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MUMBAI COACH LAUDS OMAN BOWLERS
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AstraZeneca in short supply

Hundreds of people who were supposed to get the second dose of the vaccine are waiting anxiously to get the jab

Our Correspondent
Muscat

Widely used AstraZeneca and the more affordable of the two COVID-19 vaccines available in Oman is in short supply.

Hundreds of people who were supposed to get the second dose of the vaccine are waiting anxiously, keeping their travel plans on hold. They are also worried about the new vaccination rule to enter the government and commercial spaces from October 1.

Kabir Joynal Abdin, a barber, and four of his colleagues took the first dose of the vaccine on June 12 in a private hospital. The second dose was promised after 45 days by the hospital in Bausher.

When they approached the hospital, they were told 'there was no stock of AstraZeneca as



We know we will need both doses of the vaccine to travel. We may also have problems at work place and in the market due to the new vaccination rule

KABIR JOYNAL ABDIN

of now', and they'll be informed as soon as the stock arrives.

"We know we will need both doses of the vaccine to travel. We may also have problems at work place and in the market due to the new vaccination rule," Abdin said.

Like Abdin, another expat Mohammed Ibrahim, too is worried about his second dose. He took his first dose on July 25 and the appointment for a second dose was on August 19. But when he approached the private hospital in Ruwi, he was also told that he

would be informed about the availability of the vaccine.

Ibrahim got his son vaccinated and other staff first, who work at his car repair garage.

"My son is fully vaccinated. If I am not allowed to enter commercial spaces, I can manage."

An official at a private hospital on condition of anonymity said that the last batch of AstraZeneca was received by his hospital on August 10 and that batch was expiring on August 31.

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8.5mn doses of vaccines reserved

Our Correspondent
Muscat

The COVID-19 vaccination has played a significant role in bringing down the rate of hospitalisation in the sultanate, H E Dr Ahmed bin Mohammed al Sa'eedi, Minister of Health, said on Thursday.

"There has been a significant decrease in the number of patients hospitalised and those under intensive care. Precautionary measures must be followed despite the high rate of vaccination. The total doses Oman has received so far exceeds 3,950,000," H E Dr Sa'eedi said.

"We have decided to book additional doses for those aged six years and over after some countries decided to go ahead with vaccination for this age group. We have reserved over 8,570,000 doses of vaccines so far," he added.

On Thursday, only 101 new cases of COVID-19 were registered and two deaths reported bringing the total number of positive cases to 301,784 in the sultanate.

"The total number of COVID-19-related deaths reached 4,049



We expect every Omani citizen to receive the second dose by mid-September

H E DR AHMED AL SA'EEDI

and as many as 291,039 have recovered. The total number of current hospitalised patients stands at 147 including 68 in intensive care units,' the Ministry of Health said.

CoviShield, Pfizer, Moderna, Sinovac, Sinopharm, Sputnik V, Johnson & Johnson and AstraZeneca are the eight vaccines approved for use in Oman, H E Dr Sa'eedi said. "We expect every Omani citizen to receive the second dose by mid-September, and accordingly, we can start implementing the measures

issued by the Supreme Committee," he said.

"Vaccines prevent the severity of the disease, reduce the rate of hospitalisation and reduce deaths, but they do not prevent transmission of the virus. There are countries where the vaccination rate has reached 80 per cent, but the infections have returned."

Speaking about the third dose of COVID-19 vaccines, H E Dr Sa'eedi, said, "The idea of a third dose, scientifically, is premature. The World Health Organisation has not recommended a third dose of the COVID-19 vaccine."

H E Dr Sa'eedi said that Omani citizens abroad who are not vaccinated will be allowed in. "No Omani citizen who is abroad and has not been vaccinated will be prevented from returning to Oman, provided that precautionary measures are followed.

"Even with new changes to the rules, Oman reserves the right to ask for COVID-19 tests on arrival. There has been an uproar over these tests to be taken before arrival, on arrival and after quarantine, but unfortunately, many tests carried out globally may be fake."

Price that students pay

Indian schools face drop in revenues, rule out reduction in fees

Our Correspondent
Muscat

The exodus of students from Indian schools in Oman continued unabated due to the precarious financial condition of parents faced with additional burden of 'higher fees' slapped on them.

Parents are up in arms against the managements of almost all the Indian schools for their 'unfair demands' for school fees without taking into consideration the financial constraints being faced by parents due to the current pandemic.

They are aggrieved that the school managements have turned a Nelson's eye to their plight wherein many Indian expatriates are facing salary cuts/delayed payments due to which they are unable to pay fees on time.

However, school managements have been stating that due consideration is being given to deserving cases.

The Board of Directors of Indian Schools in Oman has, indeed, confirmed that there has been a massive drop in number of students as many families have returned to India after having their jobs lost or for being unable to survive the financial turmoil.

However, despite numerous pleas to school managements, a reduction in school fees is currently ruled out as the schools also need to cope with the sudden decline in revenues stemming from the exodus of students, the managements feel.

Many parents said they have opted to take transfer certificates and enrol their wards for online classes through schools based in India.

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'Terrible impact' on revenues

Asked if it was possible to offer a suitable reduction in school fees for all parents to cope with the current pressure due to the pandemic, chairman of the Board of Indian Schools in Oman, Dr Sivakumar Manickam, said that the board was aware of the dire situation and that individual schools would try to address the difficulties of parents as much as possible.

"COVID-19 has brought on a financial crisis on all organisations, but particularly, in the case of Indian Schools in Oman as they are being sustained by the fees collected from parents," he said, pointing out that there has been an exodus of families to India during the pandemic, which has considerably reduced the strength of Indian schools.

"Indian schools in Oman are non-profit-making and self-sustaining institutions. Their fee-structure is the lowest compared to other private and international schools in the region. Therefore, the schools have had a terrible impact due to the sharp fall in the number of students and the non-payment of fees by parents due to



The fee-structure of the schools is the lowest compared to other private and international schools in the region

DR S MANICKAM

the pandemic."

Even then, Dr Manickam observed that the pandemic has not dented the quality of education provided by them. "Teachers have quickly adapted to the online mode of teaching while extra-curricular activities are being organised with optimum participation of students. More hours are spent by teachers to

ensure that every child is personally attended to and followed up with the academics," he said.

Deserving cases

With regard to measures undertaken in the interest of parents, Dr Manickam said, "The schools have sympathetically attended to the grievances of parents and granted fee concession to the most affected and deserving cases. The schools will continue to address the difficulties of parents as much as possible, depending on the financial situation of the school. Also, school administrations have taken all measures to reduce expenses while all new projects are kept on hold."

The board hopes that normalcy would return soon and that the students would be back in campuses and that the revenue generation would be better through prompt fee remittance. "When there are enough funds to spare after the pandemic, each school will be able to further reach out to the parents who may have difficulties with regard to their job or low income," he indicated.

Saudi delegation led by minister of investment arriving today

Our Correspondent
Muscat

A high-level Saudi delegation headed by Eng Khalid bin Abdulaziz al Falih, Minister of Investment, will arrive in Oman on Sunday.

Eng Falih and his team will review the investment and economic opportunities in the sultanate in a visit that will last for several days, ONA reported.

A number of programmes are planned for the visitors, including a meeting of the Omani-Saudi Council, the opening of the Omani-Saudi Investment Forum



Eng Khalid bin Abdulaziz al Falih

and a meeting with Qais bin Muhammad al Yousef, Minister of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion. The delegation will also visit the Public Establishment for Industrial Estates (Mada'ayn) and the Special Economic Zone at Duqm.

The Saudi delegation will include a number of high ranking government officials and businessmen.

Oman and Saudi Arabia have been working to enhance economic cooperation with a number of ministers from both the countries visiting each other. The landmark moment came in July when His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik visited Saudi Arabia. During His Majesty the Sultan's visit, the two sides signed a memorandum of understanding on the establishment of an Omani-Saudi Co-ordination Council co-chaired by the foreign ministers.

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Oman fully prepared to ensure safe return of regular flights: CAA

Our Correspondent
Muscat

As Oman expects to welcome back thousands of residents who have been stuck outside Oman from September 1, Civil Aviation Authority (CAA) said it is ready to follow measures taken to facilitate travel.

Eng Naif bin Ali al Abri, chairman of CAA, said that to ensure a gradual and safe return of regular flights in the sultanate, the authority has developed and implemented operational plans that meet the aviation safety and security requirements.

"CAA has been keen during the last period to plan in advance for the gradual and safe return of regular flights to the sultanate since it was approved during the



The number of incoming and outgoing passenger flights decreased by 70 per cent, while the number of passengers dropped by 81 per cent. The number of cargo flights decreased by 26 per cent during the first half of 2021

ENG NAIIF BIN ALI AL ABRI

month of October 2020. It continued to follow its developments in gradual stages, as approved by the Supreme Committee," he said.

It has adapted service providers' operational recovery plans with the civil aviation legislation, rules and recommendations of the International Civil Aviation Organization.

The statistics for the first half of 2021 indicate that the activities of civil aviation in the sul-

tanate were affected by the pandemic, in line with the global impact on the sector.

The number of incoming and outgoing passenger flights decreased by 70 per cent, while the number of passengers dropped by 81 per cent.

The number of cargo flights decreased by 26 per cent during the same period.

"Civil aviation in the sultanate continues to be affected by the pandemic," Eng Abri said.

Meanwhile, discussions are going on to waive the PCR test requirements for fully vaccinated travellers within GCC, H E Dr Ahmed bin Mohammed al Sa'eedi, Minister of Health said.

"Oman is in talks with countries of the Gulf Cooperation Council to study ways in which the requirement of PCR test can be waived for travel between GCC countries for those who have received two doses of the COVID-19 vaccine," he said.

Issuance of visas for all categories from Sept 1

Our Correspondent
Muscat

The Royal Oman Police (ROP) will start issuing all types of visas for all categories from September 1, while all visas issued to expatriates since the beginning of January 2021 will be extended until the end of the year without additional fees.

Maj Gen Abdullah bin Ali al Harthi, Assistant Inspector General of Police and Customs for Operations, ROP, said on Thursday that ROP will start issuing all types of visas like before.

"Issuance of visas will return to the pre-pandemic situation, with the same procedures that were applicable earlier for all categories. However, the current precautionary measures for entering the sultanate will be applied," he said.

He added that no extra fees



Maj Gen Abdullah bin Ali al Harthi

will be imposed for the extension.

"All visas issued since the beginning of the year will be extended until the end of the year, and no additional fees will be imposed for the extension. Everyone who has employment outside the sultanate can enter the Royal Oman Police website and will find that these visas have been extended," Maj Gen

Harthi said.

He also clarified that expatriates who have valid residencies, but are outside Oman for more than six months will be handled in an easy way. "The request has to be made by the employer or sponsor at ROP offices and the issue will be addressed," he said.

Meanwhile, land borders will be opened from September 1.

"Oman will open its land borders from September 1, while adhering to the controls imposed by the Supreme Committee, including testing before arrival in the sultanate," Dr Saif bin Salem al Abri, director general of disease control at the Ministry of Health, said.

Dr Abri said that residents currently outside Oman, who have taken a single dose of a vaccine not available in Oman, should not expect to get the second dose in the sultanate.

AstraZeneca in short supply

Continued from Page 01

"There is no need to worry about the gap between the doses, even our doctor colleagues got the second dose after the gap of around 85 days," he said in an attempt to assuage the anxiety of the people for the delay.

Commenting on the mandatory vaccination rule, he said, "There are thousands of citizens and hundreds of residents who are reluctant on taking the vaccine for various reasons and the authorities are well aware." He believed the mandatory vaccine rule was announced to convince people to get the vaccine.

Another private hospital official was confident that it would get the new batch of AstraZeneca before the end of August. "Au-

thorities assured us and we are confident we will get the new batch by Sunday or Monday."

While another private hospital official stated that they might get a new batch in the first or the second week of September. "We are not sure though," he said.

He was told by the authorities that they were trying their best to get a fresh supply of AstraZeneca vaccine as soon as possible. "Our hospital though has ample supply of Pfizer vaccines," he added.

The supreme committee had an eagerly awaited press conference last Thursday announcing that the rule to enter government offices, malls and commercial space will be implemented from October 1.

Text by Syed Fasiuddin

Documentary on Dhofar released

Salalah - A short documentary - *Dhofar: A Land for All Seasons* - was released by the Directorate General of Heritage and Tourism in the Governorate of Dhofar on Thursday.

A ceremony was held for releasing the documentary under the patronage of Abdulsalam Mohammed al Murshidi, chairman of Oman Investment Authority.

The short film shows diverse, picturesque glimpses of environments all year round, as well as folklore arts, customs and traditions renowned in Dhofar. It takes the viewers on a journey through the breathtaking scenery and marvellous landscapes of the governorate in different seasons. The documentary was compiled and designed by leading photographers in Dhofar.

OPINION

SALEH MIRI, MUSCAT DAILY COLUMNIST, IS AN ARCHITECT WHO CAME TO OMAN IN THE EARLY 1980S

When I was much younger, few houses had a telephone. When it was installed at home it had five plus digits and we were watching how our grandparents were using this machine to speak to people far away. Gradually these phones became smaller and better equipped, with loudspeakers.

With time, the phone became smaller and could be used as a Wi-Fi hotspot. Today we use the phone as a vital element of our lives, to communicate, to do business, to exchange pictures, transfer money, etc. It has become the first thing that people look at when they wake up. People often sit around the table as a family and each person looks at their phone and communicates with others, rather than talking to family members.

Technology has improved our lives; and we saw how in the past, we were using four propeller aircraft to fly from one continent to another which was quite noisy and took several hours. Today, the aircraft are almost silent and move at high speeds. Once I asked the stewardess when the aircraft would take off. She responded 'Sir, we are already flying at 12000 feet'.

