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MAJOR SPORTS EVENTS PUT OFF

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Unified system of insurance protection for GCC military personnel issued

Muscat - His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik issued a Royal Decree on Monday reading as follows:

Royal Decree No 15/2021 on implementing the 'Unified System of Extending Insurance Protection to GCC Military Personnel Operating in GCC Member States Other Than Their Own'.

Article 1 states that the provisions of the 'Unified System of Extending Insurance Protection

to GCC Military Personnel Operating in GCC Member States Other Than Their Own' will be applied in accordance with the version attached to this decree, bearing in mind the following:

1. The provisions of the 'Law of Post-Service Pensions and Gratuities for Personnel of the Defence Ministry and the Sultan's Armed Forces', issued under Royal Decree 3/2002, will apply to Defence Ministry and Sultan's Armed Forces' Omani mil-

itary personnel operating in GCC military units governed by GCC military retirement systems from among those who do not get pension from the sultanate.

2. The ceiling of a salary subject to subscription, as per the start of the salary band of a corresponding rank, will be in line with the system enforced at the Defence Ministry in the sultanate. The entitlement of personnel governed by the system

attached will be restricted to the pension. The pension will be calculated at a rate of 2.5 per cent of the monthly average of the subscribable salary received during the last five years of service, multiplied by the number of service years, to a maximum of 80 per cent of the average of the subscribable salary.

3. The family of a deceased retiree, as per the system attached, will be entitled to a grant

of RO1,000.

Article 2 stipulates that the Ministry of Finance will pay the subscription difference between the contribution of the country stated in the 'Law on Post-Service Pensions and Gratuities for Personnel of the Defence Ministry and the Sultan's Armed Forces' (on one hand) and the laws and military retirement systems in the country where the military person works (on the other hand).

Article 3 instructs all military and security departments that apply to their respective personnel the 'Law on Post-Service Pensions and Gratuities for Personnel of the Defence Ministry and the Sultan's Armed Forces' or any other military retirement law to register their GCC employees and to pay the prescribed subscriptions in accordance with the system attached to this decree.

Article 4 states that the Deputy

Prime Minister for Defence Affairs will issue the regulations and decisions necessary for the implementation of the system attached to this decree.

Article 5 cancels all that contradicts this decree or its attached system or contravenes their provisions.

Article 6 states that this decree will be published in the Official Gazette and enforced with effect from June 1, 2011.

ONA

'Closure of airports is under discussion'



Our Correspondent
Muscat

H E Dr Ahmed bin Mohammed al Sa'eedi, Minister of Health and member of the Supreme Committee in charge of dealing with COVID-19, said on Sunday that he hopes the committee will not be forced to close the sultanate's airports for international flights as it will cause "immense social and economic losses".

However, he informed that the closure of airports is under study and discussion. "We do not recommend travel at this time unless it is necessary. A decision to close down won't be made easily but it is possible if



there is non-adherence to precautionary measures," he said, adding that controlling airports is easier than land ports in terms of tests at airports before and after arrival and following up on isolated cases.

He said that a lockdown will be the last option for the Supreme Committee. "The committee was forced to take new preventive measures that it

We do not recommend travel at this time unless it is necessary. A decision to close down won't be made easily but it is possible if there is non-adherence to precautionary measures

H E DR AHMED BIN MOHAMMED AL SA'EEIDI

wished not to do. Unfortunately, we see individuals shake hands and embrace as if the pandemic has ended," H E Dr Sa'eedi said.

He described the doubling of intensive care unit patients in less than two weeks as "worrying and frightening".

"Before January 21, the number of patients in intensive care was 51. The number went up 102 patients," H E Dr Sa'eedi

said.

"Wearing a mask is mandatory even for a person who has received the vaccination. There is no consensus at the global level regarding easing of quarantine for those who get the vaccine. A vaccine may prevent you from getting a virus but it will not stop you from spreading it to others."

Continued on Page 03

Sayyid Asaad bids farewell to Uzbek ambassador

Muscat - On behalf of His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik, Sayyid Asaad bin Tarik al Said, Deputy Prime Minister for International Relations and Cooperation Affairs and Personal Representative of His Majesty the Sultan, received in his office Anvar Abdukhalimov, Ambassador of Uzbekistan to Oman, on Monday to bid him farewell at the end of his tour of duty.

The ambassador expressed his thanks to His Majesty the Sultan for the support extended to him during his tour of duty in the sultanate from His Majesty, the government and the Omani people, which enabled him to carry out his assignments. He also wished His Majesty the Sultan good health, happiness and a



long life, and Oman further progress and growth under the wise leadership of His Majesty.

Sayyid Asaad thanked the ambassador for his efforts exerted in serving the relations between the two countries. He also

wished the ambassador success, and the friendly people of Uzbekistan progress and prosperity.

The meeting was attended by the Secretary General and the two advisers at Sayyid Asaad's office.

Student assessment to be done according to mode of study: MoE

Our Correspondent
Muscat

The final exams of the current academic year will be held at the end of 2020/21 school year, Hamad bin Khalifan al Rashdi, director general of the General Directorate of Education, South Batinah governorate, announced at a press conference on Monday.

Addressing the same press conference, H E Dr Abdullah Khamis al Ambusaidi, Undersecretary for Education, informed that student evaluation is linked

to the learning mechanism. "For students who study through distance learning, evaluation will be remotely. In case distant evaluation is not possible, the parent can contact the school to find an alternative solution. Grade 12 students will be evaluated physically."

H E Ambusaidi also informed that in case of an increase in infections "the return to distance education will be according to the assessment of the epidemiological situation and the decision of the Supreme Committee".

The Ministry of Education

(MoE) has classified schools based on student density, Rashdi noted. "There is another school classification that has been approved recently - the blended education system that combines classroom and distance learning. This reduces the number of students in classrooms," he said.

"Manuals on health protocol were prepared and approved by the Ministries of Health and Education, and sterilisation tools were provided prior to schools opening last month. Schools cannot remain isolated from what is happening now," Rashdi added.

All commercial activities to remain open, but precautions mandatory: H E Yousef

Our Correspondent
Muscat

All commercial activities not covered by a closure decision will remain open for the time being, according to H E Qais bin Mohammed al Yousef, Minister of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion.

He also confirmed that a package will be presented for SMEs by the Public Authority for Small and

Medium Enterprises in coordination with the Council of Ministers.

The minister said, "Most commercial activities will remain open at the present time. The sultanate has proven its ability to face the crisis and address it. There will be an evaluation of the current situation and previous decisions and their impact on the private sector. Consequently, procedures required to be implemented will target those af-

fected."

He added that during the ongoing pandemic in the sultanate and worldwide, "We urge all commercial establishments to follow precautionary measures to prevent the spread of the virus among customers. It has been recently noticed by the ministry that some malls and commercial centres, as well as restaurants and cafes, are not following the precautionary measures issued



H E Qais al Yousef

by the ministry in coordination with the Ministry of Health," said H E Yousef.

"It is a joint responsibility of the government, individuals, community and businesses, and any violation from a particular activity can negatively affect other activities. So it is very important to follow the set precautionary measures, namely wearing masks, maintaining a safe distance of 2m between customers at cash counters, sanitising shopping trolleys, and regulating the entry of customers at a given

time to avoid crowding."

Talking about the economy, H E Yousef said that while it is vital, staying healthy by following the safety instructions remains the top priority in order to manage the crisis in the same way as it was done earlier paving the way for reopening of all commercial activities. "Adherence will enable us to avoid economic implications which might negatively impact the commercial

markets in general and companies, institutions and entrepreneurs in particular.

"We urge all consumers to strictly follow these measures to reduce infection, minimise their shopping activities to the minimal necessary level, and to avoid shopping at rush hours between 7pm to 10pm. We also encourage all individuals to make use of online shopping," the minister said.



02

1.56bn face masks entered oceans in 2020: Report



05

BP to sell \$2.6bn stake in Oman's Block 61 to Thai PTTEP



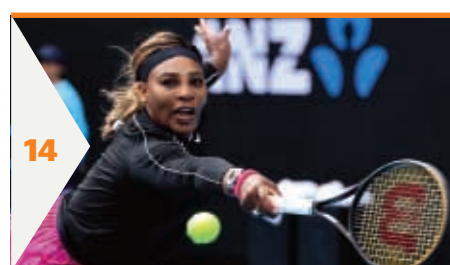
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UK races to train volunteers to inoculate 15mn in 15 days



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Myanmar military detains Aung San Suu Kyi before coup



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Australian Open delay gave me time to get fit: Serena



1.56bn face masks entered oceans in 2020

Discarded face masks are now a common sight along beaches of the sultanate too

Shaddad al Musalmay
Muscat

An estimated 1.56bn face masks may have entered the world's oceans in 2020, resulting in an additional 4,680- 6,240 metric tonnes of marine plastic pollution, according to a report. Entitled 'Masks on the Beach: The Impact of COVID-19 on Marine Plastic Pollution', the report was released by Hong-Kong-based marine conservation organisation OceansAsia.

According to the report, these masks will take as long as 450 years to break down, slowly turning into micro plastics while negatively impacting marine wildlife and ecosystems. The report used a global production estimate of 52bn masks being manufactured in 2020, a conservative loss rate of three per cent, and the average weight of three to four grams for a single-use polypropylene surgical face mask to arrive at the estimate.

"The 1.56bn face masks that will likely have entered our oceans in 2020 are just the tip of the iceberg. The 4,680 to 6,240 metric tonnes of face masks are just a small fraction of the esti-

mated eight to 12mn metric tonnes of plastic that enter our oceans each year," said Dr Teale Phelps Bondaroff, director of research at OceansAsia and lead author of the report.

"It is critical that we work to reduce our use of single-use plastics, and we all have a role to play. There are reusable and sustainable options for almost every single single-use plastic item. Please wear a reusable mask, unless absolutely necessary, and be sure to dispose of all masks responsibly," Dr Bondaroff added.

In the sultanate, the Environment Society of Oman (ESO) recently launched a campaign - It's Time. The year-long initiative is designed to promote the adoption of environmentally conscious community behaviours across the country focusing on three key issues affecting the sultanate's environment and its communities - litter, single-use plastics and recycling.

H H Sayyida Tania bint Shabib al Said, president of ESO, told *Muscat Daily* that discarded face masks are now a common sight along the beaches of Oman. "These masks, which are



Understandable hygiene concerns have triggered a significant increase in plastic consumption with a collapse in the oil market making plastic cheaper than ever to produce

H H SAYYIDA TANIA BINT SHABIB AL SAID

plastic, are a small part of a much wider issue for our marine environment. We are consuming too much plastic in our society. Attempts to reduce our universal reliance on single-use plastics have been dealt a heavy blow by COVID-19," she said.

"Understandable hygiene concerns have triggered a significant increase in plastic consumption with a collapse in the oil market making plastic

cheaper than ever to produce. The volume of plastic waste we find discarded as a result is having a significant impact on both our environmental and human health and must be addressed."

According to H H Sayyida Tania, the Ministerial Decision 23/2020 to ban single-use shopping bags from January 2021 is a positive start, and that there are reusable and sustainable options for almost every

item of single-use plastic. "A great place to start is by wearing a reusable mask whenever possible and to dispose of masks responsibly."

In response to the growing crisis, ESO launched the It's Time campaign which aims to encourage the adoption of environmentally conscious behaviours across Oman.

"We hope the campaign will serve to demonstrate the size

and scale of the three key issues we are targeting - litter, single-use plastics and recycling; provide a platform to share encouraging messaging; and serve as a call to action for communities to join us in cleaning up Oman," said H H Sayyida Tania.

ESO is committed to working hard in the pursuit of encouraging the adoption of environmentally sustainable behaviours across Oman, but she noted that it cannot do so without the support of the community. "I would encourage everyone to think about individual actions they can take in their own lives to positively impact Oman's environment, because together we can make a difference - It's Time," she added.

Plastic consumption, which has been steadily rising for years, increased significantly as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic. "Hygiene concerns and greater reliance on take-away food has led to increased use of plastics, particularly plastic packaging," said Gary Stokes, director of operations at OceansAsia.

The use of personal protective equipment (PPE), in particular face masks, has become a com-

mon tool used in preventing the spread of the virus, with many jurisdictions mandating the wearing of masks in public. The production of PPE has expanded in an attempt to meet skyrocketing demand. Consequently, PPE waste has also increased dramatically.

Single-use face masks are made from a variety of melt-blown plastics and are difficult to recycle due to both composition and risk of contamination and infection. They enter oceans when they are littered, when waste management systems are inadequate or non-existent, or when these systems become overwhelmed due to increased volumes of waste.

Marine plastic pollution is devastating the world's oceans, Stokes informed. "Plastic pollution kills an estimated 100,000 marine mammals and turtles, over a million seabirds, and even greater numbers of fish, invertebrates and other animals each year. It also negatively impacts fisheries and the tourism industry, and costs the global economy an estimated US\$13bn per year."

@shadadm

H E Dr Sa'eedi receives Unicef regional director



Muscat - H E Dr Ahmed bin Mohammed al Sa'eedi, Minister of Health, received Ted Chaiban, regional director of Unicef in the Middle East and North Africa Region, in his office on Monday.

The two sides exchanged cor-

dial conversations and reviewed joint cooperation between the sultanate and Unicef in the field of health.

The regional director praised Oman's efforts made in international cooperation.

On his part, H E Dr Sa'eedi lauded the efforts of the Unicef in the sultanate and in the region.

The meeting was attended by Lana al Wreikat, Unicef representative to Oman, and a number of senior ministry officials.

App launched for accurate reading of MRIs

Our Correspondent
Muscat

A group of health specialists has launched an app for mobile phones called Radiology Simple Guide to help health workers analyse and read MRIs (magnetic resonance imaging) more accurately.

The app was designed and developed by Dr Ishaq bin Sulaiman al Salmi, radiology specialist at The Royal Hospital, Dr Iman bin Mohammed al Hadidi, radiology specialist in the Directorate General of Health Services of Muscat governorate, and Abdulaziz bin Bader al Salmi, programming technician.

MRI is a medical imaging technique used in radiology to form pictures of the anatomy and the physiological processes of the body. MRI scanners use strong magnetic fields and radio waves to generate images of the organs in the body.

The app caters to trainee and specialist radiologists, besides oncologists, gynecologists and obstetrics.



In the initial stage, the app will focus on training users to read and analyse radiation data of the pelvic area. A similar app for chest X-rays is currently being developed in cooperation with Dr Rashid al Amiri, consultant doctor at The Royal Hospital, besides another for prostate MRIs.

The plan for the future is to produce at least ten programmes including the most frequently used radiology tests.

A number of components have been added to the app, including introduction to the most common diseases of the pelvic area with images and reports to

assist beginners.

The information of the app is displayed on an innovative feature that simulates a realistic work environment. The app improves accuracy of reading for users. The application can be downloaded to both Android phones and iPhones.

Expat recruitment fee hike will negatively impact economy: OCCI

Our Correspondent
Muscat

The decision to increase work permit fees for expatriates will negatively affect the local economy, according to Eng Ridha bin Juma al Saleh, chairman of the Board of Directors of the Oman Chamber of Commerce and Industry (OCCI).

