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ORT BLENDS EXPERIENCE AND YOUTH

GO TO **PAGE 16 SPORTS**

► NEWS BRIEFS

HM CONDOLES KING OF KSA

Muscat - His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik has sent a cable of condolences to the Custodian of the Two Holy Mosques King Salman bin Abdulaziz al Saud of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia (KSA) on the death of Princess Al Jawhara Mohammed Abdulaziz al Saud on Tuesday. In the cable, His Majesty expressed his sincere condolences and sympathy, praying to Allah the Almighty to rest the departed soul in peace in paradise and grant her family patience.

HM GREETES GEORGIAN PRESIDENT

Muscat - His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik sent a cable of greetings to President Salome Zourabichvili of Georgia on her country's National Day on Tuesday. In the cable, His Majesty expressed his heartfelt sentiments and best wishes of good health and happiness to President Zourabichvili. His Majesty also wished the friendly people of Georgia further progress and growth.



32,000 JOBS IN PIPELINE AS PART OF ROYAL ATTENTION

Muscat - His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik attaches special importance to the issue of employment of Omani youth. His Majesty has often reaffirmed that youth are the inexhaustible wealth of nations and that youth employment tops national priorities. In pursuance of the efforts exerted by the departments con-

cerned to provide jobs in public and private establishments and to promote self-employment, it has been decided to create more than 32,000 jobs for Omanis in 2021, including 12,000 jobs in the government's civil and military establishments in accordance with the actual needs of different departments.

Also, within the context of His Majesty's directives and as part of efforts made by government departments to find all means to support employment, various employment initiatives have been launched, reflecting the government's keenness to employ job-seekers and workers who were laid off in the backdrop of the cur-

rent global economic slowdown that resulted in job losses worldwide. This was compounded by the negative impact of the COVID-19 pandemic.

His Majesty gave his Royal Directives to the departments concerned to speed up the execution of these employment initiatives. **ONA**

The initiatives provide for the following:

1 Subsidising the wages of fresh employees in private sector establishments by providing RO200 towards the monthly wages of as many as 15,000 fresh employees (with the remaining to be borne by the employers) for a period of two years. The Ministry of Labour will

2 unveil the formalities and mechanisms of the same in June 2021. Providing a total of 1mn hours of part-time work in government establishments in different governorates. The Ministry of Labour will announce formalities and mechanisms for the same.

3 Expending a cut-off monthly assistance from the Job Security Fund (JSF), to the tune of RO202.5 for a period of six months, in favour of self-employed Omanis insured at the Public Authority for Social Insurance whose businesses were negatively impacted by the economic

situation and those of similar standing. This cut-off monthly assistance benefits a total of 15,000 people.

4 Expending a similar cut-off monthly assistance of RO202.5 for a period of six months, from the JSF in favour of laid-off Omani workers whose services were

terminated in GCC states.

5 Generating a total of 2,000 employment opportunities in the government sector on the basis of temporary contracts, in accordance with the actual needs of government establishments in different governorates.

Mercury set to touch 50°C in Muscat, Batinah

Our Correspondent
Muscat

No respite from the current intense heat is expected as meteorologists predicted the mercury to rise further to touch 50°C in Muscat and the governorates of North and South Batinah.

Over the last few days, a phenomenon called 'foehn wind' was behind the rise in temperatures in and around Muscat. But over the next few days, active westerly winds will push the mercury further, the Directorate General of Meteorology stated.

'Temperatures are expected to continue to rise during the next two days, reaching high 40s and early 50s on the coasts and plains of North and South Batinah and Muscat governorates, coinciding with active westerly winds,' the Met office said.

It further added that active southerly winds have been detected in Al Wusta governorate and may affect the governorates of Buraimi, Dhahirah, North and South Batinah, and parts of

Dakhliyah, which may lead to the dispersal of dust accompanied by a rise in temperatures to between 46 and 48°C in North and South Batinah.

With 45.9°C, Bidbid recorded the highest temperature in Oman on Monday, followed by Muscat (45.8°C), and Sunaynah, Bausher and Hamra ad Duru (45.6°C).

The Met office also warned about rising sea waves and asked seafarers and fishermen to be cautious. 'The upheaval in the Arabian Sea continues, resulting in waves reaching maximum height of 3-3.5m. The waves on the coasts of Musandam and the Sea of Oman will be around 2-2.5m from Wednesday to Friday.'

The Met office forecast clear skies over most of Oman with chance of clouds developing over the Al Hajar mountains towards afternoon on Wednesday. 'Dust-rising wind is expected over the desert and open areas. Chance of late night to early morning low-level clouds or fog patches along parts of the coasts of the Arabian Sea are also expected.'

Immunisation of Grade 12 students starts

Our Correspondent
Muscat

General Education Diploma (GED) - Grade 12 - students will be immunised with the Pfizer-BioNTech vaccine starting Wednesday, according to the Ministry of Health (MoH).

An MoH official said, "Vaccination centres in all governorates are ready. We urge parents to encourage their children to get vaccinated to prevent the spread of the coronavirus."

land borders. This decision came into effect on Tuesday.



Muscat - The Ministry of Health on Tuesday reported 817 new cases of COVID-19 and ten related deaths.

This takes the total number of cases in Oman to 212,038 and death toll to 2,284.

The ministry stated that 285 patients recovered in this period, accounting for a total of 195,720 recoveries.

One hundred and nine COVID-19 patients were hospitalised in the 24-hour period, accounting for a total 709 admitted in health institutions, including 243 in intensive care units.

US\$1mn donation for vaccines

In a statement on Monday, MoH said that OMIFCO has donated US\$1mn to support the efforts of the ministry to purchase and provide COVID-19 vaccines in the country.

Electronic tracking bracelets

MoH has also announced that citizens working in neighbouring countries need not pay fee RO6 for electronic tracking bracelets while entering Oman through

Private sector to manage Muttrah Fort

Our Correspondent
Muscat

To revitalise tourism and increase national income, the Ministry of Heritage and Tourism (MHT) has called on private companies to operate and manage Muttrah Fort and Al Bait al Kabir in Muttrah.

A statement issued by MHT, said, 'The ministry calls on private companies and institutions that have the technical and financial capabilities to apply for the lease, operation and man-

agement of Muttrah Fort and Al Bait al Kabir.'

It added that an application listing the terms and conditions can be bought from the Financial Affairs Department of MHT during working hours, starting May 30 until June 3. The form can be purchased for RO25 and the deadline for submission of bids is 1pm on June 26, 2021.

Muttrah Fort sits atop a rocky, narrow hill facing the sea overlooking Sultan Qaboos Tourism Port, Muttrah Souq and Corniche. It has three circular

towers - the biggest and tallest of which is built at the fort's highest point. Of the two smaller towers, one lodging cannon is located in the fort's western end.

The fort was officially opened to public after major renovations carried out over a ten-year period in June 2018. Since the opening, the ministry has planned its handover to a private company for operations and management. Entry to the fort is free but there is a proposal to introduce a visitor's fee.

According to National Centre for Statistics and Information (NCSI) statistics, as many as 426,500 people visited forts and castles in Oman in 2019, registering an increase of 16.4 per cent on the previous year's figures.

Of the total visitors, 251,080 were foreign tourists, according to statistics provided by MHT.

In 2018, 366,360 people visited the country's forts and castles, compared to 319,163 in 2017 - an increase of 14.8 per cent.



Role of oil in future of economy discussed

Our Correspondent
Muscat

A two-day international conference on the role of oil prices in the future of the economy in the countries of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) began on Tuesday in Muscat.

The conference, organised by Mazoon College, discussed the impact of oil prices on the overall economic performance of the sultanate and the energy economies of the GCC.

The conference was opened under the aegis of H E Suleiman bin Hamoud al Busaidi, Deputy Secretary-General of the Council of Ministers.

Topics of discussion included



(Supplied photo)

Technological developments in the world seek to promote the policy of self-sufficiency through successful investment in alternative sources of energy

DR JUMAH AL GHAILANI

the impact of using green fuels as alternatives to oil and exploring the scope of renewable energy development as an engine for economic growth in Oman.

H E Busaidi stressed on the importance of the conference in identifying the reasons that led to the drop in oil prices and exploring alternatives to get out of the current global economic crisis.

Addressing the conference,

Dr Jumah al Ghailani, chairman of the Board of Directors of Mazoon College, said, "High oil prices had pushed many oil-producing countries to increase government spending and increase expenditures. The sharp decline in oil prices led to a major economic crisis for these countries."

This has made oil-producing countries and the Gulf states, in particular, Ghailani noted, recon-

sider their financial policies and adopt measures to limit the effect of oil prices and their volatility on development plans besides reducing dependence on revenues generated from the sale of oil and gas.

He further explained that oil-producing states must work to enhance trade and economic exchange in the future in light of the fluctuation of oil prices in international markets, and seek scientific and technological know-how in future development projects.

"Technological developments in the world seek to promote the policy of self-sufficiency through successful investment in alternative sources of energy," Ghailani said.

70.3% drop in museum visitors during 2020

Our Correspondent
Muscat

About 121,000 people visited museums in 2020, a reduction of 70.3 per cent compared to 2019, according to the National Centre for Statistics and Information (NCSI).

Museums play a major role in spreading historical awareness among members of society. These bring Arab and foreign cultures and civilisations together, leading to a constructive civilised dialogue in order to reach a contemporary global society living in peace.

The sultanate has several museums, including the National Museum of Oman, the Omani French Museum, the Oman Children's Museum and the Natural History Museum.

In 2020, 510 individuals visited the Omani French Museum, 8,399 visited the Children's Museum, and 42,027 visited the Natural History Museum.



(Supplied photo)

In 2019, 1,828 visited the Omani French Museum, 27,397 visited the Children's Museum and 14,951 visited the Natural History Museum.

According to NCSI statistics, the government spent RO237.1mn on heritage and culture projects in 2019. The average monthly household spending on recreational and cultural activities in the sultanate in 2019 was RO10.5.

NCSI's statistics also show that the number of museums in the sultanate grew from ten in 2015 to 12 in 2019, while the number of visitors during that pe-

riod increased by 68.5 per cent to 408,040 visitors at the end of 2019. Of these, 78 per cent visitors were to three museums - the National Museum, Zubair Museum and the Land of Frankincense Museum.

In this period, the number of museum employees increased by 25.6 per cent to 186 workers.

The number of visitors to Oman's 51 castles and forts increased by 71.2 per cent between 2015 and 2019 to 426,525 visitors, while the total number of employees at these sites grew to 110 workers,' an NCSI statement said.

Lobster season ends on May 31

Fine of up to RO5,000 for fishing violations

Our Correspondent
Muscat

The Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Water Resources (MAFWR) has announced that the lobster fishing season for 2021 will end on May 31 in Dhofar, Al Wusta and South Sharqiyah. The lobster fishing season is important for many fishermen in these governorates.

"The ministry calls all fishermen, companies and individuals to register their lobster catch during the fishing season. No individual or organisation is allowed to trade in or export lobster after the end of the season unless registered with the ministry," an



MAFWR official said.

"The lobster fishing season in the sultanate is from March to May. Lobster is an important marine resource due to its high value and increasing demand in local and international markets. We have conducted several awareness campaigns through lectures and programmes for artisanal fishermen to educate them on the laws and regulations and ways to preserve this natural resource."

According to the official, the ministry ensures fishermen follow the lobster season and obey the fishing ban during the crustaceans' fertilisation and breeding period from May to February each year.

"The ministry urges individuals and companies to abide by the Living Aquatic Resources Law. The law punishes violations of fishing and possessing lobster during the ban period with a fine ranging from RO300 to RO5,000, imprisonment for a period of one to three months or both with confiscation of the catch and equipment used and temporary or permanent suspension of fishing licence," the official said.

Statistics of MAFWR show that the sultanate's lobster catch in the 2020 season yielded 950 tonnes worth RO4.1mn. Domestic consumption accounted for 597 tonnes, and the remaining 353 tonnes were exported.

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IT engineer follows his passion into carpentry

Our Correspondent
Muscat

His family and friends balked at the idea of Mazin Ali Hilal Mubarak al Bassami - a 26 year old engineer from Rustaq - pursuing passion in crafting wooden furniture in contrast to his academic qualification.

Not the one to give up easily, Bassami started small with a workshop in his home in 2017 and persisted. The young entrepreneur, who graduated from the Middle East University in IT in the same year, used his skills to make furniture from wood found locally such as sidr, al mees and al shareer.

Soon enough he found an appreciative clientele which led him to slowly save for a bigger workshop, which he currently operates in Rustaq Industrial Area.

Bassami believes that he is probably the first university graduate who has taken up carpentry as a profession.

Speaking to *Muscat Daily*, the IT engineer said that he started making small wooden furniture initially.

"Slowly, I developed skills to make furniture for bedrooms and living rooms. I brought modern machines to carve and shape up different furniture with more precisions," he said, adding that a complete range of furniture for a bedroom or a living room "takes eight to ten days for completion".

Carpentry is not easy, Bassami said. "You need money to buy woods. It then requires a lot of hard work, skill and patience to



(Supplied photos)

create a desired piece of furniture. Initially, a part of my house was converted into a manufacturing unit. But now I have big workshop called Mazin Wood Works in the industrial area in Rustaq."

Bassami recalled that his family was not convinced of his work initially.

"After my success they started supporting me."

Bassami said he makes all kinds of products including chairs, tables, gift items from wood, and promote them on social media platforms.

About his plans, he said, "Success doesn't come overnight. I wish to build a furniture factory and sell my products all over the world. I urges job seekers to believe in their capabilities and start their own business."

Expats support India with COVID-19 relief supplies

Our Correspondent
Muscat

Expatriates from the southern Indian state of Kerala have joined hands to support their country by providing oxygen cylinders and other medical items and services from Oman. The members are from the group named 'Care for Kerala' and hopes to send the first consignment by the weekend.

PM Jabir, head of Community Welfare Wing of Indian Social Club, said, "People from various walks of life are members of 'Care for Kerala'. We are collecting essential, lifesaving equipment in the wake of COVID-19 as the various state governments or bodies appointed by the state governments are authorised to procure, collect or receive medical relief from individuals, corporate, associations and NGOs from overseas. This is a time when we all must come together



People from various walks of life are members of 'Care for Kerala'

P M JABIR

to stand by one another."

Jabir added that this initiative also comes in the wake of the exemption of import duties on

medical equipment, medicines and medical supplies under exceptional circumstances due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

'Care for Kerala' is an initiative by the NRIs in the Gulf countries supported by Norka Roots to seek support from potential sponsors who would be able to contribute towards the mission.

The potential sponsors would be directed to genuine vendors identified by 'Care for Kerala', to supply medical equipment requested by the state government of Kerala, at the best price possible and lead time.

The official consignee on behalf of the Kerala government for receiving the medical relief material from overseas would be the Kerala Medical Services Corporation Limited which is a government of Kerala entity. The organisation will initiate steps to distribute the medical aid with hospitals or beneficiaries as per the requirements.

NINE EXPATS ARRESTED FOR SMUGGLING FUEL

Nine expats were nabbed while trying to smuggle large quantities of diesel via a sea route. Royal Oman Police said, 'Coast Guard boats, led by Musandam Governorate Police in cooperation with the Khasab Special Task Force Police Unit, seized a boat carrying nine Asian expats smuggling diesel fuel. Legal procedures have been completed against them'

(Supplied photo)



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Thu 20 ● ● ●	Sat 12 ● ● ●	Sat 10 ● ● ●	Thu 12 ● ● ●
Sat 22 ● ● ●	Thu 17 ● ● ●	Sat 17 ● ● ●	Sat 21 ● ● ●
Sat 29 ● ● ●	Sat 19 ● ● ●	Sat 24 ● ● ●	Sat 28 ● ● ●
September	October	November	December
Sat 04 ● ● ●	Sat 09 ● ● ●	Sat 06 ● ● ●	Thu 02 ● ● ●
Sat 11 ● ● ●	Thu 14 ● ● ●	Thu 11 ● ● ●	Sat 04 ● ● ●
Thu 16 ● ● ●	Sat 23 ● ● ●	Sat 20 ● ● ●	Sat 11 ● ● ●
Sat 25 ● ● ●	Sat 30 ● ● ●	Sat 27 ● ● ●	Sat 18 ● ● ●

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Dubai's fine-dining brand Roberto's comes to Muscat

Our Correspondent
Muscat

Roberto's, a multi-concept award-winning fine-dining Italian restaurant in the UAE, is coming to Muscat.

Skelmore Hospitality Partners, the owner of Roberto's, has announced a newly formed partnership with Alfardan Hospitality, a subsidiary of Alfardan Group, to open two branded Roberto's venues in Oman and Qatar.

The two outlets will be situated within The St Regis Al Mouj Muscat in Oman and The St Regis Marsa Arabia Island, The Pearl in Doha, Qatar.

