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INDIAN INDEPENDENCE DAY - SPECIAL SUPPLEMENT

New alliance to steer shift towards green economy

Our Correspondent
Muscat

Oman has set up a national hydrogen alliance - called Hy-Fly - to place the sultanate firmly on the world map for the development and deployment of clean hydrogen.

Led by the Ministry of Energy and Minerals, the alliance is facilitated by Petroleum Development Oman's Energy Renewal unit with participations of the Authority for Public Services Regulation, PDO, Energy Development Oman, OQ, Oman LNG, BP Oman, Oman Shell, Total Energies Oman, Sultan Qaboos University, GUTech and the ports of Sohar and Duqm.

Hy-Fly is made up of key public and private organisations who will work together to support and facilitate the production, trans-

Oman is well placed due to its climate, geo-strategic position and its know-how to drive the shift towards renewables and green hydrogen

H E SALIM AL AUFI



portation and utilisation of clean hydrogen for domestic use and export. In the run up to achieving this, the alliance will promote clean hydrogen through investments, technologies, policies, and expertise across the entire hydrogen supply chain. This will support national energy security, decarbonisation, and ultimately a successful transition to green

economy. The alliance is seen as a milestone in Oman's drive to diversify its energy mix while addressing the mounting climate change realities. Hydrogen is believed to have a significant potential to cut greenhouse gases in the sectors responsible for global emissions. H E Salim al Aufi, undersecretary in the ministry, said, "Oman

has a reputation as an established, well-connected and reliable energy producer and exporter, and the country is well placed due to its climate, geo-strategic position and its know-how to drive the shift towards renewables and green hydrogen.

"The aim of Hy-Fly is to create a leading national and international industry and a government/public authority alliance to drive the development and deployment of clean hydrogen in line with Oman Vision 2040's Energy Diversification Plans."

The establishment of Hy-Fly comes as one of the outcomes of the ongoing Hydrogen Economy Feasibility Study that is being governed by a ministry-led Steering Committee, constituting various government entities and energy companies.

Continued on Page 03

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Vaccination mandatory to attend classes

Our Correspondent
Muscat

To return to normalcy and offline lessons in the new academic year - 2021/2022 - a few institutions have confirmed that vaccination will be mandatory for students to attend classes in their colleges and universities.

A statement issued by Sultan Qaboos University said, 'SQU is keen about the health and safety of its students, and it supports the efforts of the National Immunisation Campaign against COVID-19. Therefore, the university urges you to take the

COVID-19 vaccine at the nearest vaccination centre of the Ministry of Health in all governorates of the sultanate. Due to the imminent start of the 2021/2022 academic year, the university stresses the need for students to get vaccinated as a condition to attend university. Wishing everyone continued health and wellness.'

Speaking to *Muscat Daily*, an official of a private university said, "We have sent a message to our students that they should get immunised against COVID-19 in order to return to class."

Muhammad Ali, father of a

student, said, "The university sent a message saying 75 per cent of students must be vaccinated so that lessons start offline."

Meanwhile, the Ministry of Health is continuing to vaccinate school students of 12 years and older. The ministry has confirmed that there are joint efforts between the ministries of Health and Education to vaccinate the 12 to 18 years age group - a total of 320,000 male and female students - with the first dose which will facilitate their return to classrooms in the new academic session.



Free jobs for expats in Dhahirah

Our Correspondent
Muscat

The Ministry of Health (MoH) will start a free vaccination campaign for expatriates in Dhahirah governorate from Sunday.

In a statement, the Directorate General of Health Services (DGHS) in Dhahirah Governorate, informed residents and business owners that the immunisation drive for non-Omanis in the governorate will start from August 15.

In the first phase, DGHS will target barbers, beauty salon staff, domestic workers and

farm labourers.

'Other target categories will be announced in the coming days. All are needed to make an appointment and bring with them their resident cards,' it stated.

The campaign targets residents of 18 years and older and will be carried out from 8am to 1.30pm at Al Muhallab bin Abi Sufra Hall in Ibri, Sports Hall in Dhank and the office of the wali in Yanqul.

MoH has been running a free vaccination campaign for expatriates in Dhofar and Duqm since June. It is currently administering the second dose in Dhofar.



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Madayn merges three of its centres to streamline structure

Our Correspondent
Muscat

The Board of Directors of the Public Establishment for Industrial Estates - Madayn - has decided to merge the Industrial Innovation Centre, National Business Centre and Madayn Industrial Academy into one unit called 'Madayn Industrial Innovation Academy'.

The merger was announced at a recent meeting of Madayn Board of Directors chaired by H E Dr Sale bin Said Masan, Undersecretary for Commerce and Industry in the Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion and chairman of Madayn Board of Directors.

The decision comes within efforts to streamline Madayn organisational structure, rationalise operating expenses and explore

and study value-added investment opportunities in various sectors. Additionally, the merger is expected to boost performance of factories based in Madayn's industrial cities, optimise efficiency and national capabilities through training efforts, and provide consultancy services to Madayn and its companies.

The Madayn Industrial Innovation Academy will focus on three paths or aspects - local content and opportunity development; industrial incubators and innovation; and training and rehabilitation. Through local content and opportunity development, the academy will concentrate on studying existing supply chain management in various economic sectors, develop associated investment opportunities, and provide enablers that contribute to better achieve

the expected outcome such as offtake agreements and any other enablers required by the projects.

The industrial enterprises resulting from local content and opportunity development will qualify for industrial incubators and innovation and be localised/incubated, and existing industries will be improved and developed by focusing on the innovation aspect. Being the key incubator for Omani industries, Madayn plays a significant role in providing the necessary support to industries for their advancement.

The third aspect of Madayn Industrial Innovation Academy - focused on training, rehabilitation and consultancy studies - will provide training opportunities to national cadres to benefit from the investment opportuni-

ties resulting from local content. This aspect will also take into account the significance of providing consultancy services to Madayn and its companies to achieve strategic partnership between the academy and Oman Vision 2040 Implementation Follow-up Unit.

The decision to merge Madayn's three centres follows a thorough study to keep pace with current and future prospects, unify efforts, improve performance, reduce costs, and achieve sustainable factories in Madayn's industrial cities.

The academy aims at serving the industrial sector, providing advanced innovation solutions to meet the needs of the local market, enhancing local content, reducing imports, and boosting Omani exports to foreign markets.

High-level team visits AI zone in Duqm



Muscat - The Public Authority for Special Economic Zones and Free Zones (OPAL) organised a field visit for the Steering Committee team in charge of supervising the zone designated for artificial intelligence (AI) in Duqm on Saturday.

The steering committee includes representatives from several government entities, namely the Ministry of Defence, the Royal Omnia Police, the Ministry of Higher Education, Research and Innovation, the Ministry of Transport, Communications and Information Technology, and Telecommunication Regulatory Authority.

This came after the recent announcement by OPAL allocating an area of 18sqkm to support and encourage the use of modern techniques, including artificial intelligence in the Special Eco-

The authority is seeking to achieve key objectives, including the localisation of investment opportunities in the field of artificial intelligence, drone experiments and future technology

AHMED AL FARSI

nomie Zone at Duqm.

Ahmed bin Sale al Farsi, chairman of the committee, said, "The authority is seeking to achieve several key objectives. They include the localisation of investment opportunities in the field of artificial intelligence,

drone experiments and future technology, in addition to building basic infrastructure to apply e-government strategy and smart cities.

"This will create research opportunities in the zone under the supervision of the committee for practical and academic uses, and help overcome the challenges and difficulties facing the implementation of artificial intelligence projects, drones and future technology in the zone."

The meeting of the committee at the Special Economic Zone at Duqm concluded after agreeing on the initial plan of the zone designated for artificial intelligence, while preparing the activities that can be exercised within the zone, as well as the incentives and facilities to be offered to investors in Artificial Intelligence Zone.

BLOOD DONATION MARKS PAKISTAN'S INDEPENDENCE DAY



The Pakistani Embassy organised a blood donation camp at Pakistan School Muscat on Saturday to celebrate the 75th anniversary of the country's Independence Day. H E Ahsan Wagan, Ambassador (centre), also donated blood. Muhammad bin Ahmed al Busaidi, deputy wali, wilayat of Muttrah and Hon Dr Saeed bin Muhammad al Saqlawi, Member of the State Council, too were present (Syed Fasiuddin)

Honey production in Oman decreases

Our Correspondent
Muscat

The production of honey in the sultanate decreased by 0.7 per cent to 612,000kg by the end of 2020, compared to 2019.

According to the National Centre for Statistics and Information's yearbook, the production of honey in the sultanate increased by 38 per cent by the end of 2019, recording 615,752kg of honey, compared to 443,477kg in 2018.

The Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Water Resources



said that the total worth of honey sold in the sultanate during 2020 was RO14,251,020.

According to ministry's statistics, the number of beekeepers in the sultanate reached 6,231 with 137,600 honeycombs.

The ministry has been organising honey markets annually since 2014. Honey sales jumped by 15.7 per cent in 2019 over 2018. Sales from the 13th Omnia Honey Market, which was held in December 2019, accounted for RO142,026, while the market organised in June 2019 saw sales worth RO99,000.

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Easing of restrictions eagerly awaited as cases drop further

Shaddad al Musalmay
Muscat

As daily infection count drops and more people continue to get vaccinated, an announcement from the Supreme Committee easing some of the restrictions that are currently in place is eagerly awaited.

On Thursday, the Ministry of Health (MoH) reported 224 new cases and six deaths, the lowest number of daily deaths in many months. With these figures, the total number of cases registered in the sultanate now stands at 299,642, including 3,974 deaths.

‘Twenty-three patients were admitted to hospitals across the country in a 24-hour period on Thursday, taking the total number of inpatients to 281, including 124 in intensive care units. The total number of recoveries is 287,244, accounting for a recovery rate of 96 per cent,’ an MoH statement said.

Besides easing the ban on night movement, a decision is also awaited on resumption of travel without PCR tests and allowing vaccinated passengers from 21 banned countries to return to Oman. Expat employees with valid work visas have been stranded out of the sultanate for several months as a result of the travel ban. ‘One of the eagerly awaited decisions is lifting of restrictions from countries that are on the travel ban list, especially from Tanzania, India, Philippines, Bangladesh and Pakistan where most of the expatriate workforce come from. The ban has affected many businesses and the author-



I just hope visit visas are issued soon. My son has been stranded in Malaysia for so many months

N MATHEWS

ities need to consider this,” said Abdullah al Naamani, a construction company owner.

The sultanate has currently suspended entry of passengers travelling from Sudan, Brazil, Nigeria, Tanzania, Sierra Leone, Ethiopia, India, United Kingdom, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Philippines, Thailand, Malaysia, Vietnam, Indonesia, Iraq, Iran, Tunisia, Libya, Argentina, Colombia, and any other country

if they passed through any of these in the 14 days prior to their request to enter the sultanate.

The current restrictions include a ban on visit visas which has affected many who have been separated from their loved ones for several months. ‘I am longing to see my son who is studying in Malaysia. We are Sri Lankan, but he can’t go there owing to travel restrictions to Sri Lanka. The only place for him is

to come to Oman until things open up in Sri Lanka. I just hope visit visas are issued soon. My son has been stranded in Malaysia for so many months,” said N Mathews, a Sri Lankan resident in Muscat.

Additionally, a nightly 10pm to 4am curfew is in place as a preventive measure against the spread of the virus. All commercial activities and movement, excluding home deliveries, are restricted during this period, until further notice, which has affected many businesses especially small shops.

‘The night curfew has affected my business. I have to close my shop at 9pm. Before the pandemic, the shop did good busi-

ness mostly at night. Now people want to rush back home before the night curfew. I hope this ends soon,” said Fatmah al Naamani, a clothing shop owner in Amerat.

Other restrictions, including limiting public gatherings, mandatory use of protective face coverings and compliance with social distancing guidelines, remain in force.

A decision allowing Friday prayers in mosques is also eagerly awaited. ‘My main concern now is the Friday prayer. Many other countries have allowed worshippers to congregate on Fridays. I hope the authorities reconsider and allow Friday prayers in mosques,” said Mohsin Rashid.

@shadadm



Masirah fishermen’s village to be completed in 2022

Our Correspondent
Muscat

A fishermen's village project in Masirah, South Sharqiyah governorate, will be completed in January 2022, according to the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Water Resources.

The fishermen's village being developed by the ministry aims to encourage Omani fishermen to pursue their occupation by providing them with the basic necessities needed. This is in line with efforts to raise the fisheries sector's contribution to the GDP and generate job opportunities for the youth.

According to a ministry official, the project, which was started in January 2019 ‘aims to attract fishermen from other coastal governorates to work in Masirah and limit violations committed by unauthorised expat fishermen’.

‘The project targets about 50 fishermen from outside Masirah.’

The official informed that the project will provide infrastructure, including residential buildings, health facilities, ice-making

units and refrigerated warehouses. ‘The project will create a model fishermen's village with complete facilities and services and increase their economic output by raising the quality of fisheries, besides maintaining a database of the quantity and quality of catch.’

Meanwhile, the ministry has confirmed that the expansion work of the fishing harbour in Masirah continues.

Youssef bin Hamad al Nahdi, head of the Fisheries Development Centre in the ministry, said the expansion project includes development of a refuelling area, as well as construction of a marina for more artisanal fishing boats and larger vessels. It is expected to be completed by the end of August.

‘The project aims to develop fisheries wealth, boost food security and upgrade the port's infrastructure. The total length of the two berths is approximately 180m,’ Nahdi said.

According to the ministry, the production from artisanal fishing in Masirah in 2020 amounted to 24,239 tonnes touching a total value of RO19,833,000.



New alliance to steer shift towards green economy

Continued from Page 01

Steve Phimister, managing director of PDO, said, ‘Over time, hydrogen has the potential to help transform the domestic and global energy sector, alter the way we all produce and consume energy, and address carbon emissions locally and around the world. We are committed to playing a key role in this alliance for hydrogen to drive a pivotal change as we transition to a greener, more sustainable and diversified economy, in line with Oman Vision 2040.’

According to Dr Salim al Huthaili, CEO of OQ Alternative Energy, Oman is very well positioned to take a leadership role in the global energy transition stage through partnership and collaboration. ‘Green hydrogen is becoming the molecule of choice to bridge the demand gap as economies continue to grow. This alliance will unify the efforts to build capabilities, share best practices and set the tone for global alliances.’

Also on the occasion, Haifa al

Khaifi, Interim CEO of Energy Development Oman, said, ‘EDO welcomes the creation of Oman's hydrogen alliance - Hy-Fly. EDO has indeed defined an ambitious vision to become a leading player in Oman's energy transition and is therefore committed to be a driving force in the alliance.’

She informed that global demand for low-carbon blue or green hydrogen is expected to increase significantly over the next 20-25 years, driven by decarbonisation efforts in industry, transportation as well as in power and heat. ‘Oman has the opportunity to become a major player in future hydrogen markets thanks to its high renewables and carbon capture, utilisation and storage potential, its competitive natural gas production and its geo-strategic position. The establishment of Hy-Fly is a major milestone to ensure Oman develops an ambitious national hydrogen strategy, roadmap and ecosystem.’

Describing clean hydrogen is one of the decarbonisation solu-

tions BP aims to provide to its customers in support of its new strategy to scale-up low-carbon energy businesses, Mohamed al Najwani, VP of wells at BP Oman, said, ‘Earlier this year, we announced several clean hydrogen projects in Europe and the UK. By joining this alliance, we are looking to support Oman in its energy transition strategy and explore opportunities in clean hydrogen.’

Dr Hussain al Salmi, acting rector of GUTech, said, ‘We are committed to and aligned with Oman Vision 2040 - Renewable Energy Strategy. We continue to be active pioneers and supporters of hydrogen-related initiatives in Oman, especially green hydrogen. We believe that forming the national hydrogen alliance is a positive step in bringing key stakeholders together and that more stakeholders will be added in the future. This alliance gives the industry a discussion platform and a united voice which will help in the development of hydrogen strategies in Oman.’



FLOATING TENDERS

Oman Airports Company announces the following tenders:

Tender REF.NO	TENDER TITLE	DOC'S FEE OMR	Last date for DOC's DISTRIBUTION	TENDER SUBMISSION DATE
ITC-210802	Refurbishment of Tape Library Infrastructure at Muscat International Airport and Salalah Airport.	100	24 th August 2021	8 th September 2021
ITC-210803	Update of Data Center Firewalls Technology at Muscat International Airport and Salalah Airport.	500	24 th August 2021	8 th September 2021
ITC-210804	Update of SIEM IBM QRadar Technology and Renewal of Licenses & Support.	100	24 th August 2021	8 th September 2021
ITC-210805	Provision of Solution for Control Verification System.	100	24 th August 2021	8 th September 2021

Tenders Collection: Specialized companies may obtain Tender Documents/ Specifications from Procurement Department upon receipt of complete payment of tender fees by credit card and receive scanned copy of deposit Receipt along with a copy of Company Commercial Registration Certificate to Email: (finance.oamc@omanairports.com) provided with company name, tender number & contact person as a mandatory.

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LETTER TO THE EDITOR

Waiting for the end of travel restrictions

This refers to the report 'Wait been too long for expatriates to return to Oman' (*Muscat Daily*, page 1, August 11).

Like some of those mentioned in the report, there are several thousands waiting to return to the sultanate and the reasons vary, either to join family, resume work or may be to streamline struggling businesses due to pandemic.

Even though online learning has become very popular over the past several months, it is a fact that youngsters, school-going children in particular, are going through tremendous pressure and mental strain being indoors, in the absence of a parent in certain circumstances due to the travel restrictions in place. The uncertainty adds more pressure on families.

Residents expect that flight operations will start soon. The resumption of flights can be announced subject to completing two doses of approved vaccines and mandatory quarantine. This is what some other GCC countries have done and it helps avoid mass arrival of people.

It would also be ideal for those arriving to have home quarantine and mandatory PCR upon completion of the quarantine period.

Ramachandran Nair
Ruwi

Homegrown travel company puts Musandam on world tourist map

Our Correspondent
Muscat

The success of Musandam Sea Adventure Travel and Tourism has put the spotlight on the youth as they have shown how dedication can spur growth and bring recognition even for small organisations.

According to Abdul Fattah Ahmed al Shehhi, chairman of the company, Omani youth proved their competence and excellence through the tourism company.

Musandam Sea Adventure has been recognised by several tourism organisations and won awards as a leading operator in the Middle East.

Shehhi said that this story of success began in 2001, when the company was started with only a single vessel and was only the second such tourism-specialised company in the governorate of Musandam.

The company was founded by a committed team of individuals who with many years of experience in the tourism industry saw



This success story began in 2001, when the company was started with a single vessel

ABDUL AL SHEHHI

the need for more intimate, exclusive and personal tours.

"In 2002, I received an invitation from a German company, whose officials previously visited us in the governorate to participate in an exhibition to promote tourism. In the exhibition, we highlighted tourism and related products offered by us to tourists wishing to visit islands, fjords and creeks in the governorate."

He added that in 2006, he



(Supplied photos)

utilised German expertise to help him attract tourists and to promote his company.

"We hired Omanis as well but only eight of them remained while the others found other jobs in the public and private sectors."

He further said that the company got favourable response from tourists from both inside and outside the sultanate.

