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OWYA 2020 WINNERS - DR HALIMA NASSER AL MASKARI AND JOKHA AL HARTHI
 GO TO PAGES 09 & 16



Fiscal plan includes increasing government income from non-oil sectors and financial sustainability

Speed up establishment of a national integrated system to protect families under Social Security Scheme

Implement developmental projects in different governorates to the tune of RO371mn

HM approves fiscal plan to stimulate economy

Muscat - In line with the pledge he made earlier declaring his keenness to direct financial resources in an optimum manner and to place fiscal balance on top of the government's priorities, His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik has approved a Medium-Term Fiscal Balance Plan (2020-2024) devised by the government.

The Royal Directive also includes the implementation of a number of developmental projects to come up in different governorates to the tune of RO371mn.

The plan includes a set of programmes whose overall goal is to lay down the foundations for financial sustainability in the sultanate, cut debt, raise efficiency of government spending by prioritising financial action, increase government income from non-oil sectors, bolster the state's finan-

cial reserves and improve revenues from government assets to enhance their capacity to tackle any financial challenges and to channel these revenues in the right course for economic growth and prosperity.

His Majesty the Sultan's directive includes speeding up the establishment of a national integrated system for social assurance with a view to protecting low-income segments and Social Security Scheme families against any adverse impacts, as designed in the plan's measures and procedures.

The Royal Directive reflects His Majesty the Sultan's resolve of sustained support for financial activity and domestic development. The departments concerned will announce the details of the plan and outline initiatives that it covers.

ONA



Minister of Social Development hails Royal Directive

Muscat - Laila bint Ahmed al Najar, Minister of Social Development, has hailed the Royal Directive issued by His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik to speed up the

establishment of an integrated social assurance system to protect Social Security Scheme families and low-income families from any adverse impact resulting from the measures and procedures of the Medium-Term Fiscal Balance Plan (2020-2024). The minister expressed her gratitude to His Majesty the



Sultan for his constant eagerness to place citizens as top priority of the modern renaissance and within the framework of the overall vision of national progress.

"The Royal directive underscores the attention accorded by His Majesty the Sultan to provide means for a decent life to Omanis, which is considered the focus of the development achieved through Oman Vision 2040 and related developmental programmes," she said.

ONA

Public holiday on Oct 29 to mark Prophet's birthday

Muscat - Dr Mahad bin Said bin Ali Ba'owain, Minister of Labour, issued a decision on Thursday declaring October 29, 2020, as an official holiday for employees of both public and private sector establishments.

The decision said: 'To mark Prophet Mohammed's (PBUH) birthday anniversary, it has been decided that 12 Rabeel al Awal, which falls on October 29, will be an official holiday for employees of units of the State's Administrative Apparatus and establishments of the private sector.'

'Employers at private sector establishments may agree on terms to engage employees on the said holiday, if the nature of their work deems it necessary, provided they compensate the workers for the holiday.'

'We take this opportunity to greet His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik, wishing him plentiful blessings. May Almighty Allah protect His Majesty the Sultan and guard him as a precious resource for this country.'

ONA

Omani startup makes bio-pesticide

Our Correspondent
Muscat

An Omani startup called Redhamah has formulated a bio-pesticide and bio-fertiliser to fight fungal pathogens which cause diseases in plants. The product tackles the problem of unhealthy plants and fruits as well as enriches the soil, getting rid of the need to use harmful chemicals.

The brainchild of Farahid Mohammed al Malki, Abdullah Omar Abdullah al Breiki, Ishaq Said al Kindi and Shabib Ali al Mahrouqi, Redhamah was awarded by The Research Council (TRC) under its Manafa'a programme in September 2020.

Speaking to *Muscat Daily*, Malki, said, "We are graduates from the College of Agricultural and Marine Sciences with majors in Crop Sciences. We have different talents but we share the same passion."

Malki informed that the bio-pesticide and bio-fertiliser is safe, reliable and gets rid of several fungal pathogens including Pythium, Fusarium and Rhizoctonia. "Our product is a safe replacement for chemical pesti-



(L-R) Shabib al Mahrouqi, Ishaq al Kindi, Abdullah al Breiki and Farahid al Malki

The Manafa'a Ideathon 2020 aimed to encourage responsible use of Oman's genetic resources

cides, which have adverse effects on human health, besides accumulating in water and soil causing environmental damage. It is available in powder and liquid forms and doesn't need personal protective equipment

during application. It can be used both as foliar or soil application," Malki said.

The idea for the bio-pesticide and bio-fertiliser first emerged a few years ago when several of his colleagues were conducting an experiment (yet unpublished) in which they compared between a foreign strain of a fungus called Trichoderma and a local one which showed great results in terms of adaptability to the Omani environment in reducing the effects of some fungal pathogens which cause plant diseases such as wilt, root rot and damping off.

The idea of an Omani strain that's more powerful and effective in reducing the harmful effects of diseases remained with Malki like a nagging thought. When the Manafa'a Ideathon 2020, organised by the Omani Animal and Plant Genetic Resources Centre (OAPGRC) under TRC, was announced, Malki and his team registered for the competition.

The Manafa'a Ideathon 2020 aimed to encourage responsible use of Oman's genetic resources - plants, animals, marine life and microbes - to create value for society and to contribute to the di-

versification of the economy.

"It was a good experience in conceptualising our idea into a business proposition. Full of challenges, excitement and energy, we did our best as the time was limited," Malki said.

The competition saw 50 teams in the initial round, of which 15 qualified for the Virtual Pre-Ideathon. In the final Virtual 48-hour Biodiversity Ideathon competition, four teams were announced winners, including Malki's team. "TRC awarded us RO2,500. The council incubated our project for six months helping us work on the product."

Racing against time, besides getting over situations arising from the COVID-19 pandemic - like the inability to have physical meetings - were challenges the team had to overcome.

He and his team are eager to solve the problem of diseases and plant pests which has been further complicated by indiscriminate use of chemicals, especially by illiterate farmers.

"We need to use organic products and sustainable methods in farming to safeguard the environment," he said.

Directorates to decide mode of education

Our Correspondent
Muscat

H E Dr Madiha bint Ahmed bin Nasser al Shibaniyah, Minister of Education, has granted educational directorates the provision to implement distance education in no less than 90 per cent of the governorates' schools. On Thursday, she asked director generals of all directorates to determine whether their schools apply for distance education or blended education.

She informed that a discussion is in progress to allow grade 12 students to attend full-time or weekly studies. In her meeting with the director generals, the minister explained that the list of schools that will implement the blended education system will be announced this week through the educational directorates.

According to the minister, lessons will be broadcast on the Oman Mubasher and Oman Cultural TV channels, as well as on educational platforms.



02

International Stuttering Awareness Day: Oct 22



08

Seeb a win away from maiden league title



09

Gulf Energy secures over \$1bn contracts from PDO



11

Egypt starts voting in first stage of parliament elections



15

Madny al Bakry, the artist who leaves his paintings incomplete

Stuttering is no stumbling block

Shaddad al Musalmay
Muscat

The world observed International Stuttering Awareness Day (ISAD) on Thursday - marked every year on Oct 22 - to increase understanding about the speech disorder that is said to affect 70mn people worldwide.

Those who stammer say the situation is not a 'weakness' or 'defect', nor is it something people should laugh at.

Speaking to *Muscat Daily* on the occasion, Dr Hassan Talib al Lawati, whose stuttering speech has not deterred him from being a successful professional, said there is no shame in stuttering and explained that it is how some people talk.

"We want people to know that stuttering is not a disease. A person who stutters is as normal as anyone else and is as capable as a person who does not. Mocking someone who stutters and the way they speak should be discouraged. By the way, some of the people who stutter have good jobs and some teach in colleges and universities," Lawati said.

Established in 1998, ISAD brings attention to the millions of people around the world living with this specific communication disorder. Usually when people refer to stuttering, they imagine the repetition of a specific word; however stuttering comes in many other forms, including elongation of a vowel or syllable.

On the significance of the day, Lawati said, "The day is very important as it gives out the message that those people who stutter are normal people and it is not a shame to be one of them. If you a stutterer, don't listen to those people who discourage



(Photo for illustrative purpose)



The day is very important as it gives out the message that those people who stutter are normal people and it is not a shame to be one of them and neither is it a disease

DR HASSAN TALIB AL LAWATI

you to speak. Even if you stutter, they will laugh the first time and second, but thereafter they will be okay with it."

Stuttering speech varies and the severity of the stutter can also differ. On some days a person might stutter only a few times while on others, stuttering may affect most of their interactions.

"I have stuttered since I was in school but I tried hard to over-

come it by speaking out and not being shy; I joined all the activities at school," Lawati said.

Graduating from Sultan Qaboos University with bachelor's and master's degrees, Lawati went on to do his PhD in Germany. He now works at the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Water Resources and owns a bee keeping facility.

Lawati said he hopes there were conferences in Oman

where people who stutter presented their success stories.

"This will encourage and push the people who stutter to be successful in their life. One should never be shy to speak. If you stutter with a word, try to use another word with the same meaning. This is a simple and quick solution," he said.

Though it is now understood that stuttering is a neurological disorder that can be develop-

Stuttering facts

Stuttering is a communication disorder in which repetitions or abnormal stoppages of sounds and syllables break the flow of speech. There may also be unusual facial and body movements associated with speaking. International Stuttering Awareness Day shines a helpful spotlight on stutterers and educates the public about the causes.

There are many distinguished celebrities who stutter. Legendary American actress Marilyn Monroe reportedly stuttered.

American singer and songwriter Carly Simon stuttered too. Speaking about it, Carly said that her stutter went away when she sang.

mental (beginning as a child) or acquired (developed as an adult due to trauma or drug abuse), there is still an air of stigma that follows those who live with it.

However, Lawati said he has never considered his stuttering speech a setback.

"Stuttering has not affected me or my life. I did well in school and university and I have been giving lectures both in Oman and abroad. My advice to such people is don't be shy, speak up and do whatever you love and make a lot of friends. Don't be alone in your room.

"My biggest medicine is reading the Quran in a loud voice. It gives you more confidence," Lawati said.

@shadadm

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Save marine environment at Muttrah Corniche

This refers to the articles titled 'Up to RO5,000 fine for cutting and burning trees' (*Muscat Daily*, page 1, Oct 12), and 'Bye bye plastic bags' (*Muscat Daily*, page 1, Oct 13).

Indeed these are preventive, corrective and timely actions taken by the Environment Authority of Oman.

Burning of wild trees and plastic by visitors is a common scenario in the areas of Jebel Shams and Jebel Akhdar. On many occasions, they throw leftovers near trees without using garbage bags.

Kudos to the Environment Authority, Ministry of Defence, Public Authority for Civil Defence and Ambulances and Royal Oman Police for their timely actions to safeguard nature and human life.

The ban on the use of single-use plastic bags with effect from January 1, 2021, is a positive step taken by Oman, and distribution of 20,000 environment-friendly shopping bags to create awareness is also commendable. I think no country in the world has taken such positive steps within a short span of time to protect its environment.

However, there is one more area that needs the attention of authorities - protection of the marine environment at Muttrah Corniche.

Some uncivilised citizens and residents throw plastic bags, water bottles and food leftovers into the sea. Even though there are boards stating 'In order to preserve the marine environment and the cleanliness of the area, fishing is strictly prohibited', still some people engage in fishing. People are also seen chewing tobacco and gum and spitting on the foot path and into the sea.

Muscat Municipality is doing its best for the beautification of the corniche and spending a lot of money. There is need for constant vigilance to catch the culprits and put them behind bars or slap them with heavy fines.

Hiten Dutia
Via email

REGIONAL WEATHER

	Max	Min
Abu Dhabi	35	21
Doha	33	23
Kuwait City	32	21
Manama	30	23
Riyadh	31	15

PRAYER TIMINGS

Fajr	4.53am
Sunrise	6.09am
Duhr	11.56am
Asr	3.12pm
Maghrib	5.38pm
Isha	6.49pm

CURB COVID-19

H E Dr Ahmed al Sa'eedi, Minister of Health



Protect yourselves
Protect your family
Protect your society

DO THE RIGHT THING

Help us to keep our
healthcare system safe

Help us to reduce the stress
of those on the frontline

Axed expats hopeful of finding jobs in Oman

Our Correspondent
Muscat

Not very long ago, Nadeem Javed was content with his 9am to 5pm job.

Working in a travel and tourism company for a monthly salary of RO650, the Pakistani expat managed a decent life in a one-bedroom flat in Hamriya. His children's education was his top priority. He was also helping a friend with his startup.

But then disaster struck. First came the COVID-19 pandemic and then the layoffs. Soon Javed found himself with no means of income.

At a time when thousands of expatriates, mainly from the Indian subcontinent who faced a similar predicament and decided to leave Oman, many others opted to stay on in the hope that they would find employment yet again in the sultanate which most of them consider as 'home away from home'.

Javed is one of them.

"I have no hard feelings for anyone for what happened to me," Javed said.

"We have to understand; this is a global crisis and no one must



(Photo for illustrative purpose)

feel victimised. We should act wisely and act with patience."

He said he has been in Oman for the last 11 years. "I find life here comfortable. Most of my

family and friends are here. I am confident that I'll manage to get new employment soon."

Most of the people feel it is almost impossible in the current

situation to land a job back in their home countries. Having been in the sultanate for a considerable period of time, they think they can use their profes-

sional contacts here to find fresh employment, not soon though.

One such person is Armanuddin Abdul, a Bangladeshi national.

There are no recruitments as there is no money flow and businesses around the world are at a standstill. But this is not the end of life or the world. People need to survive and the world needs to move on

ARMANUDDIN ABDUL

He said, "I have worked for long in Oman in the auditing field and I know clients from a number of reputed companies. There are friends and well-wishers too and I have made good contacts with them over the years."

However, finding employment in the present condition is not easy, he said.

"There are no recruitments as there is no money flow and businesses around the world are almost at a standstill. But this is not the end of life or the

world. People need to survive and the world needs to move on. I am sure recruitments will start once again. We need to be patient."

Most people have come to understand that they will not get their dream jobs. And in view of their future jobs, some have started learning new skills and boosting their résumés.

Sanjay Kumar from India, who used to work as a graphic designer, said he is now learning photography.

"I am skilled in InDesign, Illustrator and Photoshop. Now I have picked up my son's DSLR and started to learn the basics of aperture, shutter speed and ISO. I am sure these basic skills will help me land a decent job. I'm also learning the basics of video editing."

However some find it tough to learn new skills.

Samuel from India said, "I used to be a salesman of musical instruments and I played the guitar."

"Now I'm trying to learn other instruments, mainly the piano, as employers are looking for versatile people. At my age it is tough for me to play with keys."



(Supplied photo)

Restoration of Ras al Hadd Fort on; 426,500 visited forts, castles

Our Correspondent
Muscat

The Ministry of Heritage and Tourism has begun restoration work of Ras al Hadd Fort in the wilayat of Sur in South Sharqiyah governorate.

The work is scheduled to be completed at the end of 2021.

