

Omani adventurer to release book on India at Muscat International Book Fair

Our Correspondent
Muscat

Having visited over 70 countries and authored ten books on his travels, Omani mountaineer and adventurer Khalid Said al Anqudi has yet another literary work detailing picturesque India and its colourful traditions.

Titled *Al Mahraja* (The King), the book covers majestic mountains, customs and traditions and details of Anqudi's adventures in India.

Speaking to *Muscat Daily*, Anqudi said, "I wrote the book in 2021. It will be launched at the 26th Muscat International Book Fair starting on February 24."

Each chapter of *Al Mahraja* is a window into the natural treasures of the country. In five chapters spread over 156 pages, the book describes his travels and adventures in different regions of the country.

"One chapter describes the Indian capital, New Delhi, and the skyscrapers there. Another describes rural life and the different languages spoken across the diverse country. Yet another is on various modes of transport, including his boat rides in the Malabar Coast, and one chapter is a narration of a journey through the beautiful western state of Punjab and its friendly people."

Still fresh in his mind, Anqudi recalls a few hair-raising situations he encountered during his visit like they occurred yesterday. "We rode a balloon in Punjab with some tourists to enjoy the beautiful countryside, but midair, one of the tourists fainted

We rode a balloon in Punjab with some tourists to enjoy the beautiful countryside, but midair, one of the tourists fainted

KHALID SAID AL ANQUDI



Book cover of Khalid al Anqudi's 'Al Mahraja'



(Supplied photos)



one of the tourists fainted. So we had to make an emergency landing and take him to the hospital," said Anqudi.

Urging young people to cultivate the habit of reading, and also parents to encourage their

children to read, he said, "Our youngsters need to widen their knowledge about the world."

Anqudi hopes to inspire young minds to take up mountaineering and engage in the various adventure sports possible in

Oman. He believes that when Omani youth venture outdoors to explore, they will promote the country as a tourist destination.

"I will continue to travel to different countries to promote Omani tourism and learn about

different cultures. I am currently working on having my books translated into different languages, including English and French," he informed.

Some of his books have been translated into German.

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State Bank of India invites Applications from OMANI NATIONALS for the following vacancy at the Muscat Branch of the Bank.

Dy. Manager, Risk (Specialist Position in Senior Management)

No. of Vacancies: 1

Criteria for Applicants:

1. The applicant should hold a bachelors degree (Graduate).
2. The candidate should be in the age group of 25 to 45 years as on 31.12.2021.
3. The applicant with experience in Banking/ Finance/ Risk Management would be given preference.
4. Proficiency and working knowledge in English language will be given preference.

The application form may be downloaded from our website, www.sbioman.com

Persons meeting the specified job requirements/ criteria may email their applications and a scanned copy of their photograph to careers.oman@statebank.com or submit the same at our office on or before **25.02.2022**.

Selection will be based on interview of the candidates short listed by the Bank and the Bank reserves the right to consider/reject any application without assigning any reason thereof.

Chief Executive Officer

Salalah House, Ground Floor, Bait Al Falaj Road, CBD Area, P.O.Box 264, P.C.112, Ruwi, Sultanate of Oman
Phone : 24704232 / 3, Fax : 24788966, Web : www.sbioman.com

FREE CLASSIFIED LISTING

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

International Dates Council established

Al Ahsa, KSA - Oman, represented by the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Water Resources, took part in the founding meeting of the International Dates Council, held in Al Ahsa, KSA, on Wednesday.

The meeting announced the establishment of the council headquartered in KSA, as well as the kingdom being elected head of the council and Oman as a representative of the executive body of the GCC region and Yemen. The meeting also approved the council's strategy and work plan.

H E Dr Saud Hammoud al Habsi, Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Water Resources, and head of Oman's delegation, said the sultanate is exerting great efforts to promote date palms by devising a national strategy to achieve the goals set to produce high-quality palm fruits, in addition to marketing date palm products locally and internationally.

ONA

WEATHER WATCH

	Max	Min
Abu Dhabi	24	15
Doha	24	13
Kuwait City	23	13
Manama	22	14
Muscat	26	19
Riyadh	23	10

PRAYER TIMINGS

Fajr	5.23am
Sunrise	6.39am
Duhr	12.26pm
Asr	3.42pm
Maghrib	6.08pm
Isha	7.19pm

NEW RAO BATCH GRADUATES



Royal Army of Oman (RAO) celebrated the passing out of a new batch of recruits at the Sultan's Armed Forces Training Regiment on Wednesday. The ceremony was held under the auspices of Maj Gen Khalifa Ali al Siabi, Assistant Inspector General of Police and Customs for Administrative and Financial Affairs, in the presence of Maj Gen Mattar Salim al Balushi, Commander of RAO (Supplied photo)

COVID-19 UPDATE

Muscat - The Ministry of Health (MoH) announced 1,430 new cases in a 24-hour period on Wednesday, taking the total number of COVID-19 cases registered in Oman to 370,620. Five more deaths were also reported in this period.

The total number of COVID-19 related deaths reported in the country has now risen to 4,221,' an MoH statement said, adding that 2,114 patients recovered on Wednesday.

'There were 60 new hospitalisations in the past 24 hours. The total number of COVID-19 patients currently in health institutions is 361, including 78 in intensive care units.'

1,430 NEW CASES

New findings at Bat shed light on Umm al Nar culture

Our Correspondent
Muscat

The Ministry of Heritage and Tourism, in cooperation with archaeologist from the University of Pennsylvania and New York University Abu Dhabi, has announced new archaeological discoveries at the Bat archaeological site in the wilayat of Ibri, Dhahirah governorate.

A statement issued by the ministry said, 'Researchers found a settlement in an area overlooking a valley. Stoves, kilns and burnt seeds have been found in the excavated dwellings.

'These excavations reveal valuable information that can help understand how the people of the Umm al Nar culture lived and thrived at the site for nearly 1,000 years.'

This year, the ministry's archaeology projects are focused on the Bronze Age, including the Umm al Nar culture.

Archaeologists excavated settlements dating back 2500-2000 BC at two different sites. 'The site in Bat includes the largest collection of towers and tombs characteristic of the era. Owing to its exceptional importance, it was inscribed on the



World Heritage List in 1988,' the ministry stated.

The archaeological complex of Bat, Al Khutm and Al Ayn has

some of the most complete and well-preserved remains of settlements and necropolises from the 3rd millennium BC found in the

'These excavations reveal valuable information that can help understand how the people of the Umm al Nar culture lived and thrived at the site for nearly 1,000 years'

world. The most significant aspect of the site is the village of Bat in Wadi Sharsah, approximately 24km east of the city of Ibri.

The characteristic features of Al Khutm and Al Ayn are monumental towers and necropolis, respectively.

Besides the Ministry of Heritage and Tourism-University of Pennsylvania-New York University Abu Dhabi project at Bat, a French mission (University of Lyon) at the archaeological site of Al Aaridh in the wilayat of Ibri, and a Polish mission (Warsaw University) at Qamira archaeological site in the wilayat of Dhank are currently underway in Dhahirah.



MoCIIP holds meeting in UAE to promote investments

Our Correspondent
Muscat

In efforts to attract foreign investments, H E Qais Mohammed al Yousef, Minister of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion, held a meeting with ministers of the United Arab Emirates (UAE) on Wednesday, while the second edition of the Oman-UAE Economic Forum will kick off in Dubai on Thursday.

According to the Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion (MoCIIP), H E Yousef met Dr Thani Ahmed al Zeyoudi, Minister of Foreign Trade, Dr Ahmed Balhoul al Falasi, Minister of State for Entrepreneurship and Small and Medium Enterprises, and Abdul-

lah Touq al Marri, Minister of Economy of the UAE.

The meeting aimed at enhancing cooperation in trade, industry and investments between the two countries, MoCIIP stated.

According to Mohsin Khamis al Balushi, advisor in MoCIIP and Commissioner General of Oman at Expo 2020 Dubai, the second edition of the Oman-UAE Economic Forum is being held in coordination and cooperation between MoCIIP and UAE's Ministry of Economy.

The forum, being held in the presence of a number of officials from both sides, aims to enhance joint cooperation, discuss investment opportunities in targeted sectors and increase the volume of trade exchange between the

two countries.

While affirming that the historical and commercial relations between the two brotherly countries are extensive and developed, the forum will review several economically feasible investment opportunities.

Its agenda includes bilateral meetings between companies from both sides to discuss opportunities for cooperation and investment to conduct business.

The indicators of trade exchange between the two countries in 2020 indicate remarkable growth. The volume of trade exchange exceeded RO4bn. Investments of Emirati companies focused on various sectors, including construction, trade and services.



Ministry, OMIFCO sign pact to boost 'smart vegetable farms'

Our Correspondent
Muscat

The Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Water Resources and Oman India Fertiliser Company (OMIFCO) signed a financing agreement for a 'smart vegetable farms' project called Indoor Vertical Farming Technology to Produce Leafy Vegetables on Wednesday.

The agreement was signed by H E Dr Ahmed bin Nasser bin Abdullah al Bakri, Undersecretary

in the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Water Resources, and Sheikh Khalid bin Mohammed al Fannah al Araimi, director of Sustainability and Institutional Communication, OMIFCO.

The project involves the use of plant factory technology - a closed farming system that aims to artificially control light, temperature, humidity and carbon dioxide concentrations required for plant growth. Plants are grown vertically, instead of

horizontally, throughout the year.

The project will take place in two phases, introducing, studying and evaluating the technology in the sultanate. Information on the technology will also be disseminated to farmers.

The project also aims to expand the use of the technology by training technicians and farmers in it, which will help achieve self-sufficiency in agricultural products and contribute to food security in the country.



MoH stamp for PCR tests discontinued

Muscat - The Ministry of Health (MoH) has discontinued the requirement of ministry-approved PCR tests for which there was a fee of RO5.

An MoH statement said, 'The ministry-stamped COVID-19 PCR test result forms have been stopped from being printed for travellers and the stamping fee of RO5 has also been cancelled. PCR test results with QR code will suffice.'

All PCR test results should, however, be recorded in Tarassud app by health institutions, the ministry stated on Wednesday.

Ministry of Higher Education Research & Innovation

ELECTRONIC TENDER

The Internal Tenders Committee of the Ministry of Higher Education Research & Innovation announces the re-launch of the tender shown in the following table:

Tender No.	Tender Name	Company that are entitled to participate	Tender Price	Last Date for purchasing Tender	The deadline for submission of tenders
(3/2022)	Supply and installation of Aluminum doors (CD01 and CD02), Aluminum display windows (CD03a, CD 03b and CD 04) in Innovation Park Muscat	Specialized in providing Same service and registered with the Tender Board with Grade: Excellent, First and Second	25% OR	3/03/2022	28/03/2022

The purchasing of the tender documents by E-Tendering system will start on Thursday 17/02/2022 at 07:30 am. To purchasing, please visit the following link:

<https://etendering.tenderboard.gov.om/>

All companies that are bidding must provide a bank guarantee or a certified cheque from a bank operating in the Sultanate for at least (1%) of the tender value on behalf of His Excellency Dr. / Chairman of the Internal Tender Committee.

Preference will be given to companies' or small and medium enterprises registered with the General Authority for the development of Small and Medium Enterprises (SME) that includes the largest proportion of its tender Omanization.

Ministry is not bound to accept the lowest or any other tender.

Chairman of tender committee
Ministry of Higher Education Research & Innovation

MARKET WATCH

MSX30

4,090.72

Sensex

57,996.68

FOREX RATES

(RO1 equals)

Indian Rs

195.14

Pakistani Rs

454.28

Bangadesh taka

223.42

Philippines peso

133.32

Sri Lankan Rs

525.56

*Rates as on February 16

Source: xe.com

BRIEFS

Google to overhaul ad tracking system on Android devices

Google announced plans Wednesday to limit ad tracking on its Android operating system, a sensitive privacy issue that rival Apple has already moved to curtail on its iPhones.

Tech giants are under growing pressure to better balance privacy and ad-targeting, as users complain, regulators threaten tougher rules, but the companies try to maintain access to the data key to their many billions in ad revenue.

Apple and Google's operating software run on the majority of the world's smartphones, thus any changes they make to their policies have the potential to impact billions of users.

Asyad signs deal with Japan's Suzue to expand shipping network

Muscat - Asyad Shipping, a part of Asyad Group, has signed a memorandum of understanding (MoU) with the Japanese shipping giant Suzue Corporation to open up new prospects for collaboration and unlock mutual business opportunities.

Through this MoU, the parties aim to pool their capabilities and potentials, and expand their global logistics networks to start new projects that promote the trade and logistics sectors in both Oman and Japan.

Asyad Group seeks to maintain an active exchange of information, technologies and know-how with the Japanese provider of integrated logistics services. Suzue Corporation,



which offers a wide range of shipping and transport services in East and Southeast Asia, plans to establish a joint venture with Asyad Shipping in the future in Oman.

Asyad Group looks to harness this MoU to serve its mutual interests with Suzue, expand its network of shipping partners and collaborators, and add to its offering new support logistics solutions in East and Southeast Asia. The MoU is a clear expression of Suzue's intent to cooperate with Asyad Shipping for Oman to become its logistics gateway to the European and African markets.

These efforts translate into Asyad Group's vision of cement-

ing Oman's position as a global logistics hub standing at the nexus of key shipping routes considered to be the transit gateway to East Africa, Middle East, Arabian Gulf and India.

Asyad Shipping has dramatically evolved over the years from initially focusing on transporting domestic oil and gas products to entering the shipping of commodities and general cargo market. Today, Asyad Shipping's fleet of more than 60 ships has grown to include very large crude carriers, very large ore carriers of all sizes, chemical and petrochemical tankers, bulk carriers, multi-purpose vessels, and container ships and LNG ships.

ONA

Gulf-Japan Food Fund SPV to invest in Oman Fisheries

Our Correspondent
Muscat

Oman Fisheries Company announced that it has signed a private placement subscription agreement on Wednesday with Aqua Holding Company, a special purpose vehicle (SPV) of Gulf-Japan Food Fund.

Dubai-based Gulf-Japan Food Fund is an international private equity fund focused on the food and beverage industry and backed by prominent Japanese financial institutions as well as sovereign investors in the GCC countries.

The SPV of Gulf-Japan Food Fund will invest an amount of RO3.807mn for new shares in Oman Fisheries Company, with the company's issued share capital to be increased to RO16.307mn, Oman Fisheries Company said in a disclosure submitted to the Muscat Stock Exchange on Wednesday.

Oman Fisheries Company said its board of directors also recommends to increase the company's authorized share capital to RO20mn.

The subscription agreement [with Aqua Holding Company] is subject to conditions, including the requisite approvals of the relevant authorities and the company's shareholders in an



extraordinary general meeting,' Oman Fisheries Company added.

After the announcement, the shares of Oman Fisheries Company jumped by five per cent.

Gulf-Japan Food Fund lever-

grated logistics solutions with end-to-end services across ports, freezones and shipping - expressed its intention to acquire 100 per cent stake of Al-Ameen Stores and Refrigeration Company, a wholly-owned subsidiary

SPV of Gulf-Japan Food Fund will invest RO3.8mn for new shares in Oman Fisheries Company, with the company's issued share capital to be increased to RO16.307mn

ages a global network of strategic partners, food industry platforms and business relationships to add value to its investments. The fund is managed by Mizuho Gulf Capital Partners Limited.

Earlier this week, Asyad Group - the provider of inte-

grated logistics solutions with end-to-end services across ports, freezones and shipping - expressed its intention to acquire 100 per cent stake of Al-Ameen Stores and Refrigeration Company, a wholly-owned subsidiary

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Investcorp buys \$640mn properties in US

Manama, Bahrain - Investcorp, a leading global alternative investment firm, announced that it has acquired 64 industrial properties totaling approximately 5.6mn square feet across seven major US markets for an all-in value of US\$640mn.