Soon the company was transporting 200 people a day, which

forced Shehhi to increase the number of operating vessels. "In 2012, I designed a yacht specifically for the project, and it was launched in December 2014, eventually attracting more tourists."

The company offers various packages in different vessels. A trip on a shared vessel costs RO15 for citizens, while for people of other nationalities it costs RO20. Yachts can also be

booked fully, depending on the number of people, and costs between RO45 to RO55.

Shehhi informed that the monthly revenue during the winter season hit RO70,000 and in the summer RO30,000, before the COVID-19 pandemic.

"Nowadays, revenues do not exceed RO5,000 as a result of the current circumstances and the suspension of tourism activities."

RAO, US infantry units conclude joint exercise

Thumrait - The Royal Army of Oman (RAO) and the United States Army's Infantry units concluded a joint drill codenamed 'Valley of Fire 2021' on Thursday.

The concluding event was attended by Brig Hamid Abdullah al Balushi, commander of RAO's 11th Infantry Brigade. During the 11-day exercise, the RAO was represented by the 11th Infantry Brigade.



The exercise was conducted with the participation of the Sultan of Oman's Parachutes Regi-

ment, the Sultan of Oman's Armoured Division, the Sultan of Oman's Artillery Regiment, the

Royal Air Force of Oman and the SAF Signals and Engineering divisions.

The joint drill kicked off at Thumrait Air Base in Dhofar governorate amid precautions to avoid the spread of COVID-19.

Simulation and role-playing tasks of the exercise were aimed to provide training in accordance with a macro plan set by the RAO to achieve the desired na-

tional objectives. Such plans seek to maintain preparedness and high combat ability. They come within the context of annual training programmes carried out in cooperation with friendly countries to exchange expertise in military fields. The concluding event was also attended by senior officers from RAO's 11th Infantry Brigade and the US Army. ONA

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Oman's deficit reaches RO1.1bn in first half of 2021

Our Correspondent Muscat

Oman posted a budget deficit of RO1.108bn for the first half of 2021 as the government revenue dropped 9.7 per cent due to reduced oil production and lower prices in the initial months of the year.

The sultanate's deficit during the January-June period represents 49.5 per cent of the deficit approved for the full year 2021

and 25.1 per cent of the actual deficit recorded in 2020, the Ministry of Finance said in its monthly bulletin.

By the end of the first half of 2021, the government's total revenue amounted to RO4.361bn, a decline of 9.7 per cent compared with RO4.830bn in the first half of 2020. Net oil revenue - which accounted for over 52 per cent in total revenues - came at RO2.273bn for the first half year, a drop of 11.6 per cent over the

same period of 2020. 'This is a result of low oil price, a reduction in oil production in compliance to OPEC+ deal and persistent consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic,' the ministry said.

Gas revenue also decreased by RO14mn to RO727mn as of end-June 2021 compared with the same period in 2020. 'This is due to low sales price of liquefied natural gas affected by the decline in global oil prices,' the ministry noted.

The government's current revenue increased by 31 per cent to RO1.336bn in the first half of 2021 from RO1.02bn in the same period of 2020. The increase in current revenue was driven by RO413mn dividends received from Oman Investment Authority and tax and fees which generated a sum of RO656.2mn, the Ministry of Finance noted.

Total public expenditure decreased 3.3 per cent during the first half of 2021 to RO5.469bn

from RO5.656bn in 2020.

'This (decline in spending) comes in line with the measures taken by the government to rationalise spending and mitigate economic consequences,' the Ministry of Finance said.

It said defence and security expenditures represent 26 per cent of total spending, while expenditures of government civil units account for 36 per cent of total spending. In addition, debt servicing represents 7 per cent of

total spending.

According to the ministry's bulletin, the government has introduced 'loan repayment' as a new budget item within the spending in order to repay future loans. Total funds allocated for such budget items amounted to RO75mn as of end-June 2021, and to be increased to RO150mn by the end of 2021.

During the first half of 2021, the Ministry of Finance has managed to settle the payments of

the private sector with an amount of RO575.6mn. This reflects the payment vouchers received through e-financial system and which have completed the documentary cycle, the ministry added.

It said Energy Development Oman is still in the process of being established and the government continued to cover the expenses of oil and gas sectors, which amounted to RO702.7mn as of end-June 2021.

Oman and India sign agreement in field of mining



Muscat - The sultanate's Ministry of Energy and Minerals and India's state-owned Indian Rare Earths Limited (IREL) on Thursday signed a memorandum of understanding (MoU) to promote and develop cooperation between Oman and India in the field of mining.

The MoU was signed by H E Munu Mahawar, India's Ambassador to Oman, and H E Salim al Aufi, Undersecretary of the Ministry of Energy and Minerals.

The MoU provides for the exchange of laws and regulations endorsed by the two countries in the exploitation of mineral resources and data about investment opportunities, according to a press release.

The two sides encourage cooperation in exchanging experiences in the fields of innovation and application of techniques. Both countries will explore modern

methods of excavation for minerals and development of industries based on minerals, notably rare minerals, with the aim of realising added value in this field. This is besides enhancing cooperation in technical research and geological surveys.

The MoU comes in pursuance of the Ministry of Energy and Minerals' efforts to develop the minerals sector in a manner that responds to aspirations attached to this vital sector, being a key pillar in economic diversification as envisaged by Oman's 2040 Vision.

The agreement with India also comes within the context of the ministry's keenness on attracting scholarly expertise in exploring mineral resources in Oman, particularly minerals associated with the fourth industrial revolution.



Delta variant crimps oil demand outlook: IEA

Paris, France - Global oil demand is expected to grow slower than previously forecast this year as the spread of COVID's Delta variant has prompted lockdowns in major consuming countries, the International Energy Agency (IEA) has said.

Demand surged in June as mobility increased in North America and Europe.

But it 'abruptly reversed course' in July as the Delta variant undermined deliveries in China, Indonesia and other parts of Asia, the IEA said in a monthly report.

'The outlook for the remainder of the year has also been appreciably downgraded due to the worsening of the pandemic and revisions to historical data,' the report said.

'New COVID-19 restrictions imposed in several major oil consuming countries, particularly in Asia, look set to reduce mobility and oil use.'

The agency now forecasts demand rising by 5.3mn barrels per day (bpd) in 2021 to 96.2mn bpd. That is down 300,000 bpd from its previous estimations.

Global output, meanwhile, is expected to rise further after the OPEC group of major oil producers and its allies agreed to boost production, the IEA said.

With US petrol prices rising, the White House complained on Wednesday that the production increase by the OPEC+ group was 'simply not enough' to fuel the global economic recovery from the pandemic.

AFP



الأنوار للاستثمارات ش.م.ع

Al Anwar Investments SAOG

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Directors' Report

Dear Shareholders,

On behalf of the Board of Directors, I am pleased to present the un-audited consolidated results of Al Anwar Investments SAOG (AAI) for the three-month period ended on 30 June 2021.

Financial Overview of Al Anwar Investments Group

Al Anwar Investments has maintained a prudent and proactive approach towards managing its investments. Business clusters of our Group companies are making efforts to have continued stability in the present challenging economic environment resulting from the double impact of COVID 19 and reduction in oil prices. Certain associates have been resilient in these difficult market conditions and consequently have maintained their profitability. However, certain other investments have not done well due to the adverse market conditions. Overall, we believe that our investee companies are prepared for the difficult times. Our immediate objective is to ensure that we meet our commitments and prepare ourselves to take advantage of the opportunities which will arise once the current economic situation improves.

We reported a consolidated net profit of OMR 839,000 for the three month period ended on 30 June 2021 as against profit of OMR 223,000 for the three month ended on 30 June 2020.

Net asset per share of the Group is 159 Baisas per share on 30 June 2021 as against 158 Baisas per share on 30 June 2020.

The unaudited consolidated financial statements presented are an outcome of the following:

- The revenues generated and the costs incurred up to 31 March 2021 by its subsidiaries namely:
 - Al Anwar International Investment LLC, 100% subsidiary of AAI,
 - Al Anwar Taleem LLC, 100% subsidiary of AAI,
 - Al Anwar Hospitality SAOC, 100% subsidiary of AAI and
 - Al Anwar Industrial Investments SAOC, 100% subsidiary of AAI
- The Share of Profit/Loss) achieved by Associate Companies up to 31 March 2021 (Al Ruwad International Education Services SAOC up to 30 April 2021) in which AAI owns between 20% and 50% of their share capital or where AAI has significant influence on the Board of Directors of the company,
- Reclassification of Almondz Global Securities Ltd, India as an associate,
- Dividends from investments,
- Realized gains made from divestments and
- Realised and un-realised gains / losses from other listed & unlisted securities.

Updates on Investments

1. Al Maha Ceramics SAOG

The Company has reported revenue of OMR 2,380,745 for the three month period ended on 31 March 2021, as compared with OMR 2,064,945 for previous period, a growth of 15%. Net profit after tax for the period is OMR 603,941 as compared to OMR 326,460 in the previous period, a growth of 85%, which is mainly due to increase in the sales revenue and effective cost control measures.

2. Voltamp Energy SAOG

The Company has reported revenue of OMR 6,253,142 for the three month period ended on 31 March 2021, as compared with OMR 9,944,028 for previous period, a decline of 37%. Net loss after tax (Attributable to shareholders of Parent Company) for the period is OMR 5,195 compared to Net Profit of OMR 335,075 in the previous period, a decline of 98%. Due to lockdown related to COVID-19, the Company faced many challenges including availability of workforce, delay in inflow of material, inability of customers to attend final inspection, which resulted in lower revenue. The Company has taken numerous measures to control both direct and indirect costs to reduce the impact of reduction in revenue.

3. Arabia Falcon Insurance Company SAOG

The Company has reported Gross Written Premium of OMR 5,916,676 during the three month period ended on 31 March 2021 as compared to OMR 5,061,590 for the previous period, a growth of 17%. The Net profit after tax for the period is OMR 543,415 compared to OMR 38,330 in previous period, a very significant increase, contributed by better underwriting income combined with higher investment income and control on expenses.

4. Al Ruwad International for Education Services SAOC

The Company has reported decline in revenue and profitability for the three month period ended on 30 April 2021, primarily due to decline in student enrolment at the beginning of the academic year. Certain student moved to other schools with lower fees. The school is now a fully approved to provide International Baccalaureate (IB) curriculum.

5. National Biscuits Industries Ltd. SAOG

The Company has reported revenue of OMR 11,070,587 for the nine month period ended on 31 March 2021, compared with OMR 10,587,877 for previous period, a growth of 5%. Net profit after tax for the period is OMR 843,703 as compared to OMR 812,430 in the previous period, a growth of 4%, which is

primarily due to better product mix and cost control.

6. The National Detergent Co. SAOG

The Company reported revenues of OMR 4,858,061 for the three month period ended on 31 March 2021, as compared with OMR 5,464,533 for the previous period, a reduction of 11%. Net profit for the period is OMR 246,138 as compared to OMR 345,399 in the previous period, a decline of 29%. There was a decline in value sales due to global Covid pandemic and collection issues.

7. Oman Chlorine SAOG

The Oman Chlorine Group has reported revenue of OMR 3,981,000 for the three month period ended on 31 March 2021 as compared with OMR 4,029,000 in the previous period, a decline of 1%. The net loss (Attributable to Parent Company Shareholders) for the period is OMR 152,000 as compared to profit of OMR 103,000 in the previous period. This significant decline in profitability is mainly on account of losses reported by the subsidiaries located in UAE and Qatar. The Oman operation reported a net profit of OMR 405,000 compared to previous period profit of OMR 422,000, a decline of 4%. The expansion of its current plant in Sohar from 45 to 75 tons per day is scheduled to come in to production by third quarter of 2021.

Union Chlorine LLC, UAE, a subsidiary, has declared net loss of OMR 359,000 during the three month period ended on 31 March 2021 compared to loss of OMR 157,000 in previous period. The parent company's share of loss is OMR 215,000. Despite the plant operating at capacity utilization of 104%, the revenue was lower due to lower international price of caustic flakes and consequently the subsidiary incurred losses.

Gulf Chlorine WLL, Qatar, a subsidiary, has declared a net loss of OMR 670,000 during the three month period ended 31 March 2021 compared to a loss of OMR 440,000 in previous period. The parent company's share of loss is OMR 342,000. With the projected commissioning of the Calcium Chloride Plant by third quarter of 2021 by the joint venture "United Chemicals", will help the company enhance the plant capacity utilization and improve performance.

8. Almondz Global Securities Ltd, India

AAI hold 11.94% equity of the Company, this was previously classified as investment at "fair value through profit or loss account" and carried at market value till 31 March 2021. With effect from 24 June 2021 AAI has got the ability to exercise significant influence on the Board of Directors of the Company and from that date it is reclassified as Associate and accounted in accordance with our accounting policy for Associates.

9. Dhofar International Development and Investment Holding SAOG (DIDIC),

10. In the previous years, investment in DIDIC was classified partly as "Fair value through the profit and loss" (FVTPL) and partly as Fair value through other comprehensive income" (FVOCI). According to the Board's decision, the entire investment in DIDIC was strategic, and accordingly should have been classified as investment at FVOCI. The portion which was previously classified as FVTPL has now been reclassified as FVOCI. This correction in presentation has been made as a prior year adjustment under IAS 8.

Outlook

We foresee a challenging year ahead due to temporary suspension of public activities to contain the COVID-19 pandemic in Oman and around the world.

In the current capital market, AAI sees opportunity to make further investment and we are exploring opportunities in our strategic sectors, which will diversify our investment portfolio. We are confident that AAI and its Group companies will continue to play a pivotal role in Oman's economic growth, create job opportunities for Omani nationals, and attract foreign investments in the Sultanate of Oman.

Thanks, and Appreciation

On behalf of the Board of Directors, I would like to take this opportunity to express our greetings and good wishes to His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik, and pray to Allah to grant him and his Government success to lead the country and the people to greater prosperity and progress.

The Board records its sincere appreciation to Ministry of Commerce and Industry and Investment Promotion, Capital Market Authority, Muscat Stock Exchange, Bankers, Auditors for their continued support to AAI and the group companies.

I would also like to express my sincere appreciation to the Board of Directors of all Al Anwar Group companies for direction given to the managements of the respective companies. I place on record my sincere thanks and appreciation for the dedicated efforts of the management team and all employees of the group companies.

I would also like to convey my sincere thanks to the Shareholders of AAI for the confidence they have reposed in the company and its Board.

For & on behalf of the Board of Directors of
Al Anwar Investments SAOG

Masoud Humaid Malik Al Harthy
Chairman
August 11, 2021

UNAUDITED INTERIM CONSOLIDATED STATEMENTS OF FINANCIAL POSITION

	30 June 2021 OMR'000	30 June 2020 OMR'000	Audited 31 March 2021 OMR'000
Assets			
Investment in associates	32,391	31,229	30,972
Investments at fair value	14,555	15,873	15,353
Property and other assets	2,256	2,205	2,254
Receivables	141	184	1,344
Cash and bank balances	48	2,084	63
TOTAL ASSETS	49,391	51,575	49,986
Equity			
Share capital	20,000	20,000	20,000
Legal reserve	4,568	4,568	4,568
Fair value reserve (prior period restated)	(1,034)	(454)	(824)
Retained earnings (prior period restated)	8,180	7,413	7,222
Equity attributable to shareholders of Parent Company	31,714	31,527	30,966
Liabilities:			
Bank borrowings	17,472	18,725	18,725
Payables	205	1,323	295
TOTAL LIABILITIES	17,677	20,048	19,020
TOTAL EQUITY AND LIABILITIES	49,391	51,575	49,986
Net assets per share attributable to shareholders of the Parent Company (in Baisas)	159	158	155

UNAUDITED INTERIM CONSOLIDATED STATEMENTS OF COMPREHENSIVE INCOME FOR THE THREE MONTHS PERIOD ENDED 30th June 2021

	30 June 2021 OMR'000	30 June 2020 OMR'000
Share of results of associates	369	374
Bargain gain on reclassification of investment at fair value to associates	255	-
Interest income from Bonds	296	295
Unrealised gain (loss) of investment at fair value	297	(53)
Directors sitting fees	9	9
Net income	1,226	625
Administrative expenses	(65)	(94)
Financing charges	(288)	(271)
Corporate social responsibility	-	(23)
Director sitting fees	(34)	(14)
Total expenses	(387)	(402)
Net Profit for the period attributable to Equity holders of Parent Company	839	223
Other comprehensive income (expense): (prior year restated)		
Share of other comprehensive profit (loss) of associates	39	(254)
Net Increase (decrease) in value of investment	(129)	135
Other comprehensive profit (loss) for the period	(90)	(119)
Total comprehensive income for the period attributable to Equity holders of Parent Company	749	104
Earnings profit per share attributable to shareholders of Parent Company (in Baisas)	4	1

Note: The complete accounts will be sent by mail to any shareholder who requests them in Arabic or English as requested, within 7 days of receipt of the request.

MARKET ANALYSIS - OMAN

MSX index continues to remain range-bound

The benchmark index of the Muscat Stock Exchange (MSX30) last week remained almost flat. Financial index and Industrial index rose by 0.11 per cent and 0.85 per cent, respectively, while Services index declined by 0.18 per cent. MSX Shariah index closed higher by 1.11 per cent.

The Omani market continued to remain range-bound and we expect the same in the coming weeks.

Local news

►The Capital Market Authority (CMA) announced that it is preparing regulations to allow and licence crowdfunding platforms in the sultanate. Crowdfunding is a way of funding startups, small projects and businesses by raising funds from a large number of people through licensed online platforms. The CMA's board of directors has approved the necessary amendment in the capital market legislations to licence crowdfunding platforms in the sultanate. The CMA acknowledged that the crowdfunding platforms are innovative instruments and financial technologies which enable entrepreneurs and micro, small and medium enterprises to get more appropriate financing mechanisms. The CMA board emphasised the importance of launching such type of digital platforms for their significance as financing options for SMEs in

the sultanate to enhance economic development, job creation and financial inclusion.

►According to an outline of the Oman National Spatial Strategy (ONSS), approved by the government in March this year, the country's gross domestic product (GDP) is projected to grow at the rate of 3-5 per cent annually through to 2040, buoyed by a higher contribution from the non-hydrocarbon sector. Non-oil activities that will drive growth include knowledge and innovation industries, tourism, manufacturing, logistics, finance and services. As many as 16 industrial cities and related manufacturing zones are expected to form part of Oman's expanding industrial base by the year 2040 - up from 11 presently - with the non-oil economy playing an increasingly important role in powering economic growth over the next 20 years.

►Voltamp Energy announced that an agreement has been signed between the company and Bahwan Engineering Company to manufacture and supply a 500MVA/400kV transformer for Oman Electricity Transmission Company's network. The manufacturing of this category of transformers is considered first-of-its-kind in the sultanate and the region, while the signed deal comes within the framework of the contributions made by the Oman Electricity Transmission



Company in strengthening the fundamentals of infrastructure and supporting the energy industry sector in the sultanate.

►Oman Food Investment Holding Company (OFIC) - the government's food sector investment and development arm - has revealed that it is offering an equity stake of up to 35 per cent in its flagship poultry venture, A'Namaa Poultry, slated to commence commercial operation in January 2022. According to an official of wholly-state-owned OFIC, an affiliate of Oman Investment Authority (OIA) - the country's integrated sovereign wealth fund - the available stake is primarily

targeted at local and international private investors.

