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'Potential hijack of ship off Oman is over'

Our Correspondent
Muscat

Oman's Ministry of Defence has issued a statement on the hijacking of a marine tanker in international waters of Oman Sea, saying investigations are being carried out into what happened on the Panama-flagged tanker named *Asphalt Princess*.

'An official source at the Maritime Security Centre stated that within the framework of the joint maritime action system and the existing coordination between the centre and the sultanate, continuous investigation is being conducted to find out what happened on *Asphalt Princess*,' the ministry said in a statement.

It added that the Royal Air Force of Oman is conducting sorties near the site, while the Royal Navy of Oman has directed a number of its vessels to secure the international waters in the region.

It affirmed the Maritime Security Centre's keenness to ensure the safety of maritime navigation in coordination with the other centres of the region.

Quoting a UK maritime security agency, AFP reported that the suspected hijacking of a ship had ended and the vessel is safe. "Boarders have left the vessel. Vessel is safe. Incident complete," United Kingdom Maritime Trade Operations (UKTMO) tweeted.

Earlier, Lloyd's List reported that armed men had boarded a Panama-flagged tanker.

On Tuesday, the UKTMO upgraded its report of the 'non-piracy' incident on the unidentified ship 60 miles east of Fujairah heading towards the Strait of Hormuz to 'potential hijack'.

SAYYID BADR MEETS IRANIAN PRESIDENT FOLLOWING SWEARING IN



President Dr Ebrahim Raisi of the Islamic Republic of Iran received Sayyid Badr Hamad al Busaidi, Foreign Minister, in Tehran on Wednesday. During the meeting, Sayyid Badr conveyed greetings of His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik to the Iranian President, along with His Majesty's best wishes of health and wellbeing to him, progress and prosperity to the Iranian people and further growth in relations between the two countries. The meeting was attended by Dr Mohammad Javad Zarif, Foreign Minister of Iran, Ibrahim Ahmed al Ma'aini, Oman's Ambassador to Iran, and other senior officials (ONA)

NEWS BRIEFS

HM RECEIVES CABLE OF THANKS FROM ALGERIAN PRESIDENT

Muscat - His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik has received a cable of thanks from President Abdelmadjid Tebboune of the People's Democratic Republic of Algeria, in reply to His Majesty's greetings cable on his country's Independence Anniversary.

In the cable, President Tebboune expressed his thanks and appreciation for His Majesty's greetings and best wishes.

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Total investment at Salalah Free Zone reaches \$8.8bn

10



China restricts overseas travel to curb new virus outbreak

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India bowl out England for 183 in 1st innings

H H SAYYID SHIHAB RECEIVES CHIEF OF QATARI ARMED FORCES



H H Sayyid Shihab bin Tarik al Said, Deputy Prime Minister for Defence Affairs, received in his office at Al Murtafa'a Camp Lt Gen (Pilot) Ghanem Shaheen al Ghanim, Chief of Staff of the Armed Forces of Qatar, on Wednesday. During the meeting, Sayyid Shihab welcomed the guest and his accompanying delegation. The meeting reviewed the fraternal relations between the two brotherly countries and exchanged views on several matters of mutual interest. The meeting was attended by Vice Admiral Abdullah Khamis al Raisi, Chief of Staff of the Sultan's Armed Forces (ONA)

MoCIIP following up on fuel quality complaints

Our Correspondent
Muscat

The Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion (MoCIIP) has issued a statement about the issue of fuel quality raised in some governorates.

MoCIIP stated, 'The ministry is currently following up on what is being circulated on the social media platforms about the quality of fuel in some governorates of the sultanate.'

The statement added that 'the ministry took random samples of fuel from various petrol stations in different governorates and conducted octane number test'.

The ministry assured its 'continuous efforts to follow up on the observations and complaints received in this regard with the concerned companies'.



MoCIIP officials collect random fuel sample from a filling station

New initiative to save excess food from being wasted



(Supplied photo)

Our Correspondent
Muscat

Food waste is a long-standing problem that has troubled the conscience of many in Oman, prompting a group of volunteers to take note of the matter and start collecting excess food from restaurants and weddings to distribute among needy families.

As part of its ongoing commitment to help needy families, the Ata'Tawwon volunteer group in Seeb has launched a service with a van to collect and distribute excess food, thereby saving it from going to waste.

According to Food Waste Index Report 2021, in Oman, households waste 470,322 tonnes of food every year. The wastage per person is estimated to be 95kg.

Speaking to *Muscat Daily*, Turkiya Suleiman Abdulrahim al Zadjali, head of Ata'Tawwon, said, "We operate under the umbrella of the Committee for Social Development in the Ministry of Social Development in Seeb. The idea came from the pain we felt on seeing how food prepared in excess was thrown away as waste. In July 2021, the team

The idea came from the pain we felt on seeing how food prepared in excess was thrown away as waste

TURKIYA
AL ZADJALI

launched a van to transport excess food."

In coordination with Muscat Municipality, the team collects food from weddings, events, restaurants and companies that is safe and edible and distributes it among needy families. Food that isn't fit for human consumption is given to animals.

The team also collects used clothes, utensils, washing machines, irons and other appliances in good working condition for distribution among the needy.

According to Turkiya, arranging funds for the van to collect and distribute food and refrigerators to store the food was a major challenge for the team face.

Continued on Page 03

Artificial intelligence, original intellect

ABA student in top ten winning team of Imagine Cup Junior

Hubert Vaz
Muscat

Vaishnavi Manivannan, a 16-year-old student of ABA Oman International School, is in a team that ranked among the top ten winning teams of Microsoft's Imagine Cup Junior 2021. She has been over the moon after this recent achievement with her teammates from Western Canada High School in Calgary, Alberta, Canada.

The team, which coordinated efforts on virtual platforms from January to May, presented a language learning tool for the hearing impaired called 'Here to Hear'. It received much praise from the evaluating panel of the competition.

Microsoft's Imagine Cup Junior is open to students between the ages of 13 and 18 and Vaishnavi got to know about it from a research academy that her teammates from Canada introduced her to. They presented themselves as an international team in which she was the only representative from Oman, all other members being from Canada.

The team met weekly on Discord to discuss their ideas and opinions on the project. It was difficult for every member to be present at every meeting because of time zone difference and other commitments but they regularly updated each other about their progress.



'Here To Hear' is a language learning tool that uses artificial intelligence (AI) to help children with hearing impairments communicate better

VAISHNAVI MANIVANNAN

"We wanted to work on a technology that would increase accessibility of a specific sector of the population. One of my teammates had talked about the deaf or hard of hearing (DHH) community and this is what helped us finalise our idea to focus on helping this community. 'Here To Hear' is a language learning tool that uses artificial intelligence (AI) to help children with hearing impairments communicate better," Vaishnavi said.

She has been interested in computer science, bioinformatics and anything tech-related from an early age. "I started to develop

an interest in AI and machine learning (ML) after discovering their potential. From self-driving cars to analysing mammograms for tumours, AI has a wide array of fascinating applications in the real world. I have taken various online courses to learn about AI and ML.

"I have also spoken to multiple professionals in this field to get a lot more insights. Since middle school, I have been participating in summer camps to work on projects with peers from all over the world. I can say that the constant practice and efforts I put into the projects I work on have

been helpful in increasing and furthering my interest in AI."

Vaishnavi's team - Samantha Ouyang, Daisy Zhang, Caroline Huang, Simrit Mangat and herself - ranked among the top ten global winners of the competition. They received a trophy, a cash prize of US\$300 and certificates acknowledging their participation and achievement. They were also privileged to have a mentorship session with Anthony Salcito, vice president of Microsoft.

"We haven't divided the cash prize yet and will most probably be using it to develop our project further," Vaishnavi said, adding that the team is looking forward to receiving mentorship from Microsoft so that they can further develop 'Here to Hear' and use it professionally in the real world.

Acknowledging the support and inspiration she received from her family, Vaishnavi said, "They've always inspired me to keep working hard and stay determined to face challenges and overcome them. I'm glad to have them by my side at all times."

About her ambition, she said, "I hope to learn, build and grow with extraordinary people on exciting projects. I want to be able to contribute to the field of AI and computer science. It might sound clichéd but I want to make some sort of difference in this field. I know my mindset to genuinely keep growing will pave the way towards realising my ambition."

Ministry develops portal for researchers

Our Correspondent
Muscat

The Ministry of Higher Education, Research and Innovation (MoHERI) has developed the Oman Research Portal - a national initiative that aims to establish an integrated system to provide electronic platforms and complementary tools to facilitate and enrich the research environment in the sultanate.

The Oman Research Portal provides services to researchers wishing to submit their proposals



Eng Nasser al Mandhari

within the programmes of the ministry from any where with Internet access. The results of the evaluation of the submitted proposal and evaluation reports can

also be followed up through the portal. The researcher can access the portal if their institution is affiliated with the ministry or if they are registered as independent researchers,' MoHERI said.

Eng Nasser bin Ali al Mandhari, director of the Oman Research Portal, said the portal facilitates the process of communication between users and research centres and institutions in the sultanate. It also provides quick access to national and international research systems and research topics and publications.

BRIDGE IN DARSAIT NEARING COMPLETION



The bridge over Wadi Kabir stream in Darsait is near completion. An official at the site said basic structure of the bridge is ready and now they are working on the road, pavements on both sides of the bridge and handrails on the boundary. The official hopes the bridge will be ready by end of the month (Syed Fasiuddin)

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Pact signed to set up fish collection centre in Dhofar

Our Correspondent
Muscat

In a step to support the fisheries sector and increase national income, the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Water Resources has signed an agreement with Mawarid al Ezz Trading Company to establish a fish collection centre in Sherbath in the wilayat of Shaleem and Halaniyat Islands in Dhofar governorate.

The pact was signed by H E Eng Yaqoub bin Khalfan al Busaidi, Undersecretary for Fisheries in the ministry, and Salim bin Saeed al Bathari, CEO of Mawarid al Ezz Trading Company.

The project, to be built on an area of 9,696sqm, will include a fish-handling hall, cold stores and ice-producing factory, in addition to other facilities, such as shops, rest houses for fishermen and transporters, and workshops for repairing boats. The project aims to raise the quality of fish products.

The ministry said it will also facilitate all beneficiaries involved in the fishery sector (transporters, companies, merchants, retailers, owners of fish sale shops and restaurants), control the quality of fish products,



(Supplied photo)

and implement controls and legislations concerned with organising fish marketing and distributing fish to meet the needs of the market.

Fish production increased in 2020

The sultanate's fish production increased by 45 per cent in 2020 compared to 2019, the Ministry

of Agriculture, Fisheries and Water Resources stated. In 2020, Oman's total fish production was 840,000 tonnes and was valued at RO364mn.

In 2019, the production was 580,000 tonnes.

'Production in the artisanal fishing sector was about 793,000 tonnes while coastal fishing reached 4,000 tonnes, commercial fishing accounted for 41,000 tonnes and around 1,000 tonnes of fish was produced in farms,' the ministry said.

The quantity of fish exports reached 283,000 tonnes and was valued at RO128mn.

'The UAE was the topmost fish importer from Oman last year, with a quantity of 41,000 tonnes, followed by Bangladesh with a quantity of 35,000 tonnes, Thailand (35,000 tonnes), Brazil (26,000 tonnes) and Egypt (23,000 tonnes).'

The ministry has launched several programmes to develop the fishing fleets as part of its endeavour to develop the artisanal and coastal fishing sectors and support commercial fishing in the high seas. It launched an advanced fishing boats programme that aims at introducing 270 state-of-the-art boats by the end of 2023.

'We have also prepared a plan to develop the coastal fishing sector,' the ministry added.

MoU inked to boost economic activities

Our Correspondent
Muscat

Oman Chamber of Commerce and Industry (OCCI) and Omani Economic Association (OEA) signed a memorandum of understanding (MoU) on Monday regarding organising economic activities, seminars and conferences.

The agreement was signed by Eng Ridha bin Juma al Saleh, OCCI chairman, and Dr Khalid bin Said al Ameri, chairman of



(Supplied photo)

the Board of Directors of the Omani Economic Association.

"Through the memorandum of understanding, we hope to organise joint economic conferences and meetings that address a number of issues such as employment issues, opportunities for economic diversification, and areas of investment and cooperation with brotherly and friendly countries," Eng Saleh said.

He added, "OCCI will provide venues for holding events, seminars and conferences, and pro-

vide logistical and media support for events, conferences and seminars that are held remotely and at the chamber's headquarters or its branches in the governorates."

Dr Ameri said, "The agreement aims to enrich economic knowledge in society and conduct economic studies. OEA will support the chamber by submitting proposals on important economic issues, and providing speakers from the members of the association."

New initiative to save excess food from being wasted

Continued from Page 01

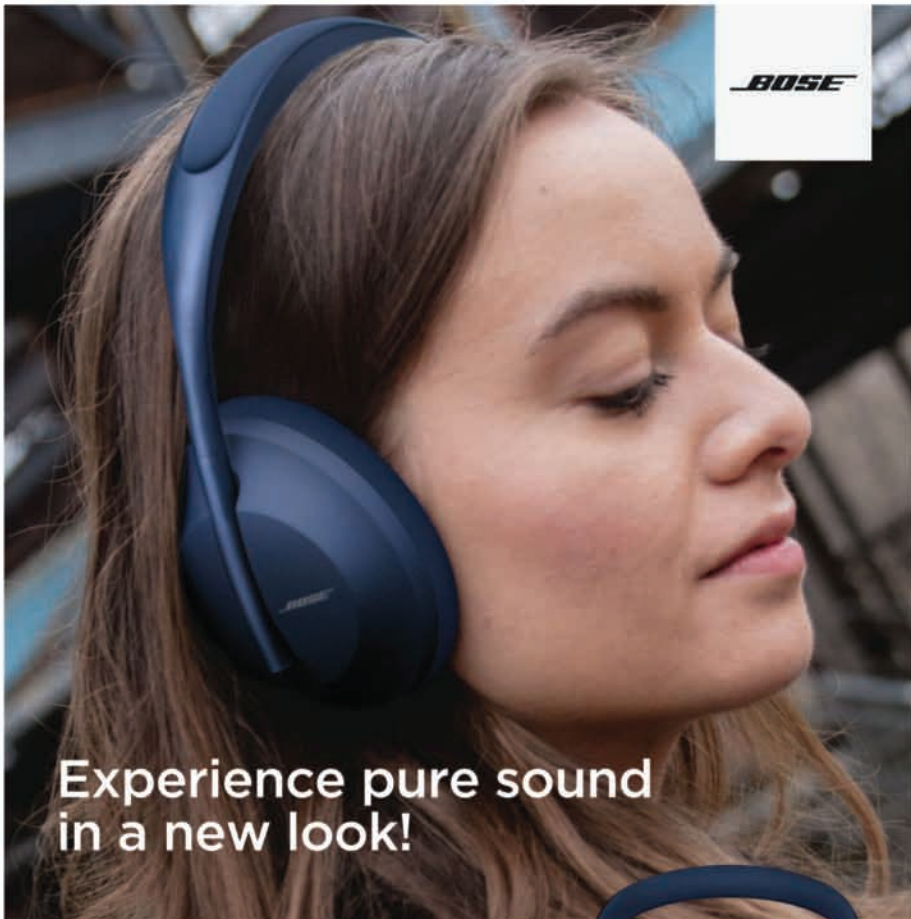
"We also face difficulty during night lockdown. Some restaurants give away food only half an hour before closing. We appeal to the concerned authorities to provide us a permit for movement during night lockdown."

She also spoke about the need for people to understand that volunteering is giving back to the community. "It is a selfless and generous initiative, so people should not think about rewards. Your reward is to see the fruits of your labour. People should also understand that volunteering can be in any form and rendered anywhere. And according to our religion, we should not waste food, not even the small amount."

AtaTawwon's future plans include collecting excess food from hospitals and hotels.



"We have received help from many people and are thankful to all those individuals and companies that have supported us."



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Manama	46	32	Asr 3.37pm
Riyadh	45	28	Maghrib 6.47pm
			Isha 8.17pm

Health Endowment Foundation meets, appoints board

Muscat - The governing board of the Health Endowment Foundation held its first meeting in the headquarters of the Ministry of Health (MoH) on Wednesday.

During the meeting, H E Dr Ahmed bin Mohammed al Sa'eedi, Minister of Health, was elected as chairman of the Health Endowment Foundation, H E Dr Fatma Mohammed al Ajmi, Undersecretary for Administrative, Financial and Planning Affairs in MoH, as deputy chairman, and Dr Halima Qalam al Hinai, acting director general of Planning and Studies, as secretary.

The meeting reviewed the foundation's statute, and approved an executive committee to regulate its work. It also identified the required assets, and de-

veloped investment plans along with marketing plans to achieve the desired goals of the foundation.

