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Mazoon all set for second Olympics

Oman's Tokyo Games squad to comprise five athletes in four disciplines

Ashok Purohit
Muscat

It was in 2008 at the Beijing Games that Oman entered a woman athlete for the first time. The representation of women continued at the next two Olympics - London 2012 and Rio de Janeiro 2016.

However, there were serious doubts that the forthcoming Tokyo Games, which begin on July 23, would feature a woman athlete as the initial Oman Olympic Committee (OOC) squad only had four men athletes on board.

In a late push by OOC, Oman managed to get the fifth invitation from International Olympic Committee (IOC) and the sultanate's fastest woman sprinter, Mazoon al Alawi, was included in the squad for her second successive participation in the Olympics.

As reported earlier by Muscat Daily, 23-year-old swimmer Issa al Adawi in his very first Olympics will be the sultanate's flag-bearer at the opening ceremony.

Continued on Page 02



(File photo)

Blood donation allowed during lockdown

Our Correspondent
Muscat

In view of the urgent need to continue blood donations, those wishing to donate will be permitted to visit the Central Blood Bank in Bausher during the movement ban, according to the Ministry of Health (MoH).

'To facilitate blood donors, coordination has been made between the MoH and the competent authorities to allow donors to go to blood banks during the movement ban. Donors will be granted temporary permits,' an MoH statement said.

The procedure to obtain a permit to donate blood at the blood bank in Bausher will involve donors booking an appointment two days before the due date by sending the word 'permit' via WhatsApp on 94555648.



(Image for illustrative purpose)

After the appointment is confirmed, a copy of the permit will be sent via WhatsApp. 'The donor will receive another permit from the blood bank after the donation,' the statement said.

Those interested can donate blood from Saturday to Thursday from 8am to 8 pm, and on Friday

from 3pm to 8pm, at the Central Blood Bank. It will be closed on the first day of Eid al Adha.

Blood banks in Oman need about 5,000 units of blood per month, while the Central Blood Bank in Bausher needs 100-120 donors a day to meet the requirements of health institutions.

COVID-19 cases drop below 1,000

Muscat - The number of daily COVID-19 cases dropped to lower than 1,000 on Tuesday, easing pressure on over-stretched hospitals and bringing a glimmer of hope even before the implementation of stricter restrictions announced ahead of the Eid holidays.

The total number of cases registered in the sultanate has now reached 287,054, including 3,472 deaths.

The Ministry of Health announced 982 new cases in the last 24 hours, a drop from 1,167 on Monday.

However, the number of daily deaths rose again, to 37 on Tuesday.

MHT completes documenting 128-year-old wreckage off Mirbat

Records show 'Kiva' sank off Mirbat in 1893 after setting sail from Mumbai to Mecca

Our Correspondent
Muscat

The Ministry of Heritage and Tourism (MHT) has completed survey and exploration work of a 128-year-old shipwreck off the coast of Mirbat in Dhofar governorate. The ship called Kiva set sail from Bombay (now Mumbai), India, to Mecca, Saudi Arabia, with close to a thousand passengers on board in 1893 when it sank.

Divers photographed the wreckage site for over a month documenting this marine heritage. The ministry considers this documentation one of the most important and first projects undertaken this year.

Noting the importance of discovering the wreckage of the sunken ship, Ayoub bin Nageh



(Supplied photo)

moush al Busaidi, Director of Maritime Archeology, said it represents a key aspect of Omani marine heritage.

'Records show that the ship sank in the waters of Mirbat during its journey from Bombay to Mecca with 979 pilgrims - 760 men, 169 women and 22 children,' the ministry stated.

It is believed that a fire broke out in the ship's storage area. 'The crew failed to contain the fire and it spread through the ship and engulfed it. The captain and his crew sailed quickly to dock at the nearest safe spot and the closest port was Mirbat,'

MHT stated.

Residents of Mirbat rallied to rescue the passengers ashore before flames engulfed the ship. Kiva burnt all night before sinking 300m from the beach.

In his memoir, the captain of the ship wrote about the role of the governor of Mirbat who provided a ship to transport the captain and some of his crewmembers to Muscat to communicate with the British Consul. The consul then approached Sultan Faisal bin Turki bin Said, who ordered the provision of a ship to transport the stranded passengers.

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'GCC cooperation: We need to work with more focus than before'

H E Sayyid Badr bin Hamoud al Busaidi, Foreign Minister, spoke to *Asharq al Awsat* newspaper, an Arabic international newspaper headquartered in London, recently about the relations between Oman and Saudi Arabia. *Excerpts:*

What are the most prominent political issues in the region for which the sultanate coordinates with the kingdom to find common solutions?

There are many issues but I will single out the Yemeni issue, which is of great interest, whether at the Yemeni level itself or at the regional and international levels. We are working tirelessly and continuously to stop the suffering of the brotherly Yemeni people, stop the on-going war, and help as much as possible to achieve peace and stability for this country with which we share a border, religion, language and many cultural and social ties.

The Alula summit held in Saudi Arabia in January witnessed Gulf reconciliation. What was Oman's role in establishing rec-

onciliation, supporting joint Gulf action, and following up on the results of the summit?

The Omani role focused, since the beginning, in supporting the Kuwaiti mediation, which was led by the late Emir of Kuwait Sheikh Sabah al Ahmad al Sabah, and completed by Sheikh Nawaf al Ahmad al Sabah. We are now working with the foreign ministers of the Gulf Cooperation Council and its secretary general to follow up on the results of the summit held in Alula to support the various tracks of Gulf cooperation, as stipulated in the decisions and directives of our leaders, in the service of the people of the GCC countries and their future.

What is the significance of consolidating joint Gulf cooperation, especially in the economic field, as countries suffer from the effects of the decline in oil prices and the COVID-19 pandemic?

The extent of the economic effects of both the pandemic and decline in oil prices is clear to everyone. It necessitates that we now work with more focus than in the past, within the framework



H E Sayyid Badr bin Hamoud al Busaidi

of one Gulf system, and work together to address this crisis. The process is never easy. It may require all of us to review and update some mechanisms, policies and priorities, some perhaps harmful and some beneficial. But we are confident in the ability of the governments and peoples of our countries to overcome these difficulties and challenges and

come out of them stronger, more determined to succeed.

What prospects do you see for joint economic cooperation between the two countries?

The prospects for cooperation are great and hold many opportunities for partnership and serious feasible investment in a number of areas. I believe that

the logistics sector will be considered one of the most important areas of cooperation and partnership, especially in light of the soon expected historic opening of the first direct land border crossing between the two countries and the promising projects and integrative infrastructure that will follow. I expect that the coming period will witness important movement at public and private sector levels benefiting from the kingdom's Vision 2030 and Oman's Vision 2040. There will be benefits from the areas of convergence and integration between these two visions, besides the advantages of the two neighbouring geographical locations, the inter-connected markets between the two countries, and their extensive network of regional and global relations.

The two countries have established an Omani-Saudi Coordination Council. What does it add to the joint cooperation between the two countries?

It is very natural for there to be a council similar to what exists between the kingdom and the GCC countries, and this in itself will

provide the umbrella and reference body that frames the next phase of cooperation between us. Many agreements and memoranda of understanding are expected to be signed in several sectors to support areas of common interest and benefit.

What steps are being taken by the sultanate to bring the conflicting parties in Yemen to the negotiating table and settle the crisis there?

We believe that all parties want to settle the crisis and want peace. We are working to help achieve this by trying to bring the viewpoints and perspectives closer and to settle all differences between them.

With the change in the US administration, the arrival of a new president in Iran and possible return to a nuclear agreement, do you expect a change in Iranian behaviour towards the countries of the region?

All behaviour is subject to change and development if the convictions and political will to do so through dialogue and understanding are there collectively

and reciprocally. We feel that these convictions and political will are now growing in the interests of regional security and stability.

Is the sultanate leading efforts for a regional dialogue with Tehran?

No, we do not lead any such efforts. Any regional dialogue must stem from the countries of the region themselves. We support and encourage it for the benefit and interests of all our nations.

Is Oman taking steps towards being the third Gulf country to normalise relations with Israel?

Oman believes in the principle of achieving a just, comprehensive and lasting peace on the basis of the two-state solution, and this is the only option that the Arab Peace Initiative and international legitimacy affirm.

We will not be the third Gulf state to normalise ties; we support the legitimate rights of the Palestinian people and we respect the sovereign decisions of states, just as we expect others to respect our sovereign decisions.

Mazoon all set for second Olympics

Continued from Page 01

Besides Mazoon and Adawi, the other Omani athletes in Tokyo will be star sprinter Barakat al Harthi, experienced shooter Hamed al Khatri and weightlifter Amer al Khanjari, who will also debut at these Games.

OOO pushed for Mazoon's inclusion in an effort to ensure gender parity, as 'we are always keen to have a woman representative,' according to Taha al Kishry, secretary general of OOO.

Oman's first woman Olympian was Buthaina al Yaqoubi, who took part in the 100m race in Beijing 2008.

Four years later in London, yet another sprinter, Shnoona al Habsi represented Oman in the same event.

Mazoon made her debut at the Rio Games in 2016 along with fellow women shooter Wadha al Balushi (10m air pistol event).

Besides Mazoon, the Tokyo Games are the second successive Olympics appearance for Harthi and Khatri, too.

At the Rio Games, Mazoon progressed from the preliminary round with a time of 12.30s to the second round heats, where she clocked 12.43s and bow out.

The 23-year-old has since improved her timing and clocked a new national record and career-best of 11.84s in the 100m race at an athletics meet in Antalya,

Turkey, in April. Her previous best was 11.85s at the Arab Athletics Championship 2017 held in Rades, Tunisia.

Mazoon has also participated in the GCC Women's Games 2019, IAAF World Indoor Championships 2018, Islamic Solidarity Games 2017, Asian Indoor Championships 2016, Nanjing Youth Olympic Games and Asian Games 2014.

All five on invitation

Oman's sportspersons will take part in four sports with all five athletes failing to meet the qualifying mark in their respective events. The five were selected based on their recent performances.

Swimmer Adawi will compete in the 100m freestyle, Mazoon and Harthi in the women's and men's 100m races respectively, weightlifter Khanjari in the 81kg category and shooter Khatri in 50m rifle three positions.

On Tuesday, OOO chairman Sayyid Khalid al Busaidi, secretary general Kishry and Oman's chef-de-mission Kazim al Balushi met the athletes and urged them to put in their best effort at the world's greatest spectacle.

Oman's delegation will also include two non-playing officials - Shuaib al Zadjali, antidoping official, and Abdulmoneim al Alawi, FINA open water referee.

@ashokmuscat

Volunteer organisation launched to make Oman's youth global thinkers

Muscat - A volunteer organisation called 'Glocal Volunteers' that aims to bridge the gap between Omani youth and the world was launched on Monday.

Its two founding members Dr Laila al Kharusi, chairperson, and Mohammed al Touqi, vice chairman, conceived the organisation with the idea of Omani youth becoming global thinkers by volunteering in the sultanate and abroad.

Hon Lujaina Mohsin Darwish - patron of Glocal Volunteers, said, "Voluntary work stems from the core of our true Islamic belief. The Almighty called us in His Book to cooperate for the good and benefit of society in general. There is no doubt that with the cooperation of all, Glocal Volunteers will advance the thinking of our Omani youth and their methods of work to a global level, and promote a culture of compassion for others."

Introducing the idea and con-



cept behind Glocal Volunteers, Dr Laila informed that they envision changing the thinking of Omani youth. Volunteering locally and globally make youth more empathetic, open-minded and innovative individuals.

"Our aim is that our volunteers will take this new mindset acquired in the first level along

with them to the next stage where they can engage with society in an impactful and meaningful way," Dr Laila said.

"We have six programmes which are tailored in a way to incorporate most of the aspects of social development. The volunteers will come out of the programmes with a genuine

difference, not just a certificate. The programmes are of a minimum duration of 62 days. This is based on research which shows that to truly change someone's thoughts and behaviour, you need 62 days," she elaborated.

"Each of our board members is programme director of one Glocal Volunteer programme.

This allows us to work together efficiently as a team and ensure success in reaching our aim and vision." Participants will emerge with an 'impactful mindset' from the programmes to engage with communities anywhere in the world and make a substantial difference.

Photo and text by Syed Fasiuddin



(Muscat Daily)

Traffic diversion at Al Khuwayr flyover

Muscat - Diversion of traffic on Sultan Qaboos Street after the Al Khuwayr flyover started on Tuesday evening.

In a statement, Muscat Municipality said, 'Under a project to construct surface water drainage channels at the Sultan

Qaboos Street in Al Khuwayr, there will be temporary diversion for traffic coming from Ruwi towards Seeb.'

The municipality said in cooperation with Royal Oman Police, it would open a 1.5km long temporary three-lane stretch

for the main street after Al Khuwayr flyover for smooth flow of traffic.

'The diversion will continue until the project is completed. Be cautious and observe all posted detours,' the municipality's statement added.




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Dhofar Municipality recently felicitated Aqeel ba Omar who picked up waste from Al Haffa beach (Supplied photo)

Campaign in Dhofar honours people helping keep city clean

Our Correspondent
Muscat

As part of its efforts to spread awareness on the importance of cleaning public places and preserving the beauty of Dhofar governorate, Dhofar Municipality has launched a campaign titled 'We are all responsible'.

Speaking to *Muscat Daily*, an official in Dhofar Municipality said, "The municipality launched

the campaign on July 10. It draws the attention of the community members not to leave waste in public places. We urge individuals and volunteer teams to participate in this campaign."

Under the campaign, a hashtag bearing the name of a person or a volunteer team who participated in cleaning a place in the governorate will be launched every week.

The hashtag for the week

from July 10 to 16 is #Thank you Aqeel ba Omar.

Aqeel ba Omar was photographed recently by Abdul Rahman al Hinai picking up waste at Al Haffa beach in Dhofar governorate - a well-known beach in Salalah.

The white sandy beach is located in the middle of Salalah. Acknowledging and appreciating his initiative, Dr Ahmed bin Mohsen al Ghassani, head of

Dhofar Municipality, received Omar in his office recently to honour and thank him for his efforts.

Dhofar Municipality has called on community members to participate in the first week of the campaign with a video, photo or opinion that helps reduce the spread of waste in public places in Dhofar under the title 'Thank you Aqeel ba Omar'.

Initiative to assist visually impaired see benefits of modern technology

Our Correspondent
Muscat

To support visually impaired people use modern technology easily, Taawon network team, in cooperation with Omar bin al Khattab Institute for the Blind, has launched an initiative called 'Nisailha' or 'making it easy'.

Ahad Saif Suleiman al Omari, a member of the team, said the initiative aims to help blind people learn about modern technologies and important electronic applications that help



Ahad Saif al Omari

them in their daily lives.

"Our team, which has nine members, held several workshops to teach people with visual

impairment how to benefit from various electronic applications. The team issued an electronic magazine that dealt with all the technological services needed by such people. The latest initiative aims to train people with visual impairment to use electronic applications easily and integrate them into their local communities. We also distributed some brochures to spread awareness among community members to help them," Ahad said.

People with visual impairment can use electronic applications to

ask for help from anyone at any time, she said.

"We brought some lecturers with visual impairment to deliver speeches to them so that they feel comfortable when using modern technology in everyday life," Ahad said.

