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Stricter measures ahead

NIGHT MOVEMENT BAN FROM 5PM TO 4AM FROM JULY 16

TOTAL LOCKDOWN DURING EID AL ADHA HOLIDAYS

Our Correspondent
Muscat

The Supreme Committee tasked with tackling the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic has issued a number of decisions including imposition of an all-day ban on individual and vehicle movement and closure of commercial activities in the three days of Eid al Adha (Dhul Hijja 10 to 12).

The committee has also decided to extend the duration of the closure of commercial activities and ban on individual and vehicle movement from 5pm to 4am, effective from July 16 to July 31.

Musandam Governorate is exempted from the closure of commercial activities and movement ban from immediate effect. However, entry to the governorate will be allowed only to those who have received at least one dose of vaccine. Visitors from outside the sultanate

must have received two doses.

The Supreme Committee has also decided to remove Egypt from the list of countries from which arrivals are banned. Singapore, Indonesia, Iraq, Iran, Tunisia, Libya, Argentina, Colombia and Brunei Darussalam have been added to the travel-ban list. Anyone passing through these countries in the 14 days before their travel to Oman are also banned.

Additionally, the committee decided to close all land ports, wedding halls, and suspend events, sports activities, exhibitions and conferences.

To cater to tourists during the Khareef season in Dhofar, citizens and residents (aged 18 years and older) who have received at least one dose of COVID-19 vaccine which is approved in the sultanate can enter the governorate from 5pm on July 9.

Continued on Page 02

HM issues Royal Decree

Muscat - His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik issued Royal Decree No 49/2021 on Tuesday, shifting the Education Museum of Al Saiidiya School from the Ministry of Education to the National Museum.

Article 1 transfers Al Saiidiya School's Education Museum with its existing organisational structure from the Ministry of Education to the National Museum.

Article 2 stipulates that all allocations, origins, rights, obligations and assets of Al Saiidiya School's Education Museum will be trans-

ferred from the Ministry of Education to the National Museum.

Article 3 transfers to the National Museum all employees of Al Saiidiya School's Education Museum, along with the employees' existing job status and financial allocations.

Article 4 cancels all that contradicts this decree or contravenes its provisions.

Article 5 states that this decree will be published in the Official Gazette and enforced on its date of issue.

ONA

SC MEMBERS MONITOR VACCINE DRIVE



Members of the Supreme Committee (SC) tasked with tackling the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic visited Oman Convention and Exhibition Centre on Tuesday to monitor the ongoing nationwide vaccination drive. On Tuesday, the daily case count was 1,824, while the number of deaths was 23, the lowest daily death count since June 14 when 19 deaths were reported (Supplied photo)

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In focus: Humanitarian crisis in Yemen

Our Correspondent
Muscat

The humanitarian crisis in Yemen was in focus when H E Sayyid Badr bin Hamad al-Busaidi, Foreign Minister, received Peter Maurer, president, International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), on Tuesday in Muscat.

During the meeting, the current humanitarian situation in Yemen and the efforts made by all parties to end the conflict and alleviate the suffering of the Yemeni people were reviewed.

Views were also exchanged on various regional and international developments of common interests.

Maurer thanked the sultanate for its support to the humanitarian operations carried out by the ICRC, while H E Sayyid Badr stressed Oman's keenness to



(Supplied photo)

Thousands of civilians have lost their lives and property. Yemen is facing the world's largest food security emergency, leaving nearly 20mn people – representing 66 per cent of the country's population – in need of humanitarian assistance

continue cooperation with the ICRC and its interest in humanitarian issues within the political and diplomatic efforts to find peaceful solutions to issues

and conflicts.

"Fruitful discussion regarding the humanitarian situation in Yemen and regional issues," tweeted H E Sayyid Badr.

"Oman's continued support for humanitarian needs worldwide remains vital. Thank you, Your Excellency Sayyid Badr for the open and constructive discussion," tweeted Maurer.

The meeting was attended by Jamila Hammami, representative of ICRC, and a number of officials in the ministry.

Maurer was in Yemen in the last few days.

"I've just arrived in Yemen for a six-day visit to Aden and Sana'a to speak with authorities and meet with communities. No part of Yemenis' lives has been left unscarred by the conflict. They are exhausted and cruelly exposed to food and water shortages, disease and poverty," he

tweeted on June 30.

During his visit to Yemen he spoke to Maeen Abdulmalik Saeed, Yemeni prime minister "on the urgent humanitarian challenges in Yemen and the work of ICRC".

According to ICRC, the conflict in Yemen is entering its sixth year, making it the world's biggest humanitarian crisis.

"Thousands of civilians have lost their lives and property. Nearly 4mn people have been forced to flee to safer places across the country. Essential services have almost collapsed, leaving millions of people in Yemen vulnerable to a humanitarian crisis. Yemen is facing the world's largest food security emergency, leaving nearly 20mn people – representing 66 per cent of the country's population – in need of humanitarian assistance," stated ICRC.

Initiative launched to provide 4,800 jobs

Our Correspondent
Muscat

In a move to provide better employment opportunities, the Oman Investment Authority (OIA), in cooperation with the Ministry of Labour, launched an initiative to provide more than 4,800 jobs and training opportunities this year.

In a statement, OIA said, "The initiative will create more than 4,800 jobs and training opportunities for jobseekers in the companies owned by the authority. The initiative will be implemented in three phases during the year 2021."

The initiative aims to provide direct jobs and training opportunities coupled with on-the-job training opportunities to develop

skills in different specialisations. The initiative targets graduates of general education diploma, bachelor's and master's degrees, those who have been laid off from work and those without a general education diploma.

The candidates' family income, social status and work location will be taken into consideration when selected.

The companies owned by the authority include Oman India Fertiliser Company (Omifco), Nama Group, OICT Group, OQ, Asyad Group, Omran Group, Oman LNG, Omantel, Oman Air, Oman Food Investment Holding Company, Abraj Energy Services, Oman Housing Bank, Fisheries Development Oman, Oman Airports, Oman Development Bank, Majan Glass, Asaas and Takatuf.

First Dusit brand hotel opens in Jebel Akhdar

Our Correspondent
Muscat

Oman Tourism Development Company (Omran Group) announced that Dusit International, one of Thailand's leading hotel and property development companies, has opened the first Dusit-branded hotel in Oman with the soft-launch of dusitD2 Naseem Resort, Jebel Akhdar.

Owned by Omran Group, the executive arm of the sultanate for tourism development, the deluxe resort is located within a 8,000sqm Adventure Park on the Saiq Plateau in the Jebel Akhdar area, just a five-minute drive from the 'Grand Canyon of the Middle East'.

Comprising 252 rooms and suites, the contemporary resort embraces its unique mountain location with a spacious layout



(Supplied photo)

that blends seamlessly with its stunning natural surrounds.

Hashil bin Obaid al-Mahrouqi, CEO of Omran Group, said, "The soft opening of the resort is an important step that solidifies Omran Group's steadfast tourism development journey

across the country, while reflecting our continued determination towards building a sustainable future for the sector, and stimulating investments in the most prominent tourist spots of the sultanate."

He added, "dusitD2 Naseem

Resort will provide tourism experiences that go beyond hotel accommodation and focus on a whole new tourism offering that combines the elements of adventure tourism and entertainment, therefore diversifying into wider market segments and

opening up new horizons for similar projects in the sultanate."

The Adventure Park, slated to open later in the year, will feature activities for visitors of all ages, such as zip-line rides offering views of the surrounding valley.

"We are delighted to make our Oman debut with this vibrant resort which showcases the heritage, culture and visual splendour of the destination in truly distinctive fashion," said Suphaje Suthumpun, group CEO, Dusit International.

"From enriching wellness experiences and exciting dining journeys to adventurous excursions and a wide range of exhilarating activities, dusitD2 Naseem Resort, Jebel Akhdar has all the elements in place to provide a highly memorable vacation for visitors of all ages."

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SAYYID THEYAZIN RECEIVES SAUDI AMBASSADOR



H H Sayyid Theyazin bin Haitham al-Said, Minister of Culture, Sports and Youth, received in his office on Tuesday H E Abdullah Saud al-Anzi, Ambassador of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia to the sultanate. The meeting reviewed the relations between the two brotherly countries and exchanged views on means of developing these for the interest of the two sides. The meeting also discussed aspects of the existing cooperation in areas related to culture, sports and youth (ONA)

Oman Arab Bank updates MSX on RO6mn embezzlement case

Our Correspondent
Muscat

Oman Arab Bank (OAB) filed an update on Tuesday in relation to its earlier disclosure to the Muscat Stock Exchange (MSX) on December 22, 2020, on a criminal complaint related to a suspected forgery and embezzlement of approximately RO6mn.

The bank said in a statement that 'it has received communication from the loss adjuster that the reinsurers have confirmed

that the policy liability in principle for the amount mentioned above has been claimed'.

OAB added, 'The bank would also like to inform that it is continuing to follow up the case with the public prosecutor, in order to preserve the rights of the bank and its shareholders, legally and financially.'

OAB had notified MSX on December 22 that it had been hit by an embezzlement to the tune of RO6mn. The bank said it had filed a complaint with ROP, while

reassuring its customers that 'this occurrence will not have any impact on them'.

In a disclosure on MSX, the bank stated, 'In furtherance to Article 291 and subsequent articles of Capital Market Executive Regulation issued by virtue of Capital Market Authority Decision No 1/2009 as amended, the bank hereby states that it has filed a criminal complaint at Royal Oman Police for suspicion of forgery and embezzlement of approximately RO6,000,000.'

Stricter measures from July 16

Continued from Page 01

'Foreigners who have received two doses of approved vaccines will be allowed to enter the Dhofar. Hotels and furnished apartment facilities in the governorate will not exceed 50 per cent of their capacity, in addition to the necessity of strict adherence to all precautionary controls,' the Supreme Committee said.

The Governorate of Musandam has been excluded from the closure decision due to a small number of inpatients in hospitals suffering from COVID-19.

Vaccines safe for kidney patients, say doctors

Our Correspondent
Muscat

Even as the number of people vaccinated in the sultanate crossed the 1mn mark, the medical fraternity has called on all members of society to get immunised at the earliest.

According to the Ministry of Health (MoH), a total of 1,096,838 individuals have been vaccinated in the country.

Speaking to *Muscat Daily*, Dr Hamed al Sinawi, senior consultant in the Department of Behavioural Medicine at Sultan Qaboos University Hospital, said, "Coronavirus still poses a real danger to the health of individuals, especially with the emergence of new strains that are considered more dangerous and more widespread. So parents should continue to remind children of the need to follow health instructions and avoid crowded places."

He said it is "unfortunate" that some adolescents and young people follow social media sites that spread misinformation about the coronavirus and COVID-19.

"These ideas can influence the



Most countries of the world passed through this difficult stage and got over it with vaccinations and commitment to safety

DR HAMAD
AL KALBANI

behaviour of young people, so it is necessary to engage them in dialogue, know their opinions, and correct these opinions with argument and proof," Dr Sinawi said.

Addressing concerns of kidney patients regarding vaccina-



tion, Dr Faisal al Ismaili, consultant nephrologist at The Royal Hospital, said, "COVID-19 vaccines are safe and effective for

kidney patients who are undergoing dialysis. Vaccines are also safe for kidney transplant patients. I urge everyone to get vac-

cinated to reduce the spread of COVID-19."

According to Dr Hamad bin Khalifa al Kalbani, resident physi-

cian in the Cardiac Surgery Department at Sorbonne University, Paris, the turnout of people at vaccination centres is indica-

tive of the fact that Oman will be "safe from the danger of the virus".

"Lately, Oman recorded a death approximately every 30 minutes. But most countries of the world passed through this difficult stage and got over it with vaccinations and commitment to safety. France recorded 700 deaths daily, and only 17 on July 4.

"On July 4, Muscat Governorate alone vaccinated approximately 8,500 people. I thank the medical staff, the Ministry of Health, and the citizens and residents for their willingness to take the vaccine. It shows their responsibility towards themselves, their community and Oman. May God protect everyone from all evil," Dr Kalbani said.

Meanwhile, MoH began vaccinating a new target group - 18 years and older - in all governorates on July 4.

According to the ministry, 3.2mn more doses of vaccines will arrive this month. Those eligible for vaccination need to register through the Tarassud+ app or covid19.moh.gov.om in advance.

MIDDAY SIESTA



Ramesh speaks with his family during his midday break. Earlier, he called home once a week but with affordable Internet data now available, he can call everyday. Ramesh spends RO2 for 1GB data for a month. The mandatory midday break between 12.30pm to 3.30pm observed in the months of June, July and August for all outdoor workers also allows others like Ramesh the time to stay in touch with their families (Syed Fasiuddin)

Labour ministry conducts tests for 1,003 job openings

Muscat - A new set of jobseekers started taking written tests at colleges of the University of Technology and Applied Sciences (UTAS) on Tuesday. The candidates are vying for employment opportunities in the public sector.

Saif Sulaiman al Shaqsi, head of the Department of Job Vacancies and Announcements Section in the Ministry of Labour, informed that the ministry notified 17,525 jobseekers to take the test for 1,003 job openings in nine government departments - the Ministry of Health, Ministry of Education, Directorate General of the Council of Ministers, Ministry of Information, Ministry of Housing and Urban Planning, Ministry of Labour, Ministry of Economy, Ministry of Higher Education, Research and Innovation, and the State Audit Institution.

According to Shaqsi, the tests on Tuesday were conducted smoothly owing to the presence of a large number of experienced supervisory staff. UTAS facilities are ideal to conduct such tests in accordance with COVID-19 pre-



cautionary measures.

"The jobseekers, from all governorates of the sultanate, are distributed depending on capacity of each college so that all candidates can be accommodated. They will be received in sets of 600 each day over a period of three days from 8.30am to 2 pm. The tests are of 30-minute duration, followed by 40 minutes of sorting and announcement of re-

sults, after which a new group enters the exam hall," Shaqsi said.

Elaborating on the evaluation pattern, Shaqsi said each test consists of 30 questions, of which 20 are based on specialisation, five on mental abilities and five on general knowledge.

As many as 83,038 aspirants applied after the jobs were announced.

ONA

Institutional quarantine waived for vaccinated passengers from Oman to Bangladesh

Muscat - Vaccinated passengers travelling to Bangladesh are now exempted from institutional quarantine but must observe strict 14-day home quarantine. Those not inoculated need to complete a mandatory 14-day self-paid institutional quarantine at government approved hotels.

An earlier circular dated June 1, 2021, mandated three-day self-paid institutional quarantine for passengers from Oman and Kuwait. Passengers from Belgium, Chili, Colombia, Costa Rica, Denmark and Greece were al-



lowed entry into Bangladesh provided they undergo a 14-day self-paid institutional quarantine.

A circular dated July 5 now exempts fully vaccinated passen-

gers from 12 countries - Argentina, Brazil, Colombia, Costa Rica, Georgia, Kuwait, Malaysia, Maldives, Oman, UAE, UK, and Uruguay - from mandatory institutional quarantine.

Commenting on the new regulations, Anfal MP of World Air Travels and Tours said, "It is good news for Bangladeshi nationals. They need to pay only for tickets. Cost of hotel quarantine is a burden for almost all travellers."

But Anfal noted that most passengers are younger than 45 and have got only a single dose of

vaccine. "They will have to either wait till they get the second dose or pay for 14 days mandatory institutional quarantine which is an addition of around RO100 to ticket costs."

S J Mohammed, a supermarket supervisor, welcomed the new regulations even though he's only taken one dose and eagerly awaiting the second. "Home quarantine is better than institutional quarantine any day. Besides saving money, it's also safer at home."

(Text and photo by Syed Fasiuddin)

Widespread power outage reported in Dhofar

Our Correspondent
Muscat

Widespread power outage was reported in Dhofar on Tuesday due to an interruption in gas supply to the power generation station.

