

NEWS BRIEFS

HM RECEIVES CALL FROM KING HAMAD

Muscat - His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik received a phone call from King Hamad bin Issa al Khalifa of Bahrain on Wednesday to enquire about conditions in Oman after cyclone Shaheen.

During the call, King Hamad stressed his country's solidarity with the sultanate while it faces the impact of the adverse climatic conditions.

He conveyed his heartfelt condolences and sympathies to His Majesty the Sultan and the Omani people for the victims of the cyclone, praying to Almighty Allah to rest their souls in peace in paradise and grant their families fortitude to bear the loss, and protect the sultanate against all harm.



Cyclone Shaheen: Insurance companies to take major hit

Six missing, hundreds rescued

Of the six, four are from North Batinah and one each from South Batinah and Muscat

Our Correspondent
Muscat

Six people continue to be missing, while three were found on Wednesday in good health, according to a Royal Oman Police official.

The official added that search operations are underway for the six, four of who are from the wilayat of Khabourah in North Batinah governorate, one from South Batinah and one from Muscat.

On Wednesday, the Civil Defence and Ambulance Authority (CDAA) confirmed that its search and rescue teams received 410 incident reports following the effects of the tropical situation created by Shaheen in the governorates of Muscat, North Batinah, South Batinah, Dakhliyah, Dhahirah, and North Sharqiyah.

As part of its mission, CDAA teams responded to a variety of



(Supplied photo)

reports and humanitarian calls, including 221 of stranded people, submerged homes and cars caught in overflowing wadis.

Medical emergency response teams handled 73 reports, while firefighting squads tackled 89 fire incidents.

Other teams dealt with landslides (six), fallen or uprooted trees (three), hazardous leak (one) and 17 other reports. A total of 607 people received the services of CDAA, supported by personnel of the National Committee for Emergency Man-

agement. NCEM responded to 231 distress calls and rescued 654 people, including 57 stranded in wadis, 66 trapped in vehicles and 91 from homes inundated with water.

As part of its rescue efforts, the Royal Oman Police Aviation

conducted 138 operations, evacuating and airlifting Shaheen victims, in addition to carrying out aerial surveillance of affected areas. The ROP operations centre received more than 36,000 distress calls.

NCEM activated a provisional

operations centre in Suwaiq with the aim of restoring basic services and repairing damaged homes of citizens and residents.

Sultan's Armed Forces (SAF), ROP, CDAA and civil defence teams joined hands in search and rescue missions.

Electricity restored in 90% of affected areas: NCEM

Our Correspondent
Muscat

Electricity supply has been restored in over 90 per cent of areas affected by Cyclone Shaheen, according to the National Centre for Emergency Management (NCEM).

The centre has stated that electricity supply was restored in 98 per cent of the wilayat of Mussanah, 95 per cent of Saham, 85 per cent of Khabourah, and 36 per cent of Suwaiq.

NCEM confirmed that efforts are continuing to restore all utility services in the governorates of North and South Batinah.

In Suwaiq, where the electricity network was battered, authorities are doubling efforts to restore full service at the earliest. 'Ninety-six per cent of fuel stations in the governorates of North and South Batinah are operational. The authorities are working to restore the remaining,' NCEM stated.

It also stated that some electricity stations, including those in Al Habban, Habashi and Wadi Bani Omar in the wilayat of Sohar, will need longer to repair. The centre will provide accommodation to families affected by electricity outages until the three stations are restored.

NCEM can be reached on 26061102, 26061118 or 26061120 by those wishing to avail this facility.

Majan Electricity Company confirmed that its emergency and maintenance teams are working around the clock to restore supply to subscribers.

Oman Water & Wastewater Services Company stated that 100 per cent water services have been restored in North and South Batinah.

About the telecommunica-



(Supplied photos)



We are working to restore at least 70 per cent of all communications services within 48 hours in the affected wilayats. There are more than 60 teams working to restore services as soon as possible

OMAR AL ISMAILI

tions sector in the worst-hit wilayats of Khabourah, Suwaiq and Saham, Omar bin Hamdan al Ismaili, CEO of Telecommunications Regulatory Authority (TRA), said, "The authority is using temporary generators, in

addition to establishing a group of alternative communication stations, until the damaged stations are repaired."

The authority has restarted more than 50 per cent of the 660 telecommunications stations affected by the cyclone in sultanate, most of which are in North Batinah.

"We are working to restore at least 70 per cent of all communications services within 48 hours in the affected wilayats. There are more than 60 teams working to restore services as soon as possible," said Ismaili.

On October 6, Ismaili made a field visit to some affected wilayats in North and South Batinah, accompanied by senior officials of telecom companies, to assess the extent of the damage caused by Shaheen.

Development plans need to factor in rise in sea-level, floods, storm-surge

Our Correspondent
Muscat

With Oman's population set to grow in the future, development in the coastal areas as well as in high-risk flood-prone zones is likely to increase, too. This puts large parts of the population at risk from floods, storm surges and rising sea level.

'There are substantial amounts of vulnerable urban infrastructure located in close proximity to flood-prone areas, or subject to coastal inundation and storm surge associated with sea-level rise. And with climate change, Oman's low-lying urban areas along the coast will be vulnerable to flooding from the combined impact of sea-level rise and storm surge associated with extreme weather events. Hence Oman's development plans for urban areas and infrastructure should be re-evaluated to account for these risks,' according to Oman's *Second National Communication 2019* report submitted to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change.

According to the report, coastal development has increased dramatically over recent decades in Oman, a trend that seems certain to continue through the 21st century with the majority of the Omani population living in low-lying areas such as coastal plains which are considered high-risk flood-prone zones. 'Moreover, more than half of the population is concentrated in Muscat and in the Batinah coastal plain.'

Continued on Page 02



(AFP)

Flood-related disasters have risen by 134%

Geneva, Switzerland - Water-related hazards like floods and droughts are increasing because of climate change and have increased in frequency over the past 20 years. Since 2000, flood-related disasters have risen by 134 per cent compared with the two previous decades, said a new report from the UN's World Meteorological Organization (WMO).

The number of people suffering water stress is expected to soar, exacerbated by population increase and dwindling availability. But management, monitoring, forecasting and early warnings are fragmented and inadequate, whilst global climate finance efforts are insufficient, stated the multi-agency report.

"We need to wake up to the looming water crisis," said Petteri Taalas, secretary general of WMO.

The State of Climate Services 2021: Water highlights the need for urgent action to improve co-operative water management, embrace integrated water and climate policies and scale

up investment in this precious commodity which underpins all the international goals on sustainable development, climate change adaptation and disaster risk reduction.



We need to wake up to the looming water crisis

PETTERI TAALAS

"Increasing temperatures are resulting in global and regional precipitation changes, leading to shifts in rainfall patterns and agricultural seasons, with a major impact on food security and human health and well-being," said Taalas.

"This past year has seen a continuation of extreme water-related events. Across Asia, extreme rainfall caused massive flooding in Japan, China, Indonesia, Nepal, Pakistan and India. Millions of people were displaced, and hundreds were killed. But it is not just in the developing world that flooding has led to major disruption. Catastrophic flooding in Europe led to hundreds of deaths and widespread damage."

The number and duration of droughts also increased by 29 per cent over this same period.

Relief measures continue in affected areas

Our Correspondent
Muscat

Massive relief efforts are continuing across the cyclone-affected areas in North and South Batinah with authorities working around the clock to provide essential items and restore services.

Dr Abdul Rahman al Shehhi, director general of Social Development in North and South Batinah governorates, said the quantity of supplies was increased on Wednesday compared to the previous two days.

He added, "We have provided aid to around 90 per cent of affected areas. More than 20 flights, operated in cooperation with the Sultan's Special Forces, have supplied essential items. We are cooperating with various parties to continue providing food supplies."

The Sultan's Special Forces is



(Supplied photos)

transporting foodstuff to the residents of the wilayat of Suwaiq. The move is aimed at providing support along with the other government departments in the aftermath of the cyclone.

The Royal Air Force of Oman,

supported by the Royal Army of Oman and Oman Charitable Organization, also continued transporting foodstuff to people affected in North Batinah on Wednesday.

Meanwhile, H E Said bin

Hamoud al Ma'awali, Minister of Transport, Communications and Information Technology, and officials visited a number of sites and roads that were affected by the cyclone.

Abdullah bin Mohammed al

Hadabi, director general of the General Directorate of Agriculture, Fisheries and Water Resources in North Batinah, also made a field visit to the wilayats of Suwaiq and Khabourah to inspect damages.



"The visit aimed to ascertain loss of farmers, fishermen and livestock breeders, and to make all efforts on the part of the directorate to limit losses," the directorate stated.

The Ministry of Awqaf and

Religious Affairs said it has formed a committee to find out the damages caused to mosques due to the adverse climatic condition in North and South Batinah, especially in the wilayat of Suwaiq.



Oman, Iran hold talks

Muscat - An official session of talks was held between Oman and the Islamic Republic of Iran on Wednesday in Muscat.

The talks were presided over by H E Sheikh Khalifa Ali al Harthi, Foreign Ministry's Undersecretary for Diplomatic Affairs, and Dr Ali Bagheri, Deputy Foreign Minister for Political Affairs of Iran.

Earlier in the day, H E Sayyid Badr Hamad al Busaidi, Foreign Minister, received Dr Bagheri.

The two reviewed relations of cooperation in various spheres as the leaderships of the two countries are keen to promote these relations to achieve mutual benefits.

The two also touched on regional and international issues,

as well as their developments. They underscored the importance of dealing with these issues through constructive dialogue and peaceful means.

The meeting was attended by H E Sheikh Harthi, Khalid Hashel al Muselhi, head of the Minister's Office, and H E Ali Najafi, Iranian Ambassador to the sultanate.

ONA

Development plans need rethink...

Continued from Page 01

During the recent tropical cyclone Shaheen, most of the damage was in Batinah region, in the towns of Mussanah, Suwaiq, Saham and Khabourah - all lying on coastal plains. Eleven people died in the wake of the cyclone which caused widespread flooding and landslides with seven of them dying in the Batinah region.

An environmental expert had recently warned of extreme weather events impacting Oman with continued global warming.

"Global warming and climate pollutants have dangerous effects on the climate. These are the reasons why we are recording a continuous rise in temperatures, decrease in annual rainfall, and increase in heat waves in the sultanate," Dr Yassin al Sharabi, director of Centre for Environmental Studies and Research at Sultan Qaboos University, said in an interview with Oman TV weeks before Shaheen hit Oman.

He warned that cyclonic activity in the Arabian Sea will increase to record levels which may result in vast destruction. "Extreme weather phenomena, like Cyclone Gonu, may become repetitive due to climate change," said Dr Sharabi, adding that climate change will affect many regions in Oman according to several studies on the challenges that may arise due to climate change.

Urban expansion in Oman has not accounted for historical risks of flooding, much less the greater flooding risks that will accompany climate change.

H E Nu'amani bids farewell to Indian ambassador



Muscat - H E Gen Sultan Mohammed al Nu'amani, Minister of the Royal Office, received in his office H E Munu Mahawar, Ambassador of the Republic of India to Oman, on Wednesday to bid him farewell at the end of his tenure as his country's ambassador to the sultanate.

The ambassador expressed his gratitude and appreciation for the cooperation extended to him during his tour of duty from all officials in the sultanate. He also praised the strong, historic relations binding the two friendly countries.

On his turn, H E Gen Nu'amani thanked the ambassador for the efforts he exerted to promote relations between the two countries.

H E Nu'amani receives French ambassador

H E Gen Nu'amani also received



in his office H E Veronique Aulagnon, Ambassador of the French Republic to Oman, on Wednesday.

H E Gen Nu'amani wished the ambassador success in her tour of duty in the sultanate.

On her turn, the French ambassador expressed her appreciation of the sultanate in enhancing means of joint cooperation to realise the joint interests of both countries.

The meeting exchanged cordial talks and discussed a number of matters of mutual interest.

ONA

Municipality discusses private sector's social responsibility role

Our Correspondent
Muscat

The Public Affairs Committee of Muscat Municipality held its third meeting for the year under the chairmanship of Qais bin Muhammad al Maashri and in the presence of representatives from the private sector.

The meeting aimed to seek

ways of partnership between the municipal council and the private sector with regard to social responsibility.

The discussions aimed at developing ways of support that can be provided to serve the municipal projects that the council considers as priority to implement for each wilayat separately, with a focus on sustainability.

The representatives of the companies present welcomed the proposal, which emphasises the importance of having a real partnership between different sectors to realise ideas and visions.

The meeting was based on the council's eagerness to see private sector institutions contribute to the development of the local community.



(Supplied photo)

MoL, Vodafone sign pact to support jobseekers

Our Correspondent
Muscat

The Ministry of Labour (MoL) signed a cooperation agreement with Vodafone to train jobseekers and engage them in different sectors.

The pact was signed by H E Sayyid Salim Musallam al Busaidi, Undersecretary for Human Resources in the ministry, and Badr Saud al Zaidi, CEO of Vodafone Oman.

fone Oman.

The agreement seeks to draft plans and strategies to prepare jobseekers to join the labour market, notably in the ICT sector, in accordance with vacancies available at Vodafone.

A joint committee will be formed to follow up the project and the method of selection of trainees. The training programme for 140 jobseekers will last one year from the date of signing.

Muscat - With an ever-increasing number of users, Instagram has evolved from a photo-sharing platform into one of the world's biggest social media sites, boasting over 1.074bn users.

As the platform celebrated its 11th anniversary on Wednesday, it is interesting to see how it has impacted entrepreneurs and creators who are growing their businesses using Instagram.

The easy-to-access and low-cost promotional tools offered by Instagram help small businesses reach a wider audience and grow.

Today, items ranging from homemade cupcakes to household items, jewellery and clothes, all depend on Instagram algorithms to promote their products.



In Oman, countless small businesses - especially those operated by homemakers - have started using Instagram to promote their offerings. "To gain popularity among audiences, I have personally DM-ed (sent direct messages) about my small business, asking them to test my products and used hashtags and the Insights feature," said

Ayesha Syed, a small business owner.

Divya Mridhula, a YouTube creator, has shifted to Instagram to better promote her channel. She uses reels, stories and feed posts to promote and post clips of her content. "Instagram has given me the confidence to explore my creativity through various non-conventional ways and

also helped me connect with diverse creators and audiences."