"We will continue to hold workshops to support people with visual impairment."

She said her team is also seeking to create a special application for the category. "The application will include all the services that blind people need."



(Image for illustrative purpose)

MEDRC announces research grants to support small desalination units

Muscat - In partnership with the United States Agency for International Development (USAID), MEDRC has launched an international call for research proposals in a bid to spur innovation in small scale desalination technologies.

To engage the broadest possible community of researchers and innovators from across the world, MEDRC's desalination innovation strategy has two approaches - an innovation inducement prize called the Oman Humanitarian Desalination Challenge Prize Competition carrying a US\$700,000 cash prize, and the international research call announced with support from USAID.

The Oman Humanitarian Desalination Challenge Pathway Research Grants call looks for

The grants call looks for the development of a small-scale desalination unit capable of supporting a family with limited or no access to fresh water sources

the development of a small-scale desalination unit capable of supporting a family with limited or no access to fresh water sources.

MEDRC is specifically looking for proposals that adopt a highly innovative approach that might eventually lead to the development of the hand-held single

user device that the US\$700,000 prize looks for.

Last year MEDRC awarded a US\$90,000 grant under its USAID backed pathway research grants to Planet, an Italian startup which has secured the funding to develop their Mangrove Still - a bio inspired, modular, low-cost easy to use solar desalination system.

This year, MEDRC will award up to three research grants of up to a maximum of US\$150,000 each. The Funding Opportunity Announcement will be made monthly with applications accepted at the end of each month until the research funds are fully awarded. MEDRC has invited interested applicants to visit medrc.org/research/#grants for further details on the research call and to apply.

Businessman gives goods worth RO6,000 to needy

Our Correspondent
Muscat

An Indian businessman in Muscat has handed over clothes and footwear worth RO6,000 to a charity to be given to deserving Omanis.

Najeeb Abdul Rehiman, who runs a sports shop in OC Centre, Ruwi, said the donation is a gesture of love and appreciation for the country.

"As part of our annual donation for Eid al Adha, we give clothes and footwear to the needy people of Oman," he said.

"We believe that even small initiatives can bring some relief to the people during this



(Supplied photo)

tough time. We have given goods worth RO6,000 for people across the sultanate,"

he added.

The goods, mostly sports items like shoes, jackets and jerseys,

will be distributed among the needy by the Zakat Committee in Muttrah.

Oman takes part in NAM conference

Muscat - The sultanate took part in the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM) Mid-term Ministerial Conference held under the theme 'Non-Aligned Movement at the Centre of Multilateral Efforts in Responding to Global Challenges' on Tuesday.

The two-day virtual conference began in Baku, Azerbaijan on July 13.

The sultanate was represented by H E Sheikh Khalifa Ali al Harthy, Undersecretary for Diplomatic Affairs in the Foreign Ministry. The conference kicked off with a recorded statement of Dr Ilham Aliyev, president of Azerbaijan.

The participants reviewed the progress made in implementing outcomes of NMA's 18th summit, which was held in Baku from October 25 to 26, 2019.

NAM is a forum of 120 developing world states that are not formally aligned with or against any major power bloc. After the United Nations, it is the largest grouping of states worldwide. The movement originated in the 1950s as an effort by some countries to avoid the polarised world of the Cold War between Communist and Capitalist states.

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'Closure of Ghubra health centre for better integration of services'

Our Correspondent
Muscat

The Ministry of Health (MoH) has issued a clarification on temporarily closing down of Al Ghubra Health Centre and shifting of the patients to Al Khuwayr North Health Centre.

The Directorate General of Health Services in Muscat said the places for primary healthcare centres were selected after studying the population density and the geographical nature of those areas.

'But after the outbreak of the pandemic, many challenges emerged, including the need for health services to be offered outside health centres such as vaccination centres, field hospitals, government hospitals, and examination centres at the airport. For these reasons, health services have been integrated at all wilayats.'

Reduction in services in some health centres 'is a temporary



(Photo for illustrative purpose)

solution and the decision to close the Al Ghubra Health Centre was based on a study', the min-

istry stated.

'The Al Khuwayr North Health Centre can accommodate pa-

tients in large numbers and through which social distancing can be maintained, in addition to

the availability of several clinics to provide all services,' the ministry statement added.

200 medics attend MoH conference on enhanced recovery

Muscat - A virtual conference recently organised by the Ministry of Health (MoH) gained overwhelming response with the participation of around 200 medical practitioners and associates including some from foreign countries to deliver on 'enhanced recovery after surgery'.

The ministry, represented by the Supportive Services Department of the Directorate General of Specialised Medical Care, organised the conference titled 'Enhanced Recovery after Surgery & Applying it in the Sultanate's Hospitals' bringing together physicians, surgeons, anaesthetists, nurses and paramedical groups from the sultanate and abroad to highlight the enhanced recovery principles during and after surgery.

It also familiarised the participants with the experience of experts in applying the recovery principles and the challenges that the experts were facing.

The conference also dis-

The ministry is working to apply the enhanced recovery principles to all surgeries at all government hospitals

cussed the national guidelines in applying the quick recovery principles after surgery in the sultanate in order to adopt these guidelines as a manual at the central level in the Ministry of Health. The event also touched upon the central manual for enhanced recovery after surgery that has been prepared by the Supportive Services Department for adoption.

In line with the tenth five-year plan and as part of its future agenda, the ministry is working to apply the enhanced recovery principles to all surgeries at all government hospitals.

REGIONAL WEATHER

	Max	Min
Abu Dhabi	43	34
Doha	38	31
Kuwait City	44	33
Manama	42	30
Riyadh	44	28

PRAYER TIMINGS

Fajr	4am
Sunrise	5.28am
Duhr	12.12pm
Asr	3.32pm
Maghrib	6.56pm
Isha	8.26pm

GCC health undersecretaries discuss COVID-19 situation ahead of Eid

Our Correspondent
Muscat

The undersecretaries from the ministries of health in the GCC states have urged upon all citizens and residents in the Gulf to adhere to preventive measures such as wearing masks and avoiding gatherings during Eid al Adha.

The undersecretaries convened on Monday for their 18th meeting through video confer-

encing to discuss the latest developments related to the ongoing pandemic.

HE Dr Mohammed bin Saif al Hosni, Undersecretary for Oman's Health Affairs, along with a number of other senior officials from the ministry participated in the meeting that agreed on a standard definition for the infected persons and deaths related to COVID-19 in the GCC countries, as well as the tests procedures for the gene se-



(Supplied photo)

quence for the mutated strains.

Furthermore, the meeting agreed to standardise the classification of high-risk countries, and adopt the standards of the World Health Organization in this regard.

The meeting reviewed a number of related issues including the latest developments in immunisation in the GCC countries, Gulf Unified Treatment Manual and the COVID-19 Gulf Unified Manual.

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MUSCAT DAILY

LETTER TO THE EDITOR

Stay home, stay safe

The Eid al Adha holidays have been announced and along with Oman most of the Gulf states are expected to have a longer break together with the weekend. However, these holidays are not for fun and frolic but to be cautious and respectfully follow all pandemic protocols that are in place.

As the pandemic has already claimed the lives of more than 4mn people across the world, the danger is still around us; everyone needs to be very careful.

Even though everyone is now familiar with the protocols, the most important aspect is to avoid close contact and gatherings as much as possible, whether it is indoor or at shopping malls where people from all walks of life meet and interact.

Celebrations and occasions of happiness will come again and again, but life comes once. Although vaccines protect us to some extent from the extreme dangers of the infection, the very basic of 'social distancing' is the best measure to keep the virus away. Keeping this in mind, let's hope the reopening after the long holidays brings some joyful news of a reduced number of positive cases and fatalities.

Stay home, stay safe!

Ramachandran Nair
Ruwi

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Oil demand surges, market set for deficit and volatility: IEA

Paris, France – Global oil demand surged last month as rising vaccination rates helped underpin robust economic activity, but with OPEC+ nations pumping less than needed prices are set to be volatile until it reaches a deal to raise output, the International Energy Agency (IEA) warned on Tuesday.

A meeting of OPEC+ nations earlier this month was deadlocked over plans to gradually ease production cuts, imposed to reverse the plunge in oil prices at the start of the coronavirus pandemic as demand tumbled.

But demand is rebounding, with the International Energy Agency estimating it surged by an estimated 3.2mn barrels per day (bpd) last month, which is more than a third of the overall drop in demand last year.

The IEA expects oil demand to rise by another 3.3mn bpd in the three months from July. That is more than twice as large as the seasonal increase registered during the same period in 2019, which the IEA said is a result of easing COVID-19 restrictions and increasing vaccination.



While OPEC+ had been set to gradually raise oil output, the stalemate means production is frozen at current levels until an agreement is found.

'Oil prices reacted sharply to the OPEC+ impasse last week, eyeing the prospect of a deepening supply deficit if a deal cannot be reached,' the IEA said in its latest monthly report.

The main international oil contracts have been trading around US\$75 per barrel, and some analysts see a spike to US\$100 as possible.

But there is another possibil-

ity: the overall OPEC+ deal breaks down and producers open the taps and try to gain market shares, which would likely lead to prices crashing.

'At the same time, the possibility of a market share battle, even if remote, is hanging over markets, as is the potential for high fuel prices to stoke inflation and damage a fragile economic recovery,' said the IEA.

Investors have been worried that a surge in inflation could force central banks to raise their ultra-low interest rates, thus removing one of the main supports

for the economic recovery.

The IEA said that absent increased production by OPEC+ nations the market for crude is set to tighten, with additional stocks built up during the pandemic already gone and reserves running below the long-term average in industrialised nations.

Furthermore, it forecasts the biggest draw upon stocks in at least a decade will happen this quarter as OPEC+ pumps nearly 2mn bpd less than market demand. The gap will rise to 3.2mn bpd in the final three months of the year.

'Oil markets are likely to remain volatile until there is clarity on OPEC+ production policy,' the IEA warned. It also noted that a spike in prices would not be in the long-term interest of oil producers.

'While prices at these levels could increase the pace of electrification of the transport sector and help accelerate energy transitions, they could also put a drag on the economic recovery, particularly in emerging and developing countries,' the IEA report said. While the agency, which advises oil-consuming nations, foresees oil demand recovering along with the global economy, it doesn't discount the pandemic continuing to weigh upon the market.

'COVID-19 remains a significant threat to oil demand growth in the near- to medium-term, in particular in the non-OECD.'

Emerging nations not in the OECD group of advanced nations – such as China and India – were responsible for much of the growth in the global economy before the pandemic.

AFP



MoF issues circular on payments of subcontractors

Muscat – The Ministry of Finance (MoF) on Tuesday issued a financial circular (No 5/2021) about assessing subcontractors' dues.

As per the circular, the Ministry of Finance has directed all ministries, government units and state firms to ask contractors to furnish proof that the designated subcontractors have received all their dues in accordance with past payment certificates and prior to the finalisation of settlement of their (contractors') payments scheduled to be received in return for executed tasks.

The circular stated that, due to the importance of adhering to laws and legislations regulating business dealings, the Ministry of Finance requests all the con-

cerned departments to fully abide by the content of this new circular as a measure to serve the public interest.

The internal audit departments at the ministries and government units have to monitor the units' commitment compliance with the circular, the ministry added.

The Ministry of Finance stressed that the financial circular is aimed at limiting the non-abidance of firms and establishments to the contracts awarded them when making due payments to subcontractors as per the contracts. This, the ministry added, impacts the business sector in the sultanate and the economy in general.

ONA

Fitch affirms Oman Reinsurance's rating, keeps outlook negative

Our Correspondent
Muscat

Fitch Ratings on Tuesday affirmed Oman Reinsurance Company's (Oman Re) insurer financial strength (IFS) rating at 'BB+'. The rating outlook on Oman Re is negative, Fitch said in a statement.

The rating affirmation reflects Oman Re's 'moderately weak' investment risk and business profile but good financial performance and capitalisation, Fitch said.

'The negative outlook reflects that on Oman's local-currency issuer default rating and that on major Omani banks, given Oman Re's high exposure to Omani assets,' the ratings agency said.

Fitch views Oman Re's investment and asset risk as 'moderately weak'.



It said, 'Almost half of Oman Re's total investments were cash deposits at Omani banks at end-2020, whereas 17 per cent was invested in US dollar-denominated government bonds. Oman Re aims to diversify its investment portfolio to reduce this concentration risk but we expect exposure to Omani assets to remain significant and to continue to drive the rating in the medium term.'

Fitch said that it regards

Oman Re's business profile as 'moderate' relative to that of non-life and reinsurance companies in the Middle East. Oman Re is a well-diversified non-life insurer with a substantive business franchise operating mainly in the Middle East.

'We view its business risk profile as less favourable since property, fire and marine lines are more volatile than health and motor, which dominate most of the markets Oman Re writes

business in,' the ratings agency said.

Fitch said it views Oman Re's financial performance and earnings as good, reflected in a combined ratio of 103 per cent in 2020, which improved from 107 per cent in 2019 as the impact from business interruption claims related to COVID-19 was limited in 2020.

Oman Re's net income return-on-equity increased to 6 per cent in 2020 from 4 per cent in 2019, with sound investment returns more than offsetting underwriting losses. Its three-year average return-on-equity was 4 per cent at end-2020, which Fitch views as good.

'Oman Re's prudent reserving is a key rating strength. Oman Re keeps a buffer over both its best and prudent estimates,' Fitch added.

UAE says to launch digital currency within five years

Dubai, UAE – The United Arab Emirates will launch its first digital currency by 2026, the central bank of the oil-rich Gulf state, which serves as the region's financial hub, said.

Several central banks around the world have recently announced similar plans, while criticising decentralised cryptocurrencies like bitcoin.

The Central Bank of the UAE said its plans include 'issuing a digital currency and driving digital transformation in the UAE's financial services sector, by utilising the latest artificial intelligence and big data solutions.'

The announcement is part of its '2023-2026 strategy' which aims to 'position it among the world's top 10 central banks', it said according to state media.

In 2019, Saudi Arabia and the UAE announced a test phase of



a common cryptocurrency for cross-border transactions.

The UAE has big tech ambitions, investing in artificial intelligence, launching a space program, and hosting the regional headquarters of large multinational digital firms.

Faced with increasing popularity of the cryptocurrency bitcoin, as well as for online payments during the pandemic, central banks are exploring new

units of their own.

China launched the race in March with the start of a test phase of its digital yuan.

The central banks of the United States, the European Union and England are also evaluating the possibility of launching their own digital currencies, which are designed to bring stability to a highly speculative sector.

AFP

Sohar Port and Freezone looks to explore investment opportunities in Indian market

Our Correspondent
Muscat

Sohar Port and Freezone (SOHAR), in collaboration with the Federation of Indian Chambers of Commerce and Industry (FICCI), has launched a series of five online webinars to explore opportunities between SOHAR and the Indian market.

In the following months, four more webinars will be conducted targeting the various key industries such as food, automotive, plastics and metals, SOHAR said in a press statement.

The first webinar titled 'Accessing industrial and logistic solutions to maximize your market reach' included presentations from Sohar Port and Freezone's deputy CEO and Sohar Freezone's CEO, Omar al Mahrizi, on SOHAR's strategic advantages, and its free trade agreement advisor, Emmee Haun, on how to utilise SOHAR to access the US market.

