

Time to allow Friday prayers?

Worshippers believe it’s about time jumaa prayers resumed given that the number of COVID-19 cases has come down significantly

Shaddad al Musalmey
Muscat

While most activities are now back to normal, discussions and debate continue on allowing worships to gather for Friday prayers with many lamenting a long wait. They believe it’s about time jumaa prayers resumed given that the number of COVID-19 cases has come down significantly and a nationwide immunisation programme is gathering pace.

Oman suspended Friday prayers at all mosques in the country in March 2020. “COVID-19 cases have now



(File photo)

COVID-19 cases have now dropped and many activities have been allowed to resume. Congregating for Friday prayers needs to be given consideration, too, now given that we take precautionary measures

SHEIKH NASSER AL JAHDHAMI

dropped and many activities have been allowed to resume. Congregating for Friday prayers needs to

be given consideration, too, now given that we take precautionary measures,” said Sheikh Nasser al

Jahdhami, imam of a mosque in Azaiba.

According to Jahdhami, two doses of vaccine can be set as a condition to attend Friday prayers. “I think the time is right to open now.”

Worshippers believe leaving a distance of one or two metres will suffice to ensure safety even if it demands praying from outside mosques. “Many activities have reopened, and now the decision

of Friday prayer congregations needs to be reviewed as soon as possible. If the authorities allow all mosques in Oman to host jumaa prayers, I don’t think there will be a problem managing social distancing even if it means praying from outside mosques,” said Abdullah al Khaldi, a resident of Amerat.

Seeb resident Anwar Abdullah noted that many countries have opened mosques up for Friday prayers and “it is time for Oman to do the same. The only difference between daily prayers and Friday prayers is the number of those who attend, which I think will not be a problem if people go to bigger mosques”.

An official of the Minister of Awqaf and Religious Affairs, however, informed that there is still no news on allowing congregations for Friday prayers. “The decision lies with the Supreme Committee,” he said.

Mosques in Oman reopened last year for five daily prayers – barring jumaa prayers – after they had been temporarily closed by the Supreme Committee to deal with COVID-19 pandemic.

“The authorities are still discussing the matter and a decision will be announced later,” H E Dr Ahmed al Sa’eedi, Minister of Health and member of the Supreme Committee, said late last year.

Supermarkets, malls clueless on vaccination rule

Muscat - With a week to go before Oman implements a new rule demanding proof of vaccination in order to enter commercial complexes and restaurants, malls and supermarkets are clueless about the measures to be taken. They are yet to receive any guidelines from the government.

While Oman has eased most of its COVID-19 pandemic restrictions, a new comes into effect starting September 1. On August 19, the Supreme Committee announced that proof of vaccination will be a mandatory requirement to enter government offices and private sector establishments, as well as to attend cultural, sports and group events.

Muscat Daily asked a few supermarkets and malls how they were preparing to implement the decision on verifying and allowing entry to only vaccinated customers.

On the condition of anonymity, an official of a mall in Bausher said, “We read in newspapers about the rule that vaccination is mandatory for entering malls. So far we do not have any guidelines from the concerned authorities.”



Two hypermarket officials echoed the same concern. “We are yet to receive official guidelines or a circular on how to implement the mandatory vaccination rule for entry,” said an officials of two hypermarkets in Ruwi.

Hussain Namazi, store manager of Al Karama Hypermarket, informed that staff of all its branches are vaccinated to ensure their safety.

“As far as we know, the mandatory vaccination rule to enter commercial establishments may only apply to malls, but as of now there is no clarity. We are awaiting clarity and guidelines from the authorities. We’ll implement whatever the authorities ask us to follow,” said Namazi.

(Text by Syed Fasiuddin)

► NEWS BRIEFS

TALIBAN AGREES TO LET AFGHANS LEAVE AFTER AUG 31

Berlin, Germany - Germany said Wednesday it has received assurance from a Taliban negotiator that Afghans who have the right documents will still be allowed to leave Afghanistan after the United States’ withdrawal deadline on August 31.

Germany’s envoy Markus Potzel said on Twitter he had met with Taliban deputy chief negotiator Sher Mohammad Abbas Stanikzai, who “assured me that Afghans with legal documents will continue to have the opportunity to travel on commercial flights after August 31”.

Berlin has said that the current military operation carried out by NATO allies to evacuate Afghans in need of protection cannot continue once the Americans pull out.

Vaccine protection weakens within 6 months: study

London, United Kingdom - Protection from two doses of the Pfizer and AstraZeneca vaccines wanes within less than six months, according to a study suggesting that booster shots may be needed to ensure prolonged coverage.

The latest finding comes as several countries are rolling out additional jabs for the fully vaccinated, a move slammed by the World Health Organization as millions in the world have yet to receive a single dose.

The Pfizer jab was 88 per cent effective a month after the second dose, but protection fell to 74 per cent after five to six months, according to the latest analysis of data from the Zoe Covid Study.

The study uses real-world data gathered via a mobile phone app with over a million active users, who log details on their



vaccinations and test results, which is then analysed by researchers including scientists at King’s College London.

The study drew on more than 1.2mn test results and participants.

Protection from the AstraZeneca vaccine fell from 77 per cent one month after a second dose to 67 per cent after four to five months.

AFP

Private healthcare capable partner in fighting COVID-19

Our Correspondent
Muscat

The Ministry of Health has praised the role played by private hospitals in Oman in strengthening the overall healthcare sector as well ably supporting public healthcare in its march to fight the COVID-19 pandemic.

Dr Mazen bin Jawad al Khabouri, director general of the Directorate General of Private Health Institutions in the Ministry of Health, said that private health institutions are one of the main pillars of the health system in the sultanate along with the rest of the government health institutions.

He said that Oman currently has 1,696 private hospitals and medical centres, including 31 private hospitals, 335 health centres and complexes, and 129



public clinics, in addition to 1,201 health institutions comprising other specialised clinics such as dental and dermatology clinics, laboratories, optical shops and corporate clinics.

“The licensing of these private health institutions is carried out by the Directorate General of Private Health Institutions after completing all the requirements that qualify them to provide health services of a high level, ensuring the health and safety of healthcare recipients,” he said.

Private health institutions are subject to supervision and control by committees and evaluation teams at the central and governorate levels on a regular basis to ensure professional standards

DR MAZEN BIN JAWAD AL KHABOURI

Dr Khabouri indicated that private health institutions are subject to supervision and control by committees and evaluation teams at the central and governorate levels on a regular basis to ensure their adherence and fulfillment of professional standards and the controls and policies approved for the law of practicing the medical profession.

He said that health insurance has played an important role in the development of the private healthcare sector as insurance

companies provide packages of various kinds, whether for workers in the private and government sectors or the rest of society.

With regard to the role of private health institutions in combating coronavirus, Dr Khabouri said that since the declaration of COVID-19 as a global pandemic, private health institutions have had a role in combating this disease by preparing their facilities in accordance with the requirements and controls to limit its spread.



More than 5bn COVID-19 jabs administered worldwide



Nails are disease indicators for a range of health conditions

10-year-old’s cleanliness drive in Dhofar wins hearts

Our Correspondent
Muscat

Pained to see trash strewn around in his native Titam in the wilayat of Salalah in Dhofar, a ten-year-old has taken on the responsibility of cleaning the area on his own and won hearts and praise from the people.

Falat Ali Mohammed Bait Saeed’s initiative during the on-going khareef season when Dhofar dazzles and draws tourists from far and near is representative of youth understanding the importance of preserving the environment.

Speaking to *Muscat Daily*, Falat’s father Ali Mohammad said, “We are farmers who love to preserve the beautiful natural areas of Dhofar. My son does not like that some tourists throw their waste in tourist areas.

“When Falat sees trash in tourist hotspots on mountains, beaches or anywhere, he sets out to clean up.”

Falat is particularly active during khareef in removing trash from tourist sites. “A few days ago, he undertook a three-day campaign over a weekend and was surprised by the amount of waste he found.”



(Supplied photo)

Describing littering as a ‘serious issue’, Saeed said, “It is embarrassing to see food packets,

bottles and soft drink cans strewn all over. This is bad for our country; it spoils our

image. But littering is not only bad for tourism but the environment too.

“My son works daily to clean up from 9am for three hours. He is keen to continue this work and spread awareness among members of the community.”

Images of the conscientious lad on social media cleaning up after others and collecting trash have triggered a flurry of reactions and comments in his praise.

Ali Akak tweeted, “I hope the concerned authorities put in place new laws to deter violators and protect the picturesque

natural areas in Dhofar. Preserving nature is everyone’s responsibility.”

Addressing tourists, Ahmed Jaboob commented, “My brother tourists, whether you are from Muscat, Salalah or any other place, enjoy the bountiful nature of our dear homeland anywhere, but before leaving, pick up your waste and put it in the nearest trash bin.”

Another Twitterati, Al Wahajj Faiz, said, “I hope that the concerned authorities honour this child for his great work, and that the culture of volunteerism spreads among children.”

Pandemic boosts research, innovation in higher education

Our Correspondent
Muscat

The COVID-19 pandemic has severely impacted education but it has also provided an opportunity to expedite and enhance the reach of education to even those sitting thousands of kilometres away from an education institution.

The effects of the pandemic on higher education in Oman is palpable as students as well as colleges and universities continue to struggle to come to terms with online education and its challenges. However, the pandemic has also helped shape national strategies in higher education towards better scientific research and innovation.

H E Dr Rahma bint Ibrahim al Mahrooqi, Minister for Higher Education, Research and Innovation, in an interview with Oxford Business Group, spoke on how higher education in Oman has geared up to overcome challenges.

"The Ministry for Higher Education, Research and Innovation (MoHERI) has continued its efforts to develop research and innovation capacity during the pandemic," she said, adding that the ministry contributed funding to the COVID-19 Research Programme launched in March 2020, covering both clinical and non-clinical categories.

The initiative funded 28 research proposals at a total cost of RO280,000.

"These projects will lead to a better understanding of the pandemic in the local context, as



MoHERI has taken specific steps to ensure the availability of a wide range of STEM programmes at both the undergraduate and postgraduate levels

H E DR RAHMA AL MAHROOQI

well as provide innovative solutions."

The ministry has prepared for economic recovery by updating the National Strategy for Research and Development 2040 to better align it with Oman Vision 2040.

"This will ensure that research leads to the development of a knowledge-based economy. We will continue to work to-

wards this end, despite the economic and administrative complications that arose due to the pandemic."

On the question of the extent of the pandemic resulting in a greater number of local students entering science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM) studies and related career paths, H E Dr Rahma said that it is still too early to deter-

Student attendance in classes compulsory: SQU

Muscat - Sultan Qaboos University (SQU) has announced that study during the new academic year 2021-2022 will begin on September 5 and that all students are required to attend classes at the campus.

The announcement was made after studying the recent decision of the Supreme Committee tasked with tackling developments resulting

from COVID-19 pandemic, SQU stated.

The SQU exhorted students, teaching and administrative staff to take the vaccine and to stick to the precautionary measures and procedures set by the Supreme Committee. An instructional guide to this effect was issued by the SQU to ensure a safe return to study at the university.

mine the long-term impact of the pandemic on the number of students entering STEM as a career path. "The MoHERI has taken specific steps to ensure the availability of a wide range of STEM programmes at both the undergraduate and postgraduate levels.

"The ministry has complemented these by adding specific programmes related to emergency and disaster sciences, and similar specialisations, including those associated with first aid work that until now had not been included in the internal and external scholarship programmes, nor in the National Postgraduate Programme (NPP). The ministry has encouraged students of the NPP to conduct research studies in STEM subjects, as well as in energy and disaster sciences, to develop expertise in the areas and to promote high levels of practical preparedness."

H E Dr Rahma said that trans-

formation of the former Ministry of Higher Education into the MoHERI and its takeover of the Research Council was a crucial step in helping Oman become a centre for R&D.

"Since then, efforts have been made to establish the sultanate as a regional leader, and we have committed to establishing more partnerships with the job market - especially the private sector - for market-ready innovation."

In light of the pandemic, an emphasis is now being placed on healthcare, food security, energy, the environment, education technology and emerging technologies associated with the Fourth Industrial Revolution.

"As part of these partnerships, the ministry and other government entities will provide financing and in-kind support, as well as numerous incubation platforms for research projects with a view to generating high-impact innovation."

MoL, MoE announce 997 teaching jobs

Our Correspondent
Muscat

The Ministry of Labour (MoL), in cooperation with Ministry of Education, has announced 997 teaching job opportunities in various disciplines as part of MoE's plans to replace expatriates.

The appointments target job-seekers and retirees from MoE who have specialisation in teaching and those who hold university qualifications and General Educational Diplomas.

H E Majid bin Saeed al Bahri, Undersecretary for Administrative and Financial Affairs in MoE, said, "The announcement comes within the two ministries' plan to recruit Omani cadres in educational jobs in various disciplines through appropriate preparation and qualification programmes. This plan is in line with the graduation of a new batch of students from higher education institu-

tions and their entry into the labour market."

The jobs available include 68 Arabic language teachers, 203 for mathematics, 26 for chemistry, 34 for physics, 67 for biology, 107 music teachers, and 492 basic education teachers.

Earlier this year, MoL announced that more than 2,000 expat teachers have been replaced by Omani jobseekers as the Omanisation drive gathers pace. The ministry is implementing a plan to replace 2,469 expat teachers with Omanis in Phase 1 of its Omanisation programme, including 1,455 male and 1,014 female teachers.

The ministry plans to replace expats with Omanis across a number of disciplines, including Islamic education, Arabic language, French language, life skills, mathematics, chemistry, physics, biology, geography, history and information technology.



Omani business delegation takes part in Turkish-Arab forum

Istanbul, Turkey - A business delegation of Oman Chamber of Commerce and Industry (OCCI) led by its chairman Eng Redha Juma al Saleh is currently taking part in the 15th Arab-Turkish Economic Cooperation Forum being held in Istanbul, Turkey.

The forum gathers business owners and representatives of private sector companies and institutions in the Arab world and Turkey.

Saleh informed that the forum aims to strengthen relations be-

tween the Arab countries and Turkey by boosting economic diversification projects, raising trade exchange and promoting joint investment projects between them.

The Omani business delegation comprises officials from various economic and investment sectors in the sultanate, a number of government units, and representatives from the technology, food and agricultural sectors. ONA

Tender Announcement

The Public Establishment for Industrial Estates (Mada'ayn) announces the following Tenders:

Tender Number	Tender Name	Last date of buying	Date of submission	Type of work	Register Degree	Fee (R.O)
8/2021/PEIE/HQ-8	CONSULTANCY SERVICES FOR THE DEVELOPMENT OF SUR INDUSTRIAL CITY MASTER PLAN	08-09-2021	30-09-2021	Consulting Offices	First	100
9/2021/PEIE/HQ-9	CONSULTANCY SERVICES FOR MASTER PLANNING OF NEW UPCOMING SAIH A' SIRAYYAH INDUSTRIAL CITY	08-09-2021	04-10-2021	Consulting Offices	First	50

Interested Companies registered with Tender Board may obtain the Tender documents from the E-Tendering website: <https://etendering.tenderboard.gov.om> against non-refundable payment as mentioned above for each set of document. Tenders should be submitted on line on given website. The Tenderer should enclose scan copy of Bank Guarantee issued by any bank in the Sultanate of Oman for the value of 1% of the Tender value validity for (90) days, and addressed to The Chairman of Tender Committee mentioned in above tenders.

1. Tender Inquiry: All correspondence pertaining to the TENDER Inquiry must be online at eTendering System.
2. eTendering System Inquiry: All correspondence pertaining to the eTendering System technical support must be directed to the following helpdesk email address and phone number: etenderhd@ita.gov.om and +968 24166670, 24166409 Note: Bid Submission will be online only.

No Document can be accepted as Manual except Original Tender Bond. Scan Copy of Tender Bond needs to be attached in system and original needs to be deposited before Bid Opening. Mada'ayn is not bound to accept the lowest or any other Offer and has the right to cancel these tenders and the tenderers have no right to claim for any compensations.

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RO100,000 to support 10mn tree plantation

Our Correspondent
Muscat

The Environment Authority and Nama Group signed an agreement on Wednesday to allocate RO100,000 to support the national initiative to plant 10mn trees in Oman.

'In line with the goals of Oman Vision 2040 and the achievement of sustainable development goals in the sultanate, Eng Omar bin Khalfan al Wahaibi, CEO, Nama Group, and H E Dr Abdullah bin Ali al Omari, chairman, Environment Authority, signed a Memorandum of Cooperation to allocate RO100,000 for the 10mn trees plantation initiative,' Nama Group said.

