an immersive digital world known as the 'metaverse', borrowing a term coined by sci-fi writer Neal Stephenson.

The project is seen as central to Facebook's future by chief executive Mark Zuckerberg, who is seeking to diversify the company beyond social networking and digital advertising.

It also comes with more people working remotely during the pandemic and companies seeking new ways to enable collaboration among scattered employees.

The Oculus division has largely been used for gaming but is gaining traction in other areas as virtual reality is adapted for tourism, remote work and other applications.

AFP

Amazon planning to launch more US brick-and-mortar stores: Report

New York, US - Aiming for a bigger presence in US brick-and-mortar retail, Amazon plans to open 'several' multipurpose shopping venues similar to department stores, *The Wall Street Journal* reported.

The stores will sell household items, electronics and apparel, showcasing Amazon's private-label merchandise, the newspaper said, citing people familiar with the matter.

Some of the first stores are expected in California and Ohio, according to the report.

An Amazon spokesperson said, "We do not comment on rumors and speculation."

The move would come on the heels of Amazon's 2017 acquisition of the Whole Foods Market grocery chain for US\$13.7bn, which significantly expanded the e-commerce giant's presence in



physical retail.

At around 30,000 square feet, the new shops would be far smaller than traditional department stores but bigger than most existing physical retailers in the company's network, which includes bookstores and smaller grocery shops.

Department stores were once prominent spaces in American

retail, showcasing not only high-end fashion but also items such as toys, furniture and appliances.

But like other brick-and-mortar shops, department stores have lost market share to online vendors, as well as big-box stores including Walmart and Target.

Chains such as JC Penney and Macy's have closed dozens of

outlets at US malls over the last few years, with the former company also shifting owners following a reorganisation overseen by a bankruptcy court. Without those big anchor stores, malls too have been in steady decline.

Analysts pointed to a number of strategic reasons for Amazon's planned expansion into physical retail, including the desire to boost sales in apparel, home furnishings and other product lines and a recognition that the 'future of retail is multi-channel' rather than primarily online, GlobalData Retail's Neil Saunders said in a note.

"The move by Amazon will be experimental at first," Saunders said. "However, if it gets rolled out in a serious way, it is very bad news for traditional department stores."

AFP

VW reins in production at main facility due to ongoing global chip shortage

Frankfurt, Germany - German car giant Volkswagen (VW) will slash production at its main plant due to ongoing problems with the global supply of computer chips, a spokesman told AFP.

Following the summer holidays for workers in Germany, work on the assembly line at the company's facility in Wolfsburg will be 'limited' and will have to 'adapt to the supply situation', the spokesman said.

From this week, cars will only be produced during the early shift at the factory, while the rest of production will be halted.

Shortages of semiconductors are set to continue, according to the carmaker.

The renewed scarcity is in part the result of 'outbreaks of COVID-19, particularly in Malaysia, which have led to factory closures for semiconductor producers', Volkswagen said.

However, the company said it hoped 'as far as possible' to make up the setbacks in production over the course of the second half of the year.



Earlier last week, the Volkswagen-owned car brand Audi also said that it would be delaying the resumption of production on some of its lines in Germany due to the 'volatile' supply situation.

Carmakers have been among those most acutely affected by the shortage of chips, key components in both electric and conventional vehicles.

On Thursday, Japanese company Toyota, the world's largest carmaker, announced that it would be reducing production in September by 40 per cent.

The decision was made in part due to a 'parts shortage resulting from the spread of COVID-19 in Southeast Asia', Toyota said.

Simultaneously, German chipmaker Infineon said it would

be increasing the cost of chips in light of difficulties along the supply chain.

"We have seen final production costs increase massively ourselves," Infineon CEO Reinhard Ploss told German business magazine *WirtschaftWoche* on Friday.

"Naturally, we have to pass these costs on," Ploss said.

AFP

Nord Stream 2 gas pipeline is nearing completion: Putin

Moscow, Russia - Russian President Vladimir Putin said that the construction of the Nord Stream 2 gas pipeline is nearing completion, and 15km of it remains to be laid by sea.

"Fifteen kilometers are still to be laid by sea, that's all. It can be said that [construction] is nearing completion," the Russian leader said at a press conference following talks in Moscow with German Chancellor Angela Merkel.

Putin noted that the route for transporting gas to Europe via Nord Stream 2 was 2,000km shorter than the transit route through Ukraine, and the project itself cut emissions five times during the transit of Russian gas to Europe.

"This is a modern, environmentally clean system, these are not just empty words," Putin said.

"Moreover, it is much cheaper than transit via the Ukrainian route," he added.

The talk that the construc-



Russian President Vladimir Putin

tion of Nord Stream 2 is a political process is 'a delusion or an attempt to mislead someone', President Putin stressed.

The Nord Stream 2 project envisages the completion of two gas pipelines with a total capacity of 55bn cubic metres per year from the coast of Russia across the Baltic Sea to Germany. Work on the project was suspended in December

2019 after Swiss Allseas abandoned pipe-laying operations due to the then-looming US sanctions. In December 2020, the construction of the gas pipeline was resumed after a year's pause.

In late July, it was reported that Nord Stream 2 was 99 per cent complete, and the pipe-laying barge *Fortuna* continued to work at the final section.

TASS

Sohar International receives best employer, safety at work awards

As a bank that focuses on the holistic wellbeing of its employees, Sohar International was recently awarded the 'Best Employer Brand Award' as well as the Award for 'Managing Health at Work' at the World HRD Congress - Oman Best Employer Brand Awards 2021 - a global body based out of India that has been recognising and highlighting exemplary branding, human resources, and leadership regionally.

Revered for recording superior levels of performance through all its operations, Sohar International believes investing in its staff and creating a conducive, positive and safe work environment is vital to its continued success.

The bank conducts ongoing training programmes and skill development workshops for its employees to ensure they remain proactive to any budding business needs and are well-equipped with the necessary competence to become leaders in their fields.

The bank also invests heavily in technology, systems and processes to enable most efficient utilisation and development of Omani talents especially focusing on local talents where the bank exceeds 90 per



cent Omanisation encompassing key strategic roles and upskilling the youth and the future of this nation.

"As an organisation that shares the national agenda of progress and prosperity, we take the welfare and development of our employees, our most precious assets, very seriously at all levels of our workforce. We are indeed delighted to receive such

coveted accolades that put us at par with international organisations. While this award is a testament to the commitment demonstrated by the bank, it also highlights the bank's corporate culture and its focus on leadership, health and safety standards, and employee welfare. Industry benchmarks and global recognitions like these are a testament to our efforts and various

strategic initiatives," said Ahmed al Musalmi, chief executive officer of Sohar International.

With the pandemic posing several changes to the traditional workplace norms, Sohar International ensured that the safety of its employees was not compromised. In accordance with the directives of the Supreme Committee and complimenting the extensive efforts of the esteemed government, the bank undertook an extensive vaccination drive to vaccinate all employees and extended this gesture to include their family members as well as strategic partners and customers.

To provide a seamless and safe vaccination experience, the adoption of the vaccination has been encouraged through comprehensive communication campaigns targeted at employees to raise awareness about the drive. Since the COVID-19 outbreak, Sohar International has implemented multiple layers of hygiene and safety measures to curb the spread of the virus. These include flexible working hours, remote working alternatives and the necessary support provided to employees in times of crisis.

"Sohar International is well-recognised for maintaining the

highest levels of excellence. To deliver such exceptional performance, we rely on a team of motivated employees who have the zeal to go the extra mile. We believe that passion promotes the spirit of excellence and therefore ensure that our employees receive the necessary support, encouragement, and recognition at the workplace so they remain dedicated. Since the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic, we have reflected our 'Human' personality staying committed to our staff by adopting precautionary measures within our premises to ensure their health and well-being becoming positive players in the overall socio-economic development and progress of the nation," Musalmi added.

Sohar International accords the highest value to acquiring the right people, providing them with an enabling and growth environment and retaining them by looking after their personal and self-actualisation needs. Striking the right balance between serving its customers and ensuring the welfare of its employees, Sohar International has earned its name as an institution that exhibits the highest levels of corporate excellence and ethical business practices.



Favourite summer moments at JW Marriott Muscat

Make the most of the remaining summer days and nights at JW Marriott Muscat. The five-star hotel is transforming traditional staycations with a range of curated experiences for the whole family to enjoy. Make a splash in one of three outdoor pools, choose from an array of nourishing cuisines, workout at the state-of-the-art fitness centre, and replenish at the Spa by JW, finishing the day in the sanctuary of a spacious room. Inspired by the hotel's 'Mindful and Present' philosophy and personalised service, every summer moment is to be savoured.

Giuseppe Ressa, general manager, said, "Summer is always a time for making memories and at JW Marriott Muscat, that is what we are all about. Our philosophy is simple and natural - we want to help our guests become the best versions of themselves; to leave feeling rested, restored,

and having spent quality time, whether coming with family or friends, or even for some well-deserved "me-time". Set in the heart of Muscat, there's no need to go far to enjoy the perfect summer break."

Sophisticated rooms and suites, world-class amenities and natural wadi views are enhanced by the JW's warm and anticipatory service that can be felt throughout the hotel. Unwind at Kitchen 7, where the talented chefs are creating the finest epicurean delights using hand-picked, fresh local ingredients, served in a comfortable and social setting. Stay late into the night enjoying the lively atmosphere at Butter Buns, where monster milkshakes, craft burgers and everyone's favourite appetisers ensure a signature sports-bar experience. Or simply stop by for a cozy coffee with friends at Bean & Gone.

Excellent response from customers for Meethaq's feature-rich credit cards

In line with the bank's vision 'To serve you better, everyday', Meethaq Islamic Banking from Bank Muscat invites everyone to take advantage of the numerous features and benefits of its credit cards. Meethaq is the leading Islamic financial services provider in Oman, operating based on the principles of Transparency, Trust and Partnership while ensuring the comfort of remaining true to Islamic values.

Currently Meethaq offers four different types of Sharia'a-compliant credit cards to its customers which include the Hafawa Visa Signature credit card, Titanium MasterCard credit card, Meethaq-Lulu co-branded credit card and the Standard MasterCard credit card. Customers can also avail up to five supplementary cards for each primary card they hold enabling supplementary card holders to enjoy the benefits



available to primary card holders.

For a limited period, Meethaq is offering a full waiver of the annual fees on both the primary and supplementary card for the first year to promote cash free digital transactions and to encourage customers, including their family members, to experience the benefits of its credit card offering.

Meethaq credit cards are based on the Sharia'a contracts of Ujrah and offers benefits which include wide acceptance across POS and ATM location

across the world, contactless payments, 24/7 customer service, One Time Pin (OTP) service for secure online transactions, SMS alerts for transactions and up to 52 days of payment grace period. Meethaq credit cards are an attractive payment solution for customers who seek banking products based on Islamic principles and at the same time seek convenience and flexibility in making day-to-day transactions at shopping malls, restaurants or at international destinations.

