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OMAN TAKE ON JAPAN IN ASIAN QUALIFIERS
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HM'S VISITS TO ARMY, AIR FORCE UNITS HIGHLIGHTED

The August edition of *Jund Oman* magazine of the Ministry of Defence (MoD) features the two high-profile visits of His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik to the 11th Infantry Brigade of the Royal Army of Oman (RAO) and to the Royal Air Force of Oman's (RAFO) Thumrait Air Base in Dhofar. His Majesty the Sultan visited the 11th Infantry Brigade on August 11, while air base visit was made on August 30 (MoD)

NEWS BRIEFS



HM CONDOLES PRESIDENT OF KAZAKHSTAN
Muscat - His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik sent a cable of condolences to President Kassym-Jomart Tokayev of Kazakhstan on victims of the explosion at an ammunition depot in Jambyl Province. His Majesty the Sultan expressed his heartfelt sympathies to President Tokayev, families of the victims and the friendly people of Kazakhstan. He prayed to Allah the Almighty to rest the souls of the deceased in peace in paradise and grant their families patience.

Oman welcomes the world again

Our Correspondent
Muscat

Oman Airports opened its doors to welcome travellers coming to the sultanate from around the world on Wednesday.

With the new decisions coming into force from Wednesday, such as lifting the ban on entry of people from certain countries and removal of the quarantine requirements, Oman Airports marked the return of the operations of regular flights by giving the green light to major international airlines to conduct their flights to Oman.

'With the expectations of operations returning to pre-pandemic levels and to achieve the highest standards of health and safety, Muscat International Airport has implemented a host of



To achieve the highest standards of safety Muscat airport has implemented some measures (Supplied photo)

measures in line with the precautionary and preventive requirements which come in compliance with the national ef-

forts to prevent the spread of the pandemic,' Oman Airports said. To ensure the safety and health of all passengers and air-

port workers; Oman Airports has allocated a special path for arriving passengers who are immunised and have a pre-departure

PCR test, and another one for those who are not vaccinated or who did not conduct a PCR examination in advance. 'This ensures the smooth flow of arriving passengers. These new paths include special tracks for first and business-class passengers, for GCC citizens, and for travellers with special needs.'

Saud bin Nasser al Hubaishi, vice president of Muscat International Airport, said, "We are on the threshold of returning to our full operations at Muscat International Airport as well as the rest of the sultanate's airports. We congratulate all the workers at our airports for the return, which we all have been longing for for a long time.

"Implementation of a set of strict precautionary protocols at Muscat and Salalah airports en-

abled us to obtain international recognition as the first airports in the Middle East in application of health standards related to COVID-19. We are constantly updating these protocols and procedures in line with the international standards adopted in this regard and aligning it with the national precautionary requirements approved by the concerned authorities in Oman."

Oman Airports emphasised the importance of adhering to the precautionary measures and wearing a face mask at all times inside the terminals, and maintaining social distancing of at least one and a half meters inside the airport premises.

It also called on travellers to present the required travel documents to be able to enter the passenger terminal.

Vaccination not mandatory for residents, citizens to enter Oman

Our Correspondent
Muscat

Omani citizens and expatriates holding valid residency who have not taken the COVID-19 vaccine can return to Oman but must adhere to all protocols that are in place including undergoing home quarantine (for Omanis) and institutional quarantine (for non-Omanis) for a period of seven days.

The government has made an exception to facilitate the return of Omani citizens and their families who are outside the sultanate and have not yet received the vaccine. This is also applicable to expatriate workers with valid resident permits who got stuck aboard due to the

They must adhere to all protocols including undergoing home quarantine (for Omanis) and institutional quarantine (for non-Omanis) for a period of seven days



pandemic.

'Expatriates who have taken only one dose of the COVID-19 vaccine in the sultanate and were unable to obtain the second dose in their countries can come. Non-Omani workers who have not taken any dose can also come

back,' the Government Communication Centre said.

The centre said that such people are allowed to return to the sultanate on the condition of adhering to all the protocols.

'These include undergoing COVID-19 PCR tests before and

on arrival, wearing electronic tracking bracelet and adhering to the home quarantine (for Omanis) and the institutional quarantine (for non-Omanis) for a period of seven days and a PCR test done on the eighth day,' the centre said.

One dose must to access public places until Oct 15

Our Correspondent
Muscat

The Supreme Committee assigned to look into COVID-19 implications has issued a clarification on new protocols that came into force from Wednesday, including allowing those vaccinated with at least one dose of a COVID-19 vaccine to enter government and private sector facilities until October 15.

Visitors to government units, private sector facilities and users of public transport system need to have at least a single dose of the vaccine.

'After October 15, visitors to government and private sector establishments will not be allowed to enter if they haven't taken the second dose of the vaccine,' the Supreme Commit-

tee said.

Each institution (governmental or private) is obligated to establish a mechanism to make sure that those who enter its establishment are vaccinated as per the decision.

The Supreme Committee has given government employees a grace period till October 1 to get two doses of vaccines.

'At least one dose is required for government employees to enter work establishments in September. They will not be allowed to come to work starting from October 1, if they haven't received the second dose of the vaccine.'

Employees who have health conditions that prevent them from receiving the vaccine must prove it with a medical report for the abstinence.



Emotions run high as expatriates return



Hurricane Ida could become costliest weather disaster: UN

'99.9% of medical waste safely treated'

Our Correspondent
Muscat

The year 2020 remained an unpredictable one due to the COVID-19 pandemic and despite the challenges that defined the year, be'ah proudly achieved 100 per cent municipal waste service coverage through its 4,172-strong service providing man-power network.

'The company now serves all citizens and residents along the length and breadth of Oman, deploying systems, practices and tools that are on par with international standards. Additionally, be'ah decommissioned all known traditional dumpsites across the sultanate and is currently working on rehabilitating them,' be'ah said in its annual sustainability report.

'So far, 31 of the 40 sites identified as priority have been rehabilitated. Ten engineered landfills and 16 transfer stations are in operation across Oman. The 11th landfill and five additional transfer stations are currently under construction,' the report added.

As it is known, be'ah treats 99.9 per cent of the medical waste generated annually in the safest and most efficient manner at its three treatment facilities, which is a commendable achievement towards safe medical waste disposal.

be'ah currently operates three sites to handle industrial waste, while an additional state-of-the-art treatment facility for the same is being readied to become operational by 2025.

Due to its nature, medical



be'ah's state-of-the-art healthcare waste treatment facilities have been established as per the latest international standards recommended by WHO to ensure safe management and disposal

waste poses a significant risk of infection, contamination, and injury. It is generated from hospitals, health and dental clinics, blood banks and veterinary facilities, as well as medical research institutions and laboratories.

Healthcare waste can contain infectious agents, sharp objects, toxic material, hazardous chem-

icals or pharmaceuticals, that can be radioactive and genotoxic. Healthcare institutions across Oman annually generate around 4,500 tonnes of healthcare waste, the highest quantity of which is produced in Muscat governorate. Dhofar, North Batinah and South Sharqiyah governorates come second in this

regard. About 15-20 per cent of the total medical waste generated, is hazardous in nature.

All individuals exposed to hazardous medical waste are potentially at risk, including those within healthcare establishments and those who handle such waste. Mismanagement or careless handling of such waste can have serious consequences on public health.

be'ah's state-of-the-art medical waste treatment facilities have been established as per the latest international standards recommended by the World Health Organization to ensure safe management and disposal using the latest scientific methods and technologies.

Through its pilot projects and recommendations towards implementation of the best practices for medical waste management, be'ah successfully launched the management of carcinogenic waste (genotoxic and cytotoxic) in Oman, which will enable proper segregations of such critical waste streams and streamline the process of managing and selecting a proper treatment at medical waste facilities.

be'ah also introduced specialised purple bins to segregate cytotoxic and genotoxic waste at The Royal Hospital and the Sultan Qaboos University. The colour purple is a recognised international waste segregating code for such healthcare waste.

With the outbreak of the pandemic, be'ah activated its medical waste management contingency plan in cooperation with the Ministry of Health.

Omani long-distance runner Khatri completes 170km race in France

Muscat - Hamdan al Khatri, Oman's top trail runner, completed the arduous 170km UTMB race in Chamonix, France on Monday. He crossed the line in a time of 41 hours, 14 minutes and 41 seconds after recording an average speed of 4.17km per hour throughout the race.

Teammate Hamed al Harthi had to withdraw after 127km and 32 hours of racing, just 45km from the finish.

Exhausted but proud as he reached the end, Khatri unfurled the Omani flag in celebration.

"It is not easy, a very technical race. The terrain is very different from the one in Oman, with a different climatic condition. But I finished and I'm delighted," he was quoted as saying in a press communiqué.

The Omani pair, 31-year-old Khatri and 62-year-old Harthi, were due to compete in last year's race but were forced to postpone the attempt due to COVID-19 and travel restrictions. Both had committed to training to prepare for the race despite the lack of competition.

Focused around the foothills of Mont-Blanc, this year's 170km race course challenged the athletes with undulating terrain leading to sharp uphill portions taking the athletes up to 2,500m with a total of 10,000 of elevation gain. The event, described as 'a mythical race, a unique experience', featured nearly 10,000 runners and is considered the showpiece meet for trail-runners around the world. The race distance that both Khatri and Harthi took part in saw around 2,300 participants. Both athletes have accumu-



lated a wealth of experience in trail running marathons, competing in the inaugural Oman by UTMB in 2018 and at a variety of races around the world. Khatri has raced at UTMB Mont Blanc in 2019, when he was the first and only Omani in the 100km race. Khatri reached the summit of Mount Kilimanjaro earlier this year and has also competed in Oman by UTMB, in 2019, as well

as Ushuaia by UTMB in Argentina in 2019.

Prior to the pandemic, the sultanate had gained a solid reputation as one of the world's newest and most exciting emerging sports and adventure destinations, with Oman by UTMB attracting athletes from around the world and an impressive local contingent to test themselves on a brand-new course.



اوميفكو
OMIFCO



INVITATION TO TENDER

We would like to invite all reputed & specialized companies, who have relevant experience to provide the required services mentioned against the below tenders for Fertilizer/Oil and Gas/Refinery/Petrochemical Industries to submit their best offer for the below Tender:

Tender No.	01-10378-2021
Tender Description	Providing Catering Services to OMIFCO Employees in OMIFCO Plant, Sur.
Brief Details	Provide variety of Catering Services at high level of quality to the employees on continuous basis including weekends & public holidays, as per specifications stated in the tender documents.
Tender Collection	05 th Sep - 14 th Sept 2021
Tender Fees (Non-Refundable)	OMR. 250/- (Omani Rial Two Hundred Fifty, only)
Bid Bond	OMR. 5,000/- (Omani Rial Five Thousand, only)
Minimum Experience	Five (5) Years of experience in the subject filed in similar scope of work and scale.
Bid Submission due date	Not later than 30 th October 2021, 12:00pm (Oman time)

Tender No.	02-10372-2021
Tender Description	Providing of Housekeeping Services
Brief Details	Housekeeping Services for OMIFCO complex supporting Ammonia Plants, Urea Plants, Utility & Offsite, Shipping & Jetty and other locations inside the plant.
Tender Collection	05 th Sep - 14 th Sept 2021
Tender Fees (Non-Refundable)	OMR. 250/- (Omani Rial Two Hundred Fifty, only)
Bid Bond	OMR. 5,000/- (Omani Rial Five Thousand, only)
Minimum Experience	Five (5) Years of experience in the subject filed in similar scope of work and scale.
Bid Submission due date	Not later than 30 th October 2021, 12:00pm (Oman time)

All bidders shall submit their offer in THREE (3) separate envelopes as following:

- Technical Bid and Un-priced Commercial Bid.
- Commercial Priced Bid.
- Bid Bond valid for 120 days, with total amount as mentioned against each tender.

All three envelopes shall be sealed and tagged with the Envelope Title, Tender Title and Tender Number. Also, the company profile and registration documents should be submitted along with the Technical Bid. All three envelopes should be submitted at OMIFCO Head Office in Sur - Tender Box at the Main Gate.

Further details can be obtained from OMIFCO Purchase & Contracts Department at Sur Industrial Estate
Tel: +968 2553 2071 Fax: +968 2556 2824 | E-mail: Purchase@omifco.com
P.O. Box: 67, P.C 411, Sur, Sultanate of Oman
www.omifco.com



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Al Jazer Shrimp Farm to get Saudi expertise

Our Correspondent
Muscat

The Al Jazer Shrimp Farm in Al Wusta, with a capacity to produce 12,500 tonnes of Indian white shrimp annually, will now be backed by Saudi Arabia.

A memorandum of understanding was signed between the Fisheries Development Oman (FDO) and the National Aquaculture Group (Naqua) of Saudi Arabia to establish Al Jazer Shrimp Farm.

Eng Ahmad al Balla, managing director of the Naqua, in a statement to the Saudi Press Agency, said that Naqua enjoys an experience of around 40 years in shrimp farming and also has the benefit of using modern technologies to enhance production.

"This makes it able to contribute to adding value to investment projects in the sultanate," he said.

The farm, which is developed by FDO, had initially an investment value of RO44.5mn for phase one of the project.

'At the beginning of 2020, an aquaculture consultant was selected by the company, and then assigned to revise the conceptual designs of the project,' stated the Economic Diversification Report 2020 of Oman Vision 2040 Implementation Follow-Up Unit.

After the revision was completed, the conceptual designs were approved in May 2020. 'Then, the company started the tendering process to assign Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) consultant, who was assigned in June 2020, and started the assessment study accordingly.'

Simultaneously, the company



Three-month shrimp season begins in Oman

Our Correspondent
Muscat

The three-month long shrimp fishing season began on Wednesday with authorities expecting it be a better year than 2020, when the sultanate saw a fall of 17.27 per cent in catch over 2019.

Shrimp fishing begins along the coasts of the sultanate, especially in the governorates of South Sharqiah, Al Wusta and Dhofar and lasts for three months.

The largest and most productive shrimp fisheries are concentrated in the wilayat of Mahout in Al Wusta governorate.

Saeed bin Humaid al Hakmani, head of the Fisheries Development Centre in Ma-

hout, Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Water Resources, said that the centre distributed traditional nets to local fishermen to encourage them and preserve the practice of traditional fishing.

He pointed out that the total quantity of shrimp production for 2020 amounted to 714 tonnes, at a value of over RO2mn, which was 149 tonnes down in comparison to 2019.

The ministry has carried out several scientific studies on shrimp fishing, as well as on ways to multiply shrimp production in sultanate. It is hopeful that this year production will be better than 2020.

According to the ministry, the preparations for the season are complete.

assigned a consultant to start the feasibility study, which was completed by the end of December 2020. 'Moreover, the EIA was completed and the study report was submitted to the Environ-

ment Authority in November 2020. In 2021, the company aims to use the results of the feasibility study to seek the board approval to continue the project,' the report stated.

Emotions run high as expats return

Our Correspondent
Muscat

Emotions ran high, tears of joy rolled down when many expats returned to the sultanate on Wednesday after months of being stuck in their home countries.

Families and friends arrived in droves at the Muscat International Airport and waited for their friends and loved ones.

Sunil Guddappa along with his wife and two children came from Chennai and their flight touched down in Muscat in the afternoon. While waiting for a friend to pick them up, he said, "I work in the government sector and we were stuck in India for five months. As soon as the announcement of airways opening was made we booked the very first flight. It feels nice to be back in Muscat once again."

Guddappa said that he was fortunate to have a company accommodation. "I know some of my friends who had to pay rent for all these months even in their absence - some even not getting



I had gone for a vacation and soon the COVID-19 cases went up and everything got closed. It was a very tough time for me. I had almost lost hope

WAQAS QAMMAR

their salaries."

Aslam Mohammad KP was waiting for his colleague Ranjith B to return. They both work in the same company as foremen.

Mohammad said, "I have



Sunil Guddappa along with his wife and two children on arrival from Chennai, India (Muscat Daily)

been waiting forever for my friend's return. We come from the same locality in Kerala."

Ranjith on his arrival said, "I came down in AI0907 that took off at 11am from Chennai. It was

a long journey from my home in Cochin via Chennai to be back here. The airfare was really very high." He said he did not want to postpone his return any further as "the times are uncertain and if

I waited any longer my livelihood would have been in danger".

As more and more flights came down, one could see people from various nationalities emerging.



I came down in AI0907 that took off at 11 am from Chennai. It was a long journey from my home in Cochin via Chennai to be back here

RANJITH B

Waqas Qammar working as an engineer was stuck in Pakistan since April.

