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HM takes stock of employment situation

Presides over meeting of the Supervisory Committee of the National Employment Programme

Muscat - As part of the Royal attention that His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik accords to the issue of employment of jobseekers, considered among the top priorities of the government, His Majesty the Sultan presided over a meeting of the Supervisory Committee of the National Employment Programme

(NEP) at Al Barakah Palace on Monday.

His Majesty the Sultan reviewed the major challenges to the jobseekers' employment file. He studied an analysis of the current labour market situation, related factors and indicators, and the efforts exerted by the government in this respect.

During the meeting, His Majesty the Sultan looked into the plans of NEP, its method of functioning and the objectives of the programme in the next stage.

His Majesty the Sultan also reviewed the progress made in the employment programme through a set of initiatives made to provide opportunities for jobseekers in the government (civil as well as military) and in the private sectors.

His Majesty the Sultan gave directives to combine the efforts of all government and private parties in their endeavour to support NEP and implement it. The aim is to accelerate the study of the challenges facing employment and draft more comprehensive plans and programmes to generate employment for jobseekers in a sustainable manner in line with Oman Vision 2040.

His Majesty the Sultan pledged to accord his Royal attention to NEP and affirmed that he will closely follow-up the programme to ensure it yields the desired outcome.

The meeting was attended by members of the Supervisory Committee of NEP and the Head of the Private Office.

ONA



HM receives credentials of Saudi ambassador

Muscat - His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik received the credentials of Abdullah Saud al Anzi, Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary Ambassador of the Custodian of the Two Holy Mosques King Salman bin Abdulaziz al Saud of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, accredited to the sultanate at Al Barakah Palace on Monday.

During the meeting with His Majesty the Sultan, Anzi conveyed greetings of King Salman

along with his best wishes of good health, happiness and a long life to His Majesty the Sultan and continuous progress and prosperity under the wise leadership of His Majesty the Sultan to the Omani people.

His Majesty the Sultan welcomed the ambassador and thanked him for the greetings and best wishes of King Salman.

ONA

NEWS BRIEFS

HM CONDOLES EMIR OF KUWAIT

Muscat - His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik has sent a cable of condolences to Sheikh Nawaf al Ahmed al Jaber al Sabah, Emir of Kuwait, on the death of Sheikh Faisal Mohammed Abdulaziz al Sabah. In the cable, His Majesty expressed his heartfelt sympathies and prayed to Almighty Allah to rest the deceased's soul in peace.

HM GREET'S PRESIDENT OF MALAWI

Muscat - His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik has sent a cable of greetings to President Dr Lazarus Chakwera of Malawi on his country's Independence Anniversary.

OPEC fails to reach deal; oil passes \$77

Muscat - Crude oil prices rose above US\$77 a barrel for the first time since 2018 after OPEC+ pushed back a contentious summit and failed to reach an agreement on bringing back curtailed output.

Oil prices rose as the United Arab Emirates battled with fellow OPEC members and other producers over the rate and timing of their next output increase.

The rare public dispute led to a summit of OPEC members and ten allies being pushed back to an undetermined date.

North Sea Brent and West Texas Intermediate, the most widely traded crude oil futures contracts, rose to their highest levels since October 2018 after the meeting was postponed. Brent traded 1.16 per cent higher at US\$77.05 a barrel, while WTI was up by 1.34 per cent at US\$76.17.

The UAE has opposed a pro-



UAE has opposed a proposal by the alliance to raise production, causing a stalemate that could derail efforts to curb rising crude prices amid a fragile post-pandemic recovery

posal by the alliance to raise production, causing a stalemate that could derail efforts to curb rising crude prices amid a fragile post-pandemic recovery.

"It's the whole group versus one country, which is sad to me but this is the reality," Saudi Energy Minister Prince Abdulaziz

bin Salman told Bloomberg television, suggesting the UAE was isolated within the 23-member OPEC+ bloc.

Officials have laboured for days over an agreement to pump more as demand picks up with the global recovery and supplies shrink, with fears that failure to

find common ground could send prices soaring.

Talks on Monday followed a delay from last week as the Saudis stood firm about raising output starting in August and extending the OPEC+ agreement to the end of 2022, while the UAE sought better terms for itself. The failure by the group to increase supply will further squeeze an already tight market, raising concerns over inflation.

Most OPEC+ members backed a proposal to increase output by 400,000 barrels a day each month from August, and push back the expiry of the broader supply deal to the end of next year. To agree to an extension, the UAE sought to change the baseline that's used to calculate its quota, a move that could allow it to boost daily production by an extra 700,000 barrels.

(Agencies)

See also Page 05

30% of target group receives vaccines

Our Correspondent
Muscat

More than 1mn individuals have received COVID-19 vaccine in Oman, of which 22 per cent received both doses, the Ministry of Health (MoH) said on Monday. With this, 30 per cent of the target group (3.7mn people) has been immunised.

'The number of people vaccinated against COVID-19 in the sultanate has increased to 1,096,838,' an MoH statement said.

MoH began vaccinating a new target group - 18 years and older - in all governorates on Sunday and officials have described the turnout as 'great'.

According to MoH, 3.2mn more doses of vaccine will arrive this month. Those eligible for vaccination need to register



through the Tarassud+ app or covid19.moh.gov.om in advance.

On weekdays, vaccination timing at Oman Convention & Exhibition Centre is 8am to 6pm; on weekends (Friday and Saturday), the centre is open from 9am to 4pm.

Currently, individuals aged 18 years and older are receiving the first dose of vaccine; the second dose will be announced shortly.

Ihsaan provides twenty oxygen devices in Muscat

Our Correspondent
Muscat

In its commitment to support the elderly and needy families, Ihsaan Association has provided 20 oxygen concentrators in co-operation with the Directorate General of Health Services of Muscat Governorate in the month of June.

Speaking to *Muscat Daily*, Jokha Mohammed Khamis al Farsi, head and founder of the association, informed that it has signed an agreement with Mitsui E&P Middle East BV, an oil and gas business, to provide 100 medical beds for the care for the elderly.

"Our association also provides free ambulance services to help the elderly and people with disabilities reach hospitals for routine check-ups and other healthcare needs. We received



(Supplied photo)

more than 1,351 families during the month of June at our headquarters to acquaint them with the services of the association. We raise awareness on respecting and valuing our elders," Jokha said.

"We helped 75 elderly persons reach hospitals in Muscat in June alone. All safety measures, like sterilising the ambulances daily, are undertaken to avoid the spread of COVID-19. We provide medical aid for the elderly at

low cost."

The association has four ambulances, named *Kafah* (Struggle), *Atta* (Giving), *Hiba* (Gift), and *Amal* (Hope).

This year, it launched an initiative to transfer the dead from their homes to hospital and later the cemetery to relieve their bereaved families.

"Ihsaan Association aims to strengthen bonds between members of society and encourage caring for the elderly. We hold awareness seminars for community members, including schools and Omani women's associations, highlighting the need to help and assist the elderly," Jokha said. She informed that the association will continue its awareness campaign in all the wilayats of the sultanate.

The association can be contacted on 92836800/93872666.

Omani philanthropist packs aid for Zanzibar



(Supplied photos)

Our Correspondent
Muscat

An Omani philanthropist has organised a 40-feet container loaded with aid to be sent to a village in Zanzibar for Eid al Adha.

The benevolent act by Naser al Jahdhary materialised in putting together school uniforms and regular clothings (both new and used), copies of Q'uran and masjid carpets, besides masks and sanitisers for delivery to the Tanzanian archipelago facing the challenges mainly after the onset of COVID-19 pandemic.

Jahdhary is a known philanthropist who had just two months back visited Tanzania to help in construction of water wells in poor areas.

"Whilst I was in Dar es Salaam a few weeks back," Jahdhary said, "I received a telephone call from the President of Zanzibar Dr Hussein Ali Hassan Mwinyi extending his support for our work."

"We promised him that before Eid al Adha, we will send one container of aid for the people of



Due to the pandemic I could not visit many countries including Yemen. I shipped aid items to 500 families in Yemen

NASER AL JAHDHARY

Zanzibar."

The pandemic has taken a heavy toll on many of Jahdhary's donation campaigns around the world. Last year he was denied permission to visit Syria owing to the COVID-19 situation.

"Due to the pandemic I could

not visit many countries including Yemen. I shipped many aid items to Yemen and they reached almost 500 families there.

"I also did the same for Zanzibar. A container loaded with wheelchairs, hospital items, dishdashas, dates and copies of Q'uran was given to Al Noor Charitable Trust in Zanzibar."

The donations for Jahdhary's voluntary works mostly come from people who feel for the cause. "For over a decade I've been involved in these activities and we share photos and videos for people to know what we are doing. Our donations go to many countries including Tanzania, Kenya, Somalia, Palestine and Yemen."

H E GEN NU'AMANI RECEIVES SWISS AMBASSADOR



H E Gen Sultan Mohammed al Nu'amani, Minister of Royal Office, received in his office on Monday H E Balz Abplanalp, Ambassador of the Swiss Confederation to the sultanate. The meeting exchanged cordial conversations on the march of the relations binding the sultanate and the Swiss Confederation. The meeting also reviewed a number of cooperation areas and means to promote them to achieve the joint interests (ONA)

Avoid travelling to Indonesia, cautions Omani embassy in Jakarta

Our Correspondent
Muscat

The Omani embassy in Jakarta has called on Omani citizens to avoid travelling to Indonesia.

A statement issued by the Omani embassy in Jakarta, said, 'The Indonesian government announced the imposition of a state of emergency in all cities until



July 20 due to the increase in the number of COVID-19 cases. The embassy urges Omani citizens to postpone travel to Indonesia.'

The embassy further requested Omani citizens in Indonesia to take precautions and stay away from crowded places.

The embassy can be reached over phone (+62816100002) or WhatsApp (+96892020300).

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Ministry issues appeal for donations as all blood types are in short supply

Our Correspondent
Muscat

The Ministry of Health (MoH) has appealed for urgent blood donations at the Central Blood Bank in Bausher due to an acute shortage in all blood types.

People can donate blood from Saturday to Thursday, between 8am and 7pm and on Friday from 3pm to 7pm. 'To book an appointment for donation, send the word 'appointment' via WhatsApp at 94555648,' MoH said.

Speaking to *Muscat Daily*, Ahmed bin Hamad al Kharusi, who has donated blood 170 times, said, "Blood banks are suffering from a severe shortage, especially with the spread of COVID-19 and the night movement ban. The Eid al Adha holidays will worsen the situation."

He said that blood banks in all the wilayats of the sultanate currently need blood due to the



(Supplied photo)

COVID-19 pandemic.

"These banks need about 1,500 units of blood every week," Kharusi said.

During the pandemic, Kharusi

has so far been involved in 13 blood donation campaigns in several wilayats conducted in co-operation with voluntary teams.

"Unfortunately, people are

afraid to donate blood because of COVID-19. They need a great deal of convincing before agreeing to donate. We spread awareness on the importance of blood

donations through various social media platforms, including Instagram, WhatsApp and Facebook."

Sulaiman al Busaidi, a volunteer who has organised about

Unfortunately, people are afraid to donate blood because of COVID-19. They need a great deal of convincing before agreeing to donate. We spread awareness on the importance of blood donations through various social media platforms

AHMED
AL KHARUSI

300 blood donation campaigns in ten years to support the Central Blood Bank, said, "Donating blood doesn't just save lives but there are health benefits for

donors too. People in Oman need to be aware of the importance of blood and platelet donation. There is a severe shortage in blood banks due to COVID-19."

Busaidi noted that there is an urgent need to create awareness on the issue. "There should be an effort to increase the number of blood and platelet donors in the country."

According to Busaidi, it's always a challenge to reach a wider audience to create awareness on such drives. "Our aim is to make people aware that they should visit the nearest blood bank for donations rather than wait for a campaign."

He said that donating blood every three months is good for health.

"People should make it a habit to visit any blood bank after completion of the three-month period."

Asyad Express to provide logistics solutions to Vodafone



(Supplied photo)

Our Correspondent
Muscat

Asyad Express, a member of Asyad Group, signed an agreement with Vodafone Oman on Monday to provide it with integrated logistics services through its Fulfillment Centre.

This cooperation is the latest in the list of Asyad partnerships aimed to bolster its status as a regional centre for fulfillment, implementation and distribution in the e-commerce sector.

Nasser bin Ahmed al Sharji, acting CEO Asyad Express, said, "Our integrated logistics services

saw rapid development recently at local and regional fronts. The company seeks to capture new opportunities in order to advance our mission to spearhead the growth of the logistics sector in Oman.

"Vodafone will enable us to expand this growth and provide our clients with more comprehensive services that cater to their needs. This is thanks to the preparedness of our facilities to empower electronic business in all parts of the sultanate."

Lujaina Saif al Kharusi, head of Regulatory and Corporate Affairs at Vodafone Oman, said, "The

Fulfillment Centre is gaining increasing acceptance and popularity from various customers for its services and benefits at competitive prices. This partnership will enable us to provide a full package of advanced end-to-end delivery and distribution services."

The centre, set up on an area of 3,000sqm, offers innovative and assorted services in the field of storage, preparation and shipping of consignments and parcels, including last mile delivery, locally and internationally, and reverse logistics management.

COVID-19 cases drop

Our Correspondent
Muscat

For the first time in four weeks, Oman on Monday saw the daily COVID-19 cases fall below 1,600. The Ministry of Health (MoH) reported 1,570 new cases and 33 COVID-19 related deaths.

With the fall in new cases, the number of active cases is decreasing as the number of recoveries go up. The total number of cases registered in the sultanate has now reached 276,736.

MoH informed that 166 patients were admitted to hospitals across the country in a 24-hour period on Monday, taking the total number of inpatients to 1,554 including 506 in intensive care units.

The total number of recoveries is 244,782 while the recovery rate is 88.5 per cent. The number of active cases dropped by 1,908 on Monday to 27,068.

However, there is no respite in the number of deaths. MoH on Monday reported 33 new deaths taking the total to 3,316.

REGIONAL WEATHER					
ABU DHABI		DUBAI		MANAMA	
Max	Min	Max	Min	Max	Min
43°C	32°C	42°C	31°C	41°C	29°C
DOHA		KUWAIT CITY		RIYADH	
Max	Min	Max	Min	Max	Min
37°C	29°C	42°C	32°C	43°C	27°C

PRAYER TIMINGS					
Fajr	3.56am	Duhr	12.11pm	Maghrib	6.57pm
Sunrise	5.25am	Asr	3.30pm	Isha	8.27pm

Two arrested over fake PCR test certificates

Our Correspondent
Muscat

Two expatriates were arrested on Monday at Muscat airport on charges of forging COVID-19 PCR test certificates, Royal Oman Police (ROP) said.

In a statement, ROP said the expatriates had obtained the PCR certificates through a travel agency.

The General Directorate of Airport Security arrested two people on charges of forging medical reports while they were trying to leave the country. The incident happened at Muscat International Airport where they were found having forged COVID-19 PCR test certificates obtained through a travel agency. The case is under investigation,' ROP said.

Tender Announcement

مدائن madayn

The Public Establishment for Industrial Estates (Madayn) announces the following Tender:

Tender Number	Tender Name	Last date of buying	Date of submission	Type of work	Register Degree	Fee (R.O)
6/2021/PEIE/HQ-6	The Security System Project At Suhar Industrial City (Fencing)	19-07-2021	15-08-2021	Construction	First & Second	600

Interested Companies registered with Tender Board may obtain the Tender documents from the E-Tendering website: <https://etendering.tenderboard.gov.om> against non-refundable payment as mentioned above for each set of document. Tenders should be submitted on line on given website. The Tenderer should enclose scan copy of Bank Guarantee issued by any bank in the Sultanate of Oman for the value of 1% of the Tender value validity for (90) days, and addressed to The Chairman of Tender Committee mentioned in above tenders.