Additionally, Meethaq credit

cards also offers an Easy Payment Plan (EPP) which allows Meethaq customers to purchase a wide range of goods and services and make payments for the purchases over a period of 12 months conveniently with no additional costs, in accordance with Sharia'a principles.

Apart from its credit cards, Meethaq is also a pioneer in offering innovative digital banking products and services that are aligned to the best practices of Islamic banking and finance worldwide. Its robust Internet Banking and Mobile Banking platforms along with its extended reach of close to 800 Meethaq & Bank Muscat ATMs and CDMs across the sultanate makes daily financial transactions a breeze for Meethaq customers.

Notably, Meethaq has also debuted a new online account opening process for savings accounts.

IAA Mobility from Sept 7-12

The IAA Mobility 2021 will be held in Munich from Sept 7-12 and will thus be the first major international event in Germany since the easing of the lockdown restrictions.

On Sept 7 German Chancellor Dr Angela Merkel will open the IAA Mobility, where more than 1,000 exhibitors and speakers will present innovations and concepts for the future of mobility. With a state-of-the-art concept, the IAA Mobility will link the major players in mobility with the big names in high-tech. It will be the first event worldwide to offer visitors a comprehensive array of test drives with the new vehicle models. All the main events at the IAA Mobility will be streamed; the IAA Mobility APP will provide visitors with orientation and information at the show itself.

"The IAA Mobility 2021 in Munich will be the largest and most modern mobility event in the world and is a perfect fit at a time when Europe has set out to

be the world's first climate-neutral continent. Traffic plays a major role in this scenario," says Jürgen Mindel, managing director of the German Association of the Automotive Industry (VDA), organiser of the IAA Mobility.

"We are already uniting the sectors - automotive, digital, bicycle and urban planning - that will belong together in the future. We will present new concepts and invite visitors to debate on the right path to a climate-neutral future."

Christine von Breitenbuch, project manager for the IAA Mobility at Messe München, adds, "We are thrilled that the IAA Mobility is taking place in Munich. The city is a global magnet attracting visitors from Germany, Europe and the entire world to directly experience the things that will shape our daily life in the future. We have put together a great program for all trade visitors, automobile and bicycle enthusiasts, and families. The trip to Munich will be worth the ef-

fort - be sure to plan at least two days for the show."

The list of companies presenting innovations at the show includes Audi, BMW, Cupra, Dacia, Ford, Genesis, Great Wall with the brands ORA and WEY, Hyundai, Kia, Mercedes-Benz, Mircolino, Polestar, Porsche, Rinspeed, Renault, Smart, Trascos, Volkswagen and Xpeng Motors. The suppliers represented include Bosch, Brose, Continental, Faurecia, Hella, Hyundai MOBIS, Kirchhoff, Magna, Mahle, Michelin, Muba, Schaeffler, Samsung, Siemens, Valeo, Velodyne Lidar, Webasto and ZF.

Under the heading "What will move us next," the IAA Mobility will be using a new concept to present innovations in mobility, the path to a climate-neutral future, and advances in digitisation. The heading will be illustrated by numerous cooperative ventures between OEMs and high-tech companies. Visitors can expect an innovative live experience with public formats and forums.

Zubair Corporation celebrates graduation of 13 employees from Etimad

The Zubair Corporation recently celebrated the graduation of 13 employees, who successfully completed 'Etimad', the national programme for leadership development to empower Omani competencies in assuming middle and senior management positions within the private sector.

Etimad is one of the programmes stemming from the recommendations of the Labour Market and Employment Lab of the National Programme for Enhancing Economic Diversification, 'Tanfeedh'. The graduation was attended by Al Zubair Mohammad al Zubair, vice chairman of The Zubair Corporation, alongside the presence of several members of the corporation's senior management.

The graduation is aligned within the framework of The Zubair Corporation's commitment to develop Omani competencies and enable growth in the private sector.

Through its participation in



this programme, the corporation aims to prepare leaders within the second and first positions at The Zubair Corporation and its subsidiaries, in various disciplines, to ensure the availability of Omani nationals qualified for leadership positions.

This celebration follows the Ministry of Labour's recent virtual graduation ceremony that was organised for the first batch of the programme, with around

247 graduates participating from various private sector companies.

Through a set of programmes aimed at enhancing a diverse set of skills and different kinds of work, The Zubair Corporation seeks to empower Omani youth and train them in various professions to enhance their future careers. Through their participation in the 'Etimad' programme, supervised by the Ministry of

Labour, the corporation aims to empower national competencies and prepare them with the required leadership skills that qualify them to spearhead growth within the private sector.

The programme consists of three main themes, which are leadership from within, leadership by position, leadership through change and cooperation.

Commenting on the staff graduation, Zubair said, "The

corporation's participation in this programme is a part of its policy to support government initiatives that are aimed at developing and qualifying young Omani talents and enabling them to occupy middle and leadership positions across various group companies. Today, we are pleased to witness the graduation of this batch and are confident in the comprehensive training that they received over the course of the pro-

gramme. We believe it will enable them to implement a clearer vision for the future of business in the companies in which they work. We extend our warmest congratulations to the graduates and look forward to seeing their achievements."

On behalf of the graduates, Shaima al Raisi said, "We are proud to complete this qualitative programme aimed at building young Omani leaders. We

look forward to implementing what we have learned over the past few months within the companies we work in.

"On behalf of my colleagues, I would like to express my thanks and appreciation to the Ministry of Labour and the management of The Zubair Corporation for providing us with this opportunity to develop our skills and knowledge and skills, to benefit the daily performance of the group companies."

The Zubair Corporation had followed a series of procedures to nominate employees to join the programme.

The qualified employees were selected from the various companies of the Zubair Group and were subjected to a comprehensive evaluation according to the criteria of efficiency, productivity and job performance, in addition to the employee's readiness to assume leadership positions in the future along with other criteria.

Sporty new-generation crossover Changan CS35 Plus now available on low EMI

Changan CS35 Plus Trend, the sporty new-gen crossover equipped with state-of-the-art technologies is now available at EMI starting from RO120 for six years. Arabian Gulf Automobiles and Equipment, which is part of Bahwan International Group announced that the pricing includes five per cent Value Added Tax (VAT).

Energetic like the youth, Changan CS35 Plus is packed with a 1.4lt Turbo charged engine which produces 156 hp and 260 nm of torque and fitted with a seven-speed Dual Clutch Transmission (DCT) to always keep you ahead of the segment competition.

Offering an unparalleled driving experience, CS35 Plus possesses fashionable appearance, strong power and good entertaining features.

Developed by the global research and development team of Changan Automobile, it integrates all comprehensive functions: high-quality performance, comfortable driving experience, large internal space and abundant configurations of entertainments.

A spokesperson for AGAE said, "We are pleased to offer affordable EMI on Changan CS35 Trend which is energetic in style and sprightly in design.

"The CS35 Plus offers a robust look on the outside while the beautifully crafted interior gives a first-class feel inside. It is a youthful SUV for younger generation who are spirited, passionate, social and want to become the influencers of their time."

The CS35 Plus Limited vari-



ant (Top Grade) has amazing features including Adaptive Cruise Control, 360° Camera, electrically folding and adjustable ORVMs, 18" Alloy wheels, LED headlamps, Panoramic Sunroof, 3D designed LED Taillamps, Leather Seats, 10 inch touch info screen, automatic AC control, 6-way power adjustable driver seat.

With cutting edge technology and advanced features, the CS35 Plus will not only surprise you but also enhance your driving experience.

Its Blue Core Powertrain Technology based on the principles of power, clean and quiet provides owners a highly effi-

cient and energy saving performance.

High safety

Safety and security features include airbags, Hill Descent Control (HDC), Brake Assist, Electronic Stability Control (ESC), Electronic Parking Brake, and Anti-lock Braking System (ABS) with Electronic Brake-force Distribution (EBD). Other complementary equipment includes parking sensors, a reversing camera and speed-sensing door locks.

Vehicle specifications

CS35 Plus's vehicle specifica-

tions include length x width x height of 4335mm x 1825mm x 1660mm, 1.4lt Turbo GDl Turbocharged Gasoline Direct Injection engine, wheelbase of 2600mm, power of 156 HP, torque of 260 Nm and fuel tank capacity of 53 litres.

AGAE

Arabian Gulf Automobiles and Equipment LLC (AGAE), which is part of Bahwan International Group, recently announced a partnership with leading international automotive group Changan Automobile Co Ltd to bring its range of passenger vehicles to Oman including Changan CS35 Plus.

Muscat Bay signs pact to open integrated pharmacy

Muscat Bay, the leading destination as an integrated tourism complex in the sultanate signed an agreement with Sandiane International LLC to open its first pharmacy at Muscat Bay.

At an exclusive signing ceremony, Sheikh Hamood al Hosni, CEO, Muscat Bay, signed the agreement in the presence of senior management and officials from Sandiane to establish this new pharmacy in Muscat Bay premises. Aimed at serving its residents and those in the neighbouring areas, this will be the first Sandiane pharmacy in Oman. This launch is part of a set of essential services and facilities that are aimed at supporting the residents. The agreement was signed by Sheikh Hosni and Dr Ana Maria Serrano on behalf of Sandiane International LLC.

The pharmacy will provide its services not only to the residents of Muscat Bay but also to those in the surrounding areas. This is an important aspect and follows Muscat Bay's guiding principles to cater to the betterment of the wider community as well. The

pharmacy will be part of the Village Square, Muscat Bay's retail and recreational hub which is envisioned to offer lifestyle conveniences in every way.

Speaking on the occasion, Sheikh Hosni said, "At the heart of Muscat Bay is a thriving community and we are constantly seeking new ways to enhance this lifestyle experience, bringing every convenience closer. This pharmacy is a step in that direction. As we progress through the phased completion of each stage, adding on new amenities and facilities brings to fruition our completion strategy and we are delighted with the progress."

Abdullah al Nasiri, VP, Muscat Bay said, "We are excited with this partnership which is part of a set of integrated packages to provide the finest quality of services to the residents and to those in the surrounding areas. We also look forward to expanding the real estate services and products that we offer in order to exceed customer expectation. This is one of the many partnerships that are on the

anvil, all of which are aimed at bringing quality lifestyle services and conveniences to the Muscat Bay community."

Commenting on this partnership, Dr. Ana Maria Serrano on behalf of Sandiane International LLC said, "We are grateful to Muscat Bay for choosing us and we are happy to be part of this family. Sandiane International has a state-of-the-art specialised medical center for dermatology and cosmetology in Muscat, offering clinical and cosmetic dermatology solutions with experienced doctors and staff. Our pharmacy services at Muscat Bay is part of our healthcare services diversification and we look forward to serving the community in a meaningful way."

