

► NEWS BRIEF

IMF EXPERTS ARRIVE IN MUSCAT FOR SERIES OF MEETINGS

Muscat - The Sultanate of Oman is hosting experts from the International Monetary Fund (IMF) who arrived in Muscat for a series of meetings beginning on Tuesday.

The IMF delegation will meet a number of officials from the Central Bank of Oman (CBO), Ministry of Finance, Ministry of Economy, Oman Investment Authority and the National Center for Statistics and Information to prepare for Article IV consultations during its stay in Oman till June 13.

Tuesday's meeting discussed a number of topics related to the latest macroeconomic developments and its expected prospects in light of the regional and international updates, in addition to the fiscal and economic policies adopted by Oman in line with the Tenth Five-Year Plan.

04



SalamAir plans fleet expansion, new routes

Oman urges swift integration of gulf economies in Muscat meet

Our Correspondent
Muscat

Oman has called for an urgent implementation of Gulf economic integration and development projects, including the customs union, Gulf common market, railways, and trade and investment liberalisation.

The announcement was made during a meeting of the senior officials of the GCC Economic and Development Affairs Authority, hosted by Oman in Muscat on Tuesday.

Chaired by H E Dr Nasser



Rashid al Ma'awali, Undersecretary at the Ministry of Economy, the meeting brought together GCC undersecretaries for economy and planning to discuss various aspects of GCC economic integration.

Highlighting the unprece-

We need to focus on the implementation of Gulf economic integration and development projects such as the customs union, Gulf common market, railways, and trade and investment liberalisation

H E DR NASSER RASHID AL MA'AWALI

dent achievements and positive indicators accomplished under the guidance and sound wisdom of the leaders of the GCC states since the council came into being, H E Dr Ma'awali emphasised on the need to address barriers hindering eco-

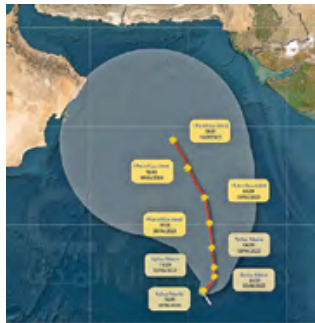
nomic unity in the next stage.

"We need to assess our achievements, review plans within the Economic and Development Affairs Authority, and focus on the implementation of Gulf economic integration and development projects such as

the customs union, Gulf common market, railways, and trade and investment liberalisation."

During the meeting, officials examined decisions made by the GCC Supreme Council in its 43rd session held in December 2022. They also discussed a proposal put forth by the GCC Secretariat General on the topic of 'governance of economic and developmental action'.

Additionally, progress in the action plan for developing a Gulf Economic Model, including its mechanism and timeframe, was reviewed.



Biparjoy to intensify to category 1 storm: CAA

Muscat - A depression in the Arabian Sea intensified into a tropical storm on Tuesday, located at a distance of 964km from the coast of Oman.

In a statement issued on Tuesday, the Civil Aviation Authority (CAA) said that the latest satellite images show intensification of the tropical deep depression to a tropical storm - Biparjoy, located south central of the Arabian Sea.

'It is likely to intensify to category 1 tropical storm after three days and the expected movement is to the north of the Arabian Sea with chances of high clouds advection over Oman within the next five days.'

The name Biparjoy given by Bangladesh means 'disaster'. As per IMD website, the name was adopted by World Meteorological Organisation (WMO) countries in 2020.

Jason Nicholls, lead international forecaster at AccuWeather, said that areas from Oman to southern Pakistan and western India should monitor for possible impacts next week.

Germany keen on importing natural gas from Oman

Our Correspondent
Muscat

Germany and Oman held talks in Muscat on Tuesday to look into the former getting gas from the sultanate in a bid to find an alternative to Russian fuel supplies.

Dr Tobias Lindner, Minister of State at the Federal Foreign Office, Germany, who is currently on a tour in the region, arrived in Oman and met with H E Mohsin bin Hamad al Hadhrami, Undersecretary at the Ministry of Energy and Minerals, on Tuesday.

During the meeting, they discussed encouraging investment in green energy, and 'Germany's



desire to cover the increasing demand for gas by importing it from the sultanate', stated the Ministry of Mineral and Energy.

Preparations for participation in the United Nations Climate Change Conference of the Parties (COP28), to be held in the UAE

later this year, were also discussed.

News agency Reuters in February had reported that Oman and Germany were in advanced talks to sign a deal for liquefied natural gas (LNG) of at least 10-year duration.

In July last year, Oman and Germany signed a declaration of intent for cooperation in the field of energy.

Europe has been pushing to replace Russian gas since last year against the backdrop of its war with Ukraine, with Russia's state-run Gazprom reducing and then suspending the lion's share of pipeline supplies to Europe.

Lindner is on a three-country tour in the region that includes his visit to Saudi Arabia and the UAE. Before his departure from Germany, Lindner issued a statement underscoring Germany's great interest in regional stability and security in the Gulf region, "not

least because of our trade relations and energy supply'.

He acknowledged that the Gulf states play a central role in finding solutions to the conflicts in Sudan, Yemen, Syria and Libya. "I would like to talk about this with our partners in Abu Dhabi, Dubai, Muscat and Riyadh," he added.

"Another focus of my visit will be on renewable energy and the preparation of COP28. The United Arab Emirates, Oman and Saudi Arabia are key countries for our global climate goals and a sustainable energy supply. We can only make progress here together!"

FIRST TIME IN OMAN 6 NEW BRANCHES Opening

Dear Patron,

It's my honour to invite you to the inauguration of 6 new branches of Joyalukkas Exchange in Oman. Joyalukkas Exchange has always excelled and we would like to take this opportunity to extend our gratitude for all the love you show us.

Chairman
Mr. Joy Alukkas

Inauguration by
MR. JOY ALUKKAS
CHAIRMAN

Inauguration by
MR. ANTONY JOS
MANAGING DIRECTOR



AMARAT - JUNE 7 - 6:00 PM



AL KHOUD - JUNE 7 - 8:00 PM



AMARAT - JUNE 7 - 6:30 PM



RUWI NESTO - JUNE 8 - 6:30 PM



SAHAM NESTO - JUNE 9 - 6:00 PM



IBRI - JUNE 10 - 6:00 PM

Joyalukkas Exchange
Your favourite money exchange



جويالوكاس للصرافة
الصرافة المفضلة لديكم

Oman seeing increasing trend in renal failure

Our Correspondent
Muscat

Oman is witnessing an increasing trend in renal failures with over 2,275 patients currently stated to be affected by chronic kidney disease.

Dr Sameh Morgan, a nephrologist from Ibri Dialysis Hospital, shared insights during a symposium on organ donation in Ibri on Monday.

Due to the increasing number of people suffering from some sort of renal problems, kidney has become the most sought-after organ for transplantation, Dr Morgan said.

The statistics indicate that out of the total number of patients with chronic renal failure in Oman, more than 135 patients reside in Dahirah. There are 24

dialysis centres across Oman providing essential services to these patients.

The symposium, focused on organ donation, adequately highlighted various aspects of human

During the symposium, Dr Morgan also explained the legal permissibility of organ donation.

The nephrologist of high repute spoke about several essential preventive measures to

Oman currently has 2,275 patients affected by chronic kidney disease... Out of the total number of patients with chronic renal failure, 135 patients reside in Dahirah

DR SAMEH MORGAN

organ transplantation. It also dwelt on the urgent need for community awareness about the significance of organ donation. A culture of organ donation in the society will ultimately help in reducing the sufferings of patients needing any replacement.

combat chronic kidney disease, including adopting a healthy diet, regular exercise, blood sugar management, controlling high blood pressure, avoiding excessive use pain reliever, and staying properly hydrated.

"Raising awareness about the



importance of organ donation is paramount, particularly due to the increasing global demand for organ transplantation and the challenges associated with finding suitable donors in most cases," said Dr Morgan.

According to the Ministry of Health's latest statistics, there are 311 living donors, besides those deceased ones whose organs were transplanted before their death.

The country has seen 28 successful liver transplants using organs from living donors.

In May, the Omani Association for Organ Donation launched a national campaign to raise public awareness on organ donation. The campaign targets registration of 100,000 donors through 'Shifa' app during the first year of its inauguration.

Ministry calls on women to go for cervical cancer tests for national study

Our Correspondent
Muscat

In an effort to detect cervical cancer at an early stage and prevent its progression, the Ministry of Health is urging women aged 25-49 to visit nearest health institution and get tested.

This clarion call comes following a workshop convened on Tuesday, during which 27 women doctors from various health institutions in Oman were brought together for a critical study on cervical cancer.

As part of this national study, the workshop served as a preparatory step to measure the prevalence rate and genotypes of



the human papillomavirus (HPV) among Omani women. HPV is stated to be the primary cause of cervical cancer.

The workshop, held at the National Genetic Center, was a collaborative effort among the Department of Women and

Child Health, the Obstetrics and Gynecology Department, the Laboratory Department at the Royal Hospital, and the United

Nations Population Fund.

Its primary focus was on the early detection of cervical cancer, as the disease has become a matter of serious concern 'globally, regionally, and locally'.

The workshop was held to equip obstetricians and gynecologists with the knowledge of early detection methods, diagnosis, treatment, and management of positive test results, including abnormal cells in cervical smears.

The participants received both theoretical and practical training, including proper collection and transportation of samples from clinics to the histology laboratory at the Royal Hospital.

Registration for ASMED's mentoring programme for SMEs, startups begins

Muscat - The Authority for Small and Medium Enterprises Development (ASMED) has started registering interested candidates for the 7th edition of its mentoring programme.

Themed 'Inspiration and Success', the programme mulls to enhance the knowledge and skill set of entrepreneurs and owners of small and medium enterprises (SMEs) and startups to be successful in their venture.

ASMED seeks to enable entrepreneurs to strategically plan their businesses and manage them in a professional manner. Through a set of seven business-tailored workshops, the pro-

gramme provides entrepreneurs with the skills needed to seize opportunities and achieve maximum success.

Besides entrepreneurship, the orientation programme also aims to spread social awareness about the culture of voluntary work that can be practiced through entrepreneurship in Oman. It targets two segments of entrepreneurship: SMEs and startups.

The programme constitutes a link in a series of business orientations that kicked off a decade ago, since the convening of the Small and Medium Enterprises Development Symposium at Seih al Shamkhat in Bahla in 2013.

MAFWR's initiative spurs turmeric farming in Dhofar

Our Correspondent
Muscat

The Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Water Resources (MAFWR) has embarked on the second phase of turmeric farming in Dhofar governorate.

In its first phase, the project had chosen 60 farmers from 12 villages across Salalah, Taqah, Dhalkhut, and Rakhyut, for cultivation of turmeric on just over half-an-hectare of land.

The project envisages diversification of the agriculture sector and eventually achieve food self-sufficiency, besides establishing a genetic bank.

The ministry has chosen 55 farmers from 25 villages for the second phase of the project.

It is now distributing turmeric roots to those farmers for cultivation of this plant over an area of 1.6 hectares. The ministry will also equip them with a modern irrigation system and provide guidance through agricultural teams. These teams will also monitor



The underground stem of turmeric is utilised as a culinary spice and traditional medicine as well... With its economic value and health benefits, turmeric enjoys high local demand and possesses great export potential

ENG RADWAN AL IBRAHIM

the cultivation of turmeric under this project.

The season for turmeric cultivation begins in June and lasts for six to eight months.

Eng Radwan Abdullah al Ibrahim, Director of Agricultural Development Department in Dhofar governorate and the project manager, explained that turmeric, a member of the ginger family, originates from Southeast Asia and is predominantly grown commercially in India. Its rhizome, the underground stem, is utilised as a culinary spice and traditional medicine as well.

The first phase of the programme saw farmers achieving a yield of approximately six tonnes of fresh organic turmeric. It is anticipated that the second phase will yield around 25 tonnes.

"With its economic value and health benefits, turmeric enjoys high local demand and possesses great export potential," Ibrahim said.

oman OASIS
BALANCED DRINKING WATER

Grand Eid OFFER

50 ONLY

HOT & COLD DISPENSER

PLUS 2 FULL BOTTLES

PLUS 30 REFILL COUPONS

20 ONLY

WHITE TAP DISPENSER OR TAP DISPENSER OR MANUAL WATER PUMP OR CRADLE WITH TAP

PLUS 2 FULL BOTTLES

PLUS 15 REFILL COUPONS

Offer valid from 1st April to 30th June 2023.

CALL TOLL-FREE 800 71 222 or GSM: 9275 5522

C.R. No: 1365452 | MP: 06/425/2023

مركز الشمس لطب الاسنان
Sun Dental Centre
Al-Khuwair

SCAN TO FIND LOCATION

95961234

www.sundentalmuscat.com
/sundentalcentre
sundentaloman
sundentalhubra@hotmail.com

• Affordable
• Experienced doctors
• Al khuwair

Our Services

- ✓ Bleeding gums
- ✓ Fixed Teeth
- ✓ Whitening Teeth
- ✓ Braces
- ✓ Teeth Cleaning
- ✓ Bad Breath
- ✓ OPG X-Ray
- ✓ Root Canal

Approved Insurance:
National Life, Mednet, Metlife, AXA, NAS, OQIC
Saico, NextCare, Vipul Better Care, Greenline & More

MOH No: 558/2023

Nama merges power companies for cost reduction, efficiency



Our Correspondent Muscat

In a significant move, Nama Group has merged all power supply and distribution entities and brought them under two main companies: Nama Electricity Distribution and Nama Supply. Nama Group stated that the restructuring was necessitated to improve the efficiency of supply and distribution of electricity, besides reducing the overall operational costs. 'It is part of a comprehensive initiative to review the electricity sector's costs and restructure the distribution and supply companies,' it added. Ahmed Amer al Mahrezi, acting CEO of Nama Group, confirmed the seamless transition of assets and employees to Nama

Electricity Distribution and Nama Supply, ensuring continuity of business operations and projects. Collaborating with key government agencies, including the Ministry of Energy and Minerals, Oman Investment Authority, and the Authority for Public Services Regulation, Nama Group went for the merger of various companies to optimise resources and enhance overall performance. Under the restructuring plan, one company will focus on supply services, including billing and collection operations, while the other will specialise in distribution services. "This strategic realignment aims to reduce costs, enhance system efficiency, improve services, and elevate customer satisfaction," said Mahrezi. Eng Alaa bin Hassan Mousa al Lawati, CEO of Nama Electricity

Distribution, explained the unification of all electricity distribution-related services, such as metre reading, network connection, and technical troubleshooting. The company with assets exceeding RO2bn is consolidating its position in the industry, he informed. Salim Said al Kamyani, CEO of Nama Supply, emphasised that the merger of electricity supply companies will lead to service enhancements, increased efficiency, and reduced operational expenses. "With 90% of subscribers receiving e-bills and 70% utilising electronic bill payment, the company has already made significant progress in streamlining the processes. The unified call centre ensures seamless handling of requests and inquiries."

Wadi Dayqah Dam to release 15mn m³ water from June 11

Our Correspondent Muscat

The Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Water Resources (MAFWR) has decided to release 15mn cubic metre (m³) of water from Wadi Dayqah Dam to feed underground reservoirs for the agricultural farms in Daghamr and Hail al Ghaf regions. The gates of the dam will be opened on June 11 for a gradual release of water, the ministry informed. 'The ministry will open the Wadi Dayqah Dam to drain about 15mn m³ of water,' it added. Located in Quriyat, 75km from Muscat, the dam on Wadi Dayqah is one of the largest in



the Arabian Peninsula. Wadi Dayqah Dam was built in 2012 to harvest rainwater from the surrounding mountains and in turn feed the falaj system in the villages below. The result is a stunning fresh water lake and a stream flowing 7km from the main body of the

dam. The dam has a storage capacity of 100mn m³ with a height of 75m. During the release of water, the ministry called on citizens to stay away from the wadi and abide by safety instructions to avoid any eventuality.

