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GO TO PAGE 05 BUSINESS

2,364 Omani teachers to be appointed in 2021-22

Our Correspondent
Muscat

In efforts to recruit jobseekers, the Ministry of Labour (MoL) will appoint 2,364 teachers in the new academic year - 2021-22 - in cooperation with the Ministry of Education.

A statement issued by MoL said it will complete procedures for the appointment of the teachers who passed the recruitment test. Results of the exams will be announced in the last week of June through the educational portal of the Ministry of Education and MoL's website.

Government continues to provide job opportunities

MoL also stated that 'it has followed with great interest the demands of those who gathered on May 23 in front of the General Directorate of Labour in North Batinah, demanding job opportunities and solution to their problems. Data was collected so as to absorb them according to the opportunities available in various sectors'.

In response to the demands,



(Image for illustrative purpose)

The number of citizens who benefited from the job security system till April was 6,413, of which 78.7 per cent were male and 21.3 per cent female

the Government Communication Centre (GCC), stated, 'The government continues to provide job opportunities through

training and qualification programmes and replacement of expats in the public sector, in addition to employment in various

fields of the private sector.'

Besides appointment of 2,364 teachers for the academic year 2021/2022, and the Sultan Qaboos Navel Academy receiving a number of new recruits on Sunday, MoL has announced various other job opportunities recently, the GCC statement added.

It informed that the Job Security Fund started disbursing dues to citizens whose services were

terminated in November 2020. 'The number of citizens who benefited from the job security system till April was 6,413, of which 78.7 per cent were male and 21.3 per cent female.'

In March 2020, His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik issued Royal Directives to establish the Job Security Fund and prepare a system for its mechanism. The fund was financed with RO10mn given by His Majesty the Sultan.

The authorities supervising the fund work in tandem with the National Employment Centre which helps find alternative jobs for individuals who have been laid off. Financial aid is given during the period of unemployment, provided that the period does not exceed six months, according to the GCC.

'The government affirms that the jobseekers' issue is a priority which receives great attention and is followed up by His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik.'

In January, MoL announced that 32,267 jobs will be available for jobseekers this year, including 7,602 opportunities in government sector units.

Vaccine centres ready for Grade 12 students

Our Correspondent
Muscat

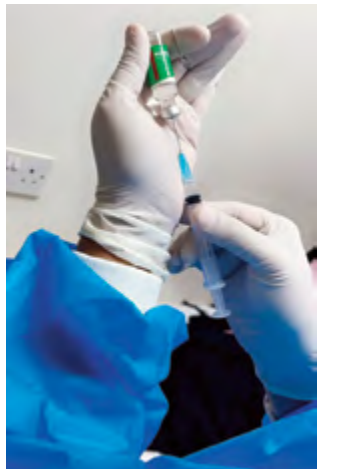
Vaccination of General Education Diploma (GED) - Grade 12 - students in all governorates of the sultanate will begin on Wednesday, according to the Ministry of Health (MoH).

In a statement, it said, 'In coordination with the Ministry of Education, MoH announces the commencement of the immunisation campaign against COVID-19 for GED or Grade 12 students on May 26.'

The campaign will be conducted in coordination with the Directorate Generals of Health Services and Directorate Generals of Education. Immunisation centres have been designated for each governorate.

The target group for this vaccination drive includes all Grade 12 students in government and private schools, teaching staff of GED, members of examination committees, observers and workers in examination centres besides examiners. Workers of evaluation and correction centres have been included in the target group.

The campaign targets 75,725 individuals, the MoH stated.



857 new cases

Muscat - The Ministry of Health on Monday reported 857 new COVID-19 cases, taking the total in Oman to 211,221. Nine deaths were reported on the day, totalling 2,274. The total number of recoveries is 195,435, accounting for a recovery rate of 93 per cent.

Eighty-six individuals were admitted to hospitals on Monday across the country, taking the total number of inpatients to 685, including 237 in intensive care units.

SAYYID SHIHAB RECEIVES MESSAGE FROM QATARI DEFENCE MINISTER



H H Sayyid Shihab bin Tarik al Said, Deputy Prime Minister for Defence Affairs, has received a written message from Dr Khalid al Attiyah, Qatari Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of State for Defence Affairs. The message deals with military cooperation between the two brotherly countries. The message was handed over to Dr Mohammed Nasser al Zaabi, Secretary General in Ministry of Defence, when he received Rashid Said al Khayarin, Chargé d'Affaires of the Qatari Embassy in Muscat, on Monday (ONA)

At least 115,000 health workers have died from COVID-19: WHO

Geneva, Switzerland - At least 115,000 health and care workers have died from COVID-19 since the beginning of the pandemic, the WHO chief said on Monday, calling for a dramatic scale-up of vaccination in all countries.

At the opening of the World Health Organization's main annual assembly, Director-General Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus hailed the sacrifices made by health workers around the world to battle the pandemic.

"For almost 18 months, health and care workers all over the world have stood in the breach between life and death," he said. "They have saved countless lives and fought for others who, despite their best efforts, slipped away."

"Many have themselves become infected, and while reporting is scant, we estimate that at least 115,000 health and care workers have paid the ultimate price in the service of others."

He said many health workers have since the start of the crisis



Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus

felt "frustrated, helpless and unprotected, with a lack of access to personal protective equipment and vaccines".

And they are not alone. He described the overall inequity in access to vaccines as 'scandalous', warning it was 'perpetuating the pandemic'.

More than 75 per cent of all COVID-19 vaccines have gone to just ten countries. "The number of doses administered globally so far would have been enough to cover all health workers and older people if they had been distributed equitably," he said.

AFP

'Foehn wind' causes heat to rise in Muscat

Our Correspondent
Muscat

A phenomenon called 'foehn wind' has led to the mercury rising sharply in Muscat over the last couple of days. The dry winds associated with the phenomenon caused night time temperature in Muscat governorate to shoot up to a maximum of 40°C.

According to the Directorate General of Meteorology, during the past two days, foehn wind caused the southwest winds to blow from the mountainous area of Wadi Samail to the coastal areas of the Sea of Oman towards Muscat governorate, 'causing the maximum temperature of Muscat to rise to 40°C during night.'

The Met department explained that the phenomenon occurs when winds descend from mountainous regions to the plains or coasts, becoming compressed, hotter and drier as they reach the plain or the coast.

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Pact inked to woo Turkish investors

Our Correspondent
Muscat

The Public Authority for Special Economic Zones and Free Zones (OPAZ) and the Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion signed a cooperation programme on Monday with a trade delegation from the Turkish Gebze Organized Industrial Zone (GOSB) to attract Turkish investments to the sultanate through the Special Economic Zone at Duqm (SEZAD).

This follows an initial agreement signed for an investment project to replicate a model of GOSB at SEZAD in key joint investment sectors include mining, petrochemicals, food and logistics. This project will see GOSB set up a Turkish Industrial Zone in Duqm.

The cooperation programme was signed by H E Eng Ahmed bin Hassan al Dheeb, deputy chairman of OPAZ, H E Asila al Samsamiyah, Undersecretary for Investment Promotion in the Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion, and



OPAZ is fully prepared to provide all facilities to these companies, which could easily access the regional and African markets through the Port of Duqm

H E ENG AHMED AL DHEEB

Fahit Yildirim, chairman of GOSB.

Signing the programme is an indication of OPAZ's efforts, in cooperation with the ministry, to attract investments to SEZAD.

"The Turkish delegation will explore the opportunities in Duqm to attract Turkish companies. OPAZ is fully prepared to provide all facilities to these com-

panies, which could easily access the regional and African markets through the Port of Duqm. Additionally, land is designated for gas-dependent projects as the gas pipeline project to Duqm is complete, while the Duqm Refinery Project is nearing completion," said H E Eng Dheeb.

He informed that OPAZ wel-

comes Turkish investors to make the most of the resources available in SEZAD and any other zone related to OPAZ.

H E Asila said, "In light of the interest in developing trade relations between the sultanate and Turkey, different ways of strengthening trade cooperation between the two countries in various spheres have been discussed. The delegation expressed interest in forming real partnerships in the targeted sectors; it will visit a number of concerned bodies during its stay in the sultanate."

She also informed that the Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion is de-

termined to continue achieving its vision and mission, reflecting the objectives of Oman Vision 2040. This confirms the ministry's ongoing endeavour to efficiently market the national economy's components. "The major objective of the investments is to develop Omani exports and free zones for various sectors, thanks to the complementary efforts and cooperation of the Omani Embassy in Turkey and other concerned authorities," H E Asila said.

According to the cooperation programme, OPAZ will allocate land in the Medium Industries Zone at SEZAD so that GOSB, as an investment developer, will promote the zone to companies operating in its industrial zone.

GOSB is located in the centre of the Marmara District, with an estimated area of 5,160,000sqm, constituting two-thirds of Turkey's market. There are 43 foreign companies and 163 companies in 188 industrial units in the zone, with total exports estimated at about US\$11bn from the zone in 2020.

Biggest supermoon of the year on May 26



Our Correspondent
Muscat

Stargazers in Oman will witness a spectacular celestial event on Wednesday - the first lunar eclipse of 2021. What will make this event special is that it coincides with a supermoon, a lunar eclipse and a blood moon all at once.

The full moon will appear bigger, brighter and redder than usual owing to the rare simultaneous occurrence of a supermoon and a lunar eclipse taking place in some parts of the world on Wednesday. Although the supermoon will be witnessed everywhere in Oman, the eclipse will not be visible from the sultanate.

May's full moon is the sec-

ond of two supermoons in 2021, with the previous occurring on April 27.

The term supermoon refers to the Moon's proximity to Earth, having first been coined in 1979 by astrologer Richard Nolle. Any full or new moon that is within 90 per cent of perigee - its closest distance to Earth - is considered a 'supermoon'.

According to NASA, the Moon will be located on the Earth's opposite side from the Sun and fully illuminated on May 26. 'This full moon was known by early Native American tribes as the Flower Moon because this was the time of year when spring flowers appeared in abundance,' NASA stated.

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H E O L Ameer Ajwad
Ambassador of Sri Lanka to the
Sultanate of Oman

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Oman participates in World Health Assembly



Muscat - The 74th session of the World Health Assembly (WHA74) commenced on Monday. Being held virtually, it will run till June 1.

The sultanate, represented by the Ministry of Health (MoH), is participating in the event with a delegation headed by H E Dr Ahmed Mohammed al Sa'eedi, Minister of Health, with attendance of the ministry's undersecretaries and senior officials, in addition to Ambassador Idris al Khanjari, Oman's permanent representative to United Nations and international organisations based in Geneva.

The sultanate's statement in the meeting was presented by H E Dr Sa'eedi on the first day of the session where he pointed out that despite the progress that has been made in understanding the pandemic's nature, its root causes and identifying some measures for its prevention, managing its spread and part of its effects, it was not enough as too many lives are still being lost.

H E Dr Sa'eedi stressed the sultanate's strong belief in advocating human security and peace through global cooperation. In cooperation with WHO and the UN Secretariat, Oman hosted a

Oman reaffirmed its regional commitment with partners to expand cooperation in health, especially in the context of COVID-19, as a tool for international solidarity, stability and peace

meeting last week to call for health security and peace in the Eastern Mediterranean Region. In the meeting, Oman reaffirmed its regional commitment with partners to expand cooperation in health, especially in the context of COVID-19, as a tool for international solidarity, stability and peace.

To emphasise Oman's effort to support peace and health, the minister further noted in his statement that the sultanate, in cooperation with Switzerland, has submitted a Global Health for Peace Initiative to WHO, which will be discussed in January dur-

ing the Executive Board Meeting 150, calling on everyone to join it.

H E Dr Sa'eedi added that in June 2020, Oman participated in launching a coalition for universal health protection which seeks a multilateral cooperative approach to protect everyone's health anywhere and at anytime.

WHA74 will review the report of the Executive Board on its 147th and 148th sessions, and its special session on COVID-19 response, implementation of the Global Strategy for Health of Women, Children and Adolescents (2016-2030), the Health in 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, and WHO's programmes and financial reports for 2020-2021.

The session will review a number of issues, the most important of which are public health emergencies - preparedness and response, mental health preparedness for and in response to the pandemic, as well as declarations of the third high-level meeting of the General Assembly on the prevention and control of non-communicable diseases, WHO's work in health emergencies, and a five-year action plan for health employment and inclusive economic growth (2017-2021).

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Instructors gear down as students dwindle



(For illustrative purpose)

Our Correspondent
Muscat

Driving instructors in the sultanate are yet another category in the society that is reeling under the pressure of the dire economic situation. They are getting fewer and fewer students due to the fear among people of COVID-19 infection. The recent mass exodus of expatriates from the sultanate has also caused dwindling of student numbers. Reluctantly, instructors have decided to reduce their charges.

Earlier, the hourly charge for training manual and automatic vehicle was RO7 to RO8. Now the charges have dropped to RO4 to RO5 per hour.

Mishal Salim, one such instructor who trains students in Darsait and Wadi Kabir, said in January 2020 he had almost 15 students a month and now the figure has dropped to only five.

"I have been in the training

I have been in the training business along with my brothers and uncles for many years and we never had such a dip

MISHAL SALIM



business along with my brothers and uncles for many years and we never had such a dip. We've been forced to reduce the charges," he said.

He added that students are also suffering because of salary cuts and loss of business and it will be unfair also on their part to charge the earlier amounts.

"Everyone is in difficulty and we need to understand that. We

all are in the same boat."

Once full of cars, training areas now wear a deserted look.

Another instructor Khalfan said he has been in the business for last 20 years and has had many students from all around the world.

"The virus has impacted our business very badly. People have some fear regarding social distancing although we wear masks all the time and sanitise the seats, steering wheel and the gear stick," he said.

He added that the present charges are not enough as cars need to undergo servicing and other repairs which cost more now.

For additional income, some instructors are trying their hands at different means of livelihood, like farming.

"Like some others, we are trying to do extra work to earn little more to support our families," said Hamood, another instructor.

Behar holds first international auction, sells 6.7 tonnes of fish

Our Correspondent
Muscat

Behar, an integrated electronic platform that holds wholesale auctions and retail sale of fish, has succeeded in its first international sale of fish to Italy.

The COVID-19 pandemic spawned a multitude of online platforms and hastened the growth of e-commerce in the sultanate.

Behar was one of the first e-platforms to be selected by Oman Technology Fund (OTF), a specialised government-backed fund that invests in IT and innovative startups, for funding support from an endowment of RO10m earmarked for Omani entrepreneurial initiatives

Speaking to *Muscat Daily*, an official at Behar, said, "The platform succeeded in implementing the first electronic auction to sell



(Image for illustrative purpose)

6.7 tonnes of fish to Italy. Its consignment was shipped in cooperation with the Omani Fisheries Company."

On May 20, the auction was conducted smoothly, and the sale process and administrative and financial procedures were completed with full trans-

parency, he stated.

The official explained, "The platform allows international traders to buy Omani fish online with multiple options such as choosing a means of transportation (land, air or sea) to their country. It also allows purchase through the platform and selec-

tion of value-added services like packaging, cutting and freezing. This also opens up real opportunities for Omani youth to work in the fishery sector."

The platform was established on March 28, 2020, he said, adding that over 170 fishing firms and 5,160 merchants engaged in fishing have registered with it.

Of the future, he said, "The coming period will witness a number of electronic auctions to sell fish outside the sultanate."

According to him, the central wholesale market for fish, in co-operation with partners in the public and private sector, works to develop the electronic sales system inside and outside the sultanate in line with the conditions of the spread of the coronavirus, to reduce congestion and mixing, and to emphasise the principle of physical distancing in light of the spread of the virus.

FOREIGN MINISTRY OFFICIAL, EU ENVOYS DISCUSS PEACE IN YEMEN



H E Sheikh Khalifa bin Ali bin Issa al Harthy, Undersecretary for Diplomatic Affairs in the Foreign Ministry, met a group of European Union (EU) ambassadors and the Swedish special envoy to Yemen on Monday. During the meeting, they discussed the latest developments in the region, especially the efforts made to bring peace to Yemen, in addition to the existing cooperation between the sultanate and the European Union countries in all fields (Supplied photo)

Shura discusses GCC law against commercial deception

Muscat - The Majlis A'Shura on Monday held its 12th ordinary session of the second annual convening, ninth term, during which it discussed a proposed draft GCC Law on Combating Commercial Deception, among other issues.

The meeting was chaired by H E Khalid Hilal al Ma'awali, Chairman of Majlis A'Shura.

The meeting discussed the report of the Education and Research Committee about a 'Science and Math Chain Report' and reviewed replies from government departments on a variety of issues.

Some of the topics on the agenda included providing the wilayat of Yanqul with a water network, the Rustaq-Al Awabi dual-carriageway, establishment of a commerce, industry and investment promotion department in the wilayat of Al Jazir.



