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WOMAN OF THE YEAR AWARDS 2021
4-PAGE SPECIAL SUPPLEMENT WITH THIS EDITION

HIS MAJESTY SULTAN HAITHAM VISITS SAID BIN SULTAN NAVAL BASE



His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik visited Said bin Sultan Naval Base in Mussanah on Wednesday. Upon his arrival, His Majesty the Sultan was greeted by Rear Admiral Saif Nasser al Rahbi, Commander of Royal Navy of Oman, and a number of senior RNO officers (M&D)

Infectious diseases burden low in Oman

Our Correspondent
Muscat

A unique global index that uses groundbreaking technology to track infectious diseases and transform how the world reacts to future crises has found Oman and most of the Middle East in 'Low Burden' category in terms of the burden of endemic diseases.

The Global Infectious Diseases Index tracks infectious diseases under broad categories of diarrhoea, lower respiratory tract infections, HIV/AIDS, malaria and tuberculosis and also tracks separately various epidemic causing pathogens, including the SARS coronavirus, Dengue virus and Measles virus, among others, in 204 countries.

While the overall burden of endemic diseases for Oman is low, it is moderate for diarrhoeal diseases, lower respiratory tract infections and HIV/AIDS. The burden is also low for malaria and tuberculosis.

Developed by Future Investment Initiative Institute, the index uses a specially designed artificial intelligence (AI) tool to track pathogens around the world and provide key data to help prepare for and fight infectious diseases.

Recorded in near real time, it was developed in partnership with the global pioneer in infectious disease risk solutions



While the overall burden of endemic diseases for Oman is low, it is moderate for diarrhoeal diseases, lower respiratory tract infections and HIV/AIDS

Metabiota and leading technology consulting firm Accenture.

The index tracks up to 60 pathogens, including those behind COVID-19, dengue and measles, and is designed to increase global awareness about infectious diseases such as tuberculosis, malaria and HIV, as well as reduce threats and provide valuable insights to drive decision making.

According to the index, the burden of endemic diseases is measured by Disability Adjusted Life Years (DALYs) per 100,000

population - a metric that combines years of life lost due to premature mortality and years of healthy life lost due to disability.

The index provides other parameters for Oman, like the number of medical and medical support staff (6.2/1,000 people), number of hospital beds (1.5/1,000), health expenditure (per cent GDP - 4.10 per cent), population with basic immunisation (99 per cent), population with access to basic water (92 per cent) and population with access to basic sanitation (100 per cent).

Commenting on the index, Richard Attias, CEO of Future Investment Initiative Institute, said he is proud of the collaborative work done to harness the technology required to provide these valuable analytics. "The insights the index will provide will prepare governments and health services to take informed decisions that will help humanity," he said. "It removes the complexities of infectious diseases data and delivers a simple and intuitive global view."

The integrated data also includes countries ranked by Highest Healthcare Expenditure (as a percentage of GDP), the number of people per country vaccinated for each disease and in-depth information on medical professionals and services.

SMEs failed to benefit from stimulus packages

Our Correspondent
Muscat

A new study on the impact of COVID-19 on Oman's economy has found that the government must devise more effective mechanisms to provide fiscal stimulus packages to companies

affected by the pandemic. Many small and medium-sized enterprises revealed that they did not benefit from these schemes.

The study also highlighted the need for more coordination between the Ministry of Labour and the Ministry of Higher Education, Research and Innovation to address the mismatch between required skills and level of education imparted. It found that many job vacancies were not filled following the departure of expatriate workers due to lack of technical skills among nationals.

Titled 'The Impact of COVID-19 on the Omani Economy', the study was led by Dr Ashraf Mishrif, Oman Chamber of Commerce and Industry Chair in Economic Studies at Sultan Qaboos University, and funded by the COVID-19 Research Programme of the Ministry of Higher Education, Research and Innovation.

Continued on Page 02

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Sayyida Rawan Ahmed al Said
CEO, Takaful Oman Insurance

Private health institutions, OCCI discuss challenges

Our Correspondent
Muscat

Oman Chamber of Commerce and Industry (OCCI) held a meeting with owners of private health institutions on Wednesday to discuss the challenges facing them and to find solutions to enable them adapt to the current economic situation in the sultanate.

The meeting was attended by Eng Redha Jumaa al Saleh, chairman of OCCI, and members of the chamber along with owners of private health institutions.

Eng Saleh welcomed the representatives of private health institutions and hailed their role in supporting the health sector particularly amid the COVID-19 pandemic. He commended the contributions of these institutions in providing healthcare, treatment and preventive serv-



ices, in collaboration with the public health sector.

He said, "The sultanate supports national and foreign investments in the health sector as part of the system to encourage investment in the country across different economic sectors. Foreign investment should be made in hospitals and specialised health centres to provide a qualitative addition to the health sector."

"The government encourages

The government encourages foreign investment aimed at adding value to national investments in the health field

ENG REDHA AL SALEH

foreign investment aimed at adding value to national investments in the health field, noting that there is an urgent need for medical expertise in the secondary and tertiary healthcare institutions."

Eng Saleh informed that the meeting was held with a view to promoting partnership with the private health sector and enhancing its role in supporting the health sector in the sultanate. "At OCCI, we strive to set visions

and make suggestions to develop various sectors, including the private health sector. These private medical and health institutions play a significantly important role in providing treatment services and taking them to the levels we aspire to."

At the meeting, businessmen expressed the importance of investing in large health projects. They confirmed that these play a role in opening new opportunities for qualified national staff who are graduating from higher education institutions in the sultanate and from abroad.

The meeting also discussed the importance of involving OCCI in decision making in the health field. It also touched on the fees imposed on private health institutions and the need to reconsider these to ensure the sustainability of the work of health institutions.



165 Omanis enrolled in pilot training programmes

Muscat - Oman Air has ramped up pilot training to meet growing demand for passenger and cargo flights, and to support its growth strategy for post-pandemic travel.

"Oman recently reopened to vaccinated travellers and expects a sharp increase in demand for flights from Omani citizens and residents of Oman eager to travel again, expats returning to work in the sultanate, as well as international tourists in search of Oman's celebrated appeal as a must-see destination in the Middle East," stated the airline.

"At the heart of the airline's push to strengthen its pilot base is a renewed focus on Omani recruitment and training. Hundred and one Omani nationals are currently enrolled in Oman Air's Cadet Pilot Training Program; 30 have recently started technical language courses at Sultan Qaboos University in Muscat; 26 have completed their technical language courses and will soon

start ground school; 14 will fly to the USA to complete their flight training; and 31 are currently undergoing flight training in Spain."

An additional 40 licensed Omani pilots are enrolled as second officers as part of narrow-body type rating at the airline's headquarters in Muscat, eight of whom are now flying as First Officers. This reaffirms Oman Air's commitment to the country's broader Vision 2040 strategy which envisions and encourages nationalisation of the workforce and more opportunities for Omani youth in private and government sectors.

"With the easing of travel restrictions for Oman announced recently, enquiries to our call centre have surged and we anticipate robust demand for travel in the foreseeable short term," said Capt Nasser al Salmi, chief operating officer, Oman Air.

"To support what we then expect will be a gradual ascent to pre-pandemic levels in the coming years, our focus now from an

operational standpoint is on route optimisation and pilot training, and making sure that Oman Air is sufficiently staffed to meet our goals for growth and success. With 165 Omani nationals enrolled in our various specialised pilot training programmes, we are confident that our pilot pool will strengthen operating capabilities for many years to come."

By the end of 2021, Oman Air will have welcomed 24 Omani pilots previously flying for other airlines. Capt Moosa al Shidhani, senior vice president of Flight Operations at the airline, stated that the national carrier continues to select Omani pilots in line with Oman Vision 2040 objectives.

"As a national airline and country brand ambassador around the world, Oman Air is committed to hiring Omani pilots as a priority, and we are extremely proud of our track record - currently, 426 Omani pilots represent 96 per cent of our total pilots."

SAYYID BADR RECEIVES CREDENTIALS OF EGYPTIAN, UK ENVOYS



H E Sayyid Badr bin Hamad al Busaidi, Foreign Minister, received on Wednesday credentials of H E Khalid Mohammed Abdulhaleem Radhi and H E Bill Murray (pictured), appointed ambassadors of Egypt and the United Kingdom (UK) to the sultanate, respectively. During the meetings, Sayyid Badr welcomed the ambassadors, wishing them success in carrying out their duties and further progress and prosperity in the relations between the countries (ONA)

ASMED, Oman Drydock sign pact to establish incubator for SMEs

Duqm - The Authority for Small and Medium Enterprises Development (ASMED) signed a technical cooperation programme with Oman Drydock Company, the executive arm of drydock services in Asyad Group, on Wednesday.

The agreement will establish an incubator specialised in the logistics sector, supply chains, and services affiliated with the Public Authority for Special Economic Zones and Free Zones (OPAZ) to support and develop new SMEs.

The agreement was signed by Halima Rashid al Zar'ei, chairperson of ASMED, and Dr Ibrahim Bakhit al Nadhairi, CEO of Asyad



Shipping and Drydock Services.

The agreement also aims to provide a stimulating environment and support that guarantee the sustainability of entrepreneurs in various work environments, as well as contribute to

the economy.

It comes within the framework of empowering entrepreneurs and boosting their role in developing activities in special economic zones and free zones. ONA

SMEs failed to benefit from stimulus packages: Study

Continued from Page 01

Mishrif and his team aimed to provide an in-depth analysis of the impact of the pandemic on the sultanate's economy and its consequences on key sectors such as transportation, logistics, SMEs, manufacturing, labour, insurance and finance.

"The findings of this study were based on primary and secondary data gathered through survey questionnaires as well as semi-structured interviews with government officials, corporate executives, business owners and managers from Oman," stated a press release.

According to Mishrif, the impact of the pandemic has been severe as the economy heavily depends on the hydrocarbon sector, which accounts for 30 per cent of the GDP. "The lockdown and travel restrictions resulted in significant reduction in performance and activities of factories and commercial centres due to decrease in demand of products and services. Initial investigations have shown that most manufacturing and non-manufacturing sectors suffered significant revenue and work-



Dr Ashraf Mishrif

force losses as a result of frequent border closures, service interruptions, drop in demand and supply shortages."

Mishrif has made recommendations for the government and the business sector, based on the findings of the study, for Oman's economy to flourish.

His recommendations include significant investments by the government and private sector enterprises in innovation and digitalisation in order to upgrade the economic and civil institutions in a way that accelerates engagement with the technological advancements of Industry 4.0.

"The government has to find more effective mechanisms to distribute fiscal stimulus packages to companies affected by the COVID-19 pandemic, as

many SMEs interviewed by researchers complained that they did not benefit from these schemes."

He also recommended that the Ministry of Higher Education, Research and Innovation initiate and support innovation schemes at universities and research centres to encourage knowledge generation and technological development that will give Oman a competitive edge in the ensuing years.

The study also called for a higher level of coordination between the Ministry of Labour and Ministry of Higher Education, Research and Innovation to prepare a national workforce with the right skills to work in areas such as artificial intelligence, big data mining, and the Internet of Things.

Mishrif also recommended that government officials and company executives put in place alternative strategies to deal with unexpected circumstances and be prepared to effectively deal with natural disasters, biological war and global financial crises in order to minimise the impact of such events in the future.

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Oman ICV forum discusses empowering youth

Our Correspondent
Muscat

A forum titled 'Oman ICV' seeking to enhance the process of in-country value and impart its benefits to all development sectors was organised on Wednesday under the theme 'Empowering youth, localising industries and creating opportunities'.

The opening ceremony was held under the auspices of H E Abdul Salam Mohammed al Murshidi, Chairman of Oman Investment Authority (OIA).

The authority and its affiliate firms pay great attention to ICV and have enacted regulatory systems that guarantee the implementation of added value in tenders, procurements and projects, according to H E Murshidi.

He noted that OIA will digitise these regulations so that they can be enforced in a transparent manner. "Certain departments will be entrusted with continuously monitoring and assessing performance in this regard," he added.



(Supplied photo)

H E Dr Saleh Said al Masan, Undersecretary for Commerce and Industry in the Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion, informed that the forum was expected to lay out a roadmap to consolidate the concept of ICV, and gain impetus

from the successful working experience of the oil, gas and petrochemical industries.

He further elaborated that the contribution of ICV in the industrial sector has crossed the RO3.1bn mark and that the contribution of non-petrochemical

subsidiary sectors to industrialisation stood at 38 per cent.

Addressing the forum, Abdulmir Abdulhussein al Ajmi, director of External Affairs and Value Creation at Petroleum Development Oman (PDO), said that as many as 200 small and

medium enterprises were registered in 2020 and that the value of associated contracts stood at RO118mn. PDO encouraged the retention of 34 per cent of ICV of national products and services within the country in 2020, Ajmi informed.

The forum saw the launch of an initiative called 'Tahfeez' (Incentivisation), the first such dealing with goals of developing ICV.

Additionally, seven agreements and memorandums of cooperation were concluded within the context of a training pro-

The forum is expected to lay out a roadmap to consolidate the concept of ICV, and gain impetus from the successful working experience of the oil, gas and petrochemical industries

H E DR SALEH AL MASAN

gramme linked to employment.

A memorandum of understanding was signed by Oman Society for Petroleum Services (OPAL) and Seeh al Sarya Engineering, while three more MoUs were inked to train graduates of technical specialisations on Industry 4.0 skills. The MoUs include training at three SME ICT companies and to provide 12-month employment for graduates in the field of engineering design.

Saham Vocational College students create 3D printer

Our Correspondent
Muscat

In a first-of-its-kind project by vocational college students in Oman, three from Saham Vocational College have created a 3D printer which can be used to print a range of products, including prosthetic limbs, toys and surgical instruments.

Imran bin Ali al Maamari, Bashar bin Khalifa al Hindasi and Abdul Majeed bin Ali al Mahduri, from the Department of Electronic Engineering at Saham Vocational College in North Batinah, ideated and innovated the 3D printer as part of their graduation project.

"Our 3D printer is of high quality that competes with printers currently on the market. It can be used to make products used in various sectors, including medical and surgical instruments and artificial limbs," said Mahduri. "The printer can also be used to design houses. Our project aims to reduce financial cost in various industries, keep pace with demand in the local market, and achieve the goals of Oman Vision 2040 based on innova-



(Supplied photo)

tion, scientific research and youth empowerment."

According to Mahduri, he and his teammates did not face any significant difficulties as the college played a major role in providing raw materials and appropriate information required in their project.

"Determination, ambition, coordination and team spirit en-

abled us to complete the project in a short period of time."

"We made the printer in two months using recycled materials. We hope to spread awareness on 3D printing in the community and create job opportunities. We also hope for support from the government and private sectors for such projects to devise 3D printers to fill the shortage in the

local market," he added.

"This 3D printer created in Saham is the first of its kind by any vocational college in the sultanate. It confirms the ability of Omani youth and will enable them to move forward in the field of innovation," said Adel bin Muhammad al Esai, assistant director of Saham Vocational College.

Students of SQU, University of Otago hold virtual summit, discuss cooperation

Muscat - The third edition of Virtual Youth Summit 2021 between Oman and New Zealand universities started on Wednesday.

The two-day online event is being organised by Sultan Qaboos University's (SQU) Political Science Group in cooperation with students of University of Otago in New Zealand.

The opening ceremony set the guidelines for preliminary negotiations between the Omani and New Zealand students.

The summit seeks to enhance cooperation between students of the two universities and discuss common political, eco-

The event is being organised by SQU's Political Science Group in cooperation with students of University of Otago in New Zealand

nomic and cultural matters to find solutions that can be applied in both countries.

The opening of the summit, sponsored by the International Institute of Protocol and Diplomacy, was followed by a series of

virtual lectures.

Through the lectures, students were trained in global diplomatic practices and protocol, and ways to apply these in official international conferences.

The opening of the summit was attended H H Dr Mona Fahd al Said, assistant vice chancellor for International Cooperation at SQU, Dr Almkhtar Saif al Abri, dean of College of Economics and Political Sciences, Prof Helen Nicholson, vice chancellor of University of Otago, and Prof Will Sweetman, dean of College of Social Sciences at University of Otago. ONA



(Supplied photo)

Al Hazm Castle restoration work nearing completion: Official

Our Correspondent
Muscat

An official at the Ministry of Heritage and Tourism has informed that restoration work at Al Hazm Castle in the wilayat of Rustaq in South Batinah is 95 per cent complete.