Roberto's expansion allows the group to build on its vision of delivering its signature contemporary lifestyle concept centred on modern gourmet Italian cuisine, exceptional mixology and world-class entertainment, stated a press release.



(Supplied photo)

"Roberto's seeks to impact each new market we enter by offering a feast for the senses. We are excited to partner with the renowned Alfardan Hospitality Group; together we have ensured that Roberto's has an incomparable platform to call our home as we prepare to launch our trademark style and services into new markets," said Andrea

Sacchi, COO of Skelmore Hospitality Partners.

"Alfardan Group's core business values evolve around providing unforgettable luxury experiences to delight our guests. We strongly believe by working closely with Skelmore Hospitality Partners and Marriott International, we will be able to provide visitors a unique experi-

ence at Roberto's, in both venues, Doha and Muscat. This partnership reflects our vision to provide iconic luxury developments focused on supreme hospitality services to Qatar and the region," said Wael Jamal, COO of Alfardan Hospitality.

Roberto's culinary product offers a cosmopolitan experience anchored in the Italian tradition.

MoE begins international reading skills assessment

Muscat - The Ministry of Education (MoE) will begin the implementation of the Progress in International Reading Literacy Study (PIRLS 2021) on Wednesday in all governorates of the sultanate.

The PIRLS is an international evaluation study organised by the International Association for the Evaluation of Educational Achievement (IEA) to measure reading skills among fourth-grade students. This year is the third participation round for the sultanate, after the 2011 and 2016 rounds.

According to a statement, a sample of 222 schools have been chosen to represent the sultanate in this study, of which 189 are government schools, 17 private schools, and 16 international schools from all educational directorates in the governorates.

The number of students participating in the actual application as a random sample in this study reached 6,381 fourth-grade students where 372 students participate from 15 schools in the Governorate of Dhofar, and 232 students from eight schools in the Musandam governorate.

From Muscat governorate, the number of participating students is 825 from 28 schools, and 505 students are participating from South Sharqiyah governorate.

South Batinah governorate participates with 653 students from 22 schools, Buraimi with 10 government schools and 272 students, North Sharqiyah with 340 students from 14 schools, 298 students from 10 schools from Dhahirah, 174 from eight schools from Al Wusta, and 717 students from 24 schools from Dakhiliyah governorate.



The choice of the fourth-grade students in the study, is because it represents an important turning point in the child's reading development

H E DR AMBOSAIDI

H E Dr Abdullah bin Khamis Ambosaidi, Undersecretary for Education in the Ministry of Education, said that the international study for measuring reading skills PIRLS 2021 is organised by IEA based in the Netherlands, which is an independent international body consisting of representatives from a group of educational institutions, research centres and government agencies.

"The International Study PIRLS is conducted once every five years, and it is concerned with measuring reading comprehension skills in the language of study in the participating country, in order to achieve a number

of objectives, the most important of which are: comparing the level of students in each country with their counterparts in other participating countries, identifying the strengths and weaknesses of the students, and help in developing and implementing plans that contribute to the development of students' abilities and competencies in reading comprehension," he said.

He added, "The choice of the fourth-grade students in the international study PIRLS, is because it represents an important turning point in the child's reading development.

"The improvement of education in the sultanate received much attention from the ministry, and because this development needs to be evaluated in order to obtain indicators about the extent of educational and reading development in particular among fourth-grade students to enhance its educational outcomes, compared to other international levels, the ministry sought to participate in the study to obtain these indicators. This is to achieve a number of objectives."

OCE launches ringing programme for vultures

Our Correspondent
Muscat

The Office for the Conservation of Environment (OCE) at the Diwan of Royal Court has launched a programme to ring a number of vultures in the sultanate.

The OCE installed rings on a number of endangered vultures in two different locations in Dhofar to celebrate the Endangered Species Day, which is marked on May 21, it said.

The sultanate is a stronghold



for around 39 species of raptors whose declining populations are a cause for concern. They include

the Egyptian vulture, steppe eagle, lappet-faced vulture, golden eagle, sooty falcon, east-

ern imperial eagle and greater spotted eagle. Several of these are listed as endangered or vulnerable on the International Union for Conservation of Nature Red List of Threatened Species, with vultures being among the most critical.

The reasons vultures are so widely threatened are numerous and include intentional and unintentional poisoning and electrocution, among others.

In Oman, Egyptian vultures breed primarily in Al Hajar Mountains in the north.

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Ooredoo, OCO, Dar al Atta'a launch donation service to help Palestinian people

Muscat - Telecom company Ooredoo has teamed up with Oman Charitable Organization (OCO) and Dar al Atta'a for a campaign to assist the people of Palestine.

Under the collaboration, a special SMS donation service has been activated.

Those wishing to donate simply need to send the word 'Palestine' to either 90909 or 90001 to send RO1 to the cause, and multiple donations are accepted. In addition, Ooredoo will send out an SMS to more than 2.5mn users, reminding them how easy it is to make a difference.

Raed Mohammed Dawood, director of Branding, Communications and Corporate Affairs at Ooredoo, said, "As part of our

commitment to caring, we continue our efforts not only by engaging in community-based projects, but also empowering others to contribute, while making it easier for them to do so.

"We know the immense hardship our brothers and sisters in Palestine are going through at the moment and how people in Oman are looking for meaningful ways to help them. This is a great way to do that."

Part of Ooredoo's Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) programme - Goodwill, it continues to work alongside voluntary organisations, the government, and non-government organisations (NGOs), making good on its promise to make people's lives better.

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*Rates as on May 24
Source: xe.com

BRIEFS

UK probes mega AstraZeneca deal with US biotech firm

London, UK – Britain's competition watchdog on Tuesday said it was investigating the planned purchase of US biotech company Alexion by Covid vaccine-maker AstraZeneca in a deal worth US\$39bn.

In a brief statement, the Competition and Markets Authority said it was looking at whether the deal would 'result in a substantial lessening of competition within any market or markets in the United Kingdom for goods or services'.

The planned tie-up, aimed at boosting AstraZeneca's work on immunology, was announced in December as the London-listed company began to roll out the coronavirus vaccine it developed with the University of Oxford in the UK.

Capital Intelligence affirms ratings of four Omani banks



(Muscat Daily)

Our Correspondent Muscat

Global credit ratings agency Capital Intelligence (CI) Ratings announced that it has affirmed the long-term and short-term foreign currency ratings of Bank Muscat, National Bank of Oman (NBO) and Oman Arab Bank (OAB). CI Ratings has also affirmed the long-term and short-term ratings of Alizz Islamic Bank on Oman national scale.

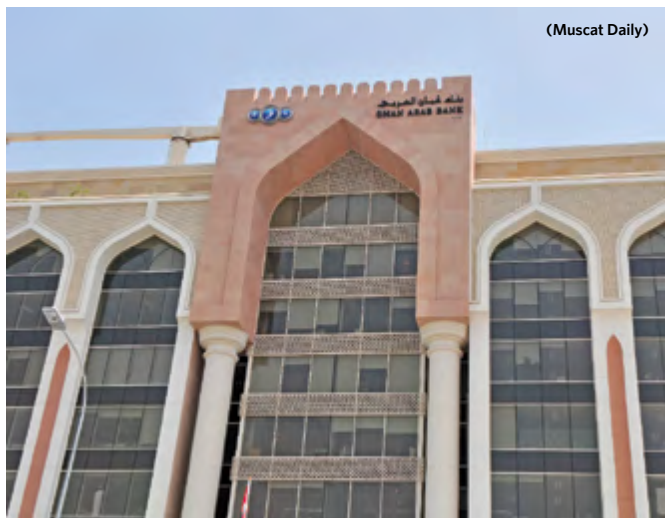
CI Ratings has affirmed the long-term foreign currency rating and short-term foreign currency rating of Bank Muscat at 'BB' and 'B', respectively. The ratings agency kept its outlook on Bank

Muscat negative, according to the statement issued by the agency.

At the same time, CI Ratings has affirmed Bank Muscat's bank standalone rating of 'bb', core financial strength rating of 'bbb' and extraordinary support level of 'moderate'.

For NBO, CI Ratings has affirmed the long-term foreign currency rating and short-term foreign currency rating of the bank at 'BB' and 'B', respectively.

At the same time, CI Ratings has affirmed NBO's bank standalone rating of 'bb', core financial strength rating of 'bbb' and extraordinary support level of 'moderate'.



(Muscat Daily)

CI Ratings has also affirmed the long-term foreign currency rating and short-term foreign currency rating of Oman Arab Bank at 'BB' and 'B', respectively.

The ratings agency has affirmed OAB's bank standalone rating of 'bb', core financial strength rating of 'bbb' and extraordinary support level of 'moderate'.

Additionally, CI Ratings affirmed Alizz Islamic Bank's ratings and kept outlook negative. It has affirmed Alizz Islamic Bank's long-term and short-term ratings on the Oman national scale at 'omAA' and 'omA1+', respectively.

The outlook on Alizz Islamic

Bank's ratings remains negative, in line with the outlook assigned to Oman's sovereign ratings, CI Ratings said.

In a recently published report, another credit ratings agency Fitch Ratings said it expects Omani banks' intrinsic credit profiles to remain under pressure during 2021 from the economic disruption caused by the coronavirus pandemic, low oil prices and the government's restrictive fiscal policies.

Fitch Ratings warned that the challenging economic conditions are likely to result in deterioration in banks' asset quality and earnings, and potentially capitalisation.

Oman Cables appoints Cinzia Farisè as new CEO

Our Correspondent Muscat

Oman Cables Industry Company has announced the appointment of Cinzia Farisè as the new chief executive officer of the company.

Cinzia is succeeding Ali Said al Habaj who resigned from his position as the CEO of Oman Industry Company due to personal reasons earlier in March.

'The company informs its shareholders that, as part of its continuous effort to support Oman Cables Industry in pursuing its development plan, the board of directors met on Sunday and appointed Cinzia Farisè as chief executive officer,' Oman Cables Industry said in a disclosure submitted to the Muscat Stock Exchange on Tuesday.

Cinzia, the company said, graduated in economics and developed her career as a sales and marketing director both in the services and industrial products sector. She joined Italy-based Prysmian Group in 2005, holding a number of positions culminated with her appointment as vice president and CEO of Prysmian India.

Later she gained four-year experience serving as CEO for



Cinzia Farisè

Trenord, one of the largest Italian Rail Company. In 2019, Cinzia returned to Prysmian Group and was named CEO of the group's Turkish affiliate.

Cinzia is also the co-founder of the Italian Angels for Women Association – the first group of female business angels in Italy for the development of female owned start-ups.

Due to the current circumstances resulting from precautionary measures related to the COVID-19 restrictions, it is expected that Cinzia will join Oman Cables Industry after the completion of the procedures associated with the concerned authorities for residence and work. The joining date, expected for the second half of June 2021, will be disclosed in due course,' Oman Cables Industry said.

NBO secures double win at World Business Outlook Awards 2021

Muscat – A testament to its role as a digital leader in the banking industry, National Bank of Oman (NBO) has won twice at the World Business Outlook Awards, for 'Best Digital Bank Oman 2021' and 'Best Mobile Banking App Oman 2021'.

The awards, which are held annually by the global publication, highlight the bank's innovative use of technology and its constantly-enhanced digital portfolio. With its mobile app at the centre, NBO's range of cutting-edge digital solutions continue to cater to the evolving demands of its customers and cement its position as a bank fit for the future.

In a press release, Abdul Karim al Hinai, chief transfor-



mation officer at NBO, said, "Our digital transformation is central to our journey as a market-leading bank, and as such we have pioneered a number of

first-of-their-kind projects, from our mobile app, to cashless and contactless banking, to our mobile wallet. Especially during the last year, our digitally-led solu-

tions have been instrumental to people being able to manage their financial lives safely and easily during the pandemic.

As we look forward, we continue to find ways to make the digital banking experience seamless, inclusive, and altogether more enjoyable."

The awards add to a growing list of accolades the bank has garnered in recent years, which include 'Best Mobile Banking App Oman 2021' from International Business Magazine, 'Best Mobile Banking App Oman' from International Finance Banking in 2020 and 2019, and 'Most Innovative Mobile Banking App Oman' at the annual Global Business Outlook Awards 2020.

Huawei to unveil new OS on June 2

Shanghai, China – Chinese tech giant Huawei on Tuesday said it would launch a long-awaited new operating system (OS) for smartphones next week, part of an all-out push into the software industry aimed at weathering US sanctions and taking on Google's Android.

Huawei tipped the June 2 launch of its HarmonyOS platform in a short teaser on social media, just as an internal memo came to light in which company founder and CEO Ren Zhengfei outlined plans to go big in software.

The 76-year-old assured staff that 'in the software domain, the US will have very little control over our future development, and we have much autonomy.'

Huawei's plans are the latest signs of a radical transformation at the Shenzhen-based company, which is moving quickly into new product lines seen as less vulnerable to US pressure and a re-focus on its core domestic market.

Donald Trump in 2018 launched an aggressive US campaign to isolate Huawei when he was president, saying its net-



working equipment installed worldwide could be used by China's Communist Party for espionage or sabotage.

The world's largest maker of telecom networking gear was barred from the huge American market and cut off from global component supply chains.

Access to Google's Android operating system was also forbidden, and Washington has pressured allies to ban or rip out Huawei gear from their telecom networks.

The Android curbs have threatened to torpedo Huawei's smartphone business – once in the global top three along with Samsung and Apple – forcing it

to create HarmonyOS.

Huawei gave no further details on the launch other than the timing.

The timing, however, is good because the advent of 5G networks in years to come will radically change the tech landscape, offering major new opportunities in artificial intelligence, wired 'smart cities', intelligent vehicles and other tech spheres.

Huawei had already announced in April that it would work with Chinese automakers to develop intelligent vehicles, after earlier unveiling moves into enterprise and cloud computing.

Saying 'the best defence is a good offence', Ren's memo out-

lined an ambitious plan to develop software that 'embraces the world'.

"The company has ample resources to support you, so feel free to boldly invest materials and human resources during your work," he said.

But he admitted that the US moves to deprive Huawei of access to semiconductors meant that 'objectively speaking, the only domain in which we can extend our roots deep is software'.

The memo, provided to AFP by the company, summarised discussions in April between Ren and technical staff. It offered few specifics on what software products Huawei could pursue.

Huawei's mobile phone sales, along with overall revenue growth, have sagged since last year as the US sanctions began to bite. The firm sold its Honor budget smartphone brand late last year as it shuffled its product mix, but has vowed to retain its flagship handset brand.

But Einstein warned that while Huawei's size and expertise will make it formidable, success is not assured.

AFP

CBO issues RO35mn treasury bills

Our Correspondent Muscat

A tender of the government treasury bills (issue number 538) was announced by the Central Bank of Oman (CBO) this week.

Total value of the allotted treasury bills amounted to RO35mn, for a maturity period of

91 days, from May 26 until August 25. The average accepted price reached RO99.806 for every RO100 bill, and the minimum accepted price arrived at RO99.805.

The average discount rate and the average yield reached 0.7764 per cent and 0.7779 per cent, respectively.

The interest rate on repo operations with the Central Bank of Oman is 0.5 per cent, while the discount rate on the treasury bills discounting facility with the central bank stood at 0.75 per cent.

Treasury bills are short-term highly secured financial instruments issued by the Ministry of Finance.

ELECTRONIC TENDER (S)

Majan Electricity Co. (SAOC) Announces the Following E-Tenders

TENDER NO	DESCRIPTION	GRADE	LAST DATE FOR BUYING	SUBMISSION DATE	TENDER PRICE R.O.
71/2021	Meter Technical Data Collection for CRT Customers in Al Dhahira and Al Buraimi	C	30/5/2021	8/6/2021	25 /=-
72/2021	Provision Of Functional Support Service For Fixed Assets, Accounts Payable, Accounts Receivable And Bank Reconciliation For Majan Electricity Company	Specialized	2/6/2021	15/6/2021	30 /=-

Interested Firm having relevant experience in the similar nature of services and registered with Tender Board and Distribution Code Review Panel (DCRP) for electrical work, may register and obtain the tender documents from E-Tendering Site <https://etendering.tenderboard.gov.om> against online payment of non-refundable fees mentioned above for each tender.

The Tenderers should enclose a copy of Bank Guarantee issued by any registered bank in the Sultanate of Oman for a value of (1%) of the submitted bid value valid for a period of (90) days from the date of Submission, and addressed to The Chairman of the Tender Committee. The original Bid Bond to be delivered in sealed envelope, and the tender number and title of project only are to be mentioned on the envelopes. The place of submission the original bond would be at: MJEC Contracts & tenders office at MJEC building in Al Sawari Center in Sohar or at MJEC Contracts & tenders office at Muscat in Al Mubailah- opposite to the industrial Area beside to Bank Suhar, before 10 A.M. according to the assigned date of submission of the tender. Any Submission of original tender bond after the time and date mentioned in the advertisement will not be accepted and tenderer offer will be rejected.