Guest speakers from Sohar-based established investors Jin-



dal Shadeed, Sameer Gupta and Khimji Ramdas, Malvika Khimji highlighted their own success stories.

Mahrizi said, "Oman and India have enjoyed decades of bilateral trading, linked by history, culture and warm and cordial relations. As a well-connected integrated hub with established clusters, our

close geographical location, coupled with prime waterfront access, leasable land options and excellent infrastructure are all key ingredients to provide Indian investors with unique business opportunities.

This webinar series provides the ideal platform for us to highlight these prospects to FICCI's vast network, paving the way for

future business development and closer relations."

As many as 70 Indian businesses took part in the first session, which focused on promoting access to SOHAR's strategic advantages and location to maximise market reach between India, the GCC, Africa and the US.

The series of webinars will

provide insights into the opportunities available to participating companies for producing or adding value to their products by partnering with SOHAR.

Sohar Port and Freezone is already home to a number of prominent Indian investors including Jindal, Larsen & Toubro (L&T), and Moon Iron and Steel Company (MISCO) and with several new infrastructure projects and investments underway, there is ample room for growth.

Sohar Port and Freezone recently released its first quarter 2021 results noting growth in all categories of cargo compared to the same period of the previous year.

Throughput increased by 21 per cent over the same period in 2020, dry bulk volume grew by 23.6 per cent to almost 9mn tonnes, breakbulk handling grew by 6.8 per cent to 426,783 tonnes and liquid bulk increased by 7 per cent to just over 4mn tonnes. In addition, the number of containers handled rose by 1.9 per cent to 1.9mn.

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MSX declines 0.5%; volumes up

Our Correspondent
Muscat

The benchmark index of the Muscat Stock Exchange (MSX) on Tuesday declined 0.51 per cent to close at 4,087.24 points. Trading activity, however, improved compared to the previous session.

The decline in main index was contributed by all the sectoral indices. Financial Index fell 0.51 per cent, while Industrial Index and Services Index decreased 0.13 per cent and 0.38 per cent, respectively. MSX Sharia Index inched down 0.07 per cent to close at 597.40 points.

Trading activity increased as volumes rose 37.3 per cent at 24.5mn shares compared with 17.8mn shares traded on Monday. Market turnover jumped 91 per cent to RO5.82mn compared with RO3.05mn in the previous trading session.

Market breadth at the MSX remained



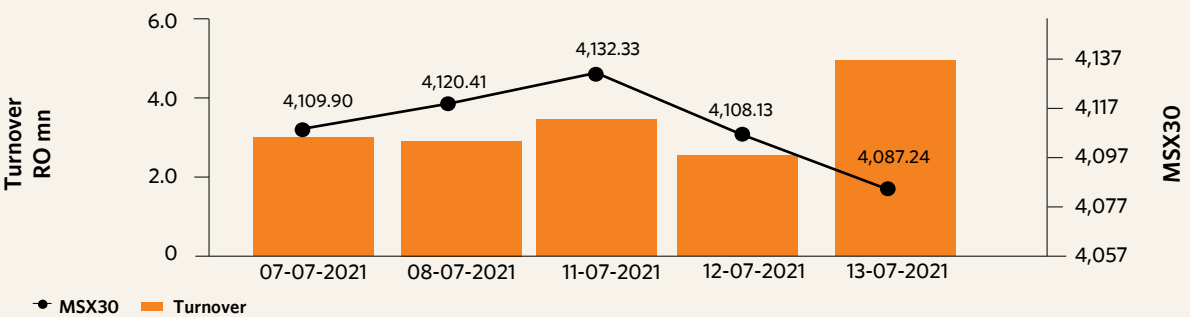
negative with eight advancing stocks to 24 decliners. As many as 23 traded stocks remained flat for the day.

Top gainers were Al Maha Ceramics (4.66 per cent), Al Jazeera Steel (2.11 per cent), Global Investment Holding (1.43 per cent), Dhofar Insurance (1.06 per

cent) and Bank Nizwa (1.01 per cent).

Top losers were Al Hassan Engineering (-7.69 per cent), National Bank of Oman (-4.26 per cent), Oman Flour Mills (-4.08 per cent), Muscat Finance (-3.18 per cent) and Gulf International Chemicals (-2.4 per cent).

MSX INDEX AND TURNOVER OF FIVE TRADING DAYS



China's growth slowed sharply to 7.7% in second quarter: Survey

Beijing, China - China's economic growth slowed sharply in the second quarter as the country's army of consumers remained hesitant to splurge and exports were dented by disruptions, according to an AFP poll of analysts.

The world's second largest economy has staged a rapid recovery from last year's pandemic-induced slump, but the investment and manufacturing rebound fuelling it now seems to be fading - and other drivers are not picking up fast enough.

It is forecast to have grown 7.7 per cent on-year in April-June and 8.5 per cent for the full year, according to a poll of 12 analysts conducted by AFP.

While the quarterly figure would be much slower than the record 18.3 per cent seen at the start of the year, that jump was largely driven by the low base of comparison owing to large parts of the country being locked down to prevent the spread of the virus. Official figures will be released on Thursday.

The virus first emerged in China in late 2019, but the strict



This file photo shows workers transferring steel pipes at a factory in Zouping in China's eastern Shandong province (AFP)

containment measures meant the disease was brought under control fairly quickly, allowing the country to be the only major economy to expand last year.

But analysts note that the economy has been expanding more slowly since the start of 2021 as the pandemic drags on globally.

"The production side of the economy is... under pressure amid increasing supply challenges," Moody's Analytics economist Christina Zhu told

AFP.

"Input shortages, surging raw material costs, and shipping disruptions are weighing on the country's manufacturers, threatening to drag down the country's growth," she said.

China's factory activity has been bogged down in recent months by supply shortages of key commodities and semiconductors, which are used to make a range of goods from electronics to vehicles.

The government has also "put

the brakes on lending in order to stop the rise in private corporate and household debt", said Hao Zhou, senior emerging markets economist at Commerzbank.

"The industrial sector has so far remained relatively unimpressed by this," he added, pointing to expectations of slowing industrial output.

Unlike most other countries, the government has so far refused to embark on a big-spending stimulus drive as it looks to prevent overheating.

However, on Friday the central bank lowered the amount of cash lenders must keep in reserve, which it said would pump an extra US\$154bn into the economy.

Another potential drag comes from exports as demand is weighed by the pandemic as well as supply and shipping bottlenecks.

A backlog caused by a coronavirus outbreak among port workers earlier this year severely hit shipping container movement and exacerbated existing challenges.

AFP

France fines Google €500mn in news copyright row

Paris, France - France's competition watchdog on Tuesday slapped Google with a €500mn (around US\$593mn) fine for failing to negotiate 'in good faith' with media companies over the use of their content under EU copyright rules.

It is "the biggest ever fine" imposed by the Competition Authority for a company's failure to adhere to one of its rulings, the agency's chief Isabelle De Silva told reporters, saying the decision was intended to "reflect the gravity" of Google's shortcomings.

The regulator also ordered Google to present media publishers with 'an offer of remuneration for the current use of their copyrighted content', or risk paying additional damages of up to 900,000 euros a day.

A Google spokesperson said in a statement to AFP that the company was 'very disappointed' by the decision.

"We have acted in good faith during the entire negotiation period. This fine does not reflect the efforts put in place, nor the reality of the use of news content on our platform," the company insisted.

"This decision is mainly about negotiations that took place between May and September 2020. Since then, we have continued to work with publishers and news agencies to find common ground."

The long-running legal battle has centred on claims that Google has been showing articles, pictures and videos produced by media outlets when displaying search results without



This illustration picture shows the Google logo displayed on a tablet in Paris (AFP)

adequate compensation, despite the seismic shift of global advertising revenues towards the search giant.

In April 2020, the French competition authority ordered Google to negotiate 'in good faith' with media groups after it refused to comply with a 2019 EU law governing digital copyright.

The so-called 'neighbouring rights' aim to ensure that news publishers are compensated when their work is shown on websites, search engines and social media platforms.

But last September, French news publishers including Agence France-Presse (AFP) filed a complaint with regulators, saying Google was refusing to move forward on paying to display content in web searches.

While Google insists it has made progress on the issue, the French regulator said the company's behaviour 'indicates a deliberate, elaborate and systematic lack of respect' for its order to negotiate in good faith.

In particular, the Competition Authority rebuked Google for having failed to 'have a specific

discussion' with media companies about neighbouring rights during negotiations over its Google Showcase news service, which launched late last year.

Tuesday's ruling had been keenly anticipated by news outlets across Europe, as the first decision of its kind by a regulator over the EU's neighbouring rights policy.

News outlets struggling with dwindling print subscriptions have long seethed at Google's refusal to give them a cut of the millions of euros it makes from ads displayed alongside news search results.

Google initially refused to pay media outlets for the snippets of news stories, photos and videos that appear in the search results, arguing that the traffic these searches send to their websites was payment enough.

The internet giant has since softened its stance, and announced in November that it had signed 'some individual agreements' on copyright payments with French newspapers and magazines, including top dailies Le Monde and Le Figaro.

AFP

UK police seize cryptocurrency

London, UK - British police on Tuesday announced they had seized a record £180mn of cryptocurrency that is suspected of having being used in criminal enterprises.

The country's largest ever haul was made as part of an ongoing investigation into international money laundering and used intelligence received about the transfer of criminal assets, according to police.

They also believe it is linked to the previous record criminal cryptocurrency haul, made just last month.

"Less than a month ago we successfully seized £114mn in cryptocurrency," explained Metropolitan Police Detective Constable Joe Ryan in a statement.

"Our investigation since then has been complex and wide-ranging. We have worked hard to trace this money and identify the criminality it may be linked to."

A 39-year-old woman was arrested on June 24 on suspicion of money laundering offences after last month's seizure, before being released on bail.

The same woman was interviewed under caution in relation

to the £180mn seized on July 10.

"While cash still remains king in the criminal world, as digital platforms develop we're increasingly seeing organised criminals using cryptocurrency to launder their dirty money," said Deputy Assistant Commissioner Graham McNulty.

"Whilst some years ago this was fairly uncharted territory, we now have highly trained officers and specialist units working hard in this space to remain one step ahead of those using it for illicit gain."

AFP

British business confidence soars to 16-year high before reopening

London, UK - British business confidence has soared to a 16-year peak on easing COVID-19 restrictions, a key survey showed Monday as the economy prepared to fully reopen in one week.

Accountancy firm BDO said in a statement that its business optimism indicator jumped to 112.45 points in June, the highest level since 2005.

June marked the fifth successive monthly increase, following 109.71 in May, with manufacturers in particular boosted by vaccine-driven optimism.

Separately on Monday, the UK government confirmed it will press ahead with so-called Freedom Day next Monday with the lifting of most remaining pandemic curbs in England.

"Businesses are clearly looking forward to the lifting of re-

strictions on July 19," said BDO partner Kaley Crossthwaite.

"After a gruelling year of unpredictable change, the ending of restrictions is timely, although rising COVID-19 cases still leave an element of uncertainty.

"The Summer spending surge that could follow will provide a huge boost to the economy, and businesses will be hopeful that the tide is turning over the long term."

At the same time, major corporates are ramping up plans for rapid growth, according to a survey of chief financial officers compiled by Deloitte.

Expectations for an increase in hiring and investment are at their highest levels in almost seven years, Deloitte revealed Monday.

"With the economy reopening, CFOs' perceptions of external uncertainty have dropped

below the average of the last five years and businesses have tacked away from the defensive strategies that helped them through the downturn," said Deloitte chief economist Ian Stewart. "The pandemic, like all major shocks, will reshape the economy and we are likely to see years of normal growth compressed into just a few months.

"Indeed, eight in ten CFOs believe that productivity will run higher in the wake of the pandemic. That offers the hope of a more comprehensive recovery than after the global financial crisis."

The UK government had reimposed England's current lockdown in early January, but began lifting restrictions at the start of March under a phased reopening of the economy.

AFP

US economy not yet ready for end to Fed stimulus, top official says

Washington, US - The recovery in key areas of the US economy is not sufficient enough for the Federal Reserve to start pulling back on its aggressive stimulus program, a top central banker said Monday.

While the Fed has begun to consider when to taper its massive bond-buying program, New York Fed President John Williams told reporters the economy has not made the "substantial progress" required for it to act.

The US economy shed more than 20mn jobs last year amid the pandemic, and still has not recovered 6.8mn of those. Policymakers have stressed that they will wait for more improvements before acting.

"I'm very focused on substantial further progress" on increas-



New York Fed President John Williams

ing employment and inflation, Williams told reporters.

"It's really about achieving our maximum employment and two

per cent inflation goals... and clearly right now, we have not achieved that," he said.

The Fed cut the benchmark lending rate to zero in the early weeks of the pandemic and has been buying US\$120bn a month in bonds - US\$80bn in US Treasury debt and US\$40bn of agency mortgage-backed securities.

"In terms of thinking of potentially adjusting asset purchases, we've set a very clear marker," Williams said.

He noted there has been "strong movement" in employment and inflation data but "this is a time of very high uncertainty" and it's too soon to judge the economy's progress, Williams said.

Unemployment has fallen to 5.9 per cent but remains well above the pre-pandemic level,

while year-over-year consumer inflation jumped five percent in May.

Williams and Fed Chair Jerome Powell have downplayed the recent spike in inflation, blaming transitory issues like the uneven reopening of the global economy and supply bottlenecks for most of the increases.

But in their last policy meeting in June, central bankers acknowledged their surprise at the size of the price jump.

They said they will be prepared to pull back on their bond buying in response to "unexpected economic developments," including if the US economy reaches full employment and inflation climbs over two per cent faster than anticipated.

AFP

Sohar International accelerates digitalisation; records increased usage of new mobile app

Setting a new benchmark in mobile banking, Sohar International has achieved yet another milestone with the recent launch of its enhanced mobile banking app that reflects the bank's global identity and values, offering customers a premium, seamless, secure and convenient medium of banking.

Equipped with a full suite of digital banking services, the app leverages the bank's proven technological expertise and is aimed at giving customers more control over their accounts while reducing the need to visit the branch or stand in queues.

While investing in technology, innovation and digitalisation have long remained one of Sohar International's top priorities, the COVID-19 pandemic has highlighted its importance even more.

With thousands of people now turning to digital channels to carry out their daily banking transactions, being prepared to cater to this radical shift has earned Sohar International the loyalty of its customers. By giving customers more freedom to manage their finances on the go, Sohar International has further enhanced the banking experience for them.

"Sohar International has always remained at the forefront of digitalisation and has made noteworthy contributions to the development of digital banking in the country. Our digital journey was set in a way to ensure that we are always prepared to meet our customers' needs and so that we continue to evolve according to the changing market trends. With the pandemic bringing with it its set of uncertainties, we have seen that our digital strategies have paid off, enabling us to carry out banking more safely, securely and swiftly from the comfort of our homes," said Ahmed al Musalmi, CEO of Sohar International.

"Embracing digital transformation more comprehensively, the bank ensures that it also takes concerted efforts to invest in its human resource by enrolling them in ongoing trainings, workshops and seminars that focus on recent developments in the sector.