►The value of traded property in Oman went up by 30.4 per cent in the first six months of 2021 to RO1.370bn compared to RO1.050bn in the same period of 2020. Traded value of mortgage contracts during the same period went up by 16.3 per cent to RO757.7mn compared to RO651.7mn in the same period of last year.

Traded value of sale contracts rose by 70 per cent to RO602mn compared to RO354mn in the first half of 2020. Number of properties issued during the first half of 2021 also rose by 68 per cent to

129,149 compared to 76,818 in the same period of 2020.

GCC markets

Non-Saudis, who are legal residents of the kingdom, can now own a single property. The Absher platform has set out three requirements that must be fulfilled by expatriates in order to buy a property in Saudi Arabia: The foreigner should have a valid and unexpired residency ID (Muqem), the resident must provide all information about the property along with a copy of the title deed, and he/she should not have another property in the kingdom.

We at U Capital believe that

foreigners in Saudi Arabia could purchase property earlier as well but had to go through a long approval process which in some cases could even take years. With current announcement we believe that approval will no longer be required provided the investor meet the requirements as mentioned above. The news did not say anything about any long-term visa benefits or residency associated with purchase of such property or if there is any minimum amount over which such benefits would accompany. We believe this is a developing story and we would probably see some more announcements in the coming period.

Global news

The US Senate has passed a sweeping US\$1tn infrastructure bill that will provide hundreds of billions of dollars to upgrade America's crumbling transport systems.

The Senate, which is split equally between Democrats and Republicans, voted 69-30 in favour of the bill, with one Republican abstaining. The infrastructure bill will dispense US\$550bn in federal spending over the next five years, upgrading America's roads, bridges and tunnels, as well as airports, rail networks and the power grid.

The proposal also includes investments to improve Americans' access to broadband and

clean drinking water.

The independent US Congressional Budget Office published an analysis last week suggesting the package would add US\$256bn to the projected national deficit over the next decade.

The bill also includes a controversial plan to require cryptocurrency transactions to be reported to the Internal Revenue Service, the federal tax collector. The plan is expected to raise almost US\$30bn for the Treasury.

Recommendation

Global markets were buoyed last week on announcement of passing the trillion-dollar stimulus in the US along with lower-than-expected core inflation in the US.

Oil on the other hand remained slightly under pressure as the US requested OPEC+ alliance to pump more oil which led to drop in oil prices. Also, the delta variant and lockdown had its toll on oil prices too.

Regionally, the markets remained range-bound because of the drop in oil prices despite some phenomenal results of the petrochemical, consumer, and other sectors.

As advised last week, the market continued to remain range bound locally and we expect the same in the coming weeks. We advise investors to build position in fundamentally strong stocks on dip.

By special arrangement with U Capital

UK economy rebounds in second quarter as virus lockdown eases

London, UK - Britain's economy rebounded 4.8 per cent in the second quarter as the government began relaxing lockdown restrictions, official data showed.

The strong growth recovery was fuelled by consumer spending, while the government continued to provide massive financial support by for example paying the bulk of private sector wages.

But the rebound faces challenges as a jobs protection programme is set to end in September and global supply chain bottlenecks persist.

Gross domestic product had fallen 1.6 per cent in the first three months of the year, the Office for National Statistics (ONS) added in a statement.

"Today's figures show that our economy is on the mend showing strong signs of recovery," Finance Minister Rishi Sunak said in a separate statement.

Total UK output however remains 4.4 per cent lower compared with before the coronavirus pandemic, or final quarter of 2019.

The ONS, providing also its latest monthly data, said the UK economy grew 1 per cent in June, before England lifted nearly all lockdown restrictions from July.

Markets are looking closely at both growth and inflation data as nations emerge from lockdowns following vaccine rollouts.

Analysts warn that strong price rises could force central banks to hike interest rates sooner than expected, hindering the recovery.



Pressure eased on Wednesday however after official data showed US inflation had cooled slightly.

'Challenges emerging'

The outlook could be bumpy, analysts warn, as the government next month ends its furlough scheme that has kept millions of Britons in work during the pandemic.

And while the Bank of England last week maintained its forecast for the UK economy to rebound 7.5 per cent this year, returning to its pre-pandemic level, it had forecast a 5 percent rebound in the second quarter.

Britain's largest business lobby group, the CBI, warned of a bumpy road ahead following Thursday's positive data.

"Growth bounced back over the second quarter as restrictions on activity were gradually lifted, underscoring that tackling the pandemic goes hand-in-hand

with supporting economic growth," noted CBI economist Alpesh Paleja.

"Yet challenges to the recovery are emerging. Several supply bottlenecks have likely taken the edge off growth over the summer: A shortage of raw materials and semiconductors, continuing global supply chain disruption and staffing shortages."

Britain's recovery comes amid its fast-paced vaccination programme that has seen nearly 89 per cent of adults given at least one dose, while close to two-thirds are now fully jabbed.

The UK government on Wednesday said it will offer coronavirus vaccinations to all 16 and 17 year olds, but not to younger healthy teenagers as in many other Western countries.

It comes amid worries about the fast-spreading Delta variant of the coronavirus that has forced some nations to reimpose lockdowns.

AFP

China signals more crackdowns in pipeline for strained businesses

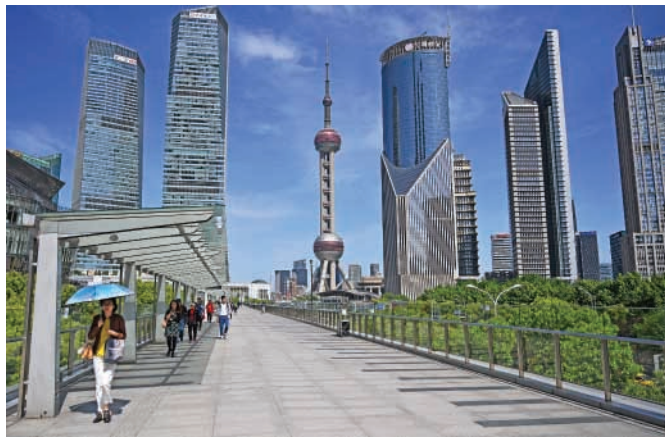
Beijing, China - China will implement tougher anti-monopoly rules and penalties over the next five years, according to new guidelines from the country's Cabinet, a signal that Beijing plans to tighten the screw further on the country's harried businesses.

A regulatory crackdown on sectors ranging from tech to education has roiled markets in recent months.

Guidelines published by the Communist Party's top decision-making body call for 'centralised special rectification' - propaganda speak for further government intervention.

Sectors including finance, public health, education and food and drug manufacturing would be targeted, the guidelines said.

"We will strengthen law enforcement in key areas related to



A file photo of the financial district of Lujiazui in Shanghai, China (AFP)

the vital interests of the people,' the document added.

Officials will 'actively' work on improving laws in areas including national security, technology and anti-monopoly rules, it said. The guidelines also promise to introduce 'good laws and good governance' on artificial intelligence, big data and cloud com-

puting - sectors that have been allowed to grow unchecked in recent years.

The document warned that Beijing will hike penalties for those who violate anti-monopoly laws, including by issuing 'a lifelong prohibition on entry' for the worst rule-breakers.

Officials also promised better

protections for industrial whistleblowers.

China recently unveiled sweeping new regulations for a range of industries that have rattled investors.

One rule forcing private tutoring companies to turn non-profit wiped out more than US\$70bn from their balance sheets.

Tech firms have also been battered as regulators tighten the leash citing data security and antitrust concerns.

And gaming companies recently saw shares plummet over fears they could be next in the sights of regulators.

The blueprint released 'suggests that the restructuring related to anti-monopoly will be a long-lasting policy direction', Ken Cheung Kin Tai, an analyst at Japan's Mizuho Bank, said in a research note.

AFP

Biden touts massive social spending plan

Washington, US - US President Joe Biden, who just scored an important victory with the passage of a giant infrastructure package, has highlighted another key goal of his administration: A massive social spending plan aimed at helping middle-class Americans.

"As we recover from this crisis, now is the moment to put in place the long-term plan to build back America better," Biden said in a speech at the White House.

The Democratic leader lamented the rising costs 'that are squeezing families month after month and year after year'.

"We need to make this economy work better for working families in the long run," he



US President Joe Biden

added.

The Senate last week passed a bipartisan infrastructure development bill that would see a US\$1.2tn investment in roads, bridges, water pipes and high-

speed Internet across the United States.

The measure now faces a make-or-break vote in the House of Representatives in coming weeks, where its future is less certain as divisions have sprung up in the Democratic majority.

Besides the economy, the Biden administration also wants to invest in 'human infrastructure' by boosting federal spending on health, education and childcare programmes.

Last Wednesday, the Senate approved a US\$3.5tn budget framework that includes major investment in social welfare programmes. The figure is equivalent to Germany's GDP in 2020.

While the infrastructure package enjoyed some cross-party support, this time around Republicans are unlikely to back the social spending plan, due to concerns that it would lead to inflation and further increase the US national debt. Some Democratic lawmakers have also been hesitant about the idea.

Biden, however, expressed confidence that the project will be 'fully paid for over the long term by having the largest corporations, including the 55 corporations that paid zero federal taxes last year, and the super wealth begin to pay their fair share'.

AFP

Finance your dream home with Bank Muscat's special one-time offers

In line with the vision 'To serve you better, everyday' and commitment to national development, Bank Muscat, the leading financial services institution in the Sultanate of Oman, has announced attractive home finance offers.

Easy and convenient credit approval can be obtained at any of the dedicated Baituna Sales Centres at Qurum, Ma'abala, Nizwa, Salalah, Barka, Sur, Saham, Sohar, Ibri, Buraimi and Ibra or at the bank's retail banking branches across Oman. Customers will be especially pleased with the maximum tenor of 25 years for Baituna facilities as well as the most attractive interest rates in the sultanate. Omanis and expatriate employees of government and semi-government institutions as well as Tier 1 companies will be eligible for



special discounted rates on both their home finance and takeover home finance from Bank Muscat till August 31.

Abdullah Tamman al Maashani, deputy general manager - Institutional Sales & Product Development, said, "We have seen that demand for Baituna Home Finance rising during this season. Hence in re-

sponse to customer feedback, we are offering special discounted rates to both home finance and takeover home finance customers. We call upon our valued customers to utilise these one-time offers at the earliest to finance their dream homes."

Bank Muscat is always committed to supporting the real estate sector, which contributes substantially to the sultanate's economic growth. Customers can use the bank's Baituna financing facilities to construct or purchase new homes as well as land for residential use. Bank Muscat customers can take advantage of the fast processing of applications across the bank's extensive network of branches and dedicated Sales Centres and the excellent insurance coverage for their financing. Flexible pay-

ment options and simple documentation makes Baituna the leading home finance facility in the Sultanate.

Baituna home finance is available for salaried government employees (Omani) with a minimum salary of RO250 and minimum service of three months for up to 25 years of home financing while employees of Tier 1 private sector companies (Omani) minimum salary of RO500 and a minimum of six months of service are eligible for home loans having a tenure of up to 25 years. Loans of up to RO500,000 are available through Baituna subject to the applicant fulfilling the relevant criteria. With Oman becoming an attractive real-estate investment destination in the region, the role of home financing is only set to grow more and more important.

Al Ahlia Insurance donates vaccines to those in need

To support Oman's COVID-19 vaccination drive, Al Ahlia Insurance, a leading general insurance provider, has donated 100 vaccines to low income and undocumented expatriates in the sultanate. The drive was in keeping with Al Ahlia's commitment to support the government with all available means through the ongoing pandemic.

The initiative, in association with a notable community group, What's Happening, Oman? (WhO), was organised at the Muscat Private Hospital where 100 first doses of the AstraZeneca vaccine were administered.

Praveen Kumar, CEO of Al Ahlia, was grateful for the opportunity extended by the WhO team. "Al Ahlia's purpose is to get our customers back on their feet in no time. Hence, it is our mission to help our communities at the time of need. The global pandemic has continued for more than a year, affecting our lifestyles and our sentiment. It became apparent to us that being healthy and safe is a prior-

ity, and we want to do our part and provide essential items to those in need. We are committed to the Sultanate of Oman and will continue to support wherever we can."

The community group WhO led the initiative and has been working with private organisations to increase the accessibility of vaccines in the sultanate. Al Ahlia is one of the few insurance companies to provide their commitment to this initiative. Showing her gratitude is Joanne James, founder of WhO, who expressed, "I want to give a massive shoutout to our good friends Al Ahlia Insurance, for their incredible gift to vaccinate 100 people. I am blown away by the kindness of people, if we keep working together, we can get so much done."

Prasanth R Nair, clinic manager, Muscat Private Clinic, who led the drive to administer the vaccines said, "It's a trying time and the authorities are doing the best they can, however, it is great to see people across various industries come together offering

their support. Al Ahlia Insurance has led the way in reaching out,



and whilst this appears to be a donation, it is important to highlight the nobility that will save lives."

Al Ahlia and WhO are long term partners in supporting the less privileged residents of Oman. Earlier in the year during Ramadan, Al Ahlia worked with WhO to donate bulk grocery of over 25 cartons to be distributed to 25 families who were immobile due to the pandemic and needed additional support.

Indian Schools board launches India@75 Celebrations activities

The Indian diaspora in Oman witnessed a ceremoniously solemn event that launched 'Azadi Ka Amrit Mahotsav' - India@75 Celebrations, a virtually synchronised programme organised by the Board of Directors under the aegis of the Embassy of India on Thursday.

Syed Salman, vice chairman of the Indian School Board and head of India@75 Celebrations Committee, welcomed the dignitaries and all invitees and set the tone for the programme by rekindling the patriotic fervour with his felicity of expression. "Celebrating India's Independence is an occasion for the Indians living on foreign soil to reconnect with the culture and heritage of their motherland, and simultaneously connect other nationals with India," Salman said highlighting the concept of 'Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam' which means 'the whole world is one family'.

Dr Sivakumar Manickam, chairman of the Indian School Board, who was the guest of honour for the evening recalled the phenomenal progress India has achieved. "As we are celebrating the 75th anniversary of our Nation's Independence, we need to appreciate the phenomenal achievements our nation can be proud of; and how as Indians we should hold our head high as true citizens of this great nation," said Dr Manickam.

Chairman exhorted the audience to "rededicate, reorient, refocus our commitment to serve



our motherland and see her becoming the most sought after country in the world. As we are launching the India@75 celebrations, it is an apt occasion to salute the freedom fighters and follow the Gandhian principles".

H E Shri Munu Mahawar, Ambassador of India to the Sultanate of Oman, graced the occasion as the chief guest. In his inaugural address, the ambassador extended greetings to His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik and the government and people of Oman for the continued peace, progress and prosperity of this beautiful land. He greeted all members of the Indian community on the occasion of the 75th Independence Day of India.

"It is an important milestone in the journey of our beloved nation. I am sure all students and faculty members of Indian Schools will participate enthusiastically in all the events scheduled to celebrate Azadi Ka Amrit Mahotsav," he said.

H E Mahawar released the tagline 'My India, My Pride' and an e-book containing 75 art forms of India, "The e-book containing 75 shades of Indian art tells the story of rich civilisation and culture that India is known for. Every child whose artwork finds a place in this book is an ambassador of our rich culture and traditions," He remarked.

A number of activities have been planned to make 'Azadi Ka Amrit Mahotsav' - Indian@75 Celebrations meaningful for the students as well as the members of the Indian community in Oman. Anuj Swarup, second secretary - Embassy of India listed out a few of the programmes during his address.

"The Board has already floated a Logo Design Contest to commemorate the momentous occasion. Besides, all programmes organised both in school and board level will incorporate themes pertaining to 'India@75'."

Samsung's new Galaxy Z Series now available for pre-order across Oman

Samsung Gulf Electronics announced that the latest generation of the Galaxy Z Series is now available for pre-order across Oman. As devices that together welcome a new chapter in mobile innovation, the Galaxy Z Fold3 5G and Galaxy Z Flip3 5G are premium foldable smartphones comprising a multitude of key features and improvements. With beautiful design, expert foldable engineering, and category-leading technology, both innovations are even more durable than their predecessors, optimizing experiences to present users with new and unique ways to work, watch, and play.

"With customer demands broadening and technology advancing, Samsung is more determined than ever to innovate, create, and break new boundaries in the smartphone world," said Osman Albora, senior director - Mobile Division, Samsung Gulf Electronics.

"This enduring vision has been the basis for the next generation of the Galaxy Z Series, enabling us to continue leading the foldable category with new products that will provide users with flexibility, versatility, and empowerment. The rollout phase of new devices is always a significant period for the Samsung family and the millions we cater to. Over the coming weeks, we look forward to witnessing the initial response and reception before the Galaxy Z Fold3 5G



and Galaxy Z Flip3 5G are officially released."

Consumers nationwide can pre-order their Galaxy Z Fold3 5G and Galaxy Z Flip3 5G smartphones through Samsung's brand shops as well as major retailers in Oman until Thursday, September 9. They can also avail exclusive offers part of the promotion. Those pre-ordering the Galaxy Z Fold3 5G will receive Galaxy Buds Pro, a Flip Cover with S Pen, and Samsung Care+ for one year, all worth RO165.80. Alternatively, customers pre-ordering the Galaxy Z Flip3 5G will acquire the new Galaxy Buds2 and Samsung Care+ for one year, worth RO111.90 in total.

Customers who wish to make their pre-order through Samsung e-store (shop.samsung.com) will receive an e-voucher, enabling them to choose a gift, such as a pair of Galaxy Buds or other se-

lected items. They will also get the chance to select from 3 e-store exclusive colors white, grey and pink when pre-ordering the Galaxy Z Flip3 5G.

The Galaxy Z Series

Samsung continues its foldable device manufacturing leadership with refined operations and time-tested processes to create devices that remain reliable after years of use. The revolutionary Hideaway Hinge enables the devices to stay in place at different angles for innovative user experiences with Flex mode, while enhanced sweeper technology ensures dust and other particles stay out of the Hideaway Hinge while maintaining a slimmer design. The Galaxy Fold3 5G and Galaxy Z Flip3 5G also are equipped with the world's first IPX8 water-resistance in a foldable device and the

strongest aluminum on a smartphone to date.

Galaxy Z Fold3 5G

The Galaxy Z Fold3 ensures users will stay fully engaged and immersed through 7.6-inch Dynamic AMOLED 2X Main screen, while every detail can be seen with greater clarity thanks to the new Eco display technology applied to the Main Screen that is 29 per cent brighter and more energy-efficient than its predecessors. The Super Smooth 120Hz adaptive refresh rate has also been incorporated with the Main and Cover screen for a smooth experience when working, gaming, and scrolling through content.

Galaxy Z Flip3 5G

The Galaxy Z Flip3 5G has been crafted to provide the best capabilities for capturing and sharing memories. Thanks to the super clear glass on the rear camera, you can take photos continuously with high light transmittance and less flare in every single shot. The Super Smooth 120Hz Infinity Flex Display also allows for incredible smoothness while scrolling through social media channels and websites.

The Galaxy Z Fold3 is available in a range of eye-catching colours, including: Phantom Green, Phantom Black, Phantom Silver, and the Galaxy Z Flip3 is available in Lavender, Cream, Green, and Phantom Black.

