



WEDNESDAY, 18 AUGUST 2021
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33°C/28°C

ALL THE TEAMS ARE REALLY COMPETITIVE: ILYAS
GO TO PAGE 16 SPORTS

MEGA SALE

Oman Vision 2040
Implementation Follow-up
Unit plans 'mega sales' similar
to US's Black Friday and
China's Singles' Day

Shaddad al Musalmay
Muscat

Similar to global discount events such as Black Friday in the US and Singles' Day in China, Oman will soon have 'mega sales' aiming to encourage and bolster such promotional activities.

'The initiative aims to influence consumer behaviour in Oman by localising spending and enhancing the percentage of sales of brands and the number of visitors and tourists going to shopping centres in Oman. Malls and entities with multiple retailers can apply for one licence, allowing all of the stores operating in the mall to conduct sales at the same time,' stated the *Economic Diversification Report 2020* of the Oman Vision 2040 Implementation Follow-up Unit.

'This enables the retail sector to conduct, for example, 'Black Friday' like mega sales at their own discretion, but to be capped at one time per year.'

Black Friday is a colloquial term for the Friday following Thanksgiving Day in the United States when many stores offer highly promoted sales on products ranging from fashion to electronics making it the ideal day to get the best bargains.

In China, Singles' Day is a holiday celebrated on November 11 commemorating unmar-

Events like these need to be planned in a big way to attract many and everyone should be involved

KHALFAN AL TAUQI



ried people when they treat themselves to gifts and presents. The event has become the largest online shopping day in the world.

Economy and market experts have observed that even though Oman has been host to many global multinational stores since long, 'mega sales' will present a win-win situation for retailers and consumers.

Khalfan al Tauqi, business and economic consultant, welcomed the initiative describing it as much needed in Oman. "Such an initiative will promote Oman among other Gulf states and I am sure that many people would come. Events like these

need to be planned in a big way to attract many and everyone should be involved," he said.

Tauqi, however, believes one day is not enough for such an event in Oman. "The sultanate is different from other countries. We need at least three days, which will also allow people to come from the interiors of the country to visit the different malls in Muscat. Such promotional sales events should also include hotels and travel tickets to attract people from all walks of life."

According to the *Economic Diversification Report 2020*, the initiative was added to Oman Vision 2040 Implementation

Follow-up Unit's plan in 2020. 'It aims to enable the implementation of major discount campaigns for a period of three days (November) coinciding with the global discount initiative by major brands during the same period,' a statement said.

According to Muscat-based Lateef Shahdad, fellow and chartered marketer - Chartered Institute of Marketing, UK, events like Black Friday will boost and diversify the economy to match the objectives of Oman Vision 2040. "It will also create a new shopping experience in Oman while lifting the economy."

@shadadm

MHT plans four offices abroad to promote tourism



Our Correspondent
Muscat

The Ministry of Heritage and Tourism (MHT) has floated international tenders to promote Oman as a tourist destination in potential markets abroad.

The ministry has issued four tenders with the objective of opening tourism representative offices in Italy; UK and Ireland; India; and Germany, the Netherlands and the Nordic countries.

The appointed companies will play a role in formulating and executing business development, and media relations strategies and programmes to attract tourists to Oman and promote the sultanate as a tourist destination. The last date for bid submission is September 29.

tion is September 29.

The former Ministry of Tourism had several representative offices in Europe and India but with expiry of the contracts, there is a renewed push to open them again and bring in tourists to Oman.

According to the *Economic Diversification Report 2020* of the Oman Vision 2040 Implementation Follow-up Unit, one of the main objectives for 2020 was to continue opening up representative offices in China and the US as a top priority.

Following that, MHT had in the beginning of August announced the opening a tourism representation office in China. The year-long contract lasts from August 1, 2021 to July 31, 2022 and is renewable.

COVID-19 takes over 4,000 lives

Our Correspondent
Muscat

Even though the number of COVID-19 cases have seen a decline with the daily count falling to less than 200 cases, the pandemic has taken many lives in Oman with the total death count crossing 4,000 after eight patients succumbed to the virus on Tuesday.

On Tuesday, The Ministry of Health (MoH) reported 173 new cases. 'The total number of cases registered in the sultanate has now reached 300,581, including 4,007 deaths,' MoH said in a statement.

'Twenty-four patients were admitted to hospitals across the country in the last 24 hours, taking the total number of inpatients to 239, including 98 in ICUs.'

Ashok Purohit
Muscat

It was in August 2018 when Oman warmly welcomed the ICC World Cup Trophy at the Oman Cricket Academy Ground in style. Hundreds of children and fans were there to see the glittering trophy, which was brought to the venue in distinctive Omani style.

Three Omani women riders, dressed in traditional dresses, rode three white caparisoned horses to the claps and cheers of the fans. That was the nearest that Oman came to hosting an ICC World Cup event.

Much water has flowed since then through Wadi Amerat as Muscat now gets ready to host the 2021 ICC Men's T20 World Cup opener on October 17.

On Tuesday, the world cricket

SAYYID FATIK BIDS FAREWELL TO FRENCH, BRAZILIAN ENVOYS



On behalf of His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik, Sayyid Fatik bin Fahar al Said received separately in his office on Tuesday Renaud Salins, Ambassador of the French Republic to the sultanate, and Jose Marcos, Ambassador of the Federative Republic of Brazil to the sultanate, to bid them farewell at the end of their tour of duties (ONA)

T20 World Cup to kick-start in Muscat on Oct 17



governing body, International Cricket Council (ICC), officially unveiled the 16-team T20 World Cup schedule in a digital show, compered by former England cricketer Isa Guha, along with T20 World Cup winners Daren Sammy of West Indies and Dinesh Karthik of India.

All eyes will be on Oman when the first ball of the seventh edition

of the T20 World Cup is bowled at 2pm as the sultanate scripts a historic chapter in its sporting history.

Oman Cricket (OC) chairman Pankaj Khimji has hinted that the opening match of the T20 World Cup will be preceded by an eye-catching ceremony showcasing Oman to the world. "The ICC World Cup Trophy tour to Oman

in 2018 had women riders bring the trophy to the venue. This time, too, we will have something very distinctive and Omani at the opening match," Khimji told the visiting ICC and Indian board officials during their visit to Muscat last month.

Oman will host Group B first round games, which involves Bangladesh, Papua New Guinea (PNG) and Scotland. Group A features Sri Lanka, Ireland, Netherlands and Namibia; their first round games will be held in the UAE.

On Tuesday, OC may have been a tad disappointed as it had expected more than the six games it has been allotted by ICC.

The top two teams from each group of the first round will advance to Super 12s. All the Super 12 stage and remaining matches, including the final, will be held in

the UAE.

The opening day fixture between Oman and PNG (2pm) will be followed by a match between Bangladesh and Scotland later in the day (6pm) at the same venue. Next, Oman play Bangladesh on October 19 (6pm) and then conclude their round one with a match against Scotland on October 21 (6pm).

In his remarks to the ICC, Oman captain Zeeshan Maqsood said, "I extend a warm welcome to all teams who will be playing in our country - the ICC Men's T20 World Cup. This is a wonderful opportunity for us to be turning out in a global ICC event on our home ground - to show the world what we are capable of as players and as a venue."

Continued on Page 02
See also Page 16



Free jabs for vulnerable expats described as 'lifesaver'



Fahud Oil completes its first successful well test in Block 61

Interviews, tests conducted for govt jobs in South Sharqiyah

Sur - Within the context of the directives of His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik to provide employment for jobseekers and, pursuant to the government's efforts in this respect, the Ministry of Labour conducted interviews and tests for applicants to jobs in government units in the Governorate of South Sharqiyah on Tuesday.

More than 600 citizens from the governorate appeared for the interviews and tests - held at the University of Technology and Applied Sciences (Sur branch) - to fill 35 vacancies at units belonging to four government departments: The Ministry of Health, the Ministry of Education, the Ministry of Housing and Urban Planning and the Environmental Authority.

Salim Khalfan al Wahaibi,



head of Tests and Interviews Management Team, Ministry of Labour, said that the South Sharqiyah governorate is the last sta-

tion for the Job Announcement No 5/2021 to fill 1,003 vacancies. As many as 16,318 applied for the job vacancies. Within 25

working days, applicants from all governorates of the sultanate were assessed. ONA

RO6bn investment plan to boost tourism in Dhofar

Our Correspondent
Salalah

Oman has started a recovery plan for the tourism sector in the aftermath of the COVID-19 pandemic, said H E Salim Mohammed al Mahrouqi, Minister of Heritage and Tourism, on Tuesday.

The plan includes the implementation of safety procedures, health protocols and directives issued by the departments concerned to overcome the crisis and bring the tourism sector back to its previous levels as soon as possible.

The minister made the statement during his meeting with tourism developers and the business community in the Governorate of Dhofar. He affirmed the ministry's resolve to press ahead with nationalising jobs in the



tourism sector, an objective that falls within the shared national responsibility.

He added that the ministry has a plan to develop tourism destinations in Dhofar and that it is bracing to launch an investment management programme to the tune of RO6bn.

The minister unveiled a 'Comprehensive Tourism Development Plan' to be undertaken by the ministry. A number of workshops will be organised shortly to unleash the details of the plan,

said the minister, noting that the workshops cover seven main aspects, including the challenges, enablers and proposed solutions to handle issues relevant to all tourism-related sectors.

The minister also spoke about winter tourism in Dhofar. He said plans have been approved and agreements will be concluded shortly with travel and tourism operators to ensure opening of direct and regular airline routes between Dhofar and other parts of the world.

Mercury drops; showers reported in some areas

Our Correspondent
Muscat

The impact of monsoons in India along with low pressure in the Arabian Sea have resulted in a significant drop in temperatures in the sultanate in the last few days.

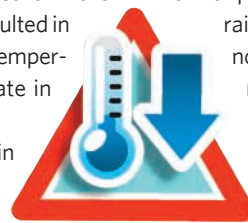
Several wilayats in North and South Sharqiyah, Dhofar have experienced occasional showers.

The weather in Muscat and

most parts of the country will be pleasant for the next few days, the Met department said.

An official said, "This is a normal phenomenon and mild rains are likely in the northern parts, Dhofar region and the mountains of the Al Hajar range. Due to the clouds and rains, overall temperature will drop by 3°C to 4°C."

The sea waves will be high and fishermen have been warned not to venture out to the seas.



Omran launches great-value staycation offers across nation

Muscat - Omran Group, the executive arm of the sultanate for tourism development, launched its revamped 'Within Oman 2021' campaign with a selection of carefully curated offers and packages on thousands of hotel rooms at the group's diverse hospitality assets nationwide.

For the third successive year, the campaign to promote domestic tourism aims to connect nationals and residents of Oman with the beauty of the country and offers new experiences at destinations across the country. Within Oman 2021 focuses on families, friends and couples and relaxing retreats at 19 sensational properties spanning the length and breadth of the country, Omran said.

'Within Oman offers exciting adventure holidays surrounded by nature to the ultimate in luxury. The packages also feature unique experiences for guests at their chosen property to bond

and help make special memories together this summer.'

The 2021 edition is characterised by the provision of flexible and customised packages for various categories, providing an array of accommodation options, hospitality services, tourism and recreational activities.

The hotels and attractions participating in the Within Oman 2021 campaign are W Muscat, JW Marriott Muscat, InterContinental Muscat, Crowne Plaza Muscat OCEC, Atana Stay Salalah, Atana Stay Ashkara, Crowne Plaza Resort Salalah, Atana Musandam Resort, Ras al Jinz Turtle Reserve, Masira Island Resort, Dibba Beach Resort, Barceló Mussanah Resort, Alila Jabal Akhdar, Alila Hinu, dusiD2 Naseem Resort, Jabal Akhdar, Hilton Salalah Resort, Sohar Beach Hotel, Crowne Plaza Duqm and City Hotel Duqm.

Booking is available via the Within Oman website.

T20 World Cup opener in Muscat

Continued from Page 01

"Our preparations are on track under the guidance of coach Duleep Mendis and we aim to be at our best, come October 17. In our group, we will be playing against Bangladesh, Scotland and Papua New Guinea. All these teams are very skilful, and we are looking forward to competing against them to the best of our ability. I'm sure there will be

thrills aplenty in the much-awaited tournament."

Oman coach Mendis expressed confidence in his team advancing to the Super 12 stage.

"We have defeated Scotland and PNG in the past and I have the confidence in my boys. Though no team can be taken lightly at this stage, we have the home advantage," said the former Sri Lankan great.

@ashokmuscat

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 0.750	 0.290	 0.175	 0.390	 0.340
 0.100	 0.390	 0.875	 0.035	
 0.990	 0.325	 0.325	 0.440	 0.430
 0.990	 0.325	 0.790	 1.890	 0.325
 0.440	 0.290	 0.390	 0.990	 1.590
 0.480	 1.900	 6.900	 4.900	

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Expats get free 'lifesaver' jabs

A large number of low-income earners injected on second day of the drive

Muscat - The most vulnerable section of the expatriate population is now being covered by the National Immunisation Campaign against COVID-19. A large number of people were vaccinated on the second day of the free vaccination drive, who hailed the long awaited move.

Shah Alam, a tailor who was among those awaiting their turn to get the first dose at the Sablat Muttrah vaccination centre, said he was 'surprised and happy' when officials visited his shop on Monday night and gave him a vaccine coupon. "I can't bear the cost of the vaccine; this free vaccine is a lifesaver," he said.

Alam's friend Tanveer, who had visited several hospitals in the Ruwi area to get vaccinated, said, "Whichever hospital I went to, they claimed they'd run out of vaccines."

After getting vaccine coupons on Monday evening, Bashaar Ahmed, a tailor from Muttrah, and his four colleagues reached Sablat Muttrah at 7am on Tuesday and patiently waited for the centre to open. They had been postponing purchasing vaccines from a private hospital due to the cost. "We've been struggling to make ends meet for more than a year. What we earn now hardly cov-



An expat displays a vaccine coupon

ers food and daily expenses," Ahmed said.

The second day of the free vaccination drive started on Monday morning by the Directorate General of Health Services (DHGS) in Muscat in coordination with Muscat Municipality was as busy as the first.

Dr Nihal Afifi, specialist and head of primary health care supporting services in the Department of Primary Health Care, DGHS, said, "This vaccination drive will protect the most vulnerable expatriate workers in the community who are helpless due to the nature of their jobs - barbers, tailors and small shop

This initiative protects the most vulnerable expatriate workers in the community who are helpless due to the nature of their jobs

DR NIHAL AFIFI

workers in Muttrah Souq and in and around Muscat governorate."

She informed that Muscat Municipality is distributing 1,000 coupons every day among target groups, mostly male workers. "We advise people to visit (designated vaccination centres) only when they

have a free vaccine coupon. We cannot vaccinate anyone without the coupon."

On Tuesday, a large number of people without vaccine coupons had gathered in front of Sablat Muttrah.

Though he didn't have coupons, Kishore, a barber from Ruwi, decided to visit Sablat

Muttrah with his wife, son and niece after he came to know about the government's new vaccination drive. "It is a difficult time. My earnings are down and I'm struggling with daily needs. Free vaccines for my family will be a big support."

Kishore and his family weren't the only ones who returned disappointed on Tuesday. Four tailors from Hamriya too decided to try their luck but Sablat Muttrah staff asked them to look out for the municipality officials' visit to their neighbourhood distributing vaccine coupons. Sanjeev, who runs a laundry in Old Muscat, also came hoping to get vaccinated

Whichever hospital I went to, they claimed they'd run out of vaccines

TANVEER

I can't bear the cost of the vaccine; this free vaccine is a lifesaver

SHAH ALAM

without the coupon. "Municipality officials distributed free coupons yesterday at around 2pm in my neighbourhood. But I missed them and the vaccine coupon as my shop is closed for lunch break in the afternoon."

An official from Muscat Municipality informed that municipal staff in Mawaleh Central Market for Fruits and Vegetables have been vaccinated and all workers, contractors and drivers engaged in work in the market have been immunised through a free vaccine coupon system. "Now Mawaleh Central Market is fully vaccinated with two doses."

Text and photos by Syed Fasiuddin



(Supplied photos)

Omani team uses virtual scalpel to remove cancer cells

Our Correspondent
Muscat

The medical team at Sultan Qaboos Comprehensive Cancer Care and Research Centre (SQCCRC) has implemented the use of Partial Breast Irradiation and Hypo-SIB radiotherapy techniques to treat breast cancer patients as part of its endeavour to provide various advanced services to treat cancer patients.