"By partnering with world-class digital banking service providers, we bring to Oman global expertise, that we then seamlessly induct into our framework to further enhance



our offerings." The on-the-go Sohar International Mobile Banking App can be downloaded from Google Play Store or Apple App Store at no cost and customers can enjoy

secure, 24/7 access to their account with a wide array of transaction options and a better overview of their financial data.

Through the app, customers can easily track their account activity through account balance inquiry and statements, transaction history and a detailed summary of their previous transactions and periodic statements.

Building on the bank's already best-in-class mobile functionalities, it also enables customers to check transactions in operative accounts with real-time account balance and information about operative, deposit, and loan accounts.

With an increase in the number of app downloads that serves as a testament to its popularity, the new on-the-go app delivers an enhanced digital banking experience for customers and offers the convenience of banking at their fingertips, through a user-friendly and intuitive interface, laden with useful functionalities.

Making day-to-day operations hassle-free, the app makes fund transfers quick, easy and secure.

All local fund transfers are free-of-charge.

The app also allows the creation and tracking of standing instructions as well as the liberty to conduct multi-currency fund transfers. Inclusive and innovative, the app is designed to assist customers in multiple ways and offers free-of-charge online bill payment options, as well as credit card related services.

Service requests like ordering cheque books and requesting debit cards can also be done directly through the app instead of going to the branch physically.

With a host of features to ensure that customers have easy accessibility to their funds while also addressing a host of other banking requirements, the app guarantees customers the highest level of security through Sohar International's proven multi-layered security infrastructure.

Committed to customer-centricity, innovation and growth, Sohar International will continue to stay abreast of the latest developments and align itself to the sultanate's Digital Vision with innovative products and solutions that are tailored to the needs of its customers.

Dhofar Poultry marks 25 years with a strong vision for future

Celebrating 25 years of successfully serving its valuable patrons with the highest quality chicken, Dhofar Poultry Company (DPC) has established its presence as the fastest growing brand in the fresh and frozen chicken segment, in Oman. With so many commendable years of experience, DPC ensures it constantly innovates to suit the varying demands of a dynamic consumer market while maintaining the same level of quality, taste and hygiene standards its customers are already familiar with.

Over the years, DPC has evolved from a farm built out of seven houses that first introduced the concept of sale of fresh chicken in the Dhofar region to an operation that includes 48 modernised EC Poultry houses, a state-of-the-art hatchery, the latest processing machinery and equipment, and a nation-wide supply chain network.

The products grew to be so loved by consumers that DPC was able to extend its sales and distribution to not just every corner of the sultanate, but even export to other GCC countries. The company now plans to enter into newer markets, with an enhanced and diversified portfolio of products.

Despite stiff competition and a number of newer brands in the market, DPC has remained the preferred choice amongst consumers due to its distinct freshness and taste. This is achieved by timely delivery through well-organised cold chains. Currently, DPC claims a significant 25 per cent market share in the overall fresh and frozen chicken market in Oman.

"We understand the dynamism of the market and we take all the necessary initiatives to incorporate the latest technology

logical innovations to ensure our products are at par with international standards," said Salim bin Taman al Maashani. "While we are confident that our customer base will keep growing with every year, our goal for the year ahead is to add new products to our existing product portfolio and expand into newer markets."

With the growing demand for superior quality, slaughtered-by-hand as per Islamic Sharia'a (100% Halal) and naturally-fed chicken in markets such as the UAE, Bahrain and Qatar, DPC has customized their products and packages to suit these demands. The popularity of the brand has grown so much over the years that DPC now sells its products at leading hypermarkets like Lulu in UAE and Mega mart in Qatar. In the past (20 years) its exports increasing year on year.

With significant investments in the poultry farming segment, Oman is set to establish itself as a key player in the region, while also reinforcing the nation's food security objectives and sustaining the requirements of its burgeoning poultry industry.

Revered as one of the oldest and the most trusted brand when it comes to fresh and frozen chicken, DPC has been committed to the sultanate's long-term objectives in achieving high self-sufficiency and enhanced food security. To meet the rising demand, DPC aims at increasing its production during 2021-2022.

In 2019, the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Water Resources said that the sultanate had achieved 51 per cent self-sufficiency in the production of poultry meat when the local production in the sultanate reached about 111,000 tonnes.



Grand Millennium Muscat launches Eid package

Grand Millennium Muscat has launched a special Eid Dine & Stay package to celebrate with your loved ones.

Eid Couple Stay package is for RO160 net in a classic room for two adults for four continuous nights and Eid Family Stay is for RO240 net for two classic rooms for two adults and two kids up to 12 years old. The offer includes breakfast and the option to choose between lunch or dinner at their all-day dining Taybat restaurant with a 20 per cent discount on all Food & Beverage outlets. Enjoy the breathtaking view of the city from the Rooftop Infinity Pool, and cool off this summer at the most exclusive ladies' swimming pool in town when you book this promotion.

The offer is valid only during Eid al Adha from July 18 to 24 and is subject to availability.

"Our main focus is to provide an excellent guest experience and ensuring our guests are

New documentary sheds light on Saudi Arabia's falconers

An eye-opening new documentary that sheds light on Saudi Arabia's falconers is set to air this week, covering the events of the 2020 King Abdulaziz Falconry Festival, where over 1,000 falconers competed from countries as far and wide as Germany, Russia, Syria, Bahrain, UAE, Kuwait and of course Saudi Arabia.

Set to stream on the non-fiction educational network, National Geographic Asia, *Wild Allies* takes a behind-the-scenes look at the enchanting art of falconry along with the intense dedication and passion of the owners and trainers as they raise these beautiful creatures to compete in the kingdom's biggest falconry racing event.

The documentary tracks the journey of some of the world's most dedicated falcon trainers including the youngest participant in the 2020 festival, nine-year-old Saudi national, Shehanah Daifallah al Nezi who began falconry when she was just five years old.

Commenting on the documentary, Hussam al Huzaimi, CEO of the Saudi Falcons Club, said, "This fascinating documentary will appeal not only to those interested in falconry, but also to anyone with a love of wildlife or competitive sports."

"It's a chance to follow the experiences and stories of several beautiful high-pedigree competition falcons, along with their proud owners and trainers, as they compete for the stage of their lives."

Wild Allies will be available to stream on National Geographic Asia digital for three months starting from July 13.



Customers laud Renault Duster, Koleos and Megane

Customers in Oman have extolled popular Renault models Duster, Koleos and Megane for the host of features they offer. While Renault Duster has been praised for its functionality and strength, Koleos has been acclaimed for its space and safety and Megane for its design and technology.

Praising Renault Duster for its functionality, Abdul al Ajmi from Ibra said, "Renault Duster adds more grandeur and sophistication with its distinctive features. It is equipped with off-road capability and affordability to beat the best in the market."

Tariq al Lawati from Shinas likes Renault Koleos for its powerful, efficient engines, safety attributes and on-board technologies. He said, "Renault Koleos impresses car enthusiasts who value distinctive design, safety technology, great space, and superior performance."

Explaining the features of Koleos, car enthusiast Ahmed Mansur from Muscat said, "The 2.5lt petrol engine in Koleos is an atmospheric, four-cylinder, 16-valve powerplant with double overhead camshafts. Power is 170hp (126kW) at 6,000rpm, with a peak torque of 233Nm at 4,000rpm. Care has been taken to minimise friction for enhanced



performance and optimised fuel consumption.

"With 233Nm torque available from as low as 1,800rpm, it is extremely responsive at low and mid-range engine speeds and is particularly suited to towing (up to two tonnes). It can be specified with either two- or four-wheel drive and is exclusively coupled to the X-Tronic automatic transmission."

Admired Megane for its driving performance, Hasan Fazal from Nizwa applauded Renault Megane for its design, driving comfort, technology and safety features. He said, "The enigmatic Renault Megane electrifies with its sedan body, dynamic lines and generous proportions. With its smooth silhouette, high-tech cockpit and sophisticated styling, Renault Megane combines style and flexibility."

Shadad Manzoor from Salalah said, "Megane delivers an exclusive driving experience, thanks to its technologies, design, and roominess. Renault's designers have drawn upon their acclaimed expertise to seamlessly incorporate 508dm3 VDA of boot storage capacity."

For more information, visit <https://www.renault.com.om/> or call Toll Free number on 80050011.

Alizz Islamic facilitates instant financing at Danube Home

Alizz Islamic Bank has extended 'iFIN' services for instant financing to all Danube Home branches spread in the sultanate. Alizz Islamic Bank and iFIN had earlier partnered to launch 'iFIN' services in Danube Home's Al Khuwayr branch and now extends this service to all of the Danube Home branches in Oman.

The 'iFIN' service is the first instant finance service launched by Alizz Islamic Bank in the Islamic banking sector, where it has become possible for customers to obtain financing for goods within ten minutes only.

This service allows customers to instantly take home their desired goods such as furniture, luxuries, accessories, health and household appliances from the store having them financed for up to 120 months without the need of visiting any bank branch.

Customers whose salaries are deposited with Alizz Islamic bank, whether Omanis with salary of RO350 or expatriate residents with a salary of RO800, are eligible for the financing service. In addition to this, with no down payment requirement, customers can finance 100 per cent of the value of the goods.

The extension of the iFIN service to other branches comes as part of the bank's plans to provide



a wide range of banking solutions designed with great care. The process of availing of finance has been simplified into a simple 10-minute process at the store's checkout counter, where the customer will go through an

online verification process and sign the finance contract following an immediate approval. Goods financing is extended through iFIN based on the Islamic concept of Murabaha, where the bank purchases the

goods desired by the customer from the authorised dealer and then sells the same to the customer at an agreed price that is paid in instalments. It offers complete transparency as the customer knows

the bank's profit margin and instalment plan at the time of signing the contract. This arrangement allows for immediate ownership of the goods by the customer who can enjoy a buy-now-pay-later option that is fully Sharia'a compliant.

Alizz Islamic Bank seeks to enter into partnership with various retailers and institutions in the sultanate to facilitate financing for its customers to include other types of products such as cars, electronics, education, travel and holidays and other products that customers need approvals and quick procedures to implement.

All retailers are welcome to join the platform to widen their customer base, boost their sales volumes, and offer their customers a unique shopping experience.

Since its inception in 2013, Alizz Islamic Bank has bridged the gap between customers and the bank using the latest technology solutions built on solid infrastructure.

The bank is committed to providing its customers with innovative financial solutions and responsive customer services via its corporate website, online banking, mobile banking, short message service, call centre, ATM, ITM, and branch banking.

Invest for your future with BankDhofar's deposit account

With two tailor-made deposit accounts, BankDhofar provides its customers with chances to secure their future. The account provides the best financial future solutions to the customers with the Retirement Plan and Education Plan having the best competitive interest rates.

Dr Tariq Taha, chief retail banking officer noted, "At BankDhofar, we are always keen to provide innovative services, product, and financial solutions that are not only designed to meet our customer current needs, but to fulfill their future aspirations as well. With the Long Term Deposit Account, our customers may save to fulfill their retirement dream with the Retirement Plan, or their children's higher education dream with the Education plan. All that they need to do is save a fixed monthly amount for a specific period and get a lumpsum amount after the deposit period."

With the Long-Term Deposit Account, customers may save any monthly amount for deposit period as per their needs. Customers may go for the Education plan, to save for the children's higher education, and benefit from the interest rate of up to 5.5 per cent. For example, if a customer saves RO50 for 18 years,



the amount will be more than RO18,000 at the end of the period and the customer will get interest amount of more than RO7,000. With the costs of higher education increasing every year, this lumpsum amount will come in handy for customers.

For the retirement plan, customers may save a minimum monthly amount of RO25 for up to 10 years, and benefit from the additional amount on their savings at an interest rate of up to 4.7 per cent. For example, if a customer starts saving a monthly amount of RO50 for a period of 5 years, the amount will be more than RO3,300 at the end of the period and the customer will get interest amount of more than RO320. With increasing possibilities of early retirement, customers can be ready to face such eventualities with this Retirement Deposit account.

Cloud solutions for retail – An offer firms can't refuse

The global pandemic caused most stores' shutters to clatter down at a time when high street retail was already vulnerable. With most physical stores closed, the technologies that underpin their online presence have had to accommodate the massive spike in online shopping driven by lockdown.

It's my belief that the pandemic will accelerate the pace at which retailers will embrace digitalised businesses models. That's not just because many customers are wary of returning to the high street in a post-pandemic world; critically, from an operational perspective, cloud-based solutions reduce retailers' overheads when it comes to managing a complicated IT infrastructure, while providing highly powerful resources delivered in a flexible consumption model. It is essential then that bricks-and-mortar retailers look to adopt such solutions for their digital transformation process.

processes, etc - all of those can be digitalised to provide a seamless online and offline shopping experience for customers.

The cloud route

Of course, consumers still consumed even when the physical stores are closed. Here, technology has worked to recreate an in store experience while consumers order online. In most cases, this has been achieved through harnessing cloud-computing capabilities, in a bid to provide brands with the technological infrastructure needed for them to better meet their customers' and business needs.

The beauty of cloud-based solutions, is that they enable retailers to automate infrastructure updates and maintenance and utilise auto-scaling to respond to fluctuating demand.

A search that goes beyond words

Retailers can implement image search as an added functionality to improve the effectiveness of search results. An image search enables customers to upload a photo or a screenshot of the product to easily find similar or identical products. Image Search is a technology that utilises machine learning and deep learning to analyse images, find desired products, and fulfil search requests quickly and conveniently.

Bear in mind that sometimes customers browse for unspecified items. With customised discovery, shoppers benefit from seeing personalised recommendations based on their interests or needs, making the shopping experience even more tailored to their needs and interests. Livestreaming is also another useful tool to drive sales, especially during the pandemic.

(Selina Yuan, general manager of International Business Unit, Alibaba Cloud Intelligence)

Free service with Mazda in 100th year celebrations

Mazda is celebrating its 100th year anniversary and is offering a never before chance to get a free service package of 150,000km/5years with select 2020 models of CX-9 and Mazda 6 and free 100,000km/5 years service package with select 2020 models of Mazda CX-3.

Under the iinjaz Service package, these are one of the highest service packages available in Oman. Added with a service interval of 6 months/10,000km, Mazda promises to give you one more reason to buy the stunning Made in Japan brand. No wonder Mazda is rated as the number 1 most preferred car brand by the Consumer Reports survey.

These service packages of 100,000 and 150,000km for 5 years are covered under the Mazda iinjaz Service, specifically designed for the peace of mind



and convenience of Mazda customers. With the most warranty related aspects covered, it makes the Mazda the most economically friendly car to own in these tough times.

With longer service intervals, 5 year service package and the convenience of a Pick and Drop Service facility now available in Muscat region, Mazda now exceeds your expectations on Style, Technology, Value and

convenience. We understand the importance of these facilities in these tough times and Towell Auto Centre has been designing custom made packages and facilities for a customer experience never heard of in Oman.

The Mazda models covered with this package are class leading in their respective segments. Mazda CX-9 is the 7 seater Turbo SUV which offers extra Space, Power, Efficiency and

Safety and is very popular. Mazda 6 sedan is one of the most popular Mazda models globally as well as in Oman and is sure to make you turn your head to take a glance at it while on the streets.

