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HIS MAJESTY SULTAN HAITHAM BIN TARIK SENT A CONGRATULATORY CABLE TO SRI LANKAN PRESIDENT GOTABAYA RAJAPAKSA ON HIS COUNTRY'S INDEPENDENCE ANNIVERSARY, ON WEDNESDAY

People over 65 can get the jab

New vaccination drive kicks off on Sunday with Oxford-AstraZeneca shots

Our Correspondent
Muscat

The Ministry of Health (MoH) announced on Wednesday that anyone over 65, healthy or otherwise, can now get the COVID-19 vaccine. A new campaign will begin on Sunday using the Oxford-AstraZeneca vaccine.

In a statement, MoH said, 'The ministry will commence vaccinating a new target group from the community in continuation of the first phase with the AstraZeneca vaccine from Sunday.'

Last Saturday, the sultanate received a total of 100,000 doses of the Oxford-AstraZeneca vaccine from India. The vaccine is produced by Serum Institute of India.

The ministry confirmed that the campaign targets the elderly who are 65 years and older in all the governorates of the sultanate, including healthy individuals and those with chronic conditions.

'The ministry would like to note that the campaign (starting on Sunday) does not cover persons who have received the first dose of the Pfizer-BioNTech vaccine. The date of the second dose will be announced later,' the MoH said.

H E Dr Ahmed bin Mohammed al Sa'eedi, Minister of Health, said, "Be committed to



Oman's total COVID-19 cases

134,856

DAILY COUNT

January 28	154	Feb 1	198
January 29 to 31	598	Feb 2	161
(Average of 199)		Feb 3	171

the precautionary measures. The virus is still here and vaccines are not going to be available to everybody in any country for a long time. We do not want to go back to even partial lock-

down. We have a choice and that is prevention."

Oman reported no deaths related to the virus in the last two days. The sultanate's death toll from the pandemic stands at

1,532. Despite a low mortality rate, which is one of the lowest in the region and much lower than several other countries globally, MoH officials continue to urge people to adhere to preventive

The virus is still here and vaccines are not going to be available to everybody in any country for a long time. We do not want to go back to even partial lockdown. We have a choice and that is prevention

H E DR AHMED
AL SA'EEDI

measures.

"The best way to be safe from the virus is to adhere to preventive measures, particularly social distancing and wearing a face mask in public and crowded places," H E Dr Sa'eedi said.

On Tuesday, MoH announced 171 new cases of COVID-19, taking the total to 134,856. There were 115 recoveries in this period. 'The number of recoveries has increased to 127,169,' an MoH statement said, adding that currently the rate of recovery is 94.3 per cent.

As of Wednesday, a total of 95 patients were admitted in health institutions, including 25 in ICUs.

MoL offers 1,680 jobs in private sector

Our Correspondent
Muscat

In line with the Ministry of Labour's (MoL) earlier announcement to create jobs and training opportunities every month, it has stated that over 1,680 opportunities are now available in the private sector.

'The ministry announces the availability of 1,683 jobs in the private sector, including 744 new opportunities and 939 positions which are still vacant, via www.moi.gov.om. Anyone can

view the details of the opportunities and apply through PKI electronic certification,' the MoL statement said.

'MoL urges citizens wishing to apply for other job opportunities to follow local newspapers, employment platforms and social media accounts concerned with offering opportunities to pursue jobs that are not announced by the ministry.'

The MoL recently indicated that 32,267 jobs will be available this year, including 7,602 in public sector units.

Will not develop proposed water park: BBH Group

Our Correspondent
Muscat

Muscat-based real estate company BBH Group has stated that it will not develop a water park project in the city that was scheduled for completion in 2020.

Reacting to criticism on social media regarding its water park project in the Al Bustan area, the company issued a statement: 'Concerned government agencies were late in giving us licences to establish the project, so the project was delayed in its implementation.'

The company said that the

park was transferred to three different locations because of which it lost time and incurred financial losses. 'These projects require studies by specialised international companies.'

According to the BBH Group, an usufruct contract for the water park was signed two-and-a-half years ago, which was cancelled and another contract issued.

'In coming days, we will submit a letter of apology to the government agency that owns the project land for the loss of time without reaching a feasible solution during the past period,' it said.

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Thank you India, Viva Oman!

India-Oman friendship has proved to be solid and most reliable. Time has now come for engagement in more vital fields



AL SAYYID NOOH BIN MOHAMMED AL BUSAIDI
State Council Member & Chairman of Historical Association of Oman

The gift of 100,000 doses of COVID-19 vaccine from India to Oman last month was a gesture of real friendship and Gandhian compassion.

The consignment may be more of a diplomatic design rather than fulfilling any profound medical requirement, but it was significant in the virtuous sense. India proved that it is a regional power and a rising world leader that cares and shares.

India has sent similar consignments of vaccine to Afghanistan and other nations in the Indian Ocean.

At a time when the world is sliding into selfishness and greed, when usurpation has become an obvious tool in international relations, Oman is lucky to have a friend that upholds moral values.

In fact, the Indian community has always been part of Oman's history and has always contributed to the sultanate - in the past and in the present.

Indians were active traders in the Omani empire that stretched to East Africa and played a role as it flourished. The Indian community always



A consignment of 100,000 doses of Oxford AstraZeneca vaccine gifted by India to Oman prior to being loaded onto a flight to Muscat on January 30, 2021

focused on trade and business, never entangling in any political issues. That is what earned them the respect of all sultans and citizens.

Indians and guests of other nationalities have been vital in the modern

Omani Renaissance under the leadership of the Late His Majesty Sultan Qaboos bin Said, Allah's Mercy be upon him. The Indian community in Oman is the most law abiding among all the expat communities and their

business partnership is most sought after by Omanis.

Today, Indians have renewed their commitment to Oman's new leadership and are steadfast in their support and to continue their friendship with

the sultanate and to play a vital role in its economy. We saw how India was so important in keeping Oman's consumer market's well stocked during the early days of the COVID-19 outbreak. As some vegetables, food items and medical supplies were beginning to run out, Oman was given access to India's stocks and direct shipping lines were opened.

Oman and India have a long history of friendship. Indian scholars surely still appreciate the Omani sacrifices of 1668AD when Omani soldiers bravely endured the most vicious fight in the Battle of Dhio (near Mumbai) to oust the Portuguese from Indian coasts. The clashes continued till 1674 culminating in a battle near Bassein.

India-Oman friendship has proved to be solid and most reliable. Time has now come for engagement in more vital fields. We must explore new avenues, such as bioresearch, mega medical projects, pharmaceutical co-operation, clean energy and education. Time has come to elevate this friendship to a higher level.

Shukria India, Viva Oman!

Digital screens in Muttrah Souq to enhance shopping experience

Our Correspondent
Muscat

As part of its efforts to develop traditional souqs and attract tourists, Muscat Municipality is studying a proposal to develop Muttrah Souq and set up an Eid habta site in Seeb.

The Public Affairs Committee of the Municipal Council of Muscat governorate held its second meeting of the fifth year of the second term under Qais bin Muhammad al Ma'shari, chairman of the committee, in the presence of representatives of the authorities concerned with the topics of the agenda of the meeting.

The committee reviewed proposals of Hamad bin Khalfan al Wahaibi, a member of the Municipal Council representing the wilayat of Muttrah, to develop Muttrah Souq. The proposals included services and new features such as digital screens at market entrances and constructing rest-rooms inside the souq.

The screens will display information about the market and facilitate easy shopping for visitors.

The committee discussed another proposal related to securing the services of professional loaders in the market. Representatives of Muscat Municipality



welcomed the proposals and expressed their willingness to study their implementation. Committee officials emphasised that Muttrah Souq attracts many residents as well as tourists.

Salem bin Mohammed al

Fawari, representative of the wilayat of Seeb in the Municipal Council, presented a proposal to allocate a site for Eid habta and other celebrations in the wilayat of Seeb. The proposal includes provision of basic services, such

as roads, lighting, parking lots and toilets at the site.

Representatives of Muscat Municipality in the meeting stressed that the Eid habta site should be far from residential and commercial neighbour-

hoods, and not cause traffic jams on main roads. The Public Affairs Committee members agreed to visit the proposed sites to hold events, including the proposed Eid habta in the wilayat of Seeb, to determine feasibility.

Current condition requires incentives, not fee hike: OCCI

Our Correspondent
Muscat

The current economic situation in the sultanate requires incentives and exemptions not an increase in fees, according to Zahir bin Mohammed al Kaabi, chairman of the Board of Directors of the Buraimi branch of Oman Chamber of Commerce and Industry (OCCI).

"Involving the private sector in making decisions is extremely important to achieve harmony and balance to serve the national economy. OCCI always strives to take care of the interests of the private sector," Kaabi said.

In response to a recent decision of the Ministry of Labour, he tweeted that the current market condition requires exemptions and reductions in fees and facilitating procedures to encourage private sector companies and institutions to conduct their business and ensure continuity.

Kaabi said that making any new decision must be in line with the economic condition of each governorate, and added that providing incentives and flexibility in procedures will enhance the economy by pushing the wheel of development, encouraging the establishment of companies and attracting regional and



Providing support and facilities for companies and establishments in the private sector will strengthen their economic position, which will support economic and social activity in the sultanate

ZAHIR BIN MOHAMMED AL KAABI

global investments.

"Providing support and facilities for companies and establishments in the private sector will strengthen their economic position, which will support economic and social activity in the sultanate," he said.

GCC health undersecretaries discuss unified travel, immunisation issues

Muscat - The GCC Undersecretaries of Health Ministries recently held their 14th virtual meeting to discuss the latest developments on the new strains of coronavirus (COVID-19). Proposals on developing a mechanism for unified travel procedures among GCC countries were also addressed.

Dr Amal al Maani, Ministry of Health's acting director general of Diseases Control & Surveillance and director of Infection Prevention & Control, chaired the meeting on behalf of H E Dr Mohammed bin Saif al Hosni, MoH's Undersecretary for Health Affairs, with the atten-

dance of a number of MoH's senior officials.

The meeting addressed the latest updates of the mutant coronavirus in the GCC countries and actions taken regarding supplying and administering COVID-19 vaccine to the target groups in the GCC countries as well as the coverage rate for each country.

It further reviewed challenges that most GCC countries face among which is the provision of the adequate doses of the vaccine to realise the specified coverage rate in each country in light of the failure of the companies manufacturing the vaccines to

deliver on schedule.

Proposals on developing a mechanism for unified travel procedures among GCC countries were also addressed.

In addition, the meeting identified unified immunisation standards and reviewed entry procedures at border-crossing points. It also touched upon mechanisms taken and procedures implemented by the GCC countries regarding quarantine and PCR tests.

The meeting reviewed the number of cases infected by the new strains of the virus and the preventive measures that have been taken by the countries.

MUSCAT MUNICIPALITY RAIDS HOUSE IN MUTTRAH



Muscat Municipality raided a house in Muttrah on Wednesday where expatriate workers engaged in commercial sewing without a licence for the activity. A statement issued by the municipality said, 'The municipal team in Greater Muttrah raided a house in the wilayat which was used by expatriate workers for sewing without obtaining a municipal licence. Such activities contravene the provisions of Administrative Resolution No 55/2017 regarding administrative penalties for municipal violations' (Supplied photos)

Adventure tourism activities planned in Al Hoota Cave

Our Correspondent
Muscat

Exciting news awaits adventure enthusiasts as they might finally get the chance to explore and descend into Al Hoota Cave from a hole above it and emerge from the lake within, all managed by a professional team and conducted under strict safety parameters.

To attract adventure tourists and develop the cave further, Al Hoota Cave Company is calling on companies to run adventure activities inside the cave.

A statement issued by Al Hoota Cave Company said, 'The company offers an opportunity for companies and specialised establishments and investors wishing to invest and manage the adventure activity in Al Hoota Cave in the wilayat of Al Hamra.'

The company confirmed that those wishing to manage and invest must have sufficient experience to supervise the general experiences of adventure tourism and exploration of caves.

'Companies must provide an integrated tourism product that includes organising the entry of visitors through the upper cave hole in Al Hoota village, passing through various stages and ending with the cave lake.

'Companies must also provide safety measures for visitors. Companies should also present a plan for how to invest and manage the adventure activ-



Companies must provide an integrated tourism product that includes organising the entry of visitors through the upper cave hole in Al Hoota village

ity,' it said.

February 18 is the deadline for applications to be deposited at the Al Hoota Cave headquarters

in the wilayat of Al Hamra.

Al Hoota Cave, located in the southern part of the Hajar Mountain range, near Jebel

Akdhar, is a fascinating cave, with splendid soil and rock formations. It was discovered hundreds of years ago by local residents. It extends a length of 5km underground.

However, visitors are allowed to access only a distance of 860m via a guided route which ends in a lake within the cave.

The cave has two openings through which water cascading

from the mountain top enters and exits after passing through different sections within. The lake within is said to be around 20m deep and has several species of 'blind fish'.

Visitors are not allowed to explore other sections of the cave, except the one marked out, as vast sections of the interior of the cave have been preserved for heritage purposes.

Sri Lanka marks Independence Day today

Muscat - On the occasion of the 73rd Independence Day of Sri Lanka on February 4, Omar Lebbe Ameer Ajwad, Ambassador of Sri Lanka to the sultanate, has issued a message. While greeting his countrymen, the Sri Lankan envoy also touched on his country's relations with Oman.



Omar Lebbe Ameer Ajwad

The full message is as follows: Today, Sri Lanka celebrates the "73rd anniversary of her Independence. I wish to extend my warmest greetings and felicitations to all Sri Lankans living in the Sultanate of Oman and back home on this special occasion.

The 73rd anniversary is a significant occasion in our bilateral relations with the Sultanate of Oman as it coincides with the 40th anniversary of the establishment of diplomatic relations between Sri Lanka and the Sultanate of Oman which falls on February 17, 2021. We are planning to organise a series of events to celebrate this historic occasion throughout the year.

I firmly believe that this remarkable year will serve as a catalyst to further elevate bilateral relations between Sri Lanka and the Sultanate of Oman to new heights in the years ahead. Sri Lanka has embarked on a journey and adopted policies that focus on socio-economic growth. The vision of Gotabaya Rajapaksa, President of Sri Lanka, 'Vistas of Prosperity and Splendour', is a clear roadmap to march towards a prosperous Sri Lanka. Oman's Vision 2040 en-

gineered by His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik, is a blueprint for the sultanate's future socio-economic development. I believe that these two visions offer enormous opportunities for partnership and collaboration between the two countries, particularly in the economic diversification drive for the mutual benefit of the two peoples.

People to people contact is the bedrock of the relations between Sri Lanka and the sultanate. A vibrant Sri Lankan community in Oman has been an important component in our bilateral relations and it has been playing a significant role in furthering the relations.

I wish to thank the government and the people of Oman for extending their warm hospitality to the Sri Lankan community in Oman who had the opportunity to contribute towards the sultanate's progress for last five decades under the Blessed Renaissance spearheaded by the visionary leadership of Late His Majesty Sultan Qaboos bin Said."

Tender Board awards projects worth more than RO15mn

Muscat - The Tender Board on Wednesday awarded projects worth more than RO15.229mn during its meeting held under H E Dr Said bin Mohammed al Saqri, Minister of Economy and chairman of the Tender Board. The tenders, which ranged from medical supplies and computer systems to development projects and services benefiting the public, were distributed as follows:

1. Procurement of medical supplies and blood transfusion apparatus (RO6,248,219).
2. Supply of computer systems for school students from families benefiting from the Social Security Scheme (RO3,499,925).
3. Supply of medicines to The Royal Hospital (RO1,358,040).
4. Supply of surgical equipment for dialysis units in health establishments under the Ministry of Health (RO409,493).
5. Maintenance services and spare parts for medical equipment at The Royal Hospital (RO895,796).
6. Renewal of tenancy contract for the Courts Complex in the wilayat of Seeb (RO226,800).
7. Additional works for the tender on designing consultancy

services and supervision of Rustaq slope dual carriageway in South Batinah (RO122,655).

8. Additional works for the tender on designing consultancy services and supervision of Al Sa'ada Sports Complex's expansion project in Dhofar governorate (RO45,000).

9. Additional works for setting up of a fish market at the fishing port in Seeb (RO196,341).

10. Additional works for the tender on designing consultancy services and supervision of a project to set up a fishing port in the wilayat of Quriyat (RO8,954).

11. Additional works for the tender on consultancy services and training for the projects department of the Ministry of Higher Education, Research and Innovation (RO24,252).

12. Contract with Eutelsat for renting space for exchange and transmission of the Cultural Channel from Salalah to Muscat and telecast of the earth station television's digital transmission (DVBT2) programmes (RO1,039,000).