The Dhofar Integrated Services Company (DISC) issued a statement regarding the inter-

ruption in the main network feeding the governorate.

'Emergency teams of engineers and technicians are taking necessary action,' it stated

According to the Authority for Public Services Regulation, preliminary data indicates that the reason for the outage was an interruption in gas supply to the power gen-

eration station.

The power outage was reported around noon. By evening, electricity supply was being restored gradually across different areas of the governorate.

DISC stated that the toll-free number 80077700 should be called in the event of any emergency.




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EA plants 1,000 mangrove saplings in Dhofar campaign



Our Correspondent
Muscat

The Environment Authority (EA) on Tuesday planted 1,000 mangrove saplings in Dhofar governorate as part of its project to cover the country's coastline with 1mn mangrove trees.

The mangrove plantation campaign was conducted in Khor Fagara in Al Shwaimiya area in the wilayat of Shaleem and Halaniyat Islands.

The EA said the campaign carried out by the Environment Department in Dhofar governorate was in support of its efforts to preserve and protect

environmental systems and rehabilitate degraded lands.

According to the EA, several efforts, including the implementation of the national initiative to plant 10mn trees, were being made to achieve protection and sustainability of vegetation and environmental cover across the sultanate.

'Mangroves are considered to have great benefits in maintaining the ecological balance and preserving beaches from erosion and helping the growth of commercially valuable fish and other marine creatures in addition to being landscaped areas,' the EA stated.

The plantation programme was part of a project which started in 2001 and aims to plant 1mn seedlings of mangrove trees on sultanate's coasts within 20 years, the EA said.

The authority has already planted over 680,000 saplings in 30 khors in various coastal areas since then.

In January 2020, the EA in co-operation with Petroleum Development Oman (PDO) launched an initiative to plant 10mn wild tree saplings in the next ten years. The authority said the wild tree species will include ghafl, al samar and sidr, for which nurseries are being set up.

OPINION

SALEH MIRI, MUSCAT DAILY COLUMNIST, IS AN ARCHITECT WHO CAME TO OMAN IN THE EARLY 1980S



Being away from present reality is the way to live in the Middle East - people are surfing between the past and the future... Intellectual honesty requires striving to understand the world not as we wish it to be, but as it is

The world had been divided by historians and specialist in geography into the West, the East, the Near East, the Middle East and the Far East, etc.

The term 'Middle East' may have originated in the 1850s in the British India Office. However, it became more widely known when American naval strategist Alfred Thayer Mahan used the term in 1907 to 'designate the area between Arabia and India'.

The Balkans were designated together with the Ottoman Empire as the Near East and the countries located between Egypt and India would be referred to as 'Middle East'.

In past history, Europe started only to exist as an important location with the Greek Empire and then the Roman Empire and today's European Union since 1958. People's behaviour and way of thinking in Europe is in its majority based on a present view. (The Carpe diem concept) - Enjoy and live with the present.

In the Far East and the development of China as a superpower and the most populated country, the vision has been modified whereby the future is seen with a 30-40 year future approach. With such a large population there seems to be no other choice than long-term planning option.

In the Middle East however things are totally different. People live either in the past, constantly reminding themselves of a past which has vanished since ages, or referring to a dreamy future which exists only in their minds. Being away from present reality is the way to live in the Middle East - people are surfing between the past and the future. It is not just religion which influences the attitude of the citizens in the Middle East, but a philosophical way of being, reciting poems, which they know by heart and which are used to substantiate arguments.

Intellectual honesty requires striving to understand the world not as we wish it to be, but

as it is. The West believes in this approach.

Omar Khayyam said, "Living Life Tomorrow's fate, though thou be wise, Thou canst not tell nor yet surmise; Pass, therefore, not today in vain, for it will never come again." This perception makes the vision either sad or become an unreal world. Khayyam wrote, "All has already been written on the tablet and the pen remains silent- Crazy those who fight and crazier the one who mourns his defeat."

Khalil Gibran wrote, "Our anxiety does not come from thinking about the future, but wanting to control it."

Rumi said, "Yesterday I was clever, so I wanted to change the world. Today I am wise, so I am changing myself."

Consequently, the entire political, social and even economy in the region gets affected by the vision of its future. So, we present it as prettier than today, but meanwhile, we forget today, which is the basis of tomorrow.

MIDDLE EAST'S FUTURE

Many countries in the Middle East have tremendous ideas on the future of their countries, but fail to see what is making problems

presently. In modern history with the development of the oil industry in the early 1910, the entire economy of the region was changed and very few alternatives were considered, imagining that this wealth would last forever. No we have started to witness the need to identify other sources of revenues based on other existing wealth in the region, which is not an easy task, because the education of the people did not prepare for such changes and encourage the citizens to be creative by themselves.

The Middle East, once the heart of civilisation, has gradually lost its values and attractiveness, because it forgot to build on its past, rather showing off its past achievements. Unless a more down-to-earth assessment of its potential is made, the future will not be very shiny. The clock is ticking. We hope that after the pandemic the thinking will start to change.

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

ROP arrests two for human trafficking

Our Correspondent
Muscat

The Royal Oman Police (ROP) on Tuesday said that the Department of Criminal Investigations

arrested two Asian expatriates on charges of human trafficking.

A statement issued by the ROP said, 'The accused lured some domestic workers with a promise of jobs with attractive

salaries and helped them escape their employers. They were later forced into prostitution. The accused have been arrested and legal action has been taken against them.'

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MUSCAT DAILY



Oman, Northern Cyprus business meet held

Our Correspondent
Muscat

As part of its efforts to attract foreign investment, the Oman Chamber of Commerce and Industry (OCCI) hosted a virtual business forum with the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus.

The Omani side was chaired by Eng Redha bin Juma al Saleh, chairman of the chamber's Board of Directors, while the Cypriot side was chaired by Turgay Deniz, president of the Cyprus Turkish Chamber of Commerce (KTTO), and Ali Kamasoglu, president of the Turkish Cypriot Chamber of Industry.

The meeting aimed to enhance communication and economic and commercial cooperation with the Turkish Re-

public of Northern Cyprus, develop trade relations between the two countries, review and exchange experiences and discuss creating trade and economic partnerships.

"The meeting also aimed to see investment opportunities and create more commercial and economic partnerships in the targeted sectors such as steel, mining, food, agriculture, building materials and higher education, in addition to introducing the Omani markets and discovering commercial and investment opportunities," Saleh said.

"The meeting is an important opportunity to open new channels and effective trade opportunities to increase the rates of intra-trade between the two sides," he added.

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Oman crude price hits 2018 peak as OPEC+ impasse continues

US benchmark oil price jumps to seven-year high at \$77 per barrel

Our Correspondent
Muscat

The price of Oman crude struck a 2018 pinnacle crossing US\$76 per barrel on Tuesday after OPEC+ oil producing countries failed to agree on lifting crude output despite improving demand due to global economic recovery.

Oman crude oil contract price (for September delivery) rose 1.8 per cent to hit US\$76.09 per barrel at the Dubai Mercantile Exchange on Tuesday, a level last seen in October 2018.

US oil benchmark West Tax Intermediate (WTI) rose to its highest level in nearly seven years, sparking fresh inflationary fears. WTI crude for August delivery hit US\$76.98 per barrel, a level last seen in November 2014.

The price of Brent crude advanced to a November 2018 peak at US\$77.84 in London.

According to a DME statement, the average price of Oman crude (for July delivery) has stabilized at US\$66.40 per barrel,



which is US\$3.30 per barrel higher than the average price for June delivery.

The OPEC+ group on Monday cancelled a planned meeting that was supposed to overcome an impasse between the United Arab Emirates and other members on how to lift output. No new date has been set.

"Oil advanced...as OPEC+

abandoned its July meeting, after the UAE stood its ground over production increases," Markets.com analyst Neil Wilson told AFP.

"The failure to agree to increasing production in August and beyond leaves the market even more in deficit than before, so WTI spiked to a near seven-year peak this morning close to

US\$77," he said.

Oil producing nations have slowly lifted output in recent months after turning the taps down last year in response to a collapse in prices caused by coronavirus lockdowns.

With demand rocketing on the back of the global rebound officials had planned to hike output each month by 400,000

barrels a day from August to December.

However, no new supplies will be forthcoming.

The breakdown of talks between OPEC and other key crude nations raised the possibility of oil hitting US\$100 – a level also not seen since 2014.

"Some speculators believe that given the strong economic recovery that we are experiencing around the globe, it may not be a surprise if Brent oil comes close to US\$100," said AvaTrade analyst Naeem Aslam.

The spike in oil prices has reignited fears about strong global inflation, which could force central banks to hike interest rates earlier than thought – and potentially derail the post-pandemic recovery.

Rallying commodity prices have already played a key role in rebounding consumer prices in recent months.

"Surging oil prices are not good news for the global economic recovery," said OANDA analyst Sophie Griffiths. (With inputs from AFP)



CBO issues RO146mn worth of treasury bills

Our Correspondent
Muscat

The Central Bank of Oman (CBO) on Tuesday issued a tender of the government treasury bills (issue number 121). Total value of the allotted treasury bills amounted to RO146mn, for a maturity period of 28 days, from July 7, 2021 until August 4, 2021.

The average accepted price reached RO99.950 for every RO100 worth of treasury bill, while the minimum accepted price also arrived at RO99.950, according to a statement issued by the CBO.

The average discount rate and average yield reached 0.6517 per cent and 0.6521 per cent, respectively. The interest rate on the repo operations with the CBO is 0.5 per cent, while the discount rate on the treasury bills

discounting facility with the central bank is 0.75 per cent.

The government treasury bills are short-term highly secured financial instruments issued by the Ministry of Finance.

This instrument provides licensed commercial banks the opportunity to invest their surplus funds.

The Central Bank of Oman acts as the issue manager for the treasury bills issuance and provides the added advantage of ready liquidity through its discounting and repurchase facilities. Furthermore, the treasury bills promote the local money market by creating a benchmark yield curve for short-term interest rates.

The government may also resort to this instrument whenever felt necessary for financing its recurrent expenditures.

Dubai's consumer confidence rises to highest since 2011

Dubai, UAE – The second quarter of 2021 saw consumer optimism in Dubai rising to its highest level since 2011, according to the quarterly Consumer Confidence Index of Dubai's Department of Economic Development (Dubai Economy).

Consumer confidence rose to 151 points in the second quarter of 2021, a marked increase from 125 points recorded in the same period last year and the 145 points in the first quarter of this year.

Mohammed Ali Rashid Lootah, CEO of commercial compliance and protection sector at Dubai Economy, said, "The latest Consumer Confidence Index, which shows remarkable improvements in consumer per-

ceptions in Dubai during the second quarter of this year, reflects the growing momentum of broader economic recovery."

"For example, 75 per cent of consumers were positive on jobs, compared to 32 per cent in the same period in 2020. Besides, 91 per cent of consumers were also optimistic of finding a job in the next 12 months, compared to 75 per cent in the same period last year. Among those confident of finding a job, 81 per cent fall in the 40-49 age group," he said.

Consumers were also positive on their current personal financial conditions as 81 per cent of them expressed confidence, compared to 57 per cent in the same period in 2020.

Those looking forward to im-

provements in their personal finance over the next 12 months constituted 85 per cent in the first quarter of 2021, compared to 73 per cent in the same period of last year. Consumers in the 50-59 age group make up 88 per cent of those optimistic of an improvement in their personal finance.

The index showed that 84 per cent of the consumers had a positive perception on the overall economy in the second quarter, compared to 77 per cent in the same period last year. The recovery seen in tourism and commercial traffic as well as increase in advertisements appeared to be the factors driving positive perceptions on the economy.

WAM

GCC to see 62mn 5G users by 2026

Our Correspondent
Muscat

Oman and other GCC countries are poised to be the region with the second highest 5G penetration by 2026, according to the Ericsson Mobility Report.

Ericsson projects that 5G mobile subscriptions in the GCC, including Oman, will exceed 62mn by the end of 2026, representing about 73 per cent of total mobile subscriptions.

The forecast, which features in the 20th edition of the Ericsson Mobility Report, estimates that 80 per cent of total mobile data traffic in the GCC countries is forecast to be carried by 5G networks in 2026.

New 5G applications and services are expected to have a profound impact on a range of



Abdullah al Balushi

industry verticals.

Abdullah al Balushi, country manager of Ericsson Oman, said, "We believe that digital transformation is key for the overall socio-economic prosperity of all countries.

Promoting technological innovation, such as in Oman Vision 2040, will drive growth of advanced use in Oman as the re-

gion prepares for a post-pandemic world. 5G will bring new capabilities allowing Omani operators to develop innovative applications, services and revenue streams for the enterprise market and beyond."

GCC service providers were among the first in the world to launch 5G, with commercial services available in most of the member states in 2019.

Mobile service providers are using 5G network performance as a key differentiator in a highly competitive market. This is positioning the GCC countries to be second only to North America in 5G subscription penetration by the end of 2026.

Furthermore, over 90 per cent of mobile subscriptions in the region were for mobile broadband at the end of 2020 and this is es-

timated to reach 95 per cent in 2026.

In terms of mobile data, data traffic per smartphone was the highest globally at the end of 2020, exceeding 18GB per month. By the end of the forecast period, it is expected to reach an average of 42GB per month, the report said.

In a business environment infused with initiatives that encourage digitisation, service providers are incentivised to keep up with the latest technologies and meet the projected demand from tech-savvy consumers.

This, Ericsson Mobility Report said, is bringing monetisation opportunities for service providers when it comes to entertainment, lifestyle, tourism, education, and the workplace.

Lebanon's caretaker premier urges donors to 'save' crisis-hit country

Beirut, Lebanon – Lebanon's caretaker premier Hassan Diab on Tuesday urged donors to 'save' the country, despite the fact it has not formal government, as it struggles through a dire economic crisis.

Warning that Lebanon is "just days away from a social explosion," Diab urged the international community to "help save Lebanon from death and prevent Lebanon's demise".

He urged foreign donors to release financial aid even though the multi-confessional country has failed to form a new government in almost 11 months.

"Linking aid to Lebanon with government formation has started to threaten the lives of Lebanese," Diab told a Beirut meeting with foreign envoys.

Withholding funds, he argued, does "not affect the corrupt. Instead it is the Lebanese people who pay a heavy price," he said.

"Save Lebanon before it's too late." Lebanese are grappling with spiralling devaluation and painful shortages as the country plunges deeper into what the World Bank has called one of the world's worst economic crises since the



Lebanon's caretaker premier Hassan Diab (centre) addresses ambassadors and diplomatic representatives in Beirut on Tuesday (AFP)

1850s. The international community has pledged humanitarian aid but conditioned any financial assistance to the cash-strapped interim government on the formation of a new cabinet to launch reforms. But despite international pressure, led by former colonial power France, the deeply divided political elite has been unable to agree on a cabinet line-up for almost 11 months.

Diab stepped down and has served as caretaker premier since the deadly Beirut port ex-

plosion of last August 4, when hundreds of tonnes of ammonium nitrate fertiliser exploded, killing more than 200 people and ravaging swathes of the capital.

The disaster overwhelmed Beirut hospitals in the middle of the novel coronavirus pandemic.

In the months since, the economic crisis that started in the autumn of 2019, sparking mass street protests, has only deepened. The Lebanese pound has lost more than 90 per cent of its value to the dollar on the black

market. Plunging foreign currency reserves have translated into long queues outside petrol stations and imported medicines running out. "Lebanon is passing through a very dark tunnel, and the suffering has reached the point of tragedy," Diab said.

Foreign donors have pledged millions of dollars in aid to the Lebanese people at two international conferences, but stopped short of offering any assistance to the Lebanese state.

AFP

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MSX rises on higher oil prices

Our Correspondent
Muscat

Upward trend at the Muscat Stock Exchange is continuing as global oil prices rose to the highest level since 2014. The benchmark MSX30 Index increased 0.46 per cent on Tuesday to close at 4,121.52 points.

