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NADAL IN 14TH FRENCH OPEN SEMIFINAL

GO TO **PAGE 16 SPORTS**

Musandam on development path

Royal Directive issued to make Musandam an attractive tourism and investment destination

Our Correspondent
Muscat

Within the context of His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tariq's keenness to achieve comprehensive and sustainable development in Musandam, to bring about economic diversification based on the competitive potential of the governorate and to make it more attractive for investment, the Council of Ministers

has issued decisions to expedite the process.

His Majesty the Sultan has issued directives to speed up the implementation of decisions of the Council of Ministers.

His Majesty the Sultan also gave directives to develop a system of management and operations for the economic zones, set frameworks for incentives, enhance competitiveness and propose proper mechanisms to

promote them for investment.

The University of Technology and Applied Sciences stated that the establishment of a branch in Musandam is a project with economic, scientific and tourism dimensions.

'It is part of the comprehensive urban development strategy for Musandam governorate and is in line with Oman Vision 2040.'

It added that the project

will be implemented in two phases. The first phase will include programmes such as mechanical and civil engineering, building maintenance, logistics and transportation systems management.

The second phase will include courses in marine navigation, marine sports management and fish products processing technology.

See also **Page 02**

COUNCIL OF MINISTER'S DECISION ON MUSANDAM

To set up a branch of University of Technology and Applied Sciences that offers courses in a number of specialisations.

To convert the Port of Khasab into a logistics hub in a bid to provide services and facilities that stimulate imports, exports and open direct export routes.

To set up specialised economic and tourism zones to promote investment in tourism and related logistics activity.

To declare the area of Mahas an economic zone with the objective of establishing and regulating light and medium industries, along with storage facilities to bolster Port of Khasab's activities.

To establish an integrated system and a strategic reservoir to achieve security in food and medicinal drug stocks.



HM sends message to Saudi King

Muscat - His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tariq sent a written message to the Custodian of the Two Holy Mosques King Salman bin Abdulaziz al Saud, King of Saudi Arabia, on Wednesday.

The message relates to the strong relations that bind the two countries and peoples, and to supporting and strengthening areas of joint cooperation.

The message was delivered by Sayyid Badr bin Hamad al Busaidi, Foreign Minister, when he met Prince Faisal Farhan al Saud, Saudi Foreign Minister, in Riyadh.

At the meeting, the existing bilateral relations were reviewed and ways of enhancing these in all fields, as well as the latest developments in regional and international arenas discussed.

NEWS BRIEFS

SOUTH AFRICAN WOMAN GIVES BIRTH TO 10

Pretoria, South Africa - A 37-year-old South African woman has given birth to ten babies, which when confirmed would be a new world record, reported BBC.

"It's seven boys and three girls. I am happy," Gosiamé Thamara Sithole's husband Teboho Tsotetsi told Pretoria News after the birth on Monday night following caesarean section 29 weeks into her pregnancy. Gosiamé previously gave birth to twins, who are now six years old. Guinness World Records told the BBC it was investigating Gosiamé's case.

A woman who had eight babies in the US in 2009 currently holds the Guinness World Record for the most children delivered at a single birth to survive.



MSX crosses 4,000 mark first time since March 2020



Oman raises \$1.75bn in global sukuk sale

1,021 cases in hospitals

Our Correspondent
Muscat

For the first time since the outbreak of the pandemic in the sultanate, the number COVID-19 patients in hospitals exceeded 1,000 on Wednesday. Also, since mid-July 2020, this is the first time the daily case count is almost 2,000.

The Ministry of Health (MoH) reported 1,931 new cases and 14 related deaths on Tuesday. The latest figures take the total cases registered in the sultanate to 228,579, including 2,448 deaths, and recoveries to 206,844 accounting for a recovery rate of 90.5 per cent.

According to an MoH statement, 128 individuals were admitted to hospitals across the country in a 24-hour period on Wednesday, taking the total number of in-patients to 1,021, including 329 in inten-

sive care units.

Since May 31, when Oman recorded 1,041 cases, the daily case count has shot past the 1,000 mark with the exception of June 4. On June 1, 1,047 cases were recorded, followed by 1,258 on June 2, 1,173 on June 3, a cumulative count of 3,177 for three days (June 4 to 6), 1,216 on June 7, and 1,563 on June 8.

Only second dose for Muscat residents

The Directorate General of Health Services in Muscat Governorate announced on Wednesday that it currently targets only those who are due for the second dose of COVID-19 vaccines and have completed ten weeks or more since the first jab. MoH urged all to follow updates on the directorate's accounts on social media platforms.

Drive-through immunisation

The Directorate General of Health Services in Muscat Governorate has confirmed that work is underway to complete the technical aspects related to a drive-through vaccination centre in Oman Automobile Association, Seeb. Commencement date of this service and target groups will be announced upon completion of regulatory procedures.

People with autoimmune diseases can get the jab

People with autoimmune diseases can take the COVID-19 vaccine if they are among the target groups and have no contraindications, according to an MoH statement.

"Doctors who such patients regularly see for their health should be consulted before they take the vaccine," MoH stated.

SURGING COVID-19 CASES



Mwasalat and NFC to merge to boost public transport



Our Correspondent
Muscat

The decision comes as part of Asyad's efforts to boost its local and international commercial presence

Asyad Group is planning to integrate the operations of Oman National Transport Company (Mwasalat) and National Ferries Company (NFC) to strengthen the country's public transportation system by providing safe, convenient and easily accessible services.

The consolidation of the companies is aimed at enhancing spending efficiency, improving service quality, and providing outstanding transportation services through an integrated digital platform that will link land and sea transport services. It will also merge the customer service outlets of both service providers in different regions of the sultanate.

The board of directors of Asyad has decided to restructure the group's business units in line with its efforts to focus on key logistics activities, such as port services, free zones, shipping, dry-docks, e-commerce services, and last-mile delivery.

The decision comes as part of Asyad's efforts to boost its local and international commercial presence, in light of its plans to expand and enhance per-

formance.

The restructuring of Asyad's business units will also result in dissolution of Oman Roads and Transport Management Company (ORTMC), according to a statement.

The Ministry of Transport, Communications and Information Technology will supervise all transport and road management responsibilities previously assigned to ORTMC based on the ministry's jurisdiction under the new state administrative apparatus.

Highlighting its future plans, Asyad stated that it will focus on the directions of Oman Investment Authority in cooperating with the private sector.

The group will partner with the private sector which constitutes a fundamental pillar of its new operating model for which several projects have been identified.

Convention centre to come up in Khasab

Our Correspondent
Muscat

In a move to boost economic activities and attract investments, the Oman Chamber of Commerce and Industry (OCCI) in Musandam has opened a tender for building an Exhibition and Convention Centre in the wilayat of Khasab.

Speaking to *Muscat Daily*, Raed bin Mohammed al Shuhi, chairman of the Board of Directors of the OCCI Musandam branch, said, “We appreciate the directives of His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik to accelerate and develop the Musandam governorate.

“Building an integrated system in the governorate and transforming Khasab port into a logistic area will help provide more services and facilities to activate the import and export movement and open direct lines for export. The establishment of tourist economic zones will also attract investments to the governorate.”

Shuhi said that the announcement of Mahas as an economic zone was made to boost the growth of small and medium industries and warehousing and support the movement in the Khasab port. It will stimulate the business environment and investment.

“The establishment of a branch of the University of Technology and Applied Sciences in Khasab will be a huge educational achievement for the Governorate of Musandam. Such moves will boost local economy and support people’s purchasing power,” he added.

“His Majesty the Sultan’s directives to the government to expedite the implementation and operation of the projects and to provide the necessary facilities and present them to investors reflects the serious desire to quickly achieve results on the ground.

“Various parties need to come together and play crucial roles in order to achieve the desired results.”



Building an integrated system in the governorate and transforming Khasab port into a logistic area will help provide more services and facilities to activate the import and export movement

RAED AL SHUHI

According to the OCCI in Musandam the contracting companies of first class and above can participate in the tender to build the centre. The last date for submission is July 8, before 12pm.

The OCCI Musandam branch said that the convention centre will boost tourism and commercial activities in the governorate and also place it on the global map of the meetings, incentives, conferences, and exhibitions (MICE) industry.

The project site is spread over 2,000sqm, while the building will be divided into two parts, one of them with an area of 1,000sqm with multi-purpose halls and a rooftop garden. The other section will consist of three floors for office and commercial spaces for rent.

The project will be built in an area close to the OCCI’s branch office in Khasab.

Khasab port
The Ministry of Transport, Communications and Information Technology said that it is pressing ahead with plans set for the development of the Port of Khasab.

The plans build on tenders launched earlier to manage, operate and develop Khasab port, including aspects related to supplying vessels with fuel, operating piers, connecting the port with global terminals and granting lands for investment in the logistics and small industries’ fields.

The ministry statement indicated that with a view to linking the wilayat of Khasab with the wilayat of Dibba and, to facilitate the movement of citizens and residents within the Governorate of Musandam, the ministry announced a consultative tender to select a route for the Dibba-Lima-Khasab carriageway and to prepare tender documents for project implementation.

In the field of air transport, the Civil Aviation Authority will co-ordinate with the departments concerned to utilise Khasab Airport for civil-cum-military services after a study, it added.

Tender Notice

The Public Authority for Social Insurance (PASI), announces following E-Tenders for 2021

Tender Number	Tender Name	Deadline for Specifications Request	Deadline for tender bids	Tender Price
03/2021	(Re-tender) LED Lighting Retrofit for Common Areas Light Fittings - TAMNIAT COMPLEX	23 June 2021	07 July 2021	25 OMR

Interested companies registered with Tender Board may obtain Tender document from the E.Tendering website: <http://etendering.tenderboard.gov.om>. Tenders should be submitted online on given website. The Tenderer should enclose scanned copy of bank guarantee issued by any bank in the Sultanate of Oman for the value of (2%) of the Tender value validity for (120) days from the deadline for the tender bids and addressed to the Public Authority for Social Insurance. And original document of the same should be submitted later directly to the Administration Department - Purchase and General Services Section / Third Floor, PASI Head Office in Bawshar.

CORRESPONDANCE:

- Tender inquiry : All correspondence pertaining to the TENDER Inquiry must be online at E-Tendering system (<http://etendering.tenderboard.gov.om>)
- E-Tendering system inquiry: All correspondence pertaining to the e-tendering system technical support must be directed to the following helpdesk email address and phone number: Tel : **+968 24166670** , E-mail : etenderhd@ita.gov.om

PASI is not obliged to accept the lowest or any other tender that may be received

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SAYYID THEYAZIN RECEIVES KOREAN ENVOY



H H Sayyid Theyazin bin Haitham al Said, Minister of Culture, Sports and Youth, received H E Kim Chang Kyu, Ambassador of the Republic of Korea to the sultanate, in the former's office on Wednesday (ONA)

OETC, MJEC hold interviews to employ 162 jobseekers

Our Correspondent
Muscat

The electricity sector is currently actively pursuing the appointment of 800 jobseekers in the sector. This follows an announcement in March by the Authority for Public Services Regulation (APSR), in cooperation with the Ministry of Energy and Minerals, the Ministry of Labour and Nama Holding Company, launching a programme to Omanise some jobs in the sector.

Oman Electricity Transmission Company (OETC) has completed personal interviews to employ 50 jobseekers in coordination with APSR, the Ministry of Labour and Nama Holding.

OETC interviewed about 150 candidates for the available supervisory and technical positions, including assistant engineer, maintenance supervisor, HSE officer, electrical technician and line installers. The company has formed three committees to conduct interviews and evaluate candidates.

Majan Electricity (MJEC) has formed committees to conduct job interviews of those who passed recruitment tests conducted in Nama Group's Numo institution for 112 positions.

On OETC's efforts to provide job opportunities for national cadres, Mubarak al Jahwari, senior manager HR, said, “We are committed to achieving a high percentage of Omanisation. The company's Omanisation rate has reached 95 per cent, and we are currently working with our partners – the contracting companies - to replace expatriates with nationals. In the coming days, 50 jobseekers will be trained and employed, and we are trying to increase this number gradually.”

He added that the company will continue to support Omani youth and give them on-the-job training opportunities. OETC annually trains a number of graduates from different universities and colleges to prepare them for the labour market.

According to Salim bin Masoud al Kabi, COO of MJEC, the company's increased Omanisation of technical jobs with long-term contracts will expedite realisation of Oman Vision 2040 and the implementation of sustainable development. “We are going to appoint and train 112 Omanis in our company's operations in North Batinah, Dhahirah and Buraimi governorates.”

The citizens who will be appointed for technical jobs will receive intensive training, he added.

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1SET Dove Levendur Shampoo + Conditioner 320ml R.O. 1.700	2PCS Bahar Premium Antiseptic 2x750ml R.O. 2.550	1.5KG OMO Active Auto 1500gm R.O. 0.950	GIANT SAVINGS BOX Fine Baby Diaper Green Large Box 96pc R.O. 6.300	4.05KG Bahar Detergent 4.05kg R.O. 1.990
6PCS Kleenex Aroma Facial Tissue Roses 6pcs R.O. 1.000	2PCS Fine Jumbo Roll 325mtr R.O. 2.250	11PCS Blackstone Cookware Ceramic 11pcs Set R.O. 9.900	impeX Impex Juicer Blender Mincer Mill 4 In 1 R.O. 13.500	

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RACHEL CHEW EXPLORES

I'M **RACHEL CHEW**; LOUD MOUTH, FOODIE AND A GENERAL EMBARRASSMENT WHO YOU CAN FIND ON HI FM WEEKDAYS 4-7PM.

Exploring the gym!



I have signed up with a personal trainer... I have agreed to three sessions a week, so no doubt you will still see me sweating at weekends on The Sa'al steps or at a wadi

I did it, I braved the scales. A combination of Ramadan, Eid and my birthday has meant I am now 3.5kg heavier than I was a month ago.

Unless you've been living under a rock you may have noticed it's got VERY hot recently, meaning exercising has got much harder. I love a hike but its meaning getting up at 4am to beat the sun which is knacker me out. I know what you're thinking, just go for a sunrise hike, however, my show on Hi FM doesn't end until 7pm and I'm normally too hungry to work out so I go home, eat dinner, and then if I have the energy I do a late night walk around Qurm/Wattayah.

What I have failed to mention is my late-night chocolate cravings which leads to bingeing meaning, that extra weight isn't coming off easily.

Therefore, I have taken the plunge, I have signed up with a personal trainer. I've been apprehensive due to COVID-19 to join a gym, but 'Elevate' in Azaba is brand new, so it's super clean and not too busy. I was expecting to have someone shouting at me but Josh the owner is super chilled, friendly and informative.

Why now? COVID pending, I have a wedding that I need to attend in September - due to the pandemic it has been rescheduled four times - so here's hoping I actually get to go as it's one of my best friends' and she has asked me to be a bridesmaid. Meaning I will no doubt be in a few photos, so I am using this as my goal to look and feel better.

I have agreed to three sessions a week, so no doubt you will still see me sweating at weekends on The Sa'al steps or at a wadi. I will try and not become one of those people who talks about the gym and protein shakes 24/7.

Just promise me you won't tell me off if you see me bingeing on shawarmas and lemon mint still. I'm a foodie after all, I can't resist them.

The views and opinions expressed in this column are solely those of the author and do not necessarily represent those of Muscat Daily or Apex Press & Publishing

GLOBE selects seven Omani students' scientific studies

Muscat - Scientific researches of seven Omani students have been selected from among the 234 participant research papers from around the world for the GLOBE Environmental Program 2020-21, said the GLOBE head office in the United States.

The sultanate's schools participated in the virtual exhibition of the GLOBE Environmental Science International Program, held in the US from March 29 to April 5, and achieved advanced ranking this year.

Five of the Omani schools obtained the highest grades of evaluation represented in obtaining four stars, which is the full mark, said a press statement.

The four stars grade is the highest classification in the evaluation stage that qualifies later for competing for the winning centres chosen randomly by lottery system for all the winning research from the countries participating in the exhibition.

This exhibition is an event in which the sultanate's schools maintained achieving advanced positions every year. This year, despite the pandemic, which directly affected education, the Omani students had a distinguished participation and continued to work, research, and strive towards achieving the best achievements, the statement added.