No injuries in cooking gas leakage in Seeb

Muscat - The Civil Defence and Ambulance Authority (CDAA) managed to contain a cooking gas leakage in a commercial complex in Seeb on Tuesday, before it turning into a major incident. CDAA said, 'The team handling hazardous materials and related accidents at CDAA re-



sponded to a cooking gas leakage incident in a commercial complex in Seeb and was able to contain the leak without recording any injuries.' The authority called for periodic maintenance of gas connections and storage places to avoid any situation of this nature.



SULTANATE OF OMAN
MINISTRY OF HEALTH



رؤية عُمان 2040
ننقذ بثقة
Moving Forward
With Confidence

ANNOUNCEMENT

The Directorate General of Khoula Hospital invites specialized companies to participate in the following Tenders: -

Tender Ref.	Description	Last date for Collection of tender Document	Bid Submission Closing Date on/ Before 09:00 am Thursday	Eligibility	Tender Fee (Non-Refundable)
MOH/DGKH-14/2106/2023	Supply of Desktop and Laptop for Khoula Hospital	15/June/2023	22/June/2023	Specialized Companies registered with the General Secretariat of the Tender Board in Excellent Grade	R.O 25,000

- Tenders should be submitted on line on <https://etendering.tenderboard.gov.om>
- Ministry is not bound to accept the lowest tender and reserves the right to accepts or reject any tender.
- For any Clarification, you may contact via Telephone: 24402200 , Email id etenderhd@ita.gov.om



SULTANATE OF OMAN
MINISTRY OF HEALTH



رؤية عُمان 2040
ننقذ بثقة
Moving Forward
With Confidence

ANNOUNCEMENT

The Directorate General of Khoula Hospital invites specialized companies to participate in the following Tenders: -

Tender Ref.	Description	Last date for Collection of tender Document	Bid Submission Closing Date on/ Before 09:00 am Thursday	Eligibility	Tender Fee (Non-Refundable)
MOH/DGKH-17/2152/2023	Refurbishment & Modification work in Male & Female Neurology ward at Khoula Hospital	22/June/2023	12/July/2023	Specialized Companies registered with the General Secretariat of the Tender Board in Excellent Grade	R.O 25,000

- Tenders should be submitted on line on <https://etendering.tenderboard.gov.om>.
- Ministry is not bound to accept the lowest tender and reserves the right to accepts or reject any tender.
- For any Clarification, you may contact via Telephone: 24402200 , Email id etenderhd@ita.gov.om

SMARTER WAY TO
SEND MONEY

SWIFTLY – SECURELY – SMARTLY







Download it NOW!

Download our app today!



+968: 91787829 | 99849289 | 91787829

www.pkexchange.com



شركة برشوتم
كانجي للصرافة



Terms & Conditions Applied

2022
OMAN'S MOST TRUSTED
BRAND AWARDS

INTERVIEW

SALAMAIR
WINNER: AIRLINES CATEGORY

SalamAir plans fleet expansion, new routes

Our Correspondent
Muscat

As the low-cost national carrier of Oman, SalamAir has made significant strides in improving and expanding its network and product offerings, all while keeping fares affordable for customers. The airline's dedication to excellence and customer satisfaction has been recognised through its recent accolade as the winner of Oman's Most Trusted Brand Award 2022 in the airlines category.

In an interview with *Muscat Daily*, SalamAir CEO, Captain Mohamed Ahmed, talked about the airline's customer-centric approach and its strengths within the aviation sector of the sultanate. He also shared insights into SalamAir's future plans for fleet and network expansion.

SalamAir has been voted as Oman's Most Trusted Brand 2022 in the airlines category. How has SalamAir built and maintained its reputation as a top brand in the sultanate's aviation industry?

Firstly, we are very humbled and thankful to our customers who chose us as their preferred airline. Our customer-first approach is something we take very seriously. Over the years, we have significantly improved our overall product offerings and network and maintained low fares, making travel affordable and accessible to many. We constantly evolve our services and continue to listen and engage with our customers.

How does SalamAir differentiate itself from other low-cost carriers in the region? What initiatives has SalamAir implemented to enhance the customer experience?

As a national carrier of Oman, we consider ourselves fortunate to operate from a base that reflects the rich culture of this remarkable country. We take pride in embodying the values of Omani hospitality, which permeates every aspect of our customer service across various touchpoints. Moreover, our product offerings are designed with simplicity in mind, effectively addressing the diverse needs of our customers in terms of both services and destinations. Our carefully crafted network is tailored to complement the travel requirements of our home base



Over the years, we have significantly improved our overall product offerings and network and maintained low fares, making travel affordable and accessible to many

CAPTAIN MOHAMED AHMED
CEO, SalamAir

while continuously expanding to meet the evolving needs of our valued customers.

We recently introduced the first freighter to our fleet to further diversify our business. This strategic addition enhances our capabilities and enables us to offer an even broader range of services. Additionally, we have upgraded our booking engine and introduced numerous value-added services, providing our passengers with a convenient and personalised experience.

Innovation and creativity are deeply ingrained in our approach, evident in our adaptability to



changing circumstances and adventurous spirit. These qualities shine through in all aspects of our business, including technology advancements, network expansion, and fleet diversification.

We consistently strive to embrace new ideas and push boundaries, ensuring we remain at the forefront of the industry. As a national carrier of Oman, we embody the essence of Omani culture, offering exceptional hospitality, simplicity, and innovative solutions. We are committed to providing our customers with unmatched travel experiences while continuously evolving and adapting to meet their ever-changing needs.

How do you keep the costs affordable for passengers while maintaining higher safety and customer satisfaction?

Efficient resource management is a crucial advantage in maintaining competitiveness. For instance, we excel in optimising operational efficiency, proudly standing out as one of the most efficient airlines in the region in terms of aircraft utilisation. This proficiency provides us with a cost-saving advantage, allowing us to offer highly competitive fares.

Moreover, we have nurtured an adaptable

team with extensive knowledge across multiple facets of the business. This strategy empowers us to reduce manpower expenses while maintaining high levels of expertise effectively.

Our focus is on short- to medium-haul operations; we focus on the latest aircraft technology that supports safety, high fuel efficiency, and low maintenance costs. We have recently secured the IATA safety audit registration, which is a testament to our commitment to passenger safety. We follow the low-cost model for saving costs across our business, which transpires to our customers as low fares. Our team is dedicated to ensuring our passengers are cared for at every step of their journey.

Can you tell about the current size of SalamAir's aircraft fleet, routes and destinations?

In 2022, we were honoured to receive the prestigious recognition of having the youngest fleets in Asia. Our fleet comprises six A320neo, four A321neo aircraft, and an A321XLR dedicated to freight operations. With these ten-passenger aircraft, we serve a comprehensive network of 38 destinations, encompassing domestic and international routes.

Looking ahead, we have exciting plans for fleet expansion. In June and July 2023, we are set to welcome three new Airbus 321neo aircraft to our fleet. Furthermore, before the end of the year, we have three additional aircraft scheduled for delivery. These developments will increase our fleet size to 17 aircraft, enabling us to enhance our services and cater to a broader range of travel demands.

What new routes or markets will your airline expand to in the next few years? What factors do you consider when selecting new destinations to add to SalamAir route network?

Our destinations are selected by listening to our customers, followed by a feasibility study to gauge the operational and commercial viability of the destination.

We have already introduced Kula Lumpur, Almaty, Rize, Mashhad, and Beirut this summer, all fascinating destinations for our passengers to explore. We have a few more in the pipeline, which we will announce in the near future.

How does SalamAir handle the competition from larger carriers in the market?

I firmly believe that competition is a positive force that ultimately benefits customers. It encourages us to continuously enhance and innovate our unique product offering, enabling us to seize new opportunities in the market.

By embracing advanced thinking and staying ahead of the curve, we consistently strive to maintain a competitive edge over other carriers. Our commitment to forward-looking strategies ensures we remain one step ahead in meeting customer needs and expectations.

How does SalamAir approach partnerships and codeshare agreements with other airlines to expand its destination offerings?

Our business model focuses on expanding our network while allowing our passengers' reliability and convenience during their travel while maintaining low fares. Thus, partnerships and agreements would be part of our strategic collaboration, which benefits the airline and is strategically advantageous to our partners, the country and the region on a macroeconomic scale.

CBO allows new activities for finance and leasing firms

Our Correspondent
Muscat

In a new development, the Central Bank of Oman (CBO) has granted permission for finance and leasing companies to engage in new business activities within the sultanate.

Following a review of the authorised business activities of licensed finance and leasing firms, the CBO on Tuesday issued instructions to allow these companies to expand their scope of operations.

This includes the relaxation of certain conditions associated with existing activities.

According to the CBO's decision, finance and leasing companies are now authorised to engage in additional lending ac-



As per the central bank's decision, finance and leasing companies are now authorised to engage in additional lending activities such as real estate financing, working capital facilities, personal loans, and lending against their own deposits

tivities such as real estate financing, working capital facilities, personal loans, and lending against their own deposits.

Furthermore, the CBO has extended relaxations to finance and leasing companies regarding their ability to accept corporate deposits and make investments.

Additionally, the finance and leasing companies now have the discretion to adjust their business hours based on market demand.

The Central Bank of Oman has emphasised that these amendments are aimed at broadening the activities of finance and leasing firms, thereby fostering positive contributions to the growth of the sector and the overall economy.

FDO gets strong response from investors at SIMEC

Muscat - Fisheries Development Oman (FDO), the leading entity in the development of Oman's fisheries sector, received overwhelming response from investors during its participation in the prestigious SIMEC Aquafish 2023 exhibition held in Saudi Arabia.

The event proved to be a resounding success for FDO, as it received significant interest from visitors who were captivated by the abundant investment opportunities in Oman's flourishing fisheries sector, according to a press release.

FDO showcased its wide range of high-quality products and value-added projects, reinforcing its reputation as a key player in the regional fisheries industry.

SIMEC Aquafish 2023, one of the largest aquaculture exhibitions in the Middle East region, attracted industry professionals, investors, and government representatives from across the globe. FDO's participation allowed them to present Oman's thriving fisheries sector to an international audience and highlight the country's potential as an attractive investment destination.

Visitors to FDO's booth were impressed by the diverse range of investment opportunities available in Oman's fisheries sector. FDO highlighted its commitment to sustainable fishing practices, which ensure the long-



term viability and environmental preservation of Oman's rich marine resources. The showcase of advanced aquaculture technologies and infrastructure further demonstrated FDO's dedication to enhancing productivity and maintaining high-quality standards throughout the added value chain.

"FDO's participation in SIMEC Aquafish 2023 was a remarkable success," said Dawood al Wahibi from Fisheries Development Oman. He said, "The event provided us with an excellent platform to showcase the immense potential of Oman's fisheries sector to a global audience. We received overwhelming interest from visitors who recognised the attractive investment opportunities and the quality of products and services offered by FDO. We are confident that these interactions will pave the way for meaningful partnerships

and collaborations."

Throughout the exhibition, FDO presented its wide array of products and services, including fresh and frozen fish, value-added seafood products, fish processing facilities, aquaculture technologies, and sustainable fishing practices. The comprehensive range of offerings displayed by FDO further solidified their position as a leading entity in the region's fisheries sector.

FDO's participation in SIMEC Aquafish 2023 reflects the government's efforts in diversifying Oman's economy and harnessing the vast potential of its fisheries sector.

With its strategic location, favorable business environment, and extensive natural resources, Oman presents an attractive destination for local and international investors seeking growth opportunities in the aquaculture industry.

CBO issues RO14mn treasury bills

Our Correspondent
Muscat

The Central Bank of Oman (CBO) on Tuesday announced the issuance of a tender for the government treasury.

Total issuance of government treasury bills amounted RO14mn for a maturity period of 91 days.

The average accepted price

reached RO98.765 for every RO100, and the minimum accepted price arrived at RO98.765. The average discount rate and the average yield reached 4.9535 per cent and 5.0155 per cent, respectively.

Treasury bills are short-term highly secured financial instruments issued by the Ministry of Finance, and they provide li-

censed commercial banks the opportunity to invest their surplus funds. The Central Bank of Oman acts as the issue manager and provides the added advantage of ready liquidity through discounting and repurchase facilities (repo).

The interest rate on the repo operations with the CBO is 5.75 per cent while the discount rate on the treasury bills discounting

facility with the central bank is 6.25 per cent.

Furthermore, treasury bills promote the local money market by creating a benchmark yield curve for short-term interest rates.

Additionally, the government may also resort to this instrument whenever felt necessary for financing its recurrent expenditures.

Oil prices sink on demand fears after Saudi-driven rally

London, UK – Oil prices sank Tuesday as dealers mulled the weak demand outlook after having rallied the previous day on output cuts from key crude producer Saudi Arabia.

Europe's Brent oil contract and US counterpart WTI crude fell more than two per cent, one day after bouncing on news that Riyadh slashed daily output by one million barrels for July in a bid to prop up prices.

The announcement came at a weekend meeting of the 23-nation OPEC+ oil producers' alliance, which also agreed to continue its current production cuts until the end of next year.

Brent North Sea crude dropped 2.2 per cent at \$75.06 per barrel while West Texas Intermediate was down 2.1 per cent at \$70.63 per barrel.

Saudi glow fades

"Oil prices are under pressure... as the glow from Saudi's supply cut fades and the reality of the sluggish demand backdrop sets in," noted Victoria Scholar, head of investment at trading firm Interactive Investor.

Asian and European stock markets mostly fell as investors also digested a surprise interest rate increase from the Reserve



Bank of Australia (RBA).

That sparked talk that global central banks were not yet done hiking to combat stubbornly-high inflation.

The RBA lifted its main rate by 25 basis points to 4.1%, which was the highest level since May 2012.

In reaction the Australian dollar jumped more than one per cent against the greenback, which traded mixed against the euro and yen.

"The RBA's surprise decision...(was) a warning that the major central banks are not done tightening yet," SwissQuote analyst Ipek Ozkardeskaya told AFP.

"That, combined to the overbought conditions in stock markets, weighs on sentiment.

"We will likely step into a period of profit taking after such a breathtaking and unexpected rally."

The tepid equities performance came after a global advance stumbled Monday, with a below-par read on US services sector activity hinting at weakness in a key area of the economy.

"After a brief rally since the end of last week, markets have taken a moment to catch their breath," noted AJ Bell investment director Russ Mould.

Traders have been broadly upbeat after a "Goldilocks" jobs

report Friday that was neither too good nor too bad suggested the economy was not facing an immediate risk of a recession and could still give the Federal Reserve room to hold monetary policy next week.

There is a growing hope that the central bank will decide against a hike but flag a resumption in July as officials try to bring inflation down while limiting damage to the economy and the troubled banking sector.

Bitcoin held steady Tuesday at \$25,785, one day after sliding after US regulators charged cryptocurrency giant Binance with securities law violations.

AFP

EU agrees economic weapon in face of China trade spat

Brussels, Belgium – The European Union on Tuesday agreed to create a trade tool aimed at punishing countries that seek to put pressure on one of its member countries, after China targeted Lithuania.

The new weapon would allow the 27-nation bloc to impose tariffs, restrict investment and limit access to public contracts for nations seen as engaging in economic blackmail.

"This sends a strong signal that the EU rejects all forms of economic coercion," said EU economy commissioner Valdis Dombrovskis.

"We'll be more assertive in defending our legitimate rights and interests."

The push to bulk up the EU's economic muscle was given impetus by a row with China over trade restrictions imposed on EU member Lithuania after it strengthened ties with Taiwan, which Beijing claims as its territory.

The EU has started action against leading trade partner China at the World Trade Organization over the restrictions.

Beijing has denied taking coercive measures.

The new instrument was agreed between EU member states and lawmakers after a year of negotiation.



It is now expected to enter into force later this year after it is formally approved by the parliament and 27 EU countries.

