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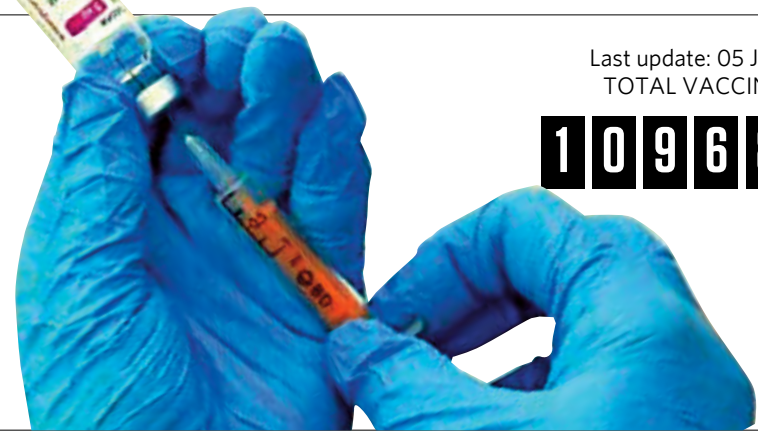
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Oman-Saudi ties to scale new heights

His Majesty heads to Saudi Arabia on his first official visit today

Muscat - In affirmation of the depth of historical relations between the sultanate and the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia (KSA) and, based on the keenness of the two countries' leaderships to enhance joint ties, His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik will head to Saudi Arabia on an official visit on Sunday. The visit is in response to an invitation from the Custodian of the Two Holy Mosques King Salman bin Abdulaziz al Saud of KSA.

With the visit, Oman-Saudi relations are set to scale new heights, ushering in a new era of wider prosperity and expanded cooperation.

The two countries are bound by deep-rooted ties, which will be consolidated further by His Majesty the Sultan's historic visit, his first official visit abroad since he assumed power on Jan-

TRADE, CONSTRUCTION AND SERVICES - THREE MAIN SECTORS FOR SAUDI INVESTMENTS IN OMAN

1,079

SAUDI COMPANIES
REGISTERED TILL
2020 WITH
INVESTMENT OF
RO188MN

16.6%

INCREASE IN
SAUDI EXPORTS
TO OMAN
IN 2020
OVER 2019



6.94%

ANNUAL
GROWTH OF
SAUDI EXPORTS
TO OMAN
(2016- 2020)

7.4%

ANNUAL
GROWTH OF
OMANI EXPORTS
TO SAUDI ARABIA
(2016-2020)

uary 11, 2020.

This will be His Majesty the Sultan's second meeting with King Salman, the first being in January 2020 in Muscat when the Saudi king arrived in Oman to offer his condolences on the death of the His Majesty Sultan

Qaboos bin Said.

Since the day of his accession to the throne, His Majesty Sultan Haitham has affirmed his determination to work in close coordination with his brethren, leaders of the Gulf Cooperation Council states, to upgrade the GCC's

march to realise the peoples' aspirations.

Oman-Saudi relations are established on solid and enduring principles, which is reflected in the tangible progress made between the two countries in political, economic, social, cultural

and security spheres.

The visit is evidence of these relations being continuous, open and expected to see further comprehensive growth.

The two countries' keenness on exchanging views on matters of common concern is reflected

in high-level meetings between the leaders and top officials, and evinced in the continuous contacts between His Majesty Sultan Haitham and King Salam.

Omani and Saudi visions are identical in many ways, including their stand in the field of environ-

ment, which is considered one of the most significant international issues raised in the agenda of UN organisations.

Oman expressed its appreciation of Saudi Arabia's 'Green Middle East' initiative to safeguard sustainability of the environment. The initiative, announced by the Crown Prince of Saudi Arabia in partnership with the region's countries, envisages the implementation of the greatest afforestation programme aimed to address environmental challenges.

His Majesty the Sultan expressed the sultanate's support to the kingdom's environment conservation efforts during a telephonic conversation in March with Prince Mohammed bin Salman al Saud, Crown Prince, Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Defence of Saudi Arabia.

Over a period of two years (2020 and 2021), the sultanate and Saudi Arabia intensified high-level bilateral meetings. In March 2020, His Majesty Sultan Haitham received Prince Khalid bin Salman al Saud, Saudi Deputy Minister of Defence, who was on a visit to Oman.

Continued on Page 02



NEW
arrivals



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'COVID-19 cases rise after 2 months of steady decline'

Our Correspondent
Muscat

Cases of COVID-19 are on the rise after two months of steady decline in the Eastern Mediterranean Region. Countries are once again struggling to contain infection and protect their populations while at the same time keeping their borders open and their economies active.

"As we continue into the summer months, we are concerned about another spike in cases due to variants of concern and increased international travel, combined with low protection of people due to limited vaccination uptake and inadequate adherence to prevention measures," Dr Ahmed al Mandheri, WHO's regional director for Eastern Mediterranean, said on the COVID-19 situation in the region.

"Despite all efforts, we are seeing a higher weekly average of new cases and deaths across the region compared to the same



Countries should prepare by strengthening surveillance and detection, social measures, and ensuring health systems are able to cope with increasing numbers of moderate and severe cases

DR AHMED AL MANDHERI

time last year. This is due to several factors. The Delta variant has been detected in at least 98 countries around the world, including 13 countries in our region,

and it is spreading quickly regardless of vaccination coverage. It is fuelling the current surge in cases and deaths. The Delta variant seems to be spreading faster

than the original strain," he added.

Dr Mandheri said the rapid spread of the Delta variant is contributing to an increase in disease transmission both globally and in the region. "Countries should prepare by strengthening surveillance and detection, social measures, and ensuring health systems are able to cope with increasing numbers of moderate and severe cases," he said.

"We are working to obtain a better understanding of the COVID-19 variants, but we cannot do this without enough in-depth information about how the virus circulates. We encourage all countries to enhance sequencing capacity and data sharing. The more we know about the virus and the impact of its different strains, the better we can adapt our response to defeat it. WHO, of course, is willing to play its role in supporting data collection, analysis, sharing and management," he added.

24-hour operations centre for public enquiries during lockdown

Our Correspondent
Muscat

A special round-the-clock operations centre will be opened on July 16 for effective monitoring and giving special permission during the complete closure period, according to Maj Gen Abdullah bin Ali bin Hamad al Harthy, Assistant Inspector General of Police and Customs for Operations in Royal Oman Police.

At a press conference of the Supreme Committee on Thursday, Maj Gen Harthy said, "The operations centre will run under the guidance of five ministries."

There will be checkpoints in various governorates and patrols within the wilayats.

"All procedures will remain the same as during the previous movement ban. The ban this time will be in effect from July 16 till the end of the month."

He added that during the closure, exceptions will be made for passage of patients, humanitarian cases and for activities re-



Maj Gen Abdullah al Harthy

lated to the storage and sale of foodstuff and other basic essential activities. Hospitals, pharmacies, fuel and water stations, factories and warehouses will remain open. Trucks carrying essential materials of three tonnes and more will be allowed to pass.

"There will be no disruption to basic services during lockdowns. People can call 1099 for help," said Maj Gen Harthy.

He added that there will also be some flexibility in rules for people owning farms and livestock barns during the full lockdown.

"For farmers who need to water their crops as well as tend

to their farms and livestock, there will be some scope of flexibility in the rules and these groups will be allowed to carry out their activities. People selling fodder will be allowed to sell their products at the entrance of wilayats.

"For Dhofar and Musandam governorates, anyone who has not received a dose of the approved vaccine and registered in Tarassud+ will not be allowed to enter. Ferries will be available to go to Musandam," said Maj Gen Harthy.

About visas, he said, "There is no change in the decision to issue visas except for what has been excluded by the Supreme Committee.

Slaughterhouses closed

Issam al Zadjali, chairman of Muscat Municipality, informed that slaughterhouses of the municipality will be closed during the three days of Eid. On other days, these will work in two shifts - 7am-12pm and 3pm-4.30pm.

TENDER NOTICE

The Internal Tender Committee of Port of Duqm Company SAOC., hereby announces the following Tender:

Tender No.	Description	Last Date of receiving Specifications	Date of Bid Submission	Suppliers	Tender Fee OMR	Place of Submission
ITC/T/006 /2021	Operation & Maintenance of Membrane Bio Reactor System (MBR) Sewage Treatment Plant at Port of Duqm	25th July 2021	15th August 2021	Only Specialized Companies	100/- OMR Non Refundable	Port of Duqm Company 3rd floor

Taking into consideration the following:

All specialized companies that wish to participate in the tender must deposit the tender amount into the bank account of the Company (details of the bank account is set out hereunder) and submit the original payment receipt of the tender along with a copy of the Commercial Registration Certificate and the contact details of the authorized individual (business card) to the address presented below. From 08:00 - 13:00 and 14:00 (Sunday - Thursday).

Payment Information:

1. Bank Transfer:

Account Name	Port of Duqm Company S.A.O.C
Account Number	0423047518510013
Bank Name	Bank Muscat
Branch	Ghala Corporate Branch
Bank ID Code	BMUSOMRXXX

2- Credit/Debit Card at Port of Duqm Muscat Office.

Complete Tender documents should be submitted in sealed envelope with red wax with tender number and title and addressed to the "Chairman of Internal Tender Committee". The envelope should not make any reference to the bidder details.

All applicants are required to submit the Tender in the Tender box in the main office of Port of Duqm Company at or before 02:00 PM on the assigned date for submission of the Tender. Tenders submitted after the above mentioned date and time shall not be considered.

- * The company is not obliged to accept the lowest offer or any other offer without any justifiable reasons.
- * The company reserve the right to issue the order either in part or full for the quoted items without any justifiable reasons.
- * The company reserve the right to reject the tenders not complying with the tender documentation requirement. For any clarification, please contact us through tenders@portduqm.com

Port of Duqm Company S.A.O.C.

PO Box: 2409, PC: 111, Sultanate of Oman, Almarshreq Building, 18 November Street, N. Azaiba, T: (+968) 24342800 | F: (+968) 24587343 | www.portofduqm.com



Flights to operate normally during lockdown: Oman Air

Our Correspondent
Muscat

Oman Air has announced that its flights are departing on time and will continue to do so during the complete lockdown period.

A statement issued by the airline said, 'For flights operating

during the lockdown period, passengers and those dropping them off or picking them up are allowed to travel to the airport.

'Please ensure that you always carry a printed copy of travel tickets along with all applicable travel documents and valid

ID in the event that you are asked to present them to the relevant authorities.'

The airline urged passengers to check its website - omanair.com - for the latest travel updates, restrictions and COVID-19 health and safety advisories before their flight.

Eid on July 20

Muscat - The main committee for moon sighting met on Saturday evening and declared that the moon for the month of Dhu'l Hijjah 1442 AH was sighted. Therefore, July 11 will mark the beginning of Dhu'l Hijjah and July 20 the beginning of Eid al Adha.

As per the decision of the Supreme Committee in charge of dealing with the COVID-19 pandemic, the complete lockdown will be from July 20 to July 22.

Oman-Saudi ties to scale new heights

Continued from Page 01

Prince Khalid bin Salman visited the sultanate to explore aspects of existing cooperation between the two countries and ways to realise the joint interests of Omani and Saudi peoples.

During the meeting, Prince Khalid bin Salman conveyed a message from the Saudi leadership to His Majesty Sultan Haitham. He pointed out that during the meeting emphasis was laid on "enhancing the brotherly, bilateral and strategic relations between the two countries in all fields".

Omani-Saudi diplomacy converges on many visions, notably combating terrorism and safeguarding international peace and security. This prompted the sultanate to join the Anti-Terrorism Alliance of Muslim Countries in 2016 and to support the efforts of Saudi Arabia in this respect.

In its political statements, the sultanate has always supported the government of the kingdom on a variety of issues. The sultanate welcomed the initiative announced by Saudi Arabia last March to reach a political settlement in the Yemeni crisis through dialogue with different parties and in cooperation with

the UN's efforts aimed at realising the desired political settlement in the war-ravaged country.

Meanwhile, Saudi Arabia has expressed its appreciation for the sultanate's efforts and its 'positive role' in supporting the efforts of UN Envoy to Yemen Martin Griffith and US Special Envoy to Yemen Timothy Lenderking. This was acknowledged by Saudi Foreign Minister Prince Faisal bin Farhan bin Abdullah at a press conference he held in Riyadh in March 2021.

The remarkable growth and expansion in Omani-Saudi relations is in pursuance of a benign march led by the Late His Majesty Sultan Qaboos bin Said and his brethren, the kings of Saudi Arabia, over the past decades. It is a march based on solid foundations and clear-cut principles that distinguish the ties of the two countries. These relations resulted in agreements and joint ventures in several fields.

The positive interactions between Oman and Saudi Arabia at many levels are conspicuous. They underscore the keenness of His Majesty Sultan Haitham and King Salman to press ahead with promoting this deep-rooted relationship.

His Majesty's visit to Saudi Arabia and his meeting with King Salman will give impetus to the bilateral relations and constitute a new starting to establish a more prosperous future for the peoples of the two countries. It will lend support to concepts of justice, peace, security and tolerance in regional and international issues of common concern. The visit will also cement intra-GCC ties and rally efforts of the council's leaders to consolidate stability and prosperity.

The future of Omani-Saudi relations is secure in the hands of their two wise leaders, His Majesty Sultan Haitham and King Salman. This visit will open up wide vistas of cooperation in the fields of business, investment, ICT, post, transport, standardisation, media, youths, sports, culture and other spheres.

These areas constitute significant pillars in Oman Vision 2040 and Saudi Vision 2030 and expected to bring a wide range of benefits to the peoples of the two countries.

The talks of the two leaders will also contribute to resolving pending issues and shaping joint visions and consensus on current regional issues. They will draw on

the great political expertise of the two countries and their diplomatic traditions founded on solid grounds of sound foreign policy, coupled with an earnest quest for establishing peace, security and stability in the region and the world at large.

During the visit, His Majesty the Sultan will be accompanied by a high-level delegation comprising Sayyid Shihab bin Tarik al Said, Deputy Prime Minister for Defence Affairs, Sayyid Khalid bin Hilal bin Saud al Busaidi, Minister of the Diwan of Royal Court, Gen Sultan bin Mohammed al Nu'amani, Minister of Royal Office, Sayyid Hamoud bin Faisal al Busaidi, Minister of Interior, Sayyid Badr bin Hamad bin Hamoud al Busaidi, Foreign Minister, Said bin Hamoud bin Said al Ma'awali, Minister of Transport, Communications and Information Technology, Qais bin Mohammed bin Moosa al Youssef, Minister of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion, Abdulsalam bin Mohammed al Murshidi, Chairman of Oman Investment Authority, and Sayyid Faisal bin Turki al Said, the sultanate's Ambassador to Saudi Arabia.

ONA






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Those who avoid jabs will face legal action: Minister

Our Correspondent
Muscat

H E Dr Ahmed bin Mohammed al Sa'eedi, Minister of Health, said on Thursday that Oman will not leave any individual unvaccinated and that there is a mechanism to vaccinate expatriates who are not covered by their employers.

He also said legal action will be taken against government employees who refuse to take the COVID-19 vaccine.

"We will take legal action against employees of government institutions who refuse to take vaccination doses without a convincing medical reason, and private sector institutions may take the same approach," he said.

On vaccination for all he said, "There is a mechanism for vaccination of expatriates as most companies have reserved doses for their employees; the vaccines have been given within defined dates. The sultanate will not leave any individual from the target categories without being vac-



There is a mechanism for vaccination of expats. Oman will not leave any individual from the target groups unvaccinated

H E DR AHMED
AL SA'EEDI

minated."

Expats in Dhofar who had not reserved vaccine doses have been vaccinated, he said.

According to H E Dr Sa'eedi, 36 per cent of the total population that includes both Omanis and residents had been vaccinated until Thursday. The government aims to immunise 65 to 70 per cent of the target groups



(Supplied photos)

with at least a dose of COVID-19 vaccine by the end of August.

"The number of immunised citizens and residents who have been entered into the surveillance programme is 1,266,293. The number of doses that the sultanate has reserved for the end of this year is over 7mn, including 4,200,000 doses of Pfizer," H E Dr Sa'eedi said.

Muscat Municipality chairman Issam al Zadjali said there is a plan to vaccinate all employees at Mawaleh Vegetables and Fruits Market.

"Some 1,400 employees working in the market have already been vaccinated and we will continue the campaign next week till all the workers will get their vaccine," he said.

Death rate up 372% compared to previous wave, says MoH

Our Correspondent
Muscat

Top officials in the Ministry of Health (MoH) have called on all to adhere to preventive and precautionary measures to preserve lives and take pressure off the healthcare system as the death rate increased by 372 per cent compared to the previous wave.

H E Dr Ahmed bin Mohammed al Sa'eedi, Minister of Health, said earlier that partial and full lockdowns have shown to reduce the number of cases. In the context of the upcoming Eid al Adha, he asked people to refrain from gatherings. "How can we celebrate Eid when we are losing dear ones on a daily basis? The decisions of the Supreme Committee depend on evidence and indicators. Closures have proven to flatten the epidemiological curve of COVID-19," he said.

