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Empowering Global Seafarers to Sustain Japan's Maritime Workforce

Interview with New IMMAJ Chairman Kiyotaka Aya

Non-Japanese seafarers serving aboard flag-of-convenience (FOC) vessels now play essential roles in sustaining Japan's merchant fleet. The International Mariners Management Association of Japan (IMMAJ) negotiates employment conditions for these crewmembers and promotes education and training to ensure safe operations. "Our core mission is to support the recruitment and development of globally competent, safety-focused seafarers," said newly appointed IMMAJ Chairman Kiyotaka Aya, who took office this June. We interviewed Chairman Aya about IMMAJ's current efforts and future plans to strengthen Japan's maritime workforce.

— Please tell us about the activities of the International Maritime Labor Association.

"IMMAJ's activities primarily focus on two major tasks. The first is negotiating revisions to the International Bargaining Forum (IBF) labor agreement, which applies to non-Japanese seafarers serving aboard Japan-related flag-of-convenience (FOC) vessels. The second is assisting in the education and training of global seafarers, which, in turn, contributes to more effective seafarer recruitment and development. In carrying out these responsibilities, I will remain committed to our core principles and strive to act with fairness at all times."

— What is the current status of non-Japanese seafarers serving on Japanese merchant ships?

"As of September 1, 2025, our association encompasses 80 member companies, 2,214 registered vessels, and 45,732 seafarers. By nationality, 70% are from the Philippines. Next is India, at just over 16%, making Filipinos the overwhelming majority. Myanmar ranks third at less than 5%, Vietnam fourth at just over 3%, and Indonesia fifth at 2%."

— Please tell us about your program at the Maritime Academy of Asia and the Pacific (MAAP).

"We operate the Japan-specific campus within MAAP—a specialized training facility for cadets aspiring to join the Japanese merchant fleet. We also provide the training ship *Kapitan Gregorio Oca* (KGO), which conducts training voyages to help Filipino cadets gain the onboard experience required for licensing. In addition, we maintain a seafarer training center in Manila.

"We constantly review our seafarer training courses based on established guidelines. In 2024, we discontinued seven out of 41 courses due to low utilization rates. Going forward, we will continue to monitor usage appropriately and consider introducing new courses to meet emerging demand.

"The number of first-year students at the JSU-IMMAJ campus alone has increased from around 200 a few years ago to 292 now. As the number of new students fluctuates annually depending on demand of our member companies, we interpret the increase as positive feedback from our members. We regard this as a sign that expectations for MAAP-trained seafarers are rising."

— Please share your aspirations as the new chairman of IMMAJ.

"I remain committed to steadfastly pursuing the two major tasks entrusted to our association. These tasks are essential for supporting the recruitment and development of highly motivated, globally competent seafarers who ensure safe operations."

— Non-Japanese seafarers have become indispensable to Japan's merchant fleet.

"Seafarers—both Japanese and foreign nationals—are indispensable to fulfilling the mission of shipping: supporting the nation's economic activities and livelihood.

"Seafarers, who share both their working and living conditions for months on end aboard the same vessel, embody not merely "trustworthy partners" united by a common goal, but rather fate-sharing community members eating from the same pot.

— Please share your thoughts on the future relationship between Japanese and foreign seafarers

"I believe the depth of mixed-nationality crew arrangements will continue to grow. In the future, we are likely to see nationality-neutral manning concepts, fostering deeper collaboration and more frequent opportunities for joint engagement. Furthermore, I believe we are entering an era in which we must rely



Kiyotaka Aya: Graduated from Department of Navigation, Faculty of Mercantile Marine, Kobe University of Mercantile Marine. Joined Kawasaki Kisen Kaisha, Ltd. ("K" LINE) in October 1984, serving as a navigator aboard various vessels. After maritime and shore-based assignments, appointed Captain in July 2001 and was named to his first active command in December 2004. Appointed Head of Maritime Human Resources Group in 2011, Executive Officer in 2015, Managing Executive Officer in 2019, Senior Managing Executive Officer in 2021, and Special Advisor in 2025. Named Chairman of the International Mariners Management Association of Japan (IMMAJ) in June 2025.

on non-Japanese seafarers for assistance not only during boarding, but also in transferring the experience and skills cultivated at sea to land-based operations."

