

Iranian president Raisi to visit Oman on Monday

Iran looking to have preferential trade agreement with Oman, which will help enhance bilateral economic ties

Muscat - Ebrahim Raisi, President of Iran, is going to pay an official visit to Oman on Monday, the Diwan of Royal Court stated on Saturday.

'In reiteration of the good neighbourliness and advanced relations binding the Sultanate of Oman and the Islamic Republic of Iran, the Iranian President Ebrahim Raisi will pay a visit to Oman this Monday, May 23,' a statement said.

The visit reflects the keenness of His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik and President Raisi to enhance bilateral relations in various spheres to serve mutual interests and aspirations, the Diwan of Royal Court added.

The president's office in Tehran announced that he will head a high-ranking delegation.

'The visit is part of the Iranian



administration's policy of developing close ties with neighbours and promoting economic, political and cultural cooperation,' the president's office stated.

'The programme includes a bi-

lateral meeting, the signing of several cooperation documents, a meeting with Iranians residing in the country and a meeting with Omani businessmen.'

Raisi's visit to Muscat is the

first visit of the president to the sultanate and his fifth foreign visit in the nine months since the establishment of his government.

In order to expand economic and trade relations between Iran

and Oman, a delegation of 50 Iranian businessmen visited the sultanate last week.

Oman and Iran have enjoyed historical relations that have been strengthened by joint cooperation and mutual interests over the past 50 years. The neighbours are seeking to achieve further economic cooperation, especially in the sectors of economic diversification and investment opportunities. Trade exchange last year amounted to US\$1.336bn.

About 2,710 Iranian companies have invested in Oman, including 1,163 with 100 per cent ownership and 1,547 Omani-Iranian partnerships.

Ali Najafi, Iranian Ambassador to Oman, was recently quoted as saying that despite US sanctions and restrictions imposed due to the COVID-19 pandemic, trade with Oman experienced a substantial increase and officials of both countries are hopeful of boosting bilateral trade further.

He also noted that the sultanate ranked sixth among Iran's neighbours and second among the GCC states for imports from the country.

Iran is looking to have an agreement with Oman to allow preferential trade, which will help enhance bilateral economic ties.



Saudi airline hails first flight with all-female crew

Riyadh, Saudi Arabia - An airline in Saudi Arabia has completed the country's first flight with an all-female crew, officials said on Saturday, framing it as a milestone for women's empowerment in the kingdom.

The flight operated by flyadeal, budget subsidiary of flag carrier Saudia, was from the capital Riyadh to the Red Sea coastal city of Jeddah on Thursday, flyadeal spokesman Emad Iskandarani said.

The 'majority' of the seven-member crew were Saudi women, including the first officer, but not the captain, who was a foreign woman, Iskandarani said.

Saudi Arabia's civil aviation authority, which confirmed flyadeal's announcement on Saturday, has touted expanding roles for women in the aviation sector in recent years.

In 2019, the authority an-

nounced the first flight with a female Saudi co-pilot.

Saudi officials are trying to engineer a rapid expansion of the aviation sector that would turn the kingdom into a global travel hub.

Goals include more than tripling annual traffic to 330mn passengers by the end of the decade, drawing US\$100bn in investments to the sector by 2030, establishing a new national flag carrier, constructing a new 'mega airport' in Riyadh and moving up to 5mn tonnes of cargo each year.

The kingdom's de facto ruler, Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman, has overseen reforms including lifting a decades-long ban on women driving and the easing of so-called 'guardianship' rules that give men arbitrary authority over female relatives.

APF

Oman questions 'unfair' report on freedom of expression by RSF

Our Correspondent
Muscat

Authorities in Oman have questioned an 'unfair' report on freedom of expression in the sultanate in the international media.

Hon Dr Aisha Hamad al Darmaki, head of the State Council's committee for culture, media and tourism, has stated that freedom of expression and opinion constitutes an inseparable part of citizens' basic civil and human rights in Oman.

The Basic Law of the State is the supreme legislation in Oman which guarantees freedom of opinion and expression in accordance with Article 35 of Chapter 3. Article 35 of the statute states that 'Freedom of Opinion' and the right to articulate by all means of expression is guaranteed within the limits of law.

Hon Aisha's statement came in response to an unfair report issued by 'Reporters without Borders' (RSF), clarifying that the report was based on misinformation and inaccuracies. She underscored the significance of partnerships between government, private establishments and civil society institutions and the importance of providing actual and real facts.

Dr Aisha added that media is one of the means available for expressing opinion, as a space for journalists and mediapersons to access information, facts and data, for which policies and legislation are well laid out. "It is an integrative process that defines the mechanism of freedom."

According to Jamal bin Salim



Freedom of expression and opinion constitutes an inseparable part of citizens' basic civil and human rights in Oman

HON DR AISHA
HAMAD AL DARMAKI

al Nabhani, director of the legislation department in the Ministry of Justice and Legal Affairs, the Basic Law of the State upholds the value of freedom of expression and has made it a constitutional right that does not distinguish between individuals. It states that all individuals have a right to express opinion by all means.