1. Tender Inquiry: All correspondence pertaining to the TENDER Inquiry must be online at eTendering System.
2. eTendering System Inquiry: All correspondence pertaining to the eTendering System technical support must be directed to the following helpdesk email address and phone number: etenderhd@ita.gov.om and +968 24166670, 24166409 Note: Bid Submission will be online only.

No Document can be accepted as Manual except Original Tender Bond. Scan Copy of Tender Bond needs to be attached in system and original needs to be deposited before Bid Opening.

Madayn is not bound to accept the lowest or any other Offer and has the right to cancel these tenders and the tenderers have no right to claim for any compensations.

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in t f y o

Gene banks to boost grape production, self-sufficiency



(Supplied photo)

Our Correspondent
Muscat

As part of its efforts to achieve self-sufficiency in homegrown fruits and vegetables, the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Water Resources (MAFWR) is planning to establish two genetic banks for the development of grape varieties in Oman.

The gene banks are part of a project to develop and grow grapes in the sultanate that was launched in June 2020, and will run till June 2023. The project is funded by the Agricultural and Fisheries Development Fund (AFDF).

Khalid al Aghbari, deputy di-

rector of the project to develop grape cultivation in MAFWR, said, "The project aims to develop, produce and market grapes, and train farmers on modern grape cultivation, such as fertilisation and pruning, and the use of new technologies that reduce effort and cost.

"The project also aims to establish genetic banks for the development of grape varieties and for research studies. The ministry will establish two genetic banks, one in Bahla and the other in Sohar."

He added that under the project, 12,500 grape seedlings will be planted on 25 acres of land in five governorates in cooperation

Around 25 farmers will benefit from this project. The ministry will provide free grape seedlings to farmers and support them with modern irrigation tools

KHALID AL AGHBARI

with small and medium enterprises. Seven acres will be in North Sharqiyah, five each in Dakhliyah, Dhahirah, North Bati-

nah and South Batinah, and three acres in Dhofar.

Talking about the ministry's efforts to support farmers, he said, "Around 25 farmers will benefit from this project. The ministry will provide free grape seedlings to farmers and support them with modern irrigation tools. The ministry will also prepare a marketing programme for grape products, design a marketing identity for Omani grape producers, and provide packaging to preserve the grapes."

MAFWR recently announced the implementation of a project to establish commercial fields to grow mango, banana and sweet

lemon.

The ministry has set some conditions for Omani farmers to benefit from the project financed by AFDF. The farmer must be Omani and the area of land that will be cultivated should not be less than one acre.

The farmer must provide a permanent source of irrigation, and the soil of the farm should be suitable for cultivation. He must also use seedlings provided by the ministry.

"The project will continue to help farmers grow more diverse crops in various governorates to support efforts in achieving self-sufficiency," the ministry said.



Alizz Islamic Bank launches campaign with exciting offers

Muscat - As part of its ongoing commitment to its customers to provide offers, benefits and attractive banking services, Alizz Islamic Bank has launched a bouquet of offers for customers who transfer their salary or finances to the bank.

The 'You Choose' campaign gives customers the flexibility to choose from a range of specially designed offers if they transfer their current finances, avail new financing from Alizz Islamic Bank or transfer their salaries to the bank.

'The #YouChoose campaign gives customers the freedom of picking one of the many offers that fits their specific requirements and needs,

such as a combo offer to enjoy a new credit card free for life-time of the financing tenors if a customer avails new financing from the bank or enjoy special rates on new financing at a rate of 4.75 per cent for home finance and 4.99 per cent for auto and personal finance or they can avail a three-month moratorium period for their new finance,' the bank said.

Customers can also transfer their salaries to the bank and enjoy ten per cent cash back on the first salary credited during the campaign period. They can also avail a zero profit Qard Hassan facility of up to RO1,000 upon transfer of their salaries to the bank.

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Offer valid from 16th May 2021 to 15th August 2021. Total of 3 raffle draws will be held at Oasis Water Company, Aziba. Draw Dates: 16th June 2021, 19th July 2021 and 15th August 2021. Winners will be intimated directly. Oasis Water Company employees are not eligible to participate in this promotion. Gifts shown are for illustrative purpose only. Actual may vary.

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MUSCAT DAILY



Real estate deals up 32.2%

Our Correspondent
Muscat

The total value of property transactions in the sultanate till the end of May 2021 increased by 32.2 per cent to reach RO1.1bn compared to the same period of 2020 as indicated by the preliminary statistics issued by the National Centre for Statistics and information (NCSI).

The collected real estate transaction fees stood at RO33.7mn, indicating a rise of 49.4 per cent.

The traded value of sale contracts went up by 73.4 per cent to reach RO491.9mn. The number of executed sales contracts

saw a rise of 129.8 per cent to reach 36,649 at the end of May 2021 compared to 15,949 contracts in May 2020.

'The traded value of mortgage contracts rose by 12.8 per cent to reach RO660.8mn at the end of May 2021 compared to RO586mn in the same period of 2020. The number of mortgage contracts reached 7,679, an increase of 85.2 per cent compared to 4,146 contracts in May 2020,' the NCSI report said.

The traded value of exchange (barter) contracts dropped by 2.7 per cent to reach RO8.9mn compared to RO9.2mn in the same period of 2020.

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Offer valid from 1st May 2021 to 31st July 2021. Total of 3 raffle draws will be held at Oasis Water Company, Aziba. Draw Dates: 1st June 2021, 1st July 2021 and 2nd August 2021. Winners will be intimated directly. Oasis Water Company employees are not eligible to participate in this promotion. Gifts shown are for illustrative purpose only. Actual may vary.

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COVID-19 impact continues to challenge real estate market

Our Correspondent
Muscat

The long-term economic impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic are continuing to challenge the recovery in Oman's real estate market, according to the leading global real estate advisory firm Savills.

Savills Oman on Monday released its latest report analyzing the current state of Oman's real estate market. Ihsan Kharouf, head of Savills Oman, highlighted that the sultanate is in a significantly improved position in comparison to this time last year, but headwinds remain for the real estate sector.

"Landlords will need to be flexible, proactive and move quickly to changing market conditions in order to attract and retain tenants. Opportunities for successful development will need to be well considered and clearly focused on evident market gaps, opportunities and needs," Kharouf said.

The Savills report said that Oman has significantly accelerated its COVID-19 vaccination programme in June with the intention of over 70 per cent of the population being vaccinated by the end of the year.

"This is likely to be of significant benefit in re-opening the travel and tourism sector while allowing current restrictions on the retail sector to be significantly eased," the report said.

Office market trends

The pandemic and subsequent lockdown measures have negatively impacted the office market in Muscat. Office leasing activity was limited before the pandemic and the onset of travel restrictions and lockdown measures



Muscat Daily



Landlords will need to be flexible, proactive and move quickly to changing market conditions in order to attract and retain tenants

IHSAN KHAROUF

led to muted demand

levels, Savills noted in the report.

'Almost all new office leases were observed from companies with an existing presence in Oman. Demand remains primarily focused on smaller, fully finished spaces. In contrast to the demand dynamics, recent years have seen the introduction of a significant supply of new office space which has exceeded the limited demand for office space in Muscat,' Savills said.

It noted that there is currently around 100,000sqm of office

space under construction, while requirements in excess of 2,000sqm are extremely rare.

Residential rental market

Expatriates constitute 40 per cent of Oman's population and play a significant role in the demand for residential units across the country.

While the Omani population has continued to grow steadily, expatriate numbers started to drop gradually in 2018 and 2019

before seeing a drop of almost 15 per cent over the course of 2020.

'The expatriate population has started to stabilise over recent months but there is potential for further reductions in numbers due to the long-term economic impacts of the pandemic and a growing focus on Omanisation of workforce, particularly for white-collar positions,' Savills said. Oman Census 2020 reveals that there are currently around 80,000 vacant residential units or around 20 per cent of the total

residential supply in Muscat, according to the Savills report.

With the vast majority of Omanis being owner-occupiers, it is estimated that a significant proportion of the vacant units are likely to be investment properties for the rental market, the report said.

'As a result of the notable drop in the number of expatriates in Muscat over 2020 allied to the difficulty for new employees to enter Oman due to travel restrictions, demand has seen a notable reduction over the last 15 months. It has been focused to a notable degree on more affordable apartments and villas/townhouses in the more exclusive localities of Al Mouj, Muscat Hills and Shatti Al Qurum,' Savills report added.

OPEC+ postpones meeting to end oil output impasse

London, UK - After failing last week to agree on crude oil output levels, the 23 members of the OPEC+ group of producers called off a meeting planned on Monday to overcome the impasse, a source close to the alliance told AFP. No new date was given for them to reconvene.

Since May, the group has raised oil output little by little, after slashing it more than a year ago when the coronavirus pandemic crushed demand.

At stake is the current proposal that would see the world's leading oil producers raise their output by 400,000 barrels per day (bpd) each month from August to December.

That would add a further two million bpd to markets by the end of the year, helping to fuel a hoped-for recovery in the global economy as the coronavirus pandemic is brought under control.

But that plan risks being delayed or even failing over a further proposal to extend the cap on incremental increases through to the end of 2022.

"The market is now fearing several scenarios," said Bjarne Schieldrop, a Norway-based analyst with SEB.

In one, there is no deal and no increase in production, sending oil prices shooting up, he said. Another sees a "free-for-all (in) production and a collapse in the oil price". The hold-out is the United Arab Emirates, which on Sunday criticised the terms of that extension as unjust.

A video conference between OPEC members and their 10 allies was due to begin at 1300 GMT on Monday, but the meeting was called off a few hours later with no new date set.

Oil prices, which had already



been sliding over concerns about the global economy, slumped in April 2020 when the coronavirus spread around the world and battered global consumption, transport and supply chains. OPEC+ decided to withdraw 9.7m bpd from the market and to gradually restore supplies by the end of April 2022.

The April 2022 deal on capping output now seems too close, and some members want to extend the period until December 2022 - and this is what Abu Dhabi objects to.

No-deal prospects

It was this issue that caused last week's talks to break down. The meetings, more used to big hitters Russia and Saudi Arabia setting the agenda, were confronted with the UAE's refusal to toe the line.

"It is the whole group versus one country, which is sad to me," Saudi Energy Minister Abdulaziz bin Salman told Bloomberg TV.

In a separate interview with Al-Arabiya television aired late on Sunday, Prince Abdulaziz called for "a bit of rationality and a bit of compromise" ahead of Monday's meeting.

Analyst Helima Croft, of RBC Capital Markets, went further.

"The prospect of a no-deal outcome - as well as a UAE OPEC exit - has risen materially, even if it has not yet fully entered into firm base-case territory," she wrote.

AFP

TENDERS ADVERTISEMENT

Oman Electricity Transmission Company (OETC) Announce the following Tenders:

Sr.No	Tender No.	Tender Name	Last Date for Obtaining Tender Documents	Closing Date	Grade	Tender Document's Fees (Including VAT) (RO)
1	33/2021 (Extended)	Supply, installation, configuration, and maintenance of IT facilities in grid stations	15/07/2021	10/08/2021	Local companies with experience in same field, Have a valid tender board registration certificate.	157.500
2	36/2021 (Extended)	Replacing of 415V LVAC Board with the essential board panel at South Mawalleh Grid station and supply of 415V (CB) incomer for Bousher Grid Station	15/07/2021	17/08/2021	Local companies with experience in same field, Have a valid tender board registration certificate.	105/=

Participation:	Interested Companies may obtain Tender Document with the necessity of sending a valid Tender Board certificate in the same required field.
Buying the Tender:	The documents required for the purchase of the tender are sent by e-mail to the Tenders, Procurement and Contracts Department, to ensure the authenticity of the documents before purchasing the tender through the official working days of the hour from 8.00 am - 01.00 pm .
Fees:	Against non-refundable payment as mentioned above against each set of document.(Payment Through Bank Transfer)
The deadline for clarification:	Before (21) Days from closing date.
Submission:	Each bid should be submitted in a separate sealed envelope addressed to The Chairman of tender committee mentioning Tender Number and Name on the top of the envelope.
Terms and conditions:	- No other writing or any reference thereto should be mentioned on the envelope. - The bid should be valid for not less than (90) days from closing date. - The Tenderer should enclose a bank guarantee issued by any bank in the Sultanate of Oman for the value of 1% of the bid value and should be valid for (90) days from closing date, addressed to Oman Electricity Transmission Company (SAOC). - Any bid not comply with the required guarantee, will not be accepted. - OETC is not bound to accept the lowest or any other offers.
Offer:	The complete bid documents should be deposited in Tender Box No. (1) at the company's building before 11:00 am on the assigned date for submission of the Tenders.
Company Address:	Muscat - Al Mawaleh Road No: 2153 - Building No. 423 O Block No: 321 - Contact Details: 91777378, 93201558
Email Website:	tenders@omangrid.com www.omangrid.com



Oman Electricity Transmission Company S.A.O.C.
P.O. Box 1389, Al Khoudh, PC 132, Sultanate of Oman
Tel: +968 2428 3000 | Fax: +968 2230 9046
www.omangrid.com



إعلان طرح مناقصات

تعلن الشركة العُمانية لنقل الكهرباء عن طرح المناقصات التالية :

م	رقم المناقصة	عنوان المناقصة	آخر موعد للحصول على مستندات المناقصة	آخر موعد لتقديم العطاءات	الدرجة	لنم الوثيقة (شامل ضريبة القيمة المضافة) (رغ)
١	٢٠٢١/٣٣ (تعديدا)	توريد وتركيب وضبط وصيانة مرافق تكنولوجيا المعلومات في محطات الشركة العُمانية لنقل الكهرباء	٢٠٢١/٠٧/١٥	٢٠٢١/٠٨/١٠	الشركات أهلية العامة في هذا المجال المسجلة لدى مجلس المناقصات وتسجيلها ساري المفعول	١٥٧/٥٠٠
٢	٢٠٢١/٣٩ (تعديدا)	استبدال لوحة المفاتيح بجهد ٤١٥ فولت مع اللوحة الأساسية في محطة الموالج الجنوبية وتوريد ٤١٥ فولت قاطع كهربائي لمحطة بوشهر	٢٠٢١/٠٧/١٥	٢٠٢١/٠٨/١٧	الشركات أهلية العامة في هذا المجال المسجلة لدى مجلس المناقصات وتسجيلها ساري المفعول	١٠٥/=

الاشتراك	يمكن للشركات والمؤسسات المتخصصة الحصول على مستندات المناقصة مع ضرورة إرسال شهادة مجلس المناقصات سارية المفعول وفي نفس المجال المطلوب.
طريقة الشراء	يتم إرسال المستندات المطلوبة لشراء المناقصة عن طريق البريد الإلكتروني إلى دائرة المناقصات والمشتريات والعقود . وذلك لتأكد من صحة المستندات قبل شراء المناقصة وذلك من خلال أيام العمل الرسمية من الساعة ٨:٠٠ ص - ١:٠٠ م .
الرسم	مقابل دفع المبلغ المحدد أعلاه للنسخة الواحدة - لا ترد . (الدفع عن طريق التحويل البنكي)
آخر موعد للإستفسارات	قبل (٢١) يوم من تاريخ آخر موعد لتقديم العطاءات
تقديم العروض	تقدم العروض في مظاريف مغلقة ومعنونة بإسم رئيس لجنة المناقصات مع تحديد رقم وعنوان المناقصة فقط . • عدم تحديد اسم صاحب العطاء أو ما يشير إليه على المظروف. • أن تكون العروض سارية المفعول لمدة لا تقل عن (٩٠) يوما من تاريخ تقديم العطاء . • إرفاق تأميناً في صورة ضمان مصرفي من أحد البنوك العاملة في البلاد قدره (X١) من قيمة العطاء ساري لمدة (٩٠) يوما من تاريخ تقديم العطاء . ومعنونا بإسم الشركة العُمانية لنقل الكهرباء . • كل عطاء لا يستوفي التأمين المطلوب لن ينظر فيه . • الشركة العُمانية لنقل الكهرباء غير مقيدة بقبول أي عروض أو أي عطاء آخر.
العرض المقدم	يجب وضع العروض في صندوق المناقصات رقم (١) بمبنى الشركة قبل الساعة ١١ صباحاً من التاريخ المحدد لتقديم العطاءات .
عنوان الشركة	عنوان الشركة: محافظة مسقط - الموالج رقم السكنة ٢١٥٣ - مبنى رقم ٤٢٣٠ تفاصيل التواصل - ٩١٧٧٧٣٧٨, ٩٣٢٠١٥٥٨
البريد الإلكتروني	tenders@omangrid.com
الموقع الإلكتروني	www.omangrid.com



الشركة العُمانية لنقل الكهرباء ش . م . ع . م
ص . ب : ١٣٨٩ . الفوس الرمز البريدي : ١٣٢ . مسقطنة عمان
الهاتف : +٩٦٨٢٤٢٨٣٠٠٠ / الفاكس : +٩٦٨٢٢٣٠٩٠٤١
الموقع الإلكتروني : www.omangrid.com



Services stocks push MSX up

Our Correspondent
Muscat

The benchmark index of the Muscat Stock Exchange (MSX) on Monday marginally increased by 0.11 per cent to close at 4,102.84 points. Trading activity remained strong compared to the previous session.

