

TUESDAY, 24 AUGUST 2021

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THREE OMANIS TO TAKE PART IN TOKYO PARALYMPICS
GO TO **PAGE 14 SPORTS**

Oman opens its skies

Starting September 1, the sultanate will open its doors to travellers. The Civil Aviation Authority announced on Monday that the entry ban from all countries on the prohibited list has been lifted. All Omani citizens, residents of Oman, visa holders of Oman, those who do not require a visa to travel to Oman, and those who can obtain a visa upon arrival are allowed to enter the sultanate in accordance with the pre-COVID-19 system.



Checklist & documentation for travel

NO QUARANTINE

- Arriving passengers who present a pre-travel negative COVID-19 PCR test result are exempted from quarantine.
- PCR test should indicate the result which can be validated and certified with a QR Code.
- Test should be conducted within 96 hours prior to the scheduled time of arrival in the sultanate for international flights of more than eight hours, including transit, and 72 hours for shorter flights.

PCR TEST REQUIREMENTS

- Arriving passengers who don't have a negative PCR test will have to take the test on arrival. Such travellers will be required to enter mandatory quarantine with an electronic tracking bracelet until a negative PCR test result is received. In cases of a positive PCR test result, the passenger will be required to undergo mandatory health isolation for ten days starting from the test date.
- Passengers who have recovered from COVID-19 but test positive on arrival are exempted from health isolation provided they are able to submit a proof that they have completed the prescribed isolation.

APP REGISTRATION

- Before boarding the aircraft, all passengers, including diplomats, are required to complete pre-registration via Tarassud+ and upload the vaccine certificate as well as PCR certificate, both containing QR codes.
- Passengers preferring to do the PCR test upon arrival will pay the prescribed fee when registering via Tarassud+ before boarding the flight.

PASSENGERS UNDER 18

- Arriving passengers aged 18 and younger are exempted from the requirements of vaccine and COVID-19 PCR test.
- Patients with diseases that prevent them from receiving COVID-19 vaccines, according to an approved medical certificate, are also exempted from presenting vaccine certificates.

VACCINE PROTOCOL

- All passengers are required to present a COVID-19 vaccine certificate containing a QR code stating that they have received two doses of a vaccine approved in Oman or single dose in case of vaccines requiring a single dose provided it is approved in Oman.
- The last dose should have been taken no less than 14 days ahead of arrival time.

Royal Decree establishes Khor Kharfout Reserve in Dhofar

Muscat - His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik issued Royal Decree No 58/2021, on Monday, establishing Khor Kharfout Archaeological Reserve in Dhofar Governorate reading as follows: **Article 1** states that a sanctuary with the name 'Khor Kharfout Archaeological Reserve' will be established in the Governorate of Dhofar and that it will be accorded the zone whose demarcations are indicated in the annex and diagram attached to the decree. **Article 2** stipulates that the Chairman of the Environment Authority, acting in coordination with ministries and departments concerned, will issue the regulations and decisions necessary for the implementation of this decree. The regulations and decisions will include the method of management of this archaeological reserve, formalities for entry to the sanctuary, the prescribed fee, the duration of stay therein, the activities allowed to be practised or prohibited there, and the appropriate administrative penalties against each case of violation. **Article 3** states that the decree will be published in the Official Gazette and enforced on the day following its date of publishing.

► NEWS BRIEFS

HM CONDOLES EMIR OF KUWAIT

Muscat - His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik has sent a cable of condolences to Sheikh Nawaf al Ahmed al Jaber al Sabah, Emir of Kuwait, on the death of Sheikhha Badriya al Ahmed al Jaber al Sabah. In the cable, His Majesty expressed his heartfelt sympathies, praying to Allah the Almighty to rest the deceased's soul in peace in paradise and grant her family patience.

HM RECEIVES CABLE FROM CHINESE PRESIDENT

Muscat - His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik has received a cable of thanks from President Xi Jinping of China in reply to His Majesty's greetings cable to him on the centennial anniversary of the founding of the Chinese Communist Party. The president thanked His Majesty for his greetings and stressed his keenness to promote relations between the two friendly countries.

HM GREET'S PRESIDENT OF UKRAINE

Muscat - His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik has sent a cable of greetings to President Volodymyr Zelensky of Ukraine on his country's Independence Anniversary. His Majesty expressed his sincere best wishes to President Zelensky and the friendly people of Ukraine.

COVID-19 curve flattens

Our Correspondent Muscat

With the Ministry of Health (MoH) reporting less than 200 daily cases for over a week now, the COVID-19 curve in Oman appears to be flattening. On Monday, the MoH reported 151 new COVID-19 cases. There were 158 cases on Thursday, 122 on Friday and 105 on Saturday. According to OmanVS Covid19, MoH's official Twitter handle for COVID-19, for a period of seven days from August 15 to 21, the number of cases went

From August 15 to 21, the number of cases went down by 26 per cent, while deaths decreased by 33 per cent

down by 26 per cent, while deaths decreased by 33 per cent. The number of hospitalisations over the same period dropped by 29 per cent, while those in intensive care units declined by 24 per cent.

With this, recoveries in the week went up 47 per cent. Vaccination coverage also climbed four per cent in the week. With 151 new cases on Monday and seven related deaths, the total number of cases registered in the sultanate has now reached 301,450, including 4,038 deaths. Twenty patients were admitted to hospitals across Oman in a 24-hour period on Monday, taking the total number of inpatients to 167, including 81 in ICUs. With the addition of 266 recoveries, the total went up to 290,410, accounting for a recovery rate of 96.3 per cent.

Virtual sessions

Second Session

The mechanism of calculating VAT

24 August 2021 pm 5:00 – 6:30

Third Session

Invoices and tax records

31 August 2021 pm 5:00 – 6:30

Broadcast platform:

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 Tax Authority of the Sultanate of Oman

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How has Value Added Tax (VAT) affected your monthly budget since its implementation four months ago?

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Muna Basheer al Zadjali
Private sector employee

The effect is more for low-income individuals, since consumer-spending patterns are unlikely to quickly change. We need to be conscious; some sellers may take advantage of VAT to raise the price of goods, especially if there is no serious and effective monitoring by the ministry.



Meer Waheed
Banking sector employee

The five per cent VAT hasn't affected me very much. But yes, one sometimes feels the pinch when out dining. It also hurts when we buy high-value items, as five per cent adds up to a lot. Overall, it hasn't forced me to change my spending or habits.



Seema Pai
Homemaker

As soon as Oman implemented VAT, we adjusted our budget accordingly. Also, with the pandemic and lockdown, we haven't spent much on entertainment or outdoor activities. We usually limit our spending to buying essential groceries. We understand that this is a necessary and important step for the country's economy.



Kiran Choudhury
Homemaker

My budget has been hit after introduction of VAT as prices of products have gone up. I've had to curtail certain expenses to adjust to VAT. I hope VAT charges remain at the current level of five per cent.



Hassan al Naamani
Private sector employee

I controlled my spending even before VAT. I only buy what I need and for this reason, I have not been affected much given that essentials and groceries are not taxable. But, I think VAT was a good decision for the country's economy and at the same time we have to appreciate the fact that essential items are exempted.



Jay Prakash
Private sector employee

VAT affects my purchasing capacity. Following implementation of VAT, I have been spending only on essentials. I am tempted but hold the purse strings.



Mohan Anandan
Banking sector employee

The fact that VAT is intended for utilisation of betterment of society has made it a part of life now. Since essential commodities and medicines are exempted, the impact on the common man is insignificant. It is an opportunity and honour to contribute towards nation building.



Prabhakar Bhandarkar
Private sector employee

It hasn't affected our monthly budget significantly. As long as you aren't spending much on luxury items and entertainment, it should be fine considering essentials are not taxed. So, the only way to not let VAT affect your monthly expenditure is to make a smart budget plan and monitor your spending.



Ruskeen S
Sales Manager

My budget isn't affected much, as most foodstuffs and vegetables don't have VAT. Also, due to lockdowns and restrictions, some expenses have come down. VAT helps the economy, so I am happy to contribute.



? NEXT ON YOUR SAY

As Oman gets back to normal, how can we make sure we do not go back to square one in terms of COVID-19 infections?

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

I wear a mask for your safety...

Face masks can now be considered the new must-have personal accessory. Suddenly, we see more people with face masks than with smart phones. Let's hope the younger generation understands that for the survival of the human race, hygiene is the key, rather than being obsessed with the use of electronic devices. I wear a mask to protect myself and others.

Petr Dubsky
General Manager,
Radisson Blu Hotel, Muscat

Do you?

The battle against COVID-19 is getting tough. Let's beat it by our responsible behaviour.

Wear a mask...always!

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'Anti-deception law makes market practices safe'

Muscat - Sulayem Ali al Hakmani, chairman of the Consumer Protection Authority (CPA), has said that the GCC Unified Law on Combating Commercial Deception, enacted via Royal Decree No 54/2021, consolidates the legal setup for protection of the sultanate's markets against harmful practices.

Hakmani said that the statute creates balance in the exchange of goods across all stages and provides necessary protection, both for merchants and consumers in the sultanate.

He pointed out that markets that have harmful practices, like commercial deception and other violations, create unfavourable



Sulayem Ali al Hakmani

settings shunned by investors. This law, he explained, has been enacted to provide more confidence to all businesses.

Hakmani added that the law

was passed to realise the vision of GCC leaders in efforts to unify joint action and prevent procedural redundancy, while at the same time monitoring the exchange of commodities in a safe GCC market.

CPA will not be the only party to implement the law, Hakmani informed.

The chairman of CPA added that the Royal Decree (under which the law was enacted) states that other executing partners include the ministries of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion, Agriculture, Fisheries and Water Resources, and Health, besides other departments concerned.

MoL announces 73 private sector job opportunities

Our Correspondent
Muscat

The Ministry of Labour (MoL) has announced 73 new job opportunities in various private sector institutions for Omani citizens.

MoL is offering eight jobs for Master's degree holders, 25 jobs for Bachelor's degree holders, four jobs for higher diploma holders, 11 jobs for post-secondary diploma holders, four jobs for professional diploma holders, 15 jobs for General Education Diploma holders, five jobs for lower qualifications and others.

Bodour bint Issa al Harthiya, director of the employment opportunities department in the ministry, said that MoL continues to coordinate with private sector institutions to offer opportunities to Omanis.



Bodour bint Issa al Harthiya

She informed that the ministry's website has more than 2,970 vacancies in private sector institutions and jobseekers can apply electronically to compete for them. These opportunities include 546 jobs for people with high school qualifications, 1,395 for General Education Diploma holders, 590 for diploma holders, 401 for Bachelor's degrees, 36 jobs for Master's degree holders, and five jobs for PhD holders.

Undersecretaries of foreign ministries in GCC meet

Our Correspondent
Muscat

Oman participated in the second meeting of the Gulf Cooperation Council Undersecretaries of Ministries of Foreign Affairs and senior consular affairs officials, held on Monday morning via video communication.

The Omani side was headed by H E Mohammed bin Nasser bin Hamad al Wahaibi, Undersecretary for Administrative and Financial Affairs in the Foreign Ministry.

During the meeting, mechanisms of diplomatic and consular cooperation between the embassies of the GCC countries abroad were discussed in order to achieve the common interests of the countries of the GCC.

MILITARY TECHNOLOGICAL COLLEGE RECEIVES STUDENTS



Military Technological College received a large number of students for medical examination and interviews on Monday in preparation for their admission to the college for the 2021/2022 academic year. The aspirants include 2020/2021 General Education Diploma holders and a number of direct admission students transferred from other academic institutions. The college is one of the leading higher education institutions of the sultanate with laboratories and workshops of international standards (ONA)

RO5mn Green Mosques solar energy investment programme launched

Our Correspondent
Muscat

As part of its initiatives to boost uptake of alternative energy in the sultanate, Amanah - a Waqf funds management company, in cooperation with the Authority for Public Services Regulation (APSR), launched an initiative called Green Mosques on Monday that will support 100 mosques in the first year to switch to solar energy and provide for their alternative energy needs.

The Green Mosque initiative seeks to reduce the operating cost of mosques by investing RO5mn to introduce solar energy systems through three packages - 100 mosques per package - over a period of three years, stated Amanah.

'The programme will provide investment solutions with the aim of encouraging mosques to adopt the use of solar energy by installing panels on roofs, for a fee for installation and operation,' APSR said in a statement.

Mosques wishing to adopt and implement the programme will be able to contract with Amanah so that the latter will install and operate the solar panels



for a specified period of time.

'The mosques will achieve immediate savings in bills as around 50 per cent of the consumption will be provided by solar energy and the investment amount will be recovered over a long-term lease.'

According to the National Centre for Statistics and Information there were 16,464 mosques till 2019 in Oman. The project seeks to transform mosques into environment-friendly buildings using clean energy and utilising the surplus to



The mosques will achieve savings in bills as around 50% of the consumption will be provided by solar energy and the investment amount will be recovered over a long-term lease

generate more revenue for the Waqf establishment.

APSR stated that the systems will be owned by the mosque immediately after the end of the investment period agreed upon between the two parties. 'This will be an important step to

wards achieving the directions of the Oman 2040 vision in the field of using alternative energy.'

Engineer Yousef bin Ali al Harthy, CEO of Amanah, said that this project represents the first investment of the endowment fund based on the

approach of partnership and co-operation with the private sector. "Amanah seeks to participate in comprehensive development programmes in the sultanate through projects that meet the needs of the endowment system and also contributes to the economic activity in the country in particular projects that support small and medium enterprises."

Solar energy is a vital and strategic solution for the provision of electric power in Oman given the vast unused land and available solar energy resources.

Oman receives a tremendous amount of solar radiation throughout the year which is among the highest in the world, and there is significant scope for harnessing and developing solar energy resources throughout the sultanate. Recently, Oman's largest solar power plant, built in Ibri, started commercial operations, according to Oman Power and Water Procurement Company (OPWP). "The plant has been built on an area of 13mn sqm at a cost of about RO250mn. The Ibri project is the largest photovoltaic plant in the country to date," Eng Ahmed bin Salim al Abri from the OPWP said.

Surgeries of 20 children facilitated by Jisr Foundation

Our Correspondent
Muscat

Khoula Hospital conducted surgeries on 20 children with congenital defects in cooperation with Al Jisr Foundation for Charitable Activities recently.

The Ministry of Health described the surgeries for children with congenital defects such as cleft lip, performed in private hospitals, as a 'pioneering experiment for a joint project'.

These congenital defects require surgical intervention within a certain age in accordance with international studies. Delaying surgical procedure in these conditions can result in complications such as difficulty in eating, or impact speech and hearing.

Following the outbreak of the pandemic, Khoula Hospital suspended certain health services, including surgeries, in order to increase capacity for COVID-19 patients.

Over 600 complaints against telecom services in H1: TRA



Our Correspondent
Muscat

As many as 671 complaints against telecom services were reported in the first half of 2021, according to the Telecommunications Regulatory Authority (TRA).

TRA said it recovered RO136,000 to subscribers in the first half of 2021.

Regarding fixed telecommunications services, the data issued by the authority indicated that

The number of grievances filed with TRA about mobile telecommunications services amounted to 314

the number of complaints received regarding billing and financial obligations was at a rate of 906 complaints per 100,000 subscribers, and with regard to

service quality and technical problems it was at a rate of 3,122 complaints per 100,000.

The total number of grievances that were filed with the authority in relation to fixed telecommunications service was 357 during the first half of the year, and RO17,000 was returned in favour of consumers.

TRA said the total billing complaints and financial obligations for mobile telecommunication services was at a rate of 1,062 complaints per 100,000 subscribers, and technical complaints were at a rate of 2,263 complaints per 100,000 subscribers.

The data also indicated that the number of grievances filed with TRA about mobile telecommunications services amounted to 314 grievances during six months of 2021 at a rate of 15 grievances per 100,000 subscribers, which resulted in the recovery of RO119,000 in favour of consumers.



2.33mn vaccinated in Oman

Muscat - The total number of people vaccinated with COVID-19 vaccines in Oman till Sunday reached 2,336,980, representing 66 per cent of the total target.

Those vaccinated with the first dose reached 1,294,098, representing 37 per cent of the target, while the those vaccinated with two doses were 1,042,882, or 29 per cent.

The Ministry of Health is continuing the vaccination campaign for the target groups in all governorates. 'On Monday, immunisation centres witnessed a large turnout, which confirms the great societal awareness about the importance of immunisation against COVID-19,' MoH stated.

