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ISSN 2075-1575



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INFLATION RATE RISES TO 1.6%
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NEWS BRIEFS

MADAYN'S GAS ASSETS TO BE TRANSFERRED TO OQ GAS

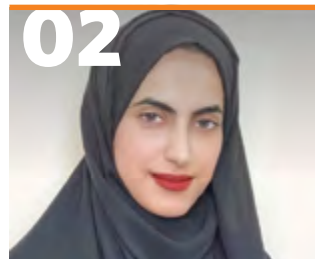
Muscat - OQ Gas Networks and the Public Establishment for Industrial Estates (Madayn) signed an agreement on Monday to transfer Madayn's gas assets to the former.

The agreement was signed by Hilal Hamad al Hasani, CEO of Madayn, and Mansoor Ali al Abdali, OQ's vice chairman for gas networks.

The agreement provides for the transfer of ownership and operations of Madayn's gas distribution networks to OQ Gas Networks.

The agreement comes within the context of Oman Vision 2040 aimed at unifying national efforts and in-country assets.

02



Paper on EOR wins Omani researcher MENASA award

10



India inoculates 7.5mn in a day; free jobs for all adults

Low-income workers desperate for vaccines, rue the high cost

Our Correspondent
Muscat

As the news of free vaccines only for Omanis aged 45 and older settles in, there is disappointment and concern among low-wage earners over affordability of the jabs available for RO22 at private hospitals. While vaccinating the entire population at the earliest is an urgent necessity to prevent the spread of COVID-19, the delay for some due to financial shortfalls will only result in a delay in return to normalcy.

Robiullah Islam's numbers aren't adding up to include two doses of vaccine in his salary of RO110. "I have to manage my expenses here as well as support my large family back home. For me even RO10 matters a lot," said the restaurant delivery boy from Bangladesh.



(Image for illustrative purpose)

Islam's restaurant was closed for some months owing to the pandemic when he was without salary, compelling him to exhaust his savings. "I can't get vaccinated. I can't afford it."

Barber Sami N (name changed on request) is in a similar situation. The number of customers in

his shop has drastically reduced, owing to the fact that most were expatriates who left the country for good. "Of the remaining, many are wary of coming to saloons for fear of getting infected."

He sees two-three customers a day, maybe five on Fridays. "In this situation, how can I spend on

Oman sees a new high in COVID-19 cases

Muscat - Daily case count hit a record high on Monday with 2,529 new infections reported. The daily count had dropped in the beginning of the year but has peaked this month with an average of over 1,500 every day. The number of deaths has also risen to 2,741 after 31 were reported on Monday.

The earlier highest - 2,164 cases - was recorded on July 13, 2020, while in 2021, the highest -

2,142 cases - was reported on June 16.

According to the Ministry of Health, the total number of COVID-19 cases registered in Oman is 250,572, while the total number of related deaths is 2,741.

One hundred and eighty-eight people were hospitalised in a 24-hour period on Monday, accounting for a total of 1,448 inpatients, including 428 in intensive care.



a huge task needs funds. We request corporate houses to come together to help."

A senior member of the Bangladesh Social Club suggested a reduction in vaccine price. "If it's say RO10, it will be better for all."

A senior member of the Pak-

istan Social Club informed that it is in talks with relevant authorities and awaiting instructions from the Ministry of Social Development. "We understand the problem for the blue-collar workers. As soon as we get instructions from the ministry, we will start vaccinating them," he said.

102 Omani pilots to bolster local aviation industry

Muscat - Oman Air continues its commitment to train the next generation of Omani cadets with the aim to increase the number of Omani pilots in the airline and contribute to the sultanate's Vision 2040 nationalisation objectives. With 102 Omani cadets currently enrolled in the Airline Transport Pilot Licence (ATPL) programme, the airline is enthusiastically reshaping the profession of pilots for Omani nationals in anticipation of a robust restart to aviation and post-pandemic

travel.

The ATPL programme was launched in 2018 with cadets undergoing training at Oman Aviation Academy in Sohar in partnership with CAE Oxford, and is approved by Oman's Civil Aviation Authority and the European Aviation Safety Agency. Additional training takes place at Oman Air's state-of-the-art Flight Training Centre at its headquarters in Muscat.

With COVID-19 restrictions limiting access to Oman Aviation



(Supplied photo)

Academy, this year's cohort of 102 cadets, which includes five female cadets, is completing

courses at various CAE training sites around the world.

"Oman Air remains commit-

Among 432 pilots in Oman Air, 413 are nationals, highlighting the importance of the airline places on developing Omani talent

ted to Oman's economic diversification and Omanisation objectives by training the next generation of Omani flight instructors and airline pilots," said Capt Moosa al Shidhani, senior vice president of flight operations at Oman Air. "The number of Omani cadets enrolled in this year's ATPL programme reflects positively on the airline's efforts to prioritise Omanis in the workforce. Today, among 432 pilots in Oman Air, 413 are Omani nationals, highlighting the importance of the airline places on developing Omani talent and contributing to in-country value."



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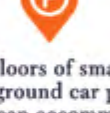
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Paper on EOR wins Omani researcher MENASA award

Our Correspondent
Muscat

A Sultan Qaboos University (SQU) researcher has won the first place in the Middle East, North Africa and South Asia (MENASA) region for her paper on increasing oil recovery and reducing capital expenditure in oil production by changing the salinity of water injected into petroleum reservoirs.

Intisar bint Khalifa al Busaidi, who is pursuing a PhD programme in petroleum engineering in SQU's College of Engineering, presented her paper at the Society of Petroleum Engineers' 2021 Student Paper Contest for MENA and South Asia regions combined and was declared the winner on June 10.

Currently specialising in EOR (enhanced oil recovery), Intisar has a Master's degree also from SQU in petroleum and natural gas engineering and a Bachelor's in Applied Chemistry.

Speaking to *Muscat Daily*, Intisar said she submitted her application in March to take part in the virtual Student Paper Contest in the category for PhD students.

"The other contestants were from some of the renowned pe-



The research can increase oil recovery and reduce capital expenditure of oil production by changing water chemistry and understanding the mechanism of low salinity polymer flooding

INTISAR BINT KHALIFA AL BUSAIDI



roleum engineering universities in India, Saudi Arabia and the UAE among others," said Intisar.

"On June 10, I presented my research paper on a study of the effects of adding polymers to low-salinity water to increase oil productivity from sedimentary rocks and achieved first place in

the competition. Six oil and gas industry experts from various companies and academic institutions from MENA judged the competition," she said.

Talking about the idea behind the research, she said that it developed after several meetings with industry experts. "The ex-

perimental work started in January 2020. My research project focuses on investigating low salinity polymer flooding in sandstone for different aspects. The paper talks about an experimental investigation of the impact of polymers on electrokinetic properties of crude oil/brine/rock in-

terfaces in the presence of divalent cations.

"The research can increase oil recovery and reduce capital expenditure of oil production by changing water chemistry and understanding the mechanism of low salinity polymer flooding."

Waterflooding has been used for many decades as a way of recovering oil from petroleum reservoirs. Historically, the salinity of the injection water was not regarded as a key variable in determining the amount of oil recovered. In recent years, however, evidence of increased oil recovery by injection of low salinity water has been observed in laboratories and fields.

The technique is getting wider attention in the oil industry because it is more cost-effective than other EOR techniques.

Intisar said that her main challenge was dealing with real crude oil and reservoir samples rather than model samples as these need special conditions and treatment. "But SQU has modern and high accuracy instrumentation and materials which helped me conduct this research." Petroleum Development Oman provided samples from different oil fields, too.



Oman, Malta hold political talks session

Muscat - H E Sayyid Badr Hamad al Busaidi, Foreign Minister, held a session of political talks with Evarist Bartolo, Minister for Foreign and European Affairs of the Republic of Malta on Monday.

The session reviewed bilateral cooperation in economic, scientific and cultural areas and ways of promoting these.

The two sides also exchanged views on several regional and international issues of common interest. They touched on the international response in battling COVID-19 pandemic and its new mutations, as well as the international cooperation in providing vaccines which are pivotal in recovering from the pandemic and its health, social and economic impacts.

Bartolo, who is on a three-day visit to Oman, met with Abdulsalam Mohammed al Murshidi, chairman of Oman Investment Authority on Sunday. During the meeting, the two sides reviewed ways of boosting cooperation in investment fields and benefiting from available opportunities in the two countries.

The Maltese minister also met Eng Ridha Juma al Saleh, chairman of Oman Chamber of Commerce and Industry, on Sunday. The two sides underscored the importance of enhancing trade exchange between the two countries, as well as benefiting from the incentives the sultanate provides for investors.

Omran announces soft opening of Alila Hinu Bay

Our Correspondent
Muscat

Dhofar has got a new luxury five-star resort located 87km from Salalah International Airport in Mirbat. The soft opening of Alila Hinu Bay was announced by Omran Group, the owner of the property, on Sunday evening.

"We are pleased to announce the soft opening of Alila Hinu Bay. The boutique, beachfront eco-resort rests on an endless bay and beach with stunning views of the Arabian Sea just off the southwest coast of Mirbat," stated Omran.

Alila Hinu Bay's opening marks the operational launch of Omran's second property under the Alila brand in Oman, the other being Alila Jabal Akhdar.

Stretching over 45 hectares of ecologically attractive beachfront site in Mirbat, Alila Hinu Bay includes 112 hotel rooms and suites, including 16 pool villas.

Hashil Obaid al Mahrouqi, CEO of Omran, said, "The soft opening of Alila Hinu is an important step that reaffirms Omran Group's role in driving growth through investment in sustainable developments across the sultanate. This also highlights the aligned efforts between Omran in partnership with Oman Investment Authority towards economic diversification, as well as our collaborative efforts with the Ministry of Heritage and



Tourism in line with the National Tourism Strategy 2040.

"Alila Hinu is a remarkable tourist addition to Dhofar governorate, and we are confident that this resort will bring unparalleled experiences, enticing local visitors and global travellers to discover Oman from another perspective."

Martin Persson, general manager of Alila Hinu Bay, said, "We are delighted to showcase the 'Alila Experience' in such a spectacular location. Alila Hinu proudly settles in Mirbat, benefiting from its rich culture, humble villages and beautiful landscape. To support this incredible nature, we are even more pleased to name this as an

eco-luxury resort."

Offering the best of both worlds, the resort flourishes in both marine life and nature reserves. Located between Jebel Samhan and the Arabian Sea, Alila Hinu is a nature lovers' paradise, boasting the richest historical and cultural settings in the coastal town of Mirbat.

Apart from 112 stylish rooms, the resort includes various tourist facilities that contribute to enriching the visitors' experiences, such as high-end villas equipped with all services, in addition to a range of recreational facilities to ensure a unique experience for guests, as well as restaurants, swimming pools and facilities for children.

Over 51,000 expats register to leave Oman under government amnesty

Our Correspondent
Muscat

More than 51,000 expatriates have so far decided to take advantage of the exit scheme announced by the Ministry of Labour (MoL).

Speaking to *Muscat Daily*, an official at MoL said, "The ministry has received 51,187 applications from expatriates who wish to leave the country for good without paying any fines or fees, since the beginning of online registration on November 26, 2020."

He explained that out of the 51,187 applications, 48,657 are related to work visa, 1,038 visit visas, 749 infiltrators, 737 visas to join relatives, 302 family visas, 91 tourist visas, nine express visas and four study visas.

The special amnesty pro-



gramme announced by the government for expatriates has been extended until August 31.

The scheme first announced on November 15 last year was to end on December 31. It was ex-

tended to March 31 this year and further extended to June 30 later, the ministry official said.

Housing Bank sanctions RO29mn loans

Muscat - Oman Housing Bank said that 673 loans having a total value of about RO29.2mn were subsidised by the government in the first five months of 2021.

In a statement to ONA, Adnan Haider Darwish, CEO of Oman Housing Bank, said that



the bank will accelerate the pace of approval of subsidised housing loans over the next few months, despite the situation with the current COVID-19 pandemic.

"This reflects the bank's commitment to developing the housing sector in the sultanate

in line with preset plans," said Darwish.

The bank's management focuses on realising the visions of the government, led by His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tariq, aimed at providing decent housing for Omani citizens, Darwish explained.



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Three youth set up heritage coffee shop

Rogan Café is a popular destination in Misfat al Abriyeen developed by the Ministry of Heritage and Tourism

Our Correspondent
Muscat

In a bid to boost tourism, three Omani youth have set up a coffee shop in the picturesque heritage setting of Misfat al Abriyeen in the wilayat of Hamra in Dakhliyah governorate.

Called Rogan Café, the recently opened shop has become a popular destination amongst visitors to the area.

Speaking to *Muscat Daily*, Ahmed bin Suleiman al Abri, a partner of the café, said, "We set up the café in November 2020. It was not an easy venture. We faced certain challenges as the mountain is located on high altitude in the village of Misfat al Abriyeen."

Talking about the unique name he said, "Rogan is the name of a fort built before the advent of Islam by Persians. We wanted to retain this historic name with the café so that visitors to the Misfat al Abriyeen will remember the fort and its rich history."



Rogan is the name of a fort built before the advent of Islam by Persians. We wanted to retain this historic name so that visitors will remember the fort and its rich history

AHMED AL ABRI

The café overlooks the aflaj, old Omani houses and castles, and allows visitors to enjoy the picturesque Omani nature while having a sip of coffee.

"We offer all kinds of hot



drinks including coffee, tea, nescafe, and juices from 9am to 9pm."

The Ministry of Heritage and Tourism along with Al Misfat al Ahlia Co has developed the her-

itage village of Misfat al Abriyeen.

The main components of the development project included restoration of the main gate of Misfat al Abriyeen and preserv-

ing its original features.

"The village's iconic mud houses were also restored, and a bakery and a restaurant serving authentic Omani cuisine for tourists were set up," Abri said.



(Supplied photos)

While domestic visitors continue to come to the café, the café owner lamented that due to the coronavirus pandemic, "there are no international visitors at present".

"We are planning to include some light snacks to the menu. We also have plans to open more outlets by the same name at different heritage sites of the sultanate," he said.

Over 14,000 artificial coral reefs boost fisheries stocks

Our Correspondent
Muscat

In a move to increase fish production and support fishermen, the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Water Resources (MAFWR) developed 14,022 artificial coral reef units in 154 sites between 2003 and 2020.

According to the ministry, development of these projects aims to increase fish stock in the sultanate, provide an environment conducive for fishing and, consequently, increase the income of fishermen.

An official at the MAFWR said, "North Batinah governorate has the largest number of coral reef units with 7,992 distributed across 89 sites, followed by Muscat with 2,661 units in 27 sites, South Batinah with 2,115 units in 22 sites, Musandam with 1,194 units in 12 sites and South Sharqiyah with 50 units in three sites."

Talking about the goals of developing coral reefs, he said, "Building artificial coral reefs in the sultanate aims to increase the productivity of fisheries,



enhance biodiversity in the marine environment, support fishermen, and save effort and money. These projects also aim to create a suitable environment for carrying out scientific studies of industrial reefs and living organisms and developing other economic sectors by creating an attractive environment for diving and tourism."

Continuing with the programme, the MAFWR signed an agreement with the Korean firm

Haejoo in January 2021 to implement the second phase of an artificial coral reef project in the wilayat of Sur.

To be built at a cost of RO90,000 and funded by the Oman Indian Fertilizer Company, the project aims to design, manufacture and unload units of purpose-built artificial reef and follow up on the results of its installation in order to create an appropriate environment for fish and marine species to flourish.

Muscat Municipality issues guidelines for spas

Our Correspondent
Muscat

In a move to limit the spread of COVID-19, Muscat Municipality has issued guidelines for spas.

As preventive controls and measures in massage area, the municipality advises spas not to put oil in cups to be used for an-

other costumer. Masseuses should wear disposable uniforms and they should avoid hot stone and bamboo massages.

Regarding Jacuzzis, the municipality advises for prior appointments for customers.

"Clean and disinfect tubs with approved disinfectant before re-operating them, change the

water after each use and ensure the ventilation system works efficiently," it said.

For saunas too prior appointments, proper disinfecting and efficient work of ventilation systems are recommended.

The municipality stated that all health clubs and spas are bound by the prohibitions in Min-

isterial Decision 2019/219 on the Health Requirements for Activities Relating to Public Health, which prevents offering all kinds of cosmetic practices that penetrate the skin, keeping customers' personal items in the facility, Moroccan bath or equivalent, facial steaming or massaging, and all kinds of home services.

Majlis A'Shura to host higher education minister

Muscat - Majlis A'Shura will hold its 13th and 14th regular sessions next week for the second annual session (2020/21) of the ninth term of the Council (2019-2023).

