

Over 45,000 jobs saved in 2021

GFW negotiated with 156 companies to prevent the dismissal of 45,708 Omanis

Our Correspondent Muscat

Laying off of over 45,708 citizens was averted in 2021, according to the General Federation of Oman Workers (GFW).

GFW's statistics show that the federation was able to negotiate with 156 companies to prevent the dismissal of 45,708 workers of the national workforce in

the private sector in 2021. Negotiations included the prevention of reduction in workers' wages.

The statistics showed that labour issues in private sector establishments varied between individual and collective termination of work contracts for the national workforce.

Additionally, many establishments did not pay workers' wages, delayed salaries or made deductions due to shortfalls resulting from the COVID-19 pandemic, and the lifting of financial support for energy, fuel, electricity and water by the government.

The federation resolved labour issues in cooperation with competent authorities, and provided the necessary support to labour unions and workers to reach appropriate solutions.



According to the statistics, GFW gave legal advice to 1,805 and arbitrated 433 settlements with a success rate of 96 per cent. Of these, 367 cases were in Muscat, 60 in North Batinah, and

two each in Buraimi, Dakhliyah and South Sharqiyah.

Fifteen cases were referred to the judiciary, GFW stated.

It confirmed that it recorded certain violations and complaints,

including collective and individual termination of work contracts of national workforce, non-disbursement or delay of wages to workers, and dismissal of citizens from work due to liquidation,

bankruptcy or final closure of companies.

Violations and complaints also included transfer to work sites not specified in employment contract and forcing workers to change their work contracts from unlimited to fixed-term contracts. Some companies did not provide the necessary documents for workers to benefit from facilities provided by banking institutions and finance companies.

GFW received five notices of striking work, of which three were in the oil and gas, and two in trade, industry and media sectors. The federation monitored 126 complaints, including 117 in Muscat, four in North Batinah, two in South Sharqiyah, and one each in Buraimi, Al Wusta and Dakhliyah governorates.

7mn doses of COVID-19 vaccines given in Oman

Our Correspondent Muscat

The ongoing nationwide COVID-19 vaccination campaign has played a significant role in bringing down the rate of hospitalisation in the sultanate, according to the Ministry of Health (MoH).

An MoH official said, "Precautionary measures must be followed despite the high rate of vaccination. So far, 6,967,597 doses have been administered."

He added that the total number of certificates issued against COVID-19 is 3,242,141 and the number of appointments for vaccination is 2,054,248.

MoH has informed that over 8mn doses of COVID-19 vaccine have been reserved. 'Studies are being conducted for administration of a fourth dose/booster dose.'

The ministry stated that the sultanate has not yet reached the stage of community immunity against the virus.

On Sunday, MoH announced 83 COVID-19 infections registered in a three-day period - Thursday to Saturday - taking the total number of cases in Oman to 388,686. There was one death in this period, accounting for a total of 4,254 COVID-19 related deaths.

The total number of COVID-19 patients currently in health institutions is 41, including three in intensive care units.



Undergraduates create multipurpose cooler bag



4 new mining blocks offered in 2022 bidding round

UN describes Oman's efforts in Yemen truce as 'tangible'

Muscat - The United Nations has described the efforts made by Oman in the truce declared in Yemen as 'tangible' and 'appreciated'.

At a meeting with H E Dr Mohammed bin Awad al Hassan, permanent representative of Oman to the UN, David Grisley, UN Resident Coordinator for Humanitarian Affairs in Yemen, said the truce renewed hopes for a peaceful solution to the Yemeni crisis in a way that restores security and stability.

He emphasised that the UN will not give up providing support



David Grisley and H E Dr Mohammed bin Awad al Hassan

and assistance to the Yemeni people.

On his part, H E Hassan reiterated

the sultanate's support for the UN and its envoy for Yemen Hans Grundberg.

The truce renewed hopes for a peaceful solution to the Yemeni crisis in a way that restores security and stability

DAVID GRISLEY

In a sign of Oman's continued role in finding a peaceful solution to the crisis, H E Sayyid Badr Bu-

saidi, Foreign Minister, received Grundberg, on Sunday. During the meeting, views were exchanged on the efforts made to secure the continuation of the truce and the importance of entering into a political process that achieves the aspirations of the Yemeni people.

Yemen's warring sides have accepted a two-month truce, starting with Ramadan. Grundberg announced the agreement beginning April from Amman, Jordan, after meeting separately with both sides in the country's brutal civil war in recent days.

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Undergraduates create multipurpose cooler bag

Our Correspondent
Muscat

A group of students from University of Nizwa has created a multipurpose cooler bag and named it 'Breeze'.

Maryam bin Yousef al Rawahi, the project's financial director, told Oman News Agency that the device has several uses, including storing electronic devices and cold or hot food.

She added that the idea was a result of the high temperatures in Oman and its impact on portable electronic devices such as phones and laptops.

"Additionally, a study has been conducted on the bag's development for it to become suitable for refrigeration," she said.

"We decided to establish a student organisation consisting of seven members from different disciplines in the university. The team is motivated to continue making efforts to turn the idea into a reality and to seek a patent," she added.

Nasser bin Rashid al Riyami, director of product development, said, "Development of the device was not a coincidence. We faced many challenges, but thanks to



(Supplied photo)

the team's efforts and moral support from the Centre for Entrepreneurship in the University of Nizwa, the product saw the light of day. Also, those who believed in our idea and bet on our success played a great role in the transformation of our idea into a product that serves the community."

He informed that the team has plans for the future. "This bag will be more versatile in the future. We will obtain a patent

and establish a big Omani company specialised in making such products and introduce it to the local and global markets."

Muntaha bint Nasser al Awiya, CEO of the company, explained that the device maintains a low temperature inside the bag with the help of external fans that disperse the heat, which in turn affects the cooling and controls the temperature automatically with the help of internal

sensors set to a certain degree.

According to Dr Abdullah bin Muhammad al Shukaili, executive director of the Centre for Entrepreneurship and assistant professor in the Department of Management, University of Nizwa, the Cooling Bag Project is one of the projects registered in Injaz Oman.

The university works to develop students' talents and capabilities and hone skills required for entrepreneurship, he added.

Muscat Municipality builds new walkway in Bausher

Muscat - Muscat Municipality is currently constructing Hay al Baydha walkway in the Jal area in the wilayat of Bausher - a community project that aims to utilise local spaces and provide quality facilities that enhance the wellbeing of community members.

The project will see the construction of a sports walkway that is 2,200m long and 4m wide, adjacent to a cycle-way also of a total length of 2,200m, and 2.5m wide. The project will also pave internal streets, and create more parking lots along the walkway, according to a



(Supplied photo)

press release.

The walkway will enhance the current facilities in the neighbourhood, encouraging people to walk, use bicycles or scooters more. It will also provide the

community an opportunity to end sedentary lifestyles. The walkway will allow community member to have more exposure to nature and to socialise with others.

Over 50 arrested for entering Oman illegally

Muscat - More than 50 Asians were arrested by the Royal Oman Police (ROP) for attempting to enter the sultanate illegally.

In a statement, ROP said, 'Coast Guard Police in North Batinah seized three boats in different locations off the governorate's shores, carrying 52 infiltrators of Asian nationalities while they were trying to enter the country illegally.'

It added that legal procedures have been taken against them.

Meanwhile, the Police Command of South Sharqiyah arrested a person of Arab nationality on charges of theft.

BIG SALE?

YOUR SAY

Conducting any promotion or sale without obtaining prior permission from authorities is prohibited and punishable by law. Businesses must fulfil a number of requirements to conduct promotional activities. They should mention the percentage of discount in Arabic and English apart from putting colour-coded tags on products that are on offer.

The law states that a list of products on sale and promotion, prices before and after reduction, and the percentage of reduction should accompany the application for approval. But are these guidelines being followed properly? Here is what *Muscat Daily* readers had to say:

Anwar Abdullah
Private sector employee

I believe the promotional discounts and sale offers are genuine but on the old stocks. I guess businesses do so to clear the old stuff and at the same time attract customers for the new products which are on display. I think the authorities are doing great in monitoring the markets.

Abdullah Salim al Naamani
Bank employee

Consumers trust that any discount offered by a business is a legitimate reduction of the original price. They may not be genuine because they could raise the price of an item by lets say 20 per cent, then turn around and offer a 20 per cent discount. So, we need to be careful not to be exploited by just remembering the original price of the product.

Abdul Ameer al Shaibani
Retired oil sector employee

I do not trust the promotional discounts in some outlets because there are similar announcement all the time. They come season after season and I sometimes wonder if these are genuine. It is not possible to give discounts throughout the year and permission is needed from the concerned authorities. The authorities need to be on alert on the frequency of granting permission by monitoring the frequent applicants.

Khalfan al Obaidani
Private sector employee

I think most of the sale offers in Oman are genuine because the authorities are strict on this matter. But at the same time, consumers need not believe all that they see. They need to consider the original price before deciding.

Mohan Anandan
Bank employee

Apparently, promotional discounts and sale offers are primarily intended to clear off old stocks as one can rarely find any such offers for newly launched products or services. The onus is therefore on the customer to be wary of such tactics to safeguard his/her interest.

Gopal Subramanian
Chartered accountant

There has been a glut of promotional discounts and sale offers being promoted by hypermarkets and leading fashion stores in Oman, especially post lockdown. Although the offers seem to be tempting, one must remember that money does not come easy in these difficult times. It would be wise to examine the products under offer in broad daylight and get a first hand feel. Needless to say, it's better to play safe than be sorry for a bad buy. To sum up, it's better to be careful before making a purchase.

? NEXT ON YOUR SAY

Are you satisfied with telecommunication services in Oman? Are prices on the higher side?

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

SEND YOUR COMMENTS

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

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(Supplied photo)

Over 6,000 prohibited goods seized in N Batinah

Our Correspondent
Muscat

As many as 6,202 prohibited goods were seized in North Batinah governorate, according to the Consumer Protection Authority (CPA).

CPA has carried out several inspection visits to shops and commercial centres in various governorates in its efforts to monitor markets before Ramadan.

A statement issued by CPA said, 'The Directorate of Consumer Protection in North Batinah governorate seized 6,202 prohibited goods, recorded 616 violations, and dealt with 214 reports during the first quarter of 2022.'

جامعة التقنية والعلوم التطبيقية
University of Technology and Applied Sciences

Electronic Local Auction Announcement

The University Of Technologies Applied Sciences announces the auctions shown in the following table :

M	Tender No.	Tender Subject	Establishments eligible to bid and registered with the Tender Board	Document's Price	Last date for electronic purchasing	Last date bid submission
1	01/2022	Providing cleaning services for the buildings of the University of Technology and Applied Sciences (College of Applied Sciences in Ibra)	Companies and institutions specialized in this field and registered with the Tender Board (Excellent Class)	RO 25/-	08/05/2022 02:30 pm	19/05/2022 at 10:00 am

- Establishments specialized in the above-mentioned works can obtain electronic auction documents from Sunday 10/04/2022 starting form (07:30 am) through the link: <https://etendering.tenderboard.gov.om/>
- All bidding companies must attach with their bids electronic temporary tender bond in the form of a bank guarantee or a cheque certified by one of the banks operating in the Sultanate, not less than (1%) of the bid value, addressed to the name of the Chairman of the Internal Tender Committee, and valid for a period of (90) days from the date of bid submission. Any bid that does not meet the required temporary tender bond shall not be considered before 10:00 am Tuesday (19/05/2022).
- Preference in awarding will be given to small and medium enterprises registered with the Authority for SME development and whose bid includes the biggest percentage of Omanisation and a biggest purchase percentage of national products.

The University shall not be bound to accept the highest or any other bid.

جامعة التقنية والعلوم التطبيقية
University of Technology and Applied Sciences

Local Bidding Announcement

The University Of Technologies Applied Sciences announces the bidding shown in the following table :

Bidding No.	Bidding Subject	Establishments eligible to bid	Purchase , submit Tender Documents	Document's Price	Last date bid submission
01/2022	Managing and operating a café to provide (hot and cold drinks and snacks) to the University of Technology and Applied Sciences (Al Musanna Technical College)	Companies and institutions specialized in this field and entrepreneurs/ owners of Small and Medium business owners	(Department of Administration Affairs) at (Al Musanna Technical College)	RO 25/-	Thursday 19/05/2022 at 10:00 am
02/2022	Management and operation of a food store for the University of Technology and Applied Sciences (College of Technology in Mussanah)			RO 25/-	

- Establishments specialized in the above-mentioned works can obtain auction documents from Sunday 10/04/2022 at (09:30 am).
- All bidding companies must attach with their bids a temporary tender bond in the form of a bank guarantee or a cheque certified by one of the banks operating in the Sultanate, not less than (1%) of the bid value, addressed to the name of the Chairman of the Internal Tender Committee, and valid for a period of (90) days from the date of bid submission. Any bid that does not meet the required temporary tender bond shall not be considered.
- Bids shall be submitted, signed and stamped on the form prepared for this purpose and on the accompanying category table, in closed envelopes sealed with red wax, addressed to the Chairman of the Internal Tender Committee at the University of Technology and Applied Sciences, bearing the auction number and subject with no indication to the name of the bidder.
- Bids must be placed in the sub-tender box in the office referred to above before 10am. of the day specified in the table above. Bids submitted after this date will not be considered, regardless of the reasons for the delay. Preference will be given to companies or institutions whose bids include the biggest Omanisation and biggest purchase percentage of national products.

The University shall not be bound to accept the highest or any other bid.

MARKET WATCH

MSX30 4,240.88

FOREX RATES

(RO1 equals)

Indian Rs	197.18
Pakistani Rs	483.82
Bangladesh taka	224.19
Philippines peso	133.96
Sri Lankan Rs	818.50

*Rates as on April 10
Source: xe.com

BRIEFS

Abu Dhabi's IHC to invest \$2bn in Adani Group firms

The Abu Dhabi-based conglomerate, International Holding Company (IHC), announced that it had signed a US\$2bn investment agreement with Indian multinational conglomerate Adani Group, as primary capital in three Adani portfolio companies – Adani Green Energy Ltd (AGEL), Adani Transmission Ltd (ATL) and Adani Enterprises Ltd (AEL) – through the preferential allotment route.

The boards of AGEL, ATL and AEL met and approved the transaction. The investment is subject to shareholder and regulatory approvals and shall comply with SEBI regulations, according to a WAM agency's report.

The three Adani companies – AGEL, ATL and AEL – are market leaders in their business sectors and span the Adani Group's green portfolio. This investment is testament to the IHC's and the Adani Portfolio's shared vision and commitment of investing in sustainable companies.

