



THURSDAY, 01 APRIL 2021
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35°C/23°C

ANTÓNIO GUTERRES, UN SECRETARY-GENERAL, HAS EXPRESSED HIS GRATITUDE TO HIS MAJESTY SULTAN HAITHAM BIN TARIK FOR SUPPORTING THE EFFORTS OF THE SPECIAL ENVOY FOR YEMEN TO SOLVE THE YEMEN CRISIS AND BRING PEACE.

132,493 doses from 144,850 dispensed

ICU patients increase by 50% in last 10 days

Our Correspondent
Muscat

Of the total 144,850 doses of COVID-19 vaccines received by Oman, 132,493 doses have been administered. On Wednesday, when 2,920 individuals were immunised, H E Dr Ahmed Mohammed al Sa'eedi, Minister of Health, was in talks to procure more vaccines.

The first shipment of 15,600 doses of the Pfizer-BioNTech vaccine arrived in Oman on December 24, 2020, the second of 11,700 doses on January 11, 2021, and the third consignment of 17,550 on February 13, 2021, making for 44,850 doses.

Additionally, a gift of 100,000 doses of the Oxford-AstraZeneca vaccine came from India on January 30, 2021.

On March 7, H E Dr Sa'eedi informed that through COVAX - the global initiative aimed at equitable access to COVID-19 vaccines - more than 240,000 doses of different vaccines were scheduled to arrive between mid-March and May. Additionally, Oman is expected to receive 200,000 doses of the Johnson & Johnson vaccine by the end of June or early July 2021.

Talks on vaccine import from Russia

H E Dr Sa'eedi received in his office H E Dmitry Dogadkin, Russian Ambassador to Oman, on Wednesday. They addressed as-



H E Dr Ahmed al Sa'eedi received Russian ambassador to Oman on Wednesday and discussed vaccine manufacturing efforts and import

pects of cooperation between the two countries in the field of health, in addition to vaccine manufacturing efforts and import.

The meeting further underlined mechanisms to deal with the developments related to COVID-19 and international efforts to combat the pandemic.

Spike in cases, ICU admissions

As a result of the recent spike in infections, intensive care units (ICUs) in the sultanate are witnessing an increase in number of patients.

According to the Ministry of Health (MoH), 68 patients were hospitalised in the last 24 hours, taking the total number of patients in hospitals to 515, including 156 in ICUs.

Continued on Page 04

Private schools, sports activities suspended

Muscat - The Supreme Committee on Wednesday ordered the suspension of private and international schools' offline activities, limiting lessons to distance learning. It also suspended official sports activities besides reducing attendance of employees in government offices to 50 per cent.

The decision on schools and government attendance comes into effect from Sunday, April 4. Official sports activities will be suspended from April 1.

Oman supports World Heritage sites in East Africa



Stone Town in Zanzibar, a Unesco World Heritage Site

Our Correspondent
Muscat

A project to support capacity-building of World Heritage sites in East Africa financed by Oman has been launched under the aegis of Unesco at its World Heritage Centre in Paris.

Oman had signed an agreement with Unesco to provide support for capacity-building of nomination projects and promotion of World Heritage sites in five Eastern African countries of Comoros, Kenya, Madagascar, Somalia and Tanzania in January this year worth RO263,265.

The three-year capacity-building programme will improve representation of the Africa region on the World Heritage List not only by developing nomination dossiers and enhancing skills of heritage practitioners, but also by

strengthening networks, sensitising actors in the field of cultural and natural heritage, and closer involvement of local communities and stakeholders in order to increase the number of East African World Heritage properties.

H E Dr Hamed al Hamami, Oman's permanent representative to Unesco, reiterated the commitment of the sultanate to provide support to the Eastern Africa region in the implementation of the 1972 World Heritage Convention and emphasised that the launch of this project is a good start for stronger collaboration between the sultanate and the Eastern Africa region.

The ambassadors of the five countries expressed their gratitude for this support and acknowledged the activities of the programme.

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NEWS BRIEFS

OMAN, ALBANIA SIGN AGREEMENT ON MUTUAL VISA EXEMPTION

Riyadh, Saudi Arabia - Oman and the Republic of Albania signed an agreement on mutual visa exemption for holders of diplomatic, special and service passports at Oman's Embassy in Riyadh on Wednesday.

The agreement was signed on behalf of the governments of the two countries by H H Sayyid Faisal Turki al Said, the sultanate's ambassador to the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, and Sami Shiba, non-resident Ambassador of the Republic of Albania to Oman.





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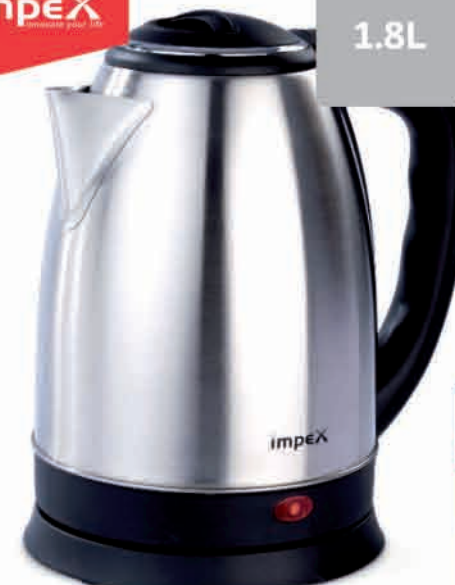
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Americana chicken franks 340g



10 Pieces
SAVE
38.10%
7 RIAL
4.890

دجاج كامل (ساديا) ١١٠٠ غرام
Dhofar whole chicken 600g



2 Pieces
SAVE
44.16%
2 RIAL
1.290

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Bahar detergent powder 1.35kg



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42.95%
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0.890

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41.72%
2 RIAL
1.690

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Pantene shampoo 400ml + conditioner 360ml



PER KG
DISCOUNT
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1 RIAL
0.900

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Online platform helps sell fish worth RO2mn in a year

Our Correspondent
Muscat

Behar, an integrated electronic platform that hosts wholesale auctions and retail sale of fish, registered sales worth more RO2mn while selling 2,826 tonnes of fish since its launch on March 28, 2020.

The COVID-19 pandemic spawned a multitude of online platforms and hastened the growth of e-commerce in the sultanate. Behar was one of the first e-platforms to be selected by Oman Technology Fund (OTF), a specialised government-backed fund that invests in IT and innovative startups, for funding support from an endowment of RO1mn earmarked for Omani entrepreneurial initiatives.

Speaking to *Muscat Daily*, Mohammed Mansoor al Housseini, founding partner of Behar, said, "Since we started the platform,



(Supplied photos)



I urge young Omani men to start their own projects and not fear failure. They must believe in their ideas

MOHAMMED MANSOOR AL HOUSSEINI

over 170 businesses engaged in the fisheries sector have registered with us, in addition to 310 merchants.

"More than 40,000 have visited Behar in one year."

He informed that the platform allows individual consumers to

view what is on offer in their neighbourhood fish stores, or select fish for the price and the quantity they want online, and

also request delivery of the items purchased at their doorstep. The platform also serves as a window for international companies to purchase local fish.

"We have exported to several countries, including Egypt, Lebanon and Saudi Arabia, and are currently looking at new markets abroad," Housseini said.

"I urge young Omani men to start their own projects and not fear failure. They must believe in their ideas. I thank the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Water Resources for supporting Behar and solving the problems which we faced."

Behar is currently looking to expand operations to the central fish markets in several wilayats, including Khasab and Dibba. "We call on all Omani fishermen to register on our platform to take advantage of it to promote their catch and also limit the spread of COVID-19," Housseini said.



(Supplied photo)

Higher education ministry launches licensing services

Our Correspondent
Muscat

The Ministry of Higher Education, Research and Innovation has launched new individual licence services and an electronic training platform called Tadreeb.

In a statement, the ministry said, 'H E Dr Rahma bint Ibrahim al Mahrouqiyah, Minister of Higher Education, Research and Innovation, launched services for individual licences and an electronic training platform. The idea is to create a nurturing and professional environment through an interactive electronic

platform targeting Omani individuals with talent and experience. It is based on enhancing the social responsibility of individuals and investing national energies in various fields.'

As per the ministry, the platform aims to simplify and accelerate procedures related to private training, create a database for this purpose, achieve competitiveness among private training institutions, create an attractive environment for investment in the private training sector, attract companies, and forge relations with local, regional and international organisations.

DBBS calls for urgent blood donations

Muscat - The Department of Blood Bank Services (DBBS) has appealed to people with A+ and B+ blood types to donate urgently at the Central Blood Bank in Bausher.

A statement issued by DBBS said, 'Many patients are in dire need of blood transfusion. We appeal to holders of A+ and B+ blood types to take the initiative to donate blood. Donation tim-

ings are 8am-6pm Saturday to Thursday and 3pm-6pm on Friday.'

Appointments to donate blood can be booked via WhatsApp on 94555648.

132,493 doses from 144,850 dispensed

Continued from Page 01

The number of ICU patients has increased dramatically - 50 per cent in the last ten days with 161 reported on March 29. On March 22, 104 patients were in ICUs, 128 on March 25, and 145 on March 28.

On Wednesday, MoH reported 1,162 new cases, taking the total number of cases registered in the sultanate to 159,218. It also reported nine deaths re-

lated to the virus, taking the death toll to 1,676. A total of 143,966 COVID-19 patients have recovered to date, which is 90.4 per cent of the total number infected.

According to the MoH, the Central Public Health Laboratory performs between 9,000 and 11,000 PCR tests every day, and 87 patients are currently hospitalised in the Field Hospital set up on the site which was earlier Muscat Airport.

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OCCI discusses stopping expat managers in manpower offices

Our Correspondent Muscat

With a view to organising the labour market, the Oman Chamber of Commerce and Industry (OCCI) has discussed stopping expatriates from managing manpower offices and increasing Omanisation rate in them.

The meeting was chaired by Ali bin Hamdan al Ajmi, chairman of the committee, and was held in the presence of Eng Reda bin Jumah al Saleh, chairman of the Board of Directors of OCCI, and members of the committee. The meeting discussed the importance of organising the labour market. The committee also discussed the challenges faced by Sanad and translation offices. OCCI said that it will organise a seminar that includes service sectors with relevant de-

cision-makers to address the challenges these sectors face. The meeting discussed the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic on the business of the service and information technology sectors. The committee suggested establishing a one-stop station with an electronic system that includes all services. OCCI will look into creating more opportunities for investors in cooperation with the Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion.

Converting mosques into green buildings powered by solar energy

Our Correspondent Muscat

The Amana Waqf Funds Management Company has finalised the first of its investment projects which will convert buildings of mosques into green, environment-friendly units operated by solar power. The project has been launched with an aim to transform mosques into environment-friendly buildings using clean solar energy and utilising the surplus to generate revenue for the Waqf establishment. Under the project, Hassan bin Thabit Mosque in the wilayat of Seeb has been converted into a



fully day-time solar powered mosque. The mosque, which occupies an area of 130sqm, uses 10kW solar panels installed in cooperation with a firm classified under the category of small and medium enterprises. The project cuts down power consumption

in the prayer area by 40 per cent and generates a power surplus of 2 per cent. Eng Yousef al Harthy, CEO of Amana Waqf Funds, said the initiative is in line with Oman Vision 2040 in establishing a sustainable environment.

RACHEL CHEW EXPLORES

I'M **RACHEL CHEW**; LOUD MOUTH, FOODIE AND A GENERAL EMBARRASSMENT WHO YOU CAN FIND ON HI FM WEEKDAYS 4-7PM.



The strangest part of the track is the fact that you end up in an old cemetery with very minimal graves and then you're back on the pavement in Muttrah, where you get to walk along the gardens and look out to the sea

Exploring Muttrah Geotrail

About six weeks ago I decided to get up at the crack of dawn and climb the Sa'al steps on my own to watch the sunrise. I had been to Sa'al before but every time I had gone everyone had been running on Oman time and we had missed the sunrise, so I thought I will go on my own and it was stunning. However, as I got to the bottom of the steps after previously reaching the summit, I saw two of my friends Sarah and Jamie with their dogs ready to tackle the descent themselves; next thing I knew I was climbing again for round two. I can assure you my legs were jelly that afternoon and I was not great company as I was knackered! The three of us decided to make this a weekly thing (climbing the steps once that is, there is no need to do it twice); we would meet at 6am at the bottom and climb together, not everyone is so

warm and friendly to the dogs but there is a real sense of community, where you find yourself bumping into the same familiar faces each week. Last week we decided to mix it up and chose to hike the Muttrah Geotrail instead. My friend Nicole had declined our invites for the last few weeks as she is not a fan of Sa'al so it was lovely to have her come along. It meant we had two Brits and two Americans which was fun and also helpful when walking with three dogs. This hike I have also done twice before, once when it had rained back in 2019 and once recently for sunset, when it was way too hot! We arrived at the carpark at 6am last Friday and followed the steps and the pipeline up to the route. The rocky terrain makes you feel like you're on a set in an Indiana Jones movie. Nestled in between the rocks are glimpses over Muttrah where you get to see some stunning

views of the Sultan's yachts and the white cup (I have no idea what it is actually called). We were surprised how many people were on the track, clearly everyone had the same idea to get up and enjoy the outdoors before it got too hot. The strangest part of the track is the fact that you end up in an old cemetery with very minimal graves and then you're back on the pavement in Muttrah, where you get to walk along the gardens and look out to the sea. Only issue was we were covered in sweat wearing hiking clothes and everyone else on the pavement is clean and wearing normal clothes looking at us in disgust. I feel with the weather getting increasingly hotter now, even 6am may be too late on a Friday morning as the sun is already beating down. I've been recommended another hike by Al Bustan Palace, so I am keen to give that a whirl one morning too.

