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HM exchanges Muharram greetings

Muscat - On the advent of the New Hijri Year and the anniversary of the Prophet Mohammed's (PBUH) Hijra, His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tariq has exchanged greetings cables with leaders of the sisterly and friendly Arab and Muslim countries.

In his cables, His Majesty the Sultan expressed his sincere greetings and best wishes of good health, happiness and a long life for the leaders. He prayed to Allah the Almighty for the return of this blessed occasion on them and to make the New Year a year of peace and security for all peoples. He also prayed for further progress, welfare

and prosperity for the Islamic nation.

In their cables to His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tariq, the leaders of the sisterly and friendly countries expressed their sincere greetings and best wishes of good health, happiness and a long life to His Majesty the Sultan. They prayed to Allah the Almighty for the return of this blessed occasion on His Majesty for many years to come to achieve all aspirations of further progress, welfare and prosperity for his faithful people and further welfare and blessings for all Muslims.

ONA

New Hijri Year holiday on Tuesday

Muscat - The Ministry of Awqaf and Religious Affairs (MARA) on Sunday announced that the Hijri New Year holiday for the year 1443 will be marked on Tuesday, August 10.

Therefore, as issued by the government earlier, the official Muharram holiday will be on Tuesday, August 10, for both public and private sectors.

Ban on pyramid schemes to limit fraud, exit of funds

Multi-level marketing systems are considered illegal in many countries

Our Correspondent
Muscat

The Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion (MoCIIP) has emphasised that the ban on selling, advertising and promoting goods, products and services via pyramid schemes will significantly limit commercial fraud. Besides deterring individuals from engaging in such practices, the ban will prevent monopoly of trade.

Among other names, pyramid schemes are also known as network marketing, multi-level marketing and hierarchical marketing.

Ministerial Decision No 105/2021 recently issued by MoCIIP aims at preventing such type of trade, which is considered fraudulent and criminalised under the Omani Commercial Law issued via Royal Decree 55/90 and by the Omani Penal

Law promulgated by Royal Decree 7/74.

Dr Mohammed bin Rashid al Badi, acting director of the Legal Department in MoCIIP, said, "Pyramid schemes begin with an individual or a company at the top of the pyramid, whose work is to persuade people to buy a product or to subscribe it by paying a certain amount of money. While subscribers are promised services or a symbolic profit if they can convince others to join their list, the biggest beneficiary is the one at the top of the pyramid."

According to Dr Maha bint Khamis al Balushi, assistant professor of Marketing and Identity at Sultan Qaboos University, there is a lot of confusion among people regarding the concept of hierarchical marketing, multi-level marketing and network marketing. Except for hierarchical



Pyramid schemes begin with an individual or a company at the top whose work is to persuade people to buy a product

DR MOHAMMED AL BADI



The decision will contribute to regulating the direct sales marketing sector in Oman as it also contributes to the GDP

DR MAHA AL BALUSHI

marketing, these are different components of the concept of direct selling.

"Direct sales marketing is di-

rect selling from a fixed retail site. Despite the popularity of direct selling in the retail trade, which is spreading in many countries

across the world, it seems that there are different types of distributors of direct selling practices with different motives. Multi-level marketing, which is considered a part of network marketing, has a multi-level commission structure based on the volume of sales of quality products with competitive pricing," Maha said.

She pointed out that sales representatives or distributors work for themselves and act as independent agents for reputed companies. These distributors sell to consumers, including themselves, thus this type of marketing is a legitimate form of direct consumer marketing.

"So multi-level marketing includes developing social networks such as family and friends groups that develop into business alliances."

Continued on Page 02

Recovery rate exceeds 95% since outbreak

Our Correspondent
Muscat

With the increase in the pace of the National Immunisation Campaign against COVID-19, the Ministry of Health (MoH) confirmed that the recovery rate in the sultanate now exceeds 95 per cent for the first time since the beginning of the pandemic.

MoH has recorded a drop in new daily cases and deaths in the past three days; 686 cases and 30 deaths were reported for the last 72 hours.

The total number of cases registered in the sultanate has now reached 298,706, including 3,936 deaths.

Thirty patients were admitted to hospitals across the country in a 24-hour period on Sunday, accounting for a total 359 inpatients, including 163 in intensive care units. The total number of recoveries is 285,057, accounting for a recovery rate is 95.4 per cent.



Vaccination drive witnesses good turnout

Muscat - The Ministry of Health (MoH) confirmed that vaccination drive for all target groups continue including school students aged 12 and older.

MoH has stated that vaccination centres in the wilayahs of North Batinah have witnessed a good turnout of citizens and residents of the target groups within the expanded National Immunisation Campaign.

LOSS OF A GIANT



The Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Water Resources has reported the death of a humpback whale near the coast of Sur, South Sharqiyah. According to a ministry statement, the whale died after it was trapped in fishing net. The loss of one humpback whale from the Arabian Sea is equivalent to the loss of 1-2 per cent of the total population of this endangered species (Supplied photo)



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Dhofar youth fight invasive plant

Our Correspondent
Muscat

With the aim of spreading awareness on the importance of preserving green spaces in Dhofar, over 200 people have come together for a campaign to fight the invasive plant Parthenium.

A volunteer team from Dhofar is uprooting the plant over several square kilometres of land.

Speaking to *Muscat Daily*, Salim Mohammed Salim al Maashani, head of Madinat al Haq team, said the campaign which began in July will continue until September.

“We began uprooting the weed in the villages of Mirbat, Taqa, Rakhout, Dalkhout and Salalah.”

The team, which was founded in July 2020, now consists of over two hundred youth.

Considered to be the worst weed currently known, Parthenium - a noxious plant - has plagued some stretches of Dhofar’s plains and farm fields.

The plant produces allelopathic chemicals that suppress crop and pasture plants and allergens that affect humans and livestock. It also frequently causes pollen allergies.

Talking about the campaign he said, “On some days we work



(Supplied photo)

On some days we work tirelessly from 8am to 4pm. This needs a lot of effort and money. We also face some challenges... have to face the threat of reptiles like cobras

MOHAMMED SALIM AL MAASHANI

tirelessly from 8am to 4pm. This needs a lot of effort and money. We also face some challenges such as lack of tools. We also

have to face the threat of reptiles like cobras.”

Maashani said during the campaign they take extra care to

follow all COVID-19 precautionary measures like wearing face masks, gloves and maintaining physical distancing to prevent the spread of the virus.

“We will continue to work in several parts of Dhofar. The team aims to promote volunteerism and social and cultural initiatives among community members. The team also aims to provide relief to the agricultural

sector in the governorate,” he said.

“We call on all responsible parties to cooperate to preserve and protect our precious environment. We will continue to spread awareness on the importance of preserving green spaces. We hope to get modern technology and tools from private or government agencies to get rid of this poisonous plant.”



(Supplied photo)

PDO’s Ras al Hamra project gets US green certificate

Muscat - Petroleum Development Oman’s (PDO) Ras al Hamra (RAH) Development Project has been awarded an international green building certification recognised as an international symbol of sustainability achievement and leadership.

The project achieved the LEED accreditation for implementing practical and measurable strategies and solutions in areas including sustainable site development, energy efficiency, water savings, minimising greenhouse gas emissions, materials selection and indoor environmental quality.

Several types of townhouses and villas in the project were awarded the LEED Platinum rating, an achievement which is the first of its kind in Oman and the

region. LEED (Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design), which was developed by the US Green Building Council (USGBC), is the most widely used green building rating system in the world.

Through design, construction and operations practices that improve environmental and human health, LEED-certified buildings are preventing pollution impacts during construction and waste diversion from landfill to contribute to the circular economy.

RAH Development Project manager Eng Jaber al Siyadi said, “The project is a prime example of how the innovative work of project teams can create local solutions that contribute to making a global difference.”

MURKY MUSCAT



Muscat skies remained partly overcast due to low-level clouds over parts of the Arabian Sea and Oman Sea coast on Sunday. The city experienced the highest temperature at 38°C and the lowest was 31°C. Shalim experienced the lowest temperature at 19.4°C, while the highest temperature was recorded at 47.5°C in Muqshin (Syed Fasiuddin)

New committee formed to grant licences for accounting profession

Our Correspondent
Muscat

H E Qais bin Mohammad al Yousef, Minister of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion (MoCIIP), issued a decision (No.11/2021) to form a committee for the registration process in the Accountants and Auditors Register.

As per the decision issued on August 2, the vice president of the Capital Market Sector in the Capital Market Authority would function as the chairman of the committee; while the Directorate

General of Trade in the MoCIIP and one representative each from the Ministry of Finance, the Tax Authority, the Central Bank of Oman and the Omani Accountants Association will be its members, besides an additional expert member.

The committee will be responsible for studying applications for licences that would be required for professional accounting and auditing and finally for granting licences after verifying that the conditions stipulated in the application for registration are met.

The committee has been

made responsible for setting the accounting standards that must be applied while preparing financial statements, budgets and the final financial results. The committee will also ensure the implementation of these standards by accounting and auditing offices.

As per the decision, the sessions of the committee shall be confidential.

Any rejected applicant can file a grievance to the minister against the committee’s decision within 30 days from the date of the rejection notification, the ministerial decision said.

Six companies found running unlicensed business: TRA

Our Correspondent
Muscat

The Telecommunications Regulatory Authority (TRA) officials have arrested people involved in running postal related businesses illegally.

The authority said that the members of six companies in the field of postal services during its inspection tours were taken in for violations of rules.

The violations were related to practices like charging fees without obtaining a license from the authority, it said.

The authority said the inspection campaign was launched to reduce illegal practices, protect the interests of beneficiaries and create job opportunities.

PRAYER TIMINGS

Fajr	4.16am
Sunrise	5.40am
Duhr	12.12pm
Asr	3.37pm
Maghrib	6.44pm
Isha	8.14pm



MAZDA 3 RECALL CAMPAIGN FOR SAFETY



Date of Campaign:	9 Aug 2021
Campaign Type:	Safety
Campaign Section:	Airbag System
Product Description:	Mazda3

Outline of concern:
The plastic logo on the steering wheel air bag module cover may shatter and project fragments into the vehicle interior during an air bag deployment in a crash, increasing the possibility of serious injury to occupants

Model	VIN From	Production Date From	Production Date To	No of Affected Vehicles
Mazda3	JM7BK**** *1 100013 – 304775	26-Sep-2003	22-Jun-2006	1007

Defect: Due to an improper material specification, the plastic logo may become brittle over time. In this condition, the logo may shatter during a normal air bag deployment.

Actions: Replace the air bag module cover with an improved part

Contact information: Towell Auto Centre LLC, Tel: 24229100, CR No. 1/36465/0

***Note:** Not all the vehicles are affected in the above list. Hence please contact Towell Auto Centre before visiting the workshop.

To check if your vehicle falls within the purview of this recall, please visit www.mazdaoman.com/en/recall



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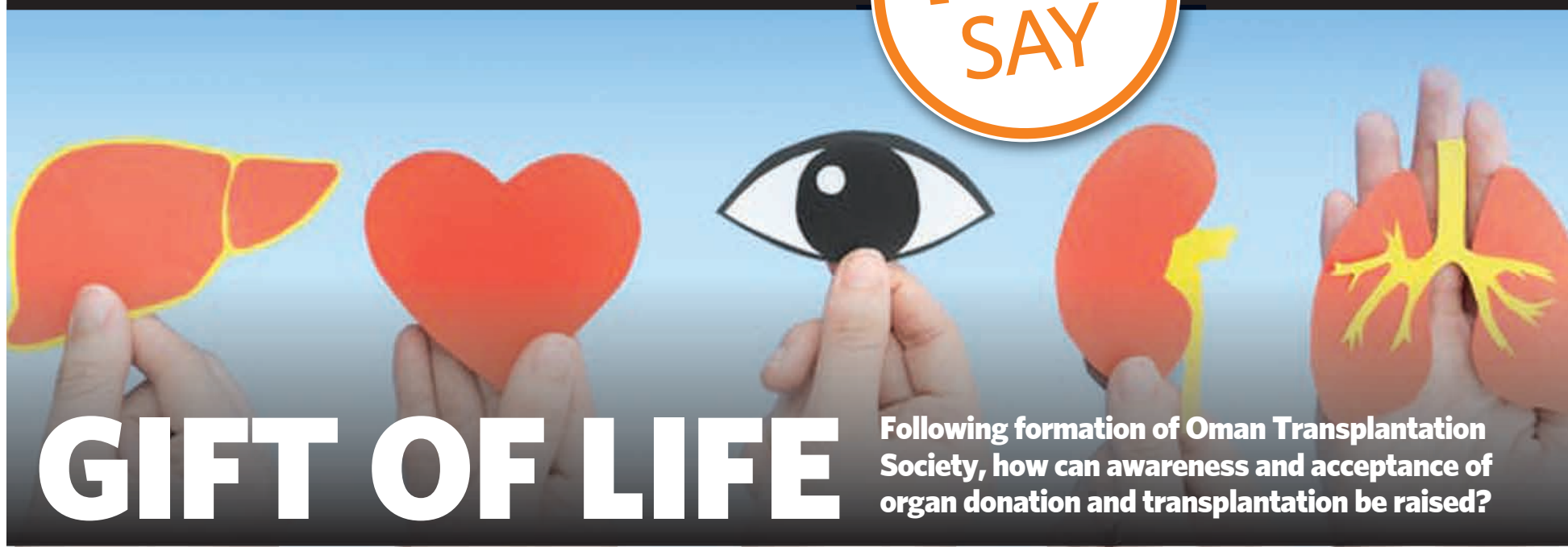
Advertisement No.(32 /2021)

specialized Companies in the field of tender shown below and registered with **Tender Board**, may obtain tender documents from the website through the following link: (<https://etendering.tenderboard.gov.om>) against non-refundable fees until the end of deadline stipulated below.

Tender No.	No E- Tender	Description of Tender	Tender Fee	Last date to collect the tender	Tender return date	Grade
PRE/21/052	(42/2021/MM/ /QS-3)	ADOBE CC RENEWAL (E- Tender)	Rial 25	23/08/2021	07/09/2021	Specialized

Tender Conditions :-

- Bidders shall submit their offers electronically accompanied with an electronic copy of abond issued by any local bank in Oman addressed to Muscat municipality. The bond shall be (1%) of the tender value valid for ninety (90) days starting from the date of bids submission. Any tenders which do not meet the required bond shall not be accepted.
- Tender Bonds shall be placed in the Tender Bond Box (B) for E-Tendering in the First floor at Muscat Municipality HQ, Darsit before 10:00 am as per the date Mentioned in the above table. All envelopes are to be clearly marked with the name of the Tender being presented and no other marks.
- For any inquiries regarding tenders, please visit e-tendering website: (<https://etendering.tenderboard.gov.om>) .
- For technical support of e-tendering system please send an email to (etenderhd@ita.gov.om) or call (+96824166670).



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Marhoun al Saidi
Account executive

The society will facilitate those who want to donate. With its formation, there will be more options for those who need organs. It will also support the government and private medical sectors, besides spreading awareness among people because we lack this culture.



Rupal Panchal
Homemaker

Reasons for organ shortage are ignorance and lack of knowledge. Social media can promote the positives of organ donation and how it can save lives if people volunteer for donation. Documentaries can be shown on how numerous lives have been saved as a result of organ transplantation.



Nandini Nandakumar
Psychotherapist

Celebrities and private and public sector employees can be engaged to motivate people to come forward to show their interest and the importance of organ donation which is needed to save lives. Also, social media and public events at parks and malls can be held to raise awareness on organ donation.



Mohan Anandan
Banking sector employee

The formation of Oman Transplantation Society is a boon for patients whose lives depend on replacement of a failed organ. The society must now start awareness campaigns to inform the public about the importance of organ donation which can save many critically ill persons.



