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Oman joins UAE in celebrating its 50th National Day

Our Correspondent
Muscat

The United Arab Emirates will celebrate its 50th National Day – the golden jubilee of its founding – on Thursday. Oman and the UAE share a deep-rooted bond and continue to build on their historical brotherly relationship by forging new ties, both politically and economically.

On Wednesday, His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik sent a congratulatory message to Sheikh Khalifa bin Zayed al

Nahyan, President of the UAE, on the occasion.

His Majesty the Sultan congratulated and conveyed his best wishes to Sheikh Khalifa for good health, happiness and a long life, and prayed to God Almighty so more can be achieved for the brotherly Emirati people in terms of progress, advancement and prosperity under his wise leadership.

According to Emirates News Agency (WAM), Sheikh Khalifa said that the UAE's founding fathers embraced sustainable de-



velopment as a guiding methodology to build up a modern nation that derives its human, socio-economic and cultural clout from robust constitutional,

organisational and structural tenets.

In a statement to *Nation Shield*, the UAE Armed Forces' magazine on the occasion of the

golden jubilee, Sheikh Khalifa said, "In line with the 'Principles of the 50th', the UAE will continue to steadily pursue a solid ecosystem of well-established values and principles, with human capital lying at the heart of the UAE's Strategy for the Future."

He affirmed that the pursuit of regional and global peace and maintaining the principles of good neighbourliness will continue to be the mainstay of the country's foreign policy. "Strengthening cooperation

among GCC states at the political, economic, social and security levels will remain a top Emirati priority. Within this context, we will continue to stand by our fraternal GCC states in the face of all threats to their stability, unity and territorial integrity."

Recently, Sayyid Badr al-Busaidi, Oman's Foreign Minister, met Sheikh Abdullah bin Zayed al Nahyan, UAE's Minister of Foreign Affairs, in Dubai and discussed the strong historic ties between the two countries and

explored ways of strengthening cooperation.

Sayyid Badr stressed on the brotherly relations between the two countries and conveyed his best wishes to the UAE for further progress and prosperity under the leadership of Sheikh Khalifa.

Sheikh Abdullah highlighted the deep-rooted strategic relations between the UAE and Oman, supported by the two countries' leaderships, stressing his keenness to consolidate and develop cooperation in all fields.



Saudi Arabia reports first Omicron case

Riyadh - Saudi Arabia has recorded GCC's first confirmed case of the Omicron variant of the coronavirus in a citizen returning from North Africa, a health ministry official said on Wednesday.

The strain, which was first announced by South Africa but has since been discovered to have been present earlier in Europe, has prompted governments around the globe to reimpose travel restrictions, despite warnings from the World Health Organization this could do more harm than good.

"One case of the Omicron variant has been detected in the kingdom - it was a citizen coming from a North African country," a ministry official told the state SPA news agency. "He has been put in isolation, as have his contacts, and the necessary health measures have been taken."

Last week, Saudi Arabia halted flights from seven southern African countries, mirroring similar moves by other governments, but travel links with North Africa have remained unaffected.

The kingdom had been lifting some of the remaining restrictions it imposed early in the pandemic, allowing worshippers at the Muslim holy places to resume praying shoulder to shoulder from October.

Since the pandemic started, Saudi Arabia has recorded 549,000 cases of COVID-19, 8,836 of them fatal. More than 47mn doses of COVID-19 vaccine have been administered in the kingdom, which has a population of nearly 35mn.

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Oman, EU to formalise open skies accord

Oman formally initialled a Comprehensive Air Transport Agreement with European Union

Our Correspondent
Muscat

Following two years of negotiations, Oman's Civil Aviation Authority formally initialled a Comprehensive Air Transport Agreement with the European Union and its member states on Wednesday signalling the sultanate's ambitions of a more liberalised air traffic accord with the 27-member group.

The initialled agreement strengthens both parties' commitment to fair access to markets for Oman and all EU member states and is an important first step in a planned five-year implementation leading up to a fully formalised open skies accord.

The initialling was witnessed by Naif bin Ali al Abri, President of Civil Aviation Authority, H E Najeem Sulaiman al Abri, Ambassador of Oman to Belgium and head of the Omani Mission to the European Union, and Henrik Hololei, Director-General for Mobility and Transport of the European Commission.

Oman holds bilateral, third and fourth air freedom rights with several EU member states, including France, Germany and Italy. The Comprehensive Air



Transport Agreement paves the way for Oman to increase flight frequencies on existing European routes and add other European destinations for the national carrier Oman Air and Salam Air.

Reciprocally, the agreement will allow EU airlines to fly to all Omani airports from their home country or from any other EU member state. Currently, Air France and KLM are the only EU airlines that fly direct to Muscat International Airport. The agreement aims to ease market access to Oman for more EU airlines.

Besides market access, the agreement includes provisions for a number of other important aspects of aviation - commercial opportunities, doing business, safety, security, air traffic management, environment, fair competition and social aspects.

On the occasion, Naif al Abri

said, "We are delighted to initial today's Comprehensive Air Transport Agreement which further strengthens the mutual co-operation and air connectivity between Oman and European Union. Greater economic development through increased air traffic is just one of many benefits of an open skies agreement, and we are extremely confident that the inherent opportunities for tourism and an entire ecosystem of interconnected industries will flourish."

According to Hololei, the initialling illustrates the successful collaboration of both negotiating teams and further reinforces the close aviation ties between the EU and Oman. "Once signed, this agreement will bring new opportunities, more choice and higher standards for passengers, industry and aviation workers."

Agreements worth RO3.5mn inked for agricultural projects

Our Correspondent
Muscat

The Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Water Resources signed five agreements worth RO3.581mn with local investors on Wednesday. The projects will be spread over an area of 1.470mn sqm.

On the occasion, H E Dr Saud bin Hammoud al Habsi, Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Water Resources, said, "These projects will enhance and help achieve

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

He also informed that the ministry will work with the concerned authorities to follow up on the implementation of these projects.

Desert Oasis

The agreements include a project called Desert Oasis for production of non-traditional vegetables and fruits, field crops and grains at a cost of RO751,000. The proj-

Spread over an area of 1.470mn sqm, five projects will help achieve food security and create job opportunities for young people

ect aims to improve self-sufficiency through the use of modern irrigation systems. The project will include establishment of a farm to produce commercial vegetables and fruits in the wilayat of Suwaiq on an area of 100 acres. An estimated production of

2,700 tonnes of figs and field crops is expected from the project annually.

Green house project

A green house project will be built on an area of 50 acres at a cost of RO280,000 in the wilayat

of Suwaiq aiming to produce vegetables and fruits - 1,200 tonnes annually - in 80 greenhouses.

Integrated tourist farm

This project aims to enhance food security, increase agricultural production and rationalise water consumption. The farm will be accessible to visitors to learn about farming methods and include freshwater fish farming, hydroponic cultivation of vegetables and fruits, and seasonal fruits

grown in open fields.

Located in the wilayat of Bidiyah on an area of 100 acres, the project is worth RO1.3mn. It is expected to produce 3,200 tonnes of vegetables and fruits, and 60 tonnes of fish annually.

Broiler breeding

A broiler breeding project will contribute to promoting self-sufficiency in fertilised eggs in the sultanate. An estimated 40,000 broilers will be bred in this project to produce 3.5mn fertilised eggs

annually using artificial insemination technology. The project worth RO950,000 is located in the wilayat of Mahdah on 50 acres of land.

Banana production

A banana plantation located in the wilayat of Suwaiq set up on an area of 50 acres at a cost of RO300,000 will produce fruit for supply to local and foreign markets. The project will produce 1,500 tonnes of the finest quality of bananas annually.

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Empty Quarter Festival to kick off on Dec 23

Our Correspondent
Muscat

The Ministry of Heritage and Tourism (MHT) will organise the Empty Quarter Festival in the wilayat of Thumrait from December 23 to early January 2022.

It will be organised in cooperation with the Office of the Minister of State, the Governor of Dhofar, Dhofar Municipality and the Authority for Small and Medium Enterprises Development (ASMED), an official at the ministry said.

"The festival will include a number of heritage, tourism and entertainment events, as well as bedouin heritage arts at Al Khidf

Oasis," he said.

The festival will include a children's and family theatre, entertainment shows, sites for climbing, basketball, football, camel and horse riding, and sandbike rental sites.

The bedouin arts will include Taghrud art and folklore, besides traditional games, sand race challenge, paragliding activities, and the Thumrait Open Shooting Championship for light saktoun rifles, the official said.

Sheikh Muslim bin Ahmed al Hadari, wali of Thumrait, said the festival will play a vital role in highlighting the heritage and tourist attractions in the sultanate and contribute to the tourism industry.

National Museum opens scent-themed exhibition

Muscat - The National Museum opened an exhibition titled 'Incensum' on Wednesday, under the patronage of H H Sayyid Kamil bin Fahd bin Mahmoud al Said, Assistant Secretary General of the Deputy Prime Minister's Office.

The event is being held in cooperation with the Italian Embassy, and the Perfumme Foundation in Turin, which was established in 2017, intending to promote the culture of scent by organising high-level cultural events.

The inauguration ceremony was attended by H E Federica Fafi, Italian Ambassador, along with Dr Nora Ourabah Haddad, representative of the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) in the sultanate, and a number of people interested in the field of culture and museums.

Jamal bin Hassan al Moosawi, secretary general of the National Museum, said the exhibition embodies the historical value of the frankincense tree, as it repre-



(Supplied photo)

sents a bridge to communicate with the civilisations of the ancient world, where the trade convoys moved via different routes.

Long-distance trade in frankincense was ongoing by the 3rd millennium BCE and included links to Mesopotamia, the Indus Valley Civilisation and ancient Egypt. In recognition of the importance of the frankincense

trade across the ages, four sites have been inscribed on the Unesco World Heritage Sites list: Al Baleed, Khor Rori (Sumhuram), Shisr (Ubar) and Wadi Dawkah.

The exhibition illustrates artefacts loaned from the Italian Republic and Omani antiquities that bear witness to ancient traditions dating back thousands of years, and highlights the continuity of

Omani-Italian relations through ages, embodied by trade caravans carrying precious frankincense and spices as popular consumer goods to the Western world.

H E Federica said that 'Incensum' coincides with the sixth Italian Kitchen Week to highlight the relationship between delicious taste and pleasant aromas, as frankincense is a major compo-

nent of delicious meals. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation financially supported this initiative to promote the cultural and historical dimensions of gastronomy at the external and global levels.

Dr Nora commented, "We pay respect to this tree, whose species is found only in this region, and because of which trade and cultural exchange flourished throughout history which shows us the importance of preserving the biodiversity. The exhibition is in line with this year's World Food Day theme, which highlights how a good environment provides a better life."

Roberta Sonzato, curator of the exhibition from the Italian side, said, "The exhibition was inspired by the deepest meanings of incense, as frankincense enjoyed a high status in Roman society, in the Tsarist court and aristocratic families. It was as precious as gold, and it became a sacred religious symbol for Christianity."

Pact signed to set up new health centre in Bahla

Our Correspondent
Muscat

The Ministry of Health (MoH), represented by the Directorate General of Health Services in Dakhliyah Governorate, signed on Wednesday a funding agreement for the establishment of Saih al Maashi Health Centre in

the wilayat of Bahla.

The agreement was signed by H E Dr Fatima Mohammed al Ajmi, MoH's Undersecretary for Administrative, Financial, and Planning Affairs, and the project funder Hon Mohammed Sulaiman al Hanai, Shura Council representative of Bahla.

The MoH's undersecretary af-

firmed the significance of the partnership between public sector and other sectors in the sultanate for serving the public interest. She commended the initiative of Hon Hanai in financing such vital projects.

H E Dr Fatima added that the signing of the agreement was in the spirit of strategic partnership

for the community's common good and upgrading public welfare services and developmental projects across the sultanate.

Hon Hinai stressed his keenness to activate partnership and cooperation with government institutions and private sectors to serve aspects of development in the country, including providing

health services to citizens as part of the social responsibility. He informed that Saih al Maashi Health Centre would provide access to primary healthcare services for a large segment of people, covering the villages located between lbri and Bahla covering approximately 15,000 people.

VFS Global brings Austria visa services to Oman

Our Correspondent
Muscat

The Embassy of Austria in Oman and VFS Global, the world's largest visa outsourcing and technology services specialist for governments and diplomatic missions worldwide, have signed a contract to provide visa services in the country on behalf of the embassy.

The Austria Visa Application Centre in Panorama Mall in Muscat was inaugurated by H E Christian Brunmayr, ambassador of Austria in Oman, on Wednesday.

This is the first time the Embassy of Austria in Oman has outsourced its visa services in the country. Prior to this, Omani nationals needed to submit their visa applications at the Spain Visa Application Centre in Muscat. VFS Global is represented in Oman by Khimji's House of Travel.

Atul Marwah, head - Middle East & North Africa, VFS Global, said, "We are excited to extend our long-standing partnership with Austria to the country of Oman, bringing our best-in-class visa services to the residents in Oman. VFS Global appreciates the constant support and faith the Embassy of Austria has placed in us in various countries



(Supplied photo)

where we offer services on their behalf, and we look forward to welcoming the enthusiastic travellers from Oman to our Visa Application Centre."

Customers submitting their visa applications through VFS Global can also select from a range of optional services to further ease their visa application process, including end-to-end personalised assistance in a Premium Lounge, form filling assistance, photocopy and photograph services on-site, SMS updates on the progress of the visa application at every stage, and courier return of processed passports to the customers' doorstep.

To ensure a safe environment for employees and customers, VFS Global has established standardised protective measures to be followed across the centres, including specific social distancing and sanitation mandates.

All customers are subjected to body temperature checks at the entrance. Any customer exhibiting COVID-19 symptoms, including fever, cough and breathing difficulties will not be permitted to enter the centre and will be requested to return once the health condition improves. Additionally, all customers and VFS Global employees are required to wear a face mask within the centre.

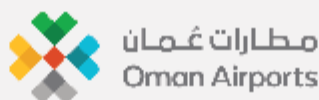
18 new COVID-19 cases reported: MoH

Muscat - The Ministry of Health (MoH) announced 18 new cases of COVID-19 on Wednesday. There were no new deaths reported.

This brings the total number of positive COVID-19 cases to 304,572 in Oman, while the total number of COVID-19-related deaths is

4,113, the MoH said in a statement.

It added six new cases have recovered, bringing the total number to 300,011 recoveries.



FLOATING TENDERS

Oman Airports Company announces the following tenders:

Tender REF.NO	TENDER TITLE	DOC'S FEE OMR	Last date for DOC'S DISTRIBUTION	TENDER SUBMISSION DATE
PC-211111	Supply of Entry forms for Muscat International Airport	100	8 th December 2021	25 th December 2021
PC-211112	Supply of New Year Stationery for Oman Airports (2022)	25	8 th December 2021	16 th December 2021
PC-211113	Supply of New Vehicles for Oman Airports	50	8 th December 2021	25 th December 2021

Tenders Collection: Specialized companies may obtain Tender Documents/ Specifications from Procurement Department upon receipt of complete payment of tender fees by Cash Transfer/deposit into below OAMC bank account and submittal of clear scanned copy of deposit Receipt along with a copy of Company Commercial Registration Certificate to Email: **(FinanceTenders@omanairports.com)** provided with company name, tender number & contact person as a mandatory.