The ministry stated that the restoration work includes renovation of hoardings, removal of fallen al sarooj (mortar), treating

cracks on the walls of the fort, repairing the roof of the western tower and some rooms to prevent rainwater leakage, paving the outer and inner floors and painting all wooden fittings such as doors and windows.

The ministry added, 'Iron mesh will be set up to close over 100 openings to prevent birds from nesting. Wooden barriers will be erected on the upper corridors on the sides of the fort for the safety.'

The fort's restoration will include maintenance work of power points and lavatories.

Meanwhile, the National Centre for Statistics and Information (NCSI) stated that as many as 426,500 people visited forts and castles in Oman in 2019, registering an increase of 16.4 per cent on the previous year's figures.

Of the total visitors, 251,080 were tourists from different countries according to statistics

of the Ministry of Heritage and Tourism.

NCSI said in 2018, some 366,360 people visited forts and castles compared to 319,163 in 2017. It was an increase of 14.8 per cent.

The ministry confirmed that restoration work at Saham Fort has been completed.

The ministry continues to restore and maintain castles and forts that are distinguished due to architectural diversity.

COVID-19 survey begins to assess psychological impact

Our Correspondent
Muscat

The National Centre for Statistics and Information (NCSI), in cooperation with Sultan Qaboos University (SQU), will launch a survey on Sunday on the novel coronavirus (COVID-19).

The survey targets citizens and looks to check their knowledge of the pandemic, its causes, symptoms, and methods of prevention. It will also assess the psychological impact of the pandemic on individuals and families.

Speaking to Muscat Daily, an official at NCSI said that the three-week survey will run till November 12.

"It is a random survey and it will include about 1,500 people. They will be contacted over the phone and asked about the pandemic."

He added, "The survey aims to measure the psychological impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on individuals and families, and impact on communication. It also aims to find out how people live with the virus and their satisfaction with the government's



The national survey, done over the phone, targets about 1,500 citizens and looks to check their knowledge of the pandemic, its causes, symptoms and methods of prevention

decisions that have been taken to mitigate the crisis."

According to the statistics of the Ministry of Health, the number of new COVID-19 patients that were recorded on Thursday reached 353.

Meanwhile, the Supreme Committee in charge of developments resulting from the spread of COVID-19 on Wednesday decided to lift the night curfew from

Saturday, October 24.

The Supreme Committee examined reports related to the number of cases infected with the disease, the number of deaths resulting from it, and other epidemiological data in various governorates of the sultanate and expressed its grave concern over non-compliance of preventive measures by some people.

UK AIR FORCE OFFICIAL VISITS



Air Chief Marshal Mike Wigston, Chief of Staff of the British Royal Air Force, and his accompanying delegation arrived on Saturday for an official visit to the sultanate. The guest and his delegation were received by the commander of the Seeb Air Base and a number of senior officers from the Royal Air Force of Oman and the military attaché at the UK Embassy in Muscat (ONA)

Sohar Aluminium funds smart education in Buraimi

Muscat - Sohar Aluminium and the Directorate General of Education in Buraimi governorate last week signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) to support technological education in the governorate's schools.

The MoU was signed during a ceremony that was held under the patronage of Sayyid Dr Hamad bin Ahmed bin Saud al Busaidi, the governor of Buraimi, in the presence of Sheikh Saleh bin Dhiab al Rubaie, the wali of Buraimi, and Ahmed bin Faris al Azzani, member of the Shura Council and representative of the wilayat of Buraimi, as well as representatives of Sohar Aluminium and Buraimi Directorate General of Education.

As per the agreement, Sohar Aluminium will fund the purchase of smart educational electronic equipment and devices for the governorate's schools.

This collaboration aims to enhance and enrich the educational



(Supplied photo)

environment, contribute to building the technological capabilities of the teaching staff and students, upgrade their competencies and skills in this field, as well as encourage and stimulate the use of new educational technologies in schools.

The agreement was signed by Ahmed bin Mohammad bin Nasser al Kharusi, general manager of Human Resources and

Corporate Affairs at Sohar Aluminium, and Dr Fathia bint Khalfan al Saddiah, director general of Education in Buraimi governorate.

Kharusi said, "This agreement comes as we seek to implement the directives of His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik to dedicate this year as the year of blended learning. Sohar Aluminium is proud of its contri-

bution to translating the vision and development plans in the sultanate into reality. We hope that this step will have a clear and direct impact and contribute to achieving the objectives of the education sector, which is one of the most important aspects and enablers of Oman Vision 2040."

Dr Fathia highlighted the importance of the agreement for the educational sector in the governorate through the implementation of technical educational projects that keep pace with the rapid development witnessed by the world.

She stated that it will be a new addition to the governorate's schools and will meet their needs in a way that contributes to the benefit of the teacher as the main factor in the educational process, as well as the learner (the focus of the educational process).

Both can directly benefit from

these technologies which will have a positive impact in raising the level of achievement, as well as developing their skills through the usage of technology in the school environment.

They will also enhance the technical capabilities and skills of the teacher and provide a source of novelty and excitement for the learning process.

Dr Fathia expressed thanks and appreciation to Sohar Aluminium for its support and funding of these digital educational projects.

The agreement is expected to cover all schools in the governorate, namely in the wilayats of Buraimi, Mahdah and Sininah (30 schools). It includes the purchase of interactive boards and tables, 3D printers, smart screens, overhead projectors and learning disability tools. It is hoped that these devices will benefit more than 14,500 students in the governorate.

Meethaq holds Hibati draw to celebrate Women's Day

On the occasion of the Omani Women's Day and in line with its commitment to celebrating special events of national importance, Meethaq Islamic banking from Bank Muscat, conducted a special Hibati cash prize draw.

Meethaq honoured the achievements of Omani women by conducting the special draw which was livestreamed for the first time on the bank's official social media accounts on Twitter and Instagram. They were conducted in the presence of Fahad al Gharibi, head of National Sales, Meethaq and Ibtisam al Yahyai, branch manager - 18th November Street, Meethaq. Ten lucky winners walked away with prizes of RO1,000 each, with a total of RO10,000 being given away on the occasion.

During the event, the presenter introduced the Hibati savings account from Meethaq and the prizes it offers to customers, in addition to explaining the eligibility for participating in the prize draw. He also shared details about the occasions on which the special prize draws are held. During the broadcast, an overview of the 'Hibati' draws was also provided and attendees discussed the importance of such programmes in promoting the concept of saving in the sultanate and encouraging individuals to adopt best practices in spending.

They also discussed the crucial role of women in society and the importance of enabling greater contributions by them to all sectors of the economy. The participants also highlighted Meethaq Islamic Banking's com-



mitment to promoting a healthy savings habit in Oman and how it has been growing from strength to strength by helping customers realise their aspirations.

Hibati Savings account is based on the unrestricted Mudarabah contract. The cash prizes offered under Hibati's 2020 prize draw scheme are 'Hiba' (gift) from Meethaq to its customers and are paid out of Mudarib's (shareholders') own sources.

The cash prizes are in addition to the profit share of Investment Account Holders (IAHs) in the General Mudarabah Pool as per the declared profit-sharing

weightages. With prizes including 100 weekly prizes of RO100 each and 10 monthly prizes of RO1,000 each, Meethaq's Hibati offers one of the biggest Sharia'a-compliant cash prize schemes in Oman.

A massive total of over RO1mn will be given away to 5,424 winners in 2020. Special prizes given away include 10 prizes of RO1,000 each for the Omani Women's Day.

Mega prizes to the Hafawa segment are also given away quarterly. These include 6 prizes of RO5,000 each given away to customers and 5 prizes of RO10,000 each for customers every quarter.

An interesting highlight of the Hibati scheme is that customers are also eligible for monthly Mudarabah Profit as per the declared profit-sharing weightage.

In keeping with Meethaq's leadership position in launching innovative products and services focused on the needs of customers, the Hibati savings scheme is the first-of-its-kind aimed at helping customers realise their aspirations and boost the savings culture in Oman.

The Hibati account benefits include attractive Mudarabah profit rates, cash prizes through draws, Visa debit card, no minimum balance charges and eBanking facilities.

Launched in 2018, Hibati has been instrumental in improving awareness for Islamic Banking in Oman and has seen excellent response from customers.

Every Meethaq product goes through the process of Sharia'a compliance certification by the Sharia'a Supervisory Board and is created in line with the guidelines of the Central Bank of Oman.

Meethaq Islamic Banking has been recognised as The Best Islamic Bank in Oman for the year 2019 by Islamic Finance News.

For more details, please visit <https://www.meethaq.om/en/depositproducts/Pages/details.aspx#saving> or call on 24656666.



NBO celebrates remarkable achievements of Omani women

Celebrating the remarkable achievements Omani women have made both in and out of the bank, National Bank of Oman (NBO) marked Omani Women's Day with a series of exciting events.

The highlight was the skill-building course conducted for ten girls in Jebel Akhdar, part of the bank's Outward Bound Oman partnership and led by programme mentor Intisar al Bartmani, section head - Corporate Credit Administration. In addition, the bank supported the Ministry of Health with a special live event recognising the staff who demonstrated the role of women in the health sector industry and their contribution to the advancement of the nation as a whole.

Amal Suhail Bahwan, chairperson of NBO, said, "At NBO, we are delighted to celebrate the incredible contribution that women have made to building this country, many of them we are proud to work with. The bank is always proud to embrace the spirit of the occasion while continuing to shine a light on the progress women have made in the industry and in the country.

Year on year, we continue to break boundaries and show the world the tremendous potential of women who are equipped to succeed."

A long-term proponent for women's empowerment and equal opportunities, NBO is responsible for a number of firsts for the sultanate's banking community, including the first Omani female as chief risk officer and the first female heading an Islamic bank or window. Nurturing a flourishing equal opportunities culture, the bank's female staff currently stand at 41 per cent, including several in senior management roles.

Latifa al Gharbi, a senior manager in Central Operations Department said, "We consider ourselves lucky to be among so many examples of positive female leadership. We have been blessed by not only a supportive work environment, but with leaders who have recognised the significant potential of women in promoting our society, while granting us equal rights to do so. Only by acting as one team and by ensuring that all feel empowered can we develop as a bank and as a nation."

Asyad achieves milestone

Asyad Group does not just talk the talk. Having achieved 10mn safe man-hours from January to September 2020, the logistics group walks the walk, too. This significant milestone reflects the group-wide implementation of occupational health and safety (OS&H) values. Asyad Group reinforces its safety-first culture through its commitment to OH&S standards set by international organisations such as the Institution of Occupational Safety and Health (IOSH) and the International Maritime Organization (IMO).

Although 80 per cent of Asyad Group activities is field work, the Group managed to maintain high OS&H standards and zero fatality rate- ensuring the safety of its employees, business continuity and unaffected operational performance across its Operating Companies. This feat has been facilitated by Asyad's employee's abidance by the OH&S policy and procedures extending throughout the group, despite COVID-19 disturbance.

Asyad Group's safety Key Performance Indicator, set at 0.4 per



million injury-free man hours, testifies to the group's keenness to adopt international best practices. Moreover, Asyad Group has successfully addressed 1875 near miss reports; not only thanks to its hazard resolution capabilities and stringent preventive measures in place, but also due to the site personnel's increasing awareness and periodic assessment of OH&S compliance.

As a global logistics services provider, these measures promote operational excellence as Asyad Group takes it upon itself to ensure the safety of its employees and all while delivering to its customers efficient, world-

class services and operations. Through close monitoring of OHS performance indicators, regular on-site visits, and awareness campaigns, Asyad Group leads by example in Oman's logistics sector.

Health, Safety, Security, Environment & Quality (HSSEQ), integrated into Asyad Group's ethos, are critical to its business and operations. To this effect, Asyad Group endeavors to live up to the highest standards for each of these elements with its people (employees and contractors), stakeholders and surrounding communities at all times.

HEC Paris in Qatar, Takatuf Oman hold leaders programme

HEC Paris, ranked number 2 worldwide for Executive Education in 2020 and number 1 for the International Executive MBA (EMBA) in 2019 by the *Financial Times*; and Takatuf Oman, the human capital solutions provider, have successfully concluded the Emerging Leaders Program (ELP) for 23 mid-senior managers and leaders from diverse industries in Oman. The programme incorporates Takatuf's human capital expertise and HEC Paris' internationally acclaimed management programs, to offer a powerful learning experience to emerging leaders.

Featuring three modules and an Action Learning Project, the ELP has been specially designed to improve the leadership competencies as well as develop new competencies for executives, and contribute to the growth and sustainability of an executive's company.

While the first module 'Me as

a Leader' analysed leadership behaviours and how to develop them; the second module 'Me as a Guide' scrutinised how teams are managed and integrated to achieve organisational goals. The third module 'Me as a Builder' examined how executives can develop the future of organisations through innovation. It further built on the insights of the previous modules and focused on strategic decision making.

The first two modules of the programme took place in September and December 2019, respectively. The third module of the programme, revised to accommodate online delivery, featured workshops by prominent HEC Paris professors. The online closing ceremony of the programme was conducted by Dr Pablo Martin de Holan, dean of HEC Paris in Qatar, and Crispin Garden-Webster, senior manager Human Capital Consulting at Takatuf.

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FOOTBALL ROUND-UP

REAL BAG CLASICO HONOURS



Real Madrid's Luka Modric (second from right) scores against Barcelona at the Camp Nou stadium in Barcelona on Saturday

SPANISH LEAGUE

Barcelona, Spain - Real Madrid averted a crisis in the best possible way on Saturday by beating Barcelona 3-1 in the first empty El Clasico, landing an early blow in La Liga's title race.

Barca had the chance to inflict a third consecutive defeat on their rivals and increase the pressure on Zinedine Zidane. Instead, Madrid's win earns them a six-point lead over the Catalans, having played one game more.

Sergio Ramos' penalty and a late Luka Modric goal finished off Barcelona after Federico Valverde and Ansu Fati had traded early strikes in a frantic game that defied those expecting further evidence of two heavyweights in decline.

Barcelona might feel hard done by, especially as Ramos' penalty was awarded after a check by VAR and a hugely exaggerated fall by Madrid's captain after Clement Lenglet tugged his shirt. But aside from an impressive spell in the first half, when an inspired Lionel

Messi threatened to win the game on his own, Madrid were dominant for longer spells and pulled away when it mattered.

This was Ronald Koeman's first Clasico as Barcelona coach and some of the pressure Zidane would have felt from a loss is now transferred to the Dutchman, who has overseen only three wins from his first six games in charge. Barcelona face Juventus on Wednesday in the Champions League, without the suspended Gerard Pique.

In the previous week, Real Madrid had lost to Shakhtar Donetsk and newly promoted Cadiz, while Barcelona were beaten by Getafe last weekend.

Yet a dip in quality does not have to mean a drop in drama and any doubts about the thrill of this fixture were answered in eight minutes, as both teams had scored. Madrid made the start they dreamed of when Karim Benzema drifted deep into the right channel and was allowed to turn, with the sprinting Valverde going beyond him. Valverde

pierced the gap before lifting a curved shot past Neto and into the far corner. Madrid celebrated as if their confidence had been reborn, but within three minutes, Barcelona were level.

Messi, from almost left-back, chipped a ball over the top freeing Jordi Alba who fired into the front post where Fati had nipped ahead of Ramos and turned in to become the youngest scorer in Clasico.

