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'OMAN HAVE POTENTIAL TO SPRING A SURPRISE'
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Oman climbs eight places in Global Innovation Index

The sultanate records its own best in indicators of Human Capital and Research

Our Correspondent Muscat

Oman has climbed eight places in the Global Innovation Index (GII) 2021 to 76th from its 84th position in 2020.

The sultanate records its own best in the indicators of Human Capital and Research (ranked 45th) and is number one in the sub-indicator of 'graduates in science and engineering'.

Among the 132 economies featured in the GI 2021, Switzerland tops the index, followed by Sweden, the US, the UK, South Korea, the Netherlands, Finland, Singapore, Denmark and Germany making the top ten.

The GI ranks world economies according to their innovation capabilities. Consisting of roughly 80 indicators, grouped into innovation inputs and outputs, the GI aims to capture the multi-dimensional facets of innovation.

In Northern Africa and Western Asia, three top performing countries are Israel, the United Arab Emirates and Turkey. In the GCC, the UAE leads with a global rank of 33rd, followed by Saudi Arabia (66th), Qatar (68th), Kuwait (72nd), Oman (76th) and



Oman's category-wise rankings in Global Innovation Index							
Overall GI rank	Human capital & research	Creative outputs	Market sophistication	Business sophistication	Knowledge & technology	Institutions	Infrastructure
76	45	71	84	94	107	71	56

Bahrain (78th).

The rankings of Oman had been falling in recent years - from 69 in 2018 to 80 in 2019 and 84 in 2020 - before improving again in 2021.

The index also indicates that the sultanate has advanced 19 ranks in the Innovation Output Sub-Index and one rank in the Innovation Input Sub-Index.

This advancement made in

the ranking reflects the integration achieved by the key players in the national innovation system.

Oman has achieved good global rankings in some categories such as first in the percentage of Science and Engineering Graduates out of total graduates, tenth in the Higher Education indicator and 13th in the Government Expenditure on School Students.

It ranked 13th even on the Economy and Investment indicator, 18th globally in the Net Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) indicator and 23rd in the Digital Applications Production indicator. Oman is placed 24th in the Government e-Services indicator.

Dr Sharifa Hammoud al Harthy, director general of Research at the Ministry of Higher Education, Research and Innovation; and director of the National Innovation Strategy (NIS), pointed out that the factors that contributed to the progress of the sultanate included the response and cooperation among the relevant institutions, as well as the rise in the creative output-related initiatives, such as the digital applications, which had a positive impact on overcoming the challenges faced by the society.

No COVID deaths in 3 days; 71% decline in a week

Our Correspondent Muscat

Oman has made significant progress by registering 71 per cent decline in the number of COVID-19-related deaths in one week from September 12 to 18. Additionally, there were no deaths reported in the last three days till Sunday.

The number of new cases in the country has also remained below 50 over the last few days, hinting at the flattening of the COVID-19 curve.

On Monday, the Ministry of Health (MoH) reported 36 new COVID-19 cases, with no deaths reported in the last 24 hours.

According to OmanVS-Covid19 - the official twitter account of the MoH for countering COVID-19 - the number of positive cases went down by 27 per cent during the period between September 12 and 18, while the number of deaths dropped by 71 per cent.

The number of hospitalisation over the same period came down by five per cent, while those in ICU declined by 15 per cent.

The total number of cases registered in the sultanate has now reached 303,459, including 4,093 deaths.

Three patients were admitted to hospitals across the country in the last 24 hours, taking the total number of inpatients to 51 including 19 in intensive care units.

With the addition of 113 recoveries, the total went up to 293,957, while the current recovery rate is 96.9 per cent.



COVID-19 jab safe for children aged 5-11: Pfizer

Frankfurt, Germany - Pfizer and BioNTech on Monday said trial results showed their coronavirus vaccine was safe and produced a robust immune response in children aged five to 11, adding that they would seek regulatory approval shortly.

The vaccine would be administered at a lower dosage than for people over 12, they said. 'In participants five to 11 years of age, the vaccine was safe, well tolerated and showed robust neutralising antibody responses,' US giant Pfizer and its German partner said in a joint statement.

AFP

2.8mn vaccinated

The total number of people vaccinated with at least one dose of COVID-19 vaccine in Oman till September 19 reached 2,810,262, representing 80 per cent of the total target population.

Those vaccinated with two doses were 1,826,224, or 52 per cent of the target, while the total doses given reached 4,636,486.





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SAYYID THEYAZIN FELICITATES PARALYMPIANS



H H Sayyid Theyazin bin Haitham al Said, Minister of Culture, Sports and Youth (fourth from right), received Omani athletes who participated in the Tokyo Paralympic Games where Mohammed al Mashaykhi (third from right) created history by winning a bronze medal in shot-put, on Monday. The meeting stressed on the importance of Omani players raising the sultanate's flag in international events and the role of institutions in supporting their endeavours (Supplied photo)

GCC states, Morocco hold meeting on health

Muscat - The Ministry of Health (MoH) on Monday participated in the third coordination meeting of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) countries and Morocco in the field of health.

The meeting was held on the decision of the GCC Supreme Council in January 2021 (Al Ola Announcement) stipulating strengthening the relations of co-operation and partnership among the GCC, and the active countries, regional and international organisations, in addition to promoting existing strategic partnerships with sister countries including Jordan, Morocco, Sudan and Iraq.

Dr Hamad al Balushi, Health Systems Development advisor, and Dr Jumana al Abdwani, director of Foreign Relations and Organisations, from the Ministry of Health participated in the meeting.

Oman's wheat production rises by 19% in 2020-21

Our Correspondent
Muscat

Oman produced 2,649 tonnes of wheat crop in the 2020-21 farming season, 19 per cent more than the 2019-20, according to statistics released by the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Water Resources.

The statistics show that the total area of farm land used for wheat plantation was 2,449 acres, and the number of farmers increased by 5.5 per cent in 2020-21.

Statistics indicate that the Governorate of Dakhliyah witnessed the highest production with 1,465.5 tonnes of wheat cultivated on 1,109.6 acres or 45 per cent of the total area of wheat cultivation in Oman, followed by 650 tonnes in Dhahirah, 360 in Dhofar, and 83.6 in North and



(Supplied photo)

The ministry has introduced modern irrigation systems. With the sprinkler system being used, a significant progress has been made in the expansion of crop cultivation

MINISTRY OFFICIAL

South Batinah. The ministry stated that the average production during the 2019-20 and 2020-21 seasons amounted to 1.1 tonnes per acre.

An official said, "The ministry has introduced modern irrigation systems. With the sprinkler system being used, a significant progress has been made in the expansion of crop cultivation and increase in its productivity."

He added, "The sultanate is working continuously through studies and research to improve arable land which constitutes only seven per cent of the total area. The ministry has built protective walls in nearby villages adjacent to the valleys. The number of such walls implemented during the current plan is 164. The ministry has also issued a regulation prohibiting the use of agricultural lands for other purposes."

Mawarid hosts workshop for Manafa'a 2021 programme



Dr Salim al Wahaibi



Zakariya al Wahaibi

Muscat - Mawarid (Oman Animal and Plant Genetic Resources Centre) of the Ministry of Higher Education, Research and Innovation, with the Environment Authority, organised a virtual preliminary workshop on Manafa'a 2021 programme.

The virtual workshop, led by Eng Abdullah al Balushi from Mawarid, consisted of a series of presentations in relation to the programme and its objectives as well as introducing the 15 teams participating in this year's programme. The theme for Manafa'a 2021 programme is 'National Initiative for Plantation of 10 Million Trees'.

Dr Thuraya al Sariri, assistant director general for Nature Conservation, who is also the head of the Technical Committee for the National Initiative for Plantation of 10 Million Trees, provided details during the workshop about the theme of this year's programme and what it entails. She explained that with this theme, the programme aims to support this national environmental initiative, encourage innovative ideas that will contribute towards the embodiment of the initiative on the ground, and maximise its environmental, educational and economic benefits, through attracting biodiversity and genetic resources-based innovative ideas.

The Manafa'a 2021 programme is implemented within a strategic partnership with the Innovation and Technology Trans-

fer Centre at Sultan Qaboos University (SQU) and Falha Investment Company. It is sponsored by Petroleum Development Oman, SGS company and Oman India Fertilizer Company.

Zakariya al Wahaibi, Incubations and Business Development in-charge at the Innovation and Technology Transfer Centre at SQU, discussed the centre's incubation programme and its importance especially in encouraging innovation and entering the market.

Dr Salim al Wahaibi, chairman of Falha Investment, elaborated on the different stages of business accelerator services provided by Falha Investment such as product testing and development, business model validation, establishment of commercial entity, intellectual property management, marketing assistance, providing specialised advisory and supervisory staff, communicating with strategic partners in the market and communicating with investors.

For the upcoming events of Manafa'a 2021 programme, the qualified teams will present their ideas for commercial products to the panel at the 48-hour Manafa'a Ideathon event on September 24, 25. The ideas will be evaluated on September 27.

Five teams will be announced at a later date during the closing ceremony, and they will receive a financial grant of RO2,000 each to develop their products in incubators.

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EA ORGANISES CLEAN-UP CAMPAIGN IN MUSANDAM



To celebrate the World Cleanup Day, the Environment Authority conducted a campaign in Musandam governorate on Monday. The clean-up was conducted in partnership with the municipalities of Khasab and Dibba, and Oman Environmental Service Holding Company - be'ah (Supplied photo)

Contest launched to evaluate, award libraries and cultural centres in Oman

Our Correspondent
Muscat

The Ministry of Culture, Sports and Youth has launched a competition to evaluate the performance of private libraries and cultural centres in the sultanate during the COVID-19 pandemic and award them with cash prizes.

'The competition aims to evaluate the performance and work of private libraries and cultural centres registered with the min-

istry. The evaluation period will include the performance of libraries and centres during the pandemic from March 2020 to August 2021,' stated the Ministry of Culture, Sports and Youth.

The ministry stated that the cultural centres and private libraries must submit detailed reports on their activities during the period, such as the type of activities that were conducted, the number of participants and the target groups.

'Libraries should also present the ways they marketed the programmes and services, the extent of social media coverage, indicating the challenges they faced in carrying out these activities.'

The ministry said that it has set prizes of RO3,000 for the first place, RO2,000 for second, and RO1,000 for third and RO500 for the fourth place. Registration can be done through Libraries@mhc.gov.om before October 17.

REGIONAL WEATHER

	Max	Min
Abu Dhabi	38	28
Doha	38	26
Kuwait City	40	28
Manama	36	28
Riyadh	38	22

PRAYER TIMINGS

Fajr	4.37am
Sunrise	5.55am
Duhr	12pm
Asr	3.25pm
Maghrib	6.04pm
Isha	7.34pm

Omani team explores ‘Well of Hell’ in Yemen



Our Correspondent
Muscat

After exploring and documenting more than one hundred caves in Oman, Omani Caves Exploration Team (OCET) has stepped up its efforts and has gone international. The team successfully documented the over 100m deep Well of Barhout, also known as ‘Well of Hell’, in Yemen recently.

The Well of Barhout, a giant hole located in the desert of Al Mahra province in Yemen’s eastern region, is surrounded by mystery. Local folklore claims it was created as a prison for demons.

The team also published a book called *A Guide to the Caves of Oman*, chronicling more than hundred caves of Oman.

Speaking to *Muscat Daily*, Dr Mohammed al Kindi, a geologist and one of the members of OCET, said, “Omani Caves Exploration Team, in cooperation with the Yemen Geological Survey and Mineral Resources Board, documented the Well of Barhout recently. The well is millions of years old and according to local residents it has not been explored or documented before.”

The well is around 30km from Oman border in the desert of Al Mahra province. “The depth of the well is 112m, and 30m in



Such caves are formed by the dissolution of limestone, such as those found in the Dhofar governorate in southern Oman, and the Governorates of Mahra and Hadramout in Yemen

DR MOHAMMED AL KINDI

width at the surface. Deep inside, the cave expands to 116m.”

“Such caves are formed by the dissolution of limestone, such as those found in the Dhofar governorate in southern Oman, and the Governorates of Mahra and Hadramout in Yemen. These layers inside the well are subjected to continuous dissolution due to the interaction of ground and surface waters that contain acids and salts forming huge pits and deep caves over millions of years,” Kindi said.

The well contains many small cavities and sharp rocky ridges.

At a depth of approximately 65m from the surface, water emerges from holes on the walls to form beautiful waterfall. The well also has other waterfalls that vary in the abundance and continuity of water, he said.

“The eastern waterfall is the most active, while the flow of water from the southern waterfall is interrupted. The hole contains a variety of cave deposits, and organisms, including snakes, frogs and beetles. Some stalagmites and stalactites are more than 9m long. This deep hole has been associated with many legends,

including that the pits contain huge crocodiles, and that it is the dwelling of the jinn.”

Kindi said the team aims to explore caves spread across Oman and document them. “Our team calculates the age of cave deposits and the level of water in the ponds. It is a scientific process where we try to learn the age of the cave and the different changes it went through by looking at its deposits as well as the soil inside.”

About the group’s future initiatives, Kindi said that they have launched the trial version of a book about caves; the book will be available in the market at the end of October.

“We added this new discovery to our book. Our team took five years to register over 101 caves from different governorates of the sultanate. The team used 3D instruments and traditional methods to measure the dimensions of caves. The book - in English and Arabic - tries to touch on important aspects of caves in each geological era. Some of the questions addressed include what tectonics affected these caves, what organisms lived there and how climate and life developed. We took samples of water and soil from these caves to see the different age patterns that the caves went through.”

Omani engineer gets Apple licence to manufacture phone accessories

Our Correspondent
Muscat

A young engineer from the wilayat of Sur, South Sharqiyah, has got a licence from Apple to manufacture mobile phone accessories. Saud al Mukhaini is considered to be the first Arab engineer to obtain the licence.

Speaking to *Muscat Daily*, Eng Mukhaini, said, “I established BRQ Advanced Technology in November 2020. Our company obtained a licence from Apple to manufacture mobile phone accessories such as chargers and cables.”

The Apple Industrial Protocol, or MFI, is an industrial and commercial protocol approved by Apple in 2012. All manufacturers of Apple phones and iPads adopt this protocol to ensure product quality and provide the highest standards of device protection.

“To obtain a licence to manufacture cables and Apple phone accessories, our company signed an agreement with one of Apple’s subsidiaries,” said Eng



We are working on plans to raise the culture of using approved products and electrical safety among members of the society

ENG SAUD AL MUKHAINI

Mukhaini.

He added that BRQ aims to expand in the local market to ensure that every member of the community has access to quality products.

Talking about the company’s achievements, he said, “I also designed a micro weather station device for use by outdoor work-



ers and adventure enthusiasts. Billed as the smallest weather station in the world, the device is being manufactured by BRQ Advanced Technology. We have also launched six mobile phone accessories this year.”

Of future, he said, “BRQ is considered the leading Omani brand in manufacturing chargers.

We are working on plans to raise the culture of using approved products and electrical safety among members of the Omani society.

“We are also working on a cost control plan in the market to provide the latest technologies and the highest quality at the lowest possible cost.”

Our Correspondent
Muscat

Over 3,000 loans worth over RO25mn have been granted by the Oman Development Bank (ODB) branch in Dhofar governorate in the past five years.

In a statement, ODB said, ‘The

number of loans granted by the Oman Development Bank in Dhofar during the past five years reached 3,465 for small, medium and micro enterprises, amounting to RO25,773,165.’

Hamad bin Salem al Harthy, chairman of Finance for Small, Medium and Micro Enterprises

and Portfolio Management at the ODB, said that the industry sector’s share of loans reached 1,705 worth RO14,877,456.

The number of loans to the fisheries sector reached 520, with a value of RO2,984,831, while RO7,910,878 worth of loans were given to other sectors.