Afrah al Musallami, another small home business owner, said Instagram's promotional tools have helped her grow her business. She sells cookies, cupcakes and other baked goods, and Instagram tools help her see how many people have shared, commented and liked her posts. Users like Afrah feature their best selling items, working with filters provided by Instagram to make attractive feeds to entice customers. Instagram's layout makes a user want to scroll more, and small businesses benefit from the urge to constantly scroll.

But despite the advantages, users must be careful when using the platform. Kaspersky, the cybersecurity and anti-virus provider, reminds users that it is

a platform for pleasure, and that they should avoid all risks to their private information being compromised. Among its safety tips, the company urges attention to users' account privacy level.

'A good option is to make your Instagram account private so your posts are visible only to approved followers. You can also remove information about payment methods from your Instagram account, or your phone number, to prevent strangers from contacting you by this method.'

To secure personal data, users are advised to remove synchronised contacts. Instagram uses these to suggest people or accounts and show targeted ads.

It's also a good idea to keep information about one's whereabouts private.

(Contributed by Rianna Lobo)

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CBO asks banks to extend grace period on loan repayments

Our Correspondent
Muscat

The Central Bank of Oman (CBO) on Tuesday issued a number of directives to all the banks and finance leasing companies (FLCs), including the announcement of a stimulus package of procedures and incentives, aimed at containing the economic impact of the pandemic on the lives of borrowers.

Taking into account the current economic scenario and in continuation of previously issued instructions, the CBO has issued further directives to banks and FLCs to extend the grace period for repayment of loans.

For Omani citizens laid-off from work, the deferment of loan instalment and interest will be extended until December 31,

2022 or until the borrower concerned obtains another job, whichever is earlier, with the suspension of charging any interests during the deferment period.

For Omani employees with reduced wages, loan instalments, interests or profits of all affected borrowers of this category has been postponed until December 31, 2021, with the suspension of charging any interests during the deferment period. For pensioners from the public and private sector, banks shall continue to modify the terms of repayment of existing personal loans/finance, so that the maximum debt service ratio does not exceed 30 per cent of the monthly pension if it is equal to or less than RO1,500 and 35 per cent if the monthly pension is more than RO1,500.

Continued on Page 05

Cyclone Shaheen: Insurance companies to take major hit

Our Correspondent
Muscat

Tropical Cyclone Shaheen has been one of the most catastrophic weather events to hit Oman since Cyclone Gonu in 2007. The intensity of Shaheen resulted in damages initially from the cyclone and subsequent floods caused by the heavy rains brought by it. Insurance companies will take a major hit on account of damage to the properties, businesses and vehicles during the cyclone.

Insurers in the sultanate are now bracing to receive a large number of claims due to the damages caused by the cyclone. The cyclone is initially estimated to have caused huge losses for the insurance and reinsurance companies.

Speaking to *Muscat Daily*, Sayyid Nassir bin Salim al Busaidi, chairman of Oman Insurance Association (OIA) said, "This cyclone will have a very big impact on insurance companies. The damage is going to cost a huge amount of money to insurers."

OIA is a trade body consisting of insurance companies, insurance brokers, loss adjusters and



(Muscat Daily)

others licensed by the Capital Market Authority to indulge in insurance activities.

Cyclone Shaheen inflicted horrendous damage in North and South Batinah and Muscat governorates, ravaging roads, public facilities, homes and businesses.

Busaidi said insurance companies in the coming weeks are expected to see a flood of claims in all segments - property, motor, and engineering insurance. As the severe flooding has far reaching implications for

businesses in the affected areas, he said, the number and size of commercial claims are likely to be huge.

"However, it is too early to fully assess the damage and losses. People are busy in cleaning-up and dealing with damage and disruption. They have not yet started registration for claims. It may take many months to evaluate the full impact of this cyclone," Busaidi, who is also the chief management executive of Oman United Insurance Company, said.

The chairman of OIA further said that the insurance companies so far have not received claims from individuals and businesses.

"Once life gets back to normal, insurers will start receiving huge claims. The impact has been huge on property, vehicles, businesses and people. It will take time to send surveyors and evaluate the losses."

When asked about the estimated cost to insurance industry due to the cyclone, he said losses arising out of the Cyclone

Shaheen's destructive sweep through a long area of the sultanate could reach hundreds of millions of rials. "We cannot estimate the amount as of now, it will depend on the damages. The area in which the cyclone has caused damage is very wide and large so the losses are also expected to be huge."

Busaidi added that the additional cost of claims due to the cyclone will have a major impact on the profitability of insurance companies.

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MSX continues its upward trend

Our Correspondent
Muscat

The benchmark index of the Muscat Stock Exchange (MSX) rose 0.17 per cent to close at 3,954.46 points on Wednesday.

Trading activity deteriorated from the previous session as turnover declined 42.92 per cent to RO1.6mn and volumes fell 27.67 per cent to 6.95mn shares.

While Financial index rose 0.05 per cent, Industrial and Services indices rose 0.15 per cent and 0.04 per cent, respectively. The MSX Shariah index closed down by 0.24 per cent at 576.87 points.

Market breadth remained negative as nine companies closed up, while 11 companies closed down. The rest 16 traded stocks closed flat for the day.

Top gainers were Oman Qatar Insurance (2.38 per cent), Phoenix Power (2.17



per cent), Bank Muscat (2.17 per cent), Al Anwar Investment (0.89 per cent) and BankDhofar (0.86 per cent).

The four losers were Oman United Insurance (-4.44 per cent), Al Jazeera Steel

Products (-1.68 per cent), Al Jazeera Services (-1.55 per cent), Global Financial Investments Holding (-1.52 per cent) and Oman & Emirates Investment Holding (-1.37 per cent).

Natural gas market soars to record heights

London, UK - European and UK gas prices surged on Wednesday to record peaks, energised by fears of runaway demand in the upcoming northern hemisphere winter.

Europe's reference Dutch TTF gas price hit €162.12 per megawatt hour and UK prices leapt to 407.82 pence per therm in morning deals.

However, prices later erased gains to flatline in early afternoon trade.

"It's panic and fear with winter just around the corner," Commerzbank analyst Carsten Fritsch said.

Soaring gas prices - coupled with oil which has struck multi-year highs - have fuelled fears over spiking inflation and rocketing domestic energy bills.

Gas demand is also heightened in Asia, particularly from China, while key Russian exports are falling.

However, Russian President Vladimir Putin declared on Wednesday that Europe was to blame for the current energy crisis, after soaring gas prices spurred accusations that



Moscow is withholding supplies to pressure the West.

"They've made mistakes," Putin said in a televised meeting with Russian energy officials.

He said that one of the factors influencing the prices was the termination of 'long-term contracts' in favour of the spot market.

Some critics have accused Moscow of intentionally limiting gas supplies to Europe in an effort to hasten the launch of Nord Stream 2, a controversial pipeline connecting Russia with Germany.

At the same time, global gas stockpiles remain worryingly low.

"Natural gas prices have climbed to new peaks ... as insufficient levels of inventories ahead of the winter season drive concerns for a spike in inflation and energy prices for consumers," XTB analyst Walid Koudmani said.

European leaders are divided on how to respond to the record rise in energy prices, with France and Spain calling on Wednesday for bold EU-wide action, while others urged patience.

The European Commission - which is the European Union's executive arm - will next week propose measures to mitigate the price surge for consumers.

AFP

IMF projects global inflation nearing peak

Washington, US - The current inflation spike hitting countries across the world will peak in the months to come and stabilise by the middle of next year, the IMF predicted on Wednesday.

"Headline inflation is projected to peak in the final months of 2021, with inflation expected back to pre-pandemic levels by mid-2022 for both advanced economies and emerging markets country groups, and with

risks tilted to the upside," the IMF said in its new World Economic Outlook. The full report will be published next Tuesday and updates the estimates the IMF made in July, when it predicted inflation would return to pre-pandemic levels next year.

Prices worldwide have crept up throughout this year as economies bounce back from the sharp contraction the pandemic caused in 2020.

In its latest forecast, the IMF pointed to commodity shortages, supply chain snarls and the resumption of economic activity fuelled by loose central bank policies and pent-up demand as spurring inflation.

For richer countries, 'headline inflation will peak in the final months of 2021 and will decline to about 2 per cent by mid-2022', the IMF said.

Among emerging and devel-

oping economies, the institution predicts inflation will decline to 4 per cent from the 6.8 per cent peak it will hit later this year.

IMF managing director Kristalina Georgieva named inflation as among the obstacles the global recovery from the COVID-19 downturn faces, which have caused the lender to revise its growth prediction for this year 'slightly' downwards.

AFP

Continued from Page 04

For Riyada card holders, banks and FLCs shall continue to postpone the instalments, interests/profits due from them until the end of December 31, 2021. The lending institutions and the borrower should mutually work out before the end of this period to restore the normal repayment schedule or to reschedule the loans according to the expected cash flows of the borrowers concerned.

The CBO emphasised that it is necessary for the borrowers, especially the companies which previously benefited from these procedures, to take into account the importance of reassessment of their financial conditions, before the expiry of the grace period on December 31, 2021. 'Accordingly, it is advised that the entities falling under this category shall work with their lenders to plan and reschedule their loan payments.'

The CBO on Monday also announced the allocation of RO7mn for the welfare of people affected by the Cyclone Shaheen. The amount will be collected from the fee income received by the CBO and banks over the next five months.

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Oman Data Park, NVIDIA launch Nebula AI service

As one of the vital enablers contributing to the improvement of the productivity in economic sectors and a key pillar driving the national economy for technological transformation, Oman Data Park (ODP), the sultanate's first IT-managed and cloud services provider, has launched Nebula AI service by joining the NVIDIA partner Network (NPN) Cloud Service Provider Partner Program.

The launching ceremony was under the patronage of H E Dr Ali bin Amer al Shidani, Undersecretary for Communications and Information Technology, Ministry of Transport, Communications and Information Technology, in the presence of high-level VIP delegations, business, and media representatives. The event was also graced by both virtual and physical presenters covering various aspects of AI and its benefits and was live streamed to a wider audience .

The launching of the Nebula AI platform, the first of its kind in Oman, comes in line with Oman's Vision 2040 and within the sultanate's exerted efforts to keep pace with the latest technological developments in the field of computing, compatible with the requirements of the fourth industrial revolution. The sultanate had advanced 11 positions in the government's readiness index for implementing in 2020, while it ranked 48" globally and sixth in the Middle East, according to the Oxford Insight Index.

Highlighting the Importance of AI for Oman's economy, Eng Maqbool al Wahaibi, CEO,



Oman Data Park, stated, "AI is transforming every industry, whether it is by improving customer relationships in financial services, streamlining manufacturer supply chains, or helping doctors deliver better outcomes for patients. It gives us great pleasure to be at the forefront to provide this platform, which will enhance the technological transformation processes in the sultanate in order to accelerate the utilisation of AI in various economic fields in Oman."

"As the launching of Nebula AI service will contribute to sealing Oman's entry into the world of AI, Oman Data Park has practically proven its success of bringing innovative services to Oman to fuel further economic growth. Coupled with our impeccable track record of over nine years of service in the cloud services industry, we now look forward to helping businesses leap ahead on innovation and profitability through the use of AI both locally and beyond," Wahaibi added.

Joining virtually for the event, Jaap Zuiderveld, vice president, EMEA at NVIDIA, stated, "AI is transforming every industry, helping nations and business to solve their biggest challenges in agriculture, healthcare, climate and more. As an NVIDIA NPN partner, Oman Data Park is helping to grow the nation's AI expertise to create new opportunities with the world leading AI system."

Wahaibi also said that the utilisation of AI services is considered an important factor for improving the productivity of many economic sectors, such as banking and finance, energy, healthcare logistics, and retail. It saves time and money and enhances operational efficiencies, as well as leads to an increase in revenue. AI also enhances the performance of sophisticated intellectual tasks such as decision making and problem solving, as well as increases customer services proactively.

He also highlighted that the Nebula AI service platform is powered by the NVIDIA DGX A100 system, which is suitable for all AI workloads, offering unprecedented compute density, performance, and flexibility in the world's first 5 peta FLOPS AI system. This will enable both government and private sector entities to explore the various benefits of AI with the guarantee of data sovereignty, security and reliability.

A teaming agreement was also signed at the launch, between ODP's CEO Eng Wahaibi and Bikal UK's CEO Raj Sandhu, which was attended by James Goldman, deputy head of Mission, British Embassy Muscat. A statement from H E Bill Murray stated, "Technology is an area of strength for the UK in particular, with London recognised as the 'AI capital of Europe'. The potential for collaboration between the UK and Oman in the technology sector is vast, and I am excited by this partnership between Oman Data Park and Bikal. "It will create job opportunities and support the development of Oman's tech ecosystem and local talent in alignment with Vision 2040. Congratulations to ODP and Bikal!" According to a PWC research, AI is estimated to contribute around US\$15.7tn globally by 2030, while the Middle East is estimated to accrue 2 per cent of the total global benefits of AI in 2030.



Sohar International allocates RO5mn to support customers

Reflecting its ongoing commitment to the people and community it serves, Sohar International allocated RO5mn to support its customers and build back the societies in severely affected areas by the cyclone Shaheen.

The bank has pledged the amount which will be effectively utilised through interest free financing, as well as deferring personal and housing loans for a period of three months for the cyclone-impacted customers in the wilayats of Saham, Khabourah, Suwaiq and Mussanah. The initiative comes as part of the bank's social responsibility programme, reinforcing its commitment towards the nation.

Commenting on the initiative, Ahmed al Musalami, chief executive office of Sohar International, said, "We appreciate the government's and individuals' efforts to mitigate the effects of cyclone Shaheen that the sultanate has witnessed. As a responsible corporate citizen, it is our national duty to always support the community, and stand by its people especially in such times of need. This initiative comes in line with the bank's 'Purpose to Help

People Win', and hence lending them support during exceptional times, to reduce the financial burden on those who have been severely impacted.

"The cyclone caused great damages on a number of the governorates of the sultanate. We would like to commend the tireless efforts made by government and various institutions in the public and private sectors to rebuild the affected areas. It's our privilege and duty to support these national efforts made by government, citizens, residents and institutions."

