

Three new free zones to attract investments: Business leaders

Our Correspondent
Muscat

To achieve comprehensive and sustainable development in the sultanate and to make it more attractive for investment, His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik issued Royal Decree No 10/2022 last week to set up three free zones - Muscat International Airport Free Zone, Sohar Airport Free Zone and Salalah Airport Free Zone.

Following the announcement, *Muscat Daily* spoke with business leaders who hailed the decision and its long-term aim of achieving sustainable growth in the sultanate.

Dr Ibrahim al Balushi, CEO of Karwa Motors, believes the free zones will attract investments from abroad and stimulate the national economy. "These free zones will be an incubator for local and international companies that will contribute to diversifying sources of income and increasing the competitiveness of the national economy, in addition to transferring knowledge and skills to the sultanate," Balushi said.

He noted that the Omani economy "needs to stand up to global competition, attract foreign capital and create job opportunities."

According to Nasser al Hosni, a businessman, the Public Authority for Special Economic Zones and Free Zones has succeeded in attracting several foreign companies and supported the economy in various industrial and



logistic activities worth billions of rials, besides creating job opportunities in the past few years.

"Special Economic Zone Authority at Duqm is the best example of attracting global investments. I believe these three new free zones will further enhance Oman's logistics sector as well as develop resources for the state's public treasury and increase Omani exports," Hosni said, adding that the free zones will also indirectly contribute to increasing tax revenues.

These free zones will be an incubator for local and international companies that will contribute to diversifying sources of income

DR IBRAHIM AL BALUSHI

Ali Mansoor al Sulaimi, owner of Tumirat, an Omani brand of traditional Arabic sweets made with premium dates, said free zones in developing and developed countries strengthen the investment climate. "Free zones

also speed up and facilitate diversified businesses and create job opportunities for jobseekers."

According to an official in the Ministry of Economy, the latest statistics - of 2020 - indicate that more than 800 companies oper-

ate in the special economic zones and free zones in the sultanate. The volume of investments in these companies was over RO7.3bn and these employed close to 36,000 workers.

"The Royal Decree to establish new free zones will support the goals of the tenth Five-Year Plan (2021-2025) in many areas, including supporting the private sector and international cooperation, and achieving economic diversification and financial sustainability."



33 women, 205 men killed in road accidents in 2020

Our Correspondent
Muscat

Despite the decrease in road accidents in the past five years, the number of related deaths is still cause for concern. Road accidents dropped by 45 per cent to claim 238 lives in 2020 compared to 432 in 2016.

The National Centre for Statistics and Information's traffic data has revealed that the total number of road accidents decreased from 4,721 in 2016 to 1,341 in 2020. The data also shows that among the total number of individuals injured in road accidents in 2020, 22 per cent were women. The number of men killed in road accidents in 2020 was 205, compared to 368 in 2016. Fatality among women in road accidents in 2020 was 33, compared to 64 in 2016.

While taking cognisance of the declining numbers, experts pointed to some safety measures that must be taken into account to prevent accidents.

Speaking to *Muscat Daily*, Rashid al Balushi, director general of Motorcycle Learning Centre, said, "Some accidents are a result of using a mobile phone

while driving, or not changing tyres on time and speeding."

He attributed the reason for women being involved in accidents to the fact that many live outside the capital and drive long distances without a break, which causes physical exhaustion leading to accidents.

Ali al Barwani, former CEO of Oman Road Safety Association, noted that women form half of society and an increasing number of them are driving these days. "However, they should focus on increasing their driving skills and identify crowded places in the city to avoid accidents."

Barwani cautioned that female drivers should have a child safety seat installed when driving with a child. "She must also ensure the safety of her car with regular check-up of brakes and tyres. Women who drive old cars should make sure of periodic maintenance," he said.

Nasser Selim, a driving instructor, said, "Some instructors are content with teaching only the basic rules of driving. But there are technical aspects of cars that all drivers must know, including the validity of tyres and when these need change."

More than 600 tonnes of wheat produced in Dhahirah in 2021

Our Correspondent
Muscat

Wheat farmers in Dhahirah produced close to 659 tonnes of wheat in 2021, according to the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Water Resources (MAFWR).

Khalid bin Khamis al Shamakhi, director of Department of Agricultural and Fisheries in Dhahirah, informed that wheat cultivation is wide spread in the villages of the governorate.

Wheat was cultivated in 577 acres in the governorate last season.

Shamakhi attributed the increase in production to the ministry's efforts and programmes to expand wheat cultivation land, introduction of agricultural mechanisation and modern irrigation systems as well as the use of high-quality varieties of seeds.

The ministry also conducted campaigns to combat agricultural pests and diseases, held programmes to protect crops from birds and intensified awareness on the importance of engaging in agricultural activities in a timely manner.



The ministry provided seed varieties that have proven quality and production, including Wadi Quriyat 226, Wadi Quriyat 308 and Wadi Quriyat 110.

"The ministry is working to increase wheat production further by expanding cultivation area. We expect farmers to achieve good production during the current season," said Shamakhi.

"We call on farmers to benefit from our agricultural programmes and to follow the correct processes of cultivation, production, harvesting and mar-

keting of their produce for better returns and more profits."

Wheat production increased 19 per cent in the 2020/2021 season in Oman to 2,649 tonnes.

MAFWR stated that the total area of land under wheat cultivation in 2020/2021 was 2,449 acres - 19.6 per cent more than the previous season. The number of farmers engaged in wheat cultivation also increased 5.5 per cent.

Average wheat production in 2019/2020 and 2020/2021 was 1.1 tonnes/acre.

Fish worth RO3.2mn sold through Behar in 2021

Our Correspondent
Muscat

Behar, an integrated electronic platform that hosts wholesale auctions and retail sale of fish, registered sales worth RO3.2mn selling 2,814 tonnes of fish through 56,520 transactions in 2021.

An official in the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Water Resources, said, "Behar is one of the first e-platforms to be selected by Oman Technology Fund - a specialised government-backed fund that invests in IT and innovative startups - for funding support from an endowment of RO1mn earmarked for Omani entrepreneurial initiatives arising out of the COVID-19 crisis."

The platform has conducted sales in 37 countries, confirming their confidence in the quality of Omani fish, the official said.

The platform was established on March 28, 2020. Over 170 fishing businesses and 5,262 fish merchants have registered on it.



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WORLD HEARING DAY

SAYYID THEYAZIN PRESIDES OVER AL BASHAYER RACE



The fifth edition of Al Bashayer Annual Festival for Arabian Camel Racing concluded on Saturday. Sayyid Theyazin bin Haitham al Said, Minister of Culture, Sports and Youth, presided over the concluding ceremony in the presence of Sayyid Asaad bin Tarik al Said, Deputy Prime Minister for International Relations and Cooperation Affairs and Special Representative of His Majesty the Sultan. The six-day event was held at Al Bashayer racecourse in Adam, Dakhliyah governorate. The race, which began on February 28, included 74 rounds with prizes for the winners ranging from cars (25 in all), a golden sword, a silver sword and cash prizes.

Our Correspondent
Muscat

Currently, over 1.5bn people globally live with hearing loss and this number is likely to rise to over 2.5bn by 2030 due to ongoing demographic shift, increasing practice of listening to loud music over long periods and persistence of other risk factors including ear infections, according to the World Health Organization (WHO).

‘It is estimated that over 1bn young persons (12-35 years of age) are at risk of hearing loss due to unsafe listening and persistence of other risk factors including ear infections, infectious diseases, birth complications, exposure to occupational noise, and ototoxic medications,’ stated WHO.

Each year on March 3, WHO marks the World Hearing Day to raise awareness on how to prevent deafness, hearing loss and promote ear and hearing care across the world.

A key message that we all need to advocate is that early detection of hearing loss is crucial and every one should check their hearing from time to time, especially those who are most at risk of hearing loss

DR JEAN JABBOUR

vent deafness, hearing loss and promote ear and hearing care across the world.

The relevance of hearing loss and required actions have been highlighted by the World Health Assembly through its resolutions WHA 48.9 of 1995 and WHA 70.13 of 2017. This year, WHO will focus on the importance of safe listening as a means of maintaining good hearing across the life course with the theme ‘To hear for life, listen with care’.

If hearing loss is not treated properly, it has a profound impact on the lives of those affected, as well as their families and communities. Moreover, it is estimated that globally, unaddressed hearing loss poses an annual cost of US\$980bn.

On this occasion, Dr Jean Jabbour, WHO representative to Oman, said, ‘Hearing, listening, and thinking are vastly important for language learning. And as the main key of communication,

good hearing with care improves our listening and thinking about others hearing and is important at all stages of life.

‘A key message that we all need to advocate is that early detection of hearing loss is crucial and every one should check their hearing from time to time, especially those who are most at risk of hearing loss.’

To facilitate regular hearing checks, WHO has developed a mobile and web-based software application (hearWHO app) for a hearing screening.

The app is based on validated digits-in-noise technology. It is especially recommended for those who commonly listen to loud music over personal audio devices. It can also be used by health professionals to screen people in the community for hearing loss and refer them for diagnostic testing if they fail the screening.

Investment forum to support SMEs from March 7: ASMED

Our Correspondent
Muscat

As part of its efforts to support small and medium enterprises, the Authority for Small and Medium Enterprises Development (ASMED), will hold an investment forum in the Special Economic Zone at Duqm (SEZAD) from March 7 to 9.

According to an official at ASMED, the forum is called ‘Horizons and Opportunities’. ‘The three-day forum will be held in cooperation with several private and governmental entities such as Asyad, SEZAD,

Oman Chamber of Commerce and Industry, Oman Development Bank, Oman Arab Bank, Bank Muscat, National Bank of Oman, Karwa Motors and Bank Dhofar.’

The ASMED official added that the forum aims to support SME owners by creating a sustainable strategy for the institutions supporting the sector in the economic zone and reviewing the investment opportunities available for SMEs.

‘The forum also aims to review the facilities provided by the banking sector to SMEs,’ said the official.

Ascott makes Oman debut with Citadines Al Ghubrah Muscat

Muscat – The Ascott Limited, the international lodging owner-operator, has entered the Omani market with the launch of its Citadines brand in Muscat. Citadines Al Ghubrah Muscat opened its doors to guests, and commemorates its presence with a special opening offer of triple Ascott Star Rewards (ASR) points and up to 60 per cent off on bookings, as part of its ASR loyalty programme.

The Ascott Limited brings an innovative perspective of the authentic ‘apart-hotel’ concept to the country, through a new 96-unit property, specially designed for the versatile and independent global citizen, delivering a fresh, functional and fulfilling lifestyle to every type of guest. Boasting

decorated spacious living spaces and adorned with sophistication, Citadines Al Ghubrah Muscat has a variety of apartments for guests to choose from, a press release stated.

Business travellers can opt to stay in urban Studio Deluxe apartments, ideal for extended stays and fully equipped with a contemporary-styled kitchen. For the solo and on-the-go traveller, Studio Premier apartments offer guests a relaxing stay with views of the city’s scenic skyline.

The One-Bedroom Executive and Premier apartments provide the perfect option to unwind, seamlessly styled to make guests feel right at home.

Vincent Miccolis, managing director for The Ascott Limited



(Supplied photo)

Middle East, Africa, Turkey and India, said, ‘Oman is a very popular international tourist destination and has immense growth potential for the tourism and hospitality industries. We are proud to establish Ascott’s presence in Muscat with the launch of the Citadines brand that caters to the global citizen, and complements the flexibility and practicality of a serviced residence.’

Mohamed Hamed Salim al Ruzaiqi, group chairman, Al Ruzaiqi Group, said, ‘We feel proud to introduce our first hotel in Oman, that is managed by the Ascott Group. Citadines Al Ghubrah Muscat is the place to be for business and leisure travellers.’

Labour ministry announces 1,464 jobs in govt sector

Muscat - In implementation of the Royal Directives of His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik to speed up the execution of employment initiatives, the Ministry of Labour (MoL) has announced the availability of 1,464 jobs in the state administrative apparatus.

Sheikh Nasser Amer al Hosni, Undersecretary for Labour in MoL, said that the announcement comes within the actual needs of government units.

He added that these job vacancies will be in the form of replacement of expats by Omanis, as well as new work contracts.

PRAYER TIMINGS

Fajr	5.10am
Sunrise	6.25am
Duhr	12.23pm
Asr	3.45pm
Maghrib	6.17pm
Isha	7.27pm

WEATHER WATCH

	Max	Min
Abu Dhabi	28	17
Doha	25	17
Kuwait City	24	17
Manama	23	17
Muscat	31	20
Riyadh	29	19

MUSCAT INSURANCE COMPANY SAOG

NOTICE FOR ANNUAL ORDINARY GENERAL MEETING

The Board of Directors of Muscat Insurance Company SAOG (the ‘Company’) has the pleasure to invite the shareholders to attend the Annual General Meeting, which will be held at 04:00 pm on 22/03/2022, through the electronic platform to hold general meetings, which can be accessed through the website of Muscat Clearing and Depository Company (www.mcd.gov.om) or company head office at MIC TOWER, Way No. 3329, Bldg. No. 233, Block No- 848, Al Khuwair South, Bowsher Wilayat, Muscat. If the quorum requirement for holding the Annual General Meeting is not fulfilled, a second Annual General Meeting shall be held at 03:00 pm on 29/03/2022, which can be accessed through the website of Muscat Clearing and Depository Company (www.mcd.gov.om) or company head office at MIC TOWER, Way No. 3329, Bldg. No. 233, Block No - 848, Al Khuwair South, Bowsher Wilayat, Muscat to discuss the following agenda:

1. To consider and approve the Board of Director’s Report for the financial year ended 31 December 2021.
2. To consider and approve the Corporate Governance Report for the financial year ended 31 December 2021.
3. To consider the Auditor’s Report and to approve the Financial Statements (Balance Sheet and Profit and Loss Account) of the Company for the financial year ended 31 December 2021.
4. To inform the AGM on the Related Party Transactions carried out during the financial year 2021 as per attached.
5. To ratify the sitting fees for the board and its subcommittees paid to the directors for the year ended 31 December 2021.
6. To determine the sitting fees to be paid to the members of the Board for the financial year ending 31st December 2022
7. To discuss and approve the proposed allocation of RO 10,000 to fulfill the Company’s Corporate Social responsibilities for the year ending on 31 December 2022.
8. To ratify the amount of RO. 37,808 spent for the company’s social responsibilities for the year ended on 31/12/2021 (as per the Annexure).
9. To Approve the criteria for measuring the performance of the Board of Directors for the financial year ending December 31, 2022 (as per Attachment)
10. To elect a new Board of Directors for the Company from amongst Shareholders or non- shareholders. Any person who wishes to be nominated to the Board of Directors of the Company is required to fill in a Director’s Nomination Form. Such a form can be obtained from the Company. The completed Form should be delivered to the Company at least five (5) days prior to the date of the Annual Ordinary General Meeting of the Company (no later than the end of the business hours on Wednesday, 16 March 2022). The candidate must satisfy the company’s board membership requirements.
11. To appoint the External Auditors for the financial year ended 31st December 2021 and determine their remuneration.
12. 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)

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:

1. Legal person has the right to authorize a natural person to attend the meeting of the General Assembly and vote on his behalf through technology means, provided that this natural person has an investor number in the Muscat Clearing and Depository Company.
2. Voting on any of the items on the agenda begins no more than three days before the date of the assembly and until the end of the voting process on the day of the meeting. The day of the assembly meeting.

In case of any inquiries, please contact Mr. Mohammed Al Hashmi on the phone number: 98898863

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Legal Advisor

Chairman

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Qatar, Oman to enhance trade and investment ties: H E Aseela

Doha, Qatar - H E Aseela bint Salem al Samsamia, Undersecretary for Investment Promotion in the Ministry of Commerce, Industry, and Investment Promotion (MoCIP), confirmed that her visit to Qatar comes within the framework of efforts to enhance integration and partnership between the two brotherly countries in the trade and investment fields, describing the visit as a success.

H E Aseela said, in a statement to Qatar News Agency (QNA) on Thursday, that the purpose of her visit to Qatar is to promote investment in the Sultanate of Oman, learn about investment opportunities in Qatar, and search for integration between the visions of Qatar 2030 and Oman 2040, referring to the meetings she had with Qatar Investment Authority and representatives of the Qatari private sector. She also met with Sheikh Khalifa bin Jassim al Thani, Qatar Chamber's (QC) chairman at the Chamber's headquarters on Tuesday.