Barcelona's momentum after the break was checked by Lenglet's error, a tug in the box clear enough that Ramos' shirt was stretched, even if the fall was comically exaggerated. Referee Juan Martinez checked the monitor. Ramos found the corner. Barca wanted a penalty themselves when Ramos booted a ball into teammate Raphael Varane's arm, but this time there was no whistle.

Ramos and Valverde both could have made it three in the final minutes before substitute Modric did, finishing beautifully after Neto rushed out.

GERMAN LEAGUE

Lewandowski hits hat-trick

Berlin, Germany - Robert Lewandowski took his Bundesliga tally to ten goals in five games this season with a hat-trick as Bayern Munich thumped Eintracht Frankfurt 5-0 on Saturday. Lewandowski has scored nine goals in his last three league games and wrapped up his treble within an hour at the Allianz Arena.

Defending champions Bayern

have scored 22 goals this term - ten more than league leaders RB Leipzig who stayed top with a 2-1 win over ten-man Hertha Berlin. Bayern sit one point behind in second place.

In Munich, Leroy Sane marked his return from injury with the fourth goal during a brief cameo, before England U17 midfielder Jamal Musiala also came off the bench to net the fifth.

However, Bayern's win could come at a price as Canadian left-back Alphonso Davies was in clear distress after going off early with an ankle injury.

OTHER RESULTS:

Saturday: Union Berlin 1 Freiburg 1, Mainz 2 Borussia Moenchengladbach 3; Borussia Dortmund 3 Schalke 0.

ENGLISH PREMIER LEAGUE

City stumble at West Ham

London, UK - Manchester City

dropped more points against West Ham on Saturday to leave them languishing in the lower half of the English Premier League (EPL) table.

Substitute Phil Foden rescued a 1-1 draw at the London Stadium but the disappointing result means Pep Guardiola's team have taken just five points from their past four matches.

Injury-hit City are already five points behind leaders Everton.

West Ham went ahead against the run of play in the first half through Michail Antonio's superb overhead kick from Vladimir Coufal's cross.

Foden, who came on at half-time, restored parity minutes later, coolly controlling Joao Cancelo's cross before slotting home.

But the visitors could not turn their dominance into goals, with West Ham indebted to Polish goalkeeper Lukasz Fabianski,

who produced some vital late saves.

There could be more grim injury news for Guardiola, who said Argentine forward Sergio Aguero, who has only just returned after a long lay-off, looked to have picked up a suspected hamstring injury.

In the second match of the day, goals from Jairo Riedewald and Wilfried Zaha for Crystal Palace condemned promoted Fulham to their fifth defeat in six matches.

Tom Cairney pulled a goal back for ten-man Fulham in the final seconds but Roy Hodgson's side held on to win 2-1 and climb to fifth in the table, ahead of the evening games.

And in an evening game on Saturday, Manchester United played out a goalless draw with Chelsea at the Old Trafford.

Earlier on Friday, Marcelo Bielsa insisted Patrick Bamford deserves all the credit for transforming his career after the striker's hat-trick inspired a 3-0 win over Aston Villa.

OTHER RESULTS:

Scottish Premiership:

Kilmarnock 0 Hibernian 1, Motherwell 4 Ross County 0, St Johnstone 0 Dundee Utd 0.

French League: Lorient 0 Marseille 1.

Italian League: Atalanta 1 Sampdoria 3, Genoa 0 Inter Milan 2.

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DIRECTORS' REPORT

Company performance during 1st July 2020 to 30th September 2020

The Company has recorded sales of RO 3,626,852 for the three months ending 30th September 2020 as against RO 3,185,747 in the corresponding period of last year. The Company has achieved a growth of 14% in the sales during three months over the corresponding period of last year. The gross profit earned during this three months' period is RO 672,004 against RO 539,593 in the corresponding period of last year which is a growth of 25% over corresponding period of last year.

The net profit achieved for the three months' period ended 30th September 2020 is RO 163,320/- as against RO 131,964/- for the corresponding period in the previous year. Hence a growth of 24% has been registered in profits over corresponding period of last year.

Future Outlook

The company is investing in brand development of the profitable product portfolio and strengthening its presence in all markets to grow the revenue and profits in the long run.

Nooh Bin Mohammed Al Zidjaly
Chairman

UNAUDITED BALANCE SHEET AS ON 30th SEP 2020

	30-Sep-20 RO	30-Sep-19 RO
ASSETS		
Non-current assets		
Property, plant and equipment	2,383,868	2,277,223
Intangible Assets	157,736	168,021
Right of Use assets	342,497	-
Advance for Capital Goods	445,072	-
Total non-current assets	3,329,173	2,445,244
Current assets		
Inventories	1,750,575	1,239,101
Trade and other receivables	3,549,990	3,623,782
Wakala deposits	3,483,937	2,812,993
Bank balances and cash	641,318	700,566
Total current assets	9,425,820	8,376,442
Total assets	12,754,993	10,821,686
EQUITY AND LIABILITIES		
Equity attributable to equity holders of the Company		
Share capital	1,000,000	1,000,000
Legal reserve	333,333	333,333
Retained earnings	5,536,467	4,779,692
Total Shareholders' equity	6,869,800	6,113,025
Non-current liabilities		
End of Service Benefits	458,951	417,179
Deferred tax liability	58,659	68,674
Lease Liabilities	362,769	-
Total non-current liabilities	880,379	485,853
Current liabilities		
Trade and other payables	4,961,797	4,185,280
Provision for income tax	43,017	37,529
Total current liabilities	5,004,814	4,222,809
Total liabilities	5,885,193	4,708,662
Total equity and liabilities	12,754,993	10,821,687
Net assets per share	6.870	6.113

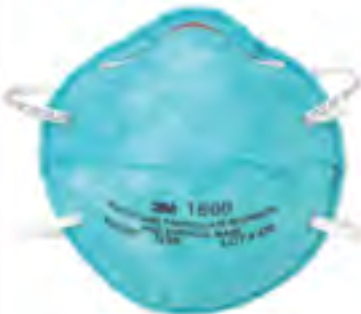
UNAUDITED STATEMENT OF PROFIT OR LOSS FOR THE PERIOD ENDED 30th SEP 2020

	3 Months 30-Sep-20 RO	3 Months 30-Sep-19 RO
INCOME		
Sales	3,626,852	3,185,747
Cost of sales	(2,954,848)	(2,646,154)
Gross profit	672,004	539,593
Other income	51,170	25,893
	723,174	565,486
EXPENSES		
Selling and distribution	(354,517)	(258,647)
General and administration	(163,516)	(144,388)
Directors' meeting attendance fees	(4,300)	(3,400)
Finance costs	(8,658)	(3,712)
	(530,991)	(410,147)
Profit before tax	192,183	155,339
Income Tax	(28,863)	(23,375)
Profit (Loss) for the Period	163,320	131,964
Attributable to:		
Equity shareholders of the Company	163,320	131,964
Earnings per share	0.163	0.132

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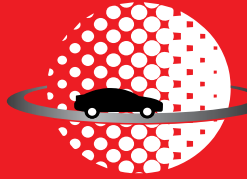
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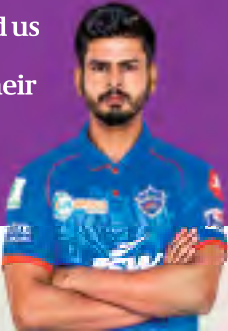


IPL 2020

QUOTE OF THE DAY

They [Kolkata] outplayed us in pretty much every department. Kudos to their approach and mindset.

Shreyas Iyer
Delhi Capitals' skipper, after the 59-run loss, on Saturday



Rana, Narine, Varun shine in Kolkata win

Abu Dhabi, UAE - Their last game had brought 84 for eight. Today, against the Delhi Capitals, they were 42 for three after 7.2 overs. Andre Russell was still out injured, so they didn't have the likeliest candidate to spark an unlikely turnaround. The Kolkata Knight Riders' hold on fourth place had never looked this tenuous.

At the crease were Nitish Rana, with scores of 9, 2, 9, 5, 29 and 0 in his last six innings; and Sunil Narine, who had a highest score of 17 from five innings this season. That run of form had cost Narine his place at the top of the order, and there was no way to tell - given the unusual trajectory of his career, spent almost entirely in the tail or at the top with hardly anything in between - if he could crack a T20 middle-order gig.

Rana and Narine put on 115 in 56 balls. The Knight Riders posted 194 for six, the second-highest first-innings total in Abu Dhabi this season.

The bowlers roared into life too. Pat Cummins, who'd gone wicketless in six of his last seven games, blew away both openers with his seam movement.

And then it was all Varun Chakravarthy. The match was in the Knight Riders' control when he came on, but Shreyas Iyer and



Kolkata's Nitish Rana plays a shot against Delhi on Saturday. Photo right: Varun Chakravarthy



Rishabh Pant had moved the Capitals into a position where they still had a chance: they needed 119 from 54 balls, with eight wickets in hand.

He was bowling on a pitch where the Capitals had only bowled four overs of spin, and where one of them, R Ashwin, had gone for 45 in his three, but Varun could have been bowling somewhere else entirely. He finished with five for 20 from his four overs, and the Knight Riders finished with a 59-run win.

They'd begun the game with the worst net run rate of all eight teams. They ended it with a

healthy improvement on that front, two more points to firm up their playoffs hopes, and a much healthier look about their line-up with three games left to play in the league phase.

Shuffling the pack

The Knight Riders have generally opened with Shubman Gill and Rahul Tripathi and used Rana at No 3. It hadn't been working, though. They shuffled their top three today, without immediately apparent success. Anrich Nortje sent back Gill and Tripathi by the end of the powerplay. And, in the eighth over, Kagiso Rabada

dismissed Dinesh Karthik.

The Capitals used their seamers for seven of the first eight overs and Axar Patel for the other. They hadn't yet bowled R Ashwin. And when he was introduced, Narine hit Ashwin's second ball for six - over long-off and it was as if he'd pressed a button that instantly reversed the game's momentum.

Ashwin went for 13 in that over, and 15 in his second. In between Ashwin's first two overs, the Capitals bowled Tushar Deshpande and Marcus Stoinis, who went for 18 and 11 respectively. The four overs starting

with Ashwin's introduction brought Kolkata 59 runs.

An emphatic finish

Nortje came on after those four overs, and sent down a 13th that only went for eight. Deshpande, showing control with his wide yorkers, conceded only nine in the 16th over. Rabada then bowled a 17th over and dismissed Narine with a short ball that cramped him for room, and bowled another good bouncer that Rana picked up a boundary to reach his half-century.

Rana unfurled a Knight Riders shirt with his recently deceased father-in-law's name on it, reminding everyone of the emotional hurdles he'd had to get through while playing this innings, in addition to all the cricketing ones. Rana and Eoin Morgan smacked the bowling around for 37 off 18 after Narine's dismissal, and though both fell off the last two balls of the innings.

The real Cummins...

... is a properly fast, 145kph bowler who hits the pitch hard and seams it and gets the ball to jar the bat upon impact. Or the pad, as when he nipped the first ball of the Capitals innings back at Ajinkya Rahane and trapped him on the crease. Or the

POINTS TABLE

TEAMS	P	W	L	NR	PTS	NRR
MI	10	7	3	0	14	+1.448
DC	11	7	4	0	14	+0.434
RCB	10	7	3	0	14	+0.182
KKR	11	6	5	0	12	-0.476
KXIP	11	5	6	0	10	-0.103
SRH	11	4	7	0	8	+0.029
RR	11	4	7	0	8	-0.620
CSK	11	3	8	0	6	-0.733

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

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

TODAY'S MATCHES

DUBAI, 2PM



ROYAL CHALLENGERS BANGALORE VS CHENNAI SUPER KINGS

ABU DHABI, 6PM



RAJASTHAN ROYALS VS MUMBAI INDIANS

SCOREBOARD

KOLKATA KNIGHT RIDERS		
S Gill	c Patel b Nortje	9 (8)
N Rana	c Deshpande b Stoinis	81 (33)
R Tripathi	b Nortje	13 (12)
D Karthik	c Pant b Rabada	3 (6)
S Narine	c Rahane b Rabada	64 (32)
E Morgan	c Rabada b Stoinis	17 (9)
P Cummins	not out	0 (0)
Extras	(lb 1, w 6)	7
TOTAL: 194 for six		
Fall of wickets: 1-11, 2-35, 3-42, 4-157, 5-194, 6-194		
Bowling: T Deshpande 4-0-40-0, A Nortje 4-0-27-2, K Rabada 4-0-33-2, Axsr Patel 1-0-7-0, M Stoinis 4-0-41-2, R Ashwin 3-0-4-5		
DELHI CAPITALS		
A Rahane	lbw b Cummins	0 (1)
S Dhawan	b Cummins	6 (6)
S Iyer	c Nagarkoti b Varun	47 (38)
R Pant	c Gill b Varun	27 (23)
S Hetmyer	c Tripathi b Varun	10 (5)
M Stoinis	c Tripathi b Varun	6 (6)
A Patel	b Varun	9 (7)
K Rabada	c Tripathi b Cummins	9 (10)
R Ashwin	not out	14 (3)
T Deshpande	c Morgan b Ferguson	1 (3)
A Nortje	not out	0 (0)
Extras	(lb 1, nb 2, w 3)	6
TOTAL: 135 for nine		
Fall of wickets: 1-0, 2-13, 3-76, 4-95, 5-95, 6-110, 7-112, 8-132, 9-135		
Bowling: P Cummins 4-0-17-3, M Prasidh Krishna 2-0-19-0, K Nagarkoti 2-0-11-0, L Ferguson 4-0-30-1, S Narine 4-0-37-0, C Varun 4-0-20-5		

Punjab pull off a stunning heist defending 126

Dubai, UAE - Kings XI Punjab held their nerve in a low-scoring encounter to beat Sunrisers Hyderabad by 12 runs on Saturday.

Needing 127 runs to win, Sunrisers were quick off the blocks as David Warner got going straightway. He cranked two sixes in the first two overs bowled by Mohammad Shami and Arshdeep Singh.

In the next two overs, Jonny Bairstow hit two fours before he and Warner teamed up to hit four fours in the fifth and sixth over to take Sunrisers past fifty at the end of the powerplay.

However, Punjab struck twice in quick succession through the leg-spinners as both the openers departed. While Ravi Bishnoi had Warner caught behind the stumps by KL Rahul, Murugan Ashwin dismissed Bairstow.

Shami was brought back into the attack to bowl his final over and team's ninth, and he struck as Abdul Samad was caught at mid-off by a leaping Chris Jordan. Manish Pandey and Vijay Shankar added 33 runs, but the partnership was broken after substitute fielder J Suchith took a



Kings XI Punjab celebrate their win over Sunrisers Hyderabad on Saturday

stunning catch near the ropes to get Manish out in the 17th over.

Vijay Shankar got hit on the helmet in the 18th over by a Nicholas Pooran throw. While Shankar seemed fine to bat, he got out on the next ball as Arshdeep Singh got his first wicket.

Hyderabad were 110 for five after the 18th over and needed 17 runs in the last two overs to win.