The properties grow Investcorp's US industrial real estate holdings to approximately US\$3.5bn across approximately 32mn square feet comprised of more than 425 buildings, the company said in a press release.

The latest acquisitions pro-

vide Investcorp with Class B+/B industrial warehouses that are 95 per cent leased. The properties are primarily located in the top major industrial markets by size including Chicago, Illinois (ranked 1st), Dallas, Texas (ranked 2nd), the New York metro (ranked 4th), Atlanta, Georgia (ranked 5th), Houston, Texas (ranked 6th), Philadelphia, Pennsylvania (ranked 9th) and St. Louis, Missouri (ranked 20th). The properties have exposure to dense population centers with robust transportation infra-

structure, proximity to interstate highways and large, diverse economies.

Yusef al Yusef, managing partner for Investcorp's Private Wealth commented, "We are pleased to have made another acquisition in the industrial and logistics sector as this sector continues to benefit from strong tailwinds, mainly driven by an increase in e-commerce, that were heightened by the pandemic. We believe that through such acquisitions, we will further strengthen our position as a leading global,

alternative investment firm."

"Our investment strategy has long approached the US industrial market with optimism, due to increased demand brought about by the rise of e-commerce and evolving supply-chain challenges," said Khulood Ebrahim, real estate product specialist at Investcorp. "We believe that our latest acquisitions, which unlock access to highly coveted industrial markets across the country, should be well-equipped to deliver attractive potential returns for our investors."

MSX gains as global markets rise

Our Correspondent
Muscat

The benchmark index of the Muscat Stock Exchange (MSX) on Wednesday gained 0.21 per cent to close at 4,090.72 points. The market was supported by recovery in global and regional markets amid easing tensions over Ukraine.

Trading activity at the Muscat bourse also improved on Wednesday after lacklustre performance recorded during past many days.

All sectoral indices closed in green territories led by Industrial index which rose 0.59 per cent. Financial and Services in-



dices rose 0.12 per cent and 0.58 per cent, respectively. MSX Sharia index, however, dropped 0.64 per cent to close below 500 points at 497.2 points.

Total trading volume jumped by more than 191 per

cent to 24.4mn shares on Wednesday compared with 8.38mn shares traded on Tuesday. Market turnover grew by more than 96 per cent to RO5.46mn against RO2.78mn recorded in the previous trading session.

Market breadth of the MSX was positive with 18 advancing stocks to eight decliners. As many as 25 traded stocks closed flat for the day.

Top gainers of the day were Muscat Desalination (9.91 per cent), Dhofar Cattle Feed (7.02 per cent), National Aluminium Products (5.56 per cent), Oman Fisheries (5.0 per cent) and United Finance (4.62 per cent).

Top losers were Takaful Oman (-10.0 per cent), Oman National Engineering and Investment (-2.54 per cent), Sharqiya Desalination (-2.1 per cent) and Al Maha Ceramics (-1.72 per cent).

new

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INTERVIEW

SHILPA CHINNAPPA, CHIEF PEOPLE OFFICER, TAXI BUTLER

'Employee wellbeing must be a top priority for successful workplace'

Our Correspondent
Muscat

Shilpa Chinnappa is the chief people officer at Taxi Butler. Taxi Butler develops unique, one-click taxi booking devices and services to make ordering a taxi easier for venues. Shilpa comes from a versatile background in business development and people management. After six glorious years in managing sales and client accounts, she realized she is more of a people person and so began her career in the field of human resources. At Taxi Butler, Shilpa is currently managing a team that is located all around the globe. She promotes connection, culture, and growth among all the team members of Taxi Butler.

Shilpa will be speaking at the Well-being at Work Middle East Summit which will take place during February 21-23, 2022 in Dubai and will also be available virtually across the region.

As a leader based in the region, what are the main challenges you are facing when it comes to employee wellbeing?

My experience is mostly managing and supporting a team that is globally based rather than in the UAE. However, the question still makes sense because wellbeing is a relevant topic across the world.

The biggest challenge identifying the concern points especially with the hybrid working environment is that it

is hard to know who is going through what kind of emotional, physiological, economic and social challenges. It is complex to identify because the team members may choose not to openly speak about it, or one may fail to notice any change in behavior.

What strategies have you seen developing in the region over the past 6-12 months during the pandemic to address health and wellbeing issues at the workplace?

The first and foremost step we adopted as soon as we realized that the pandemic would stay longer than expected and when we realized what kind of toll it was taking on everyone was creating credible internal communication channels where the team could reach out and share their concerns. Then, we also have leaders who coach and have regular individual TLC (Trust, Love, and Care) meetings with the team members who wish to be listened to or find solutions to their concerns. It has worked wonderfully in keeping all of us connected.

Why is employee wellbeing so important to you personally?

Imagine a day where you wake up in the morning and excitedly look forward to a productive day at work. This is my dream and I personally feel that it is every employee's dream.

We spend nearly 70 per cent of our time at work. Wellbeing these days does not reflect just the emo-



“When we place special importance on improving all the areas of employee wellbeing, we create a workplace that is balanced, healthy, and connected”

SHILPA CHINNAPPA

tional state of a person, wellbeing has a much larger scope – it is one's socio-economical, environmental, professional, physical stability too. Each of these areas is so inter-connected that it has its effect on others if it doesn't work like a well-oiled machine. So, if there is a time for us to re-imagine a successful workplace then employee

wellbeing must be on top of our list.

What are you most looking forward to about Wellbeing at Work Middle East Summit this month?

The list of guest speakers at the upcoming Wellbeing at Work Middle East Summit is super enticing. My takeaway will be listening to creative

solutions of dealing and achieving wholesome workplace wellbeing from the super-experienced People leaders.

What is your vision for the workplace of the future, in terms of employee engagement, health and wellbeing? Our entire vision of a great workplace is placed on 'connection' and I think it is the foundation for everything. My vision for a great workplace revolves around creating meaningful connections across all our stakeholders, especially our team members. When we place special importance on improving all the areas of wellbeing, we create a workplace that is balanced, healthy, and connected.

The COVID-19 pandemic has undoubtedly influenced all areas of employees personal and professional lives. What are the key learnings from this period and what are your tips for supporting each other through uncertainty?

Just when we thought living independently is the way to live our life, COVID-19 threw a huge boulder of endless challenges at us. I have come to learn that co-dependency and clear communication is super crucial and all of us need the support of one another through this period. Currently, creating easy communication channels and regular check-ins within our workplace or around our personal life is the most successful way of dealing

with the COVID-19 uncertainties.

How has your organisation been leading the way over the last 12 months?

At Taxi Butler, our vision is to empower connection within ourselves and others. We as a company provide taxi booking solutions to taxi companies around the world. Naturally during the pandemic, we went into a standstill as the world seemed to have stopped overnight. It took us some time to realise that we must find ways to convert the challenges into opportunities.

So together we added new verticals like 'Driver Bubble' which helps you protect yourself and other people inside your vehicle with simple, cost-effective car partition screens, and '20test' a Rapid Antigen Test kit that makes testing for COVID-19 easy. So, you can take the test before going to work, a meeting, or a social gathering and within 15 minutes it provides you peace of mind, with a 96.9 per cent accurate result. As you understand from above, we are leading by ensuring that our vision of staying connected continues to flourish in the time to come.

(Muscat Daily is the media partner of the Well-being at Work Middle East Summit. Readers can get a 25 per cent discount on tickets, use offer code MUSCAT25 and visit <https://wellbeingatwork.world/summit/wellbeing-work-summit-middle-east-2022/#Tickets>)

UK inflation hits 30-year high

London, UK - UK annual inflation has hit the highest level since 1992, data showed Wednesday, adding pressure to the cost of living and on the Bank of England to keep raising rates.

The consumer prices index (CPI) edged up to 5.5 per cent in January from 5.4 per cent in December, also a level not seen in almost three decades, the Office for National Statistics said in a statement. The rate is now at the highest level since March 1992,

the ONS added.

Prices have soared globally over the past year, in large part owing to surging energy prices, while consumers are facing also higher food costs as economies reopen from pandemic lockdowns. "We understand the pressures people are facing with the cost of living," British finance minister Rishi Sunak said in response to Wednesday's data.

"These are global challenges," he added.

Annual inflation in the eurozone stands at a record-high 5.1 per cent, while CPI in the United States hit 7.5 per cent in January – the largest increase in almost 40 years.

As global inflation reaches decades-high peaks, central banks are deciding on how fast to hike interest rates. The BoE has forecast Britain's annual inflation rate to peak at 7.25 per cent in April.

AFP

صناعة قرطاسية الكمبيوتر (ش.م.ع.ع.)

Computer Stationery Industry S.A.O.G.

ANNUAL ORDINARY GENERAL MEETING AGENDA

The Board of Directors of Computer Stationery Industries SAOG ("Company") is pleased to invite the shareholders to attend the company's annual ordinary general meeting to be held at 3:00 pm on Thursday, 03/03/2022, at Al Falaj Hotel - Ruwi - Jebel Qamar Hall, and via the electronic platform to hold general meetings which can be accessed through the website of the Muscat Clearing and Depository Company (www.mcd.gov.om), if the quorum of the meeting is not completed, a second annual ordinary general meeting will be held at 3:00 pm on Wednesday 09/03/2022, at Al Falaj Hotel - Ruwi - Jebel Qamar Hall, and via electronic platform, to discuss the following agenda:

- To consider and approve the Board of Directors' report for the financial year ended December 31, 2021.
- To consider and approve the corporate governance report for the financial year ended December 31, 2021.
- To consider the Auditors' Report and to approve the Financial Statements Balance Sheet and Profit & Loss Account, for the financial year ended on December 31, 2021.
- To approve sitting fees to the Board of Directors meetings and its Sub-committees for the last financial year and determine the fees for the forthcoming financial year (as per Annexure).
- To consider the amounts allocated and spent for the company's social responsibilities for the year ended on December 31, 2021. (as per Annexure)
- To discuss and approve the proposed allocation of OR 1,500 to fulfill the company's social responsibilities for the year ending on December 31, 2022 (as per Annexure)
- To Approve the criteria for measuring the performance of the Board of Directors for the financial year ending December 31, 2022 (as per Attachment)
- To appoint an independent entity to evaluate the performance of the Board of directors for the fiscal year ending on December 31, 2022, and determine their fee. (as per Attachment).
- To elect two board of directors members for to fill two vacant seats in the company's board of directors form among the shareholders and non-shareholders, anyone who wishes to be nominated for a membership in the Board of Directors must fill in the nomination form which can be obtained from the company, and submit the form after filling it to the company at least Five (5) days before the meeting of date, (no later than the end of the business day of Thursday 24/02/2022) the company will not accept any application form after that. The candidate must comply with the requirements set for membership in the company's board of directors.
- The appointment of the Auditors for the Company for the financial year ending December 31, 2022, and determine their fee.

According to the Company's Articles of Association and the controls for holding General Meetings using modern technology issued by the capital market authority, we would like to draw your attention to the following:

- A legal person, exclusively, has the right to delegate a natural person to attend the General Meeting and vote on its behalf through technical means, provided that this natural person has an investor number in MCDC.
- Voting on any of the agenda items begins no more than three days before the date of the General Meeting until the voting process ends on the day of the General Meeting. If the shareholder's shares are increased or decreased, the voting process will be canceled, and the shareholder will have to vote again on the day of the General Meeting.

For further information please contact Mr. Mohammed Al Nabhani on 94306245

Chairman

Auditors

Legal Advisor

الشركة العالمية لإدارة الفنادق ش.م.م

Hotel Management Company International SAOG

THE CHEDI, MUSCAT شيدى . مسقط

ص.ب. 964 الخوير - الزمر البريدي 133 سلطنة عمان P. O. Box 964, P.C. 133, Al Khuwair, Sultanate of Oman

BOARD OF DIRECTOR'S REPORT

On behalf of the Board of Directors, it gives me great pleasure to welcome you to the Annual General Meeting of the Hotels Management Company International SAOG. I would also like to avail this opportunity to present to you the annual report of HMCI S.A.O.G. for the year ended December 31st, 2021.

During 2021 the Company has achieved the following accomplishments:

The company has generated total revenues of RO. 3.308 million (vs. previous year RO. 3.102 million) which shows an increase in revenue of 6.6%.

The company made a Net Loss after taxation provision of RO. 1.653 million (vs. previous year Net loss of RO. 1.187 million) which is an increase of 39.25%.

Achievement:

- The Chedi muscat closed the year with a great Festive season and maintaining its number 01 position among its competitors, by producing best Revpar in the city and with a premium Average room rate.
- In spite of receiving many cancellations due to Omicron spreading rapidly through all main source markets, the resort managed to secure its market share.
- The Chedi Muscat ringed in the new year with a scintillating New Year's Gala dinner with glamorous belly dancers and a celebrity DJ from New York. This was applauded by its resident guests and by its other patrons equally. Considering the adverse weather conditions this was no small feat for the team.

Outlook

Despite recent improvements, new Covid-19 strains could impact the already slow and fragile recovery. The economic strain caused by the pandemic could also weigh on travel demand, aggravated by the recent spike in oil prices and disruption of supply chains.

The Chedi Muscat has secured a decent business on the books for the next quarter, however the spread of the new variant and subsequent travel restrictions/sentiments may cause a wash. Even though the pandemic has shown some relent after the vaccination roll outs, however we are still in an unpredictable situation.

From the last quarter, it could be seen that Luxury travelers when traveling, took longer vacations and chose higher room categories. Despite the occupancy levels being lower, this behavior of guests is a welcome change.

The safe resumption of international tourism will continue to depend largely on a coordinated response among countries in terms of travel restrictions, harmonized safety and hygiene protocols and effective communication to help restore consumer confidence. This is particularly critical at a moment when cases are surging in some regions and new Covid-19 variants are emerging in different parts of the world.

Appreciation

The members of the Board of Directors join me in acknowledging sincere thanks to our valued guests and shareholders for their continuous confidence in our hotel.

We wish to convey our sincere thanks and appreciation to the Ministry of Commerce and Industry, Capital Marketing Authority, Muscat Securities Market and the Ministry of Heritage and Tourism for their prudent supervising and guidance on our endeavors.

We also thank the Ministry of Health and affiliated for the enormous work of handling the COVID-19, and the Hotel's management and staff for their dedication and commitment.

We salute and pledge our allegiance to His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik Al Said as he takes the country on continued progress and prosperity.