The views and opinions expressed in this column are solely those of the author and do not necessarily represent those of Muscat Daily or Apex Press & Publishing

PRAYER TIMINGS

Fajr	4.41am	Duhr	12.10pm	Maghrib	6.22pm
Sunrise	5.59am	Asr	3.37pm	Isha	7.52pm



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Date of Campaign Start : 01/04/2021
Campaign type : Safety
Campaign section : Rear Parking Brake Calliper

Product Description

Number of affected vehicle	VIN Number	Model	The year of Production
202	JMYXLGF4WGZ703714	Mitsubishi Outlander	2016
	JMYXTGF3WGZ704046		

Description

The anti-rust coating of the ramp shaft, for rear parking brake, can get peeled off due to assembly variations. As a result, water might be able to enter and the shaft can get rusted. Should this happen, continuous use will cause the rust to erode the shaft causing it to get stuck inside the calliper. This will result in decreased parking brake force. In a worst-case scenario, the parked vehicle may move.

Procedure

Replace Brake Calliper.

For more information

Customers with vehicles carrying the chassis numbers mentioned above are requested to please contact M/s General Automotive Company LLC to arrange for the replacement of the defective parts.

Contact Details

Call 24 500 500 or 24 500 502 from Sunday to Thursday between 08.00 am to 18.30 pm.



رؤية عمان 2040



TENDER NOTICE

Haya Water hereby announces the following tenders:

TENDER NO:	DESCRIPTION	ELIGIBILITY	TENDER FEE	LAST DATE OF DISTRIBUTION OF TENDER DOCUMENTS	BID SUBMISSION DATE
T/2428433/2021	Consultancy Services for Bausher (B1) Sewer Network Rehabilitation Works	Local companies registered with Government Tender Board and international companies specialized in similar works	RO 250 Non-refundable	15/04/2021	03/05/2021
T/2429407/2021	Upgradation and Rehabilitation of Bukha Sewage Treatment Plant	Local companies registered with Government Tender Board and specialized in similar works	RO 80 Non-refundable	15/04/2021	03/05/2021

The tender documents can be purchased from Haya Water e-tendering page [\[Supplier Login\]](#) from the date of publication of this announcement until 15/04/2021. The applicants shall pay the tender fee through electronic payment gateway through [Supplier Login](#).

Applicants who are not registered with Haya Water shall register from: <https://haya.om/en/Pages/VendorRegistration.aspx> to have the login credentials of Supplier portal.

All applicants who have paid the tender fee shall have access to the Tender Documents through Haya Water e-tendering page [\[Supplier Login\]](#).

All participating companies shall submit a bid bond of %1 of bid value in a sealed envelope to Haya Water not later than 10.00 am on the bid submission date. Bid bond must be obtained from a bank registered in the Sultanate of Oman and it should be addressed in favour of Haya Water.

The bid along with all required documents shall be uploaded through Haya Water e-tendering page not later than 10.00 am on the date specified above. For more details refer to Tender Page of our website www.haya.om or Email to: tender@haya.om

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FOREX RATES
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Pakistani Rs	396.54
Bangladeshi Taka	220.20
Philippine Peso	126.00
Sri Lankan Rs	518.07

*Rates as on March 31
Source: xe.com

BRIEFS

PayPal allows US shoppers to make cryptocurrency purchases

PayPal on Tuesday began allowing people in the United States to use cryptocurrency to make purchases from millions of merchants that use the financial platform for online transactions.

The payments giant had already let users buy, sell or store digital money, but the new Checkout with Crypto feature provides an option to use it for purchases.

"As the use of digital payments and digital currencies accelerates, the introduction of Checkout with Crypto continues our focus on driving mainstream adoption of cryptocurrencies," PayPal chief executive officer Dan Schulman said in a blog post.

Merchants get paid in standard money, with PayPal converting cryptocurrency to US dollars to settle transactions at the time of sale, according to the Silicon Valley-based company.

Oman to raise RO100mn via development bonds issue

Our Correspondent
Muscat

Oman is planning to raise RO100mn through this year's second issuance of government development bonds as the government works to shore up its finances in light of lower revenues amid the coronavirus pandemic and weak oil prices.

On behalf of the sultanate's government, represented by the Ministry of Finance, the Central Bank of Oman (CBO) on Wednesday announced the launch of the 67th issue of government development bonds by the auction method.

'The size of the new government development bonds issue is at RO100mn (with an option to increase the size). The bonds will have a maturity period of seven years and carry a coupon rate of 5.50 per cent per annum,' the CBO said in a statement.

The central bank said the new bonds issue will be open for subscription from April 4 to April 19, 2021. The auction will be held on April 20, 2021 and the issue settlement date will be on April 22, 2021.

The interest amount on the new bonds will be paid semi-annually on October 22 and April 22 every year until the maturity date on April 22, 2028.

As per the CBO statement, the 67th issue of government development bonds is offered to all investors, residents and non-residents (irrespective of



their nationality). Investors may apply for these bonds through the competitive bidding process only and may submit bids through commercial licensed banks operating in the sultanate.

Investors with applications worth RO1mn or more may submit their bids directly to the CBO, at their own discretion, after getting them endorsed from their banks.

The prospectus and application forms can be obtained from any commercial licensed bank operating in Oman or through the CBO's official website, the central bank said.

Earlier in January, the sul-

tanate's government raised RO100mn through this year's first issuance (66th issue) of development bonds.

The value of the 66th issue of development bonds was fixed at RO100mn with a maturity period of three years and the bonds carry a coupon rate of 4.75 per cent per annum.

The development bonds are direct and unconditional obligations of the government of Oman, represented by the Ministry of Finance.

The bonds can be used as collateral to obtain loans from any local commercial licensed bank and can also be traded at prevailing market rates through the

Muscat Securities Market.

The development bonds provide an investment outlet for the surplus resources available in the economy and also help in financing capital expenditure of various development projects envisaged in the sultanate's five-year development plans.

The CBO on Tuesday also announced a tender of treasury bills (issue number 535) worth RO146mn.

Treasury bills are short-term highly secured financial instruments issued by the Ministry of Finance, and they provide licensed commercial banks the opportunity to invest their surplus funds.



OTTCO to build storage facility at Duqm Port

Our Correspondent
Muscat

Oman Tank Terminal Company (OTTCO), the sultanate's independent tank storage firm and a part of OQ Group, is planning to build additional storage infrastructure at the Port of Duqm with a designed capacity of up to 300,000 cubic metres.

OTTCO's storage infrastructure facility at the Duqm Port will be a part of Duqm Liquid Export Terminal and will provide storage for the import and export of petroleum and green petrochemical products, making this development a next step in strengthening Oman's independent terminal network.

OTTCO and Port of Duqm Company have signed two deals regarding a subusufruct agreement and a berth operating licence agreement. The two agreements were signed recently at OQ head office in Muscat by Hilal al Kharusi, chief commercial officer of OTTCO and Reggy Vermeulen, CEO of Port of

Duqm Company, according to a press statement issued by OQ.

These agreements represent the strong partnership between the two companies to jointly strengthen Duqm's status as the upcoming regional hub for petroleum and petrochemical products.

Kharusi said, "These strategic agreements are an example of integrating our efforts with our partners in Duqm Port and will boost the progress of the Special Economic Zone of Duqm to become a global hub contributing the economic developments of Oman."

Van Hoof, CEO of OTTCO said, "In our journey towards becoming Oman's independent terminal network company, we are pleased with the collaboration between our two companies in strengthening the port's prospects as an investment destination, feeding into the sultanate's economy and promoting the Port of Duqm's competitiveness as a regional storage hub."

Abu Dhabi's Sublime buys stake in Aldar

Abu Dhabi, UAE - Alpha Dhabi holding subsidiary, Sublime Commercial Investment, has acquired a 12.21 per cent strategic stake in Aldar Properties from Mubadala Investment Company.

Alpha Dhabi holding is an Abu Dhabi-based investment firm managing a diversified portfolio of listed and unlisted equities in both local and regional markets.

Mubadala will remain Aldar's largest shareholder at 25 per cent. It supports Aldar's growth as a national real estate champion with the highest market cap in the real estate sector, acting as a key driver for Abu Dhabi's economic diversification.

The transaction, which in-

involved the transfer of 960mn shares in a block trade valued at AED3.5bn (US\$953mn) is one of the largest private share purchases in a UAE listed company and was carried out by International Securities and ADCB Securities.

Aldar continues to produce robust operational and financial performance and has delivered consistent and progressive shareholder returns for over a decade.

Institutional investor interest in Aldar reflects confidence in the Abu Dhabi real estate sector and Aldar's central role in implementing the Emirate's economic diversification strategy.

WAM

Saudi plans \$3.2tn worth economic overhaul

Riyadh, Saudi Arabia - Saudi Arabia announced plans to pump investments worth US\$3.2tn into the national economy by 2030, roping in the oil-reliant kingdom's biggest companies in a major new economic diversification push.

The announcement by de facto ruler Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman underscores an effort to jumpstart the domestic economy as the top crude exporter battles high youth unemployment and a coronavirus-triggered downturn.

"The total investment injected... into the national economy is expected to reach SAR12tn (US\$3.2tn) by 2030," Prince Mohammed said in a speech carried by state television.

Twenty-four of the kingdom's



Saudi Arabia's Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman (SPA)

biggest companies, including energy giant Aramco and petrochemical firm SABIC, will lead the investment drive by contributing five trillion riyals over the next decade, the Crown

Prince told reporters later at a virtual briefing.

He said the companies, many of them listed, had agreed to lower their dividends and redirect the money into the domestic

economy in exchange for incentives such as subsidies.

The Public Investment Fund (PIF), the kingdom's sovereign wealth fund, will provide SAR3tn.

And the remaining SAR4tn will come from a new 'national investment strategy', which will soon be announced, Prince Mohammed said.

The initiative will help boost economic growth, create hundreds of thousands of new jobs and strengthen the private sector, he added.

The programme is part of a mammoth SAR27tn (US\$7tn) investment plan over the next decade, which will include huge government spending to spur the domestic economy, the Crown Prince said.

It is designed to 'promote the development and diversification

of the national economy', the state-run SPA news agency said, adding that it will 'strengthen co-operation between public and private sectors'.

But the investment push should be 'taken with a grain of salt', said Ellen Wald, president of Transversal Consulting and author of the book *Saudi Inc.*

"It doesn't help grow the private sector to compel nominally private sector companies to invest in government programs at the expense of their shareholders or investment in their own endeavours," Wald told AFP.

The announcement comes after the Crown Prince said in January that the PIF would invest US\$40bn annually in the domestic economy over the next five years.

AFP

Egypt's commerce reputation survives Suez blockage: Analysts

Cairo, Egypt - The near week-long shutdown of the Suez Canal threw an uncomfortable international spotlight on Egypt, but experts see limited overall fallout for its commercial shipping reputation.

The accident, in which a 200,000-tonne container vessel became wedged diagonally across the canal during a sandstorm, blocked a crucial shipping artery used for 10 per cent or more of world trade.

But fears that it could take weeks to refloat the behemoth proved unfounded.

Six days into the crisis, after major operations involving a flotilla of tug boats and excavators dredging up sand, the Japanese-owned *MV Ever Given* was freed and taken to an unobtrusive anchorage.

Egypt's Suez Canal Authority was quick to claim credit.

"Anywhere else in the world, this operation would have taken three months," boasted canal

chief Osama Rabie, adding that '99 per cent' of personnel working at the scene had been Egyptian.

Visibly relieved, he said he had been told by President Abdel Fattah al Sisi that 'the reputation of Egypt rested on my shoulders'.

Sisi, who deposed president Mohamed Morsi in 2013, spent over US\$8bn to widen and add a 35km second lane on a northern segment of the canal amid much pomp six years ago.

The country has emerged from the short crisis with credit, said Tony Munoz, editor-in-chief at trade publication Maritime Executive.

"The Egyptian government handled the blockage and closure of the critical trade lane exceptionally well, considering the intense international pressure," Munoz told AFP.

'A big one'

However, Munoz also pointed to the significant role played by the



Egyptian coast guards patrol as a ship navigates the Suez Canal on Tuesday (AFP)

international salvage specialists who worked alongside Egyptian personnel.

Munoz cited in particular the crisis management expertise provided by Resolve Marine's Captain Nick Sloane, who was also salvage master for the clearing of the 2012 *Costa Concordia*

cruise ship disaster off Italy.

