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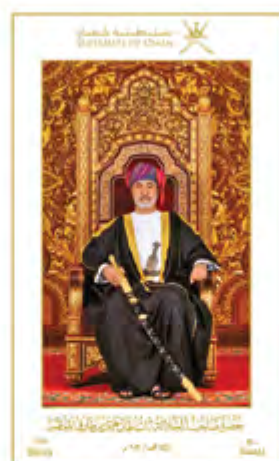
Last update: 12 July, 2021
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SULTANATE OF OMAN



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FIRST COMMEMORATIVE STAMP OF HM RELEASED

Oman Post has announced the availability of the first commemorative postage stamp featuring His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tariq. A statement issued by Oman Post said, 'With a view to revive our pledge and loyalty to His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tariq, and to commemorate him in Oman's history of glory and civilisation, the first commemorative postage stamp is now available at the Philatelic Department in Oman Post.'

Oman's longest zipline to come up in Musandam

Our Correspondent
Muscat

To attract foreign investments and stimulate tourism, Oman government will start establishing a number of industrial and tourism projects in Musandam governorate.

Omran Group will soon float a tender for development of Oman's longest zipline, running from the top of a mountain to Atana Khasab Hotel.

Speaking to *Muscat Daily*, Mohammed al Busaidi, chairman of Omran Group, said, "We will start setting up an adventure centre in Musandam. Its first phase will include a zipline covering a distance of 1,500m, which will begin at the top of a mountain at a height of 250m above sea level and end at Atana Khasab. The zipline project is expected to be completed in less than a year."

The tender will come on the heels of recent Royal directives



Atana Khasab

of His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tariq for the implementation of several key projects aimed at fuelling the governorate's socio-economic development. These include a proposal for the upgrade of Port Khasab to a maritime hub for shipping, logistics and cruise tourism. Mahas, an area well known for quarrying activities, is proposed to be redeveloped into a dedicated tourism and economic zone incorporated in Khasab Industrial City.

According to Dr Saeed bin Humaid al Harthy, Wali of Khasab, the governorate will witness large investments in the coming years.

He confirmed that RO3.5mn will be spent on various development projects in the governorate this year. "One of the investments includes establishment of a park by Asas Company, and coordination is underway to establish a hotel on Bassa beach."

He added that investors inter-

ested in the governorate, especially in the tourism sector, are offered several privileges and incentives.

"Recently, the Ministry of Transport, Communications and Information Technology announced a tender for investors to submit proposals to manage and operate Khasab Port as an alternative to Marafi."

The tender aims to develop the port to attract large and mega ships - cruise and commercial - that will allow direct export and import from the province.

"Musandam is known for its fjords, islands and seafood, which characterise the governorate. We are working to overcome all challenges related to the export of fish abroad as well as the governorates near Musandam - North Batinah, Muscat and others. Some investors have also applied to establish fish processing factories in Musandam," Harthy said.

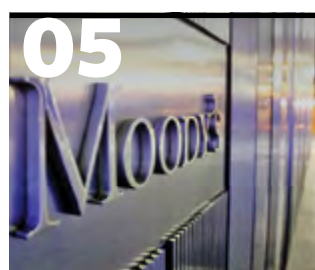
NEWS BRIEFS

HM RECEIVES CABLE OF THANKS FROM EMIR OF KUWAIT

Muscat - His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tariq has received a cable of thanks from Sheikh Nawaf al Ahmed al Jabir al Sabah, Emir of Kuwait, in reply to His Majesty the Sultan's condolences cable on the death of Sheikh Faisal Mohammed Abdulaziz al Sabah.

HM GREETES PRESIDENT OF CHINA

Muscat - His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tariq has sent a cable of greetings to President Xi Jinping of China on the centenary of the foundation of the Chinese Communist Party.



Oman's economy to grow by 2.6% in 2021: Moody's



Oman is a cricketing destination: Pankaj Khimji

Eid al Adha holidays within four walls

Shaddad al Musalmey
Muscat

Even as the sultanate prepares for Eid al Adha in a three-day total lockdown, many are looking forward to the new experience with the same excitement and fervour despite the celebrations being only with their nuclear families.

The Supreme Committee has announced a round-the-clock lockdown in the country during three days of Eid al Adha - Tuesday, July 20, to Thursday, July 22 - during which time all commercial activities and movement of individuals and vehicles is prohibited.

Those looking forward to celebrate Eid have had their dreams shattered. "We thought this Eid would be as it used to be before the pandemic but things have turned upside down with precautionary measures getting tougher. We normally organise a family day out during Eid holidays but we'll miss one this time. It's sad but I am sure the Supreme Committee issued such a decision for our benefit. This Eid will be different. We still don't know what we will do in those three days," said Rashid al Dhawi, who was looking forward to go out with relatives during the holidays.

While many are unsure of what to expect in the days preceding the three-day Eid lockdown, some are bracing for panic buying and rush at stores as cus-



I will celebrate Eid in a unique way at home with my family. This time too, I have plans to make it a beautiful experience

AMOUR AL TAUQI, AMERAT

We have to dress up and feel like it's Eid even if we'll be at home. I know it will be difficult for us not to go out, especially the children

KHALFAN AL OBAIDANI, SEEB

tomers stock up food and essential items.

"We know that we will not be going out, but we have to go shopping. Not only for basic items but also clothes. We have to dress up and feel like it's Eid even if we'll be at home. I know it will be difficult for us not to go out, especially the children, but we have to accept the fact that this is for our own good," said Seeb resident Khalfan al

Obaidani. He has planned various activities with his family at home for the three days to keep busy.

Despite three other Eids celebrated during the COVID-19 pandemic, this one will be different as all will be compelled to be indoors. "I will celebrate Eid in a unique way at home with my family. This time too, I have plans to make it a beautiful experience, even though we will miss going

out. We will do all the usual things that we do, like Eid prayers, meals and barbecue, but all within walls," said retired government employee Amour al Tauqi from Amerat.

With the current situation demanding caution from all, authorities have urged citizens and residents to follow the measures imposed to reduce the spread of the virus.

H E Dr Ahmed bin Mo-

ammed al Sa'eedi, Minister of Health, has reiterated that both partial and full lockdowns have proved to reduce the number of cases and that people need to avoid Eid gatherings.

"What happened during Eid al Fitr following the gatherings, and weddings or other celebrations, led to a very sharp rise in the number of cases and deaths. What the Supreme Committee seeks in all decisions is to preserve public health and people's lives. After the previous closures and adherence to procedures, there was a very noticeable decrease in numbers between October 2020 and January 2021," H E Sa'eedi said.

According to the Supreme Committee, Royal Oman Police will intensify patrols but with consideration to humanitarian cases during the three-day lockdown.

"The aim of the total lockdown is to contain the spread of the virus but exceptions will be made for emergency cases and those excluded according to the decisions of the Supreme Committee," said Maj Gen Abdullah al Harthy, Assistant Inspector General of Police and Customs for Operations.

The Supreme Committee has also decided to extend the duration of the closure of commercial activities and ban on individual and vehicle movement from 5pm to 4 am, effective from the evening of Friday, July 16, to Saturday, July 31.



RO10,000 for top prize in competition to develop Salalah Public Park

Our Correspondent
Muscat

Dhofar Municipality has announced a competition to develop Salalah Public Park.

Speaking to *Muscat Daily*, Omar Akak of Dhofar Municipality said, "We have launched a competition to develop and beautify Salalah Public Park. The competition aims to develop the park, support domestic tourism and introduce new facilities, including fountains and waterfalls."

Elaborating on the competition, Akak said, "Participants must present creative ideas with in-depth project details. We will choose five winners based on the evaluation of a jury panel."

Winners will be selected on the basis of the jury's evaluation (50 per cent weightage) and public evaluation (50 per cent weightage).

Dhofar Municipality will offer RO5,000 to each of the five winners to implement their projects within a period of three months. The winner of the competition will take away RO10,000. There are cash prizes for others too.

The deadline for submission of ideas is July 27. Details can be obtained by calling 99616882 or emailing garden.dept@dm.gov.om



Oman-Russia meeting discusses trade, investment

Muscat - In a move to strengthen economic relations with other countries, the Undersecretary of the Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion met his Russian counterpart in Moscow on Wednesday to discuss trade cooperation between the two countries.

The ministry said, 'H E Dr

Saleh bin Said bin Salim Masan, Undersecretary for Commerce and Industry, discussed with the Undersecretary of the Russian Ministry of Trade and Industry means of strengthening trade relations, developing joint investments and exchange of technical expertise between industrial cities of the two countries.'

UK announces new envoy

Muscat - Bill Murray has been appointed the UK Ambassador to Oman to succeed H E Hamish Cowell, who will be taking up another Diplomatic Service appointment, according to the Foreign, Commonwealth and Development



Bill Murray

Office, UK.

Murray will take the charge in September. Murray is presently a UK Embassy Counsellor in Abu Dhabi where he has been since 2019. From 2016 to 2019, he was deployed in Tunis as a counsellor.

Omani-owned 40-acre resort in Maldives beckons tourists

Our Correspondent
Muscat

Situated in a picturesque island in the Maldives, the newly opened Kuda Villingili Resort has an Omani connection. It is owned by an Omani firm and has a special corner to cater to guests from the sultanate.

Spread over 40 acres, it comprises 36 water villas, 31 beach villas, 30 'sky heaven villas' and seven restaurants, with every cabana in beachfront villas designed to witness sunset and sunrise. The resort also boasts of the biggest swimming pool in the Maldives.

Owned by Omani firm MFAR Group, the company is currently planning to acquire one more island with a 12-acre beach for future expansion of the resort.

Speaking about the property, Moihiyuddeen Mohammed Ali, owner of the project, said, "This Omani-owned island guarantees an excellent treat to guests. The property is far away from the sultanate yet close to the hearts of many Omanis who visit Maldives often. The Kuda Villingili Resort presents the best natural setting for a truly enjoyable holiday featuring the sun, sand and sea."

Ali informed that the company is also in talks with the Ministry



of Heritage and Tourism to train Omani youth in the hospitality sector in the Maldives. "A number of young Omani hospitality aspirants can look forward to be trained by globally renowned ex-

perts in the future," he said.

The resort has an 'Omani Corner' which is designed to cater to guests from Oman. The corner has luxurious villas styled like Omani homes with pools and ex-

pansive green landscaping.

Its seven restaurants offer European, Mediterranean, Indian, Asian, Arabic, American and Italian cuisines prepared by reputed chefs from different parts of the

It's an Omani resort par excellence, located in the Maldives but offering authentic Omani hospitality and gastronomy

MOIHIYUDDEN ALI

world. Besides leisurely experiences, including local sightseeing (after the COVID-19 pandemic), it offers snorkelling, scuba diving, jet skiing and parasailing among other water sports. The resort is also an ideal venue for weddings and conferences.

"Kuda Villingili offers a friendly environment for couples, adults and children to celebrate any occasion. It's an Omani resort par excellence, located in the Maldives but offering authentic Omani hospitality and gastronomy. It's simply a home away from home."

The idea for the resort originated more than two decades ago when Mohammad Ali - Moihiyuddeen's father - visited the island nation on a short break from work.

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Shura to end annual sitting

Muscat - The Majlis A'Shura will terminate the second annual sitting (2020-2021) of the 9th term (2019-2023), following Royal orders to end the current sitting of the Council of Oman - comprising the State Council and Majlis A'Shura.

The procedure comes in implementation of Article 38 of the Council of Oman Law promulgated under Royal Decree No. 7/2021.

Thunderstorms expected in parts of Oman

Muscat - Parts of the sultanate will continue to be affected by a trough extending from the Arabian Sea with the possibility of cloud formation and chances of rain and thunderstorms over Dhofar governorate, Al Hajar mountains and adjoining areas, according to the Civil Aviation Authority's National Multi Hazard Early Warning Centre.

According to the centre, the state of the Arabian Sea is expected to be rough along the coast with waves ranging in height from 3m to 4m.

The Sea of Oman will be moderate with waves of maximum 2m height.

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247 Omanis graduate from Etimad programme



(Supplied photo)

Our Correspondent
Muscat

The Ministry of Labour (MoL) celebrated the graduation of the first batch of the National Leadership Programme for Middle/Senior Management (Etimad) on Tuesday.

In a virtual ceremony held under the patronage of Dr Khamis bin Saif al Jabri, head of Oman Vision 2040 Implementation Follow-up Unit, and in the presence of undersecretaries of MoL, 247 participants graduated from the programme.

Under Etimad, private sector employees get to sharpen their leadership and supervision skills through a special programme

designed by international and local institutes specialised in enhancing management skills and training leaders.

H E Sayyid Salim bin Musalam bin Ali al Busaidi, Undersecretary for Human Resources Development in MoL, said, "The ministry will continue to develop the Etimad programme to include sectorally specialised leaders and to support various sectors with employment-related training programmes, on-the-job training, integrated training, the Khibrat programme and the Entrepreneurship Programme."

"We are proud of the graduation of 247 young men and women from the first batch of

Etimad, which is among the quality training programmes that are in line with Oman Vision 2040. These programmes invest in building national competencies with dynamic capabilities and skills that can compete locally and globally," H E Sayyid Busaidi added.

Dr Yasmin bint Shanan al Balushi, project manager of Etimad, said, "Development of national competencies and capabilities is one of the most important goals of Oman Vision 2040. The programme not only aims to build the capabilities of employees but also prepares them to a high degree of efficiency and leadership to face challenges."

India seeks Oman's help for site inclusion in Unesco list

Our Correspondent
Muscat

H E Eng Ibrahim bin Said al Kharusi, Undersecretary for Heritage Affairs in the Ministry of Heritage and Tourism, received in his office H E Munu Mahawar, Ambassador of India to the sultanate, on Wednesday.

According to a statement issued by the ministry, the meeting discussed aspects of cooperation between the two countries regarding antiquities and museums, and the sultanate's support for India to

include two archaeological sites in Unesco's World Heritage List.

Nominations for inscription of new sites will be discussed during the meeting of the 44th session of the World Heritage Committee of Unesco, which will be held virtually from July 16 to 30.

From India, two cultural sites have been listed for nominations which will be discussed at the meeting. These are Dholavira: A Harappan City; and The Glorious Kakatiya Temples and Gateways.

1,084 COVID-19 cases, 12 deaths

Our Correspondent
Muscat

The Ministry of Health (MoH) on Wednesday reported 1,084 new COVID-19 cases and 12 deaths over the past 24 hours taking the total number of cases registered in Oman to 288,138, including 3,484 deaths.

In a statement, MoH said, "One hundred and thirty patients were admitted to hospitals across the country in the last 24 hours, taking the total number of inpatients to 1,265, including 446 in intensive care."



الواجهة البحرية وخدمات المراسي
WATERFRONT & MARINA SERVICES

Invitation to Attend the Extra Ordinary General Meeting of Waterfront and Marina Services SAOC (the "Company")

The Board of Directors of the Company is pleased to invite the shareholders to the Extraordinary General Meeting of the Company to be held at 12 pm on Wednesday, 4 August 2021, at the Company's main building, located in Marina Bandar Rowdha, Sidab. In the event that the quorum to convene the Extraordinary General Meeting is not complete, the second general meeting will be convened at 12 pm on Tuesday, 10 August 2021 to discuss and consider the following agenda:

1. To consider and approve the proposed related party transaction to be entered into between Company and Marina Operation Services LLC for the sale inter alia of all the assets and liabilities related to the Company business for an amount of OMR 560,838 (Five Hundred Sixty Thousand Eight Hundred Thirty-Eight Omani Rials Only) (the "Transaction") upon and subject to the terms and conditions set out in a sale agreement approved by the board of directors. (detailed as per the attached).
2. To consider and approve the execution of the agreements in relation to the Transaction (the "Transaction Documents").
3. To authorize the Board of Directors to sign Transaction Documents and to carry out and take all steps and actions necessary to give effect to and complete the Transaction.

Pursuant to the Company's Articles of Association, a shareholder can appoint a proxy in writing to attend the Extraordinary General Meeting and vote on the proceedings on his / her behalf.

If you wish to appoint a proxy, please complete and submit the attached Proxy Form to the Company's office at least two (2) working days before the meeting. The proxy form shall be signed by an authorised signatory and sealed with the Company's seal and submitted together with a copy of the commercial registration certificate.

To prevent delay in starting the meeting, shareholders are requested to attend the meeting at least half an hour before the scheduled meeting time.

For any clarification regarding the matters mentioned in the above agenda, please contact Mr. Saud Al Subhi on Tel: 95929293.

Chairman of the Board of Directors



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Ministry holds virtual programme for special education schools

Muscat - The Ministry of Education (MoE) has carried out the first virtual summer programme for special education schools throughout this week under the slogan 'We continue for you'.

