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Social media abuzz with high utility bills

Our Correspondent
Muscat

The Authority for Public Services Regulation (APSR) has taken note of the large number of grievances related to inflated electricity bills. In response, the authority stated that it will spare no effort to ensure that electricity distribution companies follow the applicable standards while issuing bills to subscribers.

APSR is currently reviewing all bills for the month of May and June issued by distribution companies to ensure veracity of readings and, in turn, the rights of consumers. The authority has confirmed that it will not cut off electricity supply of any subscriber who has submitted a complaint until it is investigated.

In recent weeks, social media has been abuzz with comments about the inflated electricity bills with the hashtag 'High electricity bills'.

Dr Hammoud al Nawfali, said on Twitter, "I hope the government brings the subsidies for electricity and water back."

The electricity bills Mohammed Tamim received earlier were around RO15 and were

Citizens need to be creative to achieve Oman Vision 2040, not to think about their electricity and water bills

MOHAMMED TAMIM

never an issue. The resident of Mawaleh has been getting monthly bills of RO45 recently. "As I had not paid for the past few months, my bill went up to RO139. And suddenly on Sunday morning, my connection was cut without any prior notice."

Another Twitter user Hamad al Sawaai said that the government should support electricity and water services "because it is a necessity in a country that produces oil and gas. Citizens need to be creative to achieve Oman Vision 2040, not to think about their electricity and water bills".

Twitterati Houria commented, "My electric bill has increased by 50 per cent since last year. I have no idea what's going on in this country or how things

will turn out."

Another Twitter user said that considering the high electricity bills, people should think of installing solar panels in their homes and farms and "become producers rather than consumers".

Responding to the flurry of comments, APSR said that if licensed companies do not adhere to the regulatory framework for billing, it will intervene in favour of subscribers to amend the billing calculation in accordance with the legal powers granted to it.

'All licensed companies are required to take actual readings for all subscribers per month for a period of no less than 28 and not exceeding 33 days. If it is not possible to take the actual reading, an estimated reading is calculated using the actual consumption for the same month of the previous year. If this is not possible, use the actual consumption for the closest previous month available,' APSR stated.

The authority noted that to aid consumers, it directed licensed companies to change old meters to remote reading meters in December 2020.

SAYYID SHIHAB BIDS FAREWELL TO DUTCH, EGYPTIAN ENVOYS



Muscat - On behalf of His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tariq, Sayyid Shihab bin Tariq al Said, Deputy Prime Minister for Defence Affairs, received the ambassadors of the Arab Republic of Egypt and the Kingdom of Netherlands separately in his office at Al Murtafaa Camp, on Sunday, to bid them farewell at the end of their tour of duties in the sultanate.

Mohammed Ahmed Fahmi Ghoneim,

Ambassador of Egypt, and Laetitia van Asch, Ambassador of the Netherlands, expressed their gratitude to His Majesty the Sultan for the support extended to them during their tenure in the sultanate from His Majesty, the government and the Omani people, which enabled them to carry out their duties.

They wished His Majesty the Sultan good health, happiness and a long life,

and the sultanate further progress and growth under the wise leadership of His Majesty.

On his turn, Sayyid Shihab thanked the ambassadors for the efforts they exerted in serving the relations between the sultanate and their countries, wishing them success, and the people of their countries further progress and prosperity

ONA



Sur limps back to normalcy after last week's heavy rains



Fourth successive Olympics for Oman's Shuaib al Zadjali

Less than 500 daily cases in last 10 days

Our Correspondent
Muscat

The COVID-19 daily case count in the sultanate dropped to less than 500 a day - on average - in the last ten days, easing pressure off overstretched hospitals and bringing hope for better control over the spread of the virus.

The total number of cases registered in the sultanate has now reached 293,954, including 3,753 deaths, after 4,912 new cases and 255 deaths were reported in the last ten days.

The total number of recoveries has also increased to

275,760, taking the recovery rate to 93.8 per cent. According to the Ministry of Health, 68 new patients were admitted to hospitals in a 24-hour period on Sunday, accounting for a total of 786 in-patients, including 315 in intensive care.

Meanwhile, the ministry resumed its National Immunisation Campaign against COVID-19 on Sunday. The campaign had been temporarily suspended during the Eid al Adha holidays.

Oman Convention and Exhibition Centre Witnessed a good turnout of people from target groups on Sunday.



Rock art in Hima Najran listed as Saudi Arabia's sixth Unesco Site

Riyadh, Saudi Arabia - Saudi Arabia's Cultural Rock Arts in Hima Najran has been officially recognised by Unesco as a World Heritage Site, during the 44th session of the World Heritage Committee in Fuzho, China. The site, the sixth in Saudi Arabia to be enlisted, is home to one of the largest rock art complexes in the world.

Located in Najran, in southwestern Saudi Arabia, Hima was a conduit for caravans on the trade and hajj routes going to and from the

southern parts of Arabia to the ancient world markets of Arabia, Mesopotamia, the Levant and Egypt. People who passed through the area between pre- and post-historic times have left behind a substantial collection of rock art depicting hunting, wildlife, plants, symbols and tools used at the time, as well as thousands of inscriptions written in several ancient scripts, including Musnad, Thamudic, Nabataean and early Arabic.

The over 3,000-year-old site has the densest display of rock art in the world, with over 550 rock art paintings and inscriptions. The ancient Hima Wells provided fresh water to travellers who crossed the Arabian deserts thousands of years ago and still offer fresh water to the local community in the desert of Najran today.

"We are thrilled to have this exceptional ancient site recognised by Unesco as a World Heritage Site. The area has outstanding univer-

sal value, providing us with many lessons about the evolution of human culture and life in ancient times," said Dr Jasir Alherbish, CEO of the Heritage Commission. "We are working to preserve the area and conduct research to further understand the rock inscriptions, and are looking forward to welcoming more local and international visitors to come and see this historic cultural site for themselves."

See also Page 12

India thanks Oman for Unesco listing

Muscat - After Unesco announced on Sunday that the Kakatiya Rudreshwara Ramappa Temple in the state of Karnataka in India was inscribed as a World Heritage Site, the Indian Embassy in Oman thanked the sultanate for its support.

H E Munu Mahawar, Ambassador of India to the sultanate, had met H E Eng Ibrahim bin Said al Kharusi, Undersecretary for Heritage Affairs in the Ministry of Heritage and Tourism, on July 13 seeking Oman's support for India's bid.

"We thank the Government of Oman for its strong support," the embassy tweeted.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi congratulated the people of Telangana after the temple was inscribed as a World Heritage Site. Modi also urged citizens to visit the temple built during the rule of the Kakatiya dynasty.

Sur limps back to normalcy after rains

Our Correspondent
Muscat

Last week's heavy rains and thunderstorms caused severe damages in North Batinah and South Sharqiyah, with Sur being the worst hit. Damages to public and private property and vehicles in the wilayat were significant.

Despite the disruptions, cooperation between voluntary and government teams has helped overcome the problems of the residents in the wilayat.

Speaking to *Muscat Daily*, Adel al Ghailani, a volunteer from Sur, said, "Heavy rains resulted in severe damages as trees were uprooted, parts of houses collapsed, valleys flooded and vehicles were damaged."

Ghailani informed that Sur Dam was full to the brim. Its water overflowed and entered some homes in the Sabakh and Bilad Sur area. "More than a hundred families were affected by the rains. Parts of homes caved in and furniture were destroyed. These families were evacuated to safe places. Water and electricity was also cut off in some parts of Sur."

Government agencies, in cooperation with volunteer teams, formed a temporary committee to conduct rehabilitation and shelter work. "The committee consists of the Zakat Committee in Sur, Oman Charitable Organization (OCO), Omani Women's Association, Social Development Committee, and the office of the Wali of Sur. Committee members visited the affected families and provided services and food aid," Ghailani said.

"Residents of Sur have called on government agencies to change the residential plan in



Sabakh because the area is always affected following rains which cause flooding and destruction."

MoSD provides shelter to 395 people
The Relief and Shelter Sector provided shelter to several families after their homes were affected by heavy rains in South Sharqiyah and North Batinah last

week, according to Hamoud bin Mohammed al Mundhiri, spokesman of the Ministry of Social Development's Relief and Shelter Sector.

The department provided shelter in six hotel apartments to 84 families, including 501 individuals, in Sur, South Sharqiyah.

Mundhiri informed that 43 families, including 374 individuals, were evacuated and shel-

tered in four centres in the wilayats of Liwa and Shinas in North Batinah.

The families will remain in the shelters until their homes are renovated, and they are given financial compensation this week.

Efforts will continue to help the affected families, providing them electrical appliances like air conditioners and refrigerators, and beds and other furniture.



Residents of Sur have called on government agencies to change the residential plan in Sabakh because the area is always affected

ADEL AL GHAILANI

According to Mundhiri, the Relief and Shelter Sector works around the clock to help families affected by rains anywhere in the sultanate.

Rescue operations

Following the rains and overflowing wadis, the Civil Defence and Ambulance Authority (CDAA) swung into action as a large number of people were stuck in

wadis or flooded areas.

An official source in CDAA said, "On July 16, our teams in South Sharqiyah rescued 31 families during heavy rains."

Also on the day, rescue and evacuation operations were conducted in Bilad Sur in South Sharqiyah where several homes were affected by heavy rains.

On July 17, rescue teams evacuated 75 people in Shinas

Body of person missing after Sur floods found

Our Correspondent
Muscat

The Civil Defence and Ambulance Authority (CDAA) found the body of a person who went missing during heavy rains in Sur last week. The flood victim was one among four who went missing and the body was found on Sunday after an intensive search operation.

The authority said, 'The ten-day search involved the use of modern technology. CDAA and a special task force found the body of the missing person in Sur. He was last of the four who went missing during floods.'

CDAA had previously announced the death of three people in the heavy rains and overflowing wadis in the wilayats of Sur and Jalaan Bani Bu Ali. The three bodies were found in different locations last week. CDAA expanded its search operation on Friday to include a stream near Sur Dam.

when the water level rose around their homes. The people were transferred to shelter.

On July 18, CDAA teams rescued two families, including 11 individuals, who were stuck in the wilayat of Liwa in North Batinah. On the same day, five people were rescued from Wadi Falaj al Qabail in the wilayat of Sohar where they were stranded due to rising water levels.

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OFFICIALS VISIT FLOOD-HIT SUR

H E Eng Hamad bin Ali bin Sulaiman al Nazwani, Undersecretary for Housing in the Ministry of Housing and Urban Planning, (second from left) during his visit to Sur after the recent floods. H E Nazwani visited flood-affected houses and listened to the grievances of the victims. Salim bin Ali al Hakmani, chairman of the Consumer Protection Authority, also visited the wilayat of Sur to ensure the availability of goods and the stability of prices after the recent adverse weather condition (Supplied photo)

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Gyms losing shape with evening lockdown

Our Correspondent
Muscat

After five days of complete lockdown during the Eid al Adha holidays, the sultanate has opened partially with evening to dawn lockdown still in place to slow the spread of COVID-19 pandemic.

The 5pm to 4am lockdown - ordered by the Supreme Committee keeping in view the safety of the whole nation - is however affecting evening business activities - gyms are among the badly hit.

Office goers normally prefer to visit gyms after work; the ideal time being after 7pm.

"Normally we get the crowd in the evening as people finish their work and come to the gym. This lockdown has effected their fitness regime," said an official from the Horizon Gym.

He said the gym is offering online booking and most of their

We just can't rush there at 3pm, finish a 90-minute match and rush back before 5pm. It is impossible and should never be recommended

ABDULLAH BALUSHI

clients have changed their schedules. "They come in the morning now."

Generally, most of the gym members prefer evenings for their workouts.

An official from the Millennium Gym said, "Reasons are many. For many that's the avail-



able time. Mornings are rush hours for most of us with travel, family commitments and work. Exercises must be done at

leisure. Also most of the gyms are located in office areas, so that clients can easily visit them after work."

The evening lockdown has also put paid to outdoor health activities like beach football, walking and jogging.

Muscat resident Prakash Nair said, "Every evening after work I used to play badminton with my children in the parking lot of our

building. The caretaker made a makeshift court and other tenants too joined. It was a social occasion. And also an excellent opportunity to sweat it out after sitting in front of the computer for hours during work. Now we just can't step out in the evening."

Abdullah Balushi from Old Muscat used to play football with his brothers and friends at Shatti beach every weekend.

"Our games are not happening now," he said.

"We just can't rush there at 3pm, finish a 90-minute match and rush back before 5pm. It is impossible and should never be recommended."

Balushi feels authorities should allow people to walk alone at least.

"There must be some sort of health activity. Not everyone has treadmills at home and neither do they have morning hours free," he added.

Ministry to provide 25 vehicles to fish exporters by October 1

Our Correspondent
Muscat

In a move to increase fish exports, national income by supporting fishermen, the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Water Resources (MAFWR) has decided to provide 25 vehicles fitted with refrigerators to fish dealers in several wilayats of the sultanate.

Speaking to *Muscat Daily*, an official said that the ministry undertook a project to specially develop 25 vehicles for fish transportation, "as old cars don't have automatic cooling systems".

The ministry official said that the project, financed by the Agricultural and Fisheries Development Fund, started on November 3, 2019. "The new pick-ups weighing between three to ten



(Supplied photo)

tonnes" will be ready for the fish exporters by October 1 this year.

"The project targets those who transport fish across the land borders with neighbouring countries," the official said.

Talking about the objectives

of the project, he said it aims to support and encourage fish dealers to maintain the quality of fish and boost their income, while raising awareness of the use of refrigeration devices while transporting fish.

The MAFWR has urged all mobile fish vendors to develop their vehicles to maintain fish quality and in turn increase their income.

The ministry continues to introduce modern technology in efforts to support fishermen and the fisheries sector.

In line with these efforts, the ministry launched a project to transfer knowledge and modern technology for fishing in December 2019.

The project aims at introducing modern longline fishing technology, assisting fishermen and training ministry employees.

The ministry expects the fisheries sector's contribution to the GDP to rise to RO387mn and generate over 8,500 direct jobs by 2025, with investments to the tune of RO447mn, it added.

'Rising humidity to stoke temperature, heatstrokes'

Our Correspondent
Muscat

The Directorate General of Meteorology has warned of a rise in temperature accompanied by an increase in humidity in Muscat and the coastal areas of Batinah which may cause heatstrokes.

Although the temperature in Muscat was 35°C on Sunday, the humidity was 76 per cent, while in the Sultan Qaboos Port area the humidity was 80 per cent.

The Met stated that a noticeable rise in the apparent temperature will be witnessed as a result of high humidity on Sunday and Monday along the coasts of Batinah and Muscat.

Speaking about the change, an official from the Met said, "There will be chances of heatstrokes as the temperatures will rise by a few degrees in a mo-



(Muscat Daily)

ment. Presently the temperature is within the ranges of 35°C-37°C. However it will be over 40°C in a few days."

He added that there will be no rains in Muscat in next two days but thunderstorms and drizzles will be witnessed in Al Hajar Mountains and Salalah.

There will be fair weather in Muscat and only after three

days, mild clouds will be seen in the city.

"This is a common phenomenon; the change is because of the impacts of the monsoons in India and low pressure in the Indian Ocean," the official said.

For the next few days, the wave height of Oman Sea and Arabian Sea will be 1.25m and 4m respectively.



Osool Poultry begins commercial production

Our Correspondent
Muscat

Osool Poultry, one of the largest farms for the production of eggs in the Middle East, started commercial production by selling the first shipment of its hatching eggs on July 14, according to the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Water Resources.

On June 10, Osool Poultry started to operate its first farm for commercial production of hatching eggs after raising the first batch of chicks in the breeding farms.

Osool Poultry said it aims to achieve a high percentage of self-sufficiency and enhance food security in the sultanate by producing 150mn hatchery eggs annually to be marketed locally in addition to exporting part of



First consignment of hatching eggs

the quantities abroad.

