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REINFORCING TIES

HM's visit to Saudi Arabia launches an important stage of strong relations and cooperation in all fields

Neom, Saudi Arabia - A joint statement issued by Oman and Saudi Arabia appreciated the landmark visit of His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik to the kingdom which has paved the way for fruitful bilateral agreements and development of both the countries' economies.

His Majesty the Sultan and the Custodian of the Two Holy Mosques King Salman bin Abdulaziz al Saud held a session of talks on Sunday in the presence of Prince Mohammed bin Salman bin Abdulaziz al Saud, Crown Prince, Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Defence, when they reviewed ways to develop cooperation between the two countries in various fields. They praised the current level of cooperation and coordination in political, military and security sectors that will facilitate security and stability of the two brotherly countries.

Omani-Saudi Coordination Council set up

The two sides welcomed the signing of a memorandum of understanding on the establishment of an Omani-Saudi Coordination Council co-chaired by the foreign ministers of both countries to strengthen bilateral relations in all fields. They also agreed to direct the concerned bodies to expedite the opening of a direct land route and border crossing, which will contribute to the smooth movement of citizens of the two countries and integration of supply chains as a prelude to achieving economic integration between the two brotherly countries.

They welcomed the fruitful interaction between the ministers of the two countries to discuss issues of mutual interest. They also directed the concerned officials to work on finalising a number of agreements and memoranda of understanding for cooperation in economic, commercial, investment, security, cultural, diplomatic and educational fields and in every aspect that will enhance benefits and common interests to bring about prosperity and growth to the peoples of the two countries.

Continued on Page 02



HM returns, appreciates Saudi hospitality

Muscat - His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik returned to Oman on Monday after a fruitful meeting with the Custodian of the Two Holy Mosques King Salman bin Abdulaziz al Saud of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia.

His Majesty the Sultan was seen off at Neom Bay Airport by Prince Mohammed bin Salman al Saud, Crown Prince, Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Defence.

While leaving, His Majesty the Sultan sent a cable of thanks to King Salman. In the cable, His Majesty the Sultan expressed his heartfelt appreciation for the hospitality accorded to him and his delegation.

His Majesty the Sultan lauded the outcome of the visit, notably the talks, joint meetings and agreements, which he said will have a positive impact on consolidating the deep-rooted historical ties. This, His Majesty affirmed, will bring about several benefits to the peoples of the two countries.

His Majesty the Sultan prayed to Almighty Allah to grant King Salman continued good health. He wished the people of Saudi Arabia further progress and prosperity under the wise leadership of the Custodian of the Two Holy Mosques.
ONA



King Salman bin Abdulaziz al Saud sees off His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik for the day at Neom Palace on Sunday



Prince Mohammed bin Salman bin Abdulaziz al Saud bids farewell to His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik at Neom Bay Airport on Monday

HM visits Ithra Centre at Neom City



Neom, Saudi Arabia - His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik visited Ithra Centre, an advanced knowledge institution affiliated to King Abdulaziz Centre for World Culture in Neom City on Sunday night.

His Majesty the Sultan was received by Prince Mohammed bin Salman al Saud, Crown Prince, Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Defence. The reception party included senior Saudi officials, as well as the centre's CEO and working team.

His Majesty the Sultan toured Ithra Centre and had a close look at the major projects that stem from Saudi Vision 2030.

At the conclusion of the tour, His Majesty the Sultan signed the Visitors' Register, in which he expressed his appreciation for the efforts made by those running the centre and wished them success in their mission.

The state-of-the-art Ithra Centre is set up on an area of 80,000sqm in an innovative display envisaged by Saudi Aramco. Its external structure combines the best of traditional and modern architectures that portray the kingdom's brilliant future outlook.

Saudi Aramco envisioned the Ithra Centre to be a space for transformative experiences to unlock the power of potential through mastery in arts, science, literature and innovation. The facility includes an Idea Lab, a library, Ithra Theatre, a cinema, Ithra Museum, a children's museum, Energy Exhibit, The Great Hall, and Ithra Tower, all of which provide engaging and revolutionary experiences.

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Reinforcing ties

Continued from Page 01

The two sides emphasised their intention to increase the pace of economic cooperation between the two countries by encouraging government and private sectors to realise meaningful commercial and investment exchanges. Such cooperation will help realise the aspirations and expectations of the peoples of the two countries and contribute to achieving the targets of the Saudi Arabia's Vision 2030 and the sultanate's Vision 2040. This can be done through the launch of a number of joint initiatives covering key fields of cooperation, including investment in the Duqm and cooperation in the fields of energy, culture, sports and tourism in addition to partnership in food security.

The leaders also welcomed the virtual meeting of Omani-Saudi Business Council that was held via videoconferencing on July 4 with the participation of the chairman of Oman Chamber of Commerce and Industry, the head of the Saudi Chambers Federation and chairpersons of the Omani-Saudi Business Council in both countries.



United Nations Security Council Resolution 2216, as well as the Saudi initiative to end the Yemeni crisis and alleviate the suffering of the brotherly people of Yemeni.

They also stressed the importance of cooperation and dealing effectively with all aspects and repercussions of the Iranian nuclear and ballistic missile file in such a way that will contribute to achieving regional and international security and stability. They also emphasised the principle of good neighbourliness, respect for the resolutions of the United Nations, and international legitimacy to spare the region from all that may destabilise security.

At the end of the visit, His Majesty the Sultan expressed his deep gratitude to his brother King Salman and to Prince Mohammed bin Salman for the warm reception and generous hospitality accorded to His Majesty and the accompanying delegation.

His Majesty Sultan extended an invitation to King Salman to visit Oman. On his part, King Salman welcomed and expressed his appreciation for the invitation.

He also expressed his best wishes to His Majesty the Sultan and wished further progress and prosperity to the brotherly Omani people.

They stressed the necessity to continue cooperation to support oil market stability.

They also welcomed strengthening cooperation to adopt the Circular Carbon Economy approach as approved by G20 as an integrated and comprehensive framework to address and manage the challenges arising from greenhouse gas emissions. This will be achieved in an economically sustainable way to manage emissions through the application of reduction, reuse, recycle and elimination. The two sides noted the importance of the use of renewable energy sources and technologies as these contribute to sustaining global energy supplies.

The two sides also welcomed the participation of Saudi companies in investing in quality projects in the sultanate.

Support for regional security and stability

The two sides also exchanged views on regional and international issues of mutual interest and agreed to coordinate their positions in a way that would serve their interests and support security and stability in the region and the entire world.

Regarding Yemen, the two sides expressed an identical view on the need to continue their efforts to find a comprehensive political settlement to the Yemeni crisis based on a Gulf Cooperation Council initiative and its executive mechanism, the outcome of Yemen's Comprehensive National Dialogue Conference, the

Focus on food security, environment

The two sides agreed to strengthen cooperation in the fields of environment, food security and the Middle East Green Initiative unveiled by Prince Mohammed bin Salman in the light of the benefit at local, regional and global levels.

The two sides lauded the efforts of the OPEC + countries, led by Saudi Arabia and with the participation of Oman, which have brought about stability and balance to oil markets, despite the weak demand resulting from the successive waves of the coronavirus pandemic, which is still affecting a large part of the world.

Omani, Saudi investments scope explored

Our Correspondent Muscat

As part of His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik's visit to the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, ministers from both sides explored ways of enhancing cooperation in commercial and investment fields where the two sides identified broad lines of cooperation to boost their private sectors.

Abdulsalam bin Mohammed al Murshidi, Chairman of Oman Investment Authority (OIA), held a meeting with Khalid al Faleh, Saudi Minister of Investment, during which they identified areas of cooperation with a view to promote their respective private sectors. It also touched on projects capable of consolidating economic integration.

Ministers from both sides explored ways of enhancing cooperation in commercial and investment fields

Murshidi told ONA that it was agreed to form a joint action team between OIA and its Saudi counterpart. The team will be entrusted to conduct preliminary studies for the envisaged projects. He pointed out that the meeting was an opportunity to promote the advantages of the economic zones and ports of the sultanate, which he said was projected not only as a gateway to

the east, but also as a gateway for Saudi products targeting East Africa.

Said bin Hamoud al Ma'awali, Minister of Transport, Communications and Information Technology, also held a meeting with his Saudi counterpart Saleh bin Nasser al Jasser, Minister of Transport and Logistics.

The meeting discussed means of enhancing cooperation in the logistics sector through land transport, air transport, railways and the carriageway that will connect the two countries - the Ramlat Khaliya highway. "The meeting explored ways of harnessing Omani-Saudi experience in the field of electronic trade," Ma'awali said.

On his part, Qais bin Mohammed al Yousef, Minister of

Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion, met Dr Majid bin Abdullah al Qasabi, Saudi Minister of Commerce, when they discussed cooperation in commercial and investment fields and envisaged working plans towards this goal.

"The meeting underscored the importance of consolidating commercial exchange and the flow of business activities between the two countries and agreed to form a working team to undertake this mission," Yousef said.

After separate meetings, the Omani and Saudi ministers held a roundtable meeting focused on economic feasibility projects. It was agreed that OIA and the Saudi Ministry of Investment will conduct feasibility studies for joint economic projects.

ANNOUNCEMENT

Internal Tender Committee, Ministry of Labour, invites the following Bidding:

Bidding No.	Bidding Description	Establishments entitled to subscription	Last date of tender submission	Documents fee (RO)
01/2021	Management and operation of coffe shop at Muttrah Business District.	-----	24/08/2021 at 10:00 am	R.O 25/=

- Specialized establishments can obtain documents of bidding from the Department of Treasury, third floor, the Ministry's Building at Airport Heights, against a non refundable amount specified above, starting from Tuesday 13/07/2021.
- Each bid is to be attached with a bank guarantee or a certified cheque from one of the banks operating in the Sultanate of (1%) of the value of the tender for the Ministry of Manpower, valid for a period of (90) days from the date of submission of the tender.
- Bids are to be submitted in closed envelopes sealed with red wax and addressed to His Excellency Sheikh Chairman of the Internal Tender Committee, and the name and number of the tender must be written on the envelope with no reference to the bidder.
- Tenders are to be put in the box of tenders of the Internal Tender Committee, ground floor of the Ministry's Building at Airport Heights, no later than the date of submission. They will be opened at 11:00 am the same day.
- Prorty will be given to the owners of SMEs.

(The Ministry is not bound to accept the lowest price of or any tender)

labour_OMAN

1.35mn covering 38% of target group vaccinated

Our Correspondent
Muscat

A total of 1,359,065 individuals, representing 38 per cent of the targeted 3.7mn, have been vaccinated against COVID-19, according to the latest statistics released by the Ministry of Health (MoH).

Of the total vaccinated, 80 per cent have received one and 20 per cent got two doses of approved vaccines.

The MoH issued a statement on Monday about changing working hours at vaccination centres in Muscat.

'The Directorate General of Health Services in the Governorate of Muscat announces an amendment in the timing of vaccination centres in line with the decisions of the Supreme Committee to deal with COVID-19.'

The Oman Convention and Exhibition Centre in Muscat and Al Sahel Health Centre in the wilayat of Quriyat will be open



(Supplied photo)

from Sunday to Thursday from 8am to 2.30pm.

The MoH called on all individuals in the target group to book vaccine appointments in advance

through the Tarassud+ mobile app or covid19.moh.gov.om before heading to the approved government centres for immunisation in order to ensure a safe

national vaccination drive.

According to Ibrahim al Maimani, social activist and data analyst, the number of patients admitted in hospitals significantly

decreased to 119 in the last 24 hours. The drop in this number will take pressure off hospitals and intensive care units. Additionally, there is an increase in re-

COVID-19 cases, deaths drop

Our Correspondent
Muscat

The Ministry of Health (MoH) on Monday reported 1,167 new cases and 12 deaths. With this, the total number of cases registered in the sultanate has now reached 286,072, including 3,435 deaths.

The number of hospitalisations is also seen decreasing with 119 patients admitted to hospitals across the country in a 24-hour period on Monday, accounting for a total of 1,341 inpatients, including 477 under intensive care.

The number of active cases is decreasing as recoveries increase. 'The total number of recoveries is now 259,550 after 1,861 COVID-19 patients recovered on Monday, reflecting a recovery rate of 90.7 per cent,' an MoH statement said.



EA to use drones to monitor nature reserves

Our Correspondent
Muscat

The Environment Authority (EA) is planning to use drones to monitor work at nature reserves and keep a tab on encroachments.

A trial run was conducted during a field visit of its chairman H E Dr Abdullah bin Ali al Omari to Jebel Qahwan Nature Reserve and Al Saleel Natural Park on Monday morning.

The EA said that chairman's visits meant to 'see and discuss the challenges faced in the functioning of the two reserves'.



(Supplied photo)

H E Omari was accompanied by the governor of South Sharqiyah, wali of Al Kamil W'Al

Wafi, and the director general of Nature Conservation. 'During the field visits, an ex-

periment was conducted with the use of modern technologies (drones) for monitoring work, collecting biological data and assessing the environmental situation. The drones experiment will be applied to the Jebel Qahwan Nature Reserve to control all encroachments on the components of the reserve, which are characterised by a complex topographic nature,' the EA stated.

Nature reserves in Oman are a major tourist attraction, offering scenic nature, camping and diving to enjoy coral reefs and other underwater treasures.

Tharwa organises online Eid habta; livestock to be delivered at doorstep

Our Correspondent
Muscat

The traditional habtas (markets for animals), which are commonplace during Eid al Adha and deal in livestock apart from other commodities, are not taking place this year owing to COVID-19 pandemic.

However, the online platform Tharwa is holding an electronic auction on Tuesday.

As per the Supreme Committee's decisions, all habta markets and gatherings in the sultanate

have been cancelled.

"Tharwa enables consumers and breeders to buy and sell livestock through online bidding in all the governorates," an official at Tharwa said.

"Bidding starts on July 13 (today) from 6am and lasts till 10pm via www.tharwaoman.om. Livestock will be delivered to the highest bidder at his doorstep."

Tharwa supports the Omani food industry, livestock owners, breeders and livestock delivery.

"The platform provides a communication channel be-

tween suppliers and consumers in the retail sector, as well. It also provides a variety of livestock, such as Omani and Somali goats, lamb and cows, as well as lamb from Sudan, Australia, South Africa, and Turkish goats, among others," the official added.

The platform enables marketing and supply of domestic and imported meat in the sultanate.

The company can be contacted though www.tharwaoman.om, or Tharwap on Twitter and tharwa.platform on Instagram.

Heavy rains expected: CAA

Our Correspondent
Muscat

The Civil Aviation Authority's Directorate General of Meteorology has issued a weather warning on a low-pressure system over the Arabian Sea, which started affecting parts of Oman on Monday, assessing its potential to continue for a few days.