IHC will invest US\$500mn in AGEL, US\$500mn in ATL and US\$1bn in AEL, in compliance with SEBI regulations. The transaction is expected to be completed in a month after all necessary approvals are obtained.

Oman offers four new mining blocks in 2022 bidding round

Our Correspondent
Muscat

As part of Oman's strategy to expand the mining sector and its contribution to the country's GDP, the Ministry of Energy and Minerals has announced a new tender offering four mining blocks for investment in the 2022 bidding round.

The Ministry of Energy and Minerals has invited international and local mining companies with experience in mining projects to participate in the forthcoming bid round for the salt (potash) and associated commodities.

The Mining Bid Round 2022 is offering Blocks 53-A, 53-B, 53-C and 51-D in Oman, according to a tender announcement by the ministry.

Blocks 53-A, 53-B and 53-C are located in the flat desert area known as Umm A Samim Sabkhah in the interior Oman.



Block 53-A covers an area of about 3,719 sqkm, Block 53-B covers an area of about 3,823 sqkm and Block 53-C covers an area of about 5,067 sqkm, the ministry stated.

'These blocks are located in the interior Oman lying to the south of the Oman mountains

piedmont, extends into the eastern part of the Rub' al Khali sand desert and its western edge follows the international border with Saudi Arabia. This area is a flat desert desert known as Umm A Samim area,' the Ministry of Energy and Minerals said.

On the other hand, Block 51-D

covers an area of about 567 sqkm. It is located in Mahoot in central Oman, a few kilometers from Shanna harbour along the coast of Oman.

As per the ministry's announcement, the tender is open to receive bids from April 10, 2022 until June 10, 2022.



Khazaen inks deals to set up cement and steel factories

Muscat – Khazaen Economic City has signed two deals to set up a cement factory and a steel industries factory at the integrated economic city.

Khazaen Economic City on Sunday signed an agreement with Al Janabi International Investment Company to establish a factory to produce cement products with an investment of RO2mn for the first phase.

The project will be set up on a total area of 5,000 square meters.

Another agreement was signed between Khazaen Economic City and Moayyad Omair Investment Company to establish a factory for steel industries worth RO1.5mn for the first phase. The project will be set up on a total area of 7,500 square meters.

This factory for steel industries, which will target the local and regional markets, aims to produce 4,000 tons of steel structures monthly.

ONA

OOMCO and Wakud to introduce biodiesel in Oman

Muscat – Oman Oil Marketing Company (OOMCO) and Wakud International have signed an agreement to introduce biodiesel blends to Oman. The two companies will explore the potential of selling different blends of biodiesel to customers in the commercial and marine segments.

For corporations developing decarbonisation strategies, biodiesel can produce immediate impact without any capital expenditure. With almost no sulfur, biodiesel is attractive to marine customers looking to abide by IMO standards and specifications for low sulfur fuel.

"OOMCO has been successfully leading the fuel marketing sector in the sultanate by being

customer-centric and providing the highest level of service to its customers. This collaborative work with Wakud is another example of how OOMCO has always been focusing on customers' needs as this will allow OOMCO to provide new products that support its customers to achieve their decarbonisation target and drive the Oman 2040 vision towards sustainability. We are proud of Wakud as Omani SME and we trust both of us can contribute to the growth of Oman economy," said Tarik al Junaidi CEO of OOMCO.

Maheer al Habsi, CEO of Wakud, said, "We are very excited to work with OOMCO to maximize the benefits of the cir-



cular economy within Oman. Together, with Wakud's waste-

based biodiesel and OOMCO's vast distribution network and lo-

gistics expertise, we believe we can help customers meet their

carbon reduction targets without the need for expensive investment."

Biodiesel life-cycle CO2 emissions are up to 85 per cent less than petrol diesel. Replacing one liter of petrol diesel with one liter of used cooking oil based biodiesel can save 2.6kg of CO2 emissions.

Biodiesel has been a part of the energy mix in Europe, UK and US for the past 20 years and is typically sold as a blend with petrol diesel (between 5 per cent and 20 per cent biodiesel mixed with petrol and diesel). Using a blend requires no changes to existing engines, and virtually all engine manufacturers support biodiesel blends without affecting engine warranties.

Recovery in air travel 'gathering steam' as COVID restrictions eased

Geneva, Switzerland – The International Air Transport Association (IATA) announced that air travel posted a strong rebound in February 2022 compared to January 2022, as Omicron-related impacts moderated outside of Asia.

Total traffic in February 2022 – measured in revenue passenger kilometres or RPKs – was up 115.9 per cent compared to February 2021. That is an improvement from January 2022, which was up 83.1 per cent compared to January 2021. Compared to February 2019, however, traffic was down 45.5 per cent.

February 2022 domestic traffic was up 60.7 per cent compared to the year-ago period, building on a 42.6 per cent increase in January 2022 compared to January 2021. There was wide variation in markets tracked by the IATA. Domestic traffic in February was 21.8 per cent below the volumes of February 2019.

International RPKs rose 256.8 per cent in February 2022 versus February 2021, improved from a 165.5 per cent year-over-year increase in January 2022 versus the year-earlier period.

All regions improved their performance compared to the prior month. February 2022 international RPKs were down 59.6 per cent compared to the same month in 2019.

"The recovery in air travel is



gathering steam as governments in many parts of the world lift travel restrictions.

States that persist in attempting to lock-out the disease, rather than managing it, as we do with other diseases, risk missing out on the enormous economic and societal benefits that a restoration of international connectivity will bring," said Willie Walsh, IATA's director general.

The accelerated growth recorded in February 2022 compared to a year ago, is helping passenger demand catch-up to 2019 levels. Total RPKs in February were down 45.5 per cent

compared to February 2019, well ahead of the 49.6 per cent decline recorded in January versus the same month in 2019. The domestic recovery continues to outpace that of international markets.

"As the long-awaited recovery in air travel accelerates, it is important that our infrastructure providers are prepared for a huge increase in passenger numbers in the coming months. The peak Northern summer travel season will be critical for jobs throughout the travel and tourism value chain. Now is the time to prepare. Governments can help by

ensuring that border positions are staffed adequately and that background security checks for new staff are managed as efficiently as possible," said Walsh.

Middle Eastern airlines' traffic rose 215.3 per cent in February this year compared to February 2021, well up compared to the 145.0 per cent increase in January 2022, versus the same month in 2021.

February capacity rose 89.5 per cent versus the year-ago period, and load factor climbed 25.8 percentage points to 64.7 per cent.

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From energy to ports, Western sanctions target Russian economy



Paris, France – From a coal embargo to new restrictions on investments and European ports closed to Russian ships, the list of Western sanctions imposed on Russia's economy since it invaded Ukraine keeps getting longer.

The European Union decided Thursday to forgo from August purchases of Russian coal, which accounts for about 45 per cent of its total imports.

EU nations have already announced their intention to cut their imports of Russian gas by two thirds by the end of the year, as well as ban European companies from making new investments in the sector critical for the Russian economy.

In another highly symbolic decision, Germany has suspended the entry into service of the Nord Stream 2 pipeline which was due to have allowed a significant increase in imports.

But the bloc has been reluctant to impose a ban on Russian gas and oil so far, as member states such as Germany are heavily dependent on Moscow's fossil fuel exports.

The United States and Canada have imposed their own

embargoes of Russian oil and gas.

Britain plans to end imports of Russian coal by the end of the year, as it has already pledged to do for Russian crude oil and petroleum products.

The EU announced Thursday it is closing its ports to Russian ships. Russian truckers are also banned from operating in the bloc.

EU members as well as the United States, Canada, Switzerland, Norway and Iceland have closed their airspace to Russian aircraft and many Western airlines have halted flights to Russia. The wider aerospace industry is concerned as the export of aircraft, parts and equipment has been banned, as has maintenance work on Russian-registered Airbus and Boeing aircraft. Western insurers cannot provide coverage.

The fifth EU sanctions package adopted Thursday includes a 10bn-euro (US\$10.9bn) ban on exports to Russia, including high-tech goods.

The list of Russian products banned from the EU is also being extended to include certain "critical raw materials and equip-

ment" worth an estimated 5.5bn euros a year to stop the financing of Moscow's war effort in Ukraine.

Shortly before the EU adopted its latest sanctions package, US lawmakers voted to revoke most favoured nation status for Russia and its ally Belarus, which will result on goods from them facing high US import tariffs. Imports of Russian seafood, vodka and diamonds have been banned outright.

The United States on Wednesday also banned any new investment in Russia, and Britain has as well.

The US Treasury has blocked Russia from using dollars held in US banks to make payments on its foreign debt, forcing Moscow to settle in rubles which sets up a likely default.

The White House also declared "full blocking" sanctions on Russia's largest public and private financial institutions, Sberbank and Alfa Bank.

The United States, EU and Britain have frozen foreign currency held by the Russian central bank and banned all transactions with the institution.

AFP

COVID-19 vaccine supply outstrips global demand

Paris, France – After two years of racing to vaccinate the world against COVID-19, the number of available doses now surpasses demand in many areas.

Yet a yawning gap remains in vaccination rates between the richest and poorest countries.

On Friday, Gavi, which co-leads the Covax global distribution scheme, is holding a summit calling for more funds to address the issue of inequality in vaccine access.



Huge production

More than 13bn doses have been produced since the pandemic, 11bn of which have been administered, according to the International Federation of Pharmaceutical Manufacturers and Associations (IFPMA).

Science research group Airfinity expect nine billion more doses to be produced this year. Pfizer alone plans to make four billion doses.

Yet demand could fall to six billion doses this year, IFPMA's director general Thomas Cueni said.

"Since mid-2021, global vaccine production has exceeded global vaccine demand and this gap has continuously risen," Cueni told AFP.

By next year, production could exceed demand by 1.3bn to 3.1bn doses, he added.

Many richer nations are now approaching oversupply. European Union and G7 countries had a surplus of 497mn doses at the end of last month.

There are fears that doses

could go to waste. Covid vaccines have a relatively short shelf-life – AstraZeneca's jabs have a six-month expiry date, the Novavax vaccine has a nine-month shelf life in the EU.

Airfinity says 241mn doses have passed their sell-by date so far during the pandemic.

Billions unvaccinated

Nevertheless, billions of people remain unvaccinated around the world, most of them in developing nations.

Covax, an international public-private partnership co-led by WHO and Gavi, has delivered 1.4bn doses to 145 countries – far short of the planned two billion doses by end-2021.

World Health Organization chief Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus has warned that inequality in vaccine access could lead to the emergence of new, possibly more contagious variants.

The WHO wants 70 per cent of every country's population vaccinated by July. But records are uneven.

Nearly 80 per cent of France's population, for example, has received two doses. But only 15 per cent of the population on the continent of Africa is fully vaccinated, according to Oxford University data.

An average of 42 per cent of the population of 92 low- and middle-income countries participating in Covax have had two doses.

"Vaccine inequity is the biggest moral failure of our times and people and countries are paying the price," UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres said earlier this year.

Covax says it now has enough doses to vaccinate around 45 per cent of the population in the 92 countries receiving donations. But 25 of those countries lack the infrastructure for an effective immunisation campaign.

Making matters worse, many developing countries are being donated doses too close to their expiry date.

UNICEF's supply division director Etelea Kadilli said that in December almost more than 100mn doses had been refused, "the majority due to product shelf life".

Gavi has ruled that doses must be valid for at least 10 weeks on arriving in countries.

Countries like South Africa and India have long called for the World Trade Organization to suspend intellectual property rights for vaccines and anti-Covid treatments, so they can massively boost production.

AFP

MSX up 0.74% as industrial stocks surge

Our Correspondent
Muscat

The benchmark index of the Muscat Stock Exchange rose 0.74 per cent on Sunday helped by sharp rise in some industrial sectors stocks.

MSX30 index gained 31.34 points to close at 4,240.88 points.

All sectoral indices closed in green led by Industrial index which jumped by 1.47 per cent on Sunday.

Financial and Services indices increased 0.13 per cent and 0.94 per cent, respectively. MSX Sharia index also grew 1.12 per cent to close at 485.57 points.

Trading activity, however, remained weak. Total volumes decreased by 14.4 per cent to 27.55mn shares on Sunday compared to 32.2mn shares traded in the previous session.



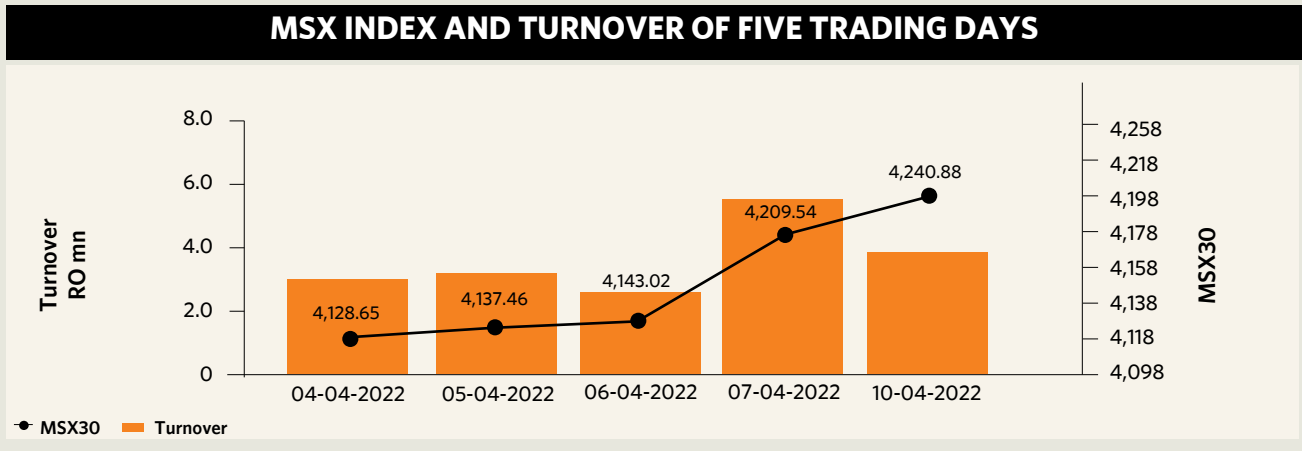
Market turnover fell 29.3 per cent to RO4.87mn from RO6.89mn on Thursday.

Market breadth of the MSX remained positive with 25 advancing stocks to six decliners. As many as 22 traded stocks re-

mained unchanged.