"What happened during Eid al Fitr? The gatherings and weddings led to a very sharp rise in the number of cases and deaths. What the Supreme Committee seeks in all its decisions is to preserve public health and people's lives. After the previous closures



(Supplied photo)

and adherence to procedures, there was a noticeable decrease in numbers between October and January of last year for various indicators," he added.

He said there is unease about the complete closure on the days of Eid. "This decision affects all, including Supreme Committee members, but the reason is clear. We want to reduce the spread of this pandemic and preserve human lives," he said.

Dr Saif al Abri, director general of Disease Surveillance and Control at MoH, said, "In the current wave of COVID-19, death rate has increased by 372 per cent compared to the previous wave. We urge everyone to ad-

here to preventive and precautionary measures to preserve lives and the healthcare system. The Supreme Committee and the technical authorities at MoH have based their decisions on the spread of the Delta variant in about 98 countries and epidemiological study in the sultanate."

He informed that decisions will change depending on the epidemiological map.

On Thursday, MoH reported 1,453 new cases and 15 deaths. With this, the total number of cases registered in the sultanate has reached 281,688, including 3,371 deaths; 150 patients were admitted to hospitals across the country in a 24-hour period.

Emergency loan programme to support affected SMEs

Our Correspondent
Muscat

Following His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tariq's directives, the Authority for Small and Medium Enterprises Development (ASMED) has launched an emergency loan programme to support SMEs, Qais bin Mohammed bin Moosa al Yousef, Minister of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion, said on Thursday.

"Under the programme, 3,200 requests for loans have been received so far. The authority decided that field visits should be conducted to companies and institutions to determine who deserve loans," he said.

According to the minister, the loans target five categories - Entrepreneurs Card holders, women, self-employed, taxi owners and driving instructors.



H E Qais al Yousef

Some 7,377 loans have already been given to owners of SMEs to support them during the pandemic, the minister added.

"The category most affected was the household activities category at the end of last year."

He added, "We will take into account the problems faced by small and medium enterprises. The Supreme Committee tasked with tackling the pandemic took into account reducing the period of complete closure of economic activities as much as possible so

that small and medium enterprises will not be affected. The economic factors and its effects on citizens are among the priorities. All decisions aim to reduce damage as much as possible," Yousef said.

During the lockdown, a specialised technical team will take decisions and a joint operations room comprising the concerned authorities will work around the clock to look into enquiries in the governorates, he said.

"Delivery companies will be allowed to operate during the period. These companies must obtain permits to operate. Companies have been able to take advantage of electronic platforms to promote their products and we urge them to continue using these."

The minister also thanked private sector companies for immunising their employees.



Oman Water & Wastewater Services Company
Diam Haya
Member of Nama Group

TENDER NOTICE

Haya Water hereby announces the following tenders:

TENDER NO:	DESCRIPTION	ELIGIBILITY	TENDER FEE	LAST DATE OF DISTRIBUTION OF TENDER DOCUMENTS	BID SUBMISSION DATE
T/2430406/2021	Cleaning of Process Tanks & Flow Channels at Al Ansab STP	Local companies registered with Government Tender Board and specialized in similar works	25/- (Plus %5 VAT) Non-refundable	29/07/2021	09/08/2021
T/2430424/2021	Service Contract for Standby Generators at OWWSC STPs and Pump Stations	Local companies registered with Government Tender Board and specialized in similar works	55/- (Plus %5 VAT) Non-refundable	29/07/2021	09/08/2021
T/2430426/2021	Maintenance of Landscaping at OWWSC premises	Local companies registered with Government Tender Board and specialized in similar works	100/- (Plus %5 VAT) Non-refundable	29/07/2021	09/08/2021
T/2430443/2021	Service Contract for Rewinding & Overhauling of Electrical Motors	Local companies registered with Government Tender Board and specialized in similar works	80/- (Plus %5 VAT) Non-refundable	29/07/2021	09/08/2021
T/2430442/2021	Upgrading the Existing Odor Control System in MPS -2 at Al Seeb	Local companies registered with Government Tender Board and specialized in similar works	35/- (Plus %5 VAT) Non-refundable	29/07/2021	09/08/2021
T/2429405/2021	Call-off contract for Repair & Maintenance of Sewer & TE	Local companies registered with Government Tender Board and specialized in similar works	300/- (Plus %5 VAT) Non-refundable	29/07/2021	16/08/2021

The tender documents can be purchased from Oman Water and Wastewater Services Company e-tendering page ([Supplier Login](#)) from the date of publication of this announcement until 29/07/2021. The applicants shall pay the tender fee through electronic payment gateway through [Supplier Login](#).

Applicants who are not registered with Oman Water and Wastewater Services Company shall register from: <https://owwsc.nama.om/Business-with-Us/Vendor-Registration> to have the login credentials of Supplier portal.

All applicants who have paid the tender fee shall have access to the Tender Documents through Haya Water e-tendering page ([Supplier Login](#)).

All participating companies shall submit a bid bond of %1 of bid value in a sealed envelope to Oman Water and Wastewater Services Company not later than 10.00 am on the bid submission date. Bid bond must be obtained from a bank registered in the Sultanate of Oman and it should be addressed in favour of Oman Water and Wastewater Services Company.

The bid along with all required documents shall be uploaded through Oman Water and Wastewater Services Company e-tendering page not later than 10.00 am on the date specified above. For more details, refer to Tender Page of our website www.owwsc.nama.om or Email to: tender@owwsc.nama.om

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Committee formed for Bahla Fort and Oasis management



(File photo)

Our Correspondent
Muscat

H E Salim bin Mohammed bin Said al Mahrouqi, Minister of Heritage and Tourism, issued a ministerial decision to form a Steering Committee for the management plan of Bahla Fort and Oasis site.

The decision states that the committee will be tasked with following up on the enforcement of regulations to manage the site

and the management plan. It will also coordinate, supervise, and follow up the plans, projects and programmes of all departments concerned in the site.

In addition, the committee has also been tasked with taking measures to ensure the social, economic and environmental sustainability of the site.

This can be achieved by finding suitable ways in tackling the challenges that may arise, especially overpopulation, the migra-

tion of the local community from the site, and the emergence of modern architecture, as well as the degradation of green landscapes as a result of building on farmlands and changing their uses. Another challenge is posed by draughts impacting the Oasis site.

Those decisions come in view of the plan towards preserving the remarkable value of the site, which was inscribed as a Unesco World Heritage site in 1987.

PRAYER TIMINGS

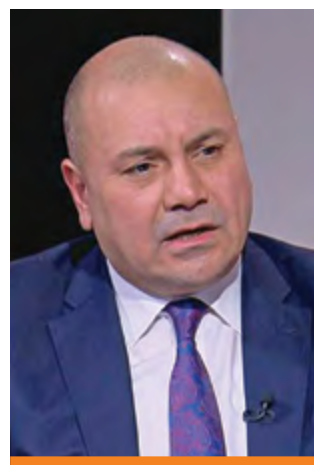
Fajr	3.58am	Duhr	12.12pm	Maghrib	6.57pm
Sunrise	5.27am	Asr	3.32pm	Isha	8.27pm

‘Oman, Jordan have special status in regional balance’

Amman, Jordan - Abdelmonem al Odat, Speaker of Jordan House of Representatives, has said that relations between the sultanate and Jordan were moulded at the hands of two astute leaders, the Late Sultan Qaboos bin Said and the Late King Al Hussein bin Talal - whom he described as “sages of the Arab nation”.

The two countries’ relations flourished further and evolved in a strategic context, since His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik and King Abdullah took the reins of power, Odat added.

In a statement to ONA, Odat said that Oman and Jordan espouse a comprehensive approach within the context of Oman Vision 2040 and Jordan Vision 2030, despite challenges



The two countries’ relations flourished further and evolved in a strategic context, since His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik and King Abdullah took the reins

**ABDELMONEM
AL ODAT**

posed by COVID-19 which undermined the growth of the global economy.

In comments about the sectors in which Jordan and the sultanate cooperate, Odat pointed

out that cooperation between the two countries is ongoing in a variety of fields, including commercial exchange, higher education and research.

Odat described cooperation

between the Jordanian House of Representatives and Majlis A’Shura as ‘solid’. He added that the two institutions engage in consultations within Arab and Islamic parliaments and the Inter-Parliamentary Union.

Odat commended the stance of the sultanate as it supported the Palestinian people during international emergency meetings held recently. He affirmed that Oman and Jordan have a special status in regional balance and play an active role in joint Arab cooperation.

They also earned the respect of the international community due to their objective and balanced stands in regional and international issues.

ONA

Oman highlights its human rights record at UN meet

Muscat - Oman, represented by the Foreign Ministry, took part in the United Nations Human Rights Council’s 47th meeting in Geneva on Thursday.

The virtual meeting was held to adopt the 3rd Universal Periodic Review on human rights.

Sheikh Humaid Ali al Ma’ani, head of the International Affairs Department at the Foreign Ministry of Oman, headed Oman’s delegation and delivered the sultanate’s speech before the council.

Sheikh Ma’ani highlighted the progress made by the sultanate so far in human rights since the 2nd UPR in 2015.

He also touched on the most important achievements made



Oman embraced many recommendations in different fields of human rights, such as empowering women, children’s rights, freedom of speech and maintaining workers’ rights

SHEIKH HUMAID ALI AL MA’ANI

in different aspects of citizens’ rights in the sultanate and the various areas of human rights (civil, social, economic, health and cultural) and other rights that enjoy a continuous care and attention of His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik.

He also previewed Oman’s efforts during the period covered in the report to enhance human rights by joining a num-

ber of human rights-related conventions and treaties, as well as enacting legislations to promote them.

Sheikh Ma’ani underscored the sultanate’s embracement of many recommendations in different fields of human rights, such as empowering and protecting women in society, children’s rights, freedom of speech, combating human traf-

ficking and maintaining workers’ rights.

Idris Abdulrahman al Khanjari, Permanent Representative of Oman to the UN, and a number of officials from the Ministry of Justice and Legal Affairs, Foreign Ministry, Ministry of Social Development and Ministry of Labour attended the meeting as part of the country’s delegation.

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MUSCAT DAILY

Offer valid from 16th May 2021 to 15th August 2021. Total of 3 raffle draws will be held at Oasis Water Company, Acacia Drive Dates: 16th June 2021, 19th July 2021 and 15th August 2021. Winners will be intimated directly. Oasis Water Company employees are not eligible to participate in this promotion. Gifts shown are for illustrative purpose only. Actual may vary.

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ESO joins movement for Plastic-Free July

Muscat - Building on its efforts to promote sustainable behaviour in the sultanate, the Environment Society of Oman (ESO) is joining the global movement ‘Plastic-Free July’ with a series of events.

This will include a month-long social media campaign, animation videos and a calendar of virtual webinars to raise awareness about the impact of single-use plastics on the environment and our health, and to encourage people, whether as consumers or producers, to help tackle the problem, stated the ESO.

The webinars, which will be in Arabic and open to the public, will kick-off with a plastics awareness presentation on July 11.

Supported by long-term partners Oman LNG and Sabco Group, Plastic-Free July is part of a wider campaign called ‘It’s Time’ that the ESO launched earlier this year. The ESO campaign aims to encourage the adoption of environmentally-conscious community behaviours focusing on three key aspects - littering, recycling and single-use plastics.



“Our fight towards eliminating plastic began a long time ago, but since hygiene concerns surrounding COVID-19 have triggered a significant increase in plastic consumption, it is even more pertinent now. Every day we see more people looking for alternatives to replace single-use plastics but we still need to increase our efforts, as a nation, to work towards solving this issue,” said H H Sayyida Tania al Said, president of the ESO.

To register for virtual events, or to find out more, keep an eye on Instagram @esooman, Twitter @eso_oman_ and ESO’s Facebook page

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Ominvest to acquire additional 5% stake in Bank Muscat

Our Correspondent
Muscat

Oman International Development and Investment Holding Company (Ominvest) is planning to acquire an additional 5 per cent stake in Bank Muscat.

Ominvest, one of the oldest and largest investment firms in the Gulf region, is an existing shareholder in Bank Muscat and the purchase of additional stake may result in up to a maximum 15 per cent total shareholding in Bank Muscat by Ominvest.

Ominvest would like to disclose that it has received the Central Bank of Oman's approval to acquire an additional 5 per cent shareholding in Bank Muscat,' Ominvest said in a disclosure submitted to the Muscat Stock Exchange on Thursday. Ominvest said it intends to



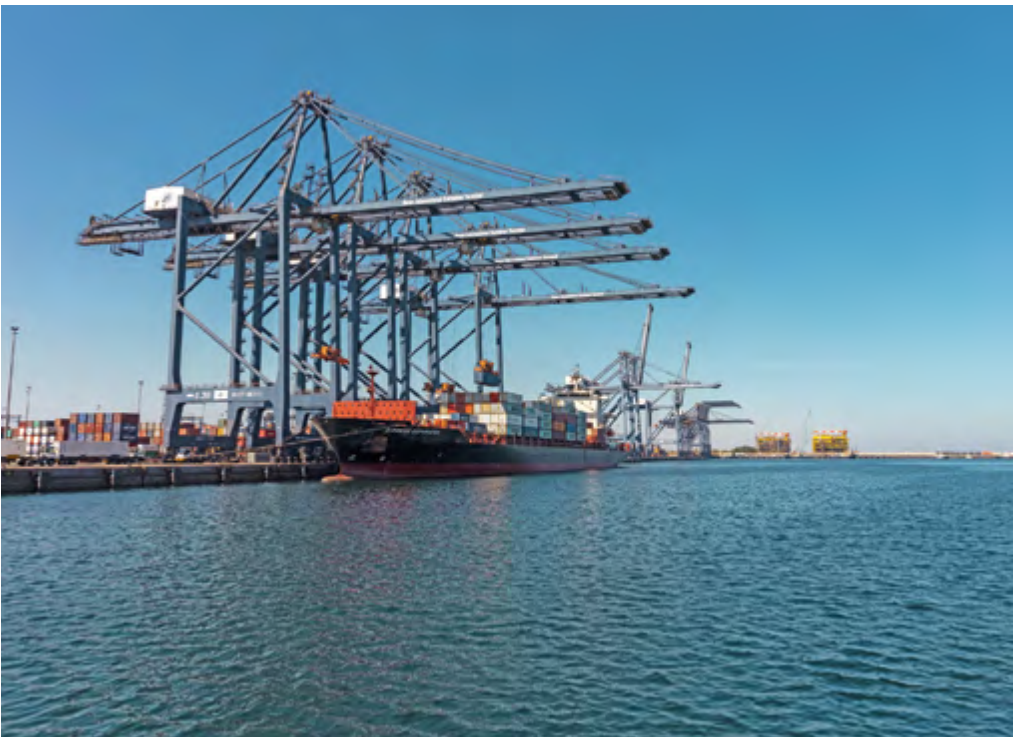
complete the acquisition of additional 5 per cent stake in Bank Muscat in a time-bound manner, subject to the market conditions. 'This [acquisition] may result in up to a maximum 15 per cent

total shareholding in Bank Muscat by Ominvest,' Ominvest added in its disclosure to the Omani bourse. In a separate disclosure to the Muscat Stock Exchange, Bank Muscat, the largest

financial institution in Oman, confirmed about Ominvest's intentions to acquire the additional shareholding in the bank. 'We wish to inform the market that Bank Muscat has been notified by Ominvest that it has received the Central Bank of Oman's approval to acquire additional shareholding of up to 5 per cent in the bank,' Bank Muscat said.

Ominvest also informed the bank that this additional stake purchase will be through the market in a time-bound manner depending on the market conditions, Bank Muscat said. 'This disclosure is being made by the bank as part of its disclosure responsibility of any material information it receives.'

Following the announcement by Ominvest, Bank Muscat shares rose 2.33 per cent and closed at 440bz on Thursday.



Sohar Port and Freezone posts strong growth in Q1

Our Correspondent
Muscat

Sohar Port and Freezone announced impressive results for the first quarter of 2021, recording growth in all categories of cargo handling.

As the rapidly growing complex continues to transform the sultanate's burgeoning maritime and logistics industries, Sohar Port and Freezone reported that throughput in the first quarter increased by 21 per cent over the same period in 2020.

Dry bulk volumes at the port grew by 25 per cent to almost 9mn tonnes, breakbulk handling grew by 7 per cent to 426,783 tonnes and liquid bulk increased by 7 per cent to just over 4mn tonnes.

The number of handled containers increased by 1.8 per cent to 197,000 TEUs during January - March period of 2021. In addition, Sohar Port also recorded spectacular growth of 200 per cent in ship-to-ship (STS) cargo given its strategic location and reputation for delivering unmatched quality of service with quick turnaround times.

Mark Geilenkirchen, CEO of

Sohar Port, in a statement said the year-on-year throughput growth at the port has transformed the sultanate's capacity for worldwide trade.