The Chairman
Hotels Management Company International SAOG

AUDITED STATEMENT OF FINANCIAL POSITION AS AT 31 December 2021

	31st Dec 2021	31st Dec 2020
Non-current Assets	9,120,770	7,117,538
Fixed Assets	6,000,669	6,867,716
Fixed Deposit- long term	2,600,000	
Deferred tax Asset	520,101	249,822
Current Assets	3,333,918	3,022,530
Inventories	394,788	501,424
Debtors and Prepayments	1,043,353	251,070
Due from related parties	81,946	36,928
Bank and cash	1,813,831	2,233,108
Total assets	12,454,688	10,140,068
Current Liabilities	1,557,189	1,001,882
Creditors and Accruals	1,488,965	883,995
Due to related parties	68,224	117,887
Income tax payable	0	0
Non-current liabilities	3,917,264	505,192
Long term loan	3,500,000	
End of service benefits	417,264	505,192
Total liabilities	5,474,453	1,507,074
Net assets	6,980,235	8,632,994
Equity		
Share capital	3,000,000	3,000,000
Legal reserve	1,000,000	1,000,000
Retained earnings/(accumulated losses)	2,980,235	4,632,994
Total equity	6,980,235	8,632,994

AUDITED STATEMENT OF COMPREHENSIVE INCOME FOR THE YEAR ENDING 31 DEC 2021

	31st Dec 2021	31st Dec 2020
Turnover/ Revenue	3,307,555	3,102,374
Operating costs	(4,825,241)	(4,210,022)
Operating profit	(1,517,686)	(1,107,648)
Administration & selling expense	(337,560)	(307,693)
Reversal/(impairment) of loss on trade receivables	3,744	(2,520)
Management & licence fees	(86,250)	(79,535)
Net Operating Profit	(1,937,752)	(1,497,396)
Interest income	120,070	101,254
Interest expenses	(123,339)	
Gain from sale of asset	17,983	0
Profit for the period	(1,923,038)	(1,396,142)
Taxation	270,279	209,271
Profit after tax provision	(1,652,759)	(1,186,871)
Earnings per share	(0.551)	(0.396)

Note: The complete accounts will be sent by mail to any shareholder who request the company in either Arabic or English as requested within 7 days of receipt of the request.

Military attaches and residents visit Special Economic Zone at Duqm



The Public Authority for Special Economic Zones and Free Zones (OPAZ) organised a visit for a number of residents and non-residents, military attaches in the embassies of brotherly and friendly countries accredited to the Sultanate of Oman, to the Special Economic Zone at Duqm from February 15 to 16.

The delegation included a

number of senior officers and retired senior officers of the Sultan's Armed Forces Command, a press release said.

Upon their arrival to the building of management of the Special Economic Zone at Duqm, the delegation met with H E Dr Ali bin Masoud al Sunaidy, chairman of the Public Authority for Special Economic

Zones and Free Zones and a number of officials from the management of the zone and the companies operating at Duqm.

The visit included a number of presentations on the capabilities of the zone and the advantages, incentives, and facilities offered to businessmen and investors, as well as the basic fa-

cilities, the location, the strategic projects that have been implemented, and the ongoing projects, in addition to the services provided and the lifestyle of the zone.

The visit also included a field visit to several projects in the zone including Oman Dry Dock, Port of Duqm, Emdaad logistics, and Duqm Refinery.

Bank Muscat trains branch employees in sign language

Financial inclusion is an important aspect of the growth and development of economies around the world. Hence, in line with its commitment to deliver long-term benefits to Omani society and the nation, Bank Muscat has always extended strong support to initiatives that promote the welfare and financial inclusion of disabled persons.

Recently, the bank announced that it has trained a number of its employees at different branches across the sultanate in Arabic sign language so as to improve service delivery and facilitate their inclusion into mainstream economic activities, a press release said.

In collaboration with the Omani Association for the Hearing-impaired, the bank has been identifying branches, which serve the maximum number of hearing-impaired and speech-impaired persons, and accordingly training a number of employees in Sign Language over the past few years. At present as many as 93 bank employees have completed two levels of the Sign Language course in order to better serve customers.

Speaking on the occasion, Said Salim al Aufi, general manager - Human Resources and Administration, said, "Bank Mus-



Said Salim al Aufi

cat has always been a pioneer in promoting financial inclusivity. We are very happy to continue our partnership with the Omani Association for the Hearing-impaired and to train our employees in sign language so as to promote greater participation in economic activities by all sections of our society.

"Employees who complete these courses are able to communicate effectively with customers with hearing and speech disabilities, and understand their various financial needs, thereby ensuring that we are able to better serve them, every day. Going ahead, the bank will continue its efforts for greater all round financial inclusivity, which is a key enabler of the ambitious goals of

Oman Vision 2040."

As the leading financial services provider in Oman, Bank Muscat has been undertaking many measures for the inclusion of persons with disabilities. In 2021, the bank contributed a number of wheelchairs and electric beds to persons with severe disabilities in partnership with the Omani Association for the Disabled. The bank also recently contributed laptops and Braille-Sense devices to visually-impaired students at Sohar University and hearing aids to the Omani Association for the Hearing-impaired.

Bank Muscat had earlier supported the construction of a playground at the Al Aman Rehabilitation Centre for children with severe disabilities, and is also at present helping provide a sports field at the Al Wafa Centre for the Rehabilitation of Persons with Disabilities. The bank has also previously installed a special ATM with a special transaction flow for blind and visually-impaired people on the premises of the head office of the Al Noor Association of the Blind. Also, special access ramps and other arrangements for easy access have been made available at different branches and ATMs in Oman.

Sony introduces new LinkBuds

Sony introduces a new way to enjoy your favourite music and the important moments in life, all at once, with the brand-new truly wireless LinkBuds.

One can stay connected and aware at all times with the help of an open ring design with audio transparency, ultra-small super fit and crystal-clear sound and call quality, a press release said.

By leveraging LinkBuds' unique design and its sensor and spatial sound technologies, Sony is creating new sound experiences together with their partners, such as AR gaming, new work from home experiences, sound AR navigation, and quick access to music.

LinkBuds have been created with a unique open ring design



and allow one to tune into the outside world whenever one wants, without compromising on the listening experience. The newly-developed ring driver unit, has the centre of the diaphragm open for audio transparency, allowing one to clearly hear the sounds around.

The new design makes LinkBuds the perfect companion for a range of uses, including working from home, gaming, listening to music, and more.

Omantel's Teamway supports govt initiatives to boost SMEs

As more and more businesses adopt for digital solutions for their operations, Omantel has stepped in to fill the need for secure, tested and reliable solutions by leveraging its capabilities and strong ecosystem of partners and sister companies.

Omantel's new product Teamway supports government initiatives to boost micro and small businesses across the sultanate by offering cloud-based ERP & POS solutions to provide ease of doing business without any initial investment in setting up the system. Teamway is a flexible product that can be scaled up as per the needs of individual businesses, a press release said.

Omantel believes that busi-



nesses need to continuously adopt cloud based solutions to operate their business efficiently, hence Omantel ICT introduced Teamway cloud solutions to Oman's market in cooperation with Intelligent Projects and Qaid Al Ard - an Omani SME company, starting with most demanded ERP & POS products.

Teamway ERP consists of different standard modules like In-

ventory, Accounting, Project & Task, HR Management and Supply Chain readily available to start using on the go and also open for any customised requirement based on customer's business nature.

Business owners opting for standard Teamway ERP solution can subscribe online, and for any customised Teamway ERP requirement, can connect with Omantel's ICT Expert. Customers can access Teamway from anywhere via the Internet.

Eng Baha al Lawati, Enterprise Business Unit VP at Omantel, said, "Omantel continues to be an enabler of digital transformation in Oman. This transformation is not just about shifting to digital options but offering society safe and secure solutions."



Maserati Grecale takes to the streets

Grecale is on the road ahead of its global premiere. Grecale's energy is unstoppable and the new SUV is already covering many miles with the Maserati Family at the wheel.

The 'everyday exceptional' already forms part of the everyday lives of the Grecale's designers, makers and those who have made it a reality, a press release said.

This time, the brand has se-

lected a new look for the light camouflage featured on the cars of the Maserati Family Fleet. And a series of messages offers a preview of the Grecale's technical specifications.

The camouflage features just one main message - 'I'm the Maserati Grecale. I can't tell you much more'.

'All questions will be answered on March 22', the release added.

Sports management book launched

Oman Olympic Committee (OOC) inaugurated the Arabic version of the book 'Managing Olympic Sports Organisations' which is one of the most important curricula taught in advanced sports management courses.

OOC, represented by the Olympic Solidarity Department, has translated the book issued by the International Olympic Committee (IOC) from English to Arabic with the aim of achieving maximum benefit from international programmes that cover and enhance all areas of sports development and benefit from multi-disciplinary Olympic solidarity programmes. A press release said.

This initiative comes in cooperation with International Olympic Solidarity as this book will contribute in promoting and facilitating the implementation of sports management courses organised by the Arabic-speaking National Olympic Committees. This work is an important addition to OOC and a true translation of the level and great confidence in the IOC.

The book aims to present a simplified and practical picture of the management science that has been developed by Olympic sports organisations around the



world, as well as to clarify the basic dimensions of administrative culture, which would strengthen Olympic institutions and run their programmes effectively.

This comes as part of the education programme that aims to exchange experience and knowledge among employees in sports institutions and use it as a reference that expresses the richness and diversity of ways to manage Olympic sports organisations.

The book consists of six chapters that cover the main aspects in the science of managing sports bodies. The first chapter

deals with the organisation of the Olympic sports institution through understanding its environment, structure and operation. The second chapter deals with the strategic management of the Olympic sports institution while the third chapter focuses on managing the human resources of the Olympic sports institution.

The fourth chapter deals with managing financial affairs of the Olympic sports institution while the fifth deals with marketing management. The sixth and final chapter focuses on organising major sports events.

National University holds White Coat Ceremony for pharmacy students

The College of Pharmacy, National University of Science and Technology, organised a 'White Coat Ceremony' at its Bousher Campus on February 10, under the patronage of Dr Khalid al Balushi, dean of the College of Pharmacy.

College of Pharmacy was established as Oman Medical College in 2003 in academic partnership with West Virginia University, USA. It is the first private pharmacy college licensed by the Ministry of Higher Education, Research and Innovation, and the Ministry of Health in the Sultanate of Oman to provide a Bachelor of Pharmacy (B Pharm) programme. More than 600 pharmacists have graduated from College of Pharmacy till date.

The 'white coat' emphasises professionalism and integrity among pharmacists and physicians as these students begin their clinical rotations.

The ceremony carries the symbolism of past accomplishments and entry into the professional programme.

Dr Balushi, in his speech,



called on the graduates undertaking the pharmacy oath to be bound with ethical and professional practice.

He also thanked the government and private hospitals, community pharmacies and the National Pharmaceutical Industry for their continuous support in the students' training.

He disclosed that, this year,

College of Pharmacy has expanded its list of training sites both inside and outside Oman. It is worth mentioning that the college has been successful to include Hamad Medical Corporation, in Qatar, and Tehran University of Medical Sciences, in Iran, to the external hospital training sites for eligible students in addition to the

previous sites.

Dr Nidaa M A Wadi, chairperson of Industry Advisory and Practice Committee, congratulated students for arriving at this milestone in their career and mentioned about the college plan to send students for training outside the sultanate to gain international experience in pharmacy practice.

Khedmah collaborates with Dhofar Insurance

As part of the newly introduced service in the Khedmah app for collecting vehicle insurance premiums, Oman Investment and Finance Company (OIFC) Khedmah, recently signed another collaboration agreement with Dhofar Insurance.

Said Ahmed Safrar, CEO of OIFC, and Sonil Kohli, CEO of Dhofar Insurance, signed the agreement, a press release said.

Customers of Dhofar Insurance Company can now pay their insurance premiums for renewal of their vehicle insurance, thanks to a direct link between Khedmah and Dhofar Insurance Company's systems. New clients can also use the app or the website to get competitive quotations from the insurance provider and apply for vehicle insurance.

Such digital services are known to provide ease and convenience, allowing customers to make transactions or browse for options from the comfort of their homes. For Dhofar Insurance customers, downloading the Khedmah App on their smart



phones or logging onto the website, can now reduce their need to visit the branches. This will save them time, effort and money.

At the same time, customers can avail the integrated services that Khedmah provides such as paying their electricity, water and telecommunications bills, recharging phone, electricity prepaid meter bills, entertainment recharge, as well as making payments to the Public Authority for Social Insurance (PASI) and other solutions.

Khedmah constantly seeks to keep abreast with current market trends in order to provide its customers with services that suit their dynamic lifestyle and make their life easier. The latest tie-up with Dhofar Insurance Company is a testament to this approach and it reflects OIFC's constant efforts in analysing market trends as well as customer requirements who are looking for fast and safe ways to finalise their daily needs from the comfort of their home or office.

Dubai's Museum of the Future opens

In the heart of Dubai, the eagerly anticipated Museum of the Future (MOTF) invites everyone to a one-of-a-kind experience with ticket sales going live this week.

Open to various cultural, philosophical, social and spiritual outlooks, MOTF looks forward to welcoming visitors for the first time ever in a place of inspiration, hope and knowledge, a press release said.

For an exclusive glimpse into the future, MOTF tickets are available for visitors to purchase on the official MOTF website: www.motf.ae. Online bookings should be made before the preferred visiting time as each ticket holder will be allocated a specific timeslot during the museum's opening hours (10am - 6pm all week long). The museum takes visitors on a transformative journey of self-discovery.

Foton Oman wins Oman's Most Trusted Brand award in 'trucks'

Foton Oman, represented by M/s Gulf Great Sands, has been bestowed with the prestigious Oman's Most Trusted Brand award at a ceremony held at Al Bustan Palace, a Ritz-Carlton Hotel, in 'trucks category' in the automobile sector.

Oman's Most Trusted Brand award is a distinctive recognition for brands that have maintained the highest standards of product integrity and brand development, a press release said.

The awards are based on the results of a month-long extensive survey which was open to general public for voting and is presented to the most trusted brands in the country by Apex Media. The event, that annually recognises a spectrum of top brands in Oman, is in its fifth year now. It is not just a commendation ceremony for market leaders, but also an affirmation of the consumers' choice, which has year after year rallied around the leading brands.

Foton strives to provide global automotive markets with high



quality, affordable vehicles powered by sourcing the best of current as well as emerging technologies. Formidable joint ventures with globally reputed manufacturers and major component brands, have enabled Foton to include sustainable engineering, advanced systems, and state-of-the-art technology

into every Foton vehicle.

A spokesperson for GGS said, "We are delighted we have won the award in the trucks category. Earning recognition from customers that determine this honour is a validation of our world class trucks including Foton Aumar (Light Duty Truck) and Foton Auman (Medium & heavy

Duty Truck) available in Oman.

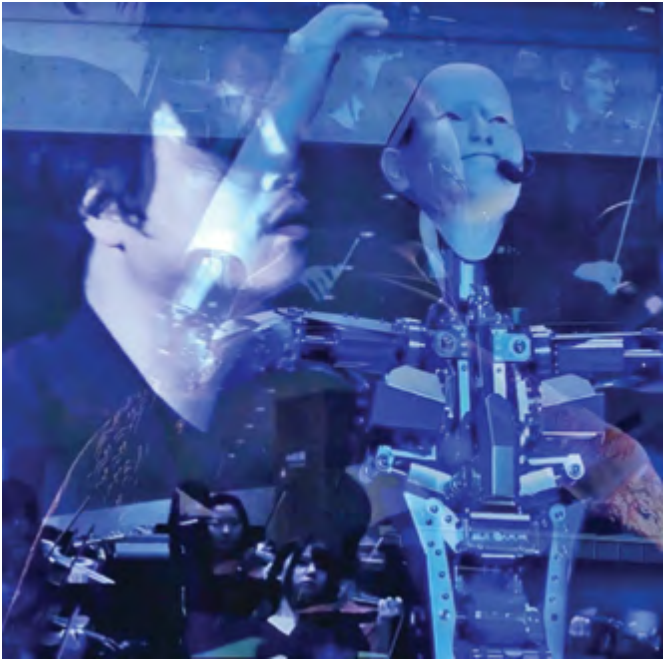
"The new generation trucks developed by Foton Motor has designs integrated as per European standards and meets all market demands. With its stunning appearance and top technical specifications, our trucks provide us with an excellent driving experience."

World Premiere of Android Opera 'Mirror' on March 2

Japanese musician and composer Shibuya Keiichiro of Android Opera will present a world premiere of his new Android Opera 'Mirror' at Expo 2020 Dubai at on March 2 at the Jubilee Stage.