Ali al Sheyadi
Teacher

This is a good move and it will support the medical field. It will also help support and save a lot of people. Awareness must be raised on how to write a will for organ donation. I have asked a lot of people to come forward to donate.



Ruskeen S
Sales manager

Health experts, religious preachers and community leaders must come forward and educate the masses and create awareness. People are afraid of post-operative costs and complications in donors. For that, insurance companies should be flexible and helpful.



Jay Prakash
Private sector employee

Organ transplantation will surely go a long way in helping those suffering due to organ failure. Acceptance of organ donation can be raised through civil society, famous people and the media. It is important to develop awareness and the culture of organ donation among the youth.



Harish Danani
Senior manager

Awareness must be raised in schools and education institutions about organ transplantation - the risks and benefits associated with live organ donation and transplantation. Social media can be used to raise awareness. A central registry can provide donor family services, public education and support services.



Naishadh Suresh Panchal
Accounts and operations manager

Social media is the most efficient platform to spread awareness on organ donation. People need to be made aware about how lives can be saved by organ transplantation/donation.



? NEXT ON YOUR SAY

Is it time for Oman to allow passengers who have received both doses of vaccine?

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

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Arabian leopard emerges in Dhofar again

Our Correspondent
Muscat

The Environmental Authority has once again recorded the presence of the Arabian leopard in the mountainous area of Najd located north of Salalah in Dhofar governorate.

In a statement the Environmental Authority said the presence of the 'critically endangered' animal in Dhofar was documented by using trap cameras.

In November 2020, the Office for Conservation of Environment (OCE) in the Diwan of Royal Court detected the first scientific evidence of the presence of the Arabian leopard in two different locations in the west of the wilayat of Dhalkut in Dhofar.

The OCE confirmed the breakthrough study - conducted by its specialists using a number of modern techniques, including trap cameras - indicates rich biological diversity of the area.

The study also reveals the presence of seven other species of wild mammals such as Arabian wolf, porcupine, lynx, striped hyena, honey badger,



There are less than 200 big cats in the wild, with 44 to 58 of them in the sultanate

mongoose and rock hyrax that inhabit the region. The animals are listed as endangered or vulnerable to extinction according to the classification of the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN).

The Arabian leopard has been

classified by IUCN as critically endangered.

There are less than 200 big cats in the wild and according to studies conducted in Oman, there are only 44 to 58 of them in the country.

Field studies carried out by

the OCE for 23 years have confirmed the presence of the Arabian leopard in the mountains of Dhofar, ranging from Hasik in the east to the wilayat of Dhalkut in the west, in addition to sightings in Najd, north of the Dhofar Mountains.

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CMA prepares regulations to allow crowdfunding in Oman

Our Correspondent
Muscat

Oman's capital markets regulator, the Capital Market Authority (CMA), is preparing regulations to allow and license crowdfunding platforms in the sultanate.

Crowdfunding is a way of funding start-ups, small projects and businesses by raising funds from a large number of people through licensed online platforms.

The CMA's board of directors has approved the necessary amendment in the capital market legislations to license crowdfunding platforms in the sultanate, according to a press statement issued on Sunday.

The CMA acknowledged that the crowdfunding platforms are innovative instruments and financial technologies which enable entrepreneurs and micro, small and medium enterprises to get more appropriate financing mechanisms.

The CMA board emphasised the importance of launching such type of digital platforms for their significance as financing options



(Muscat Daily)

for SMEs in the sultanate to enhance economic development, job creation and financial inclusion. The market regulator noted that the regulations for the crowdfunding platforms are in their final stages of preparation.

'The CMA will take into consideration, in setting out the rules, that they (crowdfunding platforms) will not be transformed into lending institutions in the conventional sense,' the CMA said, adding that it will post

the rules for public consultation and feedback.

The Capital Market Authority further said that it intends to license the first crowdfunding platform in Oman before the end of this year.

Crowdfunding is a fast growing financing industry and often used by start-up companies and SMEs as a way of accessing funds. It is an innovative way of raising funds for new start-ups and projects.

'The CMA's endeavour to launch and regulate crowdfunding platforms in Oman comes from the government's efforts to provide financing facilities for SMEs and micro projects,' the CMA said. The launch of crowdfunding platforms may help in overcoming key challenges facing the SMEs and small projects, such as the banking sector's reluctance to fund such projects due to the risks and lack of proper guarantees.

Port of Salalah handles 2.1mn containers in first half of 2021

Our Correspondent
Muscat

More than 2.1mn shipping containers were loaded and unloaded at the Port of Salalah during the first half of this year.

Besides steady growth in operations and logistic services, the Port of Salalah also handled 8.8mn tonnes of general cargo goods in the first six months of 2021.

In a statement to Oman News Agency, Mohammed Oufait al Shanfari, executive manager of Salalah Port Services Company, said, "Despite challenges posed by the COVID-19 pandemic, the Port of Salalah had achieved a positive growth in 2020 also. In fact, it made the largest volume of container handling ever—a record hit of 4.3mn containers, compared to 4.1mn in 2019."

Shanfari pointed out that the Port of Salalah achieved global records in the volume of container handling and operational efficiency. These two records were quoted by the World Bank in its Container Ports Performance Index issued by the World Bank's international transport organization. The Port of Salalah



came sixth among 351 ports worldwide. The index measures the operational efficiency shown by a port when receiving container vessels and handling them.

Shanfari added that Salalah Port Services Company is embarked on developing two products: Flexible storage (Flex Hub) and the development of simultaneous sea and air transport via Salalah.

Flex Hub has been developed in cooperation with Maersk and support from Asyad Group and the Royal Oman Police (ROP) Directorate General of Customs. The aim is to cut down cargo

handling time by 60 per cent to 80 per cent.

The second product – development of simultaneous sea and air transport via Salalah – minimises logistics cost, the period of handling goods when transporting them to markets in Europe, the United States or African countries. Both products have been developed after passing the trial periods.

Speaking about employment in higher and medium posts, Shanfari said that more than 80 per cent of the company's staff are Omanis with advanced expertise in managing operations.

Saudi Aramco's Q2 profits surge 288% to \$25bn

Riyadh, Saudi Arabia – Energy giant Saudi Aramco's second quarter profits for 2021 have bounced back to pre-pandemic levels due to higher oil prices, nearly quadrupling compared to the same period last year.

The company's success comes after its debts climbed last year, when Saudi Arabia was hammered by the double whammy of low prices and sharp cuts in production triggered by the coronavirus pandemic.

Aramco said on Sunday its net profit rose to US\$25.5bn in the second quarter of the year, compared to US\$6.6bn in the same quarter of 2020, owing to a stronger oil market and higher refining and chemicals margins, and with the easing of COVID-19 restrictions.

In the second quarter of 2019, before global economies were hit hard by COVID-19 restrictions, the company posted a net profit of US\$24.7bn.

"Our second quarter results (for 2021) reflect a strong rebound in worldwide energy demand, and we are heading into the second half of 2021 more resilient and more flexible, as the global recovery gains momentum," Aramco chief executive Amin Nasser said in a statement.

Aramco – like other global oil giants, including ExxonMobil, Royal Dutch Shell and TotalEnergies – has reported stronger profits this year, riding a wave of higher prices amid recovering demand.

It reported 'a 288 per cent increase in net income from the same quarter of last year to US\$25.5bn and declaring a dividend of US\$18.8bn', according to the statement.

Sunday's announcement comes approximately two months after the company said it raised US\$6bn from its first dollar-denominated Islamic bond sale, posting earlier this year a 30 per cent jump in first quarter profits.

Aramco – the kingdom's cash cow – said in May that its net profit rose to US\$21.7bn in the first three months of the year.

The energy giant posted a 44.4 per cent slump in 2020 net profit, piling pressure on government finances as Riyadh pursues



Amin Nasser

its multi-billion dollar projects to diversify the economy.

The world's leading oil producers agreed last month to continue to modestly boost output from August reaching a compromise after the United Arab Emirates blocked a deal.

An OPEC+ meeting decided to raise output by 400,000 barrels per day (bpd) each month from August to help fuel a global economic recovery as the pandemic eases.

The results come a day ahead of a UN report on climate change, which will give the international community its clearest ever warning about the dangers of accelerating global warming, according to Britain's COP26 President Alok Sharma.

Aramco opens up

Long seen as the kingdom's economic 'crown jewel', Aramco and its assets were once tightly government-controlled and considered off-limits to outside investment.

But with the rise of Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman, Saudi Arabia's de facto ruler, who is accelerating efforts to implement his 'Vision 2030' reform programme, the kingdom has shown readiness to cede some control.

Aramco previously sold a sliver of its shares on the Saudi bourse in December 2019, generating US\$29.4bn for 1.7 per

cent of its shares.

In April, the company said it had struck a US\$12.4bn deal to sell a minority stake in a newly formed oil pipeline business, to a consortium led by US-based EIG Global Energy Partners.

And in June, Aramco 'successfully raised US\$6bn, following the sale of US dollar-denominated sharia-compliant securities to leading institutional investors', the company said.

Earlier this year, Prince Mohammed said the kingdom would sell more Aramco shares.

Some analysts have raised concerns at past drone and missile attacks on Aramco's facilities in the kingdom – claimed by Yemen's Huthi rebels.

Aramco reassured on Sunday that it achieved '100 per cent reliability in the delivery of crude oil and other products in the second quarter of 2021'.

There are also increased fears over cyber attacks, with Saudi Aramco confirming last month that company data had been leaked from one of its contractors. However, the company said it had 'no impact' on operations.

When the coronavirus pandemic took hold early last year, oil prices plunged as demand for crude crashed.

They have since recovered, currently trading above US\$70 per barrel.

AFP

Middle East's largest wind energy project begins operations

Abu Dhabi, UAE – The Dumat Al Jandal wind farm, the Middle East's largest wind energy project and the first in Saudi Arabia, is now connected to the grid and has produced its first carbon-free megawatt-hours (MWh) of energy. The 400MW utility-scale wind power project is being developed by a consortium led by EDF Renewables and Abu Dhabi's Masdar, two of the world's leading renewable energy companies.

The wind farm consists of 99 wind turbines from supplier and EPC contractor Vestas, each with a power output of 4.2MW. Construction on the project began in September 2019 and the wind turbine erection works are near completion.

When complete, the wind farm will generate carbon-free energy, powering up to 70,000 Saudi households, while saving 988,000 tonnes of CO2 per year in support of the kingdom's climate change mitigation goals.

Olivier Marchand, project director of Dumat Al Jandal Wind Co for Energy LLC, said, "We are delighted to start the early power production of this unique large-scale wind project in Saudi Arabia.

The outstanding commitment shown by our teams and contractors with the



implementation of the highest health and safety standards and the full support provided by Saudi Arabia's Ministry of Energy, Saudi Power Procurement Company and Saudi Electricity Company have contributed to the successful execution of the project during this extremely challenging pandemic period. We are now looking forward to successfully reaching, with our partners and contractors, the full commissioning of the project in the months to come."

Osama al Othman, country representative – Saudi Arabia at Masdar, said, "Masdar is proud to be leveraging its experience in

renewable energy to deliver Saudi Arabia's first wind farm in collaboration with our partners. The successful connection of the project to the electricity transmission grid marks an important milestone for this landmark project in the kingdom and we look forward to project's completion in the near future. As a global leader in the development of commercially viable wind power, Masdar is committed to advancing clean technology across the region and we will continue our efforts to support the country's ambitious energy program."

The wind farm is also contributing to the region's eco-

nomics activity, creating more than 600 local jobs during the construction phase. The project has also achieved a significant health and safety milestone by securing 1.8mn man-hours without a single lost-time injury as a result of the strict health and safety procedures on site.

The Dumat Al Jandal wind farm will supply electricity under a 20-year power purchase agreement with Saudi Power Procurement Company, a subsidiary of the Saudi Electricity Company, the Saudi power generation and distribution company.

WAM

US oil giants to keep a lid on spending

New York, US – US oil giants ExxonMobil and Chevron reported strong profits riding a wave of higher oil prices amid recovering demand, but pledged to keep a lid on spending.

The results marked a 180-degree reversal from this time last year when the companies suffered hefty losses amid heavy pandemic restrictions that crimped economic activity and halted travel.

"Positive momentum continued during the second quarter across all of our businesses as the global economic recovery increased demand for our product," said Exxon chief executive Darren Woods.

But neither company indicated plans to pivot away from

the focus on spending discipline or open the spigots on more investment in additional projects, reflecting pressure from investors, including those who oppose more spending on fossil fuels.

ExxonMobil said it would keep its 2021 capital spending budget at the low end of projections, while Chevron highlighted its lower spending in the second quarter. Chevron also announced plans to resume share repurchases in the third quarter.

ExxonMobil reported profits of US\$4.7bn in the second quarter, compared with a loss of US\$1.1bn in the same three months of last year when pandemic restrictions devastated energy demand. Revenues more

than doubled to US\$67.7bn.

ExxonMobil scored higher profits across its exploration and production business, with significantly higher oil prices more than offsetting lower production.

But the company pointed to 'ongoing impacts from market oversupply' as a drag on its downstream business, which lost money during the quarter.

ExxonMobil said it expects higher planned spending in the second half of the year on key projects, but full-year spending will be on the 'lower end' of its projected US\$16bn to US\$19bn for all of 2021.

Chevron, meanwhile, brought in earnings of US\$3.1bn, compared with a loss of US\$8.3bn a year earlier, as revenues more

than doubled to US\$37.6bn.

"Second quarter earnings were strong, reflecting improved market conditions, combined with transformation benefits and merger synergies," said Mike Wirth, Chevron's chief executive.

"Our free cash flow was the highest in two years due to solid operational and financial performance and lower capital spending," Wirth added.

CFRA Research analyst Stewart Glickman said both oil giants had a great quarter, adding that "everything that had been a headwind turned around and became a tailwind."

Investors do not want the oil giants to boost capital spending, he said.

AFP

MSX inches up as volumes rise

Our Correspondent
Muscat

The benchmark index of the Muscat Stock Exchange (MSX) on Sunday slightly increased 0.13 per cent to close at 4,007.10 points. Trading volumes improved compared to the previous session.

All the sectoral indices closed in green territory with Industrial Index increasing most by 0.28 per cent. Financial Index rose 0.17 per cent and Services Index increased 0.15 per cent. MSX Sharia Index closed marginally up by 0.05 per cent at 586.92 points.

Trading activity increased on Sunday as volumes rose nearly 73 per cent at 11.65mn shares compared with 7.89mn shares traded in the previous trading session. Market turnover went up by 3.2 per cent to RO2.29mn compared with RO2.22mn in the previous session.

Market breadth at the MSX remained neutral with 11 advancing stock to 11 de-



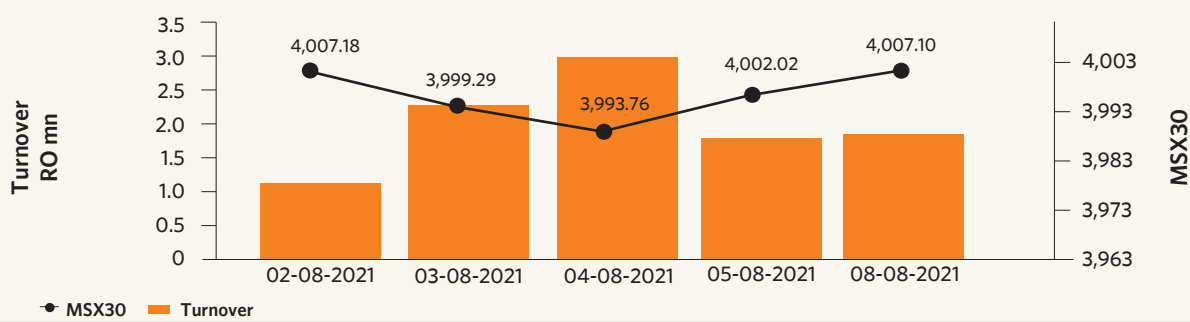
cliners. As many as 17 traded stocks remained flat for the day.