OAMC Bank Account Details:

Account Name: Oman Airports Management Co. S.A.O.C.

Account No: 0423010849180012

Name of Bank: BANK MUSCAT

Branch: Corporate Branch, CBD Area, Muscat, Sultanate of Oman

SWIFT Code: BMUSOMRX

Required Bond: All participating Companies must provide a bank guarantee, issued by locally registered bank, for the sum of not less than 1% of the Tender value, addressed to the Chairman of the Internal Tender Committee, valid for 90 days from the date of submission of the Tenders.

Submission: All bids shall be submitted as per mentioned instructions in the tender documents and late bids will not be entertained.

All Technical Queries shall be sent to:
oamctenders@omanairports.com

The committee is not bound to accept the lowest tender.
Any payment received after last date of documents distribution will not be refunded

Headquarter Address:
Muscat International Airport
South Forecourt Building, First Floor
Oman Airports Management S.A.O.C
Muscat, Sultanate of Oman.

Note: All Correspondence / Clarification / Enquiries send an e-mail:
oamctenders@omanairports.com

Oman to participate in Biennale Arte

Muscat - Oman, through its national pavilion, will take part for the first time in the 59th Biennale Arte 2022 exhibition, due to be held in Venice, Italy, from April 22 to November 27, 2022.

With its participation in this event, Oman aims to introduce its culture to the world.

The opening exhibition will display works of three generations of Omani artists, whose activities span 50 years in visual and contemporary arts. The exhibition provides a model for the broad global range of Oman's cultural history and unique traditions in visual arts.

The participating artists represent a continuous stream of influence on Omani art and include Anwar Sonya, Hassan Meer, Budoor al Riyami, Radhika Khimji and (works of) the



By participating in the exhibition, we strive to achieve the ministry's vision to map Oman as a leading cultural destination on the global cultural arena

H E SAID SULTAN AL BUSAIDI

late Raya al Rawahi.

H H Sayyid Theyazin bin Haitham al Said, Minister of Culture, Sports and Youth, said, "It is a great pleasure for the Sultanate of Oman, represented by the Ministry of Culture,

Sports and Youth, to participate for the first time in the 59th Biennale Arte exhibition, one of the most prestigious international art fairs.

"This participation reflects the importance of arts in form-



Anwar Sonya

ing cultural awareness. It also promotes cultural and intellectual exchange between peoples and communities."

On his turn, H E Said Sultan al Busaidi, Undersecretary for Culture in the Ministry of Cul-

ture, Sports and Youth, and Commissioner General of Oman's pavilion in the exhibition said, "Participation in the 59th Venice Biennale 2022 is testimony to Oman's prominent position in the world cultural

map and the role it plays in supporting artistic works, as well as boosting cultural initiatives and promoting the exchange of expertise in this field.

"By participating in the exhibition, we strive to achieve the ministry's vision to map Oman as a leading cultural destination on the global cultural arena. We also aim to affirm the existing balance between local culture, assimilation and cultural exposure to enable and enhance cultural production on the basis of innovation and creativity."

On the sidelines of Oman's participation, training programmes will also be held. These will be available for Omani youth who are interested in partnering with educational institutes.

"The event provides an opportunity for dialogue with artists and international trainees, as well as exchanging expertise and developing the trainees' information to gain a deep understanding of Omani art's history. The selected elite learners will work side by side with artists in Oman's pavilion," said H E Busaidi.

The participation also serves Oman Vision 2040's cultural strategy represented in the axis of exchanging experiences at the external level in the cultural field, as well as enhancing communication and cultural dialogue with other countries.

The number of visitors to the festival annually ranges between 600,000 to 1mn from all over the world. ONA

INTERNATIONAL TENT PEGGING IN DUQM



As many as 36 countries will take part in the International Tent Pegging Traditional Championship which starts in Duqm on Thursday. The championship will be held under the patronage of H H Sayyid Loay bin Ghalib al Said. Yousef bin Ali al Houti, vice president for executive affairs in the International Tent Pegging Federation, said preparations have been completed for the championship which will be held from December 2 to 4. The championship, a unique way to promote the sport, will see Omani riders in their traditional attire competing for medals and glory alongside competitors from 35 other countries (ONA)

'One student, one tree' campaign launched to increase tree plantation

Our Correspondent
Muscat

In line with the national programme to plant 10mn wild trees, Environment Authority (EA) has launched an initiative called 'One student, one tree' among school students.

Speaking to *Muscat Daily*, Hamad al Saadi, director of Environment Department in the wilayat of Al Kamil W'Al Wafi in South Sharqiyah, said, "EA recently launched the initiative among school students. It aims to spread awareness on the importance of planting wild trees and completing the project of planting 10mn wild trees."

The initiative includes several schools in wilayats such as Al Kamil W'Al Wafi, Jaalan Bani bu Ali and Al Ashkharah. Specialists at EA distributed more than 200 saplings of indigenous species among school students.

On November 30, the Environment Department in South Sharqiyah, represented by Al Salil Natural Park, in cooperation with a private school, planted a number of saplings in the schoolyard as part of 'One student, one tree'.

"The national initiative of planting 10mn Omani wild trees followed successes in similar tree planting initiatives. Preserving biological diversity and protecting wildlife is everyone's responsibility, whether a citizen or a resident



(Supplied photo)

Preserving biological diversity and protecting wildlife is everyone's responsibility, whether a citizen or a resident of the sultanate

HAMAD AL SAADI

of the sultanate," Saadi said.

The initiative faces several challenges, including irrigation of the saplings and trees.

"We will continue to plant wild

trees such as samar and sidr and spread the culture of preserving wild trees among all students of South Sharqiyah governorate schools," Saadi said.

"We wish citizens, residents and private institutions cooperate with us in planting the maximum number of wild trees possible and increase green coverage in South Sharqiyah."

On Wednesday, the authority in cooperation with Omani Sidr Association, planted wild shua trees in Al Nasr marble quarry and at a number of schools in the wilayats of Suwaiq and Khabourah in the ongoing efforts to plant 10mn wild trees.

13 rescued from wadis as rains lash wilayats

Our Correspondent
Muscat

Rain lashed several parts of Oman from November 29 to December 1 leading to flooding in low-lying areas. Several people were rescued from their vehicles stranded in wadis in different parts of the sultanate.

'Heavy rainfall was also reported in several coastal areas along the Sea of Oman, the governorates of Muscat and Musandam,' the Civil Aviation Authority (CAA) said in a statement.

The Civil Defence and Ambulance Authority (CDAA) reported 13 people were rescued from their stranded vehicles in wadis in North Batinah, South Batinah and Dakhliyah.

In North Batinah, a family of seven was rescued by a CDAA team after their vehicle got stuck in a wadi in the wilayat of Sahem.

As a precautionary measure, CDAA added more personnel on roads leading to wadis on November 30. Teams were also pressed into action to rescue four people in the wilayats of Rustaq and Suwaiq in South Batinah, and one in Wadi Suroor in the wilayat of Samail in Dakhliyah.

Between November 29 and December 1, weather stations of the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Water Resources recorded the highest rainfall in Sahem - 105mm - followed by 63mm in Izki, 35mm in Rustaq and Liwa, 32mm in Al Awabai and Mudhaibi, 30mm in Samail.

'Let's get back on track and focus on testing'

Our Correspondent
Muscat

On World AIDS Day marked on December 1, the World Health Organization (WHO) Regional Office for the Eastern Mediterranean stated that it is determined to confront the challenges that drive new HIV infections in the region and to reach people who are in need of HIV testing and treatment services.

This year, the World AIDS Day campaign aims to encourage people at risk of HIV to get tested, and WHO and UNAIDS are jointly calling for an HIV testing month. "With this HIV testing month, let us renew our commitment to end AIDS as a public health threat by 2030 and achieve our regional vision of health for all by all," said Dr Ahmed al Mandhari, WHO's regional director, in his message on the occasion of World AIDS Day.

In Oman, there has been a marginal increase in HIV/AIDS

cases over a five-year period. According to figures released by the National Centre for Statistics and Information, cases increased from 135 in 2016 to 147 in 2020.

Of these, 110 cases were in the 25-49 years age group, 20 cases

in the 50 years and older category, 16 in the 15-24 years age group, and one case in the 5-14 years age group.

Regionally, after more than 40 years, HIV continues to kill people. By the end of 2020, it had claimed more than 240,000 lives in the Eastern Mediterranean Region. The region faces the fastest growing HIV epidemic among any WHO region, and also has the lowest rates of access to testing and treatment services. One of the main reasons

for this is poor access to diagnosis, with only 40 per cent of those infected with HIV in the region knowing their HIV status.

Additionally, the COVID-19 pandemic has disrupted HIV services in many countries, slowing down efforts to scale up HIV diagnosis and treatment.

In 2020, WHO member states carried out only a third of the number of HIV tests that they conducted in 2019, and countries that had made tangible progress towards targets experienced setbacks.

"HIV testing must remain a priority for all countries to quickly close the gap. People who know they are living with HIV can access quality care and treatment that enables them to live a nor-

mal, healthy life," Dr Mandhari emphasised. "Our testing approaches need to be guided by the context and nature of the epidemics we face."

The 2021 regional campaign conducted around World AIDS Day is focused on leveraging social media platforms, particularly Facebook, to send targeted messages to mobilise people at risk of HIV to seek testing services in a safe and confidential manner. Once they have been diagnosed as HIV positive, people must be referred for treatment.

"Ending AIDS by 2030 is a global priority as part of the Sustainable Development Goals, and is aligned with WHO's regional vision of health for all by all. World AIDS Day reminds us all of our commitment to put people's health first in spite of the many challenges we face," said Dr Mandhari. "It is an opportunity to review progress and address the challenges in our efforts to end the HIV epidemic."

WORLD AIDS DAY



Dr Ahmed al Mandhari

الموردون الكرام

للإطلاع على آخر المستجدات حول المناقصات وطلبات عروض الأسعار وتبقى على إطلاع أول بأول حول آخر المستجدات فقد تم تفعيل رقم الهاتف (الواتس اب فقط) لهذا الغرض، لذا يرجى تسجيله لديك وإرسال رسالة طلب تسجيل مؤسستك إليه.

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موجزات

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MARKET WATCH	
MSX30	4,007.52
BSE Sensex	57,684.79
FOREX RATES	
(RO1 equals)	
Indian Rs	194.32
Pakistani Rs	455.20
Bangladeshi Taka	222.73
Philippine Peso	130.75
Sri Lankan Rs	524.53
*Rates as on December 01 Source: xe.com	

BRIEFS

Eurozone inflation soars to highest rate on record

Eurozone inflation surged to its highest rate on record in November, fuelled by soaring energy prices, official data showed on Tuesday.

Consumer prices picked up to 4.9 per cent from 4.1 per cent the previous month, the highest reading since the official statistics agency Eurostat began compiling the data more than 20 years ago.

The figure is more than double the European Central Bank's target of 2 per cent.

A member of the ECB's executive board, Isabel Schnabel, had predicted earlier in November that inflation would hit its highest level this month since the euro was introduced in 1999.

The pace of price rises would then slow over the course of the coming year, Schnabel said.

Quarterly profits of Oman's listed companies increase to RO143mn

Our Correspondent
Muscat

After witnessing fast recovery in corporate earnings during the first and second quarters of this year, listed companies on the Muscat Stock Exchange (MSX) recorded slow growth in profits during the third quarter of 2021, mainly due to steep fall in earnings of telecom and utility sector companies.

Total net profits for listed companies in Oman grew by 3.02 per cent year-on-year to RO143.4mn in the third quarter of 2021 as compared with RO139.2mn in the third quarter of 2020, according to the GCC Corporate Earnings report released by Kuwait-based Kamco Investment.

Banks and some industrial sector companies mainly contributed to the overall year-on-year growth in net profits at the MSX-listed firms. However, telecom and utilities sectors reported a steep decline in earnings, Kamco Investment said.

Third quarter earnings of banking sector, the biggest sector in the MSX by market capitalisation, improved by 17.2 per



'The COVID-19 pandemic has largely remained under control over the last few months with declining cases as well as due to a fast paced vaccination effort in the GCC. As a result, bulk of the economic sectors are back at pre-pandemic capacities barring a few that include tourism and hospitality sectors,' Kamco Investment said.

GCC corporate earnings

Aggregate net profits reported by companies listed on the GCC exchanges reached a new record

leading during the quarter led by an aggregate net profit of US\$5.6bn, an increase of almost six folds. Profits for Saudi Arabia, Dubai and Bahraini firms also more than doubled during the quarter, whereas Omani firms reported only marginal growth of 3 per cent,' the report said.

As per Kamco Investment, GCC corporate earnings for the first nine months of 2021 more than doubled to US\$139.1bn as compared to US\$65.6bn during the same period of 2020. The increase was mainly led by higher profits reported by Saudi Arabian

Banking sector mainly contributed to the overall year-on-year growth in total profits at the MSX-listed firms, while telecom and utilities sectors reported steep decline in earnings

cent to reach around RO79mn in the third quarter of this year compared to RO67mn in the third quarter of 2020.

As per Kamco Investment's analysis, National Bank of Oman (NBO) posted the biggest increase in absolute profits within the banking sector during the third quarter. NBO's net profits

increased to RO7.8mn during the third quarter of this year compared to RO1.8mn in the same period of 2020.

Lower operating expenses and a decline in net impairment contributed to the growth in the bank's earnings.

