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**DJOKOVIC PROGRESSES AT WIMBLEDON**  
**GO TO PAGE 16 SPORTS**

## NEWS BRIEFS

### HM GREETS PRESIDENT OF BURUNDI

Muscat - His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik has sent a cable of greetings to President Evariste Ndayishimiye of the Republic of Burundi on his country's National Day. In the cable, His Majesty expressed his sincere sentiments and best wishes to President Ndayishimiye and the friendly people of Burundi.

### HM GREETS ACTING GOVERNOR GENERAL OF CANADA

Muscat - His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik has sent a cable of greetings to Richard Wagner, acting Governor General of Canada, on his country's National Day. In the cable, His Majesty expressed his sincere sentiments and best wishes of good health and happiness to the acting governor general and further progress and prosperity to the friendly people of Canada.

### HM GREETS PRESIDENT OF RWANDA

Muscat - His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik has sent a cable of greetings to President Paul Kagame of the Republic of Rwanda on his country's National Day. In the cable, His Majesty expressed his sincere greetings and best wishes to President Kagame and his country's friendly people.



**Omanisation up 1.2% in academic sector**



**India approves Moderna vaccine for emergency use**

# 755 LIVES LOST IN JUNE

51,321 COVID-19 cases were reported in June, compared to the earlier monthly high of 39,089 in July 2020

**Our Correspondent**  
Muscat

A spike in COVID-19 infections in the sultanate led to more than 750 deaths in June taking the total number of deaths to 3,100. A total of 755 deaths were reported last month - averaging 25 deaths per day - making it the deadliest month since the outbreak of the pandemic in Oman. The Ministry of Health (MoH) announced 44 deaths and 2,009 new cases on Wednesday, taking the total number of COVID-19 cases to 268,547 of which 234,861 have recovered.

Hospitalisations too are on



The body of a COVID-19 victim arrives for final rites at a graveyard in Muscat (ONA)

the rise with MoH reporting 1,597 inpatients on Wednesday, including 519 in intensive care. The healthcare system is buckling under pressure of the rising number of people needing medical care.

According to Ibrahim al Maimani, data analyst, the death toll in June surpassed the earlier monthly high of 344 - averaging 11.5 deaths per day - witnessed in April this year. A total of 51,321 cases were

registered in June, compared to the previous monthly high of 39,089 in July 2020.

"The number of hospitalisations has gone up by 98 per cent. There were 808 inpatients at the end of May, which when

compared to the latest figure is an increase of 789 cases," Maimani added.

The number of patients in intensive care has also doubled since May when 247 were in ICUs. "This has now gone up by

272 cases, or increased by 110 per cent."

H E Dr Ahmed Mohammed al Sa'eedi, Minister of Health, said last week that the health sector in the sultanate is getting drained due to the current wave of COVID-19, which he observed is "considered the worst since the outbreak of the pandemic".

"Yet, extensive efforts have been undertaken in the health sector, with medical personnel working for 18 months everyday without a break," he said.

"Encouraging people to follow the procedures that protect them from the virus is our Islamic, national and professional duty. Most mortalities due to COVID-19 in April were of people under 60 years who refused to take the vaccine. The Supreme Committee will address the concerns of some of those who refuse to take the vaccine," he added.

"Oxygen equipment production units have a capacity to meet our needs," he said, refuting claims of shortage of ventilation machines. There are 1,144 ventilation apparatuses in the sultanate that cover all needs.

## Investors Residency Programme to boost economy: MoE

**Our Correspondent**  
Muscat

In light of the current economic situation, diversification of economy is not an option but rather an urgent strategic requirement, according to H E Dr Nasser bin Rashid al Maawali, Undersecretary of Ministry of Economy (MoE).

The Investors Residency Programme (IRP) complements the government's efforts to diversify the economy and achieve higher growth rates, he said on Wednesday.

"The programme aims to support integrated efforts to enhance the investment climate, attract FDIs and reflect the proposed policies of the private sector for investment and international cooperation as part of the Tenth Five-Year Development Plan," he said.

IRP is a value addition to a programme to attract foreign investment launched in March 2021 to accelerate the first phase of the executive plan for Oman



H E Dr Nasser al Maawali

Vision 2040.

"IRP is expected to improve the sultanate's position on the index of ease of doing business, specifically in the criteria related to 'investor protection' in a way that supports the objectives of Oman Vision 2040. It will increase the contribution of FDI to the gross domestic product, supporting investment activities and stimulating consumption in the local market. This will surely promote business activities and enhance economic growth," H E Maawali said.

Continued on Page 02

## Cybersecurity: Oman third in Arabia

**Our Correspondent**  
Muscat

Oman is ranked third in the Arab world and 21<sup>st</sup> globally in the latest Global Cybersecurity Index (GCI) released by the International Telecommunication Union (ITU).

The GCI ranks 193 countries in the 2020 edition where Oman has risen from a total score of 86.8 points in the 2018 index to 96.04 points in the current index. Despite the progress, the sultanate has fallen five places in the global ranking compared to the last version, when it was ranked 16<sup>th</sup> overall.

The GCI is a trusted reference that measures the commitment of countries to cybersecurity at a global level - to raise awareness of the importance and different dimensions of the issue. As cybersecurity has a broad field of application, cutting across many industries and various sectors, each country's level of development or engagement is assessed along five pillars - Legal Measures, Technical Measures, Organisational Measures, Capacity Development, and Cooperation - and then aggregated into an overall score.



The index describes the areas of Legal Measures, Organisational Measures and Capacity Development in Oman as relative strengths, while the area of Technical Measures has potential of growth.

In the GCC, Saudi Arabia leads with a 2<sup>nd</sup> world rank, followed by UAE at 5<sup>th</sup> place, Oman 21<sup>st</sup>, Qatar 27<sup>th</sup>, Bahrain 60<sup>th</sup> and Kuwait 65<sup>th</sup>.

The latest GCI shows a growing commitment around the world to tackle and reduce cybersecurity threats.

Countries are working to improve their cyber safety despite

the challenges of COVID-19 and the rapid shift of everyday activities and socio-economic services into the digital sphere, the newly released 2020 index confirms.

According to GCI 2020, around half of the countries globally say they have formed a national computer incident response team, indicating an 11 per cent increase since 2018. Rapid uptake of information and communication technologies (ICTs) during the COVID-19 pandemic has put cybersecurity at the forefront.

"In these challenging times,

the unprecedented reliance on ICTs to drive society, economy and industry, makes it more important than ever before to secure the cyberspace and build confidence among users," said Houlin Zhao, secretary general of ITU.

"Governments and industry need to work together to make ICTs consistently safe and trustworthy for all. GCI is a key element, offering a snapshot of the opportunities and gaps that can be addressed to strengthen every country's digital ecosystem."

Some 64 per cent of countries had adopted a national cybersecurity strategy by year-end, while more than 70 per cent conducted cybersecurity awareness campaigns in 2020, compared to 58 per cent and 66 per cent, respectively, in 2018.

Yet despite notable improvements, gaps in cyber capacity persist. Many countries and regions lag in key areas. These include cybersecurity skills training; finance, healthcare, energy and other key sectors, which require dedicated measures to close cybersecurity gaps; critical infrastructure protection; and individual data protection.

## Oman Air postpones flying to Phuket as sultanate put on high-risk list

**Our Correspondent**  
Muscat

With the ban on travel from Thailand to Oman continuing, besides Bangkok putting the sultanate on its high-risk country list, plans of Oman Air to fly directly to Phuket have been put on hold.

Sources at Oman Air had earlier confirmed to *Muscat Daily* (June 6 - 'Oman Air to fly to Phuket') plans to fly to Phuket from July 1. "Flights are now postponed to a further date," the source said.

An official at the Embassy of Thailand in Muscat confirmed that Oman is not part of the 66 countries approved for the inaugural Phuket Sandbox programme that allows foreign and Thai travellers to enter Phuket without quarantine.

The programme is scheduled to start on July 1 under which vaccinated travellers visiting the island will no longer need to be quarantined.

The official said that Oman has not been included in the approved list because of its low vaccination rate and rising



**Oman has not been included in the approved list because of its low vaccination rate and rising COVID-19 cases**

COVID-19 cases.

"The list will be updated every two months," he said.

According to Tourism Authority of Thailand (TAT), visi-

tors must travel from countries/regions approved by the Centre for COVID-19 Situation Administration, and must have been in the said countries for no less than 21 days before their travel date - except Thai nationals and foreign expatriates returning from overseas.

The Supreme Committee on June 3 announced inclusion of Thailand in its travel ban list, in addition to Malaysia and Vietnam.

The ban came into effect on June 5.

See also Page 10

# Omanisation up 1.2% in academic sector

A 2019 graduate survey showed women's employment rate at 8.8 per cent, men's at 39.5 per cent

**Our Correspondent**  
Muscat

The Omanisation rate among academic staff in the Tenth Five-year Plan increased by 1.2 per cent, according to H E Dr Rahma Ibrahim al Mahrouqi, Minister of Higher Education, Research and Innovation, who was hosted by Majlis A'Shura on Sunday.

Addressing the council, the minister informed that there were 47 institutions of higher education in the sultanate in the academic year 2020-21, including 19 government and 28 private, besides 416 private vocational training institutions.

She informed the Majlis A'Shura about a survey being carried out since 2015 among graduates that shows employment rate of women in the education sector is low compared to men. "A graduate survey for 2019 showed that the women's employment rate in the sector



(Supplied photo)

*In the academic year 2019/20, the number of graduates of higher education institutions was 23,861. Higher education institutions will receive more students in 2021/22*

**H E DR RAHMA IBRAHIM AL MAHROUQI**

was 8.8 per cent and 39.5 per cent for men."

H E Dr Rahma also informed the council that the ministry has approved a set of policies and

procedures to bridge the gap between graduates of higher education institutions and the labour market requirements of different disciplines and skills.

Studies have been conducted to determine the specialisations needed in industry. "Unfortunately the information we receive from the labour market is inaccurate. The ministry has contacted Oman Investment Authority, which includes 170 companies, to determine the specialisations that will be required in the future," she added.

"In the academic year 2019-20, the number of graduates of higher education institutions was

23,861. Higher education institutions will receive more students in 2021/2022 compared to previous years."

In response to a question posed by a Majlis A'Shura member, she observed that there is continued preference of Omani graduates for employment opportunities in the public sector owing to the stability and benefits the sector offers.

"The scientific research and innovation sector faced a num-

ber of challenges, including reduction in budget for such projects and multiplicity of agencies engaged in scientific research and innovation."

On the delay in issuing the Higher Education Law, she said, "The ministry has framed the law and sent it to the competent authorities for review. We have prepared a strategy in record time based on several factors, including the quality of education. We are focused on improving

education and improving quality, and trying to have at least three top ranked private universities."

The ministry has prepared a plan for digital transformation in cooperation with the Ministry of Transport, Communications and Information Technology and Oman Investment Authority.

"We expect that within a year from now, all systems will be electronic and all processing will be done electronically," H E Dr Rahma said.

## Decision issued to form committee to implement technical and vocational education in schools

**Our Correspondent**  
Muscat

Dr Madiha bint Ahmed bin Nasser al Shibaniyah, Minister of Education, has issued a ministerial decision to form a committee to implement a technical and vocational education programme in post-basic education.

The decision follows directives of His Majesty Sultan



H E Dr Madiha al Shibaniyah

Haitham bin Tarik to analyse the needs and requirements necessary to implement vocational and technical education in post-basic education, identify the necessary expertise and human resources, and develop an action plan for the programme in line with the requirements of the labour market and its future needs.

The decision mandates the

committee to undertake the general supervision of the technical and vocational education project in post-basic education, and identify the requirements to implement the project in line labour market demands and future needs.

The decision aims to find educational curricula that comply with the principles of Islam and Omani identity.

## Pandemic fallout: S Africa closes mission in Oman

Muscat - The South African Embassy in Muscat has announced its closure from June 30.

Speaking to *Muscat Daily*, Tania Canelas, charg   d'affaires, said, "The South African Embassy in Muscat and South African authorities deeply regret the closure of its mission in Oman.

"The only factor driving us to close our embassy in Oman is the exasperating financial constraints as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, which is still ongoing.

"The financial situation necessitated that South Africa reduce its diplomatic footprint and reduce residential embassies."

Twelve missions are being closed around the world.

According to Tania, South Africa intends to continue strengthening diplomatic, political and economic ties with Oman through its embassy in Riyadh.

All consular, civil and visa services will be administered through the South African Embassy in Riyadh and the South African government presence in Oman will be managed through a non-residential format.



"The South African government lays great importance to its relationship with the government and people of Oman, and we intend to continue fostering the relationship that has existed between us since the two countries opened diplomatic missions in respective countries," Tania said.

The Oman-South Africa Friendship Association (OSFA) will continue to work under the umbrella of the embassy

in Riyadh.

The non-resident ambassador will approach Omani authorities at the relevant time and present his credentials for which the process is currently underway.

Diplomatic relations between the two countries were established in October 1995, and South Africa opened its embassy in Muscat in 2002, while the sultanate opened its embassy in Pretoria in 2003.

Text and photo by Syed Fasiuddin

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## Royal Hospital bans visitors

**Our Correspondent**  
Muscat

The Royal Hospital has announced that it has banned visitors from June 30 with the exception of parents accompanying their children due to the increasing number of COVID-19 cases in Oman.

A statement issued by The Royal Hospital said, "Due to the noticeable increase in the number of people infected with COVID-19 disease across Oman, we regret to inform you that visits to all inpatients in The Royal Hospital have been prohibited."

## Investors Residency Programme to boost economy

Continued from Page 01

He added that IRP seeks to support collaborative efforts towards enhancing Oman's investment climate and push for a radical shift in attracting quality investments that contribute to creating more job opportunities and setting up more economically feasible projects.

"The programme reflects the objectives of developing the macro-

economic environment and achieving financial sustainability in the Tenth Five-Year Plan by creating the necessary environment to stimulate investment and attract foreign investments."

IRP is expected to develop a framework for competitive business environment and establish a unique economic identity that promotes best practices. "It also integrates the investor in general

into local market activities and makes them more sensitive to political, economic and social changes. This will help in developing best investment practices that serve the local market, on one hand, and achieve sustainability goals on the other."

The sectors identified for IRP have been prioritised depending on economic diversification in the Tenth Five-Year Plan.

"It will help in addressing the challenges faced in coordinating national efforts on stimulating investments and strengthening investor protection mechanisms. The programme supports the Tenth Five-Year Plan's target of increasing average contribution of investments to 27 per cent of the GDP during the plan years and to 10.9 per cent in the oil and non-oil sectors by the end of the plan."

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# OPAZ signs pact to use 3D printing in construction

Muscat - The Public Authority for Special Economic Zones and Free Zones (OPAZ) has signed a cooperation programme with Innovative Technology Company for Educational Solutions (Innotech) to use 3D printing techniques in construction.

Signing of the agreement comes in line with the decision of OPAZ Board of Directors, approving the use of modern building practices, including 3D printing techniques in the Special Economic Zone at Duqm (SEZAD) and the other free zones. Additionally, it reflects OPAZ's support for to Omani companies specialised in this field, a statement said.

The pact was signed by H E Dr Ali Masoud al Sunaidy, Chairman of OPAZ, and Eng Othman Maktoum al Mandhari, CEO of Innotech, which specialises in 3D printing services and produces parts for oil and gas companies, industries, and research and development.

The cooperation programme stipulates that the company share with OPAZ expertise and insights in construction with 3D printing techniques, which would provide a suitable and attractive environment for these projects in the SEZAD.

The programme allows OPAZ to establish projects using 3D printing techniques in SEZAD for the company as part of its efforts to support research and development while localising modern construction techniques in the zones, supervised by OPAZ, especially SEZAD.

Accordingly, Innotech will comply with all HSE standards in



(Supplied photos)



the projects assigned to the company by OPAZ.

Eng Manal Humaid al Abri, senior architect at OPAZ, pointed out that signing of this cooperation programme comes within OPAZ's efforts to support innovation, research and development in using modern technologies and 3D printing in construction.

It also aims to localise these techniques in the special economic zones and free zones in particular and the local market in general, said Eng Manal, who

added that bringing such techniques mirrors OPAZ's objective to accelerate the pace of construction in SEZAD as a first phase and other zones later on.

She said, "OPAZ welcomes any initiatives from private sector companies related to construction with 3D printing technology. The Board of Directors approved in its meeting last week to provide packages of facilities and incentives to companies that use 3D printing in construction, including exemption from rental fees for up to five

years."