In a series of tweets, the OCCI chairman said, "The decision will cause big losses for business owners and lead to the continuation of consumer concerns, such as the high cost of goods and services."

He also stressed that changes in the policies and procedures regulating workforce recruitment licences need further study so that "we can organise the labour market in accordance with future aspirations that ensure the growth of the private sector and raise its productivity".

"It is necessary to encourage foreign and domestic investment, review laws and legislation regulating investment, and grant incentives and facilities to investors, which in turn will enhance job creation and job opportunities during the next phase, and contribute to advancing development of the national economy," said Eng Saleh.

Talking about providing jobs



The decision will cause big losses for business owners and lead to the continuation of consumer concerns, such as the high cost of goods and services

ENG RIDHA AL SALEH

for Omanis, he said, "To provide these opportunities, it is necessary to work on expanding the local economy by encouraging and attracting investments in

various sectors, which will produce more fields of work, and in many specialisations that are commensurate with the various specialisations and qualifications

of local cadres.

"We are heading towards uneasy economic conditions, which require the concerned authorities to take into account these circumstances and alleviate the many burdens incurred by the private sector and work to support the growth and stability of its institutions."

He explained that the issuance of the Omani Labour Law has become necessary, and the participation of the private sector

represented by the chamber when preparing the law is an important and necessary matter in order to achieve a balanced equation that regulates the labour market and ensures balance and preservation of the rights and duties of the various stakeholders.

He stressed on the importance of education and vocational training and refining the skills of young people through on-the-job training to be able to take on jobs with perfection.

"According to Royal Decree No 45/2017, OCCI has to express an opinion on the legislation regulating commercial and industrial activities before its issuance, and submit proposals regarding the amendment of the final laws; therefore it is necessary to take the chamber's opinion, especially on the new Omani Labour Law," said Eng Saleh.

Talking about the Ministry of Labour's decision to raise the fees for a number of transactions, he said that the current economic conditions require the concerned authorities to alleviate the many burdens that the private sector has incurred and work to support the growth and stability of its institutions and actively contribute to its advancement through the facilities provided by the government.



MoL launches programme to train jobseekers

Our Correspondent
Muscat

The Ministry of Labour (MoL) on Sunday launched the Khibrat programme to train jobseekers, aimed at providing them with the necessary competencies for various jobs in the governorates of Muscat, North and South Batinah, Dakhliyah and South Sharqiyah.

To begin with, 500 jobseekers would be trained in the first batch of Khibrat - a collaboration between different ministries that envisages enhancing the employability and skills of higher diploma holders and graduates.

The programme will also prepare them for work by ensuring

their resumes are 'fit for the purpose', beside preparing them for job interviews.

Soft skills, including time management, working as part of a team, work ethics and communication skills will also be honed during the five-day intensive programme. This is to ensure that the trainees understand, adhere to and can demonstrate these key soft skills once in the workplace across the various industry sectors.

Private companies have been encouraged by the ministry to take advantage of the Khibrat initiative which offers a stipended training programme for young Omanis looking for employment and further career development.

Tax Authority announces start of VAT registration

Muscat - Tax Authority (TA) announced the start of VAT registration as of February 1, 2021, until March 15, 2021, for taxable persons with annual supplies exceeding or expected to exceed RO1mn.

The voluntary registration will also be available for taxable persons with annual supplies or expenses exceeding or expected to exceed RO19,250.

The registration must be made through TA's online portal <https://www.taxoman.gov.om>.

In addition, TA advises taxable persons to register within the preset deadlines to avoid any penalties levied on late registration.

Furthermore, taxable persons may find more information around registration, registration procedures and other VAT details on the guides published on TA's website. ONA

Salalah's Al Mughsail among five best beaches in the world

Our Correspondent
Muscat

The Al Mughsail beach in Salalah, Dhofar, has found a place among the top five beaches in the world in the list of 'The 30 Best Beaches In The World', reports *Condé Nast Traveler*, the world-renowned luxury and lifestyle travel magazine.

The Ministry of Heritage and Tourism tweeted about the report, posting, 'Al Mugsail Beach in Dhofar Governorate is chosen among the 30 best beaches in the world.' The magazine says, 'There's something about a good beach that enlivens the senses: The briny scent of salt in the air, the calming murmur of waves, and the gentle nip of sand whipped up by the soft breeze.'

It placed the Al Mughsail beach at the fifth position, stating, 'There's something 'Mad Max-esque' about Al Mughsail, with its unflinchingly white sand, parched frankincense trees and cinematic blow holes (especially impressive during monsoon season) which erupt every couple of minutes, shaking the earth and spewing out seawater with a deafening sound.'



'A favourite beach is like a favourite poem - individual, important and something that makes our hearts sing, and now more than ever we are dreaming of days spent wriggling our toes in the sand and wallowing in salty water.'

About Al Mughsail, the report said that instead of the typical sandy spots dotted with sun umbrellas and gaggles of tourists, 'it sought out spaces that you may have to venture a little further for, but that remain incredibly beautiful and very often crowd-free. From the most exquisite beaches in Europe to far-flung stretches in Asia, Africa and more, these are the best beaches in the world.'

'Stretching for four unbroken

miles (about 6.5km) and fringed with sheer limestone cliffs, the beach is lapped by gleaming turquoise water which can get a little choppy at times. That said, it's a wonderful spot from which to watch fishermen pilot traditional dhows just offshore; catch them at dusk for the most dramatic photographs, when they are silhouetted against the treacly Omani sunset.'

The others in the top five include Bengueria Island - the second largest island in Mozambique's Bazaruto Archipelago; Playa Paraiso; Cayo Largo Del Sur - a small resort island off Cuba's southern coast; Hiriketiya beach in Sri Lanka, and Uig Sands in Scotland's Isle of Lewis.

Requests for discounts, promotional offers still being accepted: MoCIIP

Our Correspondent
Muscat

The Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion (MoCIIP) has confirmed

that it has stopped accepting requests for holding exhibitions and conferences, while it clarified that it has not stopped accepting requests for promotional offers. A statement issued by the

ministry said, 'The ministry continues to receive requests for promotional offers and discounts; the requests that were stopped are applications for holding exhibitions and conferences.'



MUSCAT MUNICIPALITY

Advertisement No. (4 /2021)

Companies specialized in the field and registered with **Tender Board**, may obtain tenders documents for the website through the following link:

Tender No.	No E-Tender	Description of Tender	Tender Fee	Last date to collect the tender	Tender return date	Grade
PRE/20/113	4/2021/H Q-4)	Construction of Pedestrian Walkways at Bousher (Hay Al Bydaa) (E- Tender)	Rial 25	21/02/2021	07/03/2021	This tender has been allocated for (S M E) contractors registered in second grade
PRE/21/006	(5/2021/H Q-5)	Consultancy Services for Supervision of the Construction of Drainage Structures and Remedial Measures at Sultan Qaboos Street, Al Khuwair Phase 1A2 (E- Tender)	Rial 25	21/02/2021	07/03/2021	First
PRE/21/007	6/2021/H Q-6)	Cleaning works at Wellayet Muttrah (E- Tender)	Rial 25	21/02/2021	07/03/2021	First

(<https://etendering.tenderboard.gov.om>) against non-refundable fees as mentioned below starting from the date of this announcement and until the end of deadline stipulated below.

Tender Conditions :-

- Bidders shall submit their offers electronically accompanied with an electronic copy of a bond issued by any local bank in Oman addressed to Muscat municipality. The bond shall be (1%) of the tender value valid for ninety (90) days starting from the date of bids submission. Any tenders which do not meet the required bond shall not be accepted.
- Original Tender Bond envelope should be sealed with red wax and entitled to His Excellency/ Head of Internal Tender Committee and to be placed in the Tender Box at Muscat Municipality HQ, Third Floor, before 10:00 am as per the date Mentioned in the above table. All envelopes are to be clearly marked with the name of the Tender being presented and no other marks.
- For any inquiries regarding tenders, please visit e-tendering website: (<https://etendering.tenderboard.gov.om>) .
- For technical support of e-tendering system please send an email to (etenderhd@ita.gov.om) or call (+96824166670).

'Closure of airports is under discussion'

Continued from Page 01

Regarding vaccines, H E Dr Sa'eedi informed that Pfizer is in the process of developing production plants, which has led to a temporary interruption in supply. "It has been confirmed by the vaccine manufacturer that a delay of six weeks does not affect its efficacy for those who took the first dose. We confirm that no vaccine will be accepted in the sultanate unless we confirm the safety, effectiveness and approval of the drug in the country of origin beforehand."

A total of 2.5mn doses have been reserved for the sultanate from vaccine manufacturers.

"However, we warn that those who received the first dose of the Pfizer-BioNTech vaccine cannot receive a second dose from another company," he added.

Dr Amal bint Saif al Maani, director of the Infection Prevention and Control Department in MoH, revealed that there are 96 suspected cases of the new strain of COVID-19 in Oman and six confirmed cases.

"Of the six cases of mutated strains recorded in the sultanate,

four are related to travel and two are being investigated. There are variants of the mutated virus and the last two strains are the most dangerous even for young people. The new strains reported in the sultanate are the ones found in Britain, Brazil and South Africa," Dr Amal informed.

She advised people to not to take the numbers as an indication of the efficacy of the vaccine as it varies according to circumstances, including the method of storage, the natural immunity of people, and infection with the virus despite taking the vaccine.

REGIONAL WEATHER

	Max	Min
Abu Dhabi	24	14
Doha	24	14
Kuwait City	31	18
Manama	21	15
Riyadh	24	10

PRAYER TIMINGS

Fajr	5.30am
Sunrise	6.47am
Duhr	12.26pm
Asr	3.36pm
Maghrib	5.59pm
Isha	7.11pm

Movies made in 'dark period' see light of day

Our Correspondent
Muscat

Neither the coronavirus pandemic nor the restrictions it brought on the social life could suppress the people's creative energy in the sultanate.

In spite of this difficult period, some filmmakers in Oman have managed to come up with their works, albeit with small crews – at all times adhering to safety measures like social distancing and wearing masks.

And after months of uncertainty, they have finally released the movies, mainly for online viewing and for film festivals.

Sami Sarang, whose film *Shukran Qaboos*, which is an ode to the late Sultan Qaboos, decided to release it online.

He said, "We shot the film with the idea of releasing it in theatres as an ode to our beloved leader the late His Majesty the Sultan. Unfortunately, that did not happen because of the dark period of the pandemic. We had hopes that it would reach more



Sami Sarang during editing (Supplied photo)

people in a theatrical release."

However, as per Sarang the film is doing well even on the on-

line platforms.

"We've got a good response," he said. Sarang has also sent the

film to various film festivals around the world.

Another filmmaker, who

makes use of TikTok for his creations, said he managed to shoot a number of films during

We managed to write and shoot six scenes in the past period. Of course, it was challenging because of the confinement, movement restriction between places, and the fear of infection

MOHAMMAD DARWISH

the period.

"I kept every safety measure in mind. Because of the lockdown we had some free time and I made use of the time for my short films. I think now is the time for me to reach my audience."

He said the precautions he

took along with his friends included not shooting at public places like malls and markets.

"Also, except for the main actor, all cast and crew members wore masks."

Mohammad Darwish, a filmmaker and member of Oman Film Society, said he had written two short film scripts about COVID-19.

"One I shot and directed and is right now featuring at film festivals. I was waiting for the right time for the film to be in the circuit and now with things slowly becoming normal, I finally sent the film for festivals."

Darwish said currently he is working as an assistant director for a short documentary film.

"We managed to write and shoot six scenes during the period. Of course, it was challenging because of the confinement, movement restriction between places, and the fear of getting infected with the virus."

This year's Muscat International Film Festival has also been cancelled as a safety measure.

Oman, Turkmenistan review bilateral relations

Muscat – H E Sayyid Badr bin Hamad al Busaidi, Foreign Minister, and Rashid Meredov, Deputy Prime Minister and Foreign Minister of the Republic of Turkmenistan, discussed the existing relations between the two friendly countries.

During the meeting held via video-conferencing on Monday, the two sides affirmed their keenness to continue developing the relations in various spheres. They also exchanged views on



H E Sayyid Badr

regional and international issues of common concern.
ONA

Ooredoo, MoSD provide laptops to students to make remote learning easy

Muscat – As part of its commitment to 'caring', which is one of its core values, Ooredoo, in partnership with the Ministry of Social Development (MoSD), has donated a number of laptops to underprivileged students.

In the challenging times faced during the pandemic, the laptops will give students access to everything they need for remote learning.

As per a press statement, this is just the latest in a string of initiatives Ooredoo has carried out under its CSR programme, 'Ooredoo Goodwill', to support the community and create a positive and lasting impact on society, especially as it tackles the pandemic.

Raed Mohammed Dawood, director of Branding, Communications and Corporate Affairs at



Ooredoo, said, "We feel that collaboration between the public and private sectors is important, to make sure learning is not dis-

rupted by COVID-19. By joining hands with the Ministry of Social Development, we are doing our part to secure our young peoples' future, while helping them to overcome some of the challenges of learning off-site."

Ooredoo has launched several

offers and initiatives to facilitate the digital lives of its customers as they commit to staying at home, while supporting the government's efforts to curb the spread of the pandemic.

In addition to providing various medical supplies to a number of hospitals, Ooredoo cooperated with the Telecommunications Regulatory Authority and the Ministry of Education to provide free access to educational websites and Internet communication applications to ensure business and education continuity in the sultanate during this period. The company has also extended its support to students returning from abroad, providing them with SIM cards so that they could stay in touch with their families during their isolation period.

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20 CARAT 1 GMS GOLD COIN

APPLE IPAD

10 OMAN OASIS 5 GALLON WATER COUPONS

45 LULU SIFT VOUCHERS WORTH RO 10

60 TROLLEY BAG

15 MI-FIT BIT WATCH

30 AL MAHA PETROL VOUCHERS WORTH RO 10

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TENDER NOTICE

DANA 02/23/2021

Modern Poultry Farms Co SAOC announce that:

No.	Material For Sale	Location	Daily Quantity	Annual Quantity (Approximately)	Date Of Site Visit	Last Submission Date
1	Fresh Manure	Wadi Al	75mT	27,000 mT	02/07/2021 To 02/09/2021	02/15/2021
2	Spent Hens	Ma'awal, Afi	1500 Nos.	500,000 Nos.		

To Arrange For Site Visit

Name: Mr. Ali Salman Al Balushi

Designation: Asst. Administration Manager

Phone: (+968) 99256002

Email: ali@modernpoultry.com

Contact Details

OR

Dr. Mujibur Rahman

Farm Manager

(+968) 97750544

mujib@modernpoultry.com

Offers to be submitted in sealed envelopes addressed to Mr. Ali Salman Al Balushi, Modern Poultry Farms Company SAOC before 11:00am of the last submission date.

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MARKET WATCH

MSM30	3,650.19
BSE Sensex	48,600.61

FOREX RATES

(RO1 equals)	
Indian Rs	190.17
Pakistani Rs	417.43
Bangladeshi Taka	220.33
Philippine Peso	124.96
Sri Lankan Rs	498.67

*Rates as on February 01
Source: xe.com

BRIEFS

Japan Airlines projects higher losses over pandemic

Japan Airlines (JAL) said on Monday it forecasts a larger-than-expected annual net loss of nearly US\$2.9bn, as the aviation industry continues to struggle from the fallout of the coronavirus pandemic.