The gains in main index were supported by Services Index which rose 1.05 per cent. Financial Index inched up 0.09 per cent while Industrial Index decreased 0.29 per cent. MSX Sharia Index decreased 0.32 per cent to close at 596.71 points.

Trading activity increased on Monday as volumes surged by 183 per cent at 30.07mn shares compared with 10.62mn shares traded on Sunday. Market turnover jumped 269 per cent to RO5.76mn compared with RO1.56mn in the previous trading session.

Market breadth at the MSX remained



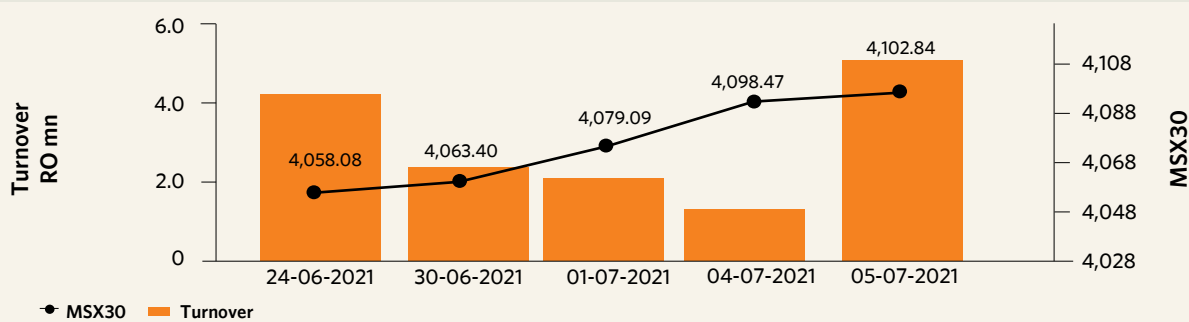
balanced with 14 advancing stocks to 15 decliners. As many as 27 traded stocks remained flat for the day.

Top gainers were Al Maha Petroleum (8 per cent), Al Ahlia Insurance (7.65 per cent), Oman Investment and Finance Company (5.17 per cent), Dhofar Cattle

Feed (2.2 per cent) and National Gas (1.97 per cent).

Top losers were Vision Insurance (-3.33 per cent), Oman and Emirates Investment Holding (-2.67 per cent), Al Jazeera Services (-2.33 per cent) and National Bank of Oman (-1.52 per cent).

MSX INDEX AND TURNOVER OF FIVE TRADING DAYS



Pandemic drives sea freight prices to record high

London, UK - Container shipping prices have reached record highs some 18 months after the outbreak of the coronavirus pandemic which disrupted maritime logistics chains and drove demand sky-high.

"We are basically running out of vessels and of empty containers," Alan Murphy, head of the consultancy Sea Intelligence, told AFP.

"There's been a massive shortage of empty containers, they are in the wrong place, they are stuck in ports and not in Asia ready to be loaded."

The Freightos Baltic Index, a benchmark for major shipping routes, has more than tripled in a year to nearly US\$7,000 for a trip from China to the west coast of the United States.

A trip to Europe has exceeded US\$10,000, compared with just US\$1,600 at the same time last year.

Murphy said the unprecedented situation compounded the troubles of the last 10 years, which he said had been "really bad for the shipping lines".

Blighted by overcapacity in the sector, he said the firms "were losing money every time they were moving a container".

'Unprecedented drop'

The COVID-19 pandemic, which initially brought global shipping to a virtual standstill, did not bode well for the industry



and led to "an unprecedented drop in demand", said Didier Rabattu, of Lombard Odier Investment Managers.

But this did not account for the trends among US and European consumers who during lockdown stopped spending in restaurants and theatres or going on holiday and instead used their money to purchase material goods - many of them imported from Asia.

"Imagine how many televisions you can buy if you don't go skiing for a week with four people?" said Paul Tourret, director of France's Higher Institute of Maritime Economics (ISEMAR).

Disruptions to loading and unloading operations, from dockers falling ill and Covid restrictions to unforeseen events like the shipping backlog caused the blockage of the Suez Canal in March, have only exacerbated the trend.

As a result, ship owners have never been in better shape.

The Marseille-based CMA CGM container and shipping company for example posted a net profit of more than US\$2bn for the first quarter of 2021 alone, 40 times more than the previous year. Its Danish competitor AP Moller-Maersk announced an even higher net profit of US\$2.7bn for the first three months of the year - 13 times what it saw last year.

"It is true that ship owners are making a lot of money at the moment," Tourret said.

"But it is also a way for them to renew their fleets and accelerate their liquefied natural gas (LNG) programmes," he added.

CMA CGM placed an order in April for 22 container ships, more than half of which are LNG-powered.

AFP

China extends probe into US-listed tech firms

Beijing, China - Beijing widened its crackdown on its embattled technology sector Monday by announcing probes into two more US-listed Chinese companies, a day after banning ride-hailing giant Didi Chuxing from app stores in the wake of its huge New York initial public offering.

The country's major internet firms wield massive influence among its army of consumers, but have in recent months had their wings clipped in a regulatory crackdown that has scuppered listings and hit business as the government seeks to rein in their influence.

The latest targets are newly listed companies Full Truck Alliance - a merger between truck-hailing platforms Yunnanman and Huochebang - and Kanzhun, which owns online recruitment platform Boss Zhipin. "The overarching message here from regulators is, you need to have your house in order domestically before listing abroad," said Kendra Schaefer, at Trivium China.

The platforms have been told to stop new user registrations during the investigation 'to prevent security risks to national



This photo taken on July 2 shows a logo of Chinese ride-hailing giant Didi Chuxing at its headquarter in Beijing (AFP)

data, safeguard national security and protect public interest', the Cyberspace Administration of China (CAC) said.

Hours earlier, the watchdog ordered the removal of Didi from app stores following a similar probe, which it said found the firm's user data collection and use in 'serious violation' of regulations. It also cited national security for the probe, in an unusual move against a domestic tech firm.

However, there were no details on what the probe was about, nor when or where the claimed violations took place.

While it does not prevent people from using Didi as existing users can still order rides for now, it throws a wrench in its growth plans after a bumper New York IPO last week raised US\$4.4bn, one of the biggest in the US over the past decade.

The ruling also comes at a time of heightened tensions between Beijing and Washington with the tech sector a key issue of disagreement.

Dubbed China's Uber, Didi was founded just nine years ago by former Alibaba executive Cheng Wei, and has gone on to dominate the country's ride-hail-

ing market since it won a costly turf war against the US titan in 2016 and took over its local unit.

Shifting landscape

It now claims to have more than 15mn drivers and nearly 500mn users, while its services are available in 16 countries, including Russia and Australia.

Kevin Kwek, senior analyst on Asian financials at Bernstein, said the "trend towards tightening on tech was clear".

Didi, with a near monopoly on ride-hailing, is "the most high profile cyber security case" of its kind, University of Hong Kong law professor Angela Zhang told AFP.

But the action was lauded by state-run Global Times, which said the country must not allow "any internet giant to become a super database of Chinese personal information even more detailed than the state".

A top Didi executive took to social media to rebuff rumours over the weekend that the firm had been sharing domestic data with the United States, saying it would be 'absolutely impossible'.

AFP

US deficit to top \$3tn again

Washington, US - The US economy is recovering faster than previously predicted, but the government will see a deficit over US\$3tn again this year, the Congressional Budget Office (CBO) said. The deficit is slightly lower than in the 2020 fiscal year, but higher than projected in the CBO's February estimates due to the massive stimulus program approved in March with the projected total 'triple the shortfall recorded in 2019.'

'Relative to the size of the economy, this year's deficit is projected to total 13.4 per cent of gross domestic product (GDP), making it the second largest since 1945,' the nonpartisan agency said in its update.

Meanwhile, federal debt is

projected to rise to US\$23tn - nearly 103 per cent of GDP, the report said.

But with the surge in consumer demand and rapid employment gains in the second half of the year, CBO projects the economy will expand by 6.7 per cent by this year - two percentage points higher than the February report. And GDP is expected to grow 5 per cent in 2022.

These improvements largely result from the nearly US\$4tn stimulus package enacted in March aimed at helping individuals and businesses avoid an even worse downturn due to pandemic restrictions.

However, average annual growth is expected to slow in the second half of the coming

decade to a below-average 1.6 per cent 'primarily because the labor force is expected to grow more slowly than it has in the past,' the CBO said.

The ageing US population is reducing the pool of available workers, a demographic change that will only accelerate. And economists point to signs that retirements have accelerated during the pandemic.

But employment is still expected to surpass its pre-pandemic level in mid-2022, according to the CBO estimates.

Unemployment will drop to 4.6 per cent by the end of the year from 5.8 per cent currently and closer to pre-crisis levels in 2022.

AFP

COVID-19 pandemic lifts global sales of wearable gadgets

Barcelona, Spain - Earphones embedded in pearl earrings, a smartwatch that measures body temperature, a diamond ring that monitors sleep patterns:

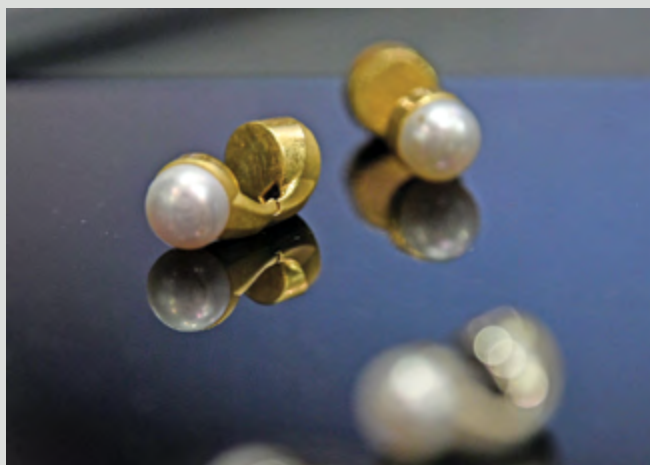
The wearable gadgets market has boomed as the pandemic boosts interest in health monitoring and working from home. While worldwide sales of smartphones slumped last year, a record 527mn wearables were sold in 2020, up from 384mn in 2019, according to research firm Strategy Analytics.

It was the first time that global wearable sales topped half a billion and analysts expect the trend to continue, with the firm forecasting the devices will overtake smartphone sales by the end of the decade.

The surge in wearables sales was last week in focus at the four-day Mobile World Con-

gress, the telecom industry's biggest annual gathering, which wraps up Thursday in Barcelona. Ear-worn devices such as earbuds, which can be used to make calls and listen to music, accounted for nearly two-thirds of global wearable sales last year as people working from home upgraded their headphones for video calling.

Wristwear such as fitness trackers and smartwatches, which can monitor steps, the heart rate and even oxygen levels, accounted for 36 per cent of worldwide wearable sales, as people paid more attention to their health during the pandemic and exercise moved outdoors since gyms were closed in many places. "Everybody is becoming much more health focused and wearables are a good device to assist with that," said Neil Mawston, an executive director at



Nova Audio Earrings are pictured at the Mobile World Congress (MWC) fair in Barcelona on June 28 (AFP)

Strategy Analytics.

More features

Falling prices and new features and shapes for wearables were also helping to deliver stronger sales, analysts said.

Chinese tech giant Huawei

for example launched a new flagship smartwatch ahead of the congress which for the first time includes a high-precision sensor to detect skin temperature. "We expect device makers to keep adding more sensors to devices," said Leo Gebbie, sen-

ior wearables analyst at consultancy CCS Insight, which expects 1.2bn devices to be in use worldwide by the end of 2025.

"It will be interesting to see what else can be added to smartwatches because I think people will want to see more features."

While the wearables market is dominated by big firms such as Apple and Samsung, smaller companies that focus on specific markets are "fuelling growth", said Ramon Llamas, wearables research director at market research firm IDC.

Indian consumer electronics firm boAt for example has become the world's fifth biggest wearables supplier by focusing solely on the Indian market with its budget wireless earbuds, he said. But with companies releasing new devices at a faster rate, Gebbie warned there often ap-

pears to be little to separate them out, especially at the lower end of the market where "wearable devices increasingly seem to be much of a muchness".

'Sea change'

Better design is also helping to boost the appeal of wearables. The tumbling size of components and batteries has made it possible to make smaller and sleeker wearables that often do not look like an electronic device. German firm NOVA for example displayed at the congress its wireless earphones which are embedded in clip-on pearl earrings that allow users to listen to music and make calls.

The device uses patented technology than can send sound from your earlobe directly to your ear canal without any sound leakage.

Finnish health technology

firm Oura has put out a wedding-band sized ring that tracks the wearer's activity - including sleep, steps, heart rate and body temperature.

The device, which comes in different metals including a top-end diamond studded one, caught the attention of major sports teams in the United States as well as Britain's Prince Harry who was seen spotted wearing it. But Gebbie of CCS Insight said consumers have gotten used to the look of wearables and the need "for them to blend in" has "disappeared a bit". "When smartwatches were still fairly new, there was a certain stigma around wearing one, it was seen maybe as a bit geeky or a bit nerdy. I think there has been a bit of a sea change in terms of how people feel about them," he added.

AFP

OAB announces initiative to administer second dose of COVID-19 vaccine

Oman Arab Bank (OAB) announced a COVID-19 vaccination drive for the administration of the second dose of the Pfizer vaccine for its employees and their families. This is in line with the national vaccination drive, spearheaded by the Ministry of Health. The initiative includes children over the age of 12, following the Ministry of Health's directives to include individuals from this age group.

This step is also aligned with the Wiqaya programme, launched by the bank's Human Resources Division, ever since the onset of the pandemic.

The initiative will run in coordination with multiple hospitals across various wilayats, providing ease and accessibility to staff, without the need for them to travel to Muscat.

Commenting on the success of the initiative, Rashad al Musafir, CEO of the bank said, "We are proud of the level of awareness shown by the employees from all wilayats and their willingness to participate in the vaccination campaign. Upon completion of the second stage of vaccination, we will surely be in a better position to reduce the spread of infection.

"Furthermore, instructions have been issued to relevant di-



visions to maintain all precautionary measures and educate employees of the need to adhere to them, even after receiving the vaccination, as per the Ministry of Health directives."

The vaccination campaign began on Sunday, July 4 and included the employees of the head office and the bank's branches in the capital who have completed three weeks at least from getting their first dose. It will later include the employees from the 53 branches spread across the sultanate in the upcoming weeks, with a

coverage rate of 100 per cent. The cost of the second dose for employees and their families will be covered by the bank.

"Through this campaign, we aim to support the government's vaccine provision efforts to everyone in the sultanate, stemming from our role in this field. We wish safe health and well-being to all citizens and residents alike, as we look forward to starting the recovery phase soon, together with everyone's efforts," Musafir added.