13. Renewal of contract for radio and television transmission via NileSat (RO1,155,000). ONA



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RACHEL CHEW EXPLORES

I'M **RACHEL CHEW**; LOUD MOUTH, FOODIE AND A GENERAL EMBARRASSMENT WHO YOU CAN FIND ON HI FM WEEKDAYS 4-7PM

Muscat Eats Drive Thru food festival



Possibly the most exciting part of the event for me was the Open Mic area. It may sound silly but I actually got quite emotional seeing live music, it's been so long since I've seen someone with a guitar

Life finally feels like it is going back to normal, well a modern normal. Recently my friend Nicole and I went to Muscat Eats. We went last year and I remember walking away with a Cheetos T-Shirt and being over the moon... That T-Shirt is now just what I sweat in when I run (attractive I know). This year the event moved to the carpark above the OCEC and was re-branded 'Muscat Eats Drive Thru'. This year, no I didn't get a T-Shirt, but I got two free samples of strawberry milk... I'm a cheap skate, so this may sound like I'm joking, but I was actually buzzing about this.

I am a massive foodie so I obviously wasn't coming to a food festival to consume just one course, that would be sacrilege! We started with dessert, because why the heck not? We started our feast with some mini Kanafeh topped with pistachio, Nutella and Kinder, which were delicious. Followed by a chicken burrito, which I cheekily asked to have some nacho cheese in, to make it even messier and because I am stupid, I seem to think I have something to prove, I asked for the extra hot sauce; it was divine but it did

burn my mouth. My friend Nicole opted for a samosa topped with chana masala and pani puri. I snuck one of the pani puris and oh my goodness they were insane - crunchy but really fresh... It would be rude not to try my friend's food too, right?

Possibly the most exciting part of the event for me was the Open Mic area. It may sound silly but I actually got quite emotional seeing live music, it's been so long since I've seen someone with a guitar. Yes, we all sat very far from one another wearing masks, but it felt like normal times were here. There was a fantastic singer called Hafed al Harthi who was superb; he sang two songs in English and one in Arabic and had the crowd transfixed and swaying along to his every word. Despite me shouting out "we want more" (I told you I was a loud mouth) that was all we were given.

I'm currently obsessed with TikTok so of course I filmed myself unattractively eating these delicious foods and attempting to clap along to the music. Note I said "attempting", as I have no rhythm so you will no way catch me singing or dancing in public!

The views and opinions expressed in this column are solely those of the author and do not necessarily represent those of Muscat Daily or Apex Press & Publishing

Korean community in Oman donates face masks to Royal Hospital



Our Correspondent
Muscat

The Korean community in the sultanate along with four prominent Korean companies on Wednesday donated 20,000 pieces of Korean face masks to The Royal Hospital.

The donation serves as a symbol of solidarity and friendship stemming from the entire Korean community in the sultanate to support the noble endeavour of the sultanate in fighting the COVID-19 pandemic under the wise leadership of His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tariq.

The Korean community in the sultanate provided 10,000 pieces of disposable masks while four Korean companies, namely Daeah International, Haejoo ENC, Samsung Engineering, and LG International, contributed 7,000 pieces of KF94 masks and 3,000 pieces of Nano masks.

The donation was coordinated by the Korea Trade-Investment Promotion Agency with the support of the Ministry of Health and the Korean Embassy

These face masks are well-known for their enhanced protection against the virus.

It should be noted that wearing masks will remain as one of the most effective measures to keep people away from the disease, even after the roll-out of the vaccine. Against this backdrop, the Korean community and the Korean firms decided to donate the Korean face masks to the sultanate in order to take part

in the sultanate's unwavering efforts to curb the spread of the virus and bring normal life back to the citizens and the residents.

Together, the Korean community and the Korean companies have supported the sultanate's march towards the social and economic growth by actively participating in a number of development projects throughout the sultanate.

Through this mask donation, they have reaffirmed their strong commitment to deepening ties with the Omani society by boosting their contribution to the sultanate.

The donation was coordinated by the office of the Korea Trade-Investment Promotion Agency (KOTRA) in Muscat with the cordial support of the Ministry of Health of the sultanate and the Embassy of the Republic of Korea to the sultanate.

Floating fish cages project in Quriyat to be scaled up



Our Correspondent
Muscat

As part of its efforts to support the fisheries sector and increase national income, Fisheries Development Oman has started expansion work of the floating cages project in Quriyat.

Supervised by Blue Waters Company, the project will increase the production capacity of koffer fish from 2,000 tonnes to 3,000 tonnes annually. The project is expected to be completed in July. The Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Water Resources said that the sultanate's aquaculture production in 2019

amounted to 1,054 tonnes, an increase of 133 per cent compared to 2018. It yielded RO2mn.

The production was limited to two types of fish - seabream and tilapia. Seabream production went up to 862 tonnes in 2019, and constituted 82 per cent of the total aquaculture production at a value of RO1.7mn. Tilapia production constituted 18 per cent, with 192 tonnes.

According to statistics of the Aquaculture Development Department in the ministry, there are currently 23 integrated projects, in addition to 16 applications for commercial aquaculture projects, to produce tilapia,

shrimp and seabream.

Aquaculture projects in the sultanate are categorised into integrated aquaculture and commercial aquaculture projects. The integrated aquaculture projects are based on the integration between agricultural activity and aquaculture. It aims to optimise the use of land and water resources in food production activity that contributes to food security. As for commercial aquaculture projects, most of them take place at sea or on a land beside the sea. The production of tilapia in integrated aquaculture increased from 20 tonnes in 2015 to 192 tonnes in 2019.

Novartis Oman gives \$75,000 to help MoH's COVID-19 efforts

Muscat - Novartis in Oman, including all its divisions (Pharma, Oncology, and Sandoz) donated US\$75,000 to the Ministry of Health (MoH) to support the national efforts to curb the spread of the coronavirus pandemic and its repercussions.

A key part of this endeavour is providing frontline support.

Through its ongoing collaboration with MoH, Novartis Oman is offering a fund to support in the provision of essential personal protective equipment for healthcare professionals (masks, gowns, goggles/glasses, face

shields, head covers) in addition to diagnostic PCR kits for COVID-19 tests. Novartis' fund, will be managed by MoH to ensure that support is directed towards government needs.

Mohamed Ezz Eldin, president & head of Gulf Cluster, said, "As a global healthcare company, we are deeply committed to supporting the fight against COVID-19 on all fronts. We are extremely grateful and proud of the medical community and frontliners who are working day and night to manage and treat COVID-19 patients."

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BRIEFS

Sony forecasts record profit after PlayStation 5 launch

Sony said on Wednesday it expects a record net profit this financial year as fresh virus lockdowns continue to boost demand for games and consoles, including the recently released PlayStation 5.

Although the pandemic has hit many industries hard, the gaming sector has been one of the few to experience an unprecedented boom, with people seeking entertainment at home during successive rounds of restrictions.

The Japanese tech giant said net profit jumped 87 per cent in April-December from the same period earlier, to US\$10bn.

The firm revised upwards its full-year sales and profits forecasts on the back of 'higher-than-expected sales in all segments except for the pictures (movies) segment', it said.

PlayStation 5 sales reached 4.5mn units by the end of December, the company said.

Sony's full-year sales are now projected at 8.8tn yen, up from 8.5tn yen forecast in October.

Oman crude price jumps to highest level in a year



Our Correspondent
Muscat

Oman crude prices on Wednesday jumped to their highest level in a year as the oil output cuts by Saudi Arabia and a US snowstorm pushed global oil prices to the pre-pandemic levels.

Following a 3.2 per cent price surge on Tuesday, Oman crude price (for April delivery) increased by 1.5 per cent on Wednesday to close at US\$57.72 per barrel at the Dubai Mercantile Exchange.

Meanwhile, the prices of other global crude benchmarks also surged on the back of upbeat market sentiment and a snowstorm that socked the northeastern United States.

US benchmark West Texas Intermediate (WTI) oil soared to one-year high of around US\$55.07 a barrel, while Brent North Sea crude hit US\$57.77, a level last reached nearly a year ago.

Oil prices have witnessed a steady rise in the past few days after the pandemic-driven concerns over a supply glut were eased with massive output cuts by Saudi Arabia. The voluntary cuts of 1mn barrels per day by Saudi Arabia began at the start of February and will run through March.

"Oil prices powered higher... lifted in part by the positive sentiment returning to equity markets, but mostly because of frigid weather sweeping the United

States, pushing up the demand for heating," OANDA analyst Jeffrey Halley told AFP.

The rebound in oil prices marked a stunning turnaround for the crude market, which briefly turned negative last year as the deadly COVID-19 outbreak shuttered economies worldwide and caused a supply glut that sent traders scrambling.

Oman crude prices last year averaged at US\$46 per barrel, a decline of 27.6 per cent compared with the average oil price in 2019. The sultanate's total oil exports decreased by 7.5 per cent to 287mn barrels in 2020 against 310.3mn barrels in the previous year.

(With inputs from agencies)

Masirah Oil starts production from its offshore Block 50

Our Correspondent
Muscat

Masirah Oil Limited announced that hydrocarbons production has commenced from its second development well drilled in the Yumna field in Block 50 offshore Oman.

The well was spudded on December 10, 2020 and production commenced on January 23, 2021. 'The well has been producing at a stabilised rate of 9,000 barrels per day (bpd) of dry oil. The rate is constrained by the size of the downhole electrical submersible pump installed in the well,' Masirah Oil said in a statement released by its Singapore-based parent Rex International Holding Limited.

According to the company, Yumna 2 well encountered 10m of Lower Aruma sandstone with a porosity of 21 per cent, proving that the good quality reservoir sand is extensive to the north of Yumna 1.

Masirah Oil's third production well, Yumna 3, was spudded on January 20, 2021, targeting a crestal location in the field to the east and up-dip from the discovery well GAS-1.



Masirah Oil said the production facilities on the Yumna Mobile Offshore Production Unit are being upgraded to double the liquid processing capacity in order to accommodate production from the three Yumna wells. The upgrade is scheduled to be completed by the end of the first quarter of 2021, the company added.

On completion of Yumna 3, Masirah Oil said the Shelf Drilling Tenacious Jack-up rig will relocate to drill the Zakhera prospect which is located about 12km to the south of the Yumna field. This exploration well is targeting a structure that looks similar to the Yumna field.

Dan Broström, executive chairman of Rex International Holding, said, "We are pleased that the Yumna 2 well was developed successfully and is now already producing 9,000 bpd. When Yumna 1 resumes production and the new Yumna 3 is completed, we are looking forward to steady production from the three Yumna wells. We are therefore in the process of upgrading the present maximum liquid processing capacity to handle up to 30,000 bpd. We will keep the market updated as soon as we have the results from Yumna 3 and the Zakhera exploration well."

Dubai records AED175bn real estate deals

Dubai, UAE - Dubai's real estate market continued to be attractive to local and global investors in 2020, with the sector recording 51,414 transactions worth over AED175bn, according to the annual transaction report issued by the Dubai Land Department (DLD).

The report revealed that real

estate sales reached AED72.5bn with 35,423 transactions, while mortgages recorded 12,958 transactions with a total value exceeding AED87.7bn, and grants recorded 3,033 transactions worth over AED15bn.

The report also showed that Dubai attracted 31,648 new investors who concluded 41,571 in-

vestments worth over AED73.2bn.

The sector was able to achieve a high volume of transactions despite the COVID-19 crisis, which, according to Sultan Butti bin Mejren, director general of DLD, "affirms Dubai's robust investment environment." WAM

Bank Nizwa says wholesale banking records remarkable growth in 2020

Our Correspondent
Muscat

Bank Nizwa said it has successfully achieved all set targets of its maiden five-year plan (2016-2020) and now set on a growth path.

The bank, in a press statement, said despite the unprecedented challenges brought about by the COVID-19 pandemic and persistent low oil prices, Bank Nizwa was able to stand tall against all odds and record a significant growth and profitability in 2020. Showing remarkable progress year after year, Bank Nizwa has acknowledged the efforts of its Wholesale Banking Group, recognising it as a vital contributor to its success.



During 2020, Bank Nizwa's Wholesale Banking Group successfully signed landmark agreements with multiple organisations supporting public and private participation (PPP) by providing Sharia'a-compliant financing and services to leading projects in the sultanate, the bank said.

This includes the financing agreement of dates processing project with Nakheel Oman De-

velopment Company, where the Musharaka financing was slated to be used for the development and construction of state-of-the-art industrial processing complex in the Wilayat of Nizwa. The bank also signed a financing agreement with Oman National Engineering & Investment Company (ONEIC) to establish Sahaloot sanitation network for Salalah Sanitary Drainage Services Co.

Recently, the bank signed a partnership deal with Arab Open University to finance the construction of its new campus in Oman supporting education being primary focus of the Oman Vision 2040 in having professionally skilled workforce to drive the economy and thereby attain prosperity for the nation.

"Bank Nizwa's growing, multi-industry portfolio under its Wholesale Banking Group is a testament of the trust our clients place in our services. Islamic financing offers a variety of opportunities in different sectors and we're honoured to be the preferred bank for our clients," said Narasimhan, general manager of wholesale banking at Bank Nizwa.

Jeff Bezos to step down as Amazon CEO

Washington, US - Amazon founder Jeff Bezos said on Tuesday he would stand aside later this year as chief executive of the company he built from a startup into one of the world's most valuable firms.

The world's richest person based on his Amazon stake, Bezos said he will transition to the role of executive chair in the third quarter, handing over the CEO role to Andy Jassy, who heads Amazon Web Services.

The news came as Amazon reported a blowout holiday quarter with profits more than doubling to US\$7.2bn and revenue jumping 44 per cent to US\$125.6bn - as pandemic lockdowns caused online sales



Jeff Bezos

to explode around the globe.

In a letter to Amazon employees, Bezos said he would 'stay engaged in important Amazon initiatives' but would pivot towards philanthropic initiatives, including his Day One Fund and Bezos Earth Fund, and other business ventures in

space exploration and journalism.

'I've never had more energy, and this isn't about retiring,' Bezos wrote.

'I'm super passionate about the impact I think these organisations can have.'

Bezos (57) founded Amazon in his garage in 1994 and went on to grow it into a colossus that dominates online retail, with operations in streaming music and television, groceries, cloud computing, robotics, artificial intelligence and more.

His other businesses include *The Washington Post* newspaper and the private space firm Blue Origin.

His successor Jassy joined

Amazon as a marketing manager in 1997 and in 2003 founded AWS, the cloud services division of the company which has been one of the most profitable but least-known units of the tech giant.

'He will be an outstanding leader, and he has my full confidence,' Bezos said of Jassy.

'Right now I see Amazon at its most inventive ever, making it an optimal time for this transition,' he said.

Bezos's tenure at Amazon has been marked by a vast expansion globally and surges in profitability.

Amazon's market value was some US\$1.69tn as of Tuesday. AFP




RECALL CAMPAIGN FOR FUSO VAN



Date of Campaign Start : 04/02/2021
Campaign type : Safety
Campaign section : Rear Axle Oil Seal

Product Description			
Number of affected vehicle	VIN Number	Model	The year of Production
24	JN6BE6CS0G9800049	Fuso Canter Van	From 2016 to 2017
	JN6BE6DS9G9800257		

Description
Differential oil is being sucked out via the outer ring portion of the oil seal due to a pressure difference formed on the differential side, generated by a drop in temperature on the bearing side after the vehicle has stopped. This is causing differential oil to leak from the rear axle oil seal.

Procedure
Replace Rear Axle Oil Seal.

For more information
Customer with chassis numbers mentioned above are asked to please contact M/s General Automotive Company LLC to replace the defective parts

Contact Details
Call 24 500 500 or 24 500 502 from Sunday to Thursday between 08.00 am to 18.30 pm.

MSM extends drop; activity improves

Our Correspondent
Muscat

The benchmark index of the Muscat Securities Market (MSM) fell 0.52 per cent to close at 3,603.72 points on Wednesday.

Trading activity improved from the previous session as turnover jumped by 113.24 per cent to RO2.05 and volumes increased 62.6 per cent to 10.73mn shares.

While Financial index fell 0.77 per cent, Industrial and Services indices rose 0.46 per cent and 0.06 per cent, respectively. The MSM Shariah index closed up by 0.81 per cent at 534.15 points.

Market breadth remained negative as ten companies closed up, while 13 companies closed down. The rest 17 traded stocks closed flat for the day.

The three gainers were Al Jazeera Services (7.84 per cent), Al Jazeera Steel Products (6.67 per cent), Oman Qatar In-

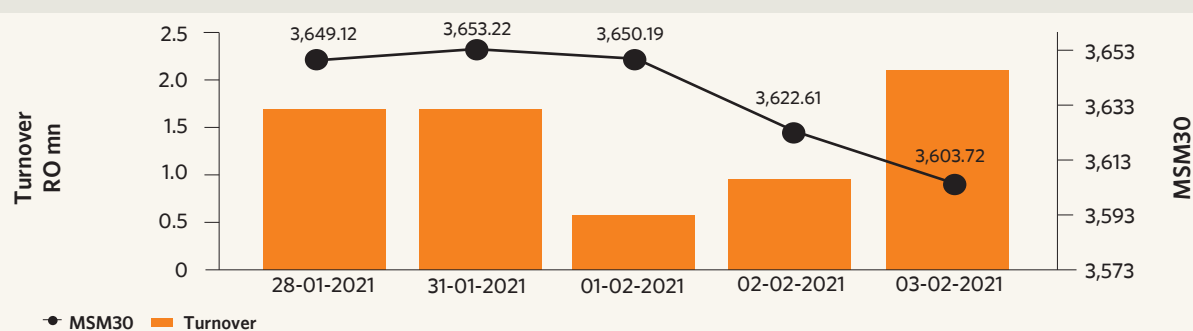


surance (5.26 per cent) and Al Madina Investment (4.35 per cent).

