



Our Correspondent

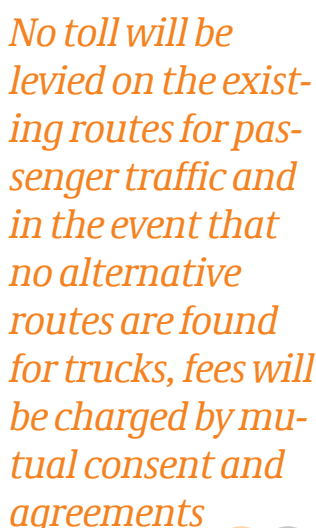
In a statement, CDAA said, 'Search and rescue teams of Dzhirah governorate received a report of a rock collapse in the Al Arid area in the wilayat of Ibrī, where six workers were killed. Five others were rescued. Search is still on for missing workers under the rubble.'



Oman Sail teams bag 7 medals at GCC Sailing Championships in Kuwait

Our Correspondent

Addressing the subject of road development projects, H E Ma'awali said, "There is a backlog. Many projects have been postponed since 2016 due to the financial situation. Projects are being implemented currently according to national priorities."



HE SAID AL MA'AWALI

He described the response to the Empty Quarter Road connecting the sultanate to Saudi Arabia as favourable. Work is

The ministry is also working on developing strategic plans to activate maritime administration.

Based on the directives of His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik to establish an economic zone in Rawda in the wilayat of Mahdah, Buriami governorate, officials including six ministers visited the proposed site for a review on Sunday (ONA)

Our Correspondent

Muscat

The app will help raise awareness about this important issue by providing reliable information,



H E Dr Sa'eedi informed that one brain-dead donor can save lives of eight people and urged

According to Dr Neven bint Ibrahim al Kalbani, head of Organ Transplant Department at The Royal Hospital and vice-president of Omani Association for Organ Transplantation, the hospital has performed four organ transplant procedures this year - two in children and two in adults.

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BOON AND A BANE

Are the RO500,000 and RO250,000 minimum investment criteria for expatriates to own real estate in Oman too high?

H E Dr Khalfan bin Said al Shu'aali, Minister of Housing and Urban Planning, recently issued a decision allowing non-Omani investors to own housing units in Oman which stated that expatriate investors wishing to obtain a First-Class residence card can request a certificate from the Real Estate Registry Secretariat after proving that he/she purchased one or more housing units of a total value of no less than RO500,000, or RO 250,000 for a Second-Class residence card.

The decision added that an expatriate investor with a First-Class residence card has the right to own one property for residential, commercial or industrial use outside the places licensed for non-Omanis to own, which can be transferred to others without prejudice to the law prohibiting non-Omanis from owning land and real estate in places specified in Royal Decree 29/2018 and the Executive Regulations issued pursuant to Ministerial Resolution 292/2020.

Following the decision, here is what Muscat Daily readers said about the RO500,000 and RO 250,000 minimum investment criteria for expat real estate investors in Oman -

K M Gurnani
Businessman

It's not high. The government can consider granting passports to investors who exceed the investment criteria and have been in Oman for more than 20 years. Granting passport to such individuals will ensure they stay in the country and invest a major portion of their income in Oman.

Jay Prakash
Private sector employee

Yes, the benchmark set by Oman is too high and the reasons are obvious. It is the safest place with zero tolerance to fraud, it is a crime-free environment, it has natural serenity and cleanliness, and last but not the least, world-class infrastructure.

Ruskeen S
Sales manager

It'll keep new small-scale investors away; the criteria are unreasonable. Allowing people with RO100,000 capital alongside big investors will help the economy more.

Shakir Bengali
(Via Facebook)

This investment criterion is very high compared to other GCC countries.

Dominic Yuwan
Manager

I work as a consultant and have been researching the Muscat real estate market for six years. The average price of residential apartment units is between RO30,000 and RO50,000 and villas RO90,000 and RO120,000. The criteria are high - five to ten times higher than the listed properties in the market.

Jayatee Choudhury
Student

The criteria are too high. A lesser investment amount will encourage more investors to Oman which will improve the economy and generate employment opportunities. A lower benchmark will also encourage healthy competition.

Karan Tanna
(Via Facebook)

It is too high an investment for very less privileges. If the minimum criteria are not reduced, then give more privileges.

Sahil Khan
(Via Facebook)

Those who have so much money will prefer to invest in Europe or the UAE, at the least.

? NEXT ON YOUR SAY

How do you plan to observe Ramadan this year?

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

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SEND YOUR COMMENTS

Share your comments in not more than 50 words along with your full name and profession before next Sunday, 10am, via WhatsApp, Facebook or Instagram

CPA ensures stability of commodity prices

Muscat - The Consumer Protection Authority (CPA) held a meeting on Sunday with suppliers in the Governorate of Muscat as part of its preparations to ensure availability of goods and monitor prices.

Presiding over the meeting, Salim bin Ali al Hakmani, chairman of CPA, stressed that the next few days will witness a tightening of control to ensure the stability of commodity prices.

"Field teams will be on duty checking shops and commercial centres in the country. In case of any violation, the supplier will be dealt with according to the procedures in place," Hakmani informed.

"Inspection teams have been increased in the authority's directorates and departments in various areas to ensure compliance with prices of goods and services."

He urged consumers to help in the authority's mission by reporting any violations that they come across while shopping.

Price control inspection visits are being conducted to ensure suppliers follow tax guidelines, too, specifically value-added tax.

During the meeting on Sunday, it was stressed that consumers must not be exploited by luring them with confusing and exploitative offers.

Hakmani was briefed by suppliers on their efforts to provide basic commodities in the market with the advent of Ramadan, when there is heavy rush to buy food and consumer goods.

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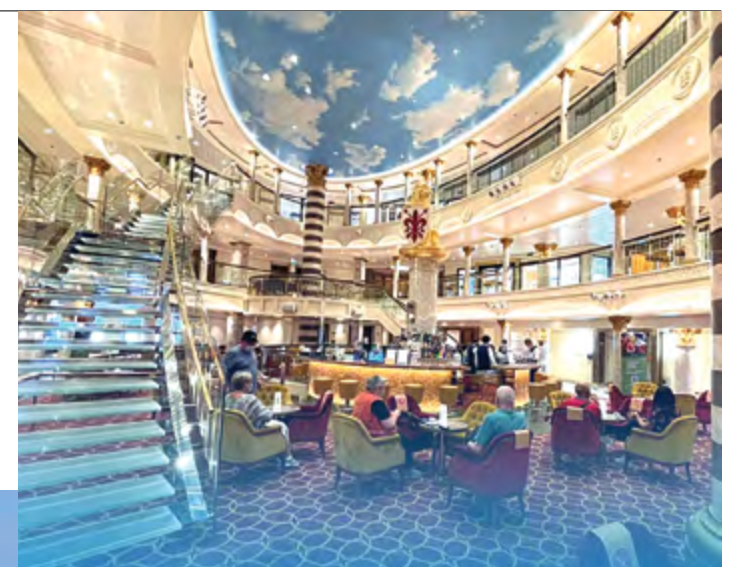
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1,200 CRUISE PASSENGERS VISIT SALALAH

More than 1,200 tourists onboard a cruise ship visited Port of Salalah on Sunday, the Ministry of Heritage and Tourism has stated. A statement issued by the ministry said Port of Salalah received the Italian cruise ship Costa with 1,264 tourists onboard during their visit to Dhofar governorate. The visitors' itinerary included a visit to the sites of the Land of Frankincense (Al Baleed and Samharam) and the Museum of the Land of Frankincense.



(Supplied photos)

Office hours announced for Ramadan

Our Correspondent
Muscat

Official working hours for the month of Ramadan in Oman have been announced.

A statement issued by ONA said, 'The official working hours in the month of Ramadan for the year 1443 AH for employees of units of the state's administrative apparatus will be 9am to 2pm.

'Working hours in private sector companies and establishments for Muslims during the Holy Month of Ramadan will be reduced to six hours per day, equivalent to 30 hours per week.'



Working hours of Slaughterhouses announced

Municipality has announced working hours of Seeb and Amerat slaughterhouses for the

month of Ramadan.

A statement issued by Muscat Municipality said, 'Working hours of slaughterhouses throughout Ramadan will be 8am to 1pm for individuals and 6am to 8am for companies.'

On Friday, April 1, both slaughterhouses in Seeb and Amerat will operate in the morning till 11am, according to the statement.

From March 29 until the end of the month of Shaban, the slaughterhouses will be open from 7am to 2pm for individuals and 6pm to midnight for companies.

OCCI, Czech delegates explore trade ties

Muscat - Redha Juma al Saleh, chairman of Oman Chamber of Commerce and Industry (OCCI), received a business delegation from the Czech Republic on Sunday.

The Czech delegation was headed by Dr Petr Mixa, deputy director general of the Czech Geological Survey.

The meeting discussed means of enhancing trade between the two countries. It also reviewed fields of cooperation and partnership in investment sectors, such as mining, as well as exchanging expertise and knowledge transfer in light of Oman Vision 2040.

Saleh explained that the meeting was held to strengthen relations and expand horizons to serve the interests of the two countries, besides promoting trade and investment relations. He added that the meeting aimed to accelerate signing commercial partnerships and qualita-

tive investments to serve the economic sectors.

Saleh pointed out that the economies of Oman and the Czech Republic include many promising opportunities.

"The volume of trade exchange between the two countries in 2021 reached more than RO6.659mn. The volume of imports amounted to more than RO797,600, while the volume of exports exceeded RO5.862mn. Medicines and medical solutions are the most important exports from Oman to the Czech Republic, while Oman imports cars and machinery parts."

On the sidelines of the visit, B2B meetings were held between Omani businessmen and their Czech counterparts. These meetings aimed to exchange experiences and commercial opportunities, as well as encourage businessmen to establish commercial partnerships.

ONA



New decision to support 20 craft industries

Our Correspondent
Muscat

H E Qais bin Mohammed al Yousef, Minister of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion and chairman of the Board of Directors of the Authority of Small and Medium Enterprises Development, issued Decision No 262/2022 regarding regulations for supporting craft industries on March 24.

The new regulations include support for 20 handicraft industries, the definition of craftsmen and crafts institutions, the type of support provided, and the beneficiaries of the support.

The new decision supports handicraft industries, including those making Omani daggers, pottery and ceramics, products from leather, palm fronds, wood, stone and gypsum, making and



processing incense and traditional fishing tools.

The new decision emphasises the formation of a specialised committee to provide all kinds of support to craftsmen, such as determining the financial support provided according to the needs of the craftsman or the craft institution in terms of machines, equipment and supplies.

MINISTER OF EDUCATION VISITS SCHOOLS IN JABAL AKHDAR



H E Dr Madiha bint Ahmed al Shaibaniyah, Minister of Education, on Sunday visited a number of schools of the Directorate General of Education in Dakhiliyah governorate. Saif bin Mubarak al Juldani, director general of the directorate, accompanied H E Dr Madiha on her visit. The visit aimed to review the efforts of the directorate in the governorate and see the progress of work after students returned to school following closures resulting from the COVID-19, besides the decisions of the Higher Committee for Education (Supplied photo)

399 violations of fishing law reported in February

Our Correspondent
Muscat

A total of 399 fishing law violations were reported in February 2022, according to statistics released by the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Water Resources (MAFWR).

"In all, 471 items were seized, including boats, engines, nets and other fishing equipment," a MAFWR official said. A total of 353kg of fish was confiscated in February. Specialists of the ministry arrested 55 expatriates for violating provisions of the Marine Fishing Law and Protection of Living Aquatic Resources.

Besides 260 violations of fishing licence regulations, there were 66 cases of using prohibited fishing methods and possession of unauthorised equipment, 16 violations of fishing in prohibited areas and time, 25 cases of employing unlicensed expatriate workers, 14 instances of non-compliance with placement of registration plates on boats and fishing vessels, and 18 other violations.

MAFWR recently conducted several campaigns to arrest violators of the fishing law in various governorates.

On March 2, the Fisheries Control Team in Dhofar conducted land and sea inspection campaigns at lobster fishing spots in the coastal wilayats of the governorate in cooperation with Royal Oman Police. Seventy-one violations were reported and legal measures were taken against violators, according to the ministry.

Global Higher Education Exhibition opens at OCEC

Muscat - Global Higher Education Exhibition (GHEDEX) 2022 opened its doors to visitors for three days on Sunday at Oman Convention and Exhibition Centre (OCEC) under the patronage of H H Sayyid Fahar bin Fatik al Said.

The exhibition is supported by the Ministry of Higher Education, Research and Innovation, Ministry of Education, Ministry of Labour, Ministry of Culture,



(Supplied photo)

Sports and Youth, and the Omani Authority for Academic Accreditation and Quality Assurance, a press release said.

It is the oldest and leading event in the sultanate for higher education as it provides a great opportunity for universities and colleges to connect and interact with students, parents and officials, as well as help students understand the opportunities they have in and outside Oman.

Amr Abdullah Baabood, CEO of Arabian Research Bureau (OITE Group), said, "After having the GHEDEX exhibition for 21 years, which this year has about 47 Omani academic institutions alongside more than 46 international universities from leading education markets such as the US, UK, Canada, France, Malaysia and others, it is the right time for Omani institutions to pay attention to quality, equi-

valence, and accreditation in order to make 'Study in Oman Vision' a reality."

The exhibition includes the Global Higher Education Exhibition, Technical Education and Vocational Training Exhibition (Trainex), Future Skills and HRD, EdTech, the International Conference on Quality in Higher Education, and the Ghedex Awards for Excellence in Higher Education.

Over 1,000 archaeological sites registered in Duqm

Our Correspondent
Muscat

Over 1,000 archaeological sites have been found in Duqm from 2015 to 2022, according to the Ministry of Heritage and Tourism (MHT).

The Public Authority for Special Economic Zones and Free Zones (OPAZ), in cooperation with MHT and in coordination with the Institute of Archeology of the Czech Academy of Sciences, have conducted studies and monitored archaeological sites in the wilayat of Duqm and the village of Nafoon located in the Special Economic Zone of Duqm.

A statement issued by MHT said, "A team of archaeologists



(Supplied photo)

from the Institute of Archeology of the Czech Academy of Sciences has monitored 155 archaeological sites in the village of

Nafoon and about 900 such sites in the wilayat of Duqm from 2015 to 2022 during excavation studies.'

The archaeological studies and research conducted by the specialised teams that came from the Czech Repub-

lic, US, Ukraine, Italy, France and Germany focused on the fact that the village of Nafoon in Duqm has numerous settlements of ancient human beings.

In addition to excavating mass graves of the Iron Age and discovering stone monuments and coastal settlements, these specialists also studied the stone tools used by humans in the Paleolithic Age in Duqm.

OPAZ, in cooperation with MHT, has also documented these settlements of ancient humans dating back to the Iron Age and archaeological sites for the purpose of research and study and providing the necessary protection for archaeological monuments in Duqm.

First phase of integrated service stations on Batinah Expressway opens in Liwa

Our Correspondent
Muscat

The Ministry of Housing and Urban Planning (MHUP) announced that Phase 1 of the integrated service stations on the Batinah Expressway was opened in the wilayat of Liwa on Sunday.

In a statement, MHUP said that in the first phase, only the primary service of fuel stations have been provided, with more facilities to open in due course.

In January, MHUP had announced that it would complete the works of the integrated service stations on Batinah Expressway within 2022.

According to the ministry, the stations are distributed over four locations in North Batinah governorate, with an area ranging from 15,000 sqm to 30,000 sqm. Two integrated service stations will be in Al Hoor region in the wilayat of Suwaiq, one in Rawdha in the wilayat of Saham and the fourth station in New Liwa District in the wilayat of Liwa.

The ministry confirmed that the integrated service stations comprise a fuel station, public utility building with restaurants, multiservice trade outlets, hotel suite, park, prayer areas for men and women, parking lots and other services.



Oman's oil output rises 8% as exports jump by 18%

Our Correspondent
Muscat

Oman's daily average production of crude oil exceeded 1mn barrels per day (bpd) mark during the first two months of 2022, up by more than 8 per cent in comparison to daily average output recorded in the same period of last year.

Oil output during January - February period increased to 1.03mn bpd compared with 954,300 bpd in the corresponding period of 2021, the data released by National Centre for Statistics and Information (NCSI) showed.

The sultanate's total oil production in the first two months of 2022 grew by 8.2 per cent to 60.9mn barrels compared to 56.3mn barrels in the same period of last year. Of the total production, crude output jumped by 11.5 per cent year-on-year to 48.01mn barrels during January - February period, while condensates output slightly decreased 2.4 per cent to 12.9mn barrels during these two months.

Exports to China jump 21%

Oman's oil exports grew by more than 18 per cent during January - February period of 2022 to 53.4mn barrels compared with 45.1mn barrels recorded in the corresponding period of 2021.

The sultanate's total oil exports for the full year 2021 had inched up 0.7 per cent to 288.9mn barrels from 287mn

38.4mn barrels in 2021.

On the other hand, exports to India decreased by 7.6 per cent to 5.2mn barrels in the first two months of 2022 from 5.7mn barrels in the same period of 2021.

Oman crude prices climb higher

The average price at which Oman sold its crude during first two months of 2022 surged by

showed.