The Completed signed and sealed commercial and technical offer with all tender documents should be submitted and uploaded online into the above mentioned E-Tendering website. The Hard copies of the tender document are not accepted.

For more information please contact Tel no.: 24051501- 26944266

For any technical assistance please contact

Helpdesk: +968-24166670

E-mail: etenderhd@ita.gov.om

Preference of awarding the tender will be given to those bidders who achieved a high percentage of purchasing from Local Products & and have a High level percentage of Omanization.

The Company is not bound to consent the lowest Bid or any other Tenders.
"WITH ELECTRICITY WE PROGRESS PLEASE AVOID EXTRAVAGANCE IN CONSUMPTION"



شركة ميجان كهرباء (SAOC)
Majan Electricity Company (SAOC)
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Sluggish trend continues at MSX

Our Correspondent
Muscat

The Muscat Stock Exchange continued to witness sluggish trend on Tuesday with benchmark MSX30 Index closing 0.16 per cent lower at 3,837.91 points amid weak trading. While Service Index recorded a gain of 0.25 per cent, Financial Index and Industrial Index decreased by 0.25 per cent and 0.02 per cent, respectively. MSX Sharia Index dropped 0.20 per cent to close at 552.97 points. Trading activity on Tuesday remained weak as volumes dropped by more than 52 per cent at 8.7mn shares against 18.32mn shares traded on Monday.

Market turnover also fell by 27 per cent at RO1.73mn on Tuesday compared with RO2.38mn in the previous trading session.

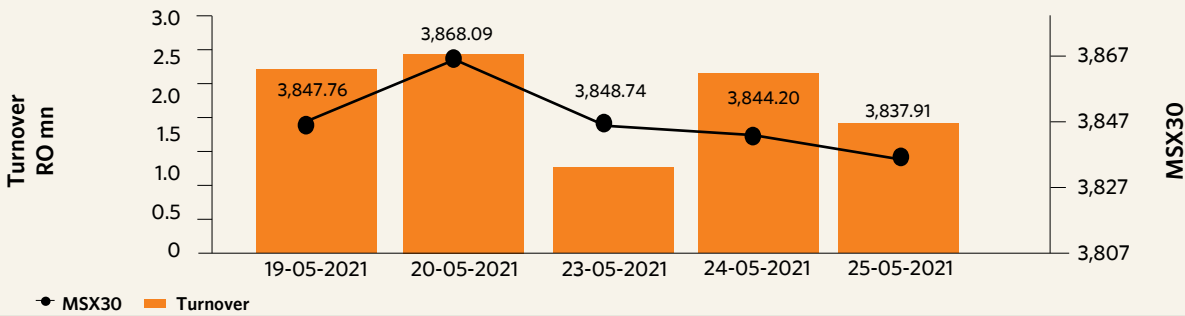
Market breadth remained negative on



Tuesday with eights advancing stocks to 15 decliners. As many as 27 traded stocks remained flat for the day. Total market capitalisation of the MSX stood at RO21.152bn on Tuesday. Top gainers for the day were Salalah Mills (2.39 per cent), Phoenix Power (2.08 per cent),

HSBC Bank Oman (2.00 per cent) and Ooredoo Oman (1.01 per cent). Top losers were Takaful Oman (-3.77 per cent), Al Sharqia Investment Holding (-3.33 per cent), National Aluminium Products Company (-2.4 per cent) and Muscat Finance (-2.22 per cent).

MSX INDEX AND TURNOVER OF FIVE TRADING DAYS



Abu Dhabi to build world-scale blue ammonia project

Abu Dhabi, UAE – Abu Dhabi National Oil Company (Adnoc) announced that it will advance a world-scale blue ammonia production facility in Ruwais, Abu Dhabi.

Adnoc is an early pioneer in the emerging hydrogen market, driving the UAE's leadership in creating local and international hydrogen value chains, while contributing to economic growth and diversification in the UAE.

The facility, which has moved to the design phase, will be developed at the new TA'ZIZ industrial ecosystem and chemicals hub in Ruwais.

Blue ammonia is made from nitrogen and blue hydrogen derived from natural gas feedstocks, with the carbon dioxide by-product from hydrogen production captured and stored. Ammonia can be used as a low-carbon fuel across a wide range of industrial applications, including transportation, power generation and industries including steel, cement and fertiliser production.

The facility's capacity will be 1,000 kilotons per annum.

In recent months, Adnoc has signed a number of agreements to explore hydrogen supply opportunities with customers in key demand centers including the



Ministry of Economy, Trade and Industry of Japan and Korea's GS Energy. This builds on the mandate given to Adnoc from the Supreme Petroleum Council in November 2020, to explore opportunities in hydrogen and hydrogen carrier fuels such as blue ammonia, with the ambition to position the UAE as a hydrogen leader.

Adnoc is already a major producer of hydrogen and ammonia, with over 300,000 tons of hydrogen produced per annum at the Ruwais Industrial Complex.

Dr Sultan bin Ahmed al Jaber, UAE's Minister of Industry and Advanced Technology and Adnoc managing director and group CEO, said, "This is a significant milestone in the development of our blue hydrogen and ammonia business, building on the UAE's strong position as a

producer of competitive, low carbon natural gas and our leadership role in carbon capture and underground storage. As we collectively navigate the global energy transition, we believe hydrogen, and its carrier fuels such as ammonia, offer promise and potential as zero carbon energy sources.

Design contracts have been awarded for the initial front-end engineering and design (pre-FEED) work for the ammonia project and the six additional TA'ZIZ chemicals projects to Wood. In parallel Adnoc will undertake a feasibility study on the supply of blue hydrogen to the project from its operations in Ruwais. The final investment decision for the project is expected in 2022, and start-up is targeted for 2025.

WAM

Spain to invest \$1.8bn in 'green hydrogen'

Madrid, Spain – Spain will spend US\$1.8bn from a European Union recovery fund to develop green hydrogen production over the next three years, Prime Minister Pedro Sanchez said Monday.

The goal is for Spain to become Europe's leading hydrogen producer using renewable sources instead of fossil fuels to curb greenhouse gas emissions and create jobs, he said.

"The Spanish government is firmly committed to green hydrogen," the Socialist premier said at a ceremony in Toledo, just south of Madrid.

His government expects the outlay will stimulate 8.9bn of mainly private sector investment to develop the technology by 2030.

Madrid has already received over 500 'green hydrogen' project proposals from energy firms, a government statement said.

Creating 'green' or emissions-free hydrogen is seen as a key step towards developing sustainable energy sources and slashing carbon emissions.

One reason for the strong interest in hydrogen technology is



when used to fuel motors, the only emission is water vapour.

But it is expensive to produce and the electricity needed generates a lot of carbon dioxide emissions or other pollutants.

Green hydrogen is produced via electrolysis – an electrical current passing through water – with wind, solar or hydro-electric power providing the electricity.

Europe in particular is anxious to get a handle on the new and still costly fuel, having missed the boat on solar and battery tech-

nology, which is dominated by China.

Experts predict green hydrogen using renewable energy will soon plunge in cost and become cheaper than natural gas in many areas.

US engine maker Cummins announced Monday it would spend 50mn euros to build one of the world's biggest electrolyser plants for the production of green hydrogen in Spain.

The plant, which will be built in the central region of Castilla-

La Mancha, is expected to open in 2023.

"Spain offers a strong and dynamic local environment for hydrogen production, and we are excited to invest," said Cummins chairman Tom Linebarger.

Spain is set to receive 140bn – half in direct payments, half in loans – from the 750bn recovery plan adopted by EU leaders last year as the economy reeled under virus lockdown restrictions.

AFP

Virus curbs hit German GDP more than expected in Q1

Berlin, Germany – Germany's economy fell more than previously thought in the first quarter as coronavirus restrictions caused a drop in private consumption, revised data showed Tuesday.

After two quarters of growth, GDP fell by 1.8 per cent between January and March, national statistics office Destatis said in a statement, revising down their initial prediction of a 1.7 per cent drop.

It was well below pre-pandemic levels, with Covid-19 curbs leading to a 5.4 per cent drop in private consumption, according to the data.

"Needless to say, the worst



and a longer-than-usual Christmas break were also factors.

Yet he also added that 'the potential for a surge in the second quarter has increased', as Germany's vaccination campaign speeds up and the economy begins to open up after months of lockdown.

Germany's Bundesbank central bank also predicted a second-quarter bounce last week, saying that Europe's largest economy could even surpass pre-pandemic growth levels from the autumn.

The German government's forecasts currently predict 3.5 per cent growth in GDP for 2021.

AFP

Bombed-out factories deepen economic pain in Gaza

Gaza City, Palestinian Territories – Surveying the charred remains of his Gaza furniture factory, destroyed by Israeli bombs last week, its owner Eyad Sawafiri confronts a dilemma familiar to many business owners in the Palestinian enclave.

"After what has happened, I'm scared to rebuild," he said. "If I do, how do I know it won't all be destroyed in the next war?"

Israeli air strikes and artillery fire in response to Hamas rockets killed more than 240 people in the Gaza Strip, but also set back any dreams of economic revival in the poverty-stricken coastal territory.

In the final hours of the latest, 11-day military escalation, Israeli artillery fire Thursday rained down on an industrial zone outside Gaza City.

Factories in Gaza have long produced furniture, plastic pipes for water and sewage networks, soft drinks and sweet tea biscuits.

Some plants remained intact, others were damaged, some completely destroyed – among

them Sawafiri's furniture workshop where he and his brother Nehad employed 70 people.

"We thought setting up our factory in this international industrial zone, next to UN refugee agency warehouses, would shield us," said Sawafiri, 45.

"We used to be the largest furniture factory in Gaza, but everything has melted – the machines, the metal structure holding up the factory."

Looking at some still red-hot embers in the rubble, he said his brother still could not bring himself to come and see how their business had been reduced to ashes.

Burnt plastic

Friday's ceasefire ended the fourth major Israel-Gaza military clash since 2008. It claimed 248 lives in Gaza, including 66 children, the local health ministry said.

The death toll in Israel reached 12, including one child and an Arab-Israeli teenager, an Israeli soldier, one Indian and two Thai nationals, medics say.



A Palestinian worker inspects the damage at a factory in Gaza's industrial area on Monday (AFP)

On the Gaza side, the conflict did major economic damage, bringing down entire office blocks, cratering roads and flattening factories.

The devastation spells another hurdle for the enclave of two million where more than half of the working-age population is unemployed.

Its residents rarely received electricity for more than 12 hours a day, ever before the latest round of air raids further pummeled the grid. Only 3 per cent of drinking water meets international safety standards.

The densely crowded Mediterranean enclave has been under an Israeli blockade since

2007.

It does not control its maritime borders, and its Hamas-run government needs permission from the Jewish state to export its produce or bring in any supplies.

Because Hamas has turned metal components into rockets, Israel has insisted that interna-

tional donors only fund projects that use plastic piping.

But in the latest conflict even a family-run Gaza factory that made plastic pipes was hit, on the last day of fighting.

"When Israel stopped certain metal pipes from entering Gaza, we decided to start producing plastic ones," said its owner Naeem al-Siksik, standing next to the scorched pipes.

"But right now around 150 tonnes of plastic has been burnt."

'Endless cycle'

Philippe Lazzarini, head of the UN Palestinian refugee agency UNRWA, said Gaza's reconstruction should go hand in hand with efforts to address the conflict's 'root causes'.

Only this could halt an endless cycle of destruction and reconstruction, he said.

US President Joe Biden said Thursday his country was committed to helping provide humanitarian relief and supporting reconstruction in Gaza "in a manner that does not permit Hamas to simply restock its military ar-

senal'.

Under a 2018 truce brokered by UN and Egyptian officials, a development roadmap was laid out for the strip's crumbling infrastructure.

The gas-rich Gulf emirate of Qatar has since been providing fuel for electricity, salaries and assistance for needy families in the strip. But the overall plan did not include Western donors who are wary of working with Hamas, which the United States and European Union have designated as a 'terrorist' organisation, and progress has been slow.

Gaza-based analyst Omar Shaaban argued that Western countries must realise they cannot work without Hamas.

"Does the international community really want to end this cycle of destruction or not?" he asked. "Gaza is under Hamas' control, so how can you possibly rebuild without them? Hamas is everywhere – it runs the municipalities, water and electricity.

"The only option is to include them."

AFP

Bank Muscat announces completion of Green Sports fields in Batinah

In line with its commitment to community development and corporate social responsibility, Bank Muscat, the leading financial services provider in the sultanate, is continuing to complete new sports fields across the sultanate as part of its flagship Green Sports programme. The bank recently celebrated the completion of two new sports fields in North Batinah and two fields in South Batinah as part of its efforts to promote Oman as a sporting nation.

The announcement of the project completion for the Al Ghadafan Sports Team's field in the wilayat of Liwa in North Batinah was attended by Saeed Khamis al Mamari, chairman of the team. The bank also celebrated the Al Nasr Sports Team's sports field in the wilayat of Al Khabourah in North Batinah, in the presence of Khalid Abdullah al Wahaibi, a member of the Board of Directors.

Abdul Rahman Abdullah al Shizawi, regional manager - North Batinah, Bank Muscat, handed over project completion certificates to both the teams at



the respective handover events in North Batinah.

Meanwhile, two Green Sports fields were also handed over to teams in South Batinah governorate. The field for the Al Hussn Sports Team in the wilayat of Rustaq was represented by Hilal Saeed al Harmali, chairman of the team. The fourth sports field was handed over to the Al

Taawun Sports Team from the wilayat of Musannah in the presence of Ali Salim al Braiki, a member of the Board of Directors. Both the events in South Batinah were attended by Adnan Ahmed Rajab al Balushi, assistant regional manager - South Batinah, who handed over project completion certificates to the teams. All the handover events

were organised in full compliance with COVID-19 norms.

On this occasion, Abdul Rahman Abdullah al Shizawi, regional manager - North Batinah, Bank Muscat, said, "We are pleased to extend our congratulations to the teams whose Green Sports fields have been completed, wishing them more success and achievements in the

future. The winning teams for this year will be announced in the coming days, across different categories including installation of artificial turf or natural grass on sports fields, floodlighting and water-desalination systems."

On his part, Adnan Ahmed al Balushi, assistant regional manager - South Batinah, Bank Muscat, said that the Green Sports

programme implemented by the bank since 2012 continues its successes as a large number of Green Sports fields have been completed over the past years.

He said, "Today, we are pleased to have completed the opening of these new fields, which will be an important resource for members of these teams to practice different types of sports, to host community events and activities and also obtain financial returns by commercialising the use of the sports field in the right way."

It must be noted that as many as 123 teams have benefitted from the bank's flagship CSR programme until the end of 2020. The scope of support under the Green Sports programme included installation of artificial turf or natural grass on sports fields, floodlighting and water-desalination systems. There is no doubt that it has been greatly contributing to further build Omani sporting talent. The programme is providing an excellent means to channelize the energy and talents of Omani youth in a productive way.



Grab unique number

Ooredoo is kicking off the summer in an exciting way with the much-awaited mobile number charity auction.

From May 27 to June 1, customers will have the chance to place a bid on over 100 of Ooredoo's most sought-after Diamond and Gold mobile numbers from the comfort and safety of their homes. With all the proceeds being donated to charity, there is no better way to have fun, get a unique number and contribute to a good cause all at the same time.

Interested customers can browse the list, which includes different starting prices for different numbers.

A registration fee of RO20 is applicable to take part in the auction and customers can bid for a maximum of ten numbers. For more details visit www.ooredoo.om/Personal/Mobile/DigitalServices/Auction.aspx.

Dabur International forays into health and food hygiene

As personal hygiene has become paramount in current challenging times with frequent hand cleansing and sanitised environments, rinsing our vegetables and fruits with plain water is not enough. That's why Dabur International has strengthened its fight against the pandemic by foraying into the hygiene segment of fresh produce with Dabur Fruit & Veggie Clean.

A 100 per cent naturally derived cleanser, Dabur Fruit & Veggie Clean liquid helps to thoroughly clean the vegetables and fruits before eating or cooking. It gently removes germs, waxes, chemicals, and soil from the fresh produce's surface without ripping off its nutrients and freshness to leave behind only crisp and clean veggies and fruits.

Being an alcohol-free formula as well as

free of all chlorine, it is odorless and lends no residue or after-taste.

Determined to make health and hygiene a priority for its consumers, Vineet Jain, head of marketing, said, "There are germs and chemicals that might be invisible to the eye but lay on the surface of our much loved fruits or vegetables. Dabur Fruit and Veggie Clean is a product that is the need of the hour offering a safe, 100 per cent naturally derived cleansing solution and not just more chemicals washing away existing chemicals.

"At Dabur International, we truly care for the health and well-being of our consumers and want them to take domestic hygiene as seriously as they prioritize their personal hygiene."



