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COVID-19 hospital bills unaffordable for expats

Muscat - The COVID-19 pandemic created challenges for many, especially treatment cost for expatriates in private sector hospitals.

Mujahid, an expatriate who wishes to be identified only by his first name, had the worst experience of his life when his wife tested COVID-19 positive and was admitted in a small private hospital. As her condition rapidly deteriorated, Mujahid was advised to take her to a hospital with an ICU facility. The hospital he approached informed him that in-patient charges for an ICU bed would cost him RO400/day, besides a deposit of RO1,000 upfront.

When Mujahid said he was unable to bear the high fee, he was advised to go to the Field Hospital on the premises of the earlier airport in Seeb. But it being a referral facility, Mujahid's wife was asked to go to a private hospital.

"When we approached the private hospital with ICU facility first, they looked at our appearance to gauge if we could afford the cost. That is why their first response was that they didn't have an empty bed. When we insisted, they informed us that a bed had just become free and that they could admit my wife."

Expatriate Syed Abdul Gaffar Turabi had a similar experience when he approached another private hospital with his COVID-19 positive father-in-law. He was told to deposit RO2,500 first, of which he managed RO1,000. After two days in ICU and three



ICU patients drop below 200

Muscat - COVID-19 patients in health institutions and intensive care units (ICUs) have gone down with daily case count falling further.

On Thursday, the Ministry of Health (MoH) reported 296 new cases and 17 deaths. "Thirty-three patients were admitted to hospitals across the country, taking the total number of inpatients to 401, including 189 in intensive care," an MoH statement said.

296
NEW CASES

The total number of cases registered in Oman has now reached 298,020, including 3,906 deaths. The total number of recoveries is 282,763, while the recovery rate is 94.9 per cent," MoH stated.

RO100 fine for improper disposal of face masks

Muscat - Authorities have reminded people to make sure that face masks are disposed of in the proper place saying that throwing these outside designated places can draw a fine of RO100.

The Government Communications Centre said: "Safe disposal of masks after use helps prevent the transmission of coronavirus and maintain a clean environment."

days of non-ICU treatment, he was handed a bill of close to RO2,500.

For Turabi, the upfront de-

posit before admission was not a surprise. "That is normal. I don't expect hospitals to give free treatment, but during a pan-

demic, hospitals should subsidise as much as they can especially for uninsured and low wage earning expatriates."

I don't expect hospitals to give free treatment, but during a pandemic, hospitals should subsidise

SYED ABDUL G TURABI

Tragic turn of events

When Kishor Pednekar's wife tested positive for COVID-19, initially her condition didn't require hospitalisation. On developing mild breathing difficulty, he decided to take her to a private hospital where he was asked to deposit RO750. She was admitted for five days when her condition worsened and she had to be shifted to Khoula Hospital. Early in the morning on the eighth day, she breathed her last.

"If my wife was admitted in Khoula earlier, she would probably be alive today because her condition wasn't severe when we took her to the private hospital," Pednekar said.

"I really appreciate the support and treatment at Khoula, and they did not charge us even a single baiza for eight days of treatment. We would not have got the treatment we got at Khoula even in India. The only problem is that government hospitals are referral hospitals and we can't approach these directly. But once admitted, they did not differentiate between citizen and resident."

Continued on Page 02



Construction work of the sultanate's first cable car in progress at Oman Botanic Garden in Al Khoudh, Seeb (Supplied photo)

Cable car work starts in Oman Botanic Garden

Our Correspondent
Muscat

In a move to stimulate Oman's tourism sector, the Ministry of Heritage and Tourism is implementing a project to set up the sultanate's first cable car (teleferik) in Muscat.

H E Salim bin Mohammed bin Said al Mahrouqi, Minister of Heritage and Tourism, confirmed through his Twitter handle that the ministry has begun construction of a cable car in Oman Botanic Garden in Al Khoudh, Seeb.

The minister also released pictures of the construction work in progress on the site. The project is the first of its kind in the sultanate and the region and will be completed in 2023.

Announcement of commencement of the project evoked a strong reaction from the public on social media.

Salim al Rabani described the project as "very important as it will support domestic tourism by

attracting tourists from around the world".

Another Twitterati said, "Oman has beautiful beaches and nature. It only needs to establish some resorts and hotels. That will increase the national income and contribute more than oil revenue."

Citizen Mohammed tweeted, "Establishing the first cable car in the sultanate at Oman Botanic Garden is a good step. But I hope other cable cars come up in some tourist sites too, such as Salalah, to stimulate tourism. Cable cars are a source of national income for many countries."

Yet another citizen tweeted, "We hope tourism in Dhofar is promoted so that it becomes a sustainable tourist destination by adding some basic services and serious promotion throughout the year."

Ali al Amri said the Oman Botanic Garden project is 'beautiful'. "It will serve a recreational as well as educational purpose."



Oman's largest solar power plant begins operations



Sultanate's economy back on growth path



Omari elected Oman Athletics Association chief

Dhofar's famed khareef attracts tourists amid pandemic

Our Correspondent
Muscat

Visitors from several parts of Oman are flocking to the wilayat of Salalah to enjoy the khareef season.

Speaking to Muscat Daily, Salim al Kathiri from the Ittin area in the wilayat, said, "This week, there were many tourists enjoying nature and the rain. Darbat Waterfalls, Al Mughsail Beach and the Ittin plains are fascinating sites during the khareef season."

"Many Dhofar citizens built hotel apartments recently in preparation of the season. Hotel apartments are seeing a big demand this year compared to the 2020 khareef which was during a full lockdown."

Hamad al Balushi, who is currently visiting Salalah, said, "All vaccinated people are allowed to enter the city. The weather is really great. I visited a lot of sites, including Arzat, Tabraq and the Al Mughsail beach west of Salalah which has soft silver sand."



(Supplied photo)

Balushi noted that it's important to support domestic tourism but also follow the precautionary measures and decisions of the Supreme Committee to limit the spread of the coronavirus and return to normal life at the earliest.

Preventive measures

"The Royal Oman Police endeavours to provide the best services and police presence in all locations in Dhofar governorate and the roads leading to it. We urge the public not to gather and

crowd in order to limit the spread of the virus," said Lt Col Saeed bin Mohammed al Buraiki, director of Traffic - Salalah in Dhofar Governorate Police Command.

"The Dhofar Governorate Po-

lice Command has prepared for khareef by making plans at the tourist sites to facilitate movement in order to prevent traffic jams and to keep visitors safe."

More than 200 domestic flights landed in Salalah in May

Hotels can operate at 75% capacity

Muscat - The Ministry of Heritage and Tourism on Friday said hotel facilities in Dhofar governorate can operate with a maximum capacity of 75 per cent, until further notice. Due to the khareef season, hotels are witnessing a rush. The ministry had earlier directed all hotels in Dhofar to operate at 50 per cent capacity due to COVID-19.

"The Ministry of Heritage and Tourism issues a circular to hotel facilities to operate hotel rooms with a maximum capacity of 75 per cent while adhering to the approved preventive measures," a statement said.

and June 2021, according to the National Centre for Statistics and Information. Eighty-eight domestic flights carrying 8,751 passengers landed in Salalah in May, and 114 flights landed in June carrying 15,39 passengers.

COVID-19 hospital bills unaffordable for expats

Continued from Page 01

"Khoulia Hospital gave all the necessary treatment and tried its best to treat her," Pednekar said.

Komal Jhadav had a similar experience at the same private hospital where Pednekar's wife was first admitted. When her husband's condition worsened, the hospital asked her to find an ICU bed and shift him. "By the grace of God, we got a bed in the Field Hospital in Seeb."

Thankfully, Komal's husband had medical insurance, saving them financial hardship though they were asked to pay for a CT scan, some treatment charges and five days in the private hospital. All the treatment at the Field Hospital where he was admitted for 24 days was completely free. The Field Hospital advised her to shift her husband home for further follow-up treatment owing to negligible risk of re-infection at home.

During a virtual press conference held in April 2020, H E Dr Ahmed bin Mohammed al Sa'eedi, Minister of Health, said

that Oman treats all patients irrespective of their nationality and that tests and treatment are free for all expatriates.

Catch-22

Following the outbreak of the pandemic in Oman, COVID-19 screening tests were done for all. Later, residents were asked to go to private hospitals for tests, and the Capital Market Authority issued a circular asking insurance companies to include PCR test and treatment in insurance packages creating a challenge for the private healthcare sector.

Speaking on condition of anonymity, an official of a private hospital in Muscat said, "The agreed treatment costs between hospitals and insurance companies are quite low. But COVID-19 requires multiple tests and expensive medicines for supportive treatment. Insurance coverage does not even recover the basic cost of treatment and medicines administered by hospitals."

He informed that this creates a 'catch-22 situation' for hospi-

tals and it is why most private hospitals find a way to avoid insured patients and prefer cash patients. "Considering the high treatment cost, they ask for a big amount as an advance for their security."

"Currently most hospitals are filled with COVID-19 patients and not much is happening in the other medical streams in terms of treatment and billing. Besides, COVID-19 facilities require dedicated staff due to high risk of infection. So hospitals can't use their COVID-19 staff for other services which adds to the running cost of the hospital."

According to Varsha Sarah Roy, finance director of AdLife at Amerat, however, the hospital hasn't turned back any patient, irrespective of their insurance status. "We ask for a minimal amount as advance. In many cases for genuine patients, we have admitted them without deposit, too," she said, adding that some patients who were unable to settle the final bill have been allowed to pay in installments. (Text by Syed Fasiuddin)

Over RO348mn foreign investment in Musandam



Our Correspondent
Muscat

More than RO348mn in foreign investment has been reported in Musandam at the end of June, according to the Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion (MoCIIP).

Mohammed bin Abdullah al Shehi, director of the ministry's directorate in Musandam governorate, said, "The number of foreign investment companies in Musandam has reached 146, with capital amounting to RO348,962,500 at the end of June 2021. The number of commercial records that were registered in the governorate were

MoCIIP has launched automatic licensing service in the governorate with the aim of creating an investment climate in the sultanate in implementation of Oman Vision 2040

MOHAMMED AL SHEHI

154 and industrial licenses 159 in 2020."

He added, "The ministry has launched automatic licensing service in the governorate with the aim of creating an investment climate in the sultanate in implementation of Oman Vision 2040."

Referring to the ministry's efforts in this direction, Shehi said,

"The ministry recently updated the foreign capital investment law. Additionally, in April this year, the ministry launched 50 investment opportunities in the industrial sector, including a number of opportunities available in Musandam governorate."

"The commercial, industrial and investment components of Musandam vary, which will con-

tribute to attracting local and foreign investments and creating sustainable economic development in the governorate," Shehi said.

Musandam's renowned natural features include the Najd, Shamm, Al Hablain and Ghab Ali creeks. Besides diverse interesting formations of coastal rocks, there are many islands scattered across the governorate, including the Al Teer and the famous Telegraph Island.

Among its beaches, Qada, Mokhi, Bassa, Hyout and Hill are big draw for tourists. Jebel Hareem, the tallest mountain - 2,087m - in Musandam is also a major attraction.

Tender Announcement



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

Tender Number	Tender Name	Last date of buying	Date of submission	Type of work	Register Degree	Fee (R.O)
7/2021/PEIE/HQ-7	DESIGN AND CONSTRUCTION OF SEWAGE TREATMENT PLANT AT SUR INDUSTRIAL CITY	22-08-2021	16-09-2021	Construction	Excellent, First	200

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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Over 2,000 cybercrimes registered in 2020

Our Correspondent
Muscat

As many as 2,292 cybercrimes were registered in Oman in 2020, according to the National Centre for Statistics and Information (NCSI).

Forty-seven per cent of such crimes consisted of malicious attacks on others with insults and slander, 16 per cent involved assaulting the sanctity of private or family life, seven per cent constituted threatening or blackmailing individuals, and 30 per cent fell under other technical crimes, NCSI stated.

Cybercrimes in Oman increased by 25 per cent in 2020 in comparison to 2019, according to an official in Royal Oman Police.

Many victims delay reporting such crimes and cases often go unreported.

"All social media platforms can be used by criminals to commit fraud. Parents should encourage their children to talk about the problems they face, especially when they are exposed to blackmail," the official said.

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Oman's largest solar power plant begins commercial operations

Our Correspondent
Muscat

Oman's largest solar power plant, built in Ibri, has started commercial operations, said an official at the Oman Power and Water Procurement Company (OPWP).

The Ibri II is a 500MW photo-voltaic (PV) solar power project which is located in the Dhahirah region, and is the first utility-scale renewable energy facility in the sultanate.

In an interview with Oman TV, Eng Ahmed bin Salim al Abri from the OPWP said, "The plant has been built on an area of 13mn sqm at a cost of about RO250mn. The Ibri project is the largest photovoltaic plant in the country to date."



(Supplied photo)

He added, "The project is part of the sultanate's efforts to diversify its sources of energy, which are primarily derived from fossil-fuel-based products such as oil and natural gas. It is part of the country's Tanfeedh plans for economic expansion."

"It is expected to play a strate-

gic role in building the sultanate's renewable production capacity."

According to Eng Abri the project aims to achieve the vision of the Omani government in adopting a renewable energy policy.

The government aims to achieve 30 per cent of its energy

through renewables by 2030.

According to OPWP, the Ibri II can power up to 33,000 homes and remove 340,000 tonnes of carbon dioxide emissions from the country's footprint per year.

The Ibri II independent power producer (IPP) project is being implemented under the build,

The plant has been built on an area of 13mn sqm at a cost of about RO250mn. It is part of the country's Tanfeedh plans for economic expansion

ENG AHMED AL ABRI

own and operate (BOO) model by the Shams Dhahira Generating Company, which is a special purpose vehicle (SPV) incorporated by ACWA Power (50 per cent), Gulf Investment Corporation (40 per cent), and Alternative Energy Projects (10 per cent).



Travel companies must issue invoices to customers: Ministry

Our Correspondent
Muscat

The Ministry of Heritage and Tourism has urged travel agents to issue stamped invoice for the ticket purchased by a customer to avoid legal liability.

The ministry said, 'It has come to our notice that some travel and tourism offices issue airline tickets to travellers without notifying them on the ticket policies such as the ticket is valid for refund or exchange, and the mechanism to change the travelling date or cancellation of the ticket, according to the airline's terms and condition.'

'The ministry urges all travel

and tourism offices to notify the travellers and provide them with office stamped invoice, explaining the details of the ticket purchased with its cancellation and return policy in both languages - Arabic and English, in order to protect the passenger's legal rights and avoid legal liability,' the statement added.

Passengers drop

Passengers travelling through Oman's airports dropped by 45 per cent during the first half of 2021.

'The passengers decreased by 45.82 per cent to reach 1,647,253 compared to the same period in 2020,' NCSI said.

Survey on social protection system begins today

Our Correspondent
Muscat

With the aim of gathering the opinions of citizens about the benefits and social services provided by the government to the various segments of society, the National Centre for Statistics and Information (NCSI) is beginning a survey from today (August 8).



(Supplied photo)

In a statement NCSI said, 'The survey aims to know the citizen's opinions and ideas about the social protection system in the sultanate.'

NCSI said the survey will continue till September 2.

The results of the questionnaire aim to develop policies related to the social protection system, NCSI said.

The National Centre for Statistics and Information added that it is calling on citizens to participate in the survey and to provide opinions that lead to community welfare.

NCSI has organised a course for the workers in call centres with the aim of training them on all the information related to the data of the survey.

ROP NEWS

Expat arrested for robbery in Sur

The Royal Oman Police (ROP) has arrested an expat on charges of stealing from houses in the wilayat of Sur.

In a statement, the ROP said, 'South Sharqiyah Governorate Police Command arrested an expatriate on charges of theft, violating the sanctity of houses and stealing from them in the wilayat of Sur.'

The ROP statement said legal procedures have been initiated against the person.



Illegal party in Batinah

The Royal Oman Police (ROP) arrested a group of people for violating the decisions of the Supreme Committee in South Batinah governorate.