The two institutions seek to achieve national goals in enhancing and preserving environmental resources through the cultivation of wild plants, in-



(Supplied photo)

creasing green coverage area, combating desertification and efficient resource management.

The initiative, launched in August will continue for a period of five years, until September 2026.

Oman Water and Wastewater Services Company (OWWSC) will participate in the implemen-

tation of projects and initiatives to plant trees in the various wilayats of Oman according to

The process of cultivation of saplings has been going on in governorates, and the nurseries have been expanded and new nurseries established

H E DR OMARI

the approved plan. OWWSC will also provide treated water from its sewage stations.

On the occasion, H E Dr Omari said that the cooperation with Nama Group in joining the 10mn trees plantation drive will have a significant impact in supporting the national initiative.

"It is a model for cooperation between government institutions

and the private sector," he said.

He confirmed that the national initiative, according to the plan adopted by the authority, has been progressing well. "The process of cultivation of saplings has been going on in various governorates, and the nurseries have been expanded and new nurseries established. They have been provided with seeds from the seed bank established for the purpose."

Eng Wahaibi said the cooperation with the authority is part of an extension of the programmes of the Nama Group emanating from group's sustainability policy, "through which we aim to reduce carbon emissions".

He added, "Through the partnership, we seek to harness the material, technical and human capabilities that the group possesses to support the authority's plan to plant 10mn trees."

Sayyid Badr takes part in Mideast summit in Lugano

Lugano, Switzerland - H E Sayyid Badr bin Hamad al Busaidi, Foreign Minister, participated in the fourth Middle East Mediterranean (MEM) Summer Summit, held at Switzerland's Italian-speaking public university, the Università della Svizzera Italiana in Lugano, on Tuesday.

Sayyid Badr delivered a keynote address on the issue of social justice and its relevance to both foreign and domestic policies.

Oman's participation in the summit was warmly welcomed by a diverse audience including a number of young people from the GCC states, Morocco and Palestine.

The main topics to be discussed at the summit throughout the week will be the Palestinian cause, the challenges facing Europe as a result of refugees fleeing conflict zones, and the need for the new US ad-



H E Sayyid Badr

ministration to rebuild the trust of its regional allies.

The summit analysed the complexity of the Middle East Mediterranean Region, contextualising its current developments in global history and prompting a broader reflection on contemporary challenges.

The participants noted that this region has a significant impact on international dynamics, on Europe and its political structures.

ONA

Madayn, Oman LNG to launch innovation scheme

Muscat - The Public Establishment for Industrial Estates - Madayn, in cooperation with Oman Liquefied Natural Gas (Oman LNG), is all set to launch Industrial Innovation Programme in October.

The programme comes in line with Oman LNG's project of financing a business incubator project at Sur Industrial City under the supervision of Madayn Industrial Innovation Academy, Madayn said.

Presenting an ideal platform for the innovators and entrepreneurs in South Sharqiyah governorate, the programme aims at qualifying Omani industrial innovation specialists through a series of training courses to be delivered by innovation experts.

The programme will feature a variety of topics including introduction to innovation; innovation in food and beverage industry; transforming innovative food products into viable models; food safety and food systems; branding; marketing of innovative

products; and development of initial innovative models of food products.

'The programme targets entrepreneurs and innovators in South Sharqiyah in food and beverage industry, as well as owners of household food products, and graduates of food science and nutrition, sales and marketing, and business fields in the governorate,' added the statement.

By the end of the programme, the participants will be awarded certification by Madayn Industrial Innovation Academy, Innovation Certification Level 1 by Global Innovation Management Institute in the United States, certification by the World Packaging Organisation, and certification by the National Registry of Food Safety Professionals.

Moreover, top six participants will be selected for their food products to be developed for commercial production with the support of Oman LNG and under the supervision of Madayn Industrial Innovation Academy.

113 new COVID-19 cases, 4 deaths

Muscat - The Ministry of Health (MoH) on Wednesday reported 113 new COVID-19 cases with four people succumbing to the infection in 24 hours.

'The total number of cases registered in the sultanate has

now reached 301,683, including 4,047 deaths,' MoH said.

MoH said 12 patients were admitted to hospitals in 24 hours. The total number of inpatients is now 150, including 67 in intensive care units.

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Omani ambassadors visit SEZAD

Our Correspondent
Muscat

Oman's ambassadors to brotherly and friendly countries visited the Special Economic Zone at Duqm (SEZAD) on Wednesday. The visit was organised by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, in cooperation with the Public Authority for Special Economic Zones and Free Zones (OPAZ).

The two-day SEZAD visit programme included an overview on the special economic zone and a visit to a number of projects, namely, Duqm Drydock, Port of Duqm, Saay commercial complex, Duqm Refinery project, Karwa Motors project, the Multipurpose Fishing Port and the Fisheries and Food Processing Complex.

H E Saleh Sulaiman al Harthy, the sultanate's Ambassador to Kenya said that the visit came as an initiative from the OPAZ management, aiming to highlight SEZAD, its existing



and planned vital facilities, economic establishments, investment facilities, commercial outlets and tourist resorts.

He said that the Special Economic Zone at Duqm is planned to be an integrated global eco-

economic gateway with a large strategic port that can serve shipping lines from east to west.

"The SEZAD is one of the key partners in supporting Oman's economy abroad. It will

open new horizons of communication and cooperation in marketing this promising zone to gain its place on the global economic map," H E Harthy added.

H E Idris Abdulrahman al

Khanjari, permanent representative of the sultanate to the United Nations, underscored the importance of increasing visits for the targeted countries to view the zone, its components, available incentives and opportunities to help attract more diversified investments that add value and enhance strategic objectives.

He stressed the importance of rallying communication efforts with different countries by coordinating with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the sultanate's diplomatic missions abroad, and Oman Chamber of Commerce and Industry, which enjoys good relations with the joint Arab chambers of commerce worldwide.

The visit included seven ambassadors from various embassies of Oman abroad.

At the end of the visit, the Omani ambassadors visited the rock garden, which is one of the most important geological sites in Oman, to see its unique and diverse rock formations.

Petrofac appoints Jahwari as country manager for Oman

Our Correspondent
Muscat

Petrofac, a leading international service provider to the energy industry, has appointed Dr Khalid al Jahwari as the country manager for Oman.

This leadership appointment recognises the activities and multiple substantial projects the company has in Oman and the strategic importance of the sultanate to the group, Petrofac said in a press statement on Wednesday.

Jahwari brings over 20 years' industry experience in the oil and gas industry, with a varied background in technical, commercial and management roles, working across the Middle East, Africa and Europe.

He has significant leadership experience, most recently as Shell's general manager of operations in Egypt, having previously been Shell's global production excellence leader, based in The Hague, Netherlands. Prior to Shell, Jahwari spent 15 years with Petroleum Development Oman (PDO), holding a number of key roles.

This appointment, Petrofac said, is aligned to the group's model of local execution to global standards. It will help underpin the continued role the company has in Oman's evolving energy needs and the development of the country's oil, gas and renewables infrastructure.

In his role as ambassador in-country, Jahwari will represent the Petrofac Group, working



Khalid al Jahwari

closely with the various parties across the entire Petrofac portfolio, in the ongoing delivery and development of the company's full-service capability offering and operations in Oman.

Elie Lahoud, Petrofac's chief operating officer - engineering and construction, said, "I am delighted to welcome Jahwari to Petrofac. He brings significant experience, with a track record spanning an impressive career, built both internationally and in Oman. This is a key market where we remain firmly focused on maximising local and sustainable delivery, generating in-country value, and playing our part in the region's energy transition for many years to come."

During the past 33 years, Petrofac has established a multi-discipline engineering and project execution office in Muscat and invested in a state-of-the-art technical training centre, Takatuf Petrofac Oman (TPO).

The group's substantial ongoing projects include the Duqm Refinery.

OPAZ floats tender for Duqm roads

Our Correspondent
Muscat

Oman's Public Authority for Special Economic Zones and Free Zones (OPAZ) has announced a tender for the construction of roads between Duqm Airport and Ras Markaz Oil Storage Park in Duqm.

OPAZ has invited experienced firms for participating in

this road construction tender in the Special Economic Zone at Duqm through Oman's e-tendering system.

The tender 'Construction of roads from Duqm Airport to Ras Markaz' is restricted to tender participation for the joint venture firms between Oman and Saudi Arabia only.

'Any individual or other international companies' bids

shall not be accepted. The tender award is exclusive to the joint ventures of Omani and Saudi companies only,' OPAZ said in its announcement.

The sale of tender documents starts from August 25 and end on September 22. The submission for the tender will close on October 20 and the technical bids will open the same day.

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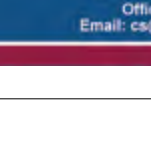
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Slow vaccination may cost global economy \$2.3tn

Paris, France – The slow rollout of coronavirus vaccines will cost the global economy US\$2.3tn in lost output, a report released on Wednesday found.

The Economist Intelligence Unit's study found that emerging and developing economies, whose vaccine rollouts are far behind those of wealthier countries, will bear the brunt of those losses.

The report comes as advanced nations move towards providing booster shots to their populations while the international effort to provide vaccines for poorer nations remains inadequate.

The study calculated that countries which fail to vaccinate 60 per cent of their populations by mid-2022 will suffer the losses, equivalent to €2tn, over the 2022-2025 period.

'Emerging countries will shoulder around two-thirds of these losses, further delaying their economic convergence with more developed countries,' the Economist Intelligence Unit said.

It warned the delayed rollout of vaccines could fuel resentment, increasing the risk of social unrest in developing economies.

The Asia-Pacific Region will be the worst hit in absolute



Palestinians attend a COVID-19 vaccination drive with Pfizer-BioNtech and Sputnik-V vaccines at the Hamdi Manko centre in the West Bank city of Nablus on Sunday (AFP)

terms, accounting for nearly three-quarters of the losses.

But as a percentage of GDP, sub-Saharan Africa will suffer the worst losses.

Around 60 per cent of the population of higher-income countries received at least one dose of the coronavirus vaccine as of late August, compared to just one per cent in poorer nations, according to the study.

Two doses are required to be fully vaccinated for most shots.

'Vaccination campaigns are progressing at a glacial pace in lower-income economies,' it said.

The report's author, Agathe Demarais, said the international effort to provide coronavirus vaccines to poor nations, Covax, has failed to live up to its even modest expectations.

'There is little chance that the divide over access to vaccines will ever be bridged' with rich countries providing only a fraction of what is needed, she said

in a statement.

"Finally, the focus in developed economies is shifting towards administering booster doses of coronavirus vaccines, which will compound shortages of raw materials and production bottlenecks," she added.

The Economist Intelligence Unit said its study was conducted by combining its in-house forecasts for vaccination timelines in around 200 countries with GDP growth forecasts.

AFP

Samsung announces \$205bn investment plan

Seoul, South Korea – Samsung Group unveiled a US\$205bn investment blueprint aimed at making the company a leader in a range of technologies from semiconductors to robotics and creating 40,000 new jobs.

The tech giant is South Korea's largest conglomerate and its overall turnover is equivalent to a fifth of the national gross domestic product. Samsung Electronics, its flagship subsidiary, is the world's biggest smartphone maker.

The plan will 'help Samsung strengthen its global standing in



key industries while spearheading innovation in new fields', the company said in a statement, adding that it will also pursue corporate acquisitions.

On the semiconductor front, the firm said it will seek to enhance cutting-edge technologies

to meet 'long-term demand rather than short-term changes'.

It is also looking to expand its biopharmaceutical business run by Samsung Biologics and Samsung Bioepisit.

The conglomerate said it would build two new manufacturing plants on top of three currently in operation with a view to tapping into the manufacturing of vaccines.

Of the 240tn won (US\$205bn) it plans to spend, it will commit 180tn won to South Korea.

AFP

India to raise \$81bn by leasing state assets

New Delhi, India – India announced plans to lease state-owned assets to the private sector in a bid to raise US\$81bn to repair public finances battered by the pandemic and fund new infrastructure.

Private firms will be able to lease on a long-term basis over 26,000km of roads, power transmission lines, hydroelectric and solar power assets, phone networks, and nearly 15,000 telecom towers, under the plans.

Also up for grabs will be some 8,000km of natural gas pipelines, 15 railway stations, railway lines, 25 airports, and a number of sports stadiums, according to the four-year plan dubbed the National Monetization Pipeline.

"The ownership of the assets remain with the government and there should be mandatory hand back [to the state]," Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman said. "So by bringing in private participation in this, you will be able to monetise it better and ensure further investment in infrastructure building," she said.

India's opposition hit out at the plans, with Congress party chief Rahul Gandhi saying 'assets created over seven decades [are] being gifted to cronies'.

AFP

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ANNOUNCEMENT OF TENDERS

The Rural Areas Electricity Company (S.A.O.C (invites following tenders:

Tender No.	Description	Tender Price (R.O)	Grade	Last Date of Buying	Last Date of Submission
Tanweer-33/2021	Construction of New 2x6 MVA Stepdown Transformer and Upgrading of Step-up Transformer from (1x 10 + 2x6 to 3 X10 MVA) at Al Hijji Power Station at Wilayat Mahout - Al Wusta Governorate	225/=	"A"	9/09/2021	28/09/2021
Tanweer-34/2021	Consultancy Supervision Services for Interlinking of Existing (33KV) Networks System with New Mahout Grid Station in Al Wusta and Salh Al Khairat Grid Station in Dhofar Governorate	70/=	Specialist Companies	9/09/2021	28/09/2021
Tanweer-35/2021	Reinforcement Works in Existing (11KV and 0.415 LV) Electrical Distribution Networks at Al Dahar Area in Wilayat Al Duqm - Al Wusta Governorate	46/=	"C" and above	9/09/2021	26/09/2021
Tanweer-36/2021	Replacement of Potentially Hazardous of LV Overhead Line Service Connections - Al-Wusta Governorate (Phase One)	48/=	"C" and above	9/09/2021	26/09/2021
Tanweer-24/2021 (Re-float)	Wadi Protection for Existing (33kv and 11KV XLPE Cable) in Wilayat Khasab - Musandam Region	49/=	"B" and above	9/09/2021	26/09/2021

The Conditions:

- Collection of Tender:** Interested and Specialized Companies and Establishments registered with Tender Board (valid certificate), Tanweer and (Distribution Code Review Panel (DCRP) except for tender no. Tanweer- 34/2021) (valid certificate) may obtain the Tender documents from Procurement & Contracts Department, against non-refundable payment as mentioned above for each set of documents. The fees for the tenders shall be deposited on Tanweer account 0423010783090041 – Bank Muscat and for more information please contact via email address i.e. tender.purchase@tanweer.nama.om , or call us on phone number : 24250824.
- Bank Guarantee:** The Tenderer should enclose original bank guarantee issued by any bank in the Sultanate of Oman for an amount equivalent to (1%) of the tender value with a validity of (90) Days from the last date of submission and addressed to Rural Areas Electricity Company SAOC (Tanweer).
- Offers Submission:**
 - A- Original bids along Cover letter shall be placed by bidders inside the red waxed Tender's envelopes as communicated to bidders by Tanweer. Such documents must be serialized according to the numbers of the tender items.
 - B- Tender bids shall be provided separately on a CD Rooms, along with original cover letters in each envelop. Bids and cover letters shall bear the bidder's official seal and must be signed in either blue or red ink, but not black. A true soft copy of the bids shall be provided on a CD in an inner envelope marked "Copy". Bids who do not comply with these requirements will be overlooked.
 - C- Bidders shall write the following details on the cover of CD:
 - Tender name and number.
 - Tender No. Tanweer -33/2021, Tanweer -34/2021 & Tanweer -24/2021 to be Addressed to the **Chairman of Tender Committee, Tanweer.**
 - Tender No. Tanweer -35/2021 and Tanweer -36/2021, to be Addressed to the **Chairman of Purchase Committee, Tanweer.**
 - Prequalification / Technical Proposal / Commercial Proposal /Bid Bond.
- Submission Location:** The Completed bids in CD should be deposited in the Tender Box at Tanweer Main Office at Wilayat Al Seeb, before 12:00 PM on the last date of submission.
- Tender Price (R.O):** 5% VAT is inclusive.
- Tanweer without mentioning the reason is not bound to accept the lowest or any other tender and not bond to refund tender purchase fees if you are not qualified to participate the tender.

For more information please call: 80077787

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New Shell Intilaaqah focuses on sustainability, renewable energy

Oman Shell has announced the launch of the new version of Shell Intilaaqah, which aims to build the capabilities of entrepreneurs and Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs) in the fields of sustainability and renewable energy. The launch comes in collaboration with the SME Development Authority (Riyada).