The gains in main index were supported by Financial Index and Services Index which rose 0.61 per cent and 0.59 per cent, respectively. Industrial Index, however, decreased 0.22 per cent. MSX Sharia Index inched up 0.06 per cent to close at 597.05 points.

Trading activity remained weak on Tuesday as volumes decreased 12.8 per cent at 26.23mn shares compared with 30.07mn shares traded on Monday. Market turnover dropped 41.7 per cent to RO3.63mn compared with RO5.77mn in the previous trading session.

Market breadth at the MSX remained



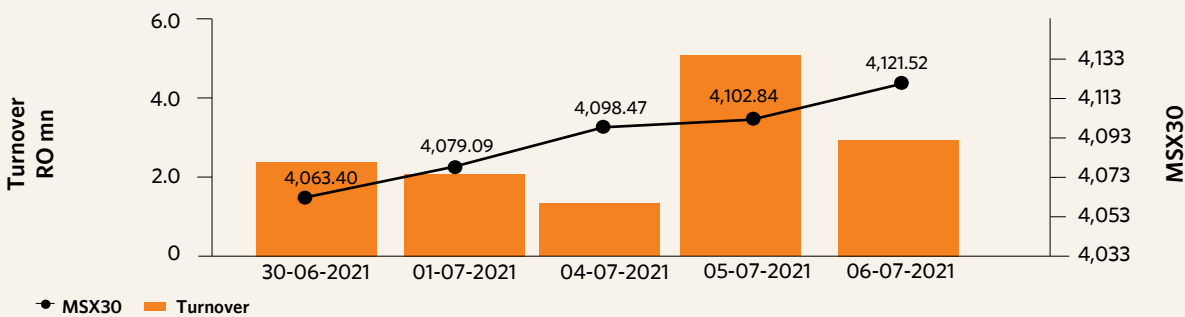
positive with 19 advancing stocks to eight decliners. As many as 20 traded stocks remained flat for the day.

Top gainers were Al Hassan Engineering (25 per cent), Global Investment Holding (5.97 per cent), Oman Investment and Finance Company (5.74 per

cent), Oman and Emirates Investment Holding (4.11 per cent) and Al Sharqiyah Investment (2.89 per cent).

Top losers were Oman Cables Industry (-4.62 per cent), United Finance (-1.61 per cent), Ooredoo (-1.43 per cent) and Oman Qatar Insurance (-1.32 per cent).

MSX INDEX AND TURNOVER OF FIVE TRADING DAYS



China asked ride-hailing giant Didi to delay its New York IPO: Report

Beijing, China - Chinese regulators urged ride-hailing giant Didi Chuxin to delay its US\$4.4bn New York IPO to examine security concerns, advice the company did not heed, according to a report.

Didi was banned from app stores on Sunday by the Cyber-space Administration of China (CAC), and now faces a probe over unspecified national security issues, in a move that stoked fresh concerns about Beijing's crackdown on the country's tech sector.

The watchdog attempted weeks before the bumper initial public offering to dissuade Didi from going ahead with it and urged the firm to launch an internal security probe, the Wall Street Journal reported Monday, citing unnamed sources familiar with the matter.

But the industry giant - dubbed China's Uber, with more than 15mn drivers serving nearly 500mn users - went ahead with last week's listing, which was one of the biggest in the United States for a decade.



This file photo shows a driver using Didi Chuxing app on his smartphone while driving along the street in Beijing (AFP)

Officials were 'wary of the ride-hailing company's troves of data potentially falling into foreign hands' owing to public disclosure around the listing, the Journal's sources said.

Beijing's scrutiny of Didi is the

latest move in a wider crackdown on major US-listed tech firms and was followed hours later by the announcement of a review of truck-hailing platform Full Truck Alliance and the owner of popular online recruit-

ment site Boss Zhipin.

All three platforms were told by the CAC on Monday to stop registering new users 'to prevent security risks to national data, safeguard national security and protect public interest'.

While the CAC gave few details, Didi has pledged to rectify any problems and said the take-down 'may have an adverse impact on its revenue in China'.

The crackdown also comes at a time of heightened tensions between China and the United States, with technology and national security major points of friction.

The timing of the ruling on Didi, coming so soon after the listing, was met with surprise by some.

But Xiaomeng Lu, a senior analyst at political risk consultancy Eurasia Group, told Bloomberg News: "Beijing is not pleased to see its national champions cosy-ing up to foreign stakeholders."

"It also wants tech companies to keep their core assets - data and algorithms - in China."

AFP

China deepens crypto crackdown with central bank warning

Beijing, China - China's central bank warned companies on Tuesday against assisting cryptocurrency-related businesses as it shut down a software firm over suspected involvement in digital currency transactions.

Beijing has turned a sharp eye on cryptocurrency in recent months as it widens its regulatory crackdown on the tech sector.

Cryptocurrency trading is banned in China, and authorities have recently closed mines and warned banks to halt related transactions.

On Tuesday, a Beijing office of the central bank ordered the closure of software company Beijing Qudao Cultural Development, alleging it had been involved in providing software services for cryptocurrency transactions.

The move was necessary 'to prevent and control the risk of speculation in virtual currency transactions, and protect the safety of the public's assets', it said in a statement.

The bank also warned organi-



sations not to 'provide premises, commercial display, advertising... and other services for cryptocur-rency-related business activities'.

Financial and payment institu-tions are instructed not to provide cryptocurrency-related services to customers.

The announcement comes shortly after provinces including Sichuan, Inner Mongolia and Qinghai shut down crypto mines - causing miners to look abroad - and follows an earlier warning

for banks and a payment giant to halt crypto-related transactions.

Last month, bitcoin tumbled after China's mining ban in southwestern Sichuan.

China is in the middle of a wide-ranging regulatory crack-down on its fintech sector, whose biggest players - including Alibaba and Tencent - have been hit with big fines after being accused of monopolistic prac-tices.

AFP

VW, Daimler, Volvo team up to build charging points for trucks

Berlin, Germany - The truck manufacturing units of Volkswagen, Daimler and Volvo announced Monday they will team up to build a network of 1,700 charging points for heavy-duty vehicles in Europe using green electricity. The initial plan fore-sees a US\$600mn investment to drive the five-year project, but the companies said they hoped to bring in additional partners and obtain public funding to build additional charging stations for long-haul trucks and buses using batteries.

The high-performance charging stations will use electricity from renewable sources and be located close to highways as well as at logistic and destination points. They will also be open to all brands of commercial vehicles.

The project will be managed by a joint venture that is planned to begin operations next year.

The companies said they hope the project 'will act as catalyst and enabler for realising the European Union's Green Deal for a carbon-neutral freight trans-



portation by 2050 - both by providing the necessary infrastruc-ture and targeting for green energy at the charging points.'

They pointed to a recent re-port by an industry body that called for the installation of 15,000 high-performance charging points in Europe by 2025 to enable haulers to begin shifting to electric vehicles.

The chief executive of Volkswa-gen's truck unit Traton, Matthias Gruendler, was quoted in a statement as saying 'it is clear that the future of transport is electric'.

He said the initiative was a first step to accelerate the tran-sition to a fossil fuel-free future for the long-haul transport sec-tor.

"The second step should be a strong engagement of the EU for the full scale-up of a charging network across Europe," he added. This is not the first such collaboration between truck and bus manufacturers in Europe.

Daimler and Volvo in March announced a joint venture to de-velop hydrogen fuel cells for heavy trucks.

AFP

Up to 1,500 firms hit in Kaseya ransomware attack

Paris, France - Hundreds of Swedish supermarkets remained shut Tuesday after a major cy-berattack that has crippled hun-dreds of companies worldwide for the past four days, with the perpetrators demanding US\$70mn in bitcoin to undo the damage.

Kaseya, the Miami-based IT company at the centre of the hack, said late Monday that up to 1,500 businesses had been af-fected by Friday's attack, which has been blamed on Russian-speaking hackers.

Experts believe this could be the biggest 'ransomware' attack on record - an increasingly lucra-tive form of digital hostage-tak-ing in which hackers encrypt victims' data and then demand money for restored access.

The Kaseya attack has rico-cheted around the world, affect-ing businesses from pharmacies to gas stations in at least 17

countries, as well as dozens of New Zealand kindergartens.

Most of Sweden's 800 Coop supermarkets were shut for a third day running after the hack paralysed its cash registers.

"Before the end of the day, the hope is that there will be more open stores than closed ones," Coop press officer Tarik Belqaid told broadcaster SVT.

While Kaseya is little known to the public, cybersecurity analysts say it was a ripe target as its software is used by thousands of companies, allowing the hackers to paralyse a huge number of businesses with a single blow.

Kaseya provides IT services to some 40,000 businesses glob-ally, some of whom in turn man-age the computer systems of other businesses.

The hack affected users of its signature VSA software, which is used to manage networks of computers and printers.



A shuttered Coop store is pictured in Stockholm during an ongoing 'colossal' cyberattack affecting firms around the world (AFP)

While Kaseya said Monday that while less than 60 of its own customers were 'directly com-

promised', it estimated that up to '1,500 downstream businesses' had been affected.

Kaseya said it was hoping to bring its own servers back online Tuesday afternoon between

2:00pm and 5:00pm Eastern Time, with a software update re-leased within the following 24 hours to allow customers to re-store their systems.

Going out with a bang?

REvil, a group of Russian-speak-ing hackers who are prolific per-petrators of ransomware attacks, are believed to be behind Friday's assault.

A post on Happy Blog, a site on the dark web associated with the group, claimed responsibility for the attack, saying it had infected 'more than a million sys-tems'.The hackers demanded US\$70mn in bitcoin in exchange for the publication of an online tool that would decrypt the stolen data.

While the hackers are thought to have been reaching out to in-dividual victims requesting smaller payments, the unprece-

dented demand for US\$70mn has surprised analysts.

French cybersecurity expert Robinson Delaugerre suggested that REvil could be treating the Kaseya attack as a final specta-cular act before going out of busi-ness. The group was responsible for around 29 per cent of ran-somware attacks in 2020, ac-cording to IBM's Security X-Force unit, looting an esti-mated US\$123mn.

"Our hypothesis is that REvil is going to disappear and this is its final big act," he told AFP, pre-dicting that the group - which also goes by the name Sodinokibi - could re-emerge under a new name.

The FBI believes REvil was also behind a ransomware attack last month on global meat-pro-cessing giant JBS, which ended up paying US\$11mn to the hack-ers.

AFP

Alizz Islamic Bank's Sharia'a board meets

The Sharia'a Supervisory Board (SSB) of Alizz Islamic Bank recently held its third meeting for the year.

The meeting was led by Sheikh Dr Essam Khalaf al Enezi, chairman of the Sharia'a Supervisory Board. Members of the Board including Sheikh Dr Ahmed Subhi Ahmed Ayadi and Sheikh Nasser bin Yousef Al Azri and the internal Sharia'a auditor Issa al Riyami were present.

The meeting was also attended by Sulaiman al Harthi, CEO of Alizz Islamic Bank, and a number of senior executive management members.

The meeting discussed matters related to the services and

products provided by the bank to various clients.

Harthi gave a presentation on the bank's ongoing activities during the second quarter of this year, and Muhammad Nadeem Aslam - DGM - chief of Wholesale Business & Key Initiatives, gave a visual presentation through which he showcased the performance of the wholesale banking portfolio.

The Sharia'a Supervisory Board reviewed the Sharia'a audit report submitted to them and discussed the observations and took the appropriate decisions.

They also reviewed the Sharia'a audit and compliance

report, which included periodic reviews of transactions, training and awareness activities for Sharia'a management. The Sharia'a Supervisory Board also reviewed several new products that will be launch during the second half of the year.

Alizz Islamic Bank continues to focus heavily on improving its services and products through coordination and continuous meetings between the Sharia'a Supervisory Board and various departments to provide services and products, present and propose possible Sharia'a solutions to the challenges arising from financial transactions in accordance with Sharia'a principles



Sheikh Dr Essam Khalaf al Enezi

and provisions.

It aims to find sound Sharia'a alternatives to violating transactions and correcting them and advising the management concerned with identified

challenges.

The Sharia'a Supervisory Board at Alizz Islamic Bank reviews and studies all Islamic banking products and services launched by the bank.

The board includes in its membership scholars who are distinguished by deep knowledge of Islamic Sharia'a and the jurisprudence of transactions, as well as to spread reassurance among shareholders and depositors whose trust is undoubtedly one of the most important success factors for the bank.

Commenting on the meeting, Issa al Riyami, head of Sharia'a Audit and Compliance Department at Alizz Islamic Bank said,

"The growth of the Islamic banking industry is fueled by the high demand for Sharia'a compliant products.

"This demand is not only among customers and financial experts in the Middle East and Islamic countries, but also from investors and clients all over the world making it a global financial industry."

Riyami added, "In addition to its vast geographical expansion, Islamic banking is witnessing a significant expansion across all sectors of various financial activities, including personal banking, Islamic Takaful insurance and investments in the financial markets. The continuous growth in

the Islamic banking industry is attributed to several factors, including the increase in demand for Islamic banking products, and the growth of attractiveness of Sharia'a-compliant financial services to investors who wish to adhere to "ethical" investment and banking practices.

"The Omani Islamic banking industry is expected to continue its steady growth over the coming years, as reports and opinions of banking experts indicate that the sultanate will witness a growth in sukuk as institutions in the sultanate and the region aspire to raise funds in a manner consistent with the provisions of Islamic Sharia'a."

Meethaq banking solutions help SMEs grow

In line with the bank's vision 'To serve you better, everyday', Meethaq, the pioneer of Islamic banking in Oman from Bank Muscat, has been regularly launching various new products and services for the SME sector. Meethaq's comprehensive suite of SME solutions are designed to empower SMEs to succeed at every stage of their business evolution and grow to their full potential.

Meethaq's Sharia'a-compliant SME solutions are unique and provide support to an important sector of the economy. Meethaq's SME product offerings include working capital finance, term and project finance, contract finance, trade services, currency exchange services and tailored financing solutions for the SMEs based on their business needs. Each Meethaq SME customer is assigned a dedicated Account Relationship Managers with a wealth of experience to provide financial advice and guidance. A brief highlight of Meethaq's key SME solutions are listed below.

Meethaq's Ijarah financing solution allows customers to enjoy the utility and benefits of assets, while Meethaq bears the ownership risks associated with the assets until the end of the financing



tenor. The ownership of the financed asset is transferred to the customer at the maturity of the financing based on requirements, which include the settlement of all liabilities in accordance to the relevant finance documents. The Ijarah financing solution is best suited for financing the purchase of plant machinery, equipment, property and vehicles.

Diminishing Musharaka is another financing solution, which allows customers to purchase assets in partnership with Meethaq. Based on the concept of 'Shirkat al Milk', assets are purchased under the joint ownership of both the customer and Meethaq. Subsequently, Meethaq will lease its ownership in the assets to the customers for

their use under a lease agreement. The share of Meethaq in the Musharaka is on a diminishing basis (i.e The customer from time to time purchases Meethaq's share in the Musharakah through periodical installments in accordance with the relevant finance documents). The gradual reduction of Meethaq's share means a corresponding increase in the share of the customer in the asset, with the entire ownership of the financed asset being transferred to the customer after the final payment.

Other essential solutions offered by Meethaq include bank guarantees to third parties as well as Letters of Credit. These solutions facilitate the import/export

of goods, or win and complete various contracts awarded by ministries, public sector entities and large corporates respectively. Meethaq also offers a Receivable Financing solution to SMEs, which is essentially a financing facility offered against assignment of receivables of a specific contract, for their working capital requirements.

Meethaq's suite of liquidity management solutions allow businesses to manage their excess liquidity efficiently and earn competitive Sharia'a-compliant profits. Liquidity management solutions include the Meethaq Current Account based on the Islamic contract of Qardh Hassan (interest-free loan), Meethaq Call Deposit Account and

Meethaq Fixed Deposits, which are both based on the Islamic concept of a Mudarabah contract between the Rabb al Mal (fund provider) and the manager of funds (Mudarib). In addition, Meethaq also offers Currency Exchange services which SMEs may utilise to buy or sell foreign currencies at competitive rates in a Sharia'a compliant manner.