The ROP said, 'The Police

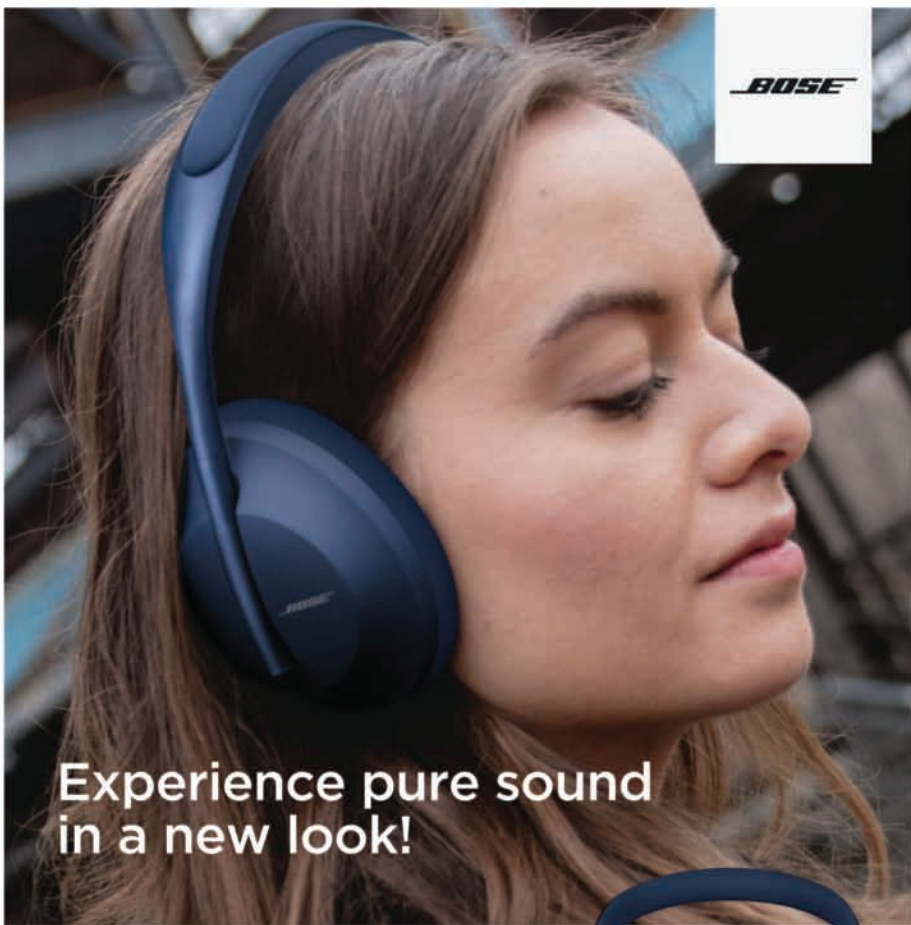
Command of South Batinah governorate took legal measures against a group of people that had gathered, in violation of the decisions of the Supreme Committee dealing with COVID-19.'

Two arrested for human trafficking

The department of criminal investigation of the Royal Oman Police (ROP) arrested two Asians on charges of human trafficking.

The ROP said, 'The sus-

pects lured some domestic workers to escaper from their employers and pretended to have other jobs with attractive salaries. They were later forced into prostitution.'



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Chairman's Report for the Quarter ended June 30, 2021

Dear Shareholders,

On behalf of the Board of Directors, it gives me great pleasure to present the unaudited consolidated financial statements of A'Sharqiya Investment Holding Company (SAOG) and its subsidiary – Qalhat Real Estate Investments & Services LLC. (QREIS) - for the six month period ended June 30, 2021.

Overview of Operations and Financial Performance

A summary of the company's operating performance for the six-month period ended June 30, 2021 in comparison to the corresponding period in 2020 and the full year ended 2020 is presented below:

(RO in '000)				
Quarter ended June 30, 2020	June 30 2021	June 30 2020	% Increase/ (Decrease)	Full Year ended 2020
Total Operating Income	664	809	(17.9)	1,165
Profit after Tax (PAT)	357	475	(24.9)	529
Net change in Fair				
Value of FVOCI	2,234	(335)	766.9	774
Total comprehensive income/(loss)	2,591	141	1,744.1	1,303
Total Assets	19,102	15,484	23.4	16,812

It may be noted from above; the company's operations during the six month period ended June 30, 2021 generated an income of RO 664,294 as compared to RO 808,943 during the corresponding period in 2020. Profit before tax decreased by 24.2% at RO 395,723 as against RO 522,365. The profit after tax arising from the company's operations is RO 357,050 as compared to RO 475,495 generated during the comparable period in 2020 - a decrease of 24.9%.

The increase in fair value of the company's investment portfolio under the fair value through other comprehensive income (FVOCI) investments during the period stood at RO 2,234,146 compared to a decrease of RO 334,986 recorded during the comparable period in 2020. The total comprehensive income increased to RO 2,591,196 as compared to RO 140,509 during the comparable period in 2020.

The total assets of the company as at June 30, 2021 was RO 19,102,142 as compared to RO 15,483,637 as at June 30, 2020, reflecting an increase of 23.4%. Net Assets per share is at RO 0.171 on June 30, 2021 as compared to Baizas 131 on June 30, 2020.

Investment and future Outlook

The global economy is projected to grow 6.0 percent in 2021 and 4.9 percent in 2022 as per IMF World Economic Outlook (July 2021). Though there is no change from its April Outlook, the prospects for emerging market and developing economies have been marked down for 2021, especially for Emerging Asia, while the forecast for developing economies has been revised up. It is to be noted that the forecast for 2022 has gone up by 0.5% from the April Outlook mainly on account of revisions in the forecasts for the advanced economies. The revisions reflect the varying effects of the pandemic on the advanced and developing economies and varying degrees of policy support.

Oman is projected to witness a GDP growth of 2.5% in 2021 and expected to average 3.0% in the medium-term. Inflation turned negative in 2020 owing to subdued demand, but it is expected to increase to 3.0% percent in 2021 given the introduction of VAT and recovery in aggregate demand, before declining to about 2.5% over the medium term. The fiscal deficit is projected to improve to 2.4% in 2021 from 19.3% in 2020 driven by increased Oil revenue, and a move to fiscal surplus is predicted over the medium term.

The emergence of COVID-19 variants could prolong the impact of the pandemic on the global outlook and financial conditions, and thus intensify the economic impact on Oman. Volatility in oil prices would have a significant impact on the outlook.

The outlook for our investee companies will continue to remain challenging and aligned to the speed of the recovery from the pandemic, especially in some of the key markets where these companies operate. Though we are confident about the eventual economic recovery in the developing world with improved availability of vaccines, allowing for gradual return to pre-pandemic level of economic activity, the severity of infections of the new strains of virus leading to further prolonged lockdowns increases uncertainty on the timing of recovery. The Company will continue to add value to its investee companies with a long-term view and also continue its efforts to diversify the portfolio to provide sustainable long-term returns to shareholders.

On behalf of the Board of Directors, I would like to express our sincere gratitude to His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tariq for his able leadership of the country during such an unprecedented crisis. I also thank the shareholders for their continued support and for the confidence reposed on the company. My appreciation also goes to the company's management and staff for their contributions and commitment to the company.

Mohammed Ali Al Fannah
Chairman

UN-AUDITED SEPARATE AND CONSOLIDATED CONDENSED STATEMENT OF FINANCIAL POSITION AS AT 30 JUNE 2021

	Un-audited 30 June 2021		Un-audited 30 June 2020		Audited 31 December 2020	
	Parent RO	Group RO	Parent RO	Group RO	Parent RO	Group RO
ASSETS						
Non-current assets						
Furniture and equipment	8,143	8,296	11,802	12,043	9,680	9,877
Lease receivables	-	5,122,082	-	5,634,495	-	5,594,315
Investment in a subsidiary	250,000	-	250,000	-	250,000	-
Financial assets at FVOCI	10,385,580	10,385,580	8,199,721	8,199,721	9,238,100	9,238,100
Financial assets at FVTPL	140,170	140,170	72,063	72,063	58,439	58,439
Capital work-in-progress	-	111,317	-	5,200	-	46,730
Deferred tax assets	54,467	54,467	38,652	38,652	54,467	54,467
Total non-current assets	10,838,360	15,821,912	8,572,238	13,962,174	9,610,686	15,001,928
Current assets						
Lease receivables	-	603,670	-	520,175	-	467,747
Prepayments and other receivables	47,219	87,234	7,749	33,191	23,825	485,911
Bank balances and cash	1,382,916	2,589,326	496,778	968,097	407,980	856,085
Total current assets	1,430,135	3,280,230	504,527	1,521,463	431,805	1,809,743
Total assets	12,268,495	19,102,142	9,076,765	15,483,637	10,042,491	16,811,671
EQUITY						
Equity:						
Share capital	9,000,000	9,000,000	9,000,000	9,000,000	9,000,000	9,000,000
Legal reserve	1,421,459	1,504,793	1,417,436	1,500,770	1,403,679	1,487,013
Fair value reserve	1,728,232	1,728,232	(1,416,961)	(1,416,961)	(307,846)	(307,846)
(Accumulated losses)/Retained earnings	(703,324)	3,146,479	(807,993)	2,671,694	(912,179)	2,758,373
Total equity	11,446,367	15,379,504	8,192,482	11,755,503	9,183,654	12,937,540
Total equity	11,446,367	15,379,504	8,192,482	11,755,503	9,183,654	12,937,540
LIABILITIES						
Non-current liabilities						
Finance lease payable	-	3,365,433	-	3,379,619	-	3,566,170
Staff terminal benefits	108,774	135,718	97,970	119,057	101,982	127,291
Total	108,774	3,501,151	97,970	3,498,676	101,982	3,693,461
Current liabilities						
Finance lease payable	-	105,443	-	105,161	-	14,285
Amount due to a subsidiary	666,698	-	727,590	-	697,458	-
Retention payable	-	7,416	-	-	-	-
Trade and other payables	33,257	63,597	39,101	71,069	42,890	82,590
Provision for taxation	13,399	45,031	19,622	53,228	16,507	83,795
Total	713,354	221,487	786,313	229,458	756,855	180,670
Total liabilities	822,128	3,722,638	884,283	3,728,134	858,837	3,874,131
Total equity and liabilities	12,268,495	19,102,142	9,076,765	15,483,637	10,042,491	16,811,671
Net assets per share	0.127	0.171	0.091	0.131	0.102	0.144

UN-AUDITED SEPARATE AND CONSOLIDATED CONDENSED STATEMENT OF COMPREHENSIVE INCOME FOR THE SIX MONTHS PERIOD ENDED 30 JUNE 2021

	30 June 2021		30 June 2020	
	Parent RO	Group RO	Parent RO	Group RO
INCOME				
Finance income on lease receivables	-	289,691	-	320,666
Dividend income	315,632	315,632	438,551	438,551
Maintenance services income (net)	-	35,157	-	28,405
Unrealised gain on financial assets at FVTPL	7,731	7,731	14,617	14,617
Realised gain on disposal of FVTPL assets	6,203	6,203	-	-
Other income	30,002	9,880	36,704	6,704
Operating income	359,568	664,294	489,872	808,943
EXPENSES				
Interest & finance expenses	(531)	(568)	(1,359)	(1,400)
Staff costs	(112,129)	(112,889)	(132,409)	(133,279)
Finance cost on lease payable	-	(91,258)	-	(92,122)
Depreciation	(2,079)	(2,123)	(2,006)	(2,050)
General and administrative expenses	(59,990)	(61,733)	(55,772)	(57,727)
Operating expenses	(174,729)	(268,571)	(191,546)	(286,578)
Profit before taxation	184,839	395,723	298,326	522,365
Income tax expense	(7,041)	(38,673)	(13,264)	(46,870)
Profit for the period	177,798	357,050	285,062	475,495
Other comprehensive income/(loss):				
Net change in fair values of financial assets at FVOCI	2,234,146	2,234,146	(334,986)	(334,986)
Total comprehensive income/(loss) for the period	2,411,944	2,591,196	(49,924)	140,509
Earnings per share	0.002	0.004	0.003	0.005

Note: The complete accounts will be sent by mail to any shareholder who requests them in Arabic or English as requested, within 7 days of receipt of the request.

Entries called for online creative writing competition

Our Correspondent
Muscat

With the aim of encouraging creativity in literary work, Bhavalaya Art and Culture Foundation is organising the Online International Creative Writing (OICW) contest for those above 15 years of age irrespective of nationality.

The topic for the contest conducted in English is 'Life During COVID-19 Pandemic Days', and according to the organisers entries should be within 3,500 (maximum) words. They can be presented as simple articles, short stories or personal opinions. Entries should be mailed to bhavalayacreations@gmail.com before August 17.

"We are very excited to have this event to encourage the art of creative writing and this is done to bring out the imagination and creativeness of people. There are exciting prizes for the best three writings - ₹10,000, ₹7,500 and ₹5,000. All participants will be given appreciation certificates," said Vindhya Singh Ghosh, coordinator of the OICW.

The essays will be evaluated by an eminent panel of judges including academicians and artists.

Dr J Retnakumar, founder and chairman of Bhavalaya said, "We



Here lies the importance of this contest, where the participants will turn their imagination into innovative ideas which can help people overcome difficulties

DR J RETNAKUMAR

are now experiencing a challenging phase in our lives. The pandemic days are slowly creeping into our personal and professional lives and people are getting depressed. Here lies the relevance and importance of this creative writing contest, where the participants will turn their imagination into innovative ideas which can help people overcome the present difficulties."

REGIONAL WEATHER

	Max	Min
Abu Dhabi	41	31
Doha	41	31
Kuwait City	45	34
Manama	44	31
Riyadh	45	30

PRAYER TIMINGS

Fajr	4.16am
Sunrise	5.39am
Duhr	12.12pm
Asr	3.37pm
Maghrib	6.45pm
Isha	8.15pm

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Oman's economy back on growth path

World Bank says the sultanate's economy is expected to grow by 2.5% in 2021 and 6.5% in 2022

Our Correspondent
Muscat

Following a year of economic distress due to the COVID-19 pandemic and weak oil prices, Oman's economy is expected to return to a growth of 2.5 per cent in 2021 and 6.5 per cent in 2022, according to the World Bank.

In its latest issue of Gulf Economic Update report titled 'COVID-19 Pandemic and the Road to Diversification', the World Bank said the GCC economies are expected to return to an aggregate growth of 2.2 per cent in 2021.

'After a deep decline in 2020, Oman's economy is forecast to recover in 2021, albeit at a moderate 2.5 per cent growth rate as a sizeable infrastructure investment programme gains momentum. Medium-term growth is projected to average 5.3 per cent over the forecast period (2021-2023),' the report said.

The World Bank said Oman's economy is expected to bounce

back strongly in 2022 with 6.5 per cent growth, the fastest growth among the GCC countries. The sultanate's economy, as per the bank, is expected to grow by 4.2 per cent in 2023.

The COVID-19 pandemic and the decline in global oil demand and prices dealt the GCC countries a health crisis and a commodity market shock causing a GDP contraction of 4.8 per cent in 2020, the World Bank said.

Oman's GDP growth, as per the bank, was an estimated negative 6.3 per cent in 2020.

According to the World Bank, Oman's non-oil economy in 2020 posted a steep decline of 9 per cent from 2019 levels. Activity in the services sector, the mainstay of the non-oil economy, contracted across the board, dragged down by lockdowns, travel bans, and supply chain disruptions.

Deficits set to decline

The gradual implementation of reforms under the Medium-



Term Fiscal Plan (2020-2024) should help Oman narrow the fiscal deficit over the forecast period, the World Bank said.

'The implementation of the 5 per cent value-added tax in April 2021 is expected to boost revenues beginning in 2021. Revenues will also be supported by higher oil prices and higher gas production expected over the forecast period and augmented by the proceeds from planned

privatisations of some oil and utility assets,' the bank said.

Overall, Oman's fiscal deficit is forecast to be reduced to 3.3 per cent of GDP by 2023, the World Bank noted. 'The deficits, however, imply that Oman's debt ratio will remain elevated, at around 70 per cent of GDP over the forecast period, and its debt servicing costs will remain high.'

The GCC fiscal deficits are projected to persist for most over

the 2021-2023 period, however. The three countries with the largest deficits in 2020 - Kuwait, Bahrain, and Oman - are projected to remain in deficit throughout 2021-2023, but at narrower ratios to GDP in 2023 than during the economic downturn in 2020, the World Bank said.

'While the GCC has done a lot in the last year to contain the effects of the pandemic on their

economy, including procuring vaccinations early on, they must continue to reform their public sector finances,' said Issam Abousleiman, World Bank regional director of the GCC countries.

'The region needs to strengthen their competition policies to harness the benefits of telecommunications and the digitalisation of economic activity,' he said. The World Bank report focuses on fiscal revenues and structural reforms including strategic investments in digitalisation and telecommunications, which can help enable more economic diversification.

The report said, 'Promoting private sector development remains at the core of national and regional economic diversification efforts. The GCC managed to complete only two state-owned enterprise privatisation transactions and only two public-private partnership agreements in 2020, but it was a difficult year for commerce and investment any-

where.'

Also, advancing the telecommunications frontier is a strategic investment sector for diversification and post COVID-19 recovery, that will serve the GCC well. 'Past investments in the sector accorded the GCC sizeable benefits during the pandemic as quarantines, lockdowns, and restrictions forced public health surveillance, wholesale and retail commerce, public and private education, banking and financial services, and private and government office work onto digital channels,' the report said.

'Strategic investment in advanced telecommunications technologies, including 5G, is underway in the GCC. But beyond capital spending on infrastructure, the telecommunications sector would benefit greatly from improvements in the legal, regulatory, and competition frameworks under which service providers operate,' the World Bank added.

IsDB, Bloomberg to launch financial education in 9 countries, including Oman

London, UK - Islamic Development Bank (IsDB) and Bloomberg LP will work together to deliver a financial education programme for university students in nine countries, including Oman.

The nine IsDB member countries involved in the programme are Oman, Saudi Arabia, Bangladesh, Egypt, Kazakhstan, Kuwait, Malaysia, Nigeria and Uzbekistan.

IsDB and Bloomberg will announce participating universities over the coming months, said an IsDB press statement on Thursday.

The programme will leverage the Bloomberg Terminal to support the growth of the Islamic finance sector and empower students in leading universities with the financial skills needed to excel in the professional world.