Oman Arab Bank has a rich

and proud history as one of the first financial institutions to be established in the sultanate.

Today, the bank operates a nationwide network of 53 branches and representative offices with 160 ATMs spread across Oman.

OAB provides a complete range of financial products and services through its OAB Online App.

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

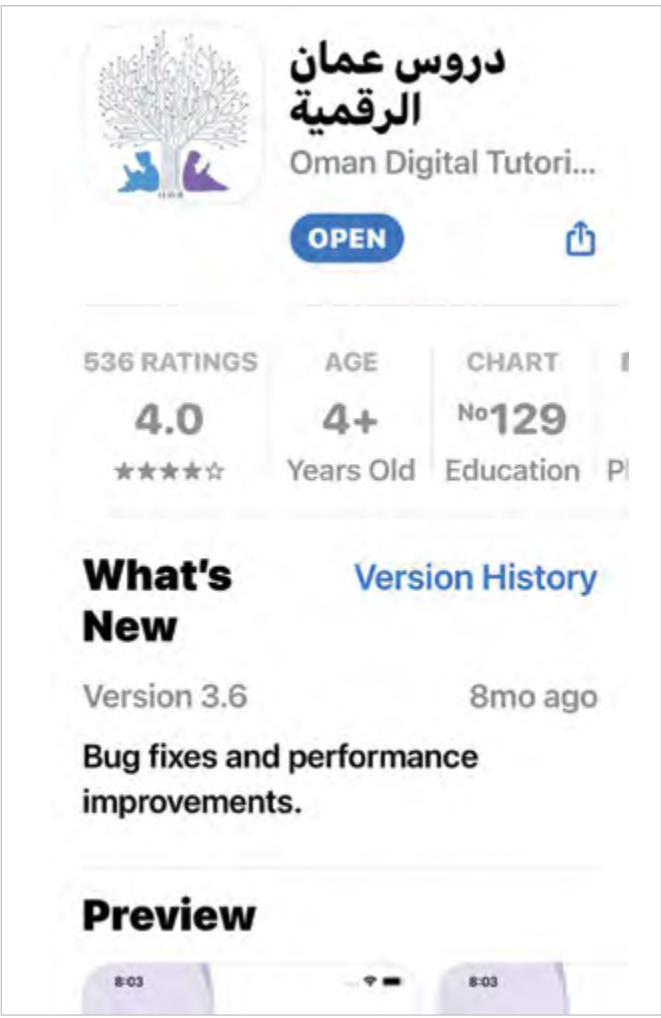
Ooredoo's Digital Tutorial App reaches 48mn views

At the forefront of digital educational technology since its launch in 2018, Ooredoo's Digital Tutorial App has received more than 48mn views since November 2020, the start of the academic year, to date. Around 14,000 users per day used the app during peak times, with average view time at around 21 minutes per student per day.

Over 808,000 students accessed some of the amazing learning materials available. And the number of registered students since the beginning of the year currently stands at 188,277. Through this innovative educational app, Ooredoo continues to enhance education in the sultanate and empower the new generation throughout their academic journey.

Raed Mohammed Dawood, director of Branding, Communications and Corporate Affairs at Ooredoo, said, "The Digital Tutorial App has been very popular, especially during the last year where most have been studying remotely. So we've been extremely active, updating it continuously and adding new lessons and features. Now, more students than ever, among all age groups, can continue their studies in a unique and fun way."

This digital initiative comes under the umbrella of the company's Corporate Social Responsibility programme, Ooredoo Goodwill, and includes different training courses on web design, HTML and programming, English and IELTS tests, literacy curric-



ula, as well as specialised topics from grade one all the way up to grade 12.

It also includes a number of courses and lessons on Java, information security, cloud computing, and IC3 global accreditation. Users can even learn about the Fourth Industrial Revolution and self-development; courses that are designed for trainers, teachers and psycholo-

gists from the sultanate and the wider Middle East.

Ooredoo will be updating the app with lessons tailored for university students and job seekers, including certificates and courses from some of the most prestigious international universities. Users can download the app from the Apple store or Google Play by searching for Oman Digital Tutorial.



AJIA's Blood Donation Drive sees overwhelming response

Al Jenaibi International Automobiles LLC (AJIA), the official importer of BMW Group vehicles in Oman, successfully conducted a Blood Donation Drive on Wednesday, June 23 and Thursday, June 24 at its Muscat showroom.

With the aim of raising awareness on the importance of blood donation in the sultanate, the initiative attracted close to 100 residents, including AJIA employees, their friends and fami-

lies, and BMW and MINI customers.

Serena Srour, marketing and PR manager of Al Jenaibi International Automobiles LLC, said, "AJIA's Blood Donation Drive is testament to our commitment to the communities and people in Oman.

"We are delighted at the altruism and overwhelming response from our staff and clients, who were happy to help and donate to such a noble cause.

"We are confident that this initiative will go a long way in saving lives and reaching those in need during these challenging times. It is one of the most gracious ways of giving back to society, and moving forward, the dealership aims to make this initiative a reoccurring event on a quarterly basis."

For more information, please call 9617 8383, 9617 9393, 800 50008 (toll-free) or visit www.bmw-oman.com.

Samsung announces availability of brand new smart laundry line-up in Oman

Samsung Gulf Electronics announced the launch of its all-new smart laundry line-up, the innovative collection powered by artificial intelligence (AI) that comprises top-tier energy efficiency capabilities. Headlined by the brand's new AI EcoBubble range and developed to complement today's lifestyle, make life easier for consumers in Oman, and present greater convenience than ever before, the line-up will customise laundry processes and achieve desired results with less time, energy, and effort.

Samsung's Add Wash, EcoBubble, QuickDrive technologies also form part of the line-up, presenting consumers with their biggest opportunity yet to reimagine laundry at home.

"At Samsung, we have always been driven by our commitment to present brand enthusiasts with products that boost lifestyles and cater to every demand and expectation," said Burcin Arabul, director of Home



Appliances at Samsung Gulf Electronics.

"With cutting-edge performance and leading technological capabilities, our smart laundry lineup will empower consumers to implement sustainable actions into their daily lives, ensuring they fully benefit from eco-friendly processes in their households. Now more than ever, customisation is important to

those we serve, and we look forward to the positive response to this latest offering."

Smart washing machine appliances have risen in popularity in recent years, establishing themselves among the most in-demand appliances thanks to the effectiveness and efficiency of several smart features. Their growing appeal is also emphasized through recent statistics,

which indicate further segment expansion in the years ahead. The smart homes technology market in the GCC has experienced notable annual growth in recent years and is expected to surpass USD3.4bn by 2025, due to technologies such as AI, according to Research & Markets. Technological advancements and innovative projects will drive such growth in due course, with Samsung's smart laundry line-up sure to set new standards and consumer expectations.

Adding to Samsung's reliable performance is artificial intelligence, which learns users' behavioural patterns to recommend cycles and offer a truly personalised laundry experience. With AI Control, the new Samsung washer familiarises itself with user preferences and combines that knowledge with big data to provide the industry's first automatic suggestion of wash cycles on its display. For more details, visit www.samsung.com.

The Chedi Muscat now offers luxury summer experiences

It is the time to try something new — a staycation at The Chedi Muscat.

With the Stay In Style offer guests at The Chedi Muscat can make the most of sunny days ahead while taking in the sweeping views of the Gulf of Oman, enjoy complimentary yoga, then unwind by trio of stunning swimming pools.

To indulge in a variety of fine dining options, The Chedi Muscat offers RO30 resort credit.

Guests can expect:

- Daily breakfast served at The Restaurant
- Hotel credit offer of RO30 per night
- Complimentary yoga class (advance reservation required)
- Early check-in and late check-

out (subject to availability)

►A 3-course dinner inclusive of soft drinks and an aperitif at RO17 per person

A valid Oman resident ID is required upon check-in. If a valid ID is not available at check-in, the prevailing best available rate will apply.

Valid until September 30 2021

Price: RO79

Suite Sensation Offer

Guests can escape to a private tropical paradise and indulge themselves in desirable Chedi Club Suites, nestled among tranquil gardens.

It is a perfect opportunity to unwind in these generous 67-metre retreats and relax in terrazzo sunken bathtub.



The royal treatment culminates with an exquisite 3-course feast for two at The

Restaurant.

Guests can expect:

- Complimentary 3-course set

menu dinner for two persons per night

- Early check-in and late check-

out (subject to availability)

►Daily breakfast served at The Restaurant or in the privacy of your suite

- Welcome drink upon arrival
- Daily seasonal fresh fruits
- Selected beverages from the minibar (replenished once daily)
- Wi-Fi access in the room and public areas
- Unlimited access to the health club and business centre

A valid Oman resident ID is required upon check-in. If a valid ID is not available at check-in, the prevailing best available rate will apply.

Valid until September 30 2021

Price: RO175

Daycation

Guests can relax and recharge as

they escape into the luxurious world of The Chedi Muscat.

With the daycation offer, they can enjoy day access to all facilities and an RO20 hotel credit to spend on F&B and Spa, wander around refreshing gardens and relax in one of the three stunning swimming pools.

For lunch, guests can choose from The Chedi Muscat exceptional dining experiences.

Guests can expect:

- RO20 hotel credit
- Pool and beach access
- Timings: 10am - 6pm, daily
- Price: RO25 per person
- Reservations are required.
- Free for children under 16 years old, no hotel credit included.

Alfardan Motors opens renovated showroom

Alfardan Motors, the official Ferrari importer in Oman, celebrated the inauguration of its newly renovated Ferrari showroom this week. Located in Muscat, Oman, the showroom offers the Prancing Horse brand's discerning clientele and prospective owners the opportunity to experience the famous brand in an immersive state-of-the-art facility. The event was enhanced with the presentation of the Ferrari Portofino M, a few short months following its online premiere during the COVID-19 crisis.

Omar Alfardan, president and CEO, Alfardan Group, said, "Our new showroom undoubtedly represents an exciting new chapter for Ferrari in Oman, worthy of the legendary Italian brand and its popularity in Oman."

"We have always been committed to offer our customers the highest standards of service and maximum ownership value, and we look forward to continue fulfilling this vision of excellence at the brand's new home in Oman."

The new Ferrari showroom located in Azaiba, Muscat, offers a



total dimension of 800m² and features a main display area accommodating the entire Ferrari range. Sitting alongside a spacious client area, guests can relax and enjoy an Italian-inspired coffee bar while experiencing a warm

community feel. The opening of our expanded and fully renovated showroom underlines the importance of the Ferrari in Oman.

The space is equipped with state-of-the-art interactive screens, innovative lighting sys-

tems and a new lounge area. Additionally, clients and prospective owners can use the Configurator Room allowing them opportunity to interact with products virtually and tailor cars to suit their taste, while leveraging from a broad

range of modification options.

Ferrari Portofino M

The showroom featured a special display and the Omani unveiling of Maranello's latest marvel, the Ferrari Portofino M;

the latest evolution of the Prancing Horse GT 2+ Spider. In a move unprecedented in the Maranello marque's 70-year-plus history, the new car's premiere took place entirely online. And in a few short months,

the marque held pride of place in the Muscat showroom bringing Italian supercar excellence to Oman. In keeping with its new presentation format, the Ferrari Portofino M is the (re)starting point for Prancing Horse's pursuit of innovation whilst fully respecting its heritage, passion and constant search for perfection. All of these values are reflected in the new Portofino M with the 'M' in its moniker standing for 'Modificata', which in Ferrari nomenclature refers to cars that have undergone an evolution that has boosted their performance.

There is no shortage of technical innovation in this stunning new evolution of the Ferrari Portofino, the most notable being its redesigned powertrain, a brand-new eight-speed gearbox and a five-position Manettino that includes a Race mode, an absolute first for a Maranello GT spider. As a result, the Portofino M guarantees a completely unprecedented combination of authentic GT performance, driving pleasure, agility, and exceptional versatility in everyday driving contexts.

NetApp acquires Data Mechanics

NetApp, a global, cloud-led, data-centric software company, announced that it has acquired Data Mechanics, a managed platform provider for big data processing and cloud analytics with offices in Paris, France, that helps businesses capitalise on Apache Spark, an open-source unified analytics engine for large-scale data processing and machine learning, in Kubernetes. Financial details of the transaction were not disclosed.

At a time when on-premises and cloud enterprise data and application growth is exploding, use of analytics and machine learning to identify operating efficiencies, cost reductions, and automate manual processes so engineers can focus on more strategic tasks is a top priority – and a strategic imperative – for all enterprises.

"Now more than ever, our customers are adopting cloud-first and cloud native strategies that will enable them to be more agile and adaptable in the face of



unprecedented data growth," said Anthony Lye, senior vice president and general manager of NetApp's Public Cloud Services business unit. "Adding Data Mechanics to our existing solutions will make it simpler and more cost-effective for organizations across all industries to fully leverage Apache Spark and Kubernetes to advance their data and cloud initiatives."

The Data Mechanics acquisition comes less than a year after NetApp acquired Spot (now Spot by NetApp), a leading

CloudOps provider that automates and optimizes workloads running in public cloud environments. Data Mechanics' s team and IP will be integrated with the Spot by NetApp team and portfolio to accelerate the development of NetApp's recently announced Spot Wave solution, which simplifies, optimises and automates Spark workloads running in public clouds.

"Although there are significant benefits to moving analytics and application workloads to the cloud, managing analytics technologies and cloud infrastructure can be resource and time intensive, impeding employee productivity and return on investment," said Amiram Shachar, vice president and general manager of Spot by NetApp. "We're excited to welcome Data Mechanics to Spot by NetApp as we further enable organizations to put their data to work and get even more value from their cloud infrastructure investments."

Sultan Center launches vaccination campaign for staff, their families

As part of its commitment to taking measures to prevent the spread of the virus, The Sultan Center (TSC) launched a COVID-19 vaccination campaign for all staff members and their families in the various branches around Muscat.

The initiative comes as part of TSC's extensive preventative measures to maintain the public safety and reduce the spread of the virus.

Mahmoud al Shaikh, marketing manager at TSC, said, "Everyone at TSC are all aware of the importance of getting vaccinated against COVID-19 and support measures in the sultanate to protect the community during this difficult time. Vaccinating our employees is the latest initiative to maintain public safety."

He added, "We have managed to provide COVID-19 vaccination for over 300 employees and their families; we will continue our campaign until we get



all our staff members and their families vaccinated, while maintaining the necessary preventive measures as advised by the official authorities in the sultanate."

TSC has been a leader in the fight against COVID-19 by implementing a series of strict safety protocols at each centre.

TSC Qurm, Azaiba, Al Khoudh and Amerat wholesale

centers and TSC Mawaleh, Samail and Quriyat centres all feature an automatic sanitiser for shopping carts, Smart Pass temperature checks for customers entering the store; carts are also sterilised round the clock on a daily basis.

Cashier counters have also been fitted with transparent plastic barriers to protect staff and customers while still allowing friendly interaction.

Staff have also been wearing protective masks, visors and gloves at all times, while every centre has been rearranged and marked in order to help customers maintain a safe distance and ensure an enjoyable and safe shopping experience.

The Sultan Center is the largest independent publicly traded retailer in Kuwait, serving 5mn customers annually across its 61 stores, in Kuwait, Jordan, Bahrain, and Oman where it operates seven stores.

New Abarth 695 Esseeesse Collectors' Edition: Top performance and handling

The Scorpione brand returns to make the hearts of the Abarthisti fandom flutter with a new 'Collectors' Edition': the Abarth 695 Esseeesse, a name that has its roots in the brand's history, referring directly to its early days when the 1960s tuning kits made a fortune for Carlo Abarth, establishing him as the inventor of tuning for mass production cars.

Produced in a limited edition of only 1390 models, divided into 695 "Scorpion Black" and another 695 in "Campovolo Grey", the Abarth 695 Esseeesse is the new collectible edition dedicated to those seeking exclusivity, top performance and a racing soul.