In all sectors technology has made progress and facilitated our lives. We are in the third decade of the 21st century and we see our world in a chaotic stage. Some troubles are due to the fact that we did not preserve nature. Extensive fires are there all around the world - in Greece, the US, Turkey, North Africa, and even Siberia. Earthquakes are happening more often and in

many places. Floods are not just happening in some remote places in Africa, but in the heart of Europe, China, and many other countries. This is the result of our mishandling of nature, which takes its revenge. We cannot abuse nature forever.

Despite our technical progress, it seems that humans are not progressing and we could say we are losing what had given us hope. Politically, many places are governed by dictators, or people only concerned with their own benefits, not allowing any opposition. When one sees what happens to Lebanon, to Belarus, to North Korea, and now to Afghanistan, where the president flees with cash in his helicopters, one wonders why we are regressing rather than evolving. Everybody is mainly concerned about making profits at any cost. Nobody leaves this planet with suitcases filled with cash. So why this desire to gain at any cost?

The main reason is that we did not pay enough attention to education. The next generation needs to have a better understanding of real values, such as generosity, friendship, tolerance, respect of the environment and others. Look at the leadership of people such as Gandhi, Mossadegh, Willy Brandt, Charles de Gaulle and others, who were devoted to the wishes of their people and who will always be remembered. They were brought up in different environments but all had been educated with real principles and respect of others. Without a radical change in the upbringing of the future generations, there is no hope for the survival of our planet.



THE ALARM BELLS ARE RINGING

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

TENDER NOTICE

Oman Water and Wastewater Services Company hereby announces the following Tenders: -

Tender No.	Description	Eligibility	Tender Fee (RO)	Last Date of Sale Tender Documents	Bid Submission Date
T/2413400/2021	Improvements of Wadi Crossing in Darsait STP	Local Companies Registered with Government Tender Board and Specialized in Road Works	115/- (Plus %5 VAT) Non-refundable	09/09/2021	27/09/2021
T/2439488/2021	Preventive and Corrective Maintenance for Trucks & Jet/Vacuum Machine Mounted on Trucks	Local Companies Registered with Government Tender Board and Specialized in Similar Works	35/- (Plus %5 VAT) Non-refundable	09/09/2021	27/09/2021

The tender documents can be purchased from Oman Water and Wastewater Services Company e-tendering page ([Supplier Login](#)) from the date of publication of this announcement until 09/09/2021. The applicants shall pay the tender fee through electronic payment gateway through [Supplier Login](#).

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

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

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

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

Decision on Friday prayers, social events soon

Our Correspondent
Muscat

The Supreme Committee in charge of dealing with the COVID-19 pandemic will take a decision on Friday prayers as well as opening up social, economic, and cultural activities in its next meeting, an official said.

Discussions among the public have been continuing on allowing worshippers to gather for Friday prayers with many lamenting a long wait. Oman suspended Friday prayers at all mosques in March this year.

H E Dr Mohammed bin Said al Maamari, Undersecretary of the Ministry of Awqaf and Religious Affairs (MARA) said, "The Supreme Committee will issue a decision on restarting Friday prayers during its meeting this week. Society has proven its ability to positively adapt in applying precautionary measures in mosques and places of worship, according to the given guidelines, and thanks to the efforts of those in charge, the ministry has not recorded anything to the contrary."



(For illustrative purpose)



Society has proven its ability to positively adapt in applying precautionary measures in mosques and places of worship, according to the given guidelines

H E DR MOHAMMED BIN SAID AL MAAMARI

As for other social and economic events, Dr Saif al Abri, director general of disease control at the Ministry of Health, said, "there is a study to open social, economic, and cultural activities,

and the Supreme Committee will issue a decision this week". Dr Abri also said since there will be 100 per cent attendance in all government sectors and institutions from September 1, vac-

Meets, events allowed at 4, 5-star hotels

The Ministry of Heritage and Tourism on Thursday announced that 4 and 5-star hotels are now allowed to rent out meeting and event halls. The entry to these facilities, however, will be limited to those who have received two doses of COVID-19 vaccines.

The ministry stated that, based on the coordination with the Supreme Committee, 4 and 5-star hotel establishments can rent out meeting and celebration rooms.

'The halls will have to operate at 35 per cent capacity,' added the statement.

cination will be a condition. "The committee will organise the mechanism for the return of employees who were unable to obtain vaccinations before September 1," he said.

Schools in Oman set to reopen on Sept 12

Our Correspondent
Muscat

Schools in Oman are all set to reopen on September 12 as vaccination drive for students and teaching staff gathers pace and new coronavirus infections decline. The opening of schools will be based on strict adherence to COVID-19 protocol.

H E Dr Madiha bint Ahmed al Shaibaniyah, Minister of Education, said on Thursday that the ministry had given schools and educational directorates the necessary authority to find various alternatives for students to continue their education during the weeks when they are at home. She said that school buses will be operated at 50 per cent capacity.



(For illustrative purpose)

"Teaching, supervisory and administrative bodies, information technology staff and parents, in cooperation with the health sector, have an active role

in the successful operation of schools, the conduct of the academic year, and the management and implementation of general education diploma

exams as intended," she said. Dr Yahya bin Khamis al Harthy, director general of curriculum development at the Ministry of Education, said, "The

ministry has a large balance of electronic curricula, and many lessons and electronic content have been recorded and are available and can be used in the next academic year."

According to the ministry plan, grades 1 to 6 student will follow a blended education system, a combination of in-person and on-line classes. Low-density schools, however, with no more than 20 students to a class, will follow the direct education system where students attend classes on all school days. The direct education system will be followed for grades 7 to 11. Schools with over 30 students to a class, however, will follow the blended education system while grade 12 students will be fully in person.



Oman wins Universal Postal Union's board membership

Muscat - Represented by the Ministry of Transport, Communications and Information Technology (MTCIT), the Sultanate of Oman has won the membership to the board of directors of Universal Postal Union (UPU) for the period 2021-24.

Oman's access to the UPU board was given during the election on the sidelines of the 27th Universal Postal Union Congress held in Ivory Coast last week.

H E Dr Ali Amer al Shidhani, Undersecretary for Communications and Information Technology, MTCIT, affirmed that the UPU members have reposed confidence in the sultanate's role and active presence in global organisations.

H E Dr Shidhani said that Oman looks forward to contributing effectively in drafting international strategies and policies of posts and electronic trade. Oman also seeks to localise successful experiences in posts and e-business.

H E Sayyid Badr bin Hamad al Busaidi, Foreign Minister, expressed his happiness on Oman

The membership would enable Oman to contribute positively to the development of international postal work strategies

H E SAYYID BADR AL BUSAIDI

winning the membership. He said that the sultanate's membership would enable it to "contribute positively to the development of international postal work strategies, embodying its pioneering role, its civilisational heritage and its historical links through times and eras".

The UPU is a United Nations' agency established on October 9, 1874. Being the second oldest international organisation, the UPU has 192 members and it is tasked with drafting global posts policies and related services. It sets criteria for posts, courier and other services.

ONA

Price that students pay when high fees hit parents

Continued from Page 01

They said they did so after the school authorities declined to consider their pleas for reduction in fees as well as to give them adequate time to pay fees for each term so that their children are not deprived of periodic assessments or online classes.

Reeling under financial constraints

Mohammad Ali, the father of a student from Indian School Wadi Kabir (ISKW) said, "A few months ago, we were allowed to pay fees every month but now they are insisting on paying quarterly fees. My salary has been delayed by a few months, and we have additional ex-

penses for vaccines as well as due to imposition of VAT for various commodities."

"It is surprising that the school managements are insensitive to our plight," he said, pointing out that the school fees are designed to include the cost of utilities (like water, electricity, etc) but these are currently not being used by students.

"Also, online classes for primary section involve teachers for around three hours a day, so children are subject to a compromised form of education but pay for normal services. At the end of the day, parents, too, have to play a supportive role in ensuring that their wards receive a decent form of academic in-

struction," he said.

Another parent belonging to the Indian School Muscat Parents (ISMP) group said, "On the onset of the pandemic, for a few months, school fees were reduced. However, it was later increased without any justification or clarification to parents. This is a severe burden when we are struggling to make ends meet. It is also unfair for schools to demand full fees when rendering online education.

"This appears as exploitation by school managements and parents have no way to confront them. School management committees should be held accountable by the board for their erratic decisions, as well as for causing

mental stress for parents who are reeling under financial constraints."

He pointed out that parents' groups have made several representations to the school authorities to put forth their grievances and have been awaiting redressal in vain. In view of such an 'unsympathetic position' taken by the managements, many parents are withdrawing their wards from Indian schools and getting them enrolled for online classes run from India to avoid paying the exorbitant fees in Oman.

P M Jabir, community welfare secretary of the Indian Social Club, agreed that the school authorities were oblivious to the plight of Indian parents who are

being forced to pay regular fees in exchange for compromised education, irrespective of the dire straits that they are in.

"I have received several pleas from parents regarding the same issue. For some cases, we try to arrange funds through benefactors, but it is not possible to do so for everyone. Many students are taking transfer certificates only because they cannot afford to pay the fees as and when demanded, and in this way, schools are also losing their bright students," he said.

He expressed hope that the Indian Embassy would step in to discuss and dissipate the matter with the Board of Directors of Indian Schools in Oman.

(Supplied photo)



Raptor restaurants serving endangered species

Our Correspondent
Muscat

Oman Environmental Services Holding Company (be'ah) has come up with a novel concept of developing 'raptor restaurants' - supplementary feeding sites for eagles and vultures - to tackle the concerns of falling population due to decline in food availability.

Raptors notably Egyptian vulture and steppe eagles, which are classified as endangered in the IUCN Red List of Threatened

Species, have found Oman to be a haven for breeding and sustainable population development. But some concerns were raised by environmentalists on their declining population, which were looked into by be'ah.

Studies carried out under collaborations between the Environmental Society of Oman (ESO) and the Office for Conservation of Environment under the Diwan of Royal Court, recorded large sightings of these birds in Al Multaqa, Tahwa, Masirah and Raysut sites which

had open dumpsites.

'These conservation bodies approached be'ah with the data, and concerns that the birds' local population was falling, citing decline in food availability due to decommissioning of traditional open dumpsites, as the reason. be'ah worked on an initiative that could boost their numbers in these areas and thus, 'raptor restaurants' were born,' be'ah stated in its Annual Sustainability Report 2020.

Developed after studying in-

ternational conservation practices, the 'restaurants' are dedicated sites where clean and safe waste from slaughterhouses is laid out for the raptors without compromising the safety and hygiene of the US Environmental Protection Agency-standard landfills, be'ah stated.

To test the success of this idea, a small-scale pilot study was launched in late 2019. It showed positive results, with bird numbers increasing from under 20 to around 500.

With the success, be'ah plans

to establish two raptor restaurants in its facilities in 2021.

Oman had over 360 traditional dumpsites a few years back that were having a negative environmental and health impact. be'ah's primary focus was first to decommission these on an urgent basis.

These sites were gradually decommissioned and through a high-risk analysis study, be'ah identified around 40 high-priority dumpsites and set a plan into motion that has so far rehabilitated 31 of them.

Oman records 3% decline in estimated oil reserves

Gas reserves slightly increased to 24tn cubic feet in 2020

Our Correspondent
Muscat

Oman's total estimated reserves of crude oil and condensates decreased by 3 per cent to reach 4.706bn barrels at the end of 2020 in comparison with expected reserves recorded in the previous year, according to the Ministry of Energy and Minerals.

Petroleum Development Oman (PDO), the sultanate's largest energy producer, contributes for 68.5 per cent of total estimated oil and condensates reserves in Oman, the ministry said in its 2020 annual report released on Thursday.

On the other hand, total reserves of natural gas in Oman are estimated to be 24tn cubic feet at the end of 2020, a slight increase from the previous year's estimated reserves.

PDO, as per the report, contributes for 55 per cent of the total estimated gas reserves in the country, followed by BP's Khazzan and Ghazeer fields with 40 per cent contribution. Other companies account for only 5 per cent of the total gas reserves.

As per the ministry's data, there are total 414 productive fields in the country, of which 342 are oil fields and 72 are gas fields.

By the end of 2020, as many as 19 companies were involved in oil and gas exploration and production operations in Oman's 37 concession areas. However, there were two relinquishments:



BP's Khazzan and Ghazeer fields contribute for 40 per cent of the total estimated gas reserves in Oman

Block 40 was relinquished by Petrotel Oman Offshore LLC and Block 66 was relinquished by MOL Oman Ltd.

New exploration

The Ministry of Energy and Minerals said that several exploration and production companies have conducted many seismic surveys in the sultanate that included multiple concession areas. Total area of the 3D seismic surveys exceeded 4,600 sqkm and the 2D seismic surveys area approximately reached 200 sqkm by the end of 2020.

'80 exploration and appraisal wells - 58 oil wells and 22 gas wells - were drilled and tested in the sultanate's oil and gas sector last year, which contributed to adding new oil and gas reserves

that will ultimately lead to continuous production,' the ministry said. It added that the petrophysical analysis and productivity tests in some of the wells showed positive results, adding new oil reserves.

The Ministry of Energy and Minerals last year concluded three new production sharing agreements for oil and gas exploration with a number of local and international companies whereby the agreed investment value will be around US\$85mn, the report added.

Gas output rises

Oman's daily average production of natural gas during the year 2020 amounted to 122mn cubic metres per day, 16.5 per cent of which was associated gas at an

average of 21mn cubic metres per day.

Non-associated gas, as per the ministry's report, constituted 79.5 per cent of the total production at an average of 101mn cubic metres per day. In addition, natural gas was imported through Dolphin Energy Company at an average of 5mn cubic metres per day.

As per the ministry's report, the number of employees working in oil and gas companies operating in Oman during 2020 reached 19,766 - 16,898 Omanis and 2,868 expatriates.

By the end of 2020, Omanisation in the upstream and downstream businesses of the oil and gas sector reached 85 per cent, an increase of 5.7 per cent compared to 2019 level.

Loan growth accelerates at GCC banks as economy recovers

Our Correspondent
Muscat

The listed banks in the GCC countries continued to post robust growth in lending activity during the second quarter of 2021, resulting in record high loan-books.