MoE, Occidental Oman sign pact for 3D printing training programme

Muscat - The Ministry of Education (MoE) signed a cooperation agreement with Occidental Oman on Monday for implementation of a specialised training programme in 3D printing, which aims to build students’ capabilities and empower them in the field of 3D engineering design.

The agreement was signed by H E Majid al Bahri, Undersecretary for Administrative and Financial Affairs in the MoE, and Stephen Kelly, president and general manager of Occidental Oman.

H E Bahri said, “The signing of this agreement comes to implement the specialised technical training programme in the field of 3D engineering design directed towards teachers of grades 10-12 from various governorates of the sultanate. It is a



starting point for teachers, students, and those interested in 3D engineering design. We hope that this programme will contribute to promoting the culture of design and creative solutions for the target groups, which begins with understanding the basics of 3D engineering design,

raising awareness about 3D design and printing techniques, and transforming students’ skills in this field to practical experience.”

He said that the programme targets 110 teachers from various governorates in the sultanate, alongside with 106 students from North Sharqiyah.

12 expats arrested for marine fishing law violation

Our Correspondent
Muscat

Twelve expatriate workers have been arrested for violating marine fishing law in the wilayat of Duqm in Al Wusta governorate.

Directorate General of Agricultural, Fisheries and Water Resources in Al Wusta said, ‘The fish control team at the directorate general followed up on the presence of some expatriate workers practising artisanal fishing in the wilayat of Duqm. The team arrested 12 violators and seized dredging equipment in addition to four fishing boats.’

According to the country’s annual statistics, 4,298 violations of the Marine Fishing Law and Protection of Living Aquatic Resources were registered in 2020.

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Islamic banking market share seen to reach 20% by 2025

Our Correspondent
Muscat

Oman's Islamic banking industry – which has seen strong growth since its launch in 2012 – is expected to reach around 20 per cent of overall banking assets by 2025, driven by high demand for Sharia'a-compliant products and evolving supportive government regulation, global ratings agency Moody's said on Monday.

In terms of market share, the sultanate's Islamic banking assets already make up 15 per cent of total banking assets as of the end of June 2021.

Islamic banking assets in Oman recorded a strong 30 per cent average annual growth between 2013 and 2020, compared with 5 per cent average annual growth for conventional banking assets, according to Moody's.

'Growth has been driven by strong demand for Sharia'a-compliant products among the country's predominantly Muslim population. We expect Islamic banking to reach around 20 per cent of Omani banking assets by 2025,' Moody's said, adding that capital injections from shareholders supported initial growth



Islamic banking assets in Oman recorded a strong 30 per cent average annual growth between 2013 and 2020

are now the main source of funding for the Islamic banking assets, mainly from the private sector (63 per cent of total deposits as of June 2021). Deposits from the government and public enterprises were 37 per cent as of June 2021, broadly in line with conventional banks,' Moody's said.

On the asset side, Moody's said Islamic financing (the Sharia'a-compliant equivalent of conventional loans) is the predominant activity in Oman. Islamic financing has been growing at an average rate of 39 per cent between 2013 and 2020, it added.

Non-financial companies and households make up the majority of the Islamic financing book

(91 per cent as of June 2021), with retail and construction being the two largest segments, the ratings agency noted.

'We expect growth in Islamic assets to continue to outpace conventional banking assets to reach around 20 per cent of Omani banking assets by 2025. Growth will be largely funded by ongoing capital injections. Bank Nizwa recently announced a RO75mn rights issue and Bank Muscat's Meethaq benefited from a capital injection of RO50mn in 2020,' Moody's said.

The ratings agency noted that regulation in Oman will continue to support Islamic finance. 'We expect Islamic finance regulations to continue to evolve over

the next 12 to 18 months to support the banks' activities and continued growth. We expect an ongoing pipeline of new Islamic finance regulations to broaden the market over the coming years,' Moody's added.

Pace of growth is slowing

According to Moody's, the pace of Islamic banking growth is slowing in Oman as the sector expands and matures.

It said Islamic banking sector growth slipped to 11 per cent in 2019 from a very high 68 per cent during 2013-2014, the first year of inception. In 2020, the growth rate fell further to 6 per cent, as the coronavirus spread disrupted business and consumer spending faltered.

An additional friction to sector growth, as per Moody's, is a lack of short-term Islamic instruments to place excess liquidity. 'The risk of Islamic growth converging with conventional growth could materialise within around ten years, if the competition in the domestic market remains high and if there will be no Sharia'a-compliant short-term instruments to place excess cash,' Moody's said.



CBO participates in Arab central bankers meeting

Our Correspondent
Muscat

The Central Bank of Oman (CBO) participated in the meeting of the Arab central banks to discuss the challenges and risks for the banking and financial sector.

Organised by the Arab Monetary Fund, the virtual meeting of 45th regular session of the Council of Arab Central Banks and monetary authorities' governors saw the participation from the central bank chiefs from the Arab countries.

H E Tahir Salim al Amri, executive president of the CBO led the delegation attending the meeting on behalf of the sultanate, according to a CBO statement.

In the meeting, the council discussed the economic, financial and monetary implications of COVID-19 pandemic, and the role of macro-prudential policies in dealing with these economic crises.

The meeting also reviewed the need to assess systemic risks

in the financial sector in the wake of the emerging COVID-19 crisis and accordingly discussed ways and means to minimise such risks.

The council also made its observations with regard to the disparities in easing the macro-prudential policy tools between countries to mitigate the impact of the current crisis.

Other topics that came up for discussions during the central bankers' meeting included deliberations on how to enhance the resilience of the financial and banking system, the role of Basel requirements in absorbing any potential financial risks or shocks, emerging trends in open finance and their implications on the traditional financial and banking institutions.

The central bank chiefs also reviewed the implications of climate change policies on banking and financial sector and pondered over the need to review existing banking legislations and regulatory requirements for the issuance of digital currencies.

UAE hotel occupancy rebounds to 62% in H1



Abu Dhabi, UAE – The UAE's hospitality sector recorded 62 per cent occupancy rate in the first half of 2021, outperforming ten other major global tourism destinations including China (54 per cent), the US (45 per cent), the UK (37 per cent) and Turkey (36 per cent).

The UAE's hotel and tourism establishments attracted nearly 8.3mn guests during the first half of this year, recording 15 per cent growth compared to the same period of 2020.

During the reference period, guests spent nearly 35mn nights in the UAE hotels reflecting a growth of 30 per cent, while the average length of their stay increased to 4.1 nights at a 12.5 per cent growth. This was accompa-

nied by a 31 per cent growth in hotel establishments' revenues to reach AED11.3bn. Domestic tourism accounted for 30 per cent of the total number of guests at these hotel establishments.

Dr Ahmad Belhoual al Falasi, Minister of State for Entrepreneurship and SMEs, and chairman of the Emirates Tourism Council, said the positive results highlight the strength and flexibility of the UAE's national tourism sector.

He pointed out that these results are of great relevance in light of the tightening of travel restrictions in some major tourism markets around the world due to the impact of COVID-19.

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Pandemic speeds innovation shift to Asia: UN rankings

Geneva, Switzerland - The COVID-19 pandemic sped up the shift of innovation from Europe and North America towards Asia, UN world rankings showed on Monday.

The Global Innovation Index 2021, from the United Nations' World Intellectual Property Organization, showed surging performances by South Korea and China.

"The pandemic has accelerated the long-term geographical shift of innovation activities toward Asia, even if Northern America and Europe continue to host some of the world's leading innovators," said WIPO.

While the top four in the global rankings remained the same as last year -- with Switzerland leading for the 11th year running followed by Sweden, the US and Britain -- South Korea leapt five places to fifth.

The index found 'substantial increases in brand values in Korea, in trademarks being filed, but also in cultural and creative services exports', index co-editor Sacha Wunsch-Vincent told reporters, citing the K-Pop phenomenon.

The Netherlands, Finland, Singapore, Denmark and Germany round out the top ten.

Meanwhile China continued its progress towards the top ten



and is still the only middle-income economy in the top 30, up two places to number 12.

Wunsch-Vincent said the country's innovation players were individually strong and China was now trying to connect them better 'so that public research feeds into commercial innovation'.

Turkey (41), Vietnam (44), India (46) and the Philippines (51) are the only other middle-income nations that are systematically catching up.

'Beyond China, these four particularly large economies to-

gether have the potential to change the global innovation landscape for good,' WIPO said.

The index ranks 132 economies. Among low income countries, Rwanda leads the way in 102nd place, ahead of Tajikistan (103) and Malawi (107).

WIPO's index found that countries and businesses increased investments in innovation despite the COVID-19 crisis, in a bid to stimulate post-pandemic economic growth.

Scientific output, research and development, IP filings and

venture capital deals continued to grow in 2020.

Companies whose innovations revolved around measures to contain the pandemic and its effects - particularly pharmaceuticals and information technology - redoubled their innovation investments.

However, sectors hit hard by coronavirus restrictions, such as travel, cut back.

"Many sectors have shown remarkable resilience - especially those that have embraced digitalisation, technology and innovation," said WIPO director

general Daren Tang.

"As the world looks to rebuild from the pandemic, we know that innovation is integral to overcoming the common challenges that we face."

Wunsch-Vincent highlighted that beyond top research and development (R&D) spenders such as Australia, Germany, Japan and the US, which all increased investments, 'seven out of ten economies still devote less than 1 per cent of gross domestic product (GDP) to R&D'.

AFP

US Treasury chief urges Congress to raise debt limit

Washington, US - US Treasury Secretary Janet Yellen pleaded on Sunday for Congress to raise the debt ceiling in order to avoid a 'historic financial crisis'.

In an editorial published in the *Wall Street Journal*, Yellen points out that the US has always raised the debt ceiling before exceeding its limit.

"The US has never defaulted. Not once. Doing so would likely precipitate a historic financial crisis," Yellen wrote.

"Default could trigger a spike in interest rates, a steep drop in stock prices and other financial turmoil."

The debt ceiling, which only Congress can increase, came back into force on August 1 after it had been suspended for two years. It prohibits the US from borrowing more than the current US\$28.4tn limit if not raised.

Last week, the Treasury said the US was set to run out of money sometime in October.

In her editorial, Yellen spelled out a list of potential financial ca-



Janet Yellen

tastrophes that could befall the country if it did not raise the debt limit and could not meet its existing financial deadlines.

"In a matter of days, millions of Americans could be strapped for cash," she warned.

Yellen recalled the 2011 debt crisis, "Debt-limit brinkmanship pushed America to the edge of crisis."

Yellen said acting sooner rather than later could avoid a repeat of the worst outcomes of 2011. "Time is money here, potentially billions of dollars," Yellen wrote.

"Neither delay nor default is tolerable," she said.

AFP

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MSX inches up; volumes down

Our Correspondent
Muscat

The benchmark index of the Muscat Stock Exchange (MSX) inched up 0.08 per cent to close at 3,945.31 points on Monday.

Trading activity deteriorated from the previous session as turnover declined 0.51 per cent to RO1mn and volumes fell 23.06 per cent to 5.09mn shares.

While Financial index rose 0.21 per cent, Industrial and Services indices fell 0.34 per cent and 0.48 per cent, respectively. The MSX Shariah index closed up by 0.44 per cent at 587.88 points.

Market breadth remained

negative as four companies closed up, while 13 companies closed down. The rest 21 traded stocks closed flat for the day.

The four gainers were Oman Education & Training Investment (7.73 per cent), Sohar International Bank (2.2 per cent), Al Madina Investment (1.67 per cent) and Bank Nizwa (1.05 per cent).

Top losers were Renaissance Services (-2.26 per cent), Oman National Engineering & Investment Co (-2.17 per cent), Oman Investment and Finance Company (-2.1 per cent), Oman Flour Mills (-2.0 per cent) and United Finance (-1.75 per cent).

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Ahli Islamic introduces dedicated account for its female customers

In its bid to constantly offer tailored banking products and services to various market segments and further grow and strengthen its retail banking portfolio, Ahli Islamic recently launched a dedicated account for its female customers.

The bank's newest launch—the Ladies Savings Account—presents a comprehensive range of unique benefits and privileges that promise to provide greater fulfilment and satisfying customer experience to this growing segment.

With the new Sharia'a-compliant Ladies Savings Account, customers could avail of attractive deals, special offers and discounts from selected merchants using a uniquely designed debit card and through the ahliwards application. More benefits await those who transfer their salaries to this account.

Each customer will also have the privilege to automatically qualify for the Qitaf weekly, monthly and quarterly prize draws and Omani Women's Day 2021 draws.



Yousuf al Rawahi, deputy general manager and head of Ahli Islamic said, "As one of the leading players in the Omani banking sector, we are committed to developing and presenting banking solutions that fulfil our cus-

tomers' personal needs and lifestyles, and contributing towards realising their aspirations. Our approach towards customising our products and services for various customer segments through an in-depth

market study has led us to recognise that an increasing number of women are joining the national workforce and require financial services to meet their evolving social and economic needs.

The Ladies Savings Account

takes into account an understanding of the importance of helping our female customers develop their savings and maximise the beneficial returns that the account provides."

Rawahi added, "Ahli Islamic pursues a growth-oriented strategy in line with the needs of its customers.

"Over the years, we have introduced products and services that are distinct and for diverse customer segments, reflecting our continuous efforts to ensure long-term service efficiency."

Ahli Islamic continues to focus on advanced products and services, in order to increase its foothold in the market and expand the market for those Sharia'a-compliant products.

The bank also facilitates customers to operate their business under Sharia'a principles by way of providing a wide array of Sharia'a-based financial products and also ensures the highest level of service standards with a focus on "Partnering" instead of offering financing services to the customer.



Khedmah app adds two power companies

As part of its constant efforts to meet clients' requirements and enrich their experience, Oman Investment and Finance Company, recently launched a series of updates for its flagship phone application, Khedmah. Through these frequent updates, OIFC ensures providing a bouquet of seamless and flexible solutions that fulfill the beneficiaries' needs of having a hassle-free bill viewing and payment process.

With the new updates, users can now view the electricity bills for Majan Electricity Company and Dhofar Integrated Services Company along with other electricity companies. Furthermore, the app provides monthly bills generated by Oman Water and Wastewater Services Company which customers can pay at the push of a button.

Additionally, a new section as "e-Store" has been created offering entertainment recharge from merchants such as Netflix, Amazon, Microsoft and many more. These series of new features come as a part of value additions that the company releases frequently based on studies and analysis of new market requirements and customers' necessities.

Seeking to cement its leading position in the market and continue its journey toward excellence, OIFC constantly evaluates the services provided to its clients and analyses their requirements. The company promptly responds to its clients demands by enhancing its solutions and harnessing the best modern technologies used in the

industry. Khedmah's efforts resonates with the national priorities that encourage digital transformation in financial services, thereby, achieving Oman Vision 2040 that aspires to create a digital and sustainable economy.

Launched in 2016, Khedmah app reflects the company's sterling efforts in delivering an easy and digital experience for all stakeholders across the sultanate. The app provides flexible, seamless and safe services designed to meet clients' necessities who seeks to dispose their daily jobs easily from their home or office and save their time, efforts as well as costs. The mobile app has accomplished a new milestone by surpassing more than half a million downloads within a short period of time. This benchmark underscores the increased societal awareness about the application's various effective and beneficial services.

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

These services can be availed through the company 65 branches across the sultanate, kiosks and its digital platforms. The company's various payment channels allow corporates, citizens and residents to easily pay and check electricity, water and telecommunications bills as well as making payment to the Public Authority for Social Insurance (PASI).

Oman Air opens brand discovery store in Mall of Oman

Oman Air, the national carrier of the Sultanate of Oman, unveiled its brand discovery pop-up store in the recently opened Mall of Oman. Located on the third floor, the combined pop-up store and visitor centre offers the public an opportunity to 'Get to Know Oman Air' with a sampling of on-board products including amenity kits, kids' soft toys, *Wings of Oman* in-flight magazine, among others, and features a dedicated Oman Air Holidays counter with the option to book a getaway package in store.