The company was established following a partnership among a number of governmental and private sector institutions, including investments from outside the sultanate.

The farm in Haima, set up at a cost of RO61.5mn, will produce 150mn fertilised eggs per annum, a target set to be achieved by

2040. The total area of the project, located in the village of Al Gaftain in Haima, is 47sqkm.

The project consists of six farms that include 72 poultry barns and 12 production farms divided over three plots with an area of 15sqkm for each in addition to the fourth plot allocated to the main building and other facilities. The project has been built to high specifications, consisting of a feed mill, a poultry slaughterhouse, a water treatment plant, electric power production plant, warehouses, and administrative offices.

The project greatly contributes to achieving the government's goals in economic diversification, developing governorates, and creating job opportunities for Omani citizens in various fields.



2,065 tonnes of dried dates exported in 2020: MoCIIP

Muscat - The quantity of dried dates (Bosour crop) exported during 2020 reached 2,065 tonnes, according to the Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion (MoCIIP).

The ministry stated that this quantity was exported directly by the farmers, against which they received a government subsidy of RO62,500 for each tonne.

The MoCIIP confirmed that its storehouses at Wadi Kabeer has received the entire volume of Bosour crop for the year 2020 from 66 suppliers during the period of April 11 to May 20. Over 190 tonnes of dried dates - which include Al-Mabsai, Al-Madlouki and Abu Narenga varieties - have been received.

The MoCIIP added that paying attention to the quality of the Bosour crop, which was supplied to the ministry or exported directly by suppliers to foreign markets, has contributed to maintaining its reputation in the international market.

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YOUR SAY

EID UNDER LOCKDOWN

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MD Moniruzzaman
Teacher

Celebrating Eid under lockdown was undoubtedly different. In particular, not performing Eid prayer on Eid day made it very gloomy. However, the world is passing through very hard times, and we are all trying to cope with the situation.

**Tania Rodrigues**
Housewife

The complete lockdown was a surprise but it was necessary in these testing times. I utilised the time to learn new dishes and DIY activities from YouTube. I also connected with friends and family members with whom I had lost touch.

**Jay Prakash**
Private sector employee

Initially, I felt let down at not being able to celebrate Eid with the usual activities, like outings. But considering the circumstances, I welcomed the opportunity to introspect.

**Ryan Cornelio**
Private sector employee

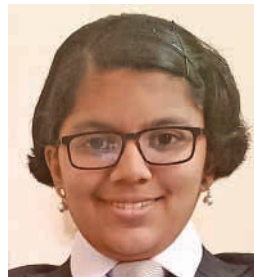
This lockdown was about spending time at home, watching the India-Sri Lanka cricket series, the Tokyo 2020 opening ceremony and some other sporting events. It also gave me time to complete some pending personal work. I was lucky to get time to take it easy with some music and reading, too.

**Maanoj Agarwala**
Service sector

Spending time with family at home is like a picnic. We cooked together, played board games, made video calls to family and friends and generally spent quality family time.

**Jayatee Choudhury**
Student

Eid in lockdown did not feel boring with many opportunities for enjoyment. There were no family get-togethers and outings, owing to preventive measures, but the lockdown was for the greater good.

**Harish Danani**
Senior manager

Being home during Eid holidays in a lockdown allowed more time with family and for virtual celebrations. It was an opportunity to focus on sleep, rest, fitness and hobbies.

**Faris al Jabri**
Engineer

All my fears of Eid under lockdown were unfounded. On the contrary, I will have beautiful memories of this Eid. We never dared spend any Eid holiday only with my small family earlier. We had a joyful time together with no distractions from relatives. But I intend to spend the next Eid holidays with my relatives as usual.

**Nandhini Nandakumar**
Psychotherapist

I didn't feel much difference since we have been in a pandemic for more than a year. I appreciate the decision to lock down because it will help control the spread of infection and return to normal life like before COVID-19.

? NEXT ON
YOUR SAY

Are you satisfied with the electricity and water billing system/meter reading? How can you as a consumer avoid inflated bills?

The views stated here are those of the respondents and not endorsed by *Muscat Daily*. If you feel strongly about the issues discussed here, you can email your comments to muscatdaily@apexmedia.co.om Log on to our Facebook page or tweet us your comments on the issue



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MUSCAT DAILY

5,779 applications for trademarks, patents and copyright in H1 2021

Muscat - There were 5,779 applications for registration of national and international trademarks, patents, copyright and related rights submitted to the Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion (MoCIIP) in first half of 2021, up 32.24 per cent over the same period in 2020 when there were 4,370 such applications.

Figures released by the National Intellectual Property Office at MoCIIP show that

the applications include 5,445 to register national and international trademarks, 260 to register patents, and 78 applications for copyright.

MoCIIP has stated that Ministerial Decision No 206/2018 reduces the registration fees by 90 per cent for students and researchers, and 50 per cent for small and medium enterprises. This fee reduction is an incentive to those interested to register their trademarks, patents and copyright.

REGIONAL WEATHER

	Max	Min
Abu Dhabi	43	31
Doha	41	32
Kuwait City	46	34
Manama	44	31
Riyadh	46	31

PRAYER TIMINGS

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Duhr	12.13pm
Asr	3.35pm
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Isha	7.22pm



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Omantel Group's profit rises to RO108mn in first half of 2021

Our Correspondent
Muscat

Oman Telecommunications Company (Omantel) has reported 8 per cent year-on-year growth in its group net profit for the first half of 2021.

Omantel Group's net profit rose to RO108.6mn for January – June period of this year compared to RO100.5mn net profit reported for the corresponding period in 2020, according to the company's initial financial results submitted to the Muscat Stock Exchange.

Net profit attributable to the shareholders of Omantel rose by 35 per cent to RO32.4mn for the six months period ended June 30, 2021 compared to RO24mn in the same period of last year.

Total revenue of Omantel Group, however, decreased by 4 per cent to RO1.194bn for the six months period ended June 30, 2021 from RO1.242bn recorded in the same period a year ago.

Domestic performance

Omantel said the company's domestic operation continued its impressive performance dur-



ing the second quarter of 2021 despite business disruptions witnessed due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

Net profit from Omantel's domestic operations increased by 14 per cent to RO36.1mn during January – June period this year against RO31.8mn recorded for the same period of 2020.

'This [growth in profit] is mainly due to realisation of higher margin on capacity sales and impressive growth in post-

paid mobile and fixed broadband revenue. This was further supplemented by a reduction in operation and maintenance costs on account of proactive cost optimisation measures,' Omantel said in its disclosure to the Muscat Stock Exchange.

In its Oman operations, the company recorded a 19.5 per cent year-on-year growth in postpaid mobile and 10.7 per cent year-on-year growth in fixed broadband revenue during the six months period ended on

June 30, 2021.

Omantel's domestic revenue decreased by 8 per cent to RO265.7mn in the first six months of 2021 against RO288.1mn recorded in the same period of 2020.

According to Omantel disclosure, Kuwait-based Zain Group generated consolidated revenue of US\$2.5bn for the six months ended June 2021, while consolidated net income of Zain Group reached US\$285mn during the six months period.

37% of financial malware attacks in Oman targeted corporate users: Kaspersky

Our Correspondent
Muscat

Kaspersky, a global cybersecurity company, on Sunday said that Oman recorded 2,482 financial malware attacks in the first half of 2021 and 37.5 per cent of these attacks targeted corporate users in the sultanate.

'Although Kaspersky's research shows that the overall number of financial malware attacks in Oman has decreased in the first half of 2021 when compared to the same period of last year, 37.5 per cent of the 2 482 attacks recorded in the country targeted corporate users, which is a cause for concern,' Kaspersky said in a press statement.

Oleg Kupreev, security researcher at Kaspersky, said, "As local businesses have continued to adjust to remote work scenarios and the rest of the circumstances surrounding the COVID-19 pandemic, we have continued to witness cyber criminals using this to their advantage, exploiting the situation however they can. When considering such statistics, we believe it is evident that cyber criminals are more commonly targeting unsuspecting corporate users in



Oman as a way to compromise corporate systems."

According to Kaspersky, the organisations in Oman have become susceptible to financial malware as more employees work outside the relative safety of the corporate network. The normalisation of a distributed workforce makes ensuring the protection of the personal endpoint devices of people, who need to access back-end systems to continue performing their job functions, that much more critical.

In addition to securing these devices, cybersecurity training of employees remains a key component to defend against the growing scourge of financial malware that uses phishing techniques to target individual users,

Kaspersky said.

Kupreev said, "It is especially financial phishing that has become one of the most popular tools used by cyber criminals to make money. It does not require much investment or technical expertise from a hacker and can be propagated quickly. In most cases, successful scammers win access either to the victim's money or data that can be sold or otherwise monetised."

"For any business this points to how important it is to address one of the weakest links in the cybersecurity chain – that of the individual user. It also signifies the importance of remaining vigilant from a cybersecurity perspective, especially during difficult operating conditions," he added.

Bank Muscat launches new initiative to support SME customers for VAT

Muscat – Bank Muscat has signed an agreement with Morison Muscat Chartered Accountants, a leading full service audit, tax and business advisory firm in Oman.

The agreement will help Bank Muscat and Meethaq SME customers comply with the recently introduced value added tax (VAT).

The agreement was signed by Ahmed Faqir al Balushi, chief corporate banking officer at Bank Muscat, and Nasser Abdullah al Khamisi, founder and country partner of Morison Muscat. VAT has been introduced for the first time in Oman and is a new concept for local businesses.

As part of Bank Muscat's continuous support to its SME customers and in order to help them navigate and adapt to this new change, the tie-up with Morison Muscat will provide the following services free of charge: VAT registration with the Tax Authority and one-to-one advi-



sory on VAT queries.

A service desk will be available at Bank Muscat head-office to receive VAT applications from SME customers, while tax experts from Morison Muscat will provide clarifications to customers through email, phone or virtual meetings.

Balushi said, "The signing of this agreement with Morison Muscat will further support SMEs in the sultanate.

The bank is committed to working hand-in-hand with the

government and its partners in line with its role in supporting the national economy and putting in place those measure, which can further boost the role of SMEs in alignment with the landmark Oman Vision 2040."

Khamisi said, "Bank Muscat's initiative to provide VAT support to SMEs is one of its kind in the region and it will immensely benefit businesses in their VAT journey and in nation-building. Morison Muscat is glad to be a part of this noble initiative."

Construction completed for logistic warehouses at Salalah Free Zone

Salalah – Salalah Free Zone (SFZ) has announced the completion of construction work of the second package of logistic warehouses covering a total area of 25,000sqm.

The facility will lend strong support to the logistics sector in the sultanate, enhance the global supply lines with innovative solutions and open up investment opportunities for national and foreign industries.

The second package of the SFZ's logistics project has a full set of services to promote the strategy espoused by Asyad Group to power its investment projects' economic roles and maximise their returns.

Ali Mohammed Tabook, CEO of SFZ, said that a steady rise in demand by local and interna-

tional investors called for the construction of new warehouses. He said the leasing rate in the first phase of logistic warehouses project stood at 100 per cent on a total area of 33,000sqm dedicated for investment, commercial and industrial activities.

The depots and new facilities are distinguished for high capacity, low operational cost and world-class design that caters to future demands from all types of clients, Tabook said.

He added that the logistic warehouses provide flexible leasing solutions for different space segments linked to a series of customs corridors that accelerate the transfer of goods, thus saving time and effort for investors.

"The project focuses on facili-



Ali Mohammed Tabook

tating the efficiency of operations, thereby supporting the supply chains for various economic, construction and industrial sectors while at the same

time offering ideal cooling solutions for foodstuff and medical drugs," said Tabook.

He pointed out that the strategic location of SFZ parallel to the Port of Salalah and its vicinity to international maritime routes prepare the freezone to play a vital role in the regional and global supply chains.

Over the past few years, Asyad Group's business team launched a number of promotional campaigns and international expos, with an overall objective of reaching the largest possible number of world markets. In its campaigns, the team familiarises investors with the competitive advantages and incentives offered by Asyad Group's free zones.

ONA

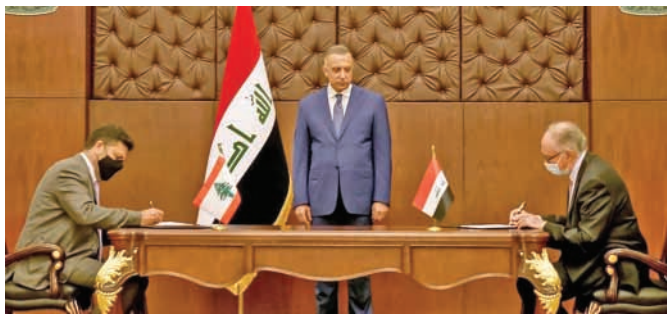
Iraq, Lebanon sign deal to swap fuel oil for medical services

Baghdad, Iraq – Iraq will provide Lebanon with one million tonnes of fuel oil for its power plants in exchange for medical services, under a deal signed on Saturday in Baghdad.

Both countries are suffering from major energy crises, with electricity shortages impacting hospitals. A statement from the Iraqi authorities said that under the deal, Lebanon would receive one million tonnes of fuel oil in exchange for 'goods and services'.

Lebanon's energy minister, Raymond Ghajar, said the deal would allow "the purchase of one million tonnes of Iraqi state fuel oil on behalf of Electricite du Liban (EDL)" over the course of a year.

The Iraqi oil cannot be used directly by Lebanon's power stations, so Beirut will continue to



Lebanon's Energy Minister Raymond Ghajar (left) and Iraq's Finance Minister Ali Abdul-Amir Allawi (right) sign agreements in Baghdad (AFP)

buy compatible fuel from other providers which will receive the Iraqi oil in exchange, Ghajar said. The mechanism is "a bit complicated", he told a news conference at Beirut airport on his return from Baghdad.

The deal will cover a third of EDL's fuel needs, he said, expressing the hope that EDL could provide "up to nine or 10 hours of electricity (daily) over four

months".

In exchange, Lebanon will provide "services and assistance to Iraq in the hospitals sector", he said.

Amid a dire financial and economic crisis, the Lebanese state is struggling to buy fuel for its power plants, increasing electricity cuts to up to 22 hours a day in some areas.

AFP



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MSX falls 0.6% on weak trading

Our Correspondent
Muscat

The benchmark index of the Muscat Stock Exchange (MSX) on Sunday fell 0.59 per cent to close at 4,051.09 points. Trading activity remained weak compared to the previous session before holidays.

All the sectoral indices closed in red with Industrial Index falling most by 1.12 per cent. Financial Index dropped 0.5 per cent while Services Index closed 0.68 per cent lower. MSX Sharia Index also decreased 0.37 per cent to close at 587.74 points.

Trading activity Sunday decreased as volumes fell 72 per cent at 14.56mn shares compared with 51.9mn shares traded in the previous trading session. Market turnover declined 68 per cent to RO1.85mn compared with RO5.75mn in the previous session.

Market breadth at the MSX remained

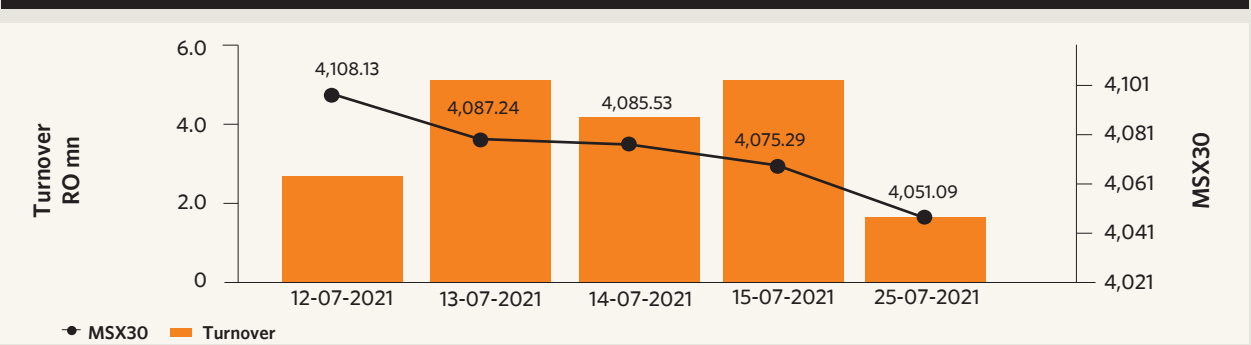


negative with eight advancing stocks to 17 decliners. As many as 11 traded stocks remained flat for the day.