Dr Zahid al Mandhari, senior consultant in Radiation Oncology and a member of the centre's Operational Committee said, "The SQCCRC team has completed radiotherapy sessions for the first breast cancer patient using Partial Breast Irradiation technique, a new technique using a beam of photons as a virtual scalpel to remove cancer cells accurately without damaging the healthy ones."

The non-invasive technique speeds up a treatment programme, allowing it to be completed in five sessions within ten days, instead of having a full treatment programme that may extend from 15 to 30 sessions.

"This technology is used only in the early stages of breast cancer. It also helps to reduce the side effects significantly, with clinical results identical to the full course of treatment."

The Oncology Radiation



This technology is used only in the early stages of breast cancer. It helps to reduce side effects significantly

DR MANDHARI

Therapy Unit at SQCCRC also managed to treat the first patient with the (Hypo-SIB) technique, which is based on giving the radiation dose and the complement dose in a simultaneous integrated session.

"This technology can be used in different stages of cancer and it helps to reduce the duration of treatment from 30 sessions to 15 sessions. The application of these two new techniques is considered as a new addition to the medical experience in treating cancer patients in the sultanate."

VITAL HEALTH INDICATORS IMPROVE DESPITE COVID-19

RO 972.5mn Total expenditure RO793.3mn in 2019	10.5mn Number of outpatients 15.7mn in 2019	9.3/1,000 births Death rate among children under five 10.2 per 1,000 births in 2019	7.6/1,000 births Infant mortality rate 8.0 in 2019	211 Health centres and polyclinics	51 Hospitals with 5,262 beds
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Our Correspondent
Muscat

Oman has remained free of many diseases, including polio since 1993, and diphtheria and neonatal tetanus since 1991. The incidence rates of other communicable diseases have also decreased. The number of malaria cases dropped to 276 cases in 2020 compared to 1,338 cases in 2019, according to the Ministry of Health's (MoH) Annual Health Report 2020.

With the COVID-19 pandemic affecting the health sector severely, the report found a decrease in the use of health services in 2020. The number of outpatient clinic visits to MoH institutions in 2020 dropped to 10.5mn compared to about 15.7mn in 2019.

The vital health indicators like death rate among children under five years and infant mortality rate have improved in 2020.

The Annual Health Report 2020 was issued by MoH, represented by the Information & Statistics Department of the Directorate General of Planning and Studies. The report highlights the main services provided by the health sector in 2020 along with health and vital indicators and sustainable development goals indicators. The report also contains a brief on the most important MoH studies and researches over the past years.

The report shows an increase in the ministry's expenditure compared to the previous three

ANNUAL HEALTH REPORT 2020

years (2017 to 2019). The total recurrent expenditure of MoH amounted to approximately RO972.5mn in 2020 compared to approximately RO793.3mn in 2019, reflecting a 22.6 per cent increase. In contrast, development expenditure decreased from RO21.6mn in 2019 to RO15.7mn in 2020.

The total number of health centres and polyclinics operated by the ministry was 211, including 54 health centres with a capacity of 84 beds, and 21 polyclinics at the end of 2020. Additionally, there were 51 hospitals with 5,262 beds at the end of 2020. Many services were also added to these institutions in order to improve the quality of health care provided at all levels. A field hospital for COVID-19 equipped with 202 beds was also set up.

There were 38,566 employees of MoH the end of December 2020 with an Omanisation rate

73%
Omanisation



(For illustrative purpose)

of 73 per cent.

Among vital indicators, crude birth rate among Omanis was 28.6 per 1,000 population in 2020, while crude death rate was 3.2 per 1,000 population. Death rate among children under five years of age decreased to 9.3 per 1,000 live births in 2020, compared to 10.2 per 1,000 live births in 2019. Infant mortality rate (less than one year) per 1,000 live births decreased from 8.0 to 7.6 for the same period.

The report also showed a control on measles. No case of the disease was recorded in 2020.

The incidence rates of other communicable diseases have decreased to lower levels - malaria cases dropped to 276 cases in 2020 compared to 1,338 cases in 2019.

The pandemic has posed a great challenge to all health systems, whether in the most or least developed countries in the world. 'The health system in the

sultanate, along with all state apparatus, has confronted this challenge with efficiency and competency, relying on the strong infrastructure that was built over the years and on the competencies of its human resources for health, implementing simultaneously all international standards and policies set for the fight against the pandemic,' the report stated.

Furthermore, the report touches upon morbidity and mortality pattern. The statistics indicate a change in the epidemiological map in the sultanate with COVID-18 changing the equation of the epidemiological change in the sultanate similarly to the rest of the world. 'Therefore, the report showed high death rates due to communicable diseases.'

The average number of visits per citizen to outpatient clinics was 3.7 during the year 2020, which led to a decrease in the total number of discharged patients from MoH's health institutions to about 257,000 in 2020, with an average period of hospitalisation of 3.7 days and bed occupancy rate of 47.8 per cent.

The report also indicated about various surgical operations that were performed in theatre rooms of MoH institutions. There were close to 52,700 surgeries in 2020, at a rate of 11.4 surgeries per 1,000 population. The report includes statistics on health services used such as the number of admissions, radiology and dialysis services.

MARKET WATCH

MSX30	4,002.34
BSE Sensex	55,792.27

FOREX RATES

(RO1 equals)	
Indian Rs	193.11
Pakistani Rs	427.33
Bangladeshi Taka	220.64
Philippine Peso	130.94
Sri Lankan Rs	518.21

*Rates as on August 17
Source: xe.com

BRIEFS

US retail sales drop in July as car purchases fall

Purchases of vehicles plunged in July, sending US retail sales down sharply, as American shoppers pulled back on buying an array of goods, the government reported on Tuesday.

Restaurants continued to see an upswing in business as customers ventured out despite increasing cases of the Delta variant of COVID-19, and rising prices at petrol stations also boosted sales there, the data showed.

Total sales fell a surprising 1.1 per cent compared to June, a far bigger drop than analysts were expecting, as auto sales collapsed 4.3 per cent, the Commerce Department reported.

Excluding all motor vehicles and parts, total retail sales fell just 0.4 per cent, but sales are still 15.8 per cent higher than July 2020.

New restrictions in some areas, including a resumption of mask requirements, could be a factor in the declines, along with the tapering of government stimulus checks, which fueled a spending boost in recent months.

Fahud Oil completes its first successful well test in Block 61

Our Correspondent
Muscat

Following a major contract award in August last year, Fahud Oil Services and Energy (FOS Energy) has successfully completed its first well test at Oman's Block 61 with zero flaring, global energy giant BP, which operates Block 61, announced on Tuesday.

FOS Energy will support the provision of well testing and clean out services at Block 61 for the next five years, testing around 50 wells over the duration of the contract.

"The contract was previously held by a large, international service provider. Its award to FOS Energy underlines BP's commitment to generating in-country value (ICV) across the sultanate," BP said in a statement.

Mohamed Najwani, BP's vice president - wells, said, "Khazzan was the first field in Oman to introduce 'green completions' - a



zero flaring concept. In 2020, we safely reduced over 148,000 tonnes of CO₂ emission. By developing and upskilling FOS Energy in well testing and the green completions concept, sharing knowledge and expertise, we hope to support them in becoming globally competitive players in this field."

Before work began, equipment suitability and crew competency was tested by modelling different well flow situations.

"Throughout the duration of this contract we have developed and upskilled our team to test wells using the green completions concept - this actively helps us support BP's journey towards becoming a net zero company by 2050 or sooner."

"Working with BP helped us improve our systems, processes and standards which will enable us to grow and expand our services in a competitive international space," he added.

BP reaffirmed that it is committed to supporting the sustainable development of Oman's economy and society through encouraging the development of Omani skills and capabilities; and generating employment and training opportunities.

In 2020, BP spent US\$610mn with Omani registered companies - 90 per cent of its total spend. The company spent US\$28.6mn with SMEs either through direct contract awards or through third party contracted services.

CBO issues treasury bills worth RO20mn

Our Correspondent
Muscat

A tender of government treasury bills (issue number 123) was held at the Central Bank of Oman (CBO) this week. The total value of the allotted treasury bills amounted to RO20mn, for a maturity period of 28 days, from today until September 15, 2021.

The average accepted price reached RO99.950 for every RO100 bill, while the minimum accepted price arrived at RO99.950.

The average discount rate and the average yield reached 0.65179 per cent and 0.65211 per cent, respectively. The interest rate on the repo operations with the CBO is 0.5 per cent while the

discount rate on the treasury bills discounting facility with the CBO is 0.75 per cent.

Treasury bills are short-term highly secured financial instruments issued by the Ministry of Finance, and they provide licensed commercial banks the opportunity to invest their surplus funds. The CBO acts as the issue manager and provides

the added advantage of ready liquidity through discounting and repurchase facilities. Treasury bills promote the local money market by creating a benchmark yield curve for short-term interest rates. Additionally, the government may also resort to this instrument whenever felt necessary for financing its recurrent expenditures.



Bank lending rises 3.8% in June; deposits up 4.2%

Our Correspondent
Muscat

Total outstanding credit extended by Oman's banking sector grew by 3.8 per cent year-on-year to reach RO27.3bn at the end of June 2021, according to the latest statistics released by the Central Bank of Oman (CBO).

Bank credit to the private sector showed a slow growth of 0.8 per cent at RO23.2bn in June this year compared to the same period of 2020, the data showed.

The shares of non-financial corporate sector and household sector (mainly personal loans) in total private sector credit stood at 46.5 per cent and 45.3 per cent, respectively, at the end of June 2021. The share of financial corporations was 4.8 per cent and other sectors received the remaining 3.4 per cent of total private sector credit.

The combined balance-sheet of Oman's conventional banks showed a year-on-year growth of 2.1 per cent in total outstanding credit as of end-June 2021.

In contrast, Islamic banking entities provided financing of RO4.6bn at the end of June,

recording an year-on-year growth of 12.7 per cent. Total assets of Islamic banks and windows increased by 16 per cent to RO5.7bn and constituted about 15.1 per cent of the banking system assets as of June 2021.

On the deposits side, the CBO data indicated that total deposits held with the Omani banks (conventional and Islamic) registered an year-on-year growth of 4.2 per cent to reach RO24.9bn at the end of June 2021. Total private sector deposits increased by 6.5 per cent to RO17.4bn.

In terms of sectorwise composition of private sector deposits, the share of households deposits stood at 51.4 per cent, followed by non-financial corporations at 32.1 per cent, financial corporations at 14.1 per cent and other sectors at 2.4 per cent. Aggregate deposits held with the conventional banks increased by 1.8 per cent to RO20.8bn at end-June 2021 compared to a year ago period.

Government deposits with conventional banks witnessed a decrease of 11.2 per cent at RO4.3bn and deposits of public enterprises increased by 13.3 per cent to RO1.2bn.

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Mubadala closes its PE fund with \$1.6bn commitments

Abu Dhabi, UAE - Mubadala Capital, asset management subsidiary of Abu Dhabi-based Mubadala Investment Company, has closed its third private equity (PE) fund, MIC Capital Partners III (Fund III), with total commitments of US\$1.6bn.

Fund III surpassed its initial target and raised capital commitments from a diverse set of new and existing investors including leading pension plans, endowments, insurance plans, government institutions, family offices and private equity firms across North America, Europe, the Middle East and Asia.

Adib Mattar, head of private equity at Mubadala Capital, said, "We began our PE investment practice 13 years ago. The closing of Fund III represents a major milestone for the private equity team and also for Mubadala Capital."

Mubadala Capital's Fund III is focused on direct investments in North America and Europe across the following core sector



areas where the team has a strong network and track record including: Media, sports and entertainment; consumer and food services; financial services; and industrials and business services.

To date, Fund III consists of approximately US\$1.4bn of investments across nine high-quality assets.

Mubadala Capital opened offices in New York and London in order to better capitalise on investment opportunities and portfolio management in its key markets as well as engage more meaningfully with its global investor base.

WAM

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MSX sluggish in thin trading

Our Correspondent
Muscat

The benchmark index of the Muscat Stock Exchange (MSX) fell 0.22 per cent to close at 4,002.34 points on Tuesday.

Trading activity deteriorated from the previous session as turnover declined 62.24 per cent to RO967,948 and volumes fell 51.58 per cent to 6.12mn shares.

While Industrial index rose 0.3 per cent, Financial and Services indices fell 0.28 per cent and 0.21 per cent, respectively. The MSX Shariah index closed up by 0.13 per cent at 592.37 points.

Market breadth remained negative as six companies closed up, while 15 companies closed down. The rest 24 traded stocks closed flat for the day.

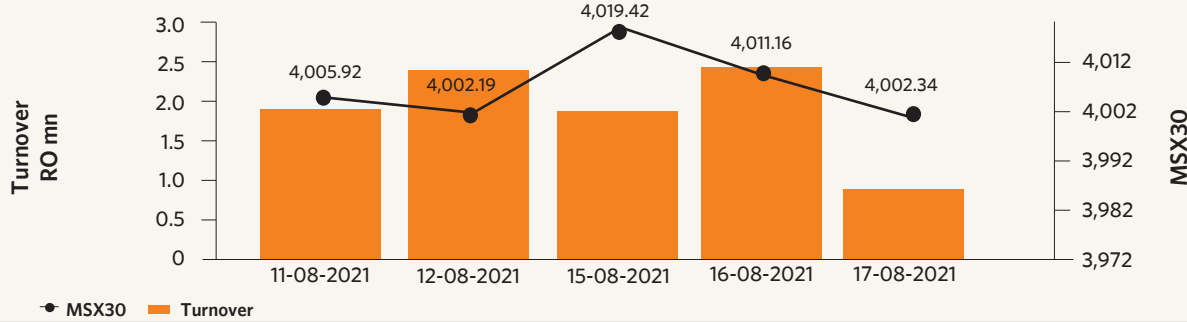
Top gainers were National Gas (3.62 per cent), Al Maha Ceramics (1.87 per cent), Raysut Cement (1.12 per cent) and Ominvest (0.64 per cent).

Top losers were Al Sharqiyah Desali-



nation (-3.33 per cent), Oman & Emirates Investment Holding (-2.7 per cent), Al Anwar Investment (-2.52 per cent) and BankDhofar (-2.44 per cent).

MSX INDEX AND TURNOVER OF FIVE TRADING DAYS



Google, Facebook unveil Asia undersea Internet cable plan

Washington, US - Google and Facebook have unveiled plans for a new undersea Internet cable connecting Singapore, Japan, Guam, the Philippines, Taiwan and Indonesia.

The cable project dubbed Apricot would be some 12,000km and be operational in 2024 subject to regulatory approvals, the companies said in separate statements.

The project announced by the US firms and regional and global partners 'will deliver much-needed Internet capacity, redundancy, and reliability to expand connections in the Asia-Pacific region', said Facebook engineering manager Nico Roehrich.

"The Apricot cable is part of our ongoing effort to expand global network infrastructure and better serve the more than 3.5bn people around the world who use our services every month," Roehrich added.

Earlier this year the companies announced another cable



project dubbed Echo connecting the United States, Singapore, Guam and Indonesia.

"The Echo and Apricot cables are complementary submarine systems that will offer benefits with multiple paths in and out of Asia, including unique routes through southern Asia, ensuring a significantly higher degree of resilience for Google Cloud and digital services," said Google Cloud vice president Bikash Koley.

"Together they'll provide businesses and startups in Asia with lower latency, more band-

width, and increased resilience in their connectivity between Southeast Asia, North Asia and the United States," Koley added.

Google and Facebook this year halted efforts on a planned undersea cable that would have connected California and Hong Kong, due to tensions between the United States and China.

Last year, the US Department of Justice recommended that the planned cable proposed by Google and Facebook bypass Hong Kong.

AFP

Half of Dubai taxi fleet comprises hybrid, electric cars

Dubai, UAE - The total number of hybrid/electric taxis and limousines in Dubai amounted to 4,683 in 2020, Mattar Mohammed al Tayar, director-general, chairman of the board of executive directors of the Roads and Transport Authority (RTA), has revealed.

Of these, 4,510 are hybrid taxis (about 50 per cent of the Dubai Taxi fleet), and 173 others are electric/hybrid limos of the Dubai Taxi Corporation.

