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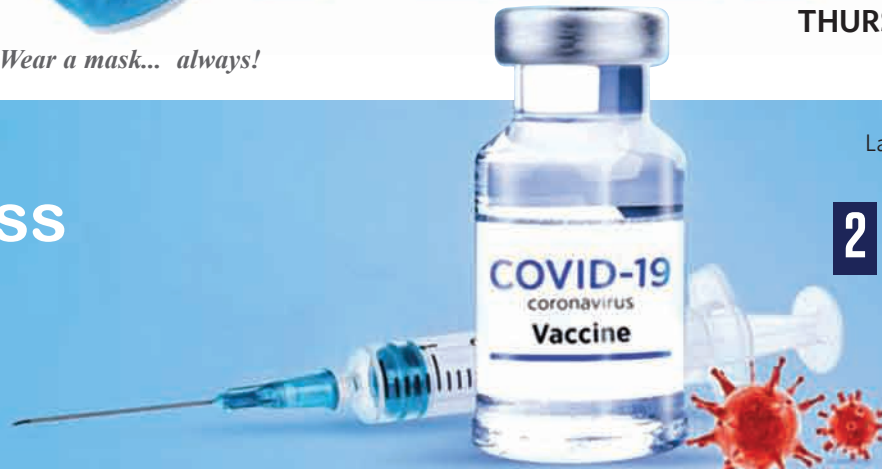


THURSDAY, 12 AUGUST 2021
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NEWS BRIEFS

VACCINATION MANDATORY FOR OMANI STUDENTS GOING TO UK

Muscat - Omani students planning to go to study in the United Kingdom must take two doses of COVID-19 vaccine and must carry a vaccination certificate, according to the Omani Cultural Attaché in London. In a statement, the attaché said, "Students, especially those who are transferred from Australia to the UK, need to have the vaccination certificate before reaching the country of study."

SUDAN TO HAND BASHIR OVER FOR WAR CRIMES TRIAL



Khartoum, Sudan - Sudan will hand longtime autocrat Omar al-Bashir to the International Criminal Court (ICC) along with other officials wanted over the Darfur conflict, Foreign Minister Mariam al-Mahdi said on Wednesday.

Bashir (77) has been wanted by the ICC for more than a decade over charges of genocide, war crimes and crimes against humanity in the Sudanese region.

"The cabinet decided to hand over wanted officials to the ICC," Mahdi was quoted as saying by state media, without giving a time frame.

The UN says 300,000 people were killed and 2.5mn displaced in the Darfur conflict, which erupted in the vast western region in 2003.

Bashir, who ruled Sudan with an iron fist for three decades before being deposed amid popular protests in 2019, is behind bars in Khartoum's high security Kober prison.

Solar only alternative to subsidies

Solar energy will allow consumers to become producers

Our Correspondent
Muscat

Solar energy is the solution to avoid sky-high electricity bills, according to specialists. In the wake of the concerns that have been raised recently about the new electricity tariff, experts affirm that the solution is to opt for clean renewable energy so that citizens become producers, not consumers.

They point towards four 'pathways' to 2040, all of which involve a major rise in renewable energy usage. The International Energy Agency sees 43 per cent more solar output by 2040 than it expected in 2018, partly due to detailed new analysis showing that solar power is 20-50 per cent cheaper than thought earlier, according to the agency's re-



port titled *World Energy Outlook 2020*.

Speaking to *Muscat Daily*, Sumaya Nasser al-Rawahi, founder and business development manager of Green Universe Enterprise, said, "The field of solar energy is still developing. We need more projects to lower the cost and persuade citizens to move to this clean energy. The government must introduce sub-

sidies or soft loans to all, especially to the industrial and commercial sectors. And it needs to introduce penalties on emissions as well as credits for emission reduction."

Sumaya explained that solar energy has become a solution to the high cost of electricity. It will gain popularity if the government gradually removes subsidy on electricity while giving incentives

for solar power.

Though the initial capital needed to set up solar energy operations is high, for commercial and industrial use the payback is less than five years. The payback period will be reduced when the government removes subsidies, 100 per cent of which is expected to be removed by 2025.

To spread awareness on the benefits of solar energy in society,

Sumaya said, "In 2011 when I was in high school, I didn't know what is renewable energy or the different resources of renewable energy. This topic was very new in our country; no one talked about it at the time. It was difficult educating myself about renewable energy. In Oman, we still don't have any university that offers a Bachelor's degree in renewable energy, and very few schools teach renewable energy as a subject. Our youth are the future. Educating them about clean energy will ensure safeguarding our environment and our future."

To date, Green Universe Enterprise has installed solar panels in eight projects of different sizes in a span of 18 months. It has nine ongoing projects for both residential and commercial purposes. "Solar energy used in residential units have lowered electricity bills by 80 per cent. The saving you can make on electricity cost by using solar energy systems depends on the space available in your house to install solar panels."

According to Majid al-Alawi, owner of Continental Shelf of Solar Tech, most people know

the importance of solar energy and the government should now increase production of solar energy to make it easier for people to install solar panels in their homes.

"Installing solar panels will benefit citizens and residents by reducing electricity bills and preserving the environment. The citizen, with his installation of solar panels, will become a producer, not a consumer of energy," said Alawi.

He observed that the solar energy sector in Oman needs factories to produce raw materials for solar panels, and that the country must ramp up solar energy projects to save the environment and relieve pressure on electricity companies, especially in the summer, besides reducing electricity bills.

"We have installed solar panels in 60 houses in different parts of the sultanate. We have also installed panels in some companies, schools and Sohar Port. I urge citizens to install solar panels to become energy producers and support the government's efforts to achieve self-sufficiency in clean energy," said Alawi.

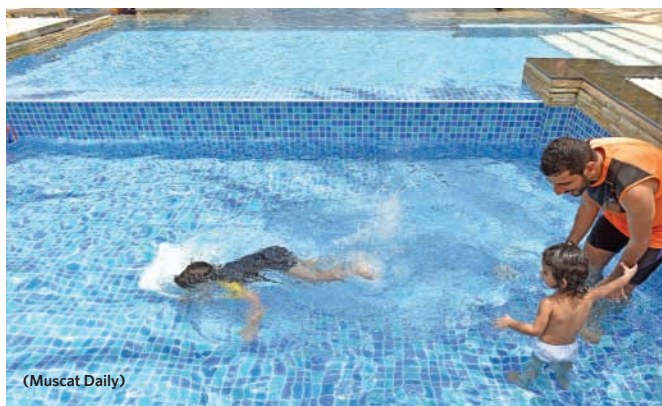
Hotels prepared to welcome guests safely

Our Correspondent
Muscat

Hope and optimism make the world go round. The COVID-19 pandemic has wreaked havoc in the last 18 months resulting in crises in personal and professional life. But now there's renewed hope of life returning to normalcy with the daily case count dropping significantly owing to a nationwide vaccination drive and lockdowns and night movement bans imposed to limit the spread of the virus.

In anticipation of resumption of flights from several countries that were on Oman's travel ban list, hotels are readying to welcome guests. Likely the worst-hit during the pandemic, the hospitality sector is eagerly awaiting the lifting of travel restrictions.

Samir Messaoudi, general manager of Sheraton Oman, said it being part of Marriott Interna-



(Muscat Daily)

tional, the hotel has already implemented its commitment to a global COVID-19 protocol programme, besides local government regulations. "We are excited to hear that airlines will start operating at a higher frequency to all major destinations and we are looking forward to welcoming inbound tourists and business travellers at our hotel."

Measures such as social distancing, hand sanitiser dis-

persers, masks, gloves and temperature checks are already in place in Sheraton Oman Hotel.

Besides the international chains, medium and small properties that probably suffered more on account of the pandemic, too aren't leaving any stone unturned to implement health protocols to ensure the safety of staff and customers while attracting business.

Anuj Singh, CEO of Manam

We are excited to bounce back and welcome guests ensuring all the safety measures are followed

ANUJ SINGH

Hotel, said, "We have vaccinated most of our staff. We have been following the directives and guidelines of the Supreme Committee tasked with tackling the impact of the pandemic and dutifully implementing all the protocols to keep our hotel rooms and also the surroundings clean and safe."

"Of course, we are excited to bounce back and welcome guests ensuring all the safety

measures are followed, including temperature checks, a no-mask-no-entry policy, hand sanitising and social distancing."

According to Surya Muduli, general manager of Royal Crown Hotel, staff members have been on their toes since the outbreak of the pandemic, adhering to Supreme Committee's health and safety guidelines.

"Despite the slack season, we did not lay off any of our staff members. We engaged them in the property's upkeep - not just rooms but the surroundings, too. Our staff attended their duties as usual throughout the pandemic as we do not want to take any chances of exposing guests to the dreaded virus," Muduli said.

He is confident of his hotel's preparedness to handle any given situation. "Our staff members are now well versed following the expertise acquired during the slack period."

Vehicles transported on trailers not insured for accidents: CMA

Our Correspondent
Muscat

Capital Market Authority (CMA) has informed that vehicles transported on trailers will not be covered by insurance in case of an accident.

A statement issued by CMA said, "The trailer truck's insurance policy does not cover the vehicles being transported as these are treated as goods carried on the back of the trailer. Damage to goods is covered by another type of insurance known as freight insurance."

Insurance coverage for vehicles will be forfeited, regardless of comprehensive or third party type, during transportation on another vehicle or trailer truck.

Eco-conscious citizen cleans trash from tourist sites in Dhofar

Our Correspondent
Muscat

A cleanliness drive conducted by a citizen on his own account to rid Dhofar's tourist sites of trash has come into the spotlight. Ahmed Issa Jaboob's recent initiative during the ongoing khareef festival when Dhofar dazzles and draws tourists from far and near has been praised in social media.

Jaboob, 50, a native of the governorate, often undertakes the task of removing garbage from tourist areas in Dhofar during its most popular season. Images of the trash the

Visitors take photographs of litter and post these on social media. This is bad for our country; it spoils our image

AHMED ISSA
JABOOB

conscientious citizen collected triggered a flurry of reactions and comments praising his initiative.

Speaking to *Muscat Daily*, the self-appointed trash cleaner said,



(Supplied photos)

"I have been cleaning tourist hotspots, beaches and mountains sites on my own since childhood. I also love hiking and camping; so when I see trash on

hiking trails and camping sites, I clean up these places."

Jaboob is particularly active during khareef in removing trash from tourist sites. "A few days

ago, I undertook a three-day campaign during a weekend and was surprised by the amount of waste I found."

Describing littering as a 'serious issue', Jaboob said, "It is embarrassing to see food packets, bottles and soft drink cans strewn all over. Many visitors take photographs of litter and post these on social media. This is bad for our country; it spoils our image. But littering is not only bad for tourism but the environment, too. With littering, we lose business as well as damage the environment."

Besides doing solo clean-up

activities at tourist sites for over 15 years, he runs awareness campaigns among community members on the importance of preserving the environment. "However, it is impossible to cover big areas. And it is next to impossible to track people who litter."

Talking about the challenges he faces, Jaboob said the sheer bulk and volume of trash - including fishing net, construction waste and industrial pipes - need a large number of people to transport them. Currently, he transports all the collected trash in his pick-up truck.



OQ exits its investment in Portuguese utility company



Omani team to compete in SSL Finals in Switzerland

ROP urges people to ignore suspicious calls, messages

Our Correspondent
Muscat

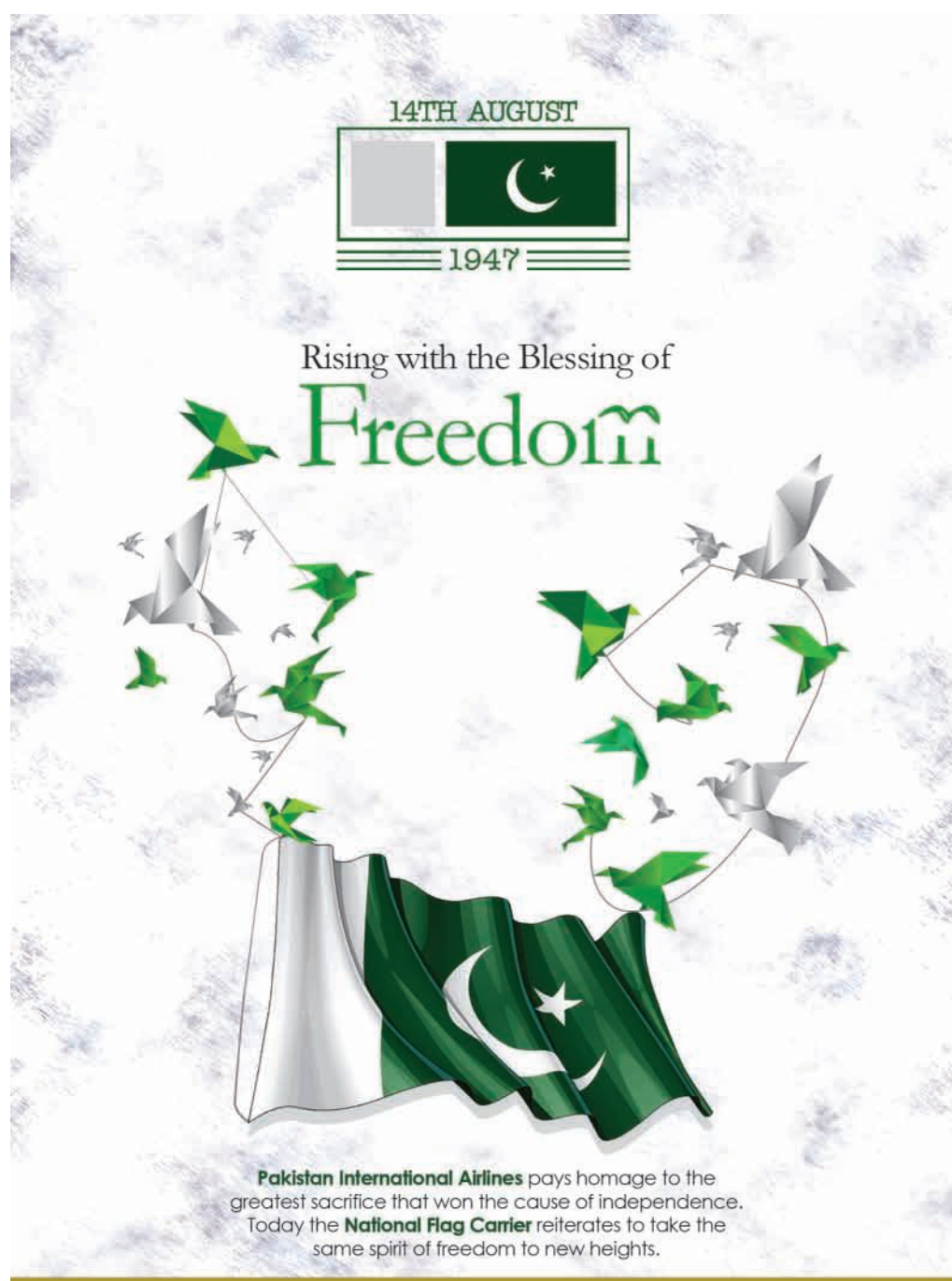
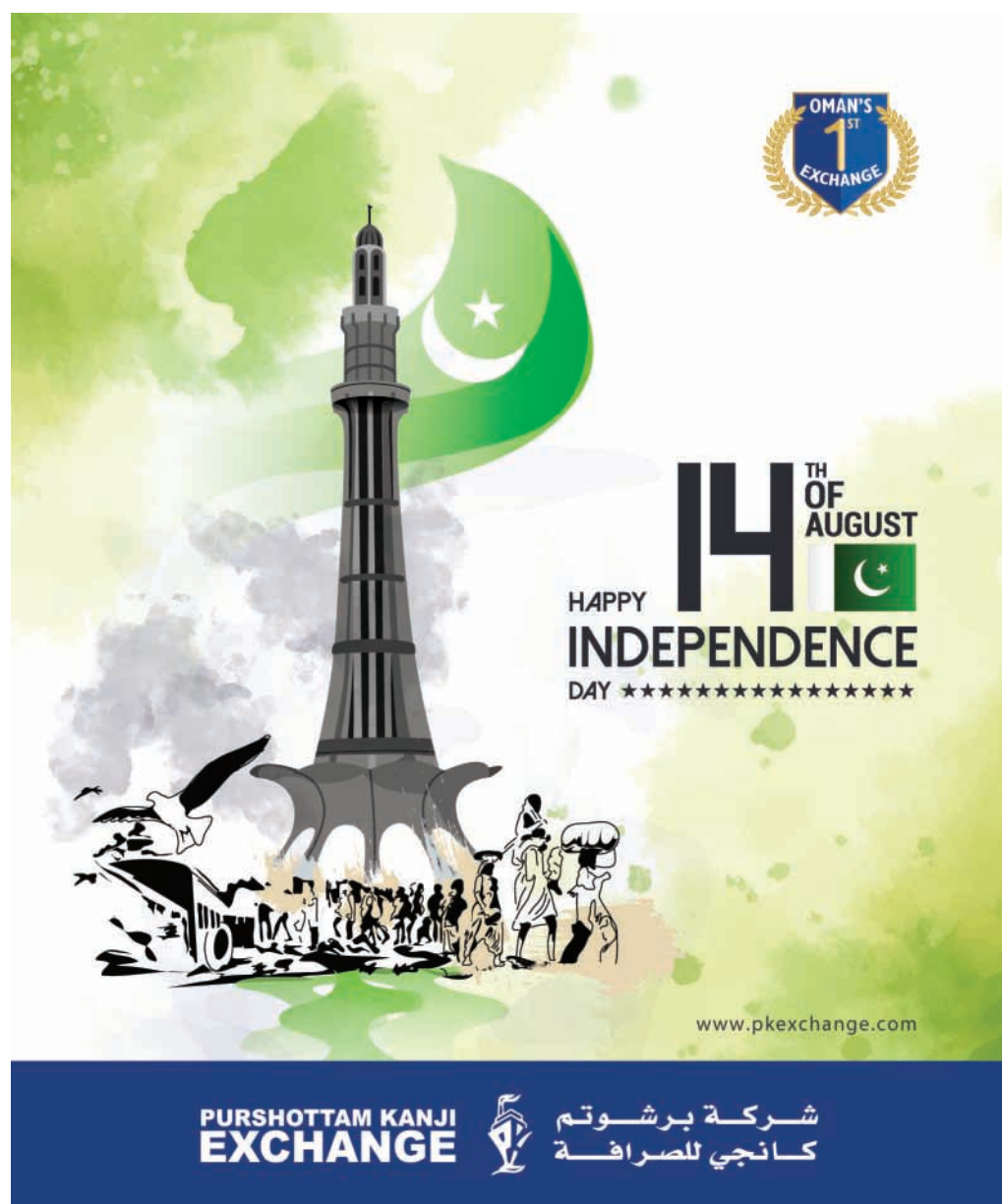
Royal Oman Police (ROP) has urged people to ignore calls or messages claiming they have won cash prizes to avoid falling prey to electronic fraud.