Top gainers were Global Investment Holding (6.06 per cent), Muscat Finance (5.17 per cent), Oman Qatar Insurance (3.68 per cent), Vision Insurance (2.5 per

cent) and Al Batinah Power (1.89 per cent). Top losers were National Aluminium Products (-9.4 per cent), Oman & Emirates Investment Holding (-5.48 per cent), Al Jazeera Steel (-4.39 per cent), Phoenix Power (-4.08 per cent) and National Gas (-3.43 per cent).

MSX INDEX AND TURNOVER OF FIVE TRADING DAYS



Profits at India's Reliance sharply fall

Mumbai, India - Profits at Indian conglomerate Reliance Industries dropped sharply between April and June this year, the company said, as Asia's third-largest economy battled a vicious second wave of COVID-19.

The oil-to-telecoms giant, which is owned by Asia's richest man Mukesh Ambani, reported a consolidated net profit of R122.73bn (US\$1.65bn) in the quarter ending June 30, a 7.25 per cent fall compared to the same period last year.

Even though its quarterly revenues jumped by 58 per cent year-on-year to R1.44tn, aided by its flagship oil and gas businesses, its retail arm took a hit as a spike in infections prompted shop closures.

"COVID-related restrictions on store operations during the quarter impacted our retail business operations and profitability. This is a temporary phenomenon," Ambani said in a state-



Mukesh Ambani

ment. "I am happy that our company has delivered robust growth despite facing a highly challenging operating environment caused by the second wave of the COVID-19 pandemic," he added.

Its telecom business Jio added 14.3mn subscribers during the quarter, recording a nearly 10-per cent increase in operating

revenue. Ambani is locked in a high-stakes battle with Jeff Bezos, the world's richest man, as Amazon and Reliance fight for a share of India's massive e-commerce market.

The two firms are currently engaged in a row over Ambani's acquisition of domestic retail giant Future Group - which Amazon has sought to delay,

with a Singapore-based arbitration panel asking Reliance to halt the deal.

Reliance has dismissed the panel's order, saying its agreement with Future Group complies with Indian law.

The behemoth has also sought to limit its dependence on its core fossil fuel business, unveiling a US\$10bn plan to invest in renewable energy last month.

The investment includes a 5,000-acre manufacturing facility in India's western state of Gujarat, with the company aiming to produce 100 gigawatts of solar power by 2030.

Reliance, which operates the world's biggest oil refining complex in Gujarat, has a market capitalisation of more than US\$182bn.

The company's shares closed down 0.74 per cent in Mumbai on Friday ahead of the earnings announcement.

AFP

Fed to meet as rising inflation complicates economic recovery

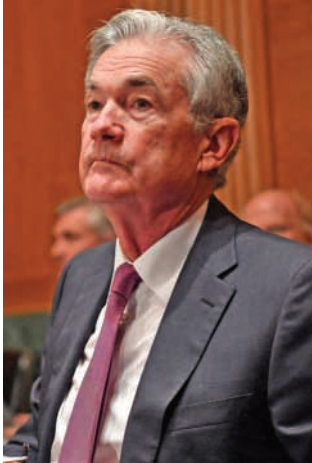
Washington, US - As rising prices and the spread of new COVID-19 variants increase risks to the US economy, Federal Reserve officials are expected to maintain their easy money policies intended to help American companies and workers survive the pandemic damage.

But as the policy-setting Federal Open Market Committee (FOMC) begins its two-day policy meeting Tuesday, markets and traders will be watching for hints of when it will begin tapering its massive monthly debt purchases. The bond buying program aimed to ease lending conditions during the crisis, but has come under scrutiny recently as inflation has soared to record levels as businesses reopen and consumers spend the savings built up during the worst months of the pandemic.

And focus also will be on any sign the Fed is rethinking its pledge to keep the benchmark lending rate at zero until the economy achieves maximum employment.

Fed Chair Jerome Powell has repeatedly said the rise in inflation is a temporary effect of the economy getting back to normal, and that the Fed has tools to respond if the surge goes on too long.

But Sam Stovall, chief investment strategist at CFRA Research said the swiftness of the price spike likely has surprised the central bank. "I think they're



Fed chairman Jerome Powell (AFP)

still saying it's transitory but they're squirming in their seats, feeling a bit anxious that the numbers have come in higher than expected."

However, the Fed is not expected to alter its stimulative policies this week or at any point this year. Powell has promised to communicate clearly in advance of any policy shift, and analysts believe he may wait to do that at the annual central banking conference in Jackson Hole, Wyoming scheduled for August.

Central bankers are convening during an uncertain moment for the world's largest economy. The fast-spreading Delta variant of COVID-19 has prompted some parts of the United States to reimpose mask-wearing rules and sparked worries it could undermine the recovery.

At the same time data is showing prices surging across

the economy, a consequence of supply chain snarls, shortages of components, unique dynamics like rental car companies moving to rebuild fleets and 'base effects,' or the comparison to the depressed prices of the year-ago period.

At the Fed's last meeting in June, signs of growing hawkishness appeared, with a majority of FOMC members predicting at least two rate hikes in 2023, and seven expecting one as soon as next year, according to quarterly economic projections. In March, a majority foresaw no rate hikes until after 2023.

Powell has downplayed those predictions, but Daniel Morris, chief market strategist at BNP Paribas, said analysts will be watching to see if the central bank chief's thinking has changed, particularly when he speaks to reporters after the meeting. "I think there's still that kind of debate, are they more hawkish?" he said. "Any info we can get from Powell during the press conference to try to help settle that debate will be important and useful."

A more-pressing decision for the Fed will be what to do about its monthly purchases of at least US\$80bn in Treasury debt and at least US\$40bn in agency mortgage-backed securities, which were part of the emergency measures taken as the economy collapsed last year.

AFP

IMF boosts lending for poorest nations

Washington, US - The IMF board announced it had approved a massive increase in its ability to provide interest-free loans to low income countries to help them recover from the pandemic's economic destruction.

The COVID-19 crisis has drained resources set aside for these countries - most are which are in sub-Saharan Africa - far faster than anticipated, and their needs will remain high, the International Monetary Fund said.

The changes, which the IMF board approved July 14, include a 45 per cent increase in the lim-

its on normal lending, and removes altogether the caps on access for the poorest countries. However, officials made clear the IMF is not offering nations a blank check.

"The decision to raise access limits is not a directive to lend more across all IMF programs - rather, it provides the flexibility to provide more zero interest financing for countries with strong economic programs to handle the pandemic and the path to full recovery," said Sean Nolan, deputy director of the Strategy Policy and Review Department.

The Washington-based crisis lender provides the financing largely through 'multi-year lending arrangements,' unlike in 2020, when most aid was pushed out through emergency programs that disbursed immediately and were not conditioned on economic policies.

The fund dramatically increased its financing to poor nations last year, eight times higher than the average in the prior three years, and said demand 'is projected to continue at elevated levels for several years.'

AFP

Netflix turning to games as streaming growth slows

San Francisco, US - Netflix is facing a formidable challenge as it expands into video games to keep the attention of customers in the increasingly competitive world of streaming television.

The streaming television leader offered details of its plans to move into games in its latest update confirming cooling growth even as the Silicon Valley giant spins off hit shows.

Analysts said the Netflix move is not aimed at disrupting the expanding gaming market but keeping its own viewers interested by offering new kinds of content.

"Entertainment and tech brands are adding gaming because it is adjacent to their video products, which makes gaming a somewhat natural extension of what they already do," said eMarketer analyst Ross Benes.

"Adding gaming allows them to suck up more of people's time and become further embedded within their customers' daily habits."

Benes reasoned that Netflix games will give people impetus to stick with the service but are

unlikely to significantly boost subscriptions.

Loup Ventures manager partner Gene Munster called Netflix's action a 'smart move to retain and inch up paid subscriptions' noting there are some two billion gamers worldwide.

Wedbush Securities analyst Michael Pachter on Wednesday expected the Netflix move to have 'zero' impact on the game world.

"We view the foray into games as an acknowledgement by management that the video content pipeline is flowing more slowly, with content costs continually on the rise," Pachter said in a note to investors.

"We also view games as a 'shiny new object' that might distract investors from what we perceive to be Netflix's slowing growth."

Chief product officer Greg Peters said during an earnings call that getting into video games will be a multiyear effort with Netflix starting small in the mobile games arena.

"We really see this as an extension of the core entertain-



In this photo illustration a computer and a mobile phone screen display the Netflix logo on March 31, 2020 in Arlington, US (AFP)

ment offering that we've been focused on for the last 20 years," Peters said.

"We're going to try a bunch of different games through a variety of different mechanisms to see what's really working for our members."

Netflix executives said they

would play to the strengths of shows to create interactive fantasy worlds for fans, and that they are talking with video game makers about licensing deals.

Game gauntlet

Netflix said games will be included in members' Netflix sub-

scription at no additional cost, augmenting shows and films.

Netflix has dabbled with games before, releasing an interactive 'Bandersnatch' episode of original series 'Black Mirror' and also a free mobile game spinning off its hit show 'Stranger Things.'

"They will attract few gamers,

if any, and don't have compelling (intellectual property) that will allow them to create compelling games," Pachter said in the note.

"The business graveyard is littered with the corpses of content companies that have failed at making mobile games, with Disney the most prominent failure."

Even video game industry veterans have missed the mark with mobile games.

Hit games spinning off of television shows are rarities, as are winning titles based on films, raising the question of why Netflix believes it can succeed where those with more experience have failed.

"The marriage of Hollywood video production and games based on that content has faced a troubled history," said Third Bridge senior analyst Joe McCormack, noting that both Disney and NBCUniversal have shuttered video game units.

"Whether Netflix can change the script seems primarily driven by cultural differences between those Hollywood and video gaming studios."

Competition in the mobile

game industry is intense. If Netflix wants to field more sophisticated games, it faces technological hurdles.

Console quality games streamed from the cloud require high-speed internet connections to avoid lag and controllers players can use to command action.

And in that arena, Netflix would be up against cloud game services run by Amazon, Google, Microsoft and Sony.

"This is complex stuff, and we think that while Netflix has vast plans for succeeding in games, it has started its efforts with half-vast ideas," Pachter said of cloud gaming.

Netflix's push into video games plays to its strengths of storytelling and content creation, and is intended to help the core subscription service grow, according to executives.

"We are in the business of making these amazing worlds and great storylines and incredible characters," Peters said.

"And we know the fans of those stories want to go deeper; they want to engage further."

AFP

NBO launches wealth management portal on its mobile app

Continuing to address the ever-evolving needs of its customers, National Bank of Oman (NBO) has launched its new wealth management portal, available through the bank's mobile app.

As the first service of its kind available in the market, the portal offers a range of useful features for Sadara and Mazaya customers, enabling them to view their portfolio, buy and sell mutual funds, buy single-fund Systematic Investment Plan (SIPs), review and renew risk profiles, and open an investment account.

It's the latest upgrade for NBO's award-winning app, as it



continues to find ways to make the banking experience seamless, accessible, and altogether

more enjoyable.

Maha al Raisi, head of Products at NBO, said, "At NBO we are working hard to expand and enhance our product offerings, in particular our digital capabilities, addressing the growing demand for online services."

"Complementing our comprehensive wealth management services, the new portal will provide added value to our customers, allowing them to access and manage their financial portfolio whenever the wish, in a way that suits their lifestyle and needs."

NBO's mobile app is filled with an ever-expanding list of innova-

tive products and services to make its customers' lives easier and more rewarding. Offering exclusive benefits for Sadara and Mazaya customers, it also includes exclusive access to Entertainer, benefiting from a host of instant discounts, from personalized deals to thousands of exclusive 2 for 1 offers throughout Oman, the GCC, and select cities internationally.

Meanwhile, through personalized products and unmatched perks, the bank provides its premier customers with better ways to build and manage their wealth effectively and meet their long-term financial goals.

Ooredoo props vaccination drive-through campaign

Helping the community and supporting the Ministry of Health, represented by the Directorate General of Health Services in Muscat, Ooredoo provided logistic and ground support during the national COVID-19 vaccination campaign that took place at the Automobile Association. Part of the company's CSR programme 'Goodwill', the initiative lives out one of their core values of 'caring'.

Raed Mohammed Dawood, director of Branding, Communications and Corporate Affairs at Ooredoo, said, "Vaccinations are an important part of protecting our society against COVID-19 and helping to keep the economy up and running."

"As an integral part of Omani society, it's our duty to support and assist the community whenever possible, and more so now. The Ministry of Health's efforts to roll out the vaccines as fast as



possible has been amazing and we're proud to see members of our Ooredoo family on the ground providing support and lifting the burden of medical teams who are working hard to keep us all safe."

From the start of the pandemic, Ooredoo has supported the community in various ways, such as donating medical testing

supplies to the Sultan Qaboos University Hospital, revamping its award-winning app to keep customers connected and providing support to the educational sector. Ooredoo places itself at the heart of the society and promotes the advancement of the Omani people, while fostering sustainable economic and social growth.

Tanweer boosts Mahout power grid to meet economic growth

The Rural Areas Electricity Company 'Tanweer' - Member of Nama Group- announced the commencement of work on a project to strengthen the electrical power grid and raise its efficiency in the wilayat Mahout in Al Wusta governorate, at a total cost of RO770,000.

The project, located in the Khlouf area, will introduce vital improvements to the power grid, which will be completed before the end of the year.

It includes constructing a 17 km-long overhead and ground 11 kilovolts (KV) power lines between Khlouf power station and the 0.433 KV substation.

The project is part of Tanweer's relentless efforts to raise the grid's efficiency, develop its assets, and safely operate them.

The company's new project aims to cover the increasing demand for energy due to the economic and social growth in the wilayat of Mahout.



The company is working on several projects to strengthen the electricity system in its concession areas and activities covering 75 per cent of the sultanate.

Tanweer is the only company in the electricity sector in the sultanate whose licence includes generation, transmission, distribution and supply of electricity and water desalination in

the areas in which the company operates.

During the last five-year plan, Tanweer invested more than RO300mn in expanding, developing and improving power stations, substations and connected grid to keep pace with the population and urban growth in its concession areas extending from the north to the south of the sultanate.

Alibaba provides Cloud Pin at Tokyo Olympic Games for media professionals

Alibaba Group, the Worldwide TOP Partner of the International Olympic Committee (IOC), has unveiled the Alibaba Cloud Pin, a cloud-based digital pin, for the broadcasting and media professionals at the Olympic Games Tokyo 2020.

The pin can be worn either as a badge or attached to a lanyard. The digital wearable is designed to enable media professionals working at the International Broadcasting Centre (IBC) and Main Press Centre (MPC) to engage with each other and exchange social media contact information in a safe and interactive manner during the upcoming Olympic Games between July 23 and August 8.

"The Olympic Games has always been a thrilling event with opportunities for media staff to meet like-minded professionals. With this unprecedented Olympic Games, we want to use our technology to add new exciting elements to the Olympic pin

tradition at the IBC and MPC while connecting media professionals and enabling them to maintain social interactions with safe distancing," said Chris Tung, chief marketing officer of Alibaba Group.