The winning schools are Umm Dhar al Ghafari School in Buraimi governorate, with the research titled 'Causes of Death of Aquatic and Plant Organisms in the Laboratory of Umm Dhar Al Ghafari School'; Alyat Fada School in Dhahirah governorate, with two research papers titled



The MoE pays great attention to the GLOBE Environmental Program which is one of the most prominent joint educational and scientific student programmes in the world

'Study of the Causes of Non-Germination of Fig Trees in Al Dhuhairiyah area in the Wilayat of Dhank', and 'Study of the Causes of the Growth-Stop and Wilting of the Cranberry Plant in the Wilayat of Dhank'; Umm Hani School in Dakhliyah governorate, with a research titled 'Study of the Causes of Water Loss from the Governmental

Distribution Networks in the Wilayat of Samail; Effects and Possibility of Use'; Sultan Said bin Taimur School in South Sharqiyah governorate, with a research titled 'Effects of Omani Samer Tree Charcoal on Soil Fertility and on Generating Electric Current in Electrochemical Cells', and Hafsa bint Sirin School in Buraimi governorate,

with a research titled 'Effects of Bio-Charging on Improving Productivity of Sandy Soil in the Hamasa area in Buraimi governorate'.

The Ministry of Education pays great attention to the GLOBE Environmental program, since its implementation in 2009, because of its role and impact in transforming students' learning towards the practical side through scientific protocols applied in collecting readings and data from the field using scientific tools and devices with accurate readings.

They are water protocol, atmosphere protocol, soil protocol, and land cover protocol, through which students prepare their scientific research for the international scientific exhibitions, regional exhibitions, as well as the local exhibitions.

It is worth noting that the GLOBE Environmental Program is one of the most prominent joint educational and scientific student programmes in the world, due to its association with the academic subjects and the environment in which the student lives.

The programme aims to improve the level of environmental awareness and self-learning of scientific research methods.

It also allows students to understand facts and data related to the environment in general and to enhance the spirit of teamwork and present an organised way to discover new facts or verify existing facts and the relationship between them or the laws that govern them in a way that contributes to increasing knowledge.

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MUSCAT DAILY

Minister lauds doctor for Harold Johnson Award



Muscat - H E Dr Ahmed bin Mohammed Al Sa'eedi, Minister of Health, received on Wednesday at his office Dr Arwa Zakaria al Riyami, senior consultant in haematology at Sultan Qaboos University Hospital and director

of Haematology Programme at the Oman Medical Speciality Board, to congratulate her for obtaining Harold Johnson Award from the International Society of Blood Transfusion (ISBT), the Netherlands (Supplied photo).

Ibri gets 21mm rain in two days

Our Correspondent
Muscat

The Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Water Resources (MAFWR) said Ibri in Dakhliyah governorate recorded the highest rainfall between June 7 and 8.

The measurement stations of MAFWR registered 21mm rainfall in the wilayat of Ibri, 7mm in

Hamra (Dakhliyah), 4mm in Mudhab (North Sharqiyah), 2mm in Bahla and Samail and 1mm in Nizwa (all Dakhliyah).

On Tuesday, heavy rains hit parts of North Sharqiyah and Dakhliyah governorates, accompanied by winds and hail, with the continuation of the activity of cumulus clouds, according to the Civil Aviation Authority (CAA).

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MARKET WATCH

MSX30	4,019.83
BSE Sensex	51,941.64

FOREX RATES

(RO1 equals)

Indian Rs	189.51
Pakistani Rs	404.49
Bangladeshi Taka	220.14
Philippine Peso	124.02
Sri Lankan Rs	514.06

*Rates as on June 09
Source: xe.com

BRIEFS

China's factory prices soar in May

China's factory gate inflation rose at the highest rate in over a decade last month, official data showed Wednesday, as the world's second-largest economy worked to contain a surge in commodity prices. Factories so far seem to be absorbing costs rather than passing them on to consumers as domestic demand recovers from the strict coronavirus lockdowns imposed last year. The producer price index (PPI), which measures the cost of goods at the factory gate, exceeded expectations to spike 9 per cent on-year in May, said the National Bureau of Statistics. This marks its highest jump since September 2008. In particular, prices in the oil and natural gas extraction industry rose 99.1 per cent.

US state sues to have Google declared a public utility

The US state of Ohio on Tuesday filed an unprecedented lawsuit calling on a local court to declare Google as much a public utility as an electric company. Google should be designated a public utility subject to government regulation regarding its search engine and other services, Ohio attorney general Dave Yost contended in the legal filing. Public utilities supply essential goods or services such as water or power, and are often effectively monopolies.

MSX crosses 4,000 mark to reach pre-pandemic levels

Our Correspondent
Muscat

The benchmark index of the Muscat Stock Exchange (MSX) has crossed the 4,000 points mark, exceeding pre-pandemic levels for the first time in past 15 months.

Continuing its recent upward trend supported by the positive outlook on local and global economies and oil prices, the MSX30 Index on Wednesday rose nearly 1 per cent to close at 4,019.8 points, the highest level since March 5, 2020.

The rise in the main index on Wednesday was mainly supported by financial sector stocks. Shares of BankDhofar and Sohar International Bank jumped by 4.3 per cent each.

Financial sector and services sector indices rose 1.3 per cent and 0.3 per cent, respectively, while industrial sector index closed almost flat for the day.



The Omani bourse recorded robust trading activity on Wednesday as the market turnover increased by more than 74 per cent to RO4.95mn compared to RO2.84mn on Tuesday.

Supported by reopening of the economic activities and improved oil prices, the MSX30 Index has recorded nearly 10 per cent gains since the beginning of

this year.

Price of Oman's crude oil last week recovered to its pre-pandemic levels of US\$70 per barrel, having hit the highest level in past 18 months. Oman crude price on Wednesday further increased by 2.5 per cent to reach at US\$71.38 per barrel at the Dubai Mercantile Exchange.

The rising trend in oil prices comes amid optimism for a vaccine-led global economic recovery and effective coordination and commitment by major OPEC and non-OPEC producers to restrain supply of crude.

"Within the region, oil remained the star performer which pulled the markets higher. OPEC+ agreement which targets the gradual easing of curbs on supplies until the end of July made way for oil price to go above US\$70 per barrel after a considerable period. With oil prices looking to stay comfortably above US\$70 we advise investors to look for stocks which will benefit from high oil prices such as petrochemicals," Ubhar Capital noted in its weekly market report.

On Wednesday, the announcement of Oman's highly successful issuance of dollar sukuk worth US\$1.75bn was received positively by investors at the Muscat Stock Exchange.

Takaful premiums to rise as demand grows for medical cover: Moody's

Our Correspondent
Muscat

Growth prospects for Islamic insurance, or takaful, remain healthy in the GCC countries helped by their large Muslim populations, relatively low insurance penetration and rising demand for medical cover, Moody's Investors Service said in a report on Wednesday.

"We expect takaful premiums to keep growing moderately in the next two to three years, helped by rising demand for medical insurance as more GCC, African and southeast Asian countries introduce compulsory health cover," said Mohammed Ali Londe, senior analyst at Moody's.

"The recent adoption of risk-



based capital regulation in key takaful markets, and takaful insurers' continued embrace of digitalization, are further positive factors," he said.

According to Moody's, takaful premiums/contributions grew at a compound annual rate of 6.8 per cent between 2017 and 2020. Insurance penetration in the takaful markets remains low,

indicating good growth potential.

The introduction of compulsory medical insurance within the past four years in Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia and Kuwait, and the implementation of mandatory motor insurance in Saudi Arabia, will help sustain takaful premium growth at or close to current levels, the ratings agency said.

Moody's said takaful operators are well positioned to benefit from compulsory medical and motor cover, as they focus mainly on retail lines.

"Mandatory medical cover along with increased demand for healthcare induced by the coronavirus pandemic is also driving the growth."

Moody's expects takaful industry's capitalisation to strengthen as more governments introduce risk-based capital regulation.

Albeit in the short term this poses some implementation and operational hurdles, including added costs, which will drive the need for takaful operators to achieve the scale required to absorb these costs or grow through mergers and acquisitions.

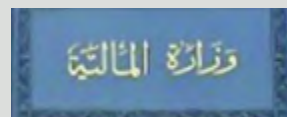
Oman raises \$1.75bn in oversubscribed global sukuk sale

Our Correspondent
Muscat

Oman has successfully raised US\$1.75bn this week through the sale of nine-year dollar sukuk in the international market, according to the Ministry of Finance.

The sultanate's issuance of sukuk, or Islamic bonds, attracted huge demand from international investors and asset management institutions.

The sukuk issuance attracted more than US\$11.5bn worth of orders and was over-



subscribed by 6.5 times of the offered value, according to an Oman News Agency report. The sukuk issuance attracted bids from investors in the Gulf, Asia, European and American markets. The data indicated that Oman's government was able to issue the dollar sukuk at a lower rate of 4.875 per cent against its initial price guidance.

Omani start-up launches crypto trading platform

Muscat - People can now buy and sell cryptocurrencies in the sultanate through a local Omani platform.

Digital Digits LLC, a local start up, has launched their platform Easy Coins (www.easycoints.me) on Tuesday to enable citizens and residents of Oman to buy and sell cryptocurrency locally, according to a press release.

The platform enables users to access Bitcoin, Ethereum and Stellar (and other cryptocurrencies in the future) using Omani riyals and store them safely on their own personal wallet.

Furthermore, the Easy Coins platform introduces users to some third party decentralised finance platforms to swap cryptos or earn yield on their cryptos.



H H Sayyid Azzan bin Kais al Said, co-founder of Digital Digits LLC, in the press release said "Easy Coins is a great step forward for Oman to have a local platform that enables access to the global blockchain networks. Such access further promotes the local blockchain ecosystem to a global standard."

Shell to speed up carbon reduction after Dutch ruling



London, UK - Royal Dutch Shell on Wednesday said it would accelerate plans to cut carbon emissions following a court order in the Netherlands last month.

The court in The Hague ordered Shell to slash its greenhouse gas emissions by 45 per cent by 2030 in a landmark victory by climate activists with implications for energy firms worldwide. In response on Wednesday, Shell chief executive Ben van Beurden expressed disappointment that the Anglo-Dutch giant had been "singled out", arguing that the ruling "does not help reduce global CO2 emissions".

But he said: "For Shell, this ruling does not mean a change, but rather an acceleration of our strategy" to cut carbon emissions, without providing any further details. The company had envisaged a 45 per cent reduction by 2035 with the aim of

reaching net zero emissions by mid-century. Campaigners hailed the 'historic' verdict as the first time that a company had been made to align its policy with the 2015 Paris climate accords.

Dubbed 'the People versus Shell', the case was backed by seven environmental groups and more than 17,000 Dutch citizens. Shell in February declared that its oil output is in decline after peaking in 2019 as it outlined green plans to switch away from fossil fuels.

Under those plans, the company had said it would invest up to US\$6bn a year in green energy projects developing and promoting biofuels, electric car charging and renewables. More than half the amount could end up being spent on marketing, it added. In addition, Shell plans to still invest US\$8bn annually on new oil and gas exploration.

AFP

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Global tax still far from becoming reality

Paris, France – After the accolades, an agreement among the world's wealthiest countries to set a global minimum tax on the biggest companies now faces a long, bumpy road to implementation.

The path is complicated even among the Group of Seven (G7) rich nations that endorsed the plan, with US President Joe Biden having to convince recalcitrant members of Congress.

In recent years countries have previously clashed over taxing the overseas profits of big companies, especially US tech giants.

But the mood has changed as governments look for new sources of revenue after spending huge sums to protect their economies during the coronavirus crisis.

The agreement between the US and its G7 partners Britain, France, Japan, Italy, Germany and Canada in London at the weekend is only the first step in a long process.

"There is still quite a long road to go," Elke Asen, a policy analyst at the Tax Foundation think tank in Washington, told AFP.

The reform now goes to finance ministers of the Group of 20 developed and emerging countries at a July meeting.

The "more difficult part",



Finance ministers from wealthy G7 nations on June 5 pledged commitment to a global minimum corporate tax of at least 15 per cent (AFP)

Asen said, will be the next step: Negotiations between 139 nations under the aegis of the Organisation for Economic Co-Operation and Development (OECD).

"I think we're probably looking at a few years here before it's actually finally implemented," she said.

A source close to the negotiations said the G7 agreement "is a very important first step but

there is still a lot of work to do to get" a G20 agreement and a majority of 139 countries to back the plan.

'Contentious details'

The reform has two 'pillars'. The first would allow countries to tax a share of the profits of the 100 most profitable companies – such as Facebook or Google – in the world, regardless of where they are based.

The second pillar is a global minimum corporate tax of 'at least' 15 per cent, which aims to stop competition between countries to attract multinationals by offering them extremely low rates.

But "none of the contentious details" such as the precise rate or tax base "have been resolved", said Simon MacAdam, senior global economist at Capital Economics.

Still, Nicolas Veron, senior fellow at the Washington-based Peterson Institute for International Economics, said there are enough countries behind the plan now, and "a desire to succeed which makes one optimistic".

A country that decides to raise taxes currently risks making companies flee elsewhere, said Sebastien Jean, director of the Paris-based Centre for Prospective

Studies and International Information.

But when a "critical mass of countries are doing it... it's those that stay out that are penalised", Jean said.

While Biden has the support of G7 allies, he has more work to do back home, as nearly half the 100 companies in 'pillar one' are American.

Asen said the US Congress is traditionally slow at passing tax treaties and "that is one concern a lot of countries have".

US Senator Mike Crapo and Congressman Kevin Brady, the top ranking Republicans on taxation in Congress, called it a 'speculative agreement'.

They said in a joint statement that the deal 'appears premature given the many unanswered questions' about the two pillars and their potential effect on US companies.

Irish concerns

Certain countries will take some convincing.

Europe is divided between its biggest economies – with Germany, France, Italy, Spain and the Netherlands backing the plan – and those that have benefited from their low tax rates.

One country unhappy about the reform is Ireland, whose 12.5

per cent corporate tax has lured the likes of Google, Facebook and Apple.

"There are 139 countries at the table, and any agreement will have to meet the needs of small and large countries, developed and developing," said Irish Finance Minister Paschal Donohoe.

Switzerland, with taxes below 12 per cent in some cantons, said it would take 'the necessary measures to maintain a very attractive economic place'.

Outside Europe, French Finance Minister Bruno Le Maire said he expected a 'tough fight' in the G20 to convince China.

The country has a 25 per cent corporate tax rate which drops to 15 per cent for high-tech companies.

"It will be difficult to go much higher than 15 per cent if we want the Chinese to agree," the source close to the negotiations said.

Asen said the final deal could be a "patchwork where each country... implements it a little differently to make it better aligned with their own national tax policy".

"It may not be a 100 per cent harmonised global minimum tax in the end," she said.

AFP



Martin Winterkorn

Ex-CEO of VW charged in 'dieselgate'

Berlin, Germany – Berlin prosecutors said Wednesday they have charged Volkswagen's former chief executive Martin Winterkorn with making false statements to a parliamentary committee over the automobile giant's emissions-cheating 'Dieselgate' scandal.

"The public prosecutor's office accuses the defendant of giving false testimony on January 19, 2017, as a witness before the 'emissions' investigation committee," they said.

Winterkorn claimed to have learnt about illegal devices installed in VW vehicles to trick emissions tests only in September 2015, when he is believed to already be aware by May that year, they said.

The issue was also raised at a crisis meeting of Volkswagen executives in July 2015, the statement said. Winterkorn resigned in September 2015, a week after the diesel emissions scandal broke.

He is already facing trial in Germany on charges of organised commercial fraud and serious tax evasion over the case.

Separately, Volkswagen on Wednesday said it had come to a deal with Winterkorn for the former chief executive to pay the company 11.2mn euros in damages.

AFP

China accuses US of 'paranoid delusion' over huge innovation bill

Beijing, China – Beijing on Wednesday accused Washington of 'paranoid delusion' after the US Senate passed a sweeping industrial policy bill aimed at countering the surging economic threat from China.

America's political parties overcame partisan divisions to support pumping more than US\$170bn into research and development, one of the most significant achievements in Congress since Joe Biden's presidency began in January.

The United States Innovation and Competition Act represents the largest investment in scientific research and technological innovation in generations, according to Senate Majority Leader Chuck Schumer.

"We are in a competition to win the 21st century, and the starting gun has gone off," Biden said. "As other countries continue to invest in their own research and development, we cannot risk falling behind."