— Could you outline your association's future plans?

"The central negotiations for the IBF collective bargaining agreement (CBA) wage revision—a key recent issue—have concluded, and regional negotiations are currently underway. The Philippine CBA was finalized on September 4, with further negotiations planned with unions in India and other countries. We will strive to achieve a mutually acceptable distribution of the wage increase, carefully balancing the need to maintain competitive crew costs for each member company with the appropriate level of compensation for seafarers."

— Could you share your association's future plans for MAAP?

"We intend to continue promoting cross-cultural exchange between MAAP students and those from Japan's National Institute of Technology (KOSEN) Colleges. In 2019, students from both countries boarded the training vessel *KGO* for the first time, engaging in joint training and cultural exchange activities. Although the program was temporarily suspended due to the COVID-19 pandemic, it resumed when the *KGO* returned to Japan for dry docking in March 2024. Japanese students boarded the vessel at Kobe Port and shared shipboard life with MAAP students until its arrival at Shimizu Port, where it was docked at Miho Shipyard. This past March, Japanese KOSEN College students traveled to the Philippines for joint shipboard training and cross-cultural exchange events.

"This program offers a valuable opportunity for students from both countries—aspiring ocean-going seafarers—to learn about each other's training and aspirations through shared experiences and communication in English. It appears to be a mutually enriching experience, fostering personal growth and serving as a positive stimulus for both sides."

— A few years later, they will come aboard as crewmembers on Japanese merchant ships.

"This program directly contributes to cultivating globally competent seafarers who can advance safe operations—our association's foremost mission. We hope to boost the motivation of students who are striving to become seafarers and give them the extra encouragement they need. As they eventually come aboard as crewmembers, they may someday recall, "We worked and learned together back then." I look forward to that day.

"In May of this year, students from the MAAP Cutter Club visited Japan and participated as open-entry competitors in the All Japan Cutter Competition. The students, who had trained using the cutter donated by our association, recorded the third-fastest time among the 10 participating teams. We hope to continue fostering opportunities for meaningful interaction between Japanese and Filipino students through various initiatives."

— What is your message to MAAP students?

"It takes experience and time to become a skilled seafarer. When you feel like giving up, I encourage you to persevere and maintain your "hang in there" spirit.



Cross-cultural exchange between Japanese and Filipino students aboard the *KGO* (March 2024)

2 from MOL Magsaysay Maritime Academy Named Among Philippines' 'Top 10 Outstanding Maritime Cadets'

Two cadets from MOL Magsaysay Maritime Academy Inc. (MMMA) in the Philippines—one woman from marine transportation and one man from marine engineering—were named to the list of 10 Outstanding Maritime Cadets of the Philippines (TOMSP) at a September 28 event held in Quezon City, Metro Manila. This marks the first time that cadets from a privately operated maritime academy in the Philippines co-founded by a Japanese shipping company have been selected for this prestigious honor.

TOMSP is a maritime cadet recognition program supported by the Maritime Industry Authority (MARINA) and other organizations, encompassing approximately 80

maritime academies throughout the Philippines. MMMA, which is participating for the first time, nominated two candidates. After undergoing leadership camps, examinations, and interviews, cadet Princess Dianna Marrey B. David was selected in recognition of her strong leadership potential in the maritime industry, and cadet Kurt Neo G. Dizon was honored for the resilience and communication skills he developed while overcoming a challenging upbringing. This achievement follows a remarkable performance in last year's Maritime Schools Assessment Program (MSAP), a standardized test for Philippine maritime education institutions, where MMMA placed second nationwide



MMMA cadets named to top 10: Left, 3rd year marine transportation cadet Princess Dianna Marrey B. David; Right, 3rd year marine engineering cadet Kurt Neo G. Dizon

Shipping Companies Conduct Tabletop Safety Drills

MOL

On October 6, the company held a tabletop drill based on a simulation of a marine accident involving a cargo transfer vessel (CTV) owned by SeaLoading Holding AS (SeaLoading), an MOL Group company.

