



MONDAY, 07 JUNE 2021
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OMAN FACE QATAR TEST TONIGHT
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HONOURABLE LADY RECEIVES NEPALESE ENVOY

The Honourable Lady received Sarmila Parajuli Dhakal, Ambassador of Nepal to the sultanate, at Al Barakah Palace on Sunday. She wished the envoy success in her tour of duty in the sultanate. On her turn, the ambassador expressed her gratitude and appreciation for the Honourable Lady and wished her good health, happiness and a long life (ONA)

HM receives written message from Yemeni president

Our Correspondent
Muscat

His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik has received a written message from Field Marshal President Abdrabbuh Mansur Hadi of the Republic of Yemen.

The message deals with the bilateral relations between the two brotherly countries and means of promoting these in all spheres. The message was received by Sayyid Badr Hamad al Busaidi, Foreign Minister, when he received Dr Ahmad Awad Mubarak, Minister of Foreign and Expatriates Affairs of Yemen, on Sunday.

The meeting reviewed developments and the situation in Yemen and the UN efforts to end the war in a way that preserves unity and safety of Yemen.

Following the meeting, Sayyid Badr tweeted, "Yemen and Yemenis have a special place in



Sayyid Badr Hamad al Busaidi receives Dr Ahmad Awad Mubarak on Sunday (ONA)

the hearts of Omanis. Today, I was pleased to meet Dr Ahmad Awad Mubarak and discuss with him the efforts to stop the war in Yemen and bring peace in line with the aspirations of the Yemeni people."

The two sides reiterated the importance of enhancing cooperation with all parties to achieve security and stability in Yemen by

supporting efforts of the UN and US envoys.

The meeting was attended by Sheikh Khalifa Ali al Harthy, Undersecretary for Diplomatic Affairs in the Foreign Ministry, Khalid Hashel al Muslahi, Head of the Minister's Office, and a number of officials from the Foreign Ministry, besides Dr Khalid Saleh, Ambassador of Yemen to Oman.

► NEWS BRIEFS

CYCLIST KILLED; HIT-AND-RUN DRIVER ARRESTED

Muscat - A motorist was arrested after a cyclist was killed in a hit-and-run incident in Muscat.

In a statement, Royal Oman Police said, 'Muscat Governorate Police Command has arrested a vehicle driver on charges of running over a cyclist, causing his death and fleeing the scene of the accident.'

Legal action has been initiated against the driver.

RAFO CONTINUES JOB RECRUITMENT

Muscat - To implement Royal Directives of His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik to employ jobseekers, Royal Air Force of Oman (RAFO), in coordination with the Ministry of Labour, is making significant progress.

RAFO confirmed that it continues to complete the recruitment procedures of those who have passed the acceptance and evaluation stages. 'Those accepted for training will be enlisted as new soldiers in RAFO,' it said.

RAFO has enhanced capacity to achieve speedy implementation of the procedures for those joining military service and serving the nation.

MASS VACCINATION DRIVE AT FULL STEAM

Oman received 210,000 doses of Pfizer-BioNTech vaccine on Sunday night to speed up nation-wide immunisation campaign

Our Correspondent
Muscat

A mass immunisation drive started on Sunday across Oman with most centres seeing heavy rush. Members of the Supreme Committee, which is tasked with tackling developments resulting from the COVID-19 pandemic, visited the vaccination centre in Sultan Qaboos Sports Complex Bausher set up for Muscat governorate, on Sunday.

The visit was led by H E Sayyid Hamoud bin Faisal al Busaidi, chairman of the Supreme Committee, accompanied by other members to monitor the progress of the immunisation drive.



Supreme Committee members visit Bausher vaccination centre to follow up on the nation-wide immunisation plan on Sunday (Supplied photo)

'Committee members were briefed on the procedures outlined from the start of registration of target groups to the moment of vaccination. They were updated about the mechanism of coordination and reception of eligible groups, as well as the precautionary measures undertaken. They commended the turnout of citizens and residents for the vaccine,' the Ministry of Health (MoH) said in a statement.

H E Dr Abdullah Nasir al Harrasi, Minister of Information and member of the Supreme Committee, pointed out that the visit aimed to follow up on the implementation of the nation-wide immunisation plan.

"The Supreme Committee

3,177 new cases in 3 days

Muscat - The Ministry of Health (MoH) confirmed 3,177 new cases of COVID-19 in the sultanate from Thursday to Saturday, in addition to 28 related deaths.

With the exception of Friday, June 4, daily cases have crossed the 1,000 mark since May 30. On Thursday, 1,157 cases were reported, followed by 940 on Friday and 1,080 on Saturday.

This takes the total number of COVID-19 cases to 223,879 in the sultanate. 'The total number of deaths is 2,413,' MoH said in a statement.

The ministry added that 2,459 cases recovered in the three-day period, accounting for a total of 204,480 recoveries.

One hundred and fourteen individuals were hospitalised in a 24-hour period on Sunday, accounting for a total of 937 patients in health institutions, including 290 in intensive care.



urges all target groups to take the vaccine to protect themselves, their families and society from this disease," said H E Dr Harrasi, stressing that the vaccine is the most efficient way of securing protection. He also underscored the significance of commitment to the measures announced by the authorities concerned, including adherence to social distancing and avoiding gatherings.

"Undoubtedly, many commercial and economic activities around the world have been seriously impacted by measures undertaken by countries for protection against this dangerous disease, and the sultanate is no exception.

"Since the outbreak of the pandemic, Oman has adopted elaborate measures that maintained a balance between public health and business activities. Experts predict that the whole world will shift between closures and opening of business activities till such a time that the vaccine shows positive results in overcoming the disease," said H E Harrasi.

The minister cautioned against paying heed to rumours about vaccines. "Scientists who are well-versed in epidemiology affirm that what is circulating about vaccines and immunisation is totally baseless and devoid of truth," he said.

Mercury crosses 50°C in Sunaynah in Buraimi

Our Correspondent
Muscat

Oman recorded the highest temperature of the year crossing 50°C in Sunaynah in Buraimi governorate on Saturday.

The heat wave engulfing areas in the interior wilayats intensified on Saturday with the mercury touching a high of 50.1°C in Sunaynah.

The mercury almost touched 50°C in Hamra ad Duru (49.9°C), Fahud (49.8°C) and Ibri (49.7°C) in Dhahirah, and Qarn Alam (48.9°C) in Dakhliyah.

According to the Directorate General of Meteorology, on Friday too Sunaynah witnessed blistering heat and a high of 49.8°C, followed by Ibri (49.6°C), Hamra ad Duru (49.5°C), Qarn Alam (49.4°C) and Fahud (49.3°C).

For several areas in the interiors, the Met department issued advisory for dust and sandstorm. The areas included Fahud, Ibri, Haima, Hamra ad Duru, Marmul, Muqshin, Al Mazyunah, Thumrait, Qarn Alam and Zamaim.

In its forecast for Monday, the Met department stated that clear to partly cloudy skies were expected along the coastal areas of Dhofar governorate and adjoining mountains with chance of intermittent rains.

The seas will be rough along the Arabian Sea with waves of a maximum height of 3m.

Expat recruitment fee hike to lower operation costs: Ministry of Labour

Our Correspondent
Muscat

The Ministry of Labour stated that it has monitored what circulated on social media on the subject of raising fee for permits of non-Omani manpower functioning in upper- and medium-level positions, as well as technical and specialist jobs.

The ministry stated that 'replacement with Omani cadres

will reduce operational costs of businesses and reflect positively on the cost of services provided to the public'.

Ministerial Decision No 12/2021 on the fee hike came into force on June 1.

The ministry added that its specialists are prepared to hear the demands of employers. 'It is ready to study their needs for manpower and prepare a replacement plan supported by the government, so that their

operational cost is less and more efficient, even with the increase in fee for the professions referred to. The ministry is fully prepared to provide free consultation services for them in this regard,' it stated.

It clarified further that the decision is aimed to raise the cost of expatriates in professions in which a large number of citizens, who have practical experience, are looking for work. 'The decision coincides with the

recent announcements to support jobseekers and training.'

The ministry has also announced an incentive for establishments who fulfil Omanisation targets.

'As per the Economic Stimulus Plan for establishments, there will be a fee reduction in expatriate workforce recruitment permits (as specified in Ministerial Decision No 12/2021) for upper and intermediate occupations, and tech-



nical and specialised professions,' the ministry stated.

The recruitment fee will be reduced by 25 per cent for establishments that have Omani workforce and 50 per cent for those that have achieved the Omanisation rate.

The General Federation of Oman Workers welcomed the ministerial decision and added that it will have a positive impact on the job market and Oman's economy.

Omani student company Shatla Team to represent MENA in global competition

Our Correspondent
Muscat

After winning several prizes in the past year, student company Shatla Team is currently all geared up to represent Oman and the Middle East and North Africa region in the de la Vega Global Entrepreneurship Award being held in the US.

The online competition aims to support student companies set up projects and develop skills.

Speaking to *Muscat Daily*, Sarah Haseeb al Zaabi, marketing manager of Shatla Team, said, "We won three awards at Injaz al Arab's Youth Entrepreneurship Celebration 2020, including the Company of the Year Award in the high-school category."

Additionally, Shatla Team won the Citi Client Focus Award, FedEx Global Possibilities Award and the Soraya Salti Company of the Year Award, with To Read from Lebanon as joint winner.

"Following this, our team qualified to participate in the de la Vega Global Entrepreneurship Award."

Shatla - Arabic for 'seedling' - is an online platform that connects nurseries and customers,



Shatla Team with Khawla al Harthy, CEO of Injaz Oman (3rd left) (Supplied photo)

creating opportunities for both.

"Through our website, Shatla connects customers and provides detailed information about specific plants, including care instructions in multiple languages. This helps nurseries increase sales, which in turn contributes to the sustainability of the environment as more plants are grown and cared for," Sarah explained

automatically entered as finalists for the award. "The winning team receives a US\$15,000 award, free registration to the next JA Global Youth Forum, and a stipend for travel costs to the forum," said Sarah.

She added that the result of the contest will be announced on July 7. A report and a video about the team members and the company's goals has been prepared

Through our website, Shatla connects customers and provides detailed information about specific plants, including care instructions in multiple languages

SARAH HASEEB AL ZAABI

The de la Vega Global Entrepreneurship Award recognises outstanding Junior Achievement (JA) entrepreneurs, which is one of the world's largest youth-serving NGOs dedicated to educating students in Kindergarten to Grade 12 about entrepreneurship, work readiness and financial literacy through experiential, hands-on programmes.

The first place winners of each of the annual regional JA student-company competitions are

and presented to the competition officials.

"Shatla Team comprises five students from Al Sahwa Schools - Shahad al Hasni as CEO, Zainab al Lawati as finance manager, Ahmed al Lawati as research and development manager, Hashim al Lawati as human resource manager and me as marketing manager," Sarah said. The team is committed to serving Oman and supporting the national economy, Sarah informed.

PDO signs pacts to train 58 medics for rigs

Our Correspondent
Muscat

Petroleum Development Oman (PDO) has signed agreements with two contractors to employ 58 Omanis as qualified medics on rig sites.

Under the terms of the Memoranda of Collaboration (MoC), PDO will train the nationals who will then secure work with Abraj Energy Services (AES) and KCA Deutag (KCAD) on the successful completion of their training. The initiative is part of a wider move by PDO to Omanise all rig medical personnel across its entire operation.

Eng Abdul-Amir bin Abdul-Hussein al Ajmi, external affairs and value creation director, PDO, signed the MoCs with Abdullah al Hadi, MD, AES, and David Troost, country manager, KCAD,

at a virtual ceremony last week.

Eng Ajmi said, "We are constantly striving with our contractors to identify meaningful and rewarding jobs for Omanis across the wide spectrum of our activities. The health and welfare of those working with us are paramount, and those employed through this new programme will take on the vital responsibility of caring for them in the field."

The trainees will undergo familiarisation training with PDO for a period of two to five months, gaining the required knowledge and experience for the roles. Forty of them will then be employed by AES, while other 18 will be engaged by KCAD on their rig sites.

"We are expanding our job creation horizons by qualifying Omanis to meet the fixed and fluctuating workforce required to

serve different market demands in the energy sector," he added.

"Our National Manpower Supply (Emdad) team have succeeded in localising thousands of jobs to date and will continue to go the extra mile to ensure that more nationals find work in the energy sector and beyond."

Hadi said, "We are proud to be part of PDO's initiatives for offering job opportunities for national job seekers and localised medic positions at Abraj rig sites."

"This initiative will contribute to increasing the Omanisation percentage of the company from the current 92 per cent. This training programme is in line with Abraj's vision and commitment to delivering In-Country Value including creating job opportunities for local Omani nationals," he added.

"We would like to extend our

appreciation to PDO for funding this training and to every individual who played a role in making this co-operation possible."

"After more than 50 years of being contracted by PDO," the KCAD country manager said, "we continue to feel our responsibility to help the development of Oman."

"It fills us with joy that we are signing an MoU today in which we commit to hire and train 18 Omani medical staff to support our drilling rigs in the field," Troost added.

PDO earlier signed two deals for an on-job-training programme in health, safety and environment so as to provide 50 job opportunities to graduates in Arabian Industries Projects (AIP) and Special Technical Services (STS), in collaboration with the Ministry of Labour.

Citizens raise RO120,000 to make their own dam

Our Correspondent
Muscat

In a move to increase green coverage, provide irrigation to farms and support farmers, a group of citizens in Dahirah governorate have banded together to construct a dam in the wilayat of Yanqul.

Built at a cost RO120,000, the Wadi al Arshi underground recharge dam is located in the village of Al Waqba. Besides raising funds, residents collect stones needed in the construction work using their own equipment every Friday.

Speaking to *Muscat Daily*, Ali Khamis al Alawi, one of the supervisors involved in building the dam, said, "The residents of Yanqul came together as a family to build the Wadi al Arshi dam. We started work in February this year. Excavations were carried out earlier in preparation of construction work of the dam measuring 13m in height and 45m in length."

Residents formed a committee and a technical team to plan, raise funds and coordinate with the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Water Resources. A contractor was hired at a later stage to construct the dam under the supervision and follow-up of the people of the wilayat.

"We have also laid an access road to reach the dam site in order to transport construction material," Alawi said, adding that after this stage of work was over,



(Supplied photo)

cement mix was used to build two layers of the dam.

"We thank every individual and company that donated and we will continue to collect donations to complete the dam soon,"

Alawi said.

The dam is being built according to technical and engineering specifications of the Ministry of Agricultural, Fisheries and Water Resources.

ROP VACCINATION DRIVE



The Royal Oman Police (ROP) personnel get vaccinated as their field vaccination campaign continues against coronavirus (Supplied photo)

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Omani doctor wins ISBT award for new study

Our Correspondent
Muscat

Dr Arwa bint Zakarya al Riyami, a senior consultant of haematology at the Sultan Qaboos University Hospital (SQUH), has received the 'Harold Gunson Award' from the International Society of Blood Transfusion (ISBT) for her research work shedding light on the impact of pandemic on blood bank workers.

She is the first Omani to win this award.

Dr Arwa said that about half of the participants, whom she talked to while conducting the study experienced increased levels of stress while going about their duties during the time of the pandemic.

Besides experiencing work pressure due to shortage of staff, they also feared getting infected or become virus-carriers to their family members. This was compounded by the lack of adequate support to care for children during their tasks, reliance on home schooling, and difficulties in obtaining basic supplies for their families.

Dr Arwa conducted her research in cooperation with the members of the advisory board of the ISBT.

"Some 283 workers in blood banks, aged 40 years, participated in the study," she said.

Forty-one per cent of the health workers stated that the tasks entrusted to them by their institutions during the pandemic had increased as a result of employees becoming infected with the coronavirus. The study also confirmed



Dr Arwa bint Zakarya al Riyami

that most of the participants could not follow social distancing measures in their institutions, while 46 per cent of them followed those measures at home.

About 55 per cent of the doctors and nurses who participated in the study, Dr Arwa informed, had stated that there was not enough equipment to protect themselves during work, and more than half of the participants were worried that their families might get infected because of their work and the lack of equipment.

