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GO TO PAGE 09 WORLD

NEWS BRIEFS

AGRICULTURE MINISTER TO ATTEND SAUDI CLIMATE SUMMIT

Muscat - Delegated by His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tariq, Dr Saud Hamoud al Habsi, Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Water Resources, left for Riyadh on Sunday to lead the sultanate's delegation in the Middle East Green Initiative (MGI) Summit, scheduled to start today.

The MGI summit will bring together prominent regional and international leaders with the aim of enhancing cooperation and rallying efforts to implement common environmental commitments. The summit aims to combat climate change in the Middle East, promote investments as well as transfer knowledge to face relevant challenges.



First visually-impaired Omani jockey unstoppable



Oman's oil output increases in September, exports drop

Resident cards to be valid for three years

Civil ID Cards for citizens and Resident Cards for expatriates must be obtained within 30 days of an individual attaining the age of ten

Our Correspondent
Muscat

Lt Gen Hassan bin Mohsen al Shraiqi, Inspector General of Police and Customs, has issued a decision to amend the executive regulations of the Civil Status Law allowing expat Resident Cards to be valid for a period of three years instead of the current two.

The decision also makes it mandatory for Civil ID Cards for citizens and Resident Cards for expatriates to be obtained within 30 days of the date of an individual attaining the age of ten.

'The Civil ID is valid for five years, while the Resident Card will be valid for a period not exceeding three years from the date of issue or renewal,' the decision stated.

Decision 235/2021 amends some provisions of the executive regulations of the Civil Status Law issued via Royal Decree No



INVESTOR-FRIENDLY MOVE

Lt Gen Hassan bin Mohsen al Shraiqi, Inspector General of Police and Customs, also issued a decision to amend some provisions of the executive regulations of the Foreigners Residence Law setting the fee for investor visas.

INVESTOR VISA FEES

	10 year	5 year
Registration	RO500	RO300
Renewal every three years	RO500	RO300
Family residence permit	RO100	RO50

66/99 and the Executive Regulations of the Civil Status Law issued by Resolution 40/2007.

Civil ID and Residency Cards will be issued within 30 days of citizens and residents attaining

the age of ten, or within 30 days of entry into the sultanate in the case of expatriates aged older than ten years.

The fee for renewal as well as new Civil ID cards has been set

at RO5. Replacement of damaged or lost Civil IDs will cost RO10.

According to the decision, the fee for new as well as renewal of Resident Cards is RO5 (for each year). Replacement of a damaged or lost Resident Card will cost RO20.

The penalty for not renewing Civil ID and Resident Cards is RO5 for each month of delay, while the fine for not obtaining a Civil ID card within 30 days of an individual turning ten is RO10.

The decision was issued on October 21, 2021, and came into effect a day following its publication (October 25).

Inflation up 2.46% in Sept

Our Correspondent
Muscat

Inflation rate in the sultanate increased by 2.46 per cent in September 2021 compared to September 2020.

According to data from the National Centre for Statistics and Information (NCSI) on Consumer Price Index, the rise is attributed to increase in prices of major segments such as transportation (up 8.19 per cent); miscellaneous goods and services (3.33 per cent); recreational activities (2.05 per cent); food (1.87 per cent); furnishing, household appliances and maintenance (1.32 per cent); restaurants and hotels (0.83 per cent);

housing, water, electricity and fuel (0.4 per cent); and clothing, footwear, health and education (0.08 per cent each).

Simultaneously, the price of communication services decreased by 0.08 per cent.

According to NCSI, prices of non-alcoholic beverages rose 6.61 per cent; fish and seafood 4.43 per cent; oils and fats 2.08 per cent; bread and cereals 1.76 per cent; sugar, jam, honey and sweets 1.45 per cent; meat 1.33 per cent; vegetables 1.16 per cent; and milk, cheese and eggs 0.29 per cent.

In contrast, prices of fruits fell by 0.03 per cent in September 2021 compared to September 2020.

MoL announces 332 private sector jobs

Our Correspondent
Muscat

In efforts to employ citizens, the Ministry of Labour (MoL) has announced 332 positions in the private sector, including jobs within the wage subsidy initiative.

A statement issued by MoL said, 'This initiative will support private sector institutions and the ministry urges them to employ Omanis. This is the second announcement of job opportunities offered by private sector establishments that have registered to benefit from the wage subsidy initiative, which comes under Royal directives.'

The ministry stated that the 332 private sector jobs have been announced for aspirants with no work experience. 'The opportunities are for university degree holders, higher diploma holders, post-secondary diploma holders, professional diploma holders, and General Education Diploma holders,' it stated.

'Under the initiative, the wages of these employees will subsidised to the tune of RO200 for a period of two years, provided that the employer bears the difference, and employment is at least for a period equal to the period of government support.'



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YOUR SAY

Alert and prepared

How can Oman prepare for future storms or heavy rains?

Rafeeq Thonse
Shopkeeper

Storm water drainage is needed, especially in Muscat governorate, so that rain and drainage water can be moved out continuously and quickly. The problem of water logging witnessed in many areas - both residential and commercial - can be avoided with such a drainage system.



Ahmed Khalaf Khalfan
Private sector employee

Authorities must not permit buildings near wadis. Such areas should be demarcated and turned into tourist sites for people to enjoy when it is not raining. Further, there must be proper measures to ensure drains and water outlets are not clogged and more culverts must be constructed.



Yusuf Khan
Senior manager

There has to be a two-fold approach. Planned evacuation not only of the area which is in the eye of the storm but 100+ km around it, and people's heightened alertness to natural events. Additionally, people have to avoid any adventure in nature during or after a storm.



Jasim Jamil
Private sector employee

There are a variety of emergency management programmes that can help the country prepare for storms and heavy rains. In addition, the Ministry of Housing has to double-check the places where they plan to build houses. Oman has all the facilities and systems to face such natural disaster, and rescue teams are always active and ready to engage and respond to emergencies.



Mohan Anandan
Bank employee

A well equipped and trained natural disaster management team, duly supported by a comprehensive plan, with frequent drills to ensure that the team's skills and preparedness are current, will go a long way in preparing for natural disasters like storms or heavy rains. Climate change and unpredictable seasons must also be factored into the infrastructural development plans.



Jay Prakash
Private sector employee

Frequent storms and heavy rains are a result of climate change and should not be ignored. The natural rainwater runoff should be used to increase green coverage. People must plant more trees to minimise soil erosion. Big building should not be constructed near the sea or hillside.



NEXT ON YOUR SAY

Do you think the cost of living in Oman has increased? If so, what in particular are you spending more on now?

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

Bahwan International, TVS Motor ink distribution deal for Iraq

Muscat - Bahwan International Group has partnered with Indian multinational automotive company TVS Motor Company, a reputed two-wheeler and three-wheeler manufacturer, for a distribution deal in Iraq.

A signing ceremony was held on Sunday between Sheikh Ahmed Bahwan, chairman of Bahwan International Group, and Sudarshan Venu, joint MD of TVS Motor Company.

Through a tri-party deal arrangement, ARATA International will be the new distributor for TVS Motor in Iraq. Based on this partnership, the groups will also explore other avenues of cooperation in Oman and India.

ARATA International and its channel partners plan to operate more than 30 dealerships for TVS Motor. The dealerships will include state-of-the-art 3S facilities in all the major cities of Iraq with after-sales service and



(Supplied photos)



spare parts support in tier-two cities to expand the TVS presence in Iraq.

A subsidiary of Bahwan International Group, ARATA International is registered in the UAE with a strong presence in the MENA region. TVS Motor ranks among the top five two-wheeler companies globally with a presence in over 70 countries across Africa, South East Asia, the Indian Sub-Continent, Latin America and the Middle East.

Speaking at signing ceremony, Abdullah Bahwan, executive director of Bahwan International Group, said, "We are happy to join hands with a multinational brand like TVS Motor. This partnership will be instrumental in bringing a wide range of mobility solutions and will cater to the requirements of a broad range of customer segments in the country. The quality prowess of TVS Motor combined with our strong understanding of the market will definitely create an impact in the mobility space in Iraq."

Also speaking on the occasion, Venu said, "We are delighted to partner with a reputed group like Bahwan International to strengthen our presence in the MENA region. ARATA International comes with rich experience, deep understanding and vast industry knowledge. Iraq is an important market for us, and ARATA International's extensive distribution network, along with our shared ethos and values, makes them the ideal strategic partner. This association with them is a significant step towards further expanding and bolstering TVS Motor's market presence in Iraq."

TVS Motor's product portfolio available in Iraq includes two-wheelers and three-wheelers.

First visually-impaired Omani jockey gallops to new heights

Our Correspondent
Muscat

Khamis al Sharji, 30, from the wilayat of Mudhaibi in North Sharqiyah is the first visually-impaired jockey in the world to qualify for endurance races.

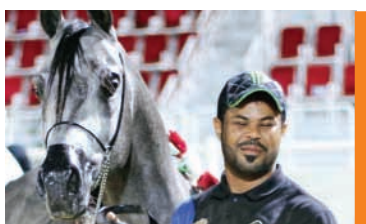
Sharji was able to pass an endurance race over a distance of 40km held recently.

'Sharji will be the first visually-impaired rider to participate in endurance races around the world,' Oman Equestrian Federation said.

A graduate from the College of Arts and Social Sciences in Sultan Qaboos University, Sharji fell in love with horse riding at an early age.

"I chose the equestrian sport because it develops one's self-confidence and riding a horse is not a great challenge for the visually-impaired because the horse knows its way well," the young achiever told *Muscat Daily*.

Also, science has proven that horse riding helps many conditions, including those with



I hope to obtain the international licence to ride horses to participate in all local and international races and raise the flag of Oman high

KHAMIS AL SHARJI



autism and neurological disorders, he added.

In 2010, Sharji started horse riding courses and training in private equestrian schools in Muscat.

Talking about the challenges, Sharji said, "I don't own any horse and had a hard time finding equestrian trainers for the blind. Equestrian schools also do not have special arrangements for the blind to train.

"But with hard training, fitness and determination, I was able to overcome all it," Sharji said, adding that "any blind person can ride a horse easily, but he must have confidence in himself and continuous training".

Sharji is now preparing for upcoming races. "I hope to obtain the international licence to ride horses to participate in all local and international races and raise the flag of Oman high," he said.

This highly motivated rider is also planning to open an equestrian club for visually-impaired and autistic children.

'560 foreign firms invested in Al Wusta'

Our Correspondent
Muscat

As many as 560 foreign firms are operating in Al Wusta with a total capital investment of RO1.3bn, said Abdoun bin Mohammad al Harsousi, Director of the Department of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion in Al Wusta governorate.

"The number of foreign investment companies in Al Wusta governorate reached 560, with a total registered capital of RO1.3bn till the end of September this year," Harsousi said.

The number of industrial licences that were issued in Al Wusta during the first nine months of this year was 177, he said.

"The country's industrial strategy will help this sector drive our diversified economy. It will help us enter new markets at the regional and international levels, and raise the standard of Omani manufacturing units to advanced levels, besides instilling a culture of innovation," the



Abdoun al Harsousi

official said.

According to Harsousi, the industrial strategy keeps pace with the Fourth Industrial Revolution by relying on modern technologies and raising the level of technology in manufacturing.

"The industrial strategy also includes a number of promising sectors such as knowledge-based industries, research and development, and industries dependent on local resources."

The Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion has adopted several measures to attract more local and foreign investments.

MUSCAT INTERNATIONAL AIRPORT WELCOMES FIRST AIR FRANCE FLIGHT



As part of Oman Airports' efforts to promote and expand the scope of direct international routes between Oman and new destinations, Muscat International Airport welcomed on Sunday the first Air France flight connecting Paris and Muscat.

In the presence of H E Veronique Aulignon, Ambassador of France to the sultanate, H E Maitha Saif Majid al Mahrouqi, Undersecretary for Tourism in the Ministry of Heritage for Tourism, and Nayef Ali Hamad al Abri, CEO of Civil Aviation Authority, Muscat International Airport welcomed on Sunday the first flight of Air France connecting Paris to Muscat, Oman Airports said. Air France will operate three flights a week - Monday, Wednesday and Friday - between Muscat and Paris.

OPAZ signs pact with Duqm refinery for pollution control

Our Correspondent
Muscat

The Public Authority for Special Economic Zones and Free Zones (OPAZ) and Duqm Refinery and Petrochemical Industries -OQ8 - on Sunday signed a technical cooperation programme to exchange expertise and information on environmental protection and pollution control.

The pact was signed by Ahmed bin Hassan al Theeb, deputy chairman of OPAZ, and Wael bin Khalid bin Salmeen, Operation CEO of OQ8, according to a press communiqué.

The technical cooperation programme stipulates developing local capacities in environmental disciplines, and opening communication channels to exchange expertise and scientific information between the two sides in the field of environmental



(Supplied photo)

protection and pollution control.

It includes organising awareness programmes and environmental events, besides holding regular meetings under the theme of 'the green table' to discuss common environmental issues and find appropriate solutions for challenges. The pact stipulates preparing an annual action plan to translate areas of cooperation into achievements and implementing the same.



Al Maha launches fuel delivery service

Our Correspondent
Muscat

To ease the process of tanking up, Al Maha Petroleum Products Marketing Company has a new service called Fuely.

It is a new app driven fuel delivery service directly to customer's cars - a market-first innovation in Oman - Al Maha claimed.

The app was launched at a press conference in InterContinental Muscat on Sunday under the auspices of H E Salim Nasser al Auli, Undersecretary in the Ministry of Energy and Minerals.

The app was developed to meet the increasing demand for

contactless services and easy transactions.

Customers can download the 'Fuely by Al Maha' app from Google Play Store or Apple App Store, order fuel and have it delivered to their cars, instead of having to drive to a fuel station to fill up.

Launching Fuely, Hamed al Mahgri, CEO of Al Maha, said, "We realised through market research that there is a segment of customers who feel stressed while driving to and visiting a fuel station. This is exactly what we set out to change just under a year ago."

Through Fuely, customers have the convenience of ordering

high-quality petrol from Al Maha to be delivered by dedicated, safety-trained Omani 'Fuely Captains' directly to their vehicles at their home or office.

After downloading Fuely, customers need to enter a few basic details, select a delivery time and location and complete the payment online. Once the order has been placed, Fuely Captains deliver fuel within the appointed time slot to the location of the customer's vehicle.

The service is initially being launched in Mawaleh South, Al Mouj, Al Hail North and South, and plans are in place to expand coverage to other parts of Muscat city and beyond.

HQ of Oman Commercial Arbitration Centre opened

Our Correspondent
Muscat

Oman Commercial Arbitration Centre (OAC) opened its new headquarters on Sunday in Muscat under the patronage of H E Dr Abdullah bin Mohammed bin Said al Saidi, Minister of Justice and Legal Affairs, in the presence of Prince Dr Bandar bin Salman bin Mohamed al Saud, Honorary President of the Commercial Arbitration Centre for the Cooperation Council for the Arab States of the Gulf.

"Oman Commercial Arbitration Centre supports Oman Vision 2040, the legislative environment - a key pillar for attracting investments and capital in the sultanate," said Ridha bin Juma al Saleh, chairman of the Board of Directors of the Oman Chamber of Commerce and Industry.

"The chamber seeks to make the centre a beacon to enhance the confidence of investors and business owners in the sultanate, and work with other state institutions in attracting more local, regional and international investments," said Saleh.

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Oman's oil output increases in September, exports drop

Our Correspondent
Muscat

Oman's daily average oil production increased by 1 per cent to 983,000 barrels per day (bpd) in September 2021 compared with 973,000 bpd recorded in the same month of last year, according to the data released by the National Centre for Statistics and Information (NCSI).

Oman's total oil production (including condensates) slightly increased by 0.5 per cent to 262.43mn barrels during the January-September period of 2021, compared to 261.10mn barrels in the same period of 2020.

Of the total oil production, crude production decreased by 4.7 per cent at 202.52mn barrels, while condensates production rose 23.2 per cent to 59.91mn barrels in the first nine months of this year against the corresponding period of 2020, the NCSI data showed.