"I had gone for a vacation and soon the COVID-19 cases went up and everything got closed. It

was a very tough time for me. I had almost lost hope," he said.

"I have a decent job here. It feels great to be back. Oman has always been my second home and I spend quite a good amount of my life here."

The airport is expected to be busy in the coming days.

Khalid Balushi, an airport taxi driver, said, "It is a return of good times for all of us. We welcome all the brothers and sisters who were stuck in their countries for long. Times were bad for all of us; but now we are hopeful that things will be ok again."

Sami Sarang, a businessman who is arriving by Salam Air on Thursday at 4am from Karachi, has been stuck in Pakistan since he went for Ramadan.

"I didn't expect a travel ban and I didn't plan for a long stay. Because of this my business has been effected; I also had to send money for my house rent every month. I am also a model and I missed many projects. But now I am happy to be back. Once again I look forward to a fruitful stay here," he said over phone.

SAYYID SHIHAB RECEIVES KOREAN MINISTER



H H Sayyid Shihab bin Tarik al Said, Deputy Prime Minister for Defence Affairs, during a meeting with Suh Wook, Minister of National Defence of the Republic of Korea, at the former's office on Wednesday. The meeting discussed areas of existing cooperation between the defence ministries of the two countries and ways to enhance them. The two sides also exchanged views on a number of matters of common interest (ONA)

MoL, OPAL ink pact to train, employ Omani jobseekers

Our Correspondent
Muscat

The Ministry of Labour (MoL) and Oman Society for Petroleum Services (OPAL) signed an agreement on Wednesday to train, qualify and employ a number of Omani jobseekers in the energy, minerals and other sectors as per the needs of the labour market.

Signed by H E Sayyid Salim bin Musalam al Busaidi, Undersecretary for Human Resources Development in the Ministry of Labour, and Abdul Rahman bin Humaid al Yahyai, CEO of OPAL, the agreement comes as part of an effort by the MoL to train, qualify and employ jobseekers by involving various sectors.

"This will be done by preparing national cadres and encouraging



(Supplied photo)

them to join training and professional skills programmes and expertise required to fill jobs available in the energy and minerals sector," the MoL said.

The training will cater to the needs of the labour market in order to ensure the continuity of the national workforce to find work and achieve their professional and practical aspirations.

"OPAL will supervise the training and qualification of jobseekers in the energy and minerals sector and others according to the labor market's needs," the MoL statement added. Licensed training institutes that are compatible with the policies and requirements of the MoL and quality programmes (Opal Star), will be selected to train the jobseekers.

No vaccine, no entry - not everyone sees the light

Muscat - Confusion and chaos marked the first day of the mandatory vaccination rule on Wednesday, as a number of malls and supermarkets in the city were waiting for an official communication to this effect.

On August 19, the Supreme Committee tasked with tackling the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic had issued a set of decisions, such as removal of night movement ban, the opening of airports and mandatory vaccination to enter government offices and private sector establishments such as commercial complexes and restaurants, as well as attending cultural, sports and group events.

On Wednesday both the commercial centre staff and customers seemed struggling at entry points. Mall and supermarket officials are still waiting for any official communication from the relevant authorities. They said they were implementing the mandatory vaccination rule following media reports.

"We are yet to receive an official communiqué from authorities on the implementation of the rule. But we are implementing it as we saw messages from a few malls and banks informing that vaccination is mandatory for entry," said a supermarket official in Ruwi on the condition of anonymity.

He added, "We cater to many



We are yet to receive an official communiqué. But we are implementing it as we saw messages from a few malls and banks informing that vaccination is mandatory for entry

A HYPERMARKET OFFICIAL

low wage-earning customers and not all of them have Internet all the time. Despite getting doses they could not produce any proof of the vaccination."

An official of a mall in Bausher shared the same sentiments.

"We noticed many customers are not aware of how to download the vaccination certificate. So whatever they could produce like SMS or any other form of proof we cross-checked with their resident ID," he said.

"We feel there is a lack of awareness with regard to carrying a proof of vaccination and we needed to form a separate team

to man the entrances as it is an additional work for our security staff."

The mall had to turn back a few customers, he said.

"We don't want anyone to pick on us in terms of breaking the rule. So we are playing safe. We even put up a message across social media and we put up a poster as well at the entrance of the mall saying to enter the mall proof of vaccination is mandatory by law."

People feel the sudden mandatory vaccination rule is hurting the common man.

Mohammed Nasir, a resident

of Ruwi, said he was not allowed into a supermarket where he works as an outsourced cleaning staff on Wednesday morning.

He said he had approached a private hospital in Ruwi for the first dose of AstraZeneca vaccine but due to shortage he was asked to wait.

"On Wednesday afternoon I took the Pfizer vaccine at a private hospital in Ruwi. I was waiting for an affordable AstraZeneca but due to fear of losing my job, I took Pfizer."

People who were recently infected but have now fully recovered also faced difficulties in entering malls and other commercial centres. As per the rule, they cannot get vaccines immediately as there is a cooling period after recovery to get the vaccines.

"There is no clarity. Some say I need to wait for six weeks and some say 12 weeks to get my first dose of vaccine, and I am not even sure if I need to take two doses or one," said an expatriate who had fully recovered but was not allowed to enter a supermarket to buy his daily grocery.

"The staff at supermarkets should be aware of such scenarios and authorities should issue clear guidelines covering all aspects of vaccine administration and the implementation of the rule," he added.

Text and photo by Syed Fasiuddin

PRAYER TIMINGS

Fajr	4.29am	Duhr	12.06pm	Maghrib	6.23pm
Sunrise	5.49am	Asr	3.34pm	Isha	7.53pm



Oman Water & Wastewater Services Company
Member of Nama Group

TENDER NOTICE

Oman Water and Wastewater Services Company hereby announces the following tender:

Tender No	Description	Eligibility	Tender Fee (RO)	Last Date of Sale Tender Documents	Date Of Submitting
1/2021	Building Maintenance in Al-Dahira Governorate	Local Companies registered with Government Tender Board and specialized in the works mentioned.	25 Rials (Plus 5% VAT) Non-refundable	9/9/2021	23/9/2021

The tender documents can be obtained from the Support Services Section in Al-Dahira Governorate (IBRI) from the date of publication of this announcement (from 8.00 am to 12.00 pm, Sunday to Thursday) up to the last date of distribution of tender documents stated above.

All participating companies shall submit a Bid Bond of 1% of bid value along with their offer. Bid Bond must be obtained from a bank registered in the Sultanate of Oman and it should be addressed in favour of The Chairman of the Tender Committee.

Sealed bids along with all required documents shall be delivered to the Tender Box, Operation Department in AL- Dhahira Governorate Building, in Ibbi not later than 10:00 am on the date specified above.

For more information call 25688196-25690592

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GCC MSCI index hits 7-year highs led by insurance, banks

Our Correspondent
Muscat

The MSCI GCC index posted gains for the tenth consecutive month during August 2021 backed by gains in key large-cap sectors such as banks and insurance.

The index – which captures large- and mid-cap representation across the GCC stock markets – closed at a seven-year high level on August 17, but as investors booked profits, the MSCI GCC index receded towards the end of the month to close at 708.48 points, registering a monthly gain of 4.3 per cent.

This further pushed year-to-date 2021 gains to 28.6 per cent for the aggregate MSCI GCC Countries Index, according to a bulletin released by Kamco Investment on Wednesday.

It said the GCC markets' performance during August this year was broadly positive as barring Oman the remaining six exchanges in the GCC posted monthly gains.

UAE exchanges reported the highest gains during the month, both recording gains of 5 per cent. Qatar and Kuwaiti benchmarks followed with monthly gains of 3.2 per cent and 3.1 per cent, respectively.

The gains in Abu Dhabi once again pushed the year-to-date returns for the benchmark to the highest level among key global markets with a gain of 52.3 per cent. Saudi Arabia's main index also showed solid gains of 30.3 per cent since the start of the year followed by Kuwait's



Oman and Qatar were the only benchmarks with single digit year-to-date gains, while the rest of GCC indices showed double digit growth. The MSX30 index shows the second-smallest year-to-date gain in the GCC at 8.4 per cent

main index with a gain of 22.4 per cent.

Qatar and Oman were the only benchmarks with single digit year-to-date gains, while the rest of GCC indices showed double digit performances.

'The Omani stock market declined for the second consecutive month and was the only market in the GCC to close in the red during August. The MSX30 index showed declining trend since the start of the month only to show partial recovery during the last week,' the report said.

The benchmark index of the Muscat Stock Exchange traded

below the critical support level of 4,000 points during August and closed at 3,966.7 points with a monthly decline of 1.6 per cent.

With the decline during August, the MSX30 index now shows the second-smallest year-to-date 2021 gain in the GCC at 8.4 per cent.

'Sector performance remained mixed during the month with gains of 2 per cent recorded by the industrial index whereas the services and financial indices reported declines of 0.5 per cent and 1.9 per cent, respectively,' the Kamco Investment report said.

The monthly gains further

pushed the year-to-date growth for the industrial index 38.8 per cent, the highest in the market, followed by financial and services indices with returns of 11.9 per cent and 7.1 per cent, respectively.

Total net profits for listed companies in Oman increased by 22.3 per cent to RO200.1mn in the second quarter of 2021 compared with RO164.1mn in the corresponding quarter in 2020, according to Kamco Investment. This was the smallest profit growth recorded among the GCC markets, it added.

Kamco Investment's report showed mixed returns in the GCC markets during August but highlighted gains for key large-cap sectors. It also highlighted the effects of waning COVID-19 cases in the region as investors booked profits on sectors that were resilient during the pandemic resulting in a decline in these sectoral indices during August.

OAB names Ganesh as acting CEO after Musafir resigns

Our Correspondent
Muscat

Oman Arab Bank (OAB) announced that its chief executive officer Rashad Ali al Musafir has resigned and is leaving the bank due to personal reasons.

OAB's board of director has appointed CB Ganesh as acting CEO of the bank with immediate effect.

'The board of directors would like to announce that Rashad Ali al Musafir, the chief executive officer, has submitted his resignation due to personal reasons. The board has accepted the resignation with effect as of October 30, 2021,' OAB said in a disclosure submitted to the Muscat Stock Exchange.

The bank's board of directors, as per the disclosure, acknowledged Musafir's contribution during his tenure with the bank as CEO and wished him all the best in his future endeavours. Musafir joined OAB in 2016



CB Ganesh

Rashad Ali al Musafir

as deputy CEO and later, in September 2018, was appointed as the chief executive officer.

'Pursuant to Musafir's resignation, the board resolved to appoint CB Ganesh, as acting chief executive officer with immediate effect,' OAB disclosure added.

In February this year Ganesh was appointed as deputy CEO – chief business officer of Oman

Arab Bank.

'CB Ganesh is an entrepreneurial and financial astute executive with a flawless record in improving profits, building brands, and creating shareholder value,' OAB said in a disclosure in February. Ganesh has vast global banking experience spanning across India, UAE, Oman, Bahrain and Hong Kong for more than 30 years.

United Finance appoints new CEO

Our Correspondent
Muscat

United Finance Company on Wednesday announced the appointment of Nasser Salim Said al Rashdi as the new chief executive officer of the company.

'This is to inform that the board of directors has received approval from the regulators to appoint Rashdi as the chief executive officer of United Fi-

nance, with effect from September 5, 2021,' United Finance said in a disclosure to the Muscat Stock Exchange.

The company said that Rashdi brings with him a wealth of experience in the banking sector in Oman having worked for over 30 years in the field of business development, risk management and internal audit within banks.

'The board of directors and management of United Finance wish Rashdi all the success during his tenure as the chief executive officer,' United Finance added.

United Finance's previous chief executive officer, Mansoor Mubarak Abdullah al Amir, retired in November 2019 and Bikram Rishi was then appointed as acting CEO.

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Abu Dhabi exchange to launch derivatives market this year

Abu Dhabi, UAE – Abu Dhabi Securities Exchange (ADX) on Wednesday announced that it has taken a key step towards launching a derivatives market this year by signing an agreement with Nasdaq to deliver marketplace technology solutions, including matching, real-time clearing and settlement technology.

ADX is rapidly expanding asset classes and developing new offerings for both regional and international investors.

The exchange plans to launch single stock futures and index futures in the fourth quarter of this year before expanding to a wider range of derivative products, according to a press release.

The initiative, ADX said, will further diversify investment avenues and provide investors with hedging tools for effective risk management.

Saeed Hamad al Dhaheri, CEO of ADX, said, "We are confident that the launch of a derivatives market will be another

important milestone, empowering investors on the exchange who wish to implement sophisticated trading strategies.

Our strategy is to ensure that investors and issuers derive significant benefits of a sophisticated marketplace by investing further in technology, broadening our offering, and attracting a wider range of institutional investors."

Nasdaq's end-to-end market technology powers more than 2,300 companies in 50 countries, spanning the world's financial industry, including capital markets infrastructure operators, market participants, banks, and regulators.

The ADX One strategy, launched at the start of 2021, aims to bring a broader offering of products and services to market and invest in state-of-the-art infrastructure in partnership with global market leaders.

As of August 2021, ADX has 78 companies listed on its main and second market.

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MSX rebounds on improved activity

Our Correspondent
Muscat

The benchmark index of the Muscat Stock Exchange (MSX) rose 0.19 per cent to close at 3,974.35 points on Wednesday.

Trading activity improved from the previous session as turnover rose by 3.96 per cent to RO2.98mn and volumes increased 23.32 per cent to 23.07mn shares.

While Industrial index fell 0.01 per cent, Financial and Services indices rose 0.17 per cent and 0.88 per cent, respectively. The MSX Shariah index closed down by 0.22 per cent at 586.97 points.

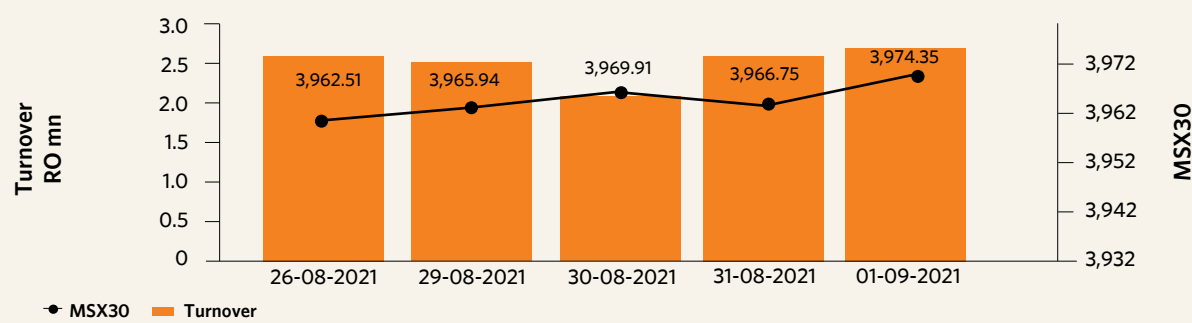
Market breadth remained positive as ten companies closed up, while seven companies closed down. The rest 26 traded stocks closed flat for the day.

Top gainers were Oman Investment & Finance Co (8.27 per cent), National Gas (4.05 per cent), National Aluminium Products Company (2.69 per cent), Phoenix Power (2.22 per cent) and Al Suwadi Power (1.96 per cent).

Top losers were Takaful Oman (-4.95 per cent), Oman REIT Fund (-2.25 per cent), Ntional Finance (-1.85 per cent), Renaissance Services (-1.35 per cent) and Oman National Engineering & Investment Co (-1.06 per cent).



MSX INDEX AND TURNOVER OF FIVE TRADING DAYS



Israel mission in Dubai eyes Gulf oil megadeal



Ilan Sztulman Starosta (AFP)

Dubai, UAE - Israel's top diplomat in Dubai has said he is hopeful a deal to ship Emirati oil will clear environmental hurdles as trade booms after the ground-breaking opening of ties.

Ilan Sztulman Starosta, who heads Israel's first consulate in the UAE economic hub, told AFP that trade between the two countries would 'easily' surpass US\$1bn within a year if the COVID pandemic abates.

His assessment came despite Israel freezing the Gulf oil deal last month over fears that spills could threaten unique coral reefs in the Red Sea.

Environmentalists had voiced anger over the plan to ship Emirati crude to Israel's Red Sea port of Eilat, and transport it via an ageing pipeline to Ashkelon on the Mediterranean coast for onward transport to Europe.

