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HM'S CUP QUARTERS: EXCITING CONTESTS ON CARDS
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Severity of COVID-19 has not reduced until now: H E Sa'eedi

Shaddad al Musalmi
Muscat

Even though the number of COVID-19 cases is low in Oman, the severity of the disease has not yet decreased. The fewer number of cases is due to everyone's commitment to the precautionary measures, according to H E Dr Ahmed bin Mohammad al Sa'eedi, Minister of Health.

Addressing the Majlis A'Shura on Sunday, H E Dr Sa'eedi said, "If we did not implement the complete closure (of activities), the human and economic losses would have been greater. There were serious violations by some quarantined patients, which we were able to detect through the Tarassud+ app."

He noted that there are advanced countries that reached a stage where they selected cases for intensive unit care. "We did not see such a situation thanks to your cooperation with the Supreme Committee. We have also not reached a point - and hope that we never do - of shortage in oxygen equipment or having to prioritise younger over older patients as in some countries," H E Dr Sa'eedi said.



If we did not implement the complete closure (of activities), the human and economic losses would have been greater. There were serious violations by some quarantined patients, which we were able to detect through the Tarassud+ app

H E DR AHMED BIN MOHAMMAD AL SA'EEDI

He informed that the Ministry of Health (MoH) didn't stop conducting coronavirus tests at any point in time, and that the number of samples tests was as high as 6,000 on certain days.

To ensure that Oman obtains the required quantity of vaccine, several negotiation channels have been opened with the Global Alliance for Vaccine and also directly with vaccine manu-

facturers. H E Dr Sa'eedi assured the Majlis A'Shura that Oman will not import any vaccine or medicine without ensuring its safety and compliance with health standards and requirements.

More doses of the Pfizer-BioNTech vaccine are scheduled to arrive soon.

"No Russian or Chinese vaccine has been booked; 370,000 of the Pfizer vaccine have been reserved, some of which will arrive this week or the next," he said, adding that 100,000 doses of the Oxford-AstraZeneca vaccine have also been booked which are expected to arrive within a week.

H E Dr Sa'eedi informed that since the launch of the national campaign for immunisation against COVID-19 on December 28, 2020, more than 27,000 people have been vaccinated with the Pfizer-BioNTech vaccine with 99 per cent coverage rate of the target group.

He cautioned that even as the MoH exerts every effort to keep the situation under control and the continuing economic constraints as a result of falling oil prices, there are serious challenges facing the development of healthcare in the sultanate. The challenges include limited financial resources and shortage of human resources.

On Tuesday, the MoH announced 558 new cases of COVID-19 during the last three

days, taking the total to 133,044. There were four deaths and 1,532 recoveries during this period.

"The number of recoveries has increased to 126,262, while the number of deaths has reached 1,521," an MoH statement said, adding the rate of recovery now stands at 95 per cent.

Omanisation in healthcare sector

A new law promulgated by the MoH makes it binding on the private sector to Omanise medical posts. "We in the health sector have absolute faith in Omanisation, and replacement is taking place gradually. The Omanisation of dentists in primary healthcare institutions has been achieved 100 per cent," H E Dr Sa'eedi said.

"The Omanisation rate in the pharmacy sector in the private sector is still unsatisfactory. In the institutions of the MoH in this sector, Omanisation has reached 95 per cent."

H E Dr Sa'eedi assured that Omani cadres are well trained. "We assure everyone that the international protocols are followed for treatment in the sultanate and I have full confidence in our health cadres."

Continued on Page 03

Land borders closed till Feb 1

Our Correspondent
Muscat

The Supreme Committee tasked with tackling developments resulting from the COVID-19 pandemic has decided to extend the closure of the sultanate's land borders for one more week till 6pm of February 1, 2021.

The Supreme Committee stated that as per recommendations of the specialised technical team on the spread of the new COVID-19 strain and in a bid to protect all individuals of society against the disease, it decided to keep land borders closed for one more week.

It added that the committee has monitored updates of the pandemic and ways to protect people against it, as well as means to curb its spread.

"The Supreme Committee is following up and assessing the epidemiological situation in the sultanate and the increase in the number of infected cases and those admitted in ICUs and hospital wards, in addition to the carelessness observed among some individuals in implementing precautionary measures approved by the authorities concerned," it said. The committee is also following up the global updates of the pandemic.

MoL Omanises some private jobs coming into effect in six months

Our Correspondent
Muscat

H E Dr Mahad bin Said bin Ali Ba'owain, Minister of Labour (MoL), has issued Ministerial Decision No 8/2021 to Omanise some professions in the private sector.

Article 1 of the decision limited the practice of all the following professions and activities in private sector establishments to Omanis -

- Financial and administrative professions in insurance companies and companies operating in insurance brokerage activities.
- The professions of selling, accounting, money exchange, administration and arranging goods in shops operating in malls.
- Account auditing professions in auto agencies.
- All sales professions dealing in new and used vehicles.
- All accounting professions in the activities of selling new and



used vehicles in car agencies.

► The activity of selling spare parts for new vehicles belonging to auto agencies.

The decision states that expatriate workforce licences and work practice licences issued for the professions and activities specified in Article 1 will be valid until their expiry date.

The decision was issued on January 20 and will come into ef-

fect six months after the date of publication in the Official Gazette.

Decision to regulate the profession of driving

H E Dr Ba'owain has also issued Ministerial Decision No 9/2021 that regulates the profession of driving.

The decision states that prac-

tising the profession of driving vehicles - of whatever type - should be for Omanis which include -

- 1- Transportation of fuel
- 2- Transportation of agricultural materials
- 3- Transportation of foodstuffs

It is permissible to authorise the recruitment of a non-Omani workforce for one of the activities stipulated in Clauses 2 and 3 of this article as a distributor of goods for small and medium enterprises owned by Omani employers full-time, which is registered with the Authority of Small and Medium Enterprises Development (Riyada), and insured at the Public Authority for Social Insurance (PASI), provided that the vehicle is commercial and registered in the name of the institution.

The decision was issued on January 20 and will come into force six months following the date of its publication in the Official Gazette.

'70% of job seekers to be absorbed by private sector'

Muscat - H E Dr Mahad bin Said bin Ali Ba'owain, Minister of Labour, said in an interview to Oman TV on Sunday night that the sultanate is working towards providing employment to 80 per cent of all jobseekers in two years. Of these, 70 per cent will be absorbed by the private sector by end of 2022.

Employment in the government sector will be according to the actual need, he added.

The minister said that the employment initiatives announced recently will provide 15,000-20,000 jobs.



H E DR MAHAD BIN SAID BIN ALI BA'OWAIN

"There is an increase in jobseekers and it needs quick, sustainable solutions, wherein comes the role and responsibility of all parties involved. We are working on opening communi-

cation with the private sector, jobseekers and the General Federation of Oman Workers, and then analyse different views. There are many initiatives that will be announced in the coming months."

Talking about challenges facing the labour market, H E Dr Ba'owain said that the continued economic crisis has disabled the private sector from generating job opportunities. "The pandemic struck during the period of economic recession that has been continuing for some years, which created

another challenge in stopping the laying off of Omanis in the private sector."

He added that the Ministry of Labour has made efforts to ensure that Omanis remain in their jobs during the pandemic.

"The private sector is central to the economy, and we are confident that it is capable of facing challenges and expand later."

Addressing jobseekers directly, he said they should upgrade their skills and experience level to increase their chances of employment.



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A new American president takes office

Oman's relations with the US will continue to flourish and grow under President Joe Biden, as they have under past presidents



MARC J SIEVERS
Former US ambassador to Oman

On 20 January, at noon Washington time, Joseph R Biden was sworn in as the 46th President of the United States of America. His Vice President, former US senator for California Kamala Harris, similarly took the oath of office, incidentally becoming the first woman and first black/Indian American to become Vice President of the United States.

Former president Donald Trump departed Washington earlier that morning, becoming the first US president to refuse to attend the inauguration of his successor since Andrew Johnson in 1869. Trump's vice president, Mike Pence, however, did attend the inauguration and congratulated Biden and Harris.

Harris, in turn, graciously escorted Pence to his car at the end of the ceremony. Millions of Americans

breathed a sigh of relief at the smooth and uneventful inauguration ceremony since it came only two weeks after a mob of enraged Trump supporters invaded the Capitol building in a failed attempt to stop the Congress from confirming the results of the presidential election.

I think the most important thing to understand about last November's elections in the United States and the ultimately smooth transition of power to President Biden is that America's constitutional process and democratic institutions held up under tremendous pressure despite a concerted effort by Trump and many of his political allies and legal advisers to claim, contrary to the facts, that he had won the election.

Over 50 courts in many different states and finally the Supreme Court in Washington all rejected at least 200 legal suits claiming electoral fraud. State governments in all 50

states and the District of Columbia all confirmed the results of the elections. Finally, on January 6, the then vice president Pence rejected president Trump's false claim that Pence had the power to reject the state-approved electors and throw the election results to the House of Representatives.

It was at this point that Trump called on thousands of his supporters, assembled at a rally only a short walking distance from the Capitol, to march on the Congress and demand that Republican members overturn the results of the elections. This action, which left five people dead and forced members of Congress to take shelter while law enforcement restored order, had no effect on the outcome since the Congress reconvened that evening and finished the process of confirming the outcome of the elections.

Although Trump denies that he in-

tended his supporters to use violence, he has now been impeached, for a second time, by the House of Representatives for inciting the mob attack on the Capitol. It remains to be seen, however, whether he will be convicted by the Senate and some legal experts question whether it is even constitutional for the Senate to try him now that he has left office.

America today is a deeply divided country, with many of Biden's supporters believing wrongly that everyone who voted for Trump was at least indirectly responsible for the attack on the Capitol, and many Trump supporters still believing the lie that President Biden won the election by fraud. In his speech at the inauguration, President Biden called for unity and for reducing the intensity of the differences that divide Americans. I believe all Americans have a stake in seeing our country's democratic institutions hold

firm and for that reason alone even those who voted against him should join in wishing President Biden success in bridging our divides.

As for Oman's relations with the United States, they will continue to flourish and grow under President Biden, as they have under past presidents of both parties since our formal diplomatic relations were established in 1973 as part of Oman's Renaissance. Despite some differences over how to handle the Iranian nuclear file, the Trump administration maintained excellent relations with Oman, from which both countries benefited.

Former secretary of state Mike Pompeo in particular took a strong interest in developing the Omani-US relationship, as had President Obama's secretary of state John Kerry. Trade and investment are again at the top of our bilateral agenda, and I remain optimistic about the future.

Up to RO2,000 fine for violation of waste export ban

Our Correspondent
Muscat

H E Dr Abdullah bin Ali al Omari, chairman of Environment Authority, has issued Ministerial Decision No 15/ 2021 to regulate the export of waste.

The decision bans the export of all types of hazardous and non-hazardous waste without obtaining a licence from the Environment Authority.

'Mixing more than one type of waste in one container or truck is disallowed. Waste that cannot be treated or recycled are exempted from export duty,' the decision stipulated.

Companies and shops that produce and deal with hazardous and non-hazardous waste must register with the authority, specifying what is sold and discarded.

The decision also stipulates an administrative fine of no less than RO500 and no more than RO2,000 for those who violate



this decision. The fine will be doubled for a repetition of the violation. The decision will be executed in cooperation and coordination with Oman Environment Services Holding Company - be'ah, Royal Oman Police, Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion, and other concerned authorities.

Waste export licence fees

- ▶ RO100 to export 1 tonne of used lead acid batteries and lead moulds
- ▶ RO150 to export 1 tonne of

- used cooking oil
- ▶ RO35 to export 1 tonne of electronic and electrical waste
- ▶ RO35 to export 1 tonne of aluminium, copper, tin and zinc scrap
- ▶ RO35 to export 1 tonne of scrap metals
- ▶ RO10 to export 1 tonne of any type of plastic waste
- ▶ RO20 to export 1 tonne of any type of paper waste

The decision was issued on January 14 and came into effect a day following its publication in the Official Gazette.

MoH undersecretary visits North Sharqiyah health institutions

Muscat - Within the field visits conducted by Ministry of Health's officials, H E Dr Fatima Mohammed al Ajmi, Undersecretary for Administrative, Financial & Planning Affairs, visited a number of health institutions and new facilities in North Sharqiyah governorate.

H E Dr Fatima visited hospitals and a number of health centres in Sinaw, Bidiyah and Ibra, in addition to health institutions in Mudaibi.

She was briefed on the workflow at these institutions as she met their administrative staff and health workers, and heard their opinions on improving the quality of the delivered services. In Ibra Hospital, presentations were made on financial and human resources, as well the situation in the governorate's primary and secondary health institutions.

H E Dr Fatima met H E Sheikh Ali al Shamsi, Governor of North Sharqiyah, and discussed quality enhancement of the delivered services in the governorate.

The MoH undersecretary also visited a new building of the Directorate General of



She was briefed on the workflow of the institutions as she met their administrative staff and health workers, and heard their opinions on improving the quality of services

Health Services of the governorate and a training centre in the old building. She reviewed with adminis-

trative personnel a number of topics related to health systems in the governorate including health plans, indicators and

achievements. Discussions further highlighted the obstacles and challenges that encountered the implementation and the development of workflow in the governorate.

The undersecretary was accompanied by Mohammed al Abri, director general of Health Services, North Sharqiyah governorate, as well as a number of senior officials.

ROYAL OFFICE MINISTER RECEIVES SAUDI ENVOY



H E Gen Sultan Mohammed al Nu'mani, Minister of Royal Office, received in his office on Sunday H E Eid Mohammed al Thaqafi, Ambassador of Saudi Arabia, to bid him farewell at the end of his tour of duty as his country's envoy to the sultanate. The ambassador expressed his gratitude and appreciation for the cooperation extended to him during his duty from all officials in the sultanate. He also praised the strength of the relations binding the two brotherly countries (ONA)

OPAZ releases 22nd issue of Duqm Economist Magazine

Muscat - The Public Authority for Special Economic Zones and Free Zones (OPAZ) on Sunday released the 22nd issue of *Duqm Economist Magazine*, featuring a number of projects in the Special Economic Zone in Duqm and the free zones in Salalah, Sohar and Mazayuna.

The front cover, with the picture of His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik along with the caption 'His Majesty calls for the development of economic zones and major projects', refers to the meeting of the Council of Ministers, chaired by His Majesty the Sultan on December 15 in which His Majesty the Sultan approved the launch of Oman Vision 2040.

In the editorial, Eng Ahmed Hassan al Dheeb, deputy chairman of OPAZ and general supervisor of the magazine, stresses on the importance of the special economic zones and free zones in the sultanate's development plans. He commends the various achievements marked over the past years. "The recorded



achievements marked all the zones an attractive destination for investors from within and outside Oman. Hence, this year OPAZ is planning to increase the gains made by the zones to the national economy," Eng Dheeb wrote.

Duqm Economist Magazine has dedicated a number of pages for the main story, titled 'Duqm: a tourist icon amid a number of investment projects' in which eight key tourist destinations in Duqm or nearby have been featured.

These breathtaking landmarks include Rock Garden, Hamar Rock, Resorts' Beach,

where Crowne Plaza Hotel, Park Inn Duqm Resort, and other under construction projects are. Other locations are Shu'ir Reach, overlooking the Arabian Sea; Duqm Beach Camp, which has been prepared for camping enthusiasts; Ras Madrakah, Bar al Hikman and Al Wusta Wildlife Reserve.

The 116-page bilingual magazine sheds light on various topics and carries different interviews, highlighting key projects in Duqm. It also highlights the facilities that contributed to promoting SMEs sector. ONA

Expat workers drop by 15.7% with 270,000 leaving in 2020



Our Correspondent
Muscat

Oman's expatriate worker population dropped by 15.7 per cent – accounting for around 270,000 people – in 2020. Over 125,000 of those who left were from India.

According to the National Centre for Statistics and Information (NCSI), there were 1,712,798 expatriate employees working in various sectors in the sultanate at the end of 2019. The number dropped to 1,443,128 at the end of December 2020 with 269,670 expatriates leaving

Expat workers	% change	Numbers in 2020
Government sector	- 22.8%	42,240
Private sector	- 15.8%	1,148,207
Domestic/family sector	- 14.1%	252,681
Bangladeshis	- 12.2%	553,963
Indians	- 20.3%	492,303
Pakistanis	- 12.9%	180,629

Oman in the year 2020.

In 2020, the number of expatriates working in the government sector fell by 22.8 per cent to 42,240 from 54,687 at the end of 2019.

The private sector which employs the majority of expatriates shrank by 15.8 per cent to 1,148,207 last year from 1,363,955 in 2019, while those engaged in the domestic/family sector came down by 14.1 per cent to 252,681 from 294,156.

Though Bangladeshi workers continue to make up the bulk of the expatriate population, however their numbers declined by 12.2 per cent or 76,718 to 553,963 in 2020 from 630,681 in 2019. The Indian expat worker population declined by 20.3 per cent or 125,427 to 492,303 from 617,730, while the Pakistani worker population fell by 12.9 per cent or 26,659 to 180,629 from 207,288.