Japan's second-largest carrier said it projected a net loss of 300bn yen for the year ending March 2021, up from its previous forecast of 240bn-270bn yen.

'Severe worldwide restrictions on international travel have caused international passenger demand to virtually disappear,' it said.

JAL suffered a net loss of 212.7bn yen in the April-December period, plunging from a 74.8bn yen profit for the same period a year before.

It posted sales of 356.5bn yen for the same period, a drop of a third from sales figures of 1.1tn yen the previous year.

BP to sell \$2.6bn stake in Oman's Block 61 to Thailand's PTTEP

Our Correspondent
Muscat

Global energy giant BP has agreed to sell a 20 per cent participating interest in Oman's Block 61 to PTT Exploration and Production Public Company Limited (PTTEP) of Thailand for a total consideration of US\$2.6bn.

Following the completion of the sale, BP will remain the operator of Block 61, holding a 40 per cent interest.

Subject to the approval from the Sultanate of Oman and partners, the deal is expected to complete during 2021. The agreed total consideration of US\$2.590bn comprises US\$2.450bn payable on completion (subject to final adjustments) and US\$140mn payable contingent on pre-agreed future conditions, BP said in a statement released on its website on Monday.

Following the completion of the sale, participating interests in Block 61 will be: BP (40 per cent); OQ (30 per cent); PTTEP (20 per cent); and Petronas (10 per cent).

PTTEP is Thailand's national petroleum exploration and production company, with interests in 15 countries, including Oman.

Block 61, covering around 3,950sqkm in central Oman,



We are committed to BP's business in Oman - this agreement allows us to remain at the heart of this world-class development while also making important progress in our global divestment programme

BERNARD LOONEY

contains the largest tight gas development in the Middle East. The block has already had two phases of development - Khazzan, which began production in 2017, followed by Ghazeer in October 2020.

These two developments, tar-

geted at developing a total of 10.5tn cubic feet of gas resources, have a combined daily production capacity of 1.5bn cubic feet of gas and more than 65,000 barrels of condensate. Gas from Block 61 is exported for domestic consumption into

Oman's national gas grid, while also boosting the availability of feedstock supply for Oman LNG.

BP's chief executive officer Bernard Looney said, "We are pleased to welcome PTTEP to the successful Block 61 partnership. Block 61 is a pioneering de-

velopment that has applied leading techniques and technologies to maximise efficiency and minimise emissions."

"We are committed to BP's business in Oman - this agreement allows us to remain at the heart of this world-class development while also making important progress in our global divestment programme," he added.

As per the statement, BP is targeting divestment proceeds of US\$25bn by 2025. Most recently, the US\$5bn sale of BP's petrochemicals business to

INEOS completed at the end of 2020.

BP Oman's vice-president Yousuf al Ojaili commented, "We look forward to working closely with PTTEP, our other partners, and the government of Oman on the continued success of Khazzan and Ghazeer, and to explore further opportunities in Block 61."

"We remain very much committed to our strategic partnership with Oman. We will continue to support critical national energy infrastructure for the sultanate through Block 61, invest significantly in local companies and Omani talent, and deliver an ambitious social investment programme," Ojaili added.

According to the company's statement, in 2020, Omanisation in BP Oman reached around 85 per cent and Block 61 spend with Omani-registered companies exceeded US\$610mn.

BP has had an upstream presence in Oman since 2007 when the original production sharing agreement (PSA) for Block 61 was signed.

Beyond Block 61, BP and Eni signed a PSA for Block 77 in 2019. BP Trading & Shipping also purchases liquefied natural gas from Oman LNG under a seven year deal that started in 2018.

Dubai announces logistics alliance to speed up COVID-19 vaccine delivery

Dubai, UAE - Key transport hub Dubai has announced an initiative to accelerate the delivery of coronavirus vaccines, particularly to developing nations, after the WHO warned against abandoning the world's poor.

The Vaccine Logistics Alliance, which includes Dubai-based Emirates airline and global logistics giant DP World, is designed to 'speed up distribution of COVID-19 vaccines around the world through the emirate'.

The alliance will 'support' the World Health Organization's Covax initiative to distribute two billion vaccine doses, the Dubai Media Office said in a statement, without specifying how many doses it would deliver.

'The distribution will particularly focus on emerging markets, where populations have been hard-hit by the pandemic, and pharmaceutical transport and lo-



gistics are challenging,' it said.

The UAE has administered vaccines to more than a quarter of its population, second only to Israel in the global race.

The WHO has urged wealthy countries to avoid repeating past mistakes of hoarding medicines and vaccines, saying such behaviour would only drag out the pandemic.

'We are all too aware of the

challenges facing us globally in this pandemic and necessity to work together,' the UAE's Minister of State for Foreign Affairs, Anwar Gargash, said in a tweet.

'Vaccine nationalism should not be tolerated in our common battle to defeat COVID,' he said.

Covax, the globally-pooled vaccine procurement and distribution effort, has struck agreements with manufacturers for

2bn vaccine doses, and secured options on a billion more.

Dubai said the alliance will work with pharmaceutical manufacturers, forwarders, and government agencies to transport vaccines, some of which have to be kept at very cold temperatures.

"Together, we are able to store a large volume of vaccine doses at a time and bring in and distribute vaccines to any point around the world within 48 hours," said Sheikh Ahmed bin Saeed al Maktoum, chairman of Dubai Airports and Emirates Airline.

The UAE itself has suffered a spike in cases after the holiday period, after aggressively opening up to tourism.

But it reported 2,948 new virus cases on Sunday, the lowest number since January 11.

AFP

Subscription period extended till Feb 9 for Oman REIT IPO

Our Correspondent
Muscat

The subscription period for the initial public offering (IPO) of Oman REIT Fund has been extended till February 9, 2021.

Earlier the subscription period for Oman REIT Fund's RO26.1mn IPO, which started on January 17, was scheduled to close on January 31. The Capital Market Authority (CMA) has now agreed to extend the subscription period by seven working days.

'Due to the increasing demand and the delay experienced in completing the subscription procedures for many willing investors, the CMA agreed to extend the subscription period for seven working days, so that the last day for subscription will be Tuesday, February 9,' Oman REIT Fund said in a statement tweeted by the Mus-



cat Securities Market on Monday.

The fund urged investors to complete their subscription procedures within the specified period.

Allowing subscribers to the fund to participate in the high potential Omani real estate sector in a hassle-free manner, Oman

REIT Fund is offering good returns with a targeted annual dividend of 7.5 per cent that is expected to grow to 8.2 per cent over a five-year period.

Oman REIT Fund will offer 261mn units for public subscription which represents 40 per cent of the total issued capital of the fund at OQ65mn.

OOMCO showcases its marine fuels business at MEBC 2021

Our Correspondent
Muscat

Oman Oil Marketing Company (OOMCO) recently participated in the Middle East Bunkering Convention (MEBC) 2021. Held online, the conference gathered key industry players to discuss the issues and challenges facing the marine fuels sector and wider shipping industry.

During the event, OOMCO's general manager of international retail, Ali Ahmed Muqail, shared a video presentation on the company's expanding marine fuels and solutions at the Port of Duqm. Playing an active role in the bunker business since 1994, OOMCO is currently building a bunker terminal barge to be permanently located at the port, part of its strategic mission to



Ali Ahmed Muqail

broaden its services beyond fuel, while supporting Oman's 2040 Vision.

In a press statement, Muqail said, "As part of our strategic goals, OOMCO continues to add infrastructure to our already substantial bunker fuel services offering to customers throughout Oman. The Port of Duqm is a preferred shipping destination and, together with

our experience and customer-centric focus, will be of great benefit to our shipping customers at Duqm and further afield."

OOMCO has been active in providing bunker services in all of Oman's major ports over the last few years, supplying a full spectrum of bunker and marine lubricants services. The company's bunker terminal at the Port of Duqm, which is set to be commissioned before the second quarter of this year, will serve as the central hub for bunkering services in other ports in Oman, offering 30,000 cubic metres storage capacity.

The terminal at Duqm Port will also benefit from being next door to Duqm Refinery, which is planned to be commissioned in the first half of 2022.

al kawthar

تثمير

TANMIA: Al Kawthar and Tathmeer funds continue to outperform the market

Oman National Investments Development Company (TANMIA) announces the performance of the investment funds under Tanmia's management. Al Kawthar, The Shariah Compliant Fund, reported the highest YTD growth of 5.5% across the Sultanate despite tough market conditions during 2020.

Tanmia's GCC Diversified Fund continued to excel locally, ranking in the top three funds in Oman. In light of the positive performance, the board is pleased to announce cash dividends of 6% for Tathmeer unit holders and 5% for AL Kawthar unit holders. Investors' names appearing with the fund administration's register as on 18 February 2021 would be eligible for the above-mentioned cash dividends.

Fahad Al-Bulushi
Acting CEO- TANMIA

+968 22300425 +968 22300400 www.tanmia.om P.O Box 3028, Postal Code 112, Ruwi, Sultanate Of Oman

MSM inches down on weak activity

Our Correspondent
Muscat

The benchmark index of the Muscat Securities Market (MSM) marginally declined 0.08 per cent to close at 3,650.19 points on Monday.

Trading activity deteriorated from the previous session as turnover declined 65.96 per cent to RO583,831 and volumes fell 62.82 per cent to 4.82mn shares.

While Services index rose 0.63 per cent, Financial and Industrial indices fell 0.16 per cent and 0.39 per cent, respectively. The MSM Shariah index closed down by 0.17 per cent at 530.45 points.

Market breadth remained negative as six companies closed up, while 12 companies closed down. The rest 19 traded stocks closed flat for the day.

Top gainers were Phoenix Power (6 per cent), National Bank of Oman (2.99 per cent), Al Maha Ceramics (2.01 per



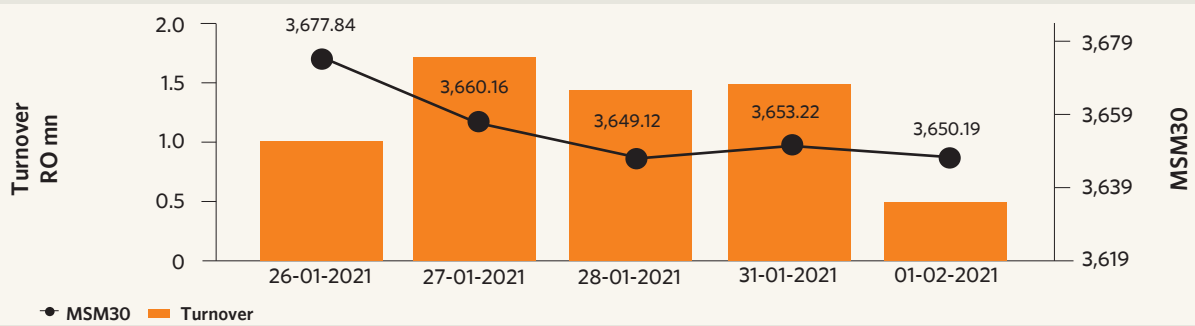
cent) and Al Batinah Power (2 per cent).

Top losers were Dhofar Cattle Feed (-5.1 per cent), Vision Insurance (-3.61

per cent), Oman & Emirates Investment

Holding (-2.33 per cent) and Bank Nizwa (-2.04 per cent).

MSM INDEX AND TURNOVER OF FIVE TRADING DAYS



India spends big to revive pandemic ravaged economy

New Delhi, India - India unveiled a massive spending plan focused on healthcare and infrastructure on Monday, as the government sought to boost a coronavirus-ravaged economy on course for its biggest annual contraction on record.

The nation of 1.3bn was badly hit by one of the world's strictest virus lockdowns, with growth slumping by a historic 23.9 per cent in April-June, and the economy expected to contract 7.7 per cent in 2020-21.

"This budget provides every opportunity for our economy to raise and capture the pace that it needs for a sustainable growth," Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman told parliament in her annual budget speech.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi added, "We have presented a proactive budget... that will speed up progress in terms of wealth and wellness."

The planned expenditure of US\$30.6bn on health and well-being schemes was more than double the equivalent outlay in the previous budget, although it included US\$4.8bn for the country's ambitious COVID-19 immunisation drive, with plans to vaccinate 300mn by July.

The health sector has long suffered from chronic underinvestment. As of 2017, the country had 0.8 doctors per 1,000 people, around the same level as Iraq, according to the World Bank.

Infrastructure was another big-ticket item in the budget, with US\$76bn - 34.5 per cent more than in the previous budget - to be sunk into major projects, including roads and railways.

Divestments - including of national carrier Air India and part of the government's stake in the country's largest insurer, Life Insurance Corporation - would help raise US\$24bn, Sitharaman said.



India's Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman (centre) along with her staff gestures as she leaves the Finance Ministry to present the annual budget in parliament in New Delhi on Monday (AFP)

We have presented a proactive budget... that will speed up progress in terms of wealth and wellness

NARENDRA MODI

But the sales of both state-run firms have been on the cards, with the mooted IPO of the insurer sparking a walk-out by nearly 100,000 staff last year.

With lenders struggling with a mountain of bad debt, Sitharaman said US\$2.74bn would be put aside for the next financial year to recapitalise state banks.

Social security benefits, including minimum wages, would be extended to workers in the gig economy, which has flourished amid cheap mobile data and abundant labour.

The spending measures will blow out the fiscal deficit to 9.5 per cent of GDP for the financial year ending March, Sitharaman said, from a forecast 3.5 per cent.

The government plans to borrow an additional US\$1.1bn to fund the deficit, she added.

As fears of higher income taxes proved unfounded, markets soared with Mumbai's Sensex index up 4.87 per cent Monday afternoon.

In its annual economic survey, the government said there would be a "V-shaped" recovery after the severe contraction, forecasting growth to hit 11 per cent in 2021-22.

With Asia's third-largest economy in the throes of a slowdown even before the pandemic, analysts said the budget provided much-needed stimulus.

"On the whole it is a pretty positive signal and a pro-investment budget," Sujana Hajra, chief economist at Anand Rathi Securities, told AFP.

"Given the relatively low outlay by the government last year, India... had the space to provide more stimulus."

But some also warned that millions of poorer workers left jobless during the virus shutdown needed more support.

AFP

Xiaomi sues to reverse US blacklisting

Washington, US - Chinese smartphone maker Xiaomi said it had filed a lawsuit seeking to overturn the former Trump administration's last-minute blacklisting of the electronics giant.

Xiaomi said it filed the appeal with a Washington federal court on Friday after former president Donald Trump's administration barred investment in the firm, saying the Beijing-headquartered company was a part of the Chinese military.

In a statement, Xiaomi said it 'believes that the decision... was factually incorrect and has deprived the company of legal due process'.

'With a view to protecting the



interests of the global users, partners, employees and shareholders of [Xiaomi], the company has pleaded to the courts to declare the decision illegal and

that it be reversed,' the statement added.

Just six days before Trump left office, his officials made a series of announcements targeting

Xiaomi and other Chinese firms including state oil giant CNOOC and embattled social media favourite TikTok.

Xiaomi - which overtook Apple last year to become the world's third-largest smartphone manufacturer - was one of nine firms the Pentagon classified as 'Communist Chinese military companies'.