Top gainers were Oman Cables Industry (3.0 per cent), Al Omaniya Financial Services (2.54 per cent), National Bank of Oman (2.25 per cent), Al Suwadi Power (1.89 per cent) and BankDhofar (1.68 per

cent).

Top losers were Oman Qatar Insurance (-4.91 per cent), Al Madina Investment (-3.13 per cent), Voltamp Energy (-3.08 per cent), Taageer Finance (-2.38 per cent) and Sohar International Bank (-2.11 per cent).

MSX INDEX AND TURNOVER OF FIVE TRADING DAYS



China's exports remain robust in July as port activity rebounds

Beijing, China – China's exports remained robust in July despite losing some steam, customs data showed Saturday, with analysts noting a rebound in port activity but warning that the recent spread of the Delta variant could act as a drag on growth.

Outbound shipments from the world's second-largest economy have remained resilient this year, boosted by demand for goods like medical gear and electronics needed to work from home – with a resurgence in coronavirus cases elsewhere increasing reliance on Chinese products.

With strict lockdowns and mass testing, business activity has largely returned to normal in China, although the country is now stepping up measures to contain the spread of the Delta variant with local outbreaks detected in more than a dozen provinces.

But trade remained strong in July, with exports growing slightly less than expected at 19.3 per cent from a year ago, said the Customs Administration.

A Bloomberg poll of analysts



had forecast the rise at 19.9 per cent year-on-year, after a surprise spike of 32.2 per cent in June.

Imports, meanwhile, grew 28.1 per cent from the same period last year, official data showed.

With the latest figures, China's overall trade surplus came in at US\$56.6bn in July, up from US\$51.5bn in June.

Electronic products continued to support export growth in the first seven months of the year even as demand for mask ex-

ports eased from last year, official data showed.

ANZ Research Asia senior strategist Irene Cheung noted this week that there has been a "rebound in port activities" following the previous disruption.

"On the other hand, imports could have received a boost from the increase in commodity prices," she added.

China has been working to temper the rising costs of bulk commodities, which have piled pressure on smaller enterprises.

But ING economists added in

a note that stricter social distancing measures due to China's COVID-19 resurgence in recent weeks are likely to cause some damage, even if the impact may be somewhat offset by exports of electronic parts and products.

"In addition to the Delta variant, China is dealing with other negative shocks to its near-term growth," Nomura economists said this week.

On top of natural disasters including heavy rainfall and flooding in the central Henan province, which have constrained economic activity, Beijing has also introduced tightened measures in the property sector and high-polluting industries.

Zhiwei Zhang, chief economist at Pinpoint Asset Management said there were signs "export may weaken in coming months."

"The imports of processing trade... slowed in July," Zhang said in a note, adding that the virus outbreak was among "the main sources of uncertainty in China for the next few months."

AFP

Biden's \$1.2tn US infrastructure bill passes key hurdle

Washington, US – A huge infrastructure bill deemed historic by US President Joe Biden passed a key procedural hurdle on Saturday, with enough Republican senators joining Democrats to make its final passage in the upper chamber appear nearly certain.

The US\$1.2tn bill, designed to fund much-needed upgrades to US roads, highways, bridges and high-speed internet, drew the support of 18 Republican senators and 49 Democrats, a rare instance of bipartisanship in deeply divided Washington.

That Republican support – with the party's Senate leader Mitch McConnell among the 18 in favour – will end floor debate on the bill, a procedural step that required 60 votes.

With only 51 votes required for final Senate passage, the vote Saturday greatly improves the bill's chances, although fierce wrangling over amendments is continuing.

The legislation, months in the making, calls for US\$550bn in new federal spending on the nation's ageing infrastructure, including spending to slow the effects of climate change.

The total US\$1.2tn price tag – equal to the 2020 GDP of Spain – includes some funds previously approved but not yet spent.

Biden, a 36-year veteran of



US President Joe Biden (AFP)

Senate maneuvering, has followed the bill's progress closely, and White House officials said he would not hesitate to phone wavering senators if needed.

Making a last-minute plea for passage, Biden tweeted Saturday that the bill represented a "historic, once-in-a-generation investment in our nation's infrastructure."

"We can't afford not to do it," he added. Biden also dispatched Vice President Kamala Harris, another former senator, to Capitol Hill Saturday to shore up support for the legislation.

If the Senate approves the plan, it will move to the House of Representatives, where passage is not guaranteed.

Democrats hold a narrow majority there, and the party's centrist and liberal wings have butted heads over the content of the bill.

Final passage by both houses would represent a major victory for the Democratic president, who has been betting his political legacy on economic recovery and the fight against the ravages of COVID-19. Biden's Republican predecessor, Donald Trump, issued a statement Saturday calling the bill "a disgrace."

Trump, who was unable to bring an infrastructure bill to passage during his four-year term, added that it would be "very hard" for him to "endorse anyone foolish enough to vote in favour of this deal."

His position could make a final vote more problematic for Republicans looking ahead to the 2022 midterm elections.

But Republicans also know that the spending in the bill is very popular among voters, according to polls.

AFP

Shipping giant Maersk buys two e-commerce firms as profits surge

Copenhagen, Denmark – Danish maritime transport giant Maersk said it was buying two e-commerce companies as surging demand for shipping led to another bumper profit in the second quarter.

The group is acquiring Visible Supply Chain Management, a US e-commerce logistics provider valued at US\$838mn, and B2C Europe, which specialises in cross-border parcel delivery services and is valued at US\$86mn.

"Our earnings and cash flow enable us to further accelerate our transformation, invest in growing the business, also through targeted acquisitions," chief executive Soren Skou said in a statement.

"These two companies will



further accelerate our logistics growth particularly in e-commerce by adding technology and last mile delivery capabilities for our customers in the United States and Europe."

Maersk's net profit rose to US\$3.7bn between April and June, a nearly ninefold increase from the same period last year, beating expectations.

That was higher than what the group made in the full-year 2020. As a result of the pandemic, demand for shipping has

surged since mid-2020 and especially since the end of the year, in particular from Asia to the US and Europe. Shipping companies and analysts attribute the rise to consumers purchasing more manufactured products, instead of spending their money on trips and restaurants and other experiences.

Additionally, many companies are still in the process of restocking after reducing their orders in the first months of the pandemic.

AFP

Half of US car sales to be zero-emission by 2030, Biden says

Washington, US – With executives from the Detroit automakers watching, President Joe Biden has announced a target for half of all cars sold in the United States to be zero-emission vehicles by 2030.

Biden cast the move as a way to compete with China and other countries that have invested in electric vehicles (EV), while also transforming the US transportation sector, which is the biggest source of the country's carbon emissions.

Speaking at the White House before an array of electric cars on Thursday, Biden called them "a vision of the future that is now beginning to happen, a future of the automobile industry that is electric, battery electric, plug-in hybrid electric, fuel cell electric."

"It's electric and there's no turning back. The question is whether we'll lead or fall behind,"

he said.

News of the announcement drew modest praise from environmentalists, who stressed the need for additional measures given the worsening climate situation.

The Sierra Club's Katherine Garcia called the target a "meaningful signal to manufacturers," but said it should be raised to 60 per cent and be supplemented with "the strongest clean car standards possible."

Significantly increasing US usage of electric vehicles – which accounted for only about 2 per cent of 2020 car sales – is expected to depend on expanding charging stations and other infrastructure, as well as convincing Americans to buy the cars.

The Big 3 US automakers – General Motors, Ford and Stellantis – have all significantly expanded their EV investments,



making the target "most likely achievable" by 2030, Jessica Caldwell of auto website Edmunds.com said.

"But what's possibly the biggest hurdle ahead is consumer acceptance: What will it take for Americans to be willing

to change their car ownership habits to go electric?" Caldwell said.

Infrastructure debate

In a joint statement, the Detroit manufacturers expressed their 'shared aspiration to achieve

sales of 40-50 per cent' of the vehicles, but said the shift 'can be achieved only' with initiatives such as consumer incentives to buy EVs and new infrastructure like a charging network.

While Biden has proposed an infrastructure plan that would in-

clude many of those programs, not all have made it into the Senate's bipartisan compromise bill viewed as having the best chance of passing in Congress.

The United Auto Workers (UAW), one of the country's largest auto worker unions, rallied behind the move.

"The members of the UAW, current and future, are ready to build these electric cars and trucks and the batteries that go in them," President Ray Curry said in a statement released by the Biden administration.

Left out of the Washington launch event was Tesla, Elon Musk's company that has been credited with accelerating the popularity of EVs in the United States and leads in domestic sales.

Musk has however been criticized for tactics seen as anti-union, and White House

spokeswoman Jen Psaki said the companies invited to the White House "are the three largest key players of the United Auto Workers."

"Yeah, seems odd that Tesla wasn't invited," Elon Musk tweeted.

Although the 50 per cent figure would not exceed what many American manufacturers were already considering, it is a steep target for the United States as a whole. While around 10 per cent of European car sales are of EVs, they account for less than two per cent in the United States, the International Energy Agency said last year.

Environmental Defense Fund President Fred Krupp praised the announcement as positioning the United States to compete in the emerging transportation economy.

AFP

Customers praise Alizz Islamic's 'You Choose' finance campaign

The 'You Choose' campaign, launched by Alizz Islamic Bank last month, has received a wide response from various segments of society.

The 'You Choose' campaign gives the customers the flexibility to choose from a range of specially designed offers, once they transfer their current finances or avail new financing from Alizz Islamic Bank or transfer their salaries to the bank.

The #YouChoose campaign gives the customers the freedom of picking one of the many benefits that fits their requirements and needs, such as, a combo offer for customer to enjoy a new Credit Card free for the life time of the financing tenors upon availing a new financing from the bank. One can also enjoy special rates on new financing at a rate of 4.75 per cent for Home Finance and 4.99 per cent for Auto & Personal Finance or they can avail a three months' moratorium period for their new finance.

Customer can also transfer their salaries to the bank and enjoy 10 per cent cash back on the first salary credited during the campaign period.

They can also avail a zero profit Qard Hassan facility of up to RO1,000 upon transfer of



their salaries to the bank.

The detail information along with the terms and conditions are available in the bank's website. Customers can also visit

the nearest branch or contact our 24/7 call centre for more details.

Alizz Islamic Bank strives to fulfill our customers' dreams

through flexible products and financing offers that will support them in their financial plans.

The bank has been focusing heavily on improving its services

and products by listening to the recommendations put forward by customers and in response, the bank has launched this campaign to provide our customers with a basket of benefits to choose from.

At Alizz Islamic Bank we take pride in putting our customers at the forefront of our product development cycle with a focus on exceptional customer experience. We firmly believe that exceptional services and products go hand in hand, and we strive to insure that we have new and innovate offerings to all our customers.

The #youchoose campaign will allow each one of the bank's customers to pick the best benefit that fits their requirement and will cater to everyone's taste.

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

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



Live 5G experience for free on Samsung, Huawei devices with Ooredoo

Curious to know what next-generation Internet feels like? Ooredoo customers can find out for free on any Samsung or Huawei 5G-enabled smartphone. Accessible from 5G-covered areas across the sultanate, the limited-time offer will show users the awesome power of lightning-fast speeds, giving amazing performance, whether watching a movie or joining a video conference.

Taking Internet use to a whole new level and opening up a world

of faster streaming, surfing, sharing and entertainment, Ooredoo continues to introduce game-changing technologies to enrich its customers' digital lives. Having launched 5G at the beginning of 2020, Ooredoo now offers a range of great value 5G packages for mobile, home and office, to suit all budgets and needs.

Customers can opt in for a free 5G trial through the Ooredoo App or by sending an SMS to 80082.



NBC holds SMEs meet with Daleel Petroleum

The National Business Centre (NBC), which falls under the umbrella of the Public Establishment for Industrial Estates - Madayn, organised a meeting between officials representing Daleel Petroleum and the SMEs incubated at NBC.

Daleel Petroleum officials were introduced to the services offered by these SMEs in the local and foreign markets. On their part, Daleel Petroleum officials elaborated on the supply chain management at Daleel, online tendering and supplier registration, and discussions took place on collaboration opportunities between Daleel Petroleum and the SMEs.

Through organising these meetings, NBC aims at exchanging views and highlighting available opportunities for the Omani entrepreneurs in various fields.

NBC is an initiative launched by Madayn at the Knowledge Oasis Muscat with the aim of offering an ideal platform for the Omani entrepreneurs to get access to business development support and guidance, training and mentoring, access to markets and industry experts, and state-of-the-art and fully equipped office space, meeting rooms and presentation facilities.

NBC plays a key role in facilitating and supporting the growth of investable ideas into successful businesses; building entrepreneurial skills through dedicated and focused training, coaching and mentoring; and providing business support facilities such as office space, administrative support, financial support and consultancy services to contribute in ensuring the success and survival of new ventures.

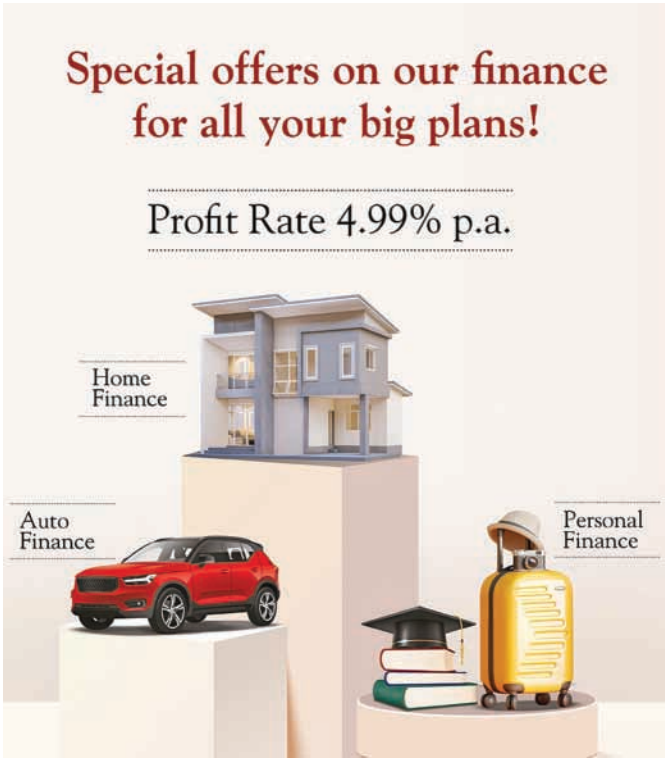
Meethaq launches offers on retail financing facilities

In line with its vision 'To serve you better, everyday', Meethaq Islamic Banking from Bank Muscat has launched enticing offers on a number of financing facilities for its customers.

The offers, which are available till September 30, include Meethaq Home Finance, Auto Finance and Personal Finance at highly-competitive profit rates.

In addition to this, Meethaq is also offering a special fee waiver on all primary and supplementary credit cards for the first year as part of this special campaign. Meethaq's financing facilities come with the advantage of simple documentation and fast processing that help its customers get financing at an affordable price and helps them meet their aspirations.

At present, Meethaq offers four different credit cards to its customers including the Hafawa Visa Signature credit card, the Titanium MasterCard credit card, Meethaq - Lulu co-branded credit card and the Standard



MasterCard credit card.

The waiver on first year annual fees is also available for supplementary cards. Existing Meethaq credit card holders can

enrol their family members for new supplementary cards. Meethaq credit cards are a big hit with customers thanks to some of the best deals and re-

wards available in the country. They provide customers with convenience and flexibility in making day-to-day transactions at shopping malls, restaurants or at international destinations.

The special offers during the campaign period are valid for all new and existing Omani customers working in government, semi-government institutions and Tier 1 and Tier 2 companies. Customers may also note that a special Takaful rate of 0.234 per cent will be applied on Home Finance and 0.145 per cent for Auto Finance and Personal Finance. Meethaq Islamic Banking continues to maintain its industry-leading position in terms of asset size, deposit base and profitability as well as branch network and distribution channels.