Dr Arwa has nearly 60 scientific researches in the field of blood transfusion and haematology.

She was chosen as an ambassador for the American Association of Blood Banks (AABB) in 2018, the first from the Arab world.

In 2013, she obtained a resident certificate from AABB - the first Omani to be certified to assess the standard of blood banks.

At ISBT she is heading the advisory board since 2018, besides serving as a representative of the Middle Eastern region currently.

Children burst with joy as COVID-19 restrictions ease

Our Correspondent
Muscat

Excitement, laughter and squeals of joy swept across Qurm beach as children of various age erupted in merriment - the magnitude of which could be gauged by the sparkle brightening their eyes.

After months of being locked within the four walls of their homes, this weekend witnessed these youngsters celebrating life as the Supreme Committee declared parks and beaches open for public.

One could see children as young as three years jumping in the water with their parents while others were seen making sand castles. They giggled and ran freely.

Raziq Abdul, father of a three year old boy, said, "My son Khalid had been in home confinement for the past few months. Previously we used to take him out for at least shopping; but as the lockdown hit, children were restricted to home. Yesterday (Saturday) I took him to Shatti beach and I could see the excitement in Khalid. He was so thrilled to see the sun and the sand. We also had a dip in the sea."

The Riyam Park also came to life with lights and rides. There were long queues of children for different rides, which had all stopped during the lockdown. The park was alive with people and food outlets did brisk business.

Sami Hosni, who came to the park after a gap of almost one year, said, "This is one of the favourite parks for me and my three daughters. They love the rides here, mainly the train."

"The park looks so beautiful with sounds of people all



(Syed Fasiuddin/ Muscat Daily)

I took him (son) to Shatti beach and I could see the excitement in Khalid. He was so thrilled to see the sun and the sand. We also had a dip in the sea

RAZIQ ABDUL

around," he added. "I am also happy to note that people are now more responsible and wearing masks and taking

care to look after nature. They are not littering around," Hosni said.

Children need to venture out

for both their physical and mental growth. This lifting of restrictions is welcomed by parents and guardians as they believe that this freedom from confinements would benefit their children's overall growth.

Lakshmi Sarkar, senior occupational therapist, welcomed the move and underlined the importance of physical activity "for the improvement of a child's physical and mental health".

"Being isolated can affect them for not getting to interact with peers and thus leading to poor social skills, social phobia among teenagers, childhood lethargy, obesity, depression, frustration and emotional imbalance. Apart from getting fresh air, improving lung capacity and getting Vitamin D, it increases vitality and activeness, which is no match to any gadgets or online activities," she added.

Houses for low-income families to be built in North Sharqiyah

Our Correspondent
Muscat

As part of its efforts to provide housing for low-income families, the Ministry of Housing and Urban Planning is seeking to build more than 50 housing units in North Sharqiyah.

The ministry said construction work has started in the village of Hail al Koufouf at the summit of the White Mountain in the wilayat of Dima Wa al Taien, at a total cost of RO2,226,380.

Masoud bin Khamis al Saadi,



director of the Department of Social Housing and Projects in North Sharqiyah, said that the project "is one of the most important housing projects" being implemented by the Ministry of Housing and Urban Planning in the wilayat of Dima Wa al Taien. It is expected to be completed by the end of December 2022.

The ministry is in the process of implementing a number of other housing development projects in the wilayats of North Sharqiyah governorate for eligible categories, he added.

Expat arrested for transporting 500 liquor bottles

Muscat - An expatriate was arrested in Sharqiyah for transporting alcohol in his vehicle.

"North Sharqiyah Governorate Police Command arrested an expatriate for transporting 500 bottles of alcohol in his vehicle. Legal proceedings are on against the arrested person," the ROP said.

PRAYER TIMINGS

Fajr	3.49am
Sunrise	5.19am
Duhr	12.05pm
Asr	3.24pm
Maghrib	6.52pm
Isha	8.22pm

Fines for owners of strays reduced

Our Correspondent
Muscat

H E Sayyid Hamoud bin Faisal al Busaidi, Minister of Interior, has issued a ministerial decision (No. 164/2021) amending some provisions of the controls and confinement of stray animals.

The decision effectively brings down the fines imposed on animal owners with regard to the older decision.

Owners would have to pay a fine up to RO20 if their animals were found straying, grazing in cities and residential places, the latest decision says. The fine will be doubled in the event of a repeat violation. The earlier fine for stray animals was RO100.

The owners of the stray or neglected animals have to bear



the 'care charges' upon a claim for their release. The fee for this is RO15 per day for every camel, cow or a horse, RO5 per day for every head of goat, sheep, or any other animal.

The decision was issued on May 24 and came into effect

from the next day of its publication in the Official Gazette.

As per the earlier decision, the 'care charges' were RO150 per day for every camel or a horse, RO50 per day for every head of a cow and RO10 per day for each goat, sheep, or other animals.

(Supplied photo)



61,553 students, teaching staff vaccinated: MoH

Muscat - The Ministry of Health (MoH) has started a nation-wide immunisation campaign on Sunday for those due for the second dose of the COVID-19 vaccines.

The ministry confirmed that 61,553 General Education Diploma students, teachers and

allied staff were vaccinated against the COVID-19 so far.

With this, the MoH and the Ministry of Education have completed 81 per cent of the target group of 75,730 people.

Muscat governorate has recorded the highest number of

vaccinated individuals (16,733 - 99 per cent of the target group) followed by North Batinah (11,397 - 82 per cent of the target group), Dakhliyah (9,360 - 89 per cent of the target group) and South Batinah (7,401 - 76 per cent of the target group).

YOUR SAY

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Local before global

At a time when the COVID-19 pandemic is hindering international tourism, how can domestic tourism be boosted?

Harish Danani
Senior manager

Oman has to enhance its local competitiveness by investing in projects related to Omani history, literature and its natural beauty. Cultural tourism projects will boost the role of wilayats in stimulating domestic tourism. Promotional and seasonal discount offers from local hoteliers and tour operators can further boost domestic tourism.



Mohan Anandan
Banking sector

With the ongoing pandemic continuing to hamper travel plans and arrival of tourists, it is challenging times for tour operators even to attract domestic travellers. Tour operators need to find innovative ways to infuse enthusiasm to bring in tourists by adhering to the safety norms. The forthcoming khareef season should test the muddy waters!



Divya Shenoy
Homemaker

Technology will play an important role, besides extensive awareness campaigns and assurance from the ministry regarding hygiene and cleanliness at tourist attractions. Effective marketing strategies and, of course, vaccination drives will all lead to growth of domestic tourism. Hope tourism picks up for khareef this year.



Sultan al Rawahi
Private sector employee

Oman has many heritage sites, such as castles and forts, and locations of natural beauty that can attract local tourists. These sites need to be promoted well and provided facilities to support domestic tourism.



Salim Musllam Masi al Mahrouqi
Interpreter/translator

Countries will need to create a 'new normal' for the tourism industry. Diversifying, shifting to more sustainable tourism models and investing in new technologies could help shape the recovery.



Jay Prakash
Private sector employee

The Government of Oman should invite local and international investors and tourism companies to develop tourism and offer them subsidies for the same. Additionally, local tourism facilities should be promoted in local media.



Jayatee Choudhury
Student

Domestic tourism can be encouraged through packaged tours to different locations in Oman, especially during weekends and public holidays, advertising these and offering special discounts. To compensate for the absence of income from international bookings, travel agents should make domestic tourism their key focus.



Abdul Raziq Kazi
Private sector employee

Oman has numerous places worth visiting which few people are aware of. Tourism companies can capitalise on this. Local celebrities can promote these locations among citizens and expats.



K M Gurnani
Businessman

Local authorities and the hospitality industry can take advantage of the situation by making attractive offers to citizens and residents during weekends and holidays which will help in the recovery of the tourism sector.



? NEXT ON YOUR SAY

How can fears and rumours about vaccines be put to rest so that vaccine acceptance increases in Oman?

The views stated here are those of the respondents and not endorsed by *Muscat Daily*. If you feel strongly about the issues discussed here, you can email your comments to muscatdaily@apexmedia.co.om Log on to our Facebook page or tweet us your comments on the issue

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MUSCAT DAILY

MoCIIP records more than 30 IPR requests during pandemic

Our Correspondent
Muscat



Nidaa al Tamimieh

Since the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic, the Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion (MoCIIP) has recorded more than 30 registration requests under intellectual property rights (IPR) in fields of virus prevention, sterilisation, disease surveillance devices, treatment methods, protective clothing and other solutions to control and fight the coronavirus outbreak, said a press statement.

Nidaa bint Yaqoub al Tamimieh, a specialist of patent inspection in the National Intellectual Property Office at MoCIIP, said that the requests received by the ministry since the beginning of the pandemic, "were varied in various sectors, particularly in the health field, in addition to other sectors such as the technology and communications fields".

During the pandemic, Nidaa

said the MoCIIP "exerted its efforts to address the challenges facing the innovators by receiving and registering applications electronically, which contributed to encouraging many inventors to protect their creative rights".

The pandemic period has witnessed presentation of many creative ideas through individual, group and corporate efforts aimed at confronting the pandemic in the sultanate, she emphasised.

"These efforts included inventions submitted by small, medium, large enterprises and emerged students' companies."

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Oman posts R0827mn deficit in first four months of 2021

Our Correspondent
Muscat

Oman recorded a drop in government revenues in the first four months of 2021 as the average oil price during the January-April period remained significantly lower compared with the same period a year ago. This drop in oil revenue resulted in a budget deficit for the first four months of this year.

The government's total revenues in the first four months of 2021 decreased by 27.7 per cent to R02.769bn compared with R03.829bn recorded in the same period of last year, according to the Ministry of Finance.

Net oil revenue – which accounted for around 49 per cent of the government's total revenues – remained 36.8 per cent lower in the first four months of 2021 at R01.347bn compared with R02.133bn in the corresponding period of 2020.

As a result of sharp drop in oil income, the sultanate's budget deficit widened to R0827.4mn in the first four months of 2021 against a surplus of R0134.2mn in the same period of last year.

'Net oil revenue was down by 36.8 per cent due to lower oil production in compliance to OPEC+ agreement, low oil price and persisting consequences of COVID-19 which have adversely affected economic growth and public finance,' the Ministry of Finance said in its monthly bulletin.



Net oil revenue dropped 36.8 per cent in the first four months of 2021 at R01.347bn compared with R02.133bn in the corresponding period of last year

The ministry noted that Oman is committed to OPEC+ production cuts agreement.

On the other hand, the ministry said that current revenue increased by 14.4 per cent, that includes R0313mn of dividends received from government investments.

Oman's average daily oil production in the first four months of this year decreased to 952,000 barrels per day from 1.08mn barrels per day in the same period of 2020.

Average oil price during the first four months of 2021 remained lower at US\$54.79 per barrel compared with US\$64.89 in the corresponding period a

year ago.

However, the price of Oman's crude oil last week recovered to its pre-pandemic levels having hit the highest level in past 18 months. Oman crude price at the Dubai Mercantile Exchange closed above US\$70 per barrel on Friday, its highest level level since January 2020.

The recent rising trend in oil prices comes amid optimism for a vaccine-led global economic recovery and an effective coordination and commitment by major OPEC and non-OPEC producers to restrain supply of crude.

With the support of higher oil prices, improvement in eco-

nom ic activity, and implementation of value-added tax, Oman is expected to record a significant growth in revenues this year which should help the country narrow its overall budget deficit for 2021.

On the other hand, the ministry's data showed that Oman's gas revenue decreased by 7.3 per cent at R0448.1mn in the first four months of this year compared with R0483.8mn in the same period a year ago.

Public spending

The sultanate's total public expenditure decreased by 2.66 per cent to R03.596bn during January – April period of 2021 from R03.695bn in the corresponding a year ago.

'This (decrease in public expenditure) comes as a result of fiscal consolidations carried out by the government to mitigate economic consequences, and to rationalize spending and en-

hance its efficiency. Investment expenditures (development and capital expenditure), for the ministries, totalled R0143mn,' the Ministry of Finance said.

As per the bulletin, the government has introduced a new budget item within the 2021 budget in order to repay future debt obligations.

'By the end of April 2021, the total appropriations allocated for this budget item amounted to R050mn, while the target figure for the current year amounts to R0150mn.'

Oil and gas reserves

According to the Ministry of Finance, the reserves of crude oil and condensates by the end of 2020 stood at 4.706bn barrels in Oman, while the average production rate reached 950,700 barrels per day.

In addition, the sultanate's gas reserves by the end of 2020 reached 23.69tn cubic feet, while the average daily gas production rate was 121.9mn cubic feet per day.

The ministry also informed that the International Monetary Fund's Article IV mission team is conducting discussions via virtual meetings for the 2021 Article IV consultation with Oman during May 24 – June 7, 2021.

The main areas of discussions with IMF team are macro-economic developments, fiscal policy and reform priorities within the sultanate's medium-term fiscal plan (2021-2024).

NBO's Innovation Incubator open for registration

Muscat – National Bank of Oman (NBO) has kicked off registration for its most exciting tech event of the year, Innovation Incubator. A collaboration with the SME Development Authority, Oman Academy for SMEs, and Paradigm Consulting, the initiative will take successful applicants on a three-month long course that will challenge them to come up with ideas for a Fintech start-up.

The winners will then get the chance to pitch to investors. All IT students and fresh graduates with a head for Fintech and a passion for entrepreneurship are invited to apply through NBO's website between the June 6 and June 20. With only 30 participants to be selected, the race is on to see who could be Oman's next Fintech superstar, NBO said in a press release.

Sherifa al Maskari, head of brand at NBO, said, "We are excited to begin the selection process for our highly-awaited programme. Oman has a huge pool of young talent and this competition is going to find out what they're made of.

'Fintech's role is becoming more vital than ever, not only in the banking industry, but as part of the sultanate's vision to be a technologically advanced nation. Innovation Incubator offers young people



Sherifa al Maskari

an unprecedented opportunity to learn more about it, get ahead of the game, and maybe even make it their career."

As part of the bank's active corporate social responsibility programme, the programme is aimed at college students and fresh graduates. Selected participants will go through a tailored programme delivered by specially trained NBO employees. At the end of the course, three out of the 30 will be selected to pitch their ideas to potential investors, connecting them to bigger opportunities.

With a range of youth-centred initiatives and programmes including Etimad, Outward Bound Oman, and the Hackathon, NBO continues to foster Oman's young people and equip them with the skills and knowledge they need to contribute to the development of the nation.

Utico to issue region's first utilities sustainability sukuk

Dubai, UAE – Utico, the Middle East's leading full service utility and the only private water and power company in the UAE, said that it has achieved an international sustainability rating for its benchmark sized sukuk from DNV UK.

In a statement, Utico said that it will be the first sustainability private corporate sukuk of its kind in the region.

The sukuk will be issued in the coming weeks, and has gathered high interest among sustainable investors and also among other financial investors who are moving towards sustainability as a key basket investment.

The sukuk is in support of Utico's ongoing innovation and sustainability programme that has driven the company over the past 16 years to deliver consis-

tent profitability every single year, and at the same time serve the community at the best utility tariffs in the region.

Utico recently signed a 35-year water supply contract in Dubai with Dubai Electricity and Water Authority (DEWA) at a world record tariff. Several other projects have been won, or are in the pipeline that are based on Utico's Sustainability Through Innovation programme.

Utico has consistently delivered positive socio-economic benefits in the areas it serve and the sukuk will pave way to expand its offerings to other areas based on its core business model of sustainability and innovation.

Utico's consistent sustainable annual average growth of 20 per cent gives it the reason to catal-

yse its growth further even during the pandemic and post-pandemic.

The consistent and sound business model has attracted many partners and investors to work with Utico, the statement said.

Currently, Utico has over 15 projects in the MENA region that will benefit from its expertise and business model and thereby leading to expanding its offerings.

Utico is working with key partners like DEWA, Sharjah Electricity and Water Authority, Federal Electricity and Water Authority, Sharjah Investment and Development Authority (Shurooq), Masdar, SWPC, NEOM, IDO as well as environmental and food security authorities on several projects.