After conceding two on the

first two balls of the penultimate over, Jordan got two wickets on two successive deliveries. While Jason Holder was caught by Mandeep Singh in the covers, Rashid Khan got out after Pooran took a catch in the deep.

Sunrisers needed 14 runs in the final over but Arshdeep conceded just two and picked two wickets before Bishnoi ran-out Khaleel Ahmed on the penulti-

mate ball as Punjab completed their fourth win on the trot and defended the lowest total this IPL.

Earlier, Mandeep, who was opening the batting in the absence of injured Mayank Agarwal, and Rahul took Punjab to 37 in the first five overs before Sandeep Sharma got Mandeep out for 17 to claim his 100th IPL wicket. Chris Gayle creamed two fours and a six in the first eight balls he faced. But, from thereon Sunrisers kept things tight and picked two big wickets off two successive deliveries.

While Holder had Gayle caught at the long-off in the tenth over, Rashid's wrong'un did Rahul in on the first ball of the 11th over. Sandeep then picked his second wicket as he dismissed Glenn Maxwell in the 14th over before Rashid had Deepak Hooda stumped in the next over.

Punjab, with five wickets down, moved past hundred in the 17th over, but lost another wicket as Holder's got the better of Chris Jordan. Nicholas Pooran, who scored an unbeaten 32, though helped his side reach 126.

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SCOREBOARD

KINGS XI PUNJAB		
KL Rahul	b Rashid Khan	27 (27)
M Singh	c Rashid b Sharma	17 (14)
C Gayle	c Warner b Holder	20 (20)
N Pooran	not out	32 (28)
G Maxwell	c Warner b Sharma	12 (13)
D Hooda	st Bairstow b Rashid	0 (2)
C Jordan	c Ahmed b Holder	7 (12)
M Ashwin	run out	4 (4)
Ravi Bishnoi	not out	0 (0)
Extras	(b 1, lb 1, w 5)	7
TOTAL: 126 for seven		
Fall of wickets: 1-37, 2-66, 3-66, 4-85, 5-88, 6-105, 7-110		
Bowling: S Sharma 4-0-29-2, K Ahmed 4-0-31-0, J Holder 4-0-27-2, Rashid Khan 4-0-14-2, T Natarajan 4-0-23-0		
SUNRISERS HYDERABAD		
D Warner	c Rahul b R Bishnoi	35 (20)
J Bairstow	b Ashwin	19 (20)
M Pandey	c sub (J Suchith) b Jordan	15 (29)
Abdul Samad	c Jordan b Shami	7 (5)
V Shankar	c Rahul b A Singh	26 (27)
J Holder	c M Singh b Jordan	5 (8)
P Garg	c Jordan b A Singh	3 (5)
Rashid Khan	c Pooran b Jordan	0 (1)
S Sharma	c Ashwin b A Singh	0 (2)
T Natarajan	not out	0 (0)
K Ahmed	run out	0 (2)
Extras	(w 4)	4
TOTAL: 114 in 19.5 overs		
Fall of wickets: 1-56, 2-58, 3-67, 4-100, 5-110, 6-112, 7-112, 8-114, 9-114, 10-114		
Bowling: M Shami 4-0-34-1, A Singh 3.5-0-23-3, M Ashwin 4-0-27-1, R Bishnoi 4-0-13-1, C Jordan 4-0-17-3		





Action from the Omantel League match between Seeb and Oman clubs at the ROP Stadium in Muscat on Friday



An unidentified Dhofar player escapes a tackle from a Muscat player during their match in Salalah on Friday

Seeb just a victory away from maiden domestic league title

Omantel League leaders post a scrappy win over Oman to retain five-point lead with two rounds to go

Ashok Purohit
Muscat

The Omani *halwa* is all ready to be savoured and distributed by thousands of Seeb Club fans as they await the crowning of their club as the 2019-2020 Omantel League champions, hopefully, on this Wednesday.

Expectations of achieving the long-awaited title success soared on Friday when Seeb edged past Oman Club 1-0 in a scrappy encounter, but the win was enough to give them crucial three points and retain their five-point lead over their nearest contender Dhofar, as the 2019-2020 season moves closer to conclusion with just two rounds remaining.

The penultimate round will be held on Wednesday with Seeb taking on Muscat Club at the ROP Stadium and Seeb will make history with their maiden league title, if they win, as the result will ensure them an unassailable lead with a round to spare. The final round of the domestic league will be played on November 1.

On Friday, Saud al Farsi scored the all-important goal in the 71st minute for Seeb after they were denied a penalty kick



All we need now is a win against Muscat. We are on the verge of our first-ever domestic league title and the board, under the chairmanship of H H Sayyid Shihab bin Tariq al Said, and the fans are all waiting for the victory on Wednesday

YOUSUF AL WAHAIBI, SEEB CLUB VICE-PRESIDENT

five minutes earlier. Seeb then held on to the slender lead to pick the crucial three points.

"All we need now is a win against Muscat. We are on the verge of our first-ever domestic league title and the board, under the chairmanship of H H Sayyid Shihab bin Tariq al Said, and the fans are all waiting for the victory on Wednesday.

"We hope the boys will not disappoint," said Yousuf al Wahaibi, the club's long-serving vice-chairman.

Eleven-time champions Dhofar, who are trailing Seeb by five points, were emphatic in their 4-0 win over Muscat at the Al Saada Sports Complex in Salalah. Rashid Jaber-coached side is expected to finish runner-up but are in line for a title as they look for their ninth His Majesty's Cup crown when they

take on Al Nahda in the second-leg semifinal in November.

Omar al Malki and Salah al Yahyai scored a brace each in Dhofar's easy win against Muscat.

The second-leg semifinal between Dhofar and Al Nahda will be played in Salalah on November 6 while the other match pitting Al Arouba against Ibri at the Sur Sports Complex will be held on November 7.

While Seeb (53 points) and Dhofar (48) have had a successful campaign so far, winning 15 and 14 games respectively out of the 24 matches played so far, Al Nahda is a distant third with 34 points with just nine wins.

In the other games played on Friday, which saw the resumption of the top-flight league after a halt of nearly seven months due to the coronavirus pan-

demic, Al Arouba edged past Al Suwaiq 1-0, nine-time winner Fanja also eked out a narrow 1-0 win over Al Nahda, Bahla routed seven goals past a hapless already-relegated Mirbat, Al Rustaq upset Al Nasr 2-0 at home and Sohar played out a goalless draw against Saham in the Batinah derby.

Standings [after 24 rounds]: 1 Seeb (53 points), 2 Dhofar (48), 3 Al Nahda (34), 4 Al Rustaq (33), 5 Saham (33), 6 Fanja (33), 7 Al Nasr (33), 8 Sohar (32), 9 Bahla (31), 10 Muscat (31), 11 Al Suwaiq (29), 12 Al Arouba (26), 13 Oman (26), 14 Mirbat (12).

Wednesday's fixtures (all kick-off times at 4pm): Al Nasr vs Sohar, Muscat vs Seeb, Saham vs Dhofar, Arouba vs Nahda, Bahla vs Oman, Mirbat vs Suwaiq, Fanja vs Rustaq.

@ashokmuscat



Seeb Club's Saud al Farsi (third from left) with his teammates celebrate after the victory over Oman on Friday



Dhofar players celebrate a goal



Salute to health care workers

Ahead of their kick-off against Muscat on Friday, Dhofar Club players expressed their thanks and gratitude to Oman's healthcare workers. And in a show of solidarity with the frontline workers, they wore personal safety kits and paid tributes to people who lost their lives fighting the coronavirus pandemic

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Record-seeking Hamilton grabs dramatic late pole in Portugal



Mercedes' Lewis Hamilton gestures after taking the pole position

FORMULA ONE PORTUGAL GRAND PRIX
Portimao, Portugal - Lewis Hamilton claimed a thrilling last-gasp pole position on Saturday to give him the perfect launchpad for his bid to win a record 92nd race in Sunday's Portuguese Grand Prix.

In denying his Mercedes teammate Valtteri Bottas in the final seconds of qualifying Hamilton moved to within three of his 100th career pole.

The six-time champion, who

had trailed the Finn in all three practice sessions and in the two opening parts of qualifying, reeled off a stunning best lap in one minute and 16.652 seconds at the new Algarve International Circuit.

It was enough to outpace the Finn by 0.102 seconds and, as so often this year, to deliver heart-break again after the pair had swapped from soft to medium tyres for their final runs.

Hamilton had gone out ahead of Bottas for the final session and

took advantage by taking two flying laps, the second completed after the chequered flag fell producing his clincher.

Hamilton's ninth pole of the season sets him up to move clear of Michael Schumacher's 14-year-old record of 91 which he equalled in the Eifel Grand Prix at Nurburgring last time out.

"I can't tell you how hard that was today," said Hamilton.

"Yes, we have a great car, but we have to drive the nuts off of it. I have been digging and digging and digging to find that extra time.

"I did the three laps to get a stab at beating his time and that last lap got better and better."

Max Verstappen took third for Red Bull ahead of Ferrari's Charles Leclerc and Sergio Perez of Racing Point with Alex Albon sixth in the second Red Bull and the McLaren pair of Carlos Sainz and Lando Norris in seventh and eighth places. Pierre Gasly was ninth for Alpha Tauri and Daniel Ricciardo tenth for Renault.

AFP

Nakagami takes first MotoGP pole in Spain

Alcañiz, Spain - Japanese rider Takaaki Nakagami grabbed his maiden MotoGP pole position for Sunday's Teruel Grand Prix, while championship leader Joan Mir could only qualify in 12th place on Saturday.

The 28 year old Nakagami, who signed a new deal with Honda's satellite team earlier this week, posted a fastest lap of one minute and 46.882 seconds.

Italian Franco Morbidelli, who was quickest in practice, qualified second, just 0.063 seconds slower, as Alex Rins rounded out the front row. Of the four likely world title contenders, Spaniard Maverick Vinales qualified best.

The Yamaha man will start the race on the second row after qualifying fourth, 0.359 seconds slower than Nakagami. Frenchman Fabio Quatararo, who trails Mir by six points at the top of the riders' standings, will also start on the second row, in sixth.

AFP



SBERBANK COMES TO ABU DHABI
Sberbank, the largest commercial bank in Russia, Central and Eastern Europe, will open an office in Abu Dhabi by the end of this year, according to a top executive of the bank

BUSINESS

Gulf Energy wins over \$1bn contract awards from PDO

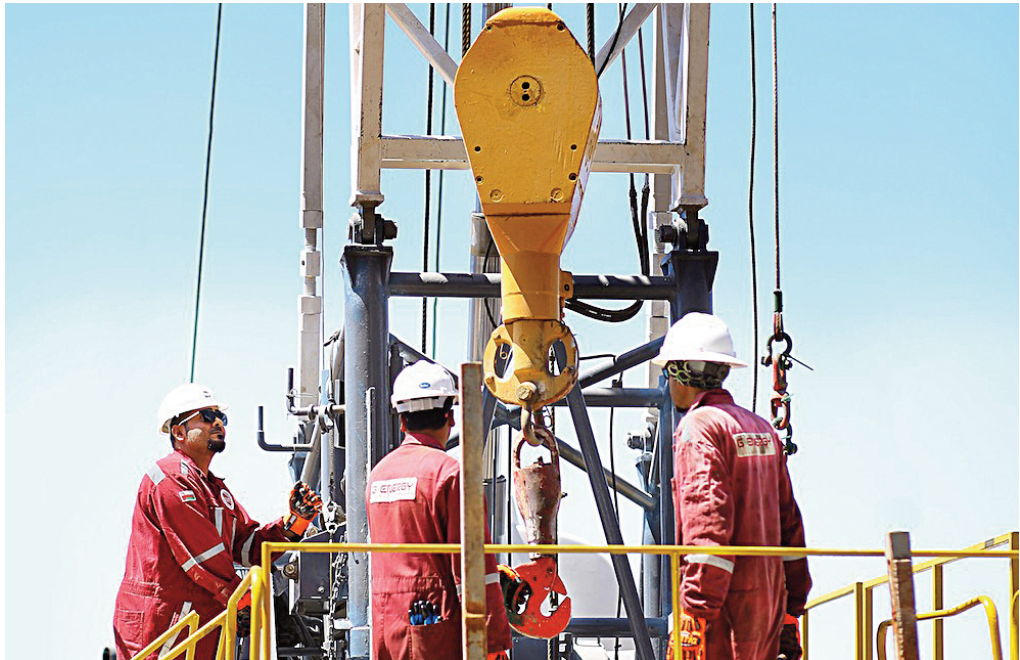
Our Correspondent
Muscat

Oman-based leading oilfield services provider Gulf Energy SAOC has secured multiple contract awards and extensions worth more than US\$1bn from Petroleum Development Oman (PDO).

Gulf Energy is a subsidiary of National Energy Services Re-united Corp (NESR), a US-based leading provider of integrated energy services in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) and Asia Pacific regions.

In a press statement posted on its website, NESR reported multiple extensions and awards to Gulf Energy in Oman by PDO valued at over US\$1bn. With these new contract awards, NESR said, Gulf Energy has cemented its position in Oman for the foreseeable future and has opened new growth avenues to expand its product lines over the next decade in the sultanate and in the MENA region.

These contract extensions to Gulf Energy include cementing, coil tubing and stimulation, fishing and milling, and downhole tools contracts for a period up to nine years, including a main term



of five years with two possible extensions of two years each, with contracts expiring between 2030 and 2032. In addition, a new contract for directional drilling and turbine drilling was also awarded for a term of up to six years, NESR said.

Raoul Restucci, managing director of PDO, commented, "I am pleased to see local companies, such as Gulf Energy, come of age supported by PDO's localization efforts and in-country

value strategy, which while delivering world class technology development for the upstream sector also ensures creation of jobs, training and learning opportunities for Omanis and enhancements in the domestic supply chain and manufacturing. Companies such as Gulf Energy are leading the change in transforming the upstream sector in Oman as well as the region."

Sultan al Ghafri, vice president of Gulf Energy, said, "We would

like to thank the Ministry of Energy and Minerals and PDO for their continued faith and confidence in our capabilities as well as the differentiated level of service which Gulf Energy has delivered over the years. The last fifteen years have seen Gulf Energy, a local Omani company, grow from a startup to one of the largest oilfield service providers in Oman and the region. These awards and extensions allow us to further grow and contribute to

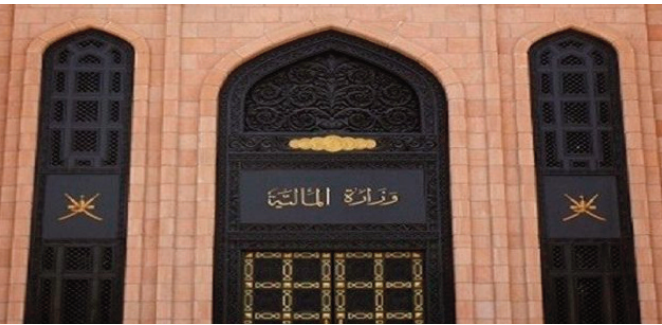
Oman's exploration and production industry and get to the next level."