Amjad bin Ahmed al Mukhadli, director of Department of Restoration and Maintenance in the ministry, said, "Maintenance

and restoration works are in advanced stages at Al Hazm Castle. The ministry continues to restore and maintain castles and forts that are distinguished by architectural diversity."

He added that the Al Hazm Castle project includes repairing deep cracks in external facades extending towards the internal ceilings of the castle, restoring other damaged structural parts, rebuilding ceilings, maintaining

floors and external fences, electrical works, restoring the mosque and addition of washrooms.

Al Hazm Castle is an Islamic architectural masterpiece, as it does not contain any ceiling rafters.

The ministry has stated that there were 366,360 visitors to castles and forts in 2018, 426,525 in 2019 and 133,464 in 2020.

22 new COVID-19 cases; no deaths

Our Correspondent
Muscat

The Ministry of Health (MoH) reported 22 new COVID-19 cases in a 24-hour period on Wednesday, taking the total number of cases to 303,512. No deaths were reported in this period, making it the fifth day in a row without a single COVID-19 related death.

In a statement, MoH said, 'The total number of deaths reported in the country is 4,093, while the recovery rate has increased to 97.1 per cent. The total number of individuals who have recovered has reached 294,742. Five patients were admitted to hospitals taking the total number of hospitalisations to 46, including 23 in intensive care.'

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BRIEFS

Adnoc increases size of offering in Adnoc Drilling IPO

The Abu Dhabi National Oil Company (Adnoc) on Wednesday announced that, following approval from the UAE Securities and Commodities Authority, it has increased the number of ordinary shares offered in the initial public offering (IPO) of Adnoc Drilling from 1,200,000,000 ordinary shares to 1,760,000,000 ordinary shares, which equates to 11 per cent of Adnoc Drilling's total issued share capital.

Subject to completion of the IPO, Adnoc will continue to own a majority 84 per cent stake in the Company, while Baker Hughes, which entered into a strategic partnership with Adnoc Drilling in October 2018, will retain its 5 per cent shareholding in the Company. The offer price of AED2.30 per share remains unchanged.

Oman's average oil price surges 48% this year

Our Correspondent
Muscat

With sharp increases in global crude prices earlier this year, the average price at which Oman sold its crude oil during the first eight months of 2021 surged by nearly 48 per cent compared to the average price recorded in the previous year.

The sultanate achieved an average price of US\$67.9 per barrel for its oil shipments during the January-August period of this year, which is 47.6 per cent higher against the average price of US\$46 recorded in 2020, according to data released by National Centre for Statistics and Information (NCSI).

This year's highest monthly average price of Oman crude was recorded in August at US\$71.7 per barrel. On Wednesday, Oman crude price gained 0.7 per cent to close at US\$73.47 per barrel at the Dubai Mercantile Exchange.

The sultanate's 2021 state budget, which estimates a deficit of RO2.2bn, is based on an average oil price assumption of US\$45 per barrel.

Since actual oil prices in 2021 have been substantially higher than the average price estimated



in the budget, the sultanate's budget deficit is expected to drop sharply this year.

The International Monetary Fund (IMF), in its recently released Article IV report, estimates Oman's average oil price at US\$60.4 per barrel for the full year 2021 against US\$46 per barrel in 2020. The IMF expects the sultanate's budget breakeven oil price to be around US\$69 per barrel for 2021.

Following a sharp deterioration in 2020 due to lower oil revenue and a COVID-19 related

slump in economic activity, Oman's fiscal balance is projected to register a substantial improvement in 2021, the IMF said.

The improved fiscal outlook, the fund said, reflects the sultanate's significant fiscal adjustment measures and a rebound in global oil prices and the recovery of hydrocarbon revenues.

The IMF expects Oman's fiscal deficit to sharply decline to 2.4 per cent of GDP in 2021 and a surplus in 2022, from around 19.3 per cent of GDP in 2020.

'The baseline projection of Oman's fiscal position remains conservative, as the oil price set for staff assessment in the Article IV report is based on a 2021 estimated price of oil at US\$60.4 while the 2021 budget adopted the oil price of US\$45, below the current and projected oil prices,' the IMF said.

On the production front, Oman's daily average oil output inched up to 958,600 barrels per day during the January-August period of 2021, from 957,300 barrels per day in the same period of 2020 and 950,700 barrels per day for the full year 2020.

Total oil exports decreased 2.8 per cent to 188.27mn barrels during the first eight months of 2021 from 193.64mn barrels in the corresponding period of 2020, the NCSI data showed.

Oil exports to China, which purchased more than 83 per cent of Oman's total oil shipments during the January-August period of this year, dropped 8.5 per cent to 156.45mn barrels compared to 171.07mn barrels in the same period of 2020. However, exports to Japan, South Korea and India sharply increased in 2021.

Raysut Cement's \$30mn plant in Duqm to be on stream in Q4

Our Correspondent
Muscat



Yousef Ahmed Alawi al Ibrahim

Raysut Cement Company (RCC), Oman's largest cement manufacturer, on Wednesday said that its US\$30mn grinding unit in Duqm will be on stream in the fourth quarter of 2021.

"Duqm plant will add another 1mn tonnes to our capacity, helping us cater to Oman and other regional markets with increased supplies, where construction activity is poised to pick up in post-pandemic resurgence," Joey Ghose, group CEO of RCC, said in a statement.

The Duqm plant will raise RCC's annual group output to 7.4mn tonnes and help the Muscat Stock Exchange-listed company raise output to 10mn tonnes by 2022.

Yousef Ahmed Alawi al Ibrahim, chief of support services and business development at RCC, said the Duqm grinding unit's construction has been progressing despite the COVID-19 pandemic, thanks to the prudent safety and health protocols in place.

He said, "This has been a challenging year for manufacturing industries in general, but RCC has been able to negotiate the hurdles with effective planning focusing on health and safety."

According to Raysut Cement, the Duqm plant is also a milestone project for the company to scale up its output to 22mn tonnes in the near future.

As part of developing the Duqm plant, RCC had signed a land lease and port of terminal services agreement with Port of Duqm Company. The new grinding unit will also complement RCC's expansion and new investments and acquisitions in Oman, Asia and East Africa.

Last year, Raysut Cement had acquired Sohar Cement Company in Oman for US\$60mn. It is also developing a new green field 1.2mn tonnes per annum cement plant near Tbilisi in Georgia, with an investment of US\$200mn.

A majority takeover of LafargeHolcim's cement terminal at Thilafushi Islands in Maldives and an investment of US\$40mn in a grinding unit in Berbera, Somaliland, are other projects of Raysut Cement.

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US warns against 'manipulation' of Europe gas prices

Warsaw, Poland - US Energy Secretary Jennifer Granholm on Wednesday warned against 'manipulation' of gas prices in Europe, as a group of European lawmakers accused Russia of being behind price rises.

"The US has been clear that we and our partners have to be prepared to continue to stand up when there are players who may be manipulating supply in order to benefit themselves," Granholm said in an online briefing during a visit to Warsaw.

"We want to all have our eye on the issue of any manipulation of gas prices by hoarding or the failure to produce adequate supply," she told reporters.

"We are looking at this very seriously and we are united with our European allies in making sure you get adequate, affordable gas supply this winter," she added.

The looming energy crisis facing Europe overshadowed a meeting of EU ministers on Wednesday, with participants describing the situation - being felt globally - as 'critical'.

The continent faces soaring power prices as its economy re-

covers from the COVID-19 pandemic and as winter approaches while natural gas reserves are at a worrying low level.

A profound EU transformation towards a low-carbon future, phasing out fossil fuels, is adding to the pressure on the bloc's market and households.

A group of more than 40 members of the European Parliament has written a letter accusing Russia's Gazprom of manipulating gas prices.

They see a diminishing flow of Russian gas through Ukraine as an attempt by Moscow to force Germany to approve activation of a newly completed gas pipeline through the Baltic Sea, Nord Stream 2. Gazprom denies the accusation.

While the EU is struggling, the situation is far worse in former EU member Britain, where wholesale energy prices are outstripping even those soaring in the rest of Europe.

The United States is also seeing an increase in energy prices but is largely shielded because of gas production from its shale fields.

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MSX declines on weak activity

Our Correspondent
Muscat

The benchmark index of the Muscat Stock Exchange (MSX) fell 0.1 per cent to close at 3,917.21 points on Wednesday.

While turnover rose by 21.19 per cent to RO2.76mn, volumes fell 22.53 per cent to 8.5mn shares.

While Financial index fell 0.35 per cent, Industrial and Services indices rose 0.04 per cent and 0.9 per cent, respectively.

The MSX Shariah index closed down by 0.73 per cent at 579.62 points.

Market breadth remained positive as 12 companies

closed up, while nine companies closed down. The rest 23 traded stocks closed flat for the day.

Top gainers were Renaissance Services (6.64 per cent), Al Maha Ceramics (3.73 per cent), Global Financial Investments Holding (3.18 per cent), Phoenix Power (2.22 per cent) and Oman Qatar Insurance (2.07 per cent).

Top losers were A'Saffa Foods (-9.91 per cent), HSBC Bank Oman (-2.17 per cent), Oman Flour Mills (-2.04 per cent), Al Anwar Ceramic Tiles (-1.86 per cent) and Oman & Emirates Investment Holding Co (-1.35 per cent).

Evergrande agrees deal to avoid default

Beijing, China - Embattled Chinese property titan Evergrande said on Wednesday it had agreed a deal with domestic bondholders that should allow the conglomerate to avoid missing one of its interest payments and avoid default, but its deeper debt burden remains.

Financial markets have been hit this week over fears that the sprawling firm could collapse, with the potential to pulse through the world's second-biggest economy and possibly beyond.

Chinese authorities have injected capital into the markets yet have remained conspicuously silent over Evergrande's woes, allowing rare protests from despairing investors and leaving analysts guessing over Beijing's plans to mop-up any spillover from the developer's demise.



In a statement to the Shenzhen stock exchange, Evergrande's property unit Hengda said it had negotiated a plan to pay interest due on its 2025 bond, worth US\$35.9mn.

Evergrande has admitted facing 'tremendous pressure' as it tackles a debt pile of more than

US\$300bn, and has warned that it may not be able to meet its liabilities. Yet founder Xu Jiayin, a billionaire once counted as Asia's richest man, on Tuesday said the company will 'step out of the darkest moment soon'.

In Wednesday's statement, Hengda said investors 'who

bought and held the bonds' before September 22, 2021 'are entitled to interest paid this time'.

The group has made no mention of its larger repayments on interest for an offshore bond due on Thursday - a payment worth US\$83.5mn on a dollar-denominated bond, in what observers view as a big test for the company. Even if it misses the payment, the company would still have a 30-day grace period before it is deemed in default.

Analysts said Wednesday's repayment will go some way to soothing anxious markets in the short term.

"But for confidence to return more meaningfully, it will need the market to see sight of the broad restructuring plans for Evergrande", Gary Dugan, CEO at the Global CIO Office, told Bloomberg News.

The Evergrande crisis has trig-

gered protests outside a number of the company's offices in China by investors and suppliers demanding their money - some of whom say they are owed as much as US\$1mn.

Given the company's liabilities, analysts and investors have speculated the government will likely step in with some kind of help for the corporate giant to prevent a damaging implosion.

But the vagueness of the filing - which did not give details on how much it would pay and when - left others warning the firm remains deep in trouble.

The payment announcement 'is likely only a temporary reprieve with no signals from the Chinese government over what steps, if any, it will take to assist an orderly wind down or restructuring', said Jeffrey Halley, an analyst at OANDA.

AFP

Sony's India unit to merge with ZEE Entertainment



Mumbai, India - Sony's India unit will merge with ZEE Entertainment, the major local broadcaster said on Wednesday, as the battle for eyeballs with international streaming services heats up.

The merged entity - which analysts say is likely to rival market leader Star and Disney India in terms of viewership and channel offerings - could create the country's biggest entertainment network.

"We have unanimously provided an in-principle approval to the proposal [from Sony] and have advised the management to initiate the due diligence process," ZEE Entertainment said in a statement to investors.

Sony Pictures Networks India will hold a majority stake of 52.93 per cent in the merged entity following a proposed capital infusion of US\$1.58bn, the statement added.

Shares in the subscription TV network jumped by 30 per cent on the announcement.

The new entity will be publicly listed on Indian stock exchanges.

India, home to 1.3bn people, has attracted leading US streaming giants Netflix, Amazon's Prime Video and Disney's Hot-

star, keen to tap into the growth in online audiences.

The entertainment market - valued at US\$24bn by accountancy giant EY - is already one of the world's biggest, while smartphone adoption is forecast to expand further in coming years.

Sony and ZEE Entertainment currently operate 75 channels in English, Hindi and ten Indian regional languages, which are broadcast in 173 countries.

"There is a big opportunity in terms of synergies as Sony is doing well in sports and mainstream GEC (general entertainment channels) whereas ZEE has a strong recall in the regional genre, which is less or absent for Sony," Elara Capital media analyst Karan Taurani told AFP.

"Both have a very strong movie catalogue which can be used for OTT (over-the-top Web platforms) and TV offerings."

Sony's sports offerings in India include cricket, UFC, WWE wrestling and UEFA football. It also recently showed the Tokyo Olympics.

The merger will also combine subscription-based streaming platforms SonyLIV and ZEE5.

AFP



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Alizz Islamic Bank unveils women's awards

In a move to honour female entrepreneurs and business executives, Alizz Islamic Bank unveiled its special and exclusive ‘Hiyya’ awards for women, recently, and announced that the grand award ceremony would coincide with the Omani Women’s Day, which is celebrated all over the nation on October 17, every year.

The announcement of the first edition of the prestigious ‘Hiyya’ award augurs well for the growing number of women in the business stratum and reflects rightly on the country’s stand towards empowerment of women in general. As per the set protocol, Alizz Islamic Bank has adopted rigorous steps to maintain transparency and credibility to the selection of nominees and short-listing of winners.

Beginning with a 10-day nomination period - starting from September 22 to October 1 - it will follow through by opening the voting process on its website from October 2 to October 14. The nomination process will be available for everyone, with the option of self nomination or nomination of other women deemed worthy of ‘Hiyya’ awards. Winners will be selected from the final tally of the public vote and the awards will be distributed on October 17.

Designed to recognise and facilitate women, the ‘Hiyya’ awards come as an expression of appreciation and gratitude for the pioneering role played by women in building the nation; it is a formal acknowledgement of their contribution in various fields as they continue to demonstrate their expertise and experience in the social and economic arena.

The awards, have been classified into several categories, including the award for the Best New Business, Best Online Business and the Most Inspiring Businesswoman Award, which is considered as an important catalyst for the growth of female owned businesses.

Other award categories are: Made in Oman Award for the Best Business Owned by Women in the field of locally produced goods; Best Service Customer Service Award for businesses - owned by women - that provide customer service; Social Responsibility Award, which will be given to the woman who gives back to the community through dedicated social responsibility program; an Award for the Best Online Business that provides its services via the Internet; and, finally, the most coveted of them all, the Role Model of the Year Award. This award will be given to that woman who has proven to be an idol with her leadership skills and success portfolio.



etted of them all, the Role Model of the Year Award. This award will be given to that woman who has proven to be an idol with her leadership skills and success portfolio.

Throwing the spotlight on the upcoming Hiyya awards, Mohammed al Ghassani, AGM - chief consumer banking officer at Alizz Islamic Bank, said, “Women have, since the beginning of the Renaissance, partnered with men in building our beloved nation. They have taken strong and steady strides to ensure that the nation runs smoothly on all levels. This devotion is pronounced in all the development projects that have started and are still growing to this day. They have been a part of all-round development and have received equal rights, which has ensured their place alongside men in all departments.”

Ghassani added, “These awards come as an appreciation and gratitude from the executive management of the bank and as an expression of solidarity with

Omani Women’s Day. It is our way of celebrating this great day and we spare no effort to support women’s creative energies in various fields, and at all levels. Besides the awards, we have also organised several events and celebrations to enhance the spirit of cooperation among women working in our bank, while establishing a sense of belonging to the workplace, which is reflected in their continuous productivity at work.”