As Oman continues to stick to its OPEC+ commitments on crude oil production, the sultanate has sharply increased its condensates output this year as condensate production is exempt from the obligations of the



Average price at which Oman sold its crude during the first nine months of 2021 remained nearly 49 per cent higher at US\$68.5 per barrel compared with US\$46 per barrels achieved in 2020

OPEC+ deal. The OPEC+ agreement allowed non-OPEC oil producers to exclude condensate output from their production quotas, which has enabled countries like Russia and Oman to sharply raise their condensate

output. The average price at which Oman sold its crude during the first nine months of 2021 remained nearly 49 per cent higher at US\$68.5 per barrel compared with US\$46 per barrels achieved

during full year 2020.

Oman crude is currently trading near its highest price level in the past three years. On Friday, Oman crude price at the Dubai Mercantile Exchange reached US\$82.75 per barrel (for December delivery).

Exports edge down

Oman's oil exports recorded a 1.7 per cent year-on-year decline during the first nine months of 2021, mainly due to a significant drop in China-bound shipments.

The sultanate's total oil exports decreased to 211.96mn barrels in the first nine months of 2021 in comparison with 215.72mn barrels recorded in the corresponding period of last year, according to the NCSI data.

Oman's crude exports to China, the biggest destination for the sultanate's oil shipments, fell 8.2 per cent to 174.85mn barrels during the January-September period of 2021 compared to the same period a year ago.

On the other hand, Oman's oil exports to India, Japan and South Korea sharply rose during the first nine months of the year.

Oil exports to India jumped by 153 per cent to 22.25mn barrels in the first nine of 2021 from 8.79mn barrels in the same period a year ago, while exports to Japan surged by 61 per cent to 3.38mn barrels.

South Korea purchased 31 per cent more quantity of Oman crude during the January-September period at 6.54mn barrels against 4.99mn barrels in the same period of the previous year.

Oman's oil exports to rest other countries dropped more than 47 per cent to 4.92mn barrels.



Duqm Hongtong Piping Factory opens today

Muscat - The Special Economic Zone at Duqm (SEZAD) marks today a significant milestone by celebrating the opening of Duqm Hongtong Piping Factory, the first factory in the Sino-Omani Industrial City in Duqm.

Being the first-of-its-kind project in the sultanate, the project is developed as an Omani-Chinese partnership, reflecting the strong relations between the two countries, SEZAD said in a press statement on its website.

Duqm Hongtong Piping Factory produces the non-metallic Reinforced Thermoplastic Pipes (RTP), which are used in the oil and gas industry and specifically for the collection and transfer of hydrocarbon fluids through

the piping networks.

According to SEZAD, this type of pipes will be one of the modern technologies used in the oil and gas operations in the sultanate, as well as being a new addition to the sector due to its high quality and durability compared to the metal pipes that are commonly used in the oil and gas industry.

Further, these pipes are manufactured as per the technical specifications accredited by Petroleum Development Oman and the American Institute of Petroleum.

The RTP products will witness a good demand as they mark a cost effective solution for the operations of many companies, the press statement said.

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Saudi Aramco sets 2050 zero carbon emissions target



Amin Nasser

Riyadh, Saudi Arabia - Energy giant Saudi Aramco committed to being a net zero enterprise by 2050, its chief Amin Nasser said on Saturday, shortly after the kingdom said it aimed to achieve zero carbon emissions by 2060.

Saudi Arabia, the world's top crude exporter, said it would also join a global effort to cut methane emissions by 30 per cent by 2030.

"Saudi Aramco will achieve an ambition of being also a net zero from our operation by 2050," Nasser told the Saudi Green Initiative forum.

"We understand that the road will be complex, the transition will have its challenges, but we are confident we can meet them and accelerate our efforts to a low emission future."

Earlier, in recorded remarks, Saudi Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman told the forum that the kingdom's target was to reach net zero emissions by 2060.

As the global COP26 global climate summit approaches, a string of countries have pledged to aim for net zero emissions by 2050, and global airlines and banks are also targeting the mid-century goal.

UN chief Antonio Guterres said on Friday the current climate situation was 'a one-way ticket for disaster', stressing the need to 'avoid a failure' at COP26 in Glasgow.

Held between October 31 and November 12, the gathering is seen as a crucial step in setting worldwide emissions targets to slow global warming.

Saudi Arabia is estimated to emit about 600mn tonnes of carbon dioxide per year - more than France and slightly less than Germany.

The initiatives come as Saudi Aramco faces scrutiny from investors over its emissions.

In January, Bloomberg News reported that Aramco excluded emissions generated from many of its refineries and petrochemical plants in its overall carbon disclosures to investors.

AFP

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MSX rises 0.16%; volumes surge

Our Correspondent
Muscat

The benchmark index of the Muscat Stock Exchange (MSX) rose 0.16 per cent to close at 3,991.12 points on Sunday.

Trading activity improved from the previous session as turnover jumped by 194.99 per cent to RO4.14mn and volumes surge 201.13 per cent to 18.96mn shares.

While Financial index rose 0.19 per cent, Industrial and Services indices fell 0.6 per cent and 0.23 per cent, respec-



tively. The MSX Shariah index closed up by 0.08 per cent at 565.53 points.

Market breadth remained

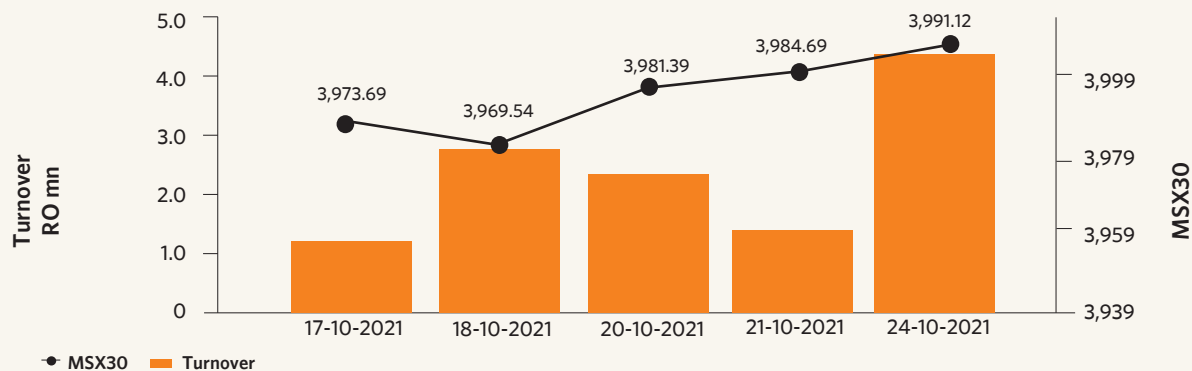
negative as five companies closed up, while 13 companies closed down. The rest 24 traded stocks closed flat

for the day.

The five gainers were Bank Muscat (1.25 per cent), Sohar International Bank (1.08 per cent), Oman Cement (0.84 per cent), Oman Education & Training Investment (0.76 per cent) and Al Maha Marketing (0.55 per cent).

Top losers were Raysut Cement (-3.23 per cent), Al Jazeera Steel Products (-3.11 per cent), Al Anwar Investment (-2.94 per cent), National Gas (-2.92 per cent) and Al Suwadi Power (-1.92 per cent).

MSX INDEX AND TURNOVER OF FIVE TRADING DAYS



China set to expand property tax trial

Beijing, China - China is set to expand pilot property tax reforms, state media reported, as the government battles real estate speculation in the world's second-biggest economy.

China's housing market took off after key 1998 reforms sparked a building boom on the back of rapid urbanisation and wealth accumulation.

But as prices soared, so did worries about wealth disparity and the resulting potential for social instability.

China's top legislature, the National People's Congress Standing Committee, on Saturday approved the latest plan to promote 'rational housing consumption', according to the official Xinhua news agency.

Under the five-year pilot scheme, Xinhua added, property tax will be levied on all types of real estate, excluding some rural homes.

Further details, such as its start date and target areas, are expected to be disclosed at a later date.



A man walks past a housing complex by Chinese property developer Evergrande in Guangzhou, China's southern Guangdong province (AFP)

The announcement comes with President Xi Jinping pushing for more 'common prosperity' in China aimed at spreading wealth more evenly.

In 2011, authorities started trials in Shanghai and Chongqing targeting high-end private residential properties for taxation.

There have been talks to expand such taxation, but localities have been reluctant, worried it will drag down property values and dampen demand for land, a key source of local government

revenue, state-run tabloid *Global Times* said on Saturday.

China's real estate sector is in troubled waters, with home sales slumping 16.9 per cent on-year in September and deeply indebted property giant Evergrande battling a liquidity crisis.

"The chances of a national tax being implemented are much higher now," said Mark Williams of Capital Economics last week as reports emerged that a plan was being stalled.

AFP

Eurozone growth slows as prices jump on supply problems: Survey

Brussels, Belgium - The recovery of the eurozone economy is losing steam, a closely watched survey said, with big supply chain problems at factories causing price hikes not seen in twenty years.

"The ongoing pandemic means supply chain delays remain a major concern," warned Chris Williamson, chief business economist at IHS Markit.

This was 'constraining production and driving prices ever higher both in the manufacturing and in the services sector', he said.

The purchasing managers' index (PMI), which measures corporate confidence, demonstrated the slowdown clearly.

IHS Markit said it slipped to 54.3 in October, after posting 56.2 points in September and a high 59 points in August. A figure above 50 indicates growth. IHS Markit said supply problems were especially felt in Germany, the EU's export powerhouse that depends on the global economy to churn out high-value goods, such as cars and machinery.

While the rate of growth was still there, IHS Markit said

that the eurozone could falter in the near-term 'as the pandemic continues to disrupt economies and push prices higher'.

A new spike in COVID-19 cases in the autumn and winter could again disrupt the economy and cause problems for the customer-facing service sectors as well, it warned.

One bright spot was hiring, which reached the record levels seen in July. Companies are beefing up staff to try to meet the backlog in orders, IHS Markit said.

AFP

India's Reliance Industries reports strong profits on COVID-19 recovery

Mumbai, India - Indian oil-to-telecoms giant Reliance Industries reported quarterly earnings that beat analyst estimates, helped by a strong recovery across its diversified businesses.

The conglomerate, which is owned by Asia's richest man, Mukesh Ambani, reported a net profit of ₹136.8bn (US\$1.8bn) between July and September, 43 per cent higher than the same period of last year.

Revenues from operations increased 49 per cent year-on-year to ₹1.74tn, aided by both its legacy energy business and newer ventures like retail.

"As the pandemic retreats, I



Mukesh Ambani

am pleased that Reliance has posted a strong performance," chairman and managing director Ambani said in a statement fol-

lowing the results.

"This demonstrates the inherent strengths of our businesses and the robust recovery of the Indian and global economies. All our businesses reflect growth over pre-COVID levels," the billionaire added.

Revenues from the oil, gas and petrochemicals business - which accounts for nearly 70 per cent of Reliance's total income - jumped 58 per cent year-on-year, as global energy demand recovered.

Revenues from Reliance's retail business recovered more sharply than expected, rising 17.8 per cent compared to the previ-

ous quarter, which was badly hit by COVID-19.

Earlier this month, Reliance opened its first 7-Eleven convenience store in Mumbai, ahead of a 'rapid rollout' planned across the country as the firm seeks to boost its retail presence in the country of 1.3bn.

Ambani is locked in a high-stakes battle with Jeff Bezos as Amazon and Reliance fight for a share of India's massive e-commerce market. The two firms are engaged in a row over Ambani's acquisition of domestic retail giant Future Group, which Amazon has sought to delay.

AFP

IATA urges governments to restore global air connectivity

Montreal, Canada - The International Air Transport Association (IATA) has urged governments to use the commitments reached at the International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO) High Level Conference on COVID-19 (HLCC) to make real progress towards restoring global air connectivity.

Oman, led by Eng Naif al Abri, CEO, Civil Aviation Authority, participated in the meeting which was held from October 12 to 22.

"Government-imposed restrictions continue to stop a revival of international travel. It remains 70 per cent down on pre-crisis levels. The ICAO HLCC commitments show that governments understand what is needed to restart global connectivity. The task now is implemen-

tation. Some governments have already started. The imminent opening of the US market to vaccinated travellers will be a big step forward. But we cannot let the output of this meeting remain as words on paper," said Willie Walsh, IATA's director general in a press release.

"The airline industry, 88mn livelihoods, 3.5 per cent of global GDP and billions of travelers are counting on governments to deliver on the risk-managed re-opening of international travel to which they have committed," Walsh added.

Countries attending the ICAO HLCC declared their commitment to 14 measures which, if acted upon, would enable airlines to meet the demands of consumers worldwide for a revival of air travel.



An American Airlines plane takes off from the Los Angeles International Airport (AFP)

In particular, two commitments need the most urgent ac-

tion by governments, stated IATA. The first one is where the

members states said they will take effective measures to pre-

vent the spread of COVID-19, in particular through the implementation of the ICAO CART guidelines, and encourage the harmonisation of member states' multilayer risk management strategies to safely restore international connectivity and support the revival of the global economy as a critical step towards achieving the goals to enhance the social, environmental and economic sustainability of aviation. 'This need to be done ensuring the interoperability and mutual recognition of, and accessibility to, digital applications, secure transmission and validation of pandemic-related testing, vaccination and recovery certification that protects privacy and personal data.'

The second one is where the member states said they were

committed to promoting a harmonised and inclusive approach to facilitate safe international air travel, including alleviating or exempting testing and/or quarantine requirements for fully vaccinated or recovered passengers.

They will be taking into account the different circumstances of individual states and their national policies, in keeping with WHO's policy and technical considerations for implementing a risk-based approach to international travel in the context of COVID-19 and providing exceptions for non-vaccinated passengers. 'This will enable us to work towards strengthening the confidence of the travelling public and safely rebuilding international civil aviation,' the member states said.

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Omantel and Infoline adopt Avaya OneCloud CCaaS

Avaya (NYSE: AVYA) today announced a new partnership with Infoline, Omantel ICT’s business process outsourcing leader, that will see Infoline significantly advance customer experience across the sultanate as it adopts Avaya (NYSE: AVYA) OneCloud Contact Center as a Service.

One of the first deployments of its kind in the region, the Avaya solution will enable Infoline, a subsidiary of the Omani telecom - Omantel to seamlessly meet the demands of a regional market set to grow by 6.9% annually to 2028, when it will be worth almost US\$20bn, a press release said.

The growing market will serve increasingly discerning end customers on behalf of a variety of clients, and Omantel/Infoline will be better placed to address their needs with Avaya OneCloud CCaaS. The new technology will deliver effortless experiences across the entire customer journey - whether they’re interfacing via voice, web, chat or email. And it will also enable end customers to be intelligently matched with the best agents to serve their needs.

“At Infoline, we are keeping pace with changing expectations by committing to a digital-ready customer experience, and through our partnership with Avaya, we are enabling our joint clients with the same capabilities. Avaya OneCloud CCaaS will further empower our clients with the advanced solutions needed to address fast-moving customer demands, and help them move forward with the e-Oman vision and strategy,” said Aladdin Abdullah Baitfadhl, chairman of the Board of Directors of Infoline and VP of Consumer Business Unit at Omantel.

“Our priority is, and always has been, on enriching the experience of our clients’ customers, and the technology that we choose is always based on that guiding principle. With Avaya OneCloud CCaaS, we will be able to deliver meaningful experiences for end customers,” said Mohammed bin Hamad al Maskari, CEO of Infoline.

Balqees among '100 Successful Omani Women'

Balqees Suliemana Al Hassani, president of the leading community knowledge sharing platform - Knowledge Oman who, and also heads the Wellbeing of one of the leading private schools in the country - Al Sahwa School, has been featured in an international book that highlights 100 of the leading women who have contributed to the development of the sultanate.

An exclusive book launch event gathering all the successful women is all scheduled to take place at the Al Bustan Palace, Ritz Carlton Hotel, on November 3, a press release said.

“I am thrilled and honoured

to be recognised internationally for the kind of work we do for the benefit of the community and the school. I attribute this success to the Honourable Lady, wife of His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik, for supporting Women development and success in Oman,” Balqees said.

Amidst the pandemic crises, Knowledge Oman has launched a series of webinars under Balqees’ direct leadership that aimed at enriching society with knowledge, enhancing skills, and raising awareness on different aspects of personal and professional life. The platform allowed students and faculty members from both, the private and public sectors, to attend the



sessions for free.