"It is one more tool at the service of our strategy for a less naive European trade," said France's trade minister Olivier Becht.

Divisions between EU members have typically hampered the bloc from flexing its collective economic might on the international stage.

The tool now hands more powers to the EU executive arm, the European Commission.

But unleashing the eco-

nomie punishment would be only a last-ditch nuclear option if attempts at mediation fail.

In practice, EU member states will report complaints to the commission, which will have four months to rule if coercion is involved.

Any decision would need to then be signed off by a qualified majority of EU countries.

If they agree, a mediation phase would begin during which the commission would seek to convince the third country involved to end its objectionable measures.

Only if that doesn't work would the EU be able to resort to its new powers..

ECB chief warns inflation pressures remain high

Frankfurt, Germany – European Central Bank president Christine Lagarde said Monday that a closely watched measure of eurozone inflation does not appear to have peaked yet, fuelling expectations of further interest rate hikes.

She told a hearing of the European parliament that the latest data suggests "indicators of underlying inflationary pressures remain high.

"Although some are showing signs of moderation, there is no clear evidence that underlying inflation has peaked," she said.

Underlying inflation, which strips out volatile energy, food, alcohol and tobacco prices – came in at 5.3% in May, down from 5.6% in April.

Headline inflation for the 20 countries that use the euro dipped more than expected to 6.1%, from 7.0% the previous month.



Christine Lagarde

However consumer price rises remain well above the central bank's two-percent target, and the stubbornness of underlying inflation in particular is worrying policymakers.

While prices initially surged on the back of high energy costs after Russia invaded Ukraine, the ECB is now concerned that higher wage demands are pushing up inflation.

Lagarde told Monday's hearing in Brussels that "wage pressures have strengthened further as employees recoup some of the purchasing power they have lost as a result of high inflation".

The ECB has raised its key rates by 3.75 percentage points since embarking on an unprecedented campaign of monetary tightening in July last year.

The Frankfurt institution "will ensure that the policy rates will be brought to levels sufficiently restrictive to achieve a timely return of inflation to our two per cent medium-term target, and will be kept at those levels for as long as necessary," Lagarde said.

The ECB chief said last week that policymakers will continue lifting borrowing costs, although at a more gradual pace.

The bank will unveil its next monetary policy decisions on June 15, with observers betting on a rate hike of 25 basis points.

AFP

Apple unveils \$3,500 Vision Pro headset

Cupertino, US – Apple on Monday unveiled its first mixed reality headset, challenging Facebook-owner Meta in a market that has yet to tempt users beyond videogamers and tech geeks. The release was the most significant product launch by the iPhone maker since it unveiled the Apple Watch in 2015.

The Vision Pro, which was generally well received on Monday, will cost a hefty \$3,499 and be available early next year in the United States only, the company said.

"There are certain products that shift the way we look at technology and the role it plays in our lives," said Apple CEO Tim Cook as he unveiled the sleek VR device that resembled ski goggles.

"We believe Apple Vision Pro is a revolutionary product with the performance, immersion and capability that only Apple can deliver," he added.

The headgear, which Apple referred to as a spatial computer, was introduced at the close of an



Apple CEO Tim Cook speaks to media people next to Apple's new Vision Pro headset at the Apple Park campus in Cupertino, California, on Monday (AFP)

Apple event in Cupertino, California in which the company announced a long list of product updates.

The product has been in development at Apple for years, and will focus on gaming, streaming video and conferencing.

Company executives insisted that the Vision Pro offers an unchallenged experience, making the hard sell on tech that has yet

to win the hearts of the greater public.

Unlike its rivals, the Vision Pro delivers mixed reality technology that "clearly situates the user in their environment," said Insider Intelligence principal analyst Yory Wurmser.

"Whereas Meta Quest and other devices are virtual reality-first, Vision Pro keeps the user in the present and emphasizes the mixed reality features -- unless

they choose otherwise," he added.

Vision Pro allows wearers to twist a watch-like "crown" to go from having interactive imagery augment one's surroundings to being fully immersed in a rich 3-D experience that feels like being in a video or on a sports playing field, a hands-on demonstration showed.

Apple went to great lengths to preserve its signature design minimalism, at least to the extent that it could, given the technology squeezed into the Vision Pro.

The device has a glass front, an aluminum frame, five sensors, 12 cameras, a display for each eye, and a computer that is cooled with a fan.

Smaller than a scuba diving mask, Vision Pro will run mainly by being plugged into a power source in a clear effort to preserve a sleek design.

A cord-attached battery pack, which would slide into your pocket, would work for no more than two hours.

AFP

US fines Microsoft \$20mn over child data violations

Washington, US – Microsoft will pay \$20mn to settle government charges that it collected personal information from children without their parents' consent, officials said Monday.

The Federal Trade Commission alleged that from 2015 to 2020 Microsoft collected personal data from children under age 13 who signed up to its Xbox gaming system without their parents' permission and retained this information.

To open an account, users had to provide their first and last names, an email address, and date of birth.

The FTC said Microsoft violated a law called the Children's



Online Privacy Protection Act, or COPPA.

"Our proposed order makes it easier for parents to protect their children's privacy on Xbox, and limits what information Microsoft can collect and retain about kids," said Samuel Levine, head of the FTC's Bureau of Consumer Protection.

"This action should also make it abundantly clear that kids'

avatars, biometric data, and health information are not exempt from COPPA," Levine added. The decision still needs the approval of a federal court before it can be implemented.

The FTC said Microsoft will be required to take several steps to bolster privacy protections for child users of its Xbox system.

Under the COPPA law, online services and websites aimed at kids under 13 must notify parents about the personal information they collect and obtain verifiable parental consent before collecting and using any personal information collected from children.

AFP

Tender Announcement

Request for Pre-Qualification for Project Management and Cost Consultancy Services

National Veterinary Vaccines Company is seeking for an experienced and qualified Project Management Consultancy firms to provide comprehensive Project Management and Cost Consultancy Services for a veterinary vaccine facility project. The selected consultancy will be responsible for overseeing the successful execution of the project, ensuring efficient project management practices, and providing expert cost consultancy advice. Scope of Service: Pre-Contract and Post-Contract Project Management and Cost Consultancy Services.

Qualification No.	PQ-PMC-2023-2
Tender Fee	50 OMR
Last Date for Collection	18 th June 2023
Last Date for Clarifications	22 nd June 2023
Last Date for Submissions	25 th June 2023

Companies with relevant experience in executing similar projects within the same domain are invited to purchase this tender.

For inquiries or to request pre-qualification documents, Please contact us by email:

musaab.alrahi@nvvc.com

+968 92466909

Badr Treatment Abroad, BLK-MAX join hands

Badr Treatment Abroad (BTA), a medical value travel initiative by Badr Al Samaa Group of Hospitals, and MAX-BLK Super Speciality Hospital, New Delhi, have signed an MoU for cooperation in knowledge exchange and facilitation for tertiary healthcare care services.

Executive directors of Badr Al Samaa Group of Hospitals, Moideen Bilal and Firasath Hassan, and unit head & senior vice president of BLK-MAX Super Speciality Hospital, Dr Sanjay Mehta signed the MoU. Dr Puneet Girdhar, senior director and head - Orthopedic Spine Surgery and Dr Yajvender Pratap Singh Rana, senior consultant - Urology, Andrology & Renal Transplant from BLK-MAX Super Speciality Hospital, also shared some recent trends about their respective specialities, a press release said.

Under this MoU, Badr Treatment Abroad, adhering to Min-

istry of Health policies and protocols, aims at bringing tertiary level expertise in various medical specialities within the Sultanate of Oman in the shape of super-specialised Out Patient Department (OPD) consultation sessions and performing advanced and complex surgeries. The vision of this programme is to make tertiary level healthcare services conveniently available within the country to save the time and money of the patients. For medical interventions requiring hi-tech technological intervention, BTA will also facilitate the travel of the patients.

Bila disclosed that Badr Treatment Aboard focuses on helping patients, in case of unavoidable need, choose the appropriate healthcare service provided and hence bring convenience of best quality healthcare and affordability. Under this programme, not just patients but doctors will also be benefitted through knowledge



exchange programmes and workshops, he added.

Hassan said, "We are working out ways to bring more convenience to our patients by way of making arrangements of super speciality OPDs and advanced and complex surgical services within the country, adhering to MoH protocols. Patients look for right guidance in the process of medical value travel and we bring the most trusted healthcare providers to help fill this gap."

Dr Mehta said it was a moment of pride to associate with the largest and most trusted private healthcare provider of the Sultanate of Oman and the main aim of this association was to bring the right quality of treatment to patients. "BLK-MAX Super Speciality hospital will facilitate the training and workshops for the doctors and nurses to keep them abreast with the latest advances," he said.

Ooredoo offers Ta'alaq Internship Programme

Ooredoo now provides an opportunity for young Omanis to boost their future job prospects through hands-on work experience via Ooredoo's Ta'alaq internship programme for students and recent graduates.

The Ta'alaq Programme enables interns to gain an insight into the way Ooredoo operates as an organisation, while also setting them up for future jobs in any industry, as an internship helps them build transferable skills. As a work-based learning experience, work placements have always been a well-known resumé builder, and Ooredoo also aims to share the achievements of top-performing interns



Sulaiman al Mughairi

on its social media platforms, a press release said.

Sulaiman al Mughairi, acting chief people officer at Ooredoo, said, "Finding a suitable job can seem like a daunting task, especially when you are still lacking relevant work experience. But an

internship is a great way to get that real world exposure and skills boost, and can support students in pursuing or even discovering their true passion."

He added, "Our Ta'alaq Programme will help students learn about the telecoms industry from experts and provides a good opportunity to network with professionals in a safe environment."

With phase one completed and phase two already underway, the Ta'alaq internship at Ooredoo lasts for a period of two months and takes place up to three times a year, for a maximum of 15 competitively selected candidates per period.

Health Minister visits Mahoot, Madirah health centres

H E Dr Hilal Ali Hilal al Sabti, Minister of Health, on Monday visited Mahoot Health Centre and Madirah Health Centre in Al Wusta Governorate.

The Minister of Health was briefed on the treatment sections and services, a press release said.

In addition, the Minister met the health staff working in the two health centres along with a number of patients and listened to their feedback and suggestions on the provided health services.

The minister was accompanied by H E Dr Fatma Mohammed al Ajmi, Undersecretary of the Ministry of Health



for Administrative, Financial & Planning Affairs, Dr Ibrahim al Mahrooqi, director general of Health Services of Al Wusta Governorate, and a number of senior officials.



Nespresso launches Vertuo Pop range

Nespresso has launch the Vertuo Pop machine to complement its Vertuo range as the smallest and most affordable machine for Vertuo to date.

Vertuo offers over 25 unique coffee blends and single origins in a range of cup sizes for coffee lovers to enjoy their favourite drink any way they like, whatever the moment from just the touch of a button. To provide an experience of the Vertuo Pop machine for customers, Nespresso has set up an exclusive booth at the Mall of Oman for an entire month, a press release said.

Francisco Nogueira, business executive officer for Nespresso Middle East & Africa, said, "By introducing Vertuo in Oman, we are expanding at-home coffee options for coffee lovers and meeting the needs of consumers across the country

who enjoy large cups of coffee with the high-quality Nespresso is known for. With Vertuo Pop we are introducing the most compact and colourful machine in our Vertuo range, without compromise on versatility or convenience for every taste and moment, delivering the full Nespresso experience."

Nespresso Vertuo Pop machine adds a burst of colour to any coffee corner, no matter how big or small. With six new colourways, Vertuo Pop allows coffee lovers to make a statement that suits their style. The newest member of the Vertuo family provides Nespresso customers with the freedom to personalise and add a style statement to their space in colours, from classic Liquorice Black or Coconut White, to vibrant and playful Spicy Red, Mango Yellow, Aqua Mint or Pacific Blue.

Geely's all-new Coolray built with passion

Geely, the authorised dealer for Geely vehicles is thrilled to announce its latest offering in Oman 'Season to Explore' with a range of exciting benefits.

Geely has earned a reputation worldwide for producing outstanding vehicles. Now, even the people of Oman can indulge in the same extraordinary driving experience with the recently launched all-new Coolray. With its impressive design, cutting-edge technology, and unparalleled cockpit experience, the all-new Coolray is the perfect vehicle for those who crave adventure, thrive on uncertainty, and demand excellence, a press release said.

This season is the perfect op-

portunity for car enthusiasts to become proud owners of a Geely car in Oman.

The 'Season to Explore' offer for all-new Coolray brings in unbelievable prices and also includes a generous cash gift of RO2301, 3 years of AAA roadside assistance, and a manufacturer's warranty for 5 years or 150,000km.

Coolray comes equipped with a range of advanced safety features, including intelligent cruise control, blind spot detection, and lane departure warning, that work together to ensure a secure and comfortable driving experience.

Its sleek and sporty design, featuring a unique grille, spoiler,



rear quad exhaust, and 1.5 turbo engine, gives the car a dynamic and energetic look.

In addition to its stylish exterior, the Coolray also offers a 540° HD panoramic view, auto parking assist, four-way DVR, unique colours, ambient lighting,

Meethaq Islamic Banking continues supporting SMEs

Meethaq Islamic Banking from Bank Muscat continues to play an important role in supporting the micro, small and medium-sized enterprises (MSME) sector, which has a huge potential for improving economic diversification and creating employment opportunities.

As part of the importance given to the sector, Meethaq had earlier launched a dedicated desk for MSMEs & Corporates at Meethaq branches located in prominent business hubs including Al Khuwair, Al Khoudh, Salalah and its head office. Meethaq has managed to extend its support to its customers by offering a complete range of Sharia complaint products and services available to them



through its extended network of 26 Meethaq branches spread across the sultanate.

Ali Ahmed al Lawati, assistant general manager, Meethaq - Corporate Banking, said,

"Meethaq's Shariah-compliant MSME solutions are designed to support our customers grow

their businesses by availing both funded and non-funded financing. Meethaq has also been playing a key role in the development of key sectors in the sultanate including manufacturing, logistics, telecommunication, fisheries, mining and energy. I would like to take this opportunity to thank all our valued customers for the tremendous confidence they have placed in Meethaq, and promise to continue developing our products and services so as to serve them better, everyday."

It may be noted that every Meethaq product goes through Shari'a compliance certification by the bank's Shari'a Supervisory Board and is created in line with the guidelines of the Central Bank of Oman.



Sidrah launches women's leadership programme

Sidrah 2.0 - the second edition of the youth leadership programme for young Omani women has been announced.

Following the resounding success of its inaugural session in 2022, the programme aims to cultivate and enhance the skills of Oman's talented youth, a press release said.

Co-designed and co-run by Lahunna Oman and Outward Bound Oman, Sidrah 2.0 brings together a diverse group of young women aged 20-30 from

across the sultanate, that is all inclusive for students, fresh graduates, jobseekers, and young professionals.

The programme is designed to equip participants with the confidence, resilience, and leadership qualities needed to become the next generation of transformational leaders.

Through a combination of experiential learning, workshops, mentorship, community building and career coaching, Sidrah 2.0 aims to create a transformative

learning experience that seeps into their hearts and ignites a lifelong thirst for continuous learning.

Over the 6-month course of the programme, participants will engage in activities and workshops that foster self-awareness, self-reliance, perseverance, networking, and effective collaboration. This will instill a sense of higher purpose and service-oriented mindsets, enabling participants to make a positive impact in their commu-

nities and beyond.

Sidrah 2.0 has been enhanced with a coaching initiative in partnership with the International Coaching Federation (ICF) - Oman Chapter. Participants will benefit from 3-6 months of group and one-to-one career coaching sessions, providing invaluable support and guidance as they navigate their personal and professional journeys.

Shatha Salim al Maskiry, Lahunna's Founder, said, "After the success of our inaugural edi-

tion, we aim to offer our young Omani women a profound journey that inspires them to own and shape their own future.