With global oil prices continuing to rise amid Russia - Ukraine conflict, Oman crude prices recently rose to their highest level in more than eight years. Oman crude price on Friday stood at US\$112.3 per barrel (for May delivery) at the Dubai Mercantile Exchange.

The International Energy Agency (IEA) last week called on the OPEC+ group of oil-producing nations to help 'relieve the strain' on oil markets, while warning that the world faced the biggest shock to oil supply in decades.

The outbreak of war in Ukraine has sent oil prices up sharply and led to major economies, such as the US and Canada, sanctioning Russia by banning imports of oil.

With the threat that supplies of Russian oil could be cut even more, "there is a real risk that markets tighten further and oil prices escalate significantly in the coming months" as the world enters its peak demand season, the IEA said as reported by AFP.

Oil output during January - February period increased to 1.03mn barrels per day in 2022 compared with 954,300 barrels per day in the corresponding period of 2021

barrels in 2020.

Exports to China, the biggest buyer of Oman's crude, accounted for over 87 per cent of the sultanate's total oil exports during the first two months of this year. Total exports to China surged 21.2 per cent at 46.5mn barrels during January - February period of this year compared to

63.5 per cent to US\$76.7 per barrel against US\$46.9 per barrel recorded in the same period of 2021.

The highest monthly average price of Oman crude was recorded in January at US\$80.3 per barrel, while the average price for February stood at US\$73.1 per barrel, the NCSI data

Oman and Sri Lanka seek to enhance trade, investment



Muscat - Dr Saleh Said Masan, Undersecretary for Commerce and Industry at the Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion received in his office on Sunday Dr Bandula Gunawardena, Minister of Trade of Sri Lanka. The two sides explored aspects of the joint cooperation, economic diversification sectors

and the investment and trade environment in both countries, as well as augmenting trade exchange between the Sultanate of Oman and Sri Lanka.

The two sides also discussed aspects of cooperation in the economy and industry sectors, logistics, ports and investment opportunities in both countries.

They also discussed exchanging expertise between the two sides, as well as seeking to benefit from the opportunities and potentials available in the two countries.

The two sides reviewed the products that can be exported and imported.

ONA

Macron dismisses Putin demand for gas payments in rubles

Brussels, Belgium - French President Emmanuel Macron has dismissed Russian President Vladimir Putin's demand for Europe to pay for gas in rubles as he accused Moscow of trying to sidestep sanctions over its war on Ukraine.

Macron told journalists after an EU summit in Brussels that the Russian move "is not in line with what was signed, and I do not see why we would apply it".

Putin made the demand last week as Moscow struggles to prop up its economy in the face of debilitating sanctions imposed by the West over his invasion of



President Emmanuel Macron

Ukraine.

Macron said that "we are continuing our analysis work" following the Kremlin's manoeuvre.

But he insisted "all the texts signed are clear: it is prohibited.

So European players who buy gas and who are on European soil must do so in euros".

"It is therefore not possible today to do what is requested, and it is not contractual," he said.

The French leader said he believed Moscow was using the step as "a mechanism to circumvent" EU sanctions against it for the assault on Ukraine.

Major gas buyer Germany has denounced the move and Chancellor Olaf Scholz on Friday reiterated that the contracts clearly stipulated how the gas should be paid for.

AFP

Zelensky urges Qatar to hike gas output

Doha, Qatar - Ukraine's President Volodymyr Zelensky has called on Qatar to increase production of natural gas to counter Russian threats to use energy as a weapon.

"I ask you to increase the out-

put of energy to ensure that everyone in Russia understands that no one can use energy as a weapon to blackmail the world," Zelensky said a video message to the Doha Forum meeting in Qatar's capital on Saturday.

Meanwhile, European Union leaders on Friday agreed for officials in Brussels to make joint gas purchases for the bloc as it struggles with high prices amid Russia's war on Ukraine.

AFP

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Sohar International and Hambro Perks sign deal to seek VC opportunities

Our Correspondent
Muscat

Sohar International has entered into a memorandum of understanding (MoU) with Hambro Perks, a London-headquartered international investment firm focussed on technology investing.

As part of the MoU, Sohar International and Hambro Perks will seek new venture capital (VC) investment opportunities in the region through the creation of co-investment platforms and joint funds. The agreement will provide new investment opportunities for Sohar International's customers and uncover business opportunities in the local market for international investors.

The MoU was signed recently at Sohar International's head-office by Ahmed al Musalmi, CEO of Sohar International, and Ali Qaiser, managing director of Hambro Perks.

The agreement's white-label VC fund structures will provide Sohar International clients with direct exposure to the VC asset class. The agreement will also enable partnership opportunities in the sultanate for Hambro Perks' portfolio of companies.

In a press statement, Musalmi said, "This strategic partnership is aligned to the embedding of innovation in our business operations, and in doing so, demonstrates that it is important



The MoU was signed by Ahmed al Musalmi (left) and Ali Qaiser

for us to play a pivotal role in bringing in new foreign investments to the country by partnering with experienced VC investors."

"We are excited that this partnership will enable early-stage Omani technology companies to access global markets and products. This strategic step will deliver on our purpose and allow our clients to win and achieve their goals through benefiting from next-generation fintech and exploring new business incubation," he added.

Backed by sovereign funds, well-established institutions, family offices and influential individuals from across the world, Hambro Perks is a multi-stage investor, investing across several specialised strategies. Hambro Perks has a unique platform for partnering with founders and entrepreneurs to support growth businesses at all stages of the investment cycle.

Dominic Perks, CEO and co-founder of Hambro Perks, said "We are looking forward to developing this close working rela-

tionship between Sohar International, Hambro Perks and our portfolio of technology companies globally. This is a great opportunity to support the Omani technology ecosystem by working together. Oman has unique opportunities to offer and this partnership will help us deliver value and access to new growth markets for our portfolio companies as we continue to help them scale. We are excited about the possibilities locally and believe Sohar International is the ideal partner to explore these with."

MSX inches down as volumes drop

Our Correspondent
Muscat

The benchmark index of the Muscat Stock Exchange (MSX) slightly decreased 0.1 per cent on Sunday to close at 4,276.82 points. Trading activity at the Muscat bourse remain weak compared to the previous day.

Among sectoral indices only Services index gained 0.11 per cent, while Financial and Industrial indices decreased 0.12 per cent and 0.45 per cent, respectively. MSX Sharia index dropped 0.58 per cent to close at 487.36 points.

Total trading volumes dropped by more than 84 per cent to 39.2mn shares on Sunday compared with 254.9mn shares traded on Thursday. Market turnover fell 84.1 per cent to RO6.74mn against RO42.35mn recorded in the pre-



vious trading session.

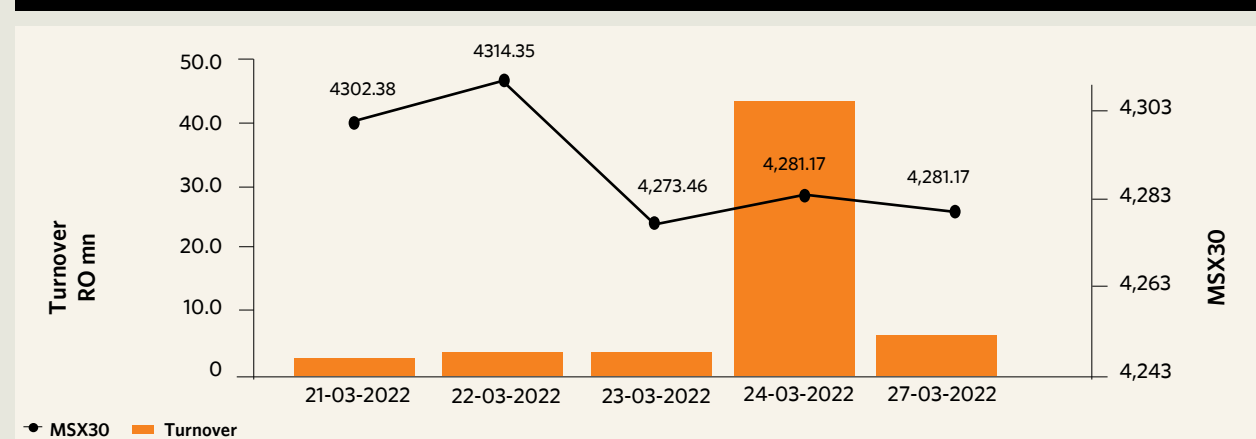
Market breadth of the MSX remained positive with 22 advancing stocks to 15 decliners. As many as 15 traded stocks closed flat for the day.

Top gainers of the day were Galfar Engineering and Contracting (9.21 per cent), Dhofar Insurance (7.18 per cent), Al

Omaniya Financial Services (5.26 per cent) and United Finance (4.94 per cent).

Top losers were Sharqia Desalination (-6.96 per cent), A'saffa Foods (-6.72 per cent), SMN Power Holding (-6.67 per cent), Al Madina Takaful (-6.12 per cent) and Al Anwar Ceramic Tiles (-5.7 per cent).

MSX INDEX AND TURNOVER OF FIVE TRADING DAYS



Canada will boost oil exports to ease global supply shortages

Ottawa, Canada – Canada announced it will boost oil exports by about five per cent to help address supply shortages faced by allies shunning Russian energy after Moscow's invasion of Ukraine.

"Our European friends and allies need Canada and others to step up. They're telling us they need our help in getting off Russian oil and gas in the short term," Resources Minister Jonathan

Wilkinson said in a statement.

Canada is "uniquely positioned to help," he said, adding that Ottawa "will continue working with our international partners to support international energy markets."

Wilkinson was taking part Thursday in a ministerial meeting of the International Energy Agency (IEA) in Paris.

"In response to requests for assistance from allies to address

supply shortages due to the conflict in Ukraine, Canadian industry has the capacity to incrementally increase its oil and gas exports in 2022 by up to 300,000 barrels per day with the intention of displacing Russian oil and gas," he said.

Ben Brunnen of the Canadian Association of Petroleum Producers said a short-term increase in production carries risk for the country's industry.

"And at the end of the day, we simply don't have sufficient market egress to really make a substantial difference," he told AFP.

A government source said even though Canada cannot control the specific destination of oil, once it is on the market it helps boost supply and this will aid European allies.

Canada is the world's fourth largest oil producer.

AFP

New EU law leaves Big Tech facing major rethink

Paris, France – From Amazon shoppers to iPhone owners, the world faces a rethink in the way it interacts with Big Tech, thanks to a new law agreed by the European Union on Thursday.

The Digital Markets Act (DMA) tries to ensure smaller players will be able to enter the market without Silicon Valley behemoths stomping on them before they get off the ground.

It fights their ability to "lock consumers into their ecosystem" by sheer force of market share, says Pierre-Jean Benghozi of French research institute CNRS.

That ethos is at the heart of one of the most eye-catching proposals -- to ensure "interoperability" between messaging apps.

Essentially, this means WhatsApp users, for example, could ditch the app, but continue conversations with friends later by using iMessage, Signal or another app.

WhatsApp, in the stable of Facebook owner Meta, has maintained a stranglehold on the market at least partially because so many people already use it.

If it no longer has that appeal, it is not hard to see users moving away to other apps.

'Landmark law'

Sonia Cisse, a specialist lawyer from the Linklaters firm, highlights provisions in the act that would stop large platforms from promoting their own services ahead of those of their rivals.

"This is an issue for Google," she says. "If you type 'travel' into your search bar, for example, you will no longer come across the trips offered by Google."

Amazon has also long been accused of promoting its own products.



Those practices will be illegal if the DMA passes in its current form.

Apple, too, faces some of its domination being squashed.

It will no longer be able to force customers to buy and sell apps using its in-house payment system, and users will be able to delete the Safari browser that comes as standard on its iPhones.

Maya Noel, of the Digital France group that lobbies for startups, says these kinds of rules could change the landscape entirely for smaller developers.

App stores "will no longer be able to force them to go through their identification system, their payment system, or prevent them from advertising directly", she explains.

Ursula Pacht of the European Consumer Organisation called it a "landmark law for the EU's digital transformation".

"But Member States must now also provide the Commission with the necessary enforcement resources to step in the moment there is foul play," she said.

'One size fits all'

In the past, big EU legislation has suffered from patchy enforcement.

The huge data privacy regulation (GDPR) came into force in 2018 and empowered regulators across the bloc to issue huge fines. But activists have long lamented the slow pace of action, with cases taking years to grind through the system.

Maya Noel hopes the DMA will be different.

She says an app developer, for example, should be able to get a very quick response to a report of non-compliance.

The complainant will no longer need to prove that the big firm is abusing its dominant position. Instead, it will be enough to show that one of the mandatory rules of the DMA has been violated. The industry, of course, is far from happy.

"The DMA borrows remedies from ongoing competition enforcement cases, but applies them inflexibly and on a one-size-fits-all basis to all platform services of companies designated as 'gatekeepers'," said the CCIA, an industry lobby group.

Lawyer Sonia Cisse also wonders whether the law has gone too far.

"It's a bit like the GDPR," she says. "It's designed for the very big players, but other smaller ones get caught in the net."

AFP

UK retail sales fall as inflation mounts

London, UK – Britons cut back on their shopping in February and consumer confidence levels tumbled this month as accelerating inflation cast a shadow over the world's fifth-biggest economy, data released on Friday showed.

UK inflation hit a 30-year high of 6.2 per cent in February and the government's budget watchdog this week forecast it will go close to 9 per cent in late 2022, contributing to the biggest fall in living standards since at least the 1950s. Retail sales volumes unexpectedly fell by 0.3 per cent in February from January. Economists polled by Reuters had on average forecast a 0.6 per cent monthly rise.

Excluding automotive fuel, which rose in price in February as tensions between Russia and Ukraine escalated, sales volumes fell by a sharper 0.7 per cent, Reuters reported.

But rising prices meant the amount of money spent on food shopping rose, even as volumes fell. Analysts said the data - combined with a drop in polling firm GfK's measure of consumer confidence in March to levels last seen in November 2020 - was a taste of things to come as inflation climbs higher.

BNA

SULTANATE OF OMAN
MINISTRY OF CULTURE, SPORTS and YOUTH
MINISTRY OF CULTURE, SPORTS and YOUTH, Muscat, hereby give notice
of tenders for the following projects

Tender No.	Project Category	Location	Fees R.O	Grade In Tender Board Registration
RE-TENDER 19/2021	Supply	Supply And Installation Of Floodlight To Main Football Pitch And Running Track At Alwahada Sports Club	25/- OMR	Excellent & First Grade
1/2022	Supply	Supply And Installation Of Floodlight To Main Football Pitch At Dibba Sports Club	25/- OMR	Excellent & First Grade
2/2022	Supply	Supply And Installation Of Moveable Grand Stand At Various Sport Clubs	25/- OMR	Excellent & First Grade
3/2022	Supply	Supply And Installation Of Furniture At Yasqi Club	25/- OMR	First & Second Grade
4/2022	Construction	Completion Of Construction Of Sports Hall At Al Lakbi In Willayt Aljazir	25/- OMR	Second Grade

Companies, which are registered with the Tender Board and engaged in same category with experience in and same Grade as noted above, can obtain the Tender Documents at the Tender Board E-tendering digital portal link (<http://etendering.tenderboard.gov.om>) until 09/04/2022.

The last date of tender submission on above E-tendering site at 09:00am 09/05/2022

A Tender Bond equivalent to 1% of the tender sum issued from a registered bank, in the prescribed form, in Sultanate of Oman and valid for 90 days should enclosed with the tender.

Any tender without the bond will be reject and the tender committee is not bound to accept the lowest or any tender received.

INTERNAL TENDER COMMITTEE OF MINISTRY OF CULTURE, SPORTS and YOUTH

Any participants have doubt in adopting e-tendering can contact over the phone 24402200 or through email etenderhd@ita.gov.om

FREE CLASSIFIED LISTING

Muscat Daily now offers free classified listings for individuals in the following categories:
Situations Wanted/Accommodation Wanted or Available/Sale of Household Items/ Car for Sale or Wanted/Matrimonial Alliances (Word limit is 35)
Please email your listing to dailyclassifieds@apexmedia.co.om or call 99104346

Al Hassan Engineering Company SAOG
P.O Box 1948, Ruwi, PC 112, Sultanate of Oman

Invitation to attend ordinary Annual General Meeting and Extraordinary General Meeting

The Board of Directors of Al Hassan Engineering Company SAOG is pleased to invite all shareholders of the Company to attend the Annual ordinary General Meeting of the Company (AGM) and the Annual Extraordinary General Meeting (EGM) on Sunday 10 April 2022 at 03:00 PM at the company's headquarters in Muscat, located in Al Wadi Al Kabir, Muscat Hall, also through the electronic platform, which you can enter through the website of Muscat Clearing and Depository Company (www.mcd.gov.om), and If the legal quorum is not complete for the meeting of these two assemblies or one of them, the second meeting will be held on Wednesday 13 April 2022 at 03:00 PM via the above mentioned electronic platform, and that to discuss the following agenda:

First: The Extraordinary General Assembly Meeting:

1. Study the erosion of the company's capital and taking appropriate measures in this regard.

Second: The Annual Ordinary General Assembly Meeting:

1. To consider and approve the report of the Board of Directors of the Company for the financial year ended 31 December 2021.
2. To consider and approve the Corporate Governance Report for the Company for the financial year ended 31 December 2021.
3. To consider the Auditor's report and to approve the financial statements (Balance Sheet and Profit and Loss Account) in respect of the Company for the financial year ended 31 December 2021.
4. Approve sitting fees for the Board of Directors & subcommittees which were received by the Directors during the financial year ended 31.12.2021 & determine the sitting fees for the year ending 31.12.2022.(as per attachment).
5. Update & appraise the AGM with transactions that the Company performed with related parties during the year ended 31.12.2021.(as per attachment).
6. Study & approve the transactions which will be performed by the Company with related parties during the year ending 31.12.2022. (as per attachment).
7. Appointment of the auditors for the fiscal year ending on 31/12/2022 and determine their fees
8. To appoint independent party to measure the performance of the Board of Directors and fixing their fees.