Zubair Corporation forms team to support and empower Omani talents

The Zubair Corporation announced the formation of a team to support and empower Omani competencies within the Zubair Group of companies. The team was created based on the initiative of The Zubair Corporation's management and under the supervision of Al Zubair Mohammad al Zubair, vice chairman of the Board of Directors.

The team, comprising of the head of Institutional Services and the Human Resources Management Team at The Zubair Corporation, reviewed various topics with the vice chairman of the Board of Directors, including part of the plans, programmes and initiatives, the mechanism of their implementation and the

goals envisaged in the short and long term.

It also touched upon the design and preparation of programmes that are directed towards the implementation of a qualitative and strategic Omaniisation policy. The policy is not solely based on numbers or percentages but focuses on empowering and developing young Omani talents and preparing them to occupy leadership, supervisory and specialised positions that are corresponding to their aspirations and capabilities across all levels. Moreover, it will aid in the preparation of a clear plan for career advancement to help in the continuous development of their career.



The vice chairman of the Board of Directors said, "The formation of this team stems from our belief that the prosperity of

the various business sectors depends entirely on the extent of our innovation in managing human capital. This is an ap-

proach that the institution has followed and continues to follow to optimally invest in Omani talents and competencies. Now, more than ever, we need to reinforce this approach by developing appropriate strategies for each stage."

"Through the formation of this team, we also aim to build a work environment based on a culture of performance and excellence. Moreover, with the creation of a spirit of challenge and motivation among Omani competencies towards more innovation at work, we can enhance productivity. This will positively reflect on the overall performance of the institutions to ensure continuous and purposeful development in vari-

ous sectors of business," he added.

A number of different programmes and initiatives that were recently reviewed by the team and their respective arrangements will be announced soon. From his side, Hilal Omar al Siyabi, chief corporate services officer at The Zubair Corporation, highlighted the importance of the role assigned to this team, explaining that the recently approved work plan includes programmes and initiatives that do not target the group's employees only but also include initiatives that fall within the social responsibility of the institution. It includes designing practical training programmes for gradu-

ates to prepare them for the labour market and creating meaningful partnerships with various educational institutions in this aspect. This is in addition to other plans and programmes that will be announced consecutively and according to a suitable time frame.

The Zubair Corporation is one of the most important economic multi-activity conglomerates in the sultanate, which operates in various sectors. Over the past years, the corporation has sought to empower national competencies by providing many training and qualifying opportunities to develop talent within the corporation and senior executives in various group companies.

JAC T8 pickup: Looks are as important as the power

Looks are as important as the power, and the JAC T8 pickup is an embodiment of both. A pickup is one of the most sought after vehicles in Oman, especially outside Muscat. With the new trend of big pick-up catching up within Muscat also, the JAC T8 has become one of the favourites in Muscat and outside. It dignifies the bold, aggressive and tough persona of the owner through the same inherent qualities of a pickup.

Fahad al Zadjali is one such proud owner of the JAC T8 pick-up. He bought the JAC T8 a couple of months ago and has fallen in love with his powerful new pickup in these months. He calls JAC T8 “an absolute king of the road,” and nicknames it as “The Uber Stylish and Bold JAC T8”.

He had a lot of positive things to say about his new ride. “The JAC T8 pickup is excellent in every aspect for my needs and I use it as a second car for my trips to wadis. JAC T8 is practical yet delivers on performance, is a value for money with ample space for my load.”

Moreover, he adds, “JAC T8



pickup is perfect and meets all my expectations.” The features that I like the most are the sound system, Bluetooth, touch screen and the large space. I also like the manual transmission and the turbo engine responds instantly and is a lot of fun and meets my adventurous personality.

The JAC T8 commands a powerful #TurboCharged 2.0lt engine that generates 182 Hp

and 290 nm of torque. A massive grille up front gives it a commanding stance and highlights its bold look. 18-inch alloy wheels decked in 265/60 R18 tyres also give it comfort and style. The JAC T8 has a two toned interior i.e. black and soft brown materials having a mixture of both hard and soft materials specifically on the dash, centre console and on its leather seats. On the front and

centre there is a large eight inch infotainment system with a bluetooth and USB connectivity coupled with a six speaker music system.

For safety and driver assistance there's a rear view monitor with rear parking sensors, traction control for rough surfaces, electronic stability control with Tire Pressure Management System and cruise control. Other

prominent features include a multifunction steering wheel and a keyless entry and a push start ignition.

JAC was founded in 1964, but has been a partner with Towell Auto Centre in Oman for over 12 years. The strides JAC has taken over in this short period of time is envious, to say the least. With a promise of #Experiencethe-new, JAC Motors has come a long way from building reliable commercial vehicles to having a global presence in 130+ countries to its partnership with the Volkswagen Group as of April 2018. In Oman, JAC Motors has a long-standing partnership with Towell Auto Centre.

JAC Motors is a breath of fresh air, the road less traveled by but the road that is on its way to new horizons with each passing day. With a wide range of vehicles in the pipeline, especially with a joint venture collaboration with the VVW group and having said that it started off as a company which only produced commercial trucks onwards to producing MPVs and SUVs worldwide is well worthy of praise.

Khedmah, Simpa Marketing pact to enhance customer experience

Continuing its efforts to enrich customer experience, Oman Investment & Finance Co (Khedmah), one of the leading Investment and services companies in the sultanate, recently signed an agreement with Simpa Marketing Research, with the objective of identifying customer service areas where the company can better experience through enhanced service.

A survey will be conducted to find the latest trends in the market and aspirations of consumers. Additionally, the survey shall evaluate clients’ satisfaction levels with Khedmah’s services. The agreement was signed by Saud Ahmed al Siyabi, chief operating officer of OIFC, and Suhail Khan, general manager of Simpa Marketing Research.

Furthermore, Simpa will implement surveys that targets various segments of Khedmah’s clients and gauge their satisfaction on the company’s services such as electricity, water and telecommunications bills payment as well as phone recharge, electricity prepaid meter and others. Furthermore, it will conduct questionnaires and interviews that evaluate customer experiences and showcase their aspirations. Ultimately, it shall submit a comprehensive and detailed report exhibiting outcomes and recommendations to OIFC.

Mohammed bin Nasser al Jabri, customer experience manager at OIFC, said, “As part of its customer-centric approach, Khedmah constantly aspires to improve customer satisfaction and enrich their experience by enhancing the efficiency and quality of its services and operations. Therefore, OIFC collaborates with experts in order to develop its offerings and acquire knowledge of consumers’ needs. Our agreement with Simpa is aimed at enhancing our communication with customers and elevate their experiences by making it safe, seamless and swift. We endeavour to provide a unique experience for the beneficiaries that lives up to their expectations.”

NATIONAL MINERAL WATER COMPANY (SAOG)

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DIRECTOR'S REPORT 11/08/2021

Dear Shareholders,

On behalf of the Board of Directors, the Company hereby reports the unaudited financial results for the six-month period ended 30th June 2021.

Review of Operations:

The consolidated financial statements include the results and the financial position of the parent company, National Mineral Water Company SAOG ("Company" or "Parent Company") and its subsidiary ValueDeal Trading LLC (which trades in manufactured bottle preforms), for the six months ended 30th June 2021 (together referred to as the "Group").

Sales and profits:

The Parent Company's sales for the six months ended 30th June 2021 were RO 3,322,247 compared to RO 3,731,946 in the previous year during the same period. The Parent Company's net loss for the six months ended 30th June 2021 was RO 333,308 which includes, as a precautionary measure, provisions for a substantial amount of expected credit losses that current and near future economic conditions may impact on reported performance in alignment with IFRS 9. This compares with the net profit of RO 15,226 for the six months ended 30th June 2020.

The net sales of the Group for the six months ended 30th June 2021 were RO 3,523,887 compared to RO 3,731,946 in the previous year, and its net loss was RO 329,416 for the six months ended 30th June 2021 compared to a net profit of RO 15,085 in 2020 for the same period.

Future Outlook

Intense competition has affected the Company's financial performance. However, the Company is considering a number of initiatives to improve its profitability. The Company's management has identified that the main drivers for change are 'increased output' and 'greater efficiency' and with this in mind, the Company is confident that this is likely to have a positive impact on its overall profitability. Management has formulated recovery plan intended to reverse the impact of current business environment.

Human Resources

Your company is currently employing 43% Omani Staff and will continue to support this initiative of employing more Omanis. Your company recognizes the importance of human asset to achieve its short term and long-term objectives.

Internal Control System

The board continues to review the effectiveness of its existing internal control systems and considers the current system to be adequate for the size and nature of the business operations.

Corporate Governance Code

The company is compliant with the CMA's directives on corporate governance.

Acknowledgement

On behalf of the Board of Directors, I wish to thank our patrons, customers, bankers and shareholders for all the support they have extended to us during this year. I also take the opportunity to thank the management for their continued efforts in growing the Company.

On behalf of the Board of Directors, I would like to express our sincere gratitude to the Government for the support extended to the private sector. May God protect His Majesty the Sultan and continue to bless him with good health and a long prosperous life.

Sayyid Khalid bin Hamad bin Hamoud Al Busaidi
Chairman

CONSOLIDATED AND PARENT COMPANY UNAUDITED STATEMENT OF FINANCIAL POSITION FOR THE SIX MONTHS ENDED 30TH JUNE 2021

	(Expressed in Omani Rial)			
	30.06.2021	30.06.2020	30.06.2021	30.06.2020
ASSETS				
Non-current assets				
Property, plant and equipment	2,589,068	2,581,843	2,589,699	2,582,749
Capital work-in Progress	126,169	-	126,169	-
Investment in subsidiary	95,000	95,000	-	-
Right of use assets	85,588	-	85,588	-
Intangible Assets	21,099	-	21,099	-
Total non-current assets	2,916,924	2,676,843	2,822,555	2,582,749
Current assets				
Inventories	979,951	1,083,170	979,951	1,088,861
Trade and other receivables	2,721,440	3,197,489	2,833,680	3,205,633
Due from related parties	167,979	12,640	16,126	12,624
Cash and bank balances	54,320	126,091	122,733	135,046
Total current assets	3,923,691	4,419,390	3,952,491	4,442,164
Total assets	6,840,615	7,096,233	6,775,045	7,024,913
EQUITY AND LIABILITIES				
Capital and reserves				
Share capital	2,700,304	2,700,304	2,700,304	2,700,304
Share premium	135,169	135,169	135,169	135,169
Legal reserve	478,388	475,680	478,534	475,680
General reserve	-	-	-	-
Accumulated losses	(956,972)	(632,812)	(1,024,149)	(705,330)
Equity attributable to				
Shareholders of parent company	2,356,889	2,678,341	2,289,858	2,605,823
Non-controlling Interest	-	-	1,462	1,183
Total capital and reserves	2,356,889	2,678,341	2,291,319	2,607,006
Non-current liabilities				
Bank borrowings - Non-current	816,412	783,022	816,412	783,022
Employees' benefit liabilities	321,282	345,275	321,282	345,275
Capital expenditure payable	243,982	392,478	243,982	392,478
Lease Liabilities - Non current	74,613	-	74,613	-
Total non-current liabilities	1,456,289	1,520,775	1,456,289	1,520,775
Current liabilities				
Bank borrowings	1,691,078	1,643,575	1,691,078	1,643,575
Trade and other payables	1,274,312	1,253,542	1,274,312	1,253,557
Lease Liabilities - Current	14,400	-	14,400	-
Due to related parties	-	-	-	-
Income tax payable	47,646	-	47,646	-
Total current liabilities	3,027,437	2,897,117	3,027,437	2,897,132
Total liabilities	4,483,726	4,417,892	4,483,726	4,417,907
Total equity and liabilities	6,840,615	7,096,233	6,775,045	7,024,913
Net assets per share	0.087	0.099	0.085	0.097

CONSOLIDATED AND PARENT COMPANY UNAUDITED STATEMENT OF COMPREHENSIVE INCOME FOR THE SIX MONTHS ENDED 30TH JUNE 2021

	(Expressed in Omani Rial)			
	30.06.2021	30.06.2020	30.06.2021	30.06.2020
Revenue	3,322,247	3,731,946	3,523,887	3,731,946
Cost of Sales	(2,118,245)	(2,374,876)	(2,256,317)	(2,374,876)
Gross profit	1,204,001	1,357,070	1,267,569	1,357,070
Other income	13,810	150	13,810	150
Expenses				
Selling and distribution expenses	(1,010,518)	(1,050,681)	(1,040,426)	(1,050,681)
General and administrative expenses	(305,156)	(251,565)	(334,924)	(251,705)
Finance costs	(1,315,674)	(1,302,246)	(1,375,350)	(1,302,386)
Operating profit (Loss)	(97,863)	54,974	(93,972)	54,833
Finance costs	(85,337)	(39,748)	(85,337)	(39,748)
Provision for expected credit losses on trade receivables	(102,462)	0	(102,462)	0
Net profit (Loss) before tax	(285,662)	15,226	(281,770)	15,085
Income tax expenses	(47,646)	0	(47,646)	0
Net profit (Loss) after tax	(333,308)	15,226	(329,416)	15,085
Net profit (Loss) attributable to ;	0	0	0	0
Equity holders of the Parent Company	-	-	(329,611)	15,078
Non-controlling interest	-	-	195	7
Basic profit per share attributable to equity holders of the Parent Company	(0.012)	0.001	(0.012)	0.001

Sohar International signs agreement with OIH

Creating an ecosystem of added-value services, Sohar International and the state-of-the-art Oman International Hospital (OIH) in Muscat have signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU), to extend a range of exclusivities and discounts to the bank's and hospital's customers. Under the agreement, Sohar International credit cards holders will be offered a 20 per cent discount on all out-patient consultations at Oman International Hospital and special rates in Health Packages.

Commenting on signing of the MoU, Khalil Salim al Hedaifi, chief retail banking officer, Sohar International said, “We are indeed delighted to announce our partnership with a premium hospital that upholds similar values as ours. People are the most valuable asset of any nation and their physical, social, and mental well-being should be of utmost priority. By entering into strategic alliances like this, we reinstate the importance of putting health first so that our customers can avail high-quality health care if the need arises. We believe a healthy workforce is essential to a thriving national economy and Sohar International will take all initiatives to contribute in this direction while aligning itself to the broader goals of the country.”

For the OIH costumers, the

bank has integrated its increasingly popular Easy Payment Plan (EPP) with the on-going offers. All Sohar International credit card holders are able to make payments in equal installments over a 3, 6 or 12 month period with a zero-interest rate for any transactions via Sohar International credit card starting from RO100 and above at Oman International Hospital.

Manuel Carvalho, chief operations officer of Oman International Hospital, stated, “We are very pleased to initiate this partnership once it will facilitate the access to quality healthcare to more and more people. High-standards of quality healthcare at Oman International Hospital are for All, and the materialisation of this agreement is one more step towards this goal.”

Encouraging the practice of opting for regular health check-ups, this partnership extends the

benefits of a Sohar International credit card holder to the entire family. While Sohar International credit card holders get discounts on health check-ups, the card holder's family members also become entitled to the same discount on health packages at Oman International Hospital.

By partnering with premium institutions to offer innovative products and services for the people, Sohar International and Oman International Hospital have once again reinstated their customer/patient-centric philosophy and commitment to offer the best-in-class services.

The collaborative approach to innovate and offer industry benchmarked products has today cemented the position of both institutions as world-leading Omani service companies helping patients, customers, communities and people to prosper and grow.

Voltamp Power inks deal with Bahwan Engineering Company

Voltamp Power, a subsidiary of the Voltamp Energy Group, has signed a deal with Bahwan Engineering Company to manufacture and supply of 500 MVA/400 kV class power transformer, which will be utilised by Oman Electricity Transmission Company's network.

The pact was signed by Eng Ali bin Said al Hadabi, vice chairman of Voltamp Power, and Ajay Jhavar, advisor to vice chairman and Business Units head - projects and products at Bahwan Engineering Company.

The manufacturing of this cat-

egory of transformers is considered first of its kind in the sultanate and the region, while the signed deal comes within the framework of the contributions made by the Oman Electricity Transmission Company in strengthening the fundamentals of infrastructure and supporting the energy industry sector.

Eng Abdullah Bin Said Al Badri, CEO of Voltamp Energy, said, “We are extremely delighted by signing this agreement with Bahwan Engineering Company. We are proud to also inform that Voltamp Power has successfully manufactured and

tested its high voltage transformers of 500 MVA / 220 kV rating during this year and again this is first of its kind in the region, this will be installed for Oman Electricity Transmission Company's network.”

D N Kachare, division head - Electrical Projects of Bahwan, added, “Voltamp Sohar facility is meeting the global standards of manufacturing and BEC is confident that this first 400kv class unit will be manufactured and delivered on time to the fullest satisfaction of end client M/s OETC who have always promoted and supported Omani products.”

COVID-19 PANDEMIC

US authorises boosters for those with weakened immune systems

Washington, US - The United States authorised an extra dose of COVID-19 vaccine for people with weakened immune systems overnight Thursday to Friday, as the country struggles to thwart the Delta variant.

Emergency use authorisation for a third injection of Pfizer-BioNTech and Moderna vaccines was granted by the US Food and Drug Administration (FDA) regulator.

"The country has entered yet another wave of the COVID-19 pandemic, and the FDA is especially cognizant that immuno-compromised people are particularly at risk for severe disease," said acting FDA Commissioner Janet Woodcock in a statement.

The FDA said the additional dose was for solid organ transplant recipients or those with equivalent weakened immune systems.

US health authorities had been debating whether a third dose may be required, following a similar move by Israel.

Some media reports suggest that one million Americans may have had unauthorised third doses in an attempt to increase protection against the virus.

"Individuals who are fully vaccinated are adequately protected and do not need an additional dose of COVID-19



This file photo shows a pharmacist inoculating a teacher at Hartford Hospital in Hartford, Connecticut (AFP)

vaccine at this time," Woodcock said.

A Centers for Disease Control and Prevention advisory committee voted in favour of the decision on Friday, with the agency subsequently publishing its recommendations for the administration of a third dose for use by healthcare professionals.

However, the committee said people who received the Johnson & Johnson single-dose vaccine, a minority of the US population, were not included in the decision due to lack of available data.

Rejects booster moratorium call

Earlier this month, the United States rejected an appeal from the World Health Organization for a moratorium on booster shots to help ease the drastic inequity in dose distribution between rich and poor nations.

More than 619,000 people have died in the United States from COVID-19, with case numbers increasing sharply in recent months due to the spread of the Delta variant.

The country's rapid vaccination programme hit resistance in

politically conservative regions in the South and Midwest, among those with lower incomes and racial minorities.

But officials this week hailed recent progress, with a half million people getting newly vaccinated every day, and improved take-up among teenagers and in virus hotspots such as Louisiana, Alabama and Mississippi.

After the FDA ruling, Moderna CEO Stéphane Bancel said it was 'promising' that studies demonstrated a third dose could help immuno-compromised people.

COVID-19 vaccines are free and widely available in the United States, though only half of the total population is fully vaccinated.

"At this moment, other than the immune compromised, we're not going to be giving boosters to people," top US COVID-19 advisor Anthony Fauci told NBC on Thursday.