Nabhani added that the Basic Law of the State defines the parameters of freedom of expression.

"Freedom of expression should not disrupt the public order or violate public ethics or infringe the supreme interests of the rights of others," he said, while emphasising Oman's interaction with international organisations that address human rights reports.

SEEING IS BELIEVING



A still from Lahza Productions' film promoting marine tourism in the sultanate which was one among three films declared winners on Thursday in a competition titled 'Oman With Your Eyes' organised by the Ministry of Heritage and Tourism

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Restoring hope for 50 more wounded Yemenis

Our Correspondent
Muscat

The seven-year long conflict in Yemen has devastated the country and has left thousands maimed for life. One Omani institution that is providing a healing touch and restoring hope among those who have been crippled is the Arabian Prosthetics Center (APC) in Salalah, Dhofar.

The prosthetics centre has been on a humanitarian mission helping over 750 war-injured Yemenis get back on their feet so far.



Arabian Prosthetics Center received the 13th batch of beneficiaries, constituting young children as well adults from Yemen on Thursday

On Thursday, the centre received the 13th batch of beneficiaries, constituting young children as well adults from Yemen.

'APC in Salalah received 50 wounded Yemenis for treatment and medical care. The 13th batch of amputees, who were affected by the war in Yemen, are at the centre for motor training and rehabilitation,' the centre stated.

Sheikh Hammoud Saeed al Mekhlafi, founder of APC, expressed his thanks to the government and to His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik for the human-

itarian efforts made by the sultanate towards Yemen and Yemenis embroiled in the war.

He added that "the sultanate supported the establishment of the centre in a fraternal humanitarian stance that deserves appreciation, bringing joy to the hearts of many Yemeni families".

On May 12, a delegation from the Dutch embassy in Oman visited the centre.

APC is a charitable project that provides rehabilitation services for amputees in exclusive cooperation with the German prosthetics company Ottobock.

Short films promote Oman tourism

Three films showcasing sultanate’s immense tourism capabilities win ministry contest

Our Correspondent
Muscat

Bestowed with over 3,100km of coastline, natural wonders as well as unique cultural heritage, Oman’s tourism potential is limitless. To bring to the fore the sultanate’s immense tourism capabilities, the Ministry of Heritage and Tourism held a competition titled ‘Oman With Your Eyes’ to produce gripping audio-visual content.

The ministry announced the winners of the short film contest last week, where Sultan al Ruqaishi won in the category of adventure and nature tourism, Mohammed bin Ali al Balushi for marine tourism and Salim bin Hamdan al Hajri for heritage and culture tourism.

Speaking to *Muscat Daily*, Balushi, 21, owner of Lahza Productions, said, “I am proud of this win. We are a 12-member team that produced a 1.20 minute film promoting marine tourism in Daymaniyat Islands.”

The film showcases the activities tourists can engage in the Daymaniyat Islands, including diving, watching whales and turtles, water sports and camping. Balushi described the compe-



(Photo: Salim bin Hamdan al Hajri)



(Photo: Sultan al Ruqaishi)



(Photo: Mohammed al Balushi)

tion as ‘tough’ with 50 other entries. “We filmed for a week in difficult conditions. High waves delayed filming for a few days. Our photographers took diving lessons to shoot underwater scenes.”

Ruqaishi’s two-minute film on adventure and nature tourism puts the spotlight on the sultanate’s diverse natural elements, including mountains and valleys, “which are ideal places to practise adventure activities.”

Ruqaishi said, “The film focuses on tourist activities, such as mountain walking, exploring valleys and caves, mountaineering, camping and bicycling.”

He added that the film introduces tourists to the natural beauty of Oman and the various adventures that can be undertaken in the sultanate. “The film targets adventure seekers of different age groups, male and female, from different segments of society.”

Hajri’s two-minute film visits and documents several tourist sites. “Oman is rich in diversity of environment, terrain and also heritage and culture.”

The film features tourist sites from Musandam to Dhofar during the tourist season. “I travelled across Oman to capture the best tourist sites at the appropriate times, choosing the best shots and pictures to produce the film showcasing Oman’s authentic heritage.”

Hajri thanked the ministry for holding the competition, while Balushi said that such competitions are “very important because they promote Omani tourism and support Omani talent”.

242 violations of Marine Fishing Law in April

Our Correspondent
Muscat

As many as 242 Marine Fishing Law violations were reported in April, according to the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Water Resources (MAFWR).

According to a MAFWR official, among the 242 violations registered, there were 207 fishing licence regulation violations,

17 cases of use of prohibited fishing methods and possession of unauthorised equipment, three instances of non-compliance in the placement of licence plates on boats and ships, and 15 other violations.