The GCC banks' aggregate gross loans at the end of the second quarter reached US\$1.68tn, up 4.6 per cent on quarter-on-quarter and 7.1 per cent on year-on-year basis, after a broad-based growth seen in all the markets, Kuwait-based Kamco Investment said in a research report.

It said net loans also showed a similar growth of 4.8 per cent quarter-on-quarter to reach US\$1.6tn, once again backed by growth in all the GCC markets.

Faster economic activity was evident in the Purchasing Managers' Index (PMI) figures for the UAE and Saudi Arabia that remained elevated during May-2021 and June-2021, well above the growth mark of 50, the report noted.

Customer deposits also showed growth in almost all the GCC markets during the second quarter of this year.

Aggregate customer deposits increased by 4.6 per cent to reach US\$2.0tn, a new record high for the GCC banking sector, as compared to US\$1.9tn at the end of the first quarter of 2021, Kamco Investment said.

Saudi banks reported the biggest sequential growth in customer deposits while Qatari banks' customer deposits remained almost flat with a marginal decline of 0.1 per cent.



Total banking sector assets in the GCC continued to show growth reaching a new record high of US\$2.64tn in the second quarter of 2021, registering an year-on-year growth of 6.7 per cent

The aggregate loan-to-deposit ratio for the sector improved slightly to 80.4 per cent, the highest in the last five quarters, but still below pre-COVID-19 levels. The report said that total banking sector assets in the GCC continued to show growth reaching a new record high of US\$2.64tn, registering a growth of 6.7 per cent during

the second quarter of 2021 against the same period a year ago. Kamco Investment said that the UAE banks continued to account for the biggest share of regional banking balance sheet with total assets of US\$840bn, accounting for a third of the total banking sector assets in the region, followed by Saudi Arabian banks at US\$771bn or 26.7 per cent of the aggregate.

'On the policy front, the economic resumption post the COVID-19 restrictions saw several targeted government support programmes announced in the region with an aim to support vulnerable sectors as well as to provide benefits including employment support, start-up ecosystem and sector specific assistance programmes,' the report said.

'Businesses are also keen on financing new projects with the ongoing low interest rates and the expectation that the rates would remain low till the end of 2022,' it added.

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Majid Al Futtaim secures \$1.5bn loan

Dubai, UAE - Majid Al Futtaim, the leading shopping malls, communities, retail and leisure pioneer across the Middle East, Africa and Asia, has signed its inaugural US\$1.5bn (AED5.51bn) Sustainability-Linked Loan (SLL), a financial instrument secured primarily on environmental, social and governance (ESG) related performance.

Majid Al Futtaim's five-year sustainability-linked loan is structured as a revolving credit facility (RCF) and is the largest corporate, non-government-linked SLL in the region and the largest in the MENA real estate sector, with over a dozen banks participating in the syndicate, according to a press release.

Ziad Chalhouh, chief financial officer of Majid Al Futtaim Holding, said, "Majid Al Futtaim continually strives to become one of the most sustainably considerate companies in the world, and this extends to genuine accountability in how we finance our operational and capital expenditures across the group.

The signing of our first sus-

tainability-linked loan comes as a result of, and in line with, our long-term strategic targets, including the production of more energy and water than we consume, reaching a net positive business model by 2040."

One of Majid Al Futtaim's core ambitions as part of this SLL is to have all its malls certified LEED Gold or better, which would be another first for the region. It is worth noting that Majid Al Futtaim Properties' hotels were the region's first to receive LEED Platinum certification across its 13-hotel property portfolio earlier this year.

Mohamed Salama, regional head of client coverage MENA, Standard Chartered Bank, said, "We are delighted to support Majid Al Futtaim in their landmark debut sustainability-linked loan by acting as sole sustainability coordinator."

"Having structured the first-ever loan in the Middle East to incorporate sustainability-linked pricing in 2018, we are proud to have brought another pioneering facility to the market," Salama added.

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MARKET ANALYSIS - OMAN

MSX declines amid weakness in services stocks

The benchmark index of the Muscat Stock Exchange (MSX30) last week recorded a 0.52 per cent drop largely due to weakness seen in the services sector stocks.

All the sub-indices recorded declines for the week led by Services index which fell by 0.59 per cent. Industrial index and Financial index also fell by 0.58 per cent and 0.10 per cent, respectively. MSX Shariah index, however, closed higher by 0.32 per cent.

Local news

►Oman Power and Water Procurement Company (OPWP) is preparing to launch the commercial operations of the Middle East's first electricity spot market by the end of 2021. The development phase of the Market Management System (MMS) required for the elec-

tricity spot market has been completed, OPWP said in its annual report. OPWP, a member of Nama Group, recently announced that it received the Authority for Public Services Regulation's (APSR) approval for the commencement of market trial phase of the electricity spot market. The spot market will enable OPWP to purchase the required electricity on a daily basis through the offers received from generation companies. The received offers will determine the daily electricity purchase prices for every half an hour based on the energy offered for trading in the market.

►A power purchase agreement (PPA) was signed by the Central Utilities Company (Marafiq), a member of OQ Group, and the Rural Areas Electricity Company (Tanweer), a member of Nama Group.



Through the agreement, Marafiq will build and operate a power plant consisting of gas fuel turbines with a capacity of more than 80MW to meet the energy requirements of Tanweer in Duqm. The power production is expected to start in November 2021.

►During the week, the Public Authority for Special Economic Zones and Free Zones (OPAZ)

signed a land reservation agreement as India's ACME Group will set up green hydrogen and ammonia project in the Special Economic Zone at Duqm. The agreement was signed by Dr Ali bin Masoud Al Sunaidi, chairman of OPAZ and Manoj Upadhyay, chairperson of ACME and Gursharan Jassal, general manager - business development of ACME. Signing the agreement

comes within the context of the authority's plan to promote investment in the field of clean energy through the production of green hydrogen and ammonia from renewable energy, and to enhance its use in various fields, such as transportation and manufacturing sector, besides other energy resources in the Sezad.

►Oman's inflation rate further increased in July as consumer prices rose after a surge in global prices of many commodities and the implementation of value-added tax (VAT) in April. The sultanate's annual inflation rate, which is based on the consumer price index (CPI), increased to 2.2 per cent in July 2021 from 1.25 per cent recorded in the previous month, according to CPI data released by the National Centre for Statistics and Information (NCISI).

Consumer prices in July 2021 remained 0.75 per cent higher compared to June this year, the data showed.

travelling, education and training, travel and tourism, environmental, and entertainment.

Recommendations

Global markets performed well during the week but became muted towards the end of the week, as investors awaited the outcome of the US Fed symposium, which could shed some clarity on the central bank's structure and timeline for bond-buying taper.

Most regional markets performed well, especially the ones with attractive valuations. We expect the trend to continue in the coming week.

Locally, we expect the market to remain range bound due to lack of triggers. Nonetheless, we advise investors to invest in high dividend yielding stocks as some stocks are trading at attractive valuations.

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US Fed may withdraw stimulus measures by year end, says Powell

Washington, US - The US economy and labour market have healed to the point that the central bank could begin to withdraw its stimulus measures by the end of the year, Federal Reserve chair Jerome Powell said on Friday.

But the Fed chief stressed that there was no hurry to raise interest rates, arguing that current inflation pressures will be temporary.

When COVID-19 hit the world's largest economy last year, the Fed jumped into action to prevent a major recession, slashing the key lending rate to zero and buying huge amounts of Treasury debt and agency mortgage-backed securities to provide liquidity to the financial system.

The pandemic recession was 'the briefest yet deepest on record', Powell said in his speech to the annual Jackson Hole central banking symposium.

With millions of jobs recovered, he signalled that the Fed may ease the pace of bond buying from its current US\$120bn per-month.

Powell provided no specifics, but instead repeated the Fed's stance that 'it could be appropriate to start reducing the pace of asset purchases this year'.

Any move to slow asset purchases would still leave a large amount of stimulus in place, and would not be a signal that an increase in the benchmark lending rate would soon follow, he said.

The timing of 'rate liftoff' from zero will be subject to a 'substantially more stringent test', Powell added.

Widespread vaccinations have allowed businesses across



Jerome Powell

the United States to reopen fully, bringing the unemployment rate down to 5.4 per cent last month, much closer to the pre-pandemic level of 3.5 per cent.

However, Powell said the recovery has further to go and the fast-spreading Delta variant of COVID-19 adds uncertainty.

He noted that total employment remains about 6mn positions below its February 2020 level 'and 5mn of that shortfall is in the still-depressed service sector'.

Meanwhile, prices have jumped as the economy restarted, pushing the central bank's preferred inflation gauge up to 4.2 per cent annually in July, well above the long-term target of 2 per cent.

Powell downplayed fears inflation could accelerate, noting that supply bottlenecks appear to be resolving and wage increases do not appear to be spilling over into prices.

Inflation is likely to decline as temporary pressures, like skyrocketing prices for used cars, recede, and Powell warned that moving to respond to factors that could prove to be temporary 'may do more harm than good'.

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Over 3,000 Ahlibank employees, family members get vaccines

In line with its core values of supporting national initiatives, Ahlibank has successfully vaccinated over 3,000 individuals, including the bank's employees and their family members. The initiative, held in collaboration with the Ministry of Health, is a testament to the bank's keen interest to protect its team members and their dear ones, thereby creating a motivated environment, ensuring seamless operations and business continuity.

Speaking on this national initiative, Mohammed al Mufargi, AGM head of Human Resources at Ahlibank said, "Ahlibank gives the highest priority to the safety of its employees and the community at large. This has been reflected in a series of initiatives undertaken within the bank that aimed mainly at preparing and responding quickly to combat the spread of this global pandemic. The launch of this vaccination campaign is an integral part of our efforts to address the spread of this virus, which has greatly affected our lifestyle, generated other dimensions and exceptional circumstances that we have never experienced before.

"Our participation in providing vaccines as soon as possible to our employees and their families is part of our responsibility to create a safe working place and environment for all. We believe this is also essential to encourage our people to continue performing undeterred and contribute effectively to Oman's social and economic development in the long-run."

Ahlibank, represented by its exceptional leadership and a strong team, has been a front-runner in taking preventive measures in accordance with the directives announced by the government and the Supreme Com-



mittee dealing with the COVID-19 pandemic. The bank continues to provide guidance and directives to its staff, not only to immunise themselves, but also to stay committed to social distancing across Ahlibank's branch network, protecting themselves and hence, protecting those around them.

"We have also implemented the strategy of security, health and safety by preparing the premises in the head office and our branches distributed in all governorates, using a full proof mechanism that safeguards our customers and stakeholders as well. We also have a Business Continuity Management framework that's aligned to the operating model and is in compliance

with regulatory requirements," added Ghada al Balushi, GM - head of Risk Management at Ahlibank.

Furthermore, Ahlibank has enhanced the level of its banking services and products through its mobile app and Internet, believing that technological transformation and digitalisation of its banking transactions contribute to enhancing the comfort, health and safety of its customers and stakeholders, to encourage them to complete their banking requirements from the comfort of their own homes.

To encourage its customers to commit to social space, the bank has announced a range of promotions that they can take advantage of when using

Ahlibank's contactless Credit Cards, and has enhanced its call centre to answer all customers' queries.

Ahlibank is continuously working with all its departments to adapt to current conditions and prepare for appropriate responses for any situation amidst this outbreak.

The bank is committed to ensuring the continuity of its available services during this time and are at the highest level of satisfaction among its stakeholders.

All the bank's processes implemented within the head office and across branches in the sultanate keep employees and the community's safety on top priority.

OAB announces winners of its Hasaad draw for July

Oman Arab Bank recently announced the names of the most recent round of draw winners for its Hasaad Savings Scheme for July. The draw saw 101 customers winning prizes of RO500 each. As for Elite account holders, two customers won RO10,000 each from Khasab and Amerat branches.

Commenting on the results of the draw, Rashad al Shaikh, head of the Retail Banking Division at OAB, said, "Our fundamental belief as a financial institution is to be able to encourage the benefits of saving habits amongst our customers, to help them fulfill their dreams and aspirations.

"With the different categories of the Hasaad scheme, regular saving is an easy practice for all individuals. In turn, we look forward to rewarding them for their efforts."

The Hasaad Savings Scheme 2021 will see 101 lucky winners each month from the 53 branches winning RO500 each. This is in addition to a Big Prize draw which will see two



winners of RO10,000 each, every quarter.

The Elite Draws will see two winners every month of RO10,000 each. This is replaced by an Elite grand prize draw conducted every three months with one lucky winner of RO25,000.

"I would like to extend my heartfelt congratulations to all the winners and urge everyone to continue saving, especially in these unprecedented times, to increase their chances of winning in the remaining draws for the year," Shaikh added.

Oman Arab Bank has a rich

and proud history as one of the first financial institutions to be established in the sultanate.

Today, the bank operates a nationwide network of 53 branches and representative offices with 150 ATMs spread across Oman.

OAB provides a complete range of financial products and services through its OAB Online App.

Customers can now digitally open an account and benefit from several other services, directly from the convenience of their mobile phones.

TAC conducts recruitment drive in support of local talent

Oman's leading automobile pioneer Towell Auto Centre (TAC) has announced a new recruitment drive for young talent across Oman. Following the campaign, interviews were conducted to fill several positions in the sales of new cars in the Barka showroom, in cooperation with the Ministry of Labour, South Batinah Directorate.

Aflah Nasser al Shibli, HR manager at Towell Auto Centre, stated that the company is committed to working alongside the directives of the Ministry of Labour to provide more job opportunities for Omani citizens in line with the government's specific goals for employment in the private sector.

More from this recruitment drive, the campaign is primarily



focused on the immediate hiring of individuals. The hired individuals will get the opportunity to work with international brands and will get a learning experience towards their growth through on the job training.

With 48+ years of glorious history, Towell Auto Centre has been proving to be a trusted

name in all automotive-related products and services and aims to be the one-stop centre in the segment. To continue its growth and business, TAC is constantly reinventing its existing relationships with brands and finding new global brand partners to enhance and enrich the lives of their customers in Oman.