"As a proud Worldwide Olympic Partner, Alibaba is dedicated to the transformation of the Games in the digital era, making the experience more accessible, aspirational and inclusive for broadcasters, sports fans and athletes from across the world."

"Today more than ever we look to engage people around the world through our digital ecosystem and connect them with the spirit of Tokyo 2020," said Christopher Carroll, director of Digital Engagement and Marketing at the International Olympic Committee.

"We are excited to be partnering with Alibaba to support us in our digital transformation journey and to help us build engagement ahead of the Olympic Games."

Serving as a multifunctional digital name tag, the pin enables users to meet and greet each

other, adding people to their 'friend list', and exchange daily activity updates, such as step counts and the number of friends made during the day. This can be done easily by tapping their pins together at arm's length, bearing in mind the social distancing measures.

Alibaba Cloud Pin serves as multifunction digital name tag for safe and fun social interaction at the IBC and MPC during the Olympic Games Tokyo 2020

The digital pins also include specific designs of each of the 33 sports on the Tokyo 2020 Programme, which can be unlocked through a list of playful tasks like making new friends. To activate the pin, users simply need to download a Cloud Pin application, and pair it with the wearable device via its bluetooth function.

This Cloud pin at the Olympic Games will be given as a token to the media professionals working at the IBC and MPC during the Olympics.



Nissan takes self-expression to next level with regional launch of 2021 Kicks

Nissan has announced the launch of the 2021 Nissan Kicks in the Middle East, refreshed with style and technology upgrades designed to meet the growing needs of urban customers in the region. Placing a large focus on enhancing connectivity, innovation and personalization, the 2021 Nissan Kicks allows drivers to further express their personal style as they cut through the city with precise handling and available advanced driver assist features.

Since its introduction to the region in 2017 as the entry model to Nissan's lineup of crossovers and SUVs, Kicks has attracted young, enthusiastic drivers to the brand. It quickly established a reputation for offering an impressive array of class-leading features with equally attractive value - even securing 11 per cent year-on-year market share increase in the SUV-B segment during fiscal year 2020 (April 2020 - March 2021).

Maintaining that momentum, the 2021 Nissan Kicks has been refreshed with updates to provide even more features, technology, customised style and value that buyers seek in a compact crossover. The exterior sees an aesthetic upgrade with the integration of Nissan's Double V-motion grille, new front and rear bumpers and an array of bold new colours, including new two-

tone combinations. The updated interior features a new center console, new seating and trim materials, Apple CarPlay and Android Auto compatibility and BOSE headrest speakers.

The 2021 Nissan Kicks also includes a number of Nissan Intelligent Mobility (NIM) technology upgrades such as Intelligent Around View Monitor, as well as Forward Collision Warning, Automatic Emergency Braking, Blind Spot Warning and Rear Cross Traffic Alert. All of these class-leading features are complemented by upgraded chassis control to provide superior ride comfort and control.

Thierry Sabbagh, managing director, Nissan Middle East said, "The Nissan Kicks has always had a finger on the pulse of the young urban commuter, combining style and technology with a value for money that has made it a fast favourite in the region. The 2021 Nissan Kicks dials up both connectivity and customer demand for crossover SUVs, as they seek space and versatility akin to SUVs, with the size and practicality of a sedan. These expectations, coupled



with growing desire amongst younger drivers to always stay connected, have helped us create a refreshed 2021 Nissan Kicks - and we are excited to see our customers across the region take this nimble model out on the streets," he continued.

Bold first impression

While maintaining Kicks' compact urban crossover dimensions - with its large interior space and nimble, city-sized exterior for easy manoeuvrability - the extensive exterior changes immediately set Kicks apart from the competition. The redesigned

2021 Nissan Kicks is available in three well-equipped trims - Kicks S, Kicks SV and Kicks SL.

Starting with a bold front end, the new Kicks features a more aggressive bumper that blends with the new "Double V-motion" grille, giving the SUV a more powerful SUV look. New LED headlights offer a high-tech, modern and premium effect, which is even further enhanced on the SL grade's super-thin LED multi-reflector design. Meanwhile, both SV and SL grades include standard LED fog lights.

A stylish rear end begins with a new bumper and back door fin-

isher and LED combination light that stretches from side to side, adding a strong horizontal line that emphasizes Kicks' wide rear structure. Like in front, the redesigned rear bumper imparts a sense of more "lifted" volume and a premium feel.

The 2021 Kicks continues with its floating roof with a wrap-around visor look to the windscreen and side glass. The wide C-pillar appears hidden, with a black finish that blends into the tailgate glass and still allows excellent outward visibility for all.

Standard exterior features include Intelligent Auto Headlights

with adjustable sensitivity and timing, along with rear wiper and available roof rails, heated outside mirrors with integrated turn signals and rear roof spoiler.

Colour is a hallmark of the Nissan Kicks, and it continues to be available in a range of vibrant hues. For 2021, the energetic, premium palette includes three new colours: Electric Blue Metallic, Scarlet Ember Tintcoat (premium colour) and Boulder Gray Pearl. Also available are Gun Metallic, Super Black, Aspen White TriCoat (premium colour), Power White and Brilliant Silver. Five two-tone paint combinations are also available, including three new options - Super Black Roof/Scarlet Ember Tintcoat, Super Black Roof/Electric Blue Metallic and Super Black Roof/Boulder Gray Pearl. Also offered are Super Black/Aspen White TriCoat and Super Black/Monarch Orange Metallic.

Smart, stylish redesigned interior

The 2021 Kicks interior also has a new stylish and premium feel, highlighted by the SL grades' new seat colour and door trim design and full center console with an armrest.

The versatile interior offers a sporting flavour - provided by a D-shaped steering wheel, comfortable 6-way driver's seat, 4-way adjustable front passenger

seat and 60/40-split fold-down rear seat. As in previous years, the 2021 Kicks provides ample passenger space throughout the cabin, including best-in-class front seat legroom.

For peace of mind, standard on all Kicks is Nissan Safety Shield 360, which includes Automatic Emergency Braking, Lane Departure Warning, radar-based Blind Spot Warning, and Rear Cross Traffic Alert. Among the other on-board technologies, Kicks features an available Intelligent Around View Monitor, which provides a virtual composite 360-degree bird's-eye view of the Kicks' exterior.

For the ultimate audio experience, the Kicks SL Premium Package includes the class-exclusive Bose Speakers, which uses eight speakers and proprietary Bose signal processing to provide what Bose calls "360 degrees of immersive sound." Key to its dynamic sound is a pair of lightweight 2.5-inch Bose Ultra-Nearfield neodymium speakers located inside the Kicks' driver's seat head restraint. A Bose PersonalSpace Control feature is built into the infotainment system's audio settings, providing adjustable listening options from front-focused sound to a wider, more enveloping experience.

The 2021 Nissan Kicks is available at dealerships across the Middle East.

Oman Airports honours freediving world champion Omar al Ghilani

Oman Airports celebrated one of its employee's accomplishments in Muscat International Airport. Omar al Ghilani won first place in AIDA's championship (Freediving World Championship) in 2021. The championship was held in Sharm el Sheikh in Egypt. Many divers participated in the event from different countries like Egypt, Oman, UAE, Switzerland, Slovakia, Ukraine, Ireland, South Africa, Chile, Israel, Germany, Holland, France, Australia and China.

The CEO of Oman Airports welcomed Omar's champion, Omar al Ghilani, in his office on Sunday in the presence of the vice president of Muscat International Airport to celebrate the event and motivate employees to participate and to reach proficiency as the company has always encouraged.

Saud al Hubaishi, VP of Muscat International Airport, commented on this occasion, and said, "I am glad to congratulate our colleague, Omar al Ghilani, the world's freediving champion, on behalf of myself and all members in the administration and company for his international accomplishment.



"He surely walked through this challenge with great spirit and well-preparation that hopefully will pave the way for other Omani honouring accomplish-

ments. It is our duty as a national institution to be proud of our people in this country and consider them the base of our accomplishments in all aspects.

"We are proud to make Omar a role model who gives an example of a national hard working athlete who makes his way to achieve the highest numbers."

Ghilani, the champion, said, "I thank the administration and all colleagues in Oman Airports for such an honour and reception that reflect the usual moral sup-



port I had since I started these participations, and set the environment for me to succeed.

"I would also like to thank all my colleagues in Muscat International Airport and the rest of units of Oman Airports for believing in such talents and supporting them. All I can say is that I am proud to be part of a national institution such as Oman Airports that embraces creativity and different sports."

Ghilani has also achieved many accomplishments in different types of diving.

He won first place in monofin-

diving, bfin-diving and without-fin diving.

He also won third place in diving using a rope. Therefore, Ghilani won four new national numbers in all types of diving. He also broke the record in bfin-diving in Asia.

Many championships still await Ghilani including the one in the coming September in Cyprus, and in October in Turkey, and in November in Egypt. Moreover, Ghilani depends on himself and his colleagues in breaking the records in such accomplishments.

beIN Sports draws 1bn viewers for UEFA Euro, Copa America

beIN Media Group, the global sports and entertainment broadcaster and its flagship sports channel beIN Sports drew record viewership numbers during UEFA Euro 2020 and Copa America 2021 - garnering a cumulative total audience of more than 1bn viewers across both tournaments that were broadcast exclusively to its viewers and subscribers across 24 countries in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA).

According to IPSOS figures, the broadcaster saw a total of 100+ million viewers tune in across both finals on Sunday, July 11 - with the unforgettable UEFA Euro 2020 England vs Italy and the Copa America 2021 Brazil vs Argentina matches receiving 64.4mn viewers and 36.1mn respectively. Additionally, France, Italy, Germany, and Portugal all saw an average of 30+ million viewers for their matches.

Mohammad al Subaie, acting CEO of beIN MENA, said, "These viewership numbers speak for themselves and are a testament to the importance of

sports in MENA. beIN looks forward to continue providing the very best of world sport to our valued viewers and subscribers across the region in the lead up to the FIFA World Cup Qatar 2022 and beyond.

"Next beIN Sports will welcome the Tokyo Olympics 2020 with a massive 3,000 hours of live events and supporting programmes- there is



simply no better broadcaster in the world to bring sporting events to fans, families and households."

During the two international tournaments, beIN specially curated dedicated TV studios with state-of-the-art facilities and technological advance-

ments for MENA subscribers to enjoy exclusively. It broadcast in three languages - English, Arabic, and French - across six beIN Sports MAX channels.

The network showcased 15-hour live daily studio coverage, featuring world-class international and Arab star talent and legends such as Arsene Wenger, Mohammad

Aboutrika, Ruud Gullit, and many more, and provided on-the-ground reporters in all 11 European-competing countries. Expanding its reach on social media, beIN also published 22 hours of daily coverage across all digital platforms.

beIN is the biggest broadcaster of premium sport and entertainment content across the MENA region. The MENA channel alone broadcasts across 34 beIN channels and airs 816 hours of content every day. Its technical and operational infrastructure is capable of recording and distributing more than 200 feeds simultaneously throughout the channel, giving fans an inside scoop into the world of professional sports.

W Hotels, Cercle to host live-streamed concert by Monolink at castaway island

If you throw a concert in the middle of the Indian Ocean and there's no one around to hear it, does it still make a sound? You bet it does. W Hotels Worldwide, part of Marriott International, announced a collaboration with Cercle, the ground-breaking French media company known for filming and broadcasting music performances in the world's most awe-inspiring places, to host an unforgettable live concert at Gaathafushi—the private castaway island at W Maldives.

Streaming live on July 26, the hour-and-fifteen-minute set will feature a performance by Berlin-based electronic musician Monolink with the island's white sandy beach and turquoise lagoon serving as the stage.

"From our Sound Suite recording studios to our intimate Living Room stages and DJ booths, there is always live music happening at a W hotel somewhere around the world," said Carly Van Sickle, senior director, Global Brand Marketing, W Hotels Worldwide. "For our next act, we're excited to be collaborating with the visionaries at Cercle to celebrate the beauty and wonder of one of our most beau-



tiful Escapes—W Maldives—through the power of music."

Cercle has produced and livestreamed some of the most jaw-dropping musical performances ever filmed. From a hot air balloon above Cappadocia, Turkey and the Great Pyramids of Giza in Egypt to Glacier 3000 in the Swiss Alps and Mont Saint-Michel island in France, Cercle productions have amassed millions of views online.

At sundown on July 26, Gaathafushi Island at W Maldives will join this list of iconic locations, becoming the first hotel

to serve as the site of a Cercle show.

"Cercle is all about great aesthetics, culture, nature and music, values which are shared by W, making this collaboration a groundbreaking no-brainer. When two entities have the same goal and vision, everything flows and expectations are exceeded," said Pol Souchier, head of Communication at Cercle.

"That's why we wanted to collaborate with W Maldives and the resort's magnificent Gaathafushi Island. It's a location we've been eager to feature on Cercle,

and with Monolink, an artist long-awaited on the channel, we're thrilled to celebrate the power of music with our loyal fan base alongside W."

Electronic singer-songwriter Monolink is known for combining melodic techno with dreamy guitar-led folk. His performance will be livestreamed via Facebook, Twitch, and Oculus Venues at 5pm UTC+5. Cercle will then work their magic to release the official performance video on their YouTube channel in August, which will be broadcast at select W Hotels around the world. Monolink is also releasing a new single —"Turning Away"—which will be featured on a Cercle-curated playlist on the W brand's Spotify channel.

This performance in paradise is meant to honor Gaathafushi, the remote island a stone's throw away from W Maldives. Guests of the Escape can take a two-minute speedboat ride to the secluded beach and enjoy over 76,000 sq ft of tropical playground by swimming in the surrounding lagoon, indulging in a candlelit meal on the beach prepared by a private chef, or simply relaxing and stargazing under a thatched-roof hut.

Audi aficionados get a chance to preview RS e-tron GT

With the launch of the Audi RS e-tron GT, the brand with the four rings is continuing to blaze the trail into the emotional, extremely exciting future of electric mobility. In celebration of its launch, Premium Motors, the official importer of Audi in Oman, held a special preview of the RS e-tron GT for Audi fans.

Christian Nehme, general manager of Premium Motors Oman commented, "The RS e-tron GT is the beginning of a new era for Audi and we were thrilled to host a preview event in Oman for our discerning customer base. This vehicle is a modern reinterpretation of the Gran Turismo and brings the best in sportiness and power to the electric segment, cementing the

e-tron's position as a leader in premium electric mobility."

Sporty and comfortable

The RS e-tron GT can sprint from 0 to 100km/h in 3.3 seconds and reach a top speed of 250km/h. The four-door coupe reinterprets the traditional Gran Turismo concept - its design expressive, its technology revolutionary. Two powerful electric motors - one on the front axle, the other on the rear axle - are responsible for the outstanding electric all-wheel drive.

Its chassis includes features such as adaptive three-chamber air suspension and an electronic differential lock on the rear axle. The e-tron sport sound creates a

fitting acoustic backdrop for this technological masterpiece. Matrix LED headlights with Audi laser light come as standard while a number of options are available, including up to 21-inch wheels and all-wheel steering.

Best-selling premium electric car

With the launch of the e-tron GT, Audi AG is continuing its transformation into a provider of sustainable premium mobility. In 2020, the brand with the four rings was by far the largest manufacturer of electric vehicles among Germany's three premium brands. The extremely successful Audi e-tron models recorded year-over-year growth of 79.5 per cent last year, with 47,324 units delivered

to customers.

More than 80 per cent of the models in Audi's range are currently available with an all-electric or electrified drive system, and the carmaker's EV offensive continues to pick up steam, with Audi increasing the number of all-electric models (BEVs) in its range from three to seven this year. Looking ahead, the company intends to have more than 20 all-electric models and an expanded PHEV lineup on the road by 2025.

The Audi RS e-tron GT is currently on a tour around the region. Customers who wish to get a hands-on experience can contact their local dealer for more information. For more details visit www.audi-oman.com



Donations pouring in from abroad to save Tunisia from COVID crisis

Tunis, Tunisia - With Tunisia's health system close to collapse after being overwhelmed by a surge of COVID-19 cases, other countries and even individuals have stepped in to stem the crisis.