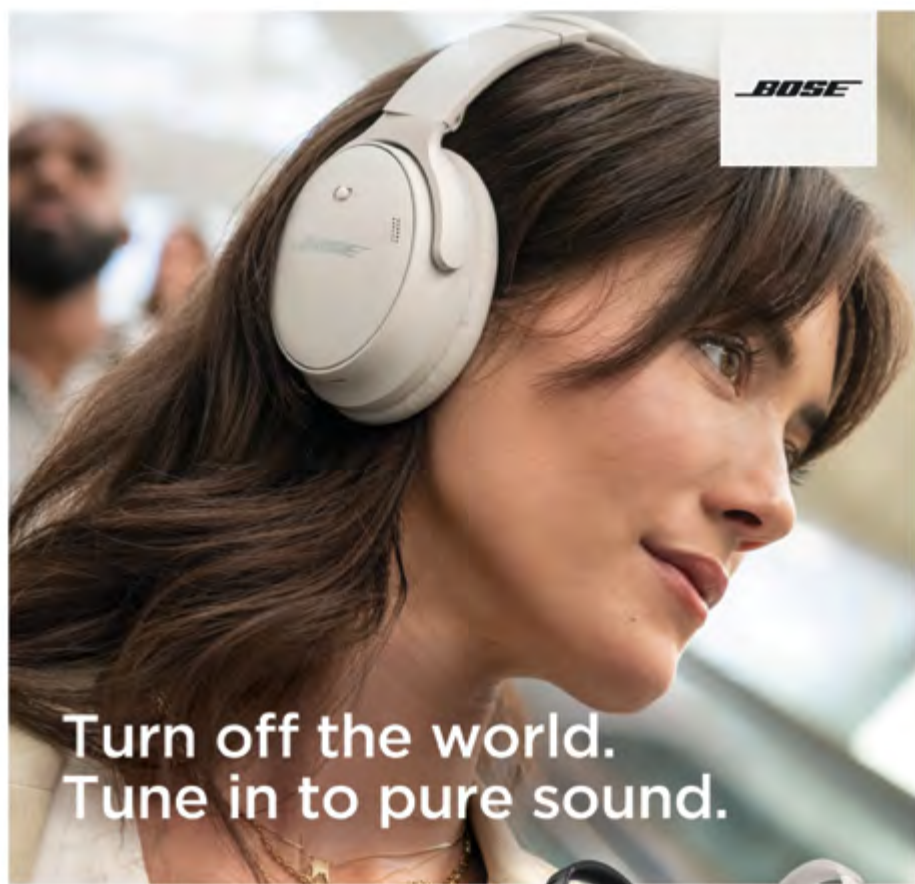
Oman's telecom sector followed with the second largest

total net profits of RO19.2mn during the third quarter of 2021, around 30 per cent down from RO27.3mn in the same period of 2020. The decline in telecom sector profits came after both Omantel and Ooredoo Oman posted a decline in net profits during the quarter, Kamco Investment said.

high during the third quarter of 2021 at US\$55.5bn, an increase of 123.4 per cent year-on-year. Higher profitability reflected accelerated economic activity in the region, Kamco Investment said.

'The increase reflected positive earnings growth across the seven exchanges with Kuwait

companies with a net profit growth of 127.5 per cent to reach US\$101bn in the first nine months of 2021 against US\$44.4bn in the corresponding period of 2020. Listed companies in Abu Dhabi and Qatar reported total net profits of US\$11.6bn and US\$9.1bn, respectively.



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EU plans to spend €300bn for global development aid to rival China

Brussels, Belgium - The European Commission announced on Wednesday a plan to mobilise €300bn in public and private infrastructure investment around the world, a move seen as a response to China's Belt and Road strategy.

"Global Gateway will aim at mobilising investments of up to €300bn between 2021 and 2027... bringing together resources of the EU, member states, European financial institutions and national development finance institutions," a commission document said.

The Global Gateway plan does not mention China's rival and longer-standing international infrastructure strategy by name - but EU chief Ursula von der Leyen called it a 'roadmap for major investment in infrastructure development around the world'.

The money to be made available will not come from EU and member state coffers, and the plan will need funding from international institutions and from the private sector if it is to get anywhere near its target.

China launched its global investment strategy known as Belt and Road, a flagship project of President Xi Jinping, in 2013. Beijing has said it had invested US\$139.8bn by 2020, including US\$22.5bn last year alone.

Officially, it aims to develop land and sea infrastructure to



European Commission president Ursula von der Leyen speaks during a press conference on the Global Gateway at the EU headquarters in Brussels on Wednesday (AFP)

better connect China to Asia, Europe and Africa for trade and development, and it has found many partners around the world.

The West, however, sees it as a tool for China to influence poorer countries. They criticise Beijing for inciting emerging economies to take on too much debt, and allege the secretive tender process is prone to corruption.

China argues that it respects its partners' sovereignty while providing loans that benefit joint projects, while critics say Beijing's contractual terms ignore

abuses of human, labour and environmental rights.

The EU strategy is an offshoot of a plan by G7 countries to offer developing countries an alternative to Belt and Road presented in June at the industrial powers' summit in Cornwall.

Jutta Urpilainen, the EU commissioner for international partnerships, defended the bloc's performance, telling reporters that European development aid between 2013 and 2018 was 'very close' to the level of Belt and Road funding.

In addition to mobilising

funds, the EU plan aims to share European technology and expertise with developing economies.

"We want to make Global Gateway a trusted brand that stands out because of high quality, reliable standards and high level of transparency and good governance," said Von der Leyen.

"We are deeply convinced that this will ensure that investment makes a real difference on the ground. And this that this is done in a sustainable way."

AFP

Season Greetings!

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OECD cuts world growth forecast, warns of Omicron

Paris, France – The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) warned on Wednesday that the Omicron coronavirus variant threatens the global economic recovery as it lowered the growth outlook for 2021 and appealed for a swifter rollout of COVID-19 vaccines.

The global economy is now expected to expand by 5.6 per cent this year, down from an earlier forecast of 5.7 per cent, the OECD said in its updated economic outlook which warns that low vaccination areas could create 'breeding grounds' for deadlier virus mutations.

Its forecast for 2022 remains unchanged at 4.5 per cent, but the report was released only days after Omicron was detected.

"We are concerned that the new variant of the virus, the Omicron strain, is further adding to the already high levels of uncertainty and risks, and that could be a threat to the recovery," OECD chief economist Laurence Boone said at a press conference.

The report by the Paris-based OECD said the global recovery is continuing to progress.

But it warned that it 'has lost momentum and is becoming increasingly imbalanced'.

While the OECD said it was 'cautiously optimistic' about the recovery, it warned that health, high inflation, supply chain bottlenecks, and potential policy missteps are 'all key concerns'.

'The top policy priority remains the need to ensure that vaccines are produced and de-



OECD chief economist Laurence Boone

played as quickly as possible throughout the world, including booster doses,' the OECD said.

'The recovery will remain precarious and uncertain in all countries until this is achieved,' it said.

Fears of 'deadlier strains'

In the 'more benign scenarios', outbreaks could continue to prompt restrictions on people's movements, which could have long-lasting consequences on labour markets, production capacity and prices.

"The harshest scenario is that pockets of low vaccination end up as breeding grounds for deadlier strains of the virus, which go on to damage lives and livelihoods," Boone warned in an editorial in the report.

The report does not take into account the possible impact of the Omicron variant.

Analysts at Oxford Economics say the new strain could shave

0.25 percentage points off global growth next year if it causes mild effects, but it would cost two percentage points if it is more dangerous and a large part of the global population was forced into lockdowns.

The strain has been spotted around the world since South African experts discovered its existence, prompting new travel restrictions.

The World Health Organization believes the variant's high number of mutations might make it more transmissible or resistant to vaccines.

Left behind

Addressing other key concerns for the world economy, the OECD said it expected inflation to peak at the turn of the year before receding gradually in the 38-nation OECD, which includes leading developed and emerging countries.

Soaring inflation has caused

commotion in the markets as investors fear that central banks will raise interest rates sooner than expected to tame runaway prices.

The OECD urged monetary policymakers to 'communicate clearly' about how far they will tolerate inflation exceeding their targets.

Supply-side constraints and shortages, meanwhile, 'should wane gradually through 2022-23' as demand normalises, production capacity grows and more people return to the labour force.

The OECD also highlighted 'marked differences' in the recovery of countries around the world.

'Parts of the global economy are rebounding quickly, but others are at risk of being left behind, particularly lower-income countries where vaccination rates are low, and firms and employees in contact-intensive sectors where demand has yet to recover fully,' it said.

In its forecast among individual regions, the OECD said the US economy should grow by 5.6 per cent this year, lower than its previous outlook which had already been cut for the world's biggest economy.

The eurozone's growth outlook was slightly lowered to 5.2 per cent.

For China, the world's second-biggest economy, the outlook was lowered to 8.1 per cent this year and 5.1 per cent in 2022. The debt crisis at property giant Evergrande has raised concerns about its potential impact on the Chinese economy.

AFP

Erdogan defends 'risky but correct' economic policy

Ankara, Turkey – Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan on Wednesday defended his 'risky but correct' economic policy of low interest rates, as the central bank intervened in markets to prop up the falling lira.

"What we are doing is right. We have made and are making a politically risky but correct plan," Erdogan told ruling party lawmakers in a speech to parliament in Ankara.

Under pressure from Erdogan, the central bank has made a series of interest rate cuts since September despite double-digit inflation.

The Turkish leader goes against conventional economic thinking to claim high interest rates cause high inflation, and vowed again to keep the main rate low.

"The world knows how uncomfortable I am with high interest rates. I have never been pro-interest rates. I wasn't today and I won't be tomorrow," he said.

Erdogan said Turkey was 'fighting against the interest rate lobby' and 'enemies of production and employment'.

"We have quit the monetary policy based on high interest rates and instead switched into growth strategy based on investments, employment, production and exports," he added.

"Our country will not return



Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan (AFP)

to the system of exploitation... based on high interest rates."

Earlier, the central bank intervened to support the embattled lira which has lost nearly 30 per cent in value against the dollar in a month.

The bank said in a statement it 'started to conduct transactions at Borsa Istanbul Derivatives Market (VIOP) due to unhealthy price formations in exchange rates'.

The Turkish lira rallied following the announcement, gaining over 3 per cent in value to the dollar to reach 13.02.

The lira has lost over 43 per

cent in value against the dollar since the start of 2021.

Erdogan appeared to dismiss concerns over the exchange rate. "What you call the exchange rate rises today, falls tomorrow. Inflation increases today, falls tomorrow."

The government 'understands sincere concerns' over uncertainty driven by soaring prices and fluctuations in the currency, he said, adding that they were 'carefully monitoring' the situation.

"This is our job," said Erdogan.

AFP

Biden 'frustrated' by 'bragging' big oil CEOs

Washington, US – US President Joe Biden is 'frustrated' by big oil CEOs 'bragging' about profits when fuel prices are soaring for ordinary Americans, the White House said on Tuesday.

A painful hike in the cost of petrol is spearheading an overall inflation problem and hitting Biden's popularity ratings.

The White House says that oil companies may be illegally profiteering and has asked the Federal Trade Commission to investigate.

In strong comments to reporters, Press Secretary Jen Psaki questioned why petrol prices were so high in filling stations when crude oil is trading sharply lower.

"I will say, yes, we're frustrated. We're frustrated because you've seen a decrease in oil prices. You've not seen a decrease in petrol" prices, she said. "It doesn't take an economist – it doesn't take an oil market expert to recognise that. That doesn't sound, look or smell right."

"We see oil company CEOs



US President Joe Biden

bragging about the profits they make when gas company prices go up," Psaki said. "This is a real impact on the American people. It is incredibly frustrating. That's why the President is so focused on it."

Last week, Biden took the unusual measure of tapping US strategic oil reserves to pump additional supplies into the market. This was done in coordination with other major consumer countries such as China and India.

Biden's attempt to calm the fuel markets has had little effect so far.

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University of Technology and Applied Sciences

Local Auction Announcement

The University Of Technologies Applied Sciences announces the auctions shown in the following table :

Tender No.	Tender Subject	Establishments eligible to bid and registered with the Tender Board	Document's Price	Purchase , submit Tender Documents	Last date bid submission
02/2021	Providing operation and maintenance services for the buildings of the University of Technology and Applied Sciences (Ibri College of Technology)	Second	R0 25/-	The Office of the Presidency of the University of Technology and Applied Sciences First Floor	Wednesday 15/12/2021 at 10:00 am
03/2021	Providing cleaning services at the University of Technology and Applied Sciences building (Ibri College of Technology)	-	R0 25/-	The Office of the Presidency of the University of Technology and Applied Sciences First Floor	Monday 20/12/2021 at 10:00 am
01/2021	Providing and supplying equipment for networks and computer laboratories for the buildings of the University of Technology and Applied Sciences (Salalah College of Technology)	-	R0 65/-	The Office of the Presidency of the University of Technology and Applied Sciences First Floor	Monday 20/12/2021 at 10:00 am
02/2021	Providing cleaning services for the University of Technology and Applied Sciences building (Shinas College of Technology)	-	R0 25/-	The Office of the Presidency of the University of Technology and Applied Sciences First Floor	Monday 20/12/2021 at 10:00 am
03/2021	Providing operation and maintenance services for the University of Technology and Applied Sciences building (Shinas College of Technology)	First	R0 25/-	The Office of the Presidency of the University of Technology and Applied Sciences First Floor	Monday 20/12/2021 at 10:00 am

- Establishments specialized in the above-mentioned works can obtain auction documents from Thursday 02/12/2021.
- All bidding companies must attach with their bids a temporary tender bond in the form of a bank guarantee or a cheque certified by one of the banks operating in the Sultanate, not less than (1%) of the bid value, addressed to the name of the Chairman of the Internal Tender Committee, and valid for a period of (90) days from the date of bid submission. Any bid that does not meet the required temporary tender bond shall not be considered.
- Bids shall be submitted, signed and stamped on the form prepared for this purpose and on the accompanying category table, in closed envelopes sealed with red wax, addressed to the Chairman of the Internal Tender Committee at the University of Technology and Applied Sciences, bearing the auction number and subject with no indication to the name of the bidder.
- Bids must be placed in the sub-tender box in the office referred to above before 10 a.m. of the day specified in the table above. Bids submitted after this date will not be considered, regardless of the reasons for the delay. Preference will be given to companies or institutions whose bids include the biggest Omanisation and biggest purchase percentage of national products.
- Preference in awarding will be given to small and medium enterprises registered with the Authority for SME development and whose bid includes the biggest percentage of Omanisation and a biggest purchase percentage of national products.

The University shall not be bound to accept the highest or any other bid

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Get prepaid cards through Bank Muscat Internet, Mobile banking

Bank Muscat, the leading financial services provider in the sultanate, has launched another new feature in its Mobile Banking application and Internet Banking for the benefit of its customers in line with its vision ‘To serve you better, everyday’ and commitment to innovation reflecting the latest technological trends. Customers can now easily apply for a Bank Muscat Prepaid card by logging into Internet Banking or the Mobile Banking application on their smartphones.

The bank will receive and process the application, and customers can pick up their personalised Prepaid card later from their chosen delivery branch.

The latest feature is a new addition to several other features, which were added in the recent



Amjad Iqbal al Lawati

past, including availability of QR code payments through mBanking and BM Wallet, Speed Transfer service to Egypt, bill payments to Awsar and instant Debit Card linkage to one's account through Internet banking

and mBanking app and visibility of linked Floosi and Children's accounts within parents' accounts.

Speaking about the addition of new features in Internet Banking and the mBanking app, Amjad Iqbal al Lawati, assistant general manager - Cards and eBanking, Bank Muscat, said, “As the leading financial services provider in the sultanate, the bank has been continuously implementing state-of-the-art technology and we are happy to launch this new service which once again enhances ease of banking and customer convenience.

“The bank aims to be future-ready in order to serve its tech-savvy customers in the best possible manner and is encouraged by the rapid shift to digital

and contactless payments. The new application process continues the bank's customer-centric strategy of launching new services and products that improves financial inclusion and offers new, convenient and highly secure e-payment options for the benefit of our valued customers.”

The bank added that its contactless ‘Just Tap’ debit, credit and prepaid cards as well as its contactless wearables have become very popular as they allow customers to complete their low-value point-of-sale (POS) transactions at groceries and supermarkets with a simple tap of the POS terminal without the need to enter their personal identification number (PIN) for transactions up to RO40.