During these meetings she



(Qatar Chamber)

was able to showcase the promising investment opportunities in Oman, and the opportunities in the Oman Vision 2040 to enhance cooperation in the vital sectors that the sultanate is working to develop, especially in light of the presence of natural resources Oman aspires to benefit from.

H E Aseela pointed out the sultanate's desire to expand the areas of partnership with the Qatari side, in line with the sul-

tanate's 2040 vision, which will focus on the logistical sector, tourism, manufacturing industries and renewable energy, in addition to exploiting the natural resources in the country that may complement the economic sectors in Qatar.

The Undersecretary explained that there are future projects that will be studied between the two sides to work on embodying them in reality, whether in Qatar or in Oman, in order to achieve

the recommendations of the leaderships of the two countries and the desire to achieve integration in various fields.

On the possibility of holding a Qatari-Omani business forum in Muscat in which businessmen and investors from both countries participate to discuss the investment climate, available economic opportunities and the possibility of establishing joint projects, H E Aseela indicated that Qatari businessmen re-

quested to see more investment opportunities in Oman and that is through organising a forum that brings together the two sides. She said, that the start will be through the formation of a joint team that will study the idea of the next forum and its timing, so that its details will be revealed in the coming period.

H E Aseela also affirmed Oman's determination to provide investment incentives to Qatari businessmen in the fields of trade, tourism, banking, industry and other sectors in which they are looking to invest.

She also pointed out that she also saw the eagerness of Qatari businesswomen to establish many joint projects with Omani businesswomen by finding channels of linkage between the two parties.

The volume of intra-regional trade between Qatar and Oman amounted to about QR4.5bn in 2021, and Oman topped the trade partners of the Qatari private sector in terms of exports during the same year.

QNA

Mala'a wins Global Business Outlook Award for 2021

Muscat - Oman Credit and Financial Information Centre (Mala'a) won the Global Business Outlook Award for the 'Fastest Growing Consumer & Commercial Credit Information Reporting in the GCC' for the year 2021.

The achievement is a testament for Mala'a's efforts in developing the credit system in the sultanate since its inception in 2019 with the support of its data providers (Royal Oman Police, and Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion) as well as its member banks, FLCs and SME Funds, according to a press release.

Mala'a, under the supervision of Central Bank of Oman, represents a National Data Bank for credit and financial information. The center provides Credit Reports and the Mala'a Credit Score for individuals and corporates. The membership of the centre spans across the banking and financial sectors, with the addition of the SME Funds recently. The centre aims to add new sectors under its membership in the upcoming phase such



as telecom and insurance. It also aims to grow connections with several data providers from the government sector.

Bassam al Jamali, Mala'a general manger, said, "Mala'a winning this award is the result of the dedicated efforts carried out by the Mala'a team to position Mala'a as a National Data Bank providing credit and financial information. We are proud of this recognition that adds up to Mala'a's achievements, and we look forward to more in the future. I would also like to thank the Central Bank of Oman and its board of governors for their continuous support."



NATIONAL MINERAL WATER COMPANY (SAOG)

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Email: contact@tanufwater.com, Web: www.nmwc.com

Director's Report

Dear Shareholders,
On behalf of the Board of Directors, I am pleased to present the Annual Report on the activities and performance of your company for the financial year ended 31st December 2021.

Review of Operations:
The consolidated financial statements include the results and the financial position of the Parent company and its subsidiary, Valuedeal Trading LLC, for the twelve months ended 31st December 2021 (together referred to as the Group).

Sales and Operational Performance:
The Parent Company's sales revenue for the twelve months ended 31st December 2021 is RO 6,768,091 compared to RO 7,211,741 in the previous year, the drop in revenues compared to last year is due to the overall stagnant economic conditions and intense competition caused by increase in number of bottled water brands in the market.

The Parent Company's net loss for the twelve months ended 31st December 2021 is RO 489,319 against last year profit of RO 27,082, the decrease in profit is due to increasing international prices of commodities, especially PET Resin which are key input raw materials to the Company's products, logistics costs and the additional provisions for expected credit losses and taxes.

The net sales of the Group for the twelve months ended on 31st December 2021 is RO 6,849,280 compared to RO 7,256,842 in the previous year. The Group's net loss for the year ended 31st December 2021 is RO 486,342 and this was a profit of RO 28,614 in the previous year 2020.

Subsidiary Company:
Valuedeal Trading LLC (VDT): The Company trades in plastic and other confectionery items.

Future Outlook
Increase in PET Resin prices and intense competition has affected the Company's financial performance. However, the Company is considering a number of initiatives to improve its profitability. The Company's management has identified that the main drivers for change are 'increased output' and 'greater efficiency' and with this in mind, the Company is confident that this is likely to have a positive impact on its overall profitability. Management has formulated a recovery plan intended to reverse the impact of the current business environment.

Human Resources
The Company is currently employing 48% Omani Staff and will continue to support this initiative of employing more Omanis. The Company recognizes the importance of human assets to achieve its objectives.

Internal Control System
The board continues to review the effectiveness of the existing internal control systems and considers the controls to be adequate for the size and nature of the business operations.

Corporate Governance Code
The company has complied with CMA directives on the Corporate Governance Code. A detailed report on compliance with Corporate Governance Code together with the Auditor's Report is included in the Annual Report.

Acknowledgement
On behalf of the Board of Directors, I wish to thank our patrons, customers, bankers and shareholders for all the support they have extended to us during this year. I also take the opportunity to thank the management for their continued efforts in growing the Company. On behalf of the Board of Directors, I would like to express our sincere gratitude to His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tariq and his Government for the support extended to the private sector.

Sayyid Khalid bin Hamad bin Hamoud Al Busaidi
Chairman

1) The complete accounts, in either Arabic or English as requested, will be sent by mail to any shareholder within 7 days of written request at the above address.

2) The complete accounts have been uploaded on Website of MSM.

3) Any shareholder who is having incorrect address or not having any address in the company's register or Co. (MDSRC) may approach the registered office to register their correct address. Register maintained by Maintained by Muscat Depository Securities Registration.

	Parent Company		Group	
	2021 RO	2020 RO	2021 RO	2020 RO
ASSETS				
Non-current assets				
Property, plant and equipment	2,682,353	2,756,766	2,682,844	2,757,538
Right-of-use assets	80,445	90,732	80,445	90,732
Intangible assets	19,707	18,812	19,707	18,812
Investment in a subsidiary	95,000	95,000	-	-
Total non-current assets	2,877,505	2,961,310	2,782,996	2,867,082
Current assets				
Inventories	1,036,901	747,960	1,036,901	747,960
Trade and other receivables	2,287,758	2,789,528	2,314,598	2,947,778
Due from related parties	22,437	159,009	21,975	16,052
Cash and bank balances	135,466	131,317	137,769	140,714
Total current assets	3,482,562	3,827,814	3,511,243	3,852,504
Total assets	6,360,067	6,789,124	6,294,239	6,719,586
EQUITY AND LIABILITIES				
Capital and reserves				
Share capital	2,700,304	2,700,304	2,700,304	2,700,304
Share premium	135,169	135,169	135,169	135,169
Legal reserve	478,388	478,388	478,534	478,534
Accumulated losses	(1,112,983)	(623,664)	(1,181,224)	(694,733)
Equity attributable to shareholders of the Parent Company	2,200,878	2,690,197	2,132,783	2,619,274
Non-controlling Interest	-	-	1,416	1,267
Total capital and reserves	2,200,878	2,690,197	2,134,199	2,620,541
Non-current liabilities				
Employees' benefit liabilities	233,485	349,216	233,485	349,216
Bank borrowings	967,193	816,737	967,193	816,737
Lease liabilities - non-current portion	70,444	78,785	70,444	78,785
Capital expenditure payable	-	337,922	-	337,922
Total non-current liabilities	1,271,122	1,582,660	1,271,122	1,582,660
Current liabilities				
Lease liabilities - current portion	14,400	14,400	14,400	14,400
Trade and other payables	1,217,687	1,114,051	1,218,538	1,114,168
Bank borrowings	1,628,185	1,387,817	1,628,185	1,387,817
Income tax payable	27,795	-	27,795	-
Total current liabilities	2,888,067	2,516,267	2,888,918	2,516,385
Total liabilities	4,159,189	4,098,927	4,160,040	4,099,045
Total equity and liabilities	6,360,067	6,789,124	6,294,239	6,719,586
Net assets per share	0.082	0.100	0.079	0.097

	Parent Company		Group	
	2021 RO	2020 RO	2021 RO	2020 RO
Revenue	6,768,091	7,211,741	6,849,280	7,256,842
Cost of revenue	(4,365,151)	(4,591,441)	(4,365,151)	(4,613,447)
Gross profit	2,402,940	2,620,300	2,484,129	2,643,395
Other income	20,965	999	20,965	999
Total	2,423,905	2,621,299	2,505,094	2,644,394
Expenses				
Selling and distribution expenses	(2,042,140)	(1,973,558)	(2,081,388)	(1,984,480)
General and administrative expenses	(540,695)	(500,242)	(579,659)	(510,883)
Provision for expected credit losses on trade and other receivables	(102,462)	(17,817)	(102,462)	(17,817)
	(2,685,297)	(2,491,617)	(2,763,509)	(2,513,180)
Operating (loss)/profit for the year	(261,392)	129,682	(258,415)	131,214
Finance costs	(180,281)	(102,600)	(180,281)	(102,600)
Net (loss) / profit before tax for the year	(441,673)	27,082	(438,696)	28,614
Taxation	(47,646)	-	(47,646)	-
Net (loss) / profit after tax and total comprehensive (loss) / income for the year	(489,319)	27,082	(486,342)	28,614
Net (loss) / profit attributable to:				
equity holders of the Parent Company	-	-	(486,491)	28,537
Non-controlling interest	-	-	149	77
Basic and diluted (loss) / earnings per share attributable to equity holders of the Parent Company	(0.018)	0.001	(0.018)	0.001

Al Jazeera Steel plans subsidiary in UAE

Our Correspondent
Muscat



Al Jazeera Steel Products Company, leading steel tube and structural products manufacturer in Oman, has announced its plans to form a subsidiary company in the United Arab Emirates.

The proposal was announced during the company's board of directors meeting held on February 24.

The Subsidiary Company will engage in the production and sale of steel long products,' Al Jazeera Steel said in a disclosure to the Muscat Stock Exchange (MSX).

The proposed capital structure of the subsidiary company envisages that 80 per cent of the equity would be held by Al Jazeera Steel Products Co and 20 per cent by Amal Suhail Salim Bahwan,' the disclosure said.

The authorised capital of the proposed subsidiary company will be RO8mn.

The above decisions are subject to approval of the shareholders at the annual general meeting to be held on March 23,' the company statement added.



NATIONAL MINERAL WATER COMPANY (SAOG)

Post Box No. 2740, Ruwi, Postal Code: 112, Sultanate of Oman, Tel: +968 24628900, Fax: +968 24628990
Email: contact@tanufwater.com, Web: www.nmwc.com

Notice and Invitation to attend the Annual General Meeting

The Board of Directors of National Mineral Water Company S.A.O.G (**the Company**) has the pleasure to invite all the Shareholders to attend the Annual General Meeting (**AGM**) of the Company scheduled to be held at 3 p.m. on Tuesday, 15 March 2022, at Sheraton Hotel Ruwi and via electronic platform for holding General Meetings, which you can login through the website of Muscat Clearing and Depository Company (www.mcd.gov.om); and in the event that quorum was not achieved for the AGM, the second AGM, shall be held at 3 p.m. on Wednesday, 16 March 2022 at Sheraton Hotel Ruwi, and via same electronic platform above to discuss the following agenda items:

- To consider and approve the report of the Board of Directors on the business of the Company and its financial position for the financial year ended 31 December 2021.
- To consider and approve the Company's Corporate Governance Report for the financial year ended 31 December 2021.
- To consider and approve the Auditor's Report about the Company's audited financial statements for the financial year ended 31 December 2021.
- To approve the sitting fees being availed by the members of the Board of Directors and members of the Board's sub-committees for the previous financial year and to fix the sittings fees for the next financial year.
- To notify the general meeting of the related parties' transactions entered into during the financial year ended 31 December 2021.
- To notify the general meeting of the amounts allocated and spent for the Company's social responsibilities for the year ended 31 December 2021.
- To discuss and approve the proposed allocation of OMR 7,000 to fulfil the Company's social responsibilities for the year ending 31 December 2022.
- To approve the appointment of the statutory auditors for the financial year ending 31 December 2022 and the proposed remuneration.
- To appoint an independent entity to evaluate the performance of the Board of directors for the fiscal year ending 31 December 2022 and determine their fee.

Chairman

Legal Advisor

Auditor

In accordance with the company's articles of association and the regulations for holding general assembly's using modern technology means issued by the authority, we would like to draw your attention to the following:

- Only juristic persons may deputize a natural person to attend the AGM and vote on their behalf through the electronic systems, provided that the deputized natural person has an investor number at Muscat Clearing and Depository Company.
- Voting on the subject items offered for voting in the agenda starts before a period of not more than 3 days and until the end of the voting process on the meeting's day. If the investor's balance of shares increased or decreased during, his/her voting will be cancelled and they should vote again on the AGM's date.

For any queries please contact Malaak Al Balushi on 24573043 or e-mail at: malaak.albalushi@dentons.com.

IEA dubs OPEC+ response to Ukraine crisis 'disappointing'

Paris, France - The International Energy Agency (IEA) on Thursday voiced disappointment over a decision by top oil producers to keep production steady despite the Ukraine crisis, which has brought a spike in prices and deepened supply fears.

At the same time, the IEA's executive director Fatih Birol said that despite the 'disappointing' outcome of Wednesday's OPEC+ meeting 'we have more than enough stocks to take further action if warranted' in the market as prices soar to decade highs.

On Tuesday, the IEA announced its members would release 60mn barrels of oil from emergency reserves to stabilise



Fatih Birol

the market after Russia's invasion of Ukraine a week ago, with Washington pledging to contribute half of what amounts to just 4 per cent of the

agency's stocks.

Birol had noted on Tuesday that the market was already tight and commercial inventories low even before Moscow invaded its

neighbour and pledged to ensure no shortfall of supplies.

The past two days have seen oil prices soar, with WTI topping US\$115 a barrel and European benchmark Brent North Sea crude closing in on US\$120.

But, despite that, the 23-member OPEC+ group elected to hold firm on plans to stick to existing output targets through April.

The Paris-based IEA was created in 1974 in a bid to ensure supply security for its 31 members - who include the US and Japan as well as major European nations - following the oil crisis the previous year.

Earlier Thursday, the IEA released a 10-point plan to reduce

Europe's dependence on Russian gas by a third over the coming year. The Ukraine crisis has highlighted the EU's reliance on Russian gas imports, which account for some 45 per cent of total gas imports and nearly 40 per cent of consumption.

Birol said the plan would also show how to support the transition to clean energy 'in a secure and affordable way'.

IEA members, who collectively hold some 1.5bn barrels, are obliged to hold on to reserves equivalent to 90 days' worth of imports. They may release part of those reserves on to the market in a coordinated fashion in the event of a supply crunch.

AFP

China 2022 GDP growth target 'around 5.5%': PM

Beijing, China - China's government has set a target for GDP to grow 'around 5.5 per cent' this year - its lowest goal in decades - the country's Premier Li Ke-qiang said on Saturday, as it faces virus outbreaks, a property slump and uncertainty over war in Ukraine.

He announced the target in a speech to open China's annual legislative session, saying, "Our country will encounter many more risks and challenges, and we must keep pushing to overcome them."

The target was based on a need to maintain stable employment, basic living needs and 'guard against risks', according to Li's speech, which is China's version of an annual state of the nation address.

Economic stability must be a 'top priority', he added.

Growth in China's maturing



China's Premier Li Keqiang

economy has slowed markedly in recent years from the boom phase triggered by market reforms four decades ago, during which annual expansion sometimes exceeded 10 per cent.

China's economy, a key driver of global growth, last year handily exceeded the official target of at least 6 per cent growth, eventually expanding by 8.1 per cent.

AFP



A woman walks past a gas shop with a sign reading 'No Gas' in Colombo, Sri Lanka on Thursday (AFP)

IMF urges Sri Lanka to raise taxes and devalue currency

Colombo, Sri Lanka - The International Monetary Fund (IMF) warned crisis-hit Sri Lanka on Thursday that its foreign debt was 'unsustainable', and called for devaluation and higher taxes to revive the almost bankrupt economy.

The pandemic pushed the South Asian island's tourism sector - a key foreign-exchange earner - off a cliff, and the government in March 2020 imposed a broad import ban to try to shore up foreign currency.