The drill assumed the following scenario: The CTV operated by SeaLoading was offloading crude oil from a floating production, storage, and offloading (FPSO) unit anchored approximately 100 nautical miles south of Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, to a tanker. During an emergency evacuation from the FPSO due to stormy weather, the offloading hose connecting the CTV and the tanker ruptured. As a result, the crude oil remaining in the hose—estimated at up to around 80 cubic meters—spilled into the sea.

During the drill, MOL confirmed emergency coordination with its group company based on a simulated incident scenario. Furthermore, SeaLoading CEO Yoshiaki Kubo, along with MOL executives and employees, held multifaceted discussions regarding the two companies' response to the incident, deepening their mutual understanding.

'K' Line

On October 8, "K" Line carried out an "Emergency Response Exercise" as a part of training to optimally prepare for any major maritime accident. The scenario of the exercise assumed that an LPG carrier owned by the "K" Line Group collided with a tanker while navigating in Osaka Bay. The company confirmed a series of emergency response process by setting up a crisis-management headquarters upon receiving an incident report, establishing communication channels with the ship management company and conducting a simulated press conference at the end of the exercise. During the press conference, journalists asked many questions, creating a tense atmosphere similar to an actual event.

IINO Lines

IINO Lines conducted a joint accident response drill with its group's ship man-



Crisis Response Room during the drill(MOL)



At the Mock Press Conference("K" Line)



Scene of Emergency Drill (IINO Lines)

agement company IINO Marine Service Co., Ltd. (IMS) on October 8.

The drill was based on a scenario in which a very large crude carrier (VLCC) owned and operated by IINO Lines and managed by IMS, collided with another vessel while navigating off the coast of Singapore. In this exercise, an emergency headquarters were established at both IINO Lines and at IMS. These two centers were connected online to enable real-time information sharing and coordination with internal and external parties. The drill also included simulations for responding to external inquiries. Due to the location of the incident, the company worked closely with its office in Singapore to confirm procedures for reporting to the local authorities and other on-site responses.

The exercise was implemented to build up emergency response expertise and share improvements across the group, and regular drills will improve the crisis response capabilities of group-operated vessels and continue to ensure safe and secure services.

NYK Celebrates 140th Anniversary Prioritizing Human Potential and Technological Expertise Across All Eras

On October 1—a company holiday in recognition of our founding—we marked our 140th anniversary. The following day, NYK President Takaya Soga addressed the company's employees in celebration of the milestone. Reflecting on our journey since founding, he expressed deep gratitude for the dedication of our predecessors and the passion of each and every employee. His remarks are excerpted below.

"The enduring DNA of NYK—passed down since its founding—embodies an unwavering sense of mission and pride: a keen ability in every era to discern society's and people's evolving needs, coupled with a resolute determination to fulfill them.

"Through its various shipping services and logistics operations, NYK has not only supported Japan's economy and industries but also conveyed peace and culture to the world through its passenger ships. Today, NYK has evolved into a corporate group that contributes to the livelihoods and prosperity of people around the world. The company's 140 years of history is also one of continually responding to societal needs and embracing challenges.



President Soga making his address

"Looking back at NYK's history, it is impressive that in every era we have prioritized human potential and technological expertise, continued to invest in growth even during challenging financial times, fostered partnerships to achieve what no single company could accomplish—what we now refer to as "co-creation"—and consistently maintained a strong sense of leadership within the industry. I am convinced that these qualities, to be equal to our mission-driven DNA, constitute the company's 'invisible assets.'

"Building on the invisible assets cultivated over 140 years and guided by flexibility and the spirit of embracing new challenges, let us shape the next chapter in the history and future of NYK and the NYK Group."