Qatar Airways Cargo receives award for highest cargo uplift

Qatar Airways Cargo, the world's leading air cargo carrier was awarded by Nepal Freight Forwarders Association (NEFFA) for achieving the highest export tonnage (2850 tonnes) out of the country for 2020. The award was handed over in Kathmandu during the annual Nepal Cargo Day celebration recently organised by NEFFA.

The awards are held every year by the association to honour the top three carriers for their roles in supporting the country's exports. Qatar Airways Cargo has been securing the first position for the highest uplift from Nepal for more than a decade.

Guillaume Halleux, chief offi-

cer cargo at Qatar Airways Cargo commented, "I am proud and humbled to receive the award for highest exports from Nepal. I extend my heartfelt gratitude to all our teams who go above and beyond to support our customers. Their dedication and team work especially during the challenging times of the pandemic last year has been vital. We also appreciate the trust and support of our customers, local authorities and business partners."

Nepal is a key market for the airline and it has been operating flights to its capital city, Kathmandu since 1997. The airline's export market share in 2020 was 45 per cent of the total exports from Nepal while imports consti-

tuted 44 per cent. Qatar Airways Cargo currently operates double daily flights to and from Kathmandu for the month of August, offering more than 150 tonnes of cargo capacity each week, each way. Through its hub in Doha, the airline connects Nepal with important export destinations in the USA, Europe, Australia and Asia.

During the pandemic, it played a crucial role to facilitate trade in Nepal and support the country and businesses with import and export requirements and even introduced passenger freighters on ad hoc basis, along with its scheduled flights to and from Kathmandu, to ensure continuity of trade.

Fitbit Charge 5: Redefining strength

This past year we've endured sickness, loss, increased stress and changes with sleep, diet and exercise. As a result, we've been forced to become stronger and more resilient. But strength has taken on a new meaning for most, and being strong in today's world is more than what we can lift or how fast we can run. It's also what the mind and body can handle.

As our approach to strength evolves, we're introducing Fitbit Charge 5, our most advanced health and fitness tracker, to help keep a pulse on your fitness, stress, heart health, sleep and overall wellbeing - all in a thinner, sleek design. With a brighter, color touchscreen and up to seven days of battery life (varies with use), Charge 5 delivers the convenience features you need to focus on what's most important.

And, with six months of Fitbit Premium included, you'll get deeper insights, actionable guidance and a range of more than 500 workouts, plus mindfulness and nutritional content to empower you to do what's best for your body each day.

Sweat the smart way

With Fitbit Premium's new Daily Readiness experience, coming soon to Charge 5, as well as Sense, Versa 3, Versa 2, Luxe and Inspire 2 devices, you can understand if your body is ready for a workout or if you should prioritise recovery instead. Each



morning, you'll receive a score based on your fitness fatigue (activity), heart rate variability (HRV) and recent sleep. You'll also get an analysis of what impacted your score, and suggestions like a recommended target Active Zone Minutes goal, along with Premium content to help you make the best decisions for your body. Charge 5 also includes built-in GPS, 20 exercise modes, automatic exercise recognition and an estimate of your VO2 max. Plus, with Premium, you can access more than 200 workouts from certified trainers and popular brands like Daily Burn, barre3, obé and new high energy workouts from LES MILLS.

Reduce your stress and relax your mind
During 2020, a record-high 40

per cent of adults said they experienced a lot of stress. To help you better manage stress, Charge 5 is our first tracker to include an EDA sensor, which measures your body's response to stress through tiny changes in the sweat glands on your fingers. We first launched EDA last fall with Fitbit Sense and have found 70 per cent of users reduced their heart rate during a two-minute EDA Scan session, showing these tools can help reduce stress.

With Charge 5 you also get a Stress Management Score in the Fitbit app, so you can see each morning if you're mentally ready to take on more challenges, or if you need to recharge. With Premium, you get access to more than 300 meditation and mindfulness sessions from brands and experts, like Ten Percent Happier

and Mindful Method by Deepak Chopra to help you manage your stress. We are also announcing a partnership with Calm, the #1 App for Sleep, Meditation and Relaxation, which will soon provide Premium members with access to Calm content.

Deep dive into your holistic health

Charge 5 tracks your heart rate 24/7 and provides notifications when you are above or below your personal ranges, and while many factors can affect your heart rate, a high or low heart rate may be an indication of a heart condition that requires medical attention.

Charge 5 will be available for RO83,700, which includes a six-month Premium membership (for new or returning customers).



MoH organises workshop on change management

The Directorate General of Specialised Medical Care (DGSMC) of the Ministry of Health (MoH) represented by the Medical Rehabilitation Services Section last week organised a training workshop in management on the topic 'Leading the change'.

The workshop targeted the DGSMC employees, heads and supervisors of medical rehabilitation departments in the MoH hospitals and other health institutions.

A spectrum of topics were highlighted at the event. It introduced the concept of change and its significance at a time where health services have been over-

whelmed by the implications of COVID-19 pandemic.

The workshop touched upon means of dealing with the changes associated with the pandemic spread, implementations of leading the change principles.

Moreover, key findings on change modules and patterns in management fields were presented in the workshop along with ways of implementing them on both individual and institution level in accordance with applicable laws and regulations.

The virtual workshop was moderated by Ayman al Shukri, head of Planning at the Directorate General of Health Services

in Dakhliyah.

The training workshop seeks to upgrade personnel's administrative and leadership competency, and enhancing their performance, which reflect directly on the quality of services provided in healthcare insinuations, and thus raising patient satisfaction rate.

Malicious code spreads through a mod in popular messenger app

Kaspersky has discovered a malicious version of a popular WhatsApp messenger mod (unofficial modification of the app) called FMWhatsApp. This mod spreads the Triada mobile Trojan, which downloads other Trojans and can launch ads, issue subscriptions, and intercept a user's SMSs.

Even though WhatsApp is one of the most popular apps for instant mobile messaging, not all users are satisfied with its features. Looking for the most user-friendly version, people can be tempted to install modified versions of WhatsApp, which provide many more options than the official one. In such apps, creators often publish various ads to monetise their work. On the flip side, there are fraudsters taking advantage of this, often distributing malicious code through advertising. One example of this is FMWhatsApp - the 16.80.0 version - which includes the Triada Trojan and one of the ad libraries.

In the dangerous version of the FMWhatsApp mod, the Triada Trojan acts as a mediator. First, it collects data about the user's mobile device and then, at the owner's command, downloads one of the other Trojans to the smartphone. These Trojans can independently launch ads, issue paid subscriptions to the device owner and even log into the WhatsApp account, intercepting the SMS to confirm login - leaving the victim vulnerable to illegal activity.

"With this app, it is hard for users to recognise the potential threat because the mod application actually does what is proposed - it adds additional features. However, we have observed how cybercriminals have started to spread malicious files through the ad blocks in such apps. That is why we recommend you only use messenger software downloaded from official app stores," comments Igor Golovin, security expert at Kaspersky.

Dentons raises US\$50,000, donates 870 volunteer hours to CSR initiatives

Dentons Middle East has reached its goal of completing 50 CSR initiatives across the Middle East, raising US\$50,000, helping 30 non-profit organisations, with more than 175 volunteers putting in over 870 volunteer hours as part of the "50 for 50 Challenge".

The project also builds upon the Firm's award-winning CSR programme in the Middle East.

In September 2019, Dentons launched the ambitious quest to complete 50 different CSR initiatives in celebration of the 50th anniversary of its Dubai and Abu Dhabi offices and to inspire all members across our Middle East offices to give back to their communities.

Over the course of the Challenge, staff across all nine offices in the Middle East have cycled, run and walked for charity, raised awareness for environmental causes and health issues, collected toys for refugees, baked

cakes to raise money for various non-profit organisations and donated time towards pro bono work.

With the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, the Challenge and fundraising moved online, including virtual fitness challenges, distributing re-usable cotton face masks, and even Zoom videos to record beards being shaved off to mark the start of 'Movember'.

Paul Jarvis, Dentons' CEO for the UK, Ireland and the Middle East, comments, "It is a privilege to be part of a very different law firm with a deep regional presence and strong connections with our communities. The '50 for 50 Challenge' has allowed us to give back to these communities.

"It has been hugely rewarding and a truly fitting way to mark 50 years of being in this remarkable nation. I hope it inspires others to choose to give back to their community."

Training programme boosts skills of newly qualified English teachers in the sultanate

A group of newly qualified English teachers in Oman have successfully completed a 15-month skills-based training programme backed by the Ministry of Higher Education.

The Cambridge Teacher Training Programme is sponsored by the Ministry of Higher Education in Oman and aims to give young Omani English teachers the confidence and skills they need to play their part in increasing education standards in the country. Cambridge Assessment English worked closely with Polyglot Institute in Oman to deliver the training, which involved the teachers taking a range of Cambridge English exams and teaching qualifications.

The first milestone in the programme was celebrated recently



when 22 teachers were awarded their Cambridge English and IELTS certificates at the graduation ceremony, held at Polyglot Institute in Oman.

The event was attended by H E Dr Rahma bint Ibrahim al Mahrouqi, Minister of Higher Education, director of Polyglot

Institute, Sheikh Qassim al Harthy, along with other distinguished guests and graduates.

Speaking at the event, Karen Ryan from Cambridge Assessment English said, "The successful graduates worked really hard in the first stage of this programme and they can now take

new teaching and language skills back to their classrooms. We're delighted to be working with Polyglot Institute to deliver such an important training programme that is supported by the Ministry of Higher Education.

"Teacher training remains a key challenge for schools world-

wide, and through this programme the new graduates will improve their English language skills and learn new techniques and approaches for the classroom."

The graduates who took part started with English language classes to help them develop their English skills up to level C1 of the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages, which is the internationally recognised standard of language ability. The trainees then took IELTS, four modules of the Cambridge English teaching qualification TKT, and the online CELTA course.

The Cambridge Teacher Training Programme will now continue with the next cohort of graduate trainees later in the year.

Mdlbeast announces return of its highly anticipated flagship festival

Mdlbeast, the global entertainment and new media platform with music culture at the core, announced the return of Soundstorm, the region's biggest and loudest music festival. Scheduled to take place in Riyadh from December 16-19, the four-day festival will deliver best-in-class experiences for its audiences.

The festival will feature global superstar headliners, international dance acts and local and regional performers. The complete artist line-up will be announced soon.

Talal Albahiti, COO and head of Talent Booking and Events, said, "We are thrilled to announce the return of Soundstorm and are proud to welcome some of the industry's biggest and brightest artists and creators. Our inaugural festival in 2019 was pivotal for the music and entertainment scene in Saudi Arabia, as it put us on the world map

and revealed just how rich music culture is in the kingdom and the region.

"Saudi Arabia is undergoing transformation and with it, the popularity and appetite for music and festival culture is growing exponentially. Mdlbeast is supercharging the creative industry, and we're excited to continue showcasing it to the world."

The inaugural festival which was also known as Mdlbeast Festival took place in December 2019 and launched Saudi Arabia onto the international festival scene, with over 400,000 attendees, 80 artists, and six stages in what became the biggest music festival to have taken place in the region.

Attendees had the chance to experience performances by world renowned artists such as David Guetta, Tiesto, Martin Garrix, Steve Aoki, Afrojack, J Balvin, and Rick Ross, and local

and regional DJs among them Cosmicat, Dish Dash, Don Edwards.

This year's edition is expected to be bigger and better in terms of number of artists, attendees and stages, and the overall offerings and services.

First Release tickets are available from September 2, followed by two further releases. Soundstorm offers its attendees day passes as well as 4-day passes with four tiers to choose from: Storm Chaser; Storm Blazer; VIB and VIB-BOX. Each tier offers something different.

The most basic festival access with a party bus shuttle service from select locations in Riyadh is at SR135 per day, while exclusive VIP experience (VIB - our very important beasts), day tickets are available for SR2,999. Discounts avail for 4-day passes during the first and second releases.



US DRONE STRIKES IS TARGETS PUSHES AIRLIFT INTO FINAL STAGES

TALIBAN TAKEOVER

Kabul, Afghanistan - The United States conducted a drone strike against an Islamic State (IS) target in Afghanistan on Saturday, as the airlift of those desperate to flee moved into its fraught final stages with fresh terror attack warnings and encroaching Taliban forces primed to take over Kabul airport.

US forces overseeing the evacuation have been forced into closer security cooperation with the Taliban to prevent any repeat of the suicide bombing that killed scores of civilians crowded around one of the airport's main access gates and 13 American troops.

The attack was claimed by a regional Islamic State chapter, and the Pentagon announced it had carried out a drone attack on a 'planner' from the militant group in eastern Afghanistan.

"Initial indications are that we killed the target," said Captain Bill Urban of the Central Command.

With the airlift window narrowing sharply ahead of an August 31 deadline, more than 5,000 people remain inside Kabul airport awaiting evacuation.

But crowds pleading for entry outside the perimeter gates have thinned to hundreds, according to two people who gained access on Saturday.

The carnage of Thursday's suicide attack injected further stress and tension into a situation already fraught with panic and despair for those wanting to leave and high risk for the US forces tasked with securing the operation.

On Saturday, two senior

health officials from the former Afghan administration told AFP the death toll from the blast had topped 100, including the 13 Americans.

Some media have put the toll as high as 170.

The bombing followed a chorus of warnings about an imminent threat and, as people gathered outside the airport on Saturday, the United States issued a fresh alert for its citizens to leave areas around the main gates 'immediately'.

With the airlift window narrowing sharply ahead of an August 31 deadline, more than 5,000 people remain inside Kabul airport awaiting evacuation

In recent years, the Islamic State's Afghanistan-Pakistan chapter has been responsible for some of the deadliest attacks in those countries - massacring civilians at mosques, shrines, public squares and even hospitals.

'Future attempts'

At the White House, President Joe Biden's press secretary Jen Psaki said US national security experts consider another attack is 'likely' and the next few days will be 'the most dangerous period to date'.