Another expert likewise said international help was crucial.

"There was bound to be some domestic flag-waving about the success of the refloating... but it does not diminish the Dutch involvement," said Angus Blair of the American University in Cairo,

referring to Dutch firm Smit Salvage.

Both Blair and Munoz saw little or no impact from the canal blockage on Egypt's share of shipping cargo traffic over the medium-term.

"In essence, this was only a traffic accident - [albeit] a big

one," said Blair.

"Airports have accidents, but within hours to a day the airport will reopen and then there is an investigation to determine the cause," he added. "So, I do not think there is damage to Egypt's reputation".

Munoz noted that 'the alternative of sailing around Africa is not reasonable', emphasising that the whole 'purpose of these mega-boxships is to reduce port calls and operational costs'.

But Yezid Sayigh, a senior fellow at the Carnegie Middle East Center, noted that 'when oil prices drop below a certain level, the longer route around the Cape of Good Hope becomes cheaper', referring to the route around southern Africa.

An expert on the enormous economic sway of Egypt's military, Sayigh has long seen the costly 2014-15 expansion of the canal as ill-judged.

In a 2019 study, he noted that 'Sisi's demand that it be com-

pleted within one year rather than the three years it was estimated to require' contributed to the cost of the project more than doubling from initial estimates.

The 2014-15 expansion was driven by overly optimistic shipping traffic projections, amid competition for some Asia-Europe cargo traffic from the Panama canal and Arctic shipping route, he told AFP.

The Suez Canal earned Egypt just over US\$5.7bn in 2019/20, little changed from the year before, and similar to the US\$5.3bn in revenues earned back in 2014.

But the expansion project had anticipated annual transit fees would hit US\$13.5bn by 2023.

Faced with this disappointing balance sheet, even Sisi was quick this week to rule out a costly widening of the southern section of the canal where the *Ever Given* got stuck.

AFP

Al Maha Petroleum launches campaign



Al Maha Petroleum Products Marketing Company launched its second campaign for its prepaid card users. The campaign, which will continue throughout April and May, is held out of its keenness to strengthen the relationship with the community and being proud of their choice of Al Maha stations and its multiple products.

The campaign allows customers who fill in fuel from its stations spread across the sultanate, with RO5 or more using prepaid cards, to enter the weekly draws, where 20 winners will be chosen every week to win

free fuel worth RO20. This is in addition to free additional litres. The ten weekly winners will be picked randomly from the Al Maha stations and they will be given a free fuel card worth RO5 during the campaign period that extends to the end of May.

It also allows doubling the chances of winning the raffle draws whenever fuel is filled more, which enhances the opportunity for Al Maha customers in all its stations - more than 224 stations.

Ahmed bin Bakhit al Shanfari, head of Marketing and Business

Development at Al Maha Petroleum Products Marketing, expressed his happiness at the launch of the second campaign, which is an extension of the first campaign because of the success and high demand of Al Maha customers to fill in the vehicle fuel using prepaid Al Maha cards.

He stressed that the company is always keen to interact with its customers with the aim of giving joy and happiness to the community members.

"I also like to stress the need for vehicle drivers to register the fuel card number by sending it to

the phone number 93214022 in order to enter the electronic withdrawal and benefit from the additional litre feature directly," he said.

He added that the extra litre award was added along with other prizes that contribute to achieving more and more benefit for Al Maha customers, and to encourage them to use prepaid Al Maha cards that allow holders of many advantages, especially with regard to regulating fuel consumption, and safe electronic use instead of dealing in cash.

Al Maha Petroleum Products Marketing Co pays great attention to its customers by ensuring the provision of services and products to meet their requirements of fuel, oils and other service facilities such as providing vehicle service, shopping stores, restaurants, and pharmacies, which makes them integrated service centres.

One of the main objectives of Al Maha is to keep pace with the current and future needs and aspirations of customers.

Al Maha stations are spread in all governorates of the sultanate, where the current number exceeded 224 stations, a translation of the basic objectives for which it was established to be the companion of everyone, carrying out its responsibilities towards society to support the various sectors.



Meethaq's plan makes high value purchases easy

In line with its vision 'To serve you better, everyday' and commitment to offering an attractive value proposition for customers, Meethaq Islamic Banking from Bank Muscat has announced the availability of an attractive Easy Payment Plan for the benefit of all its credit cardholders.

The Meethaq Easy Payment Plan is available at 0 per cent profit rate on high-value purchases made using a credit card. It allows customers to purchase goods and services and then pay conveniently for them over a period of 12 months. Customers are not required to provide any additional documents and the scheme ensures affordability for high-end products and services.

Meethaq currently offers the following credit cards to its customers - Hafawa Visa Signature Credit Card, Meethaq Titanium Mastercard Credit Card, Meethaq Standard Mastercard Credit Card and the Meethaq Lulu Credit Card. The cards are based on the concept of Ujrah, which is free from any interest-

based charges. Meethaq Credit Cards offer a large number of unmatched Sharia'a compliant services and rewards which include convenience and flexibility for customers in performing day-to-day transactions at shopping malls, restaurants or during travel. In particular, the Easy Payment Plan scheme will help Meethaq customers to avail a wide range of goods and services and allow them to make the repayments over a period of 12 months conveniently, in accordance with Sharia'a principles.

Meethaq Credit Cardholders are eligible for this scheme at over 160 participating merchant outlets from various consumer good business segments which include jewellery, electronics, home furniture and medical service segments. Customers making a purchase at any of the participating merchants should request for the Easy Payment Plan at the time of being billed for the transaction. Each time a purchase is made through the Easy Payment Plan, the available

credit limit in the credit card account will be reduced by an amount equal in value to the purchase amount. However, with every monthly instalment payment, the available balance will increase by that amount. The bank will collect payments as per the standing instructions given by customers.

The Easy Payment Plan is also aimed at motivating a change in consumer behaviour and more details about the plan including the minimum eligible amount are available at <https://www.meethaq.om/en/cards/Pages/epp.aspx>.

Meethaq has adopted the best practices in Islamic banking and finance worldwide to combine a robust model, which protects customers and complements the Islamic banking industry.

Every Meethaq product goes through the process of Shari'a compliance certification by the Shari'a Supervisory Board and is created in line with the guidelines of the Central Bank of Oman.



Bank Nizwa signs MoU with Cultural Club

Bank Nizwa, the leading Islamic bank in Oman, signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) recently with the Cultural Club, to promote cultural awareness among Omanis, and boost the sultanate's cultural scene.

The MoU was signed by Khalid al Kayed, CEO, Bank Nizwa, and Dr Mahmood al Sulaimi, chairman of the Board of Directors of the Cultural Club.

As per the MoU, Bank Nizwa will sponsor First Storyteller Forum, the first of its kind in Oman. The bank will also sponsor Child Play Production Workshop that aspires to enhance children's playscripts in the sultanate. Additionally, the bank will organise a workshop on Islamic banking in order to raise awareness about this industry. It would also financially support the club in providing trainers, advertisements, scientific material, marketing, printing and prizes for the Child Play Production Workshop and the Storyteller Forum.

Speaking on the initiative, Kayed said, "Delivering various effective initiatives resonates with Bank Nizwa's belief in the importance of investing in the communities where we operate, and contribute to its development. Being the first Islamic bank in the sultanate, the social responsibility is an integral part of Bank Nizwa's business philosophy. It is also the approach that we adopt to achieve our endeavors towards giving back to society."

"In line with this strategy, the bank formed several fruitful partnerships with various governmental, private and community entities. These are aimed at supporting Oman Vision 2040 that seeks to develop local societies and create sustainable communities based on knowledge and innovation. Through our collaboration with the Cultural Club, we seek to uplift the intellectual, cultural and practical skills of national talents, ultimately creating educated and creative generations that support the national socio-economic development and lead the sultanate toward a bright future," he further stated.

Commenting on the partnership, Dr Sulaimi said, "We are delighted to partner with Bank Nizwa. We commend their constant support to social institutions and other entities. These joint efforts will promote the cultural and intellectual richness of Oman through the programmes and activates organised by the club. Furthermore, this initiative will increase the number of activities the club deliver in various fields such as culture, literary, scientific, artistic and other. Hence, the club will be able to strengthen its bond with the community and achieve its desired objectives."

Established in 1983 by a royal decree, the Cultural Club aims to strengthen the cultural and social ties between intellectuals and innovators in various fields that include culture, art and other.

Ooredoo Nojoom raffle draw awards customers

Rewarding customers with even more, Ooredoo has introduced the Nojoom Raffle Draw, with a chance for all members to get their hands on some amazing prizes.

All Nojoom members will automatically be entered into the daily and weekly draws, which will give them anything from GBs of data, local and international



call minutes, to luxurious handsets, a Play Station 5 and even a car! With 2,500 prizes up for grabs, it's the latest in a world of benefits that can be enjoyed with Ooredoo's popular loyalty programme.

Available for both Shahry postpaid and Shababiah prepaid customers, Nojoom offers fantastic value and unique rewards.

Members can earn points by paying Ooredoo bills. They can then redeem them for a wide range of benefits, including exclusive deals and discounts from over 100 partners across Oman.

With a growing number of members, its just one way that Ooredoo is pioneering an awesome customer experience.

Users can start earning points right away and additional value and benefits will be gained by migrating to or joining Shahry postpaid services.

Nojoom is available through the Ooredoo app, available on iOS, Android and as a web app for all other smartphones.

A full list of partners is also available in the app.

Mercedes-Benz Oman Ramadan offers from April 1 to May 31

Making journeys more peaceful and comfortable, Mercedes-Benz Oman is celebrating this Ramadan with a host of special offers on its range of new models. Drivers can now own one of the most luxurious and innovative cars on the road with a host of great benefits.

Available from April 1 until May 31, the Mercedes-Benz Oman Ramadan offer extends across the new Mercedes-Benz cars and SUVs stock range, with the exception of the Mercedes-AMG G-Class. Customers can

enjoy a five year/75,000km service package, four years Mobile on-road assistance and three years unlimited mileage warranty.

The offer also includes free registration for the first year and a complimentary gift from the Mercedes-Benz Lifestyle Collection.

"The holy month of Ramadan is a special time and we're excited to celebrate it with our valued customers by offering them unbeatable offers that cater to them and their family's needs.

With the help of our dedicated team, customers can discover the car of their dreams and rest assured that they will enjoy quality, performance and excellent after-sales care for years to come," said Shaun Michael, chief executive officer at Mercedes-Benz Oman.

To find out more about the Ramadan offer, the all-star Mercedes-Benz line-up, or to book a test drive, visit the Mercedes-Benz Oman showroom in Muscat or call the customer care team on 80077333.



Investcorp acquires Investis Digital

Investcorp, a leading global provider and manager of alternative investment products, announced that it has completed the acquisition of Investis Digital ("the Company") from ECI Partners and a group of minority investors. Terms of the transaction were not disclosed.

Established in 2000, Investis Digital is a leading provider of digital corporate communications and marketing services to blue-chip institutions globally. It is headquartered in London with over 500 digital experts across nine global offices in the US, UK, EU and India. Through its proprietary Connected Content approach, Investis Digital combines compelling communications, intelligent digital experiences and performance marketing to help more than 1600 global companies build deeper connections with audiences, manage corporate reputation and drive business performance.

Investis Digital has been one of the pioneers and innovators in the growing digital communications market and has built strong relationships with some of the world's leading brands such as Ascential, Anglo American, Fruit of the Loom, Rolls-Royce and Vodafone. The acquisition is indicative of the significant market opportunity associated with digital communications as corporates become increasingly aware



of the importance of utilizing this medium in stakeholder communications.

Tarek AlMahjoub, head of UAE and Oman for Investcorp's Private Wealth, said, "Investis Digital has established itself as a partner of choice for corporates seeking to enhance their digital footprint. We believe that the company is well-positioned for growth as the need for full-service digital communication providers continue to increase especially because of the pandemic. We look forward to supporting the team as they continue with their growth journey."

Don Scales, Global CEO of Investis Digital, added, "As we look to our longer-term vision for the future, we are excited and optimistic for the support and breadth of experience Investcorp will bring in the next phase of our evolution. We are confident we can continue to make inroads within our target markets, accumulating market share."

BMW M3 Competition Sedan, BMW M4 Competition Coupé available at AJIA

Al Jenaibi International Automobiles LLC (AJIA), the official importer of BMW Group in Oman, announced the arrival of the all-new BMW M3 Competition Sedan and BMW M4 Competition Coupé models.

Remarkable sporting prowess defines the all-new BMW M3 Competition Sedan and new BMW M4 Competition Coupé, where exceptional design meets five decades of motorsport expertise from BMW M.

The BMW M3 Competition Sedan demonstrates the racing performance potential of the BMW 3 Series, the original sports sedan. Its power comes courtesy of a 510 hp BMW M TwinPower Turbo engine, rear-wheel drive and highly developed technologies derived from motorsport, such as the M specific suspension with Active M Differential.