Top gainers of the day were Raysut Cement (up 8.99 per cent), Muscat Finance (up 8.33 per cent), Tageer Finance (up 7.96 per cent), SMN Power (up 6.38 per

cent) and Global Investment Holding (up 5.2 per cent). Top losers were Voltamp Energy (-3.2 per cent), Oman United Insurance (3.1 per cent and HSBC Bank Oman (-2.63 per cent).



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PROFIT AND LOSS ACCOUNT FOR THE YEAR ENDED DECEMBER 31, 2021		
(R.O. '000)		
Details	Current Year (2021)	Previous Year (2020)
Gross Interest Income	2285	3,260
Interest Expense	(1,328)	(1,758)
Net Interest Income	957	1,502
Other Operating Income		
1. Dividend Income		
2. Net Fee & Commission Income	211	366
a) Fee and Commission Income	211	366
Less: b) Fee and Commission Expense		
3. Net Foreign Exchange Income	110	93
a) Income	110	93
Less: b) Expense		
4. Net Income from dealing in securities		-
a) Gain / (loss)		-
Less: b) Expense		
5. Net Income from Investment Securities	580	599
a) Income	580	599
Less: b) Expense		-
Gross Income	1858	2,559
General Administrative Expenses	(1,330)	(1,287)
Depreciation	(7)	(56)
Total Operating Costs	(1,337)	(1,343)
Net Operating Profit (Profit on ordinary activities before provisions)	521	1,216
Income from Subsidiaries		-
a) (Loss) from Islamic financing		-
b)		-
Income from Associate Companies		-
a)		-
b)		-
Income from Other Licensed Activities		-
- Investment Activities		-
Profit from sale of non-banking assets		-
Bad debts Written off	(1,433)	(13)
ECL Allowance (net) charged for Loans & Advances	(1,879)	(4,968)
ECL Allowance (net) charged for Investments		-
ECL Allowance (net) charged for Placements		-
ECL Allowance charged (net) for Off-balance sheet items	196	(166)
ECL Allowance charged (net) for Others (if any)		-
Provision for diminution / Gain in value of investments		-
Profit for the year after loan loss provisions	(2,595)	(3,931)
Taxation	0	(55)
Net profit after tax	(2,595)	(3,986)
Other Comprehensive Income for the year		-
- Movement in fair value of available for sale / FVOCI investment for the year		-
-Effect of currency translation for the year		-
-Any other comprehensive income for the year (please specify)		-
Total Comprehensive Income for the year	(2,595)	(3,986)
ASSETS AND LIABILITIES FOR THE THE YEAR ENDED DECEMBER 31, 2021		
(R.O. '000)		
Assets (Net of total ECL)	2021	2020
1. Cash	232	486
2. Balances with CBO	21203	15,715
3. Capital Deposit with CBO	500	500
4. Government & other Securities		-
5. Treasury Bills & Other Bills		-
6. Due from H.O., branches, principal shareholders & affiliates abroad	3568	3,586
7. Due from banks:		-
i) Placements		-
ii) Loans & Advances		-
8. Other Money Market Placements		-
9. Investments	20032	23,067
10. Loans and advances	47812	51,882
11. Tangible Fixed Assets	34	36
12. Losses carried forward		-
13. Other Assets	2433	2,341
11. Other Liabilities	2433	2,341
Total Assets	95814	97,613
Liabilities	2021	2020
1. Deposits (incl. Govt.)	57951	70,755
a) Demand	14011	16,434
b) Savings	5316	7,273
c) Time	38624	47,048
2. Certificate of Deposits		-
3. Due to H.O., branches, principal shareholders & affiliates abroad		-
4. Due to Banks:		-
i) Placements -		-
ii) Borrowings(Due to Affiliates)	9625	-
5. Other Money Market Deposits		-
6. Borrowings from CBO		-
7. Capital	24500	20,500
8. Reserves	1432	1,432
9. Retained Earnings	(1,421)	1,174
10. Capital Bonds		-
11. Other Liabilities	3727	3,752
Total Liabilities	95814	97,613



Alizz Islamic bank AGM commends achievements

During its Annual General Meeting held in Crowne Plaza, Al Qurum, Alizz Islamic Bank commended the bank's accomplishments over the past two years and its success in overcoming the difficult times.

The meeting was chaired by Yahya bin Said al Jabri, chairman of the Board of Directors of Alizz Islamic Bank, with the presence of other board members, besides Sheikh Issam Khalaf al Enezi, head of the Sharia Supervisory Board of the bank and Sulaiman bin Hamad al Harthi, the bank's CEO, a press release said.

The meeting witnessed the approval of the resolutions submitted to the Board of Directors along with relevant recommendations, in addition to approving different reports, the bank's business strategy during the next phase, and the Shariah Supervisory Board's report. Attendees also discussed the auditor's report and agreed to allocate an amount of RO100,000 to CSR programmes. Moreover, a new board of directors, presided by Yahya bin Said al Jabri, was elected.

The bank's CEO said that a year after Oman Arab Bank's acquisition of Alizz Islamic Bank in 2020, Alizz Islamic Bank was able to realise profits; in addition, its main sectors witnessed remarkable improvements and growth, as the bank announced a net profit after tax of RO4.4mn, compared to a net loss of RO7.6mn in 2020. Through adopting prudent and conservative policies, the bank managed to improve the level of expected credit losses (provisions) against exposure to credit risks, and they had a good coverage ratio against non-performing assets.

In 2021, the bank performed its obligations to its customers by offering financial solutions, with priority given to customer service, through a customer-centered philosophy.

Moreover, the bank continued to invest in the existing digital platforms and offer fin-tech solutions. The bank also remained focused on building on the key pillars that ensure meeting customers' needs while adopting a culture of innovation within the institution.

Harthi added that the performance of most sectors in Alizz Islamic Bank was aligned with the strategic plan, which was considered as the compass that directed these achievements, i.e. a growth of all major indicators, which enhanced the bank's profitability, despite the challenges witnessed during most months of last year due to the ongoing pandemic. Such success is attributed to the focused efforts made with regard to the re-alignment of business, cost rationalisation, financial discipline and improvement of asset quality.

Audi Oman launches Service Cam Programme

Designed to get owners more involved in the repair process, Audi Oman, represented by Premium Motors, has launched the 'Service Cam' programme which provides dealers with the option of communicating with customers over video on their cars' technical status and repair needs.



This transparent and comfortable process involves personalised interaction and intends to keep the customer connected, a press release said. It enables the Audi Oman's service centre to inform and seek approval from its customers for additional repairs to their car.

This is done via a video recording through Service Cam link which the service centre sends to the customers with repair or replacement requirement list. By sending the video footage to customers via email or SMS, the service centre simplifies the service and repair process, and at the same time breaks down communication gap between the two parties. After thoroughly

viewing the video, Service Cam link enables the customer to approve the repair suggested and costs associated with them. Once the customer approves the repairs, the services will be undertaken on their vehicle.

Christian Nehme, general manager of Premium Motors Oman, said, "We are delighted to introduce the Service Cam Programme. We want to guarantee that customers who entrust their

Audi to us for servicing and repairs to know what is happening with their cars. Our technicians will use a video to inform customers about the technical condition of their vehicle and suggest the most appropriate solution. In today's digital era where everyone is connected, this new service furthers our quest for absolute transparency in all our customer relationships."

OOA becomes a member of IOA

Within the goals for which Oman Olympic Academy (OOA) was established to support athletes and qualify staff in sports institutions, OOA officially joined the membership of International Olympic Academy (IOA) in an important step to benefit from the support provided by IOA and the international programmes offered.

The number of National Olympic Academies in IOA is 151 academies. The integral part of IOA is an essential tool in the performance of its mission and course of action to serve as the leading institution of Olympic education, as well as promoting it as a way of life and integrating Olympic values into modern societies around the world, a press release said.

The programmes offered by IOA, which Olympic academies around the world can benefit from, vary, and include a master's degree programme in Olympic Studies, Olympic Education, and Olympic Events Organisation and Management. It aims to qualify competencies to promote and develop Olympic education programmes, in addition to a number of international seminars and courses on Olympic studies, Youth Olympic Games ambassadors, physical education courses for university professors, sports journalists, Olympic medalists, courses on sports, society and culture.



The programmes also include visits to IOA from member national Olympic committees and academies, a group of conferences and educational visits, and the Youth Symposium on World Cultural Heritage organised annually by the Greek Cultural and Educational Club of UNESCO.

It is worth noting that OOA has organised, since its inception, 19 training courses with the

participation of more than 300 staff in sports institutions in many fields represented in sports law, advanced sports management diploma, sports training, sports media, sports event management, Olympic education, and rehabilitation, disabilities in sports institutions, and others.

Mecedes AMG CLS 53 4Matic beats the ordinary

With its unmistakable design, the new limited-edition Mercedes-AMG CLS 53 4MATIC+ is more individualised than ever.

With only 300 units up for grabs, the exterior has been improved with new radiator grilles and bumpers to express the dynamism of the four-door coupé even more strongly. Moreover, the interior has been enhanced with additional leather and trim combinations and the latest generation of steering wheel, a press release said.

A strictly limited special model of the Mercedes-AMG CLS 53 4MATIC+ forms the sporty-exclusive spearhead. Thanks to a comprehensive refresh last summer, technologically, the new CLS is up-to-date with the driving assistance systems, offering the highest level of active safety.

The MBUX (Mercedes-Benz User Experience) multimedia system functions by movement recognition and Energising Comfort uses lighting, music moods and various massage mechanisms for a wide variety of well-being programmes. Valid



until May 31, customers can avail the Mercedes-Benz Ramadan Package when purchasing a new car to receive valuable perks.

"As our first launch of the

year, the new Mercedes-AMG CLS 53 4MATIC+ connects modern luxury with intuitive on-board comfort.

Designed to meet every person's distinct individuality, this

icon provides an exceptional driving experience whether doing the daily commute or taking it for a leisurely weekend spin," said Shaun Michael, CEO at Mercedes-Benz Oman. "I in-

vite our customers to make the most of our fantastic Ramadan offer which will add heaps of benefits to owning one of our vehicles and a peace of mind when it comes to servicing," he added.

Ooredoo facilitates watching Ramadan TV content free

Binge watching your favourite TV series is a Ramadan tradition we all look forward to.

That's why Ooredoo is offering its customers a free three-month subscription to popular streaming app, Shahid, especially for Ramadan. Customers subscribing to, or upgrading, their Shahry Omanuna plans can enjoy a range of exclusive content, including Shahid Originals, premieres, and the latest Arabic movies, with no ad interruptions, any time and on any device, a press release said.

Meanwhile, those signing up to a new Fibre or 5G plans can get Shahid VIP, with even more content for the whole family.

Watch the latest Ramadan series, episodes from MBC, the hottest premieres

and pre-theatrical movies, or catch up on classic dramas, comedies and documentaries from across the region - all in true HD.

There are even first-run shows from Disney, SpaceToon, FOX, Marvel, Star Wars and more, available the same day as they are released in the US, and kids' shows with Shahid Junior. The library is constantly being updated.

With a choice of postpaid plans ranging from RO25 to RO100, Omanuna offers up to 1,000 minutes to the GCC, India, Pakistan and Bangladesh, up to a massive 2TB of data, and other exciting benefits. Offering the ultimate convenience, customers can upgrade or downgrade, swap and repeat, whenever and however it suits them.

INFINITI QX50 bears special Ramadan offer



In celebration of the holy month of Ramadan, INFINITI Oman has announced a special offer on Infiniti QX50 – a premium mid-size SUV with world-first technologies, stand-out design, and unrivalled interior space, all on an entirely new platform.

A senior spokesperson at Infiniti Oman said, “During Ramadan, we try to create a sense of joy for our customers by offering them value added benefits. This is our way of thanking them for their continuous support over

the years. The highly rated QX50 has been created to meet the needs of today’s premium car buyers and to deliver ultimate levels of comfort, design and technology. Its key features include ample space, engine power and efficiency rolled into one unique vehicle. The crossover embodies everything the brand stands for – beautiful design, advanced technology, and empowering performance.”

Range of offers on Infiniti QX50 includes free registration,

assured gifts vouchers, periodic vehicle maintenance, manufacturer’s warranty, AAA/Road assistance card, digital promotion, Infiniti loyalty programme and reference programme.

The special offer will be available till May 19. The scheme is applicable for all the customers purchasing Infiniti vehicles for personal use only. Vehicles purchased with commercial registration will not be eligible for the scheme. Vehicles bought for taxi, driving school, ministries, fleet,

and rent-a-car usage will not be eligible for this scheme. The scheme is applicable for retail billing only.

All customers purchasing Infiniti QX50 will be eligible for free first year vehicle registration, besides Value Added Service (VAS) gift vouchers of RO200 which can be redeemed for vehicle service at the SBA workshop, purchase of value-added service products at SBA workshop, and purchase of parts/accessories at SBA workshops.

NBO offers lowest rates for Badeel travel card

National Bank of Oman (NBO) has added even more value to its Badeel Multi-currency Travel Card with the lowest markup in the market on transactions in Saudi Arabia and the UAE.

Customers can pay in Saudi riyals and Emirati dirhams when using the Badeel prepaid travel card with just a 0.5% load fee, five-times lower than the market average, during the holy month of Ramadan and throughout the year.

Maha al Raisi, head of product at NBO Retail Banking, said, “Whether performing Umrah, visiting friends and family or shopping for Eid al Fitr, customers can enjoy a hassle-free



App and select the relevant currency to enjoy a flat rate without being impacted by currency fluctuations. The card is a safe, easy and cashless way to carry multiple currencies wherever you are in the world.”

NBO’s Badeel Multi-currency Travel Card is available in nine currencies, including US Dollars, Euros, British Pound Sterling, Swiss Francs, Thai Baht and Indian Rupee, besides Omani Rials, Saudi Riyals and United Arab Emirates Dirhams. If the card has multiple currencies loaded, it will automatically recognise the native currency and apply NBO’s enhanced exchange rates and low transaction fee.

travel experience. We understand that customers will be travelling during this period, so we have reduced rates to be the lowest in the market and give customers added peace of mind. There is no need to carry cash, just simply use the award-winning NBO Mobile App or Badeel

Lulu announces fourth draw of 'Shop and Win' promotion

Lulu has announced the fourth set of winners of its 'Shop and Win' promotion which kicked off on March 10 and continues till May 7 at all Lulu outlets in Oman. The winners were selected through an e-affle held on April 6 at Lulu Hypermarket, Barka.



The fourth draw saw Shafeeqa Muhammed Sulaiman al Amri win a cash prize of RO5000 while Nisar Hassan took home RO750. Sayyed Mehsam, Aboobacker E and Yousuf al Wahaibi won RO500 each. Ten winners also won RO200 and 20 others won RO100 each.