Top losers were Galfar Engineering & Contracting (-8.16 per cent), Al Ahlia In-

surance (-7.78 per cent), Sohar International Bank (-4.49 per cent) and Al Omaniya Financial Services (-4.41 per cent).

MSM INDEX AND TURNOVER OF FIVE TRADING DAYS



Alphabet profit jumps, fuelled by Google ads

San Francisco, US - Google parent Alphabet on Tuesday reported that its quarterly profit rocketed some 50 per cent to US\$15.2bn at the end of last year as its digital ad business thrived.

Alphabet revenue in the final three months of last year hit nearly US\$57bn, compared with US\$46bn in the same period in 2019, according to the Internet titan.

The strong quarter 'was driven by Search and YouTube, as consumer and business activity recovered from earlier in the year', Alphabet chief financial officer Ruth Porat said in the earnings release.

Google is among the technology titans that have flourished as people hunkered down at home due to the pandemic rely on the Internet and computing capabilities hosted at datacentres for work, school, shopping and socialising.

"All three of Google's main lines of ad business outperformed our forecast, including YouTube," said eMarketer insider intelligence analyst Nicole Perrin.

Ad revenue related to online searches was up more than



17 per cent at Google, Perrin noted.

Overall, Google took in slightly more than US\$46bn in revenue from digital ads, with US\$6.9bn of that money made from a growing advertising business at global video-sharing platform YouTube, according to the earnings report.

The cloud computing unit at Google brought in US\$3.8bn in the quarter, compared to revenue of US\$2.6bn in the same period a year earlier.

The pandemic is believed to have sped up a lasting shift by businesses, shops, and people in general to relying on services in the Internet cloud.

"Our strong results this quar-

ter reflect the helpfulness of our products and services to people and businesses, as well as the accelerating transition to online services and the cloud," said Alphabet and Google chief executive Sundar Pichai.

"We see significant opportunities to forge meaningful partnerships as businesses increasingly look to a digital future."

While a financial boon, Google's dominance in online advertising has put it in the crosshairs of regulators concerned about the firm's clout. It is the target of a trio of antitrust lawsuits in the US accusing it of abusing its position.

AFP

China's Alibaba boosts sales, profits despite crackdown

Beijing, China - Alibaba saw sales and profits jump over the last three months of 2020 despite the Chinese e-commerce giant being in the crosshairs of the authorities.

In November, Chinese authorities pulled the plug on the colossal Hong Kong IPO of Alibaba's subsidiary Ant Group.

A month later, regulators opened an investigation into Alibaba's business practices, deemed anti-competitive, and the group's outspoken founder Jack Ma disappeared from public view until mid-January.

On Tuesday, the company based in the eastern city of Hangzhou said it was 'fully cooperating' with the investigation by the State Administration for Market Regulation.



Despite the pressure from Chinese authorities, Alibaba benefited from economic activity and online spending accelerating in China.

In the third quarter of its staggered fiscal year, the Wall Street-listed group reported a profit of 79bn yuan (US\$12.2bn), a 52 per cent increase year-on-year.

That came after a fall of 60 per cent in the previous quarter,

and the pace of the increase remains much smaller than the quadrupling of profit it recorded in the final three months of 2019.

Sales for the October-December period was up 37 per cent year-on-year to 221.1bn yuan - outstripping the estimates of analysts polled by financial agency Bloomberg, who forecast a 33 per cent increase in revenue.

AFP

Yellen calls for meet over US market volatility

Washington, US - US Treasury secretary Janet Yellen has requested a meeting with financial regulatory authorities to discuss recent market volatility following a social-media-fuelled buying frenzy over shares in video game store GameStop and other stocks shorted by hedge funds.

Yellen called for the meeting with the Securities and Exchange Commission, the Federal Reserve and the Commodities Futures Trading Commission, the Treasury said in a statement late on Tuesday.

'Secretary Yellen believes the integrity of markets is important and has asked for a discussion of recent volatility in financial markets and whether recent activities are consistent with investor protection and fair and efficient markets,' it said.

Republican and Democratic



US Treasury secretary Janet Yellen

politicians have called for a review of trading regulations in recent days after a group of online small-time stock traders helped boost the share prices of previously falling stocks, including GameStop and movie theater brand AMC Entertainment.

Investors organised on Reddit forums to target shares of companies that had been short-sold

by hedge funds, which have bet that the price of the company would fall.

The moves led to some retail investor apps such as Robinhood - which says its goal is to 'democratise finance for all' - to limit trades on some of the most volatile stocks last week.

Progressive US senators Bernie Sanders and Elizabeth

Warren over the weekend called for action against what they said were Wall Street abuses by hedge funds revealed by the recent frenzy over GameStop shares.

"We need an SEC investigation," Warren told CNN on Sunday. "It's a rigged game, and it's been a set of players who come in and manipulate the market."

And Sanders told ABC, "We have to take a very hard look at the kind of illegal activities and outrageous behaviour on the part of the hedge funds and other Wall Street players."

The SEC had promised it was watching the situation.

'The commission is closely monitoring and evaluating the extreme price volatility of certain stocks' trading prices over the past several days,' the SEC said in a statement on Friday.

AFP

COMMENTARY

Will India's budget result in an elephant dance?

Sounds strange, isn't it? Yes, the headline is nothing short of hyperbole. A brief overview of the budget speech, tax proposals and the explanatory memorandum set my mind thinking like this.

After a very long time, one could get a feeling that the government did not tinker with any of the proposals by bringing a reduction here or a hike there. India's Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman has done an admirable job by making several path breaking proposals which makes me aver that it is indeed a growth oriented one. Given the economic battering that the country has undergone similar to the rest of the world due to the pandemic, it has been a very delicate task for the Finance Minister. On the whole, it is a very good performance. In this write up, I have only aimed to highlight some of the proposals which are going to have a far reaching impact.

The budget speech opened with huge optimistic words of legendary Tamil poet, Thiruvalluvar which runs like this 'A king/ruler is the one who creates and acquires wealth, protects and distributes it for common good'. Let's try to validate this with various proposals.

2021 is the year of many important milestones for our history. It is the 75th year of India's independence; 60 years

of Goa's accession to India; 50 years of the 1971 India-Pakistan war; it will be the year of the 8th census of independent India; it will also be India's turn at the BRICS presidency; the year for Chandrayaan-3 Mission; and the Haridwar Maha Kumbh.

The Finance Minister mentioned that her budget proposals for 2021-2022 rest on six pillars: (1) Health and wellbeing, (2) Physical and financial capital, and infrastructure, (3) Inclusive development for aspirational India, (4) Reinvigorating human capital, (5) Innovation and R&D, and (6) Minimum government and maximum governance.

What is it that I liked most?

The grand plan of creating institutional structures; secondly, big thrust on monetising assets, and thirdly by enhancing the share of capital expenditure in central and state budgets. This will be a very big boost to infrastructure growth and development and can be rightly called as unlocking value.

Debt financing of infrastructure investment trusts and real estate investment trust [REIT] by foreign portfolio investors will be enabled by making suitable amendments in the relevant legislations. This will further ease access of finance to these entities. I see a

big boost coming for real estate development which has been facing a sluggish demand for the last few years. With suitable arbitrage available in global markets, the monies can find way to finance infrastructure and real estate thereby creating the demand among players and investors. I see



P CHANDRASEKR

The author is group general manager at Jawad Sultan Group of Companies

another interesting fallout of this. Once REITs become popular then, the investments will become market tradeable and people can enter and exit out of these investments akin to stock exchange instruments.

This government has taken big strides in developing road, rail and waterways infrastructure. The full pronged thrusts in all these areas will naturally yield the desired results. Foreign direct investments [FDI] too will gain faster traction, once more tangible results appear on ground. Already, we have seen considerable progress in this segment over the last few years.

The other major proposal is increasing the limits of FDI in the insurance industry, a long felt demand. Of course, the limits up to 74 per cent will happen with suitable safeguards.

Being a longtime observer of the Indian budgets, one of my favourite subjects is disinvestment of government

holdings in the public sector. Due to lack of clarity the disinvestment targets in the past years always failed to be met. If the budgetary deficits can be met with by selective disinvestments, it will not only bring proper recapitalisation but also save the populace from unnecessary taxes so as to mobilise revenues. Hence, the Finance Minister's proposals in this area was real music to my ears.

The government has committed that disinvestment will happen in BPCL, Air India, Shipping Corporation of India, Container Corporation of India, IDBI Bank, BEML, Pawan Hans, Neelachal Ispat Nigam limited in 2021-22. Other

than IDBI Bank, the government plans to take up the privatisation of two public sector banks and one general insurance company in the year 2021-22 after suitable legislative amendments.

The biggest announcement is the commitment to bring the IPO of Life Insurance Corporation of India (LIC) in the ensuing year. If and when this happens, it will be unshackling the shackles.

Let's see what the government proposes to raise a whopping ₹1.75tn. A new record in the annals of Indian history. Perhaps this answers the questions as to why there are no tedious and voluminous tax proposals.

Far from it, there are several sops including reliefs to senior citizens. I must also state here a personal experience with the tax filing with the Income Tax Department. Despite the pandemic year, my assessments for tax year 2019-20 got completed in less than four months. What the Finance Minister has assured in this budget about faceless assessments is already happening in India. Interestingly, I have been experiencing it over the last four years. Such simplification of tax administration definitely goes a long way and naturally leads to greater compliance.

In another move that would please

non-resident Indians (NRIs), especially the wealthy and white-collar professionals among them, the government has also eliminated double taxation for them on foreign retirement funds.

The budget has also announced that NRI entrepreneurs to set up one man companies in the home country. Apart from ease of setting up, it is also expected to be less cumbersome with minimalist compliance. I see a big benefit for such entities. On the one hand, it will bring the limited liability feature of a corporate whilst being sole organisation. Such steps are the real need of the hour amidst the backdrop of startup ecosystem being fired concurrently.

Are we going in the direction of being a US\$5tn economy within the time frame? The path is clear and the efforts are sincere and let's pray and hope that the country realises its ambition. In conclusion, I can only say that the government seems to be taking the quote of Thiruvalluvar very seriously and it's important that there is collective consensus for achieving common good.

The views and opinions expressed in this column are solely those of the author and do not necessarily represent those of Muscat Daily or Apex Media Publication

Bank Muscat to provide digital banking services to higher educational institutions



In line with its pioneering role in providing state-of-the-art banking services and solutions to the government and private sectors and to comply with the mandate issued by the Central Bank of Oman in collaboration with the Ministry of Finance and Ministry of Labour for secure salary and bulk payments processing, Bank Muscat has signed agreements with a number of higher educational institutions in the sultanate.

The agreements with the Sultan Qaboos University, the University of Technology and Applied Sciences, College of



Sharia Sciences and the College of Banking and Financial Studies will provide them access to the bank's digital banking services.

This will allow these institutions to easily make and approve online transactions, thereby saving the time and effort of their employees and increasing operational efficiencies.

This move to digitalisation is

in line with the goals of Oman Vision 2040 including the building of a diversified, dynamic, globally interactive and competitive economy that meets the present and future needs of the locals, in which the private sector has a prominent role.

Digitalisation of banking services and solutions will help all sectors of the economy to be

highly competitive and ensure continued economic growth in the next phase of Oman's Renaissance.

Tariq Atiq, deputy general manager, Transaction and Public Sector Banking, Bank Muscat, said, "We are pleased to strengthen our partnership with leading educational institutions across the sultanate and link

them to the state-of-the-art digital banking system offered by the bank. We hope that this partnership will raise streamline business transactions and raise the operational efficiencies of these institutions.

"We thank all our partners for their confidence in the bank's services and facilities and recommend that they start using se-

cure methods like the Corporate Internet Banking platform for transferring salaries and making all recurring payments ahead of the extended February 28, 2020 deadline for banks to stop accepting insecure payment methods."

Mohammed bin Ali al Nahawi, director, Financial Affairs Department, Sultan Qaboos University, said that the agreement would further strengthen existing relations with Bank Muscat and enable prompt and quick processing of financial transactions. He expressed his happiness in getting access to various cutting-edge digital banking facilities provided by the bank.

Dr Ali Saif al Harthy, dean of the Higher College of Technology at the University of Technology and Applied Sciences, said, "We are pleased to announce this agreement with the leading bank in the sultanate to strengthen our existing partnership. The Higher College of Technology - University of Technology and Applied Sciences will greatly benefit from this digital banking system, which will sim-

plify salary transfer procedures and improve the quality of service and raise the efficiency of our employees in conducting different transactions."

Dr Abdullah bin Muslim al Hashmi, dean, College of Sharia Sciences, said, "In line with the government's vision of digitally transforming Oman through digital transactions, the College of Sharia Sciences has joined Bank Muscat's e-payments system. The bank provided excellent support in launching the system and explaining its features. One of the main advantages is the speed of transactions and reduction in human and financial costs associated with these transactions."

Anis bin Moosa al Lawati, acting dean, College of Banking and Financial Studies, said that this agreement would enhance the existing cooperation between the college and the bank, and improve the services provided to its customers.

He added that the online payments system provided by Bank Muscat will lead to further evolution in the level of electronic services in the country.

Ooredoo graduates almost 10,000 women in Oman

Continuing to empower women across Oman with its 'Women's Incubator' programme, Ooredoo rounded off 2020 with over 9,991 graduates from 17 incubators over the course of the year.

With the help of expert trainers, the telecoms company organised more than 88 online workshops, helping Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs) find innovative solutions to navigate the challenges of the pandemic and help their businesses thrive.

The programme, part of Ooredoo Goodwill, also provided 147 trainees with the skills needed to turn their talents into viable businesses, focusing on traditional crafts like sewing, perfumery, incense, pottery, bags, and leather.

Raed Mohammed Dawood, director of Branding, Communications and Corporate Affairs at Ooredoo, said, "2020 was full of challenges for individuals, business and the world as a whole. Yet despite the conditions imposed on us by the pandemic, we



were pleased to be able to hold our training programme remotely, ensuring that small business owners, especially women, could protect their livelihood. With a big thank you to the team behind Ooredoo Goodwill for their dedication and efforts, we continue to strive to help our community and support the 'Oman Vision 2040' strategy to boost the national economy."

As part of an active Corporate Social Responsibility strategy, Ooredoo runs a number of

award-winning initiatives.

This includes the sultanate's first-ever women's incubator programme, which started in 2015, as well as Ooredoo's Springboard and Spring Forward programmes, which aim to train men and women in digital entrepreneurship and leadership.

By placing itself at the heart of the community, the company aims to support the advancement of the Omani people, while fostering sustainable economic and social growth.

Occidental Oman supports HR training and development programme in Al Wusta

Occidental Oman recently sponsored a Human Resources Training and Development Program based in Al Wusta, under the supervision of the office of H E Sheikh Mudhaad Mohamed al Yaquobi, Governor of Al Wusta governorate. The programme was organised by Injaz Development, a specialised training and consulting institute.

The programme targeted 19 governmental entities and three non-profit organisations in Al Wusta, and covered three levels of management in these organisations. The programme aimed to identify performance gaps, help individuals achieve short-term and long-term career goals and support succession planning by implementing leadership development programmes.

The programme included over 240 participants, and ran educational courses and workshops.

"This programme builds on the company's existing commit-



ment to national capacity development, and we are proud to support these key governmental institutions and non-profit organisations in Al Wusta, where some of our concession areas are located," said Stephen Kelly, president and general manager of Occidental Oman.

"We hope that this pro-

gramme bridges performance gaps and provides participants with important skillsets, such that they advance throughout their career in their chosen fields and bring benefits to their organisations," he added.

This sponsorship falls under the umbrella of strategic partnerships and continuous collabora-

tion with key stakeholders, and comes within the framework of Occidental Oman's long-term commitment to strengthen its social ties with the communities located in its concession areas and the wider Omani population, and enhancing the strategic partnerships and continuous collaboration with key stakeholders.

ICAI Muscat Chapter begins VAT seminars

The Muscat Chapter of the Institute of Chartered Accountants of India (ICAI) launched its VAT knowledge series for its members in the Sultanate of Oman as part of its continuing education programme knowledge series. CA Shilpa Pawani, CPE Subcommittee member chaired the programme.