A statement issued by the Civil Aviation Authority (CAA) said, 'An analysis by the National Multi-Hazards Early Warning Centre shows a trough extending from the Arabian Sea towards the sultanate starting on Monday implying chances of cloud advection with isolated rain and occasional thundershowers over the governorates of Dhofar, Al Wusta and South Sharqiyah.'

There are chances of cloud development along the Al Hajar Mountains and adjoining areas with thundershowers. The state of the sea will be rough along the Arabian Sea with waves reaching maximum three to four metres of height. The Sea of Oman will be moderate with waves of maximum height of 1.5m to 2.5m.

REGIONAL WEATHER		
	Max	Min
Abu Dhabi	45	34
Doha	39	30
Kuwait City	45	33
Manama	44	31
Riyadh	45	28

PRAYER TIMINGS	
Fajr	3.59am
Sunrise	5.28am
Duhr	12.12pm
Asr	3.32pm
Maghrib	6.56pm
Isha	8.26pm

Tender Announcement

Muscat Electricity Distribution Company S.A.O.C Invites Interested Companies To Participate In The Following Tender

Tender No.	Description	Last Date of Buying	Date of Submission	Grade	Sit Visit	Attendee	Tender Price (R.O)
MEDC- 09/2021	Asset Replacement at Rusayl Industrial I Primary Substation (P103)	29/07/2021	24/08/2021	A	02/08/2021 @ 9:00 AM at MEDC head office	One Electrical, Civil Engineer & One Protection Engineer with Full PPE	157,500

The table below shows the instructions for participation: -

Participation	- Companies registered with Tender Board may obtain Tender documents. - The amount specified above is including 5 % VAT. - The amount specified above is Non-Refundable payment (Terms and Condition apply) - For payment procedure and to obtain the tender document, please contact us via e-mail Contract@medcoman.com 24588600 – Ext: 8577 - 8726
Purchase timing	Tender documents can be purchased at the official working time between 08:00 – 13:00 hours
Enquiries	Any inquiry can be sent using clarification available in the tender documents , one week before bid submission date
Tender Submission	- Tenders should be submitted in a sealed and stamped envelope addressed to the CHAIRMAN OF INTERNAL TENDER COMMITTEE, MUSCAT ELECTRICITY DISTRIBUTION CO. marked only with tender number and the subject - Please follow SUBMISSION OF TENDER mentioned in clause 20.0 in Prime Document
Guarantee	- The Tender should enclose a bank guarantee or a certified cheque issued by any bank in the Sultanate of Oman Unconditional and irrevocable and shall be disbursement as soon as it is submitted for the value of (1%) of the tender value valid for a period of at least ninety (90) days from the last date of tender submission and addressed to the CHAIRMAN OF INTERNAL TENDER COMMITTEE, MUSCAT ELECTRICITY DISTRIBUTION COMPANY S.A.O.C. - Any bid that does not meet the bank guarantee will not be considered Any bid that does not meet the bank guarantee will not be considered
Terms and Conditions	- The name of the bidder, other marks or any reference must not be specified on the envelope - Tenders received after the deadline stated in the Invitation to Tender, including any extension thereof, for any reason whatsoever will not be considered - The Tender shall be valid for a period of at least ninety (90) days from the last date of tender submission - If the submission date extended, the bank guarantee or a certified cheque shall be extended in accordance with the bid extension date - MEDC is not bound to consent the lowest Bid or any other Tenders. - Preference of awarding the tender will be given to those bidders who achieved a high percentage of purchasing from Local Products and have a High-level percentage of Omanization - Muscat Electricity Distribution Company gives priority to award the projects to SMEs companies. - For projects whose value is less than OMR 10K, the priority to award will be given to registered companies that hold a valid certificate Of Reyadah
Bid Placement	The Completed Tender should be deposited in the Tender Box No. 1 in the ground floor of MEDC Head Office building at Airport Heights, before 10 a.m. on the assigned date of tender submission

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Sohar International plans to open branch in Saudi Arabia

Our Correspondent
Muscat

Sohar International Bank is planning to open its first full-fledged overseas branch in Saudi Arabia. The bank is in process of submitting its application to the Saudi central bank to obtain the banking license.

'The board of directors of Sohar International would like to announce to the market and shareholders that it is in the process of submitting an application to the Saudi Arabian Monetary Authority (SAMA) for a banking license to open a full-fledged branch of Sohar International in Saudi Arabia, subject to regulatory approvals both in Saudi Arabia and Oman,' Sohar International said in a disclosure submitted to the Mus-



cat Stock Exchange (MSX) on Monday.

This step, the bank said, 'comes in line with Sohar International's consistent endeavours to take the best of Oman to the world and bring the best of the world to Oman, while following its customers and their businesses wherever they go and to offer responsive services

in this ever changing world'.

The board of directors of Sohar International affirmed to the shareholders and market that this step [opening branch in Saudi Arabia] comes in line with the bank's strategy to support Oman's Vision 2040.

'The board believes that, with its capabilities and ownership structure, Sohar International is

very well positioned to make this endeavour a success,' the bank said in its disclosure.

It added that Sohar International's board of directors shall keep the market and shareholders updated with any further progress on this matter.

Sohar International, as per the disclosure submitted to the MSX on Thursday, is planning to issue a rights issue of RO50mn as a response to the bank's increased international and regional focus and to further strengthen the quality of its capital base.

The bank's board of directors has resolved, by circulation, to issue the RO50mn rights issue. The issue will be subject to obtaining final regulatory approvals from the Central Bank of Oman and the Capital Market Authority, Sohar International said.

Commercial Bank withdraws offer to raise stake in NBO

Our Correspondent
Muscat

Commercial Bank of Qatar has withdrawn the offer to increase its stake in National Bank of Oman (NBO) by acquiring an additional 15.2 per cent share capital from NBO shareholders.

The Qatari bank, earlier in June, issued a public announcement to all NBO shareholders to acquire additional 15.2 per cent of issued share capital which would have increased Commercial Bank's shareholding in NBO to 50.1 per cent.

NBO on Monday informed the Muscat Stock Exchange that Commercial Bank has announced, through the offer manager, that the offer of acquisition has been accepted by certain shareholders of NBO, representing 7.74 per cent of the shares of the issued capital of NBO.



'Since the acceptance by NBO shareholders is less than the 15.2 per cent minimum threshold acceptance by Commercial Bank for the acquisition, Commercial Bank has decided to exercise the option of withdrawing the offer in its entirety,' NBO said in a disclosure.

Commercial Bank is already the biggest shareholder of NBO, currently holding 34.9 per cent of the issued share capital in the Omani lender.

Commercial Bank, on June 3, offered an offer price of 200bz per share to NBO shareholders which represented an 18 per cent premium to NBO's closing share price on June 2.

Commercial Bank' share acquisition offer opened on June 10 and closed on July 11. The record date for the purpose of the offer was set on June 9.

The Qatari lender in June had said that it will support NBO from a capital perspective when needed so that NBO may meet its regulatory requirements and support growth of its business.

'Commercial Bank will also support NBO with business process enhancements and use of agile frameworks to execute plans which will result in improved operational performance, optimised efficiencies and improved productivity,' the bank had said.

GE and Marafiq sign deal to build new power plant at SEZAD

Our Correspondent
Muscat

GE Gas Power has signed an agreement to build, own and operate a power plant equipped with mobile TM2500 aeroderivative gas turbines for the Centralized Utilities Company (Marafiq) in Duqm.

Rural Areas Electricity Company (Tanweer) will purchase from Marafiq the power generated at the new plant in the Special Economic Zone at Duqm



(SEZAD) pursuant to a power purchase agreement entered into by and between Tanweer and Marafiq.

Tanweer is an Oman-government owned company mandated to provide power in various regions of the country, including the Special Economic Zone in Duqm.

GE will supply four TM2500 units for the project.

These four units will be made available to provide up to 80MW of power.

'GE is expected to commission the plant in as little as five months' time. The facility will then be operated for a minimum of three years, until the area is connected to the main 400kV grid,' a press statement said.

Often described as GE's 'Power Plant on Wheels', the TM2500 aeroderivative gas turbine is an easy to install, fast power, complete turnkey energy solution that can be redeployed from one location to another.

The TM2500 units will re-

place power currently generated by diesel generators in Duqm. This will lead to significant environmental benefits.

Ahmed al Harthy, Tanweer's acting CEO, said, "The Special Economic Zone at Duqm is a major new driver of socio-economic development in Oman.

"Tanweer's, Marafiq's and GE's focus was to identify a reliable power solution that could be implemented quickly and in a more environmentally sustainable and cost-effective manner

than diesel-fueled technologies."

Hamed Ali al Wahibi, general manager of business development and strategy at Marafiq, said, "GE's TM2500 solution is an excellent fit for this new project at Duqm."

Joseph Anis, president and CEO of GE Gas Power Europe, Middle East and Africa, said, "We are honored to support Marafiq and Tanweer on their journey to further strengthen and decarbonize the power sector in Duqm."

First phase of Dhamani platform to be launched in September 2021

Our Correspondent
Muscat

The first phase of the electronic platform for the health insurance system in Oman (Dhamani) is expected to be launched in September this year, according to the Capital Market Authority (CMA).

The CMA on Monday announced the commencement of the introductory programmes of the Dhamani platform in preparation for launch of the first phase of this platform. The Dhamani platform will be rolled out in three phases.

The introductory programme targets the providers of insurance and healthcare services in Oman and IT solutions firms focusing on acquainting the participants with the platform and its role in health insurance transactions. The program will cover medical coding, electronic transfer of funds and other areas such as investment opportunities

available in the Dhamani platform for IT and innovation firms, the CMA said in a press statement. The CMA will execute the introductory programme of Dhamani platform in a specific timeframe for each healthcare and insurance service provider through the Zoom platform. The first meeting will be on July 27 for insurance companies and health insurance third party administrators. The second meeting will be on August 2 for private health institutions and the third meeting will be held on August 5 for private health institutions and IT solutions firms. A general meeting will be held on August 9 for handling the general questions.

The Dhamani platform will be a link between the regulators and supervisors in the sultanate including the Ministry of Health, Ministry of Labour, Royal Oman Police, insurance and health services providers to exchange data and information related to health insurance service.

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Space - final frontier for billionaire Branson

London, UK – As famous for his thrill-seeking lifestyle and publicity stunts as for his vast business empire, Richard Branson can now check 'astronaut' off his to-do list after successfully completing his first spaceflight.

The avowed 'Star Trek' fan attributed his drive and taste for adventure to his mother Eve, who died from COVID-19 in January.

"Dear Mum, you always told me to reach for the stars. Well, I took my own winding road, but I always knew to follow your lead," he said in a video tribute that aired before the VSS Unity spaceplane took off on Sunday.

The Virgin group boss, whose net worth amounts to US\$5.7bn, according to Forbes magazine, made his initial fortune in the record industry in the 1970s.

The London-born entrepreneur, now 70, has since launched a string of successful companies in sectors as diverse as railways and mobile phones, as well as Virgin Atlantic airlines.

But there have been plenty of missteps.

His failures include a short-lived attempt at Formula One racing, a stab at the soft drinks market with Virgin Cola, and a wedding company called Virgin Bride, which some said existed only because of the name.

An early breakthrough

Branson was said to have been a below-average student who suffered from dyslexia, with his headmaster at a private school in southern England apparently telling him he would either go to prison or become a millionaire.

He set up Virgin Records when he was just 20 and earned his first million pounds three years later, buying his own Caribbean island a few years afterwards. The record label's breakthrough came with 'Tubular Bells', a 1973 instrumental album by the British musician Mike Oldfield, which sold millions of copies.



Astronaut Chris Hadfield (right) presents wings to Sir Richard Branson and other crew members after Branson flew into space aboard a Virgin Galactic vessel on Sunday (AFP)

His mother was a flight attendant, so perhaps he was following in the family footsteps when he set up his airline in 1984.

But his business practices and publicity stunts since then have

irked many.

In 2006, it emerged that Virgin Atlantic and British Airways had engaged in price fixing, though his firm avoided any punishment because they tipped off

the authorities.

And last year, Branson asked the British government for £500mn to help Virgin Atlantic weather the economic fallout of the COVID-19 lockdown, despite

having paid no income tax in Britain for more than a decade.

Politicians accused him of 'milking the system'.

In 2012, a columnist for The Guardian newspaper compared Branson to the WikiLeaks founder Julian Assange 'in that both believe the world revolves around them'. That was a bit ironic, as Branson has tried and failed several times to become the first person to go around the world nonstop in a balloon.

'Space is hard'

At the age of 28, Branson bought Necker Island, where he has hosted lavish parties and get-aways for celebrities and political leaders including former US president Barack Obama and his wife Michelle.

Much of the publicity surrounding Branson over the years has been based around his adventuring; he has tackled a number of records in speedboats, balloons and even an amphibious car.

These exploits brought him close to tragedy in 1998, when he and his co-pilot were forced to ditch their balloon in the Pacific Ocean after low pressure forced the craft down. His efforts in recent years have focused on his space tourism company, founded in 2004 and based in the Mojave desert in California.

Branson, who was knighted in 2000 for his services to entrepreneurship, had hoped to join a commercial flight with Virgin Galactic as early as 2009.

But its timeline was hit by a series of delays, including a tragic crash in 2014 that claimed the life of a test pilot.

Ever the showman, Branson unveiled a Willy Wonka-esque competition for space enthusiasts to win two free tickets on Virgin Galactic flights, following Sunday's successful flight.

"I promise lots of chocolate," he joked, comparing himself to the beloved Roald Dahl character.

AFP

Record revenues flow from Suez despite megaship blockage

Cairo, Egypt – The Suez Canal netted Egypt a record US\$5.84bn in the last tax year, its chief said Sunday, despite the coronavirus pandemic's impact on world trade plus a six-day blockage by a giant cargo ship.

"Despite various challenges, revenues from the canal rose sharply" in the fiscal year ending June 30, said Osama Rabie, head of the Suez Canal Authority chief (SCA).

Authorities netted "the highest revenues in the history of the canal, hitting US\$5.84bn", over two per cent up from the previous year, he said in a statement.

Rabie said the SCA's "market-ing and flexible pricing policies (had) helped maintain a good rate of traffic through the canal and earned the trust of our partners." But the period was far from plain sailing.

The statement came just four days after the huge container



Suez Canal Authority chief Osama Rabie speaks during a press conference after the release of the Panama-flagged MV 'Ever Given' container ship, on July 5 (AFP)

ship MV Ever Given, which had blocked the vital waterway for six days in March, finally steamed away after its Japanese owners reached a compensation deal with Cairo.