The construction at the Village Square, overlooking the parkland has been completed and the area will house restaurants, cafes, supermarket, gym and other facilities. Envisioned to be the heart of the community for both residents and visitors, the Village Square will soon witness the launch of these retail outlets.



Nama Group participates in 'Eidaad' programme

Based on the Group Sustainability Policy, Nama Group signed a cooperation memorandum with the Ministry of Higher Education, Research and Innovation (MoHERI) to participate in the Internship Program 'Eidaad'. Nama Group intends to achieve integration with development institutions in the sultanate to strengthen the national cadres' potentials and involve them in the sustainable development to meet Oman Vision 2040 objectives.

The CEO of Nama Group, Eng Omar al Wahaibi, signed the memorandum on behalf of the group with H E Dr Rahma al Mahrouqi, Minister of Higher Education, Research and Innovation, as part of the inauguration ceremony of the training program between the industrial and academic sectors.

The event was held in the ministry's conference hall with the presence of leading companies officials and representatives from public and private universities and colleges in the sultanate.

The signing ceremony targets to achieve the national programme objectives in its second version, which aims to harmonise higher education programmes and graduates with the labour market requirements, provide the students with key skills and improve their experience at the work environment for one full academic year.

The programme also aims to provide the students with new and appropriate knowledge and skills to support them in bridging the gap between their capabilities and business sectors requirements. Nama Group will provide 46 on-the-job training



opportunities within a ten-month training plan to improve the trainees' talents and preparing them for the labor market.

Regarding the group's contributions to the national cadres development, Eng Omar al Wahaibi, CEO of Nama Group, said, "We are firmly on track in implementing the group's Sustainability Policy and giving priority to the In-Country Value. Our participation in this programme is an extension of several projects and programmes, aiming at empowering the Omani youth in the electricity sector, through the following:

1. Achieving Omanisation in the group companies and their contractors.
2. Presenting training programmes to students and graduates and preparing them for the labour market.
3. Supporting the youth in establishing and managing SMEs.

"Through such agreements, we are looking forward to build-

ing effective partnerships with government and private institutions to enhance and contribute to the National Economy."

Nama Group believes in the potentials of the local human resources and developed internal and external programmes.

The Omanisation percentage of the group reached more than 95 per cent in the electricity sector and the Omanisation in the executive leadership achieved 100 per cent. The 'Ruwad' programme, a dedicated training for emerging leaders, contributed significantly to supporting the middle and senior leadership.

Also, the group launched another training programme to achieve Omanisation with the contractors, in cooperation with the Ministry of Labour and the Authority for Public Services Regulation.

The training plan was to Omanise 800 positions in 2021. The group also launched 'Nagla' programme, which aims to sup-

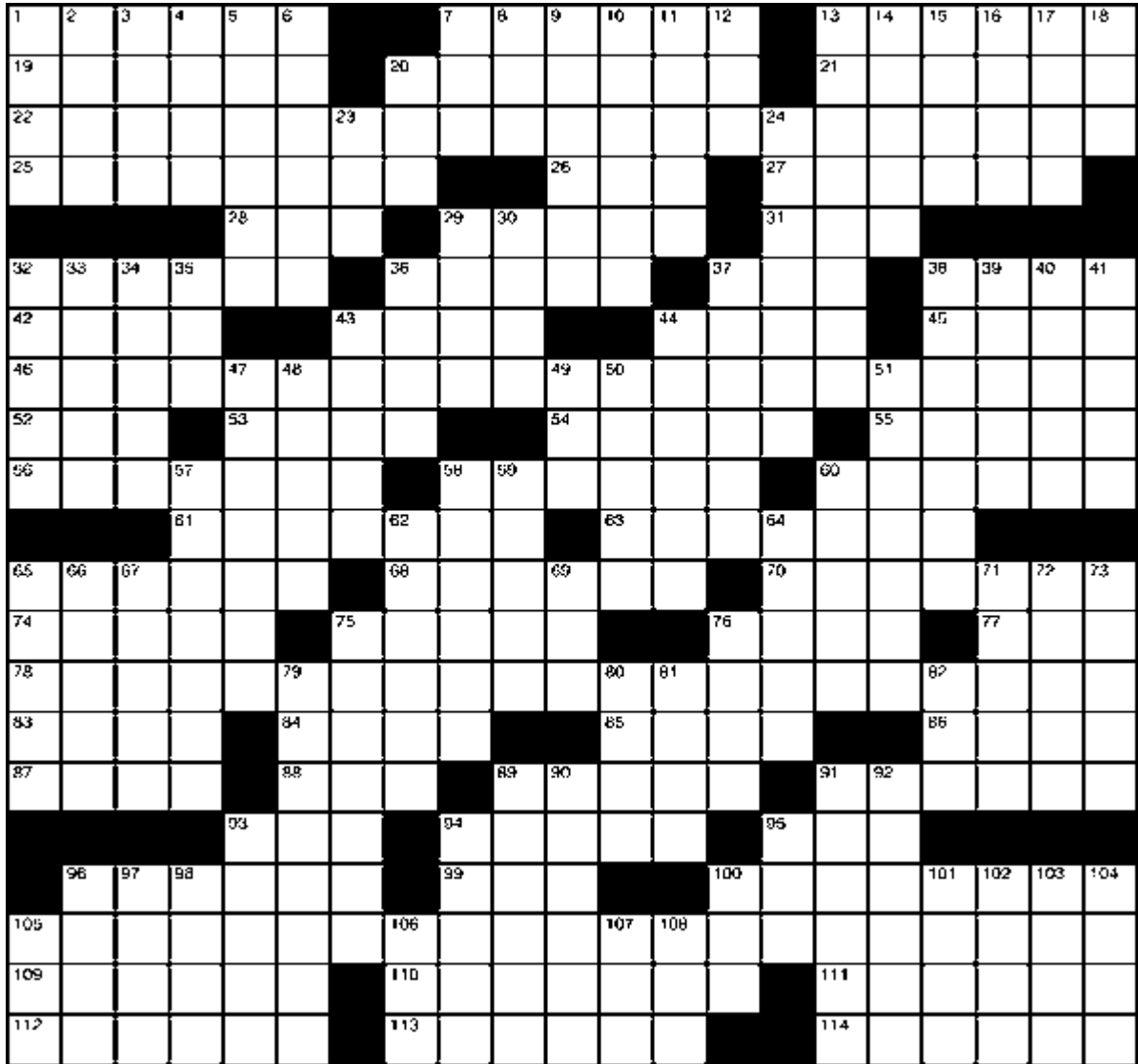
port electrical engineering graduates to obtain the electrical license to work in the electricity sector. So far, around 250 graduates out of 625 have been trained in a 5-year plan.

The licence supports the job seekers to obtain positions in several sectors, such as the oil sector, in addition to the electricity sector. It also helps them to establish their own businesses in terms of empowering small and medium enterprises.

The group also sponsored the "Injaz Oman" programme for several years, which contributed to train hundreds of participants through different stages to establish 93 student companies. The aim of the programme was to promote a culture of integrated sustainability and encourage students to know more about the labor market while developing their companies.

In the environment area, Nama Group trained 600 university and college students from the Architecture Engineering field, school students, and jobseekers in the National Electricity Conservation Campaign, entitled 'Tadoom'. Participants were trained on modern design programmes related to eco-friendly homes. In addition, 95 male and female students from 24 universities and colleges in the sultanate were trained in the Green Innovation Eco-Thon initiative. The programme's objectives also included spreading awareness of preserving the environment and promoting a culture of sustainability. The Green Innovation Eco-Thon initiative focused on various subjects like waste management and the use of renewable energy."

DAILY CROSSWORD



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YOUR DAILY HOROSCOPE



ARIES MARCH 21-APRIL 19

Your involvement in an evolving tradition or routine is necessary. You have an opinion about where the current culture is headed, and you have a right to help alter that course if it is not to your liking. This is a great time to get active in a cause that matters to you. If you can't give your time, then consider giving some of your money. Standing up for what you believe in can make you feel better.



LEO JULY 23-AUGUST 22

Quick reasoning will help you keep a bright and sunny outlook today -- and you will be in total control of every move you make. Plus, you will help other people out of some particularly sour pickles. In the end, you'll be the recipient of many glowing compliments. What appears to be an impossible situation will be a simple puzzle for you -- one that you can solve in seconds.



SAGITTARIUS NOVEMBER 22-DECEMBER 21

Is there something you have been noticing about yourself that you want to improve? It is admirable to want to rid yourself of bad habits, and best of all, it is always an attainable goal. The key is perseverance! Start turning over that new leaf, but do not put too much pressure on yourself to achieve perfection. Give yourself plenty of space to stumble along the way.



TAURUS APRIL 20-MAY 20

While you might not have clairvoyant powers, today you will have a knack for predicting the future. Friends will want to know which risk is safe to take, which person is most interested -- even which stock to buy. You don't have to divulge the fact that you're no psychic and cannot tell the future if you don't want to. Amaze them with your powers.



VIRGO AUGUST 23-SEPTEMBER 22

In romantic situations, it is best to take things slowly. Easy does it! You might want to rush down the aisle -- or at least rush ahead to take things to a more serious level -- but you really can't. Now is not the time to focus on the future. Now is the time to just enjoy where the two of you are in terms of your relationship. It is what it is, not what you want it to become.



CAPRICORN DECEMBER 22-JANUARY 19

It takes a lot of time to learn something new, so don't be impatient with yourself. Each time you uncover a new aspect of your current challenge, you will also uncover a new obstacle. This is disheartening, but it is also very normal. Just keep going and keep learning! It will all start to gel soon. Do not compare your progress to the progress of someone else.



GEMINI MAY 21-JUNE 21

You are ready for seriously bold action! It's time to step up and make the grand gestures you know you can make. If you have been beating around the bush with someone you have growing feelings for, today is the day to bite the bullet and confess your true emotions. It's now or never. If you have been contemplating a travel adventure, today is the day to book the tickets.



LIBRA SEPTEMBER 23-OCTOBER 22

Today will be another breezy day with plenty of fresh air and sunshine to enjoy. You need to be out in wide-open spaces to open your mind. This will in turn allow new ideas, new people and even a few new adventures to enter your life. If you spend more time with less conventional people, you'll be giving your mind the stimulation it needs. So say 'hello' to the folks you meet.



AQUARIUS JANUARY 20-FEBRUARY 18

Friends can be more than partners for good times and giggles -- they can be the greatest teachers you will ever meet in your life. But to learn their lessons, you have to listen without getting defensive. Remember that when someone you trust offers you some honest advice today. Upon hearing what they have to say, don't get defensive and tell them to mind their own business.