There will be a Grand Prize of RO10,000 cash, as well as weekly cash prizes of RO5000, RO750, RO500, RO200 and RO100.

Shabeer KA, regional director - Lulu Hypermarkets Oman, stated “I congratulate the fourth set of winners of our 'Shop and Win' promotion launched to coincide with Ramadan and Eid so as to make this season more valuable and enjoyable for our customers. We are glad that it has received a very positive response till date.”

“Lulu has always remained at the forefront for offering meaningful deals and discounts that meet consumer needs. As part of Ramadan and Eid shopping, Lulu has also launched special deals and promotions for both, offline and online shoppers. Customers can find Special Ramadan Family Packs with all the essential grocery items being offered at the lowest prices. Customers can also check out the daily deals in our online shopping apps, which will make shopping more convenient for them,” he added.

To be part of the promotion, customers have to spend RO10 at any Lulu store and register for the e-Raffle draws. The online shoppers are registered automatically for every shopping worth RO10. The promotion will give 281 customers the opportunity to win amazing cash prizes.

Renault Koleos floats Ramadan offer

Renault Oman, from the house of Suhail Bahwan Automobiles, has announced an attractive offer on Renault Koleos as part of its exclusive Ramadan promotion for the benefit its customers.

A great combination of power and refinement, the Koleos makes its presence felt with large shoulders and muscular side panels that are further enhanced by a robust front end, broad, smart-looking tyres, and a distinctly large wheelbase. Well-defined edges make the overall profile of the 2022 Koleos appear solid and athletic and is one of the most prominent features in this new version.

As per the Renault Oman special scheme, customers who buy Renault Koleos can enjoy free registration, free insurance, three years/100,000km manufacture warranty, free periodic vehicle service package, AAA/road assistance card and reference programme, among others. Social media users who



participate in the Ramadan promotional campaign will also be eligible for attractive prizes.

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

The unique Ramadan offer boasts of a host of advantages for customers purchasing Renault Koleos. All customers purchasing Renault Koleos from

Suhail Bahwan Automobiles will be eligible to participate in the Ramadan campaign scheme. Vehicles purchased with commercial registration will not be eligible for the scheme.

Vehicles bought for taxi, driving school, ministries, fleet, and rent-a-car usage will not be eligible for this scheme.

A spokesperson for Renault

Oman, from the house of Suhail Bahwan Automobiles, said, “We are pleased to announce a special Ramadan offer on Renault Koleos. It is engineered to demand attention and make heads turn. Offering off-road capability with its all-wheel drive transmission, Renault Koleos stands out with its assertive exterior design and enhanced interior comfort.”

MEC conducts workshop



Majan Electricity Company (MEC) conducted a workshop for contractors who participated in Unit Rate tender for Dhahirah and North Batinah governorates.

The workshop aimed at clarifying the tender terms, conditions and requirements. Further, the team responded to contractors’ inquiries regarding the tender and clarified all the queries in regards to the topic, a press release said.

This initiative will contribute

to acceleration of the implementation of network extension works to customers and network improvements, and ensure on-time implementation of projects with higher quality and efficiency.

Zubair EDC signs MoU with Al Zahra College to empower women

Zubair Enterprises Development Centre (Zubair EDC) recently signed an MoU with Al Zahra College for Women to empower, inspire and motivate aspiring women entrepreneurs in Oman via strategies designed to facilitate and foster the same.

The MoU was signed by Dr Musalam Ali al Ma’ani, dean of Al Zahra College and Said al Sahib, Director of Zubair EDC, a press release said.

Sahib said, “We believe that students at this age and level have great potential to become successful entrepreneurs, especially if the right ecosystem has been provided, such as workshops, awareness, R&D and incubation, as a part of their journey at college level.

This is where Al Zahra College and Zubair EDC joins hands to establish the right entrepreneurial infrastructure for the students. With the signing of



this MoU, we look forward to the creation of the right entrepreneurial environment at Al Zahra College which will, in turn,

help mould and motivate Oman’s future women entrepreneurs.”

Dr Ma’ani said, “We are

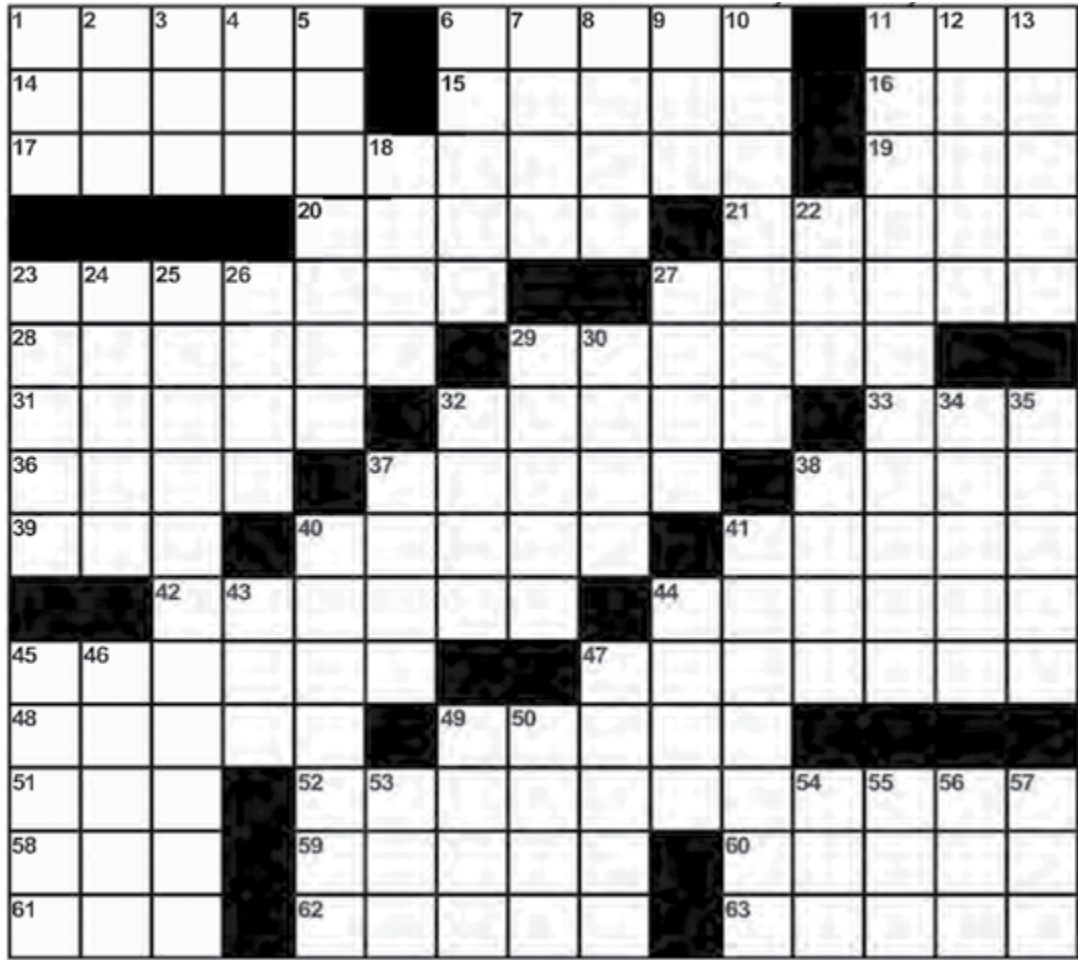
pleased to sign this MoU today with Zubair EDC, and as part of ZCW endeavours to empower its students to become future

businesswomen in Oman, we are certain that our students shall benefit from the centre’s expertise in guiding entrepre-

neurs and standing with them for the success of their businesses will bring. We, at ZCW, attach paramount importance to entrepreneurship, because we are convinced that Omani women have the capabilities to be successful businesswomen.”

Zubair’s EDC vision reflects the importance of small and medium enterprises in enhancing the national economy and contributing to sustainable socio-economic development. Zubair EDC’s Direct Support Programme rewards individuals who prove through their work with the centre, their commitment towards success and their dedication in applying the consultancy and advice provided to them by the Zubair EDC team.

DAILY CROSSWORD



ACROSS

1) South Pacific island group
6) Chases away, as a pest
11) Ambulance letters
14) Not fitting for a purpose
15) Loose fiber for caulking
16) "That feels good!"
17) Some ceramic pottery
19) Biochemistry abbr.
20) Lean
21) Communist leader, once
23) Abolitionists wanted to end it
27) Cal Ripken's record was about one
28) Musk-secreting cats
29) Charitable organizations, often
31) Make reparations, e.g.
32) Three-toed animal with a snout
33) Shortening used in recipes?
36) Type of tape
37) Short choral composition

38) Catch_ (begin to get)
39) Posh health resort
40) Murmured affectionately
41) Floorboard sound
42) Lives
44) Ship area, to a bo's'n
45) On a train
4 7) Some patterned fabrics
48) Small woods
49) Your aunt's little girl
51) Trash bag accessory
52) Use
58) Shuttle letters
59) Dreadlocked one, often
60) Like cheap red meat
61) One _ person
62) "See you later, amigo"
63) Bowling scoring unit

DOWN

1) Bring legal action
2) "Santa" trailer, geographically
3) Vandalize
4) Decide
5) Olympics VIP
6) Vito Corleone's eldest
7) Atlanta hoopster
8) "All right"

9) Sharers' word
10) Metal factory
11) Serious-mindedness
12) Craze
13) Meat cut
18) This puzzle's theme
22) Long introduction of yore?
23) Quite a few
24) Showed sudden joy
25) Guacamole source, often
26) Blow off steam
27) Agitated state
29) Some are blind
30) Newspaper opinion piece
32) It helps to get the job done
34) Celery unit
35) Jabs
37) Indication of spoiled food
38) Dangerous whale
40) Where great ideas come from
41) Give an impression
43) Is no longer
44) Almanac tidbit
45) Behave badly
46) Capital of Idaho
47) "After the Bath" painter Edgar

49) Not yet final, at law
50) "What's gotten _ you?"
53) Cool, old-school
54) Place to drink up
55) In-flight info
56) Cash dispenser
57) Type of whiskey

NOTE PAD

CLIO AVOWS STIR
RUMP TEPEE AERO
EMPTYONESWALLET
AMUSEMENT BEE
SOTSSE BISTRO
EXESRAVELHAD
CPU TIMEZONE
DRAINCLEANING
VIAMEDIASEN
ORTBEASTCALC
WETBAR REF WAH
TILL ELIMINATE
BLEEDONESBRAKES
LASS OVATE SENT
TOTS HYPEDANTS

YOUR DAILY HOROSCOPE

 **ARIES** MARCH 21-APRIL 19

Get together with a group and help make your world a better place! If you can't find people to help you get things done, then organize your very own beautification project. Starting a recycling program, painting murals, collecting trash on the beach, or even just trimming shrubbery would be an excellent use of your time and good exercise. You can do something to make things better. Why not start by making things look better?

 **LEO** JULY 23-AUGUST 22

You know that way you have with words? The way you can make even an insult sound kind of like a compliment? It's a unique verbal charm, and it's going to be even more lethal now. Be careful where you fling any casual comments, because they may not be taken that way and then there'll be that messy "afterward" to clean up. Remember, you might think you're flirting, but to them it's the signal they've been waiting for.

 **SAGITTARIUS** NOVEMBER 22-DECEMBER21

Let forgiveness and charity take over today. The peaceful resolution of a situation might require to you take the high road (yet again). You might not realize it, but you're a role model to many other people. Actions will speak louder than words right now, so be mindful of what you do today. You might want to polish up your etiquette skills a little bit. Younger people in your life are looking to you to set a good example for them.

 **TAURUS** APRIL 20-MAY 20

If you agree to do something today, be sure you intend to stick with it. It isn't wise to commit yourself to something while simultaneously creating an escape plan. If you don't want to be involved, don't get involved. Calling in sick isn't the right way to remove yourself from a situation. This type of flakiness might seem like a harmless white lie, but it's still a lie. Be up-front about things and you'll avoid tarnishing your reputation.

 **VIRGO** AUGUST 23-SEPTEMBER 22

You'll be quite a whirlwind of activity today, and the people around you will have to step aside in order to give you room. Just like a hurricane, you'll hit the scene with quite an impact. But unlike a big, scary tropical storm, your presence will be all about creation, not destruction. The energy you have today will build upon itself over and over again, priming you for an evening of fun. If you don't have any plans for later, make some!

 **CAPRICORN** DECEMBER 22-JANUARY 19

There could be a lot of noise and excitement around you today, but you will be all too happy to stay outside the activity. Your energy will flourish in quieter surroundings, with few (if any) people around you. If you could disappear to a desert island for the day, today would be the one to pick. If you can't get as much alone time as you'd like, try using music to escape from reality. Climb inside your own little world.

 **GEMINI** MAY 21-JUNE 21

Is there someone you need to have a difficult conversation with? Today is the day to do it. Instead of calling them and plunging right into the issue, invite them over for dinner. Good food and a nice atmosphere will create the perfect environment for good communication (and no one can run off if the talk gets a little tense). By dessert, they'll be clear about things and everyone will be happy. A big emotional payoff is coming to you soon.

 **LIBRA** SEPTEMBER 23-OCTOBER 22

You've got a lot of irons in the fire right now, and they're all starting to get too hot to handle. Before there's a total meltdown, you need to get active! Don't jump blindly into anything without first making a plan. Panic will only ensure mistakes. Be flexible enough to change your plan when something new happens, though. Joining with others will give you a sense of security and help you get a little breathing room.

 **AQUARIUS** JANUARY 20-FEBRUARY 18

It might be extremely tempting to let other people take the reins today and just follow along. After all, it's easier to just go where you're told to go and do what you're told to do. However, it's very important for you to fight this urge now. The universe is giving you opportunities to initiate new schemes, social plans, and personal projects, and you should try to take advantage of at least one of these lucky breaks! You have to push yourself.

 **CANCER** JUNE 22-JULY 22

People don't always practice what they preach, and it might seem like someone has an ulterior motive when they make a big effort to help others today. Their zeal might not make any sense to you right now, but that doesn't necessarily mean that anything fishy is going on. Give them the benefit of the doubt. Hold on to your suspicions for now and wait at least until the afternoon to sound any alarm bells. Being a tattletale isn't really your style.

 **SCORPIO** OCTOBER 23-NOVEMBER 21

There are many shifts going on in your relationships at work, home, or school. Luckily, these shifts are generating mostly good results. People who have been in conflict are finally settling their differences (due in part to your level head and negotiations) and turning together to face the same positive direction again. You will be surrounded by a lot more harmony today, which can help the day go by quickly and joyfully.

