

MUSCAT DAILY

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HM greets Islamic world on Eid al Fitr

Muscat - On the advent of Eid al Fitr 1442 AH, His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik exchanged cables of greetings with leaders of Arab and Islamic countries on Monday.

His Majesty the Sultan also exchanged greetings over phone calls with Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad al Thani, Emir of Qatar, King Hamad bin Issa al Khalifa of Bahrain and Sheikh Nawaf al Ahmad al Jaber al Sabah, Emir of Kuwait, on Monday.

His Majesty the Sultan expressed his sincere greetings and best wishes of good health, happiness and a long life to them, praying to Almighty Allah for the return of this and similar occasions on them and the people of their countries. His Majesty the Sultan also wished all Muslims plentiful bounties and blessings.

ONA

Eid under lockdown - a unique experience

Shaddad al Musalmay
Muscat

Even as Oman prepares to celebrate Eid al Fitr under tight COVID-19 restrictions, including a ban on congregational prayers at mosques and family gatherings, many are looking forward to enjoy the new experience with the same fervour and excitement with their nuclear families.

In pre-COVID-19 era, Eid was celebrated over lavish feasts at large gatherings at home with family and friends after early morning prayers offered in mosques. However, under the current restrictions that prohibit gatherings, most people in Oman will offer prayers at home and observe the customs of Eid albeit with much scaled-down arrangements.

"This year again, I will celebrate Eid al Fitr in a unique way at home with my family. Like last Eid, this time around too I have plans to make it a beautiful experience, even though we will miss

the other family members and our friends. We will do all the usual things that we do like offer Eid prayers, have special meals and barbecue but all at home," said Bader al Harthy, a government employee.

In Oman, the first day of Eid is generally reserved for visiting the homes of relatives and cooking ceremonial dishes like arsiya (rice made with chicken or lamb), while the second and third days saw elaborate preparations to make shuwa (meat cooked in an underground pit and served with rice) in the company of several family members and friends.

This year, however, it will be different. "Visiting relatives and wishing them a blessed holiday is a common tradition for Muslims during Eid. However, due to the pandemic, gatherings are no longer safe. For our family and our own safety, it is very important to consider our health first. People can celebrate remotely via phone or video calls," said Muna al Zadjali, who is looking forward to celebrate Eid

at home.

With the current situation demanding that we protect our loved ones by staying at home, authorities have urged people to avoid Eid gatherings, hugging and shaking hands as human contact is the key to coronavirus transmission, which to most is a new experience.

"I live in Abu Dhabi but my family is in Muscat, so I will miss joining them this Eid due to the restrictions. I will use different social media platforms to get in touch with my family and friends in Oman," said Jamal al Nu'amani.

Ahead of Eid al Fitr, Royal Oman Police announced that it will ramp up vigilance in the wake of the pandemic by deploying units across all wilayats. 'Citizens and residents need to continue to adhere to the decisions of the Supreme Committee and avoid the traditional practices of Eid, such as gatherings and family visits in order to preserve everyone's health and safety,' the ROP stated.

@shaddadm

Our Correspondent
Muscat

Eid celebrations vary from country to country. Expatriates in Oman celebrate the festival by adhering to their respective customs and traditions. But the common theme - friends and families coming together to celebrate the joyous occasion - will be missing this year yet again.

Eid al Fitr is a three-day-long festival and is known as the 'lesser' or 'Smaller Eid' when compared to Eid al Adha, which is four days long and is known as the 'Greater Eid'.

The faithfuls gather for a special morning prayer on the first day of Eid al Fitr, greeting each other 'Eid Mubarak' with formal embraces. Sweet dishes are prepared at home and gifts are given to children and to those in need.

Speaking to *Muscat Daily*, Hesham Talaat, an Egyptian expat, said, "Right now, the world is going through a challenging and difficult period. The pandemic has affected a lot of customs and traditions that are usually followed on Eid. Under this lockdown, celebrations will be without friends and family to avoid health risks.

"I will avoid social visits and instead I'll organise virtual parties and connect through various online platforms or social media and have a chat with friends and family members."

Talaat added that one of the best ways to beat the gloom is to give his house a festive look.

"I will decorate my house, pray with my family, eat our favourite Egyptian dishes, and engage in some joyful activities with the children to make them feel happy and forget the absence of friends and relatives."

For Indian expat Muneer Thazhe Purayil, Eid celebrations

Expats prepare for low-key Eid celebrations



I hope and pray that we'll never celebrate another Eid under lockdown

ILHAN AHMED

which demands us to stay at home and save our lives and of others. Therefore, this year I am going to celebrate Eid by staying at home and preparing Indian biriyani and some sweet. I am going to meet my friends and family members through Zoom and we are going to enjoy it by giving our kids an opportunity to show their talent in several cultural activities."

Purayil added that he finds this year's Eid even more difficult than last year as all the commercial activities are closed.

"Our movement is limited, which demands us to celebrate within the walls of our home and join in the virtual celebration on

social media."

Ilhan Ahmed, a restaurateur from Turkey, expressed his sadness at the lack of traditional celebrations this year. Turkish people are accustomed to enthusiastic Eid celebrations, characterised by big family gatherings, a ritual that dates back all the way to the Ottoman era.

In normal circumstances, markets would be full of excited parents and happy children, and people would indulge in typical Eid shopping. But this time around, due to the pandemic, the traditionally festive Eid mood is different, he said. "We are an emotional nation. We love to meet friends as a family. But this pandemic has separated people from each other, disrupting our social and psychological balance. I will feel something dearly missing at the time of the Eid."

He said he will use video calls to exchange Eid greetings with his parents, and other loved ones.

"I hope and pray that we'll never celebrate another Eid under lockdown."

According to Fawzi Abu Hadid, a Tunisian and an imam at a mosque in Muscat, the pandemic might have curtailed visits and prevented families from gathering, but it does not prevent celebrations and spreading joy within the families.

"I will celebrate with my family in my house, then offer the Eid prayer and greet each other on the happy occasion, praying to God Almighty to lift the affliction from us and end the pandemic for us to return to our normal lives," he said.

"After the prayer, the family would gather at the dining table to relish the famous Tunisian foods and sweets and reminisce the days of Eid that we used to spend in Tunisia."

I wear a mask for your safety...

I wear a mask for many reasons - to protect others, to protect myself, and to support our frontliners. I also follow all the other guidelines, like I don't touch my face, I maintain a safe social distance from everyone and I sanitise my hands frequently. It is the duty of every individual to remain safe and keep the community safe.

Raed Dawood

Director Branding, Communications & Corporate Affairs, Ooredoo

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4,000 plots of land ready for handover: H E Shueili



Muscat - As many as 4,000 plots of land are ready for handover to eligible applicants, according to H E Dr Khalfan al Shueili, Minister of Housing and Urban Planning.

In an interview with Oman TV, H E Dr Shueili said, "The ministry has given away about 343,000 plots of land in various governorates of the sultanate during the past ten years, 78 per cent of them were allotted to women.

"Giving Omani families the right to own property is one of the most important objectives of the new law. After Eid al Fitr, the ministry will launch a programme to study requests for land and create a specific mechanism to determine the eligibility."

He added that all existing applications will remain valid and will not be cancelled and dealt with professionally.

"But priorities will change and be reconsidered. There are currently 447,000 applications for all of Oman, 120,000 of which are for the Governorate of Muscat."

There are many requests for social housing, and the ministry has distributed 500 social housing at a value of RO15mn. "We have the housing aid programme with a budget of RO20mn."

The minister clarified that the law does not link right of a person to a plot of land and marriage, "as every person who has never been married has the right to submit an application", he said.

Second dose put off; first concern for students

Muscat - Administration of the second dose of Pfizer-BioNTech COVID-19 vaccine will be postponed as the available vaccines will be given to Grade 12 students, the Ministry of Health (MoH) said.

In a statement, the ministry said, 'The administration of the second dose of Pfizer-BioNTech COVID-19 vaccine will be postponed till June as the available vaccines will be given to Grade 12 students prior to their final examinations. Students' immunisation schedules will be announced later by the ministry.'

The ministry urged people to adhere to health measures to curb COVID-19 such as washing hands and wearing masks while also practising social distancing.



Sultanate reports 18 virus deaths, 787 new cases

Muscat - As many as 787 new cases of COVID-19 were registered in Oman on Monday, in addition to 18 new deaths.

This brings the total number of positive cases to 202,137 in the sultanate. The total number of COVID-19 related death cases reached 2138, the Ministry of Health said.

The ministry also pointed out that 960 COVID-19 patients have recovered of late, bringing the total number of recoveries to 185,607.

The ministry also pointed out that 96 patents were hospitalised over the past 24 hours, adding that the total number of patients in hospitals stands at 732, of them 263 are under intensive care.



Good bye Ramadan, welcome Eid ...

All praises be to Allah Almighty that we are in the last days of Ramadan. We are indeed left with only a couple of days before we celebrate Eid al Fitr to mark the end of the holy month. But before it finally comes to an end, there are still certain obligations left to fulfil, such as giving zakat.