"The first quarter results for 2021 show that there is very strong demand for raw materials for industry and consumer goods, fuelled by the recovery of economies around the world. Our robust business continuity strategy and advantageous position at the crossroads of global trade routes has helped us to manage increased levels of cargo traffic and ensure a seamless and uninterrupted flow of operations to support the national economy," he said.

Omar Mahmood al Mahrizi, CEO of Sohar Freezone and deputy CEO of Sohar Port, said, "Sohar Port and Freezone is positioned as a logistics gateway and is integral to bringing in the requisite goods to clients within the freezone and industries in the region relying on a steady flow of materials.

Further expansion of the port will increase Oman's role as an international trade hub allowing us to attract more leading global partners and establish ourselves

as the ideal location for business outside the Gulf."

Sohar Port and Freezone is renowned as one of the fastest-growing complexes of its kind in the world and is currently undergoing significant developments within its industrial cluster. Open 24 hours a day, seven days a week, it offers a myriad of incentives for businesses and investors, including easy set-up facilities and a One-Stop-Shop for regulatory procedures.

Meanwhile, the port's own unique online route planner, 'Sohar Navigate', has been specifically designed to help companies use container transportation in smarter ways for their supply chain.

As one of the fastest-growing ports in the world, Sohar Port and Freezone continues to build on its strategic location and enhance its services, positioning itself as a key logistics hub within the region and across the world.

Sohar Port, after 17 years of operations, serves as the main gateway for import and export in Oman, contributing 2.8 per cent of the country's GDP and almost 26,000 direct and indirect employment opportunities.

Omani banks are well-capitalised despite decline in profits: IMF

Our Correspondent
Muscat

Omani banks are well-capitalised despite the increase in non-performing loans and decline in profits due to the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, according to the International Monetary Fund (IMF).

The IMF, in its statement of the Article IV Mission to Oman, said that the sultanate's monetary and financial policy responses should strike a balance between supporting economy and containing risks to financial stability.

Banks are well-capitalised and liquid despite a slight increase in non-performing loans ratio and a decline in profitability, but credit risk is a concern going forward given the uncertain out-



look,' it said.

The IMF, however, warned that a prolonged pandemic could further intensify corporate vulnerabilities for the banking sector.

'The Central Bank of Oman should continue to have a forward-looking assessment of

banks' asset quality and ensure adequate capital buffers to withstand credit risks if they materialise.'

'Extending loan moratoria should be data-dependent and increasingly targeted to dis-

tressed but viable borrowers,' the fund said.

According to the IMF, the banking regulatory framework in the sultanate could be strengthened further.

'The Bank Resolution Framework, issued in 2019, should be grounded in the Banking Law to provide legal certainty in supporting effective resolution implementation.

Though sectoral lending exposures are broad, risks relating to lending to the commercial real estate sector, which has been negatively impacted by the pandemic, should be carefully monitored,' the IMF said.

The IMF also noted Oman's ongoing efforts to promote financial technologies (Fintech) to enhance financial inclusion while containing risks.

Number of SAOC firms reaches to 396

Muscat - The Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion (MoCIIP) last year granted 15 new licenses to set up new Omani closed joint stock companies (SAOC) with total issued capital of RO65.79mn. Total number of SAOCs or closed joint stock companies reached 396 at the end of 2020, recording total issued capital of RO8.498bn, according to a statement issued by MoCIIP. The MoCIIP's statistics department clarified that the number of companies subject to the Foreign Investment Law reached at 14,021 in December 2020 with total capital of RO5.586bn.

The ministry pointed out that the number of companies registered under the sultanate's Investment Law during the past year reached 1,414 companies, with total capital of RO188.31mn.

1,522 electronic transaction requests were completed through the 'Invest Easy' portal.20.



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ELECTRONIC TENDER (S)

Majan Electricity Co. (SAOC) Announces the Following E-Tender

TENDER NO	DESCRIPTION	GRADE	LAST DATE FOR BUYING	SUBMISSION DATE	TENDER PRICE R.O.
80/2021	Supply of drinking water for MJEC offices in (North Al Batina and Muscat) governorates for two years contract.	Specialized	22/7/2021	17/8/2021	25 /=

Interested Firm having relevant experience in the similar nature of services and registered with Tender Board and Distribution Code Review Panel (DCRP) for electrical work, may register and obtain the tender documents from E-Tendering Site <https://etendering.tenderboard.gov.om> against online payment of non-refundable fees mentioned above for each tender.

The Tenderers should enclose a copy of Bank Guarantee issued by any registered bank in the Sultanate of Oman for a value of (1%) of the submitted bid value valid for a period of (90) days from the date of Submission, and addressed to The Chairman of the Tender Committee. The original Bid Bond to be delivered in sealed envelope, and the tender number and title of project only are to be mentioned on the envelopes. The place of submission the original bond would be at MJEC Contracts & tenders office at MJEC building in AL Sawari Center in Sohar or at MJEC Contracts & tenders office at Muscat in Al Mubailah- opposite to the industrial Area beside to Bank Suhar ,before 10 A.M. according to the assigned date of submission of the tender. Any Submission of original tender bond after the time and date mentioned in the advertisement will not be accepted and tenderer offer will be rejected.

The Completed signed and sealed commercial and technical offer with all tender documents should be submitted and uploaded online into the above mentioned E-Tendering website .The Hard copies of the tender document are not accepted.

For more information please contact Tel no.:24051501- 26944266
For any technical assistance please contact Helpdesk: +968-24166670
E-mail: etenderhd@ita.gov.om

Preference of awarding the tender will be given to those bidders who achieved a high percentage of purchasing from Local Products & and have a High level percentage of Omanization.

The Company is not bound to consent the lowest Bid or any other Tenders.
"WITH ELECTRICITY WE PROGRESS PLEASE AVOID EXTRAVAGANCE IN CONSUMPTION"

Majan Electricity Company S.A.O.C
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PC 311, Sultanate of Oman
Tel: +968 2694 4444 | Fax: +968 2694 4222
Information@majanco.nama.om | www.majanco.co.om

MARKET ANALYSIS - OMAN

MSX posts weekly gains as services stocks rise

The benchmark index of the Muscat Stock Exchange reported weekly gains on the back of strong increases in services and financial sector stocks.

The MSX30 Index ended the week higher by 1.01 per cent. All sub-indices ended in green except industrial sector. Financial Index gained 1.32 per cent while Services Index jumped by 2.40 per cent. Industrial Index closed down by 1.91 per cent for the week. The MSX Shariah Index closed down by 0.65 per cent.

Local news

►The International Monetary Fund's (IMF) 2021 Article IV Mission to Oman revised the sultanate's real GDP growth forecasts to 2.5 per cent for 2021 from 1.8 per cent earlier. As per the IMF, the economy is expected to gradually recover from the pandemic and strengthen over the medium term. Fiscal and external balances are projected to improve considerably over the medium term.

►Oman Cables Industry disclosed that it has received on July 6, 2021, through the company's lawyer in Qatar, that an appeal was not registered by the defendant (Imperial Trading and Contracting Company) against the court verdict issued in favour of company. The verdict obliges the defendant to pay to the company an amount of QAR14.274mn (approx-

mately RO1.5mn) as outstanding amounts, in addition to the amount of QAR1mn as compensation for damages. Accordingly, the company will proceed with the execution procedures for the aforementioned verdict, and we will update the shareholders on this matter at the time, Oman Cables Industry said.

►With reference to Oman Arab Bank's (OAB) disclosure on the MSX on December 22, 2020, on the criminal complaint related to the existence of a suspicion of forgery and embezzlement of approximately RO6mn, OAB disclosed that it has received the communication from the loss adjuster that the re-insurers have confirmed that the policy liability in principle for the amount claimed as mentioned above. OAB would also 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.

►Energy Development Oman (EDO), a relatively new state company, is in talks with banks to raise US\$1.5bn in debt financing. The news reports said that the financing could be in the form of a loan. The financing is to help fund capital expenditure. The Block 6 is Oman's largest oil and gas operation, according to energy consulting firm Wood Mackenzie.



Muscat Daily

►As per the media reports, Oman's transport group Asyad is weighing the sale of a strategic stake in its subsidiary Oman Shipping Company (OSC). Asyad has asked banks to pitch for a mandate to help it review a potential deal in which Asyad could divest up to 40 per cent of its ownership. OSC focuses on transportation of liquefied natural gas (LNG) cargoes to the international market.

►As per the media reports, Oman's state energy company OQ is considering selling its drilling unit Abraj Energy Services. The potential sale of the midstream firm is part of a

broader divestment plan by OQ. Deliberations were at an early stage and OQ could decide to make only a partial exit by floating the company on the Muscat Stock Exchange, one of the sources said.

GCC markets

GCC net foreign flows recorded in June 2021 were at US\$1.028bn compared to US\$930mn in May 2021 and US\$1.30bn in June 2020. On year-to-date basis, the inflows were recorded at US\$5.29bn in the first half of 2021 compared to US\$1.63bn worth of foreign flows in same period of last

year.

As of the end of first half of 2021 all GCC countries' net foreign flows are positive. Highest flows during the six months period were recorded in Saudi Arabia at US\$3.35bn followed by US\$1.2bn in Abu Dhabi market.

Bahrain's nominal GDP (at current prices) for the first quarter of 2021 grew by 1.5 per cent on quarterly basis and 0.3 per cent on an annual basis, said an official report. The growth was supported by the oil sector which grew 29.3 per cent compared to the fourth quarter of 2020, and by 16 per cent com-

pared to the first quarter of 2020.

This was as a result of the increase in Bahrain's total oil production from the two fields of Abu Safah and the improvement of global oil prices, said the Bahrain Economic Quarterly Report published by the Finance and National Economy Ministry.

The growth of the non-oil sector declined by 1.9 per cent on a quarterly basis and 1.8 per cent on an annual basis, the report said.

Bahrain's largest non-oil sectors in terms of the percentage of contribution to nominal GDP are: Financial corporations (17.9 per cent), manufacturing (17.9 per cent) and government services (13.3 per cent).

Global news

The US Federal Reserve officials talked tapering at their most recent meeting, but few seemed in a rush to get the process going, according to minutes released.

The Federal Open Market Committee's June 15-16 meeting summary provided only a few new glimpses into talks about when the central bank should begin reducing the pace of its bond purchases.

Some Fed committee members indicated that the economic recovery was proceeding faster than expected and was being accompanied by an out-

sized rise in inflation, both making the case for taking the Fed's foot off the policy pedal.

However, the prevailing mindset was that there should be no rush and markets must be well prepared for any shifts. Most committee members agreed, according to the minutes, that the US economy had yet to meet the 'substantial further progress' benchmark the Fed has set out for any significant shifts in policy.

The yield on 10-year US treasury bonds also dropped during last week which gave confidence to the investors.

Recommendations

Globally, new COVID-19 outbreaks posed a new risk to economic recovery which led to drop in international as well as regional markets as oil prices also remained under pressure. Regionally, the markets remained depressed largely because of dropping oil prices and struggle of OPEC and OPEC+ members to reaching a conclusion over the oil output.

Locally, the market performed well supported by some positive and encouraging news in the financial sector along with start of result season led optimism.

Overall, we advise investors to be cautious as the impact of global pessimism and newer outbreak can keep the markets volatile in the coming period.

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G20 ministers set to green light global tax reform

Venice, Italy - Finance ministers from the G20 gathered on Saturday for a second day of talks in Venice, where they are expected to give the green light to a 'revolutionary' deal to tax multinational companies more fairly.

A framework for global tax reform, including a minimum corporate rate of 15 per cent, was agreed by 131 countries earlier this month.

It aims to prevent a race to the bottom as countries compete to offer the lowest tax rates to attract investment, with many multinationals as a result paying derisory levels of tax.

"If there is a deal today, there is no turning back. It will be implemented... it's a kind of tax revolution," French Finance Minister Bruno Le Maire said.

He earlier told AFP that the minimum tax rate, which could be in place by 2023, "must be ambitious", with his country, the United States and Germany among several nations pressing for a higher rate.

But finance ministers and central bankers from the G20 - the countries with the 19 biggest economies and the European Union - are not expected to go further than the 15 per cent agreed on July 1.

Final agreement is not expected until the run-up to the G20 leaders' summit in Rome in October.

But the Venice talks have been an opportunity to thrash out further details and exert pressure on those that have not yet signed up to the deal, struck



Italy's Finance Minister Daniele Franco speaks at a press conference during the G20 finance ministers meeting in Venice (AFP)

under the auspices of the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) - a club of 38 wealthy economies.

Aid agencies including Oxfam also argue that 15 per cent is too low, but some nations are opposed even to this, including EU member Ireland, which lured Apple and Google to Dublin with its low tax rates.

"We are really now on the way to a deal that will be finalised shortly", German Finance Minister Olaf Scholz told CNBC television on Friday.

The minimum rate is expected to affect fewer than 10,000 major companies, but the OECD estimates an effective 15 per cent rate would generate an extra US\$150bn in revenue per year. The measure is one of two so-called pillars of global tax reform that have been under negotiation for years, but which

have been given new impetus under US President Joe Biden.

The other would give countries a share of the taxes on profits earned in their territory. Multinationals operate in many countries - oil giant BP is present in 85, for example - but usually pay taxes on profits only in tax domiciles cherry-picked for their low rates.

It would initially apply to the top 100 or so companies, and is targeted at the most aggressive users of tax-reducing domiciles, such as technology giants Google, Amazon, Facebook and Apple.

According to a draft obtained by AFP of the final statement, which is still being discussed, the G20 ministers will 'endorse' the OECD's 'historic agreement on a more stable and fairer international tax architecture'. AFP

India's Zomato eyes \$1.3bn IPO

Mumbai, India - Indian food delivery giant Zomato has announced plans to raise ₹93.75bn (US\$1.3bn) via an initial public offering, the latest firm to take advantage of a strong rally in local equities.

Zomato and rival Swiggy - both of whose delivery riders are ubiquitous in Indian cities - are the two biggest players in a food delivery market forecast to explode in the coming years.

But Zomato co-founder Gaurav Gupta said the Indian market was still "highly under-penetrated" with only 8-9 per cent of food consumption from restaurants, compared with 40-50 per cent in markets such as China and the United States.

"We are disrupting the Indian habit of home-cooked food and we are very excited about the opportunity ahead of us to drive this kind of behaviour," Gupta told reporters. Both Zomato and Swiggy are, however, yet to be profitable because of high start-up and marketing costs. In the last financial year, Zomato lost



A deliveryman working for Zomato checks his phone outside a restaurant in Mumbai on Thursday (AFP)

₹8.16bn on revenues of nearly ₹20bn. Delivery firms also face a backlash from Indian restaurants, which complain that the platforms' deep discounts erode their profit margins.

Zomato has a presence in 525 Indian cities, with more than

32mn Indians visiting its platform every month. It is also active in 23 other countries.

The company will issue new shares - priced at between ₹72 to ₹76 - in the issue that opens on July 14 and closes on July 16.

Ant Financial, controlled by

Chinese investor Jack Ma, owns a minority stake in the firm.

Around 30 Indian companies have announced IPO plans this year, including digital payments firm PayTM, backed by Japan's SoftBank as well as by Ma. AFP

IMF plans to increase its lending capacity by \$650bn in coming days

Sofia, Bulgaria - The IMF is set to vote on a proposal to increase the institution's lending capacity by US\$650bn 'in the coming days,' Managing Director Kristalina Georgieva said on Thursday.

As countries look to recover from the massive economic damage caused by the COVID-19 pandemic, the IMF has been mulling an increase in its special drawing rights (SDR), which are international reserve assets that aid governments in protecting their financial reserves against



Kristalina Georgieva

global currency fluctuations, and also help the IMF calculate loans and interest rates.

The G7 and G20 groups of nations have endorsed the pro-

posal, and late last month the Washington-based crisis lender's executive board discussed the increase.

"We expect in the coming days the board of governors of the fund to table for approval by all member states a proposal for emitting US\$650bn in special drawing rights," Georgieva said in Sofia, Bulgaria during a summit of the Three Seas Initiative, which brings together the 12 European Union nations bordering the Baltic, Adriatic and Black seas. While the new reserves

may be approved in the coming days, IMF spokesman Gerry Rice said last month that the actual allocation wouldn't take place before the end of August due to the complexity of the process.

"Why is this important? It is an injection in the reserves of all members of the fund, providing a lot of space, a lot of space for fiscal actions" at a time when the economy stopped because of Covid, Georgieva said, adding the increase would be the largest in the IMF's history. AFP

Fuel and win at Shell stations with Bank Muscat's Premier Banking debit cards

Bank Muscat, the leading financial services provider in the sultanate, has invited all its Premier Banking customers (Private Banking, Asalah and Al Jawhar) to participate in its ongoing 'fuel and win' campaign at Shell service stations in the sultanate.

All Premier Banking customers who use their debit cards to make a minimum payment of RO10 for a single transaction at Shell service stations are eligible to be included in the draws, which will be held periodically during the promotion that will

run till August 20. As many as 180 lucky customers from Private Banking, Asalah Priority Banking and Al Jawhar Privilege Banking will win RO20 each during the two-month long campaign period.