"Now it's a technical environment issue, and the project was frozen because of fear that this pipeline, which is very old, is not

well kept enough for the oil to pass through and there's danger of leaks," Starosta said in an interview.

"The Environment Ministry froze the programme. So now they went into a project to have professional people look at the pipeline and check what's needed to make it foolproof."

"And eventually I hope that this is going to be open again because it's a very good deal for both the Emirates and the state of Israel."

However, he insisted 'it won't

affect the relationship' with the United Arab Emirates if the flag-ship deal founders.

Last year, the UAE broke with decades of Arab consensus that there should be no normalisation of ties with Israel without a comprehensive and lasting peace with the Palestinians.

Following the US-brokered deal with the UAE, Israel normalised relations with Bahrain, Morocco and Sudan as well.

Business exchanges between the two sides were already robust and Starosta said Israel-UAE trade hit US\$500mn in August, excluding investments, after deals ranging from tourism and aviation to financial services.

"I'm being conservative, I think we might double the trade volume in one year, if COVID goes away," he said.

"Because the potential is absolutely huge for both sides... I think we can very easily achieve this."

AFP

Abu Dhabi awards offshore oil block to Pakistani companies

Abu Dhabi, UAE - Abu Dhabi National Oil Company (Adnoc) has signed a historic exploration concession agreement, awarding the exploration rights for Abu Dhabi's offshore Block 5 to a consortium of four Pakistani companies - Pakistan Petroleum Limited (PPL), Mari Petroleum Company Limited (MPCL), Oil and Gas Development Company Limited (OGDCL), and Government Holdings (Private) Limited (GHPL) - in Abu Dhabi's second competitive block bid round.

The consortium is led by Pakistan Petroleum Limited. The award marks the first time Pakistani companies invest in and explore for oil and gas in an Abu Dhabi concession as well as the first time Adnoc partners with Pakistani energy companies.

The exploration concession agreement was signed by Dr Sultan bin Ahmed al Jaber, UAE Minister of Industry and Ad-

vanced Technology and managing director and group CEO of Adnoc, and Moin Raza Khan, managing director and CEO of PPL.

Jaber said, "We are delighted to partner with Pakistan Petroleum Limited and the other members of the consortium on offshore Block 5. The consortium was selected as part of Abu Dhabi's block bid round where we have once again reinforced our approach to strategic partnerships."

Under the terms of the agreement, the consortium will hold a 100 per cent stake in the exploration phase, investing up to US\$304.7mn towards exploration and appraisal drilling, including a participation fee, to explore for and appraise oil and gas opportunities in the block that covers an offshore area of 6,223 sqkm.

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New retail opening at Al Mouj Muscat signals continuous growth

With a diverse range of retail outlets that have opened this year at Al Mouj Muscat, Oman's premier lifestyle destination's commitment to supporting small and medium size enterprises (SMEs) is complementing the promise to residents, the community, and the economy.

Local and international venues have continued to choose the award-winning oceanfront community as the best location to begin trading.

The 17 new outlets that have opened this year now brings the total number of retailers to 86. In turn, the huge diversity in outlets, from cafés and spas to fine dining and wellness, has encouraged more people than ever to call Al Mouj Muscat home, with resident numbers now reaching over 7,000.

"Our vision for Al Mouj Muscat is to create a vibrant and ever-evolving destination where residents and visitors can enjoy great moments, every day. It is why we focus on creating a hub for well-established local and international brand names," says Nasser al Sheibani, CEO of Al Mouj Muscat.

The vibrant Community Hub recently opened Handicrafts



House, Junoon Kanga, Saaf and Azura to provide the perfect location for a touch of the traditional with a modern twist. Delectable treats await all residents and visitors at the Mall with an array of restaurants and

cafes showcasing the best of international cuisine.

The Walk added to its already impressive selection of food trucks by welcoming Owl Café, Mango Talaat and 101 Café. Residents and visitors can stroll

along the Marsa 3 promenade's casual walking trails and enjoy a meal at two of the newest additions to the oceanfront dining experiences, Eydaam and Sweet Saray.

"By designing a destination where a wide range of commercial enterprises grow, we are not only enriching experiences for visitors and residents, but we contribute towards the economic growth and diversification goals set out in Oman Vision 2040. Our SMEs base is a key component of that diversification strategy," says Sheibani.

Al Mouj Muscat is attracting over 3mn visitors each year, with the mix of retail, cafés and restaurants at Al Mouj Muscat's The Walk enjoying 10,131 guests per day.

With footfall essential to the success of any retail venture, the huge appeal of Al Mouj Muscat provides SMEs with the confidence that the location is one where they can succeed.

Flourishing independent businesses further benefit from their proximity to Al Mouj Golf, Al Mouj Marina, and the destination's four and five-star hotels, which further drive visitor numbers.

Sohar International forum to host prominent journalist

A much-anticipated event that has witnessed participation of key industry leaders in the past years, Sohar International is all set to conduct the 12th session of Viewpoints - Sohar International Chairman's Forum, on September 15.

Slated to be live-streamed via Zoom app, the event will start at 7.30pm encompassing an insightful knowledge sharing session with a speaker of international acclaim. The upcoming event will host George de Lama, who is a prominent international journalist and the president of Eisenhower Fellowships, and will deliver inspirational messages using his vast experience and extensive subject know-how.

"Viewpoints is an industry first and one-of-its-kind initiative, seeking to provide a unique opportunity for the youth to gain insights and engage in dialogue with inspirational personalities in key sectors. This is an event which I take pride to host as it aims at bringing the best global learnings to the local population of Oman and build leaders of tomorrow," said Mohammed Mahfoudh al Ardhi, chairman of Sohar International.

Viewpoints - Sohar International Chairman's Forum, is a dedicated platform where inspirational global leaders from different industries and sectors share their experiences, knowledge and ideas with a cross-section of Omani society. With a



special focus on youth, the platform aims to connect global leaders to inspire and motivate collaboration.

Anyone interested can register for the upcoming virtual session free of cost simply by visiting Sohar International's website (www.soharinternational.com) or the bank's official social media pages and follow the registration post/link. The session will provide opportunity for participants to engage with the guest speaker with their valuable inputs and questions.

"We are indeed delighted to have George De Lama as our distinguished speaker in the upcoming session of viewpoints. Drawn from personal experiences, the guest speaker will highlight important life lessons as a prominent American journalist, an international civil servant and a creative entrepreneur and he holds prestigious titles with a distinguished career as at the Chicago Tribune," said Ardhi.

As an editor, De Lama has

overseen foreign and national reporting that won journalism's top honours, including two Pulitzer Prizes.

After making his mark as a journalist, De Lama headed the Office of External Relations at the Inter-American Development Bank in Washington as he led the multilateral organisation's strategic communications in support of development operations and strategic initiatives across Latin America and the Caribbean.

Dedicated to making a difference in the lives of the people, De Lama assumed the role of president at Global Development for Answers Media LLC in Chicago and launched a startup firm, Answers Learning LLC, to produce education solutions for parents, students, educators and public and private organizations.

Today, he is also a proud member of the Advisory Board of the Nieman Foundation for Journalism at Harvard University and was twice elected to the Board of Governors of the Overseas Press Club of America.

Ooredoo wins gold for CSR initiative

Ooredoo has won Gold for Corporate Social Responsibility Program of the Year - in the Middle East and Africa from the 2021 International Business Awards, also known as the Stevies.

The award specifically recognises its Sensory Rooms initiative, which, in collaboration with the Ministry of Social Development, facilitated the building of specially-equipped rooms at social welfare centres across the sultanate. Falling under Ooredoo's Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) programme, 'Goodwill', a total of seven sensory rooms have already been created, with more planned in the near future.

Raed Mohamad Dawood, director of Government Relations and Corporate Affairs at Ooredoo, said, "Our Goodwill programme has been going strong



for 16 years now and is a proud testament of our efforts to offer so much more than just telecoms services, but to truly enrich the lives of our community.

"We are delighted to have received such recognition for our Sensory Rooms initiative, which, run by our Ooredoo family volunteers, we continued to carry out even during the pandemic.

"Up until now have provided more than 2,500 children with a

valuable therapeutic space that is designed to meet their unique needs."

The Stevie Awards are widely considered to be the world's premier business awards and this year alone received more than 3,700 nominations from 63 nations.

Ooredoo has been recognised with a number of Stevie Awards in past years, including the 2020 International Business Award's Corporate Social Responsibility Program of the Year - in the Middle East and Africa for its Goodwill programme.

Meanwhile, it continues to work in collaboration with a variety of charitable associations and government organisations to meet current issues and needs and support the economic and social development of all society members.

Wizz Air to introduce vaccination for crews

Wizz Air, Europe's fastest growing airline, announces that COVID-19 vaccinations - or regular antigen/PCR testing in special cases - for all crews will be required as of December 1. Wizz Air, being a socially responsible airline is implementing this policy as part of its commitment to protecting the health and safety of its passengers and crews, as well as to supporting smooth and continued operations of its flights in the long term.

Wizz Air is introducing COVID-19 vaccinations for all of its flight and cabin crews - or regular antigen/PCR testing in special cases - in light of research which demonstrates their effectiveness as the best available form of protection against COVID-19.

At the onset of the pandemic,



Wizz Air pioneered the introduction of stringent health and safety measures to protect both passengers and crews, ensuring

the most sanitary conditions possible and supporting physical distancing.

As the pandemic continues,

Wizz Air is among the first European airlines to further enhance its protective measures with this policy, which will be implemented in line with the support of local authorities and health institutions across Wizz Air's bases.

As governments increasingly mandate evidence of vaccinations for crews as part of national entry requirements, COVID-19 vaccinated crews are becoming more and more critical.

József Váradi, CEO of Wizz Air Group, said, "At Wizz Air, our number one priority is the health and safety of our passengers and employees.

"We have a responsibility to protect crew and passengers on board by mitigating the risks of COVID-19, and vaccines play a vital role in this."

Unique Multi-Carrying Vessel visits Arabian Gulf for first time

This week, a Multi-Carrying Vessel (MCV) owned by P&O Maritime Logistics, arrived in Saudi Arabia, the first time a ship of this category has visited the Arabian Gulf. The *Topaz Moskva*, the vessel, arrived in the country following a journey from Italy and also visited Dubai this week on its tour of the Middle East.

The *Topaz Moskva* navigated the Suez Canal on her way from the Mediterranean Sea, a first for this vessel category which are renowned for superior performance in shallow and narrow waterways. Additionally, the ship crossed into the Arabian Gulf during monsoon season, an atypical journey for this ship category - demonstrating the true versatility of MCVs.

Departing from Marghera, Italy, the *Topaz Moskva* made her journey carrying a full load of modules, that she delivered to a chemical company based in Saudi Arabia arriving on August 23.

On her visit to Dubai, she will welcome a select group of invi-



tees to have a private tour of the unique vessel - as the coastal city continues to attract an ever-expanding diversity of ships calling to the Gulf region.

With P&O Maritime Logistics being headquartered in the UAE, the visit is seen as a homecoming celebration for the *Topaz Moskva*.

Martin Helweg, CEO of P&O Maritime Logistics said, "I'm proud to see P&O Maritime Logistics make a pioneering journey with the arrival of the *Topaz Moskva* in the Arabian Gulf. As a DP World company based in Dubai, we're thrilled to see this vessel visit our global headquarters for the first time.

"MCVs are a versatile specialist vessel type, and the journey to Saudi Arabia and Dubai from Italy helps to demonstrate that they are successful in a wide variety of maritime conditions - beyond the expectations of many."

All MCVs in P&O Maritime Logistics' fleet are equipped with pioneering Internet of Things technology, which provides the capability to transmit real-time

information from the vessel about its performance. The data has enabled these ships to have a predictive maintenance model, reducing downtime whilst also boosting fuel performance.

Helweg continued, "In line with our aim of being the leading innovator and digital disruptor in our industry, all our MCVs are equipped with next-generation technology.

"This is part of our philosophy as a company to continually improve our customer offering using the best technology available, while embracing business models that break tradition - such as with Supply on Demand, our revolutionary cargo model currently operating in the Middle East."

P&O Maritime Logistics' MCV fleet is one of the youngest and most environmentally friendly in the breakbulk market. Trading areas include the Caspian Sea, Black Sea, North Sea, Mediterranean Sea, Baltic Sea and the Russian Inland Waterway System.

Majid al Futtaim opens Mall of Oman

Majid al Futtaim, the leading shopping mall, communities, retail, and leisure pioneer across the Middle East, Africa and Central Asia has opened the doors of the eagerly awaited Mall of Oman in Muscat.

The opening of the mall marks an important milestone for Majid al Futtaim as it continues to play a significant role in supporting local communities by enhancing the sultanate's retail and entertainment offerings for both residents and tourists.

A recipient of the LEED Platinum certificate for its commitment to sustainability, resource efficiency, health and wellbeing, the new super-regional mall combines a selection of curated stores that bring the very best in retail, leisure, entertainment, and dining, as well as experiential offerings for all ages.

Those visiting the mall can now experience Oman's largest VOX Cinemas — complete with 15 screens — as well as the only IMAX experience in Oman, the first GOLD experience in Oman, and the largest Magic Planet in the country, which features award-winning rides, games and attractions. Plus, those looking for dining options can indulge at Kitchen 35, the VIP Lounge (GOLD) and Nutella.

Alongside this offering, customers can also enjoy a host of brands including a 9,000sqm Carrefour Hypermarket as part of Majid al Futtaim and several brands from the Landmark and Apparel groups.

In addition, Mall of Oman offers famous outlets such as



DKNY, Nespresso, G-SHOCK, Homes R Us, Tavola and Al Khalili Buildex, ensuring there is something for everyone.

Husam al Mandhari, director of shopping malls in Oman at Majid al Futtaim Properties said, "We are pleased to welcome residents and tourists to the brand-new Mall of Oman - sultanate's flagship destination for retail, leisure and entertainment.

"This is another achievement for us as we continue to position ourselves as a retail pioneer that offers unique experiences and unmatched value, whilst contributing to the local economy. Providing 3,500 new jobs in the region, Mall of Oman offers multiple first-of-its-kind experiences in the sultanate, which allows us to continue to create memorable moments for our

customers that they can cherish with their family.

"At Majid al Futtaim, we are committed to place the people and communities we serve at the heart of everything we do, and this new opening demonstrates this."

This September, families at Mall of Oman can also embark on the ultimate adventure with Dino World, an interactive di-

nosaur experience. In collaboration with EventBox, the new family offering will have visitors travelling back in time for an exciting and educational journey showcasing the history and evolution of dinosaurs, life size dinosaur installations, a "roaming dino" interactive experience and augmented reality.

Plus, with 80 per cent of Mall of Oman's gross leasable area



leased, the mall is set to welcome over 300 additional retail outlets in the coming months.

And for those looking to go on a culinary journey, Mall of Oman has unveiled a 1,000 plus seater food court which will offer a selection of global chains.

Meanwhile, those looking for more indulgent cuisine options from across the globe, will soon

be able to visit various cafés and restaurants at the mall including over 50 dining options.

Mall of Oman is also pleased to announce that it will launch the largest indoor snow park in the sultanate next year, spanning over 14,000sqm.

Mall of Oman complements Majid al Futtaim's strong regional presence that includes 29 existing malls across the GCC.



Madayn signs pact to develop learning platform

The Public Establishment for Industrial Estates - Madayn signed an agreement with Reem al Bawadi Company (RAB HR) to develop an e-Learning platform with the objective of providing education and training programmes to Madayn's employees as well as the employees of companies and factories based in the various industrial cities.

Zuhair al Zadjali, director general of Admin and HR at Madayn, emphasised on the significance of the e-Learning Platform to equip and empower the employees with various relevant skills in line with the emerging training and development trends, and to keep pace with latest training curriculum and methods.

Zadjali added that the platform shall present an advanced educational environment, which will digitise all

procedures associated with training, save and archive data electronically, reduce training related expenses, provide training opportunities to a large number of trainees, and ensure the continuity of Madayn's training efforts in light of the disruption caused by COVID-19.

Madayn's e-Learning Platform reflects the continuity of the efforts made to achieve sustainable and comprehensive economic and social development based on the capabilities and talents of the national cadres. By organising a series of training programmes in various fields, Madayn aims at enhancing the productivity of the national cadres and equipping them with essential competences as per the needs and requirements of factories and companies based in the industrial cities.

Investcorp appoints Laura as Global Head of Institutions

Investcorp, a leading global provider and manager of alternative investment products, announced that Laura Coquis has been appointed as Global Head of Institutions. Laura will be based in London and takes up the role with immediate effect.