 **PISCES** FEBRUARY 19-MARCH 20

There's too much going on in your life for you to be concerned with what's going on in other people's lives right now, so avoid any distractions. Juicy-sounding tales of romance or turmoil might seem like a welcome distraction from what you're trying to deal with, but distraction is not what you need right now! Keep your head down and don't get sucked into the daily soap opera around you. There's no point getting down in the dirt.



TEST YOUR KNOWLEDGE

1. Jeremy Strong, Kieran Culkin, Sarah Snook and Matthew Macfadyen are part of the ensemble cast of what award-winning US TV series, first aired in 2018?

A. When They See Us
B. Lodge 49
C. Succession
D. Russian Doll

2. Which of these is one of the activities with which Coretta Scott King was associated?

A. Civil Rights Movement
B. Egyptian archaeology
C. Underwater exploration
D. Aviation

3. What is a common name for the butterfly known as Vanessa cardui?

A. Painted lady
B. Mallo skipper
C. Plum Judy
D. Cabbage white

Answers: 1. C 2. A 3. A

KIDS COLOURING





BOGGLER

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

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

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

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

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

WORD BUILDER



You have three minutes to find all the words contained in this word.

Rules: Words should be at least four letters long, proper nouns and duplicates don't count

SUDOKU EASY ANSWER

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

Ukraine braces for battles as Pope urges Easter ceasefire

Kramatorsk, Ukraine - Ukraine is preparing for 'important battles' against Moscow's forces in the east of the country, officials in Kyiv said, as Pope Francis on Sunday called for an Easter truce to end the war.

Evacuations continued from Kramatorsk, in eastern Ukraine, where a missile strike on Friday killed 52 people at a railway station, while an airport in the central city of Dnipro was completely destroyed in fresh shelling on Sunday.

President Volodymyr Zelensky again condemned atrocities against civilians, and after speaking with German Chancellor Olaf Scholz said they agreed 'that all perpetrators of war crimes must be identified and punished'.

Ukraine's prosecutor general Iryna Venediktova said the country was examining the alleged culpability of 500 leading Russian officials for thousands of war crimes, including President Vladimir Putin.

Pope Francis meanwhile called for an Easter ceasefire in Ukraine to pave the way for peace through 'real negotiation'.

"Let the Easter truce begin. But not to provide more weapons and pick up the combat again - no! - a truce that will lead to peace, through real negotiation," he told a public mass at Saint Peter's Square. The pontiff denounced a war where 'defenceless civilians' suffered 'heinous massacres and atrocious cruelty'.

But Russia's Orthodox Patriarch Kirill, a key Putin ally, issued his own appeal against Russia's 'enemies'. "In this difficult period for our fatherland, may the Lord help each of us to unite, including around power," he said.

"This is how true solidarity will emerge in our people, as well as an ability to push back external



British Prime Minister Boris Johnson (left) and Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky (centre) walking in central Kyiv, on Saturday (AFP)

Let the Easter truce begin. But not to provide more weapons and pick up the combat again - no! - a truce that will lead to peace, through real negotiation

POPE FRANCIS

and internal enemies, and to build a life with more good, truth and love."

'Ready to fight'

The appeals came after Zelensky said Kyiv was readying for a Russian onslaught.

"Sadly, in parallel we see the preparations for important battles, some people say decisive ones, in the east," he said on Saturday at a press conference with

visiting Austrian Chancellor Karl Nehammer. "We are ready to fight and to look in parallel to end this war through diplomacy."

The UN on Sunday said 4,232 civilian casualties had been recorded in Ukraine to date, with 1,793 killed and 2,439 injured.

Ukraine said Kremlin propaganda had laid the groundwork for the bloody campaign, accusing Russian media of long sowing hatred towards Ukrainians.

Foreign Minister Dmytro Kuleba cited civilian killings in the town of Bucha outside of Kyiv after bodies were discovered as the Russian army retreated from the area.

"Bucha did not happen in one day," he said on Twitter on Sunday. "For many years, Russian political elites and propaganda have been inciting hatred, dehumanising Ukrainians, nurturing Russian superiority and laying ground for these atrocities."

The comments came on the heels of a surprise visit to Kyiv on Saturday by British Prime Minister Boris Johnson, the latest Western leader to visit the capital in a show of support.

Hailing the country's response to the Russian invasion, Johnson

offered Ukraine armoured vehicles and anti-ship missiles, crucial to halting the Russian naval siege of Black Sea ports, to help ensure that the country will 'never be invaded again'.

A video released by Zelensky's office showed him and the British prime minister walking through largely empty city streets to Kyiv's historic Maidan Square, as snipers kept watch.

Johnson said the discovery of scores of civilian corpses in Ukrainian towns had 'permanently polluted' Putin's reputation. At least two bodies were found inside a manhole at a petrol station on a motorway outside Kyiv on Sunday, an AFP reporter saw.

AFP



A demonstrator holds a placard as he takes part in a protest along with others at the entrance of the president's office in Colombo on Sunday (AFP)

Sri Lanka nearly out of medicines, doctors warn

Colombo, Sri Lanka - Sri Lanka's doctors warned on Sunday they were nearly out of life-saving medicines and said the island nation's economic crisis threatened a worse death toll than the coronavirus pandemic.

Weeks of power blackouts and severe shortages of food, fuel and pharmaceuticals have brought widespread misery to Sri Lanka, which is suffering its worst downturn since independence in 1948. The Sri Lanka Medical Association (SLMA) said that all hospitals in the country no longer had access to imported medical tools and vital drugs.

Several facilities have already suspended routine surgeries since last month because they were dangerously low on anaesthetics, but the SLMA said that even emergency procedures may not be possible very soon.

"We are made to make very difficult choices. We have to decide who gets treatment and who will not," the group said on Sunday, after releasing a letter they had sent President Gotabaya Rajapaksa days earlier to warn him of the situation.

"If supplies are not restored within days, the casualties will be far worse than from the pandemic." Mounting public anger

over the crisis has seen large protests calling for Rajapaksa's resignation.

Thousands of people braved heavy rains to keep up a demonstration outside the leader's seafront office in the capital Colombo for a second day.

Business leaders joined calls for the president to step down on Saturday and said the island's chronic fuel shortages had seen their operations haemorrhage cash. Rajapaksa's government is seeking an IMF bailout to help extricate Sri Lanka from the crisis, which has seen skyrocketing food prices and the local currency collapse in value by a third in the past month.

Finance ministry officials have said sovereign bond-holders and other creditors may have to take a haircut as Colombo seeks to restructure its debt.

New finance minister Ali Sabry told parliament on Friday that he expects US\$3bn from the IMF to support the island's balance of payments in the next three years. A critical lack of foreign currency has left Sri Lanka struggling to service its US\$51bn foreign debt, with the pandemic torpedoing vital revenue from tourism and remittances.

AFP



Palestinians confront Israeli troops at the entrance of the Nur Shams refugee camp near the northern West Bank town of Tulkarem on Sunday (AFP)

Israel goes 'on offence' after attacks, launches fresh raids

Jenin, Palestinian Territories - Israeli forces carried out fresh raids on Sunday in the flash-point West Bank region of Jenin, a bastion of Palestinian fighter groups and the home of gunmen who launched two recent deadly attacks.

Heavy gun battles rocked the northern region of the occupied territory as Israeli forces launched raids for a second day running, with 10 people wounded in clashes across the West Bank, according to the Palestinian health ministry.

"The State of Israel has gone on the offence," Prime Minister Naftali Bennett said after a cabinet meeting, vowing to 'settle accounts with everyone who was linked, either directly or indirectly, to the attacks'.

Israeli troops on Sunday de-

tained 20 Palestinians, a military source said. The operation came after a gunman from Jenin went on a shooting rampage in a Tel Aviv nightlife area on Thursday, killing three Israelis and wounding more than a dozen others - the latest of a spate of bloody attacks in Israel.

Palestinian killed near Bethlehem

Elsewhere in the West Bank, near the southern city of Bethlehem, Israeli troops on Sunday shot dead a Palestinian woman who had approached them and failed to stop after they had fired warning shots, the military said.

The woman, named by the Palestinian news agency Wafa as Ghada Ibrahim Sabatien, a widowed mother of six in her 40s, died after suffering massive

blood loss from a torn artery, the Palestinian health ministry said.

But the centre of the heightened tensions was the Jenin area, where, the Israeli military source told AFP, Palestinian fighters shot from passing vehicles at Israeli soldiers - who responded with live fire.

A total of 20 'wanted individuals' suspected of involvement in 'terrorist activities' were apprehended, the source said, while the Palestinian Prisoners Club announced 24 arrests across the West Bank, which Israel has occupied since the 1967 Six Day War. The Israeli military source said its forces had located stolen Israeli army ammunition and uniforms in the residence of one of the suspects, and an explosive device in another home.

AFP

Famine-threatened Yemenis fear impact of Russia-Ukraine war

Sanaa, Yemen - The wheat fields of northern Yemen stretch into the distance but they aren't enough to nourish a country where millions go hungry.

Already teetering on the edge of famine, war-ravaged Yemen fears a shortage of the staple food ingredient because of a different war - in Ukraine, which is one of the world's major suppliers of the grain.

In a bustling Sanaa bakery, Mohammed al-Jalal and his staff sell small loaves of bread to customers carrying them away in red plastic bags.

"Flour is available on the market but we worry about shortages because of the war between Russia and Ukraine," Jalal told AFP.

In Al-Jawf province, which borders Saudi Arabia, farmers are hard at work to harvest their crops before grinding the wheat and shipping it mainly to the capital, rebel-held Sanaa.

Most of Yemen's roughly 30mn people will not be tasting this home-grown product, because the country depends almost entirely on food imports, with nearly a third of wheat supplies coming from Ukraine, according to the United Nations.

Across the Middle East and North Africa, people are struggling to secure even the most basic staples in view of soaring food and fuel prices triggered by Russia's February invasion of Ukraine.

Jalal said authorities in Yemen 'should support farmers so they



This file photo shows poor Yemeni families receiving flour rations and other basic food supplies from charities in the province of Lahj, in southern Yemen on March 29 (AFP)

Yemen depends almost entirely on food imports, with nearly a third of wheat supplies coming from Ukraine, according to the UN

can grow more wheat in our country'. After more than seven years of civil war, the Arab world's poorest country was already suffering what the United Nations called the world's worst humanitarian crisis.

More than 17mn people in

Yemen face high levels of food insecurity, UN-backed assessments showed in March, and the total is likely to increase. Famine conditions already afflict more than 30,000 Yemenis, UN agencies said.

Ali al-Kabous, an importer and trader of wheat, fears that, 'If the war between Russia and Ukraine continues, the price of wheat will increase here'.

Food prices in Yemen have already doubled since last year and the country's years of fighting have led to an economic collapse. As his staff unload dozens of white sacks filled with flour, Kabous points to a related concern. As global oil prices rise, so will transport costs, and 'that will

be an enormous burden on the people'.

The Iran-backed Houthis who control a large part of northern Yemen are fighting Yemen's internationally recognised government which, since 2015, has been aided by a Saudi-led military coalition.

Accusing Iran of smuggling weapons to the Houthis - a charge Tehran denies - the coalition has enforced an air and sea blockade of rebel-held territory since 2016. According to the Yemen Data Project, an independent tracker, the coalition has also carried out more than 25,000 air raids on Yemen since it intervened.

AFP

Sharif set to become next Pakistan PM

Imran Khan was dismissed on Sunday as Pakistan's prime minister after losing a no-confidence vote

Islamabad, Pakistan - Imran Khan was dismissed on Sunday as Pakistan's prime minister after losing a no-confidence vote, paving the way for an unlikely opposition alliance that faces the same issues that bedevilled the cricket star-turned-politician.

A new premier will be chosen on Monday, with centrist Pakistan Muslim League-N (PML-N) chief Shehbaz Sharif already anointed to lead the nuclear-armed nation of 220mn people.

His first task will be to form a cabinet that will draw also heavily from the centre-left Pakistan Peoples Party (PPP), as well as find space for the smaller conservative Jama'atul Ulama-e-Islam-F (JUI-F) group.

The PPP and PML-N are dynastic parties that have dominated Pakistani politics for decades - usually as bitter rivals - and their relations are sure to fray in the lead up to the next election, which must be held by October 2023.

Shehbaz Sharif is the brother of disgraced three-time prime minister Nawaz Sharif, while PPP leader Bilawal Bhutto Zardari is the son of former president Asif Ali Zardari and assassinated ex-premier Benazir Bhutto.

'Fight until last ball'

Khan's exit was met with a mix-



Opposition supporters chant slogans against dismissed Pakistan PM Imran Khan outside the parliament house building in Islamabad on Sunday (AFP)

ture of glee and sympathy.

"Back to the pavilion," screamed the influential *Express Tribune* newspaper, using a cricket metaphor headline writers have found difficult to resist during Khan's tenure.

No prime minister has ever

served a full term in Pakistan, but Khan is the first to lose office via a vote of no-confidence.

"Sad day for Pakistan... a good man sent home," his former information minister Fawad Chaudhry said on Twitter.

There had been high hopes

for Khan when he was elected in 2018 on a promise of sweeping away decades of entrenched corruption and cronyism, but he struggled to maintain support with soaring inflation, a feeble rupee and crippling debt.

Militancy is also on the rise,

with Pakistan's Taliban emboldened by the return to power last year of the hardline Islamist group in neighbouring Afghanistan.

Khan had vowed to fight 'until the last ball', and he certainly took his exit to the wire

on Sunday.

He tried everything to stay in power - including dissolving parliament and calling a fresh election - but the Supreme Court deemed all his actions illegal last week, and ordered the assembly to reconvene and vote.

Still, there was drama right until the midnight deadline ordered by the court, with the speaker of the assembly - a Khan loyalist - resigning at the last minute.

The session restarted after midnight with a replacement, and the vote was finally held.

Khan's Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) lawmakers stormed out, but the no-confidence motion passed with 174 votes in the 342-seat assembly.

No vendettas

New Pakistan governments frequently have a reckoning with those they replace, but Shehbaz Sharif said there would be no vendettas.

"We will put a balm on the wounds of this nation," he said immediately after the result was announced.

Khan insists he has been the victim of a 'regime change' conspiracy involving Washington, and he is certain to tap into anti-US sentiment from the opposition benches.

"Khan's politics don't stop here, his support base is intact," said Zahid Hussain, a political analyst and author.

"His narrative of last few months, that he has been removed through a foreign conspiracy, has earned him some support."