She pointed out that presenting these technologies to SEZAD will contribute to building tourist and entertainment properties in the first phase of testing this new technology in different locations.

"The newly introduced modern building techniques involve artificial intelligence technology to construct buildings and establish engineering projects. These techniques include various aspects such as robots as 3D printers for buildings or other construction, drones and other reality simulation applications.

"Such techniques aim as a whole to simplify the construction process, starting from the design phase to construction, until operating and managing buildings, facilities or infrastructure networks. Most importantly, these techniques contribute to minimising the construction duration, reducing the total cost of projects and offering environment-friendly buildings," Eng Manal explained.

# Al Mussanah Resort to be operated by Barceló

Our Correspondent  
Muscat

Al Mussanah Resort, which was operated by Millennium Hotels and Resorts, will now be run by Spanish hotel chain Barceló Hotel Group.

"We are pleased to appoint Barceló Hotel Group to operate Al Mussanah Resort from July 1, 2021. The appointment aligns with the group's plan to enhance tourism experiences and activities in the resort, while bringing new operational and management concepts to the facilities," Omran Group, the owner of the property stated on Wednesday.

It added that the group is aiming to re-position the unique beach resort, which was established ten years ago, in line with its wider strategic goals to position it as a 'locally, regionally and internationally attractive holiday destination with a wide variety of activities and experiences'.

Hashil bin Obaid al Mahrouqi, CEO of Omran Group, said, "We are pleased to cooperate with Barceló Hotel Group. This step comes in line with the directions of the National Tourism Strategy 2040 towards strengthening the sultanate's position in the travel and tourism markets and increasing its competitiveness as a destination of choice for visitors from around the world."

"We look forward to strengthening the tourism sector by working with Barceló Hotels to capitalise on their experience in the leisure tourism markets and the strength of their distribution channels in overseas markets," Mahrouqi added.

Speaking on the newly found alliance, Raúl González, CEO



(Supplied photo)

*This step comes in line with the directions of the National Tourism Strategy 2040 towards strengthening Oman's position in the market*

HASHIL AL MAHROUQI

EMEA of Barceló Hotel Group, said, "Oman has always been a prospective source market with immense growth potential for us. We are pleased to be partnering with Omran on this endeavour. This collaboration will provide us with the perfect opportunity to introduce our 90-year international hospitality expertise to the source market and establish our footprint in Oman."

José Canals, managing director for the Middle East and Asia at Barceló Hotel Group, said,

"Oman has been a focus area to expand Barceló Group's presence in the region and the country is a very popular tourism destination for our European markets. We are pleased to bring our expertise to support the country's ambitious goals. The association with Omran has provided us with the opportunity to be able to service the Oman tourism sector and expand its reach within international markets. We are delighted to be introducing for the first time in Oman our Barceló brand, and our unique blend of hospitality."

Barceló Hotel Group is the hotel division of the Barceló Group, which is the 29th largest hotel chain in the world. It currently operates more than 260 leisure and city hotels with 4 and 5 stars, and over 60,000 rooms in 22 countries worldwide, all marketed under four brands: Royal Hideaway Luxury Hotels & Resorts, Barceló Hotels & Resorts, Occidental Hotels & Resorts and Allegro Hotels.



## Sri Lanka makes U-turn on travel ban

Our Correspondent  
Muscat

Taking a U-turn, Sri Lanka on Wednesday lifted the passenger arrival restrictions imposed on Middle Eastern countries.

The news follows immediately after concerns were raised with the earlier decision that anyone with a travel history within the past 14 days to Qatar, Oman, Bahrain, United Arab Emirates, Saudi Arabia and Kuwait would be denied entry to the island nation with effect from July 1.

"In accordance with instructions received from the Ministry of Health and the National Operations Centre for Prevention of COVID-19 Outbreak, the passenger restriction on the following six countries - Qatar, Oman, Bahrain, United Arab Emirates, Saudi Arabia and Kuwait - is revoked with immediate effect," the Civil Aviation Authority of Sri Lanka (CAASL) said.

H E Omar Lebbe Ameera-jwad, Ambassador of Sri Lanka to Oman, confirming the latest development, said, "Sri Lankan authorities for the prevention of COVID-19 outbreak have removed the travel restrictions for the arrival of passengers from the Middle Eastern countries including the Sultanate of Oman."

The way Sri Lankan authori-

ties change their decisions has caused confusion among Sri Lanka-bound passengers in Oman.

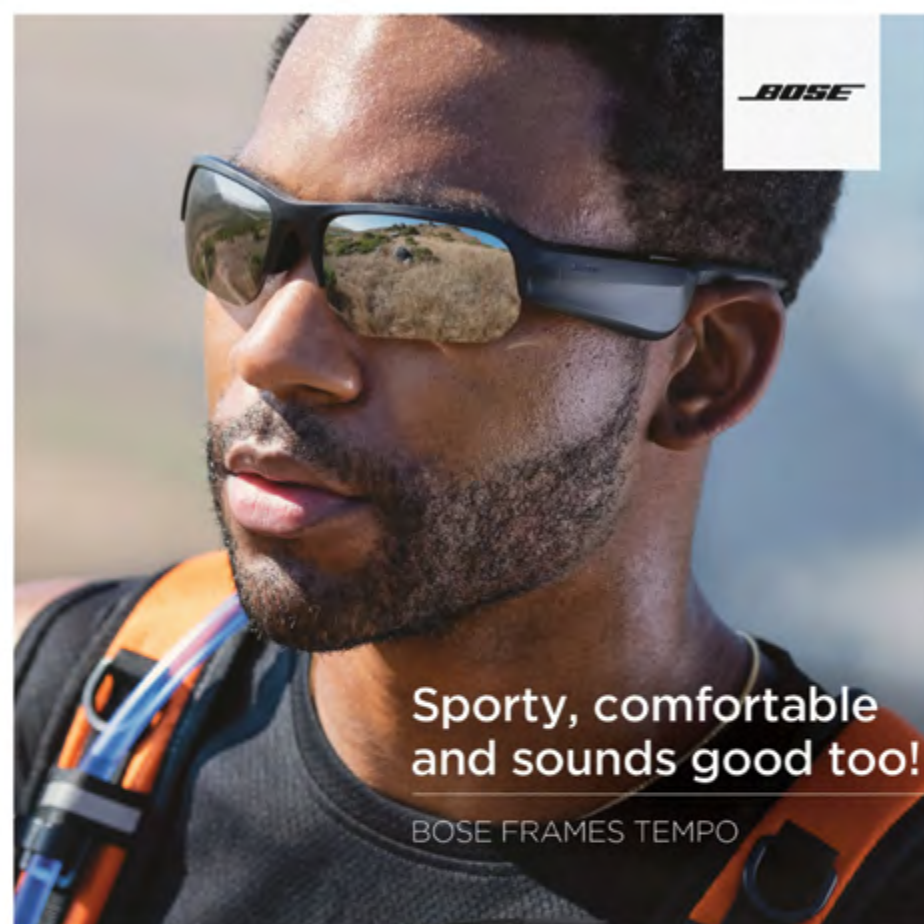
A businessman, who did not wish to be named, said, "The Sri Lankan authorities are making a mockery of the situation and the plight of the common man. Just for these whimsical decisions, two of my colleagues, among many others, cancelled their tickets as they thought they wouldn't be able to travel on July 8. Now, who will bear the losses? Add to that all the hassle they had to undergo, wasting their precious time."

'All arriving passengers must have a negative PCR test obtained within 96 hours prior to departure. The airline has to ensure this before boarding passengers. Antigen tests cannot be accepted as a pre-departure test for boarding while a PCR test must be presented from a government approved hospital/laboratory in the respective country with a QR Code/Bar Code,' CAASL said.

'Airlines must satisfy themselves of the authenticity of the test reports presented by the passengers and passengers are permitted to arrive only for hotel quarantine or through the Sri Lanka Tourism Bio Bubble Route. The above conditions will apply until further notice,' it added.

## PRAYER TIMINGS

|         |        |      |         |         |        |
|---------|--------|------|---------|---------|--------|
| Fajr    | 3.53am | Duhr | 12.10pm | Maghrib | 6.57pm |
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(Supplied photo)

## Project to engage 20 women camel-milk producers in Dhofar

Our Correspondent  
Muscat

The Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Water Resources (MAFWR) signed an agreement on Wednesday with Al Jisr Foundation to engage 20 women in Dhofar governorate for cheese production.

The deal was signed by H E Dr Saud Hamoud al Habsi, Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Water Resources, and Dina al Khalili, head of Al Jisr Foundation. The project targets 20

women camel-milk producers who will make high-quality camel-milk cheese.

The project's objectives are to support Omani camel breeders and shepherds, women and job-seekers in rural communities in Dhofar, and develop a processing unit for sustainable production of camel-milk derivatives.

The project will provide equipment and training courses to women to enhance their knowledge, develop managerial and technical skills, enhance productivity in a sustainable way.

## Temporary road opened for Bidbid road expansion work

Our Correspondent  
Muscat

The Ministry of Transport, Communications and Information Technology (MoTCIT) will open a temporary road diversion near Al Sayyh al Ahmer area in the wilayat of Bidbid in cooperation with the Royal Oman Police, a ministry statement said.

'In light of the current efforts to implement Bidbid-Rusayl

Road Expansion project, the ministry would like to bring to your attention that starting Thursday morning, July 1, a temporary road diversion will be opened near Al Sayyh al Ahmer area in the wilayat of Bidbid in cooperation with the Royal Oman Police,' a ministry statement said.

'This arrangement will continue until the completion of the additional third and fourth lanes' of the road, it added.

# 12 divers remove 3 tonnes of marine waste in Daymaniyat

Our Correspondent  
Muscat

As part of its efforts to protect the marine environment, the Environment Authority (EA) held a campaign to clean up Daymaniyat Islands.

Speaking to *Muscat Daily*, Mohammed Juma al Ruzaiqi, head of the Coastal Zones Department at the EA, said the two-day campaign started on June 29.

"Twelve divers from the authority participated in the campaign," Ruzaiqi said, adding that the authority removed waste and fishing nets stuck in the coral reefs in Daymaniyat Islands Nature Reserve.

"More than three tonnes of fishing nets and other waste were removed. The campaigns' objective was to rid the sea of pollutants and to preserve it from contamination, which will ultimately help fishermen."

The EA regularly carries out such campaigns and spreads awareness on the importance of preserving the marine environment in the community.

"The dive also aimed at protecting the marine environment and monitor the state of coral reefs in the Daymaniyat Islands Nature Reserve," Ruzaiqi said.

"Specialists are enthused to continue with their efforts to clean Oman's seas, besides sensitising fishermen about the need for keeping the sea clean."



(Supplied photos)

*The authority will continue to launch campaigns in all the coasts of Oman to clean the marine environment off any waste. We urge fishermen not to throw any waste into the seas.*

MUHAMMAD JUMA AL RUZAIQI

Of future, he said, "The authority will continue to launch campaigns in all the coasts of Oman to clean the marine environment off any waste. We urge

fishermen not to throw any waste such as plastic or fishing nets into the seas. We urge visitors also to pay attention to cleanliness of the sea and that of

the beaches."

The Daymaniyat Islands Nature Reserve is located in the wilayat of Barka in South Batinah governorate, about 18km off the

coast of Barka and 70km west of Muscat. Spread over 100 hectares on nine islands, the reserve has a rich natural heritage and several kinds of coral reefs.

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MUSCAT DAILY

## Admissions open in Middle East College for the Fall

Muscat - Middle East College (MEC) announced the opening of admissions for the Fall 2021 semester to its academic programmes in Engineering, Science, Technology, Management and Business, Logistics Management, and Archives and Records Management.

The admission process can be completed fully online for the Fall semester beginning in October this year.

The college is accredited by the Oman Authority for Academic Accreditation and Quality Assurance for Education and has achieved high accreditation ratings in Teaching Quality and Research Performance, the MEC said.

The college offers undergraduate and postgraduate programmes in academic partnership with Coventry University in the United Kingdom and Breda University of

Applied Sciences in the Netherlands.

'The college is well known for its vibrant campus life, offering over 350 extracurricular and co-curricular programmes throughout the year,' it said.

The college organises research conferences, symposiums and many other academic events to support student learning and offers students the best support services to enhance their educational journey, the MEC said, adding that 'the faculty members and students are encouraged to use a wide range of innovative and technology-supported teaching and learning practices'.

The college has been keen to provide students with an enriching and exciting learning environment during the COVID-19 pandemic through its e-learning mode.

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MARKET WATCH

|            |           |
|------------|-----------|
| MSX30      | 4,063.40  |
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FOREX RATES

(RO1 equals)

|                  |        |
|------------------|--------|
| Indian Rs        | 193.33 |
| Pakistani Rs     | 411.56 |
| Bangladeshi Taka | 220.60 |
| Philippine Peso  | 127.08 |
| Sri Lankan Rs    | 519.02 |

\*Rates as on June 30

Source: xe.com

BRIEFS

IMF approves \$2.5bn loan for Sudan

The IMF on Tuesday approved a US\$2.5bn loan for Sudan, and with the World Bank sealed a landmark deal that unlocks nearly US\$50bn in debt relief for the impoverished African nation.

The announcement came after the International Monetary Fund finalized an agreement with 101 donor countries allowing Sudan to clear roughly US\$1.4bn in arrears to the Washington-based lender – the key hurdle to allow access to fresh aid.

“We congratulate the Sudanese government and people for their commendable hard work and progress toward this remarkable milestone,” IMF chief Kristalina Georgieva and World Bank President David Malpass said in a joint statement.

Sudan will receive US\$1.4bn immediately under the 39-month IMF loan program.

# BP boosts production at Block 61



**Our Correspondent**  
Muscat

British Petroleum (BP), in partnership with OQ, PTTEP, Petronas and the Ministry of Energy and Minerals, has announced that it has significantly increased production from the Block 61 gas field in Oman.

According to an Oman News Agency report, total gas production from Block 61 has been increased to 1.5bn cubic feet per day, from its current level of around 1bn cubic feet per day.

The production of associated condensate from the field is also expected to rise. The increase in

production will generate value for the sultanate’s government and Block 61 partners.

The BP-operated Block 61 was developed in two stages – Khazzan gas field, that began production in 2017, and Ghazeer, that started up in 2020. Block 61 is a high-quality, highly efficient gas field development, designed from the outset to incorporate a number of lower emissions technologies. Yousuf Mohammed al Ojaili, president of BP Oman said, “BP is building a balanced portfolio that will continue to generate both cash and value as we transform from an international oil company to an integrated energy

*Total gas production from Block 61 has been increased to 1.5bn cubic feet per day from its current level of around 1bn cubic feet per day*

company. A core part of this strategy is our resilient and focused hydrocarbons business, of which Block 61 is an excellent example, offering stable and long-term returns.”

He said BP Oman is committed to supporting the sustainable development of Oman’s economy. “We are proud of our strategic partnership with the sultanate. The gas from Block 61



is a key part of the integrated energy value chain and will play a core role in Oman’s future development. We appreciate the collaborative support we have received from the Omani government and our partners in delivering this increase in production.” BP is the operator of Block 61 and holds a 40 per cent interest. OQ holds a 30 per cent interest, PTTEP holds 20 per

cent and PC Oman Ventures Limited, a wholly owned subsidiary of Petronas, holds 10 per cent. With an estimated 10.5tn cubic feet of recoverable gas resources, Block 61 supplies over 30 per cent of Oman’s total gas demand. The produced gas from Block 61 is distributed for domestic consumption – industrial and power – through Oman’s national gas grid and is used as fuel for power plants and feedstock to industries and to Oman LNG.

BP has prioritised the in-country value (ICV) throughout its operations in Oman. During the development of Block 61, the company has worked closely

with local vendors to develop their capabilities and help them be competitive both in Oman and globally.

The company’s ICV strategy resulted in a number of contracts and technical scopes moving from international contractors to local Omani contractors. Updated industry-leading policies and procedures on workers’ welfare and human rights have also been embedded throughout the development of Block 61.

At the end of 2020, Omanisation in BP Oman reached around 85 per cent and Block 61 spend with Omani-registered companies exceeded US\$610mn.

## First export shipment of OQ LPG plant departs from Port of Salalah

Salalah – OQ has completed its first export shipment of LPG products on *Mt Searambler* to the international markets within the Indian sub-continent.

The freight ship, which has been commercially commissioned, will be carrying 5,000MT of propane and 5,000MT of butane from Port of Salalah.

Eng Ihsan al Jandal, vice-president – Salalah operations at OQ Downstream, said, “We are proud to announce this strategic achievement as one of the main growth projects in OQ which will reiterate the position of Oman as an energy exporter.