After setting such a wonderful precedent last year with our partner Outward Bound Oman, we have expanded the programme's scope to allow us to properly invest in the next generation of leaders who will carry the torch of progress and play a vibrant role in serving the national priorities of Oman's Vision 2040."

JAC Day celebrates automotive excellence

Car enthusiasts and automotive experts gathered at JAC Motors showroom, at Al Hail, in Muscat, last month to celebrate the 53rd JAC Day organised to showcase the latest automotive technology and innovation by JAC Motors, a leading Chinese automaker.

The event was a major success, with attendees from across the region coming together to explore and experience the latest JAC vehicles on display. From sleek sedans to powerful SUVs, JAC Motors had something for everyone at the event, a press release said.

JAC Motors also showcased a range of their vehicles at the event, including the JAC J7 a premium sedan, the JAC T8 pickup powerful lifestyle truck, the JAC JS4 a compact SUV, JAC S3 a subcompact SUV and powerful Titan trucks. Each of these vehi-

cles features the latest technology and innovation from JAC Motors, and provides drivers with a comfortable and enjoyable driving experience.

Attendees at the JAC Day event were also treated to a range of exciting activities, including test drives of the latest JAC vehicles, competitions, and giveaways. The event provided a unique opportunity for car enthusiasts and team at Towell auto center to come together and celebrate the latest advancements in automotive technology.

If you're looking for a reliable and innovative vehicle, JAC Motors and Towell Auto Center are the perfect partners for you. With a range of exciting vehicles and a commitment to excellence, they are sure to provide you with the perfect automotive experience.

Tender Board urges SMEs to register

The General Secretariat of the Tender Board has urged private sector entities in the Sultanate of Oman to register in the electronic platform for managing government tenders and procurement of the state's administrative apparatus units (Isnad).

This platform enhances the competitiveness and transparency in the awarding process, by issuing government tenders and procurement and monitoring the competing of the registered bidders in the platform, in accordance with a systematic basis and a transparent process to ensure the right to compete for these tenders, a press release said.

As a support for small and

medium enterprises SMEs which have obtained entrepreneurship cards from the Small and Medium Enterprises Development Authority, these enterprises were exempted from registration fees through the Isnad website for electronic tenders till August 22.

The registration in (Isnad) enables the private sector companies to increase their chances of obtaining tenders and procurement in the government and private sectors, as well as to acquiring technical and administrative experiences in submitting bids for tenders and procurement through working with government entities and the private sector companies.



Omantel signs MoU with Hytera at COMEX

Omantel, the leading provider of integrated telecommunication services in the Sultanate of Oman, has signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) with Hytera to launch Mission-Critical Push To Talk (MCPTT) at COMEX-- a communications solution where enterprise customers can send instant voice, video, and multimedia messages and many more additional supporting services.

The MoU has been signed during the COMEX event by Eng Baha al Lawati, vice president, Enterprise Unit at Omantel, and Cook Wang, vice president of Hytera Communications, Middle East and Africa, a press release said.

Traditionally, MCPTT has been in use in mission-critical settings where operations cannot be interrupted under any circumstances, such as public safety, transportation, government, and 24x7 operations such as oil and gas, mining, and utili-

ties. The same technology can be used for generic non-mission-critical group communications by shopping centers, stadiums, hospitality, event management agencies, and security staff.

Lawati said, "We are thrilled to announce our partnership with Hytera to introduce this pioneering service at COMEX. It is a continuation of our commitment to our enterprise customers to provide them with innovative and dedicated solutions to cater and address their evolving needs in mission critical operations. Our cutting edge MCPTT service empowers enterprises and set new industry alternative solutions combining reliability, security, and advanced functionality enabling organizations to focus and achieve their business objectives more efficiently. This service will help nearly all industries such as Oil & Gas, ports, airports, municipalities, hospitality, retailers, construction, and

many more."

MCPTT is used for instant communication between individuals and among groups, with the ability to have a command and control center to manage the whole operation from a single panel.

The big edge is that solution has now gone beyond voice-only communication. Modern PTT has advanced features for increased productivity and safety, such as location features, emergency and priority communication, private calls, ambient calls, media sharing, SDS (Short Data Service), status messages, multimedia messaging, video communication, recording and man down detection feature.

The PTT solution is one of many innovative solutions that Omantel hosted at COMEX, including signing major agreements with private and government agencies to accelerate their digital transformation journey.

Gulf College holds futsal finals

In an exciting final match, Gulf Champions bagged the Gulf College Futsal Championship Cup for Gulf College students last week.

The championship ended on May 28, in the college's indoor sports hall. Abtal Al Khaleej won 6/2 over Al Nujoom which came in second place in the final match. The event was held under the auspices of Dr Issa Sabeel al Balushi, chairman of the Board of Gulf College Directors, a press release said.

This championship was attended by a group of academic and administrative staff in order to encourage and support their teams. Al Ittihad stood at third place after its 1-0 victory over Al Qabas.



MoE implements two training programmes

The Ministry of Education, represented by the Directorate-General of Administrative Affairs - Training and Rehabilitation Department, is implementing this week two training programmes within the professional development plan for the year 2023.

The two programmes continue for five consecutive days and target 63 employees from the ministry's General Diwan, the Specialized Institute for Vocational Training for Teachers, and from the educational directorates of the governorates, a press release said.

The first programme is titled 'Identification and Analysis of Training Needs' and presented by Dr Khamis al Kindi, trainer of leadership sciences, administrative development, scientific re-



search, and physiognomy at Akeed Center for Consultation and Training.

The programme includes the presentation of several topics, namely, training process and analysis of training needs, design of the training plan, analysis of needs and training in the work-

place, training specialist and examination of offers.

The second programme is entitled 'Development of Administrative and Behavioural Skills' and presented by Dr Magdi Ahmed Gouda from Mansoura University. The programme includes several topics, namely,

concepts of planning and organisation, and their impact on institutional work, monitoring all wastes of time in and outside the work environment, how to plan according to the Edward Deming PDCA scheme, and a review of some Microsoft office applications to develop the performance and skills of employees within the institution.

The two programmes aim to provide the participants with scientific intellectual and behavioral knowledge and skills, in studying and evaluating the mechanism of raising the level of job performance, developing administrative and applied skills, managing priorities, and assigned tasks.

IN BRIEF

Chinese, US diplomats hold talks in Beijing
Beijing, China - The United States and China held 'frank' and constructive talks in Beijing on improving ties and managing their differences, China's foreign ministry said on Tuesday.
Assistant Secretary of State for East Asian and Pacific Affairs Daniel Kritenbrink travelled to Beijing this week - a rare visit to China by a senior US diplomat as Washington seeks to allay tensions between the rival powers. "The two sides conducted frank, constructive, and effective communication on promoting the improvement of Sino-US relations," China's foreign ministry said of Kritenbrink's meetings with senior Chinese officials, which took place on Monday. The US described Kritenbrink's talks with China's Vice Foreign Minister Ma Zhaoxu and diplomat Yang Tao as 'candid and productive'. China said the two sides discussed 'properly managing differences in accordance with the consensus reached by the two heads of state at their Bali meeting in November last year'.

Australia issues El Nino warm weather alert
Sydney, Australia - Australia warned on Tuesday of a likely El Nino weather pattern this year, delivering warmer, drier days to a country vulnerable to fierce bushfires. The chance of El Nino forming over the Pacific Ocean this year has climbed to 70 per cent, Australia's Bureau of Meteorology (BoM) said, reaching its bar for declaring an 'El Nino alert'. El Nino, a climate pattern typically associated with increased heat worldwide as well as drought in some parts of the world and heavy rains elsewhere, last occurred in 2018-19.
Atmospheric changes would need to strengthen and sustain themselves over a longer period before the BoM declares an El Nino event, said senior climatologist Catherine Ganter.

New Zealand to ban disposable vapes
Wellington, New Zealand - New Zealand announced a ban on disposable vapes on Tuesday, tightening the nation's chokehold on smoking as it also phases in a near-total prohibition on tobacco sales. Disposable vapes - defined as those without removable or replaceable batteries - will be banned from August, Health Minister Ayesha Verrall said.
"Too many young people are vaping, which is why we're making a number of moves to stop that happening," she said in a statement. New vape shops will not be allowed near schools or marae - Maori meeting places.
AFP

Lula announces new initiatives to fight illegal Amazon deforestation

Brasília, Brazil - Brazilian President Luiz Inacio Lula da Silva urged the world on Monday to ensure British journalist Dom Phillips and Brazilian Indigenous expert Bruno Pereira did not die in vain, at commemorations marking one year since their murder in the Amazon rainforest.

In a case that caused global outcry, Phillips and Pereira were killed on June 5, 2022 on a reporting trip to the edge of the Javari Valley, a far-flung Indigenous reservation in northwestern Brazil that experts say has been invaded by drug traffickers, illegal gold miners and poachers.

"I want to pay tribute to Dom Phillips and Bruno Pereira, and all those who lost their lives defending the environment," Lula said at an event in Brasília that opened with a resounding salvo of applause in memory of the two men.

"The best way to honor them is to make sure their struggle wasn't in vain," he said, announcing new initiatives to fight illegal deforestation in the Amazon, which surged under his far-right predecessor, Jair Bolsonaro (2019-2022).

In that spirit, Lula later unveiled an update of an initiative he launched in 2004 during his first term as president, only for it to be scrapped by Bolsonaro, under whom deforestation shot up by 75 per cent compared to



the previous decade.

Iconic Indigenous chief Raoni Metuktire also attended the event, wearing his traditional lip plate and feather headdress, along with the victims' widows and Pereira's daughter, who got hugs from First Lady Rosangela da Silva, Environment Minister Marina Silva and Indigenous Affairs Minister Sonia Guajajara.

Police say illegal fishermen with suspected ties to a drug-trafficking ring have confessed to shooting Phillips and Pereira, hacking their bodies to pieces and hiding them in the jungle, where the remains were found after a 10-day search.

In the latest development, police charged an alleged drug-trafficking boss, Rubens 'Colombia' Villar, with masterminding the murders, Brazilian TV network Globo reported on Sunday.

They also brought charges against an alleged henchman for Villar, local fisherman Janio Freitas de Souza, it said.

Three other fishermen are currently on trial for the murders.

Emblematic case

One year on, the case has become a symbol of the combustible mix of violence, greed, lawlessness and poverty fueling the destruction of the world's biggest rainforest - and the dangers faced by journalists, experts, Indigenous groups and others trying to draw attention to the Amazon's plight.

At another tribute in Rio de Janeiro, Phillips's widow, Alessandra Sampaio, urged people to honor the late men's memory by informing themselves about the fight to save the Ama-

zon, 'that beautiful, marvelous ecosystem we barely know'.

She shared a poignant embrace with Indigenous leader Beto Marubo, a close friend and colleague of Pereira's.

"The Brazilian state owes the world an explanation for these murders," said Marubo, a leader of Indigenous-rights group UNI-

then-director, Bolsonaro appointee Marcelo Xavier.

He was working to help Indigenous groups protect their land - a job that had earned him death threats.

Both men were highly respected for their work, and their disappearance triggered international condemnation, from rock band U2 to Hollywood star Mark Ruffalo to late football legend Pele. "It had such an impact," Sampaio, 52, told AFP.

"I've even heard from lots of children, who say they see Dom and Bruno as heroes of the forest." The fight to protect the Amazon, a key resource in the race to curb climate change, gained new impetus in Brazil when Lula defeated Bolsonaro in elections last year.

But the ongoing threat was underlined last week when Congress passed bills cutting the powers of Lula's environment and Indigenous-affairs ministries and dramatically curbing the protection of Indigenous lands.

Under the new deforestation plan, the government will immediately seize half of all land where forest was chopped down illegally in areas designated to receive environmental protection, officials said.

By 2027 it will set aside three million more hectares of such protected land.

AFP

I want to pay tribute to Dom Phillips and Bruno Pereira, and all those who lost their lives defending the environment

LULA DA SILVA

VAJA. Commemorations, which coincided with World Environment Day, were also scheduled for London and other cities across Brazil.

'Heroes of the forest'

Phillips, 57, who published in *The Guardian*, *New York Times*, *Washington Post* and other leading media, was working on a book called *How to Save the Amazon*.

Pereira, 41, a top official at Brazil's Indigenous affairs agency FUNAI, had taken unpaid leave after clashing with the agency's

Brazil election court to hear Bolsonaro case on June 22

Brasília, Brazil - Former far-right president Jair Bolsonaro will go on trial on June 22 at Brazil's top elections court on charges of abuse of power and misinformation, the court said on Monday.

If convicted, the former Army captain could be barred from running for elected office.

Bolsonaro is being investigated for attacking the electoral courts and criticising, without evidence, the reliability of electronic voting during a meeting with ambassadors last July, less than three months before the October presidential elections in which he was defeated by the current president, Luiz Inacio Lula da Silva.

In front of dozens of ambassadors and diplomats from France, Spain and the European Union, Bolsonaro said he wanted to 'correct failures' in the system and have 'transparency' in the vote.

"I am being accused of a coup all the time (...) I am questioning this ahead of time because we



have time to solve the problem, with the participation of the Armed Forces," added the then-president, who accompanied his speech with a PowerPoint presentation on the electoral system.

The Superior Electoral Tribunal (TSE) will meet in plenary session on June 22 to examine the charges. If necessary, deliberations may continue on June 27 and 29, the court announced.

If convicted, Bolsonaro could be disqualified from politics for eight years.

The federal prosecutor's office supports a declaration of inelig-

bility for the former president 'due to abuse of political power and improper use of the media', the TSE said.

The former president faces more than a dozen administrative cases in the electoral court for alleged abuse of power during the 2022 electoral race. He is also the subject of four investigations in the Federal Supreme Court, with potential sentences that include imprisonment.

Among the charges are his alleged role as mastermind and instigator of the riot of thousands of his supporters who stormed the Supreme Court, Congress and the presidential palace in Brasília on January 8.

The ultra-rightist made the electronic ballot box a target of attacks due to its supposed vulnerability, which he said could be used against him.

Brazil adopted electronic voting in 1996 and so far no security problems have been verified.

AFP

MARITIME EXERCISE



Philippine coast guard personnel aboard a rigid hull boat speed past the Japanese coast guard ship Akitsushima during a maritime exercise with Japan and the United States in the South China Sea off Mariveles town, Bataan province on Tuesday (AFP)

Australian mother thanks 'science' for pardon in 'child murder'

Sydney, Australia - An Australian mother convicted of killing her children claimed a 'victory for science' on Tuesday after an unexpected research breakthrough helped win her freedom after 20 years in prison.

Kathleen Folbigg was jailed in 2003 after she was convicted of killing her four infant children, who died separately without explanation between 1989 and 1999.

She was found guilty despite a lack of forensic evidence linking her to the deaths and steadfastly maintained her innocence during her 20-year incarceration.

Scientific breakthroughs in recent years have uncovered genetic mutations that helped

explain why some of the children died, paving the way for Folbigg to be released from prison on Monday.

"I'm extremely humbled and extremely grateful for being pardoned and released from prison," Folbigg said in her first public statement since being released. "Today is a victory for science and especially truth."

The 55-year-old also said in a short video message she would grieve for her children 'forever', and 'missed them and loved them terribly'.

Folbigg was pardoned by New South Wales Governor Margaret Beazley after a long-running inquiry concluded there was 'reasonable doubt' she had killed her children.

Although she has won her



Kathleen Folbigg is seen after being pardoned, near Grafton in the north of New South Wales state on Tuesday (AFP)

freedom, Folbigg must now go through a separate legal process to have her convictions officially overturned.

Folbigg's lawyer Rhanee

Rego said Australia's court system had 'failed her at every step', and it had taken authorities far too long to reopen the case. "If Australia really wants

to make some good from a tragic story, they'll seriously consider reviewing the system

I'm extremely humbled and extremely grateful for being pardoned and released from prison. Today is a victory for science

KATHLEEN FOLBIGG

of post-conviction review," she told reporters.