The programme will equip the next generation of leaders in sectors with the foundational principles of financial markets. By



delivering practical real-world experiences, training will enable students to build competencies and transferable skills that are highly sought after by employers.

It is also designed to support the long-term growth of the Islamic finance industry through specialised training on market infrastructure and areas like transparency, connectivity and compliance across central banks and regulators.

At the programme's core will

be IsDB-Bloomberg certification, composed of a series of challenges and modules specially designed for the selected countries and delivered by Bloomberg market specialists.

These include the Bloomberg Islamic Finance module to introduce students to the principles of Islamic finance and the relevant tools available on the Bloomberg Terminal.

Top performing students will be recommended for internship

opportunities at IsDB.

Dr Bandar Hajjar, president of IsDB, said, 'The launch of the Capacity and Skills Building Programme with Bloomberg is important to IsDB Group to prepare young people for the 21st-century jobs and the labour market requirements.'

'We hope this programme will contribute to providing a number of our member countries with a group of young people capable of bringing about a qualitative leap in increasing productivity and enhancing competitiveness in some vital and pioneering productive sectors in these countries,' he said.

Through this partnership, the two parties will seek to develop tailored financial literacy and education programmes across the selected IsDB member countries in a manner consistent with the Fourth Industrial Revolution's applications to build a new generation of skilled workers, he added. WAM

Qatar Airways 'ordered' to ground 13 Airbus planes

Doha, Qatar - Qatar Airways said on Thursday that it had been ordered by regulators in the Gulf state to ground 13 of its Airbus A350 aircraft over the rapid degradation of fuselage surfaces.

The airline, one of the Gulf 'big three' carriers, previously stopped accepting delivery of the aircraft over the issue, according to media reports in June.

Qatar Airways said in a statement that it had been forced to press out-of-service Airbus A330 aircraft back into operation to fill the gap left by the grounding of the 13 aircraft.

Qatar Airways has 34 A350-900 types and 19 A350-1000s in its fleet, according to an Airbus document.

'The airline is working with its regulator to ensure the continued safety of all passengers... and following the explicit written instruction of (the airline's) regulator, thirteen aircraft have now been grounded,' the airline said.



Qatar Airways is regulated by the Qatar Civil Aviation Authority.

The airline's chief executive Akbar al Baker said he expects 'Airbus treats this matter with the proper attention that it requires'.

'Qatar Airways will not accept anything other than aircraft that continue to offer its customers the highest possible standard of safety and the best travel experience that they deserve,' he said in the statement.

'Qatar Airways expects Air-

bus to have established the root cause and permanently corrected the underlying condition to the satisfaction of Qatar Airways and our regulator before we take delivery of any further A350 aircraft.'

The statement said the airline was 'cooperating with all the leasing companies affected by this A350 grounding who have started to inspect their impacted aircraft', without giving details of other affected parties.

Through the coronavirus pandemic, Qatar Airways positioned itself as the leading airline for repatriating stranded travellers, winning plaudits from Britain and France among other countries whose flag carriers were virtually mothballed.

More than half of the airline's fleet is made up of the mid-sized but long-range US-made Boeing 787 and French-built Airbus A350.

AFP

US trade deficit hits record in June

Washington, US - A surge in imports of industrial supplies drove the US trade deficit to a record in June, according to government data, a sign global supply chains may be coming back online after the pandemic disruptions.

The trade gap widened by US\$4.6bn to US\$75.7bn, a nearly 7 per cent increase compared to May, the Commerce Department reported. That was higher than analysts had expected and beat the previous all-time high set that month.

Imports of goods and services jumped US\$6bn, most of which was accounted for by the rise in industrial materials and supplies such as iron, steel and chemicals, as well as a US\$1.2bn increase in non-monetary gold.

US purchases of imported consumer goods, including autos, actually fell in the month, according to the report.

Exports also rose but gained just US\$1.2bn compared to May.

AFP

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Central Stores Directorate Purchasing & Contracts Section

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

Auction No.	PT/CSD/MH/2020/BK18
Auction Description	Central Stores Directorate would like to float an Auction for the purchase, deconstruction, dismantling, demolition & removal of Sitra power & water station. The purchasers shall be responsible for arranging and mobilizing all required tools, equipment and lifting arrangements to execute the project along with demolishing civil structure and concrete foundation of all plants, machineries and equipment to the ground level.
Document Fees	BD. 100/-
Initial Bond	BD. 5,000/-
Deadline For Purchasing The Documents	Thursday 30th September 2021 at 1:30 PM
Auction Closing Date	Sunday 7th November 2021 at 1:30PM

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

- Bidders who are eligible and want to participate in the auction specified above are kindly requested to purchase the auction documents online through the e-Tendering portal <http://www.tenderboard.gov.bh> until 30th September 2021 (for assistance please contact the Tender Board help desk on (Tel: +973 1756617 or through e-mail helpdesk@tenderboard.gov.bh).
- This announcement is to be read as part of the auction documents and in compliance with the government tendering & purchasing regulations issued in Decrees Nos. 36 & 37 of 2002 and its executive regulations.
- All public tenders & auctions related to the Central Stores Directorate are published on the Tender Board website: <http://www.tenderboard.gov.bh>.

MARKET ANALYSIS - OMAN

MSX posts weekly drop as financial stocks fall

The benchmark index of the Muscat Stock Exchange (MSX) posted a decline during the last week due to sharp decreases in financial sector stocks. The MSX30 Index ended the week lower by 0.70 per cent.

Among sectoral indices, Financial Index declined 1.34 per cent while Service Index and Industrial Index rose by 0.48 per cent and 0.78 per cent, respectively. The MSX Shariah Index closed higher by 0.31 per cent for the week.

Local news

►Sohar International Bank announced that it has obtained the regulatory approvals from the Central Bank of Oman and the Capital Market Authority for a rights issue of 555.555mn shares at a price of 92bz per share (with a share price of 90bz per share plus issue expenses of 2bz per share).

►Oman is reconsidering plans to remove subsidies for electricity over the next few years, an official said. State-run Oman News Agency said on Monday that the government plans to amend tariffs, giving consumers on lower rates access to more supply and recalculate bills for May and June. The Authority of Public Services Regulation (APSR) has received more than 5,000 complaints over 'significant increases' in bills. The government had said late last year that the utility tariffs will be raised gradually until the subsidies are lifted completely in 2025. Subsidies for electricity and water totalled about

US\$1.95bn, according to the 2020 budget.

►As per the the CBO, Oman's narrow money supply (M1) decreased during the month of May 2021 by 1.6 per cent on month-on-month basis. The contraction was due to a decline in demand deposits by 2.7 per cent while currency outside commercial banks was higher by 1.8 per cent on monthly basis. Broad money (M2) supply increased by 1.2 per cent. The increase was led by an 8.8 per cent year-on-year rise in quasi money, while on monthly basis, domestic liquidity increased by about RO238mn or 1.2 per cent.

►The CBO's foreign assets (which include bullion, IMF reserve assets, placements abroad and foreign securities) rose to RO6.94bn as at the end of May 2021, having increased by 0.8 per cent on month-on-month basis and by 1.2 per cent year-on-year. The month-on-month expansion was brought on by a 1.0 per cent increase in placements abroad and 0.6 per cent growth in IMF reserve assets. Share of securities of the total was 46.2 per cent while that of placements abroad was 52.0 per cent, while the rest amounting to 1.8 per cent was held by the IMF reserve assets.

►Oman's unemployment rate stood at 3.9 per cent in June 2021 compared to 4.9 per cent in May 2021. Unemployment amongst female stood at 12 per cent while unemployment in males stood at 2 per cent in June 2021. Amongst the age



group, 15-24 age group recorded the highest unemployment at 22.8 per cent, followed by 8.5 per cent for the age group 25-29 and 2.8 per cent for the age group between 30-34 years. In terms of unemployment by educational status, highest was at 13 per cent for the people with bachelors degrees.

►Total number of small and medium enterprises (SMEs) at the end of June 2021 were 54,726 which is an increase by 23 per cent compared to the same period of 2020. Among the governorates, Al Wusta topped the list with 45.1 per cent of total SMEs registered in June 2021, followed by Musandam with 34.3 per cent, Al Sharqiyah South with 29.2 per

cent, Al Batinah South with 27 per cent, and the rest are from the other governorates. The Governorate of Muscat had 18,460 SMEs registered at the end of June 2021, followed by North Al Batinah with 8,642, Al Dakhiliyah with 6,756, Dhofar with 4,586, South Al Batinah with 4,189 and North Al Sharqiyah with 3,619 SMEs registered. This was followed by South Al Sharqiyah with 3,272 SMEs, Al Dhahirah with 3,083 SMEs and Al Buraimi with 1,165 registered SMEs.

GCC markets

The GCC stock markets recorded net foreign flows of US\$74mn in July 2021 compared to net foreign flows of US\$1.02bn in June and

US\$177.9mn in July 2020. For year-to-date period, all the GCC countries have positive net foreign flows. Saudi Arabia continues to enjoy the highest net flows at US\$3.35bn followed by US\$1.24bn in Abu Dhabi.

Saudi banking sector reported net profit of SAR25.1bn for the first half of 2021 compared to SAR14.7bn in the same period of 2020, recording an year-on-year growth of 71 per cent. The banks reported a rise in aggregate net profit before Zakat and tax to SAR3.87bn in June 2021 against a loss of SAR4.79bn a year earlier.

Saudi banks' aggregate assets grew by 10 per cent year-on-year to SAR3.114tn in June 2021. Combined deposits grew by 10 per cent year-on-year to

SAR2.30tn in the same month. Loans to the private sector saw an increase of 15.6 per cent year-on-year to around SAR1.933tn by the end of June.

Global news

The board of governors of the International Monetary Fund (IMF) has approved a historic general allocation of Special Drawing Rights (SDRs) equivalent to US\$650bn (about 456bn SDRs) on August 2, 2021, to boost global liquidity. The general allocation of SDRs will become effective on August 23, 2021. The newly created SDRs will be credited to IMF member countries in proportion to their existing quotas in the fund. About US\$275bn (about 193bn SDRs) of the new allocation will go to emerging markets and developing countries, including low-income countries. The IMF is also exploring other options to help poorer and more vulnerable countries in their recovery efforts.

The US economy advanced by an annualized 6.5 per cent growth in the second quarter of 2021. The reading marks the second-strongest growth rate since 2003, exceeded only by the record-fast expansion seen in the third quarter of 2020. It also follows an annualized growth rate of 6.3 per cent in the first quarter. It also brings US GDP above the previous peak seen in the fourth quarter of 2019.

The achievement signifies that the US economy is finally larger than it was just before the

COVID-19 crisis began. Personal consumption expenditures grew 11.8 per cent, namely services (12 per cent) and non-durable goods (12.6 per cent) as vaccinated Americans travel and engage in activities that were restricted before. Non-residential fixed investment grew by 8 per cent, exports grew by 6 per cent and state and local government spending inched up by 0.8 per cent. Meanwhile, the negative contributions came from private inventory investment, residential fixed investment (9.8 per cent decline), federal government spending (10.4 per cent decline) and imports (7.8 per cent decline).

Recommendation

Globally, the markets remained under pressure because of the spread of Delta variant in many countries. However, the global markets witnessed some support from the result season which were better in most of the cases.

Regionally, the markets were under pressure due to a drop in oil prices despite some phenomenal results of the petrochemical sector.

As expected in previous week, Oman's market was also under pressure in the absence of any catalyst and lower oil prices.

We believe the local market will continue to remain range bounded until the next earnings season. We advise investor to build position in fundamentally strong stocks on dip.

By special arrangement with U Capital

Big win for Amazon in battle with Indian conglomerate

New Delhi, India - US e-commerce giant Amazon won a major legal victory in India on Friday as the country's top court blocked a US\$3.4bn deal struck by domestic rival Reliance.

Amazon, Walmart-backed Flipkart and Reliance, owned by Asia's richest man Mukesh Ambani, are locked in a titanic battle to dominate online retail in the country of 1.3bn people.

Reliance struck a deal last year to buy assets belonging to Future Retail, India's second-largest supermarket chain, owned by Future Group.

The acquisition of Future Group, which owns some of India's best-known supermarket brands, such as Big Bazaar, would have strengthened Reliance's presence in the hugely competitive e-commerce sector.



Amazon, which owned a stake in one of Future Group's firms that reportedly included an option to buy into the flagship company, claimed that the Re-

liance deal amounted to a breach of contract.

The US online titan last year approached the Singapore International Arbitration Centre

which put the Reliance deal on hold after finding merit in Amazon's objections.

Amazon said the arbitrator's order was binding, while Future

contested its legality. On Friday the Supreme Court ruled that the order was valid.

There was no immediate comment from Reliance or Amazon. Amazon, owned by the world's richest man Jeff Bezos, has pledged US\$6.5bn in investment in India, according to Bloomberg News.

Flipkart, which Walmart bought a majority stake in for US\$16bn in 2018, recently garnered US\$3.6bn in the country's largest fund raise at a valuation of nearly US\$38bn, Bloomberg said.

Future Group founder Kishore Biyani was once known as India's retail king, but he has struggled in recent years as the coronavirus pandemic dealt a heavy blow to his empire.

AFP

Biden hails US job numbers as unemployment falls to 5.4%

Washington, US - President Joe Biden hailed strong US job creation numbers released Friday as evidence that his drive to resurrect the economy from the ravages of the pandemic is yielding results.

"Now while our economy is far from complete and while we doubtlessly will have ups and downs along the way as we continue to battle the Delta surge of COVID-19, what is indisputable now is this: The Biden plan is working, the Biden plan produces results and the Biden plan is moving the country forward," he said in remarks at the White House.

The recovering US economy added 943,000 new jobs in July, according to government data released Friday, as hard-hit industries continued to return to normal.

The result was shy of the million jobs some economists had been expecting, but enough to push the unemployment rate down a half a point to 5.4 per cent, the Labor Department reported.

With widespread vaccinations allowing economic activity to return to normal, hiring has begun to accelerate, but the economy remains 5.7mn jobs short of the pre-pandemic level.

But the jobs gain in June was revised sharply higher than the original report, to show a gain of 938,000 non-farm payroll positions, seasonally adjusted.



US President Joe Biden

Notable gains in hiring in July came in the leisure and hospitality sector, which increased 380,000, as well as public education, which rose 220,000, the report said.

For Black workers, the jobless rate fell a full point from the prior month to 8.2 per cent, although that came amid a worrying decline in labour force participation.

In another sign the labour market has not fully recovered, there were 4.5mn people working part time because they cannot find full time work, the report said. There were just 11,000 positions added in construction and 27,000 in manufacturing. Average hourly earnings nationwide jumped 11 cents to US\$30.54, the report said.

AFP

UK launches \$1bn COVID-19 insurance scheme for live events

London, UK - The UK has launched an insurance scheme to cover music festivals and other live events as the beleaguered sector seeks protection after months of mass cancellations due to the coronavirus pandemic.

The scheme, worth £750mn (or US\$1bn) and announced by the country's finance ministry late Thursday, follows pressure from organisers and venues for the government to provide a cushion from COVID-19 uncertainty. The Live Events Reinsurance Scheme, created in

partnership with UK-based Lloyd's insurance company, will run from September 2021 until the end of September 2022 to avoid a third summer of cancellations at events such as music festivals. The announcement comes as the government launches an advertising campaign warning under-30s they will miss out on going to nightclubs if they are not vaccinated.

Finance minister Rishi Sunak admitted while "organisers are raring to go" following the lifting of most major restrictions, "the lack of the right kind of insurance

is proving a problem".

"As the economy reopens I want to do everything I can to help events providers and small businesses plan with confidence right through to next year," he added. Jamie Njoku-Goodwin, chief executive of the industry organisation UK Music, said he had warned the government of "the catastrophic impact of the market failure in insurance for live events".

"This new government scheme is therefore incredibly welcome news - not just for the millions of music fans who have

been looking forward to the return of live events, but also for the tens of thousands of musicians, crew members," he added.

While England removed virtually all coronavirus restrictions last month, most major festivals were forced to cancel or reduce crowd sizes well in advance because of the long lead times required for the large events.

The Glastonbury Festival, held on a dairy farm in Somerset, southwest England, announced it would cancel for the second year in a row, as the third lockdown began in January.

The festival live-streamed a concert to fans in May instead.

Other festivals directly cited the lack of a government insurance scheme as they had to refund tickers during the emergence of a new, more transmissible Delta variant of the virus. "Though it is a shame that it has come too late for some this summer, this scheme will provide the confidence the sector needs," the head of parliament's Commons Digital, Culture, Media and Sport Committee, Julian Knight, said.

AFP

Bank Nizwa provides seamless services through Corporate Internet Banking

Bank Nizwa, the first and leading Islamic bank in Oman, announced its enhanced Corporate Internet Banking (CIB) solution availing new products, features and security enhancements to support its Wholesale Banking customers comprising of SMEs, mid-sized corporations, large corporations, project finance and government institutions.

These enhancements, in line with its customer centric-vision and values, will offer customers best-in-class services and help them to better deal with recent challenges and constraints related to COVID-19.