Notes:

According to the company's articles of association and general meeting regulations using modern technology issued by the authority, we would like to draw your attention to the following: -

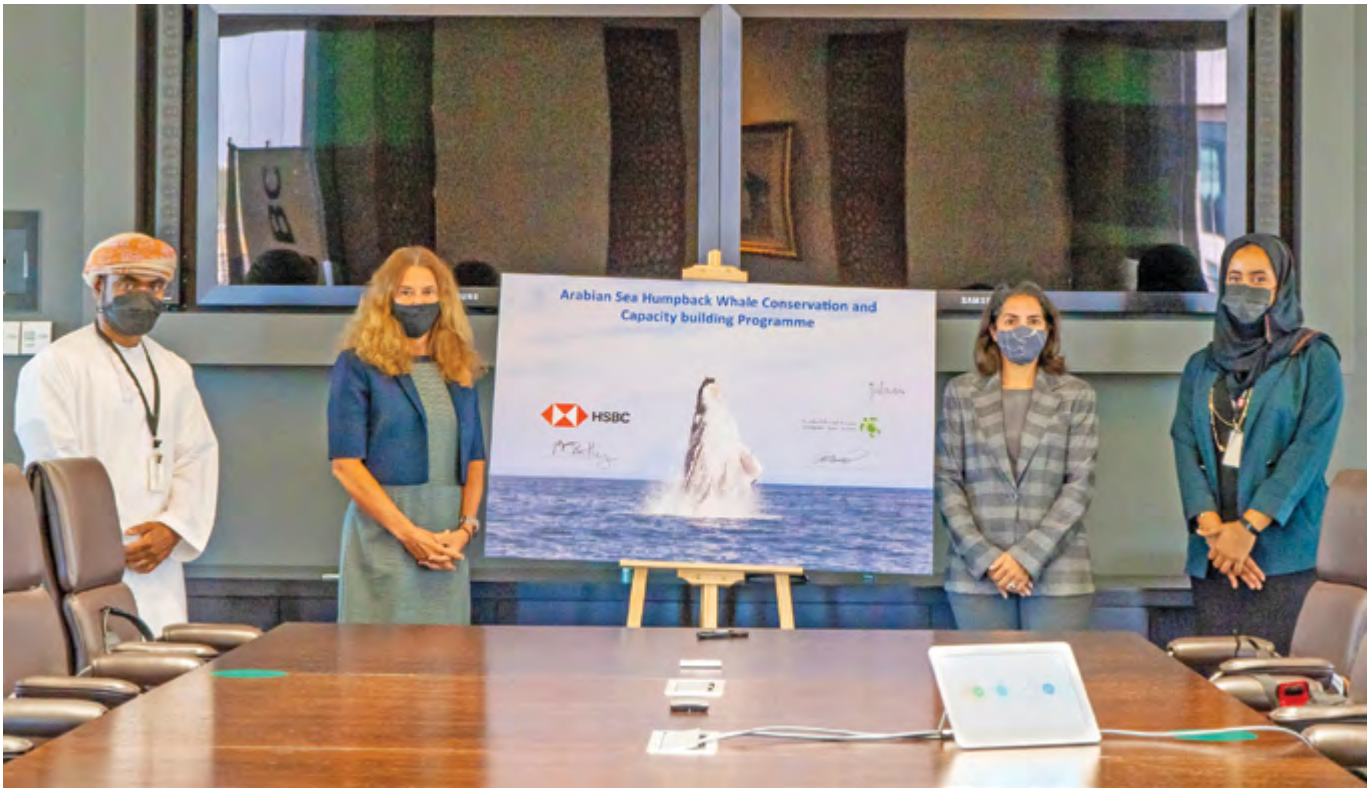
- A. A legal person, exclusively, has the right to delegate a natural person to attend the General Assembly meeting and vote on his behalf through technical means, provided that this natural person has an investor number in the MCDC.
- B. Voting on any of the items on the agenda shall start with a period of no In excess of three days, until the voting process ends on the day of the meeting, and in the event the shareholder balance is changed With an increase or decrease, the voting process will be canceled, and he will have to vote again in a day Assembly meeting.

In case of any inquiries, please contact the legal Advisor / Mr. Ahmed Al Khuzaie on 24810575-614 - GSM 95334805

ESO partners with HSBC Oman for whale conservation, capacity building

The Environment Society of Oman (ESO) has signed a two-year sponsorship agreement with HSBC Bank Oman to support its efforts towards the conservation of the Arabian Sea humpback whale. Under the partnership, ESO will carry out two new projects; a Conservation Management Plan that aims to work with local authorities to implement alternative solutions to harmful marine practices that threaten the whales' survival, and a Capacity Building programme that focuses on developing the next generation of cetacean (whales and dolphins) researchers.

Maia Willson, research and conservation manager at ESO, said, "We've been researching Oman's whales for the last 20 years with the help of local and international collaborations. Whilst this work is still ongoing, we now have sufficient scientific information to inform conservation actions. As we move into 2022, our attention turns to how we tackle the issues threatening the survival of the endangered Arabian Sea humpback whales. With the valuable support of HSBC, we are able to move towards tangible action, to help im-



plement policies for greater protection, and to prepare the next generation of local marine research and conservationists needed to continue this vital work."

"HSBC has a longstanding commitment to support the communities in which we operate. Through our partnership

with the Environment Society of Oman, this conservation and capacity building programme will give a valuable opportunity to develop the next generation of marine researchers and activists and support one of the UN Sustainable Development Goals on building human and institutional capacity on climate change miti-

gation," said Melika Betley, CEO of HSBC Oman.

The Arabian Sea humpback whale is one of one of 20 species of marine mammals found in Oman's waters.

Classified as endangered on the IUCN Red List of threatened species in 2008, it is estimated to be one of the smallest and po-

tentially most vulnerable whale population in the world, numbering fewer than 100 individuals. Research supported by ESO has also proven Oman's humpback whales to be the only known population in the world not to migrate between high and low latitudes, staying instead to breed and feed in the waters sur-

Mazoon Business Forum on March 30

rounding Oman.

Believed to have been isolated in the Arabian Sea region for c. 70,000 years, they are a highly distinct population with photo-identification studies resulting in no matches outside of the Arabian Sea region and acoustic studies revealing a highly distinctive song.

Since its inception in 2004, ESO has focused on developing a better understanding of the distribution and ecology of the different whales found in Oman's waters.

Among its achievements last year, the country's only non-profit organization focusing on environmental preservation launched the *Marine Mammal Atlas of Oman*, a publication that is the culmination of 20 years of scientific research and serves as an important reference for studies on environmental diversity, while also raising awareness on the species.

As a non-profit organisation, ESO continues to rely on the generous support of sponsors and members to deliver this work. For more information on how to support, make a donation, or to find out other ways to get involved, visit eso.org.om.

Mazoon Dairy Company announced that it will organise the Mazoon Business Forum in the Buraimi governorate on March 30, under the patronage of H E Dr Hamad bin Ahmed al Busaidi, Governor of Buraimi, and with the participation of a large number of regulatory, legislative and financial authorities, as well as entrepreneurs, university and college students and the residents of the province.

The Mazoon Business Forum falls within the framework of the Mazoon Dairy Company's social responsibility and its support for entrepreneurship in the Buraimi governorate, and as a culmination of what the organisation has accomplished since its establishment to date in terms of local added value.

This forum comes within the social responsibility initiatives of the Mazoon Dairy Company to complement its efforts to develop local talent and create an attractive investment climate in the sultanate in general and the Buraimi governorate in particular, as it hosts the company's operations center, and has many elements that attract investment.

Travel Point Oman partners with Air France for a sustainable environment

Travel Point, Oman's largest travel and hospitality company has joined with Air France KLM global quest to transition from conventional fossil fuel to SAF (sustainable aviation fuel) which will reduce carbon emissions by 75 per cent leading to cleaner environment, by joining the programme, Travel point supports KLM/AF efforts to transition from conventional, fossil fuel to sustainable aviation fuel, with this KLM /AF moves into corporate SAF programme community of sustainability pioneers.

"Sustainability is simply everything that we need for our survival and well-being, either directly or indirectly from our environment. Environmental sustainability involves making decisions and taking action that are in the interests of protecting the natural world, with particular emphasis on preserving the capability of the environment to support human life. Therefore, we took the first step towards sustainability along with Air



France KLM." Said Sunil D'Souza, CEO, Travel Point Oman.

Laila El Mansouri, country sales manager UAE & Oman, Air France KLM said, "The Air France KLM Corporate SAF programme was launched in 2012 and now includes over seventy partners worldwide. These businesses and institutions help Air France KLM finance the purchase of SAF, thereby reducing the CO2 foot-

print of their business travel by air."

"Businesses can potentially cause damage to some areas of the environment. Some of the common environmental concerns includes, damaging rainforests and woodlands through logging and agricultural clearing, polluting and over-fishing of oceans, rivers and lakes, polluting the atmosphere through the burning of fossil fuels, damaging

prime agricultural and cultivated land through the use of unsustainable farming practices etc. The same applies in the aviation sectors. Therefore, I personally believe that we cannot be overlooking at these areas and we must take action sooner than regret later."

In February 2021 KLM operated a commercial flight with an admixture of sustainable synthetic fuel.

Conference held on 'Digital Innovation for an Inspiring Future'

The Economic Department of the Embassy of France, with the support of the Omani French Friendship Association (OFA), hosted in Muscat on Thursday a business conference on 'Digital Innovation for an Inspiring Future' at the occasion of the fourth edition of the French Week in Oman.

The French Week in Oman is a week-long celebration aimed at promoting the strong ties between Oman and France.

From March 20 to 27, the Embassy of France, with the support of sponsoring companies, has been programming various events in Muscat, including a concert, cultural and scientific events, workshops and conferences.

Organised at the Crowne Plaza Qurum Hotel under the patronage of H E Véronique Aulagnon, Ambassador of France to the Sultanate of Oman, and Talal Said Marhoon al Mamari, CEO of Omantel, the 'Digital Innovation for an Inspiring



Future' conference brought together creative French and Omani companies in order to highlight the positive and concrete progress made possible by digital innovation.

In front of an audience of a hundred participants, including heads of institutions and companies, and moderated by the famous professional and practical motivational speaker Tariq al Barwani, the first panel discussion focused on 'Building an effective industry', with

Air liquide and Veolia explaining first how to deepen smart plant management, and TotalEnergies and Engie presenting then how to produce with awareness.

The second panel was dedicated to 'Becoming an e-consumer'. Idemia, Thawani pay and Thales shared their know-how about making safety convenient, and Otaxi and JCDecaux showcased current and coming improvement of urban experience.

Perfect time to drive home the dream sedan INFINITI Q50

Offering a chance for luxury enthusiasts to realise their passion for the brand, INFINITI Oman is extending an exclusive deal on INFINITI Q50 during the Holy Month of Ramadan. The INFINITI Q50 sedan has been the key driver of INFINITI's success in the Sultanate due to its sensuous feel, segment leading features and pulsating performance that delivers excellent output. INFINITI Q50 which offers an optimal blend of ride comfort and class-leading agility has been astounding luxury motoring enthusiasts in Oman. The INFINITI Q50 sedan, which represents dynamic and bold styling delivers empowering performance and rewarding drive.

Range of offers on INFINITI Q50 includes free registration, free insurance, assured gifts vouchers, periodic vehicle maintenance, manufacturer's warranty, AAA/ Road assistance card, digital promotion, INFINITI

loyalty programme and reference programme.

The special offer will be available till May 19. The scheme is applicable for all the customers purchasing INFINITI vehicles for personal use only. Vehicles purchased with commercial registration will not be eligible for the scheme. Vehicles bought for taxi, driving school, ministries, fleet, and rent-a-car usage will not be eligible for this scheme. The scheme is applicable for retail billing only.

A senior spokesperson at INFINITI Oman, said, "To celebrate the spirit of Ramadan and express our gratitude to our valued customers, we are offering an exclusive deal on INFINITI Q50.

With an athletic front bumper and a rich textured double-arch grille, the INFINITI Q50 boasts a sporty, sophisticated look. INFINITI Q50 comes with advanced technological features like intelligent cruise control with



full speed range, lane departure warning and prevention, forward emergency braking and backup collision intervention."

Free registration

All customers purchasing IN-

FINITI Q50 during the scheme period will be eligible for free first year vehicle registration.

Free insurance

All customers purchasing INFINITI Q50 during the scheme

period will be eligible for free first year vehicle insurance (Oman and UAE only).

Gifts vouchers

All customers purchasing INFINITI Q50 during the scheme

period will be eligible for Value Added Service (VAS) gift vouchers of RO200. Voucher can be redeemed for vehicle service at SBA workshop, purchase of value-added service products at SBA workshop, purchase of parts/accessories at SBA workshop and purchase of service contracts from SBA workshop.

VAS voucher will have to be utilised fully in one go and cannot be fragmented. Any additional expenses on top of the voucher amount will be paid by the customer separately. VAS Voucher will have a limited validity period and will have to be used before October 31, 2022. VAS Voucher is transferable and will be in denomination of RO50. Multiple vouchers will be issued for RO200. VAS Voucher can be redeemed only at SBA Workshop and the amount cannot be discounted in cash.

Periodic vehicle maintenance

Customers purchasing INFINITI Q50 in the scheme period will get free Periodic Vehicle Maintenance of two years or 30,000km (whichever is earlier). This offer excludes battery and wear and tear components. This offer includes only the service intervals of 10,000km.

Manufacturer's warranty

INFINITI Q50 purchased during the scheme period will have a 3 years / 100,000km Manufacturer's Warranty.

Digital promotion

Two winners from all the social media users who will participate in the Ramadan campaign, Contest and other online challenges on Instagram (@sbainfinitioman) and Facebook (@sbainfinitioman) will get BOSE Ear Buds.

Bank Muscat wins accolades at OSW Awards

In recognition of its pioneering role in the field of sustainability, Bank Muscat was honoured at the Oman Sustainability Week (OSW) Awards held recently at the W Hotel Muscat. The Bank received the Silver Award for its stellar efforts in sustainability from the chief guest, H H Sayyid Dr Fahad bin al Julanda al Said. Sheikh Waleed K al Hashar, chief executive officer, Bank Muscat, received the award on behalf of the bank at the ceremony, which was attended by a number of their excellencies and senior executives from some of the top institutions and corporates in Oman.

Oman Sustainability Week is a national platform that aims to highlight Oman's commitment to leadership in sustainability through innovative strategies, which are aligned with the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and the landmark Oman Vision 2040. It engages stakeholders in national development to present a new model for sustainable development.

The week-long event comprises the Oman Sustainability Week Expo, Oman Sustainability Week site visits, International



Sustainability Resources & Technology Conference and the Oman Sustainability Awards event, bringing together key stakeholders including policy makers, sustainability experts and industry leaders to focus on sustainability as a national objective.

The awards provided a platform for the participating organisations to perform a situation analysis, mapping out their current sustainability status in com-

parison to industry peers and identifying medium and long-term risks and opportunities. Some of the other benefits included in-depth evaluation by highly specialised sustainability assessors, introduction to self-assessment tools and assessment methodologies offered through a specially designed on-line platform.

Speaking on the occasion, Sheikh Hashar, said, "We are delighted to receive this prestigious

award, which reconfirms Bank Muscat's pioneering role in promoting sustainability in Oman. By aligning to Oman Vision 2040, the bank has a roadmap to generate and make maximum use of opportunities, which promote economic competitiveness, social well-being, growth and development, and reflecting positively on socio-economic development. As a leading financial services provider in Oman, Bank Muscat works to ensure sustain-

ability across its operations, and also to serve the Omani society through various programmes and initiatives. The bank will continue to move forward with its strategy of strengthening cooperation and partnership with various government and private sector institutions, in line with the latest sustainability trends, both at the local and international levels."

It is worth noting that the bank's sustainability strategy

aims at delivering long-term benefits to the nation. Today, the widespread adoption of renewable energy is a key part of creating a green economy in the sultanate, and Bank Muscat has been playing its part in making largescale adoption of renewable energy possible by the general public by offering Green Finance, Oman's first environmentally-friendly finance product, for installation of residential solar panels.

Bank Muscat is also committed to adapting its business operations to incorporate sustainable practices like replacing lamps with LED lights, managing Greenhouse Gas emissions, and reducing water and paper consumption as well as electronic waste. Earlier in 2018, Meethaq Islamic Banking installed rooftop solar panels at its Al Khoudh branch which was the first branch in Oman running on renewable energy.

Bank Muscat is currently running about ten long term sustainability and CSR programmes serving different segments of society. These include the landmark Green Sports programme, the Tadamun programme, which provides household appli-

ances to social welfare families, the Jesr Al Mustaqbal programme, which provides scholarships to young people from social welfare families and the Al Wathbah SME Academy, which equips Omani entrepreneurs with business skills and help them acquire internationally-accredited certification.