ROP said, 'Ignore all incoming social media calls and messages allegedly from a communication company, a bank or a famous person requesting your personal data or PIN number claiming that you have won a prize in cash or in kind, or offering financial help.'



The police said cybercrimes in Oman increased by 25 per cent in 2020 in comparison to 2019, and online fraud in the sultanate

is on the rise. 'To report frauds, people can call the Directorate General of Inquiries and Criminal Investigations on 80077444.'



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Long live Pak-Oman friendship: Envoy

On the occasion of the Independence Day of Pakistan which falls on August 14, H E K K Ahsan Wagan, Ambassador of Pakistan to Oman, has issued the following message.

On the auspicious occasion of Independence Day of Pakistan, I have the privilege to extend heartiest felicitations to all Pakistanis community members residing in the Sultanate of Oman.

Pakistan and Oman enjoy historical bonds of affinity and kinship. The relations are strongly pegged on common faith, culture and values. I am confident that these would continue to grow further in times ahead under the able and sagacious leadership of His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik, Sultan of Oman.

At this critical time when the world is witnessing the outbreak of COVID-19 pandemic and its aftershocks, I would appreciate the efforts and timely decisions made by the Government of Oman in tackling the serious global health challenge. Let me also acknowledge the generosity of the Government of Oman vis-à-vis medical facilities extended to Pakistani community members who contracted COVID-19 infections.

I am happy to share with my community members that Pakistan has successfully and effectively faced the challenges posed



Pakistan and Oman are strategic partners and may explore areas for joint investment in fields such as agriculture, livestock, IT, education, defence and health

H E K K AHSAN WAGAN

by the ongoing pandemic. Our leadership's concept on 'smart lockdown' has been greatly acknowledged and appreciated by the World Health Organization and other international agencies. Our exports have witnessed a substantial growth, whereas, globally exports of majority countries have declined.

Let me also highlight the prominent and unprecedented

contribution made by Oman-based Pakistani diaspora by trusting Roshan Digital Account as well as remitting a record US\$1,083mn during last fiscal year (2020-21) to Pakistan. It reflects the belief of Pakistani diaspora in Pakistani leadership's vision of transformed Pakistan which is centred around economic security with focus on three pillars: i) connectivity; ii)

providing economic bases as development strategy; and iii) peace within our borders and beyond.

I would like to state that Pakistan is now focused on optimally utilising its geo-economic location - at the crossroads of Middle East, South and Central Asia - to advance the goals of national economic development. Pakistan offers itself as an economic hub/melting pot for positive global interests.

In the global changing dynamics, our leadership's focus is on geo-economics and with this background, Pakistan has heavily invested on connectivity. China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) is a flagship programme, which is geo-strategic connecting point between South/Central Asia, Eastern China, Middle East and North Africa.

When viewed individually and collectively, Pakistan and Oman are both strategic partners and may explore areas for joint investment/joint ventures in the fields such as agriculture, livestock, CPEC/Gwadar related projects, IT, education, defence and health. Pakistan and Oman may complement each other to achieve economic development and progress for larger benefit of the people of two brotherly countries. Live long Pak-Oman Friendship!

Historical association board formed

Our Correspondent
Muscat

The Minister of Heritage and Tourism has issued a ministerial decision to form the Board of Directors of the Historical Association of Oman.

The Ministry of Heritage and Tourism said, 'H E Salim bin Mohammed al Mahrouqi, Minister of Heritage and Tourism, issued a ministerial decision to form the Board of Directors of Historical Association of Oman, which is specialised in studying and disseminating knowledge on



Hon Al Sayyid Nooh bin Mohammed al Busaidi

Oman's heritage, history and civilisation, and contributing to the preservation, protection and

documentation of Omani heritage, organising events and communicating with relevant scientific and intellectual institutions locally and globally.'

The Historical Association of Oman will be headed by Hon Al Sayyid Nooh bin Mohammed al Busaidi, with the membership of Dr Ibrahim bin Yahya al Busaidi, professor of Modern and Contemporary History at Sultan Qaboos University, as vice chairman, Dr Badriya bint Muhammad al Nabhani, supervisor of history at the Ministry of Education, Dr Ahlam bint Ham-

moud al Ghoreya, assistant director of the Research and Studies Department at the National Records and Archives Authority, and Ali bin Hamoud al Mahrouqi, managing director of the *Journal of Omani Studies*.

"The association will work to search for new topics to embody the Omani history that support the spirit of giving and national action for the renewed renaissance, considering that the Omani history and its rich heritage are an essential axis in the composition of the Omani personality," Hon Busaidi said.

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476 COVID-19 cases, 20 deaths in two days

Our Correspondent
Muscat

The Ministry of Health (MoH) on Wednesday reported 476 new cases of COVID-19 and 20 deaths over the past two days.

'The total number of cases registered in the sultanate has now reached 299,418, including 3,968 deaths,' MoH said in a statement.

Also, the number of hospitalisation is decreasing.

'Twenty-two patients were admitted to hospitals across the country in the last 24 hours, taking the total number of inpatients to 299 including 129 in intensive care units.'

As for recoveries, the numbers are going up.

'The total number of recoveries is 286,679, while the recovery rate is 96 per cent after 1,015 were reported recovered on Wednesday,' MoH said.

Focus on efforts of youth to restore planet, protect life

INTERNATIONAL YOUTH DAY

Shaddad al Musalmey
Muscat

With the world's population expected to increase by 2bn people in the next 30 years, it has been recognised by numerous stakeholders that simply producing a larger volume of healthier food will not ensure human and planetary wellbeing but other crucial challenges need to be addressed, stated the United Nations (UN). They include the interlinkages embodied by the UN's 2030 Agenda including poverty reduction, social inclusion, health care, biodiversity conservation, and climate change mitigation.

According to the UN, it has been acknowledged that there is a need for inclusive support mechanisms that ensure youth continue to amplify efforts collectively and individually to restore the planet and protect life, while integrating biodiversity in the transformation of food systems.

Keeping this in mind, the theme of this year's International Youth Day 2021, commemorated on August 12, is 'Transforming Food Systems: Youth Innovation for Human and Planetary Health' which highlights that the success of global effort will not be achieved without the meaningful participation of young people.

"Young people are on the frontlines of the struggle to build a better future for all. The COVID-19 pandemic has highlighted the dire need for the kind



Young people are on the frontlines of the struggle to build a better future for all. The pandemic has highlighted the dire need for the kind of transformational change they seek

ANTONIO GUTERRES

of transformational change they seek - and young people must be full partners in that effort," commented, UN secretary general Antonio Guterres.

Oman, which is considered as a peace loving country by the international community and gives highest priorities for developing the country's youth and provide ample opportunities for their development, will also join the international community in celebrating the event.

In the light of the COVID-19 pandemic situation, the event in Oman will be celebrated on a virtual platform on Thursday. It is being organised by Rajayoga Centre for Self Development.

Yasmeen al Alawi, owner of Sprout, 'Oman's first healthy and eco-friendly café', said, youth are the drivers for change.

"As a healthy food entrepreneur, we at Sprout, advocate for healthier eating habits helping the growth of a healthy society in Oman and in doing so combat the obesity epidemic. As youth are the drivers for change, youth play a vital role in helping us transform and influence our food systems to create a positive change across our country and the world," Yasmeen told Muscat Daily.

International Youth Day aims to provide a platform for young people to continue the momen-

tum in the lead up to the high-level food security summit.

This year, International Youth Day will be virtually convened by United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs in partnership with the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations and the Major Group for Children and Youth.

B K Gayathri, director of the Rajayoga Centre for Self Development, said, "Youth can be a positive force for development when provided with the knowledge and opportunities they need to thrive.

"Today, there are 1.2bn young people aged 15 to 24 years, accounting for 16 per cent of the global population. By 2030, the target date for the sustainable development goals that make up the number of youth is projected to have grown by seven per cent, to nearly 1.3bn."

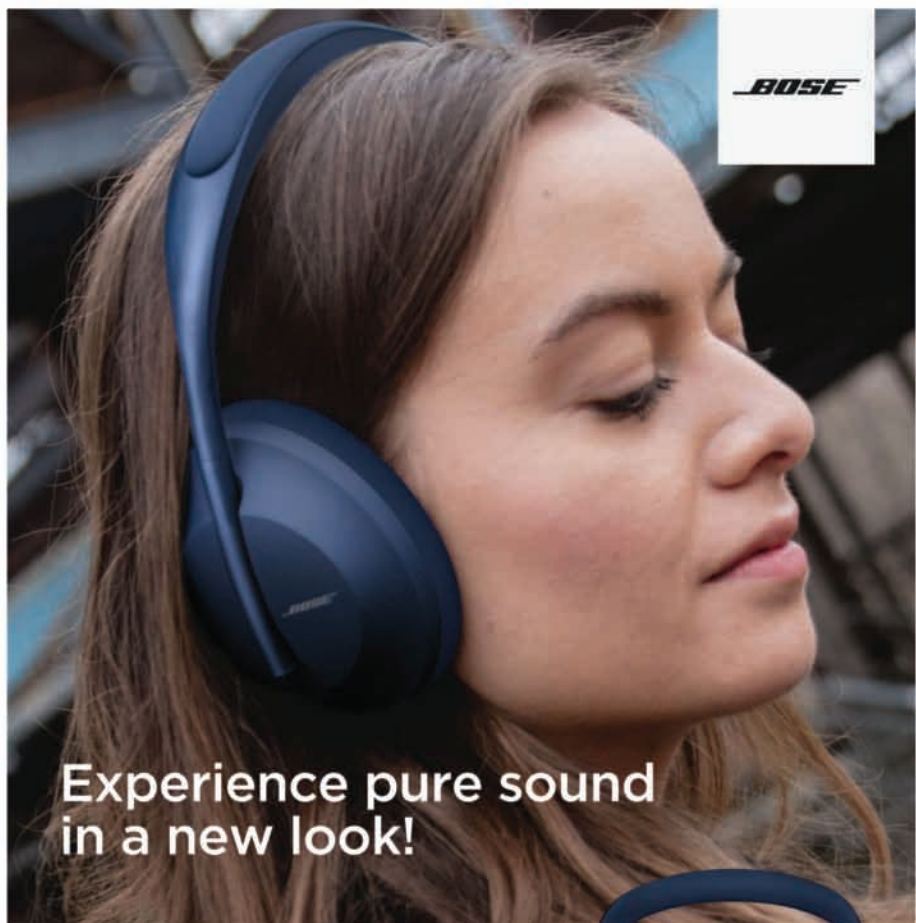
Gayathri said that Khalid al Huraibi, a well known public speaker and motivator will speak on the occasion.

Also there will be international motivational speaker from Turkey, Prakash Chogani and will be moderated by Ahmed al Buisaidi, an Omani youth.

"All interested individuals are encouraged to log onto www.rajayogaoman.org and watch the event online," Gayathri said.

During the 2021 ECOSOC Youth Forum, the issues and priorities highlighted by young participants included the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, particularly related to its effect on human health, the environment, and food systems.

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Dhofar Cattle Feed Company (S.A.O.G)

P.O. Box 1220 PC 211 Salalah – Phone 23225381 - Fax 23225258

Consolidated Un - Audited Financial for 2nd Quarter Year 2021

Chairman's Communique Dhofar Cattle Feed Financial Statements Consolidated and Parent Company 30th June 2021

Dear Shareholders,

On behalf of the Board of Directors, I am pleased to place before you the unaudited group results of your company for the 2nd quarter ended 30th June 2021.

Financial Performance

Group

The group revenue for the period ended 30th June'21 was RO19.645 Million, as compared to RO 21.063 Million achieved during the second quarter of previous year. Group's gross profit for the period under review was RO. 3.738 Million as against RO. 3.520 Million achieved during second quarter of previous year. The loss for the period under review was RO. (210k) as against a net loss after tax of RO. (211k) during the same period last year.

Company

The company achieved a Revenue of RO. 16.631 Million during the period under review, compared to RO 17,632 Million with decrease by 5.7% compared to the previous year. The COVID-19 started in mid of May 2020 impacted the operation in term of raw material availability and cost increase and sale and marketing expenses increase. The gross profit for the period was RO. 2,845 Million as against RO. 2,433 Million achieved during the same period of previous year.

The current period loss and reduced level of liquidity are mainly due to raw material cost increase, slow pace of investment and projects and increasing interest costs. The company achieved net profit for the period under review of RO. 172k as against a loss of RO (270k), compared to the second quarter of the previous year.

The total assets of the company stood at RO 48.374 Million as compared to RO 44.948 Million as of previous year. The NAV stood at RO 0.329 as against NAV of RO 0.333 as of same period last year. We believe this will improve going forward once the stock and receivables are converted to Cash.

Corporate Governance

The Company believes that to succeed on a sustainable basis, it must maintain high standards of corporate governance towards its shareholders, employees, consumers and community. To this end, the Company has always and will remain focused on good corporate governance. Your company has adhered to all the regulations covering corporate governance in Oman and your Board is fully committed to ensure compliance of all the applicable rules and regulations.

Omanisation / Training

Your company attaches enormous importance to Human resources as a strategic asset with specific attention to employ and nurture the local Omani talent. We continue to develop our staff to lay the foundation for our future growth with great amount of emphasis being done to develop local talent.

Acknowledgements

On 30th March 2021, the shareholders of the company held their AGM where they elected a new Board of Directors for a term of 3 years. The Management of the company are grateful for previous Board and their contributions to the company and welcome the new elected directors to the Board.

On behalf of the Board, I express my sincere gratitude to His Majesty Sultan Haitham Bin Tareq for his wise leadership and constant and generous support extended to the private sector.

I would also like to thank our Management, staff, bankers, suppliers and our customers for their continuous trust placed upon your company.

Nasser Bin Muhammad Salem Al Harithi
Chairman

STATEMENT OF COMPREHENSIVE INCOME FOR THE 6 MONTHS PERIOD ENDED 30 JUN 2021

	Group 2021 RO'000	Parent Company 2021 RO'000	Group 2020 RO'000	Parent Company 2020 RO'000
INCOME				
Revenue from sales of goods and services	19,604	16,584	21,037	17,600
Rental income	41	47	26	32
Cost of sales	(15,907)	(13,787)	(17,543)	(15,199)
Gross profit	3,738	2,845	3,520	2,433
EXPENSES				
Selling and distribution	2,403	1,983	2,595	2,155
General and administration	1,080	645	1,228	749
Directors' remuneration and meeting	62	46	52	26
	3,545	2,674	3,875	2,930
Profit / (loss) from operations	193	171	(355)	(497)
Investment income (net)	172	361	125	125
Other income	41	6	554	526
Share of result of associates	(8)	-	118	-
Finance costs (net)	(608)	(367)	(652)	(424)
Profit / (loss) before taxation	(210)	172	(211)	(270)
Taxation	-	-	-	-
Net profit / (loss) for the period	(210)	172	(211)	(270)
Other comprehensive income for the period:				
Potentially reclassifiable to the income statement:				
Movement in Fair value reserve	495	495	448	448
Deferred tax effect on movement in fair value reserve	-	-	-	-
Other comprehensive income for the period	495	495	448	448
Total comprehensive income for the period	285	666	237	178
Net profit / (loss) attributable to:				
Shareholders of the Parent Company	(189)	172	(196)	(270)
Non-controlling interest	(21)	-	(15)	-
	(210)	172	(211)	(270)
Total comprehensive income attributable to:				
Shareholders of the Parent Company	306	666	252	178
Non-controlling interest	(21)	-	(15)	-
	285	666	237	178
Basic earnings per share (RO)	(0.002)	0.002	(0.002)	(0.003)

STATEMENT OF FINANCIAL POSITION AS AT 30 JUN 2021

	Group 2021 RO'000	Parent Company 2021 RO'000	Group 2020 RO'000	Parent Company 2020 RO'000
ASSETS				
Non-current assets				
Property, plant and equipment	14,339	7,635	14,917	8,088
Right-of-use assets	1,114	1,008	782	650
Intangible assets	94	39	64	2
Investments in subsidiaries	0	2,957	0	3,070
Investments in associates	2,782	2,812	2,910	2,812
Fair Value through other comprehensive income	12,671	12,671	13,098	13,098
Investment properties	2,000	2,000	1,010	1,010
Biological assets	4,046	4,046	4,195	4,195
Deferred tax asset	385	232	362	232
Total non-current assets	37,430	33,400	37,338	33,157
Current assets				
Inventories and biological assets	12,556	8,876	9,771	6,430
Accounts and other receivables	5,374	5,882	5,499	5,052
Bank balances and cash	289	216	373	309
Total current assets	18,219	14,974	15,643	11,791
Total assets	55,649	48,374	52,981	44,948
EQUITY AND LIABILITIES				
Equity				
Share capital	8,085	8,085	8,085	8,085
Legal reserve	2,599	2,599	2,599	2,599
Voluntary reserve	3,712	3,712	3,712	3,712
Revaluation reserve	525	0	525	0
Fair value reserve	4,533	4,533	4,961	4,961
Retained earnings	6,466	7,662	7,082	7,564
Equity attributable to Shareholders of the Parent Company	25,920	26,591	26,964	26,921
Non-controlling interest	258	-	314	-
Total equity and non-controlling interest	26,178	26,591	27,278	26,921
LIABILITIES				
Non-current liabilities				
Non-current portion of term loans	354	354	1,243	1,104
Employees' end of service benefits	918	645	878	641
Non-current portion of lease liabilities	762	663	518	399
Deferred tax liability	15	-	2	-
Total non-current liabilities	2,049	1,662	2,641	2,144
Current liabilities				
Bank borrowings	15,762	9,488	12,224	6,142
Current portion of term loans	1,870	1,730	1,280	1,000
Accounts and other payables	9,388	8,519	9,185	8,388
Current portion of lease liabilities	400	384	329	309
Income Tax Payables	2	0	44	44
Total current liabilities	27,422	20,121	23,062	15,883
Total liabilities	29,471	21,783	25,703	18,027
Total equity and liabilities	55,649	48,374	52,981	44,948
Net assets per share (RO)	0.321	0.329	0.334	0.333

Note : The complete accounts will be sent by mail to any share- holder who request the company in either Arabic or English as requested within 7 days of receipt of the request .

More utility service providers added to Alizz Islamic's app

Muscat - Alizz Islamic Bank recently launched a new update for its mobile banking application, making bill payments even easier. The Alizz Islamic Bank mobile application now has more utility service providers added to its list of bill payment facilities.

"The service providers added to the app include Awasr, Mazoon Electricity Company, Dhofar Power Company, Majan Electricity Company and others. With the new update, customers of these companies can now pay their bills conveniently through the app and also be aware of their upcoming payments," the bank said in a statement.

"Additionally, users can now make international mobile top ups easily when they are abroad through the updated Alizz Islamic Bank mobile banking application."

The bank's electronic channels, such as the mobile banking application, ATMs, online banking, and interactive teller ma-



Mohammed Juma al Ghassani

chines provide an integrated and comprehensive delivery system. Customers can pay their bills, transfer money locally and abroad, pay their credit card fees, deposit cheques and carry out other transactions on these platforms.