Sohar International is offering an interest free personal loan of up to RO2,500 for a period of 10 years, to customers who are residents of the same locations. This can be availed till December 31, as per terms and conditions cited by the bank. In addition, the three-month (October-December 2021) instalment waivers for Personal Loan and Housing Loans are applicable for the bank's Omani customers, who are residents of Saham, Khabourah, Suwaiq and Mussanah. They can avail the waiver by providing a letter at their nearest branch before October 15.

Adeeb Ahamed appointed to World Tourism Forum Lucerne's advisory board

The World Tourism Forum Lucerne has appointed Adeeb Ahamed, managing director of Abu Dhabi-based Twenty14 Holdings, to its Global Advisory Board.

For over ten years, World Tourism Forum Lucerne (WTFL) has been bringing together industry experts, CEOs, investors and start-ups, establishing itself as a prestigious global platform for exchange. By fostering cross-generational collaboration, new ideas and solutions emerge to benefit tourism today and in the future.

Ahamed, who owns a slew of iconic properties across the world including the Great Scotland Yard in London, Waldorf



Astoria- the Caledonian in Edinburgh, Pullman Downtown Dubai and Port Muziris in Kochi among others, joins a select group of the industry's top stakeholders and decision makers who will collaborate on solving for future challenges in the travel and tourism industry.

The Advisory Board is an international body of renowned experts responsible for assuring the quality of World Tourism Forum Lucerne. It determines the themes for the forums and decides on the general content by including current global topics and addressing cultural differences.

Some of its prominent members include, Franziska Bitzi Staub, head of Department of Finance, City of Lucerne, Puneet Chhatwal, managing director & CEO, The Indian Hotels Company Limited, Geoffrey Lipman, president, ICTP (International Council of Tourism Partners), co-founder, SUN and Isabel Hill, director National Travel and Tourism Office, U S

Department of Commerce Office, among others.

On November 15 and 16, WTFL is hosting an 'Innovation Festival' in Andermatt in which Ahamed will also take the stage at the event.

At the hybrid conference, well-known personalities, such as Klaus Schwab (founder of the World Economic Forum), Laura Meyer (CEO Hotelplan), Peter Fankhauser (CEO PETRAF Ltd and former CEO Thomas Cook Group), Shannon Ghuian (chief sustainability officer at TTC), Niall Ferguson (historian and author) and Alex Lampert (CEO GuestReady) will discuss the tourism industry's current challenges.

Ominvest donates RO100,000 in support of relief efforts

As part of its social responsibility initiatives, Oman International Development and Investment Company SAOG (Ominvest) announced a donation of RO100,000 in support of those affected by cyclone Shaheen that hit several parts of the sultanate.

In alignment with the company's purpose and corporate citizenship, the donation has been approved by Ominvest's board of directors to help address adverse conditions confronting our communities.

AbdulAziz al Balushi, group CEO, Ominvest, said, "Our hearts go out to the families who have lost loved ones and homes because of cyclone Shaheen. These are challenging circum-



stances that have affected many across different governorates of the sultanate. At such times it is

our duty at Ominvest to stand by the society and extend our sincere empathy and support."

New Nokia T20 tablet: Long-lasting battery life with versatility, reliability

HMD Global, the home of Nokia phones, unveiled the new Nokia T20 tablet. The brand-new tablet brings the classic Nokia phone quality to the big screen, with a range of versatile features and a long-lasting battery life that helps you excel at work and relax when it's time to play.

The Nokia T20 marks the introduction of the brand-new T-series. Packed with innovative and accessible features you'll love, including a crystal clear 2K screen plus three years of monthly security updates and two years of free operating system (OS) upgrades.

Florian Seiche, CEO, HMD Global revealed, "We pride ourselves on always listening and responding to people's wishes. Over the past year, we noticed the increase in hybrid working and online learning, as well as the

growing use of social media, video calling platforms and streaming services - leading to an increase in the appetite for tablets, which grew an impressive 53 per cent in Q1 from 2020 to 2021. So, we created HMD Global's first-ever Nokia tablet to address people's changing needs and their desire for versatile technology and features. Designed for work, learning and play, our Nokia T20 offers the classic qualities people have come to love and expect from our smartphones, in a brand-new format."

Ben Wood, chief analyst at CCS Insight, added, "There has been a renaissance in the tablet market. Our latest Connected Consumer Radar report underlines how important this category has become, with 27 per cent of owners seeing more



value from their tablets since the pandemic began."

Security and software expertise

As with Nokia phones, security and software remain a key focus. Two years of OS upgrades for the next steps in Android avail-

able at your fingertips, along with three years of monthly security updates to help protect against the latest threats.

When it comes to screen time, helping to keep children safe is just as important as nurturing their creativity and learning. The Nokia T20 comes with

Google Kids Space, a trusted kids mode for children to explore apps, books and videos to nurture their inquisitive minds.

Google Kids Space works in parallel with your child's Google Account, which parents can help manage with Family Link parental controls.

Industry-recognised Nokia smartphone expertise

The new Nokia T20 is designed with the same Scandinavian design philosophy as Nokia phones, a simplified and pure design where every detail, edge and surface finish is curated with ease of use from the outset. The solid metal body structure and polished 3D display frame attach the large display perfectly to the thin metal body, so it's built to go the distance.

Long-lasting battery

No one wants to be chained to the charging cable, so get ready to unleash the shackles courtesy of long-lasting battery performance. The Nokia T20 powerful 8200mAh battery allows for 15 hours of surfing the web, seven hours of conference calls, or 10

hours watching the latest films with the family. The tablet also comes with faster charging, meaning that you can get back to doing what's important, quicker.

Immerse yourself in the things you love

Whether you're watching the latest show or smashing a gaming personal best, the details will pop with the Nokia T20 2K display. And, with the ongoing rise in video calls, Nokia T20 is perfectly suited to handle important business meetings to a nail-biting virtual quiz.

Not only that, but the tablet is also blue light certified so that you can go the distance whilst being kind to your eyes.

When it's time to relax, simply kick back and enjoy an audiobook with the kids or your favourite music.

Oman takes part in religious leaders council meet

The sultanate, represented by the Ministry of Awqaf and Religious Affairs, participated virtually in the opening ceremony of the Conference of the World Council of Religious Leaders on Faith and Diplomacy 2021 (Faith and Diplomacy: Generations in Dialogue), which is taking place in Lindau, Federal Republic of Germany, from October 4-7.

The sultanate's speech at the opening was delivered by Dr Muhammad bin Said bin Khalifan al Mamari, Undersecretary of the Ministry of Awqaf and Religious Affairs. Participants include government representatives, members of international organisations including academic institutions and centres, members of youth and women networks, and various interfaith networks.

This year's conference addresses three pivotal topics in its various sessions: Peace and security, environmental protection, and humanitarian action, with a focus on the importance of equitable distribution of COVID-19 vaccines. The number of participants this year is about 1,000 from speakers and attendees in person and via virtual networks from more than 60 countries and 11 different religions.

Key speakers include Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus, director general of WHO, and Jeffrey Sachs, president of the United Nations Network for Sustainable



Development Solutions.

Dr Mamari began his speech by thanking the organisers of this conference for the "global efforts to foster peace and stability, build bridges of love and harmony" in this world. He also spoke about the challenges facing the world today, represented by feelings of fear and suspicion, hate speech, and the lack of trust due to misinformation and rumours.

During his speech, he stressed the sultanate's unremitting efforts and its permanent quest towards "creating a culture of inclusion and harmony, by involving individuals, groups and relevant centres in initiatives and dialogues to promote equality, prevent discrimination, counter rumours, refute misleading information, and spreading messages that promote trust in individuals and between societies, messages that revive hope in souls and dispels fears".

Dr Mamari affirmed that the sultanate, under the wise leadership of His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik "constantly



emphasises, in its internal and external approach, on the importance of interdependence and cooperation among all and strives to remind people of the

importance of synergy, kindness, respect and appreciation of diversity, and above all rejection of all forms of discrimination, fanaticism and terrorism".

In the working paper he explained the circle of "Knowledge, Acquaintance, and Acknowledgement", as a diplomatic approach that achieves for all

humanity stability, development, security, and prosperity that they seek, and help us all "move towards the future with means that protect future generations and

preserve civilisational achievements of every nation, while focusing on the security of our planet and the people who live on it, alike".



A'Saffa Foods launches Thawaq A'Saffa

A'Saffa Foods S A O G has announced the launch of Thawaq A'Saffa – a new range of delicious, pre-packaged poultry dishes. Comprising three dishes at launch, including Chicken Shuwa Spicy, Shuwa Omani, and Chicken Broast, Thawaq A'Saffa allows you to prepare these tasty dishes in just eight minutes.

A'Saffa uses local spices in each of these dishes, the Shuwa in particular, to ensure you enjoy an authentic and high-quality Omani meal.

All you need to do is heat the dishes in a microwave for just eight minutes, and then serve

with rice and any other garnishing you prefer.

Moreover, as with any product produced by A'Saffa, Thawaq A'Saffa is hygienically processed from quality chicken from the company's farms. Doing so ensures you enjoy a fresh and healthy chicken dish with a delicious taste that will remind you of home-cooked meals.

Thawaq A'Saffa is now available for sale at leading supermarkets across the country. For more information on A'Saffa Foods and its products, please visit www.asaffa.com or follow our social media handles.

Etisalat, Starzplay partner to broadcast and stream ICC Men's T20 World Cup across MENA region

Etisalat, one of the world's leading telecom groups in emerging markets, today announced it has won the rights from Star TV Network to broadcast the most anticipated and action-packed ICC Men's T20 World Cup across the MENA region. It will partner with Starzplay, MENA region's leading subscription video on demand (SVOD) service, to ensure all cricket fans across the region enjoy the full series.

The broadcast rights for the MENA belong exclusively to Etisalat and the partnership with Starzplay will give cricket fans access to all 45 matches taking place in the UAE and Oman from October 17 to November 14.

Regional cricket fans eagerly waiting for the ICC Men's T20 World Cup 2021 can enjoy all the cricket frenzy and live the game on CricLife Max channel via Etisalat's eLife TV, Switch TV and the Starzplay app in UAE, while subscribers in the



rest of the MENA region can enjoy the game exclusively via Starzplay. CricLife Max is broadcasting all the matches LIVE along-with highlights, pre-shows and post-match analysis, with full match replays on the other CricLife channels.

Cricket is already a permanent feature on Switch TV. Now through the deal with Etisalat, Starzplay will also be streaming CricLife and CricLife2 channels which have the rights for home matches of various cricket play-

ing nations including India, Pakistan, South Africa, New Zealand, West Indies as well as the exciting T20 leagues like Pakistan Super League and Caribbean Premier League.

Khaled Elkhoully, chief consumer officer, Etisalat, said, "There is no other provider better placed in the UAE to bring sports fans the complete depth and breadth of sports action. eLife customers have access to an unprecedented line-up to watch live sport from the best

providers across the region. Our investment in bringing the very best of cricket action to the UAE and beyond will further solidify our drive. Partnering with Starzplay not only for the ICC Men's T20 World Cup but for our CricLife channels will mean more fans can watch their teams play in more places than ever before across the GCC."

Danny Bates, chief commercial officer, Starzplay said, "We have been steadily building on our focus to deliver live sporting events to our subscribers, and nothing beats the joy of bringing the action of the ICC Men's T20 World Cup to the region.

"This is a prestigious win for us, and we thank our longstanding associates, Etisalat as well as Star TV Network, for their support.

"With cricket widely followed in the region, we are bridging a gap for our subscribers, who can now effortlessly watch all the live cricket action from this exciting T20 championship. Our

aim is to become the ultimate TV entertainment destination and we will continue to explore new and innovative ways to offer the best sporting experience for our subscribers."

Harry Griffith, (Head of Syndication, Star TV Network), said, "This is a ground-breaking collaboration which will provide the largest ever reach for an ICC event in the region.

"We are delighted to associate with Etisalat and Starzplay to enhance the coverage of the ICC Men's T20 World Cup across the Middle East. With the event being staged in the UAE and Oman it is crucial the tournament is more accessible than ever before.

"This is a truly exciting juncture for all cricket fans in the Middle East."

Cricket lovers can enjoy these matches from the comfort and safety of their homes and anytime, anywhere on any device with eLife TV, Switch TV, Starzplay and eLife ON.

New range of Audi A6 vehicles added to Budget RAC's fleet

Budget car rental has partnered with Audi Oman to add the new Audi A6 to its fleet.

The partnership with Budget RAC allows customers to avail special leasing prices on the wider range of Audi vehicles.

Christian Nehme, general manager of Premium Motors Oman said, "We are thrilled to add the Audi A6 to the Budget RAC fleet and delighted to partner with Budget RAC to offer leasing services in Oman. Leasing business opportunities have increased with the current situation. Our range has a model for every business and personal need.

"Our models offer the latest safety, communications, and driver assistance technologies. They are also renowned for maintaining strong residual values, with competitive whole-life

costs that could help cut operating costs."

He added, "We strive to offer a tailored ownership experience with every Audi and will help find the model to suit business and personal needs."

Benty Jose, general manager for Budget RAC said, "We are extremely pleased to tie up with Audi Oman. We believe that the Audi A6 is an incredible addition to our existing collection and will help us provide great choice to our customers."

Budget RAC has been operational in Oman since 1981 and was the first international car rental company to start operations in Oman. Budget Oman is the only car rental agency in the country that offers a wide range of top branded cars. Premium Motors is the official importer of Audi in Oman.





Palestinians gather to apply for work permits in Israel, at Jabalia refugee camp in the northern Gaza Strip, on Wednesday (AFP)

Thousands of Gazans queue up to apply for Israeli work permits

Gaza City, Palestinian Territories

- Thousands of Gazans applied Wednesday for work permits for Israel, which has been reopening its gates to labourers from the Palestinian enclave following the latest war in May.

In Jabalia, a refugee camp in northern Gaza, a crowd of men holding their identity papers lined up hoping to obtain a permit to work in Israel, AFP journalists said.

"There is no work in the Gaza Strip," said Fathi Abu Nur, a 40 year old unemployed man.

"Yesterday I heard that workers are registering to get permits (for Israel)," he said.