The measure was seen as an attempt to cement Trump's trade war legacy with China after four years of turbulent relations with Beijing.

The blacklisting means US investors cannot buy Xiaomi securities. AFP



ExxonMobil and Chevron CEOs discussed merger in 2020: Report

Washington, US - ExxonMobil and Chevron executives discussed the possibility of a merger last year as the two oil giants were battered by the pandemic, *The Wall Street Journal* (WSJ) reported on Sunday.

Chevron CEO Mike Wirth and his Exxon counterpart Darren Woods discussed merging as demand for oil and gas plummeted due to restrictions to stem the spread of the coronavirus, the paper said, citing sources close to the issue.

The sources added that the 'preliminary' discussions are no longer taking place but could resume in the future.

The combined market value of the two companies would exceed US\$350bn, according to the *Journal*, with ExxonMobil worth US\$190mn.

The combined market value of the two companies would exceed US\$350bn, according to WSJ

'Together, they would likely form the world's second largest oil company by market capitalization and production, producing about 7mn barrels of oil and gas a day, based on pre-pandemic levels, second only in both measures to Saudi Aramco,' the WSJ wrote.

But such a merger could come up against anti-competitive regulations.

Many industry experts, how-

ever, believe that a consolidation of the oil and gas industry is necessary to reduce costs and help companies overcome the pandemic slowdown.

Additionally, the sector must prepare for an uncertain future as many countries seek to reduce their dependence on fossil fuels to combat climate change.

While President Joe Biden has already announced the United States' return to the Paris climate accord, the American oil giants are also likely to face a Democratic administration that is less supportive of the industry.

Chevron had announced on Friday that it had recorded a net loss of US\$5.5bn in 2020, affected by a sharp drop in crude oil prices at the beginning of the pandemic.

AFP

Huawei's smartphone sales plunge as US sanctions on suppliers bite

Beijing, China - Sales of smartphones made by Chinese telecom giant Huawei plunged in the latest quarter of 2020 as they were hit by US sanctions on its suppliers, research firm Canalys said.

Domestic sales fell 44 per cent to 18.8mn units in October-December, according to data released by research firm Canalys. That comes after separate figures from industry tracker International Data Corp (IDC) showed overseas shipments plunged 43 per cent to 32mn.

'It is possibly Huawei's toughest time as it is restrained to even serve its home market,' Nicole Peng, a researcher at Canalys, wrote in a research note.

Sales were hit as Huawei was unable to meet high demand 'as a result of US sanctions', the note said.

The administration of former President Donald Trump barred Huawei from the US market, pressured allies to shun its telecom networking gear and imposed a succession of escalating sanctions including cutting off access to vital components.

The Trump administration had said Huawei's telecom equipment installed globally could be used by China for espionage.

Huawei has repeatedly denied



A man walks past a Huawei showroom in Beijing, China on May 25, 2020 (AFP)

the allegation, saying the US government had never produced evidence of the charge and suggesting the moves were motivated more by national economic competition in the tech field.

Huawei last year briefly became the world's top mobile phone seller but its market share shrank to just 8 per cent in the fourth quarter, falling behind Apple, Samsung and even Chinese rivals Xiaomi and Oppo, according to IDC.

The company barely held on to its top position in the Chinese market, where its share fell to 22

per cent from 38 per cent in the same period the year before, Canalys said.

Huawei announced in November it had sold its Honor brand of budget smartphones, citing 'tremendous' supply chain pressures caused by US sanctions.

Meanwhile a Canadian judge on Friday rejected Huawei executive Meng Wanzhou's request to relax her bail conditions as she fights against extradition to the US on fraud and conspiracy charges.

British Columbia Supreme Court Justice William Ehrcke

ruled that the Chinese businesswoman must remain under constant supervision by court-ordered security guards - imposed after her arrest two years ago.

"The conditions imposed in my original bail order are the minimum necessary to ensure Meng will attend court as and when required and will not flee the jurisdiction," Ehrcke said.

She faces fraud and conspiracy charges in the United States related to alleged violations of US sanctions against Iran by Huawei and a covert subsidiary, Skycom. AFP

Lulu opens new hypermarket in Salalah



Lulu Group, the leading retail chain, further strengthened its presence in Salalah with the grand launch of its hypermarket located at the newly developed Salalah Grand Mall, which is the 26th branch in Oman and 199th globally.

The new store, which is spread over an area of about 100,000sq ft in a single level, was inaugurated with the support of government officials and the senior management of Lulu.

With its modern design and convenient layout, the new store offers a wide range of high-quality products under categories like food, home furnishings, fashion, footwear, household and much more.

Salalah emerges as a promising tourist destination especially during the khareef season, particularly on account of the thrust on tourism projects by the government.

The development of proper-

ties like the Salalah Grand Mall with a strong footfall driver like Lulu, and other world-class brands, is expected to provide a boost to the sectorial growth in the Dhofar governorate.

Speaking on the occasion, Yusuff Ali MA, chairman and managing director of Lulu Group, expressed his profound happiness and gratitude to the government, Salalah Municipality and all the authorities for their wholehearted support.

He expressed his hope that Oman will continue in its path of development under the wise leadership of His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik.

"Lulu Group is committed to expanding its footprint across the sultanate and is well on track to achieve its ambitious expansion plans with several new projects in Ruwi, Jalaan Bani Bu Ali, and Samail. These projects are also a part of the group's commitment to the community

and will generate direct and in-direct employment opportunities within the local community," he added.

Speaking on the launch of the new store, Ananth A V, director of Lulu Group - Oman & India, said, "We are excited about our association with Salalah Grand Mall for the value they bring into this project and appreciate the mall management for giving us the opportunity to be the anchor store.

"While we are happy to increase our presence in Salalah, Lulu in Oman has very fond memories of Salalah from where we started our first store to having 26 stores today in the sultanate with several more in the pipeline. This hypermarket is an important milestone in our quest to deliver quality products and a shopping experience that's world class."

The new store is conveniently set up to offer residents the

best of services coupled with value for money.

"We are happy to give Salalah this new shopping landmark with a promise to provide a great experience. The offerings at the store have a fine mix of the local and the trending products, keeping the preference of the local populace in mind and we invite customers to shop with us and make the most of the unique offers," said Shabeer K A, regional director, Oman.



OAB reveals Hasaad Savings Scheme for 2021

Oman Arab Bank (OAB) recently announced the details of its new Hasaad Savings Scheme for 2021. The new edition has been enhanced to include even more prizes, to encourage the bank's customers to continue saving and enhance their financial stability.

Commenting on the launch of the new scheme, Rashad al Shaikh, acting head of the Retail Banking Division at OAB, said, "Despite all the challenges that were faced by everyone last year, the Hasaad Savings Scheme has been successful in promoting a savings culture across the community, which we believe is core objective of this scheme. Today, we are delighted to launch the latest edition of the Hasaad Savings Scheme for 2021, which has several great prizes in store for our valued customers across the sultanate. I am confident that the new scheme will see a great turnout from our customers, who have been the cornerstone of our success over the past four decades."

The Hasaad Savings Scheme 2021 will see 101 lucky winners each month from the 54 branches winning RO500 each, as well as 5 monthly winners of RO1,000 each, from those who



transfer their salaries to Oman Arab Bank in the Platinum segment. This is in addition to a Big Prize draw which will see two winners of RO10,000 each, every quarter.

The Elite Draws will see two winners every month of RO10,000 each. This is replaced by an Elite grand prize draw conducted every three months with one lucky winner of RO25,000.

"At the end of the year, we look forward to seeing 1,300 loyal customers of the bank win these amazing prizes. The Hasaad Scheme is a way for us to showcase our appreciation to them, for placing their trust in us as a financial institution and reinforces our efforts to be their 'Partner for Life'. We look forward to conducting the first draw of the new scheme for January during the upcoming days and announcing the first batch of winners."

Majan University student Mooneesah wins big at international astrophysics competition

Mooneesah Abeer Fatimah, a student of University of Bedfordshire, UK and Majan University College, currently pursuing Master's in Computer Security and Forensics, participated in International Astronomy and Astrophysics Competition and won 3rd place (Youth-category) worldwide.

Prior to that she also won national award for Oman for her best performance in IAAC and



has become an IAAC ambassador for Oman. More than 6,500 students from more than 98

countries participated. IAAC is one of biggest, toughest and prestigious global online competitions that enables students to prove their skills and to unleash their creativity in fields of astronomy and astrophysics.

The competition has three rounds - Qualification, Pre-final and Final round. Each round requires problem-solving skills and comprehensive knowledge about astronomy and as-

trophysics.

Mooneesah successfully qualified for the final round which is of 40 minutes. Usually this round is held in college under supervision of teacher but due to COVID-19, it was possible to take from home but the whole duration of the exam must be recorded and uploaded. It should be taken in such a way that student's face, laptop screen plus background is seen and back-

ground noise is heard. Basically, in front of the camera.

Mooneesah scored 39 points out of 40 and was placed among the top 1 per cent of all participants and won third place worldwide. Mooneesah received certificates, cash prize, publication in *International Youth Journal* (scientific journal), publication of a written interview on their social media, and was featured on the winners' page on their websites.

Oman Sail opens registration for the annual youth sailing event Mussanah Race Week

Registration for the annual youth sailing event Mussanah Race Week is now open with young sailors from around the world welcome to train and compete in Oman. Set to take place in Mussanah Sports City from October 26-31, the event has traditionally brought world and continental youth champions to the sultanate's shores to sail against the best young sailors.

This year, for the first time in the event's history, Oman Sail will mark the 11th edition by introducing a boat class for young persons with disabilities known as 'RS Venture', alongside the Optimist and Laser 4.7 classes.

Rashid al Kindi, Oman Sail director of Sailing, said, "Mussanah Race Week has been an exciting fixture in our sailing calendars for a decade now, bringing the best and brightest young sailing talent to Oman. We have seen the benefits of testing our home-grown sailors against the best in the world and providing the platform for young people from different



cultures to learn from each other. We are proud to introduce the RS Venture class for the first time to welcome persons with disabilities to the event."

He added, "It is a great opportunity to include the RS Venture class to let young sailors join those sailing aboard the Optimist and Laser 4.7 classes. It is our

hope that the professional and competitive environment at Mussanah Race Week will help to hone their skills and provide useful insight into the possibilities a career in sailing can offer."

Following four days of racing, participating sailors and coaches will be able to take part in three days of classroom-based

training and practice races with coaching in each of the classes provided by world-class professional sailors.

Feras Asqul, Oman Sail's Mussanah Race Week project manager, said, "Taking part in Mussanah Race Week is the ideal preparation for international regattas, both now as a

sailing prospect and providing valuable lessons and experience to benefit the competitors in the future. We are looking forward to welcoming sailors from around the world to Mussanah once again and to continue expanding the event with the introduction of the RS Venture class in order to become one of the most important events for local and international sailors to compete and gain experience in an ideal learning environment."

Mussanah Sports City, located 85km north of Muscat, was purpose-built to host Olympic-standard international sporting events with facilities to accommodate thousands of guests, global media and up to 400 boats at its onsite marina.

The venue has become synonymous with sailing, successfully hosting high profile events including the 2013 Laser World Championship and 2015 Laser Radial World Championship, among others and is also home to Oman Sail's sailing school.

Bank Muscat to give away over RO1.4mn in Al Mazyona salary draws

Bank Muscat, the leading financial services provider in the sultanate, in step with its vision ‘To serve you better, everyday’ and commitment to partnership in encouraging a savings culture in Oman, has invited its Al Mazyona customers to take part in the salary transfer draws being held in 2021.

In line with the bank’s commitment to encouraging a savings culture in Oman, Bank Muscat recently announced that 20 winners would be chosen every month in the salary transfer category this year from among customers who use Bank Muscat accounts to receive their salaries. As many as 240 winners will receive a total of over RO1.4mn in prizes throughout the year.

Abdullah Tamman al Mashani, DGM – Institutional Sales and Product Development, Bank Muscat, said: “Bank Muscat is playing a keen role in supporting the nation in achieving the goals of Oman Vision 2040



and its Al Mazyona savings scheme is playing an important role in increasing the savings habit of people in the country. By continuously innovating over the past three decades based on customer feedback, the bank offers the largest number of prizes in Oman across different customer segments.

“The bank is proud of the success so far achieved by Al Mazyona in promoting the concept of savings in the Omani society and its role in supporting national de-

velopment goals.”

Al Mazyona rewards 10 winners every month from among those with salaries up to RO999 per month. These winners will be paid a monthly salary prize of RO500 for a whole year as a reward for choosing Al Mazyona salary accounts. Similarly, 10 winners will be chosen every month from amongst the bank’s Al Jawhar customers, whose salaries are RO1,000 or more. These winners too will receive RO500 every month for a whole year.

In 2021, Bank Muscat has further increased the number of prizes in the country’s largest savings scheme with 7,470 winners all set to be rewarded for their savings habit, up by 12 percent from 6,677 in the previous year. At a press conference to launch the 2021 scheme, bank officials explained the details of the prize draws as well as the terms and conditions to enter the draws which will be held throughout the year.

These include both the monthly draws as well as the special Mid-year and End of Year draws. Special prizes have also been reserved for Asalah and Al Jawhar customers as well as for regional, women, youth, and children’s categories. With the bank commencing livestreaming of the prize draws on the official social media channels like Twitter, Instagram and YouTube, the Al Mazyona scheme has been witnessing keen interest from the bank’s customers and the general public.

The scheme is contributing majorly to the development of Oman and encouraging financial prudence amongst the general public. Al Mazyona is designed to transform the lives of prudent savers and special prizes are reserved for different customer segments including Premier Banking, regional, youth, women and children’s account categories. Special prize draws are also held on important occasions like the National Day.

Celebrate Valentine’s Day with Joyalukkas collection



This Valentine’s Day, open up your heart and express your love with a gift as unique as her with Joyalukkas Be Mine Heart to Heart Collection.

The limited-edition collection features an exciting range of intimate heart-themed jewellery including pendants, rings, earrings and bracelets in diamonds and gold.

The 2021 collection is modelled on the latest design trends and is a fine blend of creativity and craftsmanship. The elegant collection is young, stylish and perfect for every occasion.

To make it all the more special, Joyalukkas has announced exciting offers on every purchase including free gold coins and exchange offers.

John PaulAlukkas, MD, Joyalukkas International operations, launched the collection and is quoted during the occasion, “Last year, we all learned the



need for loved ones more than ever. It was love that saw us sail through the difficult period. It’s time to return the love with a gift that her heart desires. I invite everyone to explore our all-new Be Mine Heart to Heart 2021 Collection and express your love with all your heart. I wish everyone a Happy Valentine’s Day.”

During the promotion period,



customers will be rewarded with a free 1g Gold Coin on purchase of Diamond, Polki and Pearl Jewellery worth RO300.

Customers can also sell or exchange their old gold jewellery purchased from any jeweller for cash or brand new jewellery by Joyalukkas. The offers are valid from February 3 to 15 across all Joyalukkas showrooms.

Mazoon Electricity organises workshop on new tariff

Mazoon Electricity Company, the leading electricity provider in Oman continues to hold online awareness workshops to spread information on the newly announced electricity tariff.