"The RTA intends to change the entire fleet of Dubai Taxi to eco-friendly (hybrid/electric) vehicles by 2027, a move considered the first of its kind worldwide. The RTA has taken this in line with the initiative of Sheikh Mohammed bin Rashid al

Maktoum, the Ruler of Dubai, themed 'Green Economy for Sustainable Development, UAE Vision 2021'. It is also part of a plan to reduce carbon emissions of the taxi and limousine sector by 2 per cent," Tayar said.

"The RTA succeeded in adding 2,434 hybrid vehicles, 170 electric vehicles and three hybrid limousines to the fleet of Dubai Taxi, whereas the number of hybrid taxis operated by franchise companies is 2,076. A six-year plan currently underway seeks to raise the proportion of hybrid taxis in the fleet from the existing 50 percent to 80 per cent by 2025 and achieve the ultimate target of 100 per cent by 2027," Tayar said.

WAM

Mega reconstruction projects await in Libya

Tripoli, Libya - A decade after Libya descended into chaos, a host of countries are eyeing potential multi-billion-dollar infrastructure projects in the oil-rich nation if stability is assured.

Economist Kamal Mansouri expects Libya's reconstruction drive to be one of the biggest in the Middle East and North Africa.

He estimates 'more than 100 billion dollars' are needed to rebuild Libya, which has been gripped by violence and political turmoil since dictator Moammar Gadhafi was toppled in a 2011 uprising.

Former colonial power Italy, neighbouring Egypt and Turkey are tipped to be awarded the lion's share of reconstruction deals.

In the capital Tripoli, dozens of rusted cranes and unfinished buildings dot the seafont, testimony to hundreds of abandoned



A picture shows an unfinished hotel, after its construction was halted in 2011, in the Libyan capital Tripoli (AFP)

projects worth billions of dollars launched between 2000 and 2010.

After Gadhafi's overthrow, Libya fell under the control of a complex, ever-shifting patchwork of militias and foreign mercenaries backing rival administrations.

While Turkey has supported the Tripoli government, eastern-

based strongman Khalifa Haftar, who battled but failed to seize the capital, has had the backing of Russia, the United Arab Emirates and Egypt.

But a UN-backed ceasefire was agreed last October, paving the way for the establishment in March of an interim administration.

The new government led by

Prime Minister Abdulhamid Dbeibah is tasked with organising presidential and parliamentary elections in December if a legal framework is agreed on time.

The new administration has been courted by Western and regional leaders who have visited Libya with large business delegations in tow.

Italy's Foreign Minister Luigi Di Maio was accompanied by the chief of Italian energy giant ENI.

In May, Dbeibah, an engineer and businessman, visited Rome and agreed with his Italian counterpart Mario Draghi to expand collaboration on energy projects.

Italy aims to defend its commercial interests in the nation with Africa's largest oil reserves, an energy sector where Eni has been the leading foreign player since 1959.

The firm reportedly proposes

building a photovoltaic solar plant in southern Libya.

In June, Spanish Prime Minister Pedro Sanchez also visited with a business team, while Dbeibah has travelled to Paris.

As Dbeibah's administration takes part in several business forums, Turkey, Egypt, Tunisia and Algeria are also in the running for lucrative contracts.

A delegation from Russia's energy group Tatneft visited Tripoli in June to study oil exploration projects.

"Libya hasn't built a thing in ten years," said Global Initiative senior fellow Jalel Harchaoui.

A decade of violence has ravaged its airports, roads and the electricity network.

While there is no shortage of major projects and international suitors, questions remain over funding and whether instability will return.

AFP

Britain's joblessness dips in Q2

London, UK - Britain's unemployment rate dipped in the second quarter on reopening of the economy that has resulted in record-high vacancies, official data showed on Tuesday.

While the number of payroll employees has surged, it remains below the pre-pandemic total, the Office for National Statistics (ONS) added.

The unemployment rate eased to 4.7 per cent in the second quarter from 4.8 per cent in the three months to the end of May, the ONS said in a statement.

"The world of work continues to rebound robustly from the effects of the pandemic," said ONS statistician Jonathan Athow.

But he added that 'early survey figures show the number of job vacancies passed 1mn for the first time ever in July'.

The data comes ahead of the UK government next month ending its furlough scheme that has paid the bulk of wages for Britons during the outbreak.

AFP



SULTANATE OF OMAN
MINISTRY OF CULTURE, SPORTS and YOUTH
MINISTRY OF CULTURE, SPORTS AND YOUTH, , Muscat, hereby
give notice of tenders for the following projects

Tender No.	Project Category	Location	Grade In Tender Board Registration
8/2021	Services	Maintenance, Operating & Gardening Services To Horse Riding Centre At Barka From 01/01/2022 To 31/12/2023	First Grade
9/2021	Electromechanical and Telecommunications Contracting and Maintenance	Maintenance, Operating Services To Sohar Sports (Including Director Of Culture At Sohar) Complex From 01/01/2022 To 31/12/2023	Excellent Grade
10/2021	Electromechanical and Telecommunications Contracting and Maintenance	Maintenance, Operating Services To Nizwa Sports Complex (Including Nizwa Culture Center & Sports Centre At Izki) From 01/01/2022 To 31/12/2023	Excellent Grade
11/2021	Electromechanical and Telecommunications Contracting and Maintenance	Maintenance, Operating Services To Buraimi Sports Complex (Including Art Association At Buraimi & Sports Centre At Sunaina) From 01/01/2022 To 31/12/2023	Excellent Grade
12/2021	Electromechanical and Telecommunications Contracting and Maintenance	Maintenance, Operating Services To Rustaq Sports Complex (Including Sports Centres At Nakal & Awabi And Beach Game Facility At Musannah Sports City) From 01/01/2022 To 31/12/2023	Excellent Grade
13/2021	Electromechanical and Telecommunications Contracting and Maintenance	Maintenance, Operating Services To Sur Sports Complex (Including Annex Sports Centre At Sur & Sports Facilities At Tiwi, Khalhat And Ras Al Haad) From 01/01/2022 To 31/12/2023	Excellent Grade
14/2021	Electromechanical and Telecommunications Contracting and Maintenance	Maintenance, Operating Services To Saadah Sports Complex (Including Sports Centres At Thumrait, , Mughshin, & Sadah) Dhofar Governorate From 01/01/2022 To 31/12/2023	Excellent Grade

Companies, which are registered with the Tender Board and engaged in same category with experience in and same Grade as noted above, can obtain the Tender Documents at the Tender Board E-tendering digital portal link (<http://etendering.tenderboard.gov.om>) until 27/08/2021.

The last date of tender submission on above E-tendering site at 09:00am 31 /09 /2021

A Tender Bond equivalent to 1% of the tender sum issued from a registered bank, in the prescribed form, in Sultanate of Oman and valid for 90 days should be enclosed with the tender.

Any tender without the bond will be rejected and the tender committee is not bound to accept the lowest or any tender received.

INTERNAL TENDER COMMITTEE OF MINISTRY OF CULTURE, SPORTS AND YOUTH
Any participants have doubt in adopting e-tendering can contact over the phone 24166670 or through email ctenderhd@ita.gov.om

Send your comments to muscatdaily@apexmedia.co.om



EWA
هيئة الكهرباء والماء
Electricity & Water Authority

Kingdom of Bahrain
Central Stores Directorate
Purchasing & Contracts Section

Subject: Auction-Purchase, Deconstruction, Dismantling, Demolition & Removal of Sitra Power & Water Station

Auction No.	PT/CSD/MH/2020/BK18
Auction Description	Central Stores Directorate of Electricity & Water Authority (EWA) in the Kingdom of Bahrain would like to float an Auction for the purchase, dismantling & removal of Sitra Power & Water Station that was operating with capacity of 125 MW of Electricity and 25 Million Gallon Per Day (MGPD) of Distillate Water and recently shutdown in February 2021. The purchasers shall be responsible for arranging and mobilizing all required tools, equipment and lifting arrangements to execute the project along with demolishing civil structure and concrete foundation of all plants, machineries and equipment to the ground level.
Document Fees	BD. 100/-
Initial Bond	BD. 5,000/-
Deadline For Purchasing The Documents	Thursday 30th September 2021 at 1:30 PM
Auction Closing Date	Sunday 7th November 2021 at 1:30PM

Note: Auction documents can now be purchased online using e-Tendering system.

- Bidders who are eligible and want to participate in the auction specified above are kindly requested to purchase the auction documents online through the e-Tendering portal of Tender Board in the Kingdom of Bahrain <http://www.tenderboard.gov.bh> until 30th September 2021 (for assistance please contact the Tender Board help desk on (Tel: +973 17566617 or through e-mail helpdesk@tenderboard.gov.bh).
- This announcement is to be read as part of the auction documents and in compliance with the government tendering & purchasing regulations in the Kingdom of Bahrain issued in Decrees Nos. 36 & 37 of 2002 and its executive regulations.
- All public tenders & auctions related to the Central Stores Directorate of Electricity & Water Authority (EWA) in the Kingdom of Bahrain are published on the Tender Board website: <http://www.tenderboard.gov.bh>.

Customers hail free VAT registration and advisory services by Bank Muscat

The free VAT Registration and Advisory desk at Bank Muscat's head office has been well received by the bank's many SME customers who have been making use of the facility. Earlier in July, the bank partnered with leading full service audit, tax and business advisory firm, Morison Muscat Chartered Accountants, to help Bank Muscat and Meethaq SME customers comply with the newly introduced Value Added Tax (VAT).

As part of the bank's continuous support to its Small and Medium Enterprises (SME) customers and in order to help them navigate and adapt to this taxation concept, which is new for many local business, particularly those from the SME sector, the following services are being provided free of charge for a limited period of time - VAT registration with the Tax Authority and one-to-one advisory on VAT queries.

Customers who would like to register or utilise these services are requested to register at the following link with a copy of their CR, National ID Card and bank account details: <https://mmjs.typeform.com/to/rbxiWqHt>.

Thanking the bank for the excellent support to the SME sector, Qais bin Said al Saidi, owner, Luluwat Al Afrad Modern Trading & Contracting said, "We are very happy to receive this timely support from the largest financial services provider in Oman. Many SMEs do not have access to these kind of resources like big corporates, and hence find it very helpful when their bank offers assistance, which helps them ensure that their business is tax compliant.

"We thank Bank Muscat for continuing to support SMEs with innovative financial and non-financial services and for guiding us in a fast-changing and dynamic environment."

Nasser Hamed al Jabri of Diamond Root Trading said, "We thank Bank Muscat for offering this VAT registration and advisory service free of charge to SMEs like ours. The importance of the bank's continuous support in the backdrop of the government's top priority to develop the SME sector in Oman cannot be emphasised enough. Being a pioneer of corporate social responsibility in Oman, Bank Muscat has always supported the sector with many financial and non-financial services so as to help it grow to its full potential."

Bank Muscat continues to come up with new initiatives on a regular basis to build up the SME sector which has been identified as an essential part of the Omani economy.

It is expected that the bank's vast portfolio of SME customers will be able to leverage this new initiative for ensuring that they are compliant with the laws and regulations in the Sultanate of Oman. This will help further strengthen the SME-sector in the country and also lead to more development and job opportunities for Omani youth.



Abri shortlisted from Shangri-La for top award

Shangri-La Barr Al Jissah, Muscat recently announced its latest entry into the 12th Annual Caterer Middle East Awards 2021, with the nomination of Youssef al Abri for the 'Restaurant Manager of the Year' category.

Established under *Caterer Middle East*, the largest magazine for catering industry professionals in the Middle East, the annual event celebrates dedicated professionals who make the culinary scene in the Middle East amongst the most exciting in the world.

Abri was selected among the final ten nominees who got shortlisted from hundreds of submissions for 'Restaurant Manager of the Year' award within the Middle East. He is the only individual from the sultanate across all categories and holds the honour of being the only employee on the final list of nominations from Shangri-La Hotels and Resorts in the Middle East region.

Abri started his career at the Shangri-La Barr Al Jissah as a waiter, 15 years ago, making his way to the top, where he now works as a restaurant manager. Over the years, he has progressed and developed the full spectrum of his skillset to introduce the renowned warmth of Omani hospitality into Shangri-La's stellar service record.

Abri continues to achieve milestones through consistent guest engagement, ensuring satisfaction, campaigning innovative initiatives and always going the extra mile to support business requirements.

René D Egle, area general manager for Shangri-La Resorts in Muscat noted, "Youssef is everything we seek in a Shangri-La ambassador. He brings kindness, originality and creativity to every aspect of the business while elevating the guest experience. Not only is he a seasoned professional but also a talented individual and a gentleman at heart. Even during these unprecedented times, Youssef worked effectively and diligently to meet and exceed his targets. We offer our heartiest congratulations to Youssef on this well-deserved nomination and we wish him all the best at the awards' ceremony."

"Out of 210 Omani colleagues at Shangri-La Barr Al Jissah, Youssef was one of the 30 top talents who were chosen to take part of our Omani Development Program. The programme is designed by professional learning and development experts to help our Omani colleagues grow, acquire external exposure and develop their leadership skills to become leaders of the future. Within just a few months through the programme, Youssef got promoted and has succeeded to become one of our key F&B leaders and prominent role models," Egle added.

Fueled by the desire to do more, Abri has championed several initiatives that solidify his position as an exemplary leader.

The Shangri-La Barr Al Jissah team has highlighted his key achievements as increasing his financial performance target from 200 per cent to 400 per cent and introducing safe social experiences like 'Majlis by the Beach', where he uplifted the ambience and setup of private dining by the beach. Abri also drove the initiative to celebrate the hard work and dedication of teachers on Omani Teachers Day, showcasing the hotel as a trendsetter by offering special discounts to teachers and their families, which has driven massive business results.

Abri said, "I am sincerely humbled by the praise and warmth bestowed upon me. I hope to continue making a difference in the hospitality landscape of the sultanate with innovation and integrity."



Ooredoo adds five locations to its Fibre Home network

Blazing fast and super reliable Internet technology is at more homes than ever as Ooredoo brings its Fibre Home WiFi service to Buraimi - Hamasah, Liwa - Dream City, Sur - Bilad, Amerat Al Mehaj, and Salalah - Awqad North.

Residents in those areas can now enjoy great value high-speed broadband from as little as RO29.4 per month.

With speeds of up to 1GB, plus a whole range of unique benefits like unlimited data, 10 per cent discount on international calling, unlimited national minutes, and free modem and installation, it's the ideal solution for the whole family.

With Ooredoo's Fibre Home WiFi services, subscribers no longer need to worry about interrupted downloads or streaming movies, TV shows and music even with the whole household connected.

Residents in areas with new Fibre Home WiFi service coverage can order via WhatsApp by sharing their ID and location to 95009500, or by calling the Fibre team on 1514.



OAB appoints new chief audit executive

Oman Arab Bank (OAB) recently announced the appointment of Hamza Moosa Bager as chief audit executive, as of August 1, 2021.

Commenting on the appointment, Rashad al Musafir, CEO of OAB, said, "Hamza Moosa Bager has extensive experience across various major organisations, in key positions over the last two decades. Working in internal auditing has helped him build a robust experience in the field, alongside having expertise across other areas, including corporate governance, risk management and compliance.

"His expertise and hard work earned him previous positions on Board Audit Committees and we believe that he will bring a high degree of proficiency to OAB."

"On behalf of the Board of Directors of Oman Arab Bank and members of the Executive Management, I am pleased to welcome Hamza as a new OAB family member and wish him the best of luck and success in his new position," Musafir added.

Commenting on his appointment at Oman Arab Bank, Hamza Moosa Bager said, "I believe that this is truly a unique opportunity and the next step of my career. Internal Audit is an important component of corporate governance and supports the development of an effective organisational strategy. I am delighted to be a part of this dedicated team and look forward to working with them. Together, we can collectively align the objectives of the bank to position it at the forefront of the banking industry."

Bager has over 20 years of experience in internal auditing and has held key positions across several major entities. Previously working as the group chief internal auditor for the Electricity Holding Company 'Nama Holding', he was responsible for consolidating all internal audit functions of subsidiary companies into a centralised function and streamlining internal audit operations.

Bager is a Certified Internal Auditor from the Institute of Internal Auditors and holds a BSc. with Honours in Computers and Internet Applications from Majan College (University College) and possesses several relevant professional certificates.

Oman Arab Bank has a rich and proud history as one of the first financial institutions to be established in the sultanate.

Today, the bank operates a nationwide network of 53 branches and representative offices with 160 ATMs spread across Oman. OAB provides a complete range of financial products and services through its OAB Online App.