Oman Shell designed the programme to ensure that it aligns with Shell's social investment strategy and Oman Vision 2040. The programme takes into consideration the aspirations of its partners and entrepreneurs, whilst focusing on empowering entrepreneurs and Omani businesses working in the fields of sustainability and renewable energy.

The new version of Shell Intilaaqah includes an intensive one-month certifiable training programme, where participants will undergo courses in the fields



of sustainability, solar panel installation, health, safety and environment, as well as topics in the fields of entrepreneurship, marketing, quality management, work ethics, compliance and other relevant topics.

Additionally, the programme will host local and regional experts to enrich the programme with their practical experiences.

The programme also includes a module that is considered a requirement to register and obtain accreditation in the installation of

solar panels by the Authority for Public Services Regulation.

"Through our partnership with Shell, we look to support SMEs growth and widen their horizons with necessary knowledge and skills. This programme will contribute to achieving better results by connecting entrepreneurs to experts who have paved the way in Solar energy and sustainability in Oman and beyond," said Halima bint Rashid al Zari, president of Small and Medium Enterprises Development Authority.

Malak bint Ahmed al Shaibani, GM Corporate Relations and In-Country Value, Oman Shell said, "Since the inauguration of Shell Intilaaqah in the sultanate more than 25 years ago, it has positively inspired and equipped entrepreneurs and SMEs with the right skills and tools to develop their businesses and contribute to the national economy."



Fresco Oman wraps up 'Read books, get a pizza' programme

This summer, young readers in Oman were awarded every kid's favourite prize: pizza! A summer reading programme, created by the Olson Family Library, and sponsored by Fresco Oman, wrapped up on September 1. Participants aged 4-15 were required to read several books (their choice), and write about their favourite characters or scenes in a brief report. Bringing the forms to Fresco al Mouj or Fresco al Marina resulted in a tasty treat for each child reader.

"This has been a challenging year for everyone on the planet," Giselda Abate, owner and founder of Fresco Oman shares.

"Kids in Oman dealt with incredible heat, full lockdowns, and the absence of normality. Our team at Fresco is proud to play a small part in bringing joy to kids' faces through one of the very best ways to learn — reading!"

Fresco Oman has also organised classes for kids in the restaurant: painting with breakfast, pottery with pizza, fresh pasta making and pizza making, to keep kids in the community busy and entertained.

"While this particular programme has now ended, there are other exciting things coming up, and the library remains open for families to borrow books anytime," says Rebecca Olson, founder of Olson Family Library.

"We hope that the adventure of reading continues to open new worlds of opportunity and imagination for kids, and we thank Fresco for their generous sponsorship of the summer program."

To borrow books or learn more about upcoming programmes, readers young and old may visit: www.instagram.com/olsonfamilylibrary

Japan holding virtual cultural exhibition

Japan is currently holding the online 'Japan Cultural Expo', a nationwide exhibition of Japanese culture and art. The virtual cultural expo was launched in August to allow people who cannot come to Japan to enjoy the expo online.

Japan Cultural Expo virtual platform allows everyone to ex-

perience the art exhibitions, performing arts, nature, and art festivals in the virtual world, utilising video, VR, and images.

More interesting contents will come very soon.

You can enjoy the beauty of Japan that is embodied in Japanese culture at <https://japanculturalexpo.bunka.go.jp/en/>



Oman Air to fly national football team to Osaka for World Cup qualifying match

Oman Air, the national carrier of the Sultanate of Oman, and Oman's Football Association have agreed to operate two special charter flights to fly Oman's National Football Team to Japan for its upcoming World Cup 2022 Qualifying Match.

The first flight will operate on August 27 to Belgrade, Serbia, where Oman's national football team has been training for its upcoming World Cup 2022 qualifying matches. They will be flown home to Muscat, arriving at 5:30pm local time, before departing again at 8pm for Osaka, Japan to compete in a First Round qualifying match against Japan. The team returns to Muscat on September 3, arriving at 7:40am local time.



Adil al Zadjali, country manager - Oman for Oman Air, said, "We are proud to assist Oman's national football team with spe-

cial charter flights to key qualifying matches. This is an exciting time for football in the lead-up to next year's FIFA World Cup 2022 in Qatar, and we wish them the very best of success in all their upcoming qualifiers."

Fahad bin Abdullah al Raisi, general secretary and CEO of the Oman Football Association, said, "Due to the significant distance between game cities and the tight schedule surrounding qualifying matches, Oman Air charter flights are essential for minimising long layovers and complicated multi-city connections. They help keep player fatigue to a minimum, an important element of success considering that optimal player health is key to winning matches."

Ooredoo's Shahry Endless, Omanuna plans offer benefits

Helping mobile users stay connected and entertained around the clock, Ooredoo's Shahry Endless and Omanuna plans offer a load of benefits and none of the hassle. Starting from just RO5, customers can enjoy never ending Internet, unlimited local voice and so much more, as well as the freedom to upgrade or downgrade, swap and repeat.

No surprises, no contract, just good times. Plus, with Omanuna plans coming with a free subscription to Starzplay, the fun never ends!

Providing more choice and more value than ever, Endless customers can enjoy up to 500 minutes to India, Pakistan and Bangladesh, unlimited local calls on Endless 15 and above, up to



40GB of data and much more. Meanwhile, Omanuna offers up to 1,000 minutes to the GCC, India, Pakistan and Bangladesh, up to a massive 2TB of data, and other exciting benefits, starting

from RO25. Sign up today through the Ooredoo App, the eShop or at one of Ooredoo's stores, conveniently located across the sultanate.

ARIF, NOUSHAD CLAIM B DIVISION TOP CRICKET AWARDS



Winners of B, C, D Division teams

Arif Hussain of Orient Travels/Gitacs and Noushad Haneefa of LC Tech were presented best batsman and best bowler awards respectively at a prize ceremony of B to F Divisions organised by Oman

Cricket (OC) at OC Ground One in Amerat on Tuesday. The prizes were presented by Oman Cricket directors including Madhu Jesrani, OC secretary, Kiran Asher, treasurer, Paul Sheridan, Ali Moosa

Yousuf and Alkesh Joshi in the presence of Duleep Mendis, chief development officer, Oman Cricket. C Division's top prizes went to Pervez Baig (best batsman) of Design Group Engineering

Consultants and Adnanul Haq (best bowler) of Maniz Azad. Wajid Ali of Pitspot won the D Division's best batsman award while best bowler and best all-rounder prizes went to



Winners of E and F Division teams

Rahul Chadha who was the star player for Vanderlande. Omani player Rafeeq Mohammed of OCT Al Nahdha received E Division's best batsman award while Shah Abbas of Aflag Group won the

best bowler prize. Yusuf Patanwala of Sketch International was declared the best all-rounder. Mazoon Dairy's Sakeel Khan claimed the best batsman award for his brilliant batting in

F Division's League competition whereas Prashan Rana of Y Horizon was presented the best bowler prize. The best all-rounder prize was received by Saud Haroon Khan of BSI.

The most advanced Bentley chassis yet

The new Continental GT Speed Coupe and Convertible represents the very pinnacle of performance grand touring, and defines the most dynamic road-going Bentley ever made, with no compromise to comfort or luxury. A combination of four chassis technologies give the Continental GT Speed a level of agility, performance and ride quality that has been stretched to new levels.

Bentley Dynamic Ride and three-chamber active air suspension with adaptive damping play a key role in the balance of the car and provide a formidable foundation to build upon.

The optional and newly developed Carbon Ceramic Brakes, Variable Electronic Stability Control, All Wheel Steering, and an Electronic Limited Slip Differential bolster the agility and performance even further.

Combining the new systems the Continental GT Speed still maintains Bentley's philosophy that a vehicle should feel progressive and secure, yet still be dynamic.

Largest car brakes

The new carbon ceramic braking system boasts 440mm diameter front discs combined with new ten-piston front calipers, making this not only the biggest brake ever fitted to a Bentley but also the largest car brake in the world.

This latest generation of carbon-ceramic disc has been specially formulated to provide class-leading braking performance with copper-free brake friction material for reduced environmental impact.

The ceramic brake has been extensively tested around the world including. In objective tests the ceramic brake has proven itself to be exceptionally fade resistant - after ten consecutive from 80 mph, the stopping distance only increased by 1.1 metres, to just 61.1 metres.

Electronic Stability Control

The Electronic Stability Control (ESC) system allows the driver to experience an even greater level of freedom before the GT Speed's safety systems inter-



vene to correct any anomalies.

When in Dynamic mode, the ESC system extends the freedom of the driver, allowing the experienced pilot to set and alter the cornering stance of the car at their discretion.

In order to optimise the driver's experience, when the ESC switches off, the mechanical grip and inherent balance of the GT Speed comes to the fore.

All-Wheel Steering

New Electronic All-Wheel Steering enhances the dynamic nature of the Speed in each of the driving modes, being more apparent in Sport mode, as the steering combines with Bentley Dynamic Ride and the electronic limited slip differential for a level

of agility.

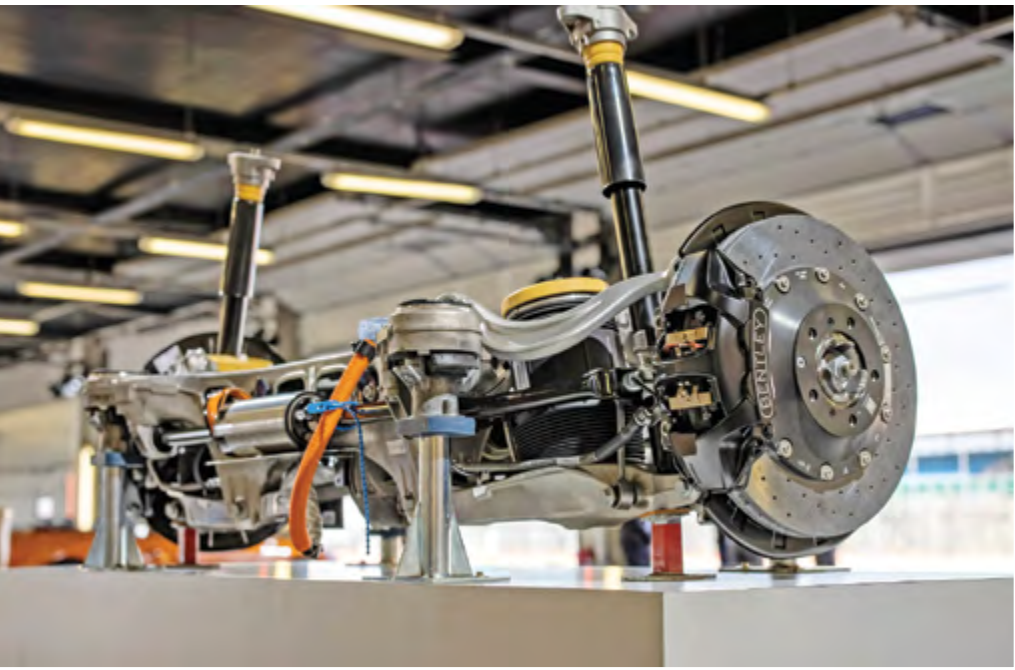
At low and medium speeds, the GT Speed's rear wheels are steered in the opposite direction to the front wheels to aid a rapid change of direction, noticeably increasing the feeling of nimbleness, instilling more confidence in the driver.

At high speeds, the rear wheels steer in the same direction as the front, to improve stability.

Electronic limited slip differential

For the first time in a Bentley, the latest generation of the Continental GT Speed introduces the use of an electronic limited slip differential (eLSD).

Specifically tuned hand-in-



hand with the traction control and active chassis systems, the eLSD provides increased lateral capacity, improved longitudinal stability, enhanced on-throttle adjustability and delivers better traction in adverse road conditions.

In all modes this provides im-

proved traction, provides a greater level of confidence for the driver and makes the vehicle feel more stable at high speeds.

Improved cornering dynamics and the extra grip provided by the new systems allows the driver to exit any corner with an increased level of precision

and confidence.

Torque distribution can vary across the powertrain according to the selected Drive Mode. In Comfort and Bentley, the system can send up to 36 per cent of torque to the front axle to keep the car sure-footed and effortless.

MEC introduces new study modes

Middle East College (MEC) announced several convenient study modes in its Master programmes to cater to the needs of working individuals and other postgraduate aspirants. The new study modes include a blended weekend mode, a blended part-time mode, and a blended full-time mode. The blended mode allows students to take 50 per cent of the classes online and the remaining 50 per cent on-campus. The new study modes apply to students joining from the Fall 21 semester starting in the first week of October.

MEC's new modes of study for PG are very flexible and convenient due to the combination of online and on-campus learning experiences. It would allow postgraduate students to acquire valuable skills using technological tools to work and think independently, preparing them to face real-world challenges and contribute to the country's economic development and help realise Oman Vision 2040.

In this context, Smitha Nair, head-Centre for Postgraduate Studies at MEC said, "It is always a priority for us to introduce mechanisms to provide access to working individuals who are planning to upskill and advance their careers."

"The new modes in Master's study with a blended weekend and part-time format are convenient options for working professionals in and outside Muscat."

MEC is a fully accredited college with high ratings in Teaching Quality and Research performance. The college continually seeks to meet the needs of the student community by giving them new opportunities to pursue higher studies and progress in their educational journey and career advancement. The college welcomes applications from postgraduate aspirants to take advantage of the new modes and pursue their higher education ambitions from Fall 21 semester, which is scheduled to commence in a month.

Online auction platform for dates

Aghthia Group PJSC, a leading regional food and beverages company, announced the launch of eZad, an innovative, convenient and efficient business to business eAuction platform, where buyers from across the globe can buy dates in bulk from sellers in the UAE.

eZad makes buying and selling of dates faster, more transparent and profitable for all stakeholders. The platform is committed to helping farmers grow better dates while enabling wholesale date buyers to grow their business. eZad will source dates from farmers in the UAE and begin listing from the start of the harvest season in August. Subsequently, eZad's scope will be gradually expanded to other countries.

Farmers will list their dates for auction in eZad through a trustworthy certification system that grades dates under reliable market standards, supported by a quality guarantee built on the extensive experience and reputation inherited from Al Foah. The auction listing will be made available on eZad to buyers around the world for 48 hours.

Special offer for law offices in Muscat Hills

The Aswaer Real Estate Company exclusive marketer of the Muscat Pavilion project for smart offices launched an offer for Muscat Hills legal consultancy and lawyer offices to own an office unit in the project and get rid of the monthly rent.

Al Waleed bin Zaher al Subhi, marketing director of Asawar Real Estate Company, said, "The special offer on the office units allocated to the owners of legal consultancy and lawyers offices and parking has been allocated for limited period of time with each office unit at a price of RO49,900.

"Thank God! With eased payment plans over three years, 35 per cent of the project was sold during the previous period with investors from within and outside the Sultanate of Oman."

Subhi added, "The Muscat Pavilion project for smart offices is considered to be one of the luxurious projects in the sultanate. The ability to control project contains multiple meeting rooms, ability to book the large smart office units remotely, in addition to using the application.



"A health club provides a relaxation room for managers and a commercial mall."

Subhi said the project also includes international restaurants and cafes, providing parking on three underground levels accommodating 550 cars. It also provides easy entry and exit to the building.

"It is worth noting that the possibility of owning the project is available to citizens of the Sultanate of Oman with the chance of GCC countries and foreigners obtaining permanent residence in the sultanate," Subhi said.

Oman Oasis announces final draw winners of Ramadan and Eid promotion

Committed to producing high-quality bottled water, Oman Oasis has been recognised as the nation's leading water brand. Produced and distributed by Oasis Water Company, Oman Oasis conducts innumerable promotions, contests and draws that focus on rewarding its customers for their loyalty to the brand. In a recent announcement, Oman Oasis revealed the third and final round of winners of its Ramadan and Eid promotion on all 5 gallon products.

After conducting two successful draws in June and July, the final draw took place on August 2 and saw a total of 88 lucky winners.

The key prizes from the final draw included 8g 22 carat gold coins and 4g 22 carat gold coins. Bennit Joseph and Ahsan were the fortunate winners who walked away with an 8g 22 carat gold coin each while Nimmy Thomas, Abdul Ajis, P S Sebastian, Padmakar Boyapati, Navin Agarwal and Suman Kumar were the final six winners who were rewarded with a 4g 22 carat gold coin each.

The Ramadan and Eid promotion on 5 Gallon products which was common to Oman Oasis and Oman Oasis Sifr ended on July 31 and witnessed a total of



310 winners.

The prizes given away included ten - 22 carat 8g gold coins, twenty - 22 carat 4g gold coins, two hundred - 10 Oman Oasis 5 Gallon water coupons and eighty - Lulu gift vouchers worth RO10.