Bioethics panel prepares for intellectual forum

Muscat - The National Biological Ethics Committee (NBEC) on Monday discussed preparations for the 10th Intellectual Forum due to be held by the end of 2021.

The panel, which met at Sultan Qaboos University (SQU), looked into a proposal to form a sub-committee to endorse research papers from an ethical point of view for researchers whose institutions do not have specialised committees for this purpose.

The NBEC's second meeting was chaired by H H Sayyid Fahd

al Julanda al Said, SQU vice chancellor and chairman of NBEC.

The meeting also discussed a proposal to develop an electronic website to cover all activities and documents of NBEC and to serve as a point of reference for all issues pertaining to biological ethics.

The committee also followed up the progress of work on establishing a Waqf Fund (endowment fund) for the committee with a view to financing future activities.

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Pink lakes in Al Wusta major attraction for domestic tourists

Our Correspondent
Muscat

Pink lakes in the wilayat of Al Jaser in Al Wusta governorate are a boon to domestic tourism.

According to the Ministry of Heritage and Tourism, these lakes are known for their colour, which make them an attraction for visitors from within the country and outside.

'Many tourists throng the site, camping on the soft sands and enjoying the beautiful landscapes,' stated the ministry.

Pink lakes are located 10km from the centre of the wilayat of Al Jaser to the east.

There are two more not so popular lakes in the wilayat, added the ministry.

'The first is at the end of the paved road, and the other is 1km north of the wilayat, where the same stretch leads to a mud road. Both of them fill up during the high tide.'



(Supplied photo)

Over 20,000 people visited nature reserves in 2020

Our Correspondent
Muscat

As many as 20,566 people visited nature reserves in Oman in 2020, compared to 359,225 in 2019 and 305,405 at the end of 2018, according to the National Centre for Statistics and Information (NCSI) and the Environment Authority.

Nature reserves in Oman are a major tourist attraction, offering scenic nature, camping and diving facilities to enjoy coral reefs and other underwater treasures.

The Environment Authority "seeks to conduct scientific studies and provide tourism and entertainment facilities for guests inside nature reserves", it said.

"We have more than 20 nature reserves through which we aim to preserve biological diversity and promote the sultanate in the world of ecotourism."

Speaking to *Muscat Daily* an official at the Environment Authority said it issued 68 special



permits to allow visitors to enter natural reserves in 2020 and also issued 134 diving licences outside the nature reserves.

Talking about the endangered animals, he said, "The authority is making great efforts to take care of endangered animals. There are 607 wild animals and birds in the Wildlife Rehabilitation and Reproduction Centre and 445 green turtles in the Turtle Reserve in Ras al Jinz. The authority also issued 172 import-export permits for endangered animals."

The sultanate has a number of

natural reserves that support domestic tourism, like Rustaq Wildlife Nature Reserve in the Governorate of South Batinah. The reserve has more than 110 species of plants and trees, six different types of mammals and over a dozen species of birds.

The Al Wusta Wildlife Reserve is home to more than 11 species of wild animals, including Arabian oryx, Arabian gazelle, Rhim gazelle, Nubian ibex, red fox, ostrich, brown eagle and wild rabbit.

The Office for Conservation of the Environment recently launched a programme to release wild animals (Arabian antelopes) into the wild, setting them free in the Al Wusta Wildlife Reserve.

The Environment Authority recently installed rings on a number of endangered vultures in two different locations in Dhofar in cooperation with the Environment Society of Oman and the Office for Conservation of the Environment with an aim "to protect them in the sultanate".

Learning Loss in the Coronavirus Pandemic symposium begins

Our Correspondent
Muscat

The two-day virtual symposium titled 'Learning Loss in the Coronavirus Pandemic: Effects and Solutions' organised by the Ministry of Education began on Monday under the auspices of H E Dr Madiha bint Ahmed al Shaibaniyah, Minister of Education.

H E Dr Abdullah bin Khamis Ambosaidi, Undersecretary of the Ministry for Education, and a number of experts from Unicef,

the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) and the International Association for Educational Achievement Assessment (IEA) attended the virtual symposium.

The symposium is targeting 700 participants including teachers, administrators, supervisors, social and psychological specialists, students, and their parents in different governorates, as well as those concerned from the ministry, and a number of government and private agencies.

H E Dr Madiha started the

symposium with a welcome speech during which she said, "The Unesco statistics show that 94 per cent of students around the world are affected by the pandemic. The sultanate quickly responded to the spread of COVID-19 by implementing all needed precautions measures and moving to the online learning environment to ensure the continuity of the learning process.

"Schools and teachers made great efforts in using online platforms for teaching from the be-



H E Dr Madiha al Shaibaniyah

ginning of the pandemic until today."

The first day of the symposium had four main sessions.

In the first session, H E Dr Ambosaidi presented a paper titled 'Education in and Post the Corona Pandemic: Learning Loss or Teaching Loss'. "The Omani education system has to work in the coming phase on finding answers to the questions raised in regard to the education post COVID-19," he said.

In the following session, Dr Dirk Hastedt, executive director

of the International Association of Educational Achievement Evaluation (IEA) presented a paper titled 'Effective Tools in Diagnosing and Monitoring Learning Loss', reflecting on what approaches could be used to measure the learning loss, beside others during the pandemic.

In the third session, Andreas Schleicher, director of education and skills at the Organization of Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) presented a paper under the title 'Measures in Dealing with Learning Loss'

analysing the data collected by the OECD on social distancing and hygiene practices during the pandemic.

A paper titled 'Acquisitions Accompanied the COVID-19 Pandemic - Experiences Around the World and the Way Forward' was presented by Suad Nabhan, expert of education and youth programs at the Unicef, in the last session highlighting the effects of the pandemic on education and how different countries, including Oman reacted to the spread of the virus.

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Ministry launches programme in Dhofar to fight coconut leaf beetle

Our Correspondent
Muscat

The Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Water Resources (MAFWR) on Sunday launched a month-long programme to combat the coconut leaf beetle known as *Brontispa longissima* which has infested trees in Dhofar region.

'The General Directorate of Agricultural, Fisheries and Water Resources in Dhofar Governorate launched a campaign to combat leaf beetle *Brontispa longissima* on May 23, after the emergence of a number of hotspots. The campaign will continue for a month,' the ministry said.

The coconut leaf beetle is one of the most damaging pests of coconut and other palms. According to researches, the larvae and adults of the beetle feed on the soft tissues of the youngest leaf in the palm. Affected leaves dry up, resulting in stunting of the palm and reduced nut produc-



tion. Prolonged attacks on young palms can lead to their death.

The beetle attacks palms of all ages, but young palms are more susceptible than older ones, because the leaves of old palms are firmer and less suitable for the beetle to breed.

Larvae of the beetle chew on large areas of the surface of leaflets still in the throat of the palm (the spear leaf), which causes the death of the underlying tissues.

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*Rates as on May 24
Source: xe.com

BRIEFS

Gazprom plans gas exports of 175-183bn cubic metres to Europe

Gazprom expects to export between 175 and 183bn cubic metres of natural gas to Europe this year at an average price of around US\$200 per thousand cubic metres, Gazprom vice chairman and export general manager, Elena Burmistrova, announced.

Burmistrova said the company is maintaining its natural gas price forecast for this year with prices for exports to Europe ranging between US\$200 and US\$206 per thousand cubic metres despite an anticipated rise in demand.

The revenue from natural gas exports of Gazprom, the only company authorised to export natural gas through pipelines, decreased year-on-year by 39.6 per cent in 2020 to US\$25.2bn.

The company's natural gas exports to Europe also decreased by 12.1 per cent last year compared to the previous year to 174.9bn cubic metres.

Gazprom holds the world's largest natural gas reserves. The firm's share in the global and Russian gas reserves amounts to 16 and 71 per cent respectively.

Oman's inflation rate picks up as prices rise on VAT

Our Correspondent
Muscat

Oman's inflation rate, which remained in negative territory for more than a year, has now returned to positive territory, reflecting the slight increase in prices of certain items after the implementation of value-added tax (VAT) from April 16.

Annual inflation rate, which is based on the consumer price index, increased to 1.59 per cent in April from a negative 0.37 per cent recorded in March, according to the data released by the National Centre for Statistics and Information (NCSI). The consumer price index in April remained 1.47 per cent higher compared to the previous month, the data showed.

A moderate increase in inflation rate was expected after the implementation of VAT in the second half of April. The sharp price increase in transport group items and a seasonal rise in vegetables and fruits prices also contributed to the overall inflation growth in April.

However, the sultanate's 5 per cent VAT rate is among the lowest internationally and most essentials and daily-need items are either zero-rated or exempted from the new tax.

In April, prices in food and non-alcoholic beverages group increased by just 0.29 per cent on year-on-year basis. A marginal increase in this group's inflation was mainly due to a 7.6 per cent jump in the prices of



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non-alcoholic beverages.

Within the food items group, prices of vegetables jumped by 11.3 per cent in April compared to

the previous month and decreased 3.3 per cent compared to April 2020. Fruit prices in April increased by 3.2 per cent

against the previous month and dropped by 2.1 per cent on an year-on-year basis.

Prices in the transport group jumped by 6.5 per cent in April compared to the same month a year ago. Furnishing, household equipment and household maintenance group witnessed an year-on-year price increase of 1.26 per cent in April. Prices in the group of housing, water, electricity, gas and other fuel items remained almost stable in April compared to the same month of 2020.

Oman's consumer price inflation has been in negative territory during the past one year due to weak domestic demand and relatively lower or stable commodity prices. However, the average inflation rate is expected to rise above 3 per cent in 2021, thanks to the implementation VAT, economic recovery and rising global commodity prices.

As per the International Monetary Fund's forecasts, Oman's annual average inflation is expected to rise to 3.8 per cent in 2021, mainly due to the implementation of VAT and the increase in global prices.

The sultanate's inflation has averaged under 1 per cent over the six years to 2019 and was negative in 2020, according to S&P Global Ratings. 'However, the implementation of tax measures, including VAT, could introduce some modest inflationary pressure in 2021,' S&P Global Ratings recently said when it affirmed Oman's sovereign ratings.

Similarly, the World Bank in its latest economic outlook for Oman said the inflation is projected to pick up to 3 per cent in 2021, reflecting the recovery of domestic demand and the introduction of VAT, but to decline in the years to come as VAT-driven impact on inflation dissipates.

Experts believe that the 5 per cent VAT rate is among the lowest internationally and its effects on individuals will be minimal, as it relies mainly on the averages and patterns of individual spending.

Court orders NFC to pay RO840,000 to ex-CEO

Our Correspondent
Muscat

National Finance Company (NFC) on Monday announced that the Appeal Court in Muscat has issued a judgement ordering the company to pay RO840,000 to its ex-CEO.

'National Finance would like to disclose that subsequent to his resignation (as disclosed on October 2, 2018) the ex-CEO, Shahin Mohammed al Balushi filed a legal (labour case) action claiming compensation. The Primary Court issued a judgement on January 6, 2021 ordering the company to pay RO36,000,' NFC said in a disclosure submitted to the Muscat Stock Exchange.

NFC further said, 'The ex-CEO appealed and the Appeal Court issued a judgement on May 19, 2021 ordering the company to pay an amount of RO840,000.'

National Finance Company said it intends to challenge the above judgement before the Supreme Court as it 'strongly believes that the judgement of the Appeal Court did not reflect the law, the internal policies and the contractual arrangements between the parties.'

Oman crude price jumps 5% to \$66.4

Our Correspondent
Muscat

The price of Oman crude jumped by 5 per cent to US\$66.43 per barrel (for July delivery) on Monday at the Dubai Mercantile Exchange (DME) compared to Friday's closing price at US\$63.25 per barrel.

The average price of Oman crude contract (for May delivery) has stabilised at US\$64.43 per barrel, which is US\$3.58 per barrel higher than the price for



April delivery. International benchmark Brent crude also rose 1.43 per cent to US\$67.30 per barrel at 0741 GMT in London on Monday after closing at US\$66.35 a

barrel on Friday. The US benchmark West Texas Intermediate oil was at US\$64.46 per barrel at the same time with 1.86 per cent increase after it ended the previous session at US\$63.28 a barrel.

Oil prices lost some gains during the last week due to market jitters over the possibility of return of Iranian crude supplies to an already volatile market severely hit by the COVID-19 pandemic.

(With inputs from agencies)

Iraq's President says \$150bn stolen oil cash smuggled out since 2003

Baghdad, Iraq - Iraq's President Barham Saleh said US\$150bn from oil had been smuggled out of the country since Saddam Hussein was ousted in 2003, as he introduced a law to fight endemic corruption.

President Saleh presented a draft law to the parliament to fight corruption, recover stolen funds and hold perpetrators to account, a statement read.

He called 'on parliament to adopt this crucial piece of legislation, in order to curb this pervasive practice that has plagued our great nation'.

Transparency International ranks the country 21st from bottom in its Corruption Perceptions Index.

"Of the close to a trillion dollars made from oil since 2003, an estimated US\$150bn of stolen money has been smuggled out of Iraq," Saleh added, calling for co-operation with other governments and international bodies to recover the funds.

Endemic corruption was one



Iraq's President Barham Saleh

of the drivers of protests that shook Iraq from October 2019 to June 2020.

"Corruption is an impediment to any nation's economic and social development," the Iraqi head of state said, whose powers are limited under the constitution.

"It deprives citizens of opportunities and livelihoods, and robs them of essential services and infrastructure," he added.

Saleh said violence and terrorism, which have plagued Iraq for

years, 'are deeply intertwined with the phenomenon of corruption'.

The draft law targets those who have held positions of director general and above in both government and public companies since the establishment of a new regime in 2004.

Under the law, transactions over US\$500,000 would be scrutinised as well as bank accounts, particularly those that held over US\$1mn, and contracts or investments obtained through

corruption would be cancelled.

But security and politics expert Fadel Abo Ragheef was sceptical the law would be passed.

"It's certainly one of the best pieces of legislation proposed by the executive branch since 2003. But will it be adopted? I doubt it," he told AFP.

"The political parties the lawmakers belong to will act to sabotage it, so it doesn't pass," Ragheef said.

"In public they will support it, but behind the scenes, they will do everything to prevent its adoption, because many of the politicians are involved in this racket," he added.

An Iraqi banking source said politicians have smuggled US\$60bn out of the country.

However, much of that was via Lebanon, a move now likely to their detriment, as the country is mired in a severe economic crisis, and it is almost impossible to get money out of its banks.

AFP

TENDER ANNOUNCEMENT

China Petroleum Pipeline Engineering Company Limited Oman Branch (CPP), as an EPC Contractor, invites companies to participate in the following tender:

Estimated Scope Description	Tender Documents Fee
CIVIL WORK, detailed work description: 1. Pipe Sleepers in Area 711,712,713,740; 2. Pipe Supports in Area 711,712,713,740; 3. Platform foundations; 4. Sumps; 5. Transformer foundation for SS01-TX-301; 6. Retention pond; 7. Chemical storage shelter foundation(820-SB04); 8. Traffic sign foundations; 9. Road guard rail foundations; 10. Street light foundation (not including the cliff road); 11. Skid/Pump foundation-all Area; 12. Pull pits and neutralization pits; 13. Communication shelter foundation; 14. Clarifier 740-T-009; 15. Electrical, instrument & Telecom Trenches; And etc. The items 1) to 14) are concrete structures construction activities. The item 15) contains excavation, disposal, formation layer, sand pre padding, post padding, cable tile, caution Tape, backfilling and etc..	Free

Legal entities, domestic Omani and foreign companies who meet the following minimum qualification criteria are eligible to quote in Tender:

- Priority to Oman local companies, or local agent appointed by foreign companies,
- Capability to submit a performance bond of ten percent of total value.
- Complying with the CPP's project execution schedule.
- ISO 14001 and OHSAS18001 in valid period are mandatory.
- Having direct experience of similar jobs in the last five years.
- Agree to complete the further prequalification undertaken by CPP.

All interested bidders shall submit a written application letter printed on Bidder's letter head signed by the Bidder's authorized Person to cppomanced@cppmde.com over a period before **1st June, 2021** stating the following details: Full name of Bidder, phone number, e-mail address, contact person, tender name and tender title. Any application received after **1st June, 2021** shall not be entertained.

The ITB documents will be issued via email by CPP later. The bidders shall bear all cost arising from or incidental to the preparation, clarification, finalization and delivery of their bid proposal.

CPP is not obliged to accept the bid with least prices or any other bids. CPP reserves the right to accept or reject any bid, and to annul the bidding process and reject all bids, at any time prior to award of contract, without thereby incurring any liability to the affected bidder or bidders or; any obligations to inform the affected bidder or bidders of the ground for the CPP's action.

MSX falls 0.12% as activity improves

Our Correspondent
Muscat

The benchmark index of the Muscat Stock Exchange (MSX) fell 0.12 per cent to close at 3,844.2 points on Monday.