"I hope things will get better because the current situation is really difficult," the father of five said.

The total number of permits being granted by Israel to Palestinian labourers in Gaza is 7,000, an Israeli security official told AFP, up from 5,000 workers and traders allowed in August.

In May, Israel and Hamas reached a truce following 11 days of the deadliest fighting in years.

Israel has since been easing restrictions on the Palestinian enclave, including reopening crossings, expanding the fishing

zone and permitting the entry of certain goods.

Many Palestinians want to work in Israel, where wages are higher than in Gaza.

The impoverished territory of two million inhabitants with an unemployment rate of about 50 per cent has been blockaded by Israel for nearly 15 years.

Palestinian economic analyst Omar Shaaban said Israeli work permits could help alleviate 'the unemployment crisis and poverty' within the territory, ruled by the Hamas.

According to Shaaban, Gaza's income would increase by US\$3mn per day, if Israel granted 20,000 work permits.

Meanwhile, the increase in permits was 'the result of a political process, including discussions in Cairo between the Hamas movement and Egyptian officials', a Palestinian official at the chamber of commerce said on condition of anonymity.

Israeli Foreign Minister Yair Lapid has put forth a plan to improve living conditions in Gaza in exchange for a Hamas commitment to 'long-term quiet'.

Israel and Hamas have fought four wars since 2008. AFP

Individual candidates in focus as Iraq goes to polls on Sunday

Baghdad, Iraq - When Iraqis go to the polls on Sunday, they will vote for individual candidates rather than parties for the first time under a new electoral law meant to appease a youth-led protest movement fed up with the country's old-style politics.

In theory, the changes will strengthen local voices as candidates can now run at the district level and as independents, allowing new hopefuls such as tribal leaders, business people and civil society activists to join the race.

But the shadow of Iraq's traditional political blocs, which are mostly defined by religious sect or ethnic group, still hovers over many of the candidates who claim to be non-aligned, raising questions about the impact of the reform.

On campaign posters, many of the more than 3,200 hopefuls seeking office declare themselves to be free of affiliations with the powerful blocs in parliament - but not everyone is convinced.

For many, it's simply an 'electoral manoeuvre', argued political scientist Ihsan al Shammari, saying they don't want to be associated with the entrenched forces widely blamed for inept governance, graft and shady backroom deal-making.

"The candidates want to distance themselves from the failures of their parties and try to adopt a new image, far from corruption and mismanagement," said Shammari of the Baghdad-based Iraqi Centre for Political Thought.

Iraq is emerging from almost two decades of war and insurgency since the 2003 US-led invasion toppled dictator Saddam Hussein. Sunday's parliamentary election is the fifth since then.

But there is little popular hope for major change through the ballot box, and widespread disillusionment persists over the political caste as most Iraqis worry more about a painful economic crisis.



An Iraqi woman near an electoral campaign poster ahead of the polls in Iraq, in the southern city of Basra on Wednesday (AFP)

More constituencies

Popular anger exploded in unprecedented street protests two years ago against youth joblessness, crumbling public services and a political class seen as more loyal to Iran or the US than to Iraqi citizens.

Hundreds died in months of protest-related violence, and more activists have been murdered, kidnapped or intimidated since, with no accountability for the deaths.

The activists have blamed pro-Iran armed groups - often part of the Hashed al Shaabi paramilitary coalition that helped defeat the Islamic State group, and whose lawmakers now wield huge influence in parliament.

The protests prompted Prime Minister Mustafa al Kadhemi to move forward the ballot originally scheduled for 2022, and authorities to reform the election rules - but many of the activists

and parties behind the uprising are boycotting the vote.

The new electoral law theoretically favours local candidates - which means tribal figures or local potentates - as the number of electoral districts has been increased to 83. Previously, under the list-based system, Iraq's electorate was divided according to the 18 governorates.

Now, all across the country, many candidates are calling themselves 'independents', despite having had partisan affiliations in the past.

This is occurring across the political spectrum - from the movement of firebrand Shiite cleric Moqtada Sadr, to the coalition of secular former vice-president Iyad Allawi and to the State of Law Alliance of former prime minister Nuri al Maliki.

One candidate, Ines Naji al Maksousi, standing for office in the city of Kut, said, "I was an in-

dependent candidate within the Sadrists. Today, I am an independent candidate."

If elected, Maksousi does not rule out eventually siding with a bloc in parliament, where 329 seats are up for grabs.

"It's possible, if there is a convergence of vision with a political tendency or deputies, and if that serves our electorate," she said.

Dangling the bait

In Iraq, alliances tend to form and break up after each election and entire blocs can change sides.

The vote count and division of seats matter, but it is the horse-trading in the formation of parliamentary coalitions that is crucial to building a new government.

The favourite this time is the Sadrist movement, whose Saeroon bloc held 54 seats and was the largest in the outgoing parliament.

Sadr, with millions of devoted

followers among Iraq's Shiites and in command of paramilitary groups, has long been a crucial player in Iraqi politics.

Also powerful is the pro-Iran Shiite camp around the Hashed al Shaabi.

It held the second-biggest bloc, the Fatah alliance.

Pro-Iran parties 'are likely to retain approximately the same portion of seats', predicted Lahib Higel, an analyst for the International Crisis Group. "I don't see that there is going to be a significant increase for them."

But amid patronage rules and frequent fraud, experts don't rule out the co-opting of independents by dangling the bait of ministerial posts and other enticements.

Shammari agreed that in Iraqi politics 'the traditional forces and parties have sufficient leeway to attract independents'.

AFP

Tunisia police seize equipment from TV station

Tunis, Tunisia - Tunisian security forces on Wednesday seized broadcasting equipment from Zitouna TV, which had been operating illegally, the country's media authority said.

"Broadcasting equipment was confiscated today from the Zitouna channel following a decision" by the Independent High Authority for Audiovisual Communication (HAICA), the body's president Nouri Lajmi told AFP.

"Zitouna has been broadcasting illegally for years and has not received a broadcasting licence as it has not respected the legal framework," he said.

Zitouna's head of production, Nasreddine bin Hammouda, said, "Security forces accompanied by members of the HAICA raided the headquarters of Zitouna Network, which produces programmes for Zitouna TV and other channels, and began confiscating equipment."

The channel was still on air, he added.

Zitouna TV is considered close to Al-Karama and Ennahdha, two parties opposed to President Kais Saied.

Saied in July suspended parliament, sacked the Ennahdha-supported government of Hichem Mechichi and removed MPs' immunity following months of growing public anger over an ongoing economic crisis and failings in managing the coronavirus pandemic.

Hichem el Senoussi, a mem-



Tunisians take part in a rally in support of President Kais Saied, in the capital Tunis on Sunday (AFP)

ber of the HAICA, told AFP that decisions had been taken a month ago against Zitouna TV and other channels that had 'failed to comply with orders to stop broadcasting'.

Zitouna TV started broadcasting in 2012, following the fall of longtime dictator Zine al Abidine Ben Ali in an uprising the previous year.

In 2015, some of its equipment was seized but it continued operating.

Senoussi said the HAICA

had repeatedly ordered the channel to close, but that it had been 'supported by political actors including Ennahdha', preventing the orders being implemented.

Tunisian authorities on Sunday arrested Zitouna TV presenter Amer Ayad along with lawmaker Abdellatif al Alaoui on charges of 'plotting against state security', their lawyer said, after the Al-Karama MP appeared on Ayad's show and criticised Saied's moves.

It was the latest detention of a legislator after Saied lifted their immunity.

Military justice arrested Al-Karama's head Seifeddine Makhlouf on September 22 for 'undermining the dignity of the army', his lawyer said at the time.

Tunisian police on July 26 closed the office of Qatari broadcaster Al Jazeera in the capital Tunis, without giving reasons.

AFP

Germany inches closer to Scholz-led centre-left govt

Frankfurt, Germany - Germany's Greens and the liberal FDP party said on Wednesday they wanted to try to form a coalition government with the centre-left Social Democrats (SPD), dealing a blow to Chancellor Angela Merkel's conservatives.

The move brings the Social Democrats' Olaf Scholz a step closer to the chancellery after 16 years of Merkel's centre-right-led government.

The political upheaval in Europe's biggest economy was unleashed by last month's general election which Scholz's party won with 25.7 per cent, followed by Merkel's CDU-CSU bloc at 24.1 per cent.

For either party to head the next German government it would need the support of the centre-left Greens and the pro-business Free Democrats (FDP), which came third and fourth.

Despite leading the conservatives to their worst-ever election result, beleaguered CDU leader Armin Laschet insisted he still has a shot at the top job.

Speaking to reporters, Laschet said the conservatives 'respect the decision' by the two king-maker parties to pursue a coalition with the SPD.

But the CDU-CSU is 'still ready to hold talks', he said.

CSU leader Markus Soeder however gave a more sobering



The Social Democratic Party (SPD) candidate for chancellor Olaf Scholz at a press meet at the SPD headquarters, in Berlin on Wednesday (AFP)

assessment, saying the possibility of a CDU-CSU government had essentially been 'rejected'.

The conservative bloc must now prepare itself for a stint in opposition after four Merkel-led coalitions, he said. "This will change our country," Soeder

said, adding that "the conservatives will enter a new era too."

Recent surveys suggest most Germans want Scholz, who is also finance minister and vice chancellor, to become the next leader of Europe's top economy.

AFP

Duo wins Nobel Chemistry Prize for work on catalysts

I thought somebody was making a joke. I was sitting at breakfast with my wife when the call came: List

Stockholm, Sweden - Germany's Benjamin List and David MacMillan of the United States on Wednesday won the Nobel Chemistry Prize for their development of a precise new tool for molecular construction which has helped make chemistry greener, the jury said.

The duo was awarded 'for their development of a precise new tool for molecular construction: Organocatalysis. This has had a great impact on pharmaceutical research, and has made chemistry greener', the Nobel Committee said.

Prior to their work, scientists believed there were only two types of catalysts, metals and enzymes.

In 2000, the researchers, working independently of each other, developed a third type, called 'asymmetric organocatalysis', which relies on small organic molecules.

List and MacMillan, both 53, will share the 10mn kronor (€1mn approx) prize.

"I thought somebody was making a joke. I was sitting at breakfast with my wife," List told reporters by telephone during a press conference after the prize was announced. He added that usually when the prize is announced, his wife jokes that he should keep an eye on his phone for a call from Sweden.

"But today we didn't even



The Nobel Committee for Chemistry members hold a press conference to explain the work of the co-winners of the 2021 Nobel Prize in Chemistry, at the Royal Swedish Academy of Sciences in Stockholm, Sweden, on Wednesday (AFP)

make the joke," List said.

"It's hard to describe what you feel in that moment but it was a very special moment that I will never forget," List said.

MacMillan is a professor at Princeton University in the US,

while List is a director at the Max Planck Institute in Germany.

'Many research areas and industries are dependent on chemists' ability to construct molecules that can form elastic and durable materials, store en-

ergy in batteries or inhibit the progression of disease,' the Nobel committee at the Royal Swedish Academy of Sciences said in a statement.

'This work requires catalysts, which are substances that con-

trol and accelerate chemical reactions, without becoming part of the final product,' it added.

Wide-open field

List was the first to prove that the amino acid proline could drive an

Benjamin List and David MacMillan developed a precise new tool for molecular construction: Organocatalysis. This has had a great impact on pharmaceutical research, and has made chemistry greener

NOBEL COMMITTEE

aldol reaction, which is when carbon atoms from two different molecules are bonded together.

'Compared to both metals and enzymes, proline is a dream tool for chemists. It is a very simple, cheap and environmentally friendly molecule,' the Academy said.

Ahead of this year's announcement, analysts said the field was wide open.

According to Clarivate, which maintains a list of potential Nobel Prize winners, more than 70 researchers had what it takes to be considered for the prize in chemistry, given the thousands of citations they have received in scientific papers.

Thought to be among the

favourites for the medicine prize that was announced on Monday, the pioneers of the COVID-19 mRNA vaccines, Hungarian biochemist Katalin Kariko and US immunologist Drew Weissman, were also seen as potential candidates for chemistry.

But many experts also said that it is a little too early for the generally cautious Nobel Committees to give the nod.

Last year, the Nobel went to Frenchwoman Emmanuelle Charpentier and American Jennifer Doudna, for developing the gene-editing technique known as CRISPR-Cas9 - DNA snipping 'scissors'.

The Nobel season continues with the two most closely watched prizes, literature on Thursday and peace on Friday. The winner of the economics prize will be announced on Monday.

The medicine prize kicked off the 2021 Nobel season on Monday, going to David Julius and Ardem Patapoutian for breakthroughs that paved the way for the treatment of chronic pain.

The physics prize followed on Tuesday, when half was awarded to US-Japanese scientist Syukuro Manabe and Klaus Hasselmann for climate models, and the other half to Italy's Giorgio Parisi for work on the theory of disordered materials and random processes. AFP



This file photo shows a deactivated Titan II nuclear ICMB in a silo at the Titan Missile Museum in Green Valley, Arizona, on May 12, 2015 (AFP)

US nuclear bomb numbers 3,750, reveals State Department

Washington, US - The US State Department published on Tuesday the number of nuclear warheads the country stockpiles for the first time in four years, after former president Donald Trump placed a blackout on the data.

As of September 30, 2020, the US military maintained 3,750 active and inactive nuclear warheads, down by 55 from a year earlier and by 72 from the same date in 2017.

The figure was also the lowest level since the US nuclear stockpile peaked at the height of the Cold War with Russia in 1967, when the total was 31,255 warheads.

The numbers were released Tuesday amid an effort by the administration of President Joe Biden to restart arms controls talks with Russia after they stalled under Trump.

'Increasing the transparency of states' nuclear stockpiles is important to nonproliferation and disarmament efforts,' the State Department said in a statement.

Trump, who pulled the United States from the Iran nuclear deal and the Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces (INF) treaty with Russia, also left another crucial pact, the New Start Treaty on the rocks last year before its scheduled expiration on February 5.

New Start caps the number of

nuclear warheads held by Washington and Moscow, and letting it expire could have sparked a reversal of warhead reductions on both sides.

Trump said he wanted a new deal that includes China, which only has a fraction of the warheads that the United States and Russia have.