Weekly activities are also planned to introduce the public to Oman Air pilots and cabin crew, showcase new add-on products, and highlight the variety of in-flight dining options available on board. The official unveiling was led by Oman Air chief operating officer Capt



Nasser al Salmi accompanied by several key members from the airline's senior management. In an official ribbon cutting ceremony, Capt Salmi commented on the importance of creating a venue where visitors can learn more about the airline.

"Our purpose in opening this store is to provide a space where locals and tourists alike can learn more about our multi-award-winning products and services and discover some of the authentic Omani hospitality we're so proud to fly around the world.

"We've also created a dedicated space to book customised getaway packages through Oman Air Holidays.

"I invite everyone in Oman to visit this exciting, interactive store to learn more about what makes Oman Air such a pre-

mium flying experience."

Fully customisable Fly & Stay packages are a leading focus of the airline's growing products, and the store offers residents in Oman an opportunity to create personalised holiday itineraries on the spot.

The walk-in location complements Oman Air Holidays' recently revamped travel platform with the added convenience to book in person.

One of the brand discovery store's more engaging features is a photo stand installation in the shape of Oman Air's familiar silver and gold logo. Visitors can strike a pose and snap a pic between the oversized wings for their very own Oman Air branded memory and then post to social media using the hashtag #OmanAirWings for their chance to win prizes.

BSM recognised as one of Mideast's top independent schools

British School Muscat has been recognised as one of the Middle East's best independent schools in *Spears Magazine's* School Index with Carfax Education.

Spears describe British School Muscat as "Dynamic, purposeful and personal". They then go on to say, "The original not-for-profit British school in Oman was founded with a royal charter 50 years ago.

"Under head Kai Vacher, the school has undergone a clever restructuring of its facilities to include three pools, a university-style sixth-form centre, state-of-the-art science labs and floodlit sports facilities. Its academic results place it in the top three international schools in the Middle East."

Kai Vacher, BSM principal, said, "We are delighted and very proud that we have been recognised as one of the world's best independent schools.

"The hard work of our students and staff, combined with the wonderful support of the parent community have contributed to this recognition. Our school was chosen by expert education consultants at Carfax and researchers at Spear's based on



our academic results, preparation for university entry, unique ethos and how we prepare students for life beyond academia."

Categorised by region, prospective parents and pupils can now access a list of the top 100 schools for 2021, across the UK, Switzerland, Europe, USA, Middle East, China, Southeast Asia and the rest of the world, chosen by expert education consultants at Carfax Education and Spear's. Collated by Carfax Education experts on the ground across the world, the index is the most comprehensive global list available.

Bank Muscat employees complete two days of immersive learning at Outward Bound Oman

In line with its pioneering role in the development of Omani human resources, Bank Muscat, the leading financial services provider in the sultanate, has partnered with Outward Bound Oman to provide its employees with specialised training that will further improve their teamwork, critical thinking and effective communication skills. Two batches of bank employees participated in these training workshops held recently at the headquarters of Outward Bound Oman in Al Khoudh. Outward Bound Oman is well known for its focus on the development of human talent through a unique, intensive and immersive learning environment.

The training workshop for Bank Muscat employees aimed to raise their awareness of the importance of focusing on customers, and to introduce them to the importance of work ethics, and how it can be applied in the work environment.

It also pointed out the importance of dealing in a professional manner with colleagues, managers and the bank's customers. In addition to enhancing the ability of employees to assume new responsibilities and adhere to the highest standards of integrity



at work, the workshop also included several assorted activities to enhance their participation and interaction during the training.

Said Salim al Aufi, group deputy general manager - Human Resources, Bank Muscat, said, "Bank Muscat recognises that its employees are its core strength and the primary reason for its success and accomplishments. Hence, it continuously invests resources and time to further develop their capabilities.

"The bank is also closely supporting efforts for further development of Omani youth through specialised programmes and courses to realise national development goals.

"We thank Outward Bound Oman for their excellent training that focuses on communication, teamwork, confidence, critical thinking and creativity. This will help our employees unleash their full potential and contribute immensely both to the bank and Omani society in general."

Mohammed Darwish al Zadjali, chief operating officer, Outward Bound Oman, said, "From school students to jobseekers and the emerging talent of leading organisations, Outward Bound Oman courses have helped shape the lives of thousands of people in the sultanate, helping equip individuals with the right competencies and capabilities to support the ambitious goals of Oman Vision 2040.

"We are very happy to partner

Bank Muscat, which is a pioneer in investing in human resources and providing Omani talent multiple ways to innovate, perform and be prepared for the next stage in their careers and lives."

A number of Bank Muscat employees who took part in the workshops expressed their happiness and appreciation for the various efforts made by the bank to develop Omani cadres in the banking and financial sector.

Since the very beginning, Bank Muscat has adopted many innovative strategies to equip talented Omani nationals to take up leadership positions.

In fact with over 3,800 employees and around 95 per cent Omanisation, the bank is a pioneer of developing Omani talent.

As a result of its strong HR processes and abundant learning and development opportunities for employees, most of its senior and middle management have been promoted from within the bank's ranks.

It must also be noted in this regard that as part of its strategic plan, the bank continually creates a pipeline of leaders not just for the bank, but also to contribute to the overall growth and development of the nation.

NBO ends vaccination drive, donates vaccines to MoH

In its latest efforts to support the country's fight against COVID-19, National Bank of Oman (NBO) has vaccinated 100 per cent of its employees and donated vaccines to the Ministry of Health (MoH).

The bank was among the first private institutions to introduce its vaccine rollout in June 2021, part of various initiatives it has launched in order to minimise the impact of the pandemic, while safeguarding the health and safety of its employees and customers.

Since March 2020, the bank has donated over RO1.5mn to the government and healthcare services, the majority of which has been used to purchase critical and life-saving equipment and supplies for the most strained hospitals across the country.

Meanwhile, to continue serving its customers as safely as



possible, and in line with guidance from the Supreme Committee for dealing with coronavirus (COVID-19), those wishing to enter the bank's branches must

provide a full vaccination certificate, with certain exemptions according to official regulations.

NBO also continues to offer an expanding range of services

on its digital platforms, including internet banking and its award-winning mobile app, to ensure that its customers can bank at their convenience.

Ominvest helps e-learning at Wadi al Ma'awel school

As part of its social responsibility initiatives towards the education sector, Oman International Development and Investment Company SAOG (Ominvest) has recently extended support towards the e-enabling of Habraa School - one of the oldest schools in the wilayat of Wadi al Ma'awel in South Batinah governorate. The school serves around 630 students from grades 1 to 10.

The contribution included setting up the required infrastructure for Internet connectivity across the school premises, in addition to providing electric tablets for students' e-learning.

Dr Hiba al Baloushi, principal of Habraa School, said, "We are very grateful to the kind support of Ominvest. The first thing they asked us was how to support the school practically and sustainably. They were attentive to our needs and the challenges we face and went beyond what was requested. They were very much hands-on through the entire



process, making sure all Internet infrastructure setup and purchased tablets were compliant with the specifications set by the General Directorate of Education."

Sarah Lashkoo, company secretary and head of Legal and Compliance at Ominvest said, "Serving and enriching societies is at the heart of Ominvest's purpose statement. We are glad to extend support to Habraa School in the wilayat of Wadi al

Ma'awel. The school's principal and team have been very cooperative and swift in responding with the needed arrangement to have the internet connectivity and tablets fully equipped and running before students went back to school."

The initiative comes in response to the significant changes the schooling system has witnessed globally and in the sultanate since the start of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Raja Yoga Centre to mark International Day of Peace

Each year the International Day of Peace is observed around the world on September 21. The UN General Assembly has declared this as a day devoted to strengthening the ideals of peace, through observing 24 hours of non-violence and cease-fire.

In 2021, as we heal from the COVID-19 pandemic, we are inspired to think creatively and collectively about how to help everyone recover better, how to build resilience, and how to transform our world into one that is more equal, more just, equitable, inclusive, sustainable, and healthier.

In the light of the COVID-19 pandemic situation, the event in Oman is celebrated as a virtual event on September 21 to mark the occasion. It is organised by Rajayoga Centre for Self Development and this celebration is dedicated for the peaceful people of Oman.

During the programme general public will be sharing their messages for the day. B K Santosh Kukreja, director of regional cultural and educational NGO- St Petersburg Brahma Kumaris



Centre, joint regional coordinator of Brahma Kumaris services in Russia, CIS and Baltic region, author and spiritual teacher with over 40 years of experience practising Raj yoga meditation will be the keynote speaker.

She will be sharing about "Healing through inner powers" and conducting meditation to empower self.

It will be 11-day programme where the masters from different countries are sharing about different powers like love, peace, happiness, courage, responsibility, tolerance, kindness, respect and cooperation each day.

The event in Oman is initiated by Raja Yoga Centre for Self De-

velopment.

The organisation is popular in Oman by organising value-based national and international events, such as International Day of Non-Violence, International Day of Peace, Oman Environment Day, Oman Women's Day, to name a few.

The organisation offers a wide range of meditation courses, public events, workshops, seminars, retreats, numerous social service activities and partnerships, with community organisations, UN agencies and government ministries to gain positive perspectives towards personal, family, and professional life.

Educell@20 celebrates 20 years of ISAS

It was a sensational moment in the history of Indian School Seeb (ISAS), when Educell@20, launching of 20 years of Education for Excellence through ISAS - the commemoration of 20 years of its existence was organised on September 16, virtually on Zoom platform. The occasion witnessed the presence of various dignitaries, all joining Indian School Seeb in this proud moment.

Dr Tahir Ibrahim Ahmed al Kindi, chairman, Ray International Group of Companies and Euro Poles Middle East LLC, was the chief guest of this historic event. A logo of Educell@20, symbolic of education to each cell for growing to a holistic human being through Indian School Seeb and leading to unfolding of all the dreams into reality, was launched by the honourable chief guest of the day.

The chief guest in his inaugural address spoke of the importance of hard work and focus and vision in life. He stated that as Indian School Seeb is on the verge of completing 20 years, it is just the beginning and a step stone to the innovative years to come, years of novel ventures and technology.



Indian School Seeb in its journey of 20 years accomplished many feats and realised many of its dreams. Video representations, highlighting the achievements, reminiscing into the past was presented during this event.

Guest of honour Dr C M Najeed, director in charge, Indian School Seeb from Board of Directors, graced the occasion and he spoke of the four M's in building a company out of which one M, the most important one, denotes

'MAN'. He reiterated the importance of practising self-discipline to reach one's destiny by oneself.

Gajesh Kumar Dhariwal, director in charge, Indian School Seeb from Board of Directors, released the latest edition of the newsletter 'Learners Endeavour' - a quarterly newsletter compiled and edited by student editorial board of Indian School Seeb.

R Ranjit Kumar, president of the School Management Committee, honoured the occasion

with his gracious presence and appreciated all the people who were instrumental in the success of Indian School Seeb and he spoke of the long journey ahead.

Dr Leena Francis, principal, Indian School Seeb, the initiator of Educell@20, on this significant juncture reflected on the journey of ISAS and the milestones achieved, since its inception on August 15, 2002.

She spoke of the basic objectives of Educell@20 which is to reflect on the school's past and acknowledge the individuals and the community members, both past and present, who helped in shaping and influencing the character and values that embody the vibrant, engaging, and safe environment of ISAS. She expressed her optimism and belief that through a close and collegial partnership with everyone associated with ISAS the school can reach further heights of success, true to its vision statement - where dreams unfold into reality.

Educell@20- Launching of 20 years of Education for Excellence through ISAS came to culmination on a positive note with an eagerness awaiting a series of celebratory activities till August 2022.

Maserati MC20 wins 'Product Design of the Year'

The MC20 has received the award for "Product Design of the Year" 2021 from the European Product Design Award.

The new Maserati super sports car also was honoured with "Top Design Winner" in Transportation/Auto/Truck/Mobile Home and "Winner" in Transportation/Other Transportation Design categories.

The European Product Design Award is a design competition created to recognise the efforts of talented international product designers. Thousands of design projects from every corner of the globe are vetted and evaluated by the jury panel to select the most aesthetically exciting, functional, and innovative products.

Klaus Busse, Maserati head of design, said, "Our mission was to design a car that would be remembered in the future as the model that launched the Maserati New Era. And I think we've achieved our goal with MC20. We are honoured to receive this coveted accolade, which recognises the work of an entire team, who have made a whole-hearted commitment to this unique project."



MC20, designed by the Centro Stile Maserati in Turin, is a mix of elegance and sporting prowess.

The super sports car is a genuine masterpiece of style, the first of its kind, and the halo car with which the Brand inaugurated its new Era.

Maserati MC20 is innovative by nature, and every design detail is functional: the butterfly

doors, for example, are not only stunningly beautiful, but they also improve the car's ergonomics and enable optimal access to and from the cabin.

The new super sports car represents the pure form of speed, in true Maserati-style: a work of sculptural engineering previewing the direction of the Brand's aesthetic future.

In fact, the focus on perform-

ance led to the conception of a car with a distinct personality, refined aerodynamics and unmistakable lines that render it unique.

A car whose superb looks conceal an uncompromisingly sporty soul, with the new 630 hp V6 Nettuno engine that delivers 0 to 100km/h acceleration in 2.88 seconds and a top speed over 326km an hour. The

patented engine was conceived, developed, designed and built entirely by Maserati, and uses a pre-chamber combustion technology derived from Formula 1 engines.

Maserati MC20 super sports car is genuinely a 100 per cent made in Italy car, developed by the Maserati Innovation Lab and built at the historic Modena plant.

Kalyan Jewellers launches Digital Gold

Kalyan Jewellers, one of the most trusted and leading jewellery brands, recently announced the launch of Kalyan Jewellers Digital Gold. Venturing into the new digital gold category, the company has entered into a partnership with Augmont, which is India's largest completely integrated gold ecosystem.

With gold continuing to shine bright, and technology offering convenient solutions, Kalyan Jewellers Digital Gold powered by Augmont provides a safe, easy and reliable method of buying 24-karat pure gold, digitally.

When customers purchase Kalyan Jewellers Digital Gold powered by Augmont, an equivalent amount of physical gold is stored under the customer name for a period of up to five years - at no additional cost, in secured and insured vaults managed by IDBI Trustee Company Limited.

Millennial or Gen-Z customers looking to make systematic purchases in gold, can opt for this feature, and start buying gold for as low as RO.50 (₹100) on the platform. At a later stage,

the overall gold purchase in their free-wallet can be redeemed as physical gold coins or jewellery, at the Kalyan Jewellers showroom. They can also opt for door step delivery of gold coins or bullion. Customers can also sell digital gold from the safe confines of their home, thus providing larger flexibility.

Talking about this partnership, Ramesh Kalyanaraman, executive director - Kalyan Jewellers said, "Gold has always been a preferred saving option, and in the post COVID-19 era it has also emerged as the safest and most lucrative long-term asset. We have witnessed a renewed interest in gold from younger, first time customers, who are looking at convenient and easy means of purchasing the yellow metal. The introduction of digital gold will provide a holistic ecosystem for consumers."

Since the restrictions due to the COVID-19 pandemic, Kalyan Jewellers has introduced a range of digital, customer-centric initiatives, enabling patrons to purchase jewellery with flexibility.

Iran’s nuclear programme back in spotlight as Raisi addresses the UN

Vienna, Austria - Tehran’s nuclear programme is back under the spotlight as the UN’s atomic energy watchdog holds its annual general conference and Iran’s new president, Ebrahim Raisi, marks his international debut by addressing the UN General Assembly.

Negotiations to revive a 2015 landmark agreement with world powers that curbed Iran’s nuclear power are at a standstill, while Tehran continues to step up its activities, according to the latest International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) report.