With 24 branches and over 40 ATMs and CDMs spread across the sultanate, Meethaq is the leading Islamic financial services provider in the sultanate, catering to the varying needs of individuals and corporates.

Meethaq extends support to all key economic sectors with innovative Sharia'a-based products. It is well positioned to provide Islamic financial expertise to all segments and thereby promote the good of society as a whole.

Meethaq Islamic Banking, which has been recognised as the Best Islamic Bank in Oman in 2019 by Islamic Finance News, has adopted the best practices in Islamic banking and finance.

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

Meethaq plans to continue expanding its services and products in response to customer needs and continuous feedback.

To know more about Meethaq Islamic Banking financing facilities visit <https://bm.click/MeethaqOffer> or call 24656666.

Hikma delivers another strong financial, operational performance

Hikma Pharmaceuticals PLC (Hikma' or 'Group'), the multinational pharmaceutical company, reported its interim results for the six months ended on June 30, 2021.

Siggi Olafsson, chief executive officer of Hikma, said, "Once again, we have benefited from the resilience of our portfolio and our flexible manufacturing footprint. Our strong performance included solid year-over-year increases in revenue and operating profit, underscoring our ability to generate positive results in challenging market conditions. We are continuing to benefit from investments we have made to build our pipeline of new medicines and our progress in the first half underpins our improved outlook for the full year. Looking ahead, our clear strategy, strong pipeline and agility give us the confidence to drive continued



growth and deliver increased value to all our stakeholders."

"During the first half of 2021, core group revenue grew 7 per cent to \$1,216mn compared to H1 2020: \$1,132mn driven by a strong performance in Generics and Branded and the resilience of our Injectables business. We made excellent progress ensuring our customers have the products they need, delivering on our purpose of putting better health within reach, every day. We achieved this through our strategy of delivering more from our foundation, building a portfolio that anticipates future health

needs, and inspiring and enabling our people. The breadth of Hikma's portfolio and our flexible manufacturing facilities have enabled us to respond quickly to evolving demand since the beginning of the pandemic.

"In H1 2021, global Injectables core revenue increased by 1 per cent to \$492mn compared to 2020: \$485mn. Our Injectables portfolio in the US of 119 products and an incremental contribution from new launches has enabled us to partially offset lower demand for products used in the treatment of COVID-19 when compared with H1 2020."

Wizz Air launches pilot recruitment drive

Wizz Air, Europe's fastest growing airline, announced it is ramping up pilot recruitment across its network, with plans to hire 4,600 new pilots by 2030.

The airline has already trained over 150 additional pilots in order to fly over 100 per cent of pre-COVID-19 capacity this summer and aims to recruit over 300 more by the end of this year as it looks to meet its ambitious growth plans following the pandemic. Enthusiastic candidates who have always dreamed of a career in the sky can apply.

Pilots joining Wizz Air will have the opportunity to operate the airline's constantly growing fleet of young, modern and sustainable Airbus A320 and A321 aircraft on over 800 routes, to 191 destinations in 49 countries. Wizz Air is committed to more than tripling the size of its fleet, with 500 Airbus aircraft expected in the next ten years, creating a wealth of opportunities



for pilots looking for rapid career progression, a competitive salary, industry-leading training and development, an indefinite and secure contract, and a variety of flexible and fixed roster patterns.

Wizz Air welcomes applications from experienced captains

and first officers as well as those with no flying experience at all, thanks to its Wizz Air Pilot Academy Program which gives aspiring pilots the opportunity to obtain a commercial pilot's license. Besides intense pilot recruitment, Wizz Air continues to recruit cabin crew members

across its 43 bases to meet its growth plans. New recruits joining Wizz Air do so at an exciting time of continued growth for the airline, having opened 18 new bases and commenced over 300 new routes across its network in the past year alone.

Heiko Holm, chief operations officer of Wizz Air said, "We are pleased to be recruiting for thousands of new pilot positions at an exciting time for Wizz Air, as we continue to grow our presence across Europe and beyond. At Wizz, we are proud of the excellent opportunities, competitive salary, and compensation and benefits package available to our flight crew, as well as flexible and fixed roster patterns to allow for an improved work-life balance. Whether a seasoned pilot with 20 years' experience, or an aspiring pilot with no previous aviation experience, we are committed to supporting our crew with a clear career path."

Omantel plays a leading role in nation's ongoing fight against COVID-19 pandemic

Omantel has sustained its efforts against the COVID-19 pandemic through community initiatives that support various organisations in the sultanate to limit the spread of the virus.

Continuing its work towards the nation's health, Omantel is lending its resources to the national vaccination campaign being held in cooperation between the Ministry of Health (MoH) and the Oman Convention and Exhibition Centre (OCEC). More than 20 Omantel employees are volunteering for the MoH vaccination campaign. Apart from this, to ensure the health and safety of its employees against COVID-19, Omantel has been running a vaccination campaign for staff and their families, in a smooth and orderly manner, using its own developed internal system 'Hassin'.

Laila bint Mohammed al Wahabi, CSR manager at Omantel, said, "As part of its CSR initiatives the company is extending its support to the national vaccination campaign, which is of high

importance for Oman's overall health and safety in these challenging times. Twenty members from Omantel's 'Together' volunteer team have participated at the national campaign, which was launched in cooperation with Ministry of Health and OCEC. This contribution complements the Company's efforts to support different initiatives to fight COVID-19 in Oman."

Commenting on the internal campaign, Thamir al Kathiri, general manager of Personnel Services at Omantel's Human Resources Unit, said, "We have joined hands with Ministry of Health to run an internal campaign for vaccinating the company's employees and their families. This campaign complements the national efforts made by the ministry and other concerned authorities to limit the spread of the virus. Omantel's widespread campaign has already covered all outlets across various governorates. Our employees are also participating as volunteers at the national vacci-

nation drive."

Omantel gives a high priority to employee vaccination as it believes that it is the company's duty to make an effective contribution in the fight against COVID-19.

Prior to this campaign, Omantel carried out a field survey of staff to collect basic information on the number of employees who have already been vaccinated and those who had tested positive for COVID-19.

To avoid crowding and to save time, Omantel has launched the 'Hassin' system to book vaccination appointments. The first phase covered staff while the second covered phase their families, with the 'Hassin' system making the procedures smooth and hassle-free.

It is worth mentioning that Omantel has been playing a prominent role in the sultanate's fight against the pandemic since 2020.

Omantel can proudly highlight its procurement of 24,000 COVID-19 testing kits and its



support to provide locally 3D printed masks and ventilator splitters to the MoH to overcome local shortage caused by increased global demand and suspension of air travel.

Omantel joined hands with The Royal Hospital to launch Virtual Clinics in sultanate that enable patients to communicate with doctors who can assess the patients' condition and develop his/ her treatment plan.

Omantel also provided free access to websites of the Ministries of Education and Higher Education, purchased laptops for the Ministry of Education's teachers to enable them conduct classes online. It introduced the G Suite for Education targeting over 45,000 students across Oman.

Moreover, the Omantel App has emerged as a one-stop virtual shop for all products and services which customers can avail without having to visit the company's outlets, thus keeping its customers protected from the COVID-19 risk.



Veolia Summer School hosts students from UAE, Saudi and Oman

Veolia, the benchmark company for ecological transformation offering game-changing solutions for water, waste and energy management, hosted six students from the UAE, Saudi Arabia and Oman at the 2021 Veolia Summer School in July. The digital one-week summer program invited students to take on environmental challenges by applying professional methods to solve various problems, supported by Veolia experts.

The six students joined from Rochester Institute of Technology in Dubai, UAE; King Saud University in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia; and Ibra College of Technology in Ibra, Oman.

Recognising the importance of educating and engaging young people in the environmental issues that will impact their future, Veolia brought together 64 students in total from the best universities in the world for a week of group work, meetings with experts and learning about Veolia's businesses and solutions, in international teams while building a network.

The students, who come from 27 countries and five continents, were divided into three time zones and 12 working groups. The 12 student teams, assisted by Veolia experts, explored multiple topics in their business cases including air quality, digital waste management, cooperation culture, oil recovery, hydrogen and electric vehicles, the Green Deal, carbon capture and storage, battery recycling, decarbonization, the International Convention for the Prevention of Pollution from Ships (MARPOL), sustainable agriculture, and health and micropollutants.

Shaima Muez, a mechanical

engineering student from Rochester Institute of Technology in Dubai, UAE, commented on her time at the 2021 Veolia Summer School. "It was an enlightening experience listening to so many professionals from the field talk about the ecological issues in our world today. In addition, it was interesting and exciting to tackle the challenge of industrial decarbonization with Veolia's diverse team that come from so many different backgrounds. It was a blast to be part of the Summer School and virtually meet so many people from around the world. Thank you to the dream team that organised it!"

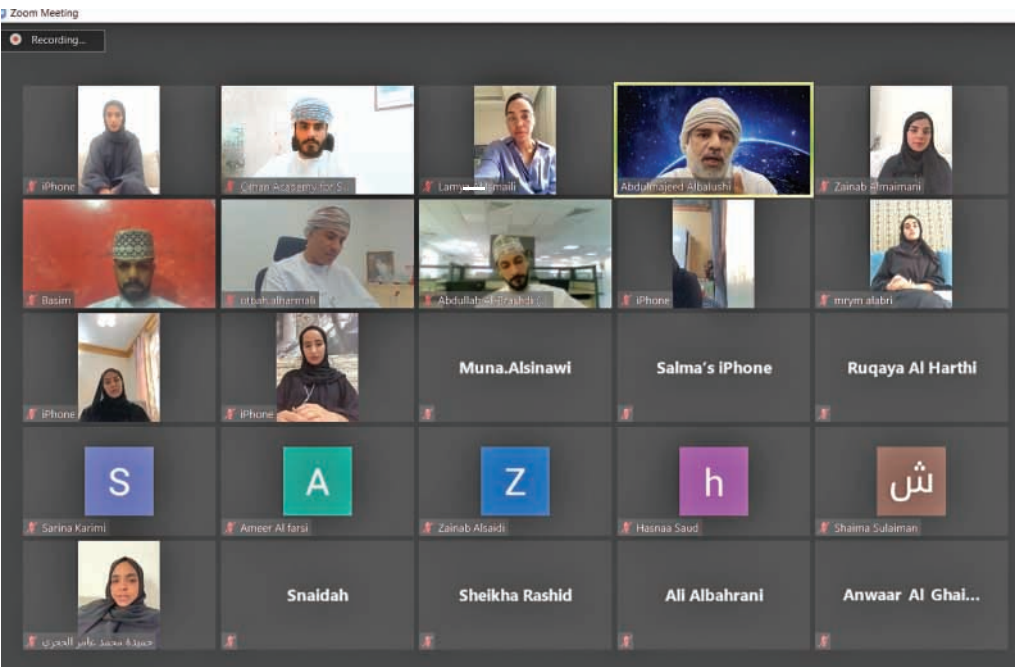
Abdulaziz Alghamdi, an engineering graduate from King Saud University in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia, said the Summer School was an invaluable experience. "I am glad to have learned so much about the crucial environmental problems and questions facing the world. I especially enjoyed working on my team's business case, where I was able to put this knowledge to practise, implementing design thinking to come up with an innovative solution that answers the customer's needs. The Veolia team were very friendly, helpful and hands-on, providing us with their advice and insights every step of the way."

The Summer School brought the entire Veolia Group's commitment to training and educating young generations to the highest level. Estelle Brachlianoff, chief operating officer, and Antoine Frérot, Group CEO, personally addressed messages to the students. Participants also had the opportunity to meet and chat with Swiss and South African explorer Mike Horn.

NBO's Innovation Incubator begins with 30

Concluding a highly successful selection process, National Bank of Oman's (NBO) Innovation Incubator has officially begun. Thirty young graduates, who were chosen from over 1,500 applicants, have now started their journey through the three-month long programme, which is part of the bank's corporate social responsibility (CSR) programme, in collaboration with the SME Development Authority, Oman Academy for SMEs, and Paradigm Consulting.

Coached by 15 of the bank's specially-trained employees, the young men and women will go head-to-head to design their own FinTech start-up. Only three will emerge as winners, and have the opportunity to pitch their ideas to potential investors.



Sherifa al Maskari, head of Brand at NBO, said, "At NBO we are committed to nurturing Oman's future leaders and championing innovation. The Innovation Incubator is among a

range of youth-centred initiatives we have run, which provide valuable business skills and knowledge. We wish all of the participants the best of luck and look forward to seeing them put their ideas into action."

NBO's role does not stop at offering innovative banking solutions, but extends through its values as a community-focused organisation. Outward Bound Oman, the Youth Awards, and the Hackathon are all initiatives that demonstrate the bank's commitment to inspiring innovation in the sultanate's young people. By continuing to foster partnerships between the private and public sectors through a range of educational and youth-led programmes, the bank is fulfilling its goals to empower local talent.

Uganda offers best African adventure experiences during summer holiday



boasts two parks where they have been habituated for human visits is the Mgahinga Gorilla National Park and Bwindi Impenetrable Forest National Park which harbor over half of the remaining world mountain gorillas.

Canoeing

Discover the peace and tranquility of Uganda's beautiful waterways, and experience wildlife like never before, while learning the pleasure of being at one with the water and nature.

The rivers, lakes, and wetlands cover about 18 per cent of Uganda's total surface, including Lake Victoria, the largest fresh water lake in Africa and the source of the Nile river. All these provide a prime environment for canoeing and kayaking across the Nile, Lake Victoria basin and several other numerous water bodies across the country.

Horse riding

Enjoy the horse riding around Kampala Gardens, Lubowa and

Jinja. A horseback safari provides the ideal way to explore the Nile up close, see a traditional Ugandan village and view the fantastic panorama from the hills overlooking the Nile River valley.

The landscape is spectacular, you will be in awe of the beauty of the area around Lake Victoria.

Water rafting

For adventurers, without at least one day of white-water rafting trip, your travel to Uganda wouldn't be complete. Right

at the source of the Nile you'll truly experience and conquer these wild waters whilst bouncing on and off the untamed river.

Mount Rwenzori climbing

The fabled "Mountains of the Moon" in Rwenzori Mountains National Park, one of Uganda's Unesco heritage sites lie in Western Uganda along the Congolese border where the snow-covered equatorial peaks rise to a height of 5,109m and the lower slopes are blanketed in moorland and rich montane forest. Most of the park is accessible only to hikers although the magnificent scenery views would be ample reward for visitors. You can explore mountaineering and hiking, bird watching of over 195 species and nature-guided tours through all the vegetation zones at the glacial peaks.

Tourists from Middle East countries need to apply for visas online before traveling to Uganda. Passengers must have a negative COVID-19 PCR test taken at most 72 hours before departure from the first embarkation point. Non-vaccinated passengers from UAE are subject to a PCR test upon arrival.

Tunisia's state of exception: No govt in sight

President Kais Saied is increasingly facing calls to pick a prime minister quickly and explain his next steps

Tunis, Tunisia - Halfway into Tunisia's 30-day 'state of exception' announced by President Kais Saied last month, he has yet to lay out a road map or appoint a government.

Despite naming several ministers to replace those in the sacked administration of Hichem Mechichi, Saied is facing calls to pick a prime minister quickly and explain his next steps.

And while many have welcomed his moves to strip MPs of their immunity, some worry his powers could easily go too far, with a suspended parliament unable to rein him in.

"There needs to be a road map, for the current situation and of what comes next, to show how we're going to return to the constitution," said Aymen Bensallah, an analyst at parliamentary monitor Bawsala.