MZEC embarks on concerted Omanisation

Muscat- As part of its concerted efforts to align with national directions and policies and add value to the national workforce in the power sector, Mazoon Electricity Company (MZEC) has embarked on an intensive Omanisation process.

The campaign is part of an initiative designed to recruit 800 Omanis in the emergency and maintenance contractors with electricity companies, in cooperation with Ministry of Labour, Authority for Public Services Regulation (APSR) and Nama Holding Company. This is with reference to APSR's announcement earlier to train and recruit Omani nationals for 800 technical positions.

With an aim to boost Omanisation, Mazoon Electricity has already formed number of committees, including one main committee and six secondary committees, to carry out the re-



quired processes. Evaluation and interviews process are underway to recruit qualified talents to join the contracts of emergency and maintenance companies which will replace the expatriate workforce. As part of the first phase of the employment process, the company in the next few days will interview around 700 candidates out of which 300 will be selected for supervisory and

technical jobs such as maintenance engineer, maintenance supervisor, HSE officer, electrical technician, cable jointer (line extension) and line man in the emergency and maintenance contractors' companies within Mazoon Electricity.

Eng Majid Nasser al Busaidi, chief operations officer - distribution at Mazoon Electricity Company, said, "We are com-

mitted to recruiting and nurturing dynamic young Omanis to meet our manpower needs. This is in line with directive of His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik to support Omani human resources and enable them to contribute to the overall national development."

Being committed to the implementation of its optimised in-country value (ICV) strategy, Mazoon Electricity Company has achieved a major milestone of 98.5 per cent Omanisation during the year 2020.

In 2020, as many as 26 nationals were recruited as part of the company's recruitment strategy. With the network expanding and the workload increasing, the number of employees in the company increased to 549 in 2020. The process of recruiting 38 Omani engineers to its payroll has been completed in the month of May 2021.

Major oil companies vow energy transition at their own pace

Paris, France – Oil majors are under growing pressure to stop drilling for crude to help curb climate change, but companies say they will wean themselves off fossil fuels at their own pace.

The demand for change is coming from many sides: law-suits, shareholders and the International Energy Agency (IEA) have all turned up the heat on firms recently.

Recently, a Dutch court ordered Shell to slash its greenhouse gas emissions, and investors used shareholder meetings to install activist board members at US oil giant Exxon-Mobil and demand deeper emissions cuts at rival Chevron.

The IEA sent shockwaves through the industry last month when it declared that no fossil

fuel exploration or new oil and natural gas fields are needed, thanks to the 'rapid drop' in demand. The intergovernmental organisation made the suggestion in a report warning that all future fossil fuel projects must be scrapped if the world is to reach net-zero carbon emissions by 2050. The agency, which advises developed countries, has been criticised by environmentalists in the past for being too timid while calling for oil investments to ensure supply.

BP chief executive Bernard Looney told the Columbia Global Energy Summit that the report was "very much in line" with the British energy company's strategy.

But Looney also noted that while the report sees much lower



investment in fossil fuels, it is "still investment in oil and gas".

"At the end of the day," he said, the report "is a scenario on a piece of paper and what the world needs more than anything is maybe less scenarios and maybe less debate... and more action."

BP plans to reduce oil and gas

production by 40 per cent within the next decade, Looney said.

'Lagging behind'

"It's really a question of rhythm," said Nicolas Berghmans, an energy research fellow at the Institute for Sustainable Development and International Relations think tank in Paris.

"Companies are not going as fast as the IEA thinks is needed and they are lagging behind in their transition," he said.

Last year, investments in clean energy accounted for just one per cent of capital spending by the oil and gas industry, according to a new IEA report published last week.

But this could rise to 4 per cent this year for the entire industry – and even higher, to 10 per cent, among leading European firms, the IEA said.

'There are signs in the latest data that spending by some global oil and gas companies is starting to diversify,' the report said. Oil and gas exploration has recently slowed down but this is due to the effects of the coronavirus pandemic.

Huge fields were discovered last year in Russia, Turkey and Suriname.

A report by the consultancy Westwood Global Energy Group found 'no evidence of a systematic change in industry exploration strategy' with regards to energy transition.

The group expects dozens of

exploration drilling operations this year, including in Mexico, Brazil, Suriname and Guyana.

The chief executive of TotalEnergies, the French energy group which changed its name recently, has bluntly said that the company is not going to give up oil overnight.

"In energy transition there is the word 'transition' and I would like to remind everyone that today... our economy functions on 80 per cent fossil fuel energies," CEO Patrick Pouyanne said, warning against "radicalism".

He said it will take time to switch to other sources of energy for transport or heating while oil demand rises in countries such as China and India.

AFP

MSX extends gains; volumes down

Our Correspondent
Muscat

The benchmark index of the Muscat Stock Exchange (MSX) Sunday further rose by 0.84 per cent to close at 3,965.51 points. The upward trend at the Omani bourse is continuing for the second consecutive week amid increased optimism about global economic recovery and rising oil prices.

All sectoral indices closed in green territory led by Financial Index which gained 1.23 per cent. Industrial Index rose 1.14 per cent while Services Index increased 0.78 per cent. The MSX Sharia Index closed 0.12 per cent up at 565.37 points.

Trading activity, however, decreased on Sunday as volumes fell 22.2 per cent to 26.8mn shares compared with 34.44mn shares traded on Thursday. Market turnover also dropped by 40 per cent to RO3.46mn compared with RO5.77mn in the previous trading ses-

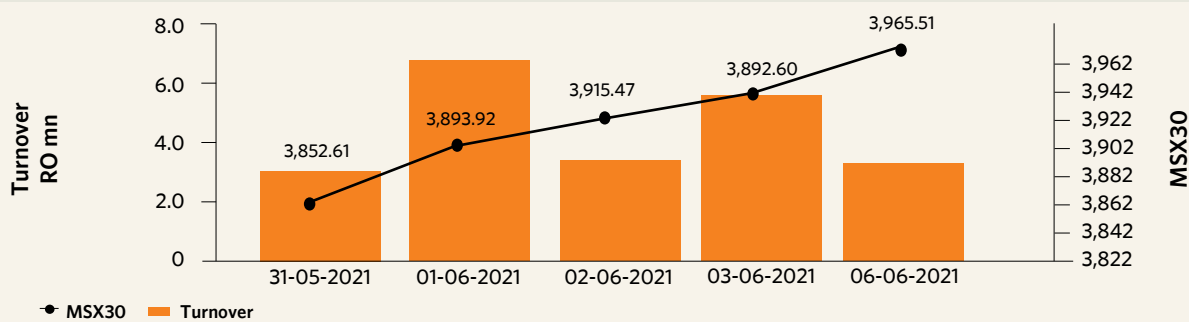


sion. Market breadth at the MSX remained positive with 26 advancing stocks to nine decliners. As many as 13 traded stocks remained flat for the day.

Top gainers were Oman Cables Industry (7.39 per cent), Oman & Emirates Investment Holding (7.27 per cent), Gulf

International Chemicals (5.77 per cent) and Al Suwadi Power (5.45 per cent). Among top losers were Al Hassan Engineering (-16.67 per cent), Al Batinah Development (-8.89 per cent), SMN Power Holding (-3.03 per cent) and Al Jazeera Services (-1.44 per cent).

MSX INDEX AND TURNOVER OF FIVE TRADING DAYS



Turkey announces new Black Sea gas discovery

Istanbul, Turkey - President Recep Tayyip Erdogan announced a new natural gas discovery in the Black Sea that could help wean Turkey off its dependence on energy imports.

Erdogan last year announced a 405bn cubic metre (14.3tn cubic feet) find in the so-called Sakarya field - the biggest ever discovery in the Black Sea.

He hopes to put bring the first gas from that find to consumers in time for Turkey's centenary celebrations in 2023.

Erdogan on Friday said that further Turkish exploration work in the region resulted in the discovery of a new well with 135bn cubic metres of reserves.

"The new discovery of 135bn cubic metres was made in the Amasra-1 exploration well," Erdogan said while attending a special ceremony in the Black Sea city of Zonguldak.

Turkey consumes between 45bn and 50bn cubic metres of natural gas each year.



Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan

Analysts have urged caution over the discoveries' significance because deep sea drilling is expensive and recoverable reserves often prove to be far smaller than the size of the actual find.

There has been no independent audit of the Sakarya field published to date.

Erdogan has said that Turkey intends to exploit the wells without foreign assistance and would not need outside financing.

Turkey's search for natural gas sparked an international crisis last year when it began conducting work in disputed waters claimed by EU members Cyprus and Greece.

The EU pulled back from its threat to expand existing sanctions on Ankara when Turkey pulled back its main exploration vessel and opened informal talks with Greece at the start of the year.

AFP

G7 agrees to make climate reporting mandatory

London, UK - The wealthy G7 countries on Saturday moved closer to mandatory disclose of companies' climate impact despite a lack of global agreement and doubts from some NGOs.

"We support moving towards mandatory climate-related financial disclosures," their finance ministers said in a statement released after two days of meetings, adding that this would 'provide consistent and decision-useful information for market participants'.

The idea backed by the UK, the US, Canada, France, Germany, Italy and Japan would make it mandatory for all major companies to come clean on, for example, their carbon dioxide emissions - a crucial aspect of the transition towards cleaner energy. Such regulations would help companies assess the financial impact of the climate crisis and make necessary changes as their countries set ambitious targets such as becoming carbon neutral by 2050.

It would also help investors who offer financing to large groups and take an ever closer interest in the impact of the cli-



US Treasury Secretary Janet Yellen at the G7 Finance Ministers Meeting in London on Saturday (AFP)

mate on businesses, both in terms of performance and reputation.

The G7 says it is following the recommendations of the taskforce on climate-related financial disclosures (TCFD), put in place in 2017 with members from across the G20.

The finance ministers went even further by hailing the creation of a taskforce on nature-re-

lated financial disclosures, which covers not only the climate but also nature and biodiversity.

The challenge is that every country takes responsibility and imposes measures on its own companies and so there has to be agreement on accounting rules. Britain already plans to force companies to go public on their environmental impact from 2025 - with the government

claiming this makes it the most progressive country in the G20.

Nevertheless, disclosing such information will not be mandatory at first, and businesses in the country are only required to either publish the data or to explain why they are not doing so.

Investors are also pushing G7 countries to do more, such as Britain's IA (Investment Association), which is urging financial

regulators to make the publication of climate risks mandatory.

"Ensuring high-quality and comparable data on the impact of climate change lies at the heart of this," said Chris Cummings, CEO of the IA.

For their part, NGOs warn that the latest measure is no guarantee that the business world will play its part in energy transition. "Disclosures should have been mandatory a long time ago, but at this stage of the climate and ecological crisis, calling for better data is a dangerous distraction," said David Barmes, an economist at Positive Money.

"Markets will not save the day," he said, adding that in his view the G7 governments should mainly work with central banks and regulators to "actively shift finance out of fossil fuels and other environmentally harmful activities."

NGOs said Wednesday in a report that G7 countries had missed a chance to become greener during the pandemic by massively subsidising polluting sectors such as air travel, despite their climate commitments.

AFP



Russian President Vladimir Putin (AFP)

Putin urges Europe to pay for gas in euros, not dollars

Saint Petersburg, Russia - President Vladimir Putin said Friday that European nations should pay for Russian gas in euros, as the Kremlin moves to dump the dollar following rounds of US sanctions.

"The euro is completely acceptable for us in terms of gas payments. This can be done, of course, and probably should be done," Putin said at the Saint Petersburg International Economic Forum.

The Russian leader's comments come a day after his economy ministry announced it was dropping the dollar from its National Wealth Fund (NWF) and shifting to other currencies.

The Kremlin has for years worked to wean the economy off the dollar and Russian state-owned energy companies have been turning to non-dollar settlements.

The economy ministry said that from May 20 the share of dollar assets in the fund had been reduced to zero per cent from 35 per cent.

Finance Minister Anton Siluanov said the euro will make up 40 per cent of the fund, with 30 per cent in yuan and 20 per cent in gold.

The British pound and the Japanese yen will make up 5 per cent each.

Some economists said the move was designed to send a signal to Washington ahead of a summit between Russian leader Vladimir Putin and US President Joe Biden on June 16.

The face-to-face meeting in Geneva comes amid the biggest crisis in ties between the two countries in years, with tensions high over a litany of issues including human rights, election meddling, Ukraine, and Belarus.

Moscow has been reducing the share of its dollar holdings since the West imposed sanctions on Russia following the annexation of Crimea in 2014.

While the US dollar is essential for international trade, it makes Russia more vulnerable to sanctions from Washington.

AFP

US economy adds 559,000 jobs in May

Washington, US - The US economy added 559,000 jobs in May and the unemployment rate dropped to 5.8 per cent, the Labor Department said Friday, as COVID-19 vaccines helped businesses reopen and rehired.

While last month's employment gains were weaker than the consensus estimate, the monthly report contained evidence the economy was recovering from the mass layoffs caused by the pandemic, with the number of long-term unemployed declining 431,000 to a still-high 3.8mn.

However, the economy is still short 7.6mn jobs compared to February 2020, before the pandemic struck, the report said.

Sectors that were badly damaged by business restrictions to stop the virus made up the bulk of the employment gains last month, with the leisure and hospitality sector adding 292,000

jobs, two-thirds of which were in businesses like bars and restaurants.

Accommodations added 35,000 jobs, and amusement, gambling and recreation businesses added 58,000, but the leisure and hospitality sector is still short 2.5mn positions.

And average hourly wages increased strongly, rising 15 cents to US\$30.33 after a 21 cent gain in April, which the Labor Department attributed to firms trying to attract unemployed workers back to the job.

"The data for the last two months suggest that the rising demand for labour associated with the recovery from the pandemic may have put upward pressure on wages," the report said, noting that the pandemic's employment disruptions complicate the analysis of wage trends.

AFP

Apple says App Store ecosystem surged during the pandemic

San Francisco, US - Apple said its App Store 'ecosystem' surged in 2020, fueled by pandemic-hit consumers seeking to stay connected for work, school and play.

Apple spotlighted an independent study by Analysis Group indicating billings and sales of digital and physical goods as well as advertising 'facilitated' by the App Store worldwide last year was up 24 per cent from 2019 to US\$643bn. "The apps we've relied on through the pandemic have been life-changing in so many ways - from groceries delivered to our homes, to teaching tools for parents and educators, to an imaginative and ever-expanding universe of games and entertainment," Apple chief executive Tim Cook



said in a release. "The result isn't just incredible apps for users: it's jobs, it's opportunity, and it's untold innovation that will power global economies for many years to come."

The Global Perspective on the Apple App Store Ecosystem study focused on small developers with fewer than a million downloads and less than US\$1mn in earnings last year.

About 90 per cent of total

billings and sales facilitated by the App Store ecosystem in 2020 occurred outside of the App Store, meaning that Apple collected no commission on those sales, according to the study. Release of the study comes as US District Court Judge Yvonne Gonzalez Rogers mulls evidence presented during a trial in which Epic Games is trying to break Apple's tight grip on its App Store, and potentially disrupt the entire mobile ecosystem.

Epic, maker of the popular Fortnite video game, is seeking to force Apple to open up the App Store to third parties seeking to circumvent Apple's procedures payment systems and its commission as high as 30 per cent in the process.

AFP

Transfer salary to Sohar International and win

Delivering on its principles of providing more vision, more value, and more velocity to customers and the nation at large, Sohar International has reasserted its customer-centric approach, announcing a host of benefits and rewards for those transferring their salary to the bank.

The special privileges come in the form of reduced interest rates on select loans, free credit card for life, and a host of countless benefits including the enrolment into the bank's ongoing Prize Scheme Draws offering lucrative cash prizes.

All customers who transfer their salaries to Sohar International are entitled to these exclusive benefits that offer interest rates as low as 4.95 per cent on personal loans and housing loans, 5 per cent on auto loans with motor insurances starting at only 1.5 per cent interest, a free for life credit card and free consultations for financial advice with financial industry experts. The offer also enables customers to enter into the Prize Scheme Draws entitling them to get chances to win in the dedicated Salary Draws totalling RO12,000 in monthly cash prizes.