Ghafri said Gulf Energy has invested heavily in both building manufacturing and operating facilities in Oman. "And these awards allow the company to build on this base to bring cutting edge technologies for the benefit of our customers in Oman and train and deploy Omani nationals as we have done in the past."

Sherif Foda, chairman of the board and CEO of NESR, said, "We are very pleased to further consolidate our presence in Oman, one of our key foundational countries and where NESR has longstanding history and deep roots. I am deeply thankful to the Ministry of Energy and Minerals and PDO as these awards validate and recognize the alignment and understanding we have had with the larger goals of in-country value creation in Oman."

"Beyond the monetary value, which is significant for these awards, the almost decade-long scope provides the business with the stability that allows us to invest heavily in recruiting and training Omani engineers and field personnel."

Oman taps global debt market with \$2bn bond sale



Our Correspondent
Muscat

The sultanate received good response from investors for its first international bond sale in more than a year, marking the sultanate's successful return to the global debt market.

Within the framework of its approved plan to finance the expected budget deficit for the current year, the sultanate's government has issued two tranches of international bonds to raise as much as US\$2bn from the global debt market, according to the Ministry of Finance's statement to Oman News Agency.

The Ministry of Finance said that it has issued two tranches of international bonds for maturity periods of seven years and twelve years amounting to US\$2bn in total.

The Ministry of Finance also

confirmed that the subscription process for bonds issue witnessed a high turnout of investors. The statement attributed this high demand for Oman's sovereign bonds to the market's confidence in the actions and initiatives of the sultanate's government which aims to achieve financial stability and sustainability.

Oman's budget deficit increased by more than 25 per cent in the first six months of this year amid a sharp plunge in oil revenues. The coronavirus pandemic and lower oil prices have hit the sultanate's economy hard this year affecting government's revenues from oil exports as well as corporate tax.

The budget deficit in the first half of 2020 increased to RO826.5mn compared to RO660.6mn in the corresponding period of 2019.



Category: Lifetime Achievement



And the winner is...

Dr Halima Nasser al Maskari

Dr Halima al Maskari, Oman's first female surgeon to join the medical profession in the sultanate at a time when medical facilities were limited and the need for female doctors much felt, has been a great inspiration to young female doctors in Oman over the years. Dr Halima, who was much sought after by female patients over the past few decades has always stressed the need for more female surgeons to join public/private sector hospitals in the sultanate. Healthcare institutions in this part of the world have been facing a dire shortage of female surgeons for long, she stresses. Dr Halima received her medical training in China, Tanzania and Germany. Also, for some time, she worked in UK. In 1992, when female surgeons were treated with skepticism, she joined the main trauma centre in Khoula Hospital and served there for a good 23 years, mainly covering breast cases and private part diseases. She is currently a senior consultant surgeon at Al Hayat International Hospital. Besides regularly attending to female patients, Dr Halima has also assisted in many complicated surgeries of trauma cases over the past two decades. Despite her busy schedule, she also devotes one day every two weeks for charity by helping the Oman Cancer Association in screening/examining women for breast cancer. With an ability to speak five languages - Chinese, German, English, Arabic and Swahili - Dr Halima is not just a good surgeon but also an excellent communicator and believes that hard work and a positive attitude are the stepping stones to success.

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MARKET ANALYSIS - OMAN

Financial stocks drag MSM index down

The benchmark index of the Muscat Securities Market (MSM) last week dropped 1.01 per cent, dragged by losses in financial sector stocks amid weak financial results reported for the first nine months of 2020.

Financial index of the MSM recorded a loss of 2.03 per cent on weekly basis, while Industrial index also dropped 1.27 per cent. Services index, however, closed higher by 1.08 per cent for the week. MSM Shariah index was also up by 0.49 per cent.

Majority of the MSM-listed companies have announced their third quarter/nine months results. Overall earnings of 100 companies, whose year ends in December, stood at RO435.5mn in first nine months of 2020 compared to RO519.3mn in the same period of 2019, a decline of 16 per cent. Financial sector earnings came at RO324mn, lower by 8 per cent on year-on-year basis. Industrial sector reported total loss of RO11.6mn for January – September period of 2020 compared to profit of RO22mn in the same period of last year. Services sector reported net income of RO123mn for the first nine months of this year, which is lower by 15 per cent compared to the same period of 2019.

Local news

►Oman's government has mandated banks for its first international public bond sale in



(Muscat Daily)

over a year and the state-owned OQ may tap the market soon after. The government hired HSBC Holdings, Standard Chartered, Citigroup, Natixis SA, Societe Generale, Bank Muscat and First Abu Dhabi Bank for a benchmark-sized offering of dollar notes due in three, seven and 12 years.

►A first-of-its-kind Unemployment Insurance Scheme, due to be launched next month on the Royal Directives of His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik, will help encourage Omanis to strongly consider risk-free employment in the private sector. The initiative, also known as the Employment Security Scheme, seeks to initially provide a safety

net to Omanis being laid off amid the ongoing economic downturn triggered by low international oil prices and aggravated by the coronavirus pandemic. In the second stage of its implementation, the scope of the scheme will be expanded to cover Omani job-seekers in general. Instituted by Royal Decree on August 17, 2020, the Employment Security Scheme was established with an initial grant of RO10mn by His Majesty the Sultan. Further contributions will come from public and private sector employees who will be required to pitch in 1 per cent of their monthly income effective from January 1, 2021.

►The Ministry of Housing and Urban Planning announced a major decision which will boost the real estate sector in the sultanate. As per the decision (No 357/2020) issued by Minister of Housing and Urban Planning, non-Omanis can purchase units in multi-storied commercial and residential buildings under the usufruct system. "There was a need to introduce a new product or policy to compensate for the decline that the real estate has been witnessing compared to last year," the under-secretary of the ministry said. In the first phase, the decision is applicable to certain locations in Muscat, namely Bausher, Al Amerat, and Al Seeb. The

places which are open for non-Omanis to buy properties are Bausher (1-3), Al Khuwair (2), Ghala Heights (1-2), Wattayah (1-2), and Misfah (2), Amerat, Hashiya (1), Mahajj (Area 1), Madinat al Nahdah (2-5), Seeb (South Mawelah 5), Al Khoud (2) and Mabelah South (7).

►Oman's sovereign rating was cut for the second time in 2020 by S&P Global Ratings as lower crude revenue and the virus pandemic took a heavy toll on the country's finances. S&P took Oman a notch lower to B+, four levels into its non-investment grade scale, according to a statement. The outlook on the rating is stable. The Gulf nation had already been downgraded

twice this year by Moody's. Oman's public sector finances, as indicated by the net debt level, will materially weaken over the next three years, notwithstanding the implementation of measures to reduce fiscal deficits, S&P said. "This is partly driven by our assumptions of restrained oil price growth and slow economic recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic," the ratings agency added.

inflation rate of 6.2 per cent in August. This change in prices is attributed to a rise in the value-added tax (VAT) to 15 per cent in July 2020 from 5 per cent, according to the latest statistics by the General Authority for Statistics.

China's economy expanded by 4.9 per cent in the July – September quarter compared to a year ago, according to the government statistics. The pace was quicker than the 3.2 per cent increase that China recorded in the second quarter, when it managed to avoid the pandemic-fueled recession that has gripped much of the world.

GCC and global news

The International Monetary Fund (IMF) issued its regional economic update report for the region. The IMF became more optimistic about the economic growth prospects for the Gulf states, but it urged the governments to retain social spending as a resurgence in coronavirus cases clouds the region's outlook. Economic output in the six GCC countries is set to shrink by 6 per cent this year, less than the 7.1 per cent contraction forecast by IMF in its July update report.

The improvement was helped by an upward revision for Saudi Arabia, the region's largest economy. In the short term, the rise in coronavirus cases regionally poses the main risk for the Middle East economies, said the IMF's director for the Middle East and central Asia.

Saudi Arabia's Consumer Price Index increased by around 5.7 per cent year-on-year in September 2020, down from an

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UK signs first post-Brexit trade deal with Japan

Tokyo, Japan – Britain hailed its first major post-Brexit trade deal Friday after signing an agreement with Japan that it said shows it can stand alone on the global stage, as talks on a pact with the European Union remain bogged down.

London said the pact, which was agreed after just a few months of talks over the summer, would boost business between the two countries by £15.2bn (US\$19.5bn) and proved others could be signed elsewhere.

The deal comes as Prime Minister Boris Johnson pursues his 'Global Britain' strategy that seeks potentially more advantageous trade deals than those that were negotiated while it was an EU member.

The UK-Japan Comprehensive Economic Partnership Agreement covers sectors including food, textiles and technology and largely replicates the existing EU-Japan arrangement, which will no longer apply to Britain at the end of this year.

It is due to take effect on January 1 – the end of a transition period in which London and Brussels are trying to thrash out the terms of their own new relationship.

British-Japanese trade was worth around £30bn last year, while Britain's imports and exports to the European Union, its biggest trading partner, totalled US\$670bn.

After the signing ceremony in Tokyo, Britain's International Trade Minister Liz Truss said, "It



British Secretary of State for International Trade Elizabeth Truss (second left) and Japanese Foreign Minister Toshimitsu Motegi (second right) take part in a signing ceremony for economic partnership between Japan and Britain at the Iikura Annex of the Foreign Ministry in Tokyo on Friday (AFP)

used to be said that an independent UK would not be able to strike independent trade deals, or they would take years to conclude. But today we prove the naysayers wrong."

Truss also said the deal 'paves the way' for Britain to join the Comprehensive and Progressive Agreement for Trans-Pacific Partnership between 11 countries including Canada, Mexico, Japan, Vietnam and Australia.

But joining is likely to be a complex manoeuvre that will take years.

Long-running post-Brexit talks with the EU resumed Thursday after Britain ended a week of threats to abandon them. Japanese Foreign Minister Toshimitsu Motegi on Friday highlighted the importance of a smooth end to the Brexit transition period, especially for Japanese businesses that see the UK as a 'gateway to continental Europe'.

AFP



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Egypt starts voting in first stage of parliament elections

Cairo, Egypt - Egyptians voted Saturday in a parliamentary election in which there was little doubt of a sweeping victory for supporters of hardline President Abdel Fattah al Sisi.

Some 63mn voters out of Egypt's more than 100mn people are eligible to elect 568 of the 596 lawmakers in the lower house, widely seen as a rubber-stamp body for executive policies.

The remaining deputies will be appointed by former army general-turned-president Sisi, whose government has over the past six years silenced any serious political opposition to its rule.

The elections will be held in two phases, with the first covering 14 provinces on Saturday and Sunday. The second, on November 7-8, will cover 13 provinces including the capital Cairo.

On Saturday morning, minibuses were seen driving around parts of Giza province, south of Cairo, bearing photos and banners of some candidates to draw support as voters trickled into polling stations, an AFP reporter said.

Giant billboards and banners have sprung up across the bustling capital Cairo and elsewhere urging Egyptians to vote, while some candidates have released online music video clips to draw support.

Many of the candidates also stood for election five years ago in a political landscape marked by the presence of dozens of parties with little weight and influence on the ground.

The outgoing parliament, elected in 2015, was packed with Sisi supporters and featured only a small opposition bloc known as 25/30.

The new parliament will be the second to convene under Sisi, who took office in 2014 after leading the military ouster of Islamist president Mohamed Morsi.



A man in mask due to the COVID-19 pandemic casts his vote at a polling station in the Talibeya district of Giza, the twin-city of Egypt's capital Cairo, on Saturday (AFP)

Over 4,000 candidates, believed to be pro-government, are competing for 284 of the 568 seats reserved for individuals. Eight party lists are running for the remaining 284 seats.

Run-offs will be held in November, and final results are to be announced in December.

A woman in Giza said she was casting her ballot under pressure from the authorities.

"I am only taking part in the elections because I am afraid if I don't vote I will be fined by the government," she said, declining to be named for security reasons.

During Senate elections in August, the election commission said citizens who fail to vote could face fines of up to 500 Egyptian pounds (US\$31 approx). Nevertheless those elections

were marked by a low voter turnout of around 14 per cent.

The parliament vote is the second to be held since the start of the COVID-19 pandemic which has so far infected more than 105,000 people and killed nearly 6,200 in Egypt.

Over 4,000 candidates, believed to be mostly pro-government, are competing for 284 of the 568 seats reserved for individuals. Eight party lists are running for the remaining 284 seats.

Among the top contenders is a political coalition known as the Unified National List, led by the

pro-government Mostakbal Watan, or Nation's Future, Party.

The party, including top businessmen and public figures, has grown since 2014 to become one of Egypt's dominant political forces.

It swept the August Senate elections, and its leader Abdelwahab Abdelrazek was named the upper house's head last Sunday.

The reinstatement of the upper house - which had been abolished after Morsi's ouster - was among constitutional amendments which included po-

tentially extending Sisi's rule until 2030. Other changes were to boost the President's control over the judiciary and granting the army even greater influence in political life.

Sisi's government has for years launched a severe crackdown on dissent, ensnaring journalists, bloggers, lawyers and intellectuals.

Protests have been effectively banned under a restrictive 2013 law, and a renewable state of emergency has been in place since 2017.

AFP

Ethiopia will not 'cave in' on Nile dam

Addis Ababa, Ethiopia - Ethiopia vowed on Saturday not to 'cave in to aggressions of any kind' after US President Donald Trump lashed out over the country's Nile River mega-dam and suggested Egypt might destroy it.

Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed's office defended the Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam, set to become Africa's largest hydropower plant, and said Ethiopia was working to resolve longstanding issues over the project with downstream neighbours Sudan and Egypt.

'Nonetheless, occasional statements of belligerent threats to have Ethiopia succumb to unfair terms still abound. These threats and affronts to Ethiopian sovereignty are misguided, unproductive, and clear violations of international law,' his office said in a statement.

'Ethiopia will not cave-in to aggressions of any kind,' the statement added.

A separate version of the statement issued in Amharic featured more muscular language.

'There are two facts that the world has certified. The first is that there has been no one who has lived in peace after provoking Ethiopia. The second is if Ethiopians stand united for one purpose, it's inevitable, they will triumph,' it said.

Abiy's office did not explicitly mention Trump, but its statement came the morning after the US president weighed in on the dam dispute in support of Egypt.

'It's a very dangerous situation because Egypt is not going to be able to live that way,' Trump told reporters in the Oval Office Friday during a ceremony marking a breakthrough normalisation deal between Israel and Sudan.

'They'll end up blowing up the dam. And I said it and I say it loud and clear - they'll blow up that dam. And they have to do something,' Trump said.

AFP

Pompeo's plea on Karabakh conflict shows no progress

Washington, US - US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo on Friday urged an end to fighting over Nagorno-Karabakh as he met his counterparts from Azerbaijan and Armenia but there were no signs of progress.

Pompeo held separate meetings in Washington an hour apart with Azerbaijani Foreign Minister Jeyhun Bayramov and Armenian Foreign Minister Zohrab Mnatsakanyan, without any three-way meeting.

Pompeo, who had downplayed expectations and did not speak alongside either minister, 'emphasised the need to end the violence and protect civilians', the State Department said.