Biden, who came in to office on January 20, immediately proposed a five-year extension to New Start, which Russian President Vladimir Putin quickly agreed to. The deal caps at 1,550 the number of nuclear warheads that can be deployed by Moscow and Washington.

Last week Russian and US diplomats held talks behind closed doors in Geneva to begin discussions on a successor to New Start and also controls on conventional weapons.

A US official called the talks 'productive', but both sides said the mere fact of holding the talks was positive.

According to a January 2021 tally by the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute, which includes retired warheads - not counted in the State Department's numbers - the United States had 5,550 warheads, compared to 6,255 in Russia, 350 in China, 225 in Britain, and 290 in France. AFP

China military tensions highest in decades: Taiwan minister

Taipei, Taiwan - Military tensions between China and Taiwan are at their highest in four decades, the island's defence minister warned on Wednesday, adding Beijing would be in a position to launch a full-scale invasion in 2025.

Taiwan lives under the constant threat of invasion by China, which views the self-ruled democratic island as its territory to be seized one day, by force if necessary.

Defence Minister Chiu Kuocheng offered his assessment after around 150 Chinese warplanes - a record number that included nuclear-capable bombers - made incursions into Taiwan's air defence zone starting on Friday. "For the military, the current situation is the grimmest in the more than 40 years since I joined the service," he told parliament.

He warned that even 'slight carelessness' or 'miscalculation' could spark a crisis, and that China would be able to launch an invasion of the island in four years.

"It is capable now but it has to

French senators in Taiwan despite China protests

Taipei, Taiwan - A delegation of French senators led by a former defence minister arrived on Wednesday in Taiwan, where they will hold talks with President Tsai Ing-wen, despite strong protests from China.

Beijing opposes Taipei having any official diplomatic exchanges and has aggressively tried to dissuade politicians from visiting in recent years.

The Chinese Embassy in Paris warned that the visit would damage the interests of China, Chinese-French relations and 'the image of France', in recent comments.

France's Foreign Ministry has dismissed China's protests, saying the senators were free to make their own decisions



Taiwan's deputy foreign minister Harry Tseng (right) greets French Senator Alain Richard leading a delegation to Taiwan, in Taoyuan (AFP)

about their travel plans.

Taiwan lauded the senators for resisting pressure from Beijing to go ahead with the visit.

"We sincerely welcome the French delegation led by Senator Alain Richard to Taiwan. I look forward to meeting with

you and working together to further strengthen Taiwan-France ties," tweeted Tsai.

"The senators are making the visit despite threats from the Chinese Ambassador to France," Taipei's Foreign Ministry said.

calculate what it would cost, and what kind of outcome it wishes to achieve," Chiu said.

"After 2025, the cost and losses would be lowered to a

minimum," he added, without providing further details.

Chinese President Xi Jinping, who has called the seizure of Taiwan 'inevitable', also described

relations with Taipei as 'grim' in a letter to the island's newly elected main opposition leader last week.

Beijing has ramped up mili-

Two stranded humpback whales rescued in Argentina



Rescuers help a stranded humpback whale on the shores of Argentine sea at Nueva Atlantis, some 350km south-east of the Argentine capital Buenos Aires, on Sunday (AFP)

beach lifeguards.

Their collective efforts allowed the animals to return to the sea, the statement said.

"Upon arriving to survey the first animal's situation, primary

support efforts were immediately carried out, including assuring the individual's position allowed it to breathe, keeping its pectoral fins underwater in order to stabilise its body temperature

as much as possible,' the organisation said.

The whole procedure was 'difficult', the group said. At one point, the force of the waves knocked the whale over so that

the mammal's blowhole was underwater and it was unable to breathe.

"Thanks to a quick action, they were able to turn it over," said Sergio Rodriguez Heredia, a biologist at the World Marine Foundation's Rescue Center.

Rescuers tucked cables underneath the whale's body - connected to a huge backhoe tractor crane - hoping to free it from the sandy sea floor.

The workers noticed the second whale overnight, seeing it was in a 'good state of health', said Augusto Giachetti, director of the Civil Defence's coastal division.

They waited until dawn to begin the second whale's rescue.

"It was necessary to realign the animal, using the assistance of a backhoe and special cables to move it a big enough distance that it was able to float," Giachetti said.

AFP

COVID-19 PANDEMIC

Russia reports record 929 deaths from virus in 24 hours

Moscow, Russia - Russia reported a record high number of daily coronavirus deaths on Wednesday as the country struggles with stubbornly high infection rates and regions beyond Moscow cautiously bring back pandemic restrictions.

The world's fifth worst-hit country with more than 7.5mn infections, Russia has seen cases climb since August driven by the contagious Delta variant and a sluggish vaccinations drive.

A government tally recorded 929 COVID-19 deaths in the past 24 hours, Russia's highest daily virus death toll since the outbreak of the pandemic.

Several Russia-made jabs have been available for months, but authorities have struggled to encourage its vaccine-sceptic population to get inoculated.

Polls show that more than half of Russians do not plan to get a shot.

As of Wednesday, just under 30 percent of Russia's 146mn population had been fully vaccinated, according to the Gogov website, which tallies COVID-19 data from the regions.

Deputy Prime Minister Tatyana Golikova said earlier this week that death rates were



A medical staff member pushes a wheelchair-bound patient at a hospital for the COVID-19 patients at Kommunarka outside Moscow on Tuesday (AFP)

high among unvaccinated Russians.

The surging infections have come without any real pandemic restrictions to limit the spread, but several regions have re-introduced QR codes for access to public places.

Moscow - the epicentre of

Russia's outbreak - has so far held back on reintroducing restrictions.

'Far from the peak'

Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov said on Wednesday lockdowns would be 'an absolutely undesirable scenario for

any region'. He also poured cold water on any nationwide measures saying regions were 'taking action individually'.

In the capital, authorities say that the highly contagious Delta variant now accounts for all of the cases.

Speaking at a government

meeting on Tuesday, Moscow mayor Sergei Sobyenin said his city was 'far from peak numbers' and the growing infections are largely linked to high detection rates. Two thirds of Moscow's hospital beds for coronavirus patients are currently occupied, he said.

In September, Russia's President Vladimir Putin (68) self-isolated for two weeks after dozens of coronavirus cases were detected in his inner circle.

Russian authorities have been accused of downplaying the severity of the outbreak and, after a tight first lockdown in 2020, have refrained from introducing restrictive new measures.

The new deaths bring Russia's total fatalities from coronavirus to 212,625 - the highest toll in Europe. However, the official figures only count virus fatalities where the virus was identified as the primary cause of death after an autopsy.

Under a broader definition for deaths linked to the coronavirus, statistics agency Rosstat reported in August that Russia had seen more than 350,000 fatalities.

AFP



A robot displays COVID-19 protocols that need to be maintained at the Expo 2020 Dubai a day after the inauguration, on Saturday (AFP)

UAE says has 'overcome' pandemic crisis

Abu Dhabi, UAE - The United Arab Emirates declared on Wednesday that it has overcome the COVID-19 crisis, recording its lowest number of infections this month since summer last year.

"I wanted to assure you all that our lives must go back to normal," said Abu Dhabi Crown Prince Mohammed bin Zayed in footage published by the official WAM new agency.

"There are some changes in how we work, in our families' studies or our personal lives... but we thank God for everything," said the de facto UAE ruler.

"We also thank God that we have overcome this crisis... safely, in good health and with an experience, for which we paid the price, but we learnt a lot."

The seven emirates of the UAE recorded fewer than 200 new cases of COVID-19 this month - the lowest figure since August last year.

While life in the UAE has largely returned to normal, it retains strict rules on wearing masks and social distancing.

Dubai is counting on the six-

The seven emirates of the UAE recorded fewer than 200 new cases of COVID-19 this month - the lowest figure since August last year

month Expo 2020 Dubai - which opened on October 1 after a one-year delay - to attract millions of visitors and boost its pandemic-hit economy.

Heavily reliant on tourism, the emirate was one of the first destinations to reopen its doors to travellers, accepting tourists in July last year, just a few months after the pandemic took hold.

Neighbouring Abu Dhabi has been more cautious, leaving it until December to reopen to visitors.

The UAE has so far recorded more than 737,000 cases of COVID-19, including 2,104 deaths.

AFP

Global death toll close to 5mn, cases over 235mn

Paris, France - The novel coronavirus has killed at least 4,813,581 people since the outbreak emerged in China in December 2019, according to a tally from official sources compiled by AFP at 1000 GMT on Wednesday.

At least 235,767,340 cases of coronavirus have been registered.

The vast majority have recovered, though some have continued to experience symptoms weeks or even months later.

The figures are based on daily

reports provided by health authorities in each country.

They exclude revisions made by other statistical organisations, which show that the number of deaths is much higher.

The World Health Organization estimates that the pandemic's overall toll could be two to three times higher than official records, due to the excess mortality that is directly and indirectly linked to COVID-19.

A large number of the less severe or asymptomatic cases also remain undetected, despite in-

tensified testing in many countries.

On Tuesday, 8,214 new deaths and 446,871 new cases were recorded worldwide.

Based on latest reports, the countries with the most new deaths were United States with 1,845 new deaths, followed by Russia with 929 and Mexico with 790. The United States is the worst-affected country with 705,284 deaths from 43,950,779 cases.

After the US, the hardest-hit countries are Brazil with

598,829 deaths from 21,499,074 cases, India with 449,538 deaths from 33,871,881 cases, Mexico with 279,896 deaths from 3,691,924 cases, and Russia with 212,625 deaths from 7,662,560 cases.

The country with the highest number of deaths compared to its population is Peru with 605 fatalities per 100,000 inhabitants, followed by Bosnia-Herzegovina with 328, Republic of North Macedonia with 324, Hungary with 313, Montenegro with 311, and Bulgaria with 305.

Latin America and the Caribbean overall has 1,496,070 deaths from 45,141,748 cases, Europe 1,323,544 deaths from 68,662,932 infections, and Asia 845,754 deaths from 54,356,958 cases.

The United States and Canada has reported 733,297 deaths from 45,592,600 cases, Africa 211,845 deaths from 8,331,950 cases, Middle East 200,812 deaths from 13,488,359 cases, and Oceania 2,259 deaths from 192,802 cases.

AFP

From insurgency to city beat: Taliban police learn the ropes

Kabul, Afghanistan - After spending 13 years as a Taliban fighter waging an insurgency, Rahimullah is now slowly adjusting to the relatively ordinary role of a policeman in Afghanistan's capital.

Like the rest of the Taliban, he is grappling with an awkward transition from rebel fighter to civilian patrolman, as the hardliners vow security and build a new police force.

Kabul residents say street crime has dropped, with widespread fear rooted in memories of the Taliban's brutal regime in the 1990s, infamous for harsh punishments such as public stoning, lashing and amputations.

"This is not risky work," says Rahimullah, who joined the Taliban as a teenager 'for Islam and for my country'.

The 28 year old from neighbouring Wardak province, along with his team of eight men, has the task of managing security in a central Kabul district.

His work involves 'catching thieves, murderers and those who drink wine', he tells AFP, which was allowed to accompany a patrol overseen by a more senior Taliban official.

Some of his colleagues appear unsure of how to navigate their new role in a city far from their previous lives in the much more conservative countryside.



Taliban fighters working as a police force stand guard next to a Humvee vehicle at the entrance gate of a police district in Kabul on Sunday (AFP)

"It's not our favourite job, but it's our responsibility," admits the Taliban commander overseeing the patrol. Instead of the jackets and trousers formerly worn by officers, many Taliban forces don traditional Afghan dress.

Some have had new versions made from the blue-and-black

camouflage material used in old Afghan uniforms.

At one station, in Kabul's 10th district, the emblem of the previous police force can still be seen, near the Taliban's white and black banner.

Taliban punishments have already been on display in some

parts of Afghanistan - last week, the bodies of four suspected kidnappers were hung from a crane in the city of Herat.

Challenging transition

The old police force, created by the international powers that

drove out the Taliban in 2001, no longer exists.

It collapsed when the Taliban swept back into power on August 15, as former police and civil servants fearful of revenge and abuse scurried into hiding or fled the country.

The Taliban authorities are

eager to keep their promise of strict law and order in the new Afghanistan, where the justice system under the US-backed government was plagued by corruption and inefficiency.

"There is a training programme underway, and there will be professionals at all levels," said

interior ministry spokesman Qari Sayed Khosti, who has invited former police personnel to return.

The new force already counts about 4,000 men in the capital, says Kabul police spokesman Afaz Sirajuddin Omeri, insisting the city is far safer than before.

"Under the previous government, there were 300 to 400 crimes reported each day. Now in total they report around 15 a day," said Omeri as he drove a dusty old Toyota Corolla through the city, his car radio playing religious songs.

It is not possible to independently verify those numbers, but Kabul residents generally agree that robberies and kidnappings, previously rampant, have eased.