Commenting on the 'Transfer Your Salary, Transform Your



Life' offer from Sohar International, Khalil al Hedaifi, chief retail banking officer at Sohar International said, "Sohar International aspires to bring the best banking services to the sultanate that add more value and provide more benefits to customers. We always try to create opportunities for rewarding various segments of individuals, through exclusive benefits and unique products that are delivered with our benchmark banking services.

"The new promotion exemplifies this approach, and allows our salary transfer customers to do more in their life, as we take care of their finance needs assuring enabling them to transform their lives."

With customer-centricity and a strong market position, the bank is ahead of the curve in adopting a culture of innovation and winning, which is key to its brand proposition. The customer centric culture spans across the bank, ensuring more consistent value for customers and their lifestyles. Sohar International continues to roll-out new products basis its assessment of customer needs and an in-depth understanding of the then prevailing market requirements.

Winners of Dar al Atta'a writing contest announced

The Let's Read judges announced the winners of the 15th Children's Writing Competition. This year the participants were asked to write a story set in Oman or to take a traditional Omani tale and re-write and illustrate it.

Winners were divided into three age groups and two languages, Arabic and English. Jane Jaffer, chairperson of the Let's Read Programme, said, "We were pleased to receive hundreds of great entries this year. We had an almost equal number in Arabic and English. Each entry was read by at least three judges and graded according to certain criteria: descriptive setting, a strong plot, an exciting story, and colourful illustrations."

Jane said she would like to thank all the judges for volunteering their time to assess each and every entry.

Elizabeth al Sarhani, one of the judges of the competition, said, "As always, it was a pleasure judging the competition. There is a lot of young talent out there, just waiting to be discovered."

The Let's Read Team would like to thank Oman Perfumes, Clair, and MHD, for sponsoring the competition.

Sami al Lawati, CEO and founder of Oman Perfumes and Clair sanitising products, said,



write. We are now busy organising Oman's first online Muscat Literature Festival."

Winners: (In English)

►8-11 years

1. Jana Eberlein aged 11 years from Royal Flight School
2. Adam Hakim aged 9 years from Royal Flight School

►12-15 years

1. Firas Talal al Busaidi aged 12 years from Modern Generation Private School
2. Dulara Kuruppu aged 12 years from Sri Lankan School Muscat

►16-18 years

1. Shabih Raza aged 16 years from Muscat International School
2. Iram al Khalifin aged 18 years from Muscat international School

►Special Education Prize -Amira Kazi

(In Arabic)

►8-11 years

1. Reem al Siyabi from Safia bint al Khattab School Muscat
2. Aliaa al Saeed al Sulaimani from Safia bint al Khattab School

►12-15 years

1. Asmaa al Alawi aged 15 years from Aisha Masood Girl's School
2. Nouf Adel al Hadrami aged 12 years from Thuraya bint Mohammed al Busaidia School

Indian schools in Oman get centre for excellence

The Board of Directors, Indian Schools in Oman, maps out a dynamic path that reaffirms the importance of learning and teaching in the context of the 21st century skills and dispositions by establishing a virtual Centre for Excellence named 'Samridhhi Centre for Excellence in Learning and Teaching' for the teachers and students of Indian Schools across the sultanate.

The logo, name and the tagline of the centre was unveiled by Dr Joseph Emmanuel, director - Academics, CBSE and the website was launched by Dr Biswajit Saha, director - Training and Skill Education, CBSE on Saturday.

In his address Dr Emmanuel lauded the yeoman service of the board in exploring all opportunities to get the teachers connected to the students despite the pandemic restrictions.

"Teachers play multiple roles to cater to the educational, social, psychological and emotional needs of the students. The initiative of the board in establishing the Centre for Excellence will help in reaching out to the students by addressing their multifarious needs," he said.

By exalting the initiatives of the board among the best educational practices in the world, Dr Saha commented that Indian Schools in Oman were equipped with the technology and expertise for online education of stu-



dents and managed to continue curriculum transaction and assessments despite the closure of schools.

"Centre for Excellence is a marvelous initiative of the board for honing the pedagogical resources and CBSE is committed to help every educational endeavour of Indian Schools in Oman," Dr Saha said.

The Samridhhi Centre for Excellence in Learning and Teaching promotes a vibrant educational culture for both the teachers and students. It will provide quality education based on contemporary needs and will empower students to become lifelong learners.

It will serve as a common repository for teachers to develop their professional and digital literacy skills with numerous transformational academic programmes.

The centre can be accessed at <https://samridhhi.center/>

In his introductory address Dr Sivakumar Manickam, chairman, Board of Directors, Indian

Schools, said the Samridhhi Centre for Excellence is aimed to "place Indian Schools from great to world class with the best teaching and learning practices and it will serve as a central resource to provide professional assistance, to encourage mutual support and to facilitate collaborative learning".

The Board of Directors, in its mission to provide quality education for the students, is committed to ensure that educators engage in continuous professional learning and apply that learning to increase student achievement.

The Samridhhi Centre for Excellence in Learning and Teaching will help the teachers to figure out new ways to engage students for better learning outcomes.

The ceremonious function was moderated by Vinoba M P, education advisor, and was attended by the members on the board, presidents and members on the Management Committees, principals, vice principals and assistant vice principals of all Indian Schools across the sultanate.

Sirajudeen Nhelat, academic chair of the board welcomed the dignitaries and the vice chairman Syed Salman explicated the meaning of 'Samridhhi' as a person's holistic prosperity and proposed the vote of thanks.

Organon: Women's health company

Women's health is being transformed and further prioritised with the launch of Organon (NYSE: OGN), the only global company of its size focused on women's health.

With the aim of improving the standard of living for women in Oman and supporting the future of healthcare, Organon goes beyond traditional focus areas of women health and deliver impactful medicines & solutions based on unique patient needs.

Managing director Ramy Koussa of MENAT (Middle East, North Africa, and Turkey) in Organon, said, "As the MENAT region continues to grow and is expected to expand further in the coming years, we recognise the need to focus on women-specific health conditions and treatments that impact the everyday life of women.

"This launch will not only transform women's healthcare, but will also create over 400 job opportunities across MENAT.

"With our expertise, products, and technology in women-related conditions, we want to influence change in the region and empower women to take charge of their health to live better lives."

The Organon executive leadership team rang the opening bell at the New York Stock Exchange (NYSE) to mark the first day of active trading. Recognising the need to listen to and act on women's experiences to ad-



Dr Hanan al Mahrooqi

dress the challenges in women's health, Organon gathered voices from around the world to create the "Wall of Voices," a multimedia installation outside of the NYSE sharing powerful perspectives, voices and images.

Dr Hanan Abdullah al Mahrooqi, senior consultant family physician and head of Bausher Specialized Polyclinic, said, "Women are the spinal cord of the family and the primary caregiver to all members; giving good care to her is giving the care to the whole community."

Women everywhere are invited to take the "microphone" to add their voice to the digital "Wall of Voices" at www.HereForHerHealth.com.

Organon Oman's lead, Razan Gharaibeh said, "A unique offering that we are bringing to Oman to best cater to the



Ramy Koussa

unique needs of women includes biosimilars. In line with our commitment to increase medical accessibility to women, biosimilars play a crucial role in reducing cost pressure on the healthcare system and provide more access to biologic therapies. We will always be here for her health for a healthier woman, every day."

The three core pillars that lead Organon's offerings in Oman include:

►Biosimilars: Actively building a strong foundation by broadening the reach of offerings into new geographies while expanding through new collaborations and into new disease areas.

►Women's Health: With more than 140 therapies that are being investigated by multiple companies across the women's health industry, our goal is to add value by identifying and advancing the most promising op-

portunities for women.

►Established Brands: Our portfolio of over 60 medicines span several areas including cardiovascular disease, respiratory conditions, non-opioid pain management and dermatology. This diverse set of products and trusted brands are critical drivers of Organon's growth that will enable us to invest in new opportunities.

Organon has an international footprint that serves people in more than 140 markets, with nearly 80 per cent of its approximately US\$6.5bn in annual revenue generated outside the US. Organon believes it is well positioned for organic low-to-mid-single digit growth from its 2021 base of business.

Their approach to innovation is led by patient needs and the use of extensive global capabilities in clinical development and patient safety with the greatest potential to impact women's health.

Sandy Milligan, head of Organon Research & Development, stated, "Women have been told to accept and normalise their conditions as a part of life. Organon's mission is to change this.

"We believe this approach will be very successful — we hope to discover the ability to identify diseases earlier, the ability to modify the course of diseases or healthcare conditions and to ultimately, improve the quality of life for women at all stages."

Carrefour raises over RO12,700 to support needy families

Carrefour, owned and operated by Majid al Futtaim in Oman, donated over RO12,700 to the Dar al Atta'a to support needy families. During the holy month of Ramadan, Carrefour partnered with Dar al Atta'a, to continue the brand's mission towards supporting the growth and prosperity of the communities it operates in.

Carrefour donated all the money raised from the sale of its '50 Baiza sustainable reusable

bags' to help local families in need. The initiative not only encouraged the involvement of customers to make a difference in people's lives, but it also led customers to make sustainable choices. Over 240,000 sustainable bags were purchased during the duration of the campaign.

Alain Enjalbert, country manager at Carrefour Oman at Majid al Futtaim said, "In the spirit of giving and compassion, the 'Together we share' Ramadan initia-



tive brought Carrefour and the local community together to support those in need. These acts of giving are especially important during these challenging times, and our collective efforts in partnership with Dar al Atta'a association underline our commitment to give back as a champion of the community."

Dr Shamsa al Harthi, director general at Dar al Atta'a said, "We would like to thank Carrefour for their continued support as

we have worked tirelessly to give back to our surrounding communities. Our combined efforts have generated an incredible RO12,744, which will not only be used to support families in need but also allowed us to raise even more awareness about our sustainability efforts. Successful partnerships like these truly make all the difference and show vast rewards of collaboration, trust and positivity on our planet and our people."

Good response for Asalah, Al Jawhar referral schemes

Bank Muscat’s ongoing Asalah and Al Jawhar referral schemes, which were launched by the bank in line with its vision ‘To serve you better, everyday’, have been well received by customers. They offer guaranteed cash prizes to Asalah and Al Jawhar customers for all successful referrals of new customers.

All existing Asalah Priority Banking Customers have a chance to win up to RO2,000 by simply referring new customers to join Asalah Priority Banking. Those who have a monthly salary of RO5,000 or with a savings deposit of RO30,000 are eligible to be upgraded to Asalah Priority Banking.

Customers can fill up the form available at <https://bm.click/3cZp9HL> and email it to AsalahReferral@bankmuscat.com to take part in the scheme. The salary/deposit transfer of the referred customer should happen within a maximum of 30 days from the date of referral, for the referral to be eligible for participation in the scheme.

A cash reward of RO100 will be credited directly to referrer’s and referee’s account for each successful referral maintaining



the eligibility criteria of Asalah over the review period.

Al Jawhar customers on the other hand have a chance to earn up to RO5,000 by referring friends and family members to join Privilege Banking. All existing Al Jawhar customers are eligible to earn an RO50 incentive for every successful referral, up to a maximum of 100 referrals. New referrals who successfully open an Al Jawhar account before the scheme ends will also win RO50 each making the innovative scheme a win-win deal both current and new customers.

More details as well as the

forms to make referrals are available at <http://bm.click/Jawhar-ReferralEN>. Customers can download the form given in the document, fill it up and email it to AlJawharCampaign@bankmuscat.com.

Asalah customers enjoy a range of benefits including access to a team of dedicated Relationship Managers, 35 Asalah Centres across Oman and a dedicated 24/7 Asalah Call Centre (24779999).

Exclusive lifestyle benefits include the Asalah Entertainer App, which has more than 3,500 “Buy 1 Get 1 free” offers in Oman

and at international destinations, as well as rewards of indulgence and merchant discounts across fine dining, entertainment, leisure, and the beauty and wellness segments.

Asalah Visa Signature credit cardholders can enjoy airport lounge access at more than 1,000 lounges worldwide, up to 12 times a year, and a 24/7 global concierge service.

The Credit Card also offers 1 per cent cashback on purchases as well as free multi-trip travel insurance for customers and their direct family members. It must also be noted that a large

number of high-value prizes have been reserved for Asalah customers in the Al Mazyona 2021 prize draw scheme including 10 monthly prizes of RO25,000 each and 10 Mid-year and 10 End of Year prizes of RO50,000 each.

Asalah customers maintaining RO30,000 or more in their savings accounts will also be automatically entered into the draw for two mega prizes of RO250,000 each during the Mid-year draw and the End of Year draw.

The Al Jawhar Privilege banking experience on the other hand opens a world of opportunities for its exclusive clientele. Al Jawhar customers are eligible for a number of exclusive 2-for-1 deals on food, entertainment and shopping that are available through the ‘Visa Offers MENA’ app on their smartphones.

They have access to a higher ATM withdrawal limit of RO800, the chance to win a fixed salary prize of RO500 every month for a year as well as other exclusive and high value Al Mazyona prizes that are especially reserved for them in the new 2021 Al Mazyona scheme.



Bait al Zubair Museum continues to receive guests

Bait al Zubair Museum continues receiving guests with precautionary measures and social distance consideration, where the museum’s staff taking care of the safety of the visitors from their arrival by taking their temperature and recording their information. The museum opens from Sunday to Thursday (9am-5pm).

Bait al Zubair Museum opened its doors for the first time in 1998 at Al Zubair’s family house. It contains the family gleanings for centuries. The museum is formed by many buildings, Bait al Bagh, Bait al Oud, Bait al Nahdha, and

Bait al Dalaleel in addition to the garden and the coffee shop and the gift shop.

Bait al Zubair Museum was the first institute that won Sultan Qaboos Prize for Architect and now it is one of the cognitive points for tourists and citizens. Since 2005, the museum expanded to be a comprehensive institute that holds cultural events in various fields, arts, children, youth, theater, literature, and others.

Also, the foundation promotes cultural initiatives and offers an environment that hosts and invests the innovative and cultural projects.

What’s on AMC and SundanceTV this Month?

Summer season begins with a group of great movies on AMC and SundanceTV, available exclusively in the Middle East and North Africa through beIN channels 72 and 73, respectively. Both channels are included with premium beIN subscription packages.

Double adventure movies

A range of Hollywood stars from Jason Statham and Matt Damon to Kevin Costner and Morgan Freeman are featured this month in back-to-back adventure movies every Friday. Even more is in store with popular TV series *Fear the Walking Dead* and *Eli Roth’s History of Horror*.

On Friday, June 11 the lineup features Heath Ledger, Matt Damon and Monica Bellucci in the *Brothers Grimm* (2005), followed by Jason Statham, Ray Liotta and Claire Forlani starring in *In the Name of the King* (2007).

Starting Monday, June 7 is the ground-breaking documentary *Touching the Void* (2003) based on Joe Simpson’s international



bestseller. This true story details one of the most harrowing tales of adventure and survival of our time. Made by Oscar-winning director Kevin Macdonald, the film recalls the story of a mountain climb gone wrong when one of the climbers falls and breaks his leg and the other has to decide whether or not to cut the rope.

The journey of nail-biting documentaries continues throughout the month with the *Last Breath* (2009) directed by Richard da Costa, *Man on Wire* (2008) directed by James Marsh, and *Over the Limit* (2017)

directed by Marta Pruss.

More movie adventures include classics such as *The Princess Bride* (1987) and *Prince Valiant* (1998) on Friday, June 18. Kevin Costner and Morgan Freeman star in *Robin Hood: Prince of Thieves* (2005) and you will see in Dylan McDermott and Ashton Kutcher in *Texas Rangers* (2001) on Friday, June 25. Watch a preview of what’s on this month at <https://www.facebook.com/SundanceTVMENA>

AMC and SundanceTV bring you great movies every Monday and Friday this June.

ABQ schools shine bright despite COVID-19 challenges

Responding to the COVID-19 situation with a very comprehensive live online education offering, ABQ Education Group, the largest private school operator in Oman, is setting an exemplary standard in the sector.