“We wanted to ensure that free educational sessions in a form of webinars from international experts were available for students, faculty members, and their parents via our Knowledge Oman platforms,” she said. The

webinar series were open free for public and were broadcast bi-weekly via platforms managed by Knowledge Oman team. The webinars were launched in support of the leadership of His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik towards Oman’s Vision 2040 on building knowledge and upskilling the nation.

“Balqees activities, engagements, and great determination at Transforming Oman into a knowledge-based society is perfectly fit and in line of the goal of this book especially for motivating women to excel and prosper to success. We are honoured to have selected Balqees among the 100 suc-

cessful Omani Women,” noted Kathleen Nejad, author of the book.

The book, which will be available during the exclusive event at Al Bustan Palace, will reveal the stories of 100 empowering Omani women, their experiences, thoughts and inspiration in the form of challenges they have faced, success that they have enjoyed throughout the course of their lives, and the contribution in the development of the economy.

“We hope to empower other women worldwide by sharing personal knowledge, experience, and thoughts of Omani Women that make a difference in society,” Kathleen added.

Meethaq floats exclusive offers for National Day

Meethaq, the pioneer of Islamic banking in Oman from Bank Muscat, has begun the countdown to the sultanate’s 51st National Day celebrations with a number of special deals and offers for customers. Customers will be eligible to receive exciting rewards and gifts as part of this special promotion, which shall continue till the end of December 2021, a press release said.



All existing and new customers of Meethaq are eligible for cash incentive of RO51 when opening a Term Deposit of RO5,000 or more for a period of 3 years and above. New Meethaq customers can also get gift voucher of RO51 on starting a Hafawa Priority Banking relationship with a deposit of RO30,000 during this period. Meethaq Credit cardholders will also get a chance to win RO51 every month for a period of three months if they are amongst the 100 highest spenders each month.

Meethaq is also offering an attractive profit rate of only 4.99% to customers who apply for home, auto and personal financing facilities during the National Day campaign. All new and existing Meethaq customers availing fresh financing from the bank can benefit from this offer, which is available for Omani nationals working in government institu-

tions as well as semi-government and Tier 1 companies.

Another exciting offer is that Hafawa Private Banking Customers will be given free locker services on booking a locker for a full year, while a massive 75% special discount on annual rentals for safe deposit lockers for the 1st year is available to all customers having an account with Meethaq. Customers can book a locker at any Meethaq branch, which offers safe deposit locker services.

On the joyous occasion of the 51st National Day, Meethaq has allocated total prize money worth RO51,000 to be given away to 51 lucky winners during the special National Day draw. Eligibility for the draws is based on an average weekly balance of RO100, and customers will have more chances of winning if they maintain higher balances in their Hibati savings accounts.

Global Aerospace Summit in May 2022

Aviation, aerospace, space and defence leaders from across the planet will meet in Abu Dhabi for the return of the Global Aerospace Summit between May 24-26, 2022.

The theme of the Summit, ‘Digital Driven Resurgence’, will showcase the rapid transformation that has happened across these sectors over recent years and the role of innovation and technology moving forward. An increasing number of aerospace and defence companies are embracing a range of digital technologies, from AI to robotics,

analytics, and automation. The Summit will address the impact of digitalisation on efficiency and sustainability across all of the sectors.

The 2022 edition, hosted by Mubadala, will be a strategic gathering of global aerospace industry leaders. It will provide an in-person platform to facilitate successful global trade across international markets.

Badr Al Olama, executive director - UAE Clusters, UAE Investments Platform, Mubadala Investment Company, said, “The aerospace sector continues to



evolve rapidly, constantly innovating and adapting to our new reality. Mubadala is continuing to invest in the sector, developing new partnerships and unlocking

opportunities for future growth through the advancement of digitalisation and automation technologies.

“We are pleased to be hosting the Global Aerospace Summit, which is an ideal platform for the industry to come together to explore ways of accelerating its recovery and growth, as well as to discuss the latest strategies and ideas that will shape the future of aviation, space, and defence. We are looking forward to welcoming our partners, colleagues and friends from across the globe, in person in Abu Dhabi, as we drive

forward a digital resurgence for our industry.”

The event will cover a wide range of areas including sessions on commercial aviation, aerospace, MRO, defence, and space. The 2022 edition of the event will also include new elements such as a dedicated start-up programme, focusing driving investment in new enterprise and technology, and the Task Force Programme, which will address key challenges identified by the Summit Advisory Board as the most pressing issues concerning the industry.

The Business Year ties with Oman American Business Center

Representatives from The Business Year (TBY), a global media group that has been providing investors, businesses, and governments with first-hand insights into the world’s most dynamic markets for over a decade, and Oman American Business Center (OABC) signed an MoU earlier this year to strengthen their strategic partnership.

This tie-up will enable the former to proliferate its research on the Omani economy, producing a high-quality report about the country’s latest trends and developments.

The content will be featured in TBY’s forthcoming publication, coinciding with OABC’s 18th year in Oman.

OABC was founded in 2003 to foster the development of commercial activity between Oman and the US, and to support the Omani business community through programmes and events focused on professional development, thought leadership, and high-level networking. It counts 170 member companies, 2,000 partners and friends, and 25 events per year, which has allowed the center

to create endless connections and reinforce the networks that have been made over time.

This year marks the 12th year anniversary of the US-Oman Free Trade Agreement (FTA), and more than 100 companies have been established in Oman since, helping the Gulf nation to thrive in the American market. Total trade between the US and Oman reached over US\$2bn as of the end of August 2021,

according to the US Census Bureau surpassing the total trade recorded for the full year 2020.

Stars of Science crowns season 13 winner

Riadh Abdelhedi has emerged as the top Arab innovator on Season 13 of Stars of Science, a Qatar Foundation (QF) initiative, winning the votes of the jury and public with his innovation, the Hybrid Power Bank, while overcoming a variety of challenges caused by COVID-19.

The Tunisian innovator was overjoyed when the show’s long-time host, Khaled al Jumaily, announced that his invention, the Hybrid Power Bank, had claimed 39.4% of the total votes, securing the top prize of US\$300,000.

“I want to thank the jury and the audience for giving me their votes and believing in my idea and invention, Hybrid Power Bank, which I hope I will be able



to continue to develop and release in regional and global markets. I hope that I can set a good example for how creative and innovative young Arab youth can be when equipped with adequate resources,” said Abdelhedi.

His winning invention, now branded as HyPow, can charge itself fully in a few minutes as a result of its unique power storage system which combines

lithium-ion batteries and supercapacitor technology. HyPow provides the world with an innovative, efficient way to charge a device while leading a busy life.

NBO signs strategic MoU with Saudi EXIM Bank



National Bank of Oman (NBO) has signed a strategic Memorandum of Understanding with Saudi Export-Import (EXIM) Bank enabling the two institutions to establish a framework of cooperation that includes exploring the possibility of knowledge sharing, staff training, and providing financing, investment, and other services in their respective countries.

The partnership is a major milestone, adding impetus to the bank's efforts to foster and promote bi-lateral trade and development, a press release said. Abdullah Zahran al Hinai, CEO of NBO, said, "As a leader in Oman's banking sector, we have a role to play in fostering partnerships that leverage Oman's competitive advantages and support its integration into the world

economy. As well as presenting financing opportunities and new ways to facilitate additional trade, our cooperation with Saudi EXIM Bank will undoubtedly provide a solid foundation for realizing our goals and enhancing mutual benefits." Saad al Khalb, CEO of Saudi EXIM Bank, added, "Our nation's long-standing and friendly relationship with Oman has opened up many new oppor-

tunities for us, including our latest with NBO, one of several partnerships we have pursued with local commercial banks. Through them, we aim to develop and grow the export financing solution and the overall Saudi international trade system in the non-oil exports in line with the Saudi 2030, all while tapping into the tremendous potential of the region's banking industry."

As the sultanate's national bank, NBO has been instrumental in helping the country realise its social/economic potential. With a growing number of international partnerships, it seeks to facilitate trade and investment as well as support cross-border banking to capitalise on Oman's long-term ascendancy as a regional logistics and trading hub.

Ahlibank joins in national cyclone relief initiatives

Demonstrating its national commitment and corporate social responsibility, Ahlibank has announced a series of initiatives to support community efforts to mitigate the effects of the recent Cyclone Shaheen in Oman.

Through its CSR initiative 'ahli cares', the Bank organised a voluntary campaign where more than 100 employees participated to assist in the distribution of basic necessities to the people in the affected wilayats, and help them clean their houses and surrounding areas, a press release said.

Said Abdullah al Hatmi, CEO, Ahlibank, expressed his deepest condolences to the families of those affected by the cyclone, asking Almighty Allah to provide them with the strength to overcome this tragedy.

"We have witnessed the impact of this calamity and the significant damage it has caused to homes, properties and infrastructure. We deem it part of our social and moral duty to respond to the call for unity and provide support and assistance where

needed. I am glad that we have been able to help in reducing the burden and losses suffered by those affected, and I pray to Almighty Allah to protect Oman and its residents from more harm," he added.

Hatmi praised the unity, solidarity and cooperation of the residents and citizens of Oman in the face of 'Shaheen' and commended efforts at all levels, while stressing the importance of seeing the affected individuals and families rebuild their lives.

Ahlibank's participation in the national relief drive, which has witnessed extensive participation from various institutions and individuals, reflects its moral and social commitment to supporting various humanitarian and countrywide efforts. It also underscores its belief in the importance of instilling a culture of public service and volunteerism, especially in these difficult circumstances.

In addition to moral and humanitarian support, the Bank provided financial relief to those affected.



ESBAAR partners with CCED for drone inspections

ESBAAR, an Omani company specialised in Artificial Intelligence (AI) and Autonomous Systems solutions, has recently partnered with CC Energy Development Oman (CCED), an independent international oil and gas operator, to conduct drone inspections and collect accurate aerial data safely and quickly for key CCED assets in Blocks 3 & 4. Utilising ESBAAR's latest and innovative technologies, the acquired data will provide CCED with deeper insights to address operational and HSE challenges, resulting in cost-savings, greater efficiency, and more informed decision-making, a press release said.

Part of the collaboration, the project included inspection of a 98km pipeline for CCED and two telecom towers, in addition to a topographic survey, and aerial photography.

It was managed and completed by an all-Omani ESBAAR and CCED teams from drone pilots, data analysts to management, while achieving its target of a zero- Incident rate.

"Since our launch, ESBAAR continues to build on its strengths of deploying innovative drone and AI technology solutions for our partners. The goal is to provide them with credible and clear aerial data for all general inspections of their operations and/or facilities across a multitude of industries, in a safer, more efficient manner, and no operational down time," said Sami al Adawi, CEO of ESBAAR. "We value our partnership with CCED and will continue to support their digital transformation efforts offering our solutions that improve operational reliability and ultimately, enable higher investment return".

Walter Simpson, managing director of CCED, said, "CCED is a firm believer in accelerating digitalisation, as well as the adoption and scale-up of disruptive and multipurpose robotic technologies that deliver safer, cost-effective, and efficient processes. In the oil and gas sector, AI is becoming a vital tool enabling us to optimise our production. Drones can also be de-

ployed for pipeline integrity management, as they can quickly cover vast stretches of pipeline, which is ultimately helping us improve asset management and maintenance. ESBAAR has been able to provide us with valuable and rich information that solidifies our role as a pioneer of smart technologies in the oil and gas industry." With the conventional methods of inspecting hard-to-reach areas involve shutting down operations, building scaffolding or setting rope lines, and sending an inspector into hazardous areas with a camera, deployment of drone and AI technology is gaining momentum globally.

The inspection capabilities are expanding into emergency response, aerial mapping, as well as project and environmental monitoring. According to a recent World Economic Forum (WEF) report, robotics and drones are expected to be the highest adopted technologies, with the highest growth in the oil and gas sector for the next 3-5 years.

Mercedes-Benz offers 51-point vehicle check

To mark the 51st National Day of Oman, Mercedes-Benz Oman is offering a special 51-point vehicle health check, along with a 51% discount on parts, from November 1 to 30.

Available at Mercedes-Benz Service Centres in Muscat, Sohar and Salalah, the offer is valid on all registered Mercedes-Benz models. Ensuring that vehicles always perform at their peak, the check is designed to specifically target components that are prone to wear and tear and even minor faults, so that drivers can continue to enjoy the best driving experience, a press release said.

"At Mercedes-Benz, our cus-



tomers' safety and peace of mind are our number one prior-

ity, and we work hard to keep that standard," said Shaun

Michael, CEO at Mercedes-Benz Oman. "In celebration of Oman's 51st National Day, we are thrilled to extend this exclusive offer to our customers as we consistently push ourselves to exceed our reputation for reliability, excellent customer service and dedicated after-sales care."

The National Day Vehicle Health Check offer includes a comprehensive 51-point check of exterior bodywork inspection, vehicle undercarriage inspection, front and rear brake and brake fluid check, A/C filters, suspension components, steering components, an electronic diagnostic test and much more.

ABLF conclave to feature tech leaders, climate change experts

Top tech leaders, educationists and climate change and biodiversity activists from the GCC and the rest of Asia will headline the power-packed ABLF Talks, part of the 15th Annual edition of the prestigious global ABLF Leadership Series in 2021.

Held under the presence and patronage of Sheikh Nahayan Mubarak al Nahayan, cabinet member and Minister of Tolerance and Coexistence, UAE, the ABLF debuts at the Expo 2020 Dubai, the mega trade fair bringing together 190 nations, in association with UAE Ministry of Economy and Dubai Cares, the world's largest NGO for education for marginalised children, a press release said.

Featuring over 100 global leaders in virtual conversations around urgent socio-economic issues, the hybrid ABLF Talks at the Expo 2020 Dubai will have in-person sessions live-streamed to an audience of over 50,000 worldwide on October 25, setting the stage for the monthly event with icons from varied sectors in impactful dialogues.

These conversations of consequence are powered by four innovative superbrands including the India-based Aditya Birla

Group, a US\$45bn conglomerate, and Fortune 500 company - Zand, which is driving the significant tech-led narratives of the post-pandemic era as the first digital bank in the world to provide retail and corporate banking, UAE's DP World, the global supply chain solutions giant who returns to the ABLF stage as a Legacy Partner, as does Etisalat, the world's fastest mobile network.

Occurring through the 6 months of the Expo 2020 Dubai, the ABLF Talks will promote narratives of tolerance, resilient leadership, innovation, sustainability, new technology and financial inclusion - values that resonate with the Arab world - through the voices of some of Asia's most admired leaders.

Accordingly, the ABLF Talks' speaker list at the October edition includes financial inclusion advocate Olivier Crespin, (CEO and co-founder, Zand, UAE) who brings over 20 years of extensive expertise in banking and FinTech across Latin America, the USA and Asia, Maaz Sheikh, CEO and co-founder, STARZPLAY, MENA's leading video streaming service, Dr Tiffany Delport, co-founder of the Possibilities Project: Eco Edition, Marine

Conservation Specialist and Environmental Consultant, Dr Theresa Mundita S Lim, executive director, ASEAN Centre for Biodiversity, Major Ali Saqr Sultan al Suwaidi, secretary of the Board for Emirates Nature - WWF, and Sheikh Dr Majid Sultan al Qassimi, the Arab world's leading expert in food technology, sustainable agriculture and biodiversity.

The discussions at the ABLF Talks are a tribute to the giant strides made by the GCC countries over the years in varied sectors as they now come together to resolve the challenges presented by the pandemic.

In the past, Oman has played a prominent role in these Asia-led conversations at the ABLF with the participation of leaders like H E Dr Mohammed bin Hamad al Rumhy, Minister of Energy and Minerals and H E Khalil Abdullah al Khonji, chairman, Al Khonji Group, Hind Bahwan, founder and chairperson, Bahwan CyberTek Group, among others.

Speaking on the significance of the ABLF Talks, H H Sheikh Nahyan Mubarak al Nahyan, patron of the ABLF since 2007, said, "Our region and the entire world is faced with unprecedented challenges that will re-

quire a collaboration of our best and brightest thinkers to navigate successfully. We remain confident that together we will continue to meet the regional and global challenges of our times with the spirit of creativity and optimism as we seek to 'recover, rebuild and rise' - the underlying motto of the ABLF Talks."