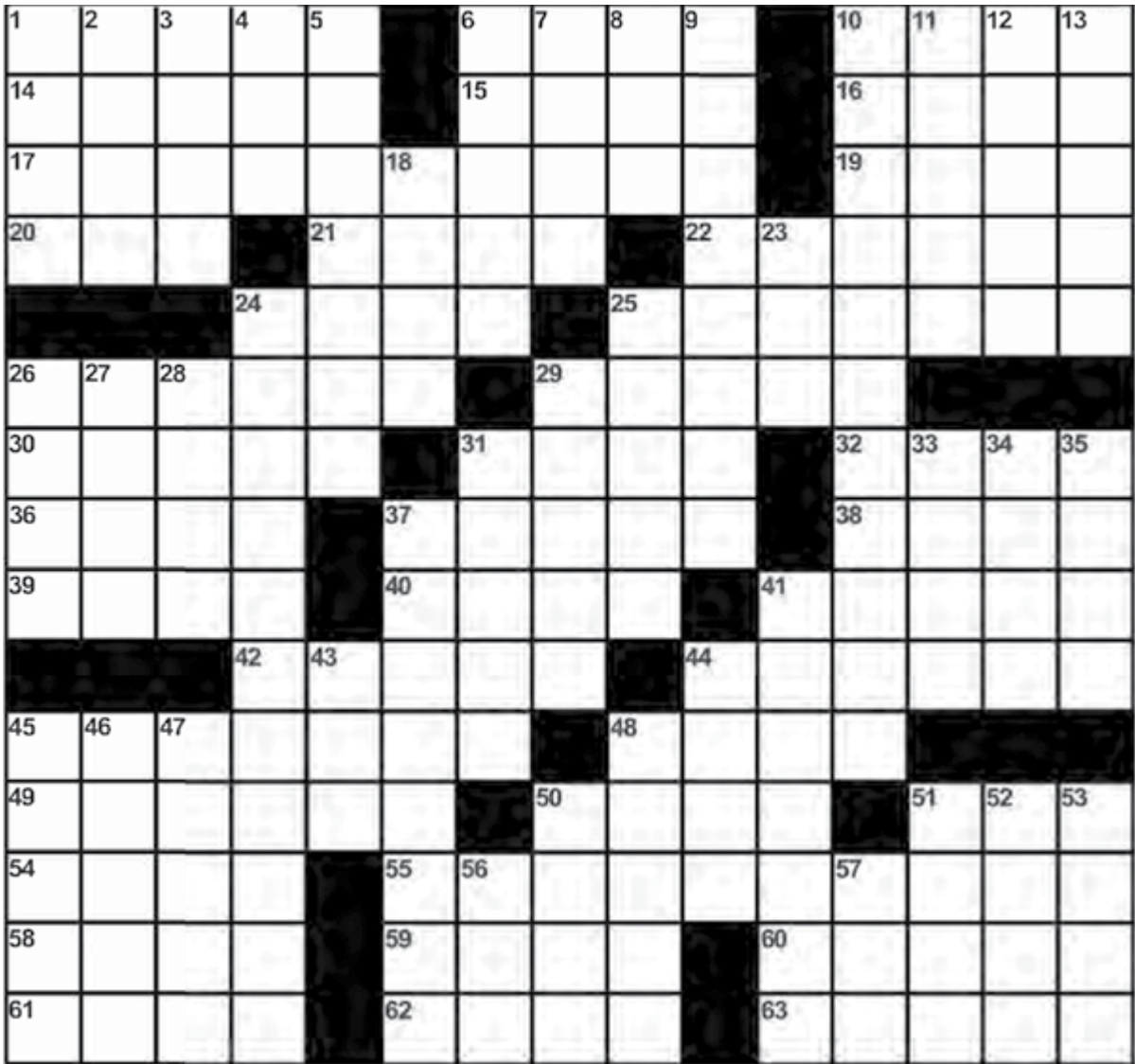
With the war between the collapsed Afghan security forces and Taliban now over, bombings - largely carried out by the insurgent group - have also dramatically decreased.

For the new policemen though, it can be challenging to go from a life immersed in extreme violence to maintaining law and order.

But Yahya Mansoor (25) on duty at a checkpoint in eastern Kabul, says he does not miss fighting and is eager to 'serve the people'. "Before we served them by making jihad," he says. "Now we are rebuilding our country."

AFP

DAILY CROSSWORD



ACROSS

- 1) Goodly sums
6) Splittable bit
10) Talk trash about
14) "Time is money," e.g.
15) Cryptologist's interest
16) Golden Rule word
17) Herb used in perfumes
19) Amphitheater section
20) "Chocolate" dog, for short
21) Announced
22) Drunk as a skunk
24) Like pizza for breakfast, typically
25) Happy brew
26) Hitchhiker on a shark
29) More astute
30) EGBDF part
31) Burgundy or claret
32) Go head over heels
36) Pal of Sawyer
37) Plateaued, with "out"
YELLOW FARE
38) _ deck (part of a cruise

ship)

- 39) Assault from Moe
40) American composer
Charles
41) Attach, as a corsage
42) More forgiving
44) Classic Volkswagen
45) Used an aerosol can
48) Gives no stars to
49) Did away with
50) Jerome who composed "O! Man River"
51) Tiny ammo
54) Crow's home
55) Bike accessory
58) Fuss over, with "on"
59) One who's off-base
60) Trump ex Maples
61) Go toe-to-toe
62) Catches on to
63) Landscaper's gadget

DOWN

- 1) Grow wearisome
2) Mental spark
3) Dish with mint jelly
4) Psyche part
5) ESP part

- 6) Nasty-smelling
7) Wart-giver of folklore
8) Takes too much, briefly
9) Contacted on Facebook, say
10) Nervous feeling
11) "America" singer in "West Side Story"
12) Bethlehem product, once
13) Nomadic tribe
18) Big bash
23) World Cup cheer
24) Dr. Scholl's product
25) Glaziers' units
26) Sports "zebras"
27) What Mr. Hyde personified
28) Suvari of "American Beauty"
29) Philly hoopster
31) Signaled "hi" or "bye"
33) Dryer buildup
34) Fan favorite
35) Dixie bread
37) A little of this, a little of that
41) Mark Twain or Dr. Seuss
43) Sailor's assent

- 44) Country dance locale
45) Fires off
46) Hospital prep area
47) Dreadlocks sporter, for short
48) Bursts of laughter
50) Two-by-four flaw
51) North Sea hazard
52) Seat at a hoedown
53) Milky Way part
56) Blow away
57) Bummed out

NOTE PAD



YOUR DAILY HOROSCOPE



ARIES MARCH 21-APRIL 19

You're as bubbly as a can full of soda pop, and with good reason. Some recent changes you've made have really started to pay off, and you're able to see just how many choices you have in your life. It's pretty darned wonderful, and part of you wants to get out there and spread the word to your fellow humans. Hold off on any evangelising tendencies, and be content to lead by example.



LEO JULY 23-AUGUST 22

Isn't it romantic? Well, it definitely could be -- you have the stars on your side and in your eyes. Set your sights on a cutie you feel a definite connection with, and just start talking. Remember to breathe and be yourself, and you just might feel that connection turn into a spark. If you're attached, it's a great time to rediscover what exactly it was that drew you two together.



SAGITTARIUS NOVEMBER 22-DECEMBER 21

Cast aside any self-doubts -- or better yet, recast them as positive statements. So instead of beating yourself up by saying, 'I make terrible choices,' tell yourself, 'I remain open-minded to all possibilities.' It's amazing how spinning things the right way can give you a new sense of perspective on circumstances that previously had you in the pit of despair.



TAURUS APRIL 20-MAY 20

It becomes pretty clear that for a certain suspicious someone, your word may not be enough. If that's the case, you may need to back up your ideas or claims with solid evidence. That's fine -- you're able to find tangible proof that you know what you're talking about, but it won't be effective if you deliver it with hidden resentment. Try to understand where they're coming from.



VIRGO AUGUST 23-SEPTEMBER 22

How hot is your ambition burning right now? Hmmm -- that answer sounds close, but try multiplying that by a factor of 10. The stars stoke your drive for success in a big way. This can help you go the extra mile, but if you let it burn unchecked, it could also cause an ego-driven meltdown. Checking in with yourself, and making sure you're not so caught up in the race.



CAPRICORN DECEMBER 22-JANUARY 19

It's time to signal a cease-fire between you a close friend or significant other. Can't you find a way to settle your differences? Even agreeing that you'll never come to an agreement on the topic is progress. While it may be difficult at first, speaking honestly to one another and putting aside any impulse to hurt is the only thing that can help heal this rift.



GEMINI MAY 21-JUNE 21

As you get older (and, with any luck, wiser) the aim should be to reduce stress and complications. While lots of drama and action are certainly entertaining, it's not necessarily the best way to live. Look at areas in your life that always generate lots and lots of conflict and figure out what you could be doing to bring the anxiety level down to the minimum.



LIBRA SEPTEMBER 23-OCTOBER 22

Take a chance on love. Speculation in the romantic realm can work out with surprisingly good results, especially since the stars currently favour bold moves and big risks. Holding back will just hinder your attempt, so whatever you're going after, go after it all the way. You're practically your own magnetic field, so you're guaranteed that the object of your desire will respond.



AQUARIUS JANUARY 20-FEBRUARY 18

Feeling like this relationship is a struggle for control? Well, maybe that's a big part of the problem. Drop the battle for supremacy and figure out a way to have a partnership. The first step is not to excuse bad behaviour that makes you or the other person angry or sad. Along the way, it's time to realise you have much more say in this relationship than you originally thought.



CANCER JUNE 22-JULY 22

Intriguing new ideas are introduced into your usual way of thinking, and these developments point the way to plenty of renewal. This comes as no surprise to you -- your instincts could tell that something big was coming down the pike. You may be surprised that you feel some hesitancy, but it's understandable. Saying yes to one thing means saying no to another.



SCORPIO OCTOBER 23-NOVEMBER 21

If you go looking for drama, you're sure to find it -- but will you like it once you do? There's the rub. Wouldn't it be easier to figure out what it is you need from the party in question and then have a discussion about it? It's normal if voices get raised and emotions run high, but that's a far cry from charging into a situation with both barrels blazing.



PISCES FEBRUARY 19-MARCH 20

You're caught in a relationship triangle, but it's not with two lovers. A third person is present who's definitely interfering with a current love interest or a potential one. The trick is to defuse this situation so it doesn't turn into your own private sitcom. Step out of this complicated dance, and focus on what matters at the centre of your primary alliance.



TEST YOUR KNOWLEDGE

1. The conservation hawks and owls is important to mankind chiefly because these birds eat

- a. numerous weed seeds
b. harmful birds
c. many harmful rodents
d. harmful reptiles

2. The first attempt in printing was made in England by

- a. James Arkwright
b. James Watt
c. William Caxton
d. Isaac Newton

3. The first foreigner to receive Bharat Ratna was

- a. Khan Abdul Ghaffar Khan
b. Nelson Mandela
c. C.V. Raman
d. None of the above

Answers: 1. c 2. c 3. a

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

NO TIME TO DIE
(IMAX Release) Bond has left active service. His peace is short-lived when his old friend Felix Leiter from the CIA turns up asking for help, leading Bond onto the trail of a mysterious villain armed with dangerous new technology.

Addam's Family 2
The Addams get tangled up in more wacky adventures and find themselves involved in hilarious run-ins with all sorts of unsuspecting characters. Sequel to the 2019 animated film, "The Addams Family"

Bhramam
A pianist pretends to be blind for inspiration, witnesses a murder. He suddenly finds himself in a blind spot having to deal with the victim's wife, the murderer, and the bizarre events that unfold. During this ordeal, he loses his eyesight for real.

Aileen Wuornos : American Boogeywoman
Aileen arrives in Florida searching for a new life that will help her escape her tragic past, marries a wealthy Yacht Club president. But tormented by inner demons she surrenders to her murderous impulses.

Book your tickets at voxcinemas.com or the VOX app

BOGGLER

T	S	T	A
O	I	B	U
Y	A	U	B
B	P	Y	T

Each game will present you with a matrix filled with letters. The objective is to form words by linking adjacent letters - to the left, right, on top, bottom, or diagonal to each other. The Boggler Classic game uses a 4 x 4 matrix. Words are valued at one point for each letter in excess of two letters. A three letter word is worth one point, a four letter word is worth two points, and so on. Valid words must be at least three letters long.
Solution 20-25 words: Excellent, 15-20 words: Very good, 10-15 words: Good, 5-10 words: Average

DO YOU SUDOKU?

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

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

WORD BUILDER

You have three minutes to find all the words contained in this word.

Rules: Words should be at least four letters long, proper nouns and duplicates don't count

SUDOKU EASY ANSWER

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

MONEY ON HIS MIND

TEENAGE PODCASTER

When boys his age may be obsessed with gaming consoles and girl friends, Aditya Bhardwaj has 'money on his mind'. The 17 year old Indian student of American British Academy has set up his own podcast and has been interviewing professionals from around the world

Hubert Vaz

You see him nodding in approval as grey-haired business and finance experts reel out statistics and strategies that have helped businesses grow and balance sheets ring. And you wonder, at the age of 17, whether at all he does comprehend the veracity of each conversation. But, after a few minutes of a non-stop monologue from the person beaming from his laptop screen, via Zoom, when he offers a poser that often sends the expert in a tizzy or make him/her do a rethink, you realise he's on track. Aditya Bhardwaj, a spirited teenager with a voracious appetite for understanding how money makes the mare go, has embarked on something which only some people would dare take up after graduating in business studies and spending decades amassing knowledge and know-how in the field.

Describing himself as 'a student passionate about Finance, Investment Banking and Economics', Aditya, who started the 'Money on My Mind' podcast chain in October 2020 to learn about the world of economics and finance from experienced professionals, is now confident about continuing seriously what he had taken up as a fad. "I wanted to make it a guest based podcast, every week, to interview a new guest on a topic concerning money. Whether it's a business owner, an accountant or an investment banker, I wanted to interview them," he said disclosing

that till date he has interviewed over 30 guests on varied subjects revolving around finance and learnt some wonderful lessons for himself. He hopes to take up university studies in business and finance in the months ahead.

As an absolute greenhorn, with his age as a major deterrent on the path he has chosen, Aditya did find it really challenging to get people to sit down for his podcast and answer serious queries about finance. But, he remained determined to get this dream rolling, and finally succeeded.

"I tried searching LinkedIn and personally messaging anybody and everybody to have them on my show. After two weeks of constant rejections, I found a few platform that specifically deals with podcast guests. I signed up and found my first guest - Brenden Kumarasamy - whom I interviewed at 11 pm on a Sunday (school night), just because I wanted to get this podcast going..." says Aditya asserting that this interview got the ball rolling, by and by.

As guests, who could be thrice or more times his age, were difficult to agree to be interviewed by him initially, he had to grow this podcast organically, focus on publishing more episodes, enhance the number of listeners and put in more effort to popularise it. He does mention that, in the face of pressure from his intense IB curriculum, he never failed to upload an episode every week.

The 'Money on My Mind Podcast' has grown to over 400 listeners per month, 3000+ total downloads, and already has 32 episodes comprising business owners, career coaches, and real estate agents, all of whom shared, not just their secrets of success but also how they got ahead in the race, without

actually having money on their minds.

Disclosing the hard work and dedication that went into making his podcasts a reality, Aditya disclosed that he often had to work extra, by recording more than one episode in a week to take care of those weeks when he had to concentrate on his IB assessments and assignments.