CA N Ramananda Prabhu, chairperson, welcomed the members and stated the plan to further enhance the standing of the Muscat Chapter of the ICAI and to conduct knowledge series, seminars, events on variety of topics that would help all accounting professionals become great business leaders.

He also provided an overview of the activities and the event carried out by the chapter for its members during the year. He stated that these included professional education as well as family events for its members.

CA Prabhu congratulated Dr Khalfan al Barwani, chairman, and College of Banking and Financial Services for having bagged two research awards



from ICAI Research Foundation recently.

Dr Barwani, chief guest at the inauguration of the Oman Vat knowledge series, commended the initiative of the Muscat Chapter for capacity building of all finance professionals in Oman.

He said, "Starting early is instrumental in ensuring that VAT implementation runs smoothly for any business. Being properly trained is critical to ensure programme success, so businesses need to provide the best possible training for all employees who

will be handling the transition to VAT."

Taysir Nasib al Rawahi, director Tax Services at Crowe in Oman, provided an overview of the tax landscape in the GCC. He discussed the current state of play with VAT in other GCC countries and highlighted key nuances which businesses and accounting professionals should consider when getting the businesses ready for VAT.

Aastha Rangan, past chairperson of ICAI Muscat Chapter and director of Crowe Oman, continued the discussions by taking the

audience through some of the key features and mechanisms of VAT.

Binat Shah, partner of Crowe UAE, highlighted the key transactional and practical challenges businesses may encounter, while transitioning to the VAT regime. Further the Crowe team addressed the questions they receive from the audience regarding VAT implementation.

Pugal T, senior consultant from Tally Solutions, presented how VAT compliance can be simplified with technology.

Kimshealth launches its new facility for people of Kerala

A new Kimshealth tower sprawling nearly 460,000sq ft area in 10 floors is being presented to the healthcare eco system of Kerala. This new venture, set up at a cost of ₹3bn, will consist of Ultramodern Operation Theatres, 75 bed ICU with all separate cubicles with central monitoring, Robotic Surgery Unit, Hyperbaric Oxygen, spacious birthing suites, labour and delivery rooms, 170 fully air-conditioned rooms, modern wellness centres, Pharmacy, Cafeteria, etc.

The new building will be the centre for all transplant programmes (kidney, liver, heart and lungs), a centre of excellence for normal and high risk delivery, Fetal medicine and Perinatology, advanced Cardiac and Neurosurgery, Paediatric Cardiac Surgery, most modern 30 bedded Neonatology department, Neonatal ICU and related services, highly specialised Dermatology, Cosmetology and Plastic Surgery Centre. This centre will provide 800



direct jobs and indirect jobs.

"This pandemic has taught us many lessons and we should give a new approach to healthcare delivery combining prevention, wellness, diagnostics, curative and hospitality. This tower will stand as a monument for a new healthcare delivery system upholding the values Kimshealth stands for in India and GCC. The new facility is environment-friendly and it has been built in accordance with the LEED Platinum standards," said Dr M I Sahadulla, group chairman & managing director.

Dr Sahadulla added that Public-Private-Participation and Pri-

vate-Private-Participation are the means of effective utilisation of resources and this is a time to leverage such ideas which will redefine our future.

Dr G. Vijayaraghavan, vice chairman - Kimshealth stated that Kimshealth was a trend setter of modern medical care for two decades and the new east block of Kimshealth will add latest developments in medical care in 2021 for people of Kerala.

"I am sure the public will appreciate this gesture with open arms as they did two decades ago. We know that public has appreciated our contributions to medical care at affordable rates."

Nissan Oman offers vehicle pick-up and drop-off facility



Nissan Oman, from the house of Suhail Bahwan Automobiles (SBA) has announced vehicle pick-up and drop-off service for customers with prior service appointments.

The facility which is available in the capital area and it needs to be pre-booked at a nominal fee via Nissan Oman Toll free (80050011), Nissan Oman website (www.nissanoman.com), sending SMS <BOOK> to 9982 5454, writing email on appointment@sbigh.com or by WhatsApp on 9769 2689.

A senior official of Nissan Oman, from the house of Suhail Bahwan Automobiles (SBA) said, "We are continuously engaging with customers on enhancing their experience. This

offering is aligned with customer feedback and our own efforts to make a difference to the ownership experience. This service provides our service customers the comfort that they can get necessary vehicle work completed without stepping out. It helps customers follow the COVID-19 safety protocols.

"As you all know Nissan Oman's Qurm showroom has received the 'Nissan Safe & Clean' certification from Nissan Middle East FZE (NMEF) for complying with the sales and service protocols established as per the programme. We will follow all related protocols while servicing a customer's vehicle."

He added, "When they opt for this service, customers do not

have to take time off work or adjust their plans. Their car will be picked up from their home or place of work, removing the inconvenience of delivering it to a service centre. Nissan Oman will take care of everything related to the car including servicing, repairs, tyres, wheel alignments and all services under manufacturer's warranty."

Every customer purchasing a Nissan vehicle can be assured of Nissan's top class after sales service, which guarantees the advantage of well-trained experts. The customers can be assured that Nissan always uses only genuine replacement parts. Customers can expect consistency and support during after sales service, which ascertains

Nissan's performance and resale value in the years to come.

Awards for Nissan

In 2016, 2017, 2018 and 2019, Nissan was conferred with 'Oman's Most Trusted Brand' award across categories including SUV, crossover, 4WD and mid-size Nissan, considered a premium and trusted name in the market, was the only brand to have won the recognition for four times in a row in the automobile category. The award is instituted by Apex Press and Publishing.

SBA commitment

SBA is largely committed to supporting Nissan's growth in the sultanate through major empha-

sis on customer satisfaction and by providing world-class after-sales services in Oman. With a national network of 12 showrooms, 17 service centres and 24 spare parts outlets, SBA has further built upon its legacy of excellent customer service and providing value for money to each of its customers.

Like Nissan Oman on Facebook

Customers can also get unlimited access to Nissan's prestigious vehicle line up at the comfort of their homes or offices on Nissan Oman's Facebook page - <http://www.facebook.com/Sbanissanoman>.

Nissan Oman on Instagram

Instagram users can follow Nissan Oman at <https://www.instagram.com/sbanissanoman/>

After sales service

Every customer purchasing a Nissan vehicle can be assured of Nissan's top class after sales service, which guarantees the advantage of factory-trained experts.

Nissan's impressive vehicle line-up

Nissan has built up its reputation through innovative technology, and a broad product line-up. For test drive options call Nissan Toll free 80050011. For more details visit www.nissanoman.com



Nokia 1.4 launched

HMD Global, the home of Nokia phones, announced the launch of its latest smartphone - the Nokia 1.4.

Boasting an impressive screen real estate which stretches to 6.51 inches edge-to-edge, it's almost a full inch bigger than its predecessor, and the largest ever to feature on a 1 series Nokia.

Juho Sarvikas, chief product officer and vice president of North America, HMD Global, said, "As a father of two myself, I can relate to the challenges many families are facing with having to fit in so many activities at home. With these needs continuing to grow, we wanted to create a reliable and enjoyable experience that truly benefits all family members without adding to any household financial pressures.

"Be it managing work emails, paying bills or keeping the kids busy with online extracurricular activities, our designers addressed the fact that millions of families around the world are spending more time at home. In response, we increased the size of the screen on the Nokia 1.4 to the maximum capacity so parents, carers and children can stay connected and productive. To further enhance the photography experience - on top of the improvements already brought to you by Google's AI on the Camera Go app, we also added a macro camera to capture epic close-ups at home or outdoors. All powered by Qualcomm, a trusted industry leader, and encased in a tough, mishap-proof body with our signature two-day battery life!"

The new expanded HD+ screen comes into its own with video calling apps, helping families to stay connected amid the current climate, and showcases the Nokia 1.4's camera capabilities.

The Nokia 1.4 [1GB/32GB RAM/ROM configuration] is available in Oman from February 25 at a retail price of RO36.9. The Nokia 1.4 [3GB/64GB RAM/ROM configuration] is available in Oman from 18 March at a retail price of RO40. Nokia 1.4 comes in Fjord, Charcoal and Dusk.

Oman Avenues Mall launches social responsibility wing

Continuing its commitment towards community development and empowering individuals for a promising future, Oman Avenues Mall, the most prominent lifestyle and retail destination in the sultanate, has launched its social responsibility wing, Tafa'ul.

Aimed at positively touching the lives of the citizens and residents of Oman, Tafa'ul will collaborate with community development and societal well-being programmes to drive meaningful impact. The mall operator seeks to provide a much-needed platform for showcasing and enhancing Omani citizens and residents in playing the role of an aggregator for standalone community enterprises.

"We are pleased and proud to launch our CSR programme Tafa'ul at Oman Avenues Mall, which strengthens our pioneering role in contributing to social



causes, environmental sustainability, empowering Omani talent, promoting awareness about education, and participating in community-oriented initiatives. The community outreach arm will effectively utilise the mall's reach and position to support and contribute to the society, by consolidating efforts of various individuals and philanthropic entities," said Ananth A V - director - Oman, India, Malaysia and Indonesia for Lulu Group International.

Five key initiatives are planned to be implemented as part of Tafa'ul this year including the ongoing support programme for Oman Cancer Association executed through Art Beats, which has been undertaken as part of Tafa'ul's debut initiative. Tafa'ul means optimism or hope and the design of 'Tafa'ul' symbol is characterised by overlapping rings, which represent the letters of the programme's name in Arabic.

ISWK celebrates 72nd Indian Republic Day

Indian School Wadi Kabir (ISWK) along with the Primary and Senior wings of ISWK celebrated the 72nd Republic Day of India with great patriotic fervour.

The chief guest of the online function was Harshendu Shah - member, Board of Directors, Indian Schools in Oman. He is a chartered accountant and managing partner of H C Shah, Muscat, as well as the director of Business Tools & Solutions LLC., Muscat. Also, participating in the celebrations were the distinguished persons connected with ISWK institutions - Alkesh Joshi and Gargi Chugh, presidents of SMCs of ISWK & ISWK (International Curriculum) respectively; esteemed committee members; special invitees; principals, vice principals, heads of various departments, coordinators, parents, teachers, students and Indian expatriates in Oman.

The chief guest in his address to the public lauded the efforts of both the Omani as well as Indian governments to combat the



COVID-19 pandemic since its outbreak.

He highlighted the cardinal role of India as being the 'Pharmacy of the world' to provide the much-needed vaccine to several other countries of the world in dire need. He also praised the high standard of education being imparted by the Indian schools in Oman by virtue of the tireless effort of the teaching community over the years.

The programme began with

live streaming of the Republic Day celebrations in New Delhi followed by a brief history of the Republic Day by the student comperes. Virtual tri-colour balloons were released as a symbol of jubilation and memorable moments reminisced from the yesteryears' Republic Day celebrations in ISWK in the form of a short video. The cultural programme began with KG children's song and dance number *Mera Desh Mera Watan*.

Winsome tiny tots dressed in spotless white wearing tricolour sachets delved on the significance and purpose of celebrating the Republic Day. A touching poem was recited on the sacrifices of India's armed forces as they guard our borders and toil to defeat the evil intentions of the enemy. The children dressed as India's common folk in native costumes or donning soldiers' uniforms performed to the melody of patriotic songs.

Happy customer shares his experience with JAC T8 pick-up

After joining hands with JAC Motors in 2008 to bring the legendary reliability of JAC commercial vehicles to Oman, Towell Auto Centre has recently added an exciting range of JAC passenger and light commercial vehicles to their line-up.

Among JAC's exciting new range of vehicles is the power packed T8 pick-up. The JAC T8 Pick-up 2.0lt Turbo enables you to 'Get more done for an unbelievable price' as Towell Auto Centre proudly states.

Available in 2WD or 4WD, and in Classic or Luxury configurations, this is a pick-up that presents a powerful, fun-filled performance for off-road enthusiasts, and an excellent business transport solution for those living and working in the sultanate's

cities and rural areas.

Known for its affordability, the JAC T8 comes with features such as Cruise Control, Blue Tooth, Acoustic Hood, Central Locking, Active Steering and ABS (Anti-lock Brake System) among others. In the T8, owners get the legendary reliability of JAC's commercial range; all wrapped up in rugged good looks. We recently had the pleasure of hearing from a happy customer who purchased a brand new T8.

Khalid al Balushi spoke of his personal experience saying, "I purchased the JAC T8 recently from Towell Auto Center after doing thorough research for vehicles in the same category. I found the JAC T8 to be the perfect choice for me given the extremely affordable price, great



performance and natural sporty looks. It truly stands out! I have also done some modifications on the exterior to improve the cars sporty appearance. The spacious interior is an added benefit, I can carry people with me whenever needed and the engine is powerful which fulfils one of my most important requisites. I am an ardent off roader and whenever I needed to go camping earlier I had to rent a car, but now with my T8 I don't need to rent a car. I am really excited to take my JAC T8 when I go camping and experience the wonderful drive."

Towell Auto Centre would be thrilled to have you experience their latest JAC range at one of their authorised dealerships. To find out more visit www.jacomman.com.

Russian court jails Kremlin critic Navalny as police detains over 10,000 protesters

Moscow, Russia - More than 10,000 people were detained at recent rallies in Russia in support of Kremlin critic Alexei Navalny with many subjected to mistreatment in police custody, monitors said on Wednesday, after the Kremlin's most prominent critic was jailed for nearly three years amid international condemnation.

The court's decision on Tuesday to turn a 2014 suspended sentence into real jail time will see the 44 year old anti-corruption campaigner - who accuses Moscow of poisoning him last year - serve a lengthy prison term.

Britain, France, Germany, the United States and the European Union denounced the ruling and called for his immediate release, as Moscow accused the West of interfering in its affairs.

At nationwide rallies over the last two weeks, more than 10,000 people were seized by police, the OVD-Info group that monitors opposition protests reported on Wednesday.

Detainees are held for hours 'in horrid and stuffy conditions, without food or the opportunity to use a bathroom', OVD-Info analyst Grigory Durnovo told Ekho Moskvy radio.

He added that lawyers from the group, which provides free legal aid to detained protesters, were at times not given access to detention centres.

Navalny's supporters had earlier called for more demonstrations against the decision after thousands joined nationwide protests against his arrest over the last two weekends.

The case is presenting one of



Law enforcement officers block Moscow's Manezhnaya Square as a court orders Kremlin critic Alexei Navalny (in the inset) to serve prison term for violating his parole, on Tuesday (AFP)

the most serious challenges to the Kremlin in years, with some in the West calling for new sanctions against Russia.

Judge Natalya Repnikova ordered a suspended three-and-a-half-year sentence Navalny received on fraud charges in 2014 to be changed to time in a penal colony, an AFP journalist at the courthouse said.

He was accused of violating parole conditions by refusing to check in with prison officials and was arrested when he flew back to Moscow on January 17 from Germany, where he spent

months recovering from a poisoning.

Navalny said it was impossible to make the appointments while abroad, but the judge said he had skipped meetings prior to the poisoning.

Plan to appeal

Navalny had spent time under house arrest after the 2014 conviction - which was denounced by the European Court of Human Rights - and Repnikova said that would count as time served.

His lawyer Olga Mikhailova said he would now serve around

Navalny was accused of violating parole conditions by refusing to check in with prison officials and was arrested when he flew back to Moscow on January 17 from Germany, where he spent months

two years and eight months in prison.

His legal team plan to appeal, she added, with Navalny expected to stay in detention in Moscow during that process.

His Anti-Corruption Fund immediately called for a protest in

central Moscow.

Several hundred of his supporters marched through the streets and AFP journalists saw police in riot gear detaining dozens across the city centre.

Videos released by local media showed officers hitting protesters with batons and chasing them through the streets.

In a fiery courtroom speech ahead of the ruling, Navalny accused Putin of trying to intimidate his critics.

"They are putting one person behind bars to scare millions," he said.

And he mocked the Russian leader over allegations the Novichok nerve agent used to poison him had been placed in his underwear, telling the court that Putin 'will go down in history as a poisoner of underpants'.

'Pure cowardice'

US Secretary of State Antony Blinken called for Navalny's release, warning Washington and its allies would 'hold Russia accountable for failing to uphold the rights of its citizens'.

French President Emmanuel Macron also called for his release, with German Chancellor Angela Merkel labelling the decision 'far removed from any rule of law' and British Prime Minister Boris Johnson calling it 'pure cowardice'.

European Union foreign policy chief Josep Borrell, due to visit Moscow later this week, said it 'runs counter to Russia's international commitments on rule of law and fundamental freedoms'.

Russian Foreign Ministry spokeswoman Maria Zakharova described the Western reaction as 'disconnected from reality', adding: "There is no need to interfere in the internal affairs of a sovereign state."

Tens of thousands have taken to the streets in Moscow and other Russian cities over the last two weekends to call for Navalny's release, prompting a massive police clampdown.

"Under this regime, life is getting harder and harder, we have no future... no one has a future. It will only get worse," Alexander, a 27 year old engineer, said.