"One of our key focuses is to provide the very best digital banking experience for our customers, whenever and wherever our customers need," Mohammed Juma al Ghassani, AGM - chief consumer banking officer of Alizz Islamic Bank, said.

The bi-lingual mobile banking application is available for Android, iOS and Huawei devices.

Musandam to set up 30 pens to support livestock sector

Our Correspondent
Muscat

Thirty livestock pens will be set up to support the farm animals sector in Musandam, according to Abdul Latif al Balushi, director general of Agriculture, Fisheries and Water Resources in the governorate in the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Water Resources (MoAFWR).

"There are a number of projects in the livestock sector in the governorate that will be implemented with funding from the Agricultural and Fisheries Development Fund," Balushi said.

Besides the 30 livestock pens being set up in two phases in Madha, the projects include six poultry sheds being built in the same wilayat, and a manual poultry slaughterhouse and poultry shed in the wilayat of Bakha.

"The Directorate General of Agriculture, Fisheries and Water Resources in Musandam has also implemented a number of programmes and projects to develop the fisheries sector in the governorate in order to achieve sustainable development in the sector," Balushi informed.

According to Balushi, a dam



(Supplied photos)

An artificial coral reef project, at a cost of RO83,000, was set up in the wilayat of Dibba to create a suitable environment for fish to breed

ABDUL LATIF AL BALUSHI



in Bakha built at a cost of RO6mn and completed last May, is among the projects to protect the region from floods. With a storage capacity of 1.98mn m3, the dam is 660m in length, 22m in height and

spread over 7km.

"An artificial coral reef project, costing RO83,000 set up last June in the wilayat of Dibba aims to create a suitable environment for fish to breed," Balushi added.

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REGIONAL WEATHER			PRAYER TIMINGS	
	Max	Min		
Abu Dhabi	44	29	Fajr	4.18am
Doha	42	31	Sunrise	5.41am
Kuwait City	47	34	Duhr	12.12pm
Manama	44	31	Asr	3.37pm
Riyadh	46	29	Maghrib	6.42pm
			Isha	8.12pm



(Supplied photo)

476 violations of marine fishing law reported in July

Our Correspondent
Muscat

Ten expatriate workers were arrested for violating fishery laws and legislations in July 2021, an official of the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Water Resources has informed.

Additionally, 476 violations were registered for non-compliance with the regulations for fishing of marine resources, and 392 violations of fishing licensing regulations.

"In all 365 items were seized, including boats, engines, nets, devices and fishing equipment," the ministry official said, adding that a total of 1,107kg of fish were confiscated in March 2021.

In all 365 items were seized, including boats, engines, nets, devices and fishing equipment. A total of 1,107kg of fish were confiscated in March 2021

A MINISTRY OFFICIAL

Specialists of the ministry arrested the ten expatriates for violating provisions of the Marine Fishing Law and Protection of Living Aquatic Resources.

"Of the total violations, 392 were for violation of fishing licensing regulations, 60 cases of use of prohibited fishing methods and possession of unauthorised equipment, 13 violations of fishing in prohibited areas and time, 13 cases of employment of unlicensed expatriate workers, 26 instances of non-compliance with placement of number plates on boats and vessels, and 31 other violations," the ministry official added.

The annual statistics of fisheries control activities indicate that 4,298 violations of the Marine Fishing Law and Protection of Living Aquatic Resources were registered in the sultanate in 2020.

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OQ exits its investment in Portuguese utility company

Our Correspondent
Muscat

OQ, Oman's integrated energy group, on Wednesday announced that it has sold its entire stake in Redes Energéticas Nacionais (REN), a leading Portuguese utility company.

In a statement to Oman News Agency, OQ said that Mazoon BV, a wholly-owned subsidiary of OQ, has sold its 12 per cent stake in Portugal-based REN through an over-the-counter transaction at the end of July.

Informing its investors and general public about the transaction, REN in a statement said that Spanish firm Pontegadea Inversiones has acquired from Mazoon BV the total shares that the latter held in REN, corresponding to 12.006 per cent of REN's share capital.

OQ, formerly Oman Oil Com-



pany, said the investment in REN was made in 2012, as the group aimed to expand and diversify its growing investment portfolio locally and internationally. OQ was

the second largest shareholder in REN.

Talal al Awfi, group chief executive officer of OQ, said, "OQ is privileged to have been a sig-

nificant shareholder in REN since 2012. I would like to take this opportunity to thank the board and the management of REN for working with us throughout this

successful partnership. I would also like to take this opportunity to wish REN and the new investors the best of luck in the future."

REN is a high-voltage transmission grid operator and natural gas transportation company with operations in several countries.

REN was formed in 1994 as the electrical transmission company for Portugal. Its main role is to manage the energy transmission systems in Portugal and is one of the few European operators active in both electricity and natural gas transmission.

In April this year, OQ also signed an agreement with India's state-run Bharat Petroleum Corporation Limited (BPCL) to sell its entire 36.62 per cent stake in Bharat Oman Refineries Limited which owns and operates Bina Refinery, located at Bina in the state of Madhya Pradesh in India.



US national security advisor Jake Sullivan

US says OPEC+ oil output hikes 'not enough'

New York, US - A boost in production agreed on by the world's leading oil producers is simply not enough to fuel the global economic recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic, US national security advisor Jake Sullivan said Wednesday.

"The increases agreed on by OPEC+ (the Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries and allies) last month will not fully offset previous production cuts that OPEC+ imposed during the pandemic until well into 2022," he said in a statement released by the White House.

"At a critical moment in the global recovery, this is simply not enough," the statement said.

"Competitive energy markets will ensure reliable and stable energy supplies, and OPEC+ must do more to support the recovery."

Sullivan's statement comes three weeks after the OPEC+ group unveiled an agreement to boost output by 400,000 barrels per day (bpd) each month from August.

The deal means the group's output will be restored to its pre-pandemic level by the end of 2022. Oil producers have faced a complex challenge to modulate output amid COVID-19, with the most recent uptick in infections from the Delta variant raising doubts about demand, especially in China. Crude prices, which briefly hit six-year peaks in June, have fluctuated in recent days amid these worries.

The Biden administration also released a letter from National Economic Council Chief Brian Deese to the Federal Trade Commission calling on the agency to use "all of its available tools to monitor the US gasoline market" and guard against "anti-competitive" conduct.

The price of gasoline is currently US\$3.19 per gallon in the US, up from US\$3.14 a month ago and more than a 45 per cent jump from the year-ago level when travel was constrained in the United States by myriad COVID-19 restrictions.

AFP

Bank Muscat offers financing for installation of solar panels

Muscat - Bank Muscat has announced that its customers can continue to make use of its Green Finance initiative to purchase and install residential solar panels.

Launched earlier in association with the International Finance Corporation (IFC), the bank's Green Finance facility aims to promote sustainable practices and renewable energy

in the sultanate in the place of fossil fuels.

The bank is thus targeting increased awareness sustainable consumer practices and increase energy savings.

Green Finance initiative encourages customers to install solar panels on their rooftops and use solar energy for a large part of their household energy requirements.

Under the scheme, loans ranging from RO1,000 to RO25,000 are being given to eligible individuals at highly competitive interest rates subject to a maximum debt burden ratio of 50 per cent. Loans under the scheme are available for a maximum of five years.

Abdullah Tamman al Mashani, deputy general manager - institutional sales and

product development, Bank Muscat, said, "The bank's Green Finance scheme has been witnessing a steady rise in interest from its customers and we are delighted with the response so far. Going ahead, we hope to reach out to even more customers."

"Through Green Finance, customers will be able to install residential solar panels and use

solar energy for a large part of their household requirements."

"It is important to note that this initiative will help Oman in reducing harmful emissions and also contribute to household savings as energy costs go down. Customers can get more information about Green Finance facility from Bank Muscat branches across the sultanate," he added.

Dubai airport's H1 passenger volumes slump 41%

Dubai, UAE - Dubai International Airport reported Wednesday a 41 per cent drop in traffic in the first half of 2021, but said it anticipates 'robust growth' after the easing of travel restrictions.

The number of passengers that passed through the world's largest airport for international travel fell to 10.6mn in the first six months of 2021, according to a statement from the Dubai Media Office.

In the first quarter of last year, the airport had welcomed 17.8mn passengers before it temporarily suspended commercial flights in the second quarter to curb the spread of the coronavirus.

"Dubai Airports is projecting robust growth for Dubai International in the second half of the year," the statement said. The emirate, one of the seven that make up the UAE, was one of the first destinations to reopen to tourism in July last year.

AFP



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UNAUDITED CONSOLIDATED STATEMENT OF FINANCIAL POSITION AS AT 30th JUNE 2021			
Particulars	As on 30-06-2021 Rials	As on 30-06-2020 Rials	
ASSETS			
Non Current Assets			
Property Plant & Equipment	1,071,682	1,199,930	
Right of Use Assets	120,376	137,539	
Differed Tax Asset	74,283	37,722	
Total non-current assets	1,266,341	1,375,191	
Current Assets	977,772	1,208,877	
Less : Current Liabilities			
Short term maturity of Long term Loan	---	---	
Other current Liabilities	330,467	424,469	
Net Current Assets	647,305	784,408	
TOTAL ASSETS	1,913,646	2,159,599	
LIABILITIES			
Share Holders' Funds:			
Share Capital	1,000,000	1,000,000	
Reserves & Retained Earnings	913,646	1,159,599	
Long Term Loan	---	---	
TOTAL LIABILITIES	1,913,646	2,159,599	

UNAUDITED CONSOLIDATED STATEMENT OF COMPREHENSIVE INCOME FOR THE SIX MONTHS ENDED 30th JUNE 2021			
Particulars	6 months ended 30-06-2021 Rials	6 months ended 30-06-2020 Rials	
Sales	414,994	568,437	
Gross Profit	47,615	113,434	
Depreciation	(66,698)	(71,197)	
Admin & General Expenses	(153,160)	(161,144)	
Operating Profit / (Loss)	(172,243)	(118,907)	
Finance Charges	(979)	(895)	
Other Income	4,819	22,971	
Balance	(168,403)	(96,831)	
Prior year tax payment	---	(1,988)	
Profit / (Loss) before taxation and minority interest	(168,403)	(98,819)	
Provision for Taxation	---	(5,100)	
NET PROFIT / (LOSS) AFTER TAX	(168,403)	(103,919)	



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Win for Biden as Senate passes massive infrastructure bill



US President Joe Biden, with Vice President Kamala Harris (left), speaks about the infrastructure bill passed by the Senate on Tuesday, in the East Room of the White House (AFP)

Washington, US – US President Joe Biden hailed the Senate passage Tuesday of a 'historic' US\$1.2tn infrastructure package, celebrating a major bipartisan win on a plan he vowed would 'transform America'.

By funding work on roads, bridges and ports, as well as clean water and high-speed internet, Biden said the bill – which still needs House approval – would create thousands of high-paying jobs for people without college degrees.

"This historic investment infrastructure is what I believe you, the American people, want," Biden said in a White

House address. "This bill shows that we can work together," he said.

Some seven weeks after the Democratic leader stood with senators from both parties hailing a preliminary agreement, the bill received rare bipartisan support in Washington's highly-polarized political atmosphere.

Needing just a simple majority, it passed by 69 votes to 30 with backing from a third of Republican Senators.

The measure now faces a make-or-break vote in the House of Representatives in coming weeks, where its future is less certain as divisions have

sprung up in the Democratic majority.

Democratic Senate majority leader Chuck Schumer credited Biden for winning approval of "the first major infrastructure package in over a decade on a bipartisan basis" after just seven months in office. "It's been a long and winding road, but we have persisted," Schumer said.

The ambitious plan provides for US\$550bn in new federal spending on transport infrastructure, but also for public transit, broadband internet, and clean water, as well as electric charging stations and other measures to fight climate

US Senate approves \$3.5tn budget blueprint

Washington, US – The US Senate early Wednesday approved a US\$3.5tn budget blueprint that would greatly expand social spending with major investments in health, education and tackling climate change.

The measure passed 50-49 along party lines after a marathon 'vote-a-rama' session of amendment votes.

"Senate Democrats just passed our budget resolution to provide historic investments in American jobs, American families, and the fight against climate change," Senate Majority Leader Chuck Schumer tweeted after the vote.

"It puts us on track to bring

a generational transformation to how our economy works for average Americans."

Democratic leaders intend to push the package through over the coming months using a fast-track process known as reconciliation that allows budget-related legislation to pass by simple majority in the Senate rather than the usual 60 votes.

The 10-year budget blueprint pushes Congress toward the next step in President Joe Biden's ambitious vision for his first term in office and follows on the heels of a US\$1.2tn infrastructure plan.

It was largely written by in-

dependent Senator Bernie Sanders, who has called it the "most consequential" social spending plan since president Franklin Delano Roosevelt's New Deal of the 1930s in response to the Great Depression. The spending plan includes funding for climate measures, new investments in infrastructure including items left out of the targeted Senate package, residency status for millions of migrant workers, and two years of paid tuition at public universities.

Senators have until September 15 to submit their amendments.

AFP

TikTok most downloaded app in 2020

San Francisco, US – TikTok was the world's most downloaded app last year, overtaking Facebook and its messaging platforms, market tracker App Annie said. The Chinese-owned video app surged in popularity despite efforts by former president Donald Trump to ban it or force a sale to US-based investors, according to the research firm.

TikTok, owned by China-based ByteDance, is believed to have one billion users worldwide including more than 100mn in the United States, and its short-form videos are especially popular with young smartphone users.

US President Joe Biden in June revoked executive orders from his predecessor seeking to ban TikTok and Chinese-owned WeChat from US markets on national security concerns but ordered a review of the potential risks of foreign-owned internet services.

While political debate about the video-snippet sharing sensation roiled, TikTok climbed from the fourth most downloaded app in 2019 to the top spot last year, according to App Annie data.

On the way, TikTok stepped over Facebook and two of the US internet giants texting apps Messenger and WhatsApp, the market tracker determined.

TikTok's popularity has prompted Facebook-owned Instagram to add video features to ride the hot trend.

Meanwhile TikTok last month began letting users post videos up to three minutes in length, tripling the prior cap to stay ahead of competitors.

AFP

Cyber security giant Norton buys Avast

London, UK – US cyber security giant NortonLifeLock is to buy Czech rival Avast for over US\$8bn to create a leading consumer business, the pair announced Wednesday after the pandemic fuelled online activity.

The deal, equivalent to more than 6.7bn euros, "is a huge step forward for consumer cyber safety and will ultimately enable us to achieve our vision to protect and empower people to live their digital lives safely", Norton chief executive Vincent Pilette said in a joint statement.

Ondrej Vlcek, chief executive of London-listed Avast, said that amid increasing global cyber threats, the tie-up would allow for "enhanced solutions and services, with improved capabilities".

More than 500mn users will benefit from the new group's safety offerings, the statement added.



Pilette was set to become chief executive of the expanded group, while Vlcek is to join NortonLifeLock as president and become a member of the NortonLifeLock board.

The combined company, to be listed on the Nasdaq, will be dual headquartered in Prague and Tempe, Arizona.

Businesses worldwide are at threat from an increasingly lucrative form of digital hostage-taking, or ransomware attacks, that

typically see hackers encrypting victims' data and then demanding money for restored access.

A massive ransomware attack on US tech firm Kaseya in July affected businesses from pharmacies to gas stations in at least 17 countries.

While Kaseya was little known to the public, analysts say it was a ripe target as its software is used by around 40,000 businesses, allowing the hackers to paralyse many companies with a

single blow.

"At a time when global cyber threats are growing, yet cyber safety penetration remains very low, together with NortonLifeLock, we will be able to accelerate our shared vision of providing holistic cyber protection for consumers around the globe," Vlcek added Wednesday.

US cybersecurity officials last week announced that Amazon, Google and Microsoft had enlisted to help them fight ransomware and defend cloud computing systems from hackers.

The tech giants are among firms signed on to be part of a Joint Cyber Defense Collaborative intended to combine government and private skills and resources to fight hackers, according to the Cybersecurity and Infrastructure Security Agency (CISA).

AFP

US drug maker Moderna opening COVID-19 vaccine plant in Canada

Montreal, Canada – US biotech company Moderna will build a plant in Canada to produce vaccines for COVID-19 and other respiratory infections, the Canadian government and the company announced.

Industry Minister Francois-Philippe Champagne made the announcement with the head of Moderna, saying the plant would fulfill orders for its messenger RNA vaccines, with manufacturers struggling to meet soaring demand for COVID-19 shots worldwide.

"The collaboration aims to provide Canadians with access to a domestically manufactured portfolio of mRNA vaccines against respiratory viruses, including COVID-19, seasonal influenza, respiratory syncytial virus (RSV) and potential other vaccines," the company said in a



statement.

"If there is a new virus emerging – a new string of Zika or Ebola or corona or flu, the Canadian government can decide to use part or all of that capacity for that specific virus to protect the Canadian people," said Champagne.

The government's financial contribution to the project was not disclosed. But the company, according to Champagne, is in-

vesting "several hundred million dollars" in the state of the art facility.

Canada currently has no domestic vaccine production, and so has depended on imports of Pfizer-BioNTech, Moderna and other jabs to inoculate its 38mn people against the novel coronavirus.

In May, it invested nearly Can\$200mn to expand Resilience Biotechnologies' vaccine plant in Mississauga, Ontario, and earmarked Can\$2.2bn in its spring budget to boost its bio-manufacturing and life sciences sector.

French pharmaceutical giant Sanofi and Canadian biotech firm Medicago were among the first to receive Canadian funding to develop vaccines and eventually produce shots locally too.

AFP

Wages rise in US as companies scramble for staff

Washington, US – An acute labour crunch amid the coronavirus pandemic is boosting US wages, with many large chains now paying US\$15 an hour, a minimum level long sought by Democrats and labour activists.

The disruption of COVID-19 has led to record job openings, but also millions of unemployed workers, some of whom dropped out of the labour force to stay home to take care of children.

But some workers have used the pandemic to retire or try to change careers. Economists say that so far, the wage bump has not resulted in troubling inflation.

"For the first time since the late 1990s, low-wage workers have a little more leverage to demand higher pay," said David Cooper, an economist at the Eco-

nomics Policy Institute, a progressive Washington think tank.

Facing a sudden jump in business as the US economy reopened, restaurants, retailers and other employers have struggled to fill open positions, and have boosted pay, and even offered signing bonuses or other perks to new workers.

Last week, pharmacy chain CVS became the latest big chain to announce plans to lift its minimum wage to US\$15 an hour, joining a group that already includes Target, Chipotle and Amazon, among others. The new policy will take effect at CVS in July 2022.

Walmart, the biggest private US employer, in late July announced it was dropping the US\$11-a-day fee for its employee



education program. The initiative supplements wages at the giant retailer, which pays less than its much smaller rival Costco.

The announcements comes as President Joe Biden's effort to win a significant boost to the federal minimum wage remains

stalled in Congress.

Upon taking office, Biden sought to more than double the wage to US\$15 an hour from US\$7.25 where it has been for the last 12 years.