European and Gulf nations, Tunisians abroad and ordinary citizens have organised equipment and vaccine donations that are now helping to battle the pandemic.

The small North African nation of 12 million people had been struggling to come up with the necessary vaccine doses even before COVID-19 really began to hit hard.

Now more than three million doses, most of them donated, have been sent, with the number set to reach five million by mid-August, the health ministry says.

China and the United Arab Emirates have each supplied 500,000 doses, while neighbouring Algeria gave 250,000.

Jean-Baptiste Lemoigne at the French ministry for Europe and foreign affairs told AFP that France this week alone sent more than one million AstraZeneca and Janssen doses, enough to vaccinate 'a tenth of the adult population'.

But either because of sluggish diplomatic efforts by Tunisia or the global shortage of doses, vaccines have arrived late.



This file photo shows COVID-19 patients lying intubated in an intensive care unit at Farhat Hached Hospital in the coastal city of Sousse on July 21 (AFP)

Tunisia has received just a sixth of the number of doses promised under the Covax programme, set up to ensure a fairer distribution of COVID-19 vaccines to lower-income countries. It now has one of the world's highest coronavirus death rates.

According to an AFP count on Wednesday based on official reports, Tunisia recorded 1.4 daily deaths per 100,000 population over the previous seven days, placing it second-worst globally on this metric after Namibia.

Swamped morgues

Tunisian Internet users have shared videos of panicked families unable to find beds for loved ones, of medics worrying about oxygen shortages and of bodies crammed into swamped morgues.

Dr Hechmi Louzir of the Pasteur Institute in Tunis said that donations would mean the vaccination programme can speed up, and thus reduce the spread of the virus. Tunisia could 'achieve our goal of vaccinating about 50

percent of the population by mid-October', he said.

Even in pre-COVID 'normal' times, Tunisia's public hospitals suffered from poor management and a lack of resources.

At the beginning of summer, they put out a plea for help - for personal protective equipment and intensive care resources in particular.

Groups including the country's organisation of young doctors, Tunisian embassies abroad and even private citizens organ-

ised fund-raising events.

"The mobilisation of civil society saved Tunisia from a catastrophic scenario," said gynaecologist Cyrine Chedly, a member of an organisation of young doctors in Kairouan.

The central city was one of the first to be badly hit by the pandemic, with some bodies left lying in rooms next to live patients for up to 24 hours because of a lack of staff to take them to overstretched mortuaries.

"Donations of oxygen concen-

trators have made it possible to reduce the number of serious cases and deaths [at the city's main hospital]," Dr Chedly said.

ICU beds

Ons Jabeur, the celebrated Tunisian tennis player now in Tokyo for her third Olympics, auctioned two racquets and raised US\$27,000 to help finance an intensive care unit.

Before the pandemic, the country had only 90 intensive care unit (ICU) beds in the public sector: Now, helped by donations, it has 500.

Tunisians arriving from abroad are allowed to import one oxygen concentrator per traveller, free of import duty.

Doctors post pictures of these items and other equipment on social media, to show donors they are being put to use.

But providing more sophisticated health care equipment can be stymied by coordination problems and bureaucratic obstacles.

One field hospital supplied in May by the United States was not up and running until July, and another donated by Qatar is still not operating because of a lack of oxygen. Of three oxygen generators, each capable of feeding 300 beds continuously and supplied by France at the beginning of June, just one is fully functional.

AFP

Turkish soldiers killed in Syria

Istanbul, Turkey - Two Turkish soldiers were killed and two others wounded in areas of northern Syria under Ankara's control to keep out extremists and Kurdish rebels, the Defence Ministry tweeted on Sunday.

The ministry said 'terrorists' targeted a Turkish military vehicle on Saturday in the Euphrates Shield region south of the border, but did not specify which group they represented.

Turkey launched Operation Euphrates Shield in 2016 in order to drive away from its border region the Islamic State militants and Syrian Kurdish militia forces deemed 'terrorists' by Ankara. The Euphrates Shield region includes the towns of Jarablus and al-Bab near the Turkish border.

After the attack, 'the terror targets were hit' in retaliation, the ministry said.

Ankara views Syrian Kurdish People's Protection Units (YPG) as an offshoot of outlawed militants who have been waging a deadly insurgency against the Turkish state.

AFP



This file photo shows the site of the explosion in a popular market in the Shiite-majority Sadr City neighbourhood, east of Baghdad on July 20 (AFP)

Iraq says militants planned other attacks during Eid

Baghdad, Iraq - The militants believed to be behind last week's deadly suicide bombing of a Baghdad market had planned more attacks during the Eid al Adha festival, Iraq's Interior Ministry said on Sunday.

The ministry released photos of five suspects arrested, including three brothers, after last Monday's attack that, according to the official toll, killed 30 people and was claimed by the Islamic State group.

Iraqi security forces have dismantled 'two terrorist networks in the provinces of Anbar and Kirkuk responsible for the July 19 attack in Sadr City', a poor Shiite district of Baghdad.

'They were planning other attacks in other parts of Baghdad and other provinces during Eid,' a ministry statement said.

Iraqi Prime Minister Mustafa al-Kadhemi announced on Saturday the arrest of the 'terror cell' behind the Baghdad market bombing.

Iraqi television broadcast overnight the 'confessions' of the five, who were dressed in yellow prison suits, a common practice in major criminal cases in Iraq.

The attack sparked revulsion

and renewed fears about the reach of the IS, which lost its last territory in Iraq after a gruelling campaign that ended in late 2017, but retains sleeper cells in remote desert and mountain areas.

The bombing hit the Al-Woheilat market in Sadr City, where many families were crowded on the eve of the Eid al Adha.

The announcement of the dismantling of the cell came on the eve of Kadhemi's departure for Washington, where he was to meet US President Joe Biden on Monday.

The Iraqi prime minister, under heavy pressure from powerful pro-Iranian factions in his country, is hoping for a substantial announcement on the withdrawal of US troops in Iraq.

Some 2,500 US troops are deployed to assist Iraqi forces in the fight against IS, which controlled large parts of Iraqi territory between 2014 and 2017.

It has been officially defeated, but its sleeper cells still carry out occasional attacks.

Already in January, a suicide bombing claimed by the IS killed 32 people in a Baghdad market.

AFP

Macron pressured to apologise for N-tests in Polynesia

Papeete, France - French President Emmanuel Macron faced pressure to apologise for the devastating impact of decades of nuclear testing as he kicked off his first official trip to French Polynesia.

During his four-day visit, Macron plans to address the legacy of nuclear testing from 1966 to 1996 as France developed atomic weapons, as well as discuss the South Pacific territory's strategic role and the existential risk of rising seas posed by global warming.

Residents in the sprawling archipelago of more than 100 islands located midway between Mexico and Australia are hoping Macron apologises and confirms compensation for radiation victims. The tests remain a source of deep resentment, seen as evidence of racist colonial attitudes that disregarded the lives of islanders.



France's President Emmanuel Macron (centre) signs a nurse's vest as he meets with frontline staff working at the French Polynesia Hospital Centre in Papeete in French Polynesia on Saturday (AFP)

After touching down on Saturday, Macron, whose 2020 trip was postponed due to the pandemic, met hospital workers fighting COVID-19 in the semi-autonomous territory where many are wary of vaccines.

"I want to send a very strong message to call on everyone to get vaccinated," he said, adding:

"When you're vaccinated, you're protected and you hardly spread the virus, or at least much less."

'Highest thyroid cancer rates'

Macron will be 'encouraging several concrete steps' regarding the legacy of nuclear tests, with the opening up of state archives

and individual compensation, a French presidential official who asked not to be named said.

French officials denied any cover-up of radiation exposure at a meeting earlier this month with delegates from the semi-autonomous territory led by President Edouard Fritch.

The meeting came after French investigative website Disclose reported in March that the impact from the fallout was far more extensive than authorities had acknowledged, citing declassified French military documents on the 193 tests.

Only 63 Polynesian civilians have been compensated for radiation exposure since the tests ended in 1996, Disclose said, estimating that more than 100,000 people may have been contaminated in total, with leukaemia, lymphoma and other cancers rife.

"We're expecting an apology from the president," said Au-

guste Uebe-Carlson, head of the 193 Association of victims of nuclear tests. "Just as he has recognised as a crime the colonisation that took place in Algeria, we also expect him to declare that it was criminal and that it is a form of colonisation linked to nuclear power here in the Pacific."

Patrick Galenon, the former chairman of the territory's CPS social security system, said female Polynesians aged 40 to 50 'have the highest thyroid cancer rates in the world'.

He estimates the CPS has spent €670mn to treat illnesses caused by radiation since 1985.

Macron, who arrived in French Polynesia after a visit to the Olympic Games in Tokyo, will also lay out his strategic vision for the South Pacific, where China has made no secret of its push for military and commercial dominance.

AFP

Greece's first underwater museum opens for tourists

Alónnisos, Greece - Emerging from the crystal-clear turquoise waters of the Aegean Sea, Hans-Juergen Fercher has just returned from his fourth dive to the site of an ancient shipwreck - and Greece's first underwater museum.

"This is a combination of diving and archaeological diving. It's diving into history," says the 48 year old psychiatrist after pulling himself onto the deck of the Triton dive boat.

"It makes it special and unique."

The museum beneath the waves at Peristera, a rocky outcrop off the island of Alónnisos, opened in 2020, though the site has been largely mothballed until now due to COVID-19 restrictions.

As Greece opens up its vital tourism industry, the site offers an example of a new and more sustainable source of revenue.

Divers like Fercher and Lisette Fredelund are willing to pay €95



This file photo shows scuba divers visiting the underwater museum in the Aegean Sea, off the coast of the Greek island Alónnisos on July 20 (AFP)

a dive - about 50 per cent more than the cost of a regular recreational scuba outing - for a guided tour of a site once the preserve of professional archaeologists.

"It was just amazing," said Fredelund.

Wrecks have been discovered in the area - the middle of the country's largest marine reserve - holding out the prospect that more such museums will open.

Greece has made diving part of its focus to attract visitors since legislation passed in 2020 making it possible to access such sites, Tourism Minister Harry Theoharis told AFP.

"This is a type of tourism that attracts people all year round, a special audience that pays generously to dive," he said, adding that ten new diving parks are ready to be licensed under the process provided for by the leg-

islation.

On board the Triton, a group of six more visitors don their scuba gear and plunge into the sea, closely following their guide. About 300 people have paid to visit the wreck since the museum opened, according to Alónnisos Mayor Petros Vafinis.

Vafinis - himself an avid scuba diver - joined a group of tourists as they one by one launched themselves off the rear deck of the Triton into the sea.

All visitors must first undergo a briefing about the site and the strict rules - such as keeping at least two metres away from the artifacts.

High expectations

After a short swim from the boat, the tour guide leads the group down through changing layers of light and increasing cold to the sea bed almost 30 metres below.

"My expectations were really high from the briefing, and it fulfilled everything," said George

Giasemidis, a Greek tourist who visited the area specifically to see the wreck.

Due to the depth and technical difficulty of the descent, only qualified divers are allowed to visit the wreck of a ship that was delivering wine and other goods when it foundered, around the fifth century BC.

More than 4,000 two-handled amphorae are anchored in the sand, their positions marking out the outline of the wooden vessel, the remains of which have been washed away over time.

"We want to propose another kind of tourism to the people who come. I don't want intensive tourism we can find anywhere else," Vafinis said.

With four other wrecks discovered nearby, the goal is that they will in turn become accessible, adding Alónnisos to the must-do list for divers around the world.

AFP

Thousands of Afghan families flee fighting in former Taliban bastion of Kandahar

Kandahar, Afghanistan - More than 22,000 Afghan families have fled from their homes to escape fighting in the former Taliban bastion of Kandahar, officials said on Sunday, as authorities arrested four suspected insurgents over this week's rocket attack on Kabul.

Since early May, violence has surged across several provinces including in Kandahar after the insurgents launched a sweeping offensive just days after the US-led foreign forces began their final withdrawal.

The Taliban's deadly assault has seen the insurgents capture scores of districts, border crossings and encircle several provincial capitals.

"The fighting has displaced 22,000 families in the past one month in Kandahar," Dost Mohammad Daryab, head of the provincial refugee department, said. "They have all moved from the volatile districts of the city to safer areas."

On Sunday, fighting continued on the outskirts of Kandahar city.

"The negligence of some security forces, especially the police, has made way for the Taliban to come that close," Lalai Dastageeri, deputy governor of Kandahar province, said.

"We are now trying to organize our security forces."

Local authorities had set up four camps for the displaced people who are estimated to be about 154,000.

Kandahar resident Hafiz Mohammad Akbar said his house had been taken over by the Taliban after he fled.

"They forced us to leave... I am now living with my 20-member family in a compound with



A security personnel stops a vehicle at a check point during night curfew, which was imposed across 31 of the country's 34 provinces to curb surging violence unleashed by a sweeping Taliban offensive in recent months, in Herat on Saturday (AFP)

no toilet," said Akbar.

Fears of fighting to increase

Residents expressed concerns the fighting might increase in days ahead.

"If they really want to fight, they should go to a desert and

fight, not destroy the city," said Khan Mohammad, who moved to a camp with his family.

"Even if they win, they can't rule a ghost town."

Kandahar, with its 650,000 inhabitants, is the second-largest city in Afghanistan after Kabul.

The southern province was

the epicentre of the Taliban's regime when they ruled the country between 1996 to 2001.

Ousted from power in a US-led invasion in 2001 after the September 11 attacks, the Taliban have spearheaded a deadly insurgency that continues to this day.

Their latest offensive launched

in early May has seen the group take control of half of the country's about 400 districts.

Earlier this week, the chairman of the US joint chiefs of staff General Mark Milley said the Taliban appear to have 'strategic momentum' on the battlefield.

But global rights group

Afghan forces capture 4 Taliban for Eid attack

Kabul, Afghanistan - Afghan forces have captured four Taliban fighters including a militant commander for carrying out this week's rocket attack targeting the presidential palace in Kabul during the Eid al Adha prayers, officials said on Sunday.

At least three rockets landed near the palace on Tuesday as President Ashraf Ghani and his top officials performed outdoor prayers to mark the start of the holiday.

The Interior Ministry said police had arrested four Taliban fighters in an operation in Kabul who were behind the attack, which was claimed by the extremist Islamic State group.

"A Taliban commander, Momin, along with his three other men, have been arrested. They all belong to the Taliban group," ministry spokesman Mirwais Stanikzai told reporters in a video message.

He said Momin was a key organiser of the rocket attack, and the group was also involved in other attacks.

The palace was also at-

tacked last year as hundreds gathered for Ghani's inauguration for a second term as president.

That attack was also claimed by the IS.

The Taliban have announced ceasefires during past holidays in recent years, offering respite to Afghans who can visit family in relative safety, but no such offer was made on this occasion.

The rocket attack on Tuesday came as the Taliban capitalise on the last stages of the withdrawal of US-led foreign forces from Afghanistan, capturing scores of districts, border crossings and encircling several provincial capitals.

The fighting continues across the rugged countryside as peace talks between the Afghan government and the Taliban have so far failed to reach a deal to end the war.

In a bid to curb the surging violence, Afghan authorities on Saturday imposed a night-time curfew in 31 of the country's 34 provinces except Kabul, Panjshir and Nangarhar.

AFP

India monsoon death toll climbs to 127; many missing in western state

Mumbai, India - The death toll from flooding and landslides triggered by heavy monsoon rains in India climbed to 127 on Sunday, officials said, with rescuers searching for dozens more missing.

The country's western coast has been inundated by torrential rains since Thursday, with the India Meteorological Department warning of further downpours over the next few days.