Presented by Japan Pavilion Expo 2020 Dubai, Alter 3, the android performer, will be surrounded by Shibuya Keiichiro piano and computer, monks led by Eizen Fujiwara, a performer of the 1200-year-old Buddhist music called Shomyo, as well as a 45-member NSO Symphony Orchestra (UAE), a press release said. 'Mirror' is a culmination of Shibuya's work, which explores a new model of artistic harmony by combining a diversity of peoples and cultures, latest technology and oldest traditional Buddhist music.

Complementing Shibuya's piano, electronic sounds, and NSO Symphony Orchestra, Alter 3 will sing AI-generated texts accompanied by Nanzan Shinryu Shomyo, the voices of Koyasan's Buddhist music.



French visual artist Justine Emard, who has collaborated with Keiichiro for many years, will oversee visual projections focused on real-time facial expressions of the android.

The visual effect is maximised with diffuse lighting effects projected throughout the venue and onto the android.

Mixed with 3D images of temples and shrines in Koyasan, the impressive filmic lighting on Alter 3, complemented with extraordinary digitally composed electronic sounds is an experiential model of harmony that never existed before. It is considered a visual treat for people of all ages.

HUAWEI Video adds 7awi Entertainment

HUAWEI Video, a flagship video streaming application by Huawei, adds 7awi Entertainment to its stellar line-up of partners. Video-on-Demand (VOD) fans from the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region can enjoy 3 to 5 minutes short original videos from 7awi media group's rich library.

7awi provides the 27 million monthly users of HUAWEI Video with over 3,000 hours of diverse content from ten MENA home-grown brands that align with major events and celebrations



including, Mother's Day, Ramadan, Eid, Back to School, and more, a press release said.

Lifestyle and celebrity enthusiasts on HUAWEI Video can access lifestyle, celebrity,

and cinematic content from Layalina and automotive content from Arabsturbu.

The platform also gives adrenaline lovers adventurous video content by Sa2eh to plan their next trip.

Ultra slim 2-in-1 laptop

Huawei Consumer Business Group (BG) has announced the launch of the new HUAWEI MateBook E, the first Huawei ultra-slim 2-in-1 laptop, featuring a new design and the first-ever Huawei OLED Real Colour FullView Display in a laptop.

The new Huawei MateBook E is specifically designed for consumers who wish to stay productive on the go.

It is also the perfect 3 screens-in-1 laptop because it depicts the complete experience of PC, tablet and smartphone in one device. Featuring

a versatile hybrid design, smart interaction features, smart interaction features, pro-grade performance and outstanding super device capabilities, the new MateBook E is a powerful mobile productivity tool that combines the advantages of traditional laptops and tablets.

OIOISSC records safety milestone

Oman Oil Industry Supplies & Services Company (OIOISSC) accomplished a new achievement in the level of occupational safety within the company by recording more than three consecutive years without any lost time injuries (LTI).

The company celebrated this occasion in the presence of the senior management from ARA Petroleum alongside a group of

contractors approved by the company, a press release said.

Commenting on this achievement, Laurentiu Popa, general manager, encouraged all employees of the company and the contracting companies to adhere to the application of the highest standards of occupational safety to prevent any harm to the company's employees. This will contribute to ensuring the return of

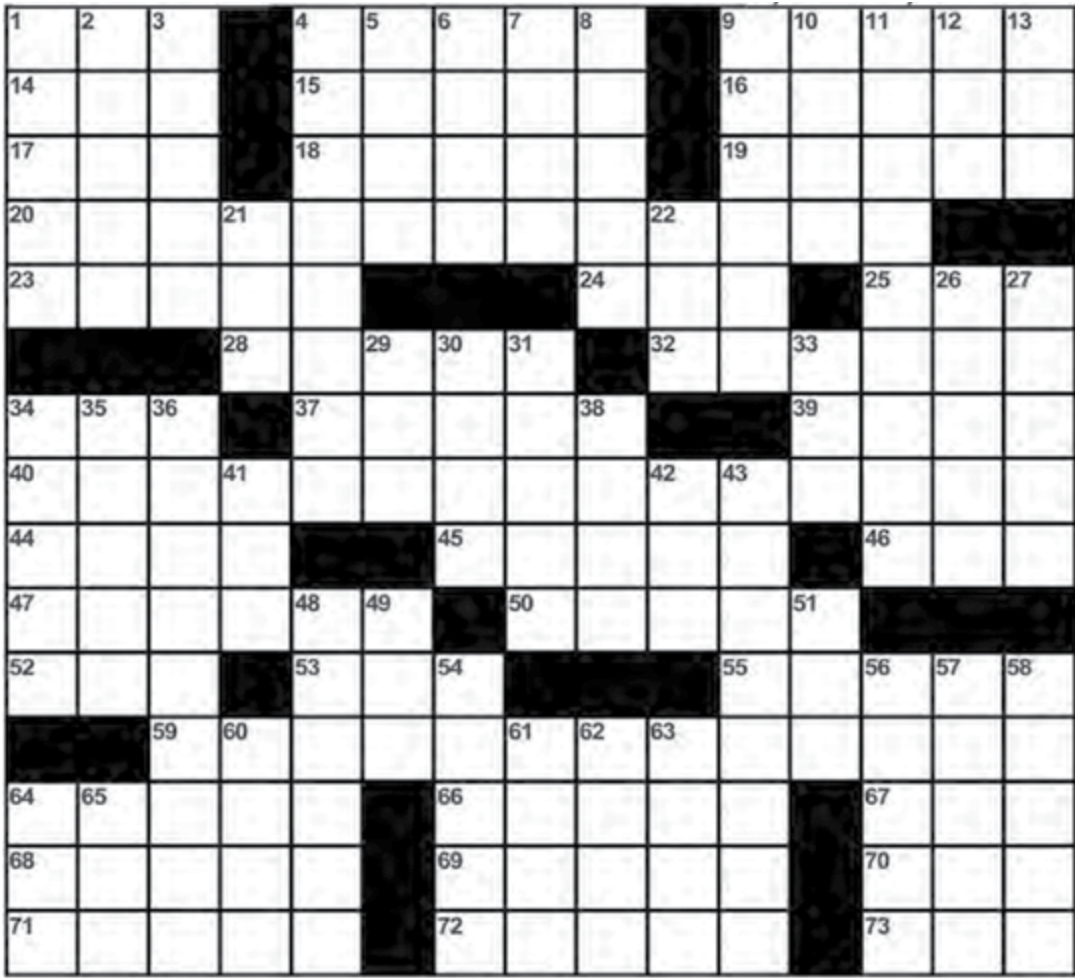
all employees to their homes safely after performing their daily duties, he said.

"This achievement reflects the keenness of Oman Oil Industry Supplies & Services Company in applying the highest standards of health and safety in all its departments in order to preserve the health and safety of its workers. The company reviews and develops these standards periodically to include all potential risks and mitigate them to provide a safe work environment across various work sites," he added.

OIOISSC is one of the leading Omani companies that provides chemical, fire and safety, mechanical, instrumentation, well intervention solutions and services to the energy and non-energy sector in the region.



DAILY CROSSWORD



ACROSS

1) One Mr. Rogers
4) Frets
9) Like the color purple
14) Aboriginal food source
15) About three grains of troy weight
16) Soft palate attachment
17)_ du Flambeau, Wisc.
18) Drop, as a vowel sound
19) "Itty" follower
20) Beyond one's imagination
23) Beauty pageant wear
24) Barely make (with "out")
25) Apprehend
28) Cavalry group
32) Fit for farming
34) Volcanic spew
37) Dentist's filling
39) Beaks
40) Like an offer one should avoid
44) Round coif
45) Small finch
46) Hr. at the prime meridian

47) Doorframe part
50) Music-score sign
52) Place for experiments
53) Grassland
55) Mouthy exams
59) Impossible to put into words
64) Contradict
66) "L_ return"
67) "Dig in!"
68) Luxury auto, for short
69) Top Boy Scout
70) Last words of Little Jack Homer
71) Start of something
72) Hairdresser's handful
73) Supply with staff

DOWN

1) Kindled anew
2) Certain Arab
3) Southwestern desert plant
4) Screenplay outline
5) Absorbent after-bath powder
6) Lake near Niagara Falls
7) Dry riverbed
8) McQueen of "The Great Escape"

9) Kind of stamp
10) Like Lucifer
11) Noted Bible printer
12) Computer keyboard key
13) What hens do
21) Food crumb
22) Alias
26) Vinyl collectible
27) Assault
29) Lennon's bride
30) Cutlass, e.g., briefly
31) Rich spreads
33) Queen of the hill?
34)_ costs (by any means)
35) Balkan capital
36) Tropical birds with curved beaks
38) Antiquity
41) Grasped
42) Magnanimous
43) Bestows a title upon
48) Firstborn
49) "I'm Sorry" singer
Brenda
51) "... blessing curse?"
54) LiabilityA's opposite
56) Crosswise, on deck
57) Andean animal
58)_ motion (begin)

60) African river
61) Blacken on a grill
62) Fierce anger

63) Misfortunes
64) "My man!"
65) Long, long time

NOTE PAD

YOUR DAILY HOROSCOPE

ARIES MARCH 21-APRIL 19
Details do tend to clump up, just like lint, especially if you don't tackle them right away! When they start to feel mountainous, the odds of an avalanche can seem overwhelming. The good news is that you just have to tackle them one by one (the way you should have in the beginning), and they will be out of the way in no time. Resolve to not let things get out of hand the next time around and you're all set.

LEO JULY 23-AUGUST 22
You may be somewhat past playground age, but there are still some games you need to learn how to play. In flirtation, for example, the point isn't to duck the incoming missile. Instead, you learn to take turns tossing questions back and forth. Of course, the real skill you need to learn is simply listening. Once you learn that trick, everyone in the game ends up a winner.

SAGITTARIUS NOVEMBER 22-DECEMBER21
If you let go a bit, you should get a little peace. If you let go a lot, you should get as much peace as you can handle. While it might feel more comfortable to hang on to something from your past, it's actually causing far more distraction than you realize, and it might be preventing you from seeing how lovely the future can be. Learn to forgive even if you can't quite forget just yet. You've got too much ahead of you to waste a moment on yesterday.

TAURUS APRIL 20-MAY 20
Sometimes you just need to hang on for the ride without trying to change its course. Taking drastic measures might bring things to an abrupt halt, forcing you to go tumbling head over heels, but you might actually have a lot of fun if you loosen up and let yourself go. You may not be in control of the situation, but ask yourself when you're ever really in total control of any situation? Relax and have fun!

VIRGO AUGUST 23-SEPTEMBER 22
Family matters are front and center for you right now, and with good reason. You've had something in mind when it comes to your relations, and reminders of that one issue keep popping up today. Your energy drags you back to remind you of your priorities, and it can be more persistent than a personal assistant. Go ahead and check in with someone who really knows you well.

CAPRICORN DECEMBER 22-JANUARY 19
Nobody knows you like your family. Still, they're sometimes less than willing to give credit where it's due for all the growing up you've done lately. Don't throw a temper tantrum. That just confirms their worst suspicions. Take a deep breath (or a few) and give yourself the praise you know you deserve for the distance you've covered and how much you've grown.

GEMINI MAY 21-JUNE 21
You know that the best things in life are free. Keep that in mind when something large, shiny, and unnecessary crosses your mind today. If your budget can stand the purchase, go ahead, but ask yourself if it's absolutely essential for you and your lifestyle. Expensive items and services can end up costing a lot in terms of your mental health!

LIBRA SEPTEMBER 23-OCTOBER 22
The universe is flashing a yellow light at you, and that means caution, not speed up! Have you been living life at the speed of light? It's time to evaluate exactly what you're getting out of this speed, because if you keep it up the result is sure to be burnout. Your friends and family haven't seen enough of you lately as a result of all this hard work, so why not do something to help you regain balance?

AQUARIUS JANUARY 20-FEBRUARY 18
Your energy right now is pushing you hard to get in touch with someone from your past. Whether it's time or circumstances that have separated you, the lights are all green and the roads are all clear when it comes to reconnecting. It doesn't matter whether you choose a letter, e-mail, or phone call, you can rest assured that they are thinking of you and thrilled that you reached out.

CANCER JUNE 22-JULY 22
Sometimes your inner needs match up with what the outer world can supply in an almost magical way. This is definitely one of those times! It's not like the universe is a pinata, exactly (although getting showered with candy doesn't sound so bad). It's just that people, places, and situations manage to sync up in just the right way at just the right time. That's actually way better than candy, isn't it?

SCORPIO OCTOBER 23-NOVEMBER 21
No situation is so insignificant that it can't spark a deep philosophical discussion. Get into the spirit of things. It's been far too long since you exercised your intellect in debating some big questions. It might be with an old friend or a stranger you just met at the coffee shop, but you should expect to work those mental muscles contemplating the deepest issues. You'll feel like you've been given a new sense of perspective afterward.

PISCES FEBRUARY 19-MARCH 20
Go ahead and pat yourself on the back. Isn't it time you gave yourself the credit you know you deserve? You've come a long way, covering distances and overcoming obstacles that you never thought you could. Even when the rest of the world said no, you pressed onward. So go ahead and rest on your laurels for the moment. Life doesn't always have to be so demanding!

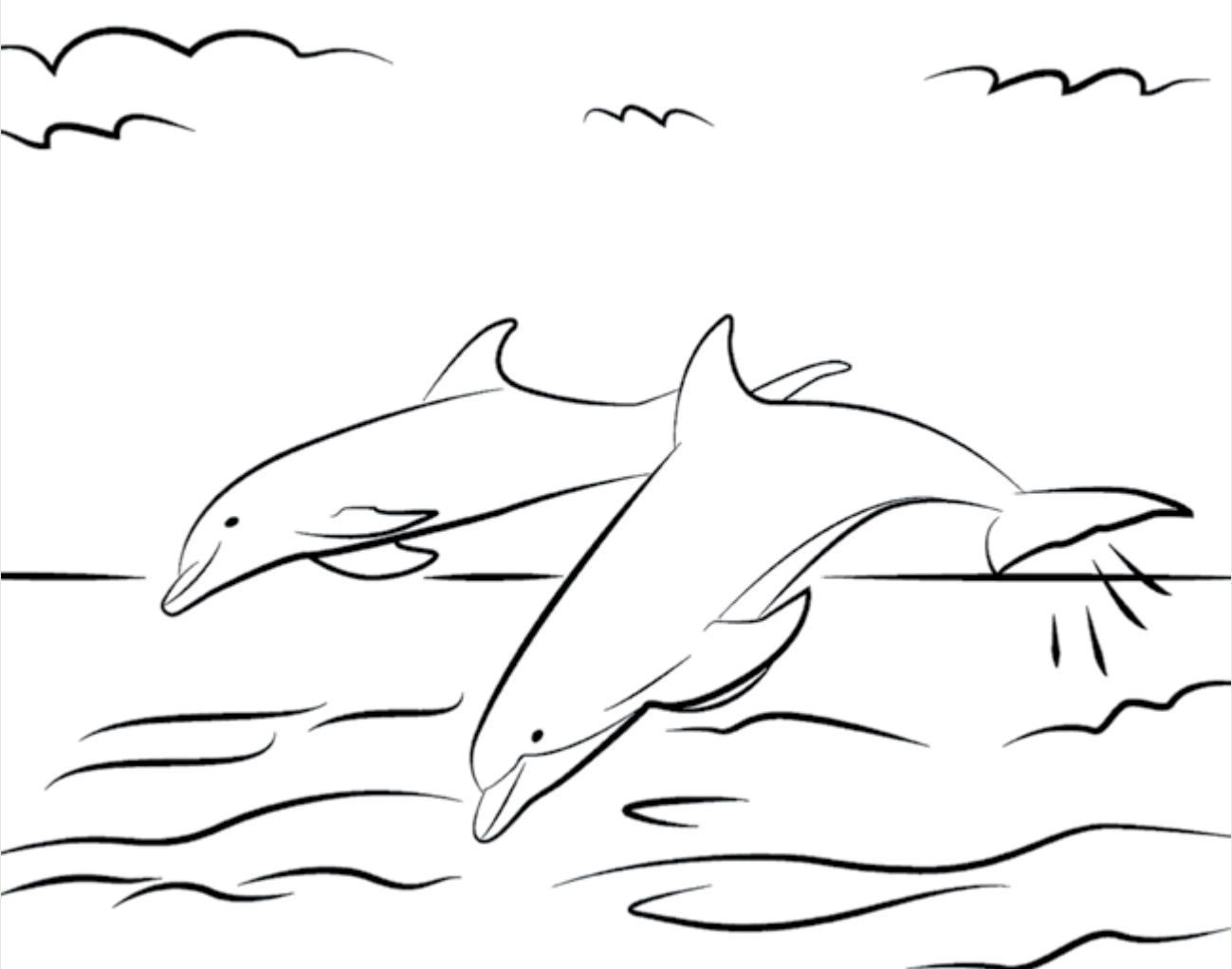


TEST YOUR KNOWLEDGE

1. In what country was the "Red Cross" founded?
A. England
B. Germany
C. France
D. Switzerland
2. In 1954, the US Department of Defence established what song as the official musical tribute to the president of the USA?
A. Hail to the Chief
B. I Think It's Gonna Work Out Fine
C. Imagine
D. Smoke Gets In Your Eyes
3. Although an annual Thanksgiving Day had been observed in several colonies throughout what became the USA, who proclaimed USA's first national Thanksgiving Day?
A. Abraham Lincoln
B. George Washington
C. Theodore Roosevelt
D. Harry S. Truman

Answers: 1. d 2. a 3. b

KIDS COLOURING



BOGGLER

M	S	R	L
P	P	S	O
P	E	L	R
I	A	A	R

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.