In its creation, the team of Abarth engineers and designers drew inspiration from the 1964 model, the "Cinquino" tuned up as a 695 Esseeesse with its displacement raised to 690 cc and 38 hp so it could achieve 140 km/h, designed for everyday use and as a sporty city car, but aimed at those who were seeking the best performance on everyday roads, and produced in only 1,000 units. In addition, the "mean little Scorpion" stood out for its distinctive badges with the monogram "SS" in capital letters



on the bonnet and "esseeesse", all in lower case on the dashboard. And it was immediately a success for fans of Italian sportiness.

In the design of the new Abarth 695 Esseeesse, the goal was to improve performance further in terms of acceleration and handling. The research therefore drove at a reduction in weight, a different balance and attention to the aerodynamics. As well as marking out the new 695 Esseeesse from an aesthetic point of view, the new doubly hunched aluminum bonnet reduces the weight by 25 per cent compared to a normal bonnet, and combined with the adoption of the Akrapovi exhaust and other tar-

geted interventions, has reduced the car's overall weight by 10kg compared to an Abarth 595 Competizione.

This distinctive feature is joined in the rear by the "Spoiler ad Assetto Variabile". As well as marking out its style, all these elements have improved performance, for example: on the quarter-mile (400 m), the 695 Esseeesse manages to reach the finish line 1/10th of a second faster than the Competizione version.

Top performance

Available in hatchback version only, the new Abarth 695 Esseeesse immediately impresses

with a new aluminum bonnet and rear spoiler that recall the world of racing and the Scorpion brand's legendary history of racing. At full tilt (60°) and a speed of 200 km/h, the "Spoiler ad Assetto Variabile" – adjustable from 0 to 60° – provides for an increase in aerodynamic load to up to 42kg, resulting in improved stability on bends and greater responsiveness in mixed sections.

Combined with the aluminum bonnet, all this translates into a lower weight, improved performance on bends and an improvement in acceleration performance. In sum, the new Abarth 695 Esseeesse "Collector's Edition" is the fastest in the line-up.

The aesthetic features of the exterior continue with a series of elements inspired by the past and present, making the 695 Esseeesse decidedly exclusive, such as the white details on the front and rear DAM, mirror caps and side stickers.

Also white are the 17-inch rims with red hub caps, red Brembo calipers, 695 logo on the side and 695 Esseeesse badge on the rear.

Nokia C1 2nd edition brings famed Finnish trust, reliability

HMD Global, the home of Nokia phones, introduces its latest Android 11 (Go edition) 3G smartphone joining the C-series family – Nokia C1 2nd edition. With award-winning build quality, the Nokia C1 2nd edition delivers impressive power behind a crisp HD+ screen, supported by all-day battery life, while the top-notch security that Nokia phones are known for works diligently in the background to keep you safe.

Stephen Taylor, CMO, HMD Global, said, "Improved in key areas including a better screen and a new operating system to compliment its power and connectivity, the Nokia C1 2nd edition sets a new benchmark for the entry-level. Being a member of the C-series means Nokia C1 2nd edition comes with everything we guarantee as part of this range beyond just the specs on paper. Our security promise and longevity track record thanks to our industry-leading durability tests, make it reliable in the long term too. That, combined with Android 11 (Go edition) benefits and the affordable price point, makes it the perfect device for the entire family that you can trust."



Beautiful moments

Family life is all about magical moments. Video calling your closest ones feels even more real thanks to the clarity an HD+ screen brings. Having flash on both sides will ensure you never miss those special moments day or night. Cosying up with the kids to watch a film will be a treat on wider viewing angles. With HDR imaging, the Nokia C1 2nd edition will ensure your memories are as beautiful as the moment itself.

Trust the Finnish standards

From build quality to security

levels, the European standards flow throughout. From twisting and bending, to heat, force and drop tests, the Nokia C1 2nd edition can meet the demands of everyday life. It also has a sturdy polycarbonate body with an inner metal alloy chassis.

When it comes to threats from the cyber world, the Nokia C1 2nd edition will work harder than most phones at this price range to keep your data safe. Regular security updates will come through for at least two years, whilst face unlock will make sure those cherished memories are well guarded.

Speed

Android 11 (Go edition) brings you a 20 per cent increase in speed and gesture navigation, which makes overall usage a breeze and frees up screen estate. The Nokia C1 2nd edition will also see you through your entire daily routine thanks to all-day battery life.

Pricing

The Nokia C1 2nd edition is available in Oman from August in Blue and Purple and comes with 1/16GB4 memory and storage for RO23.6.

Iran's Bushehr nuclear plant back online after two weeks

Tehran, Iran - Iran's only nuclear power plant has been brought back online, its manager said early on Monday, after two weeks off-grid amid a power shortage and rolling blackouts across the Islamic republic.

The Bushehr plant's shutdown was initially blamed on a 'technical fault' that required repairs followed by conflicting reports that it was a regular maintenance operation.

The plant going offline came as Tehran and world powers in Vienna talks attempt to revive a hobbled 2015 agreement on Iran's nuclear programme that was torpedoed by the United States.

It returns to the grid as major cities across Iran including the capital Tehran are experiencing frequent blackouts blamed on high summertime demand exceeding production levels.

The 'technical fault' that shut down the Bushehr plant 'was fixed', Mahmoud Jafari, who is also deputy head of the Atomic Energy Organization of Iran (AEOI), told ISNA news agency around midnight. That allowed the plant to be reconnected to the national power grid and resume production.

Jafari said power generation had resumed on Sunday, and urged Iranians to 'help' the overburdened grid by minimising power consumption as high temperatures are forecast in the coming days.

The plant on Iran's southern



The reactor building at the Russian-built Bushehr nuclear power plant about 1200km south of Tehran (AFP)

Power generation resumed on Sunday... urge Iranians to 'help' the overburdened grid by minimising power consumption in the coming days

MAHMOUD JAFARI

coast and its 1,000MW reactor were built by Russia and officially handed over in September 2013 after years of delay.

Russian and Iranian firms started work on two additional 1,000MW reactors in 2016, with construction expected to take ten years.

On June 20, the AEOI had blamed 'a technical fault' for the

shutdown and said it had given the energy ministry one day's notice before going offline.

It said two days later that the issue was with the plant's 'power generator', without explaining further.

But Iran's Foreign Ministry at the time described the shutdown as 'routine', saying it was carried out 'once or twice each year'.

sanctions on Tehran.

Trump's successor Joe Biden favours rejoining the accord and his administration is indirectly involved in the Vienna talks to salvage the deal.

Bushehr going off-grid had raised concerns of worse blackouts after a string of power cuts in Iran blamed on heat, drought impacting hydro-electrical facilities, and surging electricity demand.

Iran introduced planned, rolling blackouts in May after Tehran and several other cities were hit by unannounced power cuts, sparking complaints from consumers and an apology from the energy minister.

A spokesman for Iran's electricity company on Monday apologised for unplanned cuts the night before.

Mostafa Rajabi-Mashhadi said record consumption of 65,900MW had exceeded Iranian power plants' 55,000MW output and a 'looming heat wave' could exacerbate the situation, IRNA news agency reported.

Power cuts are not uncommon during Iran's hot summers, when air-conditioning use spikes. Adding to the problem, the country's hydropower capacity has been hit by low rainfall.

A government report in May said precipitation was down 34 percent compared to the long-term average, and warned of reduced water supplies for the year.

AFP

Record power consumption

Bushehr plant chief Jafari said in late March that Iran was having a difficult time obtaining supplies to run Bushehr because of US sanctions, and warned of an imminent shutdown 'if no solution is found'.

Tehran is engaged in talks with world powers in Vienna to revive the 2015 nuclear deal that gave Iran international sanctions relief in exchange for limiting its nuclear programme.

But hopes for rising prosperity were dashed in 2018 when former US president Donald Trump unilaterally withdrew from the accord and reimposed punishing



Philippine military personnel inspect the wreckage of the ill-fated Philippine Airforce C-130 plane, in Jolo town on Sunday (AFP)

Death toll in Philippines plane crash 50

Patikul, Philippines - Philippine security forces searched among coconut trees on a remote southern island on Monday for the flight data boxes of an aircraft that crashed and killed 50 people in one of the country's worst military air disasters.

The C-130 Hercules transport plane was carrying 96 people, most of them recent army graduates, when it overshot the runway on Sunday while trying to land on Jolo island in Sulu province - a haven for extremist militants.

The plane 'skidded' and burst into flames in a village, killing 50 people including 47 military personnel and three civilians, said military spokesman Major General Edgard Arevalo.

Another 53 were injured, most of them soldiers. It was not clear if the pilots were among the survivors.

"This is one of the worst tragic incidents that happened in our armed forces," Arevalo said.

The three civilians killed were not on the flight and had been working in a quarry, village leader Tanda Hailid told AFP.

They were relatives of Agga Ahaddi, who was lucky to survive the crash.

He and his child were outside when the plane ploughed through their house and then a neighbour's home.

"We ran away, we just left," Ahaddi told AFP.

Photos of the scene released by the military's Joint Task Force-Sulu showed the damaged tail and smoking wreckage scattered in a coconut grove.

"We have people on the ground to make sure the integrity of the pieces of the evidence that we will retrieve, most particularly the flight data recorder," Arevalo said.

"Aside from eyewitness accounts, we are also looking for recordings, radio conversation recordings between the pilot and the control tower."

Arevalo said the military had secured the crash site and would ensure militants on the island do not disrupt search efforts.

Dental records were being used to help identify the charred remains of victims.

AFP



Former South African president Jacob Zuma walks back to his home after addressing his supporters, in Nkandla on Sunday (AFP)

S Africa police await new court orders on Jacob Zuma's arrest

Johannesburg, South Africa - South Africa's police minister on Monday said he was awaiting court instructions on whether to arrest ex-president Jacob Zuma, who has been given a 15-month jail term for contempt.

The country's top court last week convicted Zuma for contempt and ordered him to turn himself in by end of Sunday to start his sentence.

If he failed to do so, the police would be told to arrest him within the following three days.

But Zuma on Friday lodged a last-ditch application to halt execution of the arrest order. The application will be heard in a high court on Tuesday.

"We hope that we will be getting the clarification, because when we were given the instruction there were no other legal activities taking place," Police Minister Bheki Cele told reporters on Monday.

Zuma (79) has also pleaded with the Constitutional Court order to reconsider and rescind its decision to jail him. That challenge will be heard on July 12.

Speaking from his rural home on Sunday night, Zuma said he would not hand himself to the police by the set deadline because of the pending court appli-

cations.

There is 'no need for me to go to jail today', he reporters at his Nkandla homestead in Kwa-Zulu Natal province, where hundreds of his supporters are camped outside in solidarity.

"They cannot accept papers and expect me to go to jail," he said, referring to his legal challenge of the sentence.

The defiant politician has repeatedly attacked the judiciary and did not hold back from lashing out again.

"I'm very concerned that South Africa is fast sliding back to apartheid-type rule," he said.

"I am facing a long detention without trial," he said. "Sending me to jail during the height of a pandemic, at my age, is the same as sentencing me to death."

The Constitutional Court, in a historic ruling last week, handed Zuma the 15-month term after he snubbed a judicial probe into the theft of state assets under his tenure.

His nine years in power were stained by scandal and allegations of graft, ending disastrously in 2018 when he was forced out by the ruling African National Congress (ANC) and replaced as president by Cyril Ramaphosa.

AFP

One dead, 27 injured from Bangkok factory explosion

Bangkok, Thailand - An explosion near Thai capital Bangkok's international airport on Monday left a plastic's factory in flames, killing at least one firefighter and wounding 27 people, officials said.

Heavy plumes of black smoke could be seen rising up to the sky from the city's downtown 35km away, as rescuers continued to evacuate residents near the site.

The blast occurred around 3.00am at Taiwan-based Ming Dih Chemical Co, located on the



Firefighters work at the site of an explosion and fire at a plastics factory on the outskirts of Bangkok on Monday (AFP)

outskirts of Bangkok near Suvarnabhumi airport.

"We have 27 injured, mostly from cuts, and one dead who was a firefighter," said Somsak Kaewsena, the chief of Bang Pli district where the factory is located. He told AFP that 500 residents had so far been evacuated to two shelters. By noon, elderly residents in wheelchairs were evacuated to a nearby school about 9km away.

The public have been ordered to stay away from a radius of at

least 500m around the blast site, said Lieutenant General Ampon Buarubporn.

"We do not know if there is anything left to explode," he said, adding that authorities are still working to get the fire under control. Rescue workers drove around the neighbourhood in emergency vans, telling thousands of residents via loudspeakers to leave for their safety.

The cause of the explosion is still unknown.

AFP

Cyprus says huge forest blaze fully 'under control'



Fires rage at different parts of a forest on the slopes of the Troodos mountain chain, in Cyprus on Saturday (AFP)

hamlet of Arakapas.

The fire, fanned by strong winds and exacerbated by a heatwave that has baked the island in temperatures over 40 degrees Celsius, sent up a vast cloud of smoke that was visible from sea and from the other side of the Troodos mountain range.

More than 600 people from

the emergency services and army were involved in tackling the blaze, along with a dozen aircraft and 70 fire trucks as well as a reconnaissance drone, the forestry department said.

'A tragedy'

Firefighters were still deployed en masse on Monday around the

badly-hit village of Arakapas, near Limassol, to tackle any potential new outbreaks, the department said.

AFP reporters had seen thick gnarled trunks of ancient olive trees reduced to smouldering stumps and grey ash replacing yellowed scrub as far as the eye could see.

A 67 year old farmer was arrested and remanded in custody on suspicion of having unintentionally started the enormous blaze while burning stubble, a charge he denied.

Police said an eyewitness had seen him leaving Arakapas in his car at the time the fire started there.

He could face charges of recklessly causing four deaths.

Interior Minister Nicos Nouris said the four Egyptians' charred bodies had been found outside the village of Odos in Larnaca district.

Their burnt-out vehicle was discovered at the bottom of a ravine and the four bodies were some 600m away.

The Egyptian government said they were farm workers from the North African country, while Nicosia vowed in a tweet to 'stand by the victims' families... offering every support'.

'It is a tragedy,' President Nicos Anastasiades said on Twitter on Sunday.

Anastasiades described the fire as the worst event since 1974, when the island was divided after Turkey occupied its northern third.

AFP

COVID-19 PANDEMIC

Israel data 'preliminary signal' Delta variant can bypass vaccine

Jerusalem - Rising coronavirus cases in Israel, where most residents are inoculated with the Pfizer/BioNTech vaccine, offer 'a preliminary signal' the vaccine may be less effective preventing mild illness from the Delta variant, a top expert said on Monday.

But Ran Balicer, chairman of Israel's national expert panel on COVID-19, stressed it was 'too early to precisely assess vaccine effectiveness against the variant' first identified in India in April that is surging across the globe.

That is partly due to the overall low number of cases among fully vaccinated Israelis and because those cases are not evenly distributed across the population, further complicating efforts to reach conclusions about the data.

Balicer, also the chief innovation officer at Clalit, Israel's largest health maintenance organisation (HMO), told AFP that the Delta variant's emergence as the 'dominant strain' in the country has led to a 'massive shift in the transmission dynamic'.

Israel's vaccine rollout that began in December was one of the world's fastest, making the Jewish state a closely-watched case study on whether mass inoculation offers a path out of the pandemic.

Vaccinations had brought transmission down to about five local new cases per day, but that



An Israeli woman move with a protective mask after the country's Health Ministry reimposed a requirement for masks to be worn in enclosed public places, in Jerusalem on June 25 (AFP)

figure has risen to around 300 in recent days, with the Delta variant raging.

About half of the daily cases are among children, and half are among mostly vaccinated adults.

"To some extent that could be expected since 85 per cent of Israeli adults are vaccinated,"

Balicer said.