Experts say climate change has caused the annual deluge to increase in frequency and intensity.

In Maharashtra state, 117 people have been killed, including more than 40 in a large landslide that hit the hillside village of Taliye some 250km southeast of Mumbai on Thursday.

Villager Jayram Mahaske, whose relatives remained trapped, told AFP that 'many people were washed away as they were trying to run away' from the landslide.

Another villager, Govind Malusare, said his nephew's body had been found after the landslide hit his family's home, but that his mother, brother, sister-in-law and niece were still missing.

The landslip flattened dozens of homes in a matter of minutes, leaving just two concrete structures standing and cutting off power, local residents told AFP.

In Posare village 210km south of Mumbai, the National Disaster Response Force said four bodies were found overnight.

In parts of Chiplun, water levels rose to nearly six metres on Thursday after 24 hours of unin-



India's National Disaster Response Force personnel conduct search and rescue operations at the site of a landslide after heavy monsoon rains at Kumbharwadi village in Chiplun district of Maharashtra on Sunday (AFP)

terrupted rain. The water levels have since started to recede.

"The water level reached the ceiling of my shop, there was so much water inside," a shopkeeper told Indian news broadcaster NDTV, pointing to sludge and debris around him. "All the shops in this area have been completely damaged. The flood has left so much soil behind, we can't even resume work."

Rescuers were working in waist-deep mud to search for 100 people still missing in the state with the help of excavators.

Record rainfall

In neighbouring Goa, a woman was feared to have drowned from the flooding, officials said, in what Chief Minister Pramod Sawant said were the 'worst floods since 1982'.

North Goa official Ajit Roy told AFP floodwaters have since receded with people who were evacuated returning to their homes.

In the coastal plains spanning Maharashtra and Goa, floodwater levels remained elevated after rivers burst their banks and forced terrified residents to seek safety on rooftops and upper floors.

Further south in Karnataka state, the death toll rose to nine overnight, with four others missing, officials said.

Power supply was disrupted in the 11 affected districts and there were crop losses across vast swathes of land.

Climate scientist Roxy Mathew Koll of the Indian Institute of Tropical Meteorology said climate change was warm-

ing the Arabian Sea.

The higher water temperatures were causing the air above to become warmer and hold more moisture, sparking more extreme rainfall events, he said.

"We are seeing a three-fold rise in widespread extreme rainfall events... since 1950," Koll said, citing a study he co-authored that was published in Nature.

He added that a hill station south of Mumbai, Mahabaleshwar, reported 594mm of rain on Friday - the highest since the start of records a century ago.

"In recent years, the impact of climate change (on monsoons in India) is much more obvious. In fact, what has happened in Europe, China and the rest of the world is similar to what's happening in India."

AFP

Traffic shut as Typhoon In-Fa lashes eastern China

Ningbo, China - Typhoon In-Fa uprooted trees and drenched communities in knee-deep water in parts of eastern China, but there were no reports of major damage as it made landfall on Sunday.

Sea, air and rail traffic had been shut down across a swathe of the coast centered on the major shipping port of Ningbo, where the weakening typhoon rumbled ashore around midday packing winds of up to 38 metres per second, according to the China Meteorological Administration.

Response teams in Ningbo cleared away fallen trees in the city centre, while residents in some neighbourhoods waded through floodwaters and merchants piled up sandbags in front of their businesses to keep out water.

The typhoon hit as the central province of Henan was still cleaning up after torrential downpours dumped a year's worth of rain in just three days last week.

Government officials on Sunday added another five dead to the toll from the freak flooding in Henan, raising the total to 63.

In-Fa's effects were also felt on Sunday in the metropolis of Shanghai, China's largest city, with strong gusts of wind and steady but not heavy rainfall.

All inbound and outbound flights were cancelled on Sunday for the city's two international airports, as were dozens of scheduled trains, while activity at the ports of Shanghai and



A woman and a boy waded through a flooded street in a neighbourhood in Ningbo, eastern China's Zhejiang province on Sunday (AFP)

It is necessary to be highly vigilant and prevent disasters that may be caused by extreme heavy rainfall

ADMINISTRATION

Ningbo - two of the world's largest - was also shut down.

The government announced that it would extend a suspension of railway services in and out of Shanghai through midday on Monday.

Some public attractions in Shanghai and other cities, including Shanghai Disneyland, also were closed and residents were warned to avoid outdoor activities.

The meteorological administration said that after landfall In-Fa would weaken but continue to

hover over a wide expanse of eastern China for days, ringing itself out and bringing heavy rainfall, possibly to areas still recovering from last week's flooding.

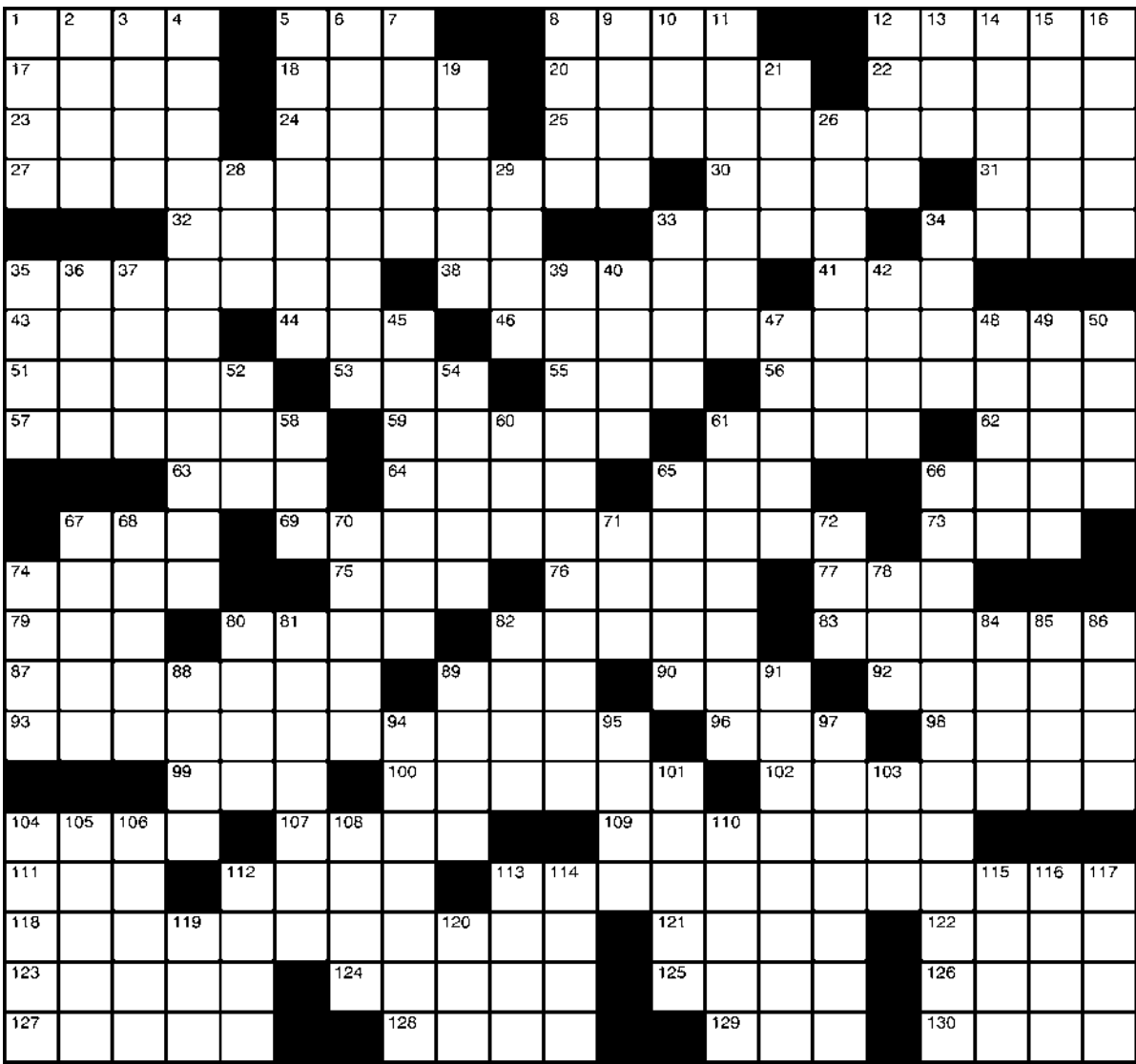
"It is necessary to be highly vigilant and prevent disasters that may be caused by extreme heavy rainfall," the administration said on Sunday.

China has suffered an annual summer flooding and typhoon season for millennia, but the record rainfall this past week in Henan has prompted questions about how cities could be better prepared for freak weather events, which experts say are happening with increased frequency and intensity due to climate change.

Millions were affected by the Henan floods, with some trapped without fresh food or water for days, and economic losses have run into the billions of dollars.

AFP

DAILY CROSSWORD



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ACROSS

- 1 Ayatollah's predecessor
5 Hotel rm.
8 Basra's country
12 ___ a manger: Fr.
17 Dalai ___
18 Promises to pay: abbr.
20 Bode
22 Sub
23 Take ___ leave it
24 Irish Rose lover
25 Mystery writer's wetland?
27 Composer's mirror?
30 Siestas
31 Ed. gp.
32 Artist's workshop
33 ___ time: never
34 Amish raising
35 "Fidelio" heroine
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41 "Born in the ___"
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66 Obtains
67 Dadaist Ray
69 Actress meadow?
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122 Dismounted: var.
123 Concerning: arch.
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6 Olympics vehicles
7 "Il Tabarro" tenor
8 Richardson and Fleming
9 Carpet cousins
10 Turkish title
11 100 kilograms
12 Aggregates
13 Garment for 33 Down
14 Blackmore heroine
15 Kind of beam or disc
16 "___ Frome"
19 Tennis greatMonica
21 White-sprinkled

- horse
26 Husbands and wives
28 Ice star Midori
29 Desertlike
33 Riyadh native
34 Adriatic port
35 Grasslands
36 "Vogue" competitor
37 Elide
39 Comic's transactions?
40 "Just you wait, ___ 'leggings . . ."
42 Control specs.
45 Entertains lavishly
47 Factotum capability
48 Tournament surprise
49 Dull finish
50 Positive sign
52 Turner or Koppel
54 Fine netting
58 Domicile: abbr.
60 Thickness unit
61 Fast cat
65 Niamy's country
66 German writer's lawn?
67 Danny's daughter
68 Composer Berg
70 Baldwin and Guinness
71 Aficionado
72 Small quantity
74 Tilled the soil
78 Capture

- 80 "Pictures ___ Exhibition"
81 Faux pas
82 Newsman Lehrer, et al.
84 "Star ___"
85 Castor's mother
86 Harrow rival
88 Wield scissors
89 Bible book
91 Stocky
94 Speaker
95 German industrial center
97 Puckered fabrics
101 Decorticates
103 Tropical cuckoo
104 Subway sign
105 Unaccompanied
106 Turmoil
108 "And pretty maids all in ___"
110 Last words?
112 JFK visitors
113 New York team
114 Once, once
115 Hodgepodge
116 Foch, of films
117 Trick ending
119 Finale
120 "Cats" librettist's monogram

YOUR DAILY HOROSCOPE



ARIES MARCH 21-APRIL 19

You'll have to do a bit of selling today -- either for yourself or for a project you want other people to pitch in on. If all you do is focus on what you want out of them, folks may find you a bit insensitive. But if you focus on what's in it for them, you can get their attention and get them on board! Put yourself in their position and think how they would think. Keep communication simple.



LEO JULY 23-AUGUST 22

Expect to get a few double takes from strangers wherever you go. You are feeling extremely good on the inside, and it shows on your outside. Your intense positive energy is amplifying your sex appeal and really getting you noticed! This is the perfect day to make a move on someone you've been crushing on -- or to turn up the heat in an existing relationship. Your partner will be at your mercy.



SAGITTARIUS NOVEMBER 22-DECEMBER 21

Put your fantastic observation skills to good use today -- they could help you save lots of money. It's time to adopt some of the money-saving ideas that a friend or family member has recommended, even if they don't sound easy or particularly enjoyable. Any discomfort you feel today will be worth it. An interesting investment opportunity will appear today.



TAURUS APRIL 20-MAY 20

You need to find a way to deal with your financial situation. Fortunately, coming up with creative ways to earn or save money will be an extremely fun challenge. Even clipping coupons will be a blast when you know how much cash it'll save you! Over the next few months, your financial health will improve. Friends will come to you to find out what you secret is.



VIRGO AUGUST 23-SEPTEMBER 22

Lots of indecisive energy is around you, and it could cause some scheduling delays. The good news is these hindrances happen for the best! So if you can be flexible and just go with the flow right now, you will open your life up to more spontaneity and excitement. Let things be messy and imperfect, and you'll enjoy them more.



CAPRICORN DECEMBER 22-JANUARY 19

Comparing yourself to other people isn't always a healthy endeavour -- it can create unnecessary insecurity. But today, you might want to look around at the people who are similar to you and observe how they handle things you're struggling with. Their unique approach will be educational and perhaps inspiring. When you need inspiration, look to them.



GEMINI MAY 21-JUNE 21

Changing your mind about something might be called for when you hear a convincing counterpoint. But don't switch gears right away. Give this issue some serious thought as the day continues. Hold off on defending your thoughts and converting to the other side. Revising your outlook is an intelligent and responsible thing to do from time to time, but you shouldn't do it too reflexively.



LIBRA SEPTEMBER 23-OCTOBER 22

You may have already made up your mind about a certain person, but why not consider changing your opinion? You should never close yourself off to the possibility that people can change, because they can. You have, haven't you? So set aside any negative feelings and make the best of the situation by thinking the best about this person. Life is too short to be judgmental.



AQUARIUS JANUARY 20-FEBRUARY 18

Keep an eagle eye out for any unfamiliar phone numbers or email addresses today, and save them for later. One of them will represent a person or organisation that could be the start of something major for your future. Building connections with other people and other groups should be a big priority for you right now, and the good news is that it won't be difficult.



CANCER JUNE 22-JULY 22

Today, it may feel as if you're missing out on the joke or a bit late to the party, but so what? You can't always be in perfect synchronicity with everyone, even if you want to be. Live with this disconnect and let it pass -- it will go away soon enough, so don't worry. You can't let this feeling shake your confidence, or else you could get distracted from some important things you have to do.



SCORPIO OCTOBER 23-NOVEMBER 21

It's time to pay more attention to the cautious and conservative voice inside you-- especially if it's telling you to walk away from something new and mysterious. It's a bad idea to get involved in anything you're not totally sure about, such as investments, major purchases or social events where big drama could occur. You might think you can handle more risk right now.



PISCES FEBRUARY 19-MARCH 20

All day long luck will be on your side big time -- and it could even affect your financial situation! Fortune will help little things add up to big things, so stick some money in your savings account. Start a short conversation with a cute person you've been trying to get to know better. Do an extra set of crunches at the gym this morning.