Marafiq signs power purchase agreement with Tanweer

Our Correspondent
Muscat

Central Utilities Company (Marafiq), a member of OQ Group, has signed a power purchase agreement with Rural Areas Electricity Company (Tanweer), a member of Nama Group, for an 80MW power generation project in Duqm.

The agreement was signed by Hamad Ali al Wahibi, general manager of business development at Marafiq, and Ahmed Said al Harthy, acting CEO of Tanweer.

As per the agreement, Marafiq will build and operate a power plant consisting of gas fuel turbines with a capacity of more than 80MW to meet the energy requirements of Tanweer in Duqm. The power production is expected to start in November.

Marafiq received natural gas in the Special Economic Zone at Duqm in April and started the commissioning activities



of the integrated power and water plant.

The project has reached a completion rate of 92 per cent and all work on the 132kV high voltage transmission line has been completed.

Abdullah al Hashimi, executive director of Marafiq, said, "The agreement will meet the requirements of the sector's law and will create high value to meet the increasing demand in

the Special Economic Zone at Duqm. In addition, the plant will contribute to reducing emissions."

Highlighting the importance of the power purchase agreement, Hilal al Kharusi, chairman of Marafiq, said, "This agreement emphasises the importance and necessity of complementary work between the competent authorities to reach the national strategic goals."

MARKET WATCH

MSX30	3,960.20
BSE Sensex	55,555.79

FOREX RATES
(RO1 equals)

Indian Rs	192.43
Pakistani Rs	426.32
Bangladeshi Taka	221.11
Philippine Peso	130.27
Sri Lankan Rs	518.85

*Rates as on August 23
Source: xe.com

BRIEFS

Bitcoin jumps above \$50,000 for first time since May
Bitcoin rose back above US\$50,000 on Monday for the first time in three months after supportive news from payments giant PayPal and cryptocurrency platform Coinbase.

The world's most popular virtual unit jumped to US\$50,440 during Asian trade, before easing to US\$50,350 in early morning London deals.

"Bitcoin continues its recent recovery, moving above the US\$50,000 mark it last attained in May though still some way short of its US\$65,000 record as PayPal announces plans to launch its cryptocurrency trading platform in the UK," said AJ Bell analyst Danni Hewson.

PayPal has announced that it will this week begin to allow users in Britain to buy, hold and sell cryptocurrency including bitcoin through the online payment platform for the first time.

Bitcoin won another shot in the arm on Monday from last week's news that Coinbase was ploughing cash into the unit.

Land deal signed for \$2.5bn green hydrogen project



Our Correspondent
Muscat

Oman's Public Authority for Special Economic Zones and Free Zones (OPAZ) on Monday signed a land reservation agreement with India's ACME Group to set up a large green hydrogen and ammonia project in the Special Economic Zone at Duqm.

India's leading clean energy platform ACME Solar Holdings earlier in March announced that it signed a memorandum of understanding with Oman Company for Development of Special Economic Zone at Duqm (Tatweer) to set up a green hydrogen and green ammonia facility in Duqm with a total investment of around US\$2.5bn.

According to Indian media reports published in March, Tatweer and ACME had identified the land parcel in Duqm region to set up the project that will produce 2,200 metric tonnes of green ammonia per day.

The land reservation agreement on Monday was signed by H E Dr Ali bin Masoud al Sunaidy, chairman of OPAZ and Manoj Upadhyay, chairperson of ACME Group and Gursharan Jassal, general manager - business developer of ACME.

Eng Yahiya bin Khamis al Zedjali, in-charge of managing operations of the Special Economic Zone at Duqm, said that ACME, under the agreement, will be conducting field studies of the project in the first phase that include installing anemometers to measure wind speed and weather station for the purpose of surveys and data collection.

ACME's project will produce hydrogen and ammonia from renewable energy. Green hydrogen is produced through electrolysis from renewable energy which becomes the raw material to make green ammonia.

The signing of this agreement comes in the context of OPAZ's plan to promote investment in

clean energy field through the production of green hydrogen and ammonia from renewable energy.

The Authority also plans to promote the use of green hydrogen in various fields such as transportation and manufacturing sectors along with other energy resources in the Special Economic Zone at Duqm.

Another OPAZ official, Jalal bin Abdul Karim al Lawati pointed out that the Authority is currently negotiating with several international companies who expressed their interest to establish green hydrogen and ammonia projects in Duqm, Salalah and Sohar.

He added that Duqm is the ideal location for attracting green hydrogen and ammonia projects considering the high solar irradiation, wind resources all year long, and easy export and import through the port.

Several international companies in the past few months have

expressed their interest and announced plans to invest in green hydrogen and green ammonia projects in Oman's special economic zones and free zones.

The Ministry of Energy and Minerals is establishing a national hydrogen alliance 'Hy-Fly' to place Oman on the global clean hydrogen map. This alliance - made up of 13 key public and private organisations - will promote green hydrogen through investments, technologies, policies and expertise across the whole hydrogen supply chain.

Recently, Hong Kong-based InterContinental Energy, Oman's OQ and Kuwait-based clean energy investor EnerTech formed a consortium to set up a mega green fuels project in Oman. The capacity of this project will be increased up to 25 megawatt over many years. The huge project would make Oman a global leader in green hydrogen and green ammonia production.



Gas consumption rises 13% in first 7 months of 2021

Our Correspondent
Muscat

The sultanate's consumption of natural gas rose by 12.8 per cent year-on-year in the first seven months of 2021 compared to the same period of last year.

Total consumption of natural gas rose to 29,363mn cubic metres (mncm) during the January-July period of 2021 against 26,041mncm in the corresponding period of 2020.

The growth in total consumption was driven by increased natural gas demand in oilfields, power plants and industrial projects, the Ministry of Energy and Minerals' figures released by the National Centre for Statistics and Information (NCSI) showed.

Oman produced and imported a total of 29,363mncm natural gas to meet the country's demand during the January-July period of this year, which is nearly 13 per cent higher compared to the total of production and imports in the first seven months of 2020.

Industrial projects, the biggest natural gas consuming sector in

the sultanate, recorded a total gas consumption of 17,164mncm in the first seven months of this year, which is 9.1 per cent higher as compared to 15,738mncm consumption in the same period a year ago.

The industrial and manufacturing sector activities started to pick up since the beginning of 2021 as the demand started to improve after the easing of COVID-19 restrictions.

Gas usage in the oilfields increased by nearly 25 per cent to 7,556mncm in the first seven months of this year against 6,063mncm in the same period of 2020.

Gas consumption in the power generation projects increased by 8.7 per cent to 4,519mncm in the first seven months of 2021 compared to 4,159mncm in the same period of previous year.

Electricity production at the sultanate's gas-fired power generation plants rose by 9.6 per cent during the first half of this year to 19,497.7GWh compared to 17,793.5GWh in the same period of 2020.

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MSX falls 0.28%; volumes surge

Our Correspondent
Muscat

The benchmark index of the Muscat Stock Exchange (MSX) fell 0.28 per cent to close at 3,960.21 points on Monday.

Trading activity improved from the previous session as turnover jumped by 497.68 per cent to RO8.71mn and volumes surged 236.95 per cent to 24.35mn shares.

All the sectoral indices closed in red territory. Financial index fell 0.14 per cent, Industrial index declined 0.24 per cent and Services index fell 0.25 per cent. The MSX Shariah index closed down by

0.17 per cent at 594.11 points.

Market breadth remained negative as six companies closed up, while 15 companies closed down. The rest 32 traded stocks closed flat for the day.

Top gainers were Construction Materials Industries & Contracting Co (3.45 per cent), Oman Qatar Insurance (2.67 per cent), Shell Oman (2.27 per cent) and Musandam Power (1.85 per cent).

Top losers were Vision Insurance (-3.75 per cent), Global Financial Investments Holding (-2.94 per cent), Renaissance Services (-2.67 per cent), and Al Jazeera Services (-1.97 per cent).

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Taliban inherit untapped \$1tn trove of lithium, other minerals

Paris, France - The Taliban now hold the keys to an untouched trillion-dollar trove of minerals including some that could power the world's transition to renewable energies, but Afghanistan has long struggled to tap its vast deposits.

The Taliban are already in a financial bind since they returned to power 20 years after their ouster, as major aid donors halted their support for Afghanistan.

Endless wars and poor infrastructure have prevented the country from getting its hands on the metals that could brighten its economic fortunes.

The resources include bauxite, copper, iron ore, lithium and rare earths, according to a January report by the US Geological Survey (USGS).

Copper, which is needed to make power cables, became a hot commodity this year as prices soared to more than US\$10,000 per tonne.

Lithium is a crucial element to make electric car batteries, solar panels and wind farms.

World demand for lithium is expected to grow by over 40 times by 2040, according to the International Energy Agency.

And Afghanistan 'sits on a huge reserve of lithium that has



Afghan miners work at a gold mine on a mountainside near the village of Qara Zaghan in Baghlan Province (AFP)

not been tapped to this day', said Guillaume Pitron, author of the book *The Rare Metals War*.

Afghanistan is also home to rare earths that are used in the clean energy sector: Neodymium, praseodymium and dysprosium.

The country's untapped mineral riches have been estimated at US\$1tn by the USGS, though Afghan officials have put it three times as high.

Afghanistan has done better

digging for precious stones such as emeralds and rubies as well as semi-precious tourmaline and lapis lazuli, but the business is plagued with illegal smuggling to Pakistan. The country also mines for talc, marble, coal and iron.

China investment

While the Taliban's takeover may deter foreign investors, one country that appears willing to do business with them is China.

The world's second-biggest

economy has said it was ready to have 'friendly and cooperative' relations with Afghanistan after the Taliban entered Kabul.

The state-owned China Metallurgical Group Corporation won rights in 2007 to lease the giant Mes Aynak copper ore deposit for 30 years and extract 11.5mn tonnes of the commodity.

The project to tap the world's second-largest unexploited copper deposit has yet to start operations 'due to safety issues',

according to Chinese state-run tabloid *Global Times*.

But *Global Times* cited a source at the group as saying that it would 'consider reopening it after the situation is stabilised, and international recognition - including the Chinese government's recognition of the Taliban regime - takes place'.

While Chinese leaders are 'not enthusiastic' about the Taliban takeover, 'they will not allow principle to stand in the way of pragmatism', Ryan Hass, a senior fellow at the Washington-based Brookings Institution thinktank, said in a blog.

"Beijing's lack of development at its major investment in the Mes Aynak copper mine demonstrates its willingness to exercise patience in pursuit of return on investment," he wrote.

French expert Pitron said, "The Chinese don't condition their business deals on democratic principles."

He warned there is no certainty that Afghanistan will become a mineral El Dorado.

"For that, you need a very stable political climate," Pitron said.

It can take as long as 20 years between the discovery of a mineral deposit and the start of mining operations, he said.

AFP

OPEC chief makes first trip to oil-rich Congo

Brazzaville, Congo - OPEC chief Mohammad Barkindo arrived in Congo late Sunday in the first-ever visit by a head of the powerful cartel to the oil-rich African country where crude constitutes the primary source of income, the Congolese Hydrocarbons Ministry said.

"Congo has an essential role to play in the global energy industry and OPEC plans to encourage it," Barkindo was quoted as saying in a statement pub-



Mohammad Barkindo

lished by the ministry.

During the trip, which will last until Wednesday, the secretary

general of the Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries will meet various government officials, including Prime Minister Anatole Collinet Makosso and President Denis Sassou Nguesso.

Barkindo will also visit an oil platform off the coast near Pointe-Noire, Congo's economic capital.

Arriving at Brazzaville airport on a flight from Nigeria, Barkindo was welcomed by Hydrocarbons

Minister, Bruno Jean-Richard Itoua.

The fourth-biggest oil producer south of the Sahara, behind Nigeria, Angola and Equatorial Guinea, Congo joined OPEC in 2018.

Congo is estimated to have proven reserves of some 2.9bn barrels of oil and its daily output amounts to 336,000 barrels.

French group TotalEnergies accounts for just over two-thirds of overall output and it saw its

contract for operating the Djeno terminal renewed last year for a further 20 years.

Italian group ENI and US rival Chevron are also present in the country.

Brazzaville set up the publicly-owned group National Society of Petroleum of Congo (SNPC) in 1998.

The city is also home to the African Petroleum Producers' Organization (APPO).

AFP

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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

TENDERS ADVERTISEMENT

Oman Electricity Transmission Company (OETC) Announce the following Tender:

Sr.No	Tender No.	Tender Name	Last Date for Obtaining Tender Documents	Closing Date	Grade	Tender Document's Fees (Including VAT) (RO)
1	45/2021	Supply of Power Quality Meters	09/09/2021	05/10/2021	Local companies with experience in same field, Have a valid tender board registration certificate.	39.375

Participation:	Interested Companies may obtain Tender Document with the necessity of sending a valid Tender Board certificate in the same required field.
Buying the Tender:	The documents required for the purchase of the tender are sent by e-mail to the Tenders, Procurement and Contracts Department, to ensure the authenticity of the documents before purchasing the tender through the official working days of the hour from 8.00 am - 01.00 pm .
Fees:	Against non-refundable payment as mentioned above against each set of document.(Payment Through Bank Transfer)
The deadline for clarification:	Before (21) Days from closing date.
Submission:	Each bid should be submitted in a separate sealed envelope addressed to The Chairman of tender committee mentioning Tender Number and Name on the top of the envelope.
Terms and conditions:	- No other writing or any reference thereto should be mentioned on the envelope. - The bid should be valid for not less than (90) days from closing date. - The Tenderer should enclose a bank guarantee issued by any bank in the Sultanate of Oman for the value of 1% of the bid value and should be valid for (90) days from closing date, addressed to Oman Electricity Transmission Company (SAOC). - Any bid not comply with the required guarantee, will not be accepted. - OETC is not bound to accept the lowest or any other offers.
Offer:	The complete bid documents should be deposited in Tender Box No. (1) at the company's building before 11:00 am on the assigned date for submission of the Tenders.
Company Address:	Muscat - Al Mawaleh Road No: 2153 - Building No. 4230 Block No: 321 - GSM:, 99105413
Email Website:	tenders@omangrid.com www.omangrid.com



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إعلان طرح مناقصات

تعلن الشركة العُمانية لنقل الكهرباء عن طرح المناقصة التالية :

م	رقم المناقصة	عنوان المناقصة	آخر موعد لتقديم المستندات المناقصة	الدرجة	لن الوثيقة (شامل ضريبة القيمة المضافة) (أر)
١	٢٠٢١/٤٥	توريد عدادات قياس جودة الطاقة	٢٠٢١/٠٩/٠٩	الشركات المحلية العاملة في هذا المجال المسجلة لدى مجلس المناقصات وتسجيلها ساري المفعول	٣٩/٣٧٥

الاشتراك	يمكن للشركات والمؤسسات المتخصصة الحصول على مستندات المناقصة مع ضرورة إرسال شهادة مجلس المناقصات سارية المفعول وفي نفس المجال المطلوب .
طريقة الشراء	يتم إرسال المستندات المطلوبة لشراء المناقصة عن طريق البريد الإلكتروني إلى دائرة المناقصات والمشتريات والعمود . وذلك لتأكيد من صحة المستندات قبل شراء المناقصة وذلك من خلال أيام العمل الرسمية من الساعة ٨:٠٠ ص - ١:٠٠ م .
الرسوم	مقابل دفع المبلغ المحدد أعلاه للنسخة الواحدة - لا ترد (الدفع عن طريق التحويل البنكي)
آخر موعد للإستفسارات	قبل (٢١) يوم من تاريخ آخر موعد لتقديم العطاءات
تقديم العروض	تقدم العروض في مظاريه مغلقة ومعونة بإسم رئيس لجنة المناقصات مع تحديد رقم وعنوان المناقصة فقط.
الشروط و الضمانات	- عدم تحديد اسم صاحب العطاء أو ما يشير إليه على المظروف. - أن تكون العروض سارية المفعول لمدة لا تقل عن (٩٠) يوماً من تاريخ تقديم العطاء . - إرفاق تأميناً في صورة ضمان مصرفي من أحد البنوك العاملة في البلاد قدره (1%) من قيمة العطاء ساري لمدة (٩٠) يوماً من تاريخ تقديم العطاء . ومعنوناً بإسم الشركة العمانية لنقل الكهرباء . - كل عطاء لا يستوفي التأمين المطلوب لن ينظر فيه . - الشركة العمانية لنقل الكهرباء غير مقيدة بقبول أقل العروض أو أي عطاء آخر.
العرض المقدم	يجب وضع العروض في صندوق المناقصات رقم (١) بمبنى الشركة قبل الساعة ١١ صباحاً من التاريخ المحدد لتقديم العطاءات .
عنوان الشركة	عنوان الشركة: محافظة مسقط - الموالح رقم المسكة ٢١٥٣ - مبنى رقم ٤٢٠ - هاتف ٩٩١٠٥٤١٣
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178 customers win in NBO's Al Kanz Draw

National Bank of Oman (NBO) has concluded its Al Kanz Draw for July, giving away a total of RO175,500 in cash prizes. The event, held at the bank's headquarters in Azaiba, included the popular monthly Salary Transfer draw, which saw 50 customers win RO500 each.