As Global Head of Institutions, Laura will hold responsibility for leading Investcorp's capital raising initiatives across international institutional markets. Managing a global, multi-disciplinary team, she will deliver capital formation strategies and innovative solutions to drive industry-leading outcomes for Investcorp's diverse range of institutional clients around the



world. Laura joins Investcorp with over 20 years' experience in capital formation, investor relations and investment banking.

Since 2008, she has focused on the design and implementation of institutional capital formation and investor relations

strategies for private markets firms including leadership positions at advisors, most recently as a Partner at Aviditi Advisors, and also within asset managers, such as BC Partners where she spent nine successful years as a partner - head of Investor Relations Management, and also OMERS Private Markets where she was a Managing Director responsible for Strategic Partnerships.

Laura's earlier career in investment banking includes leveraged finance and M&A roles at Lehman Brothers and Merrill Lynch in London, Sydney and New York.

Mohammed Alardhi, execu-

tive chairman at Investcorp, said, "Laura's highly differentiated and versatile combination of skills and experience will prove invaluable as we continue to deliver on our goals for further international expansion and diversification of our investor base. She brings a wealth of expertise from a number of leading financial institutions and a commitment to innovation, diversity and transparency which aligns with our core principles across our global platform.

"Our relationships with institutional clients continue to go from strength to strength, with investors drawn to our tailored approach and diversified portfolio.

lio. I am delighted to welcome Laura to Investcorp at this pivotal moment in the firm's growth story."

Laura added, "Institutional investors are increasingly turning to private markets as a source of robust, differentiated returns and Investcorp's disciplined, proven and yet entrepreneurial approach ensures that it is well-placed to deliver sustainable value for clients.

"I'm delighted to be joining the firm and look forward to combining Investcorp's scale and resources with my existing network to deliver on the firm's commitment to outstanding results."

Infiniti Middle East invited to judge MENA Effie Awards 2021

Nadim Ghayeb, general manager - Marketing, Customer Experience, and PR, Infiniti International Markets, and Joanna Chami, Brand & Social Media Communications Manager of Infiniti Middle East, have been invited to serve on the jury panel for the MENA Effie Awards 2021.

Placing a spotlight on organisations and individuals that have displayed excellence in marketing and contributed to a brand's success, the Effie Awards celebrate marketing performance by looking at all facets of a marketing campaign from objective to execution through to impact.

The Effie Selection Committee constitutes a well-rounded set of individuals, representing brands and marketing agencies across numerous disciplines. With 19 product and service categories, organisations can submit nominations for industry categories such as Automotive - Vehicles & Aftermarket, Retail, and New Product/ Service Intro-



duction amongst others.

With a passion for automotive marketing, Nadim Ghayeb has over 14 years of experience in the field. Prior to joining Infiniti Middle East, Ghayeb was the Head of Marketing at General Motors, overseeing the Cadillac brand for nine years, before which he was at JWT MENA, where he was responsible for all brand advertising developments for clients such as Audi Middle East.

Similarly, Joanna Chami has

worked with Infiniti since 2015, during which she was the creative and media manager. Prior to her time with the luxury Japanese car brand, Chami worked in advertising.

Commenting on this year's award, Nadim Ghayeb, general manager - Marketing, Customer Experience, and PR, Infiniti International Markets, said, "The MENA Effie Awards are a benchmark for the most successful campaigns, honouring organizations and individuals across sectors for their effective work in helping brands achieve better visibility."

Joanna Chami, Brands & Social Media Comms of Infiniti Middle East added, "I am delighted to be on the Selection Committee for the MENA Effie Awards 2021. I would like to wish this year's participants all the best and look forward to working with my industry peers to shed a light on some of the most ground-breaking campaigns in the region."



Overwhelming response to flagship Lulu Hypermarket

The shopping mall and management division of the largest hypermarket chain in the region, Lulu Group International, Line Investments & Property LLC (LIP) reiterates its position as a market leader bringing innovative concepts to the region's retail scene. This has been evident with the soft opening of the Silicon Central, a three-level retail and leisure destination that will provide an enhanced shopping experience to its neighboring communities.

Salim MA, director Lulu Group said, "Our aim is to offer the right kind of support to make our tenants and their brands successful. The team is committed to excellence in new age initiatives and for future growth and development of new sustainable

concepts across the GCC."

"We have had great feedback about the user experience aspect of the largest Lulu Hypermarket which is the anchor store of Silicon Central, in particular about the dedicated cafe, live cooking areas, the sushi counter as well as the 100,000sqm department store that offers home, electronics, appliances, fashion, shoes, kids, bicycle, eye express and outdoor sports and the BLSH beauty section with International cosmetics value brands. REO for value fashion brands and the wide range of Disney products are also popular. The wide range and convenience of products is currently the talk of the local communities," added Salim.

Silicon Central is considered a new landmark in Dubai.

Israel further eases Gaza restrictions despite unrest

Jerusalem - Israel said on Wednesday it would expand Gaza's fishing zone, increase its water supply and allow more Palestinian traders and goods to enter Israel, even as violence persisted on the border.

'It has been decided to expand the fishing zone in the Gaza Strip to 15 nautical miles, as well as to completely open the Kerem Shalom Crossing, for the passage of equipment and goods,' read a statement from COGAT, the Israeli military body responsible for civilian affairs in the occupied Palestinian territories.

'In addition, the water supply to the Gaza Strip will be increased by additional 5mn cubic meters,' it added.

It said the number of Gazan merchants with permits to pass through the Erez crossing would be increased from 2,000 to 7,000.

In May, Israel and Hamas, the Islamist rulers of Gaza, reached a truce following 11 days of the deadliest fighting in years.

But incendiary balloons have continued to fly from the Palestinian territory towards Israel in the months since, with Israel blaming Hamas and often retaliating with airstrikes.



A truck carrying supplies to Palestinians arrives at Kerem Shalom crossing with Israel in Rafah in the southern Gaza Strip on Wednesday (AFP)

Israel nonetheless began expanding the fishing zone off Gaza in July, with COGAT letting traders and goods from Gaza into the country for the first time in over a year beginning August 15.

Less than a week later, on August 21, clashes accompanying a

demonstration on the Gaza border wounded around 40 people, according to Hamas, including a 12 year old Palestinian boy and a 32 year old man.

An Israeli sniper was also shot dead during the incident.

The border incident was a return to the marches of 2018,

when Gazans began a protest movement demanding an end to Israel's blockade and the right of Palestinians to return to lands they fled or were expelled from when the Jewish state was founded.

Near-nightly clashes have taken place since.

It has been decided to expand the fishing zone in the Gaza Strip to 15 nautical miles, as well as to completely open the Kerem Shalom Crossing, for the passage of equipment and goods

ISRAELI MILITARY



The Israeli army said that on Tuesday night, 'hundreds of rioters and demonstrators' gathered at the fence where 'rioters' threw 'explosive devices and burning tyres' and the army responded with live rounds.

COGAT stressed that the 'civilian measures' were 'conditional upon the continued preservation of the region's security stability for the long term'.

Israel has maintained a tight blockade on the territory since 2007, the year Hamas took power.

AFP

Yemeni workers in Saudi at risk of forced returns, HRW warns

Dubai, UAE - Human Rights Watch has called on Saudi Arabia to stop laying off Yemeni employees, warning that this could force them to return to the humanitarian crisis in the war-torn country.

Yemen has been embroiled in conflict between the government, which is backed by a Saudi-led military coalition, and the Iran-allied Huthi rebels since 2014, creating what the United Nations calls the world's worst humanitarian crisis.

Saudi authorities in July began 'to terminate or not renew contracts of Yemeni professionals', HRW said in a statement on Tuesday.

The rights group cited local Saudi media reports that said new regulations require businesses to limit the percentage of workers from certain nationalities - including 25 per cent for Yemeni citizens.

'Saudi authorities should suspend this decision and allow Yemenis to remain in Saudi Arabia with the ability to work,' said the group.

Saudi authorities did not immediately comment when asked by AFP.

Approximately two million Yemenis work in the kingdom, according to Yemeni government data from 2020.

'Saudi authorities are effectively laying off and threatening to forcibly return hundreds, possibly thousands, of Yemeni professionals to an ongoing conflict and humanitarian crisis in Yemen,' the statement quoted Afrah Nasser, Yemen researcher at HRW, as saying.

'Saudi Arabia is always seeking praise for its 'humanitarian contributions' to Yemen, but this decision puts many Yemenis at serious risk.'

The war in Yemen has killed tens of thousands, most of them civilians, and displaced millions, according to aid groups.

Some 24mn - more than two-thirds of the population - are in need of assistance, according to the UN.

AFP

Tanzania court dismisses objections to Mbowe's trial

Dar es Salaam, Tanzania - The terrorism case against the leader of Tanzania's main opposition party can go ahead as planned, a high court judge in Dar es Salaam said on Wednesday, dismissing objections by his party.

Chadema party chairman Freeman Mbowe and his supporters have described the charges as a politically-motivated effort to crush dissent, and accused police of torturing him in custody. His lawyers had argued that the high court's Corruption and Economic Crimes Division where he appeared had no powers to hear the case, which was previously being handled by a magistrate's court.

But on Wednesday judge Elinaza Luvanda said that 'this court has the jurisdiction to hear terrorism cases and therefore I don't agree with the objection made by defendants'.

The hearing took place under tight security, with some representatives from foreign embassies and Chadema's senior leaders in attendance, but many journalists were banned from entering the courtroom by police.

Mbowe has been behind bars since July 21 when he was arrested along with a number of other senior Chadema officials in a night-time police raid hours before they were to hold a public



A file photo of Chadema party chairman Freeman Mbowe

forum to demand constitutional reform.

The 59 year old has been charged with terrorism financing and conspiracy in a case that has sparked concerns about democracy and the rule of law under President Samia Suluhu Hassan.

On Monday, Mbowe had appeared in court to pursue a case against top legal officials, claiming his constitutional rights had been violated during his arrest and when he was charged.

His defence team says he was held without charge for five days and then charged without his lawyer being present. The opposition has denounced the arrests as a throwback to the oppressive rule of Tanzania's late leader John Magufuli who died suddenly in March.

There had been hope Hassan

would bring about a new era of democracy after the increasingly autocratic rule of Magufuli, nicknamed the 'Bulldozer' for his uncompromising style.

But Chadema leaders say the arrests reflect a deepening slide into 'dictatorship'.

Prosecutors say the allegations against Mbowe do not relate to the constitutional reform conference Chadema had planned to hold in the port city of Mwanza in July, but to alleged offences last year in another part of Tanzania.

Chadema has said prosecutors accuse Mbowe of conspiring to attack a public official, and of giving 600,000 Tanzanian shillings (US\$260 approx) towards blowing up petrol stations and public gatherings.

AFP

Hurricane Ida that slammed US Gulf Coast could become costliest weather disaster: UN

Geneva, Switzerland - Hurricane Ida, which slammed into the US Gulf Coast at the weekend, could become the costliest weather disaster on record, the UN said Wednesday, hailing though that prevention measures had dramatically limited casualties.

Louisiana and Mississippi are still taking stock of the disaster inflicted by the powerful Category 4 storm that hit exactly 16 years after Hurricane Katrina made landfall and devastated the area.

Ida is known to have killed four people, although the death toll is expected to rise, and knocked out power for more than a million properties across Louisiana.

"There is a chance that the economic cost will be higher than Katrina," Petteri Taalas, who heads the UN's World Meteorological Organization (WMO), told reporters in Geneva.

He pointed as an illustration to the 'major damage to the electric system in Louisiana'.

Until now, Katrina, which killed more than 1,800 people and destroyed large parts of New Orleans, had been considered by far the costliest weather-related disaster.

A fresh WMO report that examined mortality and economic



People wait in line for supplies at sunrise outside Home Depot in Hammond, Louisiana, on Wednesday (AFP)

losses from weather, climate and water extremes between 1970 and 2019, found that Katrina had raked in nearly \$164 billion in economic losses.

Currently, hurricanes Harvey and Maria, which both hit in 2017, are considered the second and third-costliest weather-related disasters, carrying price tags of nearly US\$97bn and over US\$69bn respectively.

Taalas said it would likely take a month or more before a full cost estimate for the losses caused by Ida could be made.

But he hailed that improved

early warning and flood protection systems as well as evacuation procedures appeared to have saved numerous lives.

"The good news when it comes to Ida is that the casualties as compared to Katrina, they were much lower," Taalas said.

Mami Mizutori, who heads the UN office for disaster risk reduction, agreed.

She told reporters that the differences between the impacts of the two storms showed the importance of investing in prevention.

"The economic loss indeed

will be quite big, but the good news is that ... the mortality has been very, very low, and this is because the city of New Orleans and Louisiana ... invested in prevention."

What had made the biggest difference since Katrina, she said, was the US\$14.5bn invested in building flood walls and levees as part of a new 'hurricane and storm damage risk-reduction system'.

"They did not wait for another century to do this. They did it very quickly."

AFP

Singapore PM awarded \$275,000 in defamation damages

Singapore - Singapore's prime minister was awarded more than a quarter of a million dollars in damages on Wednesday after winning defamation suits against a news website editor and writer, the latest libel cases brought by the leader.

Critics say such lawsuits are among a range of tactics employed by the tightly regulated city-state to silence dissent.

Terry Xu, chief editor of the Online Citizen Asia, and a writer for the site were accused of defaming Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong in two separate lawsuits.

The writer, Rubaashini Shunmuganathan, had penned an article in 2019 about a bitter feud that has rocked the premier's family.

Singapore's High Court ordered Xu to pay S\$210,000 (US\$156,000) in damages.

In the second suit against the author, the judge awarded damages of S\$160,000 - bringing the total to S\$370,000 (US\$275,000).

"Overall, I find that Xu had acted recklessly, with indifference to the truth and with ill-will towards (Lee), which aggra-



Singapore's Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong during an event in Singapore

vated the injury to (Lee)," Justice Audrey Lim said in her decision.

Lee will donate the damages to charity, the *Straits Times* newspaper reported.

The row covered by the website was between Lee and his siblings over the legacy of their father, Singapore's late founding leader Lee Kuan Yew.

The drama captivated a city-state unused to public feuds among the elite.

Xu - whose site is typically more critical of authorities than the pro-government main-

stream media - has launched a crowdfunding campaign to cover the cost of the damages.

"I hope many patriotic Singaporeans who love freedom, free speech and a free press will donate generously," his lawyer Lim Tean said.

In March, blogger Leong Sze Hian was ordered to pay almost US\$100,000 in damages for defaming Lee by sharing an article on Facebook linking the leader to a corruption scandal.

He launched a crowdfunding drive too - and raised enough within a matter of days.

While Singapore is economically successful and ranks among the world's least corrupt countries, rights groups frequently accuse the government of restricting free speech and civil liberties.

Watchdog Reporters Without Borders poorly rates Singapore's press freedoms, listing it 160 out of 180 countries and regions.

Singapore's leaders have defended bringing libel suits, saying they are necessary to protect their reputations.

AFP

TALIBAN TAKEOVER

Taliban parade as Biden defends US pullout

This is the right decision... a wise decision and the best decision for America, says President Biden

Kabul, Afghanistan - The Taliban on Wednesday paraded some of the military hardware they captured during their takeover of Afghanistan, hours after US President Joe Biden defended his decision to end the two-decade war.

The Islamist hardliners celebrated the US withdrawal, which was completed on Monday, as a major victory after taking control of Afghanistan last month following a bloody insurgency.

A long line of green Humvees idled in single file on a highway outside Kandahar, the spiritual birthplace of the militant movement, many with white-and-black Taliban flags attached to aerials, an AFP journalist saw.

In footage posted on a pro-Taliban account of the build-up of the parade, a helicopter flew overhead, trailing the Taliban's standard beneath it as fighters wrapped in headscarves waved beneath.

At least one Black Hawk helicopter has been seen flying over Kandahar in recent days, suggesting someone from the former Afghan army was at the controls as the Taliban lack qualified pilots.

The United Nations warned, meanwhile, of a looming 'humanitarian catastrophe', under-



Taliban fighters atop Humvee vehicles parade along a road to celebrate after the US pulled all its troops, in Kandahar on Wednesday (AFP)

scoring the daunting challenges that the Taliban face as they transform from insurgent group to governing power.

US President Joe Biden was nonetheless defiant.

"This is the right decision. A wise decision. And the best decision for America," Biden said in an address to the nation.

For America, Biden argued, the only choice was 'leaving or

escalating'.