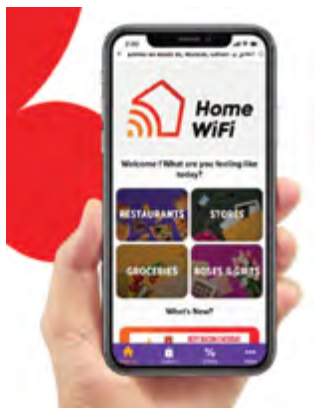
Alizz Islamic Bank has also allocated a set of exclusive cash prizes for women in the monthly draws whereby one female winner from each branch wins RO500 each in the Bushra Prize Savings Account. Women are required to only open a Bushra account and deposit RO100 to become eligible for the draws and stand a chance to win.

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PDO works with contractors to employ more Omanis

Petroleum Development Oman (PDO) has signed agreements with seven contractors to upskill and employ more than 100 Omanis in a variety of positions within the engineering and IT disciplines.

The Memorandums of Understanding (MoCs) were signed at the Oman In-Country Value Forum on September 22 held under the auspices of HE Abdul-salam Mohammed al Murshidi, President of the Oman Investment Authority.

Under the terms of the agreements, PDO will fund the training of the participants who will then secure work with Al Baraka Oil-field Services (ABOS), KCA Deutag (KCAD), Arabian Industry Projects (AIP), Data Boat (DB), Data Migration and Services (Rihal), and Phaze Technologies



(PT) upon the successful completion of their one-year training programme. PDO also signed a MoC with

The MoCs signed with AIP, ABOS, and KCAD are part of PDO’s efforts to upskill Omani electricians and mechanics by equipping them with the skills required to become licensed chief electricians and mechanics.

The same programme mandates that for every upskilled electrician or mechanic, a fresh graduate should be employed to fill the vacant entry-level position. This is part of a bigger effort to increase the Omanisation percentage within this field.

Additionally, the MoCs signed with AIP and OPAL aim to upskill light vehicle drivers to take up new professions to improve their career prospects and increase their productivity, while the agreements signed with DB, Rihal and PT aim to train and develop 14 women holding Bache-

lors’ degree in majors related to hi-tech fields such as Artificial Intelligence, Data Science, Front-end Engineering.

PDO External Affairs and Value Creation director Eng Abdul Amir al Ajmi, who signed the MoCs on behalf of PDO, said, “We are constantly striving with our contractors to identify meaningful ways to upskill the Omani workforce.

“Creating work for our job-seekers is a key aim for PDO and a national priority for Oman, and we remain committed to generating employment opportunities both within and beyond the oil and gas sector.

“I extend my heartfelt gratitude to our partners for working with us to enable dozens of nationals to take up rewarding positions.”

Technology experts at NexTech: UAE is a leader in digital transformation

Technology experts from the UAE’s public and private sectors have underscored at a recent NexTech gathering in at the Sharjah Research, Technology and Innovation Park (SRTIP) on Monday, that the UAE is a recognised leader in the digital transformation industry, highlighting that forward-looking vision and strong human resources were among the key success factors for its growth and development.

They pointed out the vital role a robust infrastructure plays in the process, and also highlighted the pivotal role of service providers and managed IT services in facilitating the digital transformation journeys of public and private sector enterprises.

The observations were shared by a number of participants who convened for the second edition of the NexTech technology dialogue series organised by Sahab Smart Solutions in partnership with the Sharjah Digital Office. Titled ‘The Future of Information Officers’, this edition was hosted at the Sharjah Research, Tech-

nology and Innovation Park (SRTIP) comprised four discussion sessions, which were focused on empowering chief information officers (CIOs) with the knowledge of latest trends and challenges in the ICT sector.

The forum highlighted emerging digital strategies and technological advancements vital for public sector institutions to improve their internal processes and end-user services, in addition to investing in qualified cadre who would handle the entities’ big data analysis to elevate and customise their digital strategies.

Sharing knowledge

SpeakSing about the significant role of the discussion series, Amin al Zarouni, CEO of Sahab Smart Solutions, said, “The second edition of NexTech’s discussions covers several vibrant topics in the technology sector ranging from the future of Chief Information Officers (CIOs) and Chief Digital Officers (CDOs), and explores the impact man-

aged IT services can create for enterprises and their ambitions to innovate and excel in the digital front. The event also identified the growing importance of unique tech tools such as the establishment of Digital Excellence Centers as a platform which IT leaders can benefit from within their digital transformation strategies.”

He added, “The world is progressively becoming digital, and CIOs have become one of the most vital components that help businesses and enterprises navigate forward through some of the complex challenges that arise from this sector.

“That said, NexTech functioned as a key guide to present the wide range of opportunities which present and future CIOs can benefit from through their mission of establishing digital excellence through transformation projects.”

During the event, Abdelrahim al Zarouni, business development manager at Sahab Smart Solutions, noted that as the

world ushers in the post-COVID-19 era, enterprises who are eager to lead the digital front and stay ahead of competition and exceed expectations of their stakeholders and customer base, will require the necessary guidance to explore the limitless opportunities the technology map has to offer.

He added that this was one of Sahab’s key principles behind the establishment of the Nex-Tech series, which aims to become the central platform for knowledge exchange, highlight emerging trends in the digital world, and enable the local community to collectively benefit from the advice shared by participants on ways to overcome challenges.

He also underscored the importance of the partnership with the Digital Sharjah Office in organising this initiative, saying that the discussions offered a unique opportunity to put forth practical recommendations for adopting new digital transformation strategies.

Canon to harness power of imagery at Expo 2020 Dubai



Canon is an Official Provider of Expo 2020 Dubai and the first company ever to be the single provider of printing and imaging solutions for a World Expo. Canon will use its heritage and expertise in imagery and technology to help create a safe, secure, digitally connected environment and deliver on the promise of Expo 2020 Dubai’s theme of ‘Connecting Minds. Creating the Future.’

As the official printing and imaging solutions provider, Canon will bring to the exhibition highly advanced secure technology to protect the data of an estimated 300,000 accreditations. All accreditations are being printed on Canon devices and each accreditation will act like a personal “passport”, determining which areas the holder can and cannot access on-site.

While also providing exhibitor and visitor access to convenient printing and digital photo services throughout exhibition sites, Canon will help operations on site to be more efficient by providing managed print services, state-of-the-art printers and the

latest smart office solutions.

Venkatasubramanian Hariharan, managing director, Canon Middle East and Turkey said, “The Canon Expo 2020 Dubai sponsorship is rooted in shared principles and values. It starts with using advanced technology to enhance the visitor experience and extends to exploring opportunities to drive innovation in such areas as sustainability, smart cities and space exploration that are important platforms for Canon and a major focus of Expo 2020 Dubai.”

In addition, Canon will host a series of interactive events and programmes to promote using the power of imagery to capture, preserve and share with the world the most inspiring transformative ideas showcased at the exhibition. Canon’s interactive events and programs will align Expo 2020 Dubai’s pillars of Opportunity, Mobility and Sustainability with corporate priority platforms of the ‘Future of the Planet’, the ‘Future of People in it’ and the ‘Future of what is Possible’.

The Future of the Planet: For

Sustainability, Canon will launch the ‘Moments that Matter’ photography competition in collaboration with the Hamdan bin Mohammed bin Rashid Al Maktoum International Photography Awards (HIPA) that will run through the duration of Expo 2020 Dubai.

Participants will be challenged to creatively capture imagery that best reflects the ideals of sustainability across any of four categories critical to global sustainability issues: Economic, Human, Environmental and Social.

The Future of People in it: Canon will host educational initiatives for photography enthusiasts including Canon Juniors Academy and Canon Academy, organise weekly photo walking tours at the Expo 2020 Dubai site, provide dedicated services for professional and semi-professional photographers and videographers through Canon Professional Services, and engage children visiting the event to explore their imaginations and artistic talents through Canon Creative Park.





Infiniti QX80 Black Edition merges elegance, performance

Featuring innovative new technologies and stylish features, Infiniti QX80 Black Edition has been designed keeping in mind the unique tastes and preferences of customers in Oman. With its unique dark chrome wheels and accents, the QX80 Black Edition adds a layer that merges elegance and performance to an already commanding presence. With the black front grille mesh, dark chrome accents and black side mirrors, the QX80 applies universal design principles for a classic look. The 22-inch aluminium-alloy wheels with unique dark finishing give your QX80 a more enhanced stature on the road.

The new 'Black Edition' grade features dark chrome and black exterior accents highlight the front grill and fascia, side fender vents, door mirror caps and rear tailgate strip. The commanding stance is heightened with the addition of dark chrome 22-inch forged alloy wheels. Three stylish interior trim colours are also available; including 'Graphite', 'Saddle Brown' and 'Wheat' with a revised Charcoal Ash Wood accent trim.

A senior spokesperson at In-

finiti Oman said, "Infiniti QX80 Black Edition has been adulated by car aficionados in Oman. They are appreciative of its style and luxury. The car brings hand-crafted luxury, convenience, and refinement for up to eight passengers. The Black Edition grade has been created keeping in mind the unique tastes and likings of our customers."

Performance

The Infiniti QX80 comes with a potent 5.6lt V8 engine. With 400hp and 560nm of torque, it gives a smooth, heady performance that really comes into its own when carrying cargo.

With Infiniti QX80 drivers can focus on the journey while the 7-speed automatic transmission's Adaptive Shift Control responds with performance exactly when they need it. The engine gradually builds engine torque as the vehicle gains speed to unleash a smooth, continual rush of power that puts drivers in total control.

With All-Mode 4WD, drivers can have the confidence in tough conditions as it automatically moves power between the front and rear wheels for better grip. Or they can choose to switch be-

tween the 4L and 4H modes yourself: normal power with extra traction or full power with maximum traction.

They can also travel with smooth, controlled comfort using the available Hydraulic Body Motion Control system. It monitors force and adjusts the suspension for smooth flat turns without body-roll or lean.

Design

The Infiniti QX80 design comes with little design enhancements that make a big difference. The LED head and taillights give you improved visibility. All while the auto headlights also have the Adaptive Front Lighting System, which illuminates corners by turning in the direction that you steer. Customers can choose any of the 22-inch forged aluminium alloy wheels with liquid metal or unique dark finishing.

Interior

Opulent craftsmanship using quality materials and rich textures create a sophisticated space of warmth and elegance. Owners can adapt the Infiniti QX80's cargo space in a number of combinations to suit their

needs. With all seating upright, stow approximately five large suitcases (16.6lt of space).

Everywhere one looks and touch, the Infiniti QX80 interior compliments the journey with premium materials. And with three coloured materials and two trim finishes, one can style their ride as uniquely as they are.

Safety and comfort

When Infiniti built the QX80, safety and comfort are top-of-mind priorities. Featuring an impressive suite of advanced safety features and an innovative series of World's First Technologies, the QX80 goes the distance to help ensure every drive isn't just a satisfying one, but a safe one, too.

When driver move to change lanes, Blind Spot Warning & Intervention warns them if someone enters the blind spot area. Then it guides them back into position with a slight steering or braking adjustment.

Using onboard sensors, Predictive Forward Collision Warning can alert driver to the sudden reduction in speed of up to two cars ahead — helping them respond and potentially

avoid a collision.

Backup Collision Intervention can sense what sits beyond line of sight. It can then warn if it detects a large object behind the vehicle, and even apply the brakes if needed. To help limit forward movement, precrash seatbelts can tighten before impact to lower the risk of serious injury. To reduce the impact on neck in rear-end collisions, Active Head Restraints can move forward to create extra support.

To give the cushion most likely to reduce the chance of injury, dual-stage front air bags adjust inflation rate depending on the impact.

It helps see beyond passengers, cargo and darkness as drivers reverse with the Smart Rearview Mirror. The flip of a switch activates an embedded LCD display that gives an enhanced view from a wide-angle, high resolution rear-facing camera.

When drivers are behind the wheel, they should only need to worry about one thing: the road ahead. That's why Infiniti designed the QX80 with comfort and convenience leading the way.

Ahlibank wins 'Excellence' award

Ahlibank received the coveted 'Excellence in Private Banking' Award at the Oman Banking & Finance Awards ceremony, presented during the high-profile New Age Banking Summit held recently at the Al Bustan Palace, A Ritz-Carlton Hotel in Muscat. Powered by Oman Economic Review (OER), the event felicitated top banking and financial institutions in the country.

The 'Excellence' award marks a new prestigious landmark for Ahlibank in premium retail banking as it strives to deliver more value-added services to its clients.

Receiving the award from Tahir al Amri - executive president of Central Bank of Oman, Najla Murtadha al Lawati, AGM-head of Private Banking & Wealth Management of Ahlibank, opined that it was, indeed, a turning point for the bank, as it has, in a short span of time, managed to expand its product portfolio to offer products and services for niche segments. Ahlibank provides expert financial and investment solutions to high-net-worth clients,



through 'Exclusiv' Banking, offering them a personalized, world-class banking experience, that satisfies their evolving needs and lifestyles.

Najla expressed her appreciation for the honour from Oman Banking and Finance Awards and credited the bank's team of professionals for meeting the high standards set by the founders of the bank. "Through consistency and perseverance, we have come out winners in understanding and realising the needs and wants of our customers - our evolving portfolio of products and services speaks for itself."



Over 36,000 professionals meet in construction event

The Big 5, The Middle East, Africa and South Asia's (MEASA) largest and most influential event for the construction industry, last week welcomed over 36,000 industry professionals, bringing the business community back to face-to-face business for the first time in two years.

Josine Heijmans, vice president - Construction at dmg events said, "The Big 5 has been an outstanding success this year and we are delighted to be back. The diversity and quality of participation has reaffirmed the industry's demand for in-person

business events and thriving activity at the exhibition shows that the region's construction sector is well poised for growth following the COVID-19 impact."

During the four-day event, inaugurated by Sheikh Mansoor bin Mohammed bin Rashid al Maktoum, chairman of Dubai Sports Council, the exhibition connected the region's engineers, architects, contractors, and project managers with over 1,200 exhibitors from more than 50 countries, offering access to the latest construction products and solutions set to accelerate market growth.

Nissan X-Terra amazes customers with its 'Go Anywhere' capabilities

Nissan X-Terra, the vehicle especially designed for adventure and the outdoors has received a terrific response from customers in Oman. The model, which empowers owners to go anywhere has impressed customers with its robust yet sophisticated look. They have defined the vehicle as an ideal partner for customers seeking exciting outdoor adventures.

Powering the all-new X-Terra is a 2.5lt four-cylinder petrol engine with a seven-speed automatic transmission. The petrol engines deliver 124kW /165 hp and 241Nm of torque that ensures an exciting drive of speed and acceleration.

Created for adventures, with a roomy interior and advanced technologies Nissan X-Terra ensures safety and comfort. Nissan Intelligent Mobility features add to its attraction.

A spokesperson for Nissan Oman, from the house of Suhail Bahwan Automobiles (SBA) said, "The seven-seater, spacious, comfortable X-Terra is a catalyst for new experiences, al-

lowing owners to connect with the people in their lives, and to confidently 'Go Anywhere' together. It addresses a variety of needs and all types of terrains as it is both, good for city use and great for an adventure with family and friends. Developed in line with the "unbreakable" frame vehicles design philosophy, it combines masculine solidity with sleek and modern execution."

The all-new X-Terra delivers a robust four-wheel drive system, including a four-wheel lock, brake limited slip differential and electronic locking rear differential - while leading the class in interior room and comfort.

Built on 70 years of unmatched Nissan SUV expertise, the all-new Nissan X-Terra 2021 reflects the evolution of four-wheel adventure travel and a growing consumer desire for connection. It effortlessly combines impressive strength with bold new design and built-for-comfort roominess. Underlining this is breakthrough engineering and a suite of cutting-edge Nissan Intelligent Mobility (NIM)



technologies to offer a superior driving experience and adventure-ready confidence for drivers to explore new places.

The SUV's rugged frame facilitates its durability and practicality, while the future-forward aesthetics are exhibited in the quad LED projector lamps and a

bold new V-motion grille. The revised rear and new LED taillights add to the all-new X-Terra's athletic look, reflecting the Nissan Design team's dynamic and modern philosophy.

Styling stands out

The styling of the all-new X-

Terra was developed at the Global Design studio in Japan. At 4.9m in length, 1.9m in height and just over 2.1m in width - with a ground clearance of 243 mm - the X-Terra looks right at home next to its bigger sibling, the Patrol, and borrows some design elements.

The front face resembles the Patrol with the powerful new V-motion grill, with its thick frame contrasting with the refined horizontal chrome bars within. The proportions of the all-new X-Terra are strong and bold. The hood is tall and horizontal, the body is muscular, and the driver sits up high for a commanding road presence.