"What the Democrats could not accomplish, businesses are

delivering to them because of pandemic effects," Rubeela Farooqi, chief US economist at High Frequency Economics, told AFP.

"There was so much opposition to a US\$15 minimum wage but companies have no choice right now but to pay up to attract/retain workers."

The competition for workers means average pay for supermarket and restaurant workers has now topped US\$15, according to an article in The Washington Post.

"Overall nearly 80 per cent of US workers now earn at least US\$15 an hour, up from 60 per cent in 2014," the newspaper said, while adding that a US\$15 average wage is different from a minimum wage and many workers still earn less.

The trend of rising wage pressure is expected to continue for some time. Companies surveyed by Willis Towers Watson expect to lift wages three percent in 2022, up from 2.7 per cent this year.

Permanent change?

But experts do not believe the trend to necessarily endure beyond the pandemic.

"The structures of the US economy that have suppressed wage growth ... for decades haven't changed," Cooper said. "We should be careful not to conclude that this will be a long-term permanent change."

Gregory Daco, chief US economist at Oxford Economics, said many of the companies boosting wages should also see a benefit.

"It's the people with the lowest salaries who are getting a raise and that usually means more of it goes to consumption," Daco said. "Whatever more the companies are giving to workers, they're likely to make up in higher sales." Farooqi also expects the current period of wage hikes to end, noting the large number of unemployed workers.

"We do not expect a wage spiral that will feed into inflation," Farooqi said. "Wages are not likely to keep accelerating if businesses can find workers easily."

The next major update on inflation will come Wednesday with the consumer price index for July, which is expected to rise 0.5 per cent after surging 0.9 per cent in June.

AFP

Oman Oasis ‘Win Gold’ offer reveals winners

Revered as the nation's leading water brand, Oman Oasis has been the preferred choice amongst consumers because of its unwavering commitment to producing high-quality bottled water and its ongoing customer-centric promotions.

Delighting consumers with ongoing campaigns, rewards and offers, Oman Oasis recently announced the second round of winners of its ‘Win Gold’ promotion. The first round of draws was conducted on June 16 and received an overwhelming response from the market.

With a total of three rounds of raffle draws guaranteeing a total of 1061 prizes, the latest draw witnessed a total of 359 winners. As the name suggests, the key prizes from the draw include a number of gold bars to be won. Rehab Saleh Hasani was one of the key lucky winners to walk

away with a 50g gold bar, while Nooh Said, Kiadhia al Mazrui and Muhammad Shabeer T V each won 25g gold bars. Eighty-five winners also rejoiced on winning 4g gold coin each. Other prizes included 100 winners who were rewarded with RO10 worth of shopping vouchers and an additional 170 winners who received 24x500ml Oman Oasis water.

With the third round of raffle draws slated to take place on August 16, consumers are eagerly anticipating the 50g and 100g gold prizes. Ensuring more chances to win for everyone, the third round will also include several other prizes still to be won.

The offer commenced on May 16 and will run until August 15. The promotion is valid on all Oman Oasis 1.5lt and 500ml cartons and customers are to look out for a Scratch Coupon inside the carton. Upon scratching and

revealing the unique code, customers have to register the code on www.omanoasis.com/wingold to be eligible to participate in the raffle draw. Offering more opportunities to win, customers are free to participate more than once. To claim the prize, winners will have to preserve the Scratch Coupon, proof of purchase and present it along with their proof of ID.

Oman Oasis has conducted innumerable such raffle draws in the past to reward its customers for their loyalty to the brand. With a customer-centric approach to all its campaigns, it has strengthened its ties with its customers while increasing its reach across the sultanate. Complementing its creative marketing strategies is its state-of-the-art production line that ensures its adherence to international standards.



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Board of Directors’ Report – 30th June 2021

Dear Shareholders,
On behalf of the Board, I take this opportunity to present the financial performance of Oman & Emirates Investment Holding Co SAOG for the six months period ended 30th June 2021.

Financial Results:
The Company (Group & Parent) recorded Net Profits of RO 844,738 and RO 849,876 respectively during January to June 2021, compared to (Group & Parent) incurred Net Losses of RO (2,181,064) and RO (2,066,914) respectively during January to June 2020. The Break-up details are as under:

Particulars	Equity Holding %	Jan– Jun 2021 RO	Jan – Jun 2020 RO
Profit / (Loss) before the share of results of Subsidiaries and Associates		354,918	(1,170,007)
FINCORP Al Amal Fund	24.33	214,203	(455,553)
FINCORP SAOG	51.2	367,068	(381,563)
Oman Hotels and Tourism Co SAOC	31.72	(170,604)	(147,647)
Omani Fiber Optic Co SAOC	20.97	84,291	87,856
Net Profit / (Loss) Parent		849,876	(2,066,914)
Omani Euro Food Industries Co SAOG	80.84	(5,138)	(114,150)
Net Profit / (Loss) Group		844,738	(2,181,064)

Stock Market Indices:
During the period January to June 2021, MSM, ADX and DFM increased by 11.06%, 35.48% and 12.78% respectively (January–June 2020: MSM, ADX and DFM declined by (-)11.68%, (-)15.56% and (-)25.30% respectively.

Net Equity, Investments and Borrowing:
The Net Equity of the Group and the Parent Company increased by 7.3% and 8.1% respectively during the first half of the year. The Net Equity of the Group reached RO 20.395 Million at 30.6.2021 (30.06.2020: RO 19.016 Million) up from RO 19.551 Million at 31.12.2020.

The Net Equity of the Parent reached RO 21.129 Million at 30.6.2021 (30.06.2020: RO 19.548 Million) up from RO 20.279 at 31.12.2020.

The Total Investment Values of the Group and the Parent Company were RO 41.761 Million and RO 39.401 Million respectively as at 30.6.2021 (30.6.2020: Group RO 43.570 Million and Parent Company RO 42.047 Million).

The total borrowing of the Group and the Parent Company have reduced to RO 25.012 Million and RO 21.284 Million respectively as at 30.06.2021 (30.06.2020: Group RO 30.768 Million and Parent Company RO 26.364 Million).

Future Outlook:
Improved vaccination rates with fiscal stimulus may be heralding a return to a gradual recovery and global growth is forecast by the IMF for the year. The spread of the new virus variants constitutes a lingering risk to global equity markets.

Oman's outlook remains vulnerable, despite improving oil prices, due to its poor fiscal position and foreign reserve pressures. Although market yields are improving and regional markets are well positioned under increasing oil prices, the investment environment remains challenging. It continues to affect the stability of financial markets, dampen investor sentiment and will continue to remain subdued with tight liquidity and strained cash flows. The effects will depend on global control of the health crisis, government actions and oil price movements.

Acknowledgement:
I take this opportunity to convey our heartfelt gratitude to the Governments of the Sultanate of Oman and United Arab Emirates for their support to our Company. I also thank the stock market authorities, banks, shareholders and employees of the Company for their guidance, cooperation and efforts.

Mohamed Darwish Al Khoori
Chairman

10th August 2021

CONDENSED INTERIM UNAUDITED CONSOLIDATED AND SEPARATE STATEMENT OF FINANCIAL POSITION AT 30 JUNE 2021

	30 June 2021 Group RO	(Restated) 30 June 2020 Group RO	31 December 2020 Group RO	30 June 2021 Parent RO	(Restated) 30 June 2020 Parent RO	31 December 2020 Parent RO
ASSETS						
Cash and cash equivalents	1,043,399	1,915,996	2,452,454	110,508	750,268	104,763
Trade and other receivables	1,204,554	2,056,094	1,250,957	58,308	85,162	143,295
Inventories	552,574	478,048	463,472	-	-	-
Financial assets at fair value through profit or loss	21,859,957	23,180,212	22,748,973	17,637,376	19,968,525	19,811,465
Investment in associates	17,785,168	18,263,474	18,901,821	15,782,784	16,720,551	17,133,033
Financial assets at amortised cost	2,115,350	2,126,040	2,120,652	2,115,350	2,126,040	2,120,652
Investment in subsidiaries	-	-	-	3,865,002	3,231,755	3,497,936
Property, plant and equipment	2,675,808	2,965,574	2,821,981	565,297	669,660	615,985
Investment properties	3,166,950	3,291,150	3,229,050	2,866,950	2,991,150	2,929,050
Right-of-use asset	116,190	26,261	116,190	-	-	-
Deferred tax asset	429,426	338,418	401,105	-	-	-
Total assets	50,949,376	54,641,267	54,506,655	43,001,575	46,543,111	46,356,179
EQUITY AND LIABILITIES						
Equity attributable to the owners of the parent						
Share capital	12,187,500	12,187,500	12,187,500	12,187,500	12,187,500	12,187,500
Legal reserve	4,921,214	4,921,214	4,921,214	4,062,500	4,062,500	4,062,500
Retained earnings	3,286,853	1,907,677	2,442,115	4,878,978	3,297,545	4,029,102
Equity attributable to the owners of the parent	20,395,567	19,016,391	19,550,829	21,128,978	19,547,545	20,279,102
Non-controlling interest	3,510,207	2,954,547	3,161,543	-	-	-
Total equity	23,905,774	21,970,938	22,712,372	21,128,978	19,547,545	20,279,102
LIABILITIES						
Bank overdrafts	1,782,977	2,556,308	2,307,610	1,708,891	1,805,330	2,180,858
Trade and other payables	1,892,248	1,875,516	2,424,085	587,721	631,566	626,023
Lease liability	139,392	26,835	139,392	-	-	-
Term loans	5,775,985	9,558,670	8,270,196	5,775,985	9,558,670	8,270,196
Loans from Governments	15,776,692	16,562,825	16,976,692	12,123,692	13,006,500	13,323,692
Deferred Government grant	1,676,308	2,090,175	1,676,308	1,676,308	1,993,500	1,676,308
Total liabilities	27,043,602	32,670,329	31,794,283	21,872,597	26,995,566	26,077,077
Total equity and liabilities	50,949,376	54,641,267	54,506,655	43,001,575	46,543,111	46,356,179
Net assets per share	0.167	0.156	0.160	0.173	0.160	0.166

CONDENSED INTERIM UNAUDITED CONSOLIDATED AND SEPARATE STATEMENT OF PROFIT OR LOSS FOR THE SIX-MONTH PERIOD ENDED 30 JUNE 2021

	Jan - Jun 2021 Group RO	(Restated) Jan - Jun 2020 Group	Apr - Jun 2021 Group RO	(Restated) Apr - Jun 2020 Group	Jan - Jun 2021 Parent RO	(Restated) Jan - Jun 2020 Parent RO	Apr - Jun 2021 Parent RO	(Restated) Apr - Jun 2020 Parent RO
Interest income	-	15,281	-	(720)	-	15,281	-	4,061
Rental income	19,539	44,499	9,769	14,450	19,539	44,499	9,769	14,450
Brokerage commission income	54,013	102,649	19,931	38,880	-	-	-	-
Realised gain/(loss) on sale of financial assets	277,820	(386,604)	511,150	6,877	274,528	-	511,428	-
Dividends income	728,043	1,102,832	306,376	207,113	643,892	959,887	239,295	160,245
Unrealised gain/(loss) on financial assets at fair value through profit or loss – net	624,159	(1,510,507)	888,824	214,192	135,818	(1,409,018)	553,218	(8,323)
Gross profit on sale of food products	158,249	59,668	91,858	22,642	-	-	-	-
Share of profit/(loss) from associates & subsidiaries – net	361,487	(853,692)	(28,527)	203,988	494,958	(896,906)	100,003	288,633
Management fees	66,990	94,413	31,620	40,236	-	-	-	-
Other income	19,499	30,897	11,453	32,308	18,029	32,409	11,958	30,000
Total income	2,309,799	(1,300,564)	1,842,454	779,966	1,586,764	(1,253,848)	1,425,671	489,066
Expenses								
Staff costs	(445,943)	(504,679)	(202,545)	(233,000)	(193,811)	(222,553)	(82,381)	(103,287)
Administrative expenses	(325,035)	(396,521)	(159,506)	(203,281)	(201,069)	(253,420)	(106,737)	(130,871)
Amortisation of placement charges	(5,301)	(5,331)	(2,665)	(2,665)	(5,301)	(5,331)	(2,665)	(2,665)
Total expenses	(776,279)	(906,531)	(364,716)	(438,946)	(400,181)	(481,304)	(191,783)	(236,823)
Net operating profit/(loss)	1,533,520	(2,207,095)	1,477,738	341,020	1,186,583	(1,735,152)	1,233,888	252,243
Finance costs	(368,439)	(402,621)	(223,693)	(194,663)	(336,707)	(331,762)	(210,634)	(159,993)
Profit/(loss) for the period before tax	1,165,081	(2,609,716)	1,254,045	146,357	849,876	(2,066,914)	1,023,254	92,250
Income tax	28,321	37,896	10,869	11,013	-	-	-	-
Profit/(loss) for the period after tax	1,193,402	(2,571,820)	1,264,914	157,370	849,876	(2,066,914)	1,023,254	92,250
Attributable to:								
Owners of the parent company	844,738	(2,181,064)	1,034,034	30,262	849,876	(2,066,914)	1,023,254	92,250
Non-controlling interest	348,664	(390,756)	230,880	127,108	-	-	-	-
	1,193,402	(2,571,820)	1,264,914	157,370	849,876	(2,066,914)	1,023,254	92,250
Basic earnings per share	0.007	(0.018)	0.0085	0.0002	0.0070	(0.0170)	0.0084	0.0008

CONDENSED INTERIM UNAUDITED CONSOLIDATED AND SEPARATE STATEMENT OF OTHER COMPREHENSIVE INCOME FOR THE SIX-MONTH PERIOD ENDED 30 JUNE 2021

Profit/(loss) for the period after tax	1,193,402	(2,571,820)	1,264,914	157,370	849,876	(2,066,914)	1,023,254	92,250
Other comprehensive income	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Total comprehensive income/(loss) for the period	1,193,402	(2,571,820)	1,264,914	157,370	849,876	(2,066,914)	1,023,254	92,250
Total comprehensive income/(loss) attributable to:								
Owners of the Parent Company	844,738	(2,181,064)	1,034,034	30,262	849,876	(2,066,914)	1,023,254	92,250
Non-controlling interest	348,664	(390,756)	230,880	127,108	-	-	-	-
	1,193,402	(2,571,820)	1,264,914	157,370	849,876	(2,066,914)	1,023,254	92,250

Note: The complete Financial Statements of the Company in Arabic or English will be made available to any shareholder on request.

Over RO300,000 to be won in Ahlibank's draw

Committed to its promise of helping people achieve their dreams with more prize draws for more customer segments, Ahlibank will celebrate the winners of its third quarterly draws in the beginning of October.

Stirring excitement amongst its customers, the bank is all geared up to reward prizes totalling more than RO300,000, wherein one winner will walk away with the grand 'Salary for Life' prize of RO250,000 (RO1,000 monthly for 250 months). The event will be streamed live on the bank's official social media pages.

Muneer al Balushi – AGM-head of Retail Distribution, Ahlibank said, "The Wafra prize scheme has witnessed huge popularity since its launch and this has encouraged the bank to continue its efforts to create new products that encompass a wider customer base. The draws help the winning customers in ensuring financial stability and secure their future and that of their families. Ahlibank will continue to look for new opportunities that add value to customers and stakeholders through prize schemes, innovative banking products and superior customer service."

"We always encourage a savings culture among our customers, and this has been reflected in the increased winning opportunities and prizes offered under Wafra 2021 scheme. The prize programme is part of our long-term strategy that aims to promote financial inclusion among citizens, and an opportunity to further contribute to the sultanate's economic and social development objectives," he added.

In addition to the 'Salary for Life' prize draw, the bank will also announce the winner of the quarterly prize for Al Nukhba and exclusive accounts worth



RO25,000, and the winner of the quarterly draw of Imtiyaz accounts, where the bank will present a prize of RO5,000.

Encouraging the habit of saving, the bank will also conduct special quarterly draws for those who maintain an average quarterly balance of at least RO5,000 in their accounts. Five lucky winners will be rewarded with cash prizes of RO25,000 (RO5,000 per winner).

In addition, the bank will announce two winners in the monthly salary transfer draws where each winner will receive a prize of RO1,000. Ensuring that everyone stands a chance to win, it will reward five young winners a total prize of RO1,500 in the

monthly draws that will be conducted under its 'MyChoice' category while five other winners in the children's category will win a total prize of RO1,000.

Apart from these, a weekly draw is held for all branches, rewarding 20 winners with prizes worth RO500 each. Along with that, the bank provides RO500 to the winner of the weekly prize from Al Nukhba and exclusive accounts, and a prize of RO500 to the winner of the weekly prize from Imtiyaz segment.

Most recently, Ahlibank announced the winners of its second quarterly draws under the Wafra prize scheme with cash prizes totalling more than RO300,000. Mohammed Salim from Avenues Mall branch won the grand 'Salary for Life' prize of RO250,000. The event was held at Ahlibank's new branch in Rustaq, in the presence of a limited number of the bank's officials, and was streamed live on the bank's official social media pages. The bank also showcased increased engagement on its Instagram account, by rewarding 10 winners from the live audience of the draws with a total of RO1,000, marking the festive occasion of Eid al Adha.

'Wafra' - which means 'abundance' in Arabic - Prize Scheme 2021, aims to award total prizes worth over RO2mn to more than 1,600 customers across Ahlibank's branches in the sultanate. These are given away across weekly and monthly prizes for the bank's branches, salary transfer prizes, children prizes and youth prizes under 'MyChoice', upper mass prizes under 'Imtiyaz', special prizes for premium and private customers under 'Al Nukhba' and 'Exclusive', and special event draws such as the 51st National Day and the opening of new branches. This reflects Ahlibank's vision of enhancing people's lives.



Ooredoo rolls out Springboard project to women incubators

In its ongoing efforts to empower women across the sultanate, and in collaboration with the Omani Women's Association, under the Ministry of Social Development, Ooredoo has dedicated its upcoming Springboard programme to graduates from its women's incubators.

Part of its award-winning Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) programme, the women will be taken through a series of online sessions aimed at boosting their personal development and leadership capabilities. Delivered by certified trainer and Ooredoo's head of CSR Ayesha al Shoihi, the first session begins in Samail, with 16 more planned throughout Manah, Mussanah, and other locations, by the end of the year.

"Ooredoo continues to find new ways to empower Omani women, helping them to reach their personal and professional goals, while promoting their role in advancing sustainable development, especially during the pandemic," said Raed Mohammed Dawood, director of Branding, Communications and Corporate Affairs at Ooredoo.

"During the incubators they were taught how to turn their talents into viable businesses, and the Springboard programme will further enrich them with tools like confidence building, goal setting, stress management, networking, self-motivation and

more. We are looking forward to following their exciting journey with us."

As part of its CSR strategy, Ooredoo Goodwill, the company runs a number of award-winning community-led initiatives. The sultanate's first ever women's incubator programme, as well as Ooredoo's Springboard and Spring Forward programmes, which aim to train men and women in digital entrepreneurship and leadership, are two of its main pillars.