The nearly 200,000-tonne vessel had run aground and become wedged across the canal during a sandstorm on March 23,

blocking a vital artery from Asia to Europe that carries 10 per cent of global maritime trade and provides Egypt with vital revenues.

It was only refloated six days later, after a huge salvage operation that saw one SCA employee killed.

Egypt, which takes a toll from ships traversing the canal, said

the crisis cost it as much as US\$15mn per day, while maritime insurers estimated the cost to world trade to be in the billions. The SCA said some 9,763 ships had passed through the canal in the first six months of the year, two per cent more than the same period last year.

AFP

EU puts digital tax plan 'on hold' during OECD talks

Brussels, Belgium – The European Commission said Monday it would delay its plan to propose an EU digital tax in order to not jeopardise efforts to secure a global deal on fairer taxation.

After an "extraordinary" breakthrough at G20 talks on Saturday, "we have decided to put on hold our work on a proposal for a digital levy", an EU spokesman said, a day after Washington asked Brussels to delay its tax plan.

Meeting in Venice, G20 finance ministers on Saturday endorsed a plan agreed by 132 countries to overhaul the way multinational companies, including US digital giants, are taxed.

The G20 called on negotiators to swiftly address the remaining issues and finalise the agreement by October. They approved the result of negotiations at the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD)



for a global minimum corporate tax rate of at least 15 per cent, and to allow nations to tax a share of the profits of the world's biggest companies regardless of where they are headquartered.

The European Commission has insisted its new levy plan, that was due to be unveiled later this month, would conform with whatever is agreed at the OECD and would hit thousands of com-

panies, including European ones.

Money raised from the digital tax is intended to help pay for the bloc's 750bn-euro post-pandemic recovery plan.

Three EU countries – including Ireland, which has become a European base for a raft of US companies thanks to low tax rates – have yet to sign up to the OECD agreement.

AFP

US Treasury Secretary urges EU to spend more, reject austerity

Brussels, Belgium – US Treasury Secretary Janet Yellen on Monday urged EU member states to reject austerity and take further stimulus measures to boost the European economy.

The unusually blunt message from the former US federal reserve chief came as countries in Europe are divided on what to do next to help the EU economy and to support a post-pandemic recovery.

"Going forward, it is important that member states seriously consider additional fiscal measures to ensure a robust domestic and global recovery," Yellen said in prepared remarks to a meeting of EU finance ministers in Brussels.

While praising the EU's economic response to the coronavirus so far, Yellen noted that: "I think we all agree that uncertainty remains high" and that public spending in Europe and the US should remain supportive through 2022.

Yellen also gave advice on how to redesign the EU's budgetary rules going forward, urging that countries should have the ability to respond swiftly to a crisis, even if this meant run-



US Treasury Secretary Janet Yellen attends a Eurogroup meeting at the EU headquarters in Brussels on Monday (AFP)

ning up deficits and debt.

"An essential part of a durable recovery is creating an EU fiscal framework with sufficient flexibility to allow countries to respond forcefully to crises," she said.

She said the EU's spending rules should not lead to "procyclical economic outcomes", the technical term for choosing austerity over spending when a serious downturn hits.

The advice goes against the path chosen by Europe during the eurozone debt crisis, when the EU, under the direction of Germany, imposed stringent

budget cuts on crisis hit countries such as Greece, Portugal and Ireland.

In the pandemic crisis, Europe chose a different route, with the EU's 27 member states adopting a historic 750bn-euro recovery plan, raised from fresh borrowing on the markets.

That plan came despite the opposition of the so-called frugal states such as the Netherlands that want heavily indebted EU countries to embark on strict reforms in return of the financial aid.

AFP

Nord Stream 2 pipeline to be finished this summer

Berlin, Germany – The controversial Nord Stream 2 gas pipeline from Russia to Germany will be completed this summer, the head of the company behind the project said in an interview with German media on Sunday.

"We expect construction to be completed by the end of August," Matthias Warnig, CEO of the Swiss-based Nord Stream 2 AG, told the Handelsblatt financial daily.

Despite the threat of US sanctions, "we will have a pipeline

that meets all licensing requirements and international industry standards," he said, adding that he hoped it would be operational "before the end of this year".

The Nord Stream 2 pipeline, set to double natural gas supplies from Russia to Germany, has long divided European capitals and fuelled tensions with Washington.

The project is set to bypass Ukraine's pipeline infrastructure, depriving the country of around a billion euros annually in transit

fees and, Kiev fears, removing a key check on potential Russian aggression.

Poland and the Baltic states have also strongly opposed Nord Stream 2, fearful that Russian President Vladimir Putin will gain greater power over smaller countries that broke free from Moscow's control with the end of the Cold War.

But US President Joe Biden in May waived key sanctions on Nord Stream 2 after concluding that it was too late to stop the

project and it was better to seek cooperation with Germany.

US officials have previously voiced hope that Germany will agree to outline automatic retaliatory steps that would be triggered if Russia steps up pressure on Ukraine.

German Chancellor Angela Merkel will meet Ukraine's President Volodymyr Zelensky in Berlin on Monday and will travel to Washington to meet Biden later in the week.

AFP

Square making real-world wallet for bitcoin

San Francisco, US – Financial payments startup Square was last week at work on a real-world wallet for safely pocketing bitcoin cryptocurrency.

Square founder and chief Jack Dorsey, who is also the top executive at Twitter, had tweeted last month asking for feedback on the notion.

"This community's response to our thread about this project has been awesome – encouraging, generous, collaborative and inspiring," Jesse Dorogusker of the Square hardware team tweeted on Thursday.

"We have decided to build a hardware wallet and service to make bitcoin custody more



mainstream."

Dorsey endorsed Dorogusker's post with a tweet of "We're doing it #bitcoin."

Hardware wallets can be used to store digital currency offline, synching with applications for transactions on the internet as

needed.

Another option for cryptocurrency owners is to use 'virtual' wallets, essentially trusting third parties to keep money safe and using passwords to access funds.

Dorsey reasoned in tweets that bitcoin is a currency for the masses, and that it is important to have ways for people to hold it that don't involve entrusting it to outside parties.

"The exchange you used to buy your bitcoin probably attends to your security with good intent, but circumstances may reveal 'custody' actually means 'IOU,'" Dorsey tweeted in June.

"Deciding to take custody, and security, of your bitcoin is

complicated."

He envisioned a bitcoin wallet that makes it easy for people to use some of it for shopping, for example through smartphones, while protecting the rest of the cryptocurrency.

"We can imagine apps that work without Square and maybe also without permission from Apple and Google," he continued, referring to the makers of the world's big two smartphone operating systems.

Square will set up accounts at Twitter and software developer community website GitHub dedicated to the bitcoin wallet project, said Dorsey.

AFP



Two NBO customers walk away with RO250,000 each

National Bank of Oman (NBO) has wrapped up one of the most anticipated events of the year, the Al Kanz Savings Scheme half-yearly Mega Draw, with two lucky customers walking away with RO250,000 each.

Conducted at the NBO headquarters in Azaiba, the event also included the monthly Mazaya Exclusive draw, which gave RO10,000 each to four winners, and the Salary Transfer draw, with RO500 for each of the 50 winners. As one of the sul-

tanate's longest-running prize draw schemes, Al Kanz continues to offer life-changing cash prizes, benefiting over 1,200 customers across the sultanate in 2021 alone.

"At NBO, we continue to find new and exciting ways to support our customers' financial lives and promote a savings culture. Our prize draws are a great way for them to start, or supplement, their savings, and since every RO100 counts, there are infinite chances of winning," said

Tariq Atiq, chief retail and digital banking officer at NBO.

"We are excited to have reached the halfway mark of this year's scheme, through which we will ultimately give out RO3.251mn."

With prizes ranging from RO100 to RO250,000, the Al Kanz Savings Scheme continues to reward more people each year. Customers are eligible to win by maintaining an average minimum balance of RO100 in their Al Kanz Savings account.

Every RO100 provides an extra chance in the draw, so the more money kept in the account, the more the chance of winning. Meanwhile, customers simply have to transfer their salary to NBO to be in for the chance of winning in the Salary Transfer draw.

What's more, Al Kanz also includes Nuqati rewards, offering nine points for every RO100 deposited, one of many unique benefits available to account-holders.

Zubair SEC company launches carpet cleaning service



Zubair Small Enterprises Centre (Zubair SEC) member's company, Al Zahi al Shamelah, recently announced the soft launch of a new automatic carpet cleaning unit.

Founded by Zubair SEC member, Imad Ali Saif al Ghafri, Al Zahi al Shamelah is a comprehensive laundry service that offers carpet, upholstery, curtain, and sofa cleaning.

The new automatic carpet washing unit is a part of an ongoing expansion plan and is expected to open in mid-August.

The new carpet cleaning unit will feature ultra-modern equipment with innovative technology from GarMak.

The automatic machine offers an extra capacity that can wash over 1,000sqm per day and can accommodate carpets of different sizes with a width of up to 5m, at any given length. It will also eliminate hand-washing

mistakes and will save overall time, electricity and water consumption.

Other features include specialised equipment to dry clean, package and perfume carpets, alongside a private indoor room for the final drying.

Commenting on this new unit, Said al Sahib, director of Zubair SEC said, "We are extremely pleased to be a part of Imad Ali Saif al Ghafri's journey as he continues to expand his business, offering customers innovative products and services that complement their lifestyles."

"We continue to work with budding entrepreneurs like Imad, extending support to them when faced with challenges. At Zubair SEC, we strongly believe in the importance of the role that small enterprises play towards enhancing the national economy and contributing to the

sustainable socio-economic development of Oman. We wish Imad the very best in all his future endeavours."

From his side, Ghafri, general manager, Al Zahi Laundry said, "Services that help manage time more efficiently and offer customers best-in-class cleaning are a necessity. With the launch of this innovative carpet cleaning service, we will be able to offer our loyal customers high-end upholstery care that can be delivered to the customer's doorstep within 48 hours."

"This includes dusting, washing, drying, perfuming, packaging and delivery."

"We combine innovative technology to provide a high-quality and affordable laundry service. I would like to thank my advisors at Zubair SEC for the unwavering support they have provided to me every step of the way."



Stay connected with Ooredoo's Shababiah

More minutes, more data, and less worry! Ooredoo's prepaid Shababiah users can enjoy amazing value monthly plans that include minutes to Ooredoo and data all rolled into one. Stay connected during lockdown and in touch with family and friends over the Eid holidays, with more time to share and celebrate virtually.

New and existing users can sign up to get 3GB and 50 local minutes for RO5.250, or 5GB and 150 local minutes for

RO7.350. Making it even more exciting, customers can get a huge 12GB browsing data and 175 local minutes or, even better, 24GB and 350 local minutes. Now, Shababiah subscribers can surf, chat and stay connected for even longer!

Shababiah customers are spoilt for choice when it comes to selecting a suitable voice and data plan. To subscribe to a desired package, users can simply log-in to the award winning Ooredoo app or dial *555*55#.

Rado ambassador Ash Barty conquers Wimbledon!

Rado ambassador Ash Barty's star is rising higher and higher. In an interview last year with ABC News she was quoted, "One day I would love to be the champion here, it's a dream."

That dream became reality on Saturday, when she defeated Karolina Pliskova in the final of the oldest and most prestigious Grand Slam tournament - Wimbledon.

Even before her latest exploit, the 2021 season has been a terrific one for the Australian tennis star.

Ranked World Number 1 since June 2019, she has already added three more singles titles to her impressive personal record.

After her win at the Yarra Valley Classic in Melbourne in February, she claimed the title at the Miami Open (WTA 1000) in March and won both singles and doubles titles at the Porsche Grand Prix Cup in Stuttgart. With her second Grand Slam title (after Roland Garros in 2019),

she consolidated her Number 1 position in an impressive way.

According to Ash's childhood coach, she picked up her first racquet at the age of 4 and hit the first ball he tossed to her right back to him. A Junior Wimbledon Champion at 15 and three-time Grand Slam Doubles finalist at 17, Ash became Australia's highest-ranked player at 21 and the World Number 1 at just 23. In addition to her 12 career singles titles, Ash has won 11 career doubles titles, playing with different partners.

Now 25 years of age, she enjoys a well-earned reputation as one of the WTA's most dynamic and talented players.

Ash Barty's Rado connection goes back to 2017, when she joined the Swiss watchmaker's YoungStar programme.

With Rado she shares an abiding love of the game, unwavering determination and a passion for endlessly inventive and creative play. Ash also enjoys the



design aspect of the relationship and worked with Rado designers to develop the look of the Rado HyperChrome Ash Barty Limited Edition.

After this off-court experience she said, "As a watch lover, I enjoyed working on the design and helping the team create this beautiful piece. I love it!"

And so, apparently, do her friends and fans: Ash and Rado have started work on a second Limited Edition Rado that will carry her name.

Ash Barty has renewed her association with the brand and serves today as an ambassador for Rado, which stands with tennis fans everywhere in taking pride in her achievements and stature as one of the greatest players in the game.

Rado has been a committed supporter of tennis and sponsor of international tournaments for close to 40 years and is the Official Timekeeper for a range of high profile tournaments.

Customers laud Nissan Sunny for its expressive design and fresh interiors

Nissan Sunny has been receiving excellent reviews from customers in the sultanate for its modern, expressive design, fresh interiors and confidence-inspiring performance.

Praising Nissan Sunny for its advanced powertrains, Waleed Sultan from Muscat who is a long-time Nissan Sunny owner says, "Nissan comes with an expressive exterior featuring Nissan's V-motion grille and combines a spacious interior design with harmonious materials and colours to give a fresh and renewed feel to the car."

Rashid Mohammed from Nizwa likes Nissan Sunny for its great design, smart technological upgrades and best-in-class spacious interiors.

He says, "These features make it an ideal car for customers looking for a superior driving experience."



Younis al Balushi from Salalah believes Nissan Sunny continues to be a popular choice amongst customers in the segment because of its outstanding features, intelligent technology and remarkable performance.

He says, "The new generation Nissan Sunny builds on this solid foundation and reinforces Nis-

san's presence in the increasingly popular B-Sedan segment that is loaded with technology and safety features not usually found in the segment."

Amna Khalid from Sohar says, "With its emotional design, large roominess and advanced Nissan Intelligent Mobility technology, Sunny brings a new level of style,

excitement and refinement to entry-level buyers at a highly affordable price."

A spokesperson for Nissan Oman, from the house of Suhail Bahwan Automobiles (SBA) said, "Nissan Sunny is the perfect car for customers looking for a sophisticated driving experience. The car continues to be a popular

choice amongst customers in the segment because of its outstanding design, intelligent technology and remarkable performance."