Recording an overwhelming response from the market, the promotion marked yet another milestone in Oman Oasis's jour-

ney to success.

Oman Oasis has always been revered as a brand that has demonstrated a strong sense of innovation and ensured that its thoughtfully created promotions are rewarding and beneficial to its customers.

Its excellent levels of customer service and keen focus on quality have enabled the brand to expand its customer base and

made it a household name in the country.

With several international product quality certifications like the IBWA membership, NSF, ABWA, and WQA testifying to its commitment to quality, Oman Oasis also reserves a deep understanding of the local market that it complements with its years of experience and industry knowledge.

Palestinian wounded in Gaza clash dies ahead of new protest

Gaza City, Palestinian Territories - A Palestinian has died from injuries sustained during weekend clashes with Israeli forces on the Gaza border, the territory's Health Ministry said, ahead of fresh protests called for Wednesday.

Following Saturday's unrest - which wounded dozens and left an Israeli police officer in critical condition - 32 year old Palestinian Osama Khaled Deaih died after being shot by Israeli forces, the ministry said.

The Israeli army said it responded with live fire and other measures to Palestinian 'rioters' who were hurling explosives over the border fence and attempting to scale it.

Hamas said that among the wounded was a 13 year old boy who was shot in the head and left in critical condition. Palestinian factions in the Israeli-blockaded enclave have called a new protest for 5:00pm (1400 GMT) on Wednesday on the border near the south Gaza city of Khan Yunis.

The Israeli army said it was reinforcing its Gaza division late Saturday, as it hit multiple Hamas targets with air strikes.

Israel struck Gaza again overnight on Monday-Tuesday in response to incendiary balloon launches that sparked multiple fires in Israel's southern Eskhol region. There were no reported casualties from the latest Israeli strikes.

The protests come three months after an informal truce ended 11 days of conflict between Hamas and Israel, the worst fighting between the two sides in years. Hamas authorities said



Palestinian mourners carry the body of Osama Khaled Deaih during his funeral at Jabalia refugee camp in the northern Gaza Strip on Wednesday (AFP)

Following Saturday's unrest - which wounded dozens and left an Israeli police officer in critical condition - 32 year old Palestinian Osama Khaled Deaih died after being shot by Israeli forces

GAZA HEALTH MINISTRY

260 Palestinians were killed by Israeli air strikes during the conflict, including fighters.

Palestinian groups launched thousands of rockets at Israel during the fighting, killing 13 people, including a soldier, according to the military and police.

In 2018, Gazans began a protest movement demanding

an end to Israel's blockade and the right for Palestinians to return to lands they fled or were expelled from when the Jewish state was founded.

The Hamas-backed weekly demonstrations sputtered as Israel killed some 350 Palestinians in Gaza over more than a year. AFP

Malaysia's new Prime Minister, opposition seek to ease tensions

Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia - Malaysia's new Prime Minister and the opposition pledged on Wednesday to find 'common ground' to tackle a coronavirus outbreak and boost the economy, seeking to ease long-running political turbulence.

Ismail Sabri Yaakob was inaugurated at the weekend following the resignation of his predecessor after a tumultuous 17 months in office.

The country's fourth premier in as many years, he faces the daunting task of uniting bickering politicians and reining in the country's worst COVID-19 wave yet.

On Wednesday he held discussions with opposition leaders, including Anwar Ibrahim, as they seek to put aside their differences, at least while the pandemic is raging.

In a joint statement, they said the meeting focused on 'the people's interests in finding the best common ground in handling the COVID-19 pandemic'.

They pledged to 'safeguard lives and personal safety from the threat of the outbreak and free people from its economic impacts, following the loss of jobs and income'.

Malaysia has been under a nationwide lockdown since June to fight the outbreak, forcing the closure of many businesses and affecting the



Malaysia's Prime Minister Ismail Sabri Yaakob

livelihoods of millions.

Ibrahim also said the opposition gave assurances that if the premier's policies help the people, they would not 'complicate' a no-confidence vote in parliament expected next month.

The king, who appointed the premier, has asked him to face the vote to confirm he has the support of MPs.

Yaakob's predecessor, Muhyiddin Yassin, quit after losing his parliamentary majority, and as public anger mounted at the outbreak.

The monarch chose not to call an election due to the pandemic, and appointed Yaakob after he won the support of most lawmakers.

But his appointment means that scandal-mired party the United Malays National Organisation (UMNO) has reclaimed the premiership without an election. AFP

Taiwan, Japan ruling parties to hold security talks for first time



A Taiwanese soldier waves a flag during a drill in Hsinchu military base ahead of the Chinese New Year holiday on January 19 (AFP)

Taipei, Taiwan - Taiwan and Japan's ruling party will hold security talks for the first time later this week, a Taiwanese lawmaker said on Wednesday, as the two neighbours fret about China's increasingly bellicose military threats.

The announcement of the talks was condemned by Beijing, which claims self-ruled, democratic Taiwan and opposes countries having official contacts with Taipei.

Two lawmakers each from

Taiwan's Democratic Progressive Party (DPP) and Japan's Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) will hold a virtual talk on Friday dubbed a 'two-plus-two' security meeting.

"This is the first dialogue of its kind initiated by the Japanese side and we will be discussing diplomacy, defence and regional security issues," participant and DPP lawmaker Lo Chih-cheng told AFP.

The talks will address regional security concerns including

China, added Lo, who also heads up the DPP's international affairs department.

Masahisa Sato, a parliamentarian in charge of foreign affairs for LDP, told the *Financial Times* that the dialogue was a substitute for ministerial talks as Japan officially recognises Beijing over Taipei.

They were necessary as Taiwan's future would have a 'serious impact' on Japan, Sato was quoted as saying.

"That is how important we

feel the situation in Taiwan is at the moment," he told the paper, adding 'higher-level talks with Taiwanese government officials' would be planned in the future.

China hit out at Friday's summit, saying it opposed 'any form of official interaction' with Taiwan.

"The Taiwan issue touches on the political foundation of China-Japan relations...[Japan] should be especially cautious in its words and deeds," warned For-

eign Ministry spokesman Wang Wenbin.

Like the United States, Japan has become increasingly rattled by China's sabre-rattling towards Taiwan.

In a recent defence white paper, Tokyo directly linked Japan's security with Taiwan's, breaking with years of precedent.

Beijing has ramped up diplomatic, military and economic pressure on self-ruled democratic Taiwan in recent years. AFP

Ukrainian soldier killed, two wounded in separatist attack

Kiev, Ukraine - The Ukrainian army said on Wednesday that a soldier had been killed and two others wounded in the country's pro-Russia separatist east, as regular clashes continue in the conflict-torn region.

It was the fourth Ukrainian soldier killed over the past week.

The Ukrainian army is locked in a simmering conflict with separatist fighters in the country's Donetsk and Lugansk regions that erupted after Moscow annexed Crimea in 2014.

Ukraine's military said in a statement that over the past 24 hours breakaway fighters had launched three attacks on its troops with small arms.

"As a result of enemy fire, one serviceman of the Joint Forces was killed and two more were wounded," the statement said. After an uptick in violence at the beginning of the year, Russia amassed 100,000 troops on Ukraine's borders in April, rais-

ing fears of a major escalation in the long-running conflict.

Russia soon announced a pullback but both Ukraine and its ally the United States say the withdrawal has been limited.

The conflict, which has claimed more than 13,000 lives, has seen at least 48 Ukrainian soldiers killed since the start of the year compared with 50 in all of 2020. The latest death comes a day after Ukrainian soldiers marched through Kiev alongside servicemen of NATO member countries as the country marked the 30th anniversary of its independence from the Soviet Union.

The separatists say more than 30 of their fighters have died.

Ukraine and its Western allies accuse Russia of sending troops and arms to support the separatists, which Moscow denies.

AFP

'Extreme' wildfires in Russia spread to central regions

Moscow, Russia - Russia's central regions on Wednesday battled 'extreme' wildfires fuelled by an unusual heatwave that comes after forest fires linked to climate change ravaged Siberia for most of the summer.

Authorities were fighting 15 wildfires in the Urals region of Sverdlovsk, the Emergencies Ministry said.

The region - which lies on the border of Europe and Asia - faced 'extreme fire hazard' due to a heatwave, it added.

Images on social media on Tuesday showed flames on either side of a federal highway between regional capital Yekaterinburg and the Urals city of Perm, forcing the road shut for most of the day, according to reports.

Fires had meanwhile grown so intense in Mordovia, a region southeast of Moscow, that firefighters were forced to escape from a 'ring of fire', the ministry said on Wednesday.

And in the Nizhny Novgorod region east of Moscow, nine planes provided by the Emer-



Urals region of Sverdlovsk faced 'extreme fire hazard' due to a heatwave

gencies Ministry, the Defence Ministry and the Russian National Guard had dropped 129 tonnes of water onto a large wildfire spreading to neighbour-

ing Mordovia.

Authorities had deployed 1,200 firefighters to put out the blaze, the Emergencies Ministry said.

President Vladimir Putin on Tuesday pledged hundreds of millions of dollars to protect the country's forests, saying the nation must learn from the 'un-

precedented' wildfires that engulfed swathes of Siberia.

In the country's largest and coldest region of Yakutia, fires have burned through an area larger than Portugal.

The Emergencies Ministry said on Wednesday that there were 50 forest fires now burning in the region.

Officials in hard-hit regions have called for resources and economic support from Moscow to deal with the damage.

Experts blame the huge fires that have ripped across Russia's vast territory in recent years on climate change, negligence and underfunded forestry management services.

Russia's forestry agency says fires this year have torn through more than 173,000 sqkm, making it the second-worst season since the turn of the century.

A former sceptic of man-made climate change, Putin has called on authorities to do everything possible to help Russians affected by the gigantic fires.

AFP

TALIBAN TAKEOVER

Afghan resistance movement leader vows 'no surrender'



Taliban fighters stand guard along a roadside near the Zanaq Square in Kabul, Afghanistan on August 16 (AFP)



Ahmad Massoud

Paris, France - The leader of a resistance movement to the Taliban has vowed to never surrender but is open to negotiations with the new rulers of Afghanistan, according to an interview published by *Paris Match* on Wednesday.

Ahmad Massoud, the son of legendary Afghan rebel commander Ahmad Shah Massoud, has retreated to his native Panjshir valley north of Kabul along with former vice-president Amrullah Saleh.

"I would prefer to die than to surrender," Massoud told French philosopher Bernard-Henri Levy in his first interview since the Taliban took over Kabul. "I'm the son of Ahmad Chah Massoud. Surrender is not a word in my vocabulary."

Putin and Xi agree to jointly combat Afghanistan 'threats'

Moscow, Russia - Russian President Vladimir Putin and his Chinese counterpart Xi Jinping have agreed their countries will step up efforts to counter 'threats' emerging from Afghanistan following the Taliban's takeover, the Kremlin said on Wednesday.

In a phone call, the two leaders 'expressed their readiness to step up efforts to combat threats of terrorism and drug trafficking coming from the territory of Afghanistan', the Kremlin said in a statement.

They also spoke of the 'importance of establishing peace' in Afghanistan and 'preventing the spread of instability to adjacent regions'.

Putin and Xi 'agreed to intensify bilateral contacts' and 'make the most of the potential' of the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO) that is due to convene for a summit in Tajikistan next month.

Several ex-Soviet republics in Central Asia - where Moscow holds military bases - share a border both with Afghanistan and China.

While Moscow has been cautiously optimistic about the new leadership in Kabul, Putin has warned of Afghan militants entering neighbouring countries as refugees.

Putin has also criticised the involvement of outside powers in Afghanistan's domestic affairs and said Moscow had

'learnt lessons' from the Soviet Union's decade-long invasion of the country.

For its part, after the Taliban swept to power on August 15, China said it is ready to deepen 'friendly and cooperative relations' with Afghanistan.

Meanwhile, Russia's armed forces said they began evacuating more than 500 Russians and citizens of several ex-Soviet states from Afghanistan on Wednesday.

Moscow said it sent four military transport planes to fly out more than 500 citizens of Russia, Belarus, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Uzbekistan and Ukraine.

AFP

days ago in Kabul," Massoud said, according to a transcript of the interview published in French.

"They refused. And these weapons - artillery, helicopters, American-made tanks - are today in the hands of the Taliban," he said.

Massoud added that he was open to talking to the Taliban and he laid out the outlines of a possible agreement.

"We can talk. In all wars, there are talks. And my father always spoke with his enemies," he said.

"Let's imagine that the Taliban agreed to respect the rights of women, of minorities, democracy, the principles of an open society," he added. "Why not try to explain that these principals would benefit all Afghans, including them?"

Massoud's father, a francophile with close links to Paris and the West, was nicknamed the 'Lion of Panjshir' for his role in fighting against the Soviet occupation of Afghanistan in the 1980s and the Taliban regime in the 1990s. He was assassinated by Al-Qaeda two days before the September 11, 2001 attacks.

AFP

Talks with Taliban must continue, says Merkel

Berlin, Germany - The international community must maintain dialogue with the Taliban if it is to protect improvements made in Afghanistan during two decades of NATO deployment, German Chancellor Angela Merkel said on Wednesday.

"Our goal must be to preserve as much as possible what we have achieved in terms of changes in Afghanistan in the last 20 years. This is something the international community must talk about with the Taliban," Merkel said in a speech to parliament.

Progress made over the years includes access to basic necessities - 70 per cent of Afghans now have

access to drinking water as opposed to 20 per cent a decade ago.

And nine in ten people have electricity supplies, up from just two in ten in 2011.

The fact that the Taliban are back in power is 'bitter but we have to deal with it', Merkel said.

"Many things in history take a long time. That is why we must not and will not forget Afghanistan," she said.

"Because even if it doesn't look like it in this bitter hour, I remain convinced that no force or ideology can resist the drive for justice and peace," said Merkel, who grew up in communist East Germany but saw the regime collapse in 1989.

AFP

Afghan robotics team girls arrive in Mexico

Mexico City, Mexico - Five members of a girls robotics team in Afghanistan were welcomed to Mexico after fleeing their Taliban-controlled country.

The team members, none of whom were identified for security reasons, were received at the Mexico City airport by Minister of Foreign Affairs Marcelo Ebrard, and four of them gave a press conference shortly after landing.

"They have not only saved our lives, but they have also saved our dreams," one of the group said of host Mexico.

"Our stories will not sadly end because of the Taliban," she added through a translator, while her face was hidden by a COVID-19 mask.

"Under this regime, we women will face difficulties...that is why we are grateful to be here," she said.

Mexico has granted the girls and one of their partners humanitarian visas valid for up to 180 days with the right to renew or apply for a change of status in the future.

"We want to tell them from the bottom of our

hearts that they are home," said Ebrard.

Part of a larger group of high-achieving high school girls known 'Afghan Dreamers', the robotics team consists of about 20 members, most of whom are still in their teens.

The girls made headlines in 2017 after being denied visas to take part in a robotics competition in Washington - before then-president Donald Trump intervened and they were allowed to travel.

Last year, they worked to build a low-cost medical ventilator from car parts hoping to boost hospital equipment during the coronavirus pandemic.

The Taliban's seizure of power a little over one week ago has fuelled a chaotic mass exodus as many Afghans fear a repeat of the brutal interpretation of Islamic law implemented during the militants' 1996-2001 rule.

During that earlier regime, girls were excluded from school, women confined to their homes and offences punishable by public stonings and executions.

AFP

Taliban shows off their own 'special forces' in propaganda blitz

Paris, France - The Taliban has been showing off its own 'special forces' on social media, soldiers in new uniforms equipped with looted American equipment who contrast sharply with the image of the usual Afghan insurgent.

Pictures and videos of fighters in the so-called 'Badri 313' unit have been posted online for propaganda purposes to underline how the Taliban have better equipped and trained men at their disposal than in the past, experts say.

The soldiers are shown in uniforms, boots, balaclavas and body armour similar to those worn by special forces around the world - and unlike the shalwar kameez, turban and sandals of the traditional Taliban fighter.

Rather than a battered Russian-designed Kalashnikov rifle slung over their shoulder, the men of Badri 313 hold new US-made rifles such as the M4, sometimes with night-vision goggles and advanced gun-sights.

"Badri 313 likely represents some of the best trained and equipped fighters within the Taliban more broadly, although as you would expect there is a degree of sensationalising in propaganda coverage of the unit by the group," Matt Henman from the Janes defence consultancy told AFP.

A Western weapons expert who writes anonymously on Twitter under the pseudonym of Calibre Obscura said the unit would be no match for Western special forces, or those of India or Pakistan.

But "they are more effective than normal Taliban and certainly more than standard Afghan national army troops from a couple of weeks ago," he told AFP.