"But we will be following them very carefully, and if they do need it, we'll be ready to give it to them... inevitably there will be a time when we will have to give boosts."

Scientists on the CDC committee will meet again at the end of August to review data on the potential of recommending a third dose for other population groups, including adults over 65 years of age, long-term nursing home residents and health care professionals.

These populations were among the first to receive a vaccine in the United States and health authorities want to study whether their level of protection against COVID-19 has eroded over time.

Any such decision, however, would 'need to focus on the prevention of severe disease, hospitalisation and death', said Sara Oliver, a physician with the CDC.

AFP



Residents queue up outside a COVID-19 screening centre in the capital city of Canberra during the lockdown on Friday (AFP)

Australia clamps down on 'most concerning day of pandemic'

Sydney, Australia - Australia's biggest city announced tighter COVID restrictions including heavier fines and tighter policing on Saturday as authorities battled to contain a Delta outbreak and said they were seeing the 'most concerning day of the pandemic' so far.

After months of pursuing a 'COVID zero' strategy, Australia has been struggling to bring a resurgence of coronavirus cases under control, with more than 10mn people under lockdown in its two largest cities and the capital Canberra.

Residents of Sydney, going into an eighth week under stay-at-home orders, will now face heftier fines for flouting rules or lying to contact tracers, with current restrictions proving insufficient to stop the spread.

Lockdown restrictions were also extended across the entire state of New South Wales for the first time this year, coming into force on Saturday afternoon for at least seven days.

Police would boost patrols and checkpoints while hundreds more defence force personnel will help enforce stay-at-home orders as the outbreak in the most populous state of New South Wales hit another daily record of 466 community cases.

"Today is the most concerning day of the pandemic that

we've seen," state premier Gladys Berejiklian told reporters in Sydney.

Describing efforts to curb the outbreak as a war against the 'diabolical' Delta strain, Berejiklian said Australia was facing a significant threat from the outbreak.

"For some time, we thought Australia was different to other parts of the world, but we're not."

Police commissioner Mick Fuller said he had sought additional powers after officers reported people using loopholes to evade restrictions.

Residents are still allowed to leave their homes for exercise, shopping, healthcare and essential work - but police would ramp up efforts to enforce restrictions, he said.

Rules for leaving Sydney were also tightened to prevent the outbreak from spreading further into other regions.

The nation's capital, which is surrounded by New South Wales, was sent into lockdown earlier this week while the second-largest city of Melbourne is battling its own outbreak.

The resurgence has increased criticism of the country's sluggish vaccine roll-out, with just a quarter of eligible Australians so far fully vaccinated.

AFP

Canada to mandate vaccine for government workers

Ottawa, Canada - The Canadian government announced on Friday it will require all federal workers and most commercial rail, air and ship passengers to get vaccinated against COVID-19, amid a surge in virus cases due to the Delta variant.

"We know that vaccines are the best way to end this pandemic," said Dominic LeBlanc, a government minister in charge of Canada's federal bureaucracy.

"We expect federal public servants to want to comply with

this mandatory requirement."

A deadline for inoculations for some 300,000 public servants will be announced in the coming weeks.

The federal government is Canada's largest employer and LeBlanc said the vaccine mandate is 'aimed at helping Canada reach a minimum level of coverage needed to fully reopen the economy, and keep it open as well as to protect thousands of workers'. The vaccination requirement for the transport sec-

tor should be applied by the end of October at the latest, LeBlanc said at a press briefing.

It includes all commercial air passengers, as well as people travelling by rail between provinces and on large vessels such as cruise ships, local media cited Transport Minister Omar Alghabra as saying.

The country's largest carrier, Air Canada, said mandatory vaccinations was 'a welcome step forward'.

AFP



This file photo shows a healthcare worker administering vaccine to a person at an Islamic centre, in Toronto on April 1 (AFP)

US envoys press Tunisia president on democracy

Tunis, Tunisia - Tunisian President Kais Saied on Friday dismissed US concerns over threats to democracy in the North African country more than a month after he suspended parliament, raising charges of a coup.

"There is no reason to worry about the subject of freedom, justice and democracy' in Tunisia, Saied said in a statement from his office during a visit by a high-level US delegation. The President said he took the 'exceptional measures' in July in line with the constitution to 'respond to the expectations of the people against a backdrop of political, economic and social crisis'.

Jon Finer, the US deputy national security advisor, and Washington's top diplomat for the Middle East, Joey Hood, met both Saied and civil society leaders in Tunis on Friday.

Finer delivered a message from President Joe Biden 'urging a swift return to the path of Tunisia's parliamentary

democracy', a White House statement said.

The White House advisor also 'discussed with President Saied the urgent need to appoint a prime minister designate who would form a capable government able to address the immediate economic and health crises facing Tunisia', it added.

Saied on July 25 froze parliament for 30 days, lifted parliamentary immunity and sacked the prime minister along with other top officials.

The largest party in parliament accused him of staging a coup, charges dismissed by Saied. His intervention came amid mounting economic and public health concerns triggered by one of the world's worst outbreaks of COVID-19.

Tunisia was the birthplace of the Arab Spring revolts a decade ago and had often been described as the Arab world's biggest success story in transitioning to democracy.

AFP

Erdogan visits Turkish flood victims as death toll hits 38

Istanbul, Turkey - The death toll from Turkey's flash floods soared to at least 38 on Friday as President Recep Tayyip Erdogan visited one of the hardest-hit cities to lead a prayer for the victims and pledge government help.

The devastation across Turkey's northern Black Sea regions came just as the disaster-hit country was gaining control over hundreds of wildfires that killed eight people and destroyed swathes of forest along its scenic southern coast.

In a provisional toll, the government's disaster agency AFAD reported that 32 people had died in Kastamonu province, along the Black Sea, and that six others had lost their lives in the neighbouring area of Sinop.

But an undetermined number of people have also been reported missing.

A previous spate of flooding killed six people last month in the northeastern province of Rize.

Scientists believe such natural disasters are becoming more intense and frequent because of global warming caused by polluting emissions.

Turkey's emergence as a frontline country in the battle against climate change also poses a challenge to Erdogan two years before the next scheduled general election.



Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan (left) speaks with people during a visit to the disaster zone and flood hit areas in the Turkish Black Sea region, in Bozkurt, in Kastamonu province in north Turkey on Friday (AFP)

The powerful Turkish leader was roundly condemned on social media for tossing out bags of tea to locals while visiting one of the fire-ravaged areas at the end of July.

Polls indicate tackling climate change will be a top priority for up to seven million teens who will be eligible to vote for the first time when Erdogan seeks to extend his rule into a third decade.

Erdogan sounded both mournful and hopeful as he attended a funeral for the first vic-

tims and led a prayer before a few hundred residents in the inundated city of Kastamonu.

"We will do whatever we can as a state as quickly as we can, and rise from the ashes," Erdogan told the crowd. "We can't bring back the citizens we lost, but our state has the means and power to compensate those who lost loved ones."

Building anger

But anger appeared to be building in Black Sea towns and cities

over what some said was a lack of proper warning from local officials about the dangers of the incoming storms.

"They told us to move our cars but they didn't tell us to save ourselves or our children," Kastamonu province resident Arzu Yucel told the private DHA news agency.

"If they had, I would have taken them and left in five minutes. They didn't even tell us that the river was overflowing," the elderly woman said.

Turkey's rugged Black Sea coast is dotted with villages built along valleys that frequently experience heavy flooding in the summer months.

Some longtime residents of the region said this year's flooding was the worst they could recall.

"I am 75 years old and have never seen anything like this," Batin province resident Adem Senol told the Anadolu state news agency.

"The water rose higher than the level of our windows, it broke down our door, even a wall," he said. "It was a powerful stream, enough to sweep away houses."

Emergency services said waters briefly rose in some parts as high as four metres before subsiding and spreading across a region stretching more than 240km wide.

Images on social media showed bridges collapsing under the force of the rushing waters and roads buckling from mudslides. Nearly 200 villages were still without electricity on Friday, the authorities said.

Footage captured on a phone showed one man standing on top of his car as it was being swept along by the current. He then vanished in the swirling waters when his vehicle hit a wall.

AFP

Afghan President vows to ‘remobilise’ forces as Taliban approach capital city

Kabul, Afghanistan - Afghan President Ashraf Ghani said on Saturday the remobilisation of the country’s armed forces was a ‘top priority’, as Taliban fighters inched closer to the capital after routing the country’s defences over the past week.

The president gave no hint he would resign or take responsibility for the current situation, but said ‘consultations’ were taking place to try to help end the war.

“The remobilisation of our security and defence forces is our top priority, and serious steps are being taken in this regard,” he said appearing sombre and sitting before an Afghan flag in a televised speech.

But Ghani offered few specifics on what his administration was planning as the government’s control over Afghanistan has all but collapsed in recent days.

The announcement came as US Marines returned to oversee emergency evacuations from Afghanistan and foreign embassies scrambled to pull out their staff as security deteriorated.

With the country’s second and third-largest cities having fallen into Taliban hands, Kabul has effectively become the besieged last stand for government forces who have offered little or no resistance elsewhere.

Taliban advance

Insurgent fighters are now camped just 50km away, leaving the United States and other countries scrambling to airlift their nationals out of Kabul ahead of a feared all-out assault.

Heaving fighting was also reported around Mazar-i-Sharif, an isolated holdout in the north where warlord and former vice president Abdul Rashid Dostum had gathered his virulently anti-Taliban militia.

The only other cities of any significance not to be taken yet were Jalalabad, Gardez, and Khost - Pashtun-dominated and unlikely to offer much resistance now.

In Kabul, US Embassy staff were ordered to begin shredding and burning sensitive material, as the first American troops from a planned 3,000-strong re-deployment started arriving to secure the airport and oversee evacuations.



Taliban fighters stand on a vehicle along the roadside in Kandahar, as they tighten their grip on the war-torn country on Friday (AFP)

gents in the wake of the September 11 attacks nearly 20 years ago.

Days before a final US withdrawal ordered by President Joe Biden, individual Afghan soldiers, units and even whole divisions have surrendered - handing the Taliban even more vehicles and military hardware to fuel their lightning advance.

Pul-e-Alam falls

Despite the frantic evacuation efforts, the Biden administration continues to insist that a complete Taliban takeover is not inevitable.

“Kabul is not right now in an imminent threat environment,” Pentagon spokesman John Kirby said on Friday, while acknowledging that Taliban fighters were ‘trying to isolate’ the city.

The Taliban offensive has accelerated in recent days, with the capture of Herat in the north and, just hours later, the seizure of Kandahar - the group’s spiritual heartland in the south.

Pul-e-Alam, capital of Logar province, was the latest city to fall on Friday, putting the Taliban within striking distance of Kabul.

Helicopters flitted back and forth between Kabul’s airport and the sprawling US diplomatic compound in the heavily fortified Green Zone - 46 years after choppers evacuated Americans from Saigon, signalling the end of the Vietnam War.

The US-led evacuation is focused on thousands of people, including embassy employees, and Afghans and their families who fear retribution for working as interpreters or in other support roles for the United States.

Pentagon spokesman Kirby said that most of the troops shepherding the evacuation would be in place by Sunday and ‘will be able to move thousands per day’ out of Afghanistan.

In his speech Saturday, Ghani said he wanted to end the fighting.

“I have started extensive consultations inside the government with the elders, political leaders, representatives of people, and international partners on achieving a reasonable and certain political solution in which the peace and stability of the people of Afghanistan are envisaged,” he said.
AFP

Canada to take in 20,000 refugees

Ottawa, Canada - Canada on Friday said it would take in up to 20,000 Afghan refugees, including women leaders, government workers and others facing threats from the Taliban, as insurgents advanced across the country seizing major cities.

“The situation in Afghanistan is heartbreaking and Canada will not stand idly by,” Immigration Minister Marco Mendicino told a news conference.

The refugees will include ‘particularly vulnerable’ Afghans still in the country or who’ve already fled to neighboring states, which in addition to female leaders and government employees also comprises human rights defenders, persecuted minorities and journalists. Several plane-loads of asylum seekers have already departed with the first one landing on Friday in Toronto, Mendicino said.

As the Taliban advances on the capital Kabul, officials said Canadian special forces form part of a contingency plans to airlift Canadian embassy staff, but details were not provided.

Spain repatriating citizens, employees

Madrid, Spain - Spain on Friday announced that it had begun to repatriate its few citizens left in Afghanistan as well as personnel from its embassy in Kabul and Afghan colleagues amid the Taliban’s lightning advance across the country.

Foreign Minister Jose Manuel Albares signalled ‘the start of repatriation of embassy personnel, Spaniards who remained in the country as well as Afghans and their families who worked at our side’, according to a statement.

‘Spain is ready for any eventuality, including that of emptying the embassy if necessary,’ the Foreign Minister said.

Apart from those in the embassy, there remained six Spanish citizens in Afghanistan on Friday, the ministry said.

The ministry is working with other ministries ‘to coordinate the transfer of Afghan citizens who collaborated in military missions and Spanish cooperation projects in Afghanistan’, the statement said.

US Embassy destroys sensitive material

Washington, US - The US embassy in Kabul on Friday ordered staff to get rid of sensitive material that could be used for Taliban propaganda as the insurgents rapidly advanced in Afghanistan.

In a memorandum to staff, a facility manager at the sprawling embassy directed employees to incinerators and other disposal sites for documents and equipment.

‘Please also include items with embassy or agency logos, American flags or items which could be misused in propaganda efforts,’ the memo said.

A State Department spokesperson said that the Embassy in Kabul was conducting a ‘drawdown’.

‘Drawdowns at our diplomatic posts around the world follow a standard operating procedure designed to minimise our footprint across various categories, including staffing, equipment and supplies,’ the spokesperson said. The memorandum is the latest sign of mounting concerns for the safety of one of the largest US embassies in the world.

A host of European countries - including Britain, Germany, Denmark and Spain - all announced the withdrawal of personnel from their respective embassies on Friday.
For Kabul residents and the

tens of thousands who have sought refuge there in recent weeks, the overwhelming mood was one of confusion and fear.
Muzhda (35), a single woman who arrived in the capital with her two sisters after fleeing

nearby Parwan, said she was terrified for the future.
“I am crying day and night,” she told AFP.
“I have turned down marriage proposals in the past... If the Taliban come and force me to

marry, I will commit suicide.”
UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres said he was ‘deeply disturbed’ by accounts of poor treatment of women in areas seized by the Taliban, who imposed an ultra-austere brand of

Islam on Afghanistan during their 1996-2001 rule.
The scale and speed of the Taliban advance have shocked Afghans and the US-led alliance that poured billions into the country after toppling the insur-

Going, going... gone? Europe’s fast-vanishing glacier now in Italy

Rome, Italy - The Calderone ice formation in central Italy once laid claim to being the southernmost glacier in Europe - before it shrank and split into much-diminished glacierets.

As climate change drives global temperatures ever higher, the glacier risks melting away into the geological record books altogether.

Situated in a deep valley in the Gran Sasso d’Italia, a massif in the Apennine Mountains, the Calderone glacier first split two decades ago.

It became the southernmost glacier in Europe after the Corral del Veleta in the Sierra Nevada in Spain melted in the early 20th century.

But since then it has been in headlong retreat: Its volume reducing by around 90 per cent between 1916 and 1990, according to a 2010 study in the Journal of Glaciology.

“This was the southernmost glacier in Europe and that’s why it was an icon and a symbol, but now it is shrinking more and more,” glaciologist Massimo



These two photos show a column of ice raising a snow cloud as it falls downstream from Grand Jorasses Glacier on Mont Blanc Massif in Courmayeur, Alps Region, north-western Italy, on August 3 (AFP)

Frezzotti told AFP. “We estimate it could disappear within the next 10-20 years,” said Frezzotti, who is president of the Italian Glaciological Committee.
He said the ablation season -

a period, usually the summer, when glaciers lose more mass than they gain - effectively ‘disappeared because temperatures increased’.
“The duration of the ablation

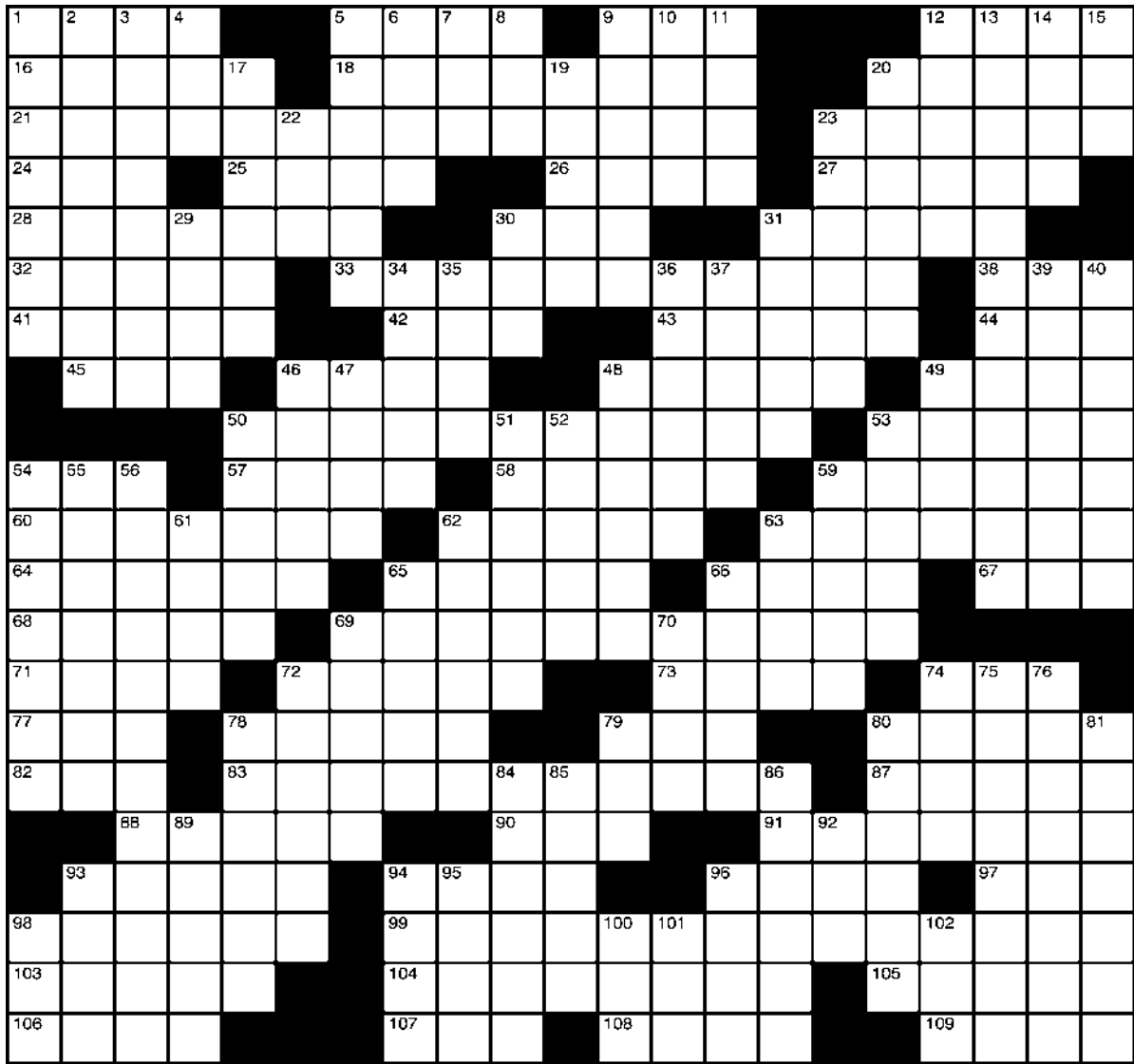
seasons became longer, the rainfall remained constant but there is a reduction in the snowfall and of course the mass balance of the glacier has shrunk more and more,” he said.