No wonder it is termed as the Head turner by the owners. Mazda CX-3 is the Fun Utility Vehicle with a compact size for the young and the young at heart. The compactness and

value of a sedan and the feel of a SUV rolled into one.

This offer has everything you would want and more. So do not waste a second and buy a Mazda of your dreams at the nearest Towell Auto Centre Showroom.

In its 100th year, Mazda also offers a select range of Mazda 100 years Anniversary Limited Edition cars for the discerning few.

These Limited Edition models are available with a customised interior and 100 years anniversary badge, and will surely make you stand out in the crowd. All the good things offered by Mazda along with the chance to be the lucky few who would own these cars.

Make cars that make driving matter. That's why we build every Mazda to inspire, excite and most of all-bring people joy.

Affordable EMIs on Mitsubishi Mirage, Attrage

Stylish and comfortable yet affordable, the redesigned and updated 2021 Mitsubishi Mirage five-door hatchback and Attrage four-door sedan are now available from General Automotive Company (GAC), the official distributor of Mitsubishi vehicles in Oman, with EMI as low as RO55 and RO57 respectively. This value is inclusive of VAT and a six years/unlimited kilometres warranty and roadside assistance.

Commenting on the Mirage and Attrage, Zuwaina al Azri, communication manager, said, "Despite being entry-level models to the Mitsubishi family, the Mirage and Attrage offer class-leading comfort, fuel efficiency, and reliability. Coupled with their compact size, lightweight, and ample power, they are the perfect vehicles for city commutes. Moreover, as a result of their updated styling and newly added features, these models now offer even greater value for money."

For the 2021 model year, both the Mirage and Attrage feature



revised front and rear styling. Out front, the vehicles incorporate Mitsubishi's latest Dynamic Shield grille design. This revised front bumper design, in particular, gives both cars a dose of sportiness to go with its efficiency message. These improvements provide the Mirage and Attrage with a more refined, sharper look while visually tying

the vehicles to Mitsubishi's current design language.

On the inside, both models feature comfortable cloth seating and high-quality materials throughout the cabin, together with the best levels of interior room and cargo storage space available in their class. For 2021, Mitsubishi is also introducing its 7-inch Smartphone Link Display

Audio (SDA) System in the Highline versions of the Mirage and Attrage.

Both models retain the 1.2lit 3-cylinder DOHC engine, featuring the latest version of Mitsubishi Innovative Valve timing Electronic Control (MIVEC), producing 78 horsepower and 100 Nm of torque; ample power for comfortable day-to-day driving. The

engine was built with efficiency at its core and teamed with Mitsubishi's INVECS-III continuously variable transmission, offers class-leading fuel economy of just 4.7l/100km.

Both models also come equipped with a wide array of safety features. These include a dual front Supplemental Restraint System (SRS) airbags, four-wheel anti-lock brakes (ABS) with Electronic Brake-force Distribution (EBD) and Brake Assist, hill start assist, and Active Stability Control (ASC). Additional protection is provided to the vehicle's occupants by Mitsubishi Motors' patented high-tech Reinforced Impact Safety Evolution (RISE) impact-absorbing safety cell technology.

For more information on the 2021 Mirage and Attrage, visit GAC's Mitsubishi showrooms in Azaiba, Barka, Sohar, Nizwa and Salalah or follow 'MitsubishiMotorsOman' on Facebook or @mitsubishiomani on Twitter to learn more.

Wildfires rage across million acres as heat wave stifles US, Canada

Los Angeles, US - Wildfires were burning across more than one million acres of the western United States and Canada on Monday, as scorching temperatures held their grip on areas reeling from a brutal weekend heat wave.

Some 850,000 acres were on fire in the United States - mainly in western states such as Oregon, California and Arizona - while more than 300,000 acres smoldered in Canada's British Columbia alone, according to wildfire officials.

After a brief lull from late June's previous heat wave, extreme temperatures in recent days reached as far inland as the edge of the Rocky Mountains - part of a dramatic trend that experts attribute directly to climate change.

The US National Weather Service (NWS) warned dangerous temperatures were continuing in the region for the early part of the week, with temperatures up to 47°C recorded in southern

California on Monday, and a heat advisory issued for communities outside Los Angeles.

The NWS said overall temperatures were beginning to dip, with breezes arriving in northern California and storms in Arizona and New Mexico on Monday, but excessive heat warnings remained in effect "for most areas through Tuesday evening."

Particularly high overnight temperatures have robbed many heat-struck regions of much-needed respite, and more sweltering forecasts lie in store for the coming days.

'Luckily the hot spots will start cooling down after today. Enjoy it while it lasts because we are looking at more heat starting this weekend,' tweeted the NWS Los Angeles service.

Wildfires raging

Across the border, temperatures of around 36.6°C - well above seasonal norms - were recorded on Monday north of Vancouver in British Columbia, where some



This file photo shows two plumes of smoke from wildfires in Long Loch and Derickson Lake areas of Canada's westernmost province of British Columbia, on June 30 (AFP)

300 wildfires were active across the Canadian province.

In California - where more than twice as many acres have burned this year compared to the same point in 2020's record-

breaking season - a large fire near Lake Tahoe expanded on Monday, spurred by the heat, increased winds, low humidity and dry vegetation.

A combination of two blazes

sparked by lightning last week, the Beckwourth Complex fire, has rapidly grown to some 90,000 acres.

Large areas of forest have burned, with reports of homes

destroyed in multiple towns and footage from the area showing burnt-out, abandoned cars and buildings.

As the state enters what are traditionally its most dangerous months for wildfires, evacuation orders were also issued for the River Fire, which began on Sunday just south of the Yosemite National Park.

In the neighbouring state of Oregon, the even larger Bootleg Fire more than tripled in size since Friday, reaching more than 150,000 acres and threatening power supplies to California.

Two firefighters were killed in an aviation accident in Arizona.

Climate change

The hot weather follows an earlier heat wave that struck the same regions at the end of June.

A study by a group of leading climate scientists found that those conditions would have been 'virtually impossible' without human-caused climate change.

The World Weather Attribution group said that global warming, caused by greenhouse gas emissions, made the June heat wave at least 150 times more likely to happen.

The scorching conditions saw the all-time record daily temperature broken three days in a row in British Columbia.

Last month was the hottest June on record in North America, according to data released by the European Union's climate monitoring service.

Human activity has driven global temperatures up, stoking increasingly fierce storms, extreme heat waves, droughts and wildfires.

The World Meteorological Organization and Britain's Met Office said in May there was a 40 per cent chance of the annual average global temperature temporarily surpassing 1.5 degrees above pre-industrial temperatures within the next five years.

AFP

South Africa's unrest death toll rises to 32 as looting continues

Johannesburg, South Africa - Soldiers stepped up deployment in South Africa on Tuesday on a mission to quell looting sparked by the jailing of ex-president Jacob Zuma as the death toll from the violence rose to 32.

President Cyril Ramaphosa announced late on Monday that he was dispatching troops to help overwhelmed police halt the unrest and 'restore order'.

But stores in Johannesburg and Pietermaritzburg, the capital of southeastern KwaZulu-Natal province, were hit by looters for a fifth day running.

Dozens of women, some wearing their dressing gowns, men and even children strolled into a butcher's cold store in the Johannesburg suburb of Soweto, coming out balancing heavy boxes of frozen meat on their shoulders or heads.

A sole private security guard stood by helplessly, frantically trying to make calls.

Police showed up three hours later, and fired rubber bullets.

The unrest erupted last Friday after Zuma started serving a 15-month term for snubbing a probe into the corruption that stained his nine years in power.

The toll in KwaZulu-Natal stands at 26, premier Sihle Zikalala told a news conference on Tuesday, a day after officials confirmed six deaths in Gauteng



South African soldiers interrogate a pedestrian in front of a looted mall, in Soweto on Tuesday (AFP)

province. "These were people killed during stampedes as protesters ran riot," Zikalala said, without specifying which parts of the province.

Hundreds of arrests

At least 757 people have been arrested, Police Minister Bheki Cele told a news conference, with most of the arrests taking place in Johannesburg, South Africa's economic capital.

Sounding a note of optimism, he insisted the police would ensure the situation 'does not deteriorate any further'.

In his nationwide address Monday night, Ramaphosa lashed 'opportunistic acts of criminality, with groups of people instigating chaos merely as a cover for looting and theft'.

It was 'of vital importance that we restore calm and stability to all parts of the country without delay', he said.

"The path of violence, of looting and anarchy, leads only to more violence and devastation," Ramaphosa said.

Once dubbed the 'Teflon president', Zuma was handed the jail term on June 29 by the

Constitutional Court for bucking an order to appear before a commission probing the graft that proliferated under his nine years in power.

He started serving the jail term on Thursday after handing himself in to authorities as a deadline for surrender loomed.

He is seeking to have the ruling set aside.

The Constitutional Court sat for ten hours on Monday hearing from Zuma's lawyers asking the court review its ruling. But the court reserved its judgment to a later, but unspecified date.

Zuma popularity

Zuma (79) is a former anti-apartheid fighter who spent ten years in jail in the notorious Robben Island jail off Cape Town.

He rose in democratic South Africa to vice president and then president, before being ousted by the ruling African National Congress (ANC) in 2018 as graft scandals proliferated.

But he remains popular among many poor South Africans, especially grassroots members of the ANC, who portray him as a defender of the disadvantaged.

Protests that began after Zuma started his sentence were swiftly followed by pillaging of shopping malls, with people carting away TV sets, furniture, alcohol, food and other items, with the police seemingly powerless to act.

Ramaphosa took aim at those who said the unrest was political.

"There is no grievance, nor any political cause, that can justify the violence and destruction," he said.

South Africa, Africa's most industrialised country, is deep in an economic malaise, with cripplingly high levels of unemployment. Economic activity has been badly affected by restrictions to stop the spread of coronavirus.

AFP



A man who got injured during clashes between Taliban and government forces, get treated at a hospital in Kandahar on Monday (AFP)

Taliban say do not want to fight inside cities in Afghanistan

Kabul, Afghanistan - The Taliban do not want to battle government forces inside Afghanistan's cities and would rather see them surrender, a senior insurgent leader said on Tuesday, as the militants also warned Turkey against extending its troop presence.

The extremist group has swept through much of the north as foreign troops complete their withdrawal, and the government now holds little more than a constellation of provincial capitals that must largely be resupplied by air.

On Tuesday, the head of a Taliban commission that oversees government forces who surrender urged residents of Afghanistan's cities to reach out to them.

'Now that the fighting from mountains and deserts has reached the doors of the cities, Mujahiddin (Taliban) don't want fighting inside the city,' Amir Khan Muttaqi said in a message tweeted by a Taliban spokesman. 'It is better... to use any possible channel to get in touch with our invitation and guidance commission,' he said, adding this would 'prevent their cities from getting damaged'.

The strategy is one well-worn by the Taliban - particularly during their first rise to power in the 1990s - cutting off towns and district centres and getting elders to negotiate a surrender.

Muttaqi's comments came as the defence ministry said Afghan forces had cleared Qala-e-Naw city after days of fighting.

The Badghis province capital saw sustained street fighting last week in the first assault by the Taliban on a major urban centre since foreign troops commenced their final withdrawal in May.

The call also came the same day as a video emerged that

CNN said it had verified showing a group of Afghan commandos being gunned down by the Taliban in June after surrendering.

Turkey warning

In a separate statement on Tuesday, the Taliban said Turkey's decision to provide security to Kabul airport when US-led forces leave was 'reprehensible'.

"We consider stay of foreign forces in our homeland by any country under whatever pretext as occupation," the group said, days after Ankara agreed with Washington to provide security for Kabul airport.

As foreign forces wind up their withdrawal - due to be completed by August 31 - the situation on the ground is changing rapidly.

The top US general in Afghanistan relinquished his command on Monday at a ceremony in the capital, the latest symbolic gesture bringing America's longest war nearer to an end.

The pace of the pullout - and multiple offensives launched by the Taliban - have raised fears that Afghanistan's security forces could be swiftly overwhelmed, particularly without vital US air support.

Around 650 American service members are expected to remain in Kabul, guarding Washington's sprawling diplomatic compound.

But Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan said on Friday he had agreed with the United States on the 'scope' of how to secure Kabul airport.

Peace talks between the insurgents and the government supposedly taking place in Doha have largely fizzled out, and the Taliban now appear set on a complete military victory.

AFP

Baby elephant abandoned by Chinese herd saved

Beijing, China - A heavily injured baby elephant left behind by a migrating wild herd in southwest China has been rescued, state media reported on Tuesday, the latest twist in a chaotic odyssey.

The herd of Asian elephants has spent months roaming across Yunnan province, travelling more than 500km from their home nature reserve in one of the longest ever animal migrations of its kind in China.

Since setting off last year, the meandering mammals have stolen villagers' food and trampled crops worth over US\$1mn, with thousands of residents evacuated from their path.

Locals sighted the baby elephant - weighing 180kg and born on the lumbering trek - alone on a tea plantation on Saturday morning, struggling with an infected injury on its leg.

The elephant's wound could



This handout photo shows a section of the herd, which had wandered 500km north from their natural habitat, near Yuxi city in China's southwest Yunnan province on July 6 (AFP)

have been life-threatening if authorities hadn't arrived and given treatment, state broadcaster CCTV reported.

"We gave it anti-bacterial and anti-inflammatory drugs, because its wound still looks pretty

bad," Bao Mingwei, director of the Asian Elephant Breeding and Rescue Center, told CCTV, adding that with a longer period of care it should be able to fully recover.

"It's possible that something

like rattan spines pricked it and the injuries slowly became infected."

State media footage showed around a dozen rescuers and police surrounding the animal in a rainforest clearing, as they tied

its thrashing limbs with rope and loaded it into a van.

The elephant was then driven 100km to a rescue centre.

Last week, a ten year old male elephant who broke away from the herd a month ago was captured and returned to a nature reserve.

Scientists are still baffled by what prompted the elephants to leave their home at the Xishuangbanna National Nature Reserve, on the border with Laos. But their mammoth trek has helped highlight habitat loss and conservation challenges in one of the few places in the world where wild elephant numbers are on the rise.

China's wild elephant population has doubled to over 300 in the past three decades - but their habitats have shrunk by nearly two-thirds over the same period.

AFP

COVID-19 PANDEMIC

Grief, anger as fire in Iraq COVID unit kills 64

Only 39 bodies could be identified; while teams are finding it difficult to identify the rest: Sources

Nasiriyah, Iraq - Grief and anger gripped the Iraqi city of Nasiriyah on Tuesday after fire swept through a COVID isolation unit killing 64 people and wounding dozens more.

The devastating Monday evening blaze in the city's Al-Hussein Hospital, which medics said was fuelled by the explosion of oxygen canisters, was the second such fire in Iraq in three months.

"Sixty-four (bodies) were retrieved and 39 identified and handed over to their families," a source at the provincial forensic science department told AFP.

"Medical teams and relatives of victims are finding it difficult to identify the rest of the corpses," the source said, adding that the death toll might rise with more bodies feared buried under the rubble.

A hundred people were also wounded in the blaze.

On Tuesday, as the first of the funerals were held, angry protesters gathered to vent their anger at provincial authorities they hold responsible for the deaths, an AFP corre-



People search the rubble at the ravaged coronavirus isolation ward of Al-Hussein hospital, in the southern Iraqi city of Nasiriyah on Tuesday (AFP)

spondent said.