Malini N Menon, president and co-founder of the ABLF, said, "As a platform that has always celebrated inclusivity, sustainability and innovation, the ABLF Talks reflects Asia's post-pandemic recovery and socio-economic zeitgeist. We are delighted to propel this vision through our varied initiatives in conjunction with our partners and global speakers who are each committed to making the world a better place."

The ABLF has also onboarded a line-up of partners who lead their business with a sustainability and development narrative, with CNBC Arabia (Broadcast Partner) and Hindustan Times, Khaleej Times, Arab News, Muscat Daily (Media Partners) UNICEF and FICCI (Federation of Indian Chambers of Commerce & Industry) as Strategic Partners.

Ugandan President Museveni says deadly bomb blast a ‘terrorist act’

Kampala, Uganda - Ugandan President Yoweri Museveni said on Sunday an explosion in the capital Kampala that killed one person and injured five was ‘a terrorist act’, vowing to hunt down those responsible.

Police said a ‘serious blast’ occurred at around 9.00pm on Saturday at a grilled meat joint in Komamboga, a northern Kampala suburb popular with roadside diners.

Museveni said he had been briefed that three people left a plastic shopping bag at the scene that later exploded, killing one person and injuring five others.

“It seems to be a terrorist act but we shall get the perpetrators,” Museveni said on Twitter.

He said investigators were still combing the bomb site and more details would be released later, including advice for the public about ‘dealing with these possible terrorists’.

“The public should not fear, we shall defeat this criminality like we have defeated all the other criminality committed by the ones who don’t respect life,” Museveni said.

Masked anti-terrorism police dressed in black fatigues held journalists and members of the public several hundred metres back from the blast site on Sunday.

Police forensic officers in white overalls could be seen examining areas close to the scene.

The explosion occurred about two hours after the start of a nationwide dusk-to-dawn coronavirus curfew.

Security forces rushed to the scene in Komamboga, a fast-growing suburb about 8km north of Kampala city centre.

Roadside eateries with plastic furniture cater to local residents there, particularly young profes-



Ugandan police officers investigate at the blast site in Komamboga, a northern Kampala suburb popular with roadside diners in Kampala on Sunday (AFP)

The public should not fear, we shall defeat this criminality like we have defeated all the other criminality committed by the ones who don’t respect life

YOWERI MUSEVENI

sionals moving into newly-constructed apartment buildings in the once-rural area.

Local mayor Emmanuel Sserunjogi said the bombing took place in an area popular with revellers looking for roasted meat and drinks on a night out.

“The community are frightened. It was such a terrible act. People were woken up by the sound of the bomb,” he said.

Terror warnings
It is the first such deadly attack in many years in Kampala, a

bustling city on the shores of Lake Victoria. But it followed an uptick in recent weeks of signs and warnings that a strike could be imminent.

On October 8, the Islamic State group claimed its first attack in Uganda, an alleged bombing of a police post in the Kawempe area, near where Saturday’s explosion occurred.

In a statement issued through its communication channels, the group claimed a unit from its Central Africa operation had detonated an improvised explosive device that resulted in injuries

and damage to police infrastructure.

No explosion or any injuries were reported by authorities or local media at the time, though police later confirmed a minor incident had occurred without providing further details.

However in the following days, both the UK and France updated their travel advice for Uganda, urging vigilance in crowded areas and public places like restaurants, bars and hotels.

‘Terrorists are very likely to try to carry out attacks in Uganda. Attacks could be indiscriminate,

including in places visited by foreigners,’ stated the updated advice from the UK.

In 2010, twin bombings in Kampala targeting fans watching the World Cup final left 76 people dead. Somalia’s Al-Shabaab militants claimed responsibility for the blasts at a restaurant and at a rugby club. The attack, the first outside Somalia by the insurgents, was seen as revenge for Uganda sending troops to the war-torn country as part of an African Union mission to confront Al-Shabaab.

AFP

Ethiopia launches airstrike on Tigray’s west

Addis Ababa, Ethiopia - Ethiopia’s military launched an airstrike on a rebel-held facility in Tigray’s west on Sunday, a government official said, the seventh aerial bombardment in the war-hit region in a week.

“Today the western front of [Mai Tsebr] which was serving as a training and military command post for the terrorist group TPLF has been the target of an air strike,” government spokeswoman Selamawit Kassa said, referring to the Tigray People’s Liberation Front (TPLF).

Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed’s government has been locked in a war against the TPLF since last November, though Tigray itself had seen little combat since late June, when the rebels seized control of much of Ethiopia’s northernmost region and the military largely withdrew.

But on Monday Ethiopia’s air force launched two strikes on Tigray’s capital Mekele that the UN said killed three children and wounded several other people.

Since then there have been three more strikes on Mekele and another targeting what the government described as a weapons cache in the town of Agbe, about 80km to the west.

The strikes coincide with ramped-up fighting in Amhara region, south of Tigray.

They have drawn rebukes from Western powers, with the US last week condemning ‘the continuing escalation of violence, putting civilians in harm’s way’.

A strike Friday on Mekele forced a UN flight carrying 11 humanitarian personnel to turn back to Ethiopian capital Addis Ababa, and the UN subsequently announced it was suspending its twice-weekly flights to the region.

AFP



This file photo shows residents at a round about with a Somali national flag flying in Galkayo, a city divided between the semi-autonomous regions of Puntland and Galmudug, in central Somalia

At least 12 people killed in clashes in central Somalia

Mogadishu, Somalia - At least 12 people were killed on Saturday in central Somalia as pro-government forces recaptured a strategic town from Sufi militants seeking greater regional control, security officials and witnesses said.

Fighters loyal to Ahlu Sunna Wal Jamaa (ASWJ) were driven out of Guricel by national forces and paramilitaries in Galmudug, a region that has long faced an armed struggle by the Sufi militia.

“We have so far confirmed that 12 people, four of them civilians, were killed during heavy fighting in Guricel this morning,” Mohamed Bile, a military commander in Galmudug, told AFP by phone.

“That toll could rise, but the situation is now calm and gov-

ernment forces are in control of most neighbourhoods.”

ASWJ fighters occupied Guricel earlier this month, taking control of Galmudug’s second-largest town after a brief skirmish with local forces.

The Sufi group has controlled many of the major cities in Galmudug over the past decade, and efforts to broker a military and political settlement to their feud with regional authorities have not succeeded.

Galmudug information minister Ahmed Shire blamed ASWJ for provoking the latest clashes.

“Government forces kept their positions for a month, and called on the invading parties to vacate the town peacefully, to avoid armed confrontation and inflicting civilian casualties,” he told reporters.

“Unfortunately, they... attacked military bases belonging to government forces, who fiercely repelled their advance. The government has taken back control of their positions, and driven the remnants of the militia into the bush.”

Witnesses reported seeing casualties on both sides.

“There is still sporadic gunfire in pockets of town, but I can see military vehicles belonging to the national government in the streets,” said Abdirahman Ali, a local resident.

The Sufi group’s recent military advances in Galmudug coincide with upper house elections in the region, which is the last of Somalia’s five federal member states to complete the long-overdue process.

AFP

Under Israel’s blockade, Gaza fishermen struggle for a catch in shallow waters

Gaza City, Palestinian Territories - Crashing through the Mediterranean waves at sunset, Palestinian fisherman Mohammed al Nahal leads a convoy of rickety boats out for another risky night under the Israeli blockade of the Gaza Strip.

Forced to stay close to shore due to Israeli restrictions on powerful engines, the men complain they must seek a catch from overfished shallow waters with declining stocks.

“If we catch 200 kilos of sardines, that would be great,” Nahal says. “But we can also come back empty-handed.”

High prices of fuel in the enclave means that fishing operating costs are crippling, making them stay closer inshore.

“The further we go, the more we pay for fuel without guarantees about the catch,” Nahal says, leading a line of five boats, the air heavy with the stench of diesel and sardines.

For Gaza, fenced in by Israel and Egypt, and where Hamas Islamists took power in 2007, the open sea seems to offer the promise of freedom - but it is deceptive.

Israel’s navy fully controls the waters off Gaza’s 40km long coastline, and regularly restricts or expands the size of the fishing zone in response to security conditions.

After months of relative calm following an 11-day conflict between Israel and Hamas in May, the permitted fishing zone was expanded last month to 15 nautical miles, its maximum under

the blockade, including deep water with richer fish stocks.

A ‘Volvo’ at sea
But Nahal’s crew does not venture that far. Six miles is their outer limit, good for sardines, but too close to shore for the bigger value fish such as tuna.

“We fishermen do not have appropriate engines to reach a distance of 15 miles,” Nahal says. “Currently, we are not allowed to enter Gaza with these modern engines.”

Some Palestinian fishermen are also fearful of heading out too far to sea. In the past, Israeli gunboats have opened fire and damaged nets to enforce access restrictions.

Making a living requires resourcefulness, and Nahal has repurposed a Volvo car engine to power the boat and run the powerful lights - which the fishermen

shine into the night waters to attract the sardines.

Due to the blockade’s import restrictions, Israel also limits access to other key equipment such as sonar devices to find fish shoals.

Israel restricts such items citing their ‘dual use’, saying they could either aid Hamas weapons production, or the powerful engines could be used by smugglers.

It says the blockade is necessary to protect Israeli civilians who have been targeted with thousands of rockets fired by militants in the enclave since the Hamas takeover.

But Yussef (22) keeping watch on Nahal’s boat, complains that with all Gaza’s fishermen forced into the same small area, they struggle to catch enough to turn a profit.

“There’s not enough fish,” he

says. “I’ve lived off of fishing since I was 14. Every day, when the water is open, I go out. It’s the only thing I know how to do in life.”

‘Overexploited’
For Gaza, home to some two million Palestinians - roughly half of whom are unemployed - fish from the sea offer a critical source of protein.

But as well as overfishing, the industry faces multiple challenges.

They include poorly treated sewage pumped into the sea from the tightly packed city, ‘affecting the entire marine environment and public health’, according to a 2020 World Bank report.

‘Many of the fish that people depend on are already overexploited,’ the World Bank adds.

AFP



Palestinian fisherman unload their catch from a boat, upon their return to the coastline of Gaza City on Friday (AFP)

MIGRANT-CRISIS

Trapped in forest, migrant regrets Belarus-EU crossing

A group of Polish mothers rallied near the border on Saturday in protest against the pushbacks

Kleszczele, Poland - Exhausted and trapped in a cold, 'cruel' forest, Lebanese barber Ali Abd Alwareth said he regretted his week-long bid to enter the European Union via the Belarus-Poland border.

"It's miserable. Something that you don't wish for your worst enemy... A nightmare," the soft-spoken 24 year old with Crohn's disease told AFP.

Sitting cross-legged on a bed of pine needles and dead leaves near the border town of Kleszczele in eastern Poland, Abd Alwareth described being a ping-pong ball for the guards. "I tried crossing like five, six times, and every time I got caught and deported back to the border [by Poland]," he said in English.

The Belarusian side meanwhile refused to let him return to Minsk to fly home.

Abd Alwareth said security

forces told him: 'You have only two choices: Either you die here or you die in Poland. That's it'.

One of thousands of migrants - mostly from the Middle East - who have tried to penetrate the 400km border since August, Abd Alwareth said he left the financial crisis in Lebanon in search of a better life.

The whole journey from his home region of Bekaa cost US\$4,000 and involved help from a Minsk-based company he found on social media.

The EU suspects Belarus is masterminding the unprecedented influx of migrants into Poland as a form of retaliation against EU sanctions, but the regime has put the blame on the West.

'I feel like a puppet'

Poland has sent thousands of troops, built a razor-wire fence



Ali Abd Alwareth from Lebanon walks with border police personnel outside the Emergency State zone on the Polish-Belarusian border on Friday (AFP)

and implemented a three-month state of emergency that bans journalists and charity workers along the immediate border area.

A group of Polish mothers rallied near the border on Saturday in protest at the pushbacks. "We feel for the people in the forest," said Sylwia Chorazy, one of a couple of hundred protesters at the border guard facility in Michalowo, eastern Poland.

"My sons asked me this morning, 'Mum, what if we too had to spend the night in the woods?'. It's sad, incredibly sad," she told AFP.

During his gruelling time in the woods, Abd Alwareth said he drank water off of leaves, was too cold to sleep, and was once hit on the head by either the Polish army or police.

Though 'exhausted' and 'devastated', he said he understood that the border guards

'are doing their job'.

"They are protecting their country. We are illegal."

On Friday, Abd Alwareth and his Syrian walking companions managed to get in touch with Polish activists, who met them in the forest with warm clothes and food as well as offering support when the guards arrived.

His fate up in the air, Abd Alwareth hopes to receive asylum in Poland - or at the very least, to return to Lebanon.

"Okay, you don't want me here, you don't want me in Belarus. Just deport me back home. That's all I'm asking for," he said.

"What is happening in the forest is cruel... I feel like a puppet. It was my decision, I came this way - but not to be treated like this," he added.

"I refuse to die at the border. I just want to see my mum." AFP

It's legitimate to protect borders: German Minister

Berlin, Germany - Germany's interior minister said on Sunday it was 'legitimate' to protect borders, after several EU states asked Brussels to pay for barriers to prevent illegal migrants from entering the bloc.

The call came earlier this month, as Poland proposed building a €350mn (US\$410mn approx) wall on its border with Belarus to keep migrants out.

The EU accuses the Belarusian authorities of flying migrants from the Middle East and Africa to Minsk and then sending them into the bloc on foot in retaliation for sanctions imposed over a crackdown on the opposition.

Asked whether Poland's border wall was necessary, Germany's Interior Minister Horst Seehofer said protecting frontiers was justifiable.

"It is legitimate for us to protect the external border in such a way that undetected border



German Interior Minister Horst Seehofer at a Cabinet meeting

crossings are prevented," he told the *Bild am Sonntag* newspaper on Sunday.

The surge in people crossing illegally over the EU's eastern frontier with Belarus has placed major strains on member states unaccustomed to dealing with large-scale arrivals.

Seehofer also said Germany would increase controls on the German-Polish border and that eight hundreds-strong teams of police had already been de-

ployed. "If necessary, I am ready to reinforce this even more," he said.

According to figures from the German Interior Ministry, around 5,700 people have travelled over the border between Germany and Poland without an entry permit since the start of the year.

Seehofer wrote to his Polish counterpart Mariusz Kaminski last week to propose increasing joint patrols along the border with Poland in response to rising numbers of migrants.

Kaminski responded that Poland would offer its 'full support' for such measures.

However, Seehofer said last week Germany had no plans to close the border with Poland, adding that such a move would also be 'legally questionable'.

Earlier this month, officials from EU countries argued for barriers along EU borders.

AFP

Italy's former minister slams migrant trial

Palermo, Italy - Italy's former interior minister and far-right leader Matteo Salvini went on trial on Saturday for allegedly illegally blocking over 100 migrants in dire sanitary conditions from disembarking from a rescue ship.

On the opening day of the trial in Palermo, Judge Roberto Murgia said all the witnesses submitted by the parties would be allowed to testify, including US actor Richard Gere - who made a humanitarian visit to the ship - and Italy's former prime minister Giuseppe Conte.

Salvini, the leader of the far-right League party who is known for an 'Italians first' policy, is charged with kidnapping and abuse of office for using his position as interior minister to detain the 147 migrants at sea in August 2019. The hearing was largely procedural and lasted less than three hours before Murgia set the next hearing for December 17.

Salvini, who was present in court, could face a maximum of



This file photo shows a mask of former Italian interior minister Matteo Salvini placed on life jackets during a protest march in Barcelona (AFP)

15 years in prison if convicted.

"You tell me how serious a trial is where Richard Gere will come from Hollywood to testify about my nastiness," Salvini told journalists outside the courtroom. "I hope it lasts as short a time as possible because there are more important things to take care of."

Salvini has said he was protecting Italy with his 'closed ports' policy aimed at stopping people attempting the danger-

ous Mediterranean crossing.

He has claimed the decision not to allow the ship to dock was not his alone, but agreed by the government, including by then-prime minister Conte.

Other witnesses the court allowed to testify include Italy's current Interior Minister Luciana Lamorgese and Foreign Minister Luigi Di Maio.

Civil party Open Arms, the Spanish charity that operated the rescue vessel, had re-

quested Gere as a witness, since he had boarded the ship in solidarity with the migrants before it docked at the Sicilian island of Lampedusa.

Ahead of the hearing, Salvini tweeted a photo of himself inside the courtroom, standing in front one of the cells used for some defendants.