"Instead of trying to understand why her children died, potentially through an inquest...

we threw her in jail, locked her up, called her Australia's worst female serial killer."

Rego said Folbigg's legal team would fight to clear her name and make sure 'right is done by her'.

'Bamboozled'

The Australian Academy of Science, which played a crucial role in the Folbigg inquiry, described the convictions as 'Australia's greatest miscarriage of justice'.

"What this case has absolutely shown is there's an absence of a mechanism for the justice system to consider new information, particularly scientific information," chief executive Anna-Maria Arabia told national broadcaster ABC.

Folbigg was released on Monday from a prison in Grafton, in the north of New South Wales state, where she had been serving a sentence of at least 25 years.

Long-time friend Tracy Chapman said Folbigg was slowly getting her head around the wonders of modern technology, such as smartphones and on-demand television.

"She slept for the first time in a real bed, had a cup of tea in a real crockery cup, real spoons to stir with," Chapman told reporters. "That sounds basic to you all, but she's grateful."

"The phones have bamboozled her a bit. Even the television she was going, 'Oh my god, it's got so many capabilities!'"

AFP

Kuwaitis elect new parliament in hope of ending stalemate

Kuwait City, Kuwait - Polls opened on Tuesday in Kuwait's seventh general election in just over a decade, following repeated political crises that have undermined parliament and stalled reforms.

More than 793,000 eligible voters will have the chance to determine the make-up of the 50-seat legislature in the only Gulf Arab state to have an elected parliament with powers to hold government to account.

Polling stations opened at 8am (0500 GMT) and are due to close at 8pm, with the results to be announced the following day.

Voters queued outside in the sweltering summer heat, many of them dressed in traditional thob gowns.

"I came to perform my patriotic duty and I am hopeful that things will get better," Maa-soumah Bousafar, 64 told AFP after casting her ballot.

Kuwait's emir, Nawaf al-Ahmad Al-Sabah, called the vote last month after he had again dissolved parliament amid a persistent deadlock with the executive branch that has deterred investment and impeded growth.

A total of 207 candidates are running for a four-year term as lawmakers, the lowest number in a general election since 1996. They include opposition figures and 13 women.

All but three of the 50 members of parliament who won in 2022 are seeking re-election.

Despite widespread frustra-



A voter casts her ballot at a polling station during parliamentary elections in Kuwait City on Tuesday (AFP)

tion with the political elite, human rights activist Hadeel Buqrais said it was still impor-

tant to cast a ballot.

"This is the only place where I have a voice, and boycotting means giving up my right as a citizen," she told AFP.

"I have to participate, even if I do not expect the new parliament to tackle issues' concerning the country's human rights record, Buqrais said.

Since Kuwait adopted a parliamentary system in 1962, the legislature has been dissolved around a dozen times.

'Failure in leadership'

In March, the constitutional court annulled the results of last year's elections - in which the opposition made significant gains - and reinstated the previous parliament elected in 2020.

"Many in Kuwait do feel as if they are being asked to participate in a political process that

does not serve them," said Daniel L. Tavana, Assistant Professor of Political Science at Penn State University.

"This is because the electoral system is broken," he told AFP, arguing that 'there are limits to what we can expect an elected legislature to do'.

While lawmakers are elected, Kuwait's cabinet ministers are installed by the ruling Al-Sabah family, which maintains a strong grip over political life.

Continual standoffs between the branches of government have prevented lawmakers from passing economic reforms, while repeated budget deficits and low foreign investment have added to an air of gloom.

Oil-rich Kuwait, which borders Saudi Arabia and Iraq, boasts seven per cent of global crude reserves. It has little debt and one of the strongest sovereign wealth funds in the world.

But its lack of stability has scared off investors and dashed hopes of reform in a wealthy country struggling to diversify in similar ways to Gulf powerhouse Saudi Arabia, Qatar and the United Arab Emirates.

"Kuwait is not doing well," said Bader al-Saif, assistant professor of history at Kuwait University. "Elections on steroids... are not the only solution.

"The Kuwaiti political system is in dire need for innovation," he told AFP, criticising a 'failure in leadership in Kuwait's often recycled political class, whether in government or parliament'.

AFP

Prince Harry tells UK court of lifelong 'press invasion'

London, UK - Prince Harry on Tuesday said he had suffered lifelong 'press invasion' and accused some media of having blood on their hands, as he became the first royal in more than 100 years to give evidence in court.

Harry, 38, said he had been the victim of relentless and distressing media intrusion 'most of my life up until this day' and attacked negative portrayals of him as the 'spare to the heir'.

"How much more blood will stain their typing fingers before someone can put a stop to this madness," the younger son of King Charles III added in a witness statement.

"You're then either the 'playboy prince', the 'failure', the 'dropout' or, in my case, the 'thicko', the 'cheat', the 'underage drinker', the 'irresponsible drug taker', the list goes on.

"As a teenager and in my early 20s, I ended up feeling as though I was playing up to a lot of the headlines and stereotypes that they wanted to pin on me... It was a downward spiral," he said, calling the reporting 'utterly vile'.

Harry is accusing Mirror Group Newspapers (MGN) Ltd - publisher of *The Mirror*, *Sunday Mirror* and the *Sunday People* tabloids - of illegal information gathering, including phone hacking.

During cross-examination by MGN's lawyer Andrew Green, Harry admitted that he had no recollection of reading the majority of the articles he had complained about.

But he called them 'incredibly



Britain's Prince Harry arrives to the Royal Courts of Justice, Britain's High Court, in central London on Tuesday (AFP)

invasive' and taken as a whole they had made him acutely paranoid and ruined his relationships.

The prince earned a rebuke from the judge on Monday for not turning up for the opening statement in his case as he had

On Monday, Harry's lawyer David Sherborne said that he was targeted by illegal information gathering even as a young schoolboy and his phone would have been hacked on 'multiple occasions'.

'No aspect of the young prince's life was safe' from press intrusion, he submitted. The case against MGN centres on claims that its tabloids broke the law to obtain stories about Harry and other claimants, including two TV soap opera actors and the ex-wife of a comedian.

At the start of the trial on May 10, MGN apologised and admitted to 'some evidence' of unlawful information gathering, including for a story about Harry.

As a teenager and in my early 20s, I ended up feeling as though I was playing up to a lot of the headlines and stereotypes that they wanted to pin on me... It was a downward spiral

PRINCE HARRY

'Industrial scale'

The case is Harry's latest legal battle with the press since he stepped down from frontline royal duties in early 2020 and re-located to California with his American wife Meghan.

been attending his young daughter's second birthday on Sunday.

Dressed in a dark suit, the Duke of Sussex, as he is formally known, began giving evidence shortly after 0930 GMT after swearing an oath on the Bible.

But it denied voicemail interception and also argued that some claims had been brought too late. Sherborne submitted that 'industrial scale' illegal activities were happening at MGN and had been approved by senior executives.

Legal battles

Harry, who is fifth in line to the throne, has had a turbulent relationship with the press and holds the media responsible for the death of his mother Princess Diana, who died in a Paris car crash in 1997 while being pursued by paparazzi.

In television interviews and his explosive memoir *Spare*, released in January, Harry hit out at other royals, accusing them of colluding with the press.

In court filings unveiled in April, Harry claimed the royal family as an institution had struck a 'secret agreement' with one UK publisher that had prevented him from suing, to avoid a royal entering the witness box.

He also alleged the monarchy wanted to prevent the opening of a 'Pandora's Box' of negative coverage that could tarnish the royal brand. The prince has vowed to spearhead efforts to enforce change on Britain's tabloid behaviour.

He has also taken Associated Newspapers (ANL), publisher of the *Daily Mail*, to court over alleged breaches of privacy, and Rupert Murdoch's News Group Newspapers, which publishes *The Sun*.

AFP



Residents cross the submerged Route Nationale 2 at L'Acul, 37km west of Port-au-Prince, Haiti, on June 3, during heavy rains (AFP)

At least 42 dead in Haiti floods and landslides

Port-Au-Prince, Haiti - At least 42 people were dead and 11 missing in Haiti after heavy rains at the weekend triggered flooding and landslides, civil protection officials said on Monday.

The bad weather hit seven of the 10 departments in the country which is already plunged into a protracted humanitarian crisis fueled by gang violence, political collapse and economic stagnation.

According to the UN, the severe rains affected 37,000 people and displaced 13,400.

The town of Leogane, located 40km (25 miles) southwest of the capital Port-au-Prince, was particularly badly hit, with damage caused by three flooded rivers.

At least 20 people died there, according to Haitian officials.

"The residents are desperate. They have lost everything. The waters have ravaged their fields, washed away their livestock," Leogane Mayor Ernsong Henry told AFP.

Thousands of families were

affected in the town, he said, stressing that the population urgently needed food, drinking water and medicine.

The floods caused extensive material damage across the country, destroying hundreds of homes and damaging several roads.

"Although it is not a hurricane or a tropical storm, the damage observed in the affected areas is considerable," said Jean-Martin Bauer, UN coordinator of humanitarian action in Haiti.

Prime Minister Ariel Henry activated the National Emergency Operation Center in response. The heavy toll highlights the country's vulnerability to natural disasters and its failure to mitigate storm risk just as the hurricane season is about to begin.

Even before the floods, nearly half of Haiti's population was in need of humanitarian assistance, a figure that has doubled in just five years, according to the UN.

AFP

Bangladesh will not force Rohingyas to return: UN

Dhaka, Bangladesh - Bangladesh has promised that no Rohingya refugee will be returned to Myanmar against their will in a controversial proposed repatriation process, a top United Nations official has said.

"Refugees who wish to return should have access to clear, factual information to be able to make free and informed decisions," Kelly T. Clements, the UN deputy high commissioner for refugees, said in a statement late on Monday after a four-day visit to Bangladesh.

"Under no condition should refugees be forced or coerced to return, which the government assured us

would not happen," added Clements, who met both government officials and refugees.

Bangladesh is home to around a million Rohingya, most of whom fled a 2017 military crackdown in neighbouring Myanmar that is now subject to a UN genocide investigation. The Rohingya are widely viewed in Myanmar as interlopers from Bangladesh, despite roots in the country stretching back centuries, and are stateless after Myanmar ceased recognising their citizenship in 2015.

Bangladesh and Myanmar have agreed to a pilot repatriation of 1,176 refugees.

AFP

Iran unveils hypersonic missile, hails deterrent boost

Tehran, Iran - Iran's Revolutionary Guards unveiled an intermediate range ballistic missile on Tuesday capable of travelling at hypersonic speeds of up to 15 times the speed of sound, state television reported.

President Ebrahim Raisi hailed the new missile's hypersonic capability, saying it would boost Iran's 'power of deterrence' and 'bring peace and stability to the countries of the region'.

The official IRNA news agency published photographs of the ceremony in a closed area it did not identify. Several top military commanders were present, including Guards chief General Hossein Salami.

"The range of the Fattah missile is 1,400km (870 miles) and its speed before hitting its target is between 13 and 15 times the speed of sound, IRNA said.



The new hypersonic missile being unveiled in Tehran on Tuesday (AFP)

Like slower ballistic missiles, hypersonic missiles can be equipped with nuclear warheads and Iran's announcement it was producing one in November

prompted International Atomic Energy Agency chief Rafael Grossi to express concern.

But Grossi added he did not see the new missile 'having any

influence' on negotiations with Iran over its nuclear activities.

Talks between Tehran and major powers on reviving a 2015 nuclear deal that was left in tatters when Washington unilaterally abandoned it in 2018 and imposed renewed sanctions are currently stalled.

Iran has since suspended its implementation of the strict limits it agreed to on its nuclear activities and restricted IAEA monitoring in a policy it is only slowly reversing.

Unlike conventional ballistic missiles, the hypersonic ones fly on a trajectory low in the atmosphere, enabling them to reach their targets more quickly and with less chance of being intercepted by other modern air defences.

When the programme was announced last year, Guards

aerospace chief General Amirali Hajizadeh said the system was developed to 'counter air defence shields', adding that he believed it would take decades before a system capable of intercepting it is developed.

Iran's arch foe Israel, which is widely believed to have its own undeclared nuclear arsenal, has multiple air defence shields for countering subsonic and supersonic missiles.

North Korea's test of a hypersonic missile last year sparked concerns about the race to acquire the technology, which is currently led by Russia, followed by China and the United States.

Since March last year, Russia's Kinzhal hypersonic missile has been used multiple times in its war against Ukraine.

AFP

Destruction of frontline dam forces Ukraine evacuations

Kherson, Ukraine - An attack on a major Russian-held dam in southern Ukraine on Tuesday unleashed a torrent of water that flooded a small city, two dozen villages and sent hundreds fleeing.

Moscow and Kyiv traded blame for ripping a gaping hole in the Kakhovka dam in what Kyiv said was an attempt by Russia to hamper Ukraine's long-awaited offensive.

People in the city of Kherson, the largest population centre in the area, headed for higher ground as water, which had been held back by the dam and a hydroelectric plant, rose in the Dnipro River.

"There is shooting, now there is flooding," said Lyudmyla, who had loaded a washing machine onto a cart that was attached to an old Soviet car.

Ukraine's interior ministry said 650 people had been evacuated as of 1000 GMT and 420 more had left the area, with a total of 24 villages flooded.

Ukrainian officials said there were a total of 16,000 people living in the 'critical zone' for potential flooding.

On the Russian-controlled riverbank, Vladimir Leontyev, the Moscow-installed mayor of Nova Kakhovka where the dam is located, said the city was underwater and 900 people had been evacuated.

He said 53 evacuation buses were being sent by the authorities to take people from Nova Kakhovka and two other settlements nearby to safety.

"We are organising temporary accommodation centres with hot meals," he said.

The Kakhovka dam and its power plant were seized by



An aerial view of the dam of the Kakhovka Hydroelectric Power Station after it was partially destroyed (AFP)

People in the city of Kherson, the largest population centre in the area, headed for higher ground as water, which had been held back by the dam and a hydroelectric plant, rose in the Dnipro River

Russia in the first hours of the war.

'War crime'

Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky accused Russia of blowing up the dam and said that the 'world must react'.

He said Russia had carried out 'an internal explosion of the structures' of the plant at 2:50am local time (2350

GMT). Ukraine also called for a meeting of the UN Security Council and warned of a potential 'ecocide' after 150 tonnes of engine oil spilled into the river as a result of the attack.

Western powers also blamed Russia for the damage to the Kakhovka dam, with EU chief Charles Michel calling it a 'war crime'.

NATO chief Jens Stoltenberg

said the dam breach was 'out-rageous' and 'puts thousands of civilians at risk and causes severe environmental damage'.

Russia however said the dam was partially destroyed by 'multiple strikes' coming from Ukrainian forces.

Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov said the destruction was the result of 'deliberate sabotage by the Ukrainian side'.

The Soviet-era dam sits on the Dnipro River, which provides cooling water for the Russian-occupied Zaporizhzhia nuclear power plant, the largest in Europe.

The flooding fuelled already existing fears for the safety of the Zaporizhzhia plant, under

Russian control.

The plant is some 150km (about 90 miles) away from the damaged dam.

Moscow and Kyiv offered conflicting versions on the safety of the facility.

The UN's International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) said its experts 'are closely monitoring the situation' but that there was 'no immediate nuclear safety risk at plant'.

The Russian-installed director of the plant, Yuri Chernichuk, echoed the UN agency and said that 'at the moment, there is no security threat to the Zaporizhzhia nuclear power plant'.

AFP



A 10-member CBI team is seen at the site of the train accident in Balasore, Odisha, on Tuesday (ANI)

India train crash: CBI team visits site, begins probe

New Delhi, India - The Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI) has registered a case in the tragic three-train crash in Odisha's Balasore district that took place on June 2.

In a statement, CBI said it has taken up the case 'on the request of Ministry of Railways...with the consent of the Odisha government and further orders from India government, relating to the train accident involving Coromandel Express, Yashwantpur-Howrah Express and a goods train at Bahanaga Bazar on June 2, 2023.'