Amjad Iqbal al Lawati, assistant general manager - Cards and eBanking, Bank Muscat, said, "We have seen a rapid shift to digital and contactless payments over the past year as a result of the many new developments in both digitalisation as well as the social distancing requirements

brought about by the pandemic. To further popularise the ease of contactless payments in daily transactions, Bank Muscat is pleased to once again and bring this exciting promotion, and we urge all our Premier Banking customers to take maximum advantage of the offer and win prizes."

Shell service stations in Oman accept contactless card payments through Bank Muscat's secure and robust, contactless "Just Tap" point of sale (PoS) systems. It is important to note that these wireless card termi-



Amjad Iqbal al Lawati
nals are certified for safe usage in service stations.
Speaking about the promo-

tion, Khalid al Awaisi, Mobility Country Manager at Shell Oman Marketing Company commented, "We recognise the importance of providing the card payment option at Shell service stations and the need to encourage the usage of contactless payments now more than ever. Customers are looking for safer and more convenient experience and by providing this option, it helps them feel safe when making payments at Shell service stations.

"Our partnership with Bank

Muscat reaffirms this strategic approach, making the experience of our customers more convenient for them."

Bank Muscat's "Just Tap" contactless cards are particularly useful in secure payments during the current challenge of social distancing and enhanced measures for hygiene.

Cardholders are able to complete their low-value point-of-sale (POS) transactions with a simple tap of the card at a 'Just Tap' enabled point-of-sale (POS) terminal without the need to

enter their personal identification number (PIN) for transactions up to RO40. With the entire process taking only a few seconds, both the customer and the retail outlet, benefit from faster checkout times.

Customers will continue to receive alerts on their mobile phones for all transactions made using their cards.

This ensures that the customers' security and privacy concerns are taken care of, while facilitating quick and secure transactions to help save time.

KR - Eshraqa announces Stemazone summer camp to run till August 5



Eshraqa, the Corporate Social Responsibility Arm of Khimji Ramdas, has announced an online 'Stemazone' summer camp in collaboration with Ministry of Culture, Sports and Youth through Children's Museum and Ministry of Education. The summer camp that started on July 4 will go on till August 5.

Launched by Eshraqa, Stemazone is a unique educational programme that introduces Omani children to the wonderful world of STEAM; Science, Technology, Engineering, Art and Mathematics. Eshraqa has partnered with Sultanate of Oman's Ministry of Culture, Sports and Youth, Ministry of Education and Children's Museum to lead this initiative.

The partnership signifies an

innovative strategy aimed towards inspiring young Omanis to enter STEAM fields and set them on the pathway from an early age.

Stemazone initiative is in line with Oman Vision 2040, which emphasises on building a knowledge economy.

The online Stemazone summer camps have been conceived to be active and engaging sessions of creativity for kids. They are designed in an interactive way, with a focus on developing children's skills and knowledge on coding, electronics, 3D design, IOT, smart cities, and design thinking.

The sessions also aim to build confidence, teach public speaking, and imbibe leadership, teamwork, and collaboration skills.

The summer camps to be held in three phases will encourage children to be lifelong learners, critical thinkers, action-takers, and global citizens.

Targeting children between the ages 6 to 12 years, phase-I of the summer camp will include 120 students aged between 6 to 12 years from Museums Friends and public will participate in phase-II.

The first two phases will focus on basic programming concepts of coding. The third phase will be held in collaboration with the Innovation Centers in the governorates of South Batinah, North Batinah and Dhahirah. 150 students from the age of 13 to 15 years will work in groups to design a smart city by applying

what they learn during workshops.

At the end of the programme each group will present their design for a smart city of which one will be selected as a winner.

Students will be contacted by the museums and innovation centres from their database for the second and third phase.

Nailesh Khimji, director, Khimji Ramdas, said, "The Stemazone summer camps aim to develop students' skills, mindsets, and experiences through coding activities, design challenges, and group projects.

"We are pleased to be able to offer programming tailored towards different age groups so that these children can gain skills and have fun in an age appropriate setting. We believe that these kind of camps are a great combination of education and fun to plant the seeds that develop into a love of learning."

The online learning platform (www.stemazoneoman.om) enables students to learn, attend innovative online STEAM workshops and access live webinars. Students will have to register themselves to check course structure or to book a slot at webinars.

Eshraqa, works towards nation building at the grassroots and aspires to significantly contribute towards the education sector by building infrastructure that will lead to enhancing knowledge, skills and capabilities.



Shaza Hotels spreads smiles with great summer family offers

Shaza Hotels, the luxury hotel and retreats chain with properties in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, UAE and Oman is welcoming the summer season with offers that will draw a smile on the faces.

The 'Summer Smiles' offer is designed for families who want to escape the heat of the summer and enjoy quality time with Shaza or Mysk by Shaza hotels.

The offer includes a complimentary room for kids, free stay and meals for kids below 12 years, 25 per cent off on room rates when booked directly, another 25 per cent off on food & beverage and spa treatments.

Not enough? Shaza DISCOVERY members to enjoy an additional 10 per cent discount as well.

Visitors to any of Shaza's luxurious properties or Mysk by Shaza's lifestyle hotels can avail the 'Summer Smiles' offer, until the end of September by using the promo code SMILES when booking directly through the hotel's website.

In the UAE, these offers apply to Mysk al Badayer Retreat from Sharjah Collection, representing the hallmarks of Sharjah's culture & heritage, with its own distinctive allure and theme.

Shaza properties in KSA include three amazing hotels in prime locations: Shaza Makkah, one the first in line hotels in Jebel al Ka'bah overlooking Al Masjid al Haram, Shaza Madinah, right next to the holy mosque of Al Masjid al Nabawi, and Shaza Riyadh, in the buzzing

heart of the capital next to Al Rajhi mosque.

In Oman, Shaza Hotels runs Mysk by Shaza al Mouj Muscat, overlooking the vibrant marina of Al Mouj in Muscat.

Shaji Abu Salih, corporate director - Business Development at Shaza Hotels noted, "Summer travels tends to be expensive and concern for families traveling with children, due to the high demand in popular destinations and safety & hygiene concerns at the destinations.

"At our hotels, you don't need to compromise your family travel dreams. Travel with family, create new memories and enjoy your best time with the beloved ones. Leave the rest to us. It's time for Summer Smiles."

World Future Energy Summit confirms exhibitors driving clean energy in ME

World Future Energy Summit, the world's leading business event for clean energy and sustainability, part of Abu Dhabi Sustainability Week, has signed key stakeholder agreements with the Ministry of Energy and Infrastructure, Bee'ah and EDF Renewables. The event, which provides the perfect platform to showcase clean energy and sustainable projects, initiatives and developments for the Middle East, returns to Abu Dhabi's National Exhibition Centre (ADNEC) as part of Abu Dhabi Sustainability Week, hosted by Masdar, from January 17-19 2022.

By bringing together the world's most innovative technology leaders with the most powerful investors and deal makers from the Middle East and Africa, the 2022 World Future Energy Summit is an ideal and timely launchpad to accelerate sustainable development. It is also the first opportunity since the 2020 event for the clean energy and sustainability community to meet in person to do business, network and share knowledge. In

the previous edition, the World Future Energy Summit hosted 34,000 attendees from 125 countries - including 10 heads of state - and featured an incredible 840 exhibiting companies and brands.

In 2022, World Future Energy Summit will host exhibitions and forums across clean energy and sustainability: Energy, Water, Solar, EcoWASTE, Smart Cities and Climate & Environment. It will also host Climate Innovations Exchange (CLIX) which connects global start-ups to investors, and a dedicated Sustainability Business Connect programme to help connect exhibitors to qualified buyers from the Middle East and North Africa looking for technology and services for their projects.

"The UAE has set itself some seriously ambitious medium- and long-term environmental targets and put in motion a strategic plan which will facilitate clean power generation and increased energy efficiency while catering for our fast economic growth," said Suhail Mohamed Faraj al Mazrouei, the UAE's



Minister of Energy and Infrastructure.

"Despite the challenges, we are already making significant progress as we work to achieve the goals set forth in the UAE National Energy Strategy 2050. The enormous investments we are now witnessing in clean energy, energy efficiency, carbon reduction and sustainable, secure water supplies provide a clear path for the UAE's future

development as a global force for driving sustainability."

According to the International Renewable Energy Agency (IRENA), by the year 2050, sustainably produced electricity will have become the world's most important energy carrier. Electricity's share of final energy use is forecast to increase from 21 per cent today to 60 per cent in 2050, a three-fold rise achievable through significant efforts to

electrify our economies. Current government plans call for US\$98trn of energy system investment in the coming three decades, yet IRENA's '1.5oC scenario' requires an additional US\$33trn related to energy transition over the planned investments and a significant redirection of money from fossil fuels into green assets.1

Bee'ah, headquartered in Sharjah, is the Middle East's sus-

tainability pioneer and has more than 10,000 employees across its operations in UAE, Egypt and Saudi Arabia. The Group's CEO, Khaled al Huraimel, said that exhibiting at the World Future Energy Summit will provide a timely platform to highlight initiatives that drive progress towards a circular economy. "Everyone at Bee'ah is committed to a sustainable, environmentally viable future," he remarked, "and we share a common goal to set the standard for sustainable living in urban communities across the UAE and beyond."

"World Future Energy Summit is a perfect fit for us, particularly as we continue to explore waste-to-energy and waste-to-hydrogen solutions that not only contribute to the UAE's ambitions for clean energy but also allow us to innovatively turn waste into a valuable resource. Our Sharjah Waste-to-Energy facility, and various other upcoming projects will contribute to the energy transition and carbon neutrality in the UAE. Through these exciting energy solutions we are promoting a cir-

cular economy and we are very much looking forward to exchanging insights around opportunities in this sector with summit delegates."

"We have been developing clean energy projects in the Middle East for over 25 years, actively strengthening our leading ambition," commented Laurent Clement, CEO and managing director of EDF Middle East.

"Building a net zero energy future with electricity and innovative solutions and services is EDF's purpose, its 'raison d'être'. It is a privilege for us to bring our vast experience and technologies to this world leading event in the UAE's capital. Science, engineering and innovation are what will tackle climate change across the planet and will drive well-being and economic development. In a leading position in this industry, we are excited to share our knowledge and expertise with like-minded companies and government entities at World Future Energy Summit 2022."

For further details visit: www.worldfutureenergy-summit.com

EV Lab partners with Majid al Futtaim to bring electric vehicles

To bring electric vehicles closer to the community and encourage them to embrace the clean transport movement, EV Lab, a first-of-its-kind omnichannel, multi-brand electric vehicle platform, has launched special EV pop-ups during Dubai Summer Surprises (DSS) 2021 in partnership with Majid al Futtaim.

DSS will serve as another strong platform for EV Lab to highlight the value that electric vehicles bring to users and the community, in addition to providing a detailed view of the new EVs available to help drive awareness.

The first EV Lab pop-up, as part of DSS 2021, is being held at the Mall of the Emirates from July 7 to 17, followed by a second showcase at Mirdif City Centre from August 15 to 24. The dedicated pop-ups feature models of EV cars including the Tesla Model 3, Mercedes EQC, MG ZS EV, among others which the community will be able to test drive. EV Lab experts will take visitors through the features and value-additions offered by each of the models.

The pop-ups by EV Lab will complement the ongoing initiatives by the UAE government to promote clean transport. In addition to cutting emissions by a quarter by 2030 and promote energy sector diversification in line with the UAE Clean Energy Agenda 2050, several new initiatives have been introduced to encourage the use of EVs. Majid al Futtaim's partnership with EV Lab will help bring EVs like the Tesla Model 3 and Mercedes EQC for customers to interact with.

For example, the Roads and Transport Authority has announced that EVs in Dubai will get access to free parking in designated slots and a free Salik tag. This is in addition to the EV Green Charger initiative that was recently announced by the Dubai Electricity & Water Authority (DEWA), which has installed around 300 charging stations across the Emirate.

Kevin Chalhoub, founder & CEO at EV Lab, said, "Through



our participation at Dubai Summer Surprises, we are highlighting the long-term value of switching to electric vehicles so that the community can learn more about the benefits EVs have to offer and experience the excitement of test-driving them.

"This will also serve as a way to create awareness around the concept ahead of Expo 2020 as the UAE focuses on working towards achieving net zero carbon emissions. The pop-ups will become destinations for visitors to the malls, where they can learn all about EVs and the new models available. For EV manufacturers and dealers, this is a great opportunity to engage with potential customers as well as to strengthen their brand visibility. With its strong portfolio of malls in the country, Majid al Futtaim provides us the platform to promote the clean transport mode to the largest possible section of the community through our pop-ups located in key malls in the city."

Fuad Sharaf, managing director, UAE Shopping Malls, Majid al Futtaim Properties, stated,

"With less than 100 days until Expo2020 welcomes the world to its six-month mega event, we at Majid al Futtaim, are excited to help build momentum to raise awareness about the future of mobility. There is no better way to raise awareness other than having people experience what electric vehicles can offer. Sustainability is an important pillar at Majid al Futtaim, and one way to raise public awareness about the benefits of electric vehicles is to engage our customers by offering test drives and face-to-face learning experiences led by experts. Through our ability to reach a vast number of people, we look forward to supporting the UAE's Clean Energy Agenda 2050, by introducing educational and interactive pop-ups across our malls."

With its slogan 'Feel Electric,' EV Lab is focused on driving the transition to sustainable mobility through leveraging the benefits that electric vehicles provide to air quality, the overall environment, as well as towards diversified economic growth. EV Lab partners with key automotive

players to offer a selection of the best EV products available in the market.

Elmer Arnautovic, director, Marketing Communications, Audi said, 'We are very excited to be partnering with EV Lab to bring electric vehicles closer to customers than ever before and make them accessible across the UAE. Audi strives to always lead in the electric sphere, and with our e-tron range we have come a long way in reshaping perceptions around the future of mobility. With our flagship RS e-tron GT on display with EV Lab we bring a modern reinterpretation of the Gran Turismo, offering the best in sportiness and power to the electric segment, and cementing the e-tron's position as a leader in premium electric mobility.'

Hisham Elsahn, general manager, Inter Emirates Motors (IEM), official distributor for MG Motor in the UAE, said, "We are extremely proud to see the MG ZS EV join forces with EV Lab. The MG ZS EV is packed with features that will appeal to even the most ardent petrol-head. A

100 per cent electric car, the MG ZS EV fast-charge promises 80 per cent charge in just 40 minutes. Three driving modes, Eco, Normal, and Sport, and multiple driver customisation options, all at an attractive price point with 200,000km manufacturers and drive-train battery warranty, making the MG ZS EV a great companion for any kind of drive."

Sahra ISLA - marketing manager, Gargash - Mercedes Benz said, "The adoption of EVs is set to enter the fast lane in our region, especially in tech-savvy urban hubs like Dubai. Our electric ambition is in full swing, by as early as 2030, we aim towards having 30 per cent of our vehicles sold to feature electric powertrains - this includes all-electric vehicles and plug-in hybrids. The list is far from complete: with the highly anticipated EQS arriving at the end of this year and EQA, further models based on the new Mercedes-Benz EQ architecture will follow soon. We are delighted to have found EV Lab to support our vision in achieving our ambitious goals, and look forward to further collaborations."

73% of internal audit groups plan to focus on innovation

According to Protiviti's 2021 Next-Generation Internal Audit Survey, most of the chief audit executives (CAEs) and senior internal audit leaders surveyed reported that their teams are still in the early stages of, or have yet to embark on, their next-gen internal audit journeys.

The COVID-19 pandemic has accelerated digital transformation initiatives across organizations, including internal audit (IA). In the Middle East, the potential to transform and initiate growth in IA is immense, though the initiatives are at a nascent stage.

The survey shows that 73 per cent of the internal audit groups in the Middle East are contemplating deeper focus on innovation and transformation initiatives.

"COVID-19 highlighted the urgent need for internal audit groups to adopt technologies and upskill to become strategic partners and advisors to their C-suites, boards and audit committees. This warrants IA functions to add talent with technology skills, which can work in tandem with the traditional accounting and auditing skill set," said Sanjay Rajagopalan, managing director, Protiviti Member Firm for the Middle East Region.

The survey also finds that one of the key accelerators to adoption of the Next Gen IA initiatives will be the interest level of and increasing questions from the Audit Committees.

In the Middle East, 58 per cent of the Audit Committees have shown medium to high level of interest in understanding the transformation and innovation activities undertaken by IA groups.

Continuous Control Monitoring (CCM) is among the strong initiatives undertaken by the IA groups in the region.



However, the survey shows that currently, only 10 per cent of the respondents in the region identified their internal audit departments as 'digital leaders' as against 14 per cent of global respondents.

It indicates that in the Middle East, less than 30 per cent of the organizations have a formal structure to foster innovation and transformation as against the global result of 41 per cent.