Meethaq's support for the SME sector is backed by an easy, convenient and quick approval process with minimal documentation. With 24 branches as well as over 40 ATMs and CDMs spread across the sultanate, Meethaq is the leading Islamic financial services provider in the sultanate, catering to the varying needs of individuals as well as corporate customers of all sizes including SMEs.

Every Meethaq product goes through Sharia'a compliance certification by the bank's Sharia'a Supervisory Board and is created in line with the guidelines of the Central Bank of Oman. Meethaq plans to continue expanding its services and products this year.

Please visit <https://www.meethaq.om> or email the SME team at SME@meethaq@bankmuscat.com to know more information about Meethaq Islamic Banking SME.

Schneider Electric to help firms achieve sustainability goals

Schneider Electric has launched a new range of decarbonisation and sustainability consulting services for companies based in Saudi Arabia and the Gulf. These services include the identification of energy efficiency savings, carbon offset programmes, offsite renewable energy sourcing, electric mobility advising, and supply chain optimisation and will provide organisations in the region with a comprehensive range of sustainability services that will ensure they are on track to reduce their environmental footprint, reduce resource costs, and focus on achieving a pathway to net zero carbon dioxide emissions.

Countries across the Gulf have set ambitious targets when it comes to developing greener, more sustainable economies. Oman is one of the Arab world's leaders when it comes to sustainability achievements and goals. The country's Environment Authority has worked to protect and develop the country's environmental sustainability as part of Oman's Vision 2040 plan. Institutions such as Oman Environmental Services Holding



Company have also led the way in promoting sustainability. Schneider Electric will support this direction and help Omani organisations with sustainability consulting expertise.

Schneider's Electric's consultants will help organisations across the region to define their energy and sustainability programmes, helping them to become more efficient, save money and realise new business opportunities. "Increased awareness on climate change risk, rising public concern and stakeholder pressure has pushed sustainability to the top of corporate priorities," said Schneider Electric's Sustainability Business Division director for MEA Capucine Dourdin Jeunet.

Shangri-La Group makes key regional appointments

The Shangri-La Group has made two key regional appointments covering the Middle East, India, Indian Ocean, Europe and the Americas (MEIA).

Kapil Aggarwal and Choon Wah Wong, have both been promoted to co-heads of the MEIA region, Aggarwal will overlook operations in Turkey, the Middle East, India and the Indian Ocean, while Wong will take responsibility for Europe and the Americas.

Prior to their latest appointments, Wong was vice president of Investment & Asset Management and Aggarwal was vice president of Investment & Asset Management as well as deputy to the executive vice president of Operations for the MEIA region.

Aggarwal, who has been working with Shangri-La for eight years now, originally joined in 2013 as director of asset management. Commenting on his new position, Aggarwal who holds a law degree and an MBA in finance said, "I am looking forward to working with Choon Wah, my other colleagues in the region and our business partners, not only to optimise the operational and financial performance of our current properties, but to strategically grow our portfolio throughout the region.

"We are keen to develop new



Kapil Aggarwal



Choon Wah Wong

markets such as Saudi Arabia, which we will enter later on in the year with the opening of the stunning Shangri-La Jeddah."

Choon Wah Wong, joined Shangri-La in 2018, having spent the majority of the previous 18 years in the private equity real estate investment sector.

Wong who has an engineering degree from the University of Cambridge, has held senior roles with APG Asset Management, Partners Group and Standard Life Investments (Singapore), before eventually relocating to Shangri-La's regional office in London.

"This is a pivotal moment not just for Shangri-La, but the rest of the hotel industry as well. Many governments especially in the developed world are gradually

beginning to relax social as well as domestic and international travel restrictions," Wong said.

"This has given us the opportunity to reopen a number of flagship properties, such as the Shangri-La The Shard, London which reopened on May 17, the Shangri-La Vancouver which reopened on May 22 and most recently the Shangri-La Paris which reopened on June 1.

"These are such positive signs, especially after enduring the initial lockdown and then the disappointment of numerous false dawns over the past 14-15 months. It is heart-warming to see some of our hotels in key cities getting back to normal, welcoming guests once again!"

Good time to own Infiniti Q50 at low EMI

Infiniti Oman has announced low EMI on the Infiniti Q50 which offers an optimal blend of ride comfort and class-leading agility. Customers can benefit from a starting EMI rate (terms and conditions apply) of RO205 of Infiniti Q50. Subject to credit approval.

The Infiniti Q50 sedan, which represents dynamic and bold styling, has impressed the new generation of buyers. Its engines and chassis technologies that deliver empowering performance and rewarding drive have been a big winner with Oman's auto enthusiasts.

A senior spokesperson at Infiniti Oman, said, "We are delighted to make it much easier for luxury motoring enthusiasts to own a premium vehicle like Infiniti Q50 which comes with the most advanced technological features like intelligent cruise control with full speed range, lane departure warning and prevention, forward emergency braking and backup collision intervention."

Infiniti Q50: High performance

The Infiniti Q50 sedan has been the key driver of Infiniti's success in the sultanate due to its sensuous, dynamic and bold styling, segment leading features and pulsating performance that delivers excellent output.

The brand puts put high performance at the heart of the In-



finiti Q50. The 400-horsepower twin-turbocharged 3.0lt V6 engine offers class-leading performance that's bound to get your heart racing. With 475 Nm of torque, acceleration is effortless. You can also choose the brand's class-leading twin-turbocharged V6 that returns 300 HP and 400 Nm of torque.

With the Infiniti Q50, you can choose from two engines: the 300 HP 3.0lt V6 Twin turbo or the exhilarating 400 horse power 3.0lt Twin Turbo V6. The RED Sport 400 has Kacchu Aluminum trim and contrast stitching that takes the cabin to a new level.

The Infiniti Q50's suspension shapes the drive around you. As road conditions change, it automatically adjusts your vehicle's body roll, pitch and bounce rate for smooth, comfortable ride.

Dynamic Digital Suspension comes equipped with two distinct settings, Standard and

Sport. Select Standard mode for comfortable, dynamic handling. Engage Sport mode for firmer dampening and greater agility.

With Infiniti Q50 one can set their preference for a soft or firm ride through the Drive Mode Selector. Electronically adjusted dampers do the rest, applying the right amount of force to keep the drive feeling balanced.

Exterior

The double-wave hood draws the eye along the car to the crescent-shaped rear windows. Strong lines and characteristic headlights create a premium sport sedan that always draws attention.

The Infiniti Q50 is available in a selection of colours, including new Slate Gray. Or go for something that reflects your personality more, like new Grand Blue.

Its signature Q50 headlights cast an illuminating gaze, making their presence known day or

night. With their distinct crescent shape, they flow elegantly into the strong shoulder line of the Infiniti Q50.

Interior

With luxurious materials, thoughtful ergonomics and meticulous craftsmanship, the Infiniti Q50 interior will make every journey a pleasure.

Infiniti Q50 is designed with a view that there would be no wasted space. The result is a class-leading interior that can easily accommodate up to five passengers. The craftsmanship and level of finish is something one will quickly notice in the Infiniti Q50. There are few trims to choose from including graphite, stone and gallery white interior colours, so you can create something unique to you.

Blind spot warning and intervention

With the Infiniti Q50 you can expand your periphery with sensors that can detect when someone enters your blind spot area. If you move to change lanes, the system warns you before a slight steering or braking input guides you back into position. With an athletic front bumper and a richly textured double-arch grille, the Infiniti Q50 boasts a sporty, sophisticated look. Step inside and experience premium materials with performance inspired accents that take refinement.

Majid al Futtaim and Lulu only Middle Eastern retailers in Deloitte list

Two retail giants from the UAE have made it to the world's top 250 most powerful retailers. International consultancy Deloitte's 'Global Power of Retailing 2021, has ranked the UAE-based Lulu Group and Majid al Futtaim Holding among the powerful retail brands.

Lulu Group - which operates hypermarkets and superstores across 10 countries - posted US\$7.4bn revenues in the financial year ending 2019, achieving a compound annual growth rate (CAGR) of 5 per cent. The UAE-headquartered Lulu has 210 stores across GCC, Egypt, India, Indonesia and Malaysia.

While Majid al Futtaim Holding group revenues reached US\$5.57bn, it posted group net retail income of US\$7.65bn with CAGR retail revenue of 6.5 per cent, reveals Deloitte report.



The list is led by US giants with Wal-Mart Stores at No.1 followed by Amazon, Costco Wholesale Corp, Schwarz Group, The Kroger Co among others.

US\$4.85tn is the total aggregate retail revenue generated by the Top 250 retailers with 4.4 per cent composite year over year retail revenue growth.

Some of the key impact of COVID-19 on leading global retailers as per the report are essential versus non-essential retail, reduced demand, enforced store closure, travels bans etc. On the other hand, online retailers have benefited from consumers aversion to in-store shopping due to the pandemic crisis. However, leading retailers were able to capitalise on the new consumer opportunities presented by the pandemic, particularly online shopping and delivery and were able to continue trading from their stores.

Since the start of the pandemic, Lulu group opened 26 new hypermarkets and supermarkets, including four e-commerce fulfillment centers across the region.

"No doubt these are very challenging times and we had to delay our expansion plans last year due to lockdowns and COVID-19 restrictions, but now we are fully back on track to open 30 new hypermarkets and ten e-commerce fulfillment centers in the GCC, Egypt and Far East by the end of this year. Dubai Expo 2020 coupled with fast improving health and safety situation is sure to boost the market sentiments sooner than later," commented Yusuffali MA, chairman of Lulu Group.



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be'ah Academy to hold sustainability programmes

Bouyed by their remarkable success, be'ah Academy, the capacity building unit of Oman Environmental Services Holding Company - be'ah has announced that its Environmental Management Accreditation Program and the Certified Sustainability Practitioner Program will start online from September 2021.

be'ah Academy will provide the Environmental Management Accreditation Program in collaboration with the Institute of Environmental Management and Assessment (IEMA), which is a global institute with over 15,000 specialists in the field of environment and sustainability as members.

This year's programme will outline the implications of global trends on the environment, society, economy and on organisations. It will cover sustainable business/governance principles and their relationship with organisations, products and services other than the relationship between environmental principles and organisations, products and services, major policy and legislation.

Apart from these, it will delve into important tools, techniques, systems and practices used to improve sustainability performance, the role of innovation and other leading practices in developing sustainable products and services and solutions. Participants will learn how effective sustainable solutions can be arrived at by collecting, analysis, and evaluation of information besides research and planning.

They will gain insights into

the role of effective communication, feedback, engagement with stakeholders, tools and techniques in identifying opportunities and risks, and propose ways to improve performance and support transformation that further promotes sustainability.

The Certified Sustainability Practitioner Program, meanwhile, will be delivered in collaboration with the Center for Sustainability and Excellence (CSE), a specialised organisation in consultancy, training and global sustainability headquartered in Chicago, US.

The Certified Sustainability Practitioner Program comprises a number of modules covering several topics including Sustainability (CSR) and the Business Case for Adoption, Global and Local Legislation for Sustainability and GHG Emissions, Sustainability Strategy & Widely Used Standards & ESG Ratings, Sustainability (ESG) Reporting based on GRI and other ESG Guidelines, Responsible Communication and How to Avoid Green & Blue Washing, Circular Economy, Importance of Sustainability in Supply Chain and carbon reduction strategies.

Eng Muhanad bin Yehya al Juma, manager, be'ah Academy, said, "These two programmes showcase how the academy is striving to incorporate all leading global practices and issues pertaining to environmental sustainability into its capacity building and educational initiatives. A deeper understanding of issues becomes a good starting point for effective sustainable solutions."

Tyreplus inaugurates its 7th outlet in the sultanate

Tyreplus an independent professional network of tyre retail stores and a global retail concept developed by Michelin recently inaugurated their new store in Azaiba, Muscat, making it the seventh store in Oman.

The Tyreplus store in Azaiba will provide customers with a variety of services including tyre replacement, fitting and balancing, batteries, air conditioning, nitrogen inflation, alignment, brakes, tuning geometry, tyre repair and oil changes.

Commenting on the opening of the new store, Naser Shashaa, regional director - Michelin Middle East Cluster, said, "We are very happy to have opened this new store in Oman, in turn expanding our footprint in the region. Since introduction of the Tyreplus concept in the region, our stores have served as one-stop-shop solutions, catering to a variety of automotive needs and requirements of our customers.



tomers. Distribution and retail is a critical lever for the growth of our partners, and Michelin has been a leader over the years and now we are complementing this focus with our support to reach consumers directly to assist them and provide them a seamless online to offline journey."

"MHD ACERE is glad to expand the operations for our Tyres and Batteries department through the opening of this latest store. We are increasingly focusing

on those distributors that deliver long-term benefits to the brand prospects through comprehensive brand strategies, rather than constantly trying to capitalize on short-term advantages. With affordable prices, we endeavor to deliver the best of service through our highly trained technicians, making these outlets very valuable to our customers," Mohsin Hani al Bahrani, CEO, MHD ACERE, was quoted as saying.

Tyreplus was established in 2002 and is currently present in 20 countries today, such as Australia, Brazil, China, Russia, Thailand, Taiwan, Oman and in the Gulf countries.

Open daily from 8am-8pm, the store is strategically located in Azaiba, behind the Jaguar and Land Rover showroom with proximity to Sultan Qaboos Street and 18 November Street. The location of the store would help a wide array of customers, who would be travelling from the other locations towards the city. For appointments and more details please call on 24523300.

To find out more details, please visit www.Tyreplus-me.com

Mercedes-Benz pre-owned vehicles offer value, quality

Inviting customers to discover the ultimate in vehicle innovation, comfort and style, Mercedes-Benz Oman has announced its latest collection of Certified Pre-Owned cars.

Among the 2020 model lineup is the sleek and timeless A 200 Sedan, starting at RO15,495, the dynamic and progressive C 200, starting at RO18,995, and the intelligent and characterful E 200, starting at RO20,995. With prices valid until September 30 and with limited stock available, there's no better time for customers to find their dream luxury vehicle.

"Every Certified Pre-Owned vehicle is only approved once it meets mandatory inspection standards, which are performed by our qualified technicians. As a result, customers are guaranteed that the vehicle meets the highest standards of quality,

reliability, performance and safety. It's part of our commitment to ensuring our customers have complete confidence and peace of mind, and why they continue to choose Mercedes-Benz," said Shaun Michael, chief executive officer at Mercedes-Benz Oman.

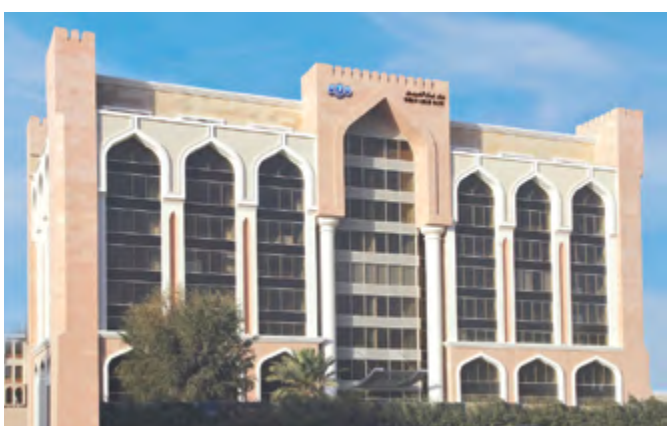
Customers can choose from select vehicles such as the A 200 Sedan (28,290km) in Polar White with two-tone ARTICO man-made leather, the C 200 (16,550km) in Mojave Silver Metallic with Black ARTICO man-made leather, and the E 200 (12,242km) in Polar White with ARTICO man-made leather in Macchiato Beige.