I tell myself before reminding others that zakat is a form of charity to be given to the poor during or before the end of Ramadan. This is an obligatory charity on every able Muslim. The purpose of zakat is to atone for any indecent act committed or word

spoken by the faithful during the days of fasting. Additionally, it helps the poor and the needy.

This year, too, we are witnessing the suffering of our Muslim brothers and sisters across the globe and it is our duty to ensure we do our part - by giving zakat - so that they can also celebrate Eid.

Bidding farewell to the days of fasting, there is a sense of sadness at the departure of Ramadan even as we prepare to celebrate Eid and for having successfully achieved the month's purpose.

While traditional Eid activities differ from culture to culture, the first and most significant of these is offering early morning prayers, for which everyone is up before the sun peeps out. Prayers promote brotherhood, therefore these are offered with the rich and poor standing side by side. But due to the current restrictions in Oman, we will have to do so at home with our micro families and Eid al Fitr festivities will have to be scaled down.

Earlier during Eid, our extended family comprising no fewer than 200

members made elaborate arrangements and met at public parks or gardens to celebrate the first day of Eid. This year, we can only fondly remember the past Eids spent in company of near and dear ones.

Also, earlier it was customary to have a day out during the Eid holidays in a farmhouse on the outskirts of Muscat. Everyone looked forward to these occasions and gatherings. Now it all appears in the distant past. This Eid, we'll be confined to our homes. But this will soon pass. This is a temporary situation and all that we'll have of it is a memory. Bye-bye for now and Eid Mubarak!



ROP urges people to avoid social gatherings

Muscat - Royal Oman Police (ROP) has urged citizens and residents to continue to commit and adhere to the decisions of the Supreme Committee that prohibit social visits and gatherings during Eid in order to safeguard the health and safety of all.

In a statement, it said, 'The ROP calls on everyone to act responsibly during the current health situation in order to protect themselves, their families and their community. People should commit to the efforts to limit the spread of the virus and prevent infections.'

Separately, the ROP also cautioned citizens and residents against sharing personal details on telecommunications platforms to avoid cyber fraud.

Building homes and hope in Yanqul

Muscat - The Yanqul Charity Team's welfare work this Ramadan include an initiative called Ma'awa, or 'Shelter', through which it facilitates construction of houses for needy families. The team currently maintains 22 houses of needy families in the wilayat of Yanqul, Dhahirah governorate.



Suad Abdullah al Alawi, head of the charity team, said, "We are co-operating with the Zakat Committee of the Ministry of Awqaf and Religious Affairs. Ma'awa benefits families that have been unsuccessful in obtaining a housing loan from any government agency."

Founded in 2011, the team's 300 volunteers are dedicated to improving the living conditions of needy families in Yanqul. It operates under the umbrella of the Social Development Committee of the Ministry of Social Development.

Besides the Ma'awa initiative, this Ramadan Yanqul Charity Team has distributed iftar meals and given away 800 food baskets containing rice, honey, dates and vegetables. Additionally, Oman Charitable Organization has provided the team 800 purchase vouchers for distribution among needy families during the month, Alawi informed.

Till March this year, the team supported social security families, the elderly and orphans at a cost of R10,743. The Yanqul Charity Team can be contacted on 94969333/96510222.



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Mazon Electricity signs \$235mn deal

Muscat - Mazoon Electricity Company (MZEC), a subsidiary of Nama Holding, announced signing of its debut Islamic financing facility for an amount of US\$235mn.



The proceeds will be used to finance the capital expenditure plans of MZEC for 2021 mainly comprising investments in the electricity distribution and supply network in its licensed areas in Oman, according to a press release.

The facility is structured as a two-year Ijarah bridge facility marking the first Islamic bank facility for Nama Group that has in the past raised several conventional bank loan facilities and issuances in the debt capital markets under RegS and 144a format, including a ten-year US\$500mn debut sukuk in 2017. The facility received interest from regional banks of Bahrain, Kuwait and UAE with 12 financiers participating in the facility and an oversubscribed order book.

National Bank of Bahrain and its subsidiary Bahrain Islamic Bank acted as the structuring, arranging and bookrunning banks on the facility.

"The inaugural Islamic financing facility is a milestone transaction for Mazoon Electricity, adding new banking relationships to the group and providing it access to Islamic financiers of the region to fund the investment in electricity distribution infrastructure of the sultanate", said Salim Said al Kamyani, CEO of Mazoon Electricity.

EVs to be cheaper than combustion by 2027

Paris, France - Electric cars will be cheaper to build than fossil fuel vehicles across Europe within six years and could represent 100 per cent of new sales by 2035, according to a study published on Monday.

Carmakers are shifting en masse to electric and hybrid models in order to bring average fleet emissions under a European Union limit of 95g of CO₂ per kilometre, or face heavy penalties.

The study by Bloomberg New Energy Finance found that electric sedans and sport-utility vehicles will be as cheap to make as combustion vehicles from 2026.

Small cars will have to wait until 2027 to match the cost of fossil fuel models, according the study, which was commissioned by Transport and Environment, a European clean transport campaign group.

An electric sedan, which cost nearly €40,000 pre-tax in 2020, is expected to sell at the same price as a combustion model - around €20,000 - in 2026, the study showed.

Electric cars will represent 50 per cent of new sales by 2030 and 85 per cent by 2035 if policies remain the same.

AFP

Oman sees a flurry of interest in green hydrogen projects



Our Correspondent

Muscat

A number of international companies in the past few months have expressed their interest and announced plans to invest in green hydrogen and green ammonia projects in Oman's special economic zones and free zones.

The latest in a series of announcements by international companies to set up green hydrogen projects in Oman is the plan of Fusion Fuel Green, an Ireland-based green hydrogen technology company.

Fusion Fuel this week announced that it reached a collaboration agreement with Consolidated Contractors Group (CCG) to develop green hydrogen plants in the Middle East including Oman.

CCC and Fusion Fuel have agreed to cooperate on projects involving the production of green hydrogen for potential clients in the refining and petrochemical industries in order to reduce their carbon footprint.

The companies plan to develop demonstrator plants in several countries in the region, namely Oman, Kuwait and Qatar, according to a statement issued by Fusion Fuel.

Fusion Fuel is an emerging leader in the green hydrogen space, committed to accelerating the energy transition and decarbonising the global energy system by making zero-emissions green hydrogen commercially viable.

Consolidated Contractors Group and Fusion Fuel Green have agreed to cooperate on projects involving the production of green hydrogen for potential clients in the refining and petrochemical industries in order to reduce their carbon footprint

and accessible.

"We are delighted to be partnering with the CCC to open this new market," Joao Wahnon, head of business development at Fusion Fuel said.

"The Middle East represents a big opportunity and it's a very promising region for us, given the high levels of solar exposure, strong appetite for green hydrogen projects, and the strategic geographic position between Europe and Asia.

We are excited to bring Fusion Fuel's revolutionary technology to the Middle East."

Dori Barakat, director of business development at CCC, said, "We are very pleased to cooperate with Fusion Fuel towards the building of green hydrogen and ammonia plants and to bring our expertise in construction projects, particularly in the Middle East."

This cooperation between our companies will generate new opportunities in the development of green energies."

Consolidated Contractors Group is

US\$2.5bn.

Tatweer and ACME have reportedly identified the land parcel in Duqm region to set up the facility that will produce 2,200 metric tonnes of green ammonia per day.

In January, Japan's Sumitomo Corporation and Omani energy firm ARA Petroleum launched a feasibility study on a hydrogen hybrid project which will be based on a local production and consumption model in Oman.

The project aims to establish a hydrogen supply chain based on the local production and consumption model at a site where ARA Petroleum produces oil and gas, with a target to commence operations in 2023.

In December 2020, DEME Concessions, a Belgium-based dredging, environmental and marine engineering group, and OQ Alternative Energy, the green energy unit of Oman's integrated energy firm OQ, announced the start of a joint project to develop a world leading, green hydrogen plant in the Special Economic Zone at Duqm.

Encouraged by strong initial interest shown by the international companies, OPAZ is aiming to place Oman in the global green hydrogen production chain through the special economic zones and free zones.

Sohar Port and Freezone, as part of its green initiatives which include solar energy and green hydrogen, is also planning to create the first green hydrogen hub in Oman.



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AJIA'S EXCLUSIVE BMW, MINI OFFERS CONTINUE



Al Jenaibi International Automobiles LLC (AJIA), the official importer of BMW Group in Oman, has launched a host of special seasonal offers across its entire BMW and MINI ranges for Ramadan.

Prospective clients will be able to enjoy great savings and benefits on some of AJIA's most sought-after vehicles, during the campaign valid till May 31.

With every new BMW model purchased during Ramadan, customers will benefit from the BMW Service Inclusive package for five years or 100,000km and the BMW Repair Inclusive Package for five years or 200,000km, in addition to one-year free insurance and registration.

In the spirit of giving, AJIA will be providing customers with complimentary benefits aimed to provide a hassle-free ownership experience with every purchase.

In accordance with the spirit of giving and generosity, the BMW offer will include a complimentary weekend getaway at the luxurious Grand Hyatt Muscat with a specially curated dinner for two.

Customer will also have the chance to win a brand-new BMW Z4, a premium open-top sports car with an emotion-packed body design and a stunning driver-focused interior.