Filipinos – 5,359 left, a drop of 10.8 per cent, reducing their number to 44,097 workers - and Egyptians – 4,087 left, a fall of 11.7 per cent, to drop their total to

30,961 - make up the top five expatriate employee populations.

The NCSI stated that the Governorate of Muscat, which is home to the largest number of expatriate workers, saw their number fall by 17.6 per cent to 602,062 in 2020 from 731,088 in 2019.

North Batinah hosts the second largest expat worker population, which fell 14 per cent to 204,445 from 237,776. It is followed by Dhofar which had 165,959 expat workers at the end of December 2020, a fall of 15.1 per cent from 195,371 in 2019.

Livestock vaccination on in North Sharqiyah

Our Correspondent
Muscat

The Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Water Resources has launched a livestock vaccination programme in North Sharqiyah governorate as part of a country-wide drive that began last year.

The ministry confirmed that veterinary teams had vaccinated 53,250 livestock with 91,257 vaccine doses until the end of 2020 in North Sharqiyah governorate.

The programme has already been implemented in the wilayat of Dima Wa al Taien.

“It aims to immunise livestock, reduce infection and prevent common disease transmission between humans and animals. The programme also aims to provide vaccination service to the largest number of livestock keepers to protect herds from epidemics, including plague, smallpox and foot-and-mouth disease that cause great economic losses for livestock farmers,” an official at the ministry said.

The vaccination programme will continue until the end of April this year.

Severity of COVID-19 has not reduced until now: H E Sa'eedi

Continued from Page 01

According to H E Dr Sa'eedi, there are 39,413 Omanis working for the MoH. “The Omanisation rate in the ministry increased to 72 per cent in 2019 compared to 69 per cent in 2016. The medical and paramedical groups represent 79 per cent of the total employees,” he said.

10th Five-Year Plan

H E Dr Sa'eedi said that the MoH has embarked on drafting the health sector's 10th Five-Year Plan with several new projects and expanded programmes to be implemented during the years of the plan, depending on the state's general economic circumstances.

He informed that the MoH has four referral hospitals offering tertiary healthcare to the sultanate's population. “These are The Royal Hospital, Khoula Hospital, Al Nahda Hospital and Al

Masarra Hospital, which have a total of 1,639 beds, with occupancy standing at 70.7 per cent.”

He added that the nine referral hospitals in Muscat governorate have a total of 23,178 beds, with occupancy standing at 56.2 per cent. Sohar Hospital has the highest occupancy rate in the sultanate (79.6 per cent).

The MoH has increased the number of accident and emergency units to four, the minister informed, adding that steps are underway to set up accident and emergency units in the hospitals of Izki and Yanqul.

H E Dr Sa'eedi also informed that at the end of 2019, the number of health establishments in the sultanate stood at 261, of which 50 were hospitals (5,049 beds), 22 polyclinics and 189 health centres. This is in addition to 27 private hospitals and 1,254 health establishments operating without pharmacies.

@shadadm

Tourism ministry, PDO sign pact to protect geo-heritage sites

Our Correspondent
Muscat

The Ministry of Heritage and Tourism signed a Memorandum of Collaboration (MoC) with Petroleum Development Oman (PDO) to protect and conserve a number of geological heritage sites in Oman.

The aim of the MoC is to ensure the sustainability of these sites, which are considered important national heritage locations and tourist destinations of global scientific significance.

The agreement was signed by H E Salim bin Mohammad bin Said al Mahrouqi, Minister of Heritage and Tourism, and Raoul Restucci, PDO managing director. H E Mahrouqi said, “Oman enjoys geological diversity by virtue of its geographical location. Mountains, springs, caves and rock formations have characterised Oman with a unique geological nature, making it a tourist destination due to its variation in terrain and climates. Its



features are an outlet for nature lovers, observers of geological transformations and those studying them.

“The memorandum signed with PDO comes within the framework of the partnership and the strengthening of relations between the public and private sectors, and the consolidation and encouragement of the exchange of experiences in various fields.”

He added, “The memorandum aims to establish a mechanism to rehabilitate a number of important Omani geo-heritage sites to protect and preserve them and to promote them as tourist destinations that highlight the diversity of Oman's rich geo-heritage. It also aims to exchange geological information, seek assistance from expertise between the ministry and the company, and exchange data and information to map the geological sites in the sultanate.”

The areas of collaboration also include providing scientific

and technical support to protect endangered geological sites, as well as preparing files for geoparks in the sultanate and identifying them with the aim of registering one or two sites subsequently in the List of Unesco Global Geoparks (UGGp).

The pact also involves delivering a series of workshops targeting existing key tourism sector players, and job seekers interested in geo-tourism. As well as enabling SME's and youth groups to engage with this new emerging sector and empowering them with knowledge and opportunities.

Restucci said, “PDO is proud to support such initiatives as Oman's geology is highly complex and of great scientific significance. This project hopes to ensure the immediate protection and conservation of key threatened geo-sites as a foundation for developing geo-heritage-based tourism in Oman and the establishment of geoparks as economic and job opportunity generators.”

CBO presents uncut sheets of banknotes for sale

Muscat - The Central Bank of Oman (CBO) on Sunday announced that the sixth series of uncut sheets of RO1, half rial and 100bz are now available for sale.

The banknotes in the sheets are legal tenders for their face values and the sheets are available for sale at CBO.

A sheet with 40 RO1 notes is priced at RO80, while a sheet containing 50 half rial banknotes is for sale for RO50.

CBO also announced that an uncut sheet with sixty 100bz banknotes can be bought for RO12.

PRAYER TIMINGS	
Fajr	5.31am
Sunrise	6.50am
Duhr	12.24pm
Asr	3.32pm
Maghrib	5.54pm
Isha	7.07pm



THROUGH ALI'S EYEPIECE

Our Correspondent
Muscat

To document wildlife and encourage the appreciation of environmental protection among people, Ali Mahad from Dhofar photographs and makes documentary films for YouTube.

Mahad also photographs the lives of people in the backdrop of nature in Dhofar to promote Omani tourism.

Mahad was drawn to photography because of the fact that he can showcase images that others fail to see. "Even an ordinary object can be made to stand out if shot from an interesting angle."

Speaking to *Muscat Daily*, Mahad said, "I have loved documentary films since childhood but began photography only in 2000. I joined the Photographic Society of Oman in 2002. As a photographer, my goal is not just to take beautiful pictures of the place and gain the admiration of followers on social media. My objective is to show people the wonderful places in Dhofar."

Mahad is keen to promote domestic tourism and showcase Oman's beauty and diversity to the world through his photographs.

"I love taking photos of nature, especially wildlife. I have made several documentaries on the wildlife of Dhofar and beautiful locations in Salalah. The films are of four-minute duration."

He takes the difficulties he faces while shooting in his stride. "Reaching some locations while doing wildlife photography need trekking for long over difficult terrain or climbing mountains."

While continuing to shoot Oman's natural beauty in the future, he hopes his photographs contribute to improve domestic tourism in the country. "I am keen to spread awareness on environmental issues among members of the community," he said.

His efforts haven't gone unnoticed; he has won several local awards and participated in numerous photography exhibitions.

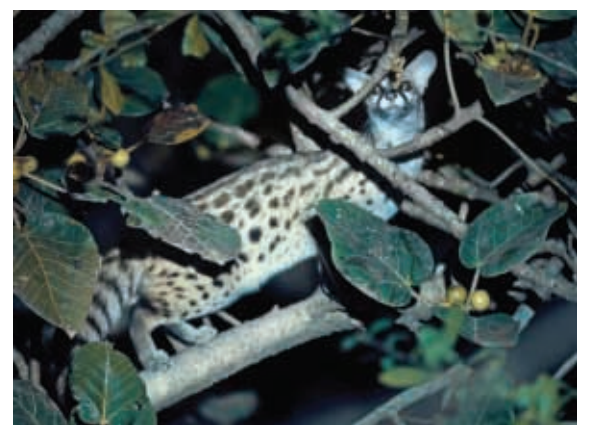


As a photographer, my goal is not just to take beautiful pictures of the place and gain the admiration of followers on social media. My objective is to show people the wonderful places in Dhofar.

ALI MAHAD



(Supplied photos)



Mawarid gets new brand identity to reflect roles, goals

Muscat - Oman Animal & Plant Genetic Resources Centre (Mawarid) of the Ministry of Higher Education, Research and Innovation launched its new brand identity at the recently held 7th Annual Research Forum to reflect its multiple roles and objectives.

Building on its slogan of transforming genetic resources into value, Mawarid has established a solid ground for the launch of its programmes and projects intended for the preservation, conservation and documentation of the diversified genetic resources in Oman.

As per a statement, the vision behind Mawarid's simple yet powerful new brand identity is to involve all details and touchpoints from the vibrant colours of the Omani natural landscape to the country's successful engagements with the 4th Industrial Revolution (4IR) and the breakthroughs made in all aspects.

The centre seeks to achieve the priority goals of Oman Vision 2040, including education, scientific research, national capabilities, natural resources and environmental sustainability. The name 'Mawarid' is therefore birthed and coupled with the new logo to represent the identity of the centre and its legacy for the coming generations.

Mawarid has been working actively for better utilisation of Oman's natural resources by expanding its activities on what has been accomplished during the past years, including creating a series of databases of Oman's diverse genetic resources, establishing genes banks, enhancing genetic innovations, opening job opportunities through initiatives like Manafa'a, and educating the community about the value and importance of genetic resources - all of which are in alignment with reaching the goals of Oman Vision 2040.

MoL urges online only salary transfer

Our Correspondent
Muscat

The Ministry of Labour (MoL) has requested all private sector establishments to begin paying salaries and other dues through electronic or online banking services starting February 28.

Following a notice issued by the Central Bank of Oman (CBO), the ministry urged companies to stop using traditional means of money transfer.

'All private sector establishments need to adhere to the cir-

cular of the CBO. Each establishment has to check with the bank in which it has its main account to find out the new mechanism to electronically transfer salaries,' an MoL statement said.

The ministry emphasised the need to cooperate with banks and adhere to the date set for implementation of this initiative at the national level for public interest.

CBO, in collaboration with the Ministry of Finance and MoL, mandated the banks operating in the sultanate to provide

a seamless mechanism for transferring salaries of all government and private agencies/companies through electronic banking services.

CBO has been working with the relevant authorities to implement this initiative since 2019. However, due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the deadline has been extended several times.

It has now been decided to implement this system starting February 28, stipulating banks stop receiving any salary transfer files by 'insecure methods'.

12 Chinese scholarships announced

Our Correspondent
Muscat

The Ministry of Higher Education, Research and Innovation, represented by the Directorate General of Scholarships, has announced 12 scholarships being offered by the Government of the People's Republic

of China for the 2020-21 academic year.

A statement issued by the ministry said, 'The Ministry represented by the Directorate General of Scholarships is pleased to announce to Omani students the availability of 12 scholarships offered by the Chinese Government for the

academic year 2020-2021 in various specialisations and academic stages. These grants include tuition fees, housing and health insurance.'

Those interested in applying for these grants can access more information on the website <http://www.cam-puschina.org>

BRIEFS

Israel and UAE firms sign renewable energy deal

Israeli and Emirati companies have signed an inaugural agreement on renewable energy, officials said as the Jewish state forges ahead with plans to become a global leader in the sector.

The principal corporate signatories of the energy agreement are Abu Dhabi-based Masdar and EDF Renewables Israel, a subsidiary of French utility giant EDF.

'These are the first fruits of the Abraham accords in the energy sector,' said Israel's Energy Minister Yuval Steinitz on Twitter, predicting the collaboration would allow his country to become a global leader in solar energy within six years.

Muhammad Jamil al Ramhi, head of Masdar, lauded a 'new era of cooperation' in clean energy ventures between the two countries.

Nissan commits to UK after Brexit deal

Japanese carmaker Nissan committed to its future in Britain, home to the group's largest European factory, citing the country's Brexit trade deal with the European Union.

Chief operating officer Ashwani Gupta said the recent agreement gave its Sunderland plant in northeast England a competitive advantage, dispelling long-running uncertainty over the facility.

"Brexit has brought the business continuity in the short term (and) protects... all of our models which we manufacture in Sunderland," Gupta said.

Nissan's Sunderland hub employs 6,000 workers, and produces 400,000 cars annually, mostly for export.

Gupta added that Nissan would switch battery production for its electric Leaf vehicles from Japan to Britain, to benefit from the zero tariffs.

Prime Minister Boris Johnson was quick to welcome the commitment.

"This is a great vote of confidence in the UK and fantastic news for the brilliant Nissan workforce in Sunderland and electric vehicle manufacturing in this country," he tweeted.

BOJ revises up growth outlook for next two years

The Bank of Japan (BOJ) revised its growth outlook upwards for the next two years and maintained its ultra-loose monetary policy as it warned that the pandemic makes clear forecasts less likely.

However, for the current fiscal year to March BOJ expects the economy to shrink 5.6 per cent, against its October estimate of a 5.5 per cent contraction.

The bank saw brighter times on the horizon in its quarterly report, published after a two-day policy meeting.

For the 12 months to March 2022 it expects growth of 3.9 per cent, and 1.8 per cent the following year. That compares with previous estimates of 3.6 per cent and 1.6 per cent, respectively.

The bank's governor Haruhiko Kuroda said the impact of the pandemic should gradually ease as vaccines reach industrialised economies followed by developing nations.

Japan's Sumitomo, ARA eye hydrogen project in Oman



Picture for illustrative purpose only

Our Correspondent Muscat

Japan's Sumitomo Corporation and Omani energy firm ARA Petroleum have launched a feasibility study on a hydrogen hybrid project which will be based on a local production and consumption model in Oman.

The project aims to establish a hydrogen supply chain based on the local production and consumption model at a site where ARA Petroleum produces oil and gas, with a target to commence

operations in 2023, according to a statement published by Sumitomo Corporation on its website.

The project is expected to produce between 300 to 400 tonnes of hydrogen annually from associated flare gas generated at the site. The hydrogen will be mainly utilised as a fuel for fuel cell vehicles that ARA plans to introduce at the site, Sumitomo Corporation said.

In addition, 20MW solar power generation panels will be installed and used as a power source for the site and hydrogen

production facilities, the company said.

Hydrogen can be produced by effectively utilising associated gas generated as a by-product during oil production and by using the steam reforming method.

'While contributing to decarbonisation and cleanliness of oil and gas production activities through this project, Sumitomo Corporation is considering expanding the model of the project both in Oman and overseas in the future,' Sumitomo Corpora-

tion said.

In November 2020, Oman's Public Authority for Special Economic Zones and Free Zones (OPAZ) announced that a group of international companies have expressed their interest to invest in the green hydrogen projects in the special economic zones and free zones in the sultanate.

In line with Oman's efforts to promote the use of hydrogen as a fuel, Sumitomo Corporation signed a memorandum of understanding with ARA Petroleum in March 2020 and engaged in discussions on the project.

Sumitomo Corporation expects hydrogen to be one of the important energy sources in the future, and it promotes hydrogen-related business such as local production and consumption projects and large scale value chain projects that utilises the regional requirements of energy and the characteristics of hydrogen.

'In order to greatly contribute to the achievement of our long-term goals toward climate change mitigation (carbon neutralisation in 2050), we will accelerate our efforts for the materialisation of a hydrogen society by promoting hydrogen-related businesses,' Sumitomo Corporation said.



Dr Hamad bin Salem al Rawahi



Ahmed bin Ali al Balushi

Awसर appoints Rawahi as board chairman

Muscat - Awसर, the company specialised in providing high-speed Internet services over broadband in the sultanate, has welcomed Dr Hamad bin Salem al Rawahi as the new chairman of the board of directors and Ahmed bin Ali al Balushi as a member of the board.

Rawahi has an extensive experience of more than 30 years in various sectors during which he held many leadership positions, the last of which was the position of chief executive officer of the Telecom-

munications Regulatory Authority.

Balushi has been appointed as a member of the board of directors of Awसर due to his experiences in various sectors, Awसर said in a press release.

Balushi currently holds several positions, most notably the position of CEO of Mwasalat Company, chairman of the board of directors of Oman Maritime College and deputy chairman of Karwa Motors, the bus manufacturing project in the Special Economic Zone at Duqm.

Esbaar looks to unlock Oman's mineral potential with AI, drone technologies

Our Correspondent Muscat

Esbaar, an Omani provider of artificial intelligence (AI) and autonomous systems, has completed its first magnetic survey of Liwa, Shinas, Mahadah and Samail covering an area of over 1,000km linear distance using drones equipped with magnetometers.

The survey of this very challenging terrain will provide accurate details of possible mineral seams, map geological features and highlight areas of interest for further study in hope of identifying key strategic areas for mineral deposits, according to a press release issued by the company.

Sara al Mazyadi, project manager at Esbaar, said, "This technology is fairly new to the Omani market and by utilising Esbaar's



resources and experienced team of licensed drone pilots, we hope to demonstrate to mining companies how we can boost their

exploration activities by adopting this new technology. Using AI and drone technologies is not only safer and more cost-effective

in hard-to-reach areas but also faster compared to traditional methods."