TEST YOUR KNOWLEDGE

1. The centenary of Mahatma Gandhi's arrival in South

Africa was celebrated in

- a. May 1993
b. August 1993
c. July 1993
d. September 1993

2. National Maritime Day of India falls on

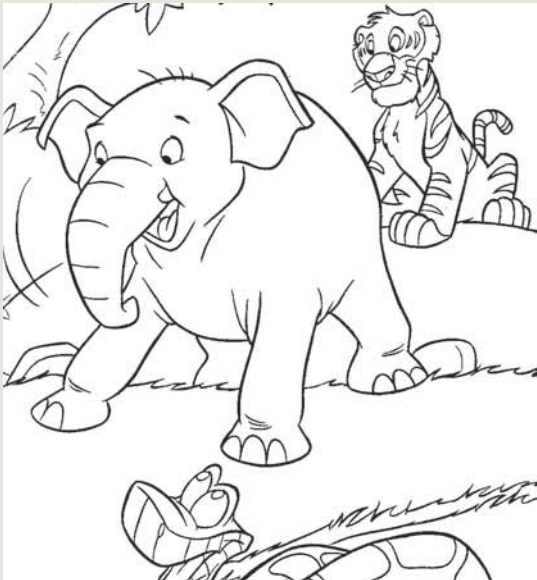
- a. April 5
b. June 5
c. October 5
d. September 5

3. The World Environment Day is celebrated on

- a. April 7
b. June 5
c. August 6
d. June 16

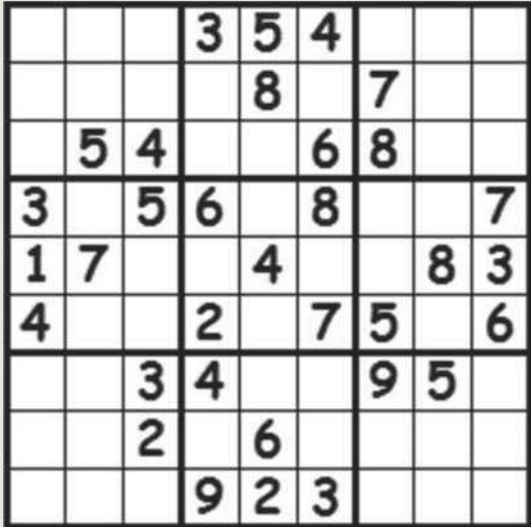
Answers: 1.a 2.a 3.b

KIDS COLOURING



DO YOU SUDOKU?

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



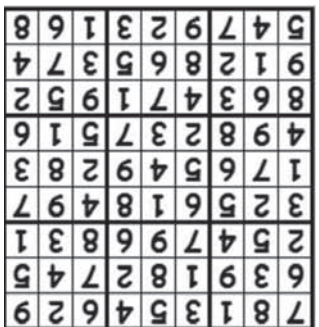
BOGGLER



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

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

SUDOKU EASY ANSWER



DAILY CROSSWORD ANSWERS (JULY 25)



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



UNESCO BATON

HERITAGE

LISTING

The World Heritage Committee has inscribed five cultural sites, including one transnational property in Austria, Belgium, Czechia, France, Germany, Italy, United Kingdom and Northern Ireland, on UNESCO’s World Heritage List during its 44th session held online and chaired from Fuzhou (China). The inscription of sites on UNESCO’s World Heritage List will continue till July 28



SIXTH SAUDI SITE ENTERS HERITAGE LIST

A sixth site in Saudi Arabia has been added to UNESCO’s world heritage list, the UN organisation announced on Saturday. Hima, in the Gulf state’s southwest, is home to one of the largest rock art complexes in the world.

“New site inscribed on the UNESCO World Heritage List: cultural area of Hima, Saudi Arabia. Mabrouk (congratulations)!” UNESCO announced.

Hima features more than 34 separate sites including rock inscriptions and wells along the route of the ancient Arabian caravans.

Prince Badr bin Abdullah bin Farhan Al Saud, the Saudi culture minister, welcomed the listing, the official SPA news agency reported.

The kingdom has a “rich heritage (of) human civilisations. Efforts have borne fruit in making it known to the world,” it quoted him as saying.

SPA said Hima was a conduit for caravans on the trade and Hajj routes to and from the southern parts of Arabia.

“People who passed through the area between pre- and post-historic times have left behind a substantial collection of rock art depicting hunting, wildlife, plants, symbols, and tools used at the time, as well as thousands of inscriptions,” the news agency said.

The site covers 557sqkm. SPA said the wells in the area are more than 3,000 years old and were considered a vital source of fresh water in the vast desert of Najran province.

“They still serve fresh water to this day,” it added.

The other UNESCO sites in Saudi Arabia include rock art in the Hail region and historic Jeddah.

FRANCE’S ‘KING OF LIGHTHOUSES’ IN LIST

Battered by the wind and swell for 400 years and nicknamed the ‘King of Lighthouses’, France’s Cordouan beacon on Saturday won recognition from UNESCO.

The lighthouse, which will be added to UNESCO’s World Heritage List, is the last to be inhabited in France and only the second after Spain’s La Coruna to win the plaudit from the world heritage body.

Cordouan was built at the very end of the 16th century and stands in the Atlantic Ocean at the mouth of the Gironde estuary in southwestern France in a highly exposed and hostile environment, according to UNESCO’s World Heritage Committee which announced its decision on Saturday.

The lighthouse was designed by engineer Louis de Foix and was later remodelled by engineer Joseph Teulere in the late 18th century.

Describing it as a ‘masterpiece of maritime sig-

nalling’, the committee added: “Cordouan’s monumental tower is decorated with pilasters, columns modillions and gargoyles. It embodies the great stages of the architectural and technological history of lighthouses and was built with the ambition of continuing the tradition of famous beacons of antiquity, illustrating the art of building lighthouses in a period of renewed navigation, when beacons played an important role as territorial markers and as instruments of safety.”

The increase in its height in the late 18th century and changes to its light chamber at the same time were also noteworthy, the committee said.

They “attest to the progress of science and technology of the period. Its architectural forms drew inspiration from ancient models, Renaissance Mannerism and the specific architectural language of France’s engineering school Ecole des Ponts et Chaussees.”



WEST AFRICAN RESERVE ESCAPES ENDANGERED LISTING

A west African nature reserve spanning Benin, Burkina Faso and Niger on Friday escaped a UNESCO listing as under threat despite the jihadist conflict harrowing the Sahel region.

South Africa convinced the UN body’s World Heritage Committee to back an amendment - also supported by other African states - to keep the W-Arly-Pendjari (WAP) complex off the list.

Backers argued that the countries had set up sufficient measures to guard against attacks, including stepping up patrols.

The committee nevertheless warned that “the Outstanding Universal Value of the property is faced with potential danger” if the security measures were not enough to protect it. It also said that

Benin, Burkina Faso and Niger should compile a report on the conservation status of the WAP complex by 2022.

Described by UNESCO on its website as ‘a major expanse of intact Sudano-Sahelian Savannah’ with forests and grasslands, the WAP includes the largest and most important continuum of terrestrial, semi-aquatic and aquatic ecosystems in the West African savannah belt.”

It hosts 85 per cent of west Africa’s savannah elephants and the only viable population of lions in the region. The protected area stretches across eastern Burkina, southern Niger and northern Benin which is at high risk of jihadist attacks.

AFP

Al Faisal on Imola podium

Lechner Racing duo finishes third in first race of the fourth round



Our Correspondent
Muscat

INTERNATIONAL GT OPEN RACE

Having missed the third round at Hungary, Oman's Al Faisal al Zubair returned to action with his Lechner Racing teammate Andy Soucek, in the fourth round of the International GT Open Series endurance racing at the Imola Grand Prix circuit in Italy.

The Omani-Spanish duo maintained their impressive start to the championship season with a hard-earned third place in the first of two races on Saturday afternoon.

The pair qualified the Lechner Racing Team's Porsche 911 GT3 R in fourth for the 70-minute race and managed to pass the Audi Sport Italia R8 of Lorenzo Ferrari and Riccardo Agostini to claim third place and add to their championship points' tally.



Al Faisal al Zubair (L) and Andy Soucek on the podium on Saturday

The car feels good, the balance and the set-up are good. Hopefully we can get another podium or a win

AL FAISAL
AL ZUBAIR

Race victory fell to Loris Spinelli's Mercedes AMG from pole position, with Michele Beretta and Frederik Schandorff finishing second in the Vincenzo Sospiri Racing Lamborghini, 4.407 seconds behind the Italian after 41 laps of racing.

Al Faisal said, "Andy qualified the car today in fourth place, which was a decent result, considering the balance of performance of the Mercedes seems a little unfair. Going into the race, Andy started and man-

aged to get into third place and this is where we finished. This was a great result. It was another podium in the championship that we should be really happy about.

"The car feels good, the balance and the set-up are good. Hopefully we can have a good starting position in the next qualifying session and get another podium or a win."

Earlier, the duo in Porsche 911 GT3 R finished the first of the two free practice sessions in second place with a best lap of 1min 42.085sec after a 22-lap stint. Al Faisal and Soucek came home in third place in the second practice.

In the first 30-minute qualifying session on Saturday morning, Spinelli claimed pole position with a best lap of 1min 39.511sec.

Soucek ran for ten laps and a best time of 1min 40.105sec put the Lechner Porsche in fourth place on the starting grid.



Nicholas Pooran
59*
75 BALLS

Pooran powers WI past Australia to level ODI series

WEST INDIES VS AUSTRALIA SECOND ODI

Bridgetown, Barbados - Half-centuries from Nicholas Pooran and Jason Holder guided the West Indies to a series-levelling four-wicket win the second one-day international (ODI) of the three-match series against Australia at Kensington Oval in Barbados on Saturday.

Replying to the visitors' modest total of 187 all out, the home side slipped to 72 for five before Pooran, who earned the Man of the Match award for his unbeaten 59, and former captain Holder, who contributed an invaluable 52, put on 93 for the seventh wicket to tilt the balance of the match decisively in their team's favour.

They reached the target at 191 for six with 12 overs to spare. This result sets up the final match on Tuesday at the same venue as the series decider.

Earlier the Australians were required to engineer their own recovery from an even more desperate situation.

With the decision to bat first made on Thursday before the

match was suspended due to a positive COVID-19 test by a non-playing member of the West Indies staff, Australia slumped to 45 for six as spinner Akeal Hosein snared three quick wickets following the successes of the Caribbean seamers.

Matthew Wade then found a resilient partner in Mitchell Starc in putting on 51 for the seventh wicket before Adam Zampa was overshadowed by No 10 Wes Agar as they put on 59 for the ninth wicket. Agar, topscored with an entertaining 41 while Wade and Zampa contributed 36 runs apiece.

Starc warmed up for his work with the new ball with a useful innings of 19 and then dismissed a fragile West Indies top order by dismissing Evin Lewis and Darren Bravo in quick succession.

Brief scores: Australia 187 in 47.1 overs (W Agar 41, A Zampa 36, M Wade 36; A Hosein 3-30, A Joseph 3-39, S Cottrell 2-29) lost to West Indies 191 for six in 38 overs (N Pooran 59 n.o., J Holder 52, S Hope 38; M Starc 3-26, A Zampa 2-43).

AFP

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BIRTHDAY WISHES

GARIMA AGARWAL
July 25

This birthday we wish you abundance, happiness, and health. May good luck come especially for you & may all the joy you have spread around come back to you a hundredfold.. We love you. Our Best Wishes with you always. Happy birthday from Friends and Family

Send your request for
Birthday/Anniversary wishes to
wish@apexmedia.co.om
with your resident card copy (It's free of cost)

TOKYO 2020



Champions Brazil held, Gignac rescues France

MEN'S FOOTBALL

Tokyo, Japan - Reigning champions Brazil were held to a goalless draw by the Ivory Coast in the men's Olympic football competition on Sunday, while Andre-Pierre Gignac's hat-trick in a 4-3 win over South Africa kept France's hopes alive.

Brazil, who won gold for the first time five years ago on home soil in Rio, could have moved to the brink of qualification for the knock-out stage in Yokohama but were denied by a stubborn Ivory Coast.

It could have been worse, though, as they had to play more than an hour with ten men after Aston Villa midfielder Douglas Luiz's 13th-minute red card for bringing down Youssouf Dao when he was through on goal.

Eboue Kouassi's late dismissal evened up the numbers, but the Ivorians held on as former Barcelona winger Malcom missed a late chance for the South Americans.

Brazil lead Group D on goal difference ahead of their final game of the opening phase against Saudi Arabia, who lost 2-3 to Germany to be eliminated from the competition.

Felix Uduokhai's 75th-minute goal gave Germany, who had Amos Pieper sent off midway through the second half, a crucial three points.

France would have been staring at an early exit with a slip-up against South Africa, but veteran striker Gignac rescued *Les Bleus* in a pulsating match in Saitama.

The Group A match burst into life after a goalless first half, which saw South African midfielder Luther Singh miss a penalty, as Kobamelo Kodisang put the underdogs ahead eight minutes after the restart.

The 35-year-old Gignac, captaining France in Japan, levelled shortly afterwards, only for

Ivory Coast's Amad Diallo (L) fights for the ball with Brazil's Richarlison during their match on Sunday (AFP)



Evidence Makgopa to restore South Africa's slender lead in the 72nd minute.

Former Marseille star Gignac, who last played for the French senior team in 2016, equalised again.

Teboho Mokoena thought he had won the match with just nine minutes to play with a wonderful curling strike that flew in off the crossbar, but Gignac slotted home his fourth goal of the tournament from the penalty spot five minutes later.

There was still time for France to snatch a winner, as Gignac found Teji Savanier to drill in a



France's Andre-Pierre Gignac (C) celebrates with Arnaud Nordin (R) after scoring against South Africa in Saitama on Sunday (AFP)

low strike in the second minute of added time.

Hosts Japan held on to register their second straight win with a 2-1 success against Mexico, who are second above France on goal difference.

Spain moved to the top of Group C as Mikel Oyarzabal's late strike - their first goal of the tournament - downed Australia 1-0 while Argentina beat Egypt 1-0. In Group B, Honduras came from behind to beat New Zealand 3-2 and South Korea thrashed ten-man Romania 4-0 to leave all four teams on three points.

AFP

MEDALS TABLE

(Only selected nations)



	Gold	Silver	Bronze	Total
China	6	1	4	11
Japan	5	1	0	6
USA	4	2	4	10
South Korea	2	0	3	5
ROC*	1	4	2	7
Italy	1	1	3	5
Australia	1	1	1	3
France	1	1	1	3
Hungary	1	1	0	2
Tunisia	1	1	0	2
Austria	1	0	0	1
Ecuador	1	0	0	1
Iran	1	0	0	1
Kosovo	1	0	0	1
Thailand	1	0	0	1
Uzbekistan	1	0	0	1
Canada	0	2	0	2
Netherlands	0	2	0	2

(ROC* - Russian Olympic Committee)

France upset USA



USA's Damian Lillard (L) looks on as teammate Devin Booker fights for a rebound with France's Rudy Gobert during their basketball game (AFP)

MEN'S BASKETBALL

Tokyo, Japan - A USA team led by 11-time NBA All-Star Kevin Durant were beaten 83-76 by France in a huge basketball upset on Sunday.

The French, with a team containing NBA players including Rudy Gobert and Evan Fournier, inflicted the Americans' first defeat at an Olympics since the 2004 Athens Games. Durant was held to just ten points in the first-round game and was unable to inspire his team as the French came from behind to take control

in the final quarter. Fournier was sensational for France, top-scoring with 28 points. Although the Boston Celtics player only scored four from 12 from the three-point line, he found his range when it mattered.

The Americans had looked rusty in the build-up to Tokyo, losing to Nigeria in a warm-up game, and the defeat will underline Durant's fears expressed before the Games that his side will not face a 'cakewalk' in Japan.

AFP



China's Chen Lijun competes in the men's 67kg weightlifting event

Chinese weightlifters complete a hat-trick

WEIGHTLIFTING

Tokyo, Japan - Chen Lijun made a stunning comeback to complete a Chinese hat-trick as the world's most populous nation continued to dominate the Tokyo Olympics weightlifting on Sunday, with Li Fabin also winning gold.

Lying fourth in the men's 67kg class, 6kg adrift of Colombia's Luis Mosquera after the snatch, world record holder Chen needed to clean and jerk 187kg, to take gold as the 28-year-old completed an unerring lift to beat Mosquera.

Irawan silver

Earlier in the day, Li Fabin had made it two out of two weightlifting medals for China in the men's 61kg category, as he saw off Indonesian veteran Eko Yuli Irawan, who

became only the fifth lifter in history to win four Olympic medals.

The flamboyant Li pulled off his signature one-legged 'flamingo lift' on his opening clean and jerk at 166kg on his way to a 313kg total. Chen and Li's gold added to Hou Zhihui's title on Saturday to complete a hat-trick.