Which limits did Tehran breach?

Under the 2015 deal with Britain,

France, Germany, China, Russia and the US, Iran agreed not to enrich uranium above 3.67 per cent, well below the 90 per cent threshold needed for use in a nuclear weapon.

In addition, it was only allowed to have a stockpile of 202.8kg in total - equivalent to 300kg in a particular compound form.

But since May 2019, Iran has announced successive breaches of the deal in reaction to former US president Donald Trump’s withdrawal from the agreement in 2018 and the reimposition of harsh sanctions on Iran.

According to the latest report, Iran has now amassed a stock-

pile of 2,441.3kg.

The total amount now includes 84.3kg enriched to 20 per cent, as well as 10kg enriched up to 60 per cent.

In addition, it has started producing uranium metal, ‘a key material used to make nuclear weapon cores, under a civil use pretext’, according to Andrea Stricker, co-author of a recent report of the Washington-based Institute for Science and International Security.

Under the 2015 deal, Iran promised not to produce the metal.

It has also made more progress operating advanced centrifuges - machines used for uranium enrichment - than it

had prior to the 2015 deal.

“Iran has made irreversible progress on advanced centrifuges and on enrichment including practising multi-step enrichment to shorten the process of moving to weapon-grade,” Stricker told AFP.

How close is it to a nuclear bomb?

Iran denies wanting nuclear weapons, saying its activities are purely for peaceful purposes such as generating electricity and treating cancer patients.

Under the 2015 deal, ‘break-out time’ - the time needed to acquire the fissile material necessary for the manufacture of a bomb - was about a year.

But with the recent developments it is ‘much less’, according to a diplomat familiar with the matter.

“Enrichment to 60 per cent could be around 99 per cent of the effort to reach weapon-grade, which underscores the gravity of the situation,” Stricker told AFP, citing a colleague’s research, though she adds ‘there is no reason for hysteria’.

She noted that Iran currently had a lower stock of enriched uranium as it had prior to 2015 ‘when it had enough material for more than ten nuclear weapons’.

“However, Iran’s nuclear programme is now much leaner and more agile than in 2015 due to

progress with advanced centrifuges, which were not supposed to exist by this point under the 2015 deal,” she said.

What safeguards are in place?

Experts note Iran would also need to take other steps, besides enriching uranium, to have a bomb.

“Even if Iran produced enough fissile material for a nuclear weapon, it would need to convert that material into the nuclear core, and package that with explosives and other components to make a nuclear device,” said Eric Brewer of the Washington-based Center for Strategic and International

Studies (CSIS).

“Additional steps would be required to fit that device on top of a missile and have it work correctly,” he told AFP.

IAEA inspectors also regularly visit Iran. Their access has been reduced since earlier this year, but their monitoring activities would still ‘help it detect a dash to a nuclear weapon fairly quickly’, according to Brewer.

“The real challenge right now is that Iran’s expanded nuclear activities, in particular its use of advanced centrifuges, are creating knowledge that is hard to erase with a simple return to the nuclear deal,” he said.

AFP

‘Apathy and despair’ as Iraq looks to October election

Baghdad, Iraq - War-scarred Iraq will hold a parliamentary election next month but Sajad, a 23 year old man sitting with his friends in a Baghdad café, doesn’t really care.

“I see the politicians’ posters in the street, but I don’t know the names or the programmes,” says the man with a shaved head and tattooed forearms.

“I think they all have the same programme: ‘We will do this, we will do that.’ It’s all promises,” he scoffs, a sentiment shared by his friends.

Iraq is emerging from almost two decades of war and insurgency since the 2003 US-led invasion toppled dictator Saddam Hussein and promised to bring freedom and democracy.

Although parliamentary polls are to be held on October 10, there is little popular hope for major change through the ballot box, and widespread disillusionment about a political caste widely seen as inept and corrupt.

Sajad, who works in a media production company, says he has no plans to vote.

Many people feel the same, and there are fears voter turnout could drop below the official rate of 44.5 per cent from the most recent legislative election in 2018.

In Iraq’s public squares and along main avenues there are banners of candidates, and rallies, often attended by local notables and tribal chiefs, have sought to mobilise support.

But overall, there has been little buzz as most Iraqis worry more about a painful economic



Campaign posters are seen in the Iraqi capital of Baghdad, ahead of the parliamentary elections (AFP)

crisis deepened by low oil prices and the COVID pandemic.

‘Why should I vote?’

The polls were initially scheduled for 2022 but moved forward to June this year by Prime Minister Mustafa al Kadhemi, then postponed to October.

The early polls were a concession to a protest movement that broke out in the autumn of 2019, venting anger against corruption, soaring youth unemployment and crumbling public services.

Nearly 25mn Iraqis are eligible to vote, to elect 329 lawmakers from a field of more than 3,200 candidates in 83 constituencies.

A 25 per cent quota has been reserved for women in the Council of Representatives, the unicameral assembly located inside Baghdad’s high-security Green Zone.

A new electoral law expands

the number of constituencies and scraps list-based voting in favour of votes for individual candidates.

But candidates can still run on behalf of a party or coalition, meaning the traditional blocs and patronage networks will likely remain powerful.

Mohammed, an economics graduate who works in a shop selling olive-, almond and other types of oils, says he feels ‘the election won’t bring change’.

At age 30, he keeps postponing the idea of marriage because of the searing economic difficulties.

“Basic services are not provided to me. Why should I go to vote?” he said, as the country suffers daily power cuts.

“The last time roads were paved in my neighbourhood was before 2003,” added Mohammed, who like many Iraqis

prefers not to give his full name when discussing politics.

In his Baghdad constituency, he said he knows two of the five candidates, but hasn’t bothered to check their electoral platforms.

“The political factions have been the same since 2003; the only thing that changes are the faces,” he said.

He denounced Iraq’s entrenched clientelism, saying, “The only people who vote are those who’ve been promised a job, or people who vote for someone close to them or from their tribe.”

‘Proliferation of weapons’

It is difficult to predict a winner in the race, where powerful blocs include the pro-Iran Shiite camp around the Hashed al-Shaabi paramilitary network and the

Sadrist camp of popular Shiite leader Moqtada Sadr.

Political scientist Marsin Alshamary said the election will be held in a climate of ‘apathy and despair, especially among young people’.

“Most people think that these elections will achieve nothing,” added the researcher from the US-based Belfer Center for Science and International Affairs.

Voter turnout ‘has been declining over previous elections cycles’, she said.

“In 2018 it was very bad. There is a very strong likelihood that this election will be worse.”

The gloom has deepened after the protest movement that started in October 2019 ended with little change and many dashed expectations.

Many activists were murdered, kidnapped or intimidated. No one has claimed responsibility for the violence and no one has been held accountable.

The activists blame the ‘militias’ in a country where Iranian-funded armed groups have steadily gained influence.

Another Iraqi who said he won’t cast his ballot is 28 year old Ali, who argues that he does not want to be complicit in the ‘crime’ the election represents for him.

“There will be no transparent elections,” the young man said.

“The money of politicians dominates, there is a proliferation of weapons in all the constituencies. Whoever has the weapons will win.”

AFP



Students evacuate a building of the Perm university campus in Perm, Russia on Monday following a shooting (AFP)

Six people dead after gunman opens fire on Russian campus

Moscow, Russia - A gunman opened fire on Monday on a university campus in central Russia and killed six people before being detained, investigators said, in the country’s second mass shooting this year to target students.

Video on social media showed students throwing belongings from the windows of university buildings in the city of Perm, around 1,300km east of Moscow, before jumping to flee the shooter.

The Investigative Committee, which probes major crimes in Russia, initially said eight people were killed but later revised the number of deaths to six.

It said 28 people were being treated after the attack at Perm State National Research University.

“Some of them have been hospitalised with injuries of varying severity,” it said in a statement.

It said the gunman, later identified as a student at the university, carried out the shooting with a hunting rifle he purchased earlier this year.

‘During his arrest, he put up resistance and was wounded, after which he was taken to a medical facility,’ the statement said.

The Health Ministry, in comments cited by Russian news agencies, said 19 among the wounded were being treated for gunshots.

State media broadcast amateur footage reportedly taken during the attack showing an individual dressed in black tactical clothing, including a helmet, carrying a weapon and walking through the campus.

Students fleeing

Video from outside the university showed distressed students fleeing the campus and making phone calls to friends and family behind a cordon of police wearing helmets and body armour.

President Vladimir Putin had been notified of the shooting, the Kremlin said, and ministers had been ordered to travel to Perm to coordinate assistance for the victims.

“The President expresses sincere condolences to those who have lost family and loved ones

as a result of this incident,” Putin’s spokesman Dmitry Peskov told reporters.

Regional authorities said that classes at local schools, colleges and universities were cancelled on Monday.

School shootings have been relatively unusual in Russia due to tight security at education facilities and because it is difficult to buy firearms.

But Monday’s attack was the second one this year, after a 19 year old opened fire in his old school in the central city of Kazan in May, killing nine people.

Investigators said that gunman suffered from a brain disorder, but he was deemed fit to receive a licence for the semi-automatic shotgun he used in the attack.

On the day of that attack - one of the worst in recent Russian history - Putin called for a review of gun control laws. The age to acquire hunting rifles was increased from 18 to 21 and medical checks were strengthened.

Peskov noted on Monday that despite the tightened legislation ‘unfortunately, this tragedy has happened, and it has to be analysed’. “Law enforcement agencies must give an expert assessment. It looks like we are talking about abnormalities in a young man who committed these killings,” Peskov said.

Rising number of shootings

Authorities have blamed foreign influences for previous school shootings, saying young Russians have been influenced by similar attacks in the US and elsewhere.

In November 2019, a 19 year old student in the far eastern town of Blagoveshchensk opened fire at his college, killing one classmate and injuring three other people before shooting and killing himself.

In October 2018, another teenage gunman killed 20 people at a Kerch technical college in Crimea, the peninsula Russia annexed from Ukraine in 2014.

The country’s FSB security service says it has prevented dozens of armed attacks on schools in recent years.

AFP

Lawmakers in crisis-hit Lebanon vote in new government

Beirut, Lebanon - Lebanon’s parliament met on Monday to vote in Prime Minister Najib Mikati’s Cabinet, tasked with pulling the country out of a deep economic crisis, in a session delayed by a power cut.

No major objections were expected to Mikati’s ministerial lineup from top political blocs as Lebanon is in desperate need of a new government following 13 months of political deadlock.

Mikati’s 24-member Cabinet, unveiled last week after protracted horsetrading, will be expected to offer solutions to shortages of medicine and fuel and to launch a ration card programme to protect the poorest.

It will have to pursue negotiations with the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and oversee preparations for parliamentary elections scheduled for May 2022.

Lebanon’s economic collapse has depleted central bank re-



Thsi file photo shows a woman tossing rose petals to welcome tankers carrying Iranian fuel, which arrived from Syria in the city of Baalbeck, in Lebanon's Bekaa valley, on September 16 (AFP)

serves, devalued the currency by more than 90 per cent and plunged three out of four citizens below the poverty line.

The country is grappling with almost round-the-clock power

cuts that have plunged homes into darkness and paralysed hospitals, schools and government offices.

Monday’s session was scheduled to start at 11am (0800

GMT) in the Unesco Palace but was delayed by around an hour because of a power cut, parliament’s secretary general Adnan Daher told AFP.

Videos circulating on social

media showed lawmakers gathering in a courtyard outside the building before electricity was restored.

“This is embarrassing,” lawmaker Teymour Jumblatt told a reporter. “This is not a country.”

Mikati, reading a statement to lawmakers ahead of the confidence vote, pledged to ‘resume talks with IMF and develop a plan to revive the economy’.

The new Premier also vowed to hold timely and transparent elections, and adjust salaries weakened by the devaluation of the Lebanese pound.

He pledged to restore the confidence of the international community, which has grown increasingly frustrated with the country’s leadership.

Mikati was interrupted by speaker Nabih Berri, who asked him to speed things up because of a risk that the power may be cut again.

AFP

France alone on world stage as it vents over submarines

United Nations - Choosing a full-fledged confrontation with the United States due to the loss of a mega-contract for submarines for Australia, France is making a risky bet and other nations are not rushing to its defence.

After Australia renounced its deal for conventional submarines in favour of US nuclear-powered ones, France took the extraordinary step of pulling its ambassadors from both Washington and Canberra for consultations.

Bertrand Badie, an international relations professor at the Sciences Po institute in Paris, said France had put itself in a position where it can only appear to be backing down or losing face once its ambassador returns to the US, its historic ally.

"When you get into a crisis like this, you better know where the exit is," he said.

Australia said it decided that nuclear submarines were a better choice to ensure its maritime edge as it announced a new three-way alliance with the US and Britain widely seen as aimed at China - whose rise has been the overriding priority of US President Joe Biden's administration.

French President Emmanuel Macron, who has stayed subdued publicly, is set to speak to Biden in the coming days.

But Foreign Minister Jean-Yves Le Drian has used language rarely used among friendly nations, alleging 'lying' and 'duplicité' and saying France was 'stabbed in the back' by Australia.

He so far has no meeting scheduled on the sidelines of this week's UN General Assembly in New York with US Secretary of State Antony Blinken, himself a French speaker known for his love of Europe.

No backing from Europe

With a contract worth A\$50bn on its signing in 2016, the French anger may show the country's powerful defence industry that political leaders are pressing their case.

But the diplomatic impact is less certain, with France appearing isolated at the start of the UN General Assembly.

Fellow EU power Germany, which holds elections next Sun-



This file photo shows French President Emmanuel Macron (second from left) and Australian Prime Minister Malcolm Turnbull (centre) standing on the deck of HMAS Waller, a Collins-class submarine operated by the Royal Australian Navy, at Garden Island in Sydney in 2018 (AFP)

EU ministers to discuss subs deal fallout

Brussels, Belgium - EU foreign ministers will meet on the sidelines of the UN General Assembly to discuss the AUKUS pact that scuppered a submarine deal between France and Australia.

"This is the first opportunity for the EU foreign ministers to discuss the implications and consequences of the whole deal," EU foreign affairs spokesman Peter Stano said.

He added that the meeting was an opportunity to discuss 'not only the issue between France and Australia but the implications of the whole AUKUS alliance'.

The meeting was previously scheduled - a usual occurrence for EU countries to coordinate and consult on many topics before their representatives took the stage at the annual

UN event.

But with Australia, the US and Britain last week unveiling a new defence pact negotiated secretly over several months, to the detriment of France, the issue has leapt to the top of the agenda.

France's Minister for Europe, Clement Beaune, has said a trade pact with the EU that Australia has been working towards since 2018 could be affected. Trade negotiators from both sides last met in June and are scheduled to continue their next session in October.

EU mulling 'impact'

EU partners have thus far not publicly voiced any strong support for France. But the issue is likely to fuel European debate over 'strategic autonomy' - a French-led call to build stand-

alone defence and industrial capacities.

The idea, however, is viewed with unease by eastern EU member states that do not want to weaken NATO.

European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen is 'keeping a close eye on the consequences of this agreement', her spokesman Eric Mamer said.

But the senior officials of her EU executive - which is responsible for negotiating trade deals for the bloc - 'want to sit back and reflect calmly on this type of announcement and the impact it might have before we actually respond', Mamer said. He said they were looking at 'what this impact could be on this schedule' of the EU-Australia trade talks.

AFP

assessment with European allies and put it on the table with the Americans to find solutions," she said.

While most European nations rejoiced at seeing Biden defeat the divisive Donald Trump, Biden also triggered criticism from European allies over his determined withdrawal from Afghanistan, which led to a swift Taliban victory after a 20-year NATO-backed war.

Another sore point is the continued COVID-19 ban on most Europeans from traveling to the US, even as the European Union - spurred by nations depending on tourism - relaxed entrance requirements for Americans.