She added, "We have been assisting clients to accelerate their business innovation, driving efficiency to solve challenges and work smarter for the benefit of the entire country and its people."

A home-grown company established in 2017 by Omani entrepreneurs, Esbaar has been supporting government and private entities in the oil and gas, mining, logistics, utilities, construction and security industries. Today, Esbaar has garnered international recognition and is one of the leading companies in the GCC in its field. At the forefront of Oman's tech-driven digital society, it offers end to end solutions powered by revolutionary commercial and industrial drones.

Oman REIT Fund offers 7.5% annual dividend

Muscat - With the launch of the RO65.48mn Oman REIT Fund and its RO26.1mn initial public offering (that can go up to RO39.2mn), both Omani and non-Omani investors are presented with an unmatched opportunity to invest their money safely in one of the most promising investment instruments in the sultanate.

Allowing subscribers to the fund to participate in the high potential Omani real estate sector in a hassle-free manner, Oman REIT Fund is offering good returns with a targeted annual dividend of 7.5 per cent that is expected to grow to 8.2 per cent over a five-year period.

Investment analysts are looking at Oman REIT Fund as a game-changer in the sultanate's real estate investment domain, given the multiple benefits offered to the fund's subscribers. With its diversified, balanced and high-occupancy assets portfolio spread across strategic localities



Jasser al Aulaqi

and sectors in the sultanate, Oman REIT Fund has positioned itself as a pioneer and leader in Oman's real estate investment trusts (REIT) sector.

Jasser al Aulaqi, CEO of Shumookh Fund Management LLC which manages Oman REIT Fund, said, "Oman REIT Fund's core objective is to provide investors with a diversified, stable and sustainable income stream, while also allowing them to benefit from organic growth and value-added opportunities so

that unitholder returns are maximised."

Explaining how Oman REIT Fund qualifies as the best-in-class investment instrument available today, Tariq A Razeq, deputy general manager at United Securities which is the issue manager for Oman REIT Fund's IPO, said, "The key investment features of Oman REIT Fund include attractive yield driven by a large and scalable pan-Oman asset portfolio; distribution of stable and high divi-

dend on a continuous basis; the large fund size; and the opportunity to gain exposure to a potential recovery in Oman's real estate sector."

"The fund is also attractive as Oman's economic diversification efforts are expected to bring in positive results and the real estate sector's contribution to national GDP is set to rise considerably. The long tenure of the assets is another factor that enhances the value and appeal of Oman REIT Fund," Razeq said.

Distributed across premium residential cum commercial, office and retail, logistics and industrial properties, the diverse range of assets owned by Oman REIT Fund is poised to take full advantage of the government's focus on economic diversification that drives the growth and sustainability of Oman's vibrant real estate sector, as well as the government's Vision 2040 that stresses on high-paced infrastructure development.

Al Hassan appoints new chief executive

Our Correspondent Muscat

Al Hassan Engineering Company on Sunday announced that Dr Shawqi Sajwani has resigned from his position as the chief executive officer of the company and the board has appointed Eng Hussain bin Hassan Abdul Hussain as the new CEO.

'Dr Sajwani has tendered his resignation as the CEO of the company on personal grounds. The board has accepted his resignation with effect on February 1, 2021,' Al Hassan said in a disclosure to the MSM. The company's board announced the appointment of Eng Hussain and he will take charge with effect from February 1, 2021.



FAB receives Oman CMA custody licence

Our Correspondent Muscat

First Abu Dhabi Bank (FAB), the UAE's largest bank and one of the world's biggest financial institutions, announced that it has been granted Oman Capital Market Authority (CMA) custody licence and the bank has signed a service level agreement with Muscat Clearing and Depository Company (MCD).

FAB has become a direct custodian member of MCD in Oman, the UAE-based bank said in a press statement.

FAB is the third international custodian of the securities depository linked to the Muscat Securities Market (MSM). It will contribute to MCD's mission to promote post-trade solutions that systematically reduce risks, enhance operating efficiency and minimise cost.

Haitham al Salmi, general manager at Muscat Clearing and Depository, said, "We are delighted to welcome First Abu Dhabi Bank as custodian of the MCD. We look forward to collaborating with the FAB team to introduce further post-trade enhancements and provide their regional and international client-base with access to Oman's capital markets."

Kashif Darr, managing director and head of securities services at FAB, said, "FAB is proud to build on its long heritage in Oman, stretching back almost 50 years, with the addition of direct custodian membership of the MCD. We look forward to bringing our differentiated brand of securities services - led by next generation technology and a dedicated client focus - to both domestic institutional investors in Oman and to international investors."

UBGCCF Inception Date*		17-Nov-09
NAV Date		JAN 21, 2021
NAV (OMR)		1.088
Adjusted NAV** (OMR)		1.431
Cash Dividend paid since inception (OMR)		0.03
Unit Dividend paid since inception		28%
YTD Performance		3.15%
Performance since inception		49.47%

* First NAV was issued on 4th March 2010
 ** Adjusted for cash and bonus dividends

For more information please contact:
 Tel: 00968 24 949 031/030, Email: ubhargocfund@u-capital.net

C O M M E N T A R Y

Value-added tax implication in designated zones

Special economic zones have special treatment under the VAT regime. For VAT purposes, these zones are treated as being located outside the sultanate and will be VAT free. Oman has three Free Zones: Salalah Free Zone, Sohar Free Zone and Al Mazunah Free Zone and two Special Economic Zones: Duqm Special Economic Zone and Knowledge Oasis. The VAT law has not defined the designated zone for VAT purposes and the Executive Regulation is expected to specify the same. These zones and its borders and location must be specified under the law, so that the area shall have applicable procedures to control the movement of goods and their supply to the area, within or between them, and the area should be supervised and

managed by the responsible operator of the area.

It is not necessary that all transactions pertaining to the designated zone will be VAT free. Let us look at some of the scenarios and the VAT implications. Under the VAT regime, the place of supply rule is very important to ascertain the taxability.

Scenario 1: The transfer of goods between two different designated zones will bear no duties and value-added taxes under certain conditions to be defined by the Executive Regulation like, the goods are not altered or released during the transfer.

Scenario 2: In the case of supply of services, the VAT treatments will be just the opposite of supply of goods. Any services whether supplied from

the mainland to the designated zone or within the designated zone, the standard rate of VAT at 5 per cent will be levied. For an instance, catering serv-

Scenario 3: In case any company located in the designated zone self-consumes goods and services, then the place of supply will be Oman and will

there can be three possible VAT treatments; (a) supply of goods into a designated zone from outside of Oman will be treated as outside Oman and will be VAT free; (b) supply of goods from mainland into a designated zone will not be considered as export and standard rate will apply; and (c) movement of goods from a designated zone to mainland will be treated as an import of goods to Oman.

It is important for businesses established within the designated zones to understand that they have the same VAT compliance obligations and rights as non-designated zone businesses have. They will have to register for VAT, account for VAT, file VAT returns and pay VAT as per

the law.

In any case, relevant documents must be kept for the transfer of goods to, within or between designated zones, to be certified by the operator and supervisor of the special zone with respect to the supply of goods within the special zone, and by the General Customs Administration with regard to the supply and transfer of goods to the special zone or from one special area to another.

(Reader questions can be directed to davis.kallukaran@apexmedia.co.om)

The views and opinions expressed in this column are solely those of the author and do not necessarily represent those of Muscat Daily or Apex Media Publication



TAYSIR AL RAWAHI

The writer is director, tax advisory services at Crowe Oman

ices, hotels, catering commitments, cultural, artistic, sports, educational, recreational services, all kinds of energy goods sold for use or consumption like supply of water will be standard rated.

be taxable at standard rate of 5 per cent. However, the executive regulations will specify certain exceptions to the rule.

Scenario 4: In the case of transfer of goods to and from a designated zone

‘UK economy faces another recession’

London, UK - Britain's private sector activity shrank in January due to another coronavirus lockdown and the Brexit fallout, survey data showed, placing the economy on course for a double-dip recession.

The composite purchasing managers' index (PMI) sank to an eight-month low at 40.6 points, compilers IHS Markit and the Chartered Institute of Procurement and Supply (CIPS) said in a statement.

The shift below 50 - indicating contraction - compared with 50.4 in December.



"A steep slump in business activity in January puts the locked-down UK economy on course to contract sharply in the first quarter of 2021, meaning a double-dip recession is on the cards," said Chris Williamson, chief business economist at IHS Markit.

"Services have once again been especially hard hit but manufacturing has seen growth almost stall, blamed on a cocktail of COVID-19 and Brexit, which has led to increasingly widespread supply delays, rising costs and falling exports."

Those delays were sparked after Britain finally departed the European Union's single market and customs union at the start of this year.

The economy had already suffered a historic recession in the first half of last year owing to an initial virus lockdown.

Britain earlier this month imposed fresh curbs as the government sought to halt the spread of a more transmissible variant of the virus.

Markit said the speed of the January downturn was slower however than that in the first phase of the pandemic because many businesses had adapted and prepared for new restrictions, while sentiment was improved by vaccine rollouts.

The composite PMI nose-dived to 13.8 in April 2020. AFP

Saudi becomes largest oil supplier to China

Beijing, Chian - Saudi Arabia, the world's largest oil exporter, held onto its position as the largest crude oil supplier to China in 2020, the General Administration of Customs of China data released recently showed.

Annual Saudi oil shipments to China, the world's biggest oil importer, in 2020 amounted to approximately 1.69mn barrels per day (bpd), up 1.9 per cent year-over-year, according to the data.

Russia was ranked as the second-biggest supplier, shipping slightly less at 1.67mn bpd to China, and marking an increase of 7.6 per cent compared to 2019, the data showed.

In 2020, Iraq was the third-biggest supplier of crude oil to China, while Brazil was fourth, capitalising on the buying binge of Chinese refiners in the spring and summer when oil prices were at multi-year lows.

China also imported a total of 28.7mn barrels of Iranian crude in 2020, with a 73.5 per cent year-on-year decline, according to the data.



However, shipments from the Middle East jumped 13 per cent year on year in 2020, outpacing China's total crude import growth of 7 per cent in the year, the data revealed.

Despite the limited increase from Saudi Arabia and the sharp decline from Iran, 44.4 per cent rises from Iraq, Oman, Kuwait and the UAE enabled the Middle East to hold 46.7 per cent of China's market share.

Furthermore, the country's imports from the US tripled in 2020, totaling 394,000 bpd as companies stepped up purchases under a trade deal with Washington D.C.

China had suspended crude imports from the US between December 2019 and April 2020 due to the trade tensions between Beijing and Washington. The inflow resumed in May last year when the world's top crude importer stepped up buying from the US to meet the Phase 1 trade deal agreement between the top two economies.

China's oil demand remained strong in 2020 with purchases of 10.85mn barrels of oil per day, representing an increase of 7.3 per cent even though the COVID-19 has undermined fuel demand all over the world.

Agencies

US Fed set to hold first policy meet of Biden administration

Washington, US - With a new year and a new administration in the White House, the US central bank nonetheless faces an unprecedented challenge in guiding the post-pandemic economic recovery.

One thing Federal Reserve chair Jerome Powell is unlikely to face from President Joe Biden is the barrage of Twitter attacks he was subject to, sometimes daily, under former president Donald Trump.

White House spokeswoman Jen Psaki last week said Biden 'clearly has a great deal of respect and value for the Federal Reserve and role they play'.

But even absent political pressures, the outlook is daunting.

The initial rollout of COVID-19 vaccines has raised hopes companies will be able to open for business and shoppers will open their wallets, improving the economy's prospects.

But the historic nature of the job losses during the pandemic - more than 10mn US workers remain unemployed - coupled with the likelihood inflation in some sectors could spike once the recovery takes hold, will test the Federal Reserve's limited toolkit.

These challenges could be discussed when the Fed's policy-setting Federal Open Market Committee (FOMC) opens its



first two-day policy meeting of the year on Tuesday.

After slashing the benchmark lending rate to zero early in the coronavirus crisis, and massively increasing bond purchases to pump cash into the economy, the FOMC has signaled will not change policy in the near future.

"I think they've set their course pretty clearly," Stephanie Aaronson, a vice president at the Brookings Institution and former Fed research economist, told AFP. "I would be surprised if that really changed throughout the spring."

Business shutdowns imposed to contain the spread of the virus caused immediate, massive job losses in 2020, and at the end of the year, 4mn people had been unemployed for six months or more, comprising 37 per cent of total unemployment.

The expectation for more

government aid under the Biden administration - which has proposed a massive US\$1.9tn rescue package - will give the central bankers hope for a more solid rebound and improved hiring, Aaronson said.

Still, so much about the pandemic-induced recession has been historic, and the recovery too will present policymakers with scenarios they have never encountered.

When the recovery does begin, the Fed's main nemesis - inflation - is likely to flare up in areas that bounce back first, like hotels, restaurants and air travel.

"There are many aspects of our current economy that are still unprecedented. And that means that their job is incredibly challenging," George Washington University economist Tara Sinclair said in an interview.

AFP

 NATIONAL BISCUIT INDUSTRIES LTD. SAOG		
DIRECTORS' REPORT		
Company performance during 1 st July 2020 to 31 st December 2020		
The Company has recorded sales of RO 7,659,897 for the six months ending 31st December 2020 as against RO 6,932,406 in the corresponding period of last year. The Company has achieved a growth of 10% in the sales during six months over the corresponding period of last year. The gross profit earned during this six months' period is RO 1,351,461 against RO 1,339,327 in the corresponding period of last year which is a growth of 1% over corresponding period of last year.		
The net profit for the six months' period ended 31st December 2020 stood at RO 481,894/- as against RO 438,589/- for the corresponding period in the previous year. Hence a growth of 10% has been achieved 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 31 ST DEC 2020		
	31-Dec-20 RO	31-Dec-19 RO
ASSETS		
Non-current assets		
Property, plant and equipment	3,389,468	2,303,269
Intangible Assets	157,023	162,774
Right of Use assets	336,525	-
Advance for Capital Goods	511,326	-
Total non-current assets	4,394,342	2,466,043
Current assets		
Inventories	1,500,431	1,248,992
Trade and other receivables	3,760,725	3,879,137
Wakala deposits	3,243,152	2,867,785
Bank balances and cash	587,096	746,664
Total current assets	9,091,404	8,742,579
Total assets	13,485,746	11,208,621
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	5,855,041	5,086,316
Total Shareholders' equity	7,188,374	6,419,649
Non-current liabilities		
End of Service Benefits	467,166	417,178
Deferred tax liability	58,659	68,674
Non-Current Lease Liabilities	342,621	-
Total non-current liabilities	868,446	485,852
Current liabilities		
Trade and other payables	5,313,401	4,211,382
Provision for Income tax	99,242	91,738
Current portion of lease Liabilities	16,283	-
Total current liabilities	5,428,926	4,303,120
Total liabilities	6,297,372	4,788,972
Total equity and liabilities	13,485,746	11,208,621
Net assets per share	7.188	6.420
UNAUDITED STATEMENT OF PROFIT OR LOSS FOR THE PERIOD ENDED 31 ST DEC 2020		
	6 Months 31-Dec-20 RO	6 Months 31-Dec-19 RO
INCOME		
Sales	7,659,897	6,932,406
Cost of sales	(6,308,436)	(5,593,079)
Gross profit	1,351,461	1,339,327
Other income	90,524	54,942
	1,441,985	1,394,269
EXPENSES		
Selling and distribution	(517,473)	(545,966)
General and administration	(330,071)	(317,806)
Directors' meeting attendance fees	(7,400)	(5,900)
Finance costs	(20,059)	(8,424)
	(875,003)	(878,096)
Profit before tax	566,982	516,173
Income Tax	(85,088)	(77,584)
Profit (Loss) for the Period	481,894	438,589
Attributable to:		
Equity shareholders of the Company	481,894	438,589
Earnings per share	0.482	0.439

Save more to win big with Bank Muscat

Bank Muscat, the leading financial services provider in the sultanate, in line with its vision 'To serve you better, everyday' and commitment to partnership in promoting a strong savings culture in Oman has encouraged all its Premier Banking customers to save more and take full advantage of the attractive prizes reserved for them in the Al Mazyona 2021 savings scheme.

With a record 7,470 prizes totaling over RO11mn to be given away during the year, the country's biggest savings scheme was launched at a special event held at the bank's head office at Airport Heights recently.

Speaking on the occasion, Abdulnasir al Raisi, deputy general manager - Premier Banking, Bank Muscat, said, "The bank is pleased to launch the 2021 Al Mazyona scheme with a large number of high value prizes reserved for its Premier Banking customers. We have been continuously innovating over the past three decades on the basis of feedback from our customers. We are also keenly supporting



the nation and the bank has been keenly developing the Al Mazyona programme over the years given the positive impact among members of society as well as its support for the economy."

Raisi added that the number of prizes have gone up this year including exclusive prizes for Premier Banking customers. Asalah and Al Jawhar customers have many opportunities to win high value prizes throughout the year through regular monthly prize draws as well as Mid-year and End of Year draws. He said that the bank is also continuing to develop the services and benefits offered to our Premier Banking customers.