The ministry, represented by the Directorate General of Special Education and Continuous Learning, organised the programme under the patronage of Dr Ali al Shukaili, director general of the Directorate General of Private Schools at the ministry.

'In its first edition, the virtual summer programme targeted special education schools' students in their three categories - verbal, visual and mental - across the sultanate', the MoE said.

It said that the aim of the programme was to provide the participants 'with the necessary knowledge and skills, which would enable them to improve their educational achievement, discover and refine their talents,



This summer programme comes in continuation of the MoE's efforts to enhance its societal role outside the actual study times for students

DR FATHIA
AL SIDIYAH



Dr Ali al Shukaili

support their experiences, and develop their various skills'.

'The virtual summer programme also aims to direct these students' emotional behaviour, intellect and energies in a positive way in order to protect them from the negative effects of the void during their summer vacation, as well as training them on skills such as public speaking,' the ministry said.

On the importance of the summer programme for students of special education schools, Dr Fathia al Sidiyah, director general of the Directorate General of Special Education and Continuous Learning at the ministry, said, "This summer programme comes in continuation of the efforts of the Ministry of Education to present its educational mission, and to enhance its societal role outside the actual study times for students, by providing educational activities in which knowledge is mixed with application and entertainment in a flexible manner in a virtual educational atmosphere."

The first virtual summer programme covered a number of activities with training in practical workshops suitable for students with disabilities that helped them discover and develop their talents, and enhance their self-confidence, the MoE said.

MoCIIP to implement 2nd phase of specification on cosmetics

Muscat - The Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion (MoCIIP) on August 1 will start the second phase of implementing the specification on cosmetic and personal care products, which requires importers to submit the technical documents of the registered products.

'This comes in line with the implementation of Ministerial Decision No. 128/2019, that considers the Gulf standard specifications for safety requirements in cosmetics as an obligatory Omani specification. It further regulates imports and ensures their safety for use by the consumer in relation to personal care requirements and cosmetics,' the MoCIIP said.

Hiba bint Yasser al Mazrouei, a chemical products quality control specialist at the ministry's Directorate General of Standards and Metrology said that the importers must submit technical documents of the products registered in the sec-



oils and serums.

It also includes oral and dental care products, which include toothpastes, mouthwash products, and perfumes, in addition to cosmetic products for hair (head, face, beard), such as hair dyes of all kinds, products for curling, straightening and fixing hair, products for strengthening and reviving hair such as oils, creams, etc, hair decoration products, hair cleaning products, hair shaping products, and henna, sun protection products of all kinds, deodorants and antiperspirants.

"In accordance with the regulations and procedures prepared by the MoCIIP, represented by the Directorate General of Standards and Metrology, the importers also must submit technical documents through the ministry's platforms for approval some time before shipments arrive in order to avoid the challenges of delays at border ports," Hiba added.

ond stage before allowing the release of the shipment by the ministry through Bayan platform.

She pointed out that the second phase of implementing the standard includes a new package of the products, which includes all cosmetic and personal care products (other than products for rinsing), products to be used on the skin (face, body, hand, feet, etc) such as creams, emulsions, lotions, jelly/buttery gels,

Dispose waste appropriately, says be'ah

Our Correspondent
Muscat

As we are approaching Eid al Adha, families are set to celebrate the occasion differently this year under full lockdown for three consecutive days. With no Eid prayer, no traditional pre-Eid souqs and no gatherings allowed, yet this Eid could still be fun according to some families.

While most people will be confined to their homes, a few will remain on duty to keep the essential services running. Among these people are workers at Oman Holding Company for Environmental Services (be'ah),

who say that despite the full lockdown, it could still be a lot of work ahead, particularly in handling household waste and waste generated from 'Udhiyah' (animal sacrifice).

To keep the environmental impact at minimum and help workers carry out their work during full and partial lockdown more smoothly, be'ah urges families and individuals to dispose municipal waste appropriately.

'Waste generated from the 'Udhiyah' should be put in a durable and tightened waste bag and disposed in trash bins whenever possible; leaving such waste on streets can attract stray ani-

mals,' stated the company.

Unlike every year, be'ah will not offer designated containers for collecting waste from the 'Udhiyah' in line with the Supreme Committee's directives, and such waste shall be disposed at regular trash bins.

be'ah also affirmed that it has set a complete plan to ensure that waste will not be accumulated during lockdown and that it will operate in accordance with the directives issued by the Supreme Committee. To report any environmental concerns, be'ah will be reachable during Eid holidays on 1881 from 8am to 10pm.

Tanweer covers 70% of its team in inoculation drive

Muscat - In accordance with the national strategy for immunisation against COVID-19, the Rural Areas Electricity Company (Tanweer) - a member of Nama Group - has vaccinated more than 70 per cent of its employees.

'Tanweer reflects its most profound appreciation of its staff's well-being by vaccinating its employees in all departments and committing to the importance of preserving the safety and health of its human resources as one of the company's most valued assets. The

The company's vaccination plan is driven by the importance it gives to preserving the safety and health of its human resources as one of the company's most valued assets

company's vaccination plan is also driven by the need to sustainably provide its services to its customers in the various regions of the sultanate in which it operates,' the company said.

The intensive vaccination campaign comes as continuation of Tanweer's efforts, in co-

steps, the most important of which is an awareness campaign for employees to notify them of all the measures that must be adhered to in the work environment.'

Within the framework and directives by the Supreme Committee tasked with tackling the developments resulting from the COVID-19 pandemic and the Ministry of Health, Tanweer said it is working effortlessly to support the employees to ensure their safety by providing a healthy work environment.

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MUSCAT DAILY

Arab Open University forum to discuss Oman Vision 2040 in relation to education

Our Correspondent
Muscat

Arab Open University in Muscat has announced that it will launch its seventh forum focusing on Oman's Vision 2040 and education in partnership with the University of Nizwa in December.

'The Arab Open University in Muscat, in partnership with the University of Nizwa, will hold its seventh forum entitled 'Oman Vision 2040 and its implications for the education sector', on December 4 and 5,' it said.

The forum aims to study the development of education and its systems in the sultanate in order to achieve the strategic directions of Oman Vision 2040,

discussing the mechanisms of organising national priorities and its implications for the development of education in accordance with the Oman 2040 vision.

'It will also discuss the governance of education in Oman and economic development plans on education programmes and outputs during 2020-2040'.

According to the university statement, the forum will include five main axes - the development of education sector systems, policies and outputs, the impact of the priority of citizenship, identity, heritage and national culture on the development of education, the future of scientific research and innovation in the education sector - beside others.

PRAYER TIMINGS

Fajr	4.01am	Asr	3.33pm
Sunrise	5.29am	Maghrib	6.56pm
Duhr	12.12pm	Isha	8.26pm

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MARKET WATCH

MSX30	4,085.53
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FOREX RATES

(RO1 equals)	
Indian Rs	193.54
Pakistani Rs	414.06
Bangladeshi Taka	220.15
Philippine Peso	130.37
Sri Lankan Rs	516.61

*Rates as on JULY 14
Source: xe.com

BRIEFS

Yemen's currency sinks to historic lows

Yemen's currency, the riyal, has sunk to historic lows in recent days, in a new threat to the war-torn country which is already on the brink of famine.

In the government-controlled southern capital of Aden, the dollar is trading at more than 1,000 riyal, the highest rate since the war began in 2014, when Iran-backed Huthi rebels seized the northern capital of Sanaa.

The currency has lost some six per cent in the south in the past three weeks. Meanwhile the riyal trades at about 600 riyals to the dollar in rebel-controlled areas, which stretch across much of the country's north.

A source at the central bank in Aden told AFP that it was taking action to prop up the currency, amid growing social discontent in areas controlled by the government, which is backed by a Saudi-led military coalition.

Fiat-Chrysler charged in French 'dieselgate' case

Fiat-Chrysler became the fifth carmaker charged in France in connection with the 'dieselgate' emissions cheating scandal, the company's lawyer told AFP.

The automaker joins Volkswagen, Renault, Peugeot and Citroen over allegations they deceived customers over emissions produced by their diesel vehicles.

Fiat-Chrysler was also placed under assisted witness status for obstructing the investigation and ordered to post a US\$175,000 bond and obtain a bank guarantee for 200,000 euros, said the company's lawyer, Alexis Gublin.

A source close to the investigation confirmed the information to AFP.

He said Fiat-Chrysler disputes the allegations and maintains that all the vehicles met the standards then in force.

European airlines fear fuel tax

The European Commission will propose a raft of measures to slash EU aviation emissions when it unveils a bumper package of legislation Wednesday aimed at reaching its climate goals.

But the push, including an unprecedented tax on highly polluting jet fuel, is facing strong headwinds from airlines in the bloc, who fear they will have their wings clipped.

Brussels argues that a new levy on kerosene for flights inside the EU is a must if the 27-nation bloc is serious about reaching its ambitious target of cutting greenhouse gas emissions by 55 per cent compared with 1990 levels by 2030.

The aviation sector - which makes up about three per cent of current EU emissions - insists the tax would make it unable to compete with rivals from outside the bloc. And the proposal is set to be one of the thorniest issues.

Oman's economy to grow by 2.6% in 2021: Moody's

Our Correspondent
Muscat

Oman's economy is expected to grow by 2.6 per cent in 2021 and 3.5 per cent in 2022, according to forecasts released by global credit ratings agency Moody's.

Moody's forecasts are in line with the IMF's recent projections.

The International Monetary Fund last week said that Oman's real GDP - which contracted by 2.8 per cent in 2020 - will grow by around 2.5 per cent in 2021, with about three per cent average growth over the medium-term.

'We expect Oman's real GDP to recover in 2021, supported by a small increase in hydrocarbon production (mainly due to higher condensate and natural gas output from the phase two of the Khazzan gas field project). We also expect a growth rebound in the non-hydrocarbon sector as coronavirus related restrictions are gradually eased and domestic demand and economic activity begin to recover,' Moody's said in a credit opinion report released on Monday.

The ratings agency said that higher oil prices, spending cuts and spending shifts, in addition to VAT collection, will support the government finances in 2021.



As per Moody's estimates, Oman's budget deficit will record a sharp decline this year to reach at 3.6 per cent of GDP in 2021 from 18.1 per cent of GDP in 2020.

'We expect higher oil prices, the VAT collection (started in mid-April) and dividends from the Oman Investment Authority to support a strong (18 per cent) rebound in government revenue during 2021.

'Our forecasts are based on an assumed average price for the

benchmark Brent crude oil of US\$62 per barrel in 2021 and US\$60 in 2022,' Moody's said.

The International Monetary Fund too expects Oman's fiscal deficit to sharply decline to 2.4 per cent of GDP in 2021 from around 19.3 per cent of GDP in 2020.

Crude oil prices, Moody's said, have averaged closer to US\$70 per barrel so far this year, so there is an upside risk to its baseline revenue forecast if oil prices remain at around the

As per Moody's estimates, Oman's budget deficit will record a sharp decline this year to reach at 3.6 per cent of GDP in 2021 from 18.1 per cent of GDP in 2020

current level for the remainder of 2021.

'At the same time, we expect government spending cuts and the anticipated shift of oil and gas related expenditure to Energy Development Oman (EDO) to reduce government spending by around 15 per cent relative to last year's outturn. Combined, this will lead to a very significant compression of the fiscal deficit to less than 4 per cent of GDP in 2021 from more than 18 per cent of GDP in 2020,' Moody's said.

Moody's expects Oman's debt burden to decline to less than 70 per cent of GDP this year from nearly 80 per cent of GDP in 2020, with a very significant contribution to the decline in the debt-to-GDP ratio stemming from higher nominal GDP relative to the 2020 slump.

CBO issues RO187mn treasury bills

Our Correspondent
Muscat

A tender of the government treasury bills (issue number 541) was announced by the Central Bank of Oman (CBO) this week.

Total value of allotted treasury bills amounted to RO187.4mn, for a maturity period of 91 days, from July 14, 2021 until October 13, 2021. Average

accepted price reached RO99.807 for every RO100 treasury bill, while minimum accepted price arrived at RO99.805.

Average discount rate and average yield reached 0.7748 per cent and 0.7763 per cent, respectively.

The interest rate on the repo operations with the CBO is 0.5 per cent while the discount rate

on the treasury bills discounting facility with the central bank is 0.75 per cent.

Treasury bills are short-term highly secured financial instruments issued by the Ministry of Finance.

These instruments provide licensed commercial banks the opportunity to invest their surplus funds. The Central Bank of Oman acts as the issue manager

and provides the added advantage of ready liquidity through discounting and repurchase facilities.

Treasury bills promote the local money market by creating a benchmark yield curve for short-term interest rates. The government may also resort to this instrument whenever felt necessary for financing its recurrent expenditures.



'UAE reaches a compromise to resolve standoff with OPEC+'

Our Correspondent
Muscat

The United Arab Emirates has reached a preliminary deal to resolve its standoff with OPEC+, giving the Gulf state a higher output quota, according to a Bloomberg News report.

The proposal would need to be approved by all OPEC+ members before it can take effect and a new date for a meeting will be set soon, a delegate said, asking not to be named because the information was private, the Bloomberg report said.

Last week, the Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC) and its allies were forced to abandon a tentative deal to boost oil production because of last minute objections from the UAE. 'If the compromise is ratified at a new meeting, it could potentially open the way to higher output, although some members have already locked in most of their supply volumes for August,' the report said.

It added that the UAE, according to the delegate, will set a new baseline of 3.65mn barrels a day for its production cuts. That

would be an increase from about 3.17mn currently - a level the country has argued is unfairly low. The UAE will now support a proposal from Saudi Arabia to extend the duration of the OPEC+ cuts agreement to December 2022, the delegate said as reported by Bloomberg.

A Reuters report said, 'Saudi Arabia and the UAE have reached a compromise over OPEC+ policy, an OPEC+ source said on Wednesday'.

Brent oil prices fell on the news by as much as US\$1 per barrel towards US\$75 per barrel after Reuters reported the two major OPEC producers had agreed a deal.

The OPEC+ source, as per Reuters report, said Riyadh had agreed to Abu Dhabi's request to have UAE's baseline - the level from which cuts under the OPEC+ agreement on supply curbs are calculated - set at 3.65mn bpd from April 2022, up from 3.168mn now.

Giving the UAE a higher production baseline paves the way for extending the overall pact to the end of 2022, the OPEC+ source said.

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AUCTION ANNOUNCEMENT NO. (GPDC/2021/2)

Al Ghubrah Power and Desalination Company SAOC, announces the following auction:

SR.	Material to be sold	Location	Date of site visit	Last submission date
1	Used Materials & Scrap (firefighting pumps, AC unites compressor, cables & some disposal scraps)	Al Ghubrah North	1/8/2021 3/8/2021	5/8/2021

Terms and conditions:

- Offers to be submitted in an envelope, sealed with red wax addressed and titled with the auction name and auction No. to the Chairman of the Internal Tender Committee without mentioning the name of the bidder.
- Offer should be dropped in the tender box at the Nama Holding reception area before 1.00 pm, time of the Sultanate, on Thursday 5 August 2021.
- Who wins the auction or part of it commits must pay its value in cash or certified bank check in the Sultanate during a period of three days from the day of notification.
- The buyer must transfer the materials within three weeks from the date of payment. In case of failure to transfer the purchased materials during the specified period, the materials are confiscated for the company. The buyer is not entitled to claim compensation and shall bear all expenses of the resale process.
- The buyer shall bear all risks involve in materials transfer or reuse.
- The buyer can quote for any item line as per the received lists.
- Bidders can preview the materials during working hours on the dates specified above, from 9:00 am until 12:00 pm with all PPE.

To preview the materials in Al Ghubrah Power & Desalination Company, please contact Mr. Ibrahim Al Hadi Tel: (0096899884074) or Mr. Saif Al Bousaidi Tel: (0096898085311), or by Email: saif.bousaidi@GPDC.nama.om.



Location to submit the offer :Nama Holding
In Beach One Building, 3rd Floor (Units 305 & 307) Shatti Al Qurum
P.O Box 850, Post Code 116, Sultanate of Oman.
Phone Number : +968 24559200 / 277
E-Mail: Siham.alamri@holding.nama.om

MSX closes flat as volumes decline

Our Correspondent
Muscat

The benchmark index of the Muscat Stock Exchange (MSX) on Wednesday remained almost flat to close at 4,085.53 points. Trading activity remained weak compared to the previous session.

Financial Index slightly increased 0.08 per cent while Industrial Index rose 0.20 per cent.

Services Index, however, closed 0.39 per cent lower. MSX Sharia Index also dropped 0.68 per cent to close at 593.37 points.

Trading activity on Wednesday decreased as volumes fell 22.9 per cent at 18.9mn shares compared with 24.5mn shares traded on Tuesday.