"On an average, a podcast episode takes me 3 hours (recording, editing, promoting, publishing). Being able to spend time on this project and excel in school called for much perseverance. But it has taught me so many beautiful life lessons," he asserts.

"I named my podcast the 'Money on My Mind Podcast' because, as a teenager, I felt, that money was very important to get ahead in life. And I did have money on my mind. However, over the course of my podcasts, I realised that even some of the most successful people didn't have money on their minds.

"For example, I interviewed Brian Bogert, a former business owner, who has eight figure revenues annually but resigned from two jobs to pursue 'career-coaching, helping other people become successful. Almost all of my guests have dedicated their time towards helping others become 'financially free,' and now, that is the aim of my podcast - helping others (and myself) to become financially free.

"Whenever I interview any expert, though I am much younger, once I see them, I feel that we are all pretty much on the same level. Today, I know, there isn't anyone in the world whom I cannot interview," he says very confidently.



I named my podcast the 'Money on My Mind Podcast' because, I felt, money was very important to get ahead in life

ADITYA BHARDWAJ



TOP PODCASTS

- | | | |
|--|--|--|
| 1. David Angel
Sales expert (US\$20,000,000 in sales) | 4. Robert Farrington
Founder of College Investor (blog with 3.5mn readers) | owner with over a million US dollars in revenue) |
| 2. Dylan Ogline
Digital marketer (Millions in revenue of his company) | 5. Maria Brito
Non-fungible tokens expert | 8. James Mulvany
Creator of Matchmaker (Podcast guest website with hundreds of thousands of users) |
| 3. Lane Kawaoka
Real estate agent (100s of properties across the word) | 6. David Moadel
Expert investor (30%+ in returns) | 9. Daniel Vivarelli
(Regenerative entrepreneur) |
| | 7. John Vuong
Search Engine Optimisation expert (Business | 10. Grant Bledsoe
Accountant |

FOOTBALL ROUND-UP

Focussed Brazil have one eye on World Cup qualification

2022 FIFA WORLD CUP

SOUTH AMERICAN QUALIFIERS

Montevideo, Uruguay - After last month's turbulent round of World Cup qualification matches, for their next games Brazil can boast a full squad and a clear objective: booking their ticket for Qatar.

The Selecao have a perfect record of eight wins from their eight qualifiers so far ahead of Thursday's trip to Venezuela, followed by a clash away to Colombia on Sunday and the visit of Uruguay next week.

Three more victories could possibly secure Brazil's qualification in record time. "Obviously it's always good to qualify as soon as possible," said Juventus' 30-year-old fullback Alex Sandro.

Brazil will also hope to avoid the chaos of last month's qualifiers when coach Tite was shorn of nine members of his original squad - including the likes of Chelsea's Thiago Silva, Liverpool trio Alisson, Roberto Firmino and Fabinho, Manchester City duo Ederson and Gabriel Jesus, and Manchester United's Fred - and saw their clash with Argentina abandoned after just ten minutes by Brazilian public health officials.



Brazil's Neymar enjoys a training session with teammates ahead of their FIFA World Cup qualifier against Venezuela on Thursday

COVID-19 was largely to blame for both issues, with English clubs refusing to release their players due to quarantine obligations - a matter that has since been resolved between the British and Brazilian governments.

Likewise, Brazil's COVID-19 regulations were behind the health officials' actions after

Argentina fielded four English-based players despite them being required to quarantine for two weeks upon arrival in Brazil.

Despite their depleted squad last time out, Brazil still won 1-0 away to Chile and beat Peru 2-0 at home with a goal from Neymar, who is suspended against Venezuela.

Brazil lead the single South American qualifying table by six points from Argentina and their in-form Lionel Messi, who last week opened his account for Paris Saint-Germain with a wonder goal to seal a 2-0 Champions League win over Manchester City.

Unbeaten Argentina travel to Paraguay on Thursday, host

Uruguay on Sunday and then entertain Peru next week.

'Worried'

Last time out, Messi scored a hat-trick in a 3-0 win at Bolivia to overtake Pele as the top international goalscorer in South American football, taking his tally to 79 goals in the light blue and white stripes.

South American teams will be playing three World Cup qualifiers in the space of one week because a number of matches earlier this year and last year were postponed due to COVID-19, creating a fixture backlog.

"I'm a bit worried about these matches," admitted Argentina coach Lionel Scaloni, who has to make do without injured forwards Sergio Aguiero and Paulo Dybala. "It's something new for us, we hope to tackle them in the best way."

Like Brazil, Copa America champions Argentina's qualification looks to be a formality but the battle behind them for the remaining two places is fierce.

Uruguay, Ecuador, Colombia and Paraguay are separated by just four points, with another nine matches still to play.

Uruguay entertain Colombia on Thursday boosted by the return of the country's two leading lights, Luis Suarez, from injury, and Edinson Cavani, who was prevented from traveling in September by his club Manchester United.

They were hardly missed last month, as Uruguay picked up seven points out of a possible nine. But after Colombia they travel to Argentina and Brazil.

AFP

Player to be charged with attempted murder over referee attack

Sao Paulo, Brazil - A second division Brazilian footballer was arrested and is due to be charged with attempted murder after knocking a referee unconscious during a match, various sources revealed on Tuesday.

Midfielder William Ribeiro sent referee Rodrigo Crivellaro tumbling to the ground with a punch and then knocked him unconscious with a vicious kick to the back of the neck during the match on Monday night.

The assault, just before the hour mark of the match between Sao Paulo-RS and Guarani, was captured by television cameras.

Crivellaro was quickly given medical assistance on the field and then taken to hospital, although he was discharged on Tuesday morning 'in good health', a source at the Sao Sebastiao Martir hospital in the city of Venancio Aires, told AFP.

Vinicius Assuncao, the police inspector in charge of the case, quoted by press, said Ribeiro would be charged with attempted murder. The referee 'was struck while on his feet and fell down without being able to defend himself', said Assuncao.

AFP

France hope to banish Euro flop memories against Belgium

NATIONS LEAGUE SEMIS

FRANCE VS BELGIUM

Milan, Italy - France will take to the field for Thursday's Nations League semifinal against Belgium in Turin with something to prove following their shock early exit from Euro 2020.

World champions France were among the favourites to win the summer's European Championship but failed to set the tournament alight despite having a squad packed with world-class talent.

Their elimination on penalties at the hands of Switzerland in the last-16 - after leading 3-1 with 15 minutes of normal time remaining - was a particular shock, and led to some fallout within the French camp.

On Tuesday sports daily *L'Equipe* published a lengthy interview with star forward Kylian Mbappe, whose missed



Belgium players warm up during a training session on Tuesday ahead of their National League semifinal against France on Thursday

spot-kick handed the Swiss a memorable win in one of the matches of the tournament. He said he would have liked 'more support' following his shoot-out error. "What shocked me, once again, was being called a monkey for a penalty," Mbappe said.

"That's why I wanted support, not because I shot the penalty to the left and (Yann) Sommer saved it."

Mbappe also said that he could have had more support from his teammates on the field right after missing the penalty,



France's coach Didier Deschamps (second from right) speaks with defender Leo Dubois during a training session in Clairefontaine-en-Yvelines

but on Tuesday vice-captain Raphael Varane insisted the squad supports one another.

"We are together when things are going well as well as when things are not going so well," Manchester United defender Varane told reporters.

"We take on things together, we don't leave anyone behind. That's our philosophy, and that's not going to change."

Euro flops meet

France go into the match on an unconvincing run of form, with

the 2-0 World Cup qualifying win over Finland last month their first victory after a run of five draws. They will be missing mid-field dynamo N'Golo Kante after he contracted COVID-19 in the run up to Chelsea's 1-0 defeat at Juventus last week.

"We shouldn't play down this competition, it's replaced friendly fixtures which weren't very popular," said France coach Didier Deschamps. "We know we're here with an aim and unlike other competitions we're already in the semifinals."

Belgium too will be looking to bounce back from their Euro campaign on the turf of the team which knocked them out of the tournament in the quarterfinals.

Roberto Martinez's side may have gone one better than France in the summer but it was more disappointment for the team ranked No 1 in the world.

The Red Devils' only major sporting honour is gold at the 1920 Olympics, which were held in Antwerp, and a golden generation of players has fallen short both at the Euro and the last World Cup, where they were eliminated by France in the semis.

"They have six or seven players with more than 100 caps, who have been there for a very long time," said Deschamps.

"It's not for nothing that they're ranked the best team in the world. They're well organised, have young players who stand out but also a core of very experienced players which makes them one of the best teams in Europe and the world."

"It's a very, very good generation of players which has not yet experienced the joy of winning a tournament."

AFP

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Oman chase second big victory, Australia seek to stay perfect

AFC ASIAN QUALIFIERS

ROAD TO QATAR: GROUP B

Doha, Qatar - Oman will hope to halt Australia's record winning streak when they meet in a crucial AFC Asian Qualifiers - Road to Qatar Group B clash in Doha, Qatar, on Thursday. The match kicks off at 10.30pm, Oman time.

Coached by Croatian Branko Ivankovic, Oman will be looking for their second big win in the Asian Qualifiers after launching this final round with a stunning 1-0 win over hosts Japan in September. Australia, on the other hand, are coming into the match with an unblemished record of ten wins from as many matches since their Asian Qualifiers campaign began in September 2019.

Another three points at Doha's Khalifa International Stadium will take the Socceroos a step closer to an unprecedented fifth successive FIFA World Cup appearance. They currently lead the table with six points from two wins and share same number of points with Saudi Arabia.

Forced to play a home qualifier on neutral soil for the second successive month due to COVID-19 restrictions, world No 32 Australia will return to the Qatari capital confident of success against an Oman side ranked 46 places below them in the FIFA Rankings.

Regular foes since Australia joined the Asian Football Confederation in 2006, Oman have managed just one win in nine previous meetings with the Socceroos, who cruised to a 5-0 win when the two sides last met



Oman striker Abdulaziz al Miqbali trains along with his teammates ahead of Asian Qualifiers - Road to Qatar game against Australia on Thursday in Doha

in Dubai in late 2018. The current Australian squad has produced similarly impressive form.

However, Oman under Ivankovic, have displayed brilliance, though, in spurts. Ivankovic's Red Warriors have been in Doha for the past two weeks and will be looking for their second big win in the campaign. While Australia have historically been able to get the better of Oman, there is a growing confidence among the West Asian side.

A superb win away to Japan sent shockwaves around the

continent, and Ivankovic's side were unlucky not to come away from their subsequent home match against Saudi Arabia without at least a point.

They were guilty of wastefulness in the final third in the latter of those matches, but there were no such worries in a 7-2 friendly win over Nepal last week, with Abdulaziz al Miqbali, who scored twice, one of six Omani players to get their names on the scoresheet.

Including unofficial friendlies against club sides, the match against Nepal was Oman's 15th

game in 2021, making them one of the busiest anywhere in Asia this year, creating a sense of cohesion which former Persepolis boss Ivankovic hopes will pay dividends against one of the continent's heavyweights.

In his pre-match comments on Wednesday, Ivankovic said that 'he is happy with his boys' display so far'. "Australia is a tough team with lot of experience. My players are ready for the game and have prepared well," he said.

Striker Mohsin al Ghassani, defender Amjad al Harthi have

had injury concerns while in all likelihood experienced defender Mohammed al Musalami will make a return.

Musalami said, "It is crucial to play for three points and we will go all out. Australia are a strong team but we are going to give our best. Hopefully, we will be rewarded."

Graham Arnold's Australia have won every one of their matches on the Road to Qatar, just one of which was played in Australia, and have the maximum six points from two matches in the final group stage



Australia is a tough team with lot of experience. My players are ready

BRANKO IVANKOVIC

start, but I expect that to continue."

China suffer familiar sinking feeling

A familiar sense of crisis threatens to envelop Chinese football with the men's national team heading into crunch 2022 World Cup qualifiers still looking for their first point and first goal.

Li Tie's side were soundly beaten by Australia in their opening match of this final round of Asian qualifying for Qatar, then lost 0-1 to old rivals Japan.

The pressure will ratchet up significantly if they do not beat Vietnam on Thursday in the UAE, where the match is taking place because of the coronavirus.

China and Vietnam occupy the bottom two places of the six-nation Group B table - Vietnam have at least scored one goal.

Only the teams that finish in the top-two in Group A and Group B are guaranteed to reach Qatar. Two rounds of matches over the next two weeks will go a long way to deciding who books their tickets for 2022.

Agencies

WTT Youth Contender event in Muscat from Sunday

Our Correspondent
Muscat

The future champions and table tennis stars of the future will be in action in Oman when the 2021 World Table Tennis (WTT) Youth Contender Muscat begins at the Sultan Qaboos Sports Complex (SQSC) from Sunday.

The seventh-leg of the highly-competitive WTT Youth Contender Series will be held from October 10-15.

The WTT is the commercial and events company of the International Table Tennis Federation (ITTF), the world governing body, and aims at placing players and fans at the core of all its business to catapult the game to the forefront of global sports business.

As part of its mission it is hosting the WTT Youth Contender Series and had initially planned 27 events in the series to be played from May-November 2021.

The opening event was held in Vila Real, Portugal in May.

However, with the coronavirus pandemic disrupting



A file photo of ITTF Hopes Week and Challenge, which was held in Salalah 2019

the schedule, the series has only held six events with the seventh due to be played in Muscat.

Four more events remain after the Muscat leg. Players in the WTT Youth Contender Series will battle it out for ITTF world ranking points, as up-and-coming stars of the sport also look to rise up the ladder.

The WTT Youth Contender

We hope that our national team players will gain lot of exposure by competing in such events

SAJAD BAQIR

leg in Muscat will have the boys' competition from October 10-12 while girls event will be from October 14-16. The events to be played are U11, U13, U15, U17 and U19 singles.

OTTA previously had hosted the ITTF Hopes Week and Challenge in Salalah in 2019 while the first camp for West Asia was hosted in Muscat in 2017.

Ahead of the tournament, an ITTF high-performance training camp will be organised at the same venue from Thursday. A total of 14 players including three from Oman (Al Hoor al Jassasi, Noor al Farsi and Retaj al Abri) will attend the camp.