The bank's Asalah and Al



Jawhar customers will be particularly pleased to know that a large number of high-value prizes worth over RO5.6mn have been exclusively reserved for them in this year's scheme.

Customers maintaining a

minimum balance of RO30,000 in their Al Mazyona accounts will be automatically entered into the prize draw for two mega prizes of RO250,000 each in the special Mid-year draw as well as the End of Year draw.

High savings Asalah Priority Banking customers maintaining a minimum balance of RO30,000 are eligible for 10 monthly prizes of RO25,000 each, 10 Mid-year and 10 End of Year prizes of RO50,000.

Al Jawhar customers who maintain a minimum balance of RO10,000 are eligible to win one of the 20 prizes of RO5,000 each in the monthly draws as well as 10 Mid-year and 10 End of Year prizes of RO20,000

each. Al Jawhar customers with a salary of more than RO1,000 will also get a chance to win a fixed salary prize of RO500 every month for a year, with 10 winners being chosen every month.

Bank Muscat recently launched the Al Mazyona 2021 savings scheme at a press conference held at its head office.

During the event, bank officials announced that the total value of prizes offered this year would be over RO11mn while the total number of prizes has increased by 12 per cent to 7,470, up from 6,677 in the previous year.

Officials explained the details of the prize draw scheme as well as the terms and conditions to enter the draws which will be held throughout the year. These include both the monthly draws as well as the special Mid-year and End of Year draws. Special prizes have also been reserved for Asalah and Al Jawhar customers as well as for regional, women, youth, children and salary transfer categories.

Radisson Hotel Group ensures safety

With the SGS certification and the Radisson Hotels Safety Protocol in place, the Radisson Hotel Group in Oman meets the highest cleanliness, disinfection and safety measures with the implementation of the 20-Step and 10-Step protocols for meetings and events.

In order to lower the risk for guests and to add a layer of safety, the group is enhancing the set-ups by focusing on health and safety protocols, social distancing arrangements, as well as adaptations in food and beverage service.

Reducing point of contacts, new room and seating configurations respecting the minimum distance between delegates, allowed number of delegates per square metre, keeping tables apart to indicate social distancing,



from each other and disinfecting pens and sanitisation of meeting rooms after every event are only a few measures taken by RHG hotels, while ensuring quality and sophisticated service combined with authenticity and personal care.

Inga Kaman, director of Sales

and Marketing, RHG Oman says, "We have learnt to navigate the new set-up which requires extensive planning and willingness by all our teams to adapt fast. We want meeting and events guests to know that we care about their health and safety when entering our properties, and we are proactively demonstrating our efforts to make them feel safe. Our five properties, Hormuz Grand Muscat, A Radisson Collection Hotel; Radisson Blu Hotel, Sohar; Radisson Blu Hotel, Muscat; Park Inn by Radisson Muscat; and Park Inn by Radisson Hotel & Residence Duqm are ready to go the extra mile and look forward to creating memorable moments for our guests."

Apart from reassuring guests by implementing the highest safety measures, RHG has also met this challenge with more innovative measure, from creating intimate gatherings for special events, weddings and enhance live interactive videoconferencing for hybrid meetings.

Z-Corp holds Microsoft Office 365 training session

With a vision to upskill and improve employee's knowledge and productivity by applying best practices, The Zubair Corporation (Z-Corp) in collaboration with Microsoft-Oman has organised a Microsoft Office 365 online training session for its employees. The main objective of the session was to impart good working knowledge of some of the key Office 365 components.

The Microsoft Office 365 online training session focused on main Microsoft office 365 applications Office 365 - desktop, web and mobile, collaborating, saving, and sharing files using OneDrive for business. It also centred on core features of Microsoft Teams and demonstrated how participants can collaborate with their colleagues.

Around 65 employees participated in the hands-on session and experienced many features that Office 365 offers.

The purpose of the online training was also to allow access to files anywhere in the organisation, enable easy collaboration and reduce capital spend and enhance email capabilities and teach about advanced security features.

Waleed al Yarubi, head of HR at the Al Zubair Group said, "Our employees learnt how to create and manage a digital workplace using the features available in Office 365. This was a highly informative session and was designed to give users a taste of what they can do within Office 365. We believe the training helped our colleagues learn, practice, and do better work."



signed to give users a taste of what they can do within Office 365. We believe the training helped our colleagues learn, practice, and do better work."

Abed Hajjiri, the Modern Workplace Solution Specialist Microsoft, said, "We were able to guide the Z-Corp employees through a successful training and show how to work through Office 365. They learnt how to collaborate using shared files as well as how to use collaboration tools."

Farah al Zidjali, an employee, said, "We were able to sharpen our skills with instructor-led training solutions. This training was ideal for a digital-first world. We are delighted to participate

in the training provided by experienced IT professionals and have access to skilled resources."

In today's ever-changing marketplace, the importance of job training has never been greater. Z-Corp believes that workforce training is an indispensable way to keep organisations competitive. Deeming that training presents a prime opportunity to expand the knowledge base of all employees. The organisation deems it is fruitful for both employees and employees.

Over the past many years, Z-Cop has invested heavily in employee training and development. Employee training has become a vital business strategy for the company.

Mazoon Electricity organises workshops across Oman on new electricity tariff

To disseminate information on the newly announced electricity tariff, Mazoon Electricity Company, the leading electricity provider in Oman is organising workshops in various governorates of Oman.

The workshops are part of a wide awareness programme planned to educate about the new tariffs using different channels and targeting different stakeholders. The company has plans to target different customers through various channels in all areas under Mazoon Electricity service coverage which is in the governorates of Dakhliyah, South Sharqiyah, North Sharqiyah, and South Batinah, in addition to the wilayat of Suwaiq in North Batinah governorate.

The first of the workshops was held on January 24 at the Omani Women's Association in Suwaiq. The second workshop will be held on January 27 at Nizwa Sports Club in Nizwa.

Four main workshops to be held in the four governorates affiliated with the company's services will be attended by governors and members of the Municipal Council. These workshops will closely identify the objectives and details of the initiative to reform subsidies in the electricity sector.

The objective of the workshops is to spread awareness, educate customers and provide important and accurate information about the reformed electricity tariff.

A new tariff for electricity consumption is being gradually applied to all consumer groups from January 1. The aim of the workshops is to spread factual information about the reformed electricity tariffs. A team from Mazoon Electricity will explain details of the new tariff and its applications to different groups and the requirements for obtaining national support.

More data with Ooredoo's add-on

Continuing to give its customers more of what they want, Ooredoo is offering extra bonus data absolutely free with RO5 and RO10 monthly Internet add-ons.

Valid until April 3, prepaid users can unlock up to 4GB of bonus data to enjoy on all their favourite social media apps. The best part is, users can subscribe as many times as they like. It's all part of Ooredoo's commitment to enriching its customers' digital lives.

Ooredoo's popular Shababiah prepaid plans provide the perfect mix of flexibility and convenience, with a choice of add-ons to fit all communication needs. Purchase an add-on quickly and easily through the Ooredoo Oman App, or activate by dialling *555*23# for RO5 or *555*26# for RO10.



For more information, log on or sign up for the app, or visit www.ooredoo.om.

Omani Vegetable Oils reports 50,000 tonne production

The annual production volume recorded by the Omani Vegetable Oils and Derivatives Company in 2020 has touched 50,000 tonnes of vegetable oils (cooking oils) such as palm oil products, sunflower oil, corn oil, and other vegetable oil products, informed Eng Mohammed bin Ahmed Jaboob, commercial manager at Omani Vegetable Oils and Derivatives Company.

The company's products are widely available in the market under the popular names of Al Safa, A'Saadah, Salalah, Taibah, Sahi, Bahjah, Diyah, Sunlife, and A'Safwah in sizes from 750ml to 20lt.

"These products are available in major commercial stores, supermarkets and retail companies. Additionally, the company adopts multi-channel distribution method throughout the Middle East and Africa, and undertakes significant efforts to expand its business to meet the



needs of customers in the emerging markets," Eng Jaboob pointed out.

He added that the company utilises advanced technologies in oil production process with high-quality specifications. The company has highly qualified competencies and experts in the field of food manufacturing to supervise the overall process. Moreover, the company ensures the implementation of product quality measures to guarantee that the products meet the customer's satisfaction requirements. The Omani Vegetable Oils and Derivatives is an HACCP Certified company, follows stringent GMP practices and certified food safety management systems by SGS Europe.

The factory was established in 2005 in Raysut Industrial City in Dhofar as an initiative of Dhofar Cattle Feed Company, Dhofar Insurance Company, and Dhofar International Development and Investments Holding Company.

The Omani Vegetable Oils and Derivatives Company has its own subsidiaries and branch offices in Muscat, United Arab Emirates and Saudi Arabia.

BAE Systems, Outward Bound invest in mental well-being



Wherever you are in the world, the impact of COVID-19 stretches beyond the economy, and has put the spotlight on mental wellbeing and increased anxiety and depression, especially amongst young people.

As part of its long-term commitment to Oman, BAE Systems has recently announced a partnership with educational training provider Outward Bound Oman

that offers support to young people in Oman who have found life difficult during Covid.

According to Deloitte, poor mental health cost UK businesses £43bn a year, and recently BAE Systems were awarded both a Bronze in Mind's Workplace Wellbeing Index and a Princess Royal Training Award for their approach to mental health awareness in the UK.

The programme welcomed a visit by Dr Amira al Raidan, head of Mental Health Department at Ministry of Health, and HH Sayyida Basma al Said, founder of Whispers of Serenity Clinic.

Steve Underwood, chief executive officer, BAE Systems Oman LLC, said, "This partnership further strengthens the long-standing relationship between ourselves and the Sultanate of

Oman. We have been supporting Oman for more than 50 years, and this is another fantastic activity that continues this commitment."

First established in the UK in 1941, Outward Bound now operates in 33 countries around the world. Oman is the first Arabic speaking nation to set up an Outward-Bound operation to develop and challenge its

human resource.

Outward Bound Oman executive director Mark Evans commented. "A key element in the success story of Outward Bound in Oman is the corporate community who, through their social investment programmes fund Omani young people on Outward-Bound training courses, so developing key life skills such as resilience. This support from BAE Systems will give young people an extraordinary opportunity to boost their self-esteem and the ability to cope with uncertainty and challenge."

Since being established in Oman in 2009, Outward Bound Oman has delivered training for more than 16,000 individuals. In 2014 it was further established by Ministerial Decision, and recently the second of three National Training Centres was opened in Muscat. Construction of a third training centre located on Jebel Akdhar will be completed later in 2021.

BAE Systems has been a trusted partner to the Sultanate of Oman's Armed Forces for nearly 50 years and has supported the sultanate's economic agenda through a number of education programmes.



The Chedi Muscat launches Full Moon Dinner experience

Nothing says romance quite like a dinner for two, particularly surrounded by a majestic Al Hajar Mountains and serene waters of the Gulf of Oman. For guests who are looking for romantic seclusion, The Chedi Muscat has launched their unique Full Moon Dinner experience.

On January 28, guests can soak up views of the horizon from the resort as they experience dining under the sublime light of the full moon on the beach.

Surrounded by a charming panorama of the Gulf of Oman, the intimate evening will begin with a live performance by a local saxophone artist to set the mood.

Guests can indulge in a varied choice of culinary delights as they pick their favorite from the

buffet menu. The spectacular dinner under the stars will be served directly at the table and feature a choice of delicious seafood and prime cut meats paired with an equally impressive beverage selection to enhance the evening.

The Chedi Muscat offers understated elegance and a perfect blend of Omani architecture and Asian Zen style. Located by the Al Hajar Mountains with its own private beach, the resort rises amidst an elegantly landscaped twenty-one acre garden oasis featuring eight dining options, a spa, a health club and three swimming pools.

Price: RO60/per couple

For more information or to reserve the Full Moon Dinner experience please call +968 96570342

Regional Cervical Cancer Forum on January 27, 28

The UAE-based civil society organisation Friends of Cancer Patients (FOCP), is partnering with the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) to host the second edition of Cervical Cancer Forum, virtually on January 27 and 28.

'Accelerating Action on HPV and Cervical Cancer' is the theme of the Forum that will be held under the patronage of Sheikha Jawaher bint Mohammed al Qasimi, wife of His Highness the Ruler of Sharjah, and Founder and Patron of FOCP.

The two-day virtual forum will build on the success of the inaugural Cervical Cancer Forum held in Sharjah in 2019 and enjoys the support of local, regional and international health authorities, and centres of medical knowledge such as the UAE Ministry of Health and Prevention, International Atomic Energy Agency - IAEA, Union for International Cancer Control (UICC), and the World Health Organization.

The forum will allow active interaction among panelists, speakers and audience members, ensuring the efficiency of discussions and outcomes. It brings together pioneering actors and global stakeholders in the field including, International Agency for Research on Cancer (IARC), global health Institutes and University Hospitals, pioneer researchers, and policy makers, media and communication experts and academia who will push the agenda of cervical cancer prevention and explore ways to foster collaboration, to address regional and national responses to HPV and cervical cancer in the Arab region more effectively.

It will discuss the establishment of sustainable and

equitable cervical cancer and HPV eradication programmes, including in health crisis settings such as the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic. It will also review the success of the 'Sharjah Declaration on Cervical Cancer' adopted by the debut edition of the Forum in 2019.

The second Cervical Cancer Forum will propose a set of recommendations and a call for action that integrates the pillars of prevention, treatment, palliative care, and social aspects globally and specifically in the Arab region.

According to a 2018 study, cervical cancer caused by human papillomavirus (HPV) is the seventh leading cause of cancer deaths among women aged 15 years and above in the UAE. In addition, nearly 7,600 women in the Arab region died from cervical cancer in 2020, according to the World Health Organization (WHO).

"WHO and UNFPA Global Strategy to accelerate the elimination of cervical cancer was launched in November 2020, of which UNFPA will be leading on the execution of the strategy," said Dr Luay Shabaneh, UNFPA Regional Director for the Arab States.

He added that this Global Strategy was launched in November 2020, and UNFPA is committed to advance the work on cervical cancer as one of the most preventable and treatable forms of cancer, as long as it is detected early and managed effectively.

"We work towards scaling up access to proper education and crucial preventive, testing and treatment tools in order to ensure a comprehensive approach to cervical cancer control," Shabaneh noted.



Oman Post Asyad Express launches international delivery

Connecting customers to all corners of the globe, Oman Post Asyad Express has launched its new international shipping service, Asyad Express International.

Offering door-to-door deliveries worldwide, customers can easily send and track their documents and parcels at competitive prices to over 220 destinations.

Available at all 86 Oman Post branches across the sultanate, as well as pickup collection services

for corporate customers, Asyad Express International makes it easier than ever to send shipments abroad, with the confidence of knowing they are in good hands.

Nasser al Sharji, acting CEO of Oman Post Asyad Express said, "At Oman Post Asyad Express, we are continually working on enhancing our services to meet our customers' evolving needs. As e-commerce continues to gain momentum, we are sup-

porting our business customers, while focusing on small and medium enterprises to scale their businesses, reach to online shoppers beyond the sultanate and access new markets, with the choice, convenience and control they need to expand their business."

Fast, reliable and affordable, Asyad Express International enables customers to ship packages of up to 25kg, delivering to over 220 destinations between

48-72 hours, and major cities in the GCC in as little as 24 hours.

With convenience as a top priority, the service includes a track and trace feature, which customers can access through the company's website and contact centers.

Oman Post Asyad Express continues to build on its strategy to provide tailored delivery services across Oman, the region and internationally, for its growing B2C and B2B customer base.

In addition to Asyad Express International, the company offers a variety of freight services, nation-wide door-to-door delivery, express mail, government services, enhanced traditional postal services and e-commerce solutions, while working to position the sultanate as a leading trade and logistics hub.

For more information, visit omanpost.om or visit any of the company's branches across the sultanate.

Hyundai Motor Group advances hydrogen strategy

Hyundai Motor Group announced that it signed an investment contract with the government of Guangdong Province to establish an offshore fuel cell system production facility in Guangzhou, China. The investment advances the group's global hydrogen leadership and supports its push into China's rapidly developing hydrogen industry.

Attendees at the signing ceremony included Kwang Guk Lee, president and head of China Operations at the group; Hyuk Joon Lee, senior vice president and chief government affairs officer of Hyundai Motor Group China Ltd.; Lin Keqing, executive vice governor of Guangdong Province; Hu Hong, vice mayor of Guangzhou Municipal Government; and Chen Yong, district chief of Huangpu District Guangzhou Municipal Government.

Construction is scheduled to begin next month and will be completed by the second half of



2022. The plant will be the group's first fuel cell production base outside of Korea, with the initial capacity to produce 6,500 units of fuel cell systems per year. The group will gradually increase the capacity in line with market demand.

The Guangzhou plant will leverage the group's extensive expertise in fuel cell system production to secure a technological

leadership position in China's rapidly developing hydrogen industry. At the new plant, the group will manufacture the same proven fuel cell systems that are used for Hyundai Motor's NEXO fuel cell electric SUV.