The Sadara draw also gave RO25,000 to three account holders, while the Mazaya Exclusive draw gave RO10,000 to four account holders. This month also saw the return of the quarterly

Women's and Youth draws, which gave RO1,000 to six customers, and RO100 to 115 customers, respectively.

With a total of RO3.251mn to be handed out by the end of the year, the bank continues to delight its customers with exciting rewards, simply for banking.

"We have been successfully running Al Kanz for numerous years, and with more customers benefiting year-on-year, it's one of the sultanate's largest schemes of its kind. We believe

that banks have an important, and active, role to play in supporting and guiding customers throughout their financial lives. Al Kanz is just one way we fulfil this role, as we continue to promote the value of savings," said Tariq Atiq, chief retail and digital banking officer at NBO.

With monthly prizes ranging from RO100 to RO250,000, customers are eligible to win by maintaining an average minimum balance of RO100 in their Al Kanz Savings account.

Every RO100 provides an extra chance in the draw, so the more money kept in the account, the more the chance of winning.

Meanwhile, customers simply have to transfer their salary to NBO to be in for the chance of winning in the Salary Transfer draw.

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

Tantalising tastes by the sea at Sea Salt Restaurant

Indulge in a five-star costal dining experience at Sea Salt, Alila Hinu Bay's Sea front restaurant. With stunning views of the Arabian Sea, guests can expect an ambience of fresh crisp air and tranquil sounds, along with a menu to satisfy the senses.

Pause for a moment of silence and take a deep breath of warm salty air, with pure zen and positive energy filling the atmosphere from the endless hours and distances across the waters.

Sea Salt creates the perfect culinary experience through style of service and fine cuisine, alongside views of beauty; you will develop a deeper connection to nature

"We invite you discover dining on a whole new level of relaxation. Our menus feature South East Asian specialties with Asian flavours served with the most innovative presentations, matching the traditional cooking way with the modern techniques. Cooked to perfection and carefully crafted to capture the best of our local elements and surroundings, each dish leaves you with mesmerising tastes and everlasting memories," says Martin Persson, general manager, Alila Hinu Bay.

Serving daily from 7am to 11pm, Sea Salt offers a la carte breakfast, lunch, and dinner. Dishes are created with a combination of both international and locally produced organic ingredients, including the freshest catch and seasonal lobster sourced from Mirbat port, in support of the community and the environment.

Signature dishes
Fish Otak Otak - The fish Otak Otak is a plate of vibrant



flavours, marinated with lemon grass, lime, Thai red chilli, peanut oil, soy sauce, coriander stem chop, garlic and ginger, gently wrapped and steamed in banana leaves and served with jasmine rice.

The dish is presented as a masterpiece of culinary creativity.

Singapore Chilli Lobster- Perfect for an evening of gastronomic indulgence, a dish made for the seafood critics.

The lobster is evenly coated with chilli sambal, shallots, black bean lee kum kee and lemon

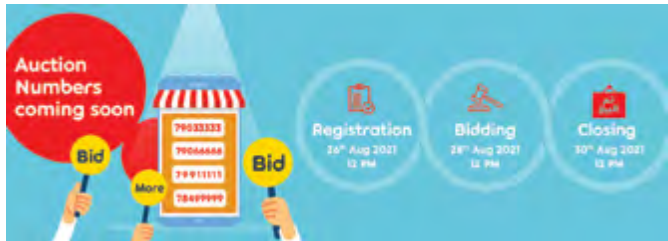
grass, gently tossed in a wok for five minutes to create a wonderful aroma of taste, sprinkled with Thai basil, spring onion, chilli and coriander to finish.

Regag Bread - made with locally produced cream, egg and dates honey. Prepared with whole green moonag dal, raw rice and fenugreek seeds, soaked overnight and lightly simmered until golden brown, the bread is topped with a layer of fine date chocolate and sliced banana served with berries and dates honey for the perfect breakfast dish.

Grab unique number with Ooredoo charity auction

It's that time again! Ooredoo is ending the summer with the popular mobile numbers charity auction.

From August 26 to 31, customers will have the chance to place a bid on over 100 of Ooredoo's most sought-after Diamond and Gold mobile numbers in a fun and interactive way, and most importantly, for a good cause.



Interested customers can browse the list, which includes different starting prices for different

numbers. A registration fee of RO20 is applicable to take part in the auction and customers can

bid for a maximum of ten numbers. First time bidders are required to fill out a registration form, while those who have participated in previous auctions can simply reactivate their account.

For more details on Ooredoo's quarterly vanity number online auction visit www.ooredoo.om/Personal/Mobile/DigitalServices/Auction.asp

REACH

COMPLIANCE

NDC products achieve REACH certificate

National Detergent Company (NDC) has achieved REACH Certification by the European Community Regulation Standards Authority for its range of Om-Surf brand of chemical products.

"The certification recognises the high standards for production and the quality of chemical products made in Oman," says Bill Hunt, CEO of the National Detergent Company.

With this new certification, NDC can develop new business in Europe for our products.

"This is a great achievement and a first for NDC," says Ajay Kaul, manager for the Basic Chemicals Business Unit of NDC.

"This is a large market opportunity and this adds to our success developing business in the US, Canada, Central America and North Africa as well as the current business in the GCC."

IRES signs management consultancy pact with AQAR Oman

Integrated Real Estate Services LLC (IRES) signed a management consultancy agreement with AQAR Real Estate Investment Firm (AQAR Oman).

The agreement of services will include management consultancy and advisory services of the startup of the operations and procedures, recruitment, training and on the job coaching in AQAR Oman.

AQAR Oman is an Omani real estate services company in the fields of real estate advisory, brokerage, property management & valuation services.

Abd Allah al Oufi, CEO of AQAR said, "We are pleased to appoint IRES LLC as our real estate advisory firm, as they will be



providing with all startup essentials from recruitment, training, on the job coaching, our develop-

ment plan along with budgeting and operational procedures."

He added, "AQAR is a 100 per

cent Omani realtor with all Omani employees; we trust that our calibre of employees along

with the extensive training they have acquired through IRES will greatly reflect on their perform-

ance and our clients will note the difference of servicing in the realty market."

Ismail Kamel, founder & CEO of IRES LLC commented, "It's our great pleasure to provide our full spectrum real estate consultancy for AQAR. Developing our Omani youth is an exciting journey for us. AQAR will be one of the prominent realtors in the market through delivering timely and efficient quantified results to their customers."

Integrated Real Estate Company (IRES LLC) is a real estate services company in the fields of property development, real estate investments, project sales management, real estate training and consultancy.

SPOFEC refines the new Rolls-Royce Ghost

The new Ghost is arguably the sportiest interpretation of a Rolls-Royce sedan ever. And thus an excellent starting point for the designers and technicians of SPOFEC, a Novitec Group Company. This brand exclusively refines cars with the Spirit of Ecstasy hood ornament, whose first letters make up the SPOFEC brand name.

The company also has developed a customisation range for the British four-door car, which gives the Ghost even greater driving dynamics and an even more extravagant appearance.

For example, SPOFEC engine tuning ups the output of the twin-turbo twelve-cylinder engine to 504 kW / 685 hp and bumps peak torque to 958 Nm. This cuts the sprint time from 0 - 100 km/h to a mere 4.5 seconds. The top speed remains limited to 250 km/h.

To match the improved driv-



ing dynamics, SPOFEC gives the new Ghost an even more athletic design with carbon bodywork components that feature sporty and elegant styling. SPOFEC forged wheels with a diameter of 22 inches developed in cooperation with US rim manufacturer Vossen fill out the wheel wells perfectly. The SPOFEC suspension module lowers the ride

height of the luxury sedan by about 40mm.

A standard peak output of 420 kW / 571 hp and 850 Nm of torque mean that there are quite a few reserves slumbering in the 6.75-liter twin-turbo V12 engine of the Rolls-Royce Ghost. The optimal fertile ground for the SPOFEC engine specialists who adapt a plug-and-play N-

TRONIC module to the electronic engine control unit. It introduces new mapping for injection and ignition, which SPOFEC programmed in a complex series of tests, and moderately increases the boost pressure.

As a result, the output of the twelve-cylinder jumps to 504 kW / 685 hp at a low 5,400 rpm.

At the same time, peak torque grows to 958 Nm. This also improves the pulling power in daily driving and the acceleration figures. The enhanced luxury sedan shoots from rest to 100 km/h in just 4.5 seconds. Due to the high vehicle weight, the electronic speed limitation to 250 km/h remains unchanged.

SPOFEC optionally underscores these significantly improved dynamics with a more thrilling sound as well. To this end, the company developed a stainless sport exhaust with actively controlled exhaust flaps. It enables the driver to select either a decidedly discreet or a very powerful exhaust note from inside the cockpit by remote control.

The SPOFEC designers were tasked to give the Rolls-Royce Ghost a sporty-elegant touch. To do so, they developed tastefully styled and aerodynamically effi-

cient bodywork components for both wheelbase variants of the Ghost. The components are produced from lightweight yet high-strength carbon.

The new SPOFEC front fascia characterises the fresh face for the Rolls-Royce. Large air intakes give it a visually striking appearance. What is more: It also reduces front-axle lift at high speeds and thus further optimizes the directional stability. The new aerodynamic-enhancement component optionally also comes with LED position markers and perfectly transitions to the likewise new SPOFEC front fenders. These fenders feature a distinctive air outlet behind the wheel arch on either side.

The SPOFEC rocker panels come in tailor-made versions for the Ghost models with short or long wheelbase. They give the British four-door car an even lower and sleeker visual stance.

Bank Muscat updates mBanking app

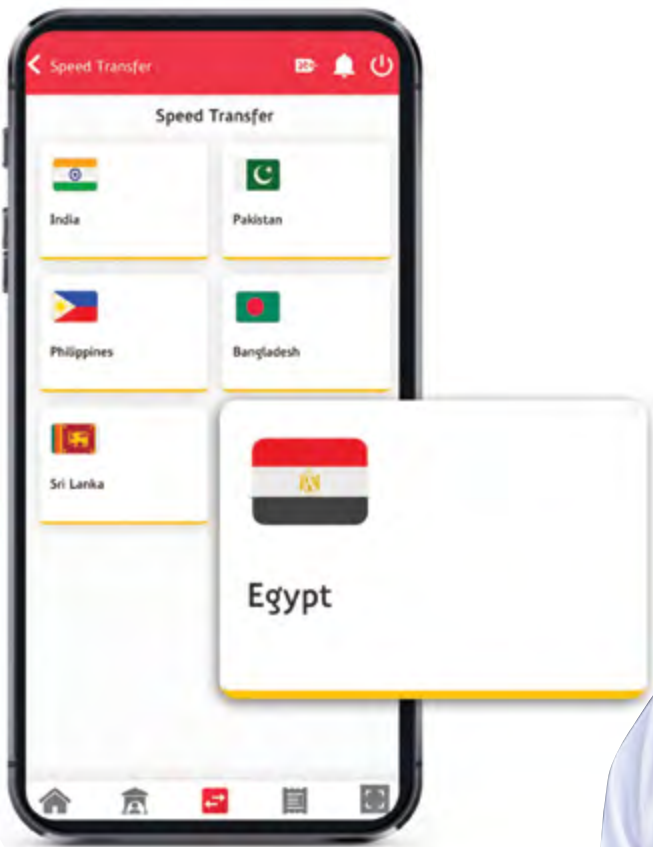
In line with its vision 'To serve you better, everyday' and commitment to innovation reflecting the latest technological trends in banking, Bank Muscat, the leading financial services provider in the sultanate, has launched several new features including Speed Transfer service to Egypt, bill payments to Awast and instant Debit Card linkage to one's account through Internet banking and mBanking app.

Also, linked Floosi and children's accounts will now be visible in their parent's accounts improving transparency and oversight. The latest features add to a number of other useful features like the instant opening of additional savings account for existing customers, generation of PIN for Debit Cards, Credit Cards and Pre Paid Cards, download of SWIFT advice for international transactions, blocking of prepaid card as well as charity contribu-

tions and donations to the Ministry of Health (COVID-19).

Amjad al Lawati, AGM - Cards & eBanking, said, "In line with our customer-centric vision, Bank Muscat is delighted to introduce new features to enhance banking convenience. The addition of Speed Transfer service to Egypt, Awast bill payment and instant Debit Card linkage to one's account will further enhance ease of banking for all our customers. Bank Muscat is committed to continuing its investments in state-of-the-art technology to further increase efficiency and improve customer service so as to maintain its clear leadership in hi-tech products and services, including electronic payment and web-based services, in tune with the banking requirements of a tech-savvy generation."

The bank's mBanking and Internet services include real-time



bill payments for utilities in Oman, fund transfers within the bank and in Oman, fund transfers across the world via the SWIFT network; speed transfers to a number of countries including India, the Philippines, Pakistan, Sri Lanka, Bangladesh and now Egypt; Zakat calculator and charity payments. It also provides bill payment facilities for a variety of



utility services such as electricity, water, telecom, mobile top ups, instant credit card bill payments, school payments etc.

The mBanking app and Internet banking also allow customers to disable or enable their debit card for international usage adding an extra layer of security for the benefit of customers. Customers also get access to a comprehensive Personal Finance Module where they can get a detailed breakup of their finances, set up budgets and track their expenses vis-à-vis their budgets.

The bank's electronic banking channels have been recording a massive success in terms of usage and customer adoption, especially in the background of the social distancing brought about by the global COVID-19 pandemic. The consistently growing number of customers reflects the high popularity

of mBanking channel as well as the bank's other electronic channels.

Bank Muscat constantly innovates to provide the best customer experience because of which it has been consistently voted as the Best Bank in Oman by leading global and regional publications. Bank Muscat was listed by Forbes Middle East as one of the Top 100 companies in the region as well as one of the Top 50 Banks in the Middle East in 2021. Other prestigious awards won by the bank in the past include Best Consumer Digital Bank in Oman award from *Global Finance* as well as the Best Bank in Oman from *The Banker*, *EMEA Finance* and *Global Finance* magazines.

Customers can download the latest version of the Bank Muscat Mobile Banking app from Apple App Store, Google Play or Huawei AppGallery.



Tanweer initiates second dose campaign for its employees

In line with the national vaccination drive, organised by the Ministry of Health, the Rural Areas Electricity Company 'Tanweer' - Member of Nama Group - announced the commencement of the vaccination campaign for the second dose of the COVID-19 vaccine for all employees.

The company, in cooperation with Nama Holding, is completing the vaccination plan to ensure preserving the health and

safety of its employees, to create a safe working environment for them and to stop the spread of this epidemic.

Abdullah bin Hamoud al Maskari - head of the Quality, Health, Safety and Environment Department - said, "The vaccination process went smoothly in Tanweer while ensuring the abidance by the precautionary measures.

"Hence, we managed to cover

80 per cent of our employees for the first dose of COVID-19 and expect to complete the rest of the employees by the end of August."

On this occasion, Tanweer expressed its appreciation to the Ministry of Health and the health sector workers, for their dedication and continuous efforts in providing the necessary healthcare across the governorates of the sultanate.

ATECA Hotels to debut in Uzbekistan soon

ATECA Hotels, a subsidiary of ATECA Holding, will soon offer a distinctive hospitality experience to residents and visitors in Tashkent with the opening of ATECA Hotel Suites. The beautiful hotel, centrally located in the Yakkasaroy district Shota Rustaveli merely 8km from Tashkent International Airport, is undergoing the final finishing touches and is expected to open in first week of September.