Customers can conduct multiple transactions totaling up to RO60 or up to 10 transactions every day using the ‘Just Tap’ feature of their card or their Shababi wearable band.

For Bank Muscat, distinguished customer service has always been and remains paramount.

The commitment to customers is the key to achieving strategic objectives, thereby establishing sustainable, long-term business relationships in the communities where the bank operates.

As the leading financial services provider in the sultanate, Bank Muscat has the largest banking network in Oman with 174 branches and over 800 ATMs and CDMs.

Enjoy FIFA Arab Cup with Ooredoo

With football fans heading to Qatar for the FIFA Arab Cup 2021, Ooredoo is making sure they can share the fun and excitement and stay in touch with friends and family at home.

For just RO10, all postpaid and prepaid customers can get 7 GB of data valid for seven days with the Qatar Passport Weekly bundle. Valid from November 30 to December 30, subscribers will also be able to enjoy ‘Roam Like Home’ and get local voice rates on roaming, applicable to both local calls and calling back to Oman.

Going above and beyond to meet its customers' data needs wherever they roam, Ooredoo's Passport bundles offer a fantastic data and voice experience. Available for all Hala and Shahry users, there's no better way to enjoy stress-free travel, with



extra data to a huge range of popular destinations, at no added cost.

Customers can subscribe through the Ooredoo app, or through USSD by dialling *141*401 # for postpaid or *141*501# for prepaid. Customers should check they have received a confirmation SMS before starting to use the bundle. Enjoy the game!

Mazoon Electricity uses AMR to serve customers efficiently

Utilising technology to enhance the speed of meter reading, Mazoon Electricity Company, the leading electricity provider in Oman, has been using Automated Meter Reading (AMR) system for the benefit of its customers.

AMR system is a central standard smart metering system that enables Mazoon Electricity to obtain monthly readings from customers and collect their consumption in an automated manner. Mazoon Electricity has been implementing the AMR system by connecting its smart meters to Nama Shared Services (NSS) through SIM cards and reading meters remotely.

AMR system operates through smart meters and communicates through a modem. The configurable meter sends the meter reading through SIM cards. AMR's system communicates with the meters through the SIM cards and gets information such as meter reads, active energy in the meter and issues



faced if any. The system lets the AMR meter read the data at any time without having to visit the meter. The statistics of AMR system available in the various governorates is 33,280 of which Dakhliyah has 10,245; South Batinah - 11,845; North Sharqiyah - 5,620 and South Sharqiyah - 5,570.

AMR is an additional achievement in our constant endeavour to drive Mazoon Electricity to provide better services to cus-

tomers. Collecting data at each meter is critical for us to better understand the patterns of electrical energy users.

Considering the current COVID-19 situation, AMR system is especially useful because meters are read remotely. The data can also be downloaded using a software. If the meter is connected to AMR system, the customer need not send meter readings as it will be received on a monthly basis through AMR system.

Sri Lankan envoy addresses OCCI members

Ambassador of Sri Lanka to the Sultanate of Oman H E Ameer Ajwad addressed the Executive Committee members of the Oman Chamber of Commerce and Industry (OCCI) of Buraimi region.

He highlighted the enormous business opportunities that are available for business communities in Sri Lanka and Oman and stressed the MoU recently signed between the National Chamber of Commerce of Sri Lanka and the Oman Chamber of Commerce and Industry needs to be fully utilised with a view to enhancing private sector interactions between the two countries.

The ambassador also shared with the chamber the details of the prospective Sri Lankan private sector companies who are interested to explore business opportunities with their Omani counterparts.

Chairman of the Oman Chamber of Commerce and Industry of Buraimi region Zahir bin Mohammed al Kaabi and the executive committee members



of the chamber participated in the meeting.

H E Ajwad together with

Fathima Asmiya Ameer Ajwad also participated at Oman's 51st National Day celebrations held at

the premises of the OCCI by ceremonially cutting a cake to mark the significant occasion.

Jeep Wrangler Rubicon 392 brings legendary 4x4 performance to ME

For off-road enthusiasts in the Middle East who crave soul-stirring, legendary off-road capability and a new level of on-road performance, the Jeep brand has now launched the mighty V8-powered Jeep Wrangler Rubicon 392.

In tandem with the launch, the brand kicked off #RewildYourself, a 360 campaign that will continue into 2022 with a 360-degree approach from digital to social media and on-ground activations across the Middle East region to support the iconic Wrangler nameplate.

“The first V8 Wrangler ever to be launched in the Middle East, this is also the quickest, most powerful and off-road capable Jeep Wrangler in the brand's history,” says Marco Melani, managing director for American Brands at Stellantis Middle East.

“Developed and tested extensively in the rugged desert and mountain landscapes of the region, the functional engine cooling hood scoop, factory lift and abundant power from the V8 on the Jeep Wrangler Rubicon 392 allow you to “re-wild yourself”, whether you’re cresting a towering sand dune or rock crawling up a steep mountain slope.”

The Wrangler Rubicon 392 carries the 6.4lt V8, rated at 470 horsepower and 470 lb.-ft (637 Nm) of torque. Mated to the crisp-shifting TorqueFlite eight-



speed automatic transmission and Selec-Trac full-time active transfer case, the powertrain rockets the Jeep Wrangler Rubicon 392 from 0-60 mph (0-96 km/h) in 4.5 seconds and the quarter mile in 13.0 seconds. Plus, this potent combination comes with a factory-backed warranty.

Away from the pavement, the Trail Rated Wrangler Rubicon 392's potent powertrain meshes with heavy-duty wide track Dana 44 axles, a 3.73 final drive ratio,

transmission torque converter lockup control, a 2-inch (5 cm) lift and standard 33-inch tires on 17-inch beadlock-capable wheels.

The result is the most-capable Jeep Wrangler ever with 10.3 inches of ground clearance, improved suspension articulation and manoeuvrability, approach/breakover/departure angles of 44.5/22.6/37.5 degrees and the ability to traverse up to 32.5 inches (82.5 cm) of water.

Peak power, plenty of torque

The addition of the 6.4lt (392 cubic inches) engine marks the first time in nearly 40 years a V-8 has been a factory option for the Wrangler. Tuned specifically for the Jeep Wrangler Rubicon 392 and its functional hood scoop, the engine is rated at 470 hp and 470 lb.-ft. (637 Nm) of torque.

Critical to performance on-road and off, nearly 75 percent of the Wrangler Rubicon 392's

peak torque is available just above engine idle speed. This delivers exciting performance, whether enabling a 4.5-second 0-60 mph (0-96 km/h) time or crawling up steep grades.

Fuel Saver Technology with cylinder deactivation seamlessly shifts to smooth, high-fuel-economy four-cylinder mode when engine loads are light, such as cruising on the highway. A tank-mounted high-performance pump keeps the V-8 fueled under even the most demanding

conditions. A functional hood scoop feeds the Wrangler Rubicon 392's engine with cool, denser, outside air, which leads to enhanced performance.

Jeep engineers ensured the Wrangler Rubicon 392's V-8 gets fresh air, regardless of the terrain and weather. The Wrangler Rubicon 392's Hydro-Guide air intake system includes a tri-level ducting system with a series of drains, including a one-way drain in the air box that separates water - up to 15 gallons (56lt) per minute - away from the engine's incoming air. This enables the Wrangler Rubicon 392 to traverse water up to 32.5 inches (82.5cm) deep worry free, even if a bow wake washes over the hood.

Should the Wrangler Rubicon 392's functional hood scoop become restricted by snow/mud/debris, a secondary air path within the hood structure feeds the engine, making it possible for the Wrangler Rubicon 392 to reach top speed even with a fully blocked primary air path.

An active dual-mode exhaust is standard to deliver an exhilarating and unmistakable sound. The system engages automatically, opening valves in the exhaust system, under higher engine loads to reduce exhaust back pressure. The driver can also activate the system with the press of a button.

The dual-pipe performance

exhaust system is finished off with unique quad exhaust tailpipes.

Geared for performance

A high-torque capacity TorqueFlite 8HP75 eight-speed automatic transmission delivers quick, crisp gear changes during both normal and performance driving conditions. This transmission also enables the driver to change gears via the new steering-wheel-mounted aluminum paddle shifters, a first for the Jeep Wrangler.

The fully electronic, eight-speed automatic transmission features on-the-fly shift-map changing. The sophisticated transmission software relies on several input parameters to determine the appropriate driving conditions and adjusts shift pattern in response. The result is automatic shifting ideally attuned to the performance requirements of almost any driving demand. The transmission's gear ratios deliver the right response at the right time, from crawling over obstructions on the trail to smooth power delivery at high-way speeds.

The Jeep Wrangler Rubicon 392's drivetrain puts the power down to all four wheels, all the time. The heart of the driveline is a Selec-Trac full-time, active transfer case with a 2.72:1 low-range gear ratio.

Cinépolis Cinemas, Oman Avenues Mall premiers Ghostbusters: Afterlife

Cinépolis Cinemas, the third largest movie exhibitor globally hosted the country-wide premier of *Ghostbusters: Afterlife* on November 30. The premier took place in the brands flagship location of Oman Avenues Mall, Muscat.

Directed by Jason Reitman, the film features a distinguished cast, starring Paul Rudd, Carrie Coon (*Avengers*) and Finn Wolfhard (*Stranger Things*). Set thirty two years after the premier of the second movie, *Ghostbusters: Afterlife* revolves around a family who realise they have a connection to the original Ghostbusters and the secret legacy their grandfather left behind.

Alejandro Aguilera, chief executive officer of Cinépolis Cinemas says, “Even though I was quite young at the time, I grew up watching *Ghostbusters*. The movie, characters and music



have literally withstood the test of time, becoming an iconic franchise. We are thrilled to launch the country-wide premier in our cinemas as we welcome the next generation of Ghostbusters to our screens!”

The premier was hosted in the Macro XE auditorium, a screen triple the size of an ordinary cinema that comes complete with Dolby Atmos surround sound creating a powerful audio experience unlike anything imaginable thanks to the high-tech combination of the latest generation of audio speakers located throughout each of the venue's premium auditoriums.

The multiplex hosts a multitude of formats such as their award-winning Junior Auditorium featuring a colourful jungle gym, complete with slide and ball pit, as well as fun bean-bag seating.

Another cinematic experience that catapults Cinépolis Cinemas ahead of the competition is the state-of-the-art 4D E-motion experience. The immersive theatre format allows cinema lovers to “live” the movie thanks to motion seats and outstanding special effects such as wind, water, seat vibration, smell and air shots all perfectly synchronised with the action on the screen.

Cinépolis Luxury Cinemas, a few steps away from Cinépolis Cinemas offers guests a more luxurious and exclusive movie-viewing format. The auditoriums host a mix Recliner leather seats with adjustable tables or the brands Lounge seats, which even more spacious and offer privacy and exclusivity to their valued customers. Cinépolis' aim is to make the movie-going experience as unique as possible in a multitude of different ways.

Annual tennis tourney begins at ISC court



Nuaim Shanawaz and Sanabhi Ail

Much-awaited Indian Social Club Oman annual tennis tournament took off at the ISC Tennis court on November 23.

In addition to the club members event, Men's doubles and Veteran's doubles opened for all nationalities.

In the combined event of girls and boys under 12, little girl Sanabhi Ail beat Nuaim Shanawaz in the finals 8-5.

Undoubtedly both are best players but Sanabhi had to muster all her resources to stave off the determined challenge of Nuaim before emerging winner with scores of 8-5.

In other matches Jaza Junaith beat Steve 6-2; Nuha beat Rahul 8-5, Devdutt beat Atif 8-1; Rohit beat Kashyap 8-5; Darsag beat Neil 8-0 and Shantanu beat Nuha 8-1.

beIN Media Group reveals new shop at Mall of Oman

beIN Media Group, the global sports and entertainment broadcaster, has unveiled a new shop at the recently-opened Mall of Oman, making it the seventh beIN location in Oman.

Located on the ground floor near the main information desk of Oman's all-new 140,000sqm shopping complex in downtown Muscat, the beIN shop is dressed in the signature purple and white colours. Visitors can sign-up and subscribe on the spot and conveniently receive access to a range

of exclusive sports and exciting entertainment packages on the same day.

Commenting on the new Omani location, Hamad Aljaber, manager of Regional Sales at beIN MENA, noted, “Oman is a very important market for us at beIN Media Group and we are proud to have this new opportunity to reach out and interact directly with our Omani audience. Whether it is watching the ongoing European football tournaments, enjoying the latest

Hollywood and Arab blockbusters, catching up with your favourite entertainment series, or getting ready for the FIFA World Cup Qatar 2022, we have the most extensive selection of international sporting events and entertainment content to watch from the comfort of your home.

“We very much look forward to expanding our easy access to a world of sports and entertainment unmatched anywhere in the region.”

beIN Media Group operates across five continents and 43 countries - including all 24 countries in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA). beIN MENA alone broadcasts across 34 channels and airs 816 hours of daily content.

Through its iconic MIRAMAX film studio, and long-time partnerships with global superstars such as Sony Pictures Television, DreamWorks, and Discovery, beIN is home to a vast array of movies and series - holding an

ever-growing presence in cinematic feature production and distribution.

beIN's flagship sports network, beIN Sports, holds the single largest portfolio of sports rights of any global broadcaster - in MENA, this includes exclusive broadcasting rights to the FIFA Arab Cup Qatar 2021, UEFA Champions League, UEFA Europa League, UEFA Women's League, English Premier League, LaLiga, Ligue 1, and the FIFA World Cup Qatar 2022.

Reach Campaign, CharityStars announce unique offers

Through The Reach Campaign's partnership with CharityStars, a groundbreaking fundraising platform, people are being given the chance to win a once-in-a-lifetime experience.

As part of Reach's '50 Days to Transform 5 Million Lives' campaign to end neglected tropical diseases (NTDs), namely, river blindness and lymphatic filariasis, people donating via the CharityStars website can place a bid in the online auction or enter-to-win a selection of incredible, money-can't-buy experiences being given to lucky winners over a 50 day period. The list of amazing prizes includes:

- Meet, greet, and have a personal photo with Scarlett Johansson at the *Sing 2* world premiere on December 12 at the Greek Theatre in Los Angeles.
- A game Junior Cityzen's Match-day experience with Premier League reigning champions, Manchester City FC, that includes welcoming the Manchester City squad at the Etihad Stadium on the Blue carpet, a picture taken with the match-ball, a signed official jersey by your favourite Man City Player, and watch the players pitch-side warm-up before the game while also receiving a 2021/2022 home kit, two match day tickets and much more.



►Unique Yasalam VIP Concert Series Package for 10 people with private box access, providing VIP views to Abu Dhabi Grand Prix After-Race Concerts

including six-time Grammy nominee, Khalid, Brit New Artist of the Year, Lewis Capaldi, 12-time Grammy Award winning rock band, Foo Fighters and award-winning British Rapper, Stormzy.

- A VIP experience at the Mubadala World Tennis Championship, with two tickets to a VIP reception, VIP seating for the matches and a tennis clinic with one or more of the participating world class players including Grand Slam Champion Rafael Nadal, US Open sensation Emma Raducanu, Olympic Champion Belinda Bencic, 2020 US Open Champion Dominic Thiem, Denis Chapolov and

Casper Ruud.