“In line with efforts to curb violations, the ministry organises monitoring campaigns in cooperation with the relevant authorities, such as the Coast Guard of

Royal Oman Police, the Royal Oman Navy, the Maritime Security Centre and the Ministry of Labour at all fishing sites,” the MAFWR official said.

The campaigns aim to ensure compliance with laws and regulations. The ministry’s Fisheries Control Operations Room uses modern technology, including satellites, and applies a remote sensing system to monitor the

movement of commercial and coastal fishing vessels.

The Marine Fishing Law prohibits the practice of fishing or any activity after the expiry of the licence period. The law stipulates that a violator will be levied a fine of RO1,000 and/or imprisoned for a month. The punishment will be increased in the event of repetition of violations.

Indian blogger connects emotionally with Oman



(Supplied photo)

Our Correspondent
Muscat

Indian travel blogger Suresh Joseph completed an eight-day visit to Oman on Thursday covering over 2,000km from north to the south of the sultanate.

A globetrotter, Joseph has been regularly taking time out to drive across India and to distant lands abroad for the last 12 years. He holds 15 Indian and three world records related to travel, and has driven on the four longest highways of the world.

Oman was the 53rd destination of the 64-year old resident of Chennai who visited Muscat, Sur and Salalah.

“Travelling gives me time to introspect and peek into my soul. My solo travels have helped me find answers to many of life’s conundrums.”

Joseph described Oman as being on his wish list for long, and the visit as being worth the wait. “I rode buses, cars and boats to travel around Oman. I am impressed with Oman’s breathtaking natural beauty, in-

cluding mountains, wadis and seas. I loved the sinkhole of Bimah and the pristine beauty of Wadi Bani Khalid.”

His drive from Muscat to Salalah was the highlight of the trip, although overcoming the heat was a challenge. “I saw the harsh landscape of the Yemen border as well as the serenity by

Oman provides more of an emotional connect. I can see that the country is close to nature and values the environment

SURESH JOSEPH

the sea in Qantab. Such diversity is tough to find anywhere.”

The trip to Oman was a birthday gift to himself this year. “Everything happens in time and at its own pace. I scheduled my Oman sojourn to coincide with my birthday.”

Joseph, however, left Oman

with a few regrets. Among others, he didn’t have enough time to visit an Omani family to experience Omani hospitality. “Also, I missed the khareef, the historical city of Sohar and the Empty Quarter.”

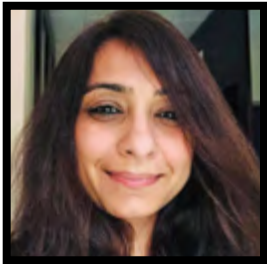
During the trip, his daily routine started at 8am and ended at sunset. He made the itinerary himself and followed it religiously. “I research the places I visit well in advance, looking at all options and aspects. From tradition and culture to nature and cuisine, I make sure to note down all elements and plan my days. It is more fruitful than a travel agent arranging your trip.”

Joseph uses Google Maps extensively, initially as a guide to plan halts and eventually as a navigation tool.

Prior to Oman, Joseph visited UAE. “Oman provides more of an emotional connect. I can see that the country is close to nature and values the environment,” he said.

Next on his itinerary are South America and Antarctica, where he plans to be next year.

BEYOND WORDS



VAISHALI HAMLAI

The columnist is a certified MBTI coach and author. She delves into the complexities of the mind and soul to guide and interpret social behaviour

Getting inside the brain of a teenager, who by now has spent 450 hours of his life doing homework, while wasted 700 other hours worrying about homework, is not easy. Unfortunately, some hours of worrying about homework in their nightmares can’t be accounted for.

Now if I ask these little wonders, why homework should be banned then I will get a host of reasons, rather I could write a thesis on it, but in the spirit of keeping up with them and doing justice to their reasoning, I list the top three reasons.

The topmost reason why homework should be banned is that it causes stress. When a teenage says something gives them stress, I would be stressed. Stress is a very strong word, and not a word to be used by teenagers. And if they feel stressed about something at this delicate age, I would like to rewind that act of homework for them. So, the real question here is, does it really cause stress? Studies prove that it does. There have been many schools across the world adapting the no-homework policy. It effectively helps students unearth

their hidden talent in that time, which is solely for themselves, and not to catch up with leftover schoolwork.

The second reason being, not every child is same. Some can do their homework and still be able to come back alive to finding their mojo. But most bury inside this humongous burden, and then they never get time back to find their inner mojo. This is the time in childhood when you are carefree and adventurous but some fear homework

SHOULD WE BAN HOMEWORK?

at this moment, the moment they should be embracing with new ideas. Fear shouldn’t be a part of their life; it shouldn’t exist in their dictionary. Unfortunately, it exists, and this time doesn’t come back, it only passes by.