"But the rates in which we see these breakthrough cases make some believe they extend beyond that expected point and suggest some decrease in vaccine effectiveness against mild illness - but not severe illness - is likely."

The number of severe cases

among vaccinated Israelis has risen in recent days from roughly one every two days up to five cases per day, Balicer said.

He said it was also too early to draw conclusions about the vaccine's effectiveness against serious illness caused by the Delta variant.

The rates in which we see these breakthrough cases make some believe they extend beyond that expected point and suggest some decrease in vaccine effectiveness against mild illness - but not severe illness - is likely

RAN BALICER

But, he added, experts 'remain hopeful that the vaccine effectiveness against serious illness will remain as high as it was for the alpha strain' identified for the first time in Britain in December.

Israeli Prime Minister Naftali Bennett warned on Sunday, ahead of a weekly Cabinet meeting, that 'with the Delta variant running amok', Israel may have to reintroduce certain restrictions that were lifted last month to curb transmission.

Balicer said it was unlikely Israel could contain rising cases without further restrictions being reimposed, but voiced hope they would be mild and that Israel's 'vaccine wall' of inoculated citizens will help reduce further spread.

AFP



People queue up to undergo nucleic acid testing for COVID-19 in the Chinese city of Ruili bordering Myanmar, on Monday (AFP)

Chinese city on Myanmar border under lockdown

Beijing, China - A Chinese city near the border with Myanmar has imposed a lockdown and started mass testing after three coronavirus cases were reported on Monday, with officials rushing to curb another outbreak.

It is the second time in four months that Ruili, home to more than 210,000 people, has been locked down after the discovery of cases imported from Myanmar.

Ruili is a major crossing point from Muse in neighbouring Myanmar, which has seen escalating unrest since a February 1 military coup, raising fears that people will try to flood across the border into China to escape the violence.

One of the three infected patients was a Myanmar national, according to health authorities in Yunnan province.

China closed the main bridge and crossing to Myanmar in March as cases surged across the border.

Authorities have also increased patrols in recent months to prevent illegal border crossings and cracked down on human trafficking to prevent an influx of refugees.

Ruili will test all residents for the virus within two days and all 'non-essential travel' will be banned until further notice, the local government said on Monday.

Only one member of each household can leave to buy daily necessities with permission during the testing period.

Anyone who wants to leave the city must produce a negative virus test conducted within the past 72 hours, the local government said.

The city tested all residents and urged everyone to get vaccinated after a small outbreak in April.

AFP

Queen Elizabeth to honour UK health workers for COVID service

London, UK - Britain's Queen Elizabeth will award the UK's state-run National Health Service (NHS) the country's highest civilian honour in recognition of health workers' service during the pandemic, the government announced on Monday.

The award of the George Cross, which is the civilian equivalent of Britain's Victoria Cross for extraordinary military heroism, comes amid outcry from medical professionals over pay and working conditions in

the NHS, which has been pushed close to breaking point during the pandemic.

"This award recognises all NHS staff, past and present, across all disciplines and all four nations," the Queen (95) said in a personal message accompanying the award.

"Collectively, over more than seven decades, they have supported the people of our country with courage, compassion and dedication, demonstrating the highest standards of public



British Queen Elizabeth II during a visit to the Edinburgh Climate Change Institute at the University of Edinburgh on July 1 (AFP)

service.

"You have the enduring thanks and heartfelt appreciation of us all," she added.

Prime Minister Boris Johnson, who was hospitalised with COVID in April last year, said he had 'witnessed their courage first-hand', saying Britain wouldn't be where we are today without our health services'.

"I know the whole of the UK is behind me in paying tribute and giving thanks for everything the NHS has done for us not

only in the last year, but since its inception," he added.

While Johnson's government has routinely praised the efforts of NHS workers, instituting a weekly clap for carers during the first wave of the virus, it has been criticised for offering only a one percent pay rise to staff.

Already under severe strain before the pandemic hit, the NHS has had to contend with one of the worst coronavirus outbreaks in Europe, which has

led to over 128,000 deaths in Britain and nearly five million cases.

Professional bodies have warned of severe mental and physical exhaustion in the NHS and a likely exodus of staff if conditions are not improved.

The Royal College of Nursing wants a 12.5 per cent pay rise for staff and has warned large numbers of nurses could leave the profession after the pandemic is over.

AFP

Over 1,000 Afghan troops flee Taliban into Tajikistan

Kabul, Afghanistan - More than 1,000 Afghan troops fled into neighbouring Tajikistan on Monday following clashes with the Taliban, as the insurgents amassed momentum on the battlefield.

The exodus of troops followed another weekend of fighting across much of the northern countryside where the Taliban have overrun dozens of districts, spurring fears that Afghan forces are in crisis.

"They did not want to surrender. They had asked for reinforcements but their call was ignored," said Abdul Basir, a soldier based with a battalion in Badakhshan province that had members flee over the border.

The United States announced Friday that it had handed over Bagram Air Base - the centre of its operations - to Afghan security forces, effectively wrapping up operations in the country following nearly two decades of fighting.

Tajikistan's national security committee said that 1,037 Afghan government troops had fled into the ex-Soviet country 'to save their lives' after clashes with



Afghan security forces personnel inspect the remains of a vehicle at the site of a bomb blast in Kandahar on Sunday (AFP)

the Taliban during the night.

"Taking into account the principle of good neighbourliness and adhering to the position of non-interference in the internal affairs of Afghanistan, the military personnel of the Afghan government forces were allowed

to enter Tajik territory," said the statement, published by Tajikistan's state information agency.

Afghan troops had already crossed into Tajikistan following earlier clashes that saw the Taliban take control of a major border crossing between the

countries. The Afghan government has vowed to launch a counteroffensive in the north.

Hamdullah Mohib, the country's national security advisor, told Russia's RIA news agency that an operation was 'absolutely' in the works.

'Emergency situation'

Already thinly stretched with supply lines strained, Afghan security forces have been crumbling in the face of the Taliban onslaught, with several bases and outposts surrendering to the

insurgents without firing a shot.

"Afghan forces have lost their morale," said analyst Atta Noori in Kabul.

"They are confused - in almost every district that the Taliban capture, they send a team of elders to talk to the soldiers and get them to surrender."

"It is an emergency situation for the Afghan government. They need to step up their counteroffensive as soon as possible," he added.

With vital air cover from the Americans massively curtailed by the closure of Bagram air base, the Taliban pressed on with their offensive across the north over the weekend, seizing most of Badakhshan and Takhar provinces with government forces holding little more than the provincial capitals.

The speed and ease of the Taliban's effective takeover of the provinces represent a massive psychological blow to the Afghan government.

Both provinces had once served as the strongholds for the anti-Taliban Northern Alliance during the gruesome civil war in the 1990s and were never routed

by the militants.

The dire situation in the north was accompanied by reports that the Taliban were also inching closer to the provincial capitals in their southern strongholds of Kandahar and Helmand, with key districts on the outskirts of both cities taken by the group.

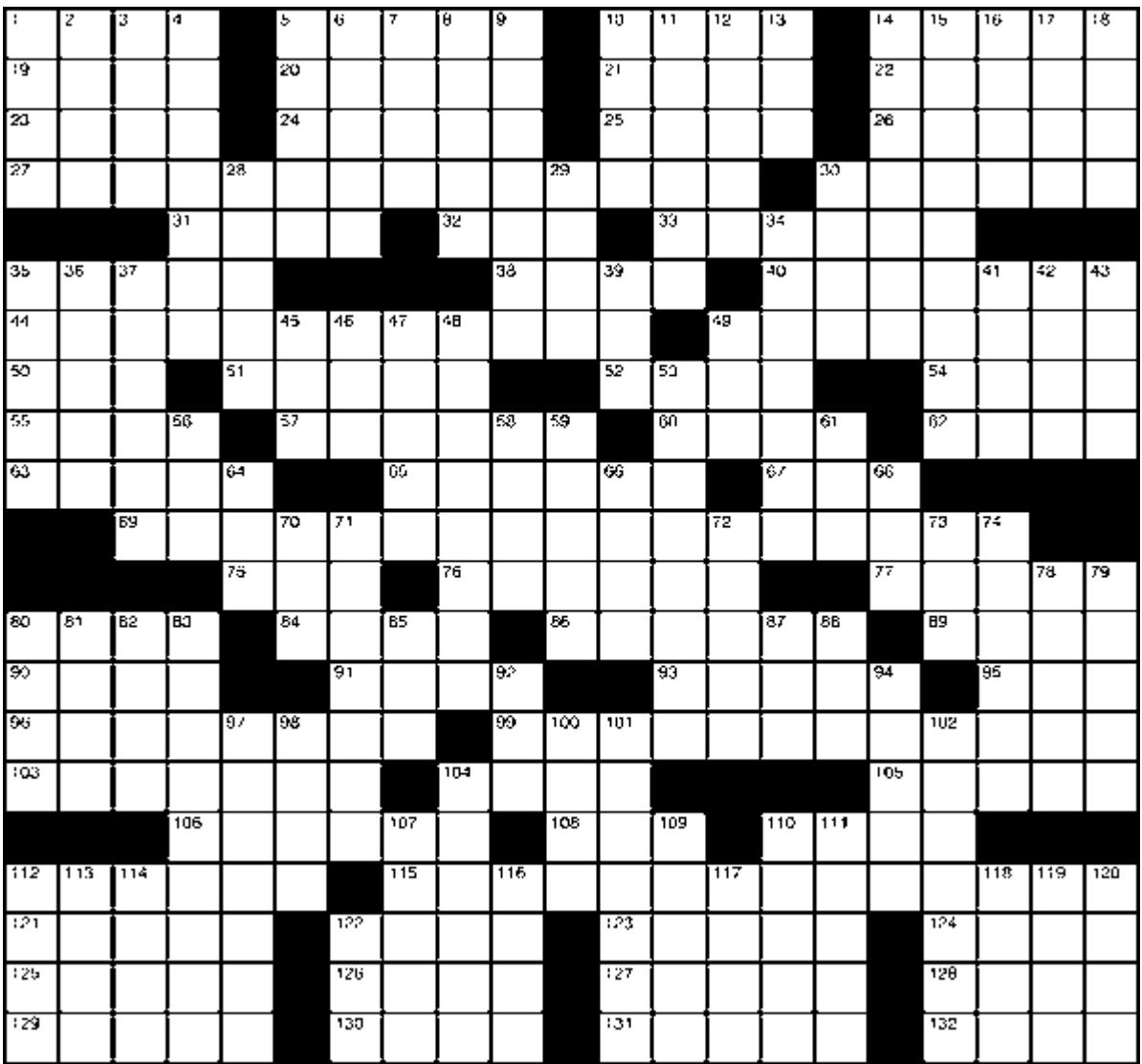
"We are so tired of this war. At least today the right thing was done, and one side should take control," said Shir Mohammad Barezai, a resident of Helmand's Nawa district that was seized by the Taliban early on Monday.

Since May 1 when the US military began its final withdrawal of about 2,500 troops, Afghan troops and the Taliban have clashed fiercely across the rugged countryside as peace talks in Doha stalled.

Despite the Taliban's rapid gains, the United States has pressed ahead with its withdrawal in accordance with President Joe Biden's decision to pull all forces from Afghanistan by this year's 20th anniversary of the September 11 attacks.

AFP

DAILY CROSSWORD



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ACROSS

- 1 Canseco or Carreras
- 5 Clutches
- 10 Plateau
- 14 Alphabetic system, Old Irish
- 19 Eden resident
- 20 Jane Curtin role
- 21 Lipinski leap
- 22 Author Ernest
- 23 Additional
- 24 Bucks
- 25 Gramm of Texas
- 26 Poe's middle name
- 27 Sarandon, after the melee?
- 30 Birch family members
- 31 Trampled
- 32 Monsieur, stateside
- 33 He played Ashley
- 35 Frighten
- 38 Cancel
- 40 Most bronze
- 44 Grouse's peeper?
- 49 Salary standard
- 50 Singer Janis
- 51 Sailing ship
- 52 Beat it!
- 54 Roasting place
- 55 Prevarications
- 57 Soon enough
- 60 Part of UCLA
- 62 Small impression

- 63 Commonplace
- 65 Pencil part
- 67 Undercover agcy.
- 69 Pants for Hans?
- 75 Murrur
- 76 Looked suggestively
- 77 Muslim rulers
- 80 Thrust
- 84 Christmas
- 86 Verse form
- 89 Let it stand
- 90 Health food
- 91 Miami county
- 93 Provide provender
- 95 Utilize
- 96 Lengthy choral work
- 99 Cinderella's loss?
- 103 Share
- 104 Actress Taylor
- 105 Sticky stuff
- 106 Plaza's pigtailed pixie
- 108 One of Mickey's many
- 110 Uncle Remus Rabbit
- 112 Lively intelligence
- 115 Lamp in Beijing?
- 121 Candied
- 122 Tight spots
- 123 See 52 Across
- 124 Sporting letters
- 125 Taxonomic group
- 126 Jai ____
- 127 Dye, briefly

- 128 Units of work
- 129 Took the series
- 130 Hankerings
- 131 Actress Spacek
- 132 Make haste!
- DOWN**
- 1 Door part
- 2 Ancient Greek coin
- 3 Evening, in Rome
- 4 Agamemnon's daughter
- 5 Star's brief appearance
- 6 Father of Beau and Jeff
- 7 Lotion ingredient
- 8 Undeveloped areas
- 9 Shore
- 10 Cartographer's goods
- 11 Breathe out
- 12 French river
- 13 Wholly
- 14 Iridescent
- 15 Wand for Midas?
- 16 ____-in-the-wall: dive
- 17 Having wings
- 18 Door designation
- 28 Businessman/philanthropist Samuel
- 29 American Nobel chemist, 1934
- 30 Unfortunately
- 34 Sea lavender

- 35 Slopped
- 36 Professorship
- 37 Virgil's epic
- 39 Brown of renown
- 41 Mansard part
- 42 British gun
- 43 Mobile home
- 45 Foreman foe
- 46 Negative lead-in
- 47 Clan symbol
- 48 Curled
- 49 Blackball
- 53 Medium of exchange
- 56 Actor Erwin
- 58 Lion's locks
- 59 Certain curves
- 61 Crooner
- Damone
- 64 And so on
- 66 Spanish river
- 68 Eureka!
- 70 Demure
- 71 Master escape artist
- 72 Ferber and Millay
- 73 Ambulance worker for short
- 74 Certain exercises
- 78 Electric clock feature
- 79 Cubic meter equivalent
- 80 Break off
- 81 Matador's opponent
- 82 In the distance

- 83 High cholesterol dish?
- 85 Indo-Chinese people
- 87 Mork and Spock
- 88 ____ Aviv
- 92 Conn. collegian
- 94 Mature
- 97 Most greasy
- 98 Plant support
- 100 Actor Rickman
- 101 Dispossesses
- 102 Spouse, often
- 104 Brit. Open champ Tom
- 107 Weight watcher?
- 109 Computer code
- 110 Common interest groups
- 111 Shabby; scruffy
- 112 Scrambled ____
- 113 Large number
- 114 Window part
- 116 Goddess of fertility
- 117 Endless time
- 118 Beige
- 119 Tatters
- 120 "Candy is dandy. . ." man
- 122 Blue bird

YOUR DAILY HOROSCOPE



ARIES MARCH 21-APRIL 19

After days of moping around, you'll wake up this morning feeling like your old self again: charming, impulsive and ready to try anything at least once. So what might be the perfect way to celebrate? How about reconnecting with the gang? After a bit of good-natured kidding about where you've been and a whole lot of winks, nods and sidelong glances, they'll be delighted to have you back in the fold.



LEO JULY 23-AUGUST 22

You're in the mood to get away from it all -- to let loose and have some serious fun. Since you're you, the sign consistently voted 'least likely to be alone unless they want to be,' you won't be short on attentive company or leisure time. Your worst problem will be deciding what grand idea to pursue with which charming companion. Gosh. Sure is tough being you, isn't it?