The *Santa Maria's* Assistant Navigator Classic Stories of the Sea By Akinori Sugiura

The ancient Greek navigational guideline, "Sail for two days with Boreas (the god of the north wind)" essentially meant "Sail for two days on the north wind." However, the distance a ship could travel varied depending on wind strength and sailing performance, making this a remarkably imprecise rule of navigation. This was because no reliable method for measuring a ship's speed had yet been established. Before setting sail across the Atlantic, Columbus appointed a seafarer whose role was

to measure the ship's speed—a log keeper, or perhaps more aptly, a navigator's assistant. The selected log keeper repeatedly practiced walking and running on land to internalize his own pace. During the voyage, Columbus estimated and recorded the distance traveled by the *Santa Maria* based on reports from this assistant, who measured the ship's speed by walking or running along the deck in parallel with sea foam and drifting debris alongside the hull.

Anti-Piracy Task Force Sails for Somali Coast and Gulf of Aden

The departure ceremony for the 52nd Maritime Task Force deployed to the Gulf of Aden off the coast of Somalia was held on October 4, and the destroyer *Oonami* departed from Yokosuka City, Kanagawa Prefecture.

Commanded by Captain Hiromasa Iio, the *Oonami* carries approximately 200 personnel, including eight Japan Coast Guard officers who comprise the 52nd Somalia-area maritime patrol unit. The vessel will relieve the destroyer *Harusame*, which is currently on duty as part of the 51st unit. It will also conduct intelligence-gathering activities in the Middle East.

At the ceremony, Self Defense Fleet Commander in Chief Katsushi Omachi stated: “The international situation is growing increasingly chaotic. Furthermore, attacks by Houthi forces on civilian vessels continue. Our counter-piracy operations are directly linked to ensuring Japan’s maritime security and have received high praise from merchant shipping organizations, as well as both domestic and international sources. Although operating under harsh conditions, I pray for the successful completion of your mission, the safeguarding of your well-being, your safe return home, and a healthy reunion.”

Finally, Captain Iio declared, “We stand united and will accomplish our mission. The destroyer *Oonami* is departing port,” and all crewmembers boarded the ship.

Representatives from the Japanese Shipowners' Association (JSA), the International Mariners Management Association of Japan (IMMAJ), and the All Japan Seamen’s Union (JSU) were also on hand for the ceremony. All attendees bid farewell from the Yokosuka wharf, enveloped in the calm autumn air and spared from the anticipated rain, wishing the *Oonami* safe passage and the crew’s well-being as it departed.



Ceremony guests who saw the ship off

IMO Holds Extraordinary MEPC Session;

Talks Continue on Net-zero Treaty Amendments in International Shipping

The International Maritime Organization’s Marine Environment Protection Committee (MEPC) met in person for an extraordinary session at IMO Headquarters in London from October 14-17. The committee held negotiations on a proposed treaty amendment aimed at achieving the international goal of “net-zero greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions from international shipping by around 2050.” However, as consensus could not be reached, it was decided to convene an extraordinary meeting one year later to resume deliberations toward adoption.