This will enable the sultanate to further optimize its gas value-chain by recovering propane, butane and condensate for international markets.

This comes in addition to other operational successes in line with best global practices in the petrochemicals industry.”

OQ’s LPG plant in Salalah is



the first of its kind to extract LPG and condensate from OQ’s gas network.

The plant currently produces propane and butane as well as condensate, which is a commercially valuable and economically competitive fuel with growing demand in domestic and the international markets.

Speaking on the occasion,

Mark Hardiman, CEO of Port of Salalah, said, “We are happy to see the strong collaboration between the Port of Salalah team and the OQ team. I am confident that together we can deliver world-class service and retain our position as one of the top players in the global marketplace.”

The OQ LPG facility in Salalah

consists of an extraction plant, a fractionation facility, storage tanks, shipping facilities, and an interconnection pipeline system.

Built with a total investment of US\$826mn, OQ LPG plant is the first of its kind gas treatment project in Oman to extract LPG and condensate from OQ’s gas network.

ONA

## CBO board reviews KYC project

Muscat – The board of governors of the Central Bank of Oman (CBO) on Wednesday held its second meeting of the year 2021.

During the virtual meeting, the board stressed the importance of banking and financial sector’s continuous and swift response by applying CBO’s directives on reliefs, relaxations and stimulus packages to minimize repercussions of the COVID-19 pandemic on the national economy.

The CBO board proceeded by taking stock of the meeting agenda and reviewed the progress of the ‘Know Your Customer (KYC)’ project, an e-platform that enables the relevant licensed financial institutions to verify and identify clients online.

The Know Your Customer project will enhance efforts towards digital transformation and financial inclusion in the sultanate.

The board of governors also reviewed CBO’s financial position as of the end of April 2021.

They also reviewed an execu-



tive summary of the accomplishments made in the project to enhance the efficiency of CBO’s monetary policy, mainly the progress made in the project of enhancing the automated economic model to build forecasts of trends of various economic indicators of the sultanate.

This will provide reliable future forecasts of macroeconomic developments in the country reaching up to at least five years.

The board examined a report

on the recent developments regarding the various interest rates in the banking sector and the performance of the CBO’s foreign currency investments.

Other topics discussed by the CBO board included key projects and activities for this year, along with the quarterly report of Oman Credit and Financial Information Centre (Mala’a) and a slew of topics listed in the agenda.

ONA

# COVID-19 impact on global tourism could top \$4tn: UN

Paris, France – The economic impact from the plunge in tourism since the pandemic emerged last year could top US\$4tn, a UN report said Wednesday.

The joint report by the UN’s World Tourism Organization (UNWTO) and Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD) found that the lack of widespread vaccination in developing countries was leading to mounting economic losses.

“Tourism is a lifeline for millions, and advancing vaccination to protect communities and support tourism’s safe restart is critical to the recovery of jobs and generation of much-needed resources,” UNWTO secretary-general Zurab Pololikashvili said in a statement.

He noted that many developing countries are highly depend-



Passengers wearing protective suits wait in the departure terminal of Suvarnabhumi Airport in Bangkok on Wednesday (AFP)

ent on international tourism.

The outbreak of the coronavirus pandemic brought international air travel to a near halt for much of last year as many countries refused to allow non-essential travel.

That punched a US\$2.4tn hole in the tourism and related sectors last year, and the report warns a similar loss may occur this year depending on the distribution of COVID-19 vaccines.

With COVID-19 vaccination rates wildly uneven – with some countries having inoculated less than one per cent of their population while others have topped 60 per cent – will see the economic damage concentrated in those countries with low vaccination rates.

The report found ‘the asymmetric roll-out of vaccines mag-

nifies the economic blow tourism has suffered in developing countries, as they could account for up to 60 per cent of the global GDP losses.’ It noted they already suffered the biggest drops in tourism arrivals last year, estimated at between 60 per cent and 80 per cent.

Although the tourism sector is expected to recover faster in countries with high vaccination rates, like the United States, the UNWTO doesn’t expect international tourism to return to pre-pandemic levels until 2023 at the earliest.

The 63-75 per cent drop in international tourism this year from 2019 levels forecast by UNCTAD is expected to cause between US\$1.7tn and US\$2.4tn in lost economic activity.

AFP

# MSX inches up in thin trading

**Our Correspondent**  
Muscat

The benchmark index of the Muscat Stock Exchange (MSX) on Wednesday marginally increased by 0.13 per cent to close at 4,063.40 points. Trading activity remained weak during the session.

The gains in main index were supported by Industrial Index and Services Index which rose 0.72 per cent and 0.44 per cent, respectively. Financial Index, however, closed 0.11 per cent lower on Wednesday. MSX Sharia Index increased 0.59 per cent to close at 596.69 points.

Trading activity decreased on Wednesday as volumes dropped 52 per cent at 19.49mn shares compared with 40.68mn shares traded on Tuesday. Market turnover fell 43 per cent to RO2.79mn compared with RO4.90mn in the previous trading session.

Market breadth at the MSX remained positive with 21 advancing stocks to 15

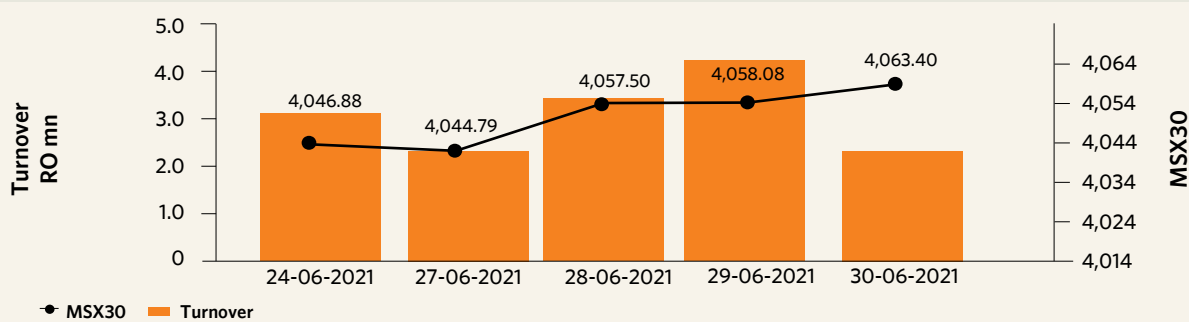


decliners. As many as 17 traded stocks remained flat for the day.

Top gainers were National Finance (4.46 per cent), Sohar Power (4.44 per cent), Dhofar Insurance (3.43 per cent), Sharqiyah Desalination (3.42 per cent) and Arabia Falcon Insurance (3.23 per

cent). Top losers of the day were Muscat Finance (-3.08 per cent), Galfar Engineering and Contracting (-2.35 per cent), Ahlibank (-1.79 per cent), Al Anwar Investment (-1.75 per cent) and United Finance (-1.59 per cent).

## MSX INDEX AND TURNOVER OF FIVE TRADING DAYS



# Elon Musk to invest up to \$30bn for Starlink internet

**Barcelona, Spain** - Billionaire entrepreneur Elon Musk said Tuesday he plans to invest up to US\$30bn to develop his ambitious Starlink satellite internet service.

Starlink plans to deploy thousands of low-orbit satellites to provide high-speed internet to isolated and poorly connected areas.

It has so far deployed over 1,500 satellites and by August it will be able to provide coverage everywhere in the world except the North and South Poles, Musk told the Mobile World Congress, a telecoms industry conference underway in Barcelona, by video.

The Tesla chief said he expects to invest "at least five billion dollars, and maybe as much as ten billion" in Starlink before the service has a positive cash flow. "Then over time it is going to be a multiple of that, and that would be 20 or 30 billion dollars. It is a lot basically," he added.

Starlink is currently operating in about a dozen countries, with more being added, and it currently has just over 69,000 active users, Musk said.

"We are on our way I think to having a few hundred thousand users, possibly over 500,000 users, within 12 months," he added.

"There is a need for connectivity in places that don't have it right now, or where it is very limited."



Elon Musk gives a keynote speech by video conference at the Mobile World Congress in Barcelona on Tuesday (AFP)

Musk said Starlink sells its terminals for US\$500 even though they cost the company over US\$1,000 to make, so his team is working to develop a model that is less expensive. He hopes to come up with a terminal that costs the company just US\$220 to US\$250. "Obviously selling terminals at half price is not super compelling," he said.

Musk said Starlink had two partnerships with "major company telcos" and was "in discussions with a number" of others, without giving further details.

He said Starlink could help telecom firms meet rural connectivity requirements contained in licences for the new super-fast 5G cellular networks which are being deployed around the world.

Musk's SpaceX firm, which operates Starlink, has requested authorisation from US regulator the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) to deploy up to 42,000 satellites to provide the satellite internet service.

Starlink faces competition from a number of rivals including OneWeb, a broadband satellite communications company acquired by a consortium of investors comprising the UK government and Sunil Mittal-led Bharti Global, and Amazon subsidiary Kuiper.

By the end of 2020 some 5.2bn people, or 67 per cent of the global population, subscribed to mobile services, according to the GSMA, industry body which organises the annual mobile congress.

AFP

# Global inflation surge 'temporary': BIS

**Zurich, Switzerland** - The recent worldwide inflation surge is most likely a 'temporary' phenomenon, the Bank for International Settlements (BIS) has said.

The BIS, dubbed the central bank of central banks, has worked up several scenarios to assess the challenges facing banks emerging from the coronavirus crisis.

"As of today, we at the BIS consider that it will most likely be temporary," general manager Agustin Carstens said of the inflation rise during a speech at the institution's annual general meeting.

The acceleration of inflation is linked to one-off effects, he said, including the rebound in commodity prices and tight supplies due to the rapid recovery which "should dissipate reasonably quickly". In May, consumer prices jumped 5 per cent in the United States - their largest increase in nearly 13 years - and 2 per cent in the eurozone: the upper limit of the target set by the European Central Bank, raising concerns among investors.

If the BIS sees it as a temporary phenomenon, the Swiss-



The headquarters of the Bank for International Settlements in Basel, Switzerland

based institution has nonetheless considered two other scenarios in order to assess the challenges that central banks will face in recovering from the COVID-19 pandemic.

While its base scenario is based on the idea of a relatively

smooth economic recovery, the second scenario envisages a more marked acceleration than expected, under the effect of stimulus plans and a strong rebound in consumption.

Central banks would then risk having to tighten their monetary

policies earlier than expected.

Thanks to vast interventions, coupled with broad government plans to support the economy, "disaster was averted, and the global economy bounced back more quickly than expected", Carstens said.

However, the crisis is not over, as the recovery is "highly uneven and incomplete, and the global outlook is uncertain".

The major long-term challenge for central banks will be to restore their leeway so that they can once again help the economy in future in the event of a recession or another unforeseen crisis.

Economists and policymakers have been at pains to stress that recent inflation surges in Europe and the United States are likely to be transitory, driven mainly by one-off effects linked to post-lockdown reopenings and supply chain bottlenecks.

Established in Basel in 1930, the BIS is owned by 62 central banks, representing countries that account for about 95 per cent of global gross domestic product (GDP).

AFP

# US consumer confidence hits highest point since pandemic: Survey

**Washington, US** - US consumers are growing more upbeat about the economy and job prospects, with confidence rebounding to the highest point since the start of the pandemic, according to a survey released on Tuesday.

And even as they become more wary about rising prices, that has not dampened enthusiasm, according to The Conference Board's monthly report showing the consumer confidence index jumped to 127.3 in June - the highest since February 2020 before COVID-19 shuttered the global economy.

And the index for May was revised up nearly three points to 120.0, the survey showed.

"Consumer confidence increased in June and is currently

at its highest level since the onset of the pandemic's first surge in March 2020," said Lynn Franco, senior director of economic indicators at The Conference Board.

Sentiment improved for current conditions as well as the six-month outlook with Americans "buoyed by expectations that business conditions and their own financial prospects will continue improving in the months ahead," Franco said in a statement.

Oren Klachkin of Oxford Economics credited the progress on containing COVID-19 in the United States.

"Low virus transmission, vaccinations, and expanded reopenings made consumers much

more confident," he said in an analysis. "Consumers are coming out of their shell."

The measures of current business conditions and job prospects jumped several points each.

And though the outlook for inflation also continues to creep higher, that has had little impact on buying plans.

"In fact, the proportion of consumers planning to purchase homes, automobiles, and major appliances all rose - a sign that consumer spending will continue to support economic growth in the short-term," Franco said.

"Vacation intentions also rose, reflecting a continued increase in spending on services." AFP

# Amazon stays atop fast-growing cloud computing market: Survey

**Washington, US** - Amazon remained the dominant global cloud computing firm in 2020 as rivals including Microsoft, Alibaba and Google gained ground in the fast-growing market, a research firm said.

A Gartner survey released Tuesday showed the so-called 'infrastructure as a service' market grew 40.7 per cent last year to US\$64.3bn.

Amazon held nearly 41 per cent of the market last year, down from 45 per cent in 2019 as its revenues grew 28 per cent, according to Gartner.

Microsoft - seen as a surging rival in the sector - saw revenue growth of nearly 60 per cent to capture almost 20 per cent of the market.

Sid Nag, research vice president at Gartner, said the mar-



ket is growing as more businesses rely on cloud-based solutions, with the trend accelerating during the pandemic.

Nag said the market was also helped by a growing trend of 'data sovereignty' with organizations seeking to keep their data in their home countries.

Gartner said Microsoft in

particular benefited from the pandemic as organizations shifted to the cloud for 'critical' workloads, such as healthcare, manufacturing and e-commerce.

China-based Alibaba also had robust growth to reach a 9.5 per cent market share while Google boosted its share to more than six per cent.

AFP

# UK economy shrinks 1.6% in first quarter

**London, UK** - Britain's coronavirus-hit economy shrank by slightly more than expected in the first quarter before a subsequent easing of lockdown restrictions, revised official data showed on Wednesday.

Gross domestic product contracted by 1.6 per cent in the three months to the end of March, down from the previous figure of 1.5 per cent, the Office for National Statistics (ONS) said in a statement.

"Today's updated GDP figures show the same picture as our earlier estimate with schools, hospitality and retail all hit by the re-imposition of the lockdown in January and February, with some recovery in March," said ONS deputy national statistician Jonathan Athow. "With many services unavailable, households again saved at record levels."

The UK government reimposed England's lockdown in early January, but began lifting



restrictions at the start of March with the reopening of schools.

Under a phased reopening, bars and restaurants restarted outdoor dining in April and indoor services in May.

Non-essential retail stores also opened back up in April.

The economy is expected to fully reopen on July 19, after the

government delayed the date by four weeks due to surging Delta infections.

The ONS added on Wednesday that economic activity in the first quarter was 8.8 per cent below its pre-pandemic level from late 2019. "The small downward revision to the first quarter GDP growth probably

won't stop the economy from rising back to its pre-pandemic peak in the coming months," noted Capital Economics analyst Paul Dales.

"And the larger rebound in the household saving rate increases the potential for faster rises in GDP further ahead." AFP

# Al Mouj Golf offers exciting playing opportunities at course

Al Mouj Golf has introduced new opportunities for golf enthusiasts to enjoy play at the award-winning signature, oceanfront course for the summer months.

Al Mouj Golf is a World Top 100 course that hosts the European Tour - Oman Open and is consistently ranked the second-best course in the Middle East. The newly launched membership packages are a chance to play over the summer without golfers having to commit to a full year-round membership.

The first package is for four weeks of unlimited play for RO99 plus VAT, and the second invites golfers to play for five months for the price of four at RO399 plus VAT.

Al Mouj Golf was designed by golf legend Greg Norman and features a 72-par championship course as well as a 9-hole Academy Course, attracting players of all standards from top level to beginners.

The lush, links-style course boasts a magnificently scenic setting on the Indian ocean coastline against the backdrop of the Hajar Mountains. It is 7342 yards long with the 9<sup>th</sup>, 11<sup>th</sup>, 12<sup>th</sup>, 13<sup>th</sup> and 14<sup>th</sup> holes all situated on the sea side and so boast breath taking sea views.

Nasser bin Masoud al Sheibani, CEO of Al Mouj Mus-



cat, says, "These are great value membership options and a fantastic opportunity to experience what play is like here.

"We are looking forward to welcoming new players who might only be in Oman for a short time or simply want to try us out before making a commitment to full membership.

"The summer months are a great time to play as set on the coast, the sea breeze helps to keep golfers cool whilst, of course, presenting challenges given it changes both speed and direction."