Two days after Navalny was placed in custody last month, his team released an investigation into an opulent seaside property he claims was given to Putin through a billion-dollar scheme financed by close associates who head state companies. Putin denied owning the property.

AFP

Afghan judge killed in ambush

Jalalabad, Afghanistan - An Afghan judge was shot dead in an ambush in the eastern city of Jalalabad on Wednesday, police said, the third court official killed in less than a month.

Judge Hafizullah was attacked on his way to work in a motor trishaw, said Farid Khan, spokesman for Nangarhar province's police.

Gulzada Sangar, a doctor at Jalalabad public hospital, said Hafizullah had multiple bullet wounds.

The murder of Hafizullah, who like many Afghans goes by one name, comes after militants shot dead two women judges working for the Supreme Court in Kabul on January 17.

Several prominent Afghans - including judges, clerics, journalists, activists and doctors - have been assassinated in often brazen daytime attacks.

Targeted killings with remotely detonated bombs attached to vehicles, or drive-by shootings, have become favoured tactics of insurgents, especially during the morning commute in big cities.

Earlier on Wednesday a policeman was killed and three others wounded in Kabul by a bomb attached to their vehicle. Four bomb blasts rocked the capital on Tuesday, including one that killed a prominent cleric.

AFP

Iran's Rouhani rules out changes to nuclear deal

Tehran, Iran - President Hassan Rouhani on Wednesday ruled out changes to Iran's nuclear accord with world powers and dismissed calls to broaden the terms of the deal and include regional countries.

US President Joe Biden has voiced support for returning to the accord, from which Donald Trump exited, but has insisted that Tehran first resume full compliance and consider expanding the deal beyond the nuclear issue.

Iran's regional arch rival, Saudi Arabia, has also called for a role in any future talks on the agreement.

"No clause of the JCPOA will change. Know this. And no one



President Hassan Rouhani (AFP)

will be added to the JCPOA," Rouhani said at a televised cabinet meeting, using the deal's official name, the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action.

"This is the agreement. If they

want it, everyone come into compliance. If they don't, they can go live their lives," he said.

Trump withdrew the US from the JCPOA and imposed crippling sanctions on Iran in 2018, maintaining a policy of 'maximum pressure' against the republic.

Iran a year later responded by gradually suspending its compliance with most of its key nuclear commitments in the deal, under which it was promised economic relief for limits on its nuclear programme.

Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif on Monday asked the European Union to coordinate a synchronised return of Washington and Tehran to the deal.

AFP

British-Iranian academic Ahmady fled Iran while on bail

London, UK - A British-Iranian academic said on Wednesday that he had fled Iran across a mountain border after being sentenced to nine years in jail for collaborating with a hostile government.

Kameel Ahmady, a social anthropologist studying female genital mutilation and child marriage in Iran, told the BBC and *The Guardian* newspaper that he escaped while on bail after being sentenced, as he feared he would not see his young son again.

'I just simply left. I packed my bag with shaving kit, a few books of mine and a laptop and I think pyjamas... and warm clothes,' he told BBC radio.



Kameel Ahmady

After being detained for suspected links with foreign intelligence services, he spent three months in Tehran's notorious Evin prison, where he said he was subjected to 'so-called white torture, a psychological pressure

they put on you'. He was then released on bail and later sentenced in December last year and fined €600,000 for receiving 'illegitimate funds' and working on projects with 'subversive institutions', Iran's Tasnim news agency reported.

British media reported that he escaped while on bail pending his appeal.

He described the journey to the BBC as 'very cold, very long, very dark and very scary'.

Ahmady is now living in London with his wife and son, British media reported, and his appeal was thrown out in his absence on Monday.

AFP



A US soldier stands by a Bradley Fighting Vehicle (BFV) during a patrol in the countryside near al-Malikiyah (Derik) in Syria's northeastern Hasakah province on Tuesday (AFP)

Rights group slams Turkey's transfer of Syria detainees

Beirut, Lebanon - Human Rights Watch on Wednesday condemned the 'illegal transfers' to Turkey of more than 60 Syrians arrested by Ankara and its local proxies in Syria's northeast in 2019.

Turkey and its Syrian rebel proxies arrested the 63 Syrians between October and December 2019 in the border area of Ras al Ain in Syria's northeast, after seizing the region from Kurdish fighters, the rights group said.

The men, Arabs and Kurds, are being held over their alleged links to Kurdish groups viewed by Ankara as 'terrorists', according to HRW.

They have been charged with 'undermining the unity and territorial integrity of the state, membership in a terrorist organisation, and murder', the rights group added. 'Not only have these Syrians been illegally transferred to Turkey for abusive prosecutions, but in an extraordinarily cruel move, the courts have imposed

the highest sentence possible in Turkey - life without parole' - on at least five of them, said Michael Page, HRW's deputy regional director.

Turkey and its Syrian proxies seized control of Ras al Ain during an October 2019 offensive that saw it wrest a 120km long strip of land from Kurdish forces on the Syrian side of its southern border.

Turkish authorities have not produced evidence that the detainees committed crimes or were active fighters with Kurdish groups, HRW said.

"Turkish authorities, as an occupying power, are required to respect people's rights under the law of occupation in northeastern Syria, including the prohibition on arbitrary detention and on the transfer of people to their territory," Page said.

"Instead, they are violating their obligations by arresting these Syrian men and carting them off to Turkey to face the

most dubious and vaguest of charges connected to alleged activity in Syria."

While HRW said it could only confirm 63 transfers, it said available evidence suggests the number of Syrians taken to Turkey could be almost 200.

The alleged arrests and transfers are only the latest violations Turkey and its Syrian rebel proxies are accused of carrying out in areas under their control.

UN High Commissioner for Human Rights Michelle Bachelet warned last year of growing violence and criminality in areas captured by Turkey and its Syrian proxies, including in Ras al Ain.

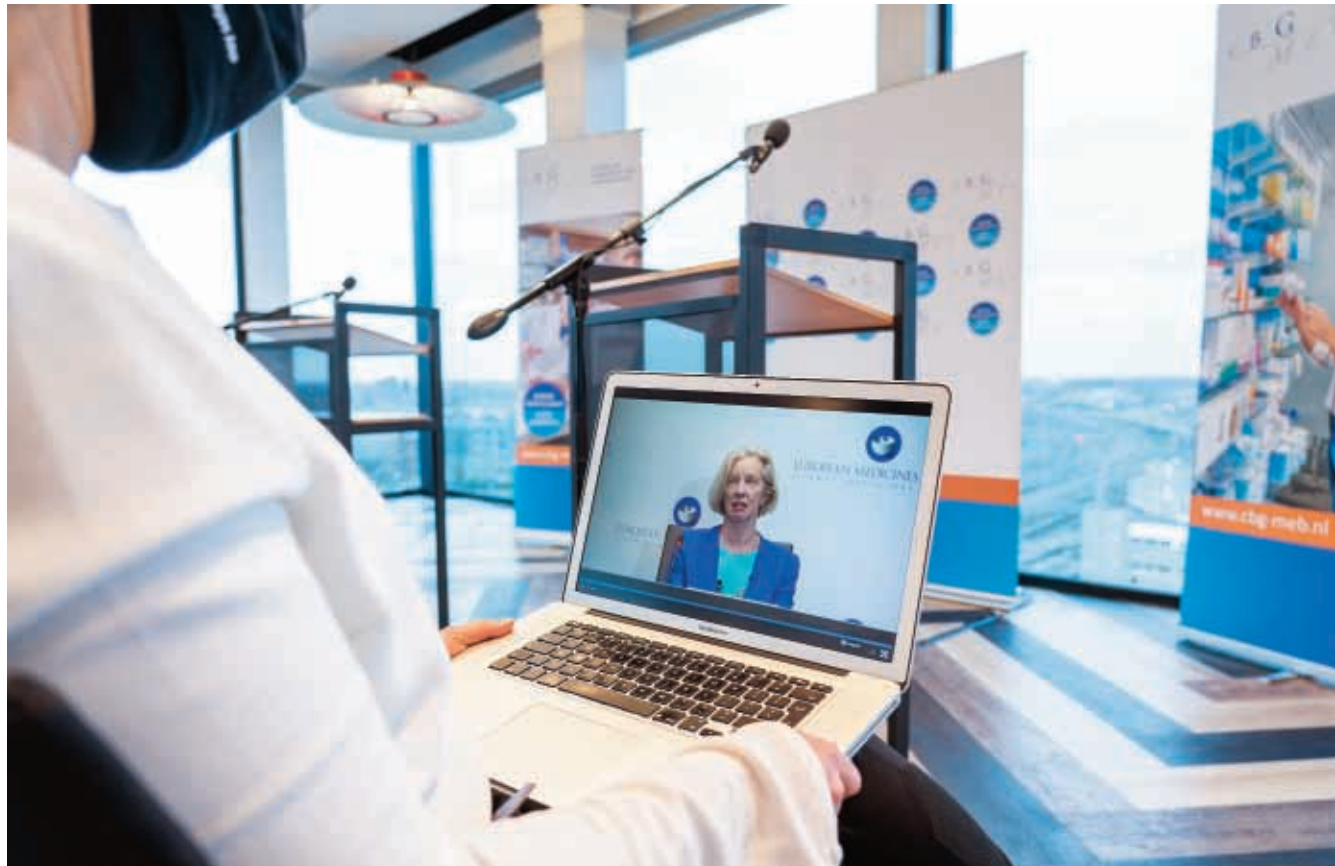
Her office has reported a pattern of violations in recent months, including increased killings, kidnappings, and seizures of land and properties.

Those who are critical of Turkey and its armed groups bear the brunt of these violations, the UN said.

AFP

COVID-19 PANDEMIC

'Oxford jab cuts virus transmission'



A representative of the European Medicines Agency take part in a video-conference of the CHMP drug evaluation committee, on the Oxford-AstraZeneca vaccine, in the city of Utrecht in the Netherlands, last Friday (AFP)

London, UK - The Oxford-AstraZeneca vaccine significantly reduces virus transmission and is highly protective after a single dose, according to an Oxford University study, which the British government said on Wednesday vindicated its inoculation strategy.

"It does show the world that the Oxford jab works, it works well," Health Secretary Matt Hancock told BBC radio, hailing the study's findings as 'good news'. "It slows transmission by around two-thirds, so it categorically supports the strategy that we're undertaking," Hancock said.

The study's findings came amid much debate over the effectiveness of the AstraZeneca jab among the elderly.

Although the European Medicines Agency recommended it for adults of all ages last week, several countries have advised against administering the AstraZeneca jab to older people.

Germany has already said it will not advise over 65s to get it.

Italy's medicines agency on Saturday approved the vaccine for all adults but recommended alternatives for people aged



over 55.

And French President Emmanuel Macron last week said the Oxford-AstraZeneca vaccine was 'quasi-ineffective' for those over 65.

The UK has been under lockdown since December with schools closed and no definite end-date, although a review of the situation is expected in mid-February.

The country has had 3.8mn cases and 108,013 deaths.

The Oxford study, which is awaiting peer review, found that those who had been vaccinated with a single dose of the vaccine

It does show the world that the Oxford jab works, it works well. It slows transmission by around two-thirds, so it categorically supports the strategy that we're undertaking

MATT HANCOCK

were 67 per cent less likely to test positive with a PCR test, 'suggesting the potential for a substantial reduction in transmission'.

Dosing schedule

It also provided backing for the UK's strategy of administering as many first doses of vaccine to high-risk groups as possible and allowing a 12-week interval before the second dose, which has been criticised by some experts.

The other vaccine already being rolled out in the UK, the Pfizer-BioNTech, was designed to be administered with a

shorter interval. "We are confident that the 12-week dosing schedule is the right one for both of the vaccines that we're using in the UK," Hancock said on Wednesday.

Researchers found that a single dose was 76 per cent effective in preventing virus symptoms after 22 days and for up to 90 days, while it did not prevent asymptomatic illness.

It was more effective to wait 90 days than to administer the second dose, researchers found "providing further support for current policy".

The survey had 17,177 participants in Britain, Brazil and South Africa. The data covers the period up to December 7, 2020. None of those studied were hospitalised.

The vaccine invented by scientists at the University of Oxford is being developed and manufactured by AstraZeneca.

The vaccine is cheap to produce and is being sold at cost price. It can also be stored at fridge temperature, while the Pfizer vaccine requires extremely cold storage.

AFP

Pfizer protects from virus, but immunity unclear: Israel data

Jerusalem - Initial data from Israel's closely-watched coronavirus vaccination campaign proves the Pfizer/BioNTech vaccine protects against serious illness but offers no conclusion yet on progress towards herd immunity, experts say.

The Jewish state is carrying out what is widely described as the world's fastest vaccination campaign per capita.

It secured its substantial stock by paying above market price and, more importantly, through a data sharing agreement with Pfizer.

Ran Balicer, chairman of Israel's national expert panel on COVID-19, told AFP it was crucial to distinguish between the vaccine's two impacts.

The first is 'the direct effect', which refers to vaccinated



A Palestinian health worker gets vaccinated against COVID-19, in the West Bank city of Bethlehem on Wednesday (AFP)

people becoming 'protected against symptomatic illness and severe disease', he said.

The second, or 'indirect effect', refers to the vaccine providing enough immunity to enough people that it forms an 'epidemiological barrier' against transmission.

Balicer, also the chief innovation officer at Clalit, Israel's largest health maintenance organisation (HMO), said the data shows the vaccine reduces serious illness but the immunity question remained open.

AFP

Pakistan health workers begin receiving Sinopharm vaccine

Islamabad, Pakistan - Pakistan began administering a Chinese-made COVID-19 vaccine to frontline health workers on Wednesday, but the country is still months away from a mass roll-out.

Beijing has donated about 500,000 doses of the Sinopharm vaccine - which has yet to be fully approved by China's health authorities - with a further million expected by the end of the month.

The country of 220mn has recorded more than half a million coronavirus cases, with around 11,000 deaths, but limited testing suggests true figures are likely much higher.

Lawmaker Nausheen Hamid, who leads parliament's health committee, said a first phase of vaccinations would prioritise health workers. "I can't say with certainty, but we



A Pakistani health worker receives a dose of the Sinopharm vaccine, at a vaccination centre, in Karachi on Wednesday (AFP)

would still need around two months to start a mass vaccination campaign," she added.

The Sindh province health authority said around 100 health workers nationwide had died since the virus reached the world's fifth most populous country last spring.

Pulmonologist and COVID-19 expert Shazli Manzoor said

the Chinese vaccine suited impoverished Pakistan because it could be stored at between two and eight degrees Celsius, compared to -70°C for other vaccines. He said the government would set up special clinics to monitor how the population was responding to the vaccinations.

AFP

Myanmar's Suu Kyi charged as calls to oppose coup become louder

Yangon, Myanmar - Myanmar's ousted leader Aung San Suu Kyi was formally charged on Wednesday two days after she was detained in a military coup, as calls for civil disobedience to oppose the putsch gathered pace.

The Southeast Asian nation was plunged back into direct military rule when soldiers arrested key civilian leaders in a series of dawn raids on Monday, ending the army's brief flirtation with democracy.

Suu Kyi, who has not been seen in public since, won a huge landslide with her National League for Democracy (NLD) last November but the military - whose favoured parties received a drubbing - declared the polls fraudulent.

On Wednesday, the NLD's press officer said 75-year-old Suu Kyi was formally charged with an offence under Myanmar's import and export law, with a court signing off on two-weeks remand.

The unusual charge stemmed from a search of her house following her arrest in which walkie-talkies were discovered, according to a leaked police



A protester holds an image of Aung San Suu Kyi outside the UN building, in Bangkok on Wednesday (AFP)

charging document.

A similarly unorthodox charge under the country's disaster management law against President Win Myint revolved around him allegedly breaching anti-coronavirus measures last year by meeting voters on the campaign trail.

With soldiers and armoured cars back on the streets of major cities, the takeover has not been met by any large street protests. But signs of public anger and

plans to resist began to show.

Doctors and medical staff at multiple hospitals across the country announced on Wednesday they were donning red ribbons and walking away from all non-emergency work to protest against the coup. "Our main goal is to accept only the government we elected," Aung San Min, head of a 100-bed hospital in Gangaw district, told AFP.

Some medical teams posted photos on social media wearing

red ribbons - NLD's colours - and raising a three-finger salute, a protest gesture used by democracy activists in neighbouring Thailand, while some have chosen to bypass work altogether.

Activists were announcing their campaigns on a Facebook group called 'Civil Disobedience Movement' which by Wednesday afternoon had more than 150,000 followers within 24 hours of its launch.

AFP

India says not 'responsible' as Rihanna, Greta Thunberg back protesting farmers

New Delhi, India - Pop superstar Rihanna and climate activist Greta Thunberg drew the attention of the Indian government on Wednesday after they tweeted in support of the massive farmers' protest against new agriculture laws.

Tens of thousands of farmers have been camped on the outskirts of India's capital New Delhi since November, calling for a repeal of laws they fear will allow large corporations to crush them.