The upgraded CIB solution incorporates well-tailored and value-added features including

enhanced transaction limits, customer self-administration options such as user creation and user management, Online Utility Payments, PASI Payments, foreign currency payments, various riyal payments, salary payments, chequebook requests, multi-level approval workflow and much more.

R Narasimhan, GM Wholesale Banking, is quoted saying, "Bank Nizwa has been showcasing an unparalleled growth story in Oman's banking sector for a couple of years with the support of our valued customers. The upgraded Corporate Internet Banking solution is expected to bring in a valuable experience to customers as an efficient business

tool particularly during this trying pandemic situation."

He added that many more exciting Sharia'a-compliant products and services are in the pipeline under its Transaction Banking suit and solutions as the bank continues with its digitisation initiatives.

Mujahid al Zadjali, GM IT & Operations, said, "The bank is committed to set a benchmark for Sharia'a-compliant digital banking in Oman by creating new value propositions and improving customer experience through innovation. The cited upgrade of Corporate Internet Banking will take our Wholesale Banking customers a step closer to the planned digital Transaction Bank-

ing solutions in the near future."

With 15 branches and growing across the sultanate, the bank aims to provide one-stop financial services to all its customers along with multiple channels for customer access and support to bring Islamic banking closer to the people and enterprises of Oman even during these challenging times.

Bank Nizwa is progressing and pursuing its digital transformation program to design and deliver Sharia'a-compliant digital banking solutions, while maintaining its position as the nation's premier Sharia'a-compliant partner of choice and propelling the growth of Islamic banking in the country and the region.



Oman Air Holidays unveils new brand, visual identity



Oman Air Holidays unveiled its revamped brand, complete with a new wordmark logo and refreshed visual identity. Developed in-house, the new look and feel supports a shift in the company's strategy towards facilitating in-bound tourism in the sultanate through integrated 'Fly & Stay' package holidays available on its website.

Aligned closely with Oman's Vision 2040 strategy, which aims to develop a diversified and sustainable economy through opportunities that strengthen the country's global competitiveness, Oman Air Holidays is redoubling efforts to broaden its integrated offering of flights, hotels, excursions and travel experiences which caters to growing local and international demand.

Also unveiled were Oman Air Holidays' refocused vision and mission statements, which

champion ambitions to become one of the top tourism operators in the Middle East by leveraging Oman Air's flight frequencies into the sultanate from international source markets, and position Oman as a uniquely different holiday experience to travel abroad globally.

"The timing is right for Oman Air Holidays to foster closer ties with local and international travel trade," said Mundher al Shaikhani, senior manager Oman Air Holidays. "As vaccine roll-out ramps up, we're seeing renewed interest for package holidays and custom stays from locals inquiring about quick getaway options, as well as international guests in the early stages of planning their next overseas holiday. Our refreshed brand, vision and mission statement, and booking platform encapsulate our strategy to offer exclusive 'Fly & Stay' packages."

ABQ Schools open doors for the future

The education of our children is too important a matter to be left to chance. Choosing a school is probably one of the most difficult decisions any parent must make, and even more so during the COVID-19 pandemic. Times have changed, and the school closest to home, is not necessarily the only option to consider anymore. The best school is the one that fits a child's needs, both short-term and long-term.

ABQ Education Group chief executive officer, Humayun Kabir says, "A truly outstanding education opens minds - and doors. That is exactly what we aim to offer our students at the three ABQ International Schools, ABQ Azzan bin Qais (in Bausher), ABQ Sohar and ABQ Seeb. Learning at an ABQ school is not simply about passing the next exam. To help our students reach their personal goals and truly benefit from the best education possible, we have a wonderfully supportive staff team, outstanding equipment and facilities, and a welcoming school community."

ABQ schools aim to inspire all students to be highly motivated individuals with a genuine love of



learning. They give students the opportunity to develop into young adults with the courage and confidence to change the world. This endeavour is further supported by their exclusive student development programmes.

The Discovering You Program is a personalised, mentoring programme which provides students with the necessary guidance and support to choose and plan their tertiary education and career options. It also gives them the opportunity to learn and master 12 vital 21st century skills. Mobeen is a specialised Arabic excellence programme. And GEDx is ABQ's unique education outcome improvement programme for students who choose the General Education Diploma pathway.

اس ام ان باور القابضة ش.م.ع.ع. SMN POWER HOLDING SAOG				
Unaudited Consolidated Financial Statements For the Six-month period ended 30 June 2021				
BOARD OF DIRECTORS' REPORT				
Dear Shareholders, On behalf of the Board of Directors ("the Board") of SMN Power Holding SAOG ("the Company"), I have the pleasure to present the unaudited consolidated financial statements for the six-month period ended 30 June 2021. Operations Providing a safe working environment is a key priority and the Board is pleased to share that during the first six months of 2021, the Health & Safety ("H&S") performance was excellent with no Lost Time Accident ("LTA") in line with previous years. The commercial performance of both plants, SMN Barka and Al Rusail, is measured by their reliability which is the ability to deliver the declared capacity as per the contract. During the first half of 2021, the reliability at SMN Barka Plant was 97.3% (98.5% in 2020) for power and 98.2% (96.4% in 2020) for water. The power reliability at Al Rusail Plant was 99.9% (99.8% in 2020) for the same period. The Company over the six-month period of 2021 produced an aggregate net power volume of 1,590 GWh (1,152 GWh in 2020) and a total volume of 15,403,000 m³ of potable water was delivered (16,671,000 m³ in 2020). All necessary annual maintenance activities of key equipment were performed in accordance with Original Equipment Manufacturers' recommendations, while applying the best industry standards and practices for health & safety and maintenance, during the 2020-2021 winter period. The Company and its O&M contractor Suez Tractebel Operations and Maintenance Oman LLC (STOMO) have taken all necessary precautionary measures to deal with the spread of Covid-19 in close coordination with Oman Power and Water Procurement (OPWP), Oman Electricity Transmission Company (OETC), Authority for Public Services Regulation (APSR) and other stakeholders. The Company and STOMO continue to implement the business continuity plan and steps on social distancing, hand wash, mask wearing and health check-up. Moreover, the Company and STOMO team are closely monitoring the situation to ensure plant availability and reliability. Financial Results Total Revenues for the six-month period of 2021 amount to RO 39.9 million (RO 36.8 in 2020), representing an increase of RO 3.1 million compared to 2020. Total Revenues include variable revenues (Fuel Charge and Variable Operating & Maintenance Charge) and fixed revenues (Fixed Capacity Fees). The Company generated a consolidated net profit of RO 5.63 million during the six-month period of 2021 compared to a net profit of RO 5.28 million for the same period in 2020. The increase in net profit of RO 0.35 million is mainly due to the following favorable variances compared to the same period in 2020: - Prior year was negatively impacted by two technical issues at SMN Barka plant: (i) Repair costs related to GT1 Generator and (ii) GT13 premix spider replacement; - Reduction in finance costs following the scheduled repayments of the term loan facilities for the two project companies and due to lower interest rates having a favorable impact on the unhedged portion of the loans. These upsidess were partially offset by the following negative variances compared to the same period in 2020: - Lower power commercial availability at SMN Barka and the Water invoice by DIAM for last 5 years for RPC plant. The reduction in Non-Current Assets is driven by the depreciation of the plant (fixed assets), receipts of the finance lease and the payment of the senior debt installment and interests as scheduled. The decrease in Current Assets is due to the payment received from OPWP of the outstanding Fuel Charges for the financial year 2020 under the fuel settlement arrangement agreed with OPWP for both SMN Barka and Al Rusail plants, part of which has been converted into cash and cash equivalent. As per the Natural Gas Sale Agreement (NGSA) signed by the Company with the Ministry of Energy and Minerals ("MEM"), the Company will pay the gas invoices to MEM once OPWP releases the corresponding Fuel Charge payments. The Company is therefore protected due to these back to back arrangements, as the increase in receivables is offset by a corresponding increase in payables. Despite the challenges caused by the spread of Covid-19, the Company has been able to maintain good plant availability and in turn pay the scheduled installments of its long-term loans. The board is delighted with the judgment passed by the Supreme Court on 19th May 2021 with regards to the tax dispute with the Tax Authority for Al Rusail Power Company. According to the Supreme Court judgment, the PPA between OPWP and Al Rusail would be treated as a Finance Lease. The Company is currently working on closing the open tax years with the Tax Authority. Future Outlook In terms of plant operations and performance, the Company will maintain its full vigilance during this unprecedented period to protect the health of its employees and the interests of all stakeholders. The Company has taken necessary legal steps in accordance with the P(W)PA contractual terms to cover any adverse impact on its operations and mitigate any losses caused by the Covid-19 situation. The Company will continue its focus on H&S and maintain the excellent plant reliability at both plants. Management will continue to proactively liaise with OPWP, APSR and the Load Dispatch Centre with the aim to reduce the cycling of the plants. In terms of initiatives to prepare for the future of Al Rusail and SMN Barka power plants, the Company will work intensively on the following activities: - For Al Rusail, a bid was submitted in April 2020 for a new PPA term for 2 Gas Turbines, GT7 & 8, beyond March 2022. Final decision on Power 2022 is expected in second half of 2021. - For SMN Barka, the Company will work closely with APSR, OPWP and all stakeholders of the power and water sector on any opportunity to extend the P(W)PA agreement. A letter was sent to OPWP on possibility of Power 2024 tender. OPWPs feedback is awaited. The spot market is expected to go live by third quarter of 2021. While both Al Rusail and SMN Barka will participate in the implementation of the spot market, such implementation will have no impact on the Company's cash-flows during this financial year as both Al Rusail and SMN Barka will remain under the P(W)PA framework and will be remunerated based on their capacity and availability. The profitability and ability to generate cash flows are independent of market demand throughout the P(W)PA term. In terms of dividend distribution, as previously disclosed and in line with the financing arrangements during the IPO, the excess cash generated by the project companies is now paid to the lenders and will not flow to the Shareholders until the loans are fully settled or until the time the loans can be restructured. The P(W)PA extension for both Al Rusail and SMN Barka will be a key factor to potentially restructure the debt in the coming years, remove or defer the cash sweep and allow further dividend distribution. As Chairman of the Board, I would like to thank our Shareholders, not only for their confidence, but also for their continued support and for the expertise they bring into the Company. The Board of Directors expresses its gratitude to OPWP, APSR, the Capital Market Authority ("CMA") and other governmental and non-governmental bodies for their guidance and support. In light of the Covid-19 crisis, I also insist upon thanking all the operational staff working at SMN Barka and Al Rusail plants as well as the team at our corporate office for their remarkable efforts to ensure reliable power and water supply to the residents of Oman. Finally, on behalf of the Board, I would like to extend our deep appreciation and gratitude to His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tariq and His Government for their continued support and encouragement to the private sector by creating an environment allowing us to contribute effectively to the growth of the Sultanate of Oman. Dr. Abdullah Al Yahya'ey Chairman of the Board				
Statement of financial position as at 30 June 2021 (Unaudited)				
	Parent Company		Consolidated	
	30 June 2021 RO '000	31 Dec. 2020 RO '000	30 June 2021 RO '000	31 Dec. 2020 RO '000
ASSETS				
Non-current assets				
Finance lease receivables	-	-	-	168
Property, plant and equipment	-	-	143,266	147,316
Right of use assets	-	-	342	376
Long term prepayment	-	-	80	133
Investment in subsidiaries	27,405	27,405	-	-
Goodwill	-	-	15,739	15,739
	27,405	27,405	159,427	163,732
Current assets				
Inventories	-	-	2,940	3,002
Trade and other receivables	44	65	25,522	46,757
Finance lease receivables	-	-	2,135	4,434
Fixed term cash deposits	-	-	1,409	4,825
Cash and cash equivalents	37	13	9,474	2,768
	81	78	41,480	61,786
Total assets	27,486	27,483	200,907	225,518
EQUITY AND RESERVES AND LIABILITIES				
EQUITY AND RESERVES				
Share capital	19,964	19,964	19,964	19,964
Statutory reserve	6,522	6,522	6,691	6,691
Retained earnings	923	923	38,125	32,489
Hedging Reserve	-	-	(3,920)	(5,307)
Net equity	27,409	27,409	60,860	53,837
LIABILITIES				
Non-current liabilities				
Term loans	-	-	76,720	84,895
Lease liabilities	-	-	379	383
Derivative financial instruments	-	-	2,776	4,182
Provisions for end of service benefits	-	-	81	99
Provisions for site restoration	-	-	2,938	2,835
Deferred operating income	-	-	808	808
Deferred tax liability	-	-	15,519	15,506
	-	-	99,221	108,708
Current liabilities				
Term loans	-	-	13,285	15,237
Lease liabilities	-	-	39	64
Derivative financial instruments	-	-	1,835	2,061
Trade and other payables	77	74	22,659	43,360
Current tax payable	-	-	3,008	2,251
	77	74	40,826	62,973
Total equity and liabilities	27,486	27,483	200,907	225,518
Net assets per share (RO)	0.137	0.137	0.324	0.296
Statement of profit or loss and other comprehensive income for the period ended 30 June 2021 (Unaudited)				
	Parent Company		Consolidated	
	30 June 2021 RO '000	30 June 2020 RO '000	30 June 2021 RO '000	30 June 2020 RO '000
Revenue	-	-	39,936	36,819
Operating costs	-	-	(30,696)	(27,319)
Gross profit	-	-	9,240	9,500
General and administrative expenses	(137)	(157)	(621)	(657)
(Loss)/Profit from operations	(137)	(157)	8,619	8,843
Finance charges	-	-	(2,219)	(3,052)
Investment income	-	-	-	-
Other income	137	157	272	460
Profit before tax	-	-	6,672	6,251
Income tax	-	-	(1,036)	(967)
Net profit for the year	-	-	5,636	5,284
Other comprehensive income				
Items that may be reclassified to profit or loss in subsequent periods:				
Fair value of cash flow hedge adjustments - net	-	-	2,971	(449)
Reclassification to profit or loss - gross	-	-	(1,340)	(1,210)
Deferred tax liability-current period change	-	-	(244)	248
Total comprehensive income/expense for the year	-	-	7,023	3,873
Basic and diluted earnings per share (RO)	0.000	0.000	0.028	0.026
SMN POWER HOLDING SAOG, P.O. Box 121, Postal Code 134, Sultanate of Oman, Qurum Building, Building No.1022, 1st Floor, Office No.15, Way No. 1013, Al Qurum – Muscat. Tel. +968 2493 5800, Fax: 2493 5830, E-mail: info@smnpower.com, www.smnpower.com				

Joyalukkas wins coveted RetailME ICONS award

Joyalukkas, the world's 'favourite jeweller', was recently awarded the coveted RetailME ICONS award as an acknowledgement of their pioneering leadership in the business of retail in MENA.

Joy Alukkas, chairman, of Joyalukkas Group, received the award from Laila Mohammed Suhail, CEO - Alliance and Partnership, Dubai Department of Tourism & Commerce Marketing in the presence of John Paul Alukkas, managing director, Joyalukkas Jewellery - International Operations in a glittering function in Dubai.

According to Joy Alukkas, this is yet another recognition from the region's leading media that is exclusively dedicated for the retail industry.

"Awards are a recognition for the efforts we put in our business and I am happy to note that we have been bestowed with this great honour," he said.

"As I understand, there were stringent guidelines in the selection process and the awardees were selected based on nominations received, jury scoring and editorial selection."

According to a note from the award organisers, the retailers who have won have demonstrated great leadership with



clear examples of innovation, proven their legacy and expanded their operations.

The aim behind the award function is to let the world know who the top retailers in the region are.

It is also noted, by the organisers, that a 'Pioneer' is someone who sees potential builds the courage to lay out the foundation

with the grit to explore and push boundaries and Joyalukkas has been recognised in this category.

"We always strive to provide an unmatched retail experience to our valued customers and this award reinforces our commitment," Joy Alukkas said.

"All our retail showrooms are equipped to provide a distinct

experience that makes our customers experience our wide range of exquisite gold and diamond jewellery leading to an experience that transcends normal customer satisfaction."

"We owe this recognition to our valued customers, our business associates and the entire team," Joy Alukkas pointed out after receiving the award.

Lulu Financial Services Phils expands banknotes business

Lulu Financial Services Phils - a leading financial services provider in the country, has been granted approval from the central bank i.e. Bangko Sentral Ng Pilipinas (BSP) and Bureau of Customs, to conduct cross-border physical transfer of foreign currencies in the Philippines.

The approval is an upgrade to the company's existing licence which allowed it to ship banknotes to countries abroad, especially those in the GCC, in APAC region and the Indian subcontinent.

Lulu Financial Services, which is majorly owned by the Abu Dhabi-based Lulu Financial Holdings, started operations in the country in 2015, and has since grown into one of the most trustworthy service providers in Asia Pacific.

Talking about the development, Adeeb Ahamed, managing director of Lulu Financial Holdings, said, "The APAC region is a hub of global financial services, and the import-export license allows us to play a more proactive role in the wholesale banknotes sector, keeping Philippines as a regional hub. Backed by our global presence in 11 countries, we are confident that Lulu Financial Services Phils will be able to create meaningful gains to the local economy and contribute to key areas of the financial services ecosystem, to become a leading player in this sector."