Any new members signing up for Al Mouj Golf's summer membership packages can also enjoy

a range of exclusive member-only benefits and perks including discounts at the Pro Shop. As well there is an Academy Restaurant with a unique setting overlooking the floodlit driving range and is the perfect spot to relax after a round or meet up with family and friends.

Al Mouj Muscat, Oman's premier

lifestyle and leisure destination is on the doorstep with its mix of shops and restaurants, pristine beaches and landscaped parks as well as a spectacular 400-berth marina.

To find out more about Al Mouj Golf's membership offers call at +968 2200 5990 or membership@almoujgolf.com



H H Al Sayyid Dr Adham al Said



Haitham al Ismaily

## British Council hosts discussion on VAT and its economic impact

The British Council delivered the 'Oman Vision 2040 talk series on VAT and its economic impact', as part of the third Oman - UK Alumni Talk series. The discussion was opened by British Ambassador to Oman, H E Hamish Cowell and attended by members of the Oman-UK Alumni network.

VAT in Oman is currently a trending topic and the webinar offered an opportunity for an engaging and informative dialogue with experts and professionals to share their views on a broad range of subjects including the background of Oman's VAT system, the UK's background and experience with VAT, how VAT works in Oman, how to calculate VAT and what VAT is used for.

The panel of speakers for the webinar included H H Al Sayyid Dr Adham Turki al Said, Assistant Professor of Economics at the College of Economics and Political Science in Sultan Qaboos University, Haitham al Ismaily, financial expert for The Firm and Alan Carter, member of HMRC'S International Relations and Capacity Building Team. The discussion was moderated by Sahar al Lawati, senior financial officer, Oman Food Investment Holding Company SAOC.

Helen Mehta, country director of the British Council in Oman said, "We are lucky to bring together such an experienced panel to discuss pressing issues related to VAT and the economic impact it has had on people as well as the opportunities it has

brought about for Oman UK partnerships in the future. The possibilities to share information are endless and we look forward to continuing the dialogue so that both countries can collaborate on opportunities and challenges with the next steps."

H H Dr Adham commented on webinar saying, "It was a pleasure to address the Oman - UK Alumni Network to talk about Oman's recent introduction of VAT and its economic impact. We reflected on the macroeconomic picture where Oman's recent fiscal reforms which aim to achieve fiscal consolidation. The VAT introduction is part of a wider array of economic reforms Oman is currently undergoing to set the country on solid foundations as it launches Vision 2040. The VAT comes with a number of economic benefits and social challenges in its first year of implementation. Despite the challenges the fiscal imperative to ensure sustainable public finances cannot be understated.

"Therefore, the relevant authorities must ensure smooth implementation of the system and addressing both technical and social challenges. This can be done with continuous technical support, information and effective social security safety net."

The British Council is the UK's cultural relations organisation, creating opportunities for people globally to connect and engage with each other through the arts, education and the English language.

## NBC discusses legal effects of COVID-19 on entrepreneurs

The National Business Centre (NBC), which falls under the umbrella of the Public Establishment for Industrial Estates - Madayn, organised a discussion session on the legal impact and challenges posed by COVID-19 on entrepreneurs.

Moderated by Rihab Fadhil, director of Councils and Committees at Madayn, the session featured the lawyer Nasser al Riyami, law lecturer - K&Co LLP, who highlighted several topics related to types of companies, e-commerce, lease agreements, insolvency litigation, partial versus complete lockdown, the variation



between liquidation and bankruptcy, COVID-19 pandemic and the judiciary, and amicable settlement of disputes.

The series of discussion sessions organised by the National

Business Centre aim at exchanging viewpoints and expertise on a variety of topics of interest and

benefit to the entrepreneurs. NBC is an initiative launched by Madayn at the Knowledge Oasis Muscat with the aim of offering promising Omani entrepreneurs a platform to develop their business ideas and advance them into growing ventures.

The centre offers a premier platform for Omani entrepreneurs by providing business development support and guidance, training and mentoring, access to markets and industry experts, and state-of-the-art and fully-equipped office spaces, meeting rooms, and presentation facilities.



Raed Mohammed Dawood, director of Branding

## Unwind with Ooredoo's Stream On HD

After a long day, there's no better way to unwind than with Ooredoo's Stream On HD! Shababiah customers can subscribe daily and enjoy unlimited streaming for some of the most popular sites including YouTube and VIU.

Making it simple and easy, the service can be activated on the Ooredoo App for an unbeatable rate of just RO1.050 per day. Staying home is easier than ever now that customers have access to their favourite movies, shows and music videos from their smartphones.

It's also available using Ooredoo's superfast 5G network, making the whole experience out of this world. For more information, customers can visit [www.ooredoo.om](http://www.ooredoo.om) or head to the multi-award winning app.

## Oman Air supports national vaccination campaign

Oman Air, the national carrier of the Sultanate of Oman, has joined the ranks of several high-profile companies in Oman as a main sponsor of the Ministry of Health's COVID-19 vaccination drive underway at Oman Convention and Exhibition Centre (OCEC) in Muscat. Staff volunteers from the airline have been on-site since the mass campaign began on June 20 to provide support in several key areas and facilitate the flow of individuals through various stations in the vaccination process.

Close to 60 Oman Air staff are participating in the campaign, which is set to run for three months, divided into three work

shifts throughout the day. Welcoming the eligible vaccine target group, managing checkpoints and scanning areas, and making sure that procedures are followed correctly are just some of the ways the team of Oman Air volunteers is assisting Ministry of Health and OCEC teams to deliver a successful vaccination campaign.

Hilal al Siyabi, senior vice-president, People Department at Oman Air, explained how Oman Air employees are consistently a source of pride for the airline through their willingness to volunteer. "As soon as the call went out to assemble a team of volunteers for Oman's national vacci-



nation campaign, our staff responded enthusiastically. The opportunity to play a part in slowing the spread of COVID-19 is a source of pride for many, and reflects their genuine compassion towards their brothers and sisters as well as heartfelt concern for community wellbeing."

Dr Salim Abdullah al Flaithi, director of Venue Operations at OCEC, said, "We are delighted to have Oman Air as a Main Sponsor of the vaccination campaign. Oman Air team has set an example of dedication and hard work during the event and seeing them take part in the nation's call, is a clear commitment in delivering a seamless experience."

## Farnek to fight climate change in Middle East with international partner

Leading UAE-based smart and green facilities management (FM) company Farnek, has joined forces with Munich-based ClimatePartner, international solutions provider for corporate climate action.

The agreement allows Farnek to provide consultancy and advisory on the full range of ClimatePartner's life cycle carbon management services to help Middle East businesses, reduce the negative impact their compa-

nies have on the environment and to secure a sustainable future for generations to come.

"Carbon offset projects help counteract the release of greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions, whilst simultaneously improving the livelihood of people around the world. By supporting carbon offset projects, companies can offset emissions that are currently unavoidable and therefore reduce their overall environmental impact," said Markus Oberlin,



CEO, Farnek.

"Carbon offsetting is crucial if we are to achieve the goals set



by the Paris Agreement on climate change, as well as the UAE's target to reduce carbon

emissions by up to 25 per cent by 2030."

Using the ClimatePartner climate action methodology, Farnek's consultants will be designing tailor-made solutions for Middle East businesses. It starts by defining corporate and product carbon footprints followed by the implementation of a climate action strategy and a carbon offsetting plan. The final act is to communicate that to corporate stakeholders.

Commenting on their partnership with Farnek, Moritz Lehmkühl, managing director of ClimatePartner said, "Farnek will have access to hundreds of internationally-recognised and certified carbon offset projects that are currently available within our portfolio or in cooperation with our global network. We decided to partner with Farnek, because the company is widely considered a market leader throughout the Middle East."

# Two customers to walk away with RO250,000 in NBO draw



With more chances than ever to win, National Bank of Oman’s (NBO) Al Kanz Savings Scheme Draw is one of banking’s biggest events.

In one week, the bank will be holding its half yearly Mega Draw, where two customers will be given RO250,000 each.

With eligibility being as easy as maintaining an average balance of at least RO100, it is one of the most exciting ways for customers to build the savings.

The event will also include the monthly Mazaya Exclusive draw, which will give RO10,000 each to four winners, and the

Salary Transfer draw, with RO500 each for 50 winners.

Al Kanz Savings Scheme continues to reward more customers each year across the sultanate with monthly prizes ranging from RO100 to RO250,000.

NBO, the first local commer-

cial bank in the Sultanate of Oman, was founded in 1973 and is today one of the leading banks in Oman.

The bank serves its customers in Oman through 60 Branches, more than 180 ATM/FFM/CCDMs as well as two branches in UAE.

# Sohar Islamic introduces real estate sector accounts

Reiterating its strong market position and investor confidence, Sohar Islamic – Sohar International’s Islamic window, has introduced Escrow Accounts for Oman’s burgeoning real estate sector. This financial solution comes in line with Royal Decree No. 30/2018 promulgating the law on escrow account for real estate development and Ministerial Decision No. 72/2019 issued by the Ministry of Housing and Urban Planning.

The Escrow account was promulgated in a move to regulate real estate market and to further provide more protection to investors when purchasing properties. As the country witnesses key legislative reforms with new laws and regulations, as well as the introduction of strict measures to ensure implementation of good governance, Sohar Islamic is keen to contribute and support the government’s efforts in providing impetus to the real estate sector. The introduction of escrow account is key to this objective, as it provides the proper financial tools for developers as well as protects investors by creating trust and transparency.

Abdul Wahid al Murshidi, chief Islamic Banking officer at Sohar International said, “With several commercial, tourist, and



residential projects underway within the sultanate, Escrow accounts have become an essential part of the framework to provide stimulus to the sector’s growth, as it protects investors by minimizing the risk prevalent in any real estate purchase. This will significantly contribute to the long-term socio-economic development in the country.

“The newly introduced Escrow Account aims at enhancing confidence of real estate developers, investors, as well as vendors, whilst protecting their interests with an ultimate purpose to support the government’s efforts to regulate the real estate sector.”

Following the introduction of the Escrow Account, Sohar Islamic was quick on harnessing this capability and signed an

agreement with Muscat Hills Joint Development Company to open Escrow account for the Muscat Pavilion Project for Smart Offices in Muscat. Representing Sohar Islamic and signing the agreement was Murshdi with Dawood al Hinai and Abdul Rahim al Kharousi, co-founders of Muscat Hills Joint Development Company.

“In our constant endeavour to provide financing services meeting the social and economic aspirations of citizens in the sultanate, we are happy to tie up with Asawer Real Estate in providing escrow account to the project. With this agreement, Sohar Islamic acts as an escrow agent, which accepts all funds and then releases these funds in accordance with the progress of the project and as per the terms of the escrow agreement,” added Murshdi.

Opening Sohar Islamic’s fully Sharia’a-compliant Escrow Account requires a few easy steps. Once the account is active, it can then be communicated to the potential investors by the developers, which will not only increase the investors’ confidence, but will also regulate and ensure the developers are paid on time which enhancing the overall experience.

# Etisalat announces 6G plans

In yet another global milestone, Etisalat announced its foray into the next generation of the mobile network with considerable efforts towards 6G realisation, conducting research, developing international standards the main building blocks for the 6G ecosystem.

Haitham Abdulazzak, chief technology officer, Etisalat, shared these insights during his address at the session titled ‘Setting the roadmap to 6G’ at the ongoing Mobile World Congress in Barcelona; the annual trade show dedicated to the mobile communications industry being held from June 28 until July 1.

Advancement and development of new mobile technologies has become much more rapid than ever. Introduction of new features, capabilities and use of millimeter frequencies seen in 5G is a result of this advancement, which is expected to be complemented with terahertz spectrum in 6G. Etisalat is one of the ambitious players making steps towards the sixth generation of the network.

“The excellent achievements by Etisalat today in 5G coverage, cloud native, slicing, Multi-Ac-



cess Edge Computing (MEC) development, AI and automation platforms, as well as high fibre penetration which stands at more than 99 per cent of UAE populated area coverage, is a result of the long term strategy paving the way towards 6G.

“We are committed to bringing the latest technologies to UAE market to enable digital societies. As part of our vision and future technology planning, 6G is going beyond earth networks into space to enable new era of services and usage scenarios with terabyte data traffic resulting in extra ordinary human to machine interaction. Etisalat is

upgrading tools and capabilities of its R&D centre to enhance the contribution towards 6G global standardisation within the international fora and alliances.”

The promise of 6G is in the transformation of use cases targeted by 5G into a full integrated autonomy, enabling the move from science fiction to reality, robotic humans operation, sophisticated human to human, human to machine and machine to machine relationship.

The 6G technology requires agile communications governance and increased collaboration across multisector stakeholders.

# Callsign warns half of consumers trust firms less after receiving scam messages

Callsign, the digital identity pioneer revealed that the rise of scams is harming organisations’ reputations across the world.

The global study of consumers revealed that just receiving a scam message purporting to be from any brand is enough for 49.8 per cent of them to lose trust in the organisation regardless of any real association with the message.

Industries most targeted by fraudsters are financial services and ecommerce with consumers stating that of all scam messages they receive, 63 per cent claim to represent their bank, or a retailer (36 per cent).

The scam problem is rampant across all communications channels. Globally, on average, individuals who receive scam messages via all channels receive 1,133 a year, with more than a quarter (27 per cent) saying they receive more messages from fraudsters than friends and family!

With 41 per cent of con-



sumers admitting they don’t report fraudulent messages, the scale of scam messaging and victims is likely to be underestimated.

“Fraud hides in volume and the rapid migration of the global population online in the last 18 months has led to the industrialisation of scams. The consequence is fraudsters are using the same channels we’re using to authenticate genuine consumers, and this is harming organisations’ reputations with

the decrease of trust in their brands,” explained Stuart Dobbie, SVP, Innovation, Callsign.

The survey is a reminder that consumers have a choice.

Almost one fifth (19 per cent) of consumers who have been a victim of fraud they have stopped using the company whose name the fraudster used to execute the scam. In comparison consumers are less likely to leave the channel the scam is executed through (only 10 per cent would leave their network provider) demonstrating that regardless of the scam method, it’s the brand being mimicked that suffers.

SMS appears to be the weakest link with only 8 per cent of consumers thinking it is a safe channel to communicate with their bank or retailer, and the channel has seen a 51 per cent decrease in trust just because they have received a scam text message.

“Organisations need to re-evaluate the communications channels they use to interact

with customers to better establish trust.

“With fraudsters monopolising open channels such as SMS and email, these channels cannot be relied upon to also authenticate identity. Our research shows that over a third (48 per cent) of consumers think identity is the problem and that people should prove who they are when signing up to use a platform to stop scammers.

“These consumer concerns emphasise organisations must wake up to the importance of digital identification.”

Dobbie concluded, “If organisations are to maintain and build trust in the digital world, they need to better balance protection and experience to ensure their brand is not tarnished by scammers.

“With Intelligence Driven Authentication, organisations can overcome the fraudsters, protect their brand, create seamless and secure customer journeys and build all important digital trust.”

# Maldives offers attractive retreats for awesome family break this Eid

Pristine sand, the glistening turquoise Indian Ocean, spectacular reefs, thick tropical vegetation and friendly smiles make the Maldives a globally renowned holiday destination. It has also become an incredibly popular destination among the UAE travellers for a long weekend break or extended holiday with convenient, short flight timings, idyllic weather and luxurious accommodation that allows for lots of privacy.

If you’re looking for an idyllic resort in the tropical nation this Eid al Adha, Atmosphere Hotels & Resorts is about to make things much easier for you. With wide range of four-star and five-star luxury holiday experiences set on its own private island, the Resort Group is providing guests an otherworldly retreat from the buzz of daily life.

These resorts offer unique experiences catering to almost every type of traveller, from

world-class water sports and diving, relaxing spa experiences, and much more, helping visitors create unforgettable memories. But the signature of these gorgeous resorts is their levels of privacy.

Whether you want family-friendly or ultra-luxe, you can go with any of these tropical island escape to the Maldives this Eid al Adha:

## Atmosphere Kanifushi, Kanifushi Island

Situated in the Lhaviyani Atoll and just 30-minutes via a scenic Sea Plane transfer from the International Airport, Atmosphere Kanifushi is home to 172 detached villas and suites, where you can enjoy access to the pristine white beaches and beautiful turquoise lagoon surrounding the island.

The Resort’s ‘Kanifushi Plan’ offers a hassle-free safe holiday



- including dining, accommodation, activities and water sports all in one package along with one of the longest uninterrupted stretch of beach in the Maldives. With its own unique variety of marine life and reef formations, Lhaviyani Atoll is a paradise for divers.