He reiterated the US stance that the conflict should be resolved on the principles of 'the non-use or threat of force, territorial integrity and the equal rights and self-determination of peoples', a statement said.

Two ceasefire bids have already failed in the month of fighting with Armenia acknowledging that Azerbaijan has made military gains on the ground.

Bayramov said he told Pompeo that the 'Armenian occupation must end' of Nagorno-Karabakh, a mountainous region recognized internationally as part of Azerbaijan that is controlled by Armenian sepa-



A fighter sits on a car during the ongoing fighting over Nagorno-Karabakh, in a village south-east of Stepanakert on Friday (AFP)

ratists backed by Yerevan.

'We are committed to finding a political solution (to) the conflict and ready to resume substantive talks immediately,' Bayramov said in a statement after the talks.

'Armenia must stop avoiding meaningful negotiations and choose lasting peace,' he said.

But Armenia said that the aggressor was Azerbaijan, which it accused of intentionally targeting civilian sites. "There is no way that the security of our compatriots will be compromised. There is no way that we are going to allow another ethnic cleansing in Nagorno-Karabakh," Mnatsakanyan said at the Atlantic Council.

He called the talks with Pompeo 'very encouraging' and said he pressed concerns about Azerbaijan receiving weapons from its ally Turkey.

"The political and military encouragement of Azerbaijan to entertain the thought that there is a military solution to this conflict has been the role of Turkey," he said.

The United States has said it is neutral but Pompeo has criticized Turkey and in a recent interview described Armenia's actions as defensive.

Azerbaijan's Ambassador in Washington, Elin Suleymanov, said that Pompeo 'either mis-spoke or was misunderstood'. AFP

Syrian volunteers spruce up famed Crusader castle after years of war

Homs, Syria - Clutching a small saw, Syrian volunteer Rana Jreij cut away at bushes growing up the centuries-old walls of one of the world's most famous Crusader castles, Krak des Chevaliers.

She was among dozens to clear grass, shrubs and dead trees from the UNESCO-listed fortress this week, to protect it from forest fires that have ravaged the region.

"This castle is our home. It's our memories, and I'm scared for it," said the 32 year old, dressed in a white T-shirt with her hair tied back.

Heritage official Naeema Muhartam said she was delighted to see the castle come back to life after years of grinding civil war that has kept almost all tourists away.

"The castle is recovering," she said.

The fortress was built by a medieval Catholic military order, the Knights of St John, who held it from 1142 to 1271, when it was captured by a Mamluk sultan.

Sitting atop a high ridge in what is now the Homs province of modern-day Syria, it could once accommodate a garrison of 2,000 men.

Many centuries later, after civil war broke out in Syria in 2011, the fortress again became



A view of a passageway inside the medieval Crusader fortress Krak des Chevaliers, approximately 40km west of Syria's central city of Homs and close to the border with Lebanon (AFP)

a battleground, this time between government forces and rebels.

"The castle closed its doors in 2012, then opened up again in 2014 but it wasn't ready to receive visitors," Muhartam said.

Most notable was the damage to the castle's Gothic reception hall, and its chapel.

Muhartam was ecstatic when the fortress finally welcomed sightseers back across the moat bridge into its walled interior in late 2018.

"Up to 23,000 visitors came in 2019, but the corona pandemic forced it back into isola-

tion and only 5,000 people have come this year," she said.

"I'm happy to see life come back to the castle with hundreds of volunteers turning up, but my dream is to see cultural and touristic events return."

"I hope one day to again see concerts within its walls like there used to be before the war."

In early 2018, the Syrian government attended a tourism trade fair in Madrid, seeking to bring back foreign visitors to the war-ravaged nation.

But most countries advise citizens against all travel to Syria, and tourists from abroad have

been few and far between.

At the entrance to the castle's large reception hall, engineer Hazem Hanna gestured to some of the decorative stonework damaged in the 2012-2014 battles. "As long as the primary materials are available, we can fix them," he said.

Hungarian archaeologists have visited to help with restoration.

"The Hungarian excavation team came at the end of 2016 and helped us to restore the church's steeple and part of the castle's interior," he said.

AFP

COVID-19 PANDEMIC

Europe, WHO alarmed by resurgence

Stockholm, Sweden - The European Union's disease control agency has joined frantic health workers to sound the alarm over a coronavirus surge across the continent, as the World Health Organization (WHO) warned of an 'exponential' rise in infections.

Even countries that avoided severe outbreaks during Europe's first wave of contagion in the spring have watched their case numbers surge on Saturday.

Governments have reintroduced containment measures to slow the renewed spread of the virus in nations that only weeks earlier believed they had triumphed over the crisis.

But populations weary of social isolation and economic hardship have pushed back against fresh restrictions, including overnight clashes in hard-hit Naples between Italian police and hundreds of protesters.

The continent was facing a major threat to public health and a 'highly concerning epidemiological situation', said Andrea Ammon, director of the European Centre for Disease Prevention and Control (ECDC).

The agency said all EU countries except Cyprus, Estonia, Finland and Greece fell into a 'serious concern' category, as did the United Kingdom, up from just seven a month ago.

After Spain became the first European country to officially record a million COVID-19 cases earlier in the week, Prime Minister Pedro Sanchez said on Friday the real number of infections was likely more than triple that number.

France followed Spain past the million-case milestone on Friday while Germany hit a fresh daily record of nearly 15,000



An employee cleans up a table on an empty terrace before a nighttime curfew enters into force, at Piazza Navona square in Rome on Friday (AFP)

Too many countries are seeing an exponential increase in cases and that is now leading to hospitals and intensive care units running close to or above capacity

TEDROS ADHANOM

new cases, with health authorities urging the public to follow social distancing measures.

Urgent new restrictions on daily life have come into effect in several nations, with France extending a curfew to cover 46 million people.

Parts of Italy including the capital Rome went under curfew late on Friday, prompting a call

to protest on social media that saw hundreds of demonstrators in Naples throw objects at police and set rubbish bins on fire.

The country is reeling from its worst post-war recession

after a gruelling two-month national lockdown prompted by one of Europe's worst outbreaks, and authorities have so far been reluctant to repeat the

drastic quarantine restrictions seen then.

Wales entered a full lockdown on Friday evening, a day after Ireland shut down, while Poland adopted a nationwide 'red zone' lockdown mandating the partial closure of primary schools and restaurants.

Only Sweden, which famously refused to lock down earlier this year, continued to stick to its guns despite a rise in cases.

Across the planet, COVID-19 has now claimed the lives of 1.1mn people and infected close to 42mn, with the WHO warning the northern hemisphere was at a critical juncture.

"Too many countries are seeing an exponential increase in COVID-19 cases and that is now leading to hospitals and intensive care units running close to or above capacity," said WHO chief Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus.

Belgium has seen one of Europe's deadliest per capita outbreaks and has found itself suffering some of the highest second-wave infection rates in Europe.

"We're losing. We're overwhelmed. We're bitter," said Benoit Misset, head of the intensive care unit at the University Hospital in the city of Liege. AFP

Germany death toll over 10,000: Health institute

Berlin, Germany - Germany has suffered more than 10,000 COVID-19 deaths since the start of the pandemic, according to official data published on Saturday.

A total of 10,003 deaths have been recorded by the Robert Koch Institute, a federal government agency, with 418,005 infections recorded nationwide. Of those, 14,714 were diagnosed in the last 24 hours - a daily record.

Robert Koch Institute president Lothar Wieler said Germany was facing a 'very serious' situation and asked

the population to adhere to social distancing measures.

Germany was spared during the first wave of coronavirus infections that hit Europe in spring but is now suffering a sharp increase in cases along with the rest of the continent.

Authorities have tightened measures against the pandemic including the adoption of a public assembly ban.

Chancellor Angela Merkel asked the country to reduce their social contact and stay home as much as possible. AFP

Poland's President tests positive, says his aide

Warsaw, Poland - Poland's President Andrzej Duda has tested positive for coronavirus, an aide said on Saturday, as the country faces a record rise in cases.

'Ladies and Gentlemen, as recommended President @AndrzejDuda was tested yesterday for the presence of coronavirus. The result turned out to be positive. The president is fine,' Blazej Spychalski, secretary of state in the president's office, said on Twitter.

While it was unclear when Duda was infected, he had attended an investment forum in Tallinn on Monday where he met with Bulgarian President Rumen Radev who

later went into quarantine.

Poland went into a 'red zone' lockdown on Saturday, including the partial closure of primary schools and restaurants. The move came as the EU country of 38mn people saw a new 24-hour record of 13,632 coronavirus cases on Friday.

Poles have been asked to work remotely if they can and primary schools are partially closed with only grades one to three attending classes.

Secondary school and university students switched distance learning a week ago.

All seniors over the age of 70 have been asked to stay home. AFP



Demonstrators protesting against the measures taken to control COVID-19 challenge policemen, in Naples on Friday (AFP)

Hundreds clash with police over curfew in Naples

Rome, Italy - Hundreds of protesters in Naples threw projectiles at police and set rubbish bins on fire late on Friday during a demonstration against coronavirus restrictions in the southern Italian city.

Calls were issued on social media to challenge a curfew that took effect in the Campania region ahead of the weekend, enacted in response to a spiralling second wave of infections that saw nearly 20,000 new cases detected in the last 24 hours.

A mostly young crowd marched through the streets of the regional capital and chanted as the curfew started at 11.00 pm, with some lighting smoke bombs.

One carried a makeshift sign that read: 'If you close, you pay.'

Regional president Vincenzo de Luca had called for stricter confinement measures to contain the virus in Campania, which recorded 2,300 cases over the last day.

"We are on the verge of tragedy, we need a national lockdown," he said.

Prime Minister Giuseppe Conte has so far avoided reimposing the kind of restrictions that saw the entire nation confined to home quarantine for two months earlier this year and precipitated the country's worst post-war recession.

Italy was the first European country to be badly hit by the virus. It has now registered nearly 500,000 cases and 37,000 deaths, according to Health Ministry figures.

AFP

US sees daily record of nearly 80,000 new cases

Washington, US - A record of nearly 80,000 new COVID-19 infections over the course of a day were reported in the United States on Friday, according to figures from Johns Hopkins University.

Between 8.30pm on Thursday and the same time on Friday, 79,963 infections were recorded, bringing the total number since the start of the pandemic to nearly 8.5mn in the country.

The United States had al-



Democratic presidential nominee Joe Biden picks up his mask after dropping it at the end of his speech on COVID-19 on Friday (AFP)

ready approached the bar of 80,000 daily cases in July, largely due to new infections in southern states such as Texas and Florida, where the virus was then spreading out of control.

The worst current outbreaks are in the north and midwest, and some 35 of the 50 states are seeing an increase in case numbers. The number of deaths over 24 hours has remained broadly stable since the beginning of autumn, with between 700 and 800.

Overall, more than 223,000 people have died from COVID-19 in the country.

In absolute terms, the United States has suffered the most deaths of any country, though not in relative terms.

Mask-wearing, which a study has shown could prevent an additional 130,000 deaths if followed widely, has become embroiled in US politics in the run up to the November 3 presidential election.

AFP

Where activists failed pandemic succeeded

Lima, Peru - In a matter of months, the novel coronavirus achieved something that animal rights activists failed to do in decades: Put a halt to bullfighting in Peru.

The annual Senor de los Milagros (lord of the miracles) festival at Lima's Acho Bullring that usually takes place in October or November was cancelled this year due to COVID-19 restrictions. The 14,000 capacity Acho Bullring is currently being used to provide shelter for homeless pensioners affected by the pandemic.

"There will be no bulls this year," said Rafael Puga, a retired bullfighter who also rears bulls.

In 1973, he won the Senor de los Milagros festival's top prize, the Escapulario de Oro.

It's the first time since the festival began in 1946 that it's been cancelled.

"But it's also the first time



This file photo shows a shelter set up for the COVID-19 pandemic, at the bicentennial Acho Bullring in Lima on March 31 (AFP)

that the San Isidro festival in Madrid hasn't been held. It's due to a force majeure," sighed Juan Manuel Roca Rey, who organizes bullfights in the Acho ring and also rears bulls, using a legal term referring to events beyond anyone's control.

Bullfighting - known as a corrida in the Hispanic world - was brought to the Americas by Spanish conquistadors in the 16th century and has since become hugely popular among Peruvians of all social classes.

Peru has more bullfighting

arenas than football stadiums.

The Acho arena in the Rimac neighbourhood of Lima, built in 1766, is one of the oldest in the world and the oldest in the Americas.

In Peru, 'there must be 700 bullfights a year with 2,500

bulls killed', said Puga.

But they have all been banned due to the pandemic that has killed 34,000 people and infected 875,000 in the country. Football, on the other hand, restarted in August after a five-month hiatus, although without fans.

"The fact that there aren't any bullfights in the provinces is like death for breeders. Some won't be able to survive because the cattle eat every day," said Rey.

"This doesn't just affect us artists but everyone that works around a bullfight," said bullfighter Fernando Villavicencio (34).

He said the ban has also affected bullfighter assistants, those who make the heavily-embroidered suits, stable owners of horses used in the corridas and cattle transporters. AFP



Head of the Libyan Arab Armed Forces delegation A Amhimimid Mohamed Alamami (left) and head of the Government of National Accord's delegation Ahmed Ali Abushahma shake hands in presence of UN representative Stephanie Williams, in Geneva on Friday (AFP)

Libyans voice hope, doubts over ceasefire

Tripoli, Libya - Libyans have reacted with a mix of hope and scepticism after the signing of a nationwide ceasefire deal intended to pave the way towards a political solution to the country's grinding conflict.

While observers have welcomed the UN-backed deal, few are under any illusions about the difficulties of turning it into lasting peace on the ground.

"We've seen a lot of deals in the past," said Hassan Mahmud al Obeidi, a 40 year old secondary school teacher from the eastern city of Benghazi.

"What's important is the implementation."

Friday's deal was signed in Geneva by military delegates from the two main warring parties in the North African country, which plunged into violence in 2011 with the NATO-backed revolt that toppled veteran dictator Moammar Gadhafi.

The Tripoli-based unity government and rival forces led by eastern military commander

It's good that the two sides have been prepared to compromise, but the devil is in the detail

PETER MILLETT

Khalifa Haftar agreed to withdraw from front lines, start demobilising armed groups and set about integrating them into the state.

Crucially, the deal also calls for the departure of all foreign forces from Libyan soil within three months.

"It's good that the two sides have been prepared to compromise, but the devil is in the detail," said Peter Millett, a former British ambassador to Libya.

"There are an awful lot of questions. A key one is: Will countries that have been sponsors of military forces in Libya

support this compromise?"

Both major camps in Libya's complex war have received extensive backing from foreign powers.

Friday's deal comes four months after Haftar's Russian- and Emirati-backed forces gave up their year-long attempt to seize the capital Tripoli, a battle that killed hundreds of people and displaced tens of thousands.

In June, Haftar withdrew from western Libya in the face of a blistering counterattack by forces supporting the Government of National Accord - backed by Turkey.

The battle had further deepened the bitter mistrust between the rival political camps and their military allies, as well as ordinary Libyans.

"The war caused terrible social divisions," said Obeidi.