By placing itself at the heart of the community, the company aims to support the advancement of the Omani people, while fostering sustainable economic and social growth.

The Chedi Muscat named among safest hotels by Forbes Travel Guide

The Chedi Muscat announced that it has become Sharecare Health Security Verified with Forbes Travel Guide. This comprehensive facility verification helps ensure that guests and travel planners can book with confidence at properties that have appropriate health safety procedures in place.

This verification comes with an easily identifiable "seal of approval" – the Sharecare Verified with Forbes Travel Guide badge – based on a hotel's compliance with expert-validated best practices that minimise the risk and impact of COVID-19 and potential future public health events. The Chedi Muscat is the first property in Oman to receive this accreditation.

The Chedi Muscat is among the first hotels worldwide to be Sharecare- Verified with Forbes Travel Guide, which means they follow a list of more than 360 global health security standards, including health and hygiene protocols, cleaning products and procedures, masks and PPE, ventilation, and communication with guests and employees.

Health security verification



gives guests and employees peace of mind that the hotel is committed to expert-validated best practices for safety and comfort.

"Verification means a lot to our company," said Thomas Guss, general manager, The Chedi Muscat.

"By earning the Verified badge, we now have a credible way to broadcast that we are following comprehensive, consistent procedures to heighten

health security, certified by a third party," he said. "It reassures our guests and colleagues that their health and safety is paramount and that they can enjoy their stay and experience without any concern."

"The pandemic has made it clear that hotels and resorts must, first and foremost, assure guests of their safety," said Filip Boyen, CEO of Forbes Travel Guide. "By becoming Verified, The Chedi Muscat has demon-

strated its commitment to creating a culture of accountability and following global best practices to heighten health security, verified by a third party."

All employees at The Chedi Muscat are currently in the process of being vaccinated. Special leave has also been granted to all pregnant employees until their delivery to ensure the safety of them and their baby.

The hotel has implemented full-scale enhancements to its already robust procedures to protect all colleagues and guests.

A COVID-19 Executive Committee has been created to address issues requiring any action. Additionally, the hotel's documented prevention plan has been updated to protect employees and guests, ensuring a safe and enjoyable experience.

The Chedi Muscat offers understated elegance and a perfect blend of Omani architecture and Asian Zen style. Perched between majestic Al Hajar Mountains and serene waters of the Gulf of Oman, the hotel continues to offer guests truly idyllic experiences.

OTC students assist in vaccination drive

Students from the Event Management course at the Oman Tourism College (OTC) are part of the organisational team that is participating in the National Vaccination Campaign against Coronavirus, recently launched by the Ministry of Health.

The campaign is taking place at the Oman Convention and Exhibition Centre and the students' participation is part of efforts towards contribution towards national efforts to combat the pandemic in the sultanate. It is also part of the practical internship requirement for Event Management Diploma students towards the completion of their bachelor's degree. The training, which began in June, has seen the participation of 15 students and will continue throughout the summer till September.

Mua'taz al Raisi, a student at OTC said, "I am in charge of organising and supervising my colleagues. Our presence here is to help citizens and provide guidance on what needs to be done to complete the vaccination process. Moreover, we strive to ensure that everyone follows the relevant precautionary measures and instructions for immuniza-



tion. It was truly an amazing experience and I would like to take this opportunity to thank all the volunteers for their efforts and dedication towards serving the country and all its citizens."

Maryam al Zaabi, a participant in the campaign, stated, "Through my participation in the National Vaccination Campaign, I was able to contribute by showcasing my support for the government's efforts in combating the pandemic, which has had adverse effects on everyone with no exception. I extend my warmest gratitude to all my fellow volunteers who were a part of the campaign."

Speaking about her experience, Al Hanouf al Nakhili said, "I am proud to be a member of the students' team that participated in this large-scale national campaign. I am delighted to have had the opportunity to witness this unique and enriching experience at the Oman Convention and Exhibition Centre, to help thousands of citizens obtain the vaccine in an organised and seamless manner. I thank the team for their tireless efforts and teamwork to ensure a smooth process."

Aisha al Hajri said, "I am honoured to be part of the organising team from OTC in the National

Vaccination Campaign against COVID-19. I would like to thank the Ministry of Health and Oman Convention and Exhibition Centre for conducting the campaign. Through their efforts in serving the country and providing the high-quality services, we were able to see a great turnout for the target groups throughout the campaign."

OTC continues to place great emphasis on various training programmes to enhance the skills and knowledge of its students and provide highly competent and trained graduates who are well-prepared to take on a competitive labour market.

Mercedes-Benz introduces video app to connect customers

Mercedes-Benz Middle East has announced its new StarView video sharing platform that will provide customers with greater connectivity to the technical teams carrying out servicing or maintenance work on their vehicles.

Designed to seamlessly connect clients with Mercedes-Benz's highly skilled technicians, the digital video service will give customers a behind the scenes look into the workshop.

Available to view on a smartphone, tablet or computer, StarView will allow teams of service advisors to easily and visually show what work is required while a client's vehicle is still on the ramp.

Watching online via a 360-video capacity, customers can engage with service advisors and start an important dialogue regarding the type and extent of work being carried out.

Salim Akdas, head of Market Management & Business Intelligence, at Mercedes-Benz Middle East, said, "StarView is another great innovation that puts the customer first and interacts with



them every step of the way. Clients can have a direct input into the type of work being carried out on their vehicle. StarView puts Mercedes-Benz customers in the driving seat even when their vehicle is off the road by providing them with unrivalled levels of access and up to the minute information delivered directly to the device of their choice in the comfort of their own home.

"The service experience for Mercedes-Benz customers in the region will be revolutionized through StarView's advanced

levels of digitization, transparency and a shared feeling of comfort, confidence and trust."

Developed by CitNOW, the leading producers of automotive video technologies, StarView has proven to be hugely popular with customers across Europe and further afield. CitNOW's use of the very latest smart communication technologies and advanced security and privacy protocols means Mercedes-Benz clients will have access to the safest and most intuitive video system on the market, at the touch of a button.

Afghan leader Ghani flies into besieged northern city as Taliban extend gains

Mazar-i-Sharif, Afghanistan - Afghan President Ashraf Ghani flew to the besieged northern city of Mazar-i-Sharif on Wednesday to rally his beleaguered forces, with Taliban fighters having now taken more than a quarter of the country's provincial capitals in less than a week.

His visit was immediately overshadowed by the mass surrender of hundreds of Afghan soldiers in nearby Kunduz, along with the overnight capture of another provincial capital - the ninth city to be overrun since Friday.

One army officer who asked not to be identified said they had endured withering mortar fire at Kunduz airport, and were left with no choice but to surrender.

"There was no way to fight back," he told AFP.

"My unit, with 20 soldiers, three humvees and four pick-up trucks just surrendered. We are now all waiting to get our pardon letter. There is a big queue."

In Mazar, Ghani held talks with long-time local strongman Atta Mohammad Noor and infamous warlord Abdul Rashid Dostum about the defence of the city, as Taliban fighters inched closer to its outskirts.

The loss of Mazar would be a catastrophic blow to the Kabul government and represent the complete collapse of its control over the north - long a bastion of



Afghanistan's President Ashraf Ghani (centre) arrives at Mazar-i-Sharif airport on Wednesday (AFP)

anti-Taliban militias.

Hours before Ghani arrived, pictures posted on official government social media accounts showed Dostum boarding a plane in Kabul en route to Mazar, along with a contingent of commandos.

After arriving in the city, Dostum issued a warning to the ap-

proaching Taliban.

"The Taliban never learn from the past," he told reporters, vowing to kill the extremists.

"The Taliban have come to the north several times but they were always trapped. It is not easy for them to get out."

Dostum stands accused of massacring hundreds, if not

thousands, of Taliban prisoners of war during the US-backed operations in 2001 that toppled the hardline Islamists' rule over the country.

Fighting in Afghanistan's long-running conflict has escalated dramatically since May, when the US-led military coalition began the final stage of a with-

drawal set to be completed before the end of the month.

Further to the east of Mazar, in Badakhshan province's capital Faizabad, a local lawmaker told AFP that security forces had retreated after days of heavy clashes.

"The Taliban have captured the city now," said Zabihullah

Attiq, confirming the latest city to fall.

Kunduz remains the Taliban's largest prize to date, with the mass surrender at the airport making a potential counterattack to retake the provincial capital highly unlikely for the time being.

An unknown number of government forces were still holding out at an army barracks outside the city.

The insurgents appeared to be consolidating their hold over captured cities in the north, with rifle-toting militants patrolling the streets of Kunduz on foot and in armoured humvees as smoke rose from smouldering shops destroyed during the fight for the city.

No regrets

Government forces were also battling the hardliners in Kandahar and Helmand, the southern Pashto-speaking provinces from where the Taliban draw their strength.

In Kandahar, fierce clashes erupted between Taliban insurgents and security forces, with heavy fighting reported near the city's prison, which the militants have been trying to reach for weeks.

The Taliban frequently target prisons to release incarcerated fighters and replenish their ranks. But even as the Taliban routed

government forces, US President Joe Biden gave no hint of delaying his deadline to withdraw all American troops by August 31, instead urging Afghan leaders to 'fight for themselves' on Tuesday.

And as fighting raged, US diplomats were desperately trying to breathe life back into all-but-dead talks between the Afghan government and Taliban in Doha, where Washington's special envoy Zalmay Khalilzad was pushing the hardliners to accept a ceasefire.

The Taliban have appeared largely indifferent to peace overtures, and seem intent on a military victory to crown a return to power after their ouster 20 years ago in the wake of the September 11 attacks.

After conquering most of the north, the Taliban have now set their sights on Mazar - long a linchpin for the government's control of the area - after capturing Sheberghan to its west, and Kunduz and Taloan to its east.

Mazar saw some of the bloodiest fighting during the Taliban's scorched-earth rampage through the country in the 1990s, with rights groups accusing the extremists of massacring up to 2,000 civilians - mostly Shiite Hazaras - after capturing the city in 1998.

AFP

Israeli Foreign Minister in Morocco on first visit since normalisation

Jerusalem - Israel's top diplomat landed in Morocco on Wednesday for the first visit by a senior official from the Jewish state since the two sides agreed to normalise ties last year.

Foreign Minister Yair Lapid is expected to meet on Wednesday with his Moroccan counterpart, Nasser Bourita, and open a diplomatic representation on Thursday in the capital Rabat.

"We have landed in Morocco. Proud to represent Israel during this historic visit," Lapid wrote on Twitter as his flight operated by Israeli national airline El Al arrived. Israel and Morocco normalised ties last year after then US president Donald Trump recognised Morocco's contested sovereignty in Western Sahara.

Morocco was the fourth Arab state to establish ties with Israel last year after the United Arab



Israeli Prime Minister Naftali Bennett (right) with Foreign Minister Yair Lapid, at the weekly Cabinet meeting, in Jerusalem on Sunday (AFP)

Emirates, Bahrain and Sudan.

The move infuriated the Palestinians as it shattered the long-standing Arab consensus that there should be no normalisation until Israel agrees to a comprehensive and lasting peace.

The Israeli delegation is ex-

pected to visit the royal mausoleum where kings Hassan II and Mohammed V are buried, before the bilateral meeting between Lapid and Bourita.

Lapid is also expected to visit the Beth-El synagogue in Casablanca on his two-day visit,

the Israeli Foreign Ministry said.

The North African country hosts the Arab world's largest Jewish community of some 3,000 people.

They are the remnant of a once much larger community. Some 700,000 Jews of Moroccan descent now live in Israel.

Morocco and Israel maintained liaison offices in the 1990s, before closing them during the second Palestinian intifada, or uprising, that raged from 2000 to 2005.

Lapid's visit to Rabat follows a June trip to the United Arab Emirates, where he inaugurated the new Israeli Embassy in Abu Dhabi. It comes just days before Israel is due to require all travellers returning from Morocco to quarantine following a review of the risks of COVID-19 infection.

AFP

Murder of Karbala official fuels anger over impunity in Iraq

Karbala, Iraq - The gunning down in the street of a municipal official in the Iraqi shrine city of Karbala sparked anger on Wednesday over the government's failure to halt a wave of assassinations.

Abir Salim, the director of municipal services in the city which houses the mausoleums of two of Shiite Islam's most revered figures, was shot dead as he was carrying out his duties on Tuesday, Prime Minister Mustafa al Kadhemi's office said.

He was on foot supervising a survey of unauthorised construction in Karbala when his killer pulled out a gun and shot him at close range.

Security camera footage posted on social media showed an attacker, in a traditional white robe, open fire in the street and Salim fall to the ground.



Iraqi Prime Minister Kadhemi (left) during a tour in the holy Shiite city of Karbala, south of the capital Baghdad, on Wednesday (AFP)

The suspected killer was arrested shortly afterwards.

"Murderers and criminals will not escape punishment," the Prime Minister promised as he visited Karbala on Wednesday to offer his condolences to Salim's family. His office released photographs of him berating the suspected killer, who had been blindfolded by his police captors, during a visit to the crime scene.

The images did little to assuage public anger at the apparent impunity for politically linked crimes that has seen more than 70 activists targeted for assassination since October 2019.

"The weakness of the security forces goes hand in hand with the intimidation of society by the tribes, religion and the political parties," one Twitter user said.

AFP

Libyans launch new round of UN-led political talks

Tripoli, Libya - Delegates from war-torn Libya launched a new round of UN-led talks via video conference on Wednesday aiming to reach a compromise ahead of planned elections.

The meeting comes six weeks after the failure of negotiations held in Switzerland between the 75 participants from all sides gathered for the Libyan Political Dialogue Forum.

The United Nations Support Mission in Libya was forced to acknowledge the failure of that session after four days, due to a lack of consensus among the delegates.

On Wednesday, the forum will again try to agree on a constitutional framework to govern the crucial parliamentary and presidential elections in December.

Oil-rich Libya was plunged into chaos after dictator Moammar Gadhafi was toppled and

killed in a 2011 NATO-backed uprising.

Two rival administrations later emerged, backed by a complex patchwork of militias, mercenaries and foreign powers.

While Turkey supported a UN-recognised administration in Tripoli, eastern-based strongman Khalifa Haftar enjoyed backing from the United Arab Emirates, Egypt and Russia.

Under a UN-backed ceasefire agreed last October, an interim administration was established in March to prepare for presidential and parliamentary polls on December 24.

The agreement was widely hailed as 'historic' at the time, but since then divisions have resurfaced, raising doubts about the likelihood that the elections can go ahead as planned.

AFP

Greece counts cost as fires 'slowly coming under control'

Edipsos, Greece - Hundreds of firefighters were battling to control two massive wildfires in Greece on Wednesday, one raging for nine straight days, that have left hundreds homeless and caused incalculable damage.

With the assistance of a huge multinational force, Greek fire crews were fighting to beat back blazes on the island of Evia and in the Peloponnese peninsula in rugged terrain.

Hundreds have been left homeless and face a harsh winter, not only at the mercy of floods, but also because of their lost agricultural livelihood and income from tourism.

"I think we can say that the fire fronts are slowly coming under control," Yiannis Kontzias, mayor of the Evia town of Istiaia that has been under threat for days, told state TV ERT.

"Yesterday, we saw the light of the sun for the first time in days," he said, referring to giant



A house stands completely charred following a wildfire engulfing the village of Kastri on Evia (Euboea) Island, on Tuesday (AFP)

smoke clouds that have choked residents and obstructed flights by water-bombing aircraft.

'We face extinction'

But even as the immediate danger receded, Kontzias said local businesses 'face extinction' in the coming months in a tourism season already decimated by the COVID-19 pandemic.

"We have lost the month of August, which would have sustained people here over the coming year."

"(Local) tourism has been demolished, most (visitors) have left," he said.

"The damage is huge, and the environmental disaster will have economic repercussions for decades," he said.

Aidipsos, one of Greece's main spa towns, would normally have tens of thousands mainly Greek and Balkan visitors in August and revenue of around €15mn, local operators say.

But local hoteliers president Theodoros Roumeliotis says August reservations have collapsed by 90 per cent.

"It's a colossal loss," Roumeliotis told AFP.

"Right now, hotels are obliged to refund one million euros in reservations cancelled," he said, adding that some operators were unlikely to survive the blow.

The fire situation was more precarious on Wednesday in the mountainous Peloponnese region of Gortynia, home to dense forests and deep ravines.

Christos Lambropoulos, deputy governor for the broader Arcadia region, said efforts were concentrated on keeping the fire from reaching the thickly forested Mount Mainalo.

"Villages do not seem at risk at the moment... but conditions change by the hour," he told ERT.

Three people have died in the latest fire wave, which came in the midst of Greece's most severe heatwave in decades.

Several firefighters have been hurt, some critically.

Many here admit that help from abroad has been critical in averting an even greater disaster.

The EU states and other countries have so far contributed 21 aircraft, 250 vehicles and more than 1,200 firefighters, some of whom were due to arrive by Friday.

Forces in Gortynia were beefed up Wednesday to nearly 600 firefighters including crews from the Czech Republic, Britain, France and Germany.

Another 60 firemen were tackling a smaller fire in Laconia, in the southeastern Peloponnese, the fire department said.

AFP

COVID-19 PANDEMIC

France overseas COVID crisis proves need for jabs: Macron

Paris, France - President Emmanuel Macron on Wednesday said a health crisis caused by escalating COVID-19 infections in French overseas territories in the Caribbean, where vaccination rates remain low, was 'cruel proof' of the need for jabs against the virus.

France's overseas territories across the globe, but especially the Antilles islands of Martinique and Guadeloupe in the Caribbean, are seeing sky-rocketing virus cases and hospitalisations amid vaccination rates that are way lower than on the mainland.

"On these territories the vaccination is still at a very low rate, a third that of mainland France. Just 20 per cent of people over the age of 12 are double vaccinated compared with 66 per cent in mainland France," Macron told a meeting of senior health officials.

"It is an urgent scenario. If we needed proof that the vaccination is the best response to the (faster-spreading) Delta variant, unfortunately the Antilles have provided, if I can put



French President Emmanuel Macron (left) chairs a Health Defence Council meeting at the Fort de Bregancon summer residence with Health Minister Olivier Veran (right), in Bormes-les-Mimosas on Wednesday (AFP)

it this way, a cruel proof," he told the meeting from his summer residence in the south of France.

He added, "There is an explosion of serious illness (in the Antilles). The situation is dramatic and requires solidarity from the entire nation."

French Overseas Territories Minister Sebastien Lecornu told AFP on Tuesday before heading to the Antilles that Guadeloupe was seeing over 1,700 cases for 100,000 inhabitants and Martinique 1,165.

Macron has faced four consecutive weekends of street

protests over the implementation of a health pass that means people need to be double vaccinated - or recently tested or recovered - to visit a cafe or travel on an inter-city train.

But with hospitalisations again rising in France as it battles a fourth wave, Macron said

On these territories the vaccination is still at a very low rate, a third that of mainland France. Just 20 per cent of people over the age of 12 are double vaccinated compared with 66% in mainland France

EMMANUEL MACRON

that the health pass, which is aimed at encouraging people to get vaccinated, was the only way forward.