The idea of establishing the foundation came due to challenges facing the health system in the sultanate, such as high costs of health services, teaching, training and hiring workforce in the health sector, as well as the high costs of medical equipment, devices, medications and biomedical technology.

In order to address these challenges, efforts have been exerted to sustain the financing of the health system.

Health endowment is one of the funding alternatives for the health system, adopted by a number of countries.

ONA

293 new COVID-19 cases, 12 deaths

Our Correspondent
Muscat

The Ministry of Health (MoH) on Wednesday reported 293 new COVID-19 cases and 12 deaths taking the total number of cases registered in the sultanate to 297,724, including 3,889 deaths.

Thirty patients were admitted to hospitals across Oman in the last 24 hours, taking the total number of inpatients to 434 including 194 in intensive care units,'

MoH stated.

The number of recoveries is also increasing. 'The total number of recoveries is now 281,724 and the recovery rate is 94.6 per cent.'



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Barka bio-fuel plant to start next month



(Supplied photos)

Our Correspondent
Muscat

As many as 600,000lt of cooking oil are wasted every year in Oman causing ecological disruptions and environmental pollution. This waste will soon be utilised to produce bio-diesel fuel compatible with vehicle use.

Erigo Bio-fuel, a Qatar-based pioneer in producing bio-diesel from used cooking oil has tied up Neutral Fuels Holdings Ltd Dubai to begin a bio-diesel production facility in the country from September.

Oman Environmental Services Holding Company (be'ah), which is responsible for all waste management throughout Oman, has endorsed Erigo group and Neutral Fuels for the project.

Asim Khamis Salman al Sabri, owner of Premium Global Group - local representative of the project - set up with support of be'ah, said, "It is estimated that Oman wastes almost 600,000lt of used cooking oil in a year causing pollution and other environmen-



This initiative to convert cooking oil waste to useful bio-diesel is needed to safeguard our environment and find another source of energy

MOHAMMED ASHRAF

tal issues along with financial losses for companies and small businesses."

He added that the plant will initially produce almost 800,000 gallons of bio-diesel

per year, utilising locally collected used cooking oil as feed-stock.

The bio-diesel plant is set to begin operations in September - under the theme Waste To Wealth - and is in its final stage of construction in Barka Industrial Area.

Mohammed Ashraf, Oman country manager of Erigo Bio-fuel, said, "This initiative to convert waste cooking oil to useful bio-diesel is needed to safeguard our environment and find another source of energy."

He added that many European countries, including Netherlands, have agreed to import bio-diesel from Oman.

"Oman's export of bio-diesel can assure around 30 to 40 per cent price advantage over traditional diesel oil," added Noushad Rahuman, managing director of Premium Global Group.

Erigo runs bio-fuel operations in several countries around the world, including India, Malaysia, the Philippines, Qatar and Tunisia.

Adventurer makes film on snakes

Our Correspondent
Muscat

To document Oman's wildlife, cobras in particular, Abdul Rahman Saeed al Omari, 28, from the wilayat of Mirbat, Dhofar governorate, has made a short film on snakes found in the sultanate.

Speaking to *Muscat Daily*, Omari said the film was shot in December 2020 in Dhofar. The two-minute film called *Arabian Cobra* is the first documentary on the orange Arabian cobra in the sultanate, claims Omari.

Omari feels that it is important to document cobra species, to better understand the life of snakes in their natural habitat.

"Snakes are an important part of the environment in Oman. There are both poisonous and non-poisonous species. The film aims to spread awareness to preserve the natural environment and help adventure seekers identify the different species of snakes found in their natural



Abdul al Omari

habitat in Oman," he said

"I developed the hobby of catching snakes in childhood when I caught the first live snake in my life at the age of six."

Curious to find out more about snakes, his passion took

him to explore and study more about them.

"I studied about their types and the extent of their toxicity. The only means for me at the time was manual examination, which was possible only after

catching the snakes."

The passionate adventurer has visited many sites in Dhofar to catch snakes with a friend, Ahmed al Busaidi from the University of Nizwa. Together they have exerted a lot of efforts to search for snakes and gather the correct information about them.

According to Omari, the most common species in Oman include the Arabian cobra, saw-scaled viper, puff adder, wadi racer, tree snakes, sand viper, sand boa and the cat snake.

For snakebites, Omari recommends going to a hospital immediately. "Snakebite victims must avoid putting pressure on the wound," he said. "If you are bitten by a snake, do not be nervous. Stay calm and move away from the site quietly. If possible, see the snake to know its pattern and colour. It'll help the doctor decide the treatment."

To see the film, go to <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EwdTxHYsswY>

34 artists in 'Rare' exhibition at Art & Soul Gallery

Muscat - An art exhibition called 'Rare' was inaugurated on Sunday evening at the Art & Soul Gallery in Water Front Mall, Qurm with 34 artists of various nationalities finding a 'common platform' to display their works.

Kethki Ambekar, Art & Soul Gallery director, said renowned artists in Oman shared the platform offered by the gallery where 'they are exhibiting their rare signature pieces'.

Inaugurated by art enthusiast Abdulrauf Wood as the guest of honour, the exhibition has art pieces made in various mediums and styles ranging from water-colour, acrylic, mixed media, charcoal, sculpture, ceramic pot-



Adulmonam al Hassani (left) explains his art piece *Memory* to Abdulrauf Wood, the guest of honour at the exhibition in Water Front Mall, Qurm

tery, abstract, nail and string and sand painting.

"The sand painting *Lion* by

Nikos Zarras is a unique one. The artist did not use any colour or any other material in creating the

painting," Kethki added.

A participating artist Adulmonam al Hassani, said, "I am taking part in this exhibition with my art piece called *Memory*. This mixed media piece expresses life in general, and I let the audience form their own interpretation of my creation."

Sondos Khafaji, an Iraqi artist residing in Oman, said, "We were told to participate with one painting and our work should be unique. I am showcasing today 'my soul' and it is called *The Clear Sight*."

The 'Rare' art exhibition will run till August 14 and the gallery timing is 8am-9pm.

Text and photo by Syed Fasiuddin

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MUSCAT DAILY

LETTER TO THE EDITOR

Updated electronic learning is inevitable

There is no doubt that electronic education has become essential and inevitable in our educational system. However, we feel that our students still need to be more equipped with electronic learning skills.

We appreciate the efforts exerted in the educational system by the concerned parties in this respect, but we do stress on the importance of boosting and developing electronic education to the best level that makes our students unique and thorough professionals in adult life. The distance learning programme that has been adopted by the Ministry of Education since the beginning of the pandemic needs a comprehensive review. Complaints about the programme have emerged among students and families, in addition to the over loaded obligations undertaken by teachers, irrespective of the simplicity of subjects.

Indicators which assess the skills and learning potential of students should be considered real evidence to update and review electronic education in schools.

We are in the middle of 2021 which is witnessing a rapid and constant transformation in technology and digital learning.

What we need is a more attentive and serious plan to be taken up by the Ministry of Education regarding electronic learning that involves making an official committee comprising professionals, experts in digital learning and academic advisers. The committee must come up with an effective and tangible electronic learning system that can save time and effort, in addition to ensuring the quality of outcome.

Ahmed Barham
Entrepreneur

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Total investment at Salalah Free Zone reaches \$8.8bn

Salalah Free Zone seeks to attract total \$20bn investment by 2028

Our Correspondent
Muscat

Salalah Free Zone (SFZ), one of the largest industrial areas in the sultanate, has attracted a total investment of more than US\$8.8bn since the inception.

As per the latest statistics revealed by SFZ, the number of usufruct agreements signed by Salalah Free Zone until the beginning of 2021 reached 95 agreements with total investment volume of US\$8.8bn (around RO3.3bn).

The increasing investment reflects local and international investors' interest in Salalah Free Zone which is home to many prominent companies and factories catering to regional and global markets.

In an interview published in the latest edition of Duqm Economist magazine, Dr Ali bin Mohammed Tabouk, CEO of Salalah Free Zone, confirmed the increase in the local and international interest to invest in the SFZ.

"The number of usufruct agreements signed by SFZ until the beginning of this year reached about 95 agreements with an investment volume of US\$8.8bn. Further negotiations are under the process to bring



Dr Ali bin Mohammed Tabouk

many new projects in different sectors," he said.

Revealing the features of SFZ's strategy for the period from 2013 to 2028, Tabouk said, "Salalah Free Zone seeks to attract investments of US\$20bn and complete the construction of infrastructure that supports attracting local and international investments."

According to Tabouk, SFZ's strategy until 2028 is divided into the commercial and technical business plans, which constitute the base of all plans and development programmes for the Zone.

"The business plan is concerned with all activities, studies, research and promotional pro-

grammes related to attracting investments. On the other hand, the technical business plan focuses on developing and providing the infrastructure, facilities and services needed by existing and future investors."

He said this strategy aims to make Salalah Free Zone a global destination to attract investments that are in line with the government policy and pillars of Oman's Vision 2040 to diversify sources of income and create new job opportunities for Omanis.

"The strategy focuses on attracting essential projects in various fields: Logistic services, warehousing, redistribution, manufacturing and textile indus-

tries, petrochemicals, pharmaceutical industries, food industries, re-manufacturing projects, recycling plastic materials, installation and assembly, and many other value-added projects," Tabouk said.

Despite the challenges from the COVID-19 Pandemic, the number of projects in Salalah Free Zone have continued to increase as a result of the competitive advantages and logistics services provided to local and foreign investors.

"The number of investment productive projects in SFZ is currently around 23 projects in various sectors. Total volume of investment in these projects records more than RO1.1bn. However, the number of under establishment investment projects is 14 projects with an investment volume reaching around RO662mn," Tabouk noted.

He said that total direct job opportunities provided by SFZ stood at 2,200 jobs and Omanisation rate is 36%, which is higher than the percentage specified in the Royal Decree on the establishment of Salalah Free Zone.

Tabouk also stated that SFZ contributed to providing many indirect job opportunities estimated at about 4,400 jobs,

bringing total direct and indirect job opportunities provided by the Zone to about 6,600 jobs.

He confirmed that Salalah Free Zone, which celebrated on June 20, 2021, the 15th anniversary of its inception, was able over the years to localise many projects.

"Localising the investments targeted in Salalah Free Zone led to the achievement of many economic and social gains. Among these benefits are providing business opportunities for national companies, offering job opportunities for Omanis, transferring knowledge and technology and utilising the natural resources available in the sultanate."

"Other advantages include developing the financial sector and many other economic sectors such as services, construction, health services, real estate, consumer items, in addition to providing business opportunities for SMEs," Tabouk added.

Salalah Free Zone recently announced the completion of the construction works of Mazaya Logistics Station (phase two), covering an area of 25,000sqm.

This milestones follows the success marked by Mazaya Logistics Warehouses (phase 1), which have been built over and an area of 34,000sqm.



CBO issues RO192mn worth of treasury bills

Our Correspondent
Muscat

A new tender of the government treasury bills (issue number 122) was announced this week by the Central Bank of Oman (CBO).

The total value of the allotted treasury bills amounted to RO192mn, for a maturity period of 28 days, from August 4 until September 1.

The average accepted price reached RO99.951 for every RO100 bill, and the minimum accepted price arrived at RO99.950, the CBO said in a statement.

The average discount rate and the average yield reached 0.64160 per cent and 0.64192 per cent, respectively. The interest rate on the repo operations with the CBO is 0.5 per cent

while the discount rate on the treasury bills discounting facility with the central bank is 0.75 per cent.

Treasury bills are short-term highly secured financial instruments issued by the Ministry of Finance. They provide licensed commercial banks the opportunity to invest their surplus funds.

The Central Bank of Oman acts as the issue manager and provides the added advantage of ready liquidity through discounting and repurchase facilities (repo).

Furthermore, treasury bills promote the local money market by creating a benchmark yield curve for short-term interest rates. The government may also resort to this instrument whenever felt necessary for financing its recurrent expenditures.

Amazon faces warehouse shortage

Washington, US - Amazon.com Inc needs to spend billions of dollars to expand its warehouse capacity and delivery system. The company is racing to meet demand even though shoppers are venturing more outside the home and it is returning to a pre-lockdown sales trajectory.

Last year, Amazon turned goods away from warehouses for weeks because it lacked the people and space to fulfil them safely. It still is playing catch-up, said Andrea Leigh, vice president at e-commerce optimisation firm Ideoclick, who formerly worked at Amazon. "Amazon is running out of available space," she said. "They're also running out of labour."

Even after the company almost doubled its warehouse and transportation network in the prior 18 months, it sees significant investment ahead, not to mention costs from hiring and training staff. A tight labour market force Amazon to raise wages early and add signing bonuses to attract full and part-time em-



ployees, who now number 1,335,000.

It also has to get back on track to its goal of one-day Prime deliveries in the United States. "This is all part of a multi-year investment cycle for us," chief financial officer Brian Olsavsky said, according to Reuters.

For shareholders, Amazon's spending to capture long-term gains at the risk of near-term profit is in a playbook it has deployed over 27 years, sometimes testing the patience of Wall Street.

Amazon plans to add 517 facilities to its global distribution

infrastructure in the coming years, according to logistics consultancy MWPVL International. That is 176mn square feet on top of the 402mn it already has.

Amazon did not comment on the accuracy of those estimates, but said its infrastructure rollout already is ramping up. Over the past 12 months, capital expenditures and equipment leases jumped 74 per cent to US\$54.5bn, almost double the growth rate a year ago.

That may be par for the course for a US\$1.7tn retailer that wants to get bigger.

Agencies

Deal signed for first business hotel in Khazaen Economic City

Our Correspondent
Muscat

Khazaen Economic City on Wednesday announced the signing of a new investment agreement with Ibtina Trading and Contracting Company to establish the first businessmen hotel in the economic city.

The hotel, which will be built on a total area of 4,500sqm, targets various segments of businesses in the city and contains hotel rooms, a business center, meeting and workshops rooms, corporate administrative offices, as well as trade fairs and various restaurants.

The agreement was signed by Eng Salim bin Sulaiman al Thuhli, CEO of Khazaen Economic City, and Ibrahim bin Khalfan al Amri, CEO of Ibtina Trading and Contracting Company.

"This agreement is the first hotel project in the city, which



will contribute significantly to attracting investors and facilitating businesses by providing hotel rooms and a business center for the city investors and visitors, which will strengthen the principle of the integrated city.

This signing reflects the steady growth of the city, and the confidence and tendency of different categories of investors," Thuhli said.

largest public-private partnership project in the sultanate in the field of integrated economic zones and free zones. It is the latest integrated economic city to be developed in the Wilayat of Barka.

The city possesses a strategic location near the capital Muscat and according to the urban strategy announced by the Ministry of Housing and Urban Planning, it is considered as a part of the Greater Muscat.

In the future, the Khazen Dry Port will be linked to Sohar City by the railway which will facilitate the transportation of goods from Sohar port to Khazaen Dry Port directly. Khazaen Dry Port is the first dry port in the sultanate, where its construction work has been completed.

The Khazaen Economic City also incorporates Khazaen Fruit and vegetables Central Market, which is part of the Food City.

Dubai to host major business events as Expo 2020 approaches

Dubai, UAE - Dubai's business events sector continues to build on its momentum as one of the first cities in the world to reopen for international meetings, with a busy calendar of high profile conferences, meetings and incentives on the horizon through the rest of 2021 and into 2022.

Following on from the resumption of international tourism to the city in July 2020, Dubai welcomed international business events from October 2020 and immediately saw a healthy pipeline of conferences and exhibitions taking place across the city, according to a statement issued by Dubai Tourism.

With meeting planners recognising Dubai's ability to safely host events and its prudent handling of the global COVID-19

pandemic, that is now poised to continue in the second half of 2021, through the hosting of Expo 2020 Dubai and into the rest of 2022.

Among the major congresses and conferences coming to Dubai in the coming months are the Congress of the Société Internationale d'Urologie, Society of Petroleum Engineers Annual Technical Conference and Exhibition, International Astronautical Congress, World Chambers Congress, LPG Week, Gastech and Africa Oil Week.

Meanwhile, major incentive groups visiting the city will include AFC Life Science, Amway, Sunhope, Jeunesse and OMNILIFE.

Issam Kazim, CEO of Dubai Corporation for Tourism and Commerce Marketing, said,



"Driven by the leadership of Sheikh Mohammed bin Rashid al Maktoum, the city was among the first in the world to restart its business events sector, providing a vital platform for associations, businesses and organisations to resume their face to face meet-

ings and drive knowledge development in key sectors.

"We understand the importance for the meetings industry globally to restart physical events, and thanks to the efforts of stakeholders across the city, this all continues to be done in

environments that prioritise the safety of all delegates, participants and organisers," Kazim said.