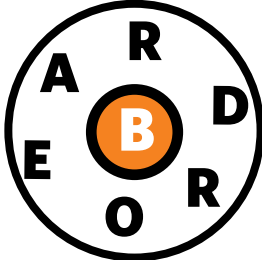
Solution 20-25 words: Excellent, 15-20 words: Very good, 10-15 words: Good, 5-10 words: Average

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

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

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

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

Hijab row: Schools reopen in southern India

Udupi, India - Schools reopened in southern India under tight security on Wednesday with public gatherings banned following protests over Muslim girls wearing the hijab in classrooms.

Tensions have been high in Karnataka state since late last year when at least four schoolgirls were prevented from wearing the Muslim headscarf, sparking protests that have since spread across India.

In an attempt to calm tensions, Karnataka's state government temporarily closed schools last week.

This came as the Karnataka High Court imposed a temporary ban on the wearing of all religious symbols in schools while it considers the headscarf ban.

As classrooms reopened in the state on Tuesday and Wednesday, police with batons were deployed outside several schools.

Authorities also imposed Section 144 - a law that prohibits gatherings of more than four people - in several districts.

There were no reports of disturbances but local media on Monday said several Muslim



Students of a government college arrive in the premises of the educational institute in Mandya district in India's Karnataka state on Wednesday (AFP)

girls chose not to attend classes or sit exams when asked to remove their headscarves.

"We have grown up wearing the hijab since our childhood and we cannot give it up. I will not write the exam, I will go home," the News Minute media outlet

quoted a young girl as saying.

"Hindu students wear vermilion... Christian students wear a rosary, what is wrong if our children wear the hijab?" a parent told broadcaster NDTV.

Nasir Sharif, 43, said his 15-year-old daughter was told to take off her hijab at the school gates on Wednesday in Chikmagalur district.

is most great)", after being prevented from entering class.

The row has heightened fears among Muslims in India, with many saying they feel under attack by the government of Hindu-nationalist Prime Minister Narendra Modi.

Rashad Hussain, US ambassador at large for international religious freedom, tweeted last

Tensions have been high in Karnataka state since late last year when at least four schoolgirls were prevented from wearing the Muslim headscarf, sparking protests that have since spread across India

He persuaded school authorities to allow her to remove it only in class.

"My daughter has been wearing the hijab since she was five years old. It is to protect her dignity. What they are asking us to do is humiliating," Sharif told AFP. A video on social media that could not be independently verified showed around a dozen girls in burqas shouting, "We want justice! Allahu Akbar (God

week that hijab bans in schools 'violate religious freedom and stigmatise and marginalise women and girls'.

The Indian government, meanwhile, said in a statement that people 'who know India well would have a proper appreciation of these realities'.

"Motivated comments on our internal issues are not welcome," it added.

AFP

17 Israelis arrested for 'racist attack' on Palestinian village

Jerusalem - Seventeen Israelis have been arrested on suspicion of involvement in a racist attack on a Palestinian village in the occupied West Bank last month, police said on Wednesday.

Police said Jewish Israelis armed with stones, clubs and 'other objects' wounded one Palestinian and vandalised shops, vehicles and property in the northern West Bank village of Hawara on January 24.

The suspects - who live in the West Bank, Jerusalem and northern Israel - are under investigation for perpetrating 'an attack, participation in a prohibited gathering and destroying property with a racist motive', police said.

Human rights groups say that West Bank Palestinians face frequent attacks by Jewish Israelis and that perpetrators often go unpunished as Israeli security forces rarely take action.

Israel's B'tselem rights group, which closely monitors West Bank violence, said in November that it had documented 451 inci-



Palestinian mourners attend the funeral of Nehad Bargouthi, killed by Israeli fire, in the Israeli occupied West Bank, on Wednesday (AFP)

dents of Jewish settler violence on Palestinians since early 2020.

In 66 per cent of cases in which settlers attacked Palestinians, Israeli security forces did not visit the scene, B'tselem said.

The United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs recorded 410 attacks by Israeli settlers against Palestinians in the first 10 months of 2021, compared to 358 in 2020.

The Israeli army said it documented 100 attacks by Palestinians against Jewish settlers in the West Bank last year.

Israel has occupied the West Bank since the Six-Day War of 1967. Since then, some 475,000 Jewish settlers have moved into the territory, living in communities considered illegal under international law alongside nearly 2.9mn Palestinians.

AFP

Nuke deal: Iran calls for US 'political statement'

Tehran, Iran - Iran urged the US Congress on Wednesday to issue a 'political statement' that Washington will stay committed to a possible agreement in Vienna talks to restore the 2015 nuclear deal.

The accord offered Tehran sanctions relief in exchange for curbs on its nuclear programme, but then US president Donald Trump unilaterally withdrew from it in 2018 and reimposed heavy sanctions.

Iran's Foreign Minister Hossein Amir-Abdollahian urged the US guarantee on the so-called Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action in an interview with the *Financial Times* published on his ministry's website.

"As a matter of principle, public opinion in Iran cannot accept as a guarantee the words of a head of state, let alone the United States, due to the withdrawal of Americans from the JCPOA," he said.

He stressed he had asked Iranian negotiators to propose to the Western parties that 'at least their parliaments or parliament speakers, including the US



Iranian Foreign Minister Hossein Amir-Abdollahian (AFP)

Congress, can declare in the form of a political statement their commitment to the agreement and return to the JCPOA implementation'.

The Vienna talks involve Iran as well as Britain, China, France, Germany and Russia directly and the United States indirectly. They aim to return the US to the nuclear deal, including through the lifting of sanctions on Iran, and to ensure Tehran's full compliance with its commitments.

"Iran's commitments are as

clear as a mathematical formula," said Amir-Abdollahian.

"It is absolutely clear what we are supposed to do and how these measures will be verified" through the UN's International Atomic Energy Agency, he said, adding that the other parties must have 'no concern'.

'Sustainable guarantees'

"But we remain concerned primarily about the guarantees" from the US side, he noted,

adding that "we are facing problems during this period because the other party lacks a serious initiative." The talks in the Austrian capital resumed in late November after a pause following the June election of ultraconservative President Ebrahim Raisi.

The US had announced its readiness to hold direct talks with Iran to resolve the remaining issues, but Tehran has said preconditions must be met before the two arch-rivals can sit at the negotiating table.

"We are not ready to enter into the process of direct talks with the US if we do not have a clear and promising outlook to reach a good agreement with sustainable guarantees in front of us," said the Iranian top diplomat. If the intentions of the US are 'genuine' they should take some 'practical and tangible steps on the ground before any direct talks and contacts can take place', he added.

Amir-Abdollahian said any direct dialogue, contact and negotiations with Washington would have 'very huge costs for my government'.

AFP

Israel PM hails 'new model' of relations on landmark Bahrain visit

Manama, Bahrain - Israeli Prime Minister Naftali Bennett said on Tuesday his landmark visit to Bahrain offered a 'new model' of Israeli-Arab relations, part of a goal of creating a regional 'ring of alliances'.

"This was a very successful visit, warm reception, strong connection, very open atmosphere," Bennett said at the end of his visit to the small, oil-rich Gulf country, 17 months after Israel and Bahrain ended decades of tensions to normalise ties.

It was the latest diplomatic breakthrough since several Arab states under the US-brokered 2020 Abraham Accords ended their isolation of Israel, despite the ongoing Israel-Palestinian conflict.

Bennett, the first Israeli head of government to visit Bahrain, said the trip had offered a very 'different atmosphere in the Arab-Israeli relationship' than in the past.

"It is a new model, it is a good model," he said.

Israel's new alliances reflect the fact that major Arab Gulf powers, the Jewish state and

their common ally the United States share an animosity toward Iran and concerns about its nuclear programme.

"My goal is to create a ring of alliances between Israel and Arab countries in the region," Bennett said as he wrapped up his visit on Tuesday evening.

Earlier, he met with King Hamad bin Isa Al-Khalifa and Crown Prince Salman bin Hamad Al-Khalifa, who is also prime minister of the island nation.

Both accepted an invitation to visit Israel in the 'near future', Bahrain's Foreign Minister Abdellatif al-Zayani said.

'Seeing my family'

Bennett, who discussed 'deepening cooperation' in meetings with the defence and other ministers, praised Bahrain's 'moderate' leaders who are looking out for 'the prosperity of their own people'. An island nation and ally of top regional power Saudi Arabia, Bahrain hosts the US Navy's Fifth Fleet.

Bennett also met with the US commander Vice Admiral Brad Cooper, the premier's office said,



King Hamad bin Isa al-Khalifa (left) receiving Naftali Bennett in the capital Manama, on Tuesday (AFP)

stressing the fleet's role in maintaining regional stability in the face of threats.

Bahrain and the United Arab Emirates became only the third and fourth Arab states - following Egypt and Jordan - to establish ties with Israel in the pacts negotiated under then US president Donald Trump. Bennett vis-

ited the UAE in December.

Bahrain's king welcomed Bennett's visit and emphasised the importance of strengthening the bilateral partnership in light of the Abraham Accords, said the official Bahrain News Agency.

Bennett also met the small Jewish community of Bahrain, about 50 people, who had prac-

tised their faith behind closed doors since the 1947 start of the Arab-Israeli conflict. After the Abraham Accords, a small synagogue in the heart of Manama was renovated and reopened.

Bennett told Jewish community members he was 'delighted' to be both in Bahrain and to be 'seeing my family'.

Bennett's Bahrain trip follows a visit by Israeli Defence Minister Benny Gantz earlier this month that saw the two countries sign a defence agreement.

That deal covered intelligence, procurement and joint training. As part of the agreements, Israel is set to post a naval official in Bahrain. Bennett also held discussions with Bahraini youth, highlighting co-operation in the face of threats.

"The fault lines used to be between Arabs and Israelis," he said, adding that now the divisions were between them and the 'agents of terror and chaos'.

'Absolutely' about Iran

Dore Gold, head of the Jerusalem Centre for Public Affairs, said Israel and Bahrain have been pushed towards closer ties as both are 'under threat by Iranian actions'.

Yoel Guzansky, a senior researcher at the Institute for National Security Studies in Tel Aviv, also said the focus of Bennett's trip was 'absolutely' on Iran.

The Islamic republic is now engaged in talks in Vienna with Britain, China, France, Germany and Russia directly, and with the United States indirectly, to revive a 2015 nuclear deal. The agreement offered Tehran sanctions relief in exchange for curbs on its nuclear programme. The US unilaterally withdrew from the accord in 2018 under Trump.

Bennett's government strongly opposes a return to the deal, and has warned repeatedly that lifting sanctions would give Iran more money to buy weapons for use against Israelis.

Guzansky said that Bennett's trip, 'in light of the talks in Vienna, it is a show of force, symbolism that the countries are working together'. He pointed to unrest in Bahrain blamed on Iran-backed opposition groups and the range of threats that Israel says Iran poses, notably its arming of Lebanese group Hezbollah.

Guzansky said that, in several respects, Bahrain has been perceived as moving slower than the UAE in consolidating ties with Israel.

AFP

Ukraine marks ‘Day of Unity’ as NATO warns on Russia pullback



People take pictures as they carry a giant Ukraine national flag at a stadium to mark a ‘Day of Unity’ in Kyiv on Wednesday (AFP)

Kyiv, Ukraine - Ukraine staged military drills and defiant displays of flag-waving patriotism on Wednesday as NATO warned Russia is continuing to mass forces for a possible invasion.

Kyiv, Ukraine - President Volodymyr Zelensky watched troops training with some of their new Western-supplied anti-tank weapons on a range near Rivne, west of the capital.

The demonstration of Ukrainian firepower contrasted with images on Russian state media that were said to show Moscow’s forces bringing an end to a major exercise in occupied Crimea. In Rivne, a row of vehicles was destroyed by simultaneous missile test strikes and armoured vehicles manoeuvred and fired on the yellowing moorland, while in Kyiv hundreds of civilians marched in a stadium with an enormous national banner.

The ‘Day of Unity’ displays came as the Kremlin called for ‘serious negotiations’ with Washington, and European leaders pushed hard for a diplomatic resolution to the crisis.

NATO chief Jens Stoltenberg, hosting the alliance’s defence ministers in Brussels, dismissed suggestions that the threat on the border had diminished.

“It remains to be seen whether there is a Russian withdrawal,” he said.

“We are of course monitoring very closely what Russia does in and around Ukraine. What we see is that they have increased the number of troops and more troops are on their way.”

US flays bid to recognise two separatist republics

Washington, US - The United States on Wednesday strongly condemned a Russian parliament proposal to recognise Ukraine’s two separatist republics as independent.

Such a move would ‘constitute a gross violation of international law’, Secretary of State Antony Blinken said in a statement.

Russia’s parliament on Tuesday voted to urge President Vladimir Putin to recognise the two breakaway regions in eastern Ukraine as ‘sovereign and independent states’ amid soaring tension with the West over Moscow’s troop build-up.

Russia’s huge build-up of troops, missiles and warships around Ukraine - which US intelligence warns could turn quickly into an invasion - has been called Europe’s worst security crisis since the Cold War. Russian President Vladimir Putin has demanded Ukraine be forbidden from pursuing its ambition to join NATO and wants to redraw the security map of eastern Europe, rolling back Western influence.

‘Signals give us hope’

But, backed by a threat of crippling US and EU economic sanctions, Western leaders have launched a drive to seek a negotiated settlement, and Moscow has signalled it will start to pull

“Kremlin approval of this appeal would amount to the Russian government’s wholesale rejection of its commitments under the Minsk agreements,” Blinken said, referring to a landmark 2014 deal meant to settle the Ukraine conflict.