ABQ Education Group has been at the forefront of hybrid-based education when the COVID-19 pandemic hit Oman in recent times. The three ABQ international schools, ABQ Azzan Bin Qais, ABQ Sohar and ABQ Seeb, were the first to offer Chromebooks to all students to ensure uninterrupted learning, facilitated in the most effective manner.

Constantly changing the future of education in Oman schools, under the ambit of ABQ Education Group, are continuously searching for ways to better prepare their students for the future and to identify the skills required to eventually be competitive in a global economy. Whilst they focus on the students in front of them, their eyes are always on the way forward.

Humayun Kabir, chief executive officer, ABQ Education



Group, says, “Our goal for the students is the acquisition of relevant knowledge, suitable skills, and the ‘can do’ attitude necessary to continuously learn and adapt in a rapidly changing world. This approach remains, irrespective of the mode of delivery whether it be face-to-face, live online or hybrid learning. We are prepared!”

Commending the school for pioneering a strategic and responsive online educational experience for students over the past year, Zahra Mahmood al Lawati, a ABQ parent said, “We have benchmarked the standard

and quality of education at ABQ with other schools. ABQ stands exceptional in serving the community distinctively in the education stream. The same has been witnessed during the pandemic where our children continued so smoothly due to ABQ’s ability to provide all the necessary platforms for education continuity.” ABQ has invested significantly in securing Chromebooks for all their students, as well as the sourcing of various suitable online resources, additional staff training, and personal protective equipment for all students and staff. This formed part of the tools supplied to all students to successfully complete their academic year, despite the challenges brought about by COVID-19. It is offered to ABQ students at no extra cost to the parents.

Another ABQ parent, Muhammad Saleem, said, “The steps taken by the school to adapt to the new normal, by investing in technological tools to support teaching and learning, are really appreciated. The teachers deserve commendation.”



AASF signs sponsorship agreement with SK Inc

Taha al Kishry, secretary general of Asia Swimming Federation (AASF) with headquarters based in Muscat signed a sponsorship agreement with SK Inc, one of the biggest corporations in South Korea, on June 4 in Doha.

The signing ceremony was attended by Sam Ramsamy, president of the African Swimming Federation, Husain al Musallam. FINA first vice president, and Jungseok Choi on behalf of SK Inc.

Infiniti Oman’s Reference Program garners great response

Infiniti Oman’s innovative Reference Program has gathered a good response from its valued customers. As per the programme, on successful conversion the referee will be incentivised with an RO100 gift voucher. The referee should own an Infiniti vehicle that was originally sold by Suhail Bahwan Automobiles (Oman) as a new vehicle.

A senior spokesperson at Infiniti Oman, from the house of Suhail Bahwan Automobiles said, “The programme has got great responses from owners of Infiniti vehicle who are our valued customers. The objective of the reference program has been to produce reference for further conversion to a sale and to build the brand. A reference can be given by any resident of Oman who is an existing Infiniti



customer.”

Referrals can be made by logging on to the website <http://referInfiniti.com>. While a

reference provided cannot be for self, a referee can submit multiple references. The referee will be eligible for RO100 gift

voucher if the reference buys a new Infiniti vehicle from any Suhail Bahwan Automobiles in Oman.

A pre-owned Infiniti car purchase/Infiniti purchase from any other outlet will not qualify under the Reference Program.

In case the reference purchases more than one Infiniti vehicle, the referee will be entitled for RO100 Gift Voucher for every successful reference. The new vehicle purchase needs to be made by a resident individual in order to be considered as a successful reference. Company, Ministry, Rent-a-Car or other commercial purchases are excluded from the programme.

The mobile number of the referenced person will be taken as the unique ID. A referee will not be able to register the same person or another person using the same mobile number. In case the same person is referred by two or more individuals, using different mobile numbers, the referee who had provided the reference first will be eligible for RO100 gift voucher benefit.

The gift voucher can be re-

deemed at any SBA facility and can be used for vehicle service, purchase of consumables, parts, and accessories. The gift voucher of the successful referee is non-transferable and cannot be redeemed for cash or exchanged for credit. The gift voucher will be valid for six months from the date of issue of same.

For any clarifications please email customerfirst@sbigh.com

SBA commitment

SBA is largely committed to supporting Infiniti Oman’s growth in the sultanate through major emphasis on customer satisfaction and by providing world-class after-sales services in Oman. With a national network of more than 40 showrooms, service centres and parts outlets, SBA has further built upon its legacy of trust, excellent customer service.

AGAINST CRUISE SHIPS



Environmental protesters from the 'No Grandi Navi' group, demonstrate against the presence of cruise ships in the lagoon, as the MSC Orchestra cruise ship (rear) leaves Venice on Saturday. The cruise ship, which arrived in Venice on Thursday for the first time in 17 months, signalling the return of tourists after the pandemic restrictions ease (AFP)

Two drones shot down above Iraq base: Army



This file photo shows coalition soldiers flying to Baghdad International Airport in a US Blackhawk helicopter, in Baghdad on May 31 (AFP)

Baghdad, Iraq - The Iraqi army said on Sunday two drones were destroyed above a base housing US troops, one month after the same base was targeted by an armed drone.

The US military's C-RAM defence system was activated to shoot down the drones above the Ain al-Assad base, located in Iraq's western desert, the Iraqi military said.

Several hours earlier a rocket was shot down above Baghdad airport, 'without causing casualties or damage', said Col Wayne Marotto, spokesman for the US-led military coalition in Iraq.

The coalition was sent to Iraq to help the country's military fight the Islamic State extremist group - a campaign that Baghdad declared won in late 2017. There are currently 2,500 US troops in Iraq, feeding into total coalition troop strength of 3,500.

The US consistently blames Iran-linked Iraqi factions for rocket and other attacks against Iraqi installations housing its personnel.

Since the start of this year there have been 39 attacks against US interests in Iraq.

The vast majority have been bombs against logistics convoys, while 14 were rocket attacks, some of them claimed by pro-Iran factions, who aim to pressure Washington into withdrawing all their troops.

"Those attacks are a distraction," said one source.

AFP

Israeli police arrest prominent Palestinian activist, says Family

Jerusalem - Israeli police on Sunday arrested a prominent activist at the centre of the movement to publicise the threatened eviction of Palestinians from their homes in Israeli-annexed east Jerusalem, her family told AFP.

The father of Mona el Kurd (23) said police apprehended his daughter and took her to a police station for questioning, leaving a summons for her twin brother, Muhammad.



This file photo shows activist Mona el Kurd (centre) taking part in a rally demanding the reopening of the Israeli Police checkpoint at the entrance of the Sheikh Jarrah neighbourhood, in east Jerusalem on May 29 (AFP)

Final vote test in Germany ahead of post-Merkel-era election



A man casts his ballot during Saxony-Anhalt's regional elections, at a polling station in Magdeburg's Art History museum on Sunday (AFP)

Magdeburg, Germany - Germans went to polls in the eastern state of Saxony-Anhalt on Sunday, with the far-right posing a tough challenge to Angela Merkel's conservatives in the final major test before the first general election in 16 years not to feature the veteran chancellor.

Saxony-Anhalt is one of Germany's smallest states with a population of just 2.2mn, but with Merkel's Christian Democratic Union running neck-and-neck with the far-right AfD there, the stakes could not be higher for the regional vote.

Victory for the AfD would be a devastating blow for the conservatives and seriously weaken the already fragile standing of the CDU's new leader Armin Laschet in the run-up to Germany's national election on September 26.

"If it turns out that the AfD is slightly stronger than the CDU on Sunday, then there could be debates about personnel in the CDU, and thus a weakening of the entire situation of the CDU," political scientist Hajo Funke of Berlin's Free University told AFP.

At a polling station in Magdeburg, voter Thomas Kibele told AFP he hoped that 'many people vote, that the turnout is high, and that we show that populist parties basically have no chance'.

"I think today the CDU will be ahead, followed unfortunately by the AfD and then let's see," said fellow voter Karl Mueller.

Merkel's party has been a dominant force in the eastern re-

gion for decades, topping all but one edition of state elections there since reunification in 1990.

But the far-right AfD established a strong foothold there in the last state election in 2016, having capitalised on anger over Merkel's decision to allow in a wave of migrants from conflict-torn countries such as Syria in 2015. In that election, the CDU scooped 30 per cent, forming a coalition with the Social Democrats (SPD) and Greens. The AfD won 24 per cent.

Latest polls published on Friday by the *Bild* daily had the CDU at 27 per cent, one point ahead of the AfD.

Although support for the AfD at the national level has stagnated at around 10 to 12 per cent in recent months, the party continues to be popular in the former East German states.

Its recent move to style itself as the party bashing Merkel's tough shutdown measures during the pandemic has also cemented its reputation as the anti-establishment party, attracting support beyond its core base of anti-immigration voters.

The AfD will not be able to govern even if it wins in Saxony-Anhalt, as all the other parties have ruled out forming an alliance with it.

But losing to the AfD would be, as *Spiegel* magazine puts it, 'a disaster' for Laschet - nominated as the conservative chancellor candidate in April.

'Laschet urgently needs a success to rally the Union behind him for the national election campaign,' said the magazine.

'The last thing he would need is a renewed debate about the AfD within his party, which would become unstoppable in case of an election defeat in Saxony-Anhalt.'

AFP

The police did not immediately respond to an AFP request for comment.

Under Israeli law, if Jews can prove that their families lived in east Jerusalem before the 1948 Arab-Israeli war that created the state of Israel, they can request the 'return' of their property, even if Palestinian families have been living there for decades.

Palestinians whose ancestors became refugees in the 1948 war have no means to retrieve their homes or land in modern-day Israel.

Israeli right groups Ir Amin says up to 1,000 Palestinians in

The arrest was part of an operation to terrorise ... because the voice that emerged from the neighbourhood was thanks to its youth

ACTIVIST'S FATHER

Sheikh Jarrah and the nearby Silwan district face being displaced. While Palestinians and their backers see the issue as a microcosm of the wider conflict over

land, Jewish settlers and their supporters have labelled it a mere property dispute, to be decided by Israeli courts.

Protests in Sheikh Jarrah spread early last month into the Al-Aqsa Mosque compound, sparking a crackdown by Israeli security forces against Palestinians there.

Hamas, the group that controls the Palestinian enclave of Gaza, responded by launching volleys of rockets towards Israel on May 10, triggering an 11 day war between the Jewish state and Palestinian fighters.

AFP

Sri Lanka recovers black box from chemical-laden sinking ship

Colombo, Sri Lanka - A black box from a ship loaded with chemical and plastic that is sinking off Sri Lanka has been located, officials said on Sunday, as investigators probe what caused the vessel to catch fire.

The Voyage Data Recorder, also known as a maritime 'black box', enables investigators to review procedures and instructions ahead of an accident.

Sri Lankan authorities said they hope it will provide details of the ship's movements and its communications with the har-

bour in the capital Colombo, where it had been due to dock.

"The navy facilitated technicians to remove the VDR from the bridge which is still above the waterline," navy spokesman Indika de Silva told AFP.

The Singapore-registered MV X-Press Pearl has been slowly sinking into the Indian Ocean since Wednesday after a fire that raged for nearly two weeks within sight of the coast.

The ship, carrying 25 tonnes of nitric acid and a huge amount of plastic raw materi-



(FILES) In this file photo taken on June 2, 2021 the Singapore-registered container ship MV X-Press Pearl sinks after burning for almost two weeks outside Colombo's harbour (AFP)

als, was heading to Colombo from Gujarat, India.

Sri Lankan officials have said an acid leak since May 11 may have sparked the blaze. Ports in Qatar and India had refused to offload the leaking nitric acid, they added.

Police on the island nation launched a criminal investigation, interviewing the vessel's skipper and chief engineer - both Russians - and its chief officer, an Indian, and seizing their passports.

Authorities are bracing for a possible oil spill after the stern

submerged. There has been no sign of any leaks so far, they added.

Tonnes of microplastic granules from the ship swamped an 80km stretch of beach declared off-limits for residents. Fishing in the area was also banned.

Sri Lankan environmentalists on Friday sued the government and the ship's operators for allegedly failing to prevent what they called the 'worst marine disaster' in the country's history.

AFP

COVID-19 PANDEMIC

Delta variant 40% more transmissible: UK minister

People with two doses of vaccine, should be equally protected against either Alpha or Delta variant

London, UK - The Delta variant of the coronavirus is estimated to be 40 per cent more transmissible than the Alpha variant that caused the last wave of infections in the UK, Britain's health minister said on Sunday.

But people who have received two doses of vaccine, should be equally protected against either variant, he added.

"That figure, around 40 per cent more transmissible, is indeed the latest advice I have," Health Secretary Matt Hancock told Sky News. The Delta variant, also known as the Indian variant, is now the dominant strain in the UK, according to Public Health England figures.

It was the Alpha variant, previously known as the Kent variant, that forced the UK into lockdown in January.

Hancock said the 40 per cent figure came from the government body of scientific advisors, SAGE. Concerns are mounting over whether the emergence of the Delta variant threatens the



Britain's Health Secretary Matt Hancock talks to the media as he leaves the BBC headquarters, in central London on Sunday (AFP)

40% figure came from the scientific advisors. We'll look at the data for another week, then make a judgement

MATT HANCOCK

government's provisional June 21 deadline for lifting virus restrictions. Hancock acknowledged that the Delta variant 'does make the calculation more difficult for June 21'. "We'll look at the data for another week and then make a judgement," he told the BBC on Sunday, stressing that the government was 'absolutely open' to delaying the lifting of restrictions.

Double jabs effective

The minister nevertheless stressed that those who have had two doses of vaccine should be protected against illness

from the Delta variant.

Public Health England said last month that research showed double vaccination was similarly effective against both the Kent and Delta variants.

"The best scientific advice I have at this stage is that, after one jab, it's not quite as effective against the new Delta variant, but after both jabs, it is," Hancock told the BBC.

So far hospitalisations are 'broadly flat', with very few hospitalised after receiving both vaccine doses, he added.

The UK has so far given more than 27mn people two doses - more than 50 per cent of adults - while more than 40mn have had one dose.

Hancock said the government was 'taking clinical advice' on whether to extend the vaccination programme to children over 12, who are believed to be playing a major role in spreading the virus. But this would not be mandatory, he added.

AFP

Migrant school forced online by virus unites children in Mexico

Matamoros, Mexico - Standing in her kitchen Alma Beatriz Serrano Ramirez waves a small board in front of her phone, hoping the students watching on the other end are paying attention to the math lesson she is teaching.

The 38 year old Honduran migrant had dreamed of settling in the United States but so far has only made it to the Mexican city of Matamoros, located on the banks of the Rio Grande River, which separates the two countries.

Her pupils - Adalid, Kimberly, Osval and a handful of others - are fellow migrants, many of whom are located some 90km away in Reynosa, another border town, where a camp of approximately 700 people has been established.

While COVID-19 has wreaked havoc on so many aspects of life, it has been a busy time for the Sidewalk School, which was operating in-person in one migrant encampment in



This file photo shows migrant children playing outside a shelter in Matamoros, Mexico, on May 26 (AFP)

Matamoros and now reaches children in several cities along the border.

In its online format, the program has welcomed students previously too embarrassed by their lack of education to set foot in a classroom.

The classes, which are taught

by asylum seekers who are former teachers or teaching assistants, are on everything from writing to math and even yoga, and offer rare comfort to students in cities stretching from Tijuana on the Pacific coast to Matamoros near the Gulf of Mexico.

Serrano Ramirez's students, who hail from Honduras, Guatemala and Haiti, are among the countless refugees still flocking to the US border, convinced that President Joe Biden's new administration will let them in - if only they ask.

Finding the border firmly

closed, they are now stuck in Mexico in a smattering of towns often controlled by drug traffickers, waiting for the US to review their refugee status requests.

'You get used to it'

Serrano Ramirez, who used to teach in Honduras, said she never would have imagined the ordeal she went through just to teach in front of a phone.

Compared to her prior classroom experience, the online classes she teaches are 'really difficult, but as time passes, you get used to it', she said.