All mechanical and electrical

components of the Certified Pre-Owned vehicles go through a stringent 150-point inspection, including engine checks, fluids and on-road evaluation.

Furthermore, customers will benefit from unlimited-mileage warranty for one year that can be extended for up to two additional years, as well as 24-hour roadside assistance (selected vehicles only) and a full service history.

With the customer's convenience in mind, service packages and finance options are available upon request and purchased cars can either be delivered or collected at the nearest Mercedes-Benz Oman showroom.



OAB announces winners of its savings scheme for May

Oman Arab Bank (OAB) recently announced the names of the winners of its Hasaad Savings Scheme for May.

The draw saw 101 customers winning prizes of RO500 each. As for Elite account holders, two customers won RO10,000 each from the Bowsher and Corporate branches.

Rashad al Shaikh, head of the Retail Banking Division at OAB, said, "The Hasaad Savings Scheme not only enables our customers to be financially secure but also encourages prudent saving habits and rewards them for the efforts. We look forward to seeing a growth in the number of customers who continue to save and have several exciting prizes in store for them

until the end of the year."

The Hasaad Savings Scheme 2021 will see 101 lucky winners each month from the 53 branches winning RO500 each. This is in addition to a Big Prize draw which will see two winners of RO10,000 each, every quarter.

The Elite Draws will see two winners every month of RO10,000 each. This is replaced by an Elite grand prize draw conducted every three months with one lucky winner of RO25,000.

"On behalf of Oman Arab Bank, I extend my warmest congratulations to all the May winners. I wish everyone the best of luck and to continue saving for the upcoming draws," Shaikh added.

Israeli PM suffers defeat as Arab family unification ban not renewed

Jerusalem - Israeli Prime Minister Naftali Bennett suffered defeat on Tuesday as lawmakers failed to extend a law that denies Israeli citizenship and residency rights to Palestinian spouses from the West Bank and Gaza.

The ban first enacted in 2003 during the second Palestinian intifada, or uprising, has been justified by supporters on security grounds but critics derided it as a discriminatory measure targeting Israel's Arab minority.

Bennett, a hardline religious nationalist, supports the measure that has highlighted cracks in his ideologically disparate eight-party coalition, which has a wafer-thin majority in Israel's 120-seat parliament, the Knesset.

In talks that ran through the night, the coalition sought a deal that would see nearly all of its members vote for the measure, including Jewish left-wingers and two Arab lawmakers from the conservative Islamic Raam party.

In exchange, the government would grant residency or citizenship rights to more than 1,500 Palestinians with pending requests who have been living in Israel for many years.

But that compromise failed when a member of Bennett's hawkish Yamina party, Amichai Chikli, voted with the opposition, tweeting on Tuesday that the



Israeli Prime Minister Naftali Bennett speaks during a press conference, in Jerusalem on Tuesday (AFP)

fracas over the bill exposed 'the problematics of a government' that relies on the nominally anti-Zionist Raam party and the Jewish left. "Israel needs a functioning Zionist government, and not a mismatched patchwork," said Chikli, a vocal sceptic of the coalition crafted by his party leader Bennett last month.

His defection left parliament tied at 59 votes to 59, meaning

the measure would lapse later on Tuesday.

Bennett had called for members of the right-wing opposition led by former prime minister Benjamin Netanyahu to support the measure in a plea for unity on national security grounds.

According to Israel's N12 website, Netanyahu told members of his Likud party 'the importance of toppling the

government is greater' than renewing the ban.

"This isn't just a law. It's a law that exposes the fault line in this government," added Netanyahu, who has made no secret of his desire to oust Bennett and reclaim the premiership he held for 12 consecutive years.

Raam leader Mansour Abbas, the first Arab party chief to ever join an Israeli coalition, told army

radio that the coalition needed to 'take stock' after the setback and would hold talks on the next steps. Interior Minister Ayelet Shaked, also of Yamina, tweeted that the ban's expiry could bring 15,000 Palestinian applications for Israeli citizenship.

The ban has caused endless complications for Palestinians living across Israel and the territories it has occupied since 1967.

'Partial victory'

A substantial number of those affected live in annexed east Jerusalem and therefore have Israeli residency, without necessarily being citizens of the Jewish state.

In a protest against the measure outside parliament on Monday, some recounted the hardships of seeking permits to join their spouses, or the risks of entering Israeli territory without permission.

Ali Meteb told AFP that his wife not having Israeli residency rights had confined his family to a 'continuous prison'.

"I am asking for rights that the state owes us... for my wife to have Israeli ID, residency rights and freedom of movement," he said.

Jessica Montell, the head of Hamoked, an Israeli human rights group that provides legal services to Palestinians, said 'tens of thousands of families are harmed by this law'.

Jaafar Farah, the head of the Mossawa Center that campaigns for the rights of Arab Israelis, said the failure to renew the law marked 'a partial victory' in an 18-year battle that is 'not over'.

The Israeli human rights activist condemned the family unification ban as 'racist collective punishment'.

AFP

Murderer gets death penalty in Kuwait

Kuwait City, Kuwait - A Kuwaiti court on Tuesday sentenced a man to death after convicting him of the kidnap and murder of a mother of two, a crime which shocked the wealthy emirate.

The brutal killing of Farah Hamzah Akbar (32), whose body was dumped outside a hospital on April 20 after she was snatched in broad daylight, sparked protests and calls for justice.

"The verdict hit the nail on the head, and we hope it is backed and implemented so the family can rest," the Akbar family lawyer, Abdulmohsen al Qattan, told AFP. He added that the case will now be referred to the court of appeal for review.

The man, who had persisted in stalking Akbar despite several complaints to authorities, dragged her from a car during the month of Ramadan. Akbar had previously filed two harassment complaints against the man who had proposed to her although she was already married. He had been arrested but was released on bail.

The Interior Ministry said at the time of the murder that Akbar had been stabbed in the chest. The attacker was arrested shortly afterwards and confessed to the crime, sparking calls for his execution.

AFP

Afghan forces deploy to counter Taliban

Kabul, Afghanistan - Afghan authorities deployed hundreds of commandos and pro-government militiamen on Tuesday to counter the Taliban's blistering offensive in the north, a day after more than 1,000 government troops fled into neighbouring Tajikistan.

Fighting has raged across several provinces, but the insurgents have primarily focused on a devastating campaign across the northern countryside, seizing dozens of districts in the past two months.

Last week, all US and NATO forces left Bagram Air Base near Kabul - the command centre for anti-Taliban operations - effectively wrapping up their exit after 20 years of military involvement that began in the wake of the September 11 attacks.

"We are planning to launch a big offensive to retake the lost territories from the enemy," Fawad Aman, a spokesman for the Ministry of Defence said.



A security personnel stands guard at the site of a car bomb attack in Afghanistan's second largest city of Kandahar on Tuesday (AFP)

"Our forces are being organised on the ground for this operation."

Troops and pro-government militiamen were deployed in the northern provinces of Takhar and Badakhshan where the Taliban have captured swathes of territory at lightning speed, often without any fighting.

Afghan defence officials have said they intend to focus on securing major cities, roads and border towns in the face of the

Taliban onslaught, launched as US and NATO troops pressed ahead with their final withdrawal in early May.

The militants' successes have spurred fears that Afghan forces are in crisis, particularly now vital US air support has been massively curtailed by the handover of Bagram Air Base.

On Monday, more than 1,000 Afghan troops fled into Tajikistan, forcing the neighbouring

country to bolster the frontier with its own soldiers.

Several hundred had already crossed into the country in recent weeks, in the face of a Taliban offensive.

Tajik President Emomali Rakhmon has ordered 'the mobilisation of 20,000 reserve troops to further strengthen the border between Tajikistan and Afghanistan', a statement from the presidency said late on Monday.

"We had to abandon our base because there was no coordination or interest among our commanders to counter the attack," said Mohammad Musa, a soldier who had fled to Tajikistan after his base in Kunduz province fell to the Taliban last week.

The fighting in the north has also forced Moscow to close its consulate in the city of Mazar-e-Sharif, the capital of Balkh province near the border with Uzbekistan.

AFP

UN 'disturbed' as Indian priest dies of cardiac arrest in jail

Geneva, Switzerland - The United Nations said on Tuesday it was deeply disturbed by the death in pre-trial detention of Father Stan Swamy, an 84 year old Jesuit priest.

Swamy, who was detained for nine months under Indian anti-terror laws, died on Monday ahead of a bail hearing.

The priest was arrested last year for allegedly inciting violence between different Indian castes in 2018.

"We are deeply saddened and disturbed by the death of 84 year old Father Stan Swamy," Liz Throssell, a spokeswoman for the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, told reporters in Geneva.

Swamy was denied bail despite suffering from Parkinson's disease and other ailments. He was admitted to hospital in May with coronavirus and suffered a cardiac arrest over the weekend.



People tie black bands on their arms as they gather outside the church for a memorial mass for the priest, in Mumbai on Tuesday (AFP)

The priest had been detained under the Unlawful Activities Prevention Act (UAPA).

"High Commissioner Michelle Bachelet and the UN's independent experts have repeatedly raised the cases of Father Stan and 15 other human rights defenders associated with the same events with the government of India over the past three years, and urged their release from pre-trial detention," said Throssell.

"The high commissioner has also raised concerns over the use of the UAPA in relation to human rights defenders - a law Father Stan was challenging before Indian courts days before he died."

Throssell said that given the severe impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, countries - India included - should release everyone detained without a sufficient legal basis, including those held simply for expressing dissenting views.

AFP

Ethiopia resumes filling Nile mega-dam reservoir, angering Egypt

Cairo, Egypt - Ethiopia has started the second phase of filling a controversial mega-dam's reservoir on the upper Blue Nile, Egypt said, raising tensions ahead of an upcoming UN Security Council meeting on the issue. Egypt, which fears water shortages, late on Monday expressed its 'firm rejection of this unilateral measure'.

It condemned the move as 'a violation of international laws and norms that regulate projects built on the shared basins of international rivers', its irrigation ministry said in a statement.

The Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam, set to be Africa's largest hydroelectric project when completed, has sparked an almost decade-long diplomatic stand-off between Addis Ababa and downstream nations Egypt and Sudan. Ethiopia says the project is essential to its develop-

ment, but Cairo and Khartoum fear it could restrict their citizens' water access.

Both governments have been pushing Addis Ababa to ink a binding deal over the filling and operation of the dam, and have been urging the UN Security Council to take the matter up in recent weeks.

Thursday's UNSC meeting was requested by Tunisia on behalf of Egypt and Sudan, a diplomatic source told AFP.

But France's ambassador to the UN said last week that the council itself can do little apart from bringing all the sides together. "We can open the door, invite the three countries at the table, bring them to express their concerns, encourage them to get back to the negotiations and find a solution," he told reporters.

Egyptian Foreign Minister Sameh Shoukry said in a note to



This file photo offers a general view of northwestern Ethiopia that focuses on the status of the Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam (GERD) and the Blue Nile River on July 11, 2020 (AFP)

the UN that negotiations are at an impasse, and accused Ethiopia of adopting 'a policy of intransigence that undermined our collective endeavours to reach an agreement'.

Shoukry and his Sudanese counterpart Mariam al-Mahdi met in New York ahead of the meeting and reiterated their 'firm rejection' of Ethiopia's move, Cairo said.

Addis Ababa had previously announced it would proceed to the second stage of filling in July, with or without a deal.

Ethiopia argues that adding water to the reservoir, especially

during the heavy rainfalls of July and August, is a natural part of the construction process.

"Filling goes in tandem with the construction," said a senior official at the water ministry.

"If the rainfall is as you see it now in July, it must have begun."

'Existential threat'

The Nile - which at some 6,000km is one of the longest rivers in the world - is an essential source of water and electricity for a dozen East African countries.

Egypt, which depends on the Nile, and particularly its tributary the Blue Nile, for about 97 per cent of its irrigation and drinking water, sees the dam as an existential threat.

Sudan hopes the project will regulate annual flooding but fears its own dams would be harmed without agreement on the Ethiopian operation.

The 145m tall mega-dam, construction of which began in 2011, has a reservoir with a capacity of 74bn cubic metres. Filling began last year, with Ethiopia announcing in July 2020 it had hit its target of 4.9bn cubic metres - enough to test the dam's first two turbines, an important milestone on the way towards actually producing energy.

The goal is to add 13.5bn cubic metres of water this year.

Egypt and Sudan wanted a trilateral agreement on the dam's operations to be reached before any filling began.

But Ethiopia says it is a natural part of the construction, and is thus impossible to postpone.

Last year, Sudan said the process had caused water shortages, including in the capital Khartoum - a claim Ethiopia disputed.

AFP

COVID-19 PANDEMIC

Tunisia hospitals struggle with COVID 'tsunami'

Kairouan, Tunisia - Tunisian hospitals are battling to keep operating as the number of people dying of COVID-19 spikes and bodies are left in rooms because mortuaries are running at full capacity.

"Some patients have died without us realising it," said Imen Fteiti a nurse at the Ibn Jazzar hospital in the central city of Kairouan, one of the hardest hit by the pandemic.

Some bodies of COVID victims have been left lying in rooms, next to other patients, for up to 24 hours because there were not enough staff to organise their transfer to over-stretched mortuaries.

Tunisia has recorded over 15,000 deaths since the start of the pandemic last year with the toll rising in recent weeks.

More than 600 COVID patients are in intensive care units around the country, and authorities have set up field hospitals to cope with a crisis they have compared to a 'tsunami'.

Doctors, nurses and non-governmental organisations have sounded the alarm particularly for Kairouan, a marginalised region where intensive care beds and oxygen supplies are lacking.

"We have reached a point where we don't know who to assist first," Fteiti said.

In Kairouan, 5,500 litres of oxygen are now needed daily to treat those stricken by COVID compared to 400-500 litres two weeks ago before the number of cases spiked, regional health officials said. And there are only 45 beds in intensive care units in Kairouan hospitals, both private and public, and just



Tunisian medics attend to patients at a gym that was converted to deal with a surge in new COVID-19 infections, in Kairouan on Sunday (AFP)

250 oxygen cylinders are available, they added.

Since June 20, authorities have imposed a total lockdown on six regions across Tunisia, including Kairouan, as the number of COVID cases spiralled in the North African country.

The capital Tunis has been placed under partial lockdown since last week, with weekend lockdowns from July 10 to prevent crowds at beaches.

'Touch and go'

But the health situation in Kairouan, home to 593,000 people, is among the worst and for health workers it has become

a nightmare.

At the Ibn Jazzar hospital there are only three nurses for 35 COVID patients.

"Our day begins very early in the morning and we never know when it will be over," said nurse Fteiti. The day starts with caring for incoming patients who have slept on the floors of hospital corridors because no beds were available when they arrived, she said. Fteiti recalled a young woman whose mother had just died of COVID who pleaded with her to check on her ill father.

"Unfortunately, he too passed away," said the nurse.

Health officials say the daily

number of COVID deaths in Kairouan has climbed to 20, including children.

"We have been through tough days with the ICU beds full," said regional health official Mohamed Rouiss.

When the spike began last month, patients from Kairouan could be transferred to other hospitals in the region.

"But now they too are full," he said.

Slah Soui, a doctor at Kairouan's second largest hospital Aghlabides, blames the situation on 'recklessness' and people failing to respect hygiene rules, including social distancing.

But 'a severe lack of vaccination' is also at fault, he said.

Tunisia has struggled with a lack of vaccines and launched its campaign in March, a month later than planned.

In the Kairouan region, just 95,000 people have registered to be vaccinated and only half of those have received a first dose.

Across Tunisia, only four per cent of the population of 12mn have received the full two doses.

In June, the director of the Tunis Pasteur Institute Hechmi Louzir told reporters that the country had received only 1.6mn doses of vaccine.

AFP

Russia records 737 deaths

Moscow, Russia - Russia reported 737 coronavirus deaths on Tuesday, a national record of pandemic-related fatalities over a 24-hour period, as the country battles a new surge in cases.