He added that such a decision would undermine Moscow’s ‘stated commitment to continue to engage in diplomacy to achieve a peaceful resolution of this crisis, and necessitate a swift and firm response from the United States in full coordination with our allies and partners’.

AFP

forces back.

In the latest such move, on Wednesday the Russian defence ministry said military drills in Crimea - a Ukrainian region Moscow annexed in 2014 - had ended and that troops were returning to their garrisons.

Washington has demanded more verifiable evidence of de-escalation, but US President Joe Biden on Tuesday nevertheless vowed to push for a diplomatic solution. Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov told reporters: “It is positive that the US president is also noting his readiness to start serious negotiations.”

German Defence Minister Christine Lambrecht, arriving at the NATO talks, said reports of a

It remains to be seen whether there is a Russian withdrawal. We are monitoring very closely what Russia does in and around Ukraine

JENS STOLTENBERG

partial Russian pullback ‘are signals that at least give us hope. But it is important to observe closely whether these words are followed by deeds.”

Zelensky has downplayed threats of an immediate Russian invasion, but is attempting to rally his people with ‘Day of Unity’ celebrations under Ukraine’s blue and gold banner.

On Wednesday, after the Rivne drills, he was to visit Mariupol, a frontline port city near a breakaway region held by Russian-backed separatists.

In a video message, the 44-year-old former television actor turned leader said the flag would fly across the country and that the national anthem ‘Ukraine has not yet died’ would be sung.

“Great people of great Ukraine! This day is ours,” he declared. The European Union ambassador to Ukraine, Matti Maasikas, along with the German, Estonian, Polish and Spanish envoys were headed to Mariupol with the president in solidarity. Maasikas also said that he had raised the Ukrainian flag alongside the EU one at his

embassy, adding: “Not sure it’s fully according to the rules, but these are extraordinary times.”

In Kyiv, the capital’s deputy mayor Valentyn Mondryivsky said headteachers have been given guidance on ‘emergency situations’ and that bomb shelters would be available at all schools.

Rich return

In another sign of Ukraine’s most powerful figures coming together, some wealthy business leaders who had been urged to come back to the country announced their return.

Ukraine’s richest man, 55-year-old billionaire industrialist Rinat Akmetov, who was born in Donetsk in an area now held by separatists, was in Mariupol.

“We continue to build, we continue to invest. This year, Metinvest will invest US\$1bn in new production,” he said, referring to his company, promising to boost salaries and support a local university. On Tuesday, Ukraine said the websites of the country’s defence ministry and armed forces as well as two banks had been hit by a cyberattack of the kind that US intelligence fears would precede a Russian attack. “It cannot be excluded that the aggressor is resorting to dirty tricks,” Ukraine’s communications watchdog said, in reference to Russia.

Peskov denied that Moscow had any role in the cyber assault. “We do not know anything. As expected, Ukraine continues blaming Russia for everything,” he said.

AFP



US soldiers work on their vehicles at a temporary base installed close to the Rzeszow-Jasionka Airport, south eastern Poland on Wednesday (AFP)

US paratroopers arrive to bolster eastern flank

Rzeszów, Poland - Dozens of US paratroopers landed at a Polish airport near the Ukrainian border on Wednesday as part of a deployment of several thousand to bolster NATO’s eastern flank amid tensions with Russia.

AFP reporters saw the soldiers leaving a Boeing C-17 military transport plane and boarding buses at Rzeszow Airport, located around 100km from the border with Ukraine.

Another group of soldiers, around a dozen, boarded two Black Hawk helicopters which then took off.

Two Chinook helicopters

were also seen landing.

Armoured cars, military trucks, containers and dozens more soldiers were seen at a makeshift camp set up in and around a glass-covered conference centre opposite the airport terminal. “We don’t know yet,” a sergeant manning a checkpoint into the camp, who declined to be named, told AFP when asked how long they might stay.

Soldiers from the 82nd Airborne Division based in North Carolina have been landing at the airport in the village of Jasionka since February 5.

AFP



Lieutenant-Colonel Paul-Henri Sandaogo Damiba (right) attends the swearing in ceremony in Ouagadougou on Wednesday. (AFP)

Burkina junta chief sworn in as president

Ouagadougou, Burkina Faso - Burkina Faso strongman Lieutenant-Colonel Paul-Henri Sandaogo Damiba was inaugurated as president on Wednesday, just over three weeks after he led a coup to topple elected head of state Roch Marc Christian Kabore.

In a televised ceremony, Damiba swore an oath before the country’s top constitutional body to ‘preserve, respect, uphold and defend the Constitution’, the nation’s laws and a ‘fundamental act’ of key decisions approved by the junta.

Damiba was dressed in camouflage uniform and a red beret, and wore a sash in the colours of Burkina’s national flag.

The press, but no foreign representatives, attended the ceremony in a small room at the offices of the Constitutional Council.

On January 24, Damiba, 41, led disgruntled officers to force

out Kabore following public anger over his handling of a bloody militant insurgency.

Last week, the Constitutional Council formally determined that Damiba was president, head of state and supreme commander of the armed forces.

The move confirmed an announcement by the junta on January 31 that Damiba would be appointed to those roles for a transitional period, and be assisted by two vice presidents.

The junta suspended the constitution immediately on taking power on January 24, but later reversed this in the face of pressure from neighbours in West Africa demanding a return to civilian rule.

The military authorities have promised to re-establish the ‘constitutional order’ within a ‘reasonable time’ but the issue of a date for elections remains unsettled.

AFP

India’s ‘disco king’ and singer-composer Bappi Lahiri dies

Mumbai, India - Indian singer-composer and ‘Disco King’ Bappi Lahiri, who collaborated with the likes of Snoop Dogg and Samantha Fox, has died aged 69, his family said on Wednesday, prompting tributes from the world of politics and Bollywood. Born in West Bengal to a musical family, the larger-than-life Lahiri was renowned for his trademark gold chain and sunglasses and was credited with popularising disco music in

India.

He had several collaborations with international stars, including English model and singer Fox in the 1995 Hindi film ‘Rock Dancer’ and with Snoop Dogg on Punjabi song ‘Patiala Peg’ in 2015. Lahiri’s family said in a statement that his death was a ‘deeply sad moment’ for us. “We are seeking love and blessings for his soul,” his wife and two children said.

Lahiri had ‘multiple health is-

sues’ and died in the film industry capital Mumbai late on Tuesday, said Deepak Namjoshi, director of CritiCare Hospital, .

He had just been discharged from a month-long hospital stay on Monday, Namjoshi told the Press Trust of India, but was readmitted on Tuesday after his condition deteriorated.

“He died due to OSA (obstructive sleep apnea) shortly before midnight,” he said.



Bappi Lahiri (AFP)

Lahiri’s music was all-encompassing, expressing diverse emotions. People across generations could relate to his works. His lively nature will be missed.

NARENDRA MODI

Lahiri had fans dancing to hit songs in 1970s and ‘80s Bollywood films such as ‘Chalte Chalte’, ‘Disco Dancer’ and ‘Sharaabi’.

He also voiced several characters for Hindi-language versions of Hollywood films.

In the early 2000s, he won a copyright case against US rapper-producer Dr. Dre for using parts of one of his songs. Prime Minister Narendra Modi tweeted that Lahiri’s music was

‘all-encompassing, beautifully expressing diverse emotions’ and that ‘people across generations could relate to his works’. “His lively nature will be missed by everyone. Saddened by his demise. Condolences to his family and admirers. Om Shanti,” the Indian leader added.

Oscar-winning composer A.R. Rahman tweeted his condolences and called Lahiri the ‘Disco King of Hindi cinema’.

AFP

COVID-19 PANDEMIC

‘Hold the line’: Canada truckers dig in despite new police powers

Ottawa, Canada - Trucker-led protesters occupying the Canadian capital showed no sign of backing down on Tuesday, despite a newly invoked state of emergency granting wide new powers to end their weeks-long protest over COVID rules.

A day after Prime Minister Justin Trudeau invoked the Emergencies Act, the truckers appeared undeterred - if anything hardening their stance to move their big rigs into positions tougher to dislodge, with signs that read: ‘Hold the line’.

“Truckers are not going anywhere,” said one protester who gave his name only as Tyler, sitting at the wheel of his truck parked outside parliament.

Trudeau’s move marks only the second time in Canadian history such emergency powers have been invoked in peacetime. Authorities have until now proven unable to end the trucker movement, which has paralysed the Canadian capital Ottawa for more than two weeks, snarling border trade with the United States and spawning copycat protests abroad. Facing intense criticism over the failure to dislodge the protesters, Ottawa police chief Peter Sloly abruptly resigned on Tuesday.

Sloly had said repeatedly that he lacked the resources to remove the demonstrators safely, but in a parting statement said authorities were ‘now better positioned to end this occupation’.

The so-called ‘Freedom Convoy’ started with truckers protesting against mandatory COVID vaccines to cross the US border, but its demands have since grown to include an



A demonstrator holds a Canadian national flag during a protest by truck drivers outside the parliament of Canada in Ottawa on Tuesday (AFP)

end to all pandemic health rules and, for many, a wider anti-establishment agenda.

In the latest move to soften the tough restrictions, federal officials announced on Tuesday an easing of COVID-19 checks and rules for vaccinated travelers arriving at its borders, including no longer requiring PCR tests. “These changes are possible not only because we have passed the peak of Omicron,”

Health Minister Jean-Yves Duclos said, but because Canadians are following public health guidance ‘to protect themselves, their families and their communities’.

Quebec, meanwhile, joined several other provinces in announcing it would no longer re-

quire proof of COVID jabs to shop, dine in restaurants and for other indoor activities, starting next month - noting a drop in hospitalisations.

‘Overthrow the government’

At a news conference, Public Safety Minister Marco Mendicino noted ‘significant progress’ in bringing an end to border crossing demonstrations that he said were carried out by ‘a very small organised group that is driven by an ideology to overthrow the government’.

Police over the weekend cleared demonstrators from the Ambassador Bridge connecting Windsor, Ontario and Detroit in the US state of Michigan - ar-

resting 46 people and seizing 37 vehicles.

And on Tuesday, protesters departed a border checkpoint in Alberta, while a crossing in Manitoba was expected to reopen on Wednesday, according to federal police.

A day earlier, police had swooped in and arrested about a dozen protesters with rifles, handguns, body armour and ammunition at the border between Coutts, Alberta and Sweet Grass, Montana.

“The group was said to have a willingness to use force against the police if any attempts were made to disrupt the blockade,” the Royal Canadian Mounted Police had said in a statement.

Mendicino said the arrests in Coutts ‘should be a cautionary tale about what it is that we are precisely dealing with here’.

The Emergencies Act, formerly known as the War Measures Act, was previously used by Trudeau’s father, former prime minister Pierre Trudeau, during the October Crisis of 1970.

It saw troops sent to Quebec to restore order after the kidnappings by militant separatists of a British trade attache and a Quebec minister, Pierre Laporte, who was found strangled to death in the trunk of a car.

Justin Trudeau said the military would not be deployed at this time.

AFP

China’s Xi orders HK to suppress outbreak

Hong Kong, China - Chinese leader Xi Jinping has called for Hong Kong to take ‘all necessary measures’ to control an Omicron-fuelled COVID-19 outbreak, Beijing-affiliated newspapers in the city said on Wednesday, a day after leader Carrie Lam ruled out a China-style hard lockdown.

Hong Kong is currently in the throes of its worst-ever coronavirus outbreak, registering over a thousand confirmed cases a day as hospitals reach their breaking point.

Lam this week insisted a hard ‘wholesale’ lockdown - which the mainland has imposed on various cities in order to stamp out cases - will not be imposed on Hong Kongers.



A family arrives at a temporary centre for patients set up outside the Caritas Medical Centre in Hong Kong on Wednesday (AFP)

By Wednesday, local newspapers *Ta Kung Pao* and *Wen*

Xi had called on authorities to ‘implement every necessary measure to ensure the protection’ of public health.

Hong Kong needs ‘to prioritise stabilising and controlling the COVID situation above everything else’, the papers reported China’s leader said.

Following the publication of Xi’s remarks, Lam expressed ‘gratitude’ for his concern.

“The government will, in accordance with the important instruction of President Xi Jinping, assume the main responsibility to... adopt all necessary measures to safeguard the lives and health of Hong Kong people,” she said in a press release on Wednesday.

Authoritarian China remains

one of the few places in the world sticking to a ‘zero-COVID’ policy - stamping out any sign of an outbreak with weeks-long lockdowns of entire cities, widespread contact-tracing and testing. But it is unclear whether Hong Kong, one of the world’s most densely-packed cities, could ever make it back to zero-COVID even with a full lockdown, given the sheer number of Omicron infections it now faces.

The emergence of the extremely contagious Omicron variant sent authorities scrambling in 2022 - upping social distancing measures, shuttering schools and night-time restaurant dining.

AFP

NZ virus cases spike as anti-vaccine protesters claim win

Wellington, New Zealand - New Zealand COVID-19 infections reached a record high Wednesday as anti-vaccine protesters claimed victory after police failed to clear vehicles blocking the streets around parliament.

Health authorities reported 1,160 new coronavirus cases, the most since the pandemic began, as the Omicron variant continues to spread in a country that was largely virus-free until August.

While there have only been 53 virus deaths in the nation of five million, some protesters have taken to the streets railing against COVID-related restrictions and a government vaci-



Police deployed near parliament in Wellington on Wednesday (AFP)

nation drive.

Demonstrators inspired by

Canada’s ‘Freedom Convoy’ jammed roads with cars, trucks and campervans last week, then set up camp on the lawns of parliament in the capital Wellington.

A tense stand-off in the city centre has stretched for nine days, with police largely taking a hand-off approach, aside from violent clashes last Thursday that led to the arrest of 122 protesters.

But law enforcement officials ramped up the rhetoric late Tuesday, describing the protests as ‘untenable’ and saying tow trucks would be used to clear the streets.

Police Commissioner Andrew Coster said he had asked

for the military’s help, warning anyone who obstructed the ‘imminent’ operation that they faced arrest.

However, no tow trucks were deployed on Wednesday, and when a line of police tried to take control of an area near the parked vehicles, they were met by massed demonstrators chanting ‘whose streets, our streets’.

The protesters cheered when police withdrew behind barricades a short time later.

Assistant Commissioner Richard Chambers defended the cautious approach taken by police. “This remains an incredibly challenging and complex situation to manage, and police

are taking care not to escalate matters unnecessarily,” he said.

Police have previously expressed concern about the large number of children in the protest camp, accusing demonstrators of trying to use them as human shields to avoid arrest.

Parliamentary speaker Trevor Mallard, who is responsible for running the legislature, took matters into his own hands over the weekend, blasting pop music at the demonstrators on a loop.

Mallard subjected the protesters to ‘Baby Shark’ and Barry Manilow’s ‘Mandy’, also activating the lawn’s sprinkler system to soak the camp.

AFP



Prince Andrew and Virginia Giuffre (AFP)

Prince Andrew’s settlement ‘worth £12mn’ as anger mounts in UK

London, UK - Disgraced British royal Prince Andrew faced a call on Wednesday to ‘live out his retirement in ignominy’ after reportedly settling a sexual assault lawsuit for a whopping £12mn (US\$16.3mn, 14.3mn euros).

The lawyer for US accuser Virginia Giuffre revealed on Tuesday that both parties had settled out of court, sparing Andrew the public humiliation of a trial. The details were not revealed.

Giuffre has said she had physical relationship with Andrew when she was 17 and a minor under US law, after meeting him through the late US financier Jeffrey Epstein, who took his own life in prison while awaiting trial for sex crimes.