Offering a wide range of services and digital products including remittances, foreign currency exchange, e-wallet and



other value-added services, the new licence positions the company among an exclusive number of financial service providers in the country, who are allowed to trade in the physical import and export of foreign currencies.

Sunil Kumar, general manager of Lulu Financial Services Phils, said, "It is indeed a milestone event for Lulu Financial Services Phils, considering that we are the only non-bank financial institution allowed by the regulators to engage in the export/import of foreign currencies."

MSBs, forex dealers and even banks have welcomed this development and we remain committed in our mission to deliver the highest standards of service to our regional and global partners."

Lulu Financial Services Phils operates branches at several strategic locations in the country and is set to expand its physical and digital presence in the coming weeks, including opening new branches, and the introduction of new features related to the e-wallet on Lulu Money app.

ISD achieves historic result in AISSE 2021



Magandha Dinesh



Sahana Sandesh Kumar



Sandeep Ramanujam



Anavadya Rajesh

Indian School Darsait (ISD) scripted yet another success story as its students of Class X displayed an impressive 100 per cent result in the AISSE 2021.

This splendid achievement has added one more golden feather to the crowning glory of the school.

The grit and determination of the Class X students to fight adversity and come out victorious have paved way for this historic performance with a splendid school average of 81.45 per cent. Students also scored centum in Mathematics, Science and Social Science enhancing the accomplishment of the batch that faced an unprecedented academic year.

Magandha Dinesh and Sahana Sandesh Kumar topped the school with 97.8 per cent followed by Sandeep Ramanujam who secured the second position scoring 96.4 per cent while Anavadya Rajesh got the third position with 96.2 per cent.

An overall 32 per cent students scored 90 per cent and above in aggregate marks and 97 per cent students have scored 60 per cent and above in aggregate marks.

The following students are the subject toppers - (English - 99%): Gopika Thalavai Nallasi van, Sandeep Ramanujam, Yogil Adrin Poomaniarumai; (Hindi - 95%): Aryan Sachin Shirke, Mohammed Rayyan UI Bari, Yogil

Adrin Poomaniarumai; (Malayalam - 98%): Sandeep Ramanujam; (Arabic - 95%): Ammar Shakeel Ash Shareef; (Sanskrit - 97%): Magandha Dinesh, Sahana Sandesh Kumar; (Mathematics Standard - 100%): Anavadya Rajesh, Magandha Dinesh, Sahana Sandesh Kumar; (Maths Basic - 95%): Gopika Thalavai Nallasi van; (Science - 100%) Magandha Dinesh, Sahana Sandesh Kumar; (Social Science - 100%): Angel Jomy, Prathima Shri Shanmugam Vijayhema; (Painting - 98%): Varsha Varghese; (Computer Applications - 90%): Azim Ahammed & (Home Science - 77%): Enosh Prabhakaran.

The school average in various

subjects: Painting (94.6); Social Science (87.3); English (86.9); Computer Applications (86.3); Sanskrit (85.6); Malayalam (83.7); Arabic (83.1); Mathematics Standard (80.1); Science (78.5); Hindi (75.8), and Home Science (74.0) & Mathematics Basic (58.1).

Amar Srivastava, principal, heartily congratulated all the students and appreciated the tireless efforts of the teachers and the unstinted support of the parents in moulding the students to become real achievers. Sebastian Chungath, president, and other members of SMC too conveyed their profuse gratitude and appreciation to team ISD over the outstanding result.

Crypto market: BitOasis reports strong H1 2021 results, doubles users

BitOasis, the first and largest digital asset (cryptocurrency) platform in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region, delivered a strong half yearly result for 2021, with trading volumes to date exceeding US\$3bn, and more than half of that in H1 2021.

A pioneer in the region since its launch in 2015, BitOasis has seen a doubling of its user base in the last six months compared to the same period last year, and increased interest from institutional and family office investors in the region.

Earlier in the year BitOasis' entity registered in Abu Dhabi Global Market (ADGM) became the first platform authorised to

operate a regulated Multilateral Trading Facility (MTF) and Custody platform for digital assets in ADGM and the UAE, to serve retail, accredited investors, trading firms and institutions.

The platform is intended to allow buying and selling of digital assets with local currencies, and will launch after securing additional launch approvals from the FSRA. BitOasis' parent company will be seeking additional licenses across the region to further expand its footprint and offering.

Ola Doudin, CEO and co-founder of BitOasis said, "The first half of 2021 has been one of many milestones, both in terms of performance for BitOasis -

processing over US\$3bn, and a doubling of users.

"This sends a strong message of confidence in the region's crypto market for the long-term.

"The growth trajectory for BitOasis includes expansion of our team in a number of countries across the region, acquiring additional regulatory licenses, and ensuring we remain industry leaders in serving the market by rolling out more tokens and products for our users."

The region's crypto ecosystem continues to grow as more crypto-friendly regulation is developed, and BitOasis continues its proactive role in working with policymakers to drive mainstream adoption.

Arzan Wealth achieves successful exit of US senior lending transaction

Arzan Wealth (DIFC) Limited (Arzan Wealth), a Dubai-based advisory firm regulated by the Dubai Financial Services Authority, announced that it has advised its clients on a successful exit of a senior lending transaction in the United States, achieving strong returns for investors.

The transaction was entered into in December 2018 as part of Arzan Wealth Real Estate Debt Platform which focuses on senior and mezzanine opportunities and is designed to respond to diverse market conditions, and to meet investors' needs for a low risk profile and predictable cash flow stream.

This investment was de-

signed as a three-year senior secured loan to Bluejack National (Bluejack), owner of a premier luxury-lifestyle community in Houston, USA.

Bluejack includes the first Tiger Woods designed golf course in the United States.

Arzan Wealth acted as the sub strategic advisor on the successful exit of this investment that has generated attractive returns for the investors during the 2 1/2 year holding period.

Muhammad Abulhasan, CEO of Arzan Wealth said, "We are pleased that we have been able to advise on this exit, which despite the severe disruption caused by the coronavirus pandemic, produced returns

that exceeded investors' expectations.

"This is not only a testament to the high due diligence standards of Arzan Wealth in relation to the real estate, but also the strong cooperation between the Arzan Wealth team and the management of Bluejack, who reacted with high integrity and professionalism while navigating the difficulties of the pandemic."

Abulhasan added, "While economic turbulence can create uncertainty, Arzan Wealth will continue to expend all its efforts and creativity to preserve and protect our client's wealth, while providing them with a very predictable and regular income stream."



Iran rejects allegations of G7, US over drone attack on ship

Tehran, Iran - Iran on Saturday rejected Western allegations its drones were used in a deadly tanker attack, while accusing Israel of concocting the 'scenario' in a bid to undermine the Islamic republic.

The *MT Mercer Street*, an oil products tanker operated by Israeli-controlled Zodiac maritime, was struck last week, killing two crew members - a Briton and a Romanian.

The incident on July 29 upped the stakes in what analysts have called a 'shadow war' that has seen a spate of attacks on vessels linked to Iran and Israel.

G7 foreign ministers on Friday pointed the finger of blame for the latest attack at Iran, as the US military released the findings of an investigation alleging the drones were made in the Islamic republic. Iran dismissed the allegations.

"We strongly condemn the baseless statement by the foreign ministers of the G7 and the European Union's high representative for foreign affairs in which they have directed baseless accusations at the Islamic Republic of Iran," foreign ministry spokesman Saeed Khatibzadeh said.

The tanker attack and the accusations against Iran were a 'scenario' concocted with 'notable' timing, he said, as they came days before Iran's new ultraconservative President Ebrahim Raisi took the oath of office.

Raisi was inaugurated on August 3 by Iran's Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, and sworn in by parliament two days later, taking over from moderate president Hassan Rouhani.

"For experts and those who know the history of this region, it is not a new thing that the Zionist regime (Israel) would design



The Israeli-linked Japanese-owned tanker *MT Mercer Street*, off the port of the Gulf Emirate of Fujairah in the UAE on August 3 (AFP)

We strongly condemn the baseless statement by the foreign ministers of the G7 and the EU's high representative for foreign affairs in which they have directed baseless accusations at Iran

SAEED KHATIBZADEH

such conspiracies," Khatibzadeh said.

Citing the results of a probe, the US Central Command said on Friday that remnants from one of three explosives-laden drones that targeted the Mercer Street indicated it was produced in Iran.

"This was a deliberate and targeted attack, and a clear violation of international law... There is no justification for this attack," the foreign ministers of the world's seven most developed

nations (G7) said in a statement.

'Fake evidence'

Iran's military spokesman denied the US allegations.

"The Americans say they have found parts of Iran's drones in the water, and this is their evidence. But what laboratory has determined (the drones) belong to Iran?" Brigadier General Abolfazl Shekarchi was quoted by IRNA news agency as saying.

"This is the Americans' method, to weave stories and

use it to accuse Iran... this is the method they have chosen to pressure Iran," he added.

Shekarchi also said the accusations were a 'psychological operation' launched against Iran by its enemies.

"If we are supposed to confront our enemies, like what we did at Ain al-Assad, we would clearly announce it," he noted, referring to an Iraqi military base housing American troops.

The base was hit by a barrage of Iranian missiles in January 2020 to avenge the assassination of the Revolutionary Guards' top commander Qasem Soleimani, killed in an American airstrike days before in Baghdad.

"Creating fake evidence is not very difficult (and) since the Zionists have a record of creating fake evidence, causing an explosion on a ship is not very

difficult," Shekarchi added.

On Tuesday, Israeli Prime Minister Naftali Bennett said his government was 'working on enlisting the world' in response to the attack but warned 'we also know how to act alone'.

Iran on Thursday warned its arch-foe not to take military action against it.

"We state this clearly: ANY foolish act against Iran will be met with a DECISIVE response," Khatibzadeh said.

"Don't test us," added the Foreign Ministry spokesman.

There have been several reported attacks on Israeli and Iranian ships in recent months that the two have blamed each for.

Iran has also accused Israel of sabotaging its nuclear sites and killing a number of its scientists. AFP



Hezbollah supporters carrying flags on motorbikes drive past Lebanese soldiers in the Khalde area, south of Beirut, on August 1 (AFP)

Hezbollah rocket attack on Israel draws retaliation

Beirut, Lebanon - Lebanon's Hezbollah fired a volley of rockets at Israeli positions on Friday, prompting retaliatory shelling, in an escalation between the Iran-backed Shiite movement and the Jewish state.

A flare-up along the border this week has seen Israel carry out its first airstrikes on Lebanese territory in seven years and Hezbollah claim a direct rocket attack on Israeli territory for the first time since 2019.

Following Friday morning's exchange, Israel said it did 'not wish to escalate to a full war', as the United Nations peacekeeping force in the border region, UNIFIL, warned of 'a very dangerous situation'.

The US State Department called on Lebanon, which has had only a caretaker government for nearly a year and where Hezbollah is a formidable political force, "urgently to prevent such attacks and bring the area under its control".

The statement came shortly after a call by Israeli Defence Minister Benny Gantz for US pressure on Lebanon.

Hezbollah said it fired dozens of rockets at open ground near Israeli positions in the disputed Shebaa Farms border district.

It said the attack came in response to Israeli airstrikes on south Lebanon on Thursday that were the first since 2014.

An AFP correspondent in south Lebanon said he heard several explosions and saw smoke rising from around the Shebaa Farms.

Israel said 19 rockets were fired, six of which hit Israeli ground. Three fell short, while the others were intercepted by air defences, it said.

A video released by the Israeli army showed vapour trails in the sky. The military said it was 'striking the launch sources in Lebanon', but did not elaborate.

UNIFIL reported an artillery response from Israel in the Shebaa Farms area, following the Hezbollah rocket attack.

An AFP correspondent in

south Lebanon reported artillery fire by Israeli forces on the Shebaa Farms and outside the town of Kfarshouba.

The Shebaa Farms district is claimed by Lebanon but the UN regards it as part of the Syrian Golan Heights, which Israel has occupied since 1967 and unilaterally annexed in 1981.

Do not wish to escalate: Israel

Israeli army spokesman Amnon Sheffer played down the prospects of all-out war with Hezbollah.

"We do not wish to escalate to a full war, yet of course we are very prepared for that," he said after Friday's exchange.

Hezbollah's deputy head, Naeem Qassem, said the group was committed to responding to any attack on Lebanon and would be 'prepared' if needed.

But 'we do not believe things are headed towards an escalation', he added.

In the south Lebanon district of Hasbaya, Druze villagers stopped a truck carrying a multiple rocket launcher used by Hezbollah in Friday's attack, a military source told AFP.

A video widely shared on social media showed angry residents blocking the truck's passage and accusing Hezbollah of endangering civilian lives by launching rockets from close to residential areas.

Hezbollah said the truck was stopped after the group's attack, but that the rockets were fired far from residential areas.

The Lebanese army said it arrested the four people who fired the rockets and seized the launcher after it was intercepted by villagers.

There has been a series of unclaimed rocket attacks from Lebanon towards Israel since Wednesday, except for Friday's salvo.

Before Thursday, Israel's last airstrikes on Lebanon dated back to 2014 when warplanes struck territory near the Syrian border.

AFP

Fighting erupts between rivals of South Sudan VP's party

Juba, South Sudan - Deadly fighting erupted on Saturday between rival factions of South Sudan Vice President Riek Machar's SPLA-IO, his military spokesman said in a statement.

The clashes erupted after Machar's rivals declared this week they had deposed him as the head of the party and its military forces.

Armed forces led by a rival general in the party, Simon Gatwech Dual, had launched an attack on Machar's men, who had 'repulsed the aggressors', the spokesman Colonel Lam Paul Gabriel said.



This file photo shows child soldiers after being released from a group called the Cobra Faction and from the main SPLA-IO rebel faction during a ceremony in Tenet, near Pibor, South Sudan, on October 26, 2016 (AFP)

Machar's SPLA-IO forces had killed two major generals and over 27 'enemy' soldiers, while

they had lost three men, he added.

The fighting could not be in-

dependently confirmed and there was no immediate response from Gatwech Dual's side.

Leaders of the military wing of Machar's SPLM/A-IO said on Wednesday they had deposed the rebel-turned-politician for failing to represent their interests.

The fighting could put pressure on the fragile 2018 power-sharing deal between Machar and his old foe President Salva Kiir.

Machar's allies on Friday dismissed his ouster as a 'failed coup', insisting he was still in full

control of the party.

Machar himself this week accused 'peace spoilers' of engineering his removal.

The 68 year old, a wily leader who survived years of bush warfare, attempts on his life and stretches in exile, served as vice president alongside Kiir in the first government post independence from Sudan in 2011.

But the pair fell out and Machar was sacked two years later. Troops loyal to each man turned their guns on each other, and South Sudan descended into five years of civil war.

AFP

Villagers become unsung heroes of Turkey's battle against wildfires

Ikizce, Turkey - They grabbed their rakes, shovels and axes, donned high-vis helmets and went off into the mountains, helping exhausted firefighters battling Turkey's deadly blazes pick their way through unfamiliar terrain.

Residents of the rolling hills and pine forests hugging the Mediterranean and Aegean coasts have turned into the unsung heroes of Turkey's battle against its deadliest and most destructive wildfires in generations.

"You see that little fire over there? We will intervene and put it out right away," Mehmet Yesimoglu, a 50 year old shopkeeper, said proudly while pointing to a worrying patch of blood-orange flames.

"If we don't, then it will grow

and then we will need helicopters or planes."

Turks have been watching in horror as huge pockets of some of the country's most fertile land goes up in flames, turning to ash fields and valleys which farmers rely on for subsistence.

At least eight people have died and dozens of villages have been evacuated.

Few know what - if anything - they will be able to return to when the fires finally subside. But instead of feeling helpless, many joined the frontlines.

"This is not something we knew how to do before," Tanzer Bulut (30) said as he walked toward the smoke blotting out the horizon.

"All we do is try to be logical. You look where the flames are going and try to get ahead of



A volunteer rests as flames rise from a forest fire near Akcayaka, a town in Turkey's Mugla province on Friday (AFP)

them. We do what we can even though we are not professionals."

'Local knowledge'

Some of the locals give the firefighters directions, showing the

best way to thread their way through winding roads that are often blanketed in smoke in the

daytime and lit up by threatening, red flames at night.

One man stood on the side of the road, shining a clear path with the flashlight in his helmet, waving fire engines through with a stick. Food and water donations have been pouring in from across the country to the point that one local official pleaded for Turks to stop - there was simply no place to store it all.

Others are helping the firefighters pull long, thick heavy hoses on their shoulders to the edges of the flames.

"To get a bulldozer through, I was able to show a clear path to the top without a problem, even though it's steep," said Hayati Zorlu (55), a local village head in the Mugla province, which is home to popular Aegean resorts.

"Because I know the terrain

and I am the only one here. There are no other officials except for the village chief."

Hakan Karabulut, who heads an Istanbul fire brigade dispatched to the disaster zone, ran out of fingers on his hand listing all the ways locals have been able to help.

"First of all, they are our guides. Second, they show where to refuel with water. Third, they tell us where the fires are. Fourth, they provide us with logistical support, whether it's food or drink. And fifth, they help us carry the fire hoses."