This can be gauged from the outcome of a question on the maturity level for a variety of NextGen IA capabilities. Machine Learning (ML) and Artificial Intelligence (AI), advanced analytics, process mining and automation have shown the lowest maturity.

"IA leadership will have to formalize the innovation and transformation agenda and reward team members who go an extra mile to innovate or transform the way they are functioning and add more value to business," Rajagopalan added.

The report includes benchmarking results derived from more than 60 questions and discusses recommended steps for a roadmap to a next-gen audit function. It is available for complimentary download in addition to an infographic.

'Digitisation, ageing population top of mind for investors'

Investcorp, a leading global provider and manager of alternative investment products, in partnership with Mercury Capital Advisors, a leading institutional capital raising and investment advisory enterprise, IMD Business School and Banque Par s Bertrand, an independent, Swiss-regulated private bank based in Geneva and Luxembourg, announced the results of the second iteration of its annual survey, "What's Next? Investment Trends for the Future." The poll explored institutional investors' sentiment and allocations regarding the most pressing economic trends that are expected to shape the global economy over the next three decades.

Ninety-five per cent of institutional investors and family offices identified Automation, Digitisation and Artificial Intelligence (AI) as the top trend they believe will shape the global economy over the coming decades. Ageing Population (69 per cent) and Climate Change (65 per cent) were listed by investors as the second and third highest-ranked trends, respectively.

"Institutional investors' view of the major trends that are to shape the global economic land-



scape over the next three decades can give us significant insight into where capital is likely to flow in both the near- and long-term," said Rishi Kapoor, Investcorp's co-chief executive officer.

"In this year's survey, we see Digitisation and AI as an area ripe for investment. An aging global population and ongoing concerns with climate change also provide ample opportunities for these investors to capture the economic upside associated with these mega trends either through direct investment or, more commonly, by allocating to external managers."

Rounding out the top ten trends:

►Automation, Digitisation and AI (95 per cent)

- Ageing Population (69 per cent)
- Impact of Climate Change (65 per cent)
- Electric Vehicles and Autonomous Driving (62 per cent)
- Personalized Healthcare (60 per cent)
- Growing Dominance of China (59 per cent)
- Digital and Cryptocurrencies (59 per cent)
- Urbanization and Smart Cities (38%)
- Sustainability and the Circular Economy (37 per cent)
- Redefining Global Trade (26 per cent)

New to the list this year were the emerging Dominance of China and Digital and Cryptocurrencies, demonstrating that a significant portion of respondents see them not as short-term trends, but those that are here to stay and deserving of significant attention and capital allocation.

The "What's Next? Investment Trends for the Future" study was commissioned by Investcorp, respondents were approached by Mercury Capital Advisors, Bank Par s Bertrand, as well as Investcorp, and the data was collected and analysed by IMD Business School.

Saudi's leisure industry one to watch

When it comes to transformative action in the Middle East, Saudi Arabia's story is an inspiring one. With a cultural shift at play, the kingdom is increasingly pinning itself to the region's Leisure and Attractions map while also being an excellent case study for the rest of the world.

Encouraging its nationals and residents to explore the country, Saudi Arabia is also boosting its appeal to international visitors by simplifying visa processes. This is further bolstered by its host of budding properties and attractions. At this rate, Saudi Arabia is set to be the talk of the town and the talk of the world.

Rosa Tahmaseb, secretary general at MENALAC comments, "Saudi Arabia is globally considered an impressive leisure market to watch. Positioning itself as much more than a pilgrimage destination, it has an exciting future ahead. From its giga-projects to its adoption of transformative technology, Saudi Arabia is on everyone's radar - from the GCC to the region at large and beyond."

Here's some insight into the trends that are shaping its Leisure and Attractions industry.

Leisure experiences

With the legalisation of cinemas in 2018, Saudi Arabia is on a mis-

sion to open 300 cinemas by 2030. Its existing cinemas perform so well that Saudi Arabia is the only country to grow year on year at the box office in 2020, according to Esquire Middle East.

As a result, the revolutionary rise of cinema in Saudi Arabia is expected to have a positive ripple effect on hospitality venues. It's also attracting business from the UAE with major brands planning to expand into the Kingdom's burgeoning cinema market.

During the cooler months, outdoor enthusiasts can also look forward to King Salman Park in Riyadh. The holistic park will house a 100,000sqm entertainment and games area and a 140,000sqm water sports section.

As Saudi Arabia's leisure and entertainment industry rapidly expands, Mohammed al Shethry, CEO of Osool Entertainment and MENALAC member shares what he is looking forward to, "The ongoing 2030 Vision developments have given us a taste of what the future holds for the kingdom, and this has enlightened us to have a new and diverse purpose.

Homegrown projects in the entertainment industry will not only

increase awareness about, but will also impact, the global image of KSA."

Future with technology

Enthusiastically embracing innovative technology, Saudi Arabia plans to heavily incorporate it into upcoming projects. Artificial intelligence and augmented reality will play a key role in user experience in the near future.

Saudi Arabia will also be making great strides in technology with Neom, a multi-billion dollar futuristic city that will have areas dedicated to biotech, food manufacturing and technology, energy, and tourism; among several others.

The kingdom is also notably the Gulf's biggest adopter of 5G technology, according to internet intelligence firm Ookla. The incorporation of this technology will help multiple industries grow, including the Leisure and Attractions sector.

Turning residents into national tourists

Saudi Arabia has been on a drive to showcase its natural wonders to national, regional, and international tourists for years. Housing a Unesco World Heritage site and a natural archipelago of 90 untouched islands; the kingdom is in the midst of transforming them into stunning travel and leisure destinations.

The imminent launch of Al Qiddiya Entertainment City, a multi-billion dollar mega entertainment and sports project, is expected to attract local and international visitors as Saudi Arabia continues to diversify its revenue streams.

Qiddiya will be known for its record-breaking parks and attractions; encompassing a diverse range of experiences which will include sports, wellness, motion, arts and culture, and nature. Its first phase is scheduled for an early debut in 2023.



Afghanistan readies to rush troops to border as Taliban extend gains

Kabul, Afghanistan - Afghan authorities prepared on Saturday to retake a key border crossing seized by the Taliban in a sweeping offensive that the insurgents claim has helped capture a vast swath of the violence-wracked nation.

As US troops continued their withdrawal, the Taliban said its fighters had seized two crossings in western Afghanistan - completing an arc of territory from the Iranian border to the frontier with China.

It now held 85 per cent of the country, a Taliban official said Friday, controlling about 250 of Afghanistan's nearly 400 districts - a claim impossible to independently verify, and disputed by the government.

Beijing, meanwhile, which has criticised Washington for its hasty withdrawal, urged its citizens to leave the country 'as soon as possible' after evacuating 210 nationals.

The 'complex and severe domestic security situation' prompted the evacuation warning, the Foreign Ministry said, adding that 22 of those flown out tested positive for coronavirus on arrival in China.

Taliban gains

On Friday Taliban spokesman Zabihullah Mujahid said their fighters had captured the border town of Islam Qala on the Iranian frontier and the Torghundi crossing with Turkmenistan.

Herat governor spokesman Jilani Farhad said on Saturday the authorities were deploying fresh troops to retake Islam Qala post, the biggest trade crossing between Iran and Afghanistan.

"They will be sent there soon,"



Afghan security personnel stand guard along the road amid ongoing fight between Afghan security forces and Taliban fighters, in Kandahar on Friday (AFP)

he told AFP. The Afghan government has repeatedly dismissed the Taliban's gains as having little strategic value, but the seizure of multiple border crossings and the taxes they generate will likely fill the group's coffers with new revenue.

With the Taliban having routed much of northern Afghanistan in recent weeks, the government holds little more than a constellation of provincial capitals that must largely be reinforced and resupplied by air.

The air force was under severe strain even before the Taliban's

lightning offensive overwhelmed the government's northern and western positions, putting further pressure on the country's limited aircraft and pilots.

On Thursday President Joe Biden said the US military mission would end on August 31 - nearly 20 years after it began - but he admitted it was 'highly unlikely' Kabul would be able to control the entire country.

"The status quo is not an option," Biden said of staying in the country. "I will not send another generation of Americans to war in Afghanistan."

Biden said the Afghan people

alone should determine their future, but he acknowledged the uncertainty about what that would look like. Asked if a Taliban takeover was inevitable, the President said: "No, it is not."

Militias deploy

Afghan commandos clashed with the insurgents this week in a provincial capital for the first time, with thousands of people fleeing Qala-e-Naw in northwest Badghis province.

On Friday the Afghan defence ministry said government forces had 'full control' of the city, but a local official said on Saturday the

insurgents had attacked again during the night.

On Saturday, the Taliban also claimed to have captured a district in the province of Laghman, neighbouring Kabul.

Around 100km from the Iranian border, Ismail Khan - a veteran warlord whose fighters helped US forces topple the Taliban in 2001 - vowed to back government forces fighting against the insurgents.

"We will soon go to the front lines and with the help of God change the situation," Khan said in the western city of Herat.

On Saturday, hundreds of

The authorities are deploying fresh troops to retake Islam Qala post, the biggest trade crossing between Iran and Afghanistan. They will be sent there soon



JILANI FARHAD

Khan's fighters deployed across the city and manned its gates, an AFP correspondent reported.

US pushes for deal

The Taliban have been emboldened by the US troop withdrawal and - with peace talks in Doha deadlocked - appear to be pressing for a full military victory.

Still, on Thursday, Suhail Shaheen, a member of the Taliban negotiating team, insisted the insurgents were seeking a 'negotiated settlement'.

But President Ashraf Ghani said the insurgents were not interested in talks.

"When one side wants negotiations but the other side doesn't want to talk, is that right?" he said in a speech on Saturday.

US Defence Secretary Lloyd Austin called for international pressure to force a deal. 'The entire world can help by continuing this push,' he said in a tweet.

The Pentagon chief did not specify which countries he was urging to help, but Pakistan is widely believed to have significant influence over the insurgents.

AFP

No cyber attack, says Iran railway

Tehran, Iran - Iran's national railway company on Saturday denied having been hit by a cyber attack following reports of disruptions at train stations across the country, media reported.

The announcement came a day after Fars news agency reported 'unprecedented chaos' at stations with hundreds of trains delayed or cancelled.

In the now-deleted report, it said the incident followed 'a widespread disruption in ... computer systems that is probably due to a cyber attack'.

Sadegh Sekri, a spokesman for Islamic Republic of Iran Railways, told ISNA news agency on Saturday that 'there has been no disruption or cyber attack for passenger, cargo or intercity trains'.

The company had said in a statement late on Friday that trains were arriving and departing on schedule with 'no problems'.

This followed the Fars report, which had included a picture of a station's departures and arrivals board showing rows of cancelled trips with a message reading 'long delays due to cyber attacks'.

Iran has been the target of repeated attempted cyber attacks in recent years.

Government infrastructure was targeted by a 'highly organised cyber attack' back in late 2019.

AFP

Bangladesh factory owner held after fire kills 52

Dhaka, Bangladesh - The owner of a factory where 52 people died in a fire was arrested for murder on Saturday along with seven others, as it emerged that children as young as 11 had been working there.

Police said Abul Hashem and four of his sons were among eight people detained over the inferno, which broke out on Thursday and raged for more than a day.

A separate inquiry has been launched into the use of child labour at the food factory.

Jayedul Alam, police chief for Narayanganj district where the factory is located, said the entrance had been padlocked at the time of the blaze and the factory breached multiple safety regulations.

"It was a deliberate murder," the police chief told AFP. All eight people detained face murder charges.

Before his arrest, Hashem told the *Daily Star* newspaper the fire 'may have been a result of workers' carelessness', suggesting a discarded cigarette could have sparked the carnage.

Emergency services found 48 of the bodies on the third floor of the Hashem Food and Beverage factory in Rupganj, an industrial town outside Dhaka. The fire department said the exit door to the main staircase had been padlocked and highly flammable chemicals and plastics had been stored in the building.

Monnujan Sufian, state minister for labour, said inquiries had begun into the use of child workers at the factory.

Laizu Begum, who spent hours waiting outside the fac-



Firemen line up after putting out a massive fire at the burnt factory in Rupganj, outside the Bangladeshi capital Dhaka on Saturday (AFP)

tory, said her 11 year old nephew had been working on the third floor and was now missing.

Child victims mourned

"We heard the door of the floor where my nephew worked was padlocked. Then we realised, after seeing how big the fire was, that he is probably dead," said the woman, who broke into tears.

Outside the burned shell of the factory and at the hospital morgue, AFP spoke to 30 survivors and relatives of the dead, who said child workers at the factory were paid just 20 taka (24 US cents) per hour.

Bilal Hossain, father of 14 year old Mitu Akter, who was among the missing, went to the Dhaka Medical College Hospital morgue with a photo of his daughter, begging police and doctors to hand over her remains.

"I sent my baby girl to die," said Hossain, who added that the company even owed the girl back wages.

"How will I tell her mother?"

At the hospital, Chandu Mia held a photo of his 15 year old daughter. "I am not sure if she is alive," he said, holding back tears.

State minister Sufian told AFP she had spoken to two survivors aged 14.

"I went to the hospital and I asked them how old they are. The youngest were 14," she said.

Sufian said some children aged as young as 14 were allowed to work in non-hazardous jobs, but that the Hashem factory was considered hazardous.

"If child labour is proved, we will take action against the owner and the inspectors," she said.

Bangladesh pledged safety reforms after the Rana Plaza disaster in 2013, when a nine-storey complex collapsed killing more than 1,100 people.

But there has been a series of fires and other disasters since then. In February 2019 at least 70 people died when a fire ripped through Dhaka apartments where chemicals were illegally stored.

AFP

Biden tells Putin to 'act' against ransomware

Washington, US - US President Joe Biden on Friday once again told his Russian counterpart Vladimir Putin to 'take action' against ransomware hackers operating from Russia, but the Kremlin gave little sign of listening.

The White House said Biden and Putin spoke for about an hour by phone, focusing on the ransomware threat and separately about allowing humanitarian aid into Syria, where Russia is the main supporter of the Assad regime.

Talking to reporters, Biden said he 'made it very clear' to Putin that 'we expect them to act' against ransomware gangs.

It was the same message Biden delivered in person to



US President Joe Biden speaks to the press in Maryland on Friday (AFP)

Putin in their first summit meeting in Geneva in June.

The Kremlin sidestepped the issue, however, insisting after Friday's phone call that Washington had not even asked for

assistance. 'Despite readiness from the Russian side to jointly clamp down on criminal activity in the informational sphere, over the past month no requests have been received from the relevant

Thai artist honours fallen anime heroes

Bangkok, Thailand - Portraits of dozens of anime characters, each with a small altar for fans to leave flowers, adorn the wall of a Bangkok gallery - a tribute to fictional heroes who met an untimely death.

The 2D Afterlife exhibit is made up of 50 of these creations from artist Jinnipha Nivasabut, who wanted to mourn the deaths of her favourite characters in popular shows and manga series.

The core concept 'is to explore the idea of why the deaths of these fictional characters could have such an impact on real people', the 22 year old anime lover said.

Eschewing anime's cartoon style, she instead painted the fallen heroes with the realism of stately oil portraits.

"In my memories, I see these



Thai artist Jinnipha Nivasabut makes a sketch in front of oil portraits of deceased anime characters, at Palette Artspace in Bangkok (AFP)

characters as real persons. They're like members of my family so I decided to draw these characters to resemble real persons as much as possible," she said.

Japanese anime and manga enjoy mainstream popularity in

the kingdom, with frequent conventions held in pre-pandemic Bangkok that would draw massive crowds of cosplayers.

Jinnipha said she wanted her work to not just serve as fan art, but as a participation experience for both her and the massive fan

base supporting each series.

Below each portrait, a small shelf acting as an altar allows the public to place flowers and Fanta soda drinks - typical Thai offerings to the dead.

Sasha Braus, a beloved character from the ultra-popular Attack on Titan series, had a potato left on her shelf - a reference to her love for food on the show that earned her the nickname 'Potato Girl'.

"They know that she loved potatoes so one of them came here and put it on the shelf for her," said gallery visitor Kullanit Assawawongkasem (19), who added that she was 'devastated' when the character was killed.

The exhibit, hosted at Palette Artspace in Bangkok, ends on August 3.

AFP

COVID-19 PANDEMIC

High vaccine rate needed to stop Delta: Experts

Paris, France - A panel of scientists who advise the French government on health warned on Friday that as many as 95 per cent of people might need to be vaccinated to dam the spread of the Delta variant of COVID-19.

With cases rising, 'a fourth wave linked to the Delta variant could hit swiftly, with repercussions for the health system despite high levels of vaccination', the Scientific Council said.

"We can't get the epidemic under control unless 90 to 95 per cent of people are vaccinated or infected," they added.

So far only around half of French people have received a first dose and 40 per cent two shots, with the government aiming to get two-thirds - 35mn - fully protected by the end of August.

"If people wait until after the summer holidays to get vaccinated, it will be too late," epidemiologist and Scientific Council member Arnaud Fontanet told broadcaster RTL, recalling that the shots are 'very effective and free of charge'.