Advanced powertrains

The latest Sunny is an addition to the growing line-up of Nissan's

renewed sedan models and features a bold new look, advanced powertrains and technology features. The fully upgraded model comes with an expressive exterior featuring Nissan's V-motion grille and combines a spacious interior design with harmonious materials and colours to give a fresh and renewed feel to the car.

Practical safety features

Safety and technology remain a top priority at Nissan, and the Sunny features Nissan Intelligent Mobility technology that helps provide front, side and rear safety monitoring and intervention technologies to enhance awareness on the road. This model also makes for an easier and more confident driving experience with seamless smartphone sync options and driver assist technology. This is bol-

stered by mechanical innovations including an advanced engine design, upgraded Xtronic transmission and an electric power steering system - all of which comes at a highly affordable price, making it ideal for entry-level buyers. The all-new model comes in three trim-levels, models - S (MT or Xtronic), SV (Xtronic) and the sporty SL (Xtronic).

Under Nissan's 'Emotional Geometry' design language, Sunny adapts key elements - such as the V-motion grille, boomerang-shaped headlamps and tail lamps, kick-up C-pillars and floating roof. The result is an entry-level car that the designers describe as an energetic, provocative, and engaging modern compact sedan. The wheels are pushed out, there's an imposing grille presence, everything about it says lower, wider, longer.

Alizz Islamic Bank draw to give away over RO130,000 as prizes

As part of its efforts to reward its loyal customers, Alizz Islamic Bank will conduct the Bushra Prize Savings account half yearly draw in the middle of July. Alizz Islamic Bank's Bushra Prize Savings account is Oman's first Sharia'a-compliant prize savings account and reflects the bank's commitment in pioneering innovative Sharia'a-compliant products and services that cater to customers' needs.

There will be 19 winners in the half-yearly draw. The more you increase your savings the more chances you have to enter the draw. The value of the half yearly prize is RO100,000 which will be allocated to one winner. A total prize value of RO30,000 will be distributed among three 'Tharwa' customers with each winner receiving RO10,000.

Employees of the Ministry of Education who have a Bushra account will have an exclusive



draw for them with an amount of RO1,500 being distributed amongst three winners from the ministry who will each receive RO500.

In appreciation of the roles of the employees working in the Ministry of Defence and the Ministry of Health, Alizz Islamic Bank also has dedicated special

draws for both sectors with three winners from the Ministry of Defence and three winners from the Ministry of Health winning RO500 each.

Valuing the pioneering roles played by the employees of the Royal Oman Police Alizz Islamic Bank will also conduct special draws for them with three winners from the Royal Oman Police each receiving cash prizes of RO500. Pensioners will also have a chance to win with a special draw exclusively for them where they will have a chance to win RO500 each.

Alizz Islamic Bank's Bushra Prize Savings Account has brought joy and happiness to a variety of customers who have won in previous draws with different amounts saved in their accounts; the Bushra account has brought good tidings and relieved the stress that many of them were facing. With some

being able to build their dream home, others being able to seek medical treatment amongst other things.

Bushra Prize Savings Account is Oman's first fully Sharia'a-compliant prize savings account offering daily, weekly, monthly, quarterly, half-yearly and annual cash prizes as hiba (gift) from the shareholders' fund.

The minimum amount required to be eligible for the draws is only RO100, and customers also receive monthly generated profit on their deposited amounts. Every RO100 gives the customer one chance to enter the draw, and the more money deposited in the account, the greater the chances of winning. Bushra Prize Savings Account customers can benefit from services such as obtaining an instant debit card, online and mobile banking, and SMS alerts for any transaction.



Oman Air offers First Class Suites on flights between Muscat, Salalah

Oman Air will offer its luxurious First Class Suites on B787 Dreamliner flights between Muscat and Salalah for the popular Khareef season.

In addition to its award-winning Economy and Business Class cabins, the airline will introduce the luxuriously appointed First Class Suites until July 31, offering three distinct cabin classes on the route.

The Muscat flight (WY 907) will depart at 2.55pm and arrive in Salalah at 4.30pm. The Salalah flight (WY 908) will depart at 5.45pm and arrive in Muscat at 7.25pm.

Guests should always consult omanair.com for the latest flight schedule and timings, which are subject to change.

Featuring extra tall, soft closing sliding doors and canopy, Oman Air's First Class Suite is recognised for its Omani-inspired design, modern amenities and exceptional comfort. In 2020 it was named best First Class Suite by German-based iF design, a world leader in design, and also won World's Leading Airline - First Class' at the World Travel Awards Middle East.

Our flights are departing on time. For flights operating during the lockdown period, passengers and those dropping them off or picking them up are allowed to travel to the airport.

Please ensure that you always carry a printed copy of travel tickets along with all applicable travel documents and valid ID in the event that you are asked to present them to the relevant authorities.

Oman Air will maintain its comprehensive safety programme throughout all elements of the travel journey to ensure that guests fly confidently. Masks are required when guests are on board the aircraft and in Oman's airports.

Distancing is maintained while guests board and exit the aircraft, which are carefully cleaned after each flight and at the end of every day. Cabin crew all wear a full set of personal protective equipment, meal service has been modified to further ensure safety, and a number of other measures have been implemented to ensure that the airline's guests and crew are safe at all times.

Zubair SEC hosts its final 'Know Your VAT' webinar

Zubair Small Enterprises Centre (Zubair SEC), in partnership with the Omani International Development and Investment Company (Ominvest), recently conducted its fifth and final VAT webinar titled, 'Key Transition Issues and Key Action Steps to be Undertaken by the SMEs'.

With this, the series of five VAT webinar sessions presented by Moore on the topic of 'Know your VAT' has now concluded. These webinars have covered all aspects of VAT starting with 'VAT registration in Oman' followed by 'Basic concepts of VAT', 'Key compliances', 'Key aspects of input tax credit', and finally, 'key action steps with a focus on transition issues'. In addition to the webinars, a series of five animated videos, a digital downloadable booklet, and one-



to-one consultations were also included as part of the initiative. Following the usual introduction, the session began with Said al Sahib, director of Zubair SEC, delivering a short speech expressing his appreciation and gratitude for all the effort that went into the 'Know your VAT' initiative. He gave special recognition to Ominvest for support-

ing the initiative and Moore for its successful execution. Shortly thereafter, Sahib wished all participants a smooth and successful transition towards meeting all required VAT compliances and procedures.

"With this most recent session, we now conclude our series of 'Know your VAT' webinars. Under this initiative, we have

journeyed through every aspect of VAT over the past four months, exploring even the most complex aspects of the law. I am confident that the information provided in these webinars will enable each of the participants to fully prepare for and execute a successful VAT compliance process," Sahib commented.

The fifth webinar, titled 'Key Transition Issues and Key Action Steps to be Undertaken by SMEs', took place on July 7 and covered two core topics - 'Key VAT Transitional Issues' and 'Key Action Steps from an Oman VAT perspective'.

Furthermore, the former was divided into two additional sections - 'Implications on Transactions' and 'Ascertaining Contract Clauses'. Over 60 Zubair SEC members and large private-se-

tor corporations attended the webinar. All participants thanked the organisers and expressed a desire to participate in any future webinars organised by them.

"With well over 350 attendees over the course of five sessions, our series of webinars have been a great success. More importantly, it shows just how willing local entrepreneurs are towards embracing the concept of VAT," added Sahib.

"For those who may have missed this session or any of our previous ones, we have made each of them easily accessible via our website."

"We are extremely impressed by the sheer number of attendees and the overall success of this initiative," added Gajendra Maheshwari - head, VAT Services at Moore.



belN Sports to broadcast 2021 CONCACAF Cup

belN Media Group, the global sports and entertainment broadcaster and its flagship sports channel belN Sports, has secured the exclusive broadcast rights to this year's CONCACAF Gold Cup 2021, in 24 countries in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA), France, Turkey and APAC.

The CONCACAF Gold Cup is the main association football competition of the national football teams which determines the continental champion of North America, Central America and the Caribbean. Held every two years, Mexico holds the record with 11 wins in total, followed by USA with 6.

Taking place across 9 cities in the United States of America (USA), the 2021 CONCACAF Gold Cup kicked off this Sunday and will go on until Sunday, August 1 with back-to-back games on belN Sports' Premium 1 channel for Arabic coverage and belN Sports 1 for English coverage.

This year's edition will see the Qatar national team take part in the tournament for the very first time as a guest nation- playing against the likes of Honduras,

Panama and Grenada in group D.

The defending Asian Cup champions will use this as a great opportunity to prepare for next year's FIFA World Cup Qatar 2022.

Qatar's first game in the 2021 CONCACAF Gold Cup will be against Panama on July 14. Qatar will then face Grenada on July 18 and Honduras on July 21 - where belN Sports will have live studio coverage of all the games that Qatar will play as well as a reporter on ground for exclusive reactions and breaking stories.

Commenting on the 2021 CONCACAF Gold Cup exclusively on belN Sports, Duncan Walkinshaw, acting director of Programs for belN MENA, said, "We are delighted to be at the heart of all the global football action by adding the CONCACAF Gold Cup to our portfolio of world class football tournaments."

"With strong national teams competing including Qatar, the 2021 CONCACAF Gold Cup promises to be a thrilling experience for our subscribers this month."

National University's marketing campaign unveiled

The National University of Science and Technology launched on Thursday the marketing campaign and its components, at the inauguration ceremony, which was held under the patronage of Dr Ali al Bimani, Vice Chancellor of the National University, at Al Araiimi Boulevard Complex.

Dr Bimani gave the starting signal for the marketing campaign, which includes several stations. This initiative is the first initiative of its kind at the level of universities in the sultanate. Dr Bimani said that the National University, through this marketing campaign, seeks to reach the community and provide its services to all, indicating that the National University is the university of everyone.

The campaign started its stations at Al Araiimi Boulevard Complex, which comes as part of its plan to visit many stations in Muscat, Sohar, Nizwa and Salalah.

The National University focuses on community service through its 'marketing campaign', which tours several stations in Oman to display its services and to convey the message of science and knowledge.

The marketing campaign include academics, media professionals, athletes, and specialists in several scientific fields and it aims to communicate with the concerned authorities, social and sport bodies, spread knowledge, raise awareness in education in the community, contribute to supporting charitable campaigns



in the sultanate and support the student work. In addition, promotion of the National University for its projects, academic programmes and international achievements, services, provision of training to the community in several fields and promoting the sultanate in tourism, history, sports, and science.

Admission and Registration Centre

Dr Salim al Arimi, DVC, announced that the centre will be the first of its kind at the university level in Oman. The university will be working around the clock and the week with a toll-free number (80080002) to enable

the university to communicate to provide its academic and educational services.

All calls are automatically linked in which the applicant information will be stored so staff will be able to contact him and quickly responded to his application.

Dr Arimi said that a specialised cadres in admission, registration, marketing, and communication will work at the call centre. The staff is fluent in both Arabic and English. The call centre operates 24 hours a day and a direct response within 12 hours during the official working hours. All calls are electronically linked so that the applicants' in-

formation is stored so that they can communicate with him and the speed of execution of the application. All the calls received by the university call center are recorded to preserve the rights.

Academic programmes

In the inauguration ceremony of the large marketing campaign the National University announces opening of admission and registration for its academic programs in engineering, medicine, and pharmacy, through offers presented by the deans of the three colleges for undergraduate and master which offered by the university.

The three colleges are in Bausher, Al Hail and Sohar.

The university programmes include Bachelor of Medicine, Bachelor of Pharmacy, Bachelor of Engineering programmes in civil engineering, mechanical engineering, computer engineering, electrical power engineering, process operation and maintenance engineering; Bachelor of Science in quantity surveying and cost management.

The National University also announced several master programmes that are being offered in cooperation with Glasgow Caledonian University, United Kingdom and the University of South Carolina, United States.

These programmes include Master in asset and maintenance management, Master in construction management, Master of Science in supply chain management and international operations, Master of Science in process engineering, Master of Science in electrical engineering and Master of Science in information technology with three sub-disciplines: Cloud Computing, Big Data and Internet of Things, Advanced computer networks and cybersecurity.

National University has four campuses in Bausher (headquarters) and the College of Pharmacy), Sohar campus (College of Medicine and Science), Al Hail South campus College of Engineering) and the university campus in the Airport Heights (Foundation Studies Centre).

Down with dictatorship: Rare anti-govt protests erupt in Cuba

Havana, Cuba - Thousands of Cubans took part in rare protests Sunday against the communist government, chanting, 'Down with the dictatorship', as President Miguel Diaz-Canel called on his supporters to confront the demonstrators.

The anti-government rallies started spontaneously in several cities as the country endures its worst economic crisis in 30 years, with chronic shortages of electricity and food.

Several hundred protesters marched through the capital Havana chanting, 'We want liberty', with a heavy military and police presence deployed after demonstrators massed outside the Capitol building.

Police used tear gas to disperse crowds, and at least ten people were arrested, while officers used plastic pipes to beat protesters, AFP journalists witnessed.

Diaz-Canel delivered a combative television address, saying: "The order to fight has been given - into the street, revolutionaries!"

"We call on all revolutionaries of the country, all communists, to go out in the streets where these provocations occur... and to face them in a decisive, firm and courageous way."

Protests around country

The only authorised gatherings in Cuba are normally Communist Party events, but according to the data journalism site Inventario, a total of 40 demonstrations took place on Sunday.

Social media showed scenes from anti-government protests around the country, but mobile internet - only introduced in Cuba since 2018 - was largely cut off on Sunday afternoon.

Several thousand protesters, mainly young people, took to the streets of San Antonio de los Baños, a town 30km southwest of Havana.



Police cars lay overturned following a demonstration against Cuban President Miguel Diaz-Canel, in Havana on Sunday (AFP)

One local, on condition of anonymity, said she participated in the demonstration as she was exasperated by 'the situation with electricity and food'.

Security forces arrived soon after the protests began, and the President later visited the town himself, surrounded by party activists as residents heckled him, videos posted online showed.

"The energy situation seems to have produced some reaction," Diaz-Canel told reporters, blaming US sanctions imposed by Donald Trump and left unchanged by President Joe Biden.

He accused 'a Cuban-American mafia' of whipping up the protests on social media.

Candido Abrines, a retired pro-government protester, told AFP he was demonstrating so that 'capitalism will never come back here again and (so) that these mercenaries paid by the Empire (the US) will never again

take our streets, first they have to kill us all'.

Government supporters also held some counter-demonstrations in Havana.

An Associated Press video-journalist was assaulted by some of them, and an AP photojournalist was injured by the police, the news agency said.

The United States reacted swiftly to the day's events.

'The US supports freedom of expression and assembly across Cuba, and would strongly condemn any violence or targeting of peaceful protesters who are exercising their universal rights,' US National Security Advisor Jake Sullivan wrote on Twitter.