Massimo Pecci, another member of the group, has been studying the Calderone glacier for the past 25 years.
“Since 2000 we have been witnessing a gradual reduction of

the thickness, of the area and a further fragmentation into smaller glacierets,” Pecci said.
Global warming caused by human activity - mostly the burning of fossil fuels - has

pushed up Earth’s average surface temperature 1.1°C compared to mid-19th century levels.
Most of that increase has occurred in the past 50 years.
AFP

DAILY CROSSWORD



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YOUR DAILY HOROSCOPE



ARIES MARCH 21-APRIL 19

When you see something that confuses you today, you need to understand that it's a clear sign that you're on the right track! And don't wait for others to heap praise on you, you are going to need to do it yourself! The challenges you have overcome would make anyone else shake with fear, and others could be a bit resentful that you have done what they couldn't.



LEO JULY 23-AUGUST 22

Sorting through all the details of a new project or challenge might be extremely frustrating for you, but that is no reason to just jump right in and throw caution to the wind! If you are confused, that is all the more reason for you to not be impulsive. Take a leap of faith. You need to fully understand every single detail of a this new endeavour before you can get involved with it.



SAGITTARIUS NOVEMBER 22-DECEMBER 21

Today you'll have the opportunity to team up with someone who balances out your skills. Sure, this person might not be your cup of tea, but minor personality clashes are nothing compared to the amount of progress you two can make if you put your heads together. You are currently in a phase of your life when you are ready to collaborate and share the spotlight.



TAURUS APRIL 20-MAY 20

Big picture thinking can all too often distract you from the details that really matter. But today, if you are flexible about a few things, you'll be able to find new appreciation for the smaller things in life. Suddenly, beauty will be all around you -- someone's laugh is like music to your ears, or their eyes hold a bright sparkle you'd never noticed before.



VIRGO AUGUST 23-SEPTEMBER 22

An unresolved romantic issue in your life suddenly seems like it has a chance at a happy ending. You are finally getting a handle on what you want and what you don't want -- which is usually much more important. This other person is going through a similar growth phase, and they are ready to hear your feelings without over-reacting. They want to know what you think.



CAPRICORN DECEMBER 22-JANUARY 19

Your brain is going to take longer than usual to ramp up this morning, so it's not a great day to do any heavy research or calculations early on. To help speed up your cerebral wake up, seek out vibrant people who are always full of energy and sass. Also, getting involved in situations that require collaboration will help you get more active and energised.



GEMINI MAY 21-JUNE 21

Reminiscing about the past is a great way to learn about where you could be going in your future. So send an email off to an old friend with the subject line 'remember when' and make your correspondence take you down memory lane! Not only will it be a great way to fill your busy day with sweet energy, it will remind you about just how far you have come in your life.



LIBRA SEPTEMBER 23-OCTOBER 22

If you've been feeling overwhelmed lately, it's probably because you are pushing yourself way too hard! Reset your agenda today, and make sure you are not spreading yourself too thin. If you're tired, take a nap. If you're sick of dealing with whiners, get some quiet alone time. Listen to your body and follow your mood, whatever hits you, whenever it hits you, today.



AQUARIUS JANUARY 20-FEBRUARY 18

This is one of those days when you need to treat just about everyone you encounter with kid gloves. If you take care when dealing with others, you will reap huge rewards -- either in terms of good will, or in terms of gratitude. There are many fragile egos around and they are attached to some people who have powerful ties. Making people happy should be your number one goal.



CANCER JUNE 22-JULY 22

You might be feeling stifled by your surroundings right now -- if there is any clutter on your desk, it will start creating clutter in your mind. But that's a problem that is really easy to solve. Simply take some time to clean up your work area or wherever you are spending the most time today. Could your car use a thorough vacuuming? Is your kitchen messier than you'd like it to be?



SCORPIO OCTOBER 23-NOVEMBER 21

People want to connect with you more than ever now, and will be extremely outgoing and talkative with you all day long. It could be difficult to juggle their attention with all the things you've got to take care of, but it will be fun! You love being busy right now, and it's going to be wonderful to have such a vibrant mix of socialising and working.



PISCES FEBRUARY 19-MARCH 20

Today is definitely a great day to get a new project started, but don't expect to get too far with it right away. Not only do you have to pace yourself to conserve your energy, but you have to have realistic expectations. If you rush ahead and try to do everything at once, you'll only end up tired and frustrated at the end of the day without much to show for all your effort.



TEST YOUR KNOWLEDGE

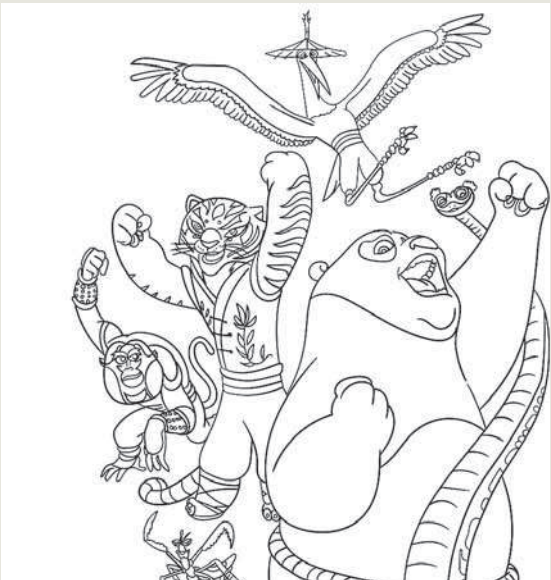
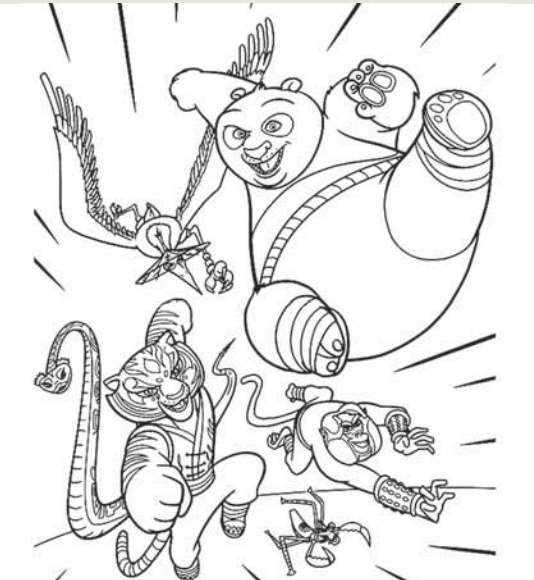
1. The age of most ancient geological formations is estimated by
a. Ra - Si method
b. Potassium - argon method
c. C14 method
d. Uranium - lead method

2. Who suggested that most of the mass of the atom is located in the nucleus?
a. Thompson
b. Bohr
c. Rutherford
d. Einstein

3. In an atomic nucleus, neutrons and protons are held together by
a. gravitational forces
b. exchange forces
c. coulombic forces
d. magnetic forces

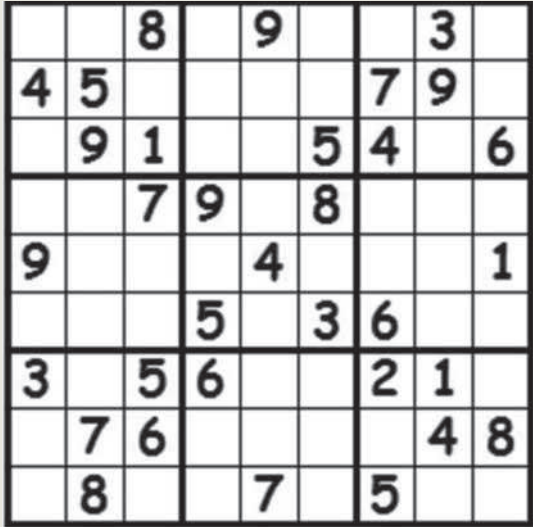
Answers: 1.d 2.c 3.b

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 12)



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



VIRTUAL EXHIBITION



Radhakrishnan S T - Theyyam



Trupti Bhatkal - Hampi, a monument in Karnataka



Kiranmayee Jandyam - A houseboat in Alleppey



Shalini Karthik - Anantha



Soni Budhia
Curator
Through this exhibition, my attempt was to showcase the unspoken love in the hearts of the artists who are staying away, yet remain very closely tied to their motherland



Vaishali Thakar - Naad - Essence of life



Shashi Hemant - Kalari Payattu



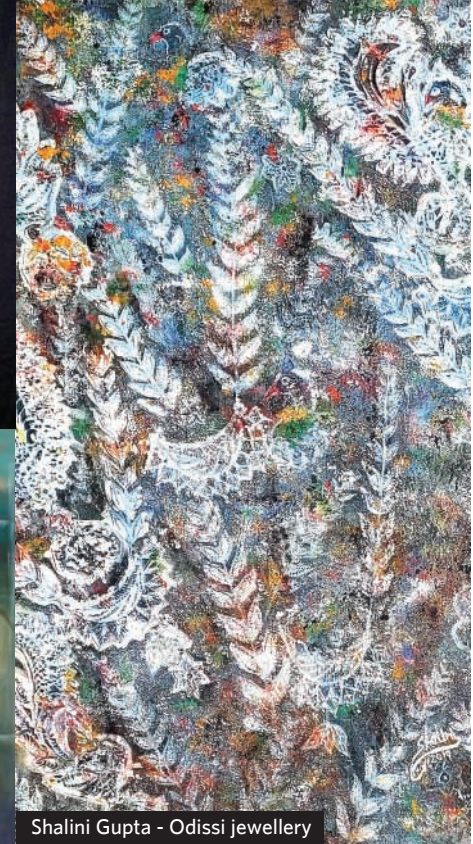
Kajal Varshney - Beauty of AP



Latha Guru - Maharashtrian jewellery



Sheffy Tattarath - Cultural beats



Shalini Gupta - Odissi jewellery

Ode to "Mother India"

Hubert Vaz

Rangrez, the Indian Social Club's artist group, presents Yeh Des Hai Mera (This is my country), a special virtual exhibition organised to coincide with India's 75th Independence Day celebrations. This is the eighth in a series of virtual exhibitions organised by the group to keep art alive and artists active during the pandemic. "It gives me immense satisfaction to lead a

group of artists like Rangrez because the members are always very gung-ho about accepting challenges of various kinds and coming up with beautiful creations month after month. 'Yeh Des Hai Mera', is our eighth this year, albeit all virtual. But virtual is how the world lives now and virtual is the buzz-word for most activities that one is able to carry out. Virtual is also a safe way of life," said Sushmita Gupta, founder-member of Rangrez. Around 46 artists have come together and created 55 paintings for the opening of the show yesterday, the eve of the Indian Inde-

pendence Day. Indian Ambassador, H E Munu Mahavar also sent a congratulatory video message to the artists for being a part of the celebrations initiated by the Indian government called 'Azadi Ka Amrit Mahotsav'. The celebration was also attended by Dr Satish Nambiar, president of the Indian Social Club. Soni Budhia, a senior Indian artist and winner of many art competitions, was the curator of this exhibitions. She is a sculptor, too, and specialises in oil and mixed media. "As I look back on my journey as a curator,

I feel proud, honoured and privileged. Proud because I am a member of a vibrant group of artists which believes in growing together. Honoured because I got an opportunity to curate an exhibition for this elite group of artists, and privileged for getting an opportunity to curate for the month of August on the theme 'Yeh Des Hai Mera'. "Being away from our homeland, this came up as an opportunity to pour our heart out on canvas as an ode to 'Mother India'. Through this exhibition, my attempt was to showcase the unspoken love in the hearts of the artists

who are staying away, yet remain very closely tied to their motherland." Featured here are some of the paintings by Kajal Varshaney (Beauty of Arunachal Pradesh), Kiranmayee Jandyam (A houseboat in Alleppey), Latha Guru (Maharashtrian jewellery), Radhakrishnan S (Theyyam), Shalini Kartik (Anantha), Shalini Gupta Kumar (Odissi jewellery), Shashi Hemant (Kalaripayattu), Sheffy Tattarath (Cultural beats), Trupti Bhatkal (Hampi - A monument in Karnataka) and Vaishali Sachin Thakar (Naad - 'Essence of life).

All Blacks retain Bledisloe Cup



Damian McKenzie (L) of New Zealand and Hunter Paisami of Australia compete for the ball during the Bledisloe Cup match at Eden Park in Auckland on Saturday (AFP)

RUGBY UNION

Auckland, New Zealand - New Zealand locked away the Bledisloe Cup on Saturday with a record 57-22 victory over Australia in a bitter, bruising encounter at Eden Park in Auckland. In a white-hot atmosphere with bone-crunching tackles echoing around the ground, the All Blacks scored eight tries to three to post their highest ever score over the Wallabies.

The All Blacks points included two impressive long-range intercept tries, and Damian McKenzie landed a monster 57m (62-yard) penalty.

The Wallabies had vowed to take an aggressive approach and the All Blacks said they would fight fire with fire. By the 25th minute, referee Brendon Pickerill had to warn both sides to cut out the off-the-ball niggles. New Zealand were ahead 21-15 at half-time and then opened up with five more tries and McKenzie's booming penalty as the rain fell in the second half.

Coach Ian Foster described it as a 'really good performance,

one we're proud of', and an improvement on last week. "In many ways it was a typical All Blacks-Australia Test match, very physical, very abrasive," he said.

"Even when we were under pressure we found a way out of there. The composure was really, really good because we were under a lot of pressure there particularly in that first half."

With the victory, they secured the Bledisloe Cup for a 19th consecutive year, made a winning start to the Rugby Championship and extended their unbeaten run at Eden Park to 46 matches.

They also crushed the hopes of frustrated Wallabies fans at a ground where Australia have not won in 22 Tests since 1986.

The previous high score by the All Blacks over Australia was 54-34 in Sydney in 2017.

The ability of the All Blacks backs to thread their way through the Wallabies was a key difference, with the Australians enjoying the better of the forward exchanges in the first half.

The injection of Lachie Swinton and Matt Philip added much-needed steel to the Wallabies and they had mastery in the lineouts and scrums.

One-way traffic

It left both sides with plenty to work on as they head to Australia for the dead-rubber third Test in Perth and with COVID-19 travel restrictions making it unlikely the All Blacks will be back in New Zealand until December.

After a sellout crowd of 47,000 watched a sub-par All Blacks win the first Test, only 25,000 turned up for the rematch and they hardly had time to take their seats before Rieko Ioane intercepted a Noah Lolesio cut-out pass and ran the length of the field to score. The Wallabies replied immediately

with Andrew Kellaway stepping around McKenzie for the first of his two tries. Brodie Retallick scored the All Blacks' second, running the last 25m to finish a move started by David Havili at the other end of the field.

Lolesio, having a better night with the boot than he did last week, kicked a penalty to keep the Wallabies in touch and, in the countdown to half-time, Ardie Savea scored for the All Blacks with livewire scrum-half Tate McDermott touching down for the Wallabies.

After the resumption, it was all one-way traffic as Codie Taylor scored twice, Sevu Reece added his runaway try from another wayward cut-out pass by the Wallabies and Will Jordan also scored.

The All Blacks had raced to a 50-15 lead before the Wallabies were again able to put points on the board from Kellaway's second try. New Zealand, determined not to fade as they did in the first Test, finished the game with Havili scoring their eighth try.

AFP

Wallabies left soul-searching



Australia's head coach Dave Rennie at Eden Park on Saturday

Auckland, New Zealand - The Wallabies were left soul-searching after a big defeat by the All Blacks in Auckland on Saturday, with coach Dave Rennie concerned about poor decision making as his side went off-script.

At half-time, the Wallabies only trailed by six points and fancied their chances if they could fashion another strong finish as they did in their three recent Tests against France and in last week's opening Bledisloe Cup Test.

They had more reason to be optimistic one minute into the second half when All Blacks loose forward Ardie Savea was yellow carded. But instead of ramming home the advantage, their game fell apart.

Rennie and captain Michael Hooper put their hands up to shoulder the blame. "It was a big part of the game, wasn't it," Rennie said as he reflected on what happened when Savea was sent to the sin-bin with the Wallabies down only 15-21 and getting a penalty five metres from the All Blacks line. They opted for a lineup that was not straight and were penalised after the resulting scrum, allowing the All Blacks to sweep down field and score.

"We've got to keep building on our attack and then it's our ability to make smart

decisions and play what's in front of us. That's an area that we need a lot of development," Rennie said.

Hooper said that in hindsight, he should have taken a shot at goal when Savea was sent off and then capitalised on the one-man advantage.

"I didn't and it turns out to hurt us, so you know I take a lot of responsibility for that and for not being able to rally our guys there to get a better outcome in that pretty pivotal

Everything falls back on me. We went in with a plan and we can't execute that plan

DAVE RENNIE

ten minutes," he said.

On the Wallabies' poor showing, Rennie said that ultimately the responsibility rested with the coaches.

"Everything falls back on me. We went in with a plan and we can't execute that plan. We'll seriously look at what we're doing," he said.

"In the end, the players are implementing what we're trying to put on the park so clearly we'll take responsibility for it."

AFP

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FOOTBALL ROUND-UP

Bayern held in season opener



Bayern Munich's Robert Lewandowski (R) celebrates with teammates, Thomas Mueller, Joshua Kimmich and Leon Goretzka, after scoring against Borussia Moenchengladbach on Friday

GERMAN LEAGUE

Mönchengladbach, Germany - Robert Lewandowski equalised as defending champions Bayern Munich were held to a 1-1 draw at Borussia Moenchengladbach in a hard-fought opening game of the new Bundesliga season on Friday.

"It wasn't perfect football from us," Lewandowski told broadcaster Sat1. "We made a lot of mistakes, but the first game is over, now we can look ahead."

Gladbach deservedly took the lead when French striker Alassane Plea fired past Bayern

goalkeeper Manuel Neuer with just ten minutes gone.

Lewandowski levelled just before the break from a corner, but both sides wasted second-half chances to grab the winner.

Only superb saves from home goalkeeper Yann Sommer repeatedly denied Lewandowski and the Bayern attack.

At the other end, Gladbach substitute forward Marcus Thuram failed to connect with the goal at his mercy and later saw his appeals for a clear penalty waved away by the referee.

"There were fireworks from us

in the first quarter of an hour," Gladbach captain Lars Stindl told DAZN and hailed Sommer's 'world-class' performance.

Bayern's new head coach Julian Nagelsmann is still waiting for his first victory after three defeats and a draw in pre-season friendlies. The 34-year-old is under pressure to deliver a tenth straight Bundesliga title for Bayern in his first season. "We have to live with the point, both sides had chances, it was a pretty crazy game for the fans to watch, not so easy for the coaches," Nagelsmann told DAZN.