CANCER JUNE 22-JULY 22

If you are feeling a bit blue, put yourself in the service of someone else. Reaching out to help solve the problems of other people will help take your mind off of your own problems. Everyone has their own cross in life to bear, and no one gets the luxury of selecting it. Get a new perspective on someone else's cross, and you might find yourself grateful for the one you've been given.



SCORPIO OCTOBER 23-NOVEMBER 21

A person from your past might be holding you back from enjoying your present -- or rather, the memories of this person are keeping you from moving forward. Are you stuck in the past? Yes, it's important to understand how old relationships or old choices can affect you today, but you could run the risk of getting stuck in nostalgia.



PISCES FEBRUARY 19-MARCH 20

Jump right in to an intimidating situation today -- and prove to yourself that you can do whatever you decide to do. You should immediately take control -- don't worry, no one around you is going to mind. In fact, a lot of people are curious to hear what you have to say. They have been talking about you and are quite eager to see what you can accomplish.



TEST YOUR KNOWLEDGE

1. Which state Government of India has instituted the Samman Award?

- a. Uttar Pradesh
- b. Himachal Pradesh
- c. Madhya Pradesh
- d. Andhra Pradesh

2. Sharad Joshi Samman is awarded for

- a. Cartoon
- b. Satire and essay
- c. Trade Union Activity
- d. Social Service

3. In 1901, Nobel Prize was not given for

- a. Chemistry
- b. Physics
- c. Economics
- d. Peace

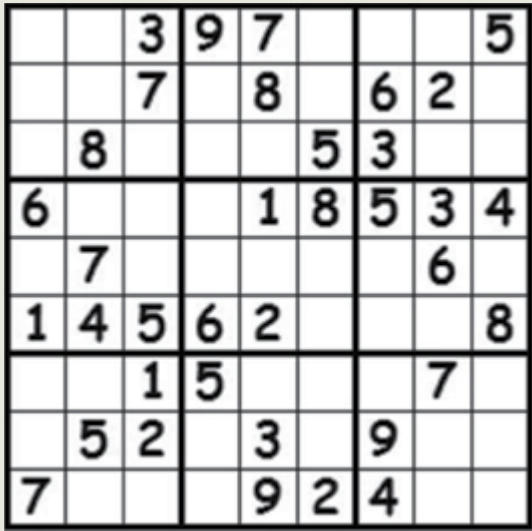
Answers: 1. c, 2. b, 3. c

KIDS COLOURING



DO YOU SUDOKU?

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



BOGGLER



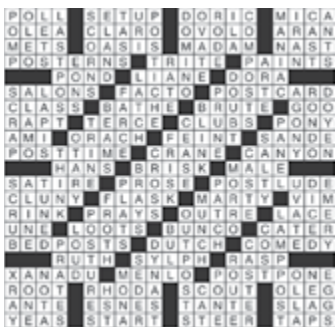
Each game will present you with a matrix filled with letters. The objective is to form words by linking adjacent letters - to the left, right, on top, bottom, or diagonal to each other. The Boggles Classic game uses a 4 x 4 matrix. Words are valued at one point for each letter in excess of two letters.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

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

SUDOKU EASY ANSWER



DAILY CROSSWORD ANSWERS (AUGUST 22)



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



Israel strikes Gaza after border clashes injure dozens

Gaza City, Palestinian Territories - Israeli warplanes bombed Gaza on Saturday after clashes between its troops and Palestinian protesters left dozens injured, including an Israeli border policeman and a 13 year old Palestinian boy who were both critically wounded.

The Israeli military said it carried out air strikes against four weapons sites and that it had reinforced its Gaza division with additional troops.

The escalation came exactly three months since Israel and the enclave's Islamist rulers Hamas reached a truce following their deadliest fighting in years.

Israeli troops fired at Palestinian protesters who gathered near the Gaza border wall, the army and Palestinian witnesses said.

A Palestinian gunman fired at Israeli troops through an opening in the wall and crowds of young protesters hurled explosives over the barrier and tried to scale it.

The Hamas-run Gaza health ministry said the injured included a 13 year old boy left in a critical condition after being hit in the head.

"Forty-one civilians were wounded with various injuries," the ministry said in a statement, with Hamas saying 'thousands' of protesters had taken part.

The Israel Border Police said a 21 year old sniper in its undercover unit was critically wounded when he was shot by a Palestinian protester.

"His condition is critical and there is a risk to his life," it said of the wounded officer.

Hamas called for protest

Israeli police commissioner Kobi Shabtai in a statement vowed the force would 'continue to act firmly and with all our might against those who want to harm us'.

Defence Minister Benny Gantz had warned that 'these



Explosions light-up the night sky above buildings in Gaza City as Israeli forces shell the Palestinian enclave, early on Sunday (AFP)

Forty-one civilians were wounded including a 13 year old boy who has been left in a critical condition after being hit in the head

GAZA HEALTH MINISTRY

are definitely extremely serious events that will have a response'.

Shortly after his comments, the Israeli Air Force said on Twitter that its 'fighter jets struck four weapons manufacturing and storage sites belonging to the Hamas organisation'.

There were no immediate reports of any casualties from the strikes.

Hamas had called a protest on Saturday to mark the burning 52 years ago of Jerusalem's Al-Aqsa Mosque.

"Al-Aqsa Mosque is a red line, and any attack on it will be met with valiant resistance from our people," the movement said in a statement.

Late Saturday, Hamas and other groups in Gaza issued a joint statement in which they 'saluted the heroic youth' who clashed with Israeli forces.

The violence is some of the worst since the May 21 ceasefire came into force.

Over 11 days in May, Israel pounded Gaza with air strikes

in response to rockets fired from the enclave.

Gaza reconstruction

Hamas said it took action after Israeli security forces stormed Al-Aqsa in May.

Reconstruction in Gaza has stalled since the ceasefire, in part because of a crippling blockade Israel has maintained on the enclave since Hamas seized power in 2007.

On Thursday, Israel announced it would allow funds from Qatar to reach impoverished Palestinians in Gaza. Other restrictions remain.

The ceasefire Egypt brokered between Hamas and Israel has largely held, although there have been flare-ups.

On Monday Israel said its 'Iron Dome' missile defence system intercepted a rocket fired by militants in Gaza into Israel, the first time since the recent battle.

That came after four Palestinians were killed in the Jenin refugee camp in the occupied West Bank.

In 2018, Gazans began a protest movement demanding an end to Israel's blockade and a right for Palestinians to return to lands they fled after the Jewish state was founded.

The Hamas-backed weekly demonstrations, often violent, sputtered as Israel killed some 350 Palestinians in Gaza over more than a year.

AFP



This file photo shows supporters of Ennahdha's Islamist Party shouting slogans against Tunisian President Kais Saied, in Tunis on July 26 (AFP)

Tunisian President takeover sparks fears for freedoms

Tunis, Tunisia - Concern is mounting over freedoms in Tunisia as President Kais Saied presses ahead with a 'purge' that has seen politicians, judges and businessmen arrested or banned from travel, activists say.

On July 25, Saied sacked the government and suspended parliament for one month citing powers he says were granted by the constitution, but he has yet to reveal a 'roadmap' for his decisions despite repeated demands by political parties.

Saied's shock move has sparked uncertainties for Tunisia, where the Arab Spring began a decade ago, setting in motion pro-democracy revolts across the region that unseated autocratic leaders.

Tunisia, hailed as a rare democratic success story in the Middle East and North Africa, is mired in a political crisis compounded by dire economic woes and the COVID-19 pandemic.

Several politicians, businessmen and judges, as well as members of parliament - who lost their immunity after Saied suspended the legislature - have said they were banned from travelling abroad or put under house arrest without prior warning.

Their claims have sparked a chorus of condemnation, with critics denouncing 'arbitrary' and 'unjustified' measures.

But Saied offered a stiff response to his critics during a re-

cent visit to the Tunis-Carthage International Airport.

"The freedom to travel is a constitutional right which I promise to guarantee," he said.

"But some people will have to answer to the judicial authorities before being able to travel".

'Constitution violated'

Saied insists that his actions are guaranteed by Article 80 of the constitution, which stipulates that the head of state can take 'exceptional measures' in case of an 'imminent danger' to national security.

Constitutional law professor Salsabil Klibi believes the terms of the controversial article 'are more dangerous for rights and freedoms than a state of emergency'. "It implies the suspension of rights and freedoms and other guarantees linked to them," she said.

Sana Ben Achour, a professor specialising in public law, was among many Saied critics who had accused the President of staging a 'coup'.

The President's measures 'violate the constitution', she said.

"He holds power and, as far as he is concerned, he is the only one capable of interpreting the constitution," she said.

By doing so, he is effectively holding all power in his hands, Ben Achour said.

AFP

Turkish army bombardment kills 2 civilians in Iraq

Arbil, Iraq - Two civilians were killed on Sunday in Iraq's northern Kurdistan region by a Turkish army bombardment as forces battled the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK) rebels, local officials said.

Turkey regularly targets northwest Iraq in operations against the PKK, which Ankara considers a terrorist organisation.

The Kurdish separatists have waged a decades-long insurgency against Turkey, and maintain bases in the rugged mountains across the border in Iraq.

The latest violence comes six days before a regional summit in Baghdad.

The Iraqi civilians were killed in Iraq's Zakho district, an area bordering Turkey, said local mayor Farhad Mahmoud.

"They had gone to an area where it is advised not to go," Mahmoud said, adding that they were not from the area, but had been visiting from the city of Mosul. "They were caught in a Turkish bombing and died."

PKK fighters said clashes were ongoing on Sunday.

Turkey has installed around

a dozen military bases over the past 25 years in Iraq's autonomous Kurdish region, and it launched a new cross-border offensive in April against the PKK, consisting of both aerial and ground attacks.

Residents of dozens of villages in the area have fled the conflict.

On Tuesday, eight people died in a Turkish airstrike in northern Iraq's Sinjar region.

Repeated Turkish raids have stoked tensions with Baghdad, but President Recep Tayyip Erdogan has warned that his country will 'deal with' the PKK presence if Iraq is unable to do so.

On Wednesday, Iraq's national security council condemned 'unilateral military actions' and rejected 'the use of Iraqi land for settling scores', but did not specifically mention of Turkey.

Ankara is one of Baghdad's key trading partners, and Erdogan has been invited to this week's regional summit in Baghdad. But it is not known if Erdogan will attend, or if Turkish operations in Iraq will be discussed.

AFP

Hurricane Henri bears down on US east coast

New York, US - Hurricane Henri was on course to make landfall on the US east coast on Sunday, with millions in New England and New York's Long Island preparing for flash flooding, violent winds and power outages.

A swath of the northeastern coastline, including New York City, was under alert late Saturday as storm Henri was upgraded to what could be the first hurricane to hit New England in 30 years.