The prince has not been criminally charged and has denied the allegations.

The Daily Telegraph newspaper reported that Andrew was to pay £10mn to Giuffre and £2mn to a charity for victims of sex trafficking. His team told AFP they would not comment on the contents of the deal. The settlement raised questions of who is footing the bill for the perennially cash-strapped prince, with the *Telegraph* reporting it would come from one of the private estates belonging to his mother Queen Elizabeth II.

The scandal has threatened to overshadow the queen’s Platinum Jubilee this year, marking her 70 years on the throne. Any jury trial could have coincided with nationwide jubilee celebrations due to take place in the summer. It also means Andrew, 61, will no longer be questioned under oath by Giuffre’s lawyers, who had been due to travel to London next month. The court

filing said Andrew ‘regrets his association with Epstein, and commends the bravery of Ms. Giuffre and other survivors in standing up for themselves and others’.

“He pledges to demonstrate his regret for his association with Epstein by supporting the fight against the evils of sex trafficking, and by supporting its victims,” it added.

‘Finished’

But British media said the prince was now ‘finished’, and called on him to withdraw entirely from public life, after he was already stripped of his honorary military ranks and the title of ‘His Royal Highness’. “A man truly determined to clear his name of such heinous allegations would have fought tooth and nail... and then, if he won, tried to rebuild his life,” said an editorial in *The Sun*.

“That is all over. Andrew is finished - undone by his insufferable arrogance, entitlement and staggering naivety.

“He must retreat entirely from public life and live out his retirement in ignominy,” it added.

British commentators also ridiculed Andrew for claiming he had never met Giuffre, querying why he had agreed in that case to settle for such an apparently large amount, and pointing to a photograph of the pair together when she was 17. His lawyers had questioned the authenticity of the photo, which also showed socialite and Epstein friend Ghislaine Maxwell.

Others called for transparency on where the settlement money is coming from, whether from the queen’s private income or from official sources backed by British taxpayers.

AFP

At least 38 dead in heavy rains, landslides near Rio

Petropolis, Brazil - At least 38 people were killed in devastating flash floods that swept through the picturesque Brazilian city of Petropolis, turning streets into torrential rivers, officials said on Wednesday. Heavy storms on Tuesday dumped 258mm of rain on the city in three hours, nearly equal to all the rainfall from the previous month, said the mayor’s office for the scenic town in the hills north of Rio de Janeiro.

Some 80 homes were damaged, and around 300 people were being housed in shelters, mostly in schools.

Wendel Pio Lourenco, a 24-year-old resident, was walking through the streets with a television in his arms, heading to a local church in search of shelter. He said he was trying to save a few possessions, after spending a

sleepless night helping search for victims of the disaster.

“I found a girl who was buried alive,” he said. Officials said there had been multiple landslides. AFP journalists saw the remains of wrecked houses strewn across a ravine by a torrent of mud in an impoverished hillside slum.

Videos posted on social media from Tuesday’s rains showed streets in Petropolis, the 19th-century summer capital of the Brazilian empire, fill with gushing floods that swept away cars, trees and nearly everything else in their path. Officials said more than 180 firefighters and other rescue workers were responding to the emergency.

City hall declared a ‘state of disaster’ in the city of 300,000 people, which sits 68km north of the city of Rio.

AFP

GARBAGE IN CANALS



SOLITARY

Cleaner

A Mexican kayaker takes up a solo mission to clean up floating gardens in Mexico City

As dawn breaks over Mexico City's floating gardens, Omar Menchaca paddles his kayak through a maze of canals collecting garbage of all sorts left by careless visitors to one of the last vestiges of the ancient Aztec capital.

In the silence of the early morning, before the hordes of tourists arrive, the 66-year-old retiree fishes plastic bottles and other debris from the waters of Xochimilco.

"I came here to train for my competitions," says the former athletics champion. "Over time, unfortunately, I started noticing that these canals were full of garbage."

As his single-seater kayak glides by,

herons and pelicans take flight in the morning mist. In the distance, the Popocatepetl volcano, Mexico's second highest summit, rises more than 5,400m above sea level.

Menchaca seems to be far from the network of congested roads that serve Mexico City and its nine million inhabitants. In fact, "the ring road is only 600m away," he says with a smile.

Menchaca regularly puts down his paddle and uses his bare hands to pick up garbage floating on the surface of the water amid aquatic flowers.

Xochimilco is a magnet for tourists who ride colourful gondolas through its network of canals and artificial islands created centuries ago by the area's indigenous peoples.

On weekends in particular, couples, families and groups of friends come to eat,

drink and dance to the sound of mariachi music.

The reserve is home to endemic species including the critically endangered axolotl, a salamander-like amphibian.

Cleaning up the waste left by visitors is a constant battle for Menchaca, who offers tours during which he recounts the history of the UNESCO World Heritage Site. He likes nothing more than to see children copy him by collecting waste.

"Xochimilco is visited by around 6,000 people on weekends. Unfortunately, people don't take care of the place," he says.

Conservationists also worry about the impact of development encroaching on the area, which is listed as a Wetlands of International Importance under an intergovernmental conservation treaty.

A small difference

Menchaca swears when sees boats equipped with outboard motors.

"The canals are not very deep, barely half a meter," he says. "A boat with an engine that carries up to 40 people causes noise and pollutes the wetlands with oil and gasoline."

At midday, Menchaca returns to the pier from which he set off through a vast canal with a breathtaking view of Mount Ajusco, which rises to some 3,900m within the city limits. His kayak is overflowing with garbage.

On the way he greets a man shoveling mud from the canal to use as a natural fertiliser. "The people at the pier should pick up all the garbage and not Don Omar," says the 69-year-old, Noe Coquis Salcedo.

Back on dry land, Menchaca deposits off the debris in a dumpster near the parking lot. He believes that his efforts make a small difference helping to preserve the place for future generations, in addition to the work of the city authorities who say they are constantly maintaining the canals.

"The canals are paths," says Menchaca. "That's why, when I see this garbage, I try to collect it so that whoever passes afterward can enjoy a clean path," he adds.

"If we do nothing for our planet there will come a time when..." Menchaca says before pausing, his hands outstretched like a gesture of helplessness.

"...there won't be much left for us to enjoy," he asserts.

AFP



Xochimilco is visited by around 6,000 people on weekends. Unfortunately, these people don't take care of the place

OMAR MENCHACA



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BEAT THE CHILL



WINTER WARMUPS

On chilly winter mornings, defying the temptation to stay cosy in bed is crucial to staying in step with your workout commitments. Don't let the weather get the better of you...

Unlike bright summer mornings when it's nice and warm for a jog or a run, cold, dark winter mornings can be quite endearing to stay curled up in bed. However, once you jump into your jersey and shoes, things begin to change in an instant. And a good warmup, would set the pace for a fulfilling workout.

Whether you've been a regular outdoor runner for years or you've only recently started up a new exercise routine, the chill weather can keep you indoors, if not disrupt your regular workouts. But with many gyms closed due to the current pandemic, outdoor activities are the best bet.

Fitness freak Nageeb al Khaldi, "The best way to start your daily morning routine is by stretching for like 5 minutes, then going for a brisk walk, cycling, running, or climbing stairs. It will help to activate your body warm up, regulate blood flow, and make you feel active and energetic."

Khaldi recommends following the warm up activity with a few exercises like push ups and crunches to strengthen the upper body. "You can then shower, have your breakfast, and start your day with positive energy," he adds.

Olympian and sprinter Barakat al Harthi recommends working out every morning during winter to maintain one's fitness quotient. His own regime is a combination of indoor/outdoor warmups and activities besides workouts in a gym during the day.

"My daily training begins with a ten-minute warm up. Sometimes I run at the beach, sometimes around my house or at any suitable place. After warming up in the morning, I then proceed for more rigorous workouts in the afternoon. Twice a week, I train in the gym. I also run in the hills once a week to increase my speed and endurance levels," he said adding that it helps him stay fit and better his performance. He is currently



My daily training begins with a ten-minute warm up. Sometimes I run at the beach, sometimes around my house or at any suitable place

BARAKAT AL HARTHI

rently getting set for the upcoming Islamic Solidarity Games (in Turkey, in August) and the Asian Games (in China, in September).

HERE ARE A FEW TIPS TO PEP UP YOUR WINTER WORKOUTS:

Seek a willing partner

When exercising alone, there is only one person you have to convince to skip a session and very often it succeeds. But if you exercise with a partner – spouse, sibling friend or a group – there will be some pressure to ignore your inclinations. Partners and exercise buddies provide motivation and support for keeping commitments.

Make it social

Some people love exercising on their own, but for others, it is helpful to have company. Being part of an exercise group is a good way to stay on track every morning. Research



The best way to start your daily morning routine is by stretching for like 5 minutes, then going for a brisk walk, cycling, running, or climbing stairs

NAGEEB AL KHALDI

shows that those who meet up with friends to exercise are less likely to pull out at the first pretext.

Get the right gear

Fitness activity, especially in winter, calls for appropriate gear to avoid getting under the weather. For events like running, hiking, etc, consider layers that can be taken off and added back later, allowing you to balance rising body temperatures with the cold air temperatures.

The layer closest to your skin should be a moisture-wicking material, like lightweight polyester or polypropylene, to take moisture away from your skin to the outer layers to evaporate. The second layer is the insulating layer, which should be wool or polyester fleece. The third, outer layer needs to be wind and rain-repellent.

There are also specially made caps and winter hats made to help wick away sweat while retaining heat.

Walking and running

Walking and running are the easiest of the outdoor exercises to keep up during the cold winter months as they don't really require much in the way of extra gear or certain conditions. As long as it's not too cold, you can pretty much put on your shoes and, with some extra preparation, hit the road.

Stretch it out

With any movement-related activity, warm-ups and cool-downs are essential, especially during cold days. A good warm-up, which uses movement to warm your muscles up as opposed to the more traditional static stretching, is ideal as it gives the body an active range of motion to warm muscles.

Stretching is a must before running but if you're just getting ready for a cold, winter walk, it's not as essential.

Running smart

Be sure you blanket the right shoes for running. Having ill-fitting sneakers can derail your running before it really gets started. If you're new to running or not naturally a runner, it's best to start with a running programme or consider getting enrolled with a group so that you get acquainted with the required guidelines.

Cycling

Like a lot of these activities, cycling is definitely doable in the winter but your ability to pull it off regularly may vary, depending on where you live and the corresponding weather. Be careful to stick to clear roads, especially if you're new to cycling. Also, as with running, make sure you incorporate dynamic stretching into your warm-up routine so you can get your body warm and ready for the ride.

Keep track of your training

There are numerous apps and gadgets that can help keep track of your activities. And it doesn't need to be tech heavy. Making a note or placing a dot on a calendar or chart can help you visualise how much you have already done. If counting steps is your thing, be aware that just racking up the numbers is not enough.

Give yourself rest

Rest and recovery are important, especially if you are undertaking intense exercise or building up your fitness. Studies show that athletes who are sleep deprived may experience subtle changes in hormone levels, leading to higher levels of cortisol and a decrease in human growth hormone, which is active during tissue repair. Be it a hot drink or a warm bath to soothe your cold bones, having a reward to look forward to can be key on cold days.



Slovakia knock USA out of Olympic hockey



Slovakia's Marek Hrivik (R) celebrates with teammates after scoring a goal during the men's play-off quarterfinal match against USA (AFP)

Beijing, China - Slovakia eliminated the United States in the Beijing Olympic ice hockey quarterfinals Wednesday, stunning the Americans with a tying goal in the final minute of regulation before winning 3-2 in a shootout.

Deprived of its National Hockey League (NHL) stars by the pandemic, the USA squad of relative unknowns had inspired comparisons to the overachieving 1980 gold-medal winning "Miracle on Ice" team as they went 3-0 in group play.

They were 44 seconds from clinching a spot in the Beijing semifinals when Slovakia's captain Marek Hrivik slotted home

to tie it 2-2 and send the game into overtime.

Slovakia scored once in the penalty shootout, leaving USA captain Andy Miele with one last shot, but his effort was smothered by goalie Patrik Rybar.

The USA's collection of ageing veterans and NHL-bound teenagers had played with sur-

prising cohesion despite practising only a few times together before the Games.

"These guys will have a great future ahead of them and they'll be back here representing USA before you know it," veteran former NHL defencemen Steven Kampfer said of his younger teammates.

MEDALS TABLE				
	G	S	B	T
Norway	13	7	8	28
Germany	10	6	4	20
United States	8	7	4	19
China	7	4	2	13
Austria	6	7	4	17
Netherlands	6	4	4	14
Sweden	6	4	4	14
Switzerland	5	0	5	10
Russian OC	4	8	12	24
France	4	7	2	13
Canada	3	4	11	18
Italy	2	7	6	15
Japan	2	5	7	14
South Korea	2	4	1	7
Slovenia	2	3	2	7
Finland	1	2	3	6
Australia	1	2	1	4
New Zealand	1	1	0	2
Hungary	1	0	2	3
Czech Republic	1	0	1	2
Slovakia	1	0	0	1
Belarus	0	2	0	2
Spain	0	1	0	1
Ukraine	0	1	0	1
Belgium	0	0	1	1
Estonia	0	0	1	1
Latvia	0	0	1	1
Poland	0	0	1	1

G Gold S Silver B Bronze T Total



Gold medalist France's Clement Noel (C) poses with his team after the men's slalom victory ceremony at the Beijing Winter Olympics (AFP)

'One-shot' Noel takes slalom gold for France

Yanqing, China - Clement Noel claimed France's first alpine skiing gold medal of the Beijing Olympics when he won the men's slalom on Wednesday.

Noel, sixth fastest after the first run, laid down the quickest second run to clock a combined total of 1min 44.09sec down the "Ice River" course in Yanqing in cold and sunny conditions.

Austria's Johannes Strolz, already a gold medalist in the alpine combined at these Games, took silver 0.61sec behind, while Norwegian Sebastian Foss-Solevaag claimed bronze at 0.70sec.

Strolz had been fastest in the first run, but he faded in his second leg, leaving Noel roaring with delight as the Austrian came through the finish line and it was clear the Frenchman had taken the gold.

"That was one of the most important races in my career. It's not often that you are able to win a medal in the Olympic Games," said 24-year-old Noel.

"It's one shot - one minute and 40 seconds every four years.

"I knew that I was in shape. My races in January were not good but training here was really good, I was fast. This is the best I can do. I have no words to describe it ... wooh!"

Noel's gold completed a full house for the French men's ski team after veteran Johan Clarey bagged downhill silver and Mathieu Faivre took a bronze medal in the giant slalom.

The most technical race on the alpine ski programme had promised to be one of the most open contests in recent history and so it proved.

Of the six World Cup races held this season, there have been five different winners, including Noel, while 14 different racers have made the podium.

Switzerland's Daniel Yule, 13th fastest in the first leg, set the pace before Noel took the lead with just five racers remaining.

Germany's Linus Strasser and Switzerland's Loic Meillard failed to bother Noel, leaving the top trio from the first run to chance their arm.

AFP

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Early riser Hall 'gambles' to bag slopestyle gold at Beijing Games

Zhangjiakou, China - Alex Hall admitted that he was "not a morning person" but he still managed to rise and shine to claim freeski slopestyle gold at the Beijing Olympics on Wednesday.

The American's first-run score of 90.01 was enough to give him the title ahead of countryman Nick Goepper but he said "having fun" was more important than winning medals, on a cold, early morning at Genting Snow Park.

"I'm glad I did something that made it fun for me, especially when it's freezing like this and you've got to get up at 6:00am and I'm not a morning person," said the 23-year-old.