"No sector can act as if as nothing is happening... We have no other choice, it was that or closing down the country with new curfews and lockdowns," he said.

"The health crisis is not finished. We will live with this virus for several more months," AFP

Melbourne city extends lockdown as surge continue

Melbourne, Australia - Five million people in Australia's second-largest city will remain under stay-at-home orders for at least another week after authorities extended a lockdown on Wednesday after failing to curb Melbourne's latest COVID outbreak.

The city entered its sixth pandemic lockdown last Thursday after a fresh Delta variant cluster emerged at a Melbourne school and quickly spread.

Daniel Andrews, the premier of the state of Victoria, said lockdown rules will be extended until at least August 19, after 20 new cases were detected overnight including several 'mystery' cases. "There are too many cases, the origins of which are not clear to us... for us to safely come out of lockdown now," he said.

In Sydney, more than five million people are enduring their seventh week under stay-at-home orders, currently scheduled to remain until the end of August. The state of New South Wales recorded 344 new cases Wednesday, taking the total for an outbreak that began in Sydney in mid-June to more than 6,100 cases.



Police detain a man at an anti-lockdown rally in Melbourne on Wednesday (AFP)

Hundreds of thousands of people outside Sydney - including in Newcastle, Byron Bay and most recently, Dubbo - are in lockdown after cases emerged in recent days.

Authorities are pinning their hopes on a fresh vaccination drive, suggesting some restrictions could be eased if enough people get vaccinated in the coming weeks. "If we keep the vaccination rate up, we will get to six million jabs by the end of August, which will give us an opportunity to think about what additional freedoms we can give people in September and October," state premier Gladys Berejiklian said.

AFP

China allows first mixed-vaccine trial as Delta spreads

Beijing, China - China's drug regulator has approved the country's first mixed-vaccine trial, a company involved in the study said, as the rapid spread of the Delta variant raises concern about the efficacy of domestically produced jabs.

The trial will test the efficacy of combining an 'inactivated' vaccine made by China's Sino-vac with a DNA-based one developed by US pharmaceutical company Inovio, a statement issued on Tuesday said.

The statement was put out by Advaccine Biopharmaceuticals Suzhou, Inovio's trial partner in China.

Preclinical work has found that 'two different vaccine applications... produce an even stronger and more balanced immune response', Advaccine chairman Wang Bin said in the statement.

There are several types of

COVID vaccines, including those using an inactivated or weakened virus to generate an immune response, and more cutting-edge RNA- or DNA-based jabs that use engineered versions of the coronavirus' genetic code to create a protein that safely prompts an immune response.

Five out of the seven vaccines approved in China are two-shot inactivated vaccines. Their published efficacy lags RNA jabs by Pfizer-BioNTech and Moderna, which have pre-Delta success rates above 90 per cent.

The World Health Organization has said there is still not enough data to say whether using two different vaccines together is safe or can boost immunity.

Inovio has not published any efficacy data from its global clinical trials.

AFP

Berlin throws a party to drum up vaccine tempo

Berlin, Germany - It's a typical Berlin scene: A long line of sharply dressed people waiting round the corner to get into a club.

The thud of music from inside the venue, strict entry controls and the chance of waking up with a headache the morning after are all familiar, too.

Only, on a rainy evening in the east Berlin neighbourhood of Alt-Treptow, the draw isn't just dance music but vaccines as well.

The German capital renowned for its clubbing scene is throwing three vaccination parties this week, giving patrons jabs to the sound of electronic music.

The site is Arena club - which has been transformed into one of Berlin's five main vaccination centres over the last year, after it, like other similar venues, was forced shut to curb coronavirus transmission.

After delivering well over a million jabs a day at its peak, Germany is now seeing the takeup for inoculation against

the coronavirus slow dramatically, according to figures from the Robert Koch Institute for disease control and prevention.

In a bid to incentivise more to take the jab, Chancellor Angela Merkel on Tuesday agreed with regional leaders to end free COVID tests from October 11.

In the Arena club, the scene is like a high-school disco with very limited dancing.

Patients who have just had their vaccines sit spaced out on chairs under strobing lights, while one of the DJs - some of them well known figures of Berlin's underground and some who have volunteered in the vaccination centre itself - works away on a set of turntables.

Some are in full party gear, others in their regular clothes.

The idea to combine dance music and vaccines was hatched by Markus Nisch, the Arena vaccination centre manager for the German Red Cross.

"We had relatively low expectations at the start," he says.

"But the queue goes all the way down there," he adds,



Police stop anti-vaxxers outside the Arena Treptow vaccination centre, during a long night of vaccinations with music, in Berlin on Monday (AFP)

pointing to dozens of social-distancing people waiting in line.

In all, about 420 people were vaccinated against the coronavirus at the Arena centre on Monday, the Berlin ministry for health said.

The word was spread on social media. "I found it on Instagram, people were posting it widely," says Olga Kapuskina (27), who recently moved to the city. "It's a Berlin experience to get vaccinated at a party," she adds.

themselves vaccinated."

Compulsory vaccination is unlikely to be introduced. Instead, officials are resorting to more ingenious means to get doses distributed. Berlin has been offering vaccines at Ikea, as well as organising the three nights' festivities at Arena.

In the town of Aue-Bad Schelma, in Saxony - where just 52.9 per cent of people have had at least one dose of the vaccine, the lowest rate amongst Germany's states, locals were offered a free bratwurst sausage with every dose.

Campaigns have been run at football stadia, too, giving fans an easy opportunity to get the vaccine.

The effort at the vaccine party appears to be attracting first-timers.

"This is my first dose of the vaccine," says Oriane Dosda (23), who works in customer service.

"I was a bit nervous but I said to myself eventually I'll just have to get it done," Dosda said.

AFP

After 60 years of Indian rule, Goa's disappearing Portuguese legacy

Panaji, India - As Lorraine Alberto begins her Portuguese class at Goa University, students from the former colony are in short supply.

Across Goa, a tiny coastal state once administered by Lisbon, there is little appetite for the territory's 450 years of European heritage after a few short generations of Indian rule.

Ramshackle colonial homes and Bollywood's increasing cultural dominance portend the disappearance of local history in a place where speaking Portuguese was once a passport to status and power.

"My children don't speak it at all," Alberto said. "They just don't see the point of learning it."

Those alive in 1961, when Indian troops marched into Goa and incorporated it into the rest of the country, recall an overnight transformation.

India's exit from the British

empire in 1947 spurred many Goans to demand an end to Portuguese rule, but few expected so much to change so quickly.

"It was a very strange feeling... The changes came so fast," said Honorato Velho, a retired school principal. The 78 year old once lived next to the grandfather of Antonio Costa, Portugal's current prime minister, and he fondly remembers a childhood peppered with European and local influences. But his enthusiasm has not been inherited by the next generation.

"My wife and I still speak Portuguese out of habit, but never with our children," Velho said.

Across the state, homes influenced by old Portuguese design trends are falling into disrepair or being pulled down to make way for apartment blocks.

The gradual disappearance of covered terraces and mother-of-pearl shell windows - built to dif-



This file photo shows Lorraine Alberto, professor of Portuguese language at Goa University, speaking to her students during an online class at Panaji in Goa on March 12 this year (AFP)

fuse harsh sunlight - is not just a loss to architecture, said author Heta Pandit.

"These houses are evidence of Goan history, they are capsules

of our culture," she said.

Only a handful of traditional homes have been earmarked for protection from development or destruction, Pandit added.

'I just wasn't interested'

Some Goans have nonetheless found themselves drawn into a relationship with their heritage,

even against their own early inclinations.

At a recent outdoor concert in a coastal village, dozens of people gathered to listen to Goan singer Sonia Shirsat, an accomplished performer of traditional Portuguese fado music.

The 40-year-old specialises in the melancholy, guitar-driven genre, which was born at the turn of the 19th century and was in recent years recognised by UNESCO for its 'intangible cultural heritage'.

Shirsat paused between songs to patiently explain the meaning behind each track, knowing many in the enraptured audience spoke little if any Portuguese.

It's a role she is well-suited to play, tracing her own journey from a teenager who refused to learn Portuguese to a fado evangelist who is now training others to follow in her footsteps.

"My mother tried to teach me the language, but I just wasn't interested," she told AFP.

That changed when Shirsat met a Portuguese guitarist who told her that her rich, velvety voice was ideal for the genre.

She decided to move to Lisbon for training, becoming the first Indian to stage a solo fado concert there in 2008.

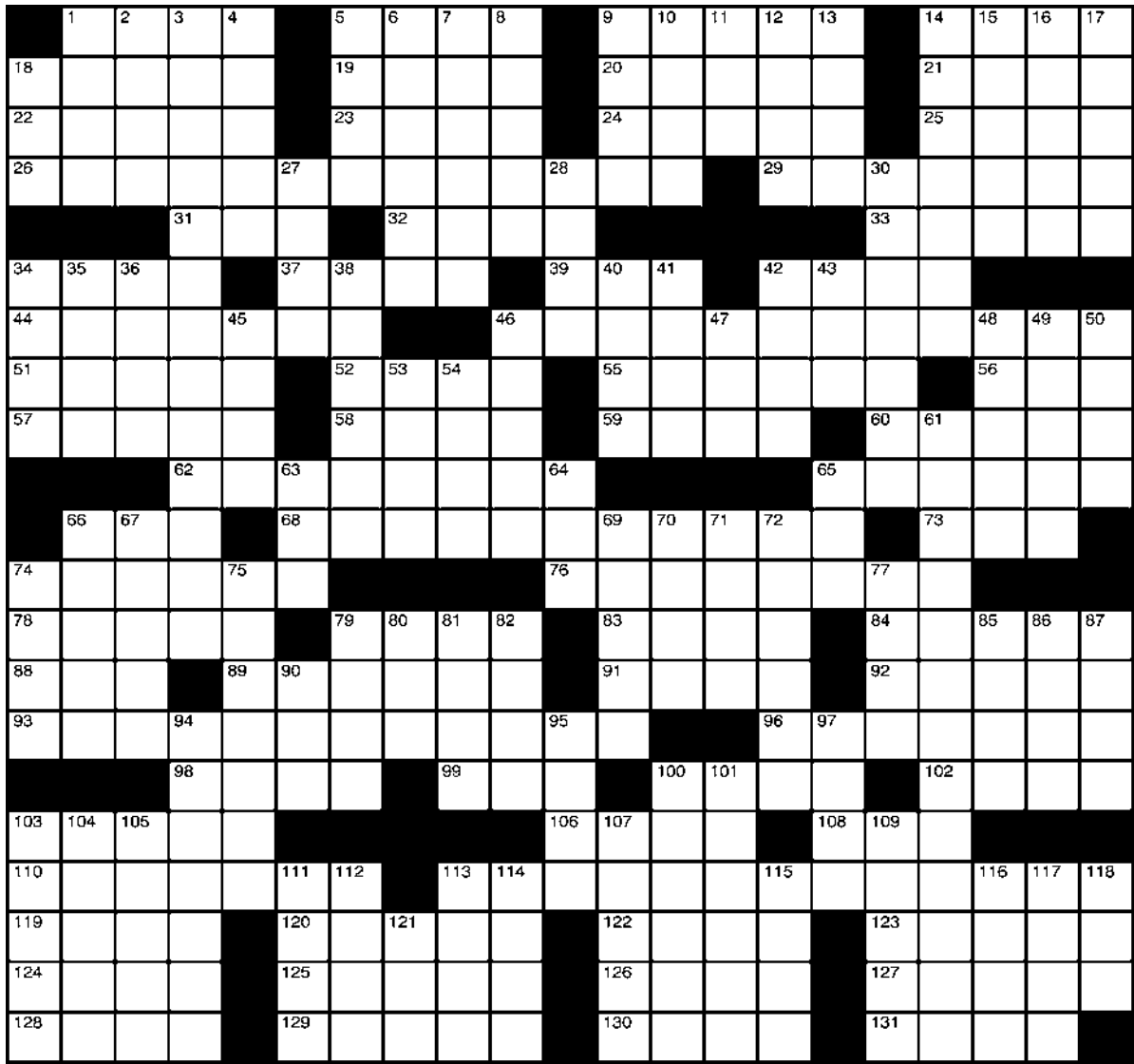
Shirsat has since performed all over the world, sometimes incorporating a cross-cultural element with the use of Indian instruments like the sitar.

All fado songs are infused with a sense of yearning for the past, but in Goa, they also serve as a bridge between two eras.

"Fado doesn't just talk about what is lost, it also talks about what is to come," she said. "It has lived in Goa for over 100 years. If we don't preserve it, it is as if we are killing a part of ourselves."

AFP

DAILY CROSSWORD



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ACROSS

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- 120 Pig language?
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- 28 Bono's first babe
- 30 English class concern
- 34 Enthusiastic
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- 49 Parisian pupil
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- 63 Apt. divisions
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- 65 Collection
- 66 "____ We Dance?"
- 67 Barbecue site
- 69 Rays
- 70 Appraise
- 71 Eight: prefix
- 72 Injuries
- 74 Makes a ____: try
- 75 Disintegrating
- 77 Manche

- department capital
- 79 "Nurse Jackie" star
- 80 Fireworks exclamations
- 81 Squeals
- 82 Ending for game or trick
- 85 Austen novel
- 86 Achiever
- 87 Landers and Miller
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- 94 Sheer crisp fabric
- 95 Overwhelming defeat
- 97 Maestro Klemperer
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- 101 Knight ____
- 103 Inclined
- 104 1962 Wimbledon winner
- 105 Pointless or silly
- 107 Sun-free spot
- 109 Elizabethan neckpieces
- 111 Otherwise
- 112 St. Louis NFL team
- 113 Discharge
- 114 Picnic intruders
- 115 Quote
- 116 Amneris's rival
- 117 FBI agts.
- 118 Building addition
- 121 Make lace

YOUR DAILY HOROSCOPE

ARIES MARCH 21-APRIL 19

Group activities are a good choice for you today, because you'll be feeling very social, and your curiosity about other people's perspectives is at an all-time high. But you have to be selective about which people you hang out with. Be careful not to join an activity if one person in the group isn't willing to share. Put yourself in an environment where your creativity is welcomed.

LEO JULY 23-AUGUST 22

Today you'll need to use your willpower to avoid stepping into a complicated situation that could turn into a trap. This new venture might sound irresistible, but you must try your hardest to resist! Romantically speaking, you might be ready to push things a little further, but you should hold back on this. Share your thoughts and feelings with the object of your affections.

SAGITTARIUS NOVEMBER 22-DECEMBER 21

Good luck is on your side today, so get ready for some lovely surprises! If you are planning to travel today, there is a strong chance you could get upgraded -- do not underestimate the power of charm and a well-placed hint. All of this good fortune should continue only through tomorrow, so if you are offered a bit of a risky gamble, you should keep that in mind.

TAURUS APRIL 20-MAY 20

Circumstances beyond your control have thrown you into the middle of a power struggle today -- but that doesn't mean you have to acknowledge it or feed into it. Just keep doing your thing, minding your own business, and letting the warring parties fight it out without you. Don't play along, and don't rearrange your schedule for anyone or anything.

VIRGO AUGUST 23-SEPTEMBER 22

A lot of pressure is being put on you today, but the one who's pushing so hard is you! Lately, you've been way too hard on yourself, and you should stop and realise that you're doing your thing in your own way -- and that's good enough. Part of the stress you're going through right now may be due to the frenetic pace of your life, so address that issue.

CAPRICORN DECEMBER 22-JANUARY 19

It's time to acknowledge that you cannot change how people make decisions. If you want the people you love to be happy, all you can do is remind them that they are entitled to be happy. Ultimately, it is up to them to improve their situations. You can't do the hard work for them. Even though you love someone, you're seeing things through your own filter.

GEMINI MAY 21-JUNE 21

Being well educated and being intelligent are not necessarily the same thing, so do not assume that someone is smarter than you just because they can spout off about philosophy, science, religion or other intellectual pursuits. When you come face to face with someone who has a reputation for being knowledgeable, be confident that you can hold your own in a conversation!

LIBRA SEPTEMBER 23-OCTOBER 22

You'll be so tuned in to the bigger picture today that the little details might slip right by. So today you need to work a little bit harder to catch the minutiae of whatever you're doing. For example, if you're going to get behind the wheel today, pay close attention to signs and directions -- if you're too busy grooving to the radio, you might miss an important detour or exit.

AQUARIUS JANUARY 20-FEBRUARY 18

In a power struggle, you might be focused on winning, but are you really seeing what's at stake? Right now it's not about winning or losing -- it's about achieving the best possible outcome. And when you realise what the best outcome is, you may realise that it's time to stop pushing against your opponent and start working with them. Making a compromise will save you a lot of stress.

CANCER JUNE 22-JULY 22

If you need to get someone's attention, consider an extravagant gesture. Instead of just buying them a cup of coffee, treat them to a champagne brunch. Instead of lending them some of your tools, get them their own. It's not about buying someone's allegiance -- it's about doing whatever you can to get them to engage with you. The stars say that all you have to do is get their attention.

SCORPIO OCTOBER 23-NOVEMBER 21

If the folks around you are missing something that you think is obvious, speak up. Chances are, you will alert them to something that will improve the situation for everyone. Let their positive reactions boost your ego and give you the confidence to share your thoughts more often. You have a fresh way of thinking -- in certain situations you are downright innovative.

PISCES FEBRUARY 19-MARCH 20

A recent change in your diet is starting to create some changes in your physical body today, either in terms of your energy level (you're starting to have more) or in terms of your body (you're starting to have less). Keep up the good work, but don't expect such dramatic changes to continue -- plateaus are in your future, and you have to be prepared to persevere through them.



TEST YOUR KNOWLEDGE

- 1. Which radioactive pollutant has recently drawn to public, due to its occurrence in the building material?
a. Thorium
b. Radium
c. Plutonium
d. Radan
- 2. Which of the following has a least penetrating power?
a. All have same penetrating power
b. Beta Particles
c. Alpha particles
d. Gamma rays
- 3. The isotope of uranium capable of sustaining chain reaction is
a. U-235
b. U-245
c. U-239
d. U-238

Answers: 1.a 2.c 3.a

VOX CINEMAS

BLOCKBUSTERS ARE BACK WHERE THEY BELONG

Witness the magic of movies the way they were meant to be seen...on the big screen.

Free Guy

In Twentieth Century Fox's epic adventure-comedy *Free Guy*, a bank teller who discovers he is actually a background player in an open-world video game, decides to become the hero of his own story. He is determined to be the guy who saves his world his way before it is late.

Rogue Hostage

Single father and former Marine Kyle Snowden (Tyrese Gibson) must save his daughter and other hostages from a dangerous criminal who has trapped them inside a neighborhood store owned by Kyle's stepfather, Congressman Sam Nelson (John Malkovich).

AI Ens Wi Nems

A poor young man working in a government job is exposed to problems and punishment because of his father's profession, and at the same time he relates to the love of his girlfriend who tries to help him solve his problems

Turu The Wacky Hen

As the only hen that can't lay eggs, Turu becomes a laughing stock among the rest of the chickens. However, her life takes an unexpected turn when she joins the circus, becomes a star and faces off with the evil Armando Tramas.