The US National Hurricane Center said in its 5am (1700 GMT) advisory that Henri was approaching eastern Long Island and southern New England, and 128km southeast of Montauk Point in New York state.

Forecasters warned of heavy rainfall and the risk of surging seas as the storm churned in the Atlantic, packing maximum sustained winds near 120km per hour.

Nasty weather that preceded Henri forced New York City to halt a star-studded Central Park concert billed as a "homecoming" for a metropolis hard hit by the pandemic.

The approaching hurricane had prompted New York Governor Andrew Cuomo to announce a state of emergency and the deployment of 500 National Guard soldiers in anticipation of response efforts.

"It's as serious as a heart attack," he warned.

He said the storm was ex-



A US Army National Guard Soldier takes a phone call as he stands next to high-water rescue trucks before the arrival of Hurricane Henri in East Lyme, New London, Connecticut on Saturday (AFP)

pected to make landfall on Long Island, home to the plush Hamptons villages where wealthy New Yorkers retreat in summer, around noon (1600 GMT) on Sunday.

"It will be about a 26-hour event," Cuomo added, telling New Yorkers to expect 'significant power outages' and 'significant flooding' in some suburbs of the Big Apple.

Henri was anticipated to miss New York City by miles, but could still cause tropical storm conditions.

Some of that weather rolled in during the concert in Central Park, where an announcer cut off pop legend Barry Manilow mid-

song to urge revelers to proceed swiftly but calmly to the nearest exit.

"I guess for safety it makes sense. I mean I can hear the thunder," said attendee Maria Fuentes.

'Begin storm preparations'

The NHC warned of 'a dangerous storm surge, hurricane conditions and flooding' in areas of southern New England and Long Island.

The National Weather Service said late Saturday Henri was expected to remain a Category 1 hurricane at landfall.

Henri is expected to produce

three to six inches of rain across the region, with isolated maximum totals near 10 inches, the NHC warned.

The heavy rainfall 'may result in considerable flash, urban, and small stream flooding' as well as river flooding, it added.

Officials in New England - which includes Connecticut, Maine, Massachusetts, New Hampshire, Rhode Island and Vermont - have warned people to get ready.

"All residents are advised to begin storm preparations and to pay close attention to local weather," the office of Massachusetts Governor Charlie Baker said on Friday.

His state, which will close parks and beaches from Saturday to Monday, was bracing for the high winds to knock out electricity for up to 300,000 people, the governor's office said.

If Henri stays on its current course and maintains strength, it would be the first hurricane to directly hit New England in 30 years.

"The last hurricane to make landfall onto New England was Hurricane Bob in 1991," Dennis Feltgen, an NHC spokesman, told AFP. That storm killed at least 17 people.

It has been almost a decade since such severe weather threatened the region.

'The last time we had hurricane watches issued for the area was for Hurricane Irene, back in late August of 2011,' tweeted the National Weather Service in New York City.

The last hurricane to make landfall in Long Island was Gloria in 1985.

New York beaches were ordered closed for swimming on Sunday and Monday as officials warned of high winds and possible storm surges, as well as flash flooding on roads.

The warnings have reignited memories of Hurricane Sandy, a more powerful storm that knocked out power for much of Manhattan and flooded subways in 2012.

AFP

TALIBAN TAKEOVER

Taliban blame US for airport chaos as Afghans face ‘impossible’ race to flee

Kabul, Afghanistan - The Taliban on Sunday blamed the United States for the chaotic evacuation of tens of thousands of Afghans and foreigners from the capital, one week after the group returned to power in a rapid victory that stunned the world.

The United States has warned of security threats and the European Union admitted it was ‘impossible’ to evacuate everyone at risk from the Taliban, who have vowed a softer version of their brutal rule from 1996-2001.

But terrified Afghans continue to try to flee, deepening a tragedy at Kabul airport where the United States and its allies have been unable to cope with the huge numbers of people trying to get on evacuation flights. “America, with all its power and facilities... has failed to bring order to the airport. There is peace and calm all over the country, but there is chaos only at Kabul airport,” Taliban official Amir Khan Mutaqi said.

Britain’s Defence Ministry said on Sunday seven people had died in the crowds, without giving further details.

A journalist, who was among a group of fleeing media workers and academics fortunate enough to reach the airport on Sunday, described desperate



US Marines calm infants during an evacuation at Hamid Karzai International Airport, in Kabul on Friday (AFP)

scenes of people surrounding their bus on the way in.

“They were showing us their passports and shouting ‘take us with you... please take us with you’,” the journalist told AFP.

“The Taliban fighter in the truck ahead of us had to shoot in the air to make them go

away,” the journalist added.

During the distress of evacuation, an Afghan woman went into labour on a US Air Force flight and gave birth to a baby girl in the plane’s cargo bay moments after landing at a base in Germany, the Air Mobility Command tweeted.

‘Impossible’ deadline

The United States, which has thousands of troops trying to secure the airport, has set a deadline to complete the evacuations by August 31.

But there are up to 15,000 Americans and 50,000 to

60,000 Afghan allies who need to be evacuated, according to the Biden administration.

Countless others fear repression under the Taliban and are also trying to flee.

US President Joe Biden has described the evacuation operations as ‘one of the largest,

most difficult airlifts in history’.

The situation was further complicated on Saturday when the US government warned its citizens to stay away from the airport because of ‘security threats’. No specific reason was given, but a White House official later said Biden had been briefed on security threats, including from the Islamic State group.

EU foreign policy chief Josep Borrell gave a bleak assessment of whether the airlift would succeed. “They want to evacuate 60,000 people between now and the end of this month. It’s mathematically impossible,” he told AFP.

Borrell added that ‘we have complained’ to the Americans that their airport security was overly strict and hampering attempts by Afghans who worked for the Europeans to enter.

On Saturday, the Pentagon said 17,000 people had been taken out since the operation began on August 14, including 2,500 Americans.

Thousands more have left on other foreign military flights.

Taliban government

The Taliban meanwhile have been focusing on forming a government.

The group’s co-founder Mullah Abdul Ghani Baradar flew

into Kabul and planned to meet radical leaders, elders and politicians in the coming days, an official told AFP.

Among them are leaders of the Haqqani network, a US-designated terrorist organisation with million-dollar bounties on its leadership.

The Taliban’s comeback has ended two decades of war, after fighters faced virtually no opposition from government forces that had been trained and equipped by the US-led alliance.

However, there have since been flickers of resistance with some ex-government troops gathering in the Panjshir Valley, north of Kabul, long known as an anti-Taliban bastion.

One of the leaders of the movement, named the National Resistance Front, is the son of famed anti-Taliban commander Ahmad Shah Massoud.

The NRF is prepared for a ‘long-term conflict’ but is also still seeking to negotiate with the Taliban about an inclusive government, its spokesman Ali Maisam Nazary told AFP in an interview.

“The conditions for a peace deal with the Taliban is decentralisation, a system that ensures social justice, equality, rights, and freedom for all.” AFP

Afghan resistance movement ready for conflict but prefers negotiations

Kabul, Afghanistan - Former Afghan government forces forming a resistance movement in a fortified valley are preparing for ‘long-term conflict’, but are also seeking to negotiate with the Taliban, their spokesman told AFP in an interview.

Since the Taliban took control of the country following a lightning charge into the capital Kabul, thousands of people have made their way to Panjshir to both join the fight and find a safe haven to continue their lives, Ali Maisam Nazary said.

There, Ahmad Massoud, the son of legendary Mujahideen commander Ahmad Shah Massoud who was assassinated by Al-Qaeda two days before the September 11, 2001 attacks, has assembled a fighting force of around 9,000 people, Nazary added.



Afghan security forces patrol on a humvee vehicle at Parakh area in Bazarak, Panjshir province on Friday (AFP)

Pictures taken by AFP during training exercises show dozens of recruits performing fitness routines, and a handful of armoured humvees driving across the valley northeast of Kabul.

The National Resistance Front’s main goal is to avoid further bloodshed in Afghanistan and press for a new system of

government.

But Nazary said the group is also prepared for conflict, and if the Taliban do not negotiate they will face resistance across the country.

“The conditions for a peace deal with the Taliban is decentralisation - a system that ensures social justice, equality, rights, and freedom for all,” said

Nazary, the NRF’s head of foreign relations, adding if the Taliban do not agree there will be ‘long-term conflict’.

Talks between local leaders from Afghanistan’s north and authorities in Pakistan were taking place until just days ago, he added.

While the Taliban control the vast majority of Afghanistan, Nazary optimistically highlighted reports that local militias in some districts have already begun resisting their hardline rule and have formed links with Massoud’s NRF.

The aim right now is to defend Panjshir and its people, Nazary said.

“If there is any aggression because our fight is only for defence; if anyone attacks us we will defend ourselves.”

AFP

Seven civilians die in chaos near Kabul airport, says UK

London, UK - Britain said Sunday that seven Afghans have died in the chaos near Kabul airport as the British Defence Secretary expressed support for extending Washington’s end-of-the-month deadline to permit the evacuation of so many people.

The US and its allies have been struggling to cope with the thousands of foreign nationals and Afghans trying to flee Afghanistan in the week since the Taliban retook power.

“Our sincere thoughts are with the families of the seven Afghan civilians who have sadly died in crowds in Kabul,” a Defence Ministry spokesman said without giving the circumstances.

Britain’s Sky News had on Saturday aired footage of at least three dead bodies covered in white tarpaulins outside the



Demonstrators, including former interpreters for the British Army in Afghanistan, protest in London, UK (AFP)

airport.

Sky reporter Stuart Ramsay, who was at the airport, said that people at the front of one part of the crowd were being ‘crushed’, while others were ‘dehydrated and terrified’.

The Defence Ministry spokesman said, “Conditions on the ground remain extremely challenging but we are doing everything we can to manage the situation as safely and securely as possible.”

The ministry said separately that the UK had now evacuated nearly 4,000 people from Afghanistan since August 13.

“If the US timetable remains, we have no time to lose to get the majority of the people waiting out,” Defence Secretary Ben Wallace wrote in the *Mail* on Sunday. “Perhaps the Americans will be permitted to stay longer, and they will have our complete support if they do.”

AFP

‘Please let us on the bus’: Heartbreak on Kabul airport convoy

Kabul, Afghanistan - Afghans aboard a convoy of buses that was given a Taliban escort to Kabul’s airport spoke on Sunday of the heartbreak of driving past huge crowds desperate to join them.

Tens of thousands of people are gathered around the airport north of the capital in the hope of getting a flight out of the country as an evacuation run by the US military continues in chaos.

People have been crushed to death in the melee, while images of a family handing a child over a wall to a soldier - and of young men clinging to the side of a military plane as it rolled down the runway for takeoff - have shocked the world.