Other results: Saturday:

Wolfsburg 1 Bochum 0, Union Berlin 1 Bayer Leverkusen 1, Stuttgart 5 Fuerth 1, Augsburg 0 Hoffenheim 4.

FRENCH LEAGUE

Moffi strikes as Lorient stun Monaco

Lorient, France - Lorient, who just escaped relegation last season, upset visiting Monaco 1-0 on Friday in their French League game as Nigerian striker Terem Moffi converted a penalty he had won.

Lorient made the most of

opening the fixtures on the second weekend of the season by jumping to the top of the table with four points.

Monaco, who finished third last season to earn a chance of a place Champions League, left a number of senior players on the bench ahead of their Champions League qualifying playoff first leg against Shakhtar Donetsk on Tuesday.

Moffi was brought down by Monaco summer signing Ismail Jakobs after 31 minutes and took the penalty to score. Moffi was Lorient's top scorer last season



Valencia's Carlos Soler celebrates with Denis Cheryshev (R) after scoring against Getafe at the Mestalla stadium in Valencia on Friday

Valencia overcome early red card to edge past Getafe

SPANISH LEAGUE

Madrid, Spain - Valencia overcame a third-minute red card to beat Getafe 1-0 in a bruising opening game in Spain's La Liga on Friday.

Defender Hugo Guillamon was given a straight red for a dangerous tackle on Getafe's Serbian midfielder Nemanja Maksimovic. After the referee consulted a video replay, it was the fastest sending off in the history of Liga season openers. The foul itself had been committed after just 39 seconds of the game.

Eight minutes after Guillamon's dismissal, Valencia were ahead. Russian winger Denis Cheryshev was brought down in the penalty area and

Carlos Soler tucked away the spot-kick.

"It was not the game we wanted, because going a man down in the third minute is not the best situation," said Soler.

"Hugo is not at fault. I don't know if it was a red. These are things that happen in football and you learn from them. When he left the pitch I told him that we were going to win for him, and we achieved that."

Valencia goalkeeper Giorgi Mamardashvili pulled off two fine saves late in the game to deny Getafe an equalising goal. Getafe's misery was completed when Erick Cabaco was sent off for a second yellow card in the 76th minute.

AFP

TENNIS ROUND-UP

Medvedev outlasts Hurkacz to reach Toronto semifinals



Daniil Medvedev of Russia hits a shot against Hubert Hurkacz of Poland during their quarterfinal match on Friday

ATP TORONTO MASTERS

Toronto, Canada - Daniil Medvedev had to work his way through a pair of tie-breakers to ensure a 2-6, 7-6 (8/6), 7-6 (7/5) victory over Hubert Hurkacz and into the semifinals of the ATP Toronto Masters on Friday.

The Russian world No 2 was caught on the back foot in the opening set, which he lost to his Polish opponent after committing nearly half of his 40 unforced errors on the night.

But the top seed gathered his resources to stage a fightback in two and a quarter hours on the way to revenge for a five-set loss he took at Wimbledon against

the No 13. Medvedev ended the evening with his 22nd ace on match point.

"It was a super-tough match, he was on top of me for many moments," the winner said. "He was playing amazing and I'm happy to get through."

The 2019 finalist here said he picked up his game in the deciding set. "I started playing a little bit better and tried to keep the pressure on him - he was certainly keeping it on me."

Stefanos Tsitsipas ended the 13-match win streak of Casper Ruud with a clinical 6-1, 6-4 win.

A day after turning 23, the Greek world No 3 celebrated the birthday of his mother Julia,

using the big day as inspiration on court.

"I'm proud of myself," the 2018 Canada finalist said. "I had it in my mind to try and make her proud today."

Tsitsipas will play on Saturday against Reilly Opelka, who sent down 18 aces in a 6-3, 7-6 (7/1) defeat of Spanish tenth seed Roberto Bautista Agut.

"It means a lot to get another semi (after Rome last May)," No 32 Opelka said. "I had a slow start to the year, and being seeded at the slams is a big priority of mine."

"Stefanos is a great player, the match will be a good test against one of the best in the world. If

you're playing Stefanos, it means you're having a good week."

Ruud, son of former ATP pro Christian Ruud, had defeated Tsitsipas on Madrid clay in May.

But the Greek seed had all the answers in Toronto as he denied Ruud a 100th career match win.

"My intentions were clear from the beginning," the winner said. "My instinct was to stick to the baseline."

"I'm super happy to be standing where I am right now. Sometimes I surprise myself with how well I can play."

Gael Monfils lived up to his showman's reputation in a 7-6 (7/5), 6-4 loss to John Isner as the pair met for a 13th time.

The Frenchman seeded 11th went through some turbulence in the second set when he was advised by chair umpire Mohamed Lahyani to stop 'dancing' around while awaiting his opponent's huge serve.

That set Monfils off, with the 34-year-old calling for the tournament supervisor and engaging in a lively debate on the non-issue while getting his right ankle taped after what he said was a "bad step."

The storm quickly blew over as Isner laid down a 13th ace for a match point, which he converted for victory.

"We bring out the good in each other's games," Isner said. "He's a great rival - not in a nasty way - and we are very good friends."

AFP



Aryna Sabalenka of Belarus hits a return shot during her match against Victoria Azarenka in Montreal on Friday

Sabalenka denies Azarenka's chance to top-ten return

WTA MONTREAL MASTERS

Montreal, Canada - Aryna Sabalenka won a battle of Belarus on Friday, denying compatriot Victoria Azarenka the chance to return to the top-ten with a 6-2, 6-4 victory at the WTA Montreal Masters.

Azarenka, a 32-year-old with two Australian Open titles to her credit, last ranked in the elite group five years ago before motherhood.

The quarterfinal success for top seed Sabalenka took 82 minutes, with the big-serving winner adding seven aces to her season's WTA-leading total of 265.

"I'm really happy with this, it was a tough match," Sabalenka said. "She played well. The second set was a little tricky. I'm really happy that I came back (after

trailing 4-2) and won it. I'm pleased with the level today."

Sabalenka has now won three of four matches against her compatriot, including their last in October, 2020 in Ostrava.

Azarenka played the Canadian semifinals in 2010 and 2011.

Sabalenka was playing her eighth quarterfinal of 2021, putting her in the joint lead in that statistical category with world No 1 Ashleigh Barty. "There were a few points that really made a big difference," Azarenka said. "I had opportunities in the first set. "But she was playing much stronger in the important moments. I didn't really quite take my chances."

"Compared to other players, she's probably one of the hardest hitting."

Sabalenka will next take on fourth seed Karolina Pliskova after the Czech defeated Sara Sorribes Tormo of Spain 6-4, 6-0. Pliskova stopped Sabalenka in their last meeting, a Wimbledon semi-final in July.

In the bottom half of the draw, 15th seed Coco Gauff saved two match points before falling to Italy's Camila Giorgi 6-4, 7-6 (7/2). The win served as revenge for Giorgi, who lost at home to the American teenager in Parma this season.

Giorgi will meet on Saturday with Jessica Pegula after the Australian Open quarter-finalist rallied past 13th seed Ons Jabeur 1-6, 7-6 (7/4), 6-0 in 90 minutes with four breaks of the Tunisian's serve

AFP



Joe Root
180*
321 BALLS

ROOT HOLDS FIRM

England skipper slams unbeaten 180 to give hosts a narrow first innings lead against India

ENGLAND VS INDIA
SECOND TEST: DAY THREE

London, UK - England captain Joe Root's commanding 180 not out, his second successive Test hundred and fifth this year, guided the hosts into a slender first-innings lead against India at Lord's on Saturday.

Root's near nine-hour innings in the second Test was the cornerstone of England's 391 - 27 runs ahead of India's first-innings 364.

He faced 321 balls, with 18

fours before James Anderson was bowled by Mohammed Shami off the last ball of the third day's play.

Root had been the only England batsman to pass fifty in the rain-marred drawn first Test of this five-match series at Trent Bridge last week with innings of 64 and 109.

On Saturday, however, he was ably assisted in a fourth-wicket partnership of 121 by Jonny Bairstow until his Yorkshire teammate gave his innings away on 57.

England resumed on 119 for three, a deficit of 245, and were again left looking to Root, 48 not out overnight, after opener Rory Burns had fallen for a well-made 49.

At 23 for two, Root had walked into bat with England having lost their second wicket before reaching 50 for the 15th time in 19 Test innings this year.

Mohammed Siraj had done the damage, removing Dom Sibley and Haseeb Hameed, out for a first-ball nought, with

successive deliveries on his way to four for 94 in 30 overs.

Root, however, square-drove Siraj for a stylish four on Saturday to complete an 82-ball fifty.

Bairstow, who started the day on six not out, struck commanding straight-driven fours off Mohammed Shami and Siraj en route to a 90-ball fifty.

Careless Bairstow

England were 216 for three at lunch, having not lost a wicket in the morning session, with Root 89 not out and Bairstow unbeaten on 51.

But just before the advent of the new ball, Bairstow carelessly fell into an obvious hooking trap when, finally tempted by one of several short-pitched deliveries from Siraj, he gloved a pull to India captain Virat Kohli in the slips.

But Root's quick single off Jasprit Bumrah saw him to a hundred, his fourth in Tests at Lord's, off 200 balls with nine fours.

This was Root's fifth Test

century this year, with scores of 228 and 186 in Sri Lanka and 218 against India in Chennai preceding last week's effort in Nottingham.

His 22nd Test hundred saw Root equal Walter Hammond, Colin Cowdrey, Geoffrey Boycott and Ian Bell, with only Kevin Pietersen (23) and Alastair Cook (33) having scored more Test centuries for England.

It was an all the more creditable innings given the ongoing strains imposed by COVID-19, with Root having to cope with the absence of allrounder Ben Stokes, due to mental health issues, and fast bowler Jofra Archer, ruled out for the year with an elbow injury.

Recalled paceman Ishant Sharma checked England's progress with three middle-order wickets, bowling Jos Buttler for 23 with an excellent full-length delivery before having Moeen Ali and Sam Curran caught in the slips off successive deliveries.

After No 11 Anderson was hit

SCOREBOARD	
India 1 st Innings 364	
ENGLAND 1 st INNINGS	
R Burns	lbw b Shami 49
Dom Sibley	c Rahul b Siraj 11
H Hameed	b Siraj 0
J Root	not out 180
J Bairstow	c Kohli b Siraj 57
J Buttler	b Ishant Sharma 23
Moeen Ali	c Kohli b Ishant 27
S Curran	c Rohit b Ishant 0
O Robinson	lbw b Siraj 6
M Wood	run out 5
J Anderson	b Shami 0
Extras:	(b 5, lb 6, nb 17, w 5) 33
TOTAL:	391 all out in 128 overs
Fall of wickets:	1-23, 2-23, 3-108, 4-229, 5-283, 6-341, 7-341, 8-357, 9-371, 10-391
Bowling:	Ishant Sharma 24-4-69-3, J Bumrah 26-6-79-0, M Shami 26-3-95-2, M Siraj 30-7-94-4, R Jadeja 22-1-43-0

on the helmet by a Bumrah bouncer during an over featuring four no-balls, Root hit two successive fours off Siraj - an audacious reverse ramp over the cordon followed by a slog past deep square leg.

The 30-year-old Root in the course of this innings became only the second England batsman, after Cook, to pass 9,000 Test runs.

AFF



Kraigg Brathwaite walks off the field after being dismissed for 97 on Friday

WI's Brathwaite misses century against Pakistan

WEST INDIES VS PAKISTAN
FIRST TEST: DAY TWO

Kingston, Jamaica - Kraigg Brathwaite ran himself out for 97 but the West Indies captain's typically obdurate innings worked his team into a potentially useful first innings lead over Pakistan on day two of the first Test at Sabina Park on Friday.

With support from former skipper Jason Holder (58) in a pivotal sixth-wicket partnership of 96, the home side rallied from the discomfort of 100 for five to 251 for eight at stumps, a lead of 34 runs with two wickets in hand going into the third day.

Starting the morning with his team already in trouble at two for two, replying to the tourists' first day total of 217, Brathwaite played his favourite sheet-anchor role to perfection. The phlegmatic opener put on 50 with overnight partner Roston Chase (21) for the third wicket, followed immediately by a stand of 49 with Jermaine Blackwood.

However Blackwood's demise to Shaheen Shah Afridi was followed next ball by the dismissal of Kyle Mayers. Just two balls later Afridi got a leg-before verdict against Holder before he had scored, only for the decision to be overturned on review of the television replay.

It proved a critical reprieve as Holder played a crucial knock. It was the deceptive pace of Faheem Ashraf which broke the partnership after tea as Holder edged a delivery through to wicketkeeper Mohammad Rizwan to leave all attention focused on Brathwaite as he crept towards what would have been his 11th Test century.

All that hard work was un-

SCOREBOARD	
Pakistan 1 st Innings 217	
WEST INDIES 1 st INNINGS	
K Brathwaite	run out 97
K Powell	c Butt b Abbas 0
N Bonner	lbw b Abbas 0
R Chase	c Rizwan b Ali 21
J Blackwood	c Abbas b Afridi 22
K Mayers	lbw b Afridi 0
J Holder	c Rizwan b Ashraf 58
J da Silva	not out 20
K Roach	lbw b Abbas 13
J Warrican	not out 1
Extras:	(b 3, lb 10, nb 6) 19
TOTAL:	251 for eight wkts in 87 overs
Fall of wickets:	1-1, 2-1, 3-51, 4-100, 5-100, 6-196, 7-221, 8-249
Bowling:	M Abbas 21-9-42-3, S Afridi 20-5-59-2, Y Shah 13-1-46-0, F Ashraf 14-6-37-1, H Ali 19-4-54-1

done by his own error of judgement. As he turned a delivery from Yasir Shah to short fine-leg, he decided to come back for a second run only for Hasan Ali's direct hit to find him well short of his ground.

Brathwaite's innings, following a succession of low scores amid his team's struggles in the two-Test series against South Africa, spanned six hours during which he faced 221 deliveries and struck 12 fours.

Pakistan's hopes of a swift end to the West Indies innings were thwarted by Joshua da Silva. He ensured the threat of the second new ball did not completely overwhelm the tail and allows the home side to continue on the third morning hoping to extend what could already be an uncomfortable deficit for their opponents.

Having ended day one with two wickets in two balls, Mohammad Abbas finished day two with the wicket of Kemar Roach to lead the bowling effort for Pakistan with figures of three for 42.

AFF

Dube, Jaiswal in Mumbai squad for Oman tour

Our Correspondent
Muscat

India pacer Shivam Dube and IPL player Yashasvi Jaiswal are part of a 14-member Mumbai team that will tour Oman to play three T20s and three 50-over games at the Oman Cricket Academy ground later this month.

With almost a dozen top Mumbai cricketers being involved either in England or for the Indian Premier League (IPL) preparations with Mumbai Indians and other franchises, the Oman-bound squad, coached by Amol Muzumdar, is expected to comprise mainly the bench strength of the India domestic 50-over champions.

The first of the three T20s will be played on August 22 while the other two will be held on August 24 and 26. The 50-over games will be played on August 29, 31 and September 2. All the matches will start at 7.30 am.

The 28-year-old Dube has played 13 T20Is and one ODI for India and represented Royal Challengers Bangalore in the IPL last year. He is a member of the Rajasthan Royals this season. His



Shivam Dube



Yashasvi Jaiswal

last T20I was against New Zealand on February 2, 2020.

Another IPL player in the Mumbai squad is 19 year old left-handed batsman Jaiswal, who plays for the Rajasthan Royals franchise in the IPL. He holds the record of being the youngest cricketer in the world to score a List A double century.

Following the Mumbai visit, Oman will be involved with two triangular series as part of the WCL League 2 tournament; first against Nepal and US from September 13-20 followed by a tri-series against Scotland and Papua New Guinea (PNG) from September 25-October 2.

Oman will then feature in the ICC Men's T20 World Cup 2021 first round at home. The hosts have been clubbed with PNG, Bangladesh and Scotland with the top two from the pool advancing to the Super 12s to be played in the UAE.

Mumbai squad: Shams Mulani, Aakarshit Gomel, Hardik Tamore, Armaan Jaffer, Chimany Sutar, Shivam Dube, Aman Khan, Sujit Naik, Yashasvi Jaiswal, Shashank Attarde, Mohit Avasthi, Ravindra Solanki, Deepak Shetty, Drumil Matkar. Coach: Amol Muzumdar.



Finch in race to be fit for T20 World Cup

Sydney, Australia - Australia's limited-overs captain Aaron Finch has undergone knee surgery with the recovery expected to take eight to ten weeks as he aims to be fit for the T20 World Cup. Finch missed the recent Bangladesh tour having suffered cartilage damage ahead of the series in West Indies. He managed to play the five T20Is in the Caribbean but aggravated the injury in the final game.

Having completed his mandatory two-week quarantine upon returning to Melbourne, Finch had the operation on Thursday with a Cricket Australia statement saying it was successful. "His recovery is expected to take eight to ten weeks meaning he should be available for the opening games of the World Cup in mid-October," the statement added.

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Dream starts for United, Chelsea

Fernandes slams hat-trick as hosts drub Leeds 5-1 at Old Trafford; Benitez’s Everton rally to win



Chelsea's Marcos Alonso celebrates after scoring against Crystal Palace



Manchester United's Bruno Fernandes celebrates after scoring against Leeds United at Old Trafford in Manchester, UK, on Saturday (AFP)

Salah shines as Liverpool rout Norwich
London, UK - Mohamed Salah scored one in the 74th minute and provided two assists as Liverpool got their English Premier League (EPL) title bid off to a winning start with a comfortable 3-0 victory at newly promoted Norwich City on Saturday.
Salah got his side's third to become the first player to score on the opening weekend in five consecutive EPL campaigns and cap a fine display after earlier setting up goals for Diogo Jota (26th minute) and Roberto Firmino (65th min).
Virgil van Dijk was restored to the Reds defence for the first time since his cruciate knee ligament injury derailed Liverpool's title defence last October.
The Dutchman looked like his old self as he strolled through the 90 minutes and Jurgen Klopp's men needed just a few moments of attacking inspiration to see off the Canaries.