The 13th session on June 29 will be a plenary session, while the 14th session the next day will be devoted to discussing the statement of the Ministry of Higher Education, Research and Innovation.

Sheikh Ahmed Mohammad al Nadabi, secretary general of the Shura Council, pointed out that the council will host on Wednesday, H E Dr Rahma

Ibrahim al Mahrouqi, Minister of Higher Education, Research and Innovation, to deliver the ministry's statement.

The statement will cover six themes about the policies of higher education, research and innovation, in addition to reviewing the ministry's strategies in light of Oman Vision 2040.

Nadabi said during the 13th regular session, the council will discuss a number of laws referred from the government that the council has completed studying in preparation for referring them to the State Council.

The Business Year to include special chapter on Oman Vision 2040 in its eighth edition

Muscat - The Business Year (TBY), a global media group that has been providing investors, businesses, and governments with first-hand insights into the world's most dynamic markets for over a decade, has signed a partnership agreement with the Oman Vision 2040 Implementation and Follow-Up Unit for the creation of a special chapter in TBY's eighth annual publication on the Omani economy.

The MoU was signed in Muscat between H E Talal al Rahbi, vice chairman of the unit, and TBY's country manager for Oman Andrea Tsiachtsiri.

The agreement lays the foundations for the preparation of a chapter on Oman Vision 2040 to be included in The Business Year: Oman 2021. Through its research, TBY will shed light on the pillars of Vision 2040 and share exclusive insights from leading political and business figures working to achieve the long-



(Supplied photo)

term vision.

TBY's team in Oman has already started conducting interviews with leaders from all major sectors of the economy, including finance, energy, agriculture, industry, logistics, ICT, health and education, tourism, and others. With its eighth edition on Oman, TBY aims to promote the country as an important player in the region and a solid investment

destination. Furthermore, TBY plans to highlight the steps Oman is taking toward a more sustainable future. In order to do so, in April, the global media group signed a partnership agreement with the Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion.

Andrea emphasised the importance of covering Oman's long-term ambitions in parallel to

monitoring the year-to-year developments in the sultanate, stating, "The Business Year has been following up on all the changes happening in Oman over the past eight years and now it is time to see how all of these developments align with the long-term vision of where the country is heading. We are excited to be getting the support of the unit in this endeavour."

The edition will reach a targeted global audience through its print edition, and will be available on a range of digital platforms, including Bloomberg Terminal, Dow Jones Factiva, FactSet, and Refinitiv Eikon, not to mention PressReader and Google Books, as well as on the TBY Reader app, available on iOS. The Business Year: Oman will be published in 4Q 2021.

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Youth volunteer team helps afforest Titam



Our Correspondent
Muscat

To increase green coverage and protect flora from harmful pests, the Titam Volunteer Team has launched several campaigns in Dhofar governorate.

The group started working on afforestation in several areas of Titam in 2021 to increase green coverage in Dhofar.

Speaking to *Muscat Daily*, Suhail Salem Said, one of the team members, said, “We also aim to spread environmental awareness among members of society and motivate young people to participate in volunteer work. The team also planted

trees and sprayed pesticides in agricultural land.”

Said emphasised the need to spread awareness on afforestation in the country.

“We are encouraging parents to inculcate this culture in children through our initiatives to grow diverse species of trees, especially figs. Our volunteers are eager to educate society and save the environment.”

On May 9, the group launched a campaign in Titam in the wilayat of Salalah to combat termites (Al Rama). Volunteers of the group cleaned trees and sprayed pesticides on 32 of these.

On June 12 its members

planted indigenous trees in Titam in cooperation with the Environment Authority (EA).

More recently, on June 16 the group launched another campaign to collect seeds of indigenous species of flora in cooperation with EA and presented these to the General Directorate of Environment in Dhofar.

The particular campaign was in support of an EA project to plant local trees in various wilayats of Dhofar.

“To spread awareness on the importance of planting indigenous trees, the group launched a short video titled ‘How to germinate baobab seeds in five days’.

The video lists the benefits of baobab trees and will help people germinate these seeds,” Said said.

“We are uprooting some trees and relocating them to places far from homes and streets to help forestation. Wild figs are local species that fight desertification and do not need much water.”

He urged people of Titam to cooperate in their endeavours and do their bit to save the environment.

“We thank all those who support us. We will continue our afforestation efforts and hope that all volunteer teams in Dhofar come together under one umbrella.”



EA expands nurseries to boost 10mn trees project

Our Correspondent
Muscat

The Environment Authority is working on expanding nurseries through an initiative aimed at providing the saplings required to implement the national project announced in 2020 to plant 10mn wild trees in ten years.

In a statement, the Environment Authority (EA) said, “Within the framework of efforts to implement the national initiative to plant 10mn wild trees, the authority is implementing a plan to expand nurseries in various

Several nurseries are being maintained and developed in Dhofar, South Batinah, Buraimi, North and South Sharqiyah

governorates to provide saplings. Several nurseries are being maintained and developed in a number of governorates, including Dhofar, South Batinah, Buraimi,

North and South Sharqiyah.’

The authority has started developing nurseries like one in Bidiyah which is spread over 600sqm and expected to produce 100,000 seedlings of trees and wild plants, including al samar, sidr, ghaf, shu’a and al arti.

The authority confirmed that the development of the nursery was based on economical use of water, including recycling of used water. The nursery’s cooling system has been calibrated to suit the needs of the specific seedlings.

OCCI branch in Musandam offers 61 private sector job opportunities

Our Correspondent
Muscat

The Oman Chamber of Commerce and Industry (OCCI) branch in Musandam has announced the first package of job opportunities in the private sector for citizens of the governorate.

The chamber informed that the job opportunities were in coordination with the Office of the Minister of State and Governor of Musandam, and the Ministry of Labour.

The chamber said, ‘The Governor of Musandam formed a team to provide these job opportunities for jobseekers in the gov-

ernorate. The team succeeded in providing 61 jobs in the first phase.

‘The jobs are in different professions, including 48 positions for electrical engineers and technicians. Other positions include human resource managers, accountants, and jobs in public services.’

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MUSCAT DAILY

ROP participates in GCC Border, Coast Guard meet

Muscat - Royal Oman Police (ROP) participated in the 28th GCC Border and Coast Guard Officials meeting on Monday.

The virtual meeting, run from the GCC Secretariat General, reviewed several topics related to border and coast guards in GCC member states.

The sultanate’s side was headed by Brigadier Ali Saif al Muqbali, Commander of Coast Guard Police.

ROP also participated in the first meeting of the technical team which evaluates and selects winners of awareness projects in the field of GCC security media.

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Oman's inflation rate rises to 1.6% as global prices increase

Our Correspondent
Muscat

Oman's inflation rate – which returned to positive territory in April after remaining negative for more than a year – slightly increased in May as consumer prices rose after a surge in global prices of many commodities and implementation of value-added tax in the sultanate.

Annual inflation rate, which is based on consumer price index (CPI), increased to 1.65 per cent in May 2021 from 1.59 per cent recorded in the previous month, according to CPI data released by the National Centre for Statistics and Information (NCSI).

Consumer prices in May remained 0.24 per cent higher compared to April, the data showed.

A moderate increase in Oman's inflation rate was expected after the implementation of VAT in April. Sharp price increases for transport group, non-alcoholic beverages and tobacco products contributed to the overall inflation in May.

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

Low food inflation

The inflation rate in food and non-alcoholic beverages group,



(Muscat Daily)

which has nearly 24 per cent weight in Oman's CPI, still remained in negative territory at -0.11 per cent in May compared to the same month a year ago.

Consumer prices in food and non-alcoholic beverages group in May increased by just 0.59 per cent compared to April, that too mainly due to a more than 7 per cent jump in prices of non-alcoholic beverages.

Within the food items, prices of fruits and vegetables in May dropped by 7.36 per cent and 2.61 per cent on year-on-year basis, respectively.

On the other hand, prices in the transport group jumped by 7.07 per cent in May compared to the same month a year ago.

Furnishing, household equipment and household maintenance group witnessed an year-on-year price increase of 1.33 per cent in May.

Prices in the group of housing, water, electricity, gas and other fuel items remained stable in May compared to the same month of 2020.

The sultanate's annual inflation averaged under 1 per cent over the six years to 2019 and was negative during the year 2020.

However, on the back of the 5 per cent VAT and rising commodities prices globally, Oman's average inflation rate is expected to rise above 3 per cent this year.

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

Similarly, the World Bank in its latest economic outlook for Oman said the inflation is projected to pick up to 3 per cent in 2021, reflecting the recovery of domestic demand and the introduction of VAT.

Inflation is currently surging worldwide, making markets nervous that it could derail a post-pandemic economic recovery by putting pressure on central banks to consider pulling stimulus measures sooner than

Sharp price increases for transport group, non-alcoholic beverages and tobacco products contributed to the overall inflation in May

planned.

The consumer price index in the US hit 5 per cent in May, the highest rate in 13 years.

The central bankers, according to an AFP report, say the global inflationary pressure is temporary and due to the low base of comparison to a big drop in prices during the first year of the pandemic in 2020.

Oil prices have returned the pre-pandemic levels while the economic recoveries in the US and China have led to growing demand in commodities, the report said.

"The rise in inflation so far has largely reflected a combination of a rebound in commodity prices and what we have termed 'reopening' inflation – that is to say, a rebound in prices caused by the unwinding of pandemic-era distortions," Neil Shearing, analyst at Capital Economics, told AFP.



Asyad completes construction of first ship at Duqm drydock

Our Correspondent
Muscat

Marking another major milestone in Oman's logistics sector, Asyad Group has successfully completed the building of Al-Duqm Drydock's first ship.

This feat falls under the integration of maritime logistic services that Asyad Group provides to its local and international customers and is in line with the National Logistics Strategy 2040 to position Oman as a global logistics hub, Asyad said in a press statement.

Dr Ibrahim al Nadhairi, CEO of Asyad Shipping and Drydock, explained that the completion of this project, which is considered the first venture of Asyad Drydock in shipbuilding, is a testament to Asyad Group's empowerment of national talent and firm belief in their capabilities. "This project, professionally implemented, has been a significant opportunity for investing in the development of our Omani talent in various engineering and managerial disciplines, and for providing Oman with a qualified human capital capable of leading and sustaining construction operations in the field of maritime services and industries," he said.

Haitham Nasser al Taie, chief operations officer of Asyad Drydock, said that the 'Hulm AlBebar' project, delivered to one of the shipping companies operating in Oman, was completed within 11,000 man-hours according to the agreed timeline.

The built ship is 15 meters long, seven meters wide and boasts a maximum payload of 25 tonnes, and a bollard pull of eight tonnes.

Asyad Drydock has been ranked as the best ship repair dock in the Middle East and Indian subcontinent according to the 2021 Ship Tek International Conference and Awards ceremony.

Oman participates in GCC trade meeting

Muscat – Oman, represented by the Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion (MoCIIP), participated on Monday in the preparatory meeting of the GCC commerce undersecretaries for the 60th session of the GCC Trade Cooperation Committee.

The sultanate was represented in the virtual meeting by Dr Saleh Said Masan, Undersecretary for Commerce and Industry at the MoCIIP.

The meeting discussed topics related to the commerce sector and the executive regulations for the GCC Patents Law. It also reviewed the challenges facing GCC states in activating the gulf joint action.

The meeting also viewed recent updates on implementing



the unified GCC standards, systems, and regulations.

In addition, initiatives of entrepreneurs, and means of supporting small and medium enterprises were also reviewed during the meeting.

ONA

'GCC's reliance on oil will remain high for many years'

Our Correspondent
Muscat

The GCC sovereigns' reliance on hydrocarbons will remain the key credit constraint despite ongoing diversification efforts, Moody's Investors Service said in a report published on Monday.

"Economic diversification away from hydrocarbons remains the most frequently stated policy objective in the region but will likely take many years to achieve," said Alexander Perjessy, a senior analyst at Moody's and the author of the report.

"The announced plans to boost hydrocarbon production capacity and government commitments to zero or very low taxes make it unlikely that heavy reliance on hydrocarbons will diminish significantly in the coming



years," he added.

Moody's said that the 2020 pandemic-induced shock to oil demand and prices highlighted GCC sovereigns' very high exposure to oil market fluctuations.

For most GCC countries, oil and gas still account for at least 20 per cent of GDP, more than 65 per cent of total exports and at least 50 per cent of government revenue, the ratings agency noted.

"Despite ambitious governments' plans, diversification efforts since 2014 have yielded only limited results and will be held back by lower oil prices," Moody's said.

Moody's expects the diversification momentum to pick up but to be held back by the reduced availability of resources to fund diversification projects in a lower oil price environment and by intra-GCC competition in a

relatively narrow range of targeted sectors.

Moody's said hydrocarbons will continue to drive GCC sovereigns' fiscal strength, liquidity position and external vulnerability for many years.

"The importance of hydrocarbons in GDP and government revenue has not changed materially since 2014, having declined mainly due to lower oil prices. While we expect the diversification momentum to pick up, it will be dampened by reduced availability of resources to fund diversification projects in a lower oil price environment and by intra-GCC competition in a relatively narrow range of targeted sectors."

Moody's warned that unless GCC sovereigns accelerate the adjustment, downward credit pressures from carbon transition

will combine with oil price shocks.

"Given commodity markets' inherent volatility, government revenue and national income volatility in the GCC will remain higher than in most other regions. Moreover, the implicit social contract between the region's governments and their citizens will limit the scope for spending cuts – rather, future oil revenue shocks will likely be absorbed through further erosions in government balance sheets," it said.

"The ongoing global transition to lower carbon emissions will accelerate this trend, although the more highly rated sovereigns in the GCC, which also have some of the lowest oil and gas production costs globally, have in principle some time to adjust," Moody's added.

Dubai's yachts offer socially-distanced luxury amid pandemic

Dubai, UAE – Dubai earned a reputation for delivering luxury for those with cash to splash years ago, but amid the COVID-19 pandemic, a new mode of travel has become popular – yachts.

"It's more private, you're with only family and friends, and it's the ideal outing during a pandemic," said Nada Naeem, a 36-year-old Saudi citizen living in Dubai.

Dozens of white yachts are seen every day zipping through the emirate's bays, canals and islands, while others are docked along the coast in Gulf waters overlooking the skyline of high-rise towers.

"You feel like you can breathe," Naeem said, adding that she had not left Dubai since the pandemic began last year. "It's like you've travelled."

Unlike so many parts of the world, Dubai opened its doors

wide open to tourists just a few months after the coronavirus pandemic took hold last year.

Life in the Gulf emirate – one of the first destinations to welcome visitors again last July – returned to largely normal, with restaurants and hotels up and running and beaches open to the public.

The UAE, made up of seven emirates including Dubai, launched an energetic vaccination drive with some of the highest inoculation rates worldwide, and continues to enforce strict rules on wearing masks and social distancing.

But some are fearful of overseas travel, and wary of crowded places where the risk of catching COVID-19 is higher.

'Secure and safe'

For those who can afford the price tag, yachts are seen as a safer bet.



Luxury yachts are moored at the Dubai Marina Beach in Dubai, UAE on June 10 (AFP)

"When they eased the lockdown... people preferred something secure and safe with regulations," said Mohammed al Sayyed, manager of Royal Star

Yachts charter company. "We are providing them with the proper customer service, following all the rules, sanitising the yacht."

For now, yachts are allowed to operate at 70 per cent capacity.

The company has a fleet that includes a 141-foot (42-metre) yacht able to host 80 passengers

at full capacity – if you can afford the US\$4,900 price for a three-hour cruise.

Charter companies said they have seen an increased interest in yachting after coronavirus measures eased, especially among those who want to spend time with friends and family.

"People want to do sightseeing, cruising," said Sayyed, who has been in the yacht industry for eight years. "They want to relax."

Cheaper yachts to hire include the company's 90-foot 'Big Daddy' – capable of normally carrying 65 people, at US\$1,225 for three hours – down to smaller boats. Some in Dubai said that when the price was split between a group, the cost was not as steep as it seemed at first.

"It can actually be more affordable than an all-inclusive brunch at a restaurant," said Naeem. And while some groups have been busted by authorities

flouting the rules and slapped with hefty fines, most excursions run smoothly.

Sayyed insisted his company follows all the rules and that even on the most luxurious 'party yachts', there are COVID-19 regulations still in place, including the need for passengers to socially distance from each other and wear masks.

Dubai, known for its skyscrapers and mega-projects, boasts the most diverse economy in the oil-reliant Gulf region and has built a reputation as a financial, commercial and tourism hub.

Tourism, which drew some 16mn visitors a year before the coronavirus hit, took a severe downturn in the first few months of the pandemic. But a flood of arrivals since the beginning of the year has regenerated the industry, and helped many business activities recover.