It marks the first time Russia, the fifth worst-hit country in the world for the number of infections, has crossed the 700-mark for daily virus deaths.

Russia has set six new pandemic highs for COVID-19 deaths in the last eight days as it fights a surging outbreak driven by the highly transmissible Delta variant.

The Delta variant ac-

counts for 90 per cent of new cases in Moscow, the epicentre of Russia's outbreak, the city's mayor Sergei Sobyanin said.

He has ordered offices to send home a third of their unvaccinated employees and restaurants to allow inside only patrons who have been vaccinated or infected in the past six months.

He has also mandated that 60 per cent of service industry workers must be fully inoculated by mid-August. As of Tuesday, just 1.8mn of Moscow's 12mn population had been fully vaccinated.

AFP

US sends Vietnam jabs

Washington, US - The United States has sent Vietnam 2mn doses of vaccine on Tuesday, the White House said.

The Moderna vaccine shipment - part of a first 80mn doses that President Joe Biden has pledged to allocate worldwide - should arrive in Vietnam this weekend, a White House official said.

"This is just the beginning of doses being shipped to southeast Asia."

A million doses went to Malaysia on Monday and last week the White House announced delivery 'soon' of 4mn doses to Indonesia.

Other regional countries

in line for a share of the 80mn doses are Cambodia, Laos, Papua New Guinea, the Philippines and Thailand.

Communist Vietnam, which borders China, was initially seen as a model for resisting the pandemic. However, vaccination rates are low in the nation of about 97mn people and the last few weeks have seen infections rise sharply.

The Biden administration official said the delivery to Vietnam, made through the World Health Organization's Covax programme, is part of a strategy aimed at 'ending the pandemic everywhere'.

AFP

Indonesia imports oxygen as hospitals battle surge

Jakarta, Indonesia - Indonesia is sourcing emergency oxygen for virus patients from neighbouring Singapore, the government said on Tuesday, as the 24-hour toll soared to a record 728 deaths and hospitals crumble under the weight of its deadliest COVID-19 wave yet.

Jakarta warned that it was bracing for a spike driven by the highly infectious Delta variant that could send cases skyrocketing to more than 50,000 a day.

Hospitals in the hard-hit capital were topping 90 per cent occupancy while more than a dozen facilities in Indonesia's second-biggest city Surabaya are now full and not taking any more patients, authorities said.

A Surabaya hospital spokeswoman described jammed ICUs and exhausted doctors, some infected with COVID-19.

"The hospital no longer has rooms for patients who need ventilators. The ICU rooms are also full," said the woman who asked not to be identified.

"We're overwhelmed. Many of our health workers have collapsed from exhaustion and some are also infected. We trying to get volunteers to help out because many of the staff are down."

Nearly 1,000 Indonesian medical workers have died of COVID-19, including more than a dozen who were already fully inoculated.

Desperate families are hunting for oxygen tanks to treat the sick and dying at home, as authorities scramble to enforce new virus curbs to bring down record daily cases, which soared on Tuesday to 31,189 new infections and 728 deaths - as much



Workers for an oxygen supplies company prepare cylinders for distribution in Semarang, in Central Java on Tuesday (AFP)

The team is preparing for a scenario of up to 50,000 cases a day, maybe even 60,000 to 70,000 per day at worst

LUHUT BINSAR PANDJAITAN

as seven times the daily mortality rate less than a month ago.

On Tuesday, Jakarta said about 10,000 concentrators - devices that generate oxygen - were to be shipped from nearby Singapore with some arriving by a Hercules cargo plane earlier.

The government was also in talks with other countries including China for help, it said.

Jakarta has ordered all the nation's oxygen supplies to be directed to hospitals overflowing with virus patients as the Delta variant ripples across Indonesia's main Java island, home to more than half of the country's nearly 270Mn people.

"The team is preparing for a

scenario of up to 50,000 cases a day, maybe even 60,000 to 70,000 per day at worst," said senior minister Luhut Binsar Pandjaitan, tasked with enforcing new virus rules. "But we hope that won't happen."

Offices, mosques, parks, shopping malls and restaurants have been shuttered across Java under new curbs that started from the weekend.

But there have been widespread violations.

Authorities in Java's Semarang city fired water hoses at shops that have refused to close, while Jakarta's governor Anies Baswedan on Tuesday ordered dozens of offices sealed after some employers ignored work-from-home orders.

The world's fourth most populous nation has seen its daily caseload soar in recent weeks with its tally at more than 2.3mn cases and 61,686 deaths.

That figure is widely believed to be a severe undercount due to low testing and poor tracing measures.

AFP

Germany relaxes curbs on travellers from UK, India and 3 others hit by Delta variant

Berlin, Germany - Germany's health agency said on Monday it would lift a ban on most travellers from the UK, India and three other countries hit by the Delta variant of COVID-19.

The Robert Koch Institute (RKI) said India, Nepal, Russia, Portugal and the UK, currently listed as so-called virus variant countries, would be reclassified from Wednesday as 'high-incidence areas'.

The change eases a ban on entry for travellers who are not German residents or citizens, instead meaning anyone will be able to enter as long as they observe quarantine and testing rules.

Germany introduced its 'virus variant country' travel category in a bid to stop new coronavirus variants that have not

yet spread widely on home soil. But Health Minister Jens Spahn said last week that the Delta variant was fast becoming dominant in Germany, meaning that bans on most travellers from countries hit by that variant may be lifted.

Given the increasing spread of Delta, which was first detected in India, and research suggesting vaccines are effective against it, 'we will look at the situation in the next few days', Spahn said.

Chancellor Angela Merkel also hinted at a potential softening in Germany's stance towards travellers from Britain during a visit to London on Friday. Last month, Merkel had called for tough restrictions, including longer quarantine, for

people travelling from Britain, where the Delta variant has caused a surge in cases.

Merkel hint

But she indicated that the stance could soften as travel advice was reviewed.

"We think that in the foreseeable future, those who have received double jabs will... be able to travel again, without having to go into quarantine," she said.

Only citizens and residents of Germany are permitted to enter from a variant country and are subject to a two-week quarantine, regardless of whether they are fully vaccinated or can provide a negative COVID-19 test.

By contrast, anyone can enter from a high-incidence country as long as they provide a nega-

tive test on arrival. They must in principle enter a 10-day quarantine but can end it after five days with another negative test.

Travellers from high-incidence areas are also exempt from quarantine if they have been fully vaccinated.

Countries where variants other than Delta are circulating, such as Brazil and South Africa, remain in the variant category.

Despite the rising share of the Delta variant, the overall incidence in Germany has been steadily declining in recent weeks.

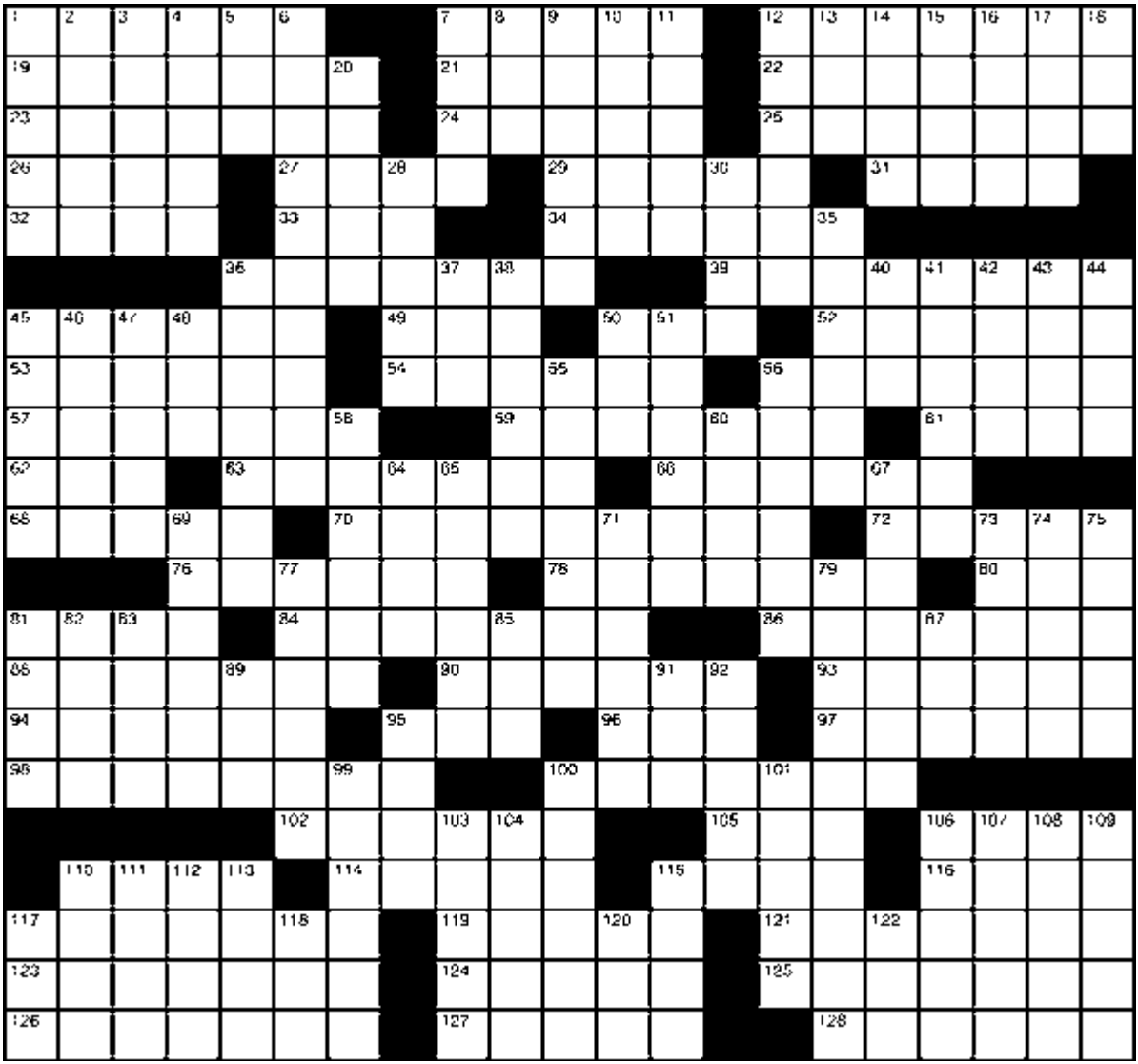
The RKI on Monday reported 212 new cases in the past 24 hours and an incidence rate of five new infections per 100,000 people over the last seven days.

AFP



Travellers queue up at check-in counters in Dusseldorf airport on Friday as summer holidays begin in this western German area (AFP)

DAILY CROSSWORD



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- 117 Idiot boxes
- 119 Devotees of Bacchus
- 121 Sage
- 123 Frequent hospital delivery
- 124 City north of Bismarck
- 125 TV exec. Boone
- 126 Noted gatekeeper
- 127 Appears
- 128 Buffets

DOWN

- 1 Train trailer
- 2 Spot producers
- 3 Blades or Sierra
- 4 Secluded
- 5 Strain
- 6 "Copperhead Road" singer
- 7 No-nos
- 8 Small payment?
- 9 Cordial sources
- 10 Bust
- 11 Books for boys' author Horatio
- 12 Unpretentious
- 13 Go ____: flip out
- 14 Secretary
- 15 Ireland, to poets
- 16 Bern's river
- 17 Item of babywear
- 18 Vented one's displeasure
- 20 First name in

- cosmetology
- 28 Made over
- 30 Besides
- 35 John, of song, et al.
- 36 Sped
- 37 Greek letter
- 38 Cocktail request
- 40 It may be bent or lent
- 41 ____ Green, Scotland
- 42 Festive
- 43 It'll hold water
- 44 Speaker spot
- 45 Promoted
- 46 Desert
- 47 Flummoxed
- 48 Fires
- 50 Film series street
- 51 Gobs
- 55 Trick
- 56 Legendary collie
- 58 Wilder's "The Skin of Our Teeth" maid
- 60 "Blast!"
- 64 ____ avis
- 65 Fairy king
- 67 Remark
- 69 Winston Cup org.
- 71 "Uncle ____": Berle
- 73 Danced to rock music
- 74 Brother's child
- 75 MSS
- accompaniments
- 77 Import

- 79 Rourke/De Niro
- American Gothic yarn
- 81 "Under the ____ Tree"
- 82 Individual
- 83 Krone spender
- 85 Switch positions
- 87 "Cry ____ River"
- 89 Title in Turkey
- 91 English rebel Tyler
- 92 Cornhusker state city
- 95 "As it ____ it ain't": Tweedledee
- 99 Idle talker; chatterer
- 100 British author Graham
- 101 Model wood
- 103 Whammos
- 104 Popeye creator Segar
- 106 The sticks
- 107 Property documents
- 108 She had a "Tootsie" role
- 109 Little endings
- 110 Support, in a way
- 111 Discontinue
- 112 Melody
- 113 Like ____ out of hell
- 115 Attention-getters
- 117 Blessings
- 118 Time for tourists
- 120 CD- ____
- 122 Mideast gp.

YOUR DAILY HOROSCOPE



ARIES MARCH 21-APRIL 19

Your family members have a big surprise in store for you -- a very big surprise. Does that mean you should worry about what's coming or head for the hills? Certainly not. Really, your only option is to hold on tight and ride the ride -- which may actually be rather fun. Oh, and when this all goes down, pretend to be surprised.



LEO JULY 23-AUGUST 22

You've been worried that you offended someone recently with your verbal enthusiasm. Don't give it a second thought. In fact, expect some crazy energy that will entice you to speak bolder and directly. You'll realise that whatever you were worried about isn't even close to what's going on now. Smile pretty. It might help when those verbal daggers come flying out of your mouth.



SAGITTARIUS NOVEMBER 22-DECEMBER 21

The universe has decided it's time to connect with a whole new peer group -- and they're going to be real kindred spirits. So even if going out and meeting them doesn't actually happen today, the invitation will -- via a new and interesting acquaintance. Don't hesitate and don't worry about hurting the feelings of the folks you're currently hanging out with.



TAURUS APRIL 20-MAY 20

You've been thinking about it for a while, and you're just about sure this is what you want to do. You're ready to forget your job and abandon your routine. You're done, you're over it and you've had it with trying to pretend otherwise. But before you do anything rash, shouldn't you at least talk to an elder who's been there before? Someone who can give you the benefit of experience?



VIRGO AUGUST 23-SEPTEMBER 22

A productive kind of energy will bring money and possessions to the very front of your mind today. You may need to make a serious decision as a result, but it's one you've seen coming for a while, so not to worry. If you need extra cash, you might also consider taking on a part-time job, maybe even something that involves a hobby. It might actually be fun.



CAPRICORN DECEMBER 22-JANUARY 19

Someone's not happy with one or more of your habits. Your first clue? The all-too-frequent lectures on self-discipline, willpower and just saying no. You'd think they would know you well enough to understand that these tactics don't work well on you -- and if they keep it up, you'll only become more determined to have your way. Just try to find a balance.



GEMINI MAY 21-JUNE 21

Getting you into the car for a long-distance trip -- or on a bus, a plane or a space shuttle, for that matter -- has never been much of a challenge. But once you've set down roots, you hate to move. Well, prepare yourself, because today's unsettling energy could bring this urge your way. If you've been thinking about a change anyway, take a deep breath and put some of those thoughts down.



LIBRA SEPTEMBER 23-OCTOBER 22

Get ready for some major changes in your career. But don't worry -- they won't be negative changes, not after all the effort you've put into that department of your life lately. Keep your chin up and see what happens. Oh, and if you need to take one final step to ensure that things go your way, go right ahead. You have every right to seal the success of future endeavours.



AQUARIUS JANUARY 20-FEBRUARY 18

You have every right to use all of your skills -- not just your intelligence -- when working toward a goal. Today's the day to pull out your secret weapon: your brilliant charm! Flash that smile and tell people just how wonderful you think they are. Folks enjoy being recognised for their unique contributions. You know how to boost someone's ego appropriately.