With case numbers rising after a series of reopening steps, President Emmanuel Macron is expected to outline next moves in managing the pandemic in a Monday evening



A woman gets her vaccine certificate checked as she arrives for the Les Vieilles Charrues music festival, in Carhaix-Plouguer on Thursday (AFP)

TV address.

On the agenda at a meeting of France's defence council earlier Monday is whether to make vaccination compulsory for health workers, one of the key recommendations from the sci-

entists.

Ministers could agree on a draft law as early as Tuesday before sending it to parliament.

The Scientific Council also urged strengthening the country's track and trace pro-

gramme and highlighted rising numbers of hospitalisations due to the Delta variant - first detected in India - in England, Scotland, Ireland and Portugal.

The strain already accounts for half of new infections in

France and is believed to be around 60 per cent more infectious.

"Without infection control measures, there could be a similar peak in hospitalisations to the one in autumn 2020," the

S Korea hits third straight record high in virus cases

Seoul, South Korea - South Korea reported 1,378 new coronavirus cases on Saturday, a record high for the third day in a row as the country prepared to impose its highest-level curbs in the greater capital area next week.

The country had previously been held up as a model of how to combat the pandemic, with the public largely following social distancing and other rules, but it was slow to start its vaccine roll-out due to supply shortages. More than 1,000 of the new cases were in the capital Seoul and its surrounding areas, home to around half the South Korean population. Clusters have recently surfaced in areas including

schools, offices and shopping malls, with people in their 20s and 30s - most of whom are not yet eligible for vaccinations - driving up the numbers.

Only about 11 per cent of the country's 52mn population is fully vaccinated, according to health authorities.

On Friday, the country's prime minister Kim Bo-kyum said the record spike in new cases left authorities no choice but to implement the highest-level curbs.

Under the new restrictions, set to come into force on Monday and last for two weeks, gatherings of more than two people will be banned after 6.00pm and schools will be closed.

AFP

Cuba approves home-grown vaccine, Latin America's first

Havana, Cuba - Cuba on Friday approved its home-grown Abdala vaccine for emergency use, the first Latin American coronavirus jab to reach this stage and a possible lifeline for a region trying to battle a killer pandemic with modest means.

The country's CECMED health regulator gave the go-ahead after Abdala's makers last month announced the vaccine candidate was more than 92 per cent effective at preventing COVID-19 disease after three doses.

Cuba is working on five coronavirus vaccines, and in May started immunizing its population using two of them - Abdala and Soberana 2 - even before they received approval.

By this week, 6.8mn of Cuba's 11.2mn people have received at least one dose of either vaccine, while 1.6mn have the required three doses.

The country has not bought



A sticker of the Cuban vaccine candidate Abdala is seen on the windshield of a car, in Havana on Friday (AFP)

or sought vaccines from elsewhere, and aims to immunise its population before the end of the year.

In June, the BioCubaFarma laboratory said Abdala 'shows efficacy of 92.28 per cent in its three-dose scheme'.

The World Health Organiza-

tion (WHO) has set a 50-per cent efficacy threshold for coronavirus vaccines to qualify for approved global roll-out, though individual countries can green-light jabs without the UN stamp for domestic use.

The CECMED said approval of Abdala was based on its

analysis that it met requirements for 'quality, safety and effectiveness'.

And Aica Laboratories, where the vaccine is produced, said there had been 'a rigorous process of evaluation of the dossier and... inspections of the plants involved'.

Under American sanctions, communist Cuba has a long tradition of making its own vaccines, dating back to the 1980s.

Nearly 80 per cent of its inoculations are produced locally.

Soberana 2 next?

On Thursday, the Finlay Institute which makes Soberana 2 said it, too, showed efficacy exceeding 91 per cent after three doses.

Eduardo Martinez, president of BioCubaFarma, said Soberana 2 will be submitted to the regulatory authority in the coming days for its own emergency approval.

Cuba has recorded more than 224,000 COVID-19 cases among its population of 11.2mn, and some 1,450 deaths.

It has seen a recent spike in infections, with a new daily infection record reported Friday.

On Wednesday, authorities sent an urgent deployment of

doctors and medical equipment to the province of Matanzas - where foreign tourists have continued to visit - after hospitals there reached capacity.

A local company has been commissioned to make more hospital beds for Matanzas and there is a social media campaign to raise donations.

Elsewhere in Latin America, the situation remains worrying.

Brazil has the world's second-highest death toll - more than 530,000. Colombia recently crossed the grim threshold of 100,000 coronavirus deaths and Peru is now the country with the world's highest death toll per capita.

Mexico, whose recorded death toll of 234,000 is the fourth-highest in the world, said Tuesday it is battling a fresh pandemic wave.

A locally produced vaccine offers a glimpse of hope for Latin America and the Caribbean, a

region which the UN says has fully vaccinated just over 13.6 per cent of its population compared to 34.9 per cent in the European Union and 46.3 per cent in North America.

The region comprises a third of the world's coronavirus death toll despite representing just 8.4 per cent of the global population.

Venezuela has signed a contract to purchase 12mn doses of Abdala and has already started using the Cuban jab in its vaccination campaign.

Argentina's Health Minister visited the island in May to discuss a possible vaccine deal and Mexico has expressed interest.

There is no requirement for the WHO to approve such bilateral vaccine deals.

Abdala and Soberana 2 are recombinant protein vaccines that - unlike some coronavirus shots already in use - do not need extreme refrigeration.

AFP

Myanmar rebel group leader suspended in massacre probe

Bangkok, Thailand - A prominent ethnic rebel group in Myanmar suspended one of its key leaders this week, a spokesman said on Saturday, as it investigates an alleged massacre of civilians on its territory.

Myanmar has been in turmoil since a February coup ousted Aung San Suu Kyi's elected government, sparking huge protests among civilians and renewing clashes between the military and ethnic rebel armies in its border regions.

The Karen National Union (KNU) - one of Myanmar's largest rebel groups in its east, which has tussled with the military for decades - has been locked in renewed conflict with the army since the coup.

In May, state-run media accused fighters from one of the group's armed wings, the Karen National Defence Organisation (KNDO), of a May 31 massacre of 25 construction workers - an allegation the KNU had said it



Gen Ner Dah Bo Mya and his subordinate have been suspended 'temporarily' for May 31 massacre

would investigate.

Spokesman Padoh Saw Taw Nee confirmed on Saturday that the KNDO's head, General Ner Dah Bo Mya, and his subordinate Lieutenant Saw Ba Wah have been 'suspended temporarily'.

"According to the Geneva Conventions, even if they are our enemies, we just arrest them, you cannot kill like that," he said.

"We stand firmly on our commitment to the Geneva Conventions and the international community, and we have to deal

with this carefully."

The decision - made on Monday by KNU leaders - will inject more discord within the rebel group, whose political divisions over the handling of the junta have spilled out in recent months to the public. Padoh Saw Taw Nee defended the suspension as 'part of our procedures'.

But General Ner Dah Bo Mya blasted the decision, saying that the KNU's political leaders had refused to hear the KNDO's side.

He alleged that Burmese soldiers had ambushed his troops with mortar artillery as they were arresting military intelligence personnel.

"During the armed conflict, the soldiers didn't take care," he told AFP, adding that he did not want to cooperate with the investigation because 'they didn't talk to me'. "Our grand leader and politicians should side with us instead of working with the enemies," he said.

AFP

Fears of instability: Haiti seeks US, UN troops

Port-au-Prince, Haiti - Haiti has asked Washington and the UN for troops to secure its ports, airport and other strategic sites after the assassination of president Jovenel Moise opened a power vacuum in the crisis-hit Caribbean nation, an official said on Friday.

The United States has already said it will send FBI and other agents to Port-au-Prince, two days after Moise was shot dead in his home.

In the wake of the slaying 'we thought that mercenaries could destroy some infrastructure to create chaos ... During a conversation with the US secretary of state and the UN we made this request', elections minister Mathias Pierre told AFP.

The US State Department and Pentagon both confirmed receiving a request for 'security and investigative assistance' and said officials remain in contact with Port-au-Prince, but did not specify whether military troops would be deployed.

The UN did not immediately



Charred cars near a police station, where suspects in the assassination of President Jovenel Moise are being held, in Petionville on Friday (AFP)

respond to a request for comment. A UN diplomatic source earlier indicated that a Security Council resolution was needed to do as the Haitians had asked.

Washington had already signaled its willingness to help the Haitian investigation, and White House spokeswoman Jen Psaki added on Friday that senior FBI and other officials would be heading to the Caribbean as soon as possible.

The development came as questions swirled about who could have masterminded the

audacious assassination, with most members of a hit squad of Colombians and Americans either dead or in custody, and no clear motive made public.

Amid the uncertainty, three men are being touted as potential leaders of the nation of 11 million people, more than half of whom are under the age of 20. There is no working parliament.

After days of paralysis in the capital, Port-au-Prince saw the timid return of people to the streets, shops opening and the resumption of public transport

on Friday morning - but under a pall of apprehension.

People scrambled to stockpile basic necessities at supermarkets and queued to buy propane for cooking in anticipation of more instability.

"I don't know what's going to happen tomorrow or the day after ... I am preparing for bad days ahead," Port-au-Prince resident Marjory said, as she and her husband stocked up on supplies at a store.

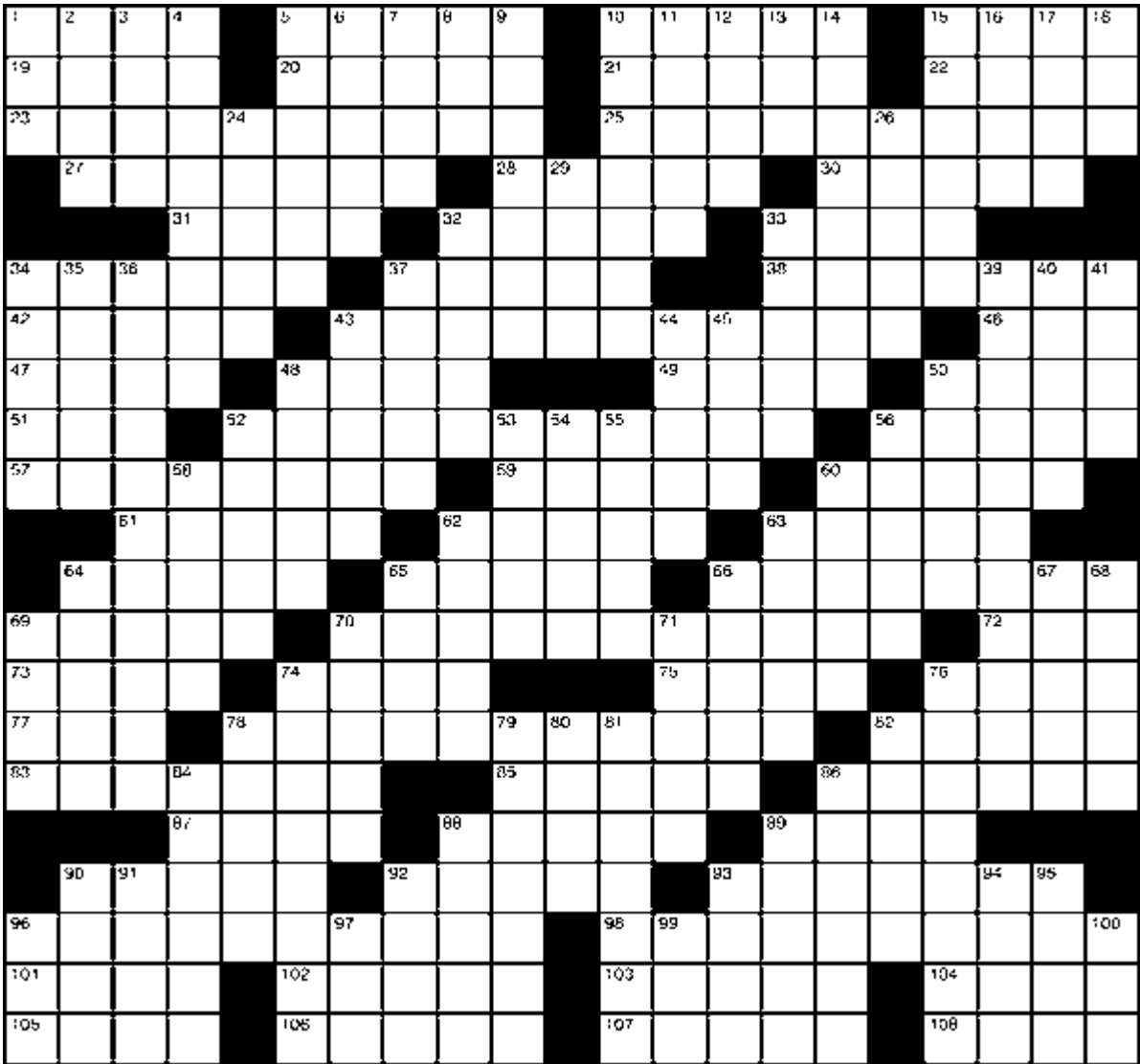
Gang violence, rife in the former French colony, also picked up again on Friday, with clashes between groups paralysing a major highway. The city's airport, shuttered after the attack, appeared to have reopened, according to Flightradar data.

As the shock of the killing wore off, many in the poorest country in the Americas were demanding answers.

"Foreigners came to the country to perpetrate this crime. We, Haitians, are appalled," a resident of the capital said.

AFP

DAILY CROSSWORD



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ACROSS

- 1 Como Villa d' ____
5 Levant or Wilde
10 Relative by marriage
15 Foundation
19 Road shoulder
20 Much: Sp.
21 Roger or Dudley
22 Q.E.D.'s E
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25 1931 Ellington tune
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30 Israel's Meir
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63 Capital of ID
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65 Chair seat mender
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70 Before "violets are blue"
72 Compass heading
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74 French parish priest
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82 Organ parts
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85 Error
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87 Type face: abbr.

- 88 Rent again
89 Tableland
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98 California strait
101 Verdi opera
102 Of a certain grain
103 Best Actor David, 1958
104 Whet
105 Prying
106 Take away by force
107 Roman official
108 Autocrat
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1 Recede
2 Andreas Strobel town
3 Factual
4 Edit
5 Egg dish
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7 310, to Scipio
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9 Stones with no moss
10 Plunge into liquid
11 Not anyone
12 Author Anita
13 Follows liz or wiz
14 Flowering shrubs
15 Wild uproar

- 16 Waterless
17 Epic
18 Ike's bailiwick
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26 Ms. Ephron and namesakes
29 Roman road
32 Suburban swards
33 Pipe for anchor chain
34 Hardly sufficient
35 Male voice
36 Tanning rays
37 Campus buildings
39 Tea type
40 Sand ridges
41 Energy units
43 Selassie
44 Type of type
45 Knob
48 "I do" sayer
50 March King
52 Singer Simon
53 Deem
54 Memoranda
55 Tropical fish
56 Baseball's hot corner
58 Gown: It.
60 Apple remainders
62 Swiss city on the Rhine
63 French chapeau

- 64 Hollywood menace
Peter
65 NCO
66 ____ Haute
67 Unskilled
68 Gossipy
69 Nickname for Elizabeth
70 Rustic
71 Cut of meat
74 Gallinaceous bird
76 Direct
78 Eyed metal spike
79 Component
80 Nimbus
81 Ornamental dish
82 Black-eyed ____
84 747 route
86 Unruffled
88 Finnish poems
89 Exemplary
90 Sonata movement
91 Hebrew letters
92 Routine
93 1056, to Cato
94 Temple
95 Volcano
96 Prohibit
97 Sailor
99 Human ending
100 Poet's word

YOUR DAILY HOROSCOPE



ARIES MARCH 21-APRIL 19

Better get your chores done now, because in a couple of days, a certain someone will make it their business to completely monopolise all of your attention. If it happens to be your current partner, you can expect that the bond between you two will deepen and intensify. If it's someone new, don't be surprised if you feel as if you've known each other forever.



LEO JULY 23-AUGUST 22

If you're single, it's time to get out there and resume your hunt for the perfect partner. You'll be amazed at how many prospective admirers will want to have a shot at the title, too. All you have to do is get dressed and get yourself on the scene. You'll be the centre of attention, no matter where you are -- and for only the loveliest of reasons.



SAGITTARIUS NOVEMBER 22-DECEMBER 21

Now this is the kind of astrological weather you can definitely live with. For once, everyone around you will be in the mood for spontaneity and impulse -- excited to take a chance and see what happens instead of planning out every single move they make. Try not to be too smug or say 'I told you so' when you see what an obviously good time they're having.



TAURUS APRIL 20-MAY 20

The more patient you are, the happier you will be when you finally get your turn. That's why there's really no need to be in such a hurry to prove yourself. The stars urge you to win your victories one at a time and maintain full awareness of your actions. As the day wears on, the increasing influence of certain astral aspects lead you to the politics of charm.