A perfectly graduated 7-speed M double clutch transmission and acceleration of 0-100km/h in 3.9s, enables particularly intensive interaction between driver and vehicle - in



everyday driving as well as on the racetrack.

A rebel among its competitors, the BMW M4 Competition Coupé offers M typical driving dynamics at the highest level. Equipped with the same 510 hp BMW M TwinPower Turbo in-line 6-cylinder petrol engine and

numerous drivetrain and suspension technologies adapted from motorsport; it lets nothing stand in the way of the ultimate driving experience.

AJIA provides car enthusiasts with the latest and greatest BMW M models. The philosophy of M cars is based on the ideal in-

teraction of dynamics, agility, and precision.

The M TwinPower Turbo Technology and the high-revving concept featured by the power units impress with performance characteristics derived directly from motor racing - without restricting the traditionally high



level of everyday suitability of BMW M models.

Rachid Zamani, managing director of Al Jenaibi International Automobiles LLC, said, "We are very excited to launch these high-performance models in our newly renovated state of the art showroom. These vehicles mark

the next stage in the ongoing expansion of BMW Group in the Middle East.

"Underpinned by a completely new architecture, the new BMW M3 and M4 generations provide a new level of formidable power, on and off the racetrack." He added, "AJIA continues to

emphasise its commitment to providing new and existing customers with an uninhibited driving experience and overall ownership experience, and we are confident that these all-new distinctive M models will be truly well received in the Sultanate of Oman."

Saturday Opera Brunch at The Chedi

Let your imagination soar to dazzling new heights this spring with the arrival of the new Opera Brunch at The Chedi Muscat. Guests are invited to indulge their senses with a programme of spectacular live performances whilst enjoying a delectable bounty of fresh seafood prepared by the hotel's talented culinary team.

The stage is set for an afternoon of musical delight, allowing front row access to a remarkable series of performances from Opera stars, set under the crystal chandeliers of the signature dining venue, The Restaurant. The programme features a selection of timeless opera classics along with an Omani band performing Spanish and international tunes, with an electric ambience that will enthrall guests of all ages and nationalities.

Timing: Every Saturday, 12pm - 4.30pm. Prices: RO32 inclusive of soft beverages

Oman Air launches new Muscat-Sharjah service

Oman Air, the national carrier of the Sultanate of Oman, has launched its new service between Muscat and Sharjah, UAE, with 3 weekly flights (Wednesdays, Saturdays & Sundays), operated with Airbus 330 aircraft.

Wednesday and Sunday flights from Muscat will depart at 2.25pm and arrive in Sharjah at 3.40pm. Flights from Sharjah will depart at 5.15pm and arrive in Muscat at 6.30pm. The Saturday flight from Muscat will depart at 8.15pm and arrive in Sharjah at 9.30pm, while the flight from Sharjah will depart at 11pm and arrive in Muscat at 12.15am.

Oman Air will maintain its comprehensive safety program throughout all elements of the travel journey to ensure that guests fly confidently. Masks are required when guests are on board the aircraft and in Oman's airports.

Distancing is maintained while guests board and exit the aircraft, which are carefully cleaned after each flight and at the end of every day. Cabin crew



all wear a full set of personal protective equipment, meal service has been modified to further ensure safety, and a number of other measures have been implemented to ensure that the airline's guests and crew are safe at all times.

Guests who are planning to travel to Muscat should visit the Civil Aviation Authority website, paca.gov.om, to ensure they are

prepared to comply with requirements to enter the sultanate.

Guests travelling to the UAE should ensure they are aware of official requirements to enter or transit through the country.

Guests departing from Oman should also ensure that they are aware of all pre-departure requirements and requirements during their flights, which are provided at omanair.com.

Rajasthan Royals announce Expo 2020 Dubai as sponsor

IPL franchise Rajasthan Royals announced an exciting partnership with Expo 2020 Dubai for the upcoming 14th season of the Indian Premier League (IPL).

Taking place from October 1, 2021 to March 31, 2022, Expo 2020 will welcome more than 190 nations and millions of people from across the globe to Dubai, UAE. For 182 visually striking, intellectually enlightening and emotionally inspiring days, visitors will experience a dynamic and diverse program, including innovation, culture, art, food, music and sport from every corner of the planet.

As part of the association, Expo 2020 Dubai will appear on the front of the Rajasthan Royals' jersey as Principal Sponsor, helping to spread the Expo 2020 message to millions of cricket fans all over the world, with exactly six months until the event opens its doors. The first World Expo to take place in the Middle East, Africa and South Asia (MEASA) region, Expo 2020 Dubai will be a global experience bringing together people, com-



munities and nations to build bridges, inspire action and deliver real-life solutions to real-life challenges. With shared beliefs of innovation, collaboration and optimism for the future, the partnership reiterates Rajasthan Royals' commitment to act as a vehicle for change, with a track record of providing opportunities to young individuals to create brighter futures for themselves.

Jake Lush McCrum, chief operating officer, Rajasthan Royals, said, "We are delighted to welcome Expo 2020 as our principal sponsor for this upcoming season. At the Royals we are driven by our ambition to impact society through cricket and this partner-

ship with Expo 2020 is another exciting step on that journey. To support this incredible event in bringing together some of the brightest and most inquisitive minds to seek solutions to the world's greatest challenges, is something that resonates extremely strongly with us."

The Royals' team, under director of cricket Kumar Sangakkara (Sri Lanka) and the leadership of captain Sanju Samson (India), and including renowned international stars Ben Stokes (England), Chris Morris (South Africa) and Jos Buttler (England), proves to be an ideal global brand to complement Expo 2020 Dubai's vision.

MC20 wins 'Best of the Best' at Red Dot Awards - Product Design 2021

The Red Dot Awards is an international design competition run by Design Zentrum Nordrhein Westfalen in Germany, which has been assessing and selecting the most aesthetically exciting, functional, intelligent, innovative products from all over the world since 1955.

Every year, this prestigious competition rewards excellence in the field of product and brand design and communication at the global level, with criteria constantly updated to the socio-cultural context.

A jury of 50 international experts chooses products in almost fifty different categories, from fashion to accessories and from furnishings to vehicles.

Maserati CEO Davide Grasso stated, "Our mission was to develop a car that would be remembered in the future as the model that launched the Maserati New Era. And I think we've achieved our goal with MC20. Maserati is innova-



tive by nature, powered by passion and unique by design: the new super sports car embodies all these values and is a watershed, the founding model of this new phase in the brand's

history."

Klaus Busse, head of Maserati Design, added, "We are honoured to receive this coveted accolade, which recognises the work of an entire team who have

worked hard on this unique project, creating a car that opens a new chapter in Maserati's history."

MC20, designed by the Centro Stile Maserati in Turin, is a

mix of elegance and sporting prowess, a genuine masterpiece of style, which inaugurates a new Era for the Trident Brand.

The focus on performance led to the conception of a car with a

distinct personality, with refined aerodynamics and unmistakable lines that render it unique.

The new super sports car represents the pure form of speed, with Maserati style: a work of

sculptural engineering, showing the way to the brand's aesthetic future.

MC20 is innovative by nature, and every design detail is functional: the butterfly doors are not only stunningly beautiful, but they also improve the car's ergonomics and enable optimal access to and from the cabin.

Developed by the Maserati Innovation Lab and built at the historic Modena plant, Maserati MC20 is genuinely an all-Italian car.

A car whose superb looks conceal an uncompromisingly sporty soul, with the new 630 hp V6 Nettuno engine that delivers 0 to 100 km/h acceleration in under 2.9 seconds and a top speed over 325km an hour.

The patented engine was conceived, developed, designed and built entirely by Maserati, and uses a pre-chamber combustion technology derived from Formula 1 engines.

Dozens of Myanmar refugees make 'voluntary return': Thai authorities

Mae Sam Laep, Thailand - Some 50 Myanmar refugees who fled airstrikes to neighbouring Thailand 'voluntarily' returned across the border on Wednesday, Thai authorities said, despite reports of continued bombings in their home state.

Myanmar's military has launched airstrikes in eastern Karen state for four straight days - the first such strikes in the area in more than 20 years - forcing 7,000 people to flee their homes.

The junta's attacks targeted territory held by the Karen National Union (KNU), one of Myanmar's largest ethnic armed groups which had earlier seized a military base.

The group has also been publicly critical of the military coup and is sheltering hundreds of anti-coup activists in their territory since security forces started deploying lethal weapons to quell nationwide protests.

Over the weekend, some 3,000 ethnic Karen people fled the bombings into Thailand's Mae Hong Son province.

Authorities said on Wednesday a small group who escaped fighting was ferried back across the Salween River, which marks the border between the two nations. "A group of 56 people who escaped fighting have voluntarily crossed back into Myanmar by



A Thai soldier moves in a village of ethnic Karen settlers in Mae Sam Laep town, on the Thai side of the Salween River in Mae Hong Son province on Wednesday (AFP)

five mid-sized boats... by 9.50am," said a notice released by provincial authorities.

Another 201 refugees who had also agreed to the 'voluntary return' remain on the Thai side.

"Most of them are children, women, elderly and patients who

will return to Myanmar," the notice said, without specifying when they will make the crossing.

A first large batch of refugees - about 2,300 - had already returned to Myanmar earlier this week.

A Karen human rights activist told AFP that Thai authorities had pushed the people back and accused them of blocking UN refugee officials from the area.

Premier Prayut Chan-O-Cha - a former general who came to power in 2014 by staging a coup

- denied this, with his spokesman reiterating Wednesday that they would 'not push them back against their will'.

An official from the UN refugee agency said they still had 'not been granted access' to the group.

The head of the Karen Women's Organisation, K'nyaw Paw, accused the Thai authorities of saying one thing and doing another on the ground.

"Who would voluntarily return to go in hiding in the jungle and under rocks?" she told AFP.

A group of 56 people who escaped fighting have voluntarily crossed back into Myanmar by five boats... Another 201 refugees who had also agreed to the voluntary return remain on the Thai side

PROVINCIAL AUTHORITIES

'Still afraid'

The sleepy village of Mae Sam Laep on Tuesday saw a handful of injured refugees make an emergency crossing across the Salween River, before being rushed to a nearby hospital.

A doctor said their injuries came from shrapnel - the most serious case was a 15 year old who had a collapsed lung.

"They are still afraid of the bombing," said Mae Sam Laep resident Hkara (70).

The ethnic Karen explained she had crossed the border when she was younger to escape similar attacks. "Nobody wants to go back right now," she said.

AFP

US extends Iraq's sanction waiver

Baghdad, Iraq - The US has granted Iraq the maximum extension to a sanctions waiver allowing it to import Iranian gas ahead of talks next month, an Iraqi official told AFP on Wednesday.

Iraq buys gas and electricity from Iran to supply about a third of its power sector, worn down by years of conflict and poor maintenance, and unable to meet the needs of the country's 40mn population.

The US blacklisted Iran's energy industry in late 2018 as it ramped up sanctions, but granted Baghdad a series of temporary waivers, hoping Iraq would wean itself off Iranian energy by partnering with US firms.

Since the imposition of its sanctions against Tehran at the end of 2018 by former US president Donald Trump, Washington has continued to extend the time allowed for Baghdad to find other suppliers.

In January, Trump's administration granted a three month exemption, and US President Joe Biden's team has now granted a further four months, the official told AFP on condition of anonymity.

The extensions, the maximum



This file photo shows a member of the Iraqi forces standing guard on the Iraqi side of the Mandali crossing on the border with Iran on July 11 last year (AFP)

that can be offered, comes ahead of the start of a 'strategic dialogue' between Washington and Baghdad, slated to open via videoconference on April 7.

Baghdad wants to tackle its energy problems ahead of the intense heat of the summer, often a time of social protest exacerbated by electricity shortages.

Tehran has demanded nearly US\$6bn in unpaid gas bills from Baghdad.

While American exemptions allow Iraq to obtain supplies from its neighbour without risk of reprisals, they still prevent it from paying its Iranian bills in dollars -

a currency that Iran, choked by sanctions, badly needs.

However, Western and Iraqi security sources have told AFP that Iraqi officials got the green light from US officials to release funds owed to Iran for gas imports into a Swiss bank account.

AFP

Italy expels Russians after spy 'caught red-handed' in Rome

Rome, Italy - Italy expelled two Russian officials on Wednesday after an Italian navy captain was allegedly caught red-handed selling secret documents to a Russian military officer.

The frigate captain was arrested on spying charges after a 'clandestine meeting' with the Russian late on Tuesday in Rome, according to a police statement.

Special operations police stopped both men but only the Italian was arrested.

He is accused of passing on 'confidential documents' in exchange for money.

The Russian, an embassy official, avoided custody thanks to diplomatic immunity, police said.

Italian Foreign Minister Luigi Di Maio summoned Russia's Ambassador to Rome, Sergey Razov, on Wednesday morning to lodge a formal protest.

The diplomat was notified of 'the immediate expulsion of the two Russian officials involved in this very serious affair', Di Maio said.