With Expo 2020 Dubai commencing on October 1, 2021 and lasting six months, the city is poised to welcome a number of

major corporate and incentive groups that will be looking to take advantage of the opportunity to allow delegates to experience and explore the world's greatest show during their time in the city.

The Dubai Exhibition Centre within the Expo 2020 site will also host a number of important conferences and events, including the Dubai Association Conference.

To build on this momentum, Dubai Business Events (DBE), the city's official convention bureau, continues to engage with meeting planners internationally, face-to-face where possible, highlighting the city's business events infrastructure and rapidly developing knowledge economy.

Over the coming months, DBE will host a number of study mis-

sions to the city, especially during Expo 2020 Dubai, allowing meeting and event planners to see offerings around the city and experience one of the world's largest events. Meanwhile, DBE's global team will also meet planners in their own markets through a series of sales missions, industry events and trade shows.

Among the major events taking place over the coming months in Dubai is Africa Oil Week. While traditionally hosted in South Africa, this year's edition has been relocated to Dubai, giving attendees the opportunity to engage in crucial discussions and deal making while at the same time taking advantage of a destination that can offer a safe setting.

WAM

Sluggish trend continues at MSX

Our Correspondent
Muscat

The benchmark index of the Muscat Stock Exchange (MSX) on Wednesday decreased 0.14 per cent to close at 3,993.76 points. Trading activity continued to remain weak on the Omani bourse.

The decline in main index was caused mainly by Financial Index which fell 0.13 per cent. Industrial and Services indices rose 1.18 per cent and 0.08 per cent, respectively. MSX Sharia Index decreased 0.04 per cent to close at 584.85 points.

Trading activity slightly improved on Wednesday as volumes inched up to 11.87mn shares compared with 11.80mn shares traded in the previous trading session. Market turnover declined more than 28 per cent to RO3.49mn compared with RO2.71mn in the previous session.

Market breadth at the MSX remained negative with 11 advancing stock to 14 de-



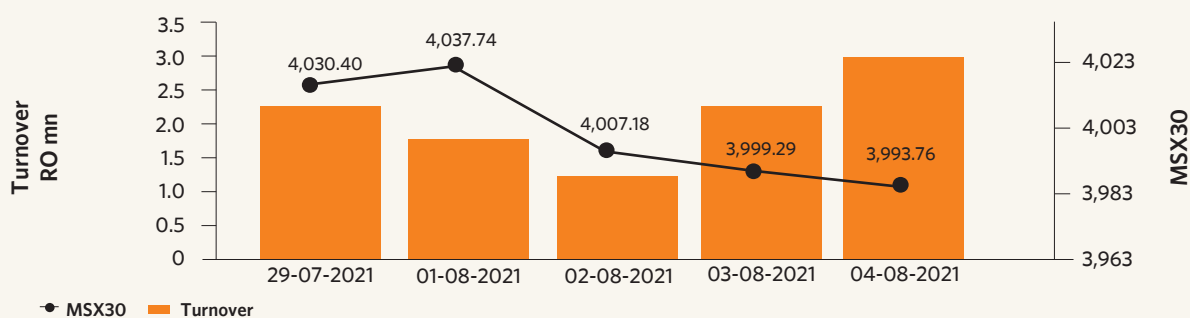
cliners. As many as 22 traded stocks remained flat for the day.

Two gainers were Salalah Mills (10.0 per cent), Oman Cables Industry (4.34 per cent), Voltamp Energy (4.0 per cent), Phoenix Power (2.17 per cent), and Ren-

aissance Services (1.84 per cent).

Top losers were Dhofar Generating (-2.34 per cent), Oman Cement (-2.13 per cent), United Finance (-1.67 per cent), Raysut Cement (-1.49 per cent) and Vision Insurance (-1.22 per cent).

MSX INDEX AND TURNOVER OF FIVE TRADING DAYS



Alibaba earnings decline as China tech giants face turmoil

Shanghai, China - Chinese e-commerce leader Alibaba Group said that it posted lower profit but maintained steady revenue growth, indicating that a government crackdown on the country's tech giants was having little impact on its core business.

Alibaba said its net income in the April-June quarter came in at 45.1bn yuan (US\$7bn), down five per cent on-year.

The Hangzhou-based company was the first of China's tech champions to feel the wrath of a government that has become concerned over their rapid growth and data security.

In April, regulators fined Alibaba a record US\$2.78bn for anti-competitive practises, dragging the company to a rare operating loss in the January-March quarter. Since then, the government has taken a number of other measures against major Chinese digital players, sending their share prices tumbling.

But through it all, Alibaba's revenues remained solid as China's economy has weathered the global pandemic well, with company executives saying it



had even helped fuel online shopping. Alibaba revenue, the vast majority of which comes from its core e-commerce platforms, increased 34 per cent on-year to 205.7bn yuan, according to the company.

That was just short of a Bloomberg poll of analysts who had forecast just over 36 per cent growth. Alibaba blamed the lower net income on strategic investments. A statement accompanying the earnings announcement made no mention of the tech clampdown.

"We believe in the growth of the Chinese economy and long-term value creation of Alibaba,"

Chairman and CEO Daniel Zhang said.

Huge fines

After years of giving them relatively free rein to help digitise the Chinese economy, regulators are now seeking to hobble dominant digital platforms. The moves echo a global pushback against the increasing clout of Big Tech that has Facebook, Google and others also facing scrutiny at home and abroad.

Alibaba has received particular attention after billionaire co-founder Jack Ma publicly criticised Chinese regulators in October for reining in a push into

online lending, wealth management and insurance products by Alibaba's online payments arm Ant Group. The government said it imposed the US\$2.78bn fine on Alibaba for its practice of forbidding merchants who wish to sell their wares on its popular online marketplaces from simultaneously offering them on rival e-commerce sites, saying the company had 'abused its dominant position in the market'.

The Alibaba fine was a record and nearly three times the almost US\$1bn levied by China against Qualcomm in 2015, Bloomberg reported earlier.

Even before the fine, the regulatory crackdown had cost Ma and Ant Group dearly.

A planned record-shattering US\$35bn Hong Kong-Shanghai IPO by Ant Group, which would have added to Ma's already massive wealth, was abruptly shelved. Ma subsequently disappeared from public view for weeks, and Ant Group was ordered by regulators to return to its roots as an online payment services provider.

AFP

Toyota bounces back from virus impact, net profit hits Q1 record

Tokyo, Japan - Toyota's net profit soared more than fivefold in the first quarter as strong sales were fuelled by the recovery from the coronavirus crisis, but the firm left its annual forecast unchanged Wednesday citing 'uncertainties' ahead.

The world's top-selling automaker has bounced back quicker than its competitors from the impact of COVID-19 lockdowns, reclaiming the top spot for sales last year.

The Japanese giant has also so far weathered a global chip shortage that has forced rivals to slash production targets, although it is now facing some disruption.

For the three months to June, Toyota logged an 897.8bn yen (US\$8.2bn) net profit - a record for the first quarter, and up from 158.8bn yen in the same period last year. Sales surged 72.5 per cent to 7.9tn yen.

"The first-quarter results were the result of our maintaining... stable sales and supply, despite the semiconductor shortage and spread of COVID-19," the company said in a statement.

But it maintained its full-year net profit forecast at 2.3tn yen, warning of 'uncertainties in and after the second quarter'.

Last week, Toyota said group global sales hit a record high for the six months to June, thanks to healthy demand for its Highlander and Camry models in the



File photo shows cars parked outside a Toyota showroom in Tokyo (AFP)

United States and Corolla and Lexus brands in China.

"Toyota has sustained its strong performance," said Satoru Takada, an auto analyst at Tokyo-based research and consulting firm TIW.

The firm "has a good chance of retaining the crown of the world's number one carmaker", Takada told AFP before the results were released.

In June, Toyota temporarily suspended operations at two domestic plants because of the global chip crunch, with a third short hiatus currently at a separate factory.

Microchips are essential for the electronics systems of modern cars, and have been in short supply since the end of last year.

When the pandemic hit, carmakers worldwide scaled back

orders, so chipmakers shifted output to consumer electronics as people splurged on equipment to work and relax at home.

That left automakers in a tight situation as demand returned, with many slowing or even temporarily halting production.

"Semiconductor supplies are expected to remain tight at least until next year, because the global economic recovery from the coronavirus pandemic should further boost chip demand in many sectors," said Yasuo Imanaka, chief analyst at Rakuten Securities. "On top of the semiconductor shortage, the impact of the spread of the Delta strain of the coronavirus on both sales and production in Asia is a potential risk for Toyota," added TIW's Takada.

AFP

US private hiring slows sharply

Washington, US - Private hiring by American firms slowed sharply in July to 330,000, with dramatically lower gains in the construction and leisure and hospitality sectors, according to payroll services firm ADP.

The result was far smaller than economists had expected and less than half of the 680,000 positions gained in June, which could be a worrisome sign ahead of the government's monthly jobs report due out Friday.

"The labour market recovery continues to exhibit uneven progress, but progress nonetheless," ADP chief economist Nela Richardson said in a statement.

As pandemic restrictions have eased, allowing businesses like hotels and restaurants to reopen, the hard-hit leisure and hospitality sector has been hiring work-

ers at a brisk pace since March, but the ADP report showed a gain of just 139,000 jobs last month - the biggest of any sector by far but less than half of June's figures.

In recent weeks, rising infections from the fast-spreading Delta variant of COVID-19 have created uncertainty and caused some areas of the United States to again put in place mask-wearing rules.

"The slowdown in the recovery has also impacted companies of all sizes. Bottlenecks in hiring continue to hold back stronger gains, particularly in light of new COVID-19 concerns tied to viral variants," Richardson said.

"These barriers should ebb in coming months, with stronger monthly gains ahead as a result."

In the dominant US services sector, hiring slowed in the trade,

transportation and utilities professions, and in healthcare and education, while manufacturing added just 8,000 jobs and construction 1,000 following four months of double-digit gains.

Economists are projecting employment gains of over 900,000 and as much as a million in the key Labor Department report, and though the ADP data are not always in sync with the official figures, the big miss could foretell weak monthly hiring overall.

Rubeela Farooqi of High Frequency Economics noted the weakness in the ADP report, but said "job growth is set to pick up over coming months as the factors that are restraining labour supply presently - health concerns, child-care, supplemental unemployment benefits - ease."

AFP

\$29bn Afterpay deal puts spotlight on BNPL platforms

Paris, France - The US\$29bn takeover of Australia's 'buy now, pay later' (BNPL) app Afterpay by US firm Square has thrown a spotlight on a sector that is growing rapidly and grabbing the attention of regulators.

The seven-year-old Sydney-based app - which allows users to pay off smaller purchases in regular instalments - is aimed at millennials who embrace a cashless lifestyle.

It now boasts more than 16mn customers worldwide and works with almost 100,000 retailers.

Afterpay is the best-known 'buy now, pay later' - or BNPL - app, alongside Sweden's Klarna. Its success caught the eye of Square, a digital payment platform owned by Twitter chief Jack Dorsey, who announced the mega deal on Sunday.

But other big-name players are also vying for a piece of the

cake, including electronic payment service PayPal, online retailer Amazon and banks.

According to a study by Kaleido Intelligence, the valuation of the BNPL sector quadrupled to nearly US\$80bn globally between 2018 and 2020 and could rise to as much as US\$250bn by 2025.

"It's a principle that has been around for quite a long time, but the process of signing up to it has never been so fluid, effective and responsive," said Thomas Rocafull, banking analyst at Sia Partners. Unlike a credit card, BNPL users are not charged interest or a joining fee and spending limits are kept low. Companies make most of their money by charging retailers for transaction costs.

In the case of Afterpay, stores using the app lose around four per cent of the value of the transaction, but get the rest of the



cash upfront and are not exposed to the risk of non-payment. "For users, it offers a cheaper alternative to credit cards for financing purchases, and is convenient for them dur-

ing the checkout process," said Nick Maynard, analyst at Juniper Research. "For a merchant, it is relatively simple to integrate BNPL in their checkouts, and it can allow them to boost their av-

erage order value and conversion rate."

According to Kaleido Intelligence analyst Steffen Sorrell, retailers offering a BNPL option see the number of visitors to their site finalising a purchase rise by around 20 per cent.

Congested market

Kaleido Intelligence estimates that Americans are the biggest customers for such apps and accounted for around one-third of worldwide BNPL market in 2020. But Asia is also gaining ground rapidly, while the picture in Europe is much more mixed. According to Sia Partners, BNPL payments made up for 23 per cent of online retail turnover in Sweden in 2020 and 19 per cent in Germany.

By contrast, in countries such as Spain and Italy, where consumers still prefer traditional

methods of payment, the proportion was only two per cent, and in France four per cent. Nevertheless, Rocafull said he expected the market in southern Europe to 'explode' in the coming years.

Jean-Pierre Viboud, head of BNPL specialist Oney Bank, said the market a projected annual growth rate of 30 per cent in Europe.

However, as the providers of such BNPL services has grown in number, "the market is very congested," said Maynard, predicting a "period of consolidation" in the foreseeable future.

Square's purchase of Afterpay is only the latest in a series of recent mergers and acquisitions in the sector. In January, Affirm - set up by PayPal's co-founders - acquired Canada's PayBright. Last year, Klarna bought Italy's MoneyMour. In France, banking

giant BNP Paribas last week signed an agreement to purchase online consumer credit provider Floa. In May, Banque Postale teamed up with fintech start-up Alma.

Not risk-free

But there are risks, too, with critics arguing that Afterpay and similar apps may tempt people to spend money they do not have.

The BNPL industry is largely unregulated in most countries, and there have been calls for regulators to step in to protect consumers. "Some consumers are not aware of the consequences of what happens if they default on payments, which is bad for the overall industry," Sorrell said.

Users who fail to meet their scheduled payments are hit with substantial late fees.

AFP

NBO and Alshaya team up to give cardholders discounts at stores

Continuing to find exciting ways to rewards its customers, National Bank of Oman (NBO), in partnership with Alshaya Group, is offering cardholders exclusive discounts when shopping in-store at a selection of major brands.

Valid until August 19, customers can enjoy between 15 and 25 per cent off when shopping at Debenhams, Footlocker, Claire's and Next, in addition to 25 per cent off at Mothercare until August 24.

All they need to do is pay using their NBO credit, debit or



prepaid card. Maha al Raisi, head of Products at NBO, said, "This cam-

paign is part of a long-term partnership we have with Alshaya, which continues to open up exclusive rewards at some of the best-loved international brands in the sultanate. With this and many other initiatives we are tapping into our customers' spending preferences and lifestyles, and providing them with even more value when using their cards, while enhancing their overall banking experience."

NBO's suite of credit, debit and prepaid cards offer cashless convenience, tailor-

made to meet the needs of its customers.

Providing excellent spending power and a smarter, safer alternative to cash, cardholders are able to access a host of exciting benefits including movie tickets, dining and hotel discounts, free travel insurance, airport lounge access and more.

More details about NBO's range of products and services can be found on www.nbo.om or at any of the 60 branches located across the sultanate, online at or by contacting the NBO Call Centre.

Khedmah unveils its new brand mascot 'Wafi'

Oman Investment & Finance Co (Khedmah), a leading investments and services company in Oman, has unveiled its new mascot, named 'Wafi'. Representing the company's ethos of digital transformation as well as its simple and swift services, Wafi will cater to Khedmah's clients' needs and answer their daily queries. The new mascot reflects Khedmah's long-standing commitment of providing high-end, anytime, anywhere services to its clients and meeting their day to day requirements.

During the past period, the demand on the company's services, growing customer base and offered solutions witnessed an increase. This is attributed to the high quality of the services and the variety of products that Khedmah seeks to deliver to its clients. Such factors prompt the company to further innovate on ways to meet customers' aspirations and keep up with the competition in the market.

Aspiring to serve and connect with the community, the company launched Wafi which denotes in its design, OIFC's technological prowess as well as futuristic vision, and in its identity, fulfilling client's requirements with perfection.

Said Ahmed Safrar, chief executive officer of OIFC said, "We are delighted to unveil Wafi to be Khedmah's ambassador and a representative for our brand for all segments of community. We strongly believe that the mascot can contribute to the delivery of the company's messages on services and communicate with beneficiaries in a friendly and unique manner that suits the target people. The name Wafi is an Arabic name which is deeply-rooted in Arab culture and being used since ancient times. It demonstrates loyalty, honesty, and wide knowledge, additionally fulfilling the needs of people with



perfection. Hence, we decided to give this name to the mascot, as the characteristics are in line with what the mascot represents to the community."

Khedmah's platforms witnessed a great expansion and renovation focusing on highest standards. The company also saw a strategic development that is aligned with latest technologies used in the market. As such, it was able to provide many electronic payment channels such as Khedmah app and the company website. Via these channels, customers can utilise all services.