VIRGO AUGUST 23-SEPTEMBER 22

Take a look around your home. If you're not happy with what you see, why not step it up and make some changes? Whether you decide to take out a wall, put on an addition or just toss some fresh paint on the walls, you'll feel like you have a brand-new place. Oh, and if you're after a truly brand-new place, call a real-estate agent. This would be a great time to take the plunge.



CAPRICORN DECEMBER 22-JANUARY 19

You're still chatting away with just about anyone who comes within a few feet of you. Your friends will be tickled -- one in particular, perhaps, who's moved or been traveling. If you've been thinking about this absent friend, don't just sit there. Make sure to contact them, and do it soon. Why would you torment yourself by missing them unnecessarily?



GEMINI MAY 21-JUNE 21

The people you hang out with are tired of excuses. They want to see you, and they want to see you now -- even if you do have to get up for work tomorrow. After all, so do they. They haven't had a good laugh in a long time -- and it is your innate gift to entertain, so why deprive them any further? Go out and play. If not for yourself, then for your admirers. When was the last time you had some fun?



LIBRA SEPTEMBER 23-OCTOBER 22

As much as you'd like to avoid it, a certain amount of frustration may be present in your life. You can actually turn this anxiety to your advantage if you work solo as much as possible right now. Direct your resources toward a resolution -- a situation that is noodling your last nerve holds the answer. You'll be sitting pretty in no time.



AQUARIUS JANUARY 20-FEBRUARY 18

It's been far too long since you've spoken to a certain someone, and you're ready to put an end to this nonsense. The funny thing is, you may think you see them on the street today or maybe in the supermarket, and that's when you'll recognise your need to get back into contact. Once they answer the phone, you'll feel a familiar smile spread across your face. That's just the beginning.



CANCER JUNE 22-JULY 22

One dominating facet of your personality loves being in the centre of attention -- having everyone admire your brilliance. The other side of you yearns for mystery, intrigue and lots of drama. But you can't have both. You'll need to make a decision: Which side will handle the current situation? Use your intuition -- either way, you know how to pour it on!



SCORPIO OCTOBER 23-NOVEMBER 21

You pride yourself on your ability to say an awful lot in a very short amount of airtime. So when you wake up in the middle of a long diatribe -- and catch yourself wondering who could have been rambling on for so very long -- don't panic that it was you. This extreme chattiness is only a temporary affliction. Besides, isn't it worth it to see the look on the faces of your friends?



PISCES FEBRUARY 19-MARCH 20

A higher-up you've admired and respected for some time is about to let you know that the feelings are mutual -- and what could be better than having the respect of your mentor? Sure does make you feel good just to be you, right? Keep in mind, though, that if you hadn't earned this, it wouldn't be coming your way. Isn't a celebration in order?



TEST YOUR KNOWLEDGE

1. Former Australian cricket captain Mark Taylor has had several nicknames. Which of the following was not one of them?

- a. Tubby
- b. Stodge
- c. Helium Bat
- d. Stumpy

2. Which was the 1st non Test playing country to beat India in an international match?

- a. Canada
- b. Sri Lanka
- c. Zimbabwe
- d. East Africa

3. How many gold medals did track and field star Carl Lewis win at the 1984 Olympic games?

- a. Two
- b. Three
- c. Four
- d. Eight

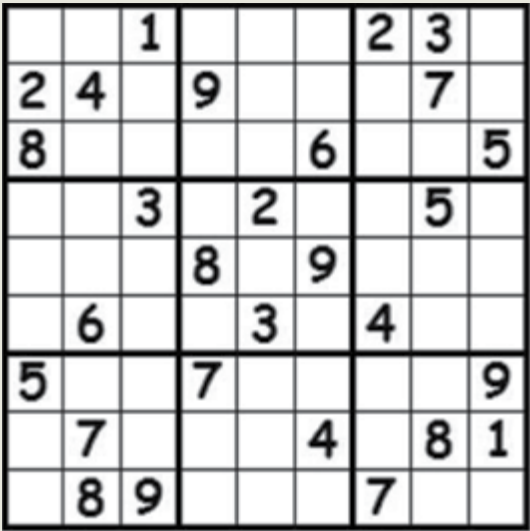
Answers: 1. d 2. b 3. c

KIDS COLOURING



DO YOU SUDOKU?

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



BOGGLER



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

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

SUDOKU EASY ANSWER



DAILY CROSSWORD ANSWERS (JULY 08)



WORD BUILDER

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

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



DIGITAL ART MARKET



CryptoAmulets is the latest venture to chase the non-fungible token craze (AFP)



Digital amulets mark Thai entry into crypto art craze, currently selling for between US\$46 and US\$1,840

Karmic fortune has arrived to the digital art market, with a kaleidoscopic splash of colours and the face of a revered Thai monk offering portable good luck charms to tech-savvy buyers.

Sales of non-fungible tokens (NFTs) - virtual images of anything from popular internet memes to original artwork - have swept the art world in recent months, with some fetching millions of dollars at major auction houses.

'CryptoAmulets' is the latest venture to chase the craze, with founder Ekkaphong Khemthong sensing opportunity in Thailand's widespread practice of collecting talismans blessed by revered monks.

"I am an amulet collector and I was thinking about how I could introduce amulets to foreigners and to the world," he told AFP.

Collecting amulets and other small religious trinkets is a popular pastime in Buddhist-majority Thailand where the capital, Bangkok, has a market solely dedicated to the traders of these lucky objects.

Their value can rise thousands of dollars if blessed by a well-respected monk.

Despite being a digital format, Ekkaphong wanted CryptoAmulets to have the same traditional ceremony as a physical piece, which is why he approached Luang Pu Heng, a highly regarded abbot from Thailand's northeast.

"I respect this monk and I would love the

world to know about him - he is a symbol of good fortune in business," he said.

Authentic and blessed

Luang Pu Heng last month presided over a ceremony to bless physical replicas of the digital amulets, which show a serene image of his face.

He splashed holy water onto his own visage as his saffron-robed disciples chanted and scattered yellow petals on the altar where the portraits were mounted.

One challenge was trying to explain the concept of NFTs to the 95-year-old abbot, who assumed he would be blessing physical amulets.

"It's very hard so we just tried to simplify it," said Singaporean developer Daye Chan.



Buddhist monks attending a blessing ceremony as replicas of the digital amulets are displayed at the Wat Pattana Thammaram temple in Surin (AFP)

"We said to him that it's like blessing the photos."

Transforming amulets into crypto art also means the usual questions of authenticity plaguing a talisman sold in a market are eliminated, he added.

"There are so many amulets being mass produced... All the records could be lost and these physical items can be easily counterfeited," Chan said. NFTs use blockchain technology - an unalterable digital ledger - to record all transactions from the moment of their creation.

"For our amulet, even a hundred years later, they can still check back the record to see what the blockchain is," Chan said. But founder Ekkaphong would not be drawn on the karmic effectiveness of digital amulets, compared to their real-life counterparts. "They are different," he said.

Lucky experiences

On the CryptoAmulets website online gallery, different inscriptions are written in

Thai - rich, lucky or fortunate, for instance - around each of the tokens. They are priced on a tiered system in ethereum, the world's second-largest cryptocurrency after bitcoin, and are currently selling for between \$46 and \$1,840.

Sales have been slow ahead of Sunday's purchase deadline, with only 1,500 tokens sold out of the 8,000 available, and with Thais making up most of the buyers.

Thai chef Theerapong Lertsongkram said he bought a CryptoAmulet because of his reverence for objects blessed by Luang Pu Heng, which he says have brought him good fortune.

"I have had several lucky experiences such as winning small lottery prizes or being promoted on my job," said Theerapong, who works in a Stockholm restaurant. I did not know anything about NFTs before, but I made the decision to buy it as I respect Luang Pu Heng so much," he told AFP.

AFP

Africa enters Cannes with homage to Chad 'heroines'

Africa took centre stage at the Cannes festival this week with a film celebrating Chadian women who navigate religious dogma and male domination with courage, ruses and female solidarity.

Lingui, by Cannes veteran Mahamat Saleh Haroun, is the main competition's only entry from sub-Saharan Africa, and tells the story of a pregnant teenager in the poor outskirts of Chad's capital N'Djamena.

The story revolves around a 15-year old girl, daughter of a single mother, who wants an abortion but faces huge obstacles, both legal and religious, within her community. In a society where men seem to hold all the power and are rarely held accountable for their actions, the women have to find covert ways to protect themselves.

"It's a film about the ordinary lives of



Mahamat Saleh Haroun (centre) says Chadian women are the 'heroines of everyday life' (AFP)

women," Haroun told AFP in an interview. "They are the heroines of everyday life. They are held down by a form of domination that comes from the patriarchy and also from religion, a double force keeping women in this situation," he said.

"I've always had a problem with religion," Haroun said. "I sometimes find it lacks intelligence, in the most basic sense of the term."

Only one director from the African continent has won Cannes' coveted Palme d'Or - Algeria's Mohammed Lakhdar-Hamina, in 1975. Africa's hopes for the golden palm this year rest on Haroun and *Casablanca Beats*, by Morocco's Nabil Ayouch, also in the main competition.

"I'm happy to be in Cannes because this is a place where I can share images, sometimes positive ones, from a place where life is a

nightmare," he said.

Chad, landlocked and poor, is a former French colony of about 15mn people, mostly Muslim with a large Christian minority.

"I am just one voice from that part of Africa. Others can make the same claim and I hope they do," he said. *Lingui*, the title of the film, refers to the links that the community is built on, solidarity, mutual aid, the wish to help others, and loyalty, Haroun said.

Haroun left Chad during civil wars in the early 1980s. He has mostly lived in France since but returned to serve in 2017-18 as minister for culture and tourism in the government of strongman Idriss Deby Itno who ran the country with an iron fist until his death this year. Most of his films are set, and shot, in his home country.

AFP



Diaz stunner helps Colombia seal third place

Brasilia, Brazil - Luis Diaz scored a sensational winner with virtually the last kick of the match as Colombia beat Peru 3-2 in Brasilia on Friday to finish third in the Copa America.

The goal was the 24 year old Porto forward's second of the match and came just ten minutes after Gianluca Lapadula looked to have sent the game into a penalty shoot-out. It was a thrilling encounter that ebbed and flowed, with Yoshimar Yotun giving Peru a first half lead before Colombia captain Juan Cuadrado equalised early in the second period.

Peru got the lead they deserved just before the break as Cueva's precise pass and Lapadula's clever run took out four defenders to set up Yotun for an emphatic finish.

Colombia were back level just four minutes after the break as

Cuadrado fired a free-kick through a disintegrating wall and past Gallese at his near post.

The game opened up and the dangerous Lapadula cut inside a defender on the right before firing in a left-foot shot that clipped the bar as it went over.

It was end to end stuff with the goalkeepers playing a role in launching long range attacks.

Vargas launched a long ball up field for Diaz to scamper away and beat Gallese with a rasping finish on 66 minutes.

Lapadula looked to have sent the match to penalties eight minutes from time when he rose almost unopposed to head home a Raziel Garcia corner from six yards out. But Diaz had the last word with a stunning strike from 25 yards that Gallese could only get his fingertips to as it rifled into the top corner.

AFP



Oman pooled with holders Portugal, Senegal, Uruguay

Our Correspondent
Muscat

FIFA BEACH SOCCER WORLD CUP RUSSIA 2021

Oman have been pooled along with defending champions Portugal, Senegal and Uruguay in Group D at the forthcoming FIFA Beach Soccer World Cup Russia 2021, which will begin in Moscow on August 19.

The draw was held on Thursday at the Home of FIFA in Zurich, Switzerland.

Record five-time champions Brazil will square off against Switzerland, whom they beat in a thrilling Dubai 2009 final, 2011 semifinalists El Salvador and

Belarus in a mouth-watering Group C, while Tahiti, the two-time runners-up, face an intriguing clash with Spain in Group B. UAE and tournament newcomers Mozambique make up the pool.

Hosts Football Union of Russia will kick off the tournament on August 19 against US. The teams have Japan and Paraguay for company in Group A.

Portugal legend Madjer, who helped conduct the draw, said, "It's going to be a tough tournament. Portugal will face three national teams we know quite well because we played against them in previous World Cups. We hope to go through."



The 11th edition of the FIFA Beach Soccer World Cup champions will be crowned on August 29. The competition will be held in its entirety at the Luzhniki Olympic Complex in Moscow.

This will be the fourth appearance of Talib Hilal-

coached Oman side at the World Cup. Oman play their opener against Portugal on August 20 before taking on Uruguay on August 22 and concluding their group engagements against Senegal on August 24.

Oman's maiden participation

was in 2011 in Ravenna, Italy. The other two previous World Cup Oman took part was in Espinho, Portugal in 2015 and in Asuncion, Paraguay in 2019.

Oman will travel to Ukraine for a warm-up camp on July 20 before proceeding to Moscow.

Al Faisal forced out of Hungary races due to illness



Al Faisal al Zubair

Our Correspondent
Muscat

2021 INTERNATIONAL GT OPEN

Oman's Al Faisal al Zubair was forced to miss the third round of the 2021 International GT Open Championship at the Hungaroring circuit in Mogyorod, Hungary, due to illness, his team, Lechner Racing, confirmed on Friday. Al Faisal's regular teammate Andy Soucek was joined by replacement driver Benjamin Barker for the third round.

The Lechner Racing Team Porsche 911 GT3 R crew currently lead the championship by

Hopefully, I will recover soon and I would be able to resume my participation in the next round

AL FAISAL
AL ZUBAIR

a single point heading into the weekend's races. Al Faisal, who could not travel due to his illness, said, "I am disappointed to miss the third round due to my illness.

"Hopefully, I will recover soon and I would be able to resume my

participation in the next round. I wish success to my team in Hungary. I promise to return for the next round at Imola in Italy."

Al Faisal's replacement, Barker, is 30 year old London-based driver. He has been competing in the LMGTE Am class of the FIA World Endurance Championship in a GR Racing Porsche 911 RSR. He was the 2010 Australian F3 champion, the Bathurst 12-Hour winner on four occasions (2013, 2018, 2019 and 2020) and won the Dubai 24-Hours in 2020.

Soucek and Barker posted impressive timings during the two free practice sessions on Friday.

CLASSIFIEDS

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BIRTHDAY WISHES



ASAD.A.SHAIKH
July 10

Wishing you a wonderful and joyful birthday now and forever.

Happy Birthday!
Best wishes from
Ammar, Mama and Abbu.

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Muscat Daily now offers free classified listings for individuals in the following categories:
Situations Wanted/ Accommodation Wanted or Available/Sale of Household Items/ Car for Sale or Wanted/ Matrimonial Alliances (Word limit is 35)

Please email your listing to dailyclassifieds@apexmedia.co.om or call 99104346



EURO2020



‘IT’S 50-50’

England captain Kane expects a nail-biter

London, UK - England captain Harry Kane expects Sunday's Euro 2020 final against Italy to go down to the wire because the teams are so evenly matched.

England and Italy head into the Wembley showdown as the tournament's two stand-out sides.

Four-time world champions Italy, who last won the Euro in 1968, made a flying start as they tore through their group before battling past Austria, Belgium and Spain to reach the final.

England initially found it harder to hit top gear as they scored just twice while winning their group, but Gareth Southgate's men were dominant in knockout stage victories against Germany, Ukraine and Denmark.

Kane believes either team would be fitting champions, but he is confident England have enough quality to win the European Championship for the first time.

"It's a real 50-50 game I think. Of course Italy have a better history than us in terms of winning tournaments, but a lot of us in our team now have had experience at club level of playing in the biggest games, the biggest finals," Kane told reporters ahead of the final.

"It's a real tough game. From our point of view we have full belief in what we have been doing and how we have been setting up, and of course we believe we can win the game.

"But we also know it will be very tough. They've got some great players, some great experience.

"In any final, in any big game, you have to be on it on all aspects. We know that's the case on Sunday and hopefully we can swing it in our favour."

Asked if he had allowed himself to imagine lifting the trophy at Wembley in front of 60,000

England fans, Kane said, "For sure, as players you think of that moment, you dream of that moment.

"Obviously we're all grounded enough to know we have a very tough game on our hands on Sunday. But there's a good belief in this team.

"You play football to win, you dream of these moments as a kid, lifting trophies for your country and we have that opportunity now.

"A great prospect for us, we just have to

enjoy the moment, take it all in, but of course perform, and we want to be on the winning side come Sunday."

If England win their first major silverware since the 1966 World Cup, Kane can be mentioned in the same breath as Three Lions icon Bobby Moore, who lifted the trophy 55 years ago.

AFP



We want to do something historic, says Bonucci

Rome, Italy - Defender Leonardo Bonucci warned that Italy were not scared of taking on hosts England on home soil in the Euro 2020 final on Sunday.

Italy are targeting a second European title after 1968 while England have never won the continental tournament, with their only major trophy the 1966 World Cup which they won at the old Wembley.

"Playing at their home does not scare us," the 34 year old Juventus centre-back told a press conference ahead of the final.

"We're only thinking about playing football and having fun. The rest is just chatter. On the pitch there will be the best show for European and world football from Italy, England and the referees.