Trading activity improved from the previous session as turnover jumped by 101.2 per cent to RO2.38mn and volumes increased 142.15 per cent to 18.32mn shares.

While Financial index remained flat for the day, Industrial and Services indices fell 0.23 per cent and 0.45 per cent, respectively. The MSX Shariah index closed up by 0.09 per cent at 554.1 points.

Market breadth remained negative as six companies closed up, while 19 companies closed down. The rest 21 traded stocks closed flat for the day.

Top gainers were Bank Nizwa (3.19 per cent), Oman Fisheries (2.47 per cent),

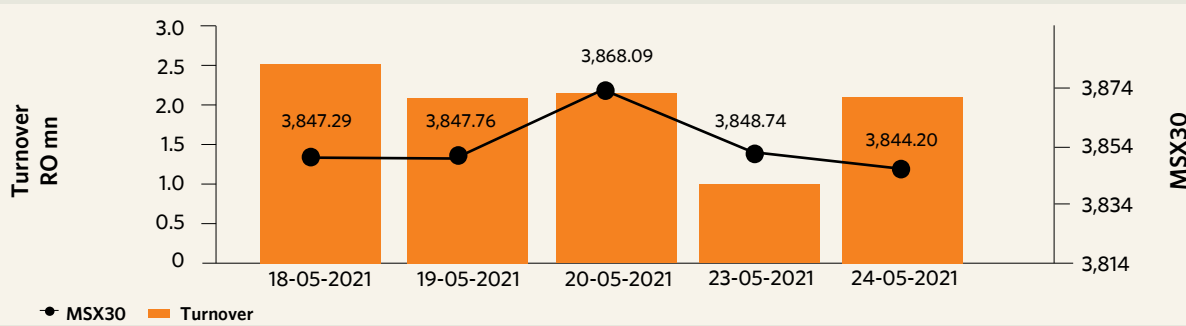


Ahli Bank (0.94 per cent) and Al Omaniya Financial Services (0.92 per cent).

Top losers were Muscat Finance

(-4.26 per cent), Al Sharqiyah Desalination (-4.17 per cent), Oman Cement (-2.44 per cent) and National Aluminium Products Company (-2.34 per cent).

MSX INDEX AND TURNOVER OF FIVE TRADING DAYS



Egypt govt slashes compensation claim over Suez blockage

Cairo, Egypt – Egypt has slashed millions of dollars off its compensation claim against the Japanese owner of a megaship that blocked the Suez canal in March, the canal authority chief said late Sunday.

Egyptian authorities had seized the 200,000-tonne *MV Ever Given* in April and lodged a claim in a local court demanding US\$916mn from its owner Shoen Kisen Kaisha in compensation for the ship's release.

But Suez Canal Authority (SCA) head Osama Rabie said the claim had been dropped to US\$550mn in a televised interview with talk show host Amr Adib late Sunday. "After the owners of the ship estimated the costs of the cargo loaded to be around US\$775mn, we respected this and reduced the [compensation] claim to US\$550mn," he said.

The *Ever Given* became diagonally stuck in the narrow but crucial global trade artery in a sandstorm on March 23, triggering a mammoth six-day-long effort by Egyptian personnel and international salvage specialists to dislodge it. The waterway connects the Red Sea and the Mediterranean Sea and is used



for more than ten per cent of world trade.

Egypt lost between US\$12mn and US\$15mn in revenues for each day the canal was closed, according to SCA figures.

A court in Ismailia, where the SCA is headquartered, ruled on Sunday the ongoing case against Shoen Kisen Kaisha would be moved to a more specialised court on May 29.

The SCA also announced on Sunday in a statement that one of its rescue workers had died during the salvage efforts, but did not provide further details.

Earlier this month, President Abdel Fattah al Sisi approved massive expansion of the canal

to avoid future blockages.

"What you heard today is about the upgrade in the southern stretch, where the problem (the grounded vessel) happened," Sisi said.

The major engineering enhancement 'will lead to improvements in the ability of the guide (SCA) and the captain of any ship to navigate inside the canal', said Rabie.

Rabie said the upgrades would stretch 'from the 122km mark to the 162km mark' and would include a 10km'duplication of the canal from the 122km to the 132km mark'.

The project will last 24 months, he added. AFP

Britain's billionaires grow 20% wealthier during pandemic chaos

London, UK - The fortunes of Britain's billionaires rose by more than a fifth last year despite the pandemic, according to figures from the latest Sunday Times Rich List.

Ukrainian-born businessman Leonard Blavatnik was named as the richest person in the country with a fortune of £23bn, according to figures released ahead of the list's full publication.

The rich list, seen as the country's most authoritative source on the UK's wealthiest individuals, found the number of billionaires rose by 24 per cent to 171 over the last year, despite the economic turbulence caused by the pandemic. The total wealth of the billionaires increased by 21.7 per cent to £597.2bn over the same period, it added.

Robert Watts, the compiler of the rich list, said that the pandemic created 'lucrative opportunities for many online retailers, social networking apps and computer games tycoons'.



Leonard Blavatnik

"The fact many of the super-rich grew so much wealthier at a time when thousands of us have buried loved ones and millions of us worried for our livelihoods makes this a very unsettling boom," he added.

Oil and media investor Blavatnik increased his wealth by £7.2bn, taking the top spot from

inventor and entrepreneur James Dyson, whose wealth increased by £100mn to £16.3bn.

"The fact that billionaires got even richer as the coronavirus ran wild and the economy cratered rather undermines the myth that extreme wealth concentration has any benefits for anybody beyond the super rich,"

said Luke Hildyard, head of the High Pay Centre thinktank.

Other well known names to appear in the top ten include Alisher Usmanov, whose fortune rose by £1.7bn after selling his 30 per cent stake in Arsenal football club, and Chelsea's Russian owner Roman Abramovich.

Here are Britain's ten richest people, according to the rich list:

- Leonard Blavatnik - £23bn
- David and Simon Reuben - £21.46bn
- Sri and Gopi Hinduja and family - £17bn
- James Dyson and family - £16.3bn
- Lakshmi Mittal and family - £14.68bn
- Alisher Usmanov - £13.4bn
- Kirsten and Jorn Rausing - £13bn
- Roman Abramovich - £12.1bn
- Charlene de Carvalho-Heineken and Michel de Carvalho - £12.01bn
- Guy, George, Alannah and Galen Weston and family - £11bn

AFP

Jack Ma to step down as head of his business school: FT

Beijing, China - Chinese billionaire Jack Ma, founder of e-commerce giant Alibaba, is going to step down as president of the elite business school he founded after having been caught in a Beijing clampdown on tech titans, the *Financial Times* (FT) reported on Monday.

Ma, formerly one of China's most flamboyant entrepreneurs, has largely disappeared from public view since Alibaba's fintech arm was investigated and fined by regulators for alleged monopolistic practices.

The *Financial Times* reported cited sources saying that Hupan University - an elite academy for Chinese business executives established in Ma's hometown of Hangzhou in 2015 - has changed its name and will restructure its



Jack Ma

curriculum.

Ma will not hold any high-level title at the restructured organisation, the report said, as Beijing seeks to limit his influence.

"Hupan is like an elite community, it's one of [the authorities'] main targets," one person

who worked with Ma was quoted as saying by the FT.

Viral videos circulating on Chinese social media earlier this month showed construction workers using a blow torch to remove characters on a large 'Hupan University' sign.

The FT also reported last month that Hupan University was forced to suspend new student enrolments after sustained pressure from Beijing to dismantle Ma's fintech empire.

In a series of blows for the group, Alibaba was fined a record US\$2.8bn by antitrust authorities last month, and its fintech arm Ant Financial has been ordered to restructure its business after a planned listing was scuppered.

AFP



Sales of EVs, hybrid cars grow in EU

Ankara, Turkey - Trade of electric and hybrid electric cars in the EU saw a significant increase in 2020, with 1.6mn exports and imports recorded last year, the bloc's statistical office revealed on Monday.

Electric and hybrid electric cars accounted for 14 per cent of the EU's total car exports and 30 per cent of imports in 2020, according to Eurostat. In total, the EU exported close to 5.2mn cars, including petrol, diesel, electric and hybrid electric vehicles, and imported 3mn last year.

"Despite the general decrease in trade following the restrictive measures taken in response to the COVID-19 outbreak, the EU's exports of electric, and hybrid

electric cars recorded almost a fivefold increase from 150,000 in 2017 to 725,000 in 2020, while the EU's imports almost tripled from 301,000 in 2017 to 892,000 in 2020," Eurostat said.

Exports of electric and hybrid electric cars in 2019 stood at 355,000, while the number of imports was 740,000.

In 2020, nearly half of all electric and hybrid electric cars imported to the EU came from Japan and the US, with each accounting for a 23 per cent share.

On the export side, the UK, the US, and Norway were the EU's main markets with 39 per cent, 16 per cent, and 10 per cent share, respectively.

Anadolu Agency

In US, 2.5mn unemployed to be without income

Washington, US - American states are moving to cut pandemic unemployment benefits, a painful blow for millions of people who will soon be left without income.

With punishing jobless levels during the COVID-19 pandemic, unemployment benefits had been extended - especially to the self-employed - and extended further until September 6, even for those who had reached the maximum duration.

But now 21 out of 27 states governed by Republicans - including Missouri, Alaska, West Virginia, Indiana and Georgia - will soon reduce or eliminate additional unemployment aid, according to a note from analysts at Oxford Economics.

This means that some 2.5mn people out of the 16mn unemployed Americans will receive no more help starting in June or July, depending on the state, the analysts said.

One million more unemployed people will lose the additional US\$300 per-week benefit. "It's going to be devastating,"



A banner against renters eviction reading 'no job, no rent' is displayed on a controlled rent building in Washington, DC on August 9, 2020 (AFP)

said Sue Berkowitz, director of the South Carolina Appleseed Legal Justice Center, an organisation that advocates for the rights of low-income residents.

"It's going to have a huge effect if families don't have the stability of income coming in, and they can't keep the lights on, or they're unable to keep up with their housing or rent payment and all the other bills. All that has a detrimental effect on kids," she said.

Unemployment payouts vary

from state to state and ranges between US\$230 and US\$820 per week, an amount that was raised by US\$300 as the effects of the pandemic hit.

With the US economic recovery underway many companies are now struggling to recruit, but the jobs that remain unfilled can be low-skill, low-pay openings.

South Carolina, for example, has a minimum wage fixed to the US federal government standard - US\$7.25 per hour. Other states have raised their minimum wage

much higher than the federal bar.

South Carolina's Republican governor, Henry McMaster, said in a May 6 letter that unemployment benefits are 'incentivising and paying workers to stay at home rather than encouraging them to return to the workplace'.

"What was intended to be short-term financial assistance for the vulnerable and displaced during the height of the pandemic has turned into a dangerous federal entitlement," said McMaster, a supporter of former president Donald Trump.

He claims these benefits 'pose a clear and present danger' to the health of South Carolina's economy.

Higher minimum wage

Yet, if politicians 'are so worried that somebody who is on unemployment can make twice as much as they can on minimum wage' then the state should raise the minimum wage - something they refuse to do, Berkowitz said.

For his part, President Joe Biden recently said that federal

unemployment benefits would remain in the states that want them, but did point out that it would be withdrawn from unemployed people who refuse to take a job.

The Oxford Economics analysts said the pandemic unemployment benefits may be a factor limiting labour supply.

But health concerns remain the main constraint, as a large percentage of Americans have yet to be vaccinated.

Another important factor, the analysts say, is childcare, especially since not all schools have resumed full-time in-person classes.

The spark that set off the anger of the Republican governors was the release of April unemployment figures: Only 266,000 jobs were created over the month, far from the expected million.

New weekly filings for unemployment benefits are however trending lower, perhaps signaling stronger hiring in the months ahead.

AFP

MG Motor Oman opens its latest showroom in Ibra

Mohsin Haider Darwish (MHD), the official distributor of MG Motor in the sultanate, recently celebrated the opening of its new showroom in Ibra. The state-of-the-art showroom, blends convenience, ease of use and best-in-class facilities.

Commenting on the opening of the new showroom in Ibra, Mohsin al Bahrani, CEO MHD ACERE, said, "We are delighted to officially be opening our first showroom here in Ibra - reflecting the continuing growth and expansion of our MG Motor business here in the sultanate. In recent months MG Motor has become an increasingly popular brand in Oman, as more and more members of the motoring public recognise its world class engineering, build quality, power and style that are offered across diverse models at affordable prices."

He added, "We have in fact seen people from different walks of life getting attracted to the MG brand; not just in the capital area of Muscat, but also in other regions of the sultanate."



"Looking ahead, our strategic focus will be centered on customer experience and providing a first-class aftersales experience. We also plan to introduce new MG models, maintaining our reputation for being at the forefront of the automotive industry when it comes to the latest models with technologically advanced features."

Customers visiting the facility, can take their pick from the latest lineup of the striking MG 6, MG 5, MG RX5, MG RX8, MG HS, and MG ZST on display and go for a test drive too.

From the cool and sophisticated MG 6 model, with sleek design and a sporty profile ensuring it turns heads to the MG ZST, a compact SUV with a bold shape, modern design elements, plush new cabin, and a sense of adventure for growing families, the MG lineup has it all!

Regardless of the model, a customer can be confident that

each new MG in the lineup offers some of the very best automotive technology, as well as performance that is economical and responsive.

Apart from having state-of-art showrooms in Sohar, Salalah, Ibra, Ibri, Sur and Muscat, MG Motor Oman also has an e-commerce platform to help enhance its customers' purchase experience from the comfort and safety of their homes.

The platform (<https://mg-om.com/buy-online/>) allows customers to select vehicles from the available stock, to reserve vehicles, to conduct online payments and to schedule home delivery of cars. Additionally, customers can also book home test drives.

For more information about the new showroom and its facilities, the ongoing promotion, or to arrange a test drive, please visit the MG Motor showroom or call 71557334.

OABC webinar on impact of pandemic on employees' well-being today

The Oman American Business Center (OABC) and Cigna, the global health services provider, will host a session on the impact of COVID-19 on employees' well-being and solutions for employers on Tuesday from 11am to 12pm.

The ongoing COVID-19 pandemic has brought on unparalleled levels of stress and anxiety for both leaders and their teams. Left unmanaged, this stress can seriously affect an individual's physical health and in turn, a company's productivity.

The webinar is dedicated to helping members and their teams manage employee health and well-being during these times. Raed Labaki, general manager at Cigna, will walk attendees through the impact of COVID-19 on mental well-being and share powerful tools and practical guidelines to help members manage their team's wellness and mental health.

Cigna will also share the results of their COVID-19 Global Impact Study, which was conducted to understand the impact of COVID-19 on people's health and well-being.



"Every single one of our member companies has been affected in one way or another by the pandemic," says Rebecca Olson, executive director at the OABC.

"The topic of mental health and the well-being of employees is pertinent to us all, as employees are a company's greatest asset. Thank you to Cigna for the collaboration and expertise."

OABC is known for hosting high-level professional networking events.



Ceylon Cinnamon Tea launched

Ambassador of Sri Lanka to the Sultanate of Oman H E Ameer Ajwad launched a new brand 'Ceylon Cinnamon Tea' at Al Meera Hypermarket in Muscat on May 21 coinciding with the International Tea Day.

He also distributed 'Ceylon Tea' dyed face masks which were recently debuted by Sri Lanka Tea Board, among the participants during the launch, to mark the occasion of the International Tea Day.

Ceylon Cinnamon Tea is a product of Cinnamon One (Pvt) Ltd in Sri Lanka and imported by Dynamicglobal Service LLC in Oman. Ceylon Cinnamon Tea is blended with 100 per cent high quality Ceylon cinnamon which has numerous health benefits.

The tea launch took place at the Sri Lanka Restaurant, 'OJAYE' located at Al Meera Hypermarket in Aziba, Muscat which is a Sri Lankan-Omani joint venture recently opened by H E

Ajwad.

Restaurant proprietor Chanaka Hettiarachchi, his Omani sponsor Saleh Suliman Mohammed al Salmi and well wishers participated during the launch of Ceylon Cinnamon Tea which is now available at the OJAYE Restaurant for sale.

This is yet another effort by the Embassy of Sri Lanka in Oman to promote new brands of Sri Lankan products into the Omani market.

Ooredoo spreads Ramadan 'Goodwill' across sultanate with number of activities

As part of fostering a stronger community, Ooredoo has undertaken a host of activities during Ramadan, which included a variety of initiatives that embodied the spirit and values of the holy month.

Held under its long-running CSR programme, 'Ooredoo Goodwill', and in collaboration with local charities and community members, Ooredoo put smiles on faces across the sultanate, with projects focusing on social development, education and empowerment.