According to *La Repubblica* newspaper, the navy captain worked at the office of Chief of



This file photo shows the then Italian Prime Minister Giuseppe Conte with Russian President Vladimir Putin (left), in Moscow on October 24, 2018

the Defence Staff and had access 'to a wide range of documents' concerning both Italian defence and NATO activities.

Corriere della Sera newspaper said the captain was paid €5,000 (US\$5,860 approx) in cash by the Russian.

Russian spats

Police said the suspected spy was discovered after long investigations led by Italy's domestic intelligence agency AISI, with support from the Chief of the Defence Staff.

La Repubblica said it was the 'most serious' incident with Rus-

sia since the end of the Cold War, recalling a 1989 incident when Russian and Bulgarian spies were discovered in Italy.

Moscow is embroiled in a series of rows with the West, most recently over the jailing of Kremlin critic Alexei Navalny, a move that triggered EU sanctions against senior Russian officials.

The Russian Embassy in Rome confirmed that an official in the office of the military attache was stopped by police on Tuesday, but said it was 'inappropriate to comment' in detail.

AFP

UN points to Yemen's Huthis for attack on Aden airport

United Nations - A deadly attack on December 30, 2020 on Aden airport in Yemen was carried out with missiles similar to those possessed by Huthi rebels and fired from locations under their control, according to a report submitted to the UN Security Council.

The attack killed about 20 people, including the deputy minister of public works, and injured more than 100 people.

'Three explosions occurred... minutes after a plane carrying Prime Minister

Maeen Abdulmalik Saeed, members of his 'unity' cabinet and other senior government officials had landed,' the report said.

'The airport was hit by three precision-guided, short-distance, surface-to-surface ballistic missiles carrying fragmentation warheads, likely an extended-range version of the Badr-1P missile, which has been part of the Huthi arsenal since 2018.'

The Huthis on Wednesday rejected the report.

AFP

Germany closes case against deported ex-Nazi guard, 95

Berlin, Germany - German prosecutors said on Wednesday they have closed their case due to lack of evidence against a 95 year old former Nazi concentration camp guard recently deported by the United States.

Friedrich Karl Berger arrived in Frankfurt on February 20, 'possibly the last' such expulsion by Washington of a former Nazi, a US official had said then.

Prosecutors in the city of Celle, who had previously halted their probe of the man, had reopened investigations over suspicion of complicity in murders on his return, as Berger had said he was willing to be questioned.

But 'after exhausting all evi-



A 1959 photo of Friedrich Karl Berger released by the US Department of Justice as he has been deported to Germany to face charges (AFP)

dence, prosecutors at Celle have once again closed the investigation because of a lack of sufficient suspicion', they said in a

statement.

Berger, who had retained German citizenship, was deported for taking part in 'Nazi-spon-

sored acts of persecution' while serving as an armed guard at the Neuengamme concentration camp system in 1945, the US Justice Department said.

He had been living in the US since 1959, and was stationed as a young man from January 28, 1945 to April 4, 1945, at a sub-camp of Neuengamme, near Meppen, Germany.

German investigators had been examining whether during his time there, and in particular when 'monitoring a march evacuating the sub-camp, he had contributed to the death of many detainees'.

More than 40,000 prisoners died in the Neuengamme sys-

tem, records show.

Germany has been hunting down former Nazi staff since the 2011 conviction of former guard John Demjanjuk on the basis he served as part of the Nazi killing machine set a legal precedent.

Since then, courts have handed down several guilty verdicts on those grounds rather than for murders or atrocities directly linked to the individual accused.

Among those who were brought to late justice were Oskar Groening, an accountant at Auschwitz, and Reinhold Han-ning, an SS guard at the same camp.

AFP

COVID-19 PANDEMIC

China slams probe critics as Europe reels from surges

Beijing, China - China on Wednesday slammed 'unethical' critics as it faced mounting pressure over origins of the COVID-19 pandemic, after the World Health Organization (WHO) chief revived the theory that the coronavirus may have leaked from a Chinese lab.

WHO-backed experts had judged it 'extremely unlikely' that the virus was leaked from a Chinese lab after a politically sensitive mission to the ground-zero city of Wuhan, but the UN body's boss stressed on Tuesday that 'all hypotheses are open' and 'warrant complete and further studies'.

The United States also led a chorus of concern over the findings, with China riled by swirling accusations that it failed to give proper access and data to the investigators.

"This practice of politicising the search for the origins of the virus is extremely unethical," Chinese Foreign Ministry spokeswoman Hua Chunying said at a press briefing, stressing that full access was granted to the Wuhan lab.

China was not mentioned directly by WHO chief Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus or in the statement by the United States and its 13 allies, but Beijing hit



This file photo shows Peter Daszak (front), Thea Fischer (back seat) and other members of the World Health Organization's investigating team at the Wuhan Institute of Virology, in Wuhan on February 3 (AFP)

back, saying it had demonstrated 'its openness, transparency and responsible attitude'.

The WHO team 'expressed the difficulties they encountered in accessing raw data', Tedros said.

China was slammed last year by former US president Donald Trump, who had promoted the theory that the virus could have leaked from the Wuhan Institute of Virology and accused Beijing of not being transparent about the initial outbreak.

Beijing has rejected the allegations.

Europe struggles with surges

As governments bicker and point fingers over its origins, the virus has spiked again in many parts of the world, including Europe, where French President Emmanuel Macron will address the nation to respond to criticism that he has let COVID-19 run out of control.

The known global COVID-19 death toll has exceeded 2.8mn, and the virus has gained fresh, devastating momentum in many countries.

Daily new cases have dou-

bled to around 40,000 in France, and hospitals in infection hotspots such as Paris have been overwhelmed, building pressure on Macron to respond.

His prime-time television address on Wednesday will follow a weekly meeting of top ministers, with several anti-virus options reportedly under consideration including a much-resisted national lockdown.

There are similar surges elsewhere in Europe, forcing governments to reimpose unpopular restrictions.

Italy on Tuesday said it would

impose a five-day quarantine on travellers arriving from other EU countries, while Germany will beef up checks along land borders to ensure people arriving have negative COVID-19 tests.

Germany is scrambling to contain a third wave of cases, with a debate raging nationwide on how to control the surge while minimising the economic and social impact of restrictions.

Authorities in Tuebingen near Stuttgart are trying to keep the historic university city open by offering free coronavirus tests - anyone with a negative result can enjoy a day of shopping, culture or outdoor dining.

In addition to the economic devastation, the pandemic has also rolled back years of progress towards gender equality, according to a report released on Wednesday. Studies have shown that the COVID-19 pandemic has had a disproportionate impact on women, who have lost jobs at a higher rate than men, and had to take on much more of the extra child-care burden, the World Economic Forum's annual Global Gender Gap Report said. The pandemic's impact on the world of entertainment was also brought into focus on Tuesday.

AFP



A health worker inoculates a Palestinian woman at a vaccination centre in Gaza City, on Saturday (AFP)

Gaza sees spike in coronavirus cases

Gaza City, Palestinian Territories - Gaza's Health Ministry said on Wednesday that more than a thousand cases of coronavirus were recorded over the previous day, the highest daily infection toll in several months.

The spike in the coastal Palestinian enclave, controlled by Hamas since 2007, stands in contrast to the slowdown in infections in Israel, which maintains a tight blockade on Gaza.

"The epidemiological situation in the Gaza Strip is dangerous," said Magdy Dahir, deputy director of primary care at the Gaza health ministry.

"There is a clear increase in hospitalisations."

In Gaza, 65,500 people have been infected with COVID-19 and 610 deaths recorded since the start of the pandemic.

The Hamas-run government, which imposed a 9.00pm curfew on Saturday to curb transmission, has ordered new restrictions on gatherings beginning on Wednesday, the Gaza Hotels and Restaurants Association said.

But in the occupied West Bank, Palestinian Authority Health Minister Mai al Kaila told the official Voice of Palestine radio that the rate of increase was slowing, after a wave of infections packed local hospitals.

In the West Bank, more than 175,000 people have been infected and 2,004 deaths have been recorded.

The Palestinian Health Ministry announced that, as of Monday morning, more than 69,000 Palestinians in the West Bank and Gaza had received one vaccine jab.

AFP

Ukraine reports record virus deaths, hospitalisations

Kiev, Ukraine - Ukraine reported on Wednesday a record number of new coronavirus deaths and daily hospitalisations as authorities struggled to accelerate a vaccine rollout.

"The situation with coronavirus disease remains quite tense," Health Minister Maksym Stepanov told a daily briefing.

On Wednesday, the ex-Soviet state reported 11,226 new coronavirus cases and 407 deaths, a new daily high.

The number of people hospitalised was also set a daily record, at 5,558, a major burden for Ukraine's ageing healthcare system.

The country of 40mn launched a nationwide vaccination campaign in late February, later than most European countries, following delays that sparked criticism of President

Volodymyr Zelensky's policies.

More than 230,000 people have so far received a first dose.

Ukraine has received 500,000 doses of the Oxford/AstraZeneca vaccine marketed under the name Covishield and produced in India.

Many Ukrainians, including healthcare workers who are first in line to receive the vaccine, are sceptical of Covishield, which has been criticised on social media for being produced in India rather than the West.

Ukraine has also received 215,000 doses of China's CoronaVac vaccine but its rollout is not expected to begin before next week.

Since the start of the pandemic Ukraine has recorded over 1.6mn coronavirus infections and more than 32,000 deaths.

AFP

Yemen receives first coronavirus vaccines: UN

Aden, Yemen - War-torn Yemen received the first shipment of COVID-19 vaccines on Wednesday, the UN children's agency said, a week after the country's coronavirus committee warned of a public health 'emergency'.

The AstraZeneca doses arrived in the southern port city of Aden, Yemen's de facto capital, where the internationally recognised government is based after being routed from Sanaa in the north by Huthi rebels in 2014.

'Yemen received 360,000 COVID-19 vaccine doses shipped via the Covax facility,' UNICEF said in a statement, referring to the World Health Organization-backed global scheme to provide jabs to countries in need.

'This first batch is part of 1.9mn doses that Yemen will initially receive throughout 2021,' it added.

Last week Yemen's coronavirus committee urged the government to declare a public health 'state of emergency' amid



A Yemeni woman recuperates at a hospital ward of COVID-19 patients in Yemen's third city of Ta'izz on Tuesday (AFP)

a surge in infections.

It called for the implementation of a 'partial curfew' and for the closure of wedding halls, shopping centres and mosques outside of prayer times.

Doctors Without Borders (MSF) has also warned the

number of critically COVID-19 patients was rising across the country, urging assistance from donor countries and specialised groups.

MSF is 'seeing a dramatic influx of critically ill COVID-19 patients requiring hospitalisation in

Aden, Yemen, and many other parts of the country', the medical charity said.

"We are urging all medical humanitarian organisations already present in Yemen to rapidly scale up their COVID-19 emergency response," said Raphael Veicht, MSF head of mission in the country.

'Game changer'

Yemen has officially recorded more than 4,000 virus cases among its 30mn people, including 863 deaths - but experts say the real toll is likely higher.

"The arrival of the COVID-19 vaccine doses is a critical moment for Yemen," Philippe Duamelle, UNICEF representative to Yemen, said on Wednesday.

"As COVID-19 continues to claim lives around the world, Yemen now has the capacity to protect those most at risk, including health workers, so that they can safely continue to provide life-saving interventions for children and families."

The country has been mired in a disastrous war for over six years which has left it on the brink of famine. Its healthcare system is in ruins.

Adham Ismail, WHO representative in Yemen, said the vaccine shipment was a significant step forward.

"It will help save lives, including of those at highest risk of serious disease, and will help protect the health system," Ismail said.

"These safe and effective vaccines will be a game changer, but for the foreseeable future we must continue wearing masks, physically distance and avoid crowds."

A Saudi-led military coalition intervened in 2015 to shore up the government, and since then the conflict has killed tens of thousands of people, mostly civilians, and displaced millions.

The United Nations calls the situation there the world's worst humanitarian crisis.

AFP

Australia misses vaccine target as concerns grow over slow rollout

Sydney, Australia - Australia will fall well short of its initial COVID-19 vaccination target, Prime Minister Scott Morrison admitted on Wednesday, claiming European export restrictions were partly to blame.

Largely coronavirus-free Australia has been heralded globally as a pandemic success story, but it is one of the few rich nations to have an extremely limited vaccination rollout.

So far, just 670,000 doses have been administered in Australia, according to official statistics, far below the initial plan to jab four million people by the end of March.

Morrison said that target had been 'dispensed with' months ago, and that strangled exports of three million doses from Eu-

rope were 'obviously going to impact the early success'.

"It's not a race," he said, accusing critics of 'wanting to play politics with vaccine and distribution'.

Critics have warned that Australia's slow vaccination rate risks new clusters emerging and an indefinite delay in reopening the country's borders.

Richard Holden, an economist at the University of New South Wales, said that Morrison 'has to say 'it's not a race'".

'Because if it was, we would have been lapped multiple times and be battling it out for 75th place,' he tweeted.

'Of course it's a race against the virus and outbreaks, and for economic recovery.'