"You've got to find everything you can to make it as fun as possible. That's exactly why I came out and did the tricks I did, just so I'd fully enjoy it."

Hall wowed the judges with his creative moves, including a flashy "butter" trick that involves using the flex of the skis to launch into a jump - "definitely a gamble", he said.

He called his first run "the best" he had ever performed but he was less concerned about scoring points than enjoying himself.

"That's why I think this win is the most special win of my career because I just did exactly what I wanted to do - I didn't do



USA's Alexander Hall competes in the freestyle skiing men's freeski slopestyle final run in Winter Games (AFP)

I think this win is the most special win of my career because I just did exactly what I wanted to do

ALEX HALL

anything for the judges and I did what I thought would be the most fun on the course," he said.

"I'm glad it put me in first but if it had put me in 12th I would have been OK with it as long as I'm skiing my best and loving it."

Goepper claimed silver on

86.48, while Sweden's Jesper Tjader took bronze on 85.35.

Goepper jumped into second with an impressive second run and said he felt he "deserved" his medal.

"I always, even at this point in my career, am contemplating if I am doing the right thing to succeed," said the 27-year-old.

"Even being at the top of my game, I'm still second-guessing myself a little bit. So for it to pay off in this way, based on how I've been taking care of myself the last year, is validating."

Goepper won bronze at the 2014 Sochi Games and silver four years later in Pyeongchang, and he admitted he struggled to cope after his initial Olympic success.

He said that he drank to excess and even thought about taking his own life.

The American said Wednesday that he was "doing really good" and was "impressed" that more athletes are opening up about their mental health.

"I've done a lot of work off the slope on myself, even more work there than I've done on the slope," he said.

"I think that's the most important, to get on a good foundation as a person before you can go and kick ass and do sports."

AFP



PSG French forward Kylian Mbappe celebrates after winning the UEFA Champions League round of 16 first leg match against Real Madrid (AFP)

Mbappe underlines value to PSG and leaves Messi in shade

Paris, France - Kylian Mbappe's importance to Paris Saint-Germain was all too evident long before his stoppage-time strike gave them a narrow win over Real Madrid in the first leg of their Champions League showdown on Tuesday and left them on course for a place in the quarter-finals.

It is understood that PSG rejected an offer worth up to 180 million euros (\$204m) from Real in August for Mbappe, despite the France World Cup-winning striker being in the final year of his contract.

They wanted at least one more season with Mbappe at the Parc des Princes knowing that, even with Lionel Messi and Neymar there too, he is the man they need if they are finally to win a

first Champions League title since the Qatari takeover of 2011.

Mbappe is still expected to leave at the end of the campaign for Real, the club who have tracked him since he was a teenager but who are now in danger of going out of the Champions League after his last-gasp winner.

The last-16 first leg in the French capital was still goalless in the fourth and final minute of injury time when the 23-year-old Mbappe burst into the box and finished through the legs of Real goalkeeper Thibaut Courtois.

That gave PSG a 1-0 victory that even Real coach Carlo Ancelotti admitted was deserved after a game dominated by the home side.

AFP

Ronaldo ends barren run, Man Utd back into top 4

Manchester, United Kingdom - Cristiano Ronaldo ended his six-game goal drought on Tuesday as Manchester United recovered from an insipid first-half display to beat 10-man Brighton 2-0 and clamber back into the Premier League top four.

The match dramatically changed complexion early in the second half, with Ronaldo scoring his first goal in 2022 before Lewis Dunk was sent off three minutes later. But the home side still managed to make heavy weather of the situation, wasting a number of great chances to double their lead until Bruno Fernandes sealed the points deep into stoppage time.

Ralf Rangnick's team had blown half-time leads to draw 1-1 in their previous three matches in all competitions, dropping crucial points in the league and exiting the FA Cup on penalties.

In his pre-match interviews, United's interim manager had spoken about how he wanted his team to be more like Dr Jekyll and less like his literary evil alter ego Mr Hyde.

The German said after the match he had seen both sides of his team, who have struggled to find consistency and fluency under his stewardship.

"First half was Mr Hyde, second half Dr Jekyll and for a change it (the result) was different," he said. "In the end it was important to get the three points against an in-form team."

Rangnick praised 37-year-old Ronaldo, who returned to the scoresheet for the first time since December 30.

"Very important not only that he scored but it was an outstanding goal," he said. "It was impor-



Cristiano Ronaldo (C) celebrates with striker Anthony Elanga (L) after scoring the first goal during EPL match against Brighton at Old Trafford (AFP)

tant for all of us, but his overall performance was one of the best since I arrived here."

United struggles

Forward Anthony Elanga and midfielder Fred came into United's starting line-up for Marcus Rashford and Paul Pogba, with defender Raphael Varane also missing out due to illness.

Jadon Sancho was denied early on but the hosts created precious little as mid-table

Brighton controlled the game, enjoying nearly 60 percent of possession in the first half.

David de Gea was forced to make a spectacular save to keep out a Jakub Moder header and the half-time whistle drew boos from a frustrated home crowd, with United fortunate to be level at 0-0.

The home side took the lead in the 51st minute when Scott McTominay found Ronaldo, who darted forwards, cutting past

Adam Webster and firing beyond goalkeeper Robert Sanchez from the edge of the box.

It was the Portugal forward's 15th goal since he returned to United from Juventus in August.

Things got dramatically better for United minutes later as Elanga's pace caught out Dunk, who brought down the teenager.

Referee Peter Bankes showed a yellow card to the Brighton captain, only to change it to red after reviewing the foul on the

advice of the video assistant referee.

United were now on top but they failed to kill off the game despite their man advantage.

They almost paid for their profligacy when Moder beat De Gea but he saw his shot cannon back off the crossbar in the 78th minute and ex-United player Danny Welbeck flashed a late header high as the home fans breathed a sigh of relief.

AFP

Troubled Barca face European reality check

Madrid, Spain - Joan Laporta claimed Barcelona are "back as big players" but Thursday will mark another checkpoint in the club's decline as they face Napoli in the knock-out stage of the Europa League.

After failing to make it out of their Champions League group, Barca will play in Europe's second-tier tournament for the first time since losing to Celtic at the last-16 stage in March 2004.

Laporta was in the opening season of his first spell as president that year and while Barcelona's fortunes would soon improve exponentially as Pep Guardiola and Lionel Messi got to work, nobody can be optimistic a similar transformation is close now. Barcelona's players were likely watching on television on Tuesday as Messi played - and missed a penalty - for Paris Saint-Germain against Real Madrid in Paris, the kind of heavyweight European tie to which the Catalans would be normally more accustomed.

There are some positive signs that coach Xavi Hernandez is



Gerard Pique is one of the few veterans left after a string of departures at Barcelona (AFP)

steering the team in the right direction, even if erratic results and performances are a reminder of the work still to be done.

Barca defeated Atletico Madrid 4-2 earlier this month in one of the most encouraging displays under Xavi, but a 2-2 draw away at city rivals Espanyol last weekend saw doubts resurface ahead of the visit of Napoli to the

Napoli are a Champions League-level side, one of the most difficult teams we could have drawn

XAVI HERNANDEZ

Camp Nou.

The youthful Barca side's attempt to rebuild their reputation in the Europa League will come under a severe examination against opponents who sit third in Serie A and have conceded only 17 goals in 25 matches.

"Napoli are a Champions League-level opponent, one of the most difficult teams we could

have drawn," said Xavi.

Luciano Spalletti's side are fighting to win their third Serie A title - after Diego Maradona left Barcelona and inspired Napoli to become champions in 1987 and 1990. "The game will be a tribute to Maradona," said Xavi.

'Big players'

Europa League success is now a priority for Barcelona, something that would have been unthinkable until recently for a club who won the Champions League three times in seven years midway through the last decade.

But the reality is that Barca managed just two goals in six Champions League group matches, sit 15 points behind Real Madrid in La Liga and lost in the quarter-finals of the Copa del Rey last month.

There are just three points separating the four teams battling for fourth place in La Liga and the final Champions League place - Barcelona, Atletico Madrid, Real Sociedad and Villarreal.

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South Africa's captain Dean Elgar and New Zealand cricket captain Tom Latham pose with the trophy in Christchurch on Tuesday (AFP)

Green wicket holds key to New Zealand-South Africa first Test

Christchurch, New Zealand - New Zealand and South Africa are focusing on the notoriously green Hagley Oval wicket as they draw up battle plans for the first Test starting in Christchurch on Thursday.

New Zealand are desperate for a first series win against South Africa and to prove they can still muster a winning combination despite missing 273 Tests-worth of experience with the absence of Ross Taylor (retired), Kane Williamson (injured) and Trent Boult (paternity leave).

South Africa are thirsting to lift both their world ranking (fifth) and to boost their World Test Championship standing, with the chance to move up to second if they sweep the two-Test series.

But the main talking point for New Zealand captains Tom Latham and South African counterpart Dean Elgar on Wednesday was the bowl-first reputation of the lush Hagley Oval surface.

It will be South Africa's first outing on the Christchurch strip where both Tests of the series

will be played. New Zealand boast an enviable record of seven wins, one defeat and one draw on a wicket that always seems to suit their swing.

"It presents opportunities to score runs but also presents opportunities for bowlers with a bit of pace and bounce and a bit of assistance off the wicket," New Zealand skipper Latham said.

"We've played some really good cricket at home now for a long period and I know if we can adapt to the wicket, adapt to the surface, then hopefully we'll give ourselves a good chance."

New Zealand go into the Test on a high after thrashing Bangladesh by an innings and eight wickets on the same ground a month ago and Latham said they have been focusing on their poor record against South Africa who they have beaten just four times in 45 Tests.

South Africa's preparations for coping with the Hagley Oval conditions have been meticulous, right down to pinpointing the best time to score runs.

AFP

Rohit, Bishnoi help India beat West Indies in T20



India's captain Rohit Sharma during the first Twenty20 international cricket match against West Indies at the Eden Gardens in Kolkata (AFP)

Kolkata, India - Skipper Rohit Sharma's opening blitz and a strong bowling performance from debutant Ravi Bishnoi helped India down the West Indies by six wickets in the first Twenty20 international in Kolkata on Wednesday.

Chasing 158 for victory, Rohit's 40 off 19 balls put India in control and the hosts achieved their target with seven balls to spare to take the lead in the three-match series.

Bishnoi impressed with his leg-spin, taking 2-17 from his four overs to restrict West Indies to 157 for seven despite Nicholas Pooran's attacking 61.

West Indies off-spinner Roston Chase proved to be a big hurdle in India's chase as he returned figures of 2-14, including the key wickets of openers Rohit and Ishan Kishan.



India's Ravi Bishnoi (2L) celebrates with teammates after the dismissal of West Indies' Rovman Powell (AFP)

But Suryakumar Yadav stood firm and smashed 34 not out off 18 deliveries to take the team home with Venkatesh Iyer, who hit the winning six in his unbeaten, 13-ball 24.

Earlier, Rohit took the attack to the opposition bowlers as he

hit four fours and three sixes but mistimed a hit to the deep mid-wicket fielder where Odean Smith took a good catch.

The left-handed Kishan, who was bought for a whopping \$2 million by Mumbai Indians in the IPL auction last Saturday, strug-

gled on his way to 35 before falling to Chase.

Virat Kohli's poor run extended into the T20 format as he fell to Fabian Allen for 17. He had scores of eight, 18 and nought in India's ODI clean-sweep of the West Indies.

SCOREBOARD			
WEST INDIES			
Brandon King	c Yadav b Kumar	4	(5)
Kyle Mayers	lbw b Chahal	31	(24)
N Pooran	c Kohli b Patel	61	(43)
R Chase	lbw b Ravi Bishnoi	4	(10)
R Powell	c Iyer b Ravi Bishnoi	2	(3)
A Hosein	c & b Chahal	10	(12)
K Pollard	not out	24	(19)
Odean Smith	c Sharma b Patel	4	(4)
Extras:	(lb 6, w 11)	17	
TOTAL:	(20 Ov, RR: 7.85)	157/7	
Fall of wickets: 1-4, 2-51, 3-72, 4-74, 5-90, 6-135, 7-157			
Bowling: B Kumar 4-0-31-1, D Chahal 3-0-28-1, H Patel 4-0-37-2, Y Chahal 4-0-34-1, R Bishnoi 4-0-17-2, V Iyer 1-0-4-0			
INDIA			
R Sharma	c Smith b Chase	40	(19)
Ishan Kishan	c Allen b Chase	35	(42)
Virat Kohli	c Pollard b Allen	17	(13)
R Pant	c Smith b Cottrell	8	(8)
S Yadav	not out	34	(18)
V Iyer	not out	24	(13)
Extras:	(lb 1, w 3)	4	
TOTAL:	(18.5 Ov, RR: 8.60)	162/4	
Fall of wickets: 1-64, 2-93, 3-95, 4-114			
Bowling: S Cottrell 4-0-35-1, R Shepherd 3-0-24-0, O Smith 2-0-31-0, A Hosein 4-0-34-0, R Chase 4-0-14-2, F Allen 1.5-0-23-1			

Sheldon Cottrell's wicket of Rishabh Pant raised the tension in the Indian dug-out, but Yadav and Iyer put on an unbeaten stand of 48.

Put into bat, Pooran built key partnerships including a 45-run sixth-wicket stand with returning skipper Kieron Pollard, who hit an unbeaten 24 after he missed the last two ODIs due to a knee injury. Pace bowler Bhuvneshwar Kumar dismissed opener Brandon King for four with the fifth ball of the match before Kyle Mayers and Pooran, who hit four fours and five sixes in his 43-ball blitz, attempted to rebuild the innings.

The left-handed Mayers made 31 off 24 deliveries but fell lbw to Yuzvendra Chahal's leg-spin while Bishnoi slowed the flow of runs from the other end.

Vfor four and dismissed Rovman Powell cheaply three balls later.

Pooran, who was given an early reprieve on eight when Bishnoi took a catch in the deep but his foot touched the boundary rope, went on to complete his sixth T20 international fifty.

The second match is on Friday at Kolkata's Eden Gardens.

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IPL's Kolkata appoint Shreyas Iyer captain

VNew Delhi, India - India's Shreyas Iyer has been appointed captain of Indian Premier League side Kolkata Knight Riders, the franchise said Wednesday, succeeding Eoin Morgan who went unsold at the tournament's recent auction.

Iyer was the costliest player bought by Kolkata, owned by Bollywood superstar Shah Rukh Khan, selling for \$1.62 million in the auction last weekend ahead of season 15 of the lucrative Twenty20 tournament.

"We are delighted firstly to have been able to successfully bid for Shreyas in the IPL auction



Shreyas Iyer

and to have the opportunity for him to lead #TeamKKR," Venky Mysore, chief executive of

Kolkata, said in a statement.

"He has impressed one and all as a quality batsman at the high-

est level and we are confident that he will excel as a leader of #TeamKKR."

The two-time champions released Morgan after last year's edition of the tournament despite the England white-ball captain leading the team to a runners-up finish in Dubai.

The 27-year-old Iyer, who recently hit a match-winning 80 in India's 3-0 ODI whitewash of the West Indies, led IPL side Delhi Capitals to their first final in the 2020 season, which was won by Mumbai Indians.

"The IPL as a tournament brings the best players from dif-

ferent countries and cultures together and I look forward to leading this great group of very talented individuals," said Iyer, an attacking batsman who has played 32 T20 matches for India since his debut in 2017.

Kolkata secured a return for Australia's Pat Cummins, who went to the same team for a record \$2.17 million in 2019 but was released last year for nearly \$1 million.

Kolkata are coached by former New Zealand captain Brendon McCullum. The 15th edition of the IPL begins in late March.

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