The statement also said that a CBI team has reached Balasore and that investigation has begun.

A senior official said: "A team of CBI with experts will investigate to find out if it was a deliberate attempt to derail the Coromandel Express or if it was a human error. Team is camping at the site."

The tragic train accident killed 278 people and injured nearly 1,100 in what was the worst accident suffered by the public transporter since

1995.

Odisha Government Railway Police (GRP) had already registered an FIR (First Information Report) against unidentified persons under multiple sections of the Railway Act 1989 and Indian Penal Code (IPC) in connection with the train accident. The FIR said that 'at present culpability of specific railway employees are not ascertained, which will be unearthed during the investigation'.

Union Railway Minister Ashwini Vaishnaw had said on Sunday that the Railway Board had recommended a CBI probe into the tragic accident. The minister had also said that the accident occurred due to a 'change in electronic interlocking'.

Electronic interlocking is an arrangement of signal apparatus that facilitates safe movement of a train through an arrangement of tracks.

The aim of this system is that no train gets the signal to proceed unless the route is safe.

ANI

Taliban provincial governor killed by a suicide bomber, say officials

Faizabad, Afghanistan - The acting governor of an Afghan province was killed by a suicide bomber on Tuesday, officials said, months after the region's police chief was killed in a similar attack claimed by the Islamic State group.

Security has improved dramatically since the Taliban stormed back to power in August 2021, ousting the US-backed government and ending their two-decade insurgency, but IS remains a threat.

The bomber drove a car filled with explosives into the vehicle carrying Nisar Ahmad Ahmadi - the deputy governor of northern Badakhshan before stepping up as acting governor last month - in the provincial capital

The bomber drove a car filled with explosives into the vehicle carrying Nisar Ahmad Ahmadi in the provincial capital Faizabad

Faizabad.

"The target of this attack was the vehicle carrying Nisar Ahmad Ahmadi," said Muazuddin Ahmadi, the head of culture and information in the province.

The driver was also killed and six others wounded in the attack, which has so far not been

claimed by anyone.

The head of the province's police force was killed in a suicide blast claimed by IS in December last year.

A bomb attack also killed the head of the mining department in April last year.

The Taliban and IS share an austere Sunni Islamist ideology but the latter group is fighting to establish a global caliphate instead of the Taliban's more inward-looking aim of ruling an independent Afghanistan.

IS has killed and wounded hundreds of people in attacks since the Taliban government returned to power, some targeting foreigners, in a bid to undermine the Taliban government.

AFP

DEFENCE & DIPLOMACY



India's Defence Minister Rajnath Singh speaking with his German counterpart Boris Pistorius during their meeting in New Delhi on Tuesday (AFP)

European court condemns Russia over Navalny 2020 poisoning

Strasbourg, France - Europe's top rights court said on Tuesday condemned Russia for failing to properly investigate the 2020 poisoning of opposition figure Alexei Navalny which the West says was an assassination bid.

The Strasbourg-based European Court of Human Rights (ECHR) said Russia had notably failed 'to explore the allegations of a possible political motive for the attempted murder, as well as possible involvement of state agents', unanimously finding Russia had violated the European Convention on Human Rights.

It said Russia had refused to open criminal proceedings into

the poisoning, which led to Navalny falling into a coma and being put on life support.

The anti-corruption campaigner, seen by supporters as a potential political rival of President Vladimir Putin, fell ill while on a domestic flight from Siberia.

Navalny was later evacuated to Germany where he recovered. He has been behind bars since he returned to Moscow in early 2021.

The ECHR noted that tests by the German government had shown 'definite proof' of the presence of the Soviet-era chemical nerve agent Novichok in Navalny's system.



Alexei Navalny is seen on a screen via a video link from his penal colony, at the Basmanny district court in Moscow on April 26 (AFP)

The court said the inquiry by Russia was not open to scrutiny and Navalny had not been al-

lowed to participate.

The investigation was not 'capable of leading to the estab-

lishment of the relevant facts and the identification and, if appropriate, punishment of those responsible', it said.

"It (the probe) therefore could not be considered adequate."

Russia was ordered to pay Navalny €40,000 (US\$43,000) in damages.

The ECHR is part of the pan-European rights body the Council of Europe from which Russia was expelled in the wake of its invasion of Ukraine last year.

It still has a backlog of cases filed by Russian nationals before then and is continuing to issue verdicts.

The ECHR says Russia has a

binding legal obligation to implement its judgements concerning Moscow's actions or violations up until 16 September 2022.

Russia joined the Council of Europe under the presidency of president Boris Yeltsin, when the country was mired in post-Soviet chaos but also amid some optimism over its future within Europe.

One of the crucial consequences of its bid for membership was that Russia imposed a moratorium on use of the death penalty which remains in place to this day.

Navalny and his supporters say he was poisoned by a hit

squad from the FSB security service sent by the Kremlin to eliminate him.

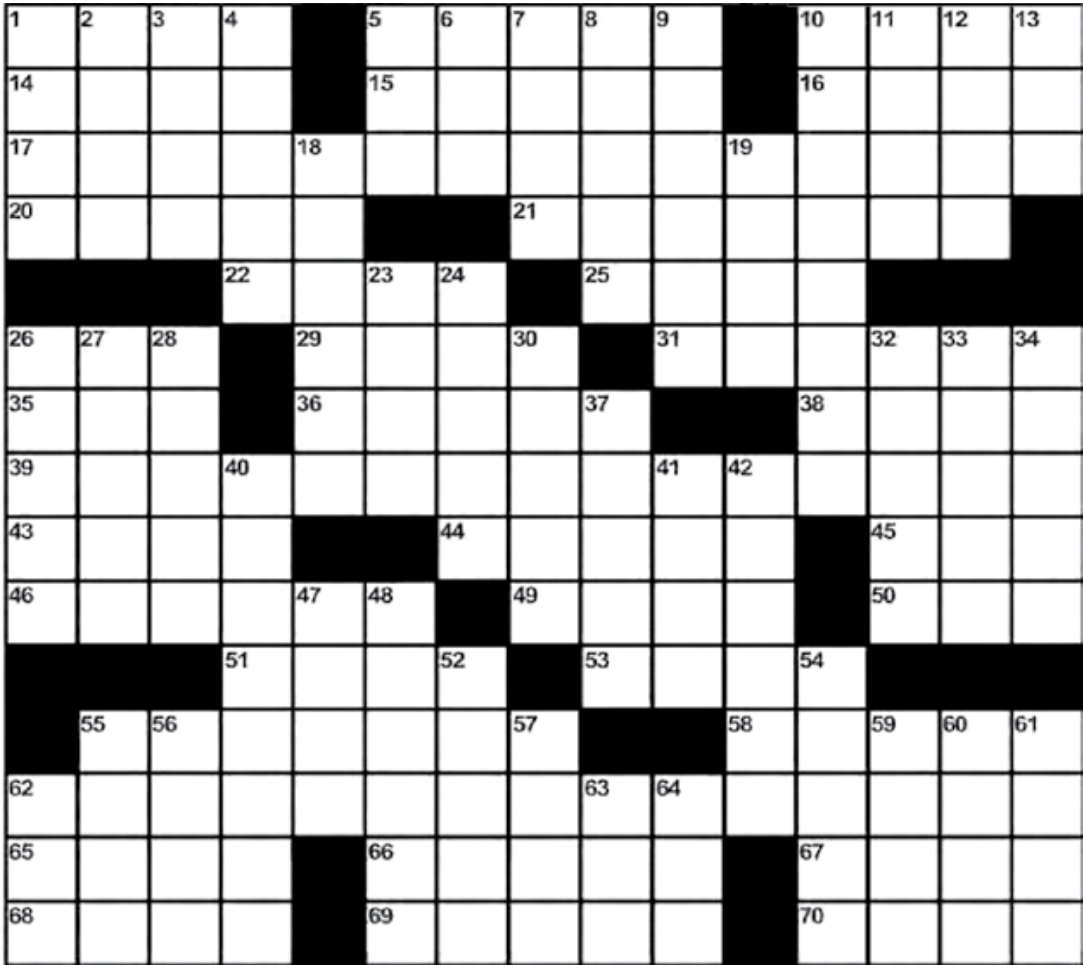
While recuperating in Germany, Navalny even called up one of the men he alleges was sent to poison him, a scene memorably captured in the Oscar-winning documentary 'Navalny' about his case.

Navalny, 47, is currently held in the IK-6 penal colony in the Vladimir region of Russia, with concerns growing over his health.

He has been repeatedly sent by the prison authorities into a punishment cell known by its acronym of SHIZO.

AFP

DAILY CROSSWORD



ACROSS

- 1) Certain something about a person
- 5) Police officer's wear
- 10) Biology lab supply
- 14) Some antelopes
- 15) Dye-yielding shrubs
- 16) Small salmon
- 17) Familiar pattern of events
- 20) Heirloom locale
- 21) Nobleman's domain
- 22) Break from activity
- 25) Four times around the track, often
- 26) Chick-_-A (restaurant franchise)
- 29) Pie crust ingredient
- 31) Husk-wrapped dish
- 35) Biochemistry abbr.
- 36) Bridges in movies
- 38) Tennessee's state flower
- 39) What's just between us?
- 43) Acronym for bad PC info
- 44) Tony winner Uta
- 45) "Give it _!"

- 46) Bar perches
- 49) Deaden
- 50) "Sure"
- 51) Pesky insects
- 53) Kunis of TV and film
- 55) Shuttle's capacity
- 58) Be bombastic
- 62) Holistic health remedies
- 65) "_ want for Christmas.is
- 66) Drew back, as a tide
- 67) Become unhinged
- 68) Lay_ the line
- 69) An anagram for "asset"
- 70) Simple to do
- DOWN**
- 1) Turkish politico (var.)
- 2) Word with "military" or "heating"
- 3) Tin Woodman's fear?
- 4) Moving about
- 5) Candy purchase, some-times
- 6) In_ event (regardless)
- 7) Potentially disastrous
- 8) Flash of light
- 9) Word with "de corps"
- 10) University professor, e.g.
- 11) "_ Jail" (Monopoly direc-tive)

- 12) "Beg pardon ... "
- 13) Angler's pole
- 18) Spots that look like eyes
- 19) Fitzgerald the jazz leg-end
- 23) Common condiment
- 24) Pledged fidelity
- 26) They croak until they croak
- 27) Arctic native
- 28) Florida's Key_
- 30) "Blowin' in the Wind" singer Bob
- 32) Orderly grouping
- 33) Feudal lord
- 34) Legally prevent
- 3 7) Remove sticky stuff
- 40) Madhouse
- 41) 18-wheeler
- 42) As a whole
- 4 7) Country singer Mc-Cann
- 48) Some neck warmers
- 52) Bossa nova kin
- 54) Leave the couch
- 55) Attack with snowballs
- 56) Guthrie with a guitar
- 57) Financial millstone
- 59) Fictional tutor

- 60) Beverages steeped from leaves
- 61) Catch a glimpse of
- 62) "Bali_" ("South Pacific"
- song)
- 63) "A Raisin in the Sun" star Ruby
- 64) Passports, e.g.

NOTE PAD



YOUR DAILY HOROSCOPE



ARIES MARCH 21-APRIL 19

After witnessing a mammoth power play that went nowhere recently, you are starting to feel less and less driven about getting what you want in a certain negotiation. Compromise is looking like the smarter and safer way to go. This may just be a phase, but it is a good time for you to readjust. Tone down your pace. Be less aggressive and you'll start to be happier. Admire the things in life that are free and take a ride in the back seat for a while.



LEO JULY 23-AUGUST 22

Words do a great job of conveying your feelings, but there is nothing quite like physical contact when it comes to making a connection. Simple things like a handshake, hug, or even just a pat on the back will show people that you're genuine. When you meet up with a friend today, give them a hug and tell them how nice it is to see them. They might be taken aback by your affection, but they'll love how it makes them feel. And you will love making them feel that way.



SAGITTARIUS NOVEMBER 22-DECEMBER21

Today will have just the right blend of new, exciting things and old, comforting things. You'll stay on a smooth course and be interested in every minute of the day. This non-boring phase in your life is just getting started, and it's sure to bring you a new work opportunity. Toward the end of the day, you could get a lovely surprise that reminds you just how much you're loved by your friends. You are on the right track in every way, and the Universe is showing you that right now.



TAURUS APRIL 20-MAY 20

Your plans are not yet fully complete, even though you might think they are. There are a still a few details left unexamined, so you need to stay alert today. Be prepared for last-minute changes or revisions and don't be afraid to make big changes even if it requires you to put in more effort than you feel like putting into it. You aren't lazy, so why start making people think you are? Protect your reputation by being patient and thorough today.



VIRGO AUGUST 23-SEPTEMBER 22

If you're feeling indecisive today, don't get frustrated. Get busy! Do the research required to get to the bottom of the pros and cons of what you're dealing with. Then talk to someone who's been through what you're going through. Their experience gives them valuable insight into your situation, although you shouldn't necessarily follow their path without thinking about it. You're still your own person with your own goals. There are no easy answers this time.



CAPRICORN DECEMBER 22-JANUARY 19

The easy life is fine for some, but not for you! You know that when a goal is too easy to reach, it isn't as fulfilling as a hard-won victory. Right now you should be ready to tackle one, two or a dozen challenges! Nothing is going to intimidate you, so it's time to take the more difficult path. Sure, it could leave you exhausted by the end of the day, but you'll love the sense of pride as you drift off to sleep.



GEMINI MAY 21-JUNE 21

If you're working on building a new romance right now, the best course if action is no action at all! Now is not the time to move anything forward even though you're filled with a sense that you've got to act now if you want to make this thing work. Rushing ahead will only force you to compromise what you want. You can't overlook the truth just because you don't like it. Let this person simmer for a while and soon enough they'll come to you.



LIBRA SEPTEMBER 23-OCTOBER 22

Even if you're dying for some peace and quiet, today's activities will be so tantalizing that you'll be convinced you should go out and play! In terms of your love life, you have to stop ignoring the fact that something is starting to develop between you and someone else. Sure, this might be complicating things, but what's the harm in flirting with them a bit more? If you like them, show it! You don't have to take it any further if you're not comfortable.



AQUARIUS JANUARY 20-FEBRUARY 18

You are taking to your new responsibilities quite well, and you're making a strong, positive impression on some very powerful people. So now that you've got everything under control, you're ready take on the next challenge. You are hungry to experience something new. The question is do you go out to find something new or wait for it to find you? The stars say to wait it out. You will know it when you see it, and it should be quite soon.



CANCER JUNE 22-JULY 22

You've been running around a lot lately, but this frenzied pace of yours must stop. Soon. Take a break today. It's the perfect time to brush off projects. There are plenty of much more fun things to do! You and a partner might have different ideas about which option sounds like the best one, but figuring it out will be fun, and this kind of good-natured negotiation will help you grow closer. No matter what you end up doing, you'll be able to really relax your mind.



SCORPIO OCTOBER 23-NOVEMBER 21

Getting time with that elusive so-and-so will be critical for you today, so when you see your opportunity for some alone time with them, don't let it go by. They're ready to talk, so things should get very interesting, very quickly. You've got to jump at things more rapidly than usual. Those who aren't ready to get into the game are going to have to watch it from the sidelines, which would be a shame. You've got many great moves and they shouldn't be wasted.



PISCES FEBRUARY 19-MARCH 20

There could be a negative thinker hovering around you today, and they're going to tick you off. Just when you thought everything was going great, they spout off with a new complaint about something trivial. They need to hear how their negativity affects you, so let them know! Break it to them gently, but don't leave out any details. You'll actually be doing them a huge favor. Their attitude has created problems in partnerships before, and you could help break the cycle.



TEST YOUR KNOWLEDGE

01. Baffin Bay is on which continent?

- A. Asia
- B. South America
- C. Europe
- D. North America

02. In cricket, what term is used to describe the situation when a batsman is "out" for no score in both innings of the same two-innings match?