Early in the pandemic, Morri-



An elderly man leaves a COVID-19 vaccination centre in Melbourne on Wednesday (AFP)

son had boasted that Australia would be 'at the front of the queue' for vaccines after a slew of deals with pharmaceutical

firms AstraZeneca, Pfizer and Novavax.

His government had set an initial target of having all adults

fully vaccinated by October.

On Wednesday, Morrison indicated that the target had changed, saying 'we are on track

for our first dose for everyone by the end of October'.

Political blame game

The crisis has resulted in some political finger-pointing, with state authorities on Wednesday angrily rejecting Canberra's claim that they were to blame for the delays.

New South Wales premier Gladys Berejiklian - an ally in Morrison's conservative Liberal party - said she was not happy with such 'untrue' and 'extremely unfair' suggestions.

Queensland premier Anastacia Palaszczuk described them as 'outrageous'.

Australia has largely avoided widespread coronavirus transmission but has regularly had to

scramble to contain outbreaks originating from hospitals and hotel quarantine for overseas arrivals.

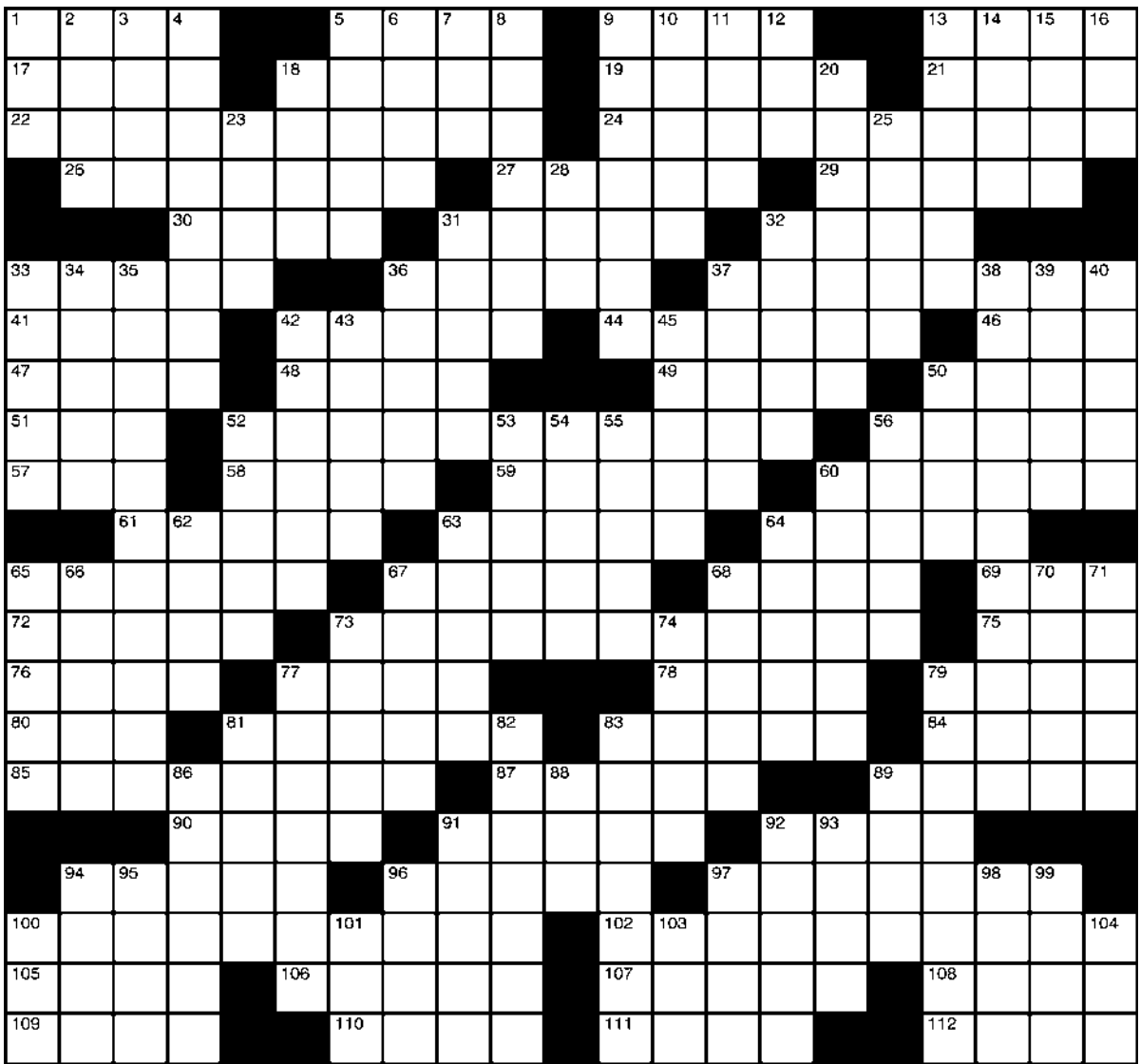
Around two million people are currently in lockdown in greater Brisbane - Australia's third-largest city - after around a dozen cases were detected.

The country has reported around 30,000 COVID-19 cases in total out of a population of 25mn since the pandemic began - including those detected in quarantine for overseas travellers.

Authorities are hoping that local production of Oxford/AstraZeneca vaccines will now kick up a gear and provide around one million doses a week.

AFP

DAILY CROSSWORD



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ACROSS

- 1 "Music ___ charms . . ."
5 Vessel
9 Renee Fleming, for one
13 Schusses
17 ___ sow . . .
18 Quickly
19 African antelope
21 Aquarium
22 Radio "choke" victim?
24 An old sweetie?
26 Entices
27 Orchestral section
29 Dapper
30 Minus
31 Carried
32 Chair material
33 Waters or Kennedy
36 Fronted on
37 Demotion
41 Some July babies
42 Ignition component
44 Infrequently
46 Golfer's situation
47 Drinks like a cat
48 Pol. subdivision
49 ___ Van Der Rohe
50 Yes, yes, in Cadiz
51 Chi.-Ft. Wayne

vector

- 52 Patient bill clerk?
56 Shack
57 Actor Beatty
58 Hamlet, to Olivier
59 Skips
60 Liquid measures
61 "___ a dream!"
63 Hides
64 Chocolate substitute
65 Poolside furniture
67 "___ & Stream"
68 Jot
69 Pacific ___
72 Cavorts
73 Protective pal?
75 Tumult
76 Psychological selves
77 Catcher's base
78 Elevs.
79 ___, crackle and pop
80 Review unfavorably
81 Touch lovingly
83 Skirt fold
84 Twinge
85 Backed
87 Trenches around
Elsinore
89 National character
90 Chief
91 Miss Doone
92 Computer screen

offering

- 94 ___ evil . . .
96 "... when I take my sugar ___"
97 Of heat
100 Towel salesgirl?
102 Barbecue host?
105 Actor Scott
106 Fonda/Sutherland movie
107 ___ mud in your eye!
108 Far: Comb. form
109 British carbine
110 "___ Rabbit"
111 Ogles
112 Small: Suffix
DOWN
1 Easter entree
2 Sale merchandise warning
3 Youngster
4 Without thinking
5 Agents
6 Witches
7 Hans's word for himself
8 1970's fad
9 Counts on
10 ___ France
11 Moving vehicles
12 Raggedy ___
13 Averred
14 German philosopher
Immanuel
15 The ___ 500

- 16 The limit, to some
18 Circle segments
20 Bundles of energy
23 Coal or gas
25 Cave ___: Beware the dog
28 Before
31 Wilkes-___, PA
32 Encrypted
33 Actress Pompeo
34 Tantalize
35 Precious optimist?
36 Bedroom ___
37 TV awards
38 Peacemaker?
39 Sadder but ___
40 Armstrong and Sedaka
42 Struggled
43 Positive thinker
45 Gives forth
50 "And ___ bed"
52 Infield cover
53 Prodded
54 Poet Dickinson?
55 Parings
56 King of Tyre
60 Hot off the presses
62 Rose ___
63 Opposing positions
64 Terra ___
65 French pancake
66 Hulk ___
67 Seethed
68 Small land masses

- 70 Gem state
71 Grouses
73 Tedious ones
74 1945 Conference site
77 Ottoman
79 Drench
81 Colleague
82 Cover, as with onions
83 Elan
86 Actress Merle
88 Prospector's find
89 Enough, for Shakespeare
91 Actress Lenya
92 Knightly weapons
93 Tundra denizens
94 Stock exchange position
95 Huron's sister
96 ___ de France
97 Process chemically
98 "___ misty . . ."
99 Indianapolis griddle
100 Recipe meas.
101 Attorney's deg.
103 "___ there, you"
104 Wedding announcement word

YOUR DAILY HOROSCOPE



ARIES MARCH 21-APRIL 19

Your routine is about to be tossed on its ear by a new person. You either desperately want to impress the heck out of them or shadow them everywhere they go to find out their secret. They're so different from you that you find them more fascinating than the latest celebrity gossip and political news. Finding out what makes them tick will be one of those challenges that inspires.



LEO JULY 23-AUGUST 22

Someone you always thought was introverted is going to prove you wrong when they explode out of their shell and cook up an exciting plan. Find out how you can hop on board! Things are changing in their life in exciting ways, and you couldn't be happier for them. Don't be surprised if they reveal to you in a quiet moment that you were the inspiration for much of their growth.



SAGITTARIUS NOVEMBER 22-DECEMBER 21

Your exciting plans could be luring your focus away from the task at hand, and you've got to be careful that you keep your head in the game today. You can't rush ahead right now. There are details that need to be covered, and they need to be covered completely. This isn't the time to take shortcuts or leave loose ends for someone else to tie up later.



TAURUS APRIL 20-MAY 20

Share some of that good energy you've got coursing through your veins right now! Crack a joke, flirt a little, and toss out a few compliments. Doing so will not only help you get favourable attention from some powerful people, but it will also help you turn a potentially ho-hum day into one that's full of adventure. Unleash all your charm and you can get promising results.



VIRGO AUGUST 23-SEPTEMBER 22

Having a messy car or bedroom isn't the end of the world, but isn't it nice to see order and cleanliness around you? Always being surrounded by clutter might not consciously bother you, but you'll think more clearly if you have less disorganisation to distract you. Spend a little time cleaning up your world. Tidy up here and there. You don't have to scrub and scour every surface.



CAPRICORN DECEMBER 22-JANUARY 19

You're well suited to being a solo act right now, so don't worry if you're not asked to join a team or collaborate with a co-worker. It's for the best. You'll be better able to control where you're going and what you're doing. Plus, being by yourself will help you stay grounded and focused. Even if you're feeling a bit lonely in the morning, by mid-afternoon you'll hit your stride.



GEMINI MAY 21-JUNE 21

It can be tough to get your feelings across to someone, but it's totally impossible to do when you won't spill the beans! Do you really think they can read your mind? And even if you give them tons of clues to figure out how you feel, they could easily misread them. The only way this thing is going to move forward is for you to use your words! Tell them what's been on your mind.



LIBRA SEPTEMBER 23-OCTOBER 22

You could get a complicated task to perform, and you might be a bit intimidated at first. When you're faced with too many details, you tend to shut down, but that isn't a sign of weakness. Feel free to take your time and figure out your plan before you get started. Most importantly, don't let anyone rush you! Rushing creates mistakes, and you don't want to be making any of those right now.



AQUARIUS JANUARY 20-FEBRUARY 18

Getting a little taste of power could be more of a curse than a blessing. As soon as you see for yourself how wonderful it feels, you're going to want to get more and more control. And this might not be possible unless you push some people so hard that they turn away from you. Getting power isn't worth making people angry, so when you hit a wall, you need to be ready to obey.



CANCER JUNE 22-JULY 22

You could encounter people who appeal to your more logical side, which will be perfect for your mood. It's not that the people who always tug at your heartstrings won't get your sympathy; it's just that you won't really be as willing to bend over backward for the sake of their feelings. But if someone has a good argument as to why you need to come to their aid, you'll be all over it!



SCORPIO OCTOBER 23-NOVEMBER 21

A friend could be acting like they're doing you a favour by inviting you somewhere. They seem intent on making you feel unwelcome, and it's working. There is some mean game playing going on here, and the only way you can get out of it is to say no. When a friend starts making you feel bad about yourself, it's time to rethink whether or not they should be your friend.



PISCES FEBRUARY 19-MARCH 20

Your financial situation is looking good, but is it too good to be true? You need to find all the facts: review recent transactions, double-check your math, and look ahead a month or two and see what major bills or purchases might be coming up. Making a bold investment might be exciting right now, but you still need to take your time. Read things through and be very careful.