Taliban spokesman Bilal Karimi tweeted that the group's fighters had already moved into



A Taliban Badri fighter, a 'special forces' unit, stands guard at the Kabul airport on Saturday (AFP)

parts of the military side of Kabul airport, but the Pentagon stressed that US forces retained control over the gates and airlift operations.

Racing to meet the Tuesday withdrawal deadline has required close cooperation with the Taliban on evacuee movements and the IS threat.

The head of US forces at Hamid Karzai International, Rear Admiral Peter Vasely, is in constant contact with the Taliban official overseeing security around the airport.

And with the Taliban poised to take over when the last US plane leaves, discussions have begun on resuming normal flight operations.

Turkish officials have held initial talks with the Taliban in Kabul about helping get the airport back up and running.

Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan said the Taliban offer was for them to oversee security at the airport, while Ankara runs logistical operations.



Afghanistan overshadows Iraq summit as Macron warns against Islamic State group

Baghdad, Iraq - The Taliban's takeover of Afghanistan overshadowed a summit in Iraq on Saturday attended by key regional leaders, with French President Emmanuel Macron warning of the threat Islamic State (IS) group militants pose.

The meeting comes as Iraq, long a casualty of militancy, also tries to establish itself as a mediator between Arab countries and Iran.

"We all know that we must not lower our guard, because Daesh (IS) remains a threat, and I know that the fight against these terrorist groups is a priority of your government," Macron said, after a meeting with Iraqi Prime Minister Mustafa al Kadhemi.

Iraq and France 'are key partners in the war against terrorism', Kadhemi replied.

Egyptian President Abdel Fattah al Sisi and Jordan's King Abdullah II flew in for the summit, while the foreign ministers of regional foes Iran and Saudi Arabia were also present.

Qatar's Emir Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad al Thani, Dubai's ruler, Sheikh Mohammed bin Rashid al Maktoum, as well as Kuwait's Prime Minister Sheikh Sabah al Khalid al Sabah and



French President Emmanuel Macron reads a document during the Baghdad conference in the Iraqi capital on Saturday (AFP)

We all know that we must not lower our guard, because Daesh remains a threat, and I know that the fight against these terrorist groups is a priority of your (Iraqi) government

EMMANUEL MACRON

Turkey's Foreign Minister were also present.

'More urgent than ever'

Iraq is seeking to play a 'unifying

role' to tackle crises shaking the region, sources close to Iraq's Kadhemi said.

Oil-rich Iraq has been caught for years in a delicate balancing act between its two main allies,

Iran and the United States.

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

Baghdad has been brokering talks since April between US ally Riyadh and Tehran on mending ties severed in 2016.

"It was really not easy to put the Saudis and Iranians in the same room," a French diplomatic source said.

But an advisor to Kadhemi

said that just the presence of the two foreign ministers together was itself a 'success'.

Macron aims to highlight France's role in the region and its determination to press the fight against terrorism, his office said.

The French President considers Iraq 'essential' to stability in the troubled Middle East, it added.

The Baghdad conference 'will make it possible to lay the framework for cooperation in the fight against terrorism', Macron said.

An IS affiliate claimed Thursday's suicide bombing in Kabul that killed scores of people, including 13 US service members.

The attack has revived global concerns that the extremist organisation, which seized swathes of Syria and Iraq before being routed from both countries, is emerging anew, analysts said.

The blast came during the final days of US-led evacuations from Afghanistan after the Taliban's lightning takeover.

A decade after the 2003 US-led invasion that ousted dictator Saddam Hussein, IS in 2014 announced a 'caliphate' in territory seized in Syria and Iraq, routing the badly prepared Iraqi army without a fight and seizing almost a third of the country.

France was part of a US-led coalition established to battle the extremists.

Iraq declared IS territorially defeated in December 2017, but the group still retains sleeper cells and continues to claim bloody attacks.

New IS 'strides'

One of the deadliest was a July bombing that ripped through a crowded Baghdad market, killing over 30 people on the eve of a key Muslim holiday.

According to Colin Clarke, senior research fellow at the Soufan Center, IS 'still has access to tens of millions of dollars and will likely continue to rebuild its network throughout Iraq and Syria'.

Its 'primary goal at the moment is to have its affiliates maintain momentum until it can sufficiently rebuild its core in the Levant', he said.

"[IS] affiliates in sub-Saharan Africa and now Afghanistan will have the opportunity to make strides in the coming year."

In July, President Joe Biden said US combat operations in Iraq would end this year, but that US soldiers would continue to train, advise and support the country's military in the fight against IS.

Washington currently has 2,500 troops deployed to Iraq.

Rasha al Aqeedi, senior analyst at Newlines Institute for Strategy and Policy, said coalition forces believed Iraq's security personnel could prevent another IS advance.

"Maybe they're not ideal, but they're good enough for America to leave the country believing that Iraq is not going to live through another 2014," she said.

AFP

RGET IN AFGHANISTAN, IAL STAGE AMID THREAT



Wounded women arrive at a hospital for treatment after two blasts outside the airport in Kabul, Afghanistan on Thursday (AFP)

Refugee exodus

Under criticism at home and abroad for his handling of the Afghan crisis and the US military withdrawal, Biden has pledged to stick to the airlift deadline and to punish those responsible for the suicide blast.

About 109,000 people have been flown out of the country since August 14, the day before the Taliban swept to power, according to the US government.

Some Western allies, including Britain and Spain, announced an end to their airlifts on Friday, following other nations such as Canada and Australia earlier in the week.

The United Nations said it was bracing for a 'worst-case scenario' of up to half a million more refugees from Afghanistan by the end of 2021.

The Taliban have promised a softer brand of rule compared with their first stint in power from 1996 to 2001, which ended when the United States invaded Afghanistan following the September 11 attacks.

But many Afghans fear a repeat of their brutal interpretation of Islamic law, as well as reprisals against those working with foreign militaries, Western missions or the previous US-backed government.

Women's role in society has been one of the biggest concerns, after they were banned from work and education and confined to their homes during the group's previous rule.

Taliban official Sher Mohammad Abbas Stanikzai, the former deputy chief negotiator of peace talks in Doha, said on Friday that women have 'an innate right' to work. "They can work, they can study, they can take part in politics and they can do business," he said.

AFP

Italy says it has taken most evacuees in EU

Rome, Italy - Italy said it has taken in the largest number of Afghans fleeing the war-ravaged country following the Taliban takeover, vowing 'not to abandon' vulnerable groups after airlift evacuations end.

Western nations are scrambling to get their citizens out of Kabul airport ahead of an August 31 deadline, along with Afghan nationals flagged as eligible to go.

Italy's Foreign Minister Luigi Di Maio said it had evacuated close to 5,000 Afghan citizens in recent days, speaking at Rome's Fiumicino airport as the last Italian

aircraft from Kabul landed with 58 more Afghan citizens on board.

"We are the EU country taking in the biggest number of Afghan evacuees," Di Maio said on Saturday.

The US, Britain and Germany are leading in terms of the number of people airlifted out of the country. Around 4,000 Afghans were among the evacuees taken in by Germany, while Italy has evacuated 4,900 Afghan citizens.

But Di Maio said it is still hoping to fly more Afghans out with the help of the United Nations, NGOs and other coun-

tries after the August 31 deadline.

"There are still so many Afghan nationals waiting to be evacuated, and we can no longer do that with the airlift," the minister said.

He added that 'a second, more difficult phase' of the evacuations process would now commence.

"Our imperative will be not to abandon the Afghan people, not to abandon Afghan women, or young Afghans and all those who over all these years have shown a great desire for evolution, for change," Di Maio said.

AFP

UK reaching the end of evacuation: Official

London, UK - Britain said it will run its last evacuation flights from Kabul on Saturday before pulling out its troops, leaving several hundred Afghans otherwise eligible to fly to the UK behind.

The UK is winding up its operation to airlift civilians ahead of the August 31 deadline for US troop withdrawal as Taliban forces prepare to take over the airport.

"We're reaching the end of the evacuation, which will take place during the course of today," General Sir Nick Carter, Chief of the Defence Staff, told BBC Radio 4 on Saturday.

"We have some civilian flights to take out but it's very few now," he said, after which "it will be necessary to bring

our troops out on the remaining aircraft".

The UK Defence Ministry said on Friday that it has evacuated over 13,000 people in the last 14 days.

The ministry said it has now stopped calling people forward for evacuation and is focusing on British nationals.

Carter said the evacuation operation had 'gone as well as it could do in the circumstances', but admitted it was 'heartbreaking' that 'we haven't been able to bring everybody out'.

The armed forces chief estimated the number of eligible Afghans who had not been evacuated to be 'in the high hundreds', saying many had feared travelling to the airport or been unable to make the

journey.

He stressed that they will be welcome in the UK if they manage to leave after the deadline, through third countries or in other ways.

Prime Minister Boris Johnson said Friday that the UK would 'shift heaven and earth' to help the Afghans left behind after the current operation ends.

Foreign minister Dominic Raab on Friday confirmed that two British nationals and the child of another British citizen were killed in Thursday's bomb attack at Kabul airport, claimed by the regional Islamic State chapter.

The last few days will be "a very demanding operation", Carter said.

AFP

'Just the clothes on me': Afghans escape to new US life

Abu Dhabi, UAE - Wazhma left everything behind to escape Taliban rule after the extremist group took control of Afghanistan, aspiring for a life 'free of threats' in the United States.

In a facility in the UAE, temporarily hosting Afghan evacuees heading to other countries, the 21 year old medical student struggled on Saturday to overcome the terror she experienced during the last days at home.

"My husband worked for the US embassy. They (Taliban) would have killed us if we stayed," brown-haired Wazhma told AFP in English, just hours before she was due to board a US-bound flight.

"I only took the clothes on me. Nothing more."

The young Afghan was among tens of thousands of evacuees who fled the capital Kabul after the Taliban swept in and deployed on the streets in mid-August.

Wazhma, her husband, brother-in-law and baby nephew spent 'the longest three days' of their lives on the road, moving in secret until they reached the gates of Kabul airport where US personnel were waiting for them.

"The situation was very bad. Thank God, we are safe," she said, holding her baby nephew tightly in her arms.

When asked whether she will



Refugees who fled Afghanistan after the Taliban takeover, gather at the International Humanitarian City, in Abu Dhabi on Saturday (AFP)

ever go back, she laughingly said, "Never, only if the Taliban go away."

She said the hardline group will never change its discrimina-

tory policies against women despite promises of a softer brand of rule than their last stint in power between 1996 and 2001 - when the US led an invasion after

the September 11 attacks.

"I'm happy I left. The only thing I am worried about now is my mother, father, sister and brother," Wazhma said.

'We were afraid'

Afghan evacuee Naim, a father of five who worked as a translator for the US army, immediately went into hiding when the Tal-

I took my kids' clothes only and our IDs. We lost everything, the carpets, the couches, the baby clothes. All gone. I just want my kids to have a good life

AFGHAN EVACUEE

iban seized the capital on August 15.

He and his family managed to escape to the airport, where they spent three nights until a US aircraft flew them to the United Arab Emirates.

"We were afraid that they would kill us," the 34 year old told AFP as he sat next to his wife, three daughters and two sons.

"I took my kids' clothes only and our IDs. We lost everything, the carpets, the couches, the baby clothes. All gone," he said.

"I just want my kids to have a good life."

Other mask-clad Afghan men, women and children were gathered in the facility in the UAE capital Abu Dhabi, some sipping on small juice boxes and others sitting on white chairs near rooms bustling

with medical staff.

They were waiting nervously before heading to the airport to board a flight to the US.

A young Afghan girl, in a black-gold sequence dress, patiently waited her turn for a medical check up, swaying her legs back and forth as she played with a stuffed bear.

Dozens of others poured in, queuing at the entrance of the facility, waiting to be checked in by Emirati employees.

Gulf nations - including the UAE, Kuwait, Bahrain and Qatar - which host US and other Western forces, have been instrumental in evacuation efforts, offering Afghans critical passage to new lives in third countries.

The UAE said on Thursday that it has helped evacuate 28,000 people from Afghanistan, adding it was hosting 8,500 evacuees on a temporary basis until they head to the US within days.

About 109,000 people have been flown out of the country since August 14, the day before the Taliban swept to power, according to the US government.

Some countries - including France and Spain - announced an end to their airlifts on Friday, following other nations such as Canada and Australia earlier in the week.

AFP

Iran's Khamenei says Biden has same demands as Trump's

Tehran, Iran - Iran's Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei on Saturday accused US President Joe Biden of making the same demands as his predecessor Donald Trump in talks to revive a nuclear deal.

The multilateral deal that offers Iran relief from sanctions in return for curbs on its nuclear programme was torpedoed by Trump's decision to withdraw the United States from it in 2018.

A last round of negotiations between Iran and the deal's remaining parties to revive the 2015 accord concluded in June with no resumption in sight.

"America's current administration is no different from the previous one, because what it demands from Iran on the nuclear issue is different in words, but the same thing that Trump demanded," Khamenei said, quoted by his official website.

"The Americans truly have no shame on the nuclear issue, and even though they withdrew from the JCPOA... they now talk in a way and make demands as it was (Iran) that withdrew," he added, referring to the deal by its official name, the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action.

Khamenei made the remarks during a meeting with President Ebrahim Raisi's newly formed Cabinet.



Iran's Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei during a meeting with President Ebrahim Raisi and his Cabinet in the Islamic republic's capital Tehran on Saturday (AFP)

The Americans truly have no shame, and even though they withdrew from the JCPOA... they now talk in a way and make demands as it was (Iran) that withdrew

AYATOLLAH ALI KHAMENEI

A year after Trump's decision to withdraw from the deal and impose sanctions on Iran, the Islamic republic retaliated by gradually waiving most of the key nuclear commitments that it had accepted under the agreement. Six rounds of nuclear talks be-

tween Iran and world powers - with the United States taking part indirectly - were held in Vienna between April and June.

The last round concluded on June 20, with no date set for another.