Max Bergmann, a former State Department official now at the left-leaning Center for American Progress, said Biden needed to take 'bold steps to repair relations with France to prevent this from spiraling'.

He said Biden could invite Macron to the White House, embrace the French leader's vision of a European defence capacity and move to end the travel ban.

AFP



German Finance Minister Olaf Scholz leaves after testifying in front of a parliamentary finance inquiry, in Berlin on Monday (AFP)

Lawmakers grill German Finance Minister Scholz in fraud probe

Frankfurt, Germany - German lawmakers on Monday grilled Finance Minister Olaf Scholz, the frontrunner to succeed Angela Merkel in national elections this weekend, over a high-stakes money-laundering probe that could shake up the race.

Local media speculated that the scandal had unsettled allies in his centre-left Social Democratic Party (SPD), with less than a week to go before the September 26 vote.

The candidate unexpectedly turned up in person to the closed-door hearing in Berlin before the parliament's finance committee, after he was initially expected to take part by video link.

Scholz was called in front of MPs after the finance and justice ministries were raided by prosecutors on September 9 as part of a probe into the Cologne-based Financial Intelligence Unit (FIU).

The body, part of Germany's customs authority tasked with tackling money laundering, is suspected of failing to report potential wrongdoing to the relevant authorities.

Speaking after the hearing, Scholz said his ministry had taken steps to 'continually improve' how the FIU works so that 'potential offenders do not go undiscovered'.

In a statement to the committee, Scholz said that no minister could solve all problems 'at the click of a finger', sources inside the room told AFP.

Ahead of the meeting, opposition parties and the SPD's coal-

ition partners, the conservative CDU-CSU alliance, accused Scholz of failures in the fight against money laundering.

CSU committee member Hans Michelbach described a 'wide range of failures' that the Finance Minister would need to answer for.

Merkel's conservative bloc has seen a steady decline in opinion polls under unpopular candidate Armin Laschet, allowing Scholz's SPD to move into first place.

'Nerves at the SPD are shredded' at the prospect that the scandal could have an impact on the party's poll ratings, according to German weekly *Der Spiegel*, though prosecutors are also under scrutiny for the timing of the raids.

In a televised election debate on Sunday, Laschet once again seized on the opportunity to reproach Scholz over the FIU controversy.

Laschet called the investigation the latest example of the minister falling short of his oversight duties in a series of recent financial scandals.

Scholz sharply rejected the accusation, saying he had introduced a series of reforms to fight money laundering and corporate fraud.

Scholz has previously been criticised for the failure of his ministry to heed early warning signs from the payments company Wirecard, which collapsed last year after acknowledging a US\$2.2bn hole in its accounts.

AFP

Molten lava from Canary Islands volcano destroys homes

Los Llanos de Aridane, Spain - A volcano in Spain's Canary Islands destroyed houses as it spewed out lava and ash, authorities said on Monday, a day after it erupted, forcing some 5,000 people from their homes.

The Cumbre Vieja volcano sent huge plumes of thick black smoke into the sky after it erupted Sunday around 3pm, churning up molten lava that oozed down the mountainside on the island of La Palma.

A regional government spokeswoman told AFP 'a number of houses have been destroyed', saying they were still surveying the area to determine how many properties had been engulfed.

Sergio Rodriguez, mayor of the nearby village of El Paso said at least 20 homes were completely destroyed by the volcano.

"The lava left absolutely nothing in its path", Rodriguez told TVE broadcaster, saying residents were living in uncertainty.

They will 'not be going home for a while, that's for sure', he added.

Spanish media said as many



Mount Cumbre Vieja erupts in El Paso, spewing out columns of smoke, ash and lava on the Canary Island, in Spain on Sunday (AFP)

as 100 homes might have been affected.

Cumbre Vieja straddles a

ridge in the south of La Palma island, home to around 80,000 people.

Experts had been keeping a close watch on the volcano after observing a recent upsurge in

seismic activity and magma displacements.

An earthquake swarm under

La Cumbre Vieja began a week ago and since then there had been thousands of tremors, the strongest with a magnitude of nearly four, the Involcan volcanology institute said.

PM at the scene

An earthquake swarm is a sequence of seismic events occurring in one place within a relatively short period of time.

On Tuesday, the authorities raised the alert level from green to yellow in certain areas around the volcano.

According to the local government's projections, lava flows from the volcano, located in the centre of La Palma island, were likely to move southwest towards inhabited and wooded areas, before reaching the coast.

The lava flows were moving at about 700m per hour, and had a temperature of nearly 1,000°C, according to the Canary Islands Institute of Volcanology.

People had been asked to stay away from the area in the days leading up to the eruption in the areas surrounding the volcano, which are sparsely populated.

As of Sunday evening, flights to and from the island had not been disrupted, though some 200 members of the security services had been mobilised, including a helicopter as back up.

Spanish Prime Minister Pedro Sanchez cancelled a scheduled trip to New York for the United Nations General Assembly after the eruption.

He arrived at the scene late Sunday evening to assess the situation.

'Given the situation [on] La Palma island, the head of government has delayed his scheduled departure for New York', to attend the UN General Assembly, a statement said earlier.

'All services are prepared to act in a coordinated fashion,' Sanchez wrote on Twitter.

The Canaries, an archipelago of seven islands off northwest Africa, last recorded a volcanic eruption in 2011, undersea off El Hierro island.

Cumbre Vieja erupted twice in the 20th century - in 1971 and in 1949.

AFP

COVID-19 PANDEMIC

Philippines allows in-person classes in 120 schools

Manila, Philippines - The Philippines will reopen up to 120 schools for limited in-person classes for the first time since the start of the coronavirus pandemic in a pilot approved by President Rodrigo Duterte, officials said on Monday.

While nearly every country in the world has already partially or fully reopened schools for face-to-face lessons, the Philippines has kept them closed since March 2020.

"We have to pilot face-to-face (classes) because this is not just an issue for education, it's an issue for the children's mental health," presidential spokesman Harry Roque told reporters.

"It's also an issue for the economy because we might lose a generation if we don't have face-to-face (classes)."

Under guidelines approved by Duterte on Monday, up to a hundred public schools in areas considered 'minimal risk' for virus transmission will be allowed to take part in the two-month trial.

Twenty private schools can also participate.

Classrooms will be open to children in kindergarten to grade three, and senior high school, but the number of students and hours spent in face-to-face lessons limited.

Schools wanting to take part will be assessed for their preparedness and need approval from local governments to reopen. Written consent from parents will be required.

"If the pilot class is safe, if it is effective, then we will gradually increase it," said Education Secretary Leonor Briones.



This file photo shows registered teachers conducting teleconference classes for struggling students to help them in their lessons through online distant learning at a local government-sanctioned online tutorial class in Taguig City, south of Manila on March 3 this year (AFP)

We have to pilot face-to-face (classes) because this is not just an issue for education, it's an issue for the children's mental health. It's also an issue for the economy

HARRY ROQUE

Duterte rejected previous proposals for a pilot reopening of schools for fear children could catch COVID-19 and infect elderly relatives.

But there have been growing calls from the UN's children fund and many teachers for a return to in-person learning amid concerns the prolonged closure was

exacerbating an education crisis in the country.

It is not clear when the pilot will begin or which schools will be included.

A 'blended learning' programme, which involves online classes, printed materials and lessons broadcast on television and social media, will continue.

France Castro of the Alliance of Concerned Teachers told AFP the decision was 'long overdue'. Fifteen-year-olds in the

Philippines were at or near the bottom in reading, mathematics and science, according to data from the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD).

Most students attend public schools where large class sizes, outdated teaching methods, lack of investment in basic infrastructure such as toilets, and poverty have been blamed for youngsters lagging behind.

AFP

Auckland extends curbs

Wellington, New Zealand - New Zealand's largest city Auckland will remain in a lockdown for at least another two weeks, although some restrictions will be eased, Prime Minister Jacinda Ardern said on Monday.

Ardern said the city of two million would move down to level three on New Zealand's four-tier coronavirus response system by late Tuesday, even as authorities remain committed to eliminating a Delta-variant outbreak.

"We're moving now because the advice we have is that we do not have wide-

spread, undetected transmission in Auckland," she told reporters. "If everyone continues to play their part, we can continue stamping out (the virus)."

The change means stay-at-home orders will remain in place but some businesses, such as takeaway food outlets, can open using contactless delivery.

New Zealand imposed a nationwide lockdown on August 17 when the first case of the highly transmissible Delta variant was found in the community.

AFP

Lockdown in Laos capital

Bangkok, Thailand - Reclusive Laos has locked down its capital Vientiane and barred travel between COVID-hit provinces, as cases soared to a record high.

The communist country appeared to have escaped the brunt of the pandemic in 2020, and by March this year had reported fewer than 60 cases - though the low number was due in part to limited testing. But a surge since mid-April has seen its caseload steadily increasing, and on Saturday the country reported 467 new cases of community infection, its highest ever single-day tally.

The mayor of Vientiane, where the bulk of the cases

were detected, declared a strict lockdown on Sunday for two weeks, ordering residents to stay in their homes unless obtaining food, medicine or making their way to a hospital.

Travel between seven other hard-hit provinces is banned, while entry into Vientiane requires a quarantine of 14 days.

All public gatherings - even religious ceremonies - are also banned, as are activities including outdoor exercise and selling street food, according to state-run media KPL.

The surge in cases over the weekend was linked to fresh clusters found in the country's garment factories.

AFP

Virus-hit Fiji to reopen for international tourists by November

Suva, Fiji - Fiji plans to reopen for international tourists by November, aiming to rebuild a pandemic-devastated economy while battling a Delta-variant coronavirus outbreak.

"Our goal is to free our country - and our economy - from the rut of the pandemic," Prime Minister Frank Bainimarama said in a statement last week.

Once 80 per cent of Fiji's eligible population is vaccinated, it will offer quarantine-free travel to visitors from a 'green list' of locations.



This file photo shows tourist at a beach at Natadola Bay in Fiji (AFP)

Of Fiji's eligible population, 66 per cent is now fully vaccinated and Bainimarama predicts the country's target will be met by November 1.

Fiji's green list includes Australia, New Zealand, Japan, Canada, Korea, Singapore and parts of the United States.

Visitors would need to be fully vaccinated and test negative for COVID-19 prior to departure.

Once in Fiji, they would stay in designated zones where all contacts, from hospitality staff

to tour operators, would be fully vaccinated.

Reviving tourism, which government figures estimate accounts for 40 per cent of Fiji's economy, is seen as crucial to containing rising poverty in the nation of under one million people. But the main opposition, the Social Democratic Liberal Party (SODELPA), has criticised the plans.

"We have got to have our priorities right - health first over the economy," SODELPA leader Bill Gavoka told Radio New

Zealand. "I don't believe Fiji is ready."

Former Health Minister Neil Sharma said high vaccination rates would not stop the virus from spreading.

"If you look at vaccination, all it does is prevent an individual from ending up in hospital and/or the mortuary," he told AFP.

"You can still acquire and transmit the virus so it's not a guarantee," he added.

Fiji was free of community transmission for a year before a

Delta outbreak emerged in April.

That outbreak's case numbers peaked in mid-June with more than 1,200 new infections daily.

Only 79 cases were recorded on Sunday.

The bulk of Fiji's tourists come from Australia and New Zealand, where foreign travel is strongly discouraged, and travellers from both countries face a two-week quarantine at their own expense upon returning home.

AFP

Afghan women outraged by new Taliban restrictions on work

Kabul, Afghanistan - Fears were mounting in Afghanistan on Monday as the Taliban tightened their grip on women's rights, slashing access to work and denying girls the right to secondary school education.

After pledging a softer version of their brutal and repressive regime of the 1990s, the fundamentalists have been stripping away at freedoms one month after seizing power.

"I may as well be dead," said one woman, who was sacked from her senior role at the Foreign Ministry.

"I was in charge of a whole department and there were many women working with me... now we have all lost our jobs," she told AFP, insisting she not be identified for fear of reprisals.

The acting mayor of the capital Kabul has said any municipal jobs currently held by women would be filled by men.

While the country's new rulers have not issued a formal policy outright banning women from working, directives by individual officials have amounted to their

exclusion from the workplace.

That came after the education ministry ordered male teachers and students back to secondary school at the weekend, but made no mention of the country's millions of women educators and girl pupils.

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

Many Afghan women fear they will never find meaningful employment.

On Monday, World Health Organization (WHO) chief Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus landed in Kabul ahead of talks with the Taliban leadership, as the country's already impoverished health system struggles to function following the suspension of aid.

'When will that be?'

Although still marginalised, Afghan women have fought for



A Taliban fighter watches as Afghan women take part in a demonstration demanding better rights for women, in front of the former Ministry of Women Affairs in Kabul on Sunday (AFP)

and gained basic rights in the past 20 years, becoming lawmakers, judges, pilots and police officers, though mostly limited to large cities.

Hundreds of thousands have entered the workforce - a necessity in some cases as many women were widowed or now

support invalid husbands as a result of two decades of conflict.

But since returning to power on August 15, the Taliban have shown no inclination to honour those rights.

When pressed, Taliban officials say women have been told to stay at home for their own se-

curity but will be allowed to work once proper segregation can be implemented.

"When will that be?" a woman teacher said on Monday.

"This happened last time. They kept saying they would allow us to return to work, but it never happened."

Women in the capital remain deeply suspicious.

"The Taliban told us not to come to work and to wait for their second announcement. But it seems like they don't want women to work again," a lawyer in the capital's high court said.

A colleague fears that because of her past role prosecuting Taliban fighters, she will not be allowed to work again, but has noticed some changes in the regime.

"They are not like before but we don't know if it will last. Before we had to be accompanied by a man, today we can come alone," she added.

During the Taliban's first rule from 1996 to 2001, women were largely excluded from public life including being banned from leaving their homes unless accompanied by a male relative.

In Kabul on Friday, a sign for the Ministry for the Promotion of Virtue and Prevention of Vice was erected at the building housing the old government's Ministry for Women's Affairs building in the capital.

Vice ministry enforcers were notorious for punishing anyone deemed not to be following the Taliban's strict interpretation of Islam.

Businesswoman Khaledi said her shop in Kabul selling Western style clothes was swiftly closed down after the Taliban took control. "They told us that women should not work as shopkeepers or run businesses," the 34-year-old told AFP.