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



Airbus celebrates 1,000th aircraft covered by Flight Hour Services with Flyadeal

Flyadeal, the low-cost Jeddah-based airline owned by Saudi Arabian Airlines, signed a long-term Flight Hour Services (FHS) agreement to support its A320 fleet.

The agreement includes the 1,000th aircraft supported by Airbus Flight Hour Services. The carrier will benefit from integrated material services including spare pool access, on-site-stock at the main base and components engineering and repairs. Through the FHS contract, Airbus will guarantee spare parts availability, contributing to securing aircraft technical performance.

Mikail Houari, president of Airbus Africa & Middle East, said, "Signing this agreement with Flyadeal is an important milestone; it is the first FHS contract in Saudi Arabia and the biggest Airbus aircraft fleet to be covered by FHS."

"We are proud of our partnership with flyadeal and look forward to continuing working together. This agreement reaffirms our commitment to supporting Saudi Arabia's aviation sector," Houari added.

Airbus has finalised 11 Flight Hour Services contracts with operators worldwide over the last six months.

The latest contract agreements demonstrate the continued interest in Airbus's integrated maintenance service, proving more relevant than ever in post-crisis times when airlines need to carefully monitor their costs and contain investments.



Dubai's property market buoyed by international interest

According to the latest research by leading international real estate services firm, Chestertons, Dubai witnessed a notable rise in residential transactions over the second quarter of 2021, with positive market sentiment and continued international buyer interest driving sales.

The findings, revealed in the latest Observer: UAE Q2 2021 Market Report, showed that total residential transaction value in Dubai increased by almost 50 per cent Quarter-on-Quarter (Q-o-Q) to AED31.02bn, up from AED20.77bn the previous quarter. Total residential transaction value reached its highest level since Q4 2013, when residential sales totalled AED31.67bn. Residential transaction volume totalled 14,426 units, a rise of 35.48 per cent from Q1 2021.

Completed property sales accounted for 71 per cent of total transaction value and 59 per cent of volume in Q2 2021, with off-plan sales yet to approach their pre-pandemic share.

Chris Hobden, head of Strategic Consultancy, said, "With residential transactions at near-record levels, increased international interest has been a key factor, with Dubai's handling of COVID-19 supporting post-lockdown demand from buyers drawn by visa reforms, the emirate's quality of life and comparatively attractive pricing.

"We have seen a clear improvement in market sentiment among UAE residents this year, with a desire to buy ahead of anticipated price rises, coupled with favourable mortgage rates and generous developer incentives, spurring sales."

In Dubai's villa sales sector, strong end-user demand and continued international buyer interest underpinned prices in Q2 2021. As a result, average villa prices increased by 5.7 per cent Q-o-Q, supporting a 9.1 per cent rise Y-o-Y. The Meadows/The Springs saw the highest quarterly increases at 6.6 per cent with average prices reaching AED885 per sqft.



National Finance launches ‘Imtidad’: New horizon for sustainable initiatives

Consolidating its efforts towards community welfare, grassroots engagement and sustainability, National Finance Company, Oman's largest finance company, has announced the launch of 'Imtidad', its independent wing for sustainable initiatives. With 'Imtidad' - an Arabic word which means "an extension of impacting lives beyond business", National Finance aims to bring a fresh perspective to its CSR programs inspired by the same core values that the company is committed to since its inception - community engagement, economic support and environmental protection.

Launching its first initiative under Imtidad, National Finance has renewed its previously successful partnership with Fund for Development of Youth Projects, SAOC - "Sharakah", for the third consecutive year, with the objective of youth skills training and development, and supporting growth of Oman's SME ecosystem.

Both the organisations have a successful track record of previous initiatives supported by National Finance and implemented by Sharakah, which has received positive feedback from participants over the years.

The agreement was signed by Ali al Mani, acting CEO at National Finance and Nasser al Hajri, board member of



Sharakah.

Commenting on the launch of Imtidad, Mani said, "At National Finance, we are pleased to announce the launch of our 'Imtidad' programme today which undertakes a strategic approach towards planning and implementing long-term sustainable initiatives those are beyond our day-to-day business operations. Imtidad stems from National Finance's belief of growing with the communities, by effectively serving them to contribute to national socio-economic development.

"We will continue to launch

several impactful initiatives for the benefit of the people of Oman under Imtidad."

He further stated, "We are delighted to extend our existing partnership with Sharakah where we have already successfully contributed skill upliftment of more than 500 participants in our previous two years of working together. Through this collaboration, we aspire to enhance the skills of future entrepreneurs, helping them realize their potential and develop their projects."

Imtidad's kick-off programme, as a joint initiative with Sharakah, will be spread over 10 months. It

aims to provide consultancy and handholding services to selected 5 SMEs and conduct 5 'Calculate it Right' workshops for existing and potential business owners and students from all around Oman.

The initiative focuses on enabling entrepreneurs gain the right set of skills on financial management and proper resource planning.

Sharakah's board member and Chief Operating Officer of NBO, Engr Nasser al Hajri said, "We are delighted to renew our collaboration with National Finance for the third consecutive

year. This time with the launch of 'Imtidad' which will take the program to a whole different level. We are pleased that National Finance has found the collaboration very useful for the community and thus continues to work with Sharakah.

"Launching of 'Imtidad' gives credence to our joint effort, as this year the scope has expanded only from conducting workshops to handholding and guiding existing SMEs over almost a year's time.

"We believe this approach will generate a greater positive impact from the social investments programs and benefit the community."

National Finance, established in 1987, has built a reputation as the market leader trusted by thousands of customers across the sultanate.

National Finance offers a wide range of products targeting both individual customers and Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs) through its 20 branches across the sultanate.

Recognising its efforts, the company has won many accolades, the latest of these being the 'Most Innovative Retail Finance - Automobile - Oman 2021' Award by International Finance Awards, and the 'Best SME Finance Solution 2021' award by Capital Finance International (CFL.co).



Ahlibank offers attractive home, personal loans

Offering convenience and steadfast processing, Ahlibank continues to stay committed to fulfilling customer needs, through its attractive packages of loans across various segments. Under a limited time period offer, Ahlibank's personal loan of up to RO200,000 can be availed at an average interest rate starting from 4.85 per cent per annum and a home loan of up to RO350,000, at an average interest rate starting from 4.83 per cent per annum.

Aligned to industry best practices, the bank ensures a speedy loan processing for its new and existing customers, providing them a benchmark service experience.

With Ahlibank's comprehensive loan programme, customers can fulfil their dreams and aspirations, as the bank enables them to expand their business, or buy a home, or give their children a better education, amongst many such needs. It also creates

the possibility of enjoying a special holiday with loved ones, and buying advanced technical devices for children without having to tolerate the load of paying large premiums.

On this offer, Muneer al Balushi, AGM - head of retail distribution at Ahlibank said, "We are keen to provide financial solutions tailored to the diverse banking needs of individuals in Oman, and we encourage our customers to maintain good levels of savings and financial stability for the same. At the same time, the bank's retail solutions are innovative and are structured to cater to their needs - be it for business, leisure, a better life or for an emergency.

"Our aim is to make them a part of and entrench them in an unmatched experience from start to finish. The bank's flexibility, and seamless processes to meet critical customer requirements is a remarkable achievement in the sector."

beIN Sports to stream Collins Cup

beIN Media Group, the global sports and entertainment broadcaster and its flagship sports channel beIN Sports, and the Professional Triathletes Organisation (PTO) have agreed a partnership that will see the Collins Cup screened live and on demand in the USA, Canada, and 24 countries across the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) on beIN Sports.

The Collins Cup is the PTO's inaugural flagship event taking place on August 28 in Šamorin, near Bratislava, Slovakia and is a new race format modelled after the Ryder Cup, which will see teams of International, European and USA athletes pitted against one another and put on display the excitement, rivalry, drama and personalities of the sport of triathlon.

As part of the multi-regional deal the entire Collins Cup broadcast of over 7 hours will be broadcast live on beIN Sports across the Middle East and North Africa, USA and Canada in addition to an hour-long highlights programme of the race ac-



tion from the Collins Cup. beIN Sports will also air the PTO's 2-part Beyond Human documentary produced by Noah Media Group, which follows the journeys of three of the biggest names in the sport - Lionel Sanders (Team Internationals), Sebastien Kienle (Team Europe) and Heather Jackson (Team US) in their quest to see who rules triathlon.

Duncan Walkinshaw, acting director of programs for beIN MENA said, "The Collins Cup will be fantastic entertainment for triathlon fans, so we are thrilled

to bring this unique competition to our subscribers across the Middle East and North Africa and our markets in the United States and Canada. For our subscribers in MENA this is especially exciting given Triathlon, as a sport, is growing rapidly in the region."

Tim Godfrey, chief marketing officer at PTO, said, "We are delighted to be able to work with beIN Sports in Middle East, North Africa, USA and Canada to showcase The Collins Cup live as well as our behind the scenes documentary."

OFA RENEWS PARTNERSHIP WITH MWASALAT



Oman Football Association (OFA) and Oman National Transport Company (Mwasalat) renewed the sponsorship agreement to support the national team. The pact was signed by Sheikh Salem bin Saeed al Wahaibi, president of OFA and Badr bin Muhammad al Nadabi, acting CEO Mwasalat

Dhofar Automotive launches summer offers on popular models

Dhofar Automotive, the official distributor of Jeep, Dodge, RAM, Chrysler, Fiat and Alfa Romeo vehicles in the sultanate, has announced its summer offers on a wide range of its popular models from Jeep, Dodge, Chrysler and Alfa Romeo.

As part of these offers, customers will enjoy exceptional prices, cash gifts as well as many amazing benefits during this offer period.

Hatem el Naggar, general manager at Dhofar Automotive, said, "Dhofar Automotive is always keen on extending incredible offers to its valued customers, to encourage them to own their favourite car from the range of famous brands that it represent in the sultanate. Through the launch of this amazing summer offer, customers



purchasing any one of the selected models can enjoy exceptional prices and valuable cash gifts.

Naggar added, "In addition, they can avail of other services that we provide our valued customers to ensure a peace of

mind experience for years to come. Therefore, I would like to invite everyone to visit the Dhofar Automotive showrooms

and learn about the current offer.

"This way they can own the car of their dreams, together with

a package of services and exceptional prices and enjoy a unique ownership experience with Dhofar Automotive."

As part of the offer, the Jeep Wrangler Rubicon starts at RO16,690, Compass Trailhawk at RO9,990, Gladiator Limited Edition at RO18,990, Dodge Charger SXT at RO9,500 and Chrysler Pacifica Touring at RO11,990.

The Alfa Romeo Giulietta is available at RO9,990, while the Giulia and Stelvio are available at RO18,990 and RO19,990, respectively.

This is in addition to a package of valuable services and benefits. All the above-mentioned prices post-reduction of the cash gift.

In the sultanate, Chrysler, Jeep, Dodge, Fiat, Alfa Romeo and RAM models are available at Dhofar Automotive showrooms with different equipment classes.

TALIBAN MOVE TO RES

TALIBAN TAKEOVER

The Taliban have sought to project an air of restraint and moderation, including by announcing a ‘general amnesty’ for govt workers

Kabul, Afghanistan - The Taliban moved on Tuesday to quickly restart the Afghan capital following their stunning takeover of Kabul and told government staff to return to work, though residents reacted cautiously and few women took to the streets.

Tens of thousands of people have tried to flee Afghanistan to escape the hardline Islamist rule expected under the Taliban, or fearing direct retribution for siding with the US-backed government that ruled for the past two decades.

Evacuation flights from Kabul's airport restarted on Tuesday after chaos the previous day in which huge crowds mobbed the tarmac, with some people so desperate they clung to the outside of a US military plane as it prepared for take-off.

The Taliban led a pariah regime from 1996 to 2001, infamous for a brutal rule in which girls could not go to school, women were barred from working in jobs that would put them in contact with men, and people were stoned to death.

US-led forces invaded following the September 11 attacks, in response to the Taliban giving sanctuary to Al Qaeda, and toppled them.

Now the Taliban are back in power, they have sought to project an air of restraint and moderation, including by on Tuesday announcing a 'general amnesty' for government workers.

Those working in any part or department of the government should resume their duties with

full satisfaction and continue their duties without any fear,' a Taliban statement said.

Some shops also reopened as traffic police were back on the streets, while Taliban officials planned a first diplomatic meeting - with the Russian ambassador.

A Taliban official also gave an interview to a female journalist on an Afghan news channel, and a girls' school reopened in the western city of Herat. However, schools and universities remained closed, few women openly took to the streets and men had shed their Western clothes for traditional garb.

The UN Security Council also said on Monday the international community must ensure Afghanistan does not become a breeding ground for terrorism.

"The world is watching," UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres said.

The Taliban took effective control of the country on Sunday when president Ashraf Ghani fled and the insurgents walked into Kabul with no opposition.

It capped a staggeringly fast rout of all cities in just 10 days, achieved with relatively little bloodshed, following two decades of war that claimed hundreds of thousands of lives.

The collapse came after President Joe Biden withdrew US troops, under the false belief that the Afghan army - with billions of dollars in American funding and training - was strong enough to withstand the Taliban.

AFP



Afghans living in exile fear for relatives trapped under Taliban

Paris, France - Afghans who have found sanctuary in France in recent years now fear the relatives they left behind will be permanently trapped and could face reprisals from the Taliban for their links to the West.

Several Afghan refugees told AFP they regretted not pressing their relatives to leave the country sooner, after the Taliban takeover caused chaos that has seen civilian flights suspended.

French President Emmanuel Macron promised on Monday that France would 'protect those who are most under threat in Afghanistan' while also vowing Europe would put together a 'robust' initiative to thwart illegal migration and in particular people-smuggling networks.

"My father and brother worked for the Americans for three years. They left Kabul to hide a few miles away because the Taliban are looking for those who have helped the West," said Nosar (24), a refugee in France since 2018.

His father and brother filed visa applications with the American embassy several weeks ago but these have - for the moment - remained unanswered, he said.

"Now that the diplomats are evacuated, I fear that it is too



French Special Forces Soldiers arrive to evacuate French and Afghan nationals in Kabul airport on Tuesday (AFP)

My father and brother worked for the Americans for three years. They left Kabul to hide a few miles away because the Taliban are looking for those who have helped the West

NOSAR

late," said Nosar. "In Kabul, everyone is in shock, it happened so quickly."

"The president is gone, it's all over," he added, referring to president Ashraf Ghani who flew out

of Kabul for an unknown destination as the Taliban took control.

Many Western diplomats have already been flown out of Kabul although some embassies are retaining a skeleton staff

around the airport to process visa applications.

'Waited too long'

Like many Afghans, Nosar fears that the Taliban will once again impose the extremist vision of Islamic law that was in effect when they ruled the country between 1996 and 2001.

"The Taliban claim they are more moderate than before. But no one is fooled. With them in power, the Afghans will be deprived of their fundamental

rights," said Nosar.

Images of Afghans crowding planes on the tarmac of Kabul airport and even clinging onto the undercarriages of aircraft have shocked the world and underlined the desperation of many to leave.

"It is their last chance before the airport comes under the control of the Taliban," said Afghan exile Reza Jafari, who heads the Paris-based organisation Children of Afghanistan and Elsewhere.

Sonila, who left Afghanistan in 2017 and asked for asylum in France, fears for her husband who stayed in the country to work for the United States and planned to join her at a later date.

"He waited too long," said Sonali (28), adding that poor Internet connections make any contact with him difficult.

"Maybe he will try to find sanctuary in a refugee camp in (neighbouring) Tajikistan for a while. He would be safer there. But we will always be separated," she said, her voice trembling.

Hashon Hassani, 21, a refugee in France since 2019, had hoped up until Sunday that his sister, 20, would get a visa allowing her to join him.

AFP



An Afghan military helicopter in Panjshir province on Monday (AFP)

Defiant former VP vows new fight

Panjshir, Afghanistan - Afghanistan's defiant vice president made one thing clear as the Taliban seized control of the capital following the collapse of his government - he will not surrender.

It appears he has retreated to the country's last remaining holdout: The Panjshir Valley northeast of Kabul.

"I won't disappoint millions who listened to me. I will never be under one ceiling with Taliban. NEVER," he wrote in English on Twitter on Sunday, before going underground.

A day later, pictures began to surface on social media of the former vice president with the son of his former mentor and famed anti-Taliban fighter Ahmed Shah Massoud in Panjshir - a mountainous redoubt

tucked into the Hindu Kush.

Saleh and Massoud's son, who commands a militia force, appear to be putting together the first pieces of a guerilla movement to take on the victorious Taliban, as fighters regroup in Panjshir.