AstraZeneca praises UAE for vaccination rollout

A government affairs director from AstraZeneca, the developer of one of the leading COVID-19 vaccines in partnership with Oxford University, has praised the UAE's vaccine rollout program by highlighting the work done by health authorities in the region to make vaccines available as soon as possible.

To date, over 12.1mn vaccination doses have been administered in the UAE with a vaccine distribution rate of over 124 doses per 100 people, with approximately 70,000 doses of the vaccine administered daily. In terms of population vaccinated, the UAE is currently fourth after the Seychelles, Maldives and Israel.

Qutaiba al Manaseer, government affairs director, Middle East and Africa, AstraZeneca, said Middle East countries have been successful in their efforts to make vaccines available as soon as possible. Health authorities across the region have developed agile regulatory systems and adapted rolling review strategies to ensure a fast but thorough regulatory process.

"Specifically, the UAE ranks among the best in the world in

terms of the speed of its vaccination programme. This is attributed to strong efforts from key senior stakeholders who worked collaboratively with health authorities to deliver impactful campaigns that are aimed at increasing the trust in the safety of vaccines available in the country, and uptake from the local population," added Manaseer.

The comments were made ahead of the inaugural Pharma and Drug Discovery Conference to be held on the opening day of Arab Health, which takes place from June 21-24 at the Dubai World Trade Centre. During the conference, Manaseer will be presenting the session Oxford University and AstraZeneca partnership towards broad and equitable access to COVID-19 vaccine.

"From the start of the pandemic, AstraZeneca's approach has focused on partnering with scientists, governments, multilateral organisations and manufacturers to establish agreements for the development and supply of our vaccine, and to fight the pandemic, together," said Manaseer.

"At AstraZeneca, we were



proud to be the first global pharmaceutical company to join COVAX in June 2020. Through the initiative, we are partnering with CEPI, Gavi, the WHO, Unicef and PAHO and our subscribing partner, the Serum Institute of India, to enable equitable and global access to our vaccine. Together, we have already delivered 37 million doses of our vaccine, including critical deliveries to countries in the Middle East. It is only through effective partnerships that reaching these milestones was made possible," he added.

Among the experts presenting at the Pharma & Drug Discovery

Conference, are Dr Yang Xiaoming, chairman of the China National Biotech Group (CNBG), Prof Graham Ball, professor of Bioinformatics, Nottingham and Trent University, UK, and Prof Mirza Baig, professor and chairman of Clinical Pharmacy and Pharmacotherapeutics, Dubai Pharmacy College for Girls.

Other notable insights will be delivered by from Prof Peter Hotez, director, Texas Children's Center for Vaccine Development (CVD), dean, National School of Tropical Medicine, professor of Paediatrics ad Molecular Virology & Microbiology, Baylor College of Medicine, Prof Dr Stefan Kaufman, director and scientific member, Max Planck Institut for Infection Biology, Prof Dr Mohammad Semreen, professor and chairman of Medicinal Chemistry Department, College of Pharmacy, University Sharjah, Prof Dr Gunnveig Grodeland, senior researcher and group leader, Oslo University Hospital Oslo and Farshad Guirakhoo, chief scientific officer, COVAX, United Biomedical, chief scientific officer, Vaxxinity.

The conference will be chaired by Dr Mohammed al

Gamal, associate professor, College of Pharmacy, Medicinal Chemistry, group coordinator, Drug Design and Discovery Group, University of Sharjah.

"Drug development has been at the forefront of the news agenda for almost 18 months and will continue to be a topic of discussion for the foreseeable future. At Arab Health we are committed to addressing the most relevant topics in the healthcare sector and as such have brought together global experts to inform and shape the future of innovative models in drug discovery," said Ross Williams, exhibition director at Arab Health.

Arab Health has been developed under the show theme of 'United by Business, driving the industry forward', with the live, in-person event expected to welcome 3,500 exhibiting companies and over 51,000 attendees from 170 countries expected to attend in-person and online during the event.

Over 300 speakers are expected to come together for the Arab Health Congress, to improve their medical practice and improve patient outcomes.

Incredible offers on Alfa Romeo models from Dhofar Automotive

Dhofar Automotive, the official distributor of Alfa Romeo vehicles in the sultanate, has announced some amazing offers on Alfa Romeo models. The company will be bearing the five per cent VAT, as well as providing several benefits on select models from the Alfa Romeo range including the Stelvio, Giulia, and Giulietta.

Hatem el Naggar, general manager at Dhofar Automotive, said, "We are pleased to provide our valued customers some exciting offers on amazing Alfa Romeo models. The Italian brand is renowned for its powerful cars, inspired by its long history of racing with its line-up winning numerous international and regional awards. The Alfa Romeo Stelvio, Giulietta, Giulia are now available at great prices, several free services and with no VAT since Dhofar Automotive will be bearing the five per cent cost."



Being the first Alfa Romeo SUV, the Stelvio features an attractive look with strong performance, something that is even more prominent in the Quadrifoglio variant. It has design features that create an even sportier style and cater to the car's specific technical features. Alfa Romeo Stelvio Super is available at a starting price of RO24,690.

The Alfa Romeo Giulietta sets new standards for the luxury mid-size sedan class. It has won numerous regional and international awards and has remained a class leader since its initial reveal. The Alfa Romeo Giulia Super is available at a starting price of RO18,890.

The Giulietta Veloce and Giulia Veloce are the more powerful variants of each model and start from RO14,390 and RO23,390, respectively. Both models feature the Alfa TCT, the innovative twin dry clutch semi-automatic

transmission from Alfa Romeo, which ensures continuous delivery of torque and traction without loss of power while shifting. Everything on the Veloce variants are conceived to deliver an authentic racing experience behind the wheel.

"We at Dhofar Automotive are pleased to invite all Alfa Romeo enthusiasts in the sultanate to visit our showrooms and see the stunning Alfa Romeo range, first-hand. We also encourage them to meet with our sales representatives and request a personal driving experience. We are confident that they will enjoy the performance of these powerful models," he added.

For more information on Alfa Romeo or to book a test drive, customers can visit their local Alfa Romeo showroom, or go online to www.dhofarautomotive.com.

NU holds symposium on engineering research

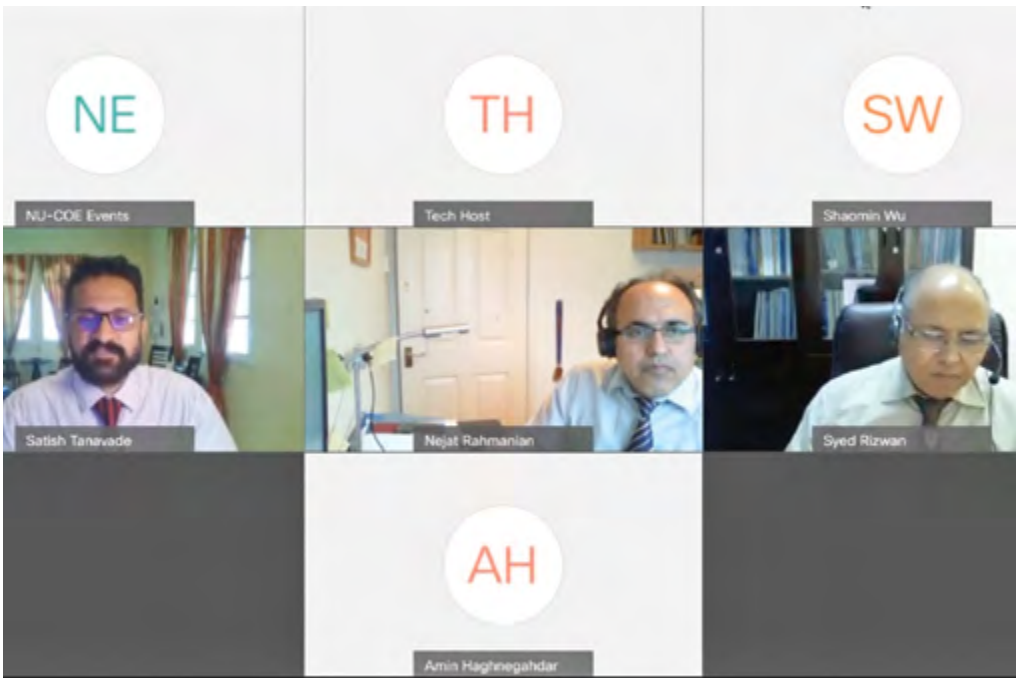
The online Symposium on Recent Trends in Engineering Research was organised by the College of Engineering, National University of Science and Technology (NU), on Sunday.

The opening address of the symposium was given by the vice chancellor, Dr Ali al Birmani of the National University of Science and Technology.

The symposium aimed to bring together scientists, researchers and educators for the meaningful exchange and sharing of their research expertise. Distinguished researchers in Nanomaterial, Water resources, Carbon Capturing, and Reliability addressed the target audiences about the recent developments in these areas.

Prof Saidur Rahman, a distinguished research professor and head of Research Centre for Nanomaterials and Energy Technology, School of Science and Technology, Sunway University, Malaysia, enlightened the participants on the recent research in Nanomaterials M'Xene and its revolutionary applications. He described the process of obtaining the Mxene nanomaterial and its revolutionary applications in the field of energy storage and heat transfer.

Dr Nejat Rahmanian from University of Bradford, United



Kingdom, threw light on a crucial topic 'Carbon Capture and Storage'.

He deliberated on the need of capturing carbon dioxide and its disposal for arresting global warming. He explained about the interlinkages between various complex issues such as GDP, circular economy with carbon capturing.

Professor Shaomin Wu from Kent Business School, United Kingdom, shared his recent findings on 'Reliability assessment for a multi-component system with masked failure data', and

some useful approaches for approximating the superposition of renewal processes were suggested from industrial systems maintenance perspective.

Finally, Dr Amin Haghnegahdar, from University of Saskatchewan, Canada, presented his insightful research on 'Value of Sensitivity Analysis for Advanced Water Resources Modelling' for all of the audience.

In his keynote Dr Amin outlined the various fields of application for the Sensitivity Analysis tool apart from water resource modelling.

In general, the symposium was a great success and a good interaction noted with extensive question and answer sessions at the end of each keynote.

The symposium was concluded by the chair of the Research and Innovation Committee, College of Engineering, Prof Syed Mohammed Rizwan, with a vote of thanks to the speakers, participants, organising committee. He thanked the dean of the College of Engineering, Dr Ahmed Hassan al Bulushi for his unconditional support to organise such events.



Oman women cricketers learn from Indian star Punam

Aiming to learn new skills and raise their games, Oman Women's Cricket Team had an online session with renowned Indian cricketer Punam Raut on Monday and came out more encouraged and inspired to do well at international level.

Oman Cricket organised the online interaction with the Indian star batswoman who had featured in a world record opening partnership of 320 runs with Deepti Sharma in an ODI, contributing 109, and thus beating the women's record of 229 (by Sarah Taylor and Caroline Atkins of England) and the standing men's record in ODIs of 286 (by Upul Tharanga and Sanath Jayasuriya of Sri Lanka).

The session was moderated

by Vaishali Jesrani, lady coordinator of Oman Cricket, and captain of Oman Women's Cricket Team.

As many as 20 Oman players interacted with Punam who shared her experiences and what all helped her grow as an international cricket player. They discussed with her ways to succeed at highest level, setting targets for self-development, how to handle pressure in critical situations, self-evaluation and technical details about batting.

Duleep Mendis, chief development officer, Oman Cricket, said it was important for Oman's women cricketers to understand the mindset of elite players so they can learn from them.

"Oman Cricket is continuously taking initiatives to develop cricket at all levels and it is committed to promoting women's cricket in the country too," he added.

Commenting on the importance of players' interaction with the Indian star, Vaishali said, "This was a huge opportunity for our players. Punam focused on important topics like setting individual goals and handling pressure. Our girls had so much to learn from her and it was heartening to see that Punam motivated them to take their cricket more seriously to succeed at international level."

Punam has played 2 Tests, 71 ODIs and 35 T20I for India so far.

Businessgateways spotlights procurement, investment opportunities

Businessgateways recently launched an exciting webinar series - Connecting the international community to Oman's Procurement & Investment Opportunities - intended to help Omani MSMEs and large businesses connect with a global audience of investors.

Regarded as one of the sultanate's most dynamic IT companies, businessgateways is an IT organisation enabling and implementing nationwide technology-driven platforms of strategic importance for governmental stakeholders.

The webinar series is hosted on an online knowledge-sharing platform, The Stage, an initiative

of businessgateways. Through these webinar-based presentations, stakeholders, suppliers, operators and embassies engage, discuss and share information on business prospects, with emphasis on showcasing procurement and investment opportunities in Oman to select international markets.

The webinars are designed to empower Omani MSMEs and garner international visibility while also promoting and encouraging B2B partnerships. Adding significant appeal to the event is the presence of key stakeholders representing promising new investment destinations in the sultanate, and



prominent public and private sector organisations in the target market.

Since its launch, the webinar series Connecting the interna-

tional community to Oman's Procurement & Investment Opportunities has garnered praise for its tangible success in shedding light on Oman's immense portfolio

of procurement and investment opportunities to the world.

China, given its unrivalled status as the global economic powerhouse, was the first international market to be featured in the series. Supported by the Embassy of the People's Republic of China (Oman), the webinar introduced China to Oman's market, upcoming projects and prospective B2B partnership ventures.

Next in the series was the United Kingdom which, as the biggest contributor of foreign direct investment into the sultanate, made for an impactful presence. Conducted under the patronage of Oman's Ministry of

Commerce, Industry & Investment Promotion (MoCIIP), the webinar titled 'Connecting UK to Oman's Procurement & Investment Opportunities' was a resounding success from all standpoints, with the backing from the Department for International Trade (UK), which is Britain's top policymaking body for trade and investment, in addition to the British Embassy in Muscat.

Opening remarks by H E Asila bint Salim al Samsamiyah, Undersecretary of MoCIIP, set the stage for roughly two hours of engaging presentations and discussions centring on a key message: 'Oman is open for business'.

An overview of Britain's longstanding trade and economic partnership with Oman was presented by Gareth Stevens, director of International Trade & First Secretary Defence & Security, British Embassy - Muscat.

Sector-wise opportunities, spanning Oil & Gas, Renewable Energy, Free Zone Developments, as well as regulatory aspects governing these opportunities and more, were outlined by representatives from Petroleum Development Oman (PDO), Daleel Petroleum, Public Authority for Special Economic Zones and Free Zones (OPAZ), Addleshaw Goddard, and businessgateways.

BITS Pilani Dubai announces \$1.5mn worth of scholarships

Making the admission process simpler and more student friendly during these unprecedented times, BITS Pilani Dubai has offered provisional admissions for the coming session starting September 2021. The initiative is aimed at allaying the fears and stress of prospective students and their families as board examinations are delayed or cancelled due to the pandemic situation.

Furthermore, the premier engineering institute also announced USD1.5mn worth of scholarships for students seeking admission for the academic year 2021-2022, therefore offering appropriate financial support to meritorious students, while encouraging them to aspire high.

"Since unconventional times like these require extraordinary measures, it was deemed necessary to make changes to our admission procedure. The idea is to provide a smoother transition for students to higher studies and that's why we decided to offer provisional admissions which will be confirmed upon the declaration of the final results and pupil meeting the minimum eli-



gibility requirement of admission to the programme irrespective of their scores", commented Prof R N Saha, director, BITS Pilani Dubai Campus.

At the same time, through the institute's scholarship scheme, almost 80 per cent of all students enrolling could avail of some sort of scholarship which would not be limited to the tuition fees only, but extend to hostel fee concessions as well. Other categories of scholarships besides merit-based include special provisions for all physically challenged students, plus special grants to BITS alumni, siblings of continuing students and candidates from collaborative organi-

sations.

"We also understand that a safe, sound and secure environment with all health measures in place is of paramount importance in today's date, and by achieving 100 per cent vaccination status along with strictly following the other COVID-19 safety protocols, BITS Pilani Dubai ensures complete safety of the students," further stated Prof Saha.

Prof Saha said, "GCC and India students have this distinct advantage of being closer to home when they study in Dubai, which is considered one of the safest international study destinations."

71% of UAE residents give indoor air quality least priority: Blueair study

Despite the proven importance of good indoor air quality for health, nearly three-quarters (71 per cent) of UAE residents give the least priority to improving ventilation and air quality at home for enhancing the health and well-being of their family, according to a new study commissioned by Blueair, a global air purification expert.

The aim of the research was to examine the public's attitudes towards health, how it has been affected by the pandemic and the most important factors for staying healthy. According to the survey, 63 per cent of respondents ranked their home setting as the least risky place for picking up an infection, despite research showing that the risk of being infected with an airborne virus or bacteria by a family member is high.