A journalist aboard the con-

voy that left a downtown hotel early on Sunday told AFP a huge crowd was camped at an intersection close to the airport - many sleeping in the open.

Families hoping for a miracle escape were crowded between the barbed-wire boundaries of an unofficial no man’s land separating Taliban fighters from US troops and the remnants of an Afghan special forces brigade helping them.

“As soon as they saw our convoy they got up and ran towards the buses,” he said.

“They were showing us their passports or other documents... One man came to my window with wife and child and waved his passport saying ‘I have a British visa, but can’t get in. Please let us on the bus’.”



Evacuee children wait for the next flight at Hamid Karzai International Airport, in Kabul on Thursday (AFP)

There have been reports of the Taliban stopping, harassing and even detaining Afghans trying to flee, but the reporter said his convoy passed largely without incident.

“They didn’t care about us,” he said.

‘One day, you’ll thank me’

The United States - and other

nations - had plans to offer sanctuary this year to tens of thousands of Afghans following Washington’s decision to withdraw all its troops from the country.

Those offered the chance of a new life abroad mostly included Afghans who had worked for foreign forces during the 20-year occupation that followed the ousting of the Taliban in the wake of the September 11 attacks.

But those plans were thrown into disarray by the Taliban’s devastating rout of Afghan forces, and their return to power last weekend.

“Everybody had a reason to leave,” the journalist on the convoy told AFP.

“Some were journalists, others women university students... then there were those who worked with foreigners.”

One girl was in tears at the hotel before the convoy set off.

“The day the Taliban came, I

knew life was over for me in Afghanistan,” she said.

“Living under their rule would mean burying all my ambitions in life.”

Those on the convoy were now waiting for their turn to be evacuated to the West - via a coronavirus isolation camp in Qatar.

“My children are crying because they are exhausted, but I am telling them hang on a bit more for the flight to come and then we are saved,” said Haji Hamid, with his wife and four youngsters in tow.

“Death and oppression would be stalking us if we stayed,” he said.

“I keep telling them ‘one day, you’ll thank me.’”

AFP

COVID-19 PANDEMIC

Israel starts antibody tests for children as young as three

Netanya, Israel - Israel on Sunday launched antibody testing for children aged as young as three, seeking information on the number of unvaccinated youths who have developed protection against coronavirus ahead of the new school year.

Despite surging daily infections caused by the highly transmissible Delta variant, Israel's government insists it wants to avoid the hardships and developmental setbacks caused by school closures.

Israel has already begun vaccinating children aged 12 and above.

The national serological survey is focused on pupils between the ages of three and 12 who are not yet eligible for the jab, nearly 1.5mn children.

It is aimed at discovering how many children developed strong antibody protection against coronavirus after having an unrecorded or latent case, according to the education ministry.

Those children with sufficient antibodies will not be forced to quarantine when exposed to a COVID patient, a move aimed at limiting school-year disruptions.



A child ensures an antigen test in order to visit the 'LEGO Space Park' exhibition, in Tel Aviv on Thursday (AFP)

In a statement Sunday from the Jerusalem municipality announcing Israel's 'largest serological operation', Mayor Moshe Leon urged parents to bring their children for the free 15-minute test done by finger pin-prick.

The survey is being conducted jointly by the health and education ministries and by the army's Home Front command, which told AFP Sunday that its antibody testing operation had

begun.

'Emotional damage'

A pilot programme conducted last week focused in mainly ultra-Orthodox Jewish communities found that roughly a fifth of children had developed antibodies, army radio reported Sunday.

Education Ministry director general Yigal Slovik said in a statement last month that last

year's school closures caused 'emotional and social damage' to students.

"The lockdowns and remote learning caused a 44 per cent increase in referrals for suicidal risk diagnosis, [among other impacts]," he said.

Israel was one of the first countries to launch a vaccination drive in mid-December via an agreement with Pfizer to obtain millions of paid vaccine doses in

The national serological survey is focused on pupils between the ages of three and 12 who are not yet eligible for the jab

exchange for sharing data on their effectiveness.

The inoculation campaign was hailed as a success story that helped drastically reduce infections, but Israel is again registering thousands of daily cases.

As it launches the serological survey, Israel is also pushing forward with vaccinations, offering a third, or booster, shot to everyone over 40 while urging the unvaccinated to get the jab.

More than 5.4mn of Israel's roughly 9.3mn people have received two doses of the vaccine, while 1.2mn have had a third jab.

Israel has recorded nearly 980,000 coronavirus infections since the pandemic started early last year, and over 6,700 deaths. AFP



Iranians shop at the Tajrish Bazaar market, in Tehran on Sunday (AFP)

COVID deaths at new daily high as curbs lifted in Iran

Tehran, Iran - Iran's Health Ministry on Sunday reported more than 680 daily COVID deaths for the first time, as nationwide curbs to contain the spread of the virus were lifted.

The ministry said the deaths of 684 people in the past 24 hours brought the total number of fatalities to 102,038. Iran also registered 36,419 new infections raising the total since the pandemic started to 4,677,114.

Iranian health officials have acknowledged that the ministry's figures understate the real toll but even they make Iran the worst-hit Middle Eastern country.

Last week Iran tightened curbs to contain the spread of the virus.

The six-day restrictive measures that ended on Saturday in-

cluded the closure of government buildings, banks and non-essential shops.

A nationwide ban on private car travel between provinces remains in force until August 27.

Iran has avoided imposing a full lockdown on its 83mn strong population, instead resorting to piecemeal measures such as temporary travel bans and business closures.

Since late June, Iran has seen what officials have called a "fifth wave" of infections, the country's worst yet, which they have largely blamed on the more contagious Delta variant of the virus.

Daily deaths and infections have hit record highs several times this month.

AFP

New Zealand queries virus approach as Delta outbreak spreads further

Wellington, New Zealand - New Zealand conceded its ambitious 'COVID zero' elimination strategy may no longer be viable on Sunday as an outbreak of the virulent Delta variant spread further.

COVID-19 Response Minister Chris Hipkins reported a further 21 cases in a virus cluster that emerged in Auckland last week, ending a six-month run of no local cases and sparking a national lockdown.

Hipkins said Delta's highly transmissible nature was making this outbreak more difficult to contain than others, raising 'big questions' about the elimination strategy.

"The scale of infectiousness and the speed at which the virus has spread is something that, despite all the best preparations in the world, has put our system under strain," he told TVNZ.

New Zealand's widely praised COVID-19 response - which has resulted in just 26 deaths in a population of five million - centres on eliminating the virus from the community.

It has relied on strict border controls backed by hard lockdowns when any cases do slip through, but Hipkins said Delta may force a rethink.

"(Delta's) like nothing we've dealt with before in this pandemic," he said.

"It does change everything, it



New Zealand's Director-General of Health Ashley Bloomfield receives his first dose of vaccine at a vaccination centre in Wellington on Sunday (AFP)

means that all of our existing preparations begin to look less adequate and raises some pretty big questions about the future of our long-term plans."

Neighbouring Australia has also pursued a 'COVID zero' strategy and been similarly frustrated as its Delta cases continue to spike.

The New Zealand outbreak has underlined the country's

slow vaccination rollout and prompted accusations the government became lax after its early success dealing with the pandemic.

Only about 20 per cent of the population is fully inoculated, one of the lowest rates in the developed world.

Opposition National Party spokesman Chris Bishop said the outbreak had exposed a lack of

urgency in Wellington's vaccine plans.

"The government's complacency and inability to ensure supply and delivery of the vaccine has made us all sitting ducks, completely vulnerable to the Delta variant when it inevitably got into the community," he said.

Another opposition figure, ACT Party leader David Seymour, said Hipkins could not use the Delta variant as an excuse for current failures.

"We've known about Delta since December, what's he been doing in the meantime?" he asked.

Hipkins said elimination remained top priority for the ongoing Delta outbreak, which now totals 72 active cases - 66 of them in Auckland and six in Wellington.

Positive cases have been recorded visited several busy locations, including schools, churches and supermarkets, with health teams checking the status of almost 9,000 close contacts.

The national lockdown is due to expire late on Tuesday, although Hipkins indicated Auckland could face further restrictions even if they were lifted elsewhere.

"If I was an Aucklander, I'd certainly be preparing to be at home for a bit longer," he said. AFP

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PARIS

DARK DAYS FOR CITY OF LIGHT.

Few tourists are gazing at the Mona Lisa or wandering the streets of Paris this summer, dashing hopes that the top tourist destination would see brighter days after last year's pandemic-linked desertion.

The City of Light has seen between 3.6mn and 4.7mn visitors between June and August, down from 10mn in 2019, before the coronavirus emerged and wrecked international travel, according to tourism office figures. Only 2.6mn tourists visited Paris last year.

"With clients from afar not coming, the impact is considerable," Didier Arino, director of the travel firm Protourisme, told AFP.

France eased its travel rules ahead of the summer season, putting countries in a red, orange and green colour-coded system that determines if visitors need to take a COVID-19 test before arriving, have a compelling reason to visit or quarantine.

Museums and other cultural venues reopened after long closures, though visitors have to show proof of vaccination or negative tests. But Paris visitor numbers are still not encouraging enough.

Reinventing ourselves

Arino said occupancy rates at hotels in Paris were worse than elsewhere in France, with revenues down 60 percent.

Romain Jouhaud, director general of 4 Roues Sous 1 Parapluie, a company that offers guided visits in a classic French car in the capital, said he only had 120 customers this summer compared to 360 in 2019. Most of his clients are from the United States and Australia.

"We're trying to get a bit more French clients but our problem is

that our average price (150 euros) is a little high," he said, noting that the French usually spend less than foreigners.

Tour guides have also suffered from the absence of tourists, with activity dropping by more than 80 percent in the Ile-de-France region, which includes Paris, according to the FNGIC association of guides.

"Paris is a mirror of the great European capitals," Arino said. "They all have problems and the more they depend on foreign clients, the more difficult it is."

On the river Seine, the sightseeing boat company Vedettes de Paris has seen turnover drop 50 percent compared to 2019. French clients used to make up half the number of passengers - they accounted for 65 percent this year.

The company has adapted by adding an 'aperitif cruise' and installing an area to play petanque on its dock.

"We learned to reinvent ourselves, give the Seine and Eiffel Tower back to Parisians," said the company's director, Marie Bozzonie. The Eiffel Tower reopened in mid-July after a nine-month hiatus due to the pandemic, but it has only had 13,000 visitors per day - half its usual number. Some 50 per cent are French compared to 20 per cent in the past. Similar scenes have been seen at the Grevin Museum, which features wax figures of famous people.

Half of its visitors are usually foreigners. It is down to 10 per cent this year, according to Francois Frassier, a director at the Compagnie des Alpes, which owns the museum and theme parks.