Famed for its natural defences, the valley never fell to the Taliban during the civil war of the 1990s, nor was it ever conquered by the Soviets a decade earlier.

"We will not allow the Taliban to enter Panjshir and will resist with all our might and power, and fight them," one resident said.

Such a battle would be the latest in Saleh's long struggle against the Taliban as a one-time insurgent turned spy chief and later vice premier.

START KABUL



Taliban fighters stand guard at an entrance gate outside the Interior Ministry in Kabul on Tuesday (AFP)



Biden defends exit

In his first comments since the Taliban victory, Biden admitted the Taliban advance had unfolded more quickly than expected.

"I am President of the United States of America and the buck stops with me," Biden said in a much-awaited televised address from the White House, after several days of silence on the momentous developments.

As scenes of mayhem unfolded in the Afghan capital, Biden said he was 'deeply saddened' by the turn of events - and promised to 'speak out' on the rights of women now facing a return to Taliban rule.

But he was steadfast in insisting he did not regret pulling out America's troops - despite a torrent of criticism of the chaotic end to two decades of US-led military intervention.

"I stand squarely behind my decision," Biden said. "After 20 years, I've learned the hard way that there was never a good time to withdraw US forces."

The US leader acknowledged that the Afghan government collapsed more quickly than he expected - and suggested that they had lacked the will to stand up to the Taliban.

"The truth is, this did unfold more quickly than we had anticipated," Biden said.

"We gave them every chance

We gave them every chance to determine their own future... The mission in Afghanistan was never supposed to be nation-building

JOE BIDEN

to determine their own future. We could not provide them with the will to fight for that future."

Biden reiterated however that the US national interest in Afghanistan was always principally about preventing terrorist attacks on the US homeland - and that America would continue to 'act quickly and decisively' against any terror threat emanating from the country.

"The mission in Afghanistan was never supposed to be nation-building," he said.

And the US President issued a stark warning to the Taliban not to disrupt or threaten the evacuation of thousands of American diplomats and Afghan translators at the Kabul airport.

"We will defend our people with devastating force if necessary," he said.

Fear: Life returning to a new normal

Kabul, Afghanistan - Gone are Western clothes favoured by the fashion-conscious in the Afghan capital, with men on the streets now wearing traditional shalwar kameez.

And there are hardly any women to be seen.

"The fear is there," said a shopkeeper on Tuesday, asking not to be named after he opened his neighbourhood provisions store.

Life was returning to a new normal in Kabul as cautious residents ventured out of their homes to see what life would be like under the Taliban following their astonishing return to power at the weekend.

For some, it's as if the last 20 years never happened.

Already there are signs that people are changing the way they live to accommodate the return of the new hardline Islamist regime - if not by direct order, then at least for self-preservation.

During their first stint in power - from 1996 until 2001 when they were ousted by the US-led invasion in the wake of the September 11 attacks - the Taliban ruled with a strict interpretation of Quran and sharia.

A swift whipping across the back of the legs by cadres from the Ministry for the Propagation of Virtue and the Prevention of Vice was common for those tardy at prayer times.

Public floggings, amputations



Taliban fighters on a pick-up truck move around a market area at the Kote Sangi area of Kabul on Tuesday (AFP)

of limbs for thieves and even executions were scheduled for Fridays - sometimes held at the national stadium.

A ban on mixed schools meant most girls could not get an education, and women were barred from working in scenarios where they may have contact with men.

There was no sign on Tuesday that such strict measures had been re-introduced - or even would be - but people were taking no chances.

"People are scared of the unknown," another shopkeeper said. "The Taliban are patrolling the city in small convoys. They

don't harass people but of course the people are scared."

A sign of the new times was seen on the TV stations that proliferated during the Taliban's absence.

State TV is showing mostly pre-recorded Islamic programmes or announcements from Maulvi Ishaq Nizami - a man introduced as the head of Voice of Sharia, the Taliban media outlet.

Tolo TV, the private channel which thrived over the past two decades on a mix of Western style game shows, soap operas and talent contests, has stopped most routine programming and

is now showing repeats of a Turkish drama about the Ottoman empire.

They did, however, have a newscast with a female presenter interviewing a Taliban official.

On Tuesday the Taliban announced a "general amnesty" for all government officials, and urged them to return to work.

"You should start your routine life with full confidence," the announcement said - and some appeared to take the advice to heart, with white-capped traffic police re-appearing on the streets for the first time in days, although it was not as busy as usual.

AFP



The now-viral image shows 640 fleeing Afghans inside a US Air Force C-17 transport flight

Over 600 fleeing Afghans cram into dramatic US flight

Kabul, Afghanistan - A photo shows more than 600 Afghans - women, men, children and the elderly - sitting packed on the floor of a cavernous US military plane, part of a dramatic airlift hours after Kabul fell to the Taliban.

The now-viral image, obtained and posted by the military news site Defense One, was taken inside a US Air Force C-17 transport.

The Afghans crammed in the giant cargo hold on the Sunday night flight were among those approved for evacuation by US authorities, according to the site.

The US military said about 640 Afghans were on board.

But such a large number on one flight was not planned, a US official told Defense One -

many climbed onto the half-open ramp at the back of the plane in desperation.

"The crew made the decision to go [rather than force them out]," the official said.

It came as Taliban fighters flooded the streets of Kabul, with panicked citizens rushing to the airport to try and find a flight out of Afghanistan.

"The unusually high number of passengers aboard this aircraft... was the result of a dynamic security environment that necessitated quick decision making by the crew," US Central Command spokesperson Karen Roxberry said in a statement.

It 'ultimately ensured that these passengers were safely taken outside the country'.

Among the people visible

in the photo is a small child holding a feeding bottle in the lap of a woman. Several other people are seen holding small children.

Hardly any belongings are visible among the passengers, except a small suitcase and a backpack in the foreground.

The flight - which Defense One said had the call sign Reach 871 - landed in Qatar in the early hours of Monday, according to the tracking website FlightAware.

The US military did not specify the destination. This C-17 was not the only one to take so many Afghans out of the country - Defense One cited the US official as saying several planes took off from Kabul with similar numbers.

AFP

UN urges no forced returns of Afghans to their country

Geneva, Switzerland - The United Nations on Tuesday called on countries to ban all forced returns of Afghans to their conflict-torn nation.

The UN refugee agency said it had released a 'non-return advisory' for Afghanistan, insisting no Afghan nationals should be forced to return, including asylum seekers who have had their claims rejected.

"In the wake of the rapid deterioration in the security and human rights situation in large parts of the country and the unfolding humanitarian emergency, UNHCR calls on states to halt forcible returns of Afghan nationals who have previously been determined

not to be in need of international protection," agency spokeswoman Shabia Mantoo told reporters in Geneva.

She welcomed the fact that a number of European countries had halted all forced returns to Afghanistan, and voiced hope that others would quickly follow suit.

Tens of thousands of people have tried to flee Afghanistan to escape the hardline Islamist rule expected under the Taliban, or fearing direct retribution for siding with the US-backed government that ruled for the past two decades.

Even before the chaos in recent days, Mantoo said more than 550,000 Afghans

have been internally displaced as a result of conflict and insecurity since the beginning of the year.

"While civilians have so far only fled sporadically in fewer numbers to countries neighbouring Afghanistan, the situation continues to evolve rapidly," she said.

"We call on the international community to extend all possible support to those who may be at imminent risk," UN rights office spokesman Rupert Colville said. He also urged the Taliban to honour the promises made to be inclusive, and to allow women and girls to work and go to school.

AFP



Afghan families walk by the aircrafts at the Kabul airport, in Kabul on Monday (AFP)

COVID-19 PADEMIC

Concern over virus outbreak in Australia Indigenous communities

Sydney, Australia - There is 'enormous concern' over a coronavirus outbreak in vulnerable Australian Indigenous communities, authorities said on Tuesday, prompting them to deploy military personnel to deliver vaccines to the largely unjabbed population.

A Delta variant outbreak that began in Sydney two months ago has spread to western New South Wales state in recent days, with health officials saying most of the 116 cases detected in the area so far were among Aboriginal people.

New South Wales premier Gladys Berejiklian said the outbreak was of 'enormous concern', with the Outback region under lockdown orders in an attempt to curb transmission.

It is the first significant outbreak among the remote Aboriginal communities since the pandemic began, and has sparked fears for a population widely believed to be more vulnerable to COVID-19.

At least five teams of military health specialists will head to the area from Wednesday to boost local vaccination efforts, Australia's Health Minister Greg Hunt said.



Health workers at a vaccination centre, in Brisbane on Tuesday (AFP)

"They'll support vaccination but where swabbing or other activities are required they're highly mobile, highly flexible and highly trained," he said.

Just 15 per cent of Indigenous people across Australia have been fully vaccinated - falling to less than eight per cent in remote outbreak hotspots - according to officials.

That is despite the population being identified as a priority for early vaccinations when Aus-

tralia's sluggish vaccine roll-out began late February.

Facing questions over whether it had failed in its duty to inoculate Aboriginal Australians, the conservative government said some previously did not seek vaccinations because they felt secure living in remote areas.

"This has now changed and it's a game changer, and that's why we're seeing the stepping up," said Minister for Indigenous

Australians Ken Wyatt.

Hunt said civilian emergency health teams would also be sent to the region to support local clinics, some of which state officials have said are short-staffed.

Additional measures are being put in place to airlift anyone requiring intensive hospital treatment to bigger towns or cities.

Australia won global praise for its early pandemic response but strict border closures have

A Delta variant outbreak that began in Sydney two months ago has spread to western New South Wales state in recent days, with health officials saying most of the 116 cases detected in the area so far were among Aboriginal people

struggled to keep out the highly transmissible Delta variant amid low vaccination rates.

The outbreak that began in Sydney has grown to more than 8,600 cases since mid-June, taking the national total to more than 39,000 cases so far during the pandemic.

More than half the country's 25mn people are currently under stay-at-home orders, including Sydney where residents have been in lockdown for two months.

AFP



New Zealand has won widespread praise for its coronavirus response, recording just 26 deaths in a population of five million (AFP)

Snap national lockdown in New Zealand

Wellington, New Zealand - New Zealand imposed a snap three-day lockdown on Tuesday after identifying a single case of locally transmitted COVID-19 suspected to be the Delta variant, Prime Minister Jacinda Ardern said.

Ardern said New Zealand, which had not recorded any infections in the community for six months, could not take any chances with the 'game changer' Delta strain.

"We have seen what can happen elsewhere if we fail to get on top of it. We only get one chance," Ardern said.

The New Zealand leader cited Australia's struggles to contain the highly transmissible variant for her 'short, sharp' response after a 58 year old Auckland man was diagnosed with coronavirus from an unknown source.

"We are better to start high and be cautious, then move out as soon as we are comfortable doing so, than to start low and be in that phase (lockdown) for much, much longer," she said.

"You only need to look at Australia to see the alternative."

The initial plan is for New Zealand to remain in lockdown for three days from Tuesday night, with Auckland and the nearby Coromandel area facing the restrictions for a week. Officials said a major factor behind the strong response was the fact that the Auckland case has no obvious connection to the border or managed isolation.

"This case was identified in

Auckland but is a national issue," director-general of health Ashley Bloomfield said.

"Because we cannot link it to the border it's possible there could be other cases around in Auckland and other chains of transmission (outside the city)."

'Go hard'

New Zealand has won widespread praise for its coronavirus response - centred on eliminating the virus rather than containing it - and has recorded just 26 deaths in a population of five million.

It had not needed to impose national stay-at-home orders for more than a year and life has remained close to normal, with no limits on social gatherings and limited mask use.

It also maintains strict border controls - with mandatory two-week quarantine for international arrivals.

"The reason New Zealand has been held up as an example is because we've used strategies like this before and they've worked... the best thing we can do to get out of this as quickly as we can is to go hard," Ardern said. Ardern said New Zealand was one of the last places in the world to record Delta in the community, giving it the advantage of learning from others' experience.

But she said it was safest to presume the strain was now present, even though laboratory tests would not offer confirmation until Wednesday.

AFP

Japan expands virus emergency to battle surge

Tokyo, Japan - Japan's government on Tuesday expanded a coronavirus state of emergency to seven more regions as it battles a record wave of infections a week before the Paralympic Games.

Virus emergency measures that ban restaurants and bars from selling alcohol and require them to close by 8.00pm are already in place in Tokyo and five other regions, and had been due to end by August 31.

But Prime Minister Yoshihide Suga said the measure would be expanded to additional areas, with the restrictions in all parts



Prime Minister Yoshihide Suga speaks on the COVID situation

of the country running until September 12.

"We are seeing unprecedented growth in infections continuing in our country. The number of patients with serious

symptoms is increasing," Suga told a meeting of ministers and government officials.

"The government will form a united front to overcome this crisis and take thorough measures to save people's lives and keep them safe."

In addition to the measures affecting bars and restaurants, the government will ask large shopping malls and department stores to limit the number of customers inside at one time.

Japan has seen a smaller outbreak than many other countries, with around 15,400 deaths despite avoiding lockdowns.

But its inoculation programme began later and more slowly than in many other developed countries, and only around 37 per cent of the population is fully vaccinated.

In recent days, Japan has reported more than 20,000 daily cases nationwide, a record for the country.

The surge began before the Olympics opened last month and continued throughout the Games, which were held with spectators banned from most events.

On Monday night, organisers said a spectator ban would also

be applied to the Paralympics, with limited exceptions for a programme bringing schoolchildren to watch the Games.

Paralympic participants face virus restrictions including regular testing and limits on their movement.

The government says there is no evidence that holding the Games contributed to the rise in cases and recent polls have found most Japanese believe holding the Olympics was a good idea, though many also think it fuelled the infection surge.

AFP

Blinded by wartime explosion, Gaza boy dreams of school

Beit Lahia, Palestinian Territories

- Eight-year-old Mohammed Shaban dreamed of returning to the classroom in Gaza for the start of the school year. But after an exploded missile blinded him in May, he is staying home.

Mohammed used to attend school with his cousins and neighbours in the town of Beit Lahia in the northern Gaza Strip.

He is one of hundreds of children the United Nations says were injured during fighting in May between Israel and the Hamas Islamists who control the Palestinian enclave.

From May 10 to 21, the Israeli army pummelled the Gaza Strip in response to rocket fire by Hamas.

Mohammed said he was walking to a market to buy clothes during the conflict when a missile exploded.

As a result of the blast, his father Hani said, "Mohammed was injured in the eyes, which led to the loss of his eyes, and Mohammed became completely blind."

The Shabans say Mohammed was injured by a missile fired by the Israelis, although AFP could not independently verify it.

The boy still hoped to return to school, Hani said, and his new



Palestinian pupil Mohammed Shaban sits alongside classmates at school in beit Lahia, in the northern Gaza Strip, on Tuesday (AFP)

disability left him moody and unpredictable. "He sometimes asks me, 'When will I see', or 'When will I go back to school with the children', or 'When will I go out to the street alone,'" Hani said.

Human Rights Watch has accused both Israel and Gaza of war crimes during the conflict.

Israeli airstrikes killed 260 Palestinians, including fighters, while munitions fired by militants in Gaza killed 13 people in Israel, including a soldier.

HRW said Israeli strikes were not always directed at military targets. Also it said Palestinians fired indiscriminately at Israeli cities, with rockets that fell short killing at least seven Palestinians

in Gaza and wounding others.

For now, Mohammed grips his father's hand, his head facing down, as they walk through their neighbourhood.

They step along narrow dirt streets lined by cinderblock walls covered in graffiti.

At home, Hani Shaban guided his son to sit down on cushions and showed him the collared shirts of his school uniform.

Mohammed gripped a pen and tried to form letters in a notebook as his parents encouraged him. "In the future, I hope he can go to a special school for the disabled," said Somaya Shaban, Mohammed's mother.

AFP

Libya political upturn boosts migrant exodus

Tripoli, Libya - As violence in Libya has waned this year, the number of would-be migrants to Europe intercepted so far has doubled compared to the same period of 2020, experts say.

The International Organization for Migration (IOM) says 20,257 people have been intercepted at sea and returned to Libya so far this year.

The North African country remains one of the main departure points for tens of thousands of migrants, mainly from sub-Saharan Africa, hoping to attempt the dangerous Mediterranean crossing.

Most try to reach the Italian coast around 300km away.

A Libyan navy official also told AFP of a "100 per cent increase in departures from January to July" compared with the same period last year, without giving figures.