But there was more, the fire chief said. "We have youngsters here who are hunters and they know the territory very well. If I find him and I trust his knowledge, I don't let him go."

AFP

Afghanistan's second city falls as Taliban fighters tighten noose over countryside

Kabul, Afghanistan - The Taliban seized the stronghold of a notorious Afghan warlord on Saturday, officials said, the second provincial capital to fall to the insurgents in less than 24 hours.

The deputy governor of Sheberghan city in Jawzjan said government forces and officials had retreated to the airport on the outskirts of the northern Afghan city, where they were preparing to defend themselves.

"The city has unfortunately fallen completely," Jawzjan deputy governor Qader Malia told AFP.

The city is home to notorious warlord Abdul Rashid Dostum, who only returned to Afghanistan this week from medical treatment in Turkey but is believed to be in Kabul.

The Taliban have gained vast parts of rural Afghanistan since launching a series of offensives in May to coincide with the start of the final withdrawal of foreign troops.

On Friday, Zaranj city in Nimroz fell to the Taliban 'without a fight', according to its deputy governor, becoming the first provincial capital to be taken by the insurgents.

There was more resistance in Sheberghan, several sources told AFP, but an aide to Dostum confirmed the city had been taken.

Dostum has overseen one of the largest militias in the north, which garnered a fearsome reputation in its fight against the Taliban in the 1990s - along with



An army soldier patrols as stranded people wait for the reopening of the border crossing point which was closed by the authorities after the Taliban took control of the Afghan border town in a rapid offensive across the country, in Chaman on Saturday (AFP)

accusations that his forces massacred thousands of insurgent prisoners of war.

A rout or retreat of his fighters would dent the Kabul government's recent hopes that militia groups could help bolster the country's overstretched military.

Roh Gul Khairzad, the deputy governor of Nimroz, said on Friday that Zaranj had fallen 'without a fight'. Social media posts suggested the Taliban were welcomed by some residents of the desert city, which has long had a reputation for lawlessness.

They showed captured military Humvees, luxury SUVs, and pickups speeding through the streets, flying white Taliban flags as local residents - mostly youths and young men - cheered them on.

One of the first things the insurgents did on entering Zaranj was to open the gates of a local jail, officials said, freeing Taliban prisoners along with common criminals.

Videos on Twitter showed mobs looting government offices, stealing desks, office chairs,

cabinets, and televisions.

The veracity of the clips could not immediately be confirmed.

"The Afghan security forces lost their morale due to intense propaganda by the Taliban," a senior official from the city said.

"Even before the Taliban attacks... most of the security forces put their weapons on the ground, took off their uniforms, and left their units and fled."

The government has made no official comment yet on the fall of either city.

The capture of Sheberghan

comes a day after the head of the Afghan government's media information department was shot dead in Kabul in an attack claimed by the Taliban.

After a failed assassination attempt on the country defence minister on Tuesday, the Taliban warned they were now targeting senior administration officials in retaliation for increased airstrikes.

The Taliban already control large portions of the countryside and are now challenging government forces in other provincial

UK asks nationals to leave Afghanistan immediately

London, UK - Britain has warned all UK nationals in Afghanistan to leave the country immediately due to the 'worsening security situation' as fighting intensifies.

The Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office on Friday updated its website to advise against all travel to Afghanistan.

'All British nationals in Afghanistan are advised to leave now by commercial means. If you are still in Afghanistan, you are advised to leave now by commercial means because of the worsening security situation,' it said.

The foreign office warned Britons not to rely on it for

emergency evacuation, saying the assistance it could provide was 'extremely limited'.

The warning comes after the Taliban launched a major offensive to coincide with the withdrawal of US-led foreign forces after nearly two decades of conflict.

'Terrorists are very likely to try to carry out attacks in Afghanistan. Specific methods of attack are evolving and increasing in sophistication,' the foreign office said.

The Taliban now control vast swathes of rural Afghanistan and are challenging government forces in several cities, including Herat.

AFP

COVID-19 PANDEMIC

Sydney posts fresh COVID record as Melbourne races to trace outbreak

Sydney, Australia - Australia's state of New South Wales reported another record day of COVID-19 cases on Saturday, as authorities in the country's second city of Melbourne rushed to trace the source of its outbreaks.

Australia's three largest cities were in lockdown on Saturday, as New South Wales recorded 319 community cases of the virus and five more deaths - a third straight day of record case numbers.

With the virus continuing to spread through Sydney's sprawling suburbs, despite the city heading into its seventh week of lockdown, state Health Minister Brad Hazzard expressed frustration that people appeared to be ignoring restrictions and urged residents to stay at home.

"That is the biggest thing you can do for all of us and for yourself, to make sure that we beat this Delta virus that is wreaking havoc across the world," Hazzard told media.



Health workers register residents for their first dose of the AstraZeneca vaccine at a walk-in vaccination centre in the Bankstown suburb of Sydney on Saturday (AFP)

He also announced that the city of Armidale, about six hours' drive northwest of Sydney, would join around 60 per

cent of Australia's 25mn residents already under stay-at-home orders.

Contact tracers in Mel-

bourne's state of Victoria, which on Thursday returned to lockdown for the sixth time since the pandemic began,

were still working to track down the source of its outbreaks.

"This is very, very significant to see this many cases. We don't know where those two outbreaks started," state premier Daniel Andrews said, announcing 29 new cases of the virus.

And as the city of Brisbane is set to end its lockdown on Sunday, health officials urged people not to become complacent ahead of the loosening of restrictions.

A lack of supply and pockets of vaccine hesitancy has throttled efforts to immunise Australians, with just over 20 per cent of the population fully vaccinated.

The nation managed to avoid the worst of the pandemic for the past 18 months, but the effectiveness of its 'COVID zero' policy had been called into question as lockdowns struggle to stamp out the highly-infectious Delta variant.

AFP



A couple takes a selfie after receiving a dose of the vaccine in India's eastern town Siliguri on Saturday (AFP)

India approves J&J's single-shot vaccine for emergency use

New Delhi, India - India gave emergency approval to Johnson and Johnson's single-shot coronavirus vaccine on Saturday to ramp up its flailing immunisation campaign as fears grow of a new wave of infections.

Health Minister Mansukh Mandaviya said the approval will boost the fight against the pandemic in India, where at least 200,000 people died in a brutal two-month wave up to mid-June.

'India expands its vaccine basket! Johnson and Johnson's single-dose COVID-19 vaccine is given approval for Emergency Use in India,' the minister said on Twitter.

No indication has been given as to when the US company's doses will reach India.

The nation of 1.3bn people has administered 500mn vaccine doses so far, but barely eight percent of the population has had two shots.

Johnson and Johnson's vaccine is the fifth to be approved after Oxford-AstraZeneca's Covishield, the home developed Covaxin, Russia's Sputnik V, and the US-made Moderna jab.

India remains the second worst-hit nation after the United States, with more than 32mn confirmed cases and 427,000 deaths. Because of under-reporting experts say the real toll is much higher.

They also warn that the slow vaccination pace puts India at risk from any new infection crisis. The number of new cases and deaths has started rising again in the past two weeks.

The government's free immunisation drive relies heavily on Covishield and Covaxin and producers are struggling to meet demand.

Sputnik has not yet scaled up production and Moderna is yet to import any shots.

AFP

Thai police fire tear gas, rubber bullets at protesters

Bangkok, Thailand - Thai police fired tear gas and rubber bullets on Saturday at hundreds of protesters in Bangkok demanding political reform and calling for a change to the country's coronavirus vaccination programme.

Demonstrators defied restrictions on public gatherings

introduced as Thailand battles its worst outbreak of the virus to call for Prime Minister Prayut Chan-O-cha to quit.

The Thai government has come under fire for the sluggish rollout of its COVID vaccination programme, and the protesters also demanded it start using mRNA shots such

as Pfizer and Moderna, rather than China's Sinovac.

The 500 or so protesters were vastly outnumbered by police, who said on Friday they planned to deploy nearly 6,000 officers to tackle the rally. "I'm worried about the situation but we will have to continue fighting despite the

severe COVID outbreak," 27 year old protester Nat, who only gave one name, told AFP.

A youth-led street protest movement for democracy rose up last year and at its peak drew tens of thousands to rallies in Bangkok.

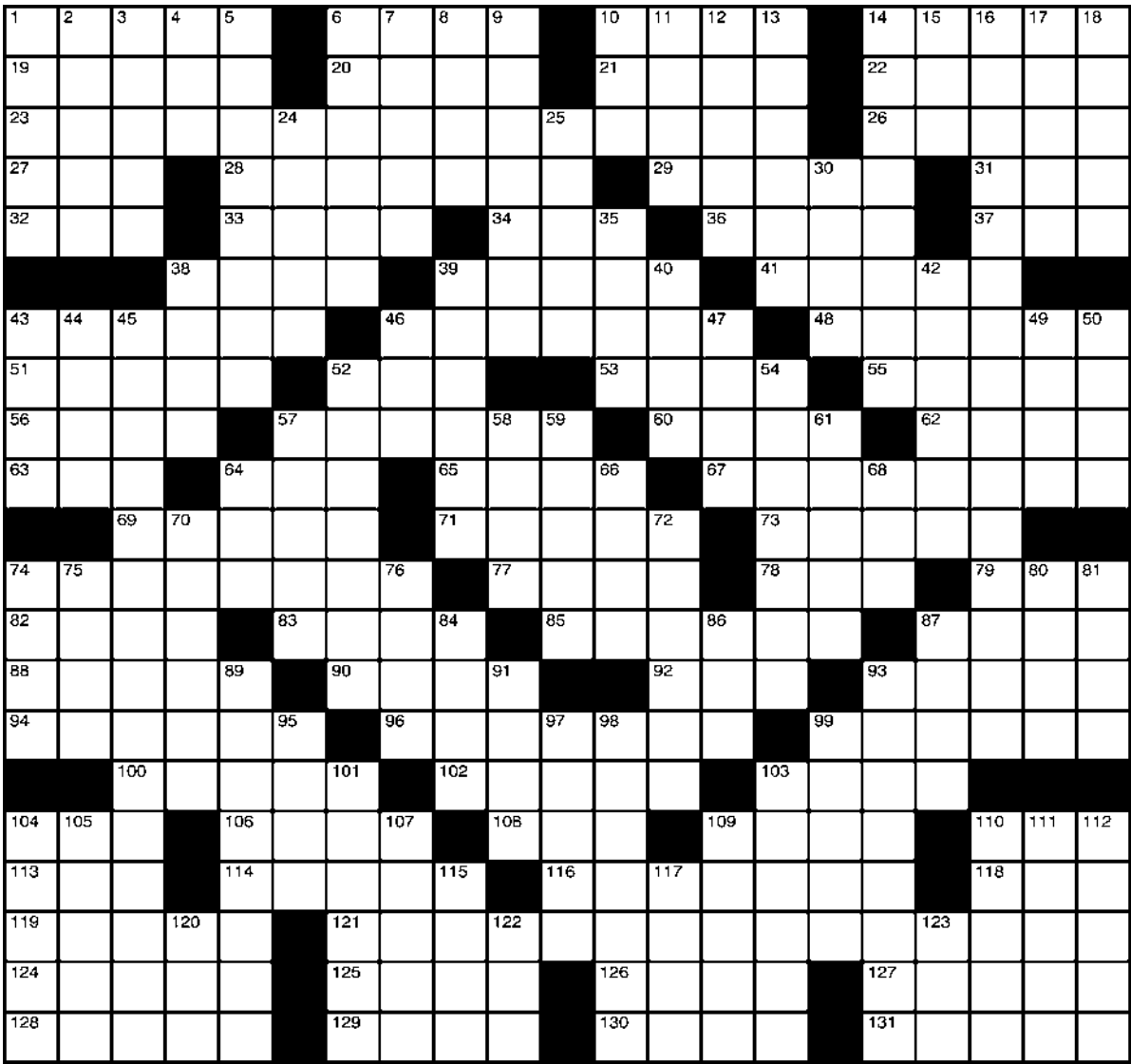
The demonstrators called for the resignation of Prayut,

the former army chief who came to power in a 2014 coup, as well as changes to the military-scripted constitution.

A COVID spike and the arrest of key leaders saw the protests peter out over the new year and they have struggled to regain the momentum of 2020.

AFP

DAILY CROSSWORD



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- ACROSS**

1 Representative

6 Senor's home

10 Fine looking, Dundee style

14 Stirred

19 Forty-____

20 Arabian sultanate

21 Ear: prefix

22 Licorice flavoring

23 Popular psychologist

26 Oslo citizens

27 WW II area

28 Arrange in order

29 Former Egyptian leader

31 Precious stone

32 Timid

33 Diplomacy

34 Chinese dynasty

36 Long ago

37 Those elected

38 ____ majesty: Fr.

39 Highway behemoths

41 Lombardy capital

43 Last a long time

46 To begin with

48 Ridicule

51 Blushing vegetables?

52 Auction action

53 Sewing line

55 Characteristic

56 Infant
- 57 Scottish fishing boats

60 Liquid unit

62 Slightly open

63 Theater sign

64 Booster

65 Essayist's pen name

67 Find the trouble

69 Employee's request

71 Cupid's arrows

73 Wide path

74 Authenticity

77 Sign style

78 Explosive intials

79 Bird's beak

82 Sports abbreviation

83 Chair, e.g.

85 Expressions of pleasure?

87 Ferrara family name

88 Window sections

90 Pitfall, for one

92 Coop or cage

93 Inscribed

94 Motto

96 Envisioned

99 Food preserver

100 Start-again button

102 Tapestry

103 Prohibits

104 Veterans' org.

106 Mop

108 Rocky peak
- 109 Protective covering

110 Clerical vestment

113 Egg: prefix

114 Emerald and Capri

116 Conjugal

118 Old card game

119 Untrue

121 Late legendary star

124 Office cabinets

125 Greek goddess of victory

126 Stare at

127 Part of a lasso

128 Winter fallout

129 Between 12 and 20

130 Western Amerindians

131 Come in
- DOWN**

1 SA mountain range

2 Waistline

3 Take pleasure in

4 Kind of con?

5 Assignment

6 Compel by force

7 Sphere of action

8 Poet Teasdale

9 One more pieces

10 "____, humbug!"

11 Regrets

12 Fine display

13 Knowledge

14 Short cloak

15 Yoko ____

16 William Masters collaborator

17 German steel city

18 Judges

24 Halt

25 Drayage pairs

30 Very dry

35 Twits, to Brits

38 Pear-shaped stringed instrument

39 Walked sideways

40 Luge

42 Unmitigated

43 Abates

44 Close to

45 Talented TV reporter

46 Speaks falsely

47 Play area

49 Portuguese explorer

50 To be, in Bordeaux

52 Medicinal plant

54 Dampen

57 Cartons

58 Esprit

59 Fathers

61 Lowest chess pieces

64 Fiver

66 Molecule particle

68 Gangster's

weapon

70 Declare without proof

72 Long-billed shore birds

74 Knocks

75 Series ending: L.

76 Chalcedony

80 Major follower

81 Malt beverage

84 Scarlett's home

86 ____ Zeppelin

87 Sea eagles

89 Most impudent

91 Saucy

93 Bomber

95 TV feature

97 Fragrance

98 Large Africanstork

99 Jeweler's weight

101 Natural ability

103 Cleanses

104 Takes off

105 Benefit

107 Contradict

109 Rank indication

110 Portion out

111 Insecure

112 Crop insect

115 Small stream

117 Mil. unit

120 Witness

122 Buddhist sect

123 "By ____ Bonnie banks..."

YOUR DAILY HOROSCOPE

ARIES MARCH 21-APRIL 19

A dear one has been wandering around in a fog for weeks now, not quite knowing what to do and not sure of who to ask for advice about their dilemma. You understand the situation, so don't wait any longer for them to ask. Offer. It's time to pull out your legendary way with words and use it to comfort them. A bit of advice wouldn't hurt, and maybe that solid shoulder of yours, too.

LEO JULY 23-AUGUST 22

Your own personal magic is running on high today -- very high. You've been casting spells on one and all for the past 24 hours, and you haven't even done it deliberately. That certainly explains why your sweetheart has been simultaneously wonderful and insanely jealous, doesn't it? Take the night off from everyone else and give your sweetie some necessary reassurance.

SAGITTARIUS NOVEMBER 22-DECEMBER 21

'A dream is a wish your heart makes' isn't just a line from a song -- it's also true. And whether that dream happens while you're awake or asleep doesn't matter, as long as you make it come true. The good news is you're about to find out how simple it will be to do just that. Pay attention to the subtle signals the universe sends your way -- and think of them as signposts.

TAURUS APRIL 20-MAY 20

Things are finally coming together just the way you'd planned. Now aren't you glad you didn't totally lose it and get someone angry -- or angrier than they already were? You've also had time to perfect a battle plan to make a certain dream into reality. Turns out there really is something to be said for sitting back and waiting, and it seems you're the expert in that department.

VIRGO AUGUST 23-SEPTEMBER 22

As nostalgic as you're feeling at the moment, it would be easy to let yourself get down in the dumps. But what purpose would that serve? We all think we'd do something differently if we had the chance, but why dwell on changing the past? Everything you've ever done has made you the person you are today. Be glad for everything that's happened, good and bad.