Established in 1979, OIFC is one of the leading Investment and Services Company and specialises in billing, collection & debt factoring for electricity, water and telecom services in the Sultanate of Oman. These services

can be availed through the company 65 branches across the sultanate, kiosks and its digital platforms. The company's various payment channels allow corporates, citizens and residents to easily pay and check electricity, water and telecommunications bills as well as making payment to the Public Authority for Social Insurance. Additionally, top-up phone, pre-paid electricity, and other services.

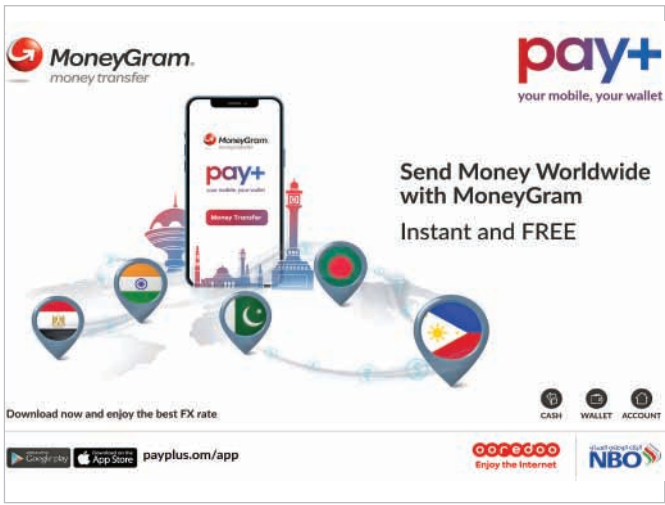
Add value to bill payments, deposits and transfers with pay+ and MoneyGram

Skip the bank queues because money transfers are easier than ever with pay+.

Developed by Ooredoo and the National Bank of Oman (NBO), the tech savvy app continues to set standards in the sultanate's evolving digital payments ecosystem.

Allowing for free international remittance via its international partner, MoneyGram, users can send money to over 40 destinations worldwide, quickly and securely from the comfort of their homes. Adding even more value, pay+ has waived its transaction fees for all destinations.

Using MoneyGram's worldwide network and the convenience and speed of pay+, the service enables customers to send money to bank accounts or



to cash pick-up locations all over the world, via a single app on their mobile device.

Meanwhile, pay+ users can benefit from a whole host of useful transactions including bill

payments, deposits, money transfers to other wallets, and withdrawals.

The service also enables contactless payments at over 3,000 locations all over Oman using QR

Code scanning, including Oman Oil petrol stations, StarCare hospitals and pharmacies, McDonalds, Caribou cafe, Nesto and Spar supermarkets, Oman United Insurance, Al Obaidani stores, and many more. Moreover, robust security features mean that payment information is protected.

Frequently updated and enhanced, the easy-to-use service is just one way Ooredoo is ensuring its customers have an awesome digital experience. Registration for pay+ is completely digital, requiring a national / resident Omani ID and photo only.

Download the pay+ app from the Apple Store or Google Play, or find out more at www.pay-plus.om.



Sohar International's Bausher branch now open

In line with the bank's ongoing expansion strategy aimed at increasing channels to serve and communicate with customers making banking as convenient as possible for all across the nation, Sohar International recently commenced operations in its premium, fully-equipped branch in Taminaat Complex located in Bausher. The new branch which was opened recently marks the opening of the second branch this year.

Mirroring the exceptional banking experience offered in its other branches, the Taminaat Complex branch has the advantage of a convenient location, spacious facilities, and ample parking.

Manned with an experienced team of professionals, it ensures quick, convenient and responsive banking services catered to meet the varying needs of all customer segments.

Besides having a dedicated Wealth Management servicing area, the branch also provides a 24-hour digital lobby with a fully functional ATM/CDM.

The branch is open to welcome customers and potential customers from 8am-2pm from Sunday till Thursday.

Khalil al Hedaifi, chief retail banking officer at Sohar International, said, "Sohar International has remained dedicated to set new benchmarks and pave the way for innovation and excel-

lence in the Omani banking sector. Our well-knit network of branches spread throughout the sultanate is complemented by our thoughtfully created services and products portfolios providing customers a pleasurable banking experience.

"We constantly strive to provide integrated and innovative banking solutions for our clients at convenient locations and our new branch attests to our endeavors in this direction."

While digitalisation is embedded in the day-to-day operations and inherent culture of Sohar International, the bank also pays keen attention to incorporating the essential human touch through its customer serv-

ice channels.

By increasing the number of branches, Sohar International seeks to get closer to customers as it believes that human interaction is fundamental in helping build a more long-standing relationship.

With a keen focus on expansion, excellence and innovation in the banking sector, Sohar International has been consistent in creating value-added products and services that have benefited its customers.

With the addition of the Taminaat Branch, the bank will now have 32 full-fledged branches in Oman offering a comprehensive gamut of innovative banking solutions to its valued customers.

Mitsubishi ASX offers style and performance in affordable package

The Mitsubishi ASX offers CUV versatility, enhanced safety features, attractive styling, and value in one affordable package. It is now available from General Automotive Company (GAC), the official Mitsubishi distributor, with EMIs starting from as low as RO106, including 6 years unlimited mileage warranty and roadside assistance.

Commenting on the ASX, Zuwaina al Azri, communications manager said, "The Mitsubishi ASX is easily one of the most versatile vehicles in our line-up, offering customers class-leading features, a powerful yet fuel-efficient engine, proven four-wheel-drive system, and advanced technologies, all wrapped in a bold new design and offered to you at an ex-

tremely competitive price with affordable EMIs."

The ASX is a popular CUV that features Mitsubishi's Dynamic Shield design and offers an all-new front bumper, hood, and fenders, which provide a bold and rugged look.

The front-end design is accented by the sophisticated LED headlights, which when combined with the redesigned rear bumper fascia and T-shaped rear combination taillights, helps raise the model's sporty aesthetic and allows the ASX to stand out from the crowd.

Inside, the ASX receives all-new, high-quality materials, a new second-generation 8.0-inch Smartphone-link Display Audio (SDA) unit, rear view camera, LED headlights with LED Day-

time running lights, Electronically controlled 4WD system, and more. Under the hood, the ASX comes standard with a 2.0lt MiVEC DOHC four-cylinder making 148 horsepower at 6,000 rpm and 145 pound-feet of torque at 4,200rpm.

Paired with Mitsubishi's INVECS-III CVT, the ASX offers an optimal balance of power output, fuel efficiency, and environmental performance, together with enhanced acceleration performance and a smooth-shifting feel.

For more information on the ASX, visit GAC's Mitsubishi showrooms in Azaiba, Barka, Sohar, Nizwa, and Salalah or follow 'MitsubishiMotorsOman' on Facebook or @mitsubishioman on Twitter to learn more.



McLaren 765LT Spider: Brand's most powerful convertible supercar unveiled

Renowned worldwide for the exclusive, luxury, high-performance supercars on which it has built its reputation over the past decade, McLaren Automotive has revealed another landmark model: the 765LT Spider. Complementing the 765LT 'Longtail' coupe unveiled last year, the new Spider is McLaren's most powerful-ever convertible supercar and brings highest-ever levels of driver engagement to the McLaren LT experience.

And now this supercar can be pre-booked from MHD ACERE's McLaren Muscat showroom. MHD ACERE is the sole distributor of McLaren automobiles in the sultanate.

Mohsin Hani al Bahrani, CEO, MHD ACERE comments, "Be it in their designs or technology or engineering, McLaren cars are truly class-apart and the new 765LT Spider pushes the supercar performance to new levels. Just imagine the thrill and excitement one can get while driving the most powerful convertible McLaren has ever built. With a marked difference from the earlier models in terms of weight and engineering, McLaren 765LT Spider is an automotive marvel



that we look forward to seeing on Oman's roads."

Engineered in addition with the other core attributes intrinsic to any McLaren Longtail — minimised weight, track-focused dynamics and optimised aerodynamics — the 765LT Spider has all of the class-leading abilities of the coupe and also meets the LT demand for exclusivity: just 765 cars will be available globally for customer order.

Carrying over the coupe's dynamic and aerodynamic DNA with no structural compromise and only a minimal 49kg weight increase — primarily from the retractable hard top and accompanying operating mechanism — the 765LT Spider weighs in at just 1,388kg, which is 80kg lighter than a 720S Spider and circa 100kg lighter than its closest comparable competitor.

The electrically operated, one-

piece carbon fibre Retractable Hard Top (RHT) enables open-top motoring in just 11 seconds and operates at speeds of up to 50km/h, bringing the dramatic soundtrack of the quad-exit titanium exhaust system into the cabin to take driver engagement into another dimension.

"As we continue to build the LT sub-brand with the introduction of the new 765LT Spider, it's clear that our customers are in-

creasingly attracted to the Longtail supercar proposition of exhilarating, extreme performance and limited availability. With all 765 examples of the 765LT coupe sold, it's no surprise that as we publicly announce our new LT Spider, production capacity for 2021 is already filled," says Mike Flevvitt, chief executive officer, McLaren Automotive.

The immense performance and dynamic prowess of the new

Spider — already proven in the 765LT coupe — are enhanced by three compelling factors: the stability of its MonoCage II-S structure, the game-changing design of its one-piece Retractable Hard Top roof, and the ongoing determination of McLaren engineers to pursue the company's philosophy of super-lightweight engineering.

The Spider version of the carbon fibre MonoCage II — designated MonoCage II-S — was developed alongside the coupe monocoque and shares most of its structural elements, including the windscreen surround. Such is the strength and stiffness of the structure that no additional bracing is required over the coupe —another weight-optimising factor. At the rear of the car, carbon fibre structural supports are fully bonded into the chassis to provide rollover protection.

The convertible roof design plays an integral role in the structure, featuring a carbon fibre frame within the Retractable Hard Top panel and creating a full carbon fibre shell when closed. There are also additional comfort benefits for occupants

because it is a single-piece panel with no central seal, headroom is improved, while the extended length of the roof panel allows the tops of the A-pillars to be further forward, enhancing the sense of space and easing ingress and egress.

Like every LT, the new Spider is designed to excel on track, however the extra dimension of theatre and drama offered by the convertible roof also makes it an even more immersive and compelling car to drive on the road. With the same highly evolved aerodynamic package as the coupe —although with active rear wing calibration revised to reflect whether the roof is up or down and a recalibration of the dampers to account for the minor increase in weight — the Spider matches the coupe's outstanding aero performance in every respect, with class-leading downforce 25 per cent greater than that of a 720S Spider.

Performance is ferocious, the 4.0-litre twin-turbocharged V8 engine producing 765PS — giving the 765LT Spider a best-in-class power-to-weight ratio of 598PS-per-tonne at lightest dry weight and 800Nm of torque.



OQ becomes partner of Omani racing driver Ahmad al Harthy

Global integrated energy company OQ on August 4, announced its newest strategic partnership – support of Omani racing champion Ahmad al Harthy, ahead of his welcome return to competitive action this coming weekend in the Intelligent Money British GT Championship.

Oman Racing's Al Harthy, who will join British GT at Snetterton on August 7 and 8 with Aston Martin works driver Charlie Eastwood, is proud to confirm the key partnership with homegrown company OQ which has operations across 17 countries.

Headquartered in the sultanate's capital city Muscat, OQ – founded in 2019 – is wholly owned by the Omani government. Already firmly established as a thriving business in the energy sector, in addition to its work with traditional fuels OQ also focuses on the expansion of alternative energies.

Covering the entire value chain, from energy exploration and production through to marketing and distribution of end-user products, pioneering company OQ invests in power generation, energy transportation and infrastructure.

Maryam al Shaibany, leader Corporate Identity and Culture in OQ, commented, "We are excited to provide our support to one of our talented Omani cham-

pions in motor sports, Ahmad al Harthy, and we are looking forward to supporting his endeavours in the upcoming racing events.

"This support comes as part of our firm commitment to empower Omani youth in all fields, and to enable them to compete and raise the Oman flag in international sport competitions. OQ will continue to cheer for Ahmad and join-in his winning titles."

Al Harthy said, "I'm obviously delighted to welcome OQ to our programme as a very important strategic partner, and looking forward to working together as Oman Racing returns to the track this weekend in British GT at Snetterton. We share the same synergies and philosophy with our approach and professionalism. OQ, like Oman Racing, is a homegrown success story, growing out of Oman and into Europe and beyond.

"I'm very proud to welcome the support of another Omani company into our racing programme as we compete in some of the globe's largest, and most competitive, championships. OQ is a natural partner for Oman Racing with our shared concepts of excellence, thinking big and aiming high. Our joint pursuit of success for Oman on the international stage is something we're all very proud of."

Mall of Oman awarded LEED Platinum certification

Majid al Futtaim, the leading shopping mall, communities, retail and leisure pioneer across the Middle East, Africa and Asia, has been awarded the internationally accredited LEED Platinum certification for their Mall of Oman project, due to open in September 2021.

The Platinum certification is another example of Majid al Futtaim's commitment to sustainability, resource efficiency and health and wellbeing.

LEED (Leadership in Energy

and Environmental Design) is widely respected as the pre-eminent green building rating system; with the award certification being viewed as a marker of sustainability excellence.

Mall of Oman adheres to the highest sustainability standards and will save 28.59 per cent energy, with a 49 per cent water saving. 82.5 per cent of construction waste is diverted from landfills and 5 per cent of mall parking spaces are dedicated to low emission vehicles.



Indian School Jalan excels in CBSE Class X results

Indian School Jalan students registered excellent performance in 2021 CBSE Class X Examinations with a 100 per cent

pass and 80.1 per cent school average. Johana Arun Arackal grabbed the first position with

94.8 per cent of marks. The second and third positions were secured by Jannet Rose Jaison (93.2 per cent) and Durva U

Chellani (89.2 per cent). 73 per cent of the students who appeared for the examination secured distinction and all

students got first class. The School Management Committee, principal, and the staff congratulated the students.

ISM celebrates CBSE Class X board exams success



Harshita Gulani



Anavadya Naganathan



Lakshmi Sathvika



Saatwik Murotia



Sana Fatima

Indian School Muscat (ISM) is celebrating cent per cent success in Class X CBSE Board Examination for the academic year 2020-21. The school's vow to stand out incomparable in academics despite the pandemic challenges, reverberates in this year's flawless result. A total of 563 students appeared for the examination and have aced it with magical scores.

Harshita Gulani emerged as the school topper with 98.6 per cent. The second topper's position was earned by Anavadya Naganathan Rajagopal with 98.4 per cent and the third position was claimed by three students, Lakshmi Sathvika Kommissetti, Sana Fatima and Saatwik Murotia with 98.2 per cent.

The school leads with an av-

erage of 85.3 per cent. It is extremely praiseworthy to see that 28 students scored centum, a perfect score of 100, 40.9 per cent students scored above 90 per cent and 34.1 per cent scored above 80 per cent.

To crown it the school average in Painting is 93.14 per cent, 92.61 per cent in Sanskrit, 92.43 per cent in Elements of Business, 91.68 per cent in Malayalam, 91.22 per cent in French, 90.85 per cent in Computer Applications, 90.71 per cent in Arabic, 88.5 per cent in Home Science, 88.29 per cent in English Language and Literature, 88.07 per cent in Social Science, 80.62 per cent in Mathematics Standard, 83.37 per cent in Hindi Course B, 79.92 per cent in Science, and 64.07 per cent in

Mathematics Basics.

The exuberance of triumph radiates as the number of centum scorers skyrockets to 28. The centum scorers in Mathematics Standard are Harshita Gulani, Anavadya Naganathan Rajagopal, Lakshmi Sathvika Kommissetti, Sana Fatima, Dmello Mark Savio, Jheel Chetan Thanki, Aiswarya S, Noyonika Mukherjee, Nahad Bin Noushad, Joel Bejoy, Sweta Mishra, Nirja Suresh Shanbhag, Dheirav Prakash Sathya Prakash, Shreyas Milind Sherekar, Altamash Hasnain, Sarah Philip and Rohan Omprakash Verma; further centum holders are - Anavadya Naganathan Rajagopal, Lakshmi Sathvika Kommissetti, Dmello Mark Savio, Jheel Chetan Thanki,

Priyadarshini and Aiswarya Sunil in Social Science; Rebecca Magdalene Dsouza, Roshni Rangarajan and Prisca Rajesh Bajeli in French and Harshita Gulani and Saatwik Murotia in Sanskrit.