Rihanna, who has more than 100mn followers on Twitter, wrote 'why aren't we talking about this?! #FarmersProtest', with a link to a news story about a government crackdown that included brief Internet blackout.

Her comment was retweeted more than 230,000 times and liked by over half a million users.

Swedish climate activist Greta Thunberg, one of the world's most prominent environmental campaigners, also tweeted a story about the Internet blackout, saying: 'We stand in solidarity with the #FarmersProtest in India.'



A man at a protest march, in New Delhi on Wednesday (AFP)

There was also support from the niece of US Vice President Kamala Harris, whose mother was born in India.

"We ALL should be outraged by India's internet shutdowns and paramilitary violence against farmer protesters," tweeted Meena Harris.

The international celebrity tweets triggered an online storm in India, where the farmers' protests have become one of the

biggest challenges to Prime Minister Narendra Modi since he took power in 2014.

Indian government took note of the international remarks on the protests. The Foreign Ministry said on Wednesday that the celebrities needed 'a proper understanding of the issues'.

"The temptation of sensationalist social media hashtags and comments, especially when resorted to by celebrities and others, is neither accurate nor responsible," it said in a statement, with the hashtags #IndiaTogether and #IndiaAgainstPropaganda.

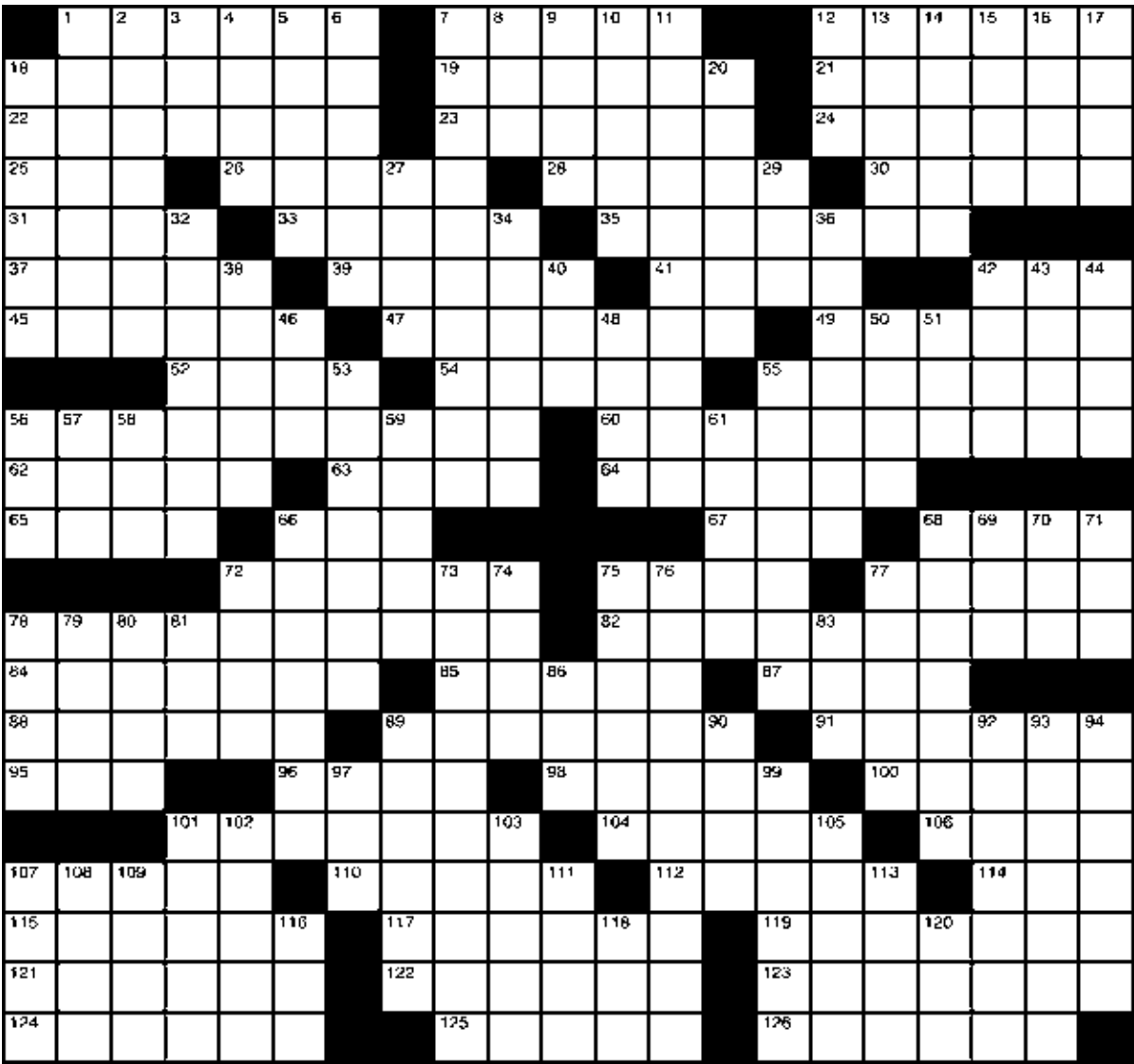
Some Indians tweeted in support of Rihanna, but others were not pleased, with her remarks getting abusive replies.

Bollywood actress Kangana Ranaut responded by calling the protesting farmers 'terrorists' and Rihanna a 'fool'.

Modi has said the laws are necessary to modernise India's agriculture sector, but farmers fear they would be placed at the mercy of big corporations.

AFP

DAILY CROSSWORD



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YOUR DAILY HOROSCOPE

ARIES MARCH 21-APRIL 19

You're giving your goals every ounce of effort you've got. This time of year often finds you striving to move forward with your ambitions—and that requires re-assessing which are worth keeping on your to-do list. Today's third quarter moon in deep-feeling Scorpio calls attention to any re-adjustments needing to be made on the emotional plane, in order for success to follow.

LEO JULY 23-AUGUST 22

You've given so much of your energy to uncovering the realities around your relationship. It's not been easy peeling back layer after layer of your love life, but you're getting a better idea of what expectations you apply to your partnerships. Today's third quarter moon in Scorpio stirs up long buried feelings from the deep, asking you to bravely face the stories that stem from your past.

SAGITTARIUS NOVEMBER 22-DECEMBER 21

This time of year is usually one of your busiest. Messages are constantly incoming and outgoing, and it's hard to catch your breath between all the things you need to finalise. You're working hard to expand your sphere of influence, but it takes a lot of mental energy. Today's skies bring the third quarter moon in Scorpio, which points to the mental and emotional clutter within.

TAURUS APRIL 20-MAY 20

Once a Taurus makes up their mind about something, they stick to it and see it through. This month had you exploring this determination on the career front. Today's third quarter moon in Scorpio highlights a need for reorientation involving relationships. Pay attention to any imbalances looking to level themselves out—especially regarding who and what you devote your time to.

VIRGO AUGUST 23-SEPTEMBER 22

You're a natural born worker. You get restless when you're not applying yourself in some capacity. This time of year has you trying to find the right work and explore ways to make it functional. Today's third quarter moon in Scorpio asks you to tune in your current mental state and find ways to declutter it, so you can pursue your newly formed goals with more clarity.

CAPRICORN DECEMBER 22-JANUARY 19

The universe is sending all of your energy inward. This time of year is all about reassessing your resources and re-activating forgotten talents. Pay attention to new enthusiasms emerging, as they beckon you towards new potentials. Today's third quarter moon in Scorpio points to the current divide between your ambitions and the raw materials you have to make it.

GEMINI MAY 21-JUNE 21

This month has been all about education—and not simply in the classic sense. You're expanding your perspectives and refreshing your philosophies, as you work towards new areas of self-expansion. Today's third quarter moon in Scorpio poses some challenges to adapt around, as it highlights the current reality of your work/life balance vs the new vision you're dreaming up for yourself.

LIBRA SEPTEMBER 23-OCTOBER 22

Every Libra has a natural artist within them. Even if you don't consider yourself a 'creative' person, you have a strong natural instinct for aesthetics and recognise beauty in your environment. This time of year is all about finding your creative self-expression, in whatever format feels best. Today's third quarter moon in Scorpio stirs up feelings around the validity of these talents.

AQUARIUS JANUARY 20-FEBRUARY 18

You're accustomed to sending your energy out to those in your community. That's why this time of year works so hard to get you back in tune with your own individuality—which, for the last few weeks you've been getting the hang of. Today's third quarter moon points to the gap between your career life and your personal life, as it highlights the parts of your career approach that need changing.

CANCER JUNE 22-JULY 22

This time of year is all about intimacy. Partnership energy requires a deeply honest, emotionally vulnerable approach as you trek into unacknowledged truths about how you approach love. Today's skies usher in the third quarter moon in Scorpio, highlighting certain changes needing to be embraced around your shared resources in relationships, and addressing commitment concerns.

SCORPIO OCTOBER 23-NOVEMBER 21

So much of your energy has been devoted to your family. The material you've been working through is emotionally charged and requires you to take a strong look at your past. Today's third quarter moon arrives in your signs stirring up powerful emotions; it's showing how who you've been in the past and how it's directly at odds with who you're working to become.

PISCES FEBRUARY 19-MARCH 20

Release is the regular theme for you this time of year. It's not easy work cleaning out your psychological closets, but it's imperative that you do, so you can make room for the new. Today's third quarter moon in Scorpio highlights the current state of your mental world, as it works to highlight the old philosophies and misconceptions you hold about life.



TEST YOUR KNOWLEDGE

1. The sacred text of Confucianism is

- a. The Tripitaka
- b. The Analects
- c. Quran
- d. no specific text

2. The Indian state having maximum cities is

- a. Uttar Pradesh
- b. West Bengal
- c. Madhya Pradesh
- d. Kerala

3. The Sports Authority of India was registered as a society in

- a. 1982
- b. 1983
- c. 1984
- d. 1985

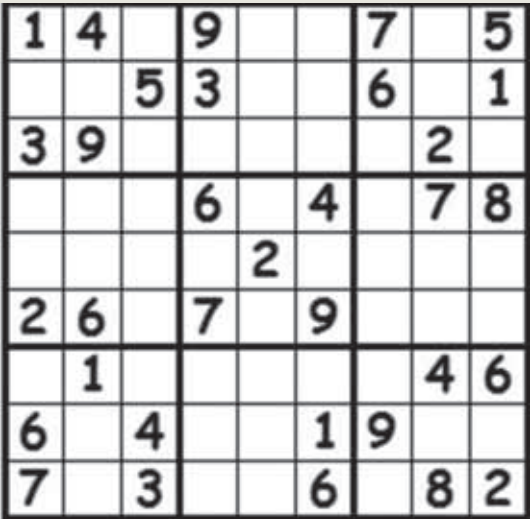
Answers: 1: b 2: a 3: c

KIDS COLOURING



DO YOU SUDOKU?

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



BOGGLER



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

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

SUDOKU EASY ANSWER



DAILY CROSSWORD ANSWERS (FEBRUARY 03)



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



TENNIS ELBOW

Exercises for ‘tennis elbow’

Tennis elbow is an overuse injury caused by a repetitive activity that lays stress on the elbow. Although common in racquet sports, it can also be seen in workplace injuries, particularly among painters, carpenters, and plumbers.

According to the American Academy of Orthopedic Surgeons, typical signs and symptoms of tennis elbow include pain and burning on the outside of the elbow and weak grip strength. The first steps in treating tennis elbow are reducing inflammation and resting the irritated muscles and tendons. Ice and compression may also help reduce inflammation and pain.

Once inflammation subsides, you can begin gentle exercises to strengthen the muscles of the forearm and prevent recurrence. Be sure to check with your doctor to determine when you are ready to begin therapy exercises.

Consider these exercises:



Fist clench

- Sit at a table with your forearm resting on the table.
- Hold a rolled up towel or small ball in your hand.
- Squeeze the towel in your hand and hold for 10 seconds.
- Release and repeat 10 times. Switch and do the other arm.



Towel twist

- Hold a loosely rolled-up towel lengthways, with one hand at each end.
- Keep the shoulders relaxed.
- Twist the towel by moving the hands in opposite directions, as if wringing out water.
- Repeat nine more times.
- Then repeat ten times, twisting the towel in the reverse direction.



Supination with a dumbbell

- Sit in a chair holding a 2-pound dumbbell vertically in your hand with your elbow resting on your knee or on a table.
- Let the weight of the dumbbell help rotate the arm outward, turning the palm up.
- Rotate the hand back the other direction until your palm is facing downward.
- Repeat 20 times on each side.
- Try to isolate the movement to your lower arm, keeping your upper arm and elbow still.



Wrist flexion

- Sit in a chair holding a 2-pound dumbbell in your hand with your palm facing up and elbow resting comfortably on your knee or on a table top.
- Keeping your palm facing up, flex your wrist by curling it towards your body.
- Return to starting position and repeat 10 times on each side. Then change position of hand - palm facing downwards.
- Try to isolate the movement to the wrist, keeping the rest of the arm still.
- The same can be performed without a dumbbell, too.

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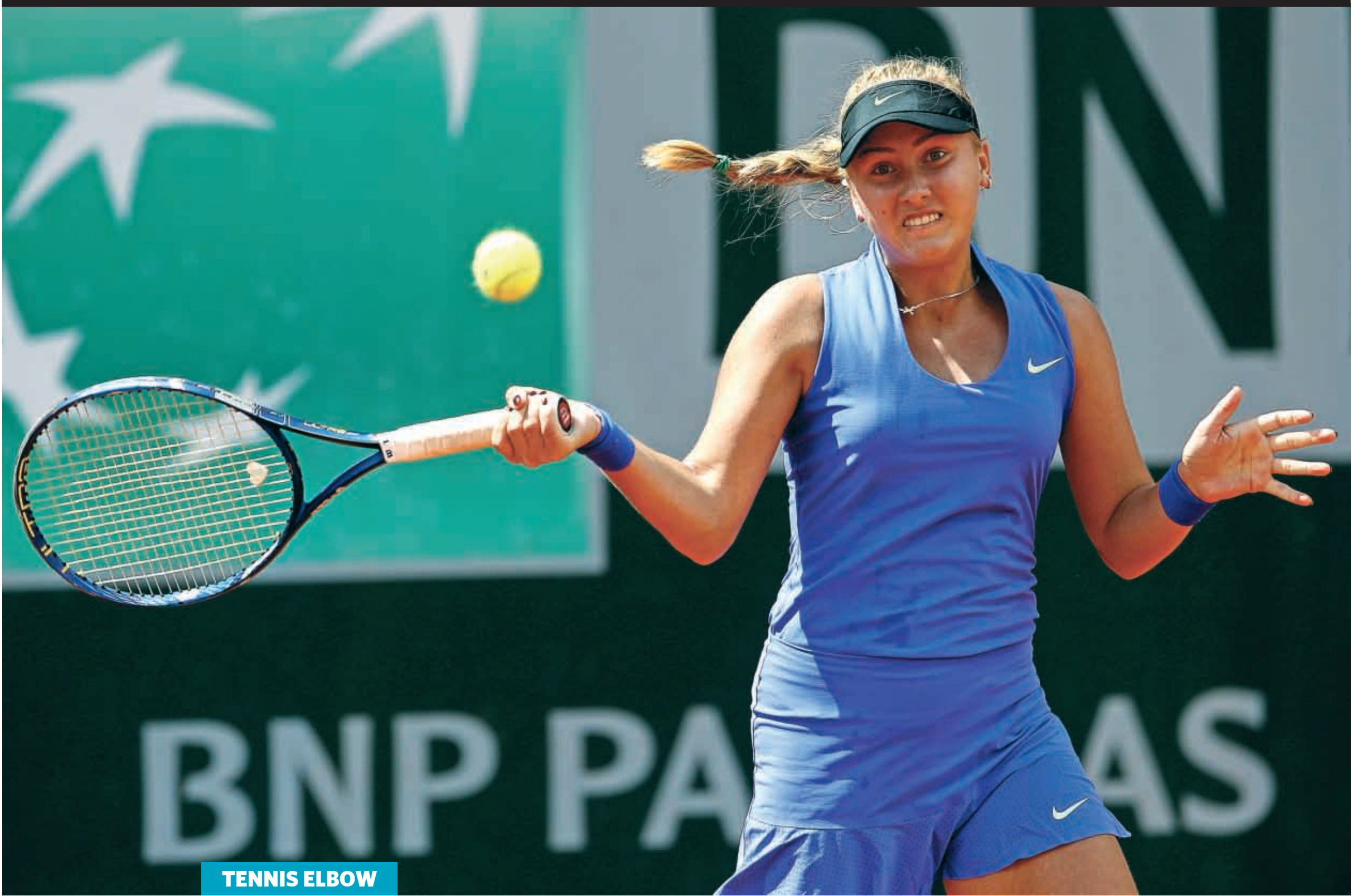
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TENNIS ELBOW

ARM HARM

Tennis elbow (lateral epicondylitis) is a painful condition that occurs when tendons in your elbow are overloaded, usually by repetitive motions of the wrist and arm. It affects not only tennis players but also those whose jobs feature the types of motions that can cause it – plumbers, painters, carpenters, butchers, also those excessively using the computer mouse. “The condition is self-limiting and, in a majority of patients, symptoms persist for 6–24 months with complete disappearance of pain in a year’s time,” says **Dr Biswajit Dutta Baruah**, consultant orthopaedic surgeon, KIMS Oman hospital



DR BISWAJIT DUTTA BARUAH
Consultant orthopaedic surgeon, KIMS Oman Hospital

Essam Mohammed Hamza sat down with a slump on the chair and thrust the question at me - “What is this pain, doctor?” As I looked at him quizzically, he continued - “It’s severe pain at the elbow. I can’t even open a bottle of water or carry a grocery bag”. I made a note about that and proceeded to examine him.