In Al-Dawaya, east of Nasiriyah, a joint funeral was held for six members of one family who died in the inferno.

In Al-Nasr, north of the city, a joint funeral was held two brothers and two sisters, who were among the dead.

Abbas Agil, a pensioner who

attended the funeral in Al-Nasr, said the shouts of grieving mourners were filled with rage at provincial officials they accuse of corruption and neglect.

newly-built public hospital in the southern city.

Last month, Iraqi Prime Minister Mustafa Khademi inaugurated the brand new hospital, constructed by a Turkish firm. But the hospital and its more than 400 beds have yet to be opened to patients.

Photos shared on social media showed graffiti spray-painted on the entrance of a private hospital with the words: 'Closed - on the orders of the people'. In late 2019, at the height of the countrywide anti-government protests, Nasiriyah was referred to as the heart of the uprising.

"The state must take the necessary measures... to confront the corrupt," one young protester said.

He said those responsible must be held 'accountable... in transparent investigations that show people that it (the state) is serious about putting an end to these tragedies'.

In a Tuesday tweet, Iraqi President Barham Salih blamed the 'catastrophe' at Al-Hussein Hospital on 'persistent corrup-

tion and mismanagement that undervalues the lives of Iraqis'.

Salih recalled an April fire at a Baghdad COVID-19 hospital which killed 82 people and injured 110. It too was sparked by the explosion of badly stored oxygen cylinders.

The April fire triggered widespread anger, resulting in the suspension and subsequent resignation of then health minister Hassan al Tamimi.

Between January and March alone, the Interior Ministry recorded 7,000 fires.

On Monday, a minor fire broke out at the health ministry's headquarters in Baghdad, but it was quickly contained without any casualties.

Iraq - whose oil-dependent economy is still recovering from decades of war and international sanctions - has recorded more than 1.4mn coronavirus cases and more than 17,000 deaths.

Much of the country's health infrastructure is dilapidated and investment in public services has been hamstrung by endemic corruption.

AFP

Rush for inoculation after Macron announces health pass for jabbed

Paris, France - A record number of French people booked appointments for COVID-19 jabs after President Emmanuel Macron announced restrictions on the unvaccinated, including mandatory tests to enter restaurants.

The head of the main website to book vaccination appointments said traffic was at an all-time high following Macron's televised speech on Monday night. "We recorded 20,000 appointments per minute, an absolute record since the start of the campaign, and it's continued during the night and into this morning," Doctolib boss Stanislas Niox-Chateau told BFMTV.

A total of 926,000 people had booked a jab on the site, with 65 per cent of them under 35, he added.

Macron announced that from August anyone wanting to go out to eat or drink, take a long-distance train or visit a shopping centre would need to show a 'health pass', which means either proof of vaccination or a negative test. The pass will also



A French nurse watches President Emmanuel Macron's televised speech in Saintigny, near Chartres, on Monday (AFP)

be needed to attend a festival, a theatre show or a cinema screening as part of the government's strategy to tackle the surging number of new cases linked to the Delta variant.

Free COVID tests will end in September 'to encourage vaccination instead of taking many tests', Macron added.

He also announced mandatory vaccinations for healthcare staff, retirement home workers and others working with vulnerable people from September, in

line with similar moves in Greece, Italy and Britain.

Objections

The measures sparked fierce criticism by some on social media, with the French word for dictatorship - #Dictature - trending on Twitter amid accusations the government has introduced mandatory vaccination by stealth.

Some objected on the grounds that the health pass infringed on the personal liberty to

choose to get vaccinated or not, while anti-vaxxers pushed conspiracy theories about the links between the government and pharmaceutical companies.

A tweet from Macron from December 2020 in which he said 'the vaccine will not be obligatory' was also shared.

French far-right leader Marine Le Pen criticised the government for making vaccinations mandatory for healthcare staff, who will not be paid after September 15 if they are not jabbed.

'We applauded them at 8pm, considered them our daily heroes, always there despite their low salaries and difficult working conditions,' she wrote on Twitter. 'Now they're being made to feel guilty and threatened with not being paid, with indecent brutality.'

Health Minister Olivier Veran insisted that the health pass was 'not a punishment, it's not blackmail'. "You can carry on working without being vaccinated, taking your children to school without being vaccinated," he said.

AFP

Thailand defends 'mix-and-match' of vaccines after WHO warning

Bangkok, Thailand - Thailand on Tuesday defended mixing two different COVID-19 vaccines to battle a surge in infections, after the WHO's top scientist warned it was a "dangerous trend" not backed by evidence.

The kingdom is struggling to contain its latest outbreak fuelled by the highly contagious Delta variant, with cases and deaths skyrocketing and the healthcare system stretched thin.

Authorities said they will mix a first dose of the Chinese-made Sinovac jab with a second dose of AstraZeneca to try and achieve a 'booster' effect in six weeks instead of 12.

Thailand's chief virologist Yong Poovorawan said this would be possible by combining an inactivated virus vaccine - Sinovac - with a viral vector vaccine such as AstraZeneca.

"We can't wait 12 weeks (for a booster effect) in this outbreak where the disease is spreading fast," he said.

"But in the future, if there are better, improved vaccines... we



A nurse administers a dose of the AstraZeneca/Oxford vaccine at the Kalayani Watthanakur Hospital, in Narathiwat on July 9 (AFP)

will find a better way to manage the situation."

His comments come a day after the World Health Organisation's chief scientist Soumya Swaminathan called the strategy a 'dangerous trend'.

"We are in a bit of a data-free, evidence-free zone as far as 'mix-and-match'," she said.

Thailand has reported more than 353,700 coronavirus cases and 2,847 deaths - the bulk of them detected since the latest wave kicked off in April from an upscale Bangkok nightlife district.

Malaysia shuts jab centre

A Malaysian vaccination centre was shut down on Tuesday after more than 200 workers tested positive for COVID-19, authorities said, as the country's cases set a new daily record, a report from Malaysia's capital Kuala Lumpur said.

The Southeast Asian nation is battling a serious outbreak driven by highly infectious variants, and has been under a strict lockdown since the start of June.

AFP

Russia sets another pandemic high for coronavirus deaths

Moscow, Russia - Russia on Tuesday set another record for coronavirus-related deaths over a 24-hour period, despite efforts from authorities to slow a rampant third wave of infections.

A government tally reported 780 pandemic fatalities and 24,702 new cases.

Russia, the fifth worst-hit country in the world in terms of cases, has seen a wave of new infections over recent weeks, a surge exacerbated by a slow vaccine rollout.

Authorities have faced a vaccine-sceptic population, with an independent poll last week showing that 54 percent of Russians do not plan on getting a COVID-19 jab.

More Russians have however been getting vaccinated recently, particularly in the capital and epicentre of the country's outbreak, Moscow, after authorities introduced mandatory jabs



A woman (left) gets inoculated with a dose of Russia's Sputnik V vaccine (right) at a vaccination facility in India's financial capital Mumbai on Tuesday (AFP)

for most service industry workers, among other measures.

The Kremlin, however, has rejected mandatory vaccinations as well as suggestions of reimposing a nationwide lockdown.

As of Tuesday, just 13 per cent of Russia's population of

some 146mn people had been fully vaccinated, according to the Gogov website, which tallies COVID data from the regions.

With 144,492 deaths from the virus, Russia has the highest official death toll in Europe - even as authorities have been accused of downplaying the sever-

ity of the country's outbreak.

India to produce 300mn Sputnik V

The developers of Russia's Sputnik V coronavirus vaccine said on Tuesday a deal had been struck with Indian vaccine maker the Serum Institute to

produce 300mn doses annually.

"The parties intend to produce over 300mn doses of the vaccine in India per year with the first batch expected in September 2021," the Russian Direct Investment Fund (RDIF) said in a statement.

Sputnik V was registered by

Russia in August last year - the first of four vaccines developed in the country - and the RDIF says it is approved for use in 67 countries.

Its hasty development and distribution for use ahead of late-stage trials meant the jab was initially greeted with scepticism.

ticism.

Sputnik V has since won over experts, in a scientific and geopolitical victory for President Vladimir Putin, who announced late last month he had been inoculated with the vaccine.

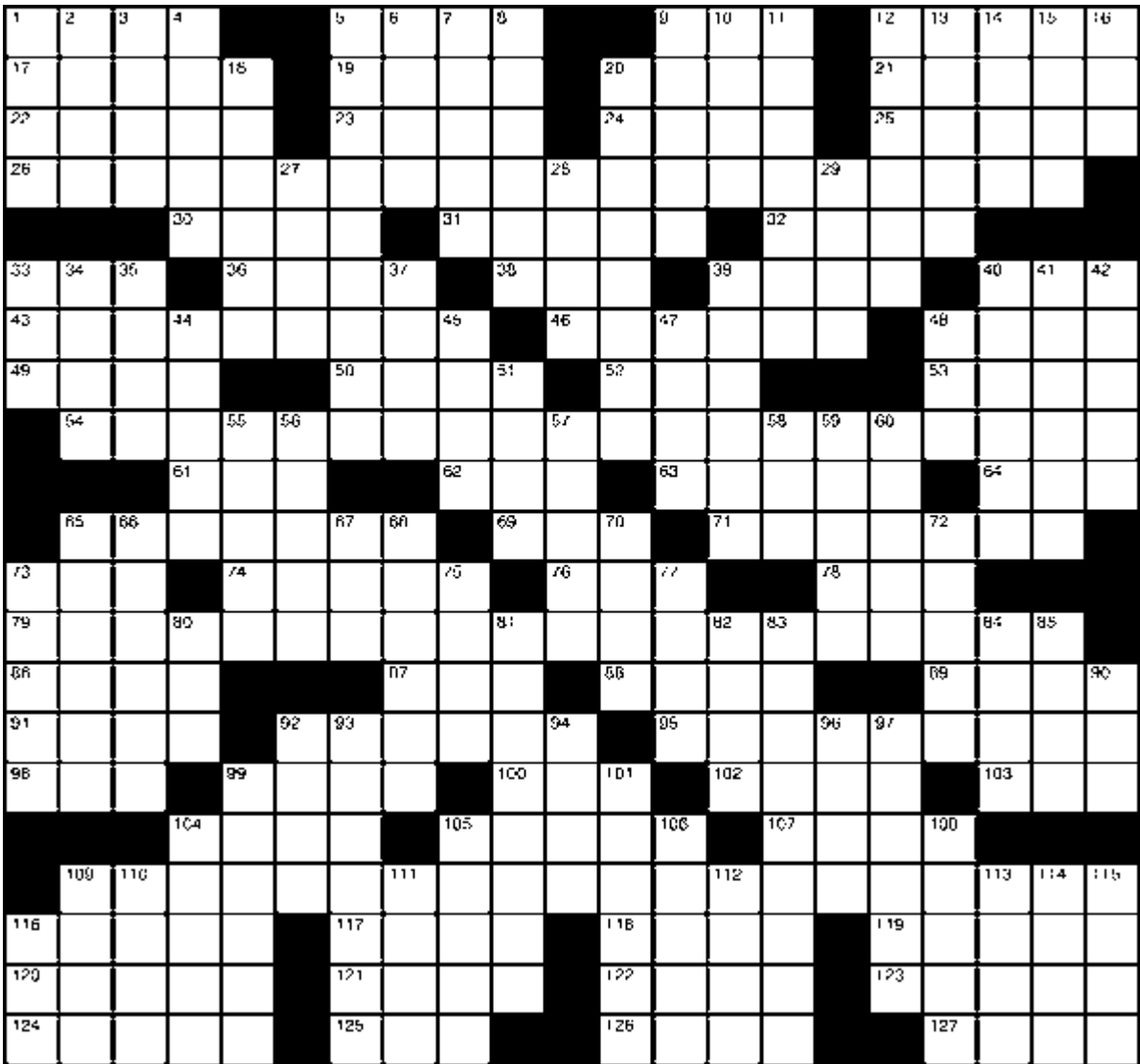
Kirill Dmitriev, the CEO of RDIF, described the deal with Serum as 'a major step' that would increase Sputnik V production capabilities and ultimately 'save lives both in India and around the world'.

He said that technology transfer had begun and joint production was expected to start in the coming months.

Serum Institute CEO Adar Poonawalla said in the statement that since it had shown 'high efficacy and a good safety profile, it is critical that the Sputnik vaccine is accessible in full measure for people across India and the world'.

AFP

DAILY CROSSWORD



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ACROSS

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46 Stair parts
48 Happy talk?
49 First lady of scat
50 1990-2012 Eagles coach Andy
52 Own, to Burns
53 Retired for the night
54 24
61 Geological period
62 Cow or mall follower
63 Underwater

detection device

- 64 Printemps follower
65 Trigonometry terms
69 Burns' "____"
O'Shanter"
71 Membership perks
73 Celestial sphere
74 Estonians' neighbors
76 69 Across, in reverse
78 Collection of related items:
suffix
79 76
86 Eager
87 Old card game
88 Novice: var.
89 UK art home
91 Walter or Lou
92 Fondue base
95 Logarithm parts
98 Reinking or Rutherford
99 Dairy sounds
100 Terminal word
102 Gloom's companion
103 Explosive initials
104 Roseanne ____
105 Durocs' dwellings
107 What baffles do
109 13
116 Roof over one's head
117 1944-1995 film

actor Jack

- 118 Neighbor of Turkey
119 Creditor's request
120 More ill-mannered
121 Irritate
122 Evaluate
123 Threefold
124 Side facing a glacier
125 Kerouac's Paradise
126 Facial features
127 Bridge goal
DOWN
1 Concrete building component
2 Fork part
3 Poker opening
4 Ache for
5 Habitual
6 Med. school course
7 Author Cather
8 Spirited horses
9 WWI battle river
10 Landed
11 Money handler
12 Scowl
13 Turkish coins
14 Face shape, often
15 Gift for Adano
16 Cat's warning
18 Malcontents
20 1740-1830 period in British history
27 Leave out

28 Fly like a falcon

- 29 Prior nights
33 Gynt's mother
34 Tyler-Taylor connection
35 "South Pacific" island
37 A region
39 Ulumnus to-be
40 Touched lightly
41 Sail attachments
42 Military nucleus
44 Window parts
45 Hindu triad god
47 Taste tests
48 "Green Eggs and ____" by Dr. Seuss
51 Dish the ____:
gossip
55 Informal restaurant
56 Divided for traffic
57 John or Abigail
58 Chicago-Montpelier dir.
59 Mogul governor: var.
60 Heavens: comb. form
65 Cowardly
66 Host Conan
67 Old English letter
68 Steps in fences
70 Dillon, of "Gunsmoke"
72 Speaks wildly
73 "Pal Joey" author

75 Kind of gin

- 77 Word to the barber
80 "The ____ Couple"
81 Fall behind
82 Toward the mouth
83 Chants, essentially
84 Orient
85 Musial or Lee
90 70s zen moment
92 Center
93 Little Jack's family
94 Author Bagnold
96 Spree: sl.
97 Brings in goods
99 Large drinking bowls
101 Wish for
104 Presages
105 Word with fry or potatoes
106 Wander off course
108 Tinker-Chance connection
109 Border on
110 Large, flightless bird
111 Inter ____: L.
112 Despise
113 Silents actor
Jannings
114 Columbus's caravel
115 Pipe part
116 ____ Poetica: L.