Earlier, the bank also joined hands with the Ministry of Tourism and Heritage to develop the old village of Misfat al Abriyeen in Al Hamra to boost heritage tourism and also contribute to the creation of new jobs and other benefits for the local community. In 2020, the bank celebrated the completion of the 15,000 sqm Al Khoudh Park project in partnership with Muscat Municipality, which is promoting domestic tourism and also strengthening the local community.

Bank Muscat also works closely with a number of civil society organisations to support and encourage persons with disabilities. In 2021, the bank was recognised by the Ministry of Social Development and the Oman Chamber of Commerce and Industry for its stellar efforts in CSR.



Alizz Islamic Bank honours best students in Suwaiq

In a celebration attended by the branch manager of Alizz Islamic Bank's Suwaiq branch Abdullah al Hadhrami, parents, the school principal, and a number of educators and administrators, Alizz Islamic Bank honoured the top performing students for the Academic Year 2021/2022 in Thabet Bin Kaab School in North Batinah governorate.

The branch manager of Alizz Islamic Bank in Al Suwaiq also honoured 60 runner-up students who came 11th - 20th in several different classes (i.e 60 students) as part of a new initiative implemented this year.

Additionally, Nabil al Salhi, supervisor of the Holy Quran Competition and top students in that competition at the Wilayat level were also felicitated during this celebration that witnessed a va-

riety of activities.

Guided by the CEO of the bank, Alizz Islamic Bank seeks to support all segments of society by investment in various social initiatives and the bank has allocated budgets in each wilayat branch to contribute to promoting and supporting social responsibility programmes that ensure the optimum benefit of people across Oman, which reflects the bank's deep belief that growth of individuals and businesses is the key driver of welfare and growth of the community.

In this respect, students commended the role played by Alizz Islamic Bank towards the community, as the bank makes great efforts to fulfill its commitment to social responsibility by providing robust support to institutions that contribute to building strong

and cohesive communities. Recently, the bank offered support to a number of events across governorates and wilayats of the sultanate, as part of its commitment to help its customers and the community and to extend its services to anyone seeking a different experience in the Islamic banking sector.

It should be noted that the bank received several awards in recognition of the banking services, products, and programmes it offers to the community, which reflects the bank's understanding of the market needs. Since the launch of its operations in 2013, the bank gave priority to investment in the community, particularly in civil society initiatives, education, youth development, and raising awareness about Islamic banking.

Pakistan School Muscat celebrates Pakistan Day

Pakistan Day celebrations took place at Pakistan School Muscat (PSM) on March 23. The flag hoisting ceremony was conducted in the PSM Hall.

H E Muhammad Imran Ali Chaudhry, the Ambassador of Pakistan to Oman hoisted the flag along with the Defence Attache, members of the board of directors and other dignitaries.

A large number of students, parents and community mem-



bers participated in the ceremony and celebrated Pakistan Day with great zeal and zest to commemorate the true essence of this glorious day.

The students projected a sense of patriotism through national songs, tableaux, plays and the display of national dresses. The ceremony ended up with the cake cutting norm and the prayer for peace and prosperity of the country.

State-of-the-art Apollo Super Specialty Hospital to open soon in Al Hail

The Apollo Hospitals Group Oman is all set for the soft launch of its state-of-the-art Apollo Super Specialty Hospital Al Hail this week.

As the flagship Hospital, Apollo Super Specialty Hospital is to offer services across 25 super specialties.

The management expressed their profound gratitude to His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tariq, the Ministry of Health, Ministry of Manpower, and Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion for all the support.

"We are looking at clinical excellence with advanced tech-

nology combined with our commitment to an absolutely patient centric approach. We envisage to expand our footprints beyond Muscat, and this is part of our phased approach. I am delighted that we are becoming operational as we prepare for the holy month of Ramadan," said V T Saileswaran, managing director of Apollo Hospitals Group Oman.

Spread across 10000 sqm, the hospital presents world-class infrastructure that will be manned by a team of super specialist consultants from the Sultanate of Oman, India, and

other countries. The new facility of Apollo will offer a wide range of clinical services across all major super specialties and subspecialties backed by cutting edge technology and advanced IT infrastructure.

Dr Waleed al Zadjali, medical director of Apollo Group Muscat stated that through Apollo Specialty they intend to reverse the outbound medical travel from Oman.

"We are further strengthening our clinical resources with international collaborations and academic affiliations as we progress on our journey," he said.

Announcing the soft launch, Saileswaran stated that in the clinical journey of the last 17 years, they have touched over 20mn lives.

"Through Apollo Super Specialty Al Hail, we reiterate our commitment to the people of this great country. The last two years of COVID-19 has proven beyond doubt the supply-demand gap in global healthcare delivery and our efforts are meant to compliment the great efforts of Oman's Ministry of Health by adding this super specialty facility to Oman's private healthcare," he added.

Renault Oman launches exclusive Ramadan scheme for customers

Renault Oman, from the house of Suhail Bahwan Automobiles, has announced attractive value benefits for customers as part of its special Ramadan promotion.

As per the Renault Oman special scheme, customers who buy specific Renault vehicles can enjoy free registration, free insurance (on selected model), three years/100,000 manufacture warranty, free periodic vehicle service package, free gift, AAA/road assistance card and reference programme among others. Social media users who participate in the Ramadan promotional campaign will also be eligible for attractive prizes.

The Renault Ramadan promotion which has already begun will go on till May 19.

All customers purchasing Re-

nault vehicles from Suhail Bahwan Automobiles LLC will be eligible to participate in the Ramadan campaign scheme. Vehicles purchased with commercial registration will not be eligible for the scheme. Vehicles bought for taxi, driving school, ministries, fleet, and rent-a-car usage will not be eligible for this scheme.

A spokesperson for SBA said, "We are confident that the exclusive offer during Ramadan will meet the aspirations of our customers. In line with spirit of the Holy Month, Renault Oman is reaching out to its customers through a host of offers. We have worked out value offers which the customers can avail during the period. This is the best time to own innovative and fuel-effi-



cient Renault vehicles."

Free registration

All customers purchasing Renault Megane PH2, Duster PH2, Koleos PH2, Dokker Van and

Master Van during this scheme period will be eligible for free first year vehicle registration.

Free insurance

All customers purchasing Re-

nault Megane PH2, Duster PH2, Koleos PH2 during this scheme period will be eligible for free first year vehicle insurance (Oman and UAE only).

Free periodic vehicle service package

All customers purchasing Renault Megane PH2, Duster PH2 and Koleos PH2 during

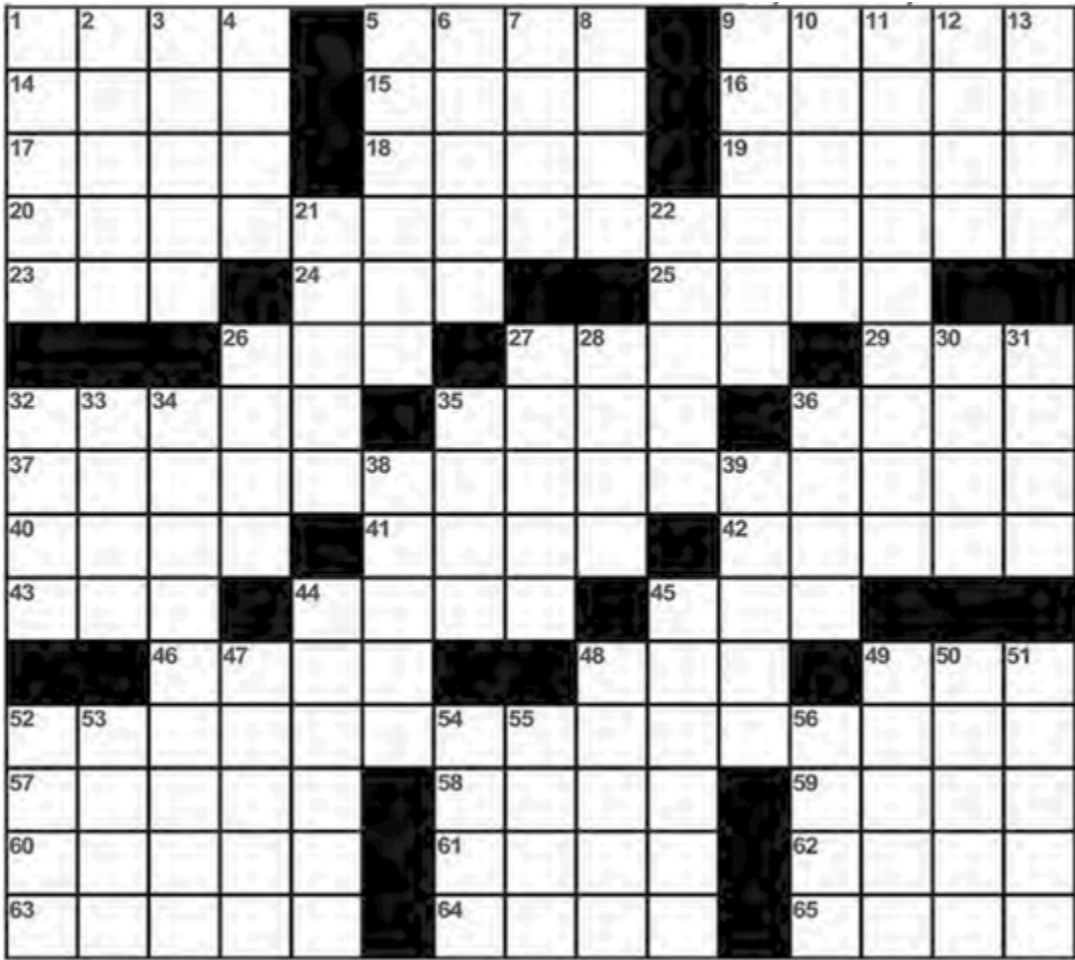
this scheme period will be eligible for Free Periodic Maintenance Service Package for five years / 100,000km (whichever is earlier), and Dokker Van, Master Van for two years / 30,000 kms (whichever is earlier) limited to six services.

This offer includes only the service intervals of 10,000km.

Digital promotion

Social Media users who will participate in the Ramadan promotional campaign and other Online Challenges on @renaultoman Instagram will get fuel voucher worth of RO50 (3nos.) and Renault branded Sterilizer cum wireless charger (2 nos.).

DAILY CROSSWORD



ACROSS

1) Place known for development
5) It usually has busy hands
9) Raised, as a bet
14) Diaper cream ingredient
15) Move through a kiddie pool
16) Hang in folds
17) Object of devotion
18) Wide-mouthed pitcher
19) Day of old Hollywood
20) Three things started by half
23) Small prop in the grass
24) "Ciao, Brutus"
25) A god of war
26) Before, in romantic poetry
27) Bests
29) Investment for the golden
32) Brown ermine horseback
35) South American country
36) Straddling
37) Three things started by half
40) Isles, to a Brit
41) Camp beds

42) Tootsie Pop portions
43) Republicans, briefly
44) Verb for Shakespeare
45) It's slung in campaigns
46) Pork purchase
48) Breakfast meat
49) Jetted bath, e.g.
52) Three things started by half
Card-game expert
Edmond
58) Go on the warpath, verbally
59) Morsel for Miss Muffet
60) Two-tone cookies
61) The munchies, for one
62) "Anyone_?"
63) Neglected to
64) Made a right turn on horseback
65) "Call of the Wild" vehicle

DOWN

1) Middle of a three-part body measurement
2) Blast from the past
3) The animal, not the dessert
4) Word with "conveyor" or "corn"
5) One way to avoid an

accident
6) Anchor rope's hole
7) As previously mentioned, in footnotes
8) Gilpin of "Frasier"
9) Milk providers
10) Investigate thoroughly
11) Like leeches
12) "Lawrence of Arabia" is one
13) Cubicle feature
21) You are here
22) Enjoy immensely
26) Puts away groceries?
27) Choppers that can't fly
28) Mine discoveries
30) Work an ax on stage
31) Dr. Zaius and kin
32) Party just for guys
33) Small band
34) Beat on a tennis court, e.g.
35) "The_ thickens"
36) Too dry for farming
38) Bakery treat
39) Perfectly vertical
44) Deprive of power
45) Tangled into a thick mass, as hair
47) DuPont fabric
48) Door attachment
49) Cranium
50) In and of itself

51) Created a sum
52) Wearing footwear
53) Spelling of "Beverly Hills, 90210"
54) Pharmacist's item
55) Suffix with "soft" or "hard," in tech
56) Bullets, in Vegas

NOTE PAD

TARSI LAMAR WAR
ALoud ADORE IRE
WINDOWPANES NOR
ALA ATE EMU
DAWNING DEADPAN
OBI ZION SLUR
DEN ENTER SMELL
GADS GAVEL ASEA
EMBER TENOR SAMP
REEF RACE ESP
STERNUM LUTISTS
CHAKETA SOD
OAK WINDOUTRIGHT
ONE ALTAR TONER
PER LEARN STUDY

YOUR DAILY HOROSCOPE

ARIES MARCH 21-APRIL 19

Right now you love nothing better than far-off places, interesting accents, and experiences yet to be had. It does sound just wonderful, doesn't it? So what's the holdup? Get out the brochures, make the calls, and let someone on the other side of the state, country, or world know that you're anxious to get together. Think of it as field research.

LEO JULY 23-AUGUST 22

You're usually not opposed to letting loose and having some fun, especially with the cosmos so focused on play and recreation. Well, you'd better get ready to live it up right now. Soon the stars are going to take a practical turn, and once that happens, you'll be thinking more about balancing the accounts, raking the lawn, and cleaning the oven. Go! Quickly! Frolic!

SAGITTARIUS NOVEMBER 22-DECEMBER 21

With some very persuasive and emotional astrological influences, you're not exactly what one might call a mountain of willpower at the moment, but then when have you ever been? Still, you are famous for your sensitivity to guilt, so why set yourself up? You can be excessive this afternoon and maybe even this evening, but only if all your work is done. If not, be prepared to either cancel your plans or stay up late.

TAURUS APRIL 20-MAY 20

Although you're ordinarily the very soul of caution, especially when it comes to financial affairs, you're suddenly feeling rather incautious. That doesn't mean you should be any less wary of strangers bearing gifts, however, no matter how convincing their pitch. In fact, at this moment in time you might want to be even more careful. Think of it as watching out for your future, and don't let anyone sweet-talk you out of it.

VIRGO AUGUST 23-SEPTEMBER 22

After yet another day of trying your best to effect a compromise, you've finally glanced at your watch and realised it's time for some fun. Force yourself to let all parties concerned know that you're officially off the clock and they're on their own. Wouldn't it be something if you called later and they told you the entire problem was all worked out to everyone's satisfaction even without you? Or is it because of you?

CAPRICORN DECEMBER 22-JANUARY 19

You've been dealing with feeling off balance for days, wanting to completely let go of any semblance of control even though you know this is prime time for you to keep things in order. Your dilemma will end this evening. The stars will inspire you to be practical and responsible, and you'll take hold of the reins and get things back to normal. Does this mean you won't have any fun? Hardly. It will just be a far calmer variety of fun.

GEMINI MAY 21-JUNE 21

Having power and having control are two very different things. You don't have to be the one in charge to shape how things are supposed to proceed. Don't think too small today. Focusing on who is actually sitting behind the steering wheel will only waste time. Today, the person behind the wheel is the chauffeur, and it's the person riding in the back seat behind the tinted glass that has all the power, so let go of the wheel and go for a ride.

LIBRA SEPTEMBER 23-OCTOBER 22

You've got a few more hours to get back into contact with the person you know you need to talk to, and you know it's important that you talk to them now. If they're on your mind, it's a good bet that you're on theirs too. Who's going to give in first? No one knows. But it definitely won't help to try to win the waiting game. Somebody has to be brave, honest, and magnanimous enough to make the first move. Bet it's you.

AQUARIUS JANUARY 20-FEBRUARY 18

You want to get crazy and let go with your friends. Does this mean you should pull out all the stops and do your worst? Really go nuts with the rebellious act? Absolutely. Later this evening, even you could feel guilty about challenging authority. What's the use in fighting it? Get it out of your system now. That way, you can be good tomorrow with no thoughts about what might have been.

CANCER JUNE 22-JULY 22

You've been working hard for a while now. In fact, you've probably had to take care of something someone else was supposed to do but never quite finished. Does that mean you're entitled to something special as a reward for what you've done? You're darned right it does. Let your family, friends, kids, and anyone else who depends on you for favors know that it's now officially your turn. Then draw a nice, hot bubble bath.

SCORPIO OCTOBER 23-NOVEMBER 21

That urge to go all out and say, do, and spend whatever you feel like is still in the neighbourhood. Are you losing your mind? Not at all. There are powerful yet subtle astrological forces at work all day. In the meantime, while you're trying to decide whether to fly to Hawaii or stay here and be dutiful, consider that being extravagant doesn't hit you all that often. Why not just enjoy it? You can go back to being good tomorrow.

PISCES FEBRUARY 19-MARCH 20

As of late this evening, you'll feel the urge to touch all bases, dot all i's and cross all t's in a most methodical way. Are you up for it even though you're usually not very fond of rules that encumber your creative side? You bet you are. You're also unwilling to let anyone walk all over you, and you'll make that quite clear, especially if someone insists on provoking you.