On Sunday, January 31, an online workshop was held in co-operation with the Omani Women’s Association in Mudhaibi. The workshop focused on educating the participants and providing them with accurate information about the new electricity tariff in accordance with the new policy of reforming government subsidies in the electricity sector recently announced by the government. The objective of the workshops is to disseminate information, educate customers and provide important and accurate facts about the reformed electricity tariff.

The workshop covered the



new electricity subsidy reformed policy and timeframe, types of target tariff, tariffs for residential groups, available channels for customers to update data, national support system and examples of changes in electricity bills for customers according to the new tariff.

The workshop was presented by Mazoon Electricity staff Samiya Hamed Khalfan al Saidi, customer experience specialist and Abdul-Qader Abdullah Ali al



Balushi, senior bill processing accountant.

The workshops are part of a wide awareness programme planned by Mazoon Electricity to educate various categories of subscribers about the new tariffs using different channels and targeting different stakeholders.

Mazoon Electricity continues to encourage customers to update their data on Mazoon Electricity website or any of Sanad Services Centres.

Enjoy jazz music at Al Bustan Palace hotel

Soul-full nights await at Al Maha Jazz Lounge, the newest venue at Al Bustan Palace, a Ritz-Carlton Hotel. Located adjacent to the hotel’s lobby, the suave lounge will transport guests instantly to the 20’s and 30’s with the smooth sounds of its resident musician, renowned pianist Abraham Kenner III.

At the only venue of its kind in Oman, guests can settle down to a nightly repertoire of jazz, soul and blues, from Billy Holiday to BB King, Ella Fitzgerald and more. Comfortable furnishings and cosy corners are made for feeling at ease, while the art pieces provide a great conversation starter, offering a nostalgic glimpse into the jazz age.

Topped off by premium drinks and the exceptional Ritz-Carlton service, Al Maha Jazz Lounge is the perfect sojourn for a leisurely evening

Nabil bin Abdul Wahab al Zadjali, general manager of Al



Bustan Palace, a Ritz-Carlton Hotel, said, “At Al Bustan, a Ritz-Carlton Hotel we aim to introduce the newest and most exclusive luxury experiences. We are thrilled to be re-introducing our piano lounge after a number of years, which has been reimagined for our modern guests.

“We are proud to be featuring the immense talent of Abraham

Kenner and are confident that Al Maha Jazz Lounge is going to become a favourite among our discerning guests. A place where they can leave the world outside and get lost in the moment.”

Award-winning artist Kenner is best known for his participation on The Voice Poland in 2017. A musician since the age of five, he won numerous awards including the 1993 Band Directors

Award, the 1997 National Choral Award, and was named among the Top 100 musical theatre students in the USA in 1997.

His versatile vocals and soulful style are truly a treat for the ears. Meanwhile, the walls of the lounge tell their own story, filled with exclusive artworks that have been expertly curated and feature prominent jazz and blues musicians, instruments, vintage record covers and posters.

Setting a precedent for hospitality in Oman, Al Bustan Palace, a Ritz-Carlton Hotel continues to delight guests with a variety of experiences that stirs the senses. From award-winning restaurants, to world-class facilities and unparalleled surroundings, guests are offered the perfect setting for creating unforgettable memories in unbridled luxury.

For reservations, email Restaurant.reservation.albustanpalace@ritzcarlton.com or call +968 2476 4444.

Bentley Motors celebrates official opening of its new campus

Bentley Motors has celebrated the official opening of its new campus – with the company’s entire industry-leading facilities now encompassed within a single site in Crewe, England.

A convoy of Bentley cars marked the occasion as the 1929 4lit supercharged Team Car, the Blower Continuation Series ‘Car Zero’ and a range of current generation Bentleys paraded down Pym’s Lane.

The creation of the campus, home to around 4,000 Bentley colleagues, follows years of planning, consultation and positive support from Cheshire East Council.

Pym’s Lane and Sunnybank Road, two roads which previously traversed through Bentley’s headquarters, are closed to the public and enable a safer, more efficient and secure modern manufacturing facility which can develop and expand in line with Bentley’s long-term aspirations.

Commenting on Bentley’s investment and continued commitment to Crewe, Peter Bosch, Member of the Board for Man-



ufacturing, said, “Bentley is in a period of significant and rapid redefinition; transforming a 101-year-old luxury car company into a new, sustainable, wholly ethical role model. We are ac-

celerating our path to electrification and end-to-end carbon neutrality, and we can only achieve these ambitions through world-class facilities that elevate our status as the

leader in sustainable luxury mobility.

“The creation of a campus, our continued, sustained investment in new R&D buildings, and the opportunities that now exist

as part of a single site all give us the capacity to grow as we diversify our model range and look to evolve every aspect of our organisation for the future.”

Pym’s Lane has remained the

focal point for Bentley’s headquarters in Crewe since the company arrived in 1938.

This will only increase with Bentley’s plans to develop that area of the site next year, with

the opening of an Engineering Test Centre and R&D building – both of which will further support Bentley’s journey towards electrification.

This was outlined as part of Bentley’s November Beyond100 strategic announcement which committed to offer truly sustainable luxury, reinventing every aspect of its business to become an end-to-end carbon neutral organisation as it embarks on its second century.

This includes switching its model range to offer exclusively plug-in hybrid or battery electric vehicles by 2026, and full electric vehicles only by 2030.

Bentley is not just investing heavily in its future product direction, however.

The campus creation is an extension of two decades of forward thinking, innovation and achievement.

Acutely aware of the responsibility to consider its environmental, social and economic impact, Bentley has transformed its 80-year-old headquarters into the UK’s single carbon neutral luxury car factory.



This file photo shows Nazanin Zaghari-Ratcliffe with her husband Richard Ratcliffe and daughter Gabriella Ratcliffe (AFP)

UK asks family not to reveal Nazanin release plan

London, UK - The husband of detained British-Iranian woman Nazanin Zaghari-Ratcliffe has said the UK government warned her family that public comments could jeopardise her possible release in Iran early next month.

Zaghari-Ratcliffe's family has been campaigning for her release since she was held in Iran in April 2016 on sedition charges. She is currently under house arrest.

Her husband Richard Ratcliffe wrote on Twitter on Sunday, 'This week the Foreign Office warned us of threats to Nazanin and her family if we continued to publicise Nazanin's release date.'

He retorted that the family believes 'transparency is the best form of protection from abuse'.

Unless Iran finds new grounds to extend her detention, Nazanin's official release date is March 7, according to Ratcliffe.

Zaghari-Ratcliffe worked for the Thomson Reuters Foundation, the media organisation's philanthropic arm.

'Mafia tactics'

She denied charges of sedition but was convicted and jailed for five years. She has spent more than four years in jail or under house arrest.

Foreign Secretary Dominic Raab said last month that the March 7 date was 'based on the existing sentence', stressing that Iran had repeatedly dashed hopes for Zaghari-Ratcliffe's release after postponing another trial in November.

Britain is 'pushing as hard as we can to get the immediate release, not in seven weeks, but as soon as possible, of Nazanin and all of our other dual nationals', Raab said on January 17.

Ratcliffe said on Sunday that the British government's role is to remind Iran that Nazanin 'has the UK's protection'. Britain should not 'act as a messenger for IRGC (Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps) mafia tactics and suppression', he added.

"If anything happens to Nazanin or her family, or if she is not released to the UK on 7 March - there should be consequences. We will be discussing with the Foreign Secretary his back up plan."

The Guardian on Monday reported that Ratcliffe sent the Foreign Office a note accusing it of a 'remarkable lack of judgement'.

The Foreign Office did not immediately respond to a request for comment.

Former British foreign secretary Jeremy Hunt tweeted: 'This is deeply concerning. I know @DominicRaab and @BorisJohnson will be doing all they can but Nazanin's voice must never be silenced'.

Iran has in recent years repeatedly detained foreigners and dual nationals on charges campaigners and governments say are unfounded, with the prisoners only going free after months and sometimes even years of painstaking negotiation.

AFP

Russian prosecutors back request to imprison Navalny

Moscow, Russia - Russian prosecutors on Monday backed a request to imprison opposition leader Alexei Navalny for several years on old charges, after police detained a record number of anti-Kremlin protesters across the country.

On Sunday, demonstrators defied government warnings and rallied from the Pacific port of Vladivostok to the northwestern city of Pskov in a second weekend of mass protest over the arrest of President Vladimir Putin's most prominent opponent.

The protests, which saw authorities enforce an unprecedented lockdown of the centre of Moscow, came ahead of a court hearing that could see Navalny imprisoned for several years.

Navalny's detention and the crackdown on protesters has sparked an outcry in the West.

The 44 year old is facing charges of violating the terms of a 2014 suspended sentence for embezzlement and could be jailed for two-and-a-half years.

The General Prosecutor's Office said in a statement on Monday that it backed a request by the prison service to change the suspended sentence to jail time.

'This motion is considered lawful and justified,' the statement said.

Navalny was detained at a Moscow airport in mid-January after flying back to Russia from Germany where he was recovering from an August poisoning.

He blames the attack with the Novichok nerve agent on Putin and the FSB security agency.



Opposition leader Alexei Navalny appears on a screen set up at a hall of the Moscow Regional Court via a video link from Moscow's penal detention centre during a hearing, in Krasnogorsk outside Moscow on January 28 (AFP)

Batons and tasers will not solve existing problems. Violence only breeds intransigence and engenders bitterness. This is a path towards great trouble. It's time to stop

ALEXANDER SHISHLOV

Batons and tasers

The anti-corruption campaigner is being held in a high-security detention centre and faces years of jail time in several different criminal cases, despite calls from Western governments for his release.

Navalny's team has urged his sympathisers to gather in front of Moscow's Simonovsky district court on Tuesday to show support for the opposition politician.

In recent years, Navalny has served a number of brief jail stints but never a long prison term.

On Sunday, thousands of people rallied across Russia to demand freedom for Navalny and changes to Russia's tightly-controlled political system.

OVD Info, which monitors arrests at opposition protests, said

more than 5,300 people had been detained. Nearly 1,800 people were held in Moscow and almost 1,200 in Saint Petersburg, Russia's second city.

More than 90 journalists were detained, OVD Info said.

Ahead of Sunday's demonstration, authorities locked down the centre of the capital, with hundreds of police lining the streets, central metro stations closed and restrictions on the movements of pedestrians.

Protesters who had hoped to gather outside FSB headquarters were instead scattered to various parts of the city as organisers made last-minute changes in locations.

Protesters and monitors

pointed to the police's harsh tactics, saying they used batons and tasers on peaceful demonstrators, and some were badly beaten.

Valery Fadeyev, the head of the Kremlin's human rights council, denounced the rallies as a 'provocation'.

'Path towards trouble'

But the Saint Petersburg ombudsman said authorities unleashed 'essentially a military operation' against protesters and paralysed the city.

'Batons and tasers will not solve existing problems. Violence only breeds intransigence and engenders bitterness,' ombudsman Alexander Shishlov said in a statement.

'This is a path towards great trouble. It's time to stop.'

Kremlin critics say a concerted effort is under way to silence Navalny's team, dismantle his Anti-Corruption Foundation and pressure his family.

Ahead of Sunday's demonstrations, Navalny's brother Oleg and several key allies including prominent activist Lyubov Sobol were placed under house arrest until March 23 for allegedly violating virus restrictions and calling on people to join protests.

US Secretary of State Antony Blinken on Twitter condemned 'the persistent use of harsh tactics against peaceful protesters and journalists by Russian authorities for a second week straight'.

AFP

Libyan election vow must be honoured 'at all costs': UN

Geneva, Switzerland - Libyan delegates gathered in Geneva on Monday to choose new temporary leaders for the war-scarred country, with the UN stressing the importance of respecting their commitment to hold elections next December.

The 75 participants at the

Libyan Political Dialogue Forum have until Friday to select a prime minister and a three-member presidency council from a list of 45 candidates.

The new leadership will then be tasked with guiding the oil-rich and conflict-ravaged North African country until elections

scheduled for December 24.

By picking that date, 'you have put an indelible mark on the calendar', acting UN envoy Stephanie Williams told the delegates. "This decision was greeted with the overwhelming approval by your compatriots, and it is a commitment that must be honoured at all costs," she said.

"The Libyan people are behind you. They support you and they want you to succeed. They need you to succeed. Don't let them down."

Libya has been torn by civil war since a NATO-backed uprising led to the ouster and killing of

long-time dictator Moammar Gadhafi in 2011. The country is now split between the Tripoli-based Government of National Accord (GNA) and its rival, the eastern-based House of Representatives backed by military strongman Khalifa Haftar.

AFP

COVID-19 PANDEMIC

UK trains volunteer vaccine army in race to inoculate 15mn in 15 days

London, UK - More used to wielding a camera than a needle, taking part in a national vaccination campaign was the 'last thing' documentary director Mike Day expected to be doing before the start of the coronavirus pandemic.

But the 41 year old is now one of an army of volunteers - many with no medical qualifications - being recruited to help deliver Prime Minister Boris Johnson's goal of vaccinating 15mn of those most at risk from the virus by mid-February.

"When I had the opportunity to do something that made a difference I definitely wanted to jump at it so I immediately signed up when I heard about it," Day told AFP at a training session for 120 volunteers at Canary Wharf in east London on Saturday.

Volunteers, wearing masks and gloves, were instructed how to administer the jab on the 32nd floor of one of the business district's skyscrapers, its windows commanding views of uninterrupted, rainswept grey skies.



Britain's Prime Minister Boris Johnson (left) attempts to engage with a member of the public waiting to receive vaccine at the Al-Hikmah Vaccination Centre in Batley, northern England on Monday (AFP)

'Aaah!' shouted one instructor, prompting laughter from the audience of volunteers as one participant stuck a needle into the false shoulder tied around her arm.

Another instructor from the St John Ambulance service, which specialises in first aid education, told the volunteers to

push the needle 'deep into the muscle'.

"Without sounding too cheesy I thought this was a great opportunity to come together to help heal the world," office assistant Katherine Odell explained.

The 35 year old said she wasn't afraid of going out to admin-

ister the shot despite the amount of information she has to assimilate.

She admitted there was 'always a risk' when faced with the disease but you 'keep to the rules as much as you can'.

Eimear Herlihy (31) explained she was used to seeing patients every day as a dentist.

"I'm just really eager for things to go back to normal, so any way that I can help I want to be able to help," she added.

A 19 year old medical student at Cambridge University, Shaun Wilson said it was 'exciting' to take the theory he had learned and 'apply it into something that really can make a difference'.

Volunteers from all walks of life are among the 30,000 individuals who will be recruited by St John Ambulance to administer the Pfizer-BioNTech and AstraZeneca vaccines currently authorised for general use in UK vaccination centres.

The training day in Canary Wharf, which is replicated regularly across the UK, allows knowledge acquired during 15 hours of online courses to be put into practice. At the end of their instruction, the volunteers are immersed in a fake vaccination centre. "Volunteers are absolutely essential to this vaccination programme because what they bring is scale and capacity," Fazackerley said.

AFP

Palestinians to launch vaccinations in 2 weeks

Ramallah, Palestinian Territories - The Palestinians are to receive a first batch of 50,000 coronavirus vaccines by mid-February, when the authorities launch inoculations in the West Bank and Gaza, Prime Minister Mohammed Shtayyeh said on Monday.