Market turnover declined 17.5 per cent to RO4.8mn compared with RO5.82mn in the previous trading session.

Market breadth at the MSX remained negative with 11 advancing stocks to 23

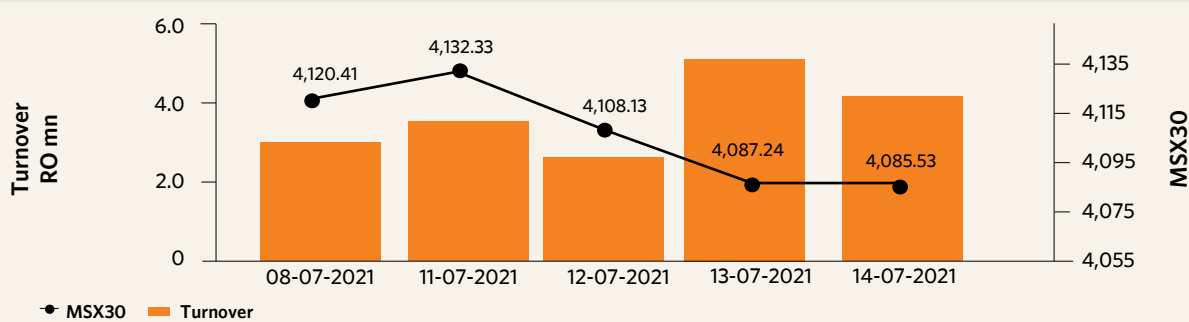


decliners. As many as 18 traded stocks remained flat for the day.

Top gainers were Salalah Mills (7.35 per cent), Oman Qatar Insurance (5.81 per cent), Dhofar Insurance (2.63 per cent), National Bank of Oman (2.22 per

cent) and Al Suwadi Power (1.85 per cent). Top losers were Global Investment Holding (-5.63 per cent), Voltamp Energy (-4.83 per cent), Al Madina Investment (-4.17 per cent), United Finance (-3.33 per cent) and Ahli Bank (-2.66 per cent).

MSX INDEX AND TURNOVER OF FIVE TRADING DAYS



Indian food delivery giant Zomato kicks off \$1.3bn IPO

Mumbai, India - Food delivery giant Zomato on Wednesday launched its much-anticipated IPO to raise R93.75bn (around US\$1.3bn), India's biggest this year and the first of a series of public listings by tech unicorns.

Zomato - which counts subsidiaries of Uber and Jack Ma's Ant Group among its existing shareholders - is one of the country's hottest tech start-ups and dominates India's booming app-based food-delivery space alongside rival Swiggy.

Fresh shares priced at between R72 and R76 were issued as part of the initial public offering, which closes on Friday.

Ahead of the IPO, Zomato raised over US\$560mn from 186 marquee institutional investors, including global investment funds like Blackrock, Fidelity, JP-Morgan and Morgan Stanley.

As of 2.00pm local time (0830 GMT) on Wednesday, 10 per cent of shares reserved for retail investors were subscribed more than two times so far.

But there was lacklustre inter-



est in the early hours of bidding for the remaining shares allocated to institutional and high-value investors. In total, institutional investors have nearly 75 per cent of the IPO reserved for them.

There are high expectations about the growth of the food delivery market in the country of 1.3bn people and Zomato and Swiggy's delivery riders are ubiq-

uitous in Indian cities.

But there are also concerns that companies like Zomato and Swiggy - which are yet to be profitable due to high start-up and marketing costs - could be overvalued.

Zomato, which operates in 525 Indian cities with more than 32mn Indians visiting the platform every month, lost R8.16bn rupees in the financial year ending March 2021.

"Zomato has been incurring substantial losses and may continue to incur losses in (the) near future too, given the business is at nascent stage," Mumbai-based investment services firm Motilal Oswal said in a note to clients ahead of the IPO.

Around 30 Indian companies have announced IPO plans this year, including digital payments firm Paytm, backed by Japan's SoftBank as well as by Ma.

Zomato's offering, along with Paytm's, is expected to propel India's IPO market to its best year on record.

AFP

ECB launches pilot project to create 'digital euro'

Frankfurt, Germany - The European Central Bank on Wednesday formally launched a pilot project to create a 'digital euro', in response to the growing popularity of electronic payments and the rise of cryptocurrencies.

"Our work aims to ensure that in the digital age citizens and firms continue to have access to the safest form of money, central bank money," ECB president Christine Lagarde said in a statement.

The initial 'investigation phase' is to last two years and will focus on the digital euro's design and distribution options, before a final decision is taken on whether to proceed.

The move comes as policymakers around the world explore so-called central bank digital currencies (CBDCs) as a stable and risk-free alternative to crypto assets like bitcoin and Facebook's planned diem currency.

Central banks are also responding to increased demand for digital payment options as cash use continues to decline, a trend fuelled by the pandemic



and the desire to avoid contact.

The Chinese central bank is already trialling a digital renminbi in several cities, while the Bank of England has launched a taskforce to look into a possible 'bitcoin'.

The US Federal Reserve and the Bank of Japan are also researching digital currencies. The ECB has previously signalled it could take around five years to bring the e-euro to life, meaning a rollout isn't expected before 2026.

The Frankfurt institution also stressed that any future digital euro 'would complement cash, not replace it'.

A digital euro would be an electronic version of euro coins

and banknotes held in a digital wallet, potentially allowing euro-zone citizens for the first time to have accounts directly with the ECB.

A key challenge will be to balance privacy demands with anti-money laundering regulations, with experts saying it's unlikely a digital euro can offer the same kind of anonymity as cash.

'A digital euro must be able to meet the needs of Europeans while at the same time helping to prevent illicit activities and avoiding any undesirable impact on financial stability and monetary policy,' the ECB said in its statement.

AFP

US inflation to remain high for months before falling: Fed chief

Washington, US - US inflation will remain "elevated" in coming months but will decline once supply bottlenecks and other temporary issues are resolved, Federal Reserve Chair Jerome Powell said Wednesday.

But the world's largest economy still has "a long way to go" to return to full employment following the COVID-19 pandemic, Powell said in his semi-annual testimony to Congress.

The Fed "will ensure that monetary policy will continue to deliver powerful support to the economy until the recovery is complete," he said.

The United States saw its biggest surge in inflation in more than a decade last month, according to government data released Tuesday, hitting consumers and challenging the White House and Federal Reserve narrative that the price spike will fade in the coming months.

The consumer price inflation spiked 5.4 per cent in the 12 months ended in June, not seasonally adjusted, the highest rate since August 2008, the Labor



US Federal Reserve Chair Jerome Powell

Department said.

As widespread COVID-19 vaccinations allowed the world's largest economy to relax pandemic restrictions, Americans have resumed spending and travelling but have faced rising prices for used cars, gasoline, hotels and airline fares.

But Powell and other Fed officials have stuck to their argument that the high inflation rate has been driven mostly by temporary issues related to the struggles to reopen the economy

following the pandemic shutdowns and is not a reason to pull back on stimulus efforts.

Many private economists agree, but Powell is likely to face tough questions from members of the House Financial Services Committee in the hearing that begins at 1600 GMT.

He is due to appear again Thursday before the Senate Banking Committee.

"Inflation has increased notably and will likely remain elevated in coming months before

moderating," Powell said in his prepared testimony.

He cited the impact of supply issues including a global semiconductor shortage that has hindered auto production, and said those factors "should partially reverse as the effects of the bottlenecks unwind."

The Fed cut the benchmark lending rate to zero right at the start of the pandemic and implemented a massive bond-buying program to provide liquidity to the economy during the crisis.

Central bankers have pledged to maintain the stimulus until inflation holds above the two per cent goal and the labour market has recovered.

But while job gains are expected to continue, Powell said "reaching the standard of 'substantial further progress' is still a ways off."

Fed officials have begun to discuss when they will start to taper the US\$120bn a month in asset purchases, and Powell again pledged to give advance notice before making any changes.

AFP

Fossil fuel power demand has 'peaked worldwide': Analysis

Paris, France - Electricity generation from fossil fuel has peaked worldwide as emerging markets opt for cheaper renewable technology as part of a global shift to cleaner energy, analysis showed Wednesday.

Renewable options such as solar and wind are already the cheapest source of new power generation in 90 per cent of the world's markets, meaning developing nations can avoid oil and gas as they seek to meet growing electricity demand.

New research from India's Council on Energy, Environment and Water (CEEW) and the financial think tank Carbon Tracker showed how emerging markets are already 'leapfrogging' fossil fuel infrastructure and heading straight for green power generation.



These same markets account for nearly 90 per cent of future electricity demand, the analysis found. It also showed that fossil fuel demand has already peaked in nearly all emerging markets, barring China.

But with solar and wind capacity growing rapidly in the world's most-polluting nation, fossil fuel demand there is predicted to peak within five years.

And, as demand plateaus, the study found that continuing to build fossil fuel-powered infrastructure could cost governments billions in stranded assets.

China stands to lose up to US\$16bn by 2030 if it pushes ahead with its new planned coal plants, for example.

"Emerging markets are about to generate all the growth in their electricity supply from renew-

ables," said Kingsmill Bond, Carbon Tracker energy strategist and report co-author.

"The move will cut the costs of their fossil fuel imports, create jobs in domestic clean power industries, and save millions of lives lost to fossil fuel pollutants."

The analysis used the example of India - a major polluter and also a main driver of electricity demand growth - to show how power systems might be rapidly decarbonised with the right economic conditions.

Since 2010, India's solar capacity has increased nearly five-fold from 20 to 96 gigawatts.

Including generation from large hydropower projects, renewables now account for 37 per cent of India's energy production, the analysis said.

AFP

UK inflation nears three-year peak

London, UK - Britain's annual inflation rate has jumped close to a three-year peak as consumer prices accelerate on easing coronavirus restrictions, official data showed Wednesday, fanning global inflationary fears.

The Consumer Prices Index hit 2.5 per cent in June from 2.1 per cent in May, the Office for National Statistics revealed in a statement one day after news of spiking US inflation.

That marked the highest rate since August 2018, with prices lifted by the economy's phased reopening as well as soaring motor fuel and oil prices. Market expectations had been for a rate of 2.2 per cent.

"Inflation rose for the fourth consecutive month to its highest rate for almost three years," said ONS statistician Jonathan Athow.

"The rise was widespread, for example coming from price increases for food and for second-



hand cars where there are reports of increased demand.

"Some of the increase is from temporary effects, for example rising fuel prices which continue to increase inflation, but much of this is due to prices recovering from lows earlier in the pandemic."

Inflation has accelerated sharply since March, when the UK government began a phased lifting of coronavirus restrictions. The rate had topped 2.0 per cent in May, breaching the Bank of England's target level for the first

time since 2019.

The economy is meanwhile set to fully reopen next Monday, with the lifting of most pandemic curbs in England.

A key driver of the inflation that countries have experienced in recent months has been surging commodity prices -- particularly oil.

The BoE warned last month of a temporary UK inflation spike to 3.0 per cent as the economy reopens, as it left monetary policy unchanged.

AFP

Five customers of Meethaq's Hibati savings account win RO300,000 in mid-year draw

In line with its vision 'To serve you better, everyday' and with its commitment to promote a healthy savings culture in Oman, Meethaq Islamic Banking from Bank Muscat held its Hibati Mid-year draw, which was broadcast live on the bank's social media channels. Being one of the most followed brand on social media in the sultanate, there was an overwhelming response from the audience and Meethaq customers.

Five lucky winners won a total of RO300,000 in mega prizes in the Hibati's mid-year draw, including one grand prize of RO100,000 and four mega prizes of RO50,000 each.

The winner of the grand prize of RO100,000 was from Meethaq's Bahla branch, bringing immense joy to the customer. Since the launch, the Hibati Savings Account has seen strong interest from the market, making it Meethaq's flagship account for its customers.

The draws were held in the presence of Said Ahmed Nasser



al Salmi, regional manager - Muscat, Meethaq and Mohammed Ahmed al Kharusi, head of Hafawa Priority Banking, Meethaq.

The cash prizes offered under Hibati's 2021 prize draw scheme are 'Hiba' (gift) from Meethaq to

its customers and are paid out of Mudarib's (shareholders') own sources to boost financial inclusion. The cash prizes are in addition to the profit share of Investment Account Holders (IAHs) in the General Mudarabah Pool as per the declared

profit rates.

Speaking on the occasion, Amor Said al Amri, Meethaq head of Retail Branches, said, "We are pleased with the excellent response to the 2021 Hibati Savings Scheme and congratulate all the winners.

"Customers who continue to consistently save, increase the chances of winning the mega prizes in the Hibati prize draws. Meethaq takes great interest in constantly updating the prize scheme, ensuring the prize scheme remains exciting for the

customers with competitive prize amounts based on the feedback of the customers. We thank all our customers for their strong confidence in Hibati and other Islamic banking products and services from Meethaq."

Meethaq's Hibati Savings Scheme, which was launched in 2018, is one of the biggest cash prize schemes in Oman offering special quarterly, National Day, Omani Women's Day and weekly prizes. Cash prizes worth more than RO1.5mn are being given away to a record number of 5,331 winners in 2021.

Customers with Hibati Savings Accounts enjoy some of the most exciting benefits in Oman, which include competitive Mudarabah indicative profit rates, attractive cash prizes through draws, Visa Debit Card, no minimum balance charges and digital banking facilities.

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

Please visit <https://www.meethaq.om/en/deposit-products/Pages/details.aspx#hibati> or call 24656666 for more details about Hibati.

Khedmah delivers initiatives to help community

Aspiring to support local communities and strengthen collaboration with national entities, Oman Investment & Finance Co (Khedmah), continued to deliver various initiatives during 2021 under its corporate social responsibility programme. The initiatives were directed toward different vital segments of the society.

The company provided financial support to the Ministry of Social Development in order to purchase medical equipment and assistive devices for severely disabled in-house residence of Al Aman Rehabilitation Centre affiliated with the ministry.

Furthermore, Khedmah signed an agreement with Oman Charitable Organization to allocate an annual contribution from the company as per the requirements set by the organisation. The objectives of this collaboration are to help a number of families affected by fires and support others in purchasing remote study supplies for their children. The company additionally provided support to many charitable teams to distribute food supplies to some regions



during the pandemic.

Commenting on these gestures, Khalid bin Kahoor al Balushi, senior director of Human Resources and Administration, and chairman of the CSR Committee at OIFC, said, "We at Khedmah pay great attention to nation development through delivering community initiatives. Seeking to implement the directives of the company's board of directors with regard to CSR, we place social responsibility among our priorities by conducting a plethora of effective programmes that target various segments of society. This is in collaboration with government authorities, charitable and local community institutions."



Lulu Exchange opens its latest branch at Salalah Grand Mall

Lulu Exchange - the sultanate's leading payments provider, has opened its newest branch in the country at Salalah in the centrally located Salalah Grand Mall.

Offering superior, affordable and world-class cross-border remittances and currency exchange services, the branch was inaugurated by Sheik Mohammed Hamed Ali al Ghazali, director, Lulu Exchange, in the presence of Adeb Ahamed, managing director of Lulu Financial Group and other senior management in a grand virtual opening ceremony.

The new branch is the company's 37th in Oman and the sixth in the Dhofar region. It also marks the 236th global branch under Lulu Financial Group.

Speaking on the occasion,

Ahamed congratulated the team for maintaining a positive growth rate in 2021 despite the many challenges.

He said, "The new branch at Salalah Grand Mall re-affirms our commitment to the economy. Despite the challenges posed by the pandemic, Oman's standing as a hub of global business has increased in recent months, especially with several progressive regulations aiding the growth of the payments sector. Through our new branch, we aspire to leverage the emerging possibilities to bridge the gap between our offerings and the people who trust in our services, in line with our vision to innovate value and inspire experiences."

Lulu Exchange, which is a part of the Lulu Financial Group, is

among the leading and most trustworthy financial service providers in Oman. The ISO:9001 certified company has a reputation for providing the highest quality service to customers looking to conduct their personal and corporate cross-border transactions at the most competitive rates.

The company also has strategic partnerships with global payment networks and caters to countries world over with direct online remittance arrangements to countries in the MENA, Indian sub-continent and APAC markets. In addition, the company's mobile app, Lulu Money, is highly rated for its superior features and ease of use.

For details, visit www.luluxchange.com

Ooredoo employees donate blood for COVID-19 patients

Continuing to support the community with timely and targeted initiatives, Ooredoo recently held a blood donation drive at the Blood Bank in Bausher.

Eligible employees gave much-needed blood, for the Ministry of Health, both for in-need hospital patients, and those suffering from COVID-19. Held under its CSR programme, 'Goodwill', it is one of a string of initiatives Ooredoo has undertaken to support the sultanate's ongoing efforts to combat the pandemic.