Sajad Mohammed Baqir, tournament director, said that 'the hosting of the ITTF high-performance camp and WTT Youth Contender Muscat are initiatives from the OTTA to promote the game'. "We hope that our national team players will gain lot of exposure by competing in such events. All preparations are complete and we look forward to a successful tournament," he added.

Oman squad for WTT Youth

Contender: Laith al Balushi, Eyad al Jassasi, Turki al Abri, Badar al Farsi, Omar al Awadi, Mohammed al Jassasi, Ali al Ghafri, Moyad al Mutawa, Loqman al Farsi, Ayman al Shehi, Mohammed al Moutawa, Badar al Jassasi, Abdulrahman al Zaabi, Mashal al Shehi, Al Hoor al Jassasi, Noor al Farsi and Retaj al Abri.

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QUOTE OF THE DAY
 Unfortunately, we didn't adapt. Mumbai bowled very well, and we lost too many wickets. The fault lies more with us than the pitch

Kumar Sangakkara
 Rajasthan coach, after his team was restricted to 90-9 and lost to Mumbai, on Tuesday

Sunrisers pull off heist

HYDERABAD VS BANGALORE

Abu Dhabi, UAE - Royal Challengers Bangalore's AB de Villiers was left to get six off the last two balls on Wednesday. They were both full tosses but he failed to hit them as he usually does and so Sunrisers Hyderabad were able to savour victory by four runs.

With 13 needed off the last over, bowled by Bhuvneshwar Kumar, de Villiers drilled the fourth ball for six, but fell short in the end.

The defeat means Royal Challengers' chances of finishing inside the top-two are all but over, as the eliminated Sunrisers pinched their third win of the season following contributions from pretty much all their bowlers, and Jason Roy and Kane Williamson.

SCOREBOARD			
SUNRISERS HYDERABAD			
J Roy	c & b Christian	44 (38)	
A Sharma	c Maxwell b Garton	13 (10)	
K Williamson	b Harshal Patel	31 (29)	
P Garg	c de Villiers b Christian	15 (11)	
A Samad	lbw b Chahal	1 (3)	
W Saha	c de Villiers b Harshal	10 (8)	
J Holder	c Christian b Harshal	16 (13)	
Rashid Khan	not out	7 (9)	
Extras	(nb 1, w 3)	4	
TOTAL	141 for seven in 20 overs		
Fall of wickets: 1-14, 2-84, 3-105, 4-107, 5-107, 6-124, 7-141			
Bowling: M Siraj 3-0-17-0, G Garton 2-0-29-1, S Ahmed 4-0-21-0, Harshal Patel 4-0-33-3, Y Chahal 4-0-27-1, D Christian 3-0-14-2			
ROYAL CHALLENGERS BANGALORE			
V Kohli	lbw b Kumar	5 (4)	
D Padikkal	c Samad		
	b Rashid Khan	41 (52)	
D Christian	c Williamson b Kaul	1 (4)	
S Bharat	c Saha b Malik	12 (10)	
G Maxwell	run out	40 (25)	
AB de Villiers	not out	19 (13)	
S Ahmed	c Williamson b Holder	14 (9)	
G Garton	not out	2 (3)	
Extras	(lb 1, w 2)	3	
TOTAL:	137 for six in 20 overs		
Fall of wickets: 1-6, 2-18, 3-38, 4-92, 5-109, 6-128			
Bowling: B Kumar 4-0-25-1, J Holder 4-0-27-1, S Kaul 4-1-24-1, U Malik 4-0-21-1, Rashid Khan 4-0-39-1			

Harshal's hot run

Harshal was introduced just after the powerplay ended, with the Sunrisers sitting pretty at 50 for the loss of one wicket. His first over went for eight - including a boundary from Roy, who pulled him to deep midwicket - and he was taken off after that.

By the time he returned for the 12th over, Sunrisers had managed to maintain the momentum, with Roy and Williamson having added 67 runs together. But two balls and three runs later, Harshal foxed Williamson with an off-cutter that landed bang on a good length, and took off to strike the top of middle stump.

Sunrisers lost track once that 70-run stand was broken. They made just 50 runs off the last eight overs. There were five wickets as well. Two of those went to Harshal, taking his tournament tally to 29.

Brought back to bowl two of the last three overs, he beat Wriddhiman Saha with a lack of pace too, as another off-cutter landed in the hands of long-off. And off the final ball of the innings, he went for a slow, dipping full-toss to Jason Holder, who found long-on with his slog.

Malik's fiery pace

Malik, brought on as a short-term replacement for the COVID-19 positive T Natarajan, attracted eyeballs with his ferocious pace and accuracy.

Like Harshal, he too started immediately after the field restrictions were lifted; but contrastingly, he beat the batters with his extra pace. Malik began by hitting 141kph, and conceded just a single off his first four deliveries. The fifth one produced a wicket, KS Bharat caught



Bhuvneshwar Kumar
1 WKT
25 RUNS

behind off a searing short ball.

Malik continued to work the speedgun, cranking it up to 153 kph. His first over cost just a single. His second just five. Williamson took him off at that point and brought him back with the Royal Challengers needing 29 off the last three. The pres-

sure was on but Malik was able to handle it well, finishing with one for 21 off his four overs.

Maxwell's Big Show

Maxwell arrived at the crease with Royal Challengers at 38 or three in the seventh over. While Devdutt Padikkal at the other

end was taking his time, Maxwell got stuck into Rashid Khan, launching the second ball he faced - and the first from the leg-spinner - over deep midwicket for six. That was followed by another maximum over long-on as well as a four two balls later, when he hoicked Rashid again.

Maxwell dominated pace as well, pulling Siddarth Kaul for four, and also stealing another four off Jason Holder. He tried attacking Bhuvneshwar in the 14th over, but tight lines from the bowler meant Royal Challengers could manage just six runs. Then the game changed as Maxwell

was run out for 40 off 25. It happened when Padikkal tapped the ball to cover and the batters set off for a non-existent single. Williamson was standing pretty close in, and swooped on the opportunity, his acrobatic direct hit catching the batter well short. Cricinfo

TODAY'S MATCHES



DUBAI, 2PM



SHARJAH 6PM

POINTS TABLE

TEAMS	P	W	L	NR	PTS	NRR
DC	13	10	3	0	20	+0.526
CSK	13	9	4	0	18	+0.739
RCB	13	8	5	0	16	-0.159
KKR	13	6	7	0	12	+0.294
MI	13	6	7	0	12	-0.048
PBKS	13	5	8	0	10	-0.241
RR	13	5	8	0	10	-0.737
SRH	13	3	10	0	6	-0.422

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

OUTSIDE IPL

Warner confirmed to open for Australia at T20 World Cup

Sydney, Australia - Australia limited-overs captain Aaron Finch has confirmed that he and David Warner will open the batting together at the T20 World Cup despite Warner twice being dropped by Sunrisers Hyderabad in the IPL this year.

Warner hasn't played a T20I for Australia since September 2020, missing Australia's last 14 matches across four series due to a combination of injury, rest, and schedule clashes.

He has endured a difficult IPL season across the two halves of the tournament. Warner has scored two half-centuries in eight innings but his strike-rate of 107.73 was cause for him to be dropped as captain by Sunrisers during the first half of the IPL season in India. He didn't tour with

Australia to the Caribbean and Bangladesh mid-year in order to rest for the second half of the IPL and the World Cup but scored just zero and two in his first two games on resumption of the IPL in the UAE and was left out of Sunrisers' side again.

But Finch, speaking a day before departing to the UAE for the World Cup on Wednesday, backed Warner to be his opening partner for the tournament. "Yep, absolutely," Finch said.

"He's one of the best players to ever play the game for Australia. I've got no doubt that his preparation, while he would love to be playing for Hyderabad no doubt, I know that he's still training away. He'll be good to go."

Finch himself enters the tournament under an injury

cloud. He missed Australia's tour of Bangladesh due to knee surgery. There was initially doubt as to whether he would be fit for Australia's two warm-up games against New Zealand and India but he is confident he will be ready to play in both of them.

"Over the last couple of weeks my recovery has progressed really well so it's looking more and more likely that I'll be fit and ready to go for them," Finch said. "And just in terms of the intensity that I've been able to train, the amount of accelerations, decelerations, putting load through my knee, that's all really positive. So, yeah, I've got no issues."

Australia's preparation is a legitimate concern heading into the tournament. Never mind their recent form having lost their



David Warner

last five T20I series, a number of key players have played very little cricket and have had difficulties trying to train due to the various lockdowns in Australia.

Glenn Maxwell and Josh Ha-

zlewood are in sparkling form in the IPL but Marcus Stoinis has suffered a hamstring injury and has not batted in the middle after breaking down in the first game on resumption. Steve Smith has

been in and out of Delhi Capital's line-up playing just two matches.

Those based in Australia have hardly had any cricket at all. Matthew Wade has not played since the Bangladesh tour after Tasmania's two domestic fixtures against Queensland were postponed last week.

Mitchell Marsh, Ashton Agar, and Kane Richardson have played one domestic 50-over match and Josh Inglis has only played two, one of which was a four-day Sheffield Shield game.

It's been even more difficult for Mitchell Starc, Pat Cummins, and Adam Zampa. Starc has been bowling on his own in Queensland while travelling with Australia's women's team in support of his wife Alyssa Healy. Zampa has been bowling to club

cricketers in Byron Bay due to lockdown restrictions in New South Wales (NSW) while Cummins has been training with the NSW state squad in Sydney.

However, despite the various issues, Finch believes his players will be ready to go.

"Training indoors or training just in the nets is no comparison obviously to game intensity so the two warm-up games and the lead-in to the World Cup is going to be really crucial," Finch said. "We get out of quarantine, I think there's three days of practice scheduled, and then two warm-up games, so they're going to be really important to get guys up to speed as quick as possible. But I've got a lot of confidence in the experience of the group."

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CATEGORY: SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY

HH Sayyida Hujaija Jaifer Saif al Said

HH Sayyida Hujaija Jaifer Saif al Said, who graduated from the American University in Cairo in 2001, had been actively involved as a volunteer in organisations there that dealt with child rights, orphans, and issues concerning people with special needs and disabilities.

In Oman, over the past four years, she has been chairperson of the Association for Children with Disabilities which has nine centres all over Oman providing care and vocational training to around 400 children with different disabilities (ages 6 to 14). She is also member of the Monitoring Committee for following education of people with disabilities, a member for the National Committee for people with disabilities, and in charge of the endowment for children with disabilities.

Scoring high on EQ (Emotional intelligence) - the ability to understand, use, and manage your own emotions in positive ways to relieve stress, communicate effectively, empathise with others, overcome challenges, and defuse conflict, Sayyida Hujaija stresses that she treats people equally and the way she'd want to be treated.

A perfectionist of sorts, Sayyida Hujaija asserts that she always feels the need to be perfect and believes that it is possible to achieve perfection. "I try my best, and expect myself and others to do well. I treat challenges as learning opportunities," she says.

She also acknowledges the strong support that she receives from her husband without which attaining her goals would've been difficult. His constant encouragement, motivation, and trust has made him Sayyida Hujaija's best friend and biggest supporter, she admits with a sense of great pride.

Harboring an ambition to provide children with disabilities in Oman the best rehabilitation facilities that include a conducive learning environment, access to quality education, and vocational training, Sayyida Hujaija hopes to continue on this journey steadfastly. And she draws immense inspiration from her late mother who had also devoted her life towards charitable works.

CATEGORY: PERSONAL ASSISTANT

Elzbieta Jureczek

Elzbieta Jureczek, personal assistant to the General Manager, Al Bustan Palace, a Ritz-Carlton Hotel, has always enjoyed playing a supporting role and helping her bosses succeed and achieve results.

Being able to get things done (and sometimes pull rabbits from hats) and helping the entire team with various tasks, Elzbieta admits that no two days are the same. "It may sound clichéd, but I get excited coming in to work every day, seeing my work family's faces and having fun while working to create something special together, such as 'wow stories' for our guests, surprising them, and making them choose our hotel once again," she says.

Being the on-property CSR champion, what she enjoys the most is being able to help people around, not only the hotel employees. This includes helping the community through various charity initiatives - from supporting the well-being of orphans, through environmental clean-ups, blood donations or organising welfare drives.

"One of the best things about working in the hospitality industry is the variety of departments with incredible people from different backgrounds," she says, adding that, besides professional tasks, she also puts her own creative hobbies, like her love for handicrafts, to use in her career. This can be seen in her interest for planning something special to enhance the guest experience - be it a personalised welcome card or the décor in the room.

The fact that she decided to come to Oman on her own, eleven years ago, was, in fact, a way of challenging her own potential against all odds, she said. What began as a cultural shock for Elzbieta, ultimately got transformed into a fulfilling career wherein every day comes with new challenges, new surprises, and the zeal to deliver on time, everyday.



CATEGORY: SOCIAL MEDIA INFLUENCER

Rumaitha al Busaidi

Omani scientist, activist and athlete, Rumaitha al Busaidi has been encouraging and empowering Arab women to venture into various professions previously denied to them, be it the football field, the volcano summit or in the frontline battle against climate change.

Rumaitha has worked with the Oman government in implementing strategies to maximise social and environmental benefits in their diversification as well as internationally with Clean Energy for America, advising the Biden administration on developing a climate resilience standard for US foreign aid, focusing on empowering women as a form of climate mitigation.

Growing up, Rumaitha admits that she struggled to find role models in line with her own aspirations, so she decided to voice the need for women to dream big, using radio and social media over the past decade. Recently, she was named by the World Economic Forum as co-chair of the Davos Lab Taskforce, the first intergenerational lab aimed at self-awareness systems leadership and an allyship to help shape the world's post-COVID-19 recovery.

"I consider myself a multi-hyphenate or a multi-potentialite (a person who has mastered many different skills). This has been a blessing because I have been able to channel my energy into different things and excel in them while pursuing my own goals," she says, adding, "many Omani millennials (female) have recently been achieving success in diverse fields. It is important to keep one's goals in sharp focus and use the right tools that allow you to pursue and achieve them?"

As someone who wears many different hats, Rumaitha also firmly believes that her strongest supporter and motivator is her own self. "I gave myself permission very early on in life to dream crazy and big, despite being told otherwise by so many people. To allow yourself to dream and work towards your goal is something that will forever be the reason for you to wake up and make a difference in your life," she asserts.



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