In his speech, Khamenei also called on Raisi to 'repair' the public's damaged trust in government.

"It's a great asset for a government to be able to attract the people's trust, which has unfortunately been slightly damaged. You must repair this."

He said the way to do it is 'officials' words and actions becoming one' and realising promises made.

Iran has in recent years been hit by several protests over the economy and living conditions made worse by punishing US sanctions.

The latest was protests over water shortages that erupted in July in southwest Iran, where, according to Iranian media, at least four people were killed.

Human rights groups outside of Iran have previously accused the Islamic republic of using force against protesters.

Iran has denied the charges and blamed violence at protests on 'opportunists' and 'rioters' linked to its enemies.

AFP



A woman gets inoculated with a dose of the COVID-19 vaccine at a camp in the southern Indian city of Chennai on Saturday (AFP)

India creates record by giving 10mn jabs in one day

New Delhi, India - India has given more than 10mn COVID-19 jabs in a single day for the first time, authorities said on Saturday, as the South Asian giant bolsters its defences for a predicted new surge.

The Health Ministry said the 10mn landmark was passed on Friday, beating the country's previous daily record of 9.2mn. The government has been stung by criticism after a brutal coronavirus wave in April and May killed more than 200,000 people.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi hailed the milestone as a 'momentous feat' for the nation of 1.3bn people.

'Kudos to those getting vaccinated and those making the vaccination drive a success,' he said on Twitter.

The government had aimed to vaccinate about 1.1bn adults by the end of the year but shortages, administrative confusion and hesitancy have held back numbers.

Only around 15 per cent have had two doses since the drive began in January.

India's daily infection count has dropped dramatically

since the devastating surge in April-May which overwhelmed its creaking health infrastructure.

Almost all restrictions on movement and activity have been lifted even though experts have warned of a new wave hitting as early as next month as the festival season starts.

Daily case numbers have started rising again above 40,000 and more than 500 deaths were reported on Saturday. The 46,000 new cases reported on Saturday was the highest figure in two months. Much of the spike has been due to a surge in the southern state of Kerala.

India is currently administering three vaccines - the Oxford-AstraZeneca jab, known locally as Covishield, Covaxin by Indian firm Bharat Biotech and the Russian-made Sputnik V.

The country has so far recorded 437,370 deaths and more than 32mn infections, the second-highest in the world after the United States. Experts say that because of under-reporting, India's true toll could be more than four times higher.

AFP

Palestinian boy wounded by Israeli army in Gaza dies

Jerusalem - A 12 year old Palestinian boy shot last week by Israeli soldiers during clashes along the border with Gaza has died of his injuries, the territory's Health Ministry said on Saturday.

Omar Hassan Abu al Nile was hit during clashes last Saturday on the sidelines of a demonstration near the border fence separating the Gaza Strip and the Jewish state, the official Palestinian news agency Wafa said.

He 'succumbed to his injuries', the Gaza's Health Ministry said in a statement.

The August 21 unrest left around 40 people wounded, according to Gaza's Hamas rulers, including a 32 year old Palestinian man who died on Wednesday.



A young Palestinian boy cries during the funeral of 12 year old Omar Hassan Abu al Nile, in Gaza City on Saturday (AFP)

day. An Israeli police officer was also shot, and remains in a critical condition.

The Israeli army said it had responded with live fire and other measures to Palestinian 'rioters'

who were hurling explosives over the border fence and attempting to scale it.

Following the clashes, Israel carried out air strikes it said were targeting weapons manufactur-

ing and storage sites of the Islamist group Hamas.

Israel struck Gaza again overnight Monday-Tuesday in response to incendiary balloons that sparked multiple fires in Israel's southern Eskhol region.

There were no reported casualties from the strikes.

New clashes took place on the border between Gaza and Israel on Wednesday, but they were less violent than those on Saturday. More protests are planned for Saturday evening, according to Palestinian sources.

The protests come just over three months after an informal truce ended 11 days of conflict between Hamas and Israel, the worst fighting between the two sides in years.

Hamas authorities said 260 Palestinians were killed by Israeli airstrikes during the conflict, including fighters.

Palestinian groups launched thousands of rockets at Israel during the fighting, killing 13 people, including a soldier, according to the military and police.

In 2018, Gazans began a protest movement demanding an end to Israel's blockade and the right for Palestinians to return to lands they fled or were expelled from when the Jewish state was founded.

The Hamas-backed weekly demonstrations, often violent, sputtered as Israel killed some 350 Palestinians in Gaza over more than a year.

AFP

Losing steam, Polish government plays immigration card

Warsaw, Poland - As it loses steam in the polls, Poland's right-wing populist government is playing the anti-immigration card that helped it win in 2015, hoping to take back the political initiative, analysts said.

Thousands of migrants - most of them from the Middle East - have crossed from Belarus into eastern EU states, including Poland, in recent months.

The EU suspects the influx is engineered by the Belarusian regime in retaliation against increasingly stringent EU sanctions, with Poland the Baltic states calling it a 'hybrid attack'.

Political attention in Poland in recent weeks has focused on a group of around 30 migrants camped out on the border between Poland and Belarus.

Poland is refusing to let in the migrants, said to be Afghans by a charity trying to help them, or give them aid without the consent of Belarus.

"It cannot be ruled out that there will be early elections next year... and it is by no means certain that the Law and Justice (PiS) party will win a majority or manage to piece together a coalition," said Agata Szczes-



A Polish soldier works on the construction of a barbed wire fence on the border with Belarus in Zubrzyca Wielka near Bialystok, on Thursday (AFP)

niak, a political analyst for the news portal OKO.press.

The government lost its formal parliamentary majority earlier this month after the departure of a junior coalition partner.

A recent poll by Kantar also found that PiS had fallen by three

points in the polls and is now neck-and-neck with the main opposition grouping, Civic Platform, at 26 per cent.

"To go back up in the polls, PiS is trying to replay what happened in 2015 but even more so. It is focusing public emotion around the image and rhetoric of

a war" against migrants, Szczes-

niak said. During Europe's migration crisis of 2015, PiS leader Jaroslaw Kaczynski scored electoral points in parliamentary elections that year with his anti-immigration rhetoric, including warnings about the diseases and

'all sorts of parasites' that the migrants might bring with them.

'Holy Polish territory'

The government has remained intransigent over the migrants on the border even after multiple appeals from the UN refugee agency, the Council of Europe

and the European Court of Human Rights.

Prime Minister Mateusz Morawiecki has said he is protecting 'holy Polish territory'.

Dressed in military-style wear, he has visited the border to announce the building of a fence.

Culture Minister Piotr Gilinski has promised to 'defend Poland against migrants' and Defence Minister Mariusz Blaszczak has sent 2,000 soldiers to the border.

"What is happening at the border is political gold [for the government]," said former EU chief Donald Tusk, now head of Civic Platform.

Adam Szostkiewicz, a political commentator for the weekly Polityka, said the government was 'building its election campaign around this'.

But analysts pointed out that public feeling around the issue has changed in recent years.

Many Poles sympathise with Afghans and are growing used to higher levels of immigration in the country, particularly of Ukrainians and Belarusians.

"At the time, around 70 per cent of Poles said they were op-

posed to letting in refugees. Today, it is 55 per cent," said Szczesniak.

Confusion

The government may also be sending a mixed message.

In recent days, it has also evacuated almost 1,000 Afghans who worked for Poland's military contingent.

"On the one hand, the PiS is helping Afghans and on the other it is rejecting them. This creates confusion," said Szczesniak.

Szostkiewicz said the fact that the crisis could be orchestrated by Minsk 'does not justify the lack of basic empathy... and Poles can see that'.

The situation of the group blocked at the border has also prompted pleas from Poland's Catholic Church, which is traditionally close to the current government.

Poland's leading Catholic clergyman, Archbishop Wojciech Polak, has appealed for political leaders 'to be guided above all by the spirit of hospitality, respect for new arrivals and goodwill'.

AFP

SUNFLOWERS

Gogh's glory

August, the month when sunflowers bloom, is the right time to remember Vincent Willem van Gogh, a Dutch post-impressionist painter who is considered the most influential figures in the history of Western art

In less than a week, in August 1888, Vincent van Gogh, the legendary Dutch painter, painted a series of still-lives of Sunflowers. Although they failed to sell during his lifetime, they would now be worth an unimaginable sum. Today, these sunflowers are arguably the world's most instantly recognisable artworks.

It is less known that Gogh painted four still-lives of sunflowers in the Yellow House in Arles in 1888. The first, with three sunflowers, has always been hidden away in private collections. The second, with six flowers, was destroyed in a bombing raid in Japan during the Second World War.

August - the month when sunflowers bloom and the anniversary of Gogh's paintings - is an appropriate time to delve into these masterpieces. Here are a few surprising facts about Gogh's glory on still life:

Van Gogh's sketches in the garden of a bathhouse in a red-light area

Vincent made a delightful drawing of a garden bed bursting with soaring sunflowers (he also included a cat and added his tiny signature near the bottom of the wooden bucket). Writing to his brother Theo a week before tackling the four Sunflower paintings, he described it as 'the little garden of a bathhouse'. Of the four bathhouses in Arles, the closest to the Yellow House was in Rue de Vers (now Place Marius Jouveau), in the then red-light district. This apparently tranquil back garden may well have been a haven behind a rowdy street. It is even possible



that Vincent picked the sunflowers for his paintings in this very spot.

Gogh only turned to Sunflower still-lives because of the wind and the rain

On 18 August 1888, two days before beginning the Sunflowers, Gogh complained there was 'the devil of a mistral - a fierce wind that blows down the Rhone valley. This made it difficult to keep a canvas on his easel. A few days later, there was heavy rain. Vincent then planned to paint portraits, but again he was stymied. As he wrote to Theo: "I've missed some models



that I hoped to have these past few days." Unable to tackle portraits inside the Yellow House (his studio was through the green door), he turned to still-lives.

Gogh did not actually paint the flowers in a pot

Gogh liked to paint what he could see, so it is usually assumed that he placed his sunflowers in a pot in front of his easel. A bunch of sunflowers do not quite fit in rustic pots because their stems are too thick. Gogh presumably had a similar pot in his kitchen-studio to serve as his model, but the 15 sunflowers were not actually placed

in it (Gauguin's portrait of Vincent making a later copy of his Sunflowers is a partly imaginative scene).

Gogh celebrated the completion of his Sunflowers with a shopping spree

Gogh started his series of Sunflowers on Monday, August 20, 1888 and finished on the following Friday. He then relaxed by temporarily abandoning his studio for a shopping expedition in town. Although notorious for his shabby clothes, he returned with a black velvet jacket of quite good quality for 20 francs (a surprising purchase in the sweltering heat) and a large yellow straw hat. Both items may appear to be hanging behind his bed in the painting he made of his bedroom two months later.

Sunflowers in Polynesia as a tribute to Gogh

In 1901, Gogh's friend Gauguin, then in Tahiti, painted four still-lives of sunflowers resting on a chair - a salute to his long-departed friend. He had grown the flowers with seeds imported from France. Later that year, Gauguin set off for the remote Marquesas Islands.

In March 1902, he wrote to his Paris dealer, Ambroise Vollard: "Please be good enough to send me by post the flower seeds mentioned on the enclosed list. Get them from the firm of Vilmorin, that is the place where one can be sure of getting fresh seeds." However, when the seeds eventually arrived in the Marquesas, in 1903, Gauguin had been dead a few weeks before.

Paintings fade like flowers, wrote Van Gogh

A few years ago, the yellow petals and stems of Vincent van Gogh's January Sunflowers in the Van Gogh Museum, in Amsterdam, were found to be microscopically wilting.

Researchers at the University of Antwerp, in Belgium, and the Technical University of Delft in the Netherlands, after examination of the pigments of the famous painting in the Van Gogh Museum in Amsterdam, concluded that one of two chrome yellow pigments he used is sensitive to light and has a tendency to turn from very pale yellow to an almost olive green or ochre over time.



The unstable chrome yellow was encountered in the pale yellow background and the bright yellow petals, but also in the green stems and flower hearts, thus indicating their higher risk for past or future darkening, a report said.

One of the goals of the Van Gogh Museum is to research the life and work of Vincent van Gogh and the art of his time, including his painting techniques and working method and the discoloration of the paintings over time.

The latter issue was the focus of the museum's REVIGO (Reassessing Vincent van Gogh) project conducted be-

tween 2013 and 2017. The project was launched to gain a clearer understanding of the extent to which the colours in Van Gogh paintings have diminished in intensity.

Van Gogh once wrote that 'paintings fade like flowers'. The REVIGO project was focused on identifying the original pigments and colours used by Van Gogh, how they have changed over time, and the mechanisms of the discoloration process. Both traditional and modern analytical methods were used, including advanced image analysis and machine-learning techniques.

FOOTBALL ROUND-UP

FIVE-STAR CITY PILE ON MISERY FOR ARSENAL



Manchester City's Ferran Torres (L) celebrates with teammates after scoring against Arsenal during their English Premier League match on Saturday (AFP)

ENGLISH PREMIER LEAGUE

London, UK - Mikel Arteta urged his Arsenal flops to 'look in the mirror' after a dismal 5-0 thrashing at Manchester City, while Everton extended their strong start with a 2-0 win at Brighton on Saturday. Arteta's side have lost their first three league games and are yet to even score a goal this term.

Arsenal sit bottom of the Premier League after their worst start to a season since 1954 as pressure mounts on under-fire boss Arteta. His switch to a back three failed to halt a slick City

attack that suggested they are more than capable of defending their Premier League title this season despite missing out on Harry Kane and Cristiano Ronaldo.

Ilkay Gundogan opened the floodgates before Ferran Torres pounced on shocking Arsenal defending to double City's lead inside 12 minutes. Arsenal's task was made even harder when Granit Xhaka needlessly lunged at Joao Cancelo and was shown a straight red card.

Gabriel Jesus made it 3-0 before half-time before Rodrigo and Torres with his second of the af-

ternoon rounded off the scoring.