In Miami, thousands of Cubans and Cuban-Americans took to the streets of the city's Little Havana district in support of the protests, on foot or waving Cuban flags out of car windows.

"These young people today

have finally said 'Enough is enough and we're going to do what our old folks couldn't do'," Cuban-American Yanelis Sales said. "Cubans, we are here with you from the United States."

COVID-19 crisis

Diaz-Canel has been president since 2018, succeeding Raul Castro, who served as leader after his brother Fidel Castro.

Public anger in Cuba has grown recently, driven by long food lines, worsening power shortages for several hours a day and a critical shortage of medicines since the start of the COVID-19 crisis, with Cuba under US sanctions.

The country is also experiencing its toughest phase yet of the coronavirus pandemic, and on Sunday reported a new daily record of infections and deaths.

The country of 11.2mn people was left relatively unscathed in

the first months of the COVID-19 outbreak but has seen a recent hike in infections.

"These are alarming numbers which are increasing daily," said Francisco Duran, head of epidemiology in the health ministry.

Under hashtags such as #SOSCuba, calls for assistance have multiplied on social media, with citizens and music stars alike urging the government to make it possible for much-needed foreign donations to enter the country.

An opposition group called Saturday for the creation of a 'humanitarian corridor', an initiative the government rejected by saying Cuba was not a conflict zone.

Ernesto Soberon, a foreign affairs official, denounced a 'campaign' he said sought to 'portray an image of total chaos in the country which does not correspond to the situation.'

AFP



Relatives of two Jordanian ex-officials wait for the State Security Court's verdict in the trial, in the capital Amman on Monday (AFP)

Jordan coup plot: Ex-officials get 15 year jail terms

Amman, Jordan - A Jordanian court on Monday sentenced two former officials to 15 years in jail after finding them guilty of a coup plot that sparked a rare crisis in a kingdom seen as a pillar of stability in the region.

Former royal court chief Bassem Awadallah and an envoy to Saudi Arabia, Sharif Hassan bin Zaid, had been convicted of conspiring to topple King Abdullah II in favour of his half-brother Prince Hamzah.

The former crown prince himself was not charged in the trial, but the charge sheet said he was 'determined to fulfil his personal ambition to rule, in violation of the Hashemite constitution and customs'.

The trial took place behind closed doors at the State Security Court, a military tribunal that also includes civilian judges.

But on Monday, journalists were allowed to watch footage of the ruling via video link from a tent set up outside the court.

Delivering the ruling, Judge Muwaffaq al Masaid noted that the men had been friends for 20 years and were close to Prince Hamzah. He said they had tried to put into action 'ideas that are hostile to the existing political system in the kingdom and His Majesty King Abdullah'.

The men had tried 'to create chaos, sedition and divisions within Jordanian society and spread hateful discourse towards the political system, threatening the safety and secu-

urity' of the kingdom, he said.

Awadallah and Bin Zaid, who both have close ties to neighbouring Saudi Arabia, were found guilty of 'incitement against the ruling system' and 'acts that could threaten society and create sedition'.

Awadallah, who holds Saudi nationality, had been on trial alongside Bin Zaid, a relative of King Abdullah, since June 21.

Images released by authorities showed the two men, wearing light blue prison uniforms, being escorted in handcuffs into the court, under heavy guard.

Their lawyers did not comment on the ruling apart from saying they would appeal.

Bin Zaid was also found guilty on two drugs charges which would have carried prison terms, but the court did not extend his incarceration.

Regional powerhouse Saudi Arabia has fervently denied any involvement in the alleged plot.

The unprecedented palace crisis erupted in April. Eighteen suspects were arrested after authorities announced they had foiled a bid to destabilise the pro-Western kingdom, but 16 were later released.

A former crown prince Hamzah had been put under house arrest on the same day. Authorities later said he would not stand trial, as his case had been resolved within the royal family, with Hamzah pledging allegiance to King Abdullah.

AFP

EU envoy visits Israel seeking 'fresh start'

Brussels, Belgium - EU foreign policy chief Josep Borrell said on Monday the bloc was hoping for a fresh start with Israel's new government, as Foreign Minister Yair Lapid held talks in Brussels.

"It's important that the new Israeli government comes here to Brussels - it is an opportunity for a fresh start," Borrell said after meeting Lapid. "I think it's a good opportunity for us to restart our relations, which in the past were quite deteriorated."

German Foreign Minister Heiko Maas described the visit as a 'good sign' and said the bloc was looking to resume meetings of the EU-Israel Association Council - last held in almost a decade ago - designed to improve ties between the two sides.

Lapid was to meet all EU 27 foreign ministers for joint talks. The EU is eyeing greater cooperation with Israel after a disparate coalition - masterminded by centrist Lapid - came together last month to oust veteran right-wing leader Benjamin Netanyahu.

Relations were tense between Brussels and Netanyahu, who pushed to sideline the EU as a player in the volatile region.

But thorny issues remain as the EU is pushing for a resumption of the search for a two-state solution to the conflict.

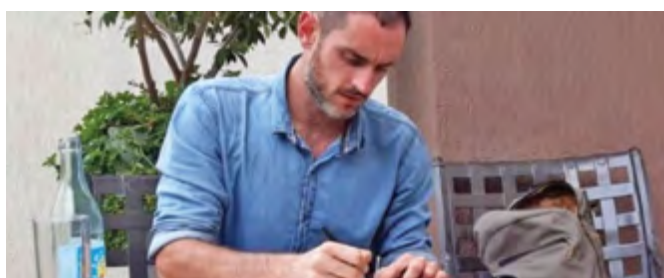
AFP

RSF condemns detention of 12 journalists in Ethiopia

Nairobi, Kenya - Campaign group Reporters Without Borders called Monday for the immediate release of 12 journalists detained in a wave of arrests in Ethiopia's capital Addis Ababa.

Most of the journalists, including one who runs a YouTube channel critical of the government, were arrested on June 30, according to Reporters Without Borders, known by its French acronym RSF.

It said no explanation had been given for their arrests until



The New York Times correspondent Simon Marks was expelled in May

July 2, when police linked the journalists to a terrorist group, referring to the Tigray People's Liberation Front (TPLF).

Federal troops have been battling TPLF forces in Tigray since November, but they withdrew at end of June in the face of rebel

advances and Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed's government then declared a unilateral ceasefire.

Ethiopia's government has imposed tough restrictions on journalists covering the conflict.

"We condemn these mass arrests of journalists, which clearly aim to deter independent investigative reporting on the war in Tigray," said Arnaud Froger, the head of RSF's Africa desk.

"These arrests, conducted in a completely opaque manner, are all the more shocking because,

just a few months ago, the Ethiopian parliament voted a new media law decriminalising most press offences," added Froger, calling for their release.

The Ethiopian Human Rights Commission at the weekend voiced 'grave' concern at the arrests, saying 'the detainees have not been granted visitation rights by their lawyer or their families'.

A foreign correspondent working for *The New York Times*, Simon Marks, was expelled from Ethiopia in May after he filed a

series of hard-hitting reports on the war in Ethiopia's northern Tigray region.

A number of Ethiopian journalists and translators working for a range of international media organisations - including AFP, Reuters, the BBC and the *Financial Times* - have been detained in recent months while doing their jobs. Reporters Without Borders ranks the Horn of Africa nation at 101 out of 180 in the world on its annual press freedom index.

AFP

Lightning strikes kill more than 50 across India

New Delhi, India - More than 50 people were killed in lightning strikes across several states in India, authorities said on Monday, including 11 people at a historic fort.

Hundreds of people are killed each year in intense storms at the start of the monsoon season, which bring respite from the summer heat across the northern Indian plains.

At least 42 people died Sunday in different districts of Uttar Pradesh, according to disaster-response authorities in India's most populous state.

In Jaipur, the capital of Rajasthan state, bolts hit two watchtowers at the 12th-century Amer Fort, which were packed with visitors watching the storm cross the city.

"It was already raining when



Members of the State Disaster Response Force conduct a search operation near the watchtowers of the Amer Fort after 11 people were killed in lightning strikes at the fort, on the outskirts of Jaipur on Monday (AFP)

Some of the injured were left unconscious by the strikes. Others ran out in panic and extreme pain

SAURABH TIWARI

the people were there. They huddled in the towers as the rainfall intensified," Saurabh Tiwari, a senior Jaipur police officer, told AFP.

People had flocked to the fort, which gives a panoramic view across Jaipur, after several weeks of intense heat in the state.

Eleven people were killed and another 17 were injured, with

three in critical condition, according to police.

Tiwari said up to 30 people were on the towers when the lightning struck.

"Some of the injured were left unconscious by the strikes. Others ran out in panic and extreme pain," Tiwari added.

Emergency teams were checking on Monday whether any victims had fallen into a deep moat on one side of the watchtowers.

Media reports said about ten other people were killed by lightning strikes across Rajasthan.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Monday said special payments would be made to the families of people who lost their lives, as he offered condolences.

AFP

COVID-19 PANDEMIC

Thailand imposes tougher curbs, night curfew ordered in Bangkok

Bangkok, Thailand - More than 10mn people were placed under fresh COVID-19 restrictions and a curfew in the Thai capital on Monday, as the kingdom battled a surge of cases worsened by the highly infectious Alpha and Delta variants.

Thailand has so far recorded more than 345,000 cases and 2,791 deaths - with the bulk of them coming in this latest wave that started in April.

First detected in clubs frequented by the Thai elite and politicians at an upscale Bangkok nightlife district, the surge has been exacerbated by a slow vaccine rollout and limited testing capacity.

"The situation is worrying," said Health Minister Anutin Charnvirakul.

"We have a big toll of new confirmed cases and the Delta strain has spread to other provinces that are home to factories."

Health authorities also said they are monitoring seven people who have contracted both the Alpha and Delta variants.

In addition to the capital, nine other provinces that have seen steady upticks in infections saw more restrictions bite.

Checkpoints sprung up



Commuters make their way on the first day of stricter lockdown restrictions, on Ratchaprasong intersection in Bangkok on Monday (AFP)

across Bangkok in the early hours of Monday as a 9.00pm-4.00am curfew came into force, with police wearing masks and facial shields stopping cars in the centre of the capital.

Residents are barred from gathering in groups of more than five people, while public transport networks will shut from 9.00pm.

Supermarkets, restaurants, banks, pharmacies and electronics stores within malls will be able to stay open but other shops have shuttered.

Authorities on Monday also approved the use of administering the Chinese-made Sinovac jab as the first dose and AstraZeneca as the second.

It did not elaborate why the

decision was taken but it came after officials announced on Sunday that nearly 900 medical staff - the majority of whom had received Sinovac shots - tested positive for the virus.

Health authorities added that medical staff who had already received two Sinovac doses will get a booster AstraZeneca or Pfizer-BioNTech shot.

Anger over new restrictions

The government of Prayut Chan-O-Cha has come under vociferous criticism for its handling of the pandemic - from the management and procurement of vaccines to ad hoc enforcement of restrictions - and anger is high at the new measures.

Cases rise in Sydney despite lockdown

Sydney, Australia - Australia reported another spike in new cases on Monday, as a lockdown in the country's largest city Sydney failed to halt a rapidly growing cluster of cases.

Health authorities reported 112 cases in Sydney in the last 24 hours, a record for this wave of infections, despite a citywide lockdown that is in its third week.

The virus has now spread to neighbourhoods across the sprawling city of 5mn people.

New South Wales premier Gladys Berejiklian said many of the latest infections were passed between family members and close friends who met despite a ban on meeting anyone outside household.

Sydneysiders are currently ordered not to leave home unless for food shopping, medical treatment or daily exercise.

"If you put yourself at risk, you're putting your entire family - and that means extended family, as well as your closest friends and associates - at risk," Berejiklian warned.

On Saturday a woman in her 90s died hours after testing positive, the first death from a locally acquired infection in Australia this year.

AFP

Covax to get 110mn Chinese vaccine doses

Geneva, Switzerland - Two Chinese vaccine makers, Sinovac and Sinopharm, have agreed to immediately begin making more than 100mn COVID vaccine doses available to the Covax distribution facility, Gavi said on Monday.

"The agreements, which come at a time when the Delta variant is posing a rising risk to health systems, will begin to make 110mn doses immediately available to participants of the Covax facility, with options for additional doses," said the vaccine alliance Gavi, which is one of the facility's main backers.

Gavi chief Seth Berkley hailed the agreements ushering two more vaccines into the Covax portfolio, which now has 11 vaccines and vaccine candidates at its disposal, including those made by AstraZeneca, Johnson&Johnson, Moderna, and Pfizer.



COVID-19 vaccines donated through COVAX coordination, upon their arrival at the Air Force base in El Alto, Bolivia, on Sunday (AFP)

"Thanks to this deal, and because these vaccines have already received WHO Emergency Use Listing, we can move to start supplying doses to countries immediately," he said.

Covax, which is also backed by the World Health Organization and the Coalition for Epidemic Preparedness Innovations

(CEPI), was set up to ensure equitable distribution of vaccines, particularly to low-income countries. But it has struggled to get hold of enough donation-funded doses for poorer nations.

As of July 12, Covax had distributed over 102mn doses to 135 countries - far fewer than the goal stated at the start of the

year.

WHO chief Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus has slammed 'vaccine nationalism' in which a handful of countries have hoarded the jabs, leading to 'shocking inequity' in global access to them.

While 70 per cent of the population is vaccinated in some developed countries, the figure is less than 1.0 per cent for low-income countries, according to the UN.

The agreements announced on Monday enable Covax to snap up 60mn Sinopharm vaccine doses through the end of October and 50mn Sinovac doses through the end of September.

In total, some 170mn Sinopharm doses and a total of 380mn Sinovac doses could potentially be made available by mid-2022, the statement said.

AFP

Rising cases hits Suu Kyi trial

Naypyidaw, Myanmar - Myanmar's spiralling coronavirus count struck the trial of ousted leader Aung San Suu Kyi on Monday, her lawyers said, with a witness for the prosecution failing to testify after becoming infected.

Cases are spiking in Myanmar, with the State Administration Council - as the military junta calls itself - reporting more than 3,400 new cases on Sunday, up from fewer than 50 per day in early May.

Suu Kyi was deposed by the military in February, sparking a mass uprising and a brutal crackdown that resulted in the deaths of 890 civilians, according to a local monitoring group.

On Monday a prosecution witness set to testify that she flouted coronavirus restrictions during elections her party won in a landslide last year 'was absent on account of COVID-19



This file photo shows a protester holding up a poster featuring Aung San Suu Kyi during a demonstration, in Yangon on February 15 (AFP)

infection', her lawyer Khin Maung Zaw told reporters.

A second witness gave testimony on the same charges, and the court also heard evidence on separate charges that Suu Kyi illegally imported and possessed walkie talkies, he said.