An overwhelming majority - over 95 per cent - of those surveyed in the UAE believe that the risk of becoming infected by a virus or bacteria is greatest outside the home and the majority believe that the most important factors for staying healthy are implementing a healthier lifestyle



(37%), protecting themselves in public environments through heightened personal protection measures (34%) and good hand hygiene (21%).

The results were part of a study carried out by YouGov on behalf of Swedish air purification specialist Blueair. The research was commissioned to mark the launch of HealthProtect, the company's most advanced air purifier to date, and the first product from a major air purifier brand to be proven to remove 99.99 per cent of live airborne

SARS-CoV-2 virus from the air in independent, third-party tests.

While 73 per cent of the survey respondents reported an increase in their concern for the health and safety of their family/friends as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, only 13 per cent cited better air quality in the home as an important factor in staying healthy.

Alexander Provins, director EMEA, at Blueair, said, "Research indicates that poor indoor air quality can be up to five times more damaging than outdoor air,

and using an air purifier is a proven way to improve ventilation. We conducted this in-depth study to understand consumer perceptions around health and wellness post-pandemic, as well as to gauge the public's knowledge about the benefits of air purification.

"The overarching finding is that the market needs more education about the importance of clean indoor air for our health as well as why we should be protecting ourselves indoors where we spend the most time."

Rebuilding Gaza should not ‘benefit’ Hamas, says US diplomat on Israel visit

Jerusalem - US Secretary of State Anthony Blinken warned on Tuesday that international aid to rebuild Gaza should not benefit its Hamas rulers as he held talks in Israel on firming up a days-old truce.

“We’ll work with our partners closely, with all, to ensure that Hamas does not benefit from the reconstruction assistance,” Blinken said following talks with Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu in Jerusalem.

Netanyahu warned Israel’s response would be ‘very powerful’ if Hamas violated the truce that ended 11 days of conflict with the Gaza militants.

“If Hamas breaks the calm and attacks Israel, our response will be very powerful,” the Israeli Prime Minister said, following his talks with the US top diplomat.

Blinken, who said earlier his trip would aim to support ‘efforts to solidify a ceasefire’, is meeting Palestinian President Mahmud Abbas later, though not Hamas, which is blacklisted by Washington as a terror group.

US President Joe Biden said Blinken would meet ‘with Israeli leaders about our ironclad commitment to Israel’s security’, as well as seeking to rebuild ties



Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu (right) and US Secretary of State Anthony Blinken hold a press conference in Jerusalem on Tuesday (AFP)

with the Palestinians.

Blinken on Sunday reaffirmed US support for a two-state solution as the only way to provide hope to Israelis and Palestinians that they can live ‘with equal measures of security, of peace and dignity’.

His remarks about ‘equal measures’ for Israelis and Palestinians seemed to shift the tone from Donald Trump’s administration, which cut aid to the Palestinian Authority and unveiled a Middle East peace plan with strong Israeli backing but no

support from Palestinians.

In Jerusalem on Tuesday, he said Israelis and Palestinians faced an uphill struggle to restore trust, after conflict in Gaza and unrest in the West Bank.

“There’s lots of hard work ahead to restore hope, respect

and some trust across the communities,” the US top diplomat said. “But we’ve seen the alternative and I think that should cause all of us to redouble our efforts to preserve the peace and improve the lives of Israelis and Palestinians alike.”

Israeli airstrikes and artillery fire on Gaza killed 253 Palestinians, including 66 children, and wounded over 1,900 people in 11 days of conflict from May 10, the health ministry in Gaza says.

Rocket and other fire from Gaza claimed 12 lives in Israel, including one child and an Arab-Israeli teenager, an Israeli soldier, one Indian and two Thais, medics say. Some 357 people in Israel have been wounded.

Mass arrests

Blinken’s visit comes as the ceasefire holds, but tensions simmer in Israel and the rest of the occupied Palestinian territories.

Hours before Blinken’s arrival, Israeli forces killed a Palestinian in the occupied West Bank, Palestinian and Israeli security sources said.

The man was killed during an Israeli arrest raid on the Al-Amara refugee camp near Ramallah, the sources said.

In annexed east Jerusalem, Israeli police said an attacker stabbed two young Israeli men on Monday before police shot him dead. The army said one of those wounded was a soldier.

Palestinian news agency WAFA identified the casualty as

a 17 year old Palestinian high school student.

In the night of Sunday to Monday, Israeli forces rounded up 43 Palestinians in the West Bank and east Jerusalem, the Palestinian Prisoners Club said.

Israeli police, who operate in east Jerusalem, said late Sunday that they had arrested 1,550 suspects and had charged 150 over the past two weeks in connection with the ‘violent events’.

Peace talks have stalled since 2014, including over the status of east Jerusalem and Israeli settlements in the occupied West Bank.

The latest military escalation started after bloody clashes in Jerusalem’s Al-Aqsa mosque compound, Islam’s third holiest site, which is also revered by Jews as the Temple Mount.

Israeli forces had moved in on Palestinian worshippers at the site, toward the end of the holy month of Ramadan.

They had also sought to quell protests against the threatened eviction of Palestinian families from homes in the east Jerusalem neighbourhood of Sheikh Jarrah to make way for Jewish settlers.

AFP



US President Joe Biden (left) and Egypt’s Abdel Fattah al Sisi (AFP)



Sisi, Biden discuss Gaza ceasefire, Ethiopia dam

Cairo, Egypt - Egyptian President Abdel Fattah al Sisi and US President Joe Biden discussed on Monday the Cairo-brokered Gaza ceasefire as well as the ongoing mega-dam dispute with Ethiopia, the Egyptian presidency said.

For the second time in less than a week, both presidents discussed ‘international efforts to rebuild Gaza and providing urgent humanitarian assistance’ to the blockaded enclave, the presidency said. Last week, Sisi pledged US\$500mn to help reconstruction efforts in Gaza, which was pummelled by Israeli strikes for 11 days.

The truce between Israel and Hamas that came into force last Friday was diplomatically engineered by Egypt, which has sent two delegations to Tel Aviv and the Palestinian Territories to keep watch over the ceasefire’s implementation.

Biden also expressed his administration’s willingness to put ‘the situation in the Palestinian Territories back to normal’. He said his administration would work ‘with international partners in supporting the Palestinian Authority and reconstruction efforts’, the statement added.

The call comes as US Secretary of State Antony Blinken prepares to head to the Middle East for a regional tour, including a Cairo stop.

Both leaders also talked about Egypt’s ‘water security’, as it remains mired in a

decade-long deadlock with Ethiopia over its mega-dam project.

Ethiopia’s construction of the Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam (GERD) on the Blue Nile has sparked fears in downstream countries Egypt and Sudan, which fear for their own vital water supplies.

Cairo, along with Khartoum, have been pushing for a binding deal on the filling of the vast reservoir behind the dam. But Ethiopia has said it will push ahead with a second phase of filling in July and August, even if no agreement has been reached.

Biden told Sisi that ‘Washington fully understands the utmost importance of this issue for the Egyptian people,’ according to the statement.

They also touched on human rights issues which the Biden administration has been vocal in making central to its foreign policy.

Sisi continues to face heavy criticism for his human rights record following his ouster of Islamist president Mohamed Morsi in 2013.

The Egyptian general-turned-president has overseen an ongoing crackdown in which thousands of dissidents have been jailed including journalists, lawyers, academics, and activists.

Blinken condemned the arrest of three Egyptian activists in November last year, prior to being confirmed as Secretary of State.

AFP

Three heavyweights barred from Iran poll: Media

Tehran, Iran - Three of the best-known candidates in Iran’s June presidential elections, Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, Ali Larijani and Eshaq Jahangiri, have been barred from running, Iranian media said on Tuesday.

First reported by ultraconservative Fars news agency, the trio’s disqualification by the conservative-dominated Guardian Council came days before campaigning starts for the June 18 poll to succeed President Hassan Rouhani.

Iranian media had widely predicted a showdown between conservative former parliament speaker Larijani, an advisor to Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, and ultraconservative



Ali Larijani

judiciary chief Ebrahim Raisi.

But unlike Raisi, Larijani did not feature on what Fars said was an ‘unofficial final list’ of seven candidates approved by the Guardian Council, which has veto power over election hopefuls.

Reformists had pinned their hopes on Jahangiri, first vice-



Eshaq Jahangiri

president to Rouhani.

Firebrand ex-president Ahmadinejad had been expected to be disqualified.

Approved candidates on the list reported by Fars also include ex-Revolutionary Guards chief Major General Mohsen Rezaei, ultraconservative former nuclear



Mahmoud Ahmadinejad

negotiator Saeed Jalili and central bank governor Abdolnasser Hemmati.

The other three on the list were the reformist ex-vice president Mohsen Mehrizadeh, and ultraconservative MPs Alireza Zakani and Amirhossein Ghazizadeh-Hashemi.

The Guardian Council’s spokesman Abbas Ali Kadkhodaei also said that ‘only seven of the presidential candidates have been qualified by the council’, according to the council’s website.

He had earlier told ISNA news agency that the final list ‘must be announced by the interior ministry’. That is expected to happen on Wednesday or Thursday.

Barred candidates have until midnight Tuesday night to appeal. Those approved are allowed to start campaigning from May 28.

Under the Islamic republic’s constitution, Rouhani is barred from running for a third consecutive term.

AFP

Belarus opposition calls for more pressure

Minsk, Belarus - Belarus opposition called on Tuesday for more pressure on strongman Alexander Lukashenko as Europe moved to cut air links with the country over the extraordinary diversion of an airliner and arrest of a dissident on board.

The forced landing of the Ryanair flight from Athens to Vilnius on Sunday and arrest of opposition journalist Roman Protasevich sparked an international outcry and calls for tough action against the longtime Belarusian leader.

European Union leaders took a first step on Monday, agreeing at a summit to ban Belarusian airlines from the bloc and calling on EU-based carriers not to fly over its airspace.

Exiled opposition leader Svetlana Tikhonovskaya urged the international community to go further in isolating the regime.

In a call with US National Security Advisor Jake Sullivan, Tikhonovskaya asked the United States to ‘isolate the regime and pressure it through sanctions’, she said on Twitter. In a separate post on her Telegram channel, Tikhonovskaya, who lives in Lithuania, said she asked for the opposition to be invited to next month’s G7 summit in Britain. “The situation with the hijack-



Belarusians living in Poland and Poles supporting them hold up a placard reading ‘Freedom to Roman Protasevich’ during a demonstration in front of the European Commission office in Warsaw on Monday (AFP)

ing of the plane cannot be considered separately from other repressions and flagrant violations of human rights in Belarus.”

EU leaders on Monday warned they would adopt further ‘targeted economic sanctions’ against the Belarusian authorities to add to the 88 regime figures and seven companies already on a blacklist over a crackdown on opposition.

The UN rights office also demanded the immediate release of Protasevich and his girlfriend Sofia Sapiega, who was also arrested.

Video ‘confession’

Lukashenko and his allies are already under a series of Western sanctions over a brutal crackdown on opposition protests that followed his disputed re-election to a sixth term in August last year.

Protasevich (26) was a co-founder of the Nexta Telegram channel, which helped organise the protests that were the biggest challenge to Lukashenko’s 26 year rule.

He had been living between Poland and Lithuania. Belarusian state television late

on Monday broadcast a 30-second video of Protasevich confirming that he was in prison in Minsk and ‘confessing’ to charges of organising mass unrest. The footage showed Protasevich - who could face 15 years in jail - with dark markings visible on his forehead, saying he was being treated ‘according to the law’.

His allies say the video was made under pressure from authorities, with Tikhonovskaya saying there was ‘no doubt that Roman was being tortured in prison’.

US President Joe Biden slammed the forced diversion of the plane and arrest of Protasevich as ‘a direct affront to international norms’ and said the video appeared to have been made ‘under duress’.

‘I welcome the news that the European Union has called for targeted economic sanctions and other measures, and have asked my team to develop appropriate options to hold accountable those responsible,’ Biden said in a White House statement.

‘Not his words’

Protasevich’s father Dmitry Protasevich said in Poland that he had not been able to contact his son since Saturday and that he did not appear himself in the video. “It’s clear that he was physically harmed because you can see signs of a beating on his face,” he said.

“He would never speak like that. Those were not his words... he was reading something out that he was told to read out.”

Minsk said it had reacted to secure the flight after receiving a bomb threat, supposedly from Palestinian group Hamas, but European leaders dismissed the claim as implausible.

AFP

India evacuates two million as it braces for another cyclone



A fisherman leaves after securing his boat in dry land as Cyclone Yaas rising from the Bay of Bengal barrels towards India's eastern coast where it is expected to make a landfall on Wednesday, in Digha some 190km from the eastern Indian metropolis of Kolkata on Tuesday (AFP)

Kolkata, India - A powerful cyclone headed for eastern India on Tuesday, forcing the evacuation of nearly two million people just a week after another huge storm claimed at least 155 lives on the west coast.

Cyclone Yaas in the Bay of Bengal is expected to slam into

West Bengal and Odisha states around midday on Wednesday, the India Meteorological Department said, and could bring winds of up to 165km per hour.

Experts say the warming of ocean waters due to climate change has led to an increase in the frequency and intensity of

such storms.

Nearly two million people living along India's east coast are being moved to shelters, officials said on Tuesday, and the storm has also disrupted efforts to combat the country's devastating COVID-19 outbreak.

"This cyclone is a terrible blow

for many people in coastal districts whose families have been struck down by COVID-19 infections and deaths," West Bengal Sundarbans Development Minister Bankim Chandra Hazra said.

"Nearly half a million people are being evacuated from their homes in the (West Bengal)

coastal region and it's a big challenge to provide them shelter (while) maintaining social distancing."

Some vaccination centres in districts under threat as well as the capital Kolkata would suspend operations, officials said, and efforts were under way to ensure the supply of oxygen and medicines to hospitals during the storm.

Some 1.4mn people were moved away from coastal districts in neighbouring Odisha, with thousands of disaster and relief personnel deployed, local media reported.

The state's special relief commissioner, Pradeep Jena, said arrangements were being made to maintain social distancing in shelters, with face masks and sanitisers supplied.

Officials in Bangladesh, which lies to the east of West Bengal, said they did not expect the storm to hit the delta nation.

The Bay of Bengal has conditions favourable to the development of cyclones, including high sea surface temperatures.

Some of the deadliest storms in history have formed there, including one in 1970 that killed half a million people in what is modern-day Bangladesh.

Odisha's worst-ever cyclone, in 1999, killed 10,000 people.

AFF



A security personnel guards the entrance of the Australian Embassy at the Green Zone, in Afghanistan's Kabul on Tuesday (AFP)

Australia to close Kabul Embassy over security fears

Kabul, Afghanistan - Australia on Tuesday abruptly announced it will shutter its embassy in Afghanistan this week, expressing fears over the 'increasingly uncertain security environment' in Kabul as foreign troops withdraw.

The Taliban, which has ramped up violence across the country in recent weeks, reacted by saying it would provide a 'safe environment' to foreign diplomats and humanitarian organisations.

The United States and allied forces are in the final stages of pulling out their remaining troops from Afghanistan, ending America's longest-ever war, but heralding an uncertain future for a nation in the tightening grip of Taliban militants.

Australian Prime Minister Scott Morrison said the embassy would close in just three days.

Around 80 Australian troops are leaving as part of the wider military pull-out, and without that small contingent and the larger US force as back-up, Morrison said there was an 'increasingly uncertain security environment'.

"The government has been advised that security arrangements could not be provided to support our ongoing diplomatic presence," he said in a statement.

The elected government in Kabul and Afghan security services remain fragile despite two decades of foreign capacity building, and their success is far from assured without continued US military support.

Western diplomats and military officials have been scrambling to work out how to provide security for their future civilian presence in Afghanistan with fears growing of a Taliban comeback.

The headline group, which briefly ruled Afghanistan in the 1990s, said on Tuesday foreign diplomats can 'continue their operations as usual'.

"(We) will not pose any threats to them," spokesman

Mohammad Naeem told AFP.

When the Taliban seized control of Kabul in 1996, they entered the United Nations compound and abducted the country's former leader Najibullah Ahmadzai, who they then murdered.

Two years later, the Taliban oversaw the killing of the Iranian diplomats at their consulate in the northern Afghan city of Mazar-e-Sharif.

"The only incentive for foreign embassies to remain is the humanitarian work that they are involved in, but if their personnel are endangered then there is no point in remaining here," a foreign defence official based in Kabul told AFP.

Win for Taliban?

Nishank Motwani, an Afghanistan specialist based in Australia, said the Taliban would interpret Morrison's announcement as a victory.

"The Taliban will see it as... a clear sign that other NATO and non-NATO partner countries are likely to shutter their diplomatic missions because of the US's decision to exit Afghanistan and the security vacuum its departure will inevitably create," he said.

In recent weeks, violence across Afghanistan has soared and government forces have clashed with Taliban fighters not far from Kabul.