TEST YOUR KNOWLEDGE

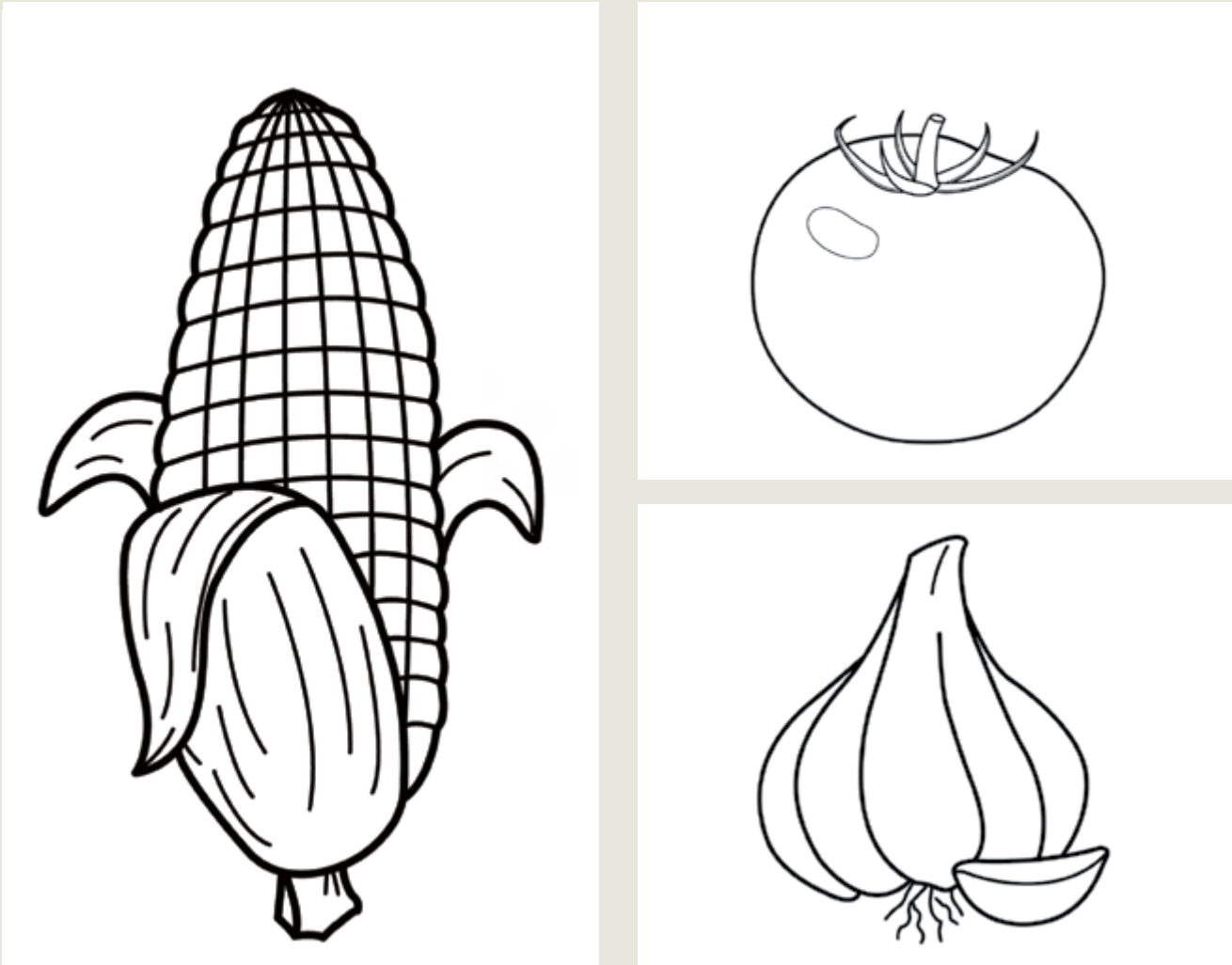
1. "The Spanish Tragedie, or Hieronimo is Mad Again", written in the late 16th century, is a work by which playwright?
A. Ben Jonson
B. Christopher Marlowe
C. Thomas Kyd
D. John Webster

2. Set to poetry, owing much to fairy tales of the same kind as those used by Hans Christian Andersen, and an enduring Czechoslovakian masterpiece this was first performed in 1901. What is the piece?
A. Rusalka by Antonín Dvořák
B. The Bartered Bride by Bedřich Smetana
C. Alexandre Bis by Bohuslav Martinů
D. Svätopluk by Eugen Suchoň

3. Where would you NOT find Fourier transforms being used directly?
A. Creating a JPEG image
B. Reconstructing a crystal structure from its diffraction pattern
C. Preparing fertilisers
D. Equalising audio recordings

Answers: 1. C 2. A 3. C

KIDS COLOURING



BOGGLER

E	S	S	A
A	L	S	Qu
U	R	S	I
E	B	L	A

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

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

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

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

SUDOKU EASY ANSWER

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

Macron warns against ‘escalation’ after Biden brands Putin ‘butcher’

Kyiv, Ukraine - France’s President Emmanuel Macron warned on Sunday against a verbal ‘escalation’ of Russia’s invasion in Ukraine, after US President Joe Biden branded Vladimir Putin a ‘butcher’ who ‘cannot remain in power’.

The Kremlin had reacted in fury over Biden’s comments which it said narrows the window for bilateral relations, with Russia’s invasion of Ukraine now into a second month.

Macron said he would speak to Putin in the next two days to organise the evacuation of civilians from the heavily bombarded port city of Mariupol.

The French leader told broadcaster France 3 that he saw his task as ‘achieving first a ceasefire and then the total withdrawal of (Russian) troops by diplomatic means’. “If we want to do that, we can’t escalate either in words or actions.”

Ukraine was making a new push to get civilians out of the city on Sunday, with an aid route agreement for people to leave by cars or on evacuation buses, said Deputy Prime Minister Iryna Vereshchuk. Several attempts at establishing safe routes for civilians to flee have collapsed as both sides trade blame for violating temporary ceasefires.

Mariupol, in the region of Donetsk, has borne the brunt of Russia’s assaults, and residents who managed to flee have recounted harrowing scenes of death and destruction.

About 170,000 people remain trapped in the besieged city and authorities have said they fear some 300 civilians may have died in a Russian strike on March 17 that hit a theatre being used as a bomb shelter.

In an impassioned speech from the Royal Castle in Warsaw, Biden blasted Putin over Russia’s invasion of Ukraine.

“For God’s sake, this man cannot remain in power,” the US leader said, before the White House clarified that Washington was not seeking regime change.

The Kremlin snapped back, saying ‘a head of state should stay sober’.

‘Going to die anyway’

Personal attacks, said Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov, were ‘narrowing down the window of opportunity’ for bilateral relations. “Biden is weak, sick and



Worshippers pray during a Sunday mass at Saints Peter and Paul Garrison Catholic Church in the western Ukrainian city of Lviv on Sunday (AFP)



A Ukrainian soldier standing before a Russian self-propelled artillery gun destroyed in the town of Trostyanets, Sumy region, on Sunday (AFP)

unhappy,” said Vyacheslav Volodin, president of the lower house of parliament.

Putin sent troops into Ukraine on February 24, vowing to destroy the country’s military and topple pro-Western President Volodymyr Zelensky.

But his army has made little progress on capturing key cities, and it has hit hospitals, residential buildings and schools in increasingly deadly attacks on civilians.

In Kharkiv, where authorities reported 44 artillery strikes and

140 rocket assaults in a single day, residents were resigned to the incessant bombardments.

Anna Kolinichenko, who lives in a three-room flat with her sister and brother-in-law, said they do not even bother to head down to the cellar when the sirens go off.

“If a bomb drops, we’re going to die anyway,” she told AFP. “We are getting a little used to explosions.”

Others have found ways to cope with the shelling.

Tamara Osypchuk, 72, told

near the Russian border that was one of the first to fall under Moscow’s control.

Images published by the ministry showed Ukrainian soldiers and civilians among heavily damaged buildings and what appeared to be abandoned Russian military equipment.

Elsewhere, Russian forces took control of Slavutych, the town where workers at the decommissioned Chernobyl nuclear plant live, briefly detaining the mayor, Ukrainian authorities said.

Residents of the town protested, prompting the Russians to fire shots in the air and lob stun grenades into the crowd, they added.

The International Atomic Energy Agency said it was ‘closely monitoring the situation’ and was concerned about the ability of employees at Chernobyl to rotate and return to their homes to rest.

“There has been no staff rotation at the NPP for nearly a week now,” the IAEA said.

Russia’s army, which Western analysts said appeared bogged down by tactical, communications and logistics problems, had suggested on Friday it would shift its concentration to eastern Ukraine.

But Biden had cast doubt, saying he was ‘not sure’ Moscow has indeed changed its objectives.

Biden, who was winding up a whirlwind visit to Poland after holding a series of urgent summits in Brussels with Western allies, met key Ukrainian cabinet ministers on Saturday.

In a possible shift on a plan to transfer Soviet-era fighter jets from Poland to Kyiv to boost Ukraine’s firepower in the skies - rejected last month by the Pentagon as too ‘high risk’ - Foreign Minister Dmytro Kuleba said the United States now did not object.

“As far as we can conclude, the ball is now on the Polish side,” Kuleba said in written comments to AFP after the meeting. In a video address, Zelensky reiterated a call for planes while urging allies to supply Ukraine with more weapons.

“We need more ammunition. We need it to protect not only Ukraine but other Eastern European countries that Russia threatened to invade,” he said.

The Ukrainian defence ministry said its forces had also recaptured Trostianets, a town

Recapture town

“I write poems and when there are explosions I feel great inspiration.” Bombardments continued over the last 24 hours in Irpin, as well as other cities around Kyiv, said Ukrainian authorities. Ukraine’s determined fighters continue to hold back Russia’s far-bigger military on the frontlines, and some units are beginning to snatch back control.

Two people were killed by shelling in the village of Stanislav, close to the city of Kherson, where Ukrainian forces have mounted a counter-offensive.

In an update early on Sunday, the Ukrainian General Staff said ‘the allied forces repulsed seven attacks’ and destroyed eight tanks in the Donetsk and Lugansk areas of the Donbas.

The Ukrainian defence ministry said its forces had also recaptured Trostianets, a town



A woman reacts as she is assisted by police after fleeing in the suburbs of Kyiv, on Saturday (AFP)

3.8mn people flee Ukraine, says UN

Geneva, Switzerland - More than 3.8mn people have fled Ukraine since Russia’s invasion a month ago, UN figures showed on Sunday, but the flow of refugees has slowed down markedly.

The UN refugee agency, UNHCR, said 3,821,049 Ukrainians had fled the country - an increase of 48,450 from Saturday’s figures. Around 90 per cent of them are women and children, it added.

Of those who have left, 2.2mn have fled for neighbouring Poland, while more than half a million have made it to Romania. Nearly 300,000 have gone to Russia. Before the crisis began a month ago, EU member Poland was home to around 1.5mn Ukrainians. In total, more than 10 million people - over a quarter of the population in regions under government control before the February 24 invasion - are now thought to have fled their homes, including nearly 6.5mn who are internally displaced.

Ukraine’s refugee crisis is Europe’s worst since World War II.

The UN children’s agency, UNICEF, said on Thursday that 4.3mn children - more than half of Ukraine’s estimated 7.5mn child population - had been forced to leave their homes.

It puts at some 1.5mn the number of those children who have become refugees, while another 2.5mn are displaced inside their war-ravaged country, it said. The number leaving daily has fallen well below 100,000 per day, and even 50,000 in recent days, even as living conditions in Ukraine worsen.

Here is a breakdown of which neighbouring countries Ukrainian refugees have headed to, as of Sunday afternoon.

Poland

Six out of 10 Ukrainian refugees - 2,267,103 so far - have crossed into Poland, according to

UNHCR. Many people who cross into Ukraine’s immediate western neighbours continue on to other states in Europe’s Schengen open-borders zone.

Many are also going in the opposite direction. Border guards said earlier in the week that some 274,000 people have left Poland for Ukraine since the war began.

Romania

Some 586,942 Ukrainians have entered EU member state Romania, including a large number who have crossed over from Moldova, wedged between Romania and Ukraine. The vast majority are thought to have gone on to other countries.

Moldova

The Moldova border is the nearest to the major port city of Odessa. UNHCR said 381,395 Ukrainians had crossed into the non-EU state, one of the poorest in Europe.

Hungary

Some 349,107 Ukrainians have entered Hungary, according to UNHCR.

Russia

Some 271,254 refugees have sought shelter in Russia, according to UNHCR figures last updated on March 22. In addition, 113,000 people had crossed into Russia from the separatist-held pro-Russian regions of Donetsk and Lugansk in eastern Ukraine between February 21 and 23.

Slovakia

Some 272,012 people have crossed Ukraine’s shortest border into Slovakia.

Belarus

Some 6,341 refugees have made it north to close Russia ally Belarus. AFP

Germany planning to buy Israeli anti-missile shield

Berlin, Germany - Germany is looking at buying an Israeli anti-missile shield system that could also offer protective cover for neighbouring EU states, parliamentary sources said on Sunday, as Russia’s invasion prompts Berlin to ramp up its defence.

While the decision has not been finalised, Chancellor Olaf Scholz’s Social Democrats, which lead a three-way coalition, are in favour, said *Bild* daily. “We must better protect ourselves against the Russian threat. To do that, we need quickly an anti-missile shield for Germany,” said Andreas Schwarz of the SPD, who sits on the parliamentary budget committee.

“The Israeli Arrow 3 system is a good solution,” he told *Bild* daily, referring to the long-range missile deterrence weapon. According to *Bild*, the system, which costs €2bn (US\$2.2bn), could be operational from 2025.

The corresponding radar

system would be installed in three sites in Germany, and their monitoring data then transmitted to a central site where soldiers will be watching for threats 24/7.

If a rocket attack is uncovered, an Arrow 3 would be sent up to intercept the missile in space, destroying it there.

The radar system is so powerful it can provide cover for Poland, Romania and the Baltic nations, said *Bild*.

“We can put the ‘Iron Dome’ over our neighbouring countries. We would then play a key role for the security of Europe,” said Schwarz.

Marie-Agnes Strack-Zimmermann, who chairs parliamentary defence committee, confirmed that Berlin was mulling the purchase. “Given the threat situation and the different weapons systems that Russia has, of course you have to look at that, so in that sense it makes sense,” she told *Welt* newspaper.

AFP

El Salvador declares state of emergency over gang killings

San Salvador, El Salvador - El Salvadoran lawmakers on Sunday declared a state of emergency, the president of the Legislative Assembly said, curtailing civil liberties and expanding police power as the country faces a wave of gang-related bloodshed that has left dozens dead in just two days.

Gang violence has soared in El Salvador, with police reporting that 62 people were killed on Saturday alone.

According to official figures, 12 of the killings took place in the central department of La Libertad, with the capital San Salvador and the western department of Ahuachapan recording nine each. The rest were distributed across the country’s remaining departments.

Hours earlier, police and the military arrested several leaders of the Mara Salvatrucha (MS-13) gang over the spate of killings.

“We will not back down in this war against gangs, we will not rest until the criminals responsible for these acts are captured and brought to justice,” the country’s National Civil Police posted on Twitter.



Police work at the scene where a man was killed by alleged gang members in El Salvador on Saturday (AFP)

In response to the surge in violence, President Nayib Bukele asked the legislature - controlled by his ruling party - to approve a state of emergency, under which certain freedoms are curtailed.

Lawmakers did so early Sunday morning, in a decree that ‘declares an emergency regime throughout the national territory derived from serious disturbances to public order by criminal groups’.

The declaration - approved by a large majority - restricts free assembly, the inviolability of correspondence and communica-

tions, and allows for arrests without a warrant.

“We approve the #emergencyregime that will allow our Government to protect the lives of Salvadorans and confront criminality head-on,” Legislative Assembly President Ernesto Castro said in a tweet.

‘Let the agents do their job’

“Since yesterday, we have had a new spike in homicides, something that we had worked so hard to reduce,” Bukele said in a statement posted on Twitter by

Congress president Ernesto Castro. “While we fight criminals in the streets, we must try to figure out what is happening and who is financing this.”

Bukele said the country ‘must let the agents and soldiers do their job and must defend them from the accusations of those who protect the gang members’.

He also asked the prosecutor’s office ‘to be effective with all’ gang member cases it processes, warning he would keep an eye on ‘judges who favour criminals’.

Top government human

rights lawyer Ricardo Martinez asked the population to ‘remain calm’ and contribute to the promotion of ‘a culture of peace’ in the country.

Last November, El Salvador suffered another spike in homicides that claimed the lives of some 45 people in three days.

The Mara Salvatrucha and Barrio-18 gangs, among others, have about 70,000 members in El Salvador, according to authorities, and their operations involve homicides, extortion and drug trafficking. The country registered 1,140 murders in 2021 - an average of 18 deaths per 100,000 inhabitants - fewer than the 1,341 registered the previous year and the lowest figure since the end of the civil war in 1992, according to official data.

Elected in 2019, Bukele enjoys broad support in El Salvador over his promises to fight organised crime and improve security in the violence-wracked country.

His allies also hold a large majority in the country’s Congress - a situation not seen since a peace deal in 1992 put an end to 12 years of bloody civil war.