- A 1.5 hour Ferrari 458 Driving Challenge Experience, including professional driving technical instruction and briefing, driving six laps, in-car video recording and much more, all presented by Dubai Autodrome.

All proceeds from donations given online to CharityStars, as part of the 50-day campaign, will benefit the Reaching the Last Mile Fund (RLMF), which offers a proof of concept for the elimination of the two diseases in Sub-Saharan Africa. Hosted by the END Fund - the leading philanthropic vehicle dedicated to ending NTDs - RLMF is a 10-year, US\$100mn initiative.

Enjoy attractive benefits on class-leading sedan Nissan Altima

Nissan Oman from the house of Suhail Bahwan Automobiles (SBA) is extending a wide range of offers for customers of Nissan Altima which offers an outstanding drive, enhanced handling, fuel efficiency and thoughtful technology solutions.

As part of the new Nissan Oman offer customers can get 3 years/60,000km periodic maintenance service, free first year insurance, free first year registration and more as attractive benefits. The offer, which is available on models purchased for personal use, will go on till January 9, 2022.

A senior official of Nissan Oman said, “We are delighted to extend a special offer on Nissan Altima which offers those who drive it an effortless power while furthering remarkable fuel economy. Nissan Altima is also cherished by owners in Oman for its classy design, fuel economy, driving performance, safety technology, and comfortability. Its good looks, striking exterior, colour range, spaciousness and fashionable interior have brought the car a lifetime of fans. Its powerful high-performance engine and a range of other options adds to its appeal.”

Service package
Customers of Nissan Altima can enjoy free periodic maintenance service package for three years/60,000km. This offer is valid for 10,000km service intervals.

Free insurance
Customers of Nissan Altima can enjoy free insurance in Oman & UAE for first year for private registration. Nissan Altima customers can enjoy free registration for the first year.

Low EMI
Customers of Nissan Altima can avail low EMI rate of RO170 as part of the offer. EMIs are calculated on the basis of 20 per cent down payment and 3.25 per cent rate of interest for 6 years loan tenure.

Pleasure to drive
Nissan Altima is also cherished by owners in Oman for its good looks, striking exterior, colour range, spaciousness and fashionable interior have brought the car

a lifetime of fans. The vehicle offers those who drive it an effortless power while furthering remarkable fuel economy.

Nissan Altima has advanced safety features for those seeking a more focused driving experience. Owners vouch that with its advanced technology and in-built design, Nissan Altima is a pleasure to drive.



tion engines ever created. Similarly, Nissan Altima 2.5lt features expressive styling, an uplifting interior, two powertrains, and advanced Nissan Intelligent Mobility features.

The Nissan Altima 2.0 has the world's first variable compression turbo engine. The engine is so smart that it anticipates what the driver wants. The Altima's shape-shifting VC-turbo engine lets the driver enjoy a lot. Nissan Altima 2.5lt unlocks the pure joy of driving through its innovative latest technology and Nissan Intelligent Mobility feature that responds to the world around in real time.

Complete technological package
Powered by an innovative 248 horsepower, 2.0lt, turbocharged variable compression, four-cylinder engine, Nissan Altima continuously adjusts its compression ratio to optimise power and efficiency. Whether its turbocharged power that pushes you back in your seat or efficiency that sips fuel, even in city streets, Altima's shape-shifting VC-Turbo engine gives you the best of both worlds. The sedan is a complete technological package - it over delivers on the basics, boasts features and innovative technologies never seen in its class.

The VC-Turbo engine has been developed after years of research and consumer feedback. It seamlessly changes its compression ratio between 8:1 (for high performance) and 14:1 (for high efficiency) - with an advanced multi-link system continuously raising or lowering the pistons' reach to transform the compression ratio. While a high compression ratio gives greater efficiency, a low compression ratio allows for greater power and torque and avoids knocking.

Iraqi cleric Sadr's bloc declared election winner

►Key pro-Iran factions reject the results claiming they were ‘rigged’ ►Protestors chant ‘No to fraud’

Baghdad, Iraq - Iraq's Shiite Muslim firebrand cleric Moqtada Sadr was confirmed on Tuesday as the biggest winner of October parliamentary election, results rejected swiftly by key pro-Iran factions claiming they were 'rigged'.

The announcement of the vote outcome had been put off for weeks amid tensions over allegations of fraud and violence, that culminated on November 7 in an assassination attempt targeting Prime Minister Mustafa al Kadhemi, from which he emerged unharmed. No group has claimed the attack.

Sadr's movement won nearly a fifth of the seats - 73 out of the assembly's total 329 - the election commission said, after a lengthy manual recount of hundreds of ballot boxes.

"The international community supported the Iraqi elections... because no manipulation or fraud was recorded," the electoral commission said on Tuesday, adding that voter turnout had been 44 percent.

Trailing well behind Sadr's bloc in the Shiite camp with 17 seats was the Fatah (Conquest) Alliance, the political arm of the pro-Iran Hashed al-Shaabi former paramilitary force, which is



A file photo shows supporters of Iraqi cleric Moqtada Sadr (portrait) demonstrating in Tahrir Square in Baghdad (AFP)

now integrated into Iraq's state security apparatus.

Hashed leaders had already rejected the preliminary result - which was sharply down from their 48 seats in the outgoing assembly - as a 'scam', and their

supporters have held street protests chanting 'No to fraud'.

Divisions

Shortly after Tuesday's announcement, several pro-Iran forces - including Fatah - re-

peated their rejection of the results, accusing the electoral commission of rigging them and vowing to continue legal action to 'annul the elections'.

Their supporters have staged sit-ins outside Baghdad's ultra-

secure Green Zone district, where the government, the assembly and many foreign embassies are located.

Despite the significant loss of seats, the Hashed remains a powerful force in the Iraqi politi-

cal scene, backed by Iran and with a strength of 160,000 fighters. It can also count on a key ally that made a surprise comeback in the polls - former premier Nuri al Maliki's pro-Iran State of Law Alliance clinched 33 seats in the legislature.

In a country still recovering from decades of war and chaos, and where most parties have armed wings, analysts have warned that political disputes could spark a dangerous escalation.

The final results must now be sent to the federal court for ratification. The parliament will then hold its inaugural session and elect a president, who will in turn appoint a prime minister to be approved by the legislature.

Backroom negotiations

In multi-confessional and multi-ethnic Iraq, the formation of governments has involved complex negotiations ever since a US-led invasion toppled dictator Saddam Hussein in 2003.

Posts and ministries have typically been handed out according to compromises reached by the main blocs in backroom talks, rather than to reflect the numbers of seats parties have won.

Sadr, a former leader of an anti-US militia who has often surprised observers with his political manoeuvres, has called for a 'majority' government with other leading blocs - possibly excluding powerful Shiite actors like Fatah.

Analysts said he could strike deals with Sunni and Kurdish groups, such as those of outgoing parliament speaker Mohammed al Halbussi's bloc, with 37 seats, or the Kurdistan Democratic Party, with 31.

"Now it's a matter of who will back down," said Hamdi Malik of the Washington Institute for Near East Policy.

"So far, neither side has given in to pressure. That is why the chance of escalation and clashes is high at this stage."

Iraq, an oil-rich country of 40mn, is still recovering from years of conflict and turmoil.

Major fighting has stopped since a military alliance including the Hashed defeated the Islamic State militant group in 2017, but sporadic violence continues.

Military bases housing US troops have been targeted with dozens of missile and drone strikes which Washington blames on pro-Iran factions. AFP



Libya's Interior Minister Khaled Mazen (AFP)

Libya 'violations' risk vote delay: Interior Minister

Tripoli, Libya - Libya may have to delay presidential polls slated for December 24 if worsening 'violations' threatening the electoral process continue, Interior Minister Khaled Mazen said on Tuesday.

The warning comes a day after the government and the UN expressed concern over an intimidation campaign that has shut the court where the son of slain dictator Moammar Gadhafi tried to appeal his rejected presidential bid.

The December 24 polls come as part of a push to end a decade of violence in oil-rich Libya following a NATO-backed uprising that toppled and killed Gadhafi in 2011.

"The continued obstruction of security plans, and worsening violations and abuses... will directly impact the conduct of the elections

The continued obstruction of security plans, and worsening violations and abuses... will directly impact the conduct of the elections

KHALED MAZEN

minister Fathi Bashagha.

But on Wednesday, Dbeibah's 'appeal was accepted, allowing [him] to take part in the election', his lawyer Abdulraouf Qanbij told journalists at the court.

He added the ruling was 'final and cannot be appealed'.

In theory, the North African country is preparing to draw a line under a decade of conflict since its 2011 revolution.

"We must not continue on a path that would lead to the deterioration of the security situation until it is out of control," Mazen said. He warned that the current circumstances would not permit elections to take place 'normally'.

Last week, Libya's electoral commission announced the rejection of the candidacy of Gadhafi's son Seif al Islam, who is wanted by the International Criminal Court for alleged war crimes. AFP

Taliban urges US to release frozen funds in Doha talks

Doha, Qatar - The Taliban renewed its call for the United States to release billions of dollars in frozen funds after two days of talks in Doha as aid-dependent Afghanistan grapples with economic crisis.

The Afghans also called for an end to blacklists and sanctions in meetings led by Taliban Foreign Minister Amir Khan Muttaqi and Thomas West, the US special representative for Afghanistan.

It was the second round of talks between the two sides in Qatar since the US ended its 20-year occupation of Afghanistan and the hardline Islamists rapidly returned to power.

"The two delegations discussed political, economic, human, health, education and security issues as well as providing necessary banking and cash facilities," tweeted Afghan Foreign Ministry spokesman Abdul



Taliban Foreign Minister Amir Khan Muttaqi (AFP)

Qahar Balkhi.

"The Afghan delegation assured the US side of security and urged that Afghanistan's frozen money should be released unconditionally, blacklists and sanctions must end and human

issues be separated from political ones."

Washington seized nearly US\$9.5bn in assets belonging to the Afghan central bank. The International Monetary Fund and the World Bank also sus-

pended activities in Afghanistan, withholding aid as well as US\$340mn in new reserves issued by the IMF in August.

The Afghan economy has effectively collapsed, with civil servants unpaid for months and the treasury unable to pay for imports. The United Nations has warned that around 22mn people, more than half the population, will face an 'acute' food shortage in the winter months.

Taliban government leader Mullah Mohammad Hassan Akhund is among those targeted by the US sanctions.

The US side stood firm on the measures and said it was taking steps to get support to ordinary Afghans.

"The United States remains committed to ensuring that US sanctions do not limit the ability of Afghan civilians to receive humanitarian support from the US

government and international community while denying assets to sanctioned entities and individuals," State Department spokesman Ned Price said in a statement. "The Department of the Treasury has issued general licences to support the continued flow of humanitarian assistance to the people of Afghanistan and other activities that support basic human needs."

The US 'expressed deep concern regarding allegations of human rights abuses'. The Americans also called for the release of US citizen Mark Frerichs, who was kidnapped in Afghanistan in February last year.

The Taliban called the talks 'positive' and said Muttaqi also met with the Japanese and German ambassadors to Afghanistan in Doha. AFP

Vintage cars show racy past of Iran's toppled royalty

Tehran, Iran - Before they were ousted by the 1979 Islamic revolution, Iran's royal family enjoyed a lavish lifestyle with a taste for fast cars quite unlike any ever built.

Now, after half a century hidden away, the royal racers are back on show, with the Iran Historical Car Museum drawing in thousands since it opened to the public in recent weeks.

"We consider that these cars are part of Iranian cultural heritage," the museum director Mohammed Faal said. "They belong to the people, not to the royal family."

It is run by the Islamic republic's Bonyad Mostazafan organisation - 'The Foundation of the Oppressed' - which manages the confiscated property of the toppled regime of Shah Mohammad Reza Pahlavi.

The line-up is staggering, and includes a car combining a unique engineering collaboration.

In 1972, knowing the shah liked German engineering, Mercedes, Porsche and Volkswagen teamed up to build an unprecedented automobile.

They created the 'MPV



Visitors look at a 1930's Pierce-Arrow Model A at the Iran Classic Cars Museum, in Tehran on November 24 (AFP)

Tehran', a bright orange painted single-seater, that was a 'gift' to help crown prince Reza, who was then 12, learn how to drive.

It has two keys. One, made of silver, limits the powerful engine to a gentle 30kmph. The other, in gold, allows the vehicle to speed at 170kmph. While the car hasn't raced since 1979, its sleek lines still inspire those who come to the museum.

Some 20,000 people have visited since its opening, more

than the number of people who visit the national museum each month.

"I really like this place, because it brings together some of the rare things that remained after the revolution," said Farzaneh, a 55 year old pensioner.

"These objects take us through our history," she added. Sprawling over more than a hectare, the museum is located in an industrial zone west of

Tehran, close to the country's automotive factories.

So far, it houses 55 cars, two coaches and four motorcycles, one of which was once driven by Farah Diba, the last empress and widow of the shah.

But a hundred other vehicles are still in warehouses awaiting to be meticulously restored and put on show.

Hitler's gift

The jewel of the museum is a

1930 Pierce-Arrow Model A.

At that time it was the most expensive car built in the United States - and was bought by Reza Shah, the founder of the Pahlavi dynasty.

Its price tag was an eye-watering US\$30,000, equivalent to one eighth of Iran's state budget at the time, and came complete with a gold-plated bumper and headlights.

The car, with the imperial crest fixed to the doors, was used by the shah during ceremonies including his marriage to his second wife Soraya and at the funeral of his father Reza.

But when the shah was de-throned and exiled 42 years ago, the car remained.

Another favourite for visitors is the 1934 Mercedes 500 K Autobahn Kurier, a gift from Adolf Hitler to Reza Shah.

The car is the last of its kind; of the six built by the German company, five were destroyed during World War II.

"Mercedes offered to buy it at a price we would set, because the firm was eager to have it in its museum," said Faal. "We refused."

AFP

Ukraine leader calls for direct talks with Russia amid invasion fears

Kiev, Ukraine - Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky on Wednesday called for direct talks with Moscow as tensions mounted over claims that Russia is laying the groundwork for an invasion.

Zelensky's call came as NATO looks to counter what it says is a build-up of Russian troops on the border with Ukraine, with US Secretary of State Antony Blinken set to meet Russia's top diplomat Sergey Lavrov in Stockholm today.

"We must tell the truth that we will not be able to end the war without direct talks with Russia," Zelensky said during an annual address to lawmakers in Kiev.

"Let's be honest, the war in Donbass has been going on for eight years," Zelensky said, referring to eastern Ukraine.

"We must talk, knowing that we have a strong and powerful army," Zelensky added, saying he was 'not afraid' to speak directly with Russian President Vladimir Putin.

In Moscow, Putin's spokesman Dmitry Peskov appeared to pour cold water on the idea, reiterating that the war was Ukraine's domestic issue.

"We know of attempts to present Russia as a party to this conflict. This is not the case," Peskov told reporters.