SAGITTARIUS NOVEMBER 22-DECEMBER 21

Enough with the baby-sitting, caretaking and looking out for everyone except yourself. It's officially time to take care of you -- especially when it comes to indulging yourself in some much-needed playtime. Feel free to have as much fun out there as you'd like! The month ahead is perfect for writing projects or new educational ventures!



TAURUS APRIL 20-MAY 20

Talk about a delectable dilemma! The stars are making impulse the name of the game, and they've set up shop in your house of secret desires. Well, now. It's easy to see how you could get yourself into a bit of trouble if you're not careful. Of course, this is the kind of trouble others might run from -- but sensual little you might take your own sweet time with it instead. Ah, well.



VIRGO AUGUST 23-SEPTEMBER 22

You may be having company tonight -- of the unexpected variety. Unlike other signs, you won't need to be reminded to keep your place neat and tidy in the event of a spontaneous visit. Now that you've been warned, you may need to be dragged gently but firmly away from the cleaning products, and involuntarily forced to give up the rubber gloves.



CAPRICORN DECEMBER 22-JANUARY 19

Ready to let loose and have some real fun? Good, because the universe is willing to help. Right now the stars are anything but short on creative ways to enjoy the company of others -- and they just so happen to have set up shop in your house of entertaining. How about having the whole crew over to your place for pizza, movies and games?



GEMINI MAY 21-JUNE 21

A group that you're quite active with is about to ask -- if not outright beg -- that you become more involved. A lot more involved. Does this mean the fun is over? Will you have to worry about things like organisation, paperwork and so on? Hardly! Delegate, delegate, delegate. You're the ideas person. That's why they want you. Assemble your staff.



LIBRA SEPTEMBER 23-OCTOBER 22

This is going to be a time to remember for all the right reasons. The romantic stars will storm into your house and demand one-on-one relationships today, so don't expect to see much of your pals -- except for maybe that one particularly close friend, of course. You two will quite literally be inseparable straight through the morning. Perfect timing, huh?



AQUARIUS JANUARY 20-FEBRUARY 18

Some fun-loving companions are about to invite you to spend an unusual evening with them, probably doing something you've never done before. Kindred spirits, a new adventure and no worrying about staying up too late -- it just doesn't get any better than that, does it? Your stars are feeling extra impulsive. That means everyone else will be feeling just as impetuous as you are.



CANCER JUNE 22-JULY 22

You'll wake up in the mood to get out of the house, have some serious fun and leave your worries behind. With the stars currently turning up the volume on your charm, finding playmates who are game won't be a problem. You may need to divide your attention among family members and friends who've been whining about not seeing you in far too long.



SCORPIO OCTOBER 23-NOVEMBER 21

You're so ready to relax that you're actually feeling torn between spending yet another evening with that delectable new admirer and taking the night off to get some sleep. Obviously, you must be really, really tired. Not to dissuade you from your well-deserved rest, but you should know that the passionate, physically impetuous stars are on duty at the moment.



PISCES FEBRUARY 19-MARCH 20

It's officially time to toss the tissues, stop worrying about the past and put some distance between you and whoever or whatever has been making you feel so blue lately. Come on. You've seen way too much of your living room lately. Your dog is even trying to figure out how to get you out of the house. Go ahead; have some fun. You've put in your time.



TEST YOUR KNOWLEDGE

1. Who wrote the line: 'A thing of beauty is a joy forever'?

- a. John Keats
- b. Robert Browning
- c. P B Shelley
- d. William Wordsworth

2. Who has written the book 'My Frozen Turbulence in Kashmir'?

- a. Anees Jung
- b. Jagmohan
- c. M J Akbar
- d. Nissim Ezekiel

3. The book 'To Live or Not Live' was written by

- a. V S Naipaul
- b. Alexandra Dumas
- c. George Elliot
- d. Nirad C Chaudhuri

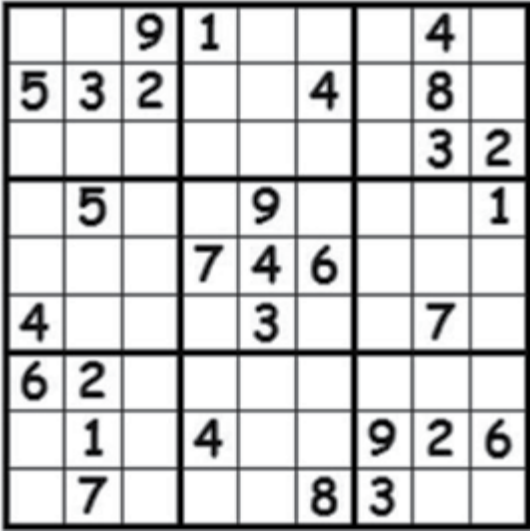
Answers: 1.a 2.b 3.d

KIDS COLOURING



DO YOU SUDOKU?

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



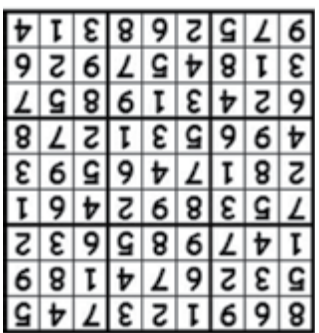
BOGGLER



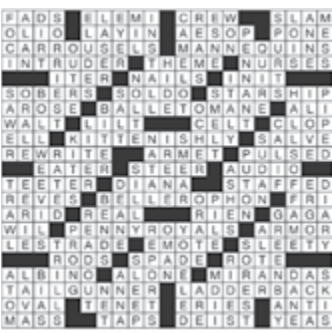
Each game will present you with a matrix filled with letters. The objective is to form words by linking adjacent letters - to the left, right, on top, bottom, or diagonal to each other. The Boggles Classic game uses a 4 x 4 matrix. Words are valued at one point for each letter in excess of two letters.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

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

SUDOKU EASY ANSWER



DAILY CROSSWORD ANSWERS (JULY 05)

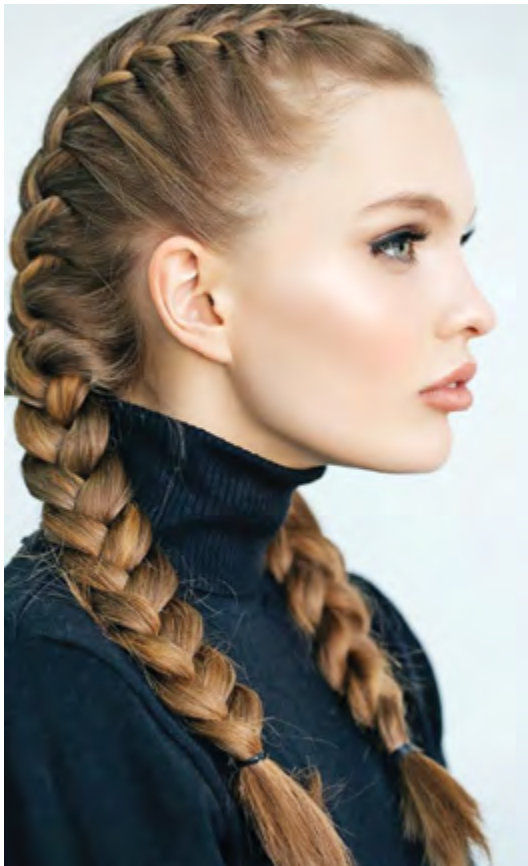


WORD BUILDER

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





Boxer Braids

Boxer braids are created by braiding two French braids from the hairline, down the back of the head, and to the ends of strands. Extremely popular this year, this style is perfect for hot weather.



Mini Beehive

Humidity has a knack for turning smooth hair instantly frizzy. Instead of fighting frizz, harness its extra volume by creating a mini beehive for formal events and functions.



Schoolgirl Braids

This edgy take on schoolgirl braids makes for the perfect weekend summer style. Rock it to the beach or out for brunch whenever you want to shake things up. Just remember to keep the look sleek and sharp to ensure a modern style.



Sleek Knot

Sweep your hair into a sleek bun at the nape of your neck to really show off a pair of statement earrings. This is ideal for summer when you need some aeration around you.

SUMMER HAIRSTYLES

BUNS & BRAIDS

While summer 2020 was a year for haircuts to stay at home, summer 2021 has many new styles doing the rounds, now that many businesses are back to normal and people have started frequenting beauty parlours to do their hair in varied styles.

A major consideration when choosing your summer hairstyle should be comfort, say experts, while the next aspect to keep in mind is what feature you need to enhance in your ultimate look.

Glamour.com says, 'If your repertoire of summer hairstyles ends at high ponies and

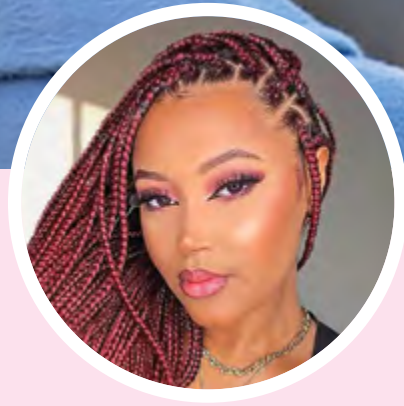
messy buns, we don't blame you. It's already tough enough to decide what to wear when the weather is nearing triple digits — are we still doing bike shorts this year? So, forget attempting an elaborate hairstyle or breaking out the hot tools.'

Tricks for dealing with long hair in the summer include befriending dry shampoo for sweaty days and using leave-in conditioner to combat humidity frizz. A layered cut is a great way to get rid of excess bulk and weight. If you just want your hair out of the way, try any number of ponytail or bun styles, or distribute the weight more evening with a braided style. Here are a few trends that have found favour with women around the globe for summer 2021:



Curly Bangs

Instead of trying to force bangs straight in summer, allow them to stay curly. This look has seen a massive revival in recent months and is completely on-trend.



Knotless Box Braids

Knotless braids are more representative of what natural hair looks like when it's braided without any extensions. Start at the scalp and continue till the ends.



Pigtail Braids

For instant UV protection, add a bucket hat to any hairstyle. Ideally, pigtail braids, during summer, are an instant cooler. Leave half the length of the braid loose.



Beach Bun

The wet look beach bun is perfect for days that are too hot for blow-drying. After washing hair, apply a wet-look gel to damp strands and sweep up into a neat bun. Then, allow hair to dry naturally throughout the day.



Retro Ponytail

Turn a boring ponytail into a cute, retro ponytail with this summer style. All you need to do is wrap the end of the pony around a curling wand to achieve one large wave. Then, just add a ribbon at its base to complete the style.



Pineappled Curls

In summer, grab the opportunity to embrace your natural texture. The pineapple updo is one of the easiest ways to toss up curls on blistering days, you bet.



Veteran Kruse in Germany's squad for Tokyo Games

Berlin, Germany - Veteran striker Max Kruse was a surprise inclusion on Monday in Germany's men's squad for the Tokyo Olympic Games, five years after he was booted out of the national side.

The 33 year old joins Nadiem Amiri, 24, and Maximilian Arnold, 27, all full Germany internationals, as the three players in the squad born before 1997.

Amiri of Bayer Leverkusen and Wolfsburg's Arnold won the 2017 European U21 title under Stefan Kuntz, who will coach the team at the Olympics.

Germany open their Olympic campaign with a game against Brazil on July 22 in a repeat of 2016's final in Rio de Janeiro.

Kruse earned his Germany call-up after scoring 11 goals, with five assists in the Bundesliga for Union Berlin last season. He won the last of his 14 caps in 2015, scoring the winning goal in a 2-1

win over Georgia after netting twice in a 7-0 thrashing of Gibraltar. However, then-coach Joachim Loew axed Kruse from the squad in early 2016 after several negative headlines.

Kruse, a well-known poker player, forgot a bag in a Berlin taxi containing US\$89,058 in cash, then just days later was involved in a public argument in a nightclub with a reporter from daily newspaper *Bild*.

Kuntz has picked seven of the German U21 team which won the junior European championship last month. There are no players from Germany's top outfits and Kuntz said a 'willingness to support the Olympic team varied in the Bundesliga. Some big clubs unfortunately did not want to help as hoped'. The Olympic final is on August 7, less than a week before the new Bundesliga season starts on August 13.

AFP

'Mbappe need to leave PSG to win the biggest prizes'

Former France striker Anelka's advice to the young star in an open letter

London, UK - Former France striker Nicolas Anelka believes Kylian Mbappe will need to follow his example in leaving Paris Saint-Germain (PSG) to play abroad if he is to be regarded as the best player in the world.

Mbappe, 22, who joined PSG in 2017, is about to enter the final season of his contract in the French capital with speculation linking him with a move to Real Madrid.

Despite spending four seasons alongside Neymar at the Parc des Princes, the superstar duo have failed to deliver PSG's first ever Champions League title and even lost French League (Ligue 1) last season to Lille.

Anelka had a brief stint in Madrid himself after joining Arsenal from PSG as a teenager in 1997.

"If you want the biggest accolades, you will have to move from PSG at some point," Anelka wrote in an open letter published in *The Athletic*.

"Whatever you do in Paris will be good, but somebody will always say, 'Well, you did great for PSG but it was only in France. The best leagues are in England and Spain, so you didn't compete with the best players in the best league.'"

Mbappe proved himself as a global star at the 2018 World



Nicolas Anelka



Kylian Mbappe

Cup where his four goals helped France become champions for the second time.

However, he was far from his best as Didier Deschamps' men crashed out of Euro 2020 at the last-16 to Switzerland on penalties last week.

Mbappe was the only player to miss in the shootout, rounding off a miserable tournament in which he failed to score.

Anelka missed the penalty that saw Chelsea lose the Champions League final to Manchester United in 2008 and

said Mbappe will bear the 'scar' of the Switzerland defeat forever.

"It is a scar that marks you, that fades but doesn't ever really go away," he added.

"You feel all alone. You have to live with it and you

have to work, work, work on the pitch, play matches, score goals, to be able to start to forget.

"But you will never completely forget. I never forgot. I will never forget."

AFP

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EURO 2020

WEDNESDAY'S
SEMIFINAL



ENGLAND VS DENMARK
Wembley, London
(11pm, Oman time)

BLOCKBUSTER IN THE OFFING

Confident Azzurri take on Spain in the first semifinal at Wembley today



Italian players train on the eve of their semifinal match against Spain on Monday

'FLAWLESS' ITALY IN BUOYANT MOOD

London, UK - Italy's Leonardo Bonucci says the Azzurri are 'thriving on the occasion' as they prepare to face Spain at Wembley on Tuesday in a blockbuster first semifinal of Euro 2020, a tournament in which they have so far been the standout side.

"We are thriving on this occasion, we have made it this far and we are going to give absolutely everything in our power to make the Italian people proud of this Azzurri side," the Juventus defensive stalwart said on the eve of the game on Monday.

Bonucci added that Italy planned to dedicate reaching the final to their stricken teammate Leonardo Spinazzola, who suffered a ruptured achilles tendon in the 2-1 quarterfinal win over Belgium in Munich on Friday.

That result saw Roberto Mancini's team stretch their remarkable unbeaten run to 32 matches after they previously saw off Turkey, Switzerland and Wales in Rome in the group stage before edging Austria 2-1 after extra-time at Wembley in the last-16.

That has inevitably led to a surge in confidence back home and Italy are now widely considered the favourites against Spain.

"We have had a flawless run so far, but even if Spain have had some issues we need to put that to one side and really focus on what we need to do, where we need to improve," said the

34 year old central defender.

"We simply need to be motivated by the fact we are coming up against such a great and prestigious side in such a wonderful arena as Wembley, in the knowledge that we could be involved in the final in just a few days' time."

Lack of fans at Wembley 'unfair'

More than 60,000 fans will be allowed to attend the game inside the 90,000-capacity stadium after the British government eased the coronavirus restrictions that have been in place during the Euro tournament.

However, the crowd will be almost entirely British due to restrictions on fans of the two sides entering the United Kingdom.