Khan says the PML-N and PPP conspired with the United States to bring the no-confidence vote because of his non-aligned international outlook and opposition to US foreign policy, particularly in Muslim nations such as Iraq and Afghanistan.

He vowed late on Friday to never support any incoming new government and has called supporters for a rally in the capital later on Sunday.

"From what he has been saying, he seems to want to create problems for the government and pursue a kind of a policy of trying to sort of rebel rather... make things better for the country and society," said Salat Masood, a former general and now political analyst.

Publicly, the military appears to be keeping out of the current fray, but there have been four coups since independence in 1947, and Pakistan has spent more than three decades under army rule.

AFP



Australia's Prime Minister Scott Morrison attends a press conference at Parliament House in Canberra on Sunday (AFP)

Australian PM calls for May 21 federal elections

Sydney, Australia - Australia's Prime Minister Scott Morrison called federal elections for May 21 on Sunday, launching a come-from-behind battle to stay in power after three years rocked by floods, bushfires and the COVID-19 pandemic.

Morrison's conservative government is struggling to woo Australia's 17mn voters, lagging behind the opposition Labour party in a string of opinion polls despite presiding over a rebounding economy with a 13-year-low jobless rate of four per cent.

"It's a choice between a strong future and an uncertain one. It's a choice between a government you know and a Labour opposition that you don't," Morrison told a news conference in Canberra.

Polls show much of the electorate distrusts the 53-year-old leader, who fashions himself as a typical Australian family man and is unafraid of advertising his Pentecostal Christian faith.

Aiming to end nine years of Liberal-National Party rule is 59-year-old Labour Party leader Anthony Albanese.

The opposition leader started the six-week race to the poll pushing a message of optimism before highlighting bruising attacks on Morrison's character emanating from his own government.

"He's running in an election campaign, whereby his deputy prime minister has said he's a hypocrite and a liar," Albanese told media in Sydney.

"We can and we must do better. The pandemic has given us the opportunity to imagine a better future and Labour has the policies and plans to shape that future."

A recent Newspoll survey showed Labour leading the coalition 54 per cent to 46 per cent on a two-party basis.

Morrison and Albanese were in a statistical tie as preferred prime minister for the next three-year term.

Multiple surveys show the cost of living, with gasoline prices notably soaring since the Russian invasion of Ukraine, is a key concern ahead of the election, in which voting is compulsory.

In a pre-election spree, the government announced an array of giveaways, including a fuel tax cut and a tax rebate for about half of the adult population. But extreme weather events blamed on an overheating planet, and the government's response, have also unnerved many Australians.

Morrison is a strident supporter of Australia's vast fossil fuel industry.

He has vowed to mine and export coal for as long as there are buyers, touted a 'gas-fired recovery' from the pandemic, and resisted global calls to cut carbon emissions faster by 2030.

As treasurer in 2017, he famously took a chunk of coal into parliament and told Labour: "This is coal, don't be afraid."

AFP

Peruvians march demanding Castillo's resignation

Lima, Peru - Hundreds of Peruvians marched through Lima demanding the resignation of President Pedro Castillo on Saturday, as the leftist leader faces nationwide demonstrations against rising fuel prices.

Tensions have been building in Peru since Monday, when truckers called for a strike and protests broke out in Lima, Ica and other parts of the country over soaring costs of living.

It is the first time in Castillo's eight months in power that he has faced protests of this scale.

The 52-year-old former rural school teacher reacted late on Monday night by calling a curfew in Lima and the neighbour-



People hold a protest against the government of Peru's President Pedro Castillo to demand his resignation from office, in Lima on Saturday (AFP)

ing port city of Callao - together home to 10mn people.

But a widespread public backlash and pressure from the

right-wing opposition dominated Congress prompted Castillo to lift the curfew late on Tuesday afternoon.

Waving the national flag and signs that said, 'Resign Castillo corrupt' and 'Out Castillo out', Saturday saw protesters bang pots and pans as they marched through Lima to the central Plaza San Martin.

Lima police deployed about 3,000 riot officers to provide security to public places and shopping centres.

"The president must leave the country because there is too much corruption, he is inept and going to lead us to ruin," insurance worker Ursula Porto-

carrero told AFP.

"We want him to step down and bring in people who love their country to truly move Peru forward," Tula Casado, 58, told AFP.

A similar protest took place in the northern city of Trujillo.

Clashes broke out in Lima earlier this week following protest marches in several parts of the city, with demonstrators chanting: "Castillo out!" as buildings were attacked and shops vandalised.

Public disapproval of Castillo has reached 66 per cent, according to an Ipsos poll last month.

AFP

Iraqis clean up river as first green project takes root

Baghdad, Iraq - Garbage clogs the banks of Iraq's Tigris River in Baghdad but an army of young volunteers is cleaning it, a rare environmental project in the war-battered country.

With boots and gloves, they pick up soggy trash, water bottles, aluminium cans and muddy styrofoam boxes, part of a green activist campaign called the Cleanup Ambassadors.

"This is the first time this area has been cleaned since 2003," shouts a passer-by about the years of conflict since a US-led invasion toppled dictator Saddam Hussein.

The war is over but Iraq faces another huge threat: a host of interrelated environmental problems from climate change and rampant pollution to dust storms and water scarcity.

The 200 volunteers at work in Baghdad want to be part of the solution, removing garbage from a stretch of one of the mighty rivers that gave birth to the ancient civilisations of Mesopotamia.

"It breaks my heart to see the banks of the Tigris in this state," said one 19-year-old volunteer, who gave only her first name, Rassel, working under Baghdad's Imams Bridge. "We want to change this reality. I want to make my city more beautiful."

The task is Herculean in a



Young Iraqi volunteers take part in a clean-up campaign on the bank of the Tigris river in Baghdad, on March 11 (AFP)

country where it remains common for people to drop their trash on the ground.

The green banks of the Tigris, popular for picnics by families and groups of friends, are usually littered with waste, from single-use plastic bags to the disposable tips of hookah pipes, especially after public holidays.

Rubbish chokes wildlife

"There is a lot of plastic, nylon bags and corks," said Ali, also 19 and an organiser of the cleanup event.

The group then handed their

collected waste to the Baghdad City Council which took it away, bound for a landfill.

More often the garbage ends up directly in the Tigris. It is one of Iraq's two major waterways, along with the Euphrates, that face a host of environmental pressures.

The rivers or their tributaries are dammed upstream in Turkey and Iran, over-used along the way, and polluted with domestic, industrial and agricultural waste.

The trash that flows downriver clogs riverbanks and wetlands and poses a threat to wildlife, both terrestrial and

aquatic.

When the water empties into the Gulf, plastic bags are often ingested by turtles and dolphins and block the airways and stomachs of many other species, says a United Nations paper.

In Iraq - which has suffered four decades of conflict and years of political and economic turmoil - separating and recycling waste has yet to become a priority for most people.

The country also lacks proper infrastructure for waste collection and disposal, said Azzam Alwash, head of the non-governmental group Nature

Iraq. "There are no environmentally friendly landfills and plastic recycling is not economically viable," he said.

Plumes of smoke

Most garbage ends up in open dumps where it is burned, sending plumes of acrid smoke into the air.

This happens in Iraq's southern Mesopotamian Marshes, one of the world's largest inland deltas, which Saddam once had largely drained. They were named a UNESCO World Heritage site in 2016, both for their biodiversity and ancient history.

Today a round-the-clock fire outside the town of Souq al-Shuyukh, which is the gateway to the marshes, burns thousands of tonnes of garbage under the open sky, sending white smoke drifting many kilometres away.

"Open burning of waste is a source of air pollution, and the real cost is the shortening of Iraqi lives," said Alwash. "But the state has no money to build recycling facilities." Even worse is the air pollution caused by flaring - burning off the gas that escapes during oil extraction. This toxic cocktail has contributed to a rise in respiratory illnesses and greenhouse gas emissions, a phenomenon the UN's climate experts have voiced alarm about.

AFP

Iran says US ‘imposing new conditions’ in nuclear talks

Tehran, Iran - Iran's foreign minister said on Sunday that Washington is 'imposing new conditions' in the negotiations to restore the 2015 nuclear agreement.

"On the issue of lifting sanctions, they (the Americans) are interested in proposing and imposing new conditions outside the negotiations," state news agency IRNA quoted Hossein Amir-Abdollahian as saying.

"In the last two or three weeks, the American side has made excessive demands that contradict some paragraphs of the text," he added.

Iran has been engaged for a year in negotiations with France, Germany, Britain, Russia and China directly, and the United States indirectly in the Austrian capital to revive the deal, known formally as the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA).

"The Americans keep talking about the need for direct negotiations, but we have not seen the benefit of direct talks with the United States," Amir-Abdollahian said. The 2015 agreement gave Iran sanctions relief in exchange for curbs on its nuclear programme to guarantee that Tehran could not develop a nuclear weapon - something it has always denied wanting to do.

But the US unilateral withdrawal from the accord in 2018 under then-president Donald Trump and the reimposition of biting economic sanctions prompted Iran to begin rolling back on its own commitments.

"We seek the lifting of sanctions, but with dignity and with a



Iranian nuclear and pharmaceutical products are seen exhibited in Tehran, a day after the country's National Nuclear Technology Day, on Sunday (AFP)

drawal from the accord in 2018 under then-president Donald Trump and the reimposition of biting economic sanctions prompted Iran to begin rolling back on its own commitments.

"We seek the lifting of sanctions, but with dignity and with a

lasting agreement," the foreign minister said, adding that 'Iran has stood and will stand by its red lines'.

The Vienna negotiations aim to return the United States to the nuclear deal, including through the lifting of sanctions on Iran,

and to ensure Tehran's full compliance with its commitments.

They have been paused since March 11 after Russia demanded guarantees that Western sanctions imposed following its February 24 invasion of Ukraine would not damage its trade with

Iran. Days later, Moscow said it had received the necessary guarantees. "During my visit to Moscow, we agreed with the Russian side that if we reached an agreement in Vienna, Russia would not be an obstacle," Amir-Abdollahian said.

On the issue of lifting sanctions the Americans are interested in imposing new conditions outside the negotiations. The Americans keep talking about the need for direct negotiations, but we have not seen the benefit of direct talks with the US

HOSSEIN ABDOLLAHIAN

"We were close to concluding technical discussions with the three European countries, but at the same time we faced the crisis and the war in Ukraine," he added. Talks had progressed toward reviving the deal, with different parties pointing to the 'final phase', but pending issues are still unresolved.

Among the key sticking points is Tehran's demand to delist the Revolutionary Guards, the ideological arm of Iran's military, from a US terror list.

AFP

Record meth haul netted in Hong Kong

Hong Kong, China - Hong Kong customs officials have seized about 700kg of suspected crystal meth sent from Mexico, authorities said on Sunday, the biggest haul of the drug in the city's history. The meth was hidden inside two consignments of heavy industrial gear, said Lee Kam-wing, head of the customs department's drug investigation bureau.

They arrived in the city by air and sea within one week in March. The equipment was arranged to ship from Mexico with a mainland Chinese logistics company, which was also asked to find a Hong Kong company to receive and store it, Lee said.

"In that way the drug dealers did not have to show up at all... it's very cunning," Lee said.

Nearly 450kg of liquid meth was found in three transformers - each weighing 500kg - at the city's airport. That led officers to 253kg of meth powder with a similar import pattern, which had been stowed inside shock absorption rubbers and had already been transported to a warehouse in a rural area near the mainland border. Customs officers had to call in firefighters to saw their way into the equipment.

Meth, the second most popular drug in Hong Kong, tops this year's seizure list with 814kg so far.

AFP

North Korea slams 'feeble' Biden

Seoul, South Korea - North Korea has described Joe Biden as an 'old man in his senility', in a characteristically colourful personal attack on the US president after he accused the Russian leader of war crimes in Ukraine.

The diatribe came after Biden called Russian President Vladimir Putin 'a war criminal' and called for him to be put on trial over alleged atrocities against civilians in Ukraine's Bucha.

"The latest story is the US chief executive who spoke ill of the Russian president with groundless data," said a commentary carried by the official KCNA news agency on Saturday.

"Such reckless remarks can be made only by the descendants of Yankees, master hand at aggression and plot-breeding," it added.

It described Biden as a 'president known for his repeated slip of tongue', but stopped short of referring to him by name.

"The conclusion could be that there is a problem in his intellectual faculty and that his reckless remarks are just a show of imprudence of an old man in his senility," said the commentary, which was issued on Saturday evening. "Gloomy, it seems, is the future of the U.S. with such a feeble man in power."

Along with Beijing, Russia is one of the North's few international friends and has previously come to the regime's aid.



US President Joe Biden arrives at St Joseph on the Brandywine Catholic Church in Wilmington, Delaware, on Saturday (AFP)

ual faculty and that his reckless remarks are just a show of imprudence of an old man in his senility," said the commentary, which was issued on Saturday evening. "Gloomy, it seems, is the future of the U.S. with such a feeble man in power."

Along with Beijing, Russia is one of the North's few international friends and has previously come to the regime's aid.

Moscow has long held the line against increasing pressure on nuclear-armed North Korea, even asking for relief from international sanctions for humanitarian reasons.

Pyongyang has also sided with Moscow in its war with Ukraine, accusing the United States of being the 'root cause' of the crisis.

AFP

US making 'groundless accusations' about epidemic control policy: China

Shanghai, China - China blasted the United States for making 'groundless accusations' about its COVID-19 policy, after surging cases in Shanghai prompted the American consulate to let some staff leave the locked-down megacity.

Beijing's zero-COVID strategy has come under strain since March as over 100,000 cases in Shanghai have seen its 25mn inhabitants locked down in phases, inciting complaints of food shortages and clashes with health workers.

The US embassy said on Saturday it would permit non-essential employees to leave its consulate in Shanghai due to the case surge, warning citizens in China they may face 'arbitrary enforcement' of virus curbs.

In response, Beijing expressed 'strong dissatisfaction and firm opposition to the US side's groundless accusations about



Health workers conduct swab tests in Shanghai on Sunday (AFP)

China's epidemic control policy', according to a statement issued on Saturday on the foreign ministry's website.

"This is the US's own decision. However, it must be pointed out that China's epidemic control policy is scientific and effective,"

ministry spokesman Zhao Lijian said, adding that Beijing had lodged 'solemn representations' with American counterparts.

"We have full confidence that Shanghai and other places will overcome this round of the epidemic," China is sticking fast to a policy of snap lockdowns, mass testing and travel restrictions to staunch the spread of the virus even as Shanghai's daily case numbers have spiralled under an Omicron-fuelled wave.