Ibrahim al Habsi, general sales manager of Al Jenaibi International Automobiles LLC said, "The holy month is upon us, and it brings with it joyful moments and exclusive benefits across AJIA's entire BMW range. We are thrilled to be able to offer our customers such unique and fantastic deals and make it easy for them to own one of the world's best-loved vehicles."

Valid until May 31, with every MINI vehicle purchase, customers will benefit from the exclusive MINI Service Inclusive Package for five years or



100,000km, and MINI Repair Inclusive Package for five years or 200,000km, as well as one-year free insurance and registration.

In line with the spirit of generosity, MINI car buyers will receive a complimentary weekend getaway at the luxurious Grand Hyatt Muscat, as well as a specially curated dinner for two.

Muna al Busaidi, MINI brand manager of Al Jenaibi International Automobiles LLC said, "Ramadan is an incredibly important time of year for AJIA, as we tend to see a growing increase in interest and desire from consumers wanting to own their

dream vehicle.

"We have embraced the holy month by offering incredible benefits on our range of MINI models, guaranteeing every customer's purchasing journey is as convenient and enjoyable as possible.

"We are confident that our Ramadan campaign will be received well by car buyers as there has never been a better time to own a premium vehicle from AJIA."

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



NBO empowers Oman's young graduates

National Bank of Oman (NBO) has signed a Memorandum of Understanding for the launch of its newest corporate social responsibility (CSR) initiative, Innovation Incubator.

Launched in collaboration with the SMEs Development Authority, Oman Academy for SMEs, and Paradigm Consulting, the programme will teach young graduates how to design their own start-up FinTechs. Attended by Qais al Tobi, acting vice president of the SMEs Development Authority, and Hassan Shaban, chief government banking & alliances of NBO, the signing marks the latest milestone in the bank's active CSR programme, which focuses on fostering Oman's young people and equipping them with the skills and knowledge they need to contribute to the development of the nation.

NBO will also select up to 15 of its employees to become certified coaches. They will help the graduates to connect to potential investors and identify bigger opportunities beyond. Sherifa al Maskari, head of brand at NBO, said, "At NBO, innovation is at the core of what we do and we are adamant to pass it on to the next generation. As one of the most significant and upcoming technological trends in the new financial age, FinTechs are an important area of knowledge for those in, and those wanting to enter, the finance and IT industries."

OPPO Reno Glow adds to glitter of Eid

The celebration of Eid al Fitr in the region is surrounded by light, love and a glow of happiness. Global technology brand, OPPO, joins the celebrations with its Reno Glow finish on the latest OPPO Reno5 Pro 5G smartphones.

The glittery finish on the phone's Galactic Silver and Starlight Black colours, adds to the shimmer and sparkle that mark one of the most important festivals in Oman and the Arab world.

Tailored for the trendy, young creators, the Reno Glow finish adds a first-of-its-kind aesthetic experience to the recently-launched Reno5 Pro 5G. The OPPO patented AG glass cutting technique is now in its second generation and delivers a fingerprint-resistant matte finish on the glass back cover of the phone, while also making it shimmer like a million diamonds embedded into a moonlit ocean.

Adding a touch of glamour to the festive celebrations, the dazzling finish is best flaunted while using the phone's 50MP all-scene expert camera to capture precious Eid memories.

Showing off a fashion forward look, the Reno Glow finish is designed to attract attention and compliments. Tarek Zaki, senior product manager at OPPO Middle

The OPPO Reno5 Series of smartphones are now available at major retailers and e-commerce platforms in Oman, at a retail price of RO299.9 for the Reno5 Pro 5G, RO209.9 for the Reno5 5G and RO159.9 for the Reno5 Z 5G. For more information, visit www.oppo.com/ae.



Dhofar Poultry sets freshness benchmark

Recognized as the pioneers in its field, Dhofar Poultry Company (DPC) has maintained its promise of delivering the highest quality fresh and frozen chicken in the sultanate. With a steady increase in its customer base over the years which stands as a testament to the rising popularity of its products, DPC is currently the fastest growing Omani brand in the segment.

DPC owes its thriving success to the consistency it has maintained in ensuring its products meet the highest standards of unflinching quality, unique taste and utmost freshness. Special care is also taken so that all the birds are slaughtered by hand as per Islamic rites, thus guaranteeing consumers 100 per cent halal chicken.

"We believe that to bring a nutritious and tasty meal to the table, the process must start at the grassroots level. DPC takes into consideration a number of parameters that start right from the environment the birds are raised in to the kind of feed they are given. While the Dhofar region provides the ideal climate for raising chicken, we ensure that the birds receive an all-organic diet comprising of natural grains that are free from any animal additives. This ensures that DPC's chicken products are always high on nutritional value," said Salim bin Taman al Maashani, CEO of Dhofar Poultry Company.

The feed for the birds comprises of soya and maize which is rich in vitamins, minerals and fibre. The strategic location of the facility also ensures stringent biosecurity protocols that ensure to prevent and control the introduction and spread of infectious agent to the birds. With the right food and water management, ideal living temperatures and daily monitoring to ensure the birds are free from diseases, DPC takes great efforts to maintain the highest quality products. Maashani added, "Our focus on rearing quality chicken is complemented with our state-of-the-art units like the hatchery, the broiler and a special processing plant. International standards of hygiene protocols are maintained."



Iran's Khatibzadeh confirms Saudi talks

Tehran, Iran - Iran's Foreign Ministry on Monday for the first time confirmed the Islamic republic is holding talks with regional rival Saudi Arabia, but said it is 'too soon' to discuss the results.

Media reports, later confirmed by diplomatic and Iraqi government sources, revealed that Iranian and Saudi officials met in Baghdad in April, their first high-level meeting since Riyadh cut diplomatic ties with Tehran in 2016.

"The purpose of the talks was both bilateral and regional," Iran's Foreign Ministry spokesman Saeed Khatibzadeh told reporters. "But let us wait and see the results of these talks ... it might still be too soon to talk about the details of the negotiations," he added, noting that Iran has 'always welcomed such talks at any level and in any shape'.

The neighbouring countries cut ties in 2016 after Iranian protestors attacked Saudi diplomatic missions following the kingdom's execution of a revered Shiite cleric.

The talks in Baghdad, facilitated by Iraqi Prime Minister Mustafa al Kadhem, remained secret until the Financial Times reported that a first meeting was held on April 9.

An Iraqi government official confirmed the talks to AFP, while a Western diplomat said he had been 'briefed in advance' about the effort to 'broker a better relationship and decrease tensions'.

Iran on April 29 welcomed a 'change of tone' from the Saudi Crown Prince Mohammad bin Salman towards it after he called for a 'good and special relationship' with Tehran.

The regional rivals have backed opposite sides of several regional conflicts, from Syria to Yemen, where a Saudi-led coalition is fighting the Huthi rebels. Iran backs the Huthis, who are battling the Saudi-led military that intervened in Yemen's war in 2015.



Iran's Foreign Ministry spokesman Saeed Khatibzadeh

Myanmar's Suu Kyi to appear in court



A protester holds up a poster featuring Aung San Suu Kyi

Yangon, Myanmar - A judge on Monday ordered Myanmar's deposed leader Aung San Suu Kyi to appear in person in court for the first time on May 24, her lawyer said, after weeks of delays in her case. The Nobel laureate has not been publicly seen since she was detained in a February 1 coup, when the military ousted her from power and re-installed its rule.

She was subsequently hit with a series of charges, and her legal team has faced an uphill battle to get a private audience with their client. Multiple court hearings in the capital Naypyidaw have seen Suu Kyi - who attended via video conferencing from under house arrest - express frustration at the pace of the proceedings.

During the latest hearing Monday, a judge ordered for her cases to be heard with her present in a special courtroom near her residence.

"She will appear in person in court on May 24," lawyer Khin Maung Zaw told AFP. However, he cautioned that the outstanding issue of not being able to meet privately with her still remains.

"The problem is not solved yet because the police did not answer on whether they can arrange our meeting," he said, adding that private counsel is 'the right of the defendant'.

The 75 year old former leader has been charged six times since her arrest.

The charges include flouting coronavirus restrictions during last year's election campaign and possessing unlicensed walkie-talkies.

The most serious charge alleges that she violated the country's colonial-era Official Secrets Act - a case that is pending in a court in commercial hub Yangon.

The junta has also accused her of corruption - though no charges have been filed - alleging that she received bribes of gold bars and cash.

The junta has continuously justified her arrest and the coup as a way to defend democracy, alleging electoral fraud by her National League for Democracy Party, which swept November's elections in a landslide.

Taliban, Afghan govt declare Eid ceasefire

Kabul, Afghanistan - The Taliban and Afghan government on Monday declared a three-day ceasefire for this week's Eid al Fitr holiday, following a sharp spike in violence as Washington goes about withdrawing its remaining troops from Afghanistan.



An internally displaced family flees from fighting in Lashkar Gah

Violence has soared since May 1 - the deadline missed by the United States to withdraw the last of its troops - and while the Taliban have avoided engaging American forces, attacks against government and civilian targets have not stopped.