Moreover, the group will work with Chinese companies to participate in the Guangdong government's hydrogen-related pilot project and initiatives, which will

help Hyundai secure a competitive advantage in China's hydrogen industry. Global companies from Japan, Germany, the UK and other countries have also been working with the Chinese partners to develop technology related to fuel cell vehicles and to advance the local hydrogen industry.

In October 2020, the China Society of Automotive Engineers

released a technology roadmap, under the guidance of the Ministry of Industry and Information Technology. The roadmap reflects China's ambition to foster a hydrogen economy, adding that the country aims to have 1 million FCEVs on its roads by 2035 centering on commercial vehicles.

In December 2018, Hyundai Motor Group announced its own long-term roadmap, 'Fuel Cell Vision 2030', to reaffirm its commitment to accelerate the development of a hydrogen society by leveraging its global leadership in fuel cell technologies. As part of this plan, the group aims to produce 700,000 fuel cells annually to meet demand from various industry sectors.

The group has decades of experience in fuel cell system development, having introduced the world's first mass-produced fuel cell electric vehicle, the ix35, in 2013.

Russia police violence in spotlight

Moscow, Russia - Nearly 3,500 protesters were arrested at demonstrations in support of jailed Kremlin critic Alexei Navalny, a monitor reported Sunday, as authorities probed violence on the part of both protesters and police.

Police clashed with demonstrators in Moscow as tens of thousands took to the streets across the country on Saturday following Navalny's call to demonstrate against President Vladimir Putin's 20 year rule.

A number of protesters were injured, including a woman in Saint Petersburg who was hospitalised with a head injury and was in intensive care on Sunday.

The West condemned the arrests and 'harsh tactics' used against demonstrators, with EU foreign policy chief Josep Borrell saying the bloc would discuss 'next steps' on Monday.

Late on Saturday the Investigative Committee, which probes major crimes, said it launched criminal inquiries in Moscow over the use of violence against law enforcement, hooliganism and property damage.

'Investigators are continuing to study and analyse a large amount of photo and video materials,' the Committee said.

In a separate statement, investigators said on Sunday a 36 year old man hit two policemen at the Saint Petersburg protest and was detained.

'Woman in intensive care'

But Saint Petersburg prosecutors also said they were probing violations 'on the part of law en-



Riot police personnel overpower a protester during clashes at a rally in support of jailed opposition leader Alexei Navalny, in Moscow on Saturday (AFP)

forcement' and the use of force against a woman.

The statement was released after local media published a video showing a middle-aged woman falling to the ground after being kicked by riot police.

In the video, a woman - identified as Margarita Yudina - is seen asking three policemen in full riot gear why they are detaining a young protester. One of the policeman then kicks her in the stomach. Saint Petersburg's Dzhanelidze hospital said Yudina was hospitalised with a head injury. "She is in a serious condi-

tion," a hospital representative told AFP on Sunday. "She's in intensive care."

Moscow authorities for their part insisted that no one remained hospitalised in the capital following the rallies.

Officials said in a statement on Sunday that 29 people were taken to hospitals and received medical assistance after the protests. 'No one required further hospital treatment,' the statement said.

The head of the Kremlin's human rights council, Valery Fadeyev, said most of those de-

tained in Moscow had been released.

He also defended the detentions, saying the protests were illegal and took place during a coronavirus pandemic. "I see no violations whatsoever," he said. "These events are illegal."

He also accused TikTok, a Chinese video-sharing app beloved by teens, of encouraging minors to participate in Saturday's protests. "This calls for an investigation," he said.

The OVD Info monitor said police seized at least 3,435 demonstrators across dozens of

cities, with 1,360 people detained in Moscow and 523 in the second city Saint Petersburg.

Saturday's protests took on an unprecedented geographic scale, spanning more than 100 cities across the country. Around 20,000 people protested in Moscow and more than 10,000 in Saint Petersburg, according to AFP estimates.

Leonid Volkov, head of Navalny's regional network, praised the turnout. "I am certainly proud, very impressed and inspired," Volkov said.

AFP

US interfering in Russia's domestic affairs: Kremlin

Moscow, Russia - The Kremlin on Sunday accused the US Embassy of interfering in Russia's domestic affairs after the mission distributed a 'demonstration alert' to US citizens in Russia recommending they avoid protests.

Nearly 3,500 protesters were arrested at demonstrations in support of jailed Kremlin critic Alexei Navalny on Saturday, a monitor reported, as Russian authorities probed violence on the part of both protesters and police.

Police clashed with demonstrators in Moscow as tens of thousands took to the streets across the country on Saturday following Navalny's call to demonstrate against President Vladimir Putin's 20-year rule.

Ahead of the demonstrations, the US Embassy issued a safety warning to Americans based in Russia.

"Of course, these publications are inappropriate," President Vladimir Putin's spokesman Dmitry Peskov told a state TV channel.

"And of course indirectly, they are absolutely an interference in our domestic affairs," he added.

He accused the US Em-

bassy of 'indirectly' supporting the violation of Russian legislation and backing 'unauthorised protests'.

He said that if the Russian embassy in the United States issued similar information 'this would cause a certain feeling of discomfort in Washington'.

The Russian Foreign Ministry on Saturday said the representatives of the US Embassy would be summoned and would have to 'explain themselves'.

A US mission spokeswoman earlier Sunday said US embassies and consulates around the world routinely issue safety messages to US citizens.

"This is a common, routine practice of many countries' diplomatic missions," she told AFP.

On Saturday, the US Embassy in Moscow also said it was following the rallies, adding that Washington supported 'the right of all people to peaceful protest, freedom of expression'.

'Steps being taken by Russian authorities are suppressing those rights,' US Embassy spokeswoman Rebecca Ross said on Twitter.

AFP

Pirates kill sailor, kidnap 15 off Nigeria: Report

Ankara, Turkey - Armed men killed an Azerbaijani sailor and abducted 15 Turkish crew members from a Turkish cargo ship off the coast of Nigeria, Turkey's Anadolu news agency reported on Sunday.

That left three crew members to sail the Liberian-flagged Mozart owned by a Turkish company, the state agency said.

Turkish news channel NTV spoke to a sailor still on board who said several crew members were wounded.

The Mozart had been en route from the Nigeria's economic capital Lagos to Cape Town in South Africa when it was boarded on Saturday.

It has now arrived at Port-Gentil in nearby Gabon.

"We have established the necessary contacts with all the countries concerned for the release of our nationals," Turkish Foreign Minister Mevlut Cavusoglu said on NTV.

"The bandits, the pirates who abducted our citizens have not

contacted us yet. These pirates make contact at some point to communicate their demands," he added.

Earlier, a voice from the Mozart - purportedly that of the new captain - had said on a recording posted on Twitter: 'I do not know where I am heading. The pirates cut the cables, only the radar is working.'

Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan spoke by telephone to the new captain and was following events closely, his office said.

Ten sailors who were taken hostage from a Turkish vessel off West Africa were released in August 2019.

Pirate attacks on ships worldwide jumped 20 per cent last year driven by a record spate of kidnappings off West Africa, the International Maritime Bureau said last week.

A total of 195 incidents of piracy and armed robbery were reported, up from 162 in 2019.

AFP

Venezuela's President Maduro willing to establish 'new path' with US under Biden

Caracas, Venezuela - Venezuelan President Nicolas Maduro said on Saturday he was willing to 'turn the page' with the US under President Joe Biden, calling for a 'new path' after years of tension with Donald Trump's White House.

"We are willing to walk a new path in our relations with Joe Biden's government based on mutual respect, dialogue, communication and understanding," the leftist leader told supporters, adding that he 'is willing to turn the page' with the new US administration.

Trump's government had slapped multiple economic sanctions on Venezuela, including an oil embargo in place since 2019, in an attempt to overthrow the socialist regime of Maduro, whom the US has labeled a dictator.

After years of a frosty relationship Caracas and Washington fully broke diplomatic ties on



President Nicolas Maduro waves the national flag during a meeting to commemorate the 63rd Anniversary of the Popular Insurrection of January 23, 1958, at Miraflores Presidential Palace in Caracas on Saturday (AFP)

January 23, 2019, when the US government recognized opposition leader Juan Guaido as Venezuela's interim president.

After Biden won the US presidential election in November,

Maduro congratulated the long-time politician, saying Venezuela was 'ready for dialogue and good understanding with the people and government of the United States', repeating those senti-

ments again in December.

Analysts believe the Biden administration will take a more moderate stance on Venezuela and will support international mediation for the transition to-

wards a new government.

That said, Biden's nominee for secretary of state, Anthony Blinken, has already described Maduro as a 'brutal dictator', and during his Senate confirmation hearing said he supported Trump's policy of backing Guaido.

The renewed support for Guaido follows the swearing in of a new pro-Maduro Venezuelan National Assembly following December elections boycotted by the opposition, who claimed fraud. The new parliament technically left Guaido, the chamber's former speaker, without a job, although he plans to maintain a parallel body of shadow opposition lawmakers that has gained foreign backing.

According to the UN, more than five million Venezuelans have left the country since 2015, fleeing political and economic turmoil.

AFP

Scotland's First Minister vows to hold 'legal' independence vote

London, UK - Scotland's First Minister Nicola Sturgeon on Sunday said she planned to hold a legal referendum on independence from Britain despite Westminster's opposition, as an opinion poll showed a majority would vote yes.

If her Scottish National Party (SNP) wins a strong showing in regional elections in May, Sturgeon said she would seek a fresh referendum even though Prime Minister Boris Johnson has said such a vote should only be held once in a generation.

'I want to have a legal referendum, that is what I am going to seek the authority of the Scottish people for in May and if they give

me that authority, that's what I intend to do,' she told the BBC's *Andrew Marr Show*.

Johnson 'will flatly refuse the demand', *The Sunday Times* quoted senior government sources as saying.

Sturgeon cited the fact that 'the polls now show that a majority of people in Scotland want independence'.

A poll done by *The Sunday Times* found 50 per cent of Scottish voters wanted another referendum in the next five years and 49 per cent would vote for independence, while 44 per cent would reject it.

A 2014 referendum saw 55 per cent vote 'no'.



Scotland's First Minister Nicola Sturgeon speaks during a session at the Scottish Parliament in Holyrood, Edinburgh on January 19 (AFP)

I want to have a legal referendum, that is what I am going to seek the authority of the Scottish people and if they give me that authority, that's what I intend to do

NICOLA STURGEON

The Sunday Times quoted a forecast that the SNP will win a 'landslide' in May polls for the Scottish parliament, giving Stur-

geon a strong basis to call for the vote. She spoke as the Scottish National Party (SNP) was due to discuss its 'roadmap to a referendum' at a policy forum on Sunday.

The SNP says it will request a Section 30 order from the British government allowing the holding of another referendum. If this is refused it intends to push through its own legislation to prepare for a referendum and 'vigorously' oppose a legal challenge from London.

Scotland could hold a preliminary referendum, calling for negotiations on independence, Alan Trench of University College's constitutional unit told *The*

Sunday Times.

The newspaper poll found 50 per cent of Scottish voters wanted another independence referendum in the next five years, despite the fact only 22 per cent thought an independent country would be better off economically.

'Brexit and the coronavirus crisis... appear to be driving Scottish voters away from union with England,' the newspaper wrote.

Twenty-two per cent thought Johnson had done a good job in tackling the pandemic, versus 61 per cent for Sturgeon.

The poll also found 53 per cent in Scotland would vote to rejoin the EU.

AFP

COVID-19 PANDEMIC

Fears slow down India's inoculation

Greater Noida, India - India's huge coronavirus vaccination drive is behind schedule, with a third of recipients not showing up for appointments because of safety fears and a belief that the pandemic is ending.

After one week, India has vaccinated 1.4mn people, or 200,000 people per day. It had initially hoped to process 300,000 per day before ramping up the rollout and inoculating 300mn by July.

At the Sharda Hospital in Greater Noida near New Delhi, pharma student Khushi Dhingra (17) hugged a friend and wept as she waited to get her shot.

"I am very afraid. I hate needles and I am worried about side effects," she said.

"My papa is very worried too. He is calling me again and again to make sure I am okay."

"There are about 80 students in my batch but only two have opted to get the shot," said nursing student Sakshi Sharma.

"My friends are saying there will be side effects, that you can even get paralysis."

India is using two shots for its drive. One is Covishield, a locally produced version of the Oxford-AstraZeneca vaccine, which has been approved and safely used in a number of other countries after completing Phase 3 human trials.

The other - Covaxin - was developed locally by Bharat Biotech and has not yet completed Phase 3 trials, though the government has insisted it is '110 per cent safe'.



Indian medical staff members pose after receiving their doses of COVID-19 vaccine at the BAPS Yogi Maharaj Hospital, in Gujarat's capital Ahmedabad on Friday (AFP)

WhatsApp worries

Side effects are a common fear, with a few cases of severe reactions reported widely in the media and circulating wildly on Facebook and WhatsApp.

In the eastern state of West Bengal, health chief Ajoy Chakraborty said that turnout was just under 70 per cent, calling it 'not encouraging'.

"We could have achieved our target if some hadn't backed out after seeing television reports of adverse effects following immunisation," Chakraborty said.

But Alisha Khan (20), a nursing student in Greater Noida,

said people were also hesitant because of the 'rushed' approval of Covaxin. "Why are they trying to experiment on us? First, they should have completed trials in a proper way," Khan said.

Dhingra, in the end, did not get a shot after staff realised she was under 18. She had, however, received a text telling her to come for the vaccination from the IT system managing the mammoth process.

The government says that this and other glitches are being ironed out.

One was that if a person did not show up for vaccination,

someone else could not simply take their place. This led to unfinished vaccine vials - which contain a certain number of doses and have to be used that day - being thrown away.

Also hurting the effort is complacency with the number of coronavirus infections and deaths in India falling sharply in recent months.

"In the beginning when there was lockdown, (villagers) were very scared of the coronavirus," said Asha Chauhan (30), who is part of vaccination efforts in rural areas. "Now that fear has gone because cases have come

down. They feel corona has gone from our country now," she said. "They fear they will die if they take the vaccine."

The government has attempted to boost participation, even adapting a classic Bollywood song with lyrics telling people not to believe false rumours. One Delhi hospital has set up a 'selfie zone' for satisfied recipients to take photos. And vaccination centres have started playing light, soothing music in waiting rooms.

"All the top clinicians and doctors have taken the jab and we're pushing the videos of

them taking the shot for circulation and it has been helping in overcoming any hesitancy," said Dr Qazi Haroon, an immunisation officer in Kashmir.

"Now (inoculations) are picking up satisfactorily... Yesterday (Friday), we met 80-90 per cent of our targets across vaccination stations."

Shahid Jameel, a virologist and academic, said that a country like India was bound to have teething problems.

"Once the frontline workers are given the jabs," Jameel said, 'confidence will slowly build up.'

AFP

Egypt to start vaccination campaign

Cairo, Egypt - President Abdel Fattah al Sisi announced on Saturday that Egypt would start rolling out a mass COVID-19 vaccination campaign the following day with the Chinese-made Sinopharm jab.

"We are starting a vaccination drive tomorrow beginning with healthcare workers followed by those suffering from chronic diseases and later the elderly," Sisi said in brief comments after unveiling several development projects in Port Said.

Egypt, the Arab world's most populous country, received its first batch of the Sinopharm vaccines in December.

The company says its vaccine is 79 per cent effective against the novel coronavirus.

Earlier this month, Health Minister Hala Zayed said Egypt would also receive 40mn doses, mostly of the AstraZeneca/Oxford jab, via the Gavi vaccine alliance, with the aim of inoculating 20 per cent of its more than 100mn strong population.

Egypt has registered over 160,000 novel coronavirus infections, including more than 8,850 deaths.

Health officials have warned that low testing rates mean the real number could be at least ten times higher.

AFP

No Europe deaths directly tied to coronavirus vaccination: Experts

Paris, France - Despite dozens of deaths of people shortly after they were vaccinated against coronavirus, scientists say the evidence available so far does not incriminate the new anti-COVID vaccines.

Health agencies stress however that the vast majority of post-vaccination fatalities were elderly, already vulnerable and often sick.

Here's a review of the situation:

Elderly, vulnerable

Norway sparked alarm last week when it reported the deaths of 33 of some 20,000 retirement home residents who

had received a first shot of the Pfizer/BioNTech vaccine.

At least 13 of the fatalities were not only very elderly but also considered frail with serious ailments, the Norwegian Institute of Public Health said.

While it noted that no analysis had yet been carried out on the causes of the deaths, it suggested that with the aged and vulnerable the normal side effects of vaccination such as fever or nausea could have contributed.

Outside Norway the news raised widespread concern and fed anti-vaccine scepticism, prompting the authorities to stress that no link had been es-

tablished between the vaccine and post-jab deaths.

In France, of 800,000 people vaccinated, nine deaths of chronically ill residents of care and retirement homes were recorded by Friday.

The national medicines agency ANSM said that based on available evidence, 'nothing leads to the conclusion that the reported deaths were linked to vaccination'. Other examples include 13 deaths of elderly people recorded in Sweden and seven in Iceland, all with no link established.