The business hub reported a record 24,943 new infections on Sunday - mostly asymptomatic, accounting for over 90 per cent of the national total. Authorities have readied tens of thousands of new beds in over 100 makeshift hospitals as part of a policy of isolating every person who tests positive - whether or not they show any symptoms.

Locals have begun to chafe at lockdown restrictions with many

taking to social media to vent anger at food shortages and heavy-handed controls - including the recent killing of a pet corgi by a health worker.

An unpopular policy of separating infected children from their virus-free parents - now softened - also triggered a rare show of public anger this week.

City health official Wu Qianyu said during a Sunday press conference the city 'would not relax in the slightest'.

Major online delivery platforms said they would bolster food stocks and draft in thousands of drivers to strengthen the supply of basic goods.

Zhang Wenhong - a top doctor in Shanghai's pandemic fight - acknowledged the impact on the healthcare system but said 'realising dynamic zero ... will help to resume normal medical order as early as possible'.

AFP

'Most peaceful' Iceland chilled by violence worthy of its noir novels

Reykjavik, Iceland - Long considered the 'most peaceful country in the world', Iceland's tranquillity has been shattered by a spate of shootings and stabbings involving criminal gangs.

The country of only 375,000 people is more accustomed to reading about murders in its famed Icelandic noir novels than in its morning newspapers.

"A gun for Icelanders symbolises sports" or hunting, said sociologist Helgi Gunnlaugsson.

"It's very alien to the Icelandic mind that you would use a weapon to protect yourself or to point at people," he told AFP.

Iceland has topped the Global Peace Index ranking since 2008 thanks to its low crime, strong education and welfare systems, fair pay and an absence of tension between social classes.

Only four people have been

shot dead in more than two decades. But four shootings have now taken place in a little over a year, one of which was fatal.

In February 2021, a man was gunned down in a hail of bullets outside his home in a neighbourhood of the capital Reykjavik, a murder that shocked the nation.

The killing was linked to organised crime, police said.

"Criminal groups in Iceland are becoming more organised," said criminologist Margret Valdimarsdottir.

"They have more ties to international groups than what we've seen before, which may be a challenge for our police force."

In February, two separate drug-related shootings took place in Reykjavik two days apart, one in the city centre.

The gang violence is similar to that already seen in other parts



Police officers simulate an operation during a training in Reykjavik, Iceland on March 22 (AFP)

of Europe. "It takes five to 10 years for what is trending in Europe to show up in Iceland," said Runolfur Thorhallsson, superintendent of Iceland's elite police unit, known as the Viking Squad.

"Of course this is a concern for us."

Unarmed police

Iceland is one of the rare countries in the world where police are not armed in their daily duties. However, patrol cars have been equipped with handguns in special safes since late 2015 after the bloody attacks by far-right

extremist Anders Behring Breivik in Norway in 2011.

Only a small number of police officers - the Viking Squad - are permanently armed with semi-automatic weapons as well as bulletproof vests and ballistic shields.

The squad assists the police when weapons are reported, with the number of such incidents rocketing almost six-fold since 2014.

"We see indicators that maybe people are less hesitant in this criminal world to use weapons. We see more of an increase in knives than firearms," Thorhallsson said.

While he doesn't have an explanation for the rise in violence, the interior minister is considering equipping police with tasers.

The head of the police union, Fjolnir Saemundsson, welcomed the idea but called for more recruits and training.

With 682 police officers in 2021, Iceland has one of Europe's smallest police forces relative to its population, second only to Finland and almost half the European average, according to EU

statistics agency Eurostat.

Studlar, a government-run treatment centre for juveniles aged from 12 to 18, helps troubled youths with problems ranging from drugs to crime and behavioural issues.

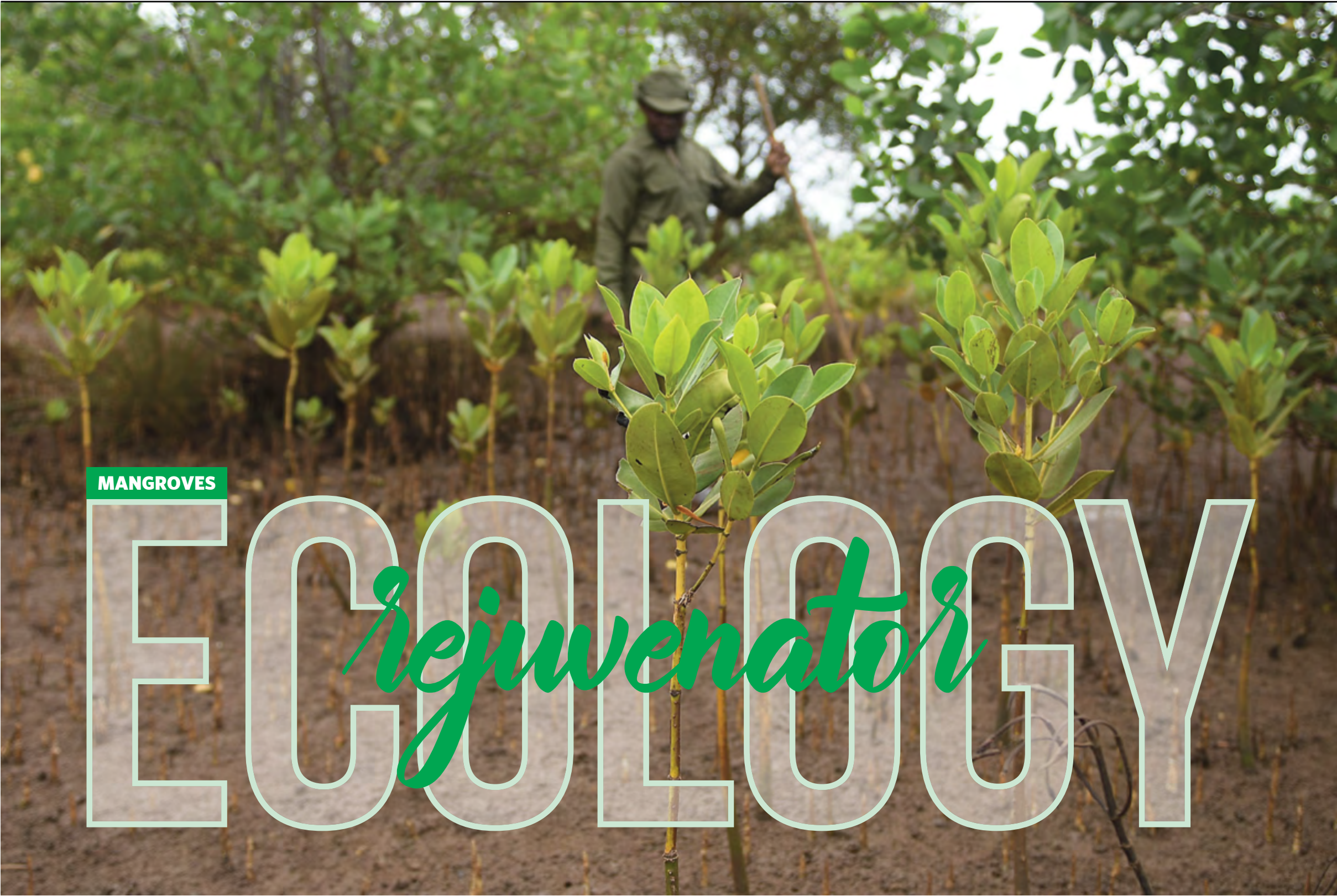
Director Funi Sigurdsson said he has also seen a slight rise in violent incidents, with the centre confiscating an increasing number of knives.

He said with some of the young people it was often clear 'when they were six years old that they would end up here'.

"If we would have intervened very well then, we could possibly have prevented them from ending up in this situation."

Several of those involved in the score-settling between the gangs passed through the centre as juveniles.

AFP



MANGROVES

ECOLOGY

rejuvenator

Along a riverbank scarred by logging, Joseph Mwandenge Mangi points out a solitary mangrove tree, a species once abundant in the forest where the mighty Sabaki River meets the sea.

"This is the last one. There are no more left," said the 42-year-old Kenyan, who grew up on the estuary and possesses a seemingly encyclopedic knowledge of its flora and fauna.

The surviving tree is a sombre reminder for local communities working to restore this critical ecosystem to health, and make amends for the plunder of the past.

For generations villagers living near the Sabaki estuary had relied on its natural bounty for lumber and firewood, fresh water, seafood, farming land, and plants for traditional medicine.

Sustainably nurtured, the coastal wetland is also a resilient ally in the face of a changing climate - storing carbon, filtering water pollution, and protecting against extreme weather and rising sea levels. But years of unchecked exploitation inflicted terrible damage on the mangroves, mudflats, freshwater pools, and sandy dunes at the mouth of Kenya's second-longest river.

Mangrove wood - harvested sustainably for centuries to build traditional Swahili homes - was chopped down to feed construction in fast-growing coastal towns like nearby Malindi, a popular tourism hub.

Locals overfished the river, using mosquito nets that trapped even the smallest of sea life. Fertile soils were uprooted and washed downstream into the Indian Ocean, further reducing fish in the Sabaki and killing coral reefs offshore.

"The landscape has changed. Back in the day, we used to have a huge forest with elephants and monkeys," said Francis Nyale, a 68-year-old village elder, standing among a clearing of gnarled mangrove stumps.

Kenyans heal devastated land with the power of mangroves



Mwalim Salim, a scout from forest protection unit, stands next to sprouting mangrove trees on the shores of the Sabaki river, in Malindi. For local communities, there are economic benefits in rehabilitating nature



Climate ally

One tree at a time, local villagers are, however, bringing the estuary back to life.

Further down the Sabaki, where its brown waters meet the blue ocean, and swarms of migratory birds flock overhead, a team of volunteers plant mangrove saplings along the riverbank.

They've planted tens of thousands in recent years, reclaiming cleared land and aiding significant forest

regrowth, said Francis Kagama, coast regional coordinator from conservation group Nature Kenya. There are early signs that their efforts are paying off.

Crouched in a grove of older trees, Kagama spotted clusters of tiny green shoots bursting out of the dark soil - evidence of natural regeneration, an ecosystem on the mend.

"The world is changing, a lot. But for the mangroves, their ability to bounce back... and colonise the areas they used to be in the past, is quite encourag-

ing," he said.

These remarkable trees also deliver for the planet many times over - mangroves can absorb five times more carbon than forests on land, and act as a barrier against storm surges and coastal erosion.

Protecting mangroves is 1,000 times cheaper per kilometre than building seawalls against ocean rises, according to the UN Environment Programme (UNEP) which sponsors the Sabaki restoration project.

"Healthy wetlands - critical for climate mitigation, adaptation, biodiversity, and human health and prosperity - punch above their weight in terms of benefits," said Leticia Carvalho, UNEP's principal coordinator for marine and freshwater.

'Our trees, our heritage'

For local communities, there are economic benefits in rehabilitating nature. UNEP estimates that a single hectare of mangrove forest can deliver anywhere between US\$33,000 and US\$57,000 per year economically.

In Sabaki, local guides are supplementing their income by leading visitors and school groups to see the hippos and birdlife that call the estuary home. Work is also under way to improve tourist facilities, and open a nursery for plant saplings.

Convincing the Sabaki's four villages that there is value in conservation requires careful diplomacy and a local touch, said Mangi, who leads a community group restoring the estuary.

They are working with fishermen to abandon unsustainable practices, and volunteer rangers who catch loggers in the estuary handle offences in-house to keep everyone on side.

"We don't take them to the police. We talk to them. We want them to understand that there is something good in these trees (rather) than cutting," said Mangi.

More than 80 per cent of mangroves have already been lost along western parts of the Indian Ocean. For Mangi, there would be no community without them. "If we don't have these trees, we lose our heritage," he said.

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SPACE TOURISM

THE PRIVATE SPACE SECTOR ACTS AS AN INNOVATION DRIVER FOR GETTING BETTER AT DOING ALL THINGS RELATED TO SPACE. BUT, ABOVE ALL, SPACEFLIGHTS YET REMAIN A RISKY AND EXPENSIVE ENDEAVOUR

ABOVE ALL

To its many detractors, space tourism amounts to nothing more than joy-rides for the global super rich that will worsen the planet's climate crisis. But the nascent sector also has supporters, who, while not rejecting the criticism outright, argue the industry can bring humanity benefits too.

The first argument is that private spaceflights, in addition to their customers, can send to space scientific experiments that require microgravity environments.

In the past, it used to take quite a long time to work within government grant channels, get approval, get the funding, get picked to be among the very select few that could go," Ariel Ekblaw, of the MIT Space Exploration Initiative told AFP.

By contrast, it took Ekblaw just six months from signing a contract to sending her research project to the International Space Station on board the private Ax-1 mission, which blasted off Friday thanks to the private entrepreneurs paying for the trip.

Her experiment, called TESSERAE, involves smart tiles that form a floating robotic swarm that can self-assemble into space architecture - which might be how future space stations are built.

An earlier prototype was flown to space for a few minutes aboard a Blue Origin suborbital spaceflight, paving the way for the new test.

"The proliferation of these commercial launch providers does allow us to do riskier, faster and more innovative projects," said Ekblaw.

Virgin Galactic, for its part, has announced plans to take scientists on future flights.

Better space technology

Space tourism, and the private space sector overall, also act as an innovation driver for getting better at doing all things related to space.

Government agencies, which operate with taxpayers' money, move cautiously and are deeply-averse to failure - while companies like Elon Musk's SpaceX don't mind blowing up prototype rockets until they get them right, speeding up development cycles.

Where NASA focuses on grand exploration goals, private companies seek to improve the rate, profitability and sustainability of launches, with reusable vessels - and in the case of Blue Origin, rockets that emit only water vapour. For now, spaceflight remains a risky and expensive endeavour.

"The more we go to space, the better we become at space, the more an industry base arises to support space technology," said Mason Peck, an aeronautics professor at Cornell University who previously served as NASA's chief technologist.

A parallel can be drawn with the early era of aviation, when flying was limited to the privileged few.

"We started out with lots of accidents, and lots of different companies with different kinds of ideas for how to build airplanes," explained George Nield, former associate administrator for the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) office of commercial space transportation.

"But gradually, we learned what works, what doesn't work." Today, commercial air travel is statistically the safest mode of transport. But what will safer, more efficient space-flight actually achieve? According to experts, it is currently difficult to imagine the future impact space will have on transport.

"Just in the next 10 years, I'm pretty confident that we're going to see companies that have systems that can have people take off from one point on the Earth, and travel to the other side of the Earth, in like an hour," said Nield, who was on BlueOrigin's last flight.