Sidewalk School founder Felicia Rangel began the organization in Matamoros in 2018 after being shocked by the destitute conditions of several dozen migrants she met under a bridge.

Although she doesn't speak Spanish, she felt moved to help the migrants, whom she saw as victims of former president Donald Trump's immigration policies.

Rangel, whose father is Mexican but considers herself African-American, is a former school teacher who followed her husband from Houston to Brownsville.

At first 'it was just a matter of entertaining the children and teaching them a few things', said Ana Gabriela Martinez Fajardo, an asylum seeker who lives in Matamoros and teaches for the nonprofit.

"As more and more children arrived, it became clear that proper classes were necessary because they weren't studying," the 26 year old said.

Sidewalk School began growing as migrants flocked to Matamoros in such numbers that they overflowed the tent camp made for 3,000 people.

When COVID struck, Rangel and her co-director, Victor Cavazos, bought 300 digital tablets so that their students, age four to 18, would not be left without schooling.

During the pandemic, the programme has flourished.

Many of the older students who did not know how to read and write found relief in the anonymity afforded by digital learning.

"You can leave your screen off and no one has to see that you're in that kindergarten class," said Rangel, who reported that older pupils would sometimes leave the programme in embarrassment over being placed with younger students.

This is why even once making it to the United States, some parents continue to enrol their children in the online courses rather than public schools, which Rangel says is regrettable.

But it's not just the students who are slowly trickling into the United States: In recent months 17 of the 19 teachers have moved across the border, now living in places such as Kentucky, Michigan or Virginia.

AFP

Biden says will stand with European allies on Russia

Washington, US - The United States will stand with its European allies against Russia, President Joe Biden has promised ahead of the first face-to-face meeting with Vladimir Putin of his administration.

Biden will head to Europe on Wednesday, and is set to attend both the G-7 and NATO summits as well as holding a high-stakes meeting with the Russian leader in Geneva on June 16.

The summit comes amid the biggest crisis in ties between the two countries in years, with tensions high over a litany of issues including hacking allegations, human rights and claims of election meddling.

In an op-ed for the *Washington Post* published on Saturday, the US President promised to shore up Washington's 'democratic alliances' in the face of multiple crises and mounting threats from Moscow and Beijing.

'We are standing united to address Russia's challenges to



This combination of photos created on Friday shows US President Joe Biden (left) and Russian President Vladimir Putin (AFP)

European security, starting with its aggression in Ukraine, and there will be no doubt about the resolve of the United States to defend our democratic values, which we cannot separate from our interests,' he wrote.

'President Putin knows that I will not hesitate to respond to future harmful activities,' he said. 'When we meet, I will again underscore the commitment of the United States, Europe and like-minded democracies to stand up for human rights and dignity.'

Since taking office in January, Biden has ramped up pressure on the Kremlin, and his comments likening Putin to a

'killer' were met with fierce criticism in Moscow.

But both leaders have expressed hopes that relations can improve, with the Russian president saying on Friday he expected a 'positive' result from the talks.

Biden in his weekend op-ed also stressed that Washington 'does not seek conflict' - pointing to his recent extension of the New START arms reduction treaty as proof of his desire to reduce tensions.

'We want a stable and predictable relationship where we can work with Russia on issues like strategic stability and arms control,' he wrote.

AFP

'US will no longer seize reporters' records'

Washington, US - The US government said on Saturday it would stop secretly obtaining reporters' phone and email records during investigations into political leaks, ending a practice that was often criticised as undermining press freedom.

The *New York Times* this week reported that under Donald Trump's administration and continuing under President Joe Biden, the Justice Department fought a covert legal battle to access email logs of four of its reporters in a hunt for leak sources.

The Department of Justice said that 'in a change to its long-standing practice - (it) will not seek compulsory legal process in leak investigations to obtain source information from members of the news media'.

White House press secretary Jen Psaki said, "The issuing of subpoenas for the records of reporters in leak investigations is not consistent with the President's policy direction."

AFP

11 people, including kids killed as roadside bomb hits Afghan bus

Herat, Afghanistan - At least 11 civilians including four women and three children were killed when a roadside bomb struck a bus in Afghanistan, officials said on Sunday, in the latest attack targeting passenger vehicles in the violence-wracked country.

The attack occurred on Saturday evening in the western province of Badghis, raising fears of fresh violence in the months ahead as the US military continues to pull out its last remaining troops from the country.

No group has claimed responsibility for the blast but Badghis governor Heshamuddin Shams accused the Taliban of planting the bomb.

Another official from the province, Khodadad Tayeb, confirmed the toll and said that the bus fell into a valley after it was hit by the bomb.

Saturday's attack came after a series of blasts targeted passenger buses in Kabul this week.

The extremist Islamic State claimed two back-to-back attacks on buses in Kabul.

Violence has soared in recent weeks as government forces and the Taliban clash in near-daily



A security personnel stands next to a damaged vehicle at the site of an explosion that killed at least four people, in Kabul on Thursday (AFP)

battles across the rugged countryside, with the militants appearing to focus on capturing new territory and battering checkpoints and bases near Kabul.

The Taliban said on Saturday that they have 'captured the district of Deh Yak' in the province of Ghazni, about 150km south of Kabul.

The authorities said they had only 'relocated' their forces from the area.

Ghazni is strategically located on the main road from Kabul to Kandahar, the former bastion of the Taliban in the south. The province sees regular fighting between the two warring sides.

In 2018, the Taliban briefly

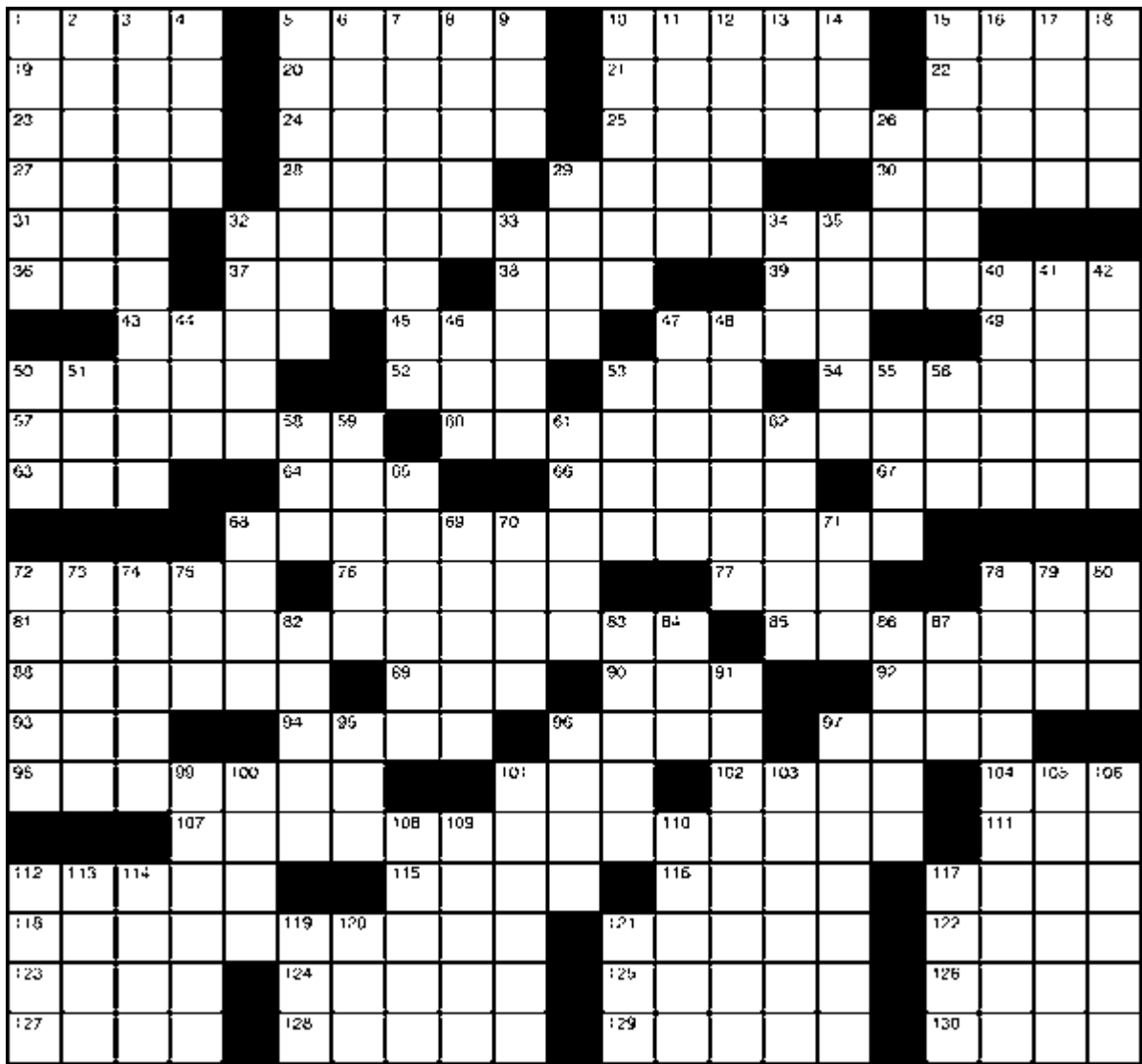
seized the provincial capital Ghazni, which has the same name as the province, in an all-out attack that left several government buildings torched and destroyed.

The surge in violence across Afghanistan comes as the US military continues to withdraw its remaining 2,500 troops from Afghanistan.

President Joe Biden has ordered the military to complete the pullout by the 20th anniversary of the September 11 attacks. But as the Americans pack up, experts fear Afghanistan will remain home to a number of extremist groups.

AFP

DAILY CROSSWORD



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- ACROSS**

1 Hence

5 "Remember the ____!"

10 Palindromic title

15 Seaweed

19 Regretted

20 Musical pause in the Bible

21 Soissons school

22 Weather word

23 Hoarfrost

24 Columbus's starting point

25 Heredity science specialist

27 Celebes ox

28 Stravinsky or Youskevitch

29 Mountain lake

30 Singer Smith

31 ____ Aviv

32 Crossword specialist

36 Bustle

37 "I would fain ____ dry death!": The Tempest

38 Zeta follower

39 Conceived

43 Secluded valley

45 Mahjong piece

47 Unctuous

49 Swiss canton

50 Larcenist

52 Author LeShan
- 53 Sail with the wind

54 Andes ruminants

57 Quits

60 Avian specialist

63 Pismire

64 Goddess of plenty

66 Cold

67 Passover dinner

68 Murder specialist

72 Binary star

76 Shorten a skirt

77 Cry's partner

78 Debussy's "La ____"

81 Skin specialist

85 Huge

88 Perfect bliss, to a Hindu

89 Yesterday's discs

90 Foot

92 Locale of 5 Across

93 Qt. halves

94 Erato, for one

96 Confined

97 Major-____

98 Tennis technique

101 Phoebus

102 Pavarotti rendition

104 Sass

107 Fossil specialist

111 Unit

112 Bobbin

115 Small container

116 Cinch

117 Mild expletive

118 Viticulture
- specialist

121 Winged

122 Actress/singer

Wilson

123 High schooler

124 Actress Zellweger

125 Refined ore

126 "It's ____ to tell a lie"

127 Mrs. counterparts

128 Liquid fat

129 News medium

130 Editor's note

DOWN

1 Printing blunders

2 Destroyed

3 Jewelry specialist

4 Greek music halls

5 Popular pill

6 Part of NFL

7 Apportion

8 New Zealand native

9 Cries of surprise

10 Greek Saronic Gulf port

11 Bitter

12 Disco queen

Summer

13 Pub quaff

14 Encountered

15 Humboldt Bay city

16 Cafe au ____

17 Essential import

18 Against

26 ____ dixit
- 29 Place for a chapeau

32 B_H link

33 Palatal

34 Mae West role

35 Romantic interlude

40 Swollen

41 Expunge

42 Sep. into portions

44 Hawaiian handout

46 Altar words

47 Expenditure

48 ____ dudgeon: irate

50 ____ -la-la

51 Biddy

53 Small brook

55 Stein's "____ Generation"

56 Ripen

58 Neither's partner

59 Hubert, ____

Gerald

61 Model Campbell

62 Intense dislike

65 Olfactory effects

68 Clothed

69 "____ to see

London once ere I de": Henry IV

70 Photo films

71 The bounding main

72 Conform

73 Slow, to Solti

74 Comprehend

75 ____ noct.: prescription
- "nightly"

78 Cocktail specialist

79 Singer/actress

Mendes

80 Legal matter

82 Dravidian caste member

83 Trance

84 Hamilton bill

86 Ermine

87 Religious inst.

91 Lose freshness

95 Pierre's one

96 Pocket billiards

97 Scatters

99 Chips to the green

100 Grow dull

101 New York City Island

103 Lariats

105 Deadlocked

106 Educational formalist

108 Sheeplike

109 American-born Japanese

110 Canadian physician

112 Topers

113 Equal

114 Draft status

117 Time periods

119 "____ y plata"

120 Solidify

121 Elec. unit

YOUR DAILY HOROSCOPE

- ARIES** MARCH 21-APRIL 19

You could be on the receiving end of several pieces of really great news. Expect the word to arrive from a higher-up you weren't sure had ever noticed you. You'll be amazed to discover you definitely haven't been overlooked. Once that news sinks in, you may need to make a decision. A serious, wonderful decision. If it doesn't happen right away, be patient. It's coming.
- LEO** JULY 23-AUGUST 22

Just when you thought you were ready to settle down and stop showing the world how unique, unusual, and sophisticated you are, someone has planted a bug in your brain that's making it impossible. The good news is you really weren't ready to quit. You may need to deal with disappointing someone who thought you'd be spending a lot more time together fighting for your cause.
- SAGITTARIUS** NOVEMBER 22-DECEMBER 21

Today's astrological weather suits you just fine. An affectionate, inviting message could set you off on a path that includes not just adventure but a new and improved intimacy with your partner. And no matter how subtle the invitation is, you'll understand the intent. Your mission, should you choose to accept it, is to enjoy it all and shelve the guilt.
- TAURUS** APRIL 20-MAY 20

Some last-minute news is due so suddenly you may not know quite what to do with it. Several astral culprits are behind the situation, just waiting to shock and delight you. Fortunately, you're as steadfast as a sign can be. You wrote the book on being steady, so if you need to make a tough decision based on your gut rather than on the facts, your instincts will guide you through it.
- VIRGO** AUGUST 23-SEPTEMBER 22

After months of griping about how nothing exciting ever happens to you, your friends will suddenly need to remind you that you've been wishing this on yourself. And to be quiet. Not that you'll mind. It's all about relationships taking surprising turns, quite possibly because you've decided the old ways don't suit you anymore. You may have some explaining to do.
- CAPRICORN** DECEMBER 22-JANUARY 19

Several planetary influences could inspire you to go after what you want. If you're challenged, you can deliver the perfect response in a most authoritative tone of voice, easily convincing any and all opponents just to drop it. Then there's your tendency to refuse to accept no for an answer. If anyone really does try to tangle with you, at least give them props for trying.
- GEMINI** MAY 21-JUNE 21

You're usually the last one to take things seriously, especially if there's any way at all to have some fun. At the moment, however, your razor-sharp intellect has informed you that something needs to be done and you're the only person on board who's equipped to make a logical decision. Well, go ahead. You might have to sacrifice an evening of fun to get things straightened out.
- LIBRA** SEPTEMBER 23-OCTOBER 22

Your specialty is taking care of others, and more often than not you do it at your own expense. Well, prepare yourself to make a decision that may actually take your own needs into account, just this once. Startling news that comes along via a family member or an old friend will convince you it's time. Still, move at your own pace.
- AQUARIUS** JANUARY 20-FEBRUARY 18

Just when you thought you were done righteously instructing the world about how it should be run, you've discovered you still have plenty left to say. Sure, you're up for a couple of days of rest, but you'll rally if it means convincing just one more person to toss their colours aside and wear yours. You can rest tomorrow. For now, do what you do best: win them over to your side with pure logic.
- CANCER** JUNE 22-JULY 22

Your relationships have been pretty darned busy, and they're probably going to stay that way. Does this mean you'll be entertaining all kinds of amazing new companions? You bet it does. In the meantime, you may also have to decide what to do with the "old" ones. Someone is about to issue what might sound suspiciously like a lover's ultimatum.
- SCORPIO** OCTOBER 23-NOVEMBER 21

You're absolutely entitled to indulge yourself in the deeper side of life: intimacy, intensity, intrigue, and a bit of leisure. It's now officially your turn to go for it, and if anyone knows how to be hedonistic, it's you. At the tail end of this fun-loving period, however, you'll also feel the need to make a serious decision, but you'll be able to pull it off, no sweat.
- PISCES** FEBRUARY 19-MARCH 20

For the next couple of days, you could quite literally wear your heart on your sleeve. Does this mean you're especially vulnerable at the moment? You bet it does. Better call someone you love and trust and ask them to chaperone you when you go out, especially if you're about to venture out with anyone you're not quite sure of. Pack some tissues just in case.