The third and probably an important reason being, not having time to have fun or be bored. Saying fun and bored in one breath, makes it confusing. But in reality, they are two sides of the same coin. Fun evolves

from being bored. If a child has time to be bored, they will get innovative, they will think of brilliant ideas to have fun with the limited resources and eventually have fun. It’s the process of being bored to having fun, that journey that creates memories everlasting for them. And memories are ideas, waiting to become business ideas. So maybe, just maybe, homework is crushing the new breed of entrepreneurs that were not allowed to bloom.

Too much of anything is harmful, and maybe homework is too much. After a long day in school, kids must be carefree and given the liberty to fly. If not then why send them to school, if they must lead the same life at home which they lead at school.

Statistically, it has been proven that homework, can lead to health concerns among students. It could lead to lifestyle diseases much earlier in life. Most times, homework is given as punishment to underperforming students which can lead to low self-morale concerns later in their life.

All in all homework leads to imbalance in the life of the child, contrary to the balanced life we should provide them.

The views and opinions expressed in this column are solely those of the author and do not necessarily represent those of Muscat Daily or Apex Press & Publishing

Artefacts from India at National Museum

Muscat - National Museum of Oman inaugurated a 'Loaned Artefacts from India' exhibition on Saturday.

The inauguration was held under the patronage of H H Sayyida Mona bint Fahd al Said, Assistant Vice-Chancellor for International Cooperation at Sultan Qaboos University, and vice-chair of the Board of Trustees of the National Museum, and other high-ranking officials.

In his address at the inauguration, H E Amit Narang, Ambassador of India to Oman, informed that the precious artefacts are on loan from India's National Gallery of Modern Art.

"It is particularly gratifying that these two exhibits were first announced at the National Day Reception of India on January 26 this year and have been on display at the National Museum since," he added.

"It is often said, and correctly so, that India and Oman are maritime neighbours with 5,000 years of shared history. Indeed, our two nations are ancient cultures bound by the threads of history."

He added that the two exhibits that were formally unveiled on Saturday are vivid examples of this shared history and cultural interchange across centuries.

The *Tarikh-i-Kesari*, which contains biographies of rulers in and around India, showcases the fact



Most of all, what the two artefacts most vividly showcase is the shared tradition of peaceful exchange of goods, ideas and culture across the blue waters of the Arabian Sea

H E AMIT NARANG

that not only were the sovereigns of Oman well known in contemporary India, but that they were also well regarded.

The other exhibit, a painting of the iconic Fort Mirani by Thomas Daniel, is a reminder of the colonial links that bound the destinies of Indians and Omanis over the past two centuries.

"Most of all, what the two artefacts most vividly showcase

is the shared tradition of peaceful exchange of goods, ideas and culture across the blue waters of the Arabian Sea that has characterised the relationship between India and Oman," H E Narang said.

"This glorious tradition in turn contributed to the evolution of our respective cultures as modern societies well known for the value they place on the virtues of

inclusiveness, openness to outside influences and universal tolerance. Just as Indians and Omanis take justifiable pride in their own culture and traditions, they have always kept their doors and windows open to winds of diverse influences from abroad.

"This has enriched our respective cultural fabrics, fostered social harmony and helped us collectively promote peaceful co-existence on the global stage.

"Today, as we celebrate these two artefacts, we celebrate this shared tradition. A tradition that is a reminder that the two countries share not only thousands of years of history, but thousands of years of friendship," H E Narang added.

Omran, S Sharqiyah sign pact to develop tourism

Sur - Oman Tourism Development Company (Omran Group) and South Sharqiyah Governor's Office signed a pact to develop several tourism projects in the governorate on Friday.

The signing aligns with Omran's endeavours to work in tandem with various stakeholders in order to stimulate the growth of the sultanate's tourism sector.

The pact was signed by Yahya bin Badr al Mawali, Governor of South Sharqiyah, and Mohammed bin Salim al Busaidi, chairman of Omran Group, in the presence of several officials from both parties.

Under the pact, Omran will provide technical support as well as supervise the execution of the multi-phased projects being developed in the governorate. Phase 1 will see development of two parks, one in Al Suwaih spread over an area of 65,000sqm, and the other in Al Ashkharah on 14,000sqm of land.

The two parks will provide a variety of tourism and entertainment facilities, including dining areas, retail outlets, children's playgrounds and camping sites.

"The governorate draws plenty of local and inbound tourists owing to its rich and diverse destinations, which we seek to exploit, jointly with various stakeholders, to further stimulate the governorate's tourism," Mawali said.

"Our collaboration with Omran aims at upgrading



tourism services and products within those destinations, which in turn will open prospects and promising opportunities for local businesses and SMEs in the governorate."

On the occasion, Busaidi said, "This signing comes within the framework of the existing collaboration between Omran and South Sharqiyah Governor's Office reflecting our vision and optimistic approach towards growing the sultanate's tourism

sector and diversifying tourism products and services within different governorates."

Omran is also working to further explore tourism development opportunities in collaboration with the Ministry of Heritage and Tourism besides various other stakeholders.