Michel Noblet, executive chairman of ATECA Holding, said, "As we get closer to the opening, ATECA Hotel Suites is looking absolutely stunning and we are soon looking forward to welcome guests. Its outstanding facilities and unique design seamlessly balance the excitement of the destination with moments to relax, refresh and connect. This collaborative approach is seen throughout the hotel's charming layout and warm service which has been defined to meet the demands of today's travellers. ATECA Hotel Suites exemplifies our vision for the brand in every way with a host of signature elements."

Seamlessly connecting life,



business and pleasure the hotel's superb facilities include fascinating dining and entertainment experiences with multiple outlets.

Karimov Kamoladdin, chief executive officer and general manager for ATECA Holding, said, "Featuring a superb choice of impeccably designed rooms equipped with first rate amenities and the latest technology and entertainment options, ATECA Hotel Suites offers more

for less. Every room is meticulously configured to maximise space, light and efficiency. The deluxe hotel has been conceptualized to welcome guests to the heart of Tashkent with an extensive array of facilities and services to make their stay comfortable and enjoyable."

Tourism is emerging as a key pillar of Uzbekistan's economy with the republic dedicated to the development and diversifica-

tion of its hotel industry.

Michel stressed, "At ATECA Hotels we are thrilled to unlock this lucrative market and delighted to expand our footprint across the country with five unique and powerful brands catering to diverse needs of local and international travellers. Our compelling portfolio of brands provides developers the flexibility and choice to identify the right brand for the right location."

MCCC SWEEP OMAN CRICKET JUNIOR DIVISION HONOURS WITH TREBLE

Muscat Cricket Coaching Centre (MCCC) swept the Junior Division honours at the prize-giving ceremony held by Oman Cricket (OC) at the Oman Academy Cricket ground on Sunday.

MCCC sides won all the Junior Division events (U13, U16, U19) and received trophies from OC officials - Madhu Jesrani, OC secretary, Kiran Asher, treasurer, and Syed Anwar Ahsan, board member, in the presence of Duleep Mendis.

Indian School Muscat (ISM) claimed the runners-up trophies in U19 and U16 categories while Indian School Wadi Kabir (ISWK) was U13 runner-up.

Individual winners: U19: Best batsman: Muhammad Muzahir Raza (BOC), **best bowler:** Amanpreet Singh Sirah (ISWK), **best allrounder:** Adeel Abbas (MCCC). **U16: Best batsman:** Aaryan Nishit Punja (MCCC Yellow), **best bowler:** Abhas Ajay Jaltare (ISWK), **best allrounder:** Abhas Jaltare. **U13: Best batsman:** Pachisia Oijus (ISM), **best bowler:** Ayush Karthyic (MCCC Yellow).



Group photo of Junior Division individual award winners with Oman Cricket officials



U13 winners: MCCC Yellow



U13 Best bowler: Ayush Karthyic



U19 champions: MCCC



U16 champions: MCCC Yellow



Iraqi Prime Minister Mustafa al Kadhem (left) during a meeting with Emir of Kuwait Sheikh Nawaf al Ahmad al Jaber al Sabah, in Kuwait City on Sunday (AFP)

Iraq seeks bigger role with regional summit this week

Baghdad, Iraq - After decades of conflict, Iraq will pitch itself as a regional mediator as it hosts a leaders' summit this week - despite foreign influence on its territory and a grinding financial crisis.

The meeting in Baghdad on Saturday seeks to give Iraq a 'unifying role' to tackle the crises shaking the region, according to sources close to Prime Minister Mustafa al Kadhem.

Egyptian President Abdel Fattah al Sisi and Jordan's King Abdullah II have said they plan to attend, as has French President Emmanuel Macron, the only official expected from outside the region.

Leaders from Iran, Saudi Arabia and Turkey have also been invited.

Kadhem came to power in May last year after months of unprecedented mass protests against a ruling class seen as corrupt, inept and subordinate to Tehran.

The new premier had served as the head of Iraq's National Intelligence Service for nearly four years, forming close ties to Tehran, Washington and Riyadh.

His appointment prompted speculation he could serve as a

rare mediator among the capitals.

"In the past, under Saddam Hussein, Iraq was a state that was feared and despised in the region and everyone saw it as a threat," said Iraqi political expert Marsin Alshamary.

After the 2003 US-led inva-

lues of arrests, remain at large -

due to their ties to Iran.

Shiite factions operating under the Hashed are also accused of dozens of attacks this year against US interests in Iraq. Kadhem is under pressure from pro-Tehran armed factions, who demand the withdrawal of 2,500 US troops still deployed in Iraq.

Iran exerts major clout in Iraq through allied armed groups within the Hashed al Shaabi, a powerful state-sponsored paramilitary network.

Since the 2019 anti-government protests, dozens of activists have been killed or abducted.

Some say the killers are known to the security services and despite government prom-

ises of arrests, remain at large -

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After the 2003 US-led invasion, Iraq became 'a weak state', prone to external influences and meddling. But Saturday's summit could be a positive thing for Iraq

MARSIN ALSHAMARY

sion, it became 'a weak state', prone to external influences and meddling. But Saturday's summit, she said, could be 'a positive thing for Iraq'.

'Not just a playground'

Renad Mansour of Chatham House said the aim was to transform Iraq from 'a country of messengers to a country that is leading negotiations'.

Organisers have been tight-lipped on the meeting's agenda.

But Baghdad has already hosted closed-door encounters in recent months between

ancing act between its two main allies Iran and the United States.

"The ambition is for Iraq to not just be a playground but actually have a role potentially as a mediating force," Mansour said.

Iran exerts major clout in Iraq through allied armed groups within the Hashed al Shaabi, a powerful state-sponsored paramilitary network.

Since the 2019 anti-government protests, dozens of activists have been killed or abducted.

Some say the killers are known to the security services and despite government prom-

Ukraine blocks access to popular Russian sites for 'propaganda'

Kiev, Ukraine - Ukraine on Monday blocked the websites of several prominent Russian media outlets in its latest round of sanctions against neighbouring Russia which it has accused of spreading propaganda.

Ties between the ex-Soviet countries have deteriorated sharply since Russia annexed the Crimean peninsula in 2014 and threw its weight behind armed separatists in eastern Ukraine.

Ukraine and its Western allies have accused the Kremlin of sending troops and weapons to reinforce the separatists and also say Russia is leveraging media as a propaganda tool to stoke the conflict.

A decree from President Volodymyr Zelensky published Sunday ordered the websites of 12 Russian media organisations to be blocked in Ukraine.

They include the Vedomosti business daily, which was recently taken over by Kremlin-friendly editors, and the Moskovsky Komsomolets news-



European Council President Charles Michel (centre) speaking during the Crimean Platform Summit, in Kiev on Monday (AFP)

paper, among others.

The decree also ordered the organisations' local bank accounts to be frozen.

The Kremlin criticised the move, describing Ukraine as being on a path towards 'strangling freedom of speech' and limiting 'unwanted and uncomfortable' information.

Vladimir Soloviev, the head of the Russian Union of Journalists, described the move as the 'final cleansing' of Russian media in Ukraine.

But Moskovsky Komsomolets

editor-in-chief Pavel Gusev said the decision would not impact on the work of its Ukraine bureau 'in any way'. "There are modern ways of bypassing these restrictions, if necessary," he told the Russian news agency, Interfax.

The measures are just latest wave of penalties Ukraine has imposed against Russian companies and businessmen.

In June, Kiev imposed sanctions on dozens of individuals and enterprises with links to Russia's defence sector.

AFP

Indian capital Delhi opens first 'smog tower'

New Delhi, India - India's capital New Delhi opened its first 'smog tower' on Monday aimed at reducing the air pollution blamed for thousands of premature deaths every year, but experts were sceptical.

Concentrations of tiny deadly particles in Delhi's air regularly exceed safe limits by up to 20 times, particularly in winter when its 20mn people are enveloped in a noxious grey blanket of smog.

Forty giant fans on the 25-metre tower will pump 1,000 cubic metres of air per second through filters that halve the amount of harmful particulates in a radius of one square kilometre, according to engineers.

"Today is a big day for Delhi in its fight for clean air against pollution," Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal said after the inauguration near the busy shopping area of Connaught Place.

"[The installation] is being looked at in an experimental way. We will analyse the data and if it's effective, more towers will be built across Delhi," Kejriwal added. The tower cost

US\$2mn and critics say erecting a sufficient number to clean the air substantially across the city would cost huge amounts of public money, and that efforts would be better directed at the sources of the smog.

These include vehicle exhaust, heavy and small-scale industry, construction activity, the combustion of waste and fuel, and in winter the burning of crops in neighbouring regions.



Workers climb up the ladder to reach the upper section of the 25-metre high smog tower, built to purify the air during pollution season, in India's capital New Delhi on Monday (AFP)

'Suitcase killer' of Bali set for early release: Lawyer

Bali, Indonesia - An American woman convicted with her boyfriend of killing her mother and stuffing the body in a suitcase at a luxury Bali hotel is to be freed from prison early, her lawyer said on Monday.

In 2015, teenager Heather Mack was handed a ten-year jail term while her boyfriend Tommy Schaefer got 18 years for the murder of Chicago socialite Sheila von Wiese Mack on the Indonesian holiday island.

Schaefer beat the 62 year old victim to death with a fruit bowl during a heated argument at the five-star St Regis resort, before the couple abandoned the suitcase containing the battered body in a taxi, and fled.

Mack, who was pregnant at the time of the crime, was found guilty on a lesser charge of assisting in the murder.

The woman, now 25, was set to be released from Bali's Kerobokan prison in October, about three years early, her lawyer said, citing sentence reductions due to good behaviour.

"Her sentence will be completed in October... and then she'll be completely free," Yulius Benjamin Seran told AFP, without giving a specific release date.

Mack, who was 19 at the time of her conviction, would face deportation back to the United

States following her release, he added.

But she wanted to stay in Indonesia to care for her six-year-old daughter, who was being raised in a Bali foster home.

"She doesn't want her daughter deported back to the US... and hounded by the media," Seran said.

Indonesian prison officials declined to comment on Mack's release date.

In 2014, von Wiese Mack's badly beaten body was discovered in the taxi, outside the ritzy hotel where she had been staying with her daughter and Schaefer.

The couple had fled to another part of Bali, where police arrested them.

Schaefer confessed to the killing during his trial but claimed he was defending himself during an argument with von Wiese Mack, who was unhappy that her daughter was pregnant.

Prosecutors alleged that Schaefer 'blindly hit' von Wiese Mack with the fruit bowl in a fit of rage after she hurled a racial slur at him. Schaefer is black.

While her mother was being murdered, Mack hid in the bathroom and the couple then stuffed the body into the suitcase together, the trial heard.

AFP



This file photo shows Heather Mack with her child waiting for her trial at a holding cell in Denpasar on Bali Island on March 31, 2015 (AFP)

TALIBAN TAKEOVER

Deadly gunbattle at Kabul airport

►One Afghan killed, three others injured in dawn firefight ►Biden seeks to speed up chaotic evacuation

Kabul, Afghanistan - Western security forces exchanged fire with unidentified gunmen on Monday at Kabul airport, as US President Joe Biden sought to speed up the chaotic evacuation of tens of thousands of people from Taliban-controlled Afghanistan.

One Afghan was killed and three others were injured in a dawn firefight that according to the German military erupted between Afghan guards and unknown assailants.

German and American troops 'participated in further exchange of fire', the German army said in a statement.

This was the latest episode in a chaotic operation overseen by the US army that has seen about 30,000 people evacuated from Afghanistan since the Taliban marched into Kabul on August 15, taking effective control of the country.

The Taliban, infamous for an ultra-strict interpretation of sharia law during their initial 1996-2001 rule, have repeatedly vowed a softer version this time.

But terrified Afghans continue to try and flee, overwhelming the operation at Kabul airport and leading to tragic scenes in which at least eight



A British soldier (left) and a member of the US Armed Forces in conversation while working at Kabul Airport on Sunday (AFP)

people have died.

The Taliban's victory ended two decades of war as they took advantage of Biden's decision to withdraw nearly all US troops from the country.

Biden, who has redeployed thousands back to Afghanistan to oversee the evacuations, has insisted he wants to end the US military presence and the airlifts by August 31.

But with the European Union

and Britain saying it would be impossible to get everyone out by then, Biden is under pressure to extend the deadline.

Speaking at the White House, Biden said on Sunday he hoped the airlift would not be extended, but said talks were underway to explore that possibility.

"There's discussions going among us and the military about extending," Biden said.

He acknowledged the tragic scenes at the airport, which have also included babies and children being passed to soldiers over razor-wire fences and men clinging to the outside of departing planes.

But he said they were part of the cost of departure.

"There is no way to evacuate this many people without pain and loss and heartbreaking images you see," he said.

'Peace and calm'

Biden spoke after the Taliban, who have been holding talks with elders and politicians to set up a government, slammed the evacuation.

"America, with all its power and facilities... has failed to bring order to the airport," Taliban official Amir Khan Mutaqi said.

"There is peace and calm all over the country, but there is chaos only at Kabul airport."

In the streets of the capital, the Taliban have indeed enforced a calm of a kind, with their armed forces patrolling the streets and manning check-points.

Visually, they have also been looking to stamp their authority, ensuring the tri-coloured national flag is replaced with their white banner.

At a roadside in Kabul at the weekend, young men sold Taliban flags, which bear in black text the Muslim proclamation of faith and the regime's formal name: 'Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan'.

"Our goal is to spread the flag of the Islamic Emirate throughout Afghanistan," said seller Ahmad Shakib, who studies economics at university.

Resistance

Outside of Kabul, there have been flickers of resistance against the Taliban.

Some ex-government troops have gathered in the Panjshir Valley, north of the capital - long known as an anti-Taliban bastion.

The Taliban said on Monday their fighters had surrounded resistance forces holed up in the valley, but were looking to negotiate rather than take the fight to

them.

Taliban fighters 'are stationed near Panjshir', spokesman Zabihullah Mujahid tweeted, saying they had the area surrounded on three sides.

'The Islamic Emirate is trying to resolve this issue peacefully,' he added.

The announcement follows scattered reports of clashes overnight, with pro-Taliban social media accounts claiming gunmen were massing, and Afghanistan's former vice-president Amrullah Saleh saying resistance forces were holding strong.

One of the leaders of the movement in Panjshir, named the National Resistance Front, is the son of famed anti-Taliban commander Ahmad Shah Massoud.

The NRF is prepared for a 'long-term conflict' but is also still seeking to negotiate with the Taliban about an inclusive government, its spokesman Ali Maisam Nazary told AFP in an interview on the weekend.

"The conditions for a peace deal with the Taliban are decentralisation, a system that ensures social justice, equality, rights, and freedom for all," he said.

AFP



Protesters wave the national Afghan flags during a rally in support of Afghanistan, at Place de la Republique in Paris on Sunday (AFP)

French Foreign Minister in UAE to oversee exodus

Paris, France - French Foreign Minister Jean-Yves Le Drian was due in the UAE on Monday to see for himself the massive airlift underway from Afghanistan using the Gulf nation as a staging post.

France is seeking to evacuate more than 1,000 Afghans who are fleeing the country following the Taliban's lightning takeover a week ago, one of a number of nations scrambling to evacuate vulnerable individuals.

Le Drian and colleagues were due to visit the Al-Dhafra base - some 30km from Abu Dhabi - where the French air force has been conducting round the clock operations in support of the evacuations.

Since August 15, 'nearly 100 French residents, 40 residents of partner nations, and more than 1,000 (at-risk) Afghans' have been transported to France via the Emirates, Le Drian's delegation said in a statement.

A flight with 250 French and Afghans aboard left for Paris on Sunday followed by another in the early hours of Monday with 150 passengers.

The first emergency flight carried 41 people, mostly French, on August 17.

Le Drian and Defence Minister Florence Parly will meet diplomats, military personnel, police officers, and 'all the staff working under extremely diffi-

cult conditions to enable evacuation operations from Kabul', the statement said.

They were also due to meet Abu Dhabi's Crown Prince Mohammed bin Zayed al Nahyan, de facto leader of the UAE, to 'thank the Emirati authorities for their support', the communiqué added.

France has a permanent military presence in the Emirates from where it conducted parts of its aerial campaign against the Islamic State group.

France is one of several NATO and EU member states that are scrambling to rescue vulnerable foreign staff and Afghan allies from Afghanistan since the Taliban overran the capital just over a week ago.