"This is the courtroom of the Palermo prison. The trial wanted by the left and by the fans of illegal immigration begins: how much will it cost the Italian citizens?" he tweeted.

But Open Arms' founder and director Oscar Camps said the trial was not politically motivated. "Saving people isn't a crime, but an obligation not only by captains but by the entire state," Camps told journalists.

The beginning of the trial came the same day that 406 migrants rescued in various operations off the coast of Libya by German charity ship *Sea Watch 3* arrived at the Sicilian port of Pozzallo.

AFP

Colombia's most-wanted drug lord captured

Bogota, Colombia - Colombia's most-wanted drug trafficker 'Otoniel' has been captured, officials said on Saturday, a major victory for the government of the world's top cocaine exporter.

Dairo Antonio Usuga, who headed the country's largest narco-trafficking gang known as the Gulf Clan, was captured near one of his main outposts in Necocli, near the border with Panama. Images released by the government showed the 50 year old Otoniel in handcuffs and surrounded by soldiers.

"This is the hardest strike to drug trafficking in our country this century," President Ivan Duque said in a message, adding that the arrest was 'only comparable to the fall of Pablo Escobar', the notorious Colombian narco-trafficking kingpin.

Some 500 soldiers backed by 22 helicopters were deployed in the Necocli municipality to carry out the operation, which left one police officer dead.

It was 'the biggest penetration of the jungle ever seen in the military history of our country', Duque said.

A live broadcast by the police later showed a handcuffed Otoniel landing in Bogota before being taken into custody under heavy security.

Colombia's police chief Jorge



Colombian soldiers escort drug lord Dairo Antonio Usuga - alias 'Otoniel' - after his capture, in Bogota on Saturday (AFP)

Vargas said during a press conference that authorities carried out 'an important satellite operation with agencies of the United States and the United Kingdom'.

According to police, Otoniel was hiding in the jungle in the Uraba region, where he is from, and did not use a telephone, relying on couriers to communicate.

Fearful of authorities, he 'slept there in the rain, never approaching inhabited areas', Vargas said.

The United States had offered a US\$5mn bounty for information leading to the arrest of Otoniel, one of the most feared men in Colombia.

He was indicted in the United

States in 2009, and faces extradition proceedings to the country, where he would appear in the Southern District of New York federal court.

The Colombian government blames the group - financed mainly through drug trafficking, illegal mining and extortion - for being one of the main drivers of the worst bout of violence since the signing of a peace pact with FARC guerrillas in 2016. The Gulf Clan is present in almost 300 municipalities in the country, according to the independent think-tank Indepaz. However, recent government efforts have seen the organisation decimated.

AFP

Life of violence

Although Otoniel announced in 2017 he intended to reach an agreement to participate with the Colombian justice system, the government responded by deploying at least 1,000 soldiers to hunt him down.

He took over the leadership of the Gulf Clan - previously known as the Usuga Clan - from his brother Juan de Dios, who was killed by police in 2012.

Born to a poor family, Otoniel joined the Popular Liberation Army (EPL), a Marxist guerrilla group that demobilised in 1991.

After laying down his arms, he later returned to fighting, joining far-right paramilitary groups.

Many of these were demobilised in 2006 at the initiative of former rightwing president Alvaro Uribe's administration, but Otoniel decided to remain in the fight. Colombia is the world's top producer of cocaine, with the US as its principal market, despite half a century of efforts to clamp down on the drug trade.

In remote areas where there is little government presence, criminal groups like the Gulf Clan, dissident FARC guerrillas and leftist ELN rebels fight bloody turf battles to control drug trafficking corridors and illegal mining operations.

AFP

Namibia halts use of Sputnik jabs after S Africa HIV fears

Johannesburg, South Africa - Namibia has discontinued the use of Russia's Sputnik V COVID-19 vaccine following concerns raised by neighbouring South Africa, the Health Ministry said on Saturday.

Neighbouring South Africa earlier this week said it would not approve Sputnik V due to concerns it could increase the risk of HIV infection among men, a claim the vaccine's developer says is unfounded.

The Namibian Health Ministry said in a statement that following South Africa's decision it was suspending, with immediate effect, use of the shots until the formula is listed for emergency use by the World Health Organization.

"The reason for discontinuation of the administration of the vaccine is being done out of abundance of caution that men who received Sputnik V may be at higher risk of contracting HIV when exposed to it," said the ministry.

Namibia had taken delivery of a Serbian donation of 30,000 Sputnik doses - out of which less than 120 have been



Namibia halted the use of the shots until the formula is listed for emergency use by the World Health Organization

administered so far.

South Africa's health products regulator on Monday said it would not authorise use of Sputnik based on earlier studies testing the safety of a modified form of adenovirus - a type of virus that causes respiratory infections - known as the Ad5 and contained in the jab.

The regulator said two previous studies, one in South Africa and one in the Americas, found a heightened risk of HIV infection among men linked to the Ad5-vectored vaccine.

In both trials, administration

of an Ad5-vectored vaccine was associated with enhanced susceptibility/acquisition of HIV in men', the regulator said last week. Russia's Gamaleya Centre, which developed Sputnik V, says any allegation of a link between the vaccine and HIV is unfounded.

It says clinical studies on more than 7,000 participants showed 'there was no statistically significant increase of HIV-1 infection among adenovirus type-5 vectored vaccine recipients'.

AFP

France launches state-of-the-art military communications satellite

Kourou, France - France has successfully launched a state-of-the-art satellite into orbit, designed to allow all of France's armed forces across the globe to communicate swiftly and securely.

Paris created a space force command in July 2019, amongst concerns that rival countries were heavily investing in space technology, seen as a new military frontier.

The satellite 'is designed to resist military aggression from the ground and in space, as well as interference', French air and space force spokesman Colonel Stephane Spet said.

The Ariane 5 rocket carrying the Syracuse 4A satellite took off from Kourou, in French Guiana late on Saturday, with the mission accomplished 38 minutes and 41 seconds after takeoff.

The satellite can survey its close surroundings and move itself to escape an attack.

'Thanks to its state-of-the-art equipment (anti-jamming antenna and digital transparent processor on board), Syracuse 4A will guarantee a high resistance to extreme jamming methods,' launch provider Arianespace wrote in its mission description.

Marc Finaud, an expert in weapons proliferation at the Geneva Centre for Security Policy, said the satellite was also



The French military communications satellite Syracuse 4A was launched on an Ariane 5 rocket from French Guiana on Saturday (AFP)

protected against the electromagnetic pulses which would result from a nuclear explosion.

"This is the final warning scenario, if deterrence fails," he added.

In March France began its first military exercises in space to test its ability to defend its satellites,

calling them 'a first for the French army and even a first in Europe'.

The French government accuses Russia of having brought its intelligence-gathering satellite Olymp-K, also known as Louch, into close proximity of the French-Italian military satellite

Athena-Fidus in 2017, in what Defence Minister Florence Parly called 'an act of espionage'.

Last year, the US claimed that Russia had conducted a non-destructive anti-satellite weapons test from space.

In March French President Emmanuel Macron's office said

there had been other similar incidents since, but gave no details.

Investments in France's space programme are set to reach €4.3bn over the 2019-2025 budget period - although that is a fraction of the amount spent by the United States or China.

AFP

Modi confirms COP26 attendance in boost to summit

New Delhi, India - India's Prime Minister Narendra Modi will attend the COP26 climate summit, his office confirmed on Sunday, in a major boost for the conference that has already been snubbed by key world leaders.

More than 120 world leaders are expected to attend the biggest climate summit since the 2015 Paris talks on November 1-2, but China's President Xi Jinping and Russia's President Vladimir Putin will be



Narendra Modi

conspicuously absent.

Climate envoys from the United States, European Union and the summit's British organisers have made repeat visits to New Delhi in recent weeks to encourage Modi's government to do more to cut carbon dioxide emissions.

Officials have indicated that India - third behind the United States and China as an emitter of greenhouse gases - will make a new offer but they have given no details.

Modi will go to the climate talks in Glasgow after attending the Group of 20 summit in Rome next weekend where rising temperatures will also be a key issue, his office said in a statement.

Modi's office said the climate summit would be a key opportunity for 'charting the way forward'.

According to the International Energy Agency, India now produces the same amount of heat-trapping carbon dioxide as

the European Union, though it is two-thirds lower on a per capita basis.

The post-pandemic economic recovery in 2021 is expected to see India's CO2 emissions rise above 2019 levels, according to the agency.

India has insisted that rich countries who profited from industrialisation in the past should pay more to help developing nations take climate-boosting measures.

AFP

Russia puts chilling torture video whistleblower on wanted list

Moscow, Russia - Russia on Saturday placed a former prison inmate who leaked harrowing videos of rape and torture inside a Russian prison on a wanted list.

A notice on the Interior Ministry's website said Sergei Savelyev - a Belarus national who is seeking asylum in France - was wanted in connection with an unspecified criminal case.

Savelyev smuggled footage of abuse out of a jail in the central city of Saratov. Fearing reprisals, he fled the country in February and last week arrived in France, where he asked for asylum.

While serving 7.5 years for drug trafficking, he worked as an IT maintenance officer, earning access to the prison's internal server and those of other jails, where he found several videos.

He saved them on a USB stick that he hid near the prison exit.

Some of the videos were then published by the Russian rights groups Gulagu.net, prompting an official probe and the sacking of several officials.

Savelyev said that while the Interior Ministry did not provide details of why he was wanted, he thought it was for 'leaking state secrets'.

"They are going down the only path they know, the path of force," he said in a video from France published by Gulagu.net.

Russian authorities are trying



A dormitory in Saratov prison, where prisoners are alleged to have been abused

'to shut my mouth'.

"It's a shame that instead of using the time to reform the system and investigate all this terrible evidence we gave them,

they are trying to hide the truth," he said.

'Serious mistakes'

Russia's vast prison system has

long been an arena of torture and sexual violence inflicted on inmates, monitors say, but the videos have cast new light on such abuses.

In an interview with AFP earlier this week, Savelyev said the abuse was often doled out to try to force inmates to confess or inform on other prisoners.

Kosovo expels two Russian diplomats citing 'national security' risk

Pristina, Kosovo - Two Russian diplomats left Kosovo on Saturday after Pristina alleged they had endangered national security, a move Moscow labelled a gross provocation, state-run television reported.

The Foreign Ministry declared the pair persona non grata on the orders of Kosovo President Vjosa Osmani 'because of harmful activities that risk endangering national security', she said on Friday.

Kosovo institutions are 'determined to fight the malignant influence of the Russian Federation and its proxies in the region', she tweeted.

Russia's Foreign Ministry on Saturday called the move a 'gross anti-Russian provocation' directed 'against Russia and its constructive role in the Balkans'.

In a statement it called on the UN mission in the former Serbian province to ensure 'reliable security and the necessary conditions' for its personnel in Pristina.

Neither Osmani nor the Foreign Ministry disclosed the identities of the two diplomats.

There were no official details about their alleged activities which, according to Pristina, were not in line with their status.

Radio Television of Kosovo (RTK) on Saturday broadcast

photos of the two diplomats leaving the premises of Russia's liaison office in Pristina and afterwards of their car crossing the border with Serbia.

It identified the two as Denis Vengerskii and Alexey Krivosheev and said their activities 'incompatible with diplomatic status' were spotted by Kosovo's Intelligence Agency (AKI).

"It is not the first time Krivosheev has been declared 'persona non grata'," RTK said, adding that he had been expelled from Albania in January.

At the time, Albania's foreign ministry said Krivosheev was expelled over repeated failures to respect coronavirus infection control measures.

Russia strongly opposes ethnic-Albanian majority Kosovo's independence from Serbia which it declared in 2008.

Moscow became Belgrade's leading ally in lobbying against international recognition of Pristina.

However, Russia maintains its diplomatic presence in Pristina, basing it on the accreditation for a UN mission that for a decade governed Kosovo after the 1998-1999 war between ethnic Albanian guerrilla and Serbian forces.

AFP



Members of the NATO-led peacekeepers in Kosovo attend the change of command ceremony in Pristina on October 15 (AFP)

It's a shame that instead of using the time to reform the system and investigate all this terrible evidence we gave them, they are trying to hide the truth

SERGEI SAVELYEV

head of the jail, where prisoners needing medical attention for tuberculosis are held, was sacked, along with three regional prison officials.

The top prison official for the Saratov region was also to be relieved of his post over 'serious mistakes', authorities said.

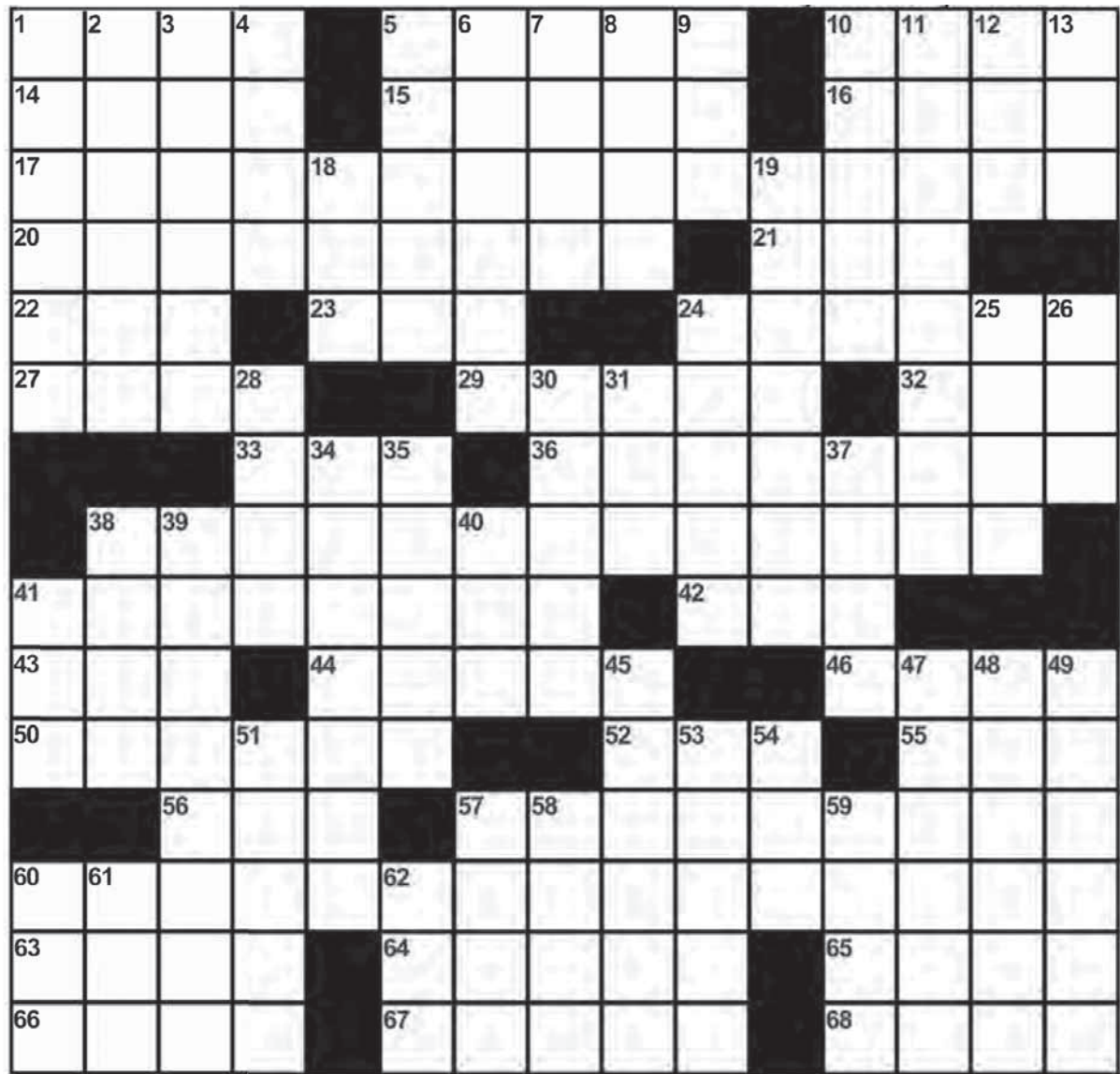
Savelyev said he still had many other videos he had collected in jail, but refused to say what he planned to do with them.