AFP

MSX drops 0.8% in thin trading

Our Correspondent
Muscat

The benchmark index of the Muscat Stock Exchange (MSX) on Monday dropped 0.84 per cent to close at 4,022.87 points.

This was the first major decline in the MSX30 Index since the beginning of the month.

The fall in main index on Monday was contributed by all sectoral indices led by Industrial Index which dropped 1.19 per cent. Financial Index and Services Index decreased 0.99 per cent and 0.53 per cent, respectively. MSX Sharia Index fell 1.13 per cent to close at 574.81 points.

Trading activity remained weak on Monday as volumes decreased 37 per cent at 12.66mn securities compared with 20.08mn securities traded on Sunday. Market turnover fell more than 25 per cent to RO2.07mn compared with RO2.77mn in the previous trading ses-



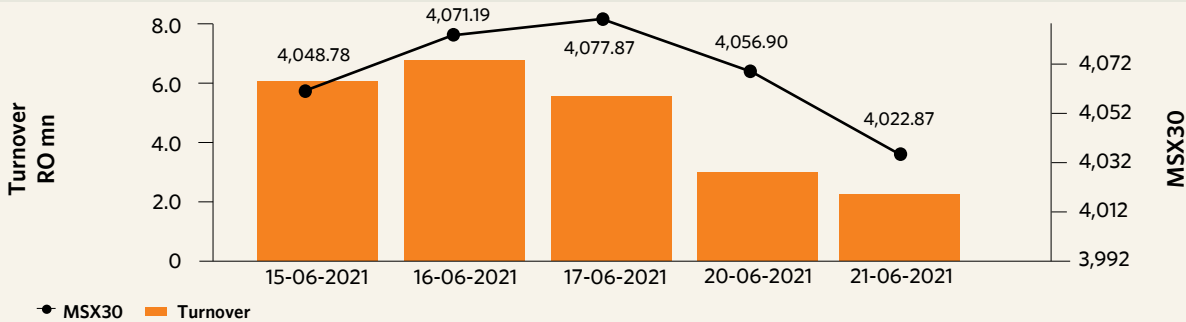
sion.

Market breadth at the MSX remained highly negative with six advancing stocks to 24 decliners. As many as 19 traded stocks remained flat for the day.

Top gainers were Muscat Insurance (10.0 per cent), Oman Qatar Insurance (1.5 per cent), Galfar Engineering and

Contracting (1.24 per cent) and Al Anwar Investment (0.93 per cent). Top losers were Oman Chlorine (-10.0 per cent), Oman Education and Training (-9.09 per cent), Dhofar Insurance (-7.39 per cent), Arabia Falcon Insurance (-4.92 per cent) and Oman Cables Industry (-4.13 per cent).

MSX INDEX AND TURNOVER OF FIVE TRADING DAYS



Europe powers up EV battery drive

Paris, France – As electric vehicle (EV) sales soar, Europe has started to build up its capacity to produce batteries on the continent but it remains far from reducing its dependence on Asia.

China, Japan and South Korea produce most of the world's electric car batteries.

Europe now has projects to build 38 gigafactories with a combined annual output of 1,000 gigawatt hours (GWh) and an estimated cost of US\$48bn, according to a June report by Transport & Environment, a non-government organisation.

This annual supply could be reached by 2029-2030 and would be the equivalent to the production of 16.7mn battery electric vehicles, a T&E spokesman told AFP.

"Given the monstrous increase in demand, there is a major stake at hand for manufacturers to break the battery makers' oligopoly," said Eric Kirstetter, a sector analyst at consulting firm Roland Berger.

"They will also have to ensure access to materials for the electrodes (anode and cathode),



which will determine the batteries' price and availability," he added. In Sweden, the start-up Northvolt expects to reach annual production of 150 GWh in Europe by 2030, with one plant under construction now and two much bigger ones on the drawing board. Northvolt has previously said that production capacity would reach 32 GWh by 2024, or enough batteries for 600,000 electric vehicles per year.

In another report, Transport & Environment said battery EVs could account for all new sales of units in the 27-nation European Union by 2035 - if policymakers introduce tighter CO2 targets

and strong support for infrastructure to charge cars.

Automakers, which are under pressure to transition out of fossil fuel vehicles, are putting money into battery production.

German giant Volkswagen has invested in Northvolt and also plans to build five other battery plants.

Stellantis, which owns brands such as Alfa Romeo, Chrysler, Citroen, Dodge and Fiat, is working on two of its own, while electric pioneer Tesla wants to make its future gigafactory near Berlin one of the biggest in the world with 250 GWh of capacity by 2030. European governments

are backing the projects because they want the continent to maintain a major role in future automobile manufacturing.

Asian manufacturers are also investing in Europe, with the Chinese group AESC planning to work with Toyota and Renault on battery plants in Britain and France.

Two South Korean companies, LG Chem and SKI, have already opened factories in Poland and Hungary, and China's CATL is building one in Germany.

European Commission vice president Maros Sefcovic said in March that the continent needed to achieve strategic independence in what has become a critical sector. He wants European factories to cover the region's needs by 2025.

That is a tall order, according to Oliver Montique, an analyst with Fitch Solutions.

Montique targets 2040 for the establishment of 'an entirely closed loop supply chain where the vast majority of battery materials are extracted, refined, processed and produced into battery cells on the continent.'

AFP

Bitcoin dives as China widens crackdown on crypto mining

Beijing, China – Bitcoin tumbled more than 10 per cent Monday after China broadened a crackdown on its massive cryptocurrency mining industry with a ban on mines in a key southwestern province.

Chinese mines power nearly 80 per cent of the global trade in cryptocurrencies despite a domestic trading ban since 2017, but in recent months several provinces have ordered mines to close as Beijing turns a sharp eye to the industry.

Authorities in the province of Sichuan ordered the closure of 26 mines last week, according to a notice widely circulated on Chinese social media and confirmed by a former bitcoin miner.

The price of bitcoin sank to as low as US\$32,309. The unit has taken a severe hit in recent weeks, having hit a record near US\$65,000 in April, partly because of Beijing's crackdown.

The notice reportedly instructed power companies to stop supplying electricity to all cryptocurrency mines by Sunday. It vowed a 'complete clean-up' and ordered local governments to carry out a 'dragnet-style investigation' to find and shut down suspected crypto mines. The province represents one of the largest bases for mining in the country.

A former cryptocurrency miner told AFP they had 'closed



everything' in line with the requirements in recent days.

"There have been working groups coming to check... making sure we shut down operations and removed the machines," he said.

Sichuan, a mountainous region in southwest China, is home to a large number of cryptocurrency mines, which require a colossal amount of energy supplied by the province's cheap and abundant hydropower.

According to a report in the state tabloid the Global Times, the closure of mines in the province has resulted in the shutting down of more than 90 per cent of the country's bitcoin mining capacity. Beijing has turned the screw on cryptocurrency miners to stamp out financial risks from speculation, although environmental concerns about the gas-guzzling mines is also a factor.

Chinese media reported that electricity supply to all crypto mines across the province was stopped at midnight Sunday, as the topic trended on social media. Sichuan is China's second most intensive mining region after Xinjiang in the country's northwest, according to Cambridge University's Bitcoin Electricity Consumption Index.

All crypto mines in the sparsely populated but coal- and hydropower-rich regions of Inner Mongolia and Qinghai were also ordered to shut down in recent months, with citizens encouraged to report illegal mines.

Last month, the value of bitcoin dived after three Chinese financial industry bodies reasserted a ban on financial institutions from offering cryptocurrency services, warning against risky speculation by traders.

AFP

Exports resume from Gaza as Israel eases blockade

Jerusalem – Trucks carrying clothes and fabric rolled out of the Palestinian enclave of Gaza on Monday as Israel lifted some restrictions it had imposed during last month's conflict.

The crowded Mediterranean territory, home to around two million Palestinians, has been under an Israeli blockade since 2007. The resumption of some trade and the postal service came one month after a ceasefire between Israel and the enclave's Hamas rulers to end an 11-day conflict.

An AFP reporter Monday saw trucks loaded with fabric go through the Kerem Shalom crossing while Palestinians in the Gaza Strip reported that some

mail also had been allowed in.

On Sunday, the Israeli military body that administers civilian affairs in the Palestinian territories, COGAT, said it will allow the 'limited export' of farm produce from Gaza. Extra restrictions since intense violence last month has meant Gaza's farmers have been unable to export goods as usual, creating a glut of produce such as tomatoes and strawberries, causing prices to tumble.

COGAT added that 'this civilian measure, which was approved by the political echelon, is conditional upon the preservation of security stability'.

The six-week freeze on mail had impacted thousands of Palestinians, including many who

have been waiting for their passports to be issued in Ramallah, seat of the Palestinian Authority in the occupied West Bank.

Israel loosened restrictions amid a fragile ceasefire that went into effect May 21, ending the bloodiest fighting between Israel and Hamas since 2014.

The conflict killed 260 Palestinians including some fighters, according to Gaza authorities.

In Israel, 13 people were killed, including a soldier, by rockets fired from Gaza, the police and army said. Last week, ceasefire violations included Palestinian militants setting off incendiary balloons to spark fires in farm land.

AFP

General Motors hits the gas on electric, autonomous push

New York, US – General Motors is hitting the accelerator on its drive towards electric autos, significantly boosting its near-term investments as it unveils new models and builds production capacity. The biggest US automaker announced it will raise spending by 30 per cent to US\$35bn through 2025 and plans to build two additional battery cell plants. Some of the funds also will go to its autonomous vehicle program.

The company cited strong consumer reception to its early electric vehicle (EV) models and beneficial public policies as factors that give it confidence the investment will pay off.

"GM is targeting annual global EV sales of more than 1mn by 2025, and we are increasing our investment to scale faster because we see momentum building in the United

States for electrification, along with customer demand for our product portfolio," said chief executive Mary Barra.

"There is a strong and growing conviction among our employees, customers, dealers, suppliers, unions and investors, as well as policymakers, that electric vehicles and self-driving technology are the keys to a cleaner, safer world for all."

The announcement marks the latest vote of confidence in an EV future by a legacy automaker in the wake of the ascent of Tesla and as governments embrace policies to address climate change.

Just last month, Ford won praise for unveiling an all-electric version of its F-150 pickup truck and said it was targeting 40 per cent of its volume by 2030 to be comprised of EVs.

As the auto giants have



General Motors chief executive Mary Barra

deepened their commitment to EVs, startups have hit speed-bumps. Earlier this week, Lordstown Motors announced the resignations of its chief executive and chief financial officer after an investigation concluded some of the company's statements about auto pre-orders were inaccurate.

That followed an announce-

ment the company did not have enough cash to begin commercial production.

Coming soon

GM's current fleet still overwhelmingly consists of internal combustion engines, and the Chevy Bolt is the only EV model in showrooms.

But the company has an-

nounced EV versions of many of its most popular vehicles such as the Silverado pickup truck.

A reboot of the 'Hummer' truck will launch this fall, when the company also begin taking reservations for the Cadillac Lyriq sport utility vehicle, a GM spokesman said.

Chief financial officer Paul Jacobson said the spending increase was a 'prudent' investment in light of consumer enthusiasm for models it has presented so far.

The company expects 30 new EV models by 2025, with about two-thirds available in North America, he said.

"We've got to make sure that we're continuing to invest in battery technology and getting into high-volume EVs to keep bringing the cost down," he said.

GM has announced numerous steps on EVs since the No-

vember election of President Joe Biden, who has championed electric autos as a component of the strategy to mitigate climate change. Shortly after the election, GM boosted its planned spending for EVs and autonomous vehicle technology by US\$7bn from US\$20bn.

Also in November, the company withdrew from a challenge to California's fuel economy rules backed by former president Donald Trump's administration, and in January said it aimed to eliminate tailpipe emissions from new light-duty vehicles by 2035.

The automaker in April announced it was building a US\$2.3bn battery cell plant with LG in Tennessee, similar to one now under construction in Ohio.

Specifics on the two additional battery cell plants will be announced later, GM said.

CFRA Research viewed the increased investment as risky, saying it 'is likely to weigh on intermediate-term free cash flow' and that 'sales of several of its EV models have disappointed in recent years.'

But Morningstar praised the move, saying GM has 'correctly' read the need for heightened spending on new technologies.

In addition to the budget announcement, GM also lifted its financial forecast for the second quarter. The company now expects operating earnings for the first half of 2021 of between US\$8.5bn and US\$9.5bn, above the US\$5.5bn previously projected. Jacobson said GM was able to 'pull forward' some semiconductors despite a supply crunch, however, the company 'remains cautious' on its full-year earnings outlook.

AFP

Home ownership made easier at Al Mouj Muscat

A new direct financing plan has been launched at Al Mouj Muscat where only 20 per cent is needed as a down payment on new, completed homes with the remaining 80 per cent settled over five years.

Called Tayseer, this affordable and flexible post-handover payment plan is available directly and exclusively from Al Mouj Muscat until the end of 2021. It has been introduced to make financing ownership of a home straightforward and is ideal for anyone wanting to make the move away from renting or for buyers looking for a valuable investment.

Nasser bin Masoud al Sheibani, CEO of Al Mouj Muscat, says, “Our award-winning community offers an incredible lifestyle for families and individuals alike. With Tayseer, home ownership is now within reach.

“This flexible finance plan il-

lustrates how Al Mouj Muscat continues to respond to buyer aspirations and market demand. Not only do we create exceptional homes, but we are making it possible for buyers and investors to secure a dream home in this luxurious, vibrant destination.”

The plan simplifies the buying process as buyers can arrange the payment plan directly through Al Mouj Muscat, rather than arranging finance via a bank. With no legal fees, owners can settle the remainder of the purchase price sooner than five years without penalties.

Tayseer is expected to attract strong interest from investors as properties in Al Mouj Muscat continue to command a premium, either as rental properties or at re-sale.

The plan is available on ready-to-move-into properties from garden-facing townhouses to

oceanfront apartments. All are situated within the established neighbourhoods and communities of Ghadeer, Juman One, Marsa and Marsa Gardens.

Al Mouj is situated along 6km of stunning coastline and is now home to over 6,000 residents, with homes set in beautiful neighbourhoods and districts that feature shared community facilities such as pools, landscaped parks, and walkways.

With so many world-class facilities on the doorstep, from shops, restaurants and hotels to a championship standard golf course and a 400-berth marina, it offers a lifestyle destination like no other.

Al Mouj Muscat’s flexible, direct 20/80 payment plan is only available until the end of 2021.

Buyers interested in finding out more can visit <http://amm.om/tayseerEN> or call 80077776.



OTTA to appoint new head coach

Oman Table Tennis Association (OTTA) board of directors discussed several topics in the second board meeting for this year. The meeting which was held remotely on Tuesday night chaired by Abdullah bin Mohammed Barmakhalef, OTTA chairman, in the presence of all the board members discussed appointing a new head coach for the national team. Revision of the yearly agenda and resumption of the activities and competitions was another item on the agenda.

Board members approved on participation of the top three clubs at the sultanate TT championship at the Arabian Table Tennis championship which will take place in Jordan in August. OTTA’s board agreed on nomination of Oman’s umpires who owned white badge at the Asian Table tennis Championship which will be held in Qatar in September.

After approving minutes of the meeting for the previous meeting, board of directors discussed on resumption of the domestic competitions and activities. Head of competition panel was assigned to prepare a detailed proposal of the remaining activities of the existing year.

In appointment of the new national table tennis head coach, the in-charge sub-panel presented many resumes of different experienced coaches representing different countries and continents. The board recommended to focus on certain criteria during the filtration and selection of the technical head. He should have similar experience in the region. He should have the right experience in coaching junior and senior categories with more focus on hopes and cadet categories.

The Jordanian coach Mohammed Atoum, former sultanate TT coach, had moved to International Table Tennis Federation (ITTF) after a successful seven years in Oman. He managed to accomplish different achievement during his technical supervision on the national team including Oman’s team attendance on the podium at West Asian Table Tennis Championship and Arabian TT championship. The board agreed on local team’s taking part at the Arabian Table Tennis championship. OTTA’s board directors instructed umpiring panel to nominate one umpire to officiate at the Asian Table tennis Championship.

Over 1,400 register for NBO’s Innovation Incubator



National Bank of Oman (NBO) has received more than 1,400 applications for its tech event of the year, Innovation Incubator.

The initiative, a collaboration with the SME Development Authority, Oman Academy for SMEs, and Paradigm Consulting, will take 30 IT students and fresh graduates through a tailored three-month programme delivered by specially trained NBO employees. In that time, they will be challenged to come up with

ideas for a FinTech start-up and those that are successful will get the chance to pitch to potential investors.