US weapons

Named after the battle of Badr 1,400 years ago, the Taliban unit could number up to several thousand men, experts say.

The amount of equipment at their disposal is unclear, but multiple pictures online



A video grab taken from Afghan TV RTA shows propaganda images of Taliban's Badri 313 special forces patrolling streets in an unidentified location in Afghanistan (AFP)

show jubilant Taliban fighters posing with captured armoured Humvees, aircraft and weapons abandoned by the defeated US-equipped Afghan national army.

Experts say the most sophisticated equipment, especially the helicopters, will be difficult

to operate and near-impossible to maintain.

"There is certainly a degree of propaganda, but we saw during the final offensive since May that the Taliban special forces have been critical in the taking over of Afghanistan," said Bill Roggio, managing editor

of the US-based *Long War Journal*.

"When they began to overrun the Afghan forces, they progressively integrated Western supplies. The US in effect armed the Taliban army," he added.

In previous days, the unit has been in charge of security

outside Kabul international airport, bringing them nearly face-to-face with American troops inside who are overseeing the airlift of thousands of civilians.

In a social media post, Badri 313 troops even mocked their US counterparts by recreating the famed picture of American soldiers raising the Stars and Stripes on the island of Iwo Jima in 1945.

The Taliban figures in uniforms are seen raising their black-and-white flag.

Haqqani role?

Badri 313 is also seen as having benefited from training from the Haqqani network, Afghanistan's most ruthless and feared militant group which has been responsible for multiple suicide attacks on civilian targets.

Mainly based in eastern Afghanistan - with alleged bases across the border in Pakistan's northwest - the group has become more visible in the Taliban leadership in recent years.

They have also long been suspected of links with the Pakistani military establishment - US Admiral Mike Mullen described them as a 'veritable arm' of Islamabad's intelligence in 2011.

Pakistan denies the allegations.

"There is a strong likelihood of Pakistan having provided at least a vestige of training to the unit," said Henman from Janes, who specialises in terrorism and insurgencies.

Gilles Dorronsoro, an expert on Afghanistan at the Sorbonne University in Paris, said the emergence of the new Taliban commandos was part of a larger trend.

"We've seen a remarkable professionalisation of the Taliban since the middle of the 2000s," he told AFP.

"The war they are fighting is not the same as the one their parents fought against the Soviets. They've learned from the ground and they are very good technically," he added.

AFP

COVID-19 PANDEMIC

More than 5bn COVID-19 jabs administered worldwide

Paris, France - More than 5bn anti-COVID jabs have been given globally, but wide disparities between rich and poor countries in access to vaccines persist.

While the most advanced countries are already giving booster shots, vaccination drives are not getting off the ground in poorer, mainly African, countries.

At least 5.006bn jabs have been injected into people's arms around the world, according to an AFP tally of official sources.

On average around the world 64 first, second or sometimes even third doses have been injected per 100 inhabitants.

The worldwide inoculation drive has reached cruising speed.

While it took around 140 days to get the first billion shots into people's arms, the third, fourth and fifth billions each took between 26 and 30 days, the data show.

Emirates lead the way

Nearly 40 per cent (1.96bn) of the 5bn shots have been administered in China. India (589mn) and the United States (363mn) complete the trio of countries that have given the most jabs.

In terms of population protected among countries with more than 1mn people, the United Arab Emirates is the leader. It has administered 179 doses per 100 inhabitants,



A high school student receives the Sinovac COVID-19 vaccine in Nanjing, China on Saturday (AFP)

meaning it has fully vaccinated nearly 75 per cent of its population.

Uruguay follows with 154 per 100 inhabitants, Israel and Qatar (149 each), Singapore (147), Bahrain (144), Denmark (143), Chile (140), Canada (139), Portugal and Belgium (138 each), China (136), Spain (134), Ireland (133) and the United Kingdom (132).

Most of these countries have fully vaccinated between 65 per cent and 70 per cent of their populations.

Some, like the UAE, Bahrain, Israel, Uruguay and Chile have even started giving out booster shots to prolong the

immunity of the fully vaccinated.

France, which will start giving booster shots from September, is not far behind, with 126 doses injected per 100 people and 62 per cent of the population completely vaccinated.

It has bypassed the United States which has given 110 doses per 100 inhabitants, with 52 per cent completely vaccinated, and was previously at the top of the game.

Asia, Latin America speed up

While countries in Western Europe, North America and parts of the Middle East have ad-

vanced vaccination campaigns, they are inoculating less quickly than countries in Asia, Latin America and Oceania which have picked up speed.

Over the past week Ecuador vaccinated most quickly, giving shots to 1.69 per cent of its population every day, followed by Panama (1.62 per cent), South Korea and Malaysia (1.54 per cent each).

Laos, Uruguay, Norway, Salvador, Australia and Paraguay each jab more than 1 per cent of their population each day.

Africa lags behind

Most poor countries have now started to vaccinate, mainly

While the most advanced countries are already giving booster shots, vaccination drives are not getting off the ground in poorer, mainly African, countries

thanks to the Covax scheme, but the coverage remains very unequal.

High-income countries (as defined by the World Bank) administered an average of 111 doses per 100 inhabitants compared with just 2.4 doses in low-income countries.

Injections in these countries have picked up recently after donations by some richer countries.

Africa is the continent which is lagging behind by far, with 6.5 doses per 100 inhabitants, ten times less than the world average of 64.

Sub Saharan Africa's most populous countries - the Democratic Republic of Congo (0.1 doses per 100 inhabitants), Tanzania (0.4), Nigeria (1.9) and Ethiopia (2) are among the least vaccinated countries in the world.

Three countries have yet to start their vaccination drives: Burundi, Eritrea and North Korea.

AFP

Joe Biden given inconclusive report on COVID origins

Washington, US - A classified US intelligence report delivered to the White House on Tuesday was inconclusive on the origins of the COVID-19 pandemic, in part due to a lack of information from China, according to US media reports.

The assessment, ordered by President Joe Biden 90 days ago, was unable to definitively conclude whether the virus that first emerged in central China had jumped to humans via animals or escaped a highly secure research facility in Wuhan, two US officials familiar with the matter told the *Washington Post*.

They said parts of the report could be declassified in the coming days.

The debate over the origins of the virus that has killed more than 4mn people and paralysed economies worldwide has become increasingly contentious.

When Biden assigned the investigation, he said US intelligence agencies were split over the 'two likely scenarios' - animals or lab.

Former president Donald Trump and his aides had helped fuel the lab-leak theory, using it to deflect blame for their administration's handling of the world's biggest outbreak, and instead finger point at Beijing, which strongly denies the hypothesis.

China on Wednesday urged the WHO to visit the US military biolab Fort Detrick, after rejecting its calls for a second stage of the COVID origins



US President Joe Biden (AFP)

probe focusing on Chinese laboratories last month.

"If [the US] want to baselessly accuse China, they better be prepared to accept a counter-attack from China," Fu Cong, head of the Foreign Ministry's arms control department, told reporters.

"If the US thinks China is guilty, they need to come up with evidence to prove that China is guilty. You don't blame a victim for not providing information to incriminate himself."

Despite Biden's directive that the intelligence community 'redouble their efforts' to untangle the origin debate, the 90-day review brought them no closer to consensus, the officials told the *Post*.

Beijing has rejected calls from the US and other countries for a renewed origin probe after a heavily politicized visit by a World Health Organization team in January also proved inconclusive, and faced criticism for lacking transparency and access.

AFP

Japan expands virus emergency areas after Paralympics open

Tokyo, Japan - Japan's government on Wednesday decided to extend a virus state of emergency to eight more regions, a day after the Paralympic opening ceremony, as rising infections put hospitals under pressure.

The step comes with summer school holidays ending and top infection experts suggesting delaying the start of classes to reduce contagion risks.

The country has been recording more than 20,000 new cases a day in recent weeks as the more infectious Delta variant spreads. In urban areas like Tokyo, patients in serious condition have been left waiting for hours or travelling long distances in ambulances to find available hospital beds.

"The number of new cases has continued to hit record highs nationwide," Prime Minis-



Yoshihide Suga

ter Yoshihide Suga told ministers and government officials as he announced the expansion.

"The transmissibility of the Delta variant is extremely strong. We need people's further cooperation in order to overcome this crisis."

Eight more regions will be placed under the virus emergency already in force in 13 areas including Tokyo, with a provisional end-date of September 12.

ber 12.

The measure largely limits the sale of alcohol by restaurants and bars and asks them to close early, while urging the public to work from home and avoid non-urgent outings.

The government also plans to bring four other regions under a less strict measure.

In all, the planned move will mean 33 of Japan's 47 regions are under heightened anti-infection rules as the country hosts the Paralympics after the Olympics.

Organisers say their counter-measures have stopped infections spreading from participants to the Japanese public, but some experts argue holding the events has undermined government messaging on the virus and encouraged people to go out.

AFP

Indonesia starts maritime vaccination drive

Jakarta, Indonesia - Indonesia is taking its vaccination drive to the sea as the world's biggest archipelago nation ramps up a bid to inoculate its huge population.

The navy has deployed 60 boats and warships to scour thousands of kilometres of coastline in the hunt for unvaccinated fishermen, from westernmost Sumatra to holiday island Bali and remote Papua.

Among their targets, a navy warship deployed a flotilla of rubber dingies with crew and vaccines aboard to jab willing fishermen in rickety boats off Sumatra at the weekend.

About 1,000 seafarers have been jabbed since the nationwide programme kicked off last week, although authorities admit they don't even know how many might be out there.

"Bad weather is usually the biggest barrier, but the real challenge now is actually finding [them] because we don't ex-



Indonesian fishermen arrive in their boats to receive doses of Sinovac's COVID-19 vaccines onboard a naval ship off the coast of southern Riau on Saturday (AFP)

actly know where they are," said navy spokesman Laode Muhammad Holib, adding that the search area extended 24 nautical miles off the coast. "We're just combing the sea."

Some Indonesian fishermen spend weeks or even months far from the coast.

Others closer to shore often leave for work before vaccina-

tion centres open and return home after they're closed.

"So that's why we're taking the initiative to approach them at sea," Holib told AFP.

The world's fourth most populous nation has been hampered by the coronavirus pandemic.

But so far only about 12 per cent of Indonesia's 270 million

people have been fully vaccinated with two jabs.

"Our lives depend on the sea," said Sumatran fisherman Adi Putra Hasibuan, who took up the navy's offer.

"We know that the government is supplying vaccines on land but we just don't have enough time to get one."

AFP

Mask wearing outdoors to be compulsory in US state Oregon

Los Angeles, US - Masks will have to be worn outside in Oregon, the state's governor announced as the United States grapples with a surge in COVID-19 cases.

The mandate, which takes effect on Friday, makes the northwestern state the first in the country to re-introduce a rule that was common during the darkest days of the pandemic.

"The Delta variant is spreading fast and wide, throwing our state into a level of crisis we have not yet seen in the pan-

demic," said Governor Kate Brown.

"Cases and hospitalisations are at a record high," she said. A 2019 study found Oregon has among the lowest number of hospital beds per capita in the country

"Masks have proven to be effective at bringing case counts down, and are a necessary measure right now, even in some outdoor settings, to help fight COVID and protect one another," added Brown.

The rules mean everyone - vaccinated and otherwise -



A man wears a mask with a print of the Statue of Liberty in Los Angeles, California on August 18 (AFP)

must wear a mask in any public place where people from different households are mixing.

Oregon, along with other states, already requires the wearing of masks indoors, but is the first to require them routinely outside.

Los Angeles County in California announced earlier this month that masks had to be worn at large outdoor events, like sports fixtures and concerts.

The United States is suffering a huge upswing in COVID-19 infections, driven by the highly

infectious Delta variant.

Scientists say the fight against the disease is being hampered by poor take-up of vaccines, which are free and readily available.

Around half of all Americans are fully vaccinated, although take-up varies considerably from region to region.

Despite their proven effectiveness, masks - and vaccines - are hugely controversial in the United States, with opposition driven by politics, distrust of government and antipathy towards science.

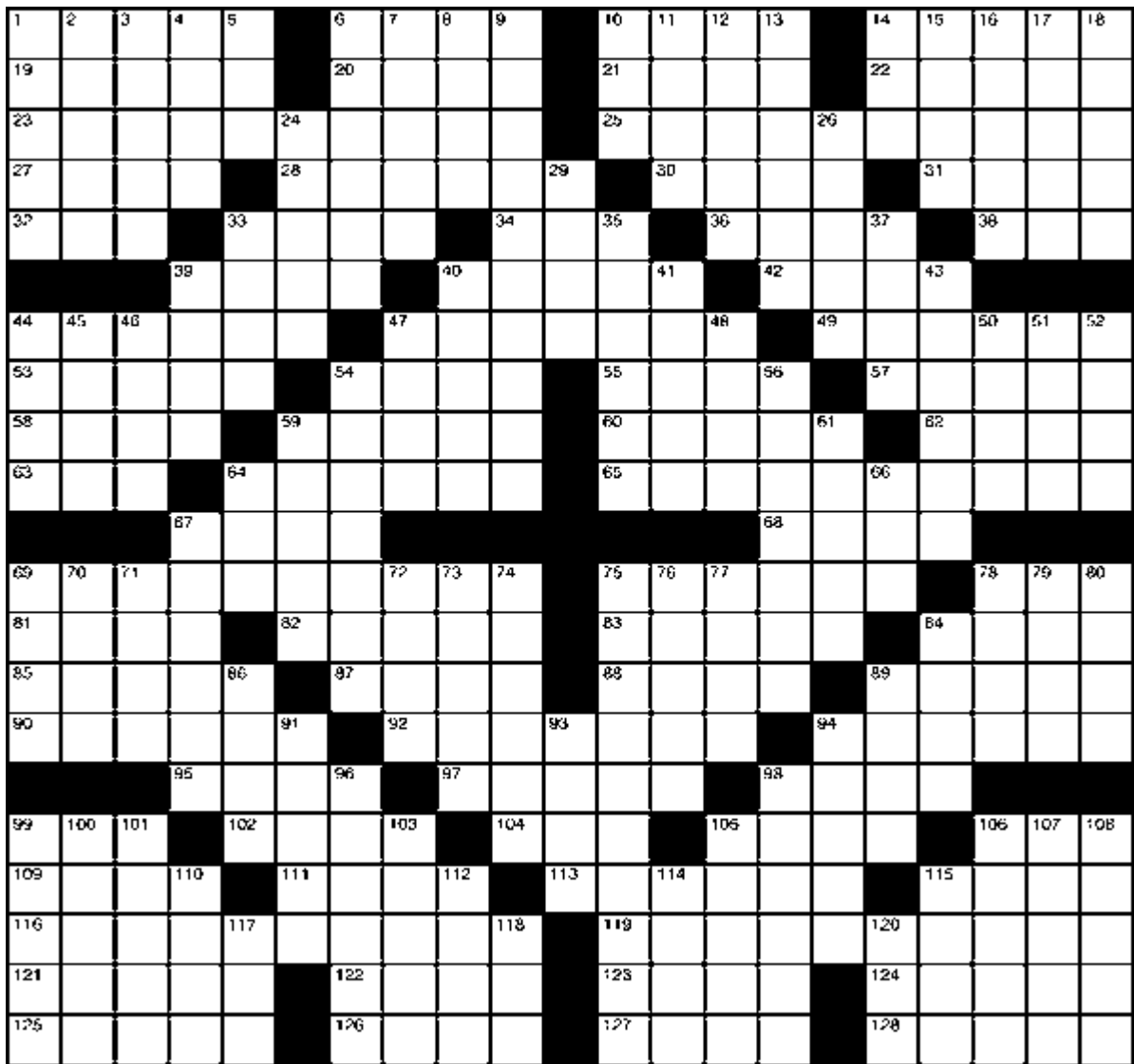
Health professionals hope that the full regulatory approval granted to the Pfizer jab on Monday will help overcome unfounded suspicions that the vaccine is unsafe.

A growing number of public and private bodies are requiring employees to be vaccinated. But suspicions remain strong.

A senior firefighter was being investigated in Los Angeles on Tuesday after posting a lengthy video in which he labels the fire department's vaccine requirement for staff as 'tyranny'.