Speaking ahead of a Palestinian Authority weekly cabinet meeting, Shtayyeh said the procurement had been secured through various

sources, including the UN-backed Covax programme, set up to provide vaccines to less wealthy states.

"Vaccination will start in the middle of this month," Shtayyeh said.

The Prime Minister said the vaccines would be allocated to the 2.8mn Palestinians in the occupied West Bank and the two million people in the Gaza Strip, which is controlled by the Hamas movement.

UK hits vaccination 'landmark' in care homes

London, UK - All elderly people living in English care homes who are eligible for the vaccine have now been offered their first injection, the National Health Service (NHS) said on Monday.

'The NHS vaccination programme, nurses, GPs and other NHS staff have offered the life-saving jab to people living at more than 10,000 care homes with older residents,' said NHS England.

A small number of homes have had their visits deferred due to severe local outbreaks, and will be seen shortly, while some residents were unable to receive their first dose 'for other clinical reasons', it added.

"Today marks a crucial milestone in our ongoing race to vaccinate the most vulnerable," Prime Minister Boris Johnson said.

AFP

COUP IN MYANMAR

Military detains Aung San Suu Kyi before coup

Yangon, Myanmar - Myanmar's military seized power in a bloodless coup on Monday, detaining democratically elected leader Aung San Suu Kyi as it imposed a one-year state of emergency.

The intervention ended a decade of civilian rule in Myanmar, with the military justifying its power grab by alleging fraud in the November elections that Suu Kyi's National League for Democracy (NLD) party won in a landslide.

The coup sparked global condemnation, with the United States leading calls for democracy to be immediately restored.

Suu Kyi and President Win Myint were detained in the capital Naypyidaw before dawn, party spokesman Myo Nyunt told AFP, just hours before parliament was meant to reconvene for the first time since the elections.

The military sealed off roads around the capital with armed troops, trucks and armoured personnel carriers. Military helicopters flew across the city.

The military then declared, via its own television channel, a one-year state of emergency and announced that former general Myint Swe would be acting president for the next year.

It alleged 'huge irregularities' in the November polls that the election commission had failed to address.

"As the situation must be resolved according to the law, a state of emergency is declared," the announcement said.

The army later pledged to hold fresh elections after the year-long state of emergency.

"We will perform real multi-party democracy... with complete balance and fairness," a statement on the army's official Facebook page said.

Suu Kyi issued a pre-emptive statement ahead of her detention calling on people 'not to accept a coup', according to a post



A soldier stands guard on a blockaded road to Myanmar's parliament following the coup, in Naypyidaw on Monday (AFP)

on the official Facebook page of the her party's chairperson.

By evening, the military announced that pandemic prevention measures will be 'effectively carried out with momentum' - a hint that it would bolster the COVID-19 restrictions that currently blanket parts of the country.

Quash dissent

The military moved quickly to stifle dissent, severely restricting the internet and mobile phone communications across the country.

In Yangon, the former capital that remains Myanmar's commercial hub, troops seized the city hall just ahead of the announcement, according to an AFP journalist.

AFP saw several trucks in Yangon carrying army supporters, with Myanmar flags and blaring nationalist songs, and some NLD members reported that security forces had ordered them to stay at home.

Elsewhere, the chief minister

The United States opposes any attempt to alter the outcome of recent elections... and will take action against those responsible if these steps are not reversed

JEN PSAKI

of Karen state and several other regional ministers were also held, party sources told AFP.

However, the military did not deploy masses of troops onto Yangon's streets.

Swift condemnation

Washington was swift to react to the news.

"The United States opposes any attempt to alter the outcome of recent elections or impede Myanmar's democratic transition, and will take action against those responsible if these steps are not reversed," White House spokeswoman Jen Psaki said in a statement.

UN Secretary General Antonio Guterres, the European Union, Britain and Australia

were among others to condemn the coup.

China declined to criticise anyone, instead calling for all sides to 'resolve differences'.

Myanmar's November polls were only the second democratic elections the country had seen since it emerged from the 49-year grip of military rule in 2011.

The NLD won more than 80 percent of the vote - increasing its support from 2015.

Suu Kyi (75) is an immensely popular figure in Myanmar for her opposition to the military, having spent the best part of two decades under house arrest during the previous dictatorship.

But the military has for weeks

complained the polls were riddled with irregularities, and claimed to have uncovered over 10mn instances of voter fraud.

Last week, military chief General Min Aung Hlaing said Myanmar's 2008 constitution could be 'revoked' under certain circumstances.

Myanmar has seen two previous coups since independence from Britain in 1948, one in 1962 and one in 1988.

Suu Kyi's previous opposition to the military earned her the Nobel peace prize.

But her international image was shredded during her time in power as she defended the military-backed crackdown in 2017 against the country's Muslim Rohingya community.

About 750,000 Rohingya were forced to flee into neighbouring Bangladesh during the campaign, which UN investigators said amounted to genocide.

Suu Kyi went to the United Nations to defend Myanmar against the allegations.

AFP



Myanmar migrants hold up portraits of Aung San Suu Kyi as they take part in a demonstration, in Bangkok on Monday (AFP)

Global reaction

United States

Newly appointed US Secretary of State Antony Blinken called on Myanmar's military 'to release all government officials and civil society leaders and respect the will of the people of Burma as expressed in democratic elections on November 8'.

Britain

British Prime Minister Boris Johnson condemned the coup and Suu Kyi's detention. 'The vote of the people must be respected and civilian leaders released,' he tweeted.

China

"China is a friendly neighbour of Myanmar and hopes the various parties in Myanmar will appropriately resolve their differences under the constitutional and legal framework to protect political and social stability," Foreign Ministry spokesman Wang Wenbin said.

Russia

Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov told reporters that Moscow was following developments in Myanmar, but added that it was too early to give an assessment.

United Nations

UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres 'strongly' condemned the military's detention of Suu Kyi, President Win Myint and other leaders. "These developments represent a serious blow to democratic reforms in Myanmar," spokesman Stephane Dujarric said.

Japan

"We request the release of stakeholders including state counsellor Aung San Suu Kyi who was detained today," Japan's Foreign Ministry said in a statement urging 'the national army to quickly restore the democratic political system in Myanmar'.

European Union

European Council President Charles Michel strongly condemned the coup. 'The outcome of the elections has to be respected and democratic process needs to be restored,' he tweeted.

Australia

"We call on the military to respect the rule of law, to resolve disputes through lawful mechanisms and to release immediately all civilian leaders and others who have been detained unlawfully," Foreign Minister Marise Payne said.

India

"We have noted the developments in Myanmar with deep concern. India has always been steadfast in its support to the process of democratic transition in Myanmar. We believe that the rule of law and the democratic process must be upheld," Ministry of External Affairs said.

Turkey

"Turkey opposes all kinds of coups and we expect the immediate release of elected leaders, political figures and civilians who have been detained," the Foreign Ministry said in a statement.

Come find freedom: North Korean envoy told daughter

Seoul, South Korea - A senior North Korean diplomat who was acting ambassador to Kuwait told his daughter they were going to defect to the South while pretending to drive her to school, Ryu Hyun-woo told media on Monday.

"Come with Mom and Dad to find freedom," Ryu recalled telling his daughter in an interview with CNN.

The teenager was 'shocked' at the sudden suggestion that would change their lives, but responded 'okay', he said - and he took them instead to the South Korean Embassy.

Ryu and his family reached the capitalist, democratic South in September 2019 but their arrival was kept secret until last week, and the interview aired on Monday was his first media communication.

About 30,000 North Koreans have fled repression and poverty to settle in the South, almost all of them first secretly crossing the porous border with China.

Defections by senior officials are rare, although Ryu's arrival came just two months



Ryu Hyun-woo, former North Korean ambassador to Kuwait

after the North's former acting ambassador to Italy Jo Song Gil also sought asylum.

Tae Yong-ho is another high-profile defector who fled his post as North Korea's deputy ambassador to Britain in 2016. He was elected a South Korean opposition MP last year after publishing a best-selling memoir that earned him celebrity-like status.

After more than a year in the South, Ryu asked his daughter what she liked the most about her new home.

"I like the fact that I can use the internet as much as I want," she replied.

Ryu now worries about the safety of his and his wife's extended families remaining in the North.

The isolated regime is known to punish relatives of privileged defectors as a warning to others contemplating similar decisions.

"I think that North Korea having such feudal collective familial punishment in the 21st century is appalling," said the former diplomat, who teared up while talking about his relatives, including his 83 year old mother.

"Any thought of them being punished for what I've done just hurts my heart."

According to reports, Ryu is the son-in-law of Jon Il Chun, the former head of Office 39, which manages the secret funds of the North Korean leadership. He became temporary acting ambassador in September 2017 after Kuwait expelled envoy So Chang Sik following the Gulf nation's adoption of a UN resolution over Pyongyang's weapons programmes.

AFP

Hong Kong tycoon remains in jail after landmark challenge to security law

Hong Kong, China - Hong Kong media tycoon Jimmy Lai was ordered on Monday to remain in jail while judges consider his fresh bail application, the first major legal challenge to a sweeping national security law Beijing imposed on the city last year.

The landmark case puts the city's independent judiciary on a potentially precarious collision course with China's authoritarian leadership as Beijing seeks to snuff out dissent in the restless financial hub.

Lai (73), who owns the pro-democracy tabloid Apple Daily, is one of more than 100 democracy supporters arrested under the new law since it was enacted in June, and the highest-profile figure to be incarcerated on pre-trial charges.

He has been charged with 'colluding with foreign forces' - one of the new security crimes - for allegedly calling for sanctions on Hong Kong and China in response to the crackdown on dissent.

The security law is the most dramatic shift in Hong Kong's relationship with China since it was handed back by Britain in 1997. It criminalises a host of political



Media tycoon Jimmy Lai outside the Court of Final Appeal in Hong Kong on Monday (AFP)

views and toppled the legal firewall between the two territories.

Written in Beijing and imposed by fiat, it allows mainland security agents to operate openly in the city for the first time, and even grants China jurisdiction in some cases.

Another precedent-setting element of the law is no presumption of bail - a hallmark of Hong Kong's independent common law legal system.

That is what Lai and his

lawyers were seeking to challenge on Monday.

Lai was detained in December and initially granted bail after agreeing to a stringent list of requirements - including house arrest and no interviews or social media posts.

But he was put back behind bars days later by the Court of Final Appeal pending this week's full hearing.

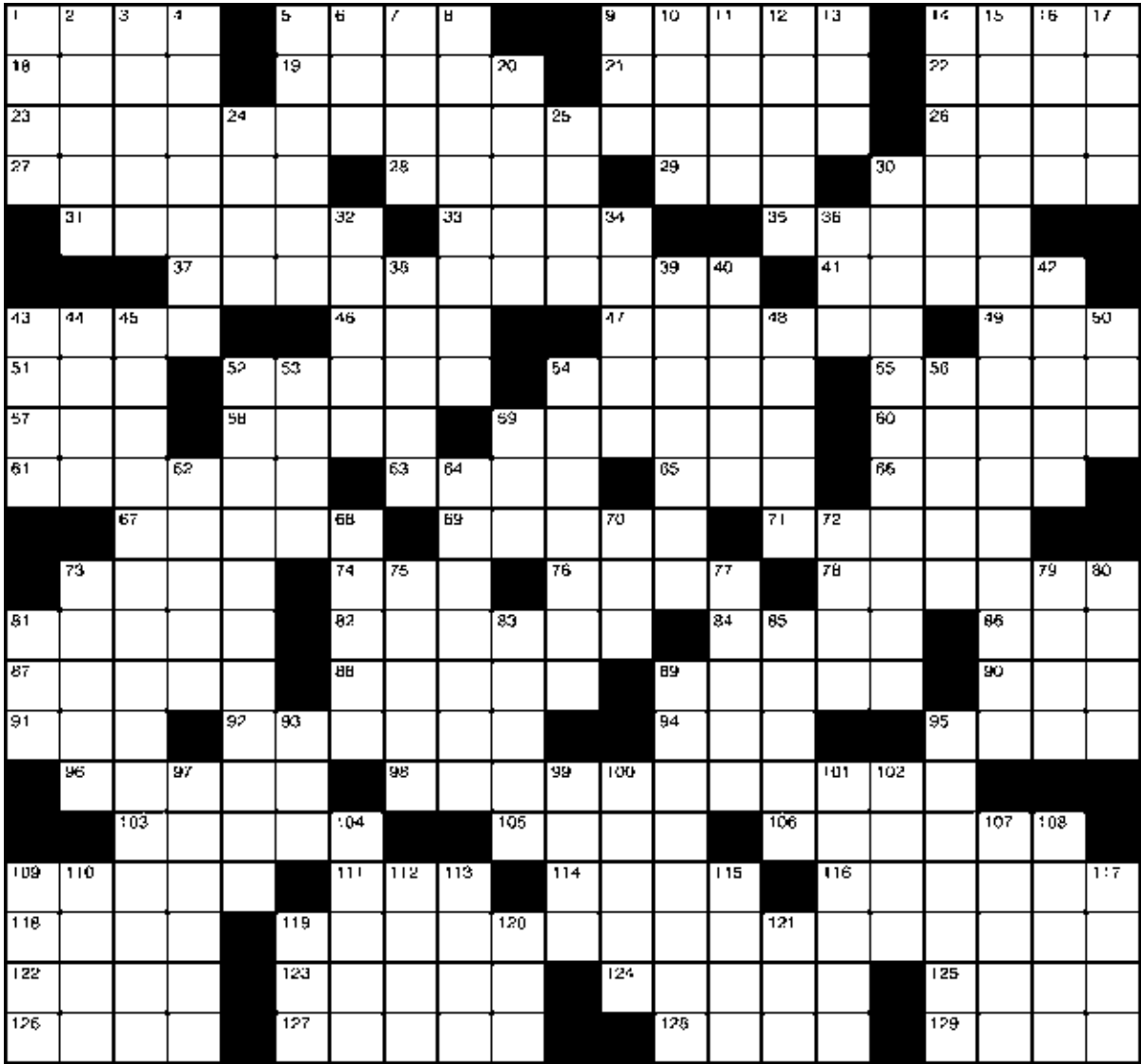
A panel of top judges will now have to balance the wording of

Beijing's law against the city's common law traditions, its mini-constitution and its Bill of Rights, which supposedly guarantee freedom of speech and a presumption of bail for non-violent crimes.

Legal analysts say the outcome will give an indication of whether Hong Kong's judiciary will serve - or even can serve - as any kind of constitutional brake against Beijing's security law.