Britain said on Monday it would urge the United States at a virtual G7 summit to extend an end-of-the-month deadline to complete evacuations of Western citizens and Afghan colleagues from Kabul.

US President Joe Biden has set an August 31 deadline for the chaotic airlift organised by thousands of temporarily deployed US troops - but has left the door open to an extension if needed.

"We need time to accomplish this task, measured in days and weeks not months," Le Drian told the French *Le Journal du dimanche* weekly.

AFP

Iran calls for restraint, establishment of 'inclusive' govt

Tehran, Iran - Iran's Foreign Ministry on Monday called on 'all parties' in Afghanistan to refrain from using violence and said Tehran supports the establishment of an 'inclusive' government in Kabul.

The Taliban took Afghanistan's capital on August 15, exploiting a vacuum caused by the withdrawal of US troops from the country and a collapse by the Afghan army.

"All groups and political parties [in Afghanistan] must refrain from using force and proceed using negotiation and talks," ministry spokesman Saeed Khatibzadeh said at a press conference in Tehran.



A member of the Iranian Red Crescent distributes food to Afghan refugees gathered on the Iran-Afghanistan border on August 19 (AFP)

Iran 'is in constant communication with all political sides in Afghanistan' and 'supports the peaceful transition of power to an inclusive government', he added, stressing that 'the crisis has no military solution'.

Khatibzadeh said Iran hoped that such a government would be able to build a 'safe, blooming and stable Afghanistan' using the 'opportunity' of foreign forces' withdrawal.

Analysts say the Taliban's advances have put neighbouring Iran on edge, but the majority Shiite Islamic republic is taking a pragmatic stance on the hard-line Sunni group's resurgence. Tensions existed between

Iran and the Taliban when the latter were in power in Afghanistan between 1996 and 2001. Tehran never recognised their rule. The Taliban were toppled in an American-led invasion over their links to Al Qaeda, which carried out the 9/11 attacks.

Iran has stressed in recent months that the Taliban must be 'part of a future solution' in Afghanistan.

Khatibzadeh said that Pakistan's Foreign Minister Shah Mahmood Qureshi will visit Tehran on Thursday to discuss bilateral ties and 'especially the issue of Afghanistan'.

AFP

Taliban flags proliferate as Afghan tricolour becomes resistance symbol across world

Kabul, Afghanistan - After two decades out of power, the Taliban are swiftly moving to stamp their authority on Afghanistan using every tool at their disposal - including flags.

Since rolling into Kabul a week ago, the white banner of the group has become a common sight across the country, replacing the national tricolour flag above government buildings, police stations and military facilities.

There have been scattered reports of people being castigated or even punished for waving the old national banner, but so far there is no official word from the group on the flag issue.

At a Kabul roadside on Sunday, vendors were making a quick sale in Taliban flags - a white banner bearing the proclamation of faith and the regime's formal name: 'Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan'.

"Our goal is to spread the flag of the Islamic Emirate throughout Afghanistan, instead of the tricolour flag," said vendor Ahmad Shakib, who studies



A man carries Taliban flags to sell at the Karte Mamorin area of capital Kabul on Sunday (AFP)

economics at university.

It was not clear if he was affiliated with the Taliban.

The sight of Taliban fighters in vehicles bearing the standard has terrorised people across Afghanistan in recent weeks as

the militants first captured vast swathes of the rural hinterland and then all the major cities.

The group was quick to replace the Afghan national flag wherever it could.

But in the middle of the de-

spair and fear sparked by the Taliban takeover, the old flag has become something of a symbol of defiance for many, featuring prominently in the small protests held in recent days.

'My heart is here'

Social media has been awash with images and emojis of the old flag - a black, red and green vertical tricolour with the national emblem overlaid in white - posted by public figures including sports stars and ordinary Afghans. On Afghanistan's independence day last week, groups of people waved the national flag in Kabul and a handful of suburbs to celebrate - sometimes in plain sight of patrolling Taliban.

At one rally, people on a convoy of honking cars waved national flags in Kabul. At another spot, men and women stood by the roadside holding the tricolour banner.

A day earlier, Taliban fighters fired guns to disperse dozens in the eastern city of Jalalabad who were protesting over the removal of the national flag, according to local media.

"My heart is here for this flag... I will never leave this flag," said one Jalalabad resident.

"Kill us, fire at us... We will never leave this flag."

AFP

COVID-19 PANDEMIC

Anger after COVID-sceptic church flouts Sydney lockdown

Sydney, Australia - Australian police on Monday criticised a Sydney church for flouting the city's COVID-19 lockdown by holding a service for 60 people in a pandemic hotspot.

The church is part of Christ Embassy, an international religious group headquartered in Lagos, Nigeria, which has a record of spreading COVID-19 conspiracy theories.

After being tipped off by residents on Sunday, police moved in on the Christ Embassy Sydney church, issuing a fine of A\$5,000 to the organisation and A\$1,000 fines to 30 parishioners.

Australian media quoted a Facebook-streamed sermon on Sunday from the church in the western Sydney region's Blacktown as saying: "In the name of Jesus we refuse every lockdown in our cities. We declare the lockdowns are over in the name of Jesus."

The Sydney church did not immediately respond to a request to comment.

"It is always disheartening and disappointing when you see people blatantly take it upon themselves to contradict what we



Protestors with placards gather following calls for an anti-lockdown protest rally, in Sydney on Saturday (AFP)

know works, to contradict what we know is keeping people out of hospital," Gladys Berejiklian, premier of New South Wales state - of which Sydney is the capital - told a news conference.

"That is the key: To keep people out of hospital, to make sure that we keep people as safe and as healthy as possible. And we

know the vaccine is having such a huge impact on that."

The whole of greater Sydney is currently under stay-at-home orders, as Australia's largest city struggles to contain a Delta variant outbreak that now tops 800 new cases a day.

Residents are only allowed to leave home to shop for essential

items, exercise, in health emergencies or for a handful of other reasons.

The state's deputy police commissioner Gary Worboys said the church service was a 'disappointing' event that would 'anger, no doubt, a lot of people'.

Videos from the church service were no longer available on

Monday on the Christ Embassy Sydney's Facebook page.

The Sydney church's website showed a video of Prime Minister Scott Morrison explaining in April 2020 that churches could broadcast or stream services and that people presenting such services should follow workplace rules and abide by social distancing protocols.

The rules have since been tightened to ban all in-person services.

The global Christ Embassy organisation is headed by Chris Oyakhilome, described on its website as pastor, teacher, television host and best-selling author of 'Rhapsody of Realities'. He is also president of Love-world Inc, a religious broadcast and streaming network.

Britain's broadcasting regulator Ofcom in April ruled that Loveworld Ltd, which it said was associated with Christ Embassy, had for a third time breached the country's broadcasting code by making misleading and potentially harmful statements about the coronavirus pandemic and vaccines.

AFP



Israeli children undergo antibody tests in the coastal city of Netanya, before the start of the new school year on Sunday (AFP)

Israel to offer jabs in schools

Jerusalem - Israel said on Monday it would offer vaccinations to students on school grounds as it announced the school year would open on time next week, despite surging cases.

'Pupils... will be vaccinated on school grounds during school hours, subject to parental approval,' a government statement said, confirming classes would begin on September 1.

Israeli leaders say they are trying to avoid repeating disruptive school closures amid the pandemic. The country has seen a steep rise in coronavirus infections after months when its world-beating vaccine campaign drove down cases.

The Health Ministry said on Monday that 6,467 new cases were recorded in Israel a day

prior, with 1,142 people hospitalised.

About 30 per cent of children aged 12-15 have received two vaccine doses in Israel, far less than any other age group.

The school reopening plan would also require pupils younger than 12 to bring parental approval to perform a coronavirus test on the first day of school. Further, high school classes in cities with high rates of transmission would require 70 per cent of students to be vaccinated or move to online learning.

Some in government had opposed vaccines in schools, with Education Minister Yifat Shasha-Biton saying in July that students could feel peer pressure to get vaccines.

AFP

Delta outbreak retreating, says China

Beijing, China - China reported no new domestic coronavirus cases on Monday, and Beijing appears poised to bring to heel the pandemic's most serious resurgence in months - driven by the highly contagious Delta variant - with mass testing and targeted lockdowns.

The latest outbreak, which began in mid-July when cleaners at a Nanjing airport tested positive, is the most severe since COVID-19 first surfaced in the central city of Wuhan.

Over a thousand people have been infected across dozens of cities. But Communist authorities reacted with swift localised lockdowns, travel restrictions and mass testing of neighbourhoods with infections as part of their 'zero case' approach to the pandemic, which has virtually sealed off China's borders but allowed the economy to rebound.

New domestic infections have been falling for over two weeks.

On Monday, National Health Commission data showed local infections returned to zero after a five week battle.

Meanwhile health experts are attempting to shore up confidence in the country's vaccina-



A staff member disinfects a classroom ahead of the new semester in Bozhou in China's eastern Anhui province on Monday (AFP)

tion drive with leading virologist Zhong Nanshan saying 'effective herd immunity' is on the horizon once over 80 per cent of the population is vaccinated - a target likely achieved by year-end.

Chinese vaccines have nearly 60 per cent efficacy against Delta, with antibodies rising with a booster shot, he added.

As of Saturday, almost 1.94bn vaccine doses have been administered, official figures show, although the proportion

of vaccinated people is unclear.

Officials are using big data to 'quickly identify risk areas', isolating high-risk groups in centralised zones, and sharing information quickly between regions. Gao Guangming of the National Health Commission told a recent press conference.

Beijing has also been clamping down on officials who mishandled local outbreaks, with dozens punished as authorities rushed to contain transmissions.

AFP

New Zealand extends national lockdown as PM Ardern says outbreak 'yet to peak'

Wellington, New Zealand - New Zealand extended a national COVID-19 lockdown on Monday, with Prime Minister Jacinda Ardern saying a Delta variant outbreak has yet to peak.

Ardern said the rapid spread of the highly transmissible variant meant it was too early to lift restrictions imposed last week after a virus cluster emerged in Auckland, ending a six-month run of no local cases.

"Delta had a head start on us and we've needed to catch up as quickly as we could... we don't think we have reached the peak of this outbreak," she said.

Ardern said 35 new cases had been detected, taking the total to 107, with more than 13,000 close contacts undergoing testing. New Zealand's lockdown was due to expire late on Tuesday but Ardern said it would continue through to Friday nationwide and until the evening of August 31 in Auckland.

"The safest option for all of us right now is to hold the course for longer," she said. "This will allow us to have additional data and see if the virus has spread."



This file photo shows people at a testing station during a lockdown, in Wellington on Wednesday (AFP)

New Zealand's 'COVID zero' elimination strategy - which has resulted in just 26 deaths in a population of five million - has relied on strict border controls backed by hard lockdowns when any cases do slip through.

Ardern's own COVID-19 Re-

sponse Minister Chris Hipkins on Sunday questioned whether Delta rendered the strategy unviable, but the leader said she believed in it 'absolutely'.

"Our plan has worked before and together we can make it work again," she said.

Ardern has previously announced plans to relax restrictions next year when vaccination rates are higher.

Only about 20 per cent of New Zealand's population is fully inoculated.

AFP

US VP Kamala Harris vows 'enduring engagement' in Asia

Singapore - Vice President Kamala Harris vowed 'enduring engagement' in Asia on Monday, offering reassurances of Washington's commitment to the region following the United States' withdrawal from Afghanistan and the Taliban takeover.

The headline Islamists' swift return to power a week ago, and desperate scenes of thousands trying to flee, have cast a shadow over the United States' status as a global superpower.

But on a visit to Singapore, her first stop on a trip that will also include Vietnam, Harris repeatedly insisted that Washington could be depended on.

"Our administration is committed to enduring engagement in Singapore, into Southeast Asia and the Indo-Pacific," Harris told a press conference alongside

Singapore's leader.

"The reason I am here is because the United States is a global leader, and we take that role seriously."

But she dodged questions about whether US credibility had been damaged by the Afghan debacle, saying only her government's focus was on 'evacuating American citizens, Afghans who worked with us and vulnerable Afghans, including women and children'.

Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong welcomed the vice president's reassurances and said Singapore was offering a military aircraft to help in the chaotic evacuation from Kabul airport overseen by the US army.

But he also expressed hopes that "Afghanistan does not become an epicentre for terrorism



US Vice President Kamala Harris speaks to troops as she visits the USS Tuls in Singapore on Monday (AFP)

again".

US President Joe Biden's administration is seeking to reset relationships in Asia after the

turbulent Trump era, and project Washington as a stabilising force in the face of growing Chinese aggression.

But analysts say the seizure of power by the Taliban, notorious for their brutal 1996-2001 rule, and rapid collapse of US-trained Afghan forces have caused fresh concerns about US dependability.

'Rules-based international order'

Harris is also facing criticism for being tone-deaf in going ahead with a visit to Vietnam as US forces struggle to evacuate tens of thousands of people.

The crisis has prompted comparisons with the trauma of 1975 in Saigon, when US helicopters ferried final evacuees from the embassy roof, as Viet Cong troops advanced.

But US officials insist the trip was planned long before the Afghan crisis and is focused on

Washington's broader strategic goals in Asia.

Southeast Asia is seen as critically important at a time China is challenging US political sway and naval dominance in the region.

Washington has repeatedly criticised Beijing's expansive claims to almost the entire flashpoint South China Sea, which overlap with claims of several Southeast Asian states and Taiwan.

At Monday's press conference, Harris reiterated US commitment to "uphold the rules-based international order and freedom of navigation, including in the South China Sea".

After arriving at the weekend, Harris began her official engagements Monday by holding talks with Lee as the United States and Singapore signed agreements on

combating cyber threats, climate change, and the coronavirus pandemic.

She was also formally welcomed at the president's official residence, inspected a guard of honour and was presented with an orchid named after her, a typical honour for a visiting dignitary.

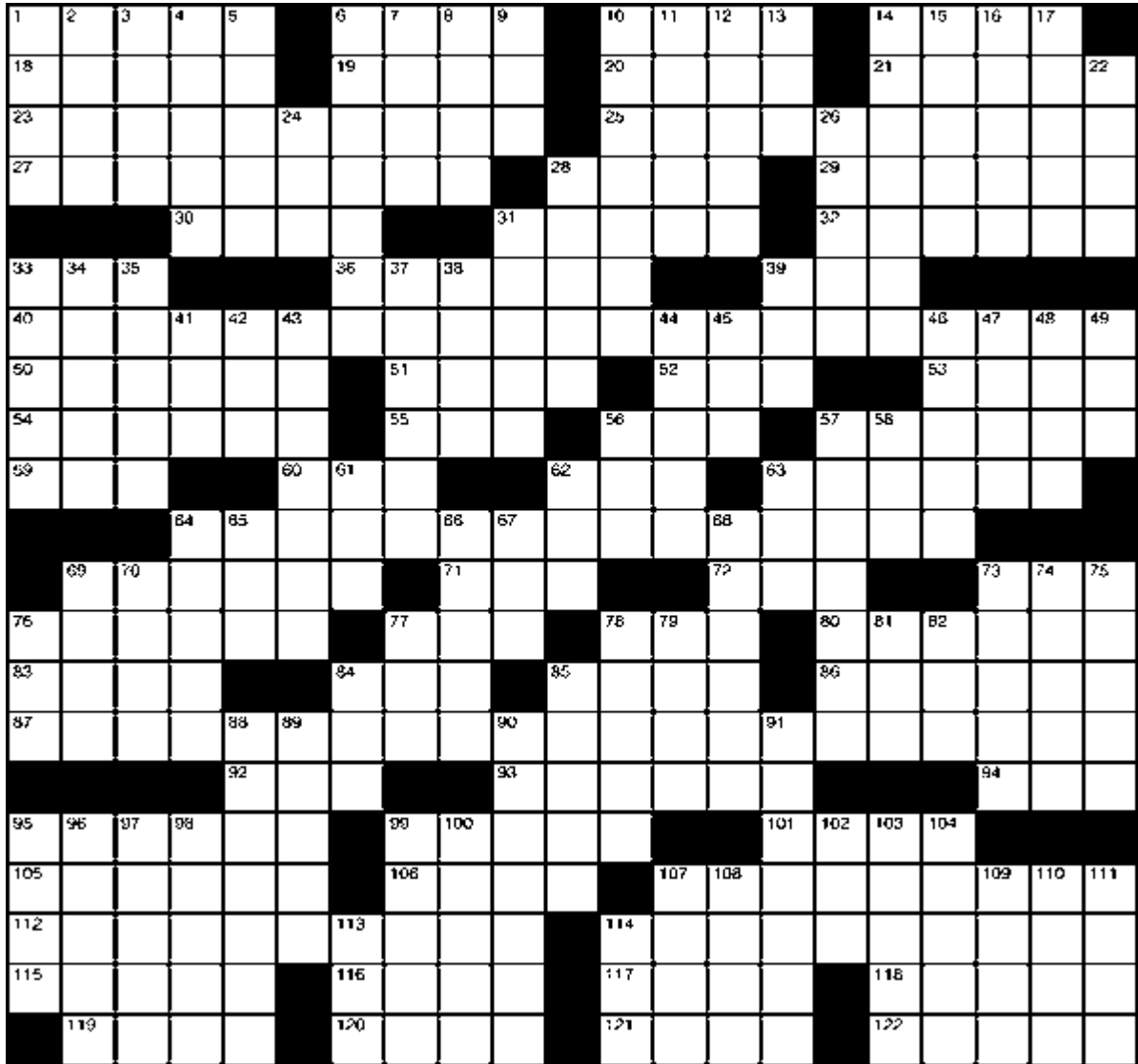
Later, she will visit Changi Naval Base and address US sailors aboard the visiting USS Tuls.