CAPRICORN DECEMBER 22-JANUARY 19

Clear your schedule of anything 'productive' because today is not a day for things that look even remotely like work. Daydreaming, sighing and reminiscing about the past, however, will suit you just fine. If you do have to focus on something, be sure you're doing something you can perform on autopilot -- because concentrating will certainly be a tall order.

GEMINI MAY 21-JUNE 21

It's time to shift gears. Put down the legal pad, the calculator and all other work-related or electronic devices. In fact, don't just put them down. Put them away. You need time now for nothing but recreation, and since you've been working so hard, you may also need help to loosen up a bit. Of course, you haven't been out of the circuit for all that long, so it won't be tough to find a playmate.

LIBRA SEPTEMBER 23-OCTOBER 22

If you've been thinking lately about how to bring in a bit of extra cash on the side, an opportunity is about to come your way -- and you really should take it. Your intuition will be especially keen for the next couple of days and will tell you what to do. All you have to do is listen. Forget what you've been told, and forget the rules. Follow your gut. When has it ever let you down?

AQUARIUS JANUARY 20-FEBRUARY 18

It's safe to come out now, and almost safe to make plans again. But you might want to give anything important -- anything you really need to come out the way you've planned it -- another day or two. Before you set your most important plans down on paper, spend some time dreaming them up. The good news is you might even come up with someone who won't stay just a dream forever.

CANCER JUNE 22-JULY 22

You're a bit angry today, aren't you? Or are you just frustrated with trying to get things done and not being able to come even close? Well, back away from any sharp objects, and try not to take this out on the ones you love. They're probably quite frustrated, too -- especially if they've been trying to get together with you and have run into some roadblocks of their own.

SCORPIO OCTOBER 23-NOVEMBER 21

You don't do anything halfway, do you? That goes for love, in particular, and it goes double now. So when you realise you've been tearing up an awful lot today, and maybe even doing a fair amount of sniffing, don't worry. You won't be feeling like this for long. Call together the ones you love and tell them how you feel. If you have to be nostalgic, don't waste it on television.

PISCES FEBRUARY 19-MARCH 20

You were hoping that all those mechanical and communication-oriented snafus you've been dealing with would be over. But they're not. Well, give it a day or two more before you start thinking that things will never get better. They will. It's just going to take a bit more of your world-famous patience to get through this. Yes, you probably are running low at this point.

TEST YOUR KNOWLEDGE

1. One horse power is equal to

a. 746 watts

b. 748 watts

c. 756 watts

d. 736 watts

2. 'Bar' is the unit of

a. temperature

b. heat

c. atmospheric pressure

d. current

3. One Joule is equal to

a. 105 ergs

b. 103 ergs

c. 107 ergs

d. 1011 ergs

Answers: 1.a 2.c 3.c

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

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

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 (AUGUST 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



GROUP EXHIBITION

SUMMER

Breeze

Hubert Vaz

A unique exhibition of artworks by artists of different nationalities in Oman opened at Fikra art gallery yesterday. Titled 'Summer Breeze', the exhibition is seen to be a means for ushering in something pleasant into the lives of people in view of the scorching summer, uncertainty in every sphere of activity this year, and the unrelenting pandemic to boot. The participating artists also see it as an

escape from everything that is going on to feel some sort of satisfaction through their art. Fikra Gallery wanted to bring many artists together and work on offering something that will bring everyone together through art, a spokesperson of the gallery said, adding that the exhibition will be on till August 25. The works on display are by ten artists, including four from Oman - Majid al Amri, Taqwa al Maymani, Intisar al Sharyani, and Intisar al Ghanbousi, besides Nashwa Tariq (Sudanese), Simran Ali (Pakistani), Mina Rezaei (Iranian), Andrea Zarate (Colombian), Dr Shalini Gupta (Indian) and Dr Zahra Akbari (Iranian).

Nashwa Tariq, who has charted a new path for herself towards contemporary art, which she believes has a deeper meaning, explained her three paintings on display at the exhibition. "Serenity was inspired by challenges we face in life. Despite the darkness that overwhelms our souls, life sparks kind memories and overthrows the darkness by the glimmer of hope for a better tomorrow. The horse in this painting represents the need to introspect and move ahead stronger. Escape reflects a creative escape from the interpretations of art - it calls on viewers to find their own interpretation. And Fierce shows that I have always found myself drawn towards painting tigers because they signify power as well as elegance."

Simran Ali indicated that her paintings reflect her changing mindset after she moved from her home, in Pakistan, to work and live in Australia, in an alien culture that often left her at the crossroads. On the other hand, Mina Rezaei, an Iranian artist who has lived in Oman for many years, said that her abstract artworks are heavily influenced by nature's glory and the inspiration she has constantly drawn from scriptural

verses. With reverence to 'the reformer of hearts and minds' and 'the director of day and night', she constantly seeks a transformation of humankind to what is best in accordance to the Almighty. Through intense expressions of complementing virtues and ideologies, Summer Breeze, seems to convey the turmoil that has taken over the world in recent years and holds out a fervent plea for self actualisation and refinement. The need to simplify human existence and make it more meaningful can never be spelt out more emphatically than now - the very essence of this joint exhibition.

Heart and soul



Taqwa al Maymani
My paintings convey 'feeling'. My art revolves around old Europe. I love bringing poor people onto my canvas as they, sort of, speak to me. My work in this exhibition includes 'Morning Flower', a surreal experience, 'Green Eyes', a poor girl who haunts my dreams, and 'Poor Angel' depicting a hardworking elder sibling of a poor family.



Nashwa Tariq
Art in all its glory and various forms attracts me. However, I am always captivated and inspired by semi-abstract art. My journey in art was heavily impacted by my career in finance. Even through painting, I felt the shackles of reality controlled my ability to draw out a path in the art world.



Majid al Amri
I am keen about abstract art, but my inspiration keeps changing, depending on how I relate to what is relevant in society. In this exhibition, the theme of both my paintings in 'Rebound' - one conveying an attempt by a person to defeat his challenges and the other about a person recovering from illness.



Simran Ali
I left home five years ago to study and work in Australia, which meant a huge change in my lifestyle and environment - this is what my paintings reflect. I felt not only disassociated with society there but also that I had started disassociating with my own culture. From photorealism, I moved towards expressive brush strokes, my favourite technique.



Mina Rezaei
I appreciate various styles of different artists but I am myself tuned towards realism and abstract art. My artworks reveal the flourishing of nature. In fact, I believe, the wellbeing of the human soul is connected with the flourishing of nature in the hope that one day joy, happiness, peace and love will flood every heart and human existence will be devoid of sorrow.



Andrea Zarate
My artwork is influenced by my interest in graphic design. Through this style, I try to experiment with different themes. I have three paintings on display in this exhibition and it is an enjoyable experience to be able to showcase my work with those of different artists in different styles. We learn so much from each other in such shows.



Photo: Syed Fasiuddin

PSG close in on Messi's 'plan P' after Barca exit

Paris, France - Plan A was to stay at Barcelona but after the Catalan club, home for his entire career, ruefully accepted it cannot afford him any more, Lionel Messi was Saturday expected to be about to embark on plan P for Paris.

French fans and media alike were salivating on the effect the superstar's mooted arrival at Paris Saint-Germain (PSG) would have on the club and the French league as a whole amid reports the Argentinian will end up in the capital.

As France awaited developments with bated breath, Barcelona said Messi will hold a press conference at noon on Sunday while coach Ronald Koeman struggled to accept the sweet sorrow of parting.

"Still hard to understand that you will not play for @FCBarcelona anymore," tweeted Koeman, the man whose goal won Barca their first European crown in 1992.

Sport daily, based in the city, insisted, however, that 'for the moment, Messi has no offer

from any club', PSG included.

After 17 years in Barcelona, where he lifted ten league crowns and four Champions Leagues, Messi, 34, would arrive at a PSG desperate to make him the final piece in their jigsaw, the club never having won the European game's premier club honour.

Former Barcelona teammate, Brazilian Neymar, has made no secret of his desire for a reunion almost since his own departure from the Camp Nou four years ago and it appears his wish is on

the verge of being granted.

The fact that the club have a fellow Argentinian in the hotseat in the shape of Mauricio Pochettino is an added attraction as six-time *Ballon d'Or* winner Messi looks to cut ties with Barca which go back to a contract signed on a napkin at the age of 13.

After all the smoke and mirrors of a will-he-won't-he-go saga stretching back to last year, when he sought to trigger an early release from his contract in Barcelona, the Catalan

club said on Friday that Spanish League salary restrictions mean they must bid farewell.

With Manchester City coach and former Messi mentor at the Camp Nou, Pep Guardiola, saying the Premier League champions are not in the market, that left PSG as the only suitors with deep enough pockets - in Spain he was reportedly pocketing north of US\$82mn a year net - to offer a new challenge. It is one he will accept, *Le Parisien* daily said.

"Messi to Paris, it's yes," the

paper headlined, describing the sealing of a 'marriage of love and reason'. Sports daily *L'Equipe* indicated Messi is to receive a three-year 'record contract' with "a net annual wage of US\$47mn" - but it appears nothing has been signed.

Barcelona president Joan Laporta said on Friday he was not prepared 'to put the club at risk' by renewing Messi's contract, as the club face up to huge financial problems ahead of the start of La Liga on August 15.

AFP

Rangers rocked as Dundee end champions' unbeaten run

SCOTTISH PREMIERSHIP

Glasgow, UK - Rangers were beaten for the first time in 41 league games as Dundee United handed the Scottish Premiership champions a shock 1-0 defeat on Saturday.

Jamie Robson's second half strike at Tannadice condemned Steven Gerrard's side to their first league loss since Hamilton beat them in March 2020.

After opening their title defence with a comfortable victory against Livingston last weekend, this was a reality check for Rangers.

AFP

INDIA HOLD EDGE



Visitors need 157 to win first Test with nine wickets in hand

ENGLAND VS INDIA

FIRST TEST: DAY FOUR

Nottingham, UK - Jasprit Bumrah's five-wicket haul left India well-placed to win the first

Test despite a fine hundred from England captain Joe Root at Trent Bridge on Saturday.

Bumrah took five for 64 in an England second innings where Root's 109 on the fourth day was the centrepiece. That gave the unorthodox paceman impressive match figures of nine for 110 after he had taken four for 46 in a meagre England first innings total of 183, where Root's 64 was again the top score.

At stumps, India were 52 for

one in their second innings, needing a further 157 runs to reach a victory target of 209.

Rohit Sharma and Cheteshwar Pujara, who ended the day's play by cover-driving Ollie Robinson for four, were both 12 not out. Stuart Broad produced a fine ball to have KL Rahul caught behind for a well-made 26 that followed the recalled opener's 84 in India's first-innings 278.

Earlier, a roaring Root was unusually animated in celebrating

SCOREBOARD		
England 1 st innings 183		
India 1 st innings 278		
ENGLAND 2 nd INNINGS		
R Burns	c Pant b Siraj	18
D Sibley	c Pant b Bumrah	28
Z Crawley	c Pant b Bumrah	6
J Root	c Pant b Bumrah	109
J Bairstow	c Jadeja b Siraj	30
D Lawrence	lbw b Thakur	25
J Buttler	b Thakur	17
S Curran	c Siraj b Bumrah	32
O Robinson	c Rahane b Shami	15
S Broad	b Bumrah	0
J Anderson	not out	0
Extras:	(b 5, lb 2, nb 10, w 6)	23
TOTAL:	303 in 85.5 overs	
Fall of wickets: 1-37, 2-46, 3-135, 4-177, 5-211, 6-237, 7-274, 8-295, 9-295, 10-303		
INDIA 2 nd INNINGS		
KL Rahul	c Buttler b Broad	26
Rohit Sharma	not out	12
C Pujara	b Bumrah	12
Extras:	(lb 1, nb 1)	2
TOTAL:	52 for one in 14 overs	
Fall of wickets: 1-34		
Bowling: J Anderson 5-1-12-0, S Broad 5-1-18-1, O Robinson 4-0-21-0		

his 21st Test ton in 154 balls, punching the air and his chest.

AFP

Swepson, Christian steer Australia to consolation victory

BANGLADESH VS AUSTRALIA FOURTH T20I

Dhaka, Bangladesh - Dan Christian smashed 39 and spinner Mitchell Swepson returned figures of three for 12 as Australia edged out Bangladesh by three wickets for a consolation T20I victory on Saturday.

Chasing 105 for victory, Australia depended on Christian's 15-ball blitz and Ashton Agar's 27 to achieve their target in 19 overs of the fourth match in Dhaka. Bangladesh, who sealed their first ever series win over Australia after winning the third match on Friday, lead the five-match series 3-1.

Christian hit five sixes off a Shakib al Hasan over to set the chase in Australia's in a low-scoring contest after Bangladesh managed 104 for nine. Bangladesh hit back after Mustafizur Rahman took two wickets including Christian's

scalp and Mahedi Hasan bowled Marsh for 11. No 8 Agar then hit a cameo off 27 balls and after his exit Ashton Turner and Andrew Tye took the team home.

Australia's decision to include leg-spinner Swepson and Tye in the team reaped results with the bowlers sharing six wickets between them. Pace bowler Josh Hazlewood did the early damage after sending back Soumya Sarkar for eight and star batsman Shakib caught behind for 15.

But it was man of the match Swepson's successive strikes to dismiss skipper Mahmudullah Riyad and wicketkeeper-batsman Nurul Hasan, in the 11th over that rattled Bangladesh.

Brief scores: Bangladesh 104-9 (M Naim 28, M Hasan 23; A Tye 3-18, M Swepson 3-12) lost to Australia 105-7 in 19 overs (D Christian 39, A Agar 27; M Hasan 2-17, M Rahman 2-9).

AFP

Omari is new OAA chief; Miqbali elected OVA president

Ashok Purohit

Muscat

Sheikh Salim al Omari was on Saturday elected as the new chairman of the Oman Athletics Association (OAA) for the 2021-2024 term, a day after the Oman Volleyball Association (OVA) got its new chief in Ibrahim al Miqbali.

Elections of various sports

bodies are due over the next few weeks with all eyes on the Oman Football Association (OFA) election on August 28.

On Saturday, the OAA general assembly, with 36 clubs' representatives present at the Sultan Qaboos Sports Complex, elected Omairi as the new boss while Said al Hadi was elected as vice-president. Asaad al Hassani is the new general secretary



Sheikh Salim al Omari, OAA boss



Ibrahim al Miqbali, OVA chief

while Hamdan al Boushri is the treasurer. Khoula al Rawahi won the woman board member post and she was joined by four other board members - Abdullah al Zahouri, Hamoud al Shabibi, Khalfan al Waeli and Mohammed al Balushi.

On Friday, the OVA general assembly saw a new board elected for the 2021-24 term in the presence of representatives

of 23 clubs. Miqbali's board will have Salem al Jabri as the vice-chairman, Mohammed al Hashmi as the general secretary and Qais Said as the treasurer.

Saada al Azri won the board member post reserved for woman. The other board members are Khalid al Arai, Rasheed Mubarak, Salem al Balushi and Issa al Balushi.

@ashokmuscat

Martin, a Spaniard who rides for Ducati satellite team Pramac, grabbed his second career pole position in 1min 22.94sec, a new lap record at the Red Bull Ring. Francesco Bagnaia, an Italian who rides for the Ducati factory team was second, 0.044sec slower. Frenchman Quartararo completed the front row on his Yamaha.

AFP

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TOKYO 2020



'BONDED FOR LIFE'

NBA All-Star
Durant revels
in his third
Olympic gold
as the US beat
France in final

MEN'S BASKETBALL
Saitama, Japan - NBA All-Star Kevin Durant said he is 'bonded for life' with his US teammates after they beat France 87-82 to win basketball gold on Saturday, ensuring the Brooklyn Nets star joined all-time great Carmelo Anthony with a third Olympic title. It was fourth straight Olympic men's basketball gold for the US.
Australia took the bronze medal as Patty Mills scored an impressive 42 points in a 107-93 win over Slovenia.
The Americans started slowly but earned a 22-18 lead after the first quarter and were 44-39 ahead at halfway, then survived some nervous late moments to prove the doubters wrong. The US had crashed to seventh-ranked France in their opening group game, their first defeat at an Olympics since the 2004 edition in Athens.
But spearheaded by Durant, they steadied the ship and began gelling, with a French team led by NBA stars Rudy Gobert, Evan Fournier and Nicolas Batum unable to repeat their feat in the final.
The 32-year-old Durant has been the backbone of the team



Kevin Durant of the US goes for the basket against France during the final of the men's basketball competition of the Tokyo 2020 Olympics on Saturday (AFP)

for a decade, scoring more Olympic points than any player in US men's basketball history, and he was again the standout against France. He drilled 29 points to go with the 30 he bagged in the 2012 final against Spain and 30 in the 2016 decider against Serbia, reinforcing his incredible consistency.
In doing so, he became the first American player to score

more than 100 points in three different Olympic Games, accumulating 124 in Japan.
"When you are part of a team that is evolving by the second, it's just amazing to see. Every game we continued to grow," he said.
"It's just that journey that is so important, you realise. You finish the job and get the gold medal, but when you go through that journey, man, it is just so special.