## OBLU Select Sangeli, Sangeli Island

Meanwhile, OBLU Select at Sangeli takes you on an exclusive romantic journey with its honeymoon water suites, providing you the ideal setting for some of your life’s most unforgettable memories. Situated at the North-Western tip of Malé Atoll, the island of Sangeli, home to OBLU Select, is a five-star resort.

Offering the discerning traveller a ‘best-in-class’ 5-Star holiday with an upgraded plan – The Serenity Plan, the resort has temporarily designed 137 villas and suites, including the very exclusive Honeymoon Water Suites with Private Pool. To keep your appetite duly sated, the resort has a variety of restaurants to match every taste.

## VARU by Atmosphere, Madivaru Island

VARU by Atmosphere, the five-star resort offering a premium plan – VARU Plan, is nestled in the pristine Indian Oceans of the Maldives. Accessible under 40-minutes via a speed boat, the resort offers a truly Maldivian experience.

It offers 108 villas dotted around the white sandy beaches and expanding over the turquoise lagoons onto three jetties with the over-water accommodation types. The beach front villas and suites that are based on the island have direct access

to the surrounding pristine white sandy beaches with views of the ocean beyond.

Enjoy snorkelling, diving, relaxing in lagoons teeming marine life and spot dolphins while you sip a cool beverage. Chill out and relax with a good book, or pamper yourself with a blissful spa treatment, and dine in style on your very own private villa.

## OBLU by Atmosphere, Helengeli Island

OBLU by Atmosphere at Helengeli, a four-star superior resort, offers guests a unique all-encompassing holiday plan. Situated in the North Atoll and just 50-minutes away by speedboat from Male’ International Airport, the resort comprises of 116 villas in 4 categories, on a premium plan – Island Plan, with high quality world cuisine, combined with a range of activities including snorkelling and Channel Diving along with a serene Garden Spa.

# China certified malaria-free after seven decades of fight

**Geneva, Switzerland** - China was certified as malaria-free on Wednesday by the World Health Organization, following a 70 year effort to eradicate the mosquito-borne disease.

The country reported 30mn cases of the infectious disease annually in the 1940s but has now gone four consecutive years without an indigenous case.

"We congratulate the people of China on ridding the country of malaria," said WHO director-general Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus.

"Their success was hard-earned and came only after decades of targeted and sustained action. With this announcement, China joins the

growing number of countries that are showing the world that a malaria-free future is a viable goal."

Countries that have achieved at least three consecutive years of zero indigenous cases can apply for WHO certification of their malaria-free status. They must present rigorous evidence - and demonstrate the capacity to prevent transmission re-emerging.

Beijing, which is in the middle of a propaganda push ahead of celebrations for the 100th anniversary of the founding of its ruling Communist Party this week, hailed the WHO's certification as a 'great achievement for China's human rights cause'.

"The CCP and the Chinese government have always prioritised safeguarding people's health, safety and prosperity," said Foreign Ministry spokesman Wang Wenbin at a routine briefing in Beijing.

"Eliminating malaria is a great contribution by China to human health and global human rights progress."

China becomes the 40th territory certified malaria-free by the Geneva-based WHO.

The last countries to gain the status were El Salvador (2021), Algeria and Argentina (2019), and Paraguay and Uzbekistan (2018). There is a separate list of 61 countries where malaria never existed, or disappeared without

specific measures.

China is also the first country in the WHO's Western Pacific region to be awarded a malaria-free certification in more than three decades. The WHO's World Malaria Report 2020 warned global progress against the disease was plateauing, particularly in African countries bearing the brunt of cases and deaths.

In 2019 the global tally of malaria cases was estimated at 229mn - a figure that has been at the same level for the past four years.

## 'Outside the box'

In the 1950s, Beijing started working out where malaria was spreading and began to combat

it with preventative anti-malarial medicines, said the WHO.

The country reduced mosquito breeding grounds and stepped up spraying insecticide in homes. While searching for new malaria treatments in the 1970s, China discovered artemisinin - the core compound of artemisinin-based combination therapies (ACTs), which are the most effective antimalarial drugs available.

In the 1980s, China was among the first countries to extensively test the use of insecticide-treated nets to prevent malaria. By 1988, more than 2.4mn had been distributed nationwide.

By the end of 1990, the num-

ber of malaria cases in China had plummeted to 117,000, and deaths had been cut by 95 per cent. "China's ability to think outside the box served the country well in its own response to malaria, and also had a significant ripple effect globally," said Pedro Alonso, director of the WHO's global malaria programme.

## Southern border surveillance

From 2003, China stepped up efforts across the board that brought annual case numbers down to around 5,000 within ten years.

After four consecutive years of zero indigenous cases, China

applied for WHO certification in 2020.

Experts travelled to China in May this year to verify its malaria-free status - and its plans to prevent the disease from coming back.

The risk of imported cases remains a concern, not only among people returning from sub-Saharan Africa and other malaria-hit regions, but also in the southern Yunnan province, which borders Laos, Myanmar and Vietnam, all struggling with the disease.

China has stepped up its malaria surveillance in at-risk zones in a bid to prevent the disease re-emerging, said the WHO.

AFP

# Executing offenders just under 18 not a rights violation: Iran

**Tehran, Iran** - Iran's use of the death penalty for crimes committed as minors does not mean it violates human rights, a senior Iranian official has insisted to AFP in response to UN criticism.

The Islamic republic executes convicts for crimes they committed while under-age 'three to four times' a year, argued Majid Tafreshi of the state-run High Council for Human Rights.

Such uses of capital punishment are 'not a symbol of violations of human rights', he said in an interview with AFP, charging that criticism of the practice was 'not fair'.

"When we are talking about under-18s, we are not talking about six or five years old. We are talking about mainly our 17 years old big boys (where) the court recognised their maturity."

The United Nations and human rights groups frequently criticise Iran for executing child offenders, which violates the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child that Tehran has ratified.

UN rights chief Michelle Bachelet last week pointed to Iran's 'widespread use of the death penalty' and said that 'over 80 child offenders are on death row, with at least four at risk of imminent execution'.



Majid Tafreshi, member of the state-run High Council for Human Rights, at his office in Tehran, on Tuesday (AFP)

Tafreshi, the council's deputy head of international affairs, rejected international criticism.

He said the council's broad goal 'is minimising the number of executions... as much as possible', calling it an effort for which 'nobody applauds Iran'.

Iran last year executed at least

four people found guilty of murders committed when they were minors, according to the UN.

## 'Barbaric sanctions'

Murder is punishable by death in Iran, according to the Islamic law of retribution that demands an 'eye for an eye'. Convicts' lives

can be spared however if the victim's family agrees to pardon them.

Tafreshi pointed out that the Quran says that demanding the convict's execution 'is your right as a victim's family' - but also that showing mercy and agreeing to a pardon is 'good for you'.

Usually, he said, 'we're trying to convince the victim's family to pardon' child offenders sentenced to death.

Tafreshi said the council routinely seeks to find money to compensate victims' families and to convince them to grant a reprieve, sometimes in a process that takes many years.

These efforts result in pardons agreed by victims' families in 96 per cent of cases, according to Tafreshi. He argued that Iran's penal code shows 'leniency' toward child offenders and that judges make special efforts to determine if a homicide was intentional and the offender mature enough to understand the nature of the crime.

Tafreshi dismissed as 'propaganda' charges by the UN, foreign governments and rights groups that many Iranian detainees are tortured and denied fair trials, adding that any suspected such cases are investigated.

He also pointed to what he labelled Western countries' own human rights violations, including the United States' 'barbaric sanctions' on Iran, and British and French arms sales to Arab monarchies of the Gulf region.

AFP

# Yemen rebels launch 'unfair' trial of model: HRW

**Dubai, UAE** - A model held for months by Huthi rebels in Yemen has gone on trial, according to Human Rights Watch, which called the process 'unfair' and riddled with 'irregularities and abuse'.

Entisar al Hammadi was arrested in February in Sanaa, where the Iran-backed Huthi rebels who control the Yemeni capital are enforcing a morality campaign.

Born to an Ethiopian mother and Yemeni father, the 20 year old had been pictured online in traditional dress as well as leather and denim jackets, and sometimes she went without a headscarf.

With her high cheekbones and green eyes, Hammadi had several thousand followers on Instagram and Facebook where she posted sessions with stylists and designers.

'Huthi authorities are carrying out an unfair trial of a Yemeni actress and model,' Human Rights Watch said in a statement.

Hammadi was detained 'on the apparent charges of committing an indecent act and drug possession', HRW quoted her lawyer as saying.

Her case was transferred to court in June, with Hammadi appearing for hearings on June 6



and June 9, said the New York-based group.

According to HRW, Hammadi had worked as a model for four years and acted in two Yemeni TV series last year.

'Sources told Human Rights Watch that Huthi authorities forced Hammadi to sign a document while blindfolded during interrogation and offered to release her if she would help them entrap their enemies with 'sex and drugs', it added.

The lawyer told Human Rights Watch that the authorities halted plans for a forced 'virginity test' after Amnesty International issued a statement condemning the plans on May 7.

It also said the public prosecutor had prevented Hammadi's lawyer from accessing her file.

AFP

# US picks Gutmann as first woman ambassador to Germany: Sources

**Berlin, Germany** - US President Joe Biden has nominated University of Pennsylvania president Amy Gutmann as ambassador to Germany, German government sources said on Wednesday, after tumultuous years with Donald Trump's envoy.

Gutmann (71), the daughter of a Holocaust survivor, would be the first woman appointed to the post.

The German officials, who spoke on condition of anonymity, confirmed a report in *Der Spiegel* magazine.

Gutmann's appointment must be confirmed by the US Senate and approved by German President Frank-Walter Steinmeier. The sources said no date had yet been set for her accreditation.

The United States had previously been represented in Berlin by Trump ally Richard Grenell, who raised hackles in Germany with a combative approach, including vowing to empower anti-establishment rightwingers in Europe.

Grenell returned to Washington to become Trump's director of national intelligence before resigning as ambassador in June 2020.

Charge d'Affaires Robin



This file photo shows Amy Gutmann, in New York City on September 25, 2017 (AFP)

Quinville had served as acting ambassador since then.

Gutmann has led the University of Pennsylvania, an Ivy League institution, since 2016 and is an expert in democratic

processes and ethics.

She served as chair of Barack Obama's Commission for the Study of Bioethical Issues.

Gutmann told *The Daily Pennsylvanian*, the university newspaper, in 2013 that her Jewish father Kurt's experiences in Nazi Germany had had a 'profound influence' on her.

As a college student in 1934, he realised he, his four siblings and his parents would not be safe in the country under Adolf Hitler and convinced them to flee to India.

"It's true that his whole family would have disappeared from the face of the earth had it not been for what he did," Gutmann told the paper.

Despite lingering differences over issues including the nearly complete Nord Stream 2 gas pipeline linking Russia and Germany, relations between Berlin and Washington have grown markedly warmer since Biden took office.

US Secretary of State Antony Blinken came to Germany for a two-day visit last week complete with a convivial stop at a Berlin beer garden with his counterpart Heiko Maas.

AFP

# Germany, Italy complete Afghan troop pull-outs

**Berlin, Germany** - Germany and Italy have completed their troop pull-outs from Afghanistan, ending a nearly 20-year deployment there alongside US and other international forces, the officials from the two countries said.

The announcement of the pull-out of German troops, whose presence there was second only to the US forces, came as the US aims to complete its own withdrawal by September 11.

'After nearly 20 years of deployment, the last soldiers of our Bundeswehr have left Afghanistan this evening,' said German Defence Minister Anngret Kramp-Karrenbauer in a statement.

'They are on the way back.'

'A historic chapter comes to an end, an intensive deployment that challenged and shaped the Bundeswehr, in which the Bundeswehr proved itself in combat,' she added.

On Twitter, the minister offered her thanks to all the 150,000 men and women who had served there since 2001, saying they could be proud of their service.

And she paid tribute to those killed and wounded in service there. 'You will not be forgotten,' she said.

According to the army, 59



This file photo shows soldiers of the German armed forces Bundeswehr listening to German Chancellor Angela Merkel during her visit to the Bundeswehr base in Mazar-e-Sharif, Afghanistan, on May 10, 2013 (AFP)

German soldiers have been killed since 2001 in the course of their service in Afghanistan.

The last of the troops were airlifted out of their base at Mazar-e-Sharif in northern Afghanistan on two German A400 Ms and two US C17s.

Members of the US-backed alliance agreed in April to wrap up their 9,600-strong mission in Afghanistan after US President Joe Biden made the call to end Washington's longest war.

'Last night, the Italian mission in Afghanistan officially ended,' Italy's Defence Minister Lorenzo Guerini said in a statement, after dozens of soldiers landed at

Pisa's airport from Herat.

'However, the international community's commitment to Afghanistan, starting with Italy, does not end here. It will continue in other forms, from strengthening development co-operation to supporting Afghan republican institutions.'

According to the ministry, 50,000 Italian soldiers were deployed to Afghanistan over the past 20 years after the 9/11 attacks prompted US and NATO involvement in the country.

Over that period, 53 soldiers died and 723 were injured.

Italy was one of the five countries most involved in

Afghanistan along with the United States, Turkey, Britain and Germany as part of 'Resolute Support'.

Before the pull-out began, Germany still had 1,100 soldiers operating as part of the 9,600-strong NATO training and support mission - second only to the US military presence.

Britain, Italy and Turkey also have a significant military presence there, the five countries between supplying 6,000 members of the mission. Smaller contributors to the force, such as Denmark, Estonia and Spain, have already pulled out their forces.

AFP

## COVID-19 PANDEMIC

# Putin rejects mandatory jabs as Russia sees record deaths

Moscow, Russia - President Vladimir Putin on Wednesday said he was opposed to mandatory coronavirus vaccinations for Russians but urged the job-sceptic population to get inoculated, as his country battles a deadly third wave.

His comments came as Russia earlier on Wednesday reported 669 coronavirus deaths over the past 24 hours, a pandemic high of fatalities for the second day in a row, according to a government tally.

Russia in mid-June saw infections spike in a third wave driven by the highly transmissible Delta variant first identified in India, authorities have said, and worsened by a sluggish inoculation drive.

Although free jabs have been available since early December, only around 15 per cent of Russia's population had received at least one dose as of Wednesday according to the Gogov website, which tallies COVID figures from the regions.

The slow uptake prompted Moscow Mayor Sergei Sobyanin earlier this month to order mandatory jabs for service sector employees, with more than a



People queue up to receive Russia's Sputnik V jabs, at a vaccination centre in Moscow on Tuesday (AFP)

dozen regions in Russia since following suit.

The widening policy has prompted concerns that all Russians eventually would be required to be vaccinated, which Putin shot down Wednesday while fielding questions in his annual phone-in session.

"I do not support mandatory vaccinations," the Russian President said.

Still, Putin - as he has done repeatedly in recent months - called on Russians to get vaccinated.

"It is necessary to listen, not to people who understand little about this and spread rumours, but to specialists," he told Russians, the majority of whom polls show oppose receiving coronavirus jabs.

"If a person is sick without a

vaccine, then the long-term consequences can be very serious," the Russian leader said.

Surveys show that Russians are particularly sceptical of the country's homegrown jabs - Sputnik V, EpiVacCorona, CoviVac and the one-dose Sputnik Light.

Putin said on Wednesday that the four homegrown vaccines were better than foreign

alternatives, naming AstraZeneca and Pfizer. He added that he himself had been vaccinated with Sputnik V.

The President's plea for Russians to get inoculated came after the Kremlin on Tuesday conceded that its target of vaccinating 60 per cent of the population by autumn will not be possible.

Critics say the third wave has been spurred by the failure to lock down, a measure taken during the first wave last spring but avoided this time by Russian authorities to support a struggling economy.

Asked on Wednesday if he supported a new lockdown, Putin said regional authorities were instead promoting localised mandatory vaccinations and other measures to avoid introducing new quarantines.

In Moscow, the epicentre of Russia's outbreak, Mayor Sobyanin has ordered businesses to send home at least 30 per cent of unvaccinated employees and restaurants to only allow inside patrons who have been inoculated or were infected in the past six months.

AFP

## N Korean officials sacked after 'breach'

Seoul, South Korea - North Korean leader Kim Jong-un replaced several senior officials after a 'crucial' coronavirus incident, state media reported Wednesday, potentially signalling a breach in the country's epidemic defences.

Pyongyang closed its borders in January last year to try to protect itself against the virus that first emerged in neighbouring China. It has not publicly confirmed any cases of the disease at any point, either in state media or in the test statistics it has disclosed to the World Health Organization (WHO).