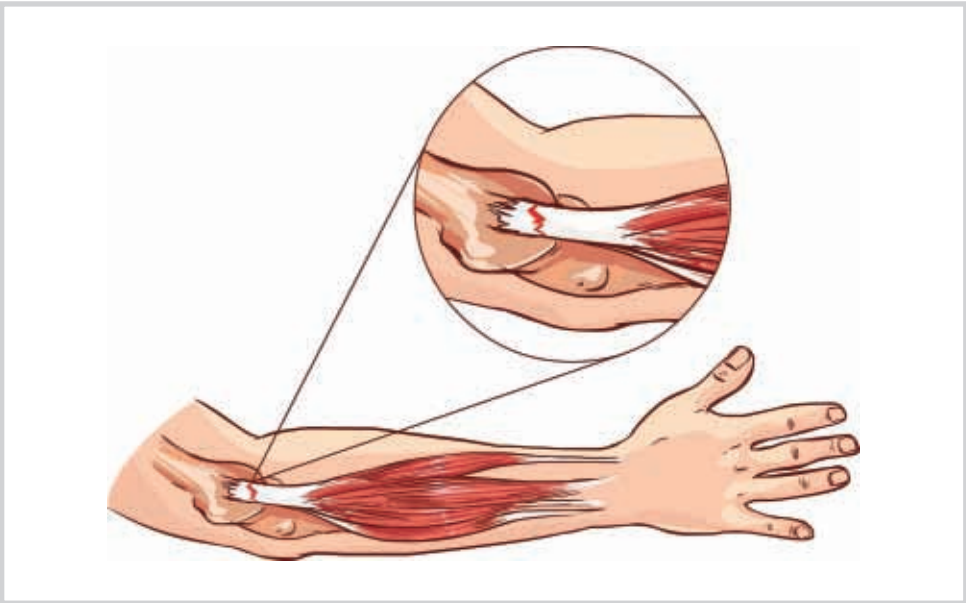
As I felt the bony points around his elbow, I continued - “Did you hurt your elbow or fall down recently?”. He shook his head and jumped in pain, almost pulling his elbow out of my hands. “That’s exactly the point where it hurts”, grimacing in pain as he spoke. “Fall?” I looked at him again hoping that he was over the pain that I had inadvertently caused. “No, no ...no fall”, he shook his head in response. Mr Hamza, you have “Tennis elbow”, I declared to him.

He gave me a funny look and said, “ Really! But I don’t play Tennis.” I proceeded to explain what this was all about.

You don’t have to play tennis

Tennis elbow is a common cause of pain in the upper limb affecting about 1-3 % of the adult population. The German doctor, F Runge first described it as ‘writer’s cramp’ in 1873 and later called it lawn tennis arm in 1883 - the latter name stuck on. Despite the name, only 10% affected individuals actually play tennis. You don’t have to play tennis to suffer from tennis elbow. Men and women are equally affected, and the majority are affected in their 40s and 50s. It is also observed commonly in those who use vibrating tools like hand held drilling machines.

Most patients develop pain on the outer aspect of the elbow with pain often passing along the forearm. Moving the wrist often triggers pain. Simple activities like opening doors, wringing clothes, turning keys in clocks can become very painful. Pain at times can be sharp and distressing to the patient. A few patients can develop



Despite the name, only 10% affected individuals actually play tennis. You don’t have to play tennis to suffer from tennis elbow. Men and women are equally affected, and the majority are affected in their 40s and 50s.

swelling or fullness around the elbow. Movements in the elbow joint are, however, not restricted except when they are in pain. X-Ray examination is not helpful as bones are not affected. Ultrasound can help confirm the diagnosis.

Often patients like Hamza inquire - “I didn’t fall or play any game like tennis, why did this happen to me?” Many muscles of the forearm (extensor group of muscles) are attached to a bony point just above and on the outer aspect of the elbow joint called the extensor origin (lateral epicondyle is the medical term). The tendon of one of these muscles, specifically ECRB undergoes degeneration.

Degeneration implies changes in the structure of the tendon. This was thought to lead to inflammation around the tendon origin, leading to pain. Increasingly, studies have shown that it is more about degeneration than inflammation.

Diagnosis and treatment

At times, doctors may prescribe MRI and the report may come as tears or defects. However, these findings have very little to do with the prognosis or treatment of the condition. Many times they give the impression that surgical repair is necessary. The condition is self-limiting and in a

majority of patients symptoms persist for 6-24 months with complete disappearance of pain in a year’s time.

For those in whom it is troublesome, various modalities of treatment exist. As a first line, most doctors will prescribe anti-inflammatories and advice restriction of those activities that provoke pain. Often a tennis elbow band will be applied just below the elbow to help alleviate pain. Icing the region can be helpful especially for those having swelling. Shockwave therapy by the physio-therapist can be helpful, as well.

When pain starts to subside, eccentric loading exercises may be prescribed for recovery. A study reported in Lancet, that among all tendinopathies, the evidence for the use of steroid injections was the strongest for tennis elbow. The injection itself can be painful but often leads to resolution of pain. However, repeated injections are to be avoided as it can lead to thinning of the tendon and eventual rupture. Platelet rich plasma (PRP) injections are being increasingly employed to treat tennis elbow effectively.

A few studies have shown that bone marrow aspirate concentrate (BMAC) and autologous tenocyte concentrate (ATI) injections may be helpful. However widespread use of these techniques is limited by its availability and the treatment is not yet mainstream.

Last option

When non-operative treatment fails, surgeons may resort to open or keyhole (arthroscopic) surgery to clean up the degenerated tendon. If tendon attachment is compromised then repair with strong suture material may be necessary.

In summary tennis elbow is a disabling condition affecting the elbow of a middle aged adult. Examination is often sufficient for diagnosing the condition and non-operative measures lead to full resolution of the pain.

TENNIS ROUND-UP

ZVEREV, TSITSIPAS WIN



Germany's Alexander Zverev celebrates after a point against Denis Shapovalov of Canada during their ATP Cup match on Wednesday

ATP CUP

Melbourne, Australia - Alexander Zverev and Stefanos Tsitsipas opened their seasons with fighting wins in the ATP Cup on Wednesday as they warm up for the Australian Open, while Italy and Russia became the first teams into the semifinals.

Seventh-ranked Zverev had to dig deep to overcome Canadian dangerman Denis Shapovalov 6-7 (5-7), 6-3, 7-6 (7-4) and seal the tie for Germany. But he gained valuable court time ahead of another crack at a first Grand Slam trophy at the Australian Open starting next week.

Germany's Jan-Lennard Struff upset Milos Raonic 7-6 (7-4), 7-6 (7-2) in the opening match and Canada are now out after a second narrow loss for Shapovalov, who pushed Novak Djokovic hard in their Group A clash on Tuesday.

Djokovic's defending champions Serbia beat Canada 2-1 in their opener on Tuesday and will play Germany on Thursday for a place in the semifinals.

Greece's world No 6 Tsitsipas



It was a thrilling match, both of us gave everything we had

STEFANOS TSITSIPAS

was also forced to work hard by Australian Alex de Minaur, who won the season-opening Antalya Open last month, eventually triumphing 6-3, 7-5. Tsitsipas, a semifinalist at the Australian Open in 2019, said he gave it his all. "It was a thrilling match, both of us gave everything we had. 'I managed to stay calm and resilient. I just tried to take my

opportunities and press as much as I could," Tsitsipas said

Australia's John Millman had won the opening singles match against Michail Pervolarakis, with the Group B tie sent into a deciding doubles.

Berrettini delivers

Italy became the first nation into the last-four by beating France to

follow their opening win against Austria in Group C.

Fabio Fognini won just five games in his ATP Cup opener on Tuesday against Dennis Novak, but bounced back to battle past Benoit Paire 6-1, 7-6 (7-2) and give Italy a 1-0 lead.

Matteo Berrettini, tipped by Djokovic as among the new generation capable of winning a Grand Slam, clinched the tie with a comfortable 6-4, 6-2 victory over Gael Monfils, ranked a place below him at 11.

Russia, the only team to feature two top-ten players, also made the semis, proving too strong for Japan.

World No 8 Andrey Rublev crushed Yoshihito Nishioka in just 64 minutes, losing just seven games across his two singles encounters at this year's event, before fourth-ranked Daniil Medvedev cruised past Kei Nishikori 6-2, 6-4.

"Really happy for the team," said Medvedev. "Semifinals is a big step ... really happy that we made it in both singles."

AFP

Australia Open warm-up events cancelled for Thursday after virus scare

Melbourne, Australia - Play at Australia Open warm-up tournaments in Melbourne has been cancelled for Thursday after a coronavirus scare, organisers announced. There will be no matches at any of the six ATP and WTA tournaments after up to 600 players and officials were told Wednesday

to isolate and get tested because a worker at a hotel tested positive for COVID-19. "There will be no matches at Melbourne Park on Thursday. An update on the schedule for Friday will be announced later today," the Australian Open's official Twitter feed announced. "Health Authorities have

advised us that a hotel quarantine worker has tested positive for COVID-19," AO added. "Those associated with the AO who quarantined at the hotel now need to be tested and isolate until they receive a negative test result."

Organisers said they would work to 'facilitate testing' as

quickly as possible. Daniel Andrews, premier of Victoria state, said the man infected last worked at the Grand Hyatt Hotel in Melbourne on January 29 and anyone there was considered a casual contact.

The opening Grand Slam of the year begins on Monday. AFP

Serena sizzles; Barty, Osaka struggle

Melbourne, Australia - Serena Williams continued her impressive Australian Open preparations with a straight-sets thrashing of Tsvetana Pironkova Wednesday, as world No 3 Naomi Osaka and top-ranked Ashleigh Barty struggled.

Serena, 39, has been on belligerent form at the Yarra Valley Classic and overpowered the Bulgarian with a 6-1, 6-4 victory in 74 minutes.

"So far, so good. It's special to play here with what's going on in the world," said Serena, who only lost four games against Daria Gavrilova in her opener on Monday. Serena, aiming for a record-equalling 24th Grand Slam title at the Australian Open, will face compatriot Danielle Collins, who knocked out world No 6 Carolina Pliskova in straight sets, in the quarterfinals on Thursday.

Osaka and Barty, however, were pushed to the brink, but both avoided early exits at Melbourne Park.

World No 1 Barty also had a fight in her match against Marie Bouzkova of the Czech Republic, but recovered from a second-set stutter to win 6-0, 4-6, 6-3.

Barty, hoping to break her country's 43-year singles title drought at the Australian Open, will face Shelby Rogers of



Ashleigh Barty hits a return against Marie Bouzkova during their Yarra Valley Classic match on Wednesday

the United States next.

Japan's Osaka was made to work hard against in-form Katie Boulter, but fought back for a 3-6, 6-3, 6-1 victory to reach the quarterfinals in the Gippsland Trophy. She next meets Irina-Camelia Begu from Romania.

British world No 371 Boulter, who knocked out teenage sensation Coco Gauff on Tuesday, ran her error-strewn opponent ragged to claim the first set in 39 minutes. A refocused Osaka lifted her intensity to run away

with the contest in a one-sided third set.

Reigning Australian Open champion Sofia Kenin was also pushed hard by American Jessica Pegula, dropping the first set and finding herself 4-1 down in the second before prevailing 5-7, 7-5, 6-2.

Kenin will play Garbine Muguruza next in a rematch of last year's Australian Open final.

World No 5 Elina Svitolina also had to come from behind to beat 2017 French Open cham-

pion Jelena Ostapenko 6-7 (7-4), 6-3, 6-2.

She next faces 20th-ranked Belgium's Elise Mertens, who knocked out Caroline Garcia of France 7-6 (7-1), 6-3.

But world No 2 Halep, like Serena, bucked the trend and downed Laura Siegemund in straight sets to set up a Gippsland Trophy quarterfinal against Russia's Ekaterina Alexandrova, who upset French Open champion Iga Swiatek 6-4, 6-2.

AFP



Serena Williams hits a return against Tsvetana Pironkova during their Yarra Valley Classic match in Melbourne on Wednesday (AFP)

Organisers unveil virus rule book for Tokyo Games

Tokyo, Japan - Olympics organisers unveiled the first of a series of 'playbooks' aimed at holding the coronavirus-postponed Tokyo Games safely on Wednesday, warning that rule breakers could be kicked out.

Sports officials will be allowed to skip quarantine as long as they monitor their health for 14 days after arriving in Japan, according to the 32-page document.

During those 14 days, however, the officials will not be allowed to travel outside the Games bubble or watch events as a spectator.

The playbooks are aimed at building confidence that the Games can go ahead even if the pandemic is not under control by the opening ceremony on July 23. The rules are set to be updated in April and again in June.

The first of the guides is aimed at sports officials, with versions for athletes, fans, media and others to follow in the coming weeks.



Officials will be subject to a series of rules during their stay in Japan, including mask-wearing, complying with contact tracing and staying within designated areas.

They will have to present a detailed itinerary of their planned movements for their first 14 days in Japan and stick closely to it on arrival.

And they will have to monitor and record their health for two weeks before going to Tokyo.

The guide released on Wednesday warns rule breakers will face 'consequences that may have an impact on participation' at the Games, with 'repeated or serious failures' potentially leading to offenders being kicked out.

Tighter border restrictions imposed after infections surged have already forced the postponement of some sporting fixtures in Japan, including this year's first Olympic test event, an artistic swimming qualifier that was scheduled for March.

The nationwide Olympic torch relay is still due to begin on March 25.

AFP

Bosher Sports Centre defeat ISWK in a thriller, ISM U16 boys trounce SLSM

LOCAL CRICKET

Bosher Sports Centre (BSC) and Indian School Muscat (ISM) boys recorded contrasting victories in the Oman Cricket U16 League (30-over-a-side) at the Al Amerat grounds recently.

BSC rode on allround performances by Lakshmi Narayana and Luis Kerrigan as they notched up a thrilling six-run victory against Indian

School Wadi Kabir (ISWK) while Divyansh Sampath three for 11 and Shanmugarajan Kuttiraja's unbeaten half-century guided ISM to a lop-sided nine-wicket win over Sri Lankan School Muscat (SLSM).

Lakshmi slammed a half-century while Luis missed it by a run as they guided BSC to a challenging total of 216 for nine in their stipulated 30 overs.

Lakshmi and Luis then made

significant contributions with the ball too as they claimed two wickets each to bowl out ISWK for 210. Ashish Valappil also claimed two wickets for BSC.

In the other U16 match, SLSM was dismissed for paltry 104 with Divyansh picking three and Glenalexei Menezes taking two wickets. Shanmugarajan Kuttiraja then slammed unbeaten 57 to power his side to a thumping nine-wicket win.



Harshil Dinesh (L), Gaurav Dinesh

Elsewhere, ISWK-A, ISWK-B, MCCC Yellow and ISM won their respective matches in the U13 League.

BRIEF SCORES

U16 League: BSC 216-9 (Lakshmi 59, Luis 49; Siddh Mehta 4-35, Abhas Ajay 2-31) beat ISWK 210 in 30 overs (Siddh 73, Chaitra Jitesh 39; Lakshmi 2-32, Ashish 2-38, Luis 2-48).

U16: SLSM 104 in 27.5 overs (Devin Wijayananda 37; Divyansh 3-11, Glenalexei 2-19) lost to ISM 105-1 in nine overs (Shanmugarajan 57 n.o.)

U13 League (T20): MCCC Red 139-2 (Shravan Sharat 56, Theertha So 35) lost to ISWK-B 140-2 in 17.4 overs (Vasudev Ram 41, Gautham Midhun 41).

U13: MCCC Yellow 206-3 (Harshil Dinesh 64, Kriv Rajesh 49, Aneek Chakrovarty 42) beat PSM 108-8 (Asad Kashif 35; Gaurav Dinesh 3-7, Ayush Karthyic 2-10, Husain Maden 2-11).

U13: BSC-A 148-4 (Jeyapranesh Ayyappan 40, Nimish Sandesh 37; Kuttiraja Girihran 2-27) lost to ISM 149-1 in 11.3 overs (Pachisia Ojius 80, Shah Jeet 37).