The bill is seen as crucial for US efforts to avoid being outmanoeuvred by Beijing as the adversaries compete in the race for technological innovation.

The foreign affairs committee of China's top legislature called the bill an attempt to interfere in the country's internal affairs and deprive it of its 'legitimate right to development through technology and economic decoupling',



US President Joe Biden (AFP)

state media reported.

"The bill shows that the paranoid delusion of egoism has distorted the original intention of innovation and competition," said the National People's Congress foreign affairs committee, according to a report by the official Xinhua news agency.

It said the bill was 'full of Cold War mentality and ideological prejudice'.

'Leader in innovation'

The package, a key provision of which addresses a shortage of semiconductors that has slowed US auto production this year, will help US industry bolster its capacity and improve technology. The bill now heads to the House of Representatives.

"Today, the Senate took a critical bipartisan step forward to

make the investments we need to continue America's legacy as a global leader in innovation," US Commerce Secretary Gina Raimondo said in a statement praising the passage of the bill.

"This funding isn't just about addressing the current semiconductor chip shortage, it is about long-term investments," she said. Schumer called the measure "one of the most important things this chamber has done in a very long time, a statement of faith in America's ability to seize the opportunities of the 21st century". The proposal aims to address a number of technological areas in which the United States has fallen behind its Chinese competitors.

The bill allocates US\$52bn in funding for a previously approved plan to increase domestic manufacturing of semiconduc-

tors.

It also authorises US\$120bn over five years for activities at the National Science Foundation to advance priorities including research and development in key areas such as artificial intelligence and quantum science. And it facilitates tie-ups between private firms and research universities. "This is an opportunity for the United States to strike a blow on behalf of answering the unfair competition that we are seeing from communist China," said Republican Senator Roger Wicker, one of the main co-sponsors.

Whichever countries best harness technologies like AI, robotics and quantum computing will be able to shape innovation to its image, added Schumer, before criticising Chinese President Xi Jinping.

A summary of the Senate legislation notes how China is 'aggressively investing over US\$150bn' in semiconductor manufacturing in order to control the advanced technology.

While the Senate's top Republican Mitch McConnell stressed that the measure remained "incomplete", it nevertheless passed by a healthy margin, highlighting how the nation's competition with China is one of the few issues that can bring feuding Republicans and Democrats together.

AFP

Clean investment surge needed to meet climate goals: IEA

Paris, France – The world has no option other than to finance a huge, sevenfold surge in investment into clean energy in emerging and developing economies if climate goals are to be met, an IEA report said Wednesday.

"In many emerging and developing economies, emissions are heading upwards while clean energy investments are faltering, creating a dangerous fault line in global efforts to reach climate and sustainable energy goals," said IEA executive director Fatih Birol.

The Financing Clean Energy Transitions in Emerging and Developing Economies report calculated that annual clean energy investment must increase more than sevenfold – from less than US\$150bn in 2020 to more than US\$1tn by 2030 if the world is to reach net-zero emissions by 2050.

The IEA, which last month said no new fossil fuel projects should be given the go-ahead if the 2050 net-zero target is to be met, estimated energy-related carbon dioxide emissions from developing countries will grow by five billion tonnes over the next two decades, making clean energy investment a top global priority.

But a lack of funds and the economic damage wrought by



Fatih Birol

the pandemic were hampering the green fight, Birol said as the IEA unveiled alongside the World Bank and the World Economic Forum a report that starkly laid out the size of the challenge ahead.

"When we look at the developing world, where two thirds of the world population lives, where more than 90 per cent of the emissions growth will come, only one fifth of the clean energy investments is going there," Birol told AFP in an interview.

"So there is a big gap between where the emissions will come from and where the clean energy investments are going," he said.

The report said it 'is a global call to action – especially for those who have the wealth, resources and expertise to make a difference.'

AFP

EU seeks firm US pledge to end Trump-era trade row

Strasbourg, France – The EU said Wednesday it was time for the US to make concrete commitments towards ending transatlantic trade tensions, days ahead of a visit by President Joe Biden to Brussels.

"As a trust and confidence building measure, we have to deescalate and solve EU-US trade disputes," EU Executive Vice President Valdis Dombrovskis told a session of European Parliament in Strasbourg.

Dombrovskis, who is also the bloc's trade commissioner, was speaking ahead of the EU-US summit on June 15, which both sides hope will mark a clear



break with the heated relations under former US president Donald Trump.

The EU hoped the visit by Biden would help achieve 'decisive progress' on solving a steel tariff dispute as well as a two-decade spat over subsidies to plane-makers Boeing and Airbus, Dombrovskis said.

Last month, the EU and US agreed to hold talks to end the steel and aluminium row with Brussels unilaterally suspending its right to double tariffs on iconic US products for six months.

"We sent a clear signal to the US of our willingness to solve

this issue in a fair and balanced way by suspending our... legitimate countermeasures," the former Latvian prime minister said.

"It is now for the US to walk the talk," he said.

The tit-for-tat battle began in June 2018 when Trump imposed tariffs of 25 per cent on steel and 10 per cent on aluminium from Europe, Asia and elsewhere.

Brussels responded with counter-tariffs on 2.8bn euros worth of US products, including bourbon whiskey, jeans, orange juice and Harley-Davidson motorcycles.

AFP

Bank Muscat celebrates 10th anniversary of its flagship Green Sports programme

As one of the pioneers of CSR and sustainability initiatives in Oman, Bank Muscat has always been committed to creating a meaningful change in the pursuit of a sustainable future. With the launch of its flagship Green Sports programme in 2012, Bank Muscat successfully created and implemented an annual programme that brings together different generations on one platform towards one common goal, sports. This year the bank is celebrating the 10th anniversary of the programme which has supported 143 teams across various governorates in the sultanate.

The response to the Green Sports programme has been growing by leaps and bounds annually since its launch, with intense competition amongst the participants to be announced as one of the winning teams every year.

So far, as many as 36,900 members from the winning teams have benefitted from the programme and more are expected to be part of it in the future. Bank Muscat has been encouraged by the tremendous success of Green Sports in transforming sports infrastructure across the country.

Currently, 95 teams have received support for installation of artificial turf or natural grass on their fields, while 40 teams have received support for floodlighting and eight teams for water desalination plants.

Till date, the bank has handed over 111 Green Sports fields to their respective teams, and more Green Sports fields are at present nearing completion.

On this occasion, Sheikh Waleed K al Hashar, chief executive officer, Bank Muscat, said, “The Green Sports programme is an example of the bank’s commitment to Public-Private partnership and the continuous



(File photos of Green Sports from previous years)

efforts to build a sustainable sports infrastructure for the benefit of Omani youth and communities across the country. The bank’s landmark Green Sports programme supports the installation of artificial turf or natural grass on sports fields, floodlighting and water-desalination systems by sports teams across the country.

“The success of Green Sports over the past many years has encouraged the bank to step up its efforts even more.”

Sheikh Hashar added, “Given the excellent response over the

years and to celebrate the 10th anniversary of its launch, the bank is very pleased to increase the number of beneficiaries to 20 teams from this year onwards, up from 15 per year.

“By redoubling its efforts and investments in the programme, the bank strengthens its commitment to Omani youth. We take this opportunity to thank all our partners, sports teams across the country and the media for all their efforts, which has greatly encouraged the bank to further expand its role in the field of CSR. I would also like to extend my

heartiest congratulations to all the winners of 2021 and assure them that the bank will closely work with them in ensuring the successful implementation of Green Sports fields.”

The 20 beneficiaries this year include:

Al Farfarah Sports Team (Bidbid); Al Kifah Sports Team (Suwaiq); Al Kefah Sports Team (Sohar); Al Mahader Sports & Cultural Team (Rustaq); Al Humida Sports & Cultural Team (Izki); Al Hajr Sports & Cultural Team (Quriyat); Al Ettihad Cultural Team (Bidiya); Al Arid

Sports & Cultural Team (Ibri); Al Memoura Sports & Cultural Team (Al Kamil W’Al Wafi); Al Samdi Sports Team (Samail); Al Khuwairat Sports & Cultural Team (Khabourah); Al Dhahir Sports Team (Jalaan Bani Bu Ali); Al Ghalila Sports, Cultural and Social Team (Suwaiq); and Al Ettifaq Sports and Cultural Team (Liwa). These teams will be provided with floodlighting for their sports fields.

The Al Soor Sports Team (Bahla); Al Husn al Ahli Team (Salalah) and Al Shabab Sports, Cultural and Social Team (Yan-

qul) will receive support for natural greening of their sports fields while artificial turf will be installed on the Wadi Nahez al Ahli Team’s field in Salalah.

The Al Majaz al Sughra Sports Team (Saham) and Al Ittihad Wudam al Sahel Sports Team (Mussanah) will be provided water-desalination systems to support their sports fields.

Bank Muscat has been conducting the registration, evaluation of applications and implementation of the programme in a transparent and impartial manner. Beneficiaries are chosen by

the bank through well-defined registration and application procedures that follow international best practices, and are complemented with field visits.

The implementation phase for beneficiaries is marked by close coordination with the teams to ensure that the projects are completed as per schedule and the necessary standards.

As a truly unique and one of its kind programme, Green Sports is contributing majorly to developing the sporting skills and talents of Omani youth, especially in football.

The bank’s efforts complement the government’s efforts to develop modern sports in the spirit of the Public-Private Partnership model.

Interestingly, Green Sports is contributing to all-round development as the facilities are also used for a number of community programmes and social activities, which lead to stronger community bonding.

As a pioneer of sustainability in Oman, Bank Muscat continuously for the overall progress and development of the country through its various programmes and initiatives.

Shangri-La announces family packages

Shangri-La in Europe, Oman and Mauritius turn vacations into playcations with special children’s amenities, themed celebrations and special family packages. Even the youngest guests can find their Shangri-La with special children’s sleep set ups, afternoon teas, superhero- and princess-themed celebrations and more.

For the health and safety of guests of all ages, families can rest assured they are taken care of through Shangri-La Cares, the group’s rigorous and elevated health and safety protocols at all Shangri-La properties worldwide.

Shangri-La Hotel, London

Shangri-La Hotel, At The Shard, London helps children realise their dreams of being superheroes and princesses with the Sky Hero Experience and Sky Princess Experience. In collaboration with expert children’s event planners My Kid Atelier, each two-hour experience is designed to cater to the endless imagination and creativity that children bring. The Sky Hero Experience transforms little ones, family and friends into superheroes for the day, while the Sky Princess Experience whisks guests to a castle in the clouds.

Each experience is hosted in the hotel’s luxurious Yi event space and complete with themed décor and activities, plus dress-up and toy stations.

For enquiries and bookings, please call +44 (0) 7884 266



006 or email celebrations.london@shangri-la.com.

Shangri-La, Paris

In the City of Light, families will enjoy true Parisian luxury with Shangri-La Hotel, Paris’ Family Fun in a Parisian Palace package. Young guests will be delighted with special children’s amenities including a fun tent setup, Bamboo activity kit with colouring cards, coloured pencils, puzzle, children-sized plush slippers and umbrella, personalized welcome balloon and special children’s menus for lunch and dinner. Shangri-La Hotel, Paris will capture memories made with an exclusive photo opportunity from a private terrace with an Eiffel Tower View. The Family Fun in a Parisian Palace package starts at about US\$1,243 per night.

Bosphorus, Istanbul

Families can discover moments of Shangri-La made for the whole

family with Shangri-La Bosphorus, Istanbul’s special Family Fun on the Bosphorus room package. Complete with fun children’s tent setup and milk and cookies served in room, young guests will find a home-away-from-home at Shangri-La. Specially-designed for families, the package includes daily breakfast, 50 per cent off meals for children under 16 years old, early check in and late check out, and more.

Muscat’s Seaside Oasis

Discover your family moments of joy at Shangri-La Barr al Jissah, Muscat with the Fun-Filled Family Adventure overnight package. Nestled amongst rugged mountains and surrounded by 124 acres of lush gardens and a 500m sandy beach, guests can rediscover Oman’s exhilarating seaside oasis with a diversity of swimming pools, splashpad, and the only lazy river in Muscat, in

addition to 50 per cent off meals for children below 16 years old, early-check in and late check-out from Sundays to Wednesdays, and more.

There are only five turtle nesting sites in the Sultanate of Oman and the protected beach of Shangri-La Barr al Jissah, Muscat is among them, where guests have a high chance of witnessing the hatching and release of baby turtles that take place from mid-April until September. Families can also experience ‘The Quest’, a fun way to explore the resort through a mobile-based treasure hunt, watch blockbuster movies at the open-air cinema on Fridays, and for an additional charge, embark on a dolphin watching boat trip or indulge in a 1001 Arabian-Nights inspired ‘Sunset Majlis Dinner’ for a sumptuous family feast on the beach between the mountains.

For reservations, please visit the website, call +968 2477 6262 or email reservations.slm@shangri-la.com.

Mauritian Paradise

Families can enjoy a stress-free getaway at Shangri-La’s Le Touessrok Resort and Spa, Mauritius with the Family Getaway In Paradise overnight package. Guests both young and young-at-heart will relax in two of the resort’s luxurious guestrooms and full board upgrade with breakfast, lunch and dinner, plus daily special children’s afternoon tea including pancakes and ice cream.

Ooredoo adds new remittance service through MoneyGram

Continuing to combine the latest technologies with the ultimate in convenience, Ooredoo has added a new international remittance service through MoneyGram to pay+, a mobile wallet developed by National Bank of Oman (NBO). Using MoneyGram’s worldwide network, users can now send money to over 40 destinations worldwide, quickly and securely, from their phones. What’s more, pay+ is waiving its transaction fees for all destinations.

Noor Al Sulaiti, chief executive officer at Ooredoo, said, “This major, first to market, new development will change the way customers can transfer money. Pay+ was designed with customer needs in mind and together with our partners, NBO and MoneyGram, the ground-breaking mobile wallet continues to set standards in the sultanate’s evolving digital payments ecosystem.”

Abdullah al Hinai, chief executive officer at National Bank of Oman, said, “At NBO, we continue to fulfil our promise to offer our customers a more convenient and hassle-free experience. Especially at a time when social distancing is a factor, our digital services give our users more options than ever for managing their money, safely and from the comfort of anywhere. By working with local and international partners such as Ooredoo and MoneyGram, pay+ combines the



latest technological developments and is one of the many ways we are driving innovation in the banking sector and beyond.”

“Amidst the pandemic, our digital transformation’s speed, reliability and convenience mean even more to consumers, and we are doubling down on our efforts to maximise digital driven growth in key send corridors like Oman,” said Ahmed Aly, head of Middle East at MoneyGram.

“This partnership expansion with Ooredoo, as well as our strong existing relationships in Oman, will help us greatly expand our network in the country so that customers can easily access our services and connect with loved ones around the world.”

Using MoneyGram’s worldwide network and the convenience and speed of pay+, the new service enables customers to send money to bank accounts or to cash pick-up locations all over

the world, via a single app on their mobile device. Pay+ users can also benefit from a whole host of transactions including bill payments, deposits, money transfers to other wallets, and withdrawals. The service also enables contactless payments at over 3,000 locations all over Oman using QR Code scanning, including OmanOil petrol stations, StarCare hospitals and pharmacies, McDonalds, Caribou cafe, Nesto and Spar supermarkets, Oman United Insurance, Al Obaidani stores, and many more.

Moreover, robust security features mean that payment information is protected. Frequently updated and enhanced, the easy-to-use service is just one way Ooredoo is ensuring its customers have an awesome digital experience. Download the pay+ app from the Apple Store or Google Play, or find out more at www.payplus.om.

OABC highlights trade financing with US bank

In line with its mission to foster the development of trade and commercial activity between Oman and the United States, the OABC (US Chamber of Commerce affiliate in Oman), together with the US Embassy in Oman organised a private roundtable discussion on Tuesday, from 3-4pm, with Rick Angiuoni, business development specialist and regional director of Africa at the Export-Import Bank of the United States (EXIM), via Zoom.

The roundtable discussion introduced key stakeholders and heads of corporate working in the top banks of Oman to the mission and services of EXIM Bank.

Attendees also discussed the status of financing opportunities already provided by EXIM Bank in Oman and discussed new ways to facilitate additional trade and collaboration between



EXIM Bank and Omani banks and companies.

The session featured opening remarks by US Ambassador to Oman H E Leslie Tsou and a presentation by Angiuoni.