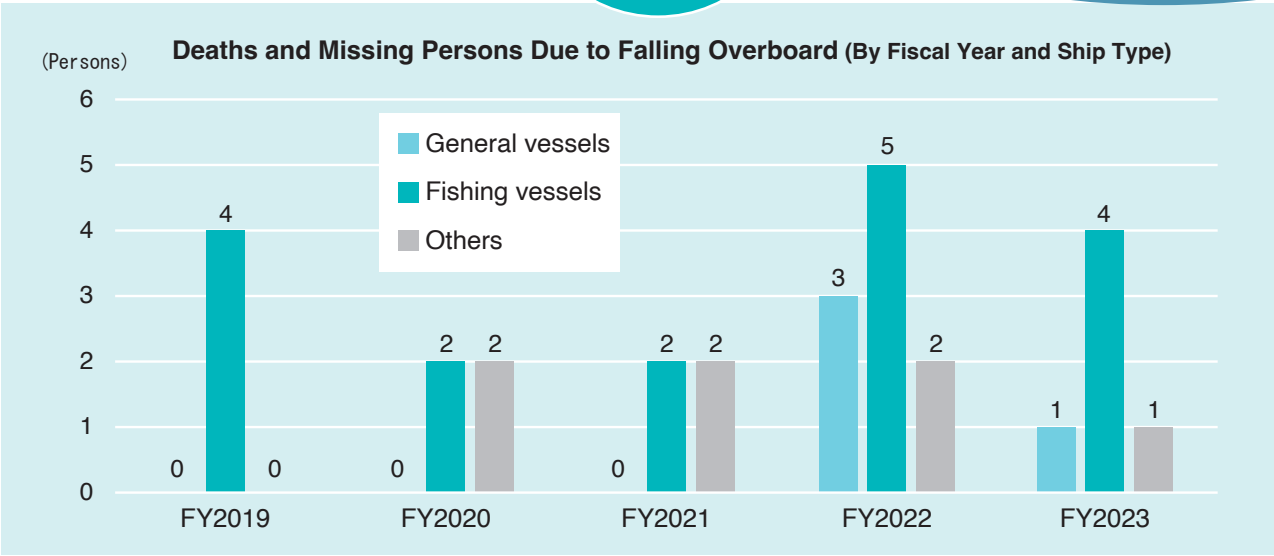
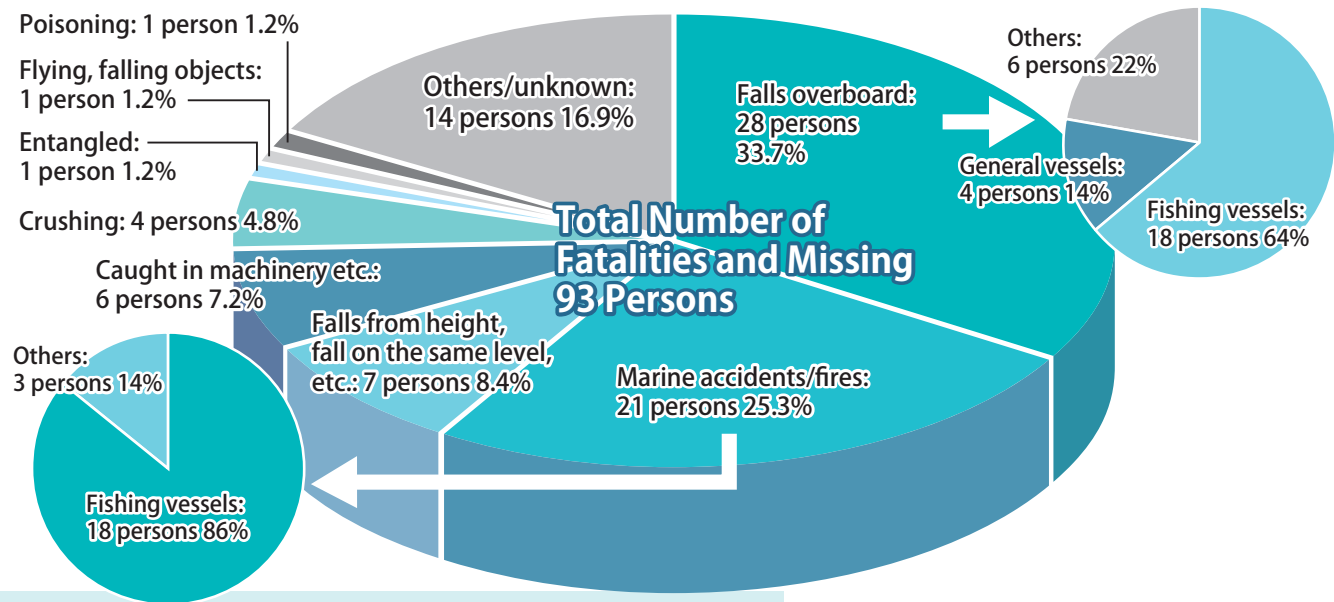
In July 2023, the IMO adopted the “2023 IMO GHG Reduction Strategy,” setting greenhouse gas (GHG) reduction targets for international shipping, including the goal of achieving net-zero GHG emissions around 2050. Since then, negotiations have continued on treaty amendments, including fuel regulation systems and economic incentive schemes for zero-emission ships—areas in which Japan has played a leading role in development. In April of this year, a basic agreement (approval) was reached on the proposed treaty amendment. Following the six-month circulation period required for contracting parties to review the proposed treaty amendment prior to final adoption, an extraordinary meeting was to be convened to deliberate on its adoption.