Another gratified commendation as ISM sees an upsurge in the subject toppers in various subjects. The following students scored the highest in various subjects and bagged the topper's position in their respective subjects. A score of 100 per cent was secured by Harshita Gulani, Anavadya Naganathan Rajagopal, Lakshmi Sathvika Kommissetti, Sana Fatima, Dmello Mark Savio, Jheel Chetan Thanki, Aiswarya S, Noyonika Mukherjee, Nahad Bin Noushad, Joel Bejoy, Sweta Mishra, Nirja

Suresh Shanbhag, Dheirav Prakash Sathya Prakash, Shreyas Milind Sherekar, Altamash Hasnain, Sarah Philip and Rohan Omprakash Verma in Mathematics Standard; Anavadya Naganathan Rajagopal, Lakshmi Sathvika Kommissetti, Dmello Mark Savio, Jheel Chetan Thanki, Priyadarshini, Aiswarya Sunil added to the perfect 100 per cent in Social Science; Rebecca Magdalene Dsouza, Roshni Rangarajan and Prisca Rajesh Bajeli earned 100 per cent in French and Harshita Gulani and Saatwik Murotia with 100 in Sanskrit.

School Management Committee, president, Sachin Toprani congratulated all the students, teachers and parents on this impressive performance.

Grief as Lebanon marks year since blast

Beirut, Lebanon - Lebanon on Wednesday marked a year since a cataclysmic explosion ravaged Beirut, with a mix of grief over lost lives and rage at the impunity for its worst peacetime disaster at a time when its economy was already in tatters.

Shortly after 6.00pm on August 4, 2020, a stock of ammonium nitrate fertiliser haphazardly stored at the city's port exploded and left swathes of the Lebanese capital looking like a war zone.

What went down as one of the largest non-nuclear blasts in history killed at least 214 people, levelled entire neighbourhoods, irreparably scarred the nation's psyche and deepened the country's economic abyss.

With more than half the country living under the poverty line, former colonial power France aims to raise humanitarian aid at another international conference co-hosted by the UN on the anniversary.

French President Emmanuel Macron, at the start of the event, pledged €100mn from France alone.

But as the probe into the disaster stalls, he warned Lebanese leaders 'owe their people the truth and transparency' over what happened.

The country's already reviled political class has hidden behind its proclaimed immunity to avoid prosecution, delaying the lead investigating judge's work at every turn.

In Beirut, security forces



The photo on the left shows portraits of victims of last year's Beirut port blast in the Lebanese capital, while on the right a gavel monument symbolising justice is seen in front of the damaged grain silos, in Beirut on Wednesday (AFP)



fanned out near the port ahead of families of the dead and survivors gathering to honour those who perished in a blast whose shockwave was felt as far away as Cyprus.

Port workers were buried under gutted grain silos, firefighters battling the fire that preceded the blast were pulverised, commuters crushed to death and residents lacerated by supersonic shards of glass bled out in their homes.

Many will stay home on what was declared a national day of mourning, but last year's shock soon gave way to an anger that has only grown with every day the crime stays unpunished.

'They all knew'

Jeffrey Chartouni, a worker at the port's grain silos, is still boiling with indignation after seven of his colleagues died in the blast.

How, he asked, had authorities for years not told them about tonnes of explosive materials stored right next to their offices? "They should have warned us. With just a phone call, I could have told the guys to flee [before the fertiliser exploded]," the 32 year old said.

"The security officials, the government, the customs, of course they all knew," he added.

"They need to be held to account, from the very top of the ladder to the lowest rung."

One protest is due to wind up in front of parliament, where no move has been taken towards accepting accountability.

Amnesty International accused the Lebanese authorities of 'shamelessly obstructing' justice, while Human Rights Watch accused them of 'criminal negligence'.

On Monday, relatives of blast victims called on authorities to lift immunity within three days, warning they were willing to 'break bones' in upcoming protests.

"We are done with routine and peaceful demonstrations...

beware of our anger," said Ibrahim Hoteit, a spokesperson

for the families.

'So many lives lost'

According to foreign and Lebanese intelligence reports seen by AFP, hundreds of tonnes of fertiliser were carelessly stored in the same warehouse as tonnes of fireworks and rolls of detonating cord, among other dangerous materials.

The reports, all dating back to last year, suggest welding work caused the original fire.

However, more thorough investigations have yet to ascertain that fact and answer how the shipment got there in the first place, or why the deadly assortment of hazardous materials was

left to fester in the same location for years.

Mervat Bakkour (43) was among dozens of people holding candles at a vigil late on Tuesday in the Gemayzeh neighbourhood ravaged by the blast.

"I still can't believe so many lives were lost," she said.

Lebanon's parliamentarians - some of whom have been nicknamed the 'nitrate deputies' on social media - are ignoring intense international pressure and threats of sanctions.

They have yet to agree on a government line-up despite being given a mid-September deadline last year by Paris, which has spearheaded an aid drive

conditioned on reform.

A first donor conference for Lebanon in the immediate aftermath of the blast collected 280mn euros.

Lebanon's descent into chaos had already started before the port blast, with a bankrupt state trapping people's savings in banks and the national currency nosediving on the black market.

The country is now facing medicine, fuel and clean water shortages that are compounding the post-blast trauma, crippling a health sector facing a new wave of COVID infections and leading all of those who can to emigrate.

AFP

Tunisia President gets army support

Tunis, Tunisia - President Kais Saied launched his takeover of Tunisia by relying on the armed forces, an institution normally above politics, but analysts believe that retaining their support will depend on developments.

Since he was elected head of state in October 2019, Saied had generally shunned being seen with political leaders, instead spending time in public with the military.

In doing so, he set himself above the grind of daily party politics, aligning with an institution that embodies the state itself. The armed forces have featured in many of his key decisions.

In December, Saied entrusted the military's health services with the running of a new Chinese-built hospital in the port city of Sfax. And on July 25, it was in the presence of top officers that Saied declared he had sacked the prime minister and suspended parliament for a month.

Since his announcement, an armoured vehicle has prevented access to the parliament building and military units have been deployed at the Kasbah, the seat of government, and at other key institutions.

Meanwhile, Saied has named a military officer to head a ministerial taskforce to battle COVID-19 in the North African country, which has recently had one of the world's worst death tolls in the pandemic.

Among the first members of parliament to be detained was an elected official convicted by a military court in 2018 of criticising the army.

Moves such as these have led some critics to decry Saied's July 25 takeover as a 'military dictatorship'.

But Hatem M'rad, professor of political science and president of the Tunisian Association for Political Studies, told AFP the head of state cannot impose himself "without the support of the army".

"And for the moment, [it] supports the President, who has prepared all this with its help,"



This file photo shows Tunisian soldiers deployed near the parliament in the capital Tunis, after the President suspended the country's parliament and dismissed the Prime Minister on July 26 (AFP)

M'rad said.

He said the military will 'follow him within the limits of the objectives set' to get the rule of law back on track.

"Kais Saied has earned the confidence of top officers in the military," according to political scientist Slaheddine Jourchi.

He 'succeeded in convincing the army that Tunisia was in imminent danger', pressing it to act.

But Jourchi added that even though the military 'may have lost some of its reserve, that does not mean we have been under military rule since July 25'.

'A legitimate force'

"The army does not govern, it supervises, it protects the president and supports his decisions without being in power directly," Jourchi said.

Retired officer Mokhtar Ben Nasr told AFP that in a regime where the head of state is also in command of the armed forces, the military is a 'legitimate force in the president's hands to protect the state and the people from danger'.

Tunisia's case is different from the military in other North African countries, said Agnes Levallois of the Mediterranean Middle East Research Institute (iReMMO).

The Tunisian army 'will not play a role like it has in Egypt' or Algeria.

"For the moment, it is working in negotiation with the president of the republic," a democratically elected civilian, she said.

In Algeria, the army is accused of behind the scenes manipulation of a discredited regime that has been the target of popular protest for more than two years.

Egypt's Field Marshal Abdel Fattah al Sisi led the military until 2014 when he became president, after overthrowing the democratically elected Islamist Mohamed Morsi.

During the 2011 Arab Spring uprising, centred in Egypt on Cairo's Tahrir Square, the army played a key role.

But in Tunisia, where the Arab Spring began that year, the military held back and refused to intervene against demonstrators calling for the overthrow of dictator Zine el Abidine Ben Ali.

"Unlike in Algeria or Egypt, where the military has a direct interest in the survival of the regime, the army in Tunisia prefers at times of acute crisis to urge politicians to act and stabilise the institutions' of state, wrote journalist and researcher Thierry Bresillon.

He pointed out that at the end of May, retired generals sent an open letter to Saied calling for conciliatory moves when he was mired in a standoff with parties including the Islamist-inspired Ennahdha, the largest party in parliament and an adversary.

AFP

Turkey saves power plant from 'unprecedented' wildfires

Milas, Turkey - Rescuers used helicopters and water cannon on Wednesday to beat back fires encircling a Turkish power plant in the second week of deadly blazes testing the leadership of President Recep Tayyip Erdogan.

More than 170 wildfires have scorched swathes of Turkey's southern coast and killed eight people since breaking out east of the Mediterranean vacation hotspot Antalya last Wednesday and then spreading west.

The blazes have destroyed pristine forests and thousands of cattle.

Their location around Turkey's main vacation destinations have also dented government hopes of a tourist-driven revival of the fragile economy.

The European Union's satellite monitoring service said their 'radiative power' - a measure of the fires' intensity - 'has reached unprecedented values in the entire dataset, which goes back to 2003'.

The Turkish government appears to have been rattled by the scale and ferocity of the flames.

Its media watchdog on Tuesday warned broadcasters that they may be fined if they continue showing live footage of the blazes or air images of screaming people running for their lives.



Flames rise from a fire spreading around Yeniköy Kemerköy Thermal Power Plant near Oren, in the holiday region of Mugla on Tuesday (AFP)

Erdogan himself has been subjected to days of ridicule on social media for tossing out bags of tea while touring one of the affected regions under heavy police escort.

The opposition further accuses the powerful Turkish leader of being too slow to accept offers of foreign assistance - including from regional rival Greece - and failing to properly maintain firefighting planes.

Erdogan prepared to mount a political counterattack in a national television interview scheduled for Wednesday night.

Much of the latest public fear and anger has been directed at a fire that has been threatening the hills around a power plant in the Aegean Sea holiday resort town of Milas.

'Very serious war'

Eyewitnesses in Milas saw Turkish workers digging trenches around the plant to keep the flames away.

Turkish helicopters and two firefighting planes from Spain dumped sea water and fire retardant on the surrounding hills and rows of scorched or burning residential buildings.

Most of the flames appeared to have been extinguished and only white plumes of smoke rose from the back of the hills on Wednesday afternoon.

The main opposition party in control of the local mayor's office said hydrogen tanks used to cool the plant had been emptied and filled with water as a precaution.

AFP

EU sends help to fight fires in Greece, Italy

Brussels, Belgium - Fire-fighting resources from EU nations are on their way to Greece, Italy, Albania and Northern Macedonia to help fight forest blazes, the EU crisis management commissioner said on Wednesday.

"We are working around the clock to send help as fires rage across Europe," commissioner Janez Lenarcic said in a statement. "I thank Cyprus, Czechia, France, Slovenia and the Netherlands for swiftly deploy-

ing firefighting airplanes, helicopters and a team of firefighters to support countries heavily affected by forest fires."

The dispatch of the aircraft and firefighters were being coordinated by the EU Civil Protection Mechanism, with the European Commission picking up most of the mobilisation cost.

Greek firefighters have been battling several heatwave-fuelled forest infernos, including around Athens that have de-

stroyed or damaged dozens of homes and businesses and forced the evacuation of villages, and others in the south and on the island of Euboea.

Devastating fires have also scorched parts of Italy, including in Sicily and near Rome.

Both Greece and Italy are EU member states.

EU help was also being given to non-EU neighbours such as Albania and North Macedonia.

AFP

Taliban claim Kabul bombing as Afghan forces defend besieged cities

Kabul, Afghanistan - The Taliban on Wednesday claimed responsibility for a huge bomb attack in Kabul targeting the Defence Minister, as the insurgents fought for control of a string of besieged cities across the country.

The bomb-and-gun attack on Defence Minister Bismillah Mohammadi on Tuesday was one of the biggest in Kabul for months, bringing violence to the capital after intense fighting in the south and west of the country.

The Afghan and US militaries have carried out air strikes against the insurgents to push them back, and the Taliban said the Kabul attack was a response to that.

‘The attack is the beginning of the retaliatory operations against the circles and leaders of the Kabul administration who are ordering attacks and the bombing of different parts of the country,’ Taliban spokesman Zabihullah Mujahid said in a statement on social media.

It represents a major escalation by the Taliban, who have largely refrained from large-scale attacks in the capital in recent years after starting talks with the United States on troop withdrawal.

The first bomb exploded in the centre of Kabul, sending a thick plume of smoke into the sky, AFP correspondents reported.

Less than two hours later, there was another loud blast followed by smaller explosions and rapid gunfire, also near the high-security Green Zone that houses several embassies, including the US mission.

The minister was safe and Afghan forces repelled the attackers, but at least eight people were killed, according to interior ministry spokesman Mirwais Stanikzai.

Mohammadi later said it was a suicide car bomb attack targeting his house.



Afghan special forces patrol the streets of Herat as the Taliban continue a series of offensives against urban areas in Afghanistan on Tuesday (AFP)

Turkey flays US plan on resettling Afghans

Istanbul, Turkey - Ankara has criticised a US plan to use third countries such as Turkey to resettle thousands of Afghans who risk being targeted by Taliban insurgents over their US links.

Less than a month before the United States is set to end its longest-ever war, the State Department on Monday announced a new refugee admissions programme for Afghan nationals.

The programme covers interpreters and translators who

worked with US forces, Afghans involved with US-funded projects and those employed by US-based NGOs or media organisations.

It involves resettling the Afghans in third countries in the region for around a year while their paperwork is processed.

But Turkey, which is already home to more than four million migrants - most from war-torn Syria - said it was never consulted.

‘It’s unacceptable to seek a

solution to the problem in our country without our country’s consent,’ the Foreign Ministry said in a statement issued late on Tuesday.

The State Department referred to Turkey as one possible relocation point, also mentioning Pakistan.

But the Turkish ministry said the US plan would lead to a ‘big migration crisis in our region’, adding it lacked the capacity to deal with ‘a new migration crisis on behalf of a third country’.

AFP

antee that we will not be killed on the way,” Mohammad said.

“The government and the Taliban are destroying us.”

The insurgents have taken control of vast swathes of the countryside and key border towns, taking advantage of the security vacuum left by the withdrawal of US forces.

The Taliban are now targeting cities, with fierce fighting for a week around Herat near the western border with Iran, as well as Lashkar Gah and Kandahar in the south.

“Those families which had financial support or a car have left their homes. The families who can not afford to are obliged to stay in their own homes as we are,” resident Halim Karimi told AFP.

“We don’t know where to go or how to leave. We are born to die.”

The loss of Lashkar Gah, the capital of southern Helmand province, would be a massive strategic and psychological blow for the government.

Meanwhile, Human Rights Watch accused the Taliban of ‘summarily’ executing detained soldiers, police and civilians with alleged ties to the Afghan government in areas they had recently seized.

The rights group said it had also obtained a list of 44 people who were killed by the Taliban in the town of Spin Boldak, which the insurgents captured last month along the border with Pakistan.

‘Taliban commanders with oversight over such atrocities are also responsible for war crimes,’ Patricia Gossman, associate Asia director at HRW said in a statement.

Washington and London have also accused the insurgents of committing atrocities that may amount to ‘war crimes’ in Spin Boldak.

AFP

South Sudan’s VP Machar deposed by party, confirm rival leaders

Juba, South Sudan - South Sudan’s Vice President Riek Machar has been ousted as head of his party and its armed forces, say rival leaders who accused the rebel-turned-politician of no longer representing their interests.

Machar, a pivotal figure in South Sudan’s bloody road to independence and subsequent civil war, was deposed following a three-day gathering of senior SPLM/A-IO leaders in the country’s far north, the party’s military wing said.

Its chief of staff, First Lieutenant General Simon Gatwech Dual, was declared interim leader of the opposition movement that governs the troubled country in a shaky alliance with former enemies.

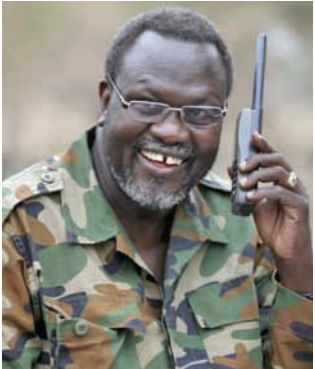
It is unclear what the putsch means for Machar, a wily leader who survived years of bush warfare, close attempts on his life and stretches in exile.

The military wing said Machar had ‘completely failed’ to show leadership and greatly weakened the party’s position in the post-war coalition government formed between the warring sides in early 2020.