But more than two years on, Sri Lanka is grappling with food and fuel shortages, which this week saw its public transport crippled as buses ran out of diesel and the state imposed blackouts.

Following its annual review of the cash-strapped country, the IMF said its fast-dwindling foreign reserves were inadequate to service the country's current foreign debt of US\$51bn.

Official data shows Sri Lanka needs nearly US\$7bn to service its foreign debt this year, but the country's external reserves at the end of January were only US\$2.07bn - just enough to finance one month's imports.

The IMF stressed 'the urgency of implementing a credible and coherent strategy to restore macroeconomic stability and debt sustainability', recommending a return to a 'market-determined and flexible exchange rate' - meaning a devaluation of the Sri Lankan rupee.

lack of dollars

While the central bank's set rate is 197 rupees to the dollar, a thriving black market offers 260 rupees for US currency notes.

This disparity has led to a more than 50 per cent decline in foreign remittances through official banking channels.

But the IMF noted the country's economic woes began pre-pandemic.

Soon after taking office in November 2019, President Gotabaya Rajapaksa cut several taxes nearly in half, the IMF said, driving down government revenues and forcing it to borrow more.

Among recommendations to address the crisis was to raise income taxes and VAT, 'commented with revenue administration reform', the IMF said.

The lack of dollars to import fuel has led to a serious energy crisis. Besides bringing public transport to a halt on Wednesday, the state's electricity com-

Sri Lanka is grappling with food and fuel shortages, which saw its public transport crippled as buses ran out of diesel and the state imposed a daily seven-and-a-half-hour blackout

pany also imposed a daily seven-and-a-half-hour electricity blackout - the longest scheduled power rationing in over a quarter of a century.

Without dollars to finance essential imports, rice, milk powder, sugar and wheat flour are in short supply, while local industries are unable to bring in raw materials and machinery.

The shortages pushed inflation to 16.8 per cent in January - the fourth consecutive record rise - and the IMF said it expected it to remain in the double digits.

International rating agencies have downgraded Sri Lanka over expectations it may not be able to service its foreign debt, though the government insists it can meet its obligations.

AFP

 اس ام ان باور القابضة ش.م.ع.ع. SMN POWER HOLDING SAOG					
Audited Consolidated Financial Statements for the Year Ended 31 December 2021					
Board of Directors' Report					
Dear Shareholders, On behalf of the Board of Directors ("the Board") of SMN Power Holding SAOG ("the Company"), I have the pleasure to present the Audited Consolidated Financial Statements for the year ended 31 December 2021. Corporate Governance The Company has complied with the Code of Corporate Governance and applicable circulars issued from time to time by the Capital Market Authority (CMA). Operations Providing a safe working environment is a key priority and the Board is pleased to share that during the year ending 2021, the Health & Safety ("H&S") performance was excellent with no Lost Time Accident ("LTA") in line with previous years. The commercial performance of both plants, SMN Barka Power Company SAOC ("SMN Barka") and Al Rusail Power Company SAOC ("Al Rusail"), is measured by their reliability which is the ability to deliver the declared capacity as per the contract. In 2021, the reliability at SMN Barka Plant was 96.2% (98.2% in 2020) for power and 97.8% (96.5% in 2020) for water. The reliability at Al Rusail Power Plant was 99.9% (99.5% in 2020) for the same period. The Company produced an aggregate net power volume of 3,702 GWh (3,140 GWh in 2020) and a total volume of 31,668,000 m³ of potable water was delivered (31,196,000 m³ in 2020). All necessary maintenance activities of key equipment were performed in accordance with Original Equipment Manufacturers' recommendations, while applying the best industry standards and practices for health & safety and maintenance, during the period. The Company and its O&M contractor Suez Tractebel Operations and Maintenance Oman LLC (STOMO) have taken all necessary precautionary measures to deal with the spread of Covid-19 in close coordination with Oman Power and Water Procurement (OPWP), Oman Electricity Transmission Company (OETC), Authority for Public Services Regulation (APSR) and other stakeholders. The Company and STOMO continue to implement the business continuity plan and steps on social distancing, hand wash, mask wearing and health check-up. Moreover, the Company and STOMO team are closely monitoring the situation to ensure plant availability and reliability. Financial Results Total Revenues in 2021 amount to RO 87.1 million (RO 82.7 in 2020), representing an increase of RO 4.4 million compared to 2020. Total Revenues include variable revenues (Fuel Charge and Variable Operating & Maintenance Charge) and fixed revenues (Fixed Capacity Fees). The Company generated a consolidated net profit of RO 9.55 million during 2021 compared to a net profit of RO 10.3 million for 2020. The decrease in net profit of RO 0.75 million is mainly due to the following unfavorable variances compared to the same period in 2020: - Goodwill impairment related to Al Rusail; - Lower commercial availability at SMN Barka power plant compared to last year due to few major outages including unavailability during Cyclone Shaheen; - Prior year's tax adjustments related to Al Rusail as a result of the Supreme Court decision to apply the finance lease model throughout the duration of the PPA. These downsides were partially offset by the following positive variance compared to 2020: - Reduction in finance costs following the scheduled repayments of the term loan facilities for the two project companies and due to lower interest rates having a favorable impact on the unhedged portion of the loans. The reduction in Non-Current Assets is driven by the depreciation of the plant (fixed assets). The decrease in Current Assets is due to the receipts of the finance lease and the payment received from OPWP of the outstanding Fuel Charges for the financial years 2019, 2020 and part of 2021 under the fuel settlement arrangement agreed with OPWP for both SMN Barka and Al Rusail plants. Despite the challenges caused by the spread of Covid-19, the Company and STOMO has been able to maintain good plant availability and in turn pay the scheduled installments of its long-term loans. Future Outlook In terms of plant operations and performance, although the Covid-19 situation is improving, the Company will maintain its full vigilance during this unprecedented period to protect the health of its employees and the interests of all stakeholders. The Company has taken necessary legal steps in accordance with the P(W)PA contractual terms to cover any adverse impact on its operations and mitigate any losses caused by the Covid-19 situation. The Company will continue its focus on H&S and maintain the excellent plant reliability at both plants. During the year management had several meetings with all stakeholders on plant cycling. APSR confirmed a change in dispatch methodology which is expected to reduce cycling from 2022 onwards. Management will continue to proactively liaise with OPWP, APSR and the Load Dispatch Centre on this very important matter. In terms of the latest development on the initiatives to prepare for the future of Al Rusail and SMN Barka power plants: - After successful completion of trial period, the spot market started operation from January 2022. While both Al Rusail and SMN Barka are participating in the spot market, such participation has no impact on the Company's cash flows until the time Al Rusail and SMN Barka will remain under the P(W)PA framework. - For Al Rusail, as foreseen in the Power Purchase Agreement between Al Rusail Power Company SAOC and OPWP, and as disclosed in SMN Power Holding SAOG Annual Report 2020, Gas Turbine 1 to Gas Turbine 6, which were erected between 1984 to 1986, have retired from operation on 30th September 2021. The revised installed capacity of Al Rusail Power Plant has gone down from approx. 665 MW to approx. 184MW. - After cancelling the Power 2022 Procurement Process in October 2021, OPWP released a Request for Proposal (RFP) to Al Rusail in December 2021 for a short-term extension of PPA in order to ensure security and stability of the transmission system until transmission system upgrade is completed by October 2022. Accordingly, Al Rusail submitted a competitive proposal for 184 MW capacity to OPWP as per RFP timeline and a decision from OPWP on extension of PPA is expected by 31 March 2022. If Al Rusail can secure the extension, it will be able to generate revenue for most of 2022 while ensuring security of the transmission system. - Specifically, for Al Rusail, in assessing all the feasible alternatives available, the Company engaged an independent consultant to carry out an assessment of the revenue that the Company can expect to generate from the Spot Market. This in-depth analysis concluded that the level of revenue that Al Rusail can expect to generate, in the short and medium terms, from the Spot Market will be negligible and therefore under the current Spot Market rules it will not be economically feasible for Al Rusail to participate in the Spot Market post PPA termination. - For SMN Barka, the Company will work closely with APSR, OPWP and all stakeholders of the power and water sector on any opportunity to extend the P(W)PA agreement. A letter was sent to OPWP on the possibility of releasing the RFP for extension of water capacity as there is no Spot Market for water. OPWP's feedback is awaited. - In terms of dividend distribution, as previously disclosed and in line with the financing arrangements during the IPO, the excess cash generated by SMN Barka is now paid to the lenders and will not flow to the Shareholders until the loans are fully settled or until the time the loans can be restructured. The P(W)PA extension for SMN Barka will be a key factor to potentially restructure the debt in the coming years, remove or defer the cash sweep and allow further dividend distribution. Al Rusail has repaid all its debt outstanding, and any dividend distribution will be contingent on end of term obligations on the expiry of the PPA. As Chairman of the Board, I would like to thank our Shareholders, not only for their confidence, but also for their continued support and for the expertise they bring into the Company. The Board of Directors expresses its gratitude to OPWP, APSR, the Capital Market Authority ("CMA") and other governmental and non-governmental bodies for their guidance and support. In light of the Covid-19 challenges, I also take this opportunity to thank all the operational staff working at SMN Barka and Al Rusail plants as well as the team at our corporate office for their remarkable efforts to ensure reliable power and water supply to the residents of Oman. Finally, on behalf of the Board, I would like to extend our deep appreciation and gratitude to His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik and His Government for their continued support and encouragement to the private sector by creating an environment allowing us to contribute effectively to the growth of the Sultanate of Oman. Dr. Abdullah Al Yahya'ey Chairman of the Board					
Statement of financial position as at 31 December 2021 (Audited)					
	Parent Company		Consolidated		
	31 Dec 2021	31 Dec 2020	30 Dec 2021	31 Dec 2020	
	RO '000	RO '000	RO '000	RO '000	
ASSETS					
Non-current assets					
Finance lease receivables	-	-	-	168	
Property, plant and equipment	-	-	139,459	147,316	
Right of use assets	-	-	285	376	
Long term prepayment	-	-	27	133	
Investment in subsidiaries	27,405	27,405	-	-	
Goodwill	-	-	14,952	15,739	
	27,405	27,405	154,723	163,732	
Current assets					
Inventories	-	-	2,901	3,002	
Trade and other receivables	54	65	44,069	46,757	
Finance lease receivables	-	-	316	4,434	
Fixed term cash deposits	-	-	7,390	4,825	
Cash and cash equivalents	24	13	3,067	2,768	
	78	78	57,743	61,786	
	27,483	27,483	212,466	225,518	
Total assets					
EQUITY AND RESERVES AND LIABILITIES					
EQUITY AND RESERVES					
Share capital	19,964	19,964	19,964	19,964	
Statutory reserve	6,522	6,522	6,691	6,691	
Retained earnings	923	923	42,036	32,489	
Hedging Reserve	-	-	(2,560)	(5,307)	
Net equity	27,409	27,409	66,131	53,837	
LIABILITIES					
Non-current liabilities					
Term loans	-	-	64,832	84,895	
Lease liabilities	-	-	353	383	
Derivative financial instruments	-	-	1,529	4,182	
Provisions for end of service benefits	-	-	84	99	
Provisions for site restoration	-	-	3,558	2,835	
Deferred operating income	-	-	808	808	
Deferred tax liability	-	-	15,447	15,506	
	-	-	86,611	108,708	
Current liabilities					
Term loans	-	-	13,795	15,237	
Lease liabilities	-	-	20	64	
Derivative financial instruments	-	-	1,484	2,061	
Trade and other payables	74	74	41,517	43,360	
Current tax payable	-	-	2,908	2,251	
	74	74	59,724	62,973	
	74	74	146,335	171,681	
Total liabilities					
Total equity and liabilities					
	27,483	27,483	212,466	225,518	
Net assets per share (RO)					
	0.137	0.137	0.344	0.296	
Statement of profit or loss and other comprehensive income for the year ended 31 December 2021 (Audited)					
	Parent Company		Consolidated		
	31 Dec 2021	30 Dec 2020	31 Dec 2021	31 Dec 2020	
	RO '000	RO '000	RO '000	RO '000	
Revenue	-	-	87,127	82,678	
Operating costs	-	-	(71,286)	(64,008)	
Gross profit	-	-	15,841	18,670	
General and administrative expenses	(252)	(267)	(1,162)	(1,200)	
(Loss)/Profit from operations	(252)	(267)	14,679	17,470	
Finance charges	-	-	(4,123)	(6,048)	
Other income	252	267	1,148	778	
Profit before tax	-	-	11,704	12,200	
Income tax	-	-	(2,157)	(1,881)	
Net profit for the year	-	-	9,547	10,319	
Other comprehensive income					
Items that may be reclassified to profit or loss in subsequent periods:					
Fair value of cash flow hedge adjustments - net	-	-	611	2,331	
Reclassification to profit or loss - gross	-	-	2,618	(2,650)	
Deferred tax liability-current period change	-	-	(482)	48	
Other Comprehensive Income/ expense for the year, net of tax	-	-	2,747	(271)	
Total comprehensive income/expense for the year	-	-	12,294	10,048	
Basic and diluted earnings per share (RO)	0.000	0.000	0.048	0.052	
SMN POWER HOLDING SAOG , P.O. Box 121, Postal Code 134, Sultanate of Oman, Qurum Building, Building No.1022, 1st Floor, Office No.15, Way No. 1013, Al Qurum - Muscat. Tel. +968 2493 5800; Fax: 2493 5830; E-mail: info@smnpower.com, www.smnpower.com					



Global Asian leaders feted at ABLF Awards

In a glittering ceremony that brought together some of the finest leaders of Asia on one stage, the ABLF Awards 2022 - held at Expo 2020 Dubai under the theme Resilience Rising: The Great Reset - showcased the power of resilient leadership and meaningful collaborations.

Around 21 global stalwarts from industry, governance, technology and social enterprise, were felicitated by Sheikh Nahayan Mubarak al Nahayan, UAE minister of Tolerance and Coexistence and ABLF Patron, with the guest of honour of the evening, Sheikh Ahmed bin

Saeed al Maktoum, CEO, Emirates Group.

The ABLF Awards, which returned as an in-person event after the onset of the pandemic, was held in partnership with the UAE Ministry of Economy and Dubai Cares, a press release said.

The high-profile event, held at Expo 2020 Dubai, featured iconic leaders from the UAE along with their counterparts from Israel, South Korea, Sri Lanka, China, Bhutan, India and Bahrain, in a true reflection of the Great Asian Century with a special focus on the measures adopted by leaders to steer their

countries, companies and communities towards growth in the post-pandemic era.

As a prelude to the grand Awards Gala was an engaging high-level panel discussion featuring Ban Ki-moon, co-chair, Ban Ki-moon Centre for Global Citizens and the 8th secretary general of the United Nations, Dr Tariq al Gurg, CEO and vice-chairman, Dubai Cares, Mariam al Mheiri, minister of Climate Change and the Environment, UAE and Alain Bejjani, CEO, Majid al Futtaim Holding.

The riveting discussion rallied around the strategies and ap-

proaches that leaders need to implement to recover from the impact of the pandemic with the overarching conclusion being that effective partnerships and a deep commitment towards improving the lives of people, were the only ways to foster equitable and sustainable growth.

This was followed by the ABLF Awards presentation that saw some of the most inspiring and influential leaders receive the sustainably-crafted 3-D printed, diamond-studded ABLF Awards trophy. Each trophy carries a high quality diamond certified from the

ABLF Luxury Partner Dhamani Jewels, as a timeless symbol of authentic and integrity-led leadership.

Congratulating the winners of the ABLF Awards on their commitment towards development, Sheikh Nahayan said, "We are here because we know the immense value of ABLF initiatives. ABLF devotes its energy and resources to promoting the great potential of Asian business. It highlights a clear determination in the region to improve the business and economic environment, to promote growth and development, to encourage innovation at

all levels, and to have greater participation and influence in the global economy. ABLF is clearly dedicated to fostering the regional cooperation essential to the growth of knowledge and the seizing of opportunities in Asian countries."

Gender parity was a key narrative of the event as some leaders achievements had made them towering icons of women empowerment. These included Sheikhha Khawla bint Ahmed al Suwaidi, founder, Khawla Art and Culture, Sheikhha Shamma bint Mohammed bin Khalid al Nahyan, chairperson, Board of Directors, Sheikh Mohammed Bin Khalid al Nahyan Cultural and Educational Institutions, Mariam bint Mohammed al Mheiri, minister of Climate Change and Environment, Shamma bint Suhail bin Faris al Mazrui, minister of state for Youth Affairs, Nadia Zaal, CEO, Zaya & Al Barari, and Dr Aisha bint Buti bin Bishr, vice chairwoman of Emaar Development Board.