The uncertainty is weighing on an economy already in tatters following a decade of political unrest and stalemate, exacerbated by the coronavirus pandemic which has brought the health system to the edge of collapse and dealt a severe blow to



This file photo shows Tunisian President Kais Saied (centre) during a meeting with commanders of the special unit of the Tunisian National Guard, in Bir Bou Rekba in Nabeul state, about 60km south of the capital Tunis, on August 4 (AFP)

the vital tourism sector.

Saied's move also comes as Tunisia negotiates with the International Monetary Fund for a fourth bailout loan in ten years, likely to be conditioned on biting

austerity measures that would inflict further pain on ordinary Tunisians.

Many Tunisians have backed Saied's move to strip parliamentarians of their immunity, seen as

a long-overdue move against a corrupt and inept political class.

According to monitor I Watch, 14 MPs are facing trial, on charges including tax fraud, corruption, conflicts of interest or

even sexual harassment.

"Some members of parliament were facing prosecution and were using their parliamentary immunity to protect themselves," said Bensallah.

"But we still don't have any information on the question of arrests."

Analyst Hatem M'rad said Saied's moves were 'risky'.

The President 'is thirsty for justice. But the absolute quest for justice is risky', he said.

'Salvation' govt

Opponents of Saied have warned of a 'purge'.

Many observers raised the alarm following the arrest of MP Yassine Ayari, a civilian found guilty by a military court in 2018 of criticising the army.

Civil society groups have also warned of a power vacuum and called on Saied to name a prime minister and publicly lay out his plan.

Islamist-inspired party Ennahdha, seen as one of the key targets of Saied's move, has called for a national dialogue - something the president quickly dismissed.

He has moved to smash the party's networks within the justice and interior ministries, which many accuse Ennahdha of using to pervert justice and entrench

impunity for certain business and political lobbies.

The party is accused of blocking investigations into the murders of leftwing figures Chokri Belaid and Mohamed Brahmi in 2013.

While many Tunisians, tired of their bickering and ineffective political class, back Saied's moves, others worry that little stands in the way of him further concentrating power in his hands.

The influential UGTT trade union confederation has backed Saied but urged him to quickly appoint a 'salvation' government.

Saied's decree detailing the measures announced on July 25 said they would apply for a renewable period of 30 days.

That has worried some activists, especially given the lack of a clear plan of action.

"Parliament is made up of the elected representatives of the people," M'rad said.

"We shouldn't mess about with this institution even if there are abuses and violence. It's very worrying."

AFP

Hezbollah chief warns against attempt to 'politicise' Lebanon port blast probe

Beirut, Lebanon - The head of Lebanon's Hezbollah on Saturday warned against any attempt to 'politicise' a probe into a deadly port blast last year, rejecting accusations that the group was involved in bringing explosive fertiliser to the dockside.

Hassan Nasrallah spoke after Lebanon on Wednesday marked one year since hundreds of tonnes of ammonium nitrate fertiliser exploded at a Beirut port warehouse, killing at least 214 people and wrecking swathes of the city.

The Shiite group's detractors have in recent weeks claimed it was involved in bringing the substance to the port so it could travel on to neighbouring Syria for its ally the Damascus government to use in barrel bombs during the Syrian civil war.

But Nasrallah in a televised speech dismissed these accusations as 'fabricated' and 'ridiculous'.

"As if Hezbollah which has



Hassan Nasrallah, the head of Lebanon's Shiite movement Hezbollah delivers a speech from an undisclosed location on Saturday (AFP)

weapons and rockets... needs to bring in nitrate," added the head of the Iran-backed group.

"As if, with its warehouses to fit tens of thousands of rockets, it did not have warehouses in which to put the nitrate."

He dismissed the accusations as 'political targeting paid for by America and Saudi Arabia in service of Israel'.

It emerged after the explosion that officials had known the am-

monium nitrate had been lingering at the port for years.

A local probe was launched into the disaster but has stalled, with families of the victims and survivors growing increasingly angry and accusing politicians of trying to hamper it at every turn.

Nasrallah in his speech also took a swipe at the lead judge probing the explosion, calling on him to provide proof to back up his decision to summon current

and former officials for questioning in the case.

"Where is the evidence?" he said, calling on Judge Tareq Bitar to share the results.

The judge is demanding that parliament lift the immunity of three former ministers so he can proceed with investigations, but lawmakers have requested more evidence before deciding on whether to waive immunity.

Bitar has rejected parliament's request.

The caretaker interior minister also did not allow Bitar to question top intelligence official Abbas Ibrahim over the blast.

"The investigation is politicised," Nasrallah said.

"Either he must work... in a clear manner or the judiciary must find another judge."

In February, Bitar's predecessor was removed by a court, which had questioned his impartiality because his home had been damaged in the explosion.

AFP

Myanmar protesters mark 1988 uprising anniversary

Yangon, Myanmar - Myanmar protesters on Sunday marked the anniversary of a 1988 pro-democracy uprising that brought Aung San Suu Kyi to prominence, with flash mobs and marches of defiance against the ruling junta.

The country has been in turmoil since the generals launched their February putsch and subsequent crackdown on dissent that has killed more than 900 people, according to a local monitoring group.

But protesters remain undeterred, taking to the streets daily in lightning-quick rallies to demand the end to the State Administration Council - as the junta's so-called 'caretaker' government has dubbed itself.

On Sunday, flash mobs popped up across Yangon and second city Mandalay to commemorate the 1988 uprising - a massive pro-democracy movement which the military violently quelled by opening fire on protesters and jailing thousands.



This file photo shows Myanmar army personnel during 1988 uprising

Following the calls of an online campaign, red-clad protesters on Sunday flashed an eight-finger salute and carried banners that read 'Let's return the old blood debt of 1988 in 2021'.

"In 1988, our country sacrificed a lot - many people lost their lives. But the dictatorship is still alive," said Ko Sai Win, who joined a morning protest in Mandalay.

"It is like a black shadow on our country."

The 1988 uprising heralded the rise of Suu Kyi, who had returned to Myanmar just before protests kicked off to care for her ailing mother.

Thanks to her stature as the daughter of General Aung San, who fought for independence against the British, and her rousing speeches, Suu Kyi emerged as a pro-democracy icon, later receiving the Nobel Peace Prize.

AFP

Libya's famed wildlife treasure island Farwa at risk of ruin

Farwa, Libya - Once famed for its exceptional wildlife, Libya's Farwa Island risks becoming just another victim of lawlessness in the war-ravaged North African nation, activists struggling to save it warn.

An uninhabited 13km long sandbar cut off at high tide in far western Libya, Farwa appears picture-postcard idyllic, with scattered date palms on white sandy beaches and ringed by the sparkling Mediterranean Sea.

The International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) has said Farwa is potentially the 'most important coastal and marine site in western Libya, in terms of its high marine and coastal biodiversity'.

But it faces a long list of threats, said Fawzi Dhane from local environmental group Bado, identifying illegal fishing and pollution as key worries.

Climate change is also exacerbating the situation, making Farwa more vulnerable to the pressures already heaped on its fragile environment.

For decades there were few visitors, apart from occasional school trips to the island.

Libya's former dictator Moammar Gadhafi dreamt of building a luxury seaside resort there, complete with 'floating' villas and a golf course.

But Gadhafi was ousted and killed in a 2011 NATO-backed uprising, and Libya has struggled to contain violence and political turmoil ever since.

Explosive fishing

In a country awash with weapons, some find lobbing grenades into the water an easy way to fish - a destructive method killing everything in the blast zone.

"The fishermen do not respect anything," Dhane said, blaming boats from the port of Zuwara, some 40km to the east.

"They fish at all times, in an unregulated way - and they practise fishing with explosives."

Endangered loggerhead turtles are also being harmed, according to the activist.

"The turtles are sometimes caught in fishing nets, when they are not killed by fishermen who fear their bites," said Dhane.

The Bado association works to protect turtle clutches laid on



This file photo shows a man walking along a beach at Libya's Farwa Island on June 10 (AFP)

the beach from predators and from people who come to dig up the eggs.

The island, which lies close to the border with Tunisia, is made up of sand dunes stretching over 4.7sqkm.

Its lagoon and salt marshes are also home to flamingos.

One of the only buildings is a crumbling lighthouse built in the 1920s under Italian colonial rule. Farwa is among the most important areas in Libya for many migratory birds, according to Tarek Jdeidi from the University of Tripoli. It is a key staging post for those travelling over Africa to rest before flying across the Mediterranean to Europe.

Today, Farwa has become a popular spot for Libyan holiday-makers, with dozens visiting every weekend.

"They leave their rubbish behind," sighed Dhane.

Chemical pollution

Another threat comes from the nearby Abu Kammash petrochemical factory, which has for years 'leaked heavy metals' into the soil and sea, according to Dhane.

While the complex has been abandoned, the impact of the dangerous pollution 'is still felt', he added.

Shawky Muammar, an archaeologist who has conducted digs on the island, discovering Roman-era tools and tombs, calls the pollution from the dilapidated plant an 'environmental disaster'.

He also expressed worry that rising sea levels due to climate change could swamp the low-lying island.

"It risks being swallowed up if measures are not taken to try to contain the sea," he said.

In recent years, oil-rich Libya was split between two rival administrations backed by foreign powers and myriad militias.

After a peace deal last year, an interim unity government was agreed in March ahead of elections set for December.

But it has not changed anything for the island.

In the meantime, environmental groups have taken on the task of protecting Farwa, while hoping for a return to stability and the rule of law.

AFP

Taliban seize two more Afghan provincial capitals in the north

Kunduz, Afghanistan - The Taliban tightened the noose over northern Afghanistan on Sunday, capturing two more provincial capitals as they take their fight to the cities after seizing much of the countryside in recent months.

The insurgents have snatched up four provincial capitals in Afghanistan since Friday in a lightning offensive that appears to have overwhelmed government forces.

Kunduz and Sar-e-Pul in the north fell within hours of each other on Sunday, lawmakers and residents in the cities confirmed, but not without fierce fighting.

Pro-Taliban social media accounts claimed the insurgents were also close to overrunning the provincial capital of Taloqan.

In Kunduz, one resident described the city as being enveloped in 'total chaos'.

'After some fierce fighting, the mujahideen, with the grace of God, captured the capital of Kunduz,' the Taliban said in a statement. 'The mujahideen also captured Sar-e-Pul city, the government buildings and all the installations there.'

Parwina Azimi, a women's rights activist in Sar-e-Pul, said that government officials and the remaining forces had retreated to an army barracks about three kilometres from the city.

The Taliban had the compound 'surrounded', said Mohammad Hussein Mujahidzade, a member of the provincial council.



Salima Mazari, a woman district governor in Afghanistan, places herself on a hill while accompanied by security personnel near the frontlines against the Taliban at Charkint district in Balkh province on July 14 (AFP)

Perennial target

Kunduz is the most significant Taliban gain since the insurgents launched an offensive in May as foreign forces began the final stages of their withdrawal.

It has been a perennial target for the Taliban, who briefly overran the city in 2015 and again in 2016 but never managed to hold it for long.

The Ministry of Defence said government forces were fighting to retake key installations.

'The commando forces have launched a clearing operation. Some areas, including the national radio and TV buildings, have been cleared of the terrorist

Taliban,' it said.

Kabul's ability to hold the north may prove crucial to the government's long-term survival.

Northern Afghanistan has long been considered an anti-Taliban stronghold that saw some of the stiffest resistance to militant rule in the 1990s.

The region remains home to several militias and is also a fertile recruiting ground for the country's armed forces.

'The capture of Kunduz is quite significant because it will free up a large number of Taliban forces who might then be mobilised in other parts of the north,' said Ibraheem Thural, a

consultant for International Crisis Group.

Vivid footage of the fighting was posted on social media over the weekend, including what appeared to be large numbers of prisoners being freed from jails in captured cities.

The Taliban frequently target prisons to release incarcerated fighters to replenish their ranks.

On Friday, the insurgents seized their first provincial capital, Zaranj in southwestern Nimroz on the border with Iran, and followed it up by taking Sheberghan in northern Jawzjan province the next day.

US airstrikes

Fighting was also reported on the outskirts of Herat in the west, and Lashkar Gah and Kandahar in the south. The pace of Taliban advances has caught government forces flatfooted, but they won some respite late on Saturday after US warplanes bombed Taliban positions in Sheberghan.

'US forces have conducted several airstrikes in defence of our Afghan partners in recent days,' Major Nicole Ferrara, a Central Command spokesperson, told AFP in Washington.

Sheberghan is the stronghold of Afghan warlord Abdul Rashid Dostum, whose militiamen and government forces were reportedly retreating east to Mazar-i-Sharif in Balkh province.

Dostum has overseen one of the largest militias in the north and garnered a fearsome reputation fighting the Taliban in the 1990s - along with accusations his forces massacred thousands of insurgent prisoners of war.

A retreat of his fighters dents the government's recent hopes that militias could help the overstretched military. The government has said little about the fall of the provincial capitals, other than vowing to retake them.

That has been a familiar response to most Taliban gains in recent weeks, although government forces have largely failed to make good on promises to retake dozens of districts and border posts.

AFP



Ruth Ngladar Pogu (right) surrendered to the military last month

Nigeria's Chibok girl free after 7 years: Governor

Lagos, Nigeria - One of the Nigerian schoolgirls kidnapped by Boko Haram militants more than seven years ago is free and has been reunited with her family, a state governor's office said on Saturday.

Nearly 300 schoolgirls, most aged between 12 and 17, were abducted by Boko Haram in April 2014 from Chibok in northeast Nigeria, sparking an international outcry and the #BringBackOurGirls campaign for their release.

Over the years, many of the girls were released or found by the military, but more than 100 are still missing, Amnesty International said in April to mark the seven year anniversary of the abduction.

Borno State Governor Babagana Umara Zulum said in a statement that Ruth Ngladar Pogu surrendered to the military last month along with a person she said she had married.

'I am extremely excited both as Borno's Governor and father of all sons and daughters of the

state, and also as a father to daughters,' the statement said.

'I know the feeling of families of those still under captivity but we have to remain hopeful especially with today's development.'

The Governor's office said Ruth had surrendered to the military on July 28. But officials had not announced the development earlier to give them time to contact her parents and other Chibok families.

Nigeria's armed forces are still fighting to end the 12 year insurgency in the country's northeast, a conflict that has left 40,000 people dead and displaced more than two million others.

Mass kidnappings in Nigeria have again made international headlines this year as heavily armed criminal gangs have targeted schools and colleges to abduct students for ransom.

Nearly 1,000 pupils have been abducted since December, mostly in the country's north-western and central states.

AFP

COVID-19 PANDEMIC

Iran records over 500 deaths, hits new high in cases

Tehran, Iran - Iran reported over 500 daily COVID deaths for the first time on Sunday, its Health Ministry announced, as new infections also hit a record high.

Iran registered 39,619 new infections in the 24 hours to Sunday, taking the total since the pandemic started to 4,158,729, the ministry said.

During that same period it recorded 542 deaths, taking the total number of fatalities to 94,015, it added.

Iranian health officials have acknowledged that the Islamic republic's COVID figures underestimate the real toll.

But Iran remains the Middle East country worst hit by the pandemic.

COVID infections have been surging since late June, in what officials have warned is a 'fifth wave' caused by the highly infectious Delta variant.

Daily infections have hit sev-



Iran's new President Ebrahim Raisi during a meeting with the National Task Force for Fighting Coronavirus, in Tehran on August 4 (AFP)

eral records over the past few weeks. The previous recorded high for fatalities was 496, registered on April 26, at the height of the Islamic republic's previous wave.

Iran's state television said hospitals across the country were facing a 'crisis' and described the health situation as bleak. 'Although the vaccination pace has been accelerating, the observation of health protocols has dropped significantly,' it said.

Iran has pinned its hopes on vaccinations to help with the health crisis.

But the inoculation campaign launched in February has progressed more slowly than authorities had planned.

Choked by US sanctions that have made it difficult to transfer money abroad, Iran says it is struggling to import vaccines for its 83mn population.