AFP

Coalition strikes Yemen despite rebel truce

The airstrikes targeted rebel-held capital Sanaa hours after Houthis announced a three-day truce

Riyadh, Saudi Arabia - The Saudi-led coalition launched airstrikes on Sunday on Yemen hours after Houthi rebels announced a three-day truce, with the UN chief condemning a surge in violence as the war enters its eighth year.

The raids targeted Sanaa, the rebel-held capital, according to Saudi Arabia's Al Ekhbariya TV, which tweeted 'the start of air strikes on Houthi camps and strongholds in Sanaa' around midnight.

The attacks began shortly after the Iran-backed Houthis announced a three-day truce and offered peace talks on condition that the Saudis stop their airstrikes and blockade of Yemen and remove 'foreign forces'.

Just a day earlier, the rebels had fired drones and missiles at 16 targets in Saudi Arabia, turning an oil plant near Jeddah's Formula One track into a raging inferno as aghast drivers looked on.

The flurry of attacks and diplomacy came as Yemen, the Arab world's poorest country, on Saturday marked seven years since the Saudi-led intervention



Yemeni Houthi rebels assess the damage following overnight airstrikes by the Saudi-led coalition, targeting the Houthi rebel-held capital Sanaa, on Saturday (AFP)

against the Houthis, who seized Sanaa in 2014. The conflict has killed hundreds of thousands of people directly or indirectly and displaced millions, creating what

the United Nations calls the world's worst humanitarian crisis. UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres on Saturday condemned the sudden rise in

hostilities. He said that eight civilians, including five children and two women, were reportedly killed in retaliatory strikes on Sanaa following Friday's rebel at-

tacks. The UN staff compound in the city was also damaged, his spokesman Stephane Dujarric said in a statement.

"The Secretary-General

strongly condemns the recent escalation of the conflict in Yemen," the statement said, adding that Guterres is 'deeply concerned' about reports of

coalition attacks on the lifeline port of Hodeida. He urged the warring parties to 'immediately de-escalate' and reach a 'negotiated settlement' with the help of Hans Grundberg, the UN's special envoy to Yemen.

Thousands of people demonstrated in Sanaa on Saturday, holding placards and chanting, to denounce the Saudi-led intervention which included nine countries when it was launched on March 26, 2015.

Today, it is largely just Saudi Arabia and, to a lesser extent, the United Arab Emirates, which says it has withdrawn troops from Yemen but remains an active player, training militias on the ground.

The coalition's intervention has stopped the Houthis' advances in the south and east of the country but has been unable to push them out of the north, including Sanaa. "Militarily, the war is now at stalemate," Elisabeth Kendall, a researcher at Oxford University, told AFP this week. Saudi Arabia 'may at this point be keen to extract itself' from Yemen, she said.

AFP

US, Israel to deny Iran a nuclear bomb

Jerusalem - The United States and Israel 'see eye-to-eye' on preventing Iran from getting an atom bomb, the US top diplomat said on Sunday, ahead of talks in the Jewish state with Arab foreign ministers sceptical of a nuclear pact with Tehran.

US Secretary of State Antony Blinken was meeting top Israeli officials in Jerusalem as signals mount that the tattered 2015 landmark deal Tehran signed with major powers will soon be restored. Israel fiercely opposed the initial accord, which promised its enemy Iran sanctions relief in return for curbs on its nuclear programme, and has said that a revived agreement will not do nearly enough to curb the Iranian threat.

Speaking alongside his Israeli counterpart Yair Lapid, Blinken said the US believes restoring the agreement was 'the best way to put Iran's programme back in the box that it was in but has escaped' after the US withdrew from the deal under former pres-



Antony Blinken (left) walks by the side of Yair Lapid, following a joint press conference in Jerusalem, on Sunday (AFP)

ident Donald Trump in 2018.

Despite long-standing disagreements with Israel over the nuclear deal, known as the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action, Blinken stressed that 'when it comes to the most important element, we see eye-to-eye'.

"We are both committed,

both determined, that Iran will never acquire a nuclear weapon."

Iran insists its nuclear programme is for civilian use only.

Lapid said Israel had 'disagreements' with Washington about the Iranian nuclear issue, which it was airing with its key ally in 'open and honest dia-

logue'. "Israel will do anything we believe is needed to stop the Iranian nuclear programme. Anything," Lapid said.

"From our point of view, the Iranian threat is not theoretical. The Iranians want to destroy Israel. They will not succeed. We will not let them."

'Not satisfied'

Blinken and Lapid will both attend a Sunday-Monday summit in Israel's Negev desert with foreign ministers from Egypt, Bahrain, the United Arab Emirates and Morocco.

The JCPOA has long been a source of concern for US allies in the Middle East, who see Iran as a menace.

Uzi Rabi, head of the Moshe Dayan Center for Middle Eastern Studies at Tel Aviv University, told AFP that the Negev summit was in part aimed at sending a message - to Tehran and Washington - as the Iran talks approach a possible conclusion.

"The most important thing is

that Iran should understand that there is a kind of united front against it," Rabi said.

"The most important message to be delivered is that there are many in the Middle East who are not satisfied with US performance regarding Iran."

UAE, Bahrain and Morocco established full ties with Israel under Trump-brokered deals. Egypt had in 1979 become the first Arab country to establish relations with the Jewish state.

Iran has been engaged for months in talks in Vienna to revive the accord with Britain, China, France, Germany and Russia directly. The United States has been taking part indirectly in the negotiations.

The European Union's foreign policy chief said at the weekend that a deal with Iran will likely be renewed 'in a matter of days'.

Blinken will also meet Palestinian president Mahmud Abbas in Ramallah in the Israeli-occupied West Bank.

AFP

US to maintain sanctions on Iran's Revolutionary Guards

Doha, Qatar - The United States will maintain sanctions on Iran's Revolutionary Guards even if there is a deal to limit the country's nuclear programme, US special envoy Robert Malley said on Sunday.

Iran has insisted that a revived nuclear accord, which diplomats say is close, is conditional on the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) being taken off a US terrorist list.

But Malley, the US envoy for Iran talks, told a conference in Doha: "The IRGC will remain sanctioned under US law and our perception of the IRGC will remain."

The Guards are on the list because of Iran's action supporting the Syrian government, Yemen's Houthi rebels and the Lebanese group Hezbollah.

EU foreign policy chief Josep Borrell told the Doha

Forum on Saturday that a revived nuclear accord would be sealed in 'a matter of days'.

Iran has been engaged in negotiations to revive the accord with Britain, China, France, Germany and Russia directly and the United States indirectly since April 2021.

The European Union's coordinator for the Vienna talks, Enrique Mora, is in Tehran where he is hoping to find a way to hammer out remaining differences.

But Malley cautioned at the Doha Forum of political and business leaders that a deal was not 'inevitable' and not 'just around the corner'.

"We're pretty close," he said of the negotiations, but added: "We've been pretty close now for some time. And I think that tells you all you need to know about the difficulty of the issues."

AFP

Nationwide protests if Afghan girls' schools stay shut: Activists

Kabul, Afghanistan - Women's rights activists pledged on Sunday to launch a wave of protests across Afghanistan if the Taliban fail to reopen girls' secondary schools within a week.

Thousands of secondary school girls had flocked to classes on Wednesday after the hardline Islamists reopened their institutions for the first time since seizing power last August.

But officials ordered the schools shut again just hours into the day, triggering international outrage. "We call on the leaders of the Islamic Emirate to open girls' schools within one week," activist Halima Nasari read from a statement issued by four women's rights groups at a press conference in Kabul.

"If the girls' schools remain closed even after one week, we will open them ourselves and stage demonstrations throughout the country until our demands are met."

The Taliban should be building more schools for girls in the country's remote rural areas rather than shutting existing fa-



This file photo shows girls attending a class after their school reopened in Kabul on March 23 (AFP)

cilities, said the statement, which comes after several high-profile women's activists in the country were detained in recent months.

"The people can no longer tolerate such oppression. We do not accept any excuse from the authorities," it said.

On Saturday, about two dozen schoolgirls and women staged a protest in Kabul demanding the reopening of the schools. The education ministry has so far not given a clear reason for its policy reversal, but senior Taliban leader Suhail Shaheen told AFP that some 'practi-

cal issues' were still to be resolved before reopening the schools.

Since storming back to power the Taliban have rolled back two decades of gains made by the country's women, who have been squeezed out of many government jobs, barred from travelling alone, and ordered to dress according to a strict interpretation of Q'uran. The Taliban had promised a softer version of the harsh Islamist rule that characterised their first stint in power from 1996 to 2001.

AFP

Prince William says former colonies must decide whether to scrap monarchy's role

London, UK - Prince William ended a turbulent tour of the Caribbean by starkly admitting this weekend that the region's former British colonies must decide whether to scrap the monarchy's role in their countries.

The 39-year-old Duke of Cambridge also hinted that a British royal may in future no longer head the club of 54 Commonwealth countries as the political association of ex-colonies evolves.

The unusually candid comments, which were splashed on the front of several British newspapers on Sunday, followed a rocky three-country Caribbean tour over the last week which drew both protests and criticism.

William and his wife Catherine, 40, faced calls to apologise for the slave trade that helped make past British royals' fortunes, and accusations of appearing 'tone deaf' over elements of the visit. They were also forced to confront the issue of former colonies considering whether to follow Barbados' lead



Catherine the Duchess of Cambridge and Britain's Prince William wave as they board a plane in Nassau, The Bahamas, on Saturday (AFP)

and ditch the queen as their head of state.

Barbados formally declared itself a republic in November.

Belize, Jamaica and The Bahamas - all stops on the royal tour - are each said to be mulling such a move.

Jamaican Prime Minister Andrew Holness pointedly told William in front of television cameras that the nation was

'moving on' as an independent country. "I know that this tour has brought into even sharper focus questions about the past and the future," the Duke of Cambridge said in an end-of-tour statement on Saturday.

"In Belize, Jamaica and The Bahamas, that future is for the people to decide upon."

William added he and his wife 'are committed to service' and

that meant 'not telling people what to do' but instead 'serving and supporting them'.

'On my mind'

The Commonwealth, a grouping of 54 mainly former British colonies, is headed by Queen Elizabeth II. In 2018, its leaders formally announced that her son Prince Charles would inherit the role when he becomes king.

But William, second-in-line to the throne, said that 'who the Commonwealth chooses to lead its family in the future isn't what is on my mind'.

"What matters to us is the potential the Commonwealth family has to create a better future for the people who form it, and our commitment to serve and support as best we can," he added.

The couple's Caribbean trip was intended to help Commonwealth countries where his 95-year-old grandmother is also head of state celebrate her record-breaking 70 years on the throne.

AFP

Crucial second black box of crashed China Eastern aircraft recovered

Beijing, China - The second black box has been recovered from last week's deadly China Eastern plane crash, officials said on Sunday, and could help solve the mystery of the jet's breakneck descent.

The Boeing 737-800 was flying between the cities of Kunming and Guangzhou on Monday when it nosedived into a mountainside, disintegrating on impact and killing all 132 people on board.

The cause of the disaster, China's deadliest plane crash in more than 30 years, is not yet known.

An 'orange cylindrical object was unearthed' on Sunday morning, Zhu Tao, director of safety at China's Civil Aviation Administration (CAAC), told reporters.

"Investigators on site have confirmed... it is the storage unit of the flight data recorder."

The plane was equipped with two flight recorders: a cockpit voice recorder and one in the rear passenger cabin tracking flight data. The former was found on Wednesday and sent to Beijing for analysis, which is expected to take several more days. This second black box contains crucial information such as the speed of the aircraft, its altitude and heading.

"While other parts of the



This file photo shows rescue workers combing through the China Eastern flight crash site near Wuzhou in Guangxi province last week (AFP)

recorder were seriously damaged, the data storage unit appears relatively intact and has been sent to a professional lab to be decoded," Zhu said. Hundreds of people, including firefighters, doctors and investigators - some dressed in full-body protective suits - remained at the scene of the tragedy on Sunday recovering human remains and the wreckage of the plane.

Earthmovers assisted in the

operation on the mountainside, which is covered in dense vegetation. Early recovery efforts were hampered by heavy rain, forcing a temporary pause due to what state media called 'the small risk of landslides' in the large pit that was bored out by the impact of the aircraft.

Pilots 'not under suspicion'

On Sunday, China Eastern said

the plane's captain and two co-pilots were not under suspicion.

A preliminary investigation had shown the three men to have 'excellent service records', the airline said, adding that their home situations hinted at no evidence of trouble.

The captain had more than 6,700 hours of flight experience while the first co-pilot had over 31,000 hours of flight time and the second more than 550 hours,

officials said previously.

The aircraft went down near Wuzhou in southern China on Monday afternoon after losing contact with air traffic control.

Tracking website FlightRadar24 showed the jet sharply dropped from an altitude of 29,100 to 7,850 feet (about 8,900 to 2,400 metres) in just over a minute.

After a brief upswing, it dropped again to 3,225 feet, the

tracker said. There is no data for the flight after 2:22pm.

Compensation process under way

The CAAC on Saturday evening said all of the people on board the aircraft had died, and that almost all their identities had been confirmed through DNA testing.

All 123 passengers and nine crew members were Chinese nationals.

Liu Xiaodong, China Eastern's director of communications, on Sunday was quoted by Chinese media as saying the process of compensating the families of the victims was already under way.

The disaster provoked a swift public response from President Xi Jinping, who ordered a probe into its cause as aviation authorities vowed an extensive two-week check-up of China's vast passenger fleet.

China Eastern also grounded all 223 of its Boeing 737-800 aeroplanes for checks.

The crash is a major setback for the return for Boeing's 737 MAX in China, the last big market where the US planemaker is still awaiting approval to resume flying following crashes in Indonesia and Ethiopia that killed a combined 346 people in 2018 and 2019.

AFP

Malta's govt claims third term after polls

Naxxar, Malta - Malta's Labour party claimed victory on Sunday in general elections, securing a third term in government despite a legacy of corruption and following the lowest turnout in decades.

Although official results are not expected for hours, Prime Minister Robert Abela claimed victory in a call with Maltese television, while in the counting hall in the town of Naxxar, Labour delegates monitoring the vote erupted into cheers.

"We are very satisfied that for the next five years Malta will again have a Labour government," Deputy Prime Minister Chris Fearnle told AFP at the count, saying all signs were of an 'absolute majority' for his party.

Michael Piccinino, general secretary of the opposition Nationalist Party, confirmed leader Bernard Grech had spoken to the prime minister to concede.

The outcome of Saturday's polls represents the first electoral mandate for Abela, a lawyer who took the reins of the tiny Mediterranean island nation in January 2020 in an internal party vote. His predecessor, Joseph Muscat, had been forced to quit following public protests over the 2017 car bomb murder of investigative journalist Daphne Caruana Galizia.

AFP



Two women pose for a selfie on the promenade next to Victoria Harbour in Hong Kong on Friday (AFP)

Hong Kong halves flight suspensions over COVID cases

Hong Kong, China - Hong Kong announced on Sunday it will halve the period for which it suspends international flights that bring in passengers infected with COVID-19, as the aviation industry increasingly voices alarm over the continued difficulty of operating in the city.

Once a global logistics and transportation hub, Hong Kong has imposed some of the world's harshest travel restrictions under its zero-COVID policy.

One of these measures is the city's 'route-specific suspension mechanism', which previously banned an airline from flying a particular route for 14 days if three or more COVID-19 infections were found among a flight's passengers.

In the early hours of Sunday, the government announced the suspension period would be shortened from 14 days to a week, beginning April 1.

Airlines have been lobbying for its complete removal, but Hong Kong leader Carrie Lam said there was 'no room for major relaxation' as preventing imported infections remained 'a fundamental pillar of Hong Kong's anti-epidemic policy'.

Last Monday, Hong Kong took its first step in easing travel restrictions as the city moves past the peak of its deadliest virus wave, saying it would lift a flight ban from nine countries from April.

But its pace of reopening still lags behind regional counter-

parts - especially rival financial hub Singapore, which said last Thursday it will lift restrictions on all vaccinated travellers this week.

Last week, Bloomberg reported that 11 airlines and logistics giants had sent a letter calling for the removal of COVID-19 testing requirements for flight crews before take-off and on arrival.

"We seek a return to normal flight operations in Hong Kong, in which the city can once again serve as an aviation hub," they were quoted as saying.

But at Sunday's press conference, Lam said the government 'will never be able to meet the aspirations and needs of the aviation industry'.

"We are in a public health emergency, so every business has to make sacrifices... so I hope and I make an appeal that airlines will also understand."

Lam again refused to draw a detailed roadmap for the city to fully emerge from the health crisis, saying policies had to be adjusted from time to time as the situation developed.

A special committee to review her administration's handling of the epidemic 'will be carefully handled by the next government as I believe', Lam said.

A 1,500-person elite committee is set to select the city's next leader on May 8 and Lam has not announced her plans to run for a new term or to retire.

AFP

Myanmar army says will 'annihilate' coup opponents

Naypyidaw, Myanmar - Myanmar's junta will 'annihilate' coup opponents, army chief Min Aung Hlaing said on Sunday as the military staged a show of force on the anniversary of its bloodiest crackdown so far on democracy protests. The Southeast Asian country has been in chaos since a putsch in February 2021, with more than 1,700 people killed in crackdowns on dissent, according to a local monitoring group.