The President, who has been savaged by critics for his handling of the withdrawal which saw the US and its allies evacuate more than 122,000 in just over two weeks, as an 'extraordinary success'.

"No nation has ever done anything like it in all of history; only the United States had the capacity and the will and

ability to do it," he said.

'Darkest hour'

All eyes will now turn to how the Taliban handle their first few days with sole authority over the country, with a sharp focus on whether they will allow free departure for those wanting to leave - including some foreigners.

The US has said that 'under

200' of its citizens remain in the country, and Britain said the number of UK nationals inside was in the 'low hundreds'.

Thousands of Afghans who worked with the US-backed government over the years and fear retribution still want to get out.

Talks are ongoing as to who will now run Kabul airport, which German Chancellor

Angela Merkel warned was of 'existential importance' as a lifeline for aid.

Qatar meanwhile urged the Taliban to ensure 'safe passage' for people still desperate to flee.

Many Afghans are terrified of a repeat of the Taliban's initial rule from 1996-2001, which was infamous for their treatment of women and girls, as well as a brutal justice system.

The group has repeatedly promised a more tolerant brand of governance compared with their first stint in power.

But UN chief Antonio Guterres expressed his 'grave concern at the deepening humanitarian and economic crisis in the country', adding that basic services threatened to collapse 'completely'.

He pleaded for financial support from the international community for the war-ravaged country, which is dependent on foreign aid.

'Not done' with IS-K

Authorities from several countries have already begun meeting with Taliban leadership, the latest being India.

Qatar's Foreign Minister, Sheikh Mohammed bin Abdulrahman al Thani, urged the Taliban to combat terrorism after

the US withdrawal, and called for an inclusive government.

The US-led airlift began as the Taliban completed an astonishing rout of government forces around the country and took over the capital on August 15.

The withdrawal came just before the August 31 deadline set by Biden to end the war, which began with a US-led invasion that ousted the Taliban in the wake of 9/11, but later reached a stalemate on the battlefield with the resurgent militants.

The conflict has claimed the lives of tens of thousands of Afghans and more than 2,400 American service members.

The evacuation was complicated by a threat from the regional offshoot of the Islamic State (IS), rivals of the Taliban.

Thirteen US troops were among more than 100 people killed when an IS suicide bomber attacked the perimeter of the airport, where desperate Afghans had massed in the hope of boarding an evacuation flight.

Biden said on Tuesday that the United States would continue the fight against terrorism in Afghanistan and other countries, and warned IS, "We are not done with you yet."

AFP



Qatari Foreign Minister Sheikh Mohammed al Thani along with his Dutch counterpart Sigrid Kaag speak to media, in Doha on Wednesday (AFP)

Qatar govt urges Taliban to ensure 'safe passage'

Doha, Qatar - Qatar on Wednesday urged the Taliban to ensure 'safe passage' for people still wanting to leave Afghanistan after the chaotic US-led evacuations came to an end.

More than 123,000 foreign nationals and Afghans fled the country in a frenzied airlift operation that wound up on Tuesday, but many more are desperate to depart.

"We stress on the Taliban the issue of freedom of movement and that there be safe passage for people to leave and enter if they so wish," Qatari Foreign Minister Sheikh Mohammed al Thani told a press conference after a meeting with his Dutch counterpart, Sigrid Kaag.

"We hope to see these commitments fulfilled in the near future when the airport begins operations again and that it happens smoothly, with no obstacles for anyone wanting to leave or come to Afghanistan."

Qatar technical team in Kabul

A Qatari aircraft landed in Kabul on Wednesday carrying a technical team to discuss the resumption of airport operations, according to a source with knowledge of the matter.

"A Qatari jet carrying a technical team has landed in Kabul

earlier today to discuss the resumption of operations in the airport," the source told AFP.

"While no final agreement has been reached regarding providing technical assistance, Qatar's technical team has initiated this discussion based on the other sides' request.

"Talks are still ongoing at the level of security and operation."

The source said that the goal was to resume flights for both humanitarian aid and to provide freedom of movement, including the resumption of evacuation efforts.

Qatar hosted negotiations between the Taliban and the United States in recent years and was a transit point for about 43,000 evacuees from Afghanistan.

Kaag said the Netherlands will move its Kabul diplomatic mission to Qatar, following similar moves by the US and Britain.

"I've asked his excellency very kindly agree to the relocation of the Netherlands embassy from Kabul to Doha," Kaag told journalists.

"I've also asked [the Qatari Foreign Minister] to employ his influence and context to really help all parties in Afghanistan, to reach an inclusive political agreement that ensures stability and future prosperity."

AFP

Britain in talks with Taliban over further evacuations

London, UK - Britain has opened talks with the Taliban over the 'safe passage' of its remaining nationals and allies out of Afghanistan after the hardline Islamist group's quickfire takeover of the country last month.

The British government confirmed to AFP it has dispatched senior civil servant Simon Gass to meet with Taliban representatives in Doha.

Much of the group's senior leadership lived in exile in the Qatari capital until the overthrow of Afghanistan's Western-backed government after 20 years of war.

Prime Minister Boris Johnson has come under fire after many Afghans who helped NATO - and are eligible to move to Britain - were believed to have



Britain's Foreign Secretary Dominic Raab arrives at Downing Street in London, UK on Wednesday (AFP)

been left stranded in Afghanistan, where they are at the mercy of the Taliban.

Gass is 'meeting with senior Taliban representatives to underline the importance of safe passage out of Afghanistan for

British nationals, and those Afghans who have worked with us', a government spokesperson told AFP on Wednesday.

It is the first publicly disclosed diplomacy between London and the Taliban since Britain joined

the United States in the mammoth airlift of more than 100,000 people out of the country after the Afghan military's capitulation.

The Taliban has pledged to allow Afghans to come and go in the face of calls from the international community to honour that commitment in the days after the US withdrawal on Tuesday.

More than 8,000 Afghans who helped NATO forces made it out of Afghanistan and the British government said they would be given indefinite leave to remain.

But criticism was levelled at the government for not evacuating hundreds more stuck in the war-torn country as the Taliban took control.

British Foreign Minister Do-

minic Raab was also condemned by the opposition Labour party for not immediately leaving a beach holiday when the Taliban took control.

An unnamed British minister told the *Sunday Times* that he believed the UK could have evacuated '800-1,000 more people' in the chaotic airlift.

Johnson's government sought to extend the US withdrawal deadline of August 31 but ultimately failed to persuade President Joe Biden.

After the Taliban swept into Kabul in mid-August, the British Prime Minister said the Taliban must be judged on its 'actions rather than by its words' and insisted Britain could not have remained in Afghanistan without American support.

AFP

In Panjshir Valley, anti-Taliban forces fight on

Panjshir Valley , Afghanistan - The Taliban on Wednesday called on fighters in the holdout bastion of the Panjshir Valley to lay down their arms, as the resistance movement said it had repulsed heavy attacks.

The rugged mountain valley with towering snow-capped peaks - which begins around 80km north of the capital Kabul - is the centre of Afghanistan's most important pocket of armed anti-Taliban forces.

The National Resistance Front (NRF), comprising anti-Taliban militia fighters and former Afghan security forces, have vowed to defend the enclave as the Islamist group sends fighters to encircle the area.

"My brothers, we tried our best to solve the Panjshir problem with talks and negotiations... but unfortunately all in vain," senior Taliban official Amir Khan Muttaqi said, in an audio message to the people of the Panjshir posted on Twitter.

"Now that the talks have failed and Mujahiddin (Taliban) have surrounded Panjshir, there



Afghan resistance movement and anti-Taliban uprising forces train in Panjshir province on Monday (AFP)

are still people inside that don't want the problems to be solved peacefully," he added.

"Now it is up to you to talk to them," the Taliban message to the Panjshir people said. "Those who want to fight, tell them it is enough."

Bismillah Mohammadi, Afghanistan's defence minister

before the government fell last month, said the Taliban had launched a renewed assault on Panjshir on Tuesday night.

"Last night the Taliban terrorists attacked Panjshir, but were defeated," Mohammadi tweeted on Wednesday, claiming 34 Taliban were killed and 65 wounded.

"Our people should not worry. They retreated with heavy casualties."

Residents and fighters in Panjshir, many of whom fought the Taliban when they were last in power from 1996 to 2001, offered a defiant message.

"We are ready to defend it till the last drop of our blood," said

one resident.

"Everyone has a weapon on their shoulder and ready to fire," another said. "From the youngest to the oldest, they all talk about resistance."

'Try their luck'

As the last US soldiers boarded their flight out of Afghanistan in the Kabul dark late Monday, residents of Panjshir said the Taliban had attacked the valley on two fronts - the Khawak pass in the west, and from Shotoi to the south.

"Perhaps they wanted to try their luck," NRF official Fahim Dashti said in a video posted on Tuesday by the US broadcaster Voice of America's Dari language service. "By the grace of God, luck wasn't on their side."

Dashti reported seven or eight Taliban fighters were killed in Monday's clashes along with one or two resistance fighters.

The Panjshir has immense symbolic value in Afghanistan as the area that has resisted occupation by invaders.

AFP

COVID-19 PANDEMIC

Israel starts new school year despite surge in infections

Jerusalem - Israel reopened its schools on Wednesday after the summer break but the coronavirus forced many students to stay home amid an infection surge fuelled by the highly transmissible Delta variant.

Of the 2.4mn children due to attend educational institutions from kindergarten to high school, 250,000 were kept home on the first day of school, said the Education Ministry.

Some 90,000 of them were infected with COVID or in quarantine, a ministry spokeswoman told AFP. Another 150,000 were either in cities with high virus rates, or enrolled in classes which did not open due to low vaccination rates.

Israel has been offering vaccines to those aged 12 and up, and has refrained from opening high school classrooms in which fewer than 70 per cent of pupils are vaccinated.

On Tuesday, the Health Ministry had confirmed 10,947 new virus cases for the previous day, the highest ever daily tally.

Prime Minister Naftali Bennett defended the government's decision to open schools despite the leap in infections, stressing that he wanted to avoid measures that would have kept chil-



A woman looks through a window at pupils who returned to the new school year at Beit Hakerem Israeli elementary school in Jerusalem on Wednesday (AFP)

WHO monitoring new variant named 'Mu'

Geneva, Switzerland - The World Health Organization (WHO) has said it is monitoring a new coronavirus variant known as 'Mu', which was first identified in Colombia in January.

Mu, known scientifically as B.1.621, has been classified as a 'variant of interest', the global health body said on Tuesday in its weekly pandemic bulletin.

The WHO said the variant

has mutations that indicate a risk of resistance to vaccines and stressed that further studies were needed to better understand it.

'The Mu variant has a constellation of mutations that indicate potential properties of immune escape,' the bulletin said.

There is widespread concern over the emergence of new virus mutations as infection rates are ticking

up globally again, with the highly transmissible Delta variant taking hold - especially among the unvaccinated - and in regions where anti-virus measures have been relaxed.

The WHO currently identifies four COVID-19 variants of concern, including Alpha, which is present in 193 countries, and Delta, present in 170 countries.

AFP

dren - and their parents - at home.

"We learnt this year that there is another important thing," he said at a school in the southern city of Yeruham. "And that is livelihood - to make sure that all the people of Israel can work and earn a decent living, even during the coronavirus, because it is a sacred thing."

Before Wednesday's school reopening, Israeli conducted hundreds of thousands of serological tests on children under the age of 12 to determine if they had developed antibody protection after contracting COVID.

The government also distributed millions of antibody tests for pupils to take at home prior to the first day of school.

About 60 per cent of Israel's 9.3mn residents have received two shots of the vaccine, including 80 per cent of adults.

Israel's vaccination campaign brought daily infections down to a trickle and allowed the lifting in June of nearly all virus restrictions. Several measures have since been reimposed, including in-door mask wearing, limits on gatherings and the need to present proof of vaccination for entry to certain facilities.

AFP



Health workers take part in a demonstration demanding release of their allowances amid rising infections, in Manila on Monday (AFP)

Philippines hits 2mn cases as Delta strain drives surge

Manila, Philippines - The Philippines topped 2mn coronavirus cases on Wednesday as the country battles a record surge in infections that the World Health Organization confirmed is being driven by the hyper-contagious Delta strain.

In recent weeks, daily case rates have hit the highest levels since the start of the pandemic and the health department warned the trend could continue.

Wednesday's official data show the country recorded 14,216 new infections, taking the total caseload to just over 2mn, with 33,533 deaths in the country of 110mn people.

'It is possible the number of COVID-19 cases will rise some more in the coming days,' the health department said on Wednesday.

Daily cases exceeded 22,000 for the first time on Monday - more than double the number on August 6 when the sprawling national capital region went back into lockdown.

WHO representative in the Philippines Rabinra Abeyasinghe said on Tuesday the latest resurgence was being driven by the Delta variant, which has ripped through neighbouring countries.

"More than 70 per cent of the current transmission is attributable to the Delta variant," Abeyasinghe told reporters, citing the results of genome sequencing.

The lockdown in the capital and nearby provinces has been extended until next week as authorities battle to slow the spread of the virus.

AFP

10,000 unvaccinated Greek health workers face suspension: Union

Athens, Greece - Some 10,000 health workers in Greece faced being suspended as a deadline to get vaccinated against COVID-19 ran out on Wednesday, a union said.

From Wednesday, inoculations became mandatory for health workers, and those who don't comply will not be allowed to work.

Protests broke out on Wednesday morning in front of hospitals throughout the country to oppose compulsory vaccinations and to highlight

the consequences of mass dismissals on the country's health services.

According to estimates by the National Federation of Public Hospital Workers, some 10,000 health workers, or 10 per cent of the workforce, had not been jabbed by Wednesday.

More specifically, the ambulance service will have to work with 1,245 less personnel, financial newspaper *Naftemporiki* reported.

"We are pushing health workers to be vaccinated, but

we are against compulsory vaccination, which poses a democratic problem," Dimitris Kourouvalakis, a member of the executive committee of the federation, told AFP.

The federation has called for a strike today morning, and protests in Athens and Thessaloniki, Greece's second biggest city.

Health Minister Athanasios Plevris said on Wednesday that the legislation bringing in mandatory vaccinations, which was voted in July,

'will be implemented'.

The government is now trying to find measures to fill the gaps, such as suspending holidays for health workers who have been vaccinated, to ensure that services are fully operational.

It also plans to move ahead with a reshuffle of healthcare workers within hospitals, mergers of clinics, the replacement of those suspended with auxiliary staff and partnerships with the private sector.

AFP



Police use a water cannon to disperse demonstrators as they protest against the government's plan for mandatory COVID-19 vaccination for health workers, in the Greek capital of Athens on Sunday (AFP)

Hong Kong University labour researcher detained in China

Beijing, China - A researcher from the University of Hong Kong has been detained by police in China, where he was studying the politically thorny issue of workers' rights, friends said on Wednesday.

Beijing has repeatedly cracked down on grassroots protests and labour NGOs in recent years, with authorities seeking to control social movements they view as a potential challenge to the state.

Fang Ran, a sociology PhD student researching labour movements in China, has not been seen for five days, his friends told AFP.

A message circulating on social media, apparently from his father, said Fang was detained by police in the city of Nanning in southwestern Guangxi region last Thursday.

"I am extremely shocked at this," wrote Fang's father, describing his son as a loyal member of the ruling Chinese Communist Party.

"In my view, Fang Ran is definitely not a criminal who seeks to harm the Party, but an ambitious young person who is helpful to the Party's cause."

AFP could not independently verify the message, but three friends of Fang's confirmed its authenticity.

Hong Kong University said in a statement that it is 'aware of the matter and actively looking into it'.

"We will provide assistance to Fang and his family where appropriate," a university spokesperson told AFP.

Fang's father wrote that the 26 year old had been put into a form of solitary secret detention known as 'residential surveillance at a designated location', which is often used against dissidents.

Friends say that Fang, a Chinese national, had been researching labour conditions in Chinese factories in the southern manufacturing hub of Shenzhen, where he lived for the past six months.

One of his friends told AFP Fang was passionate about social issues and was 'not afraid of speaking out whenever he sees some injustice'.

Numerous student labour activists were detained in 2018 and 2019. Some remain missing.

AFP

Over half of global population still living without any social protections, says UN

Geneva, Switzerland - Over half of all people in the world have no social protections, the United Nations (UN) said on Wednesday, even after the pandemic spurred countries to offer more services to their populations.

In a report on the state of social protection globally, the UN's International Labour Organization said that 4.1bn people were living without any social safety net of any kind.