At this meeting, however, the parties were unable to reach consensus, preventing adoption of the amendment. It was therefore decided to convene another extraordinary meeting one year later to resume deliberations toward adoption.

Work will continue on developing detailed guidance for the fuel regulation system and economic incentive schemes for zero-emission ships, among other matters, until the next extraordinary meeting is held one year from now.

Accidents Resulting in Fatalities and Missing Persons (Source:The Association for Promoting Safety and Sanitation for Seafarers) 5-year Cumulative Total (FY 2019-2023)

The pie chart above shows the number of fatalities and missing persons over a five-year period. The number of fatalities and missing persons due to falls overboard was 28, or 33.7% of the total. When working over the side of the vessel or fishing on the deck, seafarers are advised to take safety measures such as wearing safety harnesses or life vests, refraining from operations in rough weather, and not working alone.



The bar graph shows the number of fatalities and missing persons due to falling overboard from fiscal year 2019 to fiscal year 2023, broken down by fiscal year and vessel type. For operations involving the risk of falling into the sea, consider requiring workers to wear work life jackets or fall arresting equipment and to carry emergency signaling devices such as personal locator beacons (PLBs).

Captain Jima's Fun Pilot Diary

②⑦ [Special Edition] A Fun Learning Experience Aboard the Sailing Ship *Kaiwo Maru* in Toyama 250824 - *Kaiwo Maru*, Imizu-shi, Toyama Prefecture

You can stay aboard the sailing ship *Kaiwo Maru*!

Inspired by these words, Captain Jima took the children to the *Kaiwo Maru*, a sailing ship permanently moored at Toyama Port, where they learned many things and stayed overnight.

I pitched in to help put on a two-day, one-night tour for elementary and junior high school students called "Visit National Institute of Technology (KOSEN) College – Toyama and Sleep Aboard the Sailing Ship *Kaiwo Maru*!" hosted by the Ocean Kids Club (a volunteer organization originating from the Iruma City (Saitama Prefecture) Chamber of Commerce and Industry, focusing on education through occupational experiences for children) in Iruma City.

I traveled by bus from Iruma to Toyama with about 30 people ranging from fourth-grade elementary school students to third-year junior high school students. At KOSEN College – Toyama, we had the chance to get a close look at the ship simulators and engines, listened to talks by captains of the training ship and tugboat, and then headed to the *Kaiwo Maru*. We split into groups and set off to explore the ship. We toured the ship through activities like a stamp rally, learning about the ship while having fun.

Bedtime was 10:00 p.m., a bit late for kids, and wake-up time was 6:30 the next morning. Some kids jump right out of bed,



All participants took on the sail-raising operation together.

while others struggle to get out of their bunks. As for me, I think, "Diversity is a good thing."

"Polishing the deck with coconut husks," "hoisting the flag," "climbing the mast (specifically the bowsprit, the horizontal-like mast at the bow—a bit thrilling)," and "sail-handling experience—spreading and folding the smallest triangular sail (though it's about the size of three *tatami* mats) using only the children's strength" were all first-time experiences for everyone, and they seemed to enjoy them immensely.

All eight of us staff members got to experience all kinds of things, and I felt like I had returned to being young trainee Jima from 46 years ago.

~ Ahh... I slept on this bunk in this room for six months (so cramped!).

~ I had to climb the mast and fold this sail in some pretty strong winds, you know (scary!).



Capt. Masujima



The sailing ship *Kaiwo Maru*, permanently moored in Imizu City, Toyama Prefecture



Experiencing the ship handling simulator



Climbing the bowsprit

~ In the dead of winter, I scrubbed the deck barefoot every single day without a break (so cold!).

It was a moment when all sorts of thoughts kept welling up, one after another. And since the kids participating were around the same age as my grandchildren, it was a fun memory that was easy to relate to them.