Over 12.5mn people have

been given a first vaccine does, but only 3.7mn have received the necessary two jabs, the Health Ministry said on Sunday.

Iran's new President Ebrahim Raisi said on Saturday that a 'plan to transform the way to confront the coronavirus' was to be reviewed next week. He did not give any details.

Chairing a COVID taskforce meeting, he also vowed to 'support domestic vaccine production' while 'not hesitating' to import jabs from abroad.

The authorities have approved the emergency use of two locally produced vaccines, with the only mass-produced one, COVIran Barekat, still in short supply.

Last week, Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei ordered the government to take 'necessary measures' to contain the spread of the pandemic.

AFP

New variant 'no joke': Young Mexicans warn from hospital in the latest wave

Coacalco, Mexico - When Diego started going out again to meet friends he never expected to be among a growing number of young Mexicans needing hospitalisation by a highly contagious COVID-19 variant driving another wave of infections.

"I let my guard down thinking that I wasn't going to catch it, but in the end I did," the 20 year old student said at a private clinic in a suburb north of Mexico City.

"This is no joke. It's a pretty cruel disease," said Diego.

He is one of 16 coronavirus patients being treated in the same hospital in Coacalco.

Unlike during the first two waves of the pandemic, most of the sick are in their 20s and 30s.



COVID patient Mayra Jimenez at the Hospital Polanco Coacalco in the municipality of Coacalco, State of Mexico, on Friday (AFP)

Mayra Jimenez, another patient, believes the Delta variant is so infectious that anyone who has avoided catching it without taking extra care is very lucky.

"We didn't go to parties or gatherings," said the 39 year old, who is using a medical device to help her lungs recover.

"Fortunately I came through

it okay, but there are people who are in a really bad way," she said.

4th highest cases

Mexico's official COVID-19 death toll of more than 244,000 is the fourth highest in the world, and the actual figure is believed to be significantly higher.

The government says that is partly a reflection of the country's large population, but is also due to the prevalence of underlying health problems, including obesity, hypertension and diabetes. The country has registered nearly 3mn confirmed cases since the pandemic began, of which around 138,000 are active.

Experts say the latest wave of

infections is due to the arrival of the Delta variant of the virus, as well as reduced social distancing, particularly among younger Mexicans.

The Mexico City authorities on Friday ruled out any new lockdown measures, despite the Health Ministry raising the capital's alert status to the highest level. "Right now it seems that neither the government nor anyone is interested in making people stay at home again," said Jesus Victoria, the head of nursing at the hospital in Coacalco.

Although people aged between 18 and 29 began to be vaccinated in late July, it was too late for some of the patients at the clinic, he said.

'Vaccination helped'

"We've been able to discharge most of them, but we have also had many deaths of young people," Victoria said.

"I don't know if as a society we are failing, if the government is failing. Shopping centres are open, cinemas, sports centres. It complicates things," he added.

Thanks to vaccinations, hospitalisations remain far below a peak seen in January when occupancy rose above 90 per cent.

Now around half of general beds and 58 per cent of those equipped with ventilators are available, according to the government.

Almost 50mn people in the country of 126mn have received

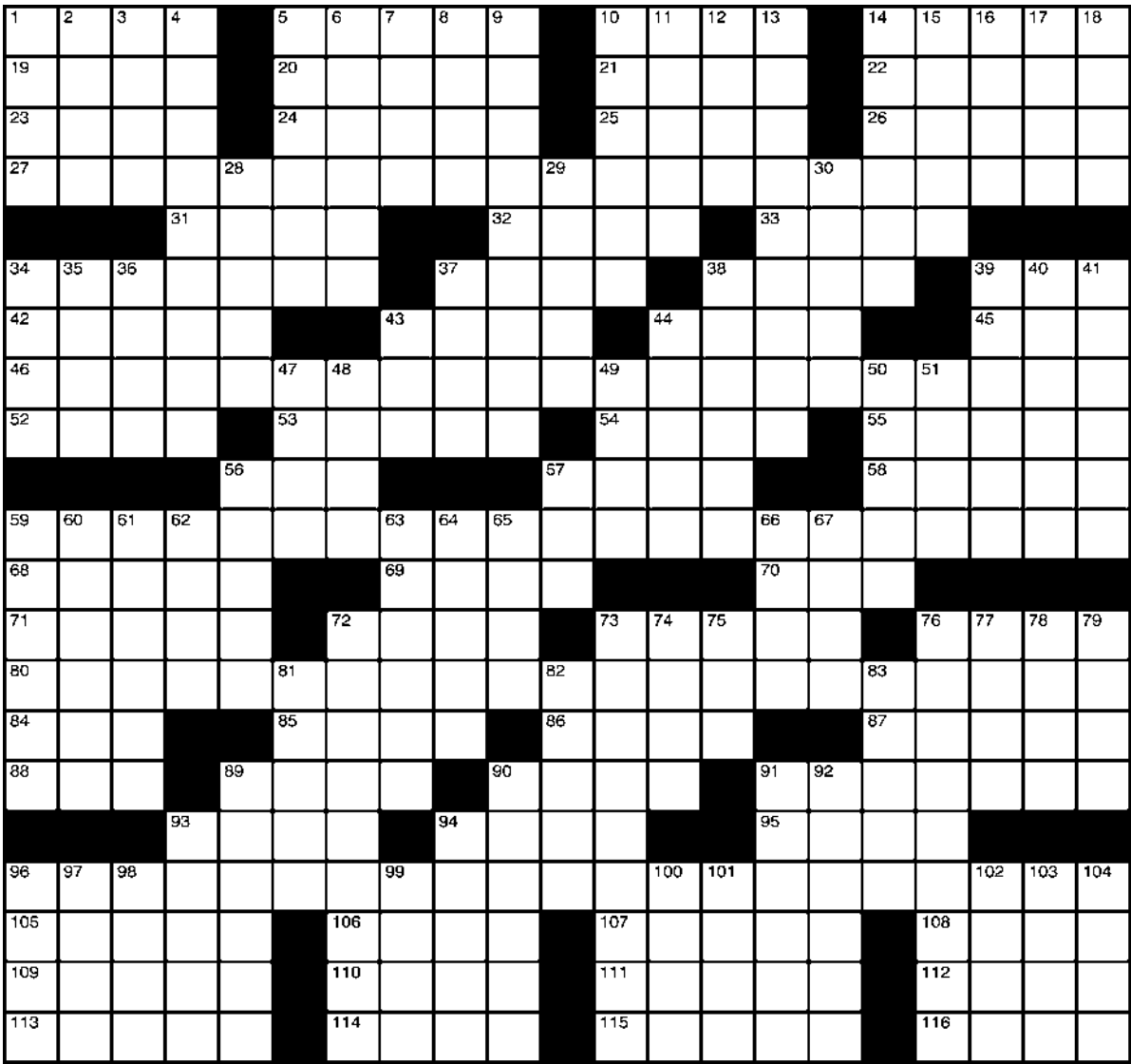
at least one dose of a coronavirus vaccine, and 27mn of them are fully vaccinated, the health ministry says.

Hector Lopez, a 26 year old computer programmer who is also hospitalised for COVID-19, said that in hindsight his family was not careful enough.

"Usually I don't go out. The problem is that my relatives do," he said. "I had been taking care of myself. I hadn't gone out unless it was necessary," he added, as machines monitored his vital signs. Lopez, who is expected to be discharged soon, said he had seen on social media that friends were going out more, despite the risks.

AFP

DAILY CROSSWORD



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ACROSS

- 1 Labryinth
- 5 Phenomenon of a circle
- 10 Title for Judi Dench
- 14 Soprano Lucine
- 19 "How ___ Your Mother"
- 20 China's Zhou ___
- 21 A holly
- 22 Indian bigwig
- 23 Scuttlebutt
- 24 Crystal gazers, e.g.
- 25 "Godfather" Corleone
- 26 Greenland air base
- 27 Start of a limerick
- 31 Felipe's bullet
- 32 ___ majesty
- 33 Walking stick
- 34 Actress Maura
- 37 Blind part
- 38 "... the ___ of it, lago!": Shak.
- 39 Carried the day
- 42 "Life ___ a dream."
- 43 Spin down the highway
- 44 Bloke's blackjack
- 45 G.I.'s address
- 46 More of limerick
- 52 Right triangle function
- 53 Quechuans
- 54 Corrida cries
- 55 Songbird Lopez
- 56 "___ tree falls.."

DOWN

- 110 Don Juan's mother
- 111 Broadcast
- 112 Lion's den
- 113 Skater Sonja of yesteryear
- 114 "Buffalo Bill"
- 115 Longtime labor leader
- 116 Noted Art Deco designer
- 1 South of France
- 2 Surrounded by
- 3 Zilch
- 4 Some famous last words
- 5 Cuddle up
- 6 Kind of street
- 7 "Waiting for the Robert ___"
- 8 Drug agent: sl.
- 9 Rejects as untrue
- 10 Strip, as of office
- 11 Among the quick
- 12 Dole out
- 13 Demon chasers
- 14 Cleo's barge buddy
- 15 Skier Phil
- 16 "Snug as ___ in a rug"
- 17 Dramatic assignment
- 18 Aid in crime
- 28 African language grouping
- 29 Football's "Greasy"
- 30 Earl Hines's nickname

- 34 Wee birds
- 35 Last Yahi Indian
- 36 Bachelor's "___ Holden"
- 37 All-purpose bean
- 38 Spinach eater of comics
- 39 Nash's "hippity-hopppity" beast
- 40 "___ Sundays": store sign
- 41 Making observations
- 43 Private eye
- 44 VIP
- 47 Repeated jazz phrase
- 48 Tree burl
- 49 Persephone
- 50 Like Hardhearted Hannah
- 51 ___ for one's money: competition
- 56 "___ nice to have a man around..."
- 57 Doctorate, briefly
- 59 Take to the beach again
- 60 Most sickly
- 61 Pre-Renaissance painter
- 62 "What ___ God wrought!"
- 63 With 82 Down, Gershwin hit
- 64 Full of pith
- 65 Ninth Hebrew letter

YOUR DAILY HOROSCOPE



ARIES MARCH 21-APRIL 19

Someone who you usually consider to be mellow and agreeable will start acting kind of feisty today -- which is going to be quite amusing to you! They have turned over a new leaf and are no longer hesitant to act out or say what's on their mind -- and they have you to thank for it. Get ready for a boatload of their gratitude, which will give you a wonderful feeling of camaraderie.



LEO JULY 23-AUGUST 22

You need to be very sensitive to the feelings of other people. You're usually good at reading people's moods, but they could be acting more unpredictably than normal today. Many emotions are zooming around just underneath the surface, and they could pop up at any time and anywhere. Everyone you talk to will be capable of bursting into tears or laughter at the littlest provocation.



SAGITTARIUS NOVEMBER 22-DECEMBER 21

If you see the world through an idealist's eyes, it looks like a great big bunch of happy people who want only the best for each other. But if you look at it through grumpy glasses, it's quite a different picture. Which viewpoint are you going to take? How the knot of your day unravels is completely up to you, so get in touch with your more positive mood and follow it.



TAURUS APRIL 20-MAY 20

If you need to have a difficult conversation with someone, today is the day to get some alone time with them and broach that touchy subject. But before you call them up, consider creating a softer, more gentle environment. Why not invite them over for a quiet dinner? Good food and a relaxing atmosphere will create a perfect environment for open communication.



VIRGO AUGUST 23-SEPTEMBER 22

Right now, there is way too much socialising to be done -- and the big questions about your life are just not important. This is a good thing, because until now you've been using up a lot of energy wondering about where you are headed. Pondering this type of imponderable question is a waste of time, so it's a good thing that your day will be filled with friends and laughter.



CAPRICORN DECEMBER 22-JANUARY 19

Today, you'll get some good news that will send your mood skyrocketing to the heavens! You should enjoy the buoyancy, but don't make any big decisions based on it. There is a slight chance things could dramatically change, so try to keep your enthusiasm in check -- you don't want your extreme happiness to plummet to extreme regret, do you?



GEMINI MAY 21-JUNE 21

The problems in your life are nowhere near as big as they feel -- in fact, if you take another look at them, you'll see that most of them are fairly simple to solve. All you need to do is get a little bit more organised about finding a solution. Make up some lists of what is wrong -- and what is right-- in your life. You'll notice that the list of 'right' things is a lot longer than the list of 'wrong' things.



LIBRA SEPTEMBER 23-OCTOBER 22

Today will start off deceptively calm, but it's only the calm before the storm! When that storm hits, get the heck out of the way. Keep your head down and avoid getting involved -- your input won't be received warmly, so why bother offering it? You might think you have the solution to the conflict, but the people who are arguing don't want solutions -- they just want to fight.



AQUARIUS JANUARY 20-FEBRUARY 18

Someone in your life says they're making big changes, but are they really? You haven't really seen any results yet and your patience might be wearing thin. There's nothing wrong with asking them about their progress. They might appreciate your prodding -- it's the sign that you are a very good friend. You should encourage them to make the choices that aren't so easy.



CANCER JUNE 22-JULY 22

A conversation you have with a coworker or collaborator will have a double meaning, although one of you might not realise it until it's too late. Speaking in code might be a great way of avoiding the wrath of nosy eavesdroppers, but it is a risky move -- after all, unless both of you know the code you can't have effective communication! Opt for crystal-clear communications.



SCORPIO OCTOBER 23-NOVEMBER 21

You need to be more proactive about getting what you want -- go right to the source, right to the person or people who can help you get where you need to go, meet that person you want to meet, or invest in that resource you need so badly. Making more aggressive moves might be hard at first, but once you get the hang of it, you will find that it creates some impressive results.



PISCES FEBRUARY 19-MARCH 20

You have every right to your feelings, no matter what they are -- and you have every right to express them. Plus, you know how to express them better than most. You have the great ability to put things in a very tactful way, so say what you mean -- you don't have to worry about how people react. That's not your responsibility, anyway.



TEST YOUR KNOWLEDGE

1. Kilowatt is a unit to measure

- a. work
- b. power
- c. electricity
- d. current

2. Electric current is measured by

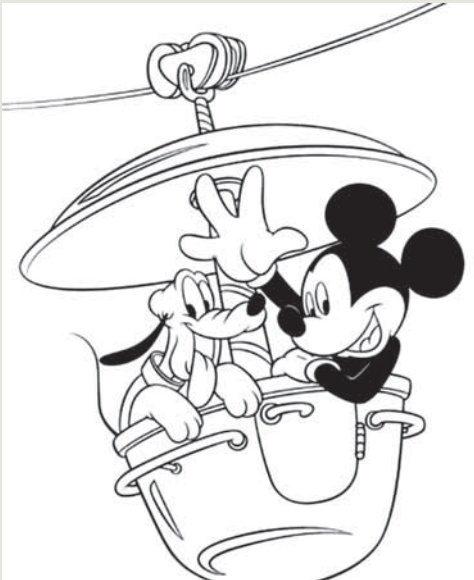
- a. commutator
- b. anemometer
- c. ammeter
- d. voltmeter

3. A chronometer measures

- a. colour contrast
- b. sound waves
- c. time
- d. water waves

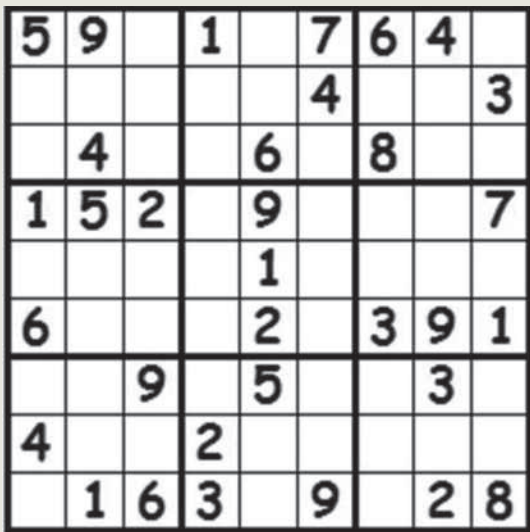
Answers: 1.b 2.c 3.c

KIDS COLOURING

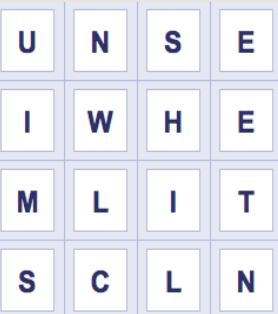


DO YOU SUDOKU?