Innovation Incubator is part of the NBO’s active corporate social responsibility (CSR) programme. Through it, the bank continues to fulfil its long-standing commitment to the sultanate’s young people with initiatives Outward Bound Oman and NBO’s scholarship programme, offering merit-based scholarships to cre-

ate opportunities for and empower young people from low-income families.

By continuing to foster partnerships between the private and public sectors through a range of educational and youth-led programmes, the bank is fulfilling its goals to empower local talent and position Oman as a future-ready economy.

To find out more about Innovation Incubator, visit www.nbo.om/io.

Redefine photography with vivo X60 Pro

In today’s world, the quality of a smartphone’s camera is almost as important as the smartphone itself. With people carrying their smartphones with them everywhere they go, it is critical that their devices can capture different scenes with clarity.

As a company that puts consumers first, vivo launched its X60 series flagship smartphones with the aim to deliver the ultimate mobile photography experience. With professional-grade camera technologies, best-in-class optical lenses and collaboration with ZEISS, a global leader in optics and opto-electronics, the X60 Pro is set to redefine photography.

Here’s a look at some of the photography features.



and making its photography function even more powerful.

ZEISS Biotar Portrait

For the first time, consumers can now access ZEISS Biotar Portrait Style on vivo’s X60 series. This new feature allows them to create customized professional portraits with an unprecedented center sharpness and unique swirly harmonious bokeh.

Gimbal Stabilisation

Another upgrade on the X60 Pro is gimbal stabilisation 2.0. The 48MP Main Camera with a large aperture (1.48) takes in up to 16 percent more light compared to the X50 Pro. Blurry images are a thing of the past with the innovative gimbal that moves the lens in the opposite direction to compensate for camera shakes.

Pro Sports Mode

The X60 Pro relies on the upgraded gimbal camera system and motion detection algorithms to address the common challenges users face when taking motion snapshots, including out-of-focus blur, motion smear resulting from the shutter not being fast enough.

Infiniti Oman’s loyalty programme offers host of benefits

Infiniti Oman, from the house of Suhail Bahwan Automobiles, has launched a loyalty programme that offers a host of benefits for its customers.

The programme aims to attract and retain a larger pool of customers and to maintain current customer base by building a closer bond.

The objective is also to influence and increase brand loyalty while building a healthy relationship with its customers.

A senior spokesperson at Infiniti Oman said, “The Infiniti owner loyalty programme offers individuals who currently own an Infiniti vehicle many special benefits. We are happy to design this programme and express our deep appreciation and gratitude to our customers for their brand loyalty.”

Customers who own an Infiniti in their respective names can qualify for this programme.

Leased vehicle owners, fleet owners, LPO customers, ministry vehicles, ministry vehicles registered on individual’s names cannot qualify for the loyalty programme.

The loyalty programme has been categorised into Diamond and Platinum segments.

The qualification criteria for Diamond segment is 2-3 Infiniti



vehicles.

The qualification criteria for Platinum segment is four and

more Infiniti vehicles.

Any existing Infiniti customer is eligible for the loyalty pro-

gramme. An existing Infiniti vehicle (applicable for vehicles sold through Suhail Bahwan Autom-

biles LLC) owner buying his second or more Infiniti vehicle is also eligible.

Benefits of loyalty programme are plenty. Loyalty bonus on trade-in price of Infiniti vehicle is RO300 for the Diamond category and RO400 for Platinum category.

Special 20 per cent discount on labour cost on vehicle service is available for both categories.

Fifty-five per cent special discount for spare parts and accessories is available for the Diamond category and 60 per cent for Platinum category.

Interest rate of 1.25 per cent less than the existing rate for Diamond category and 1.50 per cent for Platinum category if offered under the programme.

As part of special accessories package, window tinting is offered for Diamond category, window tinting and paint protection for Platinum category.

SBA is largely committed to supporting Infiniti Oman’s growth in the sultanate through major emphasis on customer satisfaction and by providing world-class after-sales services in Oman.

With a national network of more than 40 showrooms, service centers and parts outlets, SBA has further built upon its legacy of trust, excellent customer service and providing value for money to each of its customers.

Buy stylish and sleek MG 5 with EMI as low as RO69

In line with its commitment to Do More, MG Motor is offering its stylish and sleek MG 5 sedan with a reasonable EMI starting from RO69 only. MG Motor has extended its Festival of Winning campaign by popular demand and if you book or buy MG 5 sedan by end of June, you can avail low EMI offer along with a host of other benefits.

The buyer of MG 5 will get a chance to instantly win mobile phone bundles or fuel cards or up to 200,000 free service packages. Apart from this, the buyer will also stand a chance to win his/her car back every week. The other guaranteed benefits are free insurance, free registration and free window tinting.

A senior spokesperson of MHD, the sole distributors of MG Motor in Oman, says, "Known for its distinctive style, superior performance and smart technology, MG 5 is one of our most special sedans and we are happy to offer it at a monthly reasonable EMI of RO69 only. We have clubbed this offer with our ongoing Festival of Winning campaign for guaranteed benefits to our customers.

"The buyer of MG 5 will enter a weekly draw and if selected, he/she will get a chance to win



the car back. This is a great deal as there is a huge demand for MG 5 for its capabilities, comfort and safety quotient and value for money."

Distinctive style

As soon as you step inside the MG 5, you will realise that the vehicle is as intelligent as it is stylish. The forward-thinking cabin puts you in complete control of all key features, while the sense of space adds a sense of freedom. The buyer can choose

from a range of leather and fabric upholstery, and benefit from the adjustable seating in order to find the perfect position. With boot space of up to 512lt plus a host of storage options, it is an ideal sedan for a big family vacation.

Interactive technology

Cutting-edge technology can be found in abundance in the MG 5. At the heart of the dashboard, you will be able to access the media system via the 10.1 inch

colour touch screen. Through Apple CarPlay and Android Auto, there will be opportunity to stream audio and manage communications with minimum fuss. What's more, this display also offers a 360-degree camera view of your vehicle, helping you look out for any potential risks that may impact your car.

5-star safety

MG 5 comes with a five-star C-NCAP safety rating, thanks to its range of safety measures.

From Hill-Start Assist to Electronic Brakeforce Distribution, Curve Brake Control to a Tyre Pressure Monitoring System, one can be assured of utmost safety in this sedan. With a full complement of airbags and ISOFIX anchor points, you also benefit from complete peace of mind.

MG is a British-born automotive brand established in 1924, known for its historic models, awards and achievements throughout the past 97 years. MG was founded by William Morris and Cecil Kimbers and has one of the oldest car club in the automotive industry.

Best known for its two-seat open sports cars, MG also produced saloons and coupes. Since its acquisition of MG, SAIC Motor, as a Global Top 500 company, has opened a new chapter for this British icon.

MG is at the forefront of the introduction of innovative technologies and new energy vehicles for car buyers. MG Motor showrooms in Oman are located in Wattayah, Azaiba, Al Manuma, Bidaya, Sohar, Nizwa, Salalah, Sur, Ibra and Ibri. For more information, to book a test drive and to purchase a car online, visit <https://mg-om.com/>

Omani sanitiser brand Farah achieves success

The National Detergent Co (NDC) is proud of the success of the Farah brand of health and hygiene products, which has achieved over 40 per cent market share in hand sanitisers in Oman.

The success of Farah is the combination of a the best product developed through customer insights and strong support for products produced in Oman by the Ministry of Health, Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion and local retailers, like Lulu and Muscat Pharmacy, who favour Omani products, says Anish Kumar, head of Marketing and Sales for NDC.

The customers wanted a 'non-sticky' product with a beautiful fragrance, says Ratheesh Mallia, brand manager for Farah. "We were able to execute on this by using the finest purity raw materials and a rose fragrance inspired by the roses of Jebel Akhdar. The product is also one of the only products in the GCC to carry the drug facts label, giving customers the confidence they will be combating COVID-19 with the best product available.

"Keeping the family safe in these times is a top priority. NDC also developed and patented the

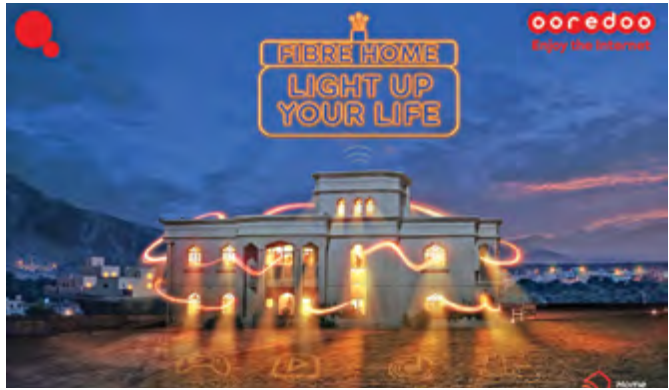


20ml pocket sanitiser by Farah making safety convenient for our customers."

The support from the Ministry of Health and the Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion was needed to meet all regulatory requirements in Oman and the GCC, said Nasser al Rawahi, head of HR and Administration for NDC.

NDC is also very excited about the decision from the Royal Oman Police (ROP) to source locally made products.

The ROP sees value in not only Farah but also Bahar, Pinex and a full range of Omani produced products, says Ahmed Jaffer, Sales for NDC.



Enjoy uninterrupted Internet with Ooredoo

Staying home is now easier than ever with Ooredoo's Fibre Home WiFi plans. It's the best in value and convenience, giving users an amazing 120 Mbps for just RO36.75 including VAT, complete with complimentary access to OSN. Supported by Ooredoo's fantastic network, these upgraded plans mean that customers can enjoy uninterrupted internet whenever, and for as long as they want it.

Ooredoo's Fibre Home WiFi gives users the ability to stream and download their favourite TV

shows, movies, music, work, and study with no interruptions. It's got everything; speed, simplicity, and value all rolled into one.

Choose from a variety of plans to suit specific needs, with speeds of up to 1 Gbps and unlimited usage, as well as the complimentary OSN access for 12 months. There's also free installation and unlimited Ooredoo fixed line use. Order Fibre Home WiFi, by messaging WhatsApp on 95009500, sharing your house location and Civil ID/Residence ID, or by calling 1514.

Oman Oasis delights customers with exciting prices

Oman Oasis has been revered as the nation's leading water brand and has been a preferred choice amongst consumers in the sultanate. Its unwavering commitment to producing high-quality bottled water is complemented with promotions, contests and rewards that instill excitement amongst its customers. Produced and distributed by Oasis Water Company, Oman Oasis recently announced the winners of its Ramadan and Eid promotion.

The first draw which took place on June 1 saw as many as 111 lucky winners. Spread across three draws, the total number of 310 prizes to be won from the 5 Gallon promotion. The second and third draws are scheduled to be held on July 1 and August 2, respectively. Among the 310 prizes to be won are ten 22 carat 8g gold coins, twenty 22 carat 4g gold coins, two hundred - 10 Oman Oasis 5 Gallon water coupons and eighty Lulu gift vouchers worth RO10.

The key prizes from the first



draw which were gold coins saw a total of 11 winners. Anto Xavier, Prakash Dhanwani, Manoj Mahanta and Jomana Alzubaidi rejoiced on winning 8g 22 carat gold coins each, while seven more winners walked away with the 4g 22 carat gold coins each.

The fortunate winners were Victor Coutinho, Jancy Mol, Sundaravadivelu, Merwyn Sophia, Memana Augustine, Manoj Narayanan and Nijamudeen Abdul Jabbar.

Under the 5 Gallon Ramadan and Eid promotion, which is ap-

plicable on all Oman Oasis and Oman Oasis Sifr products, customers are entitled to receive one raffle coupon on a minimum purchase of RO20. Customers can opt to purchase a coupon book worth RO20 or choose between the exciting RO20 and

RO50 offers. Following the purchase, the raffle coupon number has to be registered at www.omanoasis.com/eid2021 in order to enter the raffle draw and be eligible to win from the 310 exciting prizes to be given away. The offer started from May 1 will go on until July 31 giving customers ample time to register and win.

Oman Oasis has conducted several raffle draws in the past which has received an overwhelming response from the consumers.

Having a customer-centric approach to all its promotions, campaigns and contests, Oman Oasis has successfully created a long-lasting bond with its customers. Its strong understanding of the local community, decades of experience in the industry, and several international product quality certifications like the IBWA membership, NSF, ABWA, and WQA, have helped Oman Oasis to increase its market share and become a pioneer in its industry.

Youth Sailing Worlds: Oman has a proven track record, says Oman Sail CEO

Oman Sail CEO Dr Khamis al Jabri has warmly welcomed the decision of World Sailing on Monday to award the prestigious 50th edition of the Youth Sailing World Championships to Oman and promised to make it a memorable event.

The youth worlds, presented by Hempel, will be organised by Oman Sail at Mussanah Sports City from December 11-18.

Jabri said, "We are delighted to have been selected as host nation for the 2021 Youth World Sailing Championships presented by Hempel, following a very competitive bid process. Oman has a proven track record in hosting major international sporting events, and we look forward to welcoming the best young sailors from around the world to experience the Sultanate's legendary hospitality and majestic waters later this year.

"With its superb maritime facilities, Mussanah is internationally recognised as a leading destination for sailing events. I look forward to seeing our outstanding staging and race management teams deliver yet another memorable event on our shores that will have long lasting socio-economic benefits for the Sultanate of Oman."

World Sailing received two high-quality bids to host the 2021 Youth Worlds, with Oman selected ahead of Valletta, Malta by a Youth Worlds Evaluation Panel before final approval by the board of directors.

The youth worlds will be a prime example of Oman's commitment to the environment with preservation of the natural resources embedded in every activity. As part of Oman's Vision 2040 priorities, the staging of this tournament will drive greater awareness of the importance of



environmental sustainability and ensuring Oman's beautiful natural landscape is protected long into the future.

Quanhai Li, World Sailing president, said, "For the last five

decades, the Youth Sailing World Championships have provided young athletes from all around the world with the opportunity to showcase their talent and test themselves against the

very best opposition.

"The youth worlds also allows young sailors to learn about the importance of sport and fair competition, and to forge lifelong friendships with like-minded

people from all corners of the globe. It is a hugely important event on our calendar, and it is with great pleasure that we can announce this year's hosts. I am confident that Oman Sail will put on a fantastic show."

David Graham, chief executive officer at World Sailing, said, "The sailors at the youth worlds are the future stars of our sport and we aim to provide the best possible experience for them. We were really impressed with both Oman's and Malta's bids, and it was a tough choice for the Evaluation Panel, with both venues demonstrating the expertise to host a memorable championship.

"Oman's outstanding facilities and sailing conditions will help to make this youth worlds a memorable one for all involved."

The last Youth Sailing World Championships were held in Gdynia, Poland in 2019, where

409 sailors from 66 nations competed across nine youth events, including the Boy's and Girl's divisions of the 29er, 420, RS:X and Laser Radial, as well as the Mixed Multihull, the Nacra 15. The 2020 edition was scheduled to be held in Salvador, Brazil, in December 2020, but the event was unfortunately cancelled due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

Planning for this year's edition of the event has taken into consideration any relevant precautions required for everyone travelling to Oman.

Mussanah Sports City has played host to several Olympic class sailing events, including the Laser World Championships in 2013 and the RS:X World Championships in 2015.

In April this year the venue hosted the 2021 Mussanah Open Championship, a Tokyo 2020 qualification event for African and Asian nations.

Iran's Raisi calls for effective nuke talks, 'no' to Biden meet

Tehran, Iran - Iran's President-elect Ebrahim Raisi said on Monday he will not allow nuclear negotiations for the sake of negotiations, in his first news conference since winning election last week.

Raisi also ruled out meeting US President Joe Biden but said there were 'no obstacles' to resuming diplomatic relations with Saudi Arabia, the Sunni-ruled regional rival of Shiite Iran, which have been severed for five years.

Raisi (60) won Friday's election in which more than half the voters stayed away after many political heavyweights had been barred from running and as an economic crisis driven by US sanctions has battered the country.

Raisi, an ultraconservative cleric who heads Iran's judiciary, will replace moderate President Hassan Rouhani - whose landmark achievement was a 2015 nuclear deal between Iran and world powers - in August.

"Any negotiations that guarantee national interests will certainly be supported, but... we will not allow negotiations to be for negotiations' sake," Raisi said of the nuclear talks. "Any meeting must produce a result... for the Iranian nation," he added.

The 2015 deal saw Iran accept curbs on its nuclear capabilities in return for an easing of sanctions, but former US president Donald Trump unilaterally withdrew three years later and ramped up sanctions, prompting the Islamic republic to pull back from its nuclear commitments.

Trump's successor Biden has signalled his readiness to return to the deal and state parties - also including Britain, China, France, Germany and Russia -



Iran's President-elect Ebrahim Raisi arrives for his first press conference in the capital Tehran, on Monday (AFP)

have lately been negotiating its revival in Vienna.