But analysts said the latest development was a clear indication there had been infections in the isolated North, which is under international sanctions for its nuclear weapons and ballistic missile programmes.

Officials had neglected their duties and caused a 'crucial' incident, 'creating a great crisis in ensuring the security of the state and safety of the people and entailed grave consequences', Kim told a politburo meeting, according to the state Korean Central News Agency.

It did not specify any details of what had happened.

But Kim added that cadres' 'lack of ability and irresponsibility' had hindered important

work, accusing them of 'self-protectionism and passiveness'.

Footage on broadcaster KCTV on Tuesday showed a stream of officials entering the central committee building, and Kim pointing angrily as he addressed the meeting. His sister and key advisor Kim Yo Jong was also among the speakers.

The impoverished country's ramshackle health system and lack of medical supplies would leave it struggling to cope with a major COVID-19 outbreak.

Members of the presidium of the politburo - the highest decision-making body of the ruling Workers' Party - and the politburo were recalled and new ones named at the meeting, KCNA reported, adding that government officials were 'transferred and appointed'.

It did not name names, but the KCTV footage culminated in a near-unanimous show of hands on the podium - when one previously-occupied seat was empty, and marshal Ri Pyong Chol, among the most senior officials in the country, did not take part in the vote, as Kim turned to stare at him.

The KCNA dispatch 'basically means North Korea has confirmed cases', defector and researcher Ahn Chan-il said.

AFP

## France scraps capacity limits in place since April despite 'fourth wave' risk

Paris, France - France on Wednesday ended most capacity limits imposed in April on restaurants, cinemas, stores and other public venues, although the measures were extended in parts of the southwest over the spread of the coronavirus Delta variant.

The move came as the doctor who heads President Emmanuel Macron's coronavirus advisory panel said a 'fourth wave' of cases was likely this autumn.

"I think we'll have a fourth wave but it will be much more subdued than the three previous ones, because vaccination levels aren't the same," Jean-Francois Delfraissy told France Inter radio.

He said the steep drops seen recently in daily new cases were 'false assurances' given the spread of the Delta variant in a country where just one-third of the population has been fully vaccinated with two doses.

Delfraissy also welcomed a



A woman walks past an outdoor vaccination centre set up by the French Red Cross at Republique Square, in Paris on Tuesday (AFP)

plan by Health Minister Olivier Veran to make COVID vaccinations mandatory for health workers and retirement home staff if at least 80 per cent of them have not received the jabs by September.

Delfraissy had previously opposed any vaccine requirements but said, "A lot depends on what we do right now."

In the southwestern Landes department, which includes Bordeaux, officials said the capacity limits would be extended to July 6 because of 'weak collective immunity' in the area.

Around 45 per cent of new cases are being caused by the Delta variant, which was first detected in India and has been blamed for an increase in daily

COVID deaths in Britain.

Seven virus clusters have been discovered in businesses or retirement homes, Didier Couteaud of the regional health service in western France said during a video press conference.

An unvaccinated carer has been blamed for one of the retirement home outbreaks.

Elsewhere across France, events will no longer be limited to 1,000 people, whether indoors or outdoors, though participants will have to show proof of their COVID inoculation, a negative test or a recent infection.

Professional sporting matches will no longer be limited to 5,000 people, though capacity limits may still be applied to the summer music festivals that traditionally attract huge crowds.

The next stage in the lifting of restrictions will see nightclubs reopen on July 9.

AFP

## India approves Moderna vaccine for emergency use

New Delhi, India - India authorised the emergency use of Moderna's COVID-19 vaccine on Tuesday - the fourth one after the approval of Oxford-AstraZeneca's Covishield, Covaxin - which was developed by Indian firm Bharat Biotech - and Russia's Sputnik V.

"I am pleased to inform that an application received from Moderna through an Indian partner of theirs, Cipla, has been granted EUA (Emergency Use Authorisation)," Vinod K Paul, a member of government advisory body NITI Aayog, said at a Health Ministry briefing.

Paul added that the approval would pave the way for other foreign-made vaccines to be imported into India, with efforts to get Pfizer and Johnson & Johnson jabs ongoing.

A small number of Sputnik V shots were imported into India after the drug was approved in mid-April, but the majority are expected to be manufactured



A health worker prepares a dose of the Moderna vaccine (AFP)

within the country, like Covishield and Covaxin.

India said two months ago that it would fast-track the approval of vaccines manufactured outside the country that have already been granted emergency use authorisation by major regulators such as the US Food and Drug Administration.

The government has been under pressure to speed up its flagging inoculation drive by allowing the import of foreign-made shots such as mRNA

vaccines Pfizer and Moderna.

"We should have as many vaccines and alternatives as possible," said Dr Rakesh Mishra, the former director of research body the Centre for Cellular Molecular Biology, who welcomed the approval.

Anant Bhan, a senior researcher in health and bioethics, said that the Moderna vaccine - which needs to be stored at minus 20°C - was unlikely to be for mass use due to its cold-chain requirements and higher price tag.

Rival jabs like the Covishield vaccine - which is the main shot used in India - can be kept at normal refrigerator temperatures of between two and eight degrees Celsius.

"It's primarily going to be used in the private health sector largely present in the cities. There, they can manage and build to meet some of its storage requirements," Bhan said.

AFP

## Thailand prepares for Phuket reopening despite COVID surge

Phuket, Thailand - Thailand prepared on Wednesday to reopen the holiday hotspot of Phuket to tourists quarantine-free, even as the country registered its highest single-day death toll from COVID-19.

High hopes have been pinned on the so-called 'Phuket sandbox' - a model that will allow vaccinated travellers to visit without a quarantine period in an effort to revive Thailand's battered tourism industry. But the lead-up to its July 1 launch has been plagued with uncertainty amid delays to government approval.

Thailand has been trying to contain a third wave of the coronavirus by imposing restrictions in the capital Bangkok and its suburbs, which have

seen the Alpha and Delta variants spreading.

Wednesday saw the kingdom's highest single-day death toll yet of 53.

However, authorities say the Phuket sandbox will go ahead as planned. About 250 passengers are scheduled to land on the island on Thursday on four flights, according to COVID-19 taskforce spokesman Taweasin Visanuyothin.

The return of tourists will bring welcome relief for businesses. Thailand usually welcomes about 40mn tourists every year and about 18 per cent of the country's GDP comes from the sector.

But for over a year Phuket's pristine sandy beaches have been unusually quiet and more



Policemen look at a map of Phuket on a monitor made to track tourists, in Phuket on Wednesday (AFP)

*I agree 100% with the Phuket sandbox scheme... We don't have anything other than tourism to support us*

THEWAN PHROMYANG

than 80 per cent of hotels have been shuttered.

To prepare for the reopening, two-thirds of Phuket's population have been inoculated.

In the notorious Patong Beach neighbourhood - once humming with a thriving nightlife scene - vendors were busy preparing on Wednesday

for a return to action.

"Everyone and every profession associated with tourism has been affected," said Thewan Phromyang (49), who leases sun beds to tourists.

"I agree 100 per cent with the Phuket sandbox scheme... We don't have anything other than tourism to support us."

But there will be restrictions in place for those choosing Phuket for their holiday.

Visitors will have to stay on the island for 14 days if they wish to travel elsewhere in Thailand, and they must take three COVID tests during that period.

The number of COVID-19 cases in Phuket also cannot exceed 90 in one week.

AFP

[illegible]

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15 Sugar source  
 5 Hillary's hubby  
 9 Jumping or  
 string  
 13 Voting group, e.g.  
 17 Perry's creator  
 18 Sound, say  
 19 Synthetic fabric  
 21 Surf sound  
 22 Child's game  
 24 Movie about an  
 Atlanta hero?  
 26 Spiritual advisors  
 27 Uproars  
 29 Gets well  
 30 Screen fabric  
 31 Contributor  
 32 Noodle or noggin  
 33 Peaks of Peru  
 36 Brutal  
 37 Handlebar, e.g.  
 41 Caution  
 42 Fire upon  
 44 Deletes  
 46 Drivers' gp.  
 47 One of a Latin trio  
 48 \_\_\_\_ Alto, CA  
 49 Deer family  
 members  
 50 Hall of Fame  
 Speaker  
 51 Ring fig.  
 52 Kith and kin in  
 Kansas City?  
 56 Crablike move  
 57 Outlawed

pesticide  
58 Mythical warrior  
59 In solitary  
60 Depended (on)  
61 Fender bender  
reminders  
63 Leaves out  
64 Siete in Sierra  
Blanca  
65 Sporadic  
67 Japanese poetry  
form  
68 Charity's plea  
69 Band's boom box  
72 Oceanic  
movements  
73 Press member at  
Wrigley?  
75 Actress  
Thompson  
76 Rules, for short  
77 Actor/singer lives  
78 Equipment  
79 Russian ruler pre  
1917  
80 Broke the fast  
81 Gavel  
83 Clear-witted  
84 Porcine cry  
85 Manufacturer's  
promise  
87 Following  
89 Vague  
suppositions  
90 Concludes  
91 Ellipses  
92 Flunk

94 Asian capital  
96 \_\_\_ Culp  
Hobby: first HEW  
secretary  
97 Aege youngsters  
100 No big threat in  
Detroit?  
102 Comedian in  
Cincinnati?  
105 First name in  
fashion  
106 Dour  
107 Willness  
108 High-strung?  
109 Model  
110 Cliques  
111 Art Deco artist  
112 Nervous  
**DOWN**  
1 Panhandle  
2 Actor Stoltz  
3 Israeli transporter  
4 Urban dwelling  
5 Sundance's  
sidekick  
6 Bad day for Caesar  
7 Back talk  
8 Failed to succeed  
9 Name on the 1996  
ballot  
10 A fizzle or fumble  
11 "Bummer!"  
12 Scorpio's mo.  
13 One of the Starrs  
14 Burden  
15 Sculling equipment  
16 PC monitor

18 Sale item warning  
20 Bête noire, et al.  
23 \_\_\_ chic!  
25 Takes the chill off  
28 "\_\_\_ singular  
sensation..."  
31 Slaver  
32 Sled dog  
33 Rita or Clio, e.g.  
34 Nominated  
35 Pick out and hire  
in L.A.  
36 Soft drinks  
37 French director  
Louis  
38 Ethical lapse in St.  
Louis?  
39 \_\_\_ Selassie  
40 Gave some slack  
42 Casual  
43 He served between  
Grant and Garfield  
45 Colt conflict  
50 Mosaic component  
52 Carries on  
53 Indian wonder-  
worker  
54 One and the same  
55 Swab  
56 Cut  
60 Backslide  
62 Summers, in  
Provence  
63 Fabulous fur  
64 Shankar's  
instrument  
65 Back-breaker for a

66 Michelangelo  
 masterpiece  
 67 \_\_\_-burly  
 68 Actress Garson  
 70 Denoted  
 71 Bert or Rosa  
 73 Ideological groups  
 74 Checks out,  
     visually  
 77 Highwaymen  
 79 Grooming routine  
 81 Estate's main  
     house  
 82 Bars or inns  
 83 Escaped  
     confinement  
 86 Default  
 88 \_\_\_ cat:  
     moneybags  
 89 Sword handle  
 91 Conspicuous  
 92 Allegory  
 93 Chills and fever  
 94 Sign of a saint,  
     e.g.  
 95 Simians  
 96 S-shaped molding  
 97 Cut and paste  
 98 Amphibian  
 99 Like a bug in a rug  
 100 How the weasel  
     goes?  
 101 "\_\_\_, my party..."  
 103 It's W. of the Urals  
 104 Porky's pad

|                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                     |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                  |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                           |
|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
|  <p><b>ARIES</b> MARCH 21-APRIL 20</p> <p>You have a busy day ahead of you, mostly due to one particular person -- someone you see as a very exotic, special individual. Someone who just so happens to think of you the very same way. Well, needless to say, with all that mutual admiration going on, you two certainly won't be bored. But the rest of the world around you might be. Try to give spectators equal airtime.</p>              |  <p><b>LEO</b> JULY 23-AUGUST 22</p> <p>Even if you're absolutely sure that you won't want to do anything, remember one thing: You're a fire sign, and fire signs aren't famous for knowing when to quit. So when someone exciting asks if you have time to hang out, you won't hesitate. You'll trade the bath for a cool shower, an early night for a cup of strong coffee and home for an exciting evening out ... as well you should.</p> |  <p><b>SAGITTARIUS</b> NOVEMBER 22-DECEMBER 19</p> <p>You're famous for your connection to anything that has fur, feathers or leaves -- and for your willingness to do whatever it takes to keep them happy. You've also been known to extend your kindnesses to the underdog, even if they arrive in human form. So when someone comes along today with a sad story, you'll be more than happy to help.</p>                                         |
|  <p><b>TAURUS</b> APRIL 20-MAY 20</p> <p>You're the most sensual sign out there, and you know it. So when you become aware that you're especially 'in the mood,' (like you'll be when you wake up this morning) there's just not going to be any stopping you -- and no stopping your partner from giggling in delighted anticipation. In the meantime, get through the day and impress everyone with how meticulous you're being.</p>           |  <p><b>VIRGO</b> AUGUST 23-SEPTEMBER 22</p> <p>If you need something -- and to be honest, you've never been good at admitting it -- you'll be pleasantly surprised at how quickly a family member jumps to your aid. Before you start feeling guilty about it, though, think of how many times you've helped out not just this particular person, but everyone who's related to you. Hey, even you get to lean on loved ones.</p>             |  <p><b>CAPRICORN</b> DECEMBER 22-JANUARY 19</p> <p>Talk about busy. You have a list a mile long -- and that doesn't even count the things you've been rolling around in your mind. There's also a certain someone who's been trying desperately to get it across to you that they'd like some quality time alone with you. Pay attention to those subtle signals. If you get together with them, you'll be headed toward an evening to remember.</p> |
|  <p><b>GEMINI</b> MAY 21-JUNE 21</p> <p>Get the day off to an early start as only you can. Contact whomever you'll be spending your time with and let them know you're just as enthusiastic about your plans as they are. They'll be off to a head start, of course, since they've been looking forward to this ever since you suggested it. But once they actually see you well, it really won't matter where you are or what you're doing.</p> |  <p><b>LIBRA</b> SEPTEMBER 23-OCTOBER 22</p> <p>This is not at all like you -- the way you're acting, that is. Just ask anyone. You're being uncooperative, uncompromising and totally unlike your usual self. You're even beginning to wonder what strange beast has occupied you -- to make you say such outrageous things. The odd part of it is that you're actually enjoying it, although you'd never admit it. Oh, admit it.</p>        |  <p><b>AQUARIUS</b> JANUARY 20-FEBRUARY 18</p> <p>Someone has been paying some very careful attention to you for a while now -- from afar. They've made a mental list of everything about you, from your favourite movies to your favourite kind of ice cream. Anyone who's put this much energy into getting to know you would obviously make quite an attentive lover. Think of them as a secret admirer.</p>                                      |
|  <p><b>CANCER</b> JUNE 22-JULY 22</p> <p>Whether you're at work or at play, you won't be able to sit still for a single second. You'll be ready, willing and able to do whatever it takes to get things done. Just be sure to save some energy for after dark, when things will definitely become more interesting and more intriguing, as your companion will undoubtedly agree. Ready or not, here comes the good stuff.</p>                   |  <p><b>SCORPIO</b> OCTOBER 23-NOVEMBER 21</p> <p>At the moment, you just won't be able to stand the idea of not getting what you want -- especially when it comes to the objects of your attention. Whether they happen to be a person whose eye you've been trying to catch, or an item you've been lusting after, you'll do what you can to have it. And you'll have plenty of help to get it. Call in some of those overdue favours.</p>   |  <p><b>PISCES</b> FEBRUARY 19-MARCH 20</p> <p>Yes, it's time once again for another serious conversation, but don't run off just yet -- no matter what happened last time. This talk is just about guaranteed to turn out extremely well. You two may even reach a whole new level of understanding you'd never have believed possible. If one or both of you starts rehashing the past, though, don't let it continue for long.</p>                 |



## TEST YOUR KNOWLEDGE

1. In which decade was the telephone invented?

- 1850s
- 1860s
- 1870s
- 1880s

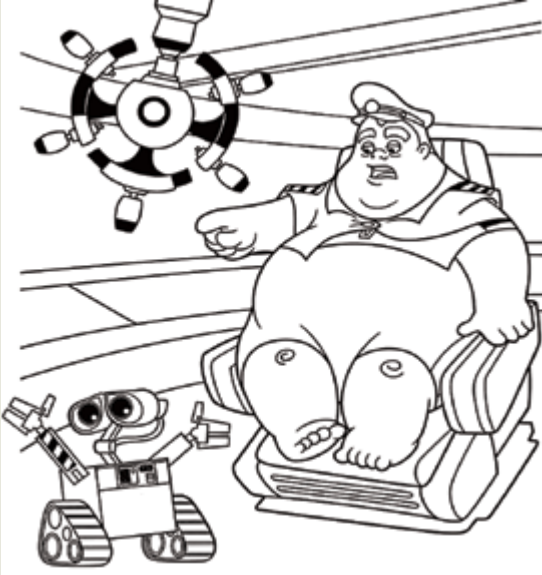
## 2. Who perfected genetic engineering?