Social protection includes access to health care and income security measures related especially to old age, unemployment, sickness, disability, work injury, maternity or the loss of the main breadwinner in a family, as well as extra support for families with children.

In 2020, only 46.9 per cent of the global population benefitted from at least one such protection, according to the report - ILOs first on the subject since 2017.

That low rate came even as access to healthcare, sickness and unemployment benefits have more than ever proved their relevance during the COVID-19 pandemic.

"This crisis has revealed the

absolutely crucial role that social protection has played in national responses around the world," ILO chief Guy Ryder told reporters.

"Without the massive and rapid expansion of social protection during the COVID-19 crisis, its impact would certainly have been very much worse than it actually has been."



Homeless people set up a camp in the Andre-Citroen park in Paris, the capital of France on Wednesday, as part of an action supported by associations' collective 'Collectif Requisition' in demand for housing solutions (AFP)

'Glimmers of optimism'

Ryder said this renewed appreciation for social protections had offered 'glimmers of optimism amid the devastation wrought by the pandemic'.

He urged countries to centre their recovery efforts around boosting social protections.

"Countries are at a cross-

roads," he said in a statement, stressing that 'this is a pivotal moment to harness the pandemic response to build a new generation of rights-based social protection systems'.

But while the pandemic has provided an opportunity for improving social protections, it also laid bare the glaring disparities between the protections cur-

rently on offer in different parts of the world.

Ryder said the COVID crisis had acted 'as an X-ray for global society', revealing 'large gaps in the coverage, in the adequacy and in the comprehensiveness of social protection'.

Europe and Central Asia have the highest rates of coverage, with a full 84 per cent of people covered by at least one social protection, followed by the Americas, at 64.3 per cent, according to the ILO.

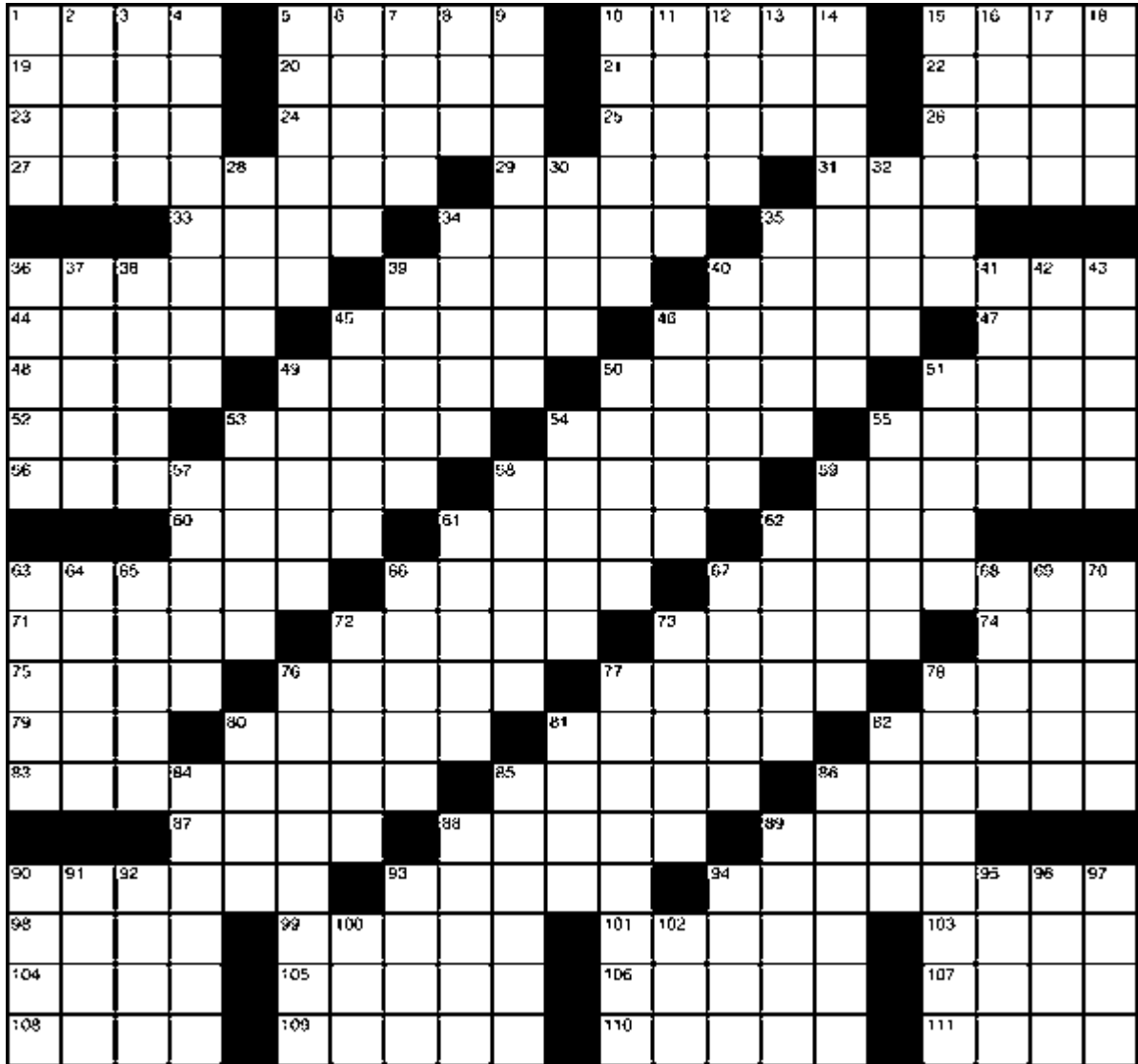
Some 44 per cent of people living in the Asia-Pacific region and 40 per cent of people in Arab states meanwhile enjoy at least one social protection, while in Africa only 17.4 per cent of people do.

Countries on average spend 12.8 per cent of their gross domestic product on social protections, excluding health care, but such spending also varies dramatically. While wealthy nations dish out 16.4 per cent of their GDP for such protections, low-income countries spend just 1.1 per cent, the report found.

And the pandemic could easily worsen the disparities.

AFP

DAILY CROSSWORD



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- ACROSS

1 Narrow gash

5 Dried orchid tubers

10 Large ungulate

15 Encounter

19 Leveret

20 Texas shrine

21 ___ Zola

22 Italian sailor's saint

23 Shakespeare's river

24 Moral faults

25 Motorist's haven

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27 The May apple

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31 Clothing

33 Old Norse poem

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35 Portico in ancient Greece

36 Surgical appliance

39 Slips

40 Causing no discomfort

44 Labors

45 Actor ___ Owen

46 Divide into two equal parts

47 Faucet

48 Derricks

49 The coast

50 Social division

51 Wan

52 Timber tree
- 53 Slumbered

54 Witch-y blemishes

55 Roasting fowl

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flowers

58 Social gathering

59 Puissant

60 Nice discernment

61 Gasps

62 Docile

63 A longing

66 11th/12th cent. Italian poet

67 Irrigating

71 Roman magistrate: var.

72 Weathercocks

73 Rounded parts

74 Title of respect

75 Tiny arachnid

76 Quibble

77 Nobleman

78 Hit TV musical show

79 SA wood sorrel

80 ___ law: sexist code

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89 Famous fictional detective

90 Holding device: mech.
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104 Case for small articles

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107 Great divisions of time

108 A bristle

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66 Magical

Copperfield

67 Merit
- 68 Religion of the Muslims

69 Maria, to JFK

70 Avarice

72 Like Jeeves

73 Long wooden spear

76 Chief cities

77 Improved

78 Spanish noblemen

80 Extend over

81 Glasgow girl

82 Comparison

84 Louisiana parish

85 Frolics

86 Participates in

88 Bet

89 Largest Greek island

90 Female deer: pl.

91 Italian princely house

92 Tense

93 Wash

94 Wide smile

95 Mosquito Coast tree

96 Footed vases

97 Flagmaker, Betsy ___

100 Game of chance

cube

102 Boxing great

Muhammad ___

YOUR DAILY HOROSCOPE

 **ARIES** MARCH 21-APRIL 19

Put your money where your mouth is today -- unless you've just realised that you don't have any cash on hand. Financial concerns pop up out of nowhere and demand your closest attention. Make sure you address these issues right away, or the next time they come knocking, they're not likely to let you know in quite as polite a fashion.

 **LEO** JULY 23-AUGUST 22

Career frustration could be coming soon, but you don't have to let it distract you from the important tasks at hand. Try to distract yourself and just keep your focus as you work on big projects that you've been dreaming of for quite some time. If someone insists on flagging your attention, it's definitely appropriate to acknowledge them -- and let them know that you can talk later.

 **SAGITTARIUS** NOVEMBER 22-DECEMBER 21

When you set your mind to it, you're the best at analysing situations and seeing the deeper meaning of things. Recent events may have the people around you in a tizzy, but you can take a clear-eyed look at what is really going on. Not only do you know what to do to make things better, but you're aware of how much work it should take to get you where you want to go.

 **TAURUS** APRIL 20-MAY 20

Being pragmatic and being creative may seem to be in opposition, but that's far from true -- and you're living proof that both can coexist. In fact, These two qualities actually complement each other. Your practical side ensures you have everything done so you can create your masterpiece, and your creativity ensures that everything that's vital gets done with flair.

 **VIRGO** AUGUST 23-SEPTEMBER 22

Something you've been keeping to yourself for quite some time needs to see the light of day -- but rather than being scared, you're actually grateful that it's finally coming out. It's great to discover that what you thought was such a big deal is actually not really a matter of life and death. The support of family and friends makes all the difference.

 **CAPRICORN** DECEMBER 22-JANUARY 19

Double your fun by making sure you get your favourite people in on the action. You're all set to have a good time, no matter what you do, but things are even sweeter if you have all the right folks along for the ride. It should all go well if you make a serious effort to contact someone you haven't seen in far too long -- you should catch up with each other and have a great time.

 **GEMINI** MAY 21-JUNE 21

Shyness is nice sometimes, but it can stop you from doing things you'd like to. While you're not known for being especially reticent, you can sometimes be less than forthcoming, especially if you need to show off a skill that's not really in your repertoire. Don't worry -- just step up to the plate and swing at the next good pitch. What happens next surprises everyone -- including yourself.

 **LIBRA** SEPTEMBER 23-OCTOBER 22

When deciding to lend a hand, you end up helping yourself to discover a new path. Rather than feeling put upon or worn out by others' demands, you find yourself rising to the challenge. It does help that you get to use your best assets in aiding this person or cause -- diplomacy, tact and charisma all come in handy for the time being.

 **AQUARIUS** JANUARY 20-FEBRUARY 18

The temptation to tune out is pretty much irresistible, especially if someone close calls who wants to tell you some neverending story about a dream they had or something they're trying to put behind them. Try listening attentively -- you may just learn something about yourself that could really put things in a different light.

 **CANCER** JUNE 22-JULY 22

You've been planning that big dinner party in your head for ages, but you realise today that you have all the necessary ingredients on hand. What more do you need than good friends, family and food? Call people up and tell them you're throwing a get-together, and don't take no for an answer. Once they see it's low-key, easygoing socialising on the menu, they're sure to turn up.

 **SCORPIO** OCTOBER 23-NOVEMBER 21

Your strong opinions and magnetic personality ensure that you're always engaging, if occasionally challenging. Remember that there are others involved, and that their opinions might be as valid as yours. A free spirit who is on your side could agitate you with their off-the-wall suggestions, but exercise patience and give all their opinions a fair hearing.

 **PISCES** FEBRUARY 19-MARCH 20

Think back to your favourite childhood meal and recreate it for someone you love. It's a great time for good food, good company and even better chatter. It doesn't have to be anything fancy -- you just need to enjoy each other's company in a comfortable manner. Go ahead and call that special person and tell them what you have in mind. They should be ecstatic.



TEST YOUR KNOWLEDGE

1. In the UK, what type of installation requires a fireman's switch?

a. Neon Lighting
b. High Pressure Sodium Lighting
c. Water Features
d. Hotel Rooms

2. In the United States the television broadcast standard is...?

a. PAL
b. NTSC
c. SECAM
d. RGB

3. The transformer that develops the high voltage in a home television is commonly called a...?

a. Tesla coil
b. Flyback
c. Yoke
d. Van de Graaf

Answers: 1.a 2.b 3.d

KIDS COLOURING



DO YOU SUDOKU?

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

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

BOGGLER

N	T	E	U
R	E	R	O
P	A	E	R
S	E	K	S

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

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

SUDOKU EASY ANSWER

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

DAILY CROSSWORD ANSWERS (SEPTEMBER 01)

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





HAIRLINE FRACTURES

(Photo: Syed Fasiuddin)

THROUGH THE CRACKS...

Hairline fractures, also known as a stress fractures, are fine cracks or severe bruises within a bone, most common in athletes. It takes roughly six to eight weeks for a stress fracture to heal, and the solution lies in stopping activities that caused it

Have you ever had to stop short in the midst of your morning run or on the sports field when excruciating pain in your limbs compelled you to remain absolutely still? Did you fall off a chair and injure your foot or accidentally trip over a parapet wall and see stars in an instant?

You, probably, wouldn't have experienced any obvious signs of a fracture (swelling, numbness, redness, bleeding), but chances are you have developed a hairline fracture that is also characterised by intense pain and limited mobility. Immediate medical attention is recommended.

Hairline fractures are often caused by overuse or repetitive actions when microscopic damage is done to the bone over time. Not allowing yourself enough time to heal between activities is often a factor in the probability of getting this injury.

Most hairline fractures are caused from either overuse or repetitive activity. An increase in either the duration or frequency of activity can result in a hairline fracture. This means that even if you are used to running, suddenly increasing either your distance or the number of times per week you run can cause this injury.

Hairline fractures can also be caused when one changes the type of exercise undertaken. For example, an experienced swimmer can sustain an injury if he/she undertakes a new activity suddenly, like running, even though one is in good shape.

LOCATION OF HAIRLINE FRACTURES

Bones adapt to increased forces put on them through various activities, where new

DON'T INVITE IT

There are ways to avoid hairline fractures during physical activity/sports. If you do the following, you can significantly reduce your chances of getting hairline fractures:

- Once you feel pain, stop exercising
 - See your doctor if you have a persistent area of discomfort
 - Use the correct sports equipment
 - Wear proper running shoes. (Should be replaced every 300 miles)
 - Add new activities slowly, and gradually increase the time/speed
- When restarting a sport or activity, reduce your intensity by 50%
 - Make sure to warm up and cool down before activities
 - Practice strength training to prevent early muscle fatigue and loss of bone density
 - Follow a healthy diet full of calcium and vitamin D foods



bones form to replace old bone. This process is called remodelling. When a breakdown happens more rapidly than new bone can form, the chances of a hairline fracture increases.

The bones of the foot and leg are especially prone to hairline fractures. These bones absorb a lot of stress during running and jumping. Within the foot, the second and third metatarsals are most commonly affected. This is because they're thin bones and the 'point of impact' when pushing off on your foot in order to run or jump.

Stress fractures can occur anywhere there is overuse, but they're most commonly found in the lower extremity as a

result of impact and weight bearing activities. The most common bone is the shin bone or tibia (20% to 75% of all stress fractures - often running injuries).

Stress fractures can also occur in the foot which is made up of several small bones - the bones running to the toes are called metatarsals. Stress fractures can also be seen in the heel, hip and even the lower back.

SYMPTOMS

The most common symptom of a hairline fracture is excruciating pain. This pain can gradually get worse over time, especially if you don't stop weight-bearing activity. Pain

is usually worse during activity and lessens during rest. Other symptoms can include swelling, tenderness, and bruising, depending on each case.

DIAGNOSIS

Certain examinations are necessary to detect the location and extent of the hairline fracture.

Physical examination

Your doctor will inspect the painful area and probably apply gentle pressure to see if it causes pain. Pain in response to pressure is often the key for your doctor to diagnose a hairline fracture.

MRI scans

The best imaging test for determining hairline fractures is an MRI. This test uses magnets and radio waves to provide images of your bones. An MRI will determine a fracture before an X-ray can.

X-ray

Hairline fractures often aren't visible on X-rays immediately after the injury. The fracture may actually become visible a few weeks after the injury takes place, when a callus has formed around the healing area.

Bone scan

This involves receiving a small dose of radioactive material through a vein. This substance accumulates in areas where bones are repairing. But because this test will indicate an increased blood supply to a particular area, it won't specifically prove there's a hairline fracture.