AFP

DAILY CROSSWORD



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- ACROSS**

1 "An American in ____"

6 Unskilled laborer

10 Scandinavian seaport

14 Birthplace of HST

19 Sheeplike

20 Within: prefix

21 London apartment

22 Humble or degrade

23 Stewart/Kelly 1954 suspense film

25 John Wayne 1948 classic Western

27 Sea eagle

28 Former scourge of sailors

30 Chicago player

31 Small storage structure

32 The Concorde, for one

33 Nobelist Wiesel

34 Rowing pole

36 Make an exchange

38 CIA forerunner

39 Celt of the Scottish Highlands

40 Cousins of bonfires

42 Jewish month

44 Detroit team

47 Muffles

49 Mountain ridges

53 Collect

54 Saul's chief herdsman

55 19th Amendment right

57 With mouth wide open
- 58 Rope-making fiber

59 Search diligently

60 Wear away gradually

62 Monogram pt.

63 Ref's counterpart

64 Bank clerk

65 John Wayne 1939 classic

67 "Serving ____": 2002 film

68 Verve

69 Oscar-winning film of 1944

75 Don't blow one!

78 Hasten

81 Whale of a movie: 1977

82 Lofty nest

83 More ready to eat

84 Difficult situation

85 Beautify

87 Art/literature movement

88 "____ at the Races"

89 Spree

90 Those receiving gifts

92 Business associate

94 Indulge another

95 Decimal points

97 Winter conveyances

98 Long, sharp tooth

99 Hanks or Cruise

102 "____ creature was stirring..."

104 Yes, informally

105 Dispatch

106 Scrooge's comment

109 Jezebel's husband
- 111 River in NW France

113 Mark with blotches

115 Seaweed: L.

116 Bogart/Bergman movie

119 Davis/Hopkins 1939 film

121 Oily cyclic ketone

122 Invert knitting stitches

123 Bring home the bacon

124 Bridal path?

125 Common weed

126 Turn on a pivot

127 Corrupts the truth

128 Matched pair: pl.

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2 Declares to be true

3 Mirthful: Fr.

4 Letter phrase

5 Stitch

6 Sketcher's medium

7 Provide with a trait

8 Aroma

9 Davis/Henreid epic

10 Switch position

11 Untidy person

12 Roman household gods

13 Canadian capital

14 Baby's perch, often

15 Protective desert garments

16 Strong and virile

17 "Angela's ____"

18 Tall marsh grasses

24 Man and Wight

26 Freshly plowed land: sp.
- 29 Scotland ____

33 Dumbo's wings

35 Actor George or Keanu

37 Pet or phrase starter

39 Exploit

40 Irritate

41 Quick, straight drink

43 General area

44 Social prohibition

45 Muslim prayer leader

46 Breathe with effort

47 Child's toy

48 Ancient Greek portico

50 Lake source of the Blue Nile

51 "Odyssey" or "Iliad"

52 Father of Enos

54 Postponed

55 Stitch

56 Leather manufacturing tool

59 Skin layer

61 Moray fisherman

64 Label

66 Lion or tiger

67 Entrapped

69 Spur

70 Annual church calendar

71 Computer screen image, e.g.

72 Shawl, for one

73 Belonging to a Verdi heroine

74 Every 12 months

75 Award-winning 1932 film

76 Trusted assistants
- 77 Prepare for the big bout

78 Female of the red deer

79 "Bus Stop" playwright

80 Broadway's Linda

84 Star of 69 Across

86 Light of Broadway?

89 Musical group

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93 Blue Jays or Orioles?

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96 Leather bindings

98 Those guilty

99 Implied

100 Catherine or Maureen

101 Oscar-nominated Marsha

103 Invalidate

105 Cubic meter

106 Strong rush of air

107 Nimble

108 Abode of the dead: myth.

110 Proscribes

112 Light tan

114 Bangkok's language

115 Genus of the bowfin

117 Turkish title

118 Pub order

120 Beaver construction

YOUR DAILY HOROSCOPE

- ARIES** MARCH 21-APRIL 19

Right now, you are able to command with exceptional skill, and this allows you to move ahead with confidence. When something has to be done, you're the first to step up and take control of the situation. Your boss or mate especially appreciates your willingness to take the initiative, as well as your ability to make the crucial decisions they are having difficulty making on their own.
- LEO** JULY 23-AUGUST 22

It might be difficult to let go of old ideas and comfortable situations, but if you're going to succeed at a leadership role, you have to be willing to be adaptable. If everyone is looking to you for the answers, you better be prepared to give them. And if you don't know the information they're asking for offhand, you better start figuring out where you can attain it.
- SAGITTARIUS** NOVEMBER 22-DECEMBER 21

Other people are sure to be envious of your superior public speaking talents, so enjoy the attention while you have it. Saying exactly what you mean diplomatically comes quite naturally to you, which means you should be able to keep the number of misunderstandings around you to a minimum. This is the perfect time to give a speech to a packed auditorium.
- TAURUS** APRIL 20-MAY 20

You definitely aren't in the mood for any kind of childish play right now. While you may be forced to concede that everyone can't be exactly like you, that certainly doesn't stop you from expecting better behaviour from the people you are spending the majority of your time with. There's nothing you'd like more than for everyone to get along and follow the plan.
- VIRGO** AUGUST 23-SEPTEMBER 22

This is the time to drop your inhibitions and your reservations and really be willing to experiment! If given the choice between something old and something new, it's always more exciting to pick the latter. In the past you've been too worried about safety precautions and what-ifs to let yourself go and experience all that life has to offer.
- CAPRICORN** DECEMBER 22-JANUARY 19

Some good deals are out there, but beware of false advertising and exaggerated product claims. You've heard it before -- something that seems too good to be true probably is -- so why aren't you paying attention? If you don't want to wind up regretting your purchases, it's imperative you use your head before plunking down your hard-earned money for anything.
- GEMINI** MAY 21-JUNE 21

There's nothing wrong with making room for other people's opinions, but you should take steps to guard yourself from being taken advantage of or being led astray. After all, your mind isn't quite made up, which makes it easy for someone to come along and influence you. Listen intently to what other people have to say about the topic in question, and then do your own research.
- LIBRA** SEPTEMBER 23-OCTOBER 22

You know you deserve to have a good time, and that's exactly what you plan on doing. You aren't about to let anyone else spoil your good mood. You'll get along swimmingly with all kinds of people today, and you don't necessarily have to know everyone to enjoy their company. Invite a big group of friends over for dinner, or go to a restaurant by yourself to cultivate new friendships.
- AQUARIUS** JANUARY 20-FEBRUARY 18

It always helps to have a plan, but right now you have the ability to come up with ingenious solutions even on the spur of the moment. Make an effort toward your goals, and you'll be rewarded. Other people are likely to flock to your ideas -- especially since you have more than your fair share of energy and charisma working for you at the moment.
- CANCER** JUNE 22-JULY 22

If everyone in the group seems to be agreeing with what you say a little too quickly, take the time to talk to each of them separately. Someone who is afraid to speak out in a group is more likely to express their opinions in a more personal setting. Do your best to remain unemotional, even if you get some less than desirable feedback. Certain balances are off at the moment.
- SCORPIO** OCTOBER 23-NOVEMBER 21

You're usually calm and collected, but something has you bothered enough to make you really blow your top. If you have a chance, take a step back from the person or thing that is irritating you long enough to calm down and reassess your position. There might actually be a way out of this jam, but you're going to have to compose yourself if you want to find the nearest exit.
- PISCES** FEBRUARY 19-MARCH 20

You can't fight what's happening around you, so why not try to take an active part of the events as they unfold? Your best chance at happiness is to be open to change right now. Besides, a simple adjustment in attitude is pretty much all it will take to get with the programme. Your dreams may have special significance tonight, but analysing the hazy symbols could take some time.



TEST YOUR KNOWLEDGE

- 1. The first black American to win the Nobel Prize for literature is**
- a. Aurthe Ashe
b. Martin Luther King
c. Toni Morrison
d. Nelson Mandela
- 2. Manav Seva Award has been instituted in the memory of**
- a. Rajiv Gandhi
b. Dr. Rajendra Prasad
c. Indira Gandhi
d. Acharya
- 3. Which of the following films won 9 Oscar Awards in 1987?**
- a. The World Safari
b. The Last Emperor
c. Rain Man
d. Amadeus

Answers: 1. c 2. a 3. b

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KIDS COLOURING

WORD BUILDER

You have three minutes to find all the words contained in this word.

Rules: Words should be at least four letters long, proper nouns and duplicates don't count

DAILY CROSSWORD ANSWERS (AUGUST 25)

GRIM	SODOW	MADAM	MOST
HACA	ACARA	AMORE	AMAH
ATON	BAIRN	NARIS	NARE
MANDRILL	DOT	MANDARIN	
RONA	PATER	SEES	
CERATE	SIMILES	SASSIED	
EVOKE	BOGUS	VAS	FALSE
RENC	WANC	MELTS	SANA
END	CARGO	BOLERO	TEL
STOLON	SNEAD	MANIFEST	
ARGO	STEFF	DARF	
MANDALAY	ARLES	TEETER	
IRA	LESTONS	MARAT	EER
LOOM	SEPTA	MACES	MANE
EMMAS	SCT	HANKS	VASCS
HATINER	SECONDS	FTNEST	
DRIP	TRUSTS	MICA	
MANOFWAR	TEE	MANICURE	
AVAIL	ELECT	GOING	LEAD
MINI	LEASE	NISSE	ELLA
EDEN	SAMAH	ALTER	SEEM

DISEASE INDICATORS



Telltale nails

Take a look at your fingernails – don't dismiss any abnormalities as insignificant. Your nails are disease indicators and can point towards a range of conditions from allergies to heart failure

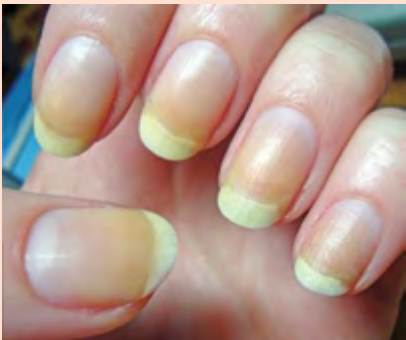
It's good to take a look at your nails everyday, whether you love them or not. Your nails reveal more than you might think. And if you do not take note, others will. Being aware of the health of your nails could give you an early warning of a serious problem that needs attention. It can even save your life in some cases. Here's what your nails may suggest about your health:

PALE NAILS



Pale finger and toenails are generally a common sign of aging. Surveys have indicated that 3 in 4 persons above 60 years had developed pale, dull nails. However, pale nails can also indicate serious health problems in some individuals. They could vary from a low red blood cell count to diabetes, liver disease, thyroid problems, malnutrition, even heart disease.

YELLOW NAILS



Nails can get yellow for many reasons, including fungal infection, the most common cause. Smokers, too, seem to have yellow

nails and it might also indicate psoriasis, thyroid problems, or diabetes. In rare cases, 'Yellow Nail Syndrome' (YNS) can be noticed in those with serious lung disease and swelling of the extremities (lymphedema). This almost always develops in patients over age 50.

BLUE NAILS



Nails can take on a blue appearance for many reasons. Technically, your nail isn't blue - the nail bed beneath gets a bluish hue. The nail bed is free of skin pigment and is vulnerable to blue colouring - one cause being silver poisoning (argyria) due to increased exposure to silver. People who work with silver, including silver miners and silverware manufacturers, are at risk of argyria. So too are people who take silver (possibly as silver salts) as an alternative medicine. Some medications may also leave your nail beds blue, especially drugs used to fight malaria and those used to fight psychosis.

RIPPLED NAILS



Nail pitting is a classical sign of psoriasis in the nail. This appears as tiny holes in the nail surface. Rippling of the nail surface is seen in patients with dermatitis of the fingertips. This can be a result of atopic dermatitis, irritant dermatitis, or allergic contact dermatitis.

WHITE NAILS

There are many reasons why only one nail may be partly or entirely white, including injury. When nails turn white, a visit to the doctor is recommended. White nails with a pink band at the top of the nail bed are called Terry's nails, and they may signify a serious health condition. The white half-moon area at the base of your nail is called the lunula, which is indistinguishable from the rest of the nail, if you have Terry's nails. This symptom may indicate cirrhosis of the liver, chronic kidney failure, or congestive heart failure. For some, this condition could also be part of aging or a harmless genetic trait.



CHEWED NAILS

The common stress-relieving habit of nail biting can cause 'chewed nails' in children and adults. It can have both obvious and subtle health consequences. Most obviously, chewing your nails leaves them looking raw and rough. But other health problems may include intestinal parasites picked up from your nails, jaw pain, fungal nail infections and stomach infections from swallowing nail pieces.

CRACKED NAILS



The cause of nail brittleness, a common condition of the elderly, is not yet discovered. It can result from drugs, trauma to the nail, or a number of diseases or nutrient deficiencies. When nails begin to split horizontally, the condition is called onychoschizia. But when they split along the direction the nail grows, this is called onychorrhexis.

GREEN NAILS

The green streak on your nails may be a splotch beneath the nail or you may find vivid, dark, completely green nails. These can appear as either finger or toenails, or both, commonly due to a bacterial infection. The Pseudomonas bacteria may be picked up from working in or otherwise spending time in water. Those gardening in wet weather, working as a dishwasher or swimming in poorly chlorinated pools and hot tubs, can get what is known as Green Nail Syndrome.

HORIZONTAL BANDS

If your nails are crossed with one or more pale or white bands from side to side, you may have Muehrcke's lines which arises out of a lack of albumin in your blood (hypoalbuminemia). Albumin makes up most of the protein in your blood, and its absence may spell serious health consequences

CLUBBED NAILS

Clubbed nails occur when the ends of your fingers or toes grow bulb-like. It's sometimes known as drumstick fingers. While nail clubbing is most often unrelated to any other condition, there are some potentially fatal diseases that this may alert you. Nail clubbing is sometimes the result of low oxygen in the blood and could be a sign of various types of lung disease.

PUFFY NAILS



The skin around the edge of your nail, known as the nail fold, can be damaged by many things. When it gets puffy and swollen, doctors call it paronychia, which can be either chronic or acute. Acute paronychia usually develops from an infection. If your nail bed is chronically puffy, you probably have a chemical irritation. People whose hands are frequently soaking in water - dishwashers, food handlers, and swimmers - can also get puffy nails.

TENNIS ROUND-UP

Serena withdraws from US Open through injury

Paris, France - Serena Williams has pulled out of next week's US Open because of a hamstring injury, the 23-time Grand Slam winner announced on her Instagram page on Wednesday.

"After careful consideration and following the advice of my doctors and medical team, I have decided to withdraw from the US Open to allow my body to heal completely from a torn hamstring," wrote the 39-year-old.

Serena, who has not played since a tearful first round exit at Wimbledon when she hobbled off court during the first set against Aliaksandra Sasnovich, is a six-time winner in New York.

She missed last week's event in Cincinnati in a bid to get fit for Flushing Meadows and said she hoped 'to be back on the court very soon' but her hamstring ultimately failed to recover in time.

The American, whose ranking has now slipped to 22, won her first Major at the 1999 US Open as a teenager, the first step on her path to domination of the women's game. She last missed the US Open in 2017 because of the birth of her daughter Olympia but she returned to



Serena Williams

the courts in March 2018.

She went on to reach the final in 2018 and 2019, losing to Naomi Osaka and Bianca Andreescu respectively before losing last in the semifinals to Victoria Azarenka, all of which added to her frustration as she attempted to equal Margaret

Court's record of 24 Grand Slam singles titles. "New York is one of the most exciting cities in the world and one of my favorite places to play - I'll miss seeing the fans but will be cheering everyone on from afar. Thank you for your continued support and love. I'll see you soon,"

she wrote on social media.

Serena is the latest big name to withdraw from the US Open following multiple winners Rafael Nadal and Roger Federer as well as the 2020 men's champion Dominic Thiem. Four-time winner Nadal, 35, withdrew because of an injury to his left foot that

has troubled him since his defeat at the French Open. Federer, 40, who won the last of his five US Open titles in 2008, said he needed further knee surgery and admitted he 'will be out for many months' while Thiem has failed to recover from a wrist injury.

AFP



Sarah Storey reacts after winning gold on Wednesday (AFP)

Britain's Storey shines; records tumble in Tokyo

Tokyo, Japan - British cyclist Sarah Storey added to her glorious golden history as wheelchair rugby powerhouses Australia suffered a shock defeat on day one of the delayed Tokyo 2020 Paralympics on Wednesday.

Paige Greco, an Australian cyclist, had the honour of winning the first gold of the Games. World and Paralympic records tumbled in the swimming pool and on the cycling track on a pulsating first day of competition that saw 24 gold medals awarded.

Greco was in record-breaking form as she beat China's Wang Xiaomei in the gold medal race in C1-C3 class 3,000m individual pursuit at the Izu Velodrome.

She smashed her own world record by nearly eight seconds in the heats and lowered it by another second and a half to 3min 50.815sec in the final.

Storey moved a step closer to becoming Britain's greatest Paralympian, shattering her own world record in the heats before powering to victory in the C5 3,000m individual pursuit final for her 15th Paralympic gold. The 43-year-old took the title for a fourth consecutive Games when she caught compatriot Crystal Lane-Wright inside eight laps of the 12.