CANCER JUNE 22-JULY 22

After days of wondering what to do -- while pretending you have everything under strict control -- you're suddenly ready to admit you don't quite know what to do. Should you let go and buy what you want, or tighten up that belt and leave it alone? You can't do this alone. Ask the advice of a trusted friend, someone who has no agenda.



SCORPIO OCTOBER 23-NOVEMBER 21

Some serious turbulence is en route, and bracing yourself before it happens is the only way to get through it. Even if you don't emerge from the experience totally unscathed, you'll definitely be a lot better off than some of your unprepared friends. You can try warning them, by the way, but don't expect them to take you seriously.



PISCES FEBRUARY 19-MARCH 20

You've been thinking privately about quitting your job and moving on -- literally, as well -- for some time now. Today's events may seem like the straw that breaks the camel's back. If you've already formulated a battle plan, go ahead and put it into action. If you haven't, don't charge off into the sunset without knowing where you'll end up. Easy, there.



TEST YOUR KNOWLEDGE

1. 'A Voice for Freedom' is a book written by

- a. Corazon Aquino
- b. Nayanara Sahgal
- c. Aung San Suu Kyi
- d. Benazir Bhutto

2. Who is the father of English Poetry?

- a. Milton
- b. Wordsworth
- c. Chaucer
- d. Charles Dickens

3. Who wrote 'War and Peace'?

- a. Leo Tolstoy
- b. Mahatma Gandhi
- c. Charles Dickens
- d. Kipling

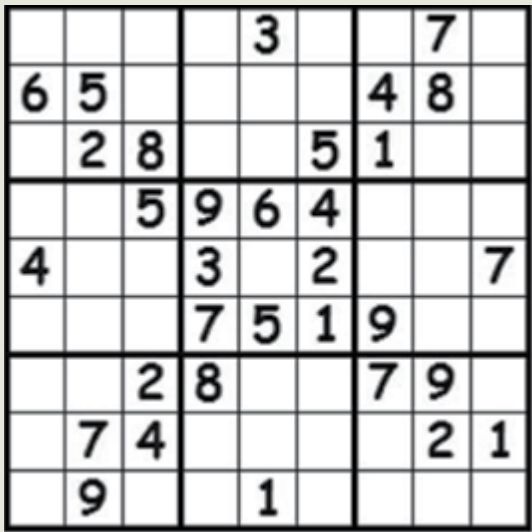
Answers: 1.b 2.c 3.a

KIDS COLOURING



DO YOU SUDOKU?

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



BOGGLER



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

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

SUDOKU EASY ANSWER



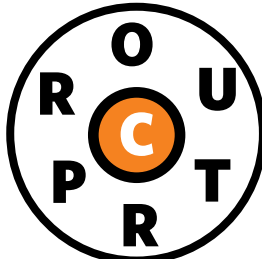
DAILY CROSSWORD ANSWERS (JULY 06)



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



ANYTIME BITES

QUICK

WHOLESOME

SNACKS

When there’s a fervent call for replenishments from your tummy, anything around, from peanuts to potato chips, can be good enough. But why not be ready to churn out some quick, wholesome snacks at anytime? ‘Quick’ – that’s the keyword – so be quick, before the rumble turns into a roar! Here are a few suggestions to take on the enemy within:



BREAD TWISTS

Ingredients

- 1½ cups warm water
- 2tbsp sugar
- 1tbsp yeast
- 3½ cups flour
- 1tsp salt
- 4tsp butter
- 2tbsp grated Parmesan cheese
- 1tsp garlic salt
- Marinara sauce - to serve

Method

Mix warm water, sugar and yeast together. Let that sit for 5 minutes. Add flour and mix until smooth. Let it rise for 10 minutes. Then, roll out the dough in a large square on a floured surface, brush with melted butter and sprinkle parmesan cheese and garlic salt. Fold the dough in half, cut into 2cm wide strips, give each strip a twist to create a ribbon effect and place on a

baking sheet. Let them sit for 10-15 minutes to rise again. Bake at 180° C for 20 minutes or until golden brown. Remove and immediately brush with more butter, garlic salt and grated parmesan cheese. Serve with marinara sauce. (Prep the twists and keep them ready to bake when you start feeling hungry – this way, you need to endure only the baking time.)



BAKED SWEET POTATO FRIES

Ingredients

- 4 medium sized sweet potatoes
- 4tbsp olive oil
- 3tbsp corn starch
- ½tsp salt, plus more for seasoning
- ¼tsp pepper, plus more for seasoning
- Cooking spray
- Chopped parsley - for garnish
- Any favourite dip – to serve

Method

Peel and cut the sweet potatoes into 1cm wide sticks. Sprinkle salt, pepper and

cornstarch, and toss well. Then drizzle olive oil and toss to coat well. Place the sticks in a single layer on a sheet pan lined with foil and coated with cooking spray. Bake the fries for 15-20 minutes at 180° C until golden. Turn over the fries with a spatula once in between. Remove and season with additional salt and pepper, to taste. Garnish with chopped parsley and serve hot and crispy with any dipping sauce. (Make sure that limited people are seated around before serving.)



HOMEMADE HOTDOGS

Ingredients

- 4 smoked chicken/beef sausages
- 4 dinner rolls
- 1tsp butter
- 1 cup potato chips (any favourite)
- 2-3tbsp tomato ketchup
- 2-3tbsp mustard sauce
- ½ cup chopped bell peppers/onions

Method

This recipe is intended to provide a wholesome, anytime snack that can be prepared in minutes. So, the ingredients needed depend on what’s readily available – one can be as creative as pos-

sible and use whatever is at hand. Chopped veggies should be those with some crunch, which need not be sauted. Chips can be of any flavour. One can replace ketchup and mustard sauce with mayonnaise/sweet chilli sauce, peri-peri sauce or any other. To begin, toast the dinner rolls and cut them lengthwise leaving a hinge. Then, toast the chicken/beef sausages with a dash of butter. Place the toasted sausage in the centre of the roll and heap up the chopped veggies, crushed chips around it. Then squeeze ketchup and mustard over it. Enjoy. (If you take more than a minute to do all this, you are not really hungry!)



OMELETTE SANDWICHES

Ingredients

- 4 eggs
- 8 slices of bread
- 1 onion – minced
- 2 green chillies – minced
- ½tsp salt
- ¼tsp crushed black pepper
- 2tsp oil
- 1 tomato – sliced very thin
- ½ cup chopped lettuce

Method

First prepare the omelette – whip up the eggs and add the onion, chillies, salt, and pepper.

Heat a frypan and coat it with 1tsp oil. Pour half the egg mixture to form an even spread. After about one minute, with a spatula, turn the omelette, to cook both sides till golden brown. Remove and set aside, then make the second omelette with the remaining mixture. To assemble the sandwich, cut each omelette into half and place each half on one slice of bread. Top with a layer of tomato and lettuce, cover with a second slice and cut diagonally to create two equal triangles. You will get eight triangles when you prepare four sandwiches with half an omelette within each. (Prepare and consume within 5 minutes, why wait?)



Australian GP called off for second year

Melbourne, Australia - The Australian Grand Prix was called off on Tuesday for a second year in succession due to logistical problems caused by the pandemic, but Formula One bosses said they still planned on a 23-race season.

The race had been scheduled on November 21, but hit roadblocks over Australia's requirement for overseas arrivals to undergo 14 days of mandatory quarantine. The 2021 Australian MotoGP in October was also cancelled.

With Brazilian Grand Prix taking place on November 7, drivers and teams would not have been able to complete the required lockdown in time, with suggestions of a more relaxed bio-secure bubble reportedly rejected.

The Australian MotoGP scheduled for Phillip Island on

October 24 fell for a second year with the Malaysian MotoGP brought forward a week to take its slot and an extra race weekend added in Portugal's Algarve on November 7.

Cancellation means two years without a Formula One race at Melbourne's newly-reconfigured Albert Park after the 2020 edition was dramatically called off just before the opening practice session.

Despite the setbacks, Formula One chief Stefano Domenicali said he was confident of still being able to stage a 23-race season in 2021.

"While it is disappointing we won't be racing in Australia this season, we are confident we can deliver a 23-race season in 2021 and we have a number of options to take forward," he said.

AFP

Paqueta powers Brazil past Peru into final

Rio de Janeiro, Brazil - Star forward Neymar set up Lucas Paqueta to score the only goal as hosts Brazil beat Peru 1-0 on Monday to qualify for the Copa America final. The semifinal was a repeat of the last final, two years ago, when a Brazil team shorn of the injured Neymar also triumphed on home soil.

The Selecao will play either Lionel Messi's Argentina or Colombia, who meet in Brasilia on Wednesday, in Saturday's final at Rio de Janeiro's iconic Maracana stadium.

"I want Argentina. I'm supporting Argentina because I have friends there and Brazil will win the final," said striker Neymar.

"Paqueta is a great player, he's getting better in every game and in every game with the national team," he said about the 23 year old match winner, who plays his club football for Lyon in France.

"He's just had a great season with his club and is showing that he can be a very important player for the Brazilian national team."

Brazil totally dominated the first half at the empty Nilton Santos stadium in Rio but had to survive some nervous moments after the break before securing a spot in the final.



Lucas Paqueta (L) of Brazil celebrates with teammates Neymar and Richarlison after scoring against Peru in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, on Monday

The Peruvian shot-stopper Pedro Gallese was the busiest player on the pitch in the first half thwarting the numerous Brazilian attacks.

Brazil deservedly took the lead ten minutes before halftime after

Peru gave the ball away in mid-field for the umpteenth time.

Neymar's twinkling toes got him free of three defenders in the box and he teed up Paqueta to fire home from 12 yards.

Peru should have been level

nine minutes from time when Yoshimar Yotun fired a free-kick into the box and Alexander Callens beat Ederson to the ball but headed wide from just six yards out.

It would prove their last

chance and coach Ricardo Gareca rued their slow start.

"We paid for being slow to settle into the game," he said.

"The team reacted well in the second half and it was even."

AFP

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EURO2020



England's players take part in their training session at St George's Park in Burton-on-Trent, UK, on Tuesday on the eve of their semifinal match against Denmark (AFP)

ENGLAND ARE READY TO END SEMIFINAL JINX

Three Lions take on Denmark in the second semifinal at Wembley today

London, UK - Gareth Southgate says England are ready to end their semifinal hoodoo as they prepare to face Denmark in the last-four of Euro 2020, bidding to reach their first final at a major tournament since 1966.

England topped their group and beat old foes Germany in the round-of-16 before ratcheting up expectations with Saturday's thumping 4-0 quarterfinal win against Ukraine in Rome.

England have fallen at the penultimate hurdle at major tournaments on four occasions since winning the World Cup in 1966, including their defeat by Croatia at the World Cup in Russia three years ago. But Southgate believes his side have learned from that

disappointment and are ready to take the next step.

"We've knocked off so many hoodoos or perceived barriers already and I feel like this group of players will feel this is just the next challenge," he said.

"I guess the interesting part for us is we won't feel totally satisfied if it's just a semi-final for us, whereas maybe three years ago, although there was massive disappointment after the semifinal, there was a feeling we'd come a long way.

"Now we've replicated what we did there, but that won't be enough to fulfil the group. That's a positive sign."

A key difference from 2018 is heightened expectation, with Southgate himself admitting their benchmark in

Russia was to end England's 12-year wait for a knockout victory. The former international defender now has more knockout wins than any previous England manager and will go looking for another in Wednesday's semifinal bolstered by a boisterous partisan crowd of 60,000-plus at Wembley.

"It's great to be coming back now," said Southgate, who expects teenager Bukayo Saka to return to training on Monday after missing the Ukraine match with a slight knock.

"To go and have that different environment, preparation, focus was definitely helpful. But now to be coming back to Wembley is a great thing for us."

Southgate says going through 'real-life experiences together' such as the

sickening racism experienced in Montenegro and Bulgaria in Euro 2020 qualifiers has helped create a bond among his players.

Semifinal opponents Denmark have also been brought closer together following Christian Eriksen's cardiac arrest in their group opener. The Inter Milan player needed resuscitation on the pitch before a successful operation in hospital.

"We talk about perspective in sport but we rarely have it," Southgate said. "This was a moment that brought it home for all of us.

"I can also imagine what it has done for the Danish team, their bond.

"We are talking about the things we have been through but what they went through that day - the way their captain was and the way the group was - and how that would have connected with their supporters. That's pretty powerful."

AFP



Contrite Brits raise cash for tearful young Germany fan

London, UK - Millions in Britain celebrated England's win over the Germans, but a darker side also emerged in the online abuse hurled at a young Germany fan pictured sobbing in the stands. Now one fundraiser has raised US\$50,000, in an attempt to show her family that not all fans are like the Twitter users who resorted to Nazi analogies to revel in her misery. Joel Hughes, from South Wales, said he was struck by 'the vileness of the online abuse, but also the xenophobia, which taps into deeper issues of where Britain is now and how we are perceived on the world stage'.

"I thought, you know what, I want to try and do something here, however small it might be," he told Sky News. Ex-footballer Stan Collymore, a campaigner against racism in the game, re-tweeted examples of the abuse directed towards the girl and her family, who have not been identified.

Maguire never feared for England career

London, UK - Harry Maguire insists he never feared for his England career after a turbulent year on and off the pitch that will see him aim to make amends against Denmark in the semifinals of Euro 2020 on Wednesday. Just 11 months ago, the Manchester United captain found himself locked up in a Greek jail for two days after a post-season holiday went wrong.

Maguire, 28, was given a suspended 21-month sentence after being found guilty of assaulting a police officer, swearing, resisting arrest and bribery during an incident in Mykonos.

He always protested his innocence and launched an appeal which nullifies the verdict and means he has no criminal record ahead of a full retrial. The incident just days after the end of the delayed 2019/20 season had consequences that rolled into the new season.

He was dropped for England's Nations League ties with Iceland and Denmark in September.

"I never felt for my international career. I always felt I had something to bring and offer," said Maguire on Monday. "Without getting into too much detail of what went off in the summer I knew where I stood on behalf of that. I always knew what went off. I'm totally over it, it was a tough time, for sure, but I've moved on."

AFP



Damsinho, the dashing Danish striker

Rome, Italy - Thrust into the starting line-up after Christian Eriksen's near-fatal cardiac arrest, Mikkell Damsgaard has emerged as Denmark's revelation of Euro 2020, helping his country resurrect a campaign that was almost over before it started.

Nicknamed 'Damsinho', the gifted Damsgaard, whose flamboyant talent has caught the eye of Europe's elite, embodies the enthusiasm and determination of a Danish team that faces England in Wednesday's semifinal at Wembley.

"I could never have dreamed of a better birthday present. It's crazy to get to Wembley," said the Sampdoria winger, cited by Danish daily BT, after Saturday's 2-1 quarterfinal win over the Czech Republic, on the day of his 21st birthday.



Denmark's Mikkell Damsgaard during the quarterfinal against the Czechs

It's an adventure to be here. Crazy, after everything that has happened

MIKKEL DAMSGAARD

"It's an adventure to be here. Crazy, after everything that has happened."

Hand-picked by Kasper Hjulmand to rebuild the attack in the absence of Eriksen, Damsgaard is more familiar than most with the Denmark coach, who handed the Jyllinge-born youngster his professional debut at Nordsjaelland in 2017. "He's a super player," said Hjulmand. "The fact that's he's been able to

throw himself into this and do it on this stage (Euro 2020) is fantastic," he told Danish media.

'100 per cent inspired by Eriksen'

His superb opening goal in the crucial 4-1 group-stage win over Russia saw him become Denmark's youngest scorer at a European Championship.

The Danes scraped through as runners-up of Group B despite losing their first two games, and Damsgaard impressed again in the 4-0 thrashing of Wales.