TREATMENT

Follow the RICE method - Rest, Ice, Compression, Elevation. It may also be recommended that you use some sort of support, like crutches, to keep weight off an injured foot or leg. You can also wear protective footwear or a cast.

Since it usually takes up to six to eight weeks to completely heal from a hairline fracture, it's important to modify your activities during that time. Cycling and swimming are great alternatives to more high-impact exercises like running or even jogging.

Some serious hairline fractures do require surgery where bones are supported by the addition of a type of fastener using pins or screws to hold bones together during the healing process.

OMAN'S HISTORY-MAKER MASHAYKHI RECEIVES BRONZE MEDAL AT TOKYO PARALYMPIC GAMES



Oman's history-maker Mohammed al Mashaykhi (left), who won the sultanate's first-ever Paralympic medal with a bronze in the shot put - F 32 category at the 2020 Tokyo Paralympic Games on Tuesday, is congratulated by the Oman Paralympic Committee chairman, Mansour al Tauqi, on Wednesday in Tokyo after the Paralympian received his medal at the awards ceremony. Tauqi, who is also the head of Oman's delegation, attended at the medal ceremony at the Olympic Stadium where the sultanate's flag was also raised after Mashaykhi received his medal. Photo right: Mashaykhi celebrates with his medal along with his long-time coach from Tunisia, Sonia Mustafa (right) in Tokyo on Wednesday (Supplied photos)



Germany's Markus Rehm competes in the men's long jump T64 final during the Tokyo 2020 Paralympic Games at the Olympic Stadium in Tokyo on Wednesday (AFP)

Tokyo, Japan - Germany's 'Blade Jumper' Markus Rehm leapt to gold at the Tokyo Paralympics on Wednesday but failed to topple his own gargantuan long jump world record. The 33-year-old set a new record in June of 8.62m, which would have won him gold at every Olympics since 1992, and set his sights on breaking it again in Tokyo.

A leap of 8.18 was his best effort on a cool and drizzly evening, but it was more than enough to give him his third straight title and a fourth Paralympic gold overall.

France's Dimitri Pavade took silver with a jump of 7.39, while Trenten Merrill of the US claimed bronze on 7.08.

Ahead of Rehm's appearance, Tunisian Raoua Tlili took her second gold of the Games with a world-record discus throw in the F41 final, beaming and jumping with delight at the result.

There was controversy elsewhere though, with International Paralympic Committee

spokesman Craig Spence condemning what he described as a wave of social media abuse after a Malaysian shot putter was disqualified and missed out on a gold medal for failing to appear on time.

Muhammad Ziyad Zolkefli was allowed to compete in the F20 final on Tuesday despite being late to the call room. He finished first, breaking the world record and winning gold. But afterwards a referee and jury

disqualified him. The gold went to Ukraine's Maksym Koval.

'Makes it all worth it'

On the eighth day of competition, the first gold in boccia, a sport similar to boules, went to Czech Republic's Adam Peska. Elsewhere, US high jumper Sam Grewe, who won gold in the T63 on Tuesday, shared online a letter handed to him by a Tokyo 2020 employee who described the athlete's impact on his family.

Grewe's leg was amputated after he was diagnosed with a

cancerous tumour in his knee as a teenager, and in his letter Masaki Kando said his 13-year-old son had also been diagnosed with a tumour on his knee and undergone a treatment known as rotationplasty.

"I was very anxious," Kando admitted. "High Jump the World Champion! You gave us great courage to my family. We are grateful to you."

Grewe, said of the letter: "Win or lose, this is what it's all about. This makes it all worth it," he added on his Twitter account.

AFP



Japan's Yuma Yamazaki in action during her women's singles WH2 badminton match on Wednesday (AFP)

'Dream come true' for shuttlers on Paralympics debut

Tokyo, Japan - Badminton's Paralympics Games debut on Wednesday was hailed as a 'dream come true' by players, 29 years after it became an Olympic sport.

Badminton was first played at the Olympic Games in Barcelona in 1992 and now 90 players will battle for medals in 14 events over five days at Tokyo's Yoyogi National Stadium in the inaugural Paralympics event.

"It's been a long, long time, 14 years for me actually," said 30-year-old British player Krysten Coombs, who has been involved from the fledgling days of the sport.

"I was at the first tournament back in 2008 that had short stature," added the men's SH6 category world No 5. "It's a dream come true and I can't wait to get started."

The honour of the first

match win in Paralympics history went to Germany's No 3 seed Valeska Knoblauch, who breezed past countrywoman Elke Rongen 21-7, 21-8 in the women's WH1 category.

The IPC finally recognised the Badminton World Federation (BWF) as a para sports organisation in 2015 and selected it for Olympics inclusion at Tokyo, four years after the BWF had integrated para badminton into its structures. "It's been a long, long journey," BWF secretary general Thomas Lund said.

There are six categories of para badminton, with players in wheelchairs taking part in the WH1 or WH2. Other categories are for standing players who have impairments to lower limbs (SL3/SL4), upper limbs (SU5) or are of short stature (SH6).

AFP

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FOOTBALL ROUND-UP

Griezmann rejoins Atletico

Real Madrid sign Camavinga from Rennes but Mbappe stays with PSG for now

EUROPEAN TRANSFERS

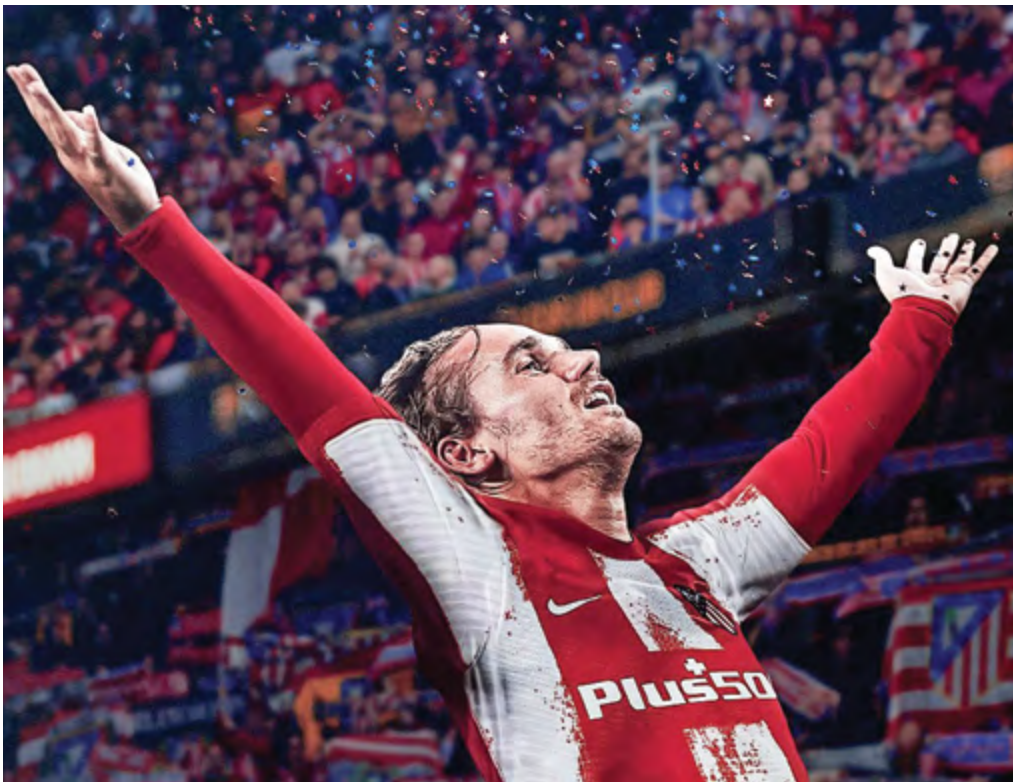
Paris, France - France forward Antoine Griezmann has made a shock return to Atletico Madrid just two years after leaving to join Barcelona, on the final day of a hectic European transfer window.

Real Madrid also bagged a French international star as Eduardo Camavinga arrived from Rennes - but their attempts to sign Kylian Mbappe from Paris Saint-Germain (PSG) failed.

World Cup-winning 30-year-old Griezmann, who scored 133 goals in his first spell with Atletico, has rejoined on a one-year loan deal with an option to extend by another year and an obligation to buy, the club said.

Barcelona have been struggling financially and had to allow six-time *Ballon d'Or* winner Lionel Messi to leave for PSG last month.

Midfield prodigy Camavinga, who is just 18, penned a six-year deal at Real, the club reportedly



France striker Antoine Griezmann rejoined Atletico Madrid from Barcelona on Tuesday



French international Eduardo Camavinga signed a deal with Real Madrid

US\$29.6mn after two seasons on loan with Real Betis, while teenager Ilaix Moriba headed to RB Leipzig for an initial US\$19mn.

Their only new permanent signings have been free agents, Eric Garcia and Sergio Agüero from Manchester City and Memphis Depay from Lyon. They also announced a deadline-day deal to take Sevilla forward Luuk de Jong on loan.

In the English Premier League, Chelsea secured the signing of Atletico midfielder Saul Niguez on a season-long loan. Early strugglers Arsenal signed Japan defender Takehiro Tomiyasu from Bologna, and offloaded defender Hector Bellerin to Real Betis on a season-long loan.

In Italy, champions Inter replaced Lukaku and Hakimi with cheaper alternatives in Edin Dzeko and Netherlands right-back Denzel Dumfries. They also signed Argentina's Joaquin Correa from Lazio on an initial one-year loan.

In Germany, Bayern Munich splashed a total of US\$80mn signing France defender Dayot Upamecano and Austria's Marcel Sabitzer from RB Leipzig.

Borussia Dortmund bought Dutch forward Donyell Malen from PSV Eindhoven and, crucially, have kept hold of Erling Haaland.

AFP

paying a fee of US\$36.6mn plus US\$10.6mn more in bonuses.

It is a considerable sum for the Angolan-born player, who was in the final year of his contract at Rennes. Real had spent the last week trying to clinch a dizzying deal for 22-year-old forward Mbappe, making two bids, the last understood to be worth a total of US\$213mn.

But PSG's Qatari owners do not need to sell and appear pre-

pared to risk losing Mbappe for free at the end of the campaign in order to have the World Cup winner, Neymar and Messi together in attack for at least one season. Real can come back in for Mbappe again in January, when they could sign him to a pre-contract agreement to move next summer without having to pay a transfer fee.

It has been an extraordinary summer transfer window in Eu-

rope, with Messi departing Barcelona for Paris and Cristiano Ronaldo on Tuesday finalising his sensational return to Manchester United from Juventus.

Apart from Messi, PSG have also signed Sergio Ramos from Real Madrid and one of the world's top goalkeepers, Gianluigi Donnarumma, from AC Milan. They also strengthened their midfield with Georginio Wijnaldum from Liverpool and

signed flying Morocco right-back Achraf Hakimi, who shone for Inter Milan last season. The latter cost some US\$71mn, with the rest all arriving as free agents.

On Tuesday, the club also announced the signing of teenage Portugal defender Nuno Mendes from Sporting Lisbon, on a season-long loan with an option to buy.

In contrast, PSG apart, leading clubs on the continent have not

been as willing to spend big money as they continue to suffer from the economic impact of the pandemic. Before adding Camavinga, Real's only signing of note was David Alaba on a free from Bayern Munich.

Barcelona, mired in huge debts, could not keep Messi and spent deadline day selling off some of their youngsters. Brazilian right-back Emerson Royal joined Tottenham Hotspur for

Neuer, Mueller ruled out of Thursday's World Cup qualifier

Berlin, Germany - Germany captain Manuel Neuer and forward Thomas Mueller are both injured and ruled out of Thursday's World Cup qualifier against minnows Liechtenstein.

Arsenal goalkeeper Bernd

Leno will deputise for Neuer, who sat out training all week with an ankle knock. Coach Hansi Flick is hopeful he will be fit for their next qualifier against Armenia in Stuttgart.

Neuer's Bayern Munich team-

mate Mueller is suffering an adductor injury and misses all three Group J games against Liechtenstein, Armenia and Iceland next Wednesday.

Borussia Dortmund captain Marco Reus or Chelsea forward

Kai Havertz could deputise.

Without Neuer, 35, and Mueller, 31, Germany lose a decade of experience as the pair have over 200 international appearances between them.

AFP



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Spanish League boss hits out at 'unsustainable' PSG spending

Madrid, Spain - Spanish League (La Liga) president Javier Tebas on Wednesday hit out at Qatari-owned Paris Saint-Germain (PSG) and what he called 'club-states' after the French club signed Lionel Messi and a host of stars in the transfer window.

"The club-states are as dangerous for the ecosystem of football as the Super League," Tebas said on Twitter.

"We were critical towards the Super League because it destroyed European football and we are equally critical of PSG."

Tebas said PSG paying Messi a reported salary of US\$590,000 a week was 'unsustainable' when TV revenues for France's Ligue 1 are down 40 per cent and the coronavirus pandemic has caused deep losses.

Messi's tearful departure from cash-strapped Barcelona means the Spanish league has now lost its three biggest names in the space of five years.

Neymar moved to PSG from Barca for a world record US\$263mn in 2017, Cristiano



Javier Tebas

Ronaldo left Real Madrid to join Juventus in 2018 and PSG lured Messi away from the Catalans, who could no longer afford to keep the six-time *Ballon d'Or* winner.

During the transfer window that closed on Tuesday, PSG also signed Real Madrid's defender Sergio Ramos, Italy goalkeeper Gianluigi Donnarumma, Morocco's Ashraf Hakimi, Netherlands' midfielder Georginio Wijnaldum and Portugal defender Nuno Mendes.

The French club will bid to win the Champions League for the first time this season.

AFP

Every day, all day!





Tamim Iqbal

Tamim Iqbal drops out of T20 World Cup

Dhaka, Bangladesh - Tamim Iqbal has stepped aside from Bangladesh's T20 World Cup squad, explaining that he did not want to take the place of openers who have been playing in the format more regularly than him in recent times.

Iqbal informed the Bangladesh Cricket Board (BCB) president Nazmul Hassan and chief selector Minhajul Abedin of his decision on Wednesday, prior to making the announcement from his official Facebook page. Iqbal, however, made it clear that he was not retiring from T20Is, but given his lack of involvement in the T20 World Cup build-up, he felt it would be unfair to take the place of those players who had been tried in his stead.

Iqbal said that he would have been fit in time for the but the lack of T20s also played a part in his decision making.

"There are a few reasons why I am not available for the tournament. Game time is the biggest reason. I haven't been playing this format for a long time," he said.

"The main reason that clicked with me when taking this decision was, I don't think it would be fair on those players who have played in the last 15-16 T20Is that I haven't played. I was probably going to be in the World Cup team, but I believe it wouldn't have been fair on those players."

Cricinfo

Spinners script Bangladesh's first-ever T20I win over NZ



Bangladesh players celebrate the dismissal of New Zealand's Colin de Grandhomme (unseen) during the first T20I match at the Sher-e-Bangla National Cricket Stadium on Wednesday (AFP)

New Zealand were bowled out for 60 as Bangladesh won the series opener in Dhaka by seven wickets

BANGLADESH VS NEW ZEALAND FIRST T20I

Dhaka, Bangladesh - For New Zealand, it was the stuff nightmares are made of. They crashed and burned to 60 all out on a challenging Mirpur surface, failing to utilise their full complement of overs on Wednesday.

While they made a good fist of it with the ball, applying the spin choke, they just didn't have the runs on the board to give Bangladesh the jitters. The hosts overhauled the target with seven wickets in hand and five overs to spare.

There was sharp turn on offer

for spinners from both sides, but the conditions weren't unplayable. The New Zealand batters looked rusty against spin and lost so much ground early that they couldn't make much of a mark against the pacers either.

This was Bangladesh's first-ever victory over New Zealand in T20Is, one that helped carry forward their impressive string of home performances from last month where they beat Australia 4-1 in the T20Is.

Nasum, Mahedi spin a web

Rachin Ravindra, on T20I debut,

returned to the scene of his maiden U19 World Cup campaign from five years ago, looking to give New Zealand a headstart against Bangladesh's plethora of spin options. Having played every summer in India for a better part of the past five years on raging turners, he was placed well to do so, too.

However, the pressure of an international debut can do strange things as he found out, chipping a return catch to Mahedi Hasan off the very first ball to fall for a golden duck. It was the start of a procession of wickets.

Barring Colin de Grandhomme's dismissal to a slog sweep, batter after batter failed to either pick the length or being done in sharp turn or skid off the pitch.