AFP

DAILY CROSSWORD



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ACROSS

- 1 Corner sign
5 Popular skirt
9 In flame
14 Not closed tight
18 Tip-top
19 Representative
21 Ascends
22 Type of apple
23 Devilishly bad exposures?
26 DLII + DLII
27 Mick's group
28 Place in a cabinet
29 Shoe width
30 Cooks with hot air
31 Trapper
33 Asian desert
35 "The Great ___ Pepper"
37 Care of horsehair?
41 Avoids work
43 Actor Rob
46 Tiny particle
47 Macadam surface
49 Broadcast
51 Alias, for short
52 North Dakota city
54 Yogi
55 Brian De ___
57 Under the weather
58 Smithsonian, for

short

- 59 Justice Burger
60 ___ myself
61 Gathering leaves
63 Medical cat?
65 Permanent commitment?
66 Singer Moreno
67 Night adventure
69 Actress Harmon
71 Observer
73 Grist for U.S. Mail mill.
74 Dep. complement
76 Remnants
78 Last exams
81 Wooden pin
82 Fast-food restaurants
84 Pinnacle
86 Day, in Madrid
87 Scorch
88 States positively
89 Dullards
90 "Nightmare" street
91 Dynamic monogram?
92 Disqualified driver
94 Art rocker Brian
95 Concordes
96 Rough rugs
98 Confess to stealing the stole?
103 Accustom
105 Muslim VIP

106 Particular

- 109 Tan
111 Decay
114 Snaky sea food
116 Gave structure to
118 As well
119 Poppa named Leo, perhaps
122 "The bad news"
123 People of the east
124 Kind of energy
125 Hall of Famer
Slaughter
126 Floating
127 Tree houses
128 "The Seven Little ___"
129 Malodorous
DOWN
1 Enervates
2 Legal wrongs
3 Tearful veggie
4 Professional moniker
5 Actress Osa
6 Here ___, again!
7 Hildegard of films
8 Impoverished
9 Covenant chest
10 Superior in quality
11 Statement of understanding
12 Make a new seam

13 Tee leader

- 14 Fleet
15 Versatile athlete?
16 Parisian pal
17 Speeds up
20 Claw
24 Trillion: Comb. form
25 McEntire of country music
30 Legislative getto-gether?
32 Directional controls
34 Before state or collegiate
36 In the manner of
38 Blows a horn
39 Toted
40 Goofed
42 "The Lion King" cub
43 Den
44 Tulsa's st.
45 Marry on Maui?
48 Massenet's tragic heroine
50 Chef Rachael
52 Appalachian baseball organization?
53 TV's Swenson
54 British sausages
56 Foreign
59 Ashen
62 Sale item tag
64 Ring Primo

68 Angry with

- 70 Election winners
72 "All ___"
73 Nickels and dimes
75 Metal pin
77 River to the Rhone
79 Spirited tune
80 Wal-Mart's Club
81 NY summertime
83 Actress Slezak
85 Mob
89 On ___: speaking for
93 Sci. register
95 Ring training partner
97 Lucinda's country
99 Elbe tributary
100 Kojak and a young Huxtable
101 Alludes
102 At the summit of
104 Wipe out
107 ___ bad mood
108 Encouraged
109 Rhum cake
110 Wallach and Whitney
112 Elevator guy
113 "Take ___!"
115 1944 Allied victory town
117 News room unit
119 Cooler
120 USNA grad
121 Fodder

YOUR DAILY HOROSCOPE



ARIES MARCH 21-APRIL 19

Ease, good vibes, and lofty spirits are the hallmarks of Tuesday's skies. The moon floats through peace-seeking Libra, attracting special attention to the interpersonal dynamics taking place in your closest one-on-ones. Luna spends the day in an uplifting connection with Jupiter and the sun, bringing benefits across the board to any activity concerning social connections.



LEO JULY 23-AUGUST 22

Words come to you with ease. The moon floats through Libra, sweetening up your social life and giving you the tools to tell your story. It's an ideal day for writing projects or important conversations, especially on the relationship front. The moon forms a supportive link to uplifting Jupiter and the life-giving sun, helping instill strength and faith into rocky partnership narratives.



SAGITTARIUS NOVEMBER 22-DECEMBER 21

You don't have to be an island! The universe is nudging you to reconnect with your people, as the moon glides through socially smooth Libra. Luna spends the day in an uplifting connection with your ruling planet, Jupiter, and the life-giving sun. This pairing assists you in any communicative efforts needing to be made today, and provides a much desired state of equilibrium.



TAURUS APRIL 20-MAY 20

You need something to sink your teeth into. The refreshed eager attitude you're feeling towards your ambitions is only adding fuel to your productivity-focused fire. The moon coasts through socially smooth Libra, helping you apply rationale and people skills to any productive efforts. Luna's strong link to Jupiter and the sun can help you take a leap of faith in your job.



VIRGO AUGUST 23-SEPTEMBER 22

It's easier than usual to cross things off your to-do list today. The moon floats through balance-seeking Libra, forming strong connections to capable Jupiter and the self-concerned sun. Any efforts aimed at getting ahead on the job front should be well-benefited today, as you're able to see the big picture view of your goals and plough ahead with confidence.



CAPRICORN DECEMBER 22-JANUARY 19

You can't be missed under Tuesday's skies. There hasn't been a more ideal day for pushing forward with your ambitions. Why not reap the imminent rewards the universe is offering you? Luna spends the day cruising through socially suave Libra, attracting all eyes to your cause. Her strong link to Jupiter and the sun helps you make big forward strides on the work front.



GEMINI MAY 21-JUNE 21

You inherently understand the importance of levity. Thus, you'll understand why the universe is nudging you towards having a good time as opposed to a productive time today. The moon floats through socially sweet Libra all afternoon, revving your engines for romance and creative outlets. And her strong link to big-hearted Jupiter and the self-confident sun help keep you uplifted.



LIBRA SEPTEMBER 23-OCTOBER 22

Tuesday's skies encourage you to turn your loving eye inward. The moon gallivants through your sign, reminding you to tune back into your body, feelings, and most pressing personal needs. Luna enjoys a pleasant day, as she creates harmonious links with feel-good Jupiter and the identity-affirming sun. This makes it easy to bask in romance or other playful activities.



AQUARIUS JANUARY 20-FEBRUARY 18

Another day of the "same old, same old" is about to push you over the edge. Feed your hunger for change and shake up your environment in whatever way feels comfortable! No effort is too small! The moon cruises through Libra, aligning with Jupiter and the self-creating sun. This helps bring up your personality with an added sparkle and charisma. Reap the cosmic rewards!



CANCER JUNE 22-JULY 22

Tuesday's skies are welcomingly restorative. A quiet day spent in reflection is ideal, as the moon glides through peaceable Libra. Luna forms sweet connections with sun and Jupiter, which brings a sense of stability and growth towards any relationship concerns that have become frayed. Cosy up, clean up, and recreate a sense of harmony in your humble abode to make the most of today.



SCORPIO OCTOBER 23-NOVEMBER 21

The cosmos think you're in need of a break today. Let yourself pull away and unwind in a way that soothes you, as the moon meanders through peace-craving Libra. Prioritise rest, hydration, and recuperation—rather than pushing and ploughing ahead. The day itself is relaxed too, as Luna forms supportive connections with good-vibes Jupiter and the life-giving sun.



PISCES FEBRUARY 19-MARCH 20

Tuesday's cosmic landscape calls you away from the energy-draining world of social interaction. The moon drifts through Libra, directing your attention to any emotionally stirring stories happening in your heart. Luna's promising link to the identity-building sun and your ruling planet, spiritual Jupiter, help to ground and uplift you—so long as you keep a low social profile.



TEST YOUR KNOWLEDGE

1. The term of office of the UN Secretary-General is

- a. three years
b. four years
c. five years
d. six years

2. The Newspaper Paravada is taken out in

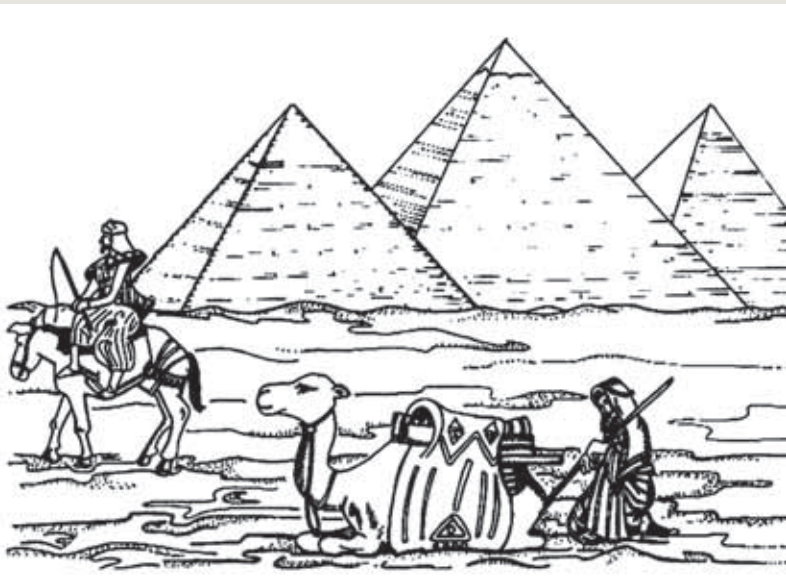
- a. London
b. Beijing
c. Jakarta
d. Moscow

3. The Olympic Symbol (Summer Games) comprises five rings or circles linked together to represent

- a. the sporting friendship of all people
b. the five continents
c. both (a) and (b)
d. None of the above

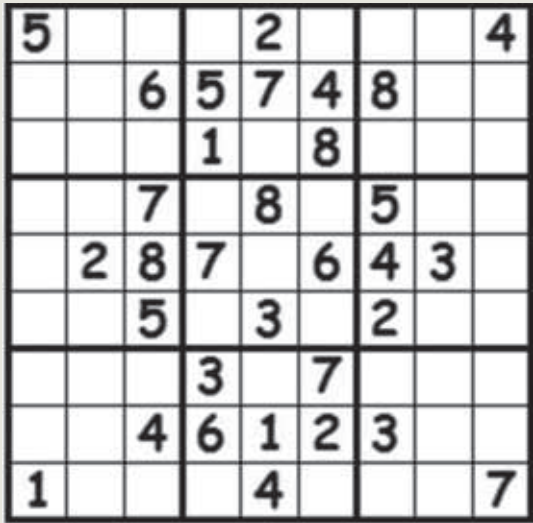
Answers: 1: c 2: d 3: c

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



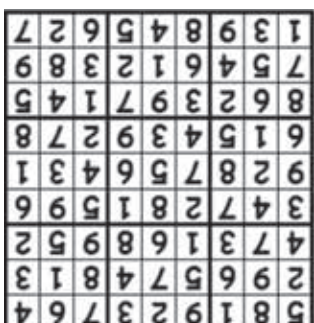
BOGGLER



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 (FEBRUARY 01)



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



LIP CARE



Chapped lips

Chapped, or cracked, lips is the term commonly used to describe dry lips. Chapped lips can be caused by several factors that include the weather, excessive licking of the lips, as well as certain medications.

Chapped lips are a common condition that can happen to anyone, especially during the winter months. However, some people may develop a more severe form of chapped lips called cheilitis, caused by an infection.

Causes

Lips don't contain oil glands like other parts of the skin. This means lips are more susceptible to drying out and becoming chapped (cracked). Lack of moisture can make the problem worse, whether it's weather-induced or related to a lack of self-care.

Little humidity in the air during the winter months is known to cause chapped lips. Frequent sun exposure in the summer can also worsen the condition. Another common cause of chapped lips is habitual licking. Saliva from the tongue can further strip the lips of moisture, causing more dryness.

Remedies

Use lip balm

A good balm can buffer your delicate lip skin from the elements. Choose one high in emollients. Check the ingredient list for petrolatum, which locks in moisture, and dimethicone, which seals off cracks and splits in drying lips. Don't limit yourself to products with the word balm in them. Lip ointments are just as good a choice.

Listen to your lips

Some treatments can do more harm than good. Ingredients like eucalyptus, menthol, and camphor can dry or irritate your lips. Stay away from them, especially if you have dry skin. If you're allergic to plant-based oils and moisturisers like beeswax, shea butter, castor seed, and soybean oil, switch to a petroleum jelly-based product.

Frequent application

Whatever type of product you choose, apply it before you put on lipstick or lip gloss, not after. To keep your lips protected, reapply frequently. You need about six to eight coats during the day, so apply first thing in the morning, last thing at night, and every couple of hours during the day. To make this easier, stash a tube in your purse, one in the car, a third on your desk, and another near the bed.

Protect your lips outside

You cover your hands and feet when the temperature drops - do the same for your lips. Wear a scarf or a ski mask that covers your mouth when

you go out in the cold. And remember to choose a lip balm with broad spectrum UV protection year-round.

Drink up

You know it has tonnes of benefits for your body. One of those is to fight the dehydration that leads to chapped lips.

Use a humidifier

These devices provide the moisture your lips and skin crave. It's great to have one at work as well as at home, especially during winter. Turn it on at night to replenish your skin while you sleep.

Don't lick your lips

While it might seem like a good idea at the time, running your tongue over your lips is the worst thing you can do for them. As your saliva dries, it takes more moisture from your skin. Reach for your lip balm instead.

Don't peel or bite flaky skin

The skin on your lips is thin and delicate. Picking at it can cause it to bleed and hurt, slow the healing process, and cause more irritation. Also, don't exfoliate it.

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POPULAR FASHION ACCESSORIES



STYLEup

Hubert Vaz

Fashion experts say, most people take just a few seconds to glance at you and form an instant opinion based on your appearance. And, your hair, watch and shoes play an important part in them thinking about how much importance you accord to personal style and grooming!

If accessories play an important part in one's personal style and get-up, then paying utmost attention to these everyday would be helpful to develop a signature style or to be 'in style' with the trends of the season when you are among people. So, there is enough reason to work hard on your accessories to unleash the favourable impression you want.

It is said, 'a woman makes an outfit her own by adding accessories that she is fond of'. Accessories aim to enhance the effect of clothes you wear but whether they succeed or not depends on your sense of style, the trend in fashion at that particular time, and the occasion you are wearing it for.

Popular accessories range between anklets, belts, bracelets and watches, handbags, umbrellas. And now, even facemasks. People have a liking for a variety of

accessories which include bangles, necklaces, earrings, handkerchiefs/scarves, shoes/sandals, hats/hairclips, handbags/clutches, socks/stockings, veils and stols, rings and pendants, also helmets and luggage. The invisible accessories, of course, include perfumes, deodorants and bodysprays that provide a typical sensory signature on their arrival.

Bangles, bracelets, brooches

Bangles and bracelets are fashion accessories worn around the wrist since time immemorial. From tribals to new age independent women, all have always treasured the trinkets they wear around their wrists. The difference between a bangle and a bracelet is that a bangle is more rigid than a bracelet while a bracelet is more fluid and has room for varied styles, from a simple set of links (as in a chain) to chunky strips, beads and what have you. Bangles and bracelets exist in countless forms in a lady's collection as one or two are never enough. Brooches and pins, on the other hand, are traditionally used as fastenings to hold folds of fabric together. However, these have evolved as decorative accessories to enhance the look and feel of an otherwise simple outfit. Pins, when attached with an orna-

ment on top of it, become brooches. They also serve as fasteners of any other décor attached to one's attire, such as a spray of flowers or ferns.

Purses, pouches, handbags

The purse, pouch, clutch or handbag has always been one of the most popular accessories without which many women just cannot go outdoors. While some have the whole world in their handbag, others carry essential items, from make-up kits to emergency medicines in small purses/clutches. In fact, unlike men, all women do not like to walk hands free, and so the purse comes to their rescue. Handbags and clutches also reflect personal style, as well as taste – they also indicate social status as well as mindset of the individual. So, women are very careful in choosing these accessories as they speak volumes about their own personality.