The overall image is imposing and rugged, but designers have also added expressions of sophistication and technology. This is underlined by the unique C-shaped LED signature headlamps, similar to those of the Patrol, but evolved and interpreted in a new way for the all-new X-Terra. The quad LED projector lamps, like ice-cubes, have a high-tech vibe. Each one is intricately framed in its own bezel, showing off an attention to detail.

The front bumper with its unique layers overlapping each other creates an overall protected, yet sophisticated feeling. Combined with sleek, high tech headlamps and a powerful grill creates a distinctive front face

that looks tough, modern and up-scale. In the rear, the width of the vehicle is highlighted by the strong horizontal movement of the tail lamps. The wide LED signature rear lamps and the characteristic chrome centre finisher further emphasize its strength and width. Like its Patrol sibling, the rear bumper uses squared-off shapes to show that the all-new X-Terra is well protected.

Taking a closer look at the wheels, the titanium grade models will come equipped with 17-inch alloy wheels, while the platinum grade will come with a set of 18-inch machine cut alloys. Chrome side steps and a chrome auto folding mirrors complement the overall look, alongside the fender vent and smart roof rail.

The all-new X-Terra is available in seven exterior colours, including bright brown and burgundy. The upscale exterior is matched by premium black and light grey interior colours that add to the richness of the vehicle, along with a choice of cloth or leather seat fabrics, depending on the grade.

As France builds EU support, some warn against US rift

When a situation... is serious, I think it's also our responsibility to state it very clearly: France's Beaune

Brussels, Belgium - European allies rallied cautiously around France on Tuesday after the US and Australian decision to strip Paris of a submarine supply contract, but some warned the dispute should not torpedo trade talks.

German Europe Minister Michael Roth said France's diplomatic crisis with the US was a 'wake-up call for all of us' on the importance of uniting an often divided EU on foreign and security policy.

A furious France has accused the United States, Australia and Britain of working behind its back to negotiate the AUKUS defence pact and replace Canberra's multi-billion-dollar order of French submarines with a US contract.

The show of solidarity from Germany and the EU's top officials was welcomed by France, which said the breakdown of trust with Washington strengthened the case for Europe to set its own strategic course.

France's minister for European affairs Clement Beaune called the row 'a European issue' not simply a French one, as he arrived at ministerial talks in Brussels, with the chaotic US pullout from Afghanistan in August also a source of irritation among EU members.

"I don't think France is overreacting and I don't think France should overreact. But when a situation... is serious, I think it's also our responsibility to state it very clearly," he said.



French minister for European affairs Clement Beaune gives a doorstep statement as he arrives for a General Affairs ministers council (GAC) at the EU headquarters, in Brussels on Tuesday (AFP)

But others were more cautious. Gasper Dovzan, the Slovenian junior foreign minister who chaired the meeting, said that some ministers 'of course expressed solidarity' with France 'but also a great interest in obtaining more information'.

EU Council chief Charles Michel said he had a 'frank, direct and lively exchange on AUKUS' with Australian Prime Minister Scott Morrison on the sidelines of the United Nations General Assembly in New York.

And EU internal market commissioner, Thierry Breton, warned there was a growing feeling 'that something is broken' in Europe's ties with Washington.

"So it is probably time to pause and reset our EU-US relationship," he said in a speech in Washington.

Notes of caution

But others were more cautious.

EU vice president Maros Sefcovic who attended the Brussels talks, said the next EU leaders summit would, after what had happened in Kabul and with the AUKUS treaty, 'focus more on strategic autonomy'.

But Ireland's European affairs minister Thomas Byrne noted that member states like Ireland

that are neutral powers would not be interested in joining a European defence pact, and stressed that the row, while damaging, shouldn't be allowed to 'tear apart' existing alliances.

The European Commission said it was considering whether the diplomatic storm would affect a gathering of a new EU-US Trade and Technology Council in Pittsburgh on September 29 to discuss ways to cooperate on trade and regulate big tech.

"The decision will be made before the 29th," Breton told journalists.

A US official involved in talks at the United Nations said the

United States expected the meeting to go ahead and noted that it was a forum to discuss shared concerns on China.

"I would argue that for countries in the EU that we are hoping to involve more deeply in our Asia-Pacific strategy having the (meeting) is essential," she said, adding that the United States welcomed French leadership in the region.

'Irritated' France

An EU diplomat said France had 'floated' the idea of delaying the TTC meeting, though they face opposition from the Baltic republics, which border Russia and set great store in the NATO alliance.

EU ambassadors were expected to discuss the proposal at a meeting on Friday, with much hinging on a hotly anticipated phone call between French President Emmanuel Macron and Joe Biden set to take place in the coming days.

On Wednesday, US Secretary of State Antony Blinken is also expected to exchange views on the crisis in ties with his French counterpart Jean-Yves Le Drian while both take part in a closed-door meeting for the five veto-wielding members of the UN Security Council, though no one-one talks are scheduled, an official said.

Byrne said the TTC meeting was not on the agenda of the EU

Denmark defends Biden

Copenhagen, Denmark - Denmark, one of Washington's closest allies in Europe, disagrees with French and EU criticism of the United States over a submarine deal with Australia, Prime Minister Mette Frederiksen said on Wednesday.

Frederiksen defended US President Joe Biden as 'very loyal' to Europe even though the United States and Australia stripped European Union member France of a submarine contract.

Copenhagen's stance contrasted with the tone in Tuesday's meeting in Brussels, where most European diplomats expressed solidarity with Paris even if several warned against a rift with Washington.

"I think it's important to say - given the talks going on in



Denmark's Prime Minister Mette Frederiksen greets delegates in Aalborg (AFP)

Europe right now - that I see Biden as very loyal to the transatlantic alliance," Frederiksen said in an interview with Danish daily *Politiken* from New York. "And in general, we should not turn concrete challenges, which will always exist between allies, into something they should not be. I would very much warn against this," she added.

ministerial meeting and stressed that 'trade and greater cooperation is in everyone's interest, and we certainly hope that discussions can continue'.

Sweden's EU minister Hans Dahlgren expressed reservations about giving too tough a response, saying he understood French irritation but wanted more detail on what had happened over the submarine deal.

"I don't think we should restructure the EU's trade policy because of this," he said.

The creation of an EU-US tech council was agreed at a summit in June.

Washington was expected to use it to seek deeper support from the Europeans on curbing the ambitions of emerging superpower China. AFP

'Assassination attempt' on Ukrainian president aide

Kiev, Ukraine - Gunmen opened fire with automatic weapons on a car carrying a senior aide to Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky on Wednesday, in what officials said was an attempted assassination in response to his crackdown on oligarchs.

Sergiy Shefir, a 57 year old former scriptwriter and longtime associate of comedian-turned-politician Zelensky, was reported to have escaped without serious injury. An advisor to the interior minister, Anton Heraschenko, said on Facebook that the attack took place around 10.00am on Wednesday near the village of Lisnyky south of the capital Kiev. He said Shefir's driver was 'seriously injured' and that police had launched a special operation in the area.

'Unidentified individuals fired about 10 shots from a 7.62 calibre automatic weapon', Ukraine's Prosecutor General Iryna Venediktova said on Facebook.

She said the authorities had opened an attempted murder investigation. Photos published by



Ukrainian President's chief aide Sergei Shefir (AFP)

officials showed a black Audi with bullet holes along its bonnet and on the driver-side door.

Official reports did not say whether Shefir was injured, but a lawmaker representing Zelensky's 'Servant of the People' party said he was fine.

'I briefly spoke to him, everything is fine, he is alive and well,' Davyd Arakhania told Russia's RIA Novosti news agency.

He said police had taken Shefir to a 'safe' location.

Another aide in Zelensky's office said the attack was an attempt to 'demonstrably kill a key member of the team'.

Mykhailo Podolyak told the Interfax-Ukraine news agency the attack was in response to 'politics directed at limiting the traditional influence of shadowy oligarchs'.

Zelensky's spokesman said on Facebook that the president, who was on a working visit to the United States, would soon make a public statement.

Sergiy Nykyforov said no 'insidious actions' would affect the president's plans to 'de-shadow and de-oligarch' Ukraine.

Shefir was born in the industrial central city of Kryvyi Rig and studied to be a metallurgist, but as a student began doing comedy for the popular KVN show with his brother, Boris.

In 2003 he co-founded a production company called 'Kvartal 95' with Boris and Zelensky, who was elected president in 2019.

Shefir produced and wrote the *Servant of the People*, a show in which Zelensky portrayed a schoolteacher who becomes president. AFP

US progressives object to Iron Dome funding

Washington, US - A group of leftist US Democrats came under heavy fire on Tuesday after reportedly vowing to nix a short-term spending bill over a US\$1bn allocation for Israel's Iron Dome missile defence system.

The party leadership vowed there would be no interruption in funding, with the cash being sourced elsewhere - but not before being berated by Republicans for capitulating to 'anti-Semites' on their left flank.

Steny Hoyer, the Democratic House of Representatives majority leader, said there would be a vote 'before the end of this week that will fund fully Iron Dome'.

He added he had talked to Israeli Foreign Minister Yair Lapid 'and assured him that that bill was going to pass this house'.

He said the House would use an accelerated procedure known as a suspension bill that requires a bill be approved by two thirds of the members present, or a unanimous oral vote. The Senate will then have to adopt it.

Tuesday's drama was sparked by House Democrats



Israel's Iron Dome defence system and rockets launched from Beit Lahia in the Gaza Strip on May 14 this year

removing a provision originally included in a bill to keep the federal government funded that would have helped boost the Israeli air defence system.

The about-face came after a group of leftist representatives objected to the allocation, US media reported, threatening to tank the bill when it comes up for a vote later Tuesday.

While the row looked ultimately like a storm in a tea cup, it underlined that progressives

are becoming increasingly skeptical of no-strings-attached aid

to America's key ally in the Middle East, just months after the end of headline right-winger Benjamin Netanyahu's 11-year premiership.

Operational for a decade, Iron Dome has intercepted and destroyed thousands of short-range rockets and artillery shells launched by Hamas militants from Gaza before they were able to hit populated areas, Israeli officials say.

House Republican leader Kevin McCarthy blasted Democrats for capitulating to 'the

anti-Semitic influence of their radical members', an accusation echoed by conservative Texas Senator Ted Cruz, who urged the Democratic rank-and-file to denounce the party's leadership.

Dean Phillips, a Democratic congressman from Minnesota, tweeted he was 'incredulous' that colleagues would risk shutting down the government rather than defend 'one of our most important allies and only Jewish nation in the world' from Hamas rockets. AFP

Treats and tradition in Tehran's oldest, tiniest 'chaikhaneh'

Tehran, Iran - With his trimmed beard, red scarf and bronze-coloured waistcoat, Kazem Mabhtutian serves a steady stream of customers in the smallest and oldest teahouse in Tehran, but at 63 years old, he is counting on God to find him a successor.

Tucked in an alleyway of the Grand Bazaar, wedged between a clothes shop and the door of a mosque, his 1.5sqm *chaikhaneh* (teahouse) is invisible from the main street.

And yet it is the most famous among tea connoisseurs in the Iranian capital.

In between pouring glasses of steaming brew for his customers, Mabhtutian tells the century-old story of the fabled Haj Ali Darvish Tea House with pride.

His father Haj Ali Mabhtutian,

nicknamed the Dervish or Beshtti, or 'He who deserves paradise', was born in Hamedan in western Iran, he says.

"He came to Tehran at the age of 15 to earn a living. He bought this shop from Haj Hassan who had opened it in 1918."

Arranged around him are cups and teapots, boxes of tea and a samovar water-heater. There is an antiquated radio, a paraffin lamp, statuettes of dervishes, and gold-coloured sticks of *Nabat*, a saffron-scented barley sugar.

On the wall, a tourism ministry certificate assures that the place 'is part of the intangible heritage of the national culture'.

'Tea of kindness'

Aside from the traditional Iranian black tea, Mabhtutian prepares



Owner Kazem Mabhtutian (63) serves tea at the smallest and oldest teahouse tucked away in an alleyway, in Tehran on Monday (AFP)

cardamom, cinnamon, mint, thyme and hibiscus brews every day from 7.30am.

But his favourite is his signature 'tea of kindness', a mixture of mint, lemon and saffron which

gives it a zesty yellow colour.

Business is usually steady: experts say that Iranians consume an average of nine small glasses of tea a day, or 100,000 tonnes nationwide every year.

"Until 2007, my father ran this house, known as the smallest in the world," said Mabhtutian. "Then he broke his leg and never returned to work. He stayed at home until his death in 2018 at the age of 92."

Kazem then left his advertising agency job and took over the business.

"I don't regret it at all," he said. "Advertising was a business, but this is a question of love. I chose this job with my heart, not for the money."

On the menu, the price of a cup of tea is listed at 100,000 rials (35 US cents), but 'the rates are not fixed', he said. "It depends on the financial situation of the customer."

Every day he serves some 200 customers.

"Most of them come from

outside the market because they know us," he said.

"There used to be a lot of tourists too, because this shop was in the guidebooks, but the foreigners disappeared with the pandemic."

'Made with love'

Given the miniature size of the teahouse, there are no tables, but customers can pull up a plastic stool outside, amid the bazaar's bustle.

Seated there was Shafagh, a 32 year old graphic designer, with her friend Forough, 47.

"Everyone sells tea, but the important thing is to know how to make it," said Shafagh, enjoying a cup of kindness tea.

"It's like cooking - when someone makes tea with love, it tastes completely different."

Forough chimed in that "I also come to chat with the owner. I think his tea is nothing like the tea served in other places".

Every weekday, Habibollah Sayadi (70) leaves his nearby clothing shop to enjoy his Iranian black tea.

"I'm a regular - I've been coming here for almost 50 years because I love the taste of his tea," he said, adding approvingly that "Mr Kazem respects hygiene" in times of COVID-19.

Mabhtutian, the owner, is getting on in years and is still single, so does he worry about what will become of his beloved shop in future?

"Not at all," he said confidently. "God will find me a successor. A place like this one does not die."

AFP

TALIBAN TAKEOVER

This is our homeland: Women plead for basic rights in Taliban's Afghanistan

Kabul, Afghanistan - As the Taliban increasingly excludes women from public life in Afghanistan, some are determined to speak out despite the threat of retribution from the hardline Islamist group.

The Taliban were notorious for their brutally oppressive rule from 1996 to 2001, when women were banned from going to school or work and only allowed to leave the house with a male chaperone.

They have promised to change, saying they would respect women's rights within the framework of Islamic sharia law, but many remain sceptical.

In Kabul - the city that has seen the most change over the past 20 years - some young women, such as activist Shaqaiq Hakimi, refuse to be forced into exile by a return to Taliban rule.

"I want to fight and regain the rights that they took from us. We don't need to go to another country. This is our homeland," she told AFP.

"If we are not forced to leave, then we won't go anywhere."

The Taliban claim that blocks on women returning to work or girls going to secondary school will be lifted once new systems are established.

But this is an echo of the early days of the last regime, which never allowed women to return.

NGO worker Farkhunda Zahidbaig (21) described how Taliban fighters entered her office to tell management that women employees should leave.

"After this, our boss made the decision that the rest of us shouldn't come to the office," she said.

"Women want to have a profession, but... they can't continue in their jobs. The Taliban have taken away their freedom to work."



Afghan women wait in front of a bank office in Kabul on Monday (AFP)

Women MPs in Greece on way to US

Athens, Greece - Greece on Wednesday said it was temporarily hosting seven Afghan women MPs and their families who fled Afghanistan ahead of eventual resettlement in the United States.

'Seven Afghan MPs arrived in Athens via Tbilisi (Georgia) a few hours ago, accompanied by family members,' the Greek Foreign Ministry said. '(They

will be hosted in Greece for a short time until resettlement procedures to the United States are completed,' it said.

The women, whose identities were not revealed, left Afghanistan with assistance from the New York-based NGO Zaka Khan, the ministry said.

Greece took part in US-led evacuation efforts in August to

remove a small number of people from Afghanistan following the Taliban return to power after two decades.

Greece is currently home to 40,000 long-term Afghan refugees and asylum seekers, making it the largest migrant population in the country, according to the UN High Commissioner for Refugees.

AFP

'as soon as possible' but did not provide a timeframe.