As this was a private roundtable event, only one representative per bank attended the session, to facilitate active discussion.

“This roundtable follows the OABC webinar held in March 2021 and EXIM bank’s US\$500mn MoU signed earlier this year between EXIM Bank and the Foreign Ministry of Oman,” said Angiuoni, who presented on behalf of EXIM Bank.

He added, “After the success of our first event with the OABC, which shared with Omani companies about the benefits and opportunities provided by the US EXIM Bank, we decided the step to build on this momentum would be to host a roundtable meeting with Omani finance executives to discuss EXIM Bank as a source of efficient cost of funds in financing US exports for the benefits of Omani importers and to enhance US-Omani trade.”

“This session was a very successful one, and we thank our presenter and partners for an engaging discussion. Sessions like

today’s roundtable provide more insight into approaches for utilising the US-Oman Free Trade Agreement, and continue to foster investment and trade between Oman and the United States.”

“Today’s event shows EXIM’s ongoing commitment to promoting international commerce by extending loans, commercial loan guarantees, and export credit insurance for the export of U.S. goods and services to Oman and other markets,” US Ambassador H E Leslie stated.

“EXIM is therefore an important tool to advance our bilateral trade partnership, and we hope the private sector’s use of this tool will continue to grow. We believe that having more Omani entities take advantage of EXIM products will advance bilateral commercial opportunities and increase prosperity for Omanis and Americans alike.”

OAB announces COVID-19 vaccination initiative

Oman Arab Bank (OAB) announced a COVID-19 vaccination initiative for its employees and their families including spouses and children over the age of 18 years, in conjunction with the national vaccination campaign supervised by the Ministry of Health.

There are currently 1,400 registrations, with the final number expected to exceed 2,000 people. This step is also in line with the Wiqaya programme, launched by the Human Resources Division since the onset of the pandemic. The initiative will run in coordination with multiple hospitals across the various Wilayats, providing ease and accessibility to staff, without the need for them to travel to Muscat.

Highlighting the importance of the initiative, Rashad al Musafir, CEO of the bank, said, “At OAB, we believe in safeguarding the health and well-being of all our employees and their families. Since the beginning of this pandemic, we have



ensured business continuity while maintaining the highest level of precautionary measures within our premises. Based on the directives of the Supreme Committee, we are well prepared to cover the costs of the vaccinations for our employees and their families, to ensure peace of mind within the communities.”

The Wiqaya programme included several preventive measures to offset the spread of coronavirus and reduce the risk internally within the bank. The vaccination initiative will begin at

the OAB head office and will be rolled out to the 53 bank’s branches across the sultanate in the coming weeks, aimed at a 100 per cent reach. The vaccination costs of the employees and members of their families will be fully covered by the bank.

“With the onset of the COVID-19 crisis, the launch of our Wiqaya programme placed a strong focus on health and hygiene at all our branches. This included the provision of sanitisers, masks and other protective gear to staff, alongside enforcing social distancing.”

Ericsson launches annual Innovation Awards 2021

Ericsson (NASDAQ: ERIC) is officially launching its annual Ericsson Innovation Awards (EIA) 2021, a global competition with a grand prize of €25,000 that offers university students around the world the chance to develop new, innovative ideas with support from Ericsson experts.

The theme in 2021 is ‘Bridge the Digital Divide’.

The digital revolution has transformed the world, enriching our lives in countless ways yet half the planet lives without access to the tools, information, and resources that many of us rely on every day. As the world becomes increasingly reliant on technology, the digital divide is growing. Economic, geographic, gender and access factors have left vast portions of the global population at a severe disadvantage.

Abdullah AlBalushi, country manager of Ericsson Oman said, “Innovation is at the core of Ericsson’s mission and we are proud to be shaping the future of communication. The Ericsson Innovation Awards support Oman Vision 2040 in Oman’s readiness to transition to knowledge and innovation.

“We are excited to welcome Oman’s bright students to this global competition and hope to see many entries from the sultanate.”

Innovations come in all sizes, from simple changes in code that could redefine the networks of the future to complex technological advances that will advance humanitarian efforts across the world. We believe that young people drive innovation and development when it comes to current pressing issues.

That’s why, with innovation at the heart of Ericsson, we want to invite young talents to register for Ericsson Innovation Awards 2021.



ance for refining their ideas!

Prizes and incentives
Semi-finalists
Each of the seven regional winners will receive: €1,000 cash prize
►In some cases, additional special recognition and prizes offered within your respective regions.

All 14 Semi-finalists - including the seven regional winners - will receive: Seven weeks of mentorship from Ericsson experts in innovation and business
►Recognition on Ericsson social and digital media
►The possibility of Ericsson recruiter interviews (if any suitable positions are available at the time)
►Certificate of achievement

Finalists
All three finalist teams will receive:
►Cash prizes, as outlined below (with the Swedish taxes paid by Ericsson)
►Grand Prize winner: €25,000
►2nd place: €15,000
►3rd place: €5,000
►Bonus: Social Media Prize: €2,000
►An invitation to the Ericsson Innovation Awards Grand Final
►An additional four weeks of mentorship
►Recognition across Ericsson social media and digital channels

All three finalists will have their entries uploaded onto the Instagram page of @ericssoncareers, and for the 24 hours before the Grand Final, anyone can vote on this page. The team who receives the most votes will win an additional €2,000.

For more details about the competition and to register, visit <https://www.ericsson.com/en/careers/eia>

Dawoodi Bohra announces winners of Oceans Day contest

The Dawoodi Bohra community in Oman announced the winners of its Middle East region-wide painting competition to mark the occasion of World Oceans Day.

Themed around ‘The Ocean: Life & Livelihoods’, the competition saw the participation of over 40 students between ages 5-15. A panel of judges selected a winner in each of the three age groups A: 5-9 yrs, B: 9-12 yrs, C: 12-15 yrs (mention).

A spokesperson of the Dawoodi Bohra community, coordinating the competition in Muscat, said, “It is overwhelming to see so many children participate in this competition to express their imagination about oceans and their ecosystems through their paintings.”

“With lockdown restrictions throughout the country, the competition was held online,” he added. All the three winners of the competition will be felicitated. One of the judges of the competition, said, “These environment-led competitions help



in creating awareness among children at the grassroots level while also inspiring them to take action and realise their collective responsibility towards nature and its resources.”

The entire Middle East region-

wide painting competition was held under the global philanthropic arm of the Dawoodi Bohra community - ‘Project Rise’.

Every painting had a unique message highlighting the significance of the ocean and how it

provides livelihood and support to other ecosystems on the planet.

The spokesperson added, “As part of our community’s global Turning the Tide - Against Plastic Pollution campaign, which

strives to eliminate single-use plastic and rid bodies of water of plastic pollution, the Dawoodi Bohra community in Muscat continues to educate members about reducing waste and leading a circular lifestyle.”

Dream offer on Nissan Sentra ending on June 13

As part of the on-going ‘Dream Offer’, Nissan Oman from the house of Suhail Bahwan Automobiles (SBA), is extending a range of unlimited benefits for the patrons of Nissan Sentra, known for its great fuel economy, attractive looks and luxurious interiors. Nissan Sentra is available in 1.6lt and 1.8lt engine options, generating maximum power of 113 HP and 130 HP respectively.

Customers of Nissan Sentra have a choice of benefits including special interest rate, cash gift, free service, insurance and more. The offer, which is available on models purchased for personal use, will go on till June 13.

Nissan Sentra boasts of several re-engineered product enhancements that have been incorporated after meticulous consumer insights and feedback over the past few months. The special look Nissan Sentra comes with a totally redesigned V-motion grille that has become almost synonymous with entire Nissan sedan range. The re-engineered model features a rear spoiler, daytime running lights, specially designed chrome package and a sports + badge.

A senior official of Nissan Oman said, “Nissan Sentra standard of design, driving enjoyment and technology makes it one of



the brand’s top sellers and most recognised nameplates. Armed with Nissan Intelligent Mobility technologies, the Nissan Sentra has a great fan following in Oman.

Nissan Sentra offers drivers the spaciousness and comfort of cars usually found in the larger segment, as well as technology usually associated with much more expensive cars.”

Special interest rate
A special interest rate is available for MY20/21 Nissan Sentra and customers can get zero per cent up to three years or 1.99 per cent

for four years or 2.49 per cent for five years or 2.99 per cent for six years on the model.

For all tenures beyond six years, normal interest rates will apply for the full tenure of the loan. This rate is applicable for individual purchase with private registration only and is subject to finance/credit approval.

This benefit will be applicable for financing through select finance companies only.

Customers purchasing in cash, LPO, credit will not be eligible for special interest rate benefit. Terms and conditions apply.

EMI
Customers of Nissan Sentra range can avail low EMI rate of RO112. Customers of Nissan Sentra can enjoy free periodic maintenance service package for three years/ 60,000km. This offer is valid for 10,000km service intervals.

Assured cash gift
Under the special promotion, customers of Nissan Sentra can avail assured cash gift ranging from RO1,600 to RO1,700.

Customers of Nissan Sentra can enjoy free insurance in Oman & UAE for first year for

private registration. Customers of Nissan Sentra can enjoy free registration for the first year.

Lead performance
Nissan Sentra’s 1.6 SV CVT P26 boasts of top of the range options that focus on class-above design standards inside and out. Loaded with full options, the Sentra 1.6 SV is an edge over competitors in its segment making it an enticing option for patrons.

Nissan’s next-generation Xtronic CVT transmission guarantees Sentra is always running in the right gear. That means better fuel efficiency, smooth acceleration, and seamless shifting. Proudly wearing the Nissan Pure Drive badge, Sentra is a living proof of Nissan’s commitment to providing more environmentally friendly and fuel-efficient cars.

The Sentra 1.6lt engine takes a leap with its lead performance. Equipped with a Dual Injector System and Twin CVTC (Continuously Variable Valve Timing Control), it provides a smoother ride with great control and responsiveness, along with superior fuel economy - making it an ideal road companion for all types of driving conditions. For test drive options call Nissan Toll free 80050011. For more details visit www.nissanoman.com

Iran women's long and difficult path to equality in politics

Tehran, Iran - Iranian women's poor political representation could be set to worsen under an ultraconservative poised to win next week's presidential election.

Ebrahim Raisi, who heads Iran's judiciary, is the clear favourite from an all-male field of seven candidates to replace President Hassan Rouhani, a moderate elected on promises of social and cultural reform.

Women's rights campaigners in Iran have criticised Rouhani for breaking his promises to create a women's ministry and appoint three women ministers - instead presiding over a decrease in women's representation over his two terms in office.

Only two women - Mas-soumeh Ebtekar, vice president for women and families, and Laya Joneydi, vice president for legal affairs - are represented in Rouhani's outgoing executive.

Unlike ministerial positions, the posts of vice president do not require parliamentary approval, and critics have accused Rouhani of not daring to submit female ministerial nominations to parliament for approval, even when moderates held a majority.

Now, after conservatives and ultraconservatives swept last year's parliamentary elections, the chances of an ultraconservative president doing so seem even less likely.

"The biggest challenge for Iranian women is linked to their



Workers hold a campaign banner of presidential candidate Ebrahim Raisi, in Iran's capital Tehran on Monday (AFP)

total absence from decision-making bodies," Elaheh Koulaei, a former reformist lawmaker, told AFP. Women's representation does not appear to be a priority for any of the seven candidates vying to replace Rouhani on June 18.

Ultraconservative Raisi has paid little attention to women's issues, criticising Rouhani's broken promises without revealing his own intentions.

Observers see little difference between pledges from ultracon-

servative Mohsen Rezai, who has promised to have 'at least two women ministers' if he wins, and reformist Abdolnasser Hemmati, who has pledged 'at least one'.

But with parliament having the last word, those promises may count for little.

'Breaking down barriers'

The number of women lawmakers today is just 17 out of 290, compared to four in the parliament elected a year after Iran's

1979 Islamic revolution, said Zahra Shojaei, an academic who heads the Reformist Women's Party.

The path towards the recognition of women is 'long and difficult', said Shojaei, who served as reformist president Mohammad Khatami's counsellor for women's affairs from 1997 to 2005. After Iran's revolution, Islamic laws gave women a lower legal status than men.

Unless expressly mentioned in marriage contracts, Iranian

women must obtain authorisation from their husbands in order to leave the country.

Women are considered to have half the value of men in various legal aspects, such as inheritance and testimony in court.

Headscarves are mandatory in public, and women are subject to various types of discrimination, from not being allowed to attend men's football matches in stadiums, to being banned from singing solo in front of male or mixed audiences.

But the Islamic republic has also encouraged education for women, who for years now have outnumbered men at universities - a development that has transformed expectations and overturned centuries-old traditions.

Young women's access to higher education has opened up job prospects, particularly in business.

"Women have shone everywhere in Iran when they have no obstacles blocking them - namely in education, philanthropy and entrepreneurship," Shojaei said.

Former lawmaker Koulaei told AFP that 'Iranian women have proved they can bring down barriers'. "We need continuity, stability and the pursuit of efforts that are of course directly linked to the country's political situation and the process of democratising society," she added.

AFP



French President Emmanuel Macron (left) and his wife Brigitte Macron meet people in Valence on Tuesday (AFP)

Macron vows to defy security fears after assault

Paris, France - French President Emmanuel Macron will continue to greet crowds during his travels despite a security scare after a man slapped him in the south of France, a government spokesman said on Wednesday.

Macron shrugged off his assault on Tuesday in the village of Tain l'Hermitage, calling it an 'isolated event' and 'stupidity', and he went to chat with and fistbump on-lookers later in the day in the nearby town of Valence.

"Obviously his trips are going to continue: The President will remain in contact with the French public," government spokesman Gabriel Attal said on Wednesday.

"It would be completely incomprehensible for people to be deprived of contact with the president because of an isolated individual who wanted to challenge [him]," Attal added.

Macron's assailant, a 28-year-old man identified as Damien T., remained in police custody on Wednesday and is expected to be charged with assaulting a public figure, which carries a maximum three-year prison term. He has been described as a fan of medieval martial arts and board games, while the French media raked over his social media activity looking for clues to his political sympathies.

Popular evening talkshow *Le Quotidien* aired footage of one of its journalists meeting Damien T. and friends earlier in the day on Tuesday.

One of the friends, who says he identifies with the anarchist movement, explains that they have come to speak to Macron about the 'decline of France'.

Police sources said that Damien T. had no criminal record and friends and acquaintances who spoke to AFP expressed surprise at his actions, describing him as a shy and placid character.

Safety debate

The slap has led to debate about whether it is safe for Macron to continue spontaneous meetings with members of the public.

The centrist began a nationwide tour of France last week, promising to 'take the pulse' of the country a fortnight before regional elections and ten months before a presidential vote.

He is widely expected to seek a second term in April and May next year, with polls giving him a narrow lead over far-right leader Marine Le Pen.

The 43-year-old former investment banker decided to get out of his car to greet on-lookers on Tuesday who were calling his name after a visit to a school in Tain l'Hermitage.

In footage of the incident, he can be seen striding over to a barrier, with his security detail behind him, before greeting Damien T., who grabs him with his left hand and strikes with his right.

Experts highlighted on Wednesday how French security services advise French presidents on their safety, but do not have authority or powers to prevent them putting themselves in danger.

"In the United States it's the opposite: the Secret Service decides," Jean-Pierre Diot, a former member of France's specialist VIP police protection force, told *Le Parisien*.

AFP

Israeli strikes kill 11 Syria troops: Monitor

Damascus, Syria - Israeli airstrikes in central Syria killed at least 11 government troops and militiamen late Tuesday, the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights said.

The strikes were the first carried out by Israel in Syria since 11 days of heavy fighting with the Hamas rulers of Gaza ended with an Egyptian-brokered ceasefire on May 21, the Britain-based war monitor said. "At least seven army soldiers and four National Defence Forces militiamen were killed," Observatory chief Rami Abdul Rahman told AFP, adding that all of the dead were Syrian.

The Observatory said the strikes targeted air force positions near the village of Khirbet al-Tin on the outskirts of Homs, as well as an arms depot belonging to the Lebanese Hezbollah movement.

The Israeli air force carried out Tuesday evening strikes in several regions of Syria, in the capital Damascus as well as in Homs, Hama and Latakia provinces, the Observatory said.

Syria's state SANA news agency said there had been 'explosions in Damascus' as Israeli forces carried out the raid from Lebanese air space. It said air defences had been activated against the 'Israeli aggression', but said nothing about any casualties or damage.