'Tom and Jerry' draws crowds at Mall of Oman

Mall of Oman, Majid al Futtaim's fifth and largest shopping destination in the sultanate is welcoming visitors to step into the legendary Tom and Jerry Cheese Town Experience.

Brought to life by Mall of Oman in partnership with Warner Bros Themed Entertainment and in association with Shooting Stars, its Middle East licensing agent, and Event-Box, this one-of-a-kind immersive experience will bring fantastic enjoyment to the whole family.

Running till March 25, Mall of Oman will host the Tom and Jerry Cheese Town inside its Central Galleria, with meet and greets taking place centrestage. This Cheese Town will offer everything Tom and Jerry fans will love, showcasing the history and evolution of this iconic cartoon including original artwork, sculptures, lots of photo opportunities and a live music performance.

Mall visitors can journey through Tom and Jerry's universe and experience many iconic areas as seen in the Tom and Jerry cartoons. These areas include, The Kitchen Illusion Space, The Interactive Study, The Living Room Illusion and Jerry's Home. Visitors will even have the chance to meet and greet with Tom and Jerry every day from 4:30pm - 8:30pm.

NBO earns fifth Citibank STP Excellence award



National Bank of Oman (NBO) has won Citibank's Straight Through Processing (STP) Excellence award.

It's the fifth time the bank has been awarded by Citibank which annually recognises its

best-in-class partner banks for their success in formatting foreign currency (USD) payments. In particular, the award highlights the bank's high efficiency in Treasury Payments and Commercial Payments, of

which NBO managed to successfully achieve an STP rate of over 98% and over 95% respectively, a press release said.

"At NBO, we pride ourselves on our efforts to constantly im-

prove our processes and as the finance industry moves increasingly towards digital platforms, we are ensuring a modern and seamless customer experience for all our clients. Winning this award for the fifth time is a testament to how efficient and cost effective our payments' processing continues to be," said Manam Mohsin al Kindi, head of Financial Institutions at NBO.

Citibank is considered the industry's premier provider of US dollar payment services, providing clearance for a vast majority of banks in the region. Its annual STP award recognises financial institutions who have successfully built a fully automated dollar dominated fund transfer platform through which they can process foreign transactions electronically without the need for manual intervention, thereby increasing efficiency and eliminating delays.

S-AWC System of Eclipse Cross wins tech award

Mitsubishi Motors Corporation (MMC) today announced that the evolved Super-All Wheel Control (S-AWC) system of the Eclipse Cross won the RJC Technology of the Year in RJC Car of the Year for 2022, run by the Automotive Researchers' and Journalists' Conference of Japan (RJC).

The Eclipse Cross is available for sale in Oman through General Automotive Company (GAC), the official distributor of

Mitsubishi vehicles in Oman, a press release said.

The Eclipse Cross, a crossover SUV, uses an optimised S-AWC integrated vehicle dynamics control system that is highly recognised around the world. The RJC selection committee acclaimed the technologies that bring out a high level of quietness and powerful, stable driving performance, as well as smooth acceleration and nimble handling.

MMC is committed to the development of environmentally-friendly vehicles that embody the company's unique Mitsubishi Motors character, or what defines MMC's vehicles - a combination of safety, security (peace of mind) and comfort. Electrification and all-wheel control technologies are at the core of such development and are fully utilised in the evolved PHEV and S-AWC systems adopted in the Eclipse Cross PHEV model.



Al Injaz Private School holds sports event

As part of the ever-growing effort to bring life back to normal after the pandemic, Al Injaz Private School organised a two-day sports event called Al Injaz Private School Invitational Cup 2022.

A total of six schools participated in the two separate tournaments - basketball and futsal - for girls and boys respectfully. After carefully selecting their players, the schools divided their students into three age groups - under-10, under-13, and under-15. To ensure fair play, the Al Injaz organising team collected all the official documents to make sure every

participant was allotted in the appropriate age group.

To prepare for the inter-school competitions, the students have been putting in a lot of extra effort and training with the hopes of winning and making their school proud. Every day for the past two months, Al Injaz students' had one-hour sessions with their dedicated coaches early in the morning before the start of their regular school day, a press release said.

The first day of the tournament went very smooth, with the girls competing in basketball. Organised as a classic league system, each team

played against the remaining teams in their age group. The two teams who scored the most points went on to the finals set for the second day.

Day two was as exciting as day one, with the boys competing in futsal, a hard court variant of the most popular sport in the world, football. Similar to the girls' tournament, the boys' finalists were determined by the highest number of points scored against all the teams.

The finals for both sports in boys and girls saw a nail-biting finish between the participating teams. In the end, Muscat International School stood champi-

ons in the U13 Girls Basketball, defeating the host Al Injaz Private School in deciding overtime by 2 points. Indian School Wadi Kabir lifted the U15 Girls basketball championship trophy, and Al Injaz Private School girls were the runners up.

On the other side, the U10 Futsal Boys saw Ibn Khaldoun Private School as the champions and El Manhal School was declared the runners up in this category. Muscat International School emerged as the winners of the U13 Boys Futsal game, and Al Injaz Private School were the runners up.

Badr Al Samaa hospitals bag ACHSI accreditation

Badr Al Samaa Hospital, Barka, Sohar, Salalah and Nizwa have received the prestigious Australian Council on Healthcare Standards (ACHSI) accreditation, a press release said.

ACHSI accreditation is an external review of the quality of care and services. It is an internationally recognised evaluation process used to assess and improve the quality, efficiency, and effectiveness of healthcare organisations. It is also a way to publicly recognise that a healthcare organisation has met the quality standards.

In a joint statement managing directors of Badr Al Samaa group, Abdul Latheef and Dr P A Mohammed, said, "We are highly jubilated by ACHSI accreditation of four of our hospitals with exceptional performance. We strive to introduce and set standards and trends in quality of care and patient safety and hence ensure the highest level of care for our patients. All our hospitals are benchmarked with international



accredited standards. Our doctors, paramedics and allied services staff diligently follow the laid policies and protocols to ensure every healthcare function meets the standards. This accreditation has only increased the standard of care, our pricing is still the

same and affordable."

The ACHSI assessment was based on EQulP 6 module. The ACHS Evaluation and Quality Improvement Programme (EQulP) is based upon principles which support best practice and which are designed to facilitate a

culture of continuous improvement. These principles can be applied to all aspects of service within a healthcare organisation. There were three functions - Clinical, Support, and Corporate, 13 standards, and 47 criteria.

The ACHSI assessment was

done from January 16-20 by nine assessors. The onsite assessors were Dr Mohammed Ahmed Garout, Dr Aliah Abdulghaffar, Dr Gurjit Singh Monga and Timothy Gardner and the virtual assessors were Vince Gaglioti, Mary-Jane Emmerton, Natalie

Lloyd, Virginia Morris and Claudine El araybi.

Jacob Oommen, Chief Operating Officer and Head of ACHSI quality accreditation process, said, "Badr Al Samaa has always set trends in the private health care sector. It played a crucial

role as a catalyst to reform the patient care system in the region. Badr Al Samaa also raised its quality of services on par with world standards and it is evident by the various recognitions and accreditation received from different organisations."

DIFC transforms into Sculpture Park



In support of Dubai's vision to turn the walls and streets of the emirate into an open art gallery, Dubai International Financial Centre (DIFC), a leading vibrant urban destination promoting culture and community, is transforming into an open-air art gallery with the unveiling of DIFC Sculpture Park, which will remain open to the public until 30 June 2022.

To enrich the emirate's thriving art scene, DIFC Sculpture Park's theme of Harmony of Different Voices: A celebration of UAE's 50th year anniversary is aligned to supporting local and international artists who have contributed to the past, present and future of the nation, a press release said.

Bringing together a diverse portfolio of artists showcasing 65 works of art including sculptures and paintings, the complete stretch of the park will feature 50 sculptures, some of which has also taken inspiration from Expo 2020 Dubai, portraying the cultural diversity and

richness of UAE in the past 50 years.

"Over the years, DIFC has been developed into a vibrant urban destination promoting innovation, harmonious living and sustainability," said Arif Amiri, CEO of DIFC Authority. "As part of our commitment to support Dubai's art and culture vision, we are transforming DIFC into a unique sculpture park that will continue to shape the emirate's growing open-air art movement whilst attracting international artists to the Centre."

The picturesque walk and exhibition, spanning from Gate Building to Gate Avenue, will feature the work of renowned international artists from different backgrounds and nationalities as they come together through the theme of harmony of different voices to communicate and express themselves through art. Works will be featured from well-established galleries such as Leila Heller Gallery, Firetti Gallery and AWC Gallery, as well from independent artists.

Lifestyle update for the AMG GT 4-door coupe

Strengthening its position as the perfect automotive companion for any life situation, the globally successful AMG GT 4-door coupé is now even more individual than ever.

Available at Mercedes-Benz Oman, the exclusive edition underlines the multifaceted character of the four-door sports car. In addition, there is an extended choice of wheels, upholstery, trim, exterior colours and a re-

tuned suspension with an even wider spread between sportiness and comfort, a press release said.

Thanks to an extensive update last summer, the AMG GT 4-door coupé already has state of the art technology. New features include updated driving assistance systems and, fitted as standard, the widescreen cockpit, including the MBUX multimedia system with AMG-specific displays and functions.

The third complete vehicle to have been developed by Mercedes-AMG is a continuing success story. The AMG GT 4-door coupé has opened up new customer groups and generated a lot of liking for the brand. It combines the supreme driving dynamics of the AMG GT sports car with enhanced everyday practicality, thanks to four doors and space for up to five passengers.



Agro experts back sustainable agro practices at Expo panel discussion

Engro Fertilisers, a subsidiary of Pakistan's leading conglomerate - the Engro Corporation - hosted an insightful panel discussion on regional food security and agricultural partnership opportunities with Pakistan at the Dubai Expo 2020.

The panel highlighted the leading and visionary role of Gulf states, particularly the UAE, to secure the entire region's food security. Food insecurity in the MENA is a growing challenge as in 2020, MENA's share of the world's acutely food insecure people was 20%, disproportionately high compared to its 6% share of the population.

The situation is worse where there is conflict, such as in Yemen and Syria. Iraq has also seen a rise in food insecurity, caused by intermittent conflict and fluctuating global oil prices, a press release said.

Climate change was highlighted as the biggest and foremost challenge affecting local agriculture, with half of the



MENA population already living under water-stressed conditions. Meanwhile, agriculture productivity rates are not keeping up with population increase, except for Egypt, where productivity gains are above the world average.

Further, the region is exceptionally dependent on food imports, especially of wheat and other staple grains. Half of MENA's food is imported, rising to 90% in Gulf Cooperation countries.

Experts noted that by forging

partnerships in the agricultural sector with resource-rich countries, like Pakistan, the region can benefit from enhanced agricultural output to overcome its food security challenge. With a greater focus on modern agricultural research and technology, seed quality, balanced use of fertilisers, and uplift of infrastructure across the agri-value chain, Pakistan can enhance production to meet its own domestic and the Gulf-region needs.

According to Nadir Qureshi, CEO of Engro Fertilisers, "We

have a vision and belief that developing Pakistan's agriculture value chain could resolve not only Pakistan's, but also the GCC regions food security needs. We hope that this dialogue will serve as an initial step to encourage Pakistan, Engro, and Gulf entities to work together to jointly develop innovative solutions and explore the scope for international partnerships in agri-space. We look forward to playing our part to deepening the connect between the two regions to help solve the most pressing issue."

ISWK holds Academic Excellence Awards ceremony

Indian School Al Wadi Al Kabir organised an award ceremony for meritorious students after a gap of 2 years.

The Late Mathradas Khimji Memorial Awards and Academic Excellence Awards ceremony for the academic years 2019-20 and 2020-21 was attended by dignitaries, students, parents, and staff on a virtual platform, a press release said.

Kirti Jaysinh Jesrani, co-treasurer and co-convenor of the School Management Committee of ISWK, was the chief guest for the evening's programme. Jesrani said, "Success is a collaborative effort where each one has a role to play and there are no shortcuts to hard work."

The guests included Kiran Asher, co-founder and group managing director of Al Ansari Group of Companies, members of the Khimji family, Alkesh Joshi, honorary president of the school MC and others.

40 teams to compete in Grand cricket tournament 2022



The Grand cricket tournament 2022, a tennis ball T10 tournament organised by the Grand Global Investment (GGI), began at the Al Hail Cricket Club grounds on March 4.

The knockout tournament with free registration had attracted a good number of teams as 40 local clubs will compete for the honours in three weekends, starting from March 4, a press release said.

Women cricketers will also get a chance to test their credentials as GGI will also organise a Women's Cup tournament

alongside the main event. Four teams have so far registered for the women's tournament, which is scheduled for March 12.

The men's tournament for the Challenger's Cup will be held among 40 teams divided into four groups.

The men's and women's finals are set for March 19.

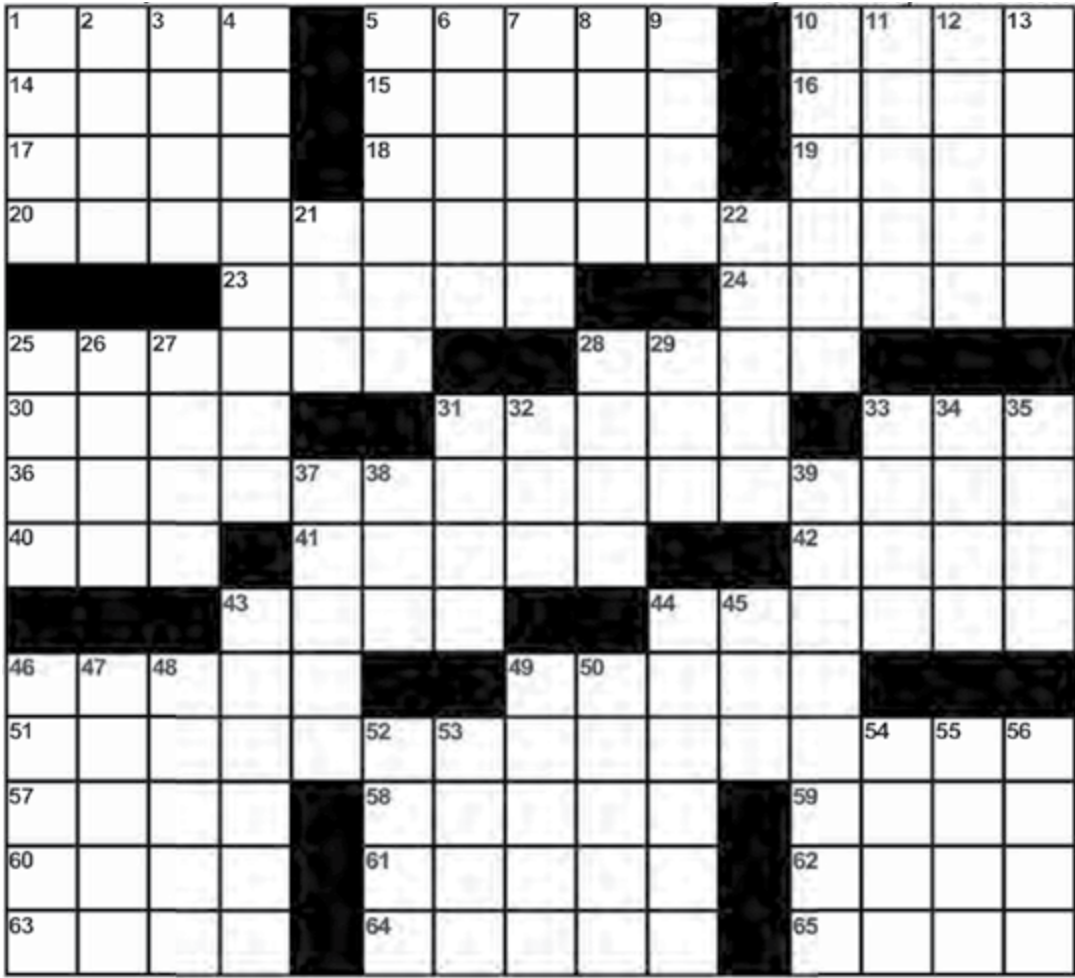
Chief organiser Ali Humaid al Alawi, chairman of Grand Global Investment, said he was elated by the overwhelming response to his first venture in organising a cricket tournament.