On Tuesday, she will give a speech laying out Washington's vision for the region and meet with business leaders to discuss supply chain issues, particularly a microchip shortage that has hit the auto industry.

She departs for Hanoi on Tuesday evening.

AFP

DAILY CROSSWORD



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ACROSS

- 1 Vacation island off Venezuela
- 6 Where to find Mashhad
- 10 It follows big or fair
- 14 Biblical word of reproach
- 18 Cold Adriatic winds
- 19 Lounging slipper
- 20 Town on the Thames
- 21 Verdugo of movies
- 23 Marilyn Monroe film/temporary engineer
- 25 Ballpark treat/IDs?
- 27 They can be spiral
- 28 Lotto's cousin
- 29 Arrange beforehand
- 30 Word before gas, oil or tar
- 31 Circle or city precursor
- 32 Matador
- 33 Boon to NY bettors
- 36 Lafayette College home
- 39 Peleg's son
- 40 Wouk/Tolstoy opus?
- 50 Home of fine Spanish swords
- 51 NM resort town
- 52 Ninny
- 53 Flower or paper starter
- 54 Regard highly
- 55 Make a boo-boo
- 56 Summer refresher

- 57 Shaped like a coil
- 59 Legal matter
- 60 Noun-forming suffix
- 62 Actress MacGraw
- 63 Supposed
- 64 Texas symbol
- might rate this?
- 69 Wall Street operator
- 71 Be in debt
- 72 Energy is part of it
- 73 Brit. knights of the lowest rank
- 76 Naval construction engineer
- 77 Decorative vase
- 78 Grampus
- 80 The Muse of astronomy
- 83 Nobelst Wiesel
- 84 Agnus ____: Lamb of God
- 85 His Rose was Irish
- 86 Type of thinking
- 87 Hepburn/Poitier collaboration?
- 92 Phys. education site
- 93 Photographer's word
- 94 Organized method: abbr.
- 95 Semiprecious stones
- 99 Man and others
- 101 Military code
- 105 Venice landmarks
- 106 Whirl rapidly
- 107 Equals
- 112 Intellectual's

- warning?
- 114 Home for the eared seal?
- 115 Birthplace of Artemis and Apollo
- 116 Yours, mine and ____
- 117 "The Aviator" star
- 118 MLB exec Joe
- 119 Observes
- 120 Head, in Paris
- 121 Command to Fido
- 122 Lundgren or Skarsgard
- DOWN**
- 1 Monastery heads: abbr.
- 2 Overwhelming defeat
- 3 Bear, in Latin
- 4 Essential
- 5 Houston player
- 6 Transfixed
- 7 Lap wraps, in London
- 8 Wings: L.
- 9 Tibet's neighbor: abbr.
- 10 Place of torment
- 11 Make amends
- 12 Boat or bike starter
- 13 Ultimate goal
- 14 Reassemble after a battle
- 15 Do a tailoring job
- 16 Came to an end
- 17 Type of management?
- 22 Regarding
- 24 SA wood sorrel
- 26 Made a choice

- 28 Recognizes
- 31 "I Can Get ____ You Wholesale"
- 33 Amphibious mammal
- 34 The others
- 35 Safety and garter followers
- 37 Fall blooms
- 38 Emulate the eagle
- 39 TLC dispensers
- 41 Tiny in Glasgow
- 42 March threat?
- 43 Candidate for election
- 44 Wheel spokes, e.g.: L.
- 45 Peer Gynt's mother
- 46 "Dallas" surname
- 47 River to the Rhine
- 48 Dressed
- 49 Blueprint add-on
- 56 Ecclesiastical robe
- 57 Botanical spikelet
- 58 Hole or head starter
- 61 Always, to a poet
- 62 "Where the Wild Things ____"
- 63 Barcelona bravo
- 64 Identification tag
- 65 One of Pindar's works
- 66 Japanese gateway
- 67 Beard on barley
- 68 Fasteners for some boots
- 69 Weblike membrane
- 70 Marsh wader

- 73 Leg joints
- 74 Onion-topped flat roll
- 75 Pieces of chalcedony
- 76 Min. unit
- 77 Biblical name
- 78 Double-reed woodwinds
- 79 Widespread
- 81 Mountain range of Morocco
- 82 Cuckoo of puzzledom
- 84 Not clearly seen
- 85 Ghastly pale
- 88 Eternal
- 89 Rabies, less commonly
- 90 Darken or obscure
- 91 Rumor
- 95 Made a hole in one
- 96 Measurement standards: var.
- 97 Point of view
- 98 CA-NV border lake
- 99 Point to be disputed
- 100 Sudden brief burst
- 102 New Guinea town
- 103 Comfortable shoes
- 104 Give the OK
- 107 Strike heavily
- 108 Egyptian skink
- 109 Emerald Isle
- 110 Manor bigwig
- 111 Small dagger
- 113 Short code signal
- 114 Abyssinian prince

YOUR DAILY HOROSCOPE



ARIES MARCH 21-APRIL 19

Have you been holding back? Now is the time to unleash your full potential. That saying about 'use it or lose it' is a lot more accurate than you think. So whatever it is that you've been too timid to say, do or wear -- well, get ready to show the world what you have and a heck of a lot more. Isn't it liberating to finally let yourself do the things that you've always wanted to? !



LEO JULY 23-AUGUST 22

Don't overdo it. Pushing yourself if you already feel like you're at the limits of your endurance isn't a good idea right now. Instead, get on the horn and ask for reinforcements. Go ahead and call in those favours you know that a few people owe you. They'll be glad to help you out, and grateful for the chance to do something for someone who's done so much for them in the past.



SAGITTARIUS NOVEMBER 22-DECEMBER 21

Just because you're a rebel doesn't mean that you'll never ever be any good. Quite the opposite is true -- your unwillingness to take things at face value means that you can see innovations and solutions where others might just go along with the comfortable status quo. Just make sure you're actually a rebel with a cause, and not just playing devil's advocate for the heck of it.



TAURUS APRIL 20-MAY 20

Emerson wrote, 'A foolish consistency is the hobgoblin of little minds'. And who wants a bunch of goblins running around in their head? So take a tip from ol' Ralphie and learn how to bend with the circumstances. Holding fast to unworkable standards might do more harm than good, while learning to sway with the tides could actually help things in the long run.



VIRGO AUGUST 23-SEPTEMBER 22

Kick it up a notch, why don't you? You've been running at a low hum, and it's an ideal time to go full throttle. You know you have what it takes to knock everyone off their feet once you reveal the real deal. So don't be shy. You've rehearsed this a thousand times in your head, and once you get going, any residual nervousness will just slide off your shoulders.



CAPRICORN DECEMBER 22-JANUARY 19

You're unstoppable. To-do lists disappear in the blink of an eye. Mountains get moved with the simple touch of a finger. The stars have taken your natural industriousness and multiplied it, so if there's been anything exceptionally big on your agenda that you've put off tackling, now is definitely the time to address it. You have so much energy that needs to be put to use!



GEMINI MAY 21-JUNE 21

Understanding leads to compassion, and that can be very dangerous, because it defuses anger and leads people into feeling (gasp!) sympathy for each other. It can also make life a whole heck of a lot easier and sweeter. So before you get on your high horse with that loved one of yours, why not take a moment and just try to see where they're coming from?



LIBRA SEPTEMBER 23-OCTOBER 22

A complicated relationship might have a surprisingly simple solution once you put your mind to it. The trouble is, this person is equal parts help and hindrance, and you don't quite know what to do about it. Lately, their behaviour might be aggravating in the extreme, but try and keep your cool. Give them the benefit of the doubt -- for now. Just make sure that they receive fair warning.



AQUARIUS JANUARY 20-FEBRUARY 18

Don't base your love on credit, or when you try to get you-know-who to pay up, the check could just come back marked insufficient funds. In other words, if someone has repeatedly proved untrustworthy and unreliable, why are you keeping them around in your life? Do you still secretly believe that somehow it's your fault that they can't be counted upon? What a load of hokey.



CANCER JUNE 22-JULY 22

Part of you wants to be out in public, waving at the crowd. The other half wants nothing more than to be wrapped up in a fluffy bathrobe with a good book. What to do? Look to events in the recent past to make your decision. If you've been out on the town every night, it might be time to stay in. If you've been resting more, well, it's imperative you get out and boogie on down.



SCORPIO OCTOBER 23-NOVEMBER 21

Let's face it -- you don't want to be the power behind the throne, although you're quite good at it. Bide your time, however. Someone needs you in that capacity, and even you have to admit that your talents match extremely well with such a position. Fortunately, the powers that be have noted your talents. They have big plans for you.



PISCES FEBRUARY 19-MARCH 20

Who is this practical, organised person who's kicking butt and taking names? Could this be you? Well, actually ... yes! You're so on top of it you're practically over it today. Nothing can phase you because you have it all under control. So whatever it is that you need to tackle, tackle it like you're at the Super Bowl. Your mental, physical and emotional stamina is at an all-time high.



TEST YOUR KNOWLEDGE

1. The first recipient of Nehru Award was

- a. Martin Luther King
- b. Khan Abdul Ghaffar Khan
- c. Mother Teresa
- d. U Thant

2. The Shanti Swarup Bhatnagar Award is given by which of the following organisations?

- a. Council for Scientific and industrial research
- b. Indian Council for Agricultural Research
- c. Indian National Science Academy
- d. ISRO

3. On whose name is the highest award for services to the development of cinema given?

- a. Raj Kapoor
- b. Dada Saheb
- c. Meena Kumari
- d. Amitabh Bachchan

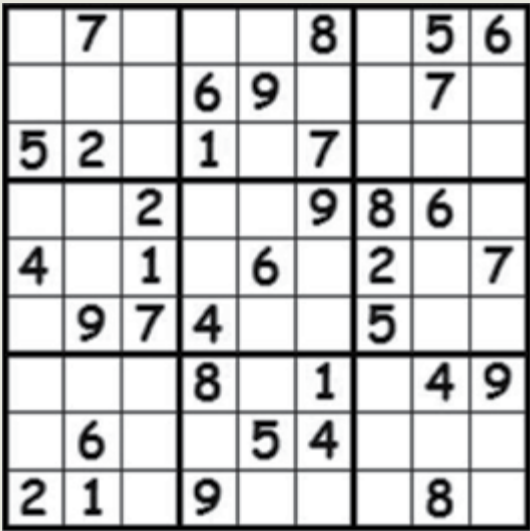
Answers: 1. d 2. a 3. b

KIDS COLOURING



DO YOU SUDOKU?

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



BOGGLER



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

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

SUDOKU EASY ANSWER



DAILY CROSSWORD ANSWERS (AUGUST 23)



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





SEQUIN DRESSES

ALL THAT SHIMMERS...

Summer 2021 might be harsh, but shiny, shimmering dresses, also those with metallic finishes, are bringing the party spirit back into fashion this season



If you love making a trendy statement and bringing in some radiance in an event with your attire, sequin dresses are your sure choice. Whether long or short dresses, tops or trousers, figure-hugging or flowy gowns, sequin has a way of making anyone look beautiful and trendy.

Now that people have started moving out of self-imposed fashion hibernation, with lockdowns and movement restrictions being eased, going out is beginning to pick up. And though thronging parties may not be in vogue, formal invites to dinners, weddings, and other celebrations have started trickling in, and you want to let yourself stand out in style.

Formal styles with sequins come in black, rose gold, silver, white, and a variety of combinations. For brides, white sequin is a popular choice but for others who hover around the bride, coloured sequin dresses take on countless forms, each delivering a punch of its own.

For semi-formal occasions like homecoming events, engagement photoshoots, and birthdays, multi-colour sequin dresses go well. You can match it with shiny shoes or clutches. For homecoming attire, long sequin gowns are apt. Make sure to complement the look with silver jewellery or stones that add to the glitter.

Some feel, sequin dresses are on their own bold and flashy, so loud statement accessories and showy footwear aren't really necessary to create a complete and polished look. Usually, when flashy accessories are styled with a sequin dress, there is a clash of interests in your ensemble and attention is drawn away from your sequin dress, they say.

Styling a sequin dress, however, should focus on keeping it simple to let the dress impress on its own. Starting with footwear, opt for solid-coloured heels that match or complement the colour hue of your dress. For example, style a light-coloured sequin dress in white or tan with light-coloured shoes or clear heels; and vice versa for dark-coloured sequin dresses as in a gold sequin dress paired with black block heels.

All year round glitter

You can wear a sequin dress all year-round. Sequin dresses are not just reserved for holiday parties, typically seen during the winter, you can totally style them for spring and summer. During the fall and winter, rock a long sleeve sequin dress for a cocktail party. During spring and summer

SEQUIN OPTIONS

A gold sequin cropped top and a silver pleated skirt are among the key elements of a versatile casual sartorial arsenal. Give a classier twist to an otherwise utilitarian outfit by rounding off with a pair of gold leather heeled sandals on a hot day.

You can also combine a black and white print long sleeve t-shirt with a silver pleated skirt. These two items are totally comfortable and look fabulous matched together. To give your look a dressier finish, introduce black velvet heeled sandals to the mix for a season-appropriate look.

Pair a white dress shirt and a silver pleated skirt for a classy look. A pair of silver leather heeled sandals will make it more elegant.

A black off shoulder top and a silver pleated skirt paired together are such a dreamy getup for those dressers who love relaxed casual styles. Give a glamorous twist to this outfit by slipping into a pair of black suede heeled sandals.



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TENNIS ROUND-UP

Zverev, Barty are champions



Alexander Zverev of Germany holds the Cincinnati Masters winner's trophy on Sunday (AFP)



Ashleigh Barty celebrates after defeating Jil Teichmann in the women's singles final on Sunday

ATP/WT A CINCINNATI MASTERS

Cincinnati, US - Alexander Zverev backed up his Olympic triumph with a fifth ATP Masters 1000 title as he crushed Andrey Rublev 6-2, 6-3 in Cincinnati on Sunday. The German needed less than an hour against his longtime childhood friend and rival to lift the trophy and put himself into a solid position with the US Open starting a week from Monday.

"The US Open starts in a week's time, so obviously I want to keep it up and I want to maybe play even better there," Zverev said.

Women's world No 1 Ashleigh

Barty was similarly impressive in winning her fifth title of the season at the combined ATP and WTA event, cruising past Swiss wild card Jil Teichmann 6-3, 6-1.

The Australian took control mid-way through the opening set and was never truly threatened.

"It's been an awesome week, with each match it was getting progressively better," Barty said.

"Today I was able to trust myself and play with confidence, which was important in a big final.

Zverev showed no effects from the stomach discomfort which forced him to take a medical timeout during his draining

semifinal victory over Stefanos Tsitsipas on Saturday. Zverev won his 11th match in a row and his fifth against Rublev, a player he's been playing since their junior days.

The German came into the week with six defeats in prior Cincinnati appearances, but turned that negative on its head.

"My first win here was on Wednesday and now I'm holding the title four days later," he said.

"It's been an incredible week, I had a lot of great matches. It's a great feeling going into the Open."

Zverev kept his unforced error count to just six, though he was out-aced by Rublev 11 to six.

The third seed produced 16 winners and broke Rublev five times.