In the latest attack, the Interior Ministry said on Monday that at least 11 people were killed by a bomb that struck a bus overnight in south-eastern Zabul province.

That followed Saturday's carnage outside a school in the capital Kabul when a series of bombs killed at least 50 people and wounded more than 100 - most of them young girls.

Early on Monday, the Taliban instructed their fighters 'to halt all offensive operations against the enemy countrywide from the first till the third day of Eid'.

That was matched later in the day by Afghan President Ashraf Ghani, who went further by urging the Taliban to announce a permanent truce to end the bloody war.

The Taliban and government have declared similar ceasefires in the past to mark religious holidays.

AFP

Hundreds hurt in Jerusalem clashes between Israelis and Palestinians



A police vehicle left unsecured on an area strewn with stones thrown by Palestinians during clashes with Israeli security forces, in Jerusalem's Old City on Monday (AFP)

Jerusalem - Hundreds were wounded in new clashes on Monday between Palestinians and Israeli security forces in Jerusalem as a planned march marking Israel's 1967 takeover of the holy city threatened to further inflame tensions.

Palestinians hurled projectiles at Israeli officers in riot gear who fired rubber bullets, stun grenades and tear gas, an AFP correspondent at the scene said, following a night of sporadic clashes.

"There are hundreds of people injured from the clashes [and about 50 were hospitalised]," the Palestinian Red Crescent said about the latest unrest since violence escalated following the last Friday prayers of the holy month of Ramadan.

The clashes were the latest in days of the worst such disturbances in Jerusalem since 2017, fuelled by a years-long bid by Jewish settlers to take over nearby Palestinian homes in Israeli-annexed east Jerusalem.

A key court hearing scheduled for Monday on Sheikh Jarrah, the flash-point east Jerusalem neighbourhood at the centre of the property dispute, has been postponed.

There were fears of further violence in the city ahead of a planned march on Monday by Israelis to commemorate Israel's takeover of Jerusalem in the 1967 Six-Day War, an anniversary known as 'Jerusalem Day' in the Jewish state.

Israeli police had, as of Sunday, approved the march.

The leader of the far-right Religious Zionism party, Bezalel Smotrich, has also announced a visit on Monday to the tense Sheikh Jarrah district.

Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu on Sunday defended Israel's tough response to the protests and rioting.

"We will uphold law and order - vigorously and responsibly," Netanyahu said while vowing to 'guard freedom of worship for all faiths'.



Palestinian medics evacuate a wounded protester from the Al Aqsa Mosque compound, in Jerusalem's Old City on Monday (AFP)

'Escalatory practices'

But the Israeli role in the hostilities - especially Friday's clashes at the Al Aqsa Mosque compound, Islam's third holiest site - has met widespread criticism.

All six Arab nations that have diplomatic ties with Israel - Egypt, Jordan, the United Arab Emirates, Bahrain, Morocco and Sudan - have condemned the Jewish state.

In Jordan, the custodian of Jerusalem's holy Islamic and Christian sites, King Abdullah II condemned 'Israeli violations and escalatory practices at the blessed Al Aqsa Mosque'.

Jordan and Egypt both summoned Israeli envoys on Sunday to lodge protests.

Tunisia said the UN Security Council was to hold a closed-door meeting on Monday, at its request, on the violence. The Middle East quartet of envoys from the European Union, Russia, the United States and the United Nations - and Pope Francis - have all called for calm.

"Israeli authorities must exercise maximum restraint and respect the right to freedom of peaceful assembly," UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres said.

The Red Crescent said a total of more than 300 Palestinians were wounded on Friday and Saturday nights.

The UN children's agency Unicef said that over two days, 29 Palestinian children had been injured in east Jerusalem, including a one-year-old.

Court case delayed

The unrest of past weeks in east Jerusalem, which Palestinians claim as their future capital, has multiple causes. Much of the recent violence stems from a long-running legal effort by Jewish settler groups to evict several Palestinians from their homes in Sheikh Jarrah.

A lower court ruling earlier this year backing the settlers' decades-old claim to the plots infuriated Palestinians.

A Supreme Court hearing on a

Palestinian appeal had been set for Monday, but the Justice Ministry said on Sunday that in light of 'all the circumstances' it would delay the hearing.

Old City shopkeeper Mohammad said Israeli police told him he must close Monday afternoon, when Israeli Jews plan to march with Israeli flags to mark Jerusalem's 'reunification'.

Israel annexed east Jerusalem following the 1967 takeover, a move not recognised by most of the international community.

The unrest has spread across the Palestinian territories, including demonstrations and clashes in the occupied West Bank.

Palestinian President Mahmud Abbas has expressed 'full support for our heroes in Al Aqsa'.

Hamas group, which controls the Gaza Strip, has also voiced support for the Palestinian protesters and warned Israel of retribution if evictions proceed in Sheikh Jarrah.

AFP



A truck carrying an oxygen generation plant sent from the UK capable of producing 500 litres of oxygen a minute arrives by road from India's capital Delhi at Ajmer, in the western Indian state of Rajasthan on Monday (AFP)

Britain eases virus curbs, India outbreak persists

London, UK - Britain on Monday announced a further easing of its coronavirus lockdown, joining several European nations in gradually reopening their economies, but India remained in the grip of a devastating outbreak.

Rapid vaccination programmes have allowed a number of wealthy nations to start taking steps towards normality, but the virus is still surging in many countries and concerns are growing about global vaccine inequality.

The pandemic has claimed close to 3.3mn lives worldwide and Britain has the highest death toll in Europe, but its successful vaccination programme has allowed the authorities to start relaxing curbs.

Prime Minister Boris Johnson's announcements on the latest measures will come into effect on May 17, including the reopening of indoor seating in pubs and restaurants.

When asked during a BBC interview on Sunday if hugging would be allowed, senior minister Michael Gove said, "Without prejudice to a broader review of social distancing... friendly contact, intimate contact between friends and family is something that we want to see restored."

Cinemas are also expected to reopen, as well as some large indoor venues after the government held several pilot events - including a rock concert - to test safety measures.

This follows Spain's lifting of a state of emergency in place since October, allowing people to travel between regions.

"It's like New Year's," said 28 year old Oriol Corbella in Barcelona, where the end of the curfew was met with shouts, applause and music.

In Germany, people fully vaccinated against COVID-19 were exempt from many restrictions from Sunday after the government passed new legislation.

Cyprus on Monday is also exiting a third partial lockdown with a new coronavirus 'safety pass' system to allow people to move freely.



This file photo shows a woman walking past the National COVID Memorial Wall adorned with hearts and messages in memory of those who lost their lives to COVID-19, on the south embankment of the River Thames in London on April 30 (AFP)

India variant worries

India, suffering from one of the worst outbreaks in the world, reported nearly 370,000 fresh infections and more than 3,700 new deaths on Monday.

The devastating wave has overwhelmed India's healthcare system, and experts have said the official figures for cases and fatalities are much lower than the actual numbers.

The situation in India has been worsened by a new variant, which is more contagious and there are fears it could potentially dodge some vaccine protections, the World Health Organization's chief scientist Soumya Swaminathan told AFP on Saturday.

The Indian outbreak has spread to some of its neighbours, with Nepal reeling from a worrying spike in cases.

Because of the outbreak in the Himalayan nation, China will set up a 'separation line' on the summit of Mount Everest - which straddles the

China-Nepal border - to avoid possible infections by climbers from Nepal, state media reported.

Dozens have been taken ill from the Everest base camp in recent weeks.

'What about the poor?'

The United States remains the worst-hit nation in the world, with the high-est number of known fatalities and infections.

But its actual death toll may be higher than the official figure of 581,000, with a University of Washington study released last week estimating deaths at more than 900,000.

"I think there's no doubt... that we are and have been undercounting," top US pandemic advisor Anthony Fauci told NBC's *Meet The Press* on Sunday.

The United States was battered by the pandemic but since January, new infections have come down as more than 114mn people have been fully vaccinated.

Some travellers from hard-hit Latin America are flying in to get jabbed.

Dozens lined up at a pop-up vaccination booth in Florida's Miami Beach to get a free, single-dose Johnson & Johnson shot - with no proof of residence required.

"In my country, (COVID-19) is getting out of hand and there's not much chance we'll have access to the vaccine soon," said 40 year old accountant Maria Bonilla, who arrived on Saturday from Honduras.

But Miami Beach city commissioner David Richardson, who oversees the facility, told AFP he has mixed feelings about the vaccine tourists and urged the US government to send doses overseas.

"My only concern is that it seems that the people who can afford to buy an airfare can come to the United States and get a vaccine now," he said.

"What about the poor people in South America?"

AFP

Australian court says India travel ban legal

Sydney, Australia - An emergency legal challenge to Australia's contentious ban on citizens returning from COVID-struck India failed on Monday, dashing stranded travellers' hopes of an immediate return.



Australian Prime Minister Scott Morrison, in Melbourne on May 6

Federal Justice Thomas Thawley ruled the government had not overstepped its biosecurity powers in banning Australians from returning home temporarily.

Prime Minister Scott Morrison earlier this month shut the door to all travel from India, fearing a large number of COVID-positive arrivals would overwhelm Australia's already strained quarantine facilities.