YOUR DAILY HOROSCOPE



ARIES MARCH 21-APRIL 19

You want to travel so badly that if you could, you'd be in a cab on your way to the airport right now, passport in hand. If duty calls, however -- especially if it calls loudly enough to keep you off that plane (or out of that car) -- your sense of responsibility will kick in. In that case, the least you can do is to treat yourself to the company of someone new and exotic.



LEO JULY 23-AUGUST 22

Thinking about staying in bed late? Well good for you. In addition to the fact that you haven't been able to do that in far too long, you're going to need your rest. The universe has arranged quite the evening for you and your dear ones. Don't ask any questions, and don't try to plan it too much. Just let go and enjoy yourself, no matter where you end up. You'll be amazed at how easy that is.



SAGITTARIUS NOVEMBER 22-DECEMBER 21

You've never been known for being shy, retiring or afraid to say what's on your mind. So when you exhibit those qualities today, and everyone around you seems just a bit shell-shocked, you'll want to explain -- but that won't be necessary. There's a certain someone in the vicinity who you're really quite sweet on, and you want to make a good impression.



TAURUS APRIL 20-MAY 20

Your responsibilities to your friends and family will take precedence over any type of romantic tryst. The good news is that, for the first time in a long time, all of these loved ones will not just be willing to get along -- it will actually come easily to them. This is one of those rare times when doing the impossible turns out to be a breeze. Enjoy it.



VIRGO AUGUST 23-SEPTEMBER 22

In your book, there's nothing like having options, is there? It makes everything better, knowing that if plan A doesn't work out, plan B looks good and plan C is ready to go. Well, you may not need quite that many plans tonight, but it couldn't hurt to have them handy anyway. The universe has arranged a rather impromptu visit from a dear one who needs you.



CAPRICORN DECEMBER 22-JANUARY 19

You're really looking forward to tonight, aren't you? Well, you have every right -- especially since the morning and afternoon look like they'll be quite busy. Do what you have to do to take care of your responsibilities to others, then be sure to save some energy to take care of your responsibility to yourself. You know what they say about all work and no play?



GEMINI MAY 21-JUNE 21

Don't even think about leaving the house if you really don't want to. Your friends, siblings and neighbours may try to talk you out of it, but if you don't feel like budging, don't budge. Dig those heels in, slip into your sweats and find a comfortable spot on the couch. If worst comes to worst, and you're dealing with some serious pouting, you can always entertain the pouters at your place.



LIBRA SEPTEMBER 23-OCTOBER 22

Going out? You sure are, and you're undoubtedly looking forward to it, too. After the crazy few days you've had, it's not surprising you need a little down time. And it's also quite possible that a dear one has arranged an impromptu gathering at their place -- which means you won't be stuck cleaning up all day tomorrow.



AQUARIUS JANUARY 20-FEBRUARY 18

You're feeling especially amorous today, and you won't be alone for a single second. Not unless you want to be, of course, which is highly doubtful. Go ahead. Let that certain someone know just how much you enjoy their company -- and how much more of it you want to enjoy.



CANCER JUNE 22-JULY 22

You've certainly earned this bit of relaxation, if anyone has, and you're going to enjoy it. It's time for some fun, complete with a lavish, extravagant evening out. Now, about the financial arrangements. Be sure you have someone to help you pay for it all -- which shouldn't be tough, since there's someone out there who really wants to make a good impression on you. Go ahead.



SCORPIO OCTOBER 23-NOVEMBER 21

Everyone else may be thinking of going out, but you're not. Your place, with the right company and all the right provisions, would suit you just fine. Besides, you've got something you want to show off and you can't do that in a group situation. Lure your sweetie or your best friend over and have a nice, quiet evening. They really can't wait to see what you have up your sleeve.



PISCES FEBRUARY 19-MARCH 20

You've been on an emotional roller coaster lately, and you've had all the fun you can stand. You may find yourself trying to figure out what's going to happen next. Just for the next couple of days, though, stop pushing. Let the universe take the wheel and see what happens. Along the way, you could end up feeling pretty darned good about yourself.



TEST YOUR KNOWLEDGE

1. How long are professional Golf Tour players allotted per shot?

- a. 45 seconds
b. 25 seconds
c. 1 minute
d. 2 minutes

2. Which NBA player scored 8 points in the final 7 seconds of a game to lead his team to victory?

- a. Baron Davis
b. Kevin Garnett
c. Stephon Maurbury
d. Reggie Miller

3. The first hang gliders to be flown were flown in...?

- a. 1600s
b. 1700s
c. 1800s
d. 1900s

Answers: 1.a 2.d 3.c

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Space Jam2
Superstar LeBron James and his son, Dom, get trapped in digital space by a rogue AI. To get home safely, LeBron teams up with Bugs Bunny, Daffy Duck and the rest of the Looney Tunes gang for a high-stakes basketball game

Jolt
A woman with severe anger issues uses a special electrode device to zap herself anytime she feels the urge to brutally murder someone. When a man she falls for is murdered, she becomes determined to bring the culprits to justice.

Book your tickets at voxcinemas.com or the VOX app

KIDS COLOURING

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

DAILY CROSSWORD ANSWERS (JULY 13)

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

UP TO DATE

SWEET HARVEST

The Al Tabsil date harvest season starts from the end of June every year when dates are abundantly harvested and are free from pests. Omani farmers have been skilled in this process of preserving the fruit of the yellow palm annually since ancient times. These photos were taken by **Ahmed al Saidi** in Jalaan Bani bu Hassan.



DATE CAKE WITH CARAMEL SAUCE

Ingredients

- 1/4 cup butter, room temperature, plus more to prep pan
- 1½ cups flour, plus more to prep pan
- 1½ cups (around 200g) chopped pitted dates
- 1tsp baking soda
- 1tsp baking powder
- ½tsp salt
- 1 cup sugar
- 1tsp vanilla essence
- 2 eggs
- 1 cup caramel or toffee sauce – to garnish

Method

Preheat oven to 180° C. Butter and flour a suitable pan and set aside.

Add dates and 1¼ cups water to a sauce pan and bring to a boil. Then remove from heat and mix in baking soda. Allow to cool, then use a blender to puree. Whisk together flour, baking powder, and salt in a small bowl. Set aside.

In a stand mixer, beat the butter, sugar, and vanilla in a large bowl. Add 1 egg and mix until combined. Add half of the flour mixture and half of the date mixture and combine well. Add the remaining 1 egg, flour mixture, and dates. Transfer the batter into the prepared pan and bake for 40-45 minutes, or until a toothpick inserted into the center of cake

comes out clean. Cool on a wire rack, then invert. Drizzle caramel sauce over top of cake, let it flow to the sides. Serve with extra caramel sauce and whipped cream, if desired.





ITALIAN PLAYERS FETED AS HEROES IN ROME

Rome, Italy - Italy's players were feted as heroes on Monday with a day of celebrations culminating in an open top bus ride through Rome after beating England in a dramatic penalty shootout to win Euro 2020 at Wembley.

Both Italy's prime minister and president hosted ceremonies for the Azzurri before the team boarded a bus and made a triumphant journey through jubilant crowds waving the tricolour flag. It is the second time the Italians have been crowned European champions and their win marks a remarkable turnaround under Mancini after the team failed to even qualify for the 2018 World Cup in Russia.



"It's a renaissance for Italian football," said an emotional Leonardo Bonucci. "We have an exceptional group, we love each other, we know where we come from," said goalkeeper Gianluigi Donnarumma, named best

player of the tournament.

The Italy team had landed back in Rome early on Monday morning, with captain Giorgio Chiellini and coach Roberto Mancini lifting the trophy aloft as they stepped off the plane.

There had been questions over whether they would hold the traditional victory parade due to concerns over coronavirus, which swept through Italy in February last year and has since claimed almost 128,000 lives.

But after meeting with President Sergio Mattarella and Prime Minister Mario Draghi the team - all wearing their medals - were given the chance to greet the fans properly.

"We are happy to have given

joy and hope to the Italians after such a difficult period," Mancini told reporters earlier.

Chiellini on Monday dedicated the win to the Italian fans and former Italy and Fiorentina defender Davide Astori, who died aged 31 after suffering a cardiac arrest before an Italian league match in 2018.

Addressing the audience in the grounds of Mattarella's Quirinale palace, he paid tribute to his teammates. "We are not here because we scored an extra penalty, but because we believed in the values of friendship," he said. "This success is a group victory. This bond made us feel like brothers of Italy to answer the call together."

Prime Minister Draghi, meanwhile, spoke about the 'extraordinary successes' achieved by the Azzurri.

Together with the Azzurri, the Prime Minister lifted the trophy in the Piazza Colonna in Rome with Italy fans making their warmth felt nearby.

AFP



Jamaica and Costa Rica win openers

CONCACAF GOLD CUP

Los Angeles, US - Shamar Nicholson and Bobby Reid powered Jamaica past Suriname and Costa Rica downed Guadeloupe in the opening Gold Cup Group C games in Orlando on Monday.

Nicholson scored in the sixth minute to put Jamaica ahead with his third career Gold Cup goal and first international strike in two years.

Fulham forward Reid doubled the lead in the 26th minute.

In the late game, Joel Campbell and Ariel Lassiter put Costa Rica 2-0 ahead early in the first half.

Raphael Mirval pulled one back for Guadeloupe just before half-time, but Celso Borges scored Costa Rica's third in the second half to seal the win.

Both teams will be off until their next matches on Friday, also in Orlando, when Jamaica play Guadeloupe and Costa Rica take on Suriname.

COVID-19 knocked Curacao out of the Gold Cup before it started, with an outbreak forcing them to withdraw. They were replaced by Guatemala.

AFP

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BIRTHDAY WISHES

KESTER VARKEY LALICHAN
 JULY 14

Happy birthday Kester..
 May God bless you.
 Appa, Amma and Anna

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wish@apexmedia.co.om
 with your resident card copy (It's free of cost)



'Best-ever prepared' Olympic host city, says IOC chief Bach

Tokyo, Japan - Olympics chief Thomas Bach praised Tokyo on Tuesday as the 'best-ever prepared' host city, as athletes began entering the Olympic Village ten days before the opening ceremony.

The final countdown to the Games comes with Tokyo under a coronavirus state of emergency and spectators banned from attending all Olympic events in the city and surrounding regions.

International Olympic Committee (IOC) President Bach, who arrived in Japan last week and spent three days in quarantine, told Tokyo 2020 chief Seiko Hashimoto that organisers were 'doing a fantastic job'.

"You have managed to make Tokyo the best-ever prepared city for an Olympic Games," he said.

"This is even more remarkable under the difficult circumstances we all have to face."

The pair met as the first athletes began entering the Olympic Village, which opened Tuesday without any of the welcome ceremonies or media opportunities often seen at the Games.

"We are sitting in one boat and we are rowing together with full force in the same direction," Bach said as he met with committee head Seiko Hashimoto for the first time in



person since his arrival in Tokyo last Thursday.

Organisers declined to even specify which teams were entering or how many athletes were now in the Village.

Strict coronavirus rules mean athletes can only enter the Village five days before their events and must leave within 48 hours of winning or being eliminated.

Despite the low-key opening, Bach said organisers could 'be confident that the stage is set'.

Aside from the spectator ban in Tokyo and surrounding regions, the public will also be kept out of almost all venues elsewhere in Japan. Athletes, media and officials are subject to regular virus testing and limits on their movement.

We are sitting in one boat and we are rowing together with full force in the same direction

THOMAS BACH, IOC CHIEF

Polls have regularly found most Japanese would prefer the Olympics to be postponed further or cancelled outright, though opposition has softened in recent weeks.

'Chinese people'

Bach also appeared to stumble over his words in his brief remarks, referring to the

'Chinese people' rather than 'Japanese people'.

"Our common target is safe and secure Games for everybody; for the athletes, for all the delegations, and most importantly also for the Chinese people - Japanese people," Bach said, quickly noticing his mistake.

The IOC chief's comments at the briefing were interpreted from English to Japanese, but the slip was not included in the translations.

Domestic news outlets and social media, however, were quick to pounce on the slip-up, with some lambasting Bach.

Beijing is due to host the Winter Olympics in February.

He ended his speech with a Japanese phrase: '*Gambari mashou*', which translates as 'Let's do our best'.

Organisers and the IOC decided last week to ban fans from all but a handful of outlying venues, a move that came after the Japanese government instituted a state of emergency in Tokyo forced by rising coronavirus cases.

Also on Tuesday, police in Tokyo said a group of four US and British men working for a power company contracted to the Olympics were arrested on suspicion of using cocaine.

Agencies



A file photo of Roger Federer

Federer withdraws from Tokyo Games after injury 'setback'

Geneva, Switzerland - Swiss great Roger Federer announced on Tuesday he has withdrawn from the upcoming Tokyo Olympics after a 'setback' in his recovery from a knee injury. The 20-time Grand Slam champion was knocked out of Wimbledon in the quarterfinals by Hubert Hurkacz last week.

The 39-year-old Federer, who has never won an Olympic singles gold medal, underwent two surgeries on his right knee in 2020.

"During the grass court season, I unfortunately experienced a setback with my knee, and have accepted that I must withdraw from the Tokyo Olympic Games," Federer said in a statement on social media.

Federer, who turns 40 next month, said he was hoping to return to the ATP Tour later this summer. "I have already begun rehabilitation in the hopes of returning to the tour later this summer," he added.

Earlier, Canadian world No 5 Bianca Andreescu said she will

skip the Tokyo Olympics, citing concerns over the COVID-19 pandemic. The 21 year old 2019 US Open champion announced her decision in a statement on social media. "I would like to inform you that I have made the very difficult decision to not play in the Tokyo Olympics later this month," Andreescu said.

Andreescu joins several high-profile players who have already withdrawn from the Olympics.

Rafael Nadal, Serena Williams and Dominic Thiem have all pulled out while others such as world No 1 Novak Djokovic are wavering. Newly crowned Wimbledon champion Djokovic said on Sunday he was '50/50' over playing in Tokyo, citing disappointment over the decision announced last week to bar spectators from the event.

Also on Tuesday, David Goffin, the Belgian No 1 who is 20th in the ATP rankings, said that he would not play at the Olympics because he has not recovered from an ankle injury.

AFP

Istanbul sets sights on 2036 Summer Games

Istanbul, Turkey - The mayor of Istanbul on Tuesday said he wanted the ancient Turkish city to host the 2036 Summer Olympics after a failed bid for the pandemic-delayed 2020 Games.

The fabled capital of the Byzantine and Ottoman Empires boasts strong infrastructure and the distinction of bridging Europe and Asia along the Bosphorus Strait. But it also suffers from stifling heat and humidity in the summer as well as traffic nightmares for its 15.5mn residents.

"Our objective is (to host) the Olympic and Paralympic Games in 2036," Istanbul mayor Ekrem Imamoglu told reporters. "I am convinced that we will win."

The International Olympic Committee (IOC) is expected to name the Australian city of Brisbane - the only candidate - as the host of the 2032 Summer Games before the Tokyo Olympics launch later this month. A formal bid could potentially boost the political standing of the popular mayor of Turkey's largest city.