One of the initiatives was 'Lenosa3dahom', which the telecoms company has been running since 2012 with the aim of improving the lives of low-income families.

This year, the team distributed ration packs to over 74 families from different regions of Oman.

They also teamed up with



several local charity organisations, including conducting a series of awareness lectures, Q'uran classes and cultural competitions for the Omani Association for the Hearing Impaired, as well as a webinar to teach sign language to the company's employees.

Throughout the month Ooredoo has also taken to social media to encourage its followers to participate in random acts of kindness, whether giving money to charity, donating food or helping a neighbour or community

project. It is now easier than ever to donate to a wide range of popular charities, by simply sending a short SMS message to any of the nine toll-free numbers.

In second half of the month, Ooredoo also hosted its first virtual women's incubator. The 'Meet and Greet' session drew participants from the wilayats of Ibri, Al Kamil W'Al Wafi, and Al Khabourah and provided them with an opportunity to discuss their journeys as entrepreneurs.

This engagement was further enhanced with a Social Media Awareness workshop, in collaboration with Maha Al Balushi, a talented young Omani entrepreneur.

Further promoting budding Omani companies, Ooredoo held 'Asaadhum', an interactive Ramadan-themed social media game that gave winners special gaming packs created by local businesses.

Spreading the joy even further, extra prizes were donated as Qarraqasho gifts to the orphanage at Al Rahma Association for Motherhood and Childhood.

Rounding off the month, and to extend its value of 'caring' to the Ooredoo family, the company collaborated with the Oman Diabetes Association for a wellness-inspired activity that encouraged employees to increase their daily step counts and improve their routines.

With these, and many more initiatives that are conducted under the Goodwill programme throughout the year, the company continues to aspire to create ever-lasting change.

By placing itself at the heart of the community, Ooredoo is promoting the advancement of the Omani people, while fostering sustainable economic and social growth.

Fuel-efficient Nissan Altima available on special 0% interest

Offering customers an unmatched buying experience, Nissan Oman from the house of Suhail Bahwan Automobiles (SBA), is extending a wide range of deals for the patrons of Nissan Altima, which is known for its classy design, fuel economy, driving performance, technology and comfortability.

Customers of Nissan Altima will have a choice of benefits including zero per cent interest for three years on specific models, cash gift, free service, insurance and more.

The offer, which is available on all models purchased for personal use, will go on till June 3.

A senior official of Nissan Oman said, "As testament of the brand's pledge to its customer to offer them the best, we have worked out deals that customers of Nissan Altima are sure to find attractive. Nissan is popular because it offers an outstanding drive, enhanced handling, fuel efficiency and thoughtful technology solutions. Its powerful high-performance engine and a range of other features add to its appeal."



Special interest rate

A special interest rate is available for MY20 Nissan Altima and customers can get zero per cent up to three years or 1.99 per cent for four years or 2.49 per cent for five years or 2.99 per cent for six years on the model. For all tenures beyond six years, normal interest rates will apply for the full tenure of the loan. This rate is

applicable for individual purchase with private registration only and is subject to finance/credit approval. This benefit will be applicable for financing through select finance companies only. Customers purchasing in cash, LPO, credit will not be eligible for special interest rate benefit. Terms and conditions apply.

EMI

Customers of Nissan Altima range can avail low EMI rate of RO168. These EMIs are calculated on basis 2.99 per cent rate of interest for six years loan tenure.

Service package

Customers of Nissan Altima can enjoy free periodic maintenance

service package for three years/60,000km. This offer is valid for 10,000km service intervals.

Assured cash gift

Under the special promotion, customers of Nissan Altima can avail assured cash gift ranging from RO2,200 to RO2,600.

Customers of Nissan Altima can enjoy free insurance in

Oman and UAE for first year for private registration.

Free registration

Customers of Nissan Altima can enjoy free registration for the first year.

Cherished by owners

Nissan Altima is also cherished by owners in Oman for its good looks, striking exterior, colour range, spaciousness and fashionable interior have brought the car a lifetime of fans. The vehicle offers those who drive it an effortless power while furthering remarkable fuel economy.

Nissan Altima has advanced safety features for those seeking a more focused driving experience. Owners vouch that with its advanced technology and in-built design, Nissan Altima is a pleasure to drive.

The Nissan Altima 2.0lt Turbo, which has a new standard of design, driving enjoyment and technology has been creating waves within the mid-size sedan segment since its launch.

The sedan's advanced VC-Turbo engine - the company's first production-ready variable

compression ratio engine - is one of the most advanced internal combustion engines ever created. Similarly, Nissan Altima 2.5lt features expressive styling, an uplifting interior, two power-trains, and advanced Nissan Intelligent Mobility features.

The Nissan Altima 2.0 has the world's first variable compression turbo engine. The engine is so smart that it anticipates what the driver wants. The Altima's shape-shifting VC-turbo engine lets the driver enjoy a lot. Nissan Altima 2.5lt unlocks the pure joy of driving through its innovative latest technology and Nissan Intelligent Mobility feature that responds to the world around in real time.

Power and efficiency

Powered by an innovative 248 horsepower, 2.0lt, turbocharged variable compression, four-cylinder engine, Nissan Altima continuously adjusts its compression ratio to optimise power and efficiency.

For test drive options call Nissan Toll free 80050011. For more details visit their new website: www.nissanoman.com

Empower your drive with Infiniti QX50

Dream of owning an Infiniti QX50, that delivers the promise of a premium motoring experience, is made easy for you this season by Infiniti Oman, from the house of Suhail Bahwan Automobiles.

Customers who purchase Infiniti QX50 during the ongoing Ramadan promotion are eligible for assured cash gift, free registration, free window film and ceramic paint protection coat, free periodic vehicle service package and free AAA assistance card.

The special offer is valid till June 6.

A senior spokesperson at Infiniti Oman said, "Customers can continue to benefit by making best use of Infiniti Oman's special offer on Infiniti QX50. The highly-rated Infiniti QX50 has been created to meet the needs of today's premium car buyers and to deliver ultimate levels of comfort, design and technology. Its key features includes ample space, engine power and efficiency rolled into one unique vehicle.

The crossover embodies everything the brand stands for - beautiful design, advanced technology and empowering performance."

Assured cash gift
Assured cash gift of RO3,000 is being offered on Infiniti QX50. The cash gift can be adjusted in the down payment of the car if customer opts for it.



Free registration
All customers purchasing Infiniti QX50 during this scheme period will be eligible for free first year vehicle registration.

Applicable to the extent of Private Registration only. For commercial registrations, additional amount including passing needs to be borne by customer.

Window film and ceramic paint protection coat
All customers purchasing Infiniti QX50 during this scheme will be eligible for free window film (side and rear glass) and ceramic paint protection coat.

All customers purchasing Infiniti QX50 during this scheme period will be eligible for free pe-

riodic maintenance service package for three years/60,000km (whichever is earlier). All customers purchasing Infiniti QX50 during scheme period will receive Free AAA assistance card for first year only.

Versatility, efficiency, and performance
Infiniti QX50 provides the high-

est level of versatility, efficiency, and performance in luxury mid-size crossovers. The VC-Turbo engine delivers the strong and convincing performance of a V6 and the fuel economy of a 4-cylinder engine, which allows users to harness the exhilarating performance of 268 hp and 380 nm at 4,400 rpm of torque.

The appearance of the Infiniti

QX50 highlights the influence of human artistry in the design process to emphasise the car's premium quality with intelligent packaging and deep character lines with Infiniti signature design cues.

VC-Turbo engine
The VC-Turbo engine is the world's first production-ready

variable compression ratio engine, transforming on demand. A breakthrough in combustion engine design, the 2.0lt VC-Turbo engine adjusts its compression ratio to optimize power and efficiency.

A multi-link system continuously raises or lowers the pistons' reach to transform the compression ratio. High compression ratios aid efficiency, while low ratios enable greater power and torque. The VC-Turbo offers any compression ratio between 8:1 (for performance) and 14:1 (for efficiency), maximizing driver control.

The engine delivers 268 hp (200 kW) and (380 Nm) and fuel economy of 14.1 km/l combined, front-wheel drive; 13.6 km/l combined, all-wheel drive). Front-wheel drive models offer a 35 per cent improvement in fuel efficiency over the previous V6 gasoline QX50; all-wheel drive models offer a 30 per cent improvement.

Sophistication
Remaining true to the design of the QX50 Concept and QX Sport Inspiration, the QX50's aerodynamic exterior reinterprets Infiniti's distinctive Powerful Elegance design language and signature design cues for the SUV segment. It combines a confident stance with intelligent packaging, while deep character lines highlight the influence of human artistry in the design process.



Second Cup Oman scoops up accolades at global awards

Second Cup Oman, the Canadian-born franchise of Bin Mirza International, scooped up three awards for Franchise Partner of the Year, Sustainability and Community, and Lifetime Achievement at the 2020 Second Cup Global Awards. The accolades are a testament of Second Cup Oman's continuous dedication to ensuring reliably great coffee while also positively contributing to its partners and community.

Dedicated to giving back to the environment, Second Cup Oman earned its Sustainability & Community Award for being the First Second Cup from around the world to recycle its coffee grinds. The grinds are collected, dried, and neatly packed to be given to customers for free to use as fertilizer for their gardens or as an ingredient to add to their beauty routine. In addition, Second Cup Oman was one of the first cafes to introduce biodegradable paper straws.

While striving to save the planet, one coffee bean at a time, Second Cup Oman was also prized with the Franchise Partner of the Year award for meeting the highest standards.

As a member of the Second Cup family since 2004, Hani Bin Mirza, managing director at Bin Mirza International, was also honoured with the Lifetime Achievement award. As a franchisee of the award-winning café, he

is determined to expand and franchise throughout the country.

Jannat Shafaei, marketing director at Bin Mirza International, said, "Despite the struggles we continue to face due to the pandemic, our staff have shown remarkable resilience, working vigorously and with the utmost dedication to overcome the obstacles we have faced this year.

"The three different awards are a welcome recognition of the sheer effort that we put into delivering excellence. It is a true honour to see our hard work pay off and as we continue to make our way through this challenging time together, we are confident that we will emerge stronger than ever."

With five outlets across Muscat, Second Cup has maintained its position as one of Muscat's best-loved cafés, offering a wide range of quality drinks and food, including its popular all-day breakfast, and a one-of-a-kind atmosphere in every outlet.

Second Cup Oman continues to move towards its vision of being the Coffee Brand that is "Most Passionately Committed to Quality and Innovation." The awards will serve as motivation for the brand and confirmation for customers, staff, and partners, that Second Cup Oman will and always guarantee its customers an incredible experience all the way.

AJIA extends Eid offers on BMW, MINI models

Al Jenaibi International Automobiles LLC (AJIA), the official importer of BMW Group in Oman, is celebrating joy this Eid al Fitr by continuing its limited-time offer, applicable across its entire BMW and MINI collections.

With every new BMW model purchase, customers can now benefit from the BMW Service Inclusive package, valid for five years or 100,000km, alongside the BMW Repair Inclusive Package, valid for five years or 200,000km.

Buyers will also benefit from free registration and complimentary insurance for one year.

Making this Eid one to remember, AJIA's limited-time offer will ensure customers can



have a hassle-free buying experience alongside a host of bespoke benefits including, one-year free insurance and registration.

Ensuring the MINI aftercare journey is as stress-free as the customer purchasing experience, AJIA will also provide clients with five years or 100,000km of

MINI Service Inclusive (MSI) and five years or 200,000 km of MINI Repair Inclusive (MRI). In addition, this exclusive offer will include a complimentary

weekend getaway at the luxurious Grand Hyatt Muscat with a specially curated dinner for two. Customers will also have the chance to win a brand-new BMW Z4, a premium open-top sports car with an emotion-packed body design and a stunning driver-focused interior.

MINI car buyers will receive a complimentary weekend getaway at the luxurious Grand Hyatt Muscat, as well as a specially curated dinner for two if they avail this exclusive offer.

This offer is valid until June 30.

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



Giulia GTA: A legend hits the street

Balocco was the setting for the unveiling and testing of the Alfa Romeo Giulia GTA as well as its "extreme" GTAM configuration.

The GTA brings back one of the legends of motoring and a milestone of the brand's history: the 1965 Giulia GTA. It is an authentic return to the roots of the brand established 111 years ago, those of the worlds of performance and touring.

It was only fitting that the official debut would happen at the former Autodelta workshops at the Balocco Proving Ground (Vercelli province), the site of the 1960s creation of the Giulia Sprint GTA. This 60-year-old venue is the home of the development and testing of all Alfa Romeo cars.

It was right here that journalists tested out the new Alfa Romeo supercar, and later enjoyed its road-going qualities on

a panoramic off-track route from the countryside of Vercelli province to the Ivrea moraine and the Lago di Viverone in the foothills of the Alps.

The model in brief
The Giulia GTA is characterised as both aesthetic and functional, confirming it is not an exercise in style but instead a high-performance vehicle derived from the exceptional Giulia Quadrifoglio. Its weight is reduced by up to 100kg compared to the Giulia Quadrifoglio, and it is powered by an upgraded version of the 540-hp Alfa Romeo 2.9 V6 Bi-Turbo engine with a best-in-class weight-to-power ratio of 187 hp/lt. It also delivers extraordinary performance with the Launch Mode system where it goes from 0 to 100 km/h in just 3.6 seconds.

Alfa Romeo engineers have

worked to improve its aerodynamics, handling, and weight through the widespread use of carbon fiber and composite material. The technical expertise comes straight from Formula 1, courtesy of the synergy with Sauber Engineering.

The GTA was entrusted with a new rear spoiler - adjustable to 4 positions in the GTAM, and the active front splitter, which can be extended for use on the track by up to 40 mm on the GTAM.

The latter is able to develop double the pressure compared to the Giulia GTA, and a triple increase compared to the Giulia Quadrifoglio thanks to a special new air extractor capable of increasing the car's ground effect. Taking part in this work were two drivers from the F1 team, Antonio Giovinazzi and Kimi Räikkönen, who played an active role in some track testing sessions.

Shangri-La's family experience brand



Shangri-La Group has announced the launch of Shangri-La's family experience brand Fam.ily that will create best-loved experiences for multi-generational families as well as provide support for customers on their parenting journeys.

This new offering reflects Shangri-La's Asian heritage and strong family culture, it also reaffirms the brand's commitment to evolving with customers to fulfill ever-changing demands and delivering on the brand promise of heartfelt hospitality. The Fam.ily brand houses a variety of new and existing programmes specially designed to enable family guests to realise their Shangri-La, both

individually and with one another, as they explore, bond and grow together. Fam.ily celebrates the unconditional love and support of a family, as well as the deep affection, respect and loyalty that bind loved ones together.

"Family has always been at the heart of the Shangri-La brand culture and treating our guests like family remains a hallmark of the Shangri-La identity," said Hui Kuok, chairman of Shangri-La Group. "With the launch of our new Fam.ily brand, we hope to deliver the best-loved experiences that will bring families closer together, and create precious and lasting memories for our family guests."

Iran inspection agreement extended by one month: IAEA



International Atomic Energy Agency chief Rafael Grossi addresses the media at the agency's headquarters in Vienna, Austria on Monday (AFP)

Vienna, Austria - The UN nuclear watchdog and Iran have agreed to extend an understanding to monitor Tehran's activities by one month, the agency said on Monday, while talks in Vienna try to save the 2015 nuclear deal.

"The equipment and the verification and the monitoring activities that we agreed will continue as they are now for one month expiring on June 24, 2021," International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) director general Rafael Grossi told a news conference.

Iran in late February limited the IAEA's access to nuclear sites it has been monitoring as part of the 2015 landmark deal.

An agreement, reached on February 21 for a duration of three months, allowed some inspections to continue.

Grossi said that besides extending that understanding, Tehran had also agreed that information collected so far by agency equipment in Iran would not be erased.

He said the outcome of this 'long discussion' was 'important' but the situation was 'not ideal'.

"We should all be reminded that the temporary understanding is a sort of stop-gap measure. It is to avoid flying completely blind," he said.

The 2015 accord, which had Iran curtail its nuclear programme in return for sanctions relief, started to unravel in 2018 when the US withdrew and reimposed sanctions.

Current talks between world powers are aiming to bring the US back into the deal and lift

sanctions in exchange for Iran reversing nuclear activities it stepped up after Washington pulled out.

Talks depend on US 'political decision'

Iran said on Monday that talks in Vienna depend on a 'political decision' by the US, after Washington questioned Tehran's readiness to return to compliance with the accord.

Iran and world powers are engaged in talks in Vienna to rescue the 2015 nuclear deal after

The equipment and the verification and the monitoring activities that we agreed will continue as they are now for one month expiring on June 24, 2021

RAFAEL GROSSI



US Secretary of State Antony Blinken speaks during a press conference at the Kangerlussuaq Airport, in Greenland on Thursday (AFP)

Unclear if Iran is ready for nuclear pact return: US

Washington, US - US Secretary of State Antony Blinken has said it remains unclear whether Iran is 'ready and willing' to take the necessary steps to return to compliance with the multi-nation nuclear agreement.