TEST YOUR KNOWLEDGE

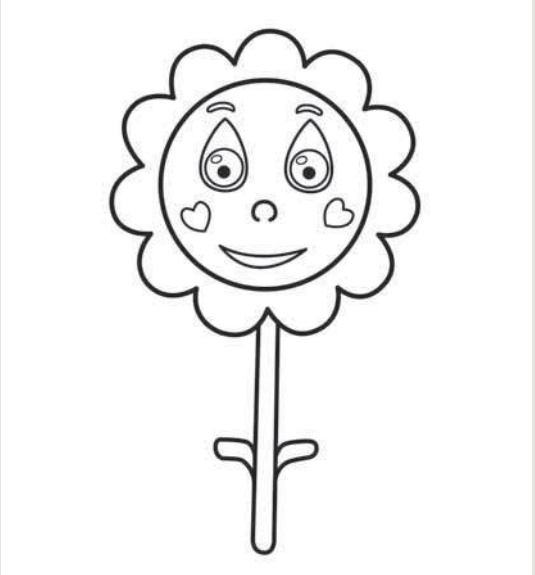
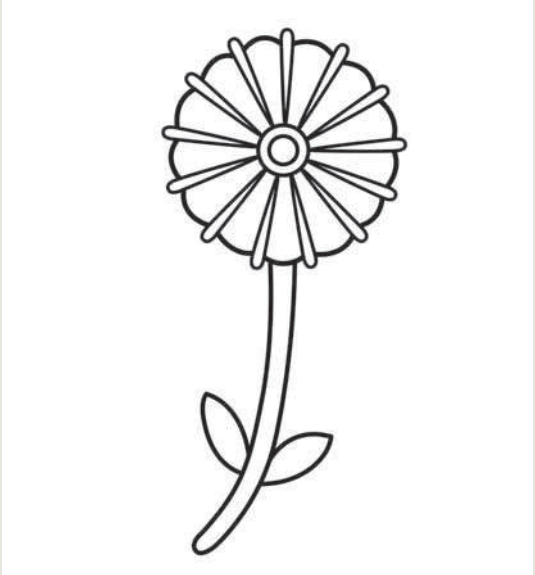
1. When did 19 NATO members and 11 'Partners for Peace' join hands for peace plan for Kosovo Crisis?
a. 1999
b. 1989
c. 1979
d. 1969

2. Yelena Isinbayeva is associated with which of the following games/sports?
a. Tennis
b. Pole vault
c. Boxing
d. Weightlifting

3. Why is the Indus valley culture called Harappan culture?
a. The first discovery comes from Harappa
b. It was first discovery by a person called Harappa
c. Harappa is the biggest site discovered so far
d. Most of the valuable remains have come from Harappa

Answers: 1. a 2. b 3. a

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

	9		1			2		
4			6		9			5
		6		8		9		
	4			6			1	7
		2	8	1	3	5		
1	5			7			6	
		9		4		8		
3			2		6			9
	2				8		5	

BOGGLER

U	N	S	E
I	W	H	E
M	L	I	T
S	C	L	N

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

1	5	9	8	6	3	4	2	7
6	7	1	9	5	2	1	8	3
2	3	8	1	7	4	6	9	5
8	9	2	7	4	6	3	5	1
7	6	5	3	1	8	2	4	9
4	1	3	2	9	5	8	7	6
3	4	6	5	8	7	9	1	2
5	8	1	6	2	9	4	7	3
9	2	7	4	3	1	5	6	8

DAILY CROSSWORD ANSWERS (MARCH 31)

SEIYA	ALLERON	ADAPTY
SEXISM	BRAVEST	ANEMITA
ISHYDUA	MARCH	NOBAND
CATHODE	DEA	MARITIA
CAR	SMEAR	PLY
SHAIKY	QUHOD	DRY
NOTE	SIAM	DEES
AROCK	YTHATH	IST
RIW	FILE	WILVER
LAISALLE	VIIOLIN	PRITEB
CLASPEO	ENDORSE	
MARIE	ARIONE	BOUSTING
PATEN	PRIOR	BAIST
APLAGA	LOFTAN	ANTHEMAND
OTAC	LADY	ERNIE
BASE	TRY	DIANA
SCREWY		
GCH	PINTO	ATO
AGREED	LEFT	SOPARRED
AGLORIOUS	FOURTH	OFJULY
GRAVEN	STETSON	DEARME
MADES	CONINET	ERINO

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



How to handle a headache

Migraines are a common type of headache which affect more women than men

It comes without a warning and you are left to deal with it all alone. Headaches are, indeed, headaches! And you patiently have to go through them until the remedy you choose to undertake begins to show effect.

According to Mayo Clinic, the first step in tackling frequent headaches is determining what type of headache you have. Sometimes headaches are a symptom of another disease or condition; sometimes there's no clear cause.

Take a close look at your headache signs and symptoms. If you experience them frequently, keeping a 'headache diary' might help determine your headache type. Note when your headaches occur, your symptoms, and potential triggers, such as food, stress or changes in sleep patterns.

There are many types and sub-types of headaches. Chronic daily headaches, which occur 15 days or more a month, are one sub-type. Tension-type headaches and migraines are also common sub-types of headaches. They can both be chronic, though they aren't always. Other types of headaches include hemicrania continua (a one-sided headache that can feel like a migraine), primary stabbing headaches (which last for a few seconds and can occur several times throughout the day), primary exertional headaches (caused by exercise), chronic paroxysmal hemicranias (sharp, one-sided headaches that can cause tearing or a congested nose), medication overuse headaches (which occur from overusing pain medications for headaches for at least three months).

Migraines

Migraines are another common type of headache which affect three times more women than men. Migraines typically:

- Cause pain that is moderate to severe
- Pulsate
- Cause nausea, vomiting, or increased sensitivity to light or sound
- Affect only one side of your head, but



Tension-type headaches can:

- Be felt as a tight band of pain around your head, a dull ache or pressure
- Cause mild to moderate pain on both sides of the head
- Vary widely in frequency
- Be occasional
- Occur more than 15 days a month (chronic)
- Last from 30 minutes to a week

- can affect both sides
- Worsen with activity such as climbing steps
- Last from four to 72 hours without treatment

Treatment

Migraine treatment is aimed at relieving symptoms and preventing additional attacks. If you know what triggers your migraines, avoiding those triggers and learning how to manage them can help prevent migraines or lessen the pain.

Practical solutions for migraine

- At the first sign of a migraine, take a

break and step away from whatever you're doing if possible. Turn off the lights. And relax or sleep in whatever posture suits you as migraines often increase sensitivity to light and sound.

- Try temperature therapy. Apply hot or cold compresses to your head or neck. Ice packs have a numbing effect, which may dull the sensation of pain. Hot packs and heating pads can relax tense muscles. Warm showers or baths are also good.

- Drink a caffeinated beverage. In small amounts, caffeine alone can relieve migraine pain in the early stages or enhance the pain-reducing effects of acetaminophen (Tylenol, others) and

aspirin. For some, however, drinking too much caffeine can lead to withdrawal headaches later on.

- During physical activity, your body releases certain chemicals that block pain signals to your brain. These chemicals also help alleviate anxiety and depression — two conditions that can make migraines worse.

Tension-type headaches

Tension-type headaches aren't necessarily caused by emotional or psychological stress or tight muscles. The name is a holdover from the era when they were thought to be the result of some type of tension. Why these headaches occur is still

unknown.

Dr Elizabeth Loder, chief of the Division of Headache in the Department of Neurology at Harvard-affiliated Brigham and Women's Hospital, notes that people with tension-type headaches don't make frequent visits to the headache clinic. That's probably because they can successfully manage their headaches themselves with over-the-counter pain relievers.

Treatment

Most occasional tension-type headaches are easily treated with over-the-counter medications, including Aspirin, Ibuprofen (Advil, Motrin IB, others) and Acetaminophen (Tylenol, others).

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SOAK IN THE SUN



For long, it is known that vitamin D and calcium are a necessity for healthy bones. Recent studies have uncovered that it may have a much wider role in the body's metabolic processes. "Vitamin D plays an important role in bone formation, and therefore, individuals with low bone density or fragility fractures need to be tested for deficiency," says **Dr Biswajit Dutta Baruah**, consultant orthopaedic surgeon, KIMS Oman hospital.

VITAMIN D FOR BONE HEALTH

Photo by Syed Fasiuddin



DR BISWAJIT DUTTA BARUAH

Consultant orthopaedic surgeon, KIMS Oman Hospital

Lira had been coming into the clinic for some time. A very active person otherwise, but due to the corona pandemic, she had been restricting her activities to within the house. The reason she was coming in to see me was because of the aches and pains that were bothering her. I ran X-rays for her spine and checked her blood. Everything came out negative. "Doctor, I've never felt this tired before. So out of energy, when I return home, I feel like collapsing into the bed," she blurted out in exhaustion. "May be, you caught the virus," I offered an explanation defensively. I sent her over to the physician knowing that viral infections are known to cause extreme fatigue. He ran tests to detect the viral antibody. It was a great relief for both patient and doctor to know that it was negative. Finally, I made up my mind to check her vitamin D levels, given that she was indoors most of the time glued to the laptop screen attending virtual meetings.

Vitamin D is unique among all the vitamins. It is a naturally occurring fat soluble steroid that qualifies as a micronutrient as its deficiency can be treated by supplementation. It is also a pro-hormone as it needs to be activated in the body to be functional. For long, it is known that vitamin D and calcium are a necessity for healthy bones. Recent studies have uncovered that it may have a much wider role in the body's metabolic processes. It was the fourth vitamin to be identified in cod liver oil by Elmer McCollum (an American researcher), thus deriving its name from the fourth letter of the English alphabet.

Dietary sources

Dietary sources of vitamin D are limited to oily fish, milk or milk products like yoghurt, laban, cheese and paneer that are fortified with vitamin D. Fortification is the process of adding extra nutrients to food at the time of processing, for example vitamin D is added to milk at the milk factory or iodine is added to salt. Many cereal manufacturers also fortify their products with minerals and vitamins (including vitamin D). However such food items may not be consumed uniformly by all or may be considered expensive for daily consumption. Thereby, for most people

dietary sources of vitamin D are very limited or even nil. Majority of the people obtain vitamin D from skin exposure to Ultraviolet B (UVB) radiation in sunlight. Alfred Fabian Hess, an American physician, once famously said, "Light equals vitamin D". UVB in sunlight is maximum from 10 am to 3 pm. However, exposing oneself to the harsh sunlight during this period is not practical. The amount of UVB that reaches the skin is also limited by the type or amount of clothing that covers the skin, use of sunscreens, greater age and darker pigmentation of the skin. This explains why vitamin D deficiency can be profound even in sunny regions like Muscat. In normal times, elderly people who are homebound commonly develop vitamin D deficiency due to limited sun exposure.

Activation of vitamin D

There are two biological forms of vitamin D, ergocalciferol (D2) and cholecalciferol (D3). vitamin D3 is the vitamin that is produced

by skin exposure to sunlight. Mushrooms have been used in the past for commercially producing large quantities of plant source of vitamin D2. Just as in case of vitamin D3, the mushrooms need to be exposed to sunlight to produce vitamin D2. Mushrooms available in the grocery stores, thereby have very small quantities of vitamin D2.

Whether obtained from the mushrooms or by sunlight exposure, the vitamin D obtained is still not functional in the body. It needs to be activated by a process called hydroxylation in two steps, first in the liver and then in the kidney, resulting in the active form of the vitamin. Due to this reason, vitamin D is technically not a vitamin (because it is inactive) and referred to by some as a prohormone. It follows naturally that an individual needs functional kidneys and a liver for the vitamin D to be useful. It is expected that those with chronic kidney or liver disease are likely to develop vitamin D deficiency.

Studies have found 25% to 50% of patients in clinical practice to be deficient in vitamin D. Despite this being a large number, vitamin D testing is expensive and, at present, not universally recommended. Patients at high risk would be those with gut disorders resulting in decreased absorption, diseases affecting the kidney or the liver and those in whom Sun exposure is limited.

Vitamin D plays an important role in bone formation, and therefore, individuals with low bone density or fragility fractures (fractures that occurred with low intensity forces that would not result in a fracture in a normal person) need to be tested for deficiency.

Several studies have suggested that symptoms like bone pain, myalgias and generalised weakness or fatigue are often associated with vitamin D deficiency. These are often misdiagnosed as

most people assume that calcium will be deficient in blood. However, low vitamin D levels result in increased secretion of parathormone - a hormone released by the parathyroid glands, resulting in release of calcium from bone and increased absorption of calcium by the kidney.

Immunity indicator

Deficiency of vitamin D can cause rickets in children and osteomalacia in adults. In both the conditions, bone is soft and often associated with deformities or non-trauma related fractures. Rickets is, however, well controlled these days due to its easy recognition among pediatricians.

Vitamin D supplementation is inexpensive and safe. Many patients worry if taking high doses of vitamin D can be toxic. This is not possible due to safety mechanisms in the body. High levels of calcitriol (activated vitamin D) will inhibit the activation process in the kidney thus limiting its availability. So vitamin D toxicity is very rare. Though marketed by many for its anti-cancer properties, studies have not found strong evidence to support this.

Once diagnosed to be deficient, the doctor will start large weekly doses in the range of 50000 to 60000 IU/week. This is called loading dose. After 8-12 weeks of this high dose therapy, the doses are tapered (decreased) to about 1000-2000 IU/day for another 8-12 weeks. It goes without saying that sufficient exposure to sunlight by walking early morning or late afternoon can also help in bringing vitamin D levels back to normal.