AFP

France eased its travel rules ahead of the summer season, but Paris visitor numbers still disappointed (AFP)

Sri Lanka bans ‘drunk riding’ of elephants



In this file photo, a mahout rides an elephant along a road in Piliyandala, a suburb of Sri Lanka's capital Colombo (AFP)

DNA stamped ID cards for all pachyderms

Sri Lanka will issue captive elephants with their own biometric identity cards and ban their riders from drinking on the job under a wide-ranging new animal protection law.

Many rich Sri Lankans - including Buddhist monks - keep elephants as pets to show off their wealth, but complaints of ill treatment and cruelty are widespread.

The new measures are aimed at protecting the animals' welfare and include strict regulations around working elephants, as well as mandating a daily two-and-a-half-hour bath for each creature.

Official records show there are about 200 domesticated elephants in the South Asian nation, with the population in the wild estimated at about 7,500.

The new law will require all owners to ensure that animals under their care have new photo identity cards with a DNA stamp. It also brings in multiple regulations for working elephants.

Baby elephants can no longer be used for work - even cultural pageants - and cannot be separated from their mothers. Logging elephants cannot be worked for more than four hours a day and night work is prohibited.

There are new restrictions on the tourism industry too - from now on, no more than four people can ride an elephant at once, and they must sit on a well-padded saddle. Also, their use in films is banned, except for government productions under strict veterinary supervision, as is allowing their riders to drink while working.

"The person who owns or has the custody of such elephants shall ensure that the mahout (rider) is not consuming any liquor or any harmful drug while employed," Wildlife Protection minister Wimalaweera Dissanayaka said in a gazette notification dated Thursday.

Owners must send their animals for a medical check-up every six months.

Those who violate the new law will have their elephant taken into state care and could face a three-year prison sentence.

Capturing wild elephants in Sri Lanka is a criminal offence punishable by death, but prosecutions are rare. Animal rights activists as well as elephant experts have alleged that over the last 15 years, more than 40 baby elephants have been stolen from national wildlife parks.

AFP



The Basilica of Bom Jesus is a Roman Catholic Church located in Old Goa and stands to be the oldest Church of Goa. It is a UNESCO recognised World Heritage Site.

CULTURAL HERITAGE

GOA's DISAPPEARING PORTUGUESE LEGACY

As Lorraine Alberto begins her Portuguese class at Goa University, students from the former colony are in short supply.

Across Goa, a tiny coastal state once administered by Lisbon, there is little appetite for the territory's 450 years of European heritage after a few short generations of Indian rule.

Ramshackle colonial homes and Bollywood's increasing cultural dominance portend the disappearance of local history in a place where speaking Portuguese was once a passport to status and power.

"My children don't speak it at all," Alberto told AFP. "They just don't see the point of learning it."

Those alive in 1961, when Indian troops marched into Goa and incorporated it into the rest of the country, recall an overnight transformation.

India's exit from the British empire in 1947 spurred many Goans to demand an end to Portuguese rule, but few expected so much to change so quickly.

"It was a very strange feeling... The changes came so fast," said Honorato Velho, a retired school principal. The 78-year-old once lived next to the grandfather of Antonio Costa, Portugal's current prime minister, and he fondly remembers a childhood peppered with European and local influences.

His enthusiasm, however, has not been inherited by the next generation.

"My wife and I still speak Portuguese out of habit, but never with our children," Velho told AFP.

Across the state, homes influenced by old



Portuguese design trends are falling into disrepair or being pulled down to make way for apartment blocks.

The gradual disappearance of covered terraces and mother-of-pearl shell windows - built to diffuse harsh sunlight - is not just a loss to architecture, said author Heta Pandit.

"These houses are evidence of Goan history, they are capsules of our culture," she said.

Only a handful of traditional homes have been earmarked for protection from development or destruction, Pandit added.

AFP



The Desai House (above) presents an incongruous sight with its striking exterior of exposed laterite and turrets on either flank. The original house belonged to a Muslim merchant who sold it to the Desais. The structure seen today dates back to around 1890 when it underwent a makeover



Sonia Shirsat

Traditional fado music

Some Goans have nonetheless found themselves drawn into a relationship with their heritage, even against their own early inclinations.

At a recent outdoor concert in a coastal village, dozens of people gathered to listen to Goan singer Sonia Shirsat, an accomplished performer of traditional Portuguese fado music. The 40-year-old specialises in the melancholy, guitar-driven genre, which was born at the turn of the 19th century and was in recent years recognised by UNESCO for its intangible cultural heritage.

Shirsat paused between songs to patiently explain the meaning behind each track, knowing many in the enraptured audience spoke little if any Portuguese. It's a role she is well-suited to play, tracing her own journey from a teenager who refused to learn Portuguese to a fado evangelist who is now training others to follow in her footsteps.

"My mother tried to teach me the language, but I just wasn't interested," she told AFP.

That changed when Shirsat met a Portuguese guitarist who told her that her rich, velvety voice was ideal for the genre. She decided to move to Lisbon for training, becoming the first Indian to stage a solo fado concert there in 2008.

Shirsat has since performed all over the world, sometimes incorporating a cross-cultural element with the use of Indian instruments like the sitar.

All fado songs are infused with a sense of yearning for the past, but in Goa, they also serve as a bridge between two eras.

"Fado doesn't just talk about what is lost, it also talks about what is to come," she said. "It has lived in Goa for over 100 years. If we don't preserve it, it is as if we are killing a part of ourselves."



Lorraine Alberto

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Zverev books Cincinnati final with Rublev; Barty faces Teichmann

Cincinnati, US - Alexander Zverev came from two breaks down in the third set to beat Stefanos Tsitsipas 6-4, 3-6, 7-6 (7/4) on Saturday and reach the final of the WTA and ATP Cincinnati Masters.

The German, who briefly left the court to vomit in the final set as he stepped up his fightback in front of a full crowd, will take a 4-0 record into Sunday's final with Andrey Rublev.

The Russian fourth seed surprised world number two compatriot Daniil Medvedev 2-6, 6-3, 6-3.

World number seven Rublev had never won so much as a set in four previous losses to Medvedev, top seed in the prestigious hardcourt tournament that serves as a tuneup for the US Open.

Zverev also turned a corner this week, having never won a match in six previous Cincinnati editions.

The German said he'd begun to feel his stomach trouble coming on in the second set, and he was seen briefly by a doctor who gave him some tablets in the third.

Immediately, things began to jell for the Tokyo Olympic gold medalist. "After I got the first break (of the third set) back I thought I had chances. He was not serving bombs and I was always in the rallies. I started to play more aggressively."

Zverev got worked up at the end of the first set when Tsitsipas - as now seems to be his habit - left the court with his full bag of gear, presumably to change clothes.



Alexander Zverev (left) plays a backhand during his match against Stefanos Tsitsipas; while Ashleigh Barty (right) celebrates match point against Angelique Kerber, in Mason on Saturday (AFP)

After I got the first break (of the third set) back I thought I had chances. He was not serving bombs and I was always in the rallies. I started to play more aggressively

ALEXANDER ZVEREV

His absence lasted an infuriating eight minutes as Zverev complained to the chair umpire, indicating he thought Tsitsipas could use the break to receive coaching via text.

Tsitsipas tried to take another break after winning the second set but was informed he had used up his one break.

Despite the tension, the two traded a friendly embrace at the

net when the match ended. "It's a great rivalry," Zverev said. "There's a lot of fire there, there's a lot of emotions there. But I think both of us, especially now before the US Open, we didn't want to give each other anything."

Zverev moved into his ninth Masters 1000 final with 42 winners including 15 aces after nearly two and three-quarter hours.

He had lost six previous matches out of eight played against the Greek.

Zverev was already thinking

ahead to Rublev.

"In a final at this level there are no easy opponents, he played incredible today in beating Daniil. He's also one of my best friends."

In the women's draw, world number one Ashleigh Barty reached her sixth final of the season with a 6-2, 7-5 victory over Angelique Kerber.

The top-seeded Aussie, who has led the rankings for the past 82 weeks, needed an hour and a quarter to move into Sunday's title match, surpassing her semi-

final showing from 2019.

Barty will play for the trophy against Swiss wild card Jil Teichmann - who beat Czech fifth seed Karolina Pliskova 6-2, 6-4 to reach a fourth career final but her first at the elite Masters 1000 level.

She needed 84 minutes to continue an outstanding week in which she beat Naomi Osaka in the third round and Olympic gold medallist compatriot Belinda Bencic in the quarters.

After ousting fourth-ranked

RESULTS:

MEN SEMI FINALS

Andrey Rublev (RUSx4) bt Daniil Medvedev (RUSx1) 2-6, 6-3, 6-3
Alexander Zverev (GERx3) bt Stefanos Tsitsipas (GREx2) 6-4, 3-6, 7-6 (7/4)

WOMEN SEMI FINALS

Ashleigh Barty (AUSx1) bt Angelique Kerber (GER) 6-2, 7-5
Jil Teichmann (SUI) bt Karolina Pliskova (CZEx5) 6-2, 6-4

Pliskova, Teichmann stands 4-0 this season against top ten players. "Playing centre court against world number one in a final...it's perfect," the 24 year old said as she looked toward the biggest final of her career.

Medvedev, who was seeking a Canada-US Masters double after lifting the title in Toronto at the weekend, required three separate medical timeouts during his loss to Rublev. He received treatment on his left hand after he hit an on-court camera during a rally and also had treatment on his right forearm and right thigh during a match played in oppressive 31°C heat.

Rublev re-adjusted after losing the opening set, hung on during his opponent's injury dramas and heated discussion with the umpire on camera placement and finally got his chances in the concluding set after two and a quarter hours.

AFP

Pacquiao nears retirement after Ugas upsets veteran



Manny Pacquiao of the Philippines looks at Yordenis Ugas of Cuba after being knocked down during the WBA Welterweight Championship (AFP)

Las Vegas, US - Yordenis Ugas bludgeoned Manny Pacquiao ever closer to retirement on Saturday, upsetting the veteran Filipino boxing icon with a comprehensive defeat.

In his first fight after a two-year absence from the ring, Pacquiao was made to look every bit of his 42 years as the younger Ugas dominated with a stinging jab and cleaner punching to retain his WBA welterweight crown at Las Vegas' T-Mobile

Arena.

Ugas (35) had only been drafted in to face Pacquiao earlier this month after the eight-division world champion's original opponent Errol Spence Jr, suffered an eye injury in training.

But the defending champion from Cuba seized his opportunity brilliantly to win on all three cards, with one judge scoring it 115-113 and two others 116-112.

A deflated Pacquiao said afterwards he will take his time be-

fore deciding on his future, but admitted the boxing world may well have seen him in the ring for the last time.

"In the future you may not see Manny Pacquiao fight in the ring," Pacquiao said.