Storey is just one medal behind the British record held by Mike Kenny, who won 16 swimming golds from 1976 to 1988.

Brazilian Daniel Dias, who is competing at his last Para-

lympics, has the chance to become the most decorated male Paralympic swimmer of all time if he wins three more golds to eclipse Kenny.

But could only take bronze in his opening event, the S5 men's 200m freestyle, which was won by Italy's Francesco Bocciardo in a new Paralympic record time. Dias, who has now won 25 Paralympic medals, will have several more chances to add to his 14 golds starting on Thursday in the 100m freestyle.

Defending gold medallists Australia suffered a setback in

their bid to become the first team to top the wheelchair rugby podium at three consecutive Games, edged out 54-53 by Denmark.

The Games had been declared open on Tuesday by Japan's Emperor

Naruhito, with International Paralympic Committee (IPC) chief Andrew Parsons paying tribute to the grit of the athletes. "Many doubted this day would happen, many thought it impossible, but thanks to the efforts of many, the most transformative sports event on Earth is about to begin," he said.

Also on Wednesday, the IPC said that Afghanistan's two Paralympic athletes have been safely evacuated from the country, declining to specify their destination. The two taekwondo athletes, Zakia Khudadadi and Hossain Rasouli, were originally due to represent their country but could not make it to Tokyo.

AFP



Murray eliminated in second round

WINSTON-SALEM OPEN

Los Angeles, US - Former world No 1 Andy Murray was ousted from the ATP Winston-Salem event on Tuesday, falling to American Frances Tiafoe 6-7 (4/7), 3-6 in a second round match at Wake Forest University.

The 34-year-old Murray has been battling injuries of late, including a groin problem that has limited his time on the court this season and resulted in him needing one of the four wild card spots to get into the draw.

Tiafoe advances to the third round of the hardcourt tournament where he will face either Thiago Monteiro or Eduardo Nava.

"The positive thing is that I moved well and served well but my level is up and down with no real consistency," Murray said.



Andy Murray of Great Britain

"There are moments in matches where I play well and then I make mistakes or miss returns. I wish I wasn't doing that.



Frances Tiafoe of USA

"My level is around 50 or 60 in the world. It's frustrating because if I wasn't moving great and not feeling good physically

then I would be a bit easier on myself. But when I'm winning a low percentage of second-serve points, that's got nothing to do with the physical side of things."

Tiafoe blasted three aces, won 76 per cent of his first serve points and 65 per cent of his second serve points in a one hour, 49 minute contest.

The pair had met just once before with Murray winning a three set thriller last year in Cincinnati.

Murray now heads to the US Open, where he won the first of his three Grand Slam titles in 2012.

Also, Hungarian fourth seed Marton Fucsovics beat Japan's Yosuke Watanuki 7-5, 6-1 and Emil Ruusuvuori of Finland upset fifth seeded Alexander Bublik 6-2, 7-6 (7/5).

Other results (x denotes seed):

Second round: Pablo Carreño-Busta (x1) beat Kwon Soon-woo 6-3, 3-6, 6-4; Jan-Lennard Struff (x9) beat Gianluca Mager 6-2, 6-2; Benoît Paire (x12) beat Gilles Simon 6-3, 6-3; Ilya Ivashka beat Marin Cilic (x6) 4-6, 7-5, 6-4; Daniel Evans (x3) beat Lucas Pouille 3-6, 6-4, 6-1; Mikael Ymer beat Albert Ramos (x11) 6-3, 6-1; Marcos Giron beat Federico Del Bonis (x10) 6-3, 6-4; Thiago Monteiro beat Eduardo Nava (x2) 7-5, 6-1; Carlos Alcaraz (x15) beat Alexei Popyrin 6-7 (9/11), 6-1, 7-6 (7/1).

Chicago Women's Open:

Second round: Kristina Mladenovic (x7) beat Françoise Abanda 6-3, 6-2; Marta Kostyuk (x8) beat Kaia Kanepi 6-2, 6-3.

AFP

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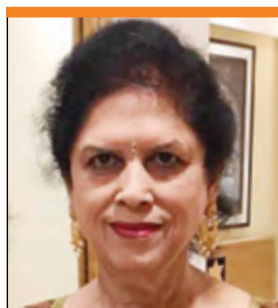
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FOOTBALL ROUND-UP

Palace suffer League Cup exit

London, UK - Patrick Vieira's winless start as Crystal Palace manager extended to three games as the Eagles suffered a 0-1 loss at Watford in the League Cup second round on Tuesday.

Vieira replaced the popular Roy Hodgson as Palace boss in the close-season, but the former Arsenal and France star has endured a miserable beginning with the south London club.

Palace lost 0-3 at Chelsea in their English Premier League opener before being held to a dour 0-0 draw by promoted Brentford on Saturday.

Hoping for the first win and first goal of his reign, Vieira selected a strong team for their trip to Vicarage Road in the League Cup.

But despite the presence of Ivory Coast forward Wilfried Zaha, Palace once again drew a blank as an 86th minute goal from Ashley Fletcher condemned Vieira to his second defeat.

"We have to change our mentality when we are in the opposition half. We have to be more aggressive and determined to take those chances because today we didn't do it," Vieira said.

Everton survive

Elsewhere in Tuesday's League Cup action, Andros Townsend fired Everton into the third round



Watford's Ashley Fletcher celebrates after scoring against Crystal Palace in the League Cup match on Tuesday

as they overcame the red card shown to Moise Kean to beat Huddersfield 2-1 at the John Smith's Stadium.

Alex Iwobi's goal for Everton was cancelled out by Tom Lees before Kean was giving his marching orders.

Kean was dismissed after an off-the-ball incident with Sorba

Thomas, but Townsend's first Everton goal made sure there was no upset by the Championship side.

"The sending off of Moise Kean, it's still in many ways a mistake. We cannot lose our temper but he's a young player," Everton manager Rafael Benitez said.

Cameron Archer scored a hat-trick on his first start for Aston Villa as Dean Smith's much-changed side thrashed Barrow 6-0.

Archer, a 19-year-old youth academy graduate, was one of ten changes by Smith, with Anwar El Ghazi netting twice and Frederic Guilbert also scoring.



Aston Villa's Cameron Archer scores against Barrow during their League Cup second round match on Tuesday

Brentford, who reached the semifinals last year, survived a scare as they beat fourth-tier Forest Green 3-1.

Jack Aitchison gave Forest Green a shock lead, but second-half goals from Yoane Wissa, Bryan Mbeumo and Marcus Forss put Brentford in the third round.

Norwich, beaten in their first two Premier League games, hammered Championship side Bournemouth 6-0 at Carrow Road. Brighton boss Graham Potter made 11 changes but his team still advanced with a 2-0 win at second tier Cardiff.

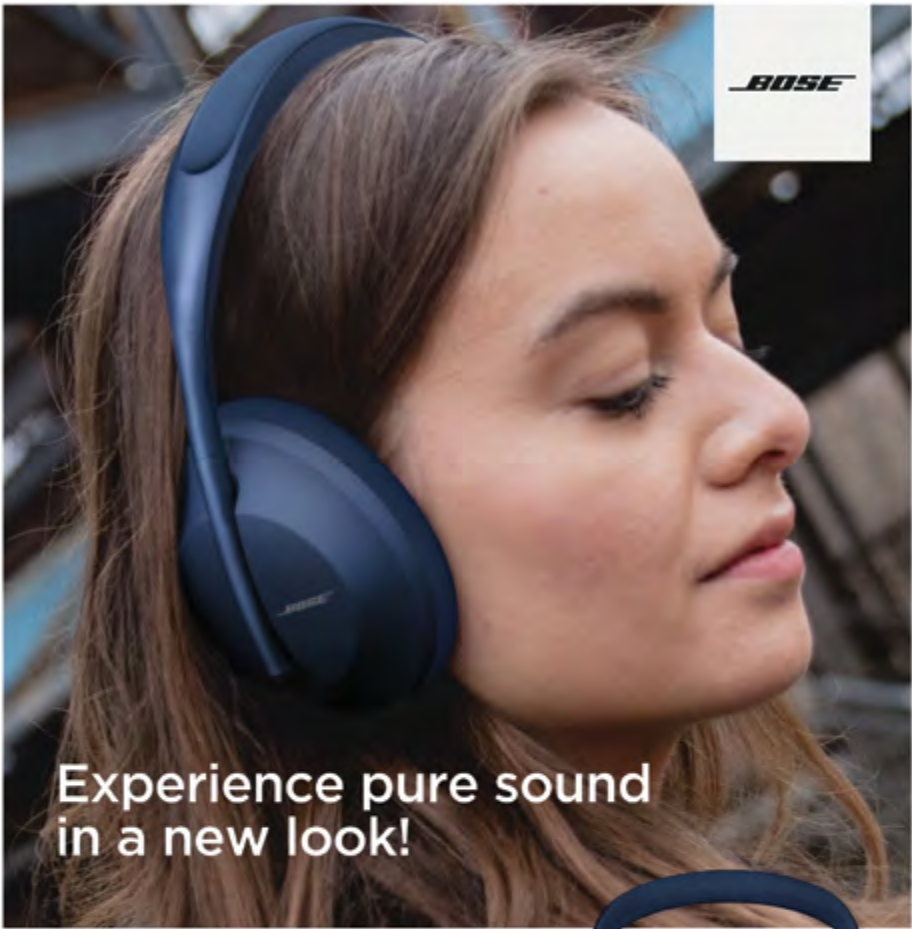
Jakub Moder and Andi Zeqiri both scored their first

goals for the Seagulls.

Jack Harrison fired a late double and Calvin Phillips was also on target as Leeds beat Crewe 3-0 at Elland Road.

Wolves eased through with a 4-0 demolition of Championship strugglers Nottingham Forest at the City Ground.

AFP



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FIFA chief writes to UK prime minister over release of EPL players

London, UK - FIFA president Gianni Infantino has asked UK Prime Minister Boris Johnson for exemptions so English Premier League clubs will release players for World Cup qualifiers in red-list countries.

Clubs in England and Spain say they will not release their players for matches in red-list countries. "I have suggested an approach similar to the final stages of Euro 2020 be implemented," said Infantino. He said

it was a 'matter of great urgency and importance'. "We have faced global problems together in the past and must continue to do so in the future," he added.

Earlier, the Premier League said its clubs will not release

players for international matches played in red-list countries next month. The Spanish Liga also said they would support clubs if they decide not to release players to red-list countries.

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A file photo of Chievo Verona players

Former Serie A club Chievo Verona go bust

Rome, Italy - Chievo Verona, who spent 17 seasons in Italian League (Serie A), were wound up after failing to find an investor to resolve their financial problems, the local authorities announced on Tuesday.

Chievo were in Serie B last season but failed to satisfy the Italian second division's financial solvency criteria and were relegated to Serie D. They needed to put their affairs in order to enter that competition before it kicked off its season. The deadline for Serie D registration was Tuesday and the club desperately sought a buyer to bail it out but failed.

"The deadline for registering for the championship, which is about to begin, passed at midday," announced the Verona town hall. The club's former captain Sergio Pellissier, who played almost 500 games for them, tried to put together a rescue plan, but signalled his failure on Instagram on Saturday.

They won promotion to Serie A for the first time in 2001. Nicknamed the 'Flying Donkeys', and operating on a shoestring budget, they survived until 2019.

They finished eighth in Serie B last season.

AFP

Every day, all day!



Afridi bowls Pakistan to series-levelling win

WEST INDIES VS PAKISTAN SECOND TEST: DAY FIVE

Kingston, Jamaica - 2005, 2011 and 2021. Three two-match series in a row West Indies took the lead at home, only for Pakistan to drag them back to parity. Rain, wet outfield, poor light all conspired to try and deny Babar Azam's side triumph in this Test, but Pakistan's positive approach and relentlessness in pursuit of a result was rewarded with a hugely gratifying 109-run win on Tuesday.

Shaheen Shah Afridi was the hero, finishing with a match haul of ten wickets as West Indies folded against a well-rounded attack. At the start of the day, Pakistan needed nine wickets, West Indies 280 runs.

For a brief spell on the final morning, hosts' Alzarri Joseph and Kraigg Brathwaite kept the bowlers at bay. Each struck a boundary to get the score rolling, and West Indies appeared to be making progress.

But once Afridi bounced Joseph out, the innings changed colour. Hasan Ali hadn't enjoyed a particularly memorable series until Tuesday, but it took just one ball to make an impact towards levelling the series. Nkrumah Bonner played down the wrong line and was struck dead in front.

Hasan then had Roston Chase as his next victim as Imran Butt



Shaheen Shah Afridi (C) of Pakistan walks off the field with his teammates after Pakistan beat West Indies in the second Test on Tuesday

dived adroitly to his right.

Brathwaite and Jermaine Blackwood kept Pakistan waiting for another breakthrough for more than an hour. It came from an unlikely source - their left-arm spinner Nauman Ali - who drew Blackwood forward and induced an outside edge to the keeper.

Brathwaite appeared to be the focal point of resistance when the middle session began but a rare loose shot off Nauman allowed Pakistan to chisel their

way into the lower order. A loose, uppish slash to point found Fawad Alam, and Pakistan were sniffing at the prospect of finishing the game off before tea.

But Kyle Mayers and Jason Holder began to hunker down. The runs came from time to time. It was down to Afridi - who else? - to give Pakistan a lift, coming with an exquisite off-stump delivery that shaped away from the left-handed Mayers and take a feather off the out-

side edge, triggering relieved Pakistani celebrations.

Pakistan were on the cusp of a series-levelling win, but the heavens chose that moment to open, and within moments, it had gone from bright sunshine to an absolute downpour.

Holder jogged back off, while Babar followed in his wake, remonstrating with the umpires; after the drama around the wet outfield, thoughts must invariably have turned to a vic-

tory snatched from under his side's noses. But it was only a cloudburst, to Pakistan's relief and an early tea later, back out they came.

The darkening skies added dramatic flair to the occasion, and for a while Holder made hay while the sun didn't shine. He rode his luck on occasion, no more so than when Afridi failed to gobble up a chance on the boundary. Butt aside, Pakistan's lacklustre fielding was themati-

SCOREBOARD

Pakistan 1st Innings: 302-9 decl

West Indies 1st Innings 150

Pakistan 2nd Innings 176-6 decl

WEST INDIES 2ND INNINGS

K Brathwaite	c Alam b Nauman	39
K Powell	run out	23
A Joseph	c Rizwan b Afridi	17
N Bonner	lbw Hasan	2
R Chase	c Butt b Hasan	0
J Blackwood	c Rizwan b Nauman	25
K Mayers	c Rizwan b Afridi	32
J Holder	c Alam b Nauman	47
J da Silva	c Ashraf b Afridi	15
K Roach	lbw Afridi	7
J Seales	not out	0
Extras:	(b 4, lb 2, nb 5, w 1)	12
TOTAL:	219 in 83.2 overs	
Fall of wickets: 1-34, 2-65, 3-69, 4-73, 5-101, 6-113, 7-159, 8-199, 9-212, 10-219		
Bowling: M Abbas 14-3-42-0, S S Afridi 17.2-5-43-4, Hasan Ali 14-6-37-2, F Ashraf 13-5-36-0, Nauman Ali 22-7-52-3, F Alam 3-1-3-0		



Afridi reaches career-best No 8 in Test rankings

Dubai, UAE - The duo of Shaheen Afridi and Fawad Alam have attained career-best positions in the latest ICC rankings for bowlers and batters, respectively after Pakistan's 109-run win against West Indies in the second Test.

Afridi's match haul of ten for 94 - his first ten-for - helped him shoot up ten spots to No 8, whereas Alam's 124 in the first innings took him up 34 places to the 21st position.

Alam's previous best in the rankings was 47th in May earlier this year and Afridi's best was 18th, which he had reached at the end of the first Test, when he picked up eight for 109.

Afridi, the highest-ranked Pakistan bowler in the rankings, was named both player of the match and player of the series, which ended 1-1.

Pakistan captain Babar Azam and wicketkeeper-batter Mohammad Rizwan also moved up. Babar gained one position to reach seventh after scoring 75 and 33, and Rizwan re-entered the top-20 at the 19th spot.

Left-arm spinner Nauman Ali, who replaced Yasir Shah for the second Test, gained four places to reach the 44th spot after his three-wicket haul in the second innings.

For West Indies, Jason Holder went up six places to 37th position among batters and fast bowler Jayden Seales, who took 11 wickets in the series, advanced four slots to 54th among bowlers.