"The war in Donbass can only be stopped through negotiations of Ukrainians with Ukrainians."

More than 13,000 people



Parliament members rise and applaud as Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky addresses the parliament in Kiev on Wednesday (AFP)

have been killed in a war between Kiev troops and Russian-backed separatists who have carved out two 'People's Republics' in eastern Ukraine.

Kiev and its Western allies have accused Russia of stirring up the separatist conflict to prevent Ukraine from joining NATO and the EU and sending troops and arms to support the breakaway regions. Moscow has denied those claims.

The war broke out after a pop-

ular uprising in Kiev ousted a Kremlin-backed president and Moscow moved to annex Crimea in 2014. Even though active fighting has decreased, the West has been concerned by Russia's troop movements on Ukraine's border this year.

Kiev's Western allies have since last month warned of a fresh Russian troop buildup around Ukraine's borders and a possible winter invasion.

The alleged surge follows a

similar buildup in the spring, when Russia gathered around 100,000 troops on Ukraine's borders but later announced a drawdown.

At the peak of those tensions Zelensky invited the Russian leader to meet for talks in eastern Ukraine, but the Kremlin declined the invitation.

Moscow accusations

Russian officials in turn have accused Kiev of massing tens of

thousands of troops near separatist-controlled territory.

"The Armed Forces of Ukraine are building up their military strength, massing heavy equipment and personnel," Russian Foreign Ministry spokeswoman Maria Zakharova said ON Wednesday.

"According to some reports, the number of Ukrainian troops in the conflict zone has already reached 125,000 personnel," she claimed, saying this represented

half of Kiev's troops.

Those comments followed the Ukrainian Foreign Ministry saying on Tuesday that Russia has massed 115,000 troops around Ukraine, on the Crimean peninsula and in two eastern regions occupied by the breakaway fighters.

Putin on Tuesday declined to say whether Moscow planned to move troops across Ukraine's border.

"Look, they spoke about a possible Russian military intervention in Ukraine at the beginning of the year. But as you see this did not happen," Putin said.

The Russian leader added that the security interests of all parties should be taken into account and called for improved ties.

Blinken was in Latvia on Wednesday where a meeting of NATO foreign ministers focused largely on tensions over Russia's military build-up.

During the gathering, Ukrainian Foreign Minister Dmytro Kuleba called for a 'deterrence package' to stop Russia.

Blinken is scheduled to hold talks with Lavrov on the sidelines of a meeting of the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe after meeting Kuleba.

The Kremlin has blamed the escalation in tensions on the West supplying Ukraine with modern weaponry, conducting drills in the Black Sea and flying bombers near Russia's borders.

AFP

Nigeria boat disaster kills 29

Kano, Nigeria - An overloaded boat carrying dozens of passengers, mostly children aged eight to 15, capsized late on Tuesday in northwest Nigeria's Kano state, a rescue agency spokesman said.

"We have recovered 29 bodies... and rescued seven passengers. The search for the remaining 13 bodies is ongoing," Saminu Abdullahi, spokesman for Kano state's fire service, said on Wednesday.

Abdullahi said the boat was 'meant to ferry 12 adults but the skipper packed such a number of children on-board'.

Boat accidents are tragically common on Nigerian waterways mostly due to overcrowding, bad weather and lack of maintenance.

The children, from Badau village in Kano state, were on their way to Bagwai, a town on the other side of the river, for a religious ceremony.

Last month seven girls aged between 10 and 12 drowned in neighbouring Jigawa state when their boat capsized.

In June, 13 people died in Sokoto state when a boat ferrying wedding guests capsized.

AFP

Three teenagers dead, eight more wounded in US high school shooting

Oxford, US - A 15 year old student opened fire at his Michigan high school on Tuesday, killing three teenagers and wounding eight other people before surrendering to police, authorities said, in what was the deadliest US school shooting so far this year.

Eight others, including one teacher, were wounded in the attack, which took place shortly after noon while classes were in session at Oxford High School, the Oakland County Sheriff's Office said.

The sheriff's office said the dead were a 16 year old male, a 14 year old female, and a 17 year old female.

Of the wounded, six were in stable condition and two were undergoing surgery.

The suspect was taken into custody and a semi-automatic handgun was seized, but there was no immediate explanation for what might have prompted the attack in Oxford, a small town about 65km north of Detroit.



Students hold candles during a vigil after a shooting at Oxford High School at Lake Pointe Community Church, Michigan on Tuesday (AFP)

"There was no resistance during the arrest and the suspect has asked for a lawyer and has not made any statements as to a motive," the sheriff's office said.

"It's a very tragic situation," Undersheriff Michael McCabe told reporters.

"We have three deceased victims right now, who are all believed to be students," he said.

"We have lots of upset parents," he said.

McCabe said police received more than 100 911 emergency calls shortly after noon, and that the shooter unleashed 15-20 shots over about five minutes.

The suspect was taken into custody within five minutes of the first 911 call, he said.

'State of shock'

President Joe Biden was informed of the shooting during a visit to Minnesota.

"My heart goes out to the families enduring the unimaginable grief of losing a loved one," he said.

"That whole community has to be just in a state of shock right now."

McCabe said police had been in contact with the suspect's parents and had searched their home.

"The suspect had been in class today and appeared to carry out the attack alone. It was unclear if victims had been specifically targeted or were randomly shot," McCabe said.

"He's not talking to us at this time," he told reporters.

McCabe said police were combing the scene at the school, which has about 1,800 students, and will want to interview anyone who might have information on the suspect.

"I think this is every parent's worst nightmare," Michigan Governor Gretchen Whitmer said at the same press briefing.

AFP

Britain and Belgium pledge to step up efforts on migrants

London, UK - Britain and Belgium have promised to cooperate more closely to tackle irregular migration, after 27 people died when their dinghy capsized as they tried to cross the Channel.

The pledge is part of a wider bilateral deal signed by prime ministers Boris Johnson and Alexander De Croo after a virtual meeting on Tuesday, the government in London said.

It came after Britain was prevented from joining a meeting of European interior ministers last weekend to try to crack down on people-smuggling gangs behind the crossings.

Frozen out of the talks, London has embarked on its own efforts to tackle the issue, with Home Secretary Priti Patel reported to be planning a tour of European capitals.

London and Brussels promised improvements in detecting and stopping irregular migration at the Belgian port of Zeebrugge, and along the Belgian coast.

They also pledged to 'improve joint working on illegal flows, in-



Migrants are helped ashore from a lifeboat in Dungeness, England, on November 24, after being rescued while crossing the English Channel (AFP)

cluding to disrupt human trafficking and human smuggling networks and prevent loss of life'.

The two countries also said they would work with others to secure closer cooperation on 'small boats in order to prevent illegal sea crossing towards the UK'. That included trying to stop 'secondary movements' of migrants with the Schengen free-movement area of the European Union, they added.

The British government is under pressure at home because

of the record numbers of migrants crossing the Channel from northern France this year.

Johnson's pitch to leave the EU in 2016 was based on 'taking back control' of Britain's borders, but doing so now Britain is out of the bloc has proved more problematic. Patel's invitation to the talks was withdrawn after French outrage at a British suggestion that migrants are sent back to the EU and that France forces boats back to its coast.

AFP

Bangladesh allows relocated Rohingya refugees to visit families

Cox's Bazar, Bangladesh - Dozens of Rohingya refugees sent to a remote and flood-prone Bangladesh island have been allowed to visit relatives for the first time since their relocations began two years ago.

Nearly 20,000 members of the stateless Muslim minority, who fled neighbouring Myanmar in 2017 after a brutal military crackdown, have already been sent to Bhashan Char island.

Bangladesh has been criticised by rights groups for the relocation plan, which aims to eventually move around 100,000 refugees to ease overcrowding in cramped refugee



Rohingya refugees get off from a bus to be relocated to Bhashan Char island in the Bay of Bengal, at Chittagong Boat Club in Chittagong on November 25 (AFP)

camp near the coastal city of Cox's Bazar.

Authorities on Tuesday allowed 68 Rohingya to leave the formerly barren island to visit their family members on the mainland.

"A Navy ship took them to Chittagong and from there they were taken to the camps by two buses," a Navy spokesman told AFP on Wednesday.

"This is the first time Rohingya living on the island have gone to the camps to visit their relatives."

A senior Disaster Management Ministry official, speaking on condition of anonymity, said the government had decided to

allow at least two trips per month from the island to the camps.

The first group leaving Bhashan Char arrived at the camps on Tuesday night for an emotional reunion with relatives after months of separation.

"When I found that I was on the list of people who were allowed to visit Cox's Bazar, I broke into tears," said Mohammad Hossain.

"My older brother lives here... I thought I would never see him again," he added. "Coming here I feel like I am coming back to my community."

About 850,000 Rohingya are

packed into camps along the Bangladesh-Myanmar border. Most fled the Myanmar military clampdown in 2017 that the United Nations says could be genocide.

Bangladesh has been praised for taking in the refugees who poured across the border but has had little success finding them permanent homes.

Bhashan Char is 60km from the Bangladesh mainland and lies at the heart of the Meghna estuary, an area prone to powerful cyclones that have killed around 1mn people in the last 50 years.

AFP

COVID-19 PANDEMIC

US health panel endorses Merck COVID pill

Merck's treatment is taken as four capsules, twice a day, over five days - for a total of 40 pills

Washington, US - A panel of US health experts on Tuesday voted to recommend Merck's COVID-19 pill for high-risk adults - a new form of treatment that is easy to administer and could prove better able to withstand variants, including Omicron.

Molnupiravir, already authorised in Britain, has been shown to reduce the rate of hospitalisations and deaths among people at high risk of developing severe COVID, when it is taken within five days of symptom onset.

The Food and Drug Administration (FDA), which convened Tuesday's meeting, is now expected to grant an emergency use authorisation (EUA) for the treatment, meaning millions of courses will soon be stocked in pharmacies.

The independent scientists appointed by the FDA voted 13 in favour and 10 against authorisation - a narrow win that reflected some concerns over a recent downgrading of the

treatment's efficacy results, as well as misgivings over potential side-effects.

Sascha Dublin, of the Kaiser Permanente Washington Health Research Institute, said that while she found the benefits compelling and voted 'yes', it will be important to make sure the treatment is strictly regulated and goes only to patients best suited for it.

Daria Hazuda, Merck's vice president of infectious disease discovery, told AFP after the vote, "We need as many tools in the toolbox as possible to really make an advance in this pandemic as this virus continues to evolve."

Last week, Merck, known as MSD outside the United States and Canada, released full results from a clinical trial of 1,400 people. These showed the pill reduced the risk of hospitalisations and death by 30 per cent, a significant result albeit more modest than an earlier advertised figure of 50 per



This file handout photo courtesy of Merck & Co, Inc shows capsules of the antiviral pill Molnupiravir (AFP)

cent, which was based on an analysis from half the number of patients.

Hazuda said the reason might be an unexplained drop in the rate of severe cases in the placebo group during the second half of the study, which may have made the drug appear less effective than it was.

Risk-benefit balance

Briefing documents uploaded by the FDA ahead of the meeting illustrated the benefit-risk balance the experts were asked to assess.

Potential harmful effects were noted on fetal development, as seen in studies on rats and rabbits, and Merck said it would not recommend use of

molnupiravir in pregnant women.

The company did not seek authorisation for children, and the FDA said it didn't plan to carry out pediatric trials until safety is established in juvenile rats over concerns related to bone formation.

Currently, the most effective treatment for COVID-19 is

monoclonal antibodies, which are administered via a drip and have been shown to reduce the risk of severe cases in high-risk patients by up to 70 per cent.

But pills have the advantage of being far more easy to use, and, unlike antibodies, don't require a visit to an infusion site.

Variant-proof

Merck's treatment is taken as four capsules, twice a day, over five days - for a total of 40 pills.

It was found to be safe in its clinical trial, with non-serious adverse events such as diarrhea and dizziness occurring roughly equally between the placebo group and the drug group.

Molnupiravir, which was developed in partnership with Ridgeback Biotherapeutics, works by introducing mutations into the genetic material of the coronavirus, inhibiting its ability to replicate.

It is thought likely to be more variant-proof than monoclonal antibodies or vaccines, because

unlike them, it does not target the ever-mutating spike proteins that dot the surface of the virus.

Molnupiravir's error-driving mechanism has also raised concerns, including that it could harm mammal DNA. In its presentation, however, the FDA said rat studies showed this effect was negligible.

Another worry is whether the mutations the pill introduces might lead to a dangerous evolution of the virus itself, spurring new variants.

This is 'currently a theoretical concern', that hasn't been found in real life, the FDA said.

"Treating people should reduce the probability that you're going to transmit these super variants, as opposed to allowing untreated people to transmit the virus," stressed Hazuda.

The US government has committed to buying 3.1mn courses of molnupiravir for approximately US\$2.2bn, with the option to purchase more.

AFP

Time to 'think about mandatory vaccination', says EU chief

Brussels, Belgium - It is time for the European Union to 'think about mandatory vaccination' against COVID-19, European Commission chief Ursula von der Leyen said on Wednesday, while stressing member state governments would decide.

"My personal position is... I think it is understandable and appropriate to lead this discussion now," she told a media conference, underlining that a third of the EU population of 450mn was still unvaccinated.

"How we can encourage and potentially think about mandatory vaccination within the European Union? This needs discussion. This needs a common approach. But it is a discussion that I think has to be led," she said.

Several EU countries have already taken steps in that direction. Austria has announced compulsory COVID-19 vaccinations from February 1 next year



People wait in front of a COVID-19 vaccination centre in Frankfurt (AFP)

and Germany is mulling following suit. Greece on Tuesday said jabs would be mandatory for over-60s, while France has said COVID passes would be deactivated for all adults who have not had booster shots six months after their last jab, starting January 15.

Von der Leyen also said that the EU's main COVID vaccine provider, BioNTech/Pfizer, would have jabs available for

children in the bloc in two weeks' time.

She said she had spoken with the German-US joint venture about the issue the day before, and they said 'they are able to accelerate - in other words children's vaccines will be available as of December 13'.

She noted that "If you look at the numbers we have now, 77 per cent of the adults in the European Union vaccinated, or if

you take the whole population, it's 66 per cent - and this means one-third of the European population is not vaccinated, these are 150mn people".

The EU's vaccination drive is very uneven across the 27-nation bloc.

Portugal, Malta, Spain, Italy, Ireland, France and Belgium have all vaccinated more than three-quarters of their populations, while eastern member states Bulgaria, Romania, Slovakia and Croatia all have jabbed less than half.

"We have the vaccines, the life-saving vaccines, but they are not being used adequately everywhere," von der Leyen said.

While the European Commission pre-purchased COVID vaccines for use in the EU, von der Leyen emphasised that the individual countries had the responsibility on how their vaccination programmes were done.

AFP

Pfizer seeks US approval for boosters for ages 16-17

Washington, US - Pfizer announced on Tuesday it was seeking US authorisation for COVID booster shots among adolescents aged 16 and 17, as concerns grow about the impact of the new Omicron variant.