He said before he fled Russia he had been approached by Russian agents who offered him a shorter sentence in return for his cooperation.

"They weren't interested in knowing anything about human rights violations," Savelyev said.

AFP

DAILY CROSSWORD



ACROSS

1) Voice amplifier
5) Liability's oppo-
site
10) Lowly poker
hand
14) With a fresh
twist
15) Sparkly head-
piece
16) Proficient
17) Bible-reading
lisper's
"Here's proof"
20) What masseurs
work out
21) "Puppet" ending
22) Before of yore
23) Type of Bud-
dhism
24) Tally-keeper
27) Feudal flunky
29) Transparent, as
hosiery
32) Affirmative
asea
33) Animal in the
horse family
36) Entered, as data
38) Like the frus-
trated lisper
who needs to work
out?
41) "Try the back
door!"
42) Sault_ Marie
43) Thing worn by
priests
44) Dashboard de-

vice
46) Units of work or
energy
50) Goodyear ves-
sels
52) Crumpets go-
with
55) Major historical
time period
56) Mai_ (rum
drink)
57) Mineral in ba-
nanas
60) Emulated a lazy
lisper?
63) Sister of your
father
64) Out of the ordi-
nary
65) Certain building
block
66) New York club
67) "Ewww!"
68) Eve's first home
8 9 13
25 26

DOWN

1) Some photo fin-
ishes
2) "Is it hot_ or is it
just me?"
3) Sharper, as vision
4) Some black
sheep
5) Make things right
6) Sounds that
cause traffic stop-
pages
7) Expresses orally
8) Arrow-shooting

god
9) Greek "T"
10) Bullfighter's en-
trance march
11) Diverge from the
expected
12) Needing a doc-
tor's care
13) Decide who is
out of bounds
18) Cylindrical hat
19) Boot camp at-
tendee
24) Ninth months,
briefly
25) "One_ Jacks"
(Brando film)
26) Like a beet
28) Inside the foul
line
30) Official lan-
guage of India
31) The final word in
movies
34) Sign of fall
35) Some Arctic
seabirds
37) Weeping wil-
low, for one
38) You pay it as
you go
39) Resident
40) Link letters?
41) Tie up the
phone
45) Frolicking
aquatic animals
47) Restrained, as a
horse
48) It may be held

or nursed
49) Delilah's victim
51) LeBlanc and
Damon
53) Lightens, as a
burden
54) "Has" anagram
57) Do some bar-

tending
58) Unfooled by
59) Merchandising
event
60) Scottish beret
61) Color quality
62) Eggy seasonal
drink

NOTE PAD

FACT MUSTS SEAM
EURO AREAL ULNA
STATIONTRUCKANT
SOWED HEROINE
MESH SPRY
FAR ALAS SPASMS
EWE TURNS KAYO
WALKEREATERIRON
ERIN MIAMI APE
RECES'S LIMB HES
ENOS DYAD
SEDUCEE LAMAS
SALEBIRDRHYDRANT
SLE AGGIE TUNA
CHAP LEEDS SLAG

YOUR DAILY HOROSCOPE

 **ARIES** MARCH 21-APRIL 19

The ball is totally in your court, and you could be nearing the end of the game. Give it your all, holding back now just confuses your teammates and might give your opponents the opening they're waiting for. You don't want to do that, especially when the prize is just within your reach. Most of all, you deserve it, a fact that competitors have to acknowledge. Keep up the good work!

 **LEO** JULY 23-AUGUST 22

Missing information proves vital to your whole day, so don't jump into any new situation before you know everything you need. It may be hard, because everything looks so good at first glance, so enlist a friend or colleague to help you wait things out until you can make an informed decision. Exercise patience for the time being and it should grow stronger, like a muscle.

 **SAGITTARIUS** NOVEMBER 22-DECEMBER 21

All your plans are finally falling neatly into place, so now is the perfect time to pack up all your troubles and drop them off at the dump. Decision-making often confounds you, and that leads to procrastination, but to resolve this problem, all you have to do is stop doubting yourself. You're on the precipice of a brand-new chapter of your life. Big fun is just ahead.

 **TAURUS** APRIL 20-MAY 20

Mind games get you nowhere today, because the rules are so complicated that no one knows what's going on. You're not doing it on purpose, you're just so muddled about what it is you want that things have become complicated. Take a step back and try to figure out what it is you really want to achieve. After that, you can approach the situation with a new sense of clarity.

 **VIRGO** AUGUST 23-SEPTEMBER 22

Take a hard look at your finances and professional life before you decide to tackle someone else's plans. Is that what you really want? Are you sure that it's even possible at this time? These are all big questions you need to ask yourself before you make a move, no matter how much you want to act on the spur of the moment. Your mental energy can help you get there.

 **CAPRICORN** DECEMBER 22-JANUARY 19

You've got a lot to think about right now! An offer to upgrade to a larger home might be out of your immediate financial capability, but opportunities like this allow you to grow. That is even more true for work challenges that you're sure you're not ready for yet. Your energy is just right, though, so release those doubts. Think things through, ask for advice, and you will be OK.

 **GEMINI** MAY 21-JUNE 21

Your ideas and advice, usually top-notch, are generally welcomed by people. A more argumentative energy is flowing through you right now, so make sure you can back up those opinions that you're suddenly handing out so generously. It's even more important to make sure that people actually want to hear your suggestions, and that you're not just lecturing them.

 **LIBRA** SEPTEMBER 23-OCTOBER 22

Just because someone close has a problem, that doesn't automatically mean that you have to fix it. The temptation to be nice is constant, but it might be kinder to everyone if you just let people deal with their own problems and try your best not to interfere. This teaches them responsibility, but it also means that you can breathe more deeply and get on with living your life.

 **AQUARIUS** JANUARY 20-FEBRUARY 18

You may find yourself in the middle of a tense moment with a loved one today. A standoff does no one any good, so find a way to talk things over with the relevant party before it's too late. If you make a serious effort toward increasing the peace, your social energy should do all the rest. Owning up to your part even if you feel justified should go a long way.

 **CANCER** JUNE 22-JULY 22

Shifting universal energies lead to corresponding changes in your life. They affect you, your friends, your family and, most importantly, how you and all your people relate to one another. Keep cool, don't overreact and remember that your faith that things will work out all right leads to positive end results for you. Hold on tight, and enjoy the ride!

 **SCORPIO** OCTOBER 23-NOVEMBER 21

Don't stop looking for love just because you're feeling a little cranky, or you may find yourself losing ground really quickly. There's a time and a place for the big discussion, so make sure things absolutely need to be discussed before you announce it's time for a negotiation session. Your current aggressive energies could trigger a full-scale war out of almost nothing.

 **PISCES** FEBRUARY 19-MARCH 20

You're sick and tired of feeling so sick and tired! If you're fed up with an old situation, it's time to take steps so it doesn't keep cropping up in your life over and over again. The key to breaking this cycle is to pay attention to everything you do: how you speak, those around you and the consequences of your actions. A little extra concentration shows you the exit.



TEST YOUR KNOWLEDGE

1. Satyajit Ray received Magsaysay Award for journalism, literature and creative communication arts in

a. 1963
b. 1965
c. 1966
d. 1967

2. The 'Red Triangle' symbol denotes

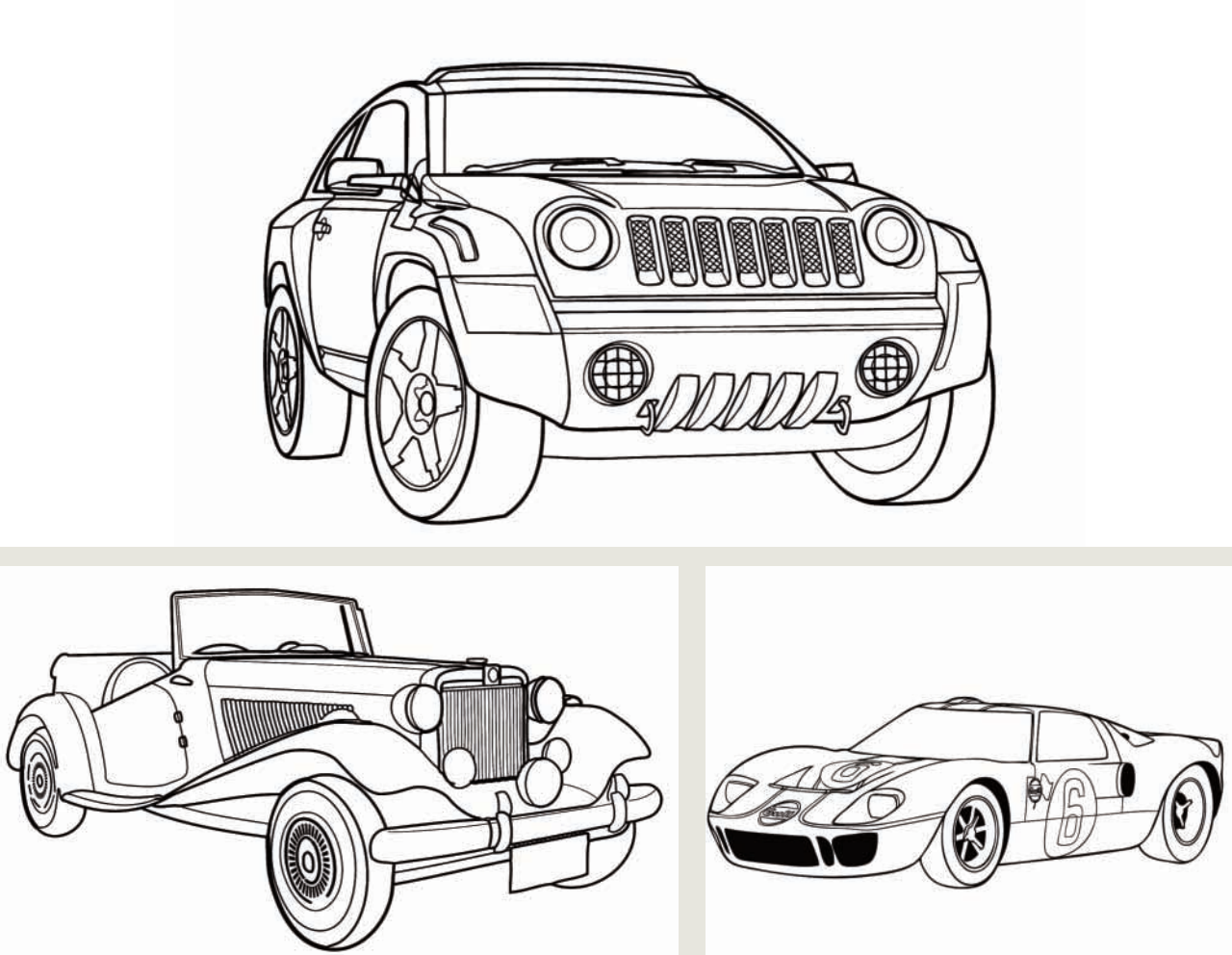
a. Air India
b. family planning
c. culture and civilization
d. None of the above

3. P.T. Usha, who came close to bagging a bronze finished fourth in ____ in 1984 Olympics.

a. 400 m final
b. 800 m final
c. 400 m hurdle
d. the marathon

Answers: 1.b 2.c 3.d

KIDS COLOURING



BOGGLER

M	S	R	L
P	P	S	O
P	E	L	R
I	A	A	R

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

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

	1		2		3	6	7	
	6		5			3		1
9		3						
	7				5		8	
		9	7	8	1	5		
	5		4				1	
						1		6
8		1			4		3	
	4	7	3		2		5	

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

SUDOKU EASY ANSWER

6	9	8	2	1	5	7	4	9
2	5	7	4	9	1	6	8	3
9	4	1	6	7	8	5	3	2
7	1	6	9	2	4	8	5	3
5	9	5	1	8	7	6	2	4
4	8	2	5	6	9	1	7	3
7	2	7	9	1	5	8	6	3
1	6	5	8	4	2	9	7	3
8	7	9	5	6	2	4	1	3

AVIATION ANGST

Flying green

Under huge pressure to go green, the aviation industry needs to spend billions of dollars to become more climate-friendly in what risks ramping up fares and making air travel the preserve of the rich once again.

Like many countries, airlines the world over have pledged net-zero emissions by 2050 as has the European Union, putting pressure on the aviation industry among other sectors.

The 27-member bloc also wants to tax kerosene. All of this will come at an unprecedented cost for the industry. The International Air Transport Association (IATA), whose 290 member airlines make up 82 percent of global air traffic, estimates that the industry's green transition will cost around 1.55tn dollars.

Cleaner fuel

In order to make that transition, airlines need to invest in the latest

planes, more efficient than their current fleets.

Airbus for one hopes to see aircraft running on hydrogen, which emits not pollution when burned, enter service by 2035.

Meanwhile, a production chain for sustainable aviation fuel (SAF) that the EU is going to make compulsory in incremental proportions needs to be created almost from scratch.

IATA hopes to accomplish two-thirds of its emissions reductions by using SAFs - non-conventional fuels derived from organic products including cooking oil and algae.

Fuel currently represents between 20 and 30 percent of airline costs.

But SAFs are, "as things stand, three times more expensive for (those using) used (recycled) oils, five times more expensive for biomass, and five to ten times more expensive for synthetic fuels," Jean-Baptiste Djebbari, France's

transport minister, told AFP, adding that it was crucial to scale up production to bring down prices.

Patrick Pouyanne, the head of oil and gas giant TotalEnergies, which is producing SAF, warned earlier this year that the cost of these non-conventional fuels were far from matching less expensive conventional ones.

"The energy and ecological transition will have to be financed not only by airlines or energy companies, but also by the whole chain, including customers," he said.

Djebbari added that flight prices could rise in the short term and warned that the pandemic could also see many airlines disappear, thus reducing competition and pushing prices up.

Drowning in debt

Higher prices would mark a big change for a sector that was once the preserve of the rich but gradually became accessible to more people,

even if it still excludes up to 95 per cent of the global population.

In 1970, 310mn air trips were taken, according to the World Bank.

In 2019, that figure stood at 4.4bn. And despite the pandemic, IATA is banking on the figure rising to 10bn in 2050.

IATA says the cost of air transport has plunged by 96 per cent since 1950 thanks to the introduction of jets in the 1960s, which led to dramatic industry growth, and the 1978 deregulation of the sector in the United States.

It adds that this 'downward trend continues due to improved technology and efficiency as well as strong competition.'

Right now, flight prices are also being pushed down in many regions as demand for air travel only timidly

recovers from the shock of the COVID-19 pandemic. Airlines are, however,

not in good posture, drowning in debt and struggling to get cash flowing again.

So how are they going to finance a green transition that cannot be delayed as the world faces the catastrophic effects of climate change?

"It's clear that sustainability and our industry's ability to meet the targets that are being set is the biggest single challenge that we face," Pauls Calitis, chief operating officer of Latvia's low-cost airBaltic airline, said at a recent symposium in Brussels.

With airlines financially fragile, the "money is going to have to come from someone," said Bertrand Mouly-Aigrot, a partner at Archery Strategy Consulting which specialises in the aerospace and energy industries, at a recent event. Making the customer pay "might not be a bad idea," he added.

AFP

THAILAND TO OPEN TO VACCINATED TOURISTS

Thai Premier Prayut Chan-O-Cha has announced that vaccinated travellers from more than 40 countries will be allowed to enter the kingdom without

undergoing quarantine from November 1, as it readies for a much-anticipated re-opening.

The 46 countries and territories is

a significant jump from the 10 initially announced last week by Prayut, when he unveiled plans to reopen the country next month. The ballooning list is due to Thailand's urgent need to stimulate the tourism sector and other related business sectors, he said.

"We need to move faster than that and do it now," the Thai premier wrote in a post on his official Facebook page. "This is because waiting for everything to be perfect will be too late."

Beside the United States, Britain and China, vaccinated tourists from a slew of European countries including France and Germany will be allowed in, if they are able to provide a negative COVID-19 RT-PCR test.

Neighbours Cambodia and

Malaysia are also on the 'low-risk' list, as well as Singapore, Japan, South Korea, and Hong Kong.

Upon landing in Thailand, travellers will have to take another COVID-19 test and book a single night in a government-approved hotel while awaiting the results, before being allowed to travel freely.