"We are overwhelmed by the

great response from the local teams to our debut cricket tournament. We believe it is our social responsibility to bring the sports loving people back into action after a challenging period of the pandemic," Ali said. This motto of GGI was the main reason to make the tournament with free registration, he added.

The GGI chief also announced a Corporate Cricket Cup event as the group's next venture. The details of the tournament will be unveiled soon, Alawi said, adding that registration has started for the prize-money event.

DAILY CROSSWORD



ACROSS

1) "X" may mark it
5) Food quality
10) Haifa fl. oz.
14) Three Bears patriarch
15) Ninth rock from the sun, once
16) Like word-of-mouth
17) Significant periods of history
18) Spritely tunes
19) Long skirt
20) Easygoing attribute
23) Female family nickname
24) Silly goose
25) 15-Across, once
28) Like a shepherd's staff
30) Indian dress
31) Immature egg
33) Barnyard bellow
36) Longtime beau
40) Some submerged leaves
41) Train lines?
42) Chanel of fashion
43) Far from bored
44) Adolph Coors, famously
46) Not on the level
49) Infant's abdominal

woe
51) Nonmoving picture
57) The Hawkeye State
58) Major blood line
59) Mark's replacement
60) "That's an order!"
61) Piece for nine
62) Bone-dry
63) "What_ can I say?"
64) San Antonio hoopsters
65) Fancy wheels

DOWN

1) On_ (with an eye toward selling)
2) "Legal" prefix
3) Gemstone for many Libras
4) Island off Australia
5) Fracture immobilizer
6) Choice invitees
7) Like dime novels and some orange JUICE
8) "Beetle Bailey" dog
9) One of the "Friends"
11) You can't join Mensa without one
12) Anglo-___
13) The Elder or Younger of Roman

history
21) Expected in
22) Word with "strength" or "city"
25) Quiet "Check this out!"
26) Fit for night owls
27) Length x width, for a rectangle
28) Accepts as true
29) Lego las of Middle Earth, e.g.
31) Final notice?
32) Remote control abbr.
33) Siamese-speak
34) More than never
35) Nose wrinkler
37) Trait of a Southerner's speech
38) Big, fat mouth
39) Common dessert
43) Empathize
44) Swells out of proportion
45) Convoy member
46) "All kidding _ ..."
47) Bar fixture
48) Fuzzy fruits
49) Horn-shaped thing
50) Freshwater carnivorous mammal
52) Some kitchen

utensils
53) Target for Carmelo
54) Psychic's read,

supposedly
55) Bluenose
56) Mortar troughs

NOTE PAD

YOUR DAILY HOROSCOPE

ARIES MARCH 21-APRIL 19

You need to accentuate the positive and eliminate the negative. It's way too easy to get caught up in a never-ending cycle of worrying about what could have been, so make sure that you don't start that kind of thinking in the first place. If others are busy spiraling downward, just ignore them and go your own way. Faith in yourself is the critical element to making sure that this situation comes out just right, so keep your spirits up!

LEO JULY 23-AUGUST 22

It's hard to for you to let go of old relationships, whether it's a friend you've known since preschool or someone you see every day. However, if today's situation is getting uncomfortable, and you two are getting less and less enjoyment from each other's company, it's time to evaluate what's going on with a clear head. It's most likely nobody's fault. In fact, it's perfectly normal and harmless. You're just growing in different directions.

SAGITTARIUS NOVEMBER 22-DECEMBER 21

Someone who believes in your talent finds a way to help you reach a much broader audience. While it might be tempting to try and blend in once you get the eyes and ears of the in-crowd, try to stay true to your unique, boundary-crossing spirit no matter what. Imitation really doesn't suit you anyway. So keep going and soon others will start to adopt your style. Take it for the flattery that all can see it is.

TAURUS APRIL 20-MAY 20

While working in tandem with someone else usually brings out your best side, right now it rouses a somewhat fiercer side. Cooperation can turn all too easily into competition if aggressive impulses on all sides are left unchecked. This may not be entirely unwelcome, though. Passions are aroused in all areas and may spice up your life in new ways.

VIRGO AUGUST 23-SEPTEMBER 22

Different ideas don't make you a misfit, far from it. In fact, you might actually be something of a visionary, especially if you have faith in the soundness of your beliefs. It's too easy to feel discouraged if people whose opinions you care about don't immediately support what you're telling them, but remember that no one believed that the world is round at first either. Keep on pushing and thinking long term.

CAPRICORN DECEMBER 22-JANUARY 19

Infuse your home with some new, stylish additions. Even if you aren't a big believer in feng shui, there are some principles that anyone can follow and make sense of. For example, a clean and orderly space is generally more pleasant to come home to, and it makes getting ready in the morning much easier. Even a quick paint job or storage system can make a major difference.

GEMINI MAY 21-JUNE 21

A difference of opinion could turn into something more fiery, but this could turn up the heat in your relationship in a good way. You're not crazy about confrontation, but this is an issue that you just can't shut up about. There's no need for you to dread the talk either. Jump into it with the best intentions and you should see the best results. This might be exactly the spark you need to take things to the next level.

LIBRA SEPTEMBER 23-OCTOBER 22

You might not be as brash and attention seeking as some people, but you're hardly a recluse either. Make sure that the people who count understand that, especially if a colleague is trying to take advantage of your modest nature to take credit for a great idea that's all yours. You may be feeling more contemplative, but your ambition isn't on the back burner. If you're in the presence of the bosses, let them hear you.

AQUARIUS JANUARY 20-FEBRUARY 18

You need to reconnect with some activity or topic that you once felt passionate about, but drifted away from over the years. It might be time to rearrange matters to make room for it again. The fit is sure to be awkward at first, but you can find space for them to dovetail, and the payoff is a renewed sense of purpose and zest in your life. The search also leads to decisions that may change your life for the better.

CANCER JUNE 22-JULY 22

People might laugh when you say you're in a rut, but you know it's true. Something has been going on for way too long, and you may be feeling the dulling effects of too much routine. Fortunately, you're the master of transformation. It's a question of pinpointing which areas of your life need revamping. Is it your friends, love life, or business that could use a change of pace? You're sure to figure it out.

SCORPIO OCTOBER 23-NOVEMBER 21

Life becomes more demanding today, so pay attention and try to stay on your toes. Multitasking types (like you) can rise to a challenge with aplomb. In fact, without one, you sometimes feel that you're not quite living life to its fullest. Remember to check in with your loved ones so you don't disappear off the map without a word of explanation, and don't go overboard when it comes to taking care of your to-do list.

PISCES FEBRUARY 19-MARCH 20

It's time for a makeover, though perhaps not of the extreme variety. A little sprucing up of your appearance is good (and fun) nonetheless. Your outward appearance might give the impression that you're more conservative than you really are. While this look is easy to maintain, it isn't the right fit for you. Go ahead and look like your true self. After all, people need to see the real you.

TEST YOUR KNOWLEDGE

1. Who was the last to hold the presidential insignia for Poland before democratic election handed it to Lech Wałęsa?
A. Ryszard Kaczorowski
B. Ignacy Mościcki
C. Józef Piłsudski
D. Aleksander Kwaśniewski

2. Public attendance was particularly sparse, virtually non-existent, at the 2020 Tokyo Summer Olympics and Paralympics. What was the reason?
A. The weather was too cold and wet
B. Extremely high ticket prices
C. Lack of interest
D. The COVID-19 pandemic at the time

3. The "Ballad of Chevy Chase" is an old English folk song about what event?
A. The beheading of Anne Boleyn
B. The Battle of Otterburn
C. The invention of golf
D. The defeat of the Spanish Armada

Answers: 1.a 2.d 3.b

KIDS COLOURING

BOGGLER

E	L	T	I
T	B	I	S
H	E	S	R
E	E	D	B

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

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

WORD BUILDER

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

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

SUDOKU EASY ANSWER

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



People cross a destroyed bridge as they evacuate the city of Irpin, northwest of Kyiv, during heavy shelling and bombing on Saturday (AFP)

Ukraine delays evacuation of key port under Russian siege

Kyiv, Ukraine - The Ukrainian port city of Mariupol postponed a planned evacuation of residents on Saturday, blaming Russian forces for breaking their temporary ceasefire to allow civilians to flee one of the war's fiercest battles.

Russia has laid siege to the strategic city, which proudly resisted Moscow-backed rebels during a 2014 conflict, cutting off electricity, food and water in the dead of winter.

"The Russian side does not adhere to the ceasefire and has continued shelling both Mariupol itself and its environs, and for security reasons, the evacuation of the civilian population has been postponed," city officials said in a social media post.

Negotiations were underway 'to establish a ceasefire and ensure a safe humanitarian corridor', Mariupol authorities added.

An evacuation had been seen as a prelude to a final assault that, if successful, would see the Russian army push north from occupied Crimea and link up with their forces from the east and take control of Ukraine's coast on the Sea of Azov.

After Russia's defence ministry declared the ceasefire, officials announced that the port city's 450,000-strong population could begin to leave by bus and private cars.

Mariupol mayor Vadim Boychenko, said, "This is not an easy decision, but... Mariupol is not its streets or houses. Mariupol is its population, it is you and me."



Wreckage of a Russian military aircraft lying on the outskirts of the city of Chernihiv on Saturday (AFP)

An aid worker in Mariupol for Doctors Without Borders, said, "Last night the shelling was harder and closer. We collected snow and rainwater yesterday... We tried to get free water today, but the queue was huge."

The siege came as more Russian forces inched closer to the capital Kyiv, encountering stiff resistance in the western suburbs and the northern town of Chernihiv. Dozens of civilians have been killed in shelling, missile attacks and air raids, and now those remaining live among the town's ruins and in craters.

"There were corpses all over the ground," Sergei told AFP, as

air raid sirens wailed once more. "They were queueing here for the pharmacy that's just there, and they're all dead."

Scenes of devastation
AFP reporters who visited the town on Saturday saw scenes of devastation - despite Moscow's insistence it is not targeting civilian areas.

Fears are rising in Kyiv that the capital will suffer the same fate once Russian missile artillery is deployed within range.

Ukrainian Defence Minister Oleksiy Reznikov alleged Russia had changed tactics after encountering tough resistance.

Ukraine, he said, had defeated Russia's plan to quickly storm major cities and overthrow President Volodymyr Zelensky's government, forcing Moscow to resort to 'cowardly' attacks on civilians.

Zelensky remains defiant and announced on Saturday that Ukrainian forces were counter-attacking around Kharkiv, the country's second largest city, which has seen Russian incursions and fierce bombardments.

"We inflict such losses on the invaders that they have not seen even in their worst dream," he said. Since Putin's army invaded on February 24, Russia has pum-

elled Ukrainian cities, with officials reporting hundreds of civilians killed. Europe's largest atomic power plant has even come under attack sparking fears of a catastrophic nuclear accident. But Moscow has so far only seized two key cities in its 10-day-long invasion - Berdiansk and Kherson on Ukraine's southern Black Sea coast.

Capturing Mariupol represents a bigger prize for Russian forces as it would deal a severe blow to Ukraine's maritime access and connect with troops coming from annexed Crimea and the Donbas.

The Kremlin said late on Friday that Moscow was waiting for a third round of talks with Ukraine in Belarus, and one of Kyiv's negotiators said it hoped to hold them this weekend.

"The third leg could take place tomorrow or the day after, we are in constant contact," Ukrainian presidential advisor Mykhailo Podolyak said on Friday.

Zelensky was to appeal to Washington for more assistance on Saturday with an address to the US Senate after some lawmakers urged President Joe Biden to take tougher measures, including banning Russia's oil imports.

Zelensky had earlier criticised NATO for ruling out imposing a no-fly zone, saying the Western military alliance had essentially given 'the green light for further bombing of Ukrainian cities and villages'.

AFP



This file photo shows an Aeroflot Airbus A320 aircraft taking off at Sheremetyevo airport outside Moscow on June 13, 2018 (AFP)

Russia's Aeroflot halting all flights

Moscow, Russia - Russia's flagship airline Aeroflot said on Saturday that it was suspending all its international flights beginning March 8, as Moscow faces down waves of Western sanctions over its military incursion in Ukraine.

An Aeroflot statement on the 'temporary suspension of all international flights from March 8', cited new 'circumstances that impede the operation of flights', noting that all domestic routes would continue unchanged as well as flights to neighbouring Belarus. Russia's civil aviation body on Saturday said it had 'recommended' Russian airlines operating rental planes registered in foreign countries cease flights abroad in order to avoid the seizure of the planes in connection with Western sanctions.

As a result, such flights overseas are due to cease at 2100 GMT on Saturday, and

flights from abroad at 2100 GMT on Monday, Russia's civil aviation agency Rosaviatsia said in a statement.

"This recommendation is due to the very high risk of grounding or arrest of the aircraft of Russian companies abroad," he added.

More than half of the commercial aircraft in Russia are leased, according to Aviation Week, an industry publication.

Rosaviatsia also recommended Russians seeking to return home from foreign countries arrange flights transiting through countries that had not joined sanctions, such as Azerbaijan, Armenia, Kazakhstan, Qatar, the UAE, Turkey and Serbia.

Another Russian carrier, S7, announced the suspension of all its international flights due to sanctions imposed on Russia over the country's invasion of Ukraine last week.

AFP

Erdogan to urge Putin to 'end war immediately'

Ankara, Turkey - Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan will urge his Russian counterpart Vladimir Putin in a call on Sunday to 'end this war immediately' after Moscow's invasion of Ukraine, the Turkish leader's spokesman said. "The President will convey to him the message that we have repeated from the start: End this war immediately, give the ceasefire and negotiations a chance, establish a humanitarian corridor and carry out evacuations," Ibrahim Kalin told the private NTV broadcaster Saturday.

The Turkish leader will also seek talks 'at the leaders' level' between Russia and Ukraine that could take place in Turkey, Kalin added. Turkish Foreign Minister Mevlut Cavusoglu expressed hope on Friday for a meeting with his Ukrainian and Russian counterparts at the Antalya Diplomacy Forum in southern Turkey on March 11-13.

Cavusoglu's invitation was welcomed by Russia's ambassador at the United Nations in Geneva, Gennady Gatilov, who described a possible meeting of the two ministers as a 'good idea', Turkish media reported.



The Turkish leader will convey to Putin the message: End this war, give ceasefire and negotiations a chance, establish a humanitarian corridor and carry out evacuations

Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov confirmed he would attend the forum, Cavusoglu said. "These meetings will have a positive impact. A meeting at the leaders' level could prevent the war causing greater destruction," Kalin said.

AFP

In Poland, Blinken pledges more humanitarian aid for Ukrain's refugees

Rzeszów, Poland - US Secretary of State Antony Blinken praised Poland on Saturday for its open embrace of hundreds of thousands of fleeing Ukrainians and said Washington was preparing to set aside another US\$2.75bn for the humanitarian crisis.

"The people of Poland know how important it is to defend freedom," he said after talks with Polish Foreign Minister Zbigniew Rau in Rzeszow, near the border with Ukraine.

"Poland is doing vital work in response to this crisis."

He said the White House was seeking US\$2.75bn to provide

support for those fleeing Ukraine, and countries that accept them, after Russia began its invasion on February 24.

Speaking next to Blinken, Rau said Poland would remain open to refugees.

"Russia's aggression in Ukraine caused a humanitarian crisis of an unimaginable scale," said Rau.

"Our priority is organising effective aid to hundreds of thousands, and soon to be millions of refugees."

Rau also pledged not to discriminate between refugees of different nationalities, after re-



A girl looks out from a window as she waits inside a train taking refugees to Poland at Lviv train station, western Ukraine, on Saturday (AFP)

ports circulated in Washington that Africans and others fleeing from Ukraine were being impeded at the border with Poland.

He accused Russian forces of committing 'war crimes' by shelling in residential areas.

Blinken arrived in Poland on Saturday for talks with officials on cooperation on defence and humanitarian support related to the conflict. More than 780,000 people have fled Ukraine into Poland since the invasion began on February 24.

Including other neighbouring countries, more than a million have left Ukraine and a million

more are estimated to be displaced within the country.

After meeting with Blinken in Rzeszow, Polish Prime Minister Mateusz Morawiecki called for tougher sanctions against Russia saying they should be 'hitting Vladimir Putin's war machine'.

Morawiecki called for all Russian banks to be excluded from the SWIFT payment system and said asset freezes 'should be as extensive as possible'.

Blinken is visiting key allies in Europe to demonstrate Washington's support for their security and shore up Western unity against Moscow.

He will travel next to Moldova, which has also experienced an inflow of Ukrainians, and the three Baltic states, particularly concerned about Russia.