- a. Cohen & Boyer
- b. Hunt & Davids
- c. Sinclair & Roberts
- d. Jaysson & Simons

3. What now-ubiquitous device was invented by Zenith engineer Eugene Polley in 1955?

- a. Microwave oven
- b. Remote control
- c. VCR
- d. Calculator

**Answers:** 1. c 2. a 3. b



## 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

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

## BOGGLER

|   |   |   |   |
|---|---|---|---|
| I | M | N | L |
| G | R | I | D |
| F | U | A | P |
| U | N | N | A |

Each game will present you with a matrix filled with letters. The objective is to form words by linking adjacent letters - to the left, right, on top, bottom, or diagonal to each other.

The Boggles Classic game uses a 4 x 4 matrix. Words are valued at one point for each letter in excess of two letters. A three letter word is worth one point, a four letter word is worth two points, and so on.

Valid words must be at least three letters long.

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

## SUDOKU EASY ANSWER

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

**DAILY CROSSWORD  
ANSWERS (JUNE 30)**

|   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| A | I | A | S | C | A | R |   | R | E | P | E | A | T |   | A | T | I | O | N |
| A | R | I | A | N | E |   | S | I | L | E | N | C | E |   | I | N | V | O | K |
| C | A | N | D | I | S |   | I | M | P | L | I | T | Y |   | T | U | R | N | S |
| Y | E | S | I | N | A |   | T | I | T |   | I |   | U | R | A | N | U | S |   |
| W | I | D | O | W | S |   | P | H | O | N | E |   | S | I | L | E |   | D | E |
| U | N | O | W | S |   | B | R | E | W |   | S | H | E | L |   | T | E | U |   |
| R | O | S | E | D |   | E | A | N | D |   | T | H | A | T |   | I | S | T |   |
| E | S | E | S | E |   | E | A | N | D |   | T | H | A | T |   | I | S | T |   |
| H | A | S | S | E | D |   | M | A | C | I | N | G |   | T | A | N | N | E |   |
| E | S | E | S | E |   | T | E | L | S | T |   | K | E | E | N | E | S |   |   |
| D | E | S | E | S |   | E | A | N | T |   | I | N | T | E |   | I | N | E |   |
| E | S | E | S | E |   | E | A | N | T |   | I | N | T | E |   | I | N | E |   |
| D | I | A | M | O | N |   | S | T | I | F | I | N | O | M |   | T | I | S |   |
| D | A | V | E |   | O | D | A | S |   | E | A | S | I |   | P | E | R | I |   |
| Y | S | E | R |   | G | E | L |   | A | S | A | N | A |   | S | H | A | T |   |
| P | E | R | I | O |   | T |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |
| D | E | R | I | O |   | T |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |
| D | O | N | O |   | T | A | T | T | E | N |   | O |   | R | O | P |   | D |   |
| U | N | I | C |   | I | O | N |   | S | O |   | K | E | E | P | T |   |   |   |

## 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





TENDINITIS

SWING,  
STRIKE,  
SKIP... SAFELY!

Tendinitis is a condition where the connective tissues between your muscles and bones become inflamed. Often caused by repetitive activities at work or play, tendinitis can be quite painful but can be healed with adequate rest and adopting correct posture or technique for any activity

If you are prone to doing physical tasks the same way, over and over again, you could be unknowingly laying repetitive strain on some parts of your body which are going to throw in the towel some day.

While certain occupations require one to take awkward positions or indulge in certain repetitive motions, these tend to cause a condition known as 'tendinitis' for some people. There are also a host of sports which give rise to tendinitis because of the need for certain repetitive movements.

If you are a sportsperson, you may be more likely to develop tendinitis, especially if your technique isn't right. This is common among players of baseball, basketball, bowling, golf, running, swimming, and tennis who need to constantly take care if they want to continue enjoying the sport of their choice.

Tendinitis is inflammation or irritation of a tendon — the thick fibrous cords that attach muscle to bone. The condition causes pain and tenderness just outside a joint. Most cases of tendinitis can be successfully treated with rest, physical therapy and medications to reduce pain. But, if tendinitis is severe and leads to the rupture of a tendon, you may need surgery.

Although tendinitis can be caused by a sudden injury, the condition is much more likely to stem from the repetition of a particular movement over time. Most people develop tendinitis because their jobs or hobbies involve repetitive motions, which put stress on the tendons.

Using proper technique is especially important when performing repetitive sports movements or job-related activities. Improper technique can overload the tendon and lead to tendinitis. The most common symptoms are pain, often a dull ache, especially when moving the affected limb or joint, tenderness, and swelling, all of which need due attention and plenty of rest.

PREVENTION

To reduce your chance of developing tendinitis, follow these suggestions:

**Ease up** - Avoid activities that place excessive stress on your tendons, especially for prolonged periods. If you notice pain during a particular exercise, stop and rest.

**Mix it up** - If one exercise or activity causes you a particular, persistent pain, try something else. Cross-training can help you mix up an impact-loading exercise (running) with lower impact exercise (biking).

**Improve technique** - If your technique in an activity or exercise is flawed, you could be setting yourself up for problems with your tendons. Consider taking lessons or getting professional instructions for a new activity.

**Stretch** - Take time after exercise to stretch in order to maximise the range of motion of your joints. This can help to minimise repetitive trauma on tight tissues. The best time to stretch is after exercise.

**Work right** - If possible, get an ergonomic assessment of your workspace and adjust your chair, keyboard and desktop as recommended for your height, arm length, and usual tasks. This will help protect all your joints and tendons from excessive stress.

**Warm up** - Strengthening muscles used in your activity or sport can help them better withstand stress and load.



SPORTS INJURIES

Tendinitis is a common sports-related injury which can occur in any of your tendons but it is most common around your shoulders, elbows, wrists, knees and heels. Some common names for various tendinitis problems are Tennis elbow, Golfer's elbow, Pitcher's shoulder, Swimmer's shoulder, and Jumper's knee.



Tennis elbow

Tennis elbow (lateral epicondylitis) is a painful condition that occurs when tendons in your elbow are overloaded, usually by repetitive motions of the wrist and arm. Despite its name, athletes aren't the only people who develop tennis elbow. People whose jobs feature the types of motions that can lead to tennis elbow include plumbers, painters, carpenters and butchers.

The pain of tennis elbow occurs primarily where the tendons of your forearm muscles attach to a bony bump on the outside of your elbow. Pain can also spread into your forearm and wrist.

Golfer's elbow

Golfer's elbow is a condition that causes

pain where the tendons of your forearm muscles attach to the bony bump on the inside of your elbow. The pain might spread into your forearm and wrist. Golfer's elbow is similar to tennis elbow, which occurs on the outside of the elbow. It's not limited to golfers.

Tennis players and others who repeatedly use their wrists or clench their fingers also can develop golfer's elbow. The pain of golfer's elbow doesn't have to keep you off the course or away from your favourite activities. Rest and appropriate treatment can get you back into the swing of things.

Pitcher's shoulder

When you're a baseball pitcher, you engage in repetitive overhead motion that places significant stress on your shoulder. Pitcher's shoulder or thrower's shoulder, is an injury that affects many baseball players. It is an overuse injury that is caused by increased load upon the rotator cuff.

While the name suggests that this is a baseball injury, any athlete that participates in a sport where repetitive overhand motions are required can sustain this injury. Some of these sports include tennis, volleyball, and track and field events. Pain is the most common symptom.



Swimmer's shoulder

Swimmer's shoulder, also called shoulder impingement, is a condition where swimmers often aggravate their shoulders while they swim due to the constant joint rotation. The sport of swimming is unique in that the shoulders are used to propel the weight of the body, against the resistance of water. Maximal range of motion and flexibility is required for the most efficient swimming. Sometimes, this can result in increased shoulder laxity, or instability.

Approximately 90 per cent of swimmer's complaints are related to problems with their shoulders, most notably swimmer's shoulder.

Jumper's knee

Jumper's knee, also known as patellar tendonitis, is a condition characterised by inflammation of your patellar tendon. This connects your knee- cap (patella) to the shin bone (tibia). Jumper's knee weakens the tendon, and, if untreated, can lead to tears.

Jumper's knee is caused by overuse of the knee joint, such as frequent jumping on hard surfaces. It's usually linked to leg muscle contraction.

# Shamsi stars in thriller

Left-arm spinner leads South Africa to one-run victory over West Indies

## WEST INDIES VS S AFRICA THIRD T20I

St George's, Grenada - Tabraiz Shamsi enhanced his reputation as the top T20 bowler in the international game by inspiring South Africa to a thrilling one-run victory over the West Indies in the third of their five-match series at the National Cricket Stadium in Grenada on Tuesday.

Defending another moderate total of 167 for eight after they were put in to bat for the third time in the series, the left-arm wrist-spinner bowled his most economical four-over spell in conceding just 13 runs for the important wickets of Evin Lewis and Shimron Hetmyer.

Yet as well as he bowled, and as much as the vaunted West Indies power-hitters stuttered for the second consecutive match, the duel still came down to the final over bowled by Kagiso Rabada with 15 runs needed.

Fabian Allen struck an early boundary and then a six off the last ball of the match but the pacer had held his nerve in between those wayward deliveries to limit the home side to 166 for seven. South Africa now take a 2-1 lead going into the fourth game on Thursday.

Lewis and Nicholas Pooran were the joint-topscorers for the West Indies with 27 while Andre Russell contributed 25.

"We faced a lot of criticism after we lost the first match so badly so I am really proud of how we have fought back in the last two matches," said Shamsi after receiving the man-of-the-match award. "These pitches are getting harder and harder to score runs and while I would have obviously liked a bigger total to defend, I felt we had a good chance



South Africa's Tabraiz Shamsi celebrates after dismissing a West Indies batsman during the third T20I on Tuesday (AFP)

once we stuck to our plans, and on this occasion, it all worked out well for us in the end."

Earlier Obed McCoy and veteran Dwayne Bravo combined for seven wickets as South Africa faltered from a promising position.

Quinton de Kock, playing in

his 50<sup>th</sup> T20I, led the Proteas batting effort once again with a top score of 72 while Rassie van der Dussen contributed 32 and Aiden Markram, brought into the middle order at the expense of Heinrich Klaasen, chipped in with 23.

However it was the 24 year

old Vincentian McCoy who stole the show with his assortment of cleverly-disguised deliveries earning the seamer the impressive figures of four for 22, bettering his haul of three for 25 just two days earlier.

Bravo, again charged with the responsibility of bowling in the

| SCOREBOARD                                                                                                                                           |                    |         |
|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------|---------|
| SOUTH AFRICA                                                                                                                                         |                    |         |
| Q de Kock                                                                                                                                            | c Simmonds b Bravo | 72 (51) |
| R Hendricks                                                                                                                                          | c Allen b McCoy    | 17 (11) |
| T Bavuma                                                                                                                                             | c Hetmyer b McCoy  | 1 (4)   |
| A Markram                                                                                                                                            | c Allen b Bravo    | 23 (18) |
| R van der Dussen                                                                                                                                     |                    |         |
|                                                                                                                                                      | c Hetmyer b McCoy  | 32 (24) |
| D Miller                                                                                                                                             | c Simmonds b Bravo | 2 (2)   |
| G Linde                                                                                                                                              | b McCoy            | 0 (4)   |
| K Rabada                                                                                                                                             | not out            | 4 (4)   |
| A Nortje                                                                                                                                             | run out            | 0 (3)   |
| T Shamsi                                                                                                                                             | not out            | 0 (0)   |
| <b>Extras:</b> (b 4, lb 2, nb 1, w 9) 16                                                                                                             |                    |         |
| <b>TOTAL:</b> 167 for eight in 20 overs                                                                                                              |                    |         |
| <b>Fall of wickets:</b> 1-42, 2-44, 3-87, 4-147, 5-150, 6-151, 7-161, 8-164                                                                          |                    |         |
| <b>Bowling:</b> O McCoy 4-0-22-4, J Holder 3-0-18-0, A Russell 2-0-25-0, K Sinclair 3-0-29-0, F Allen 2-0-23-0, D Bravo 4-0-25-3, K Pollard 2-0-19-0 |                    |         |
| WEST INDIES                                                                                                                                          |                    |         |
| E Lewis                                                                                                                                              | c Dussen b Shamsi  | 27 (21) |
| L Simmonds                                                                                                                                           | c de Kock b Linde  | 22 (22) |
| J Holder                                                                                                                                             | c Markram b Ngidi  | 16 (11) |
| S Hetmyer                                                                                                                                            | c Rabada b Shamsi  | 17 (10) |
| N Pooran                                                                                                                                             | lbw b Nortje       | 26 (28) |
| K Pollard                                                                                                                                            | b Rabada           | 1 (2)   |
| A Russell                                                                                                                                            | c Markram b Nortje | 25 (16) |
| F Allen                                                                                                                                              | not out            | 14 (9)  |
| D Bravo                                                                                                                                              | not out            | 0 (1)   |
| <b>Extras:</b> (b 1, lb 3, w 14) 18                                                                                                                  |                    |         |
| <b>TOTAL:</b> 166 for seven in 20 overs                                                                                                              |                    |         |
| <b>Fall of wickets:</b> 1-55, 2-57, 3-90, 4-97, 5-104, 6-140, 7-153                                                                                  |                    |         |
| <b>Bowling:</b> G Linde 3-0-33-1, A Markram 2-0-24-0, A Nortje 4-0-29-2, L Ngidi 3-0-22-1, K Rabada 4-0-41-1, T Shamsi 4-0-13-2                      |                    |         |

final overs of the innings, made his experience under pressure count in taking two late wickets to finish with three for 25.

After McCoy removed opener Reeza Hendricks and captain Temba Bavuma in the fifth over, de Kock put on 43 with Markram and 60 with van der Dussen to put South Africa in position for a total closer to the 180-run mark.

However de Kock's demise to Bravo, for an innings which came off 51 balls and included two sixes and five fours, triggered a slide from 147 for three in the 16th over with the tourists losing five wickets for 17 runs.

AFP



England's Chris Woakes (L) celebrates with his teammates after dismissing a Sri Lanka batsman during their ODI match on Tuesday (AFP)

## Woakes and Root shine as England rout Sri Lanka

### ENGLAND VS SRI LANKA FIRST ODI

Chester-le-Street, UK - Chris Woakes set up a comfortable five-wicket win finished by Joe Root as England again proved too strong for Sri Lanka in the opening one-day international (ODI) at the Riverside on Tuesday to go 1-0 up in a three-match series.

Woakes, in only his third international in over nine months, finished with excellent figures of four for 18 as England dismissed Sri Lanka for a meagre 185 at Durham's headquarters. Root, in his 150<sup>th</sup> match at this level, then made 79 not out as England cantered home with more than 15 overs to spare.

Warwickshire allrounder Woakes, named player of the match, told BBC Radio, "I felt good today, it is always nice to get a couple (of wickets) early."

Sri Lanka's batting had faltered repeatedly during a preceding 3-0 T20I series loss to England and it was no great surprise to see them dismissed cheaply after England captain Eoin Morgan won the toss.

Sri Lanka captain Kusal Perera

made a valuable 73 for a Sri Lanka side featuring three debutants. Together with Wanindu Hasaranga (54) he shared a stand of 99.

Woakes' return ended the partnership, with Hasaranga holing out in the deep.

That was the start of a collapse that saw seven wickets lost for 40 runs, with left-arm quick Willey removing Perera on his way to three for 44.

Jonny Bairstow hit the first two balls of England's reply for four before he played on to pace-man Binura Fernando for 43.

Morgan and Sam Billings both fell cheaply to fast bowler Dushmantha Chameera. Test captain Root batted serenely, hitting just two fours in a 58-ball fifty, before Sam Curran struck the winning runs.