EU negotiator Enrique Mora said on Sunday that those involved in the talks were 'closer' to saving the Iran nuclear deal but that sticking points remain.

An austere figure from the Shiite Muslim clerical establishment, Raisi smiled and raised his hands as he arrived for Monday's

press conference.

Raisi said he has no intentions of meeting Biden.

"No," was his flat response to a question from an American media outlet on whether he they would meet in the event the talks lead to the US lifting sanctions on Iran, and to try and 'fix' the issues between the two arch enemies.

'No obstacles' on Saudi

Raisi also said his administration would be open to restoring ties with Iran's regional foe Saudi Arabia. "There are no obstacles from Iran's side to reopening embassies... there are no obstacles to ties with Saudi Arabia," he said.

Ties between Iran and Saudi

Any negotiations that guarantee national interests will certainly be supported, but... we will not allow negotiations to be for negotiation's sake

EBRAHIM RAISI



Arabia were cut in 2016 after Iranian protesters attacked Saudi diplomatic missions following the kingdom's execution of a revered Shiite cleric.

The two sides are reported to have been engaged in talks hosted by Baghdad since April to improve relations.

Raisi, who is subject to US sanctions imposed over the executions of political prisoners in 1988, has in the past denied he played a role in the killings.

'Always defending human rights'

At Monday's news conference, Raisi said he has 'always' defended human rights.

"All that I have done through my years of service has always been towards defending human rights," said the Iranian president-elect, while accusing the west of violating human rights.

Raisi, whose black turban signifies direct descent from Islam's Prophet Mohammed, is seen as close to the 81 year old supreme leader, Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, who holds ultimate political power in Iran.

AFP



An Iranian flag flutters in the country's Bushehr nuclear power plant (AFP)

Iran's Bushehr nuclear plant shut down over 'fault'

Tehran, Iran - Iran's only nuclear power plant has been temporarily shut down over a 'technical fault', the country's atomic energy body said in a statement.

The Bushehr plant and its 1,000MW reactor, on Iran's southern coast, were completed by Russia after years of delay and officially handed over in September 2013, raising regional concerns in what is an earthquake prone area.

The shutdown comes as Tehran and world powers attempt to revive a hobbled 2015 agreement on Iran's nuclear programme in Vienna talks, which an EU negotiator said on Sunday were moving 'closer to a deal'.

That agreement is staunchly opposed by Israel, which Tehran has accused in the past of sabotage against its nuclear enrichment efforts.

"Following a technical fault at Bushehr power plant, and after a one-day notice to the energy ministry, the plant was temporarily shut down and taken off the power grid," the Atomic Energy Organisation of Iran said on its website around Sunday midnight.

The statement said the plant will be reconnected to the grid and the issue will be resolved 'in a few days', but did not elaborate further.

Iran's national electricity company had in a statement on Sun-

day called on Iranians to minimise consumption during peak hours due to a 'predicted rise in temperature' and 'limitations in power generation due to ongoing repairs' at Bushehr.

The company said that the repairs may continue until the end of the week, which is Friday in Iran.

In 2016, Russian and Iranian firms began building two additional 1,000-megawatt reactors at Bushehr. Their construction was expected to take 10 years.

Iran's Gulf Arab neighbours have often raised concerns about the reliability of the facility and the risk of radioactive leaks in the event of a major earthquake.

In April, Bushehr province was shaken by a 5.9-magnitude earthquake, leaving five people injured but causing 'no damage' to the nuclear complex, according to authorities.

Also in April, Iran accused Israel of being behind a 'terrorist' attack on its Natanz uranium enrichment plant, after a 'small explosion' at that facility's electricity distribution centre.

Iran started rolling blackouts in May this year after Tehran and several other cities were hit by unannounced power cuts that sparked complaints from consumers and an apology from the energy minister.

AFP

2 Yemenis released from US detention

Washington, US - Two Yemenis who have been held at the US military prison in Guantanamo Bay, Cuba for 17 years as alleged Al Qaeda supporters have won their release, according to newly published Defence Department filings on their cases.

Ali al Hajj al Sharqawi and Abd al Salam al Hilal were both detained in 2002 as US authorities, citing a 'war on terror', combed the world for members of Al Qaeda after the September 11, 2001 attacks.

They were transferred to Guantanamo in 2004, with subsequent records showing Sharqawi had undergone torture while being interrogated by the CIA after he was detained in Pakistan. Documents released by the Pentagon's Periodic Review Board, which regularly assesses the cases of the detainees at Guantanamo, showed both had been approved for release on June 8.

"The Periodic Review Board, by consensus, determined that continued law of war detention of the detainee is no longer necessary to protect against a continuing significant threat to the security of the United States," filings on both men's cases said.

Sharqawi (47) was accused of being a high-level facilitator for Al Qaeda, helping to move money and fighters across the Middle East and recruiting bodyguards for Al Qaeda founder Osama bin Laden.

AFP

Syria regime shelling on rebel-controlled Idlib kills 9: Monitor

Beirut, Lebanon - Syrian government shelling on the rebel-controlled enclave of Idlib on Monday killed at least nine people, including four civilians, a war monitor reported.

The violence was the latest in a spate of violations of a ceasefire deal that was brokered by Turkey and Russia in March 2020 and had largely held since.

Monday's artillery fire struck several locations near the ceasefire lines and one Syrian soldier was killed in retaliatory fire, the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights said.

In one incident in the village of



A heavily damaged house in the village of Al-Bara, in the Jabal al Zawiya region of the Idlib province, following the strikes on Monday (AFP)

Al-Bara, two women were killed by regime shelling, the observatory said.

In the village of Ihsem, shelling struck a police station, killing one policeman and four members of

armed groups opposed to the government of President Bashar Assad and its allies.

Another 13 people were wounded, the monitor said.

Both areas are under the control of Hayat Tahrir al Sham, an extremist organisation that includes ex-members of Al Qaeda's former Syria affiliate.

Smaller factions are also present in those areas, said Rami Abdel Rahman, the head of the UK-based Observatory.

The northwestern Idlib region, which borders Turkey to the north and is home to more than a million people, is the last part of

Syria controlled by rebel or extremist groups.

Assad's regime, backed by Russia and Iran, has vowed to retake the region and the enclave shrank under pressure from deadly land and air offensives.

A ceasefire deal brokered by Ankara - the main rebel backer - and Moscow was reached 15 months ago. Despite sporadic skirmishes along the ceasefire lines, the truce has largely held, averting a major assault that aid groups warned could cause suffering on a scale yet unseen in the decade-old war.

The past few weeks have witnessed an uptick in violations, mostly by regime and allied forces, Abdel Rahman said. "The escalation is unprecedented since the start of the truce," he said.

On June 10, 12 people were killed in regime shelling on the Idlib region, in what was one of the deadliest incidents since the ceasefire came into effect.

According to the observatory, close to half a million people have been killed by conflict since March 2011, when brutal government repression of pro-democracy protests ignited a civil war.

AFP

Ethiopians vote in election overshadowed by Tigray

Addis Ababa, Ethiopia - Ethiopians voted on Monday in a delayed national election taking place against the backdrop of war and famine in the northern Tigray region and questions over the poll's credibility.

Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed (44) is facing voters for the first time since coming to power in 2018 championing a democratic revival in Africa's second-most populous country, and a break from its authoritarian past.

"This election is different," said Milyon Gebregziabher, a 45 year old travel agent voting in the capital Addis Ababa.

"There are a number of parties to choose from. In the past there was just one, we did not have the luxury of choice."

Abiy, a Nobel Peace laureate who freed political prisoners, welcomed back exiles and ended a cold war with neighbouring Er-



Members of the Amhara militia rest next to a polling station in the village of Wereb Michael, on Monday (AFP)

itrea before sending troops to confront the dissident leadership of Tigray late last year, has promised this election will be Ethiopia's most competitive in

history, free of the repression that marred previous ballots.

But the spectre of famine caused by the ongoing fighting in Tigray, and the failure to stage

elections on schedule in one-fifth of constituencies, cast that promise into doubt.

Voters wrapped in blankets against the pre-dawn chill and

wearing face masks queued up to vote, while electoral officials in purple vests sprayed their hands with sanitiser before checking their IDs against the register.

A light of democracy

"I believe this election will shine a light of democracy on Ethiopia," said Yordanos Berhanu, a 26 year old accountant at the head of a queue of hundreds. "As a young Ethiopian, I (have) hope for the future of my country, and believe voting is part of that," she said.

In Bahir Dar, capital of the northwestern Amhara region which neighbours Tigray, voters said peace and economic growth were the priorities.

"No matter who wins, we want peace," said 25 year old job seeker Mirkuz Gashaw.

"As a citizen, I hope our country prospers and grows," said

first-time voter Etsubdink Sisay (18) waiting in line with her mother.

Once votes are counted, national MPs will elect the prime minister, who is head of government, as well as the president - a largely ceremonial role.

President Sahle-Work Zewde told AFP she was impressed by the turnout and believed the vote would 'bring all Ethiopians together' despite their challenges.

"This is very good for the stability of Ethiopia, for the future of Ethiopia," the President said after planting a tree in a school courtyard to commemorate election day. Abiy's ruling Prosperity Party is the firm favourite to win a majority and form the next government, tasked with bringing peace to Tigray and rebuilding an economy hammered by the coronavirus pandemic.

AFP

COVID-19 PANDEMIC

India inoculates 7.5mn in one day as PM declares free jabs for all adults

New Delhi, India - India opened up free vaccinations to all adults in an attempt to bolster its inoculation drive on Monday, as Prime Minister Narendra Modi kicked off a muted International Yoga Day hailing the practice's 'protective' properties against the virus.

More than 7.5mn COVID-19 vaccine doses were administered across the country in the last 24 hours, the highest single-day coverage till now, on Day One of centre's new vaccination policy roll-out, NDTV news channel reported.

The federal government of Modi started providing vaccines free of charge to all above 18 years from Monday taking back control of vaccination from the states, reversing a policy change that was enforced just about a month ago, it added.

The country's vaccination drive had significantly slowed in recent months, even as it battled a vicious surge in cases in April and May that overwhelmed the healthcare system in many places, AFP reported.

Case numbers have since



People take part in a yoga session, as Prime Minister Narendra Modi (in the inset) highlights the 'protective' properties yoga against coronavirus, to mark the 7th International Yoga Day, at a park in the northern city of Amritsar on Monday (AFP)

fallen sharply and the authorities have again relaxed many restrictions, sparking fears of another wave.

The government aims to inoculate all of India's almost 1.1bn adults by the end of the year.

"The vaccination drive is expected to pick up speed now... the daily vaccination has picked up over the last week and is expected to strengthen further," community health expert Rajib Dasgupta told AFP.

"However, both existing inequities as well as hesitancy merit deeper attention to make this a success."

The free rollout came as Modi marked the annual Yoga Day event with an early-morning ad-

dress to the nation as it emerges from the surge, saying that the practice had again proved itself to be a source of 'inner strength'.

"When I speak to frontline warriors, they tell me that they have adopted yoga as a protec-

tive shield in their fight against coronavirus. Doctors have strengthened themselves with yoga and also used yoga to treat their patients," Modi said.

Public parks were re-opened in Delhi on Monday just in time, but the number of events for Yoga Day was cut back around the country for the second year running because of the pandemic.

Yoga Day - proposed by Modi and adopted by the United Nations in 2014 - is observed mostly in India, but also worldwide on the Northern Hemisphere's longest day.

Throughout the pandemic, India's government has touted yoga and herbal medicines - sales of which have boomed - to protect and give relief to people infected with the virus.

But evidence is scant and the claims have faced pushback from India's doctors, who wore black armbands last month to protest Baba Ramdev, a guru with ties to the Modi administration who has said yoga can cure COVID-19.

Agencies



South Africa's President Cyril Ramaphosa (AFP)

Steep surge in cases: S African President

Johannesburg, South Africa - South Africa's daily COVID-19 infections have soared sharply in recent weeks, jumping over 1,500 per cent from April, the president said on Monday as the country's vaccination roll-out remained slow.

"The climb in new cases has been extraordinarily rapid and steep over the past few weeks," President Cyril Ramaphosa said in a weekly newsletter published every Monday. He said average new daily cases had risen from below 800 in early April to over 13,000 in the past week. "In other words, it increased more than fifteen-fold from the last low point," he added.

South Africa is the continent's worst affected country, accounting for 35 per cent of its total cases.

Gauteng, the country's most populous province and commercial hub, is the epicentre of the outbreak.

It has already seen new infections exceed peaks in the two previous waves.

The government last week deployed army medical personnel to help health workers battle the outbreak in Gauteng, where Ramaphosa said 'hospitals are reaching capacity, and healthcare workers are exhausted'.

The third infection wave has struck as South Africa is struggling to vaccinate its population - having since February inoculated just over two million of its 59mn people.

AFP

Indonesia hits 2mn coronavirus cases as crisis deepens

Jakarta, Indonesia - Indonesia passed two million coronavirus cases on Monday as infection rates soar and hospitals are flooded with new patients, prompting warnings that the Southeast Asian nation's health crisis could spiral out of control.

The unwanted milestone comes after daily case rates more than doubled in recent weeks and authorities identified the presence of highly infectious COVID-19 variants.

On Monday, official figures showed that Indonesia had recorded a daily record high of 14,536 cases, taking the total to just over two million with nearly

55,000 deaths, among a population of nearly 270mn.

But those figures are widely thought to be a severe undercount, due to low testing and contact tracing - some experts have said that official cases may only be about ten per cent of the real number.

"It's starting to bubble up to the surface, like a time bomb," said Windhu Purnomo, an epidemiologist at Indonesia's Airlangga University.

"This is just the beginning. Depending on how things are handled, we could end up with a major explosion like in India."

Case numbers are spiking as



A woman receives a dose of the Sinovac vaccine during a mass vaccination drive, at a sports centre in Banda Aceh on Saturday (AFP)

Indonesia grapples with new virus strains, including the highly infectious Delta variant first identified in India.

The rise has also been

blamed on millions travelling across the Muslim-majority nation at the end of Ramadan, despite an official ban on the annual migration.

Hospital occupancy rates have soared to over 75 per cent in Jakarta and other hard-hit areas, while funerals for COVID-19 victims have also reportedly jumped.

"It's worrying," Jakarta resident Rahmani told AFP at a cemetery where he attended the funeral of a relative who died of the virus. "As good citizens we have to follow government orders to obey health protocols."

Widespread rule-breaking on mask wearing and other health protocols, as well as vaccine scepticism, are among factors cited for the worsening situation.

The World Health Organiza-

tion has called for tougher movement restrictions.

Indonesia's government, widely criticised for a weak pandemic response, said on Monday it would temporarily beef up restrictions in the capital Jakarta and other hot spots - but enforcement has been lacklustre.

While Indonesia has not put major cities under the kind of strict measures rolled out in some virus-hit nations, dozens of communities in Central Java's Kudus regency were put into lockdown after the Delta variant was spotted in local testing samples.

AFP

US envoy offers to meet North Korea 'anywhere anytime'

Seoul, South Korea - The US special representative for North Korea on Monday offered to meet with Pyongyang 'anywhere, anytime, without preconditions', with no public contact so far between the Biden administration and the nuclear-armed nation.

Sung Kim's remarks came after North Korean leader Kim Jong Un last week gave his first reaction to Washington's recent review of its approach to his isolated country, saying Pyongyang must prepare for both 'dialogue and confrontation'.

The Biden administration has previously promised a 'practical, calibrated approach', including diplomatic efforts, to persuade the impoverished North to give up its banned nuclear weapons and ballistic missile programmes.

"We continue to hope that the DPRK will respond positively to our outreach, and our offer to meet anywhere anytime without preconditions," US envoy Kim said during a five-day visit to Washington's ally South Korea, referring to the North by its official name.

Last week, Kim Jong Un said the country's food situation was



US Special Representative for North Korea Sung Kim (AFP)

'tense', sounding the alarm in a country with a moribund agricultural sector that has long struggled to feed itself and is now under self-imposed isolation to try to protect itself against the coronavirus pandemic.

Pyongyang's state-run KCTV on Sunday reported leader Kim and top officials had discussed 'emergency measures' to tackle the country's 'current food crisis'.

North Korea has long insisted that it has had no cases of the virus but it has paid a heavy economic price for its self-imposed blockade. Trade with China, its economic lifeline, has slowed to a trickle, while all international aid work faces tight restrictions.

AFP

Afghan leader Ghani to visit US as troops withdrawal nears

Washington, US - Afghan President Ashraf Ghani and the head of the country's peace process will meet President Joe Biden at the White House on Friday, as the planned American military withdrawal accelerates.