The Israeli army, which rarely acknowledges individual strikes on Syria, declined to comment on 'reports in the foreign media'.

Since civil war broke out in Syria in 2011, Israel has carried out hundreds of air strikes on Syrian territory, targeting government positions as well as allied Iran-backed forces and fighters of Lebanon's Hezbollah movement.

AFP

Erdogan to visit Karabakh region in Azerbaijan

Ankara, Turkey - Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan said on Wednesday he will visit Azerbaijan to celebrate its victory over Armenia in a brief war last year, touring a region recaptured in disputed Nagorno-Karabakh.

Azerbaijan seized back swathes of territory in the separatist ethnic Armenia region with the help of Turkish combat drones and other weaponry from Ankara.

The conflict claimed 6,000 lives and ended with a Russian-brokered truce in November that saw ethnic Armenians pushed out of large parts of the land they had won during a brutal post-Soviet war in the 1990s.

Erdogan said he will fly to Azerbaijan from next week's NATO summit in Brussels and watch Turkey play Wales in Baku



Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan speaks during a meeting at the Grand National Assembly of Turkey, in Ankara on Wednesday (AFP)

in the Euro 2020 football championship on Wednesday.

He said he and his 'brother',

Azerbaijani President Ilham Aliyev, would then visit Shusha, a historic city that fell to Azerbai-

jani forces in the closing days of the Karabakh war.

The Shusha visit could prove to be especially painful to Armenians because many view the ancient city as the primary centre of Armenian culture in Karabakh.

Turkey has historically poor relations with Armenia.

Tensions between the two simmered up again when US President Joe Biden in April recognised the Ottoman Empire's genocide of Armenians during World War I.

While the Karabakh truce has largely held, the border region has witnessed several skirmishes.

The war was also followed by protests and political upheaval in Armenia, with Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan calling a snap election for June 20.

AFP

Iraqi Kurds in border zone flee Turkey's hunt for PKK

Sulaimaniyah, Iraq - One fine day in May, Yohanna Khushfa gathered his 200 sheep and took off, along with 120 other villagers in Iraqi Kurdistan, fearful of the Turkish drones hunting Kurdish separatists.

"Shrapnel blew out our windows and furniture," the mayor of Jelki, a village in the Al-Amadiya area, said. "We were afraid for our lives and we left," said the 71-year-old, reached by telephone from a rugged strip near the Turkish border.

Since Turkey launched a new military campaign in northern Iraq on April 23, three civilians have been killed and four wounded.

Amongst those, according to Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan was a senior official from Turkey's outlawed Kurdistan Workers Party (PKK).

In the face of Turkey's actions, some 1,500 people from 300 families have fled their villages, according to Iraq's ministry for the displaced.



Iraqi Kurdish women play daf drums during a protest against the Turkish offensive in northern Iraq, in the northeastern city of Sulaimaniyah on Saturday (AFP)

Others already left long ago, among them Berqi Islam, who fled in 2017 from Shiladzi, an area near the border where his brother was killed in Turkish bombing. With his family's farmland burnt down and no compensation paid by Iraqi Kurdish or federal authorities, he has yet to return.

Erdogan, who has threatened to 'clean up' parts of northern Iraq, accuses the PKK of using the mountainous border area as a springboard for its insurgency.

The PKK has waged a rebellion in the mainly Kurdish southeast of Turkey since 1984 that has claimed more than 40,000 lives.

'Permanent presence'

Erdogan is willing to move 'Turkey's ongoing military confrontation with the PKK from Turkey to territory the PKK controls or transits through in Iraq', said Aykan Erdemir, senior director of the Turkey Program at the Foundation for Defense of

Democracies. He said Baghdad and Arbil, the capital of Iraqi Kurdistan and an ally of Ankara, appear to have accepted this.

The growing Turkish presence in Iraqi Kurdistan 'has been evolving into a permanent Turkish presence in the region', said Erdemir, a former opposition lawmaker in Turkey.

The Iraqi state, tied up with chasing down remnants of the Islamic State group and often challenged by pro-Iran Shiite armed groups 'has no means of pressure on the PKK to make it leave', explained Adel Bakawan, director of the French Center for Research on Iraq (CFRI).

In a sign of Turkey's growing confidence, its defence minister visited troops on Iraqi soil in early May, even though the dozen bases and other military posts that the Turkish army has set up over the past quarter of a century are illegal in the eyes of Iraqi law.

Baghdad has summoned the Turkish ambassador several times in protest over Turkey's

military actions, but the bombs continue to fall - taking away 2.5 per cent of Iraq's forested areas, 'an inhuman environmental crime' in the words of Iraqi President Barham Saleh.

And the Turkish incursions are getting deeper - up to 20km inside Iraqi Kurdistan, said Kurdish MP Rivink Muhammad, himself from Al-Amadiya. "Until the latest campaign, Turkish forces were entering through the border posts, but now they are setting up their own routes to avoid the official crossings," added colleague Ali Saleh.

Ankara, the PKK charges, wants a repeat of the situation in northern Syria, where Turkey has since 2016 conducted three military offensives that have left it in control of more than 2,000sqkm.

Turkish Defence Minister Hulusi Akar on Sunday defended his country's actions.

"All of our operations only target terrorists, respecting international law," he told reporters.

AFP

COVID-19 PANDEMIC

France, Belgium ease curbs as US decision boosts travel hopes

Paris, France - France and Belgium further relaxed their COVID-19 restrictions on Wednesday, allowing restaurants and cafés to serve indoors, while the United States eased travel warnings for dozens of countries as vaccinations boost hopes of a return to normal life.

With more than 3.7mn lives lost globally, many nations are still struggling to contain their coronavirus outbreaks. But the rapid vaccine rollout in wealthier parts of the world, including Europe, is allowing the return of some activities considered unthinkable just a few months ago.

In France, that included sipping a drink inside a café, allowed on Wednesday for the first time in months.

"It's a pleasure to have a coffee inside. Normal life is gradually resuming," said transport employee Hammou Mraoui, enjoying a coffee in a bar in the Meudon suburb of Paris.

With the easing of the curfew in France, venues are not only open, they're staying open later too.

The new measures also saw gyms open their doors to the relief of eager fitness buffs like Stephanie Moscoso.

"I put on the alarm clock this morning, it was super early, I saw the sun, I said to myself: This is the beginning of a new life!" said the 35 year old, who hit her local gym in Paris at 8.00am.

If all goes to plan, French authorities will drop the overnight curfew entirely on June 30.

Belgium also relaxed restrictions, allowing cafés and restaurants to serve indoors from Wednesday, while mask-wearing rules were also eased in Brussels.



Customers enjoy their meals in a restaurant, after the government allowed people to enjoy indoor dining and staying out until 11.00pm for the first time in months under a new relaxation of rules, as cases fall and vaccinations rise, in Paris on Wednesday (AFP)

Russia sees surge in cases amid slow vaccine drive

Moscow, Russia - Russia on Wednesday reported a spike in the number of coronavirus infections as officials struggle to encourage Russians to get vaccinated.

A government tally reported 10,407 new coronavirus infections across the country, the highest since March 14. Moscow, the worst-hit city in Russia, also saw a surge in new infections, registering the highest number of daily cases since January 16.

Prime Minister Alexander De Croo announced longer operating hours for businesses and easing of restrictions on sports venues and cinemas.

Russia has been among the countries hardest hit by the coronavirus pandemic with the sixth-highest number of cases in the world.

Figures released by federal statistics agency Rosstat show that Russia had actually recorded some 270,000 virus-related deaths by the end of April - more than double the official tally.

Russia imposed a strict lockdown when the pandemic first swept across the country last spring.

Liveable cities

The easing of lockdown measures across Europe comes after the bloc's once-struggling vaccination campaign continues to gather pace.

Almost half of all adults in the EU have received at least one shot, with almost 26 per cent fully vaccinated, according to official data.

That progress is allowing Europe's governments to strike a better balance between public health and reviving sectors such as tourism that were devastated by pandemic travel restrictions.

The hopeful outlook in Europe is a far cry from the early days of the pandemic, when it was one of the worst-hit regions in the world.

The impact of that phase was visible in the world's most liveable cities list released Wednesday, which saw cities in Australia, Japan and New Zealand - all with swift coronavirus responses - leaping ahead of those in Europe.

The return of gigs

The United States on Tuesday eased its warnings against travel to dozens of countries, including Olympics host Japan and much of Europe, with the State Department asking Americans to reconsider travel but ending blanket advice to not go at all.

The US has had one of the most successful vaccine rollouts in the world, and President Joe Biden has set a goal of giving at least one shot to 70 per cent of American adults by July 4.

The current figure stands at 63.7 per cent, according to the latest Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. As vaccine drives have gathered pace, the US has seen dramatic easing of curbs in many parts, including New York City where concerts and shows are set to return.

AFP

Attack on Pakistan polio vaccine team kills two policemen

Peshawar, Pakistan - Two policemen were shot dead while escorting a polio vaccination team in northwestern Pakistan on Wednesday, the second such attack this year.

Healthcare workers flanked by a security detail were going door to door in a village near the city of Mardan, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province, when they came under attack. Polio has been eradicated across the world apart from in Afghanistan and Pakistan, where distrust of vaccines and vaccination teams is rife.

"Two attackers came on a motorcycle and one of them shot at the policemen, both of whom died at the scene," district police officer Zahid Ullah told AFP.

A second police official, Omar Ali, confirmed the toll.

"The women polio workers were inside the home to administer the polio drops when they shot the policemen," Ali said.

No group has claimed responsibility for the incident, but Islam

ist opposition to vaccines has grown in Pakistan since the CIA organised a fake inoculation drive that helped track down Al Qaeda founder Osama Bin Laden in the province a decade ago.

Healthcare teams must also battle against conspiracy theories that vaccines are a Western plot aimed at sterilising Muslim children.

In January, a policeman was killed in a similar drive-by shooting in the province, while in March, gunmen killed three women involved in a polio immunisation programme across the border. The latest week-long polio effort in Pakistan aims to vaccinate more than 33mn children under the age of five with the help of around 260,000 frontline workers.

The country of 220mn has so far only reported one polio case this year, but the number soared to 147 in 2019 before dropping to 84 last year.

AFP



Injured people receive treatments at a hospital after an attack by gunmen killed 10 people at Pol-e-Khomri in Baghlan Province on Wednesday (AFP)

10 mine-clearing workers killed in Afghanistan

Kunduz, Afghanistan - Masked gunmen killed ten people working for the HALO Trust mine-clearing organisation in northern Afghanistan, the Interior Ministry said Wednesday, blaming the Taliban for the latest attack to rock the violence-wracked country.

The raid happened on Tuesday evening as dozens of demonstrators were relaxing at a HALO compound in Baghlan province, around 260km north of the capital, after a day spent looking for ordnance in the area.

Baghlan has seen fierce fighting in recent months, with near-daily battles between the Taliban and government forces in several districts.

A survivor of Tuesday's attack told AFP that five or six armed men scaled the compound walls and gathered everyone together before asking if there were any Hazara present.

Afghanistan's Shiite Hazara community is often targeted by extremists from the Islamic State,

who consider them heretics. "Nobody responded," said the survivor, who was wounded in the attack.

He said the gunmen then asked the compound leader to identify himself, before shooting him.

"Then one of them said 'kill them all'," he said.

"As they opened fire, we all tried to escape. Some were killed and some, like me, were wounded."

The Interior Ministry blamed the Taliban for the attack, but a spokesman for the insurgents denied responsibility.

'We condemn attacks on the defenseless & view it as brutality,' Zabihullah Mujahid said on Twitter.

'We have normal relations with NGOs, our Mujahideen will never carry out such brutal acts.'

The UK-based HALO Trust told AFP 'an unknown armed group' killed ten staff and wounded 16 others.

AFP

Australia's Melbourne to exit lockdown

Melbourne, Australia - Five million Melbourne residents will exit lockdown on Thursday after Australian authorities said their adherence to strict rules had 'changed the course' of a coronavirus outbreak in the city.

After two weeks under stay-at-home orders, the toughest restrictions in Australia's second-biggest city will be lifted from 11.59pm on Thursday, after just one new virus case was recorded on Tuesday.

"This is a good day. Everyone should be absolutely proud of what we have all achieved together," Victoria state acting Premier James Merlino said on Wednesday. He said collective



People stand in a long queue outside a mass vaccination centre in Melbourne on Saturday (AFP)

efforts had steamed the outbreak in the city, which has seen more than 80 people test positive for either the Kappa or Delta strains that originated in India.

"But we know this isn't over yet, and until we have widespread vaccination across Victoria and across our country, the virus will still be with us."

Melbourne residents still cannot travel more than 25km from their homes or have visitors over, but may gather in groups of up to ten outside.

Schools, cafés and beauty salons can reopen, but gyms and nightclubs must remain closed for at least another week.

Brett Sutton, Victoria's chief health officer, said there could not be a 'snap back' to no restrictions as the situation remains 'reasonably volatile'. "We have to move by increments, safely, but with the minimum restrictions that we know will continue to control this."

Australia is one of the few countries globally without endemic transmission, recording 30,000 cases and fewer than 1,000 deaths in a population of 25mn.

AFP

UN rapporteur warns of 'mass deaths' from starvation in Myanmar

Washington, US - The UN's special rapporteur on human rights in Myanmar has warned of 'mass deaths' from starvation and disease in the wake of fighting between rebel groups and junta forces in the east of the coup-stricken country.

Myanmar has been in chaos and its economy paralysed since the February putsch and a brutal military crackdown on dissent that has killed over 800 people, according to a local monitoring group.

Fighting has flared in several communities - especially in townships that have seen a high death toll at the hands of police -

and some locals have formed 'defence forces'.

Clashes have escalated in Kayah state near the Thai border in recent weeks.

Locals have accused the military of firing artillery shells that have landed near villages and the UN estimates around 100,000 people have been displaced.

'The junta's brutal, indiscriminate attacks are threatening the lives of many thousands of men, women and children in Kayah state', Tom Andrews said in a statement posted on Twitter on Tuesday.

'Let me be blunt. Mass deaths from starvation, disease, and ex-



This file photo shows children and elders displaced from recent fighting between government troops and ethnic rebels in their area, at a monastery in Namlan town, in Myanmar's Shan state on May 25 (AFP)

posure, on a scale we have not yet seen... could occur in Kayah state absent immediate action."

AFP images from Kayah state have shown villagers manufacturing guns in makeshift factories as local defence groups go up against Myanmar's battle-hardened military.

Diplomatic efforts to halt the bloodshed have been led by the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) - of which Myanmar is a member - but the bloc is riven with infighting and has managed to put little pressure on the junta.

An emergency summit in April produced a 'five-point con-

sensus' statement that called for an immediate halt to violence and a visit to Myanmar by a special envoy.