President Joe Biden has said all American troops will leave by September 11, the 20th anniversary of the Al Qaeda attacks that sparked the US-led invasion of Afghanistan that toppled the Taliban.

It was not clear whether there was a specific threat against the Australian embassy, which is in the heavily fortified Green Zone, not far from the US mission.

Afghanistan's Foreign Ministry said it hoped Australia would review its decision, while an Afghan employee at the embassy described fear at the mission's withdrawal.

AFF



The Moscow City Court (AFP)

Navalny says three new probes launched

Moscow, Russia - Jailed Kremlin critic Alexei Navalny said on Tuesday that he had been told by investigators that three new criminal probes have been launched against him.

'My influential criminal syndicate is growing,' President Vladimir Putin's top domestic opponent quipped in a new post on Instagram. 'I am a genius and puppet master of the criminal underworld,' said the 44 year old, adding that more than 20 investigators were involved in the new probes.

Citing a senior representative of Russia's Investigative Committee, which probes major crimes, Navalny said he was accused of 'stealing' donations to his Anti-Corruption Foundation and insulting a judge.

He is also accused of creating a non-commercial organisation and encouraging Russians not to perform 'their civic duties' by publishing an investigation into Putin's alleged wealth, Navalny said. Navalny in January released a probe into a Black Sea palace Russian tycoons allegedly built for Putin which has racked up more than 116mn views on YouTube. Putin denies the palace is his.

Navalny was arrested in January upon returning from Germany after recovering from a nerve agent poisoning attack he says was orchestrated by the Kremlin. The Kremlin denies the allegation.

AFF

Germany's far-right AfD chooses hardline team to lead in September election

Berlin, Germany - Germany's far-right AfD on Tuesday chose a hardline duo over a more moderate alternative to lead it into September's election, the first in 16 years not to feature Chancellor Angela Merkel.

Co-president Tino Chrupalla and parliamentary group co-leader Alice Weidel won 70.03 per cent of the vote in a ballot of party members, beating rival duo Joana Cotar and Joachim Wundrak, a party spokesman said.

The anti-Islam, anti-immigration party has long been divided between a radical faction loyal to firebrand Bjorn Hoecke and a moderate wing around party co-leader Joerg Meuthen.

The choice of Chrupalla and Weidel represents a victory for the more radical wing of the party, which is campaigning on a vow to end virus restrictions, take a tougher line on migration and pull Germany out of the EU.



Alternative for Germany (AfD) co-president Tino Chrupalla (left) and its parliamentary group co-leader Alice Weidel, in Berlin on Tuesday (AFP)

At a party conference to firm up the AfD's election manifesto in April, Chrupalla and Weidel backed radical policies including a complete ban on refugees being joined by family members.

At the congress in Dresden, the AfD also voted to reject compulsory mask-wearing, which it said was 'based on numbers that

are not meaningful'.

The AfD has long sought to capitalise on anger over virus measures in Germany, with members joining anti-vaxxers and 'Querdenker' (Lateral Thinkers) at various demonstrations.

Starting out as an anti-euro outfit in 2013, the AfD capitalised

on public anger over Merkel's 2015 decision to allow in a wave of asylum seekers from conflict-torn countries such as Syria, Afghanistan and Iraq.

The party caused a sensation in Germany's last election in 2017 when it secured almost 13 per cent of the vote, entering parliament for the first time as the largest opposition party.

But it has lost support as Germany reels from the COVID-19 pandemic, and has lately been plagued by internal divisions and accusations of ties to neo-Nazi fringe groups.

The latest surveys have the party polling at between ten and 12 per cent, with Merkel's CDU/CSU and the Greens neck-and-neck on around 25 per cent.

September's election will be the first in 16 years not to feature Merkel, who is bowing out of politics.

AFF

Hong Kong warns it could end up binning unused vaccine doses

Hong Kong, China - Hong Kong warned on Tuesday it may soon have to throw away coronavirus vaccine doses because they are approaching their expiry date and not enough people have signed up for the jabs.

Hong Kong is one of the few places in the world fortunate enough to have secured more than enough doses to inoculate its entire population of 7.5mn people.

But swirling distrust of the government as it stamps out dissent - combined with online misinformation and a lack of urgency in the comparatively virus-free city - has led to entrenched vaccine hesitancy and a dismal inoculation drive.

On Tuesday a member of the government's vaccine task force warned that Hong Kongers 'only have a three-month window' before the city's first batch of



This file photo shows a trolley carrying Pfizer-BioNTech coronavirus vaccines being transported after being unloaded from a cargo plane at the Hong Kong International Airport, in Hong Kong on February 27 (AFP)

Pfizer-BioNTech vaccines go out of date.

"The vaccines all have expiry dates," Thomas Tsang, a former controller of the Centre for Health Protection, said.

"They cannot be used after

the expiry date and the community vaccination centres for BioNTech will, according to present plans, cease operating after September."

Tsang said it was 'just not right' that Hong Kong was sitting

on an unused pile of doses while the rest of the world 'is scrambling for vaccines'.

And he warned new doses were unlikely to be delivered.

"What we have is probably all we have for the rest of the year."

Hong Kong bought 7.5mn doses each of the Pfizer-BioNTech vaccine and China's Sinovac.

The latter has yet to be approved by the World Health Organization but was fast-tracked for use by city health regulators.

It also pre-ordered 7.5mn doses of AstraZeneca jabs but scrapped that deal earlier in the year, with authorities saying they planned to use the money for second-generation vaccines next year.

Medical worker resistance

So far just 19 per cent of the population has received one dose of either vaccine, while 14 per cent has received two doses.

Hesitancy is common even among the city's medical workers. Earlier this month, the city's Hospital Authority revealed only

a third of its staff had taken the opportunity to be vaccinated.

On Tuesday, authorities announced the first major expansion of the vaccine programme to non-residents. Some 40,000 Chinese mainlanders with travel permits as well as some 13,000 refugee claimants will now be eligible.

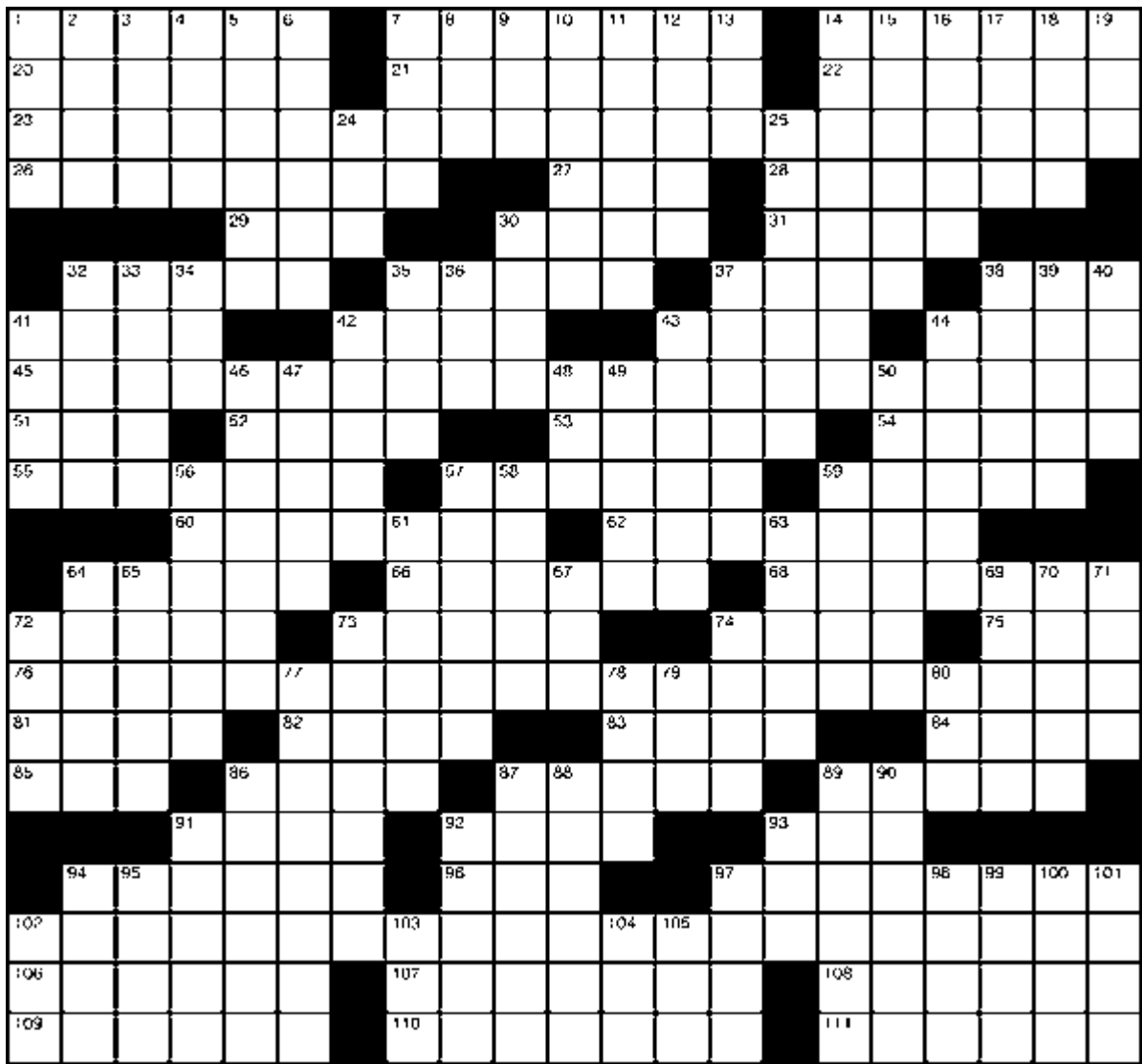
There are currently hundreds of thousands of unused Pfizer-BioNTech shots, which must be stored at ultra-low temperatures and have a six-month shelf life.

A total of 3,263,000 doses of the Pfizer-BioNTech vaccines have been shipped to Hong Kong at different stages so far but only 1,231,600 have been administered.

Around 1mn doses were also put to one side after packaging problems and it is not clear how many were replaced by suppliers.

AFF

DAILY CROSSWORD



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ACROSS

- 1 Llama’s cousin
- 7 Ocean spume
- 14 Din
- 20 Child star Jackie
- 21 Protected from gunfire
- 22 French star
- 23 Start of a New Year’s Eve soliloquy
- 26 “The Captain and ____”
- 27 ____ volente: God willing
- 28 Actor Ed and family
- 29 Vaughn or Beatty
- 30 Code word for Z
- 31 Max or Buddy
- 32 Fontainebleu woods
- 35 Izaak Walton’s basket
- 37 Clark Kent’s girl
- 38 Boater or porkpie
- 41 Word for a certain Ranger
- 42 Narrow cut
- 43 “My Name is ____”
- 44 With 82 Across, Utah’s state flower
- 45 More of soliloquy
- 51 Infamous Amin
- 52 Rainbow: Prefix
- 53 Fed the pot
- 54 Embassy spies
- 55 Person from Barcelona
- 57 Jaden and Willow
- 59 Turn outward, as feet
- 60 Asian transport
- 62 Cut another cassette
- 64 Star’s brief role
- 66 Bother persistently
- 68 Noxious atmospheres
- 72 “The Bells of St. ____”
- 73 Kitchen gadget
- 74 Where Rene goes barefoot?
- 75 “Nurses” Maris
- 76 More of soliloquy
- 81 Ship hazard
- 82 See 44 Across
- 83 Word of woe
- 84 Do a cotton-pick-ing job
- 85 Dancer Charisse
- 86 St. Louis eleven
- 87 Gentleman’s gentleman
- 89 Bone juncture
- 91 Pere’s wife
- 92 Buckle holders
- 93 “____ tho’ it be a cross . . .”
- 94 A Greg Louganis dive
- 96 Merkel of the movies
- 97 Tax man
- 102 End of soliloquy
- 106 Visigoth king

- 107 Buttercup relative
- 108 Mary Martin’s Broadway hit: 1966
- 109 Poe’s “Raven” lady
- 110 Toper
- 111 Dirty rug?
- DOWN**
- 1 “____ has only nine lives”: Twain
- 2 Vein or ore
- 3 Smut, tersely
- 4 Not “fer”
- 5 Incisor’s neighbor
- 6 Bobbysoxer’s sock
- 7 Yegg’s target
- 8 Work unit
- 9 “____ Blue?”: musical query
- 10 Melted cheese dish
- 11 “1984” author
- 12 Vowel sequence
- 13 1550, to Fabius
- 14 “____ in the Sunset”
- 15 Makes up
- 16 One on the way up
- 17 Bleaching vat
- 18 Site of the first Olympics
- 19 “____ lords a-leaping”
- 24 Of ancient vintage
- 25 Toiled mightily
- 30 Greek letter
- 32 Peter or Bridget
- 33 Bit of gossip, French style

- 34 Gun the motor
- 35 Garbed
- 36 Pacific ____
- 37 Most feeble
- 38 Icelandic volcano
- 39 “Gang aft ____”: Burns
- 40 Hellman’s attic clutter?
- 41 Nonclerical
- 42 Smooth-scaled lizard
- 43 Swimming actress Williams
- 44 Berates
- 46 Most greasy
- 47 “Potter’s” ____
- 50 Call a president to account
- 56 Part of GAR
- 57 Amber-colored wine
- 58 Electromagnetic wave amplifier
- 59 Agnew
- 61 Bobbins
- 63 Pile up
- 64 Ben’s thespian brother
- 65 Described a half-circle
- 67 1989 play about Capote
- 69 Noted naval historian
- 70 Mature

- 71 Identical
- 72 Chagall or Connelly
- 73 Monster of Greek myth
- 74 Early precollege exam
- 77 Lawyer Darrow
- 78 Milk shake flavor
- 79 Seine sight
- 80 Cio-Cio San’s sash
- 86 French director Jean
- 87 Legal locales
- 88 Siren signals
- 89 Ignatious of Loyola’s order
- 90 New York silverware city
- 91 Extremely small
- 92 Actor Victor of “The Strangler”
- 93 Marquand’s “H.M. Pulham, ____”
- 94 Big blow
- 95 Flaherty’s “Man of ____”
- 97 Dill, of old
- 98 Diving judge’s job
- 99 Beat it
- 100 “Ye ____ Shoppe”
- 101 Peasant of India
- 102 Sal of song, for one
- 103 Belfry occupant
- 104 Jazz genre
- 105 Yoko

YOUR DAILY HOROSCOPE



ARIES MARCH 21-APRIL 19

Today is a great day to have a good time while you’re getting things done. If you add some flirtation and flattery to critical conversations, you will be amazed at the results. You are surrounded by people who are very fun loving, and they could even teach you a thing or two about how to have a good time. Your social circle is widening, you will love where it all takes you.



LEO JULY 23-AUGUST 22

While working with someone else today, don’t be surprised if your teammate acts more thrifty and conservative than usual. Their mind is distracted by a mistake from their past that they’re obsessed with not repeating. While this level of caution is good, it could be holding you two back. It’s up to you to be the bolder person. This isn’t normally your style, but it’s an opportunity.



SAGITTARIUS NOVEMBER 22-DECEMBER 21

If your projects are going well, don’t rush ahead with a new one. Take the time to enjoy the success you’re having. You’ll deprive yourself of a lot of joy if all you do is think about the next mountain you can climb. Stay right where you are for a while. Be grounded and live in the moment. Speed and progress shouldn’t be a priority for you right now.



TAURUS APRIL 20-MAY 20

Right now your charms are absolutely intoxicating to every person you encounter! Folks will be eager to hang out with you just to soak up some of the sunshine you’re emitting every time you smile. Consequently, they’re going to work hard to make you smile over and over again! The jokes will be flying, and your funny bone will have the life tickled out of it.



VIRGO AUGUST 23-SEPTEMBER 22

If you spend your morning getting the rest of your day organised, you’ll be amazed by how much free time you end up with. And you know just how you’d like to spend that free time. With that new hottie! Your flirtatious energy has you bursting at the seams, and you’re ready to lay your charms on the next person who walks by. You could make some amazing headway.



CAPRICORN DECEMBER 22-JANUARY 19

Every invitation you get isn’t necessarily one you should accept. Before you say yes to any of them, wait a while. Find out who else is going. Try not to fill every second of your free time with something social. Sometimes spending time alone doing nothing is a lot more rewarding than joining a group just for the sake of having something to do.



GEMINI MAY 21-JUNE 21

It’s time for a little maintenance work on your relationships. Make sure you’ve answered all their e-mails and confirmed all your upcoming social plans. Returning messages is the best way to show someone that they still matter to you, and it’s the easiest. If you don’t have time for a long phone conversation, that’s fine. Just shoot them a message and set up a date.