Book your tickets at voxcinemas.com or the VOX app

KIDS COLOURING

WORD BUILDER

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

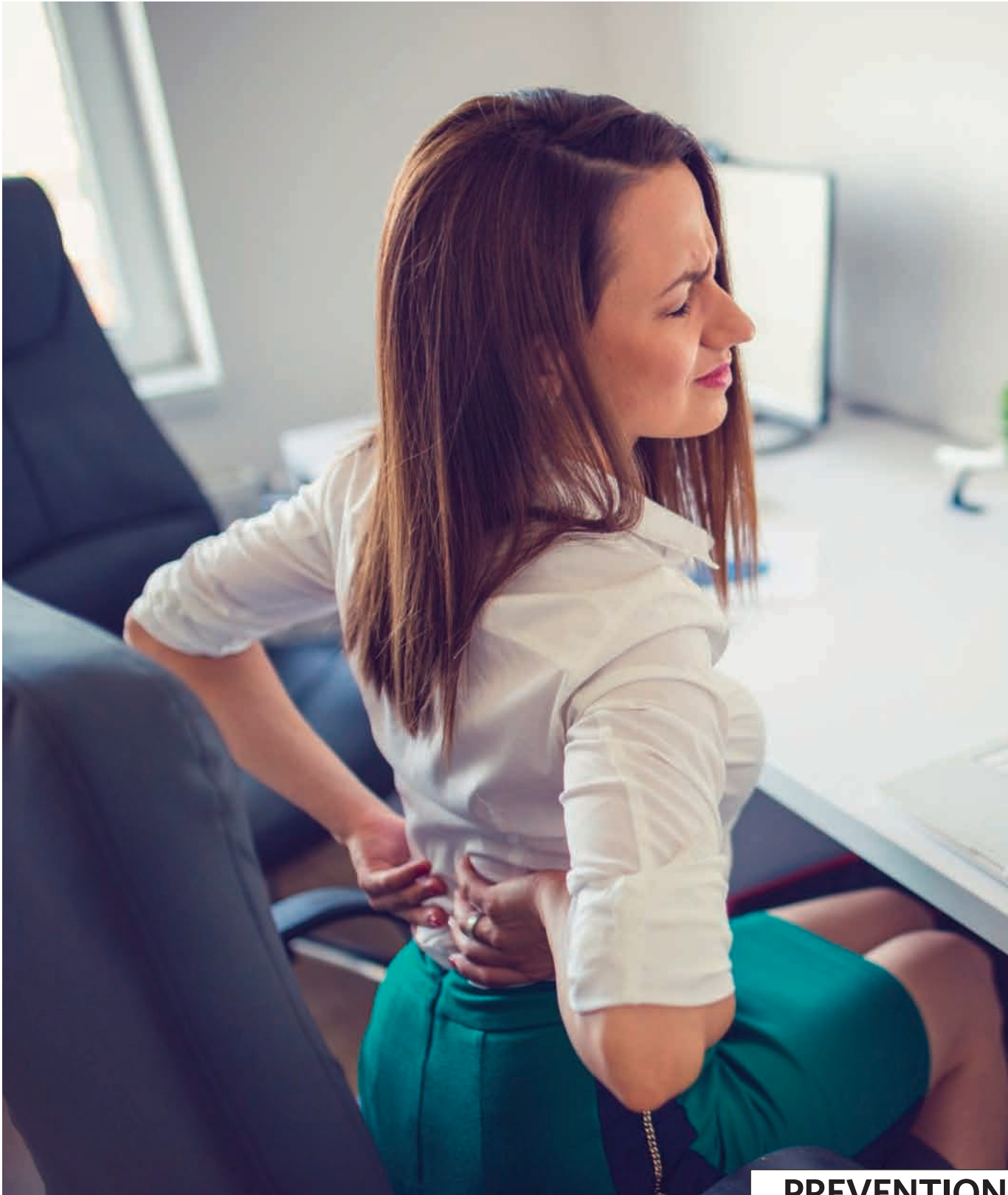
Rules: Words should be at least four letters long, proper nouns and duplicates don't count

DAILY CROSSWORD ANSWERS (AUGUST 11)

GRAS	CABAL	SPADE	TAISS
LENT	ALONE	HERES	ULNA
UNDO	READS	ORBIT	RIOT
BOYWHO	CRIED	WOOF	ANGRY
ELKS	ENTRY	ABNER	
WHIRR	BOB	FHA	
AIDE	ALBERT	CAMOO	CAAN
SLOB	GEESSE	ABOVE	KILO
HOLE	OATS	SAVES	TRES
	LEND	MATTER	SHERE
SUBWAY	SMALLER	GUESTS	
TRAIT	SPONGE	DARC	
AINT	LEONA	JOEY	LECH
BACH	OAKEN	MORAL	UCLA
SHOO	GRET	AGOB	BLE
CRAW			
UPS	EMS	SKUNK	
STATE	MAYAN	STOP	
HAMAN	TREMEMBER	MAAMAA	
EPIC	ANGLE	OLLIE	MARX
DINA	SOULS	WOMEN	AMIE
SNOW	PRESS	SCADS	SEAS

POST-COVID-19 BACK PAIN

SIT, STAND SMART



PREVENTION

Back pain is said to be one of the most common conditions treated by rehabilitation specialists. However, since the start of the COVID-19 pandemic, rehabilitation specialists around the world, say they have seen an increase in patients with back pain.

The solution for getting relief from back pain after recovering from COVID-19 can be varied - from over the counter non-steroidal anti-inflammatory drugs to surgical intervention - depending on the severity of your condition. However, maintaining a proper posture, simply learning to sit and stand smart, as well as lift heavy objects the right way, can help reduce your discomfort and lead to recovery.

Tayla Fleming, medical director of the Stroke Recovery Program & Aftercare Program at Hackensack Meridian JFK Johnson Rehabilitation Institute, New Jersey (US), confirms that there has been an increase in patients with back pain, those who have recovered from COVID-19. "We're seeing patients with old back pain that is now worse from sitting more, new back pain related to habits that have changed due to the pandemic, and new back pain related to COVID-19 itself," she disclosed.

Although physicians are still learning about the effects of COVID-19, back pain alone isn't usually a symptom of COVID-19. People who have COVID-19 may experience muscle pain and body aches due to the body's inflammatory response, which

can be felt in the upper and lower back, says Dr Sagar Parikh, an interventional pain medicine specialist and Director of the Center for Sports and Spine Medicine at JFK Johnson.

"Some people may even experience muscle soreness, aches, and pain after the COVID-19 vaccine, which is normal and means that their immune system is doing its work. However, pain from overexertion usually lasts a few days, but the pain from COVID-19 may last weeks," he said.

People who get COVID-19 may also spend a lot of time recovering in bed, which may lead to back pain due to de-conditioned muscles and altered spinal biomechanics. The conditions that cause back pain — including disc herniations, spinal arthritis and lumbar muscle strain, however, haven't changed due to the pandemic. What has changed are people's lifestyles and daily habits.

Working from home has also resulted in changed routines that may contribute to lower levels of activity. People who used to walk during breaks or stop at the gym for a workout on the way home from the office may no longer be participating in these activities, and the lack of movement may lead to weakened, tight muscles that contribute to back pain, doctors point out.

The fear of getting back to workouts or strenuous activity post-COVID-19 has also forced many active persons to take up a sedentary lifestyle to avoid risking themselves to complications. Many are also staying away from workouts to avoid pains and aches that might add to their worries and concerns during the pandemic.

BACK tips

Dr Fleming said she uses the acronym B-A-C-K to help her patients remember what they need to do to prevent and treat back pain:

- Bust-a-move:** Make movement a part of your day, whether you walk, bike, hike, stretch or dance.
- Alarm:** Set an alarm and make movement a routine - Doing some type of activity every half-hour, such as stretching or walking around, even while working.
- Calm:** Research shows that anxiety and lack of sleep can contribute to clenched

- muscles and pain in the body. Take steps to reduce stress through meditation or other calming activities.
- Keep:** Keep the environment ergonomically friendly by using a supportive chair with a lumbar pillow, avoiding hunching, elevating your computer screen and making other adjustments to reduce stress on the body.

Structural problems

A number of structural problems may also result in back pain.

- Ruptured disks:** Each vertebra in the spine is cushioned by disks. If the disk ruptures there will be more pressure on a nerve, resulting in back pain.
- Bulging disks:** In much the same way as ruptured disks, a bulging disk can result in more pressure on a nerve.
- Sciatica:** A sharp and shooting pain travels through the buttock and down the back of the leg, caused by a bulging or herniated disk pressing on a nerve.
- Arthritis:** Osteoarthritis can cause problems with the joints in the hips, lower back,

- and other places. In some cases, the space around the spinal cord narrows. This is known as spinal stenosis.
- Abnormal curvature of the spine:** If the spine curves in an unusual way, back pain can result. An example is scoliosis, in which the spine curves to the side.
- Osteoporosis:** Bones, including the vertebrae of the spine, become brittle and porous, making compression fractures more likely.
- Kidney problems: Kidney stones or kidney infection can also cause back pain.

You might avoid back pain or prevent its recurrence by improving your physical condition and learning and practising proper body mechanics
To keep your back healthy and strong:

Exercise Regular low-impact aerobic activities - those that don't strain or jolt your back - can increase strength and endurance in your back and allow your muscles to function better. Walking and swimming are good choices. Discuss with your doctor.	Build strength Abdominal and back muscle exercises, which strengthen your core, help condition these muscles so that they work together like a natural corset for your back. Be slow but regular in mobilising your back.	Maintain weight Being overweight strains back muscles. If you're overweight, trimming down can prevent back pain. Take up activity or sports that keep you engaged in burning calories at a better rate everyday. But, don't overdo it.	Quit smoking Smoking increases your risk of low back pain. The risk increases with the number of cigarettes smoked per day, so quitting should help reduce this risk. Speak with those who smoke to detect the trend.	Stand smart Don't slouch. Maintain a neutral pelvic position. If you must stand for long periods, place one foot on a low footstool to take some of the load off your lower back. Alternate feet. Good posture reduces stress on back muscles.	Sit smart Choose a seat with good lower back support, armrests and a swivel base. Placing a pillow or rolled towel in the small of your back can maintain its normal curve. Change your position frequently, at least every half-hour.	Lift smart Avoid heavy lifting, if possible. But if you must lift something heavy, let your legs do the work. Keep your back straight - no twisting - and bend only at the knees. Hold the load close to your body. Find a lifting partner. if the object is heavy.

Australian Olympic athletes face 'cruel' 28 days in quarantine

Sydney, Australia - A group of Australian Olympic athletes were on Wednesday facing 28 days in quarantine on return from Tokyo in a move slammed as 'cruel' and 'uncaring' as concerns mount over their mental wellbeing.

All overseas travellers, including the nearly 500-strong Australian team, are required to spend 14 days isolation in a hotel or special outback camp on arrival in the country, under strict coronavirus rules.

But some will have to endure double that after the South

Australian government ruled those who could not get direct flights to Adelaide from Tokyo must serve another two weeks of home quarantine when they arrive in the state.

There are 56 athletes returning to South Australia with 16 already undergoing quarantine in Sydney, which is currently in a lockdown to try and stem a Delta variant outbreak.

Australian Olympic Committee (AOC) chief Matt Carroll said it flew in the face of medical advice from the Australian

Institute of Sport (AIS) around the athletes' mental health.

"While other countries are celebrating the return of their athletes, we are subjecting ours to the most cruel and uncaring treatment," he said.

"They are being punished for proudly representing their country with distinction at the Olympic Games."

The entire Australian team, who won 17 gold medals and 46 in total, are fully vaccinated and were tested for COVID-19 almost daily in Japan.

Carroll said this made them

'extremely low risk', yet their application to South Australia to be exempt from the extra 14 days was rejected.

AIS chief medical officer David Hughes called the decision 'profoundly flawed'.

"To have individuals quarantined for such a lengthy period of time is in my opinion unreasonable and cannot be scientifically justified," he said.

"It poses a significant risk to the physical and mental wellbeing of the individuals concerned."

The South Australian govern-

ment was not immediately available for comment.

Australia had dodged the worst ravages of the pandemic through a strategy of closed borders, lockdowns, mandatory travel quarantine, and aggressive testing and tracing.

But those tools appear blunted in the face of the highly transmissible Delta variant.

The nation has recorded about 37,000 cases of COVID-19 and 940 related deaths to date in a population of 25mn.

AFP



Australian players arrive in Sydney from Tokyo on Sunday

TENNIS ROUND-UP



Bianca Andreescu in action against Harriet Dart on Tuesday (AFP)

Andreescu prevails in Montreal opener

WTA CANADIAN OPEN

Montreal, Canada - Defending champion Bianca Andreescu overcame a surprise showing from Harriet Dart, recovering to post a 6-1, 3-6, 6-3 victory to reach the third round of the Canadian Open, her home WTA tournament on Tuesday.

The 2019 US Open champion, who missed the entire 2020 season with injury, has played little in 2021 and hadn't won a match since reaching the second round at Eastbourne in June. Here she enjoyed a first-round bye before taking more than two hours to get past 172nd-ranked Briton Dart and take a step toward retaining the title she won in 2019.

"It was an awesome atmosphere out there," Andreescu said. "I was super emotional and got goosebumps walking out with the crowd cheering. There may have only been 5,000, but it seemed like a lot more."

In other second-round matches, two-time Wimbledon champion Petra Kvitová, seeded

seventh, advanced with a 6-4, 6-4 victory over France's Fiona Ferro. Kvitová's Czech compatriot Katerina Siniakova toppled fifth-seeded Garbine Muguruza of Spain 6-2, 0-6, 6-3.

In first-round action, Olympic absentee Coco Gauff played her first match since Wimbledon and came away with a 6-1, 6-4 victory over Anastasija Sevastova. The US teenager had to abort her planned trip to Tokyo when she tested positive for COVID-19 on the eve of her departure for Japan.

Sloane Stephens, a finalist in 2018, also recovered from 2-4 down to advance past Dayana Yastremska 6-4, 1-6, 6-4.

American Jessica Pegula, an Australian open quarterfinalist, beat Estonian Anett Kontaveit 5-7, 6-3, 6-3. British No 1 Johanna Konta, who missed Tokyo due to COVID-19, reached the second round in her first match since mid-June as China's Zhang Shuai retired with an injury. AFP

Injury forces Nadal out, Medvedev advances

ATP TORONTO MASTERS

Toronto, Canada - A nagging left foot injury forced Rafael Nadal out of the ATP Toronto Masters on Tuesday as top seed Daniil Medvedev rallied to reach the third round.

Nadal, a five-time champion in Canada, pulled the plug on his participation before his scheduled second-round opener with plans to return to Spain for treatment of the injury which kept him from Wimbledon and the Tokyo Olympics.

"I've had this issue for a couple of months," he said. "It is not a happy situation after all the success that I had here in Canada."

"I need to go back (to Mallorca) and try to find a way to be better again. With this pain, I'm not able to enjoy (playing)."

"I believe that I am not able to compete at the level that I need because the foot doesn't allow me to move the way that I need," added Nadal, who was the second seed in the hardcourt tournament.

Top-seeded Russian Medvedev opened his week in the second round after a bye and staged a fightback to overhaul Kazakh Alexander Bublik 4-6, 6-3, 6-4. The Russian came back a changed man after a second-set rain delay.

"I was not playing well before



Daniil Medvedev of Russia hits a shot against Alexander Bublik of Kazakhstan during their second round match

the rain," he said. "I was not feeling the ball and was missing on returns. I just wanted to play better - I knew I had to if I was going to win."

"When we got back on court, I felt much better from the first game."

Medvedev advanced with 27 winners and 28 unforced errors in the two-hour victory.

New world No 3 Stefanos Tsitsipas cured an extended case of the jitters with a runaway third set to finally overcome Ugo

Humbert 6-3, 6-7 (13/15), 6-1.

With the win he avenged a pair of previous losses to Humbert, including in the third round of the Olympics.

The Greek wasted five match points in the second set while his French opponent held on in a 23-minute tiebreaker.

But after a speedy deciding set, Tsitsipas finally prevailed on his seventh match point, finishing with 37 winners including 16 aces.

"It's all about the fighting

spirit," Tsitsipas said. "I don't like to give up. It was not easy out there, I had to put in a lot of effort and give my best."

"It didn't work out for me in the second set but nothing could stop me in the third."

Sixth seed Casper Ruud made a smooth transition to hardcourt after winning three consecutive claycourt titles, knocking out Marin Cilic 6-3, 3-6, 6-3.

The Norwegian, who has moved to tenth in the rankings, won his 36th match of the

season. Kei Nishikori, runner up in 2016, carried his Tokyo Olympic and Washington momentum into a 6-4, 6-7 (5/7), 6-2 first-round win over Miomir Kecmanovic.

Asia's leading player, who reached the quarterfinals at the Games and followed up by reaching the semifinals in Washington, broke the 59th-ranked Serb five times in their match lasting for just over two hours.

Olympic silver medallist Karen Khachanov defeated Britain's Cameron Norrie 6-4, 5-7, 6-4 with ten aces, lining up a date with 15th-seeded fellow Russian Aslan Karatsev.

Isner with ease

American John Isner, winner of a sixth Atlanta trophy earlier this month, pounded 19 aces in his 6-4, 6-1 thrashing of Spaniard Alejandro Davidovich Fokina.

Serb Dusan Lajovic put out Finnish qualifier Emil Ruusuvuori 3-6, 6-3, 6-3 while Georgia's Nikoloz Basilashvili beat Washington semifinalist Jensen Brooksby 2-6, 6-0, 6-4.

Brooksby erupted as he was aced on match point, firing his racquet angrily into advertising hoardings at the side of the court.

AFP

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We can win Champions League at PSG: Messi

Argentine superstar unveiled as a Parisian at the Parc des Princes

Paris, France - Lionel Messi has set his sights on more Champions League glory after being unveiled as a Paris Saint-Germain (PSG) player on Wednesday as hundreds of fans gathered outside the club's stadium hoping to see their new idol.

The 34-year-old Argentinian superstar was presented to media from all over the world at a news conference at the Parc des Princes after arriving in Paris the previous day and penning a two-year contract with the option of a third season.

PSG quickly emerged as the favourites to sign Messi following the shock of his departure last week from Barcelona and he arrives eyeing a fifth Champions League, with the most recent of his four victories with his old club coming in 2015.

"I have said many times that my dream is to win another Champions League and I think I am in the ideal place to have that chance and to do it," Messi told reporters inside a packed auditorium, with the audience including his wife Antonella, their children, and his father and agent, Jorge.

Messi and Barcelona were knocked out of the Champions League last season by PSG, who went on to reach the semifinals following their run to the final in 2020.

"Sometimes you can have the best team in the world and not win. That's football," Messi, who won 35 trophies in total with Barca, added as he prepares to team up with Neymar and Kylian Mbappe in Paris.