- A. Golden duck
- B. Bronze duck
- C. Silver duck
- D. Pair

03. What song was a UK #1 hit for Mike and the Mechanics in 1989?

- A. Age of Reason
- B. Reelin' in the Years
- C. The Year of the Cat
- D. The Living Years

Answers: 1. D 2. D 3. D

KIDS COLOURING



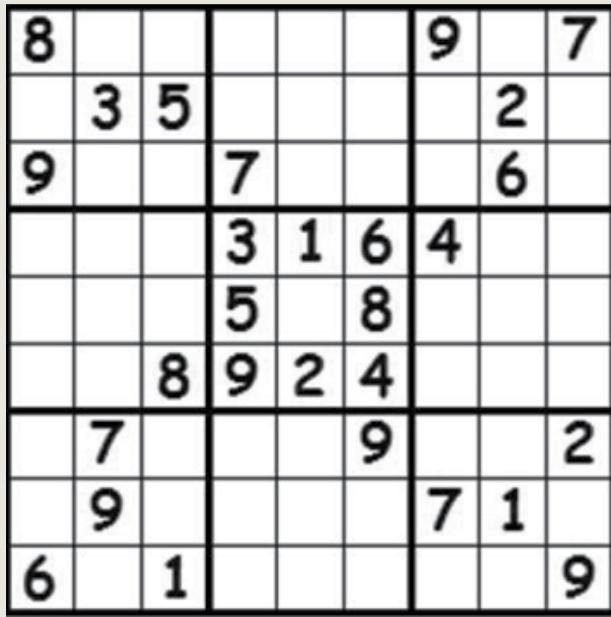
BOGGLER



Each game will present you with a matrix filled with letters. The objective is to form words by linking adjacent letters - to the left, right, on top, bottom, or diagonal to each other. The Boggles Classic game uses a 4 x 4 matrix. Words are valued at one point for each letter in excess of two letters. A three letter word is worth one point, a four letter word is worth two points, and so on. Valid words must be at least three letters long. **Solution** 20-25 words: Excellent, 15-20 words: Very good, 10-15 words: Good, 5-10 words: Average

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



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



Football's future?

Man City eye first Champions League win for state-backed club

Paris, France - Saturday's Champions League final between Manchester City and Inter Milan in Istanbul could mark a definitive turning point in European football.

Victory for City would be the first for a state-backed outfit in Europe's elite club competition, after more than a decade of trying.

The club that has just won a fifth Premier League title in six seasons has been transformed since the 2008 takeover by the Abu Dhabi United Group, backed by Sheikh Mansour bin Zayed al-

The club that has just won a fifth Premier League title in six seasons has been transformed since the 2008 takeover by the Abu Dhabi United Group, backed by Sheikh Mansour bin Zayed al Nahyan

Nahyan. They reached their first Champions League final in 2021, losing 1-0 to Chelsea.

Beaten by Real Madrid in the semi-finals last year, City exacted revenge on the great aristocrats of European football in this season's semi-finals.

Having added the FA Cup to their Premier League title, they are eyeing a treble in Istanbul, something City boss Pep Guardiola has called a "once in a lifetime" opportunity.

Meanwhile, the rest of Europe must wonder if the sport is headed for a period of City dominance.

They topped this year's De-Loitte Football Money League - a

reference in measuring the financial might of European clubs - with revenue last season of 731 million euros (\$783m).

That same ranking a decade ago had City seventh, and their rise has posed problems for the sport, with City being fined 60 million euros in 2014 for breaching UEFA's Financial Fair Play regulations.

The club were banned for two years from UEFA competitions in February 2020 for "serious financial fair play breaches", but the sanction was later overturned by the Court of Arbitration for Sport.



With the English Premier League and FA Cup titles already in their bag, Manchester City are looking in ominous form as they target a historic treble (AFP)

Old elite left behind?

Yet if simply spending vast sums were all that mattered, Paris Saint-Germain would have won the Champions League already.

PSG were bought by Qatar Sports Investments, a subsidiary of Qatar's sovereign wealth fund, in 2011.

In 2017 they signed Neymar and Kylian Mbappe for the two biggest fees in football history, and in 2020 they reached the

Champions League final but lost to Bayern Munich.

A year later they lured Lionel Messi after the Argentinian had to leave cash-strapped Barcelona.

While City put their money into attracting Guardiola and building the perfect environment for him to thrive, PSG threw cash at signing superstars.

That approach has not deliv-

ered the Champions League, but the sense is that they will eventually get there, and keeping Mbappe improves their chances.

PSG are the fifth-richest club in the world according to Deloitte's ranking.

Qatari wealth has helped decimate Barcelona, who spent beyond their means trying to replace Neymar, creating debts that ultimately led to them losing

Messi.

PSG have also managed to keep Mbappe despite interest from Madrid, who are now set to rebuild as Karim Benzema departs.

"The state clubs are a new phenomenon and present a danger that football has not seen before," observed Javier Tebas, president of Spain's La Liga, back in 2019.

The old hegemony risks being broken up as the old elite struggles to keep pace.

Real have won five of the last nine Champions Leagues, with Barcelona, Liverpool, Bayern and Chelsea claiming one each.

Barca have gone out in the Champions League group stage in the last two seasons, while Liverpool will be in the Europa League next season and Chelsea

'No fear' of City in Champions League final, says Inter's Inzaghi

Appiano Gentile, Italy - Simone Inzaghi said Monday that Inter Milan are not scared of Manchester City as he prepares his team for the Champions League final against the mega-rich, treble-hunting outfit.

Inter will contest in Istanbul their first Champions League final since last winning the competition 13 years ago, but City are heavy favourites to be crowned kings of Europe for the first time.

Pep Guardiola's City are in their second Champions League final in three years and come into Saturday's clash after destroying Real Madrid in the last four, and winning both the Premier League and FA Cup.

"We're talking about a football match, there's no fear," Inzaghi told reporters. "We have a lot of respect but we're proud to play this final because we wanted it with every fibre of our being."

Inter will have to stop a potent City attack led by striker Erling Haaland who has netted 12 times in Europe this season and will top the competition's scoring charts whatever happens in Turkey.



Inter Milan coach Simone Inzaghi during a team training session in Milan on Monday

Alessandro Bastoni is one Inter's three central defenders who will be tasked with keeping tabs on Haaland, and he said he was unconcerned about the

prospect of locking horns with the powerful Norwegian.

"You are scared of murderers, not football players. It would be a mistake to talk about fear," he said.

"It's not Haaland versus Inter it's Manchester City versus Inter.

"There's no fear, just the right level of tension. More than anything there is happiness... I can't wait to get out on the pitch."

Inzaghi added that he hasn't yet decided who will partner Lautaro Martinez in Inter's attack as he ponders whether to play veteran Edin Dzeko or in-form Romelu Lukaku.

Belgian striker Lukaku has turned his season around since April and is once again the all-action centre forward who conquered the Serie A title and Inter fans' hearts two years ago.

Lukaku has scored seven times and set up five more in his last 11 matches, form which could yet put him in Inter's starting XI in Istanbul despite former City forward Dzeko being Inzaghi's regular starter.

"I haven't decided in attack, in midfield or in defence because right now, as in last two months or so, I have the possibility of choosing. That's the best thing as a coach," said Inzaghi.

Tottenham appoint Postecoglou as manager

London, United Kingdom - Tottenham have appointed Ange Postecoglou as their new manager on a four-year deal, ending their long search for a new coach.

The 57-year-old Australian, who won the domestic Scottish treble with Celtic this season, will replace Antonio Conte at the Premier League club.

Conte left Spurs by "mutual agreement" in late March, with Cristian Stellini and then Ryan Mason taking temporary charge.

Postecoglou will officially join the London club, who finished a disappointing eighth in the Premier League this season, on July 1.

"Ange brings a positive mentality and a fast, attacking style of play," Tottenham chairman Daniel Levy said on Tuesday.

"He has a strong track record of developing players and an understanding of the importance of the link from the academy - everything that is important to our club."

The Greek-born Postecoglou enjoyed huge success during two years in Glasgow, winning five trophies.



Karim Benzema

Karim Benzema 'signs for Saudi club Al Ittihad'

Riyadh, Saudi Arabia - Real Madrid's Ballon d'Or winner Karim Benzema has signed for Saudi Arabia's Al Ittihad for three years starting next season, a source in the Jeddah-based club told AFP on Tuesday.

"Benzema has signed a contract for his transfer to Al Ittihad for a three-year period starting next season," the Saudi club source said.

Real Madrid announced on Sunday that the 35-year-old was leaving the club after 14 seasons, the day after coach Carlo Ancelotti had said there was "no doubt" Benzema's future lay in the Spanish capital.

If the move is confirmed, Benzema will join his former Real Madrid teammate Cristiano Ronaldo in the Gulf kingdom after the five-time world player of the year moved to Al Nassr from Manchester United following last year's World Cup.

Lionel Messi, who is leaving Paris Saint-Germain after two seasons, has also been linked with a move to Saudi Arabia.

Senior officials from an-

other Saudi Arabian club, Al Hilal, have flown to France to try and seal a deal for Messi after the 35-year-old Argentinian played his last game for PSG at the weekend, two sources with knowledge of the matter told AFP on Sunday.

The Saudi delegation plans to meet Messi's father and agent, Jorge, with the aiming of completing the signing as

Benzema has signed a contract for his transfer to Al Ittihad for a three-year period starting next season

soon as possible.

Benzema joined Madrid in 2009 from Ligue 1 side Lyon.

He made 648 appearances for Madrid and is second on Real's all-time goalscoring list with 354 - only Ronaldo has more.

AFP

Marseille offer out-of-contract Sanchez a salary hike

Marseille, France - Marseille president Pablo Longoria said on Monday the club had offered Chile midfielder Alexis Sanchez an improved deal in the hope of keeping him at the Velodrome next season.

The 34-year-old former Arsenal and Manchester United playmaker's contract at the French club ends later this month.

He scored 14 goals in 35 appearances as Marseille finished third in Ligue 1 in Sanchez's first campaign with the 1993 Cham-

pions League winners.

"Alexis' season was very positive. By his technical standards and his daily work, he was an exemplary leader," Longoria told reporters at an end-of-season press conference.

"Discussions have started in a positive way. We've offered him a higher salary," he added.

Following Saturday's loss to relegated Ajaccio on the last day of the season, Longoria's side are looking for a new coach after Croat Igor Tudor left the club.



Alexis Sanchez

Marseille will feature in the Champions League qualifying play-offs after finishing third behind Ligue 1 champions Paris Saint-Germain and second-placed Lens.

"Firstly, we have to establish a profile and get to know the (new) coach well," Longoria said.

"We have to play in a way that pleases our fans.

"So, we need an attacking game plan, a little bit of rock and roll, a little bit of spice," he added.

AFP

MARATHON CLASHES

Rune, Haddad Maia win French Open epics as Swiatek enjoys brief encounter

Paris, France - Holger Rune and Beatriz Haddad Maia triumphed in French Open epics which took almost eight hours to complete on Monday while Iga Swiatek required just 31 minutes to move into the quarter-finals.

World number six Rune reached a second successive quarter-final in Paris with his first ever five-set win.

The 20-year-old Dane claimed a four-hour 7-6 (7/3), 3-6, 6-4, 1-6, 7-6 (10/7) victory against Francisco Cerundolo and will face 2022 runner-up Casper Ruud in a repeat of last year's bad-tempered quarter-final.

Rune was jeered by the Court Philippe Chatrier crowd for hitting the ball on a double bounce in the fourth game of the third set.

His 23rd seeded Argentine opponent stopped playing, expecting the umpire to call the point for him.

Play continued and Cerundolo, who was called for hindrance when he halted, dropped serve.

"This is tennis. This is sports. Some umpires, they make mistakes. Some for me; some for



Denmark's Holger Rune celebrates beating Argentina's Francisco Cerundolo in their round of 16 match at French Open on Monday (AFP)

him. That's life," said Rune.

Cerundolo, playing in the second week of a Slam for the first time, had the crowd on its feet when he hit back to level the match.

In a dramatic decider, Rune survived being 3-4, 0-40 to hold and then break.

He served for the match at 5-4 but the 24-year-old from Buenos Aires hit back to level for 5-5 and held for 6-5 before the match went to a knife-edge

super-tiebreak. Rune finished the match with 48 winners and 73 forced errors.

"What a sport," tweeted Cerundolo.

Haddad Maia won the third longest ever women's match at Roland Garros to become the first Brazilian woman in the last eight of a Slam since 1968.

Haddad Maia battled from a set and 3-0 down to defeat Sara Sorribes Tormo in three hours and 51 minutes.

The 27-year-old left-hander came through 6-7 (3/7), 6-3, 7-5 against her 132nd-ranked Spanish opponent on Court Suzanne Lenglen, the venue also for the Rune-Cerundolo clash later in the afternoon.

The match was just 16 minutes short of the record four hours and seven minutes it took Virginie Buisson to beat French compatriot Noelle van Lottum in the first round in 1995.

Haddad Maia is the first

Brazilian woman in a Slam quarter-final since seven-time major winner Maria Bueno in 1968.

She will face world number seven Ons Jabeur of Tunisia for a place in the semi-finals.

Defending champion and world number one Swiatek set-up a quarter-final with Coco Gauff after Lesia Tsurenko retired from their last-16 clash through illness after just 31 minutes.

AFP



Brazil's Beatriz Haddad Maia celebrates after beating Spain's Sara Sorribes Tormo (AFP)

Haddad Maia 'inspired' by Bueno, Kuerten in French Open epic

Paris, France - Beatriz Haddad Maia said she was inspired by Brazilian legends Maria Bueno and Gustavo Kuerten as she triumphed in the third longest French Open women's match on Monday.

Haddad Maia battled from a set and 3-0 down to defeat Sara Sorribes Tormo to reach a maiden Grand Slam quarter-final.

The 27-year-old Brazilian left-hander came through 6-7 (3/7), 6-3, 7-5 against her 132nd-ranked Spanish opponent on Court Suzanne Lenglen after three hours and 51 minutes.

The match was just 16 minutes short of the record four hours and seven minutes it took Virginie Buisson to beat French compatriot Noelle van Lottum in the first round at Roland Garros in 1995.

Haddad Maia is the first Brazilian woman in a Slam quarter-final since seven-time major winner Bueno in 1968 and will face world number seven Ons Jabeur of Tunisia for a place in the semi-finals.

Bueno, who died in 2018 at the age of 78, also made the quarter-final of Wimbledon and semi-final of the US Open that year.

"She's a person who inspired us for a lot of years. She was a very powerful woman, as well," said Haddad Maia.

Three-time French Open men's champion Kuerten was also in her thoughts on Monday even if she was only one when he won his first title in Paris in 1997.

"I met him a few times. I got the energy. I understood that everything comes from the heart," said Haddad Maia.

"I think one of the things that he teaches everyone is to play with the heart. Yeah, he's an inspiration for me."

However, she added: "But I don't compare myself with them, because for me, they are another level."

Haddad Maia, ranked 14, eventually claimed victory on a fourth match point in Monday's marathon.



Aryna Sabalenka

'I don't support the war, I don't support Lukashenko': Sabalenka

Paris, France - Belarus tennis star Aryna Sabalenka outrightly condemned her country's role in the war in Ukraine on Tuesday and insisted she is not a supporter of president Alexander Lukashenko.

"I'm not supporting the war. I don't support war, meaning I don't support Lukashenko," the world number two said after reaching the French Open semi-finals by defeating Elina Svitolina of Ukraine.

The 25-year-old had come under increasing pressure to distance herself from her apparent close relationship with

Lukashenko, a key military ally of Moscow in the ongoing conflict.

"We played a lot of Fed Cups in Belarus. He (Lukashenko) was in our matches taking pictures with us after the match. Nothing bad was happening that time in Belarus or in Ukraine or in Russia," she told reporters.