Biden has ordered the withdrawal of all US forces from Afghanistan by this year's 20th anniversary of the September 11 attacks that triggered the invasion. In moving to end America's



President Ashraf Ghani (AFP)

longest war, the President said he believes that no more can be achieved.

"The visit by President Ghani and Dr. Abdullah Abdullah will highlight the enduring partnership between the United States and Afghanistan as the military drawdown continues," spokeswoman Jen Psaki said in a statement on Sunday.

As the US military presses ahead to meet the September 11

deadline, the Taliban have fought daily battles with government forces and claim to have captured 40 districts.

The growing fear and uncertainty about the future have left many Afghans desperate to leave, including thousands of men and women who fear reprisals because they worked with foreign forces.

The Taliban said on Sunday they remain committed to peace

talks but insisted a 'genuine Islamic system' in Afghanistan was the only way to end the war and ensure rights - including for women.

Talks between the militants and the Afghan government have been deadlocked for months and violence has surged across the country since May when the US military began its final withdrawal.

AFP

Danger and demons: Yemen's mysterious 'Well of Hell'

Al-Mahra, Yemen - Surrounded in mystery and tales of demons, the Well of Barhout in Yemen's east - known as the 'Well of Hell' - is a little-understood natural wonder.

Closer to the border with Oman than to the capital Sanaa 1,300km away, the giant hole in the desert of Al-Mahra province is 30 metres wide and thought to be anywhere between 100 and 250 metres deep.

Local folklore says it was created as a prison for the demons - a reputation bolstered by the foul odours rising from its depths.

Yemeni officials say they don't know what lies below.

"It's very deep - we've never reached the bottom of this well, as there's little oxygen and no



An aerial view of the Well of Barhout known as the 'Well of Hell' in the desert of Yemen's Al-Mahra province (AFP)

ventilation," said Salah Babhair, director-general of Mahra's geological survey and mineral resources authority.

"We have gone to visit the area and entered the well, reaching more than 50-60 metres down into it. We noticed strange

things inside. We also smelled something strange... It's a mysterious situation."

Sunlight doesn't extend far into the structure, and little can be seen from the edge except the birds that fly in and out of its depths.

Videographers seeking close-ups of the inside of the well have said they are almost impossible to capture - local superstition has it that objects near the hole can be sucked towards it.

Babhair said that the well was 'millions and millions' of years old.

"These places require more study, research and investigation," he said.

Over the centuries, stories have circulated of malign, super-

natural figures known as jinns or genies living in the well.

Many local residents remain uneasy about visiting the vast hole, or even talking about it, for fear of ill fortune from a chasm which, legend has it, threatens life on Earth itself.

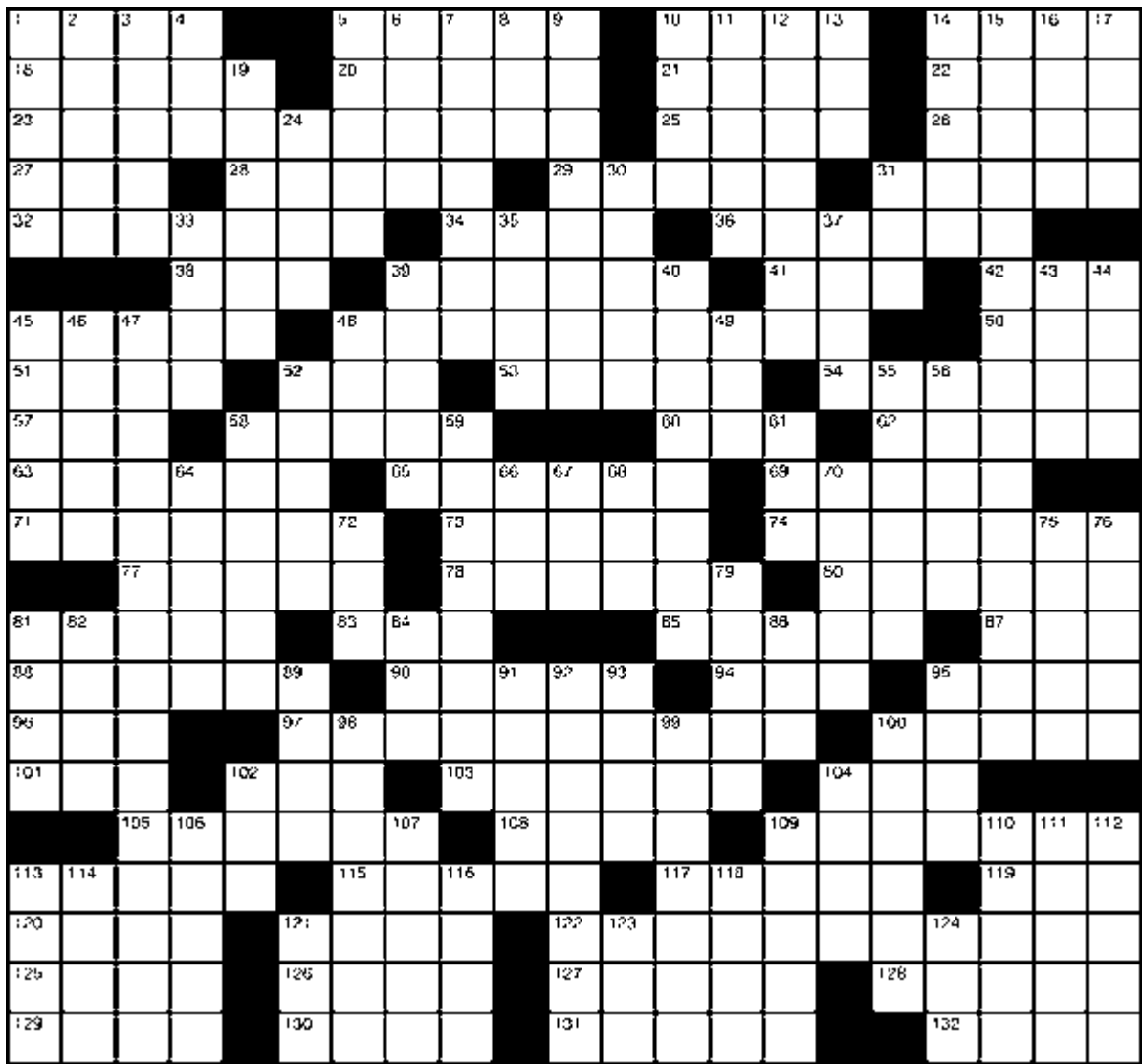
Yemenis have had enough bad luck as it is.

The country has been embroiled in a civil war since 2014 between the government and the Huthi rebels.

The United Nations says Yemen is suffering the world's worst humanitarian crisis, with tens of thousands killed, millions displaced and two-thirds of its 30mn population dependent on some form of aid.

AFP

DAILY CROSSWORD



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ACROSS

- 1 Like some
excuses
5 Israeli
10 Daybreak
14 Pleased
18 Champagne
buckets
20 Of a geographical
region
21 Lotion ingredient
22 Ange's wing
23 Aka Elia the
essayist
25 Model T
26 Drudge
27 Charged particle
28 Fiery crime
29 Entertainer
31 ___ Arenas, Chile
32 Without exception
34 Raton lead-in
36 Having limits
38 Curly's friend
39 ___ Cranston aka
The Shadow
41 Bolt down
42 Testing spot
45 Hawthorne's
birthplace
48 A Masters champ
50 Puppeteer Baird
51 Tedious type
52 Part of to be
53 Appears
54 Boardwalk feature

- 57 S.A. country
58 E trailers
60 Shocking
swimmer
62 Like some seals
63 Stick
65 Truant; absentee
69 Earl Long's Blaze
71 New member
73 Hurl
74 Huntsman's cry
77 Recklessness
78 Incendiary fuel
80 Din
81 Chew the
scenery
83 Chew the fat
85 Hardly obese
87 ___ Locka, FL
88 ___ borealis
90 Mario or Andrew
94 Dale's saddlemate
95 Court order
96 Leia to Luke
informally
97 "Private Lives"
dramatist
100 Foolish ones
101 Before, to Byron
102 Artist ___ Borch
103 Not long ago
104 Average
105 Inn
108 Comstock ___
109 Warnings
113 Work hard

- 115 Kind of energy
117 Nick of Hollywood
119 Number in
Caesar's deck
120 Roll call response
121 Portico
122 "Spin City" star
125 Take home
126 Hang fire
127 Bedeck
128 Onrush
129 The ___ the limit
130 "___ sow, so
shall. . ."
131 Canonical hours
132 Eye drop

DOWN

- 1 Allowed
2 Sneeze
3 Denoted
4 Flub
5 Hardly polite
6 Woody's son
7 Chair of the '60s
8 Aries
9 Tuna
10 Loony
11 Snobbish
12 Not at peace
13 Sparks or Rorem
14 Whole range
15 Ethel and John's
brother
16 Landed
17 Creme ___ creme
19 Skiing race
24 Gardner of mystery
30 "___ talk?": Rivers'
query
31 Peach center
33 Prayer ender
35 Cockney abodes
37 Final Frontier org.
39 ___ one's teeth:
tells a whopper
40 "The Seven Year
Itch" star
43 Staff member
44 Wasn't colorfast
45 Part of 37 Down
46 Composer Copland
47 Robert E. Lee's
father
48 Regal abbr.
49 Verb ender
52 Representative
55 No kidding!
56 "Cheers" waitress
58 Author Dame
Antonia
59 The English
personified
61 WWII landing
craft
64 Poet's muse
66 Expanse
67 Hazardly start?
68 Eggs, to Cato
70 Lacking style
72 Young sheep
75 Pueblo people
76 Take the stump

- 79 Tie the knot
81 Loosen
82 Naturalist John ___
84 Crackerjack
86 Silent assent
89 Work without ___:
take risks
91 Florida citrus
center
92 Conductor
93 Saw red?
95 "The Way We ___"
98 Electra's brother
99 Fine lace
100 Attention-getters
in court
102 Literary inits.
104 Party paste
106 Microwaves
107 Not all there
109 Highland groups
110 Actress Woodard
111 River at Corning,
NY
112 Cager from Philly
113 Women
114 Security problem
116 Put cargo aboard
118 Czech river
121 Salutory site
123 Altar vow
124 Stick out

YOUR DAILY HOROSCOPE



ARIES MARCH 21-APRIL 19

Your insight is in heavy demand right now. People who are looking for answers want to spend some time with you! This means that the tone of your day could be hectic, but you will also feel very popular, even beloved. Family members, co-workers, and even strangers want to know what you think about their situation. In giving them your honest critique, remember to be compassionate.



LEO JULY 23-AUGUST 22

Beware of being too impulsive, especially in terms of your shopping habits. Being spontaneous when shopping could lead to more financial commitment than you initially anticipated. Try to avoid making any purchases whatsoever, even if that means packing your lunch or bumming a ride. Saving more money is not only good for your bank account, it's also good for your ego.



SAGITTARIUS NOVEMBER 22-DECEMBER 21

An authority figure in your life who sometimes verges on being a real friend might stir up some difficult emotions. Your first urge will be to talk it out with them, but it's much wiser to hold onto what you're feeling for now. The line between your personal and professional relationship is too blurry, and asking them to navigate it with you is way too risky of a proposition.



TAURUS APRIL 20-MAY 20

There is a person in your life who has been working on your last nerve and it's time for them to go. Today is the right day to tell them what you're feeling, gently and with your trademark diplomacy. Let your compassion guide you through this tricky conversation, and let them know that it's nothing personal, but you just need a break (you don't have to get specific as to why).



VIRGO AUGUST 23-SEPTEMBER 22

Today is a great day to formulate your plans and organise a list of things you need to do to prepare for a new project. You need to start putting more effort into growing your career and pushing yourself to reach for goals that are a little bit higher. Remember that your boss is a human being, and a simple conversation can lay the foundation for your future.



CAPRICORN DECEMBER 22-JANUARY 19

One of your friends might have an interesting social opportunity for you, but you need to do some research before committing yourself in any way to it. If your friend is truly a friend, they won't mind in the least if you do your due diligence before associating yourself with their little scheme. And if they get defensive about it, then you know for sure that something is up!



GEMINI MAY 21-JUNE 21

Friends who you feel are more successful than you could be showing signs of wear and tear. Today you might actually see that their lives aren't as perfect as you thought they were. They need some advice, and you are the person to give it. Your perspective is so different from theirs, and it's the only one that will mean anything to them. This switch in the dynamic isn't such a switch.



LIBRA SEPTEMBER 23-OCTOBER 22

A friend or partner needs your guidance. They're in the midst of making a decision, and they need to have a sanity check with you. Make time for them! Be prepared for long conversations that don't go anywhere but around in circles. As a friend, you need to be a good listener and a good cheerleader, just like they have been for you in the past. Stay patient and positive.



AQUARIUS JANUARY 20-FEBRUARY 18

You have the right philosophy for staying grounded and in sync with all the important people. You just have to have faith! To cultivate your confidence in your people skills, get as social as you can. The sooner you can make someone smile, the sooner you will get a clear sense of the power of your personality. Recent setbacks aren't a sign that you're losing your mojo.



CANCER JUNE 22-JULY 22

Your newest relationship is going well, but you need to take things a little more slowly now. If you act impatient or try to rush the other person, you'll only create more stress for yourself. Relax and trust that things will be what they're destined to be. Let things unfold at their own pace. There are some small details around the house you can take care of.



SCORPIO OCTOBER 23-NOVEMBER 21

You could have a strong sense that there is something going on that no one is telling you about. Are you being left out of a secret? That remains to be seen. Walk a little more slowly by people in hushed conversations and see what you pick up. Before the end of the day, you'll probably be able to put the pieces together and get a loose idea of what is really going on.



PISCES FEBRUARY 19-MARCH 20

The people you love could use a reminder of that fact. Try to show as much affection as you can for them. Have confidence that your friendships are real and strong, because they are. You are in a very healthy phase in terms of communicating and connecting with others. Others are trying to distract you from your friends, but you know what's important.



TEST YOUR KNOWLEDGE

1. Light from the Sun reaches us in nearly

- a. 2 minutes
b. 4 minutes
c. 8 minutes
d. 16 minutes

2. Stars appears to move from east to west because

- a. all stars move from east to west
b. the earth rotates from west to east
c. the earth rotates from east to west
d. the background of the stars moves from west to east

3. Pa(Pascal) is the unit for

- a. thrust
b. pressure
c. frequency
d. conductivity

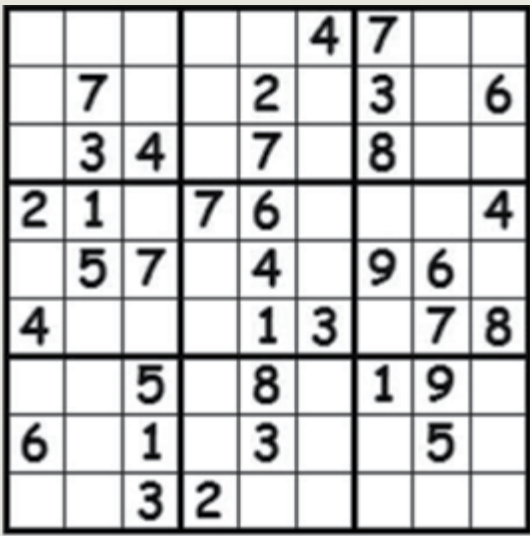
Answers: 1. c 2. b 3. b

KIDS COLOURING



DO YOU SUDOKU?

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



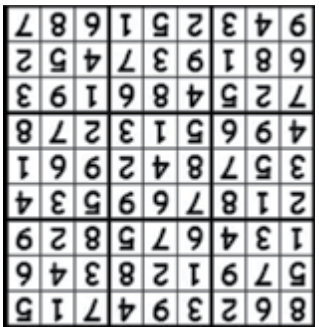
BOGGLER



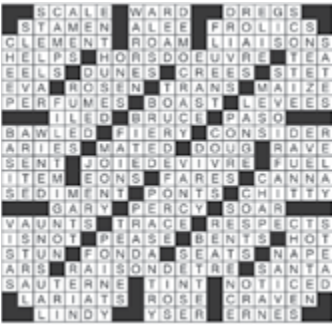
Each game will present you with a matrix filled with letters. The objective is to form words by linking adjacent letters - to the left, right, on top, bottom, or diagonal to each other. The Boggles Classic game uses a 4 x 4 matrix. Words are valued at one point for each letter in excess of two letters.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

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

SUDOKU EASY ANSWER



DAILY CROSSWORD ANSWERS (JUNE 21)



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



SUMMER ACCESSORIES

WEAR YOUR

Summer is that time of the year when your attitude towards life is evident from what you wear everyday. Besides dressing cool, it is also the right season for accessories which can elevate even the simplest of outfits. Hence, it is so important to know what's 'in' or 'out' each year. Summer is also the perfect time to wear your boldest and brightest clothes, try new trends, and take risks with your outfits. Check out these fashionable summer accessories which can brighten up your days:

Attitude



Statement earrings

This year, necklaces are getting slimmer and earrings bigger – in fact, its the direction jewellery trends have been moving since last year. Bold, extra large statement earrings are seen to be a great way to step up your travel wardrobe game. Shoulder-grazing earrings are considered perfect to pair with off-the-shoulder tops, solid neutral outfits, or simple dresses.