"With 'caring' as one of our core values, we are committed to supporting our community and involving Ooredoo family members every step of the way. With the high demand for blood supplies in hospitals across Oman due to COVID-19, donating blood is a small act that has a big impact," said Amaal al Lawati, chief people officer at Ooredoo.

"We are so grateful for the bravery of our medical workers during these difficult times and are proud to see so many of our



employees doing their part to help save lives."

Considering itself an integral member of Omani society, Ooredoo involves its staff in a number of voluntary initiatives, while raising awareness on the importance of humanitarian acts.

With recent efforts focused on the COVID-19 pandemic, last year the Ooredoo family banded together to provide much needed medical supplies to hospitals.

The telecoms company continues to collaborate with the Ministry of Health to target help where it is needed.

Nissan Patrol continues to dominate SUV market share in region

Nissan Middle East affirmed the iconic Patrol's SUV market share dominance within the region, announcing that over 20,000 Nissan Patrol vehicles were sold in the Gulf during the company's 2020 fiscal year (FY20). This resulted in a 32.2 per cent growth within its segment - with the Nissan Patrol Platinum emerging as the best-selling grade for the fiscal year, from April 2020 till March 2021.

Nissan also revealed that the 2021 Patrol NISMO, the race-inspired version of the Patrol launched exclusively in the Gulf earlier this year, has been well received by the consumers. Featuring a bold design, race-proven engineering and redefined aerodynamics, over 340 exquisitely crafted units of the high-performance SUV have already been sold, with pre-orders booking all units until October 2021.

The impressive sales per-

formances over the past year, despite the impact of COVID-19 pandemic, underlines the region's sustained love for the Patrol, which combines class-leading power and unparalleled on- and off-road capabilities with the latest Nissan Intelligent Mobility technologies, all encapsulated within a sleek exterior and premium interiors to provide a truly luxurious experience.

Thierry Sabbagh, managing director, Nissan Middle East, said, "For decades, Nissan Patrol has built a proud legacy of conquering every terrain - while becoming intrinsically linked to the history and heritage of the region as an SUV of choice for Gulf nationals and expats. The success of the Patrol is also due to its continued evolution to reflect the aspirations of our customers, as a powerful and luxurious vehicle that is capable of going anywhere, while ensur-



ing riding comfort, safety and sophistication."

Now in its seventh decade since its first global introduction in 1951, the Nissan Patrol features key design upgrades in-

cluding Nissan's front V-motion grille, boomerang-shaped LED headlights and taillights. Under the hood, the Nissan Patrol features the strongest naturally-aspirated V6 and V8 engines in the

segment - with a base 4.0lt V6 which produces 275 horsepower and 394 Nm of torque, and a 5.6lt V8 produces 400 horsepower and 560 Nm of torque.

Sabbagh added, "These highly

encouraging year-on-year sales results, particularly in a year that saw unprecedented challenges for the industry, are a testament to the enduring popularity of the Patrol - and one we look to grow even further as we celebrate its 70th anniversary throughout the year."

The extensive Patrol line-up in the region also includes the Patrol Super Safari, which continued to transcend expectations of a 4WD vehicle with design and tech enhancements in its 2021 edition. With new colour combinations, alloy wheels and other striking exterior and interior upgrades, the iconic off-road vehicle brings a fresh look to its exceptional performance and enduring legacy as one of the most coveted SUVs in the region.

These announcements come as part of Nissan's ongoing celebrations for the Patrol's 70th anniversary this year - highlighting

its significance to Nissan's SUV heritage.

The Nissan Patrol has been loved by generations of loyal customers across the world - with its durability, reliability, premium design, safety, comfort features and unmatched all-terrain performance leading to the sale of over 1.9mn units globally since 1951.

The Patrol's deep-rooted connection to the Middle East can be traced back to its arrival to the region in 1956, and it has continued to hold a special place in the hearts and minds of customers who value performance even in the toughest of conditions.

It has also won a number of accolades over the years - including the highest grade of customer satisfaction and the highest resale value.

For more information on the Nissan Patrol, please visit: <https://www.nissan-me.com/>

Oman Oasis announces winners of Win Gold offer

Oman Oasis, the nation’s number one packaged drinking water brand, announced first round winners of its much-admired ‘Win Gold’ promotion on small bottle cartons.

Three lucky people won 25g gold coins each - Hilal Khalid Mohammed Salmi, Wendy Phillips and Sandeep Sarju Prasad Gupta. Eighty-five others walked away with 4g coins. An excited hundred others won Lulu Shopping Vouchers each worth RO10. Plus, a hundred and seventy people got free Oman Oasis cartons with 24 pieces of 500ml bottles inside.

A total of 1,061 prizes are up for grabs across three rounds of draws in the promotion valid till August 15. The next two draws are scheduled for July 18 and August 16.

Consumers excitedly await the 50g and 100g gold prizes in these upcoming draws.

Buyers of Oman Oasis 1.5lt or 500ml cartons are to look out for a Scratch Coupon inside the carton. Scratch and register the code on it at www.omanoasis.com/wingold to be eligible for the raffle prizes.

Customers are free to participate more than once to increase their chances of winning the



prizes on offer.

The winners will have to preserve the Scratch Coupon, proof of purchase and present it along with their proof of ID in order to claim their prize. The rewarding experience presented to its consumers by Oman Oasis saw an overwhelming response so far.

Through campaigns like these, Oman Oasis has managed to engage with its consumers on a personal level and has created

a strong bond with them.

The brand has grown to be the preferred choice and a household name in the sultanate.

Oman Oasis provides drinking water in a range of convenient packs and formulations across retail outlets in the country.

With a perfected processing technique and state-of-the-art production line in place in order to ensure the highest levels of purity and quality, it offers pre-

mium products guaranteed to satisfy the customer on a daily basis.

With over two decades of experience and a reputation for consistently delivering quality drinking water, Oman Oasis has earnestly been established as the No.1 water brand in Oman.

It also holds several international product quality certifications like the IBWA membership, NSF, ABWA, and WQA.

Go healthy with A’Safwah’s Turkish labneh, laban drinks

A’Safwah Dairy, the largest vertically integrated dairy company in Oman, has earned the loyalty of its ever-growing customer base by offering premium quality fresh milk and dairy products. Its Turkish labneh and fresh laban and laban drinks are increasingly popular in the market.

“A 100 per cent Omani company with almost four decades of experience, A’Safwah reserves a good understanding of the local market and the preferences of its people,” said a spokesperson for A’Safwah.

“During summers, we have seen an increase in the demand for fresh and flavoured laban and various laban drinks (incl Jeera Laban) which is a well-known source of nutrition and helps to keep the body hydrated while replenishing electrolytes.” To suit the varying taste buds and preferences of its consumers, A’Safwah’s laban drinks come in a variety of flavours. Its fresh laban comes in a full cream variant as well as delicious strawberry flavour while its fresh laban drinks come in plain and jeera flavours.

Another A’Safwah product that has been a favorite amongst consumers is the delicious, soft and easily spreadable Turkish labneh. Recognised as a healthy source of protein and probiotics, it’s also a versatile ingredient that can be added to a variety of



dishes for a tangier flavour.

Commenting on the product, the spokesperson said, “Our Turkish labneh has a distinct full-bodied flavour that our customers love. Not only is its high nutritional value but it can also be used to stir up a variety of unique dishes. Light-weight and healthy, it can be enjoyed at any time of the day even on its own.”

A’Safwah’s Turkish labneh can be paired with local favourites like baba ghanoush, falafel, stuffed grape leaves or even just with regular pita. Adding a zesty touch to any dish, it is often used to make pies, dips and salads.

“Full of flavour and goodness, A’Safwah’s Turkish labneh adds a distinct taste to my favorite

dishes. Turkish labneh goes with a variety of dishes and during festive seasons I often experiment with new recipes that my family always enjoys,” testifies Asma Abdullah al Badi, who has been a loyal customer of A’Safwah.

“When I have to make a quick, light and easily digestible snack for my children, I usually make a sandwich with labneh, vegetables and a sprinkle of zaatar, and pair this with A’Safwah’s laban drinks.” Encouraging consumers to follow a healthy lifestyle, A’Safwah also ensures its remains committed to providing farm-fresh dairy products while adhering to the highest quality standards throughout all its operations.



Indian Social Club Sohar holds health awareness webinar

Indian Social Club (ISC) Sohar organised a ‘Health Awareness Webinar’ under the patronage of the Indian Embassy in Muscat.

The chief guest of the event was Reena Jain, the first secretary in the Indian Embassy in Muscat.

The topic discussed the

needed awareness during the time of the COVID-19 pandemic.

The event took place as an open discussion with Dr Vipra Shree on July 9. The welcome speech was given by the Sports Secretary of Indian Social Club Sohar Asim Mohd.

The event was attended by

Indian community members in Sohar.

It was streamed live on the official Facebook page of Indian Social Club Sohar, and even on the official ISCS YouTube channel. The vote of thanks was given by Joint Sports Secretary Ravindranath Prabhakar.

Home Box expands its Saudi Arabia footprint with its 20th furniture store

One of the largest value furniture and homeware chain Home Box has opened its 20th retail outlet in Saudi Arabia and 32nd in the GCC as part of its expansion strategy, which is aimed at expanding its furniture homeware and home decor offering in the region.

Strategically located at Riyadh’s Khalid bin Walid Street, exit 8, Al Hamra district, the new expansive store is among the largest outlets in Saudi Arabia covering over 30,000sqft of prime space.

The new store features a fresh, ultra-modern look and feel with a revamped, trend-driven theme and customer-focused shopping experience.

Home Box CEO, Ajay Antal, said that the new store was designed with the evolved customer in mind and their desire



for an expertly laid out one-stop-shop that offers an extensive range of modern and classic furniture and premium home accessories at affordable prices.

“Saudi Arabia is a special market for us mostly due to its cultural vibrancy and our customers’ sense of style and fashion. Driven by their thirst for affordable modern furniture, we have now opened a new store to complement our existing outlets in the region. This new store, which will also cover all of Riyadh, will feature our best-sell-

ing pieces as well as a new range of designer home,” said Antal.

Bringing its total GCC store count to 32 and a combined floor space spanning over 915,000sqft, the new outlet will feature a collection of over 5,000 home furniture and accessories including a new line of nine different styles of premium quality mattresses.

Regional expansion

As part of its long-term expansion strategy, Home Box, which also has 12 franchise stores in

Africa, is also planning to open three additional stores in various regions this year with plans at an advanced stage to enter new markets in the GCC.

Home Box expansion spree comes against the backdrop of pandemic-related movement restrictions. Despite the restrictions affecting footfall in stores, Saudi Arabia has experienced significant eCommerce growth with market volume expected to reach US\$8.2bn by 2024. This is largely driven by retailers shifting most of their operations online.

Jeep Gladiator Sand Runner: Ultimate high-performance off-road pickup

Dhofar Automotive, the official distributor of Jeep, Dodge, RAM, Chrysler, Fiat and Alfa Romeo vehicles in the sultanate, has announced the arrival of the Jeep Gladiator Sand Runner, the ultimate in high-speed off-road capability and performance in desert environments to Dhofar Automotive showrooms.

Courtesy of the brand’s renowned 4x4 system and significant suspension upgrades, which underwent extensive testing over harsh sand and desert terrain for vehicle durability and protection, the Jeep Gladiator Sand Runner is the first Jeep in the Middle East to wear the ‘Desert Rated’ badge.

Jeep Gladiator Sand Runner models feature new, specially-tuned FOX 64-mm (2.5-inch) internal bypass shocks with external reservoirs, industry-exclusive FOX front hydraulic jounce bumpers, a reinforced frame, a 25-mm (1-inch) front suspension lift with a silver front skid plate, stronger axles with cast-iron steering knuckles, aggressive front seats with inte-

grated upper bolsters and standard 33-inch tyres. All of these standard features enable the Gladiator Sand Runner to become the Jeep brand’s first Desert Rated vehicle.

Hatem el Naggar, general manager at Dhofar Automotive, said, “We are very pleased to welcome this premium version of Jeep Gladiator to Dhofar Automotive showrooms in the sultanate. The Gladiator Sand Runner is the most off-road capable mid-size pickup and brings Jeep’s exceptionally high standards for off-road performance to the Middle East’s extreme desert conditions. Developed and tested in some of the world’s most harsh and rugged regions, the Jeep Gladiator Sand Runner was built in the desert and for the desert. It delivers a new level of capability with the ability to master challenging rock and sand terrains with ease.”

Jeep 4x4 capability

The starting point for the Sand Runner’s new level of capability is the Gladiator’s proven Com-



mand-Trac 4x4 system. The Jeep Command-Trac 4x4 system is used to provide higher 4LO (low range) operating speeds for climbing sand dunes and other challenging desert events.

To earn the Desert Rated badge, Jeep engineers equipped the Gladiator Sand Runner with specially-tuned high-perfor-

mance FOX 64-mm (2.5-inch) internal bypass shocks to maximise handling, comfort and bottom-out resistance on high-speed sand runs.

Industry-first FOX front hydraulic jounce bumpers, which combine race-proven technology with new, cutting-edge features, add additional damping force as

the suspension reaches maximum compression to soften impacts and prevent bottoming out in harsh off-road situations.

These engineering enhancements to the Gladiator Sand Runner’s suspension provide ride control and confidence on any high-speed sand or desert terrain, while an Off-Road Plus but-

ton allows drivers to take the Gladiator to the next level of tractive capabilities. With the push of the button, the driver triggers adjustments to the throttle, transmission shift points and traction control for peak performance on higher speed passes on sand terrain, as well as during low-speed soft sand and rock crawling conditions. In addition, for the first time on a Jeep, the Off-Road Plus drive mode on the Gladiator Sand Runner enables drivers to lock their rear axle at high speeds while in a high range, “4H”.

Proven powertrain

The Jeep Gladiator Sand Runner’s 3.6lt Pentastar V-6 engine delivers 285 horsepower and 260 lb.-ft. of torque and features engine stop-start (ESS) technology as standard equipment. It is engineered to provide a broad torque band with a focus on low-end torque, an essential trait needed for extreme off-roading. An eight-speed automatic transmission is standard with the 3.6lt Pentastar V-6.

Inside and out

Inside the cabin, the Gladiator Sand Runner features more aggressive front seats with integrated upper bolsters to hold occupants comfortably in place during high-speed off-road driving. The upgraded seats are available in leather or cloth with orange accent stitching and embroidered Sand Runner logos.

Featuring a 25-mm (1-inch) front suspension lift that results in a more prominent appearance, the Gladiator Sand Runner is adorned with a unique hood decal on its performance hood that features a center scoop. Distinguishing Sand Runner elements include exterior badges, orange tow hooks and unique 17 x 7.5-inch wheels and the optional Jeep Performance Parts heavy duty side steps.

The all-new Desert Rated badge is the first of its kind for Jeep and is a natural extension of the brand’s legendary Trail Rated designation. Desert Rated vehicles represent the ultimate in high-speed, off-road capability and performance.

Rouhani hopes Iran's next govt can conclude nuclear talks

Tehran, Iran - Iran's President Hassan Rouhani said on Wednesday he hopes his successor can clinch a deal to lift US sanctions, implying that nuclear talks will not conclude before his term ends in August.

The Islamic republic has held talks since April in Vienna with major powers on reviving its troubled 2015 nuclear agreement.

The accord offered Tehran international sanctions relief in exchange for limiting its nuclear programme, but was torpedoed in 2018 when former US president Donald Trump withdrew from it and reimposed sanctions.

"The work was ready" to be done, the moderate Rouhani said of the talks, speaking in a televised cabinet meeting.

But 'they took away the 12th administration's opportunity', he added about his government, without elaborating.

"We hope the 13th administration can finish this work."

Rouhani is set to hand power in early August to the ultraconservative former judiciary chief Ebrahim Raisi, who last month won a presidential poll.

Trump's successor Joe Biden has signalled his readiness to return to the deal and has engaged in indirect negotiations with Iran as the accord's remaining other state parties - Britain, China, France, Germany and Russia -



Iranian President Hassan Rouhani attends a Cabinet meeting in the capital Tehran on Wednesday (AFP)

hold talks in Vienna.

They have held six rounds of talks, concluding the latest on June 20 without setting a date for a new one.

Decision time

The United States and France warned Iran in late June that time was running out to revive the deal, to which Tehran responded by saying that it expects others to 'take the decisions'.

Iran's ultraconservative camp, which deeply distrusts the United States, has repeatedly attacked Rouhani over the failing nuclear deal, which was reached six years ago on Wednesday.

Despite this, Iran's senior political figures, including Raisi, have voiced broad agreement that the country must seek an end to the punishing US sanctions.