"Work is needed immediately, right now, to rebuild and to heal the deep wounds in Libyan society."

In the capital Tripoli a

1,000km drive west, pro-GNA fighter Salim Atouch voiced doubts the ceasefire would hold.

"We have experience with a previous agreement, which was five days before Haftar's attack on Tripoli, during which he destroyed the capital's infrastructure and killed many people," Atouch said.

"I hope this won't be like previous agreements, meaning we go back to war again. We will abide by it, but we are ready to react at any moment if it's violated."

The Geneva talks were the military part of a process led by the UN's Libya mission UNSMIL.

Separate political talks that start Monday aim to create a new governing body and prepare for elections.

Mohamed Dorda, co-founder and consulting director of geopolitical risk consultancy Libya Desk, said the ceasefire was a positive step that 'creates a basis for the political talks'.

AFP

Myanmar vote ban dims hope for minorities

Yangon, Myanmar - For many marginalised ethnic minority groups in conflict-plagued regions of Myanmar, next month's national elections had at least offered a glimmer of hope for empowerment.

But a decision to exclude swathes of their homelands from the vote - ostensibly over security concerns - has instead filled them with anger and despair, with nearly two million people now disenfranchised.

Aung San Suu Kyi's ruling National League for Democracy (NLD) is widely expected to be returned to power in the November 8 polls - only the second since the country emerged from outright military rule.

But the party faces waning support in many ethnic minority areas, where discontent has now intensified.

Last week the election commission announced a long list of constituencies where voting will not take place, leaving more than a million disenfranchised in Rakhine and hundreds of thousands more elsewhere.



This file photo shows workers packing promotional T-shirts for Aung San Suu Kyi's National League for Democracy party, in Yangon (AFP)

"This is devastating," said Hla Maung Oo, an ethnic Rakhine and head of one of many camps for displaced people in his state. "I'm depressed by the decision, because I knew who I was going to vote for from the beginning."

Tensions in Rakhine were high even before the move.

A civil war between the Myanmar military and the Arakan Army - a militant group fighting for more autonomy for the Rakhine - has killed and

wounded hundreds and forced 200,000 from their homes.

Both sides stand accused of abuses, but the AA still enjoys widespread support from a people who have long felt marginalised by the majority Bamar in one of the nation's poorest states. Trapped by fighting and swept up in the resulting disenfranchisement are a number of other ethnic minorities, including the Mro, Khami and Daingnet.

AFP

Roadside bomb kills 9 civilians near Afghan capital: Officials

Ghazni, Afghanistan - A roadside bomb tore through a passenger bus east of the Afghan capital on Saturday, killing nine civilians, officials said, in the latest attack blamed on the Taliban.

Violence on the ground has spiked in recent weeks despite the Taliban and Afghan government holding peace talks in Qatar to end the country's grinding war.

The bomb struck the bus at around 10.30am when it was travelling from Kabul to the eastern city of Ghazni, Waheedullah Jumazada, spokesman for Ghazni governor told AFP.

"Nine civilians including three women were killed in the explosion," he said.

Four policemen were also wounded, Ghazni police spokesman Adam Khan Seerat said, blaming the Taliban for the attack.

Despite joining peace talks with the government last month, the Taliban have only increased violence in a bid to wield leverage in the negotiations.

The top US envoy to Afghanistan, Zalmay Khalilzad, said earlier this week that fighting is threatening the peace process.

On Friday, rights group Amnesty International said at least 50 people had been killed in attacks just in the preceding week, accusing the warring sides of failing to protect civilians.

"The world must sit up and take notice. Afghan civilians are being slaughtered on a daily basis," said Omar Waraich, Head of South Asia at Amnesty International.

"The international community must make the protection of civilians a core demand for their ongoing support of the peace process."

AFP

US Coast Guard to tackle China 'illegal' fishing



This file photo shows US Coast Guard personnel on the deck of the USCGC William Flores on October 17, 2012

Washington, US - The United States said on Friday it will deploy Coast Guard patrol ships in the western Pacific to counter 'destabilising and malign' activities by China in disputed fishing grounds of the South China Sea.

Accusing China of 'illegal' and 'unregulated' fishing, as well as 'harassment' of fishing boats from regional countries, White House National Security Advisor Robert O'Brien said in a statement that the US Coast Guard 'is strategically homeporting significantly enhanced Fast Response Cutters...in the western Pacific'.

These Sentinel class vessels will carry out maritime security operations, including helping fishing boats 'in collaboration with regional partners who have lim-

ited offshore surveillance and enforcement capacity, and ensure freedom of navigation', he said.

Washington regularly accuses China of breaking international law by sending its warships as escorts for Chinese fishing vessels into the fishing grounds of other countries.

In July, US Defence Secretary Mark Esper slammed a 'catalog of bad behaviour' in the South China Sea over the previous months and accused the Chinese military of having sunk a Vietnamese fishing boat, harassing Malaysian oil and gas development and escorting Chinese fishing fleets into Indonesia's exclusive economic zone.

O'Brien added that the Coast Guard, which is under the De-

partment of Homeland Security (DHS), was also studying whether to permanently station several of its patrol ships in the area of American Samoa in the South Pacific.

Last month, Indonesia protested about an incursion by Chinese coastguard ships in its exclusive economic zone, which is situated between its own territorial waters and international waters and where the state claims exclusive rights to exploit natural resources.

China claims almost the whole of the South China Sea as its own, a claim contested by several countries including Malaysia, Taiwan, the Philippines, and Indonesia.

AFP

CHANGE OF NAME

I MARY JACOB (Holder Of Indian Passport No. L8325612) daughter of CHERUMADTHIL VARGHESE having permanent residence in C/903, Wing C Trinity Chs Ltd Nr. Hiranandani Hospital, Tirandaz Village, Powai, Mumbai 76 (Complete Postal Address In India) and presently residing in Way No.1930 Bldg-2337 Flat No.5 Near Indian School Muscat (complete Postal Address In Oman) intend to change my name from MARY JACOB (old Name) to MARY JACOB MANJALY (New Name) for all practical purpose. Any objection towards my name change may please be communicated to Embassy Of India, Muscat, Diplomatic Quarters, AL Khuwair, P.Box No. 1727, Postal Code 112, RUWI, Sultanate Of Oman.

CHANGE OF NAME

I JACOB VARGHESE (Holder Of Indian Passport No.S5794227) Son Of MANJALY CHAKO VARGHESE having permanent residence in C/903, Wing C Trinity Chs Ltd Nr. Hiranandani Hospital, Tirandaz Village, Powai, Mumbai 76 (Complete Postal Address In India) and Presently Residing in Way No.1930 Bldg-2337 Flat No.5 Near Indian School Muscat Darsait (complete Postal Address In Oman) intend to change my name from JACOB VARGHESE (old Name) To JACOB VARGHESE MANJALY (New Name) for all practical purpose. Any objection towards my name change may please be communicated to Embassy Of India, Muscat, Diplomatic Quarters, AL Khuwair, P.Box No. 1727, Postal Code 112, RUWI, Sultanate Of Oman.

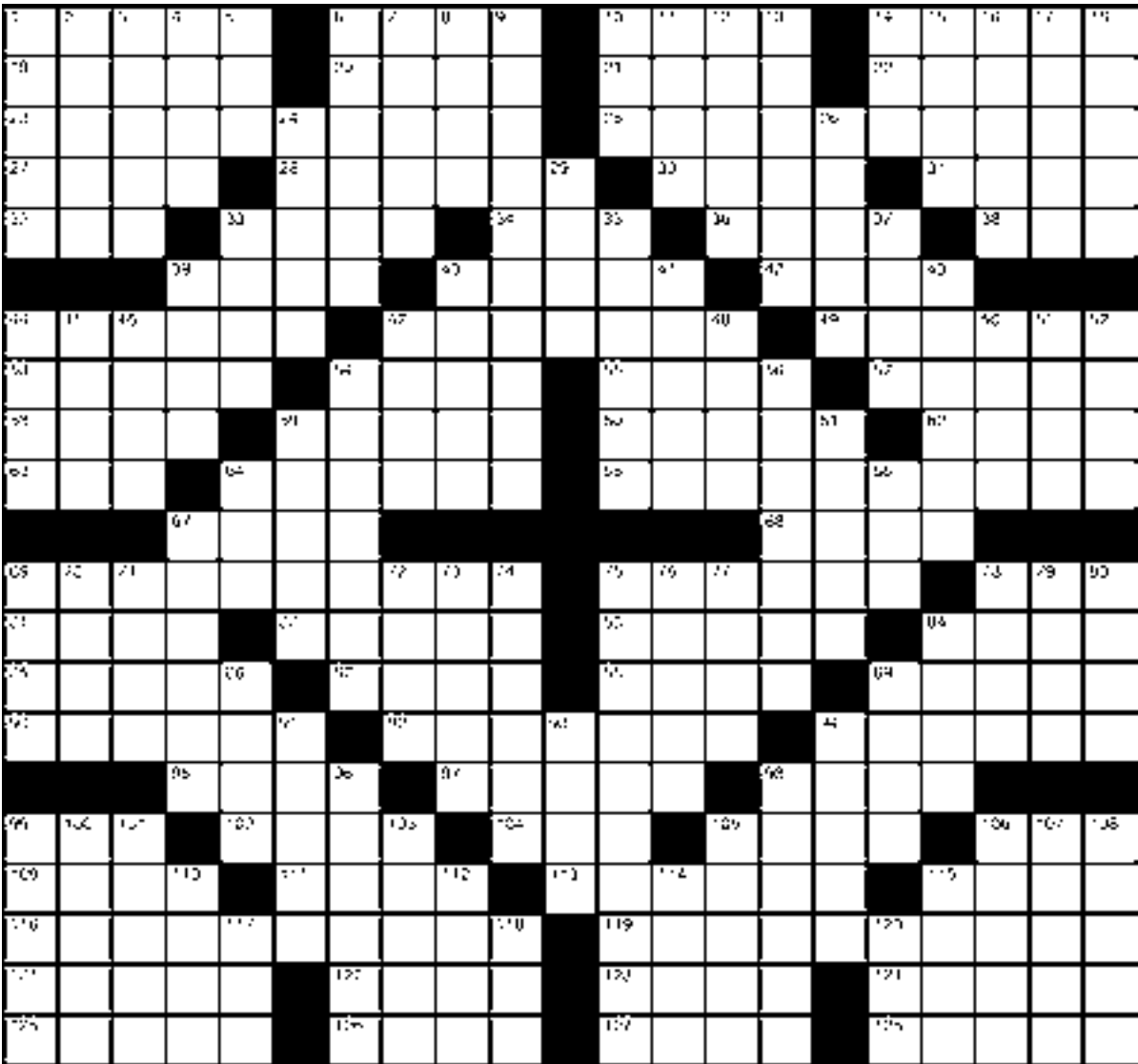
CHANGE OF NAME

We JACOB VARGHESE (Name Of Father as per the Passport, Holder of Indian Passport No.S5794227) and MARY JACOB (Name Of Mother as per the Passport Holder of Indian Passport No.L8325612) having permanent address In C/903, Wing C, TRINITY CHS. LTD., Nr. HIRANANDANI HOSPITAL, TIRANDAZ VILLAGE, POWAI, MUMBAI - 76 (Complete Postal address in India) and presently residing at the following address in Way No.1930 Bldg-2337 Flat No.5 Near Indian School Muscat P.B. No. _ _ _ P.C.No. _ _ _ Sultanate Of Oman, hereby Solemnly affirm and declare to change the name of our Child Master JOHANN JACOB (Name as per Passport) holder of Indian Passport No. T2486438 Date Of issue 10/04/2019 Issued at MUSCAT. The name of our child will be henceforth Known As JOHANN JACOB MANJALY (new Name) for all purpose. Any Objection towards change of name of our minor child may please be communicated to Embassy Of India, Muscat, Diplomatic Quarters, AL Khuwair, P.Box No. 1727, Postal Code 112, RUWI, Sultanate Of Oman.

CHANGE OF NAME

We JACOB VARGHESE (Name Of Father as per the Passport, Holder of Indian Passport No.S5794227) and MARY JACOB (Name Of Mother as per the Passport Holder of Indian Passport No.L8325612) having permanent address In C/903, Wing C, TRINITY CHS. LTD., Nr. HIRANANDANI HOSPITAL, TIRANDAZ VILLAGE, POWAI, MUMBAI - 76 (Complete Postal address in India) and presently residing at the following address in Way No.1930 Bldg-2337 Flat No.5 Near Indian School Muscat P.B. No. _ _ _ P.C.No. _ _ _ Sultanate Of Oman, hereby Solemnly affirm and declare to change the name of our child Master JEZWYN JACOB (Name as per Passport) holder of Indian Passport No. N2788609 Date Of issue 17/11/2015 issued at MUSCAT. The name of our child will be henceforth known as JEZWYN JACOB MANJALY (new Name) for all purpose. Any Objection towards change of name of our minor child may please be communicated to Embassy Of India, Muscat, Diplomatic Quarters, AL Khuwair, P.Box No. 1727, Postal Code 112, RUWI, Sultanate Of Oman.