Pearl jewellery

Pearl jewellery arrived on the scene with a bang last spring and has continued unabated all through summer. They say, classic pearls never go out of style, and in summer, they add an element of being chic as well as cool as they seem to go with all outfits, casual as well as formal.



Mask chains

Mask chains have become more popular as a cute and functional way to up your mask game. If you have to wear one, why not make it stylish jewellery? It frees your hands, and you can leave your mask around your neck when you need to take it off, so you'll never misplace it.

Round cross-body bags

These popular small, round cross body bags are just the right accessory for packing the bare essentials and looking great when you head outdoors. Stylish and compact, they are an easy-to-pack bag to bring on your trips, in addition to your larger daypack. Carry it for sightseeing, to museums, or for a night out.

Modern aviators

Sunglasses are affordable summer accessories and an easy way to change up your travel outfit. In addition to the popular round frames and mirrored lenses, the more modern style aviator is a hit this season – you can find square rimmed, even octagonal rimmed sunglasses this summer.

Packable floppy hats

Functional and fashionable, floppy hats are for summer. They add just the right amount of breezy, bohemian flare to your look. Pair them with cool aviators to keep the Sun out and the style in. Go for simple designs with good cover – light and cool on your head. Floral bucket hats are also 'in'.



Clog sandals

The popular block heel and flat-form sandals that have been trending since last year have quickly transformed into the clog sandal. This is a comfortable as well as chic alternative. Also, it provides a welcome change from the typical summertime wedge.

Net bags

Beachy materials like basket weaves and netting always emerge in the warmer months, but don't think these purses are only useful pool-side. From grocery store runs to brunches, net bags are stylish and practical. Think raffia totes, basket bags, and crochet carryalls that add a free-spirited touch to your ensembles.

Silk hair accessories

Admit it - you've been wearing your hair in a bun or ponytail for the majority of quarantine, haven't you? It's okay, but now's the moment to get back into the routine of putting some effort into our hair. Luckily, silk headbands and hair ties make it easy to accessorise and even bring those low-effort hairstyles out into the world with some added flair.



SUMMER ACCESSORIES FOR MEN



Cool bracelets

Whether you're a fan of men's jewellery or not, an understated bracelet can add a touch of personality to any outfit. Look for leather or canvas options this season that will not only be comfortable to wear in the heat, but also look

the part whether you're on the beach or at a wedding.

Travel wallets

If you're on the go this summer, a simple travel wallet will be your saviour. Keeping all of your essentials – flight tickets, bank notes and spare change

– stored smartly and securely, it's a practical addition to your collection that will ensure you feel more organised than ever.

Statement sunglasses

Summer wouldn't be summer without a pair of sunglasses, so do it with some real style. An easy way to add some flair to your style is to try a pair of statement frames. Go for a flashy pair, let heads turn.

Invisible socks

Forget the woollen socks that suck in summer. Go for invisible socks that are not just cool but also keep body odour out. Also, if you have rubber heel strips on the inside of your shoes, they'll ensure your socks stay on your feet and you don't have to adjust them



every couple of steps. Invisible socks are meant for summer, use them everyday.

Lightweight ties

The thought of wearing a suit in the summer might be quite distressing but they will be some events which require you to wear them, which you cannot avoid – client meetings, formal events, weddings. So, make do with small adjustments like using lightweight ties. They bring texture and a season-appropriate vibe.

Up to 10,000 fans allowed at Tokyo Olympics events

Tokyo, Japan - Up to 10,000 fans will be allowed at Tokyo Olympic events, organisers said on Monday, warning competition could move behind closed doors if infections surge. The decision, just weeks before the opening ceremony, ends months of speculation about whether domestic spectators would be able to attend the pandemic-postponed Games. Overseas fans were banned in March.

A lottery will determine which existing ticket-holders can attend a Games that will be unlike any other, with cheering banned, masks mandatory, and fans told to go straight home after the competition.

"In light of the government's restrictions on public events, the spectator limit for the Olympic Games will be set at 50 per cent of venue capacity, up to a maximum of 10,000 people in all venues,"

organisers said in a statement. A decision on spectators at the Paralympics will be delayed until July 16, a week before the Olympics open.

And officials left open the possibility of a reversal if the virus rebounds. Tokyo was under a coronavirus state of emergency until Sunday.

"If there should be major dramatic change in the infection situation, we may need to revisit this matter amongst ourselves and we may need to consider the option of having no spectators in the venues," Tokyo Governor Yuriko Koike said. Senior medical experts, including top advisors to the government, have said holding the Games behind closed doors would be 'ideal' from a health perspective.

They fear crowds of fans could fuel a new surge in infections in a country still racing to vaccinate its residents.

AFP

Rahm wins US Open

US OPEN GOLF

La Jolla, US - Jon Rahm made tension-packed long birdie putts on the last two holes on Sunday to win the 121st US Open and capture his first major title, defeating South African Louis Oosthuizen by one shot.

The 26 year old Spaniard curled in a spectacular birdie putt from just inside 25 feet at the par-four 17th hole then made his fourth birdie of the week at the par-five 18th, blasting out of a bunker and rolling in an 18-footer to seize the lead.

"I have a hard time explaining what just happened because I can't even believe I made the last two putts," Rahm said. After stunning, fist-pumping putts to reach the clubhouse, Rahm could only watch 2010 British Open champion Oosthuizen play the last four holes.

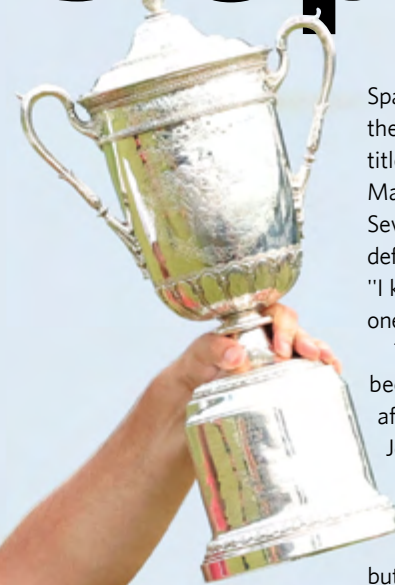
At 17, Oosthuizen sent his tee shot left into bushes and made bogey to fall two adrift and a

closing birdie only made him a major runner-up for the sixth time in his career. "I played good. Just fell a little short again," Oosthuizen said. "Jon played a great round of golf. Errant tee shot on 17 just cost me. I fought really well to stay in it and just fell short again."

Rahm fired a four-under par 67, the only leader to go bogey-free on the back nine, to finish 72 holes on six-under 278 with Oosthuizen on 279 and American Harris English third on 281.

"He was a major champion in waiting. It was just a matter of time," four-time major winner Rory McIlroy said of Rahm. "To shoot 67 out there was a really good round."

On the same course where he won his first US PGA title in 2017, Rahm became only



the fourth US Open winner to close with back-to-back birdies, matching Jack Nicklaus, Tom Watson and Ben Hogan. "It's incredible that I finished the way I did," Rahm said. "Making that putt on this green when I got my first win, it's hard to describe."

He became the first Spaniard to win a US Open and the fourth to capture a major title after Sergio Garcia, Jose Maria Olazabal and the late Seve Ballesteros. "This was definitely for Seve," Rahm said. "I know he wanted to win this one most of all."

Third-ranked Rahm also became the new world No 1 after top-ranked Dustin Johnson shared 19th on 286.

Rahm topped the rankings briefly last year after winning the Memorial, but tested positive for COVID-19 during the event two weeks ago and spent last week in quarantine.

"I'm a big believer in karma and after what happened a couple weeks ago, I stayed really positive knowing good things were coming," Rahm said.

AFP

Jon Rahm of Spain celebrates with the trophy after winning the 2021 US Open at Torrey Pines Golf Course in San Diego, US, on Sunday (AFP)

Hernandez snatches draw for Venezuela against Ecuador

Rio de Janeiro, Brazil - Ronald Hernandez scored an injury time equaliser to earn minnows Venezuela a share of the spoils in a 2-2 draw with Ecuador at the Copa America on Sunday.

Ecuador twice took the lead through Ayrton Preciado and Gonzalo Plata either side of a powerful headed goal from Venezuela's Edson Castillo.

It was a remarkable achievement for a team still missing 12

players due to testing positive for COVID-19 or injury.

"I have no words to describe my admiration for these lads," said Venezuela's coach Jose Pesero.

"The way they played for the first time in the professional team, they're here showing an ability to sacrifice, to fight, to defend the Burgundy (jersey), which excites me."

The point left Ecuador bottom



Venezuela's Ronald Hernandez celebrates after scoring against Ecuador

of the five team group on one point, with Venezuela a place and a point above them after having played a game more.

Hosts Brazil lead the group with a perfect two wins from two ahead of Colombia, who lost 1-2 to third-placed Peru in Goiania.

Ecuador were off to a bright start but deadlock was broken in scrappy circumstances six minutes before halftime.

Pervis Estupinan sent a free-kick into the box that Campana won in the air, causing havoc

before Preciado stabbed home the loose ball after it ricocheted off goalkeeper Wuiker Farinez.

Venezuela were level, though, just six minutes into the second half when Castillo rose unmarked eight yards out to plant a bullet header from Jose Martinez's cross into the top corner, leaving Ortiz rooted to his line.

They did move back in front 19 minutes from time after a counter-attack from a Venezuela corner. Plata ran from one box to the other with the ball and al-

though Farinez saved his tired effort, Christian Noboa's follow-up ricocheted back to him off a back-tracking defender and Plata poked home. Plata was at fault for Venezuela's equaliser, caught out of position as Hernandez ran past him to head in Edson Castillo's long ball.

Meanwhile, Peru upset Colombia 2-1 thanks to a Yerry Mina own goal. Sergio Pena gave Peru a first half lead but Miguel Borja equalised from the penalty.

AFP

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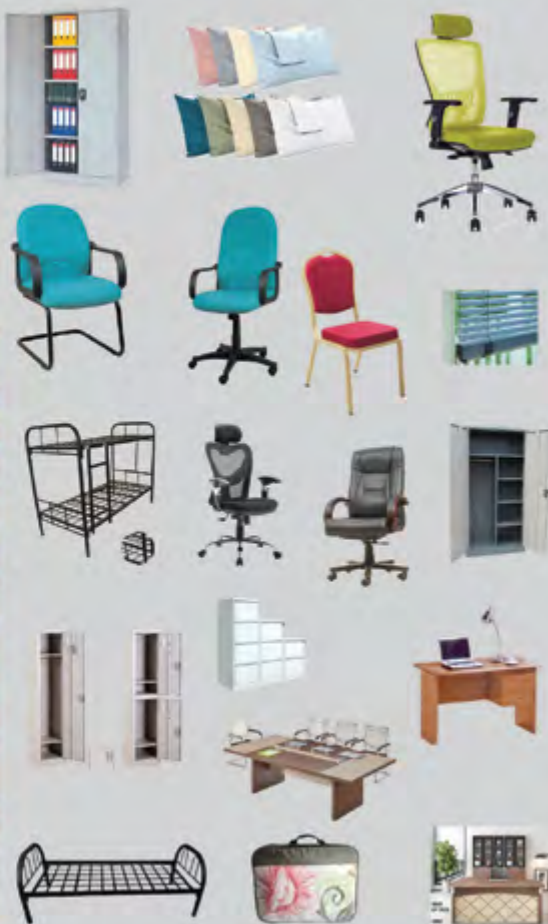


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EURO2020



DELIGHTFUL DUTCH

Wijnaldum hits double as the Netherlands complete perfect group phase with win over North Macedonia

Amsterdam, Netherlands - Georginio Wijnaldum scored twice as the Netherlands completed a perfect group stage at Euro 2020 by comfortably beating North Macedonia 3-0 in Amsterdam on Monday.

The Dutch captain, who signed for Paris Saint-Germain (PSG) from Liverpool just before the tournament began, scored twice in the second half at the Johan Cruyff Arena after Memphis Depay had put them in front.

Depay, fresh from sealing a transfer of his own to Barcelona, could claim assists for both of Wijnaldum's goals as Frank de Boer's side made it nine points out of nine in Group C.

They had already secured qualification for the last-16 as group winners after defeating Ukraine and Austria in front of their own fans at the home of Ajax, and so the 1988 European champions knew they were heading for a knockout tie in Budapest next weekend.

North Macedonia, meanwhile, were already out after losing their first two games in their debut appearance at a major tournament.

They leave without a point, but they will never forget this campaign and this game will be best remembered as the last of veteran 37 year old striker Goran Pandev's international career after two decades.

He was gifted a Dutch shirt with the number 122 - the number of caps he has won - before kick-off, and was given a guard of honour by his teammates as well as an ovation from the home fans on being replaced midway through the second half.

But the North Macedonians couldn't sign off on a high, with Pandev setting up Aleksandar Trajkovski for a shot off the post when the game was still

goalless. They also had two goals disallowed for offside and felt that the Netherlands' opener in the 24th minute should not have stood.

Pandev felt he was fouled on the edge of the Dutch box by Daley Blind but the Romanian referee allowed play to go on and the home side broke forward.

Depay exchanged passes with Donyell Malen before finishing and the goal stood following a VAR check.



Netherlands' Georginio Wijnaldum (L) scores his team's third goal against North Macedonia at Johan Cruyff Arena in Amsterdam on Monday (AFP)

PSV Eindhoven forward Malen and Ajax midfield prodigy Ryan Gravenberch came in for Wout Weghorst and Marten de Roon as the only two changes made to the Dutch line-up by De Boer.

He stuck with his much criticised 3-5-2 formation - before tweaking it in the second half - but was reluctant to rest too many players with six days after this until their next match.



Wijnaldum celebrates after scoring

And, despite the cold and damp conditions, the evening had the air of a relaxed send-off for the Dutch side, who will not play any more games in Amsterdam - victory in the last-16 will send them on to a quarterfinal in distant Baku.

After Depay's opener, Denzel Dumfries came close to making it 2-0 before they ran away with the game early in the second half. Matthijs de Ligt had a header

cleared off the line prior to Depay squaring for Wijnaldum to make it 2-0 six minutes into the second period.

Another delightful move brought the third goal just before the hour as Malen's pass found Depay whose shot was saved by Stole Dimitrievski only for Wijnaldum to convert the follow-up for his third of the tournament. AFP

Injured Dembele out of Euro 2020

Budapest, Hungary - France have lost Ousmane Dembele for the rest of Euro 2020 after X-rays showed the Barcelona winger's knee injury would not heal in time, the French Football Federation (FFF) said on Monday.

Dembele, 24, was hurt in the closing minutes of the 1-1 draw against Hungary in Budapest on Saturday after coming on as a substitute. X-rays on Sunday evening showed he would not be back before the end of the Euros.

"The recovery time is incompatible with keeping him in the squad," the FFF said.

Dembele came off the bench

in both France's matches in the Euros. He replaced Adrien Rabiot for the final seconds of the opening win over Germany and replaced Rabiot again after 57 minutes in Budapest.

Under UEFA rules which only allow for goalkeepers to be replaced during the tournament. France cannot call up a stand-in for Dembele, who has 27 caps.

France started with eight attackers in their 26-man squad including Kingsley Coman of Bayern, a similar type of player to Dembele who has yet to play a minute in the Euros.

AFP

Scotland's Gilmour tests positive for coronavirus

Glasgow, UK - Chelsea midfielder Billy Gilmour tested positive for coronavirus on Monday, dealing a blow to Scotland's hopes of advancing past the group stages of a major tournament for the first time.

Gilmour picked up the man-of-the-match award in Friday's 0-0 draw against England at Wembley in his first international start. But he will miss Tuesday's clash against Croatia at Hampden with Scotland needing to win to have any chance of progressing to the last-16 of Euro 2020.

"The Scottish FA can confirm

that a member of the Scotland national team playing squad, Billy Gilmour, has tested positive for COVID-19," the Scottish Football Association said in a statement.