Omran owns three hospitality assets in South Sharqiyah - Atana Stay Al Ashkharah, Ras al Jinz Turtle Reserve and the Masirah Island Resort.

Nine karate students of Bodhi Life Skills receive black belts



Our Correspondent
Muscat

Nine karate students of Bodhi Life Skills were awarded black belts for 2022 at a ceremony held at Al Falaj Hotel recently.

Mamuro Kanno, Deputy Head of Mission, Embassy of Japan in Muscat, was the chief guest, while Otsu Yuka, Second Secretary, was guest of honour at the event.

On the occasion, Renshi G Kumar, founder of Bodhi Life Skills, said, "I have been teaching karate in Oman since 2007. Karate not only makes the body

strong but also the mind."

According to Kumar, black belt training involves a 30km run, 2km duck walk, 2,500 sets of exercises, and performing 42 katas, among others. "The nine students have attained self-control, patience, courage and humbleness. Over the years, many tournaments have been conducted in Oman in which our teams won four gold, 15 silver and 16 bronze medals."

He informed that the black belt recipients have been practising karate for a minimum of seven years. The nine karatekas are Rashmi Singh, Aaditya-

narayan Anoop, Taanush Emmanuel Abraham, Tessa Manoj, Kalyani Sanjeev, Shreya Sudheesh Nair, Hussair Subair, Syed Uzair Ahmed and Richa Sam.

During the event, Kumar also demonstrated his control over mind and body by letting a vehicle drive over his bare hands. His students also demonstrated skills, including breaking tiles with elbows, head and knuckles, breaking burning tiles with kicks and punches, and tiles broken on abdomen of a student.

The function was presided over by Abdullah Saleh, owner of Bodhi Life Skills.

HAZY CONDITIONS PREVAIL IN MUSCAT, MERCURY RISES



Parts of Muscat witnessed poor visibility on Saturday as dusty weather conditions prevailed in the city. The Directorate General of Meteorology cautioned about visibility, stating that it will become 'poor' due to dust formation. The temperature has also risen in the past few days with highest of 47.4°C witnessed in Amerat in Muscat, followed by Rustaq (46.9°C), Samail (46.7°C) and Bausher (46.6°C) on Friday. The met department predicted clear skies over most of the governorates for Sunday (Syed Fasiuddin/Muscat Daily)

Chapter of Middle East Psychological Association launched in Muscat

Muscat - A psychological association, called Middle East Psychological Association (MEPA), was launched on Saturday to bring together psychologists and other mental health practitioners in Oman to one platform.

In her inaugural speech, Dr Joanne Hands, president of MEPA, said, "The association was first established in Kuwait with the objective of destigmatising psychological health in the Middle East."

Dr Joanne informed that with the opening in Oman, MEPA has launched seven chapters in the region - Kuwait, UAE, Lebanon, Qatar, Jordan and Bahrain - this year. Saudi Arabia and Egypt are expected to have chapters soon.



The association was first established in Kuwait with the objective of destigmatising psychological health in the Middle East

DR JOANNE HANDS



The COVID-19 pandemic caused a disruption of an unprecedented level, "but finally, now the field of psychology is seen as an important career and profession

and more and more people are seeking help and understanding the need to take care of their mental health", Dr Joanne said.

According to her, the Middle

East region currently lacks experts and resources for training mental health professionals. "I have been in the Middle East for 17 years and if I have to upskill myself with the developments in the field of psychology, then I need to travel to the UK, US or Australia to find the expertise and the resources that I could implement in my practice."

Dr Alya Sultan, director of MEPA Oman, said, "As a psychologist, almost all of us faced these questions - 'Can you read my mind?' Or 'Can you analyse my personality?' Unfortunately, we cannot read your mind, but as psychologists, we can help you understand why you think the way you think. Our role ranges from

raising awareness, to prevention, intervention and treatment."

Dr Alya added that the profession of psychology is gaining ground in Oman. "However, we have yet to develop our ethical code of conduct and our own independent regulatory board approved by the Ministry of Health, Ministry of Education and Ministry of Social Development. So, today marks a very important milestone in the profession of psychology in Oman, and we are honoured to follow the footsteps of our colleagues in neighbouring countries, both in the GCC and across the Middle East, in joining them in launching the Omani chapter of MEPA," Dr Alya said.

Elaborating on the objectives

of the association, Nutaila al Kharusi, secretary of MEPA Oman, said it will bring mental health professionals and psychologists together to make the standard of practice uniform.

"It is similar to what the American psychologists' association is doing. We are now doing the same for the MENA region, and in doing so, we are highlighting the importance of mental health and the importance of having standardised mental health practices," Nutaila said.

"We can provide evidence based services to the community. May is Mental Health Awareness Month - the perfect time to launch the Oman chapter of MEPA." (Text and Photo by Syed Fasiuddin)



Salalah Free Zone signed a usufruct agreement with Salalah Petroleum Company

Salalah Free Zone signs agreement for \$88mn petrochemicals factory

Our Correspondent
Muscat

Salalah Free Zone on Thursday signed a usufruct agreement with Salalah Petroleum Company to establish a new factory for the production of petrochemical products with an investment of US\$88mn.