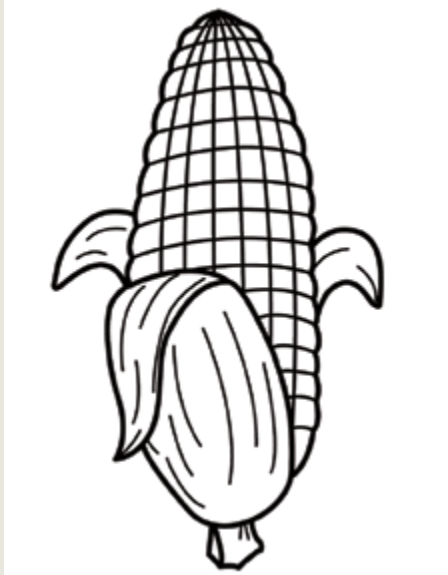


TEST YOUR KNOWLEDGE

1. In which decade with the first transatlantic radio broadcast occur?
- a. 1850s
b. 1860s
c. 1870s
d. 1900s
2. '.MOV' extension refers usually to what kind of file?
- a. Image file
b. Animation/movie file
c. Audio file
d. MS Office document
3. In which decade was the SPICE simulator introduced?
- a. 1950s
b. 1960s
c. 1970s
d. 1980s

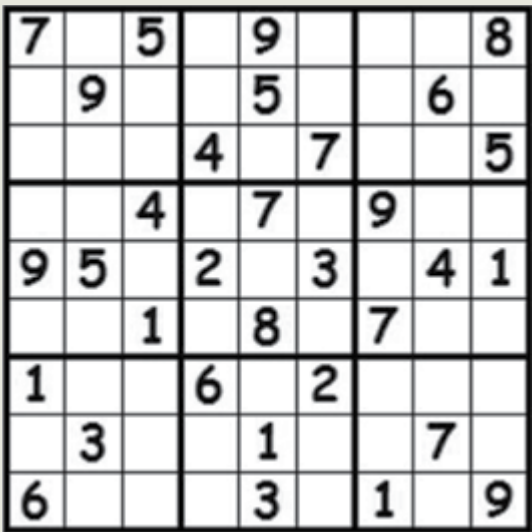
Answers: 1.d 2.b 3.c

KIDS COLOURING



DO YOU SUDOKU?

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



BOGGLER



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

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

SUDOKU EASY ANSWER



DAILY CROSSWORD ANSWERS (JUNE 06)



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



OFF TREK

GRAVE REALITY



By Anirban Ray

Some people stare at mountains...some climb them. Yet a few others dare to cross mountains.

I fall under the first and last category. When I feel poetically inclined, I admire the grandeur of the peaks, and when I feel the adrenalin kicking in, I dare to cross these giants. My adventures are not aimed at self-ies or to prove testimonies to my mojo, they are, indeed, a manifestation of an attitude that, probably, we all must apply while taking on the hurdles of everyday life.

This adventure, however, brought forth a shade of added thrill when I stumbled upon a set of 100 year old tombs amid a trek route in Muscat. In a cove amid the silent, stony mountains, with the Arabian Sea playing into its lap, these tombs seemed to remind the traveller that every man has one common destiny.

With this message in mind, I set forward for the journey along with two friends and our guide, Rahees. We dared to climb one of the toughest treks within the city. Called the 'Sidab hike', the route lies a few kilometres away from the Al Alam Palace in Mus-

cat. The place is popular not only for trekking but also for spectacular sights of the sea, besides being an apt locale for fishing and swimming.

One must travel light and have ample water to keep hydrated as the 3km trek, winding through rugged slopes can be quite exhaustive. Wearing sturdy shoes (which I missed out) is another precaution one must take to avoid hurting your feet as the rocky mountains can make the trek quite dangerous.

This trek seemed like a musical notation, swaying from various high and low notes, and so, it is recommended to always keep a keen eye on your next step.

The initial 'Tarzan' act started when we needed to climb a ladder tied with a rusty chain to get to the first mountain. We used our basic instincts - crawling, squatting, running and hanging - to reach our target.

Rahees led us, and being an expert, he hardly had any problems. Like an opera conductor or a surgeon he seemed to know his moves perfectly. He made sure to keep his gaze constant, both, on us and the path ahead. As we moved on, came the first sight - a pretty cove, bordered by rocks on



one side and the coastal towers on the other side. Waves dashed hundreds of feet below and the sight was scary yet beckon-

We used our basic instincts - crawling, squatting, running and hanging - to reach our target

ing. The sand below seemed smooth and soft while the waves made less noise as they converged with the rocks. And far away, one could catch a glimpse of Al Bustan Palace hotel, standing like a jewel in the distance.

The trek combines the best of Muscat's stunning coastline, beaches and mountains and was well marked by the authorities concerned. The sea water was crystal clear and cool while the pebbles and tiny fish moving around added their own charm. And, if you looked around intently, you could even catch a glimpse of a fox scampering away.

But, coming back to the old tombs - as we held tight on the rough rocks and entered the cove, we chanced upon this flattened out section which was, indeed, an old graveyard. It was surprising to find a quaint cemetery in the midst of nowhere.

The cemetery had graves dating back to the eighteenth century and was home to the remains of a number of Commonwealth soldiers who fought in World War I. Tombs of young sailors, as young as 21 years and dating back to the 1913s, laid peacefully among the mountains. All the tombs, around 20 in number, seemed to be white washed and had emotional epitaphs engraved.

This 'Portuguese' cemetery is one of the most remarkable places with a history to boast of. Here lies the tomb of one of the first doctors from Muscat who set up hospital for patients way back in the 1900s. Dr Thomas, a missionary doctor, had a major contribution in the healthcare of the people of Muttrah and Oman. His grave along with his missionary father, Dr Sharon (buried in 1913) and Dr Morris French, a surgeon at Thomas Hospital (buried in 1967) lie peacefully under the skies. It was peaceful, though eerie, and we did not utter a word as we viewed the tombstones and read their inscriptions.

As we continued our trek, dragging our tired legs, dusk approached faster than expected. The full moon cast its charm on the array of mountains as we trudged along, conquering ten small and big mountains. I turned back and saw the black gigantic rocks silently stating at me. And I wondered whether, indeed, it was me who had crossed these mountains. Yes, but it was not the mountains that I had conquered, rather my own inhibitions.

As we moved on, the tombs seemed to wave 'goodbye' and I wanted to respond with a few words, but Rahees yelled out that we were getting late. So, we left with lingering memories of the old tombs.



Rahees, the able guide

Oliveira claims top honours

CATALONIA MOTOGP

Montmeló, Spain - Portuguese rider Miguel Oliveira held off a late surge from Frenchman Johann Zarco to win the Catalonia MotoGP on Sunday.

Australian Jack Miller took third after championship leader Fabio Quartararo was hit with a three-second penalty for straying off the track a few laps from the end.

"Everything was so hard: tyre management, keeping cool when Fabio was putting the pressure on me for so many laps," said Oliveira, who rides for KTM.

"I kept it really cool when he overtook me. I saw my chance on the straight and overtook him back. It was the perfect race."

Both Quartararo and Miller led briefly, but both had problems on a warm Catalan afternoon.

Frenchman Quartararo was penalised three seconds for going way off the track on his Yamaha at the chicane four laps from the end.

The rider from Nice also finished the race bareheaded, after unzipping his jacket, pulling out his chest protector and discarding it.



Quartararo remains top of the rider standings but Zarco, of the Ducati satellite team Pramac, cut the gap to just 17 points.

Miller climbed to third, overtaking his factor Ducati teammate, Italian Francesco Bagnaia, who was seventh on

Sunday. Spanish title holder Joan Mir (Suzuki), who started tenth on the grid, finished fifth, while multiple world champions Marc

Marquez (Honda) and Italian Valentino Rossi (Yamaha-SRT) retired after crashes.

Zarco, who has still to win in

the MotoGP class, moved through the pack late in the race but was not quite able to catch the smooth-riding Oliveira.

"The last two laps I tried to catch Miguel," said Zarco. "But he just told me was also controlling well. I was not close enough to try to attack him."

The race was the first this season to allow fans, with a crowd of 24,000, 20 per cent of capacity permitted.

After crossing the line, Oliveira raced to the stands to collect a Portuguese flag.

"Thank you to all the fans here, everything has been amazing this weekend with the public back in the grandstand and it feels good to be back to normal," said Oliveira.

AFP



Key McLaren figure Ojeh dies, aged 68

Baku, Azerbaijan - Saudi billionaire Mansour Ojeh, a major force behind the McLaren team's success in Formula One, has died aged 68, the British team announced on Sunday.

Born in Paris, Ojeh bought into McLaren in 1984 and with former partner Ron Dennis established it as one of the major forces in F1. "It is with deep sadness that McLaren Racing announces the death of Mansour Ojeh, shareholder of McLaren since 1984," McLaren announced on Sunday. "Mr Ojeh passed away peacefully this morning in Geneva, aged 68, surrounded by his family, to whom the team sends its most heartfelt condolences."

McLaren chief executive Zak Brown said his death 'had devastated everyone' at the team. With Mansour on board McLaren won seven of their eight constructors world titles since 1984 and ten of their 12 drivers' crowns.

Lewis Hamilton, who won the first of his seven world titles at McLaren, said before the start of Sunday's race in Baku: "I carry a heavy heart into the race after the loss of a close friend, Mansour Ojeh. "He had the biggest heart and always carried the biggest smile. I am so grateful to have known such a man. This man loved unconditionally. Rest in peace brother, love you always."

AFP

France's Ogier secures success at Sardinia rally

2021 FIA WRC

RALLY ITALIA SARDEGNA

Olbia, Italy - World champion Sebastien Ogier of Toyota stretched his 2021 FIA World Rally Championship (WRC) lead with a convincing victory at Rally Italia Sardegna in Sardinia, Italy, on Sunday afternoon.

The Frenchman headed a



Toyota Yaris one-two finish on the Mediterranean island's punishing rock-strewn gravel roads to claim his third win of the season.

He finished 46.0sec clear of Elfyn Evans, extending his lead to 11 points after five of the 12 rounds.

Third place was claimed by

Thierry Neuville, a further 19.2sec behind. It was scant consolation for Hyundai Motorsport which held first and second before Ott Tänak and Dani Sordo retired on Saturday.

It was a 52nd World Rally Championship victory for Frenchman Ogier, allowing the seven-time world champion to

extend his lead on Evans in the overall standings to 11 points after five of the 12 rounds.

Ogier, 37 and with Julien Ingrassia as co-pilot, had already won in Monte Carlo and Croatia this season, and his victory on Sunday was a fourth career win on Sardinian soil.

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‘It’s important I listen to my body’

Swiss great Federer withdraws from French Open after reaching fourth round

Paris, France - Roger Federer said on Sunday he was withdrawing from the French Open despite having reached the fourth round, opting to focus on his primary objective of winning a ninth Wimbledon title.

"After discussions with my team, I've decided I will need to pull out of Roland Garros today," the 39 year old said.

"After two knee surgeries and over a year of rehabilitation it's important that I listen to my body and make sure I don't push myself too quickly on my road to recovery. "I am thrilled to have gotten three matches under my belt. There is no greater feeling than being back on court."

Federer, a 20-time Grand Slam title winner, who will be 40 in two months' time, battled over three and a half hours until 12:45 on Sunday morning to reach the last-16 with a 7-6 (7/5), 6-7 (3/7), 7-6 (7/4), 7-5 win over 59th-ranked Dominik Koepfer. He was due back on court on Monday to tackle Matteo Berrettini for a place in the quarterfinals.

However, having undergone two knee surgeries in 2020, the Swiss star had admitted there were doubts over whether he'd make it. Federer is playing only his third tournament since last year's Australian Open and has always said Wimbledon is his

main goal. He is chasing a ninth title at Wimbledon which starts on June 28.

He is also scheduled to play the warm-up grass court tournament in Halle beginning on June 14, the day after the French Open ends.

Federer, who made his Roland Garros debut in 1999 and was champion in 2009, was playing a night session for the first time in his third round tie.

However, the almost empty 15,000-capacity Court Philippe Chatrier was eerily silent due to a COVID-19 curfew.

It is likely that this was Federer's final appearance at the tournament. His return this year

was only his second participation since 2015.

"The Roland Garros tournament is sorry about the withdrawal of Roger Federer, who put up an incredible fight last night," said Guy Forget, the tournament director.

"We were all delighted to see Roger back in Paris, where he played three high-level matches. We wish him all the best for the rest of the season."

After winning his match, Federer said that he was pacing himself in his recovery.

"All the matches I've played since the injury are information for the rest of the season," he added.

"It gives me great pleasure to be able to play 3hr 30min at a high level against a very good player. It shows that I'm on the right track."

His performance won rave reviews from rivals following the match on television.

"I'm not bothered by the outcome of this match at all," tweeted Britain's Andy Murray, a former world No 1 and three-time major winner.

"Just seeing Federer at 39 off the back of two knee surgeries playing to an empty stadium at 12.30am getting fired up is inspirational to me. Do what you love."

AFP



Roger Federer leaves the court after winning his third-round match against Dominik Koepfer in Paris on Sunday (AFP)

RYBAKINA STUNS SERENA



Serena Williams

Paris, France - Serena Williams' latest quest for a record-equalling 24th Grand Slam title ended with a 6-3, 7-5 defeat by Kazakh 21st seed Elena Rybakina in the French Open last-16 on Sunday.

The 39 year old American, still one short of Margaret Court's all-time record of most Grand Slam singles titles, has not gone beyond the fourth round at Roland Garros since losing the 2016 final.

"It was definitely close. I'm so close. There is literally a point here, a point there, that could change the whole course of the match," said Serena.

"I'm not winning those points. That like literally could just change everything."

Asked whether it could be her last French Open, a smiling Serena gave little away.

"I'm definitely not thinking about it at all," she said. "I'm definitely thinking just about other things but not about that."

Russian-born Rybakina, 21,

extended her best run at a major as she advanced to her first quarterfinal, where she will face Anastasia Pavlyuchenkova for a spot in the last-four.

"I am so happy with my match, it was amazing," said Rybakina, who at 22 is the highest-ranked player left in her half of the draw. "Of course I was nervous, I was not serving that well in the game before, but I am happy that I managed to control them in the end."

Earlier, Tamara Zidansek became the first Slovenian woman to reach a Grand Slam quarterfinal when she defeated Romania's Sorana Cirstea 7-6 (7/4), 6-1. The world No 85 will meet Paula Badosa for a place in the semifinals after the Spaniard beat 2019 Roland Garros runner-up Marketa Vondrousova 6-4, 3-6, 6-2.

Anastasia Pavlyuchenkova reached quarterfinals for the first time since 2011, defeating former world No 1 Victoria Azarenka 5-7, 6-3, 6-2.

Medvedev sets up clash with Tsitsipas

Paris, France - Second seed Daniil Medvedev of Russia made the French Open quarterfinals for the first time on Sunday and will tackle Greek fifth seed Stefanos Tsitsipas for a place in the last-four.