Zverev's only minor hiccup came as he was broken while serving for victory leading 5-2 in the second set.

But he closed out the convincing win a game later with a timely break back as Rublev found the net with a return.

"Until the end I was playing pretty good tennis," Zverev said.

"I didn't do a big celebration at the net since Andrey and I have been best friends since we were 11 or 12.

"With my Olympic gold and this fifth Masters I'm really looking forward to New York."

Barty dominates

Although she doesn't leave Cincinnati with a trophy, women's runner-up Teichmann departs after a stellar week.

The world No 76 beat three top-12 players, including four-time Grand Slam winner Naomi Osaka, fourth seed Karolina Pliskova and Olympic gold medallist Belinda Bencic. But she had no answers as Wimbledon champion Barty stretched her WTA Tour-leading match win tally this season to 40.

"I'm very happy with my week, today I wanted to win, but Ash was just too good," she said.

AFP

Zverev moves up to fourth

ATP RANKINGS

Paris, France - Alexander Zverev's win in the Cincinnati Masters saw the German leapfrog Rafael Nadal to take fourth spot in the new ATP rankings released on Monday.

The 24-year-old moved to fourth for the first time since May 2019 and shunts Nadal down to fifth. The Spaniard has struggled with injury to his left foot since his French Open semifinal loss and announced last week that he would miss the US Open, which starts next week, and end his season with immediate effect.

Defending champion Dominic Thiem and 20-time major winner Roger Federer will also be absent from Flushing Meadows and have

ATP RANKINGS AS OF AUGUST 23 [TOP-TEN]

1	Novak Djokovic	(11,113 pts)
2	Daniil Medvedev	(9,980)
3	Stefanos Tsitsipas	(8,350)
4	Alexander Zverev	(8,240)
5	Rafael Nadal	(7,815)
6	Dominic Thiem	(6,995)
7	Andrey Rublev	(6,400)
8	Matteo Berrettini	(5,533)
9	Roger Federer	(4,125)
10	Denis Shapovalov	(3,580)

also terminated their seasons - they remain sixth and ninth respectively.

The young Canadian Felix Auger-Aliassime rose two places to 15th while the Bulgarian Grigor Dimitrov and Frenchman Gael Monfils both returned to the top-20.

AFP

Sabalenka climbs to second

WTA RANKINGS

Paris, France - Belarusian Aryna Sabalenka geared up for next week's US Open by climbing to second place in the WTA rankings published on Monday, nudging Naomi Osaka down to third.

Neither Sabalenka, 23, nor Osaka made it to the latter stages of the Cincinnati Open which was won by Ashleigh Barty who keeps a firm grip on the No 1 spot.

AFP

WTA RANKINGS AS OF AUGUST 23 [TOP-TEN]

1	Ashleigh Barty	(10,185 pts)
2	Aryna Sabalenka	(7,010)
3	Naomi Osaka	(6,666)
4	Karolina Pliskova	(5,530)
5	Sofia Kenin	(5,030)
6	Elina Svitolina	(5,030)
7	Bianca Andreescu	(4,537)
8	Iga Swiatek	(4,461)
9	Barbora Krejickova	(4,273)
10	Garbine Muguruza	(4,210)

Murray routs lucky loser Rubin; Kyrgios withdraws

WINSTON-SALEM OPEN

Washington, US - Nick Kyrgios pulled out of the ATP Winston-Salem Open on Sunday night, paving the way for Andy Murray to breeze into the second round with a dominating win over lucky loser Noah Rubin.

After a slow start to the first set, the former world No 1 Murray found his form and cruised through his opening match, beating Rubin 6-2, 6-0 in just 58 minutes.

Murray was initially scheduled to face Kyrgios but the Aussie withdrew just before the start of their match, throwing

Sunday's schedule into chaos. Murray will next face 13th seeded Frances Tiafoe, who received a bye into the second round.

Organisers gave Murray several different scenarios before finally deciding he would face American Rubin, who had to play back-to-back matches with just an hour rest between them.

"It was a strange 45 minutes before I played this match," said the Scot. "I didn't know if I would be playing tonight.

"They said I would play a qualifier and wouldn't play until tomorrow. And then they said I would play a lucky loser. So my



Andy Murray

opponent change three times in 45 minutes.

"Unfortunately for (Rubin) he had to play a tough match in the heat and then had to come out again."

Rubin took the court after falling to France's Lucas Pouille in a two-hour qualifying final.

The 34-year-old Murray has had to battle injuries of his own, with his latest one being a groin problem. But that didn't seem to be a factor against Rubin as Murray blasted 11 aces and had just three double faults.

Kyrgios withdrew saying he had been bothered by pain in his

left knee for some time. He said he would rather rest for the upcoming US Open than aggravate it at a regular tournament.

"Obviously I had to look after my body and with a Grand Slam next week," he said. "I have been dealing with knee pain the last couple of weeks.

"With the US Open just around the corner I just didn't feel this was worth the risk of going out there and possibly making it worse."

Kyrgios' only win over Murray came in their most recent match three years ago at the Queen's Club, where Murray made his

return following his first hip surgery.

"I had a bit of a hit to see how it is today," Kyrgios said. "I got another week now (until the US Open)."

Kyrgios retired from his third-round match at Wimbledon with an abdominal injury. He opted out of the Olympics in part because of lack of fans. He lost in his opening matches at Washington and Toronto in recent weeks and this would have been his fifth tournament of the year outside of Australia.

AFP

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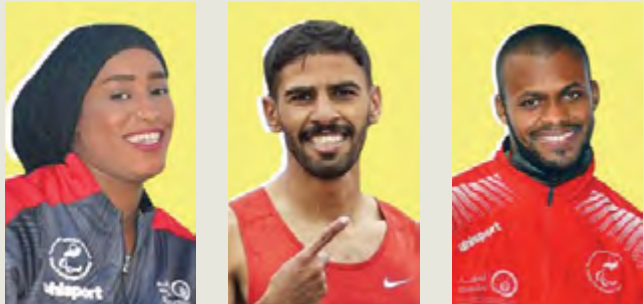


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Three Omani athletes to take part in Tokyo Paralympics



L-R: Iman Taiseer Sarbokh, Taha al Harrasi, Mohammed al Mashaykhi

Ashok Purohit
Muscat

Three Oman athletes will compete in the Tokyo 2020 Paralympic Games, which begins on Tuesday. Mohammed al Mashaykhi (men's shot put - F32 and club throw - F32), Taha al Harrasi (men's 100m - T36 and long

jump -T36) and Iman Taiseer Sarbokh (women's shot put - F34) will be vying to bring glory for the sultanate. While this will be the second successive Paralympics for Mashaykhi, Harrasi and Iman will be making their debuts at the Games. All the three are coached by Oman's long-serving

Tunisian coach Sonia Mustafa. Mashaykhi is the most experienced parathlete and the 30 year old brought laurels for the sultanate when he won a silver at the 2017 world championships in London, UK, in shot put - F32. An Asian Para Games gold medallist, Mashaykhi did consider quitting sport after a

disappointing Rio Paralympics. However, coach Sonia's and pep talk got him back and he is considered to be Oman's best bet at the Tokyo Paralympics. The 30 year old Iman is the only woman participant from Oman. At the Rio Paralympics in 2016, Oman was represented by Mashaykhi and another woman athlete in Raya al Abri.

The 27 year old Harrasi had earlier participated in the world championships in Dubai, UAE, in 2019 and won a silver at the 2018 Asian Para Games in Indonesia. The sultanate delegation will be led by the Oman Paralympic Committee (OPC) chairman Mansoor al Tauqi.

@ashokmuscat

Spirited show by Ahmad at Road to Le Mans

Our Correspondent
Muscat

Oman Racing's Ahmad al Harthy and his teammate Michael Dinan of US displayed their experience and skills in abundance as they claimed a runner-up finish and a fifth-place in the two races of the Road to Le Mans at the Circuit de la Sarthe in France recently. Driving their Aston Martin Vantage GT3, Ahmad delivered another strong drive during race two on Saturday to put Oman Racing in contention for victory - before a spin for Dinan led to an eventual fifth place finish. Running as the key support race to this year's Le Mans 24 Hours, Saturday lunchtime's race got off to a great start for Ahmad who, having qualified second fastest, ran in second place



Ahmad al Harthy in action during race two at Circuit de la Sarthe

throughout his stint and moved into the lead as the mandatory mid-race pit-stops began. The Omani served up a terrific showing as he set his sights on claiming a double Road To Le Mans podium - having finished second in race one on Thursday - but in the end it wasn't to be. "It was a good first stint for me, a cautious start and then I pushed as hard as I could," said

Ahmad. "The track was a bit different from race one, but I was really happy with my stint and delighted to give the car over to Michael in a strong position. "We got out in the lead and all was good but, unfortunately, Michael was on the dirty side of the circuit as they went into the chicane battling side by side and there was a spin. It's a real shame as we had the pace for the

podium again, but it was P5 in the end. Overall I am very happy to have come back to Le Mans and stood on the podium in race one, and we were just as competitive in race two." Ahmad's silverware from race one gives him a 75 per cent strike rate of podiums in the Road To Le Mans, having taken a double GT3 victory at the world-famous Circuit de la Sarthe in 2017 on his previous visit to the track. In race one, the pair fought back to second from eighth on the GT3 class grid. Ahmad said the fightback in the 55-minute race one was 'unbelievable'. "From P8 to P2, a podium again at Le Mans is an amazing feeling. To see the flag of Oman flying again here is something very special to me, I am very proud," said Ahmad.



Oman Racing's Ahmad al Harthy (left) and Michael Dinan hold their runner-up trophies at Circuit de la Sarthe

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Oman's Ali Anwar al Balushi at the U20 worlds in Nairobi

Oman's Balushi misses podium at U20 worlds

Our Correspondent
Muscat

Oman's Ali Anwar al Balushi missed a historic medal at the World U20 Championships in Nairobi, Kenya, recently as he finished a creditable fourth in the 100m race. Having stormed into the 100m final by winning the semifinal heat with a new Oman junior record of 10.27s, the 19-year-old Balushi clocked 10.39s to be edged out of the podium by Cuban Shainer Rengifo Montoya (10.32s), who claimed a bronze. Coached by Fahad al Mashaikhi, Balushi's performance was lauded by the newly elected Oman Athletics Association (OAA) board. Balushi's impressive timings herald a bright future for Oman athletics. With three years left

for Paris 2024 Olympics, OAA is determined to nurture the talented Balushi, who has the potential to make it big in the future. It was a historic night on Thursday for Botswana as the country won its first ever 100m medal. Having clocked two national U20 records in his run-up to the final, Letsile Tebogo did not falter, despite the harsh conditions caused by rainfall. The 18-year-old had enough steam to power to his first global title with a time of 10.19s. South Africa's Benjamin Richardson won the silver in 10.28 and Montoya took bronze. Oman's other participant at the worlds was Husain al Farsi in the 800m. The Kuwait-based Omani clocked 1m:50.34s to finish sixth in the heats and bow out early.

Victories for Muscat, Stallions, Renaissance and Yalla Shabab

LOCAL CRICKET

In one of the most lop-sided games in the top-flight league history, Muscat CT drubbed Ibn Abdul Samad Engg and Cons (IAS) by 336 runs in an Oman Cricket Premier Division match at the Oman Academy Cricket ground on the weekend. In another one-sided match on Friday, Oman Stallions thrashed Arabian Region Travel and Tourism (ARTT) by 159 runs on Friday. On Saturday, Abdul Rauf struck a century to power Renaissance CT to a 69-run victory

98 n.o., Ayaan Khan 98) beat IAS 152 in 36.4 overs (Sudeep Chavan 37; Samay Shrivastava 4-49, Ayaan 3-23, Munis Ansari 3-32).

Oman Stallions 218 in 43.5 overs (Rafi Ullah 71, Karan Sonavala 36; Aqil Khan 4-29, Malik Ali 2-15, Sanjaya Raj 2-49) beat ARTT 59 all out in 29 overs (Bilal Khan 4-12, Shakeel Ahmad 3-13, Mohammad Ali Akbar 2-7).

Renaissance CT 236 in 50 overs (Abdul Rauf 110, Sufiyan Mehmood 41; Syed Amir Ali 4-36,



Mohammad Nadeem



Rafi Ullah



Bilal Khan



Shakeel Ahmad

over AER International Trading and Contracting in another Premier Division match. And Yalla Shabab rode on Mohammad Nadeem's 83 to score a 43-run win over Majees to conclude the weekend's Premier Division matches

Arjun Suresh 2-33, Muzahir Raza 2-63) beat AER 167 in 45.4 overs (Aamir Kaleem 42; Bilal Mohammed 3-21, Ajay Lalcheta 3-35, Floury Mathunny 2-17).

Yalla Shabab 216 in 49.1 overs (Mohammad Nadeem 83, Mohammed Naseem 37; Ahmad Fayyaz 3-34, Nester Dhamba 2-34) beat Majees 173 in 46.5 overs (Khurram Khan 54; Kaleemullah 2-16, Nadeem 2-17, Sanuth Ebrahim 2-27).

PREMIER DIVISION
BRIEF SCORES:
Muscat CT 488-4 in 50 overs (Kashyapkumar Prajapati 162, Jatinder Singh 111, Sandeep Goud

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Alam's century puts Pakistan in control



Fawad Alam of Pakistan hits a boundary during his unbeaten knock of 124 during the third day's play of the second Test against West Indies on Sunday

WEST INDIES VS PAKISTAN SECOND TEST: DAY THREE

Kingston, Jamaica - Fawad Alam's fifth Test century and Shaheen Shah Afridi's new ball potency pushed Pakistan into the ascendancy on a truncated third day of the rain-affected second Test against the West Indies at Sabina Park on Sunday.

Alam's unbeaten 124 lifted the tourists to 302 for nine declared in their first innings before Afridi removed both openers swiftly and Faheem Ashraf added another to have the home side at 39 for three in reply at stumps.

Edged by one wicket in a thrilling finale to the first Test on the same ground a week earlier, Pakistan's quest for a series-levelling victory has been frustrated by showers and inefficient covering of the playing square.

All of the second day was lost to showers and a sodden outfield while play did not properly get underway on day three until early afternoon as a damp area at the southern end of the pitch, in line with the bowlers' run-ups, was a source of concern for the West Indies.

Initial attempts to get play going in the morning following another 90-minute delay resulted in just eight deliveries being bowled before the complaints of Jason Holder, supported by his fellow bowlers and captain Kraigg Brathwaite, were eventually heeded by the match officials who engaged in lengthy deliberation before suspending play.

When play finally commenced in the heat of the afternoon, Pakistan, who resumed from the overnight position of 212 for four, were almost entirely reliant on Alam to

You always feel proud when you score a century for your country, so I am very happy right now

FAWAD ALAM

push them up to the 300-run mark.

Two wickets for Jayden Seales and two in two balls for Holder kept the tourists in check.

However Alam, who resumed his innings on 76 after retiring through heat exhaustion and severe cramps on the opening day, would not be denied a fourth Test century in 12 innings.

It was an innings which reinforced the value of his return to the international scene after

being ignored for 11 years after his debut in senior Pakistan colours in 2009.

'Motivated by dad'

Having returned to the crease at the fall of Ashraf's wicket, and then seeing Mohammad Rizwan and Nauman Ali depart in quick succession, the 35-year-old left-hander stayed focused and reached the cherished landmark with a pull for two off Kyle Mayers.

Despite the disappointment of contributing to the run out of Hasan Ali, Alam's unbeaten 124, which occupied over six hours in which he faced 213 deliveries and stroked 17 fours, was a stellar effort.

"It was very challenging out there and what Babar (Azam) and I did on the first day was very important," said Alam at the end of the day in reflecting on his and the team's effort.