The Nobel laureate (76) and all members of her staff have

been fully vaccinated while in military custody, her lawyer Min Min Soe said last week.

She did not give details on when Suu Kyi - who is believed to have received a first dose before her government was deposed - had received the jab, or what vaccine she was given.

AFP

South Africa deploys troops as unrest spirals after Zuma jailing

Johannesburg, South Africa - South Africa's army on Monday said it was deploying troops to two provinces, including its economic hub of Johannesburg, to help crush mob violence and looting as unrest sparked by the jailing of ex-president Jacob Zuma entered its fourth day.

"The South African National Defence Force (SANDF) has commenced with pre-deployment processes and procedures in line with a request for assistance," the military said.

Personnel will 'assist law enforcement agencies deployed in Gauteng and KwaZulu-Natal provinces respectively to quell the unrest that has gripped both Provinces in the last few days', it said.

The violence raged as the Constitutional Court was reviewing a landmark decision to jail Zuma for contempt of court. An announcement is expected later.

The country's top court on

June 29 slapped Zuma with a 15-month term for snubbing a probe into the corruption that stained his nine years in power.

Zuma began the sentence last Thursday but is seeking to have the ruling set aside.

"What we are saying is that this court made fundamentally rescindable errors," Zuma's lawyer Dali Mpofu argued in an on-line hearing before nine of the court's 11 judges.

Zuma had been treated unfairly and his 'right to mitigation was limited', he said.

But one of the judges, Steven Majiedt, bluntly said Zuma had been convicted 'because he disobeyed the order of this court'.

Despite his reputation for graft and scandal, the 79 year old former anti-apartheid fighter remains popular among many poor South Africans.

The epicentre of the unrest is Zuma's home region, the south-eastern province of KwaZulu-



A South African police official inspects the looted Lotsoho Mall in Katlehong, near Johannesburg, on Monday (AFP)

Natal. Shortly before the military's announcement, troops were seen on the streets of its capital Pietermaritzburg and smoke billowed from the roof of a large shopping mall.

Looting

A retail shop in Durban was looted on Monday morning while in Eshowe, a town near Zuma's Nkandla home, police fired rubber bullets to disperse crowds

after a supermarket was ransacked.

In Johannesburg, in Gauteng province, an AFP photographer saw a corpse at one site. The cause of the death was not im-

mediately known. Sections of a major highway were closed.

Police said more than 200 people had been arrested.

Some of the protests appear to have been triggered by Zuma's detention, but they are also associated with grinding unemployment and hardship inflicted by a toughening of anti-COVID measures.

Ramaphosa appeal

President Cyril Ramaphosa on Sunday called on dissenters to protest peacefully.

"While there are those who may be hurt and angry at this moment, there can never be any justification for such violent, destructive and disruptive actions," he said.

Once dubbed the 'Teflon president', Zuma started serving the jail term after handing himself in to authorities as a deadline for surrender loomed.

On Friday he lost a petition at

the Pietermaritzburg High Court to have his case thrown out.

The court said it was not empowered to interfere with rulings set down by the Constitutional Court and that Zuma's claims about his health were not 'supported by any evidence'.

The anti-graft panel is probing the massive siphoning off of state assets that occurred during Zuma's 2009-2018 presidency.

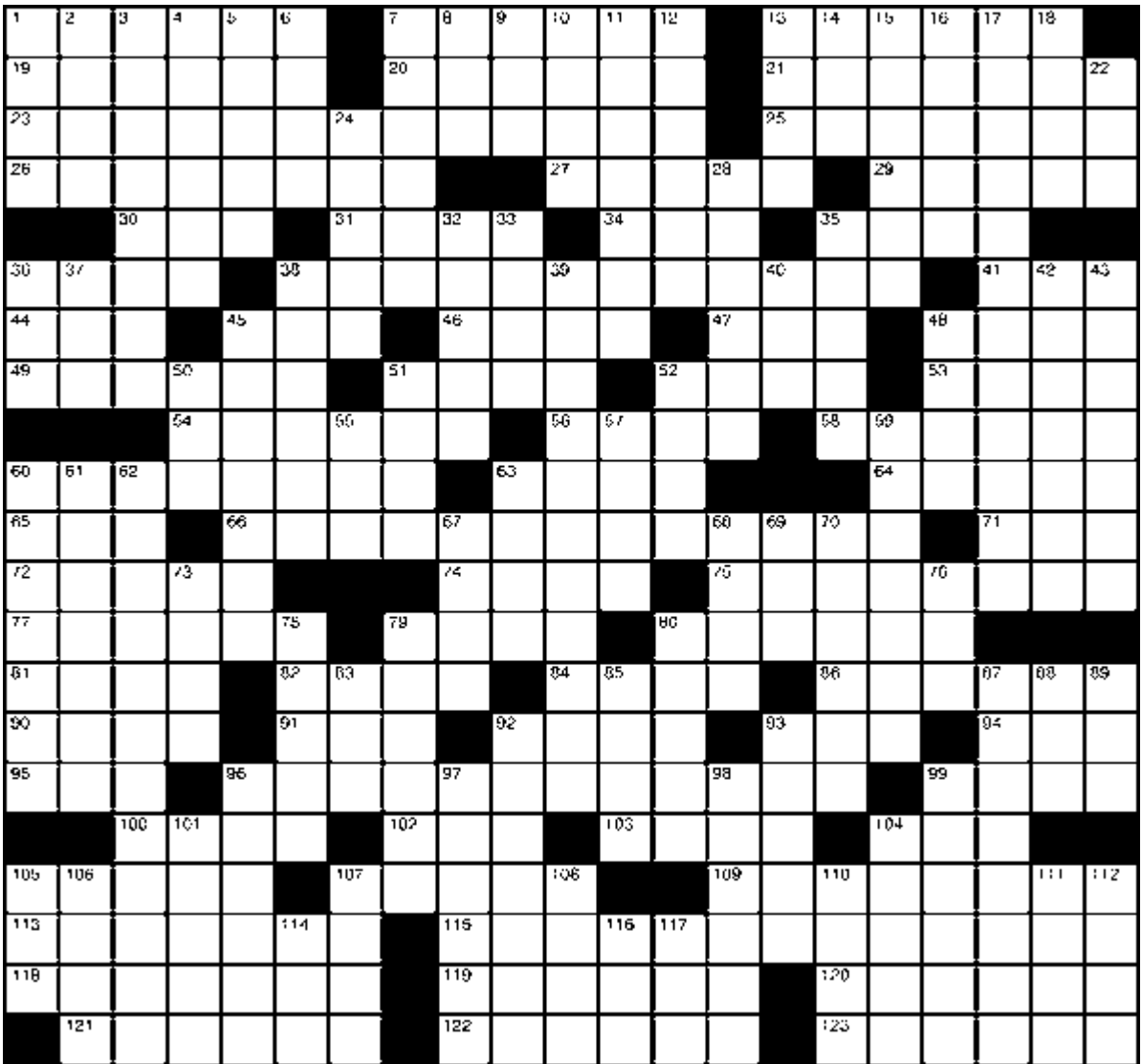
He testified just once, in July 2019, but then swiftly withdrew his cooperation, saying he was offended at being treated as an 'accused' and not as a witness.

Under the terms of his sentence, Zuma could be back home before Christmas as he would be eligible for parole in less than four months.

He separately faces 16 charges of fraud, graft and racketeering in an arms procurement scandal dating to 1999, when he was vice president.

AFP

DAILY CROSSWORD



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ACROSS

- 1 Caning material
- 7 Eye parts
- 13 Women of rank
- 19 Pied-___: second lodging
- 20 Disposition
- 21 Artist's studio
- 23 Novelist's manservant?
- 25 Souvenir
- 26 Decree disputant
- 27 "___ thousand years'": Shak.
- 29 Desi or Lucie
- 30 Superman insignia
- 31 San ___ Italy
- 34 Enologically light
- 35 Oppositionist
- 36 Dix or Knox
- 38 Singer-actress's lei?
- 41 Eliz. II's youngest
- 44 Drink in Surrey
- 45 Moon vehicle
- 46 De-ice
- 47 Museum display
- 48 Flanders river
- 49 Save
- 51 Bro, of 41 Across
- 52 Puccini heroine
- 53 Capable of
- 54 Siberian forests
- 56 Thunder god
- 58 Lurch

- 60 Arthur Miller protagonist
- 63 Toward the mouth
- 64 Funny Arnold
- 65 Ostrich's kin
- 66 Politician's catch? 71 Hwy.
- 72 Paris peach
- 74 Over there: arch.
- 75 Necessitated
- 77 Three tone chords
- 79 Antony's love, for short
- 80 TV street
- 81 Rights org.
- 82 Spillane's "___ Jury"
- 84 Julep additive
- 86 Classroom pet
- 90 Archer William
- 91 Once named
- 92 100 Mexican centavos
- 93 Teacher cert.
- 94 Gershwin or Levin
- 95 Language suffix
- 96 Actor's clubs?
- 99 European mountain goat
- 100 Small crested duck
- 102 Role for Poitier
- 103 Denomination
- 104 Scottish uncle
- 105 Fictional elephant

- 107 Listened to
 - 109 Treads heavily
 - 113 Glitter
 - 115 Actress's kiosk?
 - 118 Coal miner
 - 119 Stately dance
 - 120 Seed coats
 - 121 Replicated
 - 122 Infant oaks
 - 123 Black Sea port
- DOWN**
- 1 Tabula ___
 - 2 "___ at the pane ...": Browning
 - 3 Moderated
 - 4 Most loyal
 - 5 Spatial measures
 - 6 Dickens girl
 - 7 Congenital
 - 8 Writer Santha Rama ___
 - 9 Communications monogram
 - 10 Uninteresting
 - 11 "Able was I ___ Elba"
 - 12 Restaurant necessity
 - 13 Papa's partner
 - 14 Had a bite
 - 15 Insist on
 - 16 Warn
 - 17 Singercomedienne's gem?
 - 18 ___ good example

- 22 Actress Russell, familiarly
- 24 Antitoxin
- 28 Bakery treat
- 32 Folktales
- 33 Fed. health org.
- 35 Whimsical act
- 36 Partner of wide
- 37 Corrida call
- 38 Pancake "aunt"
- 39 Gourmets
- 40 Pepare for battle
- 42 Peaceful coexistence
- 43 Maligned
- 45 Tethered
- 48 Circular domed tent
- 50 Nice summer
- 51 "Who ___ Turn to?": 1964 hit
- 52 Up to date ones
- 55 A visit at sea
- 57 Bridge prop
- 59 Humiliated
- 60 Partitioned
- 61 Punishes by a fine
- 62 Actress's cotillion?
- 63 Platte Native American
- 67 Singer Lovett
- 68 Yard units
- 69 Office holders: sl.
- 70 Produces theatrically

- 73 Tow
- 76 Suffix for front or fusil
- 78 Tendon
- 79 Gouda or Havarti nuisance
- 80 Nocturnal
- 83 Dutch painter ___ Borch
- 85 Osiris's spouse
- 87 Trinkets
- 88 Choler
- 89 Undisciplined
- 92 Kind of victory
- 93 Way in
- 96 Vest's relative
- 97 Noxious emanation
- 98 Mendelssohn and Schubert works
- 99 Levy
- 101 Actress Thomas
- 104 Establish firmly
- 105 Science deg.
- 106 Doomsaying OT books
- 107 Range group
- 108 Martin's nickname
- 110 Regarding
- 111 Airport stats
- 112 Mets' old home
- 114 Appomattox figure
- 116 Karel Capek play
- 117 Actor Carioua

YOUR DAILY HOROSCOPE



ARIES MARCH 21-APRIL 19

Be extra careful not to let yourself become tired or run down. You'll need all the physical and emotional strength you can muster to get through today -- and, more importantly, tonight. Of course, if anyone has mastered the concept of the 20 minute power nap, followed by a cool shower and a strong cappuccino, it's you. Go ahead. Show us how it's done and make this day work for you.



LEO JULY 23-AUGUST 22

What a nice surprise. You've actually crossed paths with someone you believe may be among the last remaining intelligent, charming and interesting people on the planet. And speaking of interesting, if they're available and you are too, this could be truly interesting. If either of you isn't quite available, however, things could get tricky. Better think this over.



SAGITTARIUS NOVEMBER 22-DECEMBER 21

Bright and early this morning, you'll begin thinking about how it might be possible to get together with the one you love -- without any outside interference at all. Now that's usually not a problem at all, but this time out, you'll both have your work cut out for you. Don't worry about this alone. Spend some time on the phone and formulate a battle plan together.



TAURUS APRIL 20-MAY 20

Someone you love is thinking of you, because there's no one else who can soothe and comfort them quite like you. In fact, your knack for calming even the most troubled waters is famous among your dear ones. And don't even try to act like you don't enjoy the position. What could possible make you feel better about yourself than making someone else feel better about their own situation?



VIRGO AUGUST 23-SEPTEMBER 22

You woke up in the mood to take over a small country -- and you're feeling as if you could do it before lunch and still have some energy left over to set up a government by dinner. Well that's wonderful, but why not apply some of this magical energy to more mundane tasks -- like, say, organising your home? Do it sooner than later -- you have visitors coming.



CAPRICORN DECEMBER 22-JANUARY 19

If you've been trying to choose the perfect time to get family, friends and that certain someone all together, wonder no longer. This is it. As of tomorrow, they'll all be more than willing to cooperate, be nice to each other and do whatever it takes to please you. Use this advance notice to get cracking on your big plans for next weekend. This is a heavenly gift.



GEMINI MAY 21-JUNE 21

The things that mean the most to you will be even more important now, and you'll be more than willing to let others see just how important they are to you. That goes double for folks you know have been wondering about you lately -- and maybe even thinking you've been rather fickle. It's time to show them what you're made of. And you'll undoubtedly do quite the job of it, too.



LIBRA SEPTEMBER 23-OCTOBER 22

Here we go. It's time for you to make connections -- and promises, too. The good news is that if someone tells you they mean it now, they really do. Today's astrological agenda calls for nothing but rock-solid intensity. But the best news is that you'll be able to get close to people without even trying.



AQUARIUS JANUARY 20-FEBRUARY 18

You've been wondering exactly what's going on with you, haven't you? Well, don't poke at it too much. Just consider it the heavenly equivalent of winning the lottery and enjoy it. You can talk with literally anyone about literally anything, and make it look easy. That goes double for your communication with coworkers -- especially the ones you're interested in for more than their memos.



CANCER JUNE 22-JULY 22

If you weren't already in the mood to let things go when you woke up this morning, you will be very soon. You've been trying to keep something quiet, even after it obviously had to emerge, and it's been exhausting. Once you release this burden, you'll be able to relax and enjoy yourself. And this is one of those things that really does need to see the light of day, anyway.