**Brief scores: Sri Lanka 185 in**

**42.3 overs** (Kusal Perera 73,

Wanindu Hasaranga 54; Chris

Woakes 4-18, David Willey

3-44) **lost to England 189 for**

**five in 34.5 overs** (Jonny

Bairstow 43, Joe Root 79 not

out, Moeen Ali 28;

Dushmantha Chameera 3-50)

AFP

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# EURO2020

## QUARTERFINALS FRIDAY



**SWITZERLAND VS SPAIN**  
(8pm, Oman time)



**BELGIUM VS ITALY**  
(11pm, Oman time)



England manager Gareth Southgate celebrate his team's victory over Germany in the last-16 match of Euro 2020 at Wembley on Tuesday

# SOUTHGATE SCRIPTS ENGLAND 'MASTERPIECE'

London, UK - England are dreaming of Euro 2020 glory after finally slaying old nemesis Germany in the knockout stages of a major tournament and now have a favourable draw against Ukraine in the quarterfinals.

A 2-0 win over the four-time world champions at a raucous Wembley - thanks to late goals from Raheem Sterling and Harry Kane - rewarded England manager Gareth Southgate's measured approach, which had been criticised for being overly cautious in the group phase.

Southgate knows only too well what the consequences of failure are for England against Germany in a major tournament on home soil. His distinguished playing career was forever dogged by a miss in the penalty shootout at Euro 96 that sent the Germans to the final.

Twenty-five years on, England are still waiting for their first major tournament win since 1966, when

they beat Germany in the World Cup final, but are at least now consistent contenders.

Southgate's style on the sidelines during the 2018 World Cup in Russia, where they reached the semifinals, caused a spike in demand for waistcoats back home but on the field he has shown himself to be a pragmatist, willing to put his neck on the line with unpopular decisions.

"You know that if you change the shape, you pick certain personnel instead of others and, if it goes wrong, you're dead," he said after switching to a 3-4-3 formation to match up with Germany's wing-backs. That meant Jack Grealish, Phil Foden, Jadon Sancho, Marcus Rashford and Mason Mount all started the game sitting on the bench.

### Solid foundations

Blessed with England's best array of attacking talent in decades,

Southgate has instead focused on building solid foundations. The results are clear to see after they started a tournament with four consecutive clean sheets for the first time since 1966.

"Not for the first time in the last three weeks, sticking to his beliefs and gut instincts has been rewarded," former Liverpool and England defender Jamie Carragher wrote in the *Telegraph*.

"It has been a long time since England had such a single-minded leader who is prepared to thrive or fail on his own terms."

Southgate's loaded bench also means England have the weapons to decide games as fatigue sets in.

Grealish was the game-changer after his introduction 20 minutes from time with a part in both goals, but the manager's faith in Sterling and Kane was also rewarded.

After a poor end to the season with Manchester City, there were calls for Sterling to be dropped be-

fore the tournament began. However, with three of his country's four goals, the 26 year old has finally delivered at a major tournament.

Kane already has a World Cup Golden Boot to his name but had barely looked like scoring in the opening three games of Euro 2020.

The England skipper's time finally came four minutes from the end when he nodded home Grealish's cross to send the home crowd wild.

"With 75 minutes on the clock, Wembley reverberated to a noise 25 years in the waiting," said the *Times*.

The newspaper said the fear was that Southgate's tactics 'felt like painting the ceiling of the Sistine Chapel with a roller - it might get the job done but not as attractively as desired. Yet then two swift, perfect brush strokes produced a masterpiece'.

AFF

# WE DON'T STOP HERE, SAYS KANE

London, UK - England captain Harry Kane said his side will not stop after ending their long barren run against Germany at major tournaments with a 2-0 win at Wembley to move into the quarterfinals of Euro 2020.

It was also their first knockout victory over the four-time world champions since lifting the World Cup on home soil in 1966.

"It's an amazing day, an amazing game. To hear Wembley like this is a moment none of us will ever forget," said Kane. "A great performance, another clean sheet, just the perfect afternoon. We'll enjoy this one but we know we've got another big one on Saturday now."

A win over Ukraine in the quarterfinals in Rome on Saturday will set them up against face Denmark or the Czech Republic in the last-four. "It doesn't get bigger than this. A knockout game against a big nation, at home, when all the pressure is on, and we delivered so we should be proud of that," he added.

"The bottom line is we don't want to stop here, we've got a vision of where we want to go as a team, as a group, as a coaching staff and it's not done yet."

"We loved every second of it. Hopefully we'll be back here for the semifinal and final."

On getting back among goals, Kane said, "I always said as a striker you have to be ready for the next chance."

"It's an amazing feeling, any striker wants to be scoring goals. Hopefully I can score a couple more from here till the end. "When you look at

our attacking players, any team will be looking at us and know we are dangerous.

"We are keeping clean sheets, we are building confidence off that, there will be more self-belief now but we have to concentrate on Saturday now. We can't switch off."

England hero Raheem Sterling hailed the team's desire to rewrite history after beating Germany in a knockout game. "It sounds good," said

Sterling on ending England's hoodoo against Germany. "We knew we needed to put in a big performance against a very good side and we did that today."

Sterling had not scored in a major tournament before the Euro, but has been his country's standout performer en route to the last eight.

"Doing it for your country is always special and it's definitely a special moment for me," he added.

"I celebrated (the goal) then for half a second I thought let it not be offside. I'm really happy it went in and we got the win."

AFF



Harry Kane



Germany's coach Joachim Loew at Wembley Stadium in London on Tuesday

# Defeat hugely disappointing, says Loew

London, UK - Outgoing Germany head coach Joachim Loew admitted the defeat to England in the last-16 of Euro 2020 was 'hugely disappointing' after his side failed to take their chances. The loss brought down the curtain on his 15-year reign as Germany coach.

Loew said the Germans simply came off second best. "It's a huge disappointment. The players are gutted. It's very quiet in the dressing room," said the 61 year old, who steps down to be replaced

by former assistant Hansi Flick.

"In games like this, it is crucial to convert all goal chances, which we didn't do, neither through Timo Werner nor Thomas Mueller."

"I don't blame anyone, normally Mueller would have put that away. It's unusual that he didn't, but these things happen."

"Many players are still young and I think many of them will be at the top of their game in 2024," he added, with Germany to host the next European Championship.

Midfielder Toni Kroos said the loss was a 'very, very bitter' pill to swallow. "We weren't effective enough and the 1-0 (when Sterling scored) changed everything, until then we had played a decent game."

"When you go out in the last-16, it's disappointing, even though we came through a difficult group."

Germany qualified from Group F alongside France and Portugal.

Germany captain Manuel Neuer said England were more 'greedy' in front of goal. "The game was finely

balanced, but England were more greedy in the situations where they scored their goals than we were," he said. "The disappointment is huge."

Neuer also paid tribute to the departing Loew, whose tenure brought the highs of the 2014 World Cup triumph in Brazil and the lows of finishing last in their group four years later in Russia.

"Joachim Loew has shaped a great era. It's very sad that it ends like this for him."

AFF



# Falling stars Djokovic and Kyrgios progress

London, UK - Five-time champion Novak Djokovic overcame a series of falls on Centre Court to reach the Wimbledon third round for the 15<sup>th</sup> time on Wednesday as Australian firebrand Nick Kyrgios won his first match in four months.

World No 1 Djokovic, chasing a sixth Wimbledon and record-equalling 20<sup>th</sup> Grand Slam title, eased to a 6-3, 6-3, 6-3 win over 102<sup>nd</sup>-ranked Kevin Anderson of South Africa.

However, he slipped and fell on at least five occasions on Centre Court, the day after Serena Williams suffered a tearful, tournament-ending injury due to similar slips.

Djokovic, 34, cruised to victory over the man he defeated in the 2018 final without facing a single break point and committing just six unforced errors.

"I have a nice connection with the crowd," said Djokovic.

"I also seem to be having a really nice connection with the grass. I don't recall falling so much in the first two matches at Wimbledon."

Kyrgios, ranked 60, but a quarterfinalist on debut in 2014, won his first match since the Australian Open in February, defeating French 21<sup>st</sup> seed Ugo Humbert before declaring, "Not bad for a part-time player".

Kyrgios triumphed 6-4, 4-6, 3-6, 6-1, 9-7 in a match held over from Tuesday evening when the final set was level at 3-3.

Kyrgios also shrugged off an ugly-looking fall in the 13<sup>th</sup> game of the final set when his right knee buckled beneath him.

On Tuesday, he was over-



Novak Djokovic slips on the grass during his match against Kevin Anderson in Wimbledon, UK, on Wednesday

heard muttering that Court One was 'a joke'.

As the tournament played catch-up after two days hit by rain, recriminations continued over the state of the All England Club courts.

Serena Williams said she was 'heart-broken' to have had to withdraw as her pursuit of Margaret Court's record 24 Grand Slam singles titles was again thwarted.

Her fall came not long after French player Adrian Mannarino had slipped and hurt himself on the same part of Centre Court.

### ‘Meticulous’ courts

He too had to retire with his match against Roger Federer

level at two sets apiece. Despite the criticism, the All England Club insisted that the courts are up to standard.

"The preparation of the grass courts has been to exactly the same meticulous standard as in previous years," the club said in a statement.

"The weather conditions on the opening two days have been the wettest we have experienced in almost a decade, which has required the roof to be closed on Centre Court and No 1 Court for long periods.

"This is at a time when the grass plant is at its most lush and green, which does result in additional moisture on what is a natural surface."

French 13<sup>th</sup> seed Gael Monfils defeated Australia's Christopher O'Connell 4-6, 6-2, 7-6 (7/5), 4-6, 6-4 in a first round tie which had started on Monday. Fifth seeded Bianca Andreescu of Canada was knocked out 6-2, 6-1 by France's Alize Cornet.

### 100 wins for Nishikori

Italian seventh seed Matteo Berrettini, the champion at Queen's and tipped to go deep at Wimbledon, edged Argentina's Guido Pella 6-4, 3-6, 6-4, 6-0.

Japan's Kei Nishikori, a two-time quarterfinalist, claimed his 100<sup>th</sup> Grand Slam match win by seeing off Australia's Alexei Popyrin 6-4, 6-4, 6-4.

Britain's Andy Murray won his first singles match at the tournament in four years when he saw

off 24<sup>th</sup> seeded Nikoloz Basilashvili two days ago. The three-time champion next tackles German qualifier Oscar Otte.

### ONLY SEEDED PLAYER RESULTS

(x denotes seeded player):

**Men's second round:** Denis Shapovalov (x10) beat Pablo Andújar – walkover.

**First round:** Christian Garín (x17) beat Bernabé Zapata Miralles 6-7 (6/8), 6-3, 3-6, 6-3, 6-2; Yoshihito Nishioka beat John Isner (x28) 7-6 (7/5), 2-6, 6-3, 6-7 (3/7), 6-4; Jérémy Chardy beat Aslan Karatsev (x20) 7-6 (7/4), 7-6 (8/6), 6-3; Jordan Thompson beat Casper Ruud (x12) 7-6 (8/6), 7-6 (7/3), 2-6, 2-6, 6-2; Cameron Norrie (x29) beat Lucas Pouille 6-7 (6/8), 7-5, 6-2, 7-5; Lorenzo Sonego (x23) beat Pedro Sousa 6-2, 7-5, 6-0; Sam Querrey beat Pablo Carreño-Busta (x11) 7-6 (8/6), 6-4, 7-5; Grigor Dimitrov (x18) beat Fernando Verdasco 3-6, 6-3, 6-4, 6-4; Marin Cilic (x32) beat Salvatore Caruso 7-6 (7/5), 7-6 (7/1), 6-1.

### Women's first round:

Markéta Vondroušová beat Anett Kontaveit (x24) 2-6, 6-4, 6-2; Darya Kasatkina (x31) beat Patricia Tig 6-0, 3-6, 6-3; Elina Svitolina (x3) beat Alison Van Uytvanck 6-3, 2-6, 6-3; Paula Badosa (x30) beat Aliona Bolsova 6-2, 5-7, 6-2; Karolina Muchova (x19) beat Zhang Shuai 6-3, 6-3; Anastasia Pavlyuchenkova (x16) beat Ana Bogdan 6-2, 6-2.

AFP



Tadej Pogacar of Slovenia rides during the fifth stage on Wednesday

## Pogacar storms to time-trial victory

### TOUR DE FRANCE

Laval, France - Defending champion Tadej Pogacar stormed the Tour de France individual time-trial on Wednesday while Mathieu van der Poel clung on to the overall lead after stage five.

Van der Poel kept hold of his yellow jersey by just eight seconds while Ineos pair Geraint Thomas and Richard Carapaz lost more than a minute on Slovenia's Pogacar, who is now second in the overall standings.

Ahead of the 27.2km run Pogacar described the stage as critical to his chances of defending the 2020 title and the manner in which he raced on Wednesday backed up the statement.

Van der Poel also vowed to defend the yellow jersey in the against-the-clock discipline that is not his strongest, reaching beyond expectations to do so on his debut Tour.

"This was the best day of my career, we didn't think I could keep the jersey today but we worked well past midnight last

night in preparing it all," said Van der Poel, who had a tailored yellow one-piece suit on.

Van der Poel will likely keep the jersey a few days longer with two flat stages to come.

On a day when the spectator who caused a mass crash of riders on stage one was arrested by French police, there were thousands of roadside fans infringing onto the route to cheer Van der Poel on as the tension mounted towards the finish line.

"The woman has been formally identified and she was taken into custody a few minutes ago," the source told AFP after the state prosecutor for the city of Brest in Brittany, Camille Miansoni, said 'a suspect is in custody'.

On Saturday, a woman brandishing a cardboard sign on the roadside between Brest and Landerneau caused German rider Tony Martin to fall, who in turn brought down dozens of riders behind him. The crash held up the race for five minutes while bikes and bodies were untangled. AFP

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## Benitez appointed Everton boss

### ENGLISH PREMIER LEAGUE

London, UK - Everton confirmed the appointment of Rafael Benitez as their new manager on Wednesday despite fan protests against the English Premier League club's move for the former Liverpool boss.

Benitez has agreed a three-year contract with Everton and succeeds Carlo Ancelotti, who left Goodison Park to join Real Madrid at the start of June.

The Spaniard is the first man to manage both Merseyside teams since William Edward Barclay in the 1890s.

"I am delighted to be joining Everton," said Benitez. "Throughout this process I have been greatly impressed by the ambition shown by the senior representatives at the club and their desire to bring success to this historic club.

"I believe this is a club that is going places. I'm determined to play a big part in helping this great club achieve its ambitions."

Benitez's appointment will antagonise a significant section of Everton's fan base after he



A file photo of Spanish manager Rafael Benitez

criticised the Toffees during his time at Liverpool.

Everton supporters' animosity towards Benitez was raised above the usual level reserved for a Reds boss ever since his 'small club' jibe after a 2007 Merseyside derby.

Benitez has since sought to

clarify he was referring to what he believed was a 'small-team' mentality from Everton in the game rather than as a club.

On Monday, police confirmed they were investigating the placing of a 'threatening' banner with the words 'We know where you live. Don't sign' hung over a

garden wall close to Benitez's home, which is near Liverpool.

Offensive banners have previously been put up at the stadium.

Farhad Moshiri, Everton's major shareholder, ignored the dissenting voices to pursue "proven winner" Benitez, who won the Champions League and FA Cup during his six-year Liverpool reign, which ended in 2010.

Benitez will start work at Everton's Finch Farm training headquarters on July 5, with assistant manager Duncan Ferguson and goalkeeping coach Alan Kelly remaining at the club.

The Everton job will be the fourth Premier League stint for Benitez, who had a rocky three-year stay at Newcastle that ended in 2019 before a spell in China.

The 61 year old won the Europa League with Chelsea during his spell as interim boss in 2012/13 before joining Napoli. Benitez has also managed Valencia, Inter Milan and Real Madrid in a well-travelled career.

AFP

## Bahrain's world 400m champion Salwa banned

Lausanne, Switzerland - World 400m champion Salwa Eid Naser of Bahrain was banned for two years for doping on Wednesday in a ruling by the Court of Arbitration for Sport (CAS).

Sport's top court upheld an appeal by World Athletics against a ruling by the federation's own disciplinary tribunal which had cleared Nigerian-born Salwa of missing doping tests. The ruling means she will be unable to take part in the upcoming Tokyo Olympics.

Salwa, 23, stunned the athletics world when she powered to the third-fastest 400m in history to take the world title in Doha in 2019. Her time of 48.14s has been bettered by Marita Koch of the then-East Germany and Czech athlete Jarmila Kratochvilova in the 1980s.

AFP

Every day, all day!