Machar had engaged in a years-long ‘policy of divide and rule’ and favoured nepotism over unity or advancing their cause, according to a statement signed by the SPLM/A-IO military leadership and dated August 3.

‘As a result, the meeting saw there was no option rather than to come up with the decision and finally prompted to declare the denouncement of Dr Riek Machar Teny Dhurgon from the chairmanship of the SPLM/A-IO,’ the statement said.

AFP has sought comment from Machar’s spokesman in Juba.



South Sudan VP Riek Machar

He served as vice president in South Sudan’s first post-independence government alongside his old rival, President Salva Kiir.

But the pair fell out and Machar was sacked two years later. Troops loyal to each man turned their guns on each other, and South Sudan descended into five years of horrific bloodshed.

In 2018 - after a string of failed peace accords and violated ceasefires - a fresh truce paused the fighting that left nearly 400,000 South Sudanese dead.

Under that arrangement, Machar entered another unity government as deputy to Kiir in February 2020.

But distrust lingered and cracks soon appeared, as key provisions of the peace accords went unfulfilled.

As the process drifted Machar faced growing opposition within his own ranks, with top cadres complaining they had lost out under the power-sharing arrangement struck with the ruling party.

The political disunity comes as South Sudan faces economic disaster and its worst hunger crisis since independence, with tens of thousands of people enduring famine-like conditions in the world’s youngest nation.

AFP

COVID-19 PANDEMIC

China restricts overseas travel to curb fresh outbreak of COVID-19

Beijing, China - China on Wednesday tightened overseas travel restrictions for its citizens as part of efforts to contain rising coronavirus cases, after reporting its highest number of infections in months.

The movement of people is coming under more restriction inside China - with localised transport closures and stay-at-home orders in places in some cities - and beyond China’s borders.

China had previously boasted of its success in crushing COVID-19, with hard lockdowns in the early stages mixed with tight controls of its borders, but mass testing campaigns have uncovered Delta variant infections across the country.

The latest outbreak is threat-



Police officers spray disinfectant at Nanjing port in China’s eastern Jiangsu province on Wednesday (AFP)

ening to undo the country’s economic rebound and return to normal life with nearly 500 domestic cases reported since mid-July.

Local governments have tested entire cities and locked down millions, with the official figures on Wednesday revealing 71 new infections - the most

since January, but still a low caseload despite the outbreak spreading to dozens of cities.

The outbreak, which began when an infection among pas-

sengers on a flight from Moscow spread to airport cleaners in Nanjing, Jiangsu province, has exposed weaknesses in the country’s already strict border containment measures.

China’s immigration authority on Wednesday announced it would stop issuing ordinary passports and other documents needed for exiting the country in ‘non-essential and non-emergency’ cases.

That does not yet mean a blanket overseas travel ban for the Chinese public.

Immigration official Liu Haitao told a press briefing that those who ‘have real needs for studying abroad, employment and business’ will still have their documents issued upon verification.

Foreign crews on hundreds of ships have been stopped from disembarking and changing shifts at Chinese ports.

The central government has also ordered localities to cut off public transport and taxis in and out of areas hit by the outbreak, the transport ministry said at the same press conference.

Mass testing

Wuhan, where the virus first emerged in 2019, reported its first local infections in over a year this week and said on Tuesday it was ‘swiftly launching’ testing of all 11mn residents.

Long lines of residents waited at outdoor testing stations in the summer heat on Tuesday, fanning themselves with paper forms while workers in hazmat

suits took throat samples.

In Beijing, where the city government reported three new virus cases on Wednesday, authorities blocked entrances to a compound where one of the patients lived, while residents reached over fences to receive parcels from delivery drivers.

Nanjing has tested its 9.2mn residents three times after shutting down gyms and cinemas and closing off residential compounds. And the tourist destination of Zhangjiajie in central Hunan province, where infected travellers who had been in Nanjing attended a theatre performance, abruptly announced on Tuesday that no one would be allowed to exit the city after it emerged as an infection hotspot.

AFP

Israel reimposes more restrictions as virus surges

Jerusalem - Prime Minister Naftali Bennett said on Wednesday that vaccinations and renewed restrictions could spare Israel another lockdown, even as coronavirus infections soar.

“Our goal is to keep Israel open but not reach a situation where hospitals will say we’re full,” he said on a tour of a new vaccination centre in Jerusalem.

“We’re seeking to avoid that, and know when to hit the brakes,” Bennett said.

“To refrain from harsher restrictions, we’ll get vaccinated, wear masks and maintain distancing.”

Bennett’s government had announced a package of new restrictions on Tuesday, including requiring vaccine certificates or negative tests for entry to venues holding fewer than 100 people, and mandatory mask wearing in open spaces holding more than 100. Announcing the new restrictions, the Cabinet’s

COVID committee warned the highly infectious Delta variant of the coronavirus was spreading fast and called on Israelis to ‘stop shaking hands, embracing and kissing’.

The Health Ministry has also expanded the list of countries from which arrivals are required to quarantine, regardless of their vaccination or testing status, to include France, Italy and the United States, among other countries.

For the past week and a half, Israel has been recording an average of more than 2,000 new cases a day, with 229 people in serious condition - the highest since April. The rise in infections is a step back after Israel’s world-leading vaccine campaign drove down new COVID-19 cases from 10,000 a day to fewer than 100.

Israel had lifted most COVID restrictions in early June, but began reimposing some of them

last month following the resurgence of cases.

Nearly 60 per cent of Israel’s 9.3mn people have had two shots, mostly of the Pfizer/BioNTech vaccine.

But about one million Israelis still refuse to be vaccinated even though they are eligible.

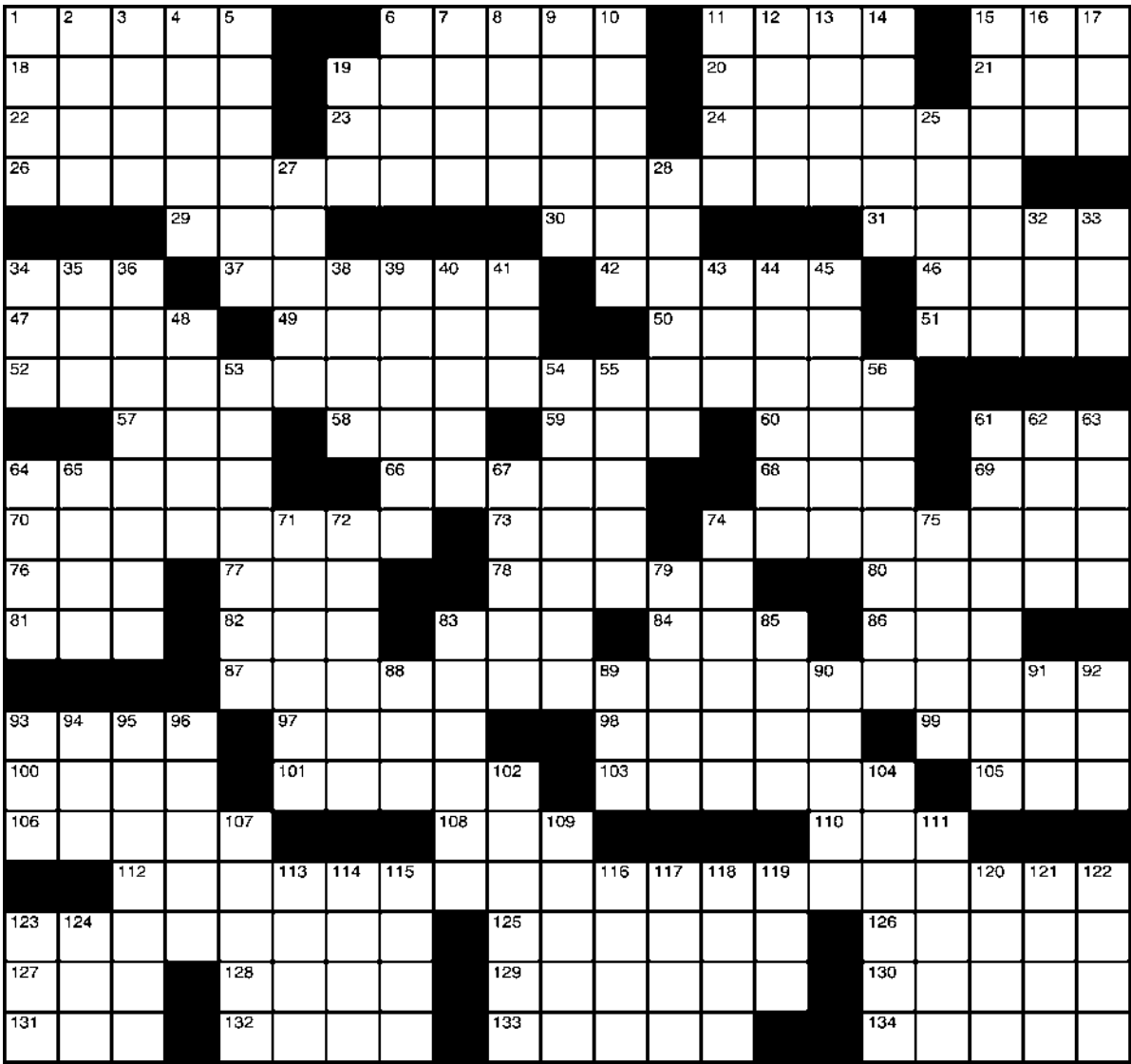
Israel last week rolled out a booster shot for the over-60s. It has also made children as young as 12 eligible for inoculation.

AFP



Israel’s Prime Minister Naftali Bennett (left) accompanies his mother Myrna Bennett as she receives her third vaccine shot, at a clinic in the northern city of Haifa on Tuesday (AFP)

DAILY CROSSWORD



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YOUR DAILY HOROSCOPE

ARIES MARCH 21-APRIL 19

You've gone out of your way for your loved ones quite a bit lately, but you're willing to do even more for them now. They know exactly how goodhearted you are, so your generosity doesn't surprise them on its own, but what you're about to do is definitely far above and beyond the call of duty. Make sure to accept their thanks and praise with grace!

LEO JULY 23-AUGUST 22

The one person you'd least expect to take your side is actually defending your actions to their superiors. In fact, they go way beyond what any reasonable person would expect of them. Fortunately, you're an expert at expressing gratitude, so once you get over the shock, you may even end up friends. Truth really is stranger than fiction!

SAGITTARIUS NOVEMBER 22-DECEMBER 21

You have little fondness for being meticulous, discreet or frugal - those traits bore you to tears, even when they're safely tucked away in other people. You're known for being a bit too blunt, honest and generous, but that's why so many different people love you. Your mission now -- not an easy one -- is to make sure you're not using any of those qualities to prove something.

TAURUS APRIL 20-MAY 20

Everyone has qualities they're famous for, and integrity is right at the top of your list. You pride yourself on doing what's right, even if it's not necessarily the easy way -- which is usually the case! Now that you have to take the long way to achieve an important goal, there's be no pouting. Try not to be too disappointed in a loved one whose list isn't the same as yours.

VIRGO AUGUST 23-SEPTEMBER 22

Every now and then, the universe sends along a nice surprise for no special reason, and you're just about due for your turn now. Someone you haven't seen for far too long may return to your life -- and not just for a quick walk-on appearance, either. Whether or not they admit it, they want to be back for good. Be generous, pretend you didn't know they were coming.

CAPRICORN DECEMBER 22-JANUARY 19

You're not known for indulging yourself -- and that goes for any category. You're the best example of self-restraint, especially when you're on a mission and your goal is clear. Right now, though, anything resembling moderation just doesn't work for you. Don't feel guilty about it, though -- if anyone has earned a break, it's you. Take advantage of this new opportunity to let go.

GEMINI MAY 21-JUNE 21

You've never loved keeping secrets, always preferring to say what's on your mind (and in your heart) as it occurs to you. You want to let the world know exactly what's really going on! When a loved one comes to you with that odd look on their face, begging you to keep quiet about some recent event, you're torn. You know what they want, and you have to just let your heart guide you.

LIBRA SEPTEMBER 23-OCTOBER 22

You specialise in relationships, and you stop at nothing to let the right person know just how fond you are. That's awesome, but it might not always be the best tactic. Right now, for example, playing a wee bit hard to get might not hurt so much -- in fact, it might help a lot! Wait until the phone rings three or four times, and pretend you don't have caller ID.

AQUARIUS JANUARY 20-FEBRUARY 18

Someone emotionally close but physically distant is about to make contact, and you should be delighted to spend some time with them. You're in such a wonderful mood that you can't help but make everyone around you feel just as good -- and it doesn't matter if it's because of a professional situation that's turned out just right or a family matter that's brought joy.

CANCER JUNE 22-JULY 22

Friends in need aren't anything new -- you actually tend to attract them, and you don't mind so much. You send out signals that let others know you're the most trustworthy of friends. Right now, in fact, those traits are amped up, so no matter who comes to you, even just for a quick hug, you go above and beyond the call of duty. Don't be surprised if you end up with a long-term friend.

SCORPIO OCTOBER 23-NOVEMBER 21

You love your privacy, and everyone knows it -- but every now and then, even you need to get out there and mingle. This absolutely does not mean you can't still give yourself some alone time -- you absolutely need it! Once you get out there, though, you may find it surprising just how many people know how to press all the right buttons!

PISCES FEBRUARY 19-MARCH 20

You've got something of a dilemma now, and you're pretty torn by it. Do you listen to what sounds like perfect logic, coming from someone close with experience with this type of situations -- or do you go with your gut, which tells you to do the opposite of what everyone else is saying? Only you can make the final decision. When was the last time your instincts let you down?



TEST YOUR KNOWLEDGE

1. The group of metals Fe, Co, Ni may best called as

- a. transition metals
- b. main group metals
- c. alkali metals
- d. rare metals

2. Heavy water is

- a. deuterium oxide
- b. PH7
- c. rain water
- d. tritium oxide

3. The element common to all acids is

- a. hydrogen
- b. carbon
- c. sulphur
- d. oxygen

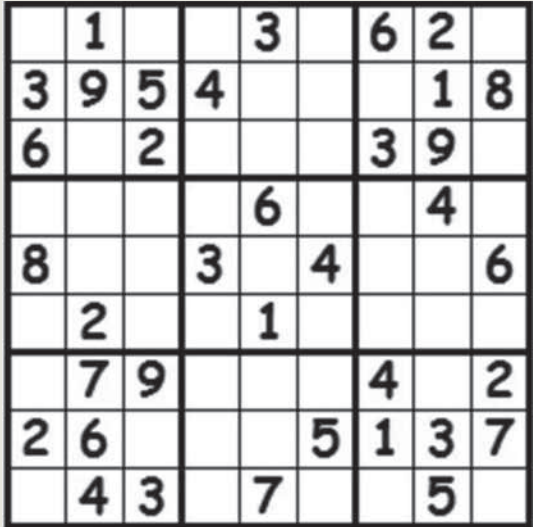
Answers: 1.a 2.a 3.a

KIDS COLOURING



DO YOU SUDOKU?

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



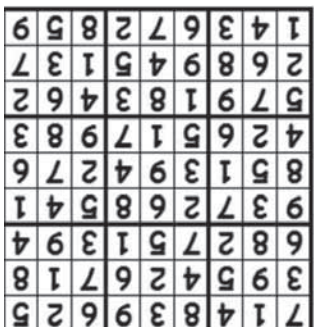
BOGGLER



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

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

SUDOKU EASY ANSWER



DAILY CROSSWORD ANSWERS (AUGUST 04)



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



COOKING CAUTIONS



HEALTH RISKS

FOR CHEFS

Chefs at every level of the industry face injuries and health problems due to the nature of their work. These issues range from problems caused by the job itself - such as back pain and arthritis - to those caused by the unavoidable lifestyle that comes with being a chef.

All chefs and cooks, whether in a commercial setting or at home, know that working by the hearth comes with a set of risks and calls for working with great care and caution. It's very important to follow safe work practises and lead a healthy lifestyle, asserts Anuraj Nair, executive Chef, Crowne Plaza Muscat.

"A professional kitchen is an incredibly stress and fast paced environment in which to work with extreme temperatures, sharp tools and careful attention to the details to be looked upon constantly. Excessive working hours, late nights, split shifts, lack of proper sleep could lead to improper diet or meal timings which may cause long term health issues if not taken care at the right stages," he points out.

Physical injury

There are some key physical health issues that are caused by standing up in a kitchen all day, as well as by lifting heavy pots and pans. Naturally, the height of kitchen surfaces is designed to suit all, which means that they are never at the correct height for any individual. Leaning over a work surface while preparing food can strain the ligaments and discs in the lower back, thereby causing severe pain. Ideally, surfaces would be raised to prevent this from happening, but in reality, it is impossible.