"He resembles a graduate fresh out of school... but on the big stage at the Euro, he appears like an old, seasoned fighter for the national team, almost like Christian Eriksen in his prime," wrote BT.

Like the Inter Milan midfielder,

Damsgaard is technically adept, strong with both feet and possesses great vision. "I have been inspired by him, 100%," he told Danish news agency Ritzau.

"He is one of the players I have watched the most. I really looked up to him when I was younger and played more like a No 10, just like him."

Damsgaard though is quick to point out the two play different roles, explaining: "I'm a bit more on the wing and in attack than him." His performances haven't gone unnoticed either in Italy, where Damsgaard made steady progress this season under Claudio Ranieri at Sampdoria.

He played 35 times in Serie A, scoring twice, no mean feat in a league where it can be hard for youngsters to settle.

AFP

AL FAISAL HOPES TO STAY ON TOP IN HUNGARY



Lechner Racing's Al Faisal al Zubair of Oman drives his Porsche 911 GT3 R car during the second round of the 2021 International GT Open at the Spa-Francorchamps circuit in Belgium last month

Our Correspondent
Muscat

2021 INTERNATIONAL GT OPEN

Following their splendid weekend at the Spa-Francorchamps circuit in Belgium in the second round, Oman's Al Faisal

al Zubair and his Spanish teammate Andy Soucek, head to the Hungaroring circuit in Mogyorod, Hungary, this coming weekend determined to defend a slender one-point lead in the 2021 International GT Open Championship.

Al Faisal and Soucek recorded their maiden race win at Spa and then rounded off the second round with a third-place podium finish to garner 43 points, a point more than their nearest rivals, Vincenzo Sospiri Racing Lamborghini crew of Frederick

Schandorff/Michele Beretta.

The Lechner Racing Team Porsche 911 GT3 R crew of Al Faisal and Soucek's success in Belgium marked the first outright win for a Porsche in the GT Open series in almost five years. Kevin Estre and Peter Terting were the

last crew to grace the top step of the podium with the Stuttgart brand in Barcelona at the end of the 2016 season.

Ahead of the back-to-back races in the third round on Saturday and Sunday, Al Faisal said, "Very excited to go into the



Al Faisal al Zubair

third round at the Hungaroring with a one-point championship lead. "I think going by the championship and our philosophy, this will not change anything from our side to be honest.

"I think the team is prepared now. We are working better together. On a personal level, the Hungaroring is a racetrack that I am strong at. It's a track that Andy likes as well and where the Porsche will be strong. Hopefully we come out with a good points' haul at the end."

Al Faisal and Soucek have joined forces with Lechner Racing after achieving their own successes in circuit racing.

Two of the highlights of the young Omani's career so far were his two Porsche GT3 Cup Challenge Middle East titles, while Soucek was the 2009 FIA Formula Two champion and has achieved more recent success in the Blancpain GT and GT World Challenge America series.

Two free GT Open practice sessions are scheduled for Friday

OVERALL STANDINGS (AFTER ROUND TWO)

- 1 Al Faisal al Zubair/ Andy Soucek 43 pts
- 2 Frederick Schandorff (Switzerland)/ Michele Beretta (Italy) 42 pts
- 3 Baptiste Moulin (Belgium)/Yuki Nemoto (Japan) 36 pts
- 4 Ollie Millroy (Great Britain)/Brendan Iribe (US) 29 pts
- 5 Jordan Pepper (South Africa)/Ivan Peklin (Ukraine) 21 pts

and then teams will take part in a 30-minute qualifying session on Saturday. The 70-minute opening race takes centre stage on Saturday.

Qualifying for race two is scheduled on Sunday morning and precedes the one-hour second race.

England name new team for Pakistan one-dayers

Existing squad forced to self-isolate after seven positive COVID-19 tests

London, UK - England named an entirely new squad, featuring nine uncapped players, on Tuesday for their upcoming one-day international (ODI) series against Pakistan after a major COVID-19 outbreak within their camp.

The England and Wales Cricket Board (ECB) said PCR tests administered in Bristol on Monday showed three players and four support staff, all of whom have not been named, returning positive results, with

the rest of the group deemed to be close contacts and having to self-isolate as well.

Nevertheless, the three-match series against Pakistan, due to start in Cardiff on Thursday, will go ahead, with Ben Stokes taking over the England captaincy from Eoin Morgan.

Stokes, who has been playing for county side Durham following a finger injury suffered on Indian Premier League duty, is now set to make his first England appearance since March.

England, the reigning men's 50-over world champions, completed a 2-0 ODI series win over Sri Lanka when the third and final match of the series in Bristol on Sunday ended in a no-result washout.

England head coach Chris Silverwood, who had been due to miss the Sri Lanka and Pakistan ODIs as part of a planned rest break, is now due to take charge again.

England announced later on Tuesday an 18-man squad to replace the originally selected group.

After Thursday's match in Cardiff, the ODI series continues at Lord's on Saturday before

finishing at Edgbaston in Birmingham a week on Tuesday.

England and Pakistan are then due to play three T20Is on July 16, 18 and 20, with the matches taking place at Trent Bridge, Headingley and Old Trafford respectively.

Squad: Ben Stokes (capt), Jake Ball, Danny Briggs, Brydon Carse, Zak Crawley, Ben Duckett, Lewis Gregory, Tom Helm, Will Jacks, Dan Lawrence, Saqib Mahmood, Dawid Malan, Craig Overton, Matt Parkinson, David Payne, Phil Salt (wk), John Simpson (wk), James Vince.

AFP



A file photo of England team during the recent ODI series against Sri Lanka

Fans urged to stay away from Olympic marathon

COVID 19 OUTBREAK

Tokyo, Japan - The public will be asked not to line the route of the Olympic marathon over fears that crowds of fans could spread the coronavirus, Tokyo 2020 organisers said on Tuesday.

With less than three weeks before the pandemic-postponed Games begin, concern is growing over a rebound in virus cases in Japan. "In view of the current COVID-19 situation, it will be necessary to reduce the risk of infection by restricting the movement of members of the public," organisers said in a statement about the marathon and race walk events.

"It has therefore been decided to ask the public to refrain from spectating along the course," they said.

The marathon was at the centre of controversy in the original build-up to the 2020 Games, when it was moved to northern Sapporo from Tokyo to avoid the capital's punishing summer heat.

Organisers said they had met police and local government officials to discuss arrangements



A file photo dated May 5, 2021 shows athletes during a half-marathon race which served as a test event for the 2020 Olympics in Sapporo, Japan

for the women's and men's marathons, which will take place on August 7-8, and race walk events. The statement said they would continue to work with local officials 'to ensure a safe and secure Tokyo 2020 Games for all participants and for the citizens of Sapporo and Hokkaido'.

Japan's government is this week expected to extend current virus restrictions, which limit

spectators at sports events to 5,000 and limit the opening hours of bars and restaurants, in several parts of the country.

Japan's COVID-19 outbreak has not been as severe as in some countries, with around 14,800 deaths, but experts say another wave could stretch medical services as the Olympics begin.

AFP

Bangladesh opener Tamim doubtful for Zimbabwe Test

BANGLADESH VS ZIMBABWE ONE OFF TEST

Dhaka, Bangladesh - Bangladesh's opening batsman Tamim Iqbal may not be available for the one-off Test against Zimbabwe in Harare from Wednesday due to a knee injury, coach Russell Domingo said.

The left-hander was in a fine touch against Sri Lanka in April and May, scoring 280 runs at an average of 93.33 but he has been out of action since last month.

"We are still not 100 per cent sure about Tamim. There's still a lot of doubt regarding him," Domingo told reporters in Harare late Monday.

Batsman Mushfiquur Rahim however was 'pretty confident' he can feature after his recent injury, Domingo said. Bangladesh will welcome allrounder Shakib al Hasan to the Test side after he skipped the previous series against Sri Lanka to play in the Indian Premier League.

They are touring Zimbabwe for the first time in more than eight years. They will also play three ODIs and three T20Is.

AFP

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Afghanistan's Rashid Khan

Rashid named Afghanistan's skipper for T20 World Cup

Kabul, Afghanistan - The Afghanistan Cricket Board (ACB) on Tuesday appointed spinner Rashid Khan as skipper for the upcoming ICC Men's T20 World Cup to be held in the UAE and Oman.

The 22 year old had briefly led Afghanistan in 2018-19 before leaving the post saying he was better off as a player.

While he had recently voiced reservations about leading the team, fearing it could affect his bowling, Rashid expressed gratitude on Tuesday.

"It is my duty now to serve my country & my team," he tweeted. "Thank you #ACBofficials for the trust & believing in me. It is a dream journey & my fans support will be the key."

Afghanistan sacked all-format skipper Asghar Afghan in May, naming Hashmatullah Shahidi as Test and one-day international (ODI) captain while deferring the announcement for the T20Is.

Afghanistan board said middle-order batsman Najibullah Zadran will be Rashid's deputy

for the shortest format.

Rashid previously led Afghanistan in two Tests, losing one and winning the other while in seven ODIs he lost six and won one. His record in the T20Is was better as he won four of the seven he captained, losing the other three.

With his uncanny leg-spin, Rashid has earned a reputation as a top cricketer and is No 2 in T20I rankings, behind South African spinner Tabraiz Shamsi. Rashid has 95 wickets in 51 T20Is at an economy of 6.21 runs per over - the best among current international bowlers.

Afghanistan will play the main rounds of the T20 World Cup from October 17-November 14.

Afghanistan has been placed in Group B alongside India, England and South Africa, with two qualifiers from the first round to join them.

Defending champions the West Indies will be with Pakistan, Australia, New Zealand and two qualifiers in Group A.

AFP

Barty sails into semis



Australia's Ashleigh Barty in action against fellow countrywoman Ajla Tomljanovic on Tuesday (AFP)

London, UK - Ashleigh Barty kept alive her dream of winning the women's Wimbledon title on the 50th anniversary of fellow indigenous Australian Evonne Goolagong Cawley's first win by easing into the semifinals on Tuesday.

The 25 year old outclassed unseeded compatriot Ajla Tomljanovic 6-1, 6-3 to set up what promises to be a far more serious test of her ability on Thursday when she faces 2018 champion Angelique Kerber of Germany. "It's the ultimate test," said Barty. "Angie's had success here before. I love that match-up. She knows her way around this court and I know I need to play well to give myself a chance in that match. "This is a dream come true."

Earlier, Kerber reached the Wimbledon semifinals for the fourth time on Tuesday with a 6-2, 6-3 win over Karolina Muchova of the Czech Republic. "It's a magical place for me," said Kerber, the world No 28, who is a three-time major winner, after securing the 80th victory of her career on grass.



"I was excited to play the grass court season after a one year break. I am so happy having my heart on the court and enjoying my time."

Also, Aryna Sabalenka ended Ons Jabeur's historic run at Wimbledon, the second-seeded Belarus player's power getting the better of the guile of the Tunisian 6-4, 6-3 in 74 minutes.

The 23 year old, who had only won one match on her three previous visits to Wimbledon, will play former world No 1

Karolina Pliskova of the Czech republic who eased into the last-four with a 6-2, 6-2 win over Viktorija Golubic of Switzerland.

Pliskova reached her first Wimbledon semifinal. She has yet to win a Grand Slam title.

Jabeur departs having lost in her second Grand Slam quarter-final but having done wonders in her goal to use her exploits to encourage young Arab women - to take up the sport.

Sabalenka said, "I mean I am really happy with this win. It's always tough against Ons, she's an amazing player and person."

Monday's results (x denotes seeding): **Women's fourth round:** Ajla Tomljanovic beat Emma Raducanu 6-4, 3-0 - retired; Karolina Muchova (x19) beat Paula Badosa (x30) 7-6 (8/6), 6-4; Karolina Pliskova (x8) beat Liudmila Samsonova 6-2, 6-3.

AFP

Poland's Hurkacz faces 'unbelievable' Federer

London, UK - Hubert Hurkacz became just the fourth Polish man to reach the Wimbledon quarterfinals on Tuesday with a five-set win over Russian second seed Daniil Medvedev.

World No 18 Hurkacz won 2-6, 7-6 (7/2), 3-6, 6-3, 6-4 in a match held over from Monday due to rain and will now face Roger Federer for a place in the semifinals.

"For this sport, Roger is unbelievable, what he does, how he plays and the titles he has won throughout his career. He inspired so many people and it's going to be fun," said Hurkacz.

Hurkacz's last-16 tie had started on Court Two on Monday but was suspended with him 4-3 up in the fourth set. It was completed under the Centre Court roof in front of a capacity crowd of 15,000.

"Playing on this unbelievable court, the best court in the world with this magnificent crowd, is so special and means a lot to me," said Hurkacz.

Hurkacz, 24, follows in the footsteps of fellow Poles who made the last-eight at the All England Club - Wojtek Fibak (1980) and Jerzy Janowicz and Lukasz Kubot (2013).

Earlier on Monday, Federer became the oldest man in the modern era to make the last-eight at Wimbledon.

Federer, who will be 40 in just under five weeks' time, brushed aside Italy's Lorenzo Sonego 7-5, 6-4, 6-2 to make the quarterfinals at



Poland's Hubert Hurkacz

Wimbledon for the 18th time and 58th overall at the majors.

Federer is the oldest man in the last-eight since the dawn of the Open Era in 1968.

Meanwhile, Novak Djokovic can inch closer to a title showdown against Federer on Wednesday when he makes landmark appearance in the quarterfinals. World No 1 Djokovic, chasing a sixth title here and record-equalling 20th Grand Slam, plays his 50th quarterfinal at the majors.

QUARTERFINAL LINE-UP

(x denotes seeding)

Novak Djokovic (x1) vs **Marton Fucsovics**, **Karen Khachanov** (x25) vs **Denis Shapovalov** (x10), **Matteo Berrettini** (x7) vs **Felix Auger-Aliassime** (x16), **Roger Federer** (x6) vs **Hubert Hurkacz** (x14).

AFP

Cavendish wins stage as Merckx record looms

TOUR DE FRANCE

Valence, France - Mark Cavendish won his third stage on the 2021 Tour de France on Tuesday to move within one of Eddy Merckx's all-time record of 34 wins on Tuesday, but said he is motivated more by inspiring people to overcome difficulties.

At the end of a flat run from Albertville to Valence, the 36 year old Briton edged Belgians Wout van Aert and Jasper Philipsen over the line to also keep a firm grip on the sprint points green jersey with his 33rd win on the world's greatest bike race.

Cavendish was a surprise late inclusion on Deceuninck's Tour roster and has seized his opportunity, ending a five-year barren patch in the race with wins on stages four, six and now ten.

Known as the 'Manx Missile' Cavendish was teamless in December before being taken in by former mentor Patrick Lefevere at the Belgian team Cavendish calls home, and where he finally put behind him the after effects of a tiring virus.



Team Deceuninck's Mark Cavendish (C) celebrates as he crosses the finish line at the end of the tenth stage

"I've been blown away by the love and support from around the world," a beaming Cavendish said. "People can be inspired by

some kind of comeback if you think things are over, if anyone can use that to get inspired that is the greatest joy for me," said

Cavendish, who had Epstein Barr virus.

Cavendish refuses to discuss the Merckx stage milestone, the

Belgian is remembered as a five-time Tour de France winner.

Pogacar ready to go full gas

The 22 year old defending champion Tadej Pogacar retained the yellow jersey for the overall lead after keeping a low profile ahead of Wednesday's monster double climb of Mont Ventoux with its barren, lunar upper reaches.

"Yeah, I didn't get too involved today, I need to get ready to go full-gas on Mont Ventoux," said the overall leader.

"There's no point me risking everything going for a stage win," said the UAE rider.

Stage ten took the peloton through the magnificent Rhone Valley where the 165 survivors from the original 184 starters appeared relaxed after their rest day.

The race ended minutes before a heavy rainstorm lashed the finish line in Valence, halfway between Lyon and Marseille, that had been on an 'orange alert' in France for bad weather.

AFP

Every day, all day!