"I've done a lot for boxing and boxing has done a lot for me. I look forward to spending time with my family and thinking about my future in boxing.

"I did my best tonight but my best wasn't good enough. No excuses. I wanted to fight for the title in the ring, and the champion tonight is still Ugas."

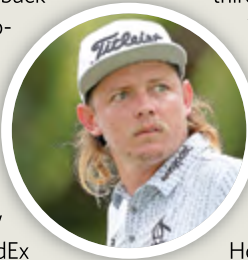
It was a sweet victory for Ugas, who had been awarded the WBA title after Pacquiao was stripped of the belt by the sanctioning body earlier this year for inactivity. "I'm a warrior. I've been doing this since I was six years old. I knew deep down inside he wasn't going to beat me tonight. I felt it coming to the fight and that's what happened," said Ugas, who improves to 27-4 with 12 knockouts.

AFP

Aussie Smith fires 60 to match Rahm for PGA lead

New York, US - Australian Cameron Smith fired a career-low and course record 11-under par 60 to seize a share of the lead with Spain's Jon Rahm after Saturday's third round of the US PGA Tour Northern Trust tournament.

The 28 year old from Brisbane shot a bogey-free 30 on both the front and back nines to equal top-ranked Rahm on 16-under par 197 after 54 holes at rain-softened Liberty National in suburban New York at the first FedEx Cup playoff event.



"The course is playing pretty soft," Smith said. "I expect the boys will get up there. We're all going to try our best."

Rahm, the reigning US Open champion who missed the Tokyo Olympics due to COVID-19, grinded out level par on the back nine to shoot 67.

"I surely hope I don't need to rely on something so unfortunate every time to have a big win," Rahm said. "I've been able to look at the positive side of things and come back even stronger."

"I came in here ready to go." South African Erik van Rooyen fired a 62 to stand third on 198 with Americans Justin Thomas and Tony Finau on 199 and Ireland's Shane Lowry, Norway's Viktor Hovland and American Tom Hoge on 200.

PGA officials postponed the final round from Sunday to Monday because of oncoming Hurricane Henri, which raised weather warnings across the region.

"It's hard to back up a really good round, so maybe the day off will help me out," Smith said.

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FOOTBALL ROUND-UP

DEPAY rescues draw for Barcelona



Barcelona's forward Memphis Depay celebrates after scoring a goal against Athletic Club Bilbao at the San Mames stadium in Bilbao on Saturday (AFP)

Madrid, Spain - Barcelona were given a torrid time by Athletic Bilbao but escaped from their trip to San Mames with a point as Memphis Depay's superb late strike secured a 1-1 draw for the Catalans on Saturday.

Depay found the net with a fine left-foot half-volley 15 minutes from time in the Basque Country for his first goal in La Liga since moving to Barcelona from Lyon.

Ronald Koeman's side had impressed in their first match of the post-Lionel Messi era as they beat Real Sociedad 4-2 last weekend, but they were fortunate to depart with a point from this game. It was a difficult night for their defence in particular, with Gerard Pique coming off after half an hour and Eric Garcia being sent off in stoppage time for bringing down Inaki Williams.

Former Manchester City defender Garcia reportedly received news of his grandfather's death just before the match and struggled throughout the 90 minutes, allowing Inigo Martinez to get away from him to head in the opener early in the second half.

Athletic will feel they should

Elsewhere in La Liga, Carlos Soler's late penalty allowed Valencia to leave Granada with a 1-1 draw, while last season's Europa League winners Villarreal were held 0-0 at Espanyol

have won despite missing several key players, among them goalkeeper Unai Simon, who has not featured at the start of this season after helping Spain reach the Euro 2020 semi-finals and then the final of the Tokyo Olympics.

Barcelona were unchanged from their opening victory meaning another start for Pedri, the brilliant young midfielder who also played at Euro 2020 and the Olympics and is now set to get a two-week holiday.

Martin Braithwaite, who netted twice against Real Sociedad, missed an early sitter for the visitors when he blazed over after great play by Depay.

Athletic, with 11,000 of their fans allowed into the 53,000-capacity San Mames for this game as coronavirus restrictions are gradually loosened in La Liga,

then saw Oihan Sancet turn and crash a shot off the crossbar from 12 yards out.

Defensive troubles

Pique then came off to be replaced by Ronald Araujo, suggesting that Koeman should not have played the centre-back who had reportedly been struggling with a minor injury before the game. Araujo had a goal disallowed in first-half stoppage time for a foul by Braithwaite, and the Uruguayan defender then had to clear off the line from Alex Berenguer just seconds after the restart.

Athletic were seeking revenge for their 4-0 loss to Messi's Barcelona in the Copa del Rey final last April and they went ahead in the 50th minute when Martinez attacked a corner quite

magnificently, getting ahead of Garcia to divert the ball into the far corner.

While Garcia played for Spain at the European Championship, fellow centre-back Martinez opted not to join Luis Enrique's squad because he wasn't 'at 100 percent physically or mentally'.

Koeman responded by withdrawing Braithwaite and Pedri and sending on Sergi Roberto as well as Yusuf Demir, the 18 year old Austrian international signed in July on loan from Rapid Vienna.

Frankie de Jong hit the bar with a brilliant attempted lob before Depay levelled a quarter of an hour from time, controlling Sergi Roberto's ball over the tap and crashing a brilliant strike past goalkeeper Julen Agirrezabala at his near post.

Garcia then denied Athletic a chance of a last-gasp winner as he chopped down Williams just outside the area.

Elsewhere in La Liga on Saturday, Carlos Soler's late penalty allowed Valencia to leave Granada with a 1-1 draw, while last season's Europa League winners Villarreal were held 0-0 at Espanyol.

AFP

Kane on bench for Spurs amid talk of Man City move



Harry Kane

Wolverhampton, UK - Harry Kane was named among Tottenham's substitutes for Sunday's Premier League match at Wolves after the Manchester City transfer target missed the first two games of the season.

Kane was in the Tottenham squad for the first time this term after his late return to pre-season training.

The England captain, unhappy at his club's 13 year trophy drought, hopes to force a move to Premier League champions City before the August 31 transfer deadline. Kane said he has 'never refused to train', but the 28 year old believes he has a gentleman's agreement with Tottenham chairman Daniel Levy to leave this summer.

However, City are so far unwilling to meet Levy's £150mn asking price for last season's Premier League top scorer.

Kane was left out of Tottenham's squad when they beat City in their Premier League opener last weekend and also missed Thursday's Europa Conference League defeat at Portuguese side Pacos de Ferreira.

"Harry is in the squad. The team is the same because we did a good job last weekend. The boys are ready," Tottenham boss Nuno Espirito Santo said.

AFP



Lyon's head coach Peter Bosz during the French L1 match against Clermont at the Groupama stadium, in Decines-Charpieu on Sunday (AFP)

Rashani double for Clermont keeps Bosz's Lyon winless

Paris, France - Clermont's Kosovo winger Elbasan Rashani scored twice in the final 10 minutes on Sunday to claim a 3-3 draw at Lyon who are still without a win this term.

Home coach Peter Bosz, who arrived from Bayer Leverkusen in the close season, is without victory after three games of the campaign despite his side leading 3-1 at the break.

Bosz dropped Brazilian defender Marcelo who was sent to train with the club's reserves as punishment for 'inappropriate behaviour' after last Sunday's 3-0 loss at Angers.

Moussa Dembele (25), who spent the latter part of last season on-loan at Atletico Madrid, opened his account for the new campaign after just five minutes from the penalty spot after he was fouled by Johan Gastien.

The hosts were all-square seven minutes later as Lyon's Sinaly Diomande repeated teammate Marcelo's feat from last weekend with an own goal.

Bosz's side took control of the fixture again after 20 minutes with Dembele claiming his second despite VAR being used to check for an offside.

The hosts' best goal came in first half injury time as Brazilian pair Bruno Guimaraes and Lucas Paqueta combined sublimely before Paqueta smoothly side-footed his finish into the bottom corner.

With 10 minutes to play, Clermont, in their first season in the French top-flight, cut the deficit as Rashani claimed his maiden goal since joining the club from Erzurumspor in July.

The comeback was complete after 91 minutes as 28 year old Rashani, born in Sweden, headed home from a cross by first-half culprit Gastien.

Later, second-placed Angers head to Bordeaux, there is a Breton derby between Rennes and Nantes before Marseille head along the Mediterranean coast to face Nice.

AFP



Markus Rehm believes he can leap even further than his own record of 8.62m when the Games open on Tuesday

'Blade Jumper' Rehm targets own world record at Paralympics

Tokyo, Japan - German 'Blade Jumper' Markus Rehm is aiming to 'attack' his long jump world record at the Paralympics - and he believes the fast track in Tokyo can help him do it.

Rehm, one of the biggest stars in para sports, arrives in Tokyo in scintillating form, having obliterated his own T64 world record by 14cm in June to set a new mark of 8.62m.

That jump would have been enough to win gold at every Olympics since 1992, but Rehm believes he can leap even further when the Games open on Tuesday. Three world records fell on the track at the Tokyo Olympics - including in women's triple jump - and Rehm is hoping he can benefit from the stadium's spongy surface.

"I heard that it's a fast track, a

great track to jump," Rehm told reporters on Sunday.

"We've seen at the Olympic Games, the triple jump world record. It would be great to have a similar headline at the Paralympic Games."

Rehm is aiming to win his third straight Paralympic long jump title and his fourth gold overall.

AFP

Omani trail-runners to take on 170km race

Our Correspondent
Muscat

Hamdan al Khatri and Hamed al Harthi, Oman's two best trail runners, will soon be taking their place on the start line in Chamonix, France, for the 2021 UTMB (Ultra Trail du Mont-Blanc) 170km trail running race.

Having been forced to postpone last year's attempt, Khatri and Harthi are determined to

make the most of the opportunity when the race kicks off on August 27.

UTMB is described as 'a mythical race, a unique experience', and it is one of the most prestigious trail-running events on the circuit.

Starting around the foothills of Mont-Blanc, the 170km race course will take the athletes up to 10,000m where each participant must rely on their strength

and push their mental and physical capabilities to the limit.

The event attracts up to 10,000 runners each year and is considered an essential event for trail-runners around the world.

Thirty-one year old Khatri and 62 year old Harthi have dedicated the past few years to running, both competing in the inaugural Oman by UTMB in 2018 and completing a variety

of ultra-marathons around the world. Khatri has raced at UTMB Mont Blanc before, in 2019, when he was the first and only Omani in the CCC 100km race.

Harthi competed in the Oman by UTMB, in 2019, as well as Ushuaia by UTMB in Argentina the same year. His crowning glory, however, was reaching the summit of Mount Kilimanjaro earlier this year.



Hamdan al Khatri



Hamed al Harthi

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