Medvedev, who had never won a match at

Roland Garros before this year, defeated Cristian Garin of Chile 6-2, 6-1, 7-5 in his last-16 tie.

Tsitsipas, a semifinalist in 2020, eased past Spain's Pablo Carreno Busta 6-3, 6-2, 7-5 in an earlier last-16 match.

Tsitsipas is fancied to

reach his first Grand Slam final, with Nadal and Djokovic in the other half of the draw. A semifinalist at the past two majors, Tsitsipas was beaten in a thrilling five-setter by Djokovic in Paris eight months ago.

AFP



Elena Rybakina



Daniil Medvedev

Stefanos Tsitsipas

Osaka thanks fans for ‘all the love’

Los Angeles, US - Four-time Grand Slam winner Naomi Osaka posted her first social media comments on Saturday since pulling out of the French Open after a dispute over news conferences.

Osaka, who also had revealed her ongoing battle with depression and anxiety, thanked her supporters in a brief message on Instagram.

"Just want to say thank you for all the love. Haven't been on my phone much but I wanted to hop on here and tell you all that I really appreciate it," she wrote.

French tennis officials fined

Just want to say thank you for all the love. Haven't been on my phone much but I wanted to hop on here and tell you all that I really appreciate it

NAOMI OSAKA



Osaka US\$15,000 and threatened to remove her from the tournament for not honoring mandatory media commitments, prompting the 23 year old Japanese star to withdraw on her own. French Open officials said they tried unsuccessfully to

speak with Osaka before she pulled out.

Osaka said earlier that post-match news conferences are detrimental to her mental health and likened the traditional question and answer format to 'kicking people when they're down'.

Osaka said she wanted to take time away from the game to get better. She did not provide any update on her condition.

Osaka also did not say when she plans to play next, putting her participation at Wimbledon and the Japan Olympics in doubt. She also has withdrawn from a grass court tournament in Berlin on June 14.

Osaka said her mental health struggles began in 2018 when she won the first of her four majors at the US Open in a controversial final against Serena Williams.

AFP



Naomi Osaka after her first-round win at the French Open before her pull out

Perez triumphs as Verstappen, Hamilton KO'd



Red Bull's Mexican driver Sergio Perez celebrates on the podium after winning the Azerbaijan Grand Prix in Baku on Sunday (AFP)

FORMULA ONE AZERBAIJAN GP

Baku, Azerbaijan - Red Bull's Sergio Perez won a chaotic Azerbaijan Grand Prix on Sunday as both Max Verstappen and Lewis Hamilton failed to finish.

Sebastian Vettel for Aston Martin and Pierre Gasly for Alpha Tauri completed the unexpected podium after the streets of Baku lived up to their reputation for delivering an afternoon of drama and tension.

Verstappen crashed with five laps to go and the sixth race of the season at his mercy. Hamilton then locked up at the restart when on target for second. As the dust began to settle on the banks of the Caspian Sea, Verstappen retained his slender four-point lead in the drivers standings.

His teammate Perez gained his first win since joining Red Bull and the second of his career.

"I'm so happy for today. Normally Baku is pretty crazy but I have to say sorry to Max.

"He deserved the win today and it would have been good for the team to get a one-two, but the win is a fantastic result."

Perez inherited the lead when Verstappen's left rear tyre shredded triggering a high-speed crash in the straight as he was set to collect his second consec-



Mercedes' British driver Lewis Hamilton steers his car during the F1 Azerbaijan Grand Prix at the Baku City Circuit in Baku on Sunday (AFP)

utive win and third of the season. "Tyre!" shouted a distraught Verstappen on the team radio.

After a red-flag stoppage lasting more than half an hour to clear debris from Verstappen's stricken car, the grand prix resumed from the grid with a two lap sprint to the chequered flag.

'Magic switch'

Hamilton looked to have the measure of Perez but the Mercedes seven-time world champion spun off at turn one, leaving the band to play the Mexican rather than British national anthem.

Pole-sitter Charles Leclerc came in fifth ahead of Fernando Alonso for Alpine and Japanese rookie Yuki Tsunoda celebrating his highest finish for Alpha Tauri in seventh. Hamilton was 15th and

out of the points for the first time since Austria in 2018.

"Naturally it's quite a humbling experience," said Hamilton.

"We've worked so hard to come back into the top-ten and I put everything on the line but just lost out in the end. I clipped a switch that places the brakes off so I just went straight on at turn one on the restart.

"I'm very sorry to the guys and girls in the team. I had no idea that I've even touched the 'magic' switch."

Leclerc made a slick start, but Hamilton was lurking and the world champion surged past the pole-sitting Ferrari going into turn one at the start of lap three. Mansour

Verstappen executed an identical manoeuvre to move past Leclerc and into second on lap

seven. Hamilton came in for a pit stop on lap 12, rejoining having swapped soft tyres for hard in the fourth - another car costing him vital seconds on his exit from the pits.

Verstappen and Perez followed suit, leaving Vettel in charge.

The German four-time former champion came in eventually to leave the two Red Bulls being hunted down by Hamilton approaching the midway point of the 51-lap contest.

The only driver not to have pitted was Lance Stroll, but the Canadian was back in the pits in the medical car on lap 31 after a high-speed smash on the straight when his left rear tyre shredded.

"Whoa, whoa, whoa. Get me out of this place on the track. Puncture, I think," he said, the crash forcing a long safety car interval. He escaped unhurt.

Racing resumed four laps later with Verstappen and Perez leading. Vettel, enjoying his best race for new team Aston Martin, jumped Leclerc and then picked off Gasly to leave Hamilton in his cross-hairs.

With five laps to go Verstappen's race was cruelly over, but Perez managed to save the day for Red Bull.

AFP

F1 AZERBAIJAN GP RESULTS [TOP-TEN]:

- 1 Sergio Perez (2hr 13min 36.410sec)
- 2 Sebastian Vettel (+1.385sec)
- 3 Pierre Gasly (+2.762)
- 4 Charles Leclerc (+3.828)
- 5 Lando Norris (+4.754)
- 6 Fernando Alonso (+6.382)
- 7 Yuki Tsunoda (+6.624)
- 8 Carlos Sainz Jr (+7.709)
- 9 Daniel Ricciardo (+8.874)
- 10 Kimi Raikkonen (+9.576)

DRIVERS' STANDINGS [TOP-TEN]:

- 1 Max Verstappen (105 pts)
- 2 Lewis Hamilton (101)
- 3 Sergio Perez (69)
- 4 Lando Norris (66)
- 5 Charles Leclerc (52)
- 6 Valtteri Bottas (47)
- 7 Carlos Sainz Jr (42)
- 8 Pierre Gasly (31)
- 9 Sebastian Vettel (28)
- 10 Daniel Ricciardo (26)



Red Bull's Dutch driver Max Verstappen reacts by his car after a crash with five laps to go during the Formula One Azerbaijan Grand Prix at the Baku City Circuit in Baku on Sunday (AFP)



England's Dom Sibley plays a shot during his unbeaten knock of 60 against New Zealand at Lord's on Sunday

Stubborn Sibley frustrates NZ as Test ends in a draw

ENGLAND VS NEW ZEALAND FIRST TEST: DAY FIVE

London, UK - There are often many different ways to end up at the same destination. The first Lord's Test in two years had seemed destined for a draw after losing the entire third day to rain, and drawn it surely was as the teams shook hands at just gone 7pm on the final evening.

But there was peril and intrigue along the route, as New Zealand sprung a declaration on England after a brief shower brought about an early lunch.

The home side looked outmatched for much of this first Test and the nerves were palpable when they fell to 56 for two shortly before tea, a wicket away from their youthful middle order being exposed. In the end, there was not enough life in the pitch nor sand in the hourglass for New Zealand to make a concerted victory push.

Dom Sibley batted more than four hours for a barnacle-encrusted half-century, as he and England's captain, Joe Root, ensured against jitters with an 80-run stand that stretched into the evening session. Even if there was no great final-day drama, the crowd were nevertheless keen to get in on the act, cheering the sweaty indefatigability of Neil Wagner - who went against type to crowbar out Rory Burns, England's first-innings centurion, and Root across two canny spells of searching swing bowling - as well as Sibley's almost heroically shot-shy approach to

accumulation. Sibley posted his highest score since making 87 in Chennai, India, earlier this year.

New Zealand resumed their second innings with a lead of 165. They took that on by more than 100 for the loss of four wickets during a lively morning session, which was curtailed by the arrival of rain, and then chose to set England what would have been the third-highest chase on the ground.

With Sibley searching for form and Burns playing in typically lugubrious fashion, the opening pair signalled England's intent. England had taken more than 23 overs in adding 49 for the first wicket when Wagner broke through. Following the blow from Southee, Burns almost fell to the same bowler when he gloved the ball just short of slip, and the introduction of Wagner's left-arm angle of attack only played on his uncertainty. After nine dot balls, which included an unsuccessful swipe, Burns fenced uncertainly to send an outswinger low to second slip.

With the atmosphere getting tense, and then with tea approaching Zak Crawley threw the bat to be caught in the gully off Southee.

That left New Zealand needing eight wickets going into the final session, with England notionally looking to score 217 from 43 overs.

Root eked his way to four off 38 balls, and although he fell to Wagner, pinned on leg stump despite a review with the shadows beginning to lengthen, New Zealand could muster no further inroads.

The morning began with

Wagner in the thick of the action, too, as New Zealand's night-watchman carved and clipped a pair of boundaries in Stuart Broad's opening over. Wagner fell in the next, top-edging a pull to give Ollie Robinson his seventh wicket on debut.

Broad then trapped Tom Latham lbw for his first dismissal in 488 deliveries. Ross Taylor upped the tempo during an innings of 33 off 35. Henry Nicholls also fell trying to lift the scoring, as he gloved a reverse-sweep off Root's off-spin.

New Zealand's declaration was another enterprising move but the series will now be decided by the next week's encounter at Edgbaston.

Cricinfo

SCOREBOARD

New Zealand 1 st Innings 378		
England 1 st Innings 275		
NEW ZEALAND 2 ND INNINGS		
T Latham	lbw Broad	36
D Conway	b Robinson	23
K Williamson	lbw b Robinson	1
N Wagner	c Bracey b Robinson	10
R Taylor	c Bracey b Wood	33
H Nicholls	c Burns b Root	23
BJ Watling	not out	15
C de Grandhomme	not out	9
(b 6, lb 12, nb 1)		
Extras: 169 for six dec in 523 overs		
TOTAL: 169 for six dec in 523 overs		
Fall of wickets: 1-39, 2-57, 3-74, 4-105, 5-133, 6-159		
Bowling: J Anderson 15.3-3-44-0, S Broad 12-1-34-1, O Robinson 14-5-26-3, M Wood 7-0-31-1, J Root 4-0-16-1		
ENGLAND 2 ND INNINGS		
R Burns	c Southee b Wagner	25
D Sibley	not out	60
Z Crawley	c Nicholls b Southee	2
J Root	lbw Wagner	40
O Pope	not out	20
Extras: (b 8, lb 10, nb 5)		
TOTAL: 170 for three in 70 overs		
Fall of wickets: 1-49, 2-56, 3-136		
Bowling: T Southee 17-1-37-1, K Jamieson 15-6-28-0, M Santner 13-3-38-0, C de Grandhomme 7-3-12-0, N Wagner 16-7-27-2, K Williamson 2-0-10-0		

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OMAN FACE QATAR TEST

Ivankovic’s Red Warriors take on World Cup hosts and Asian Cup holders in Doha tonight

2022 FIFA WORLD CUP AND 2023 ASIAN CUP QUALIFIERS
GROUP E SECOND ROUND

Ashok Purohit
Muscat

Nearly a year and a half after he took over as Oman football team coach, Croatia’s Branko Ivankovic will face his first real test when the Red Warriors meet hosts Qatar in a Group E second-round match of the joint 2022 FIFA World Cup and 2023 Asian Cup qualifiers on Monday.

The match kicks off in Doha at 9.10pm, Oman time.

Since his take over in January 2020, Ivankovic has led the national team to only four international friendlies and

Qatar. The Asian Cup winners lead Group E with 19 points from seven matches with second-placed Oman seven adrift but with two games in hand - against Afghanistan (June 11) and Bangladesh (June 15).

Felix Sanchez’s Qatar stretched their lead at the top of the standings after defeating India 1-0 last week and a draw against Oman on Monday will seal top spot and confirm their place in the Asian Cup finals.

India and Bangladesh, meanwhile, will fight it out, also on Monday, in their bid to gain automatic places in the third

Group E	P	W	D	L	GD	Pts
 Qatar	7	6	1	0	16	19
 Oman	5	4	0	1	7	12
 Afghanistan	6	1	2	3	-9	5
 India	6	0	3	3	-3	3
 Bangladesh	6	0	2	4	-11	2

Monday’s match at the Jassim bin Hamad Stadium, will be the first competitive game for the experienced Croatian manager.

The 67 year old Ivankovic knows what it takes to lead a team to the World Cup, having led Iran to the 2006 World Cup in Germany.

He had also served as assistant manager to Miroslav Blazevic, who led Croatia to a third-place finish at the 1998 World Cup in France.

Ivankovic’s men are in the race for top spot in Group E with

round of qualifying for the 2023 Asian Cup.

Oman had earlier lost their Group E away game to Qatar 1-2 at the Al Janoub Stadium in Doha in October, 2019.

It was a closely-fought match with Oman, then coached by Dutchman Erwin Koeman, rallying from a second-minute goal to get the equaliser in the 63rd minute through Al Monther al Alawi before the hosts found the winner through Almoez Ali in the 71st minute.

Against Qatar on Monday, the



Oman players during a training session ahead of their Group E World Cup and Asian Cup second-round qualification match against Qatar in Doha on Monday (OFA)



Oman’s coach Branko Ivankovic of Croatia



Oman captain and goalkeeper Faiz al Rusheidi during a training session

team will be missing Oman’s most experienced player Ahmed Mubarak ‘Kano’ in the line-up as the midfielder wasn’t picked by Ivankovic.

Oman will be relying on the strikeforce of Abdulaziz al Miqbali, Mohsin al Ghassani and Khalid al Hajri with captain Faiz al Rusheidi guarding the goal.

The four-man defence will likely comprise Juma al Habsi, Fahmi Rajab, Abdulaziz al Ghailani and Ali al Busaidi with their main defender Mohammed al Musalami yet to completely recover from an injury.

The expected starting midfielders are Salah al Yahyaie, Zahr al Aghbari, Mohsin Jawhar

We are facing the Asian Cup champions [Qatar] tomorrow. My boys are ready for the challenge. They will fight hard on the field for a good result

BRANKO IVANKOVIC,
OMAN COACH

and Abdullah Fawaz.

With a solid bench strength, Ivankovic has the wherewithal to tackle the might of their fancied opposition and will hope that his men pass the first major test under his guidance.

At a pre-match press meet in Doha on Sunday, Ivankovic said that ‘he was confident of a

good show from his players.’

“We are facing the Asian Cup champions [Qatar] tomorrow. My boys are ready for the challenge. They will fight hard on the field for a good result,” said Ivankovic, who was flanked by captain Rusheidi at the press conference.

Qatar’s coach Felix Sanchez

said he ‘wasn’t overly concerned with his team’s inability to put away their chances against India last Thursday’ but agreed that his team couldn’t risk that again and will be wary against an Oman side who are bidding to steal top spot from them.

The Red Warriors are in a strong position to claim one of the qualifying spots for the best second-placed teams should they fail to leapfrog the reigning Asian Cup holders after the completion of their remaining two matches.

Oman will go into the match against Qatar high on confidence, having notched up wins over Thailand (1-0) and

Indonesia (3-1) in recent friendlies in Dubai, UAE. Earlier in March, during a preparatory camp, also in Dubai, Oman drew both their friendlies against Jordan (0-0) and India (1-1).

Meanwhile in another game of the same group, it will be an all-South Asian affair as Bangladesh take on India with both sides vying to seal third place in Group E. Both teams are out of contention of qualifying for the next round of the World Cup qualifiers but still have a lot to play for in their remaining fixtures as a third-place finish will seal qualification to the third round of the Asian Cup qualifiers.

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