"We know how difficult the Champions League is but Paris know that too - they have come very close in recent years but it is a competition in which the best teams take part and the best team doesn't always win."

No 30 jersey and Messi-mania

PSG are reportedly paying US\$41mn a year to Messi, who will wear the No 30 jersey - fans were already queueing up outside the club's different shops in the capital on Wednesday



PSG's Qatari president Nasser al Khelaifi (L) poses with Argentinian superstar Lionel Messi as he holds-up his No 30 shirt during a press conference at Parc des Princes stadium in Paris on Wednesday (AFP)

morning to buy the shirt with his name and number on the back.

Messi was given a hero's welcome when he arrived in Paris on Tuesday, greeting supporters at Le Bourget airport to the north of the city and waving from the balcony of the plush hotel where he is staying near the Champs Elysees.

On Wednesday, he appeared unfazed as he emerged, immaculately turned out, to talk to media, although he did seem slightly uneasy at times, not least when one member of the audience started chanting his name.

Unlike when Zlatan Ibrahimovic signed for PSG in

I have said many times that my dream is to win another Champions League and I think I am in the ideal place to have that chance and to do it

LIONEL MESSI

2012 there was no glitzy unveiling in front of the Eiffel Tower, but Messi was photographed on the pitch before greeting the supporters who had waited at the stadium entrance, watching his press conference on a big screen.

"I'm very proud to present Leo Messi as a PSG player," said Nasser al Khelaifi, the

president of the Qatar-owned outfit. "It is an amazing and historic day for the club, for the football world."

Messi made no secret of his sadness at leaving Barca, the only club he has so far represented in his 17-year professional career, as he gave a tearful news conference at the Camp Nou last weekend.



Former PSG and Barcelona star Ronaldinho

Ronaldinho wishes Messi 'many moments of joy'

Sao Paulo, Brazil - Former Barcelona and Paris Saint-Germain (PSG) midfielder Ronaldinho wished Lionel Messi 'many moments of joy' on Tuesday after the Argentina attacker joined the French club from the La Liga giants.

Earlier, PSG announced 34-year-old Messi had signed a two-year deal with the club, making the opposite move to the one the former Brazil playmaker Ronaldinho made in 2003.

Ronaldinho, who won his only Ballon d'Or at the Camp Nou in 2005, predicted a first Champions League success for the Qatari-owned Parisians with former Real Madrid and Spain captain

Sergio Ramos also heading to the French capital.

Messi and Ronaldinho played together at Barca between 2004 and 2008.

"It's a great joy to have played in these two clubs and now see my friend wearing this shirt, may there be many moments of joy Leo!" he said on Twitter.

"I'm also very happy with my partner @sergioramos on the team and a super cast, I'm feeling Champions," he added.

Elsewhere, Brazil will host Argentina on September in Sao Paulo, which could pit Messi against PSG's Neymar, in a qualifying game for the 2022 World Cup.

AFP

'Can't wait to start training'

However on Wednesday he said he was looking forward to getting started in his new home.

"Everyone knows that my departure from Barca was very hard because I spent so many years there, but as soon as I arrived here I felt enormously happy," said the player who scored 672 goals in 778 games for the Catalans.

"Now I can't wait to start training."

Messi has had no pre-season having been on holiday since winning the Copa America with Argentina a month ago.

He is therefore unlikely to make his debut for PSG any time soon, and certainly not this weekend when Mauricio Pochettino's team play Strasbourg at home in French League (Ligue 1). PSG are now even more obvious favourites to run away with the French title, a trophy they missed out on last season to Lille.

However, despite concerns about a lack of competitive balance, French League president Vincent Labrune hailed the

arrival of the six-time Ballon d'Or winner as 'extraordinary news for the exposure of Ligue 1 internationally'.

"The arrival of Lionel Messi will increase the attractiveness and visibility of our league on all continents," he said.

Mbappe has 'no reason to leave'

Attention, though, will now turn to the future of 22-year-old Mbappe, who has just a year left on his contract and has been strongly linked to Real Madrid. "Kylian is a Parisian, he's very competitive. He said he wanted a competitive team," Khelaifi said.

"Now there's no-one more competitive than us. He has no reason to do anything else," other than stay, he added.

In May the 22-year-old told broadcaster Canal Plus he wanted to be in a place where he 'could really win, where there is a solid project'. Mbappe is yet to sign a new deal at the Parc des Princes, unlike Neymar, whose recently-agreed contract runs until 2025.

AFP



Date of birth: June 24, 1987 (34-year-old)
Place of birth: Rosario (Argentina)
Nationality: Argentinian (also holds Spanish citizenship)
Height: 1.7m (5'7")
Weight: 72kg
Position: Attacker
Club: Barcelona (2004-2021)
151 caps and 76 goals for Argentina

INTERNATIONAL HONOURS:

Copa America (2021)
Olympics (2008)
U20 World Cup (2005)

CLUB HONOURS:

4 Champions Leagues (2006, 2009, 2011, 2015)
10 Spanish League titles (2005, 2006, 2009, 2010, 2011, 2013, 2015, 2016, 2018, 2019)
7 Spanish Cups (2009, 2012, 2015, 2016, 2017, 2018, 2021)
3 European Super Cups (2009, 2011, 2015)
8 Spanish Super Cups (2005, 2006, 2009, 2010, 2011, 2013, 2016, 2018)
3 Club World Cups (2009, 2011, 2015)

INDIVIDUAL HONOURS:

6 Ballons d'Or (2009, 2010, 2011, 2012, 2015, 2019)
6 Golden Boots (2010, 2012, 2013, 2017, 2018, 2019)
Twice elected UEFA player of the year (2011, 2015)
Best player at 2014 World Cup
Best player at the Copa America (2015, 2021)
Best player at the 2008 Olympics
Best player at the 2005 U20 World Cup

OTHER RECORDS:

Top goalscorer in Spanish League history (474 to date)
Most goals scored for one Spanish League club (474 for Barcelona)
Top overall goalscorer in Barcelona's history (672)
Top scorer in history for one club (672 for Barcelona)
Top scorer in Spanish 'El Clasicos' (26)
Most appearances for Barcelona (778)
Most goals scored in a top class league season (50 in 2011-2012)
Top scorer in Argentina's history 76 (2006 to date)
AFP

Monaco down Sparta Prague to reach CL playoff round

CHAMPIONS LEAGUE

Paris, France - Hosts Monaco beat Sparta Prague 3-1 on Tuesday to reach the Champions League's playoff round, a week after the Ligue 1 club's Aurelien Tchouameni suffered racist abuse during the first-leg in the Czech Republic.

On Monday, Sparta said in a statement they were 'deeply saddened by the incident' during their 0-2 first-leg loss when Tchouameni was the subject of monkey chants after scoring the opener in the Czech capital.

After his second first-leg experience in Prague, 21-year-old Tchouameni was again in the starting line-up for Monaco, picking up a first half yellow card before Gelson Martins and Aleksandr Golovin gave the Principality outfit a comfortable lead by the hour mark. David Moberg-Karlsson closed the gap for the visitors with less than a quarter of an hour remaining before Sofiane Diop put Monaco within 180 minutes of the Champions League group stages.

Monaco will face Shakhtar

Donetsk on August 17 before the second leg a week later. The Ukrainians beat Genk 2-1 on the night to complete a 4-2 win on aggregate.

"We've passed the first test. It wasn't as easy as that," said Monaco coach Niko Kovac. "They (Shakhtar) will be a formidable opponent, used to the Champions League, the favourites for our match," he added.

Elsewhere, PSV Eindhoven cruised past Mitylland 4-0 over the two legs to set up a playoff against two-time champions

Benfica who eased past Spartak Moscow 3-0 over two legs, Joao Mario scoring the opener in Tuesday's 2-0 win.

Malmo beat Scottish champions Rangers 2-1 for a 4-2 overall win while Greek champions Olympiakos lost 4-1 on penalties to Bulgarians Ludogorets. That match ended 2-2 on the night which last year would have been good enough for the Greeks to progress but UEFA has done away with the away goal rule this season.

AFP



Monaco's Gelson Martins (C) celebrates with teammates after scoring against Sparta Prague in Monaco, on Tuesday

Injury concerns for hosts, India

Injured Thakur to miss Lord's Test



India's Shardul Thakur in action during the first Test against England last week

ENGLAND VS INDIA SECOND TEST

London, UK- India have suffered a selection headache on the eve of the second Test against England with a hamstring injury ruling out Shardul Thakur.

Captain Virat Kohli confirmed during his press conference on Wednesday that Thakur had a left hamstring injury and he is likely to be ready for the third Test.

Thakur arrived for training on Monday at Lord's and spent time in the gym alongside the India physiotherapist Nitin Patel and trainer Nick Webb. Thakur, who was India's fourth seamer during the first Test in Nottingham, picked up four wickets - two in each innings. Doubts surfaced about Thakur's fitness when he only sent down 13 overs in

England's second innings - the fewest of India's quicks - although he did not show any evident unease on the outside.

The key question now for India is who replaces Thakur. With conditions in London forecast to be warm and dry - with temperatures in the early 20s for the entire duration of the Test - India have the choice of either picking a second spinning allrounder in R Ashwin or a fourth seamer in Ishant Sharma or Umesh Yadav, considering reverse-swing could be in play along with the seam movement and conventional swing that are usually on offer in English conditions.

At the end of the Trent Bridge Test, which ended in a rain-affected draw, Kohli said he was happy with the template India

had picked, with four fast bowlers and one spin-bowling allrounder in Ravindra Jadeja.

The complication with playing a fourth seamer other than Thakur, however, is it will leave India with a long tail, with no reliable lower-order contributor to be found among Ishant, Umesh, Mohammed Shami, Jasprit Bumrah or Mohammed Siraj.

Apart from his swing bowling, Thakur's selection at Trent Bridge also hinged on his batting at No 8.

On Monday, at their first training session ahead of the second Test, Ashwin did not bat, but Ishant had a complete session. It was Ishant's first time back in the nets after playing in the World Test Championship final against New Zealand in June.

Cricinfo

Broad out of series, Anderson in doubt



England's James Anderson (R) throws the ball to Stuart Broad during the first Test against India (AFP)

ENGLAND VS INDIA SECOND TEST

London, UK - Stuart Broad has been ruled out of the remainder of England's Test series with India on Wednesday after tearing his right calf muscle.

Broad underwent an MRI scan in London on Wednesday, which revealed the tear, suffered when he appeared to slip during a light warm-up jog ahead of training at Lord's on the previous day.

Saqib Mahmood has been called up to England's squad as cover ahead of the second of five Tests starting at Lord's on Thursday, and could be in line for a surprise debut with James Anderson also an injury doubt.

Anderson missed training on Wednesday morning, and ESPNcricinfo understands he is suffering from a tight quad.



Stuart Broad

The decision was precautionary, but it could leave England without both of their senior seamers heading into the second Test.

He did appear for a ten-minute work-out on the main square later in the afternoon, bowling at half-pace though without apparent

discomfort, with bowling coach Jon Lewis and the medical staff in attendance.

Broad, 35, will miss what would have been his 150th Test after he was unable to put weight on his left foot. If both England seamers are ruled out, it would be only the second home Test to feature neither Anderson nor Broad since 2007.

Broad's injury comes after a fallow first Test in which he went wicketless in India's first innings before finding a better rhythm second-time around, claiming KL Rahul's wicket on the fourth evening before rain washed out an intriguing final day.

He currently has 524 wickets at 27.84 in his 149 Tests to date, placing him sixth on the all-time Test wicket-takers list.

Agencies

England and India docked two WTC points apiece

SLOW OVER RATE

London, UK - England and India have been fined two World Test Championship (WTC) points each for their slow over-rates during the first Test in Nottingham, which ended as a rain-affected draw on Sunday. Both teams were also fined 40% of their match fee by match referee Chris Broad.

The teams now take two points each out of the Test match, instead of the four they would normally get for a draw under the new points system for the 2021-23 WTC cycle. "As a team we were not pleased we lost two points because of factors that were definitely in our control," India captain Virat Kohli said on Wednesday. "We were short by two overs, but we made up quite a few overs in that second innings. We basically have to keep up to speed with the pace of the game - small little things where we can save 10-15 seconds, that really matters."

Over-rate-related points deductions could prove costly to teams during the WTC. In the inaugural 2019-21 cycle, Australia were docked four points for their slow over rate during the 2020 Boxing Day Test against India in Melbourne. It ultimately cost them a place in the final, which instead went to eventual champions New Zealand.

Cricinfo

Cairns in intensive care after major heart problem

Sydney, Australia - Former New Zealand allrounder Chris Cairns is in an intensive care unit at a Sydney hospital after being moved from Canberra for urgent treatment following a serious heart incident.

St Vincent's Hospital in Sydney confirmed Cairns had been admitted on Tuesday. "He is in a serious but stable condition in intensive care," a spokesperson said.

On Wednesday Cairns' wife, Melanie, issued a statement confirming that he had undergone further surgery.

"As has now been widely reported in the media, Chris suffered a major medical event in Canberra late last week.

"He initially underwent surgery in Canberra, but the seriousness of his condition is such that he has now been transferred to St Vincent's hospital in Sydney, where he has undergone further cardiovascular surgery," she said.

"Chris' family and friends are heartened by the respectful and warm manner in which this terrible news has been reported, and received by the public, both in New Zealand and around the world, and thanks everyone for their warm wishes, prayers, and kind words.

"For now, no further statements will be made regarding Chris' situation, and the Cairns



A file photo of former New Zealand captain Chris Cairns

family asks that people continue to respect their privacy as they deal with this difficult, upsetting and concerning situation."

New Zealand media outlet Newshub on Tuesday reported 51-year-old Cairns had suffered an aortic dissection which is a tear in the body's main artery.

Regarded one of the best all-rounders of his era, Cairns played 62 Tests, 215 one-day internationals and two T20 matches for New Zealand between 1989-2006 before becoming a television pundit. His father Lance also represented New Zealand in cricket.

The news has rocked New Zealand, where former teammates expressed sympathy

for his family. "It's absolutely devastating. It's the worst news you could possibly get," former New Zealand teammate Chris Harris told local media.

David White, the chief executive of New Zealand Cricket (NZC), said: "We're deeply concerned to hear of Chris Cairns' medical emergency. Our thoughts are with his family in Australia and here in New Zealand. Chris is a much loved husband, father, and son - and remains one of our finest all-rounders. We hope he's able to make a full recovery."

Cairns has lived in Canberra for several years with his children after his marriage in 2010.

Cricinfo

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SAILING WITH THE BEST

11 Omani sailors selected to compete in the Star Sailors League Finals at Grandson in Switzerland



A file photo of boats in action during a Star Sailors League regatta. Photo right: Oman Sail CEO Khamis al Jabri (front left) and Sabina Läderach (front right), Deputy Ambassador of Switzerland to Oman, with Oman sailors at the Oman Sail headquarters on Wednesday

Ashok Purohit
Muscat

The Star Sailors League (SSL) is an international regatta circuit featuring some of the best amateur and professional sailors from across the world vying for the top honours and cash awards in Star Class. Since 2013, when the circuit was launched, the regatta has been offering a platform for top-class sailing along with a ranking points similar to the pro tennis circuit.

For the first time, Oman Sail, which is celebrating 13 years of excellence this year, has been

invited to send a team for the SSL. A team of 11 top Omani sailors have been selected by Oman Sail to compete in the SSL Finals, which will be held at Lake Neuchatel in Grandson, Switzerland, from September 19-October 4.

In fact, the SSL circuit concludes with a grand finale – SSL Finals - which offers the best in terms of quality competition and prize money.

The SSL Finals are reserved for the highest ranked SSL sailors as well as exceptional sailors, invited by the SSL, based on their sailing pedigree and Oman is the

beneficiary to the invitation as one of the representatives of emerging countries in sailing.

On offer at the SSL Finals is a purse of US\$218,000 and a competition format that features two stages – a qualification phase and a final phase.

As part of the celebration to mark the 13th anniversary, Oman Sail unveiled the team for the SSL Finals on Wednesday in the presence of Deputy Ambassador of Switzerland to Oman, Sabina Läderach. Oman will compete at the SSL Finals for the Sir Roland Symonette Trophy. This will be the first exposure for Oman's

elite sailors in Europe since the coronavirus pandemic halted sporting activities in Oman in March 2020.

Khamis al Jabri, CEO of Oman Sail, said, "We are incredibly proud of what Oman Sail has accomplished over 13 years.

"Having a team compete in the Star Sailors League (SSL) Finals will provide a great opportunity for us to promote the sultanate at a world stage and it will give the team a platform to perform and compete against the best. As we celebrate the occasion, we are also looking forward to an incredibly busy period

We are also looking forward to an incredibly busy period of sailing events

KHAMIS AL JABRI
OMAN SAIL CEO

of sailing events that will open the eyes of the international sailing community to Oman."

The coming winter season will see Oman Sail host three world championships with the 2021

World Youth Sailing Championships, 2021 49er, 49er FX & Nacra 17 World Championships, and the 2021 ICLA Radial World Championships.

Oman Sail will also organise the 2021 49er, 49er FX & Nacra 17 Asian Championships, 2021 Asian Windsurfing Championships, along with regular fixtures in the calendar the Mussanah Race Week and Sailing Arabia-The Tour (SATT) 2021 to close out the year.

Oman Sail is also extending its expertise to bring additional high-profile sporting events to the country with the recent

announcement that the World Race Walking Team Championships is headed to Muscat in March 2022. Oman Sail also had a key role in Oman's successful bid to host the inaugural FIH Hockey5s World Cup in 2024.

OMAN SQUAD:

Nasser al Mashari (captain), Haitham al Wahaibi, Yassir al Rahbi, Waleed al Kindi, Musab al Hadi, Hussain al Jabri, Ahmed al Hasani, Abdulrahman al Mashari, Akram al Wahaibi, Ali al Balushi, Raad al Hadi. Hashim al Rashdi (manager).

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WHAT'S
ESSENTIAL



PREPARATIONS ON FOR THE HOSTING OF ICC MEN'S T20 WORLD CUP 2021 IN OMAN



With 66 days left for the opening game of the ICC Men's T20 World Cup 2021 at the Oman Cricket Academy Ground in Amerat on October 17, Oman Cricket (OC) is leaving no stone unturned to ensure the success of the event, which will be held in Oman for the first time. Oman will host the Round One Group B matches, which will feature Bangladesh, Papua New Guinea, Scotland and Oman. With ICC requirements for the hosting of T20 World Cup needing upgrades at the existing venue, work is going on at a hectic pace to ensure that the mandatory conditions, sought by the world governing body, are fulfilled. OC officials are confident that Oman will be able to successfully host the T20 World Cup, which will then open the doors for many more international tournaments to be staged in the future. Ahead of the T20 World Cup, Oman will also host Indian domestic cricket giants Mumbai side from August 20-September 3 before staging two tri-series of the World Cricket League 2 from September 13-October 2. The tri-series (50-over format) will witness Oman play against Nepal, USA, PNG and Scotland (Muscat Daily/Syed Fasiuddin)

Every day, all day!