The Food and Drug Administration (FDA) has so far only granted emergency use authorisations (EUAs) for boosters to people aged 18 and over, six months after their primary series of the Pfizer or Moderna COVID-19 vaccine, or two months after the Johnson & Johnson shot.

"Today, we submitted a request to the @US_FDA to expand the emergency use authorisation of a booster dose of our COVID-19 vaccine to include 16 and 17 year olds," Pfizer CEO Albert Bourla wrote on Twitter. "It is our hope to provide strong protection for as many people as possible, particularly in light of the new variant."



Experts are concerned that the pattern of mutations detected on the Omicron variant will mean that the protection generated by the current generation of vaccines may take a partial hit.

While lab data should be available to confirm or refute that hypothesis within a matter of weeks, US health authorities are urging all adults to get boosted when they are eligible, so that they will at least be protected against severe COVID, even if not infection itself.

Although more than 200

cases of Omicron have been found in well over a dozen countries, none have so far been detected in the United States, where Delta accounts for more than 99 per cent of all infections.

Not all health experts are on board with boosting healthy teens, who are at much lower risk of developing severe COVID but - in the case of males - at far higher risk of vaccine-linked myocarditis, when vaccinated with the Pfizer or Moderna messenger RNA vaccines.

AFP

Countries agree to negotiate new international pandemic accord

Geneva, Switzerland - World Health Organization (WHO) member states agreed on Wednesday to start building a new international accord on how to handle future pandemics and ensure there can be no repeat of COVID-19.

The economic turmoil and millions of lives lost during the coronavirus crisis triggered calls for new international defences strong enough to prevent a future such disaster.

At a special meeting in Geneva, the 194 WHO member states unanimously adopted a resolution launching the negotiating and drafting process for a new international instrument on pandemic prevention, preparedness and response.

The process will present its final outcome to WHO member states in 2024.

"The adoption of this decision is cause for celebration and cause for hope that we all need," WHO chief Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus said in closing the three-day gathering.

"Of course, there is still a long



Nurses tend to a patient, infected with the COVID-19 virus, in an intensive care unit of the Pitie-Salpetriere Hospital in Paris on Tuesday (AFP)

road ahead. There are still differences of opinion about what a new accord could or should contain. But you have proven to each other and the world that differences can be overcome and common ground can be found."

'End this pandemic'

The three-day meeting of the World Health Assembly - the WHO's decision-making body comprising all 194 member states - was an unprecedented special session on considering a

new accord on pandemics.

It came with the world nearly two years into the COVID-19 pandemic and shaken by the emergence of the newly-discovered Omicron variant of concern, deemed by the WHO to pose a 'very high' global risk.

"I have one simple request for all member states, and that is: end this pandemic," Tedros said in his closing speech.

"Just in the past week, this virus has demonstrated that it will not simply disappear. How many more lives and livelihoods

it takes is up to us."

"Ending the pandemic is not a matter of chance; it is a matter of choice."

Countries agreed to establish an intergovernmental negotiating body 'to draft and negotiate a WHO convention, agreement or other international instrument on pandemic prevention, preparedness and response'.

The body's first meeting must be no later than March 1 next year to elect two co-chairs and four vice-chairs.

A progress report will be presented at the regular World Health Assembly annual gathering in 2023, with the final outcome presented for consideration at the 2024 WHA.

Differences remain

As Tedros hinted, despite Wednesday's agreement, differences remain between countries on how far they are prepared to go in terms of legally-binding commitments on issues like equitable vaccine distribution, knowledge-sharing, financing, oversight structures and powers

to investigate outbreaks.

The United States, notably, is lukewarm on locking into a treaty.

China - where the first COVID-19 cases were detected - voiced willingness to negotiate an agreement, without specifying whether it should be binding, adding that the process should avoid 'stigmatisation'.

In a statement, Washington said it wanted to 'strengthen the international legal framework' to 'make the global health system stronger and more responsive'.

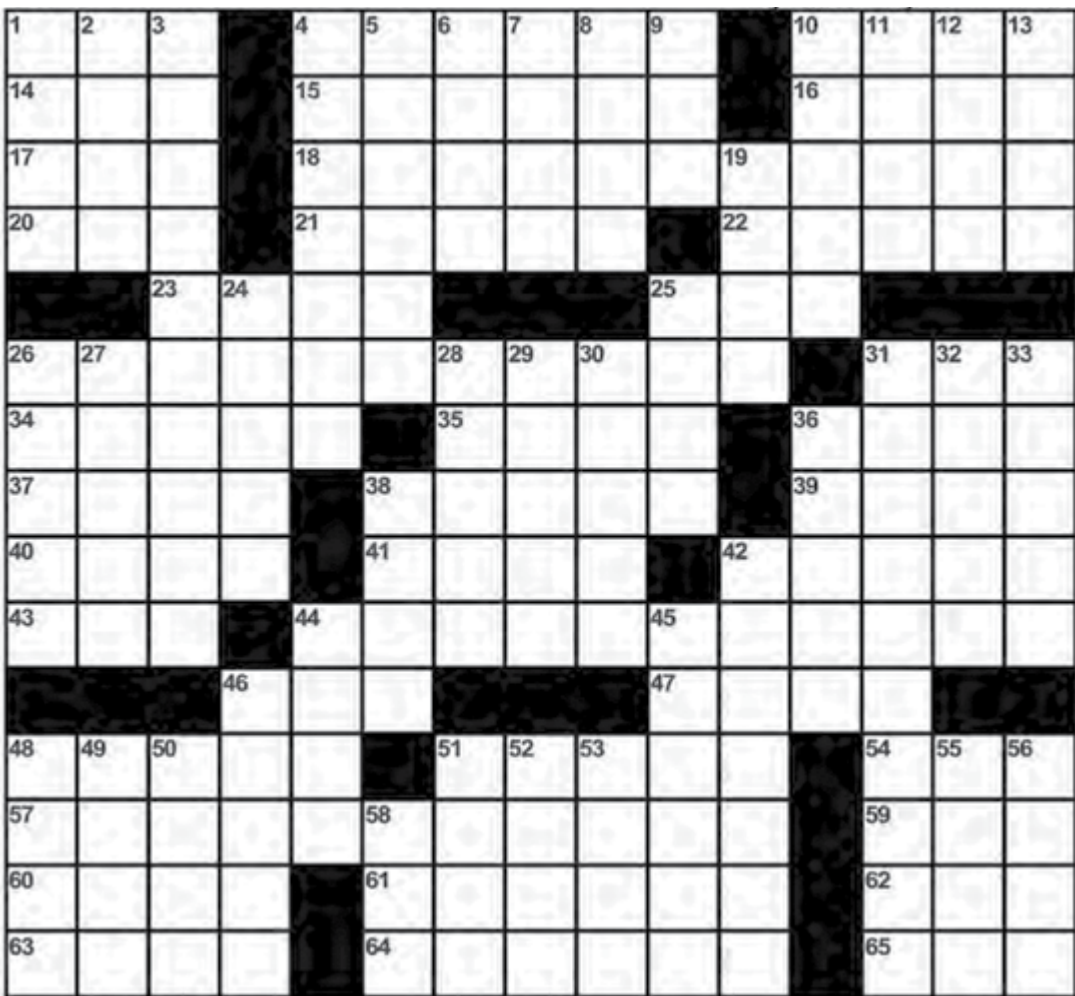
The European Union, much warmer on a treaty, said on Wednesday's decision would make history.

"We need a game change in our global health architecture, so that the international community can respond to future pandemics collectively, effectively and immediately," Lotte Knudsen, the EU's ambassador in Geneva, said in a statement.

"The situation and our citizens demand it."

AFP

DAILY CROSSWORD



ACROSS

- 1) So-so separator
- 4) Kick oneself for
- 10) Like the outdoors
- 14) It may be around a buck
- 15) Achieve success
- 16) Singing range of many women
- 17) Mohawk and others
- 18) Alternative to a tanning salon
- 20) Enjoy the bunny slope
- 21) Badger cousin
- 22) Bonkers
- 23) "Nanny" critter
- 25) Goopy black stuff
- 26) Sculptures by the shore
- 31) Expert in ledger-domain?
- 34) Avoid doing
- 35) Like laid-back jazz
- 36) Noisy closing
- 37) England's national gallery
- 38) Cocoon residents
- 39) Aspiration
- 40) Stadium division

- 41) Notice of departure?
 - 42) Mexican homes
 - 43) Antique
 - 44) Large dryers?
 - 46) Contents of 37-Across
 - 47) Electric measures
 - 48) Thing given to the police
 - 51) Military march
 - 54) A gentleman removes his
 - 57) Ocean, sea or lake, e.g.
 - 59) You may precede it, but I can't
 - 60) "Beware the_ of March"
 - 61) Remove carbon from
 - 62) Rub the wrong way
 - 63) Pekoe and others
 - 64) Pleasant smells
 - 65) Use a fork
- DOWN**
- 1) Does a bit of math
 - 2) Cranny colleague
 - 3) Earmarked
 - 4) The daily grind
 - 5) Errors in printing
 - 6) Small cave (Var.)
 - 7) Fit for pickin'

- 8) Satan's forte
- 9) Pl
- 10) Gallantry
- 11)_-ran (loser)
- 12) Cause to be immobile
- 13) Frosted Flakes tiger
- 19) "Ah, man!" of old
- 24) More eccentric
- 25) HDTV component
- 26) Brief quarrel
- 27) To no_, (fruitlessly)
- 28) Diver's gear
- 29) It's up for discussion
- 30) Reluctant
- 31) Narrow escape
- 32) From the Pope
- 33) "Don't make_" (parent's admonition)
- 36) Oboe ancestor
- 38) Rhyme writer
- 42) Sticks together
- 44) Con_ (vigorously)
- 45) City in Kansas
- 46) Bottomless chasm
- 48) Not much
- 49) Prospector's bonanza
- 50) Brainstorming contribution

- 51) Decorative pitcher
- 52) Chihuahuan treat
- 53) Thing smaller than a molecule
- 55) Realm
- 56) One way to send a message
- 58) They say "yes" to drugs

NOTE PAD



YOUR DAILY HOROSCOPE



ARIES MARCH 21-APRIL 19

It won't be a boring day. Startling, maybe, but definitely not boring, humdrum, or run of the mill. Your first surprise will likely arrive via either a co-worker or someone else you see on a daily basis. Either way, they won't be acting even remotely close to the way they usually do. Of course, you being you will enjoy the change and encourage it. It's your job to be a spark plug. Might as well have fun with it.



LEO JULY 23-AUGUST 22

You've had it with this financial roller-coaster ride, but you're not exactly sure what you should do about it. The best thing you can think of is to do something that's completely and totally startling, something that will stop the ride in its tracks, like regaining control of all joint accounts, for example, with no warning whatsoever. Desperate people do desperate things.



SAGITTARIUS NOVEMBER 22-DECEMBER 21

One of the best traits anyone can possibly possess, especially in times like these, is adaptability. You have that quality down pat, and it's certainly going to come in handy. The last thing in the world you were expecting is exactly what you can expect right now. Fortunately, you're always open to new and exhilarating experiences, so you won't mind at all, but you might be called upon to help a friend who isn't quite so flexible.



TAURUS APRIL 20-MAY 20

You've been thinking that you might have a secret admirer, and you're absolutely right. Your mystery suitor could let those feelings slip today in a very minor way, so minor, in fact, that if you weren't as sharp as you are, and if you didn't pay attention as well as you do, you might not notice it. As it is, you'll need to decide whether to ignore the slip or have some fun, which, of course, depends on your relationship situation.



VIRGO AUGUST 23-SEPTEMBER 22

There's a difference between being understanding and being naive. If you feel that someone out there has been doing their best to work you, don't take it for a second longer. Put your foot down and announce that the game has officially come to an end. You've gone out of your way to do everything you could for all the people around you. If that generosity hasn't come back to you, call a time-out. Enough is enough.



CAPRICORN DECEMBER 22-JANUARY 19

It's not usually tough to get along with you. To dear ones, you're downright predictable, not in a bad way, but because you're so grounded, stable, and solid. Those traits won't apply to you now, though, so get ready to shake things up. Once you open your mouth, you'll be anything but predictable. It's kind of nice to surprise the crowd every now and then, isn't it?



GEMINI MAY 21-JUNE 21

If it's not at all what you should be doing, and especially if it will aggravate an authority figure who you personally love to aggravate, needless to say you're probably on your way to doing it right now. That's if you're not already knee-deep in whatever mischievous project you've cooked up. Just be sure you're not indulging in these antics only to avoid broaching an important emotional issue.



LIBRA SEPTEMBER 23-OCTOBER 22

You definitely need time to devote to your work, there's no doubt about it. You could even end up doing some unexpected overtime thanks to someone else's willingness to blow off their own workload. You're also feeling the longing to be alone even if it's just for a little while. Well, that's what evenings are all about. You might have to wait until later to get the solo time you crave, but it's on its way.



AQUARIUS JANUARY 20-FEBRUARY 18

This is fine astrological weather to be you. The unpredictability you relish is everywhere. You're starting to seem almost normal. Of course, once the times become so startling that even you seem ordinary, it's clearly time to shake things up. So you'd better get busy. This obviously just won't do.



CANCER JUNE 22-JULY 22

Your dear ones had no idea this was coming, what just tumbled out of your mouth, that is. Before you continue along the path you've started, you might want to warn them that they'd better sit down. You know that you're really just getting started. This has been coming for a long time, so it might be a while before it's over. It's nice to shake things up every now and then, right?



SCORPIO OCTOBER 23-NOVEMBER 21

If anyone can deal with tough times, it's you. So when a dear one mentions a last-minute problem that's really got them floored, you'll do for them what you'd do for yourself under similar circumstances. You'll help them come up with possible solutions and remind them that the unexpected detour around an obstacle often turns out to be better than the original path.



PISCES FEBRUARY 19-MARCH 20

When it comes to relationships, you'll be anything but predictable now. In fact, if there's a different, unusual way to do it, if there's any way to push the envelope to see how much your loved ones are willing to put up with, you'll find it. Don't make a habit of this, because they might not put up with it permanently. For now, though, it's kind of exciting. Not that they'd admit that.



TEST YOUR KNOWLEDGE

1. The Indian Ocean Arc is an Imaginary circle in space about ____ over the equator

- a. 20,000 km
- b. 35,000 km
- c. 36,000 km
- d. 30,000 km

2. The main object of which of the following UN agency is to help the underdeveloped countries in the task of raising their living standards?

- a. IMF
- b. UNICEF
- c. UNDP
- d. IDA

3. The headquarter of the Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries are in

- a. Algiers
- b. Lagos
- c. Kuwait
- d. Vienna

Answers: 1. c 2. d 3. d

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BOGGLER

A	P	O	R
H	L	R	S
E	O	A	D
R	E	Y	L

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

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

DO YOU SUDOKU?

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

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

WORD BUILDER

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

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

SUDOKU EASY ANSWER

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



VOLUNTOURISM

TO TANZANIA, *With Love*

Hubert Vaz

Kalthoom al Khamayasi, a young professional, who visited Tanzania to volunteer as an assistant teacher in a community school, returned recently with valuable insights about her true purpose in life. She now hopes that other youth in Oman have a similar life-changing experience for their own betterment.