Back problems can also be encountered as a result of lifting heavy pots and pans from one surface to another, particularly if they are held at a distance from the body. Since pans are often hot when they are being moved, they cannot be held too close to the body to reduce strain on the back, neck and shoulders.

Stress

The stress of working in a kitchen can have adverse effects on health. On the job, chefs are effectively working to a constant stream of tight deadlines while trying to remain safe and organised in a confined and hazardous environment. It is unsurprising; therefore, that many chefs suffer

from stress-related health problems, whether they are direct or indirect. Directly, chefs may be prone to high blood pressure as a result of their working environments. Indirectly, chefs can develop health problems based on how they choose to unwind and relax between shifts or at the end of the working day.

Faulty lifestyle

Some of the biggest health concerns facing chefs are not directly related to the job but are a result of the lifestyle associated with it. This includes the risk of diabetes and heart disease that is caused by a lack of exercise and negative eating habits.

As chefs work during the hours that most people are eating, they often have no organised eating pattern and this can encourage them to eat convenience food at odd times of the day and night.

In addition to an unhealthy diet, chefs often do not have time for exercise - they often have only one day off a week and it can be difficult to squeeze a jog in between shifts. This leaves the morning as the only time for exercise, but given that they work late into the night, getting up to exercise can mean missing out on vital sleep.



Zahir Fadil al Hajri
Commis 2, Sheraton Oman

The kitchen can be a very hazardous place as we work with sharp knives and other equipment - so getting cuts is common. Also, floors are often slippery from grease or moisture and it can cause a chef to slip and fall.



Nader al Aisari
Chef and proprietor, Tanzanite

Stress is one common problem that all chefs face as we have to work within tight schedules and long hours. We also get to sleep less and have too much coffee to handle our stress. I do meditation, praying, swimming, etc to relax.



Anuraj Nair
Executive Chef, Crowne Plaza Muscat

It's very much a physically demanding job - the issues range from excessive standing, working in awkward positions or performing repetitive manual tasks that may cause musculoskeletal discomforts.

Quick exercises at work

Chefs who cannot find time to exercise after work hours, can try these quick exercises while at work to keep one's back, shoulders and limbs in order



Mini press ups

Starting on your heels, put your weight onto the heels of your feet and then lift your toes into the air. This will help stretch all the muscles in your feet. After you've completed about 10-20 reps, do the same with your heel. Place your weight onto the balls of your feet, then lift your body up. This small exercise can also help tone your calves and benefit circulation.



Move your hips

Using your hips like weighing scales, sway from side to side. It's a light and relaxing exercise, don't strain yourself, just keep a steady motion and just pull the muscles in your hips slightly to give a small stretch. After you've had enough (twenty reps should be plenty), move your hips in a circular motion - first, counter-clockwise and then clockwise.



Keep moving feet

Wiggle your toes, flex your feet, stretch your ankles and bend your knees. When you are working, it can be easy to forget to keep yourself moving. Simple exercises like this can help with circulation and avoid aching pains at the end of the day.



Shrug your shoulders

This is great for keeping your shoulders loose and removing tension in your back. Raise your shoulders up towards your ears, like an exaggerated version of a 'I don't mind' shrug and then release. Each time you raise your shoulders, wiggle and stretch your shoulder blades for extra relief.



Squats

The squat movement is one of the most popular exercises to do because it has good benefits. Squats make the muscles in your legs, thighs and buttocks work hard. Standing still can cause aches up along your legs and the lower end of your spine, this workout stretches all the muscles, increases heart rate and helps tone muscles.

Bumrah, Shami strike as England collapse

ENGLAND VS INDIA

FIRST TEST: DAY ONE

Nottingham, UK - India's Jasprit Bumrah took four wickets as England suffered their latest batting collapse in slumping to 183 all out on the opening day of the first Test at Trent Bridge on Wednesday.

Bumrah, who struck with the fifth ball of the match to remove Rory Burns for one of four ducks in the innings, took four for 46 in 20.4 overs, with fellow paceman Mohammed Shami also impressing with three for 28 in 17 overs.

England captain Joe Root, who won the toss, top-scored with 64 and was the only batsman to pass 30, with Yorkshire teammate Jonny Bairstow making 29 on his Test return.

Bairstow's exit on the stroke of tea sparked a slump that saw England lose six wickets for 22 runs.

England's 138 for three was transformed into 160 for nine against an attack without Ishant Sharma and off-spinner Ravichandran Ashwin, both dropped following India's loss to New Zealand in the World Test Championship final in June.

India then denied England a breakthrough to be 21-0 at stumps, with both Rohit Sharma and KL Rahul - only drafted in after Mayank Agarwal suffered a suspected concussion while batting in the nets on Monday - nine not out.

Root's decision to bat first after winning the toss on a green-tinged pitch that promised to aid India's four-man pace attack was a bold decision given England's



Jasprit Bumrah
4
WICKETS
46 RUNS

well-known batting frailties.

It took India just five balls to reduce England to none for one, with left-hander Burns lbw on review to a Bumrah delivery that cut back. New batsman Zak Crawley was largely untroubled until, on 27, he was caught behind after what seemed a speculative review by the tourists revealed a thin nick off

Mohammed Siraj to Pant - much to the evident relief of India captain Virat Kohli.

Opening batsman Dom Sibley, whose 18 took 70 balls fell tamely when he chipped Shami straight to Rahul at short midwicket. Root though square-drove Ravindra Jadeja's left-arm spin for four and struck a similar boundary off Shardul Thakur.

But a fourth-wicket stand of 72 ended off what became the last ball before tea when Bairstow was lbw to Shami.

England's 138 for four at the interval soon became 138 for five when Dan Lawrence was caught behind down the legside off Shami for nought before Buttler, who looked desperately out of touch, nicked Bumrah to Pant for a 17-ball duck.

By reaching 23, Root surpassed Cook's England record of 15,737 runs in all formats.

His fifty took 89 balls but on 64 he was lbw, aiming across the line, to Shardul Thakur with Root not bothering to review.

England's tail, Sam Curran's 27 not out apart, unsurprisingly struggled before India held firm against the veteran new-ball duo of James Anderson and Stuart Broad.

AFP

SCOREBOARD

ENGLAND 1 st INNINGS		
R Burns	lbw b Bumrah	0
D Sibley	c Rahul b Shami	18
Z Crawley	c Pant b Siraj	27
J Root	lbw b Thakur	64
J Bairstow	lbw b Shami	29
D Lawrence	c Pant b Shami	0
J Buttler	c Pant b Bumrah	0
S Curran	not out	27
O Robinson	c Shami b Thakur	0
S Broad	lbw b Bumrah	4
J Anderson	b Bumrah	1
Extras:	(b 1, lb 8, nb 4)	13
TOTAL:	183 in 65.4 overs	
Fall of wickets: 1-0, 2-42, 3-66, 4-138, 5-138, 6-145, 7-155, 8-155, 9-160, 10-183		
Bowling: J Bumrah 20.4-4-46-4, M Shami 17.2-28-3, M Siraj 12-2-48-1, S Thakur 13-3-41-2, R Jadeja 3-0-11-0		
INDIA 1 st INNINGS		
R Sharma	not out	9
KL Rahul	not out	9
Extras:	(b 1, lb 1, nb 1)	3
TOTAL:	21 for no loss in 13 overs	
Bowling: J Anderson 3-1-9-0, S Broad 5-1-9-0, O Robinson 4-3-1-0, S Curran 1-1-0-0		

Afif, Nurul steer Bangladesh past Australia

BANGLADESH VS AUSTRALIA SECOND T20I

Dhaka, Bangladesh - Afif Hossain and Nurul Hasan steered Bangladesh to a 2-0 lead over Australia in the T20I series with an emphatic five-wicket win on Wednesday.

Chasing 122 for victory, Bangladesh depended on an unbroken 56-run sixth-wicket partnership between Afif, who hit 37, and Nurul, who made 22, to achieve their target with eight balls to spare in Dhaka.

Shakib al Hasan made 26 but Bangladesh were in trouble at 67 for five in the 12th over when Mahedi Hasan departed, stumped off Adam Zampa for 23.

Pace bowler Mustafizur Rahman took three wickets to restrict Australia to 121 for seven despite 45 by Mitchell Marsh, who got the same score in his side's opening loss of the five-match series on Tuesday.

Bangladesh, who recorded their first ever T20 win over Australia in the previous match, have won two successive games against their opponents for the first time across formats.

Pace bowlers Josh Hazlewood and Mitchell Starc struck early to remove openers Soumya Sarkar, for nought, and Mohammad Naim, for nine, respectively.

Shakib made the hosts fight back with his 17-ball knock and a partnership of 37 for the third wicket with Mahedi. Medium-pace bowler Andrew Tye bowled Shakib and Mahmudullah dragged the ball from left-arm spinner Ashton Agar onto his stumps as Bangladesh slipped.

Earlier the tourists, who lost the opener after being bowled

SCOREBOARD

AUSTRALIA		
J Philippe	b Rahman	10 (14)
A Carey	c Nasum b Mahedi	11 (11)
M Marsh	c Nurul b Islam	45 (42)
M Henriques	b Shakib al Hasan	30 (25)
M Wade	b Rahman	4 (7)
A Turner	c Mahmudullah	
	b Islam	3 (7)
A Agar	c Nurul b Rahman	0 (1)
M Starc	not out	13 (10)
A Tye	not out	3 (3)
Extras	(lb 1, w 1)	2
TOTAL	121 for seven in 20 overs	
Fall of wickets: 1-13, 2-31, 3-88, 4-99, 5-103, 6-103, 7-106		
Bowling: Mahedi Hasan 3-0-12-1, Nasum Ahmed 4-0-29-0, Shakib al Hasan 4-0-22-1, M Rahman 4-0-23-3, S Islam 4-0-27-2, S Sarkar 1-0-7-0		
BANGLADESH		
M Naim	b Hazlewood	9 (11)
S Sarkar	b Starc	0 (2)
Shakib al Hasan	b Tye	26 (17)
Mahedi Hasan		
	st Wade b Zampa	23 (24)
Mahmudullah	b Agar	0 (4)
Afif Hossain	not out	37 (31)
Nurul Hasan	not out	22 (21)
Extras	(w 6)	6
TOTAL	123 for five in 18.4 overs	
Fall of wickets: 1-9, 2-21, 3-58, 4-59, 5-67		
Bowling: M Starc 3-0-28-1, J Hazlewood 3.4-0-21-1, A Agar 4-0-17-1, A Zampa 4-0-24-1, A Tye 3-0-27-1, M Marsh 1-0-6-0		

out for 108 in their chase of 131, collapsed from 99 for three to 106 for seven after Marsh's wicket. Marsh put on 57 for the third wicket with Moises Henriques, who scored 30, after the departure of the two openers.

NZ tour confirmed

New Zealand will play five T20Is in Bangladesh in September, the national board announced on Wednesday. The Black Caps will arrive in Dhaka on August 24 for the series, scheduled for September 1-10, the Bangladesh Cricket Board (BCB) said. All the matches will be held in Dhaka.

AFP



Louis van Gaal

Van Gaal returns as Netherlands coach

The Hague, Netherlands - Dutchman Louis van Gaal will return for a third time as the national football coach, leading the team to the 2022 World Cup in Qatar, the Dutch football federation (KNVB) said Wednesday.

The appointment of the 69-year-old, dubbed the 'Iron Tulip', comes after the resignation of Frank de Boer in June after the Netherlands' dismal last-16 exit from Euro 2020. The no-nonsense Van Gaal, whose last major job was at Manchester United, previously managed the Oranje between 2000-2002 and 2012-2014, when they finished third at the World Cup in Brazil.

AFP

Alisson signs new Liverpool deal



Alisson Becker

London, UK - Liverpool goalkeeper Alisson Becker signed a six-year contract extension with the English Premier League club on Wednesday.

Brazil's Alisson, 28, has established himself as one of the world's top goalkeepers since arriving at Anfield from Roma in 2018. He is now tied to Liverpool until 2027, becoming the third player to commit his future to the Reds over the last week.

England defender Trent Alexander-Arnold and Brazil midfielder Fabinho also signed new long-term deals. Fabinho's old contract was due to expire at the end of the upcoming campaign.

AFP

National chess tournament for public, private institutions

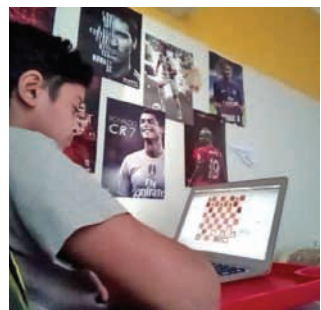
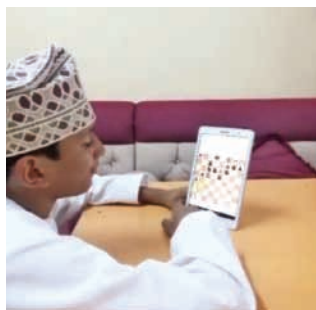
Our Correspondent

Muscat

The Oman Chess Committee (OCC), in coordination with The Zubair Corporation, will organise the inaugural National Chess Championship for Public and Private Institutions from August 20-22. All government and private institutions are eligible to

take part in the tournament and each institution can field a maximum of two teams with four players each. Each team can have one reserve player and teams are allowed to have a male or a female player from outside their establishment.

The player should have a FIDE registration and the team should have an account with online



File photos of players during an online chess competition

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TOKYO 2020



WINNING TEENS!

Japan's Yosozumi, 19, wins women's skateboarding gold; 12 and 13 year olds complete podium of teenagers

WOMEN'S SKATEBOARDING
Tokyo, Japan - Japan's Sakura Yosozumi won the women's park competition to maintain the hosts' stranglehold on Olympic skateboarding on Wednesday and stop Kokona Hiraki and Sky Brown becoming the Games' youngest-ever gold medallists.
The 19-year-old opened the final with a flowing run featuring two 540s, with her 60.09 points proving enough for victory ahead of teammate Hiraki, 12, and Brown, 13.
"This medal feels unreal - it feels like a dream," said Yosozumi, as she celebrated at a sun-baked Ariake Urban Sports Park on Tokyo Bay.
"I hope skateboarding is going to be very popular in Japan because of the strong performances of the Japanese team," she said, adding,

"Now I want to go back home and eat some delicious food."
Despite missing the title Hiraki, who scored 59.04, achieved the rare feat of winning an Olympic medal before her 13th birthday - the first to do so since French rower Noel Vandernotte in 1936.
Japan-born Brown, who became Britain's youngest Olympic medallist, threatened to snatch a dramatic win with a flawless closing routine but she was awarded 56.47 points to take bronze.
"It was unbelievable," Brown said of her medal-winning run.
"Even right now it feels like a dream. It's insane."
There was heartbreak for world No 1 Misugu Okamoto, who missed a medal when she fell on all three runs

in the final to finish fourth.
Japan also snapped up the men's and women's street titles and they have bagged five of the nine medals so far as skateboarding makes its Olympic bow.
Skateboarding is one of four debut sports aimed at reaching new audiences and in an ultra-young field, only eight of the 20 competitors were out of their teens. The podium had a combined age of 44.
Both Brown, at 13 years and 28 days, and Hiraki (12 years and 343 days) were bidding to break an 85-year-old record to become the youngest champions in Olympic history.
They had a shot at bettering American diver Marjorie Gestring, who won 3m springboard gold aged 13 years and 268 days at the 1936 Games in Berlin.
Brown, born to a Japanese mother and a British father, opted to compete for Britain in 2019, saying the team offered a more relaxed approach.
AFP



Japan's Sakura Yosozumi competes in the women's park final on Wednesday (AFP)



L-R: Silver medallist Kokona Hiraki, gold medallist Sakura Yosozumi and bronze medallist Sky Brown at the awards ceremony on Wednesday



Italy's Simone Consonni (L) and Filippo Ganna celebrate after winning gold

Italy end wait for team pursuit gold

CYCLING TRACK
Shizuoka, Japan - Italy won gold in the men's team pursuit for the first time in 61 years on Wednesday, breaking their own world record to beat Denmark in a thrilling final at the Izu Velodrome. The Italians shaded a neck-and-neck battle on the track, their blistering time of 3min 42.032sec just enough to hold off Denmark, who crossed the line in 3:42.198.
Led by the 25-year-old Filippo Ganna, the Italy quartet - Ganna, Simone Consonni, Francesco Lamon and Jonathan Milan - roared with delight after they powered to victory, circling around the arena in front of an

enthralled crowd of around 1,000 fans in Shizuoka.
Located 145km outside Tokyo, the velodrome is one of the few venues at Tokyo 2020 allowing a limited number of spectators and they were treated to a brilliant final in what is the most prestigious event of the track cycling programme.
This was also only Italy's second Olympic gold medal on the track in the last 21 years, with Elia Viviani winning the men's omnium at Rio 2016.
Australia claimed a bronze medal to go with silvers from 2012 and 2016 after they beat New Zealand.
AFP



Cuba's Lopez too good for Britain's Whittaker



L-R: Ben Whittaker, Arlen Lopez, bronze medallists Russia's Imam Khataev, Azerbaijan's Loren Berto Alfonso Dominguez on the podium on Wednesday

BOXING
Tokyo, Japan - Cuba's Arlen Lopez won his second Olympic gold medal on Wednesday as he taught Ben Whittaker a boxing lesson in Tokyo - the disconsolate Briton refusing to wear his silver medal and putting it instead in his pocket.
The 28-year-old Lopez was the aggressor throughout but he was surprisingly only a split-points winner in the final of the men's light-heavyweight.