In Portugal, a care worker died two days after being inoculated but the Justice Ministry

said a post-mortem found no direct link.

France's Interior Ministry on January 18 listed 71 'observations of death' in Europe of people who had the inoculation, but offered no further details.

Continued monitoring

The European Medicines Agency said that despite the deaths, 'to date no specific concerns have been identified with Comirnaty', the commercial name for the Pfizer shot.

The EMA noted that the authorities investigate fatalities to determine whether the vaccine was responsible.

National and European agencies check any problems with vaccinations reported by health professionals, pharmaceutical firms and patients themselves.

For the moment, the number and type of deaths among those vaccinated are not considered abnormal, with no cause-and-effect relationship identified.

In many countries - such as France, Norway, Britain and Spain - the frail and elderly are first in line for vaccinations.

"It is not unexpected that some of these people may naturally fall ill due to their age or underlying conditions shortly after being vaccinated, without the vaccine playing any role in

that," the UK medicines regulator MHRA said.

Transparency, reassurance

The deaths are a highly sensitive issue, and approaches to informing the public vary.

France and some Nordic countries have reported post-vaccination deaths and detailed the potential side effects of the jabs even if no link has been established.

But Britain's MHRA said it would make a statement at a later date, possibly seeking to avoid spreading alarm. 'We will publish details of all suspected reactions reported in associa-

tion with approved COVID-19 vaccines, along with our assessment of the data on a regular basis in the future,' it said.

In any event, European health officials say the deaths do not call into question the safety of the vaccines.

Norway has not changed its vaccination rollout, even if it has recommended doctors consider the overall health of the most frail before giving them the jab, the policy of numerous other countries.

Globally, more than 60mn doses have been received in at least 64 countries or territories, according to a tally on Saturday.

AFP

US assures 'rock-solid' support for Taiwan as Chinese jets buzz island

Washington, US - The United States' commitment to Taiwan is 'rock-solid', the State Department said late on Saturday, as it warned that China's attempts to intimidate the island are a threat to regional peace.

The comments are the first from Washington on relations with Taiwan since President Joe Biden's inauguration last week, and came on the same day Taipei reported multiple Chinese jets and bombers had flown into its air defence zone.

State Department spokesperson Ned Price said it 'notes with concern the pattern of ongoing PRC attempts to intimidate its neighbours, including Taiwan' and 'urges Beijing to cease its military, diplomatic, and economic pressure against Taiwan'.

The statement added Washington would continue to work on 'deepening' ties with democratic Taiwan.

Taiwan split from China at the



Taiwan's army troops display 'Happy New Year' signs after a drill in Hsinchu military base on January 19 (AFP)

end of a civil war in 1949. Its 23mn people live under the constant threat of invasion by the mainland, whose leaders view the island as their territory and have vowed to one day take it.

Washington diplomatically recognises Beijing over Taipei, but remains the latter's most im-

portant unofficial ally and military backer.

Beijing baulks at any official contacts with Taiwan and tries to keep the island diplomatically isolated.

President Donald Trump embraced warmer ties with the island as he feuded with China on

issues like trade and national security.

Beijing has called for a reset in US-China ties under Biden and on Thursday warned the US to 'cautiously and appropriately handle Taiwan issues to prevent harm to US-China relations'.

AFP

11 Chinese gold miners saved as rescuers race to find remaining 10

Beijing, China - Rescuers in east China on Sunday pulled 11 miners from hundreds of metres underground where they had been trapped for two weeks, state media reported, as the race to locate the remaining ten intensified.

The miners were brought to the surface starting from around 11.00am on Sunday, state broadcaster CCTV reported - a major breakthrough for a rescue operation that has captivated the nation.

One miner was in 'extremely weak physical condition' and rushed to hospital, CCTV said.

The 11 miners were rescued after the air ventilator shaft was cleared, the official state news agency Xinhua reported, citing the operation's command centre.

A further ten remain unaccounted for.

Specialist teams have been battling difficult conditions since an explosion at the Hushan mine in Shandong province trapped



One of twenty-two Chinese miners wearing a black patch comes out from a capsule after his rescue, in Qixia on Sunday (AFP)

the miners underground amid rising waters on January 10.

The explosion occurred in a ventilator shaft, causing a blockage that damaged the cable car.

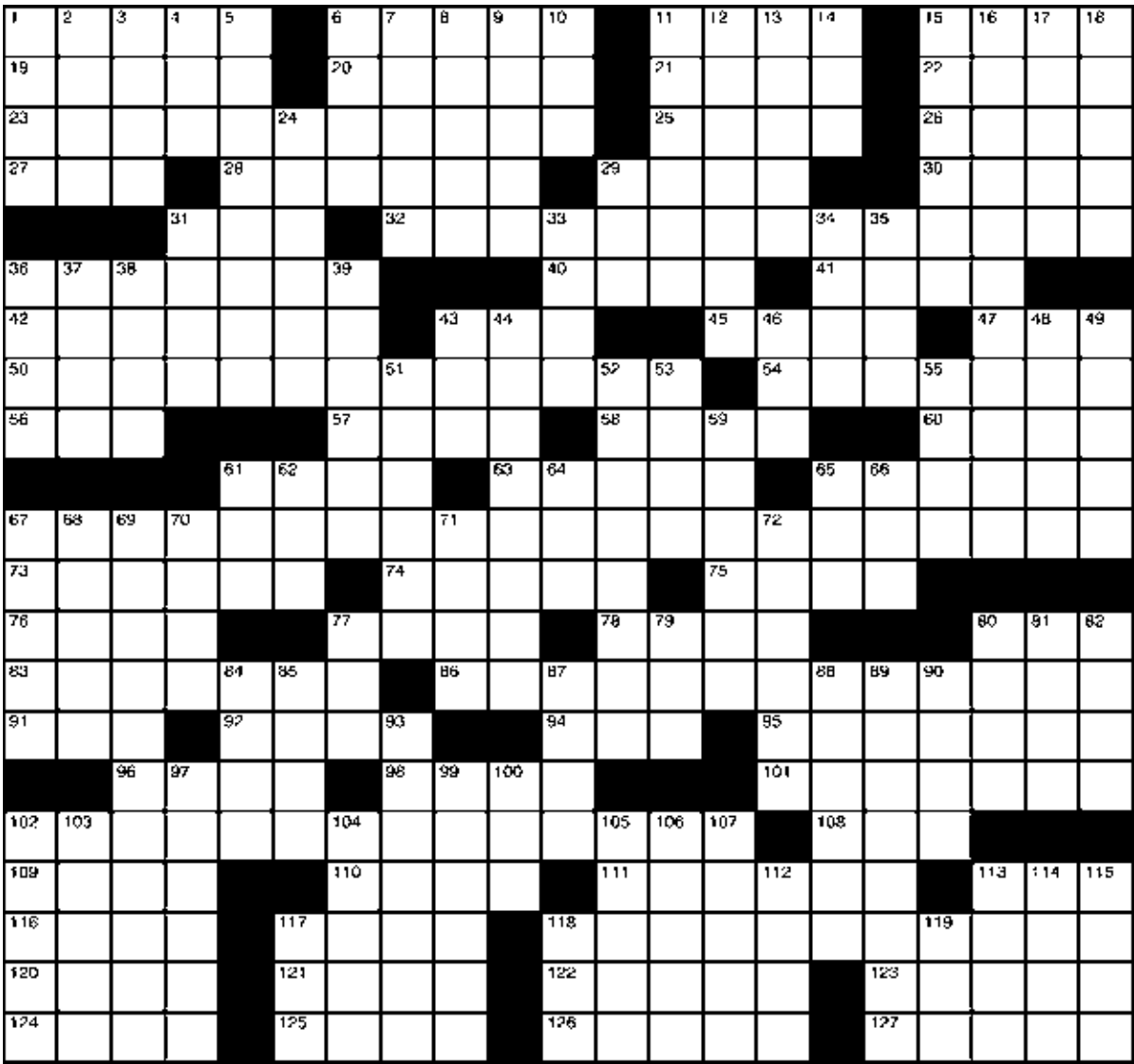
On Sunday morning the huge obstacles suddenly fell to the bottom of the shaft, allowing the operation to take a big step forward, rescue expert Du Bingjian said.

'After the obstacles fell to the bottom of the shaft, the rescue team started to bring up the miners and suspended the drilling work,' Du told the *Global Times*.

'It is currently unclear when the rescuers will reach the Sixth Central Section where the missing miners are believed to be.'

AFP

DAILY CROSSWORD



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ACROSS

- 1 Ingredient for 113
Across
6 Extent
11 Pinnacle
15 Grant
19 Escapes
20 Jury
21 Scoria
22 "... I'm ___
deceiver":
G. Colman
23 67 Across main
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25 Sharp flavor
26 E.Indian cereal
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28 Horseshoe scores
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31 Michael Jackson
album
32 67 Across
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95 Asmara's country
96 Newcastle load
98 "... is in heaven"
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- 110 Historic Spanish
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117 Jai follower
118 67 Across sweet
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121 Star in Lyra
122 Once more
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8 Sung in tune
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11 Nautically behind
12 Vintage
13 "Olympia" artist
Edouard
14 Future fowl

- 15 Decanter
16 Equal rights
advocate
17 Babylonian earth
god
18 Ogler's forte
24 Made neat
29 Moon buggy
31 Ruth's husband
33 "Oz" dog
34 High-rise hair style
35 Actress Drescher
36 D-I connection
37 Arias, e.g. lt.
38 Brit streetcar
39 Forming a rainbow
43 Jackie's second
44 Debtor's nemesis
46 Palindromic cry
48 French yearly
income
49 Poet's concern
51 16th C.
typography
52 Lamentable
53 Dispatch
55 Supreme Norse
god
59 Malicious person
61 Firmament
62 Silly one
64 Tolkien creature
65 Do sum work
66 Contend
67 Snares
68 Matisse
69 Heated
argument

- 70 Brad
71 Brit. rank
72 Out there
77 Write
79 Rocker's need, for
short
80 Bullring beast: Sp.
81 Unique person
82 Wise ___ owl
84 Gregory Peck role
85 Narrative
87 I could ___ horse!
88 Baltimore bird?
89 ___ the bud
90 "Tell ___ the
Marines"
93 Trash
97 ___ only
99 Damascene
100 Equal: prefix
102 Nestling's cry
103 Psychoanalyst
May
104 Obtain a sublease
105 Treatment
106 Suez or Erie
107 Entertainer
Cantor
112 Eat in style
113 No longer current
114 "... a man
with ..."
115 Noble Italian
family name
117 Actress Gardner
118 Rotary disk
119 Organic chemical
suffix

YOUR DAILY HOROSCOPE



ARIES MARCH 21-APRIL 19

You have a natural drive to keep things ever-expanding in your world. Thus, with all that energy, it's hard for you to know when to simply root down and move inward, rather than outward. Monday's skies help you do just that, as little cosmic action colours the day. The moon transitions from chatty Gemini into family-first Cancer, quietly calling you homeward-bound.



LEO JULY 23-AUGUST 22

It may feel like you haven't been able to catch your breath quite yet. Monday's skies offer you the chance to take a beat before yet another busy week kicks off. The moon has an aimless day, as her only interactions involve a transition from socially suave Gemini into empathic Cancer. Work to prioritise healing, decompressing, and alone time for the next few days.



SAGITTARIUS NOVEMBER 22-DECEMBER 21

Intimate encounters aren't always the easiest terrain for you to navigate. You tend to need more space and freedom than other people do, so when relationship matters intensify emotionally, you can automatically feel a bit claustrophobic. The moon slides into Cancer, encouraging you to trek a little deeper into your emotions and to connect with love in a vulnerable manner.



TAURUS APRIL 20-MAY 20

Monday's skies are relatively low-key. You could use the extra downtime, because the week ahead is shaping up to be another busy one! The moon floats aimlessly without an agenda, giving you permission to take things slow and stick to maintenance. Luna transitions out of Gemini and slides into deep-feeling Cancer, emphasising your need for soulful self-expression.



VIRGO AUGUST 23-SEPTEMBER 22

You've been pushing yourself to figure out career plans that will take time to fully get underway. Monday's skies are an open call to slow down and reconnect with your social sphere, as the moon transitions from Gemini into Cancer. Little cosmic action imbues the day, so simply prioritising your friendships will have you feeling like you're on the right track.



CAPRICORN DECEMBER 22-JANUARY 19

Part of your mission is establishing good habits and supportive routines. You may find yourself focusing on that narrative, as the moon completes its venture through Gemini. By afternoon, the moon slips into soulful Cancer, directing your attention to the current state of your love life. Little energy colours Monday's skies, so allow yourself to safely sink into your feelings.



GEMINI MAY 21-JUNE 21

Geminis tend to have an endless supply of energy. That drive for movement propels you to see and do everything you want to, but it also leaves you feeling drained from time to time. Monday's skies work to relax and reconnect you to yourself, as the cosmic landscape is welcomingly low-key. The moon moves forward into Cancer, turning your attention towards finances and resources.



LIBRA SEPTEMBER 23-OCTOBER 22

You're ready to get down to business. Let the relationship dramas fall to the wayside as you refocus your energy on your current set of ambitions, as the moon transitions from Gemini into Cancer. It's an ideal day to focus small efforts and maintenance, rather than large leaps forward, as the moon's lack of aspects makes it hard to get new ideas off the ground.



AQUARIUS JANUARY 20-FEBRUARY 18

Monday's skies kick you into high-gear. Well, not entirely so, as the moon finds herself lacking any aspects that give the day full energy. Yet, Luna's transition from excitable Gemini into initiative-hungry Cancer does help you to focus full force on your agenda and to-do list. Prioritise returning to any unfinished projects, rather than launching into a brand-new idea.



CANCER JUNE 22-JULY 22

You've had a few days to hide away in your shell. That time is coming to a close, as you feel yourself bursting out of your introverted cocoon. The moon departs from Gemini and leaps forward into your sign, helping boost your ability for confident self-expression and encouraging you to tune back into your body. Luna's lack of connections makes for a relaxed day all around.



SCORPIO OCTOBER 23-NOVEMBER 21

You need space to clear your head. Your usual routines may feel especially dull to you, as the moon transitions from connection-seeking Gemini into deep-feeling Cancer. Try to find ways to re-invigorate your day-to-day and widen your perspectives. Monday is slow and has little energy to offer, so there's no shame in coasting, but try to shake things up anyhow.



PISCES FEBRUARY 19-MARCH 20

Your shifting moods are likely to catch you off guard in the day ahead. The morning hours are coloured by the moon in Gemini. She helps you ground yourself and finish any stories that have arisen around the home environment. Come afternoon, Luna departs for Cancer, warming up your sex life and connecting you with activities that give your creativity room to breathe.



TEST YOUR KNOWLEDGE

1. The parts of the Mahabharata which include Bhagawad Gita, is

- a. more than 100 years old
b. more than 2500 years old
c. more than 1500 years old
d. None of the above

2. The ruling party of Singapore, where no opposition parties are allowed is called

- a. People's Party
b. People's Action Party
c. Labour Party
d. Communist Party

3. The restoration of the Olympic Games was at the initiative of a/an

- a. French baron
b. Greek philosopher
c. German philanthropist
d. English duke

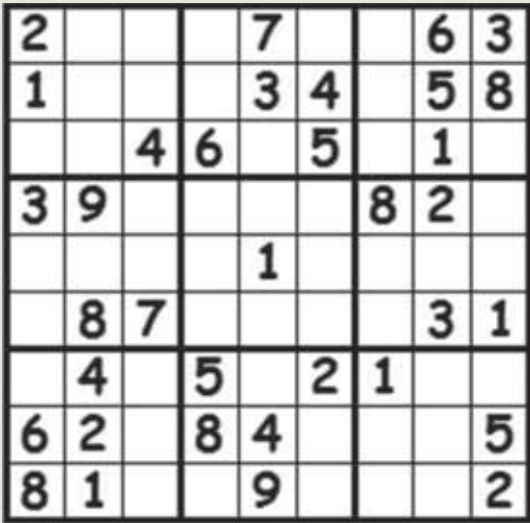
Answers: 1: b 2: b 3: a

KIDS COLOURING



DO YOU SUDOKU?

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



BOGGLER



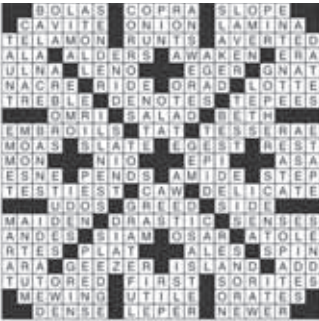
Each game will present you with a matrix filled with letters. The objective is to form words by linking adjacent letters - to the left, right, on top, bottom, or diagonal to each other. The Boggles Classic game uses a 4 x 4 matrix. Words are valued at one point for each letter in excess of two letters.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

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

SUDOKU EASY ANSWER



DAILY CROSSWORD ANSWERS (JANUARY 24)



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



TIPS FOR FIRST-TIME TRAVELLERS

FIND YOUR FEET

Don't be afraid to use a map – looking like a tourist isn't as bad as getting lost

If you have just been bitten by the travel bug and want to set out to explore the world, on your own terms and in your own time, there are quite a few guidelines and tips that you need to remember and practise, now that the world is in the grip of another unseen bug (the COVID-19 virus).