LIBRA SEPTEMBER 23-OCTOBER 22

Your mantra for today should be “keep it simple!” If you’re faced with too many details to contend with, you might get too overwhelmed, which could send you down a very grumpy path for the rest of the day. So try hard to resist the urge to overcomplicate things or make them exactly how you want them to be. This is a good day to learn the lesson about letting go.



AQUARIUS JANUARY 20-FEBRUARY 18

Make sure you cover the details today, because they’re most likely to cause the biggest problems. So get out your magnifying glass, tune into your intuition, and pay attention! Did someone say they’re a vegetarian? Remember that the next time you invite them over for dinner. Has someone recently started working out more? Compliment them on their appearance.



CANCER JUNE 22-JULY 22

Put as much energy into communication today as you possibly can, because connecting with others is more important than it has ever been. You don’t have to have deep philosophical conversations to make an impact, though. Even simple small talk with a stranger can open up new avenues and ignite a spark or two regarding new ideas. People deserve more interaction.



SCORPIO OCTOBER 23-NOVEMBER 21

Your reputation is great, but you still have to protect it and make sure it doesn’t get any black mark. Be mindful of who you’re associating with, because you could be blamed for their actions if you don’t work hard to create a line of separation in the eyes of others. Establishing boundaries protects you and sets a precedent to others that you aren’t someone who can be pushed around.



PISCES FEBRUARY 19-MARCH 20

It’s important to consider the source when you get information today. You can’t be too critical right now. Even what the big boss tells you should be double-checked. And make sure you’re not just going to the sources that you know are going to tell you exactly what you want to hear. You need to be challenged, and you need to know the truth. Get out your private detective hat.



TEST YOUR KNOWLEDGE

1. The iron and steel industries of which of the following countries are almost fully dependent on imported raw materials?

- a. Britain
- b. Japan
- c. Poland
- d. Germany

2. The temperature increases rapidly after

- a. ionosphere
- b. exosphere
- c. stratosphere
- d. troposphere

3. The humidity of the air depends upon

- a. temperature
- b. location
- c. weather
- d. All of the above

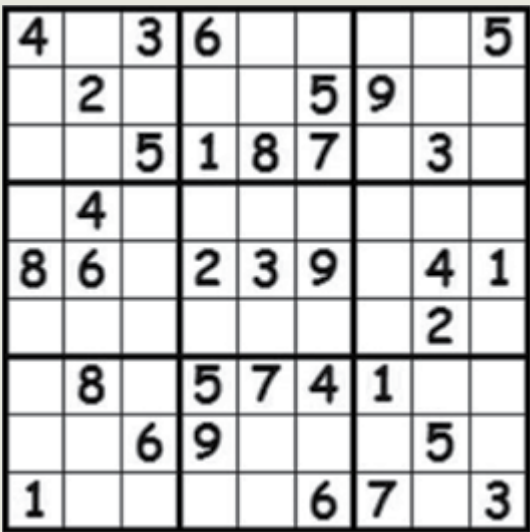
Answers: 1. b 2. c 3. d

KIDS COLOURING



DO YOU SUDOKU?

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



BOGGLER



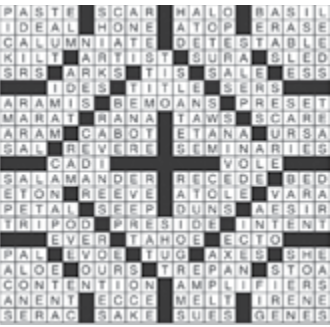
Each game will present you with a matrix filled with letters. The objective is to form words by linking adjacent letters - to the left, right, on top, bottom, or diagonal to each other. The Boggles Classic game uses a 4 x 4 matrix. Words are valued at one point for each letter in excess of two letters.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

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

SUDOKU EASY ANSWER



DAILY CROSSWORD ANSWERS (MAY 25)



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



ITALIAN DINNER

BUON
Appetito

Summer in Italy is a special time of the year to enjoy fresh produce, though Italians are so committed to eating the freshest ingredients during every calendar month at home as well as in restaurants. Some popular Italian summer dishes like a mozzarella and tomato salad can be enjoyed throughout the year though it is particularly flavourful during summer when tomatoes are the plumpest. Dishes like *Insalata di Riso*, or Italian rice salad, crop up at sea-side restaurants and is great for vegetarians since it has a lot of diced fresh and tinned vegetables, and cheese – though some add eggs and deli meats. *Caponata*, which consists of stir-fried aubergines, tomatoes, and celery cooked down with a dash of sweetness, is also very popular in Sicily; so is the *Panzanella*, a crouton based salad, which is a good way of utilising leftover, stale bread.

Also, summer in Italy is synonymous with the sea, which means fish and crustaceans are in good demand. *Spaghetti alle Vongole* (spaghetti with clams) is a summer classic and best enjoyed on the beach. Here are a few Italian summer favourites to try out at home:

Insalata di Riso (Rice salad)

Ingredients

- 3 cups water, salt - to taste
- 1 ½ cups long-grain rice
- 1 large carrot - diced
- ½ cup frozen peas
- ½ cup cubed chicken luncheon meat (optional)
- ¾ cup diced Swiss cheese
- ½ cup diced button mushrooms – sauted
- ⅓ cup canned corn - drained
- ⅓ cup sliced green olives
- ⅓ cup sliced black olives
- ⅓ cup diced pickle vegetables

- ⅓ cup sliced marinated artichoke hearts - drained
- 1 ½tbsp extra-virgin olive oil
- 1tsp thyme
- 1tsp oregano
- 1 can (100g) tuna - drained
- 4 hard-boiled eggs – quartered (optional)

Method

Combine water, rice, carrot, peas, and salt in a saucepan, bring to a boil, reduce heat, and simmer until rice is tender but

still firm. Drain excess water and let it cool completely. Then, mix the Swiss cheese, button mushrooms, corn, green olives, black olives, pickle, artichoke hearts, olive oil, thyme, and oregano together in a large bowl. Stir in cooled rice and fold tuna into the salad.

Divide salad among 4 serving plates, garnish with hard-boiled eggs and cubed chicken luncheon meat. Chill before serving, for at least 30 minutes.



Caponata (Eggplant stir fry)

Ingredients

- ¼ cup olive oil
- 1 cup chopped celery
- 1 medium onion - chopped
- 3 cloves garlic, minced
- 1 medium eggplant - diced
- 1 can (400g) whole tomatoes - partially drained
- ¼ cup sliced pitted olives - green or black
- ¼ cup red vinegar
- 2tbsp tomato paste

- 2tbsp capers - chopped
- 2tbsp fresh basil - chopped
- A pinch of sugar
- Salt, to taste
- Black pepper, to taste

Method

Preheat a large skillet or cast iron pan over high heat. Drizzle in the oil and immediately add the celery, onion, and garlic. Then add the eggplant. Sauté for about 3

minutes, or until lightly browned. Reduce the heat to medium, and stir in the tomatoes, olives, vinegar, tomato paste, capers, basil, and sugar. Cover and simmer for 15 to 20 minutes, stirring occasionally, until the eggplant is very tender. Season to taste with salt and black pepper.

Serve at room temperature, garnished with chopped basil, and with slices of baguette.

Panzanella (Bread salad)

Ingredients

- 6 cups homemade croutons
- 3 cups cherry tomatoes - halved
- 1 cucumber - chopped
- 1 yellow/red bell pepper - chopped
- ½ small red onion - sliced
- 2tbsp chopped basil
- Kosher salt and black pepper, to taste
- 2-3tbsp balsamic vinaigrette – for dressing

Method

First, make the homemade



croutons. You may use old bread but make sure you only bake the croutons for 10 to 12

minutes - you want the bread to be dried out and crispy, but not completely toasted. Also use some seasoning on the croutons, like olive oil and chilli flakes or garlic powder.

In a large bowl, combine the croutons, tomatoes, cucumber, bell pepper, red onion, basil, salt, and black pepper. Drizzle the balsamic vinaigrette over the salad and toss well until the salad is completely coated. For best results, let the salad sit for 20 to 30 minutes before serving.

Spaghetti alle Vongole (Spaghetti and clams)

Ingredients

- 300g spaghetti
- 500g fresh or frozen clams
- ¼ cup white grape juice
- 3tbsp olive oil
- 3 cloves garlic - finely sliced
- ½ cup diced parsley
- ½tsp chilli flakes
- 1tbsp fish sauce, salt to taste

Method

Bring a pot of water to a rolling boil, salt the water and cook spaghetti according to instructions. Preheat pan over medium heat and add oil and garlic. Once oil starts to bubble, add chilli flakes and toast the garlic and chilli for 1-2 minutes. Add the clams into the pan and cook for 6-7 minutes with the lid on. When there is 1 minute left before the clams finish cooking, add the grape juice and take off the lid. Add some fish sauce, too.

Once spaghetti is cooked, drag directly into the pan with some of the starchy pasta water. Add parsley and mix well. Season with salt and serve with a garnish of fresh parsley, chilli flakes. (Note: Keep the shells of the clams on.)



NADAL, DJOKOVIC EYE HISTORY



Rafael Nadal of Spain

2021 FRENCH OPEN

Paris, France - Rafael Nadal and Novak Djokovic will set their sights on more Grand Slam history at Roland Garros as the French Open embraces a new and eerily empty era of night time tennis.

The French Open begins on May 30 with the qualifiers underway from Monday.

A 14th title in Paris for Nadal would take him to a record-setting 21st major, surpassing the mark he shares with Roger Federer who has already written off his hopes of adding to his lone success in the French capital back in 2009.

Djokovic, the champion in 2016, can move to 19 Grand Slam titles with victory.

That would make the world No 1 the first man in over half a century to win all four majors on multiple occasions.

Nadal arrives in Paris buoyed by having defeated Djokovic in the Rome Masters final in what was the pair's 57th meeting.

It was Nadal's tenth title in the Italian capital. Not that he was reading too much into the statistics as far as Roland Garros is concerned.

"I think I can work on a couple of things that I can do a little bit better," he insisted.

'Work right way'

"I just need to keep going. I know what I need to work on and I'm going to do it. Work, relax mentally, and work the right way."

At last year's delayed Roland Garros, Nadal swept past Djokovic in straight sets in the final.

It was Nadal's 100th win at the tournament against just two losses since his 2005 title-winning debut.

Giving Djokovic hope,

however, is the knowledge that he was responsible for one of those losses, in the 2015 quarterfinals. He is also a four-time runner-up although three of those defeats in the championship match came against the Spaniard.

Only two men have previously managed to win all four of the Slams on more than one occasion - Roy Emerson and Rod Laver of Australia.

Laver's achievement came back in 1969.

"I think I have a good chance to go all the way in Paris, but of course it's a long shot," said Djokovic who captured the season's first Grand Slam title in Australia for a ninth time in February.

Federer, with his 40th birthday fast approaching, remains the sentimental favourite but his priority will be an assault on

Wimbledon where he has been champion eight times.

Chasing pack

"I'm not so sure in the last 50 years of the French Open, somebody just rocks up at nearly 40 years old, being out for a year and a half, and wins everything straight," said Federer after losing his only clay court match this year in Geneva last week.

Of the chasing pack, two-time runner-up Dominic Thiem is low on form and confidence. A run to the Madrid semifinals was followed by a defeat to Cameron Norrie in his Lyon opener.

World No 2 Daniil Medvedev has yet to win a match at Roland Garros in four attempts.

In Rome, he fell at the first hurdle and half-jokingly pleaded with the referee to disqualify him such is his dislike for clay.

World No 5 Stefanos Tsitsipas is the most likely man to upset the odds of Nadal and Djokovic again making the final.

The 22 year old Greek won the prestigious Monte Carlo clay court title in April, had match point before losing the Barcelona final to Nadal and then lifted the Lyon trophy. He has beaten Nadal on clay in Madrid in 2019 and stretched Djokovic to five sets at the 2020 French Open semifinals.

This year's Roland Garros will be the second taking place under the shadow of the coronavirus.

Just over 5,000 fans a day will be allowed on site until June 9 when that figure rises to 13,000.

For the first time this year, there will be nine evening sessions at the tournament.

However, a COVID-19 curfew from 9pm means that eight of those sessions will be played out inside an empty Court Philippe Chatrier.

AFP



Novak Djokovic of Serbia



RECENT MEN'S CHAMPIONS

2020:	Rafael Nadal (Spain)
2019:	Rafael Nadal
2018:	Rafael Nadal
2017:	Rafael Nadal
2016:	Novak Djokovic (Serbia)
2015:	Stan Wawrinka (Switzerland)
2014:	Rafael Nadal
2013:	Rafael Nadal
2012:	Rafael Nadal
2011:	Rafael Nadal

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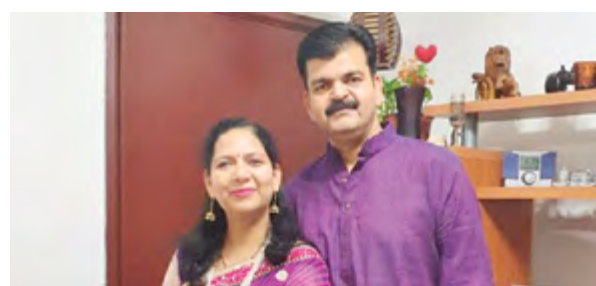
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WEDDING ANNIVERSARY



MADHVI & SANJAY
May 26

It takes only a moment to fall in love but a lifetime to prove that it was truly meant to be forever. Happy silver anniversary Madhvi and Sanjay

BIRTHDAY WISHES



VISHAL MALPANI
May 26

Wishing you a joyous birthday my dear friend Vishal. May your life always be filled with love, happiness and revolutionary success. Lots of love Harish and Deepa.

EDUCATION FURNITURE

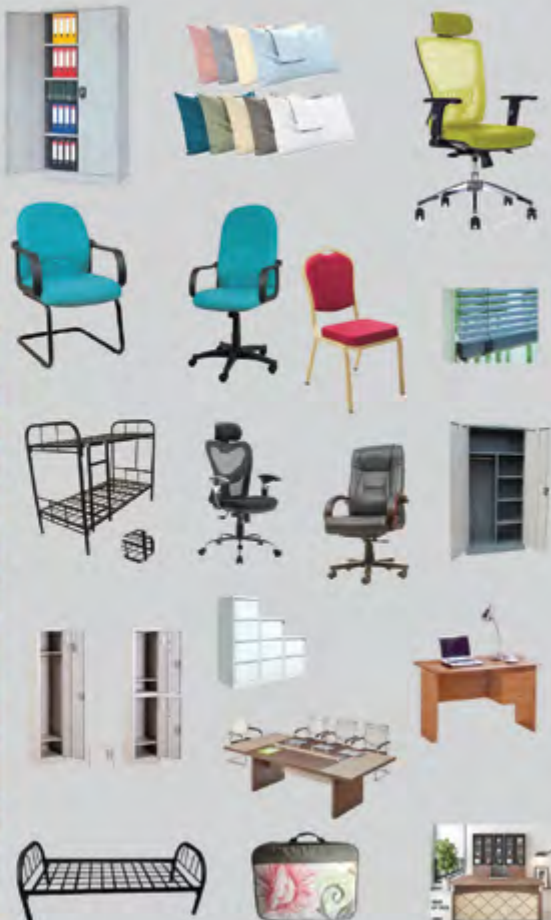


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Bangladesh post maiden series win over Sri Lanka

BANGLADESH VS SRI LANKA
SECOND ODI

Dhaka, Bangladesh - On their way to the top of the ICC's World Cup Super League points table, Bangladesh struck off Sri Lanka from their list of teams against whom they haven't won an ODI series on Tuesday.

Only Australia and England remain in this list. Mushfiqur Rahim's masterly 125 got them to 246 runs on a two-paced pitch, before the bowlers packed up the visitors to 141 for nine in a truncated 40 overs second innings to win by 103 runs, courtesy the DLS method.

Mehidy Hasan Miraz and Mustafizur Rahman took three wickets each while Shakib al Hasan's two wickets got him level on wickets with Mashrafe Mortaza's 269, at the summit of Bangladesh's ODI wicket-takers' chart. His 122 wickets in Mirpur are the joint-most wickets at a single venue, alongside Wasim Akram's 122 wickets in Sharjah.

But Bangladesh's win was set up by Rahim. He was the glue that kept Bangladesh's batting together after they lost Tamim Iqbal and Shakib in the second over. The match got off to a frenetic start when Isuru Udana conceded 14 runs off the first two legal deliveries of the match. But after he went for 15 in the first over, Dushmantha Chameera removed both Iqbal and Shakib in the following over to set the game up for the visitors.

Rahim found little support



Bangladesh's Mushfiqur Rahim plays a shot during the second ODI against Sri Lanka in Dhaka on Tuesday (AFP)

from Liton Das. Mosaddek Hossain, who was making an ODI comeback after two years, was also under considerable pressure, but couldn't impress.

Mahmudullah added 87 runs for the fifth wicket with Rahim after they slipped to 74 for four in the 16th over. The recovery was akin to their 109-run fifth wicket stand, from a similar position, in the first game.