Blinken spent Friday in Brussels in meetings with counterparts at NATO and the European Union to discuss putting more pressure on Russia and add support for refugees. "The Kremlin's attacks are inflicting an ever increasing toll on civilians there. Hundreds if not thousands of Ukrainians have been killed, many more wounded," he said in Brussels on Thursday.

AFP

Iran, UN watchdog agree on approach to resolve issues to revive nuclear deal

Tehran, Iran - Iran and the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) said on Saturday after talks in Tehran that they agreed on an approach to resolve issues crucial in efforts to revive the country's 2015 nuclear deal.

The announcement came shortly before Russia said it would seek guarantees from the United States before it backs the deal, potentially scuppering hopes the agreement could be wrapped up soon.

IAEA chief Rafael Grossi said the UN agency and Iran 'did have a number of important matters that we needed... to resolve', but that they had now 'decided to try a practical, pragmatic approach' to overcome them.

Atomic Energy Organization of Iran president Mohammed Es-lami said the two sides had come to the 'conclusion that some documents which need to be exchanged between the IAEA and the Iranian organisation should be exchanged' by May 22.

Grossi's visit to Tehran comes after Britain, one of the parties to parallel talks on the deal in Vienna, indicated an agreement was close.

The 2015 nuclear deal has been hanging by a thread since the United States' unilateral withdrawal in 2018 under then president Donald Trump.



Iranian Foreign Minister Hossein Amir-Abdollahian (right) welcomes IAEA head Rafael Grossi in Tehran on Saturday (AFP)

The landmark accord was aimed at guaranteeing Tehran could not develop a nuclear weapon - something it has always denied wanting to do.

Oil-rich Iran said this week that it was ready to raise its crude exports 'to the pre-No-

vember 2018 level' - before punishing sanctions imposed by the Trump administration started to take effect. The next few days are widely seen as a decisive point for negotiations on reviving the accord formally known as the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Ac-

tion, or JCPOA. 'We are close. E3 negotiators leaving Vienna briefly to update ministers on state of play' and were 'ready to return soon', said British delegation head Stephanie Al-Qaq, referring to negotiators from Britain, France

and Germany.

Russia seeks US guarantees
But Russia's Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov said on Saturday that Moscow, itself slapped with sanctions over its invasion of

Ukraine, would seek guarantees from Washington before backing the nuclear deal.

Lavrov said Russia had requested that the US give it written guarantees that its sanctions 'will not in any way harm our rights to free, fully-fledged trade and economic and investment cooperation, military-technical cooperation with Iran'.

Russia is party to the ongoing talks in the Austrian capital to re-

agreement with the IAEA during Grossi's visit.

Grossi is expected to hold a news conference on his return to Vienna.

'Work ongoing'

The coming days are seen as pivotal by the West because of the rate Iran is making nuclear advances. Its stockpile of enriched uranium has now reached more than 15 times the limit set out in

The IAEA and Iran did have a number of important matters that we needed ... to resolve, but we decided to try a practical, pragmatic approach to overcome them

RAFAEL GROSSI

store the agreement along with Britain, China, France and Germany. The United States involved indirectly.

Grossi vowed this week that the IAEA would 'never abandon' its attempts to get Iran to clarify the presence in the past of nuclear material at several undeclared sites.

Iran has said the closure of the probe is necessary to clinch a deal. Behrouz Kamalvandi, deputy head of the Iranian atomic agency, told television he was hopeful Iran would reach an

the 2015 accord, the IAEA said this week.

Several observers believe the West could leave the negotiating table and chalk the deal up to a failure if a compromise is not reached this weekend.

The EU has been chairing nuclear deal negotiations and the bloc's foreign policy chief Josep Borrell said on Friday he 'hopes to have results this weekend' to 'resurrect the agreement'.

He stressed there was 'still work ongoing'.
AFP

Woman makes history as she sits on top court in Cairo

Cairo, Egypt - Radwa Helmi made history on Saturday as the first woman judge to sit on the bench of Egypt's State Council, a top court in the Arab country.

Helmi, making her appearance in a Cairo courthouse, was among 98 women appointed last year to join the council, one of Egypt's main judicial bodies, following a decision by President Abdel Fattah al Sisi.

"The 5th of March has become a new historical day for Egyptian women," said the head of the National Council for Women (NCW), Maya Morsi.

The move came ahead of the March 8 International Women's Day.

Women in Egypt, the most populous Arab country, have been fighting an uphill battle for years to secure their rights.

Egypt has hundreds of women lawyers but it took decades for one to move up the judicial ladder and become a judge.

The first was Tahany al-



Radwa Helmi Ahmad sits on her first court hearing at the State Council in Cairo, on Saturday (AFP)

Gebaly, appointed in 2003 to Egypt's Supreme Constitutional Court. Gebaly held that post for a decade before being removed in 2012 by then Islamist president Mohamed Morsi.

Although no law bars women from being justices in Egypt, the

judiciary in the conservative Muslim-majority country has traditionally been a male preserve. The State Council was set up in 1946 as an independent body which mainly adjudicates in administrative disputes and disciplinary cases.

Since Egypt's founding as a modern state in the 19th century, women have been marginalised.

Women gained the right to vote and run for public office in 1956, but their personal rights have remained flouted.

AFP

Pakistan police try to identify bomber as death toll rises to 62

Peshawar, Pakistan - The death toll from a suicide attack at a Shiite mosque in northwest Pakistan rose to 62 overnight as police said on Saturday they would try to identify the bomber from two severed feet found at the scene.

Police also released CCTV footage of Friday's attack showing a man dressed in a traditional shalwar kameez tunic shoot two policemen as he entered the mosque in the Kocha Risaldar area of Peshawar, around 190km from the capital Islamabad.

He then detonated a suicide vest packed with ball bearings that ripped through the building, crowded with people just moments before Friday prayers were due to start.

The Islamic State (IS) group have claimed responsibility for the attack. "There are seven bodies beyond recognition including two amputated feet which we believe are of the bomber," Peshawar police chief Muhammad Ijaz Khan told AFP.

"We are trying to ascertain identity of the bomber through



Mourners carry coffins during the funeral of bomb blast victims a day after a suicide attack at a Shiite mosque in Peshawar, on Saturday (AFP)

DNA testing."

He said the death toll had risen to 62 - including seven children aged below 10.

It was the deadliest attack since July 2018, when a blast at an election rally killed 149 people - and was also claimed by the local chapter of the Islamic State group.

Ijaz said officials were checking the biometric data of people who had recently crossed into Pakistan from Afghanistan,

where IS have previously planned attacks.

Peshawar - just 50km from the porous border with Afghanistan - was a frequent target of militants in the early 2010s but security has greatly improved in recent years.

Sunni majority Pakistan has recently been battling a resurgence of its domestic chapter of the Taliban, Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP).

AFP

Taliban's secretive Haqqani Network leader finally shows his face

Kabul, Afghanistan - One of the Taliban's most secretive leaders, whose only picture on US 'most wanted' lists is a grainy semi-covered profile, was photographed openly for the first time on Saturday at a passing-out parade for new Afghan police recruits.

Interior Minister Sirajuddin Haqqani, who also heads the feared Haqqani Network, has previously only been photographed clearly from behind - even since the hardline Islamists seized power last August.

"For your satisfaction and for building your trust... I am appearing in the media in a public meeting with you," he said in a speech at the parade.

Before the Taliban's return,

Haqqani was the most senior of three deputies to leader Hibatullah Akhundzada, who himself hasn't been seen in public for years, and many analysts believe he may not even be alive.

Haqqani heads a powerful subset of the Taliban blamed for some of the worst violence of the past 20 years.

The United States has offered a reward of up to US\$10mn for information leading to his arrest, saying he was responsible for a string of terror attacks.

Pictures of Haqqani were being widely shared on social media on Saturday by Taliban officials who had previously only posted photographs that didn't show his face, or if it had been digitally blurred.



Taliban Interior Minister Sirajuddin Haqqani reviews new Afghan police recruits standing in formation during a graduation ceremony at the police academy in Kabul on Saturday (AFP)

At the police parade on Saturday, Haqqani was dressed like many of the senior Taliban officials - very heavily bearded and wearing a black turban and white shawl. He said he was showing his face so 'you could know how much value we have with our leadership'.

Not seen in public

Haqqani's appearance also suggests the Taliban have grown even more confident of their hold on the country since seizing power on August 15, two weeks before the last US-led foreign forces left.

Several diplomats were in the crowd - including Pakistan's ambassador - even though no country has officially recognised

the new Taliban regime.

The Haqqani Network, founded in the 1970s by Jalaluddin Haqqani, was heavily supported by the CIA during the Mujahideen war against the Soviet occupation of Afghanistan.

Sirajuddin Haqqani, who is believed to be in his 40s, is his son, and succeeded him following his death in 2018.

The latter was blamed for the deadly 2008 attack on Kabul's Serena Hotel that killed six people, as well as one assassination attempt against former Afghan President Hamid Karzai. The FBI Rewards for Justice programme says he maintains 'close ties' to Al Qaeda, and 'is a specially designated global terrorist'.

AFP

North Korea test-fires ‘ballistic’ missile

The suspected ballistic missile launch came just days before South Korea’s presidential poll

Seoul, South Korea - North Korea fired a suspected ballistic missile on Saturday, Seoul’s military said, continuing this year’s record-breaking blitz of weapons tests with a launch just days before South Korea’s presidential election.

From hypersonic to medium-range ballistic missiles, Pyongyang test-fired a string of weaponry in January and last week launched what it claimed was a component of a ‘reconnaissance satellite’ - although Seoul described it as another ballistic missile.

Despite biting international sanctions over its nuclear weapons, Pyongyang has ignored US offers of talks since high-profile negotiations between leader Kim Jong Un and then-US president Donald Trump collapsed in 2019.

Instead of diplomacy, Pyongyang has doubled-down on Kim’s drive to modernise its military, warning in January that it could abandon a self-imposed

moratorium on testing long-range missiles and nuclear weapons.

South Korea’s military said on Saturday it had detected a presumed ‘ballistic missile launched into the East Sea from the Sunan area around 8:48am.”

South Korea’s National Security Council condemned Pyongyang’s ‘unprecedented repeated firing of ballistic missiles’, which goes against peace on the Korean Peninsula and the international community, the presidential Blue House said in a statement.

Seoul will ‘even more thoroughly monitor North Korea’s nuclear and missile-related facilities, such as Yongbyon and Punggye-ri’, the statement added.

Tokyo also confirmed the launch, saying the missile had flown ‘at a maximum altitude of approximately 550km and a distance of approximately 300km’, Defence Minister Nobuo Kishi said.



People watch a television screen showing a news broadcast with footage of a North Korean missile test, at a railway station in Seoul on Saturday (AFP)

He said the ‘extremely high frequency’ of Pyongyang’s weapons tests this year were ‘a threat to the region’ and were ‘absolutely unacceptable’.

The North’s sabre-rattling comes just four days before South Korea votes for a new

president, with the tests seemingly a means of Pyongyang conveying its ‘discontent’ with outgoing dovish president Moon Jae-in, who brokered Kim’s first summit with Trump, analysts said.

“Looks like Kim is feeling that Moon did not do much after the Hanoi summit collapsed,” said North Korean studies scholar Ahn Chan-il, referring to the final meeting between Kim and Trump.

Pyongyang has clearly ‘decided to prioritise their own mili-

tary agenda regardless of what South Korea thinks’, he added.

Tensions with North Korea are no longer a major issue in South Korean elections, analysts say, with issues including domestic income inequality and youth unemployment top of vot-

ers’ lists of concerns.

But if Moon’s ruling Democratic Party loses on Wednesday, it could herald a shift in Seoul’s North Korea policy.

One of the two frontrunners, dour former prosecutor Yoon Suk-yeol of the opposition People Power Party, has threatened a pre-emptive strike on South Korea’s nuclear-armed neighbour if needed.

Not Ukraine

Analysts had widely predicted Pyongyang would seek to capitalise on the United States’ distraction over Russia’s invasion of Ukraine with more tests.

Ukraine, which emerged from the Cold War with sizeable Soviet-era nuclear weapons stocks of its own, gave up its arsenal in the 1990s.

“With these tests, North Korea seems to be saying North Korea is different from Ukraine, reminding the world that it has its own nuclear weaponry system,” said Yang Moo-jin, a professor at the University of North Korea Studies.

“It’s yet another demand for Washington to abolish the so-called ‘hostile’ policies against Pyongyang,” he told AFP.

AFP

UAE placed on money-laundering grey list, promises ‘robust’ response

Dubai, UAE - The United Arab Emirates has promised ‘robust actions’ against money-laundering and terrorist financing after the Middle East financial hub was placed on a grey list of countries subject to heightened scrutiny. The wealthy Gulf state, which includes the freewheeling trade-to-tourism hub Dubai, was named on the Paris-based Financial Action Task Force’s (FATF) 23-strong list on Friday, joining the likes of Yemen, Syria and South Sudan.

Grey-list countries are ‘actively working with the FATF to address strategic deficiencies in their regimes to counter money laundering, terrorist financing, and proliferation financing’, the global watchdog said in a statement. UAE officials said they would strive to meet a list of requirements laid down by the taskforce, including increasing prosecutions and identifying sanctions evasion.

“The UAE takes its role in protecting the integrity of the global financial system extremely seri-



People tour the ‘Museum of The Future’ on February 23, one day after its opening in Dubai (AFP)

ously,” the UAE’s Executive Office of Anti-Money Laundering and Countering the Financing of Terrorism said in a statement.

“The UAE will continue its ongoing efforts to identify, disrupt and punish criminals and illicit financial networks,” it added, pledging ‘robust actions and on-

going measures... to secure the stability and integrity of the country’s financial system’.

The resources-rich UAE has become a nexus connecting the Middle East, Europe, Central Asia and Asia. Dubai has the world’s busiest airport in terms of international passenger traffic,

and one of the busiest sea ports.

While the desert country has successfully diversified its economy rather than relying on oil, experts and international organisations have long criticised a failure to crack down on murky financial transactions.

AFP

Joe Biden calls for stronger ties with Finland during leader’s visit

Washington, US - US President Joe Biden on Friday called for stronger ties with Finland as he hosted the leader of the Nordic country, but neither mentioned the possibility of Helsinki eventually joining NATO.

Finland, which shares a 1,300km border with Russia, has close ties to the Western alliance, and the Russian war against Ukraine has reignited debate about whether the relationship should be deepened.

“Finland is a critical partner of the United States, a strong defence partner as well, a partner to NATO, especially on strengthening the security of the Baltic Sea area,” the US President said in the Oval Office.

“This is another opportunity for us to further strengthen that relationship.”

Finnish President Sauli Niinisto said, “I want to thank you also for the leadership you have showed. We need it now.”

“We have a long-lasting partnership - very good relations - and I hope that during this meeting and discussion, we can



US President Joe Biden (right) meets with Finnish President Sauli Niinisto in the Oval Office of the White House in Washington, DC on Friday (AFP)

Finland is a critical partner of the US, a partner to NATO. This is another opportunity to further strengthen that relationships

JOE BIDEN

strengthen them more between the United States and Finland

and the Nordic countries all together.”

Russia’s invasion of Ukraine has sparked a debate in Finland over whether the militarily non-aligned country should join NATO, with a recent poll showing majority support for membership for the first time.

But neither Biden nor Niinisto mentioned the issue.

Finland remained neutral during the Cold War in exchange for assurances from Moscow that Soviet troops would not invade.

AFP

About 100 new species found in Myanmar reveal its rich biodiversity

Paris, France - At least 100 new species - from monkeys to mus-sels - were found in Myanmar in a decade, according to conservationists who said discoveries during the country’s fleeting period of openness revealed ‘astounding biodiversity’.

Beginning in 2010 with the identification of the Myanmar snub-nosed monkey, a small black primate known as the ‘sneezing monkey’, researchers have made an ‘incredible sequence of discoveries’, said International wildlife group Fauna and Flora International (FFI).

Over ten years, during which Myanmar’s generals eased their stranglehold on power, scientists from all over the world made a beeline to the country to explore rainforests, delve into cave systems, wade through rivers and pick their way across majestic karst rock formations.

“Myanmar harbours incredible riches that most countries

can only dream of. Its remaining tracts of forest are home to some of the most spectacular wildlife in mainland Southeast Asia,” FFI said in a statement.

But the organisation raised fears over a ‘barrage of threats’, including from illegal logging, hunting, agriculture, infrastructure development and quarrying.

FFI had tallied up the list of 100 new species early last year. But before they could celebrate, the Myanmar army seized power in a February 2021 coup.