Speaking ahead of a fifth round of talks in Vienna on rescuing that deal, Blinken was asked on Sunday about Iranian reports that Washington had already agreed to lift some of the sanctions that have crippled the Iranian economy.

"We know what sanctions would need to be lifted if they're inconsistent with the nuclear agreement," he said on ABC's *This Week*. He added that more importantly, "Iran, I think, knows what it needs to do to come back into compliance on the nuclear side, and what we haven't yet seen is whether Iran is ready and willing to make a decision."

"That's the test and we don't yet have an answer."

Donald Trump in 2018 walked away from the deal, saying Tehran had violated its 'spirit' and remained a regional threat.

His successor Joe Biden

wants to revive the plan, and Blinken has been working with the other parties to the 2015 accord, to that end.

For that to happen, Washington would need to lift the sanctions reinstated by Trump while Tehran would have to re-commit to the terms of the deal, from which it progressively withdrew after Trump's 2018 move.

'The lifting of Trump's sanctions ... is a legal & moral obligation. NOT negotiating leverage', Iran's Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif reacted to Blinken to twitter. 'Didn't work for Trump - won't work for you.'

Also addressing Biden, Zarif said: 'Trump's legacy is past its expiration date. Drop it'.

The Trump administration's 'maximum pressure' campaign against Iran, Blinken said, 'clearly did not get the result that we all seek'.

Some opponents to the deal have argued that Tehran's support of 'extremist groups' and its arms proliferation mean it cannot be trusted to observe a nuclear pact.

AFP

Sister of murdered British MP chosen to stand in by-election

London, UK - The sister of murdered British lawmaker Jo Cox has been selected to stand in an upcoming by-election in northern England, the main opposition Labour party has announced.

Kim Leadbeater (44) was confirmed late on Sunday as the party's candidate in the contest in Batley and Spen, the Yorkshire constituency her late sister represented at the time of her death in 2016.

Cox was shot and stabbed multiple times on her way to meet constituents in the town of Birstall by a far-right gunman during the febrile campaign ahead of Britain's referendum on leaving the European Union.

Leadbeater told local activists she was a 'proud Yorkshire woman' who had a 'deep understanding of the area'.

"I feel passionately about the strength there is in such a diverse constituency," she said, adding she was a candidate that would be feared by the governing Conservative Party.

The by-election in the northern seat was triggered by the departure of the incumbent Labour MP Tracy Brabin after she was elected the first mayor of West Yorkshire during local elections earlier this month.

The upcoming poll in a traditional heartland constituency is another crucial test for the centre-left party's head Keir Starmer, after Labour lost a by-election in Hartlepool on May 6 - a seat it had held for decades.

The party, out of power since



Kim Leadbeater, the sister of murdered Labour MP Jo Cox (AFP)

2010, saw few positive electoral results in an overall poor showing across England.

It has led to questions over the direction of leadership under Starmer, as Prime Minister Boris Johnson's ruling Conservative Party notched up further gains in traditional Labour heartlands across northern England.

The Batley and Spen by-election could prove make-or-break for Starmer, who was elected to lead the opposition a little over a year ago.

"Batley and Spen holds an important place in the Labour Party's heart. And Kim's work to bring people together, just as her sister Jo Cox did, has inspired us all," Starmer said.

He added Leadbeater would be a 'fantastic champion' for the constituency.

Cox was the first woman lawmaker to be murdered in the UK and the first MP murdered since the IRA assassination of Ian Gow in 1990.

AFP

Conflict, unrest complicate Israel govt formation

Jerusalem - Israel's battle with Gaza and unprecedented inter-communal violence at home have further complicated efforts to form a government, raising the spectre of yet another general election, experts say.

That could be a political boon to Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, whose best hope of extending his record 12 straight years in office could hang on a fifth Israeli election since April 2019.

But the ideologically divided anti-Netanyahu camp still has a narrow window to reach a deal that would oust the hawkish premier: Centrist opposition leader Yair Lapid's 28-day mandate to form a government expires on June 3.

"Most analysts regard a fifth election as the most probable outcome," said Toby Greene, a political scientist at Bar Ilan University. "But we have ten days left, and that's a very long time in Israeli politics."

A Lapid-Bennett deal would have required at least some support from pro-Palestinian and non-Zionist Arab lawmakers, which was already uncomfortable political terrain both for them and for Bennett, a Jewish nationalist.

The chances of such a deal took a severe blow earlier this month as Gaza fighters launched rockets into Israel and Arab rioters torched synagogues in multiple mixed communities inside Israel. That forced Bennett to 'reconsider his choice to form a government together with Arab-supported parties', said Yohanan Plesner, president of the Israel Democracy Institute think tank.



Opposition leader and Chairman of Israel's Yesh Atid party Yair Lapid speaks during a party meeting at the Knesset, in Jerusalem on Monday (AFP)

'Support the incumbent'

Before conflict flared with armed Palestinian groups Hamas and Islamic Jihad on May 10, Netanyahu's political future looked precarious.

On trial for bribery, fraud and breach of trust, the premier had failed in a March 23 vote to secure enough seats with his allies to build a majority in Israel's 120-seat parliament.

His mandate to form a government expired on May 4, handing Lapid a chance to try.

But Yonatan Freeman, a political scientist at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem, said it was in Israel's 'political DNA to support the incumbent' when conflict flares.

As Israel ramped up its airstrikes in Gaza in response to

Palestinian rocket attacks, Netanyahu made joint appearances with his bitter political enemy, Defence Minister Benny Gantz.

Crisis leadership, experts say, may have helped Netanyahu reinforce an image that has helped him endure in politics for decades: the security-focussed statesman who defends Israel against external threats.

The crisis also 'caused a fissure among the opposing camp', Plesner said.

Lapid's best, and possibly only, hope of forming a government involved a prospective deal with Naftali Bennett, leader of the rightwing religious Yamina party. Bennett and Lapid are ideological opponents, but both have prioritised averting a fifth election and ending the divisive Netanyahu era.

A deal would have seen Bennett serving as prime minister in a rotation, a move that could harm his standings among some rightwing supporters.

But at the same time, it would constitute a 'huge opportunity for Bennett to present himself as prime ministerial material' as part of his efforts to become Netanyahu's successor, Greene said.

And without Bennett, centrist former television anchor Lapid has little space to make a deal to unite the splintered anti-Netanyahu camp.

After the Gaza crisis, 'it's unlikely, but not impossible', Plesner said. He added that Netanyahu, 'as Israel's most seasoned politician', may be now able to coax rivals into his camp.

He listed Gantz and Gideon

Saar, a right-winger who defected from Netanyahu's Likud last year, as possible candidates.

But with all blocs struggling to build a coalition, 'the most likely outcome at this point is that Israel is headed to a fifth election', Plesner said.

Momentum for unity?

After Israel agreed a mutual ceasefire with Hamas and Islamic Jihad and the inter-communal violence eased, Lapid's Yesh Atid party said coalition talks would resume on Monday.

It said Bennett's Yamina would not attend.

Yet Freeman of the Hebrew University said the crisis could actually drive momentum towards a unity government.

The inter-communal violence saw both Arab and Jewish rioters attack religious sites, among other targets.

Freeman told AFP the Arab violence in solidarity with Gaza raised profound concern across Israel's security establishment: if the Hamas conflict were to flare again, so could the internal strife.

He suggested that the imperative to offer Arab lawmakers a role in the government as a gesture of unity could create incentive for political compromise in the days ahead.

Whether Netanyahu or another leader is capable of crafting a broad, inter-communal coalition remains highly uncertain.

But, Freeman said, "people are looking for ways to mitigate against this violence happening again. Bringing more Arab politicians into the fold could be a way of doing that."

AFP

COVID-19 PANDEMIC

Saudi ups pressure on ‘anti-vaxxers’

Riyadh, Saudi Arabia - Saudi Arabia is tightening the screws on vaccine sceptics, barring them from pilgrimages and overseas travel and blocking access to universities, malls and offices in a contentious effort to boost inoculations.

So-called anti-vaxxers threaten to jeopardise global efforts to beat the coronavirus pandemic, health experts say, but Gulf countries, including Saudi Arabia, are cranking up the pressure on those refusing to get vaccinated.

Riyadh is accelerating a nationwide vaccination drive as it moves to allow only vaccinated pilgrims or those who have recovered from COVID-19 within the previous six months to perform the year-round umrah pilgrimage.

A similar move is expected for the upcoming annual hajj, sources close to the government say.

This month, only vaccinated or immunised citizens were allowed to travel abroad, after the kingdom lifted a ban on overseas trips introduced last year at the start of the pandemic.

Further riling public sentiment, the kingdom has said that from August 1, vaccinations will be mandatory to enter government and private establishments, including education institutions and entertainment venues, as well as to use public transport.



This file photo shows Saudi passengers at the King Khaled International Airport, as Saudi authorities lift travel restrictions for immunised citizens, in Riyadh on May 17 (AFP)

The sweeping announcement came just days after authorities said only vaccinated public and private sector workers would be allowed to return to the workplace.

The decisions have sparked pushback on social media from vaccine sceptics, with hashtags such as ‘No to compulsory vaccination’ and ‘My body, my choice’ gaining traction.

‘You won’t be able to do any of the following,’ wrote one Twitter user. ‘Can’t travel! Can’t work! Can’t go to public places! Can’t even buy food! Can’t study!’ Other Gulf governments are taking similar steps.

The neighbouring emirate of Dubai, one of the seven that make up the United Arab Emirates, said this month that only vaccinated people would be allowed to attend sports events and concerts.

Bahrain has announced plans to temporarily restrict entry to malls, restaurants, cinemas and salons to those who have been immunised.

In Qatar, Kuwait and the UAE, which has reported the highest number of infections in the Gulf, citizens have launched social media campaigns against mandatory vaccinations.

But Saudi Arabia, the biggest Arab economy, appears bent on pressing ahead even though it remains unclear how it will inoculate a bulk of its population before August.

Saudi Arabia’s Health Ministry says it has administered more than 12mn coronavirus vaccine doses, in a country with a population of over 34mn. Amid apparent supply shortages, the kingdom has delayed the second dose for many residents despite an uptick in infections.

The country has reported over 440,000 coronavirus cases and more than 7,200 deaths. Still, it is unlikely to tolerate vaccine hesitancy, which like other parts of the world is driven by misinformation as well as concerns over long-term side effects of vaccines developed in record time.

AFP

India passes 300,000 coronavirus deaths as 'black fungus' spreads

New Delhi, India - India passed 300,000 confirmed coronavirus deaths on Monday, fatalities remaining high despite the country flattening out the number of new cases in its devastating pandemic wave.

It became the third country - after the United States and Brazil - to cross 300,000 deaths.

For several weeks the country of 1.3bn has been hitting record daily rises in infections and fatalities, that have overwhelmed its healthcare system.

While the crisis has eased in major cities such as New Delhi and Mumbai, the coronavirus is still spreading in rural areas and southern states.

Another 4,454 deaths in 24 hours - the second-highest daily figure so far - took India’s toll to 303,720. It has added the last 50,000 deaths in under two weeks, according to government figures.



A health worker inoculates a woman with a dose of the Covishield jab at a vaccination centre set up at a wholesale vegetable market on the outskirts of Amritsar in northern India on Monday (AFP)

The virus has killed at least 3,465,398 people since the outbreak emerged in China in December 2019, according to a tally from official sources compiled by AFP at 1000 GMT on Monday. At least 166,741,960 cases of coronavirus have been registered.

The World Health Organization estimates that the pandemic’s overall toll could be two to three times higher than official records, due to the excess mortality that is directly and indirectly linked to COVID-19.

A large number of the less severe or asymptomatic cases also remain undetected, despite intensified testing in many countries.

On Sunday, 8,971 new deaths and 493,617 new cases were recorded worldwide.

The country with the highest number of deaths compared to its population is Hungary with 306 fatalities per 100,000 inhabitants, followed by the Czech Republic with 280,

TOP FIVE COUNTRIES WITH MAXIMUM DEATHS	
The novel coronavirus has killed at least 3,465,398 people since the outbreak emerged in China in December 2019	
US	589,893 deaths from 33,117,770 cases
Brazil	449,068 deaths from 16,083,258 cases
India	303,720 deaths from 26,752,447 cases
Mexico	221,647 deaths from 2,396,604 cases
Britain	127,721 deaths from 4,462,538 cases

Bosnia-Herzegovina with 278, the Republic of North Macedonia 255 and Bulgaria 252.

The brutal wave in India has been accompanied by the emergence among coronavirus patients of thousands of cases of the usually rare infection mucormycosis, or ‘black fungus’.

The government has given

figures between 5,424 and 8,848 for the number across India. Normally it records fewer than 20 cases a year.

Doctors say one of the reasons behind the explosion in ‘black fungus’ infections has been excessive use of steroids on virus patients.

Health Minister Harsh Vard-

han said imports of the main anti-fungal drug, amphotericin B, had started to arrive in the country amid a severe shortage.

Experts have warned that religious festivals and packed state election rallies held earlier in the year could have led to virus ‘superspreader’ events.

There were also concerns that the B.1.617 variant, first detected in India last year, has contributed to the surge.

Vardhan said the variant accounted for some 20 per cent of just under 26,000 samples from positive COVID-19 tests that have been genetically sequenced.

As part of its efforts to combat the pandemic, India has administered just over 196mn COVID-19 vaccination shots since mid-January.

But experts say the mass inoculation programme needs to be significantly stepped up.

AFP

Mass evacuations as second cyclone in a week strengthens to hit India

Kolkata, India - Indian authorities on Monday ordered the evacuation of nearly half a million people out of the path of a new cyclone heading towards eastern India just one week after another deadly storm smashed into the west coast.

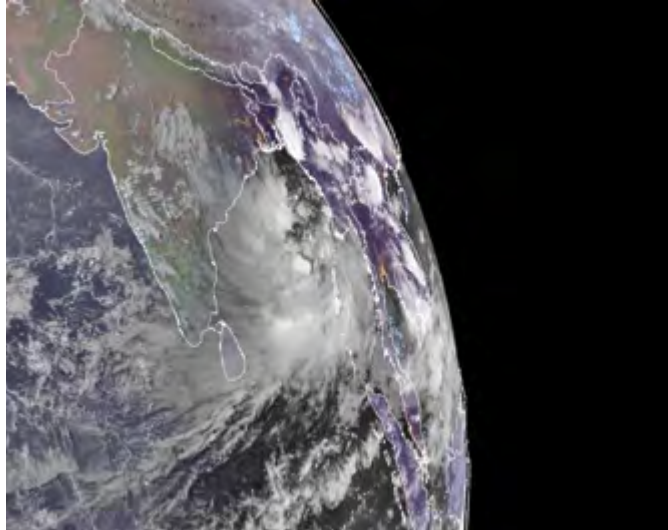
The cyclones are hitting as India reels from a surge in coronavirus infections that has plunged the healthcare system into crisis and pushed the country’s COVID-19 death toll above 300,000.

Experts say storms off India’s coast are increasing in frequency and intensity as climate change warms ocean waters.

The India Meteorological Department said Cyclone Yaas had formed in the Bay of Bengal and was expected to barrel into West Bengal and Odisha states on Wednesday.

Neighbouring Bangladesh has also been put on alert.

Yaas could pack gusts of up to



This RAMMB/CIRA handout satellite image shows a cyclone(right) approaching eastern India on Sunday at 14:00 UTC (AFP)

185km per hour as a ‘Very Severe Cyclonic Storm’ at the time of landfall, the department said.

Storm surges of up to four metres high were ‘likely to inundate low-lying coastal areas’, it added.

Evacuations in coastal districts and the Sunderbans mangrove forest, a Unesco world heritage site, started on Sunday, West Bengal disaster management minister Javed Ahmed Khan said.

“We have to evacuate nearly half a million people... to schools

(and) government offices, which have been turned into cyclone centres to provide shelter to these people,” Khan told AFP.

The military and disaster teams have been deployed to help with the preparations and potential rescue operations, Prime Minister Narendra Modi said on Sunday.

Last Monday, Cyclone Tauktae - India’s first major tropical storm this season - slammed into the western state of Gujarat.

It battered several states with torrential downpours and strong winds.

The death toll from Tauktae rose to at least 155 on Monday after more bodies were recovered from an oil rig off the western city of Mumbai and several support vessels, the navy said.

In Sri Lanka, the weather bureau warned the island nation’s fishermen not to venture into the Bay of Bengal.