The move stranded an estimated 9,000 Australian citizens and threatened them with large fines and jail time if they tried to dodge the ban and return on non-direct flights.

Thawley ruled that Morrison acted within the law, dashing the hopes of a 73 year old Australian man who brought the case as he tries to return from Bangalore.

During the hearing, a government lawyer argued that biosecurity rules are a 'bulldozer' that can clear away any other rights.

The judge did not rule on the more complex question of whether the decision was unconstitutional, an issue that is set to be taken up at a later date.

After widespread public outcry, Morrison indicated that the ban will not be extended beyond May 15.

But with the pandemic still raging and access to Australia set to be severely restricted until at least 2022, the case was being closely watched.

Since March 2020, Australians have been barred from travelling overseas and a hard-to-get individual exemption is needed for foreign visitors to enter the country.

Australia has no widespread community transmission of COVID-19, but has seen several outbreaks emerge from hotel quarantine facilities, causing disruptive city lockdowns.

Germany lifts priority limits to offer J&J jabs



German Health Minister Jens Spahn at a press meet, in Berlin on Monday

Berlin, Germany - Germany on Monday opened access to Johnson & Johnson's vaccines to all adults, lifting a priority system determining who gets the jabs first.

With the majority of people over 60 expected to be already vaccinated by June, Health Minister Jens Spahn said authorities decided not to restrict

the jabs to older people over very rare thrombosis risks.

Rather, younger people can choose to take the vaccine, which only requires one shot, after consultation with their doctors, he said.

Spahn noted that some 10mn doses of Johnson & Johnson vaccines would be delivered over June and July - when older people who want the jabs would already have been vaccinated.

"So we are lifting prioritisation for Johnson & Johnson, like we have done for AstraZeneca... so that everyone can have the possibility of getting vaccinated after clarifications with their doctors and based on their individual decisions," said Spahn.

The move would allow Germany 'to work on this vaccination campaign with greater speed, in a pragmatic manner'.

Germany had initially recommended AstraZeneca vaccines only for older people following concerns over several blood clotting cases among younger recipients of the vaccine.

But it has since opened the jabs up to all adults who want them after consultations with doctors.

The European Medicines Agency has said that blood clots should be listed as a rare side effect of both the Johnson & Johnson and AstraZeneca jabs but that the benefits continue to outweigh risks.

Both vaccines use the same adenovirus vector technology, unlike jabs made by BioNTech/Pfizer or Moderna, which are messenger RNA vaccines.

Ireland begins easing pandemic restrictions

Dublin, Ireland - Ireland on Monday lifted domestic travel restrictions and began a phased reopening of non-essential retailers in the most significant loosening of pandemic curbs so far this year.



Irish Prime Minister Micheal Martin gets the first jab of Covishield in Cork

After more than five months of severe restrictions, a ban on travel between counties was finally lifted to allow citizens to move freely throughout the Irish Republic.

Meanwhile hairdressers and other personal services, as well as non-essential shops, were permitted to trade once again on an 'appointment only' basis.

Galleries, museums, libraries and other cultural attractions were also allowed to unlock their doors to the public.

Around 12,000 businesses are now due to reopen this week according to deputy prime minister Leo Varadkar, who also serves as enterprise and trade minister. 'This is a moment that businesses across Ireland have been waiting for,' he said in a statement. 'This has been the longest lockdown since the pandemic began. I am determined to do all we can to ensure that it is the last.'

Next Monday retail businesses are set to fully reopen and the government estimates 100,000 staff will return to work throughout this month.

AFP

YOUR DAILY HOROSCOPE



ARIES MARCH 21-APRIL 19

Aries sign people will get auspicious results today. Things and situations will remain favourable in the workplace. You will remain mentally and physically agile. Older problems are likely to get resolved today. People will appreciate you in personal and professional contexts. Your income and the items of comfort are set to increase significantly. Your familial ethos will remain good.



TAURUS APRIL 20-MAY 20

Taurus sign people will have to face some physical and emotional challenges. A health problem is likely to afflict you and keep your expenses very high. Things will remain normal in the workplace. You are advised to control lethargy as well as greed. Your familial life will remain normal. Take care of your mother's health.



GEMINI MAY 21-JUNE 21

Gemini sign people are likely to maintain a very soft and melodious speech today as a result of which a lot of your work will get through. Take care of your health as your ongoing problems will start abating. Your life partner will support you. A new source of income will appear suddenly. Your brother and a close friend will support you. You will have to spend money on something.



CANCER JUNE 22-JULY 22

Cancer sign people are likely to get good results in proportion to the hard work put in by them on the professional front. Your father and senior officers will help you in performing daily duties. This will be a day of making monetary gains. You will experience relief in health-related issues. There will be some conflicts and misunderstandings between lovers.



LEO JULY 23-AUGUST 22

Leo sign people will get adequate backing from a positive stroke of luck. You are likely to get some kind of professional gain today. The ongoing issues of mental worry and stress will abate a bit. Your familial and marital life will remain good. You are likely to make monetary gains today. Control angry outbursts in the workplace.



VIRGO AUGUST 23-SEPTEMBER 22

Virgo sign people are likely to find solace after performing certain religious rituals. You may have to cope with health problems today. Do not be negligent when it comes to taking medicines or treatment. Your performance will be great in the workplace. Business people are likely to make gains today. You will make gains and also expenses. Keep away from all kinds of stress.



LIBRA SEPTEMBER 23-OCTOBER 22

Libra sign people are likely to make solid gains in the workplace. The salaried people may get promoted to a higher post. Business people may acquire new deals. You will succeed in strengthening your financial profile. Talking to new people about business will prove helpful. Your marital and familial life will remain good. You will be fit and fine and make monetary gains.



SCORPIO OCTOBER 23-NOVEMBER 21

Scorpio sign people will enjoy the patronage of senior officers in the workplace. The salaried people will get good news. You will make gains on account of your enemies and they might request you for some kind of help. You may have to spend money on household items. The domestic ethos will be cheerful. The support of your life partner will be useful in making achievements.



SAGITTARIUS NOVEMBER 22-DECEMBER 21

Sagittarius sign people will manage to resolve their financial struggles. There will be an increase in your income. Some kind of misunderstanding is possible between you and your colleagues in the workplace so you must remain patient. Your luck will prove helpful in many ways. Things will remain normal when it comes to health. Your life partner will do something good for you.



CAPRICORN DECEMBER 22-JANUARY 19

Capricorn sign people will have to put in a lot of work in the workplace. There will be some excessive running around for work. You are warned against getting aggressive in discussions with your colleagues and officers. Take care of your mother's health as she may suffer some pain. Your family members will support you. You are likely to make a minor monetary gain.



AQUARIUS JANUARY 20-FEBRUARY 18

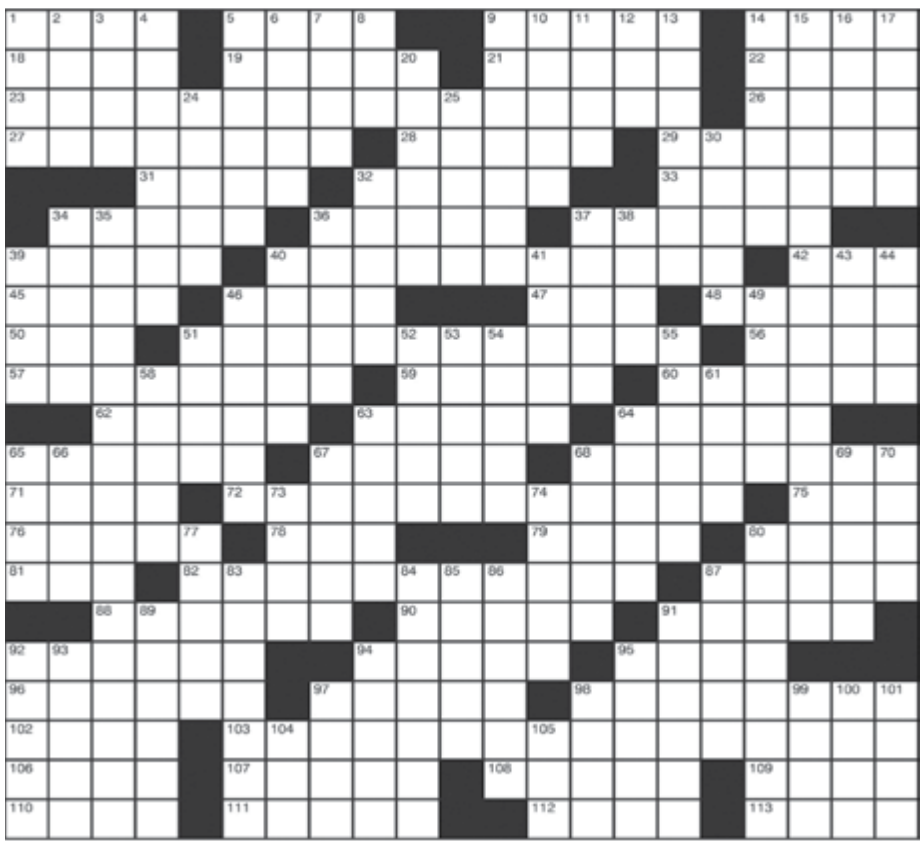
Aquarius sign people will succeed if they appear in an interview today. You will remain very confident about your work today. Your sibling's support will enable you to resolve a problem. Your life partner will shower love and affection on you. You will be drawn towards religious rituals and also spend money on them. Your health will remain good.