As the event drew to a close, some kids even called out, "Captain!," which somehow made me happy. In the post-event survey,



some children said they had become interested in jobs related to the ocean, which made me happy all over again.

Brain Teaser Let's find out!

Who's out of Your League?



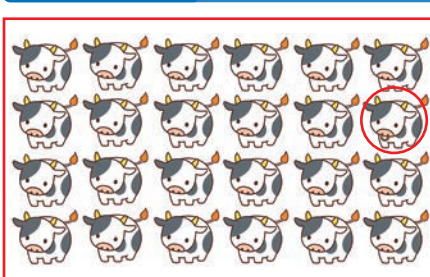
Illustration courtesy: illustAC

November has arrived! The leaves on the trees have turned color, and the chill in the morning and evening air signals the approach of winter. This month's "Brain Teaser" comes from an illustration of foxes.

Foxes frequently appear in Japanese folktales and legends, known as creatures that can transform into human form, and have been deeply intertwined with Japanese culture, revered as messengers of the *Inari* deity. On the other hand, in European folklore and stories, foxes are often depicted as symbols of cunning and craftiness, and their image varies significantly depending on the region. Foxes are nocturnal and excel at capturing small animals using their keen senses. In winter, their thick, fluffy fur helps them withstand the bitter cold. Foxes, both familiar and mysteriously alluring, continue to captivate people to this day.

So... if you look closely, you will see that one of the foxes is different from the others. Which one is it? (The answer will be in next month's issue.)

Here is the answer to last month's (October) Brain Teaser.



Only one cow has a nose ring.

Use the Floor for Easy Stretch! A 'big shoulder roll' can relieve stiff shoulders

- (1) Lie face down with both legs together and straight.
- (2) Place both palms on the floor beside your shoulders.
- (3) While inhaling, push against the floor with your arms and consciously engage your back muscles to lift your upper body. Slowly arch your upper body as if pushing your chest forward. Try to keep your navel just barely off the floor, as shown in the illustration.
- (4) Lower your shoulders without shrugging them, keeping them away from your ears, and direct your gaze diagonally upward or straight ahead.
- (5) Hold for 15 to 30 seconds, then slowly lower your upper body back to the floor while exhaling. Repeat moves (1)~(5) about 3 times.

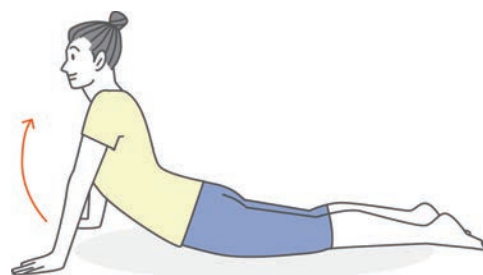


Illustration courtesy: illustAC

Today's Delicious Dish: Stir-fried *Konjac* and Colorful Vegetables

■ Ingredients (4 servings)

1 block of *konjac*
4 green bell peppers
1 red bell pepper
5-6 ears of baby corn (canned)
1 pack of *shimeji* mushrooms
2 tablespoons of *miso*
½ teaspoon of chicken bouillon powder
1/2 clove garlic
1 piece ginger
1 tablespoon *mirin*

1 tablespoon salad oil

■ How to cook

1. Cut the *konjac* block in half lengthwise, then slice thinly. Finely chop the garlic and ginger.
2. Halve the green and red bell peppers, remove the seeds, and slice lengthwise.
3. Cut the baby corn diagonally in half. Remove the stems from the *shimeji* mushrooms and separate them into small clusters.
4. Heat a frying pan and dry-fry the *konjac*.

5. Add salad oil, garlic, and ginger to the frying pan from (4) and sauté until fragrant. Add the bell peppers and stir-fry.
6. Once the bell peppers have softened slightly, add the baby corn and *shimeji* mushrooms and continue stir-frying.
7. Combine the *miso*, soup stock powder, and *mirin*, pour the mixture into the pan, stir, and let the flavors meld before serving.



Source: Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries website (Recipe, perfectly matched for rice)

<https://www.maff.go.jp/j/seisan/kakou/mezamasi/recipe/index.html>