AFP

Myanmar’s Suu Kyi defiant in first comments since coup

Naypyidaw, Myanmar - Myanmar leader Aung San Suu Kyi on Monday voiced defiance as she made her first court appearance since being detained in a coup, vowing her ousted political party would live on.

Myanmar has been in uproar since the February 1 putsch, with near-daily protests and a nationwide civil disobedience movement. More than 800 people have been killed by the military, according to a monitoring group.

The junta has threatened to dissolve her National League for Democracy - which swept elections in 2020 - over alleged voter fraud.

The Nobel laureate - who has not been seen in public since the coup - sounded ‘healthy and fully confident’ during the 30-minute meeting, her lawyer Min Min Soe said. “She wishes her people to stay healthy as well as affirmed the NLD will exist as long as people exist because it was founded for people.”



A file photo of Aung San Suu Kyi

Suu Kyi has been hit with a string of criminal charges including flouting coronavirus restrictions during last year’s election campaign and possessing unlicensed walkie-talkies.

There was a heavy security presence in the capital Naypyidaw, an AFP correspondent said, with the road to the specially-constructed courthouse blocked by police trucks.

There have been weeks of de-

lays to Suu Kyi’s legal case and her lawyers have struggled to gain access to her.

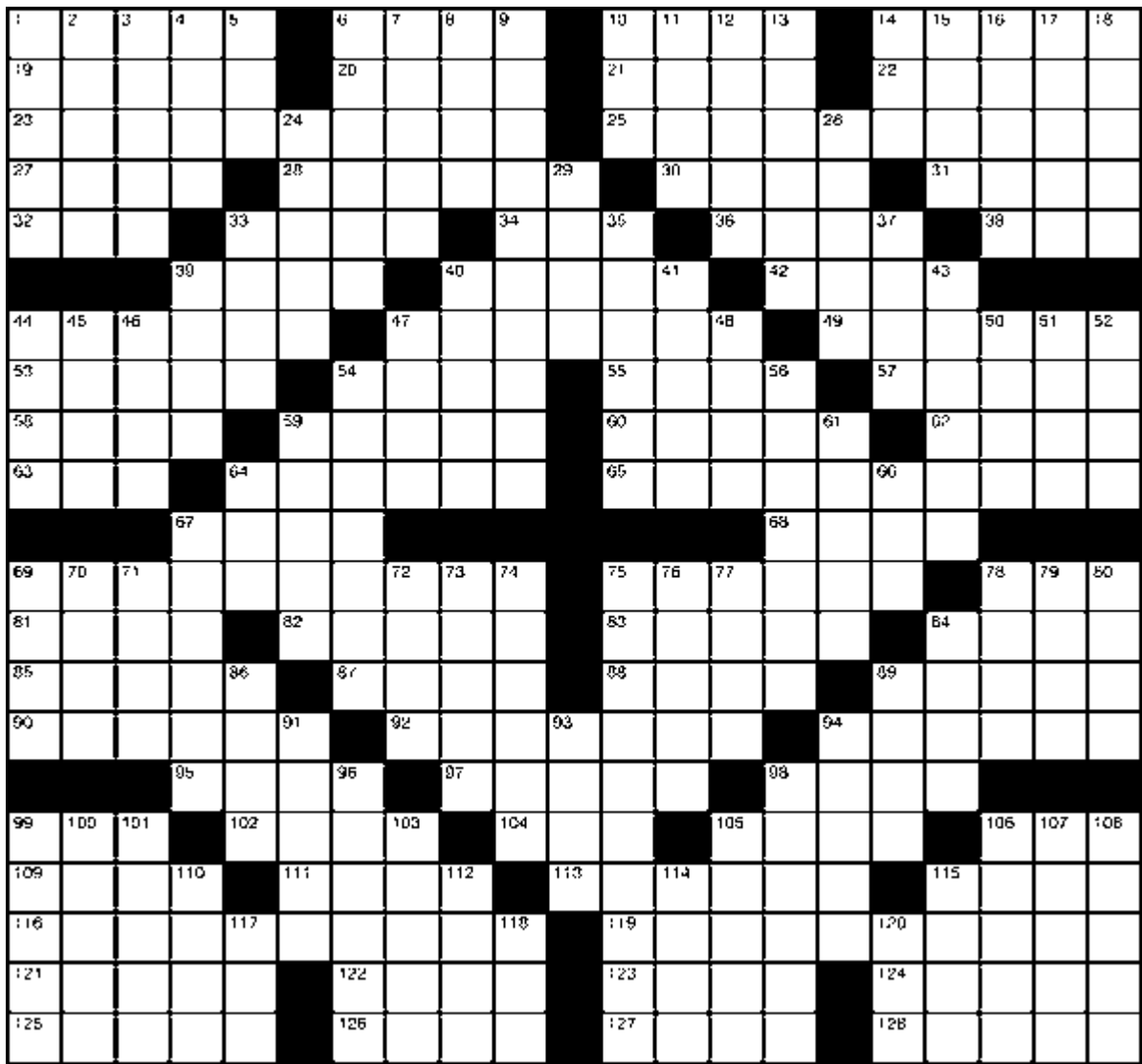
The next hearing was set for June 7, Min Min Soe said, adding she had also met with former president Win Myint, who was ousted and detained along with Suu Kyi.

“It’s hard to say why this meeting was now allowed,” Richard Horsey, Senior Advisor on Myanmar to the International Crisis Group said. “But (it) certainly suggests that the regime is feeling more confident - despite the magnitude of the ongoing crisis and resistance.”

As the lawyers left the compound in Naypyidaw, police arrested a legal representative of senior NLD figure Myo Aung, lawyers told AFP. A group of ousted lawmakers - many of them previously part of the NLD - have formed a shadow ‘National Unity Government’ in an attempt to undermine the junta.

AFP

DAILY CROSSWORD



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ACROSS

- 1 Cut-and-__
- 6 Cicatrix
- 10 Nimbus
- 14 Plant of mint family
- 19 Utopian
- 20 Sharpen
- 21 On the apex
- 22 Expunge
- 23 Traduce
- 25 Hateful
- 27 Garb of a Scotch Highlander
- 28 "The ___": 2011 Oscar
- 30 Chapter of the Koran
- 31 Winter vehicle
- 32 Jrs.' dads
- 33 Sacred vessels
- 34 Poetic contraction
- 36 Auction
- 38 S-shaped curve
- 39 March date
- 40 ___IX
- 42 Weights of India
- 44 One of the Three Musketeers
- 47 Laments
- 49 Arranged beforehand
- 53 French revolutionist
- 54 Frog genus

- 55 Marbles
- 57 To frighten
- 58 Ancient country
- 59 Venetian navigator
- 60 Babylonian hero
- 62 One of the Bears
- 63 Salt
- 64 Venerate
- 65 Theological schools
- 67 Mohammedan magistrate
- 68 A rodent
- 69 Newt
- 75 To withdraw
- 78 Place to rest
- 81 English school
- 82 Female ruff
- 83 Gruel of maize meal
- 84 Spanish measure of length
- 85 Flower part
- 87 Ooze
- 88 Presses for payment
- 89 Gods of Teutonic pantheon
- 90 Three-legged stand
- 92 Act as chairman
- 94 Purpose
- 95 Always
- 97 Lake bordering California
- 98 Without: comb.

- form
- 99 Chum
- 102 Cry of Bacchanals
- 104 Harbor boat
- 105 Chopping tools
- 106 Elvis Costello tune
- 109 Medicinal plant
- 111 Taylor Swift tune
- 113 Surgical saw
- 115 Portico
- 116 Dissension
- 119 Loudspeakers
- 121 Concerning
- 122 ___ homo
- 123 Tuna-type sandwich
- 124 Goddess of peace
- 125 Pinnacle of glacier ice
- 126 Japanese beer
- 127 Grafton and Miller
- 128 Hereditary factors

DOWN

- 1 Chooses
- 2 Robin ___
- 3 Vends
- 4 Tense
- 5 Shade tree
- 6 Evades
- 7 Winter wears
- 8 Against
- 9 Appraise again
- 10 Possessed
- 11 Western's actor
- Roscoe
- 12 Yoga position

- 13 Musical dramas
- 14 Wager
- 15 Macaws
- 16 Valuable fur
- 17 Aits
- 18 English cathedral city
- 24 Nostrils
- 26 Dried orchid tubers
- 29 Puente or Jackson
- 33 Mine entrance
- 35 Writing tablets
- 37 Blunders
- 39 Mohammedan priest
- 40 General trend
- 41 Growing out
- 43 Safe
- 44 Wine vessels
- 45 ___ avis
- 46 Russian inland sea
- 47 Infant
- 48 Floated
- 50 Hindu garment
- 51 Scottish-Gaelic
- 52 Afternoon parties
- 54 Waterworm gullies
- 56 Snuffles
- 59 Fragrant wood
- 61 Positive pole
- 64 Male sheep
- 66 Beverage
- 67 Party tidbit
- 69 Irish clan
- 70 Biblical name

- 71 French author Pierre
- 72 Profound
- 73 Turn inside out
- 74 Iterate
- 75 Certain messages
- 76 Musical study
- 77 Geometric solid
- 78 Foundation
- 79 Ireland
- 80 Flit
- 84 Interdiction
- 86 Deep affection
- 89 Pismires
- 91 River in Scotland
- 93 Close
- 94 Ancient tribe of Britons
- 96 Paths
- 98 Elevates in rank
- 99 Rodents
- 100 Unaccompanied
- 101 Antisocial person
- 103 Common heath
- 105 Pome fruit
- 106 Dutch painter
- 107 Lena ___
- 108 Comforts
- 110 Sicilian volcano
- 112 Short-legged stocking
- 114 Australian bird
- 115 Father
- 117 And so forth: abbr.
- 118 Born
- 120 Pear-shaped fruit

YOUR DAILY HOROSCOPE

ARIES MARCH 21-APRIL 19

It's good for you to feel confident about your chances going into an upcoming challenge, but it would be unwise to think that you will walk away with a victory too easily. Don't sell your competition short. The only thing less helpful than underestimating your opponent is overestimating yourself. So don't rush ahead thinking this will be a cakewalk.

LEO JULY 23-AUGUST 22

To save more money, you have to get organised. Start today by reviewing your budget and finding out what you really need to get by every month. Chances are it's a lot less than you've been spending. Find out where all that extra cash is going. Start writing down your daily expenses: every cup of coffee, every gallon of gas, every bag of groceries. Soon you'll see where you can cut corners.

SAGITTARIUS NOVEMBER 22-DECEMBER 21

Important people around you are talking, and they aren't watching what they say! So use your ears and make the most of this time. You're being given a wonderful opportunity to gain extra insight and get the information you need to get ahead. When you hear this information, don't rush ahead with anything. There are more details that need to be uncovered.

TAURUS APRIL 20-MAY 20

Today isn't the ideal day for big behaviour. Excessive actions, over-the-top attitudes; obnoxious jokes aren't going to go over well with the folks you'll be dealing with. If you want to go through the day with as little conflict as possible, avoid pushing the conversation past safe topics. It's not about altering who you are. It's about knowing your audience and making them feel comfortable.

VIRGO AUGUST 23-SEPTEMBER 22

You could find it very rewarding to find a new way to manage and clean up your life. Spend some time putting an end to messy closets, cluttered car, or that desk that looks like a hurricane just hit it! Organise all your chaos and you'll feel like there's absolutely nothing you can't do. It's a great day to tackle methodical tasks. Your energy is focused.

CAPRICORN DECEMBER 22-JANUARY 19

Everyone you'll be dealing with is going to be sending your positive energy, which will help you feel much more grounded and comfortable in your own skin, much more so than you have in a long while. This is a wonderful opportunity for you to push your personal agenda a little bit further. Whatever goals you've been working on are that much closer today.

GEMINI MAY 21-JUNE 21

You're sure to have more than your fair share of odd coincidences today. The universe is sending a positive dose of uncertain energy your way, and if you open yourself up to it you are sure to go on quite a ride. Try not to push back too hard on things that make you uncomfortable. If someone has to reschedule a meeting or a date, so what? You'll just have more free time to attend to some errands.

LIBRA SEPTEMBER 23-OCTOBER 22

Being honest isn't always fun, but it's always wise. Tell one little lie, even a white one, and you'll only get tangled up in more lies down the road. So before you get too overwhelmed by the web you're weaving, come clean! You'll definitely get some frustrated feelings aimed back at you, but it's nothing compared to the anger you'll create if you keep this up.

AQUARIUS JANUARY 20-FEBRUARY 18

You like being helpful, and that's a good thing. Just don't let the ambitions of other people become you ambitions. They may have a different agenda. There's no need to make sure yours matches with theirs as long as everyone is on the up and up about it. You can still go your own way while you help them go theirs. Work on balancing your selflessness with your selfishness.

CANCER JUNE 22-JULY 22

You deserve a break from all the heavy thinking you've been doing. Instead, step back from the arguments and issues and let everyone else deal with the headaches for a while. You've paid your dues and put your fair share of energy into the problem. This is a day when you should focus on doing some fun things. You'll find playing with children especially rewarding right now.

SCORPIO OCTOBER 23-NOVEMBER 21

There could be quite a lot of drama in your day, but you're a featured player, probably the hero of the story, so you aren't going to mind too much. There will be at least one juicy secret coming your way, and by sharing it someone will be showing you just how much they trust you, so don't blow it by blabbing! By later on tonight, you'll be ready for some quiet conversation.

PISCES FEBRUARY 19-MARCH 20

Everyone's emotions are right on the surface today, so you would be very wise to be sensitive with the people you encounter, stranger and friend alike. You won't know what word or phrase will set them off, so it's best to stick to small talk and safe topics unless you want to get into a heated discussion. It's not a great day to ask for a favour that might be hard to grant.

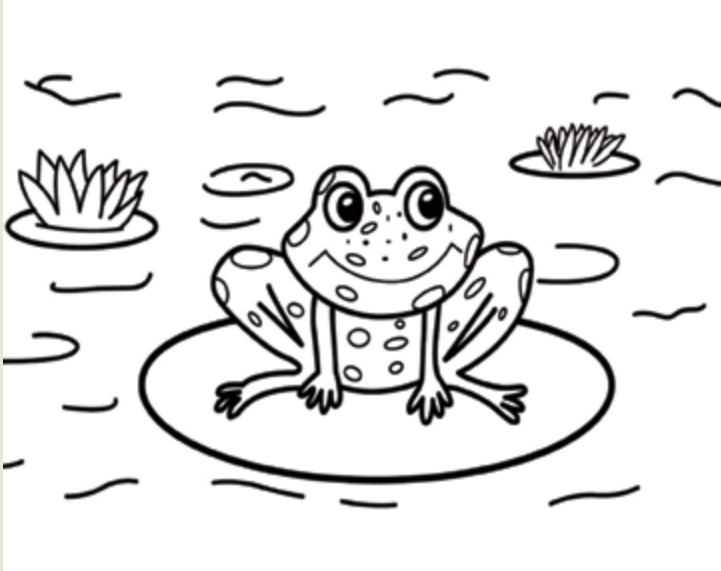


TEST YOUR KNOWLEDGE

- The landmass of which of the following continents is the least?
a. Africa
b. Asia
c. Australia
d. Europe
- The habitats valuable for commercially harvested species are called
a. coral reefs
b. sea grass bed
c. hot spots
d. None of the above
- Which of the following is tropical grassland?
a. Taiga
b. Savannah
c. Pampas
d. Prairies

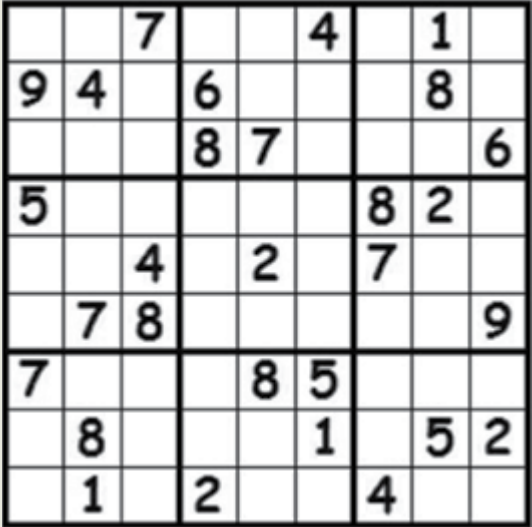
Answers: 1. c 2. b 3. b

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



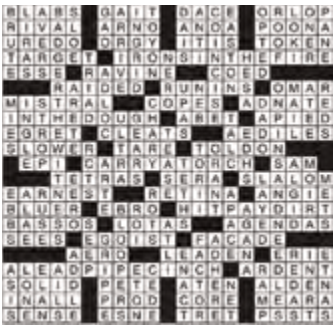
Each game will present you with a matrix filled with letters. The objective is to form words by linking adjacent letters - to the left, right, on top, bottom, or diagonal to each other. The Boggles Classic game uses a 4 x 4 matrix. Words are valued at one point for each letter in excess of two letters. 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 (MAY 24)