"I'm really disappointed with the things that happened on the pitch and the summary after three games, losing all of them, doesn't make it any easier," Arteta said. "It is time to reflect and look in the mirror, each of us, and try to change the dynamic straight away because we need to pick up results."

Despite Arteta's woes, Manchester City boss Pep Guardiola insisted Arsenal should keep faith with his former assistant.

"I love him, we love him," Guardiola said. "The period we

worked together, these two or three seasons was a key point to build what we now have.

"I know, completely, his talent. I am pretty sure the moment will come when everything will be back and he will do a job because he is an excellent manager."

At the Amex Stadium, Rafael Benitez's Everton extended their unbeaten start under the former Liverpool boss. Everton winger Demarai Gray drilled past Brighton keeper Robert Sanchez in the 41st minute.

Joel Veltman felled Seamus Coleman for an Everton penalty

Man United agree deal with Ronaldo

Manchester, UK - Cristiano Ronaldo said he achieved 'great things' at Juventus after Manchester United announced on Friday they have reached a deal to re-sign the Portuguese star. The 36-year-old made his name on the world stage in six years at United between 2003 and 2009 before moving to Real Madrid for a then world record transfer fee.

He became a legend at Madrid, scoring a remarkable 450 goals in 438 matches in a glittering nine-year spell that included four Champions League triumphs and winning

the *Ballon d'Or* for the world's best player four times. Ronaldo joined Juventus in 2018 and won two Serie A titles, but his time in Turin has not lived up to expectations.

"Today I depart from an amazing club, the biggest in Italy and surely one of the biggest in all of Europe," Ronaldo posted alongside a compilation of best moments at Juventus on Instagram.

Sky Sport Italia reported that the United have offered Juve US\$33mn, agreeing a two-year deal with the superstar worth US\$29.5mn per season. AFP

OTHER RESULTS:

SCOTTISH PREMIERSHIP

Saturday: Dundee United 0 Hearts 2, Hibernian 2 Livingston 0, Motherwell 1 Dundee 0.

ITALIAN LEAGUE

Friday: Verona 1 Inter Milan 3, Udinese 3 Venezia 0.

GERMAN LEAGUE

Friday: Borussia Dortmund 3, Hoffenheim 2. Saturday: Stuttgart 2 Freiburg 3, Mainz 3 Greuther Fuerth 0, Augsburg 1 Bayer Leverkusen 4.

AFP

QUICK RUN

Ymer to take on Ivashka in final at Winston-Salem

Sweden's Mikael Ymer upset rising Spanish star Carlos Alcaraz 7-5, 6-3, at the Winston-Salem Open on Friday. In the final, the Ymer will face Ilya Ivashka, who is also in his first final. The Belarusian hammered Finland's Emil Ruusuvuori 6-2, 6-1 in the other semifinal. Elsewhere, Olympic bronze medalist Elina Svitolina posted a 6-1, 6-7 (4/7), 6-3 win over Rebecca Peterson to reach WTA final at the hardcourt event in Chicago. The Ukrainian takes on ninth-seeded Alize Cornet of France who beat Russian Varvara Gracheva 4-6, 6-1, 6-0 in the other semifinal.

Revised 2021 F1 calendar announced

Formula One announced a revised 22-race season on Saturday. After the Belgian GP the following three races at Zandvoort in the Netherlands, Italy and Russia remain unchanged. The Turkish GP is now being held a week later than on October 10. The United States GP will be on October 24 but the races in Mexico and Brazil will be now on November 7 and 14 respectively. The slot for the Australian GP on November 21 will now be held at another venue, possibly Bahrain, or Qatar. The season concludes with the Saudi Arabian GP at Jeddah on December 5 and the Abu Dhabi finale on December 12.

AFP

Verstappen masters rain to claim pole

FORMULA ONE

BELGIAN GRAND PRIX

Spa-Francorchamps, Belgium - Red Bull's Max Verstappen mastered the rain to claim Belgian Grand Prix pole on Saturday, snatching the fastest time in qualifying from surprise package George Russell of Williams.

Lewis Hamilton's Mercedes will start on the second row as he goes for his 100th Grand Prix win, Daniel Ricciardo's McLaren completing the second row.

Qualifying was marred by a heavy crash in Q3 involving the McLaren of Lando Norris, whose hopes of a first ever pole bit the dust at Eau Rouge. With the Briton thankfully escaping serious injury, nine cars took to the track when the shoot-out resumed after a 40-minute red flag intervention. Fellow Briton Russell was poised to give Williams an astonishing first pole since 2001 with seconds of Q3 to go.

But the young driver's brilliant time was narrowly shaded by Verstappen in the Dutch driver's final flying lap.

Russell still had the satisfaction of placing in front of Hamilton, with Russell in contention alongside Valtteri Bottas for the second Mercedes drive in 2022.

"I'm absolutely buzzing," said the Williams man.

Hamilton said it had been 'a very difficult day for everyone'.

‘Treacherous’

"I'm just trying to stay positive, focused and calm. Max did a great job and a great job also by George - that's fantastic," added the seven-time world champion who is eight points clear of Verstappen in the drivers standings.

"We're first and that's the most important thing," said Verstappen. "It's an amazing track to drive and very difficult in the wet. I'm super happy to qual-



Red Bull's Max Verstappen celebrates after taking pole position for the Belgian GP at the Spa-Francorchamps circuit in Spa on Saturday (AFP)

ify like this after the (summer) break."

Q3 got off to a dramatic start when Norris came badly unstuck in the treacherous wet conditions. The Briton lost control of his McLaren, his car spinning multiple times from one side of the track to the other after the rear end hit the barriers at Eau Rouge. The only one of his four tyres intact was the front left.

Sebastian Vettel, who had called for the Q3 session to be stopped a little while earlier, drove up in his Aston Martin to make sure the 21-year-old was okay. The German, a four-time former world champion, only drove on when he got a thumbs up. Norris' team came over the radio asking "Lando, are you okay, are you okay?" with the shaken, but seemingly unharmed, driver replying "Yes, Sorry boys we should have had a good one. I've let you down."

The medics then helped him gingerly out of his cockpit.

The session was red-flagged as stewards hurried to clear the debris from the stricken McLaren off the track. Norris' mechanics were set for a long night getting it roadworthy in time for Sunday's race.

A McLaren statement on Twitter reported: "Lando is currently undergoing checks at the trackside medical centre."

Norris, third in the drivers championship, had led qualifying through the first two sessions.

He was in a great position to claim his first ever pole and end up at the front of Sunday's grid, instead he ended up in the medical centre.

After the lengthy stoppage the session got back underway with 8.59 minutes of Q1 left on the clock, and a trick up Russell's sleeve.

AFP

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Wahaibi re-elected as OFA chairman

Hon Lujaina elected as woman board member with maximum votes



Sheikh Salim al Wahaibi (C) presides over an informal meeting with the newly-elected OFA board members after the conclusion of the association's AGM at the Sheraton Oman on Saturday

Ashok Purohit
Muscat

OFA BOARD ELECTIONS

Sheikh Salim al Wahaibi retained the post of Oman Football Association (OFA) president in style for the 2021-25 term as he defeated Jassim al Shukaili in a direct fight at the OFA annual general meeting (AGM) held at the Sheraton Oman on Saturday.

Wahaibi polled 37 votes to Shukaili's seven for the post of chairman at the AGM that was attended by all the 44 clubs. Shukaili was the incumbent vice-president in the OFA board.

Also on Saturday, in a major boost to women's football and women sports, Hon Lujaina Mohsin Darwish was elected to the board with the maximum 39 votes polled in her favour among all the candidates in fray across various posts.

Lujaina, a former Ahli-Sidab Club chief and a leading Omani businesswomen, beat Fatma al Fazari, for the post reserved for a woman in the board.

In the new term, of 2021-25 there would be only one vice-president and Mohsin al Masroori was re-elected as the vice-president with 25 votes. He

defeated Khalid al Ghailani, who polled 19. In the previous OFA board there were two vice-presidents in Masroori and Shukaili.

For the six posts as board members, there were a total of 18 candidates in the fray.

Ibrahim al Hosni from Saham Club and Qutaiba al Ghailani from Al Arouba polled the maximum 26 votes each while Ali al Ajmi of Al Nasr Club got 23 to make it to the board.

Nasser al Hadabbi of Al Mussanah, Ahmed Haddad of Dhofar and Ibrahim al Alawi of Al Tale'a Club were elected to the board with 19 votes each.



Sheikh Salim al Wahaibi

Soon after the AGM, Wahaibi held a informal meeting with the newly-elected board members in the presence of OFA general sec-



Hon Lujaina Mohsin Darwish

retary and CEO Fahad al Raisi and Sheikh Shabib al Hosni, deputy CEO of the OFA.

@ashokmuscat



Honda Spanish rider Pol Espargaro in action during the British MotoGP at Silverstone circuit in Northamptonshire, UK, on Saturday

Honda's Espargaro savours season's first MotoGP pole

BRITISH MOTOGP

Silverstone, UK - Pol Espargaro was made to wait just a little bit longer for the pole position that could revive his disastrous first season at Honda at Silverstone on Saturday.

The Spaniard had recorded the fastest time of 1min 58.889sec when compatriot Jorge Martin was credited with an astonishing 1:58 right at the end of qualifying for the British Moto Grand Prix.

As both riders circled the track gesturing in disbelief, it took the timekeepers a few minutes to realise that the Pramac Ducati rider had cut across the chicane on his lap.

That left Italian Francesco Bagnaia of the factory Ducati team second fastest with 1:58.911. French championship leader Fabio Quartararo completed the front row of the grid for Yamaha.

Martin ended up fourth fastest after an earlier time.

He is joined on the second row by the second Honda Spaniard Marc Marquez and Pol's older brother Aleix Espargaro of Aprilia.

Valentino Rossi, in his last British Grand Prix, was eighth fastest and will start on the third row.

Espargaro, who has never won a MotoGP race, moved to Honda this season and had not recorded a pole position or a podium finish in the first 11 races at his new team.

"We were just celebrating like if I won the race," he said.

Italian Lorenzo Savadori, who tried to make a comeback on his Aprilia on Friday after undergoing surgery on a fractured right ankle in early August, has withdrawn for the rest of the weekend.

AFP

Vio repeats Rio gold, McFadden wins 18th medal

Tokyo, Japan - Fencing icon Beatrice 'Bebe' Vio of Italy successfully defended her women's Paralympic gold on Saturday as US wheelchair racing legend Tatyana McFadden won her 18th Paralympic medal.

Vio, one of the world's best-known Paralympians, was in unstoppable form as she defeated China's Zhou Jingjing 15-9 in the Women's Individual Foil Category B gold medal match, just as she had done in Rio five years ago. A total of 54 gold medals were up for grabs on Saturday across nine different sports, including 17 athletics finals at the Olympic Stadium.

McFadden took bronze in the women's T54 5,000m to extend her streak of finishing on the podium in every Paralympic race she has entered since 2008.

Fleur Jong of the Netherlands won the women's T64 long jump, beating French defending champion Marie-Amelie Le Fur with a jump of 6.16m.

Spain's Susana Rodriguez, who helped fight the coronavirus in her job as a doctor,



Italy's Beatrice 'Bebe' Vio celebrates after winning fencing gold

won gold in the women's PTVI triathlon. Britain's Kadeena Cox will also turn her attention to athletics after winning her second cycling gold in the team sprint. She will try to defend her T38 400m title. Also at the velodrome, husband and wife

Neil and Lorie Fachie of Britain won gold within 15 minutes of each other.

Afghan Paralympians to compete

Meanwhile on Saturday, Afghanistan's two Paralympic



Tatyana McFadden (L) celebrates with teammate Susannah Scaroni (R) (AFP)

athletes arrived in Tokyo and will compete at the Games, the International Paralympic Committee (IPC) said. Zakia Khudadadi and Hossain Rasouli were evacuated last weekend to France from the Taliban-controlled country in a 'major global operation', the IPC

said. "Zakia and Hossain have continued to express their absolute desire to come and compete at the Tokyo 2020 Paralympic Games," the committee's chief Andrew Parsons said in a statement.

AFP

Every day, all day!



England square series with Robinson five-for

Hosts rout India by an innings and 76 runs in the third Test at Headingley

ENGLAND VS INDIA
THIRD TEST: DAY FOUR
Leeds, UK - It promised to be a high-stakes morning. On one side, India's two most experienced batters, out of form on this series, but who had rediscovered a little of their resilience on day three. That they had blue skies to bat beneath will have put them more at ease, also. On the other, James Anderson and co. running in with a bright red Dukes, on a Headingley surface that never really dies. It was supposed to be a big showdown, but for India, it turned out to be a shambles. They lost their last eight wickets for 63 runs; their last seven for 41.