U13: BSC-B 37 all out in 17.5 overs (Kavish Rajeshkumar 3-7, Saumya Bhavin 3-10, Ayush Shetty 2-5, Edwin Robins 2-11) lost to ISWK-A 38-1 in 2.4 overs (Nilaksh Vats 27).

Opening day honours shared

Bangladesh fight back in final session after Warrican three-for puts West Indies in front

BANGLADESH VS WEST INDIES
FIRST TEST: DAY ONE

Chattogram, Bangladesh - The West Indies bowlers did well to keep Bangladesh in check for the most part of the opening day of the first Test in Chattogram before the home side wrested back some control in the final session on Wednesday.

After being 140 for four at tea, Bangladesh added another 102 for the loss of one more wicket in the evening to finish the day on 242 for five, the unbroken sixth-wicket stand between Shakib al Hasan and Liton Das worth 49.

Left-arm spinner Jomel Warrican was the most successful bowler for West Indies, picking up three wickets.

The day started with Kemar Roach and Shannon Gabriel struggling to get their lengths right and erring consistently on the fuller side after Bangladesh opted to bat on a placid pitch. The first ball of the match, a half-volley from Roach, was driven through the covers for four by Shadman Islam. Two overs later, Roach presented a similar opportunity to Tamim Iqbal and the batsman didn't miss out.

The lack of assistance from the pitch meant West Indies were a bit conservative with their field placements too. Given those conditions, Iqbal would be disappointed with himself - he was on nine when a Roach delivery came in from the around-the-wicket angle and found the gap between bat and pad to clatter into the stumps.

Like the two openers, Najmul



Bangladesh's Shadman Islam plays a shot on the first day of the first Test against West Indies



West Indies' Jomel Warrican celebrates after dismissing a Bangladesh batsman on Wednesday

Hossain too opened his account with a boundary off Roach. Islam and he batted calmly and added 43 for the second wicket before a misunderstanding led to Najmul Hossain's run-out.

West Indies made further inroads in the second session as Warrican picked up the wickets of Momtaz Haque and Islam.

The West Indies bowlers

were much tighter with their lines and lengths after lunch. They also deployed in-out fields, which meant that on the rare occasions when the bowlers presented scoring opportunities, the Bangladesh batsmen couldn't really cash in.

Except for the one Mayers over, when the bowler lost his length and gave away two

easy boundaries, the runs didn't come easy for the hosts.

That reduced the contest to a battle of attrition, in which Haque was the first to blink. The Bangladesh captain skipped down the pitch against Rahkeem Cornwall and Warrican only to miscue the shots over mid-on.

The next time he tried to do it, against Warrican, the ball

dipped, Haque failed to keep his attempted whip down, and John Campbell held on to a juggling catch at short midwicket.

Islam brought up a measured half-century before falling to Warrican in the penultimate over before tea. The batsman went for the sweep only to miss and be struck in front of middle and leg. Rahim and Shakib, though,

showed positive intent in the final session. The first four overs after tea produced 20 runs as the two experienced batsmen hit four boundaries.

They didn't hesitate in taking quick singles either and suddenly West Indies were just looking to plug the flow of runs. With the ball getting soft, West Indies opened up the field and the

SCOREBOARD		
BANGLADESH 1 ST INNINGS		
S Islam	lbw b Warrican	59
T Iqbal	b Roach	9
N Hossain	run out	25
M Haque	c Campbell b Warrican	26
M Rahim	c Cornwall b Warrican	38
Shakib al Hasan	not out	39
Liton Das	not out	34
Extras:	(b 2, lb 2, nb 3, w 5)	12
TOTAL:	242 for five in 90 overs	
Fall of wickets: 1-23, 2-66, 3-119, 4-134, 5-193		
Bowling: K Roach 16-5-44-1, S Gabriel 17-3-51-0, R Cornwall 22-1-56-0, Kyle Mayers 7-2-16-0, J Warrican 24-5-58-3, K Brathwaite 4-0-13-0		

singles were available easily. But Shakib and Rahim were alert to quick singles as well. When Kraigg Brathwaite brought himself on, Rahim was his usual adventurous self, going deep in the crease to manufacture the desired length and even scooping him to the fine-leg boundary.

Shakib and Rahim had added 59 for the fifth wicket when Warrican dismissed Rahim against the run of play. Having moved to 38, Rahim looked to defend Warrican only to edge to first slip where Cornwall took a low catch.

Das could have been on his way back soon after but debutant Nkrumah Bonner failed to latch on to a sharp chance at forward short-leg off Cornwall.

That was on the last ball of the 80th over and West Indies opted for the new ball straight-away. That worked in Bangladesh's favour, though, as they took 40 runs from the last ten overs of the day, with Das scoring 32 of them.

Cricinfo



West Indies tour in doubt as virus hits Sri Lanka team

Colombo, Sri Lanka - Sri Lanka's national coach Mickey Arthur and a player have tested positive for the coronavirus, the country's cricket board said Wednesday, casting doubt over the upcoming West Indies tour.

Top-order batsman Lahiru Thirimanne, 31, and the 52 year old Arthur were found to have been infected with COVID-19 after Sri Lanka's 36-member squad was tested ahead of their planned departure in two weeks.

"Considering the current situation, Sri Lanka Cricket (SLC) is exploring the possibility of rescheduling the tour of West Indies, which was scheduled to commence on February 20," the governing body said in a statement.

It is the first time that members of the national cricket team have tested positive for COVID-19.

Sri Lanka hosted a two-match Test series against England at Galle last month without any spectators as part of strict health regulations to prevent the spread of the virus.

Sri Lanka were to play two Tests, three one-day internationals and three T20 matches from March 2 to the end of the month as part of the West Indies tour.

AFP

FREE CLASSIFIED LISTING

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RECALL CAMPAIGN FOR FUSO VAN

Date of Campaign Start : 04/02/2021

Campaign type : Safety

Campaign section : Alternator

Product Description

Number of affected vehicle	VIN Number	Model	The year of Production
50	JN6BE6ASOG9800149	Fuso Canter Van	From 2016 to 2017
	JN6BE6DS9G9800257		

Description

During use, the tension of the auxiliary belt may exceed the strength of the clutch bearing inside the alternator one-way clutch (OWC) pulley, and the wear of the bearing may progress to the point where the OWC may stick. If it is used as is, a large force is applied to the power steering pump, which is driven by the same belt, and its bracket may get damaged.

Procedure

Replace Alternator.

For more information

Customer with chassis numbers mentioned above are asked to please contact M/s General Automotive Company LLC to replace the defective parts

Contact Details

Call 24 500 500 or 24 500 502 from Sunday to Thursday between 08.00 am to 18.30 pm.

FOOTBALL ROUND-UP

UNITED ON CLOUD NINE

Solskjaer’s men drub Saints 9-0 to equal Premier League biggest win record; Arsenal lose at Wolves

ENGLISH PREMIER LEAGUE

London, UK - Manchester United equalled the biggest win in English Premier League (EPL) history as they crushed nine-man Southampton 9-0, while Arsenal had two players sent off in their defeat at Wolves on Tuesday.

Rampant United scored four times in the first half after Southampton’s teenage midfielder Alexandre Jankewitz was dismissed in the second minute at Old Trafford.

Ole Gunnar Solskjaer’s side hit five more after the break, tying them with Leicester’s 9-0 win at Southampton in 2019 and United’s own 9-0 victory against Ipswich in 1995. Aaron Wan-Bissaka’s goal opened the floodgates and Marcus Rashford bagged United’s second.

Jan Bednarek’s own goal made it three for the hosts before Edinson Cavani added the fourth.

The goals kept coming as Anthony Martial and Scott McTominay netted before Bruno Fernandes’ penalty after Bednarek was sent off.

Martial and Daniel James scored in stoppage-time to complete an incredible display by United.

"We’ve been waiting for them to show the magic and it was a night for them to go and enjoy it. We’ve not had many times where we could just enjoy the second half," Solskjaer said. "You get lots of confidence from a performance like this, scoring goals is always good for a team."



United players celebrate on the pitch after drubbing Southampton 9-0 in the English Premier League at Old Trafford in Manchester, UK, on Tuesday

Southampton manager Ralph Hasenhuttl added: "It was a stupid foul from the young lad (Jankewitz) and kills everything. What can I say? It’s horrible."

After the frustration of their shock defeat against Sheffield United and dour draw at Arsenal, the demolition job was a much-needed boost to their title bid.

United’s first victory in three league games means they are

behind leaders Manchester City only on goal difference.

Pep Guardiola’s team have two games in hand, including one at Burnley on Wednesday.

Jankewitz, making his first EPL start, saw red after just 82 seconds for an ugly challenge that left stud marks on McTominay’s thigh.

United took advantage of their numerical superiority in the 18th minute when Luke Shaw swung

a cross to far post and Wan-Bissaka bundled his shot past Alex McCarthy from close range.

Rashford doubled United’s lead seven minutes later with a composed finish from Mason Greenwood’s cross.

It was only Rashford’s second goal in his last ten appearances in all competitions.

Rashford, subjected to vile abuse on social media recently,

claimed the assist for United’s third in the 34th minute when his cross was turned into his own net by Bednarek.

Cavani scored United fourth with a thumping header from Shaw’s cross in the 39th minute.

Martial ended his eight-game goal drought when he lashed home from close range in the 69th minute.

McTominay rifled home from 25 yards two minutes later and

Fernandes struck from the spot in the 87th minute after Bednarek fouled Martial.

There was still time for Martial to score again before James capped the rout.

Arsenal woe

A seven-game unbeaten league run had propelled Arsenal back into contention for a return to the Champions League next season and they could have moved to

within five points of the top-four after Nicolas Pepe’s strike opened the scoring at Molineux.

But David Luiz’s third red card in two seasons as an Arsenal player for clipping Willian Jose on the stroke of half-time turned the game around.

Ruben Neves converted the resulting penalty before Joao Moutinho’s stunning long-range strike early in the second half put goal-shy Wolves in front.

Goalkeeper Bernd Leno then rounded off a miserable night for the visitors when he was also dismissed for handling outside his box.

A much-needed victory for Wolves ended an eight-game winless run and takes them 12 points clear of the relegation zone.

Nuno Espirito Santo’s men also completed a first league double over Arsenal in 42 years.

Arsenal remain in tenth, eight points adrift of fourth-placed Leicester, having played a game more.

"The team was really on top of the game, we should have been three or four-nil up and after the red card the game changed completely," said Arsenal manager Mikel Arteta. "I’ve seen it ten times in different angles and I cannot tell you where the contact is."

West Brom lost 2-1 at bottom-of-the-table Sheffield United, while Crystal Palace won 2-1 at struggling Newcastle.

AFP

Ronaldo double gives Juventus edge

ITALIAN CUP SEMIS

FIRST-LEG

Milan, Italy - Cristiano Ronaldo scored twice as Juventus came from behind to beat Inter Milan 2-1 at the San Siro in their Italian Cup semifinal first-leg on Tuesday.

Record 13-time winners Juve will be favourites to reach a sixth final in seven years when they bid to complete the job in the return game in Turin next Tuesday.

"This is just the first leg, we haven’t achieved anything yet," Juventus coach Andrea Pirlo told RAI Sport.

"What this does prove is that if we are fully concentrated, it becomes difficult for anyone against us."

Inter, who beat Juventus 2-0 last month in Serie A, have it all to do to keep their hopes of lifting a first Italian Cup since 2011 alive.

"It was an important match, the Serie A game showed Inter are far from an easy side to face," Juventus midfielder Adrien Rabiot said.

"The tie isn’t over yet, there’s another leg to go and that will be even tougher than this one."



Juventus’ Cristiano Ronaldo (centre) celebrates after scoring against Inter Milan in Milan, Italy, on Tuesday

Holders Napoli host Atalanta in the second last-four first-leg on Wednesday night.

Inter made a flying start in the ninth minute, as Lautaro Martinez got in front of Matthijs de Ligt to meet Nicolo Barella’s low cross, sweeping a right-footed finish into the net despite Gianluigi Buffon getting a hand to the shot.

But Juventus were given a way back into the tie midway through the first half.

Juan Cuadrado, who was making a run into the box off the ball, was held by Ashley Young, with VAR deeming that the visitors should be awarded a penalty.

Ronaldo did the rest, hammering the spot-kick into the roof

of the net to score his 21st goal of the season.

Juventus completed the first-half turnaround in the 35th minute, as a terrible mix-up between Alessandro Bastoni and Inter goalkeeper Samir Handanovic allowed Ronaldo to slide in his second goal from a tight angle.

Inter, missing top-scorer

Romelu Lukaku through suspension, should have equalised 11 minutes after half-time, but Alexis Sanchez’s shot was brilliantly cleared off the line by Merih Demiral.

The hosts kept pushing for an equaliser, with Martinez curling narrowly over after Buffon’s smart save kept out Matteo Darmian from point-blank range.

Ronaldo was visibly frustrated to be replaced by Alvaro Morata with 14 minutes remaining, but Pirlo said he wanted to keep his key player fresh for Sunday’s league match against Roma.

"I understand that Ronaldo wasn’t happy at being substituted, but it was only right to rest him for the upcoming Serie A game, even if just a few minutes," he added.

Inter coach Antonio Conte threw on Christian Eriksen, who scored a late winner in the last eight against AC Milan, but the home side failed to create another clear-cut chance.

"We had Juve on the ropes, it’s really disappointing, because we deserved much, much, much more than the final result," bemoaned Conte.

AFP



Sevilla’s Lucas Ocampos celebrates after scoring

Ocampos fires Sevilla into Copa semifinals

Madrid, Spain - Lucas Ocampos’ second-half goal was enough to see Sevilla edge past second-tier Almeria 1-0 on Tuesday to reach the Copa del Rey semifinals.

Papu Gomez, who joined from Atalanta last week, made his debut for Sevilla but made little impact and was substituted on the hour mark. It was his first appearance since December 16 after falling out of favour with Atalanta coach Gian Piero Gasperini.

"I think he played a good game," said Sevilla boss Julien Lopetegui.

Gomez’s fellow Argentinian Ocampos broke Almeria’s stubborn resistance in the 67th

minute, heading home Suso’s cross. It is the first time Sevilla, five-time winners, have reached the last four since being thrashed 5-0 by Barcelona in the 2018 final.

Sevilla are bidding for a second major trophy under former Spain and Real Madrid coach Lopetegui, having won the Europa League last season.

Lopetegui’s side have now won six straight matches in all competitions and have lost just one of their last-16 games.

Sevilla, who sit fourth in La Liga, are also into the Champions League last-16, where they will face Borussia Dortmund.

AFP



Rot-Weiss Essen players celebrate after defeating Bayer Leverkusen in the German Cup last-16 match in Essen, Germany, on Tuesday (AFP)

Fourth-tier Rot-Weiss Essen stun Leverkusen

GERMAN CUP

Berlin, Germany - Fourth-division club Rot-Weiss Essen continued their giant-killing run in the German Cup on Tuesday by defeating last season’s runners-up Bayer Leverkusen 2-1 after extra-time to reach the quarterfinals.

Jamaica international Leon Bailey put the Bundesliga team ahead in the 105th minute of the last-16 tie, but Essen levelled soon after with a goal from Oguzhan Kefkir.

Unbeaten since February 1 of last year, Simon Engelmann scored the winner for Essen on 117 minutes as the lowest-ranked team left in the competition claimed another scalp following wins over Arminia Bielefeld and second-tier Fortuna Dusseldorf in previous rounds.

Essen, who are currently second to Borussia Dortmund’s reserves in the Regionalliga West, won the German Cup in 1952-53, the first edition of the tournament after World War II.

Dortmund’s first team threw away a two-goal lead but overcame second-division Paderborn 3-2 in extra-time courtesy of a 95th-minute goal by Erling Braut Haaland.

Emre Can and Jadon Sancho struck in the first half as Dortmund appeared to be cruising, but Julian Justvan gave Paderborn hope and Prince Oseu Owusu equalised from the spot deep into stoppage time.

The visitors were awarded a penalty following a VAR review,

which nullified an effort from Haaland. However, the Norwegian striker grabbed the winner in extra time after another lengthy consultation with VAR.

Werder Bremen beat Greuther Fuerth 2-0.

Bundesliga Two side Holstein Kiel, who knocked out holders Bayern Munich in the last round on penalties, outlasted Darmstadt 7-6 in another shootout following a 1-1 draw.

RB Leipzig host second-division Bochum on Wednesday,

while Stuttgart play Borussia Moenchengladbach and Wolfsburg face Schalke.

The draw for the quarterfinals will be conducted on Sunday, with the ties scheduled for March 2 and 3.

OTHER RESULTS

SCOTTISH PREMIERSHIP

Tuesday: Aberdeen 0

Livingston 2,

St Mirren 1 Hibernian 2,

Kilmarnock 0 Celtic 4.

AFP

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