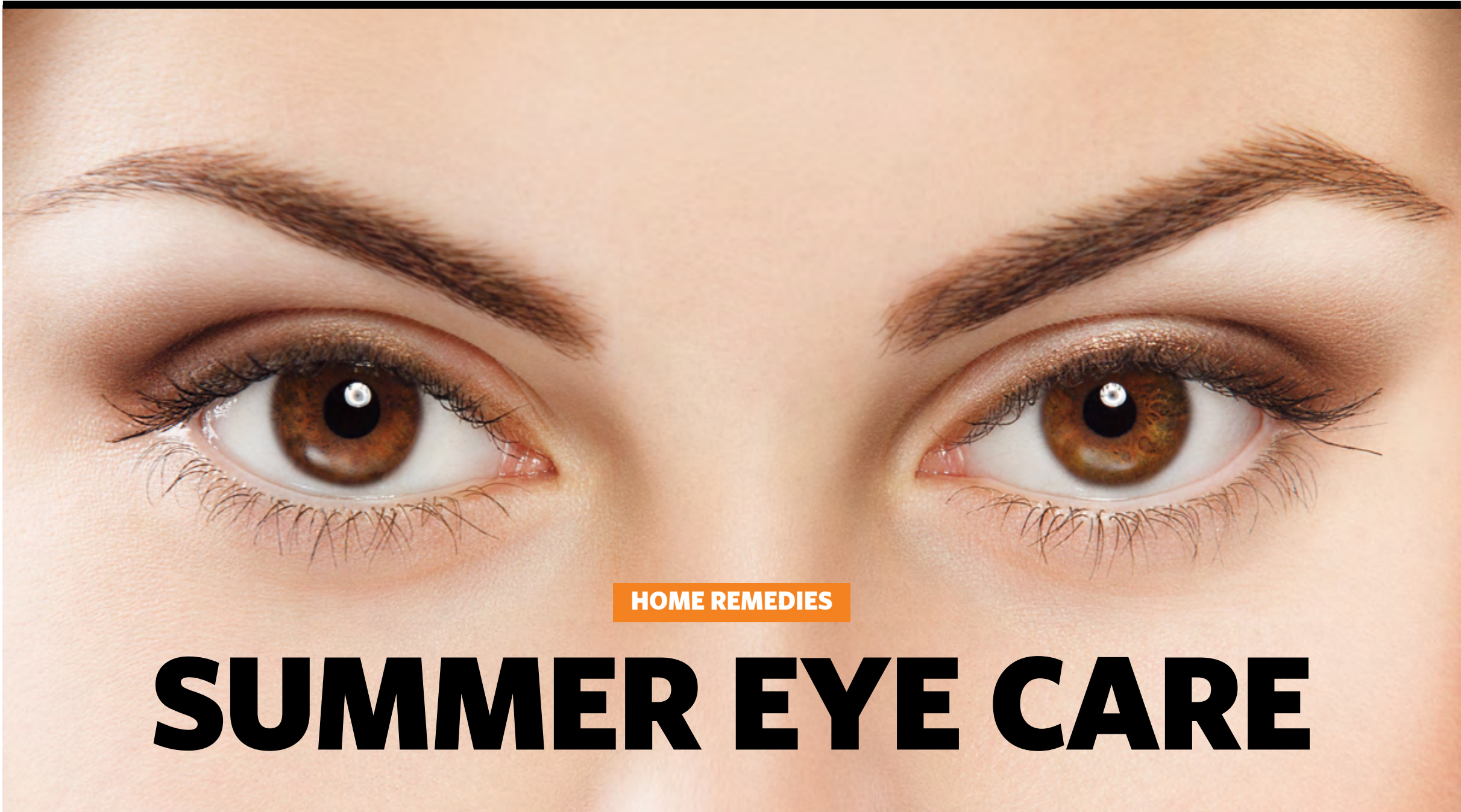


WORD BUILDER

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





HOME REMEDIES

SUMMER EYE CARE

It's summertime and your eyes will need extra care to keep out the glare, the strain, and everything that lays a shadow on its freshness, quite literally.

You don't need to scour the supermarket shelves for the latest products to bring in some respite for your eyes during the harsh summer, rather turn to natural beauty solutions that lie close at hand. You can make your eyes look refreshed and beautiful without expensive make up of beauty products.

Diet plays a very important part in eye care as the food you consume can decide the health and wellbeing of your eyes. Make sure to eat a lot of fresh vegetables including carrots which are rich in beta carotene - an antioxidant that helps reduce the risk of macular degeneration, broccoli and brussels sprouts - rich in vitamin C that is crucial for eye health, fish such as salmon and sardines - rich in omega-3 fats that protect tiny blood vessels in the eyes, and spinach which contains lots of vitamin C, lutein and zeaxanthin - responsible for healthy and sharp vision. However, cut back on salts as they can cause your skin to retain fluids which may lead to puffiness under the eyes.

Here are some simple home remedies:

Egg mask

You can begin your morning with eggs in many interesting ways. Beat an egg white and apply it around your eyes. Leave it on for about 15 minutes and then rinse with cold water. This helps in tightening the skin around the eyes.

Chill dips

Dip cotton pads in ice water and apply them to closed



Cold spoon

Place two steel spoons in the freezer over night and in the morning place their curved backs on your eyes. This process enhances blood circulation around the eyes. Pace them at intervals on your eyes to avoid a chill sting.

eyelids. Hold them on for a few minutes to allow the coldness to constrict the blood vessels and make them feel lighter.

Cucumbers

To get rid of dark circles, grate a cucumber and squeeze out the juice. Apply the juice with a cotton pad around your eyes and leave it on for 15 minutes.

Do it at least once a day for a week to discover the darkness around your eyes receding considerably. Also, make a poultice with 1tsp of tomato pulp, a pinch of turmeric powder, a few drops of lime juice and 1tsp of gram flour. Apply the paste on the eyelids and the dark areas. Wash your eyes gently with cold water after 30 minutes. Do this for a week for visible results.

Green tea bags

Green tea bags are also a god solution for tired eyes. Immerse the tea bag in cold water and place it on the closed eyelids for 15 minutes. The tannins in the tea help reduce inflammation and make eyes look bright and fresh.

Potato slices

Slice a raw potato and place on closed eyelids for 15 minutes. You may also gently rub them on the eyes in a circular motion. This helps in reducing puffiness. Other remedies include placing a cotton pad dipped in chilled milk in a similar manner.

Rose Water

If you experience a burning sensation in your eyes, cool them off with rose water. A few drops in each eye or placing cotton pads dipped in rose water on the eyelids help in relieving tiredness and burning sensations.

Aloe vera

Another effective remedy for brightening dull eyes is aloe vera juice. Put some aloe vera juice in the eyes to get rid of summer strain. Another way to use aloe vera is to freeze the juice to form cubes and place them on tired eyelids.

Strawberries and mint

Strawberry slices placed on the eyes help rejuvenate them. Place strawberry slices or crushed mint leaves on your eyes. Mint juice, mixed with an equal quantity of cucumber juice, applied under the eyes reduces dark circles.



Summer eye care tips

Adequate sleep at a regular time every day is a sure way to keep your eyes looking healthy, without having to employ any other techniques. Around 6-8 hours of restful sleep every night is a must during summer to keep your eyes fresh all day. It not only sharpens vision but also helps you combat strain during the day. An afternoon siesta could be bonus!

Other precautions:

- Avoid the direct blast of an air-conditioner on your eyes. The cold blast can result in dry, sensitive eyes.
- UV rays can be the cause of many eye problems. Protecting your eyes from exposure is a must. Wear sunshades with suitable UV protection, as well as hats when out in the sun.
- Drink plenty of water to keep your body and your eyes hydrated - at least 2 litres everyday.
- Remove all eye make-up before you sleep. Almond or baby oil act as good make-up removers.
- Consume a diet rich in Vitamin A and C. Go for leafy and red vegetables and fruits



Swimmers, take care!

If you are fond of swimming to cool yourself during summer, you must take adequate care to protect your eyes when in the pool as well as when out of it. Whether you swim in a private pool in your home or in a public pool, in a pond or the sea, remember your eyes can be exposed to infection in view of the fact that pools contain a whole lot of contaminants

which include dust, insects, sweat/urine, suncreams/perfumes, algae, chlorine, fungi, parasites, bacteria and salt.

Make sure to wear appropriate swimming goggles to protect your eyes from the contaminants. Goggles protect the delicate membranes of your eyes from harsh pool chemicals and other contaminants. Contact lenses are not good for

swimming, but if you must, wear disposable lenses. You may also use a preservative-free lubricant eye drop to help soothe the pain of sore eyes after swimming.

If you swim without swimming goggles, make sure to flush your eyes with cool water once you are out of the water. Avoid reading books or electronic gadgets as soon as you are out.

Asher-Smith blitzes to victory

US sprint star Richardson shocked in women's 100m as pole vaulter Duplantis suffers a rare defeat

DIAMOND LEAGUE GATESHEAD MEET

Gateshead, UK - Dina Asher-Smith shocked US sprint sensation Sha'Carri Richardson to win the women's 100m as Swedish pole vaulter Armand Duplantis suffered a rare defeat in the first Diamond League meet of the season on Sunday.

The northeastern English city of Gateshead stepped in to host the pre-Olympic event after Rabat pulled out because of coronavirus restrictions in Morocco.

There are only six Diamond League meetings after Gateshead before the Olympic Games in Japan, which start on July 23.

And after a 2020 season badly disrupted by the global COVID-19 pandemic, there is no shortage of athletes in search of top-quality competition.

Britain's Asher-Smith, 25, started the final strongly in wet and cool conditions and crossed the line to take gold in a time of 11.35 seconds, with Richardson second in 11.44.

The Ivory Coast's Marie-Josée Ta Lou was third in 11.48.

Richardson is fresh from clocking 10.72sec at the Miramar Invitational last month, making her the sixth-fastest women sprinter ever. The strong field for the final in Gateshead also included Jamaican 100m world champion Shelly-Ann Fraser-Pryce, who finished fourth, and Blessing Okagbare of Nigeria.

It was the kind of statement Asher-Smith desired after taking



Britain's Dina Asher-Smith races to victory in the women's 100m event at the Diamond League meet in Gateshead, UK, on Sunday

a prolonged absence from the track following her 200m gold at the 2019 world championships in Doha.

"I was really happy to start my 100m season with a win," she said. "It was far from ideal conditions (but) this is good practice for staying in the moment."

"It is essential to race the best. The only way to get race-fit is to race the best in the world. These are the type of races you want to be in."

The vanquished Richardson, 21, lived up to her bold persona afterwards, insisting, "I'm happy with the execution of the performance, knowing what I have to work on, and just continuing to grow and show the world I'm here to stay."

"I'm excited to show the world that my times aren't a fluke. I can run, I am pretty, and I am a force to be reckoned with. I want all the women and the world to watch out."



Sam Kendricks of US

American Sam Kendricks beat Sweden's Duplantis - who set a pole vault world record of 6.18m in Glasgow last year - clearing 5.74 metres. Duplantis was second with a jump of 5.55m.

Ingebrigtsen wins

Double European gold medallist Jakob Ingebrigtsen of Norway justified his favourite tag in the men's 1,500m, winning in a time of 3min 36.27sec.

Ingebrigtsen, 20, said he was



Norway's Jakob Ingebrigtsen competes in the men's 1,500m race

used to the wind and the rain from racing in Norway.

"I want to race as much as possible, that's why I'm doing this," he said. "At the same Tokyo is my main focus so I need to be smart and do what I can."

"There are not too many competitions in the near future so I have to race what I can and hopefully be prepared when Tokyo comes."

Poland's Kamila Licwinko won the women's high jump with a

best of 1.91m, with three-time world champion Mariya Lasitskene trailing in fourth place.

In-form American Kenny Bednarek won the men's 200m in 20.33sec, coming home ahead of Canadian pair Aaron Brown and Andre de Grasse. Home favourite Laura Muir destroyed her rivals in the women's 1,500m, charging down the home straight to take victory in 4:03.73.

AFP

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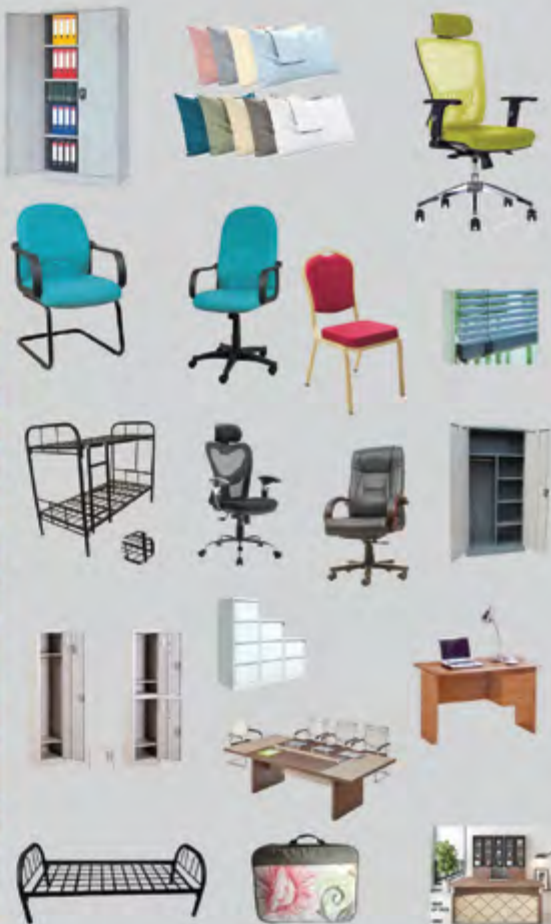


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A TRIUMPH FOR THE AGES

Phil Mickelson becomes the oldest major winner at the age of 50 with PGA Championship win

103rd PGA CHAMPIONSHIP

Kiawah Island, US - Phil Mickelson became the oldest major winner in golf history on Sunday, the 50 year old left-hander capturing the PGA Championship by two strokes for his sixth and most iconic major title.

The age-defying American took the US\$2.1mn top prize with an epic victory for the ages, producing a dazzling shotmaking display at windy Kiawah Island's while younger rivals faded.

"It has been an incredible day," Mickelson said. "Certainly one of the moments I'll cherish my entire life."

Mickelson erased the major age win mark set by American Julius Boros when he captured the 1968 PGA Championship at age 48. "I don't know how to describe the feeling of excitement and fulfillment and accomplishment to do something of this magnitude when very few people thought that I could," Mickelson said.

Mickelson grinded out a final-round one-over par 73 to finish 72 holes on six-under 282 with South Africa's Louis Oosthuizen, the 2010 British Open champion, and American Brooks Koepka, a four-time major winner, sharing second on 284. It was the first major victory for Mickelson since the 2013 British Open.

"This is just an incredible feeling because I believed that it was possible but yet everything was saying it wasn't," Mickelson said. "I hope others find that inspirational."

Tiger Woods, a 15-time major winner and long-time Mickelson rival, did, tweeting: "Truly



Phil Mickelson celebrates with the Wanamaker Trophy after winning the final round of the 2021 PGA Championship held at the Ocean Course of Kiawah Island Golf Resort on Sunday (AFP)

PHIL MICKELSON

Age:	50
Born:	June 16, 1970
Birthplace:	San Diego, California, US
Home:	San Diego, US
Height:	6ft 3in/1.91m
Weight:	91kg

Turned Professional: 1992

Highest World ranking: 2

Current World Ranking: 115

Career US PGA Tour titles: 45

Career major titles: 6

(2004, 2006, 2010 Masters; 2013 British Open; 2005, 2021 PGA Championship)

PAST TEN WINNERS

2021:	Phil Mickelson (US)
2020:	Collin Morikawa (US)
2019:	Brooks Koepka (US)
2018:	Brooks Koepka
2017:	Justin Thomas (US)
2016:	Jimmy Walker (US)
2015:	Jason Day (Australia)
2014:	Rory McIlroy (Northern Ireland)
2013:	Jason Dufner (US)
2012:	Rory McIlroy

inspirational to see @PhilMickelson do it again at 50 years of age. Congrats!!!!!!"

Spectators created a surreal scene at the 18th hole, swarming around Mickelson after his second shot as he tried to walk to the 18th green, needing to three-putt from 16 feet for the epic triumph. Outnumbered security guards forced Mickelson through a throng of thousands of people who encircled the green chanting 'Lefty, Lefty', and roared with delight as he tapped in for par to complete a victory for the ages.

Then they bumped him. Then they raced by him to get good viewing spots and Mickelson

was swallowed by the crowd. Outnumbered security and police surrounded and protected Mickelson, but he needed the escort to make his way through the jam-packed crowd of spectators to complete his historic moment.