DAILY CROSSWORD



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ACROSS

- 1 Michelangelo's work
- 6 Ram down
- 10 Biblical wise men
- 14 Fat
- 19 Straight as one
- 20 Culture medium
- 21 Solar disk
- 22 Formed into bundles
- 23 African lake
- 25 Plotting in secret
- 27 French summers
- 28 Bowling lanes
- 30 Needy
- 31 ___ Lisa
- 32 Thing, in law
- 33 A tree
- 34 Greek letter
- 36 Arabic letter
- 38 Parking lot layer
- 39 God of love
- 40 A support
- 42 Actors Lager or Jennings
- 44 Inhume
- 47 Executes by hanging
- 49 Light refractors
- 53 Showy flower
- 54 Tolerable
- 55 Recording ribbon
- 57 A legislator
- 58 Scottish-Gaelic
- 59 Society no-no
- 60 Habituate

- 62 Cyrano's attribute
- 63 Goddess of dawn
- 64 Connect again
- 65 Vermillion
- 67 German metaphysician
- 68 Pagan deity
- 69 Hair ___
- 75 Trimmed, as shrubs
- 78 Bucketlike vessel
- 81 Simple
- 82 Uncanny
- 83 Stair part
- 84 Father
- 85 Senseless
- 87 East Indian cereal
- grass: var.
- 88 Poems
- 89 Title of honor
- 90 Sots
- 92 Signified
- 94 Criminals
- 95 Tears
- 97 Smooth consonants
- 98 "Little ___ Sunshine"
- 99 Workout target
- 102 Require
- 104 Aves. counterpart
- 105 Spectacles extra
- 106 Deface
- 109 Roman circus
- post
- 111 War god

- 113 Indolent
- 115 Philippine municipality
- 116 Predilection
- 119 Comes between
- 121 Page or Pompeo
- 122 A gas
- 123 Poetic contraction
- 124 A tidal flood
- 125 Erects
- 126 Italian princely house
- 127 Jewels
- 128 Waste allowances
- DOWN**
- 1 ___ familias
- 2 Angry
- 3 Sea eagles
- 4 Clothes
- 5 Milkfish
- 6 Singer Swift
- 7 Nimble
- 8 Manufacture
- 9 Devotional tome
- 10 Prefix to Scotch names
- 11 Over
- 12 Italian city
- 13 Part of a shoe
- 14 Japanese sash
- 15 Yeast on brewing liquors
- 16 George ___
- 17 Dried cassia leaflets

- 18 ___ Allan Poe
- 24 Man of great wealth
- 26 To dress up
- 29 Pierce with a dagger
- 33 Television award
- 35 Producing vinegar
- 37 Confiers
- 39 First-class
- 40 Burger option
- 41 Babylonian hero
- 43 One of the Barrymores
- 44 Fencing sword
- 45 Roman emperor
- 46 Fling
- 47 Desert in Asia
- 48 To goad
- 50 Vegas machine
- 51 Greatest amount
- 52 Dirk
- 54 More briny
- 56 Certain weasels
- 59 Taut
- 61 Sea duck
- 64 Operated
- 66 To drowse
- 67 More acute
- 69 Issue forth
- 70 Strange: comb. form
- 71 Snare
- 72 Toward the mouth
- 73 ___ Wolpert in "Harry Potter"
- 74 Nets

- 75 Remonstrating
- 76 Carnival features
- 77 Pre-owned
- 78 Edible rootstock
- 79 "Once ___ a time . . ."
- 80 Proscribes
- 84 Chums
- 86 Ireland
- 89 To outstrip
- 91 Lance
- 93 A preposition
- 94 More delicate
- 96 Calm
- 98 Stingy hoarders
- 99 Blemish in cloth
- 100 Comedian of yore, Milton ___
- 101 Stone pillar
- 103 Sand hills
- 105 ___ pole
- 106 Skin disease
- 107 Wide awake
- 108 Flowers of love
- 110 The southwest wind
- 112 Tax
- 114 Arrow poison
- 115 Bosc or Anjou
- 117 Printer's measures
- 118 Compass direction: abbr.
- 120 Spot's doc

YOUR DAILY HOROSCOPE

ARIES MARCH 21-APRIL 19

Revelations around relationships are weaving their way up through your subconscious. Messenger Mercury merges with the identity focused sun this afternoon, helping you sink into long lost hidden thoughts and feelings around intimacy, commitment, and sexuality. The moon slips into "feely" Pisces this evening as well, suggesting that it's best to process your emotional findings in private.

LEO JULY 23-AUGUST 22

History has a way of repeating itself. Ancient material relating back to your early foundations and experience of childhood seem to be bursting forth into your thinking, as mental Mercury merges with the identity-building sun. Long awaited conversations or revelations can make themselves known today—especially regarding matters concerning family or home life.

SAGITTARIUS NOVEMBER 22-DECEMBER 21

Introspection is your favourite activity. You prefer to think big about the world, rather than mull over the messy little details of your emotional life. Sunday's skies don't allow for an escape from that reality—as the sun merges with Mercury. This stirs up long buried thoughts, feelings, and resentments that have been stowed away in your subconscious.

TAURUS APRIL 20-MAY 20

So much energy is swirling around your partnership story, Taurus. Single or taken, you can expect yourself to be devoting lots of thought towards the level of intimacy you're experiencing in your life. Important breakthroughs or powerful conversations initiated by a partner are likely in the course of the day, as communicator Mercury merges with the illuminating sun.

VIRGO AUGUST 23-SEPTEMBER 22

Don't hold back from speaking up. Your ruling planet, Mercury, conjoins the illuminating sun, helping you witness your mental interior world and the ways in which you communicate with a penetratingly sharp eye. Revelations and critical conversations are to be expected around your identity. The moon slides into Pisces, helping you talk things out with a partner.

CAPRICORN DECEMBER 22-JANUARY 19

Old friends and goals that have been put on the shelf have been sneaking their way back into your awareness. That story comes to a head today, as Mercury merges with the sun, prompting you to engage in critical conversations with friends or allies. This helps create a breakthrough in your approach to your goals. This evening's Pisces moon prompts you to speak up.

GEMINI MAY 21-JUNE 21

You're likely to begin connecting the dots around your work/life balance. Your ruling planet, Mercury, merges with the identity-focused sun, helping prompt important conversations or revelations regarding the state of your relationship to your current workload. By evening, the moon dips into Pisces, having you fully focused on the future of your reputation and career.

LIBRA SEPTEMBER 23-OCTOBER 22

Pay attention to the stories taking place around your finances and feelings of self-worth. It's easy to think that finances and self-worth don't go hand-in-hand, but they often work together. Today's skies feature the merging of Mercury and the sun, helping reveal your current relationship with money and its level of importance. This also creates revelations around your own experience of validity.

AQUARIUS JANUARY 20-FEBRUARY 18

New information is seeping in on all sides of your career. Sunday's skies make it easy to see with clarity what direction needs to be taken next, as Mercury unites with the self-contained sun. Look for important exchanges or revelations in your thinking, as you'll begin to absorb messages being funnelled towards you and your ambitions. Your new reputation awaits!

CANCER JUNE 22-JULY 22

Tune into the messages you're receiving around your creative life today, Cancer. The self-concerned sun unites with retrograde Mercury this afternoon, highlighting the ongoing story around old romances, creative projects, and the vulnerability of your self-expression. Come evening, the moon dips into dreamy Pisces, encouraging you to break out of your usual nightly routine.

SCORPIO OCTOBER 23-NOVEMBER 21

Scorpios are notorious for their natural insight into others. The only area they tend to struggle is when they're called to look inward! Today's skies have all eyes on you, as Mercury aligns with the sun, prompting revelations or critical conversations around your own identity and individuality. Pay attention to the messages you're receiving around being your own person.

PISCES FEBRUARY 19-MARCH 20

You don't tend to learn in the classic classroom setting. All of life and its rich feelings and abstractions tend to change and deepen your impressions on the world. Important revelations around your education and future self-expansion are present today, as Mercury conjoins the sun, helping to make clear what elements of your belief systems need further exploration.



TEST YOUR KNOWLEDGE

- 1. In which year did Sir Edmund Hillary reach the summit of Mount Everest?
a. 1952
b. 1953
c. 1954
d. 1955
- 2. HP stands for
a. Harmonic Progression
b. Horse Power
c. both (a) and (b)
d. None of the above
- 3. India's first fast breeder neutron reactor was
a. Zerlina
b. Apsara
c. Purnima-I
d. Kamini

Answers: 1: b 2: c 3: d

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

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

BOGGLER

T	S	P	C
L	E	E	E
A	I	E	R
G	U	A	S

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

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

SUDOKU EASY ANSWER

DAILY CROSSWORD ANSWERS (OCTOBER 22)

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

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



ARTICULATE ARTIST

Hubert Vaz

I experience colour... I live inspired! Graffiti like this on the exterior wall of his villa seems to convey a magical experience to all who call on him. And soon it dawns upon the visitor, that Madny al Bakry, one of the most popular, talented, and senior artists in Oman, doesn't quite live with art... Art lives with him!

A maverick with colours and concepts, an erudite artist, and an eloquent speaker that he is, Madny doesn't need any introduction - his art speaks volumes about his skill with the paintbrush. And every canvas created by him is not just a work of art but a visual trap that can capture the viewer and send him in a tizzy in an instant.

When you visit this artist at his residence, a stone's throw off the first traffic intersection on 18th November Street, you would notice that the celebration of colours and patterns begins right from the compound that surrounds his dwelling where one is greeted with greenery galore, an interesting seating space, waterfalls, thought-provoking graffiti and, above all, a world of artistic fantasy waiting to be discovered

Living with Art

behind the main door.

Madny has newly created his very own gallery adjacent to his studio within his residence where he has put up a fabulous display of his latest collection of what he terms as 'Calligrafic', a new spin on 'Calligraffiti' (which was once coined by him to categorise his art but unfortunately got usurped by others due to wide exposure on the internet). The new collection includes a set of huge canvasses of abstract motifs interspersed by dynamic Arabic graffiti, all in vibrant hues that reflect the eternal cultural ethos of Africa. He has also taken this new art a step forward by infusing it with what he calls 'human patterns' that are symbolic of the essence of cultures from around the world and which have a universal appeal.

As you enter his abode, you discover that right from the foyer to every passage and in every room the walls are adorned with his paintings turning the entire house into an art gallery of sorts. Madny has found artistic expression for his creativity in diverse ways, from abstract art, to landscapes, and even in photographic essays, since he also is a skilled photographer who has published many books on photography,

capturing diverse aspects of life in Africa, especially Zanzibar - his birthplace.

Over the past few decades, Madny has travelled around the world and not just exhibited his explicit works, some of which have been installed in prestigious institutions, but also delivered lectures to diverse audiences comprising artists as well as art lovers.

When asked how art has influenced his life over the years, Madny disclosed that after studying art in the US, he began his journey as a textile artist. However, in Oman, it was always a hobby that he pursued side by side with his profession as a sports advisor in the Ministry of Sports from which he has now retired.

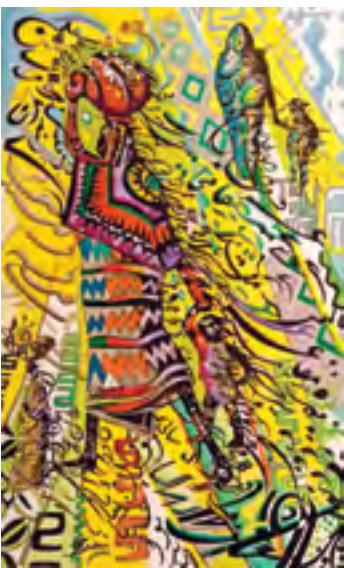
Madny further disclosed that, after painting for years and selling his art routinely, he had craved for recognition and had asked an accomplished photographer friend of his how he could get there. The friend told him that he needed two aspects to gain recognition - a unique individual style and an understanding of what appeals to the art world. Taking a cue from that, he developed his own style, backed with his robust grasp of the Arabic

All my works, though they are up on the walls, they are subject to change. I say, they are 'abandoned', not finished!
MADNY AL BAKRY

language and combined with his love for strong colours, and it now has a great demand internationally.

Madny's ability to observe, process and store all his visual experiences in his brain, like a hard disc, has given him numerous inspirations for all his creations. And he makes it a point to construct every painting with a focal point and a balance of patterns and colours such that they do not lead the viewer out of the painting, rather they hold onto him and compel him to move from element to element within.

"None of my paintings are complete. There is always something that can be added or corrected in



Mother and Child
This painting indicates the bonding between a mother and child, with an image of and African woman and child combined with Arabic graffiti.

every work. So, we leave completion, as an aspect, to the creator - only He has the power to complete something," he said, adding, "All my works, though they are up on the walls, they are subject to change. I say, they are 'abandoned' not finished!"



Landscape of Qurriyat
A beautiful scene from erstwhile Mazara in Qurriyat, indicating bountiful nature which has now been intercepted by concrete constructions.



Elephants
This painting comprises a series of dots showing the facade of the Grand Mosque fused by images of numerous elephants



Calligrafitti
This abstract painting is indicative of triangular compositions, one of Madny's art structures, which holds on to the viewer's attention in a triangular trap

OUTDOOR OPTIONS

Never before has a home's outdoor space been more cherished or vital. A large number of homeowners have recently either undertaken or are in the process of upgrading their home's exterior to make their outdoor space more hygienic and appealing.

For those still in the planning phase, professional designer and TV personality Alison Victoria, host of HGTV's 'Windy City Rehab', suggests four DIY-friendly projects to undertake this fall to turn your backyard into an outdoor oasis.

Deck it out

A great deck space can add valuable square footage to a home for al fresco dining, outdoor fun or just a refreshing retreat between Zoom meetings. The first thing to remember when planning a deck build is that materials matter. Consider building with composite decking that feature a beautiful wood-grain pattern without the constant upkeep of wood. This high-performance, low-maintenance option won't ever need sanding or staining, and only requires soap and water cleanings to retain its colour.

Go green

Put your green thumb to use by

starting a vegetable garden or sprucing up your backyard with new plants and seasonal flowers. If you're looking to create privacy, a popular and eco-friendly solution is to build a living wall that can shield you from neighbours while surrounding your outdoor space with flowers and fresh herbs. Planter boxes for a vertical wall are relatively easy to build. If your skills are more advanced, consider adding a drip irrigation system so you don't have to worry about watering.

Liven with lattice

For a clever design trick that adds both personal style and functionality to any outdoor space, consider incorporating lattice. Perfect for enhancing privacy or



DECK MATERIAL CHOICES

- **Pressure-treated lumber:** This is most popular and gives a classic hardwood look, but needs a lot of maintenance and is susceptible to warping.
- **Cedar/Redwood:** These are more expensive materials for outdoor decks.
- **Composite:** Plastic or a composite material needs little maintenance after installation but can be limited in terms of colour or aesthetics.
- **Aluminium:** The most durable and expensive option, however, is aluminium.

hiding unsightly views, such as garbage cans and lawn equipment, lattice is durable, lightweight and easy to install. Go for lattice that offers exclusive styles ranging from traditional to art deco in panels that can be applied to structures such as arbors, trellises and gazebos, or used as deck skirting.

Create an outdoor room

Just like the inside of your home, you can establish separate outdoor areas for relaxing, cooking,

dining and socialising. A pergola is perfect for creating the look and feel of an 'outdoor room', serving to frame a space while adding a distinct, architectural element. Incorporate traditionally interior accents like plush furnishings, accent pillows, throw blankets and an area rug - to create an inviting outdoor haven.

"When it comes to backyard design, pergolas remain on-trend due to their versatility. They add definition and drama to any deck," Victoria adds. (BPT)



Category: Literature



And the winner is...

Jokha al Harthi

Jokha al Harthi, an Omani writer and academician, best known for her Man Booker International Prize winning novel – Celestial Bodies (which was translated from the original in Arabic – Sayyidat el Qamar), turned the spotlight on the literature scene in Oman with this achievement last year. She has also authored many novels and collections of short stories, all of which reflect folklore and tales of yore in Oman. Sayyidat el Qamar was the first work by an Arabic language writer to be awarded the Man Booker International Prize, and the first novel by an Omani woman to appear in English translation. The book was regarded as 'A richly imagined, engaging and poetic insight into a society in transition and into lives previously obscured.' With a PhD in classical Arabic literature from Edinburgh University, Jokha currently is an associate professor in the Arabic language department, College of Arts and Social Sciences, Sultan Qaboos University. Her work has, however, been translated into English, Serbian, Korean, Italian, German, Azerbaijani, Brazilian Portuguese, Bulgarian, Catalan, Chinese, Croatian, English, French, Greek, Hungarian, Italian, Malayalam, Norwegian, Persian, Portuguese, Romanian, Russian, Sinhalese, Slovenian, Swedish and Turkish. A recipient of many literary awards, including the Sultan Qaboos Award for Culture, Arts and Literature (2016), Jokha is also an eloquent speaker and has presented lectures in London, Seoul, Tokyo, Cairo, Agadir, Tunisia, Beirut, Sharjah, Istanbul, Barcelona, Kerala, Edinburgh, Harrisburg, Adelaide, and Wellington.

HEADLINE PARTNER



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