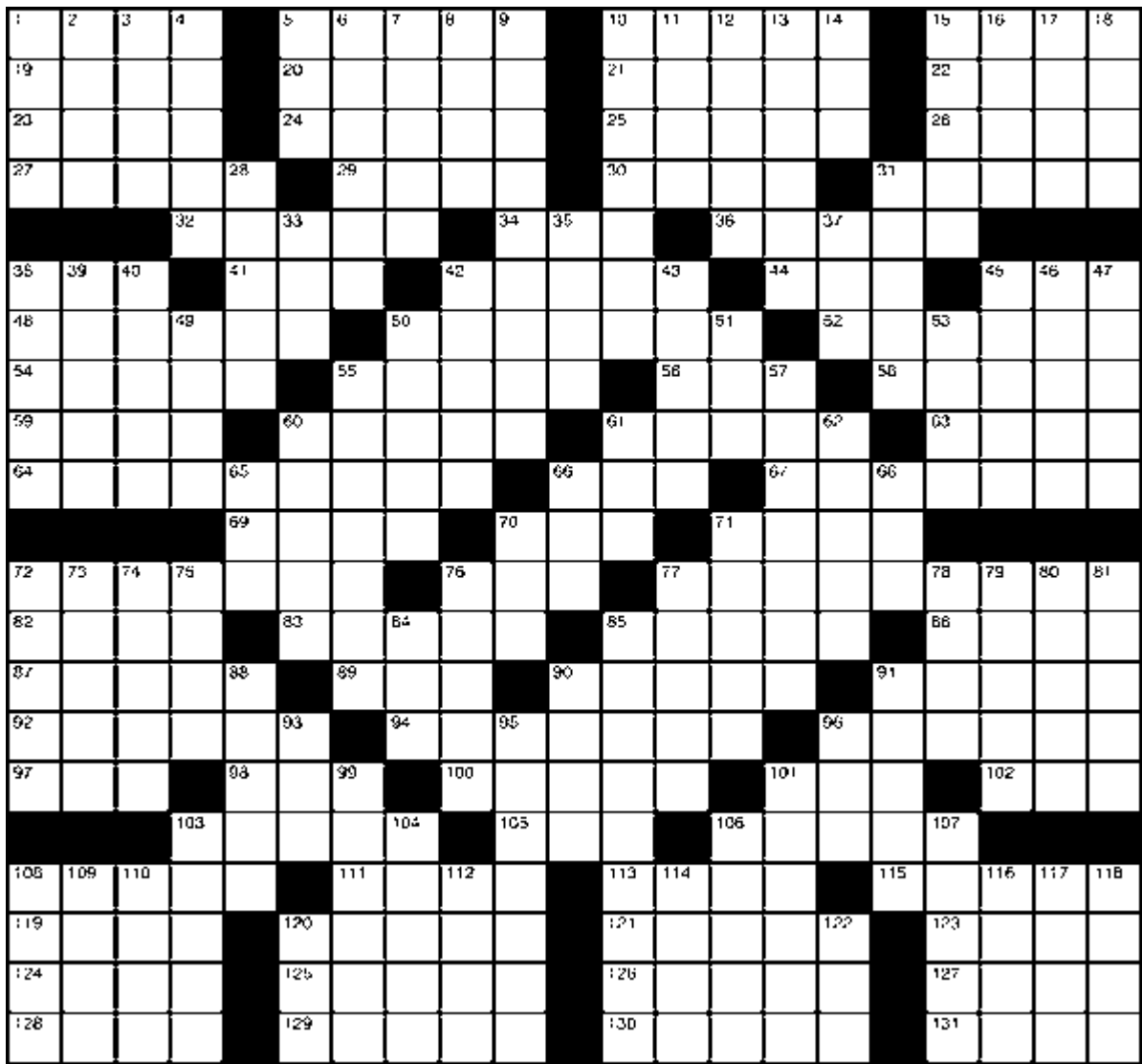
But a special envoy has yet to be appointed, and violence has continued across the country.

China - which enjoys exceptional leverage over Myanmar - has also been unwilling to condemn the junta and has refused to label its power-grab a coup.

Its Foreign Minister Wang Yi said on Tuesday that Beijing's policy towards its neighbour 'is not affected by changes to Myanmar's domestic and external situation'.

AFP

DAILY CROSSWORD



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ACROSS

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DOWN

- 1 Dismounted
- 2 Simple
- 3 Soon
- 4 Beleaguered city
- 5 Spanish Christian champion
- 6 Blood disorder
- 7 Unreasoning fear
- 8 Single units
- 9 Young birds
- 10 Italian child
- 11 Genus of maples
- 12 Purse holder
- 13 To cement
- 14 Native metal
- 15 Low couch
- 16 Hebrew instrument
- 17 Diseases
- 18 Green or Rogen
- 28 Strong cords
- 31 City official
- 33 Unused
- 35 Concludes
- 37 Bounder
- 38 Shatter
- 39 Skin disease
- 40 A shrub
- 42 Type cases
- 43 Move furtively
- 45 Large stream
- 46 Wide awake
- 47 Flavorful plants
- 49 Township of Attica
- 50 Summons
- 51 Unit of energy
- 53 Sheltered inlet
- 55 Hesitates
- 57 Lessens
- 60 Of gold or stone?
- 61 A dance doubled
- 62 Vends
- 65 Wager
- 66 Sweet potato
- 68 Ocean
- 70 Sweet roll
- 71 Perle ___
- 72 Volcanic tuff
- 73 West Indian island

- 74 Sea duck
- 75 Over again
- 76 Suggestions
- 77 Accomplishing
- 78 Check
- 79 Goddess of peace
- 80 Radon
- 81 Exploit
- 84 Three-toed sloths
- 85 Chief supports
- 88 Native policeman
- 90 Government agent
- 91 Actor Matthews
- 93 Press for payment
- 95 French city
- 96 Food fish
- 99 Oil of orange flowers
- 101 Busy commotion
- 103 Karate honors
- 104 Underwater detecting device
- 106 Farewell: Fr.
- 107 Sign of good faith
- 108 daVinci's painting ___ Lisa
- 109 Algerian city
- 110 Cozy place
- 112 French river
- 114 Indigo dye
- 116 Ornamental vessel
- 117 Lohengrin's bride
- 118 Look askance
- 120 Liquid measures: abbr.
- 122 Paid notices

YOUR DAILY HOROSCOPE

ARIES MARCH 21-APRIL 19

You've always felt that it is better to keep your mouth closed and appear a fool than to open it and remove all doubt. At the moment, however, you have a lot on your mind and in your heart, and you really want to let it all out. So stop worrying about potentially seeming a fool. First off, you won't. The only thing you'll seem like a fool in is love, and there's nothing wrong with that!

LEO JULY 23-AUGUST 22

It's not that your mouth will be totally out of control, well, not today, anyway. Tomorrow, however, is another story. Today, you'll have a preview of coming attractions, but you'll still manage to stay in possession of most of your verbal faculties. That is, if you want to possess them. But when you're sufficiently angry or passionately involved? Well, that's a different situation entirely.

SAGITTARIUS NOVEMBER 22-DECEMBER 21

Grab hold of your pioneering spirit, because you could be asked to do a little exploring. You could have the opportunity to try something no one has ever done before, which should go a long way toward spicing up your life and making things interesting again. Let other people travel the well-worn highways of life, never doing anything that scares them.

TAURUS APRIL 20-MAY 20

Your ability to focus is the stuff of legend, and that goes double when you're on a mission, like right now, for example. What might that mission be? Why, to outshine your co-workers so that you'll be able to get that raise you've been bucking for. There's no need to lose any sleep over it. Keep up like you have been and you'll win what you want. Just don't let any secrets slide.

VIRGO AUGUST 23-SEPTEMBER 22

The fewer financial dealings you have with others today the better. It's not that you necessarily need to save money, but your emotions are uncertain, and you could be associating buying something with solving something. Paying a problem to go away isn't the right idea. It will only waste your money. You need to focus on any challenges you encounter the right way.

CAPRICORN DECEMBER 22-JANUARY 19

If it's on your mind and in your heart, it's also going to be written all over your face for the next several days, which means an upcoming weekend could be quite a blowout. Make your plans now, but allow for a bit of wiggle room because things could change. You won't mind at all, though, and heaven knows your companion won't be mad. Surprised, definitely.

GEMINI MAY 21-JUNE 21

It's time to reconnect with your favourite buddies. They've been missing you, you've been missing them, and the few phone calls or video chats you've had time to make just aren't cutting it. Make time for them tonight. You're guaranteed to have some serious fun, and isn't that what life is all about? But do make sure your chores are done, if only so you can have a guilt-free evening.

LIBRA SEPTEMBER 23-OCTOBER 22

Buck authority? If it's called for, you're ready to put up your dukes and fight it out. This one issue you've been dealing with lately has really gotten under your skin, and you're willing to do whatever it takes to make your point. Well, good for you, because you're right. And you know it, too, don't you? Well, then, don't give up and don't give in. Keep at it. You're almost there.

AQUARIUS JANUARY 20-FEBRUARY 18

While your pals might not be able to fix your problems, they can at least figure out a way to put a smile on your face. So when the going gets rough, just reach out for your friends. That's what they're there for! You've been a bit melancholy lately, but that isn't necessarily anything to worry about. Everyone experiences the doldrums. You'll come out on the other end shortly.

CANCER JUNE 22-JULY 22

Just when you thought you might actually be able to see things clearly for a while, it turns out it's not quite time. And you'll come to that realisation via a startling message that arrives today. Now, this doesn't mean you should be expecting bad news or that you'll be disappointed with what happens. Not at all. You might, however, want to write your plans in pencil.

SCORPIO OCTOBER 23-NOVEMBER 21

You're just about due for something totally out of the ordinary. You've turned down all kinds of fabulous temptations lately in just about every category. But just as you start to wonder why, the universe will deliver you a one-of-a-kind reward designed especially for you. Don't question it and don't worry about why it's there. You will definitely want someone fun on board.

PISCES FEBRUARY 19-MARCH 20

Still in the mood for love? Well, it's no wonder. You may, however, also need to tend to a little thing called earning a living. You never know when you'll want the security. Besides, if you're really in love, won't you want to have a couple of nickels to rub together to impress your dear one? Especially since you've been thinking about how to spoil them for days now.

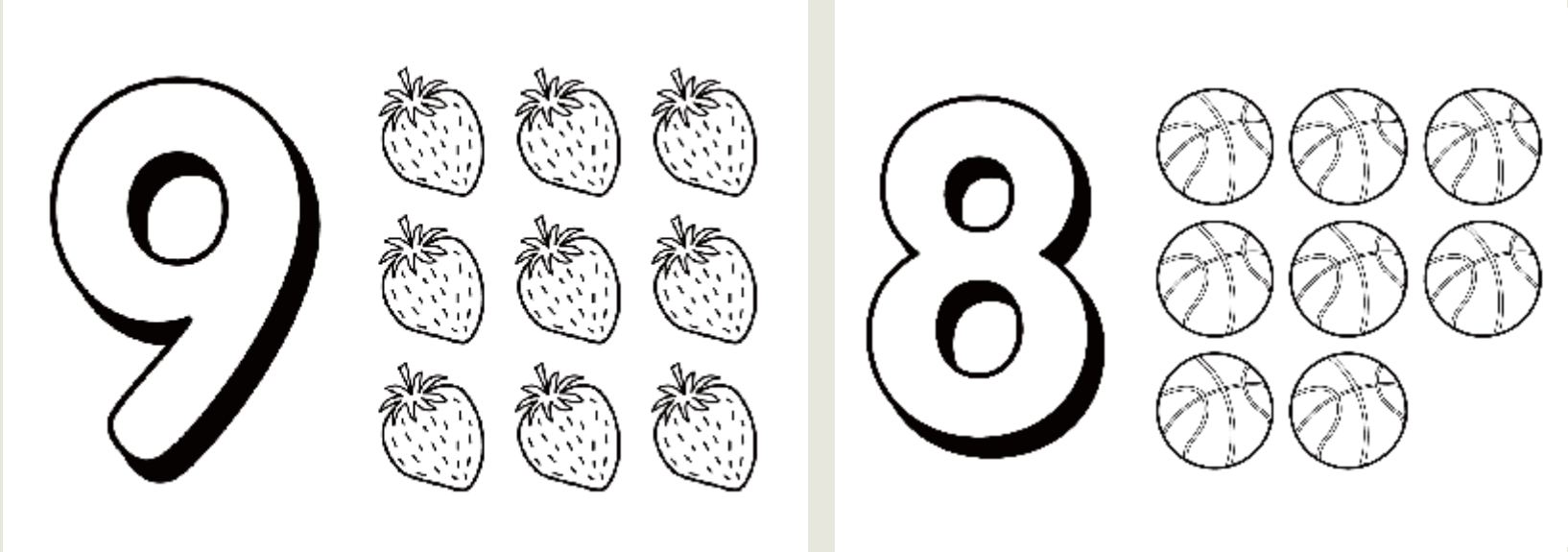


TEST YOUR KNOWLEDGE

1. The most common format for a home video recorder is VHS. VHS stands for...?
- a. Video Home System
 - b. Very high speed
 - c. Video horizontal standard
 - d. Voltage house standard
2. What does VVVF stand for?
- a. Variant Voltage Vile Frequency
 - b. Variable Velocity Variable Fun
 - c. Very Very Vicious Frequency
 - d. Variable Voltage Variable Frequency
3. What frequency range is the High Frequency band?
- a. 100 kHz
 - b. 1 GHz
 - c. 30 to 300 MHz
 - d. 3 to 30 MHz

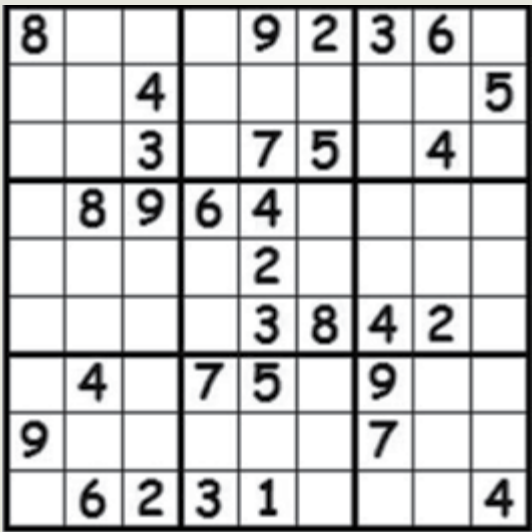
Answers: 1.a 2.c 3.d

KIDS COLOURING



DO YOU SUDOKU?

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



BOGGLER



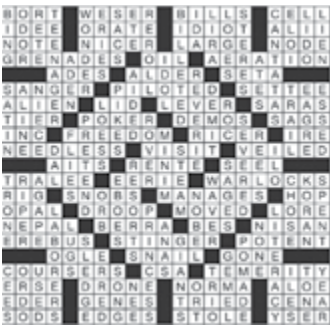
Each game will present you with a matrix filled with letters. The objective is to form words by linking adjacent letters - to the left, right, on top, bottom, or diagonal to each other. The Boggles Classic game uses a 4 x 4 matrix. Words are valued at one point for each letter in excess of two letters.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

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

SUDOKU EASY ANSWER



DAILY CROSSWORD ANSWERS (JUNE 09)



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



THE RUNNERS

Shin splints are injuries to the front of the outer leg most commonly in runners or aggressive walkers. They usually result from inflammation due to injury of the soft tissues in the front of the outer leg due to overuse. “The appropriate medical term for this condition is Medial Tibial Stress Syndrome (MTSS). Although not serious, it can be disabling and progress to serious complications like a fracture,” says **Dr Biswajit Dutta Baruah**, consultant orthopaedic surgeon, KIMS Oman Hospital



DR BISWAJIT DUTTA BARUAH
Consultant orthopaedic surgeon, KIMS Oman Hospital

Asif was referred by a friend from a local running group. He had recently joined an enthusiastic group of runners and started running daily. He even joined a competition that required daily running. After slogging it out at the office daily, running was to be the right outlet for his energy. Asif had made a lot of new friends and running turned out to be a way to spend time with his friends. However, of late, he had started to develop pain and swelling around the lower leg and ankle regions. He had seen a local physician who ran the usual tests to see if he had elevated uric acid levels. His blood uric acid levels were normal but soon the swelling started to bother him. It is at this point that he visited my clinic. “Doctor Sa’ab, you need to do something about this,” he blurted out. The desperation and frustration in his voice was obvious. “I used to be active in college. I was good at track events. After I joined work, this is the result,” he continued pointing at his belly. “I don’t want to give up running”, he pleaded. It was obvious that the previous physician had asked him to stop doing what he loved so much.

“Asif, we need to know the reason behind this. If we do that, then it’s a matter of applying the solution.” I responded to his plea. I inquired into his running pattern making a note of the fact that he had started running long distances on a daily basis. On the preceding few days, he would start out fine and after about 5-6 km of running he had to slow down due to pain around the shin of his leg. He would walk for a few more minutes before returning home, and inevitably develop swelling around his ankle. It was frustrating that guys older than him were making it beyond the distances that he was capable of doing. “It’s likely that you have shin splints,” I told him.

Shin splints

The appropriate medical term for this condition is Medial Tibial Stress Syndrome (MTSS), however, it is commonly referred to as shin splints. Shin is a common term referring to the bony part felt right underneath the skin on the inner side of the lower leg. Pain on this part of the leg that comes with exertional activity, like running or brisk walking, is described as shin splints.

The important point differentiating it from other painful conditions is that it must arise or worsen in intensity following an activity. Although not serious, it can be disabling and progress to serious complications like a fracture.

Many surgeons believe that repetitive impacts on the leg, as it happens when running, puts the tibia (the major leg bone) under strain. This induces inflammation of the outer lining of the tibia (periostitis). At times, under chronic stress, there is remodelling of the bone in response to repetitive loading. In a small percentage of cases, this may end up as a stress fracture.