PISCES FEBRUARY 19-MARCH 20

Pisces sign people will succeed in their efforts to make money. Your familial life will go on smoothly. You are likely to remain extremely busy with a specific project in the workplace even though your colleagues will extend full support. Take care of your health as an eye-related problem will afflict you in a major way.

DAILY CROSSWORD



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- ACROSS**

1 Feeler

5 Tartness

9 Prelude

14 Field measure

18 Jewish month

19 Roman magistrate

21 Nerve networks

22 Bark, of a sort

23 Secretary of State under Washington

26 Dies ____

27 Brings into conflict

28 Robert, Alan and Frances

29 Soprano Conner

31 Actresses Archer and Margret

32 Refrigerant

33 Discharges

34 Celebrated, in a way

36 San ____, Calif.
- 37 Certify

39 Kind of berry

40 Secretary of State in 1811

42 "Batman's" Christian

45 Black birds

46 Group of turtles

47 Seven, in Old Rome

48 Sudden outpouring

50 Levin or Gershwin

51 Jefferson's Secretary of State

56 Rare bird

57 Pottery casseroles

59 Straighten

60 Manhattan or Montreal

62 Confederate Jefferson

63 Derogatory

64 Hebrew bushel

65 Tacks
- 67 Cartographer's tome

68 Ambitious ones

71 Official records

72 Hoover's Secretary of State

75 Classic car

76 Anoint, old style

78 Aloha neckpiece

79 Expression assent

80 Capital of Manche

81 Lease

82 Truman's Secretary of State

87 Dutch painter Jan

88 Craving

90 TV's Anderson and namesakes

91 Ogile

92 ____, Iripino, town near Naples

94 Hangings fabric

95 Aperture

96 Heavenly foods
- 97 Recoils

98 Springers

102 "... what ____ for love"

103 Jackson's Secretary of State

106 Amnion membrane

107 Climbing vine

108 Choose

109 Prohibited

110 Gaelic

111 Pulls violently

112 Entities

113 Trudge

DOWN

1 Gourmet treat

2 Take ____ view

3 Mary's pet

4 Apportions

5 Aft of

6 Pastoral poems

7 Cants

8 Bush, at one time

9 Condemn in advance

10 Operated again

11 Singer/songwriter Redding

12 German article

13 "X-Men" villain

14 Playwright's ploys

15 Eisenhower's Secretary of State

16 Blithe

17 Dueling swords

20 Game with 32 cards

24 Copier liquid

25 Swiss painter and others

30 Pulitzer winner James and others

32 Reputations

34 Warning light

35 An FDR Secretary of State

36 Often they are alphas?

37 Flavoring seed

38 Singing group

39 Redact

40 Succeeded by John Quincy
- Adams

41 Sheepish

43 Solar deity

44 Geek

46 Exile

49 Certain bear

51 Swing music

52 Virile

53 Nom de plume

54 Biblical verb

55 Japan

58 Assessment amount

61 Part of the leg

63 Groove

64 Ruhr metropolis

65 False god

66 A teen's problem

67 Concerning

68 Weapon categories

69 CSA general

70 Promptly

73 Guido's notes

74 Process: suffix

77 Wealthy Minneapolis suburb

80 Data collectors, for short

83 Unevenly

84 Actresses Danes and Forlani

85 Anticipated

86 Isolate

87 Irritate

89 Deal with

91 Inclines

92 Ecclesiastical vestment

93 Speeders' bane

94 Express gratitude

95 Mace or cumin

97 Portman's "Black ____"

98 Pet reindeer in "Frozen"

99 List extender, for short

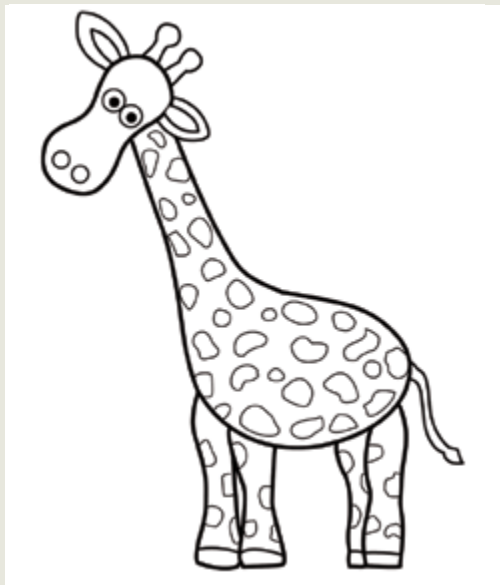
100 Timber wolf

101 Comfy

104 Rad. times 2

105 UN labor org.

KIDS COLOURING



TEST YOUR KNOWLEDGE

1. In an atomic explosion, enormous energy is released which is due to

- a. conversion of chemical energy into heat energy
- b. conversion of mechanical energy into nuclear energy
- c. conversion of mass into energy
- d. conversion of neutrons into protons

2. Isotopes are separated by

- a. crystallisation
- b. sublimation
- c. distillation
- d. filtration

3. The wavelength of X-rays is of the order of

- a. 10 micron
- b. 1 angstrom
- c. 1 cm
- d. 1 m

Answers: 1.c, 2.c, 3. b

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

WORD BUILDER

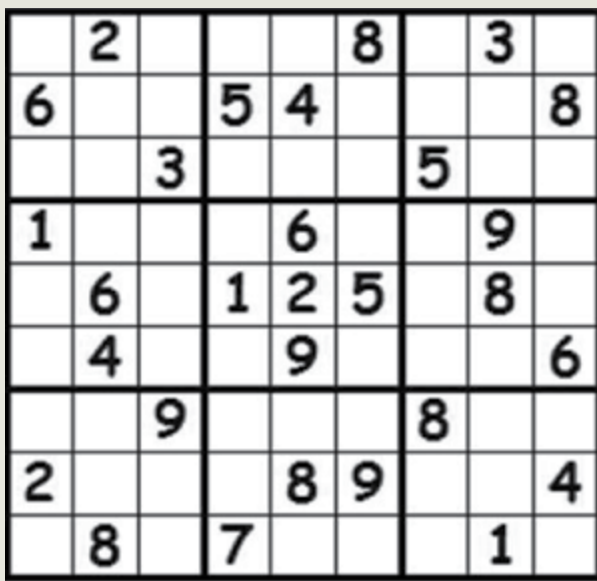
You have three minutes to find all the words contained in this word.

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



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



SUDOKU EASY ANSWER



DAILY CROSSWORD ANSWERS (MAY 09)



EID REVELRY

How to spend Eid at home



This year, once again Eid will be a home-bound affair. So make the most of it by planning some interesting ways to spend quality time at home with the family and make the festive season memorable in a unique way.

Spruce up

Clean up and decorate your home as well as car. Use festoons, balloons and home made decorations and lights to bring in a festive atmosphere in your home. Decorate each room and passage differently – use lamps, candles, banners with messages and personal wishes for family members. Wash and clean up your car - spruce up the interiors with new seat covers or floor mats, place stuffed toys and new cushions.

Dress up

You don't have to spend your holiday at home in your pyjamas or shorts – dress up, choose your favourite outfit or a new one and ask all members of the family to dress up in festive attire. Take family photos and instantly send them out to friends and relative with your Eid wishes and greetings.

Drive and wish

Go for a short drive around your block or locality. Don't visit friends or relatives but drive past their villas or apartments and wave out or shout our 'Eid Mubarak'. Inform them in advance about your arrival time so that they can come to the window or balcony to wave out.

Cook together

Plan your festive lunch/dinner and assign tasks to all family members so that everyone has a role



to play with regard to treats and snacks, salads and soups, main course and desserts. This way, the burden of cooking need not be upon just one or two members. Decorate your dinner table, give it a restaurant feel. Bring out your special crockery and cutlery from the showcase and dine in style. If you want to avoid cooking, order your favourite dishes from outlets that are open and offer home delivery. Make sure to place your orders well before meal time to have them delivered on time.

Do a barbecue

If you do have the luxury of a compound or outdoor seating area within your premises, bring out your barbecue set, marinate stuff for grilling and add

some fun to your meal time with items straight off the grill. This is ideal for making each meal feel different indoors.

Open presents

Have a special time together for presenting gifts and opening them together. Let all family members be present together and share their joys over gifts as well as offer gratitude in different ways.

Have a henna session

Get Henna cones from the supermarket and enjoy a henna session together. Create interesting designs on hands/arms and feet and let male members join in the fun by sharing their skill or creativity.

ZOOM, BOOM, & CARD ROOM

Organise Zoom meets

Organise Zoom meetings with other family members who are away, or with relatives and friends. Share experiences and pleasantries, sing together or share jokes – have a nice time of interesting interaction using technology to the best. Give a name for your Zoom interaction and ask every participant to introduce himself/herself in a special way and hold out a unique wish. Include the children in family interaction or have special sessions for children, ladies, cousins, parents, and grandparents.