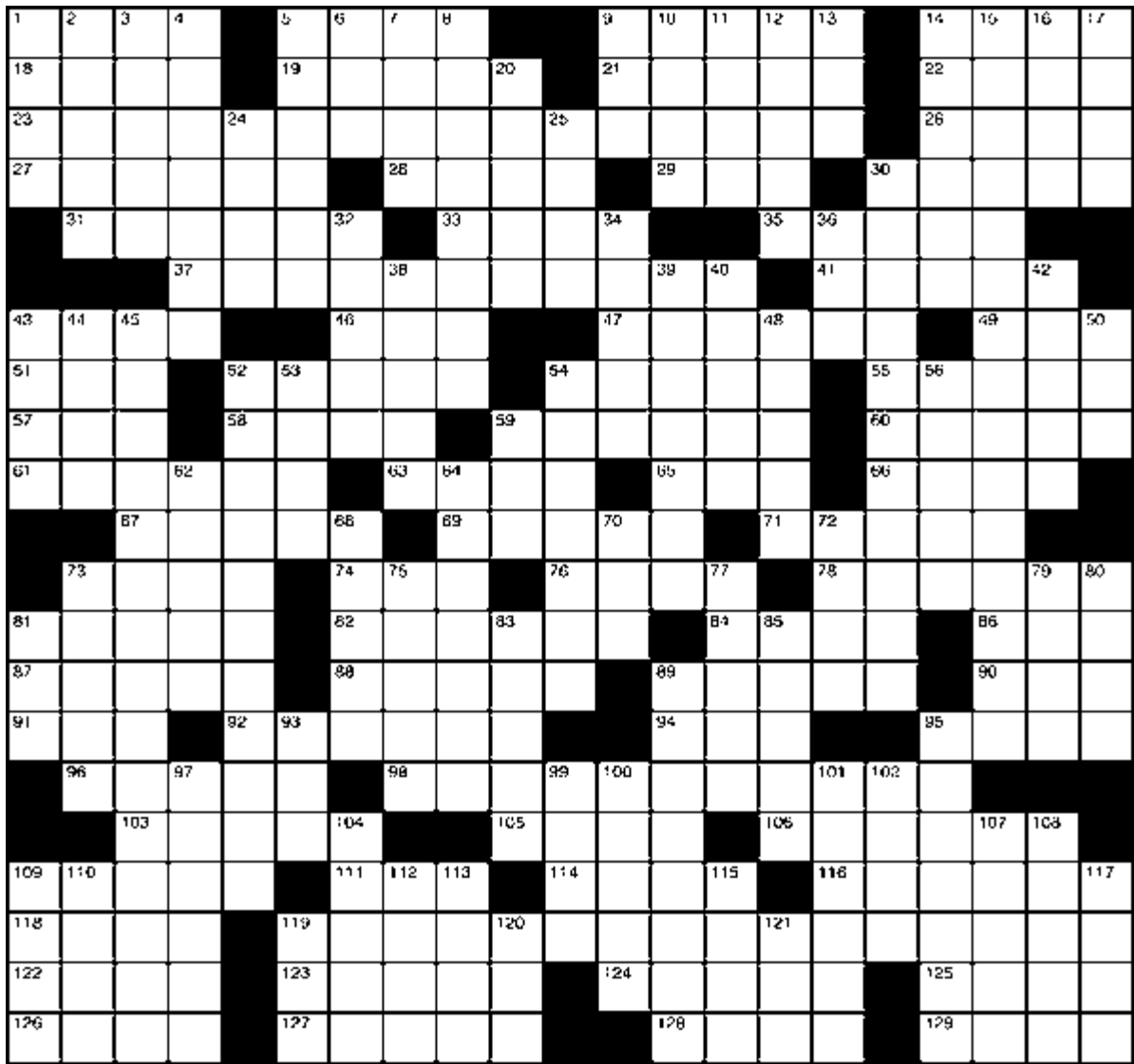
Women have been at the forefront of a number of small, isolated protests, but the Taliban stamped down on dissent, dispersing crowds with gun fire and issuing new rules for demonstrations. No official from the new regime responded on Monday to requests for comment.

In Herat, an education official insisted the issue of girls and women teachers returning to secondary school was a question of time, not policy.

"It is not exactly clear when that will happen: Tomorrow, next week, next month, we don't know," Shahabudin Saqib said.

AFP

DAILY CROSSWORD



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ACROSS
1 Corner sign
5 Popular skirt
9 In flame
14 Not closed tight
18 Tip-top
19 Representative
21 Ascends
22 Type of apple
23 Devilishly bad exposures?
26 DLII + DLII
27 Mick's group
28 Place in a cabinet
29 Shoe width
30 Cooks with hot air
31 Trapper
33 Asian desert
35 "The Great ___ Pepper"
37 Care of horsehair?
41 Avoids work
43 Actor Rob
46 Tiny particle
47 Macadam surface
49 Broadcast
51 Alias, for short
52 North Dakota city
54 Yogi
55 Brian De ___
57 Under the weather
58 Smithsonian, for

short
59 Justice Burger
60 ___ myself
61 Gathering leaves
63 Medical cat?
65 Permanent commitment?
66 Singer Moreno
67 Night adventure
69 Actress Harmon
71 Observer
73 Grill for U.S. Mail mill.
74 Dep. complement
76 Remnants
78 Last exams
81 Wooden pin
82 Fast-food restaurants
84 Pinnacle
86 Day, in Madrid
87 Scorch
88 States positively
89 Dullards
90 "Nightmare" street
91 Dynamic monogram?
92 Disqualified driver
94 Art rocker Brian
95 Concordes
96 Rough rugs
98 Confess to stealing the
103 Accustom
105 Muslim VIP

106 Particular
109 Tan
111 Decay
114 Snaky sea food
116 Gave structure to
118 As well
119 Poppa named Leo, perhaps
122 "The bad news"
123 People of the east
124 Kind of energy
125 Hall of Famer
Slaughter
126 Floating
127 Tree houses
128 "The Seven Little ___"
129 Malodorous
DOWN
1 Enervates
2 Legal wrongs
3 Tearful veggie
4 Professional moniker
5 Actress Osa
6 Here ___ again!
7 Hildegarde of films
8 Impoverished
9 Covenant chest
10 Superior in quality
11 Statement of understanding
12 Make a new seam

13 Tee leader
14 Fleet
15 Versatile athlete?
16 Parisian pal
17 Speeds up
20 Claw
24 Trillion: Comb. form
25 McEntire of country music
30 Legislative getto-gether?
32 Directional controls
34 Before state or collegiate
36 In the manner of
38 Blows a horn
39 Toted
40 Goofed
42 "The Lion King" cub
43 Den
44 Tulsa's st.
45 Marry on Maui?
48 Massenet's tragic heroine
50 Chef Rachael
52 Appalachian baseball organization?
53 TV's Swenson
54 British sausages
56 Foreign
59 Ashen
62 Sale item tag
64 Ring Primo

68 Angry with
70 Election winners
72 "All ___"
73 Nickels and dimes
75 Metal pin
77 River to the Rhone
79 Spirited tune
80 Wal-Mart's Club
81 NY summertime
83 Actress Slezak
85 Mob
89 On ___: speaking for
93 Sci. register
95 Ring training partner
97 Lucinda's country
99 Elbe tributary
100 Kojak and a young Huxtable
101 Alludes
102 At the summit of
104 Wipe out
107 ___ bad mood
108 Encouraged
109 Rhum cake
110 Wallach and Whitney
112 Elevator guy
113 "Take ___!"
115 1944 Allied victory town
117 News room unit
119 Cooler
120 USNA grad
121 Fodder

YOUR DAILY HOROSCOPE

ARIES MARCH 21-APRIL 19
If you're not moving anywhere, it doesn't matter how much drive you have! Today is a day for making the most of your potential. There is too much at stake right now to let other people take control or to let other people tell you what to do. You have a goal, and you have the skills you need to get there. Have confidence in your gut, and trust it to help you make the right choices.

LEO JULY 23-AUGUST 22
You shouldn't speak or act too quickly because you are going to be around people who are quick to judge -- and slow to listen. Not only could they misinterpret your goals, they could start talking to other people and spread news or gossip around that isn't accurate. Also, while your confidence is healthy and well-managed, it could come off as arrogance if you are not careful.

SAGITTARIUS NOVEMBER 22-DECEMBER 21
A battle is brewing between your more cautious and conservative side and your more outrageous and radical side. No matter which side comes out on top, you'll still be fine -- so don't worry, this day will be a win for you. You'll even start to enjoy how your mood swings between being quiet and calm to being boisterous and ready to the hunt for the next party.

TAURUS APRIL 20-MAY 20
It might feel as if you are losing some of your idealism when a harsh truth hits you square in the face, but do not lose sight of your hopes. You can see the better side of people if you choose to, so don't give up. Sure, every once in a while someone will disappoint you with their actions, but that doesn't make them a bad person. You need to give them a second chance.

VIRGO AUGUST 23-SEPTEMBER 22
Today, any first impressions you are going to make will be very important, and your ambition requires you to play along with some political games. Use a classic combination of calm and cool to help you take advantage of a gigantic opportunity when it appears. Don't show how enthusiastic you really are right away. Save that for when you are celebrating later with friends.

CAPRICORN DECEMBER 22-JANUARY 19
If you're putting negative energy into a tricky situation at work or school, then how on earth are you going to ever have a positive outcome? You have to work for the good of everyone, not just yourself, right now. Acting out of spite, jealousy or greed might get you an instant payoff, but farther on down the road it is going to cost you big. So be altruistic in every situation.

GEMINI MAY 21-JUNE 21
You need to slow down. Why are you trying so hard to rush past everyone else? Why get ahead of them? You haven't stopped to realise than once you zoom right by everyone, you'll be all alone! There is much more value to being in sync with the pack right now than in crossing some sort of finish line before the rest of them. You can't think of it as slowing down for the sake of others.

LIBRA SEPTEMBER 23-OCTOBER 22
You may really want to help a friend or coworker who is struggling to keep up right now, but there are limits to what you can do. Don't beat yourself up if you can't make their world as bright as you feel it should be. Everyone goes through tough times, and this person will get through it. More than anything, they just need your support right now.

AQUARIUS JANUARY 20-FEBRUARY 18
You have to listen to your body. If you are feeling tired, then go get some rest. If you're feeling antsy, then go get some exercise! Do whatever your body craves and it will lead you to fulfillment. It's too easy to lose sight of what's best for you when you are always so busy helping others. For a change, how about letting other people cater to your needs? They really would be happy to do it.

CANCER JUNE 22-JULY 22
Today is a great time for you to look ahead toward your future. Start putting some new goals into place, and try to get a little bit more aggressive about achieving them. It's very wise to create attainable goals, but it's only the loftiest goals that can inspire you to stretch yourself in new ways. Time is going to move forward whether you are aware of it or not.

SCORPIO OCTOBER 23-NOVEMBER 21
Your healthy ambition needs to get a little bit more exercise to stay on top of its form -- so how about putting it to work in your personal life? This is a great day to start making powerful improvements in the romantic arena. If your love life is nonexistent, it's a great day to start one! Make sure the actions you take are bold, bright and confident!

PISCES FEBRUARY 19-MARCH 20
Today could be a very productive day, thanks in no small part to all of the generous friends and coworkers who are offering their helping hands. Are you going to accept their contributions? Don't let your ego get in the way of doing something that makes sense, such as calling in some favours or accepting the help that's offered! These people want to help you, so why not let them?



TEST YOUR KNOWLEDGE

1. What furniture item was invented by California furniture designer Charles Prior Hall in 1968?

- a. Sofa bed
- b. Captain's chair
- c. Waterbed
- d. Hammock

2. When was the first lawn mower invented?

- a. Roger Bacon
- b. Karl Benz
- c. Dr Alan M Turing
- d. Otto

3. In which decade were the first successful diode and triode vacuum tubes invented?

- a. 1800s
- b. 1880s
- c. 1890s
- d. 1900s

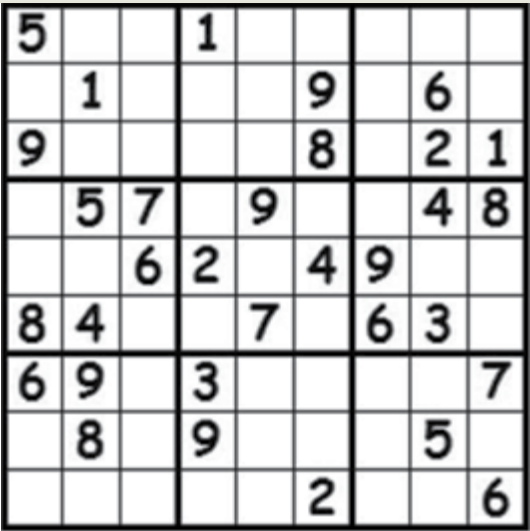
Answers: 1. c, 2. a, 3. d

KIDS COLOURING



DO YOU SUDOKU?

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



BOGGLER



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

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

SUDOKU EASY ANSWER



DAILY CROSSWORD ANSWERS (SEPTEMBER 20)



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



CLONING CAMELS

Beauty

and the beast

Beauty pageants, races, spur high demand for cloning ‘good looking’ camels in the Gulf

Cloning is in high demand in the competitive world of camel beauty pageants, leaving scientists at a Dubai clinic working round the clock to produce carbon-copy beasts.

Not every animal is blessed with sought-after drooping lips and a tall, elegant neck, but technology now allows wealthy clients to replace their most beautiful camel with one just like it.

At the Reproductive Biotechnology Center, with views of the UAE city’s towering skyscrapers, scientists pore over microscopes while dozens of cloned camels roam outside.

“We have so much demand for cloning camels that we are not able to keep up,” the centre’s scientific director Nisar Wani told AFP.

Beauty pageants are not the only driver of the camel cloning industry. Many customers want to reproduce racing camels, or animals that produce large amounts of milk.

Botox and filler scandals

But ‘beauty queens’ are the most popular order. Gulf clients are prepared to pay anything between 200,000 and 400,000 dirham (\$54,500-\$109,000) to duplicate a dromedary.

The camels are paraded at dusty race-tracks around the region and scrutinised by judges, with occasional discoveries of Botox and cosmetic fillers adding a spice of scandal to the high-stakes contests.

Saud Al-Otaibi, who runs a camel auction in Kuwait, said customers’ judgement



“We have so much demand for cloning camels that we are not able to keep up. We are now producing more than 10 to 20 babies a year”

NISAR WANI

of the animals’ looks is key to his business. “The price of the camel is determined according to its beauty, health, and how well known the breed is,” he told AFP.

When it comes to young animals, customers are keen on seeing the mother to determine its beauty before buying the camel, he added.

First cloned camel

Twelve years ago, Dubai claimed the world’s first cloned camel. Injaz, a female whose name means achievement in Arabic, was born on April 8, 2009, after more than five years of work by Wani and others. From the minute Injaz was born, there was no going back.

“We are now producing plenty, maybe more than 10 to 20 babies every year. This year we have 28 pregnancies (so far), last

year we had 20,” Wani said with pride.

The centre is churning out racing champions, high milk-producing animals, and winners of beauty contests called ‘Beauty Queens’, said Wani, sitting in a lab next to the preserved body of a cloned camel in a glass container.

Known as ‘ships of the desert’, and once used for transport across the sands of the Arab peninsula, camels are symbols of traditional Gulf culture.

Now, after being replaced by gas-guzzling SUVs as the main mode of transport, they are used for racing, meat, and milk.

“We have cloned some she-camels that produce more than 35 litres of milk a day,” said Wani, compared to an average of five litres in normal camels.

Camel milk is commonly found next to regular milk at supermarkets in the Gulf

while meat products, such as camel carpaccio, are served in fancy restaurants.

Super stimulation

Cloning dogs, cows and horses is popular in many countries, although animal rights groups say the process causes undue suffering to the animals that provide the egg cells and carry embryos.

With orders flying into the cloning clinics in the United Arab Emirates, the only such facilities in the Gulf, scientists have developed new techniques to keep up with the pace.

Female camels only give birth to one calf every two years, including a gestation period of 13 months. But breeding centres use a surrogacy technique to increase the number of offspring, whether from cloning or traditional breeding.

“In this process, which we call multiple ovulation and embryo transfer, we super-stimulate the champion females and breed them with champion males,” explained Wani.

“We collect the embryos from these females after seven to eight days and then we put them in surrogate mothers, which are very ordinary animals.”

Alternatively, cloned camels can be created by placing DNA from cells in the desired animal’s ovaries into eggs taken from the surrogate mothers. These mothers carry the babies to term, and instead of producing one baby at a time in a year, produce many more.

Cloning is not just for those who want to own elite camels. Sometimes, clients simply want to reproduce a beloved animal after a sudden death.

Wani, who started working at the clinic in 2003, said his proudest moment was the birth of Injaz - and the worst time was her death this year. It was the saddest moment.”

AFP



Pele ‘punching the air’ and getting ‘better every day’

Sao Paulo, Brazil - Brazilian football legend Pele said on Sunday he is 'punching the air' to celebrate 'every better day' after the 80-year-old suffered his latest health scare.

"As you can see, I'm punching the air in celebration of every better day," Pele wrote on Instagram beside a photograph of him sitting in a hospital chair, watched over by two medical staff.

The three-time World Cup winner was on Friday briefly transferred back to an intensive care unit at the Albert Einstein Hospital in Sao Paulo, where he underwent surgery earlier this month, after suffering breathing difficulties.