'We welcome Salalah Petroleum Company to establish a factory for the manufacturing and production of petrochemical products with an investment of US\$88mn on a land area of 78,000 sqm,' Salalah Free Zone said in a tweet.

The new factory, a multifunctional unit to treat and produce petrochemical products, will be an important addition to the

petrochemical sector projects in Salalah Free Zone.

The factory's petrochemical products will be handled through the Port of Salalah which will enhance the performance of the maritime transport sector.

Salalah Free Zone on Thursday also signed a second agreement for the establishment of a workshop for the maintenance and repair of containers.

'We welcome Majan Logistics Solutions Company which will establish a company in Salalah Free Zone,' Salalah Free Zone said in another tweet.

The new company, which will be established by Majan Logistics Solutions with an estimated investment of US\$1mn, will be specialised in providing logistic

services, manufacturing and maintenance of containers in Salalah. The project will cover a total area of 3,000 sqm.

The workshop will also provide services for transforming and designing containers in the shapes of houses, restaurants and rooms based on international standards.

Salalah Free Zone said that these two agreements will contribute to the national economy by creating direct job opportunities.

Salalah Free Zone offers economic incentives for investors, particularly tax exemptions and complete ownership of the projects. The zone boasts a strategic position next to the Port of Salalah.

Dubai Financial Market to launch trading of Oman crude from June 1

Our Correspondent
Muscat

The Dubai Financial Market (DFM) announced that it is launching trading of its new Micro Oman Crude Oil Contracts on June 1, 2022, providing investors with a unique investment opportunity.

The Micro Oman Crude Oil Contract will represent a significant addition to DFM's growing futures market.

It enables investors' seamless access to gain on the increase or decrease of oil prices as well as to diversify their portfolios and access leverage to maximise portfolio size and potential returns. 'The contracts will be cash settled and will have a smaller contract size of 100 barrels making them accessible to a large



number of investors,' DFM said in a statement on Thursday.

The Oman Crude Oil Contracts will be supported by three market makers including: xCube, Al Ramz Capital, and BHM Capital and will be offered by several DFM trading members including: International Securities, BHM Capital Financial Services, Al

Ramz Capital, Mena Corp Financial Services, Al Dar Shares and Bonds, SICO Financial Brokerage, EFG Hermes (UAE) and Arqaam Securities.

The new contracts are also the first outcome of the collaboration agreement between DFM and the Dubai Mercantile Exchange (DME) to develop new investment opportunities and offer retail investors the opportunity to be directly involved in the biggest and most relevant asset class in the region.

DFM said this new initiative underscores its efforts to implement its growth strategy that focuses on diversifying investment opportunities and financial products, in line with the growing demand from its diversified investor base of more than 900,000 investors.

Renaissance Services appoints new chief corporate affairs officer

Muscat - Renaissance Services has appointed Raed Dawood as its new chief corporate affairs officer. Dawood, who previously worked in the telecom sector, joined Renaissance Services on May 1, 2022, according to a press release.

Dawood's appointment is part of the broader objectives of Renaissance 2.0, which sets the template for the company's next generation and turbo-charges strategy implementation, modernisation, and exponential growth. The company looks forward to an exciting future with Dawood as he brings with him over 25 years of experience along with a long list of accomplishments.



Raed Dawood

As a multi-disciplinary, change-focused leader passionate about Oman's innovation-driven future, Dawood has led and contributed to pioneering projects in sectors ranging from banking and finance, ICT to government relations and policy affairs.

Stephen R Thomas, CEO of Renaissance said, "Dawood has an impressive track record across multiple disciplines, which will be an asset for us. His passion to shape the future of Oman through technology is inspiring and completely in sync with our Renaissance 2.0 goals. I am confident that his contributions will add significant value to the company's new direction."

MARKET ANALYSIS - OMAN

MSX posts weekly gains as industrial stocks rise

The benchmark index of the Muscat Stock Exchange closed higher during last week, mainly supported by industrial sector stocks.

MSX30 Index ended the week higher by 0.26 per cent. While Industrial Index rose 0.19 per cent, Financial Index and Service Index closed down 0.3 per cent and 0.29 per cent, respectively. MSX Shariah Index closed higher by 0.22 per cent for the week.

Local news

►Takaful Oman Insurance announced that it has received regulatory approval from the Capital Market Authority for the rights issue of 150mn offer shares at a price of 41bz per share (consisting of issue price of 40bz and 1bz towards issue expenses). The board of directors of the company resolved that the record date of the rights issue shall be May 22, 2022.