With field operations already suspended because of the COVID-19 pandemic, FFI’s Acting Country Manager Ngwe Lwin said the team was focusing on existing conservation programmes with Myanmar partner Biodiversity and Nature Conservation Association.

Critically endangered

Ngwe Lwin said a decade of



This photo shows a Pupa langur, found in the vicinity of Mount Pupa, Myanmar (AFP)

openness had afforded researchers a rare chance to travel into remote areas of the country, some of which had previously been heavily restricted and conflict-torn.

But that does not mean the discoveries came easily.

In 2010, Ngwe Lwin and colleagues travelled to the forests of northern Kachin state near the border with China, looking for a new monkey species.

Local people had seen the monkeys and said they were easy to track, particularly in the

rain because their upturned noses collect water causing them to sneeze. They told the conservation team to head through the dense forest to a spot near their village.

“Actually that was about one day’s walk,” Ngwe Lwin told

AFP. “They said it’s very easy, but for us, it was really hard.”

After days of fruitless searching, they were presented with a single dead monkey that local hunters had accidentally captured in an iron trap meant for black bears.

“Unfortunately, the snub nosed monkey got trapped,” Ngwe Lwin said, adding that a conservation area had now been set up there and local people were far less likely to use traps or target the critically endangered creatures.

FFI said it was crucial to involve local communities in preservation efforts, adding that many people in the country were dependent on natural resources for survival.

The United Nations Development Programme has estimated that nearly half of Myanmar’s 55mn population will be living below the national poverty line this year.

‘Remarkable’

Other species found in the last decade include a cave dwelling crab, a carnivorous snail and 17 species of freshwater mussels. Scientists also discovered 37 different species of gecko living in isolated pockets of karst limestone habitat in eastern Myanmar - in many cases restricted to a single cave or hilltop.

In one instance, a two-week expedition yielded 15 new species, said conservation biologist Aung Lin, “One day, one new species.”

Lee Grismer, a professor of biology at La Sierra University, whose team found the majority of the geckos, has described his expeditions in Myanmar as ‘one of the most remarkable experiences ever’. He said the chances of finding more new species were ‘extremely high’, adding he was confident he would return to Myanmar to look.

AFP

BAYEUX TAPESTRY

UK seamstress Mia Hansson has been on a 11-year mission to reproduce the Bayeux Tapestry depicting William the Conqueror's invasion of England



STITCHES IN TIME

Curling up on her sofa in the east of England, former teacher Mia Hansson carefully adds another stitch to her life-size reproduction of the world-famous Bayeux Tapestry.

Swedish-born Hansson began the project in 2016, working for several hours a day to reproduce the epic 70m embroidery of William the Conqueror's invasion of England.

"I had nothing to do and I was really, really bored so I thought I needed a project that I can't finish in a hurry, and what's bigger than the Bayeux Tapestry?" Hansson, 47, told AFP at her home in Wisbech, Cambridgeshire.

The nearly 1,000-year-old original is a symbol of the frequently tempestuous relations between the UK and the European mainland.

Hansson, who has lived in Britain for more than 20 years, has been working on her version for three to four hours a day for the last five-and-a-half years. In January, she reached the halfway mark.

She must keep her work rolled up as her house isn't big enough to unfurl it, and knows the tapestry so intimately that she even knows the little mistakes made by the original creators.

"Look here for example: you can see four soldiers' heads but only four legs, something is wrong!" she said. "But who am I to correct what they did?"

8,000 metres of wool

The 11th-century embroidery tells the story of events leading up to William the Conqueror's Norman conquest of England, culminating with



Mia Hansson looks at her embroidery replica of the Bayeux Tapestry at home

King Harold Godwinson's death at the Battle of Hastings in 1066.

The tapestry, believed to have been made in England, was recognised by UNESCO in 2007 as a 'Memory of the World'. Today it is housed in a museum in the town of Bayeux, in the Normandy region of northwestern France.

There is talk of the original visiting Britain on loan, but not before a full restoration, currently set for late 2024 and due to take at least 18 months.

Hansson said she was not much interested in the history when she began the project, but stitching the 626 characters has made her an expert.

"You have everything - you have birds and dragons, camels, horses, ships, buildings... and nothing is ever the same," she says. "Even if there's two horses, they're not going to be the

same. There will never be a repeat."

Hansson is using seven different colours of wool on a linen base. "If I remember correctly I calculated about 8,000 metres of wool in total," she said, adding that she's given herself another five years - until July 13, 2027 - to finish the project, or a total of 11 years to the day after she began.

"As far as I know, there's nobody else in Europe" who has reproduced the tapestry, she said, although Hansson heard of someone in Canada taking 10 years to make one. Once hers is completed, Hansson says she might sell the work, noting that her husband has been working to support her obsession.

"It would be nice if it paid for itself so I can put my feet up," she said. "If someone gives me an offer I can't refuse, that's fine."

AFP



The original Bayeux Tapestry

The Bayeux Tapestry is preserved and displayed in Bayeux, in Normandy, France. Nothing is known for certain about the tapestry's origins. The first written record of the Bayeux Tapestry is in 1476, when it was recorded in the cathedral treasury at Bayeux as 'a very long and narrow hanging on which are embroidered figures and inscriptions comprising a representation of the conquest of England'.

The Bayeux Tapestry was probably commissioned in the 1070s by Bishop Odo of Bayeux, half-brother of William the Conqueror. It is over 70m long, and although it is called a tapestry, it is, in fact, an embroidery, stitched not woven in woollen yarns on linen. Some historians argue that it was embroidered in Kent, England. The original tapestry is on display at Bayeux in Normandy, France.

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Bullets hamper ballets

PRO-PUTIN BOYCOTT

A cultural iron curtain suddenly falls on Russian musicians around the world as Russian President Vladimir Putin intensifies his attack on Ukraine



Russian-born cellist and conductor Mstislav Leopoldovich Rostropovich rehearses in Moscow in 1990



Russian opera soprano Anna Netrebko performs during the 27th annual Victoires de la musique classique ceremony at the L'Arsenal de Metz, in Metz, in 2020



Russian President Vladimir Putin presents a medal to then Mariinsky Theatre's artistic director, Valery Gergiev, during an awarding ceremony at the Kremlin in Moscow on September 22, 2016

Even during the darkest days of the Cold War in the 20th century, Russian opera and ballet stars came regularly to the West for performances. This time round, things are different as a cultural boycott far more stringent is falling into place.

In barely a week, some of the world's leading dancers, opera singers, and conductors have been stripped of their jobs in the West, their shows cancelled and careers curtailed, in the wake of Russian President Vladimir Putin's invasion of Ukraine.

"Even at the height of the Cold War, cultural exchanges between Russian, American, and European artists continued. There were of course always tensions, but it was possible," said Peter Gelb, director of the Metropolitan Opera House in New York. "What's happening today is different, it goes beyond the Cold War, it's a real war."

Gelb, who had been in Moscow to discuss a joint production with the Bolshoi just days before the invasion, knows what he is talking about.

As a young talent agent representing the legendary Russian-American pianist Vladimir Horowitz, Gelb had organised his client's return to Soviet Russia as the country opened up in the 1980s. Gelb also filmed the concert of Russian cellist Mstislav Rostropovich during his return in the same period.

Soft power

Ballet was a particular source of 'soft power' for the Soviet Union and tours to the West began in the 1950s - though always under tight surveillance by both their hosts and their KGB minders.

Some of those trips have gone down in history: the Bolshoi's visit to London in 1956, or the first tour by the Kirov (later renamed the Mariinsky) to Paris in 1961, during which the legendary dancer Rudolph Nureyev defected.

The West sent its emissaries in the other direction - the American Ballet Theater performed for the first time in Moscow in 1960, followed two years later by the New York City Ballet, in the midst of the Cuban missile crisis.

After the collapse of the USSR, exchanges intensified, with star Russian dancers invited everywhere and even becoming lead members of companies in the West, such as Svetlana Zakharova, the 'tsarina' of dance, who had principal dancer roles at both the Bolshoi and Scala in Milan.

Once unimaginable, an American, David Hallberg, became a principal dancer of the Bolshoi in 2011. Suddenly, it has become unimaginable once again.

"In the current context of brutality against innocent citizens, there is no possibility of making exchanges like those during the Cold War," said Gelb.

The Met has ceased its collaboration with the Bolshoi, and will boycott all pro-Putin artists, a decision also taken by the Paris Opera and many other venues around Europe. The Bolshoi's trip to London this summer has also been cancelled.

Russian choreographer Alexei Ratmansk, a former head of the Bolshoi who grew

up in Kyiv, abandoned a new ballet he was putting together in Moscow and rushed back to his home in New York.

Laurent Hilaire, the French head of the Moscow Stanislavski Ballet, quit his post of five years.

Stars cancelled

The wrath fell especially on two superstars seen as close to Putin. Conductor Valery Gergiev, considered among the greatest of his generation, was stripped of his role as head of the Munich Philharmonic, and declared persona non grata in many theatres and by his own agent.

Soprano Anna Netrebko, international queen of opera, has also cancelled her performances at the Met.

Laurent Bayle, former director general of the Philharmonie de Paris, said it leaves little for these artists to do outside Russia, especially since China remains almost entirely closed off due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

"They will remain in their own country," he told AFP. "Three-quarters of their activity has been called into question." If the current war ends in a long-term occupation of Ukraine, "it is certain that no one will risk inviting Russian artists," he added.

Exceptions will clearly be made for those who have themselves been victims of Putin's regime or openly denounce it. But state-backed institutions like the Bolshoi and Mariinsky are unlikely to get a pass.

AFP



Russian conductor Valery Gergiev performs on stage with the Vienna Philharmonic Orchestra during the Summer Night Concert at Schoenbrunn Palace in Vienna, Austria, on September 18, 2020

TRIBUTE TO SHANE WARNE

Shane Warne dies aged 52, shocks cricket fraternity

Koh Samui, Thailand - Thai police on Saturday ruled out foul play in the shock death of Australian cricket superstar Shane Warne, who died of a suspected heart attack while on holiday on the paradise island of Koh Samui aged just 52.

The "King" of spin's death sparked a global outpouring of grief from prime ministers, rock stars and fellow players, an acknowledgement that the Melbourne native transcended his sport.

Warne - one of the greatest Test cricketers of all time - was found unresponsive at his luxury villa at the Samujana resort on Friday evening.

He had reportedly been due to meet friends, who went in search of him when he failed to emerge from his quarters.

"Despite the best efforts of medical staff, he could not be revived," a statement from his management company said.

His body was brought to the Thai International Hospital Samui at around 6:00 pm (1100 GMT).

"No foul play was suspected at the scene based on our investigation," Thai police told AFP.

As Australia awoke to the news on Saturday, fans laid flowers at the Melbourne Cricket Ground, where there is a statue in Warne's honour.

Among the other offerings were a can of beer, a packet of cigarettes and a meat pie - a nod to Warne's famously hard-charging lifestyle and unathletic diet.

So beloved was Warne in his native Melbourne that the state government said the Great Southern Stand at the MCG will be renamed the S.K. Warne Stand.

Australian Prime Minister Scott Morrison called Warne



In this file photograph taken on December 28, 2006, Australian spinner Shane Warne (R) sends down a delivery as umpire Aleem Dar (L) looks on as Warne plays his last Test match on his home ground, the MCG, on the third day of the fourth cricket Test in Melbourne (AFP)

"one of our nation's greatest characters" and announced he would receive a full state funeral. In a touching tribute, Morrison praised him as an inspiration to backyard cricketers across the country and someone who lit up each Australian summer.

"His achievements were the product of his talent, his discipline and passion for the game he loved. But Shane was more than this to Australians," Morrison said.

His achievements were the product of his talent, his discipline and passion for the game he loved. But Shane was more than this to Australians

SCOTT MORRISON

Current players - who have led emotional tributes - took to the field against Pakistan in Rawalpindi, with both sides observing a minute's silence and sporting black armbands.

The atmosphere was subdued on Koh Samui, with security guards outside the villa where he was found as tourists expressed shock. "It's terrible, of course - a real

big sports star found dead here. It's always shocking," said Dutch tourist Ian, 26.

Speaking outside the police station, Andrew Neophitou, a close friend of Warne, said, "We really just want to get Shane home, that's all it is."

Spin pioneer

Credited with reviving the art of leg-spin, Warne was part of a dominant Australian Test team in the 1990s and 2000s and helped his country win the 1999

limited-overs World Cup.

A larger-than-life character, his tally of 708 Test wickets has been surpassed only by fellow spinner Muttiah Muralitharan.

Australian captain Pat Cummins said he was "a hero" to the current generation of cricketers.

"The loss that we are all trying to wrap our heads around is huge," he said in a video message.

Warne's inestimable impact was reflected by his inclusion in a list of the Wisden Cricketers of the 20th Century, alongside Don Bradman, Garfield Sobers, Jack Hobbs and Viv Richards.

West Indian great Richards expressed his shock, tweeting: "There are no words to describe what I feel right now".

Bursting onto the scene as a brash young player with a shock of blond hair, Warne became almost as well known for a colourful life away from cricket as he was for his exploits on the field.

Both he and Australia teammate Mark Waugh were fined for accepting money from a bookmaker and Warne was suspended for 12 months after failing a drugs test on the eve of the 2003 World Cup in South Africa, having taken a diuretic.

The first bowler to take 700 Test wickets with an assortment of leg-breaks, googlies, flippers and his own "zooters", Warne retired from Australia duty in 2007 following a 5-0 series win at home to arch-rivals England.

He played 145 Tests in total over a 15-year career, taking 708 wickets, and was also a useful lower-order batsman, with a highest Test score of 99.

In addition to his international exploits, Warne also enjoyed a successful career with his Australian state side Victoria and English county team Hampshire. AFP

Gatting remembers Warne's 'ball of the century'

Sydney, Australia - Mike Gatting said he was "happy" to have been bowled by the "ball of the century" that kick-started Australia leg-spinner Shane Warne's career as one of cricket's greatest bowlers.

Gatting made the remarks in an interview with the Daily Mail in 2013 to mark the 20th anniversary of one of the most celebrated deliveries of all time.

Warne, making his Ashes debut at Manchester's Old Trafford ground, saw his first ball pitch outside leg-stump and then spin viciously across bemused England batsman Gatting to clip the top of the off-bail.

As the late Richie Benaud, himself a former Australia leg-spinner, remarked during his television commentary: "Gatting has absolutely no idea what has happened to him - and he still doesn't know."

"We'd seen a few bits and pieces of him but nothing special," Gatting told the Daily Mail. "We thought we'd have a look at him, see what he's about and what he could do, but it was a remarkable delivery. There are people who think I should have padded it away. I was more worried about being bowled around the back of my legs."

Warne 'made us believe', say IPL's Royals

Mohali, India - Shane Warne was often called "the best captain Australia never had", and the Indian Premier League side he led to a title triumph in 2008 paid tribute to the late Australian bowler Saturday.

The victory for the Rajasthan Royals in the inaugural edition of the world's most valuable cricket tournament not only lit up the Twenty20 contest but also turned several rookie Indian cricketers including Ravindra Jadeja and Yusuf Pathan into popular names.

The Royals have not won again in the 13 subsequent seasons and paid an emotional tribute to the spin legend, who passed away on Friday aged 52 due to a suspected heart attack.

"Shane Warne. The name stands for magic. Our first Royal, a man who made us believe that impossible is just a myth," the team said in a statement.

"A leader who walked the walk, talked the talk, and turned underdogs into champions. A mentor who turned everything he touched into gold."

The Royals added: "Warnie, you're forever going to be our captain, leader, Royal. Rest in peace, legend."

Warne, who revived the art of leg spin and took 708 Test wickets in his glittering but controversial career, captained Australian state side Victoria and the English county Hampshire.

He also led Australia's one-day side temporarily but report-



File photograph taken on May 20, 2011, Rajasthan Royals captain Shane Warne bowls in IPL Twenty20 match

edly lost out in the race to lead the national Test team to Ricky Ponting due to his off-field dramas. But his teammates at the Royals hailed Warne as a leader par excellence.

Jadeja was nicknamed "Rockstar" by Warne, whom he found himself playing with straight after his stint in under-19 cricket.

"When I met him for the first time in 2008 then he was a big name and it was surreal to play with a legend," Jadeja said after his 175 not out in the first Test against Sri Lanka in Mohali.

"To share the dressing room

Warnie, you're forever going to be our captain, leader, Royal. Rest in peace, legend

RAJASTHAN ROYALS

with Warne was a huge thing for youngsters like us.

"It's sad that life is uncertain and anything could happen. But may he rest in peace."