Too much, too fast

In the initial stages, pain subsides when the patient stops the activity. At later stages, pain may start early in the course of the activity and persist even at rest. Training errors appear to be the most common cause with athletes developing pain as they attempt to do ‘too much, too fast’.

A recent onset of increased activity (increased mileage), increased intensity (running at high speeds or uphill and off road) or increased duration are common risk factors. Any individual runner doing more than 20 miles (32 km) is prone to develop this condition. Not only runners, but this can affect ballistic sports like football, basketball and dancing.

Ladies are at increased risk of the pain progressing into a stress fracture, given the higher incidence of diminished bone density and osteoporosis. Biomechanical alterations in the foot, like flat feet and muscle imbalance like overnight calf muscles (night leg cramps) can also lead to shin splints.



Diagnosis

If the symptoms evolve into focal pain - intense pain at a single spot associated with local swelling - this may indicate a stress fracture. Presence of numbness in the feet or toes, or colour changes in the toes indicate conditions not related to shin splints.

Within the first 2-3 weeks of developing pain, X-rays could be negative. Bone formation underneath the bone capsule (periosteal reaction) or a black line may become apparent at later stages. Bone scans are used in older centres to confirm the diagnosis. MRI scans of the leg is more commonly done these days and is ordered to confirm or rule out shin splints.

Treatment options

In early stages, resting the limb and icing it is helpful in reducing the pain and swelling. However, rest is not necessary in those with mild pain and can be a detriment. In those in whom the pain is severe, cessation of the activity may be required for 4 to 6 weeks.

Anti-inflammatories can help control pain. Physical therapy in the form of ultrasound and electrical stimulation may aid in this phase. Decreasing the weekly duration, intensity and frequency of activity by 50% will help in quicker recovery. Runners are advised to avoid running on hard surfaces and uphill or go off-road, and prefer synthetic running tracks or a uniform surface. Cross training with other low impact exercises, like pool running, swimming, using an elliptical machine or cycling can be helpful.

Core body exercises

Strengthening the calf muscles and performing calf stretches are essential in restoring muscle balance. Doing regular core body exercises involving muscles of the hip, lower back, abdominal (stomach) and the gluteal (buttocks) are necessary. Appropriate footwear is also necessary. Balancing exercises like one leg stance or using wobble/balancing boards can help develop balance. In women with osteoporosis or osteopenia, vitamin D and calcium supplementation will be necessary. Use of crutches to unload the leg and avoid weight bearing will be necessary when there is an associated fracture. Applying a cast may be necessary in the extreme eventuality of a stress fracture.

Shockwave therapy is beneficial if there is associated tendon inflammation (tendinopathy). Other alternate remedies like dry needling, acupuncture or injections have failed to relieve symptoms, and are better avoided.

A vast majority of the patients improve with this line of treatment. Rarely is nailing required to stabilise the fracture. Releasing the tight compartment at the back of the lower leg (fasciotomy) and cauterising (burning with heat) the affected border of the tibia can be helpful.

Asif was advised scans due to the severity of his pain and swelling. However, he did not proceed with scans. Instead, he focused on reducing his activity. He turned to walking, and within a few months, his symptoms started to subside. These days, he’s busy collecting medals, participating in virtual running events from all over the world.

Benzema injury takes gloss off France win

Giroud, Griezmann on target against Bulgaria in final pre-Euro friendly



Antoine Griezmann (left) celebrates with his teammates after scoring against Bulgaria on Tuesday

Paris, France - Karim Benzema was forced to leave the pitch with a 'dead leg' on Tuesday as world champions France beat Bulgaria 3-0 in their final friendly one week before beginning their Euro 2020 campaign. Benzema was taken off in the 39th minute at the Stade De France in what is France's last match before they take on Germany in their opening Group F match of the European Championship against Germany on June 15.

France also face reigning European champions Portugal and Hungary, who will play two of their group matches in front of big crowds at the Puskas Arena in Budapest.

The 33 year old Benzema had been recalled with great fanfare to the national team following a near six-year exile, but his replacement Olivier Giroud showed why *Les Bleus* are considered among the favourites for the tournament with a late



brace which took his France total to 46.

Giroud, 34, is now just five

goals behind France's all-time top scorer Thierry Henry but will likely be sidelined when Benzema returns.

"When people call on me, the most important thing is to do the job," Giroud told broadcaster M6.

"I had good service from my teammates. They know where I'm going to be in the box so I just tried to finish well."

Antoine Griezmann scored the opening goal in front of

5,000 joyous supporters who were also celebrating their return to live football in the stadium.

Fans were allowed in if they had a negative test for COVID-19 within the previous 48 hours or proof they had been completely inoculated for the virus.

Benzema's 'dead leg'

The supporters were worried when, with France already ahead thanks to Griezmann, Benzema sat down in the middle of the



Karim Benzema is attended by medics on the pitch against Bulgaria

pitch and was checked over by team doctors after having fallen heavily when attempting a header a few minutes earlier. He then left the field, but France coach Didier Deschamps played down the injury, saying it was a 'dead leg'.

"He took a good hit on the muscle above the knee," Deschamps told M6.

"He stopped playing because he felt it hardening... the medical staff are at his side."

Elsewhere a Spain side made up of young players due to captain Sergio Busquets' positive COVID-19 test, which led to the entire first team squad being put in isolation, thumped Lithuania 4-0. Hugo Guillamon began the rout in the fourth minute before AC Milan forward Brahim Diaz doubled their lead 20 minutes later.

Abel Ruiz missed a penalty on the half-hour mark but nine minutes after the break Juan Miranda made it three with a perfectly placed free-kick. Javi Puado rounded off the scoring in the 73rd minute.

Spain, whose first team squad will be vaccinated on Wednesday according to the country's health ministry, open their Euro campaign in Group E against

Sweden in Seville on Monday.

The Swedes have also been affected by the virus, announcing on Tuesday positive tests for Dejan Kulusevski and Mattias Svanberg.

Robert Lewandowski drew a blank as Poland drew 2-2 at home with Iceland, Karol Swiderski replacing the Bayern Munich forward and saving the Poles' blushes with two minutes remaining.

And Euro 2020 outsiders Hungary were held to a 0-0 draw by a spirited Ireland in Budapest in their final friendly match.

The tie extends the Magyars unbeaten streak to 11 games across all competitions, with their last defeat coming against Russia in the UEFA Nations League in September 2020.

The match was played in front of over 10,000 raucous home fans in the Szusza Ferenc stadium, with packed stands also expected at the Puskas Arena in Budapest, the only one of the 11 Euro 2020 stadia not to limit fan numbers.

The Magyars will be appearing at their second successive European Championships after reaching the last-16 round at Euro 2016.

AFP

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Brazil players against Copa America hosting but rule out boycott

Sao Paulo, Brazil - Brazil's national footballers said on Tuesday they are against hosting the troubled Copa America, but will not boycott the tournament. South American Football Confederation CONMEBOL moved the tournament from Argentina on June 1.

The regional championship is being organised on Brazilian soil in a last-minute, pandemic-defying rush after organisers withdrew it from Argentina over a COVID-19 surge. "We are against organising the Copa America, but we will never say no to the Brazilian national team," the players said in a joint statement on social media.

"We have a mission to accomplish in the historic green and yellow jersey of the five-time world champions," they said, five days from the opening match of the South American football championships.

Brazil's players were reportedly unhappy over their country's late decision to host the tournament.

"For different reasons, be they humanitarian or professional, we are not satisfied with the way the Copa America has been handled by CONMEBOL," the players said.

Brazil is itself reeling from the pandemic, with a death toll of more than 475,000, second only to the United States.

Neymar and team - as well as



Brazil players before the start of their World Cup qualifying game against Paraguay on Tuesday

coach Tite - were reportedly caught off guard by news last week that the tournament would be held in Brazil, and there had been talk the players would boycott. They put those rumors to rest, but were blunt in their criticism of South American football confederation CONMEBOL.

"We are dissatisfied with CONMEBOL's handling of the Copa America," they said in their statement, released shortly after Brazil beat Paraguay 2-0 in

a World Cup qualifier. "Recent events lead us to believe the process of organising the tournament will be inadequate."

New doubts cloud Copa America

Resistance from players is just one hurdle still facing the world's longest-running international football tournament.

Already delayed by 12 months because of the pandemic, it may still be blocked when Brazil's Supreme Court hears a case against it Thursday filed by opponents of far-right President Jair Bolsonaro.

Chief Justice Luiz Fux said given the 'exceptional nature of the case', he had decided to have the full 11-member court take up the matter in an extraordinary virtual session.

The cases the Supreme Court agreed to hear were brought by national metalworkers' union CNTM and by opposition Congressman Julio Delgado and his Brazilian Socialist Party (PSB).

The union argues that hosting the tournament 'risks causing an increase in COVID-19 infections and deaths', the court said in a statement announcing it had agreed to hear the cases.

Delgado and the PSB argue that hosting 'violates the fundamental rights to life and health', it said.

AFP

PERFECT SIX FOR BRAZIL

Neymar scores as Brazil maintain unbeaten start in World Cup qualifying

2022 FIFA WORLD CUP S AMERICAN QUALIFIERS

Montevideo, Uruguay - Neymar scored one goal and created the other as Brazil maintained their perfect start to World Cup qualifying with a 2-0 win over Paraguay on Tuesday.

Substitute Lucas Paqueta sealed the win deep into injury time in Asuncion as Brazil opened up a six point lead at the top of South America's single qualifying group after a sixth win out of six. Paraguay's first defeat saw them drop out of the automatic qualification places.

Brazil got off to a quick start with less than four minutes on the clock. Gabriel Jesus, recalled to the starting line-up, crossed from the right and although Richarlison missed his attempted volley, Neymar was unmarked at the back post to bobble the ball past goalkeeper Antony Silva.

Paraguay did not crumble, though, and centreback Omar Alderete forced an incredible save out of goalkeeper Ederson with a blockbuster drive from 30 yards. Miguel Almiron also found space in the box but his shot was deflected behind by Eder Militao.

In between, Silva was out quickly to smother a chance for Richarlison. The Everton forward thought he'd extended the lead just before halftime with a brilliant dipping volley, but he was denied by an offside flag.

Paraguay had a strong start to the second half as Ederson saved a Gustavo Gomez header but



Brazil's striker Neymar (right), celebrates with teammate Richarlison and Roberto Firmino (left), after scoring his side's opening goal against Paraguay during their World Cup qualifier on Tuesday

Marquinhos should have doubled the visitors' advantage when he somehow headed Neymar's cross wide from four yards out. Brazil had chances to kill the game off on the counter but Neymar screwed an effort wide and Gomez did brilliantly to block Richarlison's shot.

But in injury time, Neymar played in Paqueta on the right to send a precise left-foot finish just inside the far post.

Argentina blow two-goal lead

Miguel Borja scored four minutes into stoppage time to rescue a 2-2 draw for Colombia in a World Cup qualifier against Argentina in Barranquilla.

Argentina were off to a flying start, helped by woeful home defending, to move 2-0 up inside eight minutes through goals by Cristian Romero and Leandro Paredes.

But Colombia's substitutes turned the game around in the second half as Luis Nuriel netted from the spot and then Borja snatched a point at the death.

"We went out to press, we scored two goals but unfortunately we couldn't hold on, I think we were tired," said Argentina forward Lautaro Martinez.

Argentina remain unbeaten in second place while Colombia are just outside the automatic qualification spots in fifth.

The visitors will be kicking themselves, though, after a fast start and having the better chances throughout. Three minutes in, Romero rose highest to head home a Rodrigo De Paul free-kick from wide on the right that made it all the way to the edge of the six yard box.

A few minutes later, Lionel Messi picked out Marcos Acuna and his rasping left-footed drive was deflected inches past the

corner of post and crossbar.

Colombia failed to fully clear the resulting corner and following some pinball in the box, Paredes was able to run past four players, find space and shoot low into the corner across goalkeeper David Ospina.

Argentina were well on top and Ospina had to save a fierce drive from Martinez on 27 minutes, with Nicolas Gonzalez putting the rebound a whisker past the post.

Colombia finally came alive in first half stoppage time but Muriel's shot was blocked by Nicolas Otamendi, while Duvan Zapata blazed over. They were back in it six minutes into the second period, though, after Otamendi brought down Mateus Uribe in the box and Muriel slotted in from the spot. Borja had the last word, though, rising at the back post to head home Juan Cuadrado's cross.



Argentina's Lionel Messi in action during the match against Colombia

Peru claim first win of their campaign

Peru earned their first win of the qualification campaign but remained bottom of the group despite a surprise 2-1 success at Ecuador.

In Caracas, Venezuela held Uruguay to a 0-0 draw to remain above Peru on goal difference,

while the visitors clung on to a top four automatic qualification spot.

Marcelo Moreno's penalty eight minutes from time earned Bolivia a 1-1 draw in Santiago with dominant Chile, who took the lead through Erick Pulgar on 69 minutes.

AFP



Bruno Lage

Wolves appoint Bruno Lage as new manager

London, UK - Wolves on Wednesday announced the appointment of former Benfica boss Bruno Lage as the new manager of the Premier League club to replace Nuno Espirito Santo. The Portuguese led Benfica to the Primeira Liga title in his first season in management in 2019 but left the club the following year after failing to defend the crown.

"First of all, I'm very happy," Lage told the club's website. "It's a big opportunity. I'm very happy because I've returned to this country, and to be the manager of a big team.

"It's a team and a club that wants to do history and a chance to compete in the Premier League. So, I'm happy, excited, with a big ambition to do great things for this club."

The 45 year old has previous experience of working in Britain in coaching roles with Sheffield Wednesday and Swansea City under Carlos Carvalhal.

"I was here (in Britain) for three years, so I know Wolves, but now, the best thing to do - the next thing to do - is to know everyone better," Lage said.

Nuno, who left at the end of the season, secured successive seventh-place finishes in the Premier League after promotion from the Championship in 2018 but Wolves could only manage 13th place in the 2020/21 campaign.

AFP

Ethiopia's Gidey sets new women's 10,000m world record



Ethiopia's Letesenbet Gidey

ATHLETICS

Paris, France - Ethiopia's Letesenbet Gidey smashed the women's 10,000m world record on Tuesday, on the same track where Dutch runner Sifan Hassan had set the previous record just two days previously.

Gidey's time of 29 minutes 1.03sec at Ethiopia's Olympic trials held in Hengelo in the Netherlands means she now holds the world records in the 5,000m and 10,000m.

Aided by the Wavelight technology that paces runners,

she sliced a remarkable 1min 20.2sec off her previous best for 10,000m of 30:21.23, set at the World Championships in Doha in 2019. Gidey, 23, finished more than a minute ahead of Tsigie Gebreselama and improved Hassan's two-day-old mark by five seconds. In the final lap, Gidey navigated lapped runners to sprint home and stop the clock at 29:01.03.

"I expected to run a world record," said Gidey. "I'd like to try to break the world record again and break 29 minutes."

She becomes the first woman to hold the 5,000m and 10,000m world records simultaneously since Norway's Ingrid Kristiansen did so from 1986-1993.

Technology criticism

Florence, Italy - Elite athletes, Sifan Hassan and Joshua Cheptegei of Uganda, on Wednesday dismissed criticism of new running shoes that some say are the equivalent of mechanical doping.

Both Cheptegei and Hassan

wear Nike ZoomX Dragonfly track spikes, a super-light shoe with a rigid plate and a unique foam that lends a propulsive sensation to every stride.

Critics claim the shoes are the equivalent of mechanical doping, while supporters hail them as a revolutionary technical advance.

Cheptegei set new bests in the men's 5,000m in Monaco, 10,000m in Valencia and 5km road, also in Monaco, last season.

"I don't know why they get crazy about technology," Hassan

said ahead of Thursday's Diamond League meet in the Italian city of Florence where she will step down from an endurance to a speed outing, running the 1,500m in which she is also world champion.

Cheptegei said innovative track spikes were 'available not just for me or Sifan' but for every-day runners wishing to improve.

"I believe technology is changing the world," said the Ugandan, who won 10,000m world gold in Doha in 2019.

AFP



New Zealand's captain Kane Williamson attends a training session at Edgbaston Cricket Ground in Birmingham, UK, on Wednesday. Williamson has been ruled out of the second Test

NZ skipper Williamson ruled out of second Test

ENGLAND VS NEW ZEALAND SECOND TEST

London, UK - Kane Williamson, the New Zealand captain, has been ruled out of the second Test against England at Edgbaston because of a persistent elbow injury.