Sabalenka had cancelled two previous press conferences at Roland Garros, claiming she didn't feel "safe" after facing a barrage of questions over her links to her country's strong-man leader.

As Australian Open champion

and potential world number one after the French Open, she was pressed by Ukraine rivals to individually stand up against the war.

"I don't want my country to be involved in any conflict. I said it many times. You have my position. You have my answer," she said.

"I don't want sport to be involved in politics, because I'm just a 25-year-old tennis player. And if I would like to be political I wouldn't be here. I don't want to be involved in any politics."

Sabalenka has had close associations with Lukashenko in the

past.

Lukashenko praised Sabalenka when she won the Australian Open in January.

At the end of Tuesday's match, Svitolina chose not to shake the hand of Sabalenka, a common practice now in the sport when a Ukrainian player meets a Russian or Belarusian opponent.

Svitolina was booed by the crowd while Sabalenka stood at the net. The Ukrainian accused Sabalenka of deliberately "inflaming" the situation.

AFP

'Embarrassing', 'feral', 'disrespectful': French Open fans under fire

Paris, France - Branded "embarrassing", "disrespectful" and even "feral", French Open fans are under fire for the kind of boisterous behaviour usually associated with the diehard ultras of nearby football giants Paris Saint-Germain.

Basking in temperatures which have nudged 30 degrees most days and with beer-sellers roving conveniently throughout the grounds, notoriously impatient locals have made their voices heard.

On the first day at Roland Garros, Ukraine's Marta Kostyuk was booed for refusing to shake

hands with Belarusian opponent Aryna Sabalenka in protest over the ongoing war in her country.

"I want to see people react to it in 10 years when the war is over. I think they will not feel really nice about what they did," said Kostyuk, a vociferous and articulate critic of the ongoing presence of Russian and Belarusian players on tour.

"People should be honestly embarrassed."

Sabalenka initially thought the boos from the showpiece Court Philippe Chatrier were targeted at her and performed an exaggerated bow in response.

On Court Suzanne Lenglen, America's Taylor Fritz knocked out Arthur Rinderknech, the last remaining French player in the singles tournament after 27 had already fallen.

It was only day five and only the second round.

'Very involved'

It was all too much for a proud tennis nation on the 40th anniversary of being able to hail their last home men's champion in Yannick Noah and 23 years since Mary Pierce claimed the women's title.

Fritz had been irritated by the



Have been criticised for their behaviour at French Open

partisan night-time crowd's desperate attempts to push Rinderknech over the line. At one stage, fans even sang the French national anthem. When he wrapped up victory, 25-year-old Fritz placed his finger to his lips to shush his tormentors before theatrically blowing kisses.

The jeers continued as he attempted to carry out the traditional on-court TV interview.

"The crowd was just so great that I had to let it fire me up. They cheered so well for me, I wanted to make sure I won. Thanks guys," the American said sarcastically.

TRUE TEST FOR LONG FORMAT

World Test final takes centre stage amid T20 boom

London, United Kingdom - The World Test Championship final between Australia and India at the Oval starts Wednesday against a backdrop of fears for the long format given the growth of Twenty20 franchise leagues.

Not that there's anything new about cricket-lovers worrying about the future of their sport.

Indeed it was following an 1882 Test at the Oval, after Australia had inflicted England's first defeat on home soil, that the Sporting Times published a mock obituary of English cricket that referenced its cremation, with "the Ashes taken to Australia".

The Ashes has since become a shorthand for Anglo-Australian Test cricket, with a five-match series in England starting next week - just days after the sched-

uled finish of the WTC final.

One current concern is that the riches on offer to leading players from T20 tournament such as the Indian Premier League, and the vastly shorter time it takes to earn the money than by playing five-day Test cricket, makes the traditional format of the game much less attractive to leading modern-day players.

The International Cricket Council's response was to devise the WTC, a two-year cycle of games culminating in a final, in order to give Test cricket greater context.

This week's match marks the culmination of the second edition, with New Zealand having defeated India in the inaugural 2021 final at Southampton.



India captain Rohit Sharma (L) with Australia skipper Pat Cummins with the World Test Championship trophy

Australia and India are two of cricket's major on and off-field powers, together with England, and the 'Big Three' play the ma-

jority of five-match Test series.

The proximity of the first Ashes Test at Edgbaston starting on June 16 has led to the WTC

final being labelled a "warm-up" game for Australia.

But Australia star batsman Steve Smith, whose side just

It's something you aspire to, to be in the top two teams so you get an opportunity to play this game

RAHUL DRAVID

missed out on the inaugural final, after losing their last home series India, is adamant it is a match his side want to win just as much as a 50-over or T20 World Cup final.

"We're all just looking forward to this (match against India)," Smith told reporters at the Oval on Monday. "It's two years in the making, of getting to the final of the World Test Championship, it's a big week for us and India, so we'll get through this then we'll focus after that."

"Every game you play for your

country is important."

And India coach Rahul Dravid said: "It's something you aspire to, to be in the top two teams so you get an opportunity to play this game."

The former India batsman added the fact New Zealand had won the first final after qualifying via the ICC's weighted points system, was proof of how teams whose cricket economics mean they are often restricted to two-Test series, could still be competitive at Test level.

"If you play less you still have the opportunity to make it to the final, as New Zealand showed last time," said Dravid. "Actually playing less gives you an opportunity to protect your resources."

When India, now cricket's financial powerhouse, won the 1983 one-day World Cup final, it transformed the format's status in the sport's most populous nation and with it the economy of the global game.

CLASSIFIEDS

BIRTHDAY WISHES

JHON M KURIAKOSE
JUNE 04

Wish you a very happy birthday and a year filled with love and adventure.
From press team

BIRTHDAY WISHES

MOHAMMED KHAZA
JUNE 06

Wish you many happy returns of the day dear father. May Allah grant you peace & healthy life. Mohammed Zulfikar Ali & Mohammed Zaheer

Oslo

+968 99565653
+968 91220018
maraj_ghalets

We Offer you a combination of luxury and ultimate comfort to create an unique experience with high level of excellent services to ensure your comfort and joy by giving you a unique and unforgettable vacation.

• R.O 50 (Weekdays) • R.O 75 (Weekends)
Check in 13:00 & Check out next day 11:00

ROVE

Our Offers:
Looking for a perfect get away, come visit us at Barka with private pool, totally air conditioned chalet, relax at your comfort.

- R.O 45 (Weekdays)
- R.O 65 (Weekends)

+ 968 71111571
rove_chalet

REGISTER NOW

Registration is now open for the academic year 2023-2024

"A bright future for your child" for Kindergarten stage

From two & a half years to five years

99764111 | 99364499

Al Khoudh - Al Shabab Street, next to Al Khoudh Guest building

SEND YOUR REQUEST FOR Birthday/Anniversary wishes to
wish@apexmedia.co.om with your resident card copy
(It's free of cost)

fustuqaa.om

Luxurious, light and fragile, pistachio cake is kneaded with crunchy and fresh pistachios. Prepared by hand directly from the oven, garnish with cream of pistachio sauce, crunchy pistachios and roses. With every bite, the delicious taste blends with these flavors...

Price: RO.10/-
Delivery to all the states of the Sultanate

92286598

BARIQ

Services:
Kitchen - Supermarket - Bakery - Equipments Supply

+ 968 24831661

Showroom: Ruwi High Street
Near Bank Muscat
Factory: Wadi Kabir Industrial Area Muscat

info@gitter-gulf.com

PROFILE

Our Services:
Profile Dental & Orthodontist Clinic

+968 96646605
Azaiba Near Scientific Pharmacy
+968 72188999
Mawalath South Near Bhala Pharmacy

Timings : 9am - 1pm
4:30pm - 9pm

neenashik@gmail.com

VENTURE & TRAVEL FOR TOURISM

EXPLORE THE WORLD WITH US !!

+968 91378813

P.O. Box :62,
Postal Code : 117,
Wadi Al Kabir, Muscat
- Sultanate of Oman

manger@vttoman.com

FOR RENT

Available 2100 sq meter best in class Warehouse cum office Space, fully furnished ready to use, Located at Prime area of Ghala in the heart of the city having easy access to airport & express Way.

Contact: Girish Sewani - 93893596

ARCHITECTURE HOUSE
Consulting Engineers & Architects

+968 99433380

P.O. Box : 1451 Muttrah
Postal Code : 114
Sultanate of Oman

hussainalshidi@hotmail.com

TADMUR TRAVEL & TOURISM

Book your tickets at the best rates with us to your travel destinations.

+968 24830685

Ruwi high street, near Bank Muscat Opp. Al Baraka Hypermarket

tadmurttravelsllc@gmail.com

WJ Towell Group Company

Quality car rentals at competitive prices.

Muscat 9014 6672, 9679 0684
Sohar 9731 6218 | Salalah 9429 9325

www.orbit-oman.com

اوربٹ ORBIT
Car Rental & Lease

- Fleet of 2,000 vehicles
- Choose from a wide range of brands & models
- PDO, OXY and BP spec vehicles available
- Attractive rates for short-term & long-term lease

mai alkaline
pH 9.1 to 9.5
Alkaline Ionized Drinking Water

HYDRATE SMARTLY

- ✓ Ultra-hydrating
- ✓ Revitalizing
- ✓ Energizing
- ✓ Electrolytes

800 71 222
9275 5522

OmanOasis OmanOasisOfficial OmanOasisWater



OLD PENCIL SHOP

Mohammad Rafi, seller of coloured pencils at his shop in Grand Bazaar in Tehran

In a dimly lit corner of Tehran's Grand Bazaar, Mohammad Rafi is surrounded by all colours of the rainbow in his tiny shop that sells nothing but art pencils. The world may have gone digital, but Rafi has stayed true to his passion of the past 35 years, surrounded by thousands of pencils in every hue and shade imaginable. With the pencils stacked from floor to ceil-

sages of the storied market in the heart of the Iranian capital. Rafi himself takes up much of the three square metres shop in the market's arts and crafts section where he has welcomed generations of customers. "Every time a customer shows up, I enjoy it, even if they don't buy anything," smiled Rafi. He then spent 10 minutes advising a

sells the pencils individually, not by the box. He is proud to cater to all budgets, offering domestically made pencils and ones imported from Europe and America. "The most expensive pencil costs 100,000 tomans (around two euros)," he said, "but it is one of the best." A drawing lover since childhood, Rafi has always adored pencils and, after his technical studies in the 1980s, began his professional life in a pencil company before opening his own shop.

Show must go on He knows that, in the days of high-tech and touch-screens, the humble coloured pencil has had its golden age, looking back nostalgically at the past century when all children carried them in their school bags.

Unlike many other shop owners in the bazaar, he will not pass on the business to his son, a trained physician who is not interested in this work.

Until he retires, however, Rafi plans to keep serving his loyal customers, meeting their every creative need, including some pencils that are no longer produced. "Fortunately, I have a large stock accumulated over the years," Rafi said, proudly brandishing the oldest pencil he has, 'made 72 years ago'.

AFP



Sketchers

In the digital age, Tehran bazaar's popular pencil seller fulfills every student and artist's quest for the right tools to propagate sketching skills

ing, his tiny cubicle has become a photogenic splash of colour, hidden deep in the market known as a 'city within a city'. "I don't know how many pencils there are but I have about 200 colours available," said the proud 50-year-old owner of the Medad Rafi (Rafi's pencils) shop. Finding his shop requires a veritable treasure hunt through the maze of alleys and pas-

schoolgirl in search of two pencils, one blue, one orange, who tried out different types, doodling on a drawing pad on the counter. **Colours and textures** "Depending on what they want to do with it, I advise customers on the colour, the texture or the brand," said Rafi, who only

Three bags of snacks are shown: a bag of Sunflower seeds, a bag of Pumpkin seeds, and a bag of Luxe. All bags have a red banner that says "GOLDEN GIFT".

CRACK
EAT
REPEAT

GOLDEN GIFT

Distributed by

CATERING SOLUTIONS TRADING LLC

Please contact +968 22060236/237



Traditional Papua New Guinean 'Bilum' bags at a craft market in Port Moresby



Maureen Charlie working at a workshop producing traditional Papua New Guinean 'Bilum' bags

BILUM BAGS

CARRY ON

Papua New Guinea women weave their way to a living with traditional bags for all purposes

Inside a compound in Papua New Guinea's capital, Betty Nabi is putting six decades of expertise to work, weaving traditional bags that can last a lifetime.

The boutique workshop in Port Moresby hosts a group of women who specialise in intricately lacing plant fibres together to make the roomy pouches known as bilums, a symbol of indigenous pride.

The word bilum means 'womb' in the local Tok Pisin language, and the women are giving the functional handwoven bags new life - bringing them to an international audience in return for a steady wage in a country where about 40% live below the poverty line.

"You can put everything inside," said Nabi, a 70-year-old weaver at Bilum & Bilas, who earns a monthly paycheck of 1,000 Kina (US\$285), around 50% more than the country's minimum wage. "Go to the store, you can put the kaikai (food) inside. In the big one, you can even carry a baby."

Bilums can take weeks to make, and are dyed using colours unique to the maker's heritage. Nabi and the three other weavers each craft up to five bilums a month, attracting customers as far away as Iceland.

In the fashion world

Demand is growing, with international customers in North America, Europe and neighbouring Australia increasingly looking for authentic bilums, says supervisor Maureen Charlie, 34.

The bags have also drawn attention in the fashion world, with coverage of the patterned pouches and the techniques used to make them landing in top magazines such as Grazia, Harper's Bazaar and Vogue Australia.

Some are concerned, that the bag which serves as a pillar of Papua New Guinea culture is being misappropriated by Westerners for fashion and profit. But

the weavers say they have little issue with its export.

"It makes us proud, like, 'Oh yeah, there's something from PNG there'," said Charlie. "It's special. It's part of who we are and it's part of our culture. We are still doing it, and my children will be doing it."

Bilums are often given to friends and family, or used in welcome rituals, sometimes being laid on the floor in front of guests. But the women are capitalising on their increasing popularity to stitch together a living for their families and other weavers.

"In villages, women don't have any source of income. Sometimes they don't have time to come to the markets, or road access, so they just weave and store their bilums," said Charlie.

Anytime, forever

At the lower end of the market, women in Port Moresby take their wares to stalls in shanty towns, risking the theft of stock in high-crime areas.

"It's a good income for my family. I make bilum and get income to sustain my daily living," said independent weaver Cathy Wariapa, 35, who sells her bags every weekend at a safer spot inside the grounds of a hotel. "Sometimes we don't sell. When there are no buyers, we just take them back."

The bags are usually made and worn by women like Charlie, but Papua New Guinean men are increasingly donning them as pouches around their neck.

"If a woman doesn't wear a bilum... they say you're not a woman," said Charlie. "When I carry a bilum, I feel like I'm a woman and I'm from Papua New Guinea."

So weaving the bags handed down to them by their mothers and grandmothers is about more than money.

"We can make bilum anytime, forever," said Betty Nabi. "We will not stop."

AFP



It's special. It's part of who we are and it's part of our culture. We are still doing it, and my children will be doing it

MAUREEN CHARLIE

JAC
MOTORS

JAC

Season of Giving, JUST GOT BETTER

 **#Cash Gift**
STARTING FROM
RO 1,400
UPTO
RO 2,500

****FREE AAA** ROADSIDE ASSISTANCE
3 YEARS

*****MANUFACTURER'S
WARRANTY**
6 years
or
200,000 KM
(WHICHEVER COMES EARLIER)

##IINJAZ
Service Package
3 YEARS OR 50,000 KM
(WHICHEVER COMES FIRST)
STARTING FROM **RO 100 ONLY**



S3 SUV
*STARTING FROM RO **5,550**



J7
*STARTING FROM RO **6,600**



JS 4 SUV
*STARTING FROM RO **6,700**



T8
*STARTING FROM RO **5,750**