Lopez, who won middleweight gold at the Rio 2016 Olympics, fell to his knees and banged on the floor when he was named the victor, while Whittaker quickly left the ring with his hands over his face. After receiving his gold medal, Lopez put his fingers to his lips, a gesture he said was towards 'those who were against me or thought that I would not be able to make it or lacked motivation'.
Lopez, a former world



Turkey's Busenaz Surmeneli (R) and India's Lovlina Borgohain fight during their women's welterweight semifinal bout on Wednesday (AFP)

champion in middleweight, led through two rounds of the scheduled three on the judges' scorecards and the only surprise was that he was not awarded the bout on unanimous points. Cuba, a powerhouse of Olympic boxing, have now won two of the three gold medals in the sport so far in Tokyo. The other went to Japan.

India's Lovlina loses in semifinal
In the women's competition on Wednesday, there was also disappointment for India's Lovlina Borgohain in the welterweight semifinals.
She was well beaten by Turkey's flamboyant Busenaz Surmeneli, who will face China's Gu Hong in the final for gold on Saturday. The 23-year-old Lovlina will still take home bronze, equalling the achievement of India's trailblazing 'Magnificent' Mary Kom, a London 2012 bronze medallist and national treasure back home.
But like Whittaker, Borgohain was not celebrating. "I just lost the match now and definitely not feeling good at this time," she said.
AFP



Breanna Stewart (C) of the USA dribbles the ball during their quarterfinal game against Australia on Wednesday

USA crush Australia to set up date with Serbia, Japan reach semis

WOMEN'S BASKETBALL
Saitama, Japan - Breanna Stewart scored a game-high 23 points as the United States crushed Australia on Wednesday to set up an Olympic women's basketball semifinal against Serbia as the Americans close in on a seventh consecutive title.
Brittney Griner added another 15 points and A'ja Wilson 10 in the 79-55 rout against the world's number two team.
They will meet Serbia on Friday after the European cham-

pions and Rio bronze medallists swept past China 77-70.
Meanwhile, hosts Japan won a thriller against Olympic debutants Belgium 86-85 to set up a last-four showdown 2012 Olympic silver medallists France who beat 2016 runners-up Spain 67-64.
It was never going to be easy for Australia to take down the US, who have now won 53 Olympic games in a row. The incredible streak began with the 1992 bronze-medal decider and

includes a record six straight gold medals and four victories in Tokyo. So dominant are the US that they have won eight out of the past nine Olympic titles, with the only blemishes a silver medal behind the Soviet Union at the inaugural tournament in 1976 and bronze in 1992.
Led by WNBA stars Sue Bird, Diana Taurasi and Sylvia Fowles, the US set the tone with a 15-0 run in a first quarter and then galloped to a 48-27 halfway lead, with Seattle Storm forward



Stewart nailing 20 of them. That blew out to 68-39 heading into the final stretch and there was no way back for Australia.
Earlier, towering forward Jelena Brooks drilled 18 points to help Serbia get past China. Sonja Vasic added 16 and Ana Dabovic chipped in 13 to book their second Olympic semifinal in only their second appearance.
A three-pointer from Saki Hayashi with 15 seconds left put Japan through to the last-four for the first time ever.
AFP



TOKYO 2020

Dominant Dutch

Argentina overcome India to set up clash against the Netherlands for gold



The Netherlands players celebrate after defeating Britain 5-1 in their women's hockey semifinal on Wednesday

WOMEN'S HOCKEY

Tokyo, Japan - The Netherlands will play in the women's Olympic hockey finals for a fifth straight time after a dominating 5-1 triumph over 2016 Rio Olympic champions Britain at the Oi Hockey Stadium on Wednesday. The Dutch women will take on Argentina for the title after the latter overcame a magnificent challenge from underdogs India to book their place in the gold medal match with a 2-1 win. The final will be played on Friday. For the Netherlands, it would be a chance to claim their fourth

Olympic crown against the team that they defeated to the gold medal at London 2012. On Wednesday, the Dutch took the lead against Great Britain when 21-year-old forward Felice Albers' shot beat British goalie Madeleine Hinch. The Dutch, who won silver at the 2016 Rio Games after taking home the top prize twice in a row at the 2008 and 2012 Olympics, doubled the score less than a minute later through a shot by Marloes Keetels. After the halftime, the



Netherlands extended its lead to 4-0 thanks to goals by Maria Verschoor and Albers. Britain came back a goal when Giselle Ansley flicked in a penalty corner, before Frederique Matla did the same for the Netherlands, settling the final score. In the second semifinal, the 37-year-old Argentina captain Maria Noel Barrionuevo rolled back the years by scoring two penalty corner drag-flicks to guide her team to victory. India - who stunned highly-rated Australia in the



Argentina's Maria Noel Barrionuevo (R) celebrates after defeating India

quarterfinals with a 1-0 win - took the lead inside the opening two minutes when Gurjit Kaur rattled the backboard with a superb penalty corner drag-flick. However, it was the contribution of veteran defender Barrionuevo that proved decisive for Las Leonas, firing her team into their third Olympic final. Argentina pulled themselves level when Barrionuevo produced the kind of goal she was famous for a decade ago, sending an unstoppable penalty corner drag-flick rocket to the right of India goalkeeper Savita.

Barrionuevo struck again six minutes into the third quarter, although there was more than an element of fortune about her second goal, which clipped the shinpad of an India player to completely deceive Savita before nestling into the corner. India came agonisingly close to equalising with just 20 seconds of the match remaining, as Navneet Kaur guided a deflection towards the bottom left corner only for Argentina goalkeeper Belen Succi to make a brilliant save. Agencies



Iran's Mohammadreza Geraei celebrates after winning gold on Wednesday

Geraei claims gold for Iran, India's Dahiya reaches 57kg final

WRESTLING

Tokyo, Japan - Iran's Mohammadreza Geraei won gold in the men's Greco-Roman lightweight (67kg) category at the Tokyo Olympics on Wednesday. Ukraine's Parviz Nasibov took the silver medal while Germany's Frank Staebler and Egypt's Mohamed Ibrahim El-Sayed claimed the bronze medals. Later in the day, Ukraine's Zhan Beleniuk won gold in the men's Greco-Roman middleweight (87kg) category after beating Hungary's Viktor Lorincz. Germany's Denis Kudla and Serbia's Zurabi Datunashvili won the bronze medals. Earlier, India's Ravi Kumar Dahiya entered the men's 57kg final, assuring India of their fourth Olympic medal in Tokyo. The 23

year old wrestler was trailing Nurislam Sanayev of Kazakhstan 2-9 at one stage in the semifinal when he pinned his opponent to be declared winner by fall. After Sushil Kumar, world bronze medallist and two-time Asian champion Dahiya became the second Indian wrestler to book a berth in the final. He will take on two-time world champion Zaur Uguev of Russia in the title clash. Another Indian wrestler and world silver medallist Deepak Punia lost to former world champion David Taylor of the USA in the 86kg semifinal. He will now fight for a bronze. Earlier, Dahiya beat Pan American silver medallist Colombian Oscar Tigreros and Bulgarian Georgi Vangelov to enter the last-four. Agencies



Brazil's Cunha swims to women's marathon title

MARATHON SWIMMING

Tokyo, Japan - Brazil's Marcela Ana Cunha said she had to be 'cold mentally' to see off the challenge of defending champion Sharon van Rouwendaal on her way to Olympic gold in the women's 10km marathon swim on Wednesday. Cunha won by less than a second from a fast-charging Van Rouwendaal in their early morning duel in Tokyo, timing 1hr 59min 30.8sec to 1:59:31.7 for the Dutch swimmer. Kareena Lee took the bronze medal for Australia. Cunha, 29, finished tenth in the event at the Rio Olympics and fifth at the Beijing Games in 2008. The Brazilian said she had arrived in Japan desperate to win gold. "We arrived here wanting, as much as you can, this medal and around ten days ago, I said to my coach to win this race will be very difficult for my opponents



Brazil's Ana Marcela Cunha bites her gold medal at a ceremony after winning the women's 10km marathon swimming event on Wednesday (AFP)

because I want it so hard, so much and I'm really well prepared," she said. "We had to be cool or 'cold' as Europeans (are)," she added. "We are Latin people - we are hot, we are emotional people - so I had to be very cold mentally in the race to be focused and I had to win it myself.



I knew I was prepared for that." The seven-lap course in Tokyo Bay featured a backdrop of skyscrapers, the Rainbow Bridge and the nearby floating Olympic rings. The air temperature during the latter stages of the race was 30°C, with 74 per cent humidity that made it feel like 35°C. AFP

 MEDALS TABLE (Only selected nations)				
	Gold	Silver	Bronze	Total
China	32	22	16	70
USA	25	31	23	79
Japan	21	7	12	40
Great Britain	15	18	15	48
Australia	15	4	17	36
ROC	14	21	18	53
Germany	8	8	16	32
France	6	10	9	25
Italy	6	9	15	30
Netherlands	6	8	9	23
South Korea	6	4	9	19
New Zealand	6	4	5	15
Cuba	5	3	4	12
Hungary	4	5	3	12
Canada	4	4	7	15
(ROC - Russian Olympic Committee)				

Transgender lifter Hubbard retires

Tokyo, Japan - Transgender weightlifter Laurel Hubbard has announced she will retire in the wake of her groundbreaking appearance at the Tokyo Olympics this week. The New Zealander on Monday contested the +87kg category weightlifting, in a debut the International

Olympic Committee (IOC) described as the first appearance by an openly transgender woman at an Olympics. The intensely private Hubbard, aged 43, said she was now ready to step away from the spotlight. AFP

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TOKYO 2020

De Grasse delights after epic McLaughlin show

ATHLETICS

Tokyo, Japan - Andre de Grasse upstaged Noah Lyles to claim the first men's 200m gold of the post-Usain Bolt era on Wednesday, as Sydney McLaughlin obliterated her own world record to claim a thrilling victory in the women's 400m hurdles.

The stage for the 200m final at Tokyo's Olympic Stadium had been set up by McLaughlin's epic duel with American teammate Dalilah Muhammad.

McLaughlin, 21, surged past Muhammad just metres from the line in a baking hot morning session to win in 51.46sec, slicing a whopping 0.44sec off her previous mark of 51.90sec set at the US trials in June.

"It's just iron sharpening iron," McLaughlin said. "You need somebody who's going to push you to your best and that's what we do so well."

"Every time we step on the track it's always something fast."

De Grasse had set the fastest qualifying time for the 200m, an event recently dominated by Jamaican sprint legend Bolt, who had won golds in Beijing, London and Rio between 2008-16.

And the 26-year-old Canadian finally came good on the promise he has shown on the track, having won 200m silver and 100m bronze in Rio before laying out his store in Tokyo with a second bronze in Sunday's blue riband track event.

De Grasse was fast out of his blocks and drove through to the line, clocking a national record of 19.62 seconds for gold.

"I have been waiting for this moment, been training hard for this moment," he said. "I went back after the 100m and I felt disappointed. I said to myself 'I just got to go and get it (gold)'."

American Lyles, long touted as Bolt's most likely successor,



Canada's Andre De Grasse (third from left) crosses the finish line to win the men's 200m final during the Tokyo 2020 Olympic Games at the Olympic Stadium in Tokyo on Wednesday

had to be happy with bronze in 19.74sec as teammate Kenny Bednarek claimed silver in a personal best of 19.68sec. The third US runner in the field, 17-year-old Erriyon Knighton, came in fourth (19.93).

Kenya secure men's 800m

Emmanuel Korir ensured Kenya's grip on the men's 800m continued by leading Ferguson Rotich home for a one-two finish for the east African powerhouses.

Korir, who succeeds injured two-time champion David Rudisha as gold medallist in the event, timed 1:45.06, Rotich taking silver ahead of Poland's Patryk Dobek.

Korir said his success was rich compensation after he failed to reach the final at successive major championships. "This is a big thing for me after failing to qualify for the final in the 2017 and 2019 worlds. But today is my day," he said.

There was glory, and another bronze, for Poland in the men's hammer as Wojciech Nowicki's best of 82.52m secured gold. Norway's Eivind Henriksen claimed silver, with four-time world champion Pawel Fajdek taking bronze.

Elsewhere on the track, there was a first ever Olympic gold for an Ugandan woman as Peruth Chemutai outstripped the field to win the 3,000m steeplechase.



Kenya's Emmanuel Korir celebrates after winning the men's 800m final at the Olympic Stadium on Wednesday



USA's Sydney McLaughlin wins the women's 400m hurdles final

The 22-year-old timed 9min 01.45sec, with American Courtney Frerichs claiming silver and Kenyan Hyvin Kiyeng bronze. "After my fifth place at the world championships in Doha, I knew a medal would be possible if I run a good race," said Chemutai.

Dutch runner Sifan Hassan's bid for an unprecedented Olympic treble remains on course after she eased into Friday's 1,500m final by winning her semifinal. The newly-crowned 5000m Olympic champion - who also has the 10,000m in her sights - will face a challenge to make it two out of two titles as Kenya's defending champion Faith Kipyegon awaits her.

Injury heartbreak for 'KJT'

There was drama in the heptathlon as British world champion Katarina Johnson-Thompson 'KJT' pulled up with a right calf injury in the final event of the first day, the 200m.

It left reigning Olympic champion Nafi Thiam of Belgium, third overnight, in prime position to defend her title in Thursday's second day of competition which features the long jump, javelin and the 800m. Canada's Damian Warner was in pole in the men's decathlon, with fancied French rival Kevin Mayer, the world record holder, in fifth.

Warner, 31, registered 10.12sec in the 100m, 8.24m in the long jump, 14.80m in the shot put, 2.02m in the high jump and 47.48sec in the 400m for an overnight total of 4,722 points.

AFP

Tropical storm could cut women's golf to 54 holes

GOLF

Kawagoe, Japan - The Tokyo Olympics women's golf tournament could be cut to 54 holes, organisers said on Wednesday, because of an approaching tropical storm due to hit Kasumigaseki Country Club at the weekend.

"We have notified the players that we may have to be forced to reduce to a 54-hole competition," International Golf Federation (IGF) official Heather Daly-Donofrio told a media briefing at the course in Saitama prefecture on Wednesday evening.

"We will not change tomorrow's schedule. We will play 18 holes as scheduled tomorrow. We will play another 18 holes on Friday and then we will continue to track this tropical system and see what Saturday brings."

Daly-Donofrio said the idea of playing extra holes over the next two days to complete four rounds by Friday had been explored, but the extreme heat meant it wasn't feasible.

"The health and safety of our



Sweden's Madelene Sagstrom plays a shot out of the bunker on the 18th green in round one of the women's golf event on Wednesday (AFP)

players and caddies is first and foremost," Daly-Donofrio said.

Lexi Thompson's caddie, Jack Fulghum, had to pull out during Wednesday's opening round with heat exhaustion on a day where the thermometers topped 36°C. Similar temperatures are forecast for Thursday and Friday with high humidity seeing the heat index

exceed 44°C on Wednesday.

"In an ideal world we would make (the cut to 54 holes) before they tee off in their third round, so the players know what they are playing for, but it's all going to depend on that forecast and what we are seeing from our meteorologists."

"We hope the storm veers and goes off and then we can

play our final round cleanly on Saturday."

The men's tournament last week was interrupted several times on the opening two days because of heavy rain and dangerous lightning. The second round was not completed until Saturday morning.

The women's tournament is scheduled to finish on Saturday but could be extended another day, weather permitting, Daly-Donofrio confirmed, but there is no option to extend past Sunday's Olympics closing ceremony. However, the weather forecast for Sunday is even worse than Saturday.

Sweden's Madelene Sagstrom has a one-shot lead going into second round after an opening five-under 66. American Nelly Korda and India's Aditi Ashok trail with four-under 67 while there is a three-way tie at third spot with three-under 68 between Finland's Matilda Castren, South Korea's Ko Jin Young and Carlotia Ciganda of Spain.

AFP

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