Azam credits 'bold decisions' and 'outstanding bowlers'



Pakistan's skipper Babar Azam and Mohammad Rizwan (L) celebrate their team's win over West Indies in the second Test on Tuesday

WEST INDIES VS PAKISTAN

Kingston, Jamaica - Pakistan's captain Babar Azam said on Tuesday that he was always confident of taking 'bold decisions' as he trusted his bowlers to take all ten West Indies wickets in the second innings.

Azam said that with Pakistan already trailing in the series, they had few options but to go for an early declaration after taking a lead of 152 in the first innings. "The plan was always to ask them to bat for 20-25 overs on the fourth day, and it eventu-

ally worked out well for us," he said after winning the second Test to level the series.

"Take the lead up to 330-340, and then to make them play in whatever time remains on the fourth day. We had to level the series and so had to take some bold decisions for that - which we did take - and things worked out well for us."

Azam also credited his bowlers for setting up the win, and singled out left-arm quick Shaheen Afridi. "He is really young, and the way he is groom-

ing himself and performing for Pakistan shows he is such a good talent," Azam said.

"He is only improving day-by-day, and learning as well. He is leading the bowling too, and it was fun watching him bowl. He believes in himself, and each time he is given the ball, he bowls with the same pace and aggression. And so this is really helpful for me as captain."

"Our bowlers were outstanding today, and I should only give them all the credit," Azam said. "Even Nauman Ali bowled well.

It was a fifth-day pitch, and the way he bowled and got some turn, as well as those three of his wickets, proved really crucial for us in the end."

Azam's counterpart Brathwaite, however, was left asking for more from his batters, with West Indies folding for 150 and 219 in the match. "We were behind the eight-ball from the start," Brathwaite said.

"Consistently is obviously what we need. Test cricket is never easy."

More pressure on Boucher as assistant coach Nkwe resigns

Johannesburg, South Africa - South Africa left for Sri Lanka on Wednesday without assistant coach Enoch Nkwe, who resigned after apparent disagreements with under-pressure head coach Mark Boucher.

Cricket South Africa (CSA) announced Nkwe's resignation late on Tuesday despite, it claimed, having made 'every effort to retain his services'.

According to the statement, Nkwe 'raised concerns about the functioning and culture of the team environment'.

Nkwe's resignation came against a backdrop of widespread criticism of Boucher following revelations made at ongoing hearings into racism in South African cricket. Local media reported the rift with Boucher was an issue of personality rather than race, with Nkwe believing he had been sidelined in his role as an assistant.

Nkwe, a former provincial player, briefly served as South Africa team director - effectively head coach - after being appointed by the subsequently-



A file photo of South Africa's head coach Mark Boucher (R) and assistant coach Enoch Nkwe during a training session

fired CSA chief executive Thabang Moroe in 2019. Nkwe's position was abolished after former captain Graeme Smith was appointed director of cricket later that year.

Boucher and Nkwe were

made coach and assistant coach respectively, with contracts through to the end of the 2023 Cricket World Cup.

Although Boucher played in 147 Test matches, his appointment was criticised because of

his lack of formal coaching qualifications. The criticism intensified when black former players alleged they were not made to feel welcome in the national team environment during the period in which Boucher was a prominent member of the team.

Former spin bowler Paul Adams said he was racially abused during fines meetings presided over by Boucher which put the spotlight directly on the current coach.

Boucher on Monday made public an affidavit he submitted to the Social Justice and Nation Building hearings in which he apologised for any offensive behaviour.

The former wicketkeeper attempted to put into context the allegations against him but his affidavit unleashed a storm of condemnation on social media, with calls for him to resign or to be fired.

The short tour of Sri Lanka consists of three ODIs, starting in Colombo on September 2, and three T20Is.

Cricinfo

Ervine named Zimbabwe captain

ZIMBABWE'S TOUR OF IRELAND AND SCOTLAND

Harare, Zimbabwe - Craig Ervine will captain Zimbabwe for their limited-overs series in Ireland and Scotland. Zimbabwe had named the 18-member squad last week but hadn't named a captain.

Ervine will be the fifth man to lead Zimbabwe in white-ball cricket since the start of 2020. During this period, they have tried Chamu Chibhabha, Brendan Taylor, Sikandar Raza and Test captain Sean Williams.

This will be the first time Ervine will captain Zimbabwe in white-ball cricket. He has previously led the side in a Test match, against Bangladesh in Dhaka in 2020.

Ervine, who has played 18 Tests, 96 ODIs and 26 T20Is for Zimbabwe, had missed out on all three formats against Bangladesh after coming into contact with people who tested positive for COVID-19.

Zimbabwe are scheduled to play a five-match T20I series against Ireland, starting on August 27, followed by a three-match ODI series. The tour was originally scheduled to begin on August 6 but was postponed



Craig Ervine of Zimbabwe

because of complications around COVID-19 protocols.

The ODIs will be part of the World Cup Super League. With one win from six matches, Zimbabwe are currently at the bottom of the World Cup Super League points table, while Ireland are a bit better placed with three wins and a no result from 12 games. After their matches against Ireland, Zimbabwe will travel to Scotland to play three T20Is.

Zimbabwe squad for Ireland and Scotland tours: Craig Ervine (capt), Ryan Burl, Regis Chakabva, Tendai Chatara, Luke Jongwe, Tinashe Kamunhukamwe, Wessly Madhevere, Tadiwanashe Marumani, Wellington Masakadza, Tarisai Musakanda, Blessing Muzarabani, Dion Myers, Richard Ngarava, Sikandar Raza, Milton Shumba, Brendan Taylor, Donald Tiripano, Sean Williams.

Cricinfo

INDIA ALL OUT FOR 78

Hameed, Burns slam fifties as allround England dominate first day at Headingley

ENGLAND VS INDIA

THIRD TEST: DAY ONE

Leeds, UK - England great James Anderson ripped through the top order as India collapsed to 78 all out in the third Test at Headingley on Wednesday before openers Rory Burns and Haseeb Hameed capped a near-perfect first day for Joe Root's men with an unbroken stand of 120.

Anderson took three for six in eight overs, including the prize wicket of India captain Virat Kohli, who won the toss.

Both Sam Curran and Craig Overton took two wickets in two balls after lunch, with Overton finishing with three for 14 in 10.4 overs after being recalled in place of injured fast bowler Mark Wood.

Even so there was still the worry for England, beset by top-order problems during a run of seven Tests without a win, might collapse in similar fashion.

But Burns and Hameed - England's 22nd Test-opening partnership since Andrew Strauss retired nine years ago - posted only England's second century first-wicket stand in five years at this level.

At stumps, Burns was unbeaten on 52 and Hameed, promoted to open after Dom Sibley was dropped, 60 not out.

This was England's best first day in a Test since the 2015 Ashes clash at Trent Bridge where they dismissed Australia for just 60, with Stuart Broad taking eight for 15, before reaching stumps on 274 for four - with Root unbeaten on 124.

India, 56 for four at lunch on Wednesday, lost their last six wickets for 22 runs in an innings that was finished inside 41 overs.

Rohit Sharma (19) and Ajinkya Rahane (18) were the only India batsmen to make it into double figures, with extras providing 16 runs.

An unchanged India came into this match 1-0 up in the five-Test series following a superb 151-run win at Lord's last



England's James Anderson (R) celebrates after dismissing India's captain Virat Kohli on the first day of the third Test at Leeds, UK, on Wednesday (AFP)

week. England, by contrast, recalled Overton after Wood joined fellow quicks Broad, Jofra Archer and Ollie Stone on the sidelines.

Kohli won the toss and despite the overcast conditions that promised to aid Anderson, decided to bat.

Sensational start

But India, having seen Rahul and Rohit share a century opening stand at Lord's, were 1-1 off the fifth ball of the day.

Rahul, fresh from his 129 at the 'home of cricket', fell for a duck when he edged a booming drive to give wicketkeeper Jos Buttler the first of five catches in the innings.

The often gritty Pujara lasted just nine balls for one, undone by

a superb Anderson delivery that both swung away and seamed.

Anderson and Kohli had exchanged angry words at Lord's after the England tailender had been subjected to a bouncer barrage from Jasprit Bumrah.

But there was little time for any more 'sledging' as Kohli, without a Test hundred in two years and averaging just 23 since January 2020, fell for seven when he tried to drive an Anderson ball he might have defended to give Buttler another catch. Anderson, already the most successful fast bowler in Test history, now has 629 wickets at this level.

Rohit who made a fine 83 at Lord's, fell when he mishooked a looping bouncer from Overton to Ollie Robinson at mid-on. Next



England's Haseeb Hameed (L) celebrates his half-century with his teammate Rory Burns on the first day of the third Test against India on Wednesday

ball India were 67 for seven when Mohammed Shami, who made a Test-best 56 at Lord's, was out for a duck when he

edged to Burns in the slips.

Left-arm swing bowler Curran then had Ravindra Jadeja and Bumrah lbw with successive

INDIA'S LOWEST

TEST-INNINGS TOTALS

36 vs Australia, Adelaide 2020
42 vs England, Lord's 1974
58 vs Australia, Brisbane, 1947
58 vs England, Manchester, 1952
66 vs South Africa, Durban 1996
67 vs Australia, Melbourne 1948
75 vs West Indies, Delhi 1987
76 vs South Africa, Ahmedabad 2008
78 vs England, Leeds 2021

SCOREBOARD

INDIA 1st INNINGS

Rohit Sharma	c Robinson b Overton	19
KL Rahul	c Buttler b Anderson	0
C Pujara	c Buttler b Anderson	1
V Kohli	c Buttler b Anderson	7
A Rahane	c Buttler b Robinson	18
R Pant	c Buttler b Robinson	2
R Jadeja	lbw b Curran	4
M Shami	c Burns b Overton	0
Ishant Sharma	not out	8
J Bumrah	lbw b Curran	0
M Siraj	c Root b Overton	3
Extras:	(lb 11, nb 5)	16

TOTAL: 78 in 40.4 overs

Fall of wickets 1-1, 2-4, 3-21, 4-56, 5-58, 6-67, 7-67, 8-67, 9-67, 10-78

Bowling: J Anderson 8-5-6-3, O Robinson 10-3-16-2, S Curran 10-2-27-2, Moeen Ali 2-0-4-0, C Overton 10-4-5-14-3

ENGLAND 1st INNINGS

R Burns	not out	52
H Hameed	not out	60
Extras:	(b 4, nb 3, w 1)	8

TOTAL: 120 for no loss in 42 overs

Bowling: Ishant Sharma 7-0-26-0, J Bumrah 12-5-19-0, M Shami 11-2-39-0, M Siraj 7-1-26-0, R Jadeja 5-3-6-0

deliveries. Ishant Sharma conceded nine runs in his first over, more than Anderson gave up in his spell.

Hameed had managed just nine runs in total at Lord's - his first Test in five years following injuries and a career-threatening loss of form that saw him move from his native Lancashire to Nottinghamshire.

But, cutting strongly, he completed a 110-ball fifty - his third in Tests, with a tenth four although the edge off Bumrah was dropped by a diving Rohit at second slip.

Burns, who had pulled Mohammed Siraj for six, followed up with a 123-ball fifty to the delight of a raucous and sun-drenched crowd.

AFP

FIFA to be given \$201mn after corruption probe



FIFA president Gianni Infantino welcomed the decision

Paris, France - The US Department of Justice has agreed to hand FIFA US\$201mn confiscated from corrupt football administrators, the governing body of world football announced on Tuesday.

Most of the cash comes from US legal actions in the wake of the 'FIFAgate' scandal, which erupted in May 2015 with the dramatic arrest of seven world football executives in Zurich and led a few months later to the departure of Sepp Blatter, FIFA's president since 1998. "This money was seized from the bank accounts of former officials who were involved in, and then prosecuted for, years of corruption schemes

in football," said FIFA in a statement on its website.

It said it had set up a 'World Football Remission Fund' under the supervision of the FIFA foundation to use the money 'to help finance football-related projects with positive community impact across the globe'.

Gianni Infantino, who replaced Blatter at the head of FIFA welcomed the deal. "I am delighted to see that money which was illegally siphoned out of football is now coming back to be used for its proper purposes, as it should have been in the first place," Infantino said.

"It's great to see significant funding being put at the disposal of the FIFA Foundation, which

can positively impact so many people across the football world, especially through youth and community programmes."

The cases prosecuted in the US centered on bribes and 'rackeeteering' organised by football officials in South and Central America in exchange for the awarding of TV broadcasting rights for competitions, including the Copa America.

They resulted in the sentencing of Paraguayan Juan Angel Napout, a former president of South American football's governing body CONMEBOL, to nine years in prison and Brazilian Jose Maria Marin, former head of the Brazilian Football Federation, to four years in prison.

A significant slice of cash will be funneled into South American football. CONMEBOL said it would be receiving US\$71mn in recovered funds.

The funds 'are being returned to CONMEBOL because it was a victim of the criminal scheme underlying the FIFAgate investigation,' the governing body said in a statement.

The US justice system continues to investigate world football, particularly the awarding of the 2022 World Cup to Qatar and suspicions of vote buying.

AFP



A file photo of Oman sailors during a regatta

Oman sailors for Marina Militare Nastro Rosa Tour

Muscat - Five Oman Sail sailors will participate in the Marina Militare Nastro Rosa Tour 2021, which will be held in port cities along the Italian coast from August 26-September 20 ahead of their participation in the Star Sailors League Finals.

The Omani sailors will take part in the first six of the eight stages before joining their teammates in Switzerland to train for the Star Sailors League Finals, which will be held from September 21-October 4.

The team comprises skipper Nasser al Mashari, Hussain al Jabri, Ali al Balushi, Haitham al Wahaibi and Akram al Wahaibi. The quintet will take part in races in Genova, Rome, Gaeta, Naples, Brindisi and Bari.

Oman will field a 12-member team for the Stars Sailors League Finals, which will compete against professional teams from around the world for the Sir Roland Symonette Trophy in the first major international tournament for Oman's elite

sailors since March last year.

Mashari said, "We are all eager to get back on the water and take every opportunity we can to learn, train and compete. The Nastro Rosa Tour is a great chance to gain experience on the DIAM 24 ahead of Sailing Arabia-The Tour later this year (November 24-December 5), assess our performance and test ourselves against some very experienced sailors, both in Italy and at the Star Sailors League in Switzerland."

QUICK RUN

Oman vs Mumbai matches to be streamed live: OC

Oman Cricket (OC) on Wednesday announced that six of Oman's upcoming matches against the visiting Mumbai team will be streamed live on different platforms, in partnership with ITW Consulting. Mumbai, India's domestic cricket giants, are currently on a tour to Oman and played their first of the three T20 games on Tuesday. The remaining two T20 games and four 50-over games will be streamed live with the second T20 to be played on Thursday. The other matches will be played from August 27-September 3. The live streaming will be available on Fan Code in India; Geo Super in Pakistan and CricLife in UAE. OC chairman Pankaj Khimji said, "The live streaming will give the Oman Cricket an opportunity to reach widespread audience and encourage the players for the upcoming season. In association the ITW Consulting, we believe in accelerating the recognition cricketers received by broadcasting the game." Richard Saldanha, Head of New Initiative, ITW Consulting MEA, said, "We are delighted to partner with Oman Cricket and start a new journey in bringing Oman Cricket matches to viewers regionally as well as internationally."

Real Madrid make \$188mn bid for PSG's Mbappe

Real Madrid have offered US\$188mn to Paris Saint-Germain (PSG) for France World Cup winner Kylian Mbappe, French and Spanish media reported on Wednesday. According to outlets *L'Equipe* and *Le Parisien* the Ligue 1 club have rejected the proposal for 22-year-old Mbappe, whose contract at the Parc de Princes expires next June. PSG paid US\$211mn to Monaco for the forward in 2017 and are keen for him to sign a new deal.After the arrival of Lionel Messi in Paris earlier this month club president Nasser al Khelaifi said Mbappe 'has no reason to do anything else' but stay. Mbappe has made three appearances so far this term with Messi expected to make his PSG debut on Sunday.

Kane confirms he will remain at Tottenham

Harry Kane announced on Wednesday he will remain at Tottenham this season, ending speculation over his future with Manchester City interested in the England captain. Kane had made clear his desire to leave his boyhood club in the quest to end his wait for the first trophy of his career. However, the 28-year-old was warmly welcomed back by the Tottenham support as he made his first appearance of the season as a substitute in a 1-0 win at Wolves last weekend. "It was incredible to see the reception from the Spurs fans on Sunday and to read some of the messages of support I've had in the last few weeks," he posted on Twitter. "I will be staying at Tottenham this summer and will be 100% focused on helping the team achieve success." Kane is club's second top goalscorer in history with 221, just 45 off the record held by Jimmy Graves.

Agencies