Across Myanmar 'People's Defence Force' fighters - often armed with homemade or rudimentary weapons - clash regularly with junta troops, with some analysts suggesting the military has struggled to respond effectively to their hit-and-run tactics.

Fighting has also flared with more established ethnic rebel groups along the Thai and Chi-



Chief Senior General Min Aung Hlaing attending a ceremony to mark Myanmar's 77th Armed Forces Day in Naypyidaw on Sunday (AFP)

nese borders.

Presiding over the annual parade that showcased tanks, truck-mounted missiles, artillery and troops on horseback, Min Aung Hlaing told about 8,000 assembled security personnel that the army would not let up.

The military will 'no longer negotiate... and annihilate until the

end' groups fighting to overturn its rule, he said ahead of the Armed Forces Day procession in army-built capital Naypyidaw.

Jets flew overhead trailing the yellow, red and green of the national flag, while state media showed women lining the streets leading to the parade ground to give flowers and place garlands

on the marching soldiers.

In commercial hub Yangon around a dozen anti-junta flash-mob protesters set off flares and shouted slogans, according to footage posted on social media.

Others on social media called for residents to switch off their lights at home in a national 'power strike' on Sunday evening.

Bloodiest day

Armed Forces Day commemorates the start of local resistance to the Japanese occupation during World War II, and usually features a military parade attended by foreign officers and diplomats. Last year, as new junta chief Min Aung Hlaing inspected the parade, troops brutalised those protesting the coup that had ousted Aung San Suu

Kyi's government. The violence was the bloodiest day in the military's crackdown on democracy rallies and left around 160 protesters dead, according to a local monitoring group, sparking widespread condemnation.

The junta has become increasingly isolated, with Cambodia's Hun Sen the only foreign leader to visit since the putsch. On Sunday Min Aung Hlaing accused unnamed 'foreign aggressors' of working against the military and called for the armed forces to remain united against 'internal and external mischiefs'.

Russia's vice defence minister had been due to attend this year's parade but was unable to because of his 'country's affairs', junta spokesman Zaw Min Tun added.

AFP

Meat off the menu in Lebanon as poverty bites

Beirut, Lebanon - Layla Ibrahim has cut down on her daily meat consumption, not because of a health fad but forced by Lebanon's bruising economic crisis.

"I used to eat a slice of meat, chicken or fish every day, but the prices of these items have become ridiculous," the 44-year-old mother of two told AFP.

"Out of necessity and not choice, I have almost become a vegetarian," she added.

Lebanon is grappling with an unprecedented financial crisis that the World Bank says is of a scale usually associated with full-scale wars.

The currency has lost more than 90 per cent of its value on the black market, more than 80 per cent of the population lives in poverty, and prices have skyrocketed. The price of imported red meat has increased fivefold, with some cuts costing more than the monthly minimum wage of 675,000 Lebanese pounds (US\$33).

As a result, dietary habits have changed and plant-based



This file photo shows people waiting for their orders at a butcher in Lebanon's port city of Tripoli on July 28, 2020 (AFP)

dishes - a popular part of Lebanon's Mediterranean cuisine - are now a main course in many households.

For Ibrahim and her family, meat is served only once a week and even then in small portions.

"We started using smaller quantities of minced meat in stuffings and stews," Ibrahim said. "Even the Sunday family

barbecue has been scrapped."

Luxury item

Nabil Fahed, head of the syndicate of supermarket owners, said customers are opting for poultry or grain as a cheaper alternative.

Chicken is almost three times cheaper than beef and sells at around 120,000 pounds (US\$5) a kilogram. The demand for red

meat has plummeted since the government lifted subsidies on certain food imports in March 2021, Fahed said.

Sales dropped by around 70 per cent in large supermarkets and the decline is even steeper in popular markets frequented by people with low incomes, he said.

Nancy Awada, a food inspec-

tor working with the Beirut municipality, has noticed a change in supply. "The quantities of meat stored in a butcher's refrigerator... today are a quarter or a third of what they used to be," she said. "Instead of slaughtering two or three calves a day, butchers make do with only one."

Lebanon's cash-strapped government is struggling to afford fuel imports to feed its power plants, causing outages that last up to 22 hours a day in most parts of the country.

To safeguard stocks, traders and distributors have to pay for expensive generator subscriptions to power refrigerators, said meat importer Imad Harouk of the Fed Distribution company.

A spike in transport costs due to the lifting of fuel subsidies last year has also raised the overall meat bill, Harouk told AFP.

Adjusting to demand, importers have sized down on stocks. "Lebanon used to import 70 containers of frozen meat every month, but now the number is nearly 40," Harouk said.

AFP

PETRIFIED PETS



A woman holds a cat as refugees fleeing the Russian invasion of Ukraine arrive at a border crossing in Vysne Nemecke, Slovakia

TALE OF TAILS

At the 'Home for Rescued Animals' in the city of Lviv, exotic creatures are now sheltered alongside everyday pets - those left behind in the rush of refugees fleeing Russia's invasion of Ukraine.

A milky-eyed wolf prowls in its enclosure. Boris, the goat, bathes his bedraggled face in the spring sunshine. A parliament of owls peers out from the perches of their shaded roost.

In a side building around a dozen cats from Kyiv are lodged. Dogs yowl from an industrial barn, courting volunteers arriving to walk them round nearby parkland.

"Migrants who come from Kharkiv, Kyiv, Mykolaiv, and go abroad via Lviv, leave animals en masse," said 24-year-old shelter manager Orest Zalypskyy.

His hilltop sanctuary in the 13th century city of Lviv was once a haven reserved for exotic animals, he says. "This war has made us more engaged."

Left behind

The UN estimates more than 3.7 million Ukrainians have fled the country since the war began a month ago. More than two million of those crossed the border to Poland, where AFP has witnessed droves of animal lovers ferrying dogs, cats, parrots and turtles to safety.

Abandoned animals join Ukraine's war exodus, sharing the psychological trauma of displacement and desolation

Lviv - just 70km from the border - has been the final stopover on Ukrainian soil for many making the journey out of the war zone. Some soon-to-be refugees felt unable to take their pets further.

Zalypskyy estimates his shelter has taken in 1,500 animals since the war began, from migrants and shelters in 'hot spots' to the east. Between 10 and 20 were collected from Lviv's train station - the locus of chaos in the first days of the war, where carriages and platforms heaved with desperate passengers.

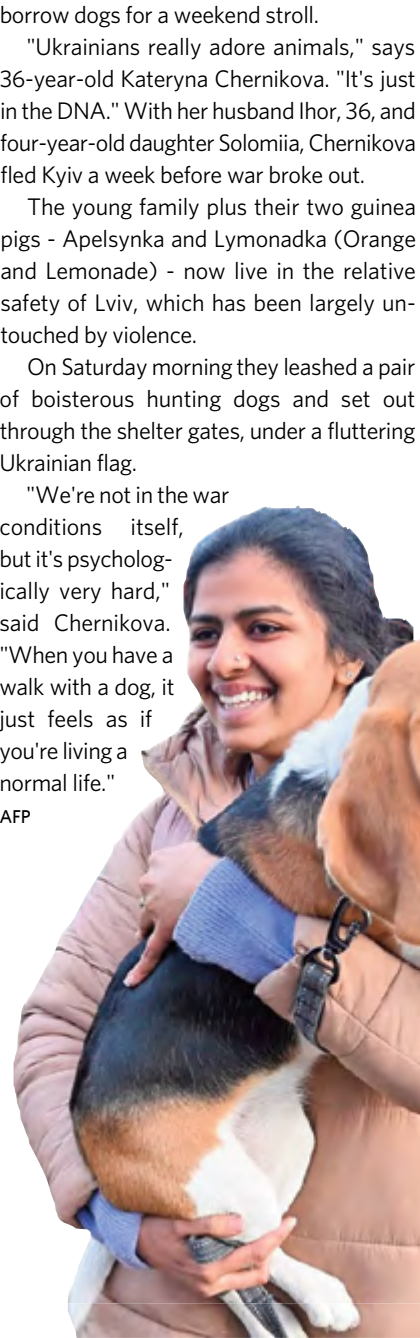
"There's been no system," says Zalypskyy. "We just have many volunteers who head out and fetch them."

One dog from a war-torn region in the east did not leave its pen for two weeks. A cat abandoned by its owner of seven years is distraught. "We are all bitten and scratched," said Zalypskyy of his volunteer teams. "The animals are very stressed."

Onward travel

The animals left here, however, do not languish. Around 200 have been adopted by the locals of Lviv, while most of the rest are taken onwards by volunteers to Germany, Latvia and Lithuania. There are currently no cats available for adoption - they are all bound for Poland.

By noon, Zalypskyy has already signed his third set of dog adoption paperwork for the day. Meanwhile, the shelter is inundated with couples, friends and families arriving to



A woman carries her dog as refugees arrive at the Hungarian-Ukrainian town of Zahony



A child with a cat waits in the hall of the train station after fleeing the Russian invasion of Ukraine, in Przemysl, Poland

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HOT, NEW DESTINATION

TOURISTS TRICKLE BACK TO

Despite travel advisories in the West that often warn of Iraq being a ‘dangerous’ land to visit, tourists from around the world have started coming to the land rich in archaeological wonders and heritage sites

An American tourist poses for a holiday snap in Iraq, in front of the blue-brick Ishtar Gate that was rebuilt at the ancient site of Babylon under dictator Saddam Hussein. Most foreigners here since Saddam's ouster in a 2003 US-led invasion have worn army fatigues and carried guns - but more recently there has been a trickle of camera-toting travel pioneers. "Iraq was in my top three countries," said the visitor to Babylon, 50-year-old Californian Ileana Ovalle, who was excited to see the millennia-old Mesopotamian site. "This is where civilisation started," said the passionate globetrotter with some 40 countries under her belt. "I think too few people understand how important this region is." Most Western governments still issue travel warnings for all or parts of Iraq, pointing to risks from kidnappings to jihadist bombings and unexploded ordnance from multiple wars. But for some explorers who are unafraid of the odd military roadblock, Iraq is a hot new destination with multiple World Heritage sites that is slowly reopening to the world. Retirees and YouTubers, on package tours or lugging backpacks, are braving Iraq's still basic tourist infrastructure to visit ancient sites that rival those of Egypt,

Syria and Jordan.

Scary travel warnings

Whether in Baghdad or Mosul, the northern city that was a jihadist stronghold, they can be seen strolling through streets that still bear the scars of years of conflict. Blogs and vlogs have proliferated with names such as 'American in Baghdad, Iraq', 'Two German guys alone in Iraq' and 'Exploring Baghdad - how dangerous is it?' The tourist mini-boom has gained momentum since Iraq started granting visas on arrival for dozens of nationalities a year ago. Ovalle, along with 14 other tourists, said she was happy to take part in a trip organised by a travel agency which offers cultural, sports and adventure trips. "The first thing that I noticed is the warmth, the generosity and the kindness of the Iraqi people," she said. "They smile, they welcome you, they are very polite." In Babylon, more than 4,000 years old, weeds grow among the old bricks and rubbish is strewn about. Not so long ago, a nearby base housed US and Polish coalition troops. "I think everyone has hesitations, especially coming from the United States," said another visitor, 35-year-old New Yorker



Spanish visitors of the Marshes of Jabayesh in southern Iraq ride boats as they tour the area

Justin Gonzales. "Our government website has a travel advisory saying: 'Do not travel to Iraq, it's dangerous, you can get kidnapped, there is often violence.' But I haven't seen any of that, and I don't think I will."

Happy and generous

Last year, Iraq attracted 107,000 tourists including from Britain, France, the United

States, Turkey and Norway. That was over three times more than the 30,000 in 2020, according to Tourism Authority data. Apart from tourists, hundreds of thousands of religious pilgrims - especially Shiite Muslims, mostly from Iran - flock each year to the shrine cities of Karbala and Najaf, south of Baghdad. Elsewhere in Iraq, however, "we need infrastructure, private investment to have



Our government website has a travel advisory saying: Do not travel to Iraq, it's dangerous, you can get kidnapped, there is often violence. 'But I haven't seen any of that, and I don't think I will

JUSTIN GONZALES

hotels, buses," said the owner of the Bil Weekend agency, Ali al Makhzoumi, who has 30 to 40 clients a month. There has been progress. Baghdad's National Museum reopened earlier in March after three years of closure, and the city's famed booksellers' street Al Mutanabi was given a facelift in December. Ur, the birthplace of Abraham, is attracting more Westerners following a much-publicised Iraq visit by Pope Francis in 2021. Industry trailblazers, however, want to see more done - among them Aya Salih, who runs the Safraty travel agency with her husband. The government has authorised visas on arrival, but everything else is still complicated, she said. "Half of the trip is wasted at roadblocks even though we have the necessary permits." Some visitors, however, love the more edgy, authentic travel experience. "I like to go to places that are not so touristy yet," said Emma Witters, 54, who has over 70,000 subscribers on her YouTube channel. After so much war and isolation, she said, "you would think that they would be unhappy, miserable people. But they are so happy to see people and foreigners, they are so generous." AFP



West Indies crush England to win 3rd Test and series



Kraigg Brathwaite (R) and John Campbell (L) of West Indies celebrate winning on the 4th day of the 3rd and final Test against England at Grenada National Cricket Stadium

SCOREBOARD		
England 1st Innings 204		
West Indies 1st Innings 297		
ENGLAND 2 ND INNINGS		
Alex Lees	b Mayers	31
Zak Crawley	c Holder b Seales	8
Joe Root	c Campbell b Mayers	5
Dan Lawrence	b Mayers	0
Ben Stokes	c Brooks b Mayers	4
J Bairdow	c Da Silva b Joseph	22
Ben Foakes	run out	2
Chris Woakes	c Holder b Roach	19
Craig Overton	c Holder b Mayers	1
Jack Leach	c Da Silva b Roach	4
S Mahmood	not out	3
Extras:	(b 13, lb 7, w 1)	21
TOTAL:	(64.2 Ov, RR: 1.86)	120
Fall of wickets: 1-14, 2-27, 3-27, 4-39, 5-80, 6-83, 7-97, 8-101, 9-116, 10-120		
Bowling: K Roach 9.2-4-10-2, J Seales 12-2-26-1, K Mayers 17-9-18-5, J Holder 8-5-6-0, A Joseph 16-3-38-1, J Blackwood 2-1-2-0		
WEST INDIES 2 ND INNINGS		
K Brathwaite	not out	20
J Campbell	not out	6
Extras:	(b 1, lb 1)	2
TOTAL:	(4.5 Ov, RR: 5.79)	28
Bowling: C Woakes 2.5-0-13-0, Saqib Mahmood 2-0-13-0		

St. George's, Grenada - West Indies crushed England by 10 wickets to win the third Test and claim the three-match series on Sunday.

Set just 28 for victory after dismissing the tourists for 120 in their second innings, openers Kraigg Brathwaite (20) and John Campbell (6) knocked off the runs inside five overs.

The first two Tests in Antigua and Barbados had ended in tame draws.

England were dismissed for 204 in their first innings while West Indies made 297.

All-rounder Kyle Mayers starred in the demolition of the England second innings with impressive figures of 5-18.

However, it was wicket-keeper-batsman Joshua da Silva who was named man of the match for his undefeated 100 in West Indies' first innings.

"The emotion is still there - 100%. I've dreamt of this moment and hopefully it isn't the last time I win this award," he said.

"I wanted to trust my tailenders - all the credit goes to

them. I can't thank them enough. It is because of them that I've won this award."

Defeat was particularly painful for England skipper Joe Root whose job will come under more pressure following the Ashes debacle in Australia.

"I've made it quite clear at the start of this game and tour that I want to take this team forward," said Root to BT Sport.

"I don't think it's ever in your hands and I feel like the group are behind me. We're doing quite a lot of good things - we just need to turn that into results now."

AFP

Medvedev advances in Miami as Murray downed

Miami, United States - Daniil Medvedev is thriving on the pressure of being the man to beat after dispatching Andy Murray in straight sets at the Miami Open on Saturday to edge closer to regaining his world number one ranking.

The Russian top seed served superbly against the 34-year-old three-time Grand Slam champion to ease to a straightforward 6-4, 6-2 triumph at Hard Rock Stadium and will face Spain's Pedro Martinez next.

Medvedev lost his No. 1 ranking after just 18 days, having failed to go deep in Indian Wells, but will regain it once again from the absent Novak Djokovic if he reaches the semi-finals in Florida.

With Djokovic and Rafael Nadal both missing, the 26-year-old is the favorite to claim his first Miami Open title and his performance against Murray showed he's in the kind of form that will cause the rest of the field a multitude of problems.

"For sure, guys going against you are going to have more motivation if you are the top seed," Medvedev told AFP.

"It could be the biggest win of their season but I like to be in this position. The more pressure you have, the more you expect from yourself. At the beginning of my career, I would be really happy when I was in the third round for the first time but now I want to achieve more. So yeah, there's definitely more pressure but also more motivation to continue



It could be the biggest win of their season but I like to be in this position. The more pressure you have, the more you expect from yourself

DANIIL MEDVEDEV

doing well."

Medvedev was delighted to briefly reach the pinnacle of men's tennis but is determined to ensure his next spell at the top won't be as short.

"It felt good to touch it,"

smiled Medvedev. "Reaching No.1 is something that nobody can take away from me even if it was for two weeks.