Lawyer Anwar al Werfalli, a specialist in migration law, attributes the rise in migrant numbers 'in particular to the end of the fighting' in Libya.

The 2011 uprising that brought about the downfall and death of dictator Moammar Gadhafi plunged the country into chaos and years of infighting between militias.

But a UN-brokered ceasefire in October 2020 has been generally respected, and a transi-



This file photo shows rescued migrants aboard a Libyan coastguard vessel at a naval base in Tripoli (AFP)

tional government was installed this year.

Werfalli said this has created some 'stability which, though relative, encourages migrants to undertake the crossing'.

The central Mediterranean crossing between Libya and Italy or Malta is by far the deadliest in the world, according to IOM figures. The most recent tragedy was last month, when at least 57 migrants drowned.

According to UN refugee agency the UNHCR, more than 10,000 migrants and refugees made landfall in Italy in the first four months of 2021, an increase of about 170 per cent over the

same period of 2020.

Werfalli said people smugglers have now boosted operations 'to compensate for the shortfall during the many months of lockdown' for the COVID-19 pandemic.

"Many migrants who had to put their plans on hold are now back on the road," he said.

Miloud el Hajj, a professor of international relations, told AFP that traffickers had exploited the conflict in Libya, to the extent that the country became a hub for people smugglers.

While violence and a collapsed state 'facilitated the crossing' to Europe, he said, it

also 'frightened migrants who worried about being badly treated or kidnapped'.

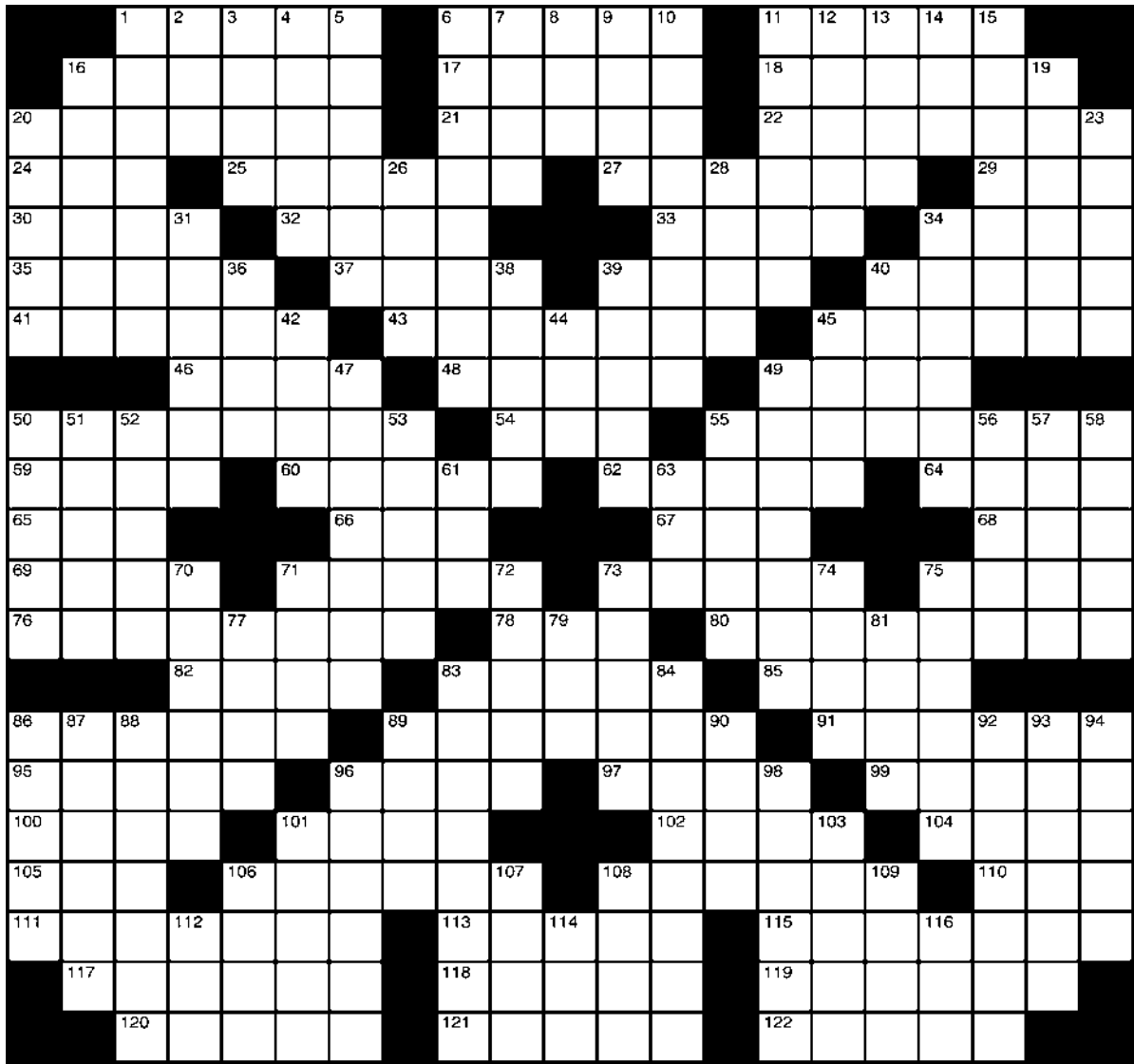
Libya's own coastguard has long faced accusations of ill-treatment of migrants.

At the end of June, German charity Sea-Watch released aerial images of what it said was a Libyan coastguard vessel firing shots about two to three metres from the bow of a boat carrying around 50 migrants.

Abdel Rahman al Mahmoudi, a former officer in the Libyan navy, said the country 'needs international aid to cope with the endless flow of migrants'.

AFP

DAILY CROSSWORD



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ACROSS

- 1 Native West Indian
6 Word before book or opera
11 "West Side Story" heroine
16 Part of AD
17 Genus of ground beetles
18 Catkins
20 A Romance language
21 Principle or doctrine
22 White-flowering tree
24 Social insect
25 Make beloved
27 Greet the troops
29 "Castles in the ____": 1970's song
30 Prejudiced leaning
32 Jewish month
33 Role for Leslie Caron, 1953
34 First of 16 Across
35 On the level: sl.
37 Assam silkworm
39 Cold wind of the Adriatic
40 Pays to play
41 Tropical oleoresins
43 Increase in size
45 He condemned Jesus
46 Ms. Chase
48 Hillside dugouts
49 Mother of Helen and Pollux
50 Enzyme found in blood

- 54 Piece out a living
55 Underground vault
59 Algerian seaport
60 Stooges number
62 James Galway's instrument
64 Case for small articles
65 Fond du ____, WI
66 Thames island
67 Burrows or Vigoda
68 SA country: abbr.
69 Goddess of the rainbow: Gr.
71 Malign or slander: inf.
73 Blade of grass, for one
75 Pure form of trona
76 Hybrid bison: pl.
78 Hasten
80 Aircraft launcher
82 Piecrust need
83 Relating to citizenship
85 Cole and Turner
86 Conditional freedom
89 1971 Woody Allen comedy
91 Coronets
95 San Antonio battle site
96 Lavish excess
97 Affliction
98 List ender?
99 West Point freshman
100 Old Greek musical note
101 Chinese wax

- insect, Ericerus
102 Gelatinous culture medium
104 Pretty soon
105 Tate start?
106 Noted jockey Eddie
108 Uses a carpenter's tool
110 Printer's units of measure
111 Seaport in Sicily
113 Brass or bronze
115 Variety of grape
117 Wise old counselor
118 Duck like water birds
119 Musical studies
120 Word with room or tire
121 Type of fund
122 Small drum
DOWN
1 Summer abode
2 Physicians' grp.
3 Irritate
4 Without sense or meaning
5 Hobo's burden
6 Island off California
7 Ancient Hebrew measure
8 Ice or wing follower
9 Angers
10 Shop-at-home manuals

- 11 Blotch on the skin
12 Valuable violin
13 Plexus
14 Once __ lifetime
15 Peach State capital
16 Radcliffe or Craig
19 Small piano
20 Undersea message, e.g.
23 Part of a Stein line
26 NW France river
28 Spend them in Milan
31 Ape or monkey
34 Broad medieval dagger
36 Money drawer
38 Dramatist Edward
39 Law-case summary
40 Verdi heroine
42 Three-handed card game
44 Biblical boat
45 Rose of baseball
47 Humiliated
49 Pope's cathedral as bishop of Rome
50 Infant's complaint
51 Aussie palm cockatoo
52 Unspoken
53 Iroquoian-stock members
55 Having three dimensions
56 Japanese seaport
57 Work by Jose Sert
58 Narrow-minded zealot

- 61 Info at JFK
63 Once around the track
70 Daughter of Herodias
71 Pretty offended: inf.
72 River in Germany
73 Large fishing net
74 French state
75 College in New Jersey
77 French composer Edouard
79 The yellow bugle
81 Waiter's reward
83 Large waterfall
84 Chemical agent
86 Unreasoning fear
87 Spanish novelist Mateo
88 Large flightless birds
89 Gaucho missile
90 Early Icelandic tale
92 Renovator
93 Nuclear weapons
94 Kind of philosophical data
96 Metric unit of area
98 Surgical knife
101 Former
103 Lariat
106 Temple wall part
107 Swan genus
108 Flower and poker containers
109 Pencil end
112 Poisonous viper
114 Comic Costello
116 Commotion

YOUR DAILY HOROSCOPE



ARIES MARCH 21-APRIL 19

There is nothing wrong with letting your hopes get a bit high right now, so go ahead and reach for the stars! Your positive thinking has made things happen in the past, so why would you doubt that they could ever work again? As long as you don't sign any legal documents, make any big commitments, or invest any money in something that isn't fully fleshed out yet, there is nothing wrong.



LEO JULY 23-AUGUST 22

Reminiscing about the past is a great way to determine where to go in your future. Get together with old friends or family members and share your feelings about the past with them. Even if you just send an email off to an old friend with the subject line 'remember when', you'll unlock an important memory that will teach you about who you are now -- and who you want to evolve into.



SAGITTARIUS NOVEMBER 22-DECEMBER 21

Just when you thought you'd missed the boat on a hot new trend, today you will get an exciting invitation from a new person who's on a mission to add more fun to your life! So get ready to go for an exciting ride for a while. There will be new people, new experiences and perhaps even some new romance coming your way. And be ready to move at a moment's notice.



TAURUS APRIL 20-MAY 20

Immerse yourself in a different culture, and you will give yourself a wonderful learning experience. Getting in touch with foreign food, music, dance or art will all invigorate you -- and make you aware of other philosophies that you may or may not want to adopt to your own life. It's up to you to take every opportunity you can to grow as a person. You are always a work in progress.



VIRGO AUGUST 23-SEPTEMBER 22

Today, you are going to make a very good impression on the people you're about to meet -- no matter what the situation, setting or occasion. You'll have the perfect balance of charm and relaxation. So now that your social life is about to take a major upswing, is your wardrobe prepared for it? A shopping trip might be warranted today if you can swing it.



CAPRICORN DECEMBER 22-JANUARY 19

Your energy is strong right now -- which is good. However, when your power is so potent, it can be difficult to work with others, especially those who are at the opposite end of the energy spectrum. So try to avoid anyone who is weak, slow, or passive today. They'll provide no inspiration or match for you, and you will quickly become bored. Instead, seek out an equal.



GEMINI MAY 21-JUNE 21

There is a new romance coming your way, but it might not be love-related. You can find passion when you discover a new hobby, new kind of music, or even a new kind of food! The bottom line is that at some point today, you will come across something wonderful that you didn't even know you were waiting for. No matter what it is, it will bring a lot of fun into your life.



LIBRA SEPTEMBER 23-OCTOBER 22

It's a super day to get a little more creative with the things you do for fun! You don't need things to be first class, top shelf or super exclusive to be enjoyable, and you know that. So put your grey matter to work figuring out how to spend zero money and still have a good time! Go online to track down some free lectures, concerts and art shows.



AQUARIUS JANUARY 20-FEBRUARY 18

Someone whose eye you have been trying to catch is suddenly staring right at you! They are waking up to your charms, and they are interested in learning more about what you think of them. Take advantage of their interest today by extending them a casual invitation -- maybe ask them to lunch, coffee or just for a walk around the block. It's important to get a conversation going.



CANCER JUNE 22-JULY 22

When you need a break, you're really going to need a break! Lately, you have a tendency to get so wrapped up in what you are doing that you forget you've been doing it so hard for so long -- and you could burn out if you don't slow down when you need to. Try to tune into your body and your subconscious a little bit more. Listen to your inner voice when it tells you it's getting tired.



SCORPIO OCTOBER 23-NOVEMBER 21

Whether you have an awareness of it or not, your career is going through a transformation now. Talk to one or two coworkers about where they think you could be headed and get some insight about what might be in store. You're in for a lot more than you thought -- and a lot more than you had hoped! Not all the gossip has been accurate.



PISCES FEBRUARY 19-MARCH 20

The art of friendship is not easy for everyone to master, and one of your friends is having a very difficult time managing this partnership right now. If they have flaked out on you yet again, or put their needs ahead of yours, you should try to be cool about it. Let them know that you are none too pleased by their behaviour, but don't get too emotional about it.



TEST YOUR KNOWLEDGE

1. Paper is manufactured by

- a. Wood and resin
b. Wood, sodium and bleach-ing powder
c. Wood, calcium, hydrogen sulphite and resin
d. Wood and bleaching powder

2. Soap is a mixture of sodium or potassium salts of

- a. dicarboxylic acids
b. monocarboxylic acids
c. glycerol
d. tricarboxylic acids

3. The type of glass used in making lenses and prisms is

- a. jena glass
b. soft glass
c. pyrex glass
d. flint glass

Answers: 1.c 2.b 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

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

BOGGLER

L	H	I	R
L	O	T	F
L	H	R	L
G	E	I	I

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

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

DAILY CROSSWORD																	
ANSWERS (AUGUST 17)																	
H	A	R	S	H	A	N	D	L	A	S	H	H	A	R	P	O	
A	V	I	L	L	A	A	T	I	A	A	G	A	W	A	R	D	
R	E	D	A	N	N	E	E	D	H	O	R	N	N	A	I	A	D
T	R	I	E	N	D	D	U	C	E	R	I	E	D	D	R	A	M
G	O	T	T	E	N	S	A	S	S	U	M	E					
S	A	I	P	E	R	I	S	U	S	E	T	O	P	E	B	I	J
C	A	L	I	B	A	N	T	A	E	L	S						
A	R	I	A	D	A	S											
R	O	T	O	R													
E	N	O	L														
S	T	E	N														
S	I	K	I														
Y	E	R	E	K													
O	P	E	N	E	R												
W	I	N	E	S	A	P											
E	S	E															
A	M	I	S	H	A	R	E	S									
B	A	L	S	A													
A	L	I	E	N													
S	T	A	N	D													

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



3

RIAL MEAL FOR 4

When the economic situation gets grim and purse strings have to be tightened to avoid frivolous domestic expenditure, preparing budget meals at home can be helpful. Here's how to prepare a simple, yet sumptuous, meal for four persons at home by spending just RO3 at the market



BUDGET MEALS – INDIAN

COST
RO1.5
APPROX

Spicy Mackerel Curry

Ingredients

- 1 kg small mackerels - RO1
- 1 box fish masala (any brand) – 400bz
- 2 sachets tomato paste – 150bz
- 1tbsp ginger-garlic paste –
- 1 onion – sliced
- 2 green chillies – slit
- 1 sprig curry leaves
- 4tbsp oil
- Juice of half lemon
- Salt, to taste

Method

Clean the fish and mark cuts on both sides of each. Marinate with 2tsp of fish masala, lemon juice, and salt to taste. Cut four

fishes into halves and reserve for the curry while four full fishes will be fried later.

Now make the curry. Heat 2tbsp oil in a wok or curry pot, add the curry leaves followed by the onion. When the onions get translucent, add the ginger-garlic paste and fry for a minute. Then add 2tbsp (heaping) of the fish masala powder and two sachets of tomato paste. Add half cup of water, mix all ingredients well and cook on low flame for 4-5 minutes. Then, add two cups of water and the green chillies, mix well, and continue cooking on medium flame for 6-8 minutes.

Now add the fish pieces reserved for the curry, cover lid, and simmer for 6-8

minutes till fish pieces are cooked well.