►Oman Fisheries Company announced to its shareholders that a commercial fishing agreement has been reached with the Irish company Atlantic Dawn in May 2022, for a period of three years. The partners aim to utilise the fishing quotas granted to the company by the Ministry of Agricultural, Fisheries Wealth and Water Resources in order to secure sustainable supplies in addition to enhancing export operations. Accordingly, Atlantic Dawn will bring a small pelagic fishing vessel targeting 30,000 metric tonnes of small pelagic that, if achieved, will result in improvement in financial performance

and margins. It is anticipated that the ships will start fishing in Omani waters by the next fishing season in 2022.

►Oman's consumption of natural gas dropped by 8 per cent year-on-year in March 2022 compared to the same period of last year. Total production of natural gas increased to 4,136mn cubic meters (mncm) in March 2022 against 3,820mncm in the corresponding period of 2021.

►The Authority for Public Services Regulation (APSR), which regulates the electricity sector, among other public utility services in the Sultanate of Oman, plans to shortly commission an audit of licensed power transmission and distribution companies to ensure that consumers are not impacted by poor quality power supply. The audit will form the basis of a new 'Quality of Power Supply Regulatory Framework' to help monitor compliance by transmission and distribution licensees with the technical requirements of quality of supply across their networks. A number of consultants are participating in a competitive tender launched by APSR for the selection of a qualified firm to undertake the proposed audit, as well as to develop the regulatory framework around it. Interested bidders have until Jun 6, 2022 to submit their proposals in this regard.

►Islamic banking is continuing to grow rapidly in Oman driven by growing awareness about Sharia'a-compliant products, strong retail demand and sup-



portive regulations. Total assets of the sultanate's Islamic banks and windows grew by 10.7 per cent year-on-year to hit RO6bn mark in the first quarter of 2022, according to the Central Bank of Oman's data released on Sunday. In terms of market share, Oman's Islamic banking assets now make up 15.4 per cent of total banking sector assets as of the end of March 2022, the central bank data showed.

GCC marketes

The GCC financial markets recorded net foreign inflows of US\$3.11bn in April 2022 with year-to-date net inflows reaching at US\$16.32bn. Countries with positive foreign inflows in April were led by Saudi Arabia followed by Qatar, Abu Dhabi

and Kuwait, respectively. Overall, on year-to-date basis, Saudi Arabia led with net foreign inflows of US\$8.81bn followed by US\$3.07bn by Qatar and US\$2.84bn by Abu Dhabi.

Bahrain's Finance and National Economy Minister Shaikh Salman bin Khalifa al Khalifa said that the monetary policy adopted by the Central Bank of Bahrain (CBB) seeks to stabilise the exchange rate of the Bahraini dinar against the US dollar. This policy has been followed for a long time in order to maintain the stability and steadiness of foreign financial transactions, smoothly and transparently, in a manner that enhances trust in the banking system and transactions in Bahraini dinar in the local market, he pointed out. In response

to a question regarding monetary and financial policies to curb inflation, the minister said this policy has proven successful over the past decades to reduce risks of exchange rate fluctuations and their negative repercussions on the local economy.

Saudi Arabia posted the highest quarterly surplus in the first quarter of 2022 budget with SR57.49bn in over six years. This is equivalent to 63.82 per cent of the total estimated SR90.09bn surplus of the 2022 budget, according to a report by the Ministry of Finance. The ministry announced on last Sunday that the actual revenues of the first quarter amounted to about SR277.96bn, a rise of 36 per cent year-on-year, while actual

expenditures grew by 4 per cent to SR220.47bn in the first quarter of the year.

The ministry disclosed that the total oil revenues amounted to SR183.7bn, an increase of 58 per cent while compared to the same quarter of last year, while non-oil revenues rose SR94.26bn, an increase of seven per cent. Oil revenues accounted for 66.09 per cent of the total revenues, while non-oil revenues amounted to about 33.91 per cent.

Business conditions in Dubai's non-oil private sector economy maintained a strong pace of improvement in the first month after the Expo 2020 ended, led by a sharp increase in output levels, a survey showed last week. The seasonally adjusted S&P Global Dubai Purchasing Managers' Index (PMI) was registered at 54.7 in April, down from 55.5 in March, its first drop since January.

The indicator stayed above the 50 no-change mark for the 17th consecutive month. The output index remained strong in April, and despite a slight softening from the previous month, the rate of growth was the second-quickest seen since July 2019.

This was due to a sharp rise in customer sales as the economy recovered further from COVID-19 measures, the survey report said.

Global news

Heavy falls in European and Asian stock markets followed the Wall Street's worst day since mid-2020 on Thursday,

as stark warnings from some of the world's biggest retailers underscored just how hard inflation is biting. Bond markets rallied in the dive for safety and on bets that interest rate rises may get recalibrated, but it was the gloom striking down equities after Wednesday's US\$25bn wipe out in US retailer Target's shares that dominated the action.