"But when I did lose it, I just headed back to the practice court and knew I had to get to the

semis in Miami to get it back again. I have a lot of motivation to stay at No.1 for a long time."

Murray eyes Wimbledon

While Medvedev is at the top of his game, Murray is still searching for answers.

The Scot, playing with a metal hip after two operations to fix the problem which almost forced him to retire, has reintroduced Czech legend Ivan Lendl into his coaching team for a third time and hopes he can arrest a run that has seen him fail to back up first-round wins at his last six tournaments.

"My level of tennis wasn't good enough to win matches like that but Ivan will bring clarity over the right way to play," said Murray, who will spend time working with Lendl in Florida before skipping the clay court swing of the ATP Tour to ensure he's prepared for Wimbledon later this summer.

"I don't think I have been practicing the right things for 18 months or so, it's difficult to sort of undo that space. That's one of the reasons why I'm taking a big period of training to change some of those things and hopefully get my game to a place where it's more competitive against the top players again. I do feel like I played better here than I did in the previous tournament in Indian Wells but it's going to take a lot of work."

AFP

IAS, Yalla Shabib, Oman Stallions and Renaissance register wins

PREMIER DIVISION CRICKET

Muscat - IBN Abdul Samad (IAS) beat Majees by six wickets in their Premier Division clash on March 24, 2022 at the Oman Cricket Academy.

Put to bat first after losing the toss, multiple Majees batsmen got off to great starts but were unable to convert them into substantial scores. They were bowled out for 206 with nine balls to spare. Jasim Ali was the star performer with the ball for the IAS. He finished with figures of 4/42 in his 10 overs.

In the second innings, IAS lost three of their most reliable batsmen inside the powerplay. Haythim Ali was also dismissed soon after to leave his side at 80/4 after 21 overs. However, a 127-run partnership between Akmal Shahzad and Waseem Akhtar secured IAS the win, with 10 overs in the bank. They ended the day on individual scores of 74 and 88 respectively.

In the day's other game, Yalla Shabib came out on top in their encounter with Muscat CT.

Electing to bat, Muscat CT posted a first innings score of 223/9. With scores of 76 and 58, Shoaib Khan and Kashyap Kumar Prajapati were the architects in chief. Kaleemullah and Jitenkumar Ramanandi were both brilliant with the ball for Yalla Shabib. The pair accounted for 7 of Muscat CT's 9 wickets.

In keeping with the theme of the day, a 125-plus run partnership in the second innings decided the game in favour of the side batting second. Openers Hannan Rizwan and Mohammad



Yalla Shabib players pose after their win over Muscat CT

Usmani picked up right where they left off in the D10 league to amass 81 and 89 runs respectively. Wasim Ali and Mohammed Naseem applied the finishing touches to hand Yalla Shabib a 7-wicket victory with 20 overs to spare.

The Oman Stallions thumped AER International by 194 runs in their match on March 25.

Electing to bowl first after winning the toss, things went wrong for AER International who saw the Stallions make their way to 397/7 after 50 overs.

Opener Akshaykumar Patel set the tone with a sublime 100-ball 117. Prasad Sankata contributed 64 runs of his own, while Pratik Athavale, Mehran Khan, Vinayak Shukla and Karan Sonavale all chipped in with scores around the 30-run mark. The final seven overs saw Rafi Ullah go totally ballistic. He made 81 runs off 28 balls - an innings that

included a total of 10 sixes.

Chasing, AER International lost wickets at regular intervals and were bundled out for 203 in 37.3 overs. Aamir Kaleem was their best performer by a distance. He recorded a 90-ball century and was the final batsman to depart the crease. For the Stallions, Hemalkumar Tandell and Rafi Ullah claimed 3 wickets apiece.

In the final Premier Division game of the weekend, Renaissance were victorious. They beat Arabian Region Travel and Tourism (ARTT) by 5 wickets.

Batting first after winning the toss, ARTT were cleaned out for 147 in 33.4 overs. Sanjaya Ravindra top scored with 38 runs. Asif Khan was phenomenal with the ball for Renaissance. He finished with figures of 4/26 in 7.4 overs. Mehdi Hasan and Fawad Ali picked up a respective total of 3 and 2 wickets.

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(R to L) Lalit (48) and Axar (38) lifted Delhi from a precarious 104-6 with an unbeaten stand of 75 to win with 10 balls to spare

Lalit, Axar help Delhi down Mumbai in IPL

Mumbai, India - Lalit Yadav and Axar Patel turned unlikely heroes to help Delhi Capitals stun Mumbai Indians by four wickets in the Indian Premier League on Sunday.

Chasing 178 for victory, Lalit (48) and Axar (38) lifted Delhi from a precarious 104-6 with an unbeaten stand of 75 to win with 10 balls to spare at Mumbai's Brabourne Stadium.

Ishan Kishan's unbeaten 81 off 48 balls had steered Mumbai to 177-5 after being put in to bat first in the opening match of the season for the two teams in the Twenty20 tournament.

Lalit, an uncapped all-rounder who hails from Delhi, started slowly but took apart the Mumbai bowling in the final few overs.

Axar, a left-arm spinner who bats left-handed and has played six Tests and 15 T20 matches for India, combined with Lalit and completed the win with a bound-



Kuldeep Yadav got the key wickets of Rohit and Kieron Pollard

ary off fast bowler Jasprit Bumrah.

Delhi's New Zealand import Tim Seifert, who hit 21 off 14 balls, said, "Everything is going good, and it's obviously a great way to start, for me in a new

franchise and for the team, an awesome way to start the tournament."

Earlier the left-handed Kishan lived up to the \$2 million auction price that Mumbai paid to get the left-handed wicketkeeper-

batter back in their team.

He put on an opening stand with skipper Rohit Sharma, who made 41, and steered the five-time champions to what seemed a good total.

The 23-year-old smashed 11 fours and two sixes in his blitz.

Delhi spinner Kuldeep Yadav got the key wickets of Rohit and Kieron Pollard - who made three before Seifert pulled off a stunning catch at mid-wicket - to return figures of 3-18.

Punjab Kings take on Royal Challengers Bangalore in the second match, at Mumbai's DY Patil Stadium.

The world's most valuable cricket tournament has been expanded to 10 teams and 74 matches, but league games will be restricted to four venues in Mumbai and Pune with limited crowds because of coronavirus-related restrictions.

AFP

SCOREBOARD

MUMBAI INDIANS		
R Sharma	c Powell b K Yadav	41 (32)
I Kishan	not out	81 (48)
A Singh	c L Yadav b K Yadav	8 (9)
T Varma	c Shaw b Ahmed	22 (15)
K Pollard	c Seifert b K Yadav	3 (4)
T David	c M Singh b Ahmed	12 (8)
D Sams	not out	7 (2)
Extras:	(lb 1, w 2)	3
TOTAL	(20 Ov, RR: 8.85)	177/5

Fall of wickets: 1-67, 2-83, 3-117, 4-122, 5-159

Bowling: S Thakur 4-0-47-0, K Ahmed 4-0-27-2, A Patel 4-0-40-0, K Nagarkoti 2-0-29-0, K Yadav 4-0-18-3, L Yadav 2-0-15-0

DELHI CAPITALS		
Prithvi Shaw	c I Kishan b B Thampi	38 (24)
Tim Seifert	b Ashwin	21 (14)
M Singh	c T Varma b Ashwin	0 (2)
R Pant	c David b Mills	1 (2)
L Yadav	not out	48 (38)
R Powell	c Sams b B Thampi	0 (2)
S Thakur	c Sharma b B Thampi	22 (11)
A Patel	not out	38 (17)
Extras:	(lb 4, w 7)	11
TOTAL	(18.2 Ov, RR: 9.76)	179/6

Fall of wickets: 1-30, 2-30, 3-32, 4-72, 5-72, 6-104

Bowling: D Sams 4-0-57-0, J Bumrah 3.2-0-43-0, B Thampi 4-0-35-3, M Ashwin 4-0-14-2, T Mills 3-0-26-1

TODAY'S MATCH



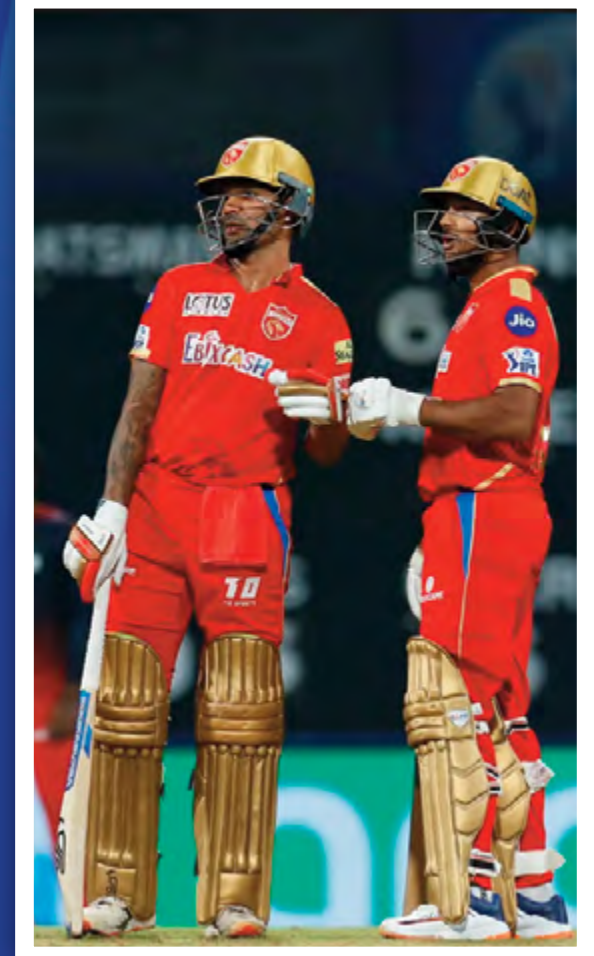
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Punjab Kings chase 205 to defeat RCB

BRIEF SCORES:

Royal Challengers Bangalore 205/2 in 20 overs (Faf du Plessis 88 (57) 3 x 4, 7 x 6; Rahul Chahar 22/1) lost to Punjab Kings 208/5 (Bhanuka Rajapaksa 43 (22) 2 x 4, 4 x 6, Odean Smith 25 (8); Mohammed Siraj 59/2) by 5 wickets with 6 balls remaining

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Oman Sail, PDO sign MoC to unlock sailing opportunities

Muscat - Oman Sail and Petroleum Development Oman (PDO) signed a five-year Memorandum of Collaboration (MoC) to provide technical expertise in sailing and water sports activities and potential collaboration for in-country value (ICV) projects in Oman. The agreement was signed by Steve Phimister, Managing Director, PDO and Dr Khamis al Jabri, CEO, Oman Sail.

The collaboration agreement includes the Ras Al Hamra Club (RAHRC) and cov-



ers recognised accreditation support at the Ras Al Hamra boat club, potentially sailing courses, power boat courses,

instructor development, support off and on water rescue and leisure boat charter. Oman Sail's personal corporate devel-

opment arm, Zimam, is in talks with PDO's learning and development center to collaborate on the exchange of expertise.

In addition, Oman Sail will help to train the Club's Safety Post team in health and safety, rescue management during watersports events. It also covers the development of club volunteers and staff for the maintenance and management of the Club's fleet of boats and equipment, as well as water sports event planning and delivery.

The partnership will enable the Ras Al Hamra Boat Club to become a training and development platform for sailing and water sports in the future. Thus, enabling the creation of new employment opportunities within the water sports sector, and career advancement opportunities for club members in Oman and beyond.

Phimister said, "PDO's collaboration with Oman Sail, is well suited and timely. We both have a united purpose to serve Oman."

Oman Sail teams bag 7 medals at GCC Sailing Championships in Kuwait

Muscat - Oman Sail's sailing team concluded their participation at the 11th GCC Sailing Championships, held from March 22-26 at Messilah Beach in Kuwait, after claiming the highest number of medals out of all participating nations.

The Omani entry is the first regional tournament for the young Optimist sailors, who were joined by experienced ILCA sailors to together claim seven podium positions.

Medals were won by: Hood al Nofali, silver (Optimist U12); Tameem al Balushi, silver, and Abdullatif al Qasmi, bronze (Optimist); Nebras al Owaisi, silver, and Elyas al Fadhli, bronze (ILCA 4); Ahmed al Bulushi, bronze (ILCA 6); Abdulmalik al Hinai, bronze (ILCA 7).

Sultan AbdulAziz al Zadjali, Optimist Coach, said, "This was a great performance from our young sailors in their first regional competition. We have worked hard behind the scenes to prepare them for the event and to return to Oman with so many medals is really pleasing. This is a very strong group of sailors and they will definitely learn from this challenge as



Tameem al Balushi won 2nd place in Optimist class



Nibras al Owaisi won 2nd Place in ILCA 4 class



Hood al Noflin



Ahmed al Baushi



Abdulmalik al Hanai



Elyas al Fadhli



Abdullatif al Qasmi

they continue to improve and gain experience on the water."

He added, "It is inspiring to see the youth of the country embrace the sport of sailing and reinforce Oman's maritime heritage.

"The achievements of this very young Oman Sail team shows that the future of sailing in Oman is promising and that

This was a great performance from our young sailors in their first regional competition. We have worked hard behind the scenes to prepare them for the event

SULTAN ABDULAZIZ AL ZADJALI

the nation's youth is both highly-capable and highly-motivated to fulfil their considerable potential."

UAE win GCC Women's T20i Cup, Oman 2nd

Muscat - Oman clinched a hard-fought two-run victory over Qatar on the final day of the GCC Women's T20i Championship Cup at the Oman Cricket Academy on Saturday. They ended the tournament in second place, while in the other match of the day UAE defeated Bahrain and won the championship.

Electing to bat first after winning the toss, Oman made 97/8 after 20 overs. Skipper Vaishali Jesrani was the only batter to cross the 20-run mark. Fiza Javed, Saya Channa and Amanda Dcosta chipped in with scores of 13, 13 and 12 respectively.

The visitors were energetic in the field, but Oman paid the price for their indecisive strike rotation throughout the game. Qatar inflicted a total of four run-outs in the first innings. Saachi Dhadwal, Hiral Agarwal, Rochelle Sherlene Quyn and Aysha, with 1 wicket apiece, administered the other dismissals.

Qatar fell agonizingly short in the second phase of the match. Captain Aysha led the scoring for her side with a 25-ball 24. At the 14-over mark, her 41-run partnership with Saachi Dhadwal, who made 18 runs herself, looked to be enough to steer the visitors to victory. However, Priyanka Mendonca picked up 3 key wickets in the space of 2 overs to turn the tide back in Oman's favour. With 10 runs needed off the final 6 balls, Saya Channa held her nerve



Oman Women National T20 Cricket Team celebrate win over Qatar in GCC Women's T20i Championship

and secured the win for the hosts. Snehal Nair, Amanda Dcosta and Saya Channa accounted for Oman's remaining scalps.

UAE tops

In the day's other game, the UAE cemented their spot at the top of the standings with a dominant 210-run victory over Bahrain.

Batting first after winning the toss, the UAE openers forged a 193-run partnership in 16 overs to turn the remainder of the contest into a formality.

Kavisha Egodage was dismissed for 67 runs but Esha Oza continued the carnage. Her unbeaten 71-ball 158 - the second highest-individual score in



Priyanka Mendonca picked up 3 key wickets in space of 2 overs

Women's T20i history, powered the UAE to 253/1 after 20 overs.

In response, Bahrain were bowled out in 16 overs for 43 runs, 25 of which belonged to opener Tharanga Gajanayake.

Lavanya Keny was the pick of the UAE bowlers. She claimed 4 wickets while giving away just 3 runs. Qatar, Kuwait and Bahrain settled on 3 rd , 4 th , and 5 th spot respectively, with net run

rate separating all of them. Saudi Arabia were unable to pick up any points in the competition and finished last.

All in all, the GCC Women's T20i Championship Cup succeeded in providing game time at the top level to all sides competing. In addition, the matches were broadcasted live, serving to garner further exposure for the women's game in the Gulf.

BRIEF SCORES:

Oman 97/8 in 20 overs (Vaishali Jesrani 23(33) ; Rochelle Quyn 13(1) **beat Qatar 95/8 in 20 overs** (Aysha 24(25) 2 x 4 ; Priyanka Mendonca 11(3) **by 2 runs**



Japan's Ryoyu Kobayashi celebrates with the crystal globe trophy after winning the overall FIS Ski Jumping World Cup

Kobayashi clinches World Cup crown in season finale

Planica, Slovenia - Ryoyu Kobayashi of Japan won the overall ski jumping World Cup title on Sunday after finally pipping German rival Karl Geiger on the final day of their months-long tussle.

Kobayashi, 25, finished eighth in Sunday's World Cup final in Planica, earning enough points to see off Geiger, who was 16th, to win the overall crown.

Kobayashi finished with 1621 points to Geiger's 1515.

In bright sunshine and spring temperatures, Geiger was the first to congratulate

Kobayashi.

The Japanese, this winter's Four Hills champion, claimed the second overall World Cup title of his career following his 2018/19 triumph.

Norway's Olympic individual champion Marius Lindvik landed leaps of 241.5 and 245.5 metres to win Sunday's final World Cup event ahead of Japan's Yukiya Sato.

Germany's Severin Freund, 33, the 2014/15 overall World Cup champion, announced his retirement after finishing the season in 30th place.

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