Self-isolation

In a related development on Monday, England's Ben Chilwell and Mason Mount have to self-isolate as a precaution after coming into close contact with Scotland's Gilmour. Chilwell and Mount were seen interacting with Gilmour after Friday's goalless draw with Scotland.

AFP

TODAY'S MATCHES

GROUP D	
	
CROATIA VS SCOTLAND	
	
CZECH REPUBLIC VS ENGLAND	
(Both games kick-off at 11pm, Oman time)	

STANDINGS

	P	W	D	L	GF	GA	GD	PTS
GROUP A								
Italy	3	3	0	0	7	0	7	9
Wales	3	1	1	1	3	2	1	4
Switzerland	3	1	1	1	4	5	-1	4
Turkey	3	0	0	3	1	8	-7	0
GROUP B								
Belgium	2	2	0	0	5	1	4	6
Russia	2	1	0	1	1	3	-2	3
Finland	2	1	0	1	1	1	0	3
Denmark	2	0	0	2	1	3	-2	0
GROUP C								
Netherlands	3	3	0	0	8	2	6	9
Austria	3	2	0	1	4	3	1	6
Ukraine	3	1	0	2	4	5	-1	3
North Macedonia	3	0	0	3	2	8	-6	0
GROUP D								
Czech Republic	2	1	1	0	3	1	2	4
England	2	1	1	0	1	0	1	4
Croatia	2	0	1	1	1	2	-1	1
Scotland	2	0	1	1	0	2	-2	1
GROUP E								
Sweden	2	1	1	0	1	0	1	4
Slovakia	2	1	0	1	2	2	0	3
Spain	2	0	2	0	1	1	0	2
Poland	2	0	1	1	2	3	-1	1
GROUP F								
France	2	1	1	0	2	1	1	4
Germany	2	1	0	1	4	3	1	3
Portugal	2	1	0	1	5	4	1	3
Hungary	2	0	1	1	1	4	-3	1



Austria's Christoph Baumgartner (2L) celebrates with teammates after scoring against Ukraine on Monday

Austria advance

Bucharest, Romania - Christoph Baumgartner's first-half goal sent Austria through to the last-16 of Euro 2020 on Monday after a 1-0 win over Ukraine that left their opponents facing an anxious wait to see if they qualify.

Hoffenheim midfielder Baumgartner turned in David Alaba's corner on 21 minutes in Bucharest as Austria pipped Ukraine to second place in Group C behind the Netherlands. Austria will play Italy at Wembley on June 26 after advancing from the group stage at a major tournament for the first time since the 1982 World Cup.

Ukraine, eliminated in the group stage at the past two

Euros, must wait to find out if they advance as one of four best third-placed teams.

Austria coach Franco Foda recalled Marko Arnautovic after the forward missed the 2-0 defeat by the Netherlands while serving a one-match ban for insulting a North Macedonia player in their opener.

Needing victory to be assured of a place in the next round, Austria went ahead as Baumgartner beat 18 year old defender Illia Zabarnyi to Alaba's corner and poked beyond Georgiy Bushchan.

Ukraine came close to an equaliser when Mykola Shaparenko drew a good low save from Daniel Bachmann, the re-

bound just eluding a lunging Andriy Yarmolenko, who had scored in the first two group games.

Baumgartner's evening ended prematurely due to injury and his replacement Alessandro Schopf soon set up Arnautovic, the former Stoke man dribbling wide moments after Konrad Laimer's curling effort was pounced away by Bushchan. AFP

GROUP C	
	
UKRAINE VS AUSTRIA	
0 - 1	



EURO2020



Italy's coach Roberto Mancini gestures to his players during the match against Wales on Sunday (AFP)

MANCINI'S MAGIC

Rome, Italy - Roberto Mancini has turned the clock back for Italy, recapturing the atmosphere of the 1990 World Cup the country hosted, with a 1-0 victory over Wales on Sunday capping a perfect Euro 2020 group-stage run.

Three years after taking over following Italy's failure to qualify for the World Cup for the first time in 60 years, Mancini has led the Azzurri back to centre stage in emphatic fashion.

All Italy's group matches have been played in Rome's Stadio Olimpico.

And the song *Notti magiche* (Magical Nights) popularised during their home World Cup 31 years ago when Italy reached the semifinals rang out among the thousands of fans who were both delighted to rediscover their all-conquering national side and

return to the stands after over a year away because of the pandemic.

After a perfect European qualifying run, Italy have continued that form in the group stage, beating Turkey and Switzerland, both with a 3-0 scoreline, before the victory over the Welsh sealed top spot in Group A.

It was an 11th consecutive victory without conceding a goal. "It was nice to hear the Stadio Olimpico singing *Notti magiche* (Magical Nights)," said 56 year old Mancini.

"It brought us back a few years when we were all younger and we felt an extraordinary love for the national team.

"This is why I want to dedicate this victory to them."

He added, "We say *Ciao Roma* and thank them for what they have done."

Italy will play the runner-up

from Group C, either Austria or Ukraine, at Wembley, where the semifinals and final will also be hosted.

Italy extended their unbeaten run to 30 games - 25 wins and five draws - a feat last achieved under two-time World Cup winning coach Vittorio Pozzo between 1935 and 1939.

"I'd like to resemble one of the coaches who won the World Cup," said Mancini, who has been in charge of four-time world champions Italy for 35 games.

"Pozzo won many other important things. We are still behind."

Another record beckons - a 12th consecutive victory. That was achieved by Ferruccio Valcareggi, who led Italy to their only European title in 1968, and a runners-up spot in the World Cup two years later.

'Dream big'

Midfielder Federico Chiesa also got his first start in this Euro 2020 and earned the man of the match award on Sunday. "We are ready to dream big. We've all the options in hand," said the 23 year old Juventus player. "The best is yet to come. It's great to play at Wembley. But our goal is to return to London after the last-16.

"We've given the coach a lot of headaches about who to field. We have 26 players on the team who can start."

Mancini conceded the run had been perfect as Italy matched their unbeaten group runs in three previous world and European tournaments in 2000, 1990 and 1978.

"We couldn't have done better," said the former Manchester City manager.

AFP

CRICKET ROUND-UP

SA in control

WEST INDIES VS S AFRICA SECOND TEST: DAY THREE

Gros-Islet, Saint Lucia - Rassie van der Dussen's unbeaten 75 and support from Kagiso Rabada saved South Africa from a complete second innings collapse as they recovered from 73 for seven to eventually be dismissed for 174 on the rain-shortened third day of the second Test against the West Indies in St Lucia on Sunday.

That left the home side with a daunting victory target of 324 to level the series. Captain Kraigg Brathwaite and opening partner Kieran Powell negotiated six overs to the close of play with the Caribbean side set to resume on the fourth day at 15 without loss.

Seeking to build on a healthy first innings lead of 149 at the start of the day, the Proteas were first thwarted by heavy rain which resulted in the entire morning session's play being lost. When play did get underway, they lost early wickets to Kemar Roach as he prised out Aiden Markram in the first over of the innings. Then after changing ends to replace pacer Shannon Gabriel, he accounted for the other



SA's Rassie van der Dussen celebrates his half-century

opener and captain Dean Elgar.

Elgar's demise triggered a collapse with six wickets tumbling for another 40 runs before van der Dussen found a reliable partner in Rabada with the score at 73 for seven. Brathwaite quickly turned to Mayers, who led the bowling effort in the first innings with figures of three for 28. He enjoyed immediate success when Keegan Peterson dragged a wide delivery onto his stumps.

Mayers then despatched Kyle Verreynne to a catch at the wicket and claimed his third victim when Wiaan Mulder's drive found Shai Hope at gully.

However the biggest celebration came just minutes before

SCOREBOARD			
South Africa 1st Innings 298			
West Indies 1st Innings 149			
SOUTH AFRICA 2 ND INNINGS			
A Markram	c Holder b Roach	4	
D Elgar	c Holder b Roach	10	
K Petersen	b Mayers	18	
R van der Dussen	not out	75	
K Verreynne	c da Silva b Mayers	6	
Q de Kock	c da Silva b Holder	0	
W Mulder	c Hope b Mayers	0	
K Maharaj	c Holder b Seales	6	
K Rabada	c sub (Bravo) b Roach	40	
A Nortje	c da Silva b Roach	3	
L Ngidi	st da Silva b Brathwaite	6	
Extras:	(b 1, lb 1, w 4)	6	
Total:	174 in 53 overs		
Fall of wickets: 1-4, 2-33, 3-44, 4-52, 5-53, 6-54, 7-73, 8-143, 9-152, 10-174			
Bowling: K Roach 13-1-52-4, S Gabriel 6-0-28-0, J Seales 11-3-34-1, K Mayers 9-2-24-3, J Holder 11-2-24-1, K Brathwaite 3-0-10-1			
WEST INDIES 2 ND INNINGS			
K Brathwaite	not out	5	
K Powell	not out	9	
Extras:	(lb 1)	1	
Total:	15 for no loss in six overs		
Bowling: K Rabada 3-1-5-0, L Ngidi 2-0-6-0, K Maharaj 1-0-3-0			

Mulder's demise as Holder dismissed the prolific Quinton de Kock without scoring. Holder's brilliance in the slip cordon was again in evidence when he dived full-length to his right at second slip to come up with his 50th Test catch in accounting for Keshav Maharaj off pacer Jayden Seales. AFP

Day four of WTC final washed out

Southampton, UK - Persistent rain allowed no play on day four of the World Test Championship (WTC) final, leaving India and New Zealand a maximum of 196 overs - including the reserve day - to identify an outright winner. In case of a draw, the WTC will have joint winners who will share the award money and the trophy. The draw has become a more favoured result with the first innings of both sides yet to be completed, with only 141.2 overs possible on the first four days.

As it stands, New Zealand are 116 behind India's first-innings score of 217 with eight wickets in hand after putting India in on day two, after the first day had been washed out. Kane Williamson and Ross Taylor are at the wicket. All eyes are now on the forecast for the last two days of the Test. BBC has predicted nothing more than a early-morning shower on Tuesday and a clear sunny day on Wednesday.

Cricinfo

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SPLENDID SHOW AT SPA

- Oman’s Al Faisal al Zubair and Spain’s Andy Soucek claim third place in second race
- Lechner Racing duo claims back-to-back podiums to lead series after two rounds

Our Correspondent
Muscat

2021 INTERNATIONAL GT OPEN

A splendid and a successful weekend came to a conclusion at the famed Spa-Francorchamps in Belgium for Oman’s Al Faisal al Zubair and his Spanish teammate, Andy Soucek, as they claimed another podium finish to retain their overall series lead after the second round of the 2021 International GT Open Championship on Sunday.

The maiden race win on Saturday gave them the series lead for first time, and on Sunday, they followed it up with a third place to sum up a scintillating show as the Lechner Racing duo head to the third round (July 9-11) at the Hungaroring circuit in Mogyorod, Hungary, high on confidence.

There have been not many occasions in Oman’s motor-sports history when an Omani racer, competing in one of the top European endurance series, is leading the championship. Al Faisal’s impressive display in his maiden endurance series has underlined his reputation as one of the best talents in the region.

The 23 year old, the only Omani to have won successive Porsche Middle East Challenge Series titles, was delighted at the turn of events in Spa where the series had a grid of 20 cars.

A third-place finish in the fourth race of the series gave the Lechner Racing Team Porsche 911 GT3 R duo a slim one-point overall lead (43 points) over Sunday’s race winners, Michele



Oman’s Al Faisal al Zubair drives his Porsche GT3 R car (second from left) in the second race of the second round at Spa-Francorchamps circuit on Sunday

Beretta and Frederik Schandorff, of Vincenzo Sospiri Racing (VSR) in their Lamborghini. Another VSR Lamborghini team of Yuki Nemoto and Baptiste Moulin, who came second to complete a one-two VSR finish, are overall third with 36 points.

Al Faisal and Soucek, garnered a total of 25 (15 and ten) points at Spa, having earlier pocketed 18 points from the first round at the Circuit Paul Ricard in France.

Of the four races, the pair has

a victory, two third-place finishes and a fourth spot.

Handicap system

With the FIA handicap system penalising a winning team with ten seconds for the pit stop in a subsequent race, finishing third overall on Sunday was all the more impressive for the Lechner Racing team. Beretta and Schandorff won the second race by 14.067s from their teammates with Soucek and Al Faisal 16.872s adrift at the chequered



A delighted Al Faisal al Zubair after finishing third at Spa on Sunday

flag, despite the handicap.

“This was an amazing race weekend, coming out with a win, a third-place and leading the championship,” said Al Faisal. “We definitely could not have asked for more. We were so happy to get our first victory in the GT Open, for myself, Andy [Soucek] and Lechner Racing. It was a big step.”

On Sunday, the one-hour second race was also held in warm and sunny conditions and Al Faisal lined up in sixth place on the grid behind Adam Carroll’s Audi R8, Loris Spinelli (Mercedes AMG), Robbie Foley (Aston Martin), Beretta (Lamborghini) and Nemoto (Lamborghini).

Al Faisal slipped behind Jens Reno Moller’s Honda NSX on the opening lap but regained his sixth position during the first 13 minutes of the race, as Carroll continued to lead from Spinelli and Foley.

He then held fifth as the race reached its mid point and he pitted after 11 laps for Soucek to take over for the final stint having

slipped to seventh. Once the front-runners had all pitted and switched drivers, Schandorff held the lead from Moulin and Michael Dinan with Soucek in sixth place heading into the final 23 minutes.

Soucek began to close in on his rivals and moved up to third place in the final quarter of the race and retained his position to the finish to cap an excellent weekend for the Lechner Racing Porsche.

“Coming in with the handicap in the pit stop, which gave us an extra ten seconds in the race, I think the job was really amazing,” added Al Faisal.

“The car felt good in the first stint. I lost a position to the Honda and then had a good move around and started catching the Lamborghini.

“We switched to Andy and he put on some better tyres and had a good stint to go up to third place. We are very happy with it. It seems like the whole team is working well together.”

Earlier, Al Faisal replaced Soucek for qualifying duties for Sunday’s slightly shorter second race. Saturday’s victory had given the Lechner Racing duo a six-point series lead over the Schandorff/Beretta Lamborghini and an eight-point advantage over the McLaren of Brendan Iribe and Ollie Millroy.

The Omani qualified the Lechner Porsche in sixth with a best lap of 2min 18.240s, with pole position falling to the Audi R8 of the British duo of Shaun Baffe and Adam Carroll with a tour of 2min 16.598sec.

2021 INTERNATIONAL GT OPEN
Overall standings after round two:
1 Andy Soucek (Spain)/Al Faisal al Zubair (Oman) 43 points
2 Frederick Schandorff (Switzerland)/Michele Beretta (Italy) 42 pts
3 Baptiste Moulin (Belgium)/Yuki Nemoto (Japan) 36 pts

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Oman survive Somalia scare to qualify



Victorious Oman players and officials after defeating Somalia at the Jassim Bin Hamad Stadium in Doha, Qatar, to qualify for the 2021 FIFA Arab Cup, which will be held later in the year

Our Correspondent
Muscat

2021 FIFA ARAB CUP QUALIFIER

Muhsen al Ghassani was the star of Oman’s scrappy 2-1 win over African minnows Somalia as Branko Ivankovic’s men secured their spot in the 2021 FIFA Arab Cup at the Jassim Bin Hamad Stadium in Doha, Qatar, on Sunday night.

Ghassani opened the scoring

for the Red Warriors and then earned the penalty for the second, which was converted by Salah al Yahyaei.

However, Oman had to stave off a spirited second-half comeback from Somalia, who reduced the margin and threatened to get the equaliser.

Oman become the second team after Sudan to advance to the FIFA Arab Cup with five more teams to join the main tournament, which will be

held from November 30-December 18.

The entertaining encounter on Sunday had Oman, ranked 80th in the world, clash against a side 117 places lower.

Ivankovic’s men, who recently booked one of the 12 spots in the third round of the FIFA World Cup Asian Qualifiers, were heavy favourites - and justified that status with an impressive first-half performance.

Ghassani pounced on a

rebound to fire them into an 11th-minute lead following Abdulaziz al Miqballi’s shot from the edge of the area.

Oman doubled 25 minutes later when Ghassani earned a penalty after he was brought down by Mustaf Mohamed inside the area. Yahyaei converted the resulting penalty.

Somalia, though, showed real spirit in the second half and provided a dramatic finale after deservedly halving the deficit

through a superb downward header by Abel Gigli in the 54th minute from Mohamed Abdulahi’s cross.

Oman held on for victory, however, and they will join hosts Qatar, Iraq, and the winner of Friday’s match between Bahrain and Kuwait in Group A.

The other teams already in the main round are Tunisia, UAE, Syria, Morocco, Saudi Arabia, Egypt, Algeria while Sudan qualified on Saturday.

Every day, all day!