SCORPIO OCTOBER 23-NOVEMBER 21

You're not used to being around other people when they're acting like this -- like you do on a daily basis. They're thinking intense thoughts, not just considering surface stuff, and are actually wondering out loud about things they'd ordinarily take for granted. Nice, huh? Invite one of your new best buds out for dinner and drinks and have a nice, long chat.



PISCES FEBRUARY 19-MARCH 20

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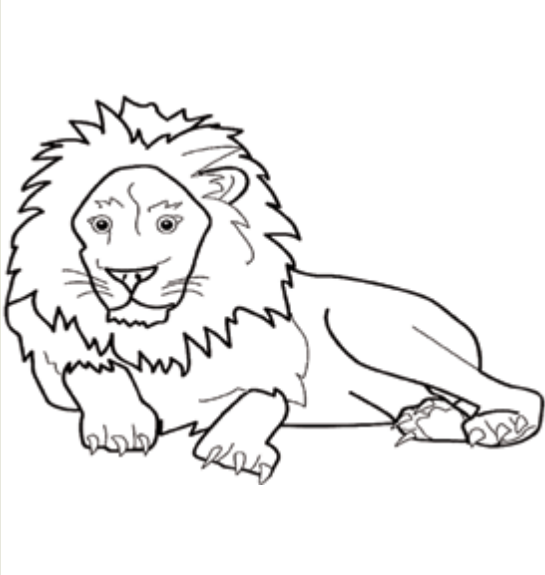
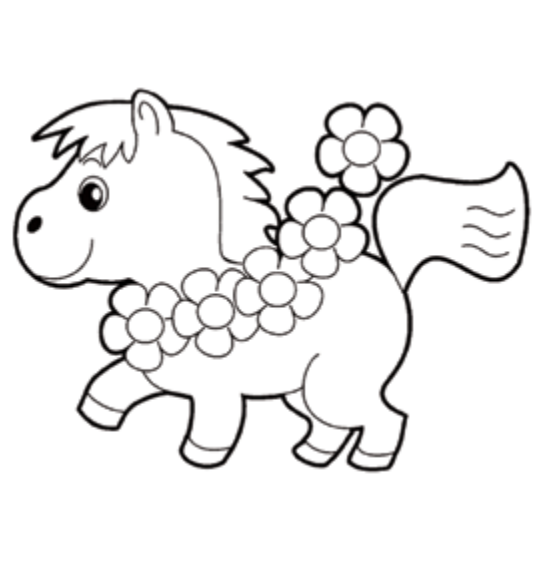


TEST YOUR KNOWLEDGE

- 1. Which two counties did Kapil Dev play for?
 - a. Northamptonshire & Worcestershire
 - b. Northamptonshire & Warwickshire
 - c. Nottinghamshire & Worcestershire
 - d. Nottinghamshire & Warwickshire
- 2. Who did Stone Cold Steve Austin wrestle at the 1998 edition of 'Over the Edge'?
 - a. Cactus Jack
 - b. Mankind
 - c. Dude Love
 - d. Mick Foley
- 3. Ricky Ponting is also known as what?
 - a. The Rickster
 - b. Ponts
 - c. Ponter
 - d. Punter

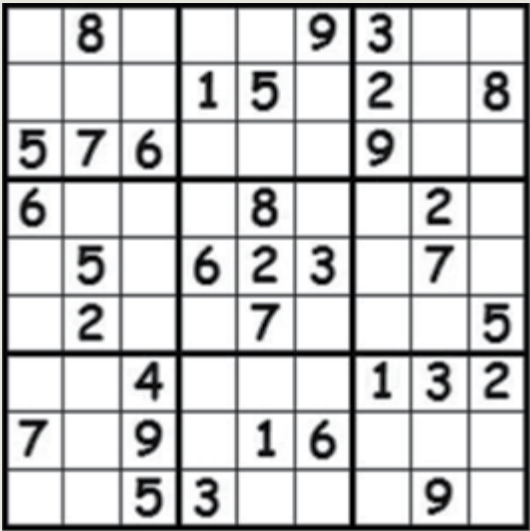
Answers: 1.a 2.c 3.d

KIDS COLOURING



DO YOU SUDOKU?

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



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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 12)



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





SOLO EXHIBITION

Mutant

art

Hubert Vaz

Fikra art gallery in Muttrah is currently showcasing 34 exclusive works of Iranian artisit Marjan Habibian under the theme ‘Mutant’. The exhibition, which opened last weekend, will be on till the end of July.

“I just share my opinion, thoughts, dreams about life, everything that’s going on around me and how I see the world. This exhibition contains mostly the work which I have done from the beginning of the pandemic. What happened to me, what I saw and feel, also what effected my normal life are shown in my art,” Marjan said, explaining that the theme of ‘Mutant’ came to her mind not only because of the pandemic but also because of the mutations that happened in her life and her work. “It also effects my new technique where I use the pattern of a Persian batik stamp on my drawings,” she said.

Marjan, who obtained her Graphic Diploma from the Art High school in Tehran, and studied at Azad University of Fine Arts and Architecture in Tehran where she gained a Master’s degree in painting, is an artist with a mind of her own that finds unique expression for things around her.

Skilled in abstract expressionism, she also includes figurative elements in her work and has participated in more than 69 exhibitions in Iran, Austria, Oman, Sri Lanka, Italy, Argentina, England, Sweden, Brussels, USA, and has won several awards, including the Windsor & Newton Worldwide Millennium Painting Competition in 2000.

Marjan’s professional work experience includes several years working in animation at Iran TV, teaching art at university and school and leading workshops in Oman and Austria.



“Through my paintings, I try to express my personal highs and lows – and those of the society I’m living in,” she says, adding, “I have always been inspired by nature, and by people their attitude to life, and to the society they live in. I search for answers in my daily life and in people’s faces. I try to read their stories, I try to get an insight into the way they feel about their lives.”

Explaining further about the inspiration behind the Mutant collection, which she created when being recently stuck in Iran due to travel restrictions, she said,

“It is possible to look beyond the eternal silence and peace in things of daily life which are covered by the dust of the years, or you continue to explore the meaning of mutation with a step forward into the soul of the atom.

“In this exhibition, I am showing some of my paintings, drawings and monotypes which have been done in Iran and Oman, mostly from the beginning of the year 2020 until present. It also contains a wall painting for which I invited other artists of Oman to join in.”



ISG student

enters Asia

Book of Records

Pranav Sivakumar, a grade 9 student of Indian School Ghubra (ISG), has entered the Asia Book of Records which has awarded him a ‘Grandmaster certification’ for drawing one of the largest caricatures of Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi.

The 2.1m x1.2m caricature was created by 14 year old Pranav by joining together eight standard chart papers. The record is the biggest caricature ever drawn in a limited timeframe.

“Sketching is my passion from my childhood. I am interested in caricatures, portraits and 3D car designing. It was a great pleasure and a challenge in sketching the biggest caricature of Prime Minister Narendra Modi in 16 minutes flat,” Pranav said, adding, “I would like to show PM Modi, and the world, what I have done for him as a mark of admiration and respect. I have drawn many caricatures but this one is special as it was a challenge to do it within 16 minutes to set a record. I hope Modi ji would see it some day.”

Pranav’s caricature collection includes world leaders like US President Donald Trump, former US president Barack Obama, UK Prime Minister Boris Johnson, Google CEO Sundar Pichai, Kerala (India) chief minister Pinarayi Vijayan, and others. He has also created caricatures of Bollywood personalities like Amitabh Bachchan, Aishwarya Rai, Hollywood’s Rowan Atkinson (Mr Bean) and south Indian actors like Mohanlal, Jagathy Sreekumar, Prithviraj, Nivin Pauly, Thilakan, among others.

Keen on drawing from a vey early age, Pranav has also sketched his favourite cartoon characters like Tom, Sher Khan and Spiderman along with his collection of sports personalities which include Indian cricketers like Sachin Tendulkar and Virat Kohli and football icons like Lionel Messi.

Under the guidance of his mother, Rema, who is an artist and art teacher, Pranav has been exploring newer sides to his talent and has showcased his drawings through various exhibitions in Muscat and India. He has also bagged several prizes in various national and international competitions and harbours an ambition of becoming a creative car designer in the near future.

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Some of Pranav’s caricatures

Messi dedicates Copa title to family, country, Maradona

Buenos Aires, Argentina - Lionel Messi has dedicated Argentina's Copa America triumph over Brazil to his family, his country and also late idol Diego Maradona.

"I want to dedicate this success to my family, who have always given me the strength to continue, to my friends whom I love so much, to all the people who support us and above all to 45 millions Argentinians who have suffered so with this dreadful virus," Barcelona megastar Messi wrote on Instagram.

Messi, 34, also paid tribute to the memory of Maradona, who died aged 60 last November, saying that 'Diego was surely urging us on wherever he is'.

Argentina's success over the Brazilians in Rio was not just Messi's first major trophy for the Albiceleste but his country's first continental honour in 28 years.

Messi had been desperate to lead the side to glory after a series of disappointments both at World Cups and the Copa.

Given its battle against the further spread of the virus, Argentina has not organised celebrations to mark their title win.

After arriving back in the country on Sunday, the squad



Fans surrounding buses transporting Argentina's football team upon its arrival in Ezeiza, Buenos Aires, on Sunday

Argentina's forward Lionel Messi is embraced by his wife Antonella Roccuzzo

were briefly received at the country's football federation headquarters and then dispersed for a pre-season break.

Despite the low-key welcome, thousands of fans took to the streets despite tight virus restrictions. "To continue to party we must continue to take care of each other - let's not forget we have a long way to go to

get back to normality," Messi warned. "Use this happiness to gather strength to fight this virus together."

Argentina is approaching a 100,000 COVID-19 death toll and weeks before the start of the Copa, Buenos Aires refused to co-stage with Colombia owing to the surge in pandemic cases.

AFP



US defender Sam Vines (C) scores a goal against Haiti during the CONCACAF Gold Cup opener in Kansas City, US, on Sunday

US defeat Haiti, Canada cruise past Martinique

CONCACAF GOLD CUP

Los Angeles, US - Sam Vines scored in the first half on a fortunate bounce as the US edged short-handed Haiti 1-0 on Sunday night in the opening game of the 2021 CONCACAF Gold Cup for both Group B teams in Kansas City.

Vines' first career international goal came off a header in the eighth minute for the USA, who fielded a team of mainly backup players for the 16-nation tournament.

A cross from Shaq Moore deflected off two Haitian defenders before popping in the air and right in front of Vines, who headed it in from six yards.

Elsewhere on Sunday, Canada romped to a 4-1 victory over

Martinique. Canada, stung by the loss of Bayern Munich star Alphonso Davies to an ankle injury on the eve of the event, nevertheless had no trouble in their Group B opener in Kansas City thanks to goals from Cyle Larin, Jonathan Osorio, Stephen Eustaquio and Theo Corbeanu.

COVID-19 knocked Curacao out of the tournament before it started, an outbreak forcing them to withdraw. They were replaced by Guatemala, who lost their opener 2-0 to El Salvador in a Group A clash in Frisco, Texas on Sunday. Mexico's title defence got off to a rocky start on Saturday when they were held to a goalless draw by Trinidad and Tobago in Group A.

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EURO 2020



England's Harry Kane (L) greets supporters after the loss to Italy

Worst feeling in the world: Kane

London, UK - England captain Harry Kane admitted his side's penalty shoot-out defeat in the Euro 2020 final against Italy on Sunday was 'the worst feeling in the world'.

Along with Harry Maguire, Kane was one of only two England players to score from the spot as Italy won the shoot-out 3-2 after a 1-1 draw following extra-time at Wembley. "Penalties is the worst feeling in the world when you lose," Kane told ITV.

"Anyone can miss a penalty. Penalties is penalties. We went through a process. The boys did everything they could, it just wasn't our night."

Tottenham striker Kane conceded England had played into Italy's hands by adopting a cautious approach in a failed bid to preserve their lead. "We were playing against a very good side. We got off to the perfect start. Maybe dropped a little too deep sometimes. They had a lot of the ball," Kane said.

"We looked fairly in control, they didn't create too many chances. They got their breakthrough from the set-piece and after that was 50-50."

After reaching their first European Championship final in an up-lifting run to their first major title match since the 1966 World Cup, Kane insisted England would bounce back from the agonising loss.

"We win together, we lose together. We'll learn and grow from it. Those boys will grow from it and it will give us more motivation for the World Cup next year," he said.

"You've got to hold your heads high. It's been a fantastic tournament."

AFP



England's coach Gareth Southgate (back-right) and his players reacts after their defeat to Italy on penalties at Wembley Stadium in London on Sunday (AFP)

'WE WIN AND LOSE TOGETHER'

Totally my responsibility for penalty gamble in final: Southgate

London, UK - Gareth Southgate urged England to use the pain of their Euro 2020 final defeat against Italy to fuel success in the future as the Three Lions boss accepted the blame for their heartbreaking penalty shoot-out defeat.

England failed to win their first major title since the 1966 World Cup as Marcus Rashford, Jadon Sancho and Bukayo Saka all missed penalties at Wembley on Sunday.

Southgate's side had made a dream start thanks to Luke Shaw's second-minute goal, but Italy showed their class to hit back through Leonardo Bonucci's second-half equaliser. When it came to penalties, Southgate gambled by sending on late substitutes Rashford and Sancho specifically for their prowess from the spot.

The move backfired as England suffered the latest in a long line of bitter shoot-out defeats at major tournaments. "That is my responsibility. I chose the guys to take the kicks. I told the players that nobody is on their own in that situation," Southgate said. "It is my decision to give Saka that penalty. That is totally my responsibility. It is not him or Marcus or Jadon."

"Marcus and Jadon have been by far the best in the lead-in. It was a gamble (to bring them on), but if we gamble earlier we maybe lose the game in extra-time."

'Incredible memories'

Jordan Pickford did his part with two saves and Southgate insisted he had no regrets about his picks for the penalty takers. "We've tracked them,



Bukayo Saka (3rd L) is consoled by teammates after the defeat

'Racial abuse of Rashford, teammates is unforgivable'

London, UK - England manager Gareth Southgate condemned as 'unforgivable' the racial abuse targeting his three players who missed penalties in Sunday's Euro 2020 final defeat to Italy. Marcus Rashford, Jadon Sancho and Bukayo Saka were the victims of a stream of abuse on Twitter and Instagram following the 2-3 shoot-out loss.

While some people identifying as England fans used racial slurs in blaming the trio for the defeat, other offensive messages were accompanied with 'forza italia' hashtags. England's players have made a strong stand against racism at the tournament, taking a knee before their games including Sunday's final. "For some of them to be abused is unforgivable," Southgate said on Monday. "Some of it has come from abroad, we have been told this, but some of it is from this country. "We have been a beacon of light to bring people together and the national team stands for everybody. "We felt the energy and positivity from the fans and I'm incredibly proud of that."