To fry the fish:

Heat 2tbsp oil in a pan and fry the marinated fish for 4-5 minutes on both sides till they get a nice golden-brown char. For a crisper version, coat the marinated fish with 1tbsp of either semolina, gram flour or rice flour and then shallow fry on both sides. Serve with with onion/lemon rings.

Note: Less than half of the fish masala is used for this recipe, which costs just 200bz. You may also try this recipe with sardines, sole fish or barracuda, all within the same price as mackerel.



COST
300BZ
APPROX

Jeera Aloo

Ingredients

- 750g potatoes – 200bz (1 kg costs around 350bz)
- 2 green chillies
- 1 onion – sliced
- 2 sprigs of coriander leaves
- ½ tsp turmeric powder
- 1tsp cumin seeds (Jeera)
- 1tsp mustard seeds
- 2 cloves garlic – sliced
- 1 sprig curry leaves
- 1tbsp oil
- Salt, to taste

Method

Boil the potatoes till tender, peel and chop into cubes. Heat oil in a pan, add the mustard seeds. When the mustard crackles, add the curry leaves, onion, garlic and cumin seeds. Fry for 2 minutes on medium flame, then add the green chillies and turmeric powder. Add salt to taste and mix well. Now add the chopped potatoes and toss to coat well. Garnish with chopped coriander leaves.

COST
700BZ
APPROX

Steamed Rice

Ingredients

- ½ kg basmati rice – 700bz (1 kg costs around RO1.4)
- Juice of half lemon
- Salt, to taste

Method

Wash and soak the rice in water for half an hour. In a large pot, boil water and add the soaked rice. Half way through, add the lemon juice and salt to taste. When tender, remove from the fire and drain the water in a colander. Cover and set aside. In another version, cook two cups of soaked rice with four cups of water, lemon juice, salt and 1 tsp ghee. Add all ingredients together and simmer on very low flame until rice is tender.



TENNIS ROUND-UP

Winning return for Murray

Three-time Grand Slam champion defeats Frenchman Gasquet in first round of Cincinnati Masters



Andy Murray of Great Britain returns a shot to Richard Gasquet of France during their first round game

CINCINNATI MASTERS

Cincinnati, US - Andy Murray returned to the ATP Tour on Monday after last competing at Wimbledon, reaching the second round of the Cincinnati Masters with a 6-4, 6-4 win over Frenchman Richard Gasquet.

The three-time Grand Slam winner, who owns two titles here and played the 2016 final, has been struggling over the summer with a groin strain. Murray, with 15 aces among his 38 winners, was pleased with his effort. "I thought I did well. I moved pretty well for my first singles match in a while on hard courts," he said. "(I was) certainly, a little bit more confident in my movement than when I played him a couple of years ago (2019)."

Also, birthday boy Jannik Sinner turned 20 on a rain-interrupted day and celebrated with a win. The young gun was joined in the second round after a delayed start by 34-year-old Italian compatriot Fabio Fognini.

Sinner erased memories of a disheartening first-round loss a week ago in Toronto when he went down in his opening match to Australian qualifier James Duckworth. The youngster, ranked 15th, came good in Cincinnati as he defeated Argentine Federico Delbonis 6-2, 7-5. Fognini joined the party with a 7-6 (7/3), 6-3 win over Nikoloz Basilashvili of Georgia in a first-time meeting.

"I gave myself the best present possible," Sinner said. "I

played and won a match on my birthday at a big tournament." Sinner later posted pictures on social media of himself and his team enjoying a celebratory pizza.

I thought I did well. I moved pretty well for my first singles match in a while on hard courts. (I was) certainly, a little bit more confident in my movement...

ANDY MURRAY

Argentine Diego Schwartzman turned 29 on the day, defeating British No 1 Dan Evans 6-2, 4-6, 6-3 after more than two hours. South African Lloyd Harris earned a place in the second



Jannik Sinner of Italy celebrates after winning his first round match

round against Tokyo Olympic gold medalist Alexander Zverev as he beat Japan's Yoshihito Nishioka 6-3, 6-4.

Canadian Felix Auger-Aliassime overcame his first-round

defeat of Jan-Lennard Struff 7-6 (7/2), 5-7, 6-3.

In the women's draw at the joint event, Roland Garros finalist Barbora Krejickova defeated Russian Daria Kasatkina 6-3, 6-2. Czech 12th seed Petra Kvitová, a two-time semi-finalist, beat 2019 champion Madison Keys 7-5, 6-4, avenging a defeat by the American in January, 2020, in Brisbane.

Spain's Paula Badosa saved five match points in two and three-quarter hours to get past Petra Martić 4-6, 6-4, 7-6 (11/9) and next takes on third seed and Montreal semifinalist Aryna Sabalenka. Swiss Jil Teichmann beat Romania's Sorana Cirstea with the loss of just two games.

AFP

Barty hopes to shake off Olympic disappointment

CINCINNATI MASTERS

Cincinnati, US - Top seed Ashleigh Barty is working to get accustomed to hot, humid summer conditions at the ATP-WTA Cincinnati Masters after shaking off her Tokyo Olympic disappointment. The world No 1 skipped last week's US Open tuneup event in Montreal but is back and eager to get stuck into the final big event prior to the start of the Grand Slam in a fortnight.

"I'm looking forward to now changing back to hard courts and trying to find some rhythm and some groove," she said on Monday.

"It feels like a long time since I've played on hard courts. Miami (March) was my last hard court tournament, and the conditions there

are vastly different to here.

"It's going to take some time to adjust, without a doubt. But we'll just keep chipping away and try and get the best chance in each and every match."

Barty fell flat at the Games after training with her team in the Bahamas prior to travelling to Japan. The reigning Wimbledon champion admitted it will take some work for her to feel at ease on court this week.

"This is a place where I've never quite felt 100 per cent comfortable," the Australian said. "But we've got New York right around the corner. "This period of the year is always an enjoyable one, I can't wait to get started back into some matches again."

AFP



Naomi Osaka during the video call press conference on Tuesday

Osaka breaks down in tears at press conference

CINCINNATI MASTERS

Cincinnati, US - Naomi Osaka broke down in tears on Tuesday before resuming her first news conference since the controversy over refusing to speak to media at the French Open.

Osaka became emotional shortly after being asked about 'dealing with media in this format' - and the Cincinnati Masters video call was briefly halted.

Earlier, the Japanese star, 23, said she was 'proud' of the stand

she took in Paris.

"It was something that needed to be done," she said.

At Tuesday's conference everything had initially gone smoothly, before *Cincinnati Enquirer* columnist Paul Daugherty asked how she balanced the benefits of a big media profile with not talking to them.

Osaka sought clarity around what he was asking and the pair had a calm exchange before the player began to cry as questions

about tennis from another reporter were asked. The conference was briefly stopped to allow her to compose herself, and Osaka returned to respond to the question she was asked in English. 'Something that needed to be done'.

At the French Open, Osaka was fined US\$15,000 for not taking part in a news conference following her first-round match.

Grand Slam organisers said she could face expulsion from

the tournament should she refuse to take part in media duties.

But the player withdrew the following day, saying she needed to 'protect her mental health'.

On Tuesday, she added, "It felt like something I needed to do for myself. I felt like I holed up in my house for a couple of weeks and was a little bit embarrassed to go out. The biggest eye-opener was going to the Olympics and having other athletes come up to me and say they were

really glad I did what I did."

Osaka also said she supported America's four-time Olympic gold medalist Simone Biles, who pulled out of the women's gymnastics team final - and individual all-round, vault, uneven bars and floor exercise finals - in Tokyo to focus on her mental health. "I sent her [Biles] a message but I also wanted to give her space because I know how overwhelming it can feel," added Osaka.

Agencies

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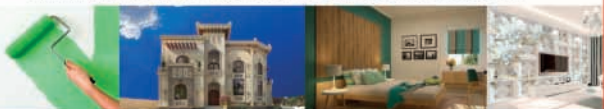
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RUGBY UNION ROUND-UP



File photo of former Wallabies coach Toutai Kefu

Former Australian star Kefu ‘recovering well’ after stabbing

Brisbane, Australia - Tonga coach and former Wallabies star Toutai Kefu has undergone surgery and was ‘recovering well’ on Tuesday after being stabbed during an attempted burglary at his Brisbane home, his family said.

The 47-year-old was rushed to hospital in the early hours of Monday with his wife, a son and a daughter after three youths allegedly broke into their house.

Another of Kefu’s daughters, Olivia, posted an update on

social media after a 15-year-old boy was charged with attempted murder.

“Both Josh and Dad had their surgeries yesterday and are recovering well,” she wrote, adding that her sister Madi and mother Rachel were due to be operated on Tuesday. “Thank you to everyone for all the kind messages and support, it means the absolute world to us all.”

Kefu was a powerful No 8 who played 60 times for Australia over a seven-year

Thank you to everyone for all the kind messages and support

OLIVIA, KEFU’S DAUGHTER

international career, helping them win the World Cup in 1999. He was appointed head coach of the Tongan national side in 2016

and steered them to the 2019 World Cup in Japan.

Police on Monday described his condition as ‘critical’ after he was stabbed in the stomach, while his wife had ‘very, very serious lacerations to her arm’.

The 15-year-old suspect - who was tackled by neighbours at the scene - was charged with four counts of attempted murder, among a host of other offences.

A second 15-year-old was arrested at a Brisbane hospital.

AFF



Tana Umaga

Ex-All Black Umaga quits Auckland Blues coaching staff

Wellington, New Zealand - Former All Blacks captain Tana Umaga announced on Tuesday he was leaving the coaching staff at Super Rugby’s Auckland Blues to pursue business interests.

Umaga, who played 74 Tests for New Zealand, including 21 as skipper, had been the Blues’ defence coach since 2018.

He had previously spent three seasons as head coach before being replaced by Leon MacDonald, who guided the Blues to the Super Rugby Trans-Tasman title this year, the club’s first major honour in 18 years.

Umaga said he was leaving the Blues to focus on his business, which produces dietary supplements. “Although I’m stepping away from rugby, I know the door isn’t closed and who knows what the future holds,” he said.

MacDonald said Umaga, 48, had been a major part of the Blues’ revival. “His influence throughout our club, on and off the grass, has been crucial to where we are today and I am sure we would love to see him return in the future,” he said.

Umaga’s international career included leading the All Blacks in 2005 to a Grand Slam victory and a clean sweep of the British and Irish Lions the same year.

AFF



A file photo of a Test between New Zealand against South Africa

All Blacks play down prospects of hosting Boks centenary Test

RUGBY UNION TEST

Wellington, New Zealand - New Zealand Rugby (NZR) has played down prospects of the All Blacks hosting this year’s historic centenary Test against South Africa, with Perth shaping as the match’s likely venue.

The All Blacks are scheduled to play the Springboks twice in the Rugby Championship, with the first meeting in Dunedin on September 25 the 100th Test in a rivalry dating back to 1921.

New Zealand’s strict COVID-19 border controls have already led to two championship Tests against Argentina being moved to Australia and NZR chief Mark Robinson said the South Africa matches could also be shifted.

“We’d dearly love for those two games against the Springboks to be played here in New Zealand,” he told Sky Sports NZ late on Monday.

“We all recognise the significance of those games and the huge amount of importance they have on the legacy of the rivalry,” he added.

“We’re doing everything possible to make that happen and we haven’t given up all hope, but the reality is we’re living in challenging times.”

The All Blacks-Argentina matches will be played on September 11 and 18, and the Springboks games on September 25 and October 2.

The first South Africa match is scheduled to take place in Dunedin and the second at Auckland’s Eden Park.

Robinson said Perth was the preferred venue if the All Blacks had to play all four of their remaining Championship matches in Australia.

From there, they would head to Washington to play the US, followed by a European tour including Tests against France and Ireland.

AFF

ONLY
PURE
WATER

AND
PERFECT
TASTE

ONLY
WHAT'S
ESSENTIAL

Boks make 11 changes for Argentina Test



South Africa Cobus Reinach (R) in action during a recently-played Test against Argentina

RUGBY UNION TEST

Johannesburg, South Africa - South Africa coach Jacques Nienaber on Tuesday stuck to a policy of multiple changes, making 11 to the starting line-up for the Rugby Championship second-round match against Argentina this weekend.

Keen to develop strength in

depth and rotate players after a gruelling three-Test series against the British and Irish Lions, Nienaber made ten changes to the world champions’ starting XV last weekend.

Nienaber congratulated lock Lood de Jager, who will on Saturday become the fourth Springbok this season to reach

the 50-cap milestone.

Only one of the Springbok backs, scrum-half Cobus Reinach, is retained for the match in Gqeberha (formerly Port Elizabeth) from the team that began against the Pumas last Saturday and won 32-12.

Among the forwards, captain

and flanker Siya Kolisi, eighthman Jasper Wiese and De Jager keep their places.

The backline is the same as the one which beat the British and Irish Lions 19-16 two weekends ago in Cape Town to win the series 2-1 with Reinach at scrum-half because first choice Faf de Klerk was injured.

A new front row includes loosehead Trevor Nyakane. By wearing the No 1 jersey, Nyakane allows Thomas du Toit, popularly known as ‘The Tank’ because of his formidable physique, to come into the front row on the other side of hooker Malcolm Marx.

The only uncapped player in the matchday 23 is replacement lock Nicolaas van Rensburg who, along with Reinach and recalled fly-half Handre Pollard, plays for French club Montpellier.

Both matches against Argentina are being played behind closed doors at the Nelson Mandela Bay Stadium in Gqeberha because of the coronavirus situation in the South American country.

AFF

Cavendish and Froome for Tour of Germany

Berlin, Germany - Legendary sprinter Mark Cavendish and four-time Tour de France winner Chris Froome are set to be included in a star-studded field for this month’s Tour of Germany.

Cavendish and Froome will race in the four-stage race from August 26-29.

Deceuninck Quick-Step rider Cavendish, 36, rolled back the years to win four stages on this year’s Tour de France to take the green points jersey.

His tally saw the Englishman equal Eddy Merckx’s 46-year-old record tally of 34 stage wins to write his name in Tour history.

Froome, 36, who rides for Israel Start-Up Nation, will also take part in the race around Germany which starts on the Baltic coast at Stralsund and finishes in Nuremberg.

Also included in the 132-strong field are German sprinters Andre Greipel, who will retire at the end of this season, and Nils Politt, who also won a stage on this year’s Tour.

AFF

Every day, all day!

FOOTBALL ROUND-UP



Granada's Luis Milla (L) challenges Villarreal's Etienne Capoue during the Spanish League at the La Ceramica Stadium in Villarreal, Spain, on Monday (AFP)

Villarreal held by Granada in opener

SPANISH LEAGUE

Madrid, Spain - Villarreal's struggles in Spanish League openers continued on Monday with a 0-0 draw against Granada.

It was the seventh consecutive winless opening match for Villarreal in the league, and it hasn't started the season with a win at home in six attempts.

A crowd of about 7,000 was at the La Cerámica Stadium as Spanish health authorities allowed capacities of up to 40 per cent in the stadiums for the league's restart. Some 5,000 had been allowed into Villarreal's games at the end of last season.

The club presented the Europa League trophy to its fans before the match. Villarreal played a man down from the 82nd minute as Argentine defender Juan Foyth was sent off with a second yellow card.

Villarreal was coming off a loss in a shootout to Chelsea in the UEFA Super Cup. Unai

Emery's team was seventh in the Spanish league last season.

Granada, which finished ninth in the league last season, earned the away draw in the debut of former Spain national team coach Roberto Moreno.

Also on Monday, Elche and Athletic Bilbao drew 0-0 in a rematch of their encounter in the last round last season, when Elche won 2-0 at home to secure its stay in the first division.

Athletic had lost its last three league openers away from home.

ITALIAN CUP

Bologna exit after nine-goal thriller

Rome, Italy - Italian League (Serie A) club Bologna were knocked out of the Italian Cup in the first round 4-5 by Ternana on Monday in an astonishing match in which the second-division side were four goals ahead with less than an hour on the clock.

Ternana were promoted to Serie B last season but showed



Action from the Italian Cup match between Bologna and Ternana on Monday

no signs of stage fright in Bologna as a Danilo Peralta brace and further goals from Davide Agazzi, Alfredo Donnarumma and Cesar Falletti put them 5-1 ahead eight minutes into the second half. Quick-fire strikes moments after from Marko Arnautovic and Roberto Soriano got the hosts back in contention.

Riccardo Orsolini's penalty 12 minutes from the end cut the gap to just one goal and Bologna would have levelled had it not been for Ternana goalkeeper

Antony Iannarilli, who first made two stops from Musa Barrow and then pulled off a double save from Sydney van Hooijdonk and Matias Svanberg.