Such point-to-point travel would probably eventually happen anyway, but space tourism is speeding up its advent, he added.

Environmental benefit

The last argument, paradoxically, has to do with the climate. Many of those who have observed Earth from outer space have reported feeling deeply moved by how fragile the planet appears, and overwhelmed by a desire to protect it. The phenomenon was dubbed the 'overview effect' by space philosopher Frank White.

"It gives you a sense of urgency about needing to be part of the solution," stressed Jane Poynter, co-founder of Space Perspective.

Her company plans to start flying tourists on a giant high-altitude balloon to observe the Earth's curvature from a capsule with panoramic views. The vessel was developed precisely for its minimal environmental impact, unlike some highly-polluting rockets.

The overall contribution to climate change from rockets is currently minimal, but could become problematic if the number of launches increases. Increased activity in space can also help the planet in more concrete, less philosophical ways, say industry advocates.

"Because of the advances in space technology, terrestrial solar cells have become more efficient over the years," said Peck.

AFP

In this NASA handout photo, a SpaceX Falcon 9 rocket carrying the company's Crew Dragon spacecraft is launched on Axiom Mission 1 (Ax-1) to the International Space Station with Commander Michael López-Alegría of Spain and the United States, Pilot Larry Connor of the United States, and Mission Specialists Eytan Stibbe of Israel, and Mark Pathy of Canada aboard, April 8, at NASA's Kennedy Space Center in Florida

Scheffler in complete command at Masters

World No 1 star takes a three-shot lead over Australian Cameron Smith into the final round

Augusta, United States - Scottie Scheffler seized a three-stroke Masters lead while Tiger Woods's hopes of a victorious return from career-threatening injuries evaporated on Augusta National's greens on Saturday.

Woods, 14 months removed from a car crash that left him with injuries so severe he feared he might lose his right leg, saw his hopes of a stunning comeback for a sixth green jacket come undone with his worst-ever Masters round, a six-over par 78.

The fact that the 46-year-old was even able to tee it up - and make a 22nd consecutive Masters cut - was astonishing.

But at nine off Scheffler's lead to start the day, Woods knew he needed something sensational to give himself a chance come Sunday, and instead he posted a round worse than the third-round 77 he shot in his 1996 debut as an amateur.

"It's just like I hit a thousand putts out there on the greens today," said Woods, whose prior mastery of the unforgiving, undulating greens of Augusta helped him to five Masters titles.

"I felt like I didn't really hit it that bad, but I had four three-putts and a four-putt," Woods said. "I just could not get a feel."

Woods's seven-over par total of 223 put him 16 strokes behind Scheffler, who survived drama at the 18th to card a one-under par 71 for a nine-under total of 207.

The 25-year-old Texan takes a three-shot lead over Australian Cameron Smith into the final



Scottie Scheffler lines up a putt on the 18th green during the third round of the Masters at Augusta National Golf Club on Saturday (AFP)

It's just like I hit a thousand putts out there on the greens today. I felt like I didn't really hit it that bad, but I had four three-putts and a four-putt. I just could not get a feel.

TIGER WOODS

round.

On a cold, windy day where scores soared, Smith carded the only round in the 60s with a four-under par 68 for 210.

Smith was two strokes in front

of third-place South Korean Im Sung-jae, who shot a one-under 71.

While Woods acknowledged on Thursday that just making through his first competitive

round in 17 months was a victory of sorts, he made it clear he would be looking for better things on Sunday, like getting himself back to even par.

Ireland's Shane Lowry and 2011 Masters winner Charl Schwartzel both carded one-over par 73s to share fourth place on two-under 214.

Scheffler shrub drama

Scheffler was 10-under through 17 holes when his tee shot at 18 clipped a tree branch and ended up in dense undergrowth left of

the fairway.

It took a concerted search to find his ball and after wading into the bushes to see the situation he took and unplayable lie, belted a shot up to the green and limited the damage to a bogey.

It was a dramatic end to a round that featured half a dozen birdies and five bogeys, Scheffler maintaining his air of methodical calm throughout.

"You hate bogeying the last hole, but the way I bogeyed it, it for sure felt like a par," he said.

AFP



Casemiro is joined by teammates as he celebrates his goal

Modric, Kroos rested but leaders Madrid sail past Getafe

Madrid, Spain - Real Madrid kept Chelsea in mind by resting Luka Modric and Toni Kroos but eased past Getafe 2-0 on Saturday to restore their advantage to 12 points at the top of La Liga.

Casemiro's header and a smart finish by Lucas Vazquez sealed a comfortable victory for Madrid, who can turn their attention back to finishing the job against Chelsea and reaching the Champions League semi-finals.

"This kind of game can be a trap because after the Champions League, you always lack something physically and mentally, but the team has responded well," said coach Carlo Ancelotti.

Atletico Madrid will face Manchester City at the Wanda Metropolitano on Wednesday on the back of a limp defeat after they were beaten 1-0 at

Mallorca. Atletico also lost 1-0 to City in the first leg in Manchester last week.

Karim Benzema, the hat-trick hero of Real Madrid's 3-1 win over Chelsea, started against Getafe but came off in the 74th minute, departing to a standing ovation which felt like the Santiago Bernabeu crowd paying tribute to his performance at Stamford Bridge.

Gareth Bale came on to make only his second La Liga appearance since August.

Bale is likely to be back on the bench again for the visit of Chelsea on Tuesday and, despite another dynamic performance from Eduardo Camavinga, the rested Modric and Kroos will surely return to Ancelotti's midfield in mid-week. Neither were even needed off the bench.

AFP



Ronaldo could find himself in trouble despite issuing an apology

Sarco LLC crowned A-Division T20 Champions

Muscat - Sarco LLC defeated Zawawi Powertech by five wickets in the final to emerge champions of Oman Cricket's A-division T20 season 2021/22 at the Oman Cricket Academy last week.

Electing to bat first, Zawawi Powertech found it hard to get going and were all out for 81 in 17 overs.

Arun Dev and Vijay Anand Dayanandan were the only ones to cross the 20-run mark, with the latter top-scoring with 23.

Sarco LLC bowlers were always threatening and their alert fielding made it tougher for the batters.

Pradeep Salian was the most impressive of the lot, finishing with three for 17 from three overs, and was adjudged the



Sarco LLC players display the winners' trophy and their medals after beating Zawawi Powertech in the final

player of the match. He later received his award from Varun Khimji, Director of Khimji Ramdas, at the post-match presentation ceremony. Nazish Mohammad took two wickets.

Chasing a moderate total, Sarco LLC got over the line in 14.2 overs despite a wobble in the middle. Openers Sathisha Achary and Rakesh Patel made their way to scores of 19 and 18

and took their side halfway home. However, their dismissals were followed by an unconvincing display from the middle order, with Prabathindika Withane, Deepak Kumar Shetty and

Zahid Hafiz walking back for single digit scores. But a 5-ball 16 run blitz from Ajay Menon was enough for Sarco LLC.

For Zawawi Powertech, Vijeesh Velunni took two wickets in his three overs.

With 153 runs from five matches, Sathisha Achary finished as the tournament's leading run-getter. Rakesh Patel, also of Sarco LLC, was the most effective with the ball, picking up 11 wickets from his five outings.

BRIEF SCORES:

Zawawi Powertech 81 all out in 17 overs (Vijay Anand Dayanandan 23(21) 1 x 4, 1 x 6 ; Pradeep Salian 3 for 17) lost to Sarco LLC 82 for five in 14.2 overs (Sathisha Achary 19(12) 3 x 4; Vijeesh Velunni 2 for 16) by five wickets

Police investigate Ronaldo over 'assault' allegation

London, United Kingdom - Police have launched an investigation after Cristiano Ronaldo allegedly 'assaulted' a supporter by smashing a phone out of his hand following Manchester United's defeat against Everton on Saturday. Merseyside Police on Sunday appealed for witnesses after footage on social media showed Ronaldo knocking the phone away from the Everton fan as he left the pitch immediately after United's 1-0 loss.

"We can confirm that we are liaising with Manchester United Football Club and Everton FC following reports of an alleged assault at the Everton v Manchester United football match at Goodison," a spokesperson for Merseyside Police said. "As players were

leaving the pitch at 2.30pm, it was reported that a boy was assaulted by one of the away team.

"Inquiries are under way and officers are currently working with Everton Football Club to review CCTV footage and are carrying out extensive witness enquiries to establish if an offence has taken place.

"Anyone with information on this incident is asked to contact Merseyside Police social media."

The 14-year-old supporter's mother told the *Liverpool Echo* that her son, who is autistic and has dyspraxia, was left with a bruised hand after the incident.

Ronaldo issued an apology for his "outburst" on Saturday and invited the boy to watch a game at Old Trafford to make amends.

AFP

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IPL 2022



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Warner Shaw!

Openers David Warner and Prithvi Shaw sparkle as Delhi Capitals thrash Kolkata Knight Riders by 44 runs



David Warner (left) and Prithvi Shaw's opening partnership of 93 runs laid the foundation for Delhi Capitals' convincing victory

Mumbai, India - David Warner and Prithvi Shaw hit attacking half-centuries to set up a convincing 44-run win for Delhi Capitals in the Indian Premier League match against Kolkata Knight Riders on Sunday.

The left-right opening pair of Warner (61) and Shaw (51) put on 93 runs to lay the foundation for Delhi's 215 for five - the highest total of the season so far - in Mumbai.

Left-arm wrist spinner Kuldeep Yadav then returned figures of 4-35 to help bowl out Kolkata for 171 in 19.4 overs.

Shaw raised his second successive half-century in 27 balls to get Delhi off to a flier but soon fell to mystery spinner Varun Chakaravarthy.

Warner, the swashbuckling Australian batter who was picked by Delhi for \$826,000 in the February auction, kept up the charge and reached his fifty with a six off Andre Russell.

Warner said he was "absolutely loving" his time with

Delhi Capitals, who are coached by Australian great Ricky Ponting.

"He is a like a father and a big kid to be honest," Warner said of coach Ponting. "Obviously he has got lot of respect, great knowledge about the game. He is a great coach. Everyone's happy to be underneath him."

Warner finally fell to pace bowler Umesh Yadav but Axar Patel (22) and Shardul Thakur (29) steered the team to the big total with an unbeaten stand of 49 off 20 balls.

Skipper Rishabh Pant also contributed with a quickfire 27.

In reply, Kolkata lost early wickets with pace bowler Khaleel Ahmed sending back openers Venkatesh Iyer, who made 18 off eight balls, and Ajinkya Rahane,

who struggled to get eight, in his first two overs.

Skipper Shreyas Iyer, who smashed 54, and Nitish Rana, who hit 30, attempted to rebuild with a partnership of 69 but the Delhi bowlers hit back and rattled the opposition batting.

Kuldeep got Shreyas stumped after the captain's 33-ball blitz and Khaleel sent back Sam Billings out for 15.

Kuldeep in his fourth over struck thrice including two on successive deliveries and finished with a superb diving catch off his own bowling to send back Umesh for nought.

Thakur wrapped up the Kolkata innings as he got Russell out for 24 and Rasikh Salam for seven.

AFP

BRIEF SCORES:

Delhi Capitals 215 for 5 in 20 overs (Prithvi Shaw 51(29) 7x4, 2x6, David Warner 61 (45) 6x4, 2x6; Sunil Naraine 2 for 21) beat Kolkata Knight Riders 171 all out in 19.4 overs (Shreyas Iyer 54 (33) 5x4, 2x6; Kuldeep Yadav 4 for 35, Khaleel Ahmed 3 for 25) by 44 runs.



Kuldeep Yadav

RR V LSG



Royals survive Stoinis scare to beat Super Giants

BRIEF SCORES:

Rajasthan Royals 165 for 6 in 20 overs (Shimron Hetmyer 59 (36) 1x4, 6x6, Ravichandran Ashwin 28 (23) 2x6; Krishnappa Gowtham 2 for 30) beat Lucknow Super Giants (Quinton de Kock 39 (32) 2x4, 1x6, Marcus Stoinis 38(17) 2x4; 4x6; Yuzvendra Chahal 4 for 41) by 3 runs

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RED-HOT



Ferrari's Charles Leclerc wins Australian Grand Prix as Max Verstappen fails to finish

Melbourne, Australia - A flawless Charles Leclerc led from start to finish to steer his Ferrari to an action-packed win at the Australian Grand Prix on Sunday with world champion Max Verstappen failing to finish.

The world championship leader from Monaco started from pole, held his position at the first turn and never looked back, scorching round the 58-lap Albert Park circuit to take the chequered flag by a massive 20.5 seconds.

Red Bull's Sergio Perez was second, with George Russell an encouraging third for the struggling Mercedes and his seventh-time world champion teammate

Lewis Hamilton fourth.

"It's amazing, the car was incredible today. What a race and what a pace today," said Leclerc after clocking a fourth career win and second of the season.

"Honestly, what a car today. I did a good job all weekend but it's not possible without the car. I'm just so happy."

"Obviously we have only had three races so it's difficult to think of the championship but we have a very strong car and a reliable car. It's great to be back in this position," he added.

The McLaren's Lando Norris and Daniel Riccardo were fifth and sixth.

Alpine's Esteban Ocon came

I did a good job all weekend but it's not possible without the car. I'm just so happy.

CHARLES LECLERC

seventh ahead of Valtteri Bottas in an Alfa Romeo, with Pierre Gasly's AlphaTauri and Alex Albon's Williams rounding out the top 10.

But there was disaster for Red Bull's Verstappen, the winner two weeks ago in Saudi Arabia,

who pulled over on lap 39 when second, saying on the team radio: "I smell some weird fluid."

He jumped out with smoke coming from the engine, grabbing a fire extinguisher to help marshals put out the flames. It was his second retirement in three starts this season.

"These kinds of things, if you want to fight for the title, are unacceptable," the Dutchman fumed. "We are so far behind (Ferrari)."

In contrast, Russell was delighted with his podium place after Mercedes' early season struggles with porpoising -- bouncing at high speed.

"We've got to be in it to win it

and capitalise on others' misfortune and obviously we got a little bit lucky today twice, but we'll take it," he said, referring to two safety cars.

Ferrari's Carlos Sainz and Aston Martin veteran Sebastian Vettel also failed to finish after spinning out.

Victory consolidated Leclerc's championship lead after three rounds with the Ferrari ace, who also won the year's opening grand prix in Bahrain, earning the extra point for the fastest lap to add to 25 for the race victory.

He now sits on 71 points ahead of Russell on 37. Verstappen is sixth with only 25.

AFP

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