"Any negotiations that guar-

antee national interests will certainly be supported, but... we will not allow negotiations to be for negotiations' sake," Raisi said on June 21.

He added that 'any meeting must produce a result ... for the Iranian nation'.

Rouhani's government has insisted that Iran's basic position on the nuclear talks will remain the same.

Ultimate political power in

The work was ready [to be done]. But they (US) took away the 12th administration's opportunity. We hope the 13th administration can finish this work

HASSAN ROUHANI



Iran rests with the supreme leader, Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, who gave the green light to both the original nuclear agreement and the efforts to revive it.

In his speech, Rouhani also insisted that his government has 'done what was required' to lift US sanctions and that Iranians could 'clearly see' their efforts in a Foreign Ministry report released on Monday.

The report mentioned in broad terms what has been agreed to in Vienna and included a note from Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif, who called on all political forces to work together to succeed in the talks.

AFP



People light candles during a vigil for the victims of the fire that killed over 60 COVID-19 patients, at a hospital in Nasiriyah on Tuesday (AFP)

Iraq cleric demands action over deadly COVID unit fire

Baghdad, Iraq - Populist Shiite cleric Moqtada Sadr has warned he will hold the Iraqi government responsible if it fails to take action over a devastating fire that killed at least 60 people in a COVID isolation unit.

The warning comes just months before Iraq is scheduled to go to the polls in October for an early parliamentary election that was demanded by a protest movement backed by Sadr's supporters.

'It is incumbent on the government to work immediately to firmly and seriously punish those to blame for hospital fires, whether in Nasiriyah or other provinces, no matter their (political) affiliation,' Sadr tweeted late on Tuesday.

'Otherwise, this government will be held responsible from its lowest to its highest (official).'

The devastating blaze, which swept through the COVID isolation unit of Al-Hussein Hospital in the southern city of Nasiriyah

on Monday evening, was the second such fire in Iraq in three months. An April fire at a Baghdad COVID hospital killed 82 people and was also blamed on the explosion of badly stored oxygen bottles.

That blaze triggered widespread anger and resulted in the suspension and subsequent resignation of then health minister Hassan al Tamimi, a nominee of Sadr's powerful political bloc.

Prime Minister Mustafa al Kadhem has ordered an investigation into Monday's blaze 'that will lead to those directly responsible', his office said.

He already dismissed the hospital's manager, the provincial health director and the local civil defence chief.

Arrest warrants have been issued for 13 officials, including the provincial health director.

Sadr demanded that the findings of the official inquiry be released quickly.

AFP

Armenia says soldier killed in shootout with Azerbaijan

Erevan, Armenia - An Armenian soldier was killed in a shootout with Azerbaijani forces on Wednesday, Yerevan said, in the latest incident between both countries since their war last year over the disputed Nagorno-Karabakh region.

Armenia's Defence Ministry said the soldier died at the border between the arch-foes, accusing Azerbaijan of opening fire on its troops, forcing it to return fire. 'The Azerbaijani side also suffered losses,' it said.

But Baku retorted that Armenian forces opened fire near the Azerbaijani exclave territory of Nagorno-Karabakh which claimed some 6,500 lives and

ended with a Russian-brokered ceasefire under which Yerevan ceded territories it had controlled for decades. Tensions between Baku and Yerevan have been running high again since May, when Armenia accused Azerbaijan's military of crossing its southern border to 'lay siege' to a lake shared by the two countries.

Both Baku and Yerevan have reported occasional shootouts along their shared border.

Azerbaijan said that Armenian forces on Tuesday 'opened fire from machine guns at Azerbaijani positions in Shusha', a town in Karabakh that was recaptured by Baku in last year's war. Last week, Armenia and Azerbaijan also traded accusations of starting a shootout in which troops on both sides were injured.

AFP

UAE opens embassy in Israel after normalisation deal

Tel Aviv, Israel - The United Arab Emirates opened an embassy in Israel on Wednesday, housed in Tel Aviv's new stock exchange building, in the latest normalisation move under a deal brokered by Washington last year.

The venue in the heart of Israel's financial district highlighted the central role economic cooperation has played since the UAE became only the third majority-Arab country to recognise the Jewish state.

At the ceremony, attended by new Israeli President Isaac Herzog, Emirati Ambassador Mohamed al Khaja called the embassy opening 'an important milestone in the growing relationship between our two countries'.

"The UAE and Israel are both innovative nations, we can harness this creativity to work towards a more prosperous and sustainable future for our countries and our region," he said.



Israeli President Isaac Herzog (left) and Emirati Ambassador to Israel Mohamed al Khaja cut the ribbon to declare the opening of the new UAE Embassy, in Tel Aviv on Wednesday (AFP)

Herzog called for the 'historic agreement' with the UAE to be 'extended to other nations seeking peace with Israel'.

Israel and the UAE have signed a raft of deals - ranging from tourism to aviation to financial services - since normalising ties as part of the so-called Abra-

ham Accords brokered by former US president Donald Trump's administration.

Wednesday's ceremony, held in the lobby of the stock exchange building two floors below the embassy, came after Israeli Foreign Minister Yair Lapid made a landmark visit to the UAE last

comprehensive and lasting peace between Israel and the Palestinians.

Following the UAE deal, Israel normalised relations with Bahrain, Morocco and Sudan, accords that also sparked Palestinian protests.

But Israel and UAE have sought to emphasise the economic dividend offered by normalisation.

Lapid told Emirati media last month that bilateral trade has reached over US\$675.22mn since the signing of the Abraham Accords in September 2020.

Israel's spate of normalisation deals were agreed under former prime minister Benjamin Netanyahu.

Lapid was an architect of the coalition that ousted Netanyahu last month, but has, along with Prime Minister Naftali Bennett, vowed to keep up Netanyahu's policy of pursuing deeper ties in the Arab world.

AFP

Ethiopia PM vows to repel 'enemies' after Tigray rebel assault

Addis Ababa, Ethiopia - Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed on Wednesday vowed to repel attacks by Ethiopia's 'enemies' after rebels in Tigray launched a fresh offensive to regain territory in the war-torn region.

Tigrayan forces this week claimed a series of battlefield gains in a renewed assault that comes two weeks after the federal government declared a unilateral ceasefire in the face of rebel advances.

The latest rebel push followed the stunning recapture of the regional capital Mekele last month from federal forces, a turning point in a brutal eight-month conflict that has killed thousands of people and left many hundreds of thousands facing famine.

Abiy said he remained committed to peace - even if it came

at a 'cost' - but these latest attacks would not go unanswered.

'We will defend and repel these attacks by our internal and external enemies, while working to speed up humanitarian efforts,' he said in a statement posted on Twitter.

Abiy, the winner of the Nobel Peace Prize, sent troops into Tigray last November after accusing the region's once-dominant ruling party of orchestrating attacks on Ethiopian military bases.

He said Ethiopia had demonstrated its willingness to end hostilities in the mountainous northern region.

"We've undertaken a unilateral ceasefire to avoid further conflict, to provide the people with a reprieve during the farming season, and to allow aid operations to proceed without



Children stand under a tree on the site of a future camp for Eritrean refugees, in a rural area near the village of Dabat, 70km northeast from the city of Gondar in Ethiopia, on Tuesday (AFP)

excuse," he said.

"Even though we knew peace would exact some cost on us, we have taken the peaceful option."

'Resist provocation'

But he said Ethiopia's enemies were 'unable to rest without conflict' and accused them of using

child soldiers.

He urged Ethiopians to remain united and stand behind the Ethiopian army and resist 'out-

side pressure and internal provocation'.

A spokesman for the Tigray Defence Forces (TDF) told AFP on Tuesday they had seized Alamata, the main town in southern Tigray, and pushed into the western part of the region where fertile farmlands have long been contested.

The rebel claims could not be independently confirmed as communications were largely down in the area, but UN and humanitarian sources reported fighting around towns in western Tigray and in a refugee camp.

Abiy and Ethiopian officials characterised their troop withdrawal from Mekele as a strategic move while the TDF described it as a major rebel victory, and the declaration of a ceasefire a 'joke'.

However, they later accepted

it 'in principle' while demanding the withdrawal from the region of Eritrean and Amhara forces.

The war, characterised by grisly massacres and rampant sexual violence, has damaged Abiy's standing as a reformer and peacemaker, and badly strained Ethiopia's ties with traditional allies.

Western powers have demanded the ceasefire be accompanied by unfettered aid access and the withdrawal of Eritrean troops, warning of possible sanctions should these conditions not be met.

The World Food Programme said this week that it had reached Mekele with food supplies but far more was needed to address the massive need in a region where the United Nations says famine conditions are already present.

AFP

Taliban claim control of key border crossing

Kandahar, Afghanistan - The Taliban said Wednesday they had captured the strategic border crossing of Spin Boldak on the frontier with Pakistan, continuing sweeping gains made since foreign forces stepped up their withdrawal from Afghanistan.

The situation on the ground could not immediately be verified, with Afghanistan's interior ministry denying the report even as social media was abuzz with pictures of Taliban fighters looking relaxed in the frontier town.

Spin Boldak is the latest in a string of border crossings and dry ports seized by the Taliban in recent weeks, with the insurgents looking to choke off much-needed revenue from the government in Kabul while also filling their own coffers.

The seizure of the vital border crossing with Pakistan follows days of heavy fighting across Kandahar province, where the government was forced to deploy commando fighters to prevent the fall of the provincial capital even as the insurgents inched closer to taking the frontier.

In a statement, insurgent spokesman Zabihullah Mujahid assured traders and residents there that their 'security is guaranteed'.

But Afghan officials insisted they were still in control.

"The terrorist Taliban had some movements near the border area... The security forces have repelled the attack," Interior Ministry spokesman Tareq Arian



People wave Taliban flags as they drive through the Pakistani border town of Chaman, after the Taliban claimed they had captured the Afghan side of the border crossing of Spin Boldak along the frontier with Pakistan on Wednesday (AFP)

told AFP.

Residents disputed the government's claims.

"I went to my shop this morning and saw that the Taliban are everywhere. They are in the bazaar, in police HQ and custom areas. I can also hear the sound of fighting nearby," said Raz Mohammad, a shopkeeper who works near the border.

The border crossing is one of the most strategically valuable for the Taliban.

It provides direct access to Pakistan's Balochistan province - where the insurgents' top leadership has been based for decades - along with an unknown number of reserve fighters who regularly enter Afghanistan to help bolster their ranks.

Hours after the crossing fell, an AFP reporter on the Pakistani side saw around 150 Taliban fighters riding on motorcycles, waving insurgent flags, as they demanded to be allowed to cross into Afghanistan.

Balochistan is a favoured destination for fighters regularly heading for medical treatment and hosts many of their families.

A major highway leading from the border connects to Pakistan's commercial capital Karachi and its sprawling port on the Arabian Sea, which is considered a linchpin for Afghanistan's billion-dollar heroin trade that has provided a crucial source of revenue for the Taliban's war chest over the years.

AFP

'Troop pullout a mistake'

Berlin, Germany - Former US president George W Bush on Wednesday criticised the withdrawal of NATO troops from Afghanistan and said civilians were being left to be 'slaughtered' by the Taliban. "Afghan women and girls are going to suffer unspeakable harm. This is a mistake... They're just going to be left behind to be slaughtered by these very brutal people, and it breaks my heart," Bush told German broadcaster Deutsche Welle.

The former Republican president, who sent troops to

Afghanistan in autumn 2001 after the September 11 attacks on New York's World Trade Center, said he believed German Chancellor Angela Merkel 'feels the same way'.

Bush said Merkel, who is set to retire from politics later this year after 16 years in power, had brought 'class and dignity to a very important position and made very hard decisions'.

US and NATO forces began withdrawing from Afghanistan in early May and are due to completely pull out by September 11.

AFP

'UK could work with Taliban'

London, UK - Defence Secretary Ben Wallace said on Wednesday Britain will work with the Taliban if it enters into a power-sharing government in Afghanistan and respects human rights.

"Whatever the government of the day is, provided it adheres to certain international norms, the UK Government will engage with it," he said.

"Just like other governments around the world, if they behave in a way that is seriously against human rights, we will review that relationship.

"All peace processes require you to come to terms with the enemy. Sometimes, that's what it is."

Wallace's comments, delivered in an interview with the *Daily Telegraph* during a visit to the United States, came as the hardline Islamist group swept through much of Afghanistan in recent months.

The Afghan government now holds little more than a constellation of provincial capitals. Wallace urged the two sides to 'show leadership and bring together Afghanistan'.

AFP



Cuban citizens residing in Ecuador demonstrate against Cuban President Miguel Díaz-Canel, in front of their embassy in Quito on Tuesday (AFP)

One dead scores arrested in Cuba protests: Officials

Havana, Cuba - One person has died in the anti-government protests across Cuba, according to officials, with activists saying at least 100 people have been arrested and scores remain in detention as demonstrations overseas in solidarity continued.

The rallies are the largest since the Cuban revolution of the 1950s and come as the country endures its worst economic crisis in 30 years, with chronic shortages of electricity, food and medicine, just as it records a spike in coronavirus infections.

Cuba's San Isidro free speech protest movement published late Monday a list of 144 people held or reported as disappeared following the demonstrations in dozens of cities and towns.

A 36 year old man died during a protest on the outskirts of Havana on Monday, the Interior Ministry said on Tuesday, according to the state news agency, which named him as Diubis Laurencio Tejeda and said he had taken part in 'disturbances'.

Demonstrators had chanted 'down with the dictatorship' before being dispersed by police in about 40 different locations across Cuba on Sunday, but about 100 protesters again gathered in the capital Havana Monday evening, shouting 'down with communism'.

Relatives and friends of those detained during and after the his-

toric demonstrations engaged in a desperate search on Tuesday for news on their whereabouts.

"They took him from the house handcuffed and beaten, without a shirt, without a mask," said a 50 year old woman who did not wish to give her name, asking after her 21 year old son at a police station in the capital.

"They took many from the neighbourhood, young and old."

On Tuesday Cuba's Foreign Minister Bruno Rodriguez denied there had been a 'social outbreak', insisting that the people still support 'the revolution and their government'.

Repression

Havana blamed the show of discontent on the United States - which has placed Cuba under sanctions since 1962 - pursuing a 'policy of economic suffocation to provoke social unrest in the country'.

But Washington pointed the finger at 'decades of repression' in the one-party communist state.

In Miami and the US capital, Cuban-Americans rallied in support of the anti-government demonstrations, with smaller scale protests also breaking out in Brazil, Ecuador, Uruguay.

Cuba's Catholic Church called for 'understanding', adding 'the people have the right to express their needs, desires and hopes'.

AFP

12 killed in Pakistan bus blast; China says 'bombing'

Peshawar, Pakistan - Beijing said nine Chinese workers were among 12 people killed on Wednesday by a bomb attack on a bus in northwestern Pakistan and called for severe punishment, but Islamabad blamed the explosion on a 'gas leak'.

The bus was carrying around 40 Chinese engineers, surveyors and mechanical staff to a hydropower dam construction site in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province.

Islamabad is Beijing's closest regional ally, but the security of Chinese workers has long been of concern in Pakistan.

Large numbers of them are based in the country to supervise and build infrastructure projects.

Pakistan's Foreign Ministry in a statement said the bus



Rescue workers and onlookers gather around the bus that plunged into a ravine following an explosion, in Kohistan district on Wednesday (AFP)

'plunged into a ravine after a mechanical failure, resulting in leakage of gas that caused a blast'.

Meanwhile, China's Foreign Ministry spokesman Zhao Lijian expressed his 'shock and condemnation over the bombing'.

He urged Pakistan to 'severely

punish' those responsible and 'earnestly protect' Chinese nationals and projects.

The Chinese Embassy in Islamabad also earlier said its nationals had come under 'attack'.

Both countries said nine Chinese workers and three Pakista-

nis had died in the disaster which happened at around 7.00am.

Arif Khan Yousafzai, a senior government official in Kohistan district where the blast happened, said around 28 people were also injured.

They were airlifted to hospital by the military, officials said.

Pakistan authorities said an investigation was under way.

Construction of the Dasu dam on the Indus River began in 2017 and was scheduled to be built within five years, according to the Pakistan Water and Power Development Authority.

In April, the Pakistani Taliban claimed responsibility for a deadly suicide blast at a luxury hotel hosting the Chinese ambassador, who was unhurt, in southwest Balochistan.

The group has recently claimed a string of attacks - not only in Pakistan's restive tribal areas along the Afghanistan border, but also in the country's cities, including the capital, Islamabad.

Beijing has poured billions of dollars into Pakistan in recent years to boost the country's infrastructure.

But Chinese-funded projects have sparked resentment, particularly among separatist groups, who say locals see little benefit, with most jobs going to outsiders.