And they didn't last till lunch, going down by an innings and 76. Ollie Robinson, England's best bowler in the second innings, claimed five for 65 - a second career five-for in just his fourth Test. Craig Overton took two wickets to wipe out the tail and seal the match. Moeen Ali produced a big-spinning beauty to get a wicket of his own, and Anderson was unlucky to wind up with just one dismissal to his name - he'd been all over Virat Kohli in his first spell. It didn't take long for England to strike. Midway through the fourth over of the day, Pujara - who had largely left judiciously until then - shouldered arms to a Robinson inswinger that struck



England's Ollie Robinson (C) celebrates with teammates after taking the wicket of India's captain Virat Kohli on the fourth day of the third Test on Saturday

him low on the pad, just outside off, and which would have gone on to cannon into off stump. England had to use a review to get that decision. Pujara had begun the day nine runs short of what would have been his first Test hundred since January 2019, but did not add to his score. Kohli battled on at the other end, surviving an especially tense Anderson over in which he was required to overturn a caught behind decision, via DRS. Having begun the morning on 45, India's captain got to fifty in the next over, whipping Robinson through midwicket, then

smoking him down the ground, before he edged the last ball of that over to first slip, having prodded at a ball that left him slightly. He was out for 55. Then, the wickets came like a flash flood. Anderson had Ajinkya Rahane nicking off, the ball again seaming away a touch as the batter hung his bat out. Rishabh Pant tried a couple of advancing hoicks, but was caught defending. Mohammed Shami was bowled when a Moeen off-break ripped from way outside off stump, and through the gate. Robinson then had a leaden-footed Ishant Sharma

edge through to the keeper, Ravindra Jadeja had some fun thumping a few boundaries but eventually he succumbed to Overton. On day four, there was little of the resolve that had defined India's day three performance. India now have four days off before the fourth Test, which in theory, should be played in conditions more to their liking, at The Oval. Following the high of Lord's though, this Test at Headingley, which has now featured two plunging collapses, is almost certain to have deflated them. Cricinfo

SCOREBOARD		
India 1st Innings: 78		
England 1st Innings: 432		
INDIA 2nd INNINGS		
Rohit Sharma	lbw b Robinson	59
KL Rahul	c Bairstow b Overton	8
C Pujara	lbw b Robinson	91
V Kohli	c Root b Robinson	55
A Rahane	c Buttler b Anderson	10
R Pant	c Overton b Robinson	1
R Jadeja	c Buttler b Overton	30
M Shami	b Moeen Ali	6
Ishant Sharma	c Buttler b Robinson	2
J Bumrah	not out	1
M Siraj	c Bairstow b Overton	0
Extras: (b 4, lb 4, nb 5, w 2)		15
TOTAL: 278 in 99.3 overs		
Fall of wickets: 1-34, 2-116, 3-215, 4-237, 5-239, 6-239, 7-254, 8-257, 9-278, 10-278		
Bowling: J Anderson 26-11-63-1, O Robinson 26-6-65-5, C Overton 18.3-6-47-3, S Curran 9-1-40-0, Moeen Ali 14-1-40-1, J Root 6-1-15-0		



India's captain Virat Kohli

Kohli not in favour of sixth batsman

Leeds, UK - With two collapses bookending India's innings defeat at Headingley, there have been suggestions - not all post facto either - that India should play six specialist batters and that their bowling unit is good enough to take 20 wickets, but India's captain Virat Kohli practically ruled out that combination, saying he doesn't believe in that plan, and never has. "I don't believe in that balance," Kohli said at the post-match press conference on Saturday. "I have never believed in that balance. Because either you can try to save a defeat or try to win the game. We have drawn games in the past with similar number of batters in the team. So, if your top six or seven don't do the job, that extra batter is no guarantee of bailing you out every time. "You have to accept that as a team you take responsibility and pride in doing the job for the team. If you don't have the ability or the resources of taking 20 wickets going into a Test, then you are only playing for two results. And that's not how we play." Kohli told Michael Atherton at the post-match presentation that if the pitch in the remaining Tests have enough assistance for fast bowlers, 4-1 would be the likely combination. "That depends on the pitch," Kohli said. "We have to

obviously assess the surface that we are going to play on. Forecast is something that no one really knows in this country. It all depends on the pitch. "I think this template works. If you are consistent enough, the pressure from the fourth seamer, especially when you lose the toss and you have to bowl first, that comes in very handy because when you have two spinners you can only attack with three seamers and then the spinners are into play on a fresh wicket on Day One." With three back-to-back Tests deciding the series, you can be all but sure that India will rotate the fast bowlers even if they decide to play four of them. "That's bound to happen," Kohli said. "It is a logical and sensible thing to do. You obviously don't want to push individuals to a point where they break down. That conversation is very important. Very sensible and logical one at that as well. "We will have that conversation with individuals and see who is placed where physically and who needs to have a game off. You can't expect with a short turnaround like this for guys to play four Tests in a row. So, we will have to assess who are the guys who will be given that many days to recover and be okay for the fourth one." Cricinfo

Schedule for WCL Two series in Oman released

Dubai, UAE - The ICC announced the resumption of the World Cup League (WCL) Two for the first time since February 2020, with two series scheduled for next month. Oman will play host to both series to be played at the Oman Cricket Academy Ground. The first tri-series involves Nepal and the USA with the six ODIs taking place between September 13-20. The second will see Oman welcome PNG and Scotland between September 25-October 2. Each team will have a maximum of eight points available as qualification to the World Cup 2023 restarts for League Two. Currently Oman sit on top of the standings with 16 points after ten matches, followed by the USA in second place with 12 points from 12 matches. After the 21 tri-series have been completed the top three teams will confirm their place in the World Cup Qualifier 2023. The bottom four teams will drop into the World Cup qualifier playoff 2023 - which is a repechage event to the global qualifier - and will be joined by the winner of Challenge League A and B. The top two teams

THE FIXTURES		
	SEPTEMBER 13 NEPAL VS USA	
	SEPTEMBER 14 OMAN VS NEPAL	
	SEPTEMBER 16 OMAN VS USA	
	SEPTEMBER 17 NEPAL VS USA	
	SEPTEMBER 19 OMAN VS NEPAL	
	SEPTEMBER 20 OMAN V USA	
(All matches begin at 2.30pm)		
	SEPTEMBER 25 PNG VS SCOTLAND (9.30am)	
	SEPTEMBER 26 OMAN VS PNG (9.30am)	
	SEPTEMBER 28 OMAN VS SCOTLAND (9.30am)	
	SEPTEMBER 29 PNG VS SCOTLAND (2.30pm)	
	OCTOBER 1 OMAN VS PNG (2.30pm)	
	OCTOBER 2 OMAN VS SCOTLAND (2.30pm)	

from the playoff will keep their hopes alive of participating in India 2023, by qualifying for the World Cup Qualifier 2023. Cricinfo



Cairns paralysed after stroke during surgery

Sydney, Australia - Former New Zealand allrounder Chris Cairns is paralysed in his legs after suffering a stroke in his spine following emergency heart surgery in Sydney, New Zealand media reported on Friday. Cairns, 51, had returned to his home city Canberra but remained in a serious condition, reports said, citing a statement from his lawyer Aaron Lloyd. "During the life-saving emergency heart surgery Chris underwent in Sydney he suffered a stroke in his spine. This has resulted in paralysis in his legs," the statement said. "As a result he will be undertaking a significant rehabilitation process at a specialist spinal hospital in Australia. "Chris and his family remain appreciative of the immense public support as they deal with this difficult time. They also appreciate the way in which their privacy has been respected." Cricinfo

Whatmore to step down as Nepal's head coach

Kathmandu, Nepal - Dav Whatmore has communicated to Cricket Association of Nepal his wish to resign as head coach of the men's national team. The next round of World Cup League Two matches in Oman on September 19 will be his last assignment. The Nepal team are currently camping in Muscat, ahead of the WCL series. It is understood that 67-year-old Whatmore's decision was influenced by the COVID-19 pandemic, which has made it difficult for him to see his family. Whatmore, the former Sri Lanka, Bangladesh, Pakistan and Zimbabwe coach, was appointed as Nepal's head coach in December last year and took charge at the start of 2021 with qualification for the 2022 T20 World Cup in Australia the primary focus. Nepal failed to qualify for the 2021 edition. Whatmore had taken over after Nepal were without a head coach for around ten months following the resignation of Umesh Patwal. Nepal are currently sixth in the seven-team CWC League 2 table, with four points from four games. Some of the series in the competition have been affected by the pandemic, and that has



Dav Whatmore, Nepal coach

meant Oman, the table-toppers at this stage, have played ten games, while USA, currently second on the table, have played 12 games. In September, Nepal will face the home side and USA, with the hope of moving some way up the table. Whatmore's highest honour as coach remains steering Sri Lanka to a 50-over World Cup title in 1996. He then went on to oversee Bangladesh's rise from

2003-07, guiding them through to the Super Eights of the 2007 50-over World Cup where they knocked out India and also upset South Africa. In the past, he has also coached India U19 and the Kolkata Knight Riders IPL franchise for two seasons as well as Indian domestic side Kerala, who made their first Ranji Trophy semifinals in 2018-19 under his guidance. Cricinfo

Muzumdar: Bowling is Oman's strength

Oman would have home advantage for the T20 World Cup, says visiting Mumbai team coach

Ashok Purohit
Muscat

His Twitter account profile reads "Cricket is my life, thinking and talking about it, my passion...! Teaching it now, what drives me." And this is exactly what Amol Mazumdar is doing nowadays. Talking about cricket, thinking and now teaching.

His exquisite drives during his playing days were a treat for the eyes, and though Amol Muzumdar never got a chance to make it to the Indian team, his prolific first-class career over two decades saw him obliterate many batting records only to be better known as 'one of the best who never played India'. That tag line hardly is a matter of 'regret' for the present Mumbai team coach, who is in Oman with the India's domestic cricket giants, for a two-week tour.

In an exclusive chat with *Muscat Daily* on Saturday, Muzumdar said, "It has been a fantastic week so far in Oman. We were pleasantly surprised by the infrastructure at the Oman Cricket Academy Ground. Oman is hosting the ICC T20 World Cup in October so the facilities are expectedly top-class."

The visiting Mumbai team concluded the three-match T20 series on Friday with Duleep Mendis-coached Oman winning the series 2-1. Mumbai will now play a four-match 50-over series, beginning on Sunday.

Having watched Oman play

of Rajasthan Royals IPL franchise for nearly four years. He was named Mumbai coach in June this year and is on his first overseas assignment with his boys since taking over the reigns.

Following Oman's victory in the T20 series, Muzumdar said, "Oman's strength is bowling. They have a couple of decent medium pacers and the bowling attack has a variety. No wonder, they opted to bowl first whenever they won the toss against us."

"Besides a good medium pace attack, they have a left-arm spinner and a leg-spinner. Overall, their strength is bowling."

On Oman's chances to make it to the Super 12s in the T20 World Cup, the Mumbai coach said, "As a host nation, there are both advantages and pressure. The Oman players are used to climatic and ground conditions. So, they would have that advantage, but playing at home also brings in pressure and it is important to see how the players react. Knowing the ground well does give them an advantage."

He added, "Oman definitely have a chance to advance but at the World Cup, it is a matter of close margins."

Muzumdar said that 'it is very important for players to play more matches ahead of such big events'.

"The more games the better and Oman should play preparatory matches against quality opposition. Nothing can beat a match practice. One may train for hours and hours but it is crucial to play games to see the results and the way they handle the match pressure," he added.



Mumbai team coach Amol Muzumdar at the Oman Cricket Academy Ground on Friday

I am sure that this team [Oman] is a result of last few years and the coach has worked hard to get this squad and talent together. I definitely have seen some talent in Oman team

AMOL MUZUMDAR, MUMBAI COACH

'No regrets, only few disappointments'

If one puts in a Google search for the best Indian cricketer never to have played for the country,

among the top names to crop would be invariably of Amol Muzumdar.

Having garnered more than 11,000 runs in domestic cricket



A file photo of Oman bowlers Bilal Khan (centre), Kaleemullah (right) and Sufyan Mehmood

three T20 games against his boys, Muzumdar was 'impressed' with the hosts' talent.

"They have some good bowlers and couple of good strikers of the ball. It is evident that the boys have put in a lot of hard yards over the years under coach Duleep [Mendis].

"I am sure that this team [Oman] is a result of last few years and the coach has worked hard to get this squad and talent together. I definitely have seen some talent in Oman team."

The 46-year-old Muzumdar, considered to be one of the best batsmen of his times on the Indian circuit, led Mumbai to a Ranji trophy title in 2007 and moved to coaching in 2013.

A former India U19 and U23 batting coach, he was also a batting consultant to the Netherlands and a batting coach

India a favourite for T20 World Cup

The Mumbai stalwart said that India will go into the T20 World Cup as one of the favourites as almost all the players would be featuring in the IPL just ahead of the global showpiece. The IPL 2021 will resume in the UAE on September 17 and conclude on October 15.

"They [Indian players] will be in a great position to play the T20 World Cup purely because IPL finishes just before the World Cup. It will be a great practice for the players and all the players who will be part of the IPL will get a good hang of it. Besides India, I think the teams to watch out would be Pakistan, New Zealand and England. New Zealand does well in ICC events and England's brand of cricket has been phenomenal of late," he said.



A file photo of Oman's Khawar Ali (centre) celebrating with his teammates after taking a wicket during an international match



Sachin Tendulkar

'Tendulkar's biggest quality is his humility'

Ashok Purohit
Muscat

Having grown up with Indian legend Sachin Tendulkar and Vinod Kambli, Amol Muzumdar was all praise for Tendulkar, having known and seen him from close quarters. "I think the biggest quality is his humility. Sachin is a great human being and that really stands out besides his crickering exploits. We grew up together and his rise was extraordinary. The way he carried himself for 23 years was phenomenal. I have never seen somebody, with such an aura, having such humility," he said.

'Focus on my preparations'

For a coach, who even as a player did not believe in setting up goals, Muzumdar said 'he wants was his boys to prepare well'. "My job is to make these guys ready. At the end of the day, it's all about execution on the field. I focus on my preparations, results will follow," he said.

"Coaching or playing for Mumbai means there is always a pressure. We are considered favourites. But I want to make sure our preparations are good ahead of a long domestic season."

Mumbai last won the Ranji Trophy in 2015-16 and the coach is well aware of the expectations that come with his new responsibility. "We have 14-15 players representing India and various IPL franchises. Six of our players are in India squad. We have so many talented youngsters, and over the past five weeks, I have witnessed unbelievable talent in my team."

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with 30 centuries and with a batting average of around 50, Muzumdar said that he 'doesn't regret' on missing out on an India cap but admitted there have been 'few disappointments'.

"I gave it my all, gave my best. For me, the ultimate joy was to play cricket. It didn't matter where I played or for whom. Be it in Netherlands or at Wankhede, I gave my best," he said.

Among his contemporaries were Sachin Tendulkar, Rahul Dravid, V V Laxman and Sourav Ganguly. He added, "I was really consistent during the period between 1993-1999 and then between 2003-2008. Looking back, I think I was lucky to be playing during a superb era of Indian cricket. We had some of the greatest players the game had ever seen. So, no regrets."

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