"I couldn't hear a thing through the whole darned thing," said Mickelson's caddie and brother, Tim Mickelson.

"I don't think I've ever had an experience like that, so thank you for that," Mickelson told the crowd as he accepted the Wanamaker Trophy. "Slightly unnerving, but exceptionally awesome."

The crowd, limited to 10,000 people by COVID-19 safety

measures, roared with every successful swing by Mickelson, creating an electric atmosphere all day on the punishing Ocean Course, the longest layout in major history at 7,876 yards.

On the front nine, Mickelson answered three bogeys with three birdies in a roller-coaster start, his most astonishing effort a 50-foot chip-in from the sand at the par-three sixth, for a two-stroke lead at the turn.

World No 115 Mickelson sank a 12-foot birdie putt at the tenth while Koepka and Oosthuizen made bogeys to leave 'Lefty' with a four-stroke edge.

Koepka fell back with three bogeys in the first four holes on

the back nine. When Oosthuizen made double bogey at the 13th, Mickelson owned a five-stroke lead with six holes remaining.

Mickelson found water at the 13th and made bogey on Sunday's hardest hole, then missed a seven-foot par putt at the par-three 14th for a bogey that increased the tension, leaving Oosthuizen two adrift and the week's toughest holes remaining.

But Mickelson hit his longest drive of the week, 366 yards, into the 16th fairway, then went over the green, pitched within inches from the cup and tapped in for birdie to restore his three-stroke edge.

Mickelson took a bogey at 17 and drove left at 18 near a hospitality tent then put his approach on the green to spark the chaotic finish.

45th US PGA Tour title

It was the 45th career US PGA Tour triumph, his first since 2019 at Pebble Beach.

Mickelson improved to four-for-six in majors with 54-hole leads or shared leads, winning at the 2004 and 2006 Masters and the 2005 and 2021 PGA but sharing second at the 2006 and 2013 US Opens.

His other major wins came at the 2010 Masters and the 2013 British Open.

With 16 years between PGA Championship triumphs, Mickelson owns the longest gap between wins at the same major.

Irishmen Padraig Harrington, Europe's 49 year old captain for September's Ryder Cup, and Shane Lowry, the 2019 British Open champion, shared fourth with American Harry Higgs and England's Paul Casey on 286.

American Jordan Spieth, trying to win to complete a career Grand Slam, closed on 74 to finish on 290.

Four-time major winner Rory McIlroy, who won the 2012 PGA at Kiawah, grinded out a 72 to finish on 293.

AFP



Ageless wonder eyes elusive US Open

Kiawah Island, US - Ageless wonder Phil Mickelson is taking aim at an elusive US Open title to complete a career Grand Slam after becoming golf's oldest major winner by capturing the PGA Championship.

"I've believed for some time now without success that I could play at my best and compete in major championships still," Mickelson said. "But until this week, I haven't proven it to myself or anyone else."

Transforming mind and body with work and discipline, Mickelson has new inspiration to challenge the US Open, the one major he has never won and an event where he owns a record six runner-up finishes, the most recent in 2013.

This year's US Open is next month at Torrey Pines, near Mickelson's San Diego home, and he turns 51 on June 16, the eve of the opening round.

"I do believe that if I stay sharp mentally I can play well at Torrey Pines," Mickelson said. "I know I'm playing well and this could very well be my last really



Phil Mickelson (L) celebrates with brother and caddie Tim Mickelson on the 18th green after winning the title

good opportunity to win a US Open, so I'm going to put everything I have into it."

Mickelson needs the US Open to join Tiger Woods, Jack Nicklaus, Gary Player, Gene Sarazen and Ben Hogan as the only golfers to win all four major

titles in their careers.

"I'll take two weeks off before that and go out to Torrey and spend time on the greens and really try to be sharp for that week," Mickelson said.

"Certainly takes more energy out of me, but if I work a little

harder, spend a little more time in the gym, eat well, practice hard, there's no reason why I can't put it all out there for 18 holes," Mickelson said.

"There's no reason why you can't accomplish your goals at an older age. It's just going to

take more effort. If you put in the work, there's nothing you can't accomplish."

For Mickelson, that has meant clearing his mind through meditation in order to stay calm under pressure.

"Just the ability to kind of quiet my mind and get rid of all the exterior noise," he said. "I don't want to get all spiritual but that has kind of been the biggest thing for me.

"I've tried to shut my mind to a lot of stuff going around. I wasn't watching TV. I wasn't getting on my phone. I was just trying to quiet things down."

It also means Mickelson, who fasts 36 hours each week, watches what he eats far more than when he was younger, in part to fight psoriatic arthritis.

"I've got to eat a lot less and I've got to eat better. I just can't eat as much and I have to let my body recover," Mickelson said.

"It has been a blessing for me because I feel better and I don't have inflammation and I wake up feeling good. It has been a sacrifice worth making."

AFP





A file photo of experienced Spain defender Sergio Ramos

RAMOS LEFT OUT OF SPAIN EURO SQUAD

Madrid, Spain - Spain coach Luis Enrique on Monday left veteran defender Sergio Ramos out of his Euro 2020 squad but called up centre-back Aymeric Laporte, who recently switched his football nationality.

Ramos, the 35 year old Real Madrid captain has struggled with injury this season and has featured just five times since the start of the year.

"It was a very difficult decision but he has not been able to play this season and has hardly trained since January," Luis Enrique told the press conference as he announced a 24-man squad.

"I called him yesterday (Sunday), it was hard, difficult. I feel bad, because he is very professional and he helps the national team a lot. And he can still help it in the future. But I have to look for the best for the squad," the coach said.

The absence of Ramos means there is not a single Madrid player in the Spain squad.

It was a very difficult decision but he has not been able to play this season and has hardly trained since January

LUIS ENRIQUE, SPAIN COACH

Laporte, a 26 year old Manchester City defender, was born in southwest France and was called up three times for Les Blues but never made it onto the pitch.

Luis Enrique said Laporte's selection 'has nothing to do' with the absence of Ramos.

While France coach Didier Deschamps has a wealth of central defenders to choose from, Luis Enrique has had fewer options since Gerard Pique retired in 2018.

Ramos has been an automatic

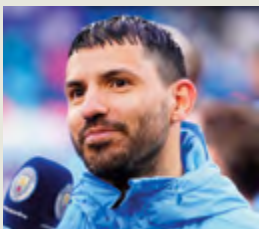
starter when fit with a number of players, including Villarreal's Pau Torres, Real Sociedad's Inigo Martinez and Eric Garcia of Manchester City, playing alongside him.

After an impressive start at City, Laporte suffered a knee injury in 2019 and has not been a regular under Pep Guardiola this season. In the absence of Ramos, two 32 year old Barcelona players, Sergio Busquets and Jordi Alba, become the veteran leadership in a rejuvenated squad.

Luis Enrique has been able to test many young talents in recent months, and has called up a large number of them for the Euro, including Garcia, Pau Torres, Ferran Torres, Mikel Oyarzabal, Pedri and Dani Olmo.

Spain established itself as one of the favourites with a 6-0 thrashing of Germany in the Nations League in November when Manchester City's Ferran Torres hit a hat-trick and Oyarzabal of Real Sociedad also scored.

AFP



Sergio Aguero

'Aguero close to Barca deal'

London, UK - Sergio Aguero is close to agreeing a move to Barcelona that would unite him with fellow Argentine superstar Lionel Messi, according to Manchester City manager Pep Guardiola.

City's record goalscorer, who has spent a decade at the Etihad, scored a double in the champions' 5-0 win over Everton in his final English Premier League appearance for the club on Sunday. The goals took his Premier League tally to 184 - the most by any player for a single club.

The 32 year old forward is set to leave the Etihad as a free agent after Saturday's Champions League final against Chelsea.

"Maybe I reveal a secret," Guardiola told the BBC. "Maybe he is close to agreeing a deal for the club of my heart - for Barcelona.

"He is going to be playing alongside the best player of all time, Messi."

If the move goes ahead it would be Aguero's second spell in Spain - he made his name at Atletico Madrid before the move to Manchester in 2011.

AFP



A file photo of Max Mosley, former president of motorsport's world governing body

Former FIA president Mosley dies aged 81

MOTORSPORTS

London, UK - Max Mosley, the former president of motorsport's world governing body the FIA, has died aged 81, ex-Formula One supremo Bernie Ecclestone announced on Monday.

Mosley became FIA president in 1993 after serving in previous administrative roles in the sport, including within Formula One.

The former racing driver, who had been suffering from cancer, served three terms as president before standing down in 2009. Ecclestone told the PA news agency: "Max was like family to me. We were like brothers. I am pleased in a way because he suffered for too long."

Mosley was the son of 1930s British fascist leader Oswald Mosley. In 2008 he won a privacy case against the now-defunct *News of the World* newspaper after it printed photographs

and published video of his involvement in a sadomasochistic sex session. It was reported by the newspaper as a 'sick Nazi orgy' but the judge found no evidence of Nazi themes in his judgement. He also said there was no public interest defence in the clandestine recording of the session.

Mosley experienced a family tragedy in 2009 when his son Alexander died aged 39. The coroner ruled Alexander's death was due to non-dependent drug abuse.

Mosley senior studied at Oxford University, where he read physics, but later trained as a lawyer and became a barrister whose specialism was patent and trademark law. His love of motor racing began in his youth and he was involved in Formula 2 for Brabham and Lotus before retiring in 1969. He founded a car

manufacturing company, March Engineering, and oversaw its legal and commercial affairs from 1969 to 1977.

He became president of FISA, FI's governing body at the time, in 1991 and two years later took over unopposed at the FIA. He oversaw the safety reforms in the sport that followed the death of Ayrton Senna at the San Marino Grand Prix in 1994.

Jean Todt replaced Mosley as FIA president in 2009. Since then, Mosley had campaigned for tougher regulation of the press. The Williams Racing team were one of the first to pay tribute, tweeting from their official account: "We are saddened to learn of the passing of former FIA president, Max Mosley."

"Our condolences go out to his family and friends at this difficult time."

AFP



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LILLE LIFT FRENCH TITLE

Club's fourth league crown comes after a decade to end PSG's dominance

FRENCH LEAGUE

Paris, France - Lille won the French League (Ligue 1) title on Sunday thanks to a 2-1 victory at Angers which ensured they were crowned French champions for the first time since 2011 on the final day of the season.

An early Jonathan David strike and Burak Yilmaz's penalty in first-half stoppage time ensured that Christophe Galtier's Lille finished one point ahead of second-placed Paris Saint-Germain (PSG), who won 2-0 at Brest.

Angelo Fulgini pulled one back in added time at the end of the match, but the hosts couldn't stop Lille becoming champions for the fourth time in their history.

The match was played behind closed doors due to COVID-19 restrictions but fans poured into the streets of Lille to celebrate at the final whistle.

Supporters lit flares and chanted songs in the northern city's central Place Charles de Gaulle in jubilation at a historic triumph against far wealthier opposition.

Seven people were arrested as thousands of fans gathered despite a coronavirus curfew to celebrate Lille's Ligue 1 title, the prefecture of the Nord region said on Monday.



Lille players celebrate after defeating Angers to claim the French Ligue 1 title in Angers, France, on Sunday

"This is exceptional. It's been a long day and a lot of pressure. To beat Paris Saint-Germain to the league title is something exceptional," a jubilant Galtier said to *Canal+*.

"The players were amazing... the credit goes to the players, they are the heroes."

The title triumph came after another away success for Lille, who finish the season unbeaten on the road since November, and ends a three-year league winning streak for PSG.

It was fitting that it was David and Yilmaz who scored the crucial goals at Angers, as both have been key to an improbable

run to the title that has also held significant pressure from Monaco.

Canadian young gun David latched on to a superb Renato Sanches pass to coolly slot home his 13th of the league season with nine minutes on the clock, immediately calming any nerves after last week's disappointing draw with Saint-Etienne left them needing a win to make sure of the title.

David was the man who won the penalty that secured the points and the championship just before the break, Paul Bernardon bringing the 21 year old down and allowing Yilmaz to score his

16th league goal of a remarkable season for the veteran Turkey striker.

'Focus on future'

Mauricio Pochettino's PSG will have to settle for the French Cup in a disappointing season for the mega-rich club.

They lost eight times - a record since they were taken over by Qatar Sports Investments in 2011 - and took only one point from their two matches with Lille.

Neymar had already missed a penalty when they took the lead in the 37th minute at Brest thanks to a freak own goal from Romain

Faivre, who somehow diverted Angel Di Maria's corner into his own goal from way out near his own touch line.

Kylian Mbappe made sure of the win in the 71st minute but by that time the destination of the title was already as good as certain.

"There are no worries. We lost the title and now we have to focus on the future," said Mbappe, who was crowned Ligue 1 top scorer for the third year in a row.

Monaco won the race for the final Champions League position despite only managing a goalless draw at Lens, as Lyon lost 2-3 at

home to mid-table outfit Nice and allowed the Principality club to claim third spot.

Rudi Garcia revealed he will step down as Lyon coach after only leading his team to the Europa League.

Lyon will be in the Europa League alongside fifth-placed Marseille, who scraped a 1-1 draw at Metz thanks to a penalty from Arkadiusz Milik in the 14th minute of added time.

Strasbourg coach Laurey quits

Strasbourg, France - Strasbourg announced on Monday that coach Thierry Laurey will leave a

day after he kept the club in Ligue 1.

Laurey, 57, was appointed in 2016 and took the club from Alsace into the top-flight as well as to a French League Cup triumph two years ago.

OTHER RESULTS

Sunday: Saint-Etienne 0 Dijon 1, Nantes 1 Montpellier 2, Strasbourg 1 Lorient 1, Rennes 2 Nîmes 0, Reims 1 Bordeaux 2.

FINAL STANDINGS [TOP FIVE]:

1 Lille (83 pts), 2 PSG (82), 3 Monaco (78), 4 Lyon (76), 5 Marseille (60).
AFP

Juve, Milan seal Champions League spot

ITALIAN LEAGUE

Milan, Italy - Juventus qualified for the Champions League on the final day of the season on Sunday with a 4-1 win at Bologna and were joined by AC Milan who beat Atalanta 2-0.

Napoli had to settle for a Europa League spot, finishing fifth, one point behind Juventus, after a 1-1 draw at home against Hellas Verona.

A pair of Franck Kessie penalties at the end of either half ensured AC Milan finished the season second - 12 points behind city rivals Inter Milan - and return to the Champions League for the first time since the 2013-2014 season.

"We deserved the Champions League as well as second place," said Milan coach Stefano Pioli whose side had missed the chance to seal their berth last weekend against Cagliari.

"We went through the whole championship at the top, unfortunately we had thrown away the match point last Sunday.

"I'm really excited, happy, I have to thank the club because they made us work in a spectacular way."

Atalanta had already ensured a third consecutive season of Champions League football but missed out on a first second-place Serie A finish days after losing out in the Coppa Italia final to Juventus.

Cristiano Ronaldo was left on the bench by Juventus coach Andrea Pirlo who opted for an attacking line-up of Paulo Dybala and Alvaro Morata flanked by Federico Chiesa and Dejan Kulusevski. "It was a shared choice, Ronaldo was tired after the fatigue on Wednesday," said Pirlo.

"He made himself available to the team but I chose to have



Juventus' players celebrate after defeating Bologna to secure their qualification for the Champions League in Bologna, Italy, on Sunday (AFP)



AC Milan's Franck Kessie (2R) celebrates with teammates after a goal

another player named Morata play, who is not the latest arrival. I have a quality team, with many choices available."

A Morata brace along with goals from Chiesa and Adrien

Rabiot prevented Juventus missing out on the elite European competition for the first time since 2012.

In Naples, Amir Rrahmani scored for Napoli after an hour

against his former club, which would have been enough to secure a berth at the top table but Davide Faraoni pulled one back for the visitors nine minutes.

Gennaro Gattuso's side were denied a return to elite European action after also missing out last season.

Lazio join Napoli in the Europa League despite a 0-2 loss at Sassuolo with Roma finishing seventh after coming from two goals down to hold Spezia 2-2.

Napoli confirm Gattuso exit

Napoli president Aurelio De Laurentiis on Sunday confirmed that coach Gennaro Gattuso will leave the club after failing to qualify for the Champions

League. "Dear Rino, I am happy to have spent almost two seasons with you," De Laurentiis wrote on Twitter.

"Thanking you for your work, I wish you success wherever you go. A hug to your wife and children too. Aurelio De Laurentiis."

Former AC Milan coach Gattuso took over after Carlo Ancelotti was sacked in December 2019.

The 43 year old also missed out on a Champions League return with AC Milan in the 2018-2019 season by just one point.

The Italian 2006 World Cup winner as a player has been linked with clubs including Fiorentina and Tottenham.

AFP

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Office Timing: Saturday to Thursday 10 am to 6:30 pm
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