Yusuf, who went on to win a

50-over World Cup with India after his IPL heroics, tweeted: "He was one of the skippers I always rated very highly. Very tough to consume this news. Condolences to his family and dear ones."

Australia's Shane Watson, who was part of Royals' title win, said, "Warnie, the impact you had on this great game and everyone around it is immeasurable. Thank you for being so bloody good to me. I am going to miss you so much. Rest In Peace SK."

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Jadeja's 175 puts India on top in first test against Sri Lanka

Mohali, India - All-rounder Ravindra Jadeja hit an unbeaten 175 and took a wicket to put India in command of the opening Test against Sri Lanka on day two on Saturday.

Jadeja pulverised the Sri Lankan bowling in Mohali to amass his Test-best total before India declared their innings on 574-8 in superstar cricketer Virat Kohli's 100th Test.

In reply, Sri Lanka were in trouble at 108 for four at stumps - needing another 267 runs to avoid the follow-on.

Pathum Nissanka, on 26, and Charith Asalanka, on one, were batting at close of play.

Ravichandran Ashwin took two wickets while fellow spinner Jadeja and fast bowler Jasprit Bumrah claimed one each.

Both teams observed one minute's silence before the start of play in memory of Shane Warne and Rod Marsh - the Australian greats who both died Friday - and wore black arm-bands.

India resumed the day on 357-6 and Jadeja put on a stand of 130 with overnight partner Ashwin, who made 61, to stretch India's dominance after they elected to bat first at the start of the two-match series.

He recorded his second Test century before lunch, surpassing his previous best of 100 not out, to ram home the advantage after Rishabh Pant's 96 on Friday.

Jadeja, who began day two on 45, went past 150 with a six off Dhananjaya de Silva and put on an unbeaten partnership of 103

with number 10 Mohammed Shami, who made 20.

Shami appeared to be struggling after being hit on the back by a fielding throw and skipper Rohit Sharma called his batsmen back to the pavilion, with tea taken early.

'Tired' Sri Lanka

"Today I just stayed calm and batted normally," Jadeja told reporters afterwards. "Ashwin and I have enjoyed batting with each other."

On Friday's first day, he said, "I was just staying at the non-striker's end and enjoying watching Rishabh bat."

He was approaching a double century when Rohit declared, but said he had signalled to the dressing room to end the Indian innings soon as the ball was turning and it was a good time to get a "tired" Sri Lanka in to bat.

Shami returned to bowl the first over after the Indian team gave Kohli, who made 45 on day one, a guard of honour in the star batsman's landmark game.

Ashwin struck first with the wicket of Lahiru Thirimanne as he trapped the left-handed opener lbw for 17 with his off spin. Leg spinner Jadeja was introduced in the 25th over and on his second ball sent back skipper Dimuth Karunaratne trapped lbw for 28 with one that turned sharply from outside off to the left-handed opener.

It would have been three down when Bumrah bowled Nissanka through the gate but the delivery turned out to be a no-

SCOREBOARD			
INDIA 1 ST INNINGS			
M Agarwal	lbw b Embuldeniya	33	
Rohit Sharma	c Lakmal b Kumara	29	
Hanuma Vihari	b Fernando	58	
Virat Kohli	b Embuldeniya	45	
Rishabh Pant	b Lakmal	96	
Shreyas Iyer	lbw b de Silva	27	
Ravindra Jadeja	not out	175	
R Ashwin	c Dickwella b Lakmal	61	
J Yadav	c Thirimanne b Fernando	2	
M Shami	not out	20	
Extras:	(b 4, lb 12, nb 12)	28	
TOTAL:	(129.2 Ov, RR: 4.43)		
Fall of wickets: 1-52, 2-80, 3-170, 4-175, 5-228, 6-332, 7-462, 8-471			
Bowling: S Lakmal 25-1-90-2, V Fernando 26-1-135-2, L Kumara 10.5-1-52, Lasith Embuldeniya 46-3-188-2, D de Silva 18.2-1-79-1, C Asalanka 3.1-0-14-0			
SRI LANKA 1 ST INNINGS			
D Karunaratne	lbw b Jadeja	28	
L Thirimanne	lbw b Ashwin	17	
P Nissanka	not out	26	
A Mathews	lbw b Bumrah	22	
D de Silva	lbw b Ashwin	1	
C Asalanka	not out	1	
Extras:	(lb 6, nb 7)	13	
TOTAL:	(43 Ov, RR: 2.51)	108/4	
Fall of wickets: 1-48, 2-59, 3-96, 4-103			
Bowling: M Shami 7-3-17-0, J Bumrah 9-2-20-1, R Ashwin 13-6-21, J Yadav 5-2-14-0, R Jadeja 9-3-30-1			

ball. Bumrah, the team's vice-captain, made amends with the wicket of Angelo Mathews for 22 and Ashwin got de Silva for one as Sri Lanka slipped to 103-4.

Asalanka survived an anxious moment at the death when he was given out lbw to Jadeja but successfully reviewed the decision in his favour when the system showed the ball missing the stumps.

"The wicket might turn more as the game progresses and the odd ball is also keeping low," Jadeja said. "We will try to bowl wicket to wicket" on Sunday.

AFP



India's Ravindra Jadeja celebrates after scoring a century during the second day of the first Test against Sri Lanka (AFP)

Azhar and Haq hundreds put Pakistan in driving seat in first Australia Test



Imam-ul-Haq (L) and teammate Azhar Ali take a run during the second day of play of the first Test (AFP)

Rawalpindi, Pakistan - Veteran batsman Azhar Ali and opener Imam-ul-Haq scored big hundreds to help Pakistan dominate Australia Saturday on the second day of the opening Test in Rawalpindi.

Azhar knocked 185 and Haq a career-best 157 to guide Pakistan to 476-4 against a hapless Australian attack on a placid and unresponsive Rawalpindi Cricket Stadium pitch.

Skipper Babar Azam declared the innings an hour before close in the hope of an early wicket, but Australia closed the day on five without loss after bad light ended play with 15 overs remaining.

Left-handed opener Usman

Khawaja scored five, while David Warner was yet to get off the mark.

Australia will need another 272 runs to avoid the follow-on against Pakistan's wily spinners who are used to the pitch conditions.

The day began on a sombre note as players paid tribute to the legendary Australian spinner Shane Warne, who died of a suspected heart attack in Thailand Friday, with a minute's silence.

Players from both teams also wore black arm bands, while the handful of early-morning spectators in the stands also stood in respect.

Pakistan added just 57 runs at snail's pace in the morning session.

Haq was the slowest of the Pakistan pair, adding just six runs in the first hour and not hitting a boundary until the 90th minute.

He was lucky to survive a caught-behind appeal on 143 off Lyon that the Australians didn't challenge, when replays showed it hit the bat.

But Azhar put on a solid 208-run stand for the second wicket with Haq and then another 101 for the third wicket with Azam, who was run out for 36.

Azhar was finally caught reverse sweeping part-time spinner Marnus Labuschagne after

SCOREBOARD			
PAKISTAN 1 ST INNINGS			
A Shafique	c Cummins b Lyon	44	
Imam-ul-Haq	lbw b Cummins	157	
Azhar Ali	c Green b Labuschagne	185	
Babar Azam	run out (Labuschagne)	36	
M Rizwan	not out	29	
Iftikhar Ahmed	not out	13	
Extras:	(b 4, lb 7, nb 1)	12	
TOTAL:	(162 Ov, RR: 2.93)	476/4d	
Fall of wickets: 1-105, 2-313, 3-414, 4-442			
Bowling: M Starc 24-5-71-0, J Hazlewood 26-6-53-0, N Lyon 52-5-161-1, P Cummins 28-5-62-1, T Head 3-0-13-0, C Green 15-3-47-0, M Labuschagne 12-0-53-1, S Smith 2-0-5-0			
AUSTRALIA 1 ST INNINGS			
U Khawaja	not out	5	
David Warner	not out	0	
TOTAL:	(1 Ov, RR: 5.00)	5	
Bowling: Sajid Khan 1-0-5-0			

batting for just four minutes under nine hours.

Mohammad Rizwan (29) and Iftikhar Ahmed (13) remained not out.

For Australia's pace-cum-spin attack it was a hard toil as Labuschagne (1-53), Cummins (1-62) and Nathan Lyon (1-161) were amongst wickets.

Spearheads Mitchell Starc (0-71) and Josh Hazlewood (0-53) went wicket-less.

Pakistan lost only Imam-ul-Haq in the first two sessions as they added 149 runs after resuming the day on 245-1.

Haq completed 150 before he was trapped leg-before by Cummins soon after lunch.

Haq, who unsuccessfully reviewed the decision, batted for nearly nine hours and hit 16 boundaries and two sixes.

Azhar lifted Lyon towards deep mid-on to complete his 19th century in his 92nd Test -- his fourth against Australia in 12 matches.

AFP



Afghanistan's Hazratullah Zazai plays a shot during the second T20I against Bangladesh (AFP)

Afghanistan punish sloppy Bangladesh to level series

Dhaka, Bangladesh - Hazratullah Zazai struck an unbeaten half century to help Afghanistan thrash Bangladesh by eight wickets in the second Twenty20 international with the two-match series ending all square at 1-1 in Dhaka on Saturday.

Zazai hit 59 off 45 balls and Usman Ghani scored 47, guiding Afghanistan to 121-2 in 17.4 overs after Fazalhaq Farooqi and Azmatullah Omarzai claimed three wickets each to restrict Bangladesh to 115-9.

A minute's silence was observed in memory of late Australian greats Shane Warne and Rodney Marsh before the start of the match. Both Zazai and Ghani benefited from Bangladesh's sloppy fielding as the hosts failed to back up Thursday's convincing 61 run victory.

Nasum Ahmed dropped Zazai on nought off the third ball of the innings before Afif Hossain and Mohammad Naim reprieved Ghani at 39 and 41 off the bowling of Mahedi Hasan.

Mahedi struck early to remove Rahmanullah Gurbaz for three but Zazai and Ghani took full advantage of Bangladesh's weak fielding to add 99 runs for the second wicket.

Mahmudullah Riyad dismissed Ghani to break the stand, with Afghanistan only 13 runs away from victory.

It was left to Darwish Rasooli to end the game with a towering six off left-arm spinner Nasum.

Afghanistan captain Mohammad Nabi hailed the team for their bowling efforts.

"The boys played really well, especially in the first innings.

Hazratullah and Ghani batted well for us," he said.

The hosts earlier never managed to get going after electing to bat first, losing wickets at regular intervals. "It was a good wicket to bat on. We didn't put together enough partnerships. (I am) very disappointed the way this game turned up," said Bangladesh captain Mahmudullah.

"We need to improve our fielding. That's something we need to work on," he added.

Mushfiquar Rahim top-scored with 30 off 25 balls, in his 100th Twenty20 international, while Mahmudullah chipped in with 21 off 13 balls.

On 19, Mahmudullah became the first Bangladeshi to score 2000 runs in Twenty20 internationals.

AFP

Swede Karlstrom, Ecuadorian Gelnda take gold in 35km race in Muscat



Perseus Karlstrom of Sweden celebrates his win in the Men's 35km race on Saturday



Ecuadorian Gelnda Morejon, clocked 2:48:33, to win in Women's 35km race on Saturday

Muscat - Perseus Karlstrom produced the first European win at this year's World Athletics Race Walking Team Championships in Muscat when he strode to victory in the men's 35km event on Saturday.

Karlstrom pulled away from Spain's Alvaro Martin, the reigning Europe champion over 20km, with just over three kilometres to go and was never seriously challenged during the final stages of the race, eventually crossing the line in 2:36:16 while wearing the Viking hat he donned several

hundred metres before the finish when he was as good as assured of victory.

"I certainly did not expect that," said the 31-year-old Karlstrom later, whose watching mother Siv Gustavsson was a winner in the forerunners of this event in 1977 and 1981.

"I was coming out of last season with a hamstring injury, came out of that and then was just starting to build back up; then I caught COVID-19, and I was bad for three weeks.

"In the last few weeks, I

haven't been able to push the intensity, I've had only one good session each week, but I had a really good training session 10 days ago. The slower pace at the start was also to my advantage," added the Swede, who also won over 20km at the European Race Walking Team Championships last year and the 2017 European Race Walking Cup.

Martin finished second in 2:36:54 and was shortly afterwards joined on the podium by his compatriot Miguel Angel Lopez, the former European and

In the last few weeks, I haven't been able to push the intensity, I've had only one good session each week, but I had a really good training session 10 days ago. The slower pace at the start was also to my advantage

PERSEUS KARLSTROM

world 20km gold medallist coming through for third in 2:37:27.

With Martin and Lopez getting in the top three, the Spanish scoring trio was completed when Marc Tur came home 11th and

the Spain comfortably took the team title with 16 points while Germany added to the European presence on the podium by taking the bronze medals.

In the women's race,

Katarzyna Zdzienicka produced an outstanding, focussed effort to get her first major international medal when she finished third in 2:51:48, racing alone in that position from just before 19 kilometres. The Pole crossed the line just over three minutes behind the Ecuadorian winner Gelnda Morejon, who stopped the clock in 2:48:33.

Laura Garcia-Caro finished just outside of the medals in fourth with 2:52:10, despite a valiant effort to reel in Zdzienicka over the final four kilometres

after having been 48 seconds behind her at 30km, but she led Spain to the team silver medals behind Ecuador and just ahead of the highly favoured China.

Raquel Gonzalez and Maria Juarez in 11th and 13th places respectively completed the scoring trio for Spain.

Spain also led the way for the continent in the men's 20km later in the day with Diego Garcia the first European across the line in fifth place, with the Spanish team also finishing in the same position



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China sweep WTT Contender in Muscat

Muscat - China took a complete takeover of the World Table Tennis (WTT) Contender Muscat 2022 held at Sultan Qaboos Sports Complex in Muscat.

The championship that started on February 27 came to an end on Saturday with the top seed Liang Jingkun of China taking the singles crown by beating fellow compatriot Lin Gaoyuan.

Pursuing his third WTT Contender Series crown, Liang Jingkun won a decisive quarter-final over Sweden's Jon Persson, but the World No.5 was pushed much harder one round later as younger compatriot Xiang Peng eyed an upset. Staring two match points in the face in a nerve-racking sixth game, Liang tapped into all his international experience to turn the tide in his favour, salvaging a dramatic victory from the jaws of defeat. Women's Singles Finals was also an all out Chinese fair with Kuai Man beating Fan Siqi 4-1.

The Indian mixed doubles pair of Manav Thakkar and Archana Kamath clinched a silver medal after losing their final match, as



Liang Jingkun of China took the singles crown at the WTT Contender Muscat on Saturday (ONA)

did the women's doubles duo of Sutirtha Mukherjee and Ayhika Mukherjee on Saturday.

The Thakkar-Kamath duo lost to the Chinese pair of Wang Chuqin and Chen Xintong in the mixed doubles final while Sutirtha and Ayhika suffered a defeat at the hands of Zhang Rui and Kuai Man, also from China, in the women's doubles

summit clash.

MEN'S SINGLES - FINALS
Liang Jingkun beat Lin Gaoyuan

WOMEN'S SINGLES - FINALS
Kuai Man beat Fan Siqi

WOMEN'S DOUBLES - FINALS
Zhang Rui/ Kuai Man beat Ayhika Mukherjee / Sutirtha

Mukherjee

MIXED DOUBLES - FINALS
Wang Chuqin/Chen Xintong
Vikash Manav Thakkar / Girish Archana Kamath

MEN'S DOUBLES - FINALS
Lin Shidong/Xiang Peng of China beat Chuangchich Yuan/Peng Wang-Wei of Chinese Taipei.

Australia, South Korea power into Davis Cup finals

Sydney, Australia - Australian Open doubles champion Thanasi Kokkinakis won a decisive singles rubber to power 28-time winners Australia through to the next stage of the Davis Cup Saturday, with South Korea toppling Austria to also make the grade.

Lleyton Hewitt's Australians went into day two tied 1-1 with Hungary and were fighting an uphill battle after Fabian Marozsan and Mate Valkusz upset John Peers and Luke Saville to clinch the doubles 6-4, 6-4.

That left world number 30 Alex de Minaur needing to win against 35th-ranked Marton Fucsovics to keep the clash alive -- and backed by a rowdy crowd at Sydney's Ken Rosewall Arena he battled through 7-6 (7/4), 6-4.

Kokkinakis last played in the Davis Cup seven years ago, but was recalled after claiming a first ATP singles title in Adelaide this year, then winning the Australian Open doubles crown with Nick Kyrgios.

AFP



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