Ekrem Imamoglu

Imamoglu is a prominent member of the main opposition party who has become a thorn in the side of President Recep Tayyip Erdogan.

The long-serving Turkish leader is a fan of sports diplomacy who spearheaded unsuccessful efforts to host the 2020 Games as well as the Euro 2024 football championship that will be played in Germany.

The IOC has not yet started the formal bidding process but cities including London have expressed early interest.

AFP

France stun Wallabies for first win in Australia since 1990

RUGBY UNION TEST

Melbourne, Australia - Melvyn Jaminet nailed seven penalties as a beefed-up France stunned the Wallabies 28-26 to post their first win on Australian soil in more than 30 years on Tuesday and keep the three-Test series alive.

Fabien Galthie's depleted but resolute *Les Bleus*, boasting a new heavyweight pack, stamped their mark on the game early and went to the break with a 16-13 lead.

Despite a fightback from Australia, they clung on at

Melbourne's AAMI Park to clock their first victory Down Under since 1990 in Sydney, when they came out 28-19.

It was a battling effort from the French, who were stung by a painful last-gasp 21-23 defeat in the opening Test, with defeat piling pressure on Australian coach Dave Rennie ahead of the decider in just four days' time.

Jaminet drilled seven, including the winner three minutes from time, plus a conversion to go with Damian Penaud's try.

Jake Gordon and Michael Hooper both crossed for Aus-

tralia and Noah Lolesio slotted four penalties, but it was not enough.

"I don't have the words but I'm really proud of what we have done tonight," said France skipper Anthony Jelouch.

Galthie said it was reward for their persistence and belief.

"We feel we have solid foundations, the skills of the players, a team that is ready to fight whatever the scenario," he said of his young squad missing a host of regulars. "The players are determined."

AFP



France's Melvyn Jaminet (C) catches the ball during the second Test against Australia in Melbourne on Tuesday

Austrian Konrad claims stage 16

TOUR DE FRANCE

Paris, France - Patrick Konrad from Austria held on to clinch a thrilling solo victory on stage 16 of the Tour de France on Tuesday. He attacked out of a breakaway on the Col de Portet-d'Aspet, the penultimate climb of the hilly 169km stage.

It is the 29-year-old's first Tour stage and first professional win. Italy's Sonny Colbrelli and Australian Michael Matthews finished second and third.

Slovenia's Tadej Pogacar retained the yellow jersey as the group of overall leaders crossed the line almost 14 minutes later with no significant changes at the top of the general classification.

Agencies



West Indies clinch T20I series against Australia

WEST INDIES VS AUSTRALIA THIRD T20I

Gros-Islet, Saint Lucia - Chris Gayle has thanked injured West Indies captain Kieron Pollard for a pre-match 'pep talk' after he emerged from his lean run with a reminder of him at his best, scoring 67 off 38 balls to wrap up the series against Australia on Monday.

Gayle came into the match having made 102 runs in nine innings since his recall earlier in the year against Sri Lanka and hadn't struck a T20I half-century since 2016.

That all changed in a display that brought seven sixes, including three in a row off Adam Zampa, and during the innings he went past 14,000 T20 runs.

"It's a great journey," he said at the presentation.

"I'm so happy and so pleased to get a series win first of all. I just want to commend the stand-in captain Nicholas Pooran for winning a fantastic series against a great team.

"To Kieron Pollard, he played a big part as well even though he played in none of these games. You all knew I was struggling with the bat and to be able to get some runs today was very pleasing.

"I want to dedicate this half-century and milestone to West Indies, my teammates, especially Kieron Pollard. We had a team meeting before the

game and...he let me know where I stand within this team and he wanted me to go and express myself. So I'm very grateful for that pep talk because sometimes it doesn't matter how great you are, you need a bit of a talk sometimes.

ally pleased to win this series."

T20 World Cup title defence

Gayle then went into full Universe Boss mode and spoke of his desire to help West Indies defend their T20 World Cup title

I have to commend those senior guys, they played a fantastic part with what happened today. With this strength and unity, we're playing some great allround cricket

CHRIS GAYLE

"I have to commend those senior guys, they played a fantastic part with what happened today. With this strength and unity, we're playing some great allround cricket and I'm re-

in the UAE in October.

"My main focus is the World Cup," he said. "Don't mind the numbers, Chris Gayle not getting the runs, soon to be 42. You guys should be happy to see Chris

Gayle on the field still, hopefully Chris will last as long as possible. Cherish those moments, commentators don't put up no stats about Chris Gayle not scoring a half-century. Just respect the Universe Boss, let him play cricket and have some fun. Enjoy the moment with Chris Gayle, a strong West Indies team and some good youngsters."

After the second match, Dwayne Bravo said that Gayle's presence was more than about just runs, citing the calmness and experience he brings to the dressing room. Gayle explained after this innings that he and Bravo will often split the batting and bowling advice while coach Phil Simmons lauded Gayle's role in the team environment.

"We've seen what he's been doing in practice, seen what he's done in IPL in the UAE where the

World Cup will be played and we thought this was a role he could fill for us," Simmons said.

"He started badly as it was highlighted, but we know where his heart is and today he showed what we insisted he can do. Nice to see him back in a bit of nick. He was absolutely happy tonight, he's always wanted to do well for West Indies and tonight he showed why we are backing him.

"He's unbelievable in the dressing room. He doesn't shout and scream - well he does when he has too - but he offers advice quietly. We have him as a mentor added to him playing. He's allowed to say what he as to say and when he speaks all of us listen because there's no greater T20 player that's passed through the world. That's a huge part of having him there, not just the runs."

Cricinfo

SCOREBOARD

AUSTRALIA			
M Wade	b McCoy	23	(36)
A Finch	c Allen b Walsh	30	(31)
M Marsh	lbw b Allen	9	(12)
A Carey	c Simmons b Walsh	13	(9)
M Henriques	c Allen b Bravo	33	(29)
A Turner	run out	24	(22)
D Christian	not out	1	(1)
Extras:	(lb 1, w 7)	8	
TOTAL	141 for six in 20 overs		
Fall of wickets: 1-41, 2-58, 3-79, 4-80, 5-139, 6-141			
Bowling: S Cottrell 4-0-32-0, A Russell 3-0-29-0, O McCoy 1-0-9-1, D Bravo 3-0-17-1, F Allen 4-0-26-1, H Walsh 4-0-18-2, C Gayle 1-0-9-0			
WEST INDIES			
A Fletcher	c Marsh b Starc	4	(1)
L Simmons	c Starc b Meredith	15	(13)
C Gayle	c Wade b Meredith	67	(38)
N Pooran	not out	32	(27)
D Bravo	c Zampa b Meredith	7	(7)
A Russell	not out	7	(2)
Extras:	(lb 4, nb 1, w 5)	10	
TOTAL:	142 for four in 14.5 overs		
Fall of wickets: 1-4, 2-42, 3-109, 4-124			
Bowling: M Starc 4-0-15-1, J Hazlewood 3-0-33-0, R Meredith 3.5-0-48-3, A Zampa 3-0-34-0, M Marsh 1-0-8-0			

India's World Cup winner Sharma dies aged 66

New Delhi, India - Yashpal Sharma, a member of India's 1983 World Cup-winning side, died in New Delhi after a cardiac arrest on Tuesday. Sharma was 66.

A middle-order batter, he played 37 Tests and 42 ODIs for India between 1978 and 1985. He was the second-highest run-getter in India's historic 1983 triumph, scoring two half-centuries: an 89 in India's win over West Indies in the group stage, and 61 in the semifinal against England.

In his first-class career that spanned nearly two decades, Sharma scored 8933 runs, with 21 centuries and 46 half-centuries.

Post-retirement, he remained actively involved in coaching, commentary and cricket administration. He served as a national selector across two stints, first from 2004 to 2005, and later from 2008 to 2011. He was part of the committee that picked India's 2011 World Cup-winning squad. He also officiated in a

number of domestic matches, both as an umpire and match referee. Most recently, he was part of Delhi's Cricket Advisory

The news was met with shock by his former teammates, some of whom he had met last month on the anniversary of the 1983 World Cup win.

"It is unbelievable," Dilip Vengsarkar told PTI.

"He was the fittest among all of us. I had asked him that day, when we met, about his routine. He was a vegetarian, teetotaler, used to have soup for his dinner and very particular about his morning walks. I am just shocked."

"As a player, he was a proper team man and a fighter," Vengsarkar added.

"I fondly remember the 1979 Test against Pakistan in Delhi. We had a partnership that helped us save the game. I knew him since my university days. Still can't believe it."

Kirti Azad, another member of that 1983 team, had also met him last month. "He told me

that day we met that I had lost weight. We had a great reunion. I remember the very first game in the 1983 World Cup playing the mighty West Indies with those fast bowlers, he set the agenda and we won that game," Azad told PTI.



Yashpal Sharma

"He was again fantastic in the semifinal, hitting Bob Willis for a six. Nowadays people say [Ravindra] Jadeja hits the stumps regularly but so did Yashpal. He was a livewire on the field and would hit stumps all the time," Azad said.

Another member of the 1983

World Cup squad, Balwinder Sandhu, told PTI that Sharma should have got more recognition than he did for the way he played the game. "The '83 team is like a family, one of our family members is no more, it is so shocking," Sandhu said.

He was the fittest among all of us... I am just shocked. As a player, he was a proper team man and a fighter

DILIP VENGSAKAR, FORMER TEAMMATE

"The media may not have given him that kind of credit that he should have been given. But he gave 100% all the time, played to win the game, and even while fielding - he was brilliant in the field."

Sharma was born in Ludhiana and represented Punjab,

Haryana and Railways in the domestic circuit.

He first came into national contention in 1977, when he made a match-winning 173 for North Zone in the Duleep Trophy final, against a South Zone attack comprising B S Chandrasekhar, S Abid Ali and Erapalli Prasanna.

He was subsequently picked for the Pakistan tour but had to wait for nearly two years for his Test debut, at Lord's against England. Sharma scored two Test centuries, his first an unbeaten 100 against Australia in Delhi.

In the following Test, Sharma made 85 not out off 117 balls in Kolkata to steer India's race towards the 247-run target before bad light halted play. Sharma's second Test century (140) came during the course of a 316-run stand with Gundappa Viswanath, who made 222, against England in Chennai.

Sharma is survived by his wife, two daughters and a son. Cricinfo



A file photo of Yashpal Sharma in action



A file photo of Oman football team during a training session in Doha, Qatar, last month

Oman team to camp in Serbia

Coach Ivankovic selects 28 players as preparatory plans for final round of 2022 FIFA Asian qualifiers unveiled

Ashok Purohit
Muscat

A long journey awaits national team footballers as they attempt to write a new chapter with a place in the 2022 FIFA World Cup in Qatar.

Oman are placed in a tough final round Group B Asian qualifiers along with heavy-weights Japan, Australia and Saudi Arabia. China and Vietnam complete the six-nation group.

Oman's World Cup final round campaign begins with an away game in Japan on September 2 and national team coach Branko Ivankovic of Croatia on Tuesday announced his 28-member squad for an overseas camp.

The Red Warriors will hold a month-long camp in Serbia, beginning on July 25, and will fly directly to Tokyo after the conclusion of the camp on August 23. The team is expected



L-R: Khalifa al Hasani, Sheikh Shabib al Hosni, Fahd al Raisi and Maqbool al Balushi

to arrive in Japan on August 25. Oman are seeking to play a couple of friendlies against local clubs before they meet the hosts on September 2.

During the camp in Serbia, the national team is expected to play four warm-up matches against the local teams.

Oman Football Association (OFA) and the national team received a boost on Tuesday after H H Sayyid Theyazin bin Haitham, Minister for Culture, Sports and Youth, directed the concerned authorities to provide full support to the team's preparations for the qualifiers.

A tough campaign involving long travel across continents and against stronger and higher-ranked rivals await Oman. Coach Branko Ivankovic has relied mainly on the squad that was in Qatar last month during the third round qualifiers.

Oman advanced as one of the best runners-up side from Group E with Qatar topping the group.

Following the Japan game, Oman have a home game against Saudi Arabia in Muscat on September 7. After the games against Japan and Saudi Arabia, Oman will travel to Australia for their match on October 7 before returning to play against Vietnam in Muscat on October 12.

China host Oman on November 11 before the Red Warriors take on Japan at home on November 16. The national team then visit their Gulf rivals



A tough campaign involving long travel across continents and against stronger and higher-ranked rivals await Oman. Coach Branko Ivankovic has relied mainly on the squad that was in Qatar last month during the third round qualifiers

Saudi Arabia on January 27, 2022 before playing host to Australia on February 1. They make their last road trip to Vietnam for the match on March 24 before concluding their campaign with a home game against China on March 29.

The winner and runner-up in each group will seal an automatic spot at the World Cup finals. The third-placed teams in each group will meet in an Asian playoff to determine which team advances to an intercontinental playoff for one of the last places at the World Cup.

Omantel League from October 16

At a press meet on Tuesday, OFA general secretary and CEO

Fahd al Raisi, OFA executive director Sheikh Shabib al Hosni, OFA's league expert Khalifa al Hasani and national team manager Maqbool al Balushi spoke about the national team's plans, domestic leagues and Olympic and beach soccer teams.

In his comments to *Muscat Daily*, Hosni said that the 2021-22 Omantel League, comprising 14 teams, and the OFA First Division League, featuring 21 teams, will begin on October 16 while the His Majesty's Cup will start on October 29. The OFA Cup will begin on November 19.

"Obviously these dates will be reconfirmed as the pandemic situation is expected to be much better by that time," said Hosni.



Oman beach soccer goalkeeper during a training session

Beach soccer side for World Cup named

The Oman beach soccer team, which will be participating in the forthcoming FIFA Beach Soccer World Cup in Russia, in August, was also announced on Tuesday.

Coached by Talib Hilal, Oman will be making their fourth appearance at the global showcase event and are pooled along with defending champions Portugal, Senegal and Uruguay. The World Cup will kick-off on Au-

gust 19. Oman will travel to Ukraine for preparatory camp on July 20 before proceeding to Moscow.

BEACH SOCCER TEAM:

Amjad al Hamdani, Mishal al Araimi, Khalid al Araimi, Eid al Farsi, Younus al Owaisi, Mundhir al Araimi, Jalal al Sinani, Nooh al Zadjali, Said al Farsi, Salim al Araimi, Hamood al Toqi, Abdullah al Sooti, Yahya al Araimi.

hosts. The finals will be held from September 6 to 25, 2022.

OMAN TEAM FOR SERBIA CAMP:

Faiz al Rushedi, Ahmed al Rawahi, Ibrahim al Mukhaini, Mohammed al Musalami, Abdulaziz al Ghailani, Amjad al Harthi, Zahir al Aghbari, Jameel al Yahmadi, Mohsin al Ghassani, Juma al Habsi, Ali al Busaidi, Abdullah Fawaz, Salah al Yahyaei, Abdulaziz al Miqbali, Omar al Fazari, Khalid al Breiki, Fahmi Durbein, Arshad al Alawi, Mohammed al Ghafri, Al Mundher al Alawi, Ahmed al Khamisi, Saud al Habsi, Ahmed al Kaabi, Yazeed al Mashani, Mohsin Jawhar, Khalid al Hajri, Issam al Subhi, Harib al Saadi.

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