Ternana will face Venezia in the second round in December.

In Monday's other early match Crotone got past Brescia on penalties after a 2-2 draw.

Also, Fabio Quagliarella inspired Sampdoria to a 3-2 comeback win over Alessandria, including a spectacular back-heel flick goal and another that

was disallowed, to set up a next round tie with Torino.

There was a surprise start at Marassi, as Alessandria won it back in midfield and Riccardo Chiarello unleashed a scorching strike that beat goalkeeper Emil Audero. Quagliarella equalised through a flying back-heel flick.

However, Andrea Arrighini skinned Jeison Murillo and then went down under the soft Bartosz Bereszynski challenge for an Alessandria penalty, converted by Simone Corazza.

Straight after the restart, a defensive error let the Quagliarella ball through and Manolo Gabbiadini beat the on-rushing goalkeeper with a delicate finish. The turnaround was completed by a Morten Thorsby header on Antonio Candreva's cross.

And in another game, a brace from Federico Bonazzoli helped newly promoted Salernitana through at the expense of Reggina, winning 2-0.

Agencies



Tammy Abraham (R) was unveiled as a Roma player on Tuesday

Striker Abraham joins Roma from Chelsea

Rome, Italy - Tammy Abraham has completed his move to Roma from Chelsea, the Italian League (Serie A) club announced on Monday, the England forward joined former Blues boss Jose Mourinho in the Italian capital in a deal worth US\$47mn.

In a statement, Roma said that Abraham had signed a five-year contract and that Chelsea would 'retain the right to a percentage of any future transfer fee involving the striker'.

The 23-year-old, who will wear the No 9 jersey left vacant by Edin Dzeko's transfer to Inter Milan, will earn US\$5.28mn net each season.

"You can sense when a club really wants you - and Roma made their interest clear immediately," said Abraham to the Rome website.

"Roma is a club that deserves to be fighting for titles and trophies.

"I've had the experience of winning major trophies and I want to be in those competitions again - so I want to help this team to achieve that and get to the level where Roma should be."

Abraham moves to Roma after Romelu Lukaku's return to Chelsea left him further down the pecking order at the club he joined as a young boy in 2004.

Abraham had scored 30 times for Chelsea in all competitions since breaking through in 2019 but his most prolific league season as a professional came on loan in the second-tier Championship with Aston Villa, where he scored 25 goals in 2018-19.

He has played six times for England since making his debut in 2017, scoring his only goal against Montenegro in 2019.

Lukaku more 'complete' striker

Earlier, Lukaku said that he believes he is now a 'complete' striker as the club's record signing settles back into life at Stamford Bridge. Lukaku rejoined Chelsea in a US\$135mn move from Inter Milan last week.

The 28-year-old could make his debut in Sunday's trip to Arsenal and the Belgium forward plans to show how much he has developed since the last time he played for the Blues.

Almost ten years after arriving in west London as an unknown teenager, Lukaku returns as one of the world's top strikers.

"I just feel more complete; I've tried to master all the facets that a striker needs and I just want to keep improving on the small details all the time and keep improving on my strengths as well," Lukaku told Chelsea's website.

"I just want to try to help the team win and be available for the manager as well as for my team-mates. I want to make sure that they feel comfortable and they can lean on me in whatever situation we're in.

"The two years in Italy helped me master all the facets of the game for a striker and now I'm ready."

Lukaku fired 27 goals and laid on 11 assists last term as Inter stormed to the Serie A title.

AFP



Romelu Lukaku holds his new Chelsea jersey at Stamford Bridge



A file photo, dated August 5, 2021, of USA's Carli Lloyd during the Tokyo 2020 Olympic Games in Kashima city, Ibaraki prefecture

US women's football icon Lloyd to retire

Los Angeles, US - Two-time Olympic gold medal winner Carli Lloyd said on Monday she will retire from the US women's national football team later this year.

Lloyd, who was also named FIFA Women's Player of the Year twice, announced she plans to hang up her cleats after a series of national team exhibition matches in the fall.

The 39-year-old also plans to finish the professional football season out with the NJ/NY Gotham FC team of the National Women's Soccer League.

In her most recent national

team outing earlier this month, Lloyd helped the US win a bronze medal in the women's football tournament at the Tokyo Olympics.

The World Cup champions had hoped for gold in Japan but losses to Sweden in group play and to Canada in the semifinals dashed their top of the podium aspirations.

Lloyd, who was the oldest player on the US Olympic team, has amassed 312 caps, trailing only Kristine Lilly (354) all-time in international play.

Only four players have played 300 or more times for their

country in international women's football history.

"When I first started out with the national team in 2005, my two main goals were to be the most complete soccer player I could be and to help the team win championships," Lloyd said.

"Every single day I stepped out onto the field, I played as if it was my last game. I never wanted to take anything for granted, especially knowing how hard it is to get to the top, but even harder to stay at the top for so long."

"I am forever grateful to have represented the crest and to be

able to play for my country.

"I will continue to support and cheer this team on and continue to find ways to help grow the game and inspire the next generation."

Lloyd also played pro football with six teams over 12 years.

"Carli Lloyd is a true legend," said US women's national team coach Vlatko Andonovski.

"Her career was unique, and her success on the field is something all current and future national team players should aspire to achieve."

Lloyd played for five different national team head coaches,

earning 100 caps under Pia Sundhage and 124 under Jill Ellis.

"I am thankful for all five head coaches I have played for, as they have all helped mold me into the player I have become over the years," Lloyd said.

Lloyd, who scored in Manchester City's 4-1 Women's FA Cup final victory over Birmingham during her short spell, has said she wants to start a family with her husband, professional golfer Brian Hollins.

She also plans to continue leading football clinics with young players once she retires.

AFP

BLOCKBUSTER ON OCT 24

ICC Men’s T20 World Cup 2021: Arch-rivals India take on Pakistan in Dubai

Dubai, UAE - The India vs Pakistan Super 12s Group Two game at the men’s T20 World Cup 2021 will be played on October 24 in Dubai.

The date was confirmed as the ICC announced the tournament schedule on Tuesday.

The tournament’s first round kicks off on October 17 in Oman, with the hosts taking on Papua New Guinea (PNG) and Bangladesh playing Scotland later on the same day at the same venue - Oman Academy Cricket Ground.

The final will be played in Dubai on November 14, with November 15 marked as a reserve day. The Super 12s - round two of the tournament, with two groups - will begin on October 23, with Australia facing South Africa in Abu Dhabi and England up against West Indies in Dubai.

India vs Pakistan aside, another big-ticket encounter in this round includes England

and Australia playing in Dubai on October 30. England and Australia are part of Group One in the Super 12s, along with South Africa, West Indies and two qualifiers from the first round of games. India and Pakistan are in Group Two, along with New Zealand, Afghanistan and two qualifiers. The top-two teams from the two Super 12 groups will play the semifinals.

The first on November 10 in Abu Dhabi and the second on November 11 in Dubai. Like the final, both the semifinals will have reserve days.

The tournament’s first round features Sri Lanka, Ireland, Netherlands and Namibia in Group A, and Bangladesh, Scotland, PNG and Oman in Group B.

Oman and UAE are co-hosts for the tournament, with the first round being played in Oman, Abu Dhabi and Sharjah. The second round is spread around the three UAE venues of Abu Dhabi,



A file photo of India and Pakistan fans cheering their teams during a World Cup match

Sharjah and Dubai.

This will be the first time in over two years that India and Pakistan will play each other, their last meeting being at the 50-over World Cup in England in 2019.

This edition of the World Cup was initially scheduled to be held in Australia in 2020, but it was postponed because of the pandemic. Then, it was slated to

be played in India this October but, again, complications triggered by the pandemic forced a venue change to the UAE and Oman. Incidentally, 2021 was also due to feature a T20 World Cup as per previous ICC schedules, and that second tournament will now to be played in Australia late next year.

The matches will be held across four venues - the Dubai

International Stadium, the Sheikh Zayed Stadium in Abu Dhabi, the Sharjah Stadium (all in the UAE), and the Oman Cricket Academy Ground in Muscat.

Sammy tags WI favourites

Daren Sammy, the two-time T20 World Cup-winning West Indies captain who unveiled the schedule in a virtual function on

Tuesday along with Dinesh Karthik and Isa Guha, told [T20worldcup.com](https://www.t20worldcup.com) that he expected West Indies to grab the most attention at the tournament.

"When you look at West Indies - and I might sound a bit biased - in the last [three] tournaments we have managed to get to the final four, win in two out of that [2012 and 2016],"

Sammy said.

"Our players, the calibre of players we have - when you look at captain [Kieron] Pollard, the universe boss Chris Gayle, Andre Russell, Jason Holder, Fabian Allen, Evin Lewis - I could go on... it's a long list of guys who can take the attack to you.

"But, in this stage, every team looking at the group stages would be thinking, 'Wow, you got to start well'. And I expect England and West Indies to come out of that group [Group One in the Super 12s]. [I predict that the team] that tops this group gets to the final."

Karthik said he expected Group Two in the Super 12s to be highly competitive as well.

He said, "If five Asian teams come through and you have New Zealand there... that's a tougher group; I am looking forward to some high-octane action.

"It's going to be close call for me between Pakistan and New Zealand [with India being the other team to get through from Group Two to the semis].

"My heart says I would love to see a Pakistan there, but New Zealand find ways to always punch above their weight. They are a pretty well-rounded team with a great leader in Kane Williamson."

Cricinfo

ICC MEN'S T20 WORLD CUP 2021 GROUPINGS						
ROUND ONE Group A: Sri Lanka, Ireland, the Netherlands		and Namibia Group B: Bangladesh, Scotland, Papua New Guinea	(PNG) and Oman (Top two teams from each group advance to Super 12s)	SUPER 12S Group One: England, Australia, South Africa,	West Indies, A1 and B2. Group Two: India, Pakistan, New Zealand,	Afghanistan, A2 and B1. (Top two teams from each group advance to the semifinals)
ROUND ONE SCHEDULE:						
Oct 17: Oman vs PNG, Muscat (2pm) Bangladesh vs Scotland, Muscat (6pm)	Oct 20: Namibia vs Netherlands Abu Dhabi (2pm) Sri Lanka vs Ireland Abu Dhabi (6pm)	SUPER 12S:	Pakistan vs New Zealand Sharjah (6pm)	Australia vs England Dubai (6pm)	India vs Afghanistan Abu Dhabi (6pm)	Nov 7: New Zealand vs Afghanistan Abu Dhabi (2pm)
Oct 18: Ireland vs Netherlands, Abu Dhabi (2pm) Sri Lanka vs Namibia, Abu Dhabi (6pm)	Oct 21: Bangladesh vs PNG Muscat (2pm) Oman vs Scotland Muscat (6pm)	Oct 23: Australia vs South Africa Abu Dhabi (2pm) England vs West Indies Dubai (6pm)	Oct 27: England vs B2 Abu Dhabi (2pm) B1 vs A2 Abu Dhabi (6pm)	Oct 31: Afghanistan vs A2 Abu Dhabi (2pm) India vs New Zealand Dubai (6pm)	Nov 4: Australia vs B2 Dubai (2pm) West Indies vs A1 Abu Dhabi (6pm)	Pakistan vs B1 Sharjah (6pm)
Oct 19: Scotland vs PNG Muscat (2pm) Oman vs Bangladesh Muscat (6pm)	Oct 22: Namibia vs Ireland Sharjah (2pm) Sri Lanka vs Netherlands Sharjah (6pm)	Oct 24: A1 vs B2 Sharjah (2pm) India vs Pakistan Dubai (6pm)	Oct 28: Australia vs A1 Dubai (2pm)	Nov 1: England vs A1 Sharjah (6pm)	Nov 5: New Zealand vs A2 Sharjah (2pm) India vs B1 Dubai (6pm)	Nov 8: India vs A2 Dubai (6pm)
		Oct 25: Afghanistan vs B1 Sharjah (6pm)	Oct 29: West Indies vs B2 Sharjah (2pm) Pakistan vs Afghanistan Dubai (6pm)	Nov 2: South Africa vs B2 Abu Dhabi (2pm) Pakistan vs A2 Abu Dhabi (6pm)	Nov 6: Australia vs West Indies Abu Dhabi (2pm) England vs South Africa Sharjah (6pm)	KNOCKOUT STAGE
		Oct 26: South Africa vs West Indies Dubai (2pm);	Oct 30: South Africa vs A1 Sharjah (2pm)	Nov 3: New Zealand vs B1 Dubai (2pm)		Nov 10: Semifinal 1 (A1 vs B2) Abu Dhabi (6pm)
						Nov 11: Semifinal 2 (B1 vs A2) Dubai (6pm)
						Nov 14: Final Dubai (6pm)

India savours ‘fantastic’ Lord’s win



India's captain Virat Kohli celebrates with his teammates after England's Jonny Bairstow's dismissal on the final day of the second Test at Lord's on Monday

ENGLAND VS INDIA TEST SERIES

New Delhi, India - Former cricketers and national media on Tuesday lauded India's thrashing of England in the second Test at Lord's with fast bowlers coming in for special praise.

Indian quicks including Jasprit Bumrah, Mohammed Shami, Mohammed Siraj and Ishant Sharma shared ten wickets between them to bundle out England for 120 in the final session on Monday's fifth day to go 1-0 up in the five-match series.

"Fantastic win for India...what character and guts from the team...each and every one...such a pleasure to watch it from so close," India's cricket chief Sourav Ganguly, who was in London for the match, wrote on Twitter.

The *Indian Express* headlined its report 'India sledge hammer England' while *The Times Of India* said, 'India Believe In The Lord's!'

Virat Kohli's side won by 151 runs in a match that witnessed some on-field verbal exchanges

between the two sides.

Opener KL Rahul was named man of the match for his 129 in India's first-innings total of 364 after being invited to bat first by England skipper Joe Root.

"That was some Test match #TeamIndia! Enjoyed watching every moment of it. The resilience and grit that the team displayed in difficult situations is something that stood out for me. Very well played!," cricket icon Sachin Tendulkar said.

Batting great VVS Laxman said, "What an incredible day of

Test Match Cricket and one to remember for a long time for every Indian Fan.

"Bumrah and Shami fighting with the bat early in the day, and pace attack of Siraj, Ishant, Bumrah, Shami giving it their all and India registering a sensational win."

Former England captain Michael Vaughan said, "Amazing game of Cricket... India today showed why they are so much better than England... The belief to Win was immense."

AFP

All the teams are really competitive, says Ilyas

ICC MEN'S T20 WORLD CUP

Muscat - Set to fight in Group B of the first round, co-hosts Oman aim to go deep in this year's ICC Men's T20 World Cup. After their experience of the T20 World Cup 2016 first round in India, Oman aim to grab a top-two spot to enter the Super 12 stage this time, hoping to exploit their home advantage as they play the first round at home - Oman Cricket Academy Ground.

Oman will look to go one better than their one-victory effort five years ago at Dharamshala, India.

The occasion is certainly not lost on right-hand batter Aqib Ilyas, who has struck two centuries and six fifties in his international career thus far.

Likely to play an important part in Oman's campaign, the middle-order player was not a member of their 2016 campaign, though understands the scale of the tournament, especially as an opportunity for the game's emerging stars to stand up.

"The T20 World Cup is one of the most popular sporting events taking place on the planet," Ilyas told [T20worldcup.com](https://www.t20worldcup.com) on Tuesday.



A file photo of Oman's Aqib Ilyas

"It's one of the best platforms for all Associate players and Associate teams to compete against the best playing nations."

On paper, Bangladesh will provide Oman with the biggest test in their group, though the collective experience of Scotland and PNG's heavy T20 focus means Oman's bid to progress, even in home conditions, will be no easy task in the eyes of Ilyas.

"All the teams are really competitive and they will try to give their best to secure their spot (in the Super 12 phase)."

Building from the last campaign and after a solid qualification campaign, coach

Duleep Mendis is once again at the helm, keeping a tight ship alongside a unified team of support staff. As the mercury climbs during the day in Muscat, Oman's preparation at home has been physically demanding, though Ilyas and the team are not using the conditions as an excuse.

"We're really committed under the coaching of Duleep Mendis. 'The boys are working really hard as the weather is not supportive, it's really hot, around 45 degrees."

Oman were the last team to enter the tournament, beating Hong Kong by 12 runs in the playoff stages of the ICC T20 World Cup Qualifier 2019.

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