"I am bonded with these guys for life, it's a family for life. I am grateful we all committed to this (Olympics) early and finished it off."
Durant, who is poised to sign a four-year, US\$198mn contract extension with the Nets, according to his manager, scored 21 of his points on Saturday in the first half.
He was quieter in the fourth term until he drained a pair of crucial free throws with

eight seconds left. Durant said he was reluctant to compare the gold medal in Japan with his previous two 'because everything is its own memory'. "But this is one of those special journeys that is hard to describe," he added.
"Each one of us put in that work every single day. From the coaches, to the trainers, to the players. We all came in with the goal of let's finish this thing off, let's build a family, let's build a team, let's finish this thing off."
US coach Gregg Popovich said he was 'totally frozen' when his team won, calling it 'an out of body experience when you are in those kinds of games'.
"Every championship is special, every group is special, but I can be honest and say this the most responsibility I've ever felt, because you're playing for so many people that are watching it for your country," he said.
Boston Celtic guard Jayson Tatum racked up 19 points and seven rebounds. Utah Jazz centre Gobert and the Celtics' Fournier both sank 16 points to lead the way for France.
"Our goal was to push them as far as possible in this game. Unfortunately we did a couple of mistakes at the end of the third quarter and beginning of the fourth quarter," said French coach Vincent Collet.
In the bronze medal playoff, the Australians held Dallas Mavericks guard Luka Doncic to 22 points as Mills hit from all over the floor against the Slovenians.



Team USA pose with their gold medals after the awards ceremony

AFP

Sadulaev takes gold; India's Punia picks bronze



Russia's Abdulrashid Sadulaev reacts after defeating USA's Kyle Snyder

WRESTLING
Tokyo, Japan - In one of the most hotly anticipated showdowns of the Tokyo Olympics, Russian Abdulrashid Sadulaev 'The Russian Tank' prevailed over 'Captain America' Kyle Snyder to win gold in the men's freestyle heavyweight (97kg) category in men's wrestling on the last day of the week-long wrestling competition at the Tokyo Olympics on Saturday.
In the third meeting between these two all-time great wrestlers, it is the four-time world champion Sadulaev who came out on top.

Italy's Abraham Conyedo and Cuba's Reineris Salas claimed the bronze medals.
Also, Otoguro Takuto became the first men's wrestler in 25 years to win gold for his host nation. The young Japanese star overcame Haji Aliyev of Azerbaijan in the men's 65kg freestyle final. He became only the second Japanese athlete to win a men's wrestling medal in the past 32 years.
Bajrang Punia of India shutout Dautlet Niyazbekov of Kazakhstan (8-0) to claim the one of the two bronze medals on offer

in the 65kg category. "I'm happy, but not really happy because I wanted the gold medal," said the Indian after his match. Gadzhimurad Rashidov of the ROC beat Ismail Muszukajev of Hungary 5-0 to claim the other bronze medal in the 65kg class.
Earlier, Japan's Yui Susaki won gold in the women's freestyle flyweight category. China's Sun Yanan took silver while Azerbaijan's Mariya Stadnik and American Sarah Hildebrandt claimed the bronze medals.



AFP



Britain's Galal Yafai bites his gold medal as he celebrates on the podium

Golden Briton trumps boxing brothers as Turk makes history

BOXING
Tokyo, Japan - Britain's Galal Yafai said that he will enjoy light-hearted bragging rights over his boxing brothers after defeating Carlo Paalam to win flyweight Olympic gold on Saturday.
The 28-year-old Yafai won on split points against the Filipino to earn Britain's first boxing gold in Tokyo.
There was meanwhile a shock in the men's middleweight final after Brazil's Hebert Sousa scored a third-round knockout against Ukraine's top seed Oleksandr Khlyzhniakto win gold.
Yafai's older brothers, Kal and Gamal, are both established professionals. But neither ever won a Games medal, never mind a gold one.
Yafai said that he will indulge

in a little good-natured one-upmanship when he sees them. "To be fair, we are normally supportive of each other and not argumentative," said the new champion. "They will be happy for me, like I would be for them. "I might do it once or twice (brag to them) in future, but only on the joking side."
In women's boxing, Busenaz Surmeneli of Turkey won the welterweight title for her country's first Olympic gold in the sport. There was also silver for compatriot Buse Naz Cakiroglu, beaten in the flyweight final by Bulgaria's Stoyka Krasteva. The 35-year-old Krasteva also made a piece of history, becoming Bulgaria's first women's Olympic boxing winner.



AFP

Indian women's hockey captain Rampal hits out at racist abuse

HOCKEY
New Delhi, India - India's hockey captain Rani Rampal on Saturday criticised the 'shameful' racist abuse of a team member's family that she said was damaging the country's quest to boost its sporting image.
India saw a hockey renaissance at the Tokyo Games with the men taking third place - their first medal in 41 years in a sport where they have won a record eight golds - while the women were narrowly beaten by Great Britain in their bronze medal playoff.
The women's best ever

Olympic performance was tainted by abuse of the family of Vandana Katariya, from the low caste Dalit community that has faced generations of discrimination. Youths taunted the family at their Uttarakhand state home saying the Dalits in the team were to blame for the defeat. The family has said that threats were made too. "It's such a bad thing," Rampal told reporters.
"We put our life and soul into it, struggle and sacrifice so much to represent our country and when we see what is happening - what happened to Vandana's

family - I just want to say to people please stop this religious division and casteism."
She added, "We have to rise above this. We come from different religions - Hindu, Muslim, Sikh - and come from all parts of India - north, south and east - but here we work for India."
The 26-year-old Rampal, whose own father pulled a cart to feed his family, added, "We sweat it out for the Indian flag and it is such a shameful thing when we see that people behave like this."



AFP



A file photo of India's women's hockey team player Vandana Katariya. The player's family was subject to racist abuse recently (AFP)



TOKYO 2020



Brazil's Malcom celebrates after scoring against Spain during the men's football gold medal match at Yokohama International Stadium in Yokohama, Japan, on Saturday (AFP)

Malcom the hero as Brazil retain crown

MEN'S FOOTBALL

Yokohama, Japan - Brazil won Olympic men's football gold for the second consecutive tournament as substitute Malcom struck the winner in a 2-1 victory over Spain after extra-time on Saturday.

Matheus Cunha took advantage of a defensive lapse to score in first-half stoppage time after Richarlison smashed a penalty over the crossbar for Brazil.

Spain equalised on the hour when Mikel Oyarzabal crashed home a thumping volley, but former Barcelona forward Malcom secured Brazil the title

with his goal in the 108th minute.

Brazil, who won gold on home soil at Rio 2016, became the fifth team to retain their Olympic crown on another triumphant night in Yokohama, where they claimed the last of their five World Cup titles in 2002.

After Neymar led Brazil to Olympic gold, this time it was the turn of Dani Alves to captain the country in the final against a strong Spain side featuring six players who participated at Euro 2020.

Unbeaten at the Olympics against a European nation since



1988, Brazil almost fell behind when Diego Carlos scooped the ball over his own goalkeeper before hooking off the line as Oyarzabal tried to pick out Dani Olmo.

A poor clearance from Unai Simon allowed Richarlison to set up Douglas Luiz, whose spinning effort was turned behind by the Spain goalkeeper.

Brazil needed penalties to get past Mexico in the semifinals, and they were awarded a spot-kick here after a VAR review as Simon flattened Cunha while attempting to punch away a cross.

But Everton forward Richarlison wasted the chance to add to his competition-leading five goals by blazing well over.

There was no let-off for Spain a second time though when Alves sent the ball high into the area, where a hesitant Pau Torres gave Cunha time to control and slot into the corner.

Marco Asensio, Spain's match-winner in extra-time against Japan in the previous round, lasted just 45 minutes as Carlos Soler came on for the second half, inadvertently getting in the way of a goalbound effort from Oyarzabal.

Brazil nearly doubled their lead when a quick break resulted in Simon making a terrific stop with his legs to divert Richarlison's shot onto the bar.

Spain youngster Bryan Gil rattled the bar two minutes from the end, as an extra 30 minutes was required for the fifth time in eight knockout matches.

Malcom, who endured a difficult spell at Barcelona in 2018-19 before leaving for Zenit Saint Petersburg, ran onto a long ball from Antony, racing past Jesus Vallejo and firing past Simon to etch his name into the history books.

AFP



MEDALS TABLE

(Only selected nations)

	Gold	Silver	Bronze	Total
China	38	31	18	87
USA	36	39	33	108
Japan	27	12	17	56
ROC	20	26	23	69
Great Britain	20	21	22	63
Australia	17	7	22	46
Germany	10	11	16	37
Netherlands	10	11	12	33
Italy	10	10	19	39
France	9	12	11	32
New Zealand	7	6	7	20
Brazil	7	4	8	19
Hungary	6	7	6	19
Canada	6	6	11	23
South Korea	6	4	10	20

(ROC* - Russian Olympic Committee)



USA's Nelly Korda celebrates after winning the gold medal on Saturday

Nelly weathers storm to claim gold, Aditi misses bronze medal

WOMEN'S GOLF

Kawagoe, Japan - Nelly Korda held her nerve during a storm delay on Saturday to cap an incredible six weeks with Olympic gold, completing a US golf clean sweep at the Tokyo Games.

The 23-year-old rose to the top of the global rankings after winning her first major at the Women's PGA Championship in June.

The six-time LPGA Tour winner stayed cool during a storm delay at Kasumigaseki Country Club to finish one stroke clear of Japan's Mone Inami and Lydia Ko of New Zealand.

But there was heartbreak for India's 23-year-old Aditi Ashok, who had been in medal position for much of the week but finished fourth, one adrift, on 15-under par.

"Honestly, it's crazy," said Nelly, who has won three of the past five events in which she has teed up, including the PGA Championship.

"So like it never really gets to kind of sink in, in a sense. So I think I'll look back at the season after the season is done."

Jessica Korda, the older of the two golfing sisters at 28, ran onto the final green in joy after the winning putt and hugged Nelly as they celebrated together.

Inami secured the silver medal for the host nation at the first extra hole when Ko missed a ten-

foot putt for a par.

The final group of Nelly, Ko and Aditi, plus Inami in the group ahead, kept Nelly under pressure during a pulsating final round, which began almost three hours early to beat an approaching tropical storm system.

Ko, the silver medallist from the Rio 2016 Olympics, posted five birdies in seven holes during



India's Aditi Ashok reacts after her putt on the 18th green on Saturday

a phenomenal front nine. The Seoul-born New Zealander now has the distinction of being the only golfer to win two Olympic medals.

A disheartened Aditi, who is ranked world No 200, said, "I didn't leave anything out there. But, yeah, fourth at an Olympics where they give out three medals kind of sucks."

AFP

Seven out of eight gold medals for China

DIVING

Tokyo, Japan - China underlined its dominance in the Olympic diving pool on Saturday, with Cao Yuan winning the men's 10m platform to make it seven gold medals in eight events for the nation at the Tokyo Games.

Compatriot Yang Jian took silver while Britain's Tom Daley added the bronze to an emotional gold in the 10m synchronised - the only event China failed to win.

Cao was strong from the start in the final, earning three 10s on

his first dive, and finishing with 582.35 points, just ahead of Yang, with 580.40. Daley battled hard, grabbing pole position in two of the six rounds, but a disappointing score for his armstand back three somersaults in round four pushed him down the table and gave his Chinese competitors an opening.

The British diver, who is a prominent voice on gay rights and has won cult status for his hobby of knitting poolside to



calm his nerves, ended with 548.25. Cao, 26, becomes the first athlete to win gold in all three diving disciplines, having taken the 3m springboard gold in Rio and the 10m synchronised in London.

Daley has made headlines out of the pool with his recently acquired love of knitting, which he has described as his 'secret weapon' and a way to calm his nerves between dives.

AFP



China's Cao Yuan during the men's 10m platform diving final on Saturday



Germany's Annika Schleu struggles as she rides Saint Boy in the women's individual show jumping modern pentathlon event on Friday (AFP)

German coach thrown out of Olympics for striking horse

MODERN PENTATHLON

Tokyo, Japan - A German modern pentathlon coach was thrown out of the Olympics on Saturday for striking a horse during the women's event.

The International Modern Pentathlon Union said footage showed coach Kim Raisner 'appearing to strike the horse ... with her fist' and that



'her actions were deemed to be in violation of (the rules)'.

The incident came as Germany's Annika Schleu was leading Friday's competition but was having difficulty bringing her horse Saint Boy under control.

The horse refused to jump the fences in the showjumping segment and a tearful Schleu

eventually finished outside the medals in the event won by Britain's Kate French. Riders in the event draw their horses at random. Raisner is the second German official sent home from the Games after the sporting director of Germany's cycling team was forced to leave for making a racist comment about riders from Africa.

AFP

TOKYO 2020



JAVELIN JOY FOR INDIA

Neeraj Chopra bags India's first ever Olympic track and field gold medal

Dutchwoman Hassan completes incredible double with 10,000m title

ATHLETICS

Tokyo, Japan - Javelin thrower Neeraj Chopra delivered a first ever Olympic track and field gold medal for India on Saturday as the Tokyo Games athletics competition drew to a close.

On a pulsating final night of action, Dutch distance runner Sifan Hassan complete an incredible double with victory in the 10,000m while USA star Allyson Felix brought the curtain down on her 17-year Olympic career with a record-extending relay gold.

Norway celebrated gold in the men's 1,500m with Jakob Ingebrigtsen downing Kenya's Timothy Cheruiyot in a thrilling duel while Russian athlete Mariya Lasitskene won the



India's Neeraj Chopra celebrates after winning the men's javelin throw final during the Tokyo 2020 Olympic Games at the Olympic Stadium in Tokyo on Saturday (AFP)

after leading for all but two kilometres of the 25-lap race, claimed bronze in 30:01.72. With 150m to go, Hassan swept past Gidey and kicked for home to seal gold.

Felix finale

There was another superb tactical performance in the men's 1,500m as Norway's Ingebrigtsen won in an Olympic record of 3:28.32. The 20-year-old added Olympic gold to his European title, easing home after passing long-time leader Timothy Cheruiyot of Kenya, who took silver in 3:29.01. Britain's John Kerr claimed bronze.

In the men's and women's 4x400m relays the United States ended what has been a difficult campaign at the Olympic Stadium with a pair of golds.

A star-studded US women's quartet featuring Felix, 400m hurdles gold and silver medallists Sydney McLaughlin and Dalilah Muhammad, along with 800m gold medallist Athing Mu, cruised to victory in 3:16.85, with Poland taking silver and Jamaica bronze.

The win gave the 35-year-old Felix - competing in her fifth and final Games - an 11th Olympic medal, extending her record as the most decorated female track and field Olympian in history. Only legendary Finnish distance runner Paavo Nurmi, with 12 medals, has more.

"I came out at peace, wanting to soak it all in," said Felix after her final Olympic race. "It was really cool to come together to close out the Olympic Games and my Olympic career."

The US men's 4x400 team were similarly emphatic winners in their race, with 400m hurdler Rai Benjamin bringing home the gold in 2:55.70, ahead of the Netherlands and Botswana.

In the women's high jump, three-time world champion Mariya Lasitskene finally won her first Olympic title with a best of 2.04m.

The 28-year-old, who was barred from competing in the 2016 Rio Olympics due to Russia's doping scandal, held off a stiff challenge from Australian Nicola McDermott, who took silver in an Oceania record of 2.02m. Ukraine's Yaroslava Mahuchikh won bronze with a 2.00m clearance.

Earlier on Saturday morning, Peres Jepchirchir secured back-to-back women's Olympic marathon titles for Kenya on Saturday timing 2hr 27min 20sec.

The 27-year-old two-time half marathon world champion beat compatriot and world record holder Brigid Kosgei (2hr 27:36) whilst USA's Molly Seidel was third (2hr 27:46).

AFP

women's high jump.

Chopra, 23, claimed the first athletics gold in India's history with an 87.58m second throw at the Olympic Stadium.

It ended India's 121-year wait for an athletics gold. The previous best had been two silver medals won at the 1900 Paris Games. "This is our first Olympic medal for a very long time, and in athletics it is the first time we have gold, so it's a proud moment for me and my country," Chopra said. "It feels unbelievable."

On the track the Netherlands' Hassan, raced to her second gold of the games after an earlier win in the 5,000m. Twenty-four hours earlier, Hassan had taken bronze in the 1,500m final, part of an audacious bid for an Olympic

treble. Hassan was in action on five days of the nine-day schedule of track and field, running more than 61 laps in total on the way to her three-medal haul.

"I am just so thankful, and I don't think I could have done any better than this," said Hassan.

"During the medal ceremony I was thinking: 'It is over. Now you can sleep!'"

In the 10,000m, Hassan clocked 29min 55.32sec for gold, with Bahrain's Kalkidan Gezahegne, also born in Ethiopia, claiming silver in 29:56.18.

Ethiopian Letesenbet Gidey,



India's Neeraj Chopra is all smiles as he displays his gold medal on Saturday



Netherlands' Sifan Hassan wins the women's 10,000m final, her second gold at the Tokyo Olympics, at the Olympic Stadium on Saturday (AFP)

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