"It is pretty unfair if I'm perfectly honest, very unfair indeed," lamented Italy coach Roberto Mancini.

"That said we are better off playing in front of any crowd as opposed to a small number of people, but I do think it's unfair we don't have half the stadium full of Italian fans and the

other half full of Spaniards."

It is the fourth consecutive European Championship in which these sides have met, with Spain winning on penalties in the European Championship 2008 quarterfinals and then claiming a stunning 4-0 win in the final in Kiev in 2012.

Italy gained a measure of revenge last time out, winning 2-0 in the last-16 of European Championship 2016 in France with Giorgio Chiellini and Graziano Pelle finding the target.

"The final in Kiev leaves a bitter taste in the mouth because we were really all out of puff by the time we got to the game," recalled Bonucci, who played for Italy against Spain in 2012 and in 2016.

"We were short of ideas and short of energy and the result was a fair one on the day, but 2016 was a completely different occasion."

Mancini said he expected Italy to be at full strength with both striker Andrea Belotti and defender Rafael Toloi hoping to shake off knocks in time.

AFP



Spain players attend a training session ahead of their semifinal match against Italy

SPAIN'S ENRIQUE OUT TO SETTLE OLD SCORES

London, UK - Luis Enrique's belligerent self-belief has led Spain to the semifinals of Euro 2020, but the former Barcelona boss has another personal score to settle in Tuesday's last-four against Italy.

His playing career at major tournaments is best remembered for the vicious elbow from Mauro Tassotti that left blood flowing from his burst nose over his white Spain shirt at the 1994 World Cup. Tassotti escaped without punishment at the time - Spain denied a stoppage time penalty and the chance to take the game to extra-time as the Azzurri ran out 2-1 winners.

The Italy defender was subsequently banned for eight games by FIFA, but the damage was already done for Spain as they exited at the quarterfinals. That was a familiar story for Spanish football at the time as generations of talented players came and went without leaving a trace at major competitions.

All that changed in 2008 as a last-eight win over Italy on penalties opened the door for Luis Aragones' side to win the European Championship.

Vicente del Bosque then took over to win the 2010 World Cup and Euro 2012. But by the time Enrique got the call, Spain had fallen rapidly from grace. In the previous three major tournaments, they failed to even reach the quar-

terfinals as the generation of a glorious era grew old together.

Enrique's contentious call to leave out former captain Sergio Ramos for Euro 2020 broke the last remaining link to the 2008 team. Without Ramos, or any other Real Madrid player for the first time in Spain's history at a major tournament, the Madrid press cried foul, claiming *La Furia Roja* would lack leadership.

"I am one of the leaders, like all coaches," said Enrique in response.

"If that is not the case, it is a bad signal." It has not been a totally smooth ride.

Big calls come good

A case of coronavirus for Sergio Busquets in the days before the event began meant the coach's decision not to take his full complement of 26 players was further questioned.

Spain have also only won one of their five games in 90 minutes.

Yet, a number of Enrique's biggest calls have come through for him when it mattered most.

Alvaro Morata had to listen to his own fans chant 'how bad are you' in a friendly against Portugal.

After a host of missed chances, including a penalty, in the group stages, the Juventus striker produced a stunning finish in extra-time to turn the last-16 tie against Croatia back in his side's favour.

Unai Simon's comical own goal in that game to open the scoring when he failed to control a simple back pass from Pedri reopened the debate over who should be Spain's No 1. But the Athletic Bilbao goalkeeper made two penalty saves in the shootout win over Switzerland in the quarterfinals.

Also, PSG winger Pablo Sarabia has more than justified his surprise place in the squad with goals against Slovakia and Croatia, while Ferran Torres, Dani Olmo and Mikel Oyarzabal have all made telling contributions when introduced as substitutes.

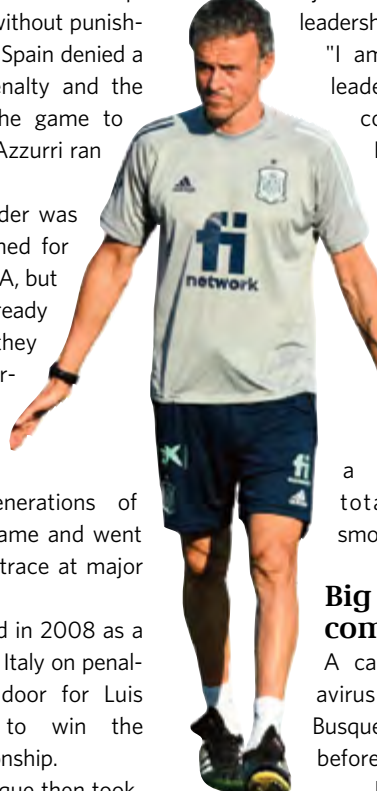
"I always said we were one of the eight candidates to win the European Championship and now we are among the four best," said Enrique.

"It would be ridiculous to be in the semifinals and not think about taking one step more. This is the objective." A familiar foe stands in his way at Wembley, but win or lose, Luis Enrique will do it his own way.

AFP



Leonardo Bonucci



Luis Enrique

Djokovic enters 50th Slam quarterfinal

London, UK - Novak Djokovic marched effortlessly into his 50th Grand Slam quarterfinal as Ons Jabeur became the first Tunisian player to make the last-eight at the All England Club, leading a host of first timers to reach the landmark on 'Manic Monday'.

World No 1 Djokovic, chasing a sixth Wimbledon and record-equalling 20th major, eased into the last-eight at the tournament for the 12th time with a 6-2, 6-4, 6-2 win over Chile's Cristian Garin. He will next face Hungary's Marton Fucsovics, one of a host of players booking last-eight spots at the tournament for the first time.

The list included women's top seed Ashleigh Barty, second seed Aryna Sabalenka, Karolina Pliskova, Viktorija Golubic as well as Matteo Berrettini, Denis Shapovalov and Karen Khachanov in the men's draw.

Djokovic is halfway to a calendar Grand Slam. Only two men have swept all four majors in the same year with Rod Laver the most recent back in 1969.

"Confidence levels are very high after winning the French Open," said Djokovic.

"It was one of my biggest wins in the circumstances - two five-setters, two four-setters in the second week.

"They took a lot out of me but they also gave me wings."

Barty reached the quarterfinals for the first time, beating French Open winner Barbora Krejickova of the Czech Republic 7-5, 6-3.

The 25 year old Australian will play the winner of the match be-



Serbia's Novak Djokovic celebrates after defeating Chile's Cristian Garin in the fourth round on Monday

tween unseeded compatriot Ajla Tomljanovic and British teenager Emma Raducanu for a place in the semifinals.

"It was an incredibly tough match," said Barty.

13 service breaks

Former world No 1 Pliskova reached her first Wimbledon quarterfinal with a 6-2, 6-3 win over Russian wildcard Liudmila Samsonova.

Men's seventh seed Berrettini became only the fifth Italian man to make the last-eight with a quickfire 6-4, 6-3, 6-1 win over Ilya Ivashka of Belarus.

The Queen's Club champion,

the first Italian man in the quarterfinals since 1998, will face either Felix Auger-Aliassime of Canada or German fourth seed Alexander Zverev for a semifinal spot.

Khachanov also reached a maiden quarterfinal with a five-set win over Sebastian Korda who was celebrating his 21st birthday.

Russian 25th seed Khachanov triumphed over his American rival 3-6, 6-4, 6-3, 5-7, 10-8 and will face Canadian tenth seed Denis Shapovalov. A marathon 81-minute final set on Court 18 featured 13 breaks of serve before Khachanov steadied himself to take the victory. "At least we made some record in some ways," said 25 year old Khachanov.

Shapovalov, who knocked out two-time champion Andy Murray in the last round, dismissed Spain's 2019 semifinalist and eighth seed Roberto Bautista Agut 6-1, 6-3, 7-5.

Germany's Angelique Kerber, the only former champion left in the women's event, defeated 17 year old American Coco Gauff 6-4, 6-4 to leave no Americans in the women's singles. She will face 19th seed Karolina Muchova in the last-eight.

Viktorija Golubic, ranked 66, defeated Madison Keys 7-6 (7/3), 6-3 as she also broke through to the last-eight for the first time where she'll face Pliskova.

AFP

Osaka: Preparing for Olympics, will attend press conferences

Tokyo, Japan - Tennis star Naomi Osaka said on Monday she wants to be on top form at the Olympics and will take part in press conferences, after pulling out of several tournaments citing her struggles with depression and anxiety.

The world No 2 told Japan's national broadcaster NHK she was getting ready to play on home turf at the pandemic-postponed Tokyo Games, after having withdrawn from Wimbledon and the French Open.

"I am preparing myself little by little so I can be at the top of my game for the Olympics," the 23 year old wrote in a message published by the broadcaster.

"Since getting the attention of the world, I've always had bouts of anxiety. This is especially the case in the lead up to big competitions."

Osaka set off a debate about mental health in June after abandoning her French Open campaign just one match in over a dispute on media duties.

The Japanese player had said



Japan's Naomi Osaka

post-match news conferences were detrimental to her mental health and likened them to 'kicking people when they're down'.

Federer for Olympics

Paris, France - Roger Federer was named by Switzerland's Olympic Committee in their team for the upcoming Tokyo Games on Monday. The 20-time Grand Slam champion had said he would wait until the end of Wimbledon, with the men's final scheduled for this Sunday, to confirm his participation at Tokyo, with the men's singles starting on July 24.

AFP

Tunisian Jabeur scripts history

London, UK - Ons Jabeur's historic Wimbledon campaign saw her reach the women's quarterfinals on Monday, beating Poland's 2020 French Open champion Iga Swiatek 5-7, 6-1, 6-1 in their fourth round match.

The 26 year old Tunisian is the first Arab woman to reach the last-eight at Wimbledon and will face Belarus second seed Aryna Sabalenka who defeated Elena Rybakina 6-3, 4-6, 6-3.

Sabalenka will be playing in her first Grand Slam quarterfinal.

Jabeur celebrated victory with a fist pump and a yell of delight but for once she was not a lone Tunisian voice as some spectators burst out into song.

"Tunisians are everywhere, I got to say," she said.

"Yeah, they were singing actually a football song. I felt the need to sing with them also.

"I felt so happy that I wanted, like, to hear more. I was doing like this to hear them (cupping a hand to one ear)"



Tunisia's 26 year old Ons Jabeur celebrates her win over Iga Swiatek at Wimbledon on Monday

Jabeur's exploits in the past few weeks have give huge momentum to her mission to encourage more Arab women, especially North African, to take up the sport.

She admitted, though, that to get to where she is now has taken a lot of resilience to overcome setbacks.

"Maybe one of them was 2018, I started really bad the

season, winning no matches," she said. "I was doubting myself a lot. I think early in my career, after the juniors, when I didn't see the results that I wanted, when I was seeing the juniors

that I played with breaking the top-50, top-40, it was very difficult for me.

"I've worked hard to earn my place here."

However, with her maiden WTA title under her belt - the first Arab woman to achieve that - and now her run to the quarterfinals at Wimbledon she could not have done more to raise the profile of herself and her broader goal.

"It is very important to me," she said.

"I have seen it, heard it, a lot of times coming here on tour from where I come, I need to gain my respect either with the players or anyone around here.

"I just want to give the example for many generations coming from North Africa, from my country, from the African continent, that it's not impossible, that we can do it.

"I'm trying to carry this message for a very long time. Hopefully it is working."

AFP



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Need to have more good tennis coaches in Oman, says Hashmi

First Omani to complete ITF Academy Play Tennis national tutor development course

Ashok Purohit
Muscat

A long-serving Oman's Davis Cup non-playing captain, he is also an experienced Oman Tennis Association (OTA) board member and one of the few qualified coaches in the sultanate.

Siddiq al Hashmi, currently the OTA treasurer, recently successfully completed the International Tennis Federation (ITF) Academy West & Central Asia- Play Tennis National Tutor Development Course, making him the only Omani and only the second in the GCC region to achieve the distinction.

The latest recognition allows Hashmi to coach the trainers independently, without the supervision of ITF officials, evaluate and also issue certificate to the successful trainers.

Speaking after the completion of the course, Hashmi said, "I have always strived to get myself updated with the latest courses on offer from the ITF. Now, I have more responsibilities from the ITF.

"The idea is to devise an integrated system for the education and training of all tennis coaches in Oman, whether they are with public or private clubs."

Hashmi added, "I hope there will be a stronger coordination

I have always strived to get myself updated with the latest courses on offer from the ITF

SIDDIQ AL HASHMI



between Ministry of Labour, Ministry of Culture, Sports and Youth and the OTA before issuing or renewing coaches' licences. If a centralised system is in place then we can ensure that the coaches who work in Oman are of high technical standards. We need more good and qualified coaches in Oman."

Hashmi has previously received ITF coach of advanced players (CAP)- Level Two certificate and has also worked as an assistant lecturer during workshops in Iran, Bahrain, Kuwait, Jordan and Oman. He hoped that the OTA would have proper regulations in place to ensure that good coaches are selected and only those qualified can impart training in Oman'.

The 49 year old has been an international swimmer and took part in Asian Games in New Delhi in 1982. Since 2006, Hashmi has been the non-playing Davis Cup captain of Oman and has completed ITF Level Two and USTA Level Three coaching courses.

He has been an OTA board member since 2002 and also been the chairman of national teams' committee for more than a decade. He represented Oman at various ITF and Arab meetings on several occasions. A banker for over 24 years, Hashmi is now keen to spend more time to serve Oman tennis community.

@ashokmuscat



A file photo of Oman's non-playing captain Siddiq al Hashmi during a Davis Cup Asia/Oceania Group IV match

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ESSENTIAL

Oman in fray to host ICC events in 2024–2031 cycle

A file photo of a domestic women's T20 game being played at the Oman Cricket Academy Ground

Our Correspondent
Muscat

Hardly has the excitement of Oman being awarded the ICC Men's T20 World Cup Qualifiers subsided in the sultanate, comes another encouraging news that Oman are one of the six Associate nations and among 17 countries from across the world who have submitted bids for the hosting of eight men's white-ball ICC events in 2024-2031 cycle.

ICC on Monday confirmed that Oman is one of the six Associates that have submitted the preliminary technical proposal as a potential host along with Malaysia, Namibia, Scotland, the UAE and the USA.

A total of 17 member nations have put themselves forward as potential hosts for eight events - two ODI World Cups, four T20 World Cups and two Champions Trophies - to be held from 2024 to 2031.

The 11 full member nations that have also submitted the initial proposals are India, Australia, Bangladesh, England, Ireland, New Zealand, Sri Lanka, West Indies, Zimbabwe, South Africa and Pakistan.

The hosting of the ICC World Test Championship Final, the ICC women's and U19 events in the new cycle will be determined in a separate process that will get underway later this year.

"We are delighted with the response from our members to hosting ICC men's white-ball events post 2023," Geoff Allardice, the ICC's acting chief executive, said on Monday.

"This process gives us an opportunity to extend our range of hosts and grow interest in cricket worldwide reaching more fans whilst creating a long-term legacy for the sport.

"Cricket has more than a billion fans around the world and ICC events have a proven track record of bringing significant economic and social benefits for host counties. These events provide hosts with a wonderful opportunity to work closely with local communities to grow the game whilst supporting economic and social development public policy goals.

"We will now move forward to the second phase of the process where members will provide a more detailed proposal before the ICC Board takes decisions on our future hosts later this year."

The ICC's men's white-ball events have largely been hosted by the so-called 'Big Three' boards over the past decade or so.

The last three 50-over World Cups have taken place in India (co-hosted with Sri Lanka and Bangladesh in 2011), Australia (co-hosted with New Zealand in 2015) and England (2019), with India set to host the 2023 event as well.

India were due to host this year's T20 World Cup before it was shifted to the UAE and Oman due to the COVID-19 pandemic, while Australia are set to host the next T20 World Cup in 2022.

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