The pair focused on milking runs in singles and twos, Rahim hitting just one four between the 19th and 38th over.

Mahmudullah, after striking two sixes and a four in his 41 off 58 balls, fell to a smart catch

down the leg-side by Kusal Perera. Meanwhile, Rahim struck eight of his ten fours in the last 10 overs, scoring 47 out of the 58 runs as there was little support after Mahmudullah's dismissal.

Bangladesh needed early wickets while defending 246 runs, and it came from debutant Shoriful Islam who removed Kusal Perera in the sixth over, with Iqbal timing his jump perfectly at mid-on to get rid of his opposite number. The other Sri Lankan opener, Danushka Gunathilaka, holed out to deep point off Rahman, having made the innings' top score of 24.

Bangladesh's spinners took

over from this point. Shakib had Pathum Nissanka caught at mid-wicket by Iqbal. Miraz had Kusal Mendis lbw, playing back to a fullish delivery. Dhananjaya de Silva suffered the same fate against Shakib shortly afterwards as Sri Lanka were tottering on 89 for five.

Miraz added Dasun Shanaka and Wanindu Hasaranga to his tally, finishing with three wickets, before Rahman added two more to his kitty - Ashen Bandara and Lakshan Sandakan - both caught trying to hit down the ground.

Sri Lanka only had their bowling to be cheerful about. Chameera and Sandakan took

SCOREBOARD		
BANGLADESH		
T Iqbal	lbw b Chameera	13
L Das	c Hasaranga	
	b Sandakan	25
Shakib al Hasan	lbw b Chameera	0
M Rahim	c Bandara b Chameera	125
M Hossain	c Perera b Sandakan	10
Mahmudullah	c Perera b Sandakan	41
A Hossain	c Nissanka b Udana	10
M H Miraz	b Hasaranga	0
M Saifuddin	run out	11
S Islam	c Perera b Udana	0
M Rahman	not out	0
Extras:	(b 1, lb 4, nb 3, w 3)	11
TOTAL:	246 in 48.1 overs	
Fall of wickets: 1-15, 2-15, 3-49, 4-74, 5-161, 6-178, 7-184, 8-232, 9-246, 10-246		
Bowling: I Udana 9-0-49-2, D Chameera 9.1-2-44-3, W Hasaranga 10-1-33-1, D Shanaka 7-0-38-0, L Sandakan 10-0-54-3, D de Silva 3-0-23-0		
SRI LANKA (TARGET 245 IN 40 OVERS)		
D Gunathilaka	c Shakib b Rahman	24
K Perera	c Iqbal b Islam	14
P Nissanka	c Iqbal b Shakib al Hasan	20
K Mendis	lbw b Miraz	15
D de Silva	lbw b Shakib al Hasan	10
A Bandara	c Mahmudullah	
	b Rahman	15
D Shanaka	c Mahmudullah	
	b Miraz	11
W Hasaranga	b Miraz	6
I Udana	not out	18
L Sandakan	c Iqbal b Rahman	4
D Chameera	not out	4
Extras:	0	
TOTAL:	141 for nine in 40 overs	
Fall of wickets: 1-24, 2-53, 3-71, 4-77, 5-89, 6-104, 7-114, 8-116, 9-122		
Bowling: M H Miraz 10-0-28-3, S Islam 6-0-30-1, T Ahmed 8-0-27-0, M Rahman 6-1-16-3, Shakib al Hasan 9-0-38-2, M Hossain 1-0-2-0		



Abdulaziz Miqbali celebrates after scoring against Thailand on Tuesday

Miqbali scores winner for Oman against Thailand

Ashok Purohit
Muscat

INTERNATIONAL FRIENDLY

Oman recorded a narrow 1-0 win over Thailand in an international football friendly, played at The Sevens Stadium in Dubai, UAE, on Tuesday.

The all-important goal was scored by striker Abdulaziz al Miqbali in the 41st minute of the match.

Oman, under Croatian coach Branko Ivankovic, are holding a camp in the UAE to prepare for next month's joint FIFA 2022 World Cup and 2023 Asian Cup joint qualifiers in Qatar in June.

As part of the team's preparations, Oman will play another friendly match on May 29 against Indonesia before concluding their camp and flying to Qatar for the final camp between June 1-5 before the

Group E qualifiers start in Doha on June 7.

Oman are second in the group with 12 points behind World Cup hosts Qatar, who have 16. The other teams in the group are India, Bangladesh and Afghanistan.

Oman take on Afghanistan on June 11 before concluding their second round campaign with a match against Bangladesh on June 15.

The four best runners-up across all eight groups will advance to the third round of the World Cup qualifiers. The remaining four runners-up will advance to the Asian Cup qualifying third round.

Prior to ongoing camp, Ivankovic had also held the previous camp from April 17-May 5 in Dubai before the players left for the Eid break.

@ashokmuscat



The BCCI has told IPL franchises it needs a 25-day window to conduct the 31 remaining matches

BCCI mulls September-October window for remainder of IPL

Mumbai, India - The BCCI is honing in on the possibility of conducting the second half of IPL 2021 in the UAE in a window between September 18-October 12.

For that to happen, however, it would require a rejigging of various boards' calendars, not least the Caribbean Premier League (CPL) which is scheduled to start on August 28.

If the BCCI does push ahead with these dates it would mean that the IPL ends only around a week before the mooted start of the ICC's T20 World Cup, which may also be held in the UAE.

The BCCI has informally communicated these plans to IPL franchises, telling them it needs a 25-day window to conduct the 31 remaining matches. This year's IPL was indefinitely suspended on May 4, after a number of players and staff tested positive for COVID-19 in the midst of the second wave of the pandemic in India.

The window remains a fluid prospect and is subject to the BCCI being able to convince various other member boards to tweak their schedules, which would allow maximum player availability.

Not least among them would

be the CPL, which is scheduled to run between August 28-September 19.

West Indian players are a significant part of the IPL and the clash of dates has forced the BCCI to open discussions with the CPL, asking whether it can tweak its itinerary to allow enough time for players to travel to the UAE for the IPL.

That might not be easy, given West Indies' packed home international season, which ends with the last Test against Pakistan, which is scheduled to take place from August 20-24.

The BCCI also opened up informal dialogue with the England and Wales Cricket Board (ECB) last week to explore the feasibility of tweaking the schedule of the five-Test series between England and India, which will be played between August 4-September 14.

An earlier end to that series could allow enough of a window for the IPL. That is an equally difficult request to consider, given the ECB's own packed schedule this summer, including the launch of The Hundred.

England's players are also due to travel to Bangladesh and Pakistan immediately after the

home summer for two white-ball series, with the ECB having already indicated that their players are unlikely to be part of a rescheduled IPL.

On the FTP (Future Tours Programme), South Africa are also scheduled to tour India for three ODIs and three T20Is in October before the T20 World Cup.

With India still firmly in the grip of the second wave of the pandemic, the BCCI has concluded that the IPL will need to be shifted overseas and that the UAE is the best option, especially since it also remains the ICC's back-up venue for the T20 World Cup. There could be an impact on the global event should the BCCI succeed in scheduling the IPL around those dates.

The T20 World Cup is expected to start around October 16, but would need teams to start arriving a few weeks before that date - wherever the event is ultimately staged. If both the IPL and T20 World Cup do go ahead in the same country - most likely the UAE - the ICC would need a window between the end of the IPL and the start of its tournament for preparation.

Cricinfo

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Atulya Sharma
CEO, UMS

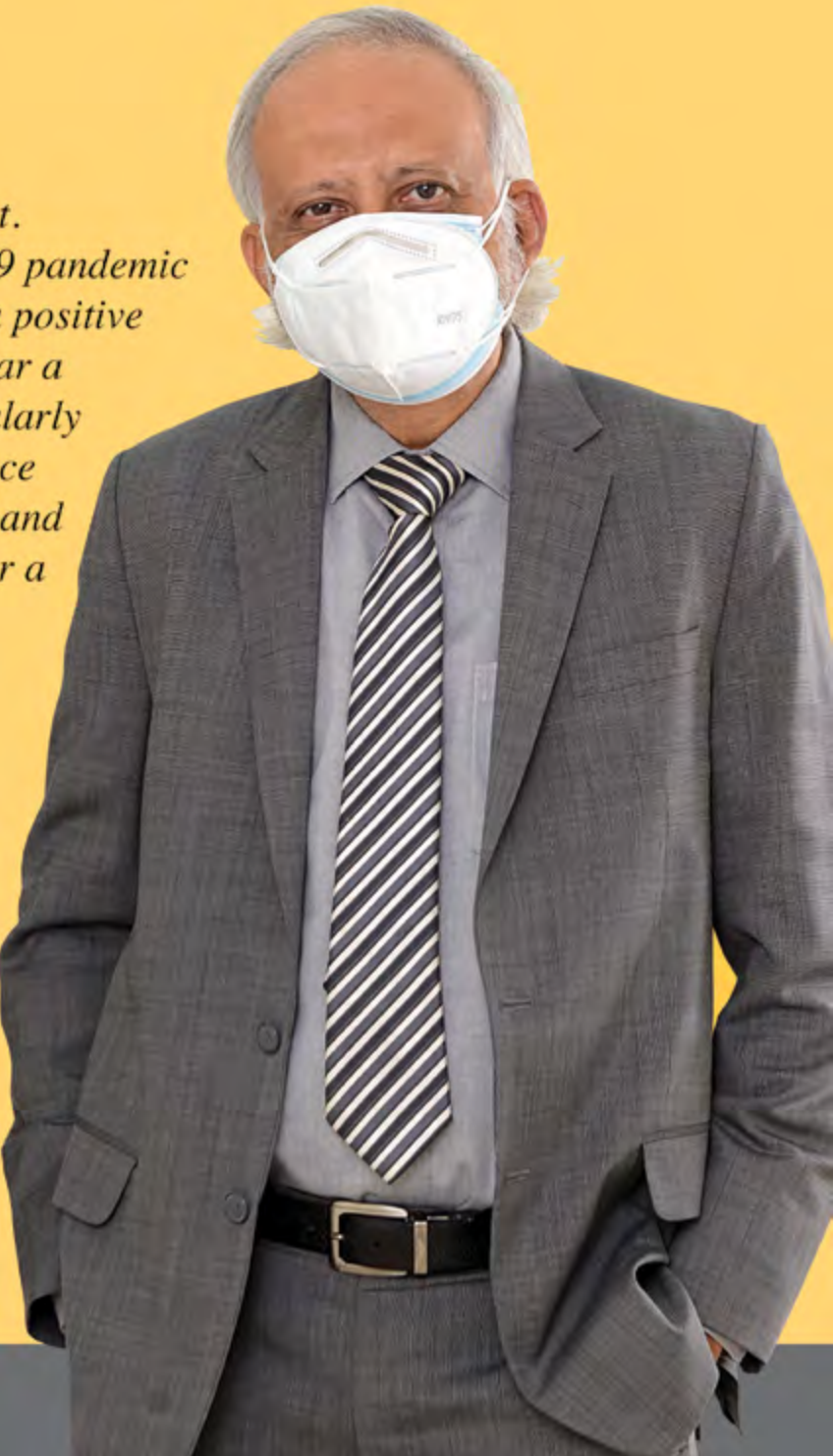
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Oman Racing Team's Abdullah al Rawahi drives during a practice round ahead of the 2021 Jordan Rally, the second round of the FIA Middle East Rally Championship, in Jordan recently

- Veteran Hamed al Wahaibi and talented Abdullah Rawahi to spearhead Oman's challenge
- Oman Rally Team (ORT) to compete with two cars in the Jordan Rally, starting on Friday

Ashok Purohit
Muscat

2021 FIA MERC: ROUND TWO

He wasn't even born when Oman's Hamed al Wahaibi was taking the regional rallying circuit by storm in late nineties. And come this Friday, Abdullah al Rawahi, now, 24, will join Wahaibi, 53, as they constitute a two-car Oman Rally Team (ORT) to spearhead the sultanate's challenge at the Jordan Rally, the second round of the 2021 FIA Middle East Rally Championship (MERC).

The two drivers demonstrate a perfect blend of experience and youth and will be among the 13 teams from eight nations at the two-day rally, which begins on Friday.

For Wahaibi, it will mark a return to international rallying after a long gap of nine years.

But the veteran campaigner, along with his woman co-driver Ilka Minor of Austria, have been preparing diligently for the rally, even travelling early to Jordan to train for the past few weeks.

Rawahi will team up with his trusted navigator, Ata al Hmoud of Jordan, as the two ORT teams tackle the demanding gravel special stages in the Dead Sea and Mount Nebo areas of Jordan on Friday and Saturday.

Wahaibi used to be a household name in Oman in nineties and was considered to be one of the fastest drivers in the Middle East during his heydays in the late 1990s. He had won numerous special



Abdullah al Rawahi (R) is all ears to Hamed al Wahaibi in Jordan

stages and competed in more than 35 rallies including the FIA World Rally Championship (WRC).

However, his last competition was the regional rally - 2011 Dubai International Rally - in a Mitsubishi Lancer Evolution X, when he finished fourth.

Wahaibi did compete in two events in Oman in 2012 in his WMS-built Toyota Yaris as part of a youth development programme with Ulster navigator Allan Harryman and ran a Mitsubishi on three national rallies in Oman, winning all three.

Prior to his departure to Jordan, Wahaibi has been testing on gravel stages in Oman to regain the pace and rhythm he showed for many years.

The 46 year old Ilka is one of the top female rally co-drivers in the world and has guided an impressive list of drivers, including Henning Solberg, Manfred Stohl and Evgeny Novikov. This year she has already finished 26th and 21st overall in the Monte-Carlo and Croatian rallies with Johannes Keferböck.

Wahaibi will drive a Motortune-run Škoda Fabia 1.6 with logistical support from Asyad Express, Wahaibi Motor Sports (WMS), Sandan Oman and Pirelli.

Ahead of the Jordan Rally,

Wahaibi said, "At this stage, I am not here to win against Nasser (Saleh al Attiyah). He's in a car every week and has been there for so long. He knows the stages so well. I am here aiming to gain as much experience as possible. My year is next year. That's the plan.

"I've come out of retirement with a different mind-set. Now I am really enjoying the time in the car. It feels great to be back behind the wheel. I realise I have been out of touch for the last nine years and it will take some time for me to get back in the groove. I am proud to represent Oman on my return."

Wahaibi first competed in a WRC event in the UK in 1997 and



Hamed al Wahaibi drives his Skoda Fabia 1.6 during a practice round in Jordan recently

I've come out of retirement with a different mind-set. Now I am really enjoying the time in the car. It feels great to be back behind the wheel

HAMED AL WAHAIBI

finished as the runner-up in the 1999 Production WRC behind Gustavo Trelles of Uruguay. He last competed in the WRC in Japan in 2005.

He has yet to win a round of the MERC, but came close to winning the Jordan Rally in 2004, before a engine failure handed the win to local driver Amjad Farrah on the final super special

stage. Wahaibi's best finishes to date in the MERC were as runner-up in Oman in 1998 and third overall in Abu Dhabi, Jordan and Dubai in 1997.

With Hamed around it has helped: Rawahi

Wahaibi's ORT teammate, Rawahi, is one of the most improved drivers in regional rallying and can call upon the experience of local navigator Ata al-Hmoud, himself a winner of the inaugural Jordan Baja on a motorcycle.

Last season's championship runner-up behind Attiyah, the talented Rawahi graduated from a Subaru Impreza in the MERC2 category to driving an M-Sport-built Ford Fiesta R5 prepared by Motortune.

During the pandemic-hit season last year, he finished second and tenth on rounds of the MERC in Oman and Cyprus and reverted to the Subaru to win the opening round of the Jordan National Championship.

A broken steering arm and exhaust sensor issues halted his challenge for honours at the opening round of the 2021 series in Qatar at the end of January. But Rawahi carried out over 150km of testing in Oman before his home event was postponed until December because of the ongoing COVID-19 crisis.

"I want to continue learning and getting ready for 2022," said Rawahi. "I also want to compete in some European rallies to further my experience. I am optimistic for a good Jordan Rally and have increased my physical training in preparation for the longer stages. Having Hamed [al Wahaibi] around me is a plus point and I feel more confident. His support has definitely helped me a lot."

Rawahi's rallying programme is supported by Sohar International, Al Manar Financial Investments, Khimji Ramdas Group, WMS and Motul.

This year's Jordan Rally features ten gravel stages in the Dead Sea and Mount Nebo areas, which hosted the FIA WRC in 2008, 2010 and 2011.

There are two passes through the Syagha, new Adasiyah and Baptism Site specials on Friday and runs through the daunting and longer Jordan River and Joufeh stages on Saturday.

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Hamed al Wahaibi (R) and co-driver Ilka Minor of Austria



Every day, all day!