In 2019, gunmen stormed a luxury hotel in Balochistan overlooking a flagship Chinese-backed project - the deep-water seaport in Gwadar - killing at least eight people.

AFP

S Africa unrest prompts fears of food, fuel shortages

Johannesburg, South Africa - Unrest raged in South Africa on Wednesday for the sixth day running, stoking fears of food and fuel shortages as disruption to farming, manufacturing and oil refining began to bite.

Seventy-two people have died and more than 1,200 people have been arrested, according to official figures, since former president Jacob Zuma began a 15 month jail term, sparking protests that swiftly turned violent. Looting has hit supply chains and transport links in the Johannesburg region and the southeastern province of KwaZulu-Natal, sending a shockwave to goods and services around the country.

In the port city of Durban, people started queueing outside food stores and at fuel stations as early as 4.00am when the Covid night curfew ends, an AFP photographer saw.

The night before, the country's largest refinery, Sapref, declared 'force majeure' - an emergency beyond its control - and shuttered its plant in Durban, shutting down a third of South Africa's fuel



Looters take away whatever is left to grab in a vandalised mall in Vosloorus, on Wednesday (AFP)

supply. The firm said the refinery was 'temporarily shut down... due to the civil unrest and disruption of supply routes in and out of KwaZulu-Natal'.

Some fuel retailers have begun rationing while others are starting to run dry.

"It's inevitable that we will have fuel shortages in the next couple of days or weeks," Layton Beard, spokesman for South Africa's Automobile Association, told AFP.

'Humanitarian crisis'

Outside a branch of a popular supermarket in northern Durban's Eastman region, around 400 people started lining up to buy food, hours before the shop was due to open.

"With these lootings, it's an inflection point... this has now seriously compromised our energy security and food security," warned Bonang Mohale, chancellor of the University of the Free State and a professor of

business and economics studies.

"It has created disruption to the coronavirus vaccine rollout and deliveries to hospitals," he said.

Christo van der Rhee, executive director of the largest farmers' organisation, AgriSA, said producers were struggling to get their crops to market because the logistical network was in a 'shambles'.

"We need the restoration of law and order as soon as possi-

ble, because we are going to have a massive humanitarian crisis," van der Rhee told AFP.

Troop deployment

Stores and warehouses have been targeted by looters despite the deployment of 2,500 troops by President Cyril Ramaphosa to help the overwhelmed police force. But these boots on the ground are dwarfed in numbers by the more than 70,000 troops deployed to enforce last year's coronavirus lockdown.

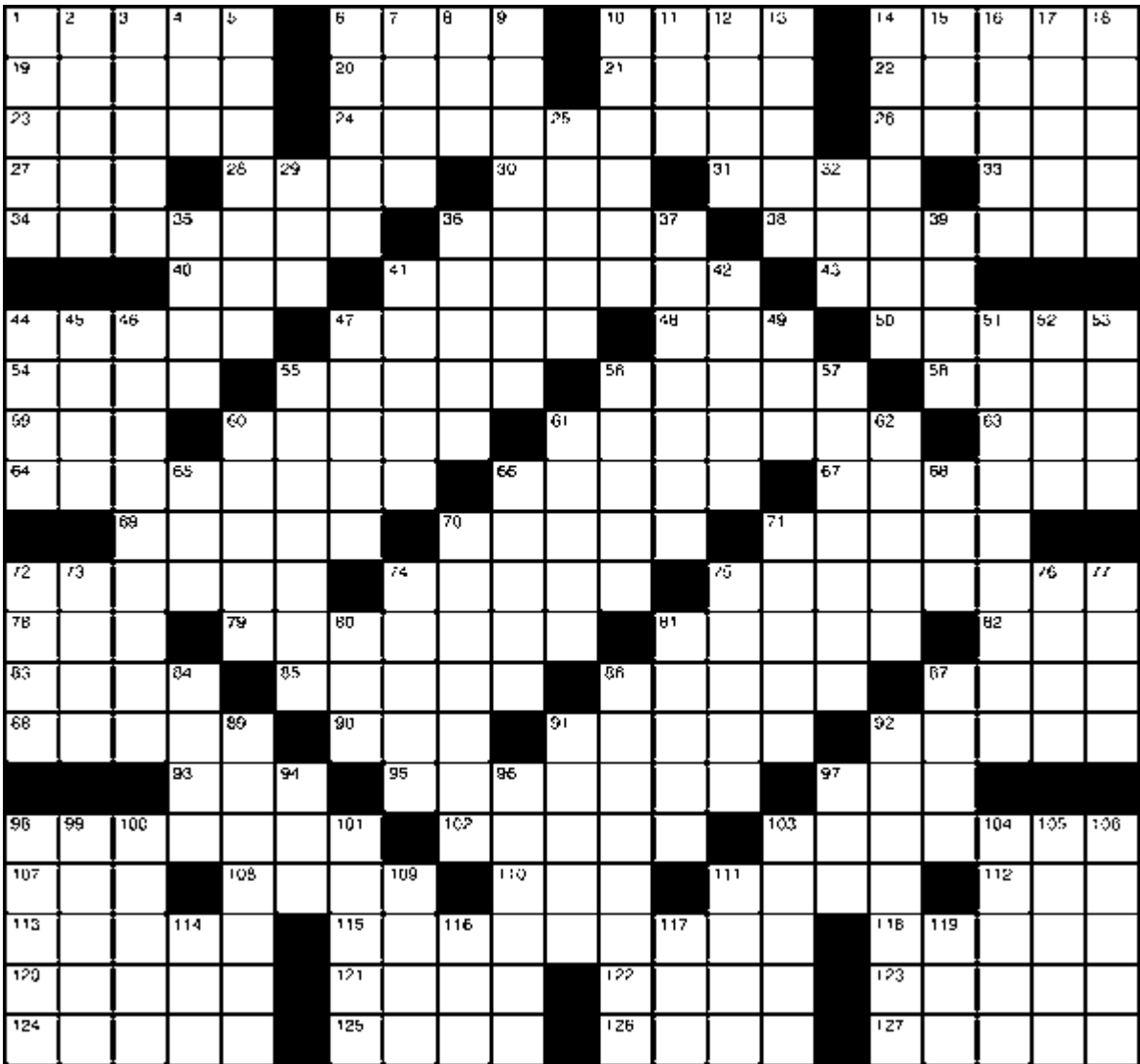
Only a handful of soldiers have been seen at some shopping centres.

The TV footage has been a visceral shock for many South Africans, showing crowds of looters casually hauling away refrigerators, large televisions, microwave ovens, fashion goods and crates of food and alcohol.

The pillaging swiftly followed protests over the jailing of former president Zuma, who is viewed by radicals and many grassroots members of the ruling African National Congress (ANC) as a defender of the poor.

AFP

DAILY CROSSWORD



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ACROSS

- 1 Anagram of trace
6 Sicilian lava producer
10 Long slit
14 Prepares to catch trout
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123 Synthetic fiber burden
124 Leverets
125 Give off smoke
126 Valley
127 Crystal-gazers
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5 Perfume
6 Short literary work
7 Ballerina's skirt
8 Small drink
9 Swift-footed Greek maiden
10 Attic
11 Born Cassius Clay
12 Plunder or loot
13 Raised, as prices
14 Medical examiner
15 Essen exclamation
16 Lead singer of The Police
17 Ancient Greek

- headband: var.
18 It might be stainless
25 State of the Alamo
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37 Relaxes opposition
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60 Zodiac ram
61 Cut in two
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65 Ever, to Keats
66 " ____ Attraction"
68 Attention-getter
70 Italian dish of cornmeal
71 SD's ____ City
72 Hermit or king
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- 75 Was entertained sumptuously
76 Swedish actress Lena
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99 Hair-coloring agent
100 Essence of roses
101 African river
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104 Sheeplike
105 New England fall drink
106 Falls over suddenly
109 Biblical weed
111 Temporary release bond
114 White House nickname
116 Fib
117 Bikini top
119 Strong soap ingredient

YOUR DAILY HOROSCOPE



ARIES MARCH 21-APRIL 19

Suddenly in the mood to stay at home? Well, don't offer up any apologies, even if you'd previously made a promise to head out with someone who's been trying to pin you down to an actual date for weeks. Putter around the kitchen, make your place your own again -- even if that just means rearranging the living room furniture -- and get to know the dog again.



LEO JULY 23-AUGUST 22

Even you, famously known to often be the most difficult of all signs to talk into staying home on the couch long enough for half a sitcom, can occasionally be impossible to pry out of your favourite chair. Yep, you guessed it. This is officially one of those nights. Don't apologise, don't make excuses and don't force yourself to make an appearance anywhere if you're not into it.



SAGITTARIUS NOVEMBER 22-DECEMBER 21

Staying in to watch whatever happens to be on television isn't your style. It's so not your style that when you even suggest it, your loved ones start hunting around for thermometers and your physician's home phone number. Of course, you definitely don't have either handy, so you'll have to rely on your skills of humour and reassurance to talk them off the ledge.



TAURUS APRIL 20-MAY 20

If anyone can calm someone down, whether or not you have any rational reasons to talk them off the ledge they're currently teetering on, it's you. Your voice has that certain soothing quality that hostage negotiators would pay big bucks for -- very big bucks. Use it now to help a loved one see that the way they're being treated isn't fair, it's not right.



VIRGO AUGUST 23-SEPTEMBER 22

Feel like cooking? Or maybe just some plain old puttering around? Or spending some impromptu time with a group of friends you haven't been able to arrange a catch-up session with? Well, here's a thought: How about a combination of the three? The heavens are in a splendidly sociable mood, and perfectly ready to pass it all on to us mere mortals.



CAPRICORN DECEMBER 22-JANUARY 19

It's time to make a decision -- to those gadgets off. You need some time with your loved ones, as they'll be happy to remind you, and anyone who gets in the way of those few precious hours alone they're so looking forward to. You've been 100 per cent available to your professional cohorts for so long that they're far more spoiled than even your sweetheart should be.



GEMINI MAY 21-JUNE 21

It's your turn to let all your emotions out, regardless of when they occur, how they occur, or who happens to be in the vicinity when said emotions emerge. This happens at least once a month, but when your turn rolls around, since expressing emotions are your specialty, you do it right. Whether you're happy, sad or angry now, do your job and set the example.



LIBRA SEPTEMBER 23-OCTOBER 22

There's absolutely no time like the present to have that sit-down with your superiors -- especially if you have something emotional on your mind that you've really got to let them know about. Sure, it's tough to combine the two -- business and personal feelings -- but if anyone can pull it off, is there any doubt at all that it's you? Oh, and if you start feeling just a touch cranky.



AQUARIUS JANUARY 20-FEBRUARY 18

You've considered your coworkers to be your 'other family,' so now, when one of them calls and asks for help, you'll be more than willing to do what you can. Remember one thing, though: It's called 'tough love.' In other words, if you've dug them out before and they still haven't done anything to help themselves in the meantime, it might be time to remind yourself of the definition of 'enabling.'



CANCER JUNE 22-JULY 22

When it comes to shopping, your usual M.O. is this: Decide exactly what you want; get yourself to the exact location where said item will undoubtedly be found, using a 'Point A to Point B' strategy; then lay hands on the item(s); and bring said items to the nearest available cash register, with both plastic and cash in hand, just in case.



SCORPIO OCTOBER 23-NOVEMBER 21

You're tired of the same old, same old. The routine. You're so tired of it that in the middle of your intense little heart, you're quite sure that if you don't do something to change it soon, you won't be any good to anyone. Not yourself, not your loved ones and certainly not the people who depend on your keen intuition and impeccable work skills to get them through the day.



PISCES FEBRUARY 19-MARCH 20

Are they gone yet? The 'gang,' that is? Great. Because if anyone knows what it takes to romance someone -- anyone at all -- it's definitely you, and it starts with some privacy. (That's for sure.) At the moment, you're probably going over the basics of all that in your mind, wondering exactly what it would take to make every single moment go along perfectly.



TEST YOUR KNOWLEDGE

1. The nickname of Glenn McGrath is...

- a. Ooh Ahh
b. Penguin
c. Big Bird
d. Pigeon

2. Mark Waugh is commonly called what?

- a. Afganistan
b. Junior
c. Tugga
d. Julio

3. India won its first Olympic hockey gold in...

- a. 1928
b. 1932
c. 1936
d. 1948

Answers: 1.d 2.b 3.a

KIDS COLOURING



DO YOU SUDOKU?

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



BOGGLER



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

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

SUDOKU EASY ANSWER



DAILY CROSSWORD ANSWERS (JULY 14)



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



INDOOR WORKOUT

Holiday EXERCISES

The holidays are on your doorstep. And with lockdowns, movement bans, and stay-home instructions becoming the order of the day, you might tend to let your fitness regimes go out of the window. Don't do that, as exercise helps you de-stress by keeping your mind fit along with your body. You don't have to avoid your favourite foods that will do the rounds during the festive season ahead, just focus on healthy eating and exercise to avoid holiday weight gain. Here are a few popular holiday exercises to do at home. All you need is a resistance band, which serves as an alternative to weights and are available in all hypermarkets and sports stores in Oman.



Upright row

- Place your feet in the center loops of the resistance band.
- Grab the end loops of the band, holding the end attached to your left leg in your left hand, and the end attached to your right leg in your right.
- Keeping your knees slightly bent, lift your hands straight up to your chin.
- Your hands should stay close to your body, with knuckles facing down.
- Return to the starting position, then repeat.



Woodchop

- Stand with feet shoulder width apart, knees slightly bent, and left side next to a low positioned, fixed band.
- Grasp the band at the left of your hips, with both hands and long arms.
- Rotate your torso and drive your arms diagonally upward and across your body, with your hands stopping on the right side of your head.
- Control back down to the start position.

Kickback and arm extension

- Place your feet in the center loops of the resistance band.
- Grab the end loops of the band.
- Bend forward slightly, and bring your arms to 90 degrees.
- Keep your right arm at your side, and fully extend your left arm forward, reaching towards the ceiling.
- While reaching forward, simultaneously kick back the opposite leg.
- Hold, then slowly return to start. Switch sides.



Bicep curls

- Place your feet in the center loops of the resistance band, and grab the end loops of the band.
- Stand with your feet shoulder-width apart and elbows at your sides, with your palms facing up.
- Bend your elbows and bring your hands all the way up to shoulder height. Be sure to keep your elbows tucked at your sides.
- Bring your arms all the way down, extending your elbows. Repeat by bringing your hands back up to shoulder height
- Continue the movement until the exercise is complete.



Pick up

- Place your feet in the center of loops of the resistance band, with feet shoulder width apart.
- Grab the end loops of the band and bring your hands to shoulder height (so that there is no slack)
- Keeping your elbows and back straight, bend forward from the hips with your knees straight. Be sure to bend at the hips, not back.
- Slowly return to an upright position against the tension of the band, then repeat.



Benefits of resistance bands

Resistance bands provide a different kind of workout. In addition to being as effective as more expensive equipment, resistance bands offer many unique perks:

- Bands work much like a cable machine, allowing you to keep constant tension on the muscle.
- You can perform the same exercises you do with free weights. The difference lies in positioning the band.
- Resistance bands allow you to change your positioning in multiple ways and create resistance from all directions—the side, overhead, behind, below, etc.
- They are inexpensive and don't take a lot of space, unlike other equipment.
- Depending on how you use them, bands can be great for beginners as well as more advanced exercisers.



Pogacar wins to extend lead

TOUR DE FRANCE

Saint-Lary-Soulan, France - Tadej Pogacar extended his lead by winning stage 17 of the Tour de France on Wednesday atop Pyrenean giant the Col du Portet, where he was followed over the line by Jonas Vingegaard and Richard Carapaz after the three played out an epic struggle.

Ecuadorian Carapaz launched a blistering attack 1.5km from the 2,200m summit finish, but was reeled in by Pogacar.

The Slovenian champion took his second victory on this Tour to extend his five-and-a-half minutes lead over the surprising Dane Vingegaard. Carapaz climbed to third overall after Rigobert Uran was

dropped on the hillside.

"It was the most difficult stage of the Tour, and I dedicate this win to my team who worked so hard for me here," said Pogacar.

On the French national holiday of Bastille Day, FDJ's French rider David Gaudu came fourth at a finish line above the clouds in this remote bear inhabited corner of France.

French team AG2R saw their Australian podium hope Ben O'Connor consolidate fifth overall as he rounded out the day's top five.

AG2R boss Vincent Lavenu said that the stage, with 36km of steep climbing on the final section, was a 'race for second place and that half the pretenders will be dropped here'.

It proved to be so, but Ineos man Carapaz, who looked to be struggling after the lead trio broke off from the pretenders 8km from home, kept fighting with his late but fruitless burst

One last mountaintop finish awaits the riders Thursday before Saturday's potentially decisive time-trial and Sunday's parade into Paris.