AFP

NO STOPPING THIS!



France's goalkeeper Cleopatre Darleux fails to stop a shot by Hungary's Petra Vamos during the women's preliminary round Group B handball match of the Tokyo 2020 Olympic Games at the Yoyogi National Stadium in Tokyo on Sunday. France defeated Hungary 30-29 in a thrilling game. (AFP)



TOKYO 2020

Osaka makes winning return, Barty shocked



Naomi Osaka returns a shot to Zheng Saisai during their first round match in Tokyo on Sunday

TENNIS
Tokyo, Japan - Japan's Naomi Osaka won in straight sets on her highly-anticipated return to the court at the Tokyo Olympics on Sunday, while world No 1 Ashleigh Barty crashed out in the first round.

Osaka, the star of the opening ceremony, defeated China's Zheng Saisai 6-1, 6-4 and said she felt 'refreshed' after taking an eight-week break for mental health reasons. "I felt really nervous being in Japan and playing here for the first time in maybe two years, and for it to be my first Olympics," said Osaka, chosen as the first tennis player to light the Olympic cauldron on Friday.

"It was definitely really nerve-wracking. But I am glad I was able to win, she is a very tough opponent."

The Australian Open cham-

ption had not played since May, when she walked out of Roland Garros saying that media commitments were harming her mental health. "I feel like more than anything I'm just focused on playing tennis. Playing the Olympics has been a dream of mine since I was a kid," she said, in her first appearance before media.

"I feel like the break that I took was very needed, but I feel definitely a little bit refreshed and happy again."

The 23 year old Osaka is attempting to become Japan's first Olympic tennis champion. She will play Switzerland's Viktorija Golubic in the last-32.

Osaka is now the clear favourite for gold after Barty, the reigning Wimbledon champion, dropped serve twice in each set and made 55 unforced errors in a 6-4, 6-3 loss to Spain's 48th-



Australia's Ashleigh Barty reacts after her first-round defeat on Sunday

ranked Sara Sorribes Tormo. "I'm disappointed I wasn't able to get through today, it just wasn't my day," said Barty.

Murray withdraws
Meanwhile defending champion Andy Murray withdrew from the men's singles with a quad muscle strain just hours before he was scheduled to play Felix

Auger-Aliassime. Murray, 34, will stay in Japan to play doubles with Joe Salisbury. The pair won their opening match of the competition on Saturday.

Three-time Grand Slam champion Murray is the only player to win two Olympics singles titles (2012 and 2016). He was replaced in the draw by Australia's Max Purcell, who

beat ninth seed Auger Aliassime 6-4, 7-6 (7/2). French Open runner-up Stefanos Tsitsipas battled past German veteran Philipp Kohlschreiber 6-3, 3-6, 6-3, while Alexander Zverev defeated Taiwan's Lu Yen-hsun 6-1, 6-3. Kei Nishikori, the 2016 bronze medalist, took down Russian fifth seed Andrey Rublev 6-3, 6-4.

Karina Pliskova, the Wimbledon runner-up two weeks ago, demolished France's Alize Cornet 6-1, 6-3, while Aryna Sabalenka, the third seed from Belarus, swept past Pole Magda Linette 6-2, 6-1.

Newly-weds Elina Svitolina and Gael Monfils, who tied the knot just before flying to Tokyo, suffered contrasting fortunes on their Olympic honeymoon.

Svitolina beat Laura Siegemund 6-3, 5-7, 6-4, but Monfils lost to Ilya Ivashka of Belarus.

AFF



Jon Rahm

COVID-19: Rahm, DeChambeau ruled out after testing positive

GOLF
Tokyo, Japan - The Olympic golf tournament lost two of its top stars to coronavirus on Sunday, as world No 1 Jon Rahm and 2020 US Open champion Bryson DeChambeau were forced to withdraw from the Tokyo Games.

The PGA announced that big-hitting DeChambeau was being replaced by Patrick Reed and hours later the Spanish Olympic Committee said Rahm had pulled out after testing positive for COVID-19 for the second time in two months. The virus has cast a shadow over the event, with a total of 132 Games-related cases in Japan so far. Thirteen of those are athletes.

The loss of Rahm and DeChambeau, who has been replaced by fellow US golfer Patrick Reed, robs the golf tournament of some of its star power.

"Bryson DeChambeau tested positive for COVID-19 as part of the final testing protocol before he left the United States for the Olympics 2020 in Japan," the PGA said in a statement on behalf of USA Golf.

"He will be unable to compete for Team USA.

"Patrick Reed will replace DeChambeau and is undergoing the requisite testing protocol today, Sunday and Monday before departing for Japan."



Bryson DeChambeau

DeChambeau could not hide his bitter disappointment. "I am deeply disappointed not to be able to compete in the Olympics for Team USA," said DeChambeau. "Representing my country means the world to me and it was a tremendous honour to make this team."

Reed, who won the Masters in 2018, will join Justin Thomas, recently crowned British Open champion Collin Morikawa and Xander Schauffele in the men's event.

Rahm, who stormed to victory at the US Open in June, returned a positive sample after undergoing mandatory testing following his recent participation in this month's British Open. It was the latest twist to what has been a tumultuous season for the 26 year old Spaniard.

AFF



Siblings Uta Abe (R) and Hifumi Abe celebrate after winning respective gold medals in judo on Sunday

Japan's 'golden' judo siblings

JUDO
Tokyo, Japan - Japan's judo brother and sister Hifumi and Uta Abe won gold medals within an hour of each other at the Tokyo Olympics on Sunday, on a day of success for the host nation. Uta Abe was first to strike gold in the women's under-52kg category, beating Amandine Buchard.

The 21-year-old then cheered from the sidelines as her big brother beat Georgia's Vazha Margvelashvili in the under-66kg gold medal

fight. It made them unique in Olympic history as the first siblings to win gold medals on the same day in an individual sport. Both are also two-time world champions.

"We had a strong determination, that's the reason," Uta said. "This was our dream since childhood."

Hifumi said his sister's success inspired him to victory. "I was sure she was going to get that gold medal," he said.

AFF



Iran celebrates nurse's golden shot

SHOOTING
Tehran, Iran - Iran on Sunday celebrated 41-year-old Javad Foroughi, a Republican Guards hospital nurse, who won gold in the 10m air pistol to become the Islamic republic's oldest and newest Olympic champion.

Foroughi, who survived COVID-19 in the Middle East's worst-hit country, on Saturday became Iran's first medal winner in any shooting event at the Olympics.

"Foroughi makes history with a golden shot," headlined the government daily *Iran*, splashing his picture on the front page - as did many other newspapers in his homeland.

The ultra-conservative *Javan* published a picture of Foroughi giving a military salute on the podium as Iran's national anthem played.

"An unexpected medal... won by a Guards nurse who is at the same time a defender of health and of the shrine," the newspaper wrote.

The term 'defender of the shrine' refers to those who work



Iran's Javad Foroughi holds his gold medal on the podium after winning the men's 10m air pistol final on Sunday (AFP)



on Iran's behalf in Syria and Iraq. At the beginning of May, Foroughi told public television

channel *Salamat* (Health in Persian) about serving at field hospitals in Syrian war zones,

including at Palmyra.

Media reports said Foroughi contracted COVID-19 in August last year, and also helped to battle the virus at home in Iran, which has reported nearly 89,000 deaths out of more than 3,690,000 infections.

After his winning shot in Tokyo, state television broadcast a report from Baqiyatallah Hospital in Tehran, which is run by the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps, and in which his colleagues hailed Foroughi's win.

Guards chief Hossein Salami also celebrated the win, the movement's *Sepahnews* website reported, calling the shooter an 'exuberant Guard of the Islamic revolution'.

President-elect Ebrahim Raisi, who takes office next month, spoke to Foroughi by phone just a few minutes after his successful shot, media reports said.

Foroughi has said he began his professional shooting career just four years ago in 2017. On Saturday he became his country's oldest Olympic medal winner.

AFF

TOKYO 2020



Australian players celebrate a goal against India during their hockey match

Australia rout India to lay down marker

HOCKEY

Tokyo, Japan - A magnificent attacking display from Australia's Kookaburras was the highlight of a remarkable evening session at the Oi Hockey Stadium on Sunday, with Argentina, Spain and Netherlands also claiming important wins as the search for a place in the competition quarterfinals continued.

Australia produced a devastating display of attacking hockey to overwhelm India 7-1 and put themselves two points clear at the top of Pool A after two rounds of matches.

Daniel Beale netted in the tenth minute to open the floodgates. Strikes from Jeremy Hayward, Flynn Ogilvie and Joshua Beltz established a 4-0 lead at half time. India made a strong start to the second half and pulled a goal back through Dilpreet Singh, but a Blake Govers double killed off any hope of a fightback before Tim

Brand completed the rout.

Reigning Olympic champions Argentina remain unbeaten in Pool B, having added three points from 2-1 win over hosts Japan. Los Leones ended the day sitting second in the pool after their triumph over the Samurais.

New Zealand moved up to third in the Pool A standings thanks to victory over Spain, fighting back from 3-2 down in the final quarter to win a pulsating fixture 4-3.

European champions the Netherlands avoided what could have been the shock result of the tournament against South Africa, fighting back from 0-3 down to beat the African champions 5-3 in an absorbing Pool B encounter.

RESULTS

Women's competition:

Pool A: Great Britain 1 Germany 2.

Pool B: Australia 3 Spain 1,

Japan 3 China 4, New Zealand

3 Argentina 0.

(Fih media release)



TUNISIAN TEEN KING



Tunisia's Ahmed Hafnaoui exults after winning the 400m freestyle event in Tokyo on Sunday

Japan enjoy gold rush with four titles on Sunday

Tokyo, Japan - On the day Tunisia marked the moment the monarchy was abolished in 1957, they will have permitted themselves to at least celebrate an Olympic king after a sensational performance in Tokyo from Ahmed Hafnaoui.

The 18-year-old produced a devastating late burst way out in lane eight on Sunday - Republic Day in Tunisia - to win the 400m freestyle swimming gold in 3min 43.36sec, overhauling Australian Jack McLoughlin.

"When I saw the flag of my country being raised and I heard

the national anthem I had tears in my eyes," he said afterwards.

"I felt so proud. I dedicate this title to all the Tunisian people. You have a champion now!"

His Tunis-based coach Jabrane Touili danced up and down the rows of empty seats left empty because of the coronavirus-related ban on spectators. "I train alone with my coaches, it is difficult but the result speaks for itself," Hafnaoui said.

Skateboarder makes history

A Japanese skateboarder claimed a piece of Olympic history as the host nation enjoyed a gold rush on Sunday.

There were 18 gold medals up for grabs, including the first ever in skateboarding, one of several new sports introduced in Tokyo in a bid to attract younger fans.

A perfectly scripted final saw Japanese world champion Yuto Horigome strike gold. "This is special because it was held in Koto City, where I was born," said Horigome.

Horigome's victory was one of four golds Japan won on Sunday to take the host nation to second in the medals table behind China.

Earlier, unheralded swimmer Yui Ohashi had sparked the Japan gold spree in an action-packed morning session at the pool. Ohashi powered to victory in the women's 400



Japan's Yuto Horigome in action en route to his skateboarding gold

individual medley, topping Hungary's defending champion Katinka Hosszu.

The other swimming medals were split between the US and Australia, with Chase Kalisz winning the 400m medley and Australia taking gold in the women's 4x100m freestyle relay in a world record 3:29.69.

Austrian mathematician Anna Kiesenhofer claimed a surprise victory in the women's cycling road race, which ended in bizarre fashion with Dutch veteran Annemiek van Vleuten crossing the line mistakenly thinking she had won. Van Vleuten was oblivious to the fact that Kiesenhofer had broken away from the peloton to take gold.

Elsewhere on Sunday, a century-long wait to see surfing

at the Olympics came to an end at Tsurigasaki Surfing Beach.

It marked the culmination of efforts to get surfing added to the Olympic programme dating back more than 100 years.

In gymnastics, US superstar and defending champion Simone Biles produced a rusty performance in qualifying. Biles rolled her eyes after one unsteady landing on the vault and had her performance director Tom Forster shaking his head in disbelief after a shaky end to her beam routine.

"Simone took three big steps on the beam dismount, I've never seen her do that before," said Forster. "This is not the finals, this is getting into the finals, this might be a great awakening for us," he said.

AFP

OMAN AT OLYMPICS

Four-in-a row for Zadjali

Our Correspondent
Muscat

It his fourth successive participation at the Olympic Games as an official, an achievement in itself for Oman's Shuaib al Zadjali.

The Doping Control Officer (DCO) at the Tokyo 2020 Olympic Games is a widely experienced official and is well-respected among his fraternity for his outstanding work over the past many years in curbing the doping menace.

Zadjali is also the acting general secretary of the Oman Anti-Doping Committee and began his Olympic journey as a DCO at the Beijing Olympic Games in 2008. He was then nominated for the next two Games - London (2012) and Rio (2016) before his latest inclusion at the Tokyo Games.

On his fourth successive participation, Zadjali said, "It is a great honour to attend the world's biggest sporting spec-



Shuaib al Zadjali

tacle as an anti-doping official. It is a great learning experience for me as I get a chance to interact with the top experts.

"The selection process is tough and I am happy to represent Oman at the Olympics and Paralympic Games."

Zadjali will be at work for nearly 50 days as he has also

been nominated for the Paralympic Games later in August.

He thanked the support of the Oman Olympic Committee (OOC) and Oman Anti-Doping Committee. Besides the Olympic Games, Zadjali has also worked with the anti-doping team at the 2018 FIFA World Cup in Russia and Asian Games since 2006.

Elsewhere, experienced marksman, Hamed al Khatri, will arrive in Tokyo on Monday. This is Khatri's second Games participation after Rio and he will compete in 50m rifle three position event. He will be accompanied by head coach, Sultan al Rushaidi and administrative member Suleiman al Hinai.

On Wednesday Oman's sprinters - Barakat al Harthi and Mazoon al Alawi - and weightlifter Amur al Khanjari will arrive in Tokyo from Oman while swimmer Issa al Adawi will be in action in the 100m freestyle heat on Tuesday.

OUTSIDE OLYMPICS

IPL to resume in UAE on September 19

New Delhi, India - The Indian Premier League (IPL), the world's richest cricket tournament, will resume in the UAE on September 19, more than four months after it was suspended due to the COVID-19 pandemic, officials said on Sunday.

"A total number of 31 matches will be played in the duration of 27 days," said a statement by the Board of Control for Cricket in India (BCCI).

"The 14th season, which was postponed in May this year in the wake of the pandemic, will resume on September 19th in Dubai with a blockbuster clash between Chennai Super Kings and Mumbai Indians."

The tournament was only half finished when it was halted in India on May 4 after a number of players and team officials caught coronavirus despite being in bio-secure bubbles. Under the new schedule, 13 matches will be held in Dubai, ten in Sharjah and eight in Abu Dhabi.

The final will be staged in

Dubai on October 15, just two days before the rescheduled T20 World Cup gets underway, also in the Gulf (UAE and Oman).

In the new-look IPL, there will be seven double headers. The final game of the league stage will be played between Royal Challengers Bangalore and Delhi Capitals on October 8. The first qualifier will be played in Dubai on October 10 with the eliminator qualifier 2 to be played in Sharjah on October 11 and 13.

The T20 World Cup will be staged in Oman and the UAE from October 17-November 14.

The sultanate will host the first round of the T20 World Cup. Oman have been pooled in Group B along with Bangladesh, Papua New Guinea and Scotland. The Group B matches will be held at the Oman Cricket Academy ground in Muscat. Group A comprises Sri Lanka, Ireland, Netherlands and Namibia. The ICC is yet to release the schedule of the T20 World Cup.

Agencies

Every day, all day!