Sit in the Sun

Lira was diagnosed with vitamin D deficiency. Calcifediol levels were very low in her blood sample. She was started on vitamin D supplements. She was also asked to walk outside daily and sit next to the window with drapes open. She will need to come back in 6 months to check if her vitamin D levels in blood have been restored to normal.

To summarise, vitamin D is important for both bone and non-skeletal health. It is well established that vitamin D deficiency is rampant in society. Vitamin D is mostly produced in the body by exposure to sunlight. Testing for the intermediate form will reveal if a person is deficient. Supplements are necessary and sufficient to restore levels back to normal.



Vitamin D deficiency can also be a surrogate marker for poor nutritional status and lack of outdoor activity, especially in children

DR BISWAJIT DUTTA BARUAH

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fibromyalgia, chronic fatigue or age-related weakness. However a cause-effect relationship between the two is yet to be established, and routine testing in such situations is not yet the norm.

Vitamin D deficiency can also be a surrogate marker (indicator) for poor nutritional status and lack of outdoor activity, especially in children.

Ingested or skin produced vitamin D is quickly activated in the liver and kidney, to an intermediate form (25-hydroxy vitamin D or calcifediol) and a final activated form (1,25-dihydroxy vitamin D or calcitriol). However, a small amount of the activated form exists in the blood. Hence, almost all lab studies detect the intermediate form of vitamin D. So, doctors order this test to make a diagnosis. Though vitamin D is necessary to mobilise calcium into the bones and its absorption in the intestines,

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Sri Lanka make steady progress to WI's 354

WEST INDIES VS SRI LANKA SECOND TEST: DAY TWO

North Sound, Antigua and Barbuda - Captain Kraigg Brathwaite was last out in the West Indies' first innings of 354 before the visitors rallied behind Lahiru Thirimanne's third consecutive half-century to reach 136 for three at stumps on the second day of the second and final Test on Tuesday.

After scores of 70 and 76 in the first Test, Thirimanne's run of good scores - going back to the series in South Africa last December - continued with another innings of 55.

However, his dismissal to Kemar Roach in the day's final session necessitated consolidation which the unbroken fourth-wicket pair of Dinesh Chandimal (34 n.o.) and Dhananjaya de Silva (23 n.o.) provided with a stand of 59.

Earlier, Brathwaite extended his occupation of the crease to eight-and-a-half hours which brought him 126 off 311 deliveries with 13 fours, a ninth Test century in which he fulfilled the role of anchor of the innings.

His opposite number Dimuth Karunaratne, by contrast, survived 16 balls before an edged drive off fast bowler Alzarri Joseph produced a diving catch at third slip by Nkrumah Bonner to send the left-hander back to the pavilion for just one when Sri Lanka started their reply immediately after lunch.

As in the first Test, occasional seamer Kyle Mayers accounted for Oshada Fernando and when Roach bowled Thirimanne



Sri Lanka's Lahiru Thirimanne in action against the West Indies on Tuesday

through the gate, the innings was at a crossroads at 77 for three.

Suranga Lakmal again led the Sri Lankan bowling effort with figures of four for 94 off 28 overs as the West Indies batted through the morning session after resuming on 287 for seven.

It was Lakmal, the experienced fast-medium bowler, who finally broke through for an increasingly frustrated Sri Lankan team halfway through the morning session when he terminated a 103-run eighth-wicket partnership between Brathwaite and Rahkeem Cornwall.

Cornwall went past his previous best in Tests - 61 in the first innings of the first Test. But he miscued a heave to the on-side and offered a simple catch to Vishwa Fernando. His 73 came off 92 balls and included ten fours and one six.

Brathwaite resumed on 99 and went to three figures by turning the third ball of the morning from Lakmal to fine leg. He eventually stroked two more

boundaries to add to his tally of 11 from day one but then saw the dismissal of Kemar Roach.

AFP

SCOREBOARD			
WEST INDIES 1 st INNINGS			
K Brathwaite	b Chameera	126	
J Campbell	c Dickwella b Lakmal	5	
N Bonner	b Lakmal	0	
K Mayers	c Dickwella b Fernando	49	
J Blackwood	c Dickwella b Lakmal	18	
J Holder	c Thirimanne b de Silva	30	
J de Silva	c Dickwella b Chameera	1	
A Joseph	lbw Embuldeniya	29	
R Cornwall c	V Fernando b Lakmal	73	
K Roach	c Dickwella b Chameera	9	
S Gabriel	not out	1	
Extras:	(lb 6, nb 7)	13	
TOTAL:	354 in 111.1 overs		
Fall of wickets: 1-11, 2-15, 3-86, 4-120, 5-171, 6-185, 7-222, 8-325, 9-351, 10-354			
Bowling: S Lakmal 28-11-94-0, V Fernando 27-4-71-1, L Embuldeniya 25-5-88-0, D Chameera 21-1-4-69-3, D de Silva 10-3-26-1			
SRI LANKA 1 st INNINGS			
D Karunaratne	c Bonner b Joseph	1	
L Thirimanne	b Roach	55	
O Fernando	lbw Mayers	18	
D Chandimal	not out	34	
D de Silva	not out	23	
Extras:	(lb 2, nb 3)	5	
TOTAL:	136 for three in 61 overs		
Fall of wickets: 1-18, 2-64, 3-77			
Bowling: K Roach 12-4-39-1, S Gabriel 10-2-28-0, A Joseph 10-2-31-1, J Holder 12-2-20-0, K Mayers 7-4-6-1, R Cornwall 9-5-8-0, J Blackwood 1-0-2-0			

FOOTBALL ROUND-UP



Portugal's Ronaldo (R) celebrates after scoring against Luxembourg during their World Cup qualifier on Tuesday

Ronaldo, Jota save Portugal

2022 FIFA WORLD CUP EUROPEAN QUALIFIERS

Paris, France - Cristiano Ronaldo helped Portugal to a hard-fought 3-1 win over Luxembourg on Tuesday with his first goal of the 2022 World Cup qualifying campaign, while Belgium became the latest team to join the protests over human rights in Qatar before hitting eight past Belarus.

Juventus forward Ronaldo bagged his 103rd international goal five minutes after the break to stop his side falling foul of a Luxembourg team whose recent performances have defied their small status and tiny population.

Ronaldo had been controversially denied what looked to have been an added-time winner in Saturday's draw against Serbia in Belgrade, but he was not to be denied when he tapped home Joao Cancelo's cross.

Luxembourg beat the Republic of Ireland last time out and another shock result looked possible when Gerson Rodrigues put the hosts in the lead with a glancing header half an hour into the Group A contest at the Stade Josy Barthel.

Diogo Jota put the European champions back on level terms in first-half stoppage time with a close-range header of his own, finding himself unmarked to nod home Pedro Neto's cross. Ronaldo put Portugal ahead and then Joao Palhinha added a third to save Portugal's blushes and

put them top, level on seven points with Serbia, who won 2-1 at Azerbaijan earlier on Tuesday thanks to an Aleksandar Mitrovic brace. The 36 year old Ronaldo is now six goals short of Iranian Ali Daei's all-time record of 109 international strikes.

Belgium join Qatar protests

Belgium's players donned T-shirts in support of migrant workers building the stadiums for next year's finals in the Gulf state and then smashed Belarus 8-0 to move top of Group E despite coach Roberto Martinez playing a second-string side.

Germany, Denmark, Norway and the Netherlands have recently staged similar protests, and the Belgian gesture mirrors the one made by their Dutch neighbours with T-shirts emblazoned with the message 'Football supports change'.

On the field in Leuven Belgium made easy work of their opponents, Michy Batshuayi starting a deluge of goals in the 14th minute. Two braces from Hans Vanaken and Leandro Trossard - the Brighton winger's first for his country - and further strikes from Jeremy Doku, Dennis Praet and Christian Benteke gave Belgium a thumping win.

It leaves them three points ahead of the second-placed Czech Republic after they lost 0-1 to Wales in Cardiff in a match

which finished with ten men on each side.

Dutch close in on Turkey

The Netherlands closed the gap on Group G leaders Turkey to one point after they won 7-0 in Gibraltar. Steven Berghuis opened the scoring three minutes before the break and in the second half the Dutch managed to make their superiority count.

Luuk de Jong made it two with a 55th-minute tap-in and then three goals in as many minutes from Memphis Depay, Georginio Wijnaldum and Donyell Malen put the Dutch five ahead.

Donny van de Beek lashed home the sixth from close range before Depay added his second of the night to complete the scoring with two minutes remaining. They move closer to the Turks, who beat the Netherlands in the group's opening round of fixtures, thanks to Davis Ikaunieks's late strike which allowed Latvia to draw 3-3 in Istanbul. The Dutch are level on six points with Norway and Montenegro, who lost 1-0 at home to the Norwegians.

Croatia moved top of Group H thanks to their 3-0 win over Malta. They are level on six points with Russia, who fell to a 2-1 defeat at Slovakia while Cyprus eked out a 1-0 win over Slovenia in the same group.

AFP

QUICK RUN

Saudi Arabia ease past Palestine in World Cup qualifier

Saudi Arabia eased past Palestine 5-0 on Tuesday to go top of Group D in the second round of Asian qualifiers for the 2022 World Cup in Qatar. The two sides had featured in a goalless draw when they clashed earlier in the competition at Al Ram in 2019, but the Asian giants proved far superior on their home turf with Saleh al-Shehri grabbing a second-half brace at the King Saud University Stadium in Riyadh. Earlier, Yasser al-Shahrani scored to put the Saudis ahead in the 37th minute. Fahad al-Muwallad increased the lead six minutes later. Shehri then grabbed two goals within a space of seven minutes. Saudi captain Salem al-Dawsari completed the rout with an 88th-minute penalty after Palestinian defender Ahmed Qatmish had handled the ball. The three points took Saudi Arabia's tally to 11 after five matches, overtaking Uzbekistan who have nine.

Lewandowski out for four weeks, to miss PSG match

Robert Lewandowski will miss both legs of holders Bayern Munich's Champions League quarterfinal against Paris Saint-Germain (PSG) after being ruled out for nearly a month with a knee injury, the Bundesliga giants said on Tuesday. "The striker will be out for around four weeks", Bayern said in a statement, confirming Lewandowski injured ligaments in his right knee after scoring twice in Poland's 3-0 win over Andorra on Sunday in World Cup qualifying. The 32 year old will also miss Saturday's top-of-the-table Bundesliga clash at second-placed RB Leipzig, with leaders Bayern four points clear. Lewandowski is also out of Poland's qualifier against England at Wembley on Wednesday. Bayern host PSG in the last-eight first leg on April 7, before visiting the Parc des Princes for the return game on April 13.

South Africa fire Ntseki after Cup of Nations failure

South Africa sacked coach Molefi Ntseki on Wednesday, three days after losing in Sudan and failing to qualify for the 2021 Africa Cup of Nations. The decision was announced in Soweto by South African Football Association chief executive Teboho Motlanthe. South Africa finished third in Group C behind Ghana and Sudan to continue a poor record in the competition. Since 2008, *Bafana Bafana* (The Boys) have reached the finals only twice.

AFP

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COVID-19 row: Benin refuse to play

AFRICA CUP OF NATIONS QUALIFIERS

Johannesburg, South Africa - Benin refused to play a key Africa Cup of Nations qualifier in Sierra Leone on Tuesday after challenging positive COVID-19 tests for five of their players.

A dramatic final day of qualifying for the 2021 tournament in Cameroon also saw a referee collapse, leading to a match between the Ivory Coast and Ethiopia being abandoned ten minutes from time.

There were five qualifying places up for grabs and Cape Verde, Ethiopia, Guinea-Bissau and Mauritania took four with Benin or Sierra Leone set to join them.

Talks between Sierra Leone,

Benin and Confederation of African Football (CAF) officials in Freetown failed to resolve the standoff as both squads remained in their hotels.

Meanwhile, Ghanaian referee Charles Bulu collapsed 80 minutes into a Group K match in Abidjan and was removed on a stretcher and taken to hospital.

Originally chosen as the fourth official, Bulu handled the game because a fellow Ghanaian failed to arrive at the venue.

An Ivorian was drafted in as the fourth official, but Ethiopia questioned his neutrality and refused to continue playing.

Madagascar fail

Ethiopia, who were trailing 1-3 at the time against Ivory Coast, still

qualified as 2019 quarterfinalists Madagascar were held 0-0 in Toamasina to finish third.

Guinea-Bissau beat Congo Brazzaville 3-0 in Bissau and claim the second Group I ticket to the finals behind Senegal.

Mozambique suffered a 0-1 defeat in Maputo by Cape Verde, who qualified from Group F behind Cameroon that drew 0-0 with ten-man Rwanda in Douala.

Elsewhere, Mauritania earned a 1-0 win over the Central African Republic in Bangui.

OTHER RESULTS

Group E: Morocco 1 Burundi 0;

Group I: Senegal 1 Eswatini 1;

Group L: Nigeria 3 Lesotho 0.

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