AFP

Team UAE Emirates' Tadej Pogacar of Slovenia wearing the overall leader's yellow jersey celebrates as he crosses the finish line at the end of the stage 17 of the 108th edition of the Tour de France cycling race, 178 km between Muret and Saint-Lary-Soulan, on Wednesday (AFP)



England fans cheer on their team outside Wembley Stadium ahead of the Euro final on July 11, 2021 (AFP)

UEFA opens probe into fan disturbances during final

Lausanne, Switzerland - UEFA has charged the English Football Association (FA) over fan disturbances during England's Euro 2020 final loss to Italy, European football's governing body announced on Tuesday.

An investigation into 'events involving supporters which occurred inside and around the stadium' will also be conducted, after fans without tickets managed to force their way into Wembley on Sunday.

Videos on social media also appeared to show England supporters fighting among each other in the stadium. The other two charges related to the final were for a pitch invasion during the game and

the 'throwing of objects' by supporters.

London's Metropolitan Police said it made 86 arrests and a total of 19 officers were injured while managing the final.

Stewards bribed, tickets forged: Press

England fans allegedly bribed stewards and forged tickets to enter London's Wembley Stadium for the Euro 2020 final, causing chaos that defender Harry Maguire said had left his father injured.

The Guardian newspaper on Wednesday quoted an anonymous fan as saying ticketless fans used the messaging app Telegram to share advice on

breaching security before and during Sunday's disturbances.

The report came as Maguire revealed his father suffered two suspected broken ribs and struggled to breathe after being caught up in the incident.

Alan Maguire, 56, and the Manchester United player's agent Kenneth Shepherd were trampled by unruly ticketless fans as they entered the stadium before the match between England and Italy.

"It was not a nice experience - it shook him up. It was scary. I don't want anyone to experience that at a football match," Maguire told British tabloid The Sun.

AFP

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BIRTHDAY WISHES

OMAR ALI ALBALUSHI
JULY 17

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Zahra, Mama and Abbu.

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Oman hockey official Munir selected for Tokyo Olympic Games

Ashok Purohit
Muscat

Oman Hockey Association (OHA) official Shakir Munir has been selected by the Asian Hockey Federation (AHF) to be the 'Team Analyst and COVID-19 Liaison Officer' for the hockey competition at the forthcoming Tokyo 2020 Olympic Games. Munir, who hails from Pakistan, is a long-serving official, and is currently OHA's coordinator of international relations.

A former Pakistan junior international, Munir played for Salalah giants, Al Nasr Club, as goalkeeper (2006-12) before becoming the national team's goalkeeping coach from 2013-2018. He began assisting OHA board in administration matters since 2014.

This is the first Olympic assignment for Munir, who has played a key role in administration when Oman hosted the AHF Congress in 2017 and when the Asian Champions Trophy was held in Muscat in 2018.

Munir's contribution in Oman's successful bid to host the inaugural FIH Hockey5s World Cup in 2024 was also praised by the OHA chairman, Talib al Wahaibi, recently.

In his remarks to *Muscat Daily* ahead of his departure to Japan, Munir said, "It is a great honour and privilege for me to be part of the Tokyo Olympic Games. It will be a great learning experience for me as a team analyst and CLO (COVID Liaison officer). I hope to benefit a lot with the exposure at the



world's biggest sporting event." The Tokyo Olympics will be held from July 23-August 8.

It is a great honour and privilege for me to be part of the Tokyo Olympic Games

SHAKIR MUNIR

The hockey competitions at the Olympic Games Tokyo 2020 will take place from July

24 to August 6. Both the men's and women's competitions feature 12 teams, split into two pools of six ahead of quarterfinals, semifinals and medal matches.

Two Omani officials Munir will join two other Omani officials at the Tokyo Games.

Abdulmonem al Alawi has been selected to be a referee for the open water competition by the world swimming body, FINA, and Shuaib al Zadjali will be one of the doping control of-

ficers at the Games. For Zadjali, this will be the fourth Olympics, having made his debut at the 2008 Beijing Games as a doping control officer (DCO). He was also a DCO in London (2012) and Rio (2016) and also been an anti-doping official at the Asian Games since 2006. Shuaib also worked as a DCO at the 2018 FIFA World Cup in Russia.

For Alawi, who is a member of the FINA Open Water Technical Bureau, this is his second Olympics after 2016 Rio.

@ashokmuscat

Wimbledon: 2 matches probed over irregular betting patterns

London, UK - Two matches at this year's Wimbledon are being investigated by the International Tennis Integrity Agency (ITIA) over potential irregular betting patterns. The ITIA, which is responsible for safeguarding the integrity of professional tennis worldwide, received two alerts from the betting industry during the grass-court Grand Slam in south London.

The matches were reported by German newspaper *Die Welt* to be an early-round singles tie and a men's doubles contest. On the singles match, a five-figure sum was reportedly placed at the end of the second set on the exact result.

During the doubles match, a winning bet was placed as the favourites, who eventually lost, took the first set.

Alerts can be for match-fixing, but also incorrect odds-setting, well-informed betting, player fitness, fatigue or form as well as playing conditions and personal circumstances.

"Any alert reported to the ITIA is recorded, assessed and followed up as an indicator that

something inappropriate may have happened," an ITIA spokesman said.

"It is important to note that an alert on its own is not evidence of match-fixing. Where analysis of a match alert does suggest corrupt activity, the ITIA conducts a full and confidential investigation."

The ITIA said it was not able to provide more details on the matches being investigated.

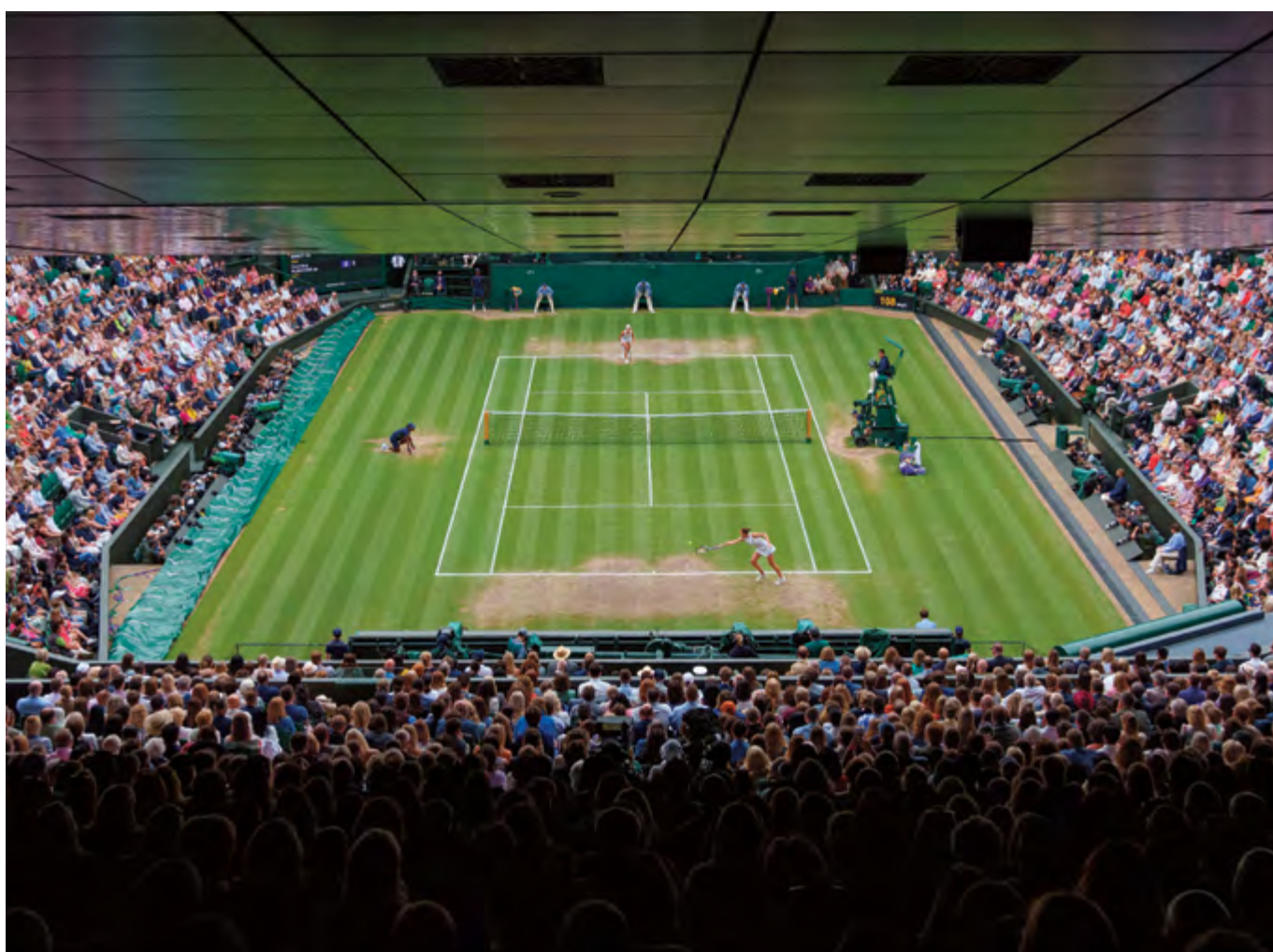
"The integrity of the sport is of the utmost importance to everyone at Wimbledon," an All England Club spokesperson said.

"We continue to invest in additional measures to support the integrity operation onsite during the Championships and we work closely with the ITIA both at the Championships and throughout the year."

The ITIA banned Argentina's Franco Feitt for life in April after he admitted nine incidents of match-fixing over a four-year period.

No alerts occurred at the French Open this year or at the Australian Open in February.

AFP



A file photo of a women's singles match being played at the 2021 Wimbledon Championships



Thomas Bach, IOC president

IOC chief vows to minimise virus risk

Tokyo, Japan - Olympics chief Thomas Bach pledged on Wednesday 'not to bring any risk' to Japan with the Games, seeking to reassure a sceptical public as virus cases surge just over a week before Tokyo 2020 begins.

Fans have been banned from Olympic events in the capital, which is under emergency restrictions to curb rising infection numbers that on Wednesday hit highs not seen since January.

As more athletes arrive in Japan and move into the Olympic Village, International Olympic Committee (IOC) chief Bach promised a safe summer Games. "We are making all our efforts and the Japanese people have all our commitment to contribute in the best way to fight this virus and not to bring any risk to the Japanese people," Bach told reporters after meeting Prime Minister Yoshihide Suga.

Bach said "85 per cent of all the residents in the Olympic Village and almost 100 per cent of the IOC members and staff coming here to Tokyo arrive vaccinated."

"This is why I'd like to humbly ask the Japanese people to warmly welcome the athletes from all around the world who have overcome, like the Japanese people, so many challenges."

On Wednesday there were 1,149 new cases recorded in Tokyo, the highest since January 22.

Organisers announced the decision to ban spectators from all but a tiny number of Olympic events last week, following repeated warnings from experts about the risk of crowds gathering as infections rise.

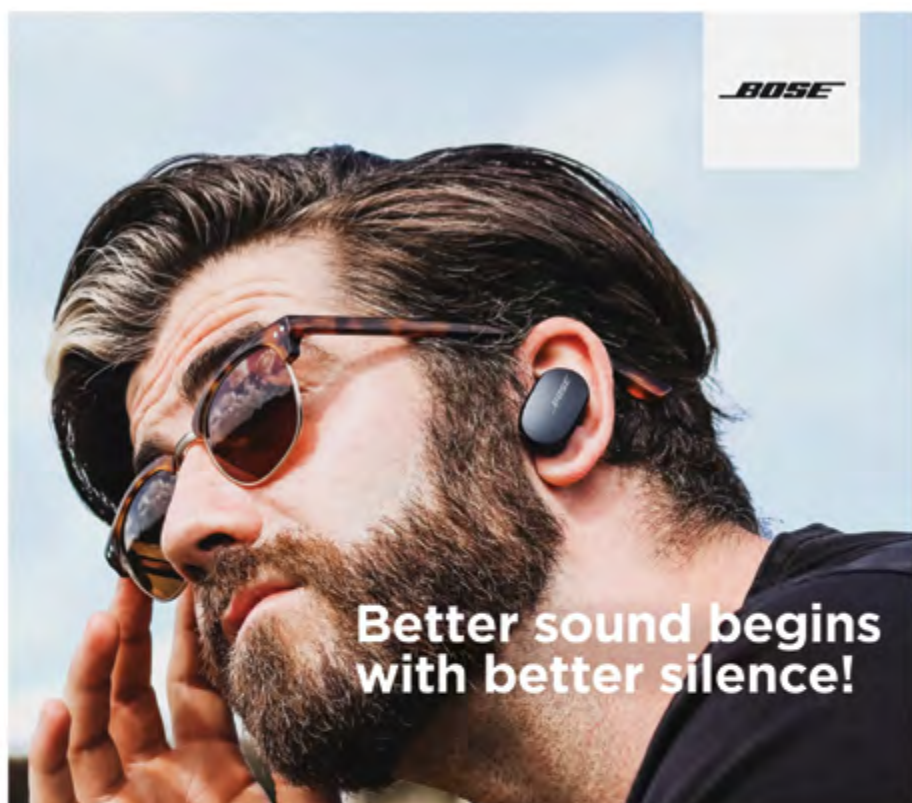
Meanwhile, the US softball team moved into the Olympic Village on Wednesday, local media said, the day after the compound opened without any of the welcome ceremonies or media opportunities often seen at the Games.

But the arrival of the Refugee Olympic team was delayed after an official tested positive in Doha, the IOC said. All the team's athletes tested negative.

The team is made up of displaced athletes living in 14 countries around the world.

Some 56 athletes were supported by IOC scholarships, of which 29 were chosen to compete in Japan. The selection criteria was based on sporting performance and their refugee status being confirmed by the UN Refugee Agency.

AFP



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Vince trumps Azam as England sweep series



England's James Vince plays a shot during his knock of 103 against Pakistan in the third ODI match at Edgbaston, UK, on Tuesday

ENGLAND VS PAKISTAN THIRD ODI

Birmingham, UK - James Vince hit a maiden one-day international (ODI) century and Lewis Gregory made 77 as a new-look England beat Pakistan by three wickets at Edgbaston on Tuesday to complete a remarkable 3-0 series clean sweep.

Set a challenging 332 to win 50-over world champions England, without most of their first-choice players because of a pre-series COVID-19 outbreak, were faltering at 165 for five. But

a stand of 129 between Vince, who made 102, and Gregory turned the tide. Pakistan paceman Haris Rauf removed both batsmen in quick succession on his way to four for 65.

But England, to the delight of most of a sun-drenched crowd of 19,500, won with two overs to spare when Brydon Carse, who had earlier taken five wickets, drove Shaheen Shah Afridi for four. "It's pleasing to make a contribution, this time last week I didn't expect to get this opportunity," said Vince, the player of

the match. "I'm delighted."

Earlier, Pakistan captain Babar Azam returned to form with a superb ODI best 158 during the tourists' 331 for nine. Together with Mohammad Rizwan (74) he shared a partnership of 179 - the highest for any Pakistan wicket against England in an ODI - after opener Imam-ul-Haq had made 56. But from 292 for two, Pakistan, significantly, lost seven wickets for 37 runs.

Fast bowler Carse checked Pakistan's progress with five for 61, his maiden five-wicket haul at

this level. "The boys' efforts, not just today but throughout the series, the guys who have turned out, has been fantastic," said England stand-in captain Ben Stokes.

"It has been a tough week, but we've managed to pull through."

Meanwhile, a disappointed Azam said: "We started well but we were sloppy in the field. "We will learn from our mistakes and hopefully not repeat them," he added ahead of a three-match T20 series against England.