Kalthoom, co-founder, Jisser Internship Platform, and section head, Agro-Industry Development, Ministry of Agriculture and Fisheries, has always been concerned about the ambitions and aspirations of the youth and so had floated her own venture of setting up a bridge between organisations and prospective young employees who seek experience before taking up fulfilling jobs. Her decision to spend a month volunteering in a school in Tanzania was, however, intended to give herself an out of the routine experience.

"I volunteered as an assistant teacher at a community school for kids in need. I helped with English language classes for underprivileged teenage students unable to attend public schools and sports and crafts classes for nursery-level children. Even though this was not my first volunteering experience, the time I spent there made it

so much more valuable," said Kalthoom, adding that the decision to take on this experience was a result of the built-up stress over the past almost two years due to COVID-19.

"As soon as travel restrictions were removed, I researched the easiest countries to go to with minimum COVID-19 restrictions and Tanzania was one of them. When I arrived there, I understood why that was the case. When most of the population's concern is about getting food on the table at the end of the day, thinking about 'uncertain health threats' that might or might not reach them is a 'luxury' they cannot afford because missing one day of work could easily mean missing all 3 meals of the day," she asserted.

Though Kalthoom had ventured on what she calls 'voluntourism', she says, she realised that all the stress faced by people could not be relieved within just a week or a ten-day trip. So, she spoke to friends about her plan and collected some donations to spend for the welfare of hapless children in Tanzania.

"The very low value of the Tanzanian currency made every rial I was able to afford worth an unimaginable amount for those children," she said, explaining, "When

you get there, you see how much your rial means to an entire family living in a windowless house, depending on their seasonal farm products for income and breakfast. And you stop feeling sad about your life. You become grateful for every-

male students buy enough sanitary pads, so that they do not have to skip school once every month for the entire academic year. Or one could buy around 10 uniforms for 10 students who come to school with torn clothes, or 10 pairs of shoes for students who wear mended rubber slippers to walk a couple of hours to school everyday.

"The thing about this school is that you can see that the students really wanted to learn. They had actual goals like becoming a chef or an employee at a specific company, so they would come to school without being forced to. They are actually thankful for the chance to attend school even in their poverty. A daily dose of inspiring chats with these kids reminds you to be thankful again for the life you have," Kalthoom said, calling on youngsters not to get disheartened with small setbacks in life.

"I wish I had a way to let everybody know how valuable such an experience is in changing you as a person," said Kalthoom, pointing out that she had not only collected donations in cash, but also in kind, like school stationery, some iPads/tabs, copies of the Holy Quran and headscarves for Muslim girl students, besides Omani snacks and sweets. After seeing pictures

sent by her on social media, her family members and some friends sent more stuff across to help out in her self-styled humanitarian mission.

"When we were little, we heard adults often say, 'You should be thankful, there are children starving in Africa'. I got to see that in real life and it hit me hard and in a completely different way. For the first time, I understood what that really meant.

One of the students, she said, often brought a stick of sugarcane to school, as breakfast and lunch because they lived near a sugarcane farm and that was the only thing they could afford to eat. That was the plight of most children but they were eager to come to school to get educated in the hope of a better tomorrow, Kalthoom pointed out.

"Traveling with a purpose will open your eyes to a whole different world you are not aware of, not just to other countries outside Oman's borders but within your own personal capabilities which you were not even aware of. I do not come from a rich family to go globe trotting, but I have realised that travelling doesn't have to be a costly affair if there is a genuine purpose attached to it. I travelled the same old way by finding local hosts for free or at cheap rates while getting a deeper experience of the local culture."



thing you have, and you soon find the lost purpose of your life during COVID-19 slowly returning."

She pointed out that by merely skipping one meal, one could be able to help five fe-



Back from
a 'voluntourism'
trip to Tanza-
nia, **Kalthoom
al Khamayasi**
comes back a
better person,
thankful for
everything
in life





FIJI REOPENS

Passengers are welcomed at the Nadi International Airport in Fiji's third largest city on December 1

TROPICAL

Getaway

Traditional dancers in grass skirts welcomed waving holidaymakers as Fiji opened its borders to international travellers on Wednesday for the first time since the COVID-19 pandemic swept the globe and devastated its tourism-reliant economy.

Fiji Airways flight FJ914 arrived at Nadi airport from Sydney at 11.40am (2340 Tuesday GMT), ending 615 days of international isolation for the Pacific island nation. As the plane taxied down the runway, two fire engines lined up and aimed their hoses in the air to honour it with a water salute.

Inside the terminal, face coverings obscured the beaming smiles of tourism operators but cries of 'bula' (hello) and indigenous songs of celebration reverberated around the building.

Fiji Airways chief executive Andre Viljoen said it was a momentous occasion after a tough 20 months for the tropical destination, where tourism accounts for about 40 per cent of the economy.

"The international border reopening will reignite Fiji's economy," he told reporters. Viljoen said strict health measures were in place to contain COVID-19 and the recent emergence of the Omicron variant had not deterred passengers. "Flights are coming in

at full capacity," he said.

Fiji has tightened restrictions on arrivals from southern Africa but made no changes to rules surrounding travel partner countries, whose citizens can now experience a tropical getaway in the Pacific idyll.

They include Japan, New Zealand, the United States and France, as well as countries where Omicron has been detected such as Australia, Canada and Britain.

Tourism Fiji chief executive Brent Hill said resorts on the two main islands of Viti Levu and Vanua Levu were gearing up for an influx of foreign travellers.

"We've noted around 75,000 bookings for the next couple of months, which is out-



standing," he said. "We know our job has just started and we look forward to seeing more tourists coming in 2022."

Foreign visitors need to be fully vaccinated and test negative for COVID-19 prior to departure, as well as providing a 14-day travel history to ensure they have not visited virus hotspots.

Once in Fiji, they must stay in designated

zones where all contacts, from hospitality staff to tour operators, will be double jabbed.

Fiji managed to eliminate COVID-19 for 12 months before a devastating second wave of the Delta variant earlier this year caused almost 700 deaths in the nation of one million. In the past week, it has reported one death and a few dozen infections.

AFP

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HIMAM TRAIL RUN RACE

Muscat - This Friday, more than 420 trail runners will take their place on the start line at Birkat al

Mouz for an endurance test as the second Himam Trail Run Race gets underway. Runners from 35 countries have regis-

tered for the event, including over 40 female participants, far surpasses the previous inaugural edition.

The expanded field of runners will all begin at 6.15am, with the first athletes taking part in the 20km race due to finish after four hours. Runners completing the 35km course have eight hours to finish and those taking part in the 70km race must finish within 18 hours.

Local favourites Hamdan al Khatri, Sami al Saidi, Saleh al Saidi, Adil al Subaihi and Abdel-Nasser al Riyami, will join notable international ultra-trail marathon runners including eight-time winner of the Marathon des

Forty women to take part among over 420 runners

Sables, Rachid El Murabity of Morocco, and three-time Oman Desert Marathon medallist Evgenii Glyva from the Ukraine on the 70km course.

Each race has been meticulously-designed to include tradi-

tional walkways and a variety of terrains to challenge even the most experienced of runners.

All three courses feature steep climbs from 350m to 2210m through the village of Al Muaydin and nearby date plantations before turning for home and concluding with a gentle descent to the finishing line.

The 70km race this year is recognised by the International Trail Running Association (ITRA) and carries three points for each finisher which helps towards ranking positions and entry into

the world's toughest ultra-trail marathon races.

The Himam Trail Run Race is organised by Himam Adventure, under the umbrella of Al Sahwa Team, Nizwa Club, and supported by the Ministry of Tourism, Ministry of Culture, Sport and Youth, and the Oman Chamber of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion, and the Authority for SME Development (Riyada) in Dakhliyah.

For updates on the race, please follow @himam_adventure on Instagram.



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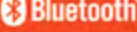
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**WE ARE STRONG
WE ARE OMANIS**







Sri Lanka's Ramesh Mendis (left) celebrates a wicket (AFP)

Sri Lanka claw back as Mendis sparks West Indies collapse

Galle, Sri Lanka - Ramesh Mendis led the Sri Lanka fight-back at Galle with a six-wicket haul to bowl out the West Indies, but the hosts stumbled after returning to bat in the second Test on Wednesday.

Sri Lanka were 46-2 at stumps on day three, trailing by just three runs. But they lost captain Dimuth Karunaratne, who made six before he was run out in a superb piece of fielding by Kyle Mayers.

Karunaratne was man of the match in the first Test with scores of 147 and 83 but paid the

price for attempting a quick early single as Mayers ran in and found him well short of the crease. Oshada Fernando too was run out.

Earlier, off-spinner Mendis belatedly found his line and length, dismissing Nkrumah Bonner to end his 75-run stand with West Indies captain Kraigg Brathwaite.

It broke a two-session drought for Mendis, who then ran through the tourists' middle order, ending with figures of 6-70 as the West Indies were all out for 253 -- a lead of 49.

AFP

**WE ARE STRONG
WE ARE OMANIS**







Norwich City's Scottish midfielder Kenny McLean (21) vies in the air with Newcastle United's Brazilian striker Joelinton (AFP)

Norwich deny 10-man Newcastle 1st win in Premier League season

Newcastle, United Kingdom - Teemu Pukki denied 10-man Newcastle a first win all season as Norwich earned a 1-1 draw at St James' Park on Tuesday, but wasted a huge chance to deepen the Magpies' relegation fears.

Newcastle were a man short for more than 80 minutes after Ciaran Clark saw red for pulling down Pukki.

However, Norwich were largely wasteful in trying to make that advantage count and fell behind to Callum Wilson's penalty on the hour mark.

Pukki smashed home on the volley to equalise 11 minutes from time and Norwich should have claimed a massive three points in stoppage time when

Martin Dubravka saved from Pierre Lees-Melou.

A point does little for either side's hopes of beating the drop as Leeds' 1-0 win over Crystal Palace moved them five points clear of the bottom three.

Newcastle are six points off safety in their bid to minimise the damage before they can turn to the Saudi sovereign wealth fund to strengthen in the January transfer window.

Howe was on the sideline as Newcastle boss at St James' Park for the first time, having missed the 3-3 draw with Brentford 10 days ago after testing positive for coronavirus.

The former Bournemouth boss could not have asked for a

worse start to a crucial clash between the bottom two before kick-off when Clark inexplicably hauled down Pukki as he threatened to burst clear on goal.

"I felt the players showed real resilience, which we're going to need for the upcoming matches," said Howe.

"If we can do that 11 against 11, we're definitely going to win some matches."

No side has conceded more goals in the Premier League than Newcastle this season, but Norwich are also the lowest scorers and their lack of quality in the final third was obvious as they laboured to create chances despite dominating possession.

Newcastle looked to have

snatched a first win under Saudi ownership when Billy Gilmour was penalised for handball inside his own box after a VAR review.

Tim Krul nearly denied his former club as he got a hand to Wilson's spot-kick, but saw the ball rebound in off the underside of the bar.

Norwich finally produced a moment of quality to ensure they remain just three points off safety.

Dimitris Giannoulis helped the ball back into the box after Dubravka flapped at a cross and Pukki smashed home a volley into the top corner.

Norwich then piled on the pressure in the closing stages, but failed to find the winner as

Dubravka made amends for his part in the equaliser with a crucial late save.

Leeds gave themselves some breathing space from the bottom three by edging out Palace in stoppage time thanks to Raphinha's penalty.

Palace wasted the biggest chance of the game from open play when Christian Benteke headed Wilfried Zaha's pinpoint cross wide.

Leeds got the break their season needed deep into added time when Marc Guehi handled from Liam Cooper's header and Raphinha coolly slotted home the resulting spot-kick to move Marcelo Bielsa's men up to 15th. AFP

Ronaldo hits back at claim he wants to beat Messi's Ballon d'Or haul



Cristiano Ronaldo

London, United Kingdom - Manchester United star Cristiano Ronaldo has hit back at a "disrespectful" claim that his only remaining ambition is to win the Ballon d'Or more times than Lionel Messi.

Paris Saint-Germain forward Messi won the prestigious award for a seventh time on Monday.

Ronaldo, who finished sixth in this year's voting, has earned the Ballon d'Or five times.

The Ballon d'Or, given to the best male and female footballers of the year, is voted on by 180 journalists and presented by France Football.

Pascal Ferre, the editor in chief of France Football, was quoted in the New York Times recently saying Ronaldo told him his primary motivation was to retire having won the accolade more often than his old rival Messi.

Ronaldo, 36, took to Instagram to deny that suggestion.

"Today's outcome explains Pascal Ferre's statements last week, when he said that I con-

fided in him that my only ambition was to finish my career with more Ballon d'Ors than Lionel Messi," Ronaldo wrote.

"Pascal Ferre lied, he used my name to promote himself and to promote the publication he works for. It is unacceptable that the person responsible for awarding such a prestigious prize could lie in this way, in absolute disrespect for someone who has always respected France Football and the Ballon d'Or.

"The biggest ambition of my career is to win national and international titles for the clubs I represent and for the national team in my country.

"The biggest ambition of my career is to be a good example for all those who are or want to be professional footballers. The biggest ambition of my career is to leave my name written in golden letters in the history of world football."

Ronaldo last won the Ballon d'Or in 2017.

AFP

Gerrard hopes Grealish gets warm welcome on return

London, United Kingdom - Aston Villa manager Steven Gerrard said on Tuesday Jack Grealish has earned the right to a warm reception when he returns to Villa Park for the first time as a Manchester City player this week.

Grealish moved for a Premier League record £100mn (\$133mn) in August after making over 200 appearances for his boyhood club since making his debut aged 18.

The England international has been sidelined in recent weeks, but returned to training on Monday and could feature against his former club. "Jack very much deserves a warm welcome and I have no doubt he'll get that," said Gerrard, who has made a perfect start to his Premier League coaching career with two wins from two games.

"This is his club and it will be when his career is over, because he was here as a little boy and he has come through the academy.

"The club have benefited a lot



Steven Gerrard

from what Jack has given and we very much wish him well moving forward for the remainder of his career. Obviously not for 90 minutes tomorrow," he added before Wednesday's fixture.

Back-to-back wins over Brighton and Crystal Palace have propelled Villa seven points clear of the relegation zone.

However, Gerrard is well aware of the step up in class his side face when the champions come calling. "We're aware that a real good side is coming into town and this will be a big acid test for us."

AFP

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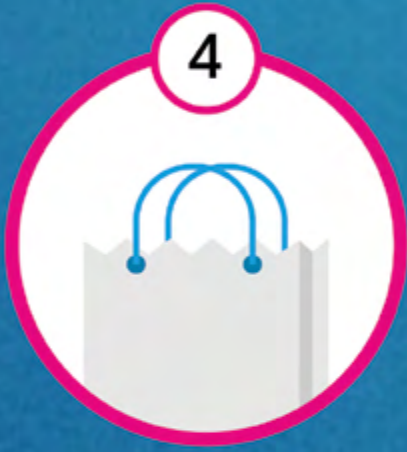
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