ENGLISH PREMIER LEAGUE
London, United Kingdom - Manchester United enjoyed a dream start to the English Premier League (EPL) season as Bruno Fernandes scored a hat-trick in a 5-1 thrashing of Leeds in front of 73,000 at Old Trafford, while Chelsea swept aside Crystal Palace 3-0 on Saturday.
Over 300,000 fans are expected to attend the opening

weekend of the season with full crowds restored following the easing of coronavirus restrictions. United were inspired by a raucous atmosphere as Fernandes and Paul Pogba combined to blow away Marcelo Bielsa's men.
Fernandes walked away with the match ball, but Pogba was just as impressive as the Frenchman produced four assists for the Portuguese's first two goals and second-half strikes from

Mason Greenwood and Fred.
"I can't remember the last time that happened," said Solskjaer on Pogba's quartet of assists.
"Paul's got that quality and, when you've got runners willing to make runs and create space for others, it opens up."
Luke Ayling's stunning strike early in the second-half briefly brought Leeds level, but it was another Old Trafford trip to forget for them after also

being thrashed 6-2 last season.
Chelsea cruise
After seeing United display their title credentials, European champions Chelsea dispatched Palace in Patrick Vieira's first match in charge of the Eagles with ease to make their own case.
Marcos Alonso's free-kick and Christian Pulisic's scuffed finish gave Thomas Tuchel's men a commanding 2-0 lead

before half-time. Centre-back Trevoh Chalobah then marked his Premier League debut with a long-range strike to round off the scoring.
Elsewhere, Rafael Benitez went a long way to quieting his doubters at Everton as the Toffees came from behind to beat Southampton 3-1.
Adam Armstrong's opener on his debut for the Saints saw Benitez's men booed off at

half-time at Goodison Park with many of the home fans still unhappy at the appointment of the former Liverpool manager.
But the mood was lifted straight after half-time by Richarlison's equaliser before Abdoulaye Doucoure and Dominic Calvert-Lewin ensured Benitez got off to a winning start. Leicester also secured all three points as Jamie Vardy's deft flick proved the dif-

ference in a 1-0 win over Wolves.
Life for Aston Villa without Jack Grealish got off to a terrible start as Watford celebrated their return to the top flight with a 3-2 win at Vicarage Road.
Brighton bounced back from conceding inside two minutes at Burnley to win 2-1 at Turf Moor thanks to second-half goals from Neal Maupay and Alexis MacAllister.
AFP

ONLY
PURE
WATER

AND
PERFECT
TASTE



ONLY
WHAT'S
ESSENTIAL



Naabi elected as OBA chairman

Ashok Purohit
Muscat



Khalfan al Naabi, OBA president

Nizwa Club president Khalfan al Naabi was elected as the president of the Oman Basketball Association (OBA) for the 2021-24 term on Saturday.

A total of 12 clubs attended the annual general meeting of the OBA and Naabi emerged an easy winner, having polled eight votes against his rival Ahmed al Rawas.

Naabi succeeds long-serving chairman Fareed al Zadjali, who was at the helm for two four-year terms.

Ali al Yarubi was elected as the vice-president and Rabia Auladthani was elected as the general secretary.

Rashid al Ghufaili will be the new OBA treasurer while the mandatory women board member seat was won by Oman women team captain Hiba al Naabi.

Hiba is also an experienced coach and a qualified basketball

referee and brings in with her loads of experience in the game.

The other four board members elected were Hamad al Ghufaili, Hanif al Balushi, Saeed al Katheri and Mohammed al Hassani.

With the conclusion of the OBA elections, all eyes will be now on the elections of the Oman Football Association (OFA), which are scheduled to be held on August 28.

All the other sports associations under the Oman Olympic Committee (OOC) have elected the office-bearers for the new 2021-24 term.

With six board elections completed so far, Taha al Kishry and Saeed al Shahri retained their posts as chairmen of the Oman Swimming Association (OSA) and the Oman Handball Association respectively.

Sheikh Salim al Omari was elected as the new Oman Athletics Association (OAA) chief while the other chairmen elected were Marwan al Juma (Oman Hockey Association) and Ibrahim al Miqbali (Oman Volleyball Association).

The Oman Tennis Association (OTA) elections have not been given the go-ahead by the Ministry of Culture, Sports and Youth so far and the existing board, under chairman Khalid al Adi, continues to run the association till further notice.

@ashokmuscat



Jorge Martin steers his motorbike during the qualifying session on Saturday

Martin smashes lap record to grab pole

AUSTRIAN MOTOGP
Spielberg bei Knittelfeld, Austria - Jorge Martin grabbed pole position for a second straight week at the Red Bull Ring as he smashed a nine-minute old lap record in the dying seconds of Saturday's Austrian Grand Prix qualifying.

On the fastest track in MotoGP, championship leader Fabio Quartararo seemed to have sealed pole when he smashed the record set in practice on Friday by fellow Frenchman Johann Zarco. Quartararo's time of 1min 22.677sec was three-tenths of a second faster than anyone else nine minutes later when Martin set off on one last attempt with qualifying time about to expire. He took advantage of Ducati-Pramac teammate Zarco's slipstream to grab pole.

Ducati's strength on the track brought it four of the first six positions on the grid. Factory rider Francesco Bagnaia was third 0.43sec slower than Martin. Zarco, the second Pramac rider, was fourth and Australian Jack Miller was sixth.

Sandwiched between them will be Honda's Marc Marquez.

AFP

Every day, all day!



On the occasion of 75th Independence Day of India, I extend warm greetings and heartiest felicitations to all members of the Indian community living in the Sultanate of Oman. On behalf of the government and people of India, including the Indian community in Oman, I extend best wishes to His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik and the government and people of Oman for the continued peace, progress and prosperity of Oman.

It is a moment of pride for all Indians across the world as we celebrate this important milestone in the journey of our beloved nation.

Earlier this year, Prime Minister Shri Narendra Modi inaugurated the curtain raiser activities of the 'Azadi Ka Amrit Mahotsav' India@75. Speaking on the occasion, Prime Minister asserted that Azadi Ka Amrit Mahotsav means elixir of energy of independence. It means elixir of inspiration from the warriors of freedom struggle, elixir of new ideas & pledges and nectar of Aatmnirbharta (Self-reliance).

Government of India plans to commemorate India@75 in a big way with a series of events and I am confident that Indian nationals in Oman will also participate wholeheartedly to celebrate India@75 in a grand way in Oman. India is proud of its Constitution and democratic traditions. India's present-day achievements, especially in the fields of healthcare and vaccine manufacturing, are giving hope to the entire humanity during the COVID-19 pandemic. It is fitting that India's Presidency of the United Nations Security Council coincides with this special occasion.

India's engagements with the world have always been guided by the philosophy of Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam - the world in one family. This has also been the guiding principle in our efforts to

AMBASSADOR H E MUNU MAHAWAR'S MESSAGE

Opportunities for enhanced cooperation abundant

deal with COVID-19. As the world continues to battle against COVID-19 pandemic, India has supported more than 130 countries by supplying medicines. Earlier this year, under Vaccine Maitri initiative, India supplied over 60mn doses of COVID-19 vaccines to more than 90 countries. Within our country, India rolled out the largest vaccination drive in the world, efficiently managed by indigenous technological platform Co-WIN. India has made it an open-source platform and is willing to share it with friendly countries across the world.

India-Oman cooperation during COVID-19 has been reflective of the special and deep friendship that the two countries share. Government of Oman has taken good care of the Indian Diaspora residing in Oman which we sincerely appreciate. India remained a reliable supplier of food and other essential items to Oman at a time when global supply chains were severely disrupted. India gifted 100,000 doses of Made-in-India COVID-19 vaccines to Oman. Indian healthcare workers are working side-by-side with their Omani friends to provide medical care to the population. Oman also supported India's fight against COVID-19

during the second wave by providing essential medical equipment and medicines. We are also grateful to the Indian diaspora in Oman for their continuous support and their contribution towards India's fight against COVID-19.

India and Oman share a millenia-old friendship which has evolved into a vibrant and multifaceted strategic partnership. In a fitting tribute to the chief architect of India-Oman strategic partnership and in recognition of his seminal role in enhancing regional peace, India announced in March 2021 the conferment of the prestigious Mahatma Gandhi Peace Prize 2019 on the Late His Majesty Sultan Qaboos bin Said.



There is a strong desire among the leaderships and peoples of India and Oman to further expand and deepen our strategic partnership. In a telephone conversation that Prime Minister Narendra Modi had with HM Sultan Haitham earlier this year, this desire was reaffirmed by both the leaders. As Oman seeks to realise its Vision 2040 and India marches ahead on the path towards self-reliance, the opportunities for enhanced cooperation are abundant. India can be a trusted partner in all priority areas identified by Oman under Vision 2040.

India's economic growth offers huge opportunities for Omani companies. Working towards realisation of this huge potential will be the main objective for the Indian Embassy in the days ahead. In this endeavour, we look forward to working closely with the Government and people of Oman as well as the Indian diaspora in Oman.

May the India-Oman friendship continue to flourish! Jai Hind!



GREETINGS

TO THE GOVERNMENT AND PEOPLE OF INDIA ON THE OCCASION OF THE INDEPENDENCE DAY



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75th INDEPENDENCE DAY OF INDIA

MUSCAT DAILY SPECIAL FEATURE



18 MUSCAT DAILY SUNDAY, AUGUST 15, 2021

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Indian start-ups' unicorn strides

A famous saying states, "Ideas get their worth when something is done with them."

During the past decade, India has seen several start-ups mushrooming especially in technology sector and many of them reaching unicorn status (technology-driven, disruptive, privately-owned start-up companies valued at over US\$1bn). They have shown a rare immunity against the waves of the COVID-

19 pandemic that have brought most other businesses down to their knees. In 2021, amidst COVID-19, India witnessed 11 new unicorns, taking the total to 48, the third largest number in the world, after the US and China. Joining the initial unicorn club are some marquee names such as MakeMyTrip, InMobi, Paytm, Ola, BYJU'S, Cars24, Razorpay, Swiggy, Zomato, etc.

The Indian start-up ecosystem is nothing short of a revolution

with US\$106bn worth of value-creation by 48 unicorns, in turn creating 1.4mn direct and indirect jobs. The emergence of a greater number of unicorns is beneficial for all stakeholders as well as for employment generation. Moreover, start-ups have helped women entrepreneurs to contribute immensely to the start-up ecosystem. These include Swati Bhargava of CashKaro and Falguni Nair of Nykaa, who are an inspiration for young women.

While the average time taken by several companies to become unicorns is seven years, this period has been reducing recently as founders with prior founding or start-up experience enter the game. The recent Tie & Zinnov joint release, titled 'COVID-19 and the Antifragility of Indian Start-up Ecosystem', estimates India's Unicorns will reach 100 by 2025.

Unicorns can be spotted in a crowd of other start-ups not just by valuations but as industry disrupters. Maintaining the first-user advantage and exploiting every opportunity that comes their way is key to success. At the helm of such unicorns is strong executive leadership that makes or breaks the company. Another notable aspect of unicorns is they are more consumer-oriented rather than other enterprise start-ups.

The factors enabling the rise of unicorns comprise the availability of private equity funds, increasing Internet penetration and digital payments, more robust infrastructure and the rising pool of skilled talent.

India's changing reforms and policies towards start-ups and various government initiatives have helped the Indian start-ups scale. The inflow of forex especially from leading tech companies such as Facebook, Google, and Microsoft into the Indian start-up ecosystem signals the immense potential of the domestic market. As business models get more complex and interlinked, the regulators have to play a more proactive role in formulating appropriate regulations that encourage innovation.

As we move ahead there are many start-ups in India commanding high valuations in the queue to become unicorns. The time is right for the birth of more unicorns in India as it is brimming with new ideas and innovations.



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15TH AUGUST

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75th INDEPENDENCE DAY OF INDIA

MUSCAT DAILY SPECIAL FEATURE

SUNDAY, AUGUST 15, 2021

MUSCAT DAILY 19

The COVID-19 pandemic has come with whole new set of challenges to governments across the world in terms of policy-making. India is no exception. Raising enough resources for public welfare while ensuring sustainability is proving to be one of the biggest challenges.

In this backdrop of financial crunch seen across the world, do you know that Indian states were able to borrow significantly more in 2020-21? It would perhaps pleasantly surprise you that states were able to raise an extra ₹1.06tn in 2020-21. This significant increase in availability of resources was made possible by an approach of Centre-State *bhagidari* (participation).

When we formulated our economic response to the COVID-19 pandemic, we wanted to ensure that our solutions do not follow a 'one size fits all' model. For a federal country of continental dimensions, finding policy instruments at the national level to promote reforms by State Governments is indeed challenging. But, we had faith in the robustness of our federal polity and we moved ahead in the spirit of Centre-State *bhagidari* (participation).

In May 2020, as part of the Aatmanirbhar Bharat package, the Government of India announced that State Governments would be allowed enhanced borrowing for 2020-21. An extra 2 per cent of GSDP was allowed, of which 1 per cent was made conditional on the implementation of certain economic reforms. This nudge for reform is rare in Indian public finance. This was a nudge, incentivising the states to adopt progressive policies to avail additional funds. The results of this exercise are not only encouraging but also run contrary to the notion that there are limited takers for sound economic policies.

The four reforms to which additional borrowings were linked (with 0.25 per cent of GDP tied to each one) had two characteristics. Firstly, each of the reforms was linked to improving the Ease of Living to the public and particularly the poor, the vulnerable, and the middle class. Secondly, they also promoted fiscal sustainability.

The first reform under the 'One Nation One Ration Card' policy required State Governments to ensure that all ration cards in the State under the National Food Security Act (NFSA) were seeded with the Aadhaar number of all family members and that all Fair Price Shops had Electronic Point of Sale devices. The main benefit

Reforms by conviction and incentives



In May 2020, as part of the Aatmanirbhar Bharat package, the Government of India announced that state governments would be allowed enhanced borrowing for 2020-21

from this is that migrant workers can draw their food ration from anywhere in the country. Apart from these benefits to citizens, there is the financial benefit from the elimination of bogus cards & duplicate members. 17 states completed this reform and were granted additional borrowings amounting to ₹376bn.

The second reform, aimed at improving ease of doing business, required states to ensure that renewal of business-related licences under 7 Acts is made automatic, online and non-discretionary on mere payment of fees. Another requirement was implementation of a computerised random inspection system and prior notice of inspection to reduce harassment

and corruption under a further 12 Acts. This reform (covering 19 laws) is of particular help to micro and small enterprises, who suffer the most from the burden of the 'inspector raj'. It also promotes an improved investment climate, greater investment and faster growth. 20 states completed this reform and were allowed additional borrowing of ₹395.21bn.

The 15th Finance Commission and several academics have emphasised the crucial importance of sound property taxation. The third reform required states to notify floor rates of property tax and of water & sewerage charges, in consonance with stamp duty guideline values for property transactions and current costs respectively, in

urban areas. This would enable better quality of services to the urban poor and middle class, support better infrastructure and stimulate growth. Property tax is also progressive in its incidence and thus the poor in urban areas would benefit the most. This reform also benefits municipal staff who often face delay in payment of wages. 11 states completed these reforms and were granted additional borrowing of ₹159.57bn.

The fourth reform was introduction of Direct Benefit Transfer (DBT) in lieu of free electricity supply to farmers. The requirement was for formulation of a state-wide scheme with actual implementation in one district on a pilot basis by year end. Additional borrowing of 0.15 per cent of GSDP was linked to this. A component was also provided for reduction in technical & commercial losses and another for reducing the gap between revenues and costs (0.05 per cent of GSDP for each). This improves the finances of distribution companies, promotes conservation of water and energy and improves service quality through better financial and technical performance. 13 states implemented at least one component, while six states implemented the DBT component. As a result, ₹132.01bn of additional borrowings was permitted. Overall, 23 states availed of additional borrowings of ₹1.06tn out of a potential of ₹2.14tn. As a result, the aggregate borrowing permission granted to states for 2020-21 (conditional and unconditional) was 4.5 per cent of the initially estimated GSDP.

For a large nation with complex challenges as ours, this was a unique experience. We have often seen that for various reasons, schemes and reforms remain un-operational often for years. This was a pleasant departure from the past where the Centre & States came together to roll out public friendly reforms in a short span of time amidst the pandemic. This was made possible due to our approach of Sabka Saath, Sabka Vikas and Sabka Vishwas. Officials who have been working on these reforms suggest that without this incentive of additional funds, enactment of these policies would have taken years. India has seen a model of 'reforms by stealth and compulsion'. This is a new model of 'reforms by conviction and incentives'. I am thankful to all the states who took the lead in ushering in these policies amidst tough times for the betterment of their citizens. We shall continue working together for the rapid progress of 1.3bn Indians.

(By Prime Minister Narendra Modi)





GREETINGS

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Indian Railways en route to be the largest green railways



The Indian Railways is working at a break-neck speed to transition into one of the largest green railways network in the world. It is implementing several strategies such as widespread electrification and water/paper conservation to re-

duce its carbon footprint. The Ministry of Railways has committed to achieving net zero carbon emissions by 2030. This initiative will support the government's commitments such as the Paris Agreement on Climate Change, UN Sustainable Development Goals and National Disaster

Management Plans. The initiative is also guided by the vision of transforming Indian Railways into a cost-effective, efficient, punctual and modern carrier of passengers and freight.

Strategies Adopted
The railways has conducted ex-

tensive research to identify areas where carbon footprint can be decreased and has sought feasible ways to deploy green initiatives. It published the Environment Sustainability Reports in collaboration with subsidiary units of the Indian Railways to outline a framework of strategies

and points of focus for addressing climate change. Acquisition of green certifications and implementation of environment management systems are a core part of its strategy to achieve net zero carbon emissions by 2030. In addition, it has conducted focus group discussions with

various stakeholders to incorporate climate change features in its risk assessments and disaster management protocols. Initiatives Undertaken
The Ministry of Railways has set a target of transforming the Indian Railways into the "World's Largest Green Railways Network" by 2030. To achieve this, it has adopted several strategies to mitigate the impact of global warming and combat climate change. Largely, all strategies and initiatives undertaken by the ministry have a singular focal point - efficient use of energy. This is a two-pronged agenda involving transition to renewable sources of energy and an overall increase in energy-conservation efforts.

for consumption. Another similar project of 1.7 MW in Bina, Madhya Pradesh, has been installed in collaboration with Bharat Heavy Electricals Limited (BHEL).

Wind Energy
The Indian Railways is also implementing programmes to harness the potential of wind energy. It has installed wind-based power plants with an energy potential of 26 MW in Rajasthan, 21 MW in Tamil Nadu and 57 MW in Maharashtra. In addition, it has set a target of setting up wind energy plants with an energy potential of 200 MW by 2023 in Tamil Nadu, Gujarat, Rajasthan and Karnataka.

Energy Conservation
The railways has also implemented several green initiatives aimed at increasing efficient use of energy. One such initiative is 100 per cent use of LED light illumination of railway buildings and train stations. It has also acquired green certification from the Confederation of Indian Industry (CII) for 7 production units, 39 workshops, 6 diesel sheds, 2 warehouses, 14 train stations and 21 campuses. These

The railways has conducted research to identify areas where carbon footprint can be decreased and has sought ways to deploy green initiatives

include 20 platinum, 30 gold and 26 silver ratings. Green certification mainly covers assessment of parameters having a direct impact on the environment, such as energy-conservation measures, use of renewable energy, greenhouse gas emission reduction, water conservation, waste management, material conservation and recycling.

An additional 718 train stations have been certified under the ISO 14001 standard by the Environment Management System (EMS). The railways has also fitted 69,000 train coaches with >24,400 bio toilets. Additionally, the railways has converted 505 trains to head-on generations systems, resulting in fuel savings to the north of ₹4.5bn (US\$62mn) per annum or 70mn litres of diesel per annum. The railways has been monitoring progress of these initiatives and energy efficiency studies of these green initiatives have recorded a 15 per cent improvement in energy use.

Conclusion
Overall, efforts taken by the Indian Railways towards transforming it into one of the largest green railways network in the world are beginning to bear fruit. At the current pace of adoption and implementation of green initiatives, the railways is expected to meet its target on becoming a net zero carbon emitter by 2030.



HAPPY INDIAN INDEPENDENCE DAY

On this glorious occasion of Indian Independence Day, we pay homage to the visionary leaders of India and this great nation for strengthening the bond of friendship for unity and prosperity.

LONG LIVE INDO-OMAN FRIENDSHIP