Enjoy music together

Have a Karaoke session in the family and insist on all members participating. Appoint a DJ and enjoy popular music together. Have sing-song session, offer prizes and appreciation points or vote for the best singer at home.

Watch interesting programmes on television that the entire family can watch together and discuss/debate over it. Induce children to watch educative as well as entertaining programmes and enjoy them together

Play cards, board games

Now's the time for family bonding. Sit-down games like, cards, carrom and board games are not meant just for children, they have a unique way of bringing family members together. Set aside a time, post lunch, for the family to relax playing such games together. Award points, maintain a scorecard and provide gifts for winners.

Take up group hobbies, like gardening

Growing indoor plants, caring for them, landscaping and decorating your lawn or compound is a good passtime and needs many hands to make work light. Get potted plants, soil and manure and get down to earth, quite literally. It is a really fruitful passtime (no pun intended). You may also borrow saplings and cuttings as well as expertise from friends and neighbours and start your own home garden. If plant nurseries are closed, supermarkets also have a few plants as well as seeds, that would be helpful.

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Biryanis around the world

Hyderabadi Pakki Biryani

It was initially conceived as a dish under Asaf Jaha I, the appointed Governor of Deccan by Aurangzeb. The usual components of the dish are rice, meat (gosht) and spices. The pakki biryani comprises cooked rice and cooked meat made in alternative layers and cooked on a flame. The Hyderabadi Biryani is rendered spicy than any other form of Biryani.

Sheherzahde Biryani

Traditional Iranian style biryani layered with marinated fish and fried onions. Topped with raisins and cashews. The aroma of rose water is beautiful in this biryani recipe.

Malabar Biryani

A very popular dish among the community of Malabar Muslims, this variation of the dish originated in Kerala. Although the components of meat and spices are similar to the other varieties, how this biryani differs from the others is by the choice of its rice. They use an unusual type of rice grain known as Khyma, a small-grain thin rice.

Sindhi Biryani

This is a Biryani flavoured in Pakistan, as it prevailed in the previously known Sindh region of the country before the partition. It has since then, evolved to become a significant part of Sindhi and Pakistani cuisine. Truly exotic in taste, this biryani is a treasure of sorts for its aromatic spices and flavour.

Kashmiri Biryani

Kashmiri cuisine faces a mix of influences over time. The first of biryanis were a result of the Mughal Emperor's frequent visit to the heavenly state of Kashmir which used to be a retreat. Other than the royalty of the Kashmiri Biryani, it stands out for the addition of asafoetida.

Thai Biryani

Kao mok gai is the Thai version of chicken biryani which literally means "chicken buried in rice". It is usually made with chicken drumsticks and rice. The dish was probably bought to Thailand by Muslim Indians but it is today enjoyed by all Thais.

Kachchi Biryani

This is a type of biryani in which (unlike other biryanis which use cooked or semi-cooked rice) raw chicken and raw rice are both cooked simultaneously in a sizzling, spicy gravy. Traditionally, it is cooked in clay oven and the cooking pot is sealed with flour dough to allow the biryani to cook in its own steam.



MUTTON BIRYANI

If you are getting set for Eid, planning your festive dinner is a huge part of the preparation – this year, only for the family. And what better way to light up your dinner table than with a sumptuous spread of biryani. There are numerous ways in which people prepare biryani all around the world but the basic concept remains the same – meat cooked in a spicy gravy and simmered together with alternate layers of fragrant long-grain rice. Here's an easy-to-do recipe for mutton biryani that simply cannot go wrong, even if you are a novice in the kitchen:

Ingredients

- 1kg mutton - cut into medium pieces
- 750g basmati rice - soaked for half an hour
- 1 cup oil/ghee
- 4 onions - finely sliced
- 2 green chillies - slit
- 2tbsp ginger garlic paste
- 5-6 tomatoes - finely chopped
- 1 bay leaf, 4 cloves
- 2 cinnamon sticks (3cm each)
- 4 cardamoms
- ½ tsp shahi jeera

- 2tsp red chili powder
- 2tsp coriander powder
- 4 cups yogurt
- Salt, to taste
- 2tbsp lemon juice
- A small bunch of coriander leaves - chopped
- A small bunch of mint leaves - chopped

Method

Mix the red chilli powder, coriander powder, salt, tomato, yogurt and ginger garlic paste to the mutton pieces and set aside for at least an hour.

Heat oil/ghee in a large pan and add the bay leaf, cloves, cinnamon sticks, cardamom, shahi jeera and green chilli, and fry for 1 minute. Add onions and fry till golden brown. Add the marinated mutton to the onions, mix well, cover and cook on medium flame till mutton is well cooked and the oil starts leaving the sides of the pan.

Mix in the lemon juice, coriander leaves and mint leaves. Switch off the flame and set aside while you get the rice ready.

Boil sufficient water in a large vessel to cook the rice. Add salt and 1tbsp of oil to the water. (The oil helps to keep the

rice grains separate.) Add rice to the boiling water and cook to 70% doneness.

Now, in a large pot, add half of the cooked mutton with gravy. Add a layer of partially cooked rice over it. Add a teaspoon of ghee and a few mint leaves on top of the rice. Then add the second half of the mutton and cover with a final layer of rice. Again, top with a teaspoon of ghee and few mint leaves. Cover lid and seal edges with foil to prevent steam from escaping. Simmer on low flame or place on a hotplate (tawa) and cook on low heat for 15 minutes.

Serve hot (through the layers), with raita as an ideal accompaniment.

Tips

Marinate the mutton with curds and spices overnight to tenderise it. Add juice of half lemon to the boiling water of the rice to prevent the grains from sticking to each other. For garnish: slice two onions, fry them till golden brown, and spread on top of the rice layer after the final simmer. Optional – peel 2-3 medium sized potatoes, cut in half and add halfway when mutton is cooking.



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I'M CONFIDENT OF A STRONG START ON MY DEBUT, SAYS AL FAISAL

First round of 2021 International GT Open series at Paul Ricard Circuit



Oman's Al Faisal al Zubair of Lechner Racing gets ready for a session during the 2021 International GT Open Winter Test in Barcelona last month

Ashok Purohit
Muscat

Ahead of his much-anticipated debut in the highly-competitive 2021 International GT Open series, young Oman's motor sports star Al Faisal al Zubair expressed confidence of a strong display as he prepared himself for the opening round at the Paul Ricard Circuit in Le Castellet, near Marseille in France.

The first round comprising two races will be held on May 15-16 with the practice session beginning on May 13. The seven-leg series will conclude in October.

Speaking ahead of his departure to France, the 23 year old Omani racer said, "I am looking forward to a strong start to the series. This is my debut series in the GT3 endurance racing and along with my experienced teammate, Andy Soucek of Spain, we hope to come up with good results during the campaign.

"It is going to be a new experience with a large grid comprising some of the top drivers from leading professional teams. "We will compete hard and will take each race as it comes."

Al Faisal and Soucek will be representing Lechner Racing and the

duo had a satisfactory outing in their new Porsche GT3 R car at the joint International GT Open and GT Cup Open Europe Barcelona Winter Test last month.

During the two-day Winter Test held at the Circuit de Barcelona-Catalunya, Al Faisal and Soucek competed with 17 other teams.

After the testing, Al Faisal said, "I am very happy and satisfied with my stint in new GT3 R car. I thoroughly enjoyed the car. I and Andy were very happy with the car's performance."

The two-time former Porsche GT3 Cup Challenge Middle East champion said, "I feel positive about the upcoming series and believe that we have a good package to provide stiff challenge to other teams during the season."

Al Faisal, who is fully backed by Oman-based Al Manar Financial Investments, will be competing in the Pro class at the GT Open.

The opening free practice will be on Thursday while Friday will witness two more free practice sessions followed by qualifying on Saturday morning.

The opening 70-minute race will be held later that evening while the second race will be on Sunday to conclude the opening round.

[@ashokmuscat](#)



Andy Soucek (left) and Al Faisal al Zubair of Lechner Racing

EXTRAS



Pakistan wrap up innings win to sweep Test series

ZIMBABWE VS PAKISTAN SECOND TEST: DAY FOUR

Harare, Zimbabwe - Pakistan captain Babar Azam lauded his players after they completed a successful southern Africa tour with a second straight innings victory over Zimbabwe on Monday.

It took Pakistan five overs to take the remaining Zimbabwe wicket to seal a win by an innings and 147 runs on the fourth day of the second Test at Harare Sports Club and take the series 2-0.

Shaheen Shah Afridi had Luke Jongwe caught behind for 37 to complete a five-wicket haul. He took five for 52. It saw him complete a five-wicket haul, becoming the third Pakistan bowler in the Test to do so after Hasan Ali and Nauman Ali. This is the first time in Pakistan history three bowlers have taken five wickets in a single Test, and just the sixth time overall.

Zimbabwe, who resumed at 220 for nine, were all out for 231.

Fast bowler Hasan Ali was named man of the series. He had match figures of nine for 89 in the first Test at the same venue and took a career-best five for 27 in the first innings of the second Test. Pakistan won the first Test by an innings and 116 runs.