Will Young was bowled looking to cut Shakib al Hasan to one that kept low, while Tom Blundell played for turn, only to be beaten by an in-drifter that crashed into the stumps. New Zealand were under the pump at nine for four.

Latham, Nicholls share best stand

As long as they were there, Tom Latham and Henry Nicholls showed the top order just how they should have approached their innings. The pair put together 34, the highest partnership of the innings, before Latham fell.

Having thwarted the spinners, Latham fell to a long hop, failing to control a pull that he hit straight to fine leg to give Mohammad Saifuddin his first wicket. Five balls later, New

Zealand's second debutant of the day - Cole McConchie - also fell for a duck when he chipped a tame catch to short midwicket off Shakib.

Realising he was running out of partners, Nicholls then looked to launch one down the ground off Saifuddin, only to be beaten by the slowness of the surface as he dragged one to long-on for 18.

New Zealand had slumped to 49 for seven in 13 overs. It didn't take Mustafizur Rahman long to then clean up the lower order and finish with three for 13.

Bangladesh slow but steady

It was by no means a cakewalk for the hosts. Not even two early wickets and five quiet overs had them press the panic button, especially after Ajaz Patel kept

SCOREBOARD			
NEW ZEALAND			
T Blundell	b Ahmed	2	(6)
R Ravindra	c & b Mahedi Hasan	0	(1)
W Young	b Shakib al Hasan	5	(11)
C de Grandhomme			
	c Naim b Ahmed	1	(4)
T Latham	c Ahmed b Saifuddin	18	(25)
H Nicholls	c Rahim b Saifuddin	18	(24)
C McConchie	c Rahim		
	b Shakib al Hasan	0	(3)
D Bracewell	c Mahedi b Rahman	5	(7)
A Patel	b Rahman	3	(6)
B Tinkner	not out	3	(9)
J Duffy	c Saifuddin b Rahman	3	(5)
Extras:	(b 2)	2	
TOTAL: 60 in 16.5 overs			
Fall of wickets: 1-1, 2-7, 3-8, 4-9, 5-43, 6-45, 7-49, 8-52, 9-55, 10-60			
Bowling: Mahedi Hasan 4-0-15-1, N Ahmed 2-0-5-2, Shakib al Hasan 4-0-10-2, M Rahman 2-5-0-13-3, Mahmudullah 2-0-8-0, M Saifuddin 2-0-7-2			
BANGLADESH			
M Naim	c Nicholls		
	b McConchie	1	(6)
L Das	st Latham b Patel	1	(3)
Shakib al Hasan			
	c Latham b Ravindra	25	(31)
M Rahim	not out	16	(26)
Mahmudullah	not out	14	(22)
Extras:	(w 5)	5	
TOTAL: 62 for three in 15 overs			
Fall of wickets: 1-1, 2-7, 3-37			
Bowling: A Patel 4-0-7-1, C McConchie 4-0-19-1, R Ravindra 4-0-21-1, J Duffy 1-0-3-0, D Bracewell 1-0-3-0, B Tinkner 1-0-9-0			

them quiet with his ripping left-arm spin, finishing his four overs with one for seven.

Mohammad Naim chipped one to short midwicket as off-spinner McConchie struck with his first ball on T20I debut. In the next over, Liton Das was sucked into a drive, only to be beautifully deceived in flight as Latham effected a stumping to leave them seven for two.

Shakib and Mushfiqur Rahim used their strong spin game to play the sweeps and paddles to pick off runs. Shakib cruised through to 25 before giving Ravindra his maiden international wicket when he top-edged a cut to Latham. Mahmudullah, the captain, and Mushfiqur then saw off the chase without any further hassles.

Cricinfo

India's batting and selection in focus

ENGLAND VS INDIA FOURTH TEST

London, UK - That Headingley juju, eh? England could try to bottle it, though they can barely control it themselves. But there's no doubting some Yorkshire magic rubbed off on Joe Root's team during the third Test, and just in the nick of time.

A dismal run of six home Tests without a victory - for precedent, you had to go all the way back to the dark ages (or 1989-90, to be specific) - came to an end in spectacular style. Now the question is whether it will be a turning point for the series or an isolated blip on the readout.

India will quickly have to face up to the repercussions of 78 all out - much as they did after being blown away for 36 in Adelaide last year. Never mind that India have by and large had the edge on England in the series so far, can they push past the doubts that will now begin to crowd in. Can they ignore the whispers about how their previous two tours of England began competitively only to end in one-sided scorelines?

The advantage of such a hammering, perhaps, is that it can quickly be consigned to history. Root's magnificence aside, India have two of the leading run-scorers in the series in openers Rohit Sharma and KL Rahul, while a second-innings 91 at Headingley by Cheteshwar Pujara puts him fourth.



India's Rishabh Pant attends a practice session ahead of the fourth Test against England at The Oval on Wednesday

And despite skipper Virat Kohli's apparent struggles, the data suggests his form is as much down to bad luck as a lack of control. When the tide turns, a deluge may follow.

England, nevertheless, will return south rejuvenated. Although they will be without Jos Buttler, with his wife due to give birth, the return of Chris Woakes - so effective in these conditions and England's player of the summer in 2020 - should give Root another reason to be cheerful.

The buzz

England: The hosts will have to change a winning team. Bairstow will retake the gloves for the first time since the 2019 Ashes and Ollie Pope looks favourite to come ahead of Dan Lawrence. Chris Woakes is also set for a first Test show since August 2020, most likely for Sam Curran.

India: They have plenty of selection posers to consider after defeat at Headingley. The Oval is perhaps the ideal ground on

which to go with their strength and deploy two spinners, R Ashwin having already turned out there once this summer for Surrey. Ravindra Jadeja might be a case of either/or once again, with Shardul Thakur in contention to stiffen the batting as a fourth seamer. Ishant Sharma seems most likely to miss out, with Prasidh Krishna added to the squad as cover.

In the spotlight

Jonny Bairstow: Restored to the

Test side in January, for the first time in more than a year, Bairstow impressed as a specialist batter. And now, another twist has given him the gloves once again. There's no doubt Bairstow will be aiming to prove England have done the right thing in going back to an old flame.

Rishabh Pant: It feels like the spotlight rarely leaves him. An average of 17.40 in the current series tells of his struggle in English conditions. It was at The Oval in 2018 that the 20-year-old Pant announced himself, with the first hundred in England by an India wicketkeeper. A return to form on the same ground would be timely.

Teams (likely)

England: Rory Burns, Haseeb Hameed, Dawid Malan, Joe Root (capt), Ollie Pope, Jonny Bairstow (wk), Moeen Ali, Chris Woakes, Craig Overton, Ollie Robinson, James Anderson.

India: KL Rahul, Rohit Sharma, Cheteshwar Pujara, Virat Kohli (capt), Ajinkya Rahane, Rishabh Pant (wk), Ravindra Jadeja/ R Ashwin, Shardul Thakur/ Ishant Sharma, Mohammed Shami/ Umesh Yadav, Jasprit Bumrah, Mohammed Siraj.

Match begins at 2pm, Oman time.

Cricinfo



England's captain Joe Root at The Oval cricket ground on Wednesday

Root back at No 1 in ICC Test rankings

Dubai, UAE - Joe Root's unstoppable run-making in the series against India has carried him to No 1 in the ICC Test batting rankings, displacing Kane Williamson at the top.

Root tops the Test batting rankings for the first time since December 2015, and is just one rating point off his career-best aggregate of 917, which he also achieved back in 2015. Three Tests into the India series, Root has three centuries and a fifty to his name, for a tally of 507 at 126.75.

Speaking on the eve of The Oval Test, Root said, "It [the news of going to No 1] is a nice thing to hear.

"My main focus is on trying to keep scoring runs and get us across the line in this series. As nice as it is, there's still so much hard work to do and the

focus doesn't change. It's all about continuing to try and keep getting better, continue scoring runs and hopefully setting up games to win Test matches."

Other gainers from the series include England's spearhead James Anderson, who has moved back into the top five of the Test bowling rankings following his match haul of four in England's win in Headingley.

And from the India camp, Rohit Sharma moves up to No 5 among the batters, pushing Virat Kohli down to No 6 - Rohit's numbers in the series currently read 230 runs at 46.00, compared to Kohli's 124 at 24.80.

This is the first time since November 2017 that a batter other than Kohli is the top-ranked Indian on the table.

Cricinfo



Ready for Japan test, says Ivankovic

Oman take on heavyweights Japan in their opening game of the third round Group B Asian World Cup Qualifiers in Osaka

Ashok Purohit
Muscat

Oman's coach Branko Ivankovic is a respected figure among the footballing world. The Croatian had led West Asian giants Iran to the 2006 World Cup finals in Germany and was also an assistant coach of the Croatia national team that finished third at the

1998 World Cup finals in France. With a wealth of experience, the 67 year old gears up for yet another challenge - guiding Oman to the maiden finals at the 2022 FIFA World Cup in Qatar. Ivankovic steered Oman into the third round of the AFC Asian World Cup Qualifiers in June with a second-place finish in the group behind Qatar. On Thursday, Oman begin

their ambitious campaign against the fancied and heavyweights Japan in the third round Group B Asian World Cup Qualifiers at the Suita City Football Stadium in Osaka, Japan. The match kicks off at 2.14pm, Oman time. Ivankovic, who trained his Red Warriors in Serbia for a month ahead of the third round qualifiers, admitted that his side faces a 'challenging task'. Speaking on the eve of the match in Osaka, Ivankovic said, "We are happy to be here in Japan to play the third round qualifiers. We have prepared well for the past month in Serbia, where we also played a few friendlies. Undoubtedly, we are in a tough group with Japan and

Australia, who have a rich experience of playing in the FIFA World Cup finals over the years." At the training camp in Serbia, Oman notched up wins over FK Kolubara, Qatar Club, Spartak Subotica and FK Vozdovac. The wily Croatian, who led Iran's Persepolis Club to the Asian Champions League final in 2018 said, "Japan is one of the best teams in Asia. They consist of players who are thriving in the top European leagues. The players have plenty of experience." Ivankovic, who took over Oman in January, 2020, said that 'he is proud to lead Oman in the third round of FIFA World Cup and 2023 Asian Cup'. "We will try to make Oman

fans happy with good results. We are ready for the game against Japan, though we had few injury concerns. But Mohammed al Musalami (defender), Mohsin al Ghassani (striker) and Ahmed al Kaabi (midfielder) have all recovered and are ready for tomorrow's game," the coach added. Meanwhile, Japan coach Hajime Mori yasu will look to take

Japan is one of the best teams in Asia. They consist of players who are thriving in the top European leagues. The players have plenty of experience

BRANKO IVANKOVIC, OMAN COACH



Oman's Abdulaziz al Miqbali during a training session in Osaka, Japan



Oman players during a training session ahead of their Japan game

the positives of his team's run to the semifinals at the Tokyo Olympic Games. Mori yasu, who serves as both the Olympic and men's national team coach, led the country's U24 squad to fourth place at Tokyo 2020 after guiding the Samurai Blue into the third round with a perfect record. Japan aim for a seventh straight FIFA World Cup qualification and hope to

begin on a winning note at home. Mori yasu has included nine players from the 22-man squad selected for the Olympics in his line-up against Oman. The third round will witness 12 of Asia's best teams fight for four direct spots available for teams in the two groups. Besides Oman, Japan and Australia, Group B also features three-time Asian champions Saudi Arabia, China and Vietnam. Oman have reached this stage (third round) for the third time in their history after 2002 and 2014. The Red Warriors were also drawn with Japan and Australia during the third round stage of the 2014 qualifiers.

@ashokmuscat

Djokovic begins Grand Slam quest

Defending champion Osaka advances by walkover, Halep wins at rain-hit US Open

New York, US - World No 1 Novak Djokovic won without playing his best to reach the second round of the US Open on Tuesday in his quest for a calendar-year Grand Slam and record 21st major title. The 34-year-old Serbian star dominated much of the way in beating 18-year-old Danish qualifier Holger Rune 6-1, 6-7 (5/7), 6-2, 6-1 after two hours and 15 minutes in the night feature at Arthur Ashe Stadium. "It wasn't the best of my performances," Djokovic said. "At the same time, he played well in the second set when it mattered and I didn't serve well in the second set." And in early games on Wednesday, defending women's champion Naomi Osaka advanced to the third round by walkover as rain showers interrupted play on the New York hardcourts. The 23-year-old Japanese third seed, seeking her fifth Grand Slam title and third US Open crown in four years, moved on when Serbian qualifier Olga Danilovic withdrew due to illness. "I have been feeling unwell

these past few days dealing with a non-covid related viral illness," 20-year-old Danilovic posted on social media. Osaka's Grand Slam win streak remains at 16 matches, the walkover not counting toward the run just as her withdrawing from the French Open after the first round did not halt it. The remnants of Hurricane Ida, which slammed into the US Gulf Coast at the weekend, drenched the grounds to interrupt outside court matches. But the show went on on the Arthur Ashe and Louis Armstrong Stadium courts, which are both protected by retractable roofs. Romanian 12th seed Simona Halep, the 2018 French Open and 2019 Wimbledon champion, replaced Osaka on Ashe and dispatched Slovakian Kristina Kucova 6-3, 6-1. Spanish ninth seed Garbine Muguruza, a two-time Grand Slam champion, defeated Andrea Petkovic 6-4, 6-2. It was her first win in four tries against the German. Advancing between raindrops was Tunisian 20th seed Ons Jabeur, who beat



Serbia's Novak Djokovic eyes the ball during his first round match against Denmark's Holger Rune on Tuesday



Garbine Muguruza in action during her win over Andrea Petkovic



Ashleigh Barty of Australia

Colombian Maria Camila Osorio 6-0, 6-1. History-chasing Djokovic, who has won eight of the past 12 Grand Slam events, will next face 121st-ranked Dutchman Tallon Griekspoor, a rival the top seed admitted he didn't know much about. "I know this court well," Djokovic said. "Hopefully that's going to help." Also on Tuesday, French-born US qualifier Maxime Cressy fired 44 aces and saved four match points to upset Spanish ninth seed Pablo Carreno Busta 5-7, 4-6, 6-1, 6-4, 7-6 (9/7). World No 1 Ashleigh Barty, coming off wins at Wimbledon and Cincinnati, began her chase for back-to-back Slam titles by defeating Russian Vera Zvonareva 6-1, 7-6 (9/7). "When my back was against the wall late in that buster, I came up with some really good stuff," Barty said. The 25-year-old Australian next faces Denmark's Clara Tauson as she goes for her sixth title of the year. Canadian sixth seed Bianca Andreescu, the 2019 US Open winner who skipped last year's event, struggled but outlasted Swiss Viktorija Golubic 7-5, 4-6, 7-5. AFP

SELECT SEEDED PLAYER RESULTS

(x denotes seeding):

Men's first round:

Aslan Karatsev (x21) beat Jaume Munar 7-5, 1-6, 6-3, 6-2; Taylor Fritz beat Alex de Minaur (x14) 7-6 (7/4), 6-2, 1-6, 6-4; Hubert Hurkacz (x10) beat Egor Gerasimov 6-3, 6-4, 6-3; Oscar Otte beat Lorenzo Sonego (x20) 6-7 (8/10), 7-5, 7-6 (7/4), 7-6 (7/1); Vasek Pospisil beat Fabio Fognini (x28) 2-6, 3-6, 6-1, 6-3, 7-6 (7/4); Matteo Berrettini (x6) beat Jérémy Chardy 7-6 (7/5), 7-6 (9/7), 6-3; Alexander Bublik (x31) beat Yannick Hanfmann 6-0, 4-6, 6-2, 6-1; Gael Monfils (x17) beat Federico Coria 6-3, 6-2, 6-2; Jannik Sinner (x13) beat Max Purcell 6-4, 6-2, 4-6, 6-2; Reilly Opelka (x22) beat Kwon Soon-woo 7-6 (7/3), 6-4, 6-4; Denis Shapovalov (x7) beat Federico Del Bonis 6-2, 6-2, 6-3.

Women's first round:

Sara Sorribes beat Karolína Muchová (x22) 6-2, 7-6 (7/3); Belinda Bencic (x11) beat Arantxa Rus 6-4, 6-4; Jessica Pegula (x23) beat Anastasia Potapova 6-2, 6-2; Anett Kontaveit (x28) beat Samantha Stosur 6-3, 6-0; Iga Świątek (x7) beat Jamie Loeb 6-3, 6-4; Anastasia Pavlyuchenkova (x14) beat Alison Riske 6-4, 6-2; Petra Kvitová (x10) beat Polona Herczeg 6-1, 6-2.