Their all-male government has also shut down the former administration's ministry of women's affairs and replaced it with one that earned notoriety during their first stint in power for enforcing religious doctrine.

On top of the pressures of unemployment, women now fear going outside alone.

"We're afraid that if we go out the Taliban might whip us or hit us," said Shabana, who was travelling around Kabul with her father. "We can't even go to the bazaar alone."

Hakimi said she would wait to see if the Taliban fulfil their promise to allow all Afghans to go back to work or school.

"I hope that they do just that."

AFP

Two Taliban among three killed in Jalalabad attack

Jalalabad, Afghanistan - Two Taliban fighters and a civilian were killed on Wednesday by gunmen who attacked a checkpoint in eastern Afghanistan, security sources and witnesses said.

The attack in Jalalabad city is the latest on Taliban targets in Nangarhar province, which for years was the main operating base for the Islamic State group's Afghanistan chapter.

A security source and witnesses said unidentified gunmen in a rickshaw attacked a checkpoint in Ghawchak district of Jalalabad and killed two Taliban guards and a civilian bystander.

A Taliban official confirmed the attack, but said

the dead were all civilians.

In another incident, locals said two Taliban fighters were injured while trying to defuse an improvised explosive device in Jalalabad. Further details were not immediately available.

Islamic State-Khorasan, the local branch of the extremist group, claimed responsibility for several weekend attacks in Jalalabad that killed at least two people.

They were the first deadly blasts since the last US forces withdrew from Afghanistan on August 30.

IS-K also claimed responsibility for a bloody attack that killed more than 100 people at Kabul airport at the end of August.

UN releases \$45mn to save health system

Geneva, Switzerland - The United Nations aid chief said on Wednesday he had released US\$45mn in emergency funds to help prevent Afghanistan's healthcare system from collapsing.

Martin Griffiths, the UN's Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs and Emergency Relief Coordinator, warned in a statement that 'medicines, medical supplies and fuel are running out in Afghanistan'.

"Cold chains are compromised. Essential health-care workers are not being paid," he said.

Afghanistan's healthcare

system was plunged into crisis after the Taliban swept into power last month, complicating aid deliveries and leaving many health facilities understaffed.

In a bid to avert catastrophe, Griffiths said he was releasing funds from the UN's Central Emergency Response Fund to boost life-saving support in Afghanistan.

"Allowing Afghanistan's healthcare delivery system to fall apart would be disastrous," he said. "People across the country would be denied access to primary health care such as emergency care."

Thousands flee Myanmar town after clashes

Yangon, Myanmar - Thousands have fled a town in west Myanmar after days of fighting between anti-junta dissidents and the military, during which soldiers bombed civilian homes, residents and local media said on Wednesday.

Myanmar has been in turmoil since Aung San Suu Kyi's government was ousted by the military in February, sparking a nationwide uprising that the junta has tried to crush with a bloody crackdown.

Attacks on junta troops and assets have increased after lawmakers ousted by the generals called for a 'people's defensive war' earlier this month.

Soldiers fought a gunbattle with around 100 members of a local defence group after being 'ambushed' in Thantlang in remote Chin state near the India border on September 18, junta spokesman Zaw Min Thun said on Tuesday.

He did not give any casualty figures.

Residents began to flee en masse on Monday after soldiers 'began to randomly shoot out the windows' of houses in the town, according to one local who did not want to be named.

"Almost everyone has left," he said, adding he was sheltering in a nearby village with around 500 people, and that several hundred had already fled towards the India border.

Thantlang has a population of around 7,500 according to the most recent census.



This handout photo shows people attempting to extinguish a fire as houses burn in Namg Kar village in Magwe region's Gangaw township following clashes with the Myanmar forces, on September 10 (AFP)

Another resident said she travelled for three days with her elderly parents to reach India after soldiers bombed her house and fighting escalated around the town.

"I never thought of running from my own house even after the military bombed it... but as things got worse... I finally had to flee," she told AFP.

Videos and pictures published by local media showed buildings in Thantlang they said had been destroyed by the military, and domestic animals roaming deserted streets.

Military spokesman Zaw Min Thun said 20 homes and a government building had been destroyed in a fire after the September 18 clash, without specifying a cause.

In recent weeks anti-junta fighters have attacked communications towers belonging to the military-owned Mytel across the country, including in Chin state.

The UN warned renewed fighting in the region was sending more people fleeing into India, where they urgently required food and shelter.

In May, government forces

used artillery to flush out rebels from the town of Mindat in southern Chin state, and later cut off its water supply, according to a spokesman for a local insurgent group.

More than 1,100 civilians have been killed and nearly 8,000 arrested since the coup, according to local observers.

The junta has defended its power grab by alleging massive fraud during elections in late 2020 which Suu Kyi's National League for Democracy won by a landslide.

AFP

Wall of molten lava destroys 320 buildings on Spanish island

Los Llanos de Aridane, Spain - The vast wall of molten lava creeping down the slopes of Spain's La Palma island has destroyed 320 buildings and over 154 hectares of land, Europe's volcano observatory said on Wednesday.

The property damage figure was twice that given 24 hours ago by Copernicus, which uses sky radar imagery to monitor the extent of lava coverage and posted the update on Twitter.

The Cumbre Vieja volcano, which erupted on Sunday, straddles a ridge in the south of La Palma, one of seven islands that make up the Canary Islands, Spain's Atlantic archipelago which lies off the coast of Morocco.

Experts are expecting the scale of damages to rise in the coming hours as the slow-moving but unstoppable mass of white-hot rock, slides towards the island's western coast.

"In the last few hours it has slowed down a lot, it is now moving at 300m an hour, maybe less, because it is reaching a very flat area but it is gaining height," David Calvo, an expert with the Involcan volcanology institute, told AFP.

"There are areas where it is already 15 metres thick."

If the lava - which has a temperature of 1,100°C - continues to move at the same pace, it will



A woman pats her dog next to boxes with belongings prior to their evacuation, on the Canary Island of La Palma, on Sunday (AFP)

reach the sea later on Wednesday or possibly on Thursday, he said, warning it would have an explosive effect.

"There will be a huge battle between the water and the lava. With those contrasting temperatures, it causes massive explosions and a fragmentation of the lava which shoots out like missiles," Calvo said.

The eruption on this island of some 85,000 people, the first in 50 years, has forced some 6,000

people out of their homes, but so far nobody has been injured.

Involcan believes the eruption of La Cumbre Vieja could last 'between 24 and 84 days'.

"Dealing with this crisis won't end when the lava reaches the sea," Prime Minister Pedro Sanchez said on Tuesday.

"It will end when we've managed to rebuild everything the volcano has destroyed and will destroy."

AFP

COVID-19 PANDEMIC

Six billion vaccine shots injected worldwide

India on September 17 set a record by administering 25mn jabs in a single day

Paris, France - More than six billion doses of COVID-19 vaccines have been administered around the world, according to an AFP tally based on official sources on Wednesday at 0930 GMT.

The vaccination drive has reached a steady rhythm as it took 29 days to clock up the sixth billion, almost the same speed as the fourth and fifth billion at 30 and 26 days respectively.

India on September 17 set a record by administering 25mn COVID-19 jabs in a single day, the highest in the world.

The previous daily best was 14mn on August 31.

It took around 140 days to get the first billion doses into people's arms.

Nearly 40 per cent (2.18bn) of the six billion shots have been administered in China. India (826.5mn) and the United States (386.8mn) make up the trio of countries that have administered the most jabs.

Among countries with a population of over one million, the United Arab Emirates (UAE) leads the way with 198 doses per 100 inhabitants and more than 81 per cent of the population fully vaccinated.

Uruguay comes next with 175 doses per 100 inhabitants, followed by Israel (171), Cuba (163), Qatar (162) and Portugal (154).

Some countries, including Israel, the UAE and Uruguay, have started giving booster jabs with the aim of extending immunity among the fully vaccinated.



A health worker inoculates a woman with a dose of the Covishield vaccine at a makeshift centre, in New Delhi on Wednesday (AFP)

While most poorer countries have now started vaccination drives, mainly thanks to the Covax scheme, coverage remains very unequal, although injections have picked up in recent weeks after donations by richer countries.

High-income countries, as defined by the World Bank, administered an average of 124 doses per 100 inhabitants compared with just four doses per 100 inhabitants in low-income countries.

World's top three countries

China	India	US
2.18bn	826.5mn	386.8mn

US to donate 500mn jabs to the world

US President Joe Biden will announce Wednesday the US plans to donate an additional 500mn Pfizer-BioNTech COVID vaccines to the rest of the world,

bringing its total commitment to 1.1bn, officials said.

Biden will relay the news at a virtual summit to be held on the margins of the United Nations General Assembly, where he will challenge world leaders to vac-

inate 70 per cent of every country by September 2022.

The donations are being made 'free of charge, no strings attached', a senior administration official said ahead of the meeting. "For every one shot we have administered in this country to date, we are now donating three shots to other countries," she added.

In his first speech to the UN as president on Tuesday, Biden told delegates that the United States had put more than US\$15bn to-

wards the global COVID-19 response and shipped more than 160mn doses to other countries.

The US and other wealthy countries have been criticised by the World Health Organization for their plans to roll out booster shots for elderly and high-risk populations, while much of the world faces a severe shortage in doses. But the administration official said: "We're proving that you can take care of your own, while helping others as well."

70 per cent target

Despite the development of safe and highly effective vaccines in record-breaking time, huge disparities exist between countries with ample supply and others that have barely begun their immunisation campaign.

Just 3.6 per cent of Africa's eligible population has been inoculated - compared with an average of more than 60 per cent in Western Europe.

Three countries that are not yet vaccinating at all are Burundi, Eritrea and North Korea.

"The president will call on world leaders to elevate the global level of ambition to end the COVID-19 pandemic in 2022," said a second US official.

Washington will seek to rally the world around three goals: Increasing vaccine supply; saving lives now by resolving the oxygen crisis and access to testing, medicine and therapeutics; and lastly improving future preparedness.

Agencies

Brazil Minister infected

Brasília, Brazil - Brazil's Health Minister Marcelo Queiroga tested positive for COVID-19 on Tuesday after attending the UN General Assembly in New York that was inaugurated by his country's President, Jair Bolsonaro, according to an official statement.

"The other members of the delegation have been tested and are negative," said the official Brazilian government press release.

Queiroga, who had received a COVID-19 vaccine, was the second member of Bolsonaro's entourage to test positive for the virus since arriving in New York for the UN gathering.

The 55 year old Health Minister will remain in the US for a period of isolation, even though the rest of the delegation has returned to Brazil.

Bolsonaro, who appeared without a mask on several occasions during the trip, has not been not vaccinated and repeated that he would be 'the last' Brazilian to receive the vaccine.

Queiroga was with Bolsonaro at several events, including a meeting with British Prime Minister Boris Johnson on Monday. He wrote on Twitter that while following 'all health security protocols', the ministry 'will continue to take firm action to deal with the pandemic in Brazil'.

AFP

Amnesty asks for two billion jabs for poorer world

London, UK - COVID-19 vaccine manufacturers are putting profit before lives, Amnesty International said on Wednesday, as it demanded two billion doses for poorer nations by the end of the year.

The human rights group said in a new report that US President Joe Biden was expected to outline a pledge at the UN General Assembly to fully vaccinate 70 per cent of the world's population by next September.

"We need leaders like President Biden to put billions of doses on the table and deliver the goods, otherwise this is just another empty gesture and lives will continue to be lost," Amnesty chief Agnes Callamard said.

The group said AstraZeneca, BioNTech, Johnson & Johnson, Moderna, Novavax and Pfizer had all refused to share doses or technology to enable more of the world to get COVID-19 jabs.

Most people in the rich world have been inoculated, but parts of Latin America, Africa and Asia have plunged into renewed crises with 'tens of thousands of preventable deaths every week', Amnesty said.

Out of 5.76bn doses administered worldwide, only 0.3 per cent have gone to low-income countries with over 79 per cent heading to upper-middle and high-income countries, it said.

In letters sent to Amnesty, all the companies pledged their support for human rights, but the report said their actions violated that commitment.

AstraZeneca and Johnson & Johnson were selling their doses at cost price, it noted.

But all of the six companies had fought a bid by India and



Amnesty chief Agnes Callamard

South Africa to waive vaccine-related intellectual property rights at the World Trade Organization, despite receiving hefty government support themselves.

Amnesty launched a new campaign which it said was backed by the World Health Organization and UN High Commissioner for Human Rights 'to hold states and big pharma to account'.

With 100 days to go till the end of the year, it said the WHO's target of vaccinating 40 per cent of the population of low and lower-middle income countries was at risk.

It demanded richer countries redistribute 'the hundreds of millions of excess doses currently sitting idle' and for vaccine developers to ensure that at least half of doses produced go to poorer countries.

"We're calling on states and pharmaceutical companies to drastically change course and to do everything needed to deliver two billion vaccines to low and lower-middle income countries starting now," Callamard said.

"Profits should never come before lives," she said.

"No one should spend another year suffering and living in fear," the Amnesty chief said.

AFP

Sri Lanka seeks World Bank loan for vaccine drive

Colombo, Sri Lanka - Sri Lanka will seek an emergency loan of US\$100mn from the World Bank for a coronavirus vaccination drive, officials said on Wednesday, as the country struggles with an acute currency crisis.

The COVID-19 pandemic has claimed more than 12,000 lives and infected over half a million people in Sri Lanka, which is also suffering food shortages because of the cash crunch.

The government said in a statement that the Cabinet had 'granted approval to the resolution furnished by the Minister of Health for obtaining the relevant supplementary financing facility' from the international lender.



A man gets a Sinopharm vaccine dose, in Colombo on Tuesday (AFP)

The statement said the World Bank had indicated willingness to provide the money to buy 14mn doses of the Pfizer vaccine and finance 'other costs pertaining to vaccination'.

Sri Lanka has double-jabbed

more than half of its 21mn people, mostly with Chinese vaccines, but has remained in the grip of a major COVID-19 wave since April.

Medical experts say the death toll is much higher than

the official figure.

The economy, shorn of its key tourism sector by the pandemic, shrank by an unprecedented 3.6 per cent last year.

President Gotabaya Rajapaksa declared a state of emergency on August 31 to deal with food shortages, as most banks have run out of dollars to finance imports.

But he has resisted calls to secure a bailout from the International Monetary Fund as the country faces what Finance Minister Basil Rajapaksa recently described as a 'dangerous foreign exchange crisis'.

Central bank governor Ajith Cabraal has said the IMF would

want Sri Lanka to depreciate its currency in return for a bailout, but Colombo cannot accept that.

Sri Lanka's foreign reserves stood at US\$3.55bn at the end of August while the country has to repay about US\$2bn in foreign debts before the end of the year.

The main opposition SJB party has led calls for the government to seek IMF cash to avoid a sovereign debt default next year.

Struggling to raise domestic revenue, the government on Wednesday raised its debt ceiling by 400bn rupees (US\$2bn) so it can meet its expenses in the next three months.

AFP

Shots in the dark: China sends aid to Myanmar rebels

Muse, Myanmar - Delivering vaccines to Myanmar's junta, but also to rebel groups that are the generals' sworn enemies, China is playing both sides to fight the coronavirus and strengthen its hand in the messy politics of its southern neighbour.

Beijing has already handed over nearly 13mn doses to the generals, who ousted Aung San Suu Kyi in February and plunged Myanmar and its healthcare system into chaos.

The junta has appeared powerless to halt the spread of the virus, spooking authorities on the other side of its porous, 2,000km frontier with China, where officials are waging a 'zero case' war on COVID-19.

So Beijing has quietly shipped thousands of vaccines, medical workers, and construction materials for quarantine centres, multiple rebel groups told AFP.

Chinese Red Cross staff 'come to help us sometimes... to help us prevent the COVID-19 pandemic', said Colonel Naw Bu,



This file photo shows motorists passing by the China-Myanmar border gate in Myanmar's Muse town (AFP)

spokesman for the Kachin Independence Army (KIA).

"But they did not come to stay here," added the colonel, whose group - numbering thousands - controls territory in Myanmar's northern jade-rich hills.

"They just came for a while and went back."

The KIA is one of Myanmar's more than 20 ethnic rebel

groups - many of whom control swathes of remote border territory - who have fought each other and the military over the drugs trade, natural resources and autonomy. But they are all vulnerable to COVID-19.