"A good mood is the best medicine and I have plenty of that. It couldn't be different," he added on Sunday.

"I have received so much

affection that my heart is full of gratitude. Thanks to all the amazing staff at Albert Einstein Hospital!"

His condition had been described as stable.

Pele's daughter Kely Nascimento also posted a photo of herself next to her father in the hospital on Friday, seeking to cheer up his fans.

On September 6, the hospital said Pele had undergone surgery

for a suspected colon tumour.

"This is the normal recovery scenario for a man his age. After an operation like this, sometimes you take two steps forward, one step back," Nascimento wrote on Instagram.

"Yesterday he was tired and he took a step back. Today, he has taken two steps forward," she added.

AFP



Brazilian legend Pele is seen with two medical staff in this Instagram photo he posted on Sunday

TENNIS ROUND-UP



Naomi Osaka

Japan's Osaka drops out of top-five in rankings

WTA RANKINGS

Paris, France - Naomi Osaka slipped out of the top five in the WTA rankings on Monday while Simona Halep, another former world No 1, continued her slide by also dropping three places.

Four-time Grand Slam champion Osaka fell from fifth to eighth as Halep, who married boyfriend Toni Iuruc last week in a civil ceremony in

her hometown of Constanta, tumbled down to 14th.

Ashleigh Barty remains top and French Open winner Barbora Krejickova climbed to a career high of fifth.

Danish teenager Clara Tauson rose 18 places to 52nd after capturing her second title of the year in Luxembourg. Italy's Jasmine Paolini jumped from 87th to 64th following her first WTA title in Slovenia.

WTA RANKINGS [AS OF SEPTEMBER 20]:

1 Ashleigh Barty (10,075 pts), 2 Aryna Sabalenka (7,720), 3 Karolina Pliskova (5,315), 4 Elina Svitolina (4,860), 5 Barbora Krejickova (4,668), 6 Iga Swiatek (4,571), 7 Sofia Kenin (4,413), 8 Naomi Osaka (4,326), 9 Garbine Muguruza (4,135), 10 Petra Kvitova (4,060).

AFP

Tired Kvitova pulls out of Billie Jean King Cup finals in Nov

Prague, Czech Republic - Two-time Wimbledon champion Petra Kvitova said Sunday she would not play the Billie Jean King Cup finals in November as she needs rest.

The rebranded Fed Cup tournament will be held on indoor hard courts at the O2 Arena in Prague on November 1-6 after the Czech capital replaced Budapest as the host city earlier this year.

"I have told the team captain I wouldn't play. I'll play two or three tournaments in the rest of the season and then I need to rest," said the 31-year-old Czech. "This year has been tough mentally and physically, I've had lots of injuries and my body can't cope with it anymore," added the world No 10.

"Of course, this decision wasn't easy, but I have to think about myself, I'm not the youngest one," Kvitova told



Petra Kvitova

reporters from the eastern Czech city of Ostrava.

The Wimbledon champion from 2011 and 2014 was a part of the Czech Republic team which won six of the last nine Fed Cup editions. The maiden Billie Jean King Cup was due to be played in Budapest last year, but it did not happen because of the COVID-19 pandemic.

"We've got young girls and I believe they will take care of it," Kvitova said. "Of course I would like to play but I need my time off in order to manage the next few seasons."

The Czechs face Germany and Switzerland in the group stage of the Billie Jean King Cup finals.

AFP



A file photo of action during a Rugby Union Test match between New Zealand and South Africa

Barrett expects Boks to 'rise to challenge' in centenary Test

RUGBY CHAMPIONSHIP

Brisbane, Australia - The All Blacks are eager to claim bragging rights over the world champion Springboks but expect a much-improved South Africa performance in Townsville this weekend, fly-half Beauden Barrett said on Monday.

The Rugby Championship fifth-round clash on Saturday will be the 100th Test between the southern hemisphere heavyweights and Barrett said the New Zealanders were keenly aware of the fixture's history.

It will also be the first time in a decade the All Blacks have faced a reigning world champion, which Barrett admitted added spice to the occasion.

"It's been a while since we played the Boks and the first time for me personally and any of the team playing against the world champs," he told reporters.

"It's a rivalry that has a long tradition and lots of very memorable games, there's a proud history and I can't wait to hopefully



Beauden Barrett of New Zealand (AFP)

play the 100th on the weekend."

South Africa were world champions when they played New Zealand in the Tri-Nations in 2011, before the All Blacks claimed back-to-back titles.

The teams have contrasting fortunes heading into Saturday's match, with the All Blacks undefeated in this year's tournament and regaining the world No 1 ranking, while the Boks have

lost twice to Australia.

Barrett did not believe the South Africans' recent disappointments would have any bearing on Saturday's match.

"We're playing the world champions - we know they'll rise to the occasion and be a lot better than they've been in recent weeks," Barrett said.

Lock Brodie Retallick said dealing with South Africa's rush

defence would be crucial.

"Where they've caught us out the last couple of times was their line speed defensively," said Retallick.

"They've outmuscled us, we haven't been able to break them down through our attack and they've punished us.

"So you've always got the set-piece battle but dealing with that line speed and being able to hurt them is going to be massive."

Retallick said the All Blacks would concentrate on producing their trademark free-flowing game rather than playing the game at South Africa's pace.

"It's two completely different styles," he said.

"From our point of view, it's what we do with the ball. We don't want to get caught up in going set-piece to set-piece.

"With the freedom the boys are playing with, using the ball and creating opportunities, there's no doubt about how we want to play our game."

AFP

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BIRTHDAY WISHES

DHRUV
September 21

Happy Birthday Dear Dhruv.
God bless you!
From: Mum, Dad and Aaji

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FOOTBALL ROUND-UP

Benzema strikes again as Real down Valencia

SPANISH LEAGUE
Madrid, Spain - Real Madrid moved to the top of La Liga on Sunday after scoring twice in two minutes to pull off an incredible late comeback against Valencia.

Valencia looked set for victory at Mestalla when Hugo Duro scored against his former club in the second half but the in-form Vinicius Junior equalised in the 86th minute before Karim Benzema headed home in the 88th for a 2-1 away win.

Real Madrid remain unbeaten this term, having now won five and drawn one of their first six matches in all competitions under returning coach Carlo Ancelotti.

"We didn't win through quality, we won through spirit," said Ancelotti.

"I have a young team and I cannot say we are playing spectacular football - we have to improve our defensive game, be more aggressive - but I think with this spirit we will fix it."

Valencia, who stay third, have also enjoyed a strong start under new coach Jose Bordalas but leave hugely disappointed not to have taken three points from this game, let alone one.

Madrid sit two ahead of Atletico Madrid after Atletico were held to a goalless draw by Athletic Bilbao on Saturday, and six in front of Barcelona, who have two games in hand, the first against Granada on Monday night.

Benzema already has six goals this season but the real bonus for



Real Madrid's coach Carlo Ancelotti (L) greets Karim Benzema as they celebrate their win over Valencia at the Mestalla stadium in Valencia on Sunday

Ancelotti has been the form of Vinicius, who has five goals himself, already more than the 21-year-old managed in the whole of the last campaign.

"They were both fantastic," Ancelotti said.

OTHER RESULTS:
Mallorca 0 Villarreal 0, Real Sociedad 0 Sevilla 0, Real Betis 2 Espanyol 2.

GERMAN LEAGUE
Wolfsburg held
Berlin, Germany - Wolfsburg lost their 100 per cent record on Sunday, missing the chance to regain top spot in the Bundesliga as their 1-1 home draw against Eintracht Frankfurt meant defending champions Bayern Munich finish the weekend first in the table on goal difference.

After winning their four previ-

ous league games, Wolfsburg's draw leaves them level on 13 points, but second on goal difference behind Bayern, who beat Bochum 7-0 on Saturday.

Earlier, Erling Braut Haaland scored with a stunning lob as his two-goal haul helped Borussia Dortmund hold off Union Berlin with a 4-2 home win to go third, a point behind Bayern and Wolfsburg.

Haaland, 21, chipped the ball over the Union goalkeeper from the edge of the area seven minutes from time to see off Union who had fought back with second-half goals. "Erling is simply a goal-hunting machine. When he sees a chance to put the ball in the net, his eyes light up and a fire is lit," Dortmund defender Mats Hummels told DAZN.

AFP



PSG's Mauro Icardi celebrates after scoring against Lyon at the Parc des Princes Stadium in Paris on Sunday (AFP)

Icardi's winner in PSG's win as Messi makes home bow

FRENCH LEAGUE
Paris, France - Lionel Messi had a lively home debut for Paris Saint-Germain (PSG) but it was his compatriot Mauro Icardi who scored a dramatic stoppage-time winner as the Ligue 1 leaders edged Lyon 2-1 on Sunday.

Messi outshone his teammates in PSG's all-star attack for much of the game at the Parc des Princes but he had been taken off by the time substitute Icardi headed in a cross from the left to secure the win.

The excellent Lucas Paqueta gave Lyon the lead in the 54th minute, before Neymar won and then converted from the spot midway through the second half (66th minute). "We deserved our victory, even if it was in the last second," insisted PSG coach Mauricio Pochettino.

However, the fact this was a contest might surprise many who expect PSG to run away with the Ligue 1 title this season and perhaps even go all the way in the Champions League.

Nevertheless, they were disappointing in drawing 1-1 with Club Brugge in Belgium in midweek in Messi's first start for the club and they were given a run for their money by Peter Bosz's Lyon.

Yet Icardi - in many ways the forgotten man of the PSG attack - allowed his side to make it six wins from six in Ligue 1 this season and they are now five points clear at the top from Marseille.

That gap will surely widen as the weeks go by. Lyon, for all their good intentions here, are already ten points behind the leaders in ninth place.

"It was a cruel defeat," said coach Peter Bosz. "We made a real match of it and showed we were not afraid of losing."

Three games into his Paris career Messi is still looking for his first goal, but he was unfortunate not to find the net in the first half when everything PSG did went through the six-time *Ballon d'Or* winner.

Neymar, Kylian Mbappe and Angel di Maria were all on the field too but - unfortunately for such a superstar attack - there is only one ball and it seemed to be drawn to Messi's feet. He was set up by Mbappe for a shot that was saved by Anthony Lopes in the 17th minute. Then he combined with Neymar for another effort that was turned behind, and soon after the Argentine cracked a free-kick from almost 30m off the junction of post.

AFP

AC Milan stalemate piles on misery for Juventus



AC Milan's Fikayo Tomori (L) fights for the ball with Juventus' Moise Kean during the Italian League match in Turin, on Sunday (AFP)

ITALIAN LEAGUE
Milan, Italy - Juventus were left struggling in the unlikely surroundings of Serie A's bottom three on Sunday after a 1-1 draw with AC Milan kept them searching for a first league win this season.

Alvaro Morata's fourth-minute goal gave Juve the lead but Ante Rebic headed in a 76th-minute equaliser as Milan ended the weekend in second on goal

difference behind rivals Inter who beat Bologna 6-1 on Saturday.

Milan could have won the match in the dying moments but Juve keeper Wojciech Szczesny pulled off a brilliant point-blank save to deny Pierre Kalulu.

Juventus, still reeling from the departure of Cristiano Ronaldo to Manchester United, are 18th with just two points from four games with only Cagliari and Salernitana propping them up.

Coach Massimiliano Allegri had harsh words for some of his stars. "You have to be determined, to bring home the tackle, keep focused. This is part of the general growth process of some players," he said.

Roma dropped their first points in Serie A under Jose Mourinho as Verona came from behind to earn new coach Igor Tudor a 3-2 victory on his debut.

Lorenzo Pellegrini's clever backheel flick gave visitors Roma a half-time lead. Antonin Barak equalised for Verona shortly after the interval and Gianluca Caprari put the hosts ahead with a precise finish five minutes later.

Ivan Ilic turned a Pellegrini cross into his own goal to bring Roma level before the hour, but Davide Faraoni's brilliant volley secured the win for Verona to halt a run of three straight losses.

Roma's city rivals Lazio needed a late goal from Danilo Cataldi to salvage a 2-2 draw at home to Cagliari.

AFP

Sometimes players don't like it: Pochettino on Messi substitution

Paris, France - PSG coach Mauricio Pochettino defended his decision to take off Lionel Messi as the former Barcelona man made his home debut in Sunday's Ligue 1 game against Lyon.

Messi was outstanding in the first half at the Parc des Princes but began to fade from the game after the break and was replaced by Achraf Hakimi for the final quarter of an hour with the score 1-1 at the time. PSG won 2-1.

"Everyone knows we have great players, a squad of 35. It is my decision. We can only have 11 players on the

field at one time," Pochettino said.

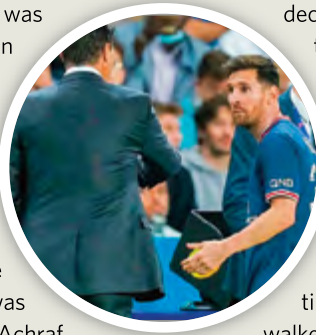
"I only think about the best decision in each game, for each player, just as every coach does.

"We are here to make decisions. Sometimes people will be happy with them, sometimes they won't be."

Messi appeared to reject Pochettino's hand as he walked past his coach towards the Paris bench.

Pochettino dismissed any suggestion the six-time *Ballon d'Or* winner was unhappy, saying, "I asked him how he was and he said he was fine."

AFP



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QUOTE OF THE DAY
Over the next three years I want to be the best finisher in the world

Marcus Stoinis
Delhi Capitals allrounder



OUTSIDE IPL

T20 World Cup: BCCI transfers ticketing rights to Oman Cricket and ECB

Mumbai, India -The Board of Control for Cricket in India (BCCI) on Monday said that it has decided to transfer the ticketing rights of the ICC T20 World Cup to Oman Cricket (OC) and Emirates Cricket Board (ECB), according to an ANI report.

The BCCI also revealed the compensation it is paying the ECB and OC for hosting the mega event. All the money which will be generated through the sales of the ticket would now be taken by the OC and ECB boards. The tournament was originally going to be held in India, but COVID-19 threat meant the tournament was shifted to Oman and the UAE.

"BCCI is paying ECB a fixed fee of US\$1.5mn (from hosting fee of US\$13.5mn) and operational costs of US\$5.5mn which will be covered by ICC. The total fee payable is US\$7mn," a BCCI official said.

"Oman Cricket, which will host six T20 World Cup first round matches at the Oman Cricket Academy Ground, including the opening match on October 17, will be paid a fixed fee of US\$400,000," the official added.

25th Gulf Cup in Basra postponed to January, 2023

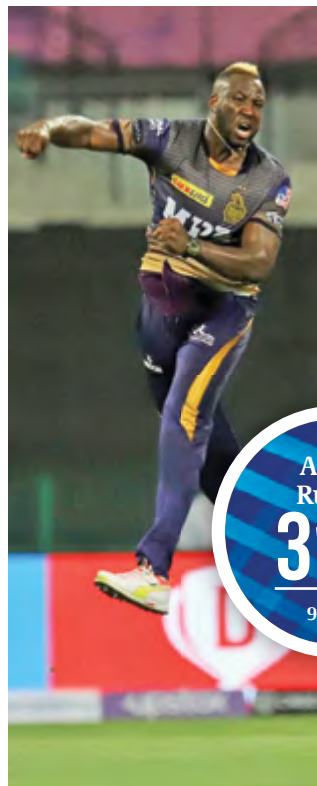
Muscat - The Arabian Gulf Cup Football Federation (AGCFF) announced on Monday that the 25th edition of the Gulf Cup, which was due to be held in the Iraqi city of Basra, has been postponed to January 2023.

The decision was taken at the executive meeting of the AGCFF, which was held virtually on Monday. The 25th Gulf Cup was due to be held from December, 24 2021-January 7, 2022.