It was Pakistan's fourth successive series win on a seven-week southern Africa tour. They beat South Africa 2-1 in ODIs and 3-1 in T20Is before defeating Zimbabwe 2-1 in a T20I series.

SCOREBOARD		
Pakistan 1st Innings 510 for eight decl		
Zimbabwe 1st Innings 132		
ZIMBABWE 2 nd INNINGS (FOLLOWING ON)		
K Kasuza	b Nauman Ali	22
T Musakanda	c Rizwan b Afridi	8
R Chakabva	c Azam b Nauman	80
B Taylor	c Rizwan b Afridi	49
M Shumba	c Butt b Nauman	16
L Jongwe	c Rizwan b Afridi	37
D Tiripano	lbw b Nauman	0
R Kaia	c Sajid Khan b Nauman	0
T Chisoro	b Afridi	8
R Ngarava	b Afridi	0
B Mazarabani	not out	4
Extras:	(b 1, lb 5, 1 nb)	7
TOTAL:	231 in 68 overs	
Fall of wickets: 1-13, 2-63, 3-142, 4-170, 5-188, 6-196, 7-196, 8-205, 9-205, 10-231		
Bowling: 5 Afridi 20-5-52-5, Tabish Khan 11-3-46-0, Hasan Ali 10-7-9-0, Sajid Khan 6-1-32-0, Nauman Ali 21-3-86-5		

India's tour of Sri Lanka to comprise ODIs and T20Is

Mumbai, India - India are set to tour Sri Lanka in July for a white-ball series comprising three ODIs and three T20s. As per Sri Lanka Cricket's proposed itinerary to the BCCI, accessed by *ESPNCricinfo*, the series will commence with the ODIs on July 13, 16, 19 followed by T20 segment on July 22, 24, 27.

The venues are yet to be finalised. It is understood that none of the India's white-ball players who are part of the travelling group for the World Test Championship (WTC) final and the England Test series will be part of the Sri Lanka series.

Zverev clinches second Madrid Open crown

Madrid, Spain - Alexander Zverev recovered from a set down to defeat Matteo Berrettini 6-7 (8-10), 6-4, 6-3 and win the Madrid Open for a second time Sunday as he clinched a fourth Masters 1000 title.

The German fifth seed recorded his third consecutive top-ten victory this week, having eliminated five-time Madrid champion Rafael Nadal and Dominic Thiem to reach the final.

Zverev, last year's US Open runner-up, added to his 2018 Madrid triumph as he denied Berrettini successive titles following the Italian's win in Belgrade last month. "It is great (to win this title), especially after losing my last three finals I played at Masters 1000 events," he said.

McIlroy snaps PGA victory drought at Quail Hollow

Washington, US - Rory McIlroy snapped an 18-month US PGA victory drought on Sunday, overcoming a tense last-hole dilemma to win his third Wells Fargo Championship by one stroke.

The 32 year old from Northern Ireland defied windy conditions to win his 19th career US PGA title, firing a final-round three-under par 68 to finish 72 holes at Quail Hollow in Charlotte, North Carolina, on ten-under 274. It was the first victory by McIlroy since the WGC HSBC Champions at Shanghai in November 2019.

Mexico's Abraham Ancer was second on 275 after a closing 66 with Norway's Viktor Hovland and American Keith Mitchell sharing third on 276 and 2019 US Open champion Gary Woodland fifth on 277.

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SIDE KICKS

West Brom relegated after Arsenal defeat

ENGLISH PREMIER LEAGUE

London, UK - West Bromwich Albion were relegated from the English Premier League (EPL) after a 1-3 loss away to Arsenal on Sunday. First-half goals from Emile Smith Rowe and Nicolas Pepe left West Brom struggling at 2-0 down.

Matheus Pereira pulled a goal back in the 67th minute but West Brom's fate was sealed when Arsenal's Willian made it 3-1 with a superb free-kick in the last minute of normal time. West Brom will join already-relegated Sheffield United in playing in the second-tier Championship.

Meanwhile, West Ham's top-four bid suffered a major setback after a 0-1 defeat by Everton with Dominic Calvert-Lewin's 24th-minute goal. The Hammers are now five points behind fourth-placed Leicester with three games to play. Elsewhere, Brighton blew a chance to secure their survival in a dramatic 2-1 defeat at Wolves.

Milan knock Juventus out of Serie A top-four

ITALIAN LEAGUE

Milan, Italy - AC Milan pushed Juventus out of the Serie A top-four with a 3-0 win in Turin on Sunday which increases their hopes of Champions League football for the first time since 2014.

Brahim Diaz put Milan ahead just before the break with Anton Rebic and Fikayo Tomori adding two more in the second half after Franck Kessie had missed a penalty. Milan move up to third, equal on 72 points with second-placed Atalanta, with Napoli a further two points behind in fourth and the final Champions League berth. Juventus are now fifth, one point behind the top four with three games left to play, including next weekend's clash with newly-crowned champions Inter Milan. In another game, Roma trounced Crotone 5-0 at home.

Neymar on target but PSG held by Rennes

FRENCH LEAGUE

Paris, France - Neymar was on target the day after signing his contract extension but Paris Saint-Germain (PSG) were held to a 1-1 draw at Rennes on Sunday that leaves Lille a step closer to a remarkable Ligue 1 title triumph. PSG led at half-time after Neymar converted a controversial penalty award, but they were pegged back in the second half as Serhou Guirassy headed in the equaliser.

Presnel Kimpembe was later sent off for Mauricio Pochettino's side, who could not get back to winning ways on their return to domestic action following their Champions League semifinal exit against Manchester City. PSG are now three points adrift of Ligue 1 leaders Lille, who know they will be champions for the first time since 2011 by taking four points from their remaining two matches of the season.

AFP

Real's title hopes dented after draw

SPANISH LEAGUE

Madrid, Spain - Eden Hazard's 94th-minute equaliser salvaged Real Madrid a dramatic 2-2 draw against Sevilla on Sunday as an extraordinary penalty decision swung La Liga's title race back in Atletico Madrid's favour.

Zinedine Zidane's side had levelled through Marco Asensio midway through the second half and thought they had a penalty when Karim Benzema was brought down after rounding Sevilla goalkeeper Yassine Bono.

But VAR prompted referee Juan Martinez Munuera to check an Eder Militao handball a few seconds before, with a huge decision seeing Madrid's penalty cancelled and a spot-kick awarded to Sevilla instead.

Ivan Rakitic converted and while Madrid still managed to hit back in injury time, Toni Kroos' shot deflecting in off Eden Hazard's foot, the draw hands the advantage back to Atletico at the end of another dramatic weekend in the Spanish title race.

"They have to explain the exact rules of the hands to me," said Zidane afterwards. "But now we have to think about the next game. It is not up to us now, but we will fight to the end, to the death."

After Barcelona and Atletico played out a goalless draw on Saturday at Camp Nou, the second instalment of La Liga's blockbuster weekend also finished honours even, meaning the situation at the top is unchanged with three games now remaining. Atletico are two points clear of both Real and Barcelona, with the title very much back in their hands.

A Sevilla victory might have given them an outside chance but instead they remain six points back and are surely out of the running.



Real Madrid's Toni Kroos celebrates Sevilla's own goal during the Spanish League in Valdebebas, Madrid on Sunday

With a superior head-to-head record over Barcelona, Real Madrid scraping a draw could also yet prove decisive, given they only have to overtake one team now instead of two.

"It's a shame but we're alive," said Real's Luka Modric. "We have seen that everyone is dropping points so you have to have faith."

Hazard had to come off the Real bench after his controversial reaction to the Champions League defeat by Chelsea and while the equaliser was eventually credited to him, there was hardly a sense of redemption given how little the Belgian knew about it.

Sevilla took the lead in the 22nd minute and it was brilliantly worked, a short free-kick down the right improving the angle before Rakitic's cool header down gave Fernando Reges

the chance. He dummied past the diving Casemiro before slotting in.

Madrid emerged early after half-time. Vinicius Junior poked onto the outside of the post after a clever short corner before Modric departed for Asensio, who scored 65 seconds after coming on. Sevilla's Joan Jordan was caught in midfield and Benzema sped away. Asensio looked like he had overrun the ball but it was returned to him by Kroos and he swept first time into the net.

Madrid had the momentum and they thought they had a penalty before the pendulum swung one way and then the other in a matter of seconds. Sevilla's corner was cleared and Benzema was sent through one-on-one, rounding Bono and going down for what looked an obvious spot-kick.

Instead, Martinez was prompted to look at the monitor, where he saw Militao had dangled an arm onto the ball before Sevilla's corner was cleared. Both benches made their feelings clear while the voices from the stand in front of Martinez, most of them belonging to Madrid, insisted the ball had struck Militao's back.

But Martinez cancelled Madrid's penalty and awarded one to Sevilla instead, with Rakitic stepping up and slotting into the corner. Hazard came on and the drama was not yet finished. Kroos ghosted forward in the 94th minute and fired off a shot that deflected off the Hazard's foot and in.

Madrid still had two minutes to find a winner and they almost got it, Casemiro's effort curling wide.

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