The world's top-ranked Test batsman withdrew on Wednesday, a day before the match is due to start at Birmingham's Edgbaston ground.

Williamson had to miss an ODI series against Bangladesh earlier this year because of the same problem, which also caused him to miss the start of the 2021 IPL for the Sunrisers Hyderabad.

Tom Latham, the regular vice-captain, will lead the team in Williamson's absence, as he did against Australia at the SCG in January 2020 and West Indies in Wellington in December.

"It's not an easy decision for Kane to have to miss a Test, but we think it's the right one," Gary

Stead, New Zealand's head coach, said. "He's had an injection in his elbow to relieve the irritation he's been experiencing when he bats and a period of rest and rehabilitation will help maximise his recovery."

The injury is not expected to rule him out of the World Test Championship (WTC) final against India, which starts on June 18 at the Ageas Bowl.

"The decision has been made very much with the ICC World Test Championship final at Southampton in mind and we are confident he will be ready for that match," Stead added.

"I'm sure he'll be back [for the final]," Latham said. "From our point of view, it's a precautionary thing. We'd love him to be available for this game but obviously we've got the eye on the final in a week's time, so for Kane, it's about giving himself the best opportunity to be fully fit and available for that game. The decision was made for him to

rest and get that right for what we have coming up.

"He's fantastic as a captain. It's well-documented how his personality and his calm nature out in the middle has been vital to this group. He's very relaxed - doesn't get too high, doesn't get too low which I think has been great for this side in recent years. He's obviously a wonderful leader and we've seen that throughout his captaincy career."

Williamson will be replaced in the New Zealand side by Will Young, the top-order batter who won both of his Test caps to date in the home series against West

Indies in December.

Young prepared for the series by playing four County Championship matches for Durham, scoring hundreds in two of his three most recent innings. He will bat at No 3, with Latham and Devon Conway continuing to open the batting.

"He's been here a few weeks earlier [than the rest of the squad] and was playing cricket," Latham said.

"He had an opportunity back in our home summer and is coming off runs for Durham which is always nice when you get selected, especially in these conditions, so it's another exciting opportunity for Will to put his hand up and try to put that performance on the board."



Trent Boult

Boult set to play

Latham also confirmed that Trent Boult will return to the side, with Mitchell Santner missing through injury, though he was yet to reach a final decision on the side before training on Wednesday afternoon.

Ajaz Patel and the uncapped allrounder Rachin Ravindra are the two candidates to replace Santner, while Matt Henry, Doug Bracewell and Jacob Duffy will also be considered as Kiwis look to manage their seamers' workloads ahead of the WTC final.

"It's a case-by-case situation," he said. "There is an eye to what we have coming up in a week's time but on the other hand this is obviously such an important game for us. We've got training now and then we'll have a look at the wicket and have those conversations around what best suits the playing XI tomorrow. We've got a big squad to pick from."

Cricinfo



England's James Anderson attends a training session on Wednesday

Anderson thought he 'wasn't good enough' on debut

ENGLAND VS NZ

London, UK - Few players have married skill and longevity to quite such staggering effect as James Anderson, who stands to overtake Alastair Cook as England's most-capped Test cricketer on Thursday, if selected for his 162nd appearance against New Zealand in the second Test at Edgbaston.

But, as he reflected on his 18-year journey from a raw but successful debut against Zimbabwe at Lord's in 2003, Anderson admitted that his initial reaction to the big stage was one of intense self-doubt, as he questioned his right to be there at all. "I thought I wasn't good enough," Anderson said, as he recalled how his first over, from the Nursery End at Lord's, was picked off by Zimbabwe's openers for 17 runs, including two fours and a three for Dion Ebrahim as he strayed too close to the right-hander's pads. "I thought it was a huge step up from county cricket," Anderson added. "I remember Nasser

[Hussain] didn't have a fine leg for me and I went for quite a few runs. My first ball was a no-ball as well so there were a lot of nerves there and I did feel like this was maybe a step too far for me at that point."

He left the field with figures of five for 73 to earn the first of his six entries on the Lord's honours board, and begin his journey towards becoming the most successful fast bowler in history, with 616 wickets now to his name.

Anderson turns 39 next month, and England are understandably keen not to over-bowl him with series against India and Australia later in the year. His eagerness to get involved, however, has not diminished with age. "I'm not sure on the team yet," Anderson said. "Hopefully I've got the opportunity to do that on Thursday. It's been an incredible 15 years really. Knowing how much Cooky played it makes me very proud I've actually got to this point."

Cricinfo

Hope and Seales named in 13-man WI Test squad

WEST INDIES VS S AFRICA

TEST SERIES

Gros-Islet, Saint Lucia - Shai Hope has been picked in West Indies' squad for the first Test against South Africa, and could make a return to their Test XI after being dropped last year. Trinidad & Tobago's Jayden Seales, the 19 year old rookie fast bowler, has also made the cut after being named in the 17-man squad for the series earlier.

Shannon Gabriel has missed out on selection due to injury. The inclusion of Hope, who also keeps wicket, has meant that Jahmar Hamilton misses out as backup-keeper to Joshua Da Silva.

Darren Bravo was left out of the squad, while Roston Chase and Kieran Powell are also in line for a Test return, having missed West Indies' series against Sri Lanka in March.

WI squad for the first Test: Kraigg Brathwaite (capt), Jermaine Blackwood (vice-capt), Nkrumah Bonner, Roston Chase, Rahkeem Cornwall, Joshua Da Silva, Jason Holder, Shai Hope, Alzarri Joseph, Kyle Mayers, Kieran Powell, Kemar Roach, Jayden Seales.

Cricinfo

Kind of a shock, says Holder on losing Test captaincy

WEST INDIES VS S AFRICA

TEST SERIES

Gros-Islet, Saint Lucia - "It was kind of a shock" for Jason Holder, 29, to be relieved from the West Indies Test captaincy, and while he admits to finding it difficult to transition from being the leader to an ordinary member of the team, he wants to focus more on his game, and be a sounding board for youngsters looking for guidance.

"Yeah, it's been difficult. I probably may not show it, but it has been difficult," Holder told ESPNcricinfo in an interview ahead of the start of West Indies' first Test against South Africa in St Lucia on Thursday.

"For the last five-six years, I've been captaining West Indies, whether that be Test-match cricket or one-day cricket. So now being relieved of both captaincies, it has been a strange transition for me personally."

Holder's stint as captain, which had begun in October 2015, ended after 37 matches, which included 11 wins and 21 losses. It was a period in which he climbed to great heights as a player, piling on big hauls with the ball and even hitting a



Jason Holder

double-century with the bat. After 47 Tests, he has 123 wickets at an average of 27.41, 2253 runs at an average of 33.13, and the No 1 spot in the ICC rankings for Test allrounders.

"It was kind of a shock. Yeah, still lost for words in regards to that, but I am not dwelling on it. I don't think it's something I should dwell on, to be fair," Holder said. "I am just trying to find ways to move on and transition back to just being a regular player. For me now, it's about showing a bit more of my

character, and being a lot more... I would say outspoken. I am relatively outspoken, but just expressing myself a little bit more and having fun... I'm a 100% team man.

"I feel as though I have been really, really committed to West Indies cricket - I am still committed to West Indies cricket, but more or less for me now it's just about having fun and enjoying however many days I have playing international cricket."

Cricinfo

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Barbora Krejickova after her win over Coco Gauff on Wednesday

I always think of her, says Krejickova of Czech great Novotna

Paris, France - Czech Republic's Barbora Krejickova paid a poignant tribute to the late Jana Novotna, the former Wimbledon champion and Czech great, who died of cancer aged just 49 in 2017, after reaching her first Grand Slam semifinal at the French Open on Wednesday.

The 25 year old Krejickova beat American teenager Coco Gauff 7-6 (8/6), 6-3 to set up a last-four clash with Maria Sakkari.

The Czech beat 17 year old Gauff after saving five set points in the opener and then needing six match points to finish the job. Gauff, the 24th seed and the youngest quarterfinalist at a major in 15 years, was undone by seven double faults and 41 unforced errors.

Krejickova matched Novotna's run to the Roland Garros semifinals in 1990 and 1996, and admitted her late coach is never far from her thoughts. "I always think

about her. Every time I go on court, I step out of the court, I always think about her," Krejickova said of Novotna, who began working with her fellow Brno native in 2014.

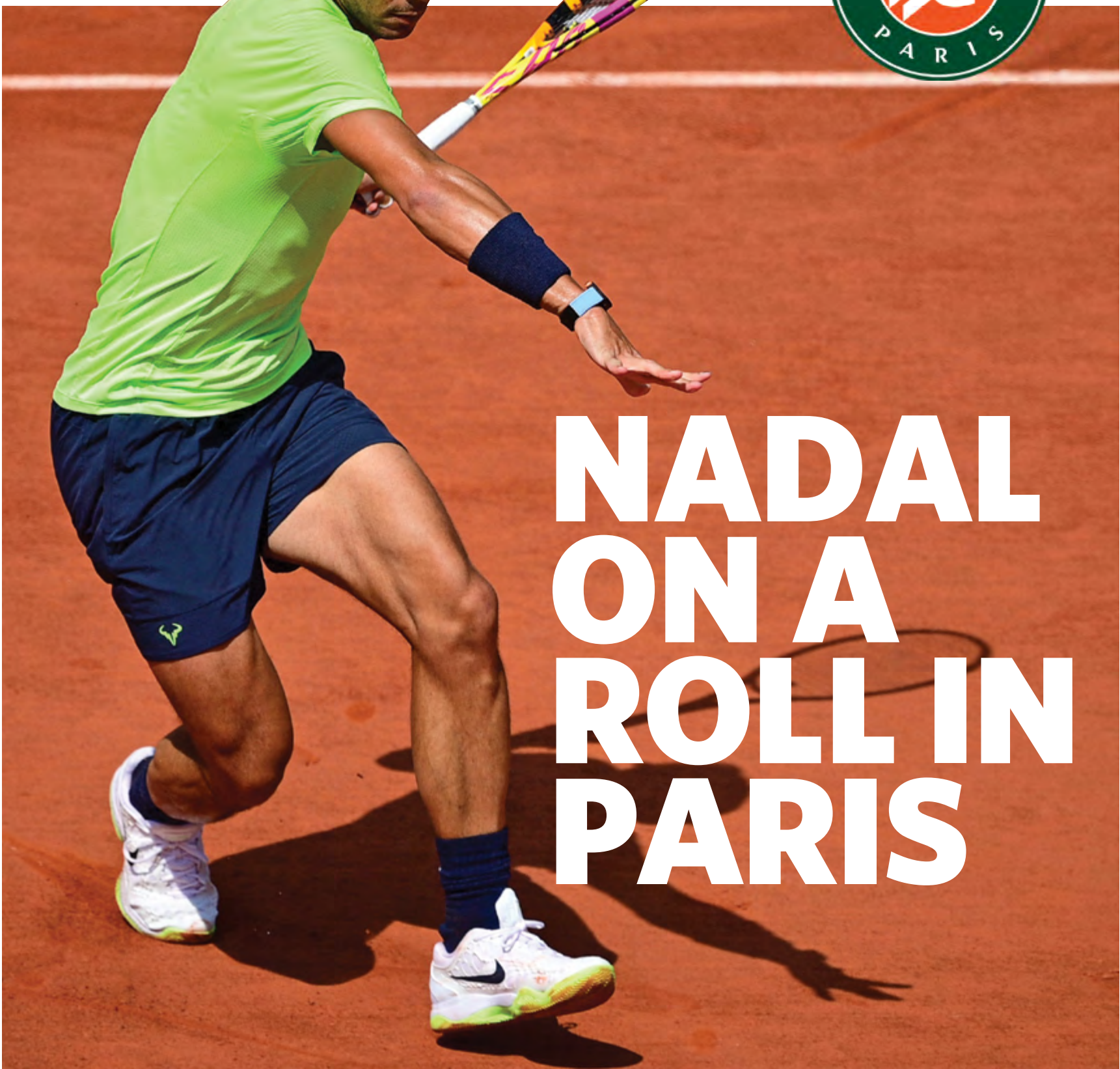
"I'm always wondering what she would tell me after such a run, all this winning matches and everything. I'm just really sad I cannot actually hear her and she cannot really say anything."

"I think she would just tell me that she's very proud," added Krejickova.

"She would be just extremely happy. She would just be jumping and screaming. That's how I remember. That's actually what she was doing when I played ITFs and I won ITFs. I guess maybe it would be even bigger right now."

Krejickova, now on a ten-match winning streak, is also in the semifinals of the women's doubles.

AFF



NADAL ON A ROLL IN PARIS

Maria Sakkari stuns defending champion Iga Swiatek to become the first Greek woman to reach a Grand Slam semifinal

Paris, France - Spain's Rafael Nadal reached a record-extending 14th French Open semifinal on Wednesday with a 6-3, 4-6, 6-4, 6-0 win over Argentine Diego Schwartzman, setting up a potential last-four showdown with world No 1 Novak Djokovic.

Nadal, bidding for a 14th Roland Garros title and record 21st major triumph, dropped his first set at the tournament since 2019 - ending a run of 36 consecutive sets won in Paris by the Spanish third seed.

The 35 year old Nadal improved his incredible French Open record to 105 wins and two losses as he advanced to his 35th Grand Slam semifinal.

"It's always incredible for me to return to the semifinals for another time," said Nadal.

"Diego is such an amazing player with so much talent, today was a very difficult challenge."

Nadal and Schwartzman had both progressed to the last-eight without dropping a set.

After Nadal took the opener he faltered while serving to stay in the second set, shanking long to concede his first set at Roland Garros since beating Dominic Thiem in four sets in the 2019 final. "I started bad the second set and then was able to come back, but then the game at 4-4,

returning with the wind helping. I played a bad game and had a tricky situation serving to not lose the set. Well done to him, he played well," said Nadal.

The Spaniard regrouped and grabbed a decisive break in the ninth game of the third set, winning the final nine games against a weary Schwartzman to close out victory. "I needed to play a little bit more aggressive and I think I did later, so I am very happy for that," added Nadal.

He awaits the winner of Wednesday's night-time quarterfinal between Djokovic and Italian ninth seed Matteo Berrettini.

Earlier, Maria Sakkari stunned defending champion Iga Swiatek to become the first Greek woman to reach a Grand Slam semifinal on Wednesday.

World No 18 Sakkari triumphed 6-4, 6-4 over Polish eighth seed Swiatek and will face 33rd-ranked Barbora Krejickova

of the Czech Republic for a place in the final.

Thursday's other semifinal sees Russian 31st seed Anastasia Pavlyuchenkova tackle unseeded Tamara Zidansek of Slovenia.

For the first time in the Open era, the French Open semifinals will feature four women who have never previously got this far at the Slams.

"I am speechless. It is a dream coming true. It's a very nice feeling and I could not have done it without my team and their support," said the 25 year old Sakkari.

"We have a long way to go but we made a huge step today."

Swiatek had gone into the match on the back of 22

consecutive sets won at the French Open but her challenge was hobbled by a right thigh injury which needed taping during a medical timeout early in the second set.

Her defeat means that Justine Henin remains the last player to defend the women's title in Paris in 2007.

Tsitsipas in semis

Greece will have two players in the semifinals this year after Stefanos Tsitsipas made it to the last-four on Tuesday night.

Tsitsipas defeated Daniil Medvedev in straight sets to stay on track for a first Grand Slam final at the French Open.

Greek fifth seed Tsitsipas qualified for his third successive major semi-final, winning 6-3, 7-6 (7/3), 7-5 to avenge his defeat by second-ranked Medvedev at the Australian Open and set up a showdown with Alexander Zverev.

"I was playing against one of the best guys on the tour and I had to keep up with the intensity and elevate my game," said Tsitsipas. "I thought I was playing good and not giving him space to do things and I think my performance was close to one of my best this week. I love being in Paris, it brings back good memories and I'm happy to keep going."

"It was a very close match, there were not many breaks, we both served pretty well. It was intense," said Tsitsipas.

AFF

Greece's Maria Sakkari reacts after her win over Poland's Iga Swiatek in Paris on Wednesday (AFP)



I am speechless. It is a dream coming true. It's a very nice feeling

MARIA SAKKARI

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