As a third wave ripped through lowland Myanmar in July, the KIA inoculated 10,000 people in their Laiza headquar-

ters with Chinese jabs, Naw Bu said. Health workers had also crossed over from China to deliver masks and hand sanitiser, he added.

The Shan State Progress Party rebel group has vaccinated 1,000 people in areas under its control with Chinese vaccines, a spokesperson told AFP.

It had ordered a total of half a

million, he added.

'Good neighbour' China had also promised to supply doses to the Ta'ang National Liberation Army, based in nearby territory, spokesman Brigadier General Tar Phone Kyaw said.

Meanwhile, in the border town of Muse, men work on a new quarantine centre that will house up to 1,000 beds for traders keen to resume business with the country's giant, COVID-19-wary neighbour.

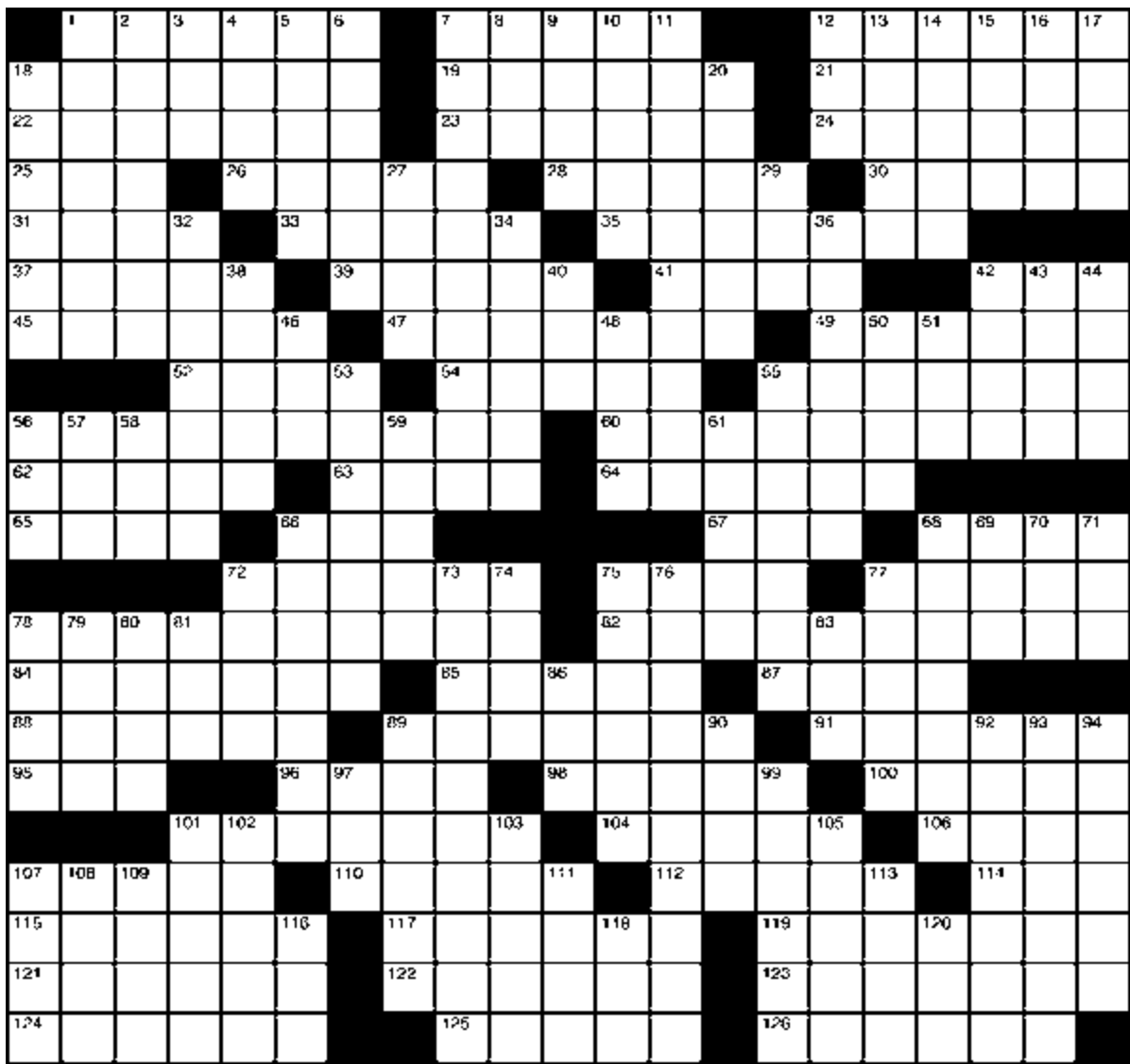
The workers are Myanmar nationals, but the building materials were all provided by authorities in China's Yunnan province.

The aid is receiving none of the fanfare of Beijing's diplomacy elsewhere in Asia and across Africa.

"China will as always, according to their needs, provide necessary assistance and support to the Myanmar people in their fight against the epidemic," a Chinese Foreign Affairs spokesman said.

AFP

DAILY CROSSWORD



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ACROSS

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106 ____ paddy
107 Gracious
110 Clock faces
112 Cover and ground starters
114 Chatter

115 Amazonia's little cat
117 Complete
119 Early bloomer
121 Hydrocarbon
122 Fishy features
123 Moans
124 Worshipped
125 Show signs of wear
126 Word with life and latest
DOWN
1 Brazilian coin
2 Brings into accord
3 Even if, for sort
4 Politicos Hayworth and Rich
5 Pyrenees peak
6 Bookish person
7 Amazon forest feature
8 Yoko
9 Brazilian state
10 Labine namesakes
11 River sources
12 Protrude
13 Lissome
14 Croc's cousin
15 "Do ____ others ..."
16 Lime and lemon drinks
17 Unusual

18 Herr, in Houston
20 Bat's daytime job?
27 Employs
29 Scientists' org.
32 Heirloom
34 Most loyal
36 Put on a second coat
38 Fleshy plant
40 Gal of song
42 Aleutian isle
43 Versifier
44 Concludes
46 Portuguese king
48 Singer McEntire
50 "____ Well That Ends Well"
51 Cask
53 In the beginning
55 Violinist Joseph
56 Swab
57 Lyric poem
58 Pose
59 Satellite's route
61 Adrift
66 River to Limerick
68 Great circle
69 Sprint
70 Wander
71 Sapporo sash
72 Pintail
73 Dreaded
Amazonian serpent
74 Dapper

75 Diva Renata
76 Amazonia's language
77 Economist Adam
78 Canaanite god
79 Uncanny, to a Scot.
80 Rabbit tail
81 That man
83 Atty's' group
86 Mil. men
89 Confederates
90 Harbinger
92 Inferior imitator
93 Trigonometric functions
94 Ancient Nile city
97 Dispose
99 Rides a bike
101 More disgusting
102 In solitude
103 Where two become one
105 French council
107 Uncas's beloved
108 Topped off a cake
109 Reject
111 Rural sight
113 Saint ____ France
116 Turner of sailing and ranching
118 Detroit's ____ Wings
120 Brooks or Blanc

YOUR DAILY HOROSCOPE



ARIES MARCH 21-APRIL 19

This is one of those days -- one of those days when just about everything goes right. In your case, it's friendships, romance and career that will put you on top of the world, which doesn't leave much more to be desired, now does it? Take full advantage of this gift from the universe. Do all the socialising, mingling and introducing that you feel the need to do. All the lights are green.



LEO JULY 23-AUGUST 22

Life is good, love is grand and the world is a wonderful place to be. One of you has finally gotten up the courage to mention exactly how you feel and the other has responded with an enthusiastic 'me too!' For the next few days, if not weeks, you'll be right on top of the world -- and when you're happy, everybody's happy! Be sure to spread the good feelings around.



SAGITTARIUS NOVEMBER 22-DECEMBER 21

It's often been said that you Sagittarians are the 'favourites of the Gods' because you're their clowns. Well, that might or might not be true, but that clownish way certainly has gotten you out of more than one difficult situation with mere mortals in the past, hasn't it? You might want to pull that talent out of the closet today, if a tough situation comes up, it will work wonders.



TAURUS APRIL 20-MAY 20

You've been working really hard with a bit more gusto than usual for the past six weeks. Well, guess what? It's time to be rewarded for your efforts -- yes, finally! This may not mean that a raise, promotion or bonus is coming your way today -- but it won't be far behind. Rest assured that the powers that be are investigating, and quite happy with what they've seen.



VIRGO AUGUST 23-SEPTEMBER 22

The next six weeks are going to knock your romantic socks off - lots of flirtation and love at every turn. You're off to a great beginning, and today's astrological forecast calls for a little extra sugar. Enjoy yourself in the company of your dear one -- and if you're not yet attached, rest assured that the universe will be more than happy to arrange at least one blind date.



CAPRICORN DECEMBER 22-JANUARY 19

Your friends will definitely not recognise you for a while, maybe even a long while. You've already changed, seemingly overnight, from being reticent and polite to being bold and brazen -- but today you'll be adding a touch of rebellion into the mix. This is just not your usual style -- but hey, don't rein it in. Not one inch. It's good to keep 'em guessing. And fun, too!



GEMINI MAY 21-JUNE 21

A cosmic energy shift is going to occur over the next couple of days, and you'll feel it. Suddenly, a weight will be lifted from your shoulders, a situation that just wouldn't allow itself to be solved will easily untangle, and the person you've been trying in vain to reach - either figuratively or literally -- will suddenly be available. That ought to send you out of the house this morning in a fine mood.



LIBRA SEPTEMBER 23-OCTOBER 22

If you want it, you can have it now. There's just no other way to say it. If you really want it, you won't be shy about letting that fact be known, which means the universe will step in and make the arrangements for you. Basically, all you have to do now is to show up with a wish list. Pretend you're five, you're sitting on Santa's lap, and you've been a very, very good kid.



AQUARIUS JANUARY 20-FEBRUARY 18

This is one of those very few days out of every year when the universe smiles on us all. You Aquarians, in particular, have been singled out for a very special visit from the Cosmic Prize Patrol. You'll feel it as soon as you put your toes on the floor this morning, and as the day progresses it's only going to get better. Enjoy. Don't even bother questioning it. Just enjoy!



CANCER JUNE 22-JULY 22

Generosity is your middle name -- and everyone who knows you knows it. Don't let that wonderful quality come between you and a dear one, though. Although it sounds like it might be tough to turn something wonderful into something tricky, if you're too good to someone else, your sweetheart could easily become jealous. You'll have a lot of good stuff to pass around.



SCORPIO OCTOBER 23-NOVEMBER 21

You never bet on anything -- or anyone -- unless you're sure it's a well-calculated risk. The same holds true for today, with one exception: The universe is feeling exceptionally generous, so any risk you take will have a safety net built into it. Does this mean you'll win the lottery? Well, it might. After all, someone has to. If you're really meant to win, one ticket will do it.



PISCES FEBRUARY 19-MARCH 20

You're just dying to tell someone about a special secret -- one you've been keeping to yourself for weeks. You don't feel comfortable talking about it to just anyone -- even though that grin you've been wearing has probably helped more than a few folks to figure it out. This secret can only be entrusted to someone you know will take it to their grave.



TEST YOUR KNOWLEDGE

1. Who invented the Spinning Jenny?

- a. Thornton Hargreaves
b. Peter Hargreaves
c. James Hargreaves
d. Simon Hargreaves

2. Which insurance salesman invented the fountain pen in 1884?

- a. Lewis Edson Waterman
b. Sir William Grove
c. Charles Kettering
d. George Fountain

3. When was the first elevator built?

- a. 1743
b. 1739
c. 1760
d. 1785

Answers: 1. c 2. a 3. a

BLOCKBUSTERS ARE BACK
WHERE THEY BELONG
Witness the magic of movies the way they were meant to be seen...on the big screen

Dune
A mythic and emotionally charged hero's journey, "Dune" tells the story of Paul Atreides, a brilliant and gifted young man born into a great destiny, who must travel to the most dangerous planet in the universe to ensure the future of his family and his people.

Worth
Following the horrific 2001 attacks on the World Trade Center and Pentagon, Congress appoints attorney Kenneth Feinberg to lead the September 11th Victim Compensation Fund. Feinberg and his firm face the impossible task of determining the worth of a life

Willy's Wonderland
When his car breaks down, a quiet loner (Nicolas Cage) agrees to clean an abandoned family fun center in exchange for repairs. He soon finds himself waging war against possessed animatronic mascots.

Arousati
A romantic comedy drama film about the relationship of a young man and a girl and their impressions of the idea of the relationship between a man and a woman and the idea of marriage.

Book your tickets at voxcinemas.com or the VOX app

KIDS COLOURING

WORD BUILDER
You have three minutes to find all the words contained in this word.
Rules: Words should be at least four letters long, proper nouns and duplicates don't count

DAILY CROSSWORD ANSWERS (SEPTEMBER 22)

A	S	K	O	F	P	A	S	H	A	P	E	R	U	S	T	A
L	L	A	N	O	N	S	C	O	T	M	E	L	O	D	H	A
S	V	E	L	I	F	E	N	S	A	F	E	T	A	M	F	R
E	L	E	G	I	E	D	A	L	I	E	R	N	E	S	I	
C	P	I	L	O												
L	O	O														
A	M	E	C	H	E		R	I	S	E	S		S	T	A	N
R	E	S	C	T			N	A	P	A		C	N	D	O	R
A	S	S	E	S			A	M	I	S	H	O	R	G	Y	E
							M	A	T	I	N	E	C	I	D	O
S	I	R					V	I	V	E		S	P	A	C	E
E	D	U	C	A	T	E					A	R	K	S		
R	E	S	C	U	E	R	S				M	I	L	E	S	
F	E	T	I	D			S	A	T	I	N		S	A	N	F
							E	L	E	G	A	N	T			
C	A	S	A	V	A						S	P	A	H	E	S
A	D	E	L	I	N	E					I	R	O	N	E	
B	I	T	P	L	A	Y	E	R			S	E	I	D	E	S
L	O	U	L	I	C	S					T	C	A	L	S	
E	S	P					E	S	S		E	R	L	E	S	

RESPIRATORY DISORDERS

BREATHE
RIGHT

Breathing problems refer to the condition when you feel you can't get enough air, your chest feels very tight, you are breathless, or feel suffocated

Are you breathing right? Do you experience a lack of oxygen that alters your comfort level during the day or at night? It is important to understand and examine the way you breathe in order to detect any abnormalities early.

Your respiration rate - the number of times you breathe in a minute - is one of the vital signs your doctor checks when you visit. The normal rate depends on your age, but a typical adult takes between 12 and 20 breaths a minute when resting. You can measure your rate by counting the number of breaths you take in a minute - count the number of breaths taken 15 seconds and multiply by 4.

Hyperventilation

This common issue happens when you breathe faster than your body needs to and you get rid of too much carbon dioxide. That throws off the balance in your blood. Hyperventilation can be caused by things like exercise, anxiety, or asthma. It can make you feel dizzy, weak, or confused.

The traditional treatment is to breathe into a paper bag so you breathe back in some of the carbon dioxide. But today, doctors recommend taking deep breaths or covering your mouth and one of your nostrils to limit how much air gets in. If you have trouble calming down, ask someone to help you.

Dyspnea, orthopnea, trepopnea

Dyspnea is when you feel 'short of breath', like your body can't get enough air. It's a common symptom of many heart and lung problems, and it can be a sign of something serious, like an asthma attack or heart attack. Get medical help right away if you're short of breath very suddenly.

It also can happen if you're at high altitudes, in poor physical health, or are obese. In those cases, your doctor might recommend special breathing exercises, or they may give you oxygen.

Several types of dyspnea happen only when your body is in a certain position. They include:

Orthopnea, when you feel short of breath when you lie down. It often happens in people who have heart failure, when blood can build up in their lungs, if they lie down. Sitting up or standing usually eases the problem.