The meeting also appointed Oman Football Association (OFA) chairman Sheikh Salim al Wahaibi as the AGCFF vice-president. The OFA chief succeeds former OFA vice-president Jassim al Shukaili at the post.

In another decision, it was also decided to extend the term of the current executive office until May 2023.

KKR CRUSH RCB



Andre Russell
3 WKTS
9 RUNS



Varun Chakaravathy
3 WKTS
13 RUNS

SCOREBOARD	
ROYAL CHALLENGERS BANGALORE	
V Kohli	lbw b P Krishna 5 (4)
D Padikkal	c Karthik b Ferguson 22 (20)
S Bharat	c Gill b Russell 16 (19)
G Maxwell	b Chakaravathy 10 (17)
AB de Villiers	b Russell 0 (1)
S Baby	c Rana b Chakaravathy 7 (17)
W Hasaranga	lbw b Chakaravathy 0 (1)
K Jamieson	run out 4 (12)
H Patel	b Ferguson 12 (10)
M Siraj	c Chakaravathy b Russell 8 (10)
Y Chahal	not out 2 (6)
Extras	(lb 2, nb 3, w 1) 6
TOTAL:	92 in 19 overs
Fall of wickets: 1-10, 2-41, 3-51, 4-52, 5-63, 6-63, 7-66, 8-76, 9-83, 10-92	
Bowling: V Chakaravathy 4-0-13-3, P Krishna 4-0-24-1, L Ferguson 4-0-24-2, S Narine 4-0-20-0, A Russell 3-0-9-3	
KOLKATA KNIGHT RIDERS	
S Gill	c Siraj b Chahal 48 (34)
V Iyer	not out 41 (27)
A Russell	not out 0 (1)
Extras	(nb 1, w 4) 5
TOTAL:	94 for one in 10 overs
Fall of wickets: 1-82	
Bowling: M Siraj 2-0-12-0, K Jamieson 2-0-26-0, W Hasaranga 2-0-20-0, Y Chahal 2-0-23-1, H Patel 2-0-13-0	

TODAY'S MATCH



DUBAI, 6PM

POINTS TABLE

TEAMS	P	W	L	NR	PTS	NRR
CSK	8	6	2	0	12	+1.223
DC	8	6	2	0	12	+0.547
RCB	8	5	2	0	10	-0.706
MI	8	4	4	0	8	-0.071
KKR	8	3	5	0	6	+0.110
RR	7	3	4	0	6	-0.190
PBKS	8	3	5	0	6	-0.368
SRH	7	1	6	0	2	-0.623

P: Played, **W:** Won, **L:** Lost, **NR:** No Result, **PTS:** Points, **NRR:** Net Run-Rate

CSK: Chennai Super Kings
DC: Delhi Capitals
KKR: Kolkata Knight Riders
PBKS: Kings XI Punjab
MI: Mumbai Indians
RR: Rajasthan Royals
SRH: Sunrisers Hyderabad

Forgettable evening for Kohli in his 200th IPL match for Bangalore

KOLKATA VS BANGALORE

Dubai, UAE - Virat Kohli's Royal Challengers Bangalore (RCB) suffered a crushing nine-wicket loss to Kolkata Knight Riders (KKR) on Monday a day after he announced to step down as captain at the end of this IPL.

It remained an unforgettable evening for Kohli who fell for five

in his 200th IPL match and Bangalore were skittled out for 92 with Kolkata spinner Varun Chakaravathy returning figures of three for 13 in Abu Dhabi.

The 32-year-old Kohli, who put out a video message of his captaincy exit on the opening day of the revived IPL on Sunday, is still searching for Bangalore's

first title win in the T20 tournament.

"Sometimes it can take you a game, I hope not two, to get into the tournament, you have to stay with the eight-ball, if you're not, the other teams will be all over you," Kohli said after his team's first match of the UAE leg.

Kohli, who last week announced his decision also to quit India's T20 captaincy at the end of the T20 World Cup in October-November, has been under close scrutiny as a

leader in recent months.

His record without a title is often compared to India's vice-captain Rohit Sharma who has secured five IPL crowns for holders Mumbai Indians.

RCB were at the receiving end of an inspired Kolkata bowling performance with Chakaravathy and Andre Russell taking three wickets each to flatten the opposition batting.

Seam bowler Prasidh Krishna took down Kohli, trapped lbw after the skipper opened the

batting with Devdutt Padikkal who top-scored with 22.

Bangalore lost regular wickets to Chakaravathy's mystery spin that got key batsman including Australia's Glenn Maxwell for ten and Sri Lankan import Wanindu Hasaranga for nought.

"Pretty good from Varun, he's going to be a key factor when he plays for India," Kohli said of the spinner who is included in India's World Cup squad.

"It's great guys who've got the opportunity to play at the

international level. He's someone who is going to play in the near future for India, it's a great sign."

Shubman Gill, who made 48, and debutant Venkatesh Iyer, who hit an unbeaten 41 off 27 balls, then put on 82 for the first wicket as Kolkata chased down their target in just ten overs.

The Eoin Morgan-led side need to win five of their remaining six matches to stay in the race for a play-off spot.

AFP

Oman drub USA, stay on top

Ashok Purohit
Muscat

ICC WCL 2 TRI SERIES

OMAN VS USA

Oman bounced back in style after Sunday's loss to Nepal as they trounced the USA by 72 runs to conclude the first of the back-to-back ICC World Cricket League (WCL) 2 tri-series in style at the Oman Cricket Academy Ground on Monday.

With the win, Oman have recorded 11 victories out of the 14 matches played and remain on top of the WCL 2 standings with 22 points in the seven-team competition. The USA stay second with 14 from 16 games and Nepal are fourth with eight from eight matches.

On Monday, Oman, put to bat, put up a strong total, courtesy contributions from top order to tailenders.

Opener Jatinder Singh (42), debutant Pruthvikumar Macchi (25), allrounder Ayaan Khan (41), skipper Zeeshan Maqsood (53), Sandeep Goud (25) and Naseem Khushi (35) helped the hosts score 274 for seven. Nosthush Kenjige took three for 49.

In reply, the USA were



Oman's Ayaan Khan (L) receives the man-of-the-match trophy from Oman Cricket chairman Pankaj Khimji on Monday

struggling early as they were down to 22 for two in eight overs.

Only Monank Patel (56) and Gajanand Singh (48) put up some resistance as Oman bowlers - Ayaan and Khawar Ali - bagged four and three wickets each respectively. Bilal Khan, Maqsood and Kaleemullah took one wicket each. It was Khawar's first match of the tri-series fol-

lowing his recovery from injury.

Oman's show in the first WCL tri-series after the COVID-19 break, where they lost just one out of the four matches, will be heartening for Oman coach Duleep Mendis as he gets his team ready for the T20 World Cup. They beat the USA in both the matches and won one and lost another to Nepal.



Pruthvikumar Macchi (R) receives his Oman cap on his ODI debut from skipper Zeeshan Maqsood

Mendis will hope that his boys continue their winning momentum when the second tri-series begins on September 25. Scotland and Papua New Guinea will be the other teams in the fray. Both the teams will also be in Oman's first round Group B along with Bangladesh in the ICC T20 World Cup, which begins in Muscat on October 17.

Brief scores: Oman 274-7 in 50 overs (Maqsood 53, Jatinder 42, Ayaan 41, Khushi 35) beat USA 202 in 39.5 overs (Monank 56, Gajanand 48; Khawar 3-39, Ayaan 4-36).

@ashokmuscat

England withdraw from Pakistan tour

London, UK - England's scheduled tour of Pakistan for two T20Is in mid-October has been cancelled, the England and Wales Cricket Board (ECB) announced on Monday.

England's men and women were due to play T20I double-headers in Rawalpindi on October 13 and 14, with the women's team staying on for a subsequent three-match ODI series.

But following New Zealand's last-minute withdrawal from their tour of the country due to a security threat, the fixtures have been scrapped.

The ECB use the same security consultants - ESI Security - as New Zealand Cricket and despite Wasim Khan, the Pakistan Cricket Board (PCB) chief executive, insisting on Sunday that he expected the fixtures to go ahead as scheduled, they were immediately in doubt.

The ECB released a statement on Monday afternoon confirming that its

board had 'reluctantly decided to withdraw both teams from the October trip', citing 'increasing concerns about travelling to the region' and the prospect of adding 'further pressure to a playing group who have already coped with a long period of operating in restricted COVID-19 environments'.

"The mental and physical well-being of our players and support staff remains our highest priority and this is even more critical given the times we are currently living in.

"We know there are increasing concerns about travelling to the region and believe that going ahead will add further pressure to a playing group who have already coped with a long period of operating in restricted COVID-19 environments.

Ramiz Raja, the newly-appointed PCB chairman, accused the ECB of 'failing a member of their cricket fraternity when it needed it most'.

Cricinfo



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Dav Whatmore, World Cup-winning coach of Sri Lanka, believes hosts Oman will have the home advantage and a good chance to advance into Super 12s when they compete in the T20 World Cup next month

Ashok Purohit
Muscat

Victories at the World Cup and a title glory at the highest level is something this man not only knows about but has experienced the sheer joy of the holding the ultimate trophy in his own hands. Dav Whatmore is no stranger to World Cup and cricket and the respect the journeyman coach has earned around the world over the past 25 years is underlined by the success of his career.

The Sri Lanka-born former Australian Test cricketer guided Sri Lanka to World Cup glory in 1996 and then was coach of the India's U19 team when they boys, led by current India skipper Virat Kohli, won the U19 World Cup in Malaysia. Since the early 1990s, he has coached national teams of Pakistan, Bangladesh, Zimbabwe, Singapore and Nepal.

Whatmore, who has an illustrious coaching career, is currently in Muscat and formally ended his tenure as Nepal coach on Sunday with his team giving him a fitting farewell gift by defeating hosts Oman in the World Cricket League (WCL) 2 at the Oman Academy Cricket Ground.

The match marked the culmination of Whatmore's tenure and he now heads to India where he is set to become the head coach of Baroda Ranji Trophy team.

In an exclusive chat with *Muscat Daily* on Monday, ahead of his departure to the western state of Ahmedabad in India, Whatmore spoke at length on various issues but began by wishing hosts Oman good luck for the forthcoming ICC Men's T20 World Cup.

The 67-year-old experienced coach said, "We have to doff our hats on what Oman has achieved in recent times.

"They have qualified for the T20 World Cup for the second time and have risen high in world rankings. So to achieve it means they have something that suits

their play in the shortest format.

"What I have seen with this 50-over side, which I have been told is the core for the T20 World Cup, they are also a bit more power-oriented squad.

"Of course, they are a bit of an ageing side. They have a power game, technically suited more for T20 and a bit for 50-over game. Like most Associates, the players lack little ability to be patient in the middle of the game. They have a reasonable attack and with return of allrounder Khawar Ali for the World Cup, they will have a decent attack.

"If the opposition lowers their guard, then they will get punched by Oman. So, I wouldn't be surprised to see some results go in favour of Oman at the T20 World Cup."

Bangladesh, the side which he coached for four years and guided them to a historic win against India in the Cricket World Cup in 2007, Scotland and Papua New Guinea (PNG) are pooled with Oman in the first round Group B and the top-two will advance to Super 12s.

Whatmore said, "Oman stand a chance, and why not, a good chance. They have the advantage of playing at home and in their own conditions. The recent T20 series victory over Mumbai will also give them a good confidence. It would be great for Associate nations like Oman to make an impact at the upcoming World Cup."

He praised the efforts of

Oman Cricket (OC) chairman Pankaj Khimji, OC secretary Madhu Jesrani and OC's chief development officer and head coach Duleep Mendis in the growth of the game.

"Pankaj and Madhu, have done an amazing job for Oman Cricket and with Duleep's deep knowledge, Oman have progressed well," he said.

Bats for Associates

The Australian, who has now settled in Sri Lanka, the country of his birth, was emphatic in

the game healthy across the world.

"There should be more encouragement and little bit more professionalism. Like in this ongoing WCL 2 tri-series here in Muscat, it is strange that there is no option of a decision review system (DRS). We need to limit the on-field errors."

Whatmore was satisfied with his stint with Nepal and said though it is 'always a sad feeling' to leave, as a professional coach, this is 'how life is and the nature of the beast'.

If the opposition lowers their guard, then they will get punched by Oman. So, I wouldn't be surprised to see some results go in favour of Oman at the T20 World Cup

DAV WHATMORE

seeking more support for Associate nations in the ICC.

"The Associate nations need to be given more opportunities at the top-level. I do know there will be a mis-match when the heavyweights take on Associate nations. But ICC should give them the chance to develop.

"Associates need to be supported more by the ICC. I have been with Nepal for less than a year but given the enthusiasm and the talent among the players, I think ICC should show a bit more care. Of course, there is a cost involved, but by supporting it is keeping

He said, "I was there with Nepal for around nine months. I take away good memories.

"We didn't have many games to play but I am overall satisfied with how the team progressed. We had a decent outing here in the WCL 2, winning two and losing two.

"The game on Sunday against Oman was good and intense and the boys did well in the win against the USA.

"I was pleasantly surprised with the potential of players in Nepal where there is no proper mainstream domestic competition. Recently, the team has

climbed up the ICC ladder. There have been major contributions from Paras Khadka (former skipper) and Gyanendra Malla (Nepal captain), who were instrumental in their rise."

Whatmore added, "The main frustration for me in Nepal was lack of competitions."

WI power-hitters

With the T20 World Cup to begin at the Oman Cricket Academy Ground on October 17, Whatmore said that the T20 global showpiece is a volatile competition and predictions on who would be favourites are difficult to make.

"Once the early games begin we would get to know about the trend and it is better to speak about the favourites then. This format is all about power hitters, and for me, holders West Indies are right up there.

"West Indies do well in power game. With hitters like skipper Kieron Pollard, Chris Gayle and Andre Russell, they have enough power on their side."

Whatmore agreed that India will also be one of the favoured teams as the players are now competing in the IPL in the UAE, the venue for the T20 World Cup.

"That will certainly help and they are a strong side along with England and New Zealand. Australia can't be counted out but it is a format where a lot matters who plays better on that day."

@ashokmuscat



Nepal's Karan KC (L) receives the man-of-the-match award from Dav Whatmore after Nepal's win over Oman on Sunday

Whatmore all set to take over as Baroda coach

Ashok Purohit
Muscat

Putting all speculations to rest, Dav Whatmore confirmed on Monday that he is going to take up his next assignment as head coach of Baroda Ranji team in India.

In his exclusive remarks to *Muscat Daily*, a day after his tenure as Nepal chief coach ended with a win over Oman in an WCL 2 tri-series match, Whatmore said, "Yes, I am heading to Baroda. We have been in touch for the past year and a half. But due to COVID-19, the whole process to take up the assignment as head coach got delayed.

"It will be a one-year deal with Baroda and I am looking forward to guide them to a successful season. I am excited to be back in India, where I have had few memorable stints in the past."

Baroda are one of the most successful teams in Ranji Trophy in the new millennium

with five titles to their credit and are last season's runner-up in the Syed Mushtaq Ali Trophy, India's domestic T20 championship.

"It is a fresh challenge and I am ready for it," he said.

In India, Whatmore had previously worked with the National Cricket Academy and was also the national U19 coach in 2008. He was also the coach of Kerala Ranji Trophy team for two seasons (2017-19).

The former Bangladesh, Zimbabwe and Pakistan head coach also worked with IPL team - Kolkata Knight Riders - for two seasons from 2010.

Asked if he would like to return to IPL, Whatmore said, "I am open to all options. But at the moment, I have taken the responsibility of Baroda team. I am still fit at 67 to work for few more years and I love my job. I would like to continue coaching till I feel I am no longer interested."

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A recent photo of Oman T20 squad with coach Duleep Mendis (second from left) after their T20 series win over Mumbai

Photo by Bishal: Twitter



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