Azam's highest score at this

SCOREBOARD		
PAKISTAN		
Imam-ul-Haq	b Parkinson	56
F Zaman	c Crawley b Mahmood	6
B Azam	c Malan b Carse	158
M Rizwan	c Simpson b Carse	74
S Maqsood	c Vince b Carse	8
H Ali	c Crawley b Carse	4
F Ashraf	b Mahmood	10
S Khan	c Simpson b Mahmood	0
S Shakeel	not out	3
S Afridi	c Vince b Carse	0
H Rauf	not out	0
Extras:	(lb 3, w 9)	12
TOTAL: 331 for nine in 50 overs		
Fall of wickets: 1-21, 2-113, 3-292, 4-305, 5-309, 6-324, 7-324, 8-328, 9-329		
Bowling: S Mahmood 10-2-60-3, L Gregory 7-0-42-0, C Overton 10-0-64-0, B Carse 10-0-61-5, B Stokes 4-0-31-0, M Parkinson 9-0-70-1		
ENGLAND		
P Salt	c Zaman b Rauf	37
D Malan	c Rizwan b Ali	0
Z Crawley	b Rauf	39
J Vince	c Azam b Rauf	102
B Stokes	c Rizwan b Khan	32
J Simpson	lbw b Khan	3
L Gregory	c Khan b Rauf	77
C Overton	not out	18
B Carse	not out	12
Extras:	(lb 5, w 7)	12
TOTAL: 332 for seven in 48 overs		
Fall of wickets: 1-19, 2-53, 3-104, 4-151, 5-165, 6-294, 7-303		
Bowling: S Afridi 10-0-78-0, H Ali 9-0-69-1, H Rauf 9-0-65-4, F Ashraf 6-0-34-0, S Khan 10-0-61-2, S Shakeel 4-0-20-0		

Morgan returns to lead England

ENGLAND VS PAKISTAN T20I SERIES

Birmingham, UK - Eoin Morgan has been cleared to lead England in an upcoming Twenty20 series against Pakistan it was announced on Wednesday after he missed their ODI clean sweep following a COVID-19 outbreak within the hosts' camp.

The three T20Is will be played on July 16, 18 and 20.

Only four of the England players involved in ODI success have been retained for the three T20s against Pakistan, with James Vince omitted.

Saqib Mahmood, Lewis Gregory and Matt Parkinson have all been included in a 16-man squad after starring in the ODIs, with T20 regular Dawid Malan keeping his place. Jos Buttler has also been included following a calf injury.



Eoin Morgan

Ben Stokes, however, has been rested ahead of a five-match Test series at home to India starting in August.

Squad: Eoin Morgan (capt), Moeen Ali, Jonny Bairstow, Jake Ball, Tom Banton, Jos Buttler (wk), Tom Curran, Lewis Gregory, Chris Jordan, Liam Livingstone, Saqib Mahmood, Dawid Malan, Matt Parkinson, Adil Rashid, Jason Roy, David Willey.

AFF

Equal points system for next WTC: ICC

New Delhi, India - The International Cricket Council (ICC) on Wednesday said the next World Test Championship (WTC) will have a 'simpler' equal points system to decide the finalists after the previous system came under criticism.

The second championship will kick off with a five-Test series between hosts England and India in August and September. The ICC switched from the original system of total points to percentage of points won midway through the first championship which was severely disrupted by the

coronavirus pandemic. Each match will now earn 12 points for a win, four for a draw and six for a tie, the ICC said in a statement. The top nine Test nations will play six series each, three home and three away before March 31, 2023.

"We received feedback that the previous points system needed to be simplified," ICC chief executive Geoff Allardice said. "The Cricket Committee took this into consideration when proposing a new, standardised points system for each match."

AFF

Hundred hero Balbirnie stars as Ireland stun South Africa

IRELAND VS SOUTH AFRICA ODI SERIES

Dublin, Ireland - Ireland captain Andy Balbirnie led from the front with a hundred as his side beat South Africa for the first time in a one-day international (ODI) with a 43-run success at Malahide on Tuesday.

Balbirnie's 102, his seventh hundred at this level, was the centrepiece of Ireland's 290 for five.

South Africa could only manage 247 all out in reply as the hosts took an unassailable 1-0 lead in a series reduced to two matches following Sunday's washout, although the Proteas can square the campaign by winning on Friday.

Ireland's victory also gave them ten points in the World Cup Super League, which will qualify teams for the 2023 50-over showpiece in India.

Ireland white-ball wins over established Test nations, once restricted to World Cups, are no longer the shocks of old with Tuesday's triumph following a defeat of England in Southampton last year.



Ireland skipper Andy Balbirnie celebrates after reaching his century against South Africa on Tuesday

Balbirnie, opening the innings, batted until the 42nd over before Harry Tector added impetus with a dashing 79 off 68 balls, which included six fours and four sixes.

Tector and George Dockrell (45) boosted the total with a fourth-wicket stand of 90.

South Africa did not help themselves by dropping four catches, with Balbirnie reprieved on 74.

They also rested star batsman Quinton de Kock for a second successive match and left out fast bowler Lungi Ngidi.

Janneman Malan (84) and Rassie van der Dussen (49) shared a 108-run stand but the Proteas' innings fell away after the pair were dismissed within eight balls of each other.

It was the only the fourth time Ireland have beaten a team in the top-five after their victory over

Pakistan in the 2007 World Cup and England in 2011 and last year.

"We've beaten big teams before but we haven't beaten them consistently. We don't have the players these teams have, we don't have the infrastructure or the exposure. A lot of the South African team have played in the IPL. We don't get that," Balbirnie said.

"So what we do, when we do play these big teams, we get the

most of out of these games and we try to put in our best performance. We are thrilled and beating them once off is great but winning a series at the end of the week will be so important, because it shows we're making strides."

Balbirnie expects South Africa to go back to what they think their strongest XI is for Friday's finale and wants his own team to keep the foot on their gas as they hunt a series win.

"We've played really good cricket over the last two games so it will be disappointing if we drop our standards for the last game. They have just come off a tour of West Indies so they are looking to rest people and rotate people but when we get opportunities to play these teams we want to come out all guns blazing and hopefully turn them over."

BRIEF SCORES:
Ireland 290 for five in 50 overs (A Balbirnie 102, H Tector 79) beat South Africa 247 in 48.3 overs (J Malan 84).

AFF

Every day, all day!



One of the top Test-playing nations likely to hold a preparatory camp in Oman ahead of T20 World Cup

Oman Cricket chairman Pankaj Khimji confident that the sultanate will become a sought-after cricketing venue in near future



A file photo of His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tariq (second from right), the then Minister of Heritage and Culture, during the inauguration of the Oman Cricket Academy in November, 2018

Ashok Purohit
Muscat

His mobile phone rings endlessly. Suggestions and instructions are delivered on the phone throughout the day. One meeting follows another and he hardly breaks a sweat despite the searing summer heat in Muscat. Amid all the meetings and hectic calls, there is glint in his eyes and smile on his face at the mention of the ICC Men's T20 World Cup Qualifiers being awarded to Oman.

And why not! Being chairman of Oman Cricket (OC), Pankaj Khimji has been the force behind the success of the game in the sultanate and has played a pivotal role in the latest Bradmanesque achievement of the OC. Hosting the T20 World Cup Qualifiers, which are scheduled to start on October 17, by an Associate nation along with fellow Associate, UAE, is expected to catapult Oman into a different orbit of cricketing destinations and Pankaj seems determined to make the most of it.

In a wide-ranging interview with *Muscat Daily*, Pankaj spoke of the joy of T20 World Cup coming to Oman and revealed that a top Test-playing nation is likely to come to Oman for a preparatory camp ahead of the T20 World Cup.

"We want Oman to become a top cricketing destination. That is our long-term ambition and we are now on the right path to achieve it," he said.

While the recent developments of cricket in Oman has been encouraging to say the least, the strong support the game has received from His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tariq, who has been OC's patron-in-chief, and the previous OC chairman and Pankaj's father, the Late Kanak Khimji, laid the 'foundation of where we have reached today'.

The idea and how it materialised
According to Pankaj, it was not too long back when the thought of hosting a 'TV tournament' came to his mind. "We have been hosting T20Is and even ODIs as part of the World Cricket League over the past

couple of years. But it was the Oman Cricket Academy Ground accreditation as a Test venue by the ICC this January that changed my thinking," said Pankaj.

"I decided that it was time to go big. When the next IPL [Indian Premier League] was going to be played in the region, I would try to get four-five games to Oman.

"The idea was to get a live TV telecast international game to Oman. Unfortunately, the proposed Zimbabwe- Afghanistan Test did not materialise and I started to plan ahead. However, in June when International Cricket Council (ICC) officials

and the our stars all got together for Oman to stage the event and take us at the next level."

HM's support a blessing

Pankaj's love for the game began in the early 80s as a student in London. The long drives from Muscat to Sharjah to see the games on the dusty grounds from a hospitality box, bought by his father, were the earliest memories followed by India's historic World Cup triumph in 1983 watched on a TV set despite staying walking distance from Lord's.

"In fact, I met the Indian team

and ACC affiliation in 2000."

Pankaj said, "All through the early years of Oman Cricket, His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tariq gave us the needed support. I was with him at Lord's to watch the historic win of India against England in the NatWest Trophy final in July 2002.

"After watching the thriller, I remember him saying that cricket needs to grow in Oman."

It was in 2004, when Dr Ali bin Masoud al Sunaidy took over as Minister of Sports Affairs that he announced that Oman Cricket will get government recognition. "It paved the way for the land to be allotted where the Oman

after cricketing destinations for the top teams," said Pankaj. "We would like to position ourselves as one of the destinations for the developed nations [Test-playing sides] in the future. Hosting the T20 World Cup Qualifiers has set the ball rolling for us.

"As for the various upgrades needed for the T20 World Cup, we have already handed over the orders for the necessary work - upgrade of floodlights, dressing rooms, electronic scoreboards, temporary seating arrangements and hospitality boxes."

Pankaj said he isn't in favour of a permanent stadium at the existing facility and would be happier with temporary seating arrangements for spectators between 3,000-5,000. "With the Al Hajar mountains in the backdrop behind the Oman Cricket Academy Ground, we could also opt for grass mounds in the future at Amerat, a typical cricket ground more suited to families sitting together."

Oman to be shown to the world

The biggest benefit of the T20 World Cup Qualifiers, Pankaj believes will be the massive coverage of the event with live telecast and virtual platforms reaching an audience upwards of 3.5bn people across the world.

"What's most important of all that is Oman is shown to the world, not just Oman Cricket. We are already in close talks with the Ministry of Heritage and Tourism to showcase Oman through the cricket coverage during the T20 World Cup Qualifiers. We already have a lot of interest from media persons from the Indian subcontinent," he said.

Team's success the biggest pride

Pankaj said that the success of the national team since 2005 when Oman managed to reach a World Cup Qualifier for the first time - despite having no grass pitch or ground - is a true reflection of the board's commitment towards the game.

"My father always believed that one has to prove on the pitch and his concern for the wellbeing of the players and the team was something I learnt a lot from over the years," said Pankaj.



BCCI president Sourav Ganguly (L) and BCCI secretary Jay Shah

BCCI chief Ganguly, Shah to visit Muscat

Muscat - Board of Control for Cricket in India (BCCI) president Sourav Ganguly and BCCI secretary Jay Shah are due to arrive in Muscat on Friday. The BCCI officials along with ICC officials from Dubai, UAE, are expected to sign an agreement with Oman Cricket for the hosting of the ICC T20 World Cup Qualifiers in Muscat in October.

Shah, who is also the Asian Cricket Council (ACC) president, played a key role in Oman being awarded the rights to co-host the T20 World Cup, according to OC chairman and ACC vice-president Pankaj Khimji.

Officials from the ICC are already in Muscat to inspect the preparations for the T20 World Cup.

For his dedication and love for the game, the Late Kanak Khimji was presented with a Lifetime Service award by the ICC in 2011.

Things changed dramatically when Oman's first grass pitch and ground at Amerat came up in 2012. Since then, the national team has been on an upswing with coach Duleep Mendis joining in 2013.

"Qualification to the T20 World Cup in 2016 in India was another big turning point and our stunning win over Ireland at Dharamshala in the Qualifiers brought lot of attention."

Pankaj said, "I remember Papa [Kanak Khimji] wanted to be in the dugout at the ground in Dharamshala. However, officials said that non-playing team officials can't be in the team dugout.

"It was a big dilemma for me as I knew he was so passionate. But I was the mentor and team official and he gave me the badge to stay. It was then I realised that he is handing over the baton to me to run OC and the team. He then was more of a guardian and guide to us, always pushing me to take the lead till he passed

away. In fact, we had made all plans for the T20 World Cup in Australia before it was cancelled last year."

As for the number of games of the Qualifiers yet to be finalised, Pankaj said, "I am hopeful that we've all sat down, we'll know if we have six games, eight, 12 or whatever it is."

Being a host country and also playing the T20 World Cup is what stands out for Oman and this honour is unique and rare. "We are the only Associate nation to host and play a T20 World Cup. This is the biggest achievement in itself and we are now going to make sure that the World Cup is hosted in such a grand manner that Oman becomes a much sought cricketing destination for teams across the world. We will make that happen," he said as he signed off.

@ashokmuscat

All through the early years of Oman Cricket, His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tariq gave us the needed support. I was with him at Lord's to watch the historic win of India against England in the NatWest Trophy final in July 2002

PANKAJ KHIMJI,
OC CHAIRMAN

met and there was talk of a possible switch from India, the original 2021 T20 World Cup host, that I saw an opening for us.

"With my election as vice-president of Asian Cricket Council (ACC) and Board of Control for Cricket in India (BCCI) secretary Jay Shah as ACC chairman, we started getting along well.

"We share the same roots from Gujarat in India and it definitely worked. So when BCCI was planning to shift the T20 World Cup to the UAE, I pitched in Oman as an option for the fourth venue. UAE have three grounds in Sharjah, Dubai and Abu Dhabi but the fourth ground with an ICC accreditation was our venue.

"And here we are. I guess my relationship with the BCCI bosses

a day before the final at St James' Hotel where there was a reception for the players," recollected Pankaj on his association with World Cup.

He added, "It was my Papa's passion for the game that got me closer to him and the game in the 80s. But it was only in 1999 that I watched a World Cup game on the ground with my family. It was the famous World Cup semifinal between Australia and South Africa at Birmingham. Since that World Cup game, there has been no looking back.

"The proximity of my father to former BCCI chiefs Raj Singh Dunga and NKP Salve was another big reason for me to get into cricket administration. I was inspired by those stalwarts and Oman owe a lot to Raj Singh as he was key to us getting ICC

Cricket Academy Ground is today. We are forever indebted to His Majesty the Sultan and Dr Sunaidy for the allotment that has brought us so far.

The Oman Cricket Academy was inaugurated in November, 2018, by OC's patron-in-chief and the then Minister of Heritage and Culture. "His Majesty the Sultan has been involved with the game for long and there have been a few memorable occasions when we have watched games together at Lord's in London, including the 2019 World Cup final from the Royal Box."

Looking ahead with high hopes

"We are delighted to host the T20 World Cup but we are looking ahead. The aim is to make Oman one of the sought-



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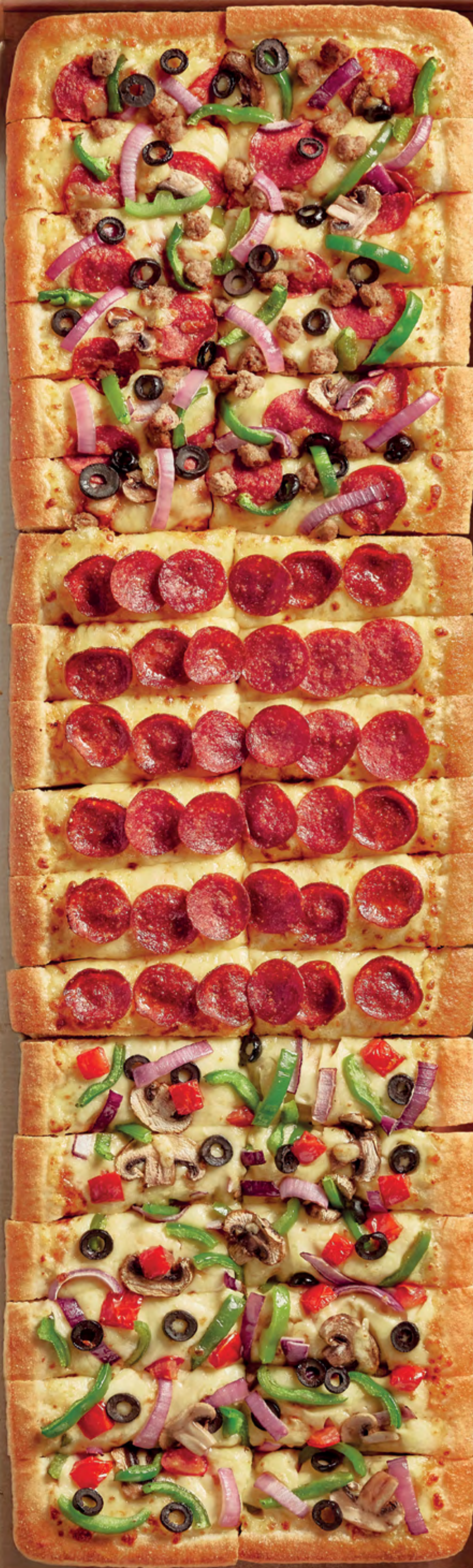
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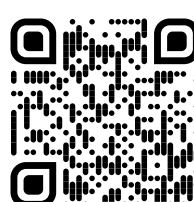
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