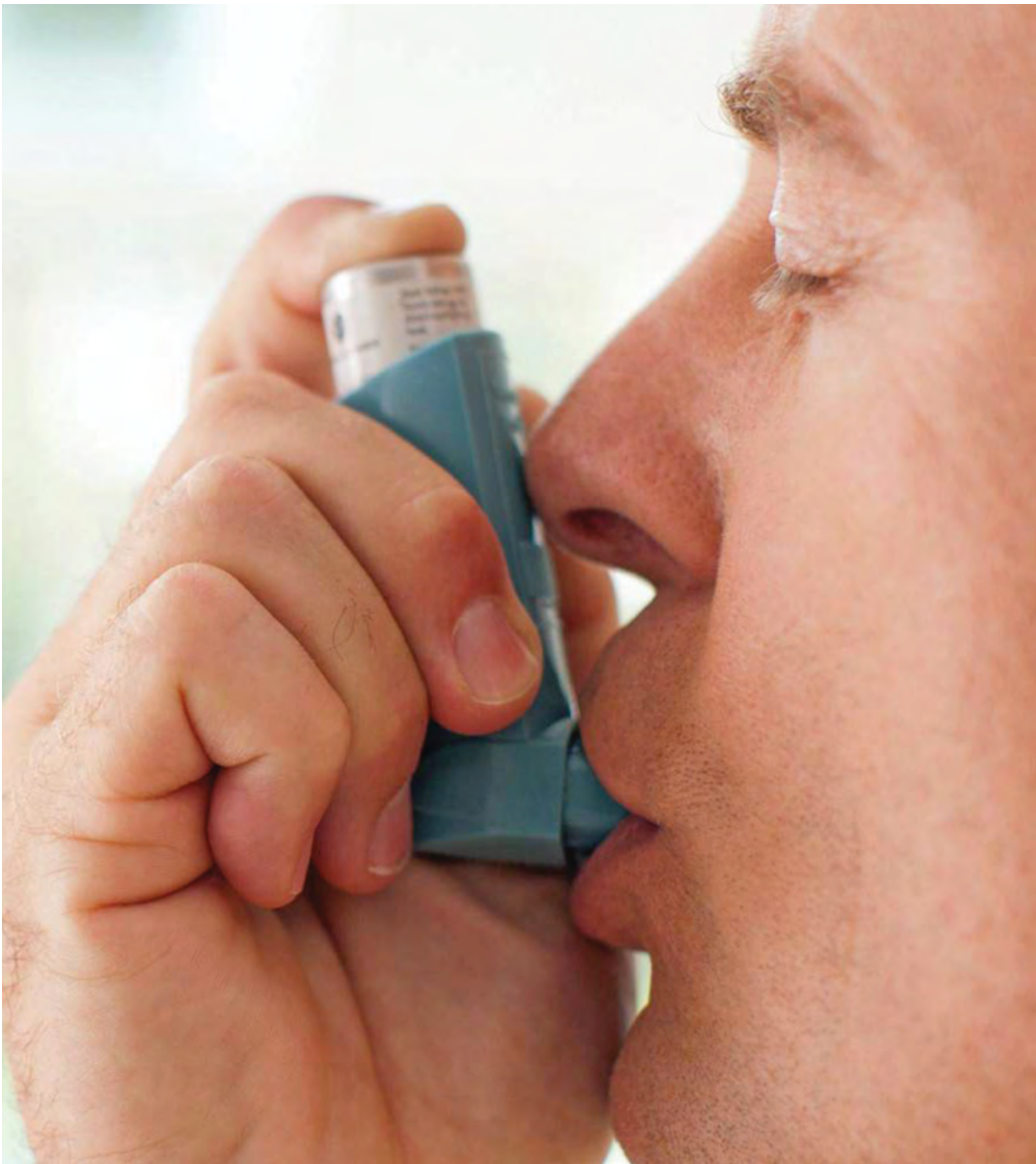
A similar condition called paroxysmal nocturnal dyspnea can make you feel so short of breath that you wake up in the middle of the night. This is also a symptom of heart failure.

Trepopnea is a kind of dyspnea that happens when you lie on a certain side. It might happen when you lie on your left side but not on your right - or the other way around.

Platypnea is a rare type of dyspnea that makes you feel short of breath when you're standing up. Lying down makes you feel better.

Some people have trouble breathing when they get a cold. For others, it's caused by infections like sinusitis which can make it hard to breathe through your nose for a week or two, until the inflammation eases and your congested sinuses begin to drain.

Many breathing problems are long-term (chronic). These include chronic sinusitis, allergies, and asthma which can cause nasal/chest congestion, runny/itchy nose, etc.



PREVENTION

Treatment of breathing problems depends on its nature and onset as well as necessary tests (X-rays, blood tests) to ascertain the condition. However, some preventive measures can be helpful to avoid getting breathless. You should:

- ▶ Avoid stressful situations that cause you to be breathless

▶ Stay calm and stand/sit up straight, it helps air get in and out easily
- ▶ Avoid pollution or anything you are allergic to

▶ Lose weight, if you are overweight

▶ Have a plan for what to do, if things get worse



RESPIRATORY
DISTRESS

People having trouble breathing often show signs that they are having to work harder to breathe or are not getting enough oxygen, indicating respiratory distress. Some signs indicate that a person is working harder to breathe and may not be getting enough oxygen. These include:

Breathing rate - An increase in the number of breaths per minute may mean that a person is having trouble breathing or not getting enough oxygen.

Colour changes - A bluish colour seen around the mouth, on the inside of the lips, or on the fin-

gernails may happen when a person is not getting as much oxygen as needed. The colour of the skin may also appear pale or gray.

Grunting - A grunting sound can be heard each time the person exhales. This grunting is the body's way of trying to keep air in the lungs so they will stay open.

Nose flaring - The openings of the nose spreading open while breathing may mean that a person is having to work harder to breathe.

Retractions - The chest appears to sink in just below the neck or under the breastbone with each breath or both. This is one way of trying to bring more air into the lungs, and can also be seen under

the rib cage or even in the muscles between the ribs.

Sweating - There may be increased sweat on the head, but the skin does not feel warm to the touch. More often, the skin may feel cool or clammy. This may happen when the breathing rate is very fast.

Wheezing - A tight, whistling or musical sound heard with each breath can mean that the air passages may be smaller (tighter), making it harder to breathe.

Body position - A person may spontaneously lean forward while sitting to help take deeper breaths. This is a warning sign that he or she is about to collapse.



Wahaibi, Rawahi set for Cyprus Rally

Oman's Abdullah al Rawahi and his co-driver Ata al Hmoud in their Ford Fiesta during a testing session in Nicosia, Cyprus, on Wednesday. Besides Rawahi, the other Omani driver in fray for the fourth round of 2021 MERC is Hamed al Wahaibi

Wahaibi joins hands with NZ co-driver Sircombe; Rawahi is other Oman driver in fray

Ashok Purohit
Muscat

FIA MIDDLE EAST RALLY CHAMPIONSHIP: ROUND 4

The best days may have been behind Oman's rallying star Hamed al Wahaibi. But what keeps him going is his insatiable hunger to compete and succeed at the top.

For the 53 year old Wahaibi, rallying is a sport which defines him. Having competed in World Rally Championship (WRC) series in late nineties and excelled in regional rallies, his last top-level rally was in 2011.

Ten years after Wahaibi competed in an Middle East Rally Championship (MERC) in Dubai, he now returns to competitive rallying along with his former co-driver during his WRC days, Tony Sircombe of New Zealand.

Wahaibi will launch his comeback at the Cyprus Rally, the fourth round of the 2021 FIA Middle East Rally Championship (MERC) in Nicosia, which will be held from September 24-26.

If Wahaibi has flown the sultanate's flag high in the past, then in recent times, it has been Abdullah al Rawahi, who has impressed in the regional circuit with his rallying skills and speed.

The 24 year old Rawahi, who had finished overall runner-up in the MERC behind rallying legend Nasser al Attiyah in 2020, will drive a Ford Fiesta with his regular co-driver Ata al Hmoud of Jordan in Cyprus.

Wahaibi had initially planned his comeback to MERC in May this year at the Jordan Rally, the third round of MERC. However, his plans failed as he was forced to pull out of the event following



Hamed al Wahaibi (left) and his navigator Tony Sircombe of New Zealand in Nicosia on Tuesday

a testing accident in Jordan.

Both Wahaibi and Rawahi are in Nicosia for the rally and did testing with their respective teams on Tuesday and Wednesday ahead of the main action on Saturday and Sunday.

In his remarks to *Muscat Daily*, after going through a test session along with his co-driver, on Wednesday, Rawahi said, "I have been competing in Cyprus for the past couple of years. It is

a challenging terrain and I am hopeful of doing well. I have an experienced co-driver in Ata and we are aiming for a podium."

On his return after a decade-long gap, Wahaibi said, "I am excited to be back, and more so, in Cyprus after all these years."

"It is such a great place with very good people and culture. The roads are fantastic, but very slow and twisty. It requires a different rhythm. There is a

different flow. A different driving technique is needed here.

"I have been out of rallying for a long time. I cannot wait to get started. My goal is to get to the finish and have a clear run and gain the miles that I have lost through the years. I want to get the confidence back. We will have a big disadvantage against the guys who have been doing this rally year-after-year."

"The team is good, the car



Abdullah al Rawahi

feels great. What happened in Jordan was a setback for me. That's why here it is like starting again at my first event."

Wahaibi will drive a Motortune-run Škoda Fabia 1.6 with logistical support from Asyad Express, an Omani delivery and logistics company, and Sandan (a new industrial area near Muscat).

Competition for Wahaibi comes from multiple times

champion Nasser Saleh al Attiyah (Volkswagen), his cousin Nasser Khalifa al Attiyah (Ford), Turkey's Raul Denktas (Hyundai i20), the local Petrolina Racing Team duo of Alex Tsouloftas and Simos Galatariotis in their Volkswagen Polo R5s in a strong 32-car field that includes numerous local drivers.

This year's Cyprus Rally gets underway with a ceremonial start in Nicosia city centre on Friday evening. The Cyprus Automobile Association (CAA) has laid on 12 gravel stages over the weekend. Two loops of three stages of 6.19km (Nikitari), 20.07km (Kapouras) and 21.21km (Kourdali) make up the opening leg on Saturday. Crews will tackle three sinuous stages of 13.01km (Lythrodontas), 19.02km (Ayios Ephifanios) and 10.96km (Ayia Marina) on two occasions on Sunday. The overall distance of the event is 663.22 km, of which 180.92 km is the competitive distance.

The ceremonial finish is scheduled for Sunday evening.

@ashokmuscat

Al Faisal, Soucek hope for strong show at Monza

Our Correspondent
Muscat

2021 INTERNATIONAL GT OPEN ROUND SIX

Oman's Al Faisal al Zubair and his teammate, Andy Soucek of Spain, head to the Italian circuit of Monza this weekend, hoping to erase their disappointment at the Red Bull Ring in Spielberg, Austria, with a strong show as they continue their challenge for top honours in the 2021 International GT Open Championship.

The Lechner Racing Team's duo suffered a late puncture in their Porsche 911 GT3 R car to finish seventh in the second race after finishing 12th in the first race in the fifth round in Austria.

Soucek is currently overall second in the championship



A file photo of Al Faisal competing at the Red Bull Ring earlier this month

standings, 24 points behind the leading duo of Michele Beretta and Frederick Schandorff in their Vincenzo Sospiri Racing Lamborghini. Belgium's Baptiste Moulin and Japanese teammate Yuki Nemoto are third while Al Faisal is at fourth spot after missing one race due to illness.

Ahead of the Monza race, Al Faisal said, "I am really looking forward to Monza. It is a track that I love from my previous stints, having competed during my racing days in the Porsche Super Cup."

"It is a track where I have performed strongly and I hope to

keep the form this time too as this is my debut in Monza in the endurance series."

The Omani racer added, "The team has been on great form. Obviously we had some bad luck in Austria. But the important thing was that Andy and myself kept up a good pace throughout and the car was running great. If that continues on the same path, and with a bit of luck, hopefully we can get back to the podium with race wins."

"There are two race meetings of this season left for us. It will be a difficult challenge for podium because there are four or five Pro car guest entries that will be added this weekend. I am confident in myself and Andy and am looking forward to getting back on track."

Teams will be permitted up to three free practice sessions on the Italian circuit with the opening 40-minute stint getting underway on Thursday afternoon. Sessions two and three start at on Friday and the first 30-minute qualifying session fires into life on Saturday. This precedes the opening 70-minute race.

The International GT Open series is sharing the race meeting with MAXX Formula, TCR Europe, Porsche Carrera Cup Deutschland, Euroformula Open and the French F4 race series'.

The second qualifying for GT Open teams takes centre stage on Sunday morning and the second one-hour race starts later in the afternoon.



Al Faisal al Zubair

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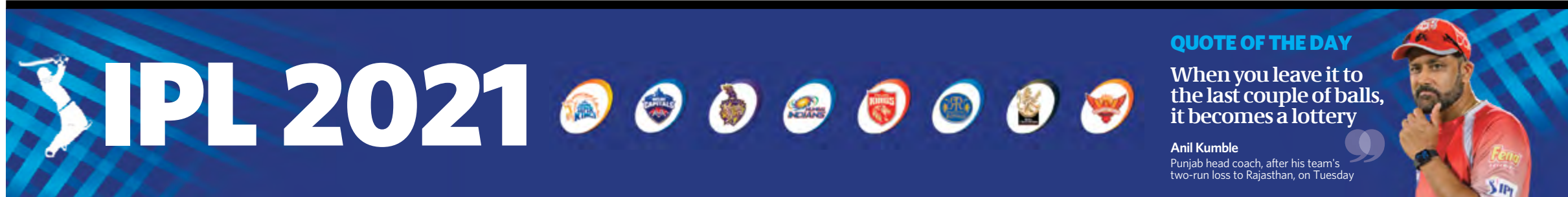
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OUTSIDE IPL

WI's Samuels charged for alleged corruption

Dubai, UAE - Marlon Samuels, the architect of West Indies' twin T20 World Cup triumphs in 2012 and 2016, has been charged by the ICC's anti-corruption unit on four counts of breaching the anti-corruption code of Emirates Cricket Board (ECB).

In a media statement on Wednesday, the ICC said the charges related to the T10 tournament conducted by the ECB. The investigation concerns the 2019 edition of the Abu Dhabi T10 where Samuels was picked by Karnataka Tuskers, but did not get to play a single game.

Cricket West Indies (CWI) responded to the charges against Samuels, stating it was 'firm in denouncing any such activities within the sport'.

Samuels, 40, announced his retirement last year after a career in which he played 71 Tests, 207 ODIs and 67 T20Is since his West Indies debut in 2000, and score over 11,000 international runs and 17 centuries. He was given a two-year ban in 2008 after being found guilty of receiving 'money, benefit or other reward... which could bring him or the game of cricket into disrepute'.

MCC adopts gender-neutral term 'batter'

London, UK - Marylebone Cricket Club (MCC) on Wednesday announced an amendment to the laws of the game meaning the gender-neutral term 'batter' will be used from now on instead of 'batsman'.

The club, the sole authority on the laws of the game, said the use of the terminology would 'help reinforce cricket's status as an inclusive game for all'.

The profile of women's cricket has rocketed in recent years, with England's victory over India in the 2017 World Cup final taking place in front of a capacity crowd at Lord's, which is owned by the MCC.

A crowd of 86,174 saw Australia defeat India in the T20 World Cup final in Melbourne in 2020 and in August Lord's broke the record for a domestic women's match as more than 17,000 fans watched the final of the inaugural Hundred competition.

"MCC believes in cricket being a game for all and this move recognises the changing landscape of the game in modern times," said Jamie Cox, assistant secretary with responsibility for cricket and operations.

AFF

DOMINANT DELHI

DELHI VS HYDERABAD

Dubai, UAE - The South African pace duo of Anrich Nortje and Kagiso Rabada for Delhi Capitals were too hot to handle for Sunrisers Hyderabad on Wednesday evening in Dubai.

A pair of blistering spells from the duo produced a total of five wickets. This tied down Sunrisers to set up a simple chase for Delhi Capitals as they prevailed by eight wickets with 13 balls to spare.

The win helped Capitals move two points clear of Chennai Super Kings at the top of the table, while Sunrisers were staring at elimination, having lost seven out of their eight games so far. Sunrisers struggled mightily after choosing to bat first, with no one making it past Abdul Samad's 28 in a total of 134 for nine.

By contrast, Capitals coasted across the line thanks to a pair of half-century stands, first a 52-run partnership between Shikhar Dhawan (42) and Shreyas Iyer (47 not out) before Iyer and Rishabh Pant sealed victory with an unbroken 67-run third-wicket partnership.

Speaking at the post-match presentation, player of the match Nortje said, "I wanted to bring the energy. Looking at the first game of the tournament for us here, we decided it was nice to see some grass. It was nice to have some sort of assistance, we didn't have to do too much; just keep it simple. I don't focus on that [getting the big wickets]..."