Planning your trip and practising safe conduct is of utmost importance as is the urge of the novice to 'get lost' and discover not just destinations and experiences but also one's own potential to rough it out.

Nomadic Matt, a New York Times best-selling author of 'How to Travel the World on \$50 a Day' says every first-time traveller often asks the same old questions: How do I find the money to travel - It seems too expensive for me.

Where do I find the best travel deals? How do I save money on flights, accommodation, and other big expenses? How do I plan my trip? How do I stay safe and healthy? The answers to most of these lie in the following set of tips that Matt offers:

Pack light

By purchasing a small backpack, you will be forced to pack light and avoid carrying too much stuff. Humans have a natural tendency to want to fill space. It's okay to wear the same t-shirt a few days in a row. Take half the clothes you think you will need but do take extra socks.

Always pack a towel

It's the key to successful galactic hitchhiking and plain common sense. You never know when you will need it, whether it's at the beach, on a picnic, or just to dry off.



Take extra bank cards

Disasters happen. It's always good to have a backup in case you get robbed or lose a card. You don't want to be stuck somewhere new without access to your funds. Get a credit card/debit card that doesn't charge a foreign transaction fee or an ATM fee.

Travel by yourself

You'll learn a lot about yourself and how to become independent. It's a cliché, but it's true.

Traveling solo teaches you how to fend for yourself, talk to people, and handle unfamiliar situations with ease. Don't be afraid to use a map - looking like a tourist isn't as bad as getting lost. Though, wandering aimlessly through a new city is a good way to get to know it.

Visit the local tourism office

They know about everything going on in town. They can point you to free activities, special

events happening during your stay, and everything in between. They even offer discounts on attractions and transportation.

Don't use a money belt

Thieves know they exist and being seen with one basically shouts, 'Look at me, I'm a tourist with money! Rip me off!' The more you can blend in and act like a local, the easier it will be to get deals and avoid touts. Limit the amount of cash and bank cards you carry with you on each trip.

Always carry a lock

They come in handy, especially when you stay in dorms and need to lock your stuff up. Carry a small combination lock with you when you travel. Don't use one with keys because, if you lose the keys...

Carry extra copies of your passport

Carry extra copies of your passport and travel documents. And don't forget to e-mail a copy to yourself too. You never know when you might need to have some sort of documentation with you.

Don't fly direct

When booking flights, sometimes it is cheaper to fly into airports close to your final destination, and then take a train or bus to where you need to go.

Learn basic phrases in the native language

The locals will appreciate it and it will make your interactions easier. You don't need to master the language but learning a few things

like Hello, Goodbye, Thank you!, Where's the bathroom? will be helpful. Also, read up on the destinations you are visiting. It will give you a deeper understanding.

Lunchtime is best to visit historical sites

Be a contrarian. You'll have fewer crowds getting in your way as big tour buses, groups, and most travelers head to lunch. It's always best to visit an attraction super early, late, or when people eat.

Never eat in a touristy area

The closer you are to tourist attractions the more you are going to pay and the worse the food (and service). Additionally, never eat anywhere where the menu is in like 6 languages! That means the restaurant is just for tourists. Remember, most expensive restaurants offer 'lunch specials' featuring the same food they would serve for dinner but half the price.

Pack a flashlight

It will let you see at night, you can avoid stepping on stuff, and help you tell ghost stories. Who's afraid of the dark? Also, carry a basic first-aid kit as accidents do happen. So be prepared.

Be open to strangers

Not everyone bites. Say hi to people on the road. Turn strangers into friends. Remember they are just like you. But keep a healthy level of suspicion. You don't want to fall for any travel scams or get yourself into uncomfortable situations. Be open but cautious at all times during your trip.

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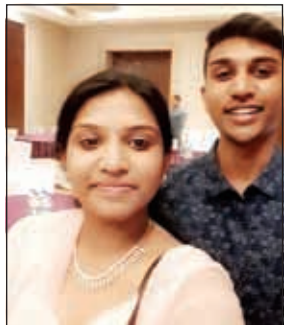
bit.ly/simpsonp

Computer service technician with 4 years exp in Oman, looking for suitable job. Indian male 28, currently in Oman, NOC available. Contact: 94496905 bit.ly/christopaul

Accounting Manager/Chief Accountant, Indian, Male, 15+ Years Of Experience In Oman, Uae & India, Looking For A Job And Have Noc On Visit. Contact: 79007124 / 78039524 Email: Shkkader@Gmail.Com

Web developer, 22, Indian, BSc (Hons) IT, UK. Exp in various software projects (including PHP, Node.js, React.js). Seeking a suitable job. Currently in Oman. Contact: 79371798,

BIRTHDAY WISHES



SHRUTHI & SHYAM
January 25

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VISIT SEYCHELLES

ISLANDS OF JOY

Seychelles is now more accessible for tourists

If you are not keen on visiting any of the 1100plus islands of the Maldives, how about another choice in the same league – Seychelles!

Seychelles is an island republic in the western Indian Ocean, comprising about 115 islands with lush tropical vegetation, beautiful beaches, and a wide variety of marine life. There are three main islands in Seychelles – Mahe, Praslin, and La Digue, all three of which offer wonderful beach experiences with a wide range of activities.

The flight duration between Muscat and Seychelles is just about five hours but indirect flights via Dubai or Doha might take around 7-8 hours. The capital, Victoria, is situated on the island of Mahé where the international airport it located. Just about a 10-minute flight north from Mahe lies Praslin, the Seychelles’ second largest island which is less busy than Mahe. La Digue lies a 15-minute ferry away from Praslin. In face, an regular inland ferry service connects all three islands .

Praslin is famed for its Valle de Mai reserve which is home to the ubiquitous Coco De Mer (a uniquely shaped huge nut) which gives credence to folklore suggesting that it was the original site for the biblical ‘Garden of Eden’. Now a world heritage site, it is surrounded by a bunch of stunningly untouched beaches, wherein the sea is abode to the most beautiful coral reefs on earth.

While Mahe and Praslin are better known, and certainly more accessible, La Digue, the fourth largest island in the Seychelles, is something else altogether. Reachable by ferry from Mahe, or by privately chartered boat, it contains dirt roads but several luxury lodges. Its forests and the Veuve National Park there is home to the last wild Black Paradise Flycatchers, which is not found anywhere else, and other birds.

The climate of Seychelles is tropical oceanic, with little temperature variation during the year. Daily temperatures range between 20-30° C.

Of the roughly 200 plant species found in Seychelles, some 80 are unique to the islands, including screw pines, several varieties of jellyfish trees, latanier palms, the bois



Praslin is famed for its Valle de Mai reserve which is home to the ubiquitous **Coco De Mer (a uniquely shaped huge nut)** which gives credence to folklore suggesting that it was the original site for the biblical ‘Garden of Eden’

rouge, the bois de fer, Wright’s gardenia, and the most famous, the C oco de mer.

Wildlife includes a remarkably diverse array of marine life, including more than 900 identified species of fish, green sea turtles, and giant tortoises which are endemic to Aldabra atoll. Praslin has a display of few of these.

Travel during the pandemic

Seychelles has reviewed its entry requirements procedures so as to be more accessible for potential visitors, including GCC travelers, as part of the restart of its tourism activities for 2021 and beyond, according to official sources. The new measures are to be implemented in two phases and this was announced by Seychelles’ Minister for Foreign Affairs and Tourism, Sylvestre Radegonde during a press briefing on January 14, 2021. With immediate effect, Seychelles will be welcoming vaccinated visitors from any part of the world.

Vaccinated visitors

To be recognised as ‘vaccinated’, visitors must be able to show that they have taken the complete dose of the vaccine - two doses plus 2 weeks after the second dose for the four vaccines currently receiving heavy media exposure. Visitors need to submit an authentic certificate from their national health authority as proof of COVID-19 vaccination alongside a negative COVID-19 PCR certificate, obtained less than 72 hours prior to travel.

Non-vaccinated visitors

All visitors currently permitted entry (Category 1 and 2, private jet passengers) will now need to show a negative PCR test obtained less than 72 hours prior to travel. Prior to January 14, 2021, Category 2 required a test less than 48 hours. Visitors that are not vaccinated or not coming from a Category 1 or 2 countries or travelling by private



Best time for watersports

If one wants to indulge in water sports and other activities, here is a list of the best months for each:

Sailing: Year-round

Snorkeling: Year-round (April – May and October – November are the best months for snorkeling)

Surfing: May – September

Diving: March – May; September – November

Bird watching: April – October

jet, are still unable to enter. This will be in force until mid-March.

Mid-March onwards

Once the majority of the adult population in Seychelles is vaccinated by mid-March, the country will open up to all visitors, vaccinated or not. At that point, visitors will only need a negative PCR obtained less than 72 hours prior to travel.

Irrespective of the above, visitors are to abide to the existing health measures (wearing of face masks, social distancing, etc) which remain applicable as per the travel advisory published on the Department of Tourism Website. Similarly, all tourism operators will still be required to follow their existing COVID-19 standard operating procedure and protocol.

(More details will be published in the website www.tourism.gov.sc)



Anse Lazio is one of the most beautiful beaches in the world in Praslin island



Aldabra Giant Tortoises, one of the largest tortoise species on earth, are endemic to Aldabra atoll in Seychelles



Spain's Carolina Marin celebrates after defeating Taiwan's Tai Tzu-ying in the women's singles final of Thailand Open in Bangkok on Sunday

Marin, Axelsen claim badminton titles in Bangkok

THAILAND OPEN

Bangkok, Thailand - Spain's Carolina Marin and Viktor Axelsen from Denmark on Sunday claimed their second Thailand Open badminton singles titles in a fortnight.

Axelsen was a commanding force against his compatriot Hans-Kristian Solberg Vittinghus in the men's final in Bangkok.

Marin, the reigning Olympic champion, smashed top seed Tai Tzu-ying for the second time in a fortnight.

Thailand is hosting three consecutive badminton tournaments in a bio-secure coronavirus bubble, without spectators to guard against the coronavirus outbreak.

Marin, 27, went into Sunday's final without losing a single game across the two tournaments.

In a much tighter contest than the first final last week, the Spaniard claimed the first game 21-19.

The Taiwanese 26 year old appeared to lose her confidence early in the second set, as a dangerous Marin asserted her dominance.

Tai saved four match points but her comeback was too late as Marin sealed her victory 21-17.

"I feel extremely happy. Two

victories in two weeks, it's an amazing way to start the year," said Marin.

Axelsen 27, ran rings around 35 year old Vittinghus triumphing in the first set 21-11.

Vittinghus, ranked 42nd, made the tournament from a reserves list and had to reschedule his flight home because he had not anticipated a finals berth.

Axelsen repeatedly sent Vittinghus diving for shots and appeared in control of most rallies throughout the 40-minute match.

He polished off the second set 21-7 and flagged there would be low key celebrations.

"I'm going to stay at the hotel and talk to my family, my baby girl at home and that's what's on the menu tonight," he said.

Four people involved in the tournaments, including two players, have tested positive for the coronavirus during the past fortnight of competition.

The finale - the Badminton World Federation World Tour Finals - kicks off on Wednesday at the Impact Arena and will be contested by the top eight of each discipline.

Chinese and Japanese athletes have not participated in the Bangkok tournaments.

AFP



Denmark's Viktor Axelsen exults after defeating compatriot Hans-Kristian Solberg Vittinghus in the men's singles final on Sunday

Ogier bags record eighth Monte Carlo rally title

Monte Carlo, Principality of Monaco - Seven-time world champion Sebastien Ogier celebrated a 50th world rally win by securing a record eighth Monte Carlo rally on Sunday.

The 37 year old Frenchman, along with co-pilot Julien Ingrassia, mastered snow and ice on the final leg in the mountains above Monaco to head a Toyota 1-2, finishing 32.6sec clear of teammate Elfyn Evans.

Defending champion Thierry Neuville was third, a further 40.9sec off the pace in his Hyundai i20.

In winning the 89th edition of the Monte Carlo rally, held with no fans in accordance to coronavirus protocols, Ogier outdid compatriot Sebastien Loeb, the nine-time world champion who won the rally seven times.

Ogier and co-driver Ingrassia stood on top of their car as they celebrated.

"It's the rally I've won the most. It is always special winning here," the 37 year old Ogier said. "It's the rally which made me dream since I was little."

Ogier won Sunday's first stage in icy conditions to extend his overnight lead to 21 seconds over Evans.

Although the Welshman clawed back one second on the next stage - won by the Hyundai driver Neuville - Ogier was in dominant form on the day's third special and won it to lead by 28 seconds going into the final



France's Sebastien Ogier and co-pilot Julien Ingrassia drive their Toyota Gazoo Racing WRT during the WRC season-opening Monte Carlo Rally on Saturday



Sebastien Ogier speaks to the press after winning the Monte Carlo Rally

stage. He signed off in style by winning that one, too, as Japanese manufacturer Toyota celebrated its first Monte Carlo

victory since 1998.

Evans had a glimmer of hope when he led Ogier by seven seconds on Friday night.

But that was after Ogier sustained a flat tyre during that afternoon on snowy roads, and Evans acknowledged he could not sustain enough pressure.

"It's been good, but just not 100 per cent as it should have been," he said. "Never consistently where I liked to be."

Overall, drivers completed 258km over 14 stages in a shorter edition of the race, which

was held without fans on the roadside because of the coronavirus.

Last year, Neuville won by just 2.2 seconds ahead of Ogier, who had won the previous six editions of the rally after first winning it in 2009.

The nine-time world champion Loeb won Monte Carlo seven times between 2003-13.

The next event on the 12-race calendar is the Arctic Rally in Finland, starting on February 26. Agencies

New WTA tournament for quarantined players

Melbourne, Australia - Australian Open organisers on Sunday released a revised schedule for lead-in events to the Grand Slam, saying it would give players more time to prepare after a 14-day quarantine lockdown.

More than a quarter of the tournament's players have been confined to their hotel rooms after coronavirus cases were detected on charter flights carrying them into the largely virus-free country. The positive cases, on three of 17 flights carrying more than 1,000 people, threw preparations for the tournament into disarray as players complained they would struggle to be ready to hit the court.

Tennis Australia said in a statement the tournament build-up had been revamped after 'extensive consultation' to help give the 72 affected players 'the best possible preparation and training opportunities'. A third WTA 500 event will run from February 3-7 for players who have been unable to train, while the two original events will go ahead with reduced draw sizes.

The two ATP 250 events will



A cleaner wipes down the nets as she prepares the court for the next group of players for a practice session in Melbourne, with players allowed to train while on quarantine for two weeks ahead of the Australian Open

start 24 hours later, on February 1, and each feature an increased singles main draw size of 56. The ATP Cup will also be delayed 24 hours to February 2.

"This has been a particularly challenging time for the athletes in hard lockdown and we, along with the WTA and ATP, aim to do everything we can to help," Australian Open tournament director Craig Tiley said. "These changes to the lead-in events have been made to give

the 72 players a little bit of extra time to help them prepare.

Players on the flights with no cases have been allowed out of hotel quarantine for five hours a day to train in a strict bio-security bubble.

Many participants, including men's world No 1 Novak Djokovic - who was not in the full-quarantine group - have taken issue with the quarantine arrangements. The complaints have drawn an unsympathetic

reaction in Australia, with many online defending the strict isolation measures as an essential part of the country's success in containing the virus.

Others have balked at the athletes' requests for eased restrictions, framing them as spoil and insensitive to host city Melbourne, which only came out of a harsh four-month lockdown in October. The Australian Open, which was delayed three weeks due to the pandemic, is scheduled to begin on February 8.

AFP

QUICK RUN

McGregor knocked out by Poirier in stunning UFC upset

American underdog Dustin Poirier shook up the world of mixed martial arts (MMA) on Sunday, beating up the legs of Irish superstar Conor McGregor before knocking him out at UFC 257 in Abu Dhabi, UAE.

"I'm happy but I'm not surprised. I put in the work," Poirier after the referee stepped in after 2min 32sec of the second round to save McGregor from further damage after he was dropped by a fierce combination of punches. The 32 year old Poirier was ranked second in the flyweight division going into the fight, but still rated a heavy underdog by bookmakers to beat his fourth-ranked opponent, arguably the most famous fighter the sport has seen.

Hatton outshines McIlroy for victory in Abu Dhabi

Tyrrell Hatton outshone world No 6 Rory McIlroy in a head-to-head battle on Sunday to claiming the US\$8mn Abu Dhabi Championship by a whopping four shots. The 29 year old Englishman started the final round one shot behind McIlroy, but shot a fine bogey-free six-under par 66 to finish on 18-under par 270 for the tournament. Australian Jason Scrivener, who had a round of 66, finished in second place. McIlroy (72) finished third at a 13-under par 275, with Spaniard Rafa Cabrera-Bello (69) in fourth with a 12-under par 276.