"We are looking forward to taking to the field even though most of the fans present will be English. We want to do something historic, have a great performance and then we'll see how it ends."

Veteran Italy duo Bonucci and captain Giorgio Chiellini, 36, will

be tasked with stopping England striker Harry Kane and Raheem Sterling, England's star performer at this tournament. "Young against old men..." smiled Bonucci.

"Kane? We're not discovering him now, it's been years that he's being doing good things with Tottenham, England.

"In the last three matches we've been lucky to come up against the three best strikers in the world (Romelu Lukaku, Alvaro Morata and Kane). It's just an added motivation not to concede anything.

"They have very strong forward, we will need to be very careful of them, the defence and the whole team.

"We know the difficulties they can give us and we will have to be careful about their speed."

Bonucci and Chiellini are the only remaining players from the Italy team that lost the Euro 2012 final to Spain, with coach Roberto Mancini taking over in 2018 after their failure to qualify for the World Cup that year.

"Mancini pushed us right from the first day," continued Bonucci.

"There we felt everyone's desire to start again.

"He worked on the mind, giving us back our confidence, enthusiasm, self-esteem."

The postponement of the tournament also helped Italy rebuild, he believes.

"It helped us one more year. Experience for everyone, young and even us older players.

"In this year we have gained experience and enthusiasm, it has allowed us to be here to believe in something that three years ago seemed utopia. "The past is the past. We're ready to do battle on Sunday."



FINAL
ENGLAND VS
ITALY



Wembley, London
(11pm, Oman time)

Raheem Sterling: From hated one to a Euro star

London, UK - Raheem Sterling will complete a remarkable journey from vilified scapegoat to England legend if the forward inspires his side to victory in Sunday's Euro 2020 final against Italy.

Sterling has been England's most influential player during their historic run to a first major final in 55 years. If England are to make history at Wembley this weekend, they need Sterling to unleash his pace and trickery on the Italians.

The 26 year old was the catalyst for England's 2-1 semifinal win against Denmark on Wednesday.

He forced the own-goal equaliser from Simon Kjaer, then, with England labouring to break down the Danish defence in extra-time, it was Sterling who took the fight to them with his incisive raids. Sterling's persistence eventually drew a foul from

Joachim Maehle, earning the penalty from which Harry Kane netted the winner after his initial effort was saved.

Sterling had already scored England's first three goals in the tournament and provided the assist for Kane's quarterfinal opener against Ukraine, repaying Southgate's faith after a difficult season with Premier League champions Manchester City.

When Sterling started England's first group game against Croatia, there were some who claimed it was a mistake to pick him instead of Jack Grealish.

But Southgate is a firm believer in Sterling's 'incredible resilience and hunger' and the forward rose to the occasion with England's winner against Croatia. It was his first goal in a major tournament after some wretched experiences



on the international stages. His lowest ebb came at Euro 2016 when England fans turned on him after a series of lacklustre performances, culminating in the humiliating exit against Iceland.

On social media, Sterling branded himself the 'hated one' during that tournament and he had to deal with negative stories in the press about his perceived lavish lifestyle. The backlash could have ruined someone with a more fragile personality, but Sterling's tough upbringing prepared him for football's slings and arrows.

Sterling was born in Jamaica and was just two years old when his father was shot dead in Kingston. Aged five, Sterling and his sister moved to London to be reunited with their mother Nadine Clark, who left Jamaica shortly after their father's death.

Life was hard in Brent - where he lived just a stone's throw from Wembley - and Sterling recalls, "My mum was working as a cleaner at some hotels to make extra money so she could pay for her degree.

"I'll never forget waking up at five in the morning before school and helping her clean the toilets at the hotel."

Sterling had to ride three buses across London to reach his training sessions with QPR as young teenager. That commitment reaped its reward

when Liverpool signed him before his 15th birthday in 2010.

Sterling has been one of England football's most captivating figures ever since, both on the pitch and off it, where he has emerged has a fearless and eloquent voice in the fight against racism.

After his problems with City, Sterling has found comfort in the warm embrace of the empathetic Southgate, while his proximity to his old home in north London clearly inspired his England performances.

Paying homage to his past, Sterling has Wembley's iconic arch tattooed on his arm.

If Southgate's side lift the trophy on Sunday, Sterling's standing as an England great will be etched indelibly in the hearts of the fans who once disowned him.

AFP



Bangladesh eye win

ZIMBABWE VS BANGLADESH

ONE OFF TEST: DAY FOUR

Harare, Zimbabwe - Bangladesh would be confident of finishing off Zimbabwe on the fifth day after finally getting rid of a rampant Brendan Taylor. The Zimbabwean captain smacked a 73-ball 92, that kept the visitors in the backfoot for much of the evening session. The home side finished on 140 for three, still 337 runs adrift of Bangladesh's 477-run target.

Taylor dominated the 95-run second wicket-stand to a ridiculous extent with Takudzwanashe Kaitano who contributed just two runs. He struck 16 fours, most of them in the arc between cover and the sightscreen.

Bangladesh had set up the target after Shadman Islam and Najmul Hossain Shanto added 196 runs, Bangladesh's highest second-wicket stand against Zimbabwe breaking the 121 be-

tween Javed Omar and Habibul Bashar from 2001.

Shanto made 117 off 118 with five fours and six sixes while Shadman struck nine fours in his 115 off 196 balls. Shanto hit the most sixes in an innings in Zimbabwe.

The home side lost Milton Shumba before the tea break, when substitute Yasir Ali caught him at second slip off Taskin Ahmed. Yasir, who was fielding in place of the injured Mushfiqur Rahim, has now taken six catches without playing a Test yet.

Taylor got into action almost immediately, cracking Taskin for two fours through the leg-side, before launching Shakib over mid-off with the full flow of the bat.

Then came two Taylor specials, the first a stand-up-tall punch through the covers, then a get-down-low caress through

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the covers. He ended the Taskin over with a ramp over the slips. Two more fours in the following over, off Miraz, took Taylor to his fifty off 33 balls.

Kaitano finally opened his account off his 39th ball, taking a single off Ebadat Hossain to fine leg. Taylor, who was on 57 by then, continued unabated at the other end, hitting the fast bowler for three more fours in his next two overs.

Ebadat also dropped a catch that was reminiscent of Joe Denly's drop in Sri Lanka last year. As Kaitano top edged Miraz, the ball looped over Ebadat and, much to everyone's shock, the ball just slipped through his reverse cup.

Miraz, however, got the job done, getting Taylor caught and bowled almost against the run of play. The dismissal brought Taylor to his knees as he fell eight short of a stunning hundred.

SCOREBOARD		
Bangladesh 1 st Innings 468		
Zimbabwe 1 st Innings 276		
BANGLADESH 2 ND INNINGS		
S Islam		115
S Hassan	c Myers b Ngarava	43
N H Shanto		117
Extras:	(b, 1, nb, 3, w, 5)	9
TOTAL:	284 for one cide in 67.4 overs	
Fall of wickets: 1-88		
Bowling: b Muzarabani 12-4-27-0,		
R Ngarava 9-0-36-1, D Tpiripano 11-2-33-0		
V Nyuachi 10-1-36-0, M Shumba 12-4-67-0, R Kaia 13-2-84-0		
ZIMBABWE 2 ND INNINGS		
M Shumba	c sub (Yasir Ail)	
b T Ahmed		11
T Kaitano	lbw b Shakib al Hasan	7
B Taylor	c & b Miraz	92
D Myers		18
D Tpiripano		7
Extras:	(b, 1, lb, 4)	5
TOTAL:	140 for three in 40 overs	
Fall of wickets: 1-15, 2-T10, 3-132		
Bowling: Shakib al Hasan 12-4-23-1,		
M H Miraz 14-2-45-1, T Ahmed 7-0-39-1,		
E Hossain 3-0-19-0, Mahmudullah 4-0-9-0		

him from 85 to 97, before he took a single and ran two more to get to his century off just 109 balls.

Cricinfo

McCoy and Walsh shine as Windies defeat Australia

WEST INDIES VS AUSTRALIA
FIRST T20I
Gros-Isolet, Saint Lucia - Obed McCooy and Hayden Walsh combined for seven wickets to trigger a stunning Australian collapse as the West Indies pulled off an 18-run victory in the opening fixture of the five-match T20I series at the Darren Sammy Stadium in St Lucia on Friday.

Seamer McCooy (four for 26) and leg-spinner Walsh (three for 23) turned the match on its head as the tourists, replying to the home side's total of 145 for six, lost their last six wickets for 19 runs to be dismissed for 127 off 16 overs.

kipper, wicketkeeper-batsman Nicholas Pooran, who effected the match-winning dismissal when Hazlewood was caught behind off McCoy to trigger celebrations among the Caribbean players which bore a hint of disbelief as they looked completely out of it with Australia cruising along at 108 for four in only the 11th over of their reply.

Walsh triggered the slide by bowling Ben McDermott with a googly in the 11th over and then claimed the all-important wicket of Marsh two overs later.

SCOREBOARD

WEST INDIES	
L Simmons	c Wade b Marsh 27 (28)
E Lewis	c Marsh b Hazlewood 0 (2)
C Gayle	c Agar b Hazlewood 4 (10)
S Hetmyer	c Starc b Marsh 20 (25)
N Pooran	run out 17 (16)
A Russell	b Hazlewood 51 (28)
F Allen	not out 8 (8)
D Bravo	not out 7 (3)
Extras	(lb 6, w 5) 11
TOTAL	145 for six in 20 overs
Fall of wickets: 1-8, 2-4, 3-35, 4-65, 5-101, 6-137	
Bowling: M Starc 4-0-40-0, Josh Hazlewood 4-1-12-3, A Agar 3-0-28-0, A Zampa 3-0-20-3, M Marsh 4-0-26-2, D Christian 2-0-10-0	
AUSTRALIA	
M Wade	c Hetmyer b Russell 33 (14)
A Finch	c Lewis b Allen 4 (5)
M Marsh	c b & Walsh 51 (30)
J Philippe	c Bravo b McCoy 1 (4)
M Henriques	c Bravo b Allen 16 (8)
B McDermott	Walsh 2 (6)
D Christian	c Bravo b Walsh 10 (12)
A Agar	c b & McCoy 1 (5)
M Starc	c Allen b McCoy 3 (8)
A Zampa	not out 1 (2)
J Hazlewood	c Pooran b McCoy 0 (1)
Extras:	(w 5) 5
TOTAL:	127 in 18 overs
Fall of wickets: 1-8, 2-46, 3-53, 4-89, 5-108, 6-117, 7-122, 8-125, 9-126, 10-127	
Bowling: F Edwards 2-0-24-0, F Allen 3-0-24-0, A Russell 1-0-14-1, D Bravo 2-0-16-0, O McCoy 4-0-26-4, H Walsh 4-0-23-3	



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Stage winner Team Trek Segafredo's Bauke Mollema celebrates on the podium after winning the 14th stage of the Tour de France on Saturday

Mollema claims stage 14 of Tour

TOUR DE FRANCE

Quillan, France - Dutchman Bauke Mollema won stage 14 of the Tour de France on a baking run from the citadel at Carcassonne to the small town of Quillon at the foot of the Pyrenees on Saturday.

"It's amazing to win a stage again," said Mollema. "I was feeling good so I thought, 'Let's go from far out'. I had the confidence I could ride alone and keep going for a long time."

Overall leader Tadej Pogacar was under no threat as he finished some seven minutes adrift, although Frenchman Guillaume Martin of Cofidis closed to second overall around three minutes behind the Slovenian. "It was really hard, but I saw an opportunity even if it took a great deal of energy," said Martin.

"I'll need to get back on form for tomorrow, this is the Tour, today it payed off, but who knows," said the author of the novel *Socrates on a bike* and who

studied philosophy. It was a gruelling stage, exposed to beating heat, along narrow, winding Pyrenean foot-hill roads dotted with patches of melting tarmac.

The 2018 champion Geraint Thomas and world champion Julian Alaphilippe dropped off the back of the peloton with 20km to go when it became clear the overall leader's chasing group would not catch the escape.

"Some of the guys in the escape group were not working so I went from 45km on my own," explained the 34-year-old after winning his second Tour de France stage.

After Mark Cavendish matched 'the Cannibal' Eddy Merckx's 46 year old record for stage wins on Friday, French daily *L'Equipe* called the Manxman the 'Sprint Cannibal'. But the Deceuninck man was eating the peloton's dust from the first slopes and trailed at 7min halfway along the route and was battling to beat the time cut for expulsions.

AFP

BARTY CLINCHES FIRST WIMBLEDON CROWN

London, UK - Ashleigh Barty won her first Wimbledon title on the 50th anniversary of fellow indigenous Australian Evonne Goolagong Cawley's maiden crown, beating Karolina Pliskova 6-3, 6-7 (4/7), 6-3 in the final on Saturday.

The 25 year old Australian - who wore a specially-designed dress in tribute to Cawley's iconic scallop one she sported in 1971 - adds the Wimbledon crown to her 2019 French Open title. "It took me a long time to verbalise, to dare to dream it and say it," said Barty, who was also fulfilling a childhood dream.

"I didn't sleep a lot last night, I was thinking of all the what-ifs. I hope I made Evonne proud."

It was the first women's Wimbledon final to go to three sets since 2012 when Serena Williams beat Poland's Agnieszka Radwanska. Barty is also the first top seed to win the title since Serena in 2016.

Barty had looked like cruising to victory after soaring into a 4-0 lead over her opponent - the Australian's start so blistering that she won the first 14 points.

However, 29 year old Pliskova steadied herself while Barty faltered when she served for the match at 6-5 in the second set.

The Czech broke and then swept the tie-breaker to take the final into a decider.

Barty got the break for 2-0 in the final set and despite one or two wobbles she got herself over the line sinking to her knees, her hands over her face in disbelief.

She wiped a couple of tears away before climbing up to the player's box, just like her compatriot Pat Cash did when he won the Wimbledon men's title in



Ashleigh Barty holds the Venus Rosewater Dish trophy after winning the women's singles final on Saturday

ASHLEIGH BARTY

AGE: 25

NATIONALITY: AUSTRALIAN

WORLD RANKING: 1

CAREER TITLES: 12

CAREER GRAND SLAM TITLES: 2
(2019 FRENCH OPEN, 2021 WIMBLEDON)

CAREER EARNINGS:
US\$21,197,824

Djokovic braced for Berrettini and crowd

MEN'S SINGLES FINAL

London, UK - Novak Djokovic admits he will have to overcome the majority of 15,000 fans on Centre Court as well as Matteo Berrettini if he is to capture a sixth Wimbledon and 20th Grand Slam title on Sunday.

The world No 1 will be playing in his seventh final at the All England Club and 30th at the majors.

By contrast, Berrettini is in his maiden Slam final and bidding to be the first Italian man to claim a major title since Adriano Panatta at the 1976 French Open.

"Every player hopes in big matches, coming into big stadiums, that he's going to have a majority of the crowd behind him," said Djokovic. "Having the crowd behind you, against you, it's a big difference.

"Berrettini, his first time in a Grand Slam final, he's kind of an underdog. People also like to see someone win who is an underdog or is not maybe expected to win, is not the favourite to win."

Djokovic reached his latest Wimbledon final on Friday with a 7-6 (7/3), 7-5, 7-5 win over Denis Shapovalov.



Italy's Matteo Berrettini (L) faces Serbia's world No 1 Novak Djokovic in the men's singles final on Sunday (AFP)

He had to dig deep, saving ten of 11 break points in a semifinal in which he was outplayed for large parts of the first two sets.

Most of the Centre Court crowd were behind the Canadian, even more so when he walked off in floods of tears. It's a situation that has become depressingly familiar to Djokovic as he stands one win away from equalling Roger Federer and

Rafael Nadal on 20 Grand Slam titles. When Sunday comes, the 34 year old hopes the Centre Court crowd will appreciate what he is trying to achieve.

Victory will leave him requiring just a fourth US Open title in September to become only the third man in history and first since Rod Laver in 1969 to complete the calendar Grand Slam.

"Hopefully people can also

recognise the importance of this match for me, the history that is on the line," said Djokovic.

"I'm prepared for anything really that is going to happen in terms of the crowd support on Sunday. I've had many different experiences throughout my career. I just need to focus on myself and what I need to do."

Berrettini, the world No 9 became the first Italian to reach a



Woman to umpire men's final

London, UK - Marija Cicak will make history on Sunday when she becomes the first woman to umpire a Wimbledon men's singles final. The All England Club confirmed that the 43 year old from Croatia will oversee Sunday's clash between five-time champion Novak Djokovic and Matteo Berrettini.

Wimbledon singles final by beating Hubert Hurkacz 6-3, 6-0, 6-7 (3/7), 6-4 in the other semifinal. "I think I never dreamed about this because it was too much for a dream," said Berrettini after the win. "So far it is the best tennis day of my life but hopefully Sunday will be even better. I feel kind of chills but I am doing it, so I have to believe it." AFP

Every day, all day!