"We know that this is a rapid acceleration and there is a risk that the number of infected people will increase, but it's a risk that we have to accept," Prayut said.

Before the pandemic, Thailand had attracted nearly 40mn visitors, with tourism making up almost 20 percent of its national income. Last year, the country lost about US\$50bn in



tourism revenue as foreign arrivals plunged 83 per cent to 6.7mn.

Prayut had initially said, earlier this year, that 70 per cent of all Thais must be vaccinated before the kingdom fully reopened its borders. To date, nearly 40 per cent have received two

vaccine doses.

Thailand is still registering about 10,000 cases per day - largely fuelled by the contagious Delta variant. The country has more than 1.8mn cases to date and has recorded 18,559 deaths.

AFP

Verstappen beats Hamilton for US Grand Prix pole

FORMULA ONE
US GRAND PRIX

Austin, US - Max Verstappen in a Red Bull stormed to pole position for the US Grand Prix on Saturday, edging out title rival and Mercedes' world champion Lewis Hamilton in front of an estimated crowd of 120,000 people.

Verstappen, who leads Hamilton by six points in the championship race, claimed his ninth pole of 2021 with a time of 1min 32.910sec, just two tenths faster than the British driver.

Sergio Perez, in the second Red Bull, was third, only 0.15sec behind Hamilton.

Valtteri Bottas, in the other Mercedes, was fourth quickest, but will drop to ninth on the grid for Sunday's race after changing his engine.

"In Q3 my first

lap wasn't amazing but in the final lap it started drizzling in the final sector so I wasn't sure if I could hold on to my lap time but it came together," said Verstappen.

On Sunday, organisers say the crowd figure at the Circuit of the Americas will swell to 140,000 to see Verstappen and Hamilton go head-to-head and side-by-side. "I guess that's that people like," said the Dutch driver.

"From here onwards we hope to have a good start and work together



Red Bull's Dutch driver Max Verstappen leaves the pits during the qualifying session at the Circuit of The Americas in Austin, US, on Saturday (AFP)

as a team and have the best possible result."

Hamilton has won five of the eight races held at the Austin track since its 2012 debut.

He also wrapped up world titles at the Texan circuit in 2015 and 2019.

Bottas was victorious once, in the last event held in 2019, before the 2020 race was dropped from the schedule due to the pandemic.

Verstappen has finished fourth, third and second. "I gave it everything today - it was a bit of a struggle through qualifying," said Hamilton.

"I think from P1 onwards we kind of fell back a little bit and the Red Bull guys were incredibly quick.

He added: "I was happy with my last lap, of course there's always areas we can improve but I think that was pretty much everything we had.

"We'll just work as hard as we can tomorrow. My mindset

is to win the race."

In an indication of the intense pressure building in the title race, Verstappen had branded Hamilton a "stupid idiot" in Friday practice.

He was angered by the Mercedes man pushing past on the inside of his Red Bull when the Dutchman was lining up a flying lap.

Despite Hamilton's love of the track, Red Bull do at least have one win in Texas courtesy of Sebastian Vettel in 2013.

The rest of Sunday's top half

of the grid is made up of Ferrari duo Charles Leclerc and Carlos Sainz followed by Daniel Ricciardo and Lando Norris in the McLarens.

AlphaTauri duo Pierre Gasly and Yuki Tsunoda were the next fastest.

Former world champions Fernando Alonso, of Alpine, and Aston Martin's Vettel, as well as George Russell in a Williams, will all start from the back of the grid on Sunday after power units were changed on their cars.

AFP



Letesenbet Gidey

Ethiopia's Gidey sets new world record

Madrid, Spain - Letesenbet Gidey pulverised the women's half-marathon world record Sunday, slicing more than a minute off the previous mark when she won in Valencia.

Running in bright sunshine, it was the first half-marathon the 23-year-old Ethiopian had raced in and she added the record to her 5,000m and 10,000m world records.

Gidey timed 1hr 02min 52sec to better the previous time of 1hr 04min 02sec set by Ruth Chepngetich of Kenya in April 2021.

Valencia was also the scene of Gidey's 5,000m record in October 2020.

"Gracias Valencia," Gidey said at the finish line. "I'm so happy," she said, holding a sign saying 'First woman in history under 63 minutes'.

She ran the first 10km in 29min 45sec and then got even faster over the final section of the race.

AFP

Al Faisal, Soucek fight back to claim fifth place in Barcelona

Our Correspondent
Muscat

2021 INTERNATIONAL
GT OPEN: ROUND SEVEN

An amazing fightback from Oman's Al Faisal al Zubair and Spain's Andy Soucek saw them recover from first-lap drama to finish fifth in the first of two races in the final round of the 2021 International GT Open Series at the Circuit de Catalunya in Barcelona on Saturday.

The Lechner Racing Porsche 911 GT3 R duo climbed two places from seventh on the grid to earn more valuable experience and championship points, but a sixth-placed finish for rivals Michele Beretta and Frederick Schandorff secured the 2021 title for the Vincenzo Sospiri Racing Lamborghini crew.

Soucek also sealed the championship runner-up spot with Al Faisal overall third with a race to go on Sunday.

Al Faisal was pushed off the track into the gravel on the open-



Al Faisal al Zubair in action in Barcelona on Saturday

ing lap of the race and fought back from 12th to hand the car over to Soucek from seventh place.

Soucek then managed to recover another two places to seal a hard-earned fifth.

Martin Kodric and Ethan Simioni claimed victory in the 70-minute race by 0.278 seconds from Jim Pla and Thomas Drouet. Belgium's Baptiste Moulin and Japan's Yuki Nemoto rounded off the podium places in the second of

the VSR Lamborghini.

Speaking after the race, Al Faisal, who is in his debut GT Open Series season, said,

"For race one, I went out for qualifying and we qualified P7. Considering we did not go on the second set of tyres to save it for the race, I think it worked out in the end.

"Unfortunately, I was pushed out into the gravel in turn one and that dropped me down to 12th place. Then I managed to drive back to seventh before

Overall standings after 13 of 14 races:

1	Frederick Schandorff/ Michele Beretta (142 points)
2	Andy Soucek (116)
3	Al Faisal al Zubair (98)
4	Baptiste Moulin/Yuki Nemoto (97)
5	Ollie Millroy/Brendan Iribe (70)

handing the car to Andy."

He added, "Andy brought it back in P5, which was a great result considering all the action that happened during the race - pushed out in the gravel in turn one on lap one and getting pushed out midway through my stint.

"That set a few obstacles for us to pass. Overall it was a good way to end. We will give it our all in the last race on Sunday."

Al Faisal qualified the Porsche for the first of the weekend's

races in chilly but dry track conditions. The Omani was in the top-three through the early minutes and then finished the session in seventh place with a best lap of 1min 44.633sec.

Frenchman Jim Pla dominated the session in the AKKA ASP Mercedes AMG GT3 and qualified on pole position with a fastest lap of 1min 43.152sec. Schandorff left it relatively late in the session to snatch second place with a 1min 43.448sec and Martin Kodric was third.

Earlier, the Lechner Racing duo raced for 20 laps during the first practice with a best tour of 1min 45.371sec put them in sixth and just 0.124 seconds behind Beretta and Schandorff.

The pair enjoyed a better second practice session and a best lap of 1min 45.221sec placed them third in the results behind the session-winning Beretta and Schandorff and second-placed Loris Spinelli and Florian Scholze in their AKM Motorsport Mercedes.

Ecuadorian sprinter Quinonez shot dead

Quito, Ecuador - Ecuadorian Olympic sprinter Alex Quinonez was shot dead in the port city of Guayaquil, authorities announced, sparking an outpouring of grief in a country struggling to contain a surge in violence.

Quinonez, 32, and another person were found dead close to midnight local time (0500 GMT) on Friday, according to police.

Ecuador's President Guillermo Lasso promised to bring his killers to justice.

"Those who take the lives of Ecuadoreans will not remain unpunished. We will act with force," Lasso tweeted.

The provincial governor likewise pledged accountability for the murders.

"No one will rest until @PoliciaEcuador captures the culprits. We are facing a war against drug gangs that intend to subdue us," Pablo Arosemena, the governor of Guayas province, whose capital is Guayaquil, said on Twitter.

The country's sports ministry confirmed Quinonez's killing on Twitter, paying tribute to "the



Alex Quinonez

greatest sprinter this country produced." "We have lost a great sportsman, someone who allowed us to dream, who moved us," the ministry said.

Quinonez held Ecuador's record for the 200m sprint with a time of 19.87 seconds.

He was a finalist in the 2012 London Olympics, achieving seventh place after competing in the semis in the lane next to Usain Bolt, the fastest sprinter in history. Ecuador's Olympic Committee said the death of Quinonez 'leaves us with profound pain' and that his 'legacy will forever stay in our hearts'.

AFP

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FOOTBALL ROUND-UP

Real Madrid seal El Clasico victory

Barcelona lose fourth successive *Clasico* match

SPANISH LEAGUE

Madrid, Spain - Real Madrid piled renewed pressure on Barcelona coach Ronald Koeman as David Alaba scored a scintillating goal to help them seal a 2-1 victory in the *El Clasico* at Camp Nou on Sunday.

Alaba's bending shot had Madrid in front for the majority of an end-to-end contest, with Lucas Vazquez making it two in injury-time before Sergio Aguero tapped in his first goal for Barcelona with seconds left.

Barca have now lost a fourth consecutive *Clasico* for the first time since 1965 and stay a lowly eighth in La Liga, five points behind Madrid, who surge back to the top of the table.

After beating Valencia and winning a crucial Champions League game against Dynamo Kiev this week, it represents a fresh set-back for Barca and Koeman, whose future will again come under scrutiny.

Madrid, meanwhile, see their own recovery bolstered, after backing up a thumping win over Shakhtar Donetsk to leave a rocky run in the rear-view mirror.

This was the first league meeting between these clubs without either Lionel Messi or Sergio Ramos since 2005 and while there were still veterans on show - Luka Modric, Toni Kroos, Karim Benzema, Gerard Pique and Sergio Busquets all starting - it was a *Clasico* more about the future.

For the first time in 65 years, six players younger than 22 began the game while Gavi, Barcelona's 17-year-old midfielder, was the youngest Barca starter in a *Clasico* in almost a century.

The promotion of a duel between Ansu Fati and Vinicius



Real Madrid's Spanish forward Lucas Vazquez (R) is congratulated by teammates after scoring his team's second goal during the *El Clasico* match against Barcelona at the Camp Nou stadium in Barcelona, Spain, on Sunday (AFP)

Junior perhaps felt a little forced, but both players have become symbols of hope.

Madrid made Barcelona pay in the 32nd minute with a wonderful goal. Alaba tackled Memphis Depay on the edge of his own box and kept going, at first wanting it down the line from Vinicius, who instead switched forward to Rodrygo.

This time Alaba would get it back, his space opened up by the curving run of Benzema, and from the edge of the area he swerved the ball inside the far post.

Then on the counter-attack, Madrid made it two, Marco Asensio's shot swept in by the sliding Vazquez in the 93rd minute.

There was still time for an Aguero goal in the 97th, a sharp finish from Dest's cross, but not for a comeback.

OTHER RESULTS

Sunday: Sevilla 5 Levante 3.

Saturday: Elche 2 Espanyol 2, Athletic Bilbao 2 Villarreal 1.

ITALIAN LEAGUE

Verona's Simeone shoots four past Lazio

Milan, Italy - Giovanni Simeone struck all four goals as Verona hammered Lazio 4-1 in Serie A on Sunday, while Fiorentina closed in on the Champions League places with a 3-0 win over Cagliari.

Simeone, the son of former Lazio player and long-time

Atletico Madrid coach Diego, struck twice in each half to sink Maurizio Sarri's Lazio, who briefly threatened when Ciro Immobile halved the deficit seconds after the break.

Verona move up to 11th on 11 points after starting the day hovering above the drop zone, while Lazio drop to eighth.

OTHER RESULTS

Sunday: Atalanta 1 Udinese 1, Fiorentina 3 Cagliari 0.

Saturday: Bologna 2 AC Milan 4, Sassuolo 3 Venezia 1.

FRENCH LEAGUE

Sunday: Nice 3 Lyon 2, Lens 4 Metz 1, Lorient 1 Bordeaux 1, Reims 1 Troyes 2, Rennes 1

Strasbourg 0, Monaco 3 Montpellier 1. Saturday: Nantes 2 Clermont 1, Lille 1 Brest 1.

GERMAN LEAGUE

Sunday: Cologne 2 Bayer Leverkusen 2, Stuttgart 1 Union Berlin 1.

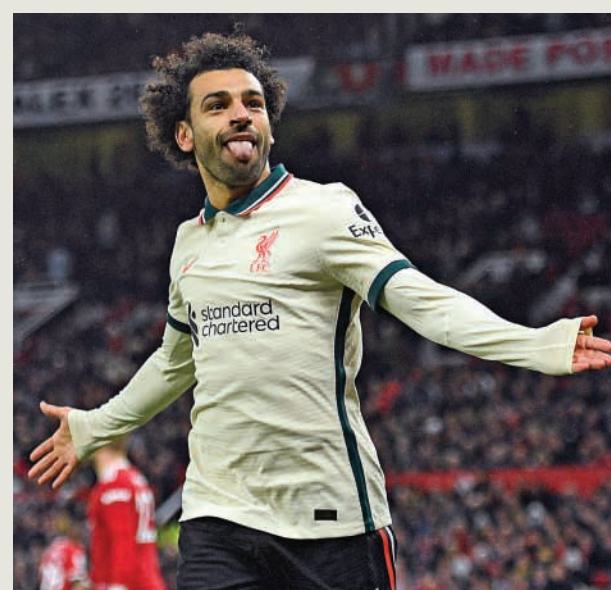
Saturday: Arminia Bielefeld 1 Borussia Dortmund 3, Hertha Berlin 1 Borussia Moenchengladbach 0.

SCOTTISH PREMIERSHIP

Sunday: St Mirren 1 Rangers 2.

Saturday: Celtic 2 St Johnstone 0, Aberdeen 1 Hibernian 0, Hearts 1 Dundee 1, Ross County 2 Livingston 3, Dundee United 2 Motherwell 1.

AFP



Liverpool's Mohamed Salah celebrates after scoring against Man Utd

Salah's treble as Liverpool rout Man Utd

ENGLISH PREMIER LEAGUE

London, UK - Liverpool swept to a stunning 5-0 win at arch-rivals Manchester United as Mohamed Salah's hat-trick and Paul Pogba's red card condemned the hosts to one of the darkest days in their history, while West Ham beat London rivals Tottenham 1-0 on Sunday.

Ten years after Manchester City's infamous 6-1 victory at Old Trafford, Liverpool inflicted one of the most embarrassing losses United have ever suffered. It was Liverpool's biggest win against United since 1925 and moved them seven points clear of Ole Gunnar Solskjaer's side in the English Premier League table.

Second-placed Liverpool are just one point behind leaders Chelsea.

In a telling indictment of United's capitulation, thousands of fans left Old Trafford well before full-time. Many supporters even fled before half-time, with those that remained loudly booing Solskjaer and his players.

United are languishing in seventh place after a fourth successive league game without a win, a dismal streak that includes three defeats.

Liverpool were ahead after less than five minutes. Harry Maguire and Victor Lindelof were out of position and Salah played through Naby Keita,

who slotted home in front of the shell-shocked Stretford End. Liverpool smelt blood and grabbed a second in the 13th minute when Maguire and Luke Shaw got in tangle, allowing Trent Alexander-Arnold to cross for Diogo Jota to convert from close range.

Jurgen Klopp's side were rampant and Salah finished off Keita's cross in the 38th minute. With United in disarray, Maguire was pulled out of position and Salah struck at the far post in stoppage-time.

Salah was not finished yet and he ran clear to complete his treble in the 50th minute, making him Africa's all-time leading scorer in the EPL with 106 goals. The Egypt forward had netted for the tenth successive game in all competitions and was the first away player to score a hat-trick at Old Trafford since Brazil legend Ronaldo in 2003.

Summing up United's plight, France midfielder Pogba, sent on at half-time, lasted just 15 minutes before being dismissed for a reckless studs-up lunge on Keita.

At the London Stadium, a second-half strike from Michail Antonio gave West Ham win against Tottenham.

In Sunday's other match, Leicester won 2-1 at Brentford to extend their unbeaten league run to four games.