AFP

Ayaan and Chandrashekar help Muscat clinch a thriller

LOCAL CRICKET

Ayaan Khan and Ganesh Chandrashekar contributed with both bat and ball to guide Muscat CT to a thrilling one-wicket win over Al Turki NMC in an Oman Cricket Premier Division (50-over-a-side) match at Al Amerat on Saturday.

The match between the two most experienced sides went to the wire with Ayaan keeping his nerves to take his team through in the 45th over with an unbeaten knock of 91.

Al Turki was restricted to 214

for nine with key contributions from Suraj Kumar (43), Karan Sonavala (37) and Akshay Patel (36).

Chandrashekar picked up three for 42 while Ayaan and Sandeep Goud took two wickets each.

In their chase, Muscat slumped to 82 for six before Ayaan and Chandrashekar (28) came together for a crucial 65-run ninth-wicket partnership.

Chandrashekar departed with Muscat still requiring 12 runs and five overs remaining. Ayaan then hit Al Turki's ace



Ayaan Khan (left) and Ganesh Chandrashekar Tahir Ali

spinner Ajay Lacheta for a four and a six to steal 14 runs from his first five balls and seal a thrilling one-wicket win. Ayaan's unbeaten innings comprised eight boundaries and two maximums.

After the completion of six

games in the top-flight league, Muscat and IT Works lead the table with ten points each while Al Turki have eight points.

BRIEF SCORES:
Premier Division: Al Turki NMC

214-9 (Kumar 43, Sonavala 37, Patel 36; Chandrashekar 3-42, Ayaan 2-28, Goud 2-38) lost to Muscat CT 217-9 in 44.5 overs (Ayaan 91 n.o., Shoaib Khan 31; Mehran Khan 3-24).

C Division (T20): Maniz Azad International 153 in 19.2 overs (Tahir Ali 48; Satham Hussain 3-12, Nishan Padmakumara 3-25, Parvez Beg 2-18) beat Design Group Engineering Consultants 96 in 17.5 overs (Beg 33, Mohammed Altaf 29; Adnan Ahamad 3-6, Adnan-ul Haq 2-9, Zaheer

Abbas 2-15, Tahir 2-22).

D Division (T20): Ideal Technology 162-6 (Vijesh Vijayakumaran 57, Noman Mohammed 38) beat Spanio & VDD 134 in 19.1 overs (Jeason George 38; Biji Sundar 3-29, Ummer Mahmood 2-16, Sooraj Raj 2-19, Vijayakumaran 2-22).

D Division: Jotun CT 174-7 in 19 overs (Vineesh Raj 63, Prajeesh 47; Sandesh Pusalkar 2-38) lost to Safara International 175-6 in 18.2 overs (Shadab Kazi 55 n.o., Adeel Anwar 50; Joby Abraham 3-33).

Root and Embuldeniya share day's honours

SRI LANKA VS ENGLAND

SECOND TEST: DAY THREE

Galle, Sri Lanka - Skipper Joe Root was run out shy of a second successive double century on Sunday as England scored 339 for nine in reply to Sri Lanka's 381 on day three of the second Test in Galle.

Root was out to a direct throw from Oshada Fernando on 186 in the final over of the day, and stumps were called with England trailing by 42 runs.

Sri Lanka's Lasith Embuldeniya claimed seven wickets and broke a key seventh-wicket stand of 81 between Root and Dom Bess, who fell to the left-arm spinner for 32.

Root, who completed his 19th Test ton in 99 matches before lunch, kept pushing in the marathon knock of 309 balls.

The captain, who hit a match-winning 228 in his team's opening win, was helped along by wicketkeeper-batsman Jos Buttler in a partnership of 97 runs.

"Quite an amazing innings," Buttler said of his skipper.

"To back up his double hundred in the first Test... both physically and mentally to show the application to go and do it again to their spinners. A masterclass really.

"It has been a great education for all of us really watching it from the sidelines."

Buttler added, "I think we just have to praise not just the technical and tactical aspects of his game, but the physicality and concentration to apply himself for so long is quite amazing."

Debutant Ramesh Mendis took his first international wicket when he dismissed Buttler for 55 after the batsman's reverse sweep hit his boot and the ball lobbed for an easy catch to short leg.

Embuldeniya strikes

Buttler survived a similar call in the morning session when replays showed his shot had hit the boot and ground, and he went on to register his 18th Test fifty.

Embuldeniya, who registered



England's Joe Root celebrates upon reaching 150 during his knock of 186 against Sri Lanka in the second Test in Galle on Sunday

his third five-wicket haul, struck twice early in the day with his left-arm spin, including the key wicket of Jonny Bairstow, to break a 111-run third-wicket stand with Root.

Bairstow, who added just four more to his overnight 24, was given not out by the umpire but Sri Lanka successfully reviewed

the call as replays suggested the ball had grazed the bat before hitting the pad and being caught second slip.

Root reached his hundred with a single off Dilruwan Perera and raised the bat to an applauding dressing room and lone England fan standing on the ramparts of the fort overlooking the

picturesque ground.

He went past England greats including Geoff Boycott (8,114), Kevin Pietersen (8,181) and David Gower (8,231) in Test runs before he attempted a cheeky single, and was run out while returning back to his crease.

"The wicket is turning now compared to day one and day

two," said Embuldeniya, who added if they could get close-out the England innings early on Monday and set a target of 150-200, "we are in the game".

The series resumed on January 14 behind closed doors after being cancelled in March due to the coronavirus pandemic.

AFF



Sri Lanka's Lasith Embuldeniya celebrates after picking a wicket of England batsman during the second Test on Sunday

SA Tests mark 'monumental moment' for Pakistan cricket

PAKISTAN VS SOUTH AFRICA

FIRST TEST

Karachi, Pakistan - South Africa will play their first Test in Pakistan for 14 years this week, a match being described as a 'monumental moment' for the revival of international cricket in the country.

The match in the port city of Karachi starting on Tuesday marks a significant vote of confidence for Pakistan where international cricket was suspended following a terrorist attack on the Sri Lanka team's bus in Lahore in 2009. A tight security cordon has been thrown around the venue and Pakistan Cricket Board (PCB) chief executive Wasim Khan said South Africa's visit was significant.

"These are very exciting times for fans and supporters," said Khan. "I would say that it's a monumental moment that South Africa is here after 14 years and everybody is looking forward to the matches."

England have also agreed to play two Twenty20s in October on their first trip to Pakistan since 2005, to be followed by New Zealand and the West Indies for white-ball series.

If all go untroubled, then Australia will arrive for Tests and one-day matches next year, having not toured Pakistan since 1998.

"We have an exciting year ahead of us as our efforts are bearing fruit," said Khan, a former England county player and ex-chief executive of Leicestershire.

Unknown conditions

On the field a dominant South Africa - having won 15 of the 26 Tests between the two teams with four losses and seven draws - will take on a new-look Pakistan with Babar Azam making his Test captaincy debut.

It will be a dream come true for Azam, who was a ball boy during South Africa's last tour in 2007, but he faces a task to lift Pakistan after being swept 2-0 in Tests in New Zealand in the past month. Azam is back to full fitness after missing the New Zealand tour with a fractured thumb and leads an inexperienced 20-man squad with nine players yet to play a Test.

One of the uncapped spinners, Nauman Ali and Sajid Khan, is expected to win their first cap partnering seasoned leg-spinner Yasir Shah.

South Africa captain Quinton De Kock, whose team blanked Sri Lanka 2-0 at home in their recent series, said he expects spin to be a big factor. "Those selections say a lot about where they want to go and how they want to prepare these wickets," said De Kock, who has left-arm Keshav Maharaj as his frontline spinner.

De Kock cautioned that none of his squad have played in Pakistan before. "Our biggest challenge would be the conditions that we could face because they are unknown to us," he said.

The second Test is in Rawalpindi from February 4-8 followed by three T20Is in Lahore on February 11, 13 and 14.

AFF



Pakistan's players during a practice session at the National Stadium in Karachi ahead of the first Test against South Africa starting on Tuesday

Rajasthan Royals appoint Sangakkara as director

New Delhi, India - The Indian Premier League's Rajasthan Royals have appointed former Sri Lankan captain Kumar Sangakkara as director of cricket for the 14th season of the world's richest cricket league.

"Kumar brings a wealth of cricket knowledge both as a player and a leader," Mike Fordham, Group CEO of Rajasthan Royals, said in a statement.

"We are thrilled to have him join the team and we are confident that Kumar will motivate, challenge and inspire our players and coaches that will translate to success on the field," Fordham added.

The Sri Lankan said he was excited about the new challenge.

"To oversee the cricket strategy of a franchise in the leading cricket competition in the world... is an opportunity that really motivated me," Sangakkara said in a statement. The appointment comes days after Royals released Australian star batsman Steve Smith and announced Sanju Samson as the new captain, days before next month's pre-tournament player auction.

AFF

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HM’s Cup quarters: Dhofar vs Al Mussanah, Seeb vs Saham, Al Suwaiq vs Ibri, Al Ittihad vs Al Nahda

Ashok Purohit
Muscat

2020-21 HIS MAJESTY’S CUP FOOTBALL CHAMPIONSHIP

Exciting clashes are in store after defending champions Dhofar were on Sunday drawn against an unpredictable Al Mussanah in the quarterfinals of the 2020-21 His Majesty’s Cup Football Championship while Omantel League holders Seeb will take on Saham in a match-up between two former champions.

The draw for the double-leg quarterfinals was held at the Oman Football Association (OFA) headquarters on Sunday in the presence of Said Othman al Balushi, OFA general secretary and CEO, and Zayid Mahmood, assistant general manager, QNB, Oman and other OFA officials.

The remaining two matches pit former champions Al Suwaiq against unfancied Ibri and Al Nahda locking horns with Al Ittihad.

The home and away legs of the last-eight stage will be held on February 5-6 and February 15-16. The two-leg semifinals will be played on February 26-27 and March 8-9.

Following the conclusion of round-of-16 knockout matches, four clubs remained in fray who have achieved HM’s Cup glory. The quartet included holders and nine-time champions Dhofar, Seeb, Suwaiq and Saham.

Three-time champions Seeb, who prevailed over five-time winners Al Nasr in the previous round in a penalty shootout, found themselves up against yet another tough opponent in Saham.

Saham have won the title



Action from the last-16 round of the 2020-21 HM’s Cup match between Seeb and Al Nasr at the Seeb Sports Stadium last week. Omantel League champions Seeb made it to the quarterfinals with a win in a penalty shootout



QNB’s Zayid Mahmood (centre) holds Mussanah Club chit at the draw ceremony on Sunday as OFA officials look on

twice and last claimed the crown in 2015-16. Seeb, on the other hand, last won the title in 1998 and the Omantel League winners are hoping to bring back the trophy that they won three times in a row from 1996.

For the reigning champions, Dhofar, the match against Mussanah could be a tricky affair after the latter knocked out former champions Oman in the previous round.

Mussanah are also having a good run in the Omantel League after being promoted to the top-flight this season.

The Batinah side have

recorded four wins in the six rounds they have played so far and are third in the standings with 13 points, trailing second-placed Al Suwaiq only on goal-difference.

Seeb leads the Omantel League table after six rounds with 16 points.

For Dhofar, the experience of winning 11 titles in the top-flight league and nine HM’s Cup crown will be the biggest advantage against Mussanah but the holders can’t afford to be complacent as they chase a record tenth crown.

Dhofar are now tied on the

HM’s Cup honours list with Fanja as both clubs have won nine titles each.

Three-time winners Suwaiq, who survived a scare from Sohar in the last-16 will also be wary of their rivals Ibri, who knocked out four-time winners and Sharqiyah giants, Sur, to advance into the quarterfinals.

Al Nahda and Al Ittihad will be a match that could go either way with both teams displaying good form in recent times.

The OFA will release the schedule of the venues for both legs in the coming days.

@ashokmuscat

FOOTBALL ROUND-UP

Arthur scores maiden Juve goal in win to put pressure on Milan sides

ITALIAN LEAGUE

Milan, Italy - Brazilian midfielder Arthur Melo scored his first goal for Serie A champions Juventus in a 2-0 win over Bologna on Sunday to pile the pressure on the Milan teams.

Andrea Pirlo’s side bounced back from last weekend’s 0-2 league defeat by Inter Milan, and followed on from their morale-boosting Italian Super Cup triumph over Napoli midweek.

AC Milan held top spot in Serie A on Saturday despite falling 0-3 at home against Atalanta after second-placed Inter were held to a goalless draw at Udinese.

Roma are third after a 4-3 win over Spezia on Saturday with Juventus moving fourth ahead of Atalanta into the Champions League berths, seven points behind AC Milan with a game in hand.

Juventus dominated 13th-



Juventus’ Cristiano Ronaldo (right) embraces Arthur after the latter scored against Bologna in Turin on Sunday (AFP)

placed Bologna in Turin with Arthur breaking through after quarter of an hour with a long-range shot that took a big

deflection off Bologna defender Jerdy Schouten. It was the first goal for the ex-Barcelona player in 19 appearances since joining

Juventus last summer from the La Liga side in a transfer worth up to US\$99mn. US midfielder Weston McKennie got the second

on 71 minutes nodding in off a corner, for his fourth goal in 21 games since moving from Bundesliga side Schalke.

“McKennie is always in the right place, he has great vision,” said Pirlo, hailing an ‘important’ win after last week’s defeat to Inter in the San Siro.

“We are a strong team, it all depends on us. As we demonstrated in the Super Cup we are not the team seen in the San Siro.

“We did well in the first half but if you don’t manage to close it, the games always remain in the balance.”

OTHER RESULTS

Sunday: Genoa 1 Cagliari 0, Hellas Verona 3 Napoli 1; Saturday: Fiorentina 2 Crotone 1.

GERMAN LEAGUE

Sunday: Schalke 0 Bayern Munich 4
AFP

OTHER RESULTS

FRENCH LEAGUE
Sunday: Bordeaux 2 Angers 1, Dijon 1 Strasbourg 1, Metz 2 Nantes 0, Reims 1 Brest 0; Saturday: Monaco 3 Marseille 1.

SCOTTISH PREMIERSHIP

Saturday: Aberdeen 2 Motherwell 0, Rangers 5 Ross County 0.
AFP



Chelsea’s Tammy Abraham heads home their second goal during the English FA Cup fourth round match against Luton on Sunday

Abraham’s hat-trick in Chelsea victory

FA CUP

London, UK - Tammy Abraham eased the pressure on under-fire Frank Lampard as the Chelsea striker’s hat-trick sealed a 3-1 win against Luton in the FA Cup fourth round on Sunday.

In just his second season in charge at Chelsea, Lampard is fighting to avoid the sack after a wretched run in the English Premier League (EPL).

Abraham scored twice in the first half before Jordan Clark got one back for Luton after yet another blunder from Chelsea keeper Kepa Arrizabalaga. Luton gave Lampard some nervous moments after that, before Abraham finally sent Chelsea through to a last-16 tie at second-tier Barnsley.

Leicester also sealed their place in the last-16 on Sunday, but had to come from behind

to beat Brentford 3-1, thanks to another masterclass from James Maddison.

Also on Sunday, Burnley, who beat Liverpool in the English Premier League at Anfield on Thursday, continued their brilliant week with a 3-0 win at Fulham.

Earlier on Saturday, Manchester City were given a huge FA Cup scare by fourth-tier Cheltenham before a late blitz gave them a 3-1 win on Saturday. Six-time winners City were minutes away from exiting at the fourth-round stage before goals from Phil Foden, Gabriel Jesus and Ferran Torres broke the hearts of the brave League Two side.

OTHER RESULTS

ENGLISH PREMIER LEAGUE
Saturday: Aston Villa 2 Newcastle United 0.
AFP

Hazard leads Real Madrid to Alaves rout

SPANISH LEAGUE

Madrid, Spain - Eden Hazard scored one goal and set up another as Real Madrid thrashed Alaves 4-1 on Saturday to ease the pressure on their coach Zinedine Zidane, who was absent after testing positive for COVID-19.

Zidane’s position has come under scrutiny again after Wednesday’s defeat by third-tier side Alcoyano in the Copa del

Rey but Madrid responded at Mendizorroza without their coach, or their captain Sergio Ramos, who was out with a knee injury.

Goals from Casemiro, Karim Benzema and Hazard put Madrid three up at half-time and while Alaves briefly threatened a fight-back when Joselu headed in, Benzema added a second to put the result beyond doubt.

The victory is only Real

Madrid’s second in six matches and leaves them four points behind Atletico Madrid, who have two games in hand and play Valencia at home on Sunday.

“The goals are good for the confidence, for everyone,” said Benzema. “It’s been a tough week for us because we always have to win, always have to be on the up. There’s always pressure. Today it went well, not just for me, for everyone.”

Zidane was confirmed to have tested positive on Friday, leaving his assistant David Bettoni to take charge in the dug-out, although Bettoni was pictured on the telephone in the second half.

“He was very happy with the attitude of the team,” said Bettoni when asked what Zidane had told him after the game. “He told me to congratulate the players, as he would have done if he was with us.”

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