SCOREBOARD		
PAKISTAN 1 ST INNINGS		
Abid Ali	c Blackwood b Roach	1
I Butt	c da Silva b Seales	0
Azhar Ali	c da Silva b Roach	0
B Azam	c Holder b Roach	75
F Alam	not out	124
M Rizwan	lbw b Holder	31
F Ashraf	lbw b Seales	26
Nauman Ali	c da Silva b Holder	0
Hasan Ali	run out	9
S S Afridi	c Powell b Seales	19
M Abbas	not out	0
Extras:	(b 1, lb 9, nb 6)	16
TOTAL:	302-9 decl in 110 overs	
Fall of wickets: 1-2, 2-2, 3-2, 4-168, 5-218, 6-231, 7-231, 8-267, 9-302		
Bowling: K Roach 27-9-68-3, J Seales 15-4-31-3, A Joseph 18-1-75-0, J Holder 23-9-46-2, K Mayers 17-5-34-0, R Chase 8-0-32-0, N Bonner 1-0-6-0, K Brathwaite 1-1-0-0		
WEST INDIES 1 ST INNINGS		
K Brathwaite	b Afridi	4
K Powell lbw	b Afridi	5
N Bonner	not out	18
R Chase	b Faheem Ashraf	10
A Joseph	not out	0
Extras:	(nb 1, w 1)	2
TOTAL:	39 for three in 18 overs	
Fall of wickets: 1-8, 2-9, 3-34		
Bowling: M Abbas 6-1-17-0, S S Afridi 6-4-13-2, Hasan Ali 3-1-8-0, F Ashraf 2-2-0-1, Nauman Ali 1-0-1-0		

Afghanistan's ODI series against Pakistan moved from Sri Lanka

Lahore, Pakistan - Afghanistan's three-match ODI series against Pakistan has been moved from Hambantota in Sri Lanka to Pakistan because of logistical challenges in the Afghanistan team's travel, the Afghanistan Cricket Board (ACB) CEO Hamid Shinwari confirmed to *ESPNCricinfo* on Monday.

No commercial flights are taking off from Kabul following the Taliban takeover of the country, and Sri Lanka announced a ten-day lockdown on Friday, two days after the country reported 3793 new COVID-19 cases and a highest-ever single-day death toll of 187.

The Afghanistan contingent was supposed to travel to Pakistan by road, then fly to Dubai, and then on to Colombo for the series, but the circuitous route is throwing up logistical challenges because of the COVID-19 protocols.

The Afghanistan squad will now travel to Pakistan later this week, with the ACB yet to announce the venue(s) for the ODIs starting on September 3.

It will still remain a 'home' series for Afghanistan, though

was originally scheduled to be played in the UAE. *ESPNCricinfo* had learnt that the Pakistan Cricket Board (PCB) had offered to host the series in one venue in Pakistan when the UAE plan fell through, but the ACB had declined then.

This will be the first bilateral series between the two teams.

Afghanistan's 17-member squad for the tour had assembled in Kabul last week to train amid the Taliban's takeover of the country.

Pakistan have, however, delayed the announcement of their squad - which was originally set to happen on August 21 - because of lack of clarity around the tour. In the meantime, a pre-season camp of Pakistan's 26 white-ball players started at Lahore's High Performance Centre on Sunday under the supervision of Saqlain Mushtaq. It is so far known that Pakistan's four premier all-format players - Babar Azam, Mohammad Rizwan, Shaheen Shah Afridi and Hasan Ali - are expected to be rested for the series to manage their workload ahead of the T20 World Cup.

Cricinfo



A file photo of Afghanistan cricket team

Wood ruled out of Headingley Test

ENGLAND VS INDIA THIRD TEST

London, UK - Mark Wood has been ruled out of this week's third Test with India dealing a blow to the hosts' hopes of levelling the five-match series which the tourists lead 1-0.

The 31-year-old has a jarred right shoulder, a result of diving headlong into an advertising hoarding when saving a boundary on the fourth evening of the second Test at Lord's.

Even though he bowled at speeds in excess of 150 kph on the last day of the second Test, which England lost, he has been judged not fit to take his place in the starting line-up for the game at Headingley, which gets underway on Wednesday.

"It is frustrating for Mark and for us as a side - he gives us a real

point of difference," said England captain Joe Root at his press conference on Monday. The Durham paceman, whose career has been blighted by injuries, adds to the growing list of unavailable England seam bowlers.

Stuart Broad, Jofra Archer, Olly Stone and Chris Woakes are out due to injury whilst allrounder Ben Stokes is unavailable owing to a mental health break. "I really feel for all three of those guys," Root said of Archer, Stone and Wood, who are all capable of bowling in excess of 150 kph.

"There is no doubt that when all three of them are back and ready, they will do wonderful things for English cricket and have a big impact over a period of time." It is frustrating for them more than anyone else."



Mark Wood (R) did some damage to his shoulder while diving to field a ball

Many felt Wood should have taken greater care in the field. "It was madness," said former

England batsman Geoffrey Boycott in his column for Britain's *Daily Telegraph*.

"Modern-day cricketers all dive athletically to save runs and the effort is commendable, but it is not worth the risk of injury to a leading bowler."

Either Saqib Mahmood or Craig Overton - both of whom were already in the squad - could replace Wood in the starting XI.

Overton has won four caps to date whilst Mahmood has taken 14 wickets for England in seven one-day internationals.

Root though hinted 24-year-old Mahmood may be give his Test debut. "Saqib could not be in a better place to potentially play Test cricket," said Root. "The opportunities he has taken this year when he has been given them has been exceptional."

"He has been a standout bowler." AFP

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FOOTBALL ROUND-UP

Bale on target but Real held in six-goal thriller

SPANISH LEAGUE

Madrid, Spain - Gareth Bale scored his first Liga goal since 2019 but took two late goals from his replacement, Vinicius, to earn Real Madrid a 3-3 draw at Levante on Sunday.

That result allowed champions Atletico Madrid, who beat Elche 1-0 earlier in the evening, to take top spot in La Liga.

In the late game in Valencia, Bale gave Real Madrid the lead after five minutes. Karim Benzema ran in on goal but when the ball was held up by water on the pitch cut it back to Bale who side-footed the ball home.

It was the Welshman's first goal in La Liga since his second goal, an 86th minute equaliser, in a 2-2 draw against Villarreal at the start of September in 2019, a match which he ended by collecting a red card.

Real dominated the first half but could not find a second.

Instead, Levante levelled 28 seconds into the second half.

The ball broke to unmarked Roger who beat Thibaut Courtois with a hard low shot

Levante took the lead in the 57th minute when Jose Campana met a deep cross with a sweet volley into the top corner.

Real manager Carlo Ancelotti promptly yanked off Bale, Isco and Eden Hazard in a triple substitution. One of the subs,



Real Madrid's Gareth Bale (centre) celebrates after scoring against Levante at the Ciutat de Valencia stadium in Valencia, Spain, on Sunday (AFP)

Vinicius repaid his coach in the 73rd minute, accelerating onto a pass from Casimero, shrugging off a defender and rolling a shot into the corner of the net.

Seven minutes later, David

Alaba nodded a Levante free-kick down into his own six yard box and Rober Pier gleefully thumped the ball home from close range.

With five minutes left, Vini-

cus again equalised. Receiving the ball wide of the post and near the goal-line, he still somehow found the net, lofting the ball round goalkeeper Aitor Fernandez and in off the far post.

Two minutes later, Fernandez was sent off for handling outside his area to stop a Real counter-attack. Because Levante had used all their substitutes, defender Ruben Vezo went in goal but

Real could not find a winner.

"He has qualities, he's very fast, he's young, he's a great striker," said Ancelotti of the Brazilian, but he refused to say if Vinicius would start the next game, which could cost Bale his place.

Earlier in Madrid, Angel Correa continued his torrid form for Atletico.

A week after striking twice in a 2-1 victory in the opening round at Celta Vigo, the diminutive Argentinian striker struck again in the 39th minute.

Atletico, who won the title in a season played behind closed doors, finally got to share their trophy with their fans. For the first time in 18 months there was a crowd at the Wanda Metropolitano on Sunday, where 24,926 were allowed in. The home club also presented summer signing Rodrigo de Paul.

OTHER RESULTS:

Real Sociedad 1 Rayo Vallecano 0.

GERMAN LEAGUE

Hoffenheim 2 Union Berlin 2, Bayern Munich 3 Cologne 2.

SCOTTISH PREMIERSHIP

Dundee 2 Hibernian 2, Heart of Midlothian 1 Aberdeen 1, Ross County 2 Rangers 4, St Johnstone 0 Dundee United 1. AFP

QUICK RUN

Argentina call up Messi for WC qualifier vs Brazil

Superstar Lionel Messi was called up on Monday to the Argentina squad due to face his new Paris Saint-Germain teammate Neymar and Brazil in a World Cup qualifier next month. The CONMEBOL encounter on September 5 will mark the first time the two icons face each other as PSG teammates, and will come less than two months after Messi inspired Argentina to a 1-0 victory over Brazil in the Copa America final. The highly-anticipated encounter is sandwiched between two other World Cup qualifiers, with Argentina playing Venezuela on September 2 and Bolivia a week later. Brazil lead the single CONMEBOL qualifying group with a perfect 18 points from six matches, while Argentina are second with 12 points and also unbeaten.

Rangers fans banned over Furuhashi abuse

Several Rangers fans have been 'banned indefinitely' after a social media video showed a group allegedly chanting a racist song about Celtic's Japanese star Kyogo Furuhashi. The footage emerged after Rangers' 4-2 win over Ross County in the Scottish Premiership on Sunday. The individuals have been identified and, as well as banning the fans involved, the club also confirmed no tickets would be given to the Rangers Supporters Club they were travelling with. Furuhashi has made a strong start with Celtic after joining Rangers' bitter Glasgow rivals from Vissel Kobe in the close-season. The 26-year-old has scored six goals in seven games for Celtic.

PSG lose Icardi to shoulder injury

Paris Saint-Germain (PSG) will be without striker Mauro Icardi for 'three to four weeks' after the Argentine sprained his right shoulder, the French League club said on Monday. Icardi was injured towards the end of Friday's 4-2 win in Brest. PSG said in a statement that an examination confirmed Icardi's injury. "His return to squad training is estimated at between three and four weeks," said the statement. The injury is a setback for Icardi who has netted twice in the opening three rounds of the championship.

Kimmich extends stay at Bayern

German international Joshua Kimmich has signed an extension to stay at Bayern Munich until 2025, the club announced on Monday. Kimmich, a versatile player, at ease in both defence and midfield, was under contract with the German champions until 2023. "We are delighted that Joshua Kimmich is staying in Munich! Joshua identifies totally with FC Bayern," the club's sporting director Oliver Kahn wrote on Twitter. The Bavarian giants were intent on keeping Kimmich, who has become one of Europe's best midfielders since he signed from in 2015. In all, Kimmich has racked up 264 appearances with Bayern, 30 goals, and won six German titles, three German cups and the Champions League with them. AFP

Nice authorities open probe into abandoned match

FRENCH LEAGUE

Nice, France - Authorities in Nice have opened a probe into the incidents which caused the abandonment of Sunday's French League match between Nice and Marseille, the local prosecutor's office said on Monday.

"An investigation is underway, but no one has been taken into custody" at this stage, said the prosecutor's office. Sunday's match was abandoned after home fans invaded the pitch after 75 minutes with their team leading 1-0 and angrily confronted opposing player Dimitri Payet, who had thrown a bottle lobbed at him back into the crowd.

A security cordon of stewards, dressed in yellow vests, tried to stem the pitch invasion before a brawl broke out between players of the two teams, supporters and staff.

The referee then led both teams off to the safety of the dressing room.

Eighty minutes after the game was suspended, Nice said they wanted to restart. "The decision was taken by the authorities to resume the match, but Marseille do not want to," Nice president Jean-Pierre Rivere told broadcaster Prime Video.

Marseille refused with club officials claiming their players' safety could not be guaranteed. "Our players were attacked," said Marseille president Pablo Longoria.

"The league wanted the match to restart. We decided for the safety of our players, who were attacked during the pitch invasion, not to resume because the safety of our players was not guaranteed."

OTHER RESULTS:

Lyon 3 Clermont 3, Bordeaux 1 Angers 1, Metz 1 Reims 1, Montpellier 3 Lorient 1, Strasbourg 1 Troyes 1, Rennes 1 Nantes 0. AFP

Ronaldo denied late winner

ITALIAN LEAGUE

Milan, Italy - Cristiano Ronaldo was denied a last-gasp winner to save Juventus after his stoppage-time header was ruled out for offside in a dramatic 2-2 draw at Udinese, while Jose Mourinho got off to a winning start at Roma with a 3-1 victory over Fiorentina.

Ronaldo started on the bench at the Dacia Arena in Udine amid rumours he is looking for a way out of the Italian giants, but he almost snatched the three points deep into stoppage time after Juve insisted he was going nowhere this term.

After the match returning coach Massimiliano Allegri played down the controversy, saying that he was always planning to bring on Ronaldo.

"Cristiano is OK... It's the start of the season and seeing the condition everyone is in and thinking about the game, especially at the beginning, I put him on the bench knowing that there would be a need for him to come on," he told broadcaster DAZN.

Allegri's Juve looked to be cruising to victory when Paulo Dybala, wearing the captain's armband, and Juan Cuadrado put them two ahead midway through the first half.



Juventus' Cristiano Ronaldo (L) and Udinese's Bram Nuytinck vie for the ball

But two second-half blunders from Juve 'keeper Wojciech Szczesny allowed Udinese to take a point through Roberto Pereyra's penalty and a Gerard Deulofeu strike.

Ronaldo entered the field to loud applause from the Juve fans on the hour mark with Juve leading 2-1 and he was unlucky not to restore their two-goal advantage when his header from a Dybala cross flashed wide.

And with just seconds left he wheeled away after meeting

Federico Chiesa's pinpoint cross with a trademark header, celebrating with his jubilant teammates who thought he had saved their skins. However he could only watch on in desperation as VAR ruled it out.

Abraham repays Mourinho

It was the most dramatic moment in an eventful night in the Italian top flight, with six red cards in four matches and three big-name managers returning to

the touchline. The one with the biggest reputation - Mourinho - was made happy by two assists from new signing Tammy Abraham who shone on his Roma debut at the Stadio Olimpico.

With Fiorentina already down to ten men, in the 26th minute Abraham slipped through Henrikh Mkhitaryan whose finish was given as a goal after a VAR check. Nicolo Zaniolo's second yellow card gave Fiorentina side hope and Nikola Milenkovic levelled the scores on the hour mark.

However great work again from Abraham - who also hit the bar - led to Roma retaking the lead through Jordan Veretout four minutes later, the 23-year-old just about staying outside before rolling a perfect low cross which allowed the French midfielder to slot home.

Veretout made sure Mourinho got three points from his first match in Serie A since winning the league with Inter Milan in 2010 when he rolled home the third in the 79th minute after collecting a Eldor Shomurodov pass.

OTHER RESULTS:

Bologna 3 Salernitana 2, Napoli 2 Venezia 0. AFP

Lukaku strikes as Chelsea sink Arsenal

ENGLISH PREMIER LEAGUE

London, UK - Romelu Lukaku scored on his second Chelsea debut as the club's record signing inspired a 2-0 win at troubled Arsenal, while Harry Kane made his first appearance for Tottenham this season in a 1-0 win against Wolves. Dele Alli's tenth minute penalty gave Spurs the win at Molineux. In Sunday's other game, Mason Greenwood salvaged a 1-1 draw for Manchester United at Southampton.

Lukaku has rejoined Chelsea from Italian champions Inter

Milan for US\$133mn and the Belgian striker made an immediate repayment on that huge investment in the London derby at the Emirates Stadium. He took just 15 minutes to showcase his power and predatory instincts. Holding off Pablo Mari, Lukaku kept the Chelsea attack going before shrugging aside the Arsenal defender as he surged into the six-yard box to tap in Reece James' cross.

James scored Chelsea's second himself with a superb strike into the far corner after Mason

Mount picked out the unmarked defender inside the Arsenal area.

Lacklustre Arsenal were booed off at half-time and Mikel Arteta's team are pointless and goalless after following their limp loss at Brentford with a second defeat.

At St Mary's, United trailed to Fred's own goal. While Ole Gunnar Solskjaer's side left the south-coast frustrated, they did equal Arsenal's English top-flight record of 27 successive away league games without defeat.

Southampton took their con-

troversial lead in the 30th minute.

Bruno Fernandes felt he was fouled when a barge from Jack Stephens left the United midfielder in a heap but referee Craig Pawson waved play on. Moussa Djeneo and Adam Armstrong worked the ball to Che Adams on the edge of the United area and his shot deflected off Fred's outstretched boot as it flashed past David De Gea. Greenwood equalised in the 55th minute, firing under home keeper Alex McCarthy from 12 yards. AFP



Chelsea's striker Romelu Lukaku (second from right) celebrates after scoring against Arsenal at the Emirates Stadium in London on Sunday (AFP)