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



BOGGLER



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

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

SUDOKU EASY ANSWER



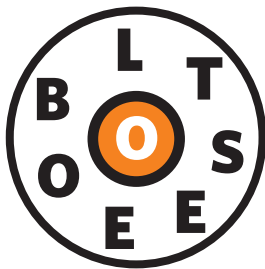
DAILY CROSSWORD ANSWERS (AUGUST 08)



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



UMRAH



PILGRIMS' Progress

Saudi Arabia to reopen borders for vaccinated Umrah pilgrims

Nearly 18 months after it closed its borders to battle coronavirus, Saudi Arabia will from Monday begin "gradually receiving Umrah requests from various countries," the Saudi Press Agency (SPA) reported. The Umrah can be undertaken at any time and usually draws millions from around the globe, unlike the annual hajj, which abled-bodied Muslims who have the means must perform at least once in their lifetime. The COVID-19 pandemic hugely disrupted both Muslim pilgrimages, which are usually key revenue earners for the kingdom that rake in a combined US\$12bn annually.

Before Sunday's announcement, only immunised pilgrims residing in Saudi Arabia were eligible for umrah permits. And last month only around 60,000 inoculated residents were allowed to take part in a scaled down

form of the annual Hajj.

But the kingdom is slowly opening up, and has started welcoming vaccinated foreign tourists since August 1. Foreign pilgrims must be immunised with a Saudi-recognised vaccine - Pfizer-BioNTech, AstraZeneca, Moderna and Johnson & Johnson - and agree to undergo quarantine if necessary, the SPA said quoting deputy Hajj minister Abdulfattah bin Sulaiman Mashat.

He added that the kingdom was working on determining the destinations from which pilgrims can come and their numbers on a "periodic basis according to the classification of preventive measures" in those countries.

Relief on resumption

Barring overseas pilgrims has caused deep disappointment among Muslims worldwide, who typically save for years to take part. "I feel relieved about the resumption of the Umrah

pilgrimage," Ahmed Hamadna, 33, a sales manager in Egypt, told AFP. But he added that he was concerned about the complex procedures and measures during the pandemic.

Engineer Mohamad Ragab, an Australian resident, said he, too, was still hesitant to perform the Umrah pilgrimage. "There will likely be crowds in Mecca and the chances of infection are high," he said.

According to the SPA report, Saudi Arabia will allow 60,000 pilgrims to perform Umrah each month, and gradually increase that to reach two million worshippers per month.

Hosting the pilgrimages is a matter of prestige for Saudi rulers, for whom the custodianship of Islam's holiest sites is their most powerful source of political legitimacy. Riyadh has spent billions trying to build a tourism industry from scratch, as part of efforts to diversify its oil-reliant economy.

The once-reclusive kingdom began issuing tourist visas for the first time

in 2019 as part of an ambitious push to revamp its global image and draw visitors. Between September 2019 and March 2020, it issued 400,000 of them - only for the pandemic to crush that momentum as borders were closed.

Reviving tourism

The government has accelerated a nationwide vaccination drive as it moves to revive tourism and other pandemic-hit sectors, such as sport competitions and entertainment extravaganzas.

Vaccination is mandatory for anyone seeking to enter government and private establishments, including education institutions and entertainment venues, as well as to use public transport.

The Hajj, one of the five pillars of Islam, is usually one of the world's largest religious gatherings, with 2.5 million taking part in 2019.

AFP



Billions to boost tourism

As per the kingdom's Tourism Ministry, it has approved the entry of tourists who have taken the shots of - Pfizer, AstraZeneca, Moderna or Johnson & Johnson. It also directs foreign tourists to produce a negative RT-PCR coronavirus test taken within 72 hours before travel to avoid institutional quarantine period.

The ministry's latest order also directs foreign tourists to register their details, including contacts and the name of the hotel/house where they would stay. It is worth noting the country has been spending billions in order to attract foreign tourists apart from its oil-reliant economy. It has issued nearly 400,000 tourist visas after the kingdom began issuing traveller permits for the first time in 2019, reports said.

The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia had launched the tourist visa in September 2019, in a historic decision in which it opened its heart and its doors to tourists from different countries of the world. However, the COVID-19 outbreak hugely disrupted the Hajj and Umrah pilgrimages, usually a key revenue earner for the kingdom.

Till date, only immunised pilgrims resident in Saudi Arabia were eligible for Umrah permits. So far, 26 million jobs have been administered to the population of 35 million in the Kingdom. The Saudi government has said that vaccinations will be mandatory to enter government and private establishments, including education institutions and entertainment venues, as well as to use public transport from August 1, the reports said.

Messi's era ends at Barca

PSG most likely destination as tearful Argentine star confirms it's all over with Spanish giants

Barcelona, Spain - An emotional Lionel Messi confirmed on Sunday he is leaving Barcelona after 17 trophy-laden years, with Paris Saint Germain (PSG) his likely next port of call for a career swansong.

"I have still not come to terms with the reality of leaving this club now - I love this club," said a suited Messi, who several times wiped away tears before a squadron of reporters at the club's Camp Nou ground.

The Argentine, widely considered the most gifted player in the history of the game, has won 35 trophies at the club which he joined as a 13-year-old - including four Champions Leagues and ten league titles while his 672 goals are a record for any of the top five European leagues.

Despite offering to cut his

salary by half to seal a new five-year deal which a club carrying debts of US\$1.5bn and player had agreed on, the agreement foundered on strict Spanish League salary restrictions.

Barca president Joan Laporta said he could not 'mortgage' the club's future on any player - not even Messi. Previously Messi had been earning over US\$82.3mn a year net - but financial observers of the Spanish game estimate he pulled in around twice as much in commercial revenue, accounting for almost one-third of total incomes and eight in ten shirt sales.

Messi tried to engineer his departure last year, fed up with some underwhelming recent Champions League showings.

But he stayed and stressed on Sunday that he and his family

had wanted to continue in Catalonia rather than embark on a likely reunion with former clubmate Neymar at PSG.

"I would've liked to have won another Champions League," said Messi. "I don't regret anything, I tried to give my best and I'm ending my career here with a good number of titles".

He also said he had been completely transparent throughout the saga regarding his intentions. "I gave everything for this club from the first day that I arrived right to the last. I never imagined having to say goodbye.

"I'm not ready for this," he said, again choking back tears as thousands of fans waited outside to salute their icon, whose first contract 21 years ago was signed on the back of a restaurant napkin for want of anything else to seal the deal on. Stressing no deals had been done, Messi did concede that joining PSG was a 'possibility' as the Qatar-owned club consider a move.

AFP



An emotional Lionel Messi during the press conference at the Camp Nou stadium in Barcelona on Sunday (AFP)

QUICK RUN

Leicester down Man City to lift Community Shield

Jack Grealish's Manchester City debut was spoiled by Kelechi Iheanacho as the Leicester striker's late 89th minute penalty clinched a 1-0 win in the Community Shield at Wembley on Saturday. All eyes were on Grealish when he came on as a second half substitute following his British record US\$139mn move from Aston Villa on Thursday. Grealish replaced Sam Edozie in the 65th minute and looked lively in his cameo appearance. Defeat in the annual curtain raiser to the English top-flight season will matter little to Man City if they can replicate last term's superb form, which carried them to English Premier League and League Cup glory.

PSG claim French League opener

Paris Saint-Germain (PSG) might be closing in on signing Lionel Messi but another Argentinian was their match-winner on Saturday as Mauro Icardi's goal secured a 2-1 victory against newly-promoted Troyes in their opening game of the new French League season in Paris. Earlier on Saturday Lyon were held to a 1-1 draw by Brest in their opening game of the campaign.

Martin takes first MotoGP victory

Rookie Jorge Martin of Ducati-Pramac cruised to his first MotoGP win in the Styria Grand Prix in Spielberg, Austria, on Sunday, finishing ahead of Spanish compatriot and reigning champion Joan Mir on a Suzuki. French championship leader Fabio Quartararo of Yamaha was third in a race that had to be restarted after the KTM of Spaniard Dani Pedrosa and the Aprilia of Italian Lorenzo Savadori caught fire in the middle of the track after a third-lap crash. The victory restored Ducati's domination at the Red Bull Ring, where they won five straight races before Miguel Oliveira halted their streak last year on a KTM.

AFP

Ahmad takes pole on return to British GT at Snetterton

Our Correspondent
Muscat

Experienced Oman's racing driver Ahmad al Harthy produced a stunning display in the qualifying session to bag a pole in race one of the fifth round of the 2021 British GT Championship at the Snetterton 300 circuit in Norfolk, UK, on Saturday.

It was a remarkable return to the circuit for Ahmad after a gap of five months with the guest-entered Oman Racing team with TF Sport in their Aston Martin Vantage GT3 along with his teammate Charlie Eastwood.

In control throughout the first of the day's two qualifying sessions, the Oman Racing star was at one stage almost 1.5 seconds ahead of the competition before ultimately ending the run 0.8 seconds clear with a time of 1m49.237 seconds (97.84mph).

During the race two session, Ahmad's Pro teammate Eastwood posted the sixth quickest time of 1m48.159 seconds (98.81mph) to ensure the TF Sport-engineered entry has a



Ahmad al Harthy in action during the qualifying session on Saturday

chance of two very strong results in the pair of one-hour races.

"It's great to be back in the car and obviously great to start the race weekend with P1", said an elated Ahmad. "Qualifying went very well for me, the team did an amazing job over the week to make sure we were comfortable in the car and able to perform at a high level.

"The car felt absolutely amaz-

ing and I'm really happy to be back at this level straight away, after being away from the car for such a long time - more than five months. I think that's what's really driving me and motivating me. I'm really looking forward to having a clean and solid first race, the weather has been fluctuating over the last few days but, either wet or dry, I'll do the best I can."



Said al Shahri Musa al Balushi

Shahri re-elected as OHA chairman

Muscat - Incumbent Said al Shahri was re-elected as the chairman of the Oman Handball Association (OHA) for the 2021-2024 term on Sunday.

At the OHA general assembly held on Sunday and which was attended by all the 26 member clubs, Shahri beat former OHA chief Said al Busaidi in a straight fight as he polled 17 votes.

Also retaining his position as general secretary was Musa al Balushi while Jamil al Hassani was elected as the new vice-president and Ali al Alawi as the treasurer. Abeer al Zadjali won the reserved woman member post while the other newly elected members were Omar al Balushi, Taufiq Abdulgani and Nasr al Hassani. Mohammed al Alawi retained his position as a member for second term.



The umpires after carrying out an inspection of the ground on Sunday

England, India draw rain-marred first Test

ENGLAND VS INDIA FIRST TEST: DAY FIVE

Nottingham, UK - England and India drew the first Test at Trent Bridge after rain meant no play was possible on Sunday's last day.

The match, which had already seen more than 100 overs lost to bad weather, was intriguingly poised with India 52 for one in their second innings, needing a further 157 runs to reach a victory target of 209.

But rain prevented play resuming as scheduled at 11:00 am local time (1000 GMT) on Sunday and, after further down-

pours the umpires abandoned the match as a draw at 3:49 pm (1449 GMT), only for the sun to briefly burst through the overcast skies above Trent Bridge.

The second Test in this five-match series is scheduled to start at Lord's on Thursday.

Brief scores: England 1st Innings 183 (J Root 64; J Bumrah 4-46, M Shami 3-28), England 2nd Innings 303 (Root 109; Bumrah 5-64) vs India 1st Innings 278 (KL Rahul 84, R Jadeja 56; O Robinson 5-85, J Anderson 4-54), India 2nd Innings 52-1. Match drawn.

AFP

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TOKYO 2020



LORDS OF THE RING

Cuban boxers reign as classy Cruz shows his moves en route to gold in lightweight category

BOXING

Tokyo, Japan - Cuba won their fourth Olympic boxing title of the Tokyo Games on the final day of action on Sunday for their best performance in 17 years, as Team USA again failed to strike gold.

The classy Andy Cruz was the man to ensure a best gold-medal return since the five at Athens 2004, and did some Michael Jackson dance moves after defeating Keyshawn Davis on split points for the lightweight crown.

Cruz, already a two-time world champion and now a gold medallist at only 25, adds his Tokyo title to the ones won by compatriots Roniel Iglesias, Arlen Lopez and Julio la Cruz.

"We Cubans really worked hard in the run-up to the Games despite the situation in Cuba and around the world with COVID-19," said Cruz.

"We have been working harder and training hard and also had a good training base here. I think that it all came together here. We are a close-knit family in the Cuban boxing



Cuba's Andy Cruz reacts as he fights USA's Keyshawn Davis during their men's lightweight final bout at the Kokugikan Arena in Tokyo on Sunday

community and we brought all that together to have success in Tokyo."

Cruz, who used to do karate, was all feints and flicks as he went ahead on the judges' scorecards after the first round.

The 22-year-old Davis, who has already turned professional, likes a scrap and was able to disturb the Cuban's rhythm in the second round.

But Cruz got the decision - and celebrated with some neat moves in the middle of the ring to show he can dance as well as he fights. There was to be double disappointment for the United States.

They had been chasing a first men's gold since the 2004 Athens Games but after Davis tasted defeat, super-heavy-

weight Richard Torrez was given a pounding by the giant Uzbek Bakhodir Jalolov in their final.

All four super-heavyweight medalists, including bronze winners Britain's Frazer Clarke and Kazakhstan's Kamshybek Kunkabayev, did a group embrace at the end of the ceremony.



'It's crazy'

In the women's competition, Ireland's Kellie Harrington won lightweight gold and Britain's Lauren Price carried off the middleweight title.

Harrington, who works as a part-time cleaner at a psychiatric hospital in Dublin, defeated Brazil's Beatriz Ferreira on unanimous points.



Britain's Lauren Price celebrates after winning middleweight gold

"It's crazy," said the 31-year-old Harrington, peering out at the assembled reporters, and said that being away from home for so long had been tough.

"I said to my coaches (before Tokyo), if I get homesick can I go home? I'm glad that I didn't."

Price underlined her sporting prowess by beating China's Li Qian, also on unanimous points.

The 27-year-old has represented Wales in football and has also played netball and taken part in high-level taekwondo and kickboxing and once had a stint as a taxi driver.

But she concluded, "Boxing's the one for me and I am going to stick to boxing. This tops everything I've done."

AFP

Cash, gifts worth nearly \$2mn for the man with a golden arm



India's Neeraj Chopra celebrates after winning the javelin throw gold

New Delhi, India - Indian companies and governments promised cash and gifts worth more than US\$2mn to javelin thrower Neeraj Chopra after he won India's first ever Olympic athletics gold medal.

The 23-year-old farmer's son, who two years ago underwent surgery on a career-threatening elbow injury, threw 87.58m in the Tokyo Olympic stadium on Saturday to send his country into raptures. Chopra led India's most successful Olympics ever with a gold, two silver medals and four bronze.

He will lead a cash bonanza for the winning athletes - the government in his home state of

Haryana said it would give Chopra a US\$800,000 bonus.

Other state governments offered another US\$400,000 between them and a leading education company promised US\$270,000.

Chopra said he hoped the Olympic gold would be a turning point for his country's athletes. "In athletics, I feel we have missed medals by fine margins over the years. So this medal was important," he said. "Now that I have won, I feel we can do anything."