AFP

Boxing Day Ashes Test at MCG could see 80,000 fans

Melbourne, Australia - Australia's Boxing Day Test at the Melbourne Cricket Ground (MCG) against England could have a crowd of more 80,000, a senior official said Sunday as Melbourne emerges from one of the world's most prolonged series of COVID-19 lockdowns.

How many spectators, if any, would be allowed into the cavernous MCG for the third Ashes Test has long been up in the air. But with the nation's second-biggest city re-opening on Friday after more than 260 days under lockdown since the pandemic began, Victoria state Premier Dan Andrews was hopeful it will be jam-packed.

"I want to see 80,000-plus people at the Boxing Day Test on day one, that's what I want to see," he told reporters in flagging a further planned easing of COVID-19 restrictions.

"We are determined to deliver that. It won't be easy. I think selling the tickets will be pretty easy. But we are very confident that we will be able to deliver that."

The crowd for last summer's Boxing Day Test against India



A file photo of Melbourne Cricket Ground

was capped at 30,000 per day due to the pandemic.

The five-Test Ashes series will start in Brisbane on December 8 before moving to Adelaide, Melbourne, Sydney and ending in Perth. Cricket Australia said in July that venues would be sold to full capacity, except the 100,000-seat MCG, given the city's battle against COVID-19.

Andrews' comments will encourage not only cricket fans

but Australian Open organisers, with the first tennis Grand Slam of 2022 due to start on January 17 at Melbourne Park.

The tournament was hit hard this year with limited crowds and a five-day snap lockdown called mid-event.

But whether a full contingent of tennis stars will make the trip to Melbourne remains to be seen.

AFP

Quartararo claims first MotoGP title

EMILIA-ROMAGNA MOTOGP

Misano Adriatico, Italy - Fabio Quartararo won his first MotoGP world title on Sunday after his closest rival Francesco Bagnaia crashed out of the Emilia-Romagna MotoGP. Bagnaia, who was 52 points behind Quartararo with three GPs including this race remaining, was leading when he fell with just four laps left to hand the Frenchman his country's first ever MotoGP championship.

Yamaha rider Quartararo, 22, now leads Bagnaia by 65 points meaning he can no longer be caught by his Ducati rival and guarantees a first riders' title for his team since 2015.

Of the 16 MotoGPs Quartararo has contested this season, he has claimed ten podiums, including five victories. Marquez's Honda teammate Pol Espargaro was second and Italian rider Enea Bastianini of Ducati came third.

Sunday's race was also Valentino Rossi's last MotoGP in Italy ahead of retirement at the end of the season, and he finished a creditable tenth.

AFP

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QUOTE OF THE DAY

The T20 World Cup is a lottery because the format favours upsets. India, Pakistan, England and West Indies could be the likely semifinalists

Ian Chappell
Former Australia captain, in his column published on Sunday



ICC MEN'S T20 WORLD CUP 2021

Asalanka stars in Sri Lanka win



CHARITH ASALANKA

80*

49 BALLS

GROUP ONE
SRI LANKA VS BANGLADESH

Sharjah, UAE - Sri Lanka defeated Bangladesh by five wickets in a feisty T20 World Cup clash on Sunday, hammering home their status as surprise title contenders.

Chasing an imposing target of 172, the 2014 champions saw Charith Asalanka (80 not out) and Bhanuka Rajapaksa (53) lead them to victory for a fourth successive win after three triumphs in the qualifying round.

Earlier, Mushfiq Rahim, with an undefeated 57 and opener Mohammad Naim, who hit 62, starred for Bangladesh in the Super 12 game after being put into bat.

England, Australia, South Africa and West Indies are the other teams in the group from where the top two will make the semifinals.

"I am happy to hit a winning knock for my country," said Asalanka who got the winning runs off a boundary with seven balls to spare.

"When I faced the first ball, it looked like a good pitch and I backed myself to play my natural game. Rajapaksa played a brilliant knock and he changed the momentum."

Asalanka made his runs from 49 balls, hitting five boundaries and five sixes as he and Rajapaksa put on 86 for the fourth wicket.

Both men were dropped by Liton Das with Rajapaksa re-

prieved after he had made only 14.

The lone bright spot for Bangladesh in the field was the two wickets in four balls by Shakib al Hasan to dismiss Pathum Nissanka and Avishka Fernando.

That allowed the veteran allrounder go to 41 wickets, surpassing Pakistan's Shahid Afridi for most victims in T20 World Cups.

"I thought 171 could be defended. Liton and Naim gave us a very good start. Mushfiq played a brilliant innings," said Bangladesh skipper Mahmudullah Riyad. "We were in the game till the tenth over. But things went wrong for us after that."

Bangladesh had made 40 by the sixth over before they lost their first wicket and the sparks flew.

Liton Das (16) was caught by Sri Lanka skipper Dasun Shanaka at mid-off trying to hoist Lahiru Kumara into the outfield.

However, Liton and Kumara then exchanged angry words with fellow Bangladesh opener Naim pushing away Kumara.

Both umpires had to intervene before the game continued.

Kumara went on to bowl a 'beamer', clocked at over 140kmph, at Mushfiq in the penultimate over, forcing the Bangladesh player to take evasive action.

Naim made 62 from 52 balls before he was eventually dismissed in the 17th over, caught

SCOREBOARD

BANGLADESH

M Naim

c & b B Fernando

62 (52)

L Das

c Shanaka b Kumara

16 (16)

Shakib al Hasan

b Karunaratne

10 (7)

M Rahim

not out

57 (37)

Afif Hossain

run out

7 (6)

Mahmudullah

not out

10 (5)

Extras:

(b 2, lb 3, nb 3, w 1)

9

TOTAL:

171 for four in 20 overs

Fall of wickets:

1-40, 2-56, 3-129, 4-150

Bowling:

C Karunaratne 3-0-12-1, B Fernando 3-0-27-1, D Chameera 4-0-41-0, L Kumara 4-0-29-1, C Asalanka 1-0-14-0, W Hasaranga 3-0-29-0, D Shanaka 2-0-14-0

SRI LANKA

K Perera

b Ahmed

1 (3)

P Nissanka

b Shakib al Hasan

24 (21)

C Asalanka

not out

80 (49)

A Fernando

b Shakib al Hasan

0 (3)

W Hasaranga

c Naim

b Saifuddin

6 (5)

B Rajapaksa

b Ahmed

53 (31)

D Shanaka

not out

1 (1)

Extras:

(w 7)

7

TOTAL:

172 for five in 18.5 overs

Fall of wickets:

1-2, 2-71, 3-71, 4-79, 5-165

Bowling:

N Ahmed 2.5-0-29-2, Mahedi Hasan 4-0-30-0, M Saifuddin 3-0-38-1, Shakib al Hasan 3-0-17-2, M Rahman 3-0-22-0, Mahmudullah 2-0-21-0, Afif Hossain 1-0-15-0

and bowled by Binura Fernando.

Naim and Mushfiq Rahim put on 73 for the third wicket as Bangladesh upped the pace.

The classy Mushfiq reached his sixth T20 half-century off 32 balls with four boundaries and two sixes.

Sri Lanka were without key spinner Maheesh Theekshana who had claimed eight wickets in three qualifying matches as Sri Lanka swept into the Super 12 stage. The 21-year-old had been suffering with a back injury.

AFP

Bavuma blames on ‘execution thing’

GROUP ONE

SOUTH AFRICA VS AUSTRALIA

Abu Dhabi, UAE - It had to happen. A World Cup. Australia versus South Africa. A thriller. And a run-out. This one is less significant than the most (in)famous one of them all, in 1999, but possibly more comical.

Keshav Maharaj bunted Pat Cummins to point and the fielder shied at the non-striker's stumps and missed. On 83 for six in the 15th over, South Africa were desperate for every run, so Maharaj tried to take advantage with a single. Aiden Markram, the last recognised batter left in the line-up, had his back turned and didn't see Maharaj advance. When he did, he sent Maharaj back but from two-thirds of the way down the track, it was always going to be difficult. Then Maharaj slipped as a wide throw came into Matthew Wade.

The time it took Maharaj to get up and begin making his way back allowed Wade to gather the ball and take aim at the stumps. Maharaj was run-out by some distance.



Temba Bavuma gives his team a pep talk before the chase against Australia in Abu Dhabi, UAE, on Saturday

South Africa were 83 for seven, with 34 balls left in an innings in which almost everything had gone wrong. South Africa's top-heavy-but-still-a-batter-short strategy is coming home to roost. It's a limitation that they overcame against opposition like Ireland and Sri Lanka but it was always going to be difficult against an attack like Australia's.

South Africa skipper Temba Bavuma spoke on the eve of the match of the anxiety running through the South African camp, seven of whom are at their first World Cup. He also reminded his team, and everyone else, that

there was no bigger motivation for South Africa than taking on their second-oldest and fiercest rivals, Australia. In the end, he didn't blame the nerves but the execution.

"The guys have prepared quite well in terms of trying to deal with mental pressures," he said after the game. "I can't remember a time when our batting has collapsed like that. It's not every day when your top seven, bar Aiden Markram, all fail. It was an execution thing."

But he conceded they fell well short of expectations: "118 was definitely not a par score. Anything around 150-160 would have been competitive."

On the evidence of Australia's batting, even 135 may have been enough on the day, in those conditions, but all the what-iffing in the world is not going to change that South Africa have already given themselves a mountain to climb over the next two weeks, and Australia have already issued a small warning to the rest that they are here to play. As always.

Cricinfo

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QUOTE OF THE DAY
I'm backing myself to bowl against anybody and just do what worked for me. The result is not in our hands
Naveen-ul-Haq
Afghanistan's quick bowler ahead of his first senior World Cup



ICC MEN'S T20 WORLD CUP 2021

FINALLY, THE JINX IS OVER

- Pakistan beat India for the first time in an ICC World Cup match
- Afridi set the tone for the night with a fiery opening spell; skipper Azam and Rizwan share unbroken 152-run opening stand for a ten-wicket romp



India's captain Virat Kohli (C) congratulates Pakistan's Mohammad Rizwan as Babar Azam (L) looks on after their victory in Dubai on Sunday (AFP)

GROUP TWO

INDIA VS PAKISTAN

Dubai, UAE - In their 13th attempt in World Cups, Pakistan finally managed to beat India, and did so comfortably on a night when almost everything went to plan for them.

With the sensational uprooting of the openers with the new ball, Shaheen Shah Afridi was the brightest star of the night, but everyone in the support cast played their role well, including a nerveless chase by the openers Babar Azam and Mohammad Rizwan.

Chasing 152 for victory, Azam (68) and Rizwan (79) took apart the Indian bowling as they steered their team home with 13 balls to spare in Dubai.

Left-arm quick Afridi set up victory - their first over their neighbours in six attempts in the tournament - with figures of three for 31 that restricted India to 151 for seven despite a valiant 57 from skipper Virat Kohli.

"This is the first time we've beaten India and I feel proud,"



SHAHEEN SHAH AFRIDI

3 WIKTS

31 RUNS

said Afridi. "I knew it would be good for us if I got early wickets and that worked out. My idea was to get as much swing as possible.

"You don't get a lot here, but

I wanted to get those breakthroughs and gave it 100 per cent. In my opinion the new ball was difficult to play, so credit goes to Babar [Azam] and Rizwan."

In the immediate aftermath of the victory, celebratory gunfire erupted in the Pakistani cities of Islamabad and Karachi.

Azam and Riwan went on the attack from the start with

SCOREBOARD			
INDIA			
KL Rahul	b Afridi	3	(8)
Rohit Sharma	lbw b Afridi	0	(1)
V Kohli	c Rizwan b Afridi	57	(49)
SK Yadav	c Rizwan		
	b Hasan Ali	11	(8)
R Pant	c & b Shadab Khan	39	(30)
R Jadeja	c sub (M Nawaz)		
	b Hasan Ali	13	(13)
H Pandya	c Azam b Rauf	11	(8)
B Kumar	not out	5	(4)
M Shami	not out	0	(0)
Extras:	(b 6, lb 1, nb 1, w 4)	12	
TOTAL:	151 for seven in 20 overs		
Fall of wickets: 1-1, 2-6, 3-31, 4-84, 5-125, 6-133, 7-146			
Bowling: S S Afridi 4-0-31-3, I Wasim 2-0-10-0, Hasan Ali 4-0-44-2, Shadab Khan 4-0-22-1, M Hafeez 2-0-12-0, H Rauf 4-0-25-1			
PAKISTAN			
M Rizwan	not out	79	(55)
B Azam	not out	68	(52)
Extras:	(lb 1, w 4)	5	
TOTAL:	152 for no loss in 17.5 overs		
Bowling: B Kumar 3-0-25-0, M Shami 3.5-0-43-0, J Bumrah 3-0-22-0, V Chakravarthy 4-0-33-0, R Jadeja 4-0-28-0			

boundaries inside the powerplay - the first six overs when only two fielders are allowed outside the inner circle - to set the tone for their chase.

The dew did not help the

GROUP ONE						
TEAM	P	W	L	PTS	NRR	
ENG	1	1	0	2	+3.970	
SL	1	1	0	2	+0.583	
AUS	1	1	0	2	+0.253	
SA	1	0	1	0	-0.253	
BAN	1	0	1	0	-0.583	
WI	1	0	1	0	-3.970	

GROUP TWO						
TEAM	P	W	L	PTS	NRR	
PAK	1	1	0	2	+0.973	
IND	1	0	1	0	-0.973	
AFG	0	0	0	0	+0.000	
NZ	0	0	0	0	+0.000	
NAM	0	0	0	0	+0.000	
SCO	0	0	0	0	+0.000	

AUS: Australia, BAN: Bangladesh, ENG: England, SL: Sri Lanka, SA: South Africa, WI: West Indies, AFG: Afghanistan, IND: India, NAM: Namibia, NZ: New Zealand, PAK: Pakistan, SCO: Scotland

P: Played, W: Won, L: Lost, PTS: Points, NRR: Net Run Rate

TODAY'S MATCH

GROUP ONE

Sharjah (UAE), 6pm



AFGHANISTAN vs **SCOTLAND**

Indian bowlers who regularly wiped the moisture off the ball with their towels while the openers kept the score ticking and got the occasional fours and sixes.

The batting pair kept up the charge as Babar reached his fifty with a six off spinner Varun Chakravarthy to get the Pakistan supporters dancing with joy.

Rizwan raised his fifty with a boundary off pace bowler Jasprit Bumrah and then raced past his captain, hitting six fours and three sixes in his 55-ball knock. Babar hit the winning runs to turn a new page in Pakistan-India rivalry.

"We did not execute the things that we wanted to but credit is certainly due - they outplayed us today," admitted Kohli.

'Not the end'

"They were very professional with the bat as well but we're certainly not a team that presses the panic button, it's the start of the tournament, not the end."

Earlier Afridi picked three crucial early wickets after a lethal first spell to hurt India who elected to field first in the Super 12s encounter watched by 20,000 in the stadium and a global TV audience of hundreds of millions of fans.

Kohli scored his 29th T20I fifty to help the team rebuild before being caught behind off Afridi as Pakistan dismissed the star batsman for the first time in a T20 World Cup game.

Afridi struck the first blow with an express delivery that swung in to trap Rohit Sharma lbw for a first ball duck. Kohli walked in amid raucous applause from the Indian fans who were soon silenced by another ripper from Afridi in his second over.

The 1.98m bowler got KL Rahul with a delivery that came in sharply to take the batsman's thigh pad and rattle the stumps. Kohli and new batter, Suryakumar Yadav attempted to hit back with some positive shots as they smashed Afridi for a six each.

Wicketkeeper Rizwan then pulled off a superb diving catch to cut short Yadav's stay at the wicket with quick bowler Hasan Ali striking in his first over. Yadav made 11.

Rishabh Pant joined Kohli in the middle and the left-right batting pair rebuilt the innings and took India to 60 for three at the halfway stage.

Pant, a wicketkeeper-batsman who survived a close caught behind call off one of his attempted reverse sweeps, kept up the charge with adventurous strokeplay.

He hit Hasan Ali for two successive sixes but finally fell to Shadab Khan's leg-spin in the next over, top-edging a ball that went high and into the hands of the bowler. Pant made 39 off 30 balls. Kohli stood firm to soak up the pressure to get to his 50 in 45 balls.

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