Facemasks, gloves, headwraps

While some people always had a fondness for facemasks, gloves, headwraps and scarves, these have now emerged as necessary elements of ones attire, in view of the current pandemic. Especially, the facemask has emerged as a essential fashion accessory which is now

custom-made to suit varied tastes. Gloves, too, in cotton, silk, wool and leather have always been a style statement for some. However, these have now emerged as essential accessories for many people. The headdress or headwrap is an accessory that may have religious or cultural connotations in different countries but now they have become essential for people of all cultures.

Watches and shoes

Though these are worn on two different ends on upper an lower limbs, watches and shoes have always been an important part of an individual's style quotient. There are some people who have analyse one's total personality by just taking a look at the watch and shoes worn. And rightly so, these are available in countless designs and to suit pockets of every size, giving a clear indication of personal taste as well as status. The brand of your watch and shoes seem to determine on which rung you stand on the social ladder. However, there are some people who care more for creativity and comfort level, rather than value and esteem, when choosing their watches or shoes and these can send the social barometers for a tizzy.



Areejal Balushi

My most favourite accessory would be a classic bag, like the Chanel flab bag, as it can complete any style. It's a timeless piece.



Emily Shotter

I probably never go out without some cat fur... it's the new trend! And of course no outfit of mine is complete without it (I have a few pet cats at home). I don't have an accessory 'vice' that I can't live without. Each day and outfit is different for me.



Dr Mary Ann

My favourite accessories are scarves and brooches. The scarf, is versatile and creates an air of formality with either a woggle, brooch, or a fancy knot, depending on the occasion. The brooch adds an air of sophistication to any outfit - it's design and colour creates a story. My wardrobe is incomplete without a collection of scarves and brooches.



Azra Aleem

My most favourite accessory is my handbag. I have many different ones and often mix and match them with my outfits. It's also an essential part of my attire as it carries other personal items like my phone, my keys, etc. It's basically like a mini emergency kit.



Shalini Kumar

As an artist, it comes naturally to me to match my accessories with my outfit, whether its Indian or Western. My most beloved fashion accessory is earrings. Without matching earrings, I feel incomplete, as if something is missing. I feel very confident when I wear nice, matching, beautiful earrings.



Deepti Rawal

My most favourite fashion accessory is my handbag. It's like a mini home for me - so useful in carrying all cosmetics, necessities, first-aid medicines, extra masks, sun glasses, cash and credit cards, ID cards, mobile phone and much more. In fact, I'd surely not step out of my house without my bag.

Spectators likely to be allowed at second Test

Members of India and England squads clear COVID-19 tests

INDIA VS ENGLAND TEST SERIES

Chennai, India - The second India-England Test in Chennai will not be played behind closed doors as the BCCI has informally given permission to the Tamil Nadu Cricket Association (TNCA) to open its gates for spectators, up to a 50% capacity.

The I, J, and K stands of the MA Chidambaram Stadium will likely be opened to public, pending state government clearance, for the second Test starting February 13. The ticket details and standard operating procedures for crowds will be released when formal approval arrives.

It is understood that TNCA had approached the BCCI to allow fans up to 50% of the ground's capacity during the second Test. Media personnel are also likely to be allowed at the stadium, albeit from the first Test itself, should the BCCI approve these measures formally.

Neither spectators nor media personnel were allowed at the seven venues where India's only domestic tournament so far this season - the recent Syed Mushtaq Ali T20 Trophy - was held.

If spectators are indeed allowed, it would signal a change in course for both the BCCI and the TNCA, who had recently informed its members that the stadium would not allow crowds for the two Tests.

Although the Indian government has ruled that spectators can be allowed at 50% capacity for outdoor sports, the decision was said to be taken so as 'not to take any kind of risk with the safety of the players'.

"For outdoor events, spectators will be allowed up to a maximum of 50% of the total capacity of the stadium," the Indian ministry of youth affairs and sports had said on December 26 in a note, which was part of the 'standard operating procedures and guidelines for conducting sporting competition in India in the COVID-19 environment'.



A panoramic view of the MA Chidambaram Stadium in Chennai, where the forthcoming two Tests between India and England will be played



India's Rohit Sharma with a teammate at the outdoor session on Monday

Nothing official has been communicated on the subject yet. "We are not going to comment on speculation. We are still waiting to hear from the BCCI in terms of their protocols for the forthcoming Test series," a representative of the England touring party said.

Meanwhile, all members of the India and England Test squads have returned negative COVID-19 tests and have been cleared to exit their bio-secure bubbles for training in the lead up to the first Test, which starts February 5. The two teams had

been in mandatory six-day quarantines after arriving in Chennai.

While England will train, as per schedule, from Tuesday afternoon, India began their preparations on Monday evening. A team statement said, "The Indian Cricket Team completed their quarantine period today in Chennai. Three RT-PCR tests for COVID-19 were conducted at regular intervals and all tests have returned negative results. The team had their first outdoor session today and nets sessions will begin from tomorrow."

Cricinfo



India's captain Virat Kohli arrives at the Chepauk Stadium on Monday



Pakistan head coach Misbah ul Haq

Misbah 'prepared to drop spinners' if pitch unsuitable

PAKISTAN VS SOUTH AFRICA SECOND TEST

Rawalpindi, Pakistan - Pakistan head coach Misbah ul Haq has said he is prepared to drop spinners, despite their stellar contributions to the team's win in the first Test against South Africa, if the Rawalpindi pitch favours the fast bowlers.

But at the same time, he said Pakistan were looking to prepare a drier surface than normal in Pindi, which would theoretically assist the slower bowlers more.

Pakistan lead the two-match Test series 1-0 after their victory in Karachi. The second Test begins on Thursday.

In the last five years, pacers have had significantly more joy in Rawalpindi. They have averaged 21.40, picking up 498 wickets at the venue in first-class cricket, with spinners responsible for just 72 wickets at 34.18 with a strike rate of 67.50.

The recent record raises questions about whether Pakistan can afford to go in with the same spin-heavy strategy that masterminded their Karachi win, where Nauman Ali and Yasir Shah combined to take 14 of South Africa's 20 wickets.

This is a departure from the tactics Pakistan employed against Bangladesh in Pindi last year, where Yasir was the only frontline spinner alongside three quick bowlers.

In Karachi, the weather was drier and the groundsmen kept the pitch covered to ensure it retained some moisture, but even so, 14 wickets fell on the first day.

In Pindi, however, the cooler weather means groundstaff are exposing it to the sun to allow the moisture to evaporate.

"The weather and pitch is different from what we got in Karachi but we will take a call closer to the game," Misbah said after the first day of training session in Rawalpindi stadium.

"We are open for change if needed and it's not compulsory to play a spinner just because he did well in Karachi. If it's quite evident that the surface isn't suiting a spinner, we are ready to bring in a fast bowler."

"We are trying to accrue maximum home advantage. Normally in first-class cricket here (in Rawalpindi), this pitch is much greener and in between games, there isn't much time for them to dry as moisture stays in. But recently the pitch got enough time with sunlight which is good and I am hoping to have it on a drier side just according to what we asked for."

Misbah added, "It was a much-needed win in Karachi and the best part was the fightback from a difficult situation, which was outstanding. Now, we are guarding against complacency. The conditions are likely to be different but we have to carry on with all the good things we did in the first Test and look out for the areas where we can improve. We know South Africa is a tough team and they will come hard with full preparation to square the series but we have to be ready and go full throttle to win the series."

Cricinfo



BCCI secretary Shah elected chief of ACC

Mumbai, India - BCCI secretary Jay Shah was on Saturday elected president of the Asian Cricket Council (ACC) following the continental body's annual general meeting held virtually.

Shah, 32, replaced Bangladesh Cricketer Board (BCB) president Nazmul Hassan in the post, and is the youngest administrator to be appointed ACC president.

The ACC is responsible for organising the Asia Cup tournaments, including the senior men, women and U19 boys' competitions. Last year the ACC decided to postpone the men's tournament owing to the pandemic, with June 2021 and Sri Lanka jotted down as the date and venue. Pakistan, who were meant to host the 2020 edition, were awarded the hosting rights for the 2022 edition.

Cricinfo

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Major sports events put off

- 2021 Tour of Oman postponed, confirms one of the world's leading cycling teams
- Three international motorsport events due in Feb-March suspended until further notice

Ashok Purohit
Muscat

The announcement by the Oman Automobile Association (OAA) on Monday that three upcoming international motorsport events, scheduled in February and March, have been postponed was on expected lines in view of the ongoing COVID-19 situation.

Last week, the OAA had pushed forward two of the three events - the 2021 Oman International Drift Championship (OIDC) and the Oman Rally Sohar International - by a week.

However, following the recent directives of the Supreme Committee in charge of dealing with COVID-19, the OAA tweeted on Monday that the OIDC, Oman Rally Sohar International and the MENA Karting Nations Cup Championship have been postponed until further notice.

The first round of OIDC was scheduled to be held on February

According to an OAA official, new dates will be announced only after consultations with various stakeholders

11-12 while the rally, which would have been the second-leg of the FIA Middle East Rally Championship (MERC), was to be held from February 25-27. The MENA Karting Nations Cup was due to be held from March 2-6.

According to an OAA official, new dates will be announced only after consultations with various stakeholders and he 'expected that the events may be held later in the year'.

February and March were



A file photo of cyclists competing during one of the stages of the 2019 Tour of Oman in Muscat



A file photo of drifters in action during the 2020 Oman International Drift Championship in Muscat

expected to be busy months for Oman, with five major international sporting events scheduled. But the COVID-19 situation has now forced the postponement of four international events, officially confirmed by the respective organisers.

Earlier this week, the 2021 Oman Open, a European Tour tournament, due to be held at the Al Mouj Golf in March was postponed by the European Tour in consultations with Oman Golf Association.

One of the biggest global attractions in Muscat in February is the Tour of Oman cycling race. Muscat Municipality, the local organisers, have yet to formally confirm the cancellation or the postponement of the event.

However, one of the world's leading cycling teams - UAE Team Emirates - has confirmed to *Muscat Daily* that the race has been postponed. In an email, UAE Team Emirates press officer said that they have received information of the 2021 edition

being postponed though no new dates have been given. The 2021 Tour of Oman was due to be held from February 9-14 and is part of the annual UCI ProSeries.

A senior member of the Oman Cycling Association (OCA) also confirmed to *Muscat Daily* that the Tour has been postponed. The previous Tour of Oman was held in 2019 as the 2020 edition got cancelled following the death of the Late His Majesty Sultan Qaboos bin Said.

@ashokmuscat

FOOTBALL ROUND-UP

Liverpool back in the groove; Tottenham suffer shock loss

ENGLISH PREMIER LEAGUE

London, UK - Mohamed Salah scored twice as Liverpool muscled their way back into the English Premier League (EPL) title race with a 3-1 win at West Ham on Sunday.

Jürgen Klopp's injury-hit champions appeared to have lost their way after a five-game winless spell but are back on track after beating Tottenham and West Ham in the space of 72 hours.

And later in an evening kick-off Tottenham suffered a shock 0-1 defeat at Brighton.

Two goals from Egypt international Salah and a late Georginio Wijnaldum effort lifted them to 40 points after 21 games, a single point behind Manchester United and four behind leaders Manchester City.

Salah, who had not scored in six EPL matches, put the visitors ahead in the 57th minute with a fine curling lob over Lukasz Fabianski and added the second after a lightning break following a West Ham corner.

Liverpool grabbed a third when substitutes Roberto Firmino and Alex Oxlade-Chamberlain combined to set up Wijnaldum for a tap-in before a late consolation for West Ham's

Craig Dawson. Salah is the first player to score at least 20 goals in all competitions in four consecutive seasons for Liverpool since Ian Rush in the 1980s.

"It was a great game, a very professional game, very controlled against usually a flying side," Klopp told Sky Sports.

"We didn't create enough in the first half. We made little adjustments at half-time and it paid off. We scored three unbelievable goals."

Jose Mourinho's Spurs, without the injured Harry Kane, slipped to their second successive defeat, courtesy of a first-half goal for Brighton's Leandro Trossard at Amex Stadium.

Tottenham, who topped the table last month, remain in sixth place, 11 points behind City and six behind fourth-placed Leicester, though they have a game in hand.

Mourinho admitted his 'sad' Tottenham flops 'lacked energy' "We didn't start well. In the first half I felt the team was probably too sad with the goal conceded and the situation," Mourinho said.

"There was a lack of energy. In the last 25, 30 minutes they gave everything but of course



Liverpool's Mohamed Salah (right) celebrates with Jordan Henderson after scoring against West Ham on Sunday

with some limitations.

"The boys showed great spirit in the second half and showed they are suffering. They tried to fight against that sadness."

Fourth-bottom Brighton moved seven points clear of the relegation zone.

ITALIAN LEAGUE Roma stay third

Milan, Italy - Roma maintained third spot in Serie A on Sunday with a 3-1 win over Hellas Verona to keep the pressure on the Milan teams leading the title race. Captain Edin Dzeko was

again sidelined after a fall-out with coach Paulo Fonseca, but Roma shrugged off his absence to stay six points behind leaders AC Milan and four adrift of Inter. The capital side were three goals up after half an hour at the Stadio Olimpico, despite losing English defender Chris Smalling to a injury in the first half.

Gianluca Mancini rose to head in a corner in the 20th minute to get Roma into their stride, and two minutes later Borja Mayoral teed up Henrikh Mkhitaryan for a second.

Mayoral added the third

himself just before the half-hour, finishing off after Verona goalkeeper Marco Silvestri cleared a Lorenzo Pellegrini volley into the Spaniard's path.

Napoli, in fifth, a further two points adrift, rebounded with a 2-0 win against Parma.

OTHER RESULTS

FRENCH LEAGUE:
Sunday: Nantes 1 Monaco 2

GERMAN LEAGUE
Sunday: VfL Wolfsburg 3 Freiburg 0.
AFP



Barcelona's Lionel Messi (right) celebrates with teammates

Messi shows his worth

SPANISH LEAGUE

Madrid, Spain - Lionel Messi underlined his worth to Barcelona by scoring a sensational free-kick on Sunday in a 2-1 win over Athletic Bilbao.

Barca's win at least maintains their momentum while Messi's 650th club goal may have carried extra satisfaction for the Argentinian, who had the details of his contract published in the Spanish newspaper *El Mundo* on Saturday night.

El Mundo claimed the deal signed by Messi in 2017 shows he could earn up to US\$670.3mn over its four years, describing it as 'the colossal contract that ruined Barcelona'.

"Someone has done it with bad intentions to cause problems," said Ronald Koeman. "You have to respect a player who has given so much to Spanish football and to this

club. I didn't have any doubts that it wouldn't affect him on the pitch."

Few can argue with Messi's contribution in that regard, with the 33 year old showing against Bilbao why the club have gone to such lengths to keep him. Bilbao briefly drew level through a Jordi Alba own-goal early in the second half but Antoine Griezmann's strike secured Barca their third consecutive victory, with Ousmane Dembele and Frenkie de Jong both impressive again.

Asked what Messi worth is to the team, Griezmann said: "What a question, we are enjoying him, he is a legend. I hope we can keep enjoying him for many more years."

In another match on Sunday, hosts Granada was held to a goalless draw by Celta Vigo.

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