Pizza for life

Byju Raveendran, owner of the Byju's education tech company that is chipping in for a bonus, said

India had to make its athletes 'heroes so that we transform ourselves from a sport loving nation to a sport-playing nation'.

The Indian cricket board, the BCCI, and the Chennai Super Kings, an IPL team, vowed to give US\$135,000 each and Chopra will also get US\$100,000 from the Indian Olympic Association (IOA). Other firms offered free air travel, luxury cars and cash gifts that took Chopra's bonus over US\$2mn and more was expected.

All of the Indian medal winners can expect big cash rewards for their return, with the IOA offering US\$53,750 for a silver, and US\$33,500 for a bronze.

India's cricket board said they would give US\$168,000 to the men's hockey team for its bronze medal - the first in four decades. And state governments also promised hundreds of thousands to the team. After wrestler Mirabai Chanu gave India a silver on day one of the competition and said she craved pizza, a well-known chain said it would give her pizza for life.

India's other medallists were wrestler Ravi Dahiya, who won silver, while badminton ace P V Sindhu, wrestler Bajrang Punia, boxer Lovlina Borgohain and the men's hockey team won bronze medals. The medal count and stacks of cash is a dramatic turnaround for India after its athletes won just two silvers in 2016.

AFP



USA's Brittney Griner (C) goes to the basket in the women's final basketball match against Japan during the Tokyo 2020 Olympic Games on Sunday

Seven in a row for all-conquering US

WOMEN'S BASKETBALL

Saitama, Japan - A rampant United States swept past Japan to their seventh straight women's basketball crown on Sunday, with Sue Bird and Diana Taurasi collecting their fifth Olympic gold medals to cap remarkable careers.

Brittney Griner scored a game-high 30 points with five rebounds and two assists as the hosts were overpowered 90-75 by a team that stretched their Olympic win streak to 55 games dating back to their last defeat in the 1992 semis.

They went to half-time with a 50-39 lead and there was no

stopping them, with a valiant Japan settling for second place and a best-ever Olympic finish.

The Americans had won eight out of the past nine Olympic titles heading into the final.

Their only blemishes in the history of the tournament were a silver behind the Soviet Union at the inaugural event in 1976 and bronze in 1992.

"It really is hard to wrap your head around it, to grasp what it is," said Bird on her fifth gold, as US soccer star fiancée Megan Rapinoe watched on in Saitama Super Arena.

Bird, 40, and Taurasi, 39, both

scored early buckets as the US raced to a 13-point lead against a nervous Japan, closing out the first quarter with a 23-14 advantage.

Japan stabilised and began making some shots but they again struggled with Griner's 6ft 7ins (2.01m) height in the paint as the US picked her out repeatedly and she went 9-of-10 from the floor.

They took a 50-39 lead into the second half and built it into a 75-56 edge heading into the final stretch, with A'ja Wilson contributing 19 points and five assists for the game.

Japan were led by Maki Takada with 17 points, but the US successfully restricted the dangerous Rui Machida to just six assists.

The Americans' seventh title equalled the longest ever streak by a team in any Olympic sport - matching the feat of the US men's basketball team between 1936 and 1968.

Bird, who has won four WNBA titles with the Seattle Storm, and Taurasi, who has led the Phoenix Mercury to three WNBA championships, have been front and centre during the past five, with the first at Athens.

AFP





TOKYO 2020



MEDALS TABLE
(FINAL STANDINGS)

	Gold	Silver	Bronze	Total
USA	39	41	33	113
China	38	32	18	88
Japan	27	14	17	58
Great Britain	22	21	22	65
ROC	20	28	23	71
Australia	17	7	22	46
Netherlands	10	12	14	36
France	10	12	11	33
Germany	10	11	16	37
Italy	10	10	20	40
Canada	7	6	11	24
Brazil	7	6	8	21
New Zealand	7	6	7	20
Cuba	7	3	5	15
Hungary	6	7	7	20
South Korea	6	4	10	20
Poland	4	5	5	14
Czech Republic	4	4	3	11
Kenya	4	4	2	10
Norway	4	2	2	8
Jamaica	4	1	4	9
Spain	3	8	6	17
Sweden	3	6	0	9
Switzerland	3	4	6	13
Denmark	3	4	4	11
Croatia	3	3	2	8
Iran	3	2	2	7
Serbia	3	1	5	9
Belgium	3	1	3	7
Bulgaria	3	1	2	6
Slovenia	3	1	1	5
Uzbekistan	3	0	2	5
Georgia	2	5	1	8
Chinese Taipei	2	4	6	12
Turkey	2	2	9	13
Greece	2	1	1	4
Uganda	2	1	1	4
Ecuador	2	1	0	3
Ireland	2	0	2	4
Israel	2	0	2	4
Qatar	2	0	1	3
Bahamas	2	0	0	2
Kosovo	2	0	0	2
Ukraine	1	6	12	19
Belarus	1	3	3	7
Romania	1	3	0	4
Venezuela	1	3	0	4
India	1	2	4	7
Hong Kong, China	1	2	3	6
Philippines	1	2	1	4
Slovakia	1	2	1	4
South Africa	1	2	0	3
Austria	1	1	5	7
Egypt	1	1	4	6
Indonesia	1	1	3	5
Ethiopia	1	1	2	4
Portugal	1	1	2	4
Tunisia	1	1	0	2
Estonia	1	0	1	2
Fiji	1	0	1	2
Latvia	1	0	1	2
Thailand	1	0	1	2
Bermuda	1	0	0	1
Morocco	1	0	0	1
Puerto Rico	1	0	0	1
Colombia	0	4	1	5
Azerbaijan	0	3	4	7
Dominican Republic	0	3	2	5
Armenia	0	2	2	4
Kyrgyzstan	0	2	1	3
Mongolia	0	1	3	4
Argentina	0	1	2	3
San Marino	0	1	2	3
Jordan	0	1	1	2
Malaysia	0	1	1	2
Nigeria	0	1	1	2
Bahrain	0	1	0	1
Saudi Arabia	0	1	0	1
Lithuania	0	1	0	1
North Macedonia	0	1	0	1
Namibia	0	1	0	1
Turkmenistan	0	1	0	1
Kazakhstan	0	0	8	8
Mexico	0	0	4	4
Finland	0	0	2	2
Botswana	0	0	1	1
Burkina Faso	0	0	1	1
Ivory Coast	0	0	1	1
Ghana	0	0	1	1
Grenada	0	0	1	1
Kuwait	0	0	1	1
Moldova	0	0	1	1
Syria	0	0	1	1

(ROC* - Russian Olympic Committee)



Britain's Jason Kenny reacts after winning gold in the men's track cycling keirin final during the Tokyo 2020 Olympic Games at Izu Velodrome in Izu, Japan, on Sunday (AFP)

CYCLING TRACK

Tokyo, Japan - Jason Kenny said he might think twice about retiring from the cycling track after winning his seventh Olympic gold on Sunday to become Britain's most successful Olympian of all time. The 33-year-old produced a dazzling performance in the men's keirin final to win his ninth medal overall and overtake Chris Hoy, who won six golds. Elsewhere on the final day of action at the Izu Velodrome, Canada's Kelsey Mitchell won the women's sprint and America's Jennifer Valente took gold in the women's omnium. But Kenny stole the show and has now also surpassed retired cyclist Bradley Wiggins as the

most-decorated British Olympian ever, with seven golds and two silvers across four Games. The defending champion finished ahead of Malaysia's Azizulhasni Awang and Dutch world champion Harrie Lavreysen - who won gold medals in the sprint and team sprint at the Tokyo Games - after pulling off a stunning ambush in the final. The keirin involves riders lurking behind a pace-maker until the last three laps and Kenny caught his opponents napping by immediately launching into an incredible sprint. The veteran rider, who briefly retired after Rio 2016, is yet to

confirm if he will continue beyond the Tokyo but admits his latest triumph has given him pause for thought. Asked if this was his final race, Kenny said, "If you'd asked me this morning I would have said 'yeh, probably', but now I feel pretty good so I might carry on." Kenny had looked like a fading force for most of the week in the Izu Velodrome, where he took a silver medal in the team sprint before being outclassed in the individual sprint by Lavreysen. Niggles "This morning in my head I was 33 and getting slower," he said. "From a British cycling point of

view you'd rather back someone who is 20 and getting faster. It was difficult. "I haven't been able to train the way I want to, I've had niggles. It might not be up to me (whether he stays in the team). I was disappointed with my pace here so it might be out of my hands." On his victory lap, Kenny tossed away his helmet before throwing his arms into the air. On the podium, Awang and Lavreysen hoisted Kenny onto their shoulders. Kenny's wife, Laura, was unable to add to her own medal haul, finishing sixth in the women's omnium, an event in which she won gold in 2012 and 2016.

Laura Kenny won gold in the madison and silver in the team pursuit at the Tokyo Games, taking the Kenny couple's total Olympic medal haul to 15, including 12 gold. US cyclist Valente won the race, finishing 14 points ahead of Yumi Kajihara, who took silver to win Japan's first medal on the track. Dutch rider Kirsten Wild took bronze. Canada's Kelsey Mitchell won gold in the women's sprint, just four years after taking up the sport. Mitchell won the first two races in a best-of-three final against Olena Starikova of Ukraine. Hong Kong's Lee Wai-sze took bronze. AFP

Maiden crown for US



USA women and coaching staff celebrate after the women's volleyball awards ceremony in Tokyo on Sunday

WOMEN'S VOLLEYBALL

Tokyo, Japan - The United States won their first women's volleyball Olympic gold medal on Sunday, downing Brazil 3-0 (25-21 25-20 25-14) in the final. The US women, ranked No 1 in the world, avenged losses against the Brazilians in the 2012 and 2008 Olympic finals. Serbia claimed the bronze after beating South Korea.

US captain Jordan Larson, who was part of that silver-winning team in 2012 and the bronze medal team five years ago, paved the way with her leadership on the court and her strong play on the attack and on defence. Larson and middle blocker Foluke Akinradewo Gunderson, who both came back for a third Olympics, now have a

complete medal collection. The victory also allowed US coach Karch Kiraly to join Lang Ping of China as the second person to win gold as a player and then lead a country to gold as coach. Kiraly won gold indoor as a player in 1984 and 1988. He also won gold in beach volleyball in 1996. Agencies

Serbia retain title

MEN'S WATER POLO

Tokyo, Japan - Serbia retained their Olympic men's water polo title on Sunday with a 13-10 victory over Greece, winning the last of 339 gold medals on offer at the Tokyo 2020 Olympics. Dusan Mandic, Nikola Jaksic and Andrija Prlainovic scored three goals apiece as Serbia defended the crown they won in Rio five years ago, denying Greece a first Olympic gold medal in any team sport. It was Serbia's third gold in Japan after wins in women's taekwondo and karate. Greece finished the Games with a gold medal in men's rowing and

another in the long jump. A delighted Serbia's goalkeeper Branislav Mitrovic said, "We're two-time Olympic champion, these are things that I only read [about] in the papers or I saw on the TV. "I cannot believe that this happened to us right now. I think I'm going to come to my mind in a few days." "It was very hard and it's very rare for teams to win two times in a row. "I want to congratulate Greece also. They had the best tournament ever, but I'm happy at the end that we won," he added. Agencies



Serbia's Dusan Mandic celebrates after the win against Greece on Sunday

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TOKYO 2020

CURTAINS DOWN ON TOKYO 2020 OLYMPIC GAMES



Fireworks go off around the Olympic Stadium during the closing ceremony of the Tokyo 2020 Olympic Games, as seen from outside the venue in Tokyo on Sunday (AFP)



Kenya's Eliud Kipchoge crosses the finish line to win the men's marathon final in Sapporo on Sunday

China at the top of the medals table.

The US scored wins in volleyball, track cycling and basketball on Sunday to top the tally with 39 gold medals, just one ahead of China.

The Olympics were plagued by low Japanese support as they went ahead with Tokyo and other regions under a state of emergency and with infections multiplying to new highs.

But Japan's record haul of 27 golds to finish third on the table has won hearts. Britain were fourth with 22 and the Russian Olympic Committee (ROC), the team for Russian athletes after their country was banned for systematic doping, were fifth with 20.

A succession of big names had failed to perform in Japan, where new sports skateboarding, surfing, sport climbing and karate brought young new stars to the fore. But marathon world record holder Kipchoge showed his class on Sunday, kicking in the closing stages and clocking 2hr 08min 38sec to retain the title he won in 2016.

The world record holder clocked 2hr 08min 38sec to win gold, becoming only the third man to win consecutive marathon titles.

Abdi Nageeye of the Netherlands claimed silver in 2:09.58, just ahead of Belgium's Bashir

Abdi in the final event of the athletics programme at the Tokyo Games.

The marathon, moved north to Sapporo to avoid Tokyo's summer heat, was one of the few events to allow spectators.

"I think I have fulfilled the legacy by winning the marathon for the second time, back-to-back. I hope now to help inspire the next generation," Kipchoge said.

"It means a lot for me, especially at this time," he added of winning his second gold medal.

Sunday's race saw 106 runners representing 45 countries and the Olympic Refugee Team set off from Odori Park in the heart of Sapporo in temperatures of around 27°C and a stamina-sapping 80 per cent humidity.

Fears of a major outbreak among the mostly vaccinated Olympic athletes and officials proved unfounded and 430 cases were picked up during the Games, including 32 in the Olympic Village.

Superstar gymnast Simone Biles provided the most jaw-dropping moment when the American abruptly pulled out of competition over a bout of the 'twisties', a disorientating mental block.

Biles, widely acknowledged as the greatest gymnast in history, recovered sufficiently to claim a redemptive bronze medal in her final event, the beam.

Weightlifter Laurel Hubbard of New Zealand became the first openly transgender woman to compete at the Games and Canada's Quinn became the first openly transgender Olympic medalist, with gold in the women's football.

In other highlights, US swimmer Caeleb Dressel assumed the mantle of Michael Phelps with five gold medals and Jamaica's Elaine Thompson-Herah achieved a sprint double on the track.

Tokyo will host the Paralympics from August 24. The Olympic circus will reconvene in just six months when Beijing, faced with boycott threats and a renewed coronavirus emergency, holds the Winter Games in February.

(Complete Tokyo 2020 Olympics medals table on p15)
AFP

Kenya's Kipchoge retains men's marathon title; USA edge China at the top of the medals tally

Tokyo, Japan - The Tokyo 2020 Games were declared closed on Sunday by the International Olympic Committee (IOC) chief Thomas Bach, who said it had been the 'most challenging Olympic journey' after a year's pandemic delay and threats of cancellation.

Bach called the Tokyo Games 'unprecedented' as he addressed the 68,000-seat Olympic Stadium, which was empty of spectators as Japan battles a record coronavirus outbreak.

"In these difficult times we are all living through, you give the world the most precious of gifts: hope," the Bach told athletes at the ceremony. "And now I have to mark the end of this most challenging Olympic journey to Tokyo: I declare the Games of the 32nd Olympiad closed," he said.

It marked a low-key end to an extraordinary Olympics that have mostly played out in empty venues with only athletes, team officials and media present. Athletes have lived in strict biosecure conditions with social distancing at the Olympic Village

and instructions to wear masks unless eating, sleeping, training or competing.

As the Olympic flag was passed to Paris mayor Anne Hidalgo for the 2024 Games, live footage showed cheering crowds in the French capital - in stark contrast to Tokyo.

Bach has described how the IOC considered cancelling the Olympics and claiming the costs on its insurance policy but said officials ploughed ahead with holding the Games 'for the athletes'.

'Our athletes moved people'

On Sunday, the climax of the biggest sports event since the pandemic, Kenya's Eliud Kipchoge won the men's marathon and the USA edged



IOC president Thomas Bach (L) hands over the Olympic Flag to Paris Mayor Anne Hidalgo for the 2024 Games at the closing ceremony of the Tokyo 2020 Olympic Games, at the Olympic Stadium in Tokyo, on Sunday

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