A dejected Sunrisers' skipper Kane Williamson said that his team 'didn't get off to the start they would have liked'. He said,



"We were some 25 or 30 short in the end. Bit of a shame, but at the same time, it's important we keep the attitude the boys showed last time. It's been a tough campaign so far. At our best, we can beat anybody."

"Delhi are an outstanding side, and have a great balance. They put us under pressure, and that is what you expect. Things started to unfold for us. It wasn't to be today. Delhi were fantastic. For us, it is focusing on our cricket and trying to improve."

Williamson's counterpart Rishabh Pant was very happy with the victory.

He said, "I'm very happy with this performance. We had a good first phase. We are happy to start this way. We want to focus on the process [is what coach Ricky Ponting says]."

"Our bowlers did a pretty good job to restrict them. We have one of the quickest bowlers in the world. Pretty happy as the skipper."

Cricinfo



TODAY'S MATCH



ABU DHABI, 6PM

POINTS TABLE

TEAMS	P	W	L	NR	PTS	NRR
DC	9	7	2	0	14	+0.613
CSK	8	6	2	0	12	+1.223
RCB	8	5	2	0	10	-0.706
MI	8	4	4	0	8	-0.071
RR	8	4	4	0	8	-0.154
KKR	8	3	5	0	6	+0.110
PBKS	9	3	6	0	6	-0.345
SRH	8	1	7	0	2	-0.689

P: Played, W: Won, L: Lost,

NR: No Result, PTS: Points,

NRR: Net Run-Rate

CSK: Chennai Super Kings

RCB: Royal Challengers Bangalore

DC: Delhi Capitals

KKR: Kolkata Knight Riders

PBKS: Kings XI Punjab

MI: Mumbai Indians

RR: Rajasthan Royals

SRH: Sunrisers Hyderabad

SCOREBOARD

SUNRISERS HYDERABAD		
D Warner	c Patel b Nortje	0 (0)
W Saha	c Dhawan b Rabada	18 (07)
K Williamson	c Hetmyer b Patel	18 (26)
M Pandey	c & b Rabada	17 (16)
K Jadhav	lbw b Nortje	3 (08)
A Samad	c Pant b Rabada	28 (27)
J Holder	c Shaw b Patel	10 (09)
Rashid Khan	run out	22 (09)
B Kumar	not out	5 (03)
S Sharma	run out	0 (01)
Extras	(b 1, lb 6, nb 3, w 3)	13

TOTAL: 134 for nine in 20 overs

Fall of wickets: 1-0, 2-29, 3-60, 4-61, 5-74, 6-90, 7-115, 8-133, 9-134

Bowling: A Nortje 4-0-12-2, Avesh Khan 4-0-27-0, Axar Patel 4-0-21-2, K Rabada 4-0-37-3, M Stoinis 1-1-0-8-0, R Ashwin 2-5-0-22-0

DELHI CAPITALS		
P Shaw	c Williamson b Ahmed	11 (08)
S Dhawan	c Samad b Rashid Khan	42 (27)
S Iyer	not out	47 (46)
R Pant	not out	35 (27)
Extras	(w 4)	4

TOTAL: 139 for two in 17.5 overs

Fall of wickets: 1-20, 2-72

Bowling: K Ahmed 4-0-33-1, B Kumar 3-0-21-0, J Holder 3-5-0-33-0, Rashid Khan 4-0-26-1, S Sharma 3-0-26-0

Natarajan tests positive for COVID-19, in isolation

Six members of Hyderabad, including allrounder Vijay Shankar, identified as close contacts

Dubai, UAE - Sunrisers Hyderabad left-arm seamer T Natarajan has tested positive for COVID-19 during scheduled RT-PCR test in Dubai on Wednesday.

He has isolated himself from the rest of the squad, while six other members of the franchise, identified as his close contacts, are also in isolation. As per an official IPL release, Natarajan is asymptomatic.

Two of the six isolated members are players: allrounder Vijay Shankar and net bowler G Periyaswamy. The others are members of the support staff: Vijay Kumar (team manager), Shyam Sundar J (physiotherapist), Anjana Vannan (doctor) and Tushar Khedkar (logistics manager).

Both Natarajan and Vijay Shankar were, incidentally, part

of the Sunrisers' training session in Dubai on Tuesday. The entire contingent, including the close contacts, have since tested negative after undergoing RT-PCR tests at 5am local time.

ESPNcricinfo has learnt that most of the Sunrisers members, including Vijay Shankar and Periyaswamy, had travelled to the UAE from Mumbai on September 1. Natarajan had travelled separately, in a commercial flight from Bengaluru on September 9, and linked up with the squad subsequently.

All participants in the IPL had to quarantine for six days upon arriving in the UAE, and undergo testing every two days in the first week, and every fifth day from the second week.

According to the guidelines in place for the IPL, anyone testing positive for COVID-19 must



T Natarajan during a recent training session

isolate for a minimum of ten days. They can then rejoin the

bubble after clearing two tests, on days nine and ten.

While the IPL's standard operating protocols do not make it mandatory for players, and others, to be vaccinated, Natarajan had been vaccinated twice, based on the photographs he put out on his social-media handles recently.

This is the second time during the course of the two-part IPL 2021 that a Sunrisers player has tested positive for COVID-19. In May, wicketkeeper-batter Wriddhiman Saha had to isolate for two weeks in Delhi, too, after returning a positive test.

The latest development is bound to draw attention, even globally, as it came exactly 12 days after the fifth Test of India's tour of England in Manchester was called off. The extreme step was taken after India's players expressed strong reservations against taking the field following

their assistant physiotherapist, Yogesh Parmar, testing positive for COVID-19 two days before the scheduled start of the match.

The added cause of concern could be that the IPL will be followed by the T20 World Cup, in the same part of the world, from October 17.

In May this year, the IPL - played in India at the time - had to be postponed after a COVID-19 outbreak in multiple team biobubbles.

That forced the second part of the tournament to be hosted in the UAE, where the entire 2020 edition of the tournament had also been played. The World Cup, too, was earlier scheduled to be played in India, but was shifted out to the UAE (and Oman) because of the COVID-19 situation in India.

Cricinfo



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WOMAN

OF THE YEAR AWARDS 2021

THURSDAY, 23 SEPTEMBER 2021

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Celebration of 'woman power' in Oman

Our Correspondent
Muscat

The brilliance of the designer lighting in the Crystal Ballroom of Grand Millennium Muscat got much brighter on Tuesday evening as around 30 ladies with illustrious backgrounds held aloft their coveted trophies symbolising the rise and triumph of 'woman power' in Oman.

The fourth edition of the Woman of the Year Awards, organised by Apex Media with Perfumes and Cosmetics as the headline partner, was held on September 21 at a glittering function, following all COVID-19 precautions. Last year (the third edition), the awards ceremony had to be avoided in view of the pandemic and awardees had been individually presented their trophies in their own homes.

At the outset, Honourable Saleh Zakwani, chairman of Apex Media and editor-in-chief of Muscat Daily, welcomed the



Honourable Saleh Zakwani with H H Dr Mona al Said, chief guest of the awards ceremony, on Tuesday

guests and lauded their exceptional contributions in varied fields of activity. He encouraged them to continue their good work as well as keep inspiring other women to follow suit, saying,

"We need more women to take up prestigious positions in the government as well as in the public/private sectors."

The programme for the evening included a series of

splendid renditions by violinist Tahira Jamal while the winners and guests enjoyed an explicit three-course dinner. This was followed by the awards presentation ceremony.

The coveted trophy - The Shining Lady (*Al Mara Al Laama*) - was presented by H H Dr Mona al Said, the chief guest, to winners in 30 different categories comprising varied fields in which women have not just excelled but also set shining examples for others to follow. From charity work to culinary distinction, fashion to finance, and start-up business to social media influence, awards were given out for varied achievements amid tumultuous applause.

This year, a new category - COVID Warrior - was presented to Dr Fanah Abdullah al Fannah al Arai, chairperson of the Oman Public Health Society, affiliated to the Oman Medical Association, who said, "I hope, I am able to inspire young female doctors of Oman to want to achieve more in life - professionally and personally."

The most important award of the evening - the Lifetime Achievement Award - was presented to Dr Kaltham al Zadjali, a popular media personality in Oman on radio and television, fondly known as 'Mama Kaltham'. She has been touching the lives of numerous individuals and families, especially youth, with her unique programmes and initiatives on air.

Most of the winners admitted that their journey now continues with renewed zeal. Some said, every task undertaken was not just a learning experience but also brought fulfillment.



The Woman of the Year Awards is a reflection of the role and contribution of women in building the sultanate. We are overwhelmed by the response to the awards this year

LAILA ZAKWANI,
Executive director, Apex Media

I am very happy and honoured to get the award. This is a great responsibility for me to offer more in serving Oman. I advise young Omani women to work hard and cooperate to serve Oman and develop it further

DR KALTHAM AL ZADJALI



A big thank you

to our headline partner for making the event a grand success

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I'm blessed to be in a position where I can motivate and inspire other women. To receive this award is a great honour, but it also comes with its share of responsibilities. I will continue to strive to inspire women to pursue and achieve their dreams

Honourable Lujaina Mohsin Darwish



Winning this award is a testament to the hard work and commitment towards building a robust marketing and communications team and showing the real impact of our work. It is truly a proud moment for me and my mother, my true inspiration

Sherifa al Maskari



Being a lady, this award means a lot to me as a recognition to women's participation in country's development and how gender equality is promoted in our country. I urge all women to come forward and accept challenges faced by their underestimated abilities

Ziyoun Rashid al Jabri



It's safe to say that I'm still in shock, and it's hard to put into words what winning this award means to me. More than anything, it's an incredible honour to be recognised with this award alongside other incredible women

Elzbeita Jureczek

The winners...



LIFETIME ACHIEVEMENT
DR KALTHAM AL ZADJALI



COVID WARRIOR
DR FANNAH ABDULLAH AL FANNAH AL ARAIMI



ARTS
H H SAYYIDA MEYYAN SHIHAB TARIQ AL SAID



CHARITY WORK
JOKHA MOHAMED AL FARSI



COMMUNICATIONS
OTHAILA AL SAIFI



CORPORATE DEVELOPMENT
ZIYOUN R AL JABRI



CULINARY DISTINCTION
HANAN MANSOOR AL BUSAIDI



CUSTOMER SERVICE
BADRIYA DARWISH AL HAMDANI



EDUCATION
SAHRA AL SABTI



ENTREPRENEUR
DR RAUHIYA RASHID AL KHAIFI



ENVIRONMENT
SUHAILA NASSER AL KINDI



EXCELLENCE IN LEADERSHIP
HONOURABLE LUJAINA MOHSIN DARWISH (FRSA)



EXCELLENCE IN UNIFORM
MAHA FARAZ AL BALUSHI



FASHION
RAYAN AL SULAIMANI



FINANCE
SABRINA AL BAKRI



I am very honoured to receive this award and to be recognised as an 'Inspirational Woman'. It is very humbling to know that my dedication and commitment to my work has been recognised. I hope to continue to inspire other ladies to follow their dreams and goals

Areej Mohsin Darwish



I am so happy to be awarded this incredible honour, and particularly excited about the extraordinary list of the winners. An award like this shows appreciation to volunteer work we do. This recognition motivates us to continue to improve the lives of others

H H Sayyida Hujaija Jaifer Saif al Said



This award will motivate me to work for more achievements to raise the name of Oman higher. I advise Omani women authors and writers to continue writing and to have self-confidence to spread the Omani culture among the countries of the world and promote Oman

Ruqaya al Harthy



I am very happy to win this award. I thank the jury and Apex Media for choosing me. I also thank my family for supporting me. This award is a motivator for me to achieve more at the local and global levels. I congratulate all Omani women for their achievements

Dr Samah Mahmoud al Sharif



Perfumes and Cosmetics are the proud sponsors of the Woman of the Year Awards 2021. We believe that excellence in any field should be celebrated. It's an inspiration to see women all over Oman come together and celebrate these incredible women

Vairali Mehta, COO, Muscat Pharmacy & Stores



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NADIYA ASGHAR AL BALUSHI



HEALTHCARE
DR NOOR KAMAL
(Award accepted by her sister-in-law Dr Farah al Aani on her behalf)



INNOVATION & TECHNOLOGY
LEEN AL ATASSI



INSPIRATIONAL WOMAN
AREEJ MOHSIN DARWISH



INTERNATIONAL ACHIEVER
DR SAMAH MAHMOUD AL SHARIF



LEGAL SERVICES
BUDOOR ABDULJALIL MOOSA
(Award accepted by her sister Mouzna Moosa on her behalf)



LITERATURE
RUQAYA ALI NASSER AL HARTHY



MARKETING
SHERIFA IBRAHIM AL MASKARI



OIL & GAS
INTISAAR AL KINDY
(Award accepted by Dr Malik Abu Ruman on her behalf)



PERSONAL ASSISTANT
ELZBIETA JURECZEK



SOCIAL MEDIA INFLUENCER
RUMAITHA AL BUSAIDI



SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY
H H SAYYIDA HUJAIJA JAIFER SAIF AL SAID



START-UP
NASRA AL YAZIDI

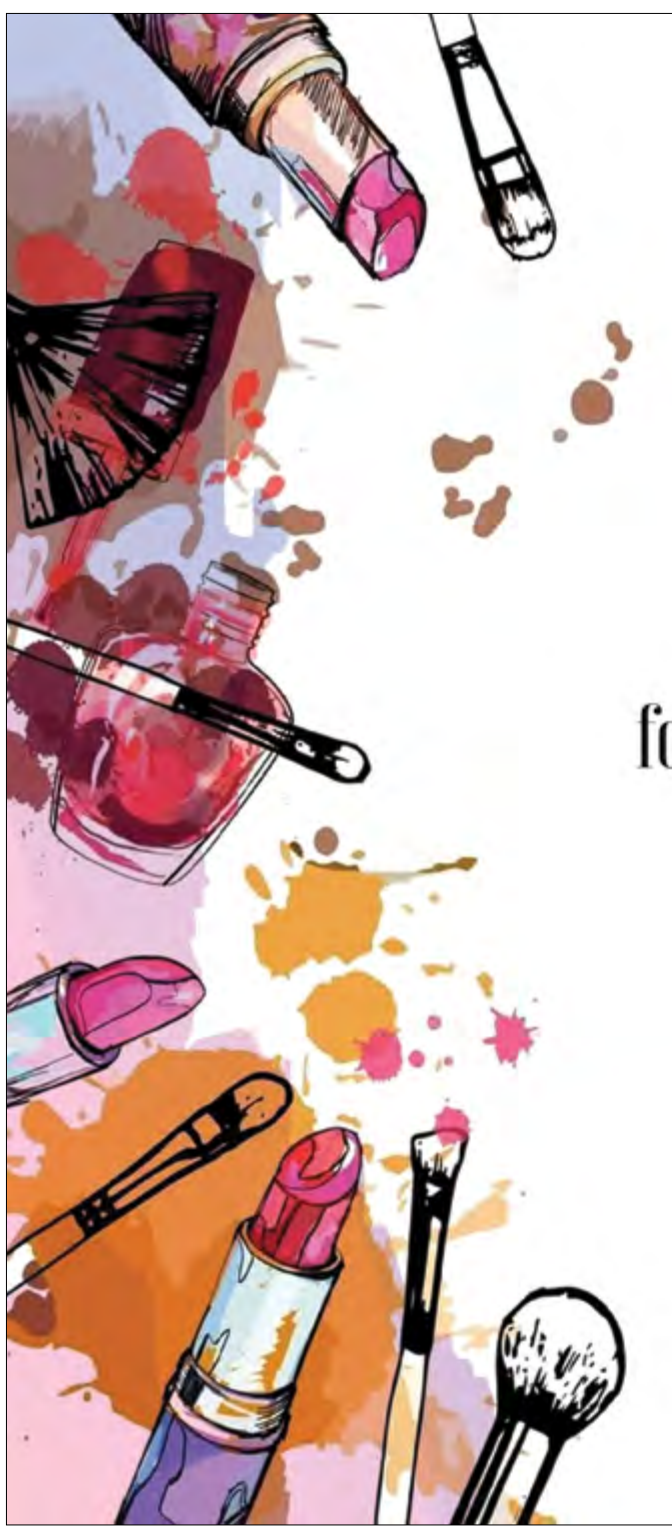


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