AFP

what they've done with their clubs over a long period of time and what they've shown in training as well," Southgate said.

"That's the process that worked for us in Russia and in the Nations League. Tonight it didn't quite work." Southgate admitted his side's lack

of composure on the ball proved fatal as they allowed Italy to regain their composure following Shaw's opener.

"We did start well. They were bound to have a spell where they came into the game," Southgate said. "We didn't keep the ball well enough in that initial period in the

second half. It was our lack of composure in possession that turned the game. The way they used the ball was better than us."

After an uplifting run to their first European Championship final featuring memorable knockout stage wins over Germany, Ukraine and Denmark, Southgate and his players have to pick up the pieces after seeing their dreams shattered.

They have the 2022 World Cup in Qatar to aim for and Southgate believes they will be better for the experience of their Euro run.

"At the moment the players are understandably really quiet. Prince William has just been down to see them in the dressing room and has rightly thanked them for what they've done and being fulsome in his praise," Southgate said.

"I said we could have no recriminations. We win and lose together. They've got to walk away from here with their heads held high. "They've done more than any other team in the last 50 or so years. In terms of the players, they should be incredibly proud of what they've done."

Mulling over the missed chance to lead England to a long-awaited major title, Southgate said he hoped the thrilling journey at least partially made up for the bitter ending. "Tonight the balloon is burst isn't it? The feeling will be very empty I know," he said. "That's hard for everyone to take. We wanted to give everyone one more night to continue the biggest party ever. "We haven't been able to do that but I hope we've given everybody some incredible memories."

AFP



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EURO2020

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TROPHY COMES TO ROME

Triumphant Italy return home after their thrilling victory over England in Euro 2020 final

Rome, Italy - Italy captain Giorgio Chiellini held aloft the gleaming trophy before a crowd of joyful fans on Monday as he and his triumphant team returned home from their victory against England in Euro 2020.

There were euphoric scenes overnight following Sunday's victory at Wembley, as fans draped in the tricolour flag thronged streets across Italy and the sound of fireworks and beeping cars and scooters filled the air.

And there was elation among a group who got up early - or never went to bed - to greet the Azzurri as they arrived back in Rome on Monday morning, fronted by Chiellini, the 36 year old veteran at the heart of Italy's defence, wearing a crown.

A grinning Leonardo Spinazzola, who played an outstanding role in the team's progress before injuring his Achilles tendon in the quarter-final against Belgium, had earlier hopped down the steps of the plane at Rome's Fiumicino and hobbled on crutches across the tarmac to cheers from media and airport staff snapping photographs.

The boys in blue chanted 'We're the champions of Europe!' as they piled out of the coach that whisked them from the airport to the hotel in Rome where they were headed for a rest - or to continue the celebrations.



Italian coach Roberto Mancini (L) and Giorgio Chiellini hold the European Championship trophy as they arrive at Fiumicino airport in Rome on Monday

They were invited to meet with Prime Minister Mario Draghi on Monday evening and also with President Sergio Mattarella, who himself was in London to watch the match.

"It's too beautiful!", proclaimed

the *Gazzetta dello Sport* newspaper, saying: "Italy is the queen of Europe. "It knew how to recover a match that seemed lost, as only the greatest teams know how.

"Finally Wembley falls silent, after having whistled, shouted,

howled. Every single Italian during those two hours felt like a giant once more".

A great emotion

Some Italian fans were bleary-eyed on Monday after late night

carousing, ordering double espressos to revive themselves. "It was a real satisfaction, a great emotion," said Mario Castellini, the manager of a bar in the capital's historic centre.

"I was sure we'd make it in the

It was a real satisfaction, a great emotion. I was sure we'd make it in the penalty shoot-out

MARIO CASTELLINI
ITALIAN FAN

penalty shoot-out, because we have a great goalkeeper" in Gianluigi Donnarumma, who claimed the player of the tournament award on Sunday, he added.

Greengrocer Matteo Falovo spoke for many when he said it had been 'a pleasure to be able to think about something else' than the pandemic, with Italy being the first European country to be hit hard by the coronavirus.

Despite entreaties from the government to respect social distancing rules, the streets of central Rome were packed with fans late Sunday and early Monday.

But even the street cleaners sweeping up broken beer bottles and firework casings after the celebrations were cheerful.

Rome butcher Mauro Antonucci summed it up in five simple words, saying that 'it was really something wonderful'.

AFF

Mancini: Italy's renaissance man

Rome, Italy - Roberto Mancini marked the crowning moment of his career on Sunday by winning the European Championship title with an Italy side transformed from the dark days of their 2018 World Cup qualifying fiasco.

The four-time world champions beat England 3-2 on penalties as the Euro 2020 final finished 1-1 after extra time at Wembley, with Italy claiming their second European crown, and first since 1968.

"It has not sunk in yet but we are delighted for the Italian public because they really deserve this after what has been a trying period. This is great joy for us," said Mancini.

It was his 14th trophy as a manager and first with Italy after falling short as a player with the national team between 1984 and 1994. "I was very fortunate to play in a great side in 1990 and fortunate to play in a terrific U21 team in 1988 but despite the fact we were the best team we didn't win it and lost both times on penalties, so I was due this."

In May 2018, few were in a hurry to take over from Gian Piero Ventura, after Italy failed to qualify for the



Italy's coach Roberto Mancini

World Cup for the first time in 60 years. First choice Carlo Ancelotti politely declined before Mancini, then coach of Zenit Saint Petersburg, landed his 'dream' job.

Mancini had been coaching for 17 years, winning trophies with Fiorentina, Lazio, Inter, Manchester City and Galatasaray. But his coaching career seemed to have lost a sense of purpose since leaving City in 2013 before the Azzurri hotseat became vacant. His first job was to restore confidence in a demoralised

side. "At the beginning when he said we had to think about winning the European Championship, we too thought he was crazy," said captain Giorgio Chiellini. The 36 year old defender was at the San Siro in Milan in November 2017 when Italy lost a World Cup playoff to Sweden.

"But it's a dream which he slowly instilled in our heads until it became reality," said Chiellini.

The victory follows three years of reconstruction, carried out with the support of many of his former Sampdoria teammates, including former Chelsea manager Gianluca Vialli.

The new-look Italy were without big stars, the bulk of their international experience centred largely around Chiellini and fellow Juventus defender Leonardo Bonucci.

"He worked on the head, giving us back our confidence, enthusiasm, self-esteem," said 34 year old Bonucci.

"He's a man of few words, but he created a great group and he revived a team that was at their lowest in 60 years. With great serenity, he conveys calm and confidence," continued Chiellini.

'Italy dominated'

The statistics under Mancini have been impressive. Just two defeats in 39 matches and an ongoing series of 34 games without defeat stretching back to September 2018.

During the European Championship he broke the national record of 30 games without defeat set by former World Cup-winning coach Vittorio Pozzo in the 1930s, and is now just one behind the records of 35 held by both Spain and Brazil.

Mancini hailed his side's performance and said Italy 'dominated' England on Sunday. "We did well. We conceded a goal straight away and struggled, but then we dominated the game," Mancini told RAI Sport. "The lads were wonderful, I don't know what more to say. It's important for all the people and all the fans."

Chiellini said 'there was something magical in the air' since the tournament kicked off in Rome a month ago.

"A few tears fell. We all deserved it, at this age we realise even more what it means to win such a trophy," said the defender.

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'Oman to take centre stage in Hockey5s development'

Top FIH official Tayyab Ikram believes that hosting of the inaugural Hockey5s World Cup in Muscat in 2024 will be a game-changer

Ashok Purohit
Muscat

Hosting of the inaugural FIH Hockey5s World Cup in January 2024 will allow Oman to take the centre stage and enhance their reputation as leaders in the region, according to a top official of the International Hockey Federation (FIH) on Monday.

In his remarks to *Muscat Daily* at an event to announce the 'indicative' dates of the Hockey5s World Cup, Tayyab Ikram, FIH chair of International and Olympic relations and FIH executive board member, said, "It is a proud moment for Oman to be the host of the inaugural Hockey5s World Cup. Oman Hockey Association (OHA) under its chairman, Talib al Wahaibi, and the bid team did a remarkable job to bring the prestigious tournament to the sultanate.

"Both the FIH and the Asian Hockey Federation (AHF) are confident that their initiative to bring the Hockey 5s World Cup to the region will meet its desired objectives. The World Cup is expected to help the game grow not only in Oman but also make a lasting impact on the region."

Ikram, who is also the AHF chief executive, said that 'it was a fantastic opportunity for Oman to showcase their potential as a sporting nation'.

"We have witnessed that over the years, Oman have proven to be successful hosts of many world-class tournaments, starting with the 2010 Muscat Asian Beach Games," said Ikram.

"The inaugural FIH Hockey5s World Cup provides a platform for Oman Hockey Association, Oman Olympic Committee and the Ministry of Culture, Sports and Youth to propel the sultanate to a new level as all

eyes will be on the tournament, which will be held for the first time and feature the best 16 best men's and women's teams from around the world. Oman qualifies into the both events as host nation.

"It is up to Oman to view the hosting of the World Cup as a one-off tournament or make it a catalyst to bring in a change in the sporting culture of the nation. Oman have time to build on this World Cup, involve the local youth, enhance community engagements and spread the game among children.

"We are talking of thousands of children in schools being involved with the hosting of the World Cup that will leave a long-lasting legacy of the game, including a new Hockey5s stadium."

Ikram expressed his thanks and gratitude to His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik and H H Sayyid Theyazin bin Haitham, Minister of Culture, Sports and Youth, for their strong support to the game.

Ikram, who is also a FIH Masters coach, said, "Sports and youth are the backbone of a nation's growth and the support the sports is receiving from HM the Sultan and the government is an example to follow for many nations.

"I have been visiting Oman for more than a decade and I have closely watched the giant strides the sultanate has made in the field of sports, hockey in particular."

Ikram wished OHA the very best and said that the hard work and commitment of the outgoing OHA chief Wahaibi is praiseworthy.

"I am aware of the passion and dedication of Captain Wahaibi and how keen he is in bringing the Hockey5s World



A file photo of women Hockey5s match in action



We at FIH and the AHF assure OHA and Oman government to extend full support in all aspects to ensure the success of the first ever Hockey5s World Cup

TAYYAB IKRAM

Cup to Oman despite tough competition.

"I hope he will continue to play a lead role in the organisation of the forthcoming World Cup and that the new chairman-elect, Dr Marwan al Juma, and his team will carry on the good work ahead," he said.

FIH had also received bids to host the World Cup from India, Pakistan and Singapore.

Ikram said, "We at FIH and the AHF assure OHA and Oman government to extend full support in all aspects to ensure the success of the first ever Hockey5s World Cup. Oman's organisational success will set the benchmark for future editions and I am confident of a memorable tournament for both men and women."

On this occasion, Tahir Zaman, former Oman coach and AHF representative, was also present at the meet.

@ashokmuscat



A file photo of a men's Hockey5s game

Asian Qualifiers in Muscat

Muscat - In another positive development, the AHF chief executive said that the Asian Qualifiers for the Hockey5s World Cup will be held in Muscat next year.

"We plan to organise the qualifiers in the last quarter of

2022 in Muscat. It would be an ideal test event for Oman with just about a year to go for the World Cup."

Three teams - both men and women - from Asia will qualify for the first edition in Muscat.

Week-long fiesta to begin on January 24, 2024

Our Correspondent
Muscat

Oman Hockey Association (OHA) boss Talib al Wahaibi, who has been the force behind Oman's winning bid, thanked the Ministry of Culture, Sports and Youth, Oman Olympic Committee secretary general Taha al Kishry, Oman Sail officials and OHA external relations manager Shakir Munir for their contribution in ensuring Oman put up a strong bid for the Hockey5s World Cup.

"I would like to announce that the biggest hockey event in Oman will be held from January 24, 2024, with the final to be held on January 31," he said.

"These are indicative dates and we will try to get endorsement from the International Hockey Federation (FIH) on the proposed schedule. We are very happy and promise to put up a winning show on all fronts," he added.



OHA chairman Talib al Wahaibi (L) and Tayyab Ikram on Monday

"Our men's team is already in place and we have a good pool of young players. I can assure you that our team will be there not to add numbers but compete with the world's best," he said.

"The formation of the women's team is a challenge but we are confident of fielding a team for the World Cup. We have begun the journey.

"A domestic Hockey5s league is already in the pipeline and a Salalah club is organising

a Hockey5s tournament soon. So the format is picking up and it is my dream to see the Hockey5s World Cup be the best ever.

"We will work hard with all stakeholders to make this happen," said Wahaibi.

He is expected to take up a lead role in the organising committee, which will be formed under the chairmanship of H E Rashad al Hinai, Undersecretary in the Ministry of Culture, Sports and Youth.



KNOW ABOUT HOCKEY5S

The game is played with five players per team.

It is non-stop end to end action, since the ball is in play for about 90 per cent of a match, with rebound-boards placed on of the side-lines and back-lines.

Goals are in plenty as compared to the traditional 11-a-side format of hockey, since players can score from anywhere after the attacking line. It is currently played in about 70 countries in the world.

Hockey5s was the most attended sport at the 2018 Youth Olympic Games in Buenos Aires, Argentina, with no less than 200,000 spectators.



Talib al Wahaibi (R) presents a memento to Rashad al Hinai (C) at an event held at the OOC headquarters

Oman eager to host world class events, says H E Hinai

Ashok Purohit
Muscat

Oman's Ministry of Culture, Sports and Youth is open to hosting world-class sports tournaments, according to H E Rashad al Hinai, undersecretary in the ministry, and the emphasis is on 'events that neighbouring GCC nations are not involved with'.

Speaking on the sidelines of a press meet to announce details of the inaugural FIH Hockey5s World Cup, H E Hinai said, "We

are now more open to hosting world-class events to boost the profile of the sultanate on all fronts. "We have good infrastructure not just for sports but also have a lot of tourism potential that we would like the world to know. We are delighted that the FIH [International Hockey Federation] has awarded the inaugural Hockey5s World Cup to Oman and we are confident that it would be a successful event.

"The ministry expects the respective associations to prepare strong bids well in advance. If it's

a bid that adds value to the sultanate, then we are behind them.

According to H E Hinai Oman is not in competition with the neighbouring GCC countries to host big sports events. "We have been the front-runners in hosting world-class sailing championships and we have a couple of them later this year. Likewise Hockey5s is also unique as hockey is a very old game in Oman. We stand apart and are not in a race with anyone. We go by the merit of the tournament.

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