The focus remained on what central banks will now do as they walk the tightrope of trying to regain control of inflation, which is now at 40-year highs in some countries, without causing painful recessions. Inflation worriers watched oil prices ease again too, as fears over slower economic growth outweighed lingering fears over tight global supplies. Brent crude went from US\$110.41 to US\$108.25 per barrel in London trading, while US crude dipped to US\$108.78 a barrel and gold , which has fallen more than 12 per cent since March, clawed up to US\$1,822 levels per ounce.

Recommendations

Globally, the markets fell again as global sell-off continued during last week. The S&P 500 index is down more than 17 per cent in the first 95 trading days of 2022.

Investors are on high alert mode as they are watching inflation numbers and shifting to bond market.

Regionally, all the GCC markets ended the week lower due to higher inflation and high volatility.

Russia halts gas supplies to Finland

Helsinki, Finland – Russia on Saturday stopped providing natural gas to neighbouring Finland, which has angered Moscow by applying for NATO membership, after the Nordic country refused to pay supplier Gazprom in rubles.

Following Russia's February 24 invasion of Ukraine, Moscow has asked clients from "unfriendly countries" – including EU member states – to pay for gas in rubles, a way to sidestep Western financial sanctions against its central bank.

Gazprom said in a statement Saturday that it had "completely stopped gas deliveries" as it had not received ruble payments from Finland's state-owned energy company Gasum "by the end of the working day on May 20".

Gazprom said it had supplied 1.49bn cubic metres of natural



In this file photo taken on May 12 pipes at the Gasum plant are pictured in Raikkola, Imatra, Finland (AFP)

gas to Finland in 2021, equal to about two thirds of the country's

gas consumption.

However, natural gas accounts for around eight per cent of Finland's energy.

Gasum said it would make up for the shortfall from other sources through the Balticconnector pipeline, which links Finland to Estonia, and assured that filling stations would run normally.

"Natural gas supplies to Finland under Gasum's supply contract have been cut off," the company said in a statement.

In April, Gazprom Export demanded that future payments in the supply contract be made in rubles instead of euros.

Gasum rejected the demand and announced on Tuesday it was taking the issue to arbitration. Gazprom Export said it would defend its interests in court by any "means available".

Gasum said it would be able to secure gas from other sources and that gas filling stations in the network area would continue "normal operation".

In efforts to mitigate the risks of relying on Russian energy exports, the Finnish government on Friday also announced it had signed a ten-year lease agreement for an LNG (liquefied natural gas) terminal ship with US-based Excelerate Energy.

On last Sunday, Russia suspended electricity supplies to Finland overnight after its energy firm RAO Nordic claimed payment arrears, although the shortfall was quickly replaced.

Finland, along with neighbouring Sweden, this week broke its historical military non-alignment and applied for NATO membership, after public and political support for the western alliance soared following the invasion of Ukraine.

Moscow has warned Finland that any NATO membership application would be "a grave mistake with far-reaching

consequences".

Both Finland and Sweden are seemingly on the fast track to joining the military alliance, with US President Joe Biden offering "full, total, complete backing" to their bids.

But all 30 existing NATO members must agree on any new entrants, and Turkey has condemned the Nordic neighbours' alleged toleration of Kurdish militants and has so far voiced opposition to letting them in.

Russian Defence Minister Sergei Shoigu has said the Kremlin would respond to any NATO expansion by creating more military bases in western Russia.

Saturday's halt to gas shipments follows Moscow cutting off Poland and Bulgaria last month in a move the European Union described as "blackmail". AFP

Pakistan bans import of luxury items to boost economy

Islamabad, Pakistan – Pakistan's new government on Thursday said it would ban the import of over 30 luxury items including cars and fruit jams in an austerity move to help boost the country's faltering economy.

Cash-strapped Pakistan has been hit by a storm of crippling debt, dwindling foreign currency reserves and galloping inflation.

The national currency hit a historic low on Thursday, with 200 rupees fetching US\$1.

"My decision to ban (the) import of luxury items will save the country precious foreign exchange," Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif tweeted.

The move was an effort to target the country's elite, with the banned goods including mobile phones and cars – which make up the largest share of import bills on the list – as well as cosmetics and jams.

"We will be able to save US\$6bn by imposing a ban on import of the luxury items," information minister Mariyum Aurangzeb said at a press conference, adding that the ban would be effective immediately.

"The decision will give a boost



Shehbaz Sharif

to the local economy and industry".

However, business leaders said the country must seek consent from the World Trade Organization, which regulates international trade.

"I think it is a prudent step by the government... it would help save much needed foreign exchange to pay off our international trade debts," said Khalid Tawab, the former senior vice president of the Pakistan Chamber of Commerce.

"The government has not declared a financial emergency yet, but that is the situation we are facing, and so under such circumstances the WTO could be persuaded to relax its rules."

Pakistan's current trade deficit stands at US\$39.2bn.

AFP

Sri Lanka to repay debts after six months: Central bank

Colombo, Sri Lanka – Sri Lanka will take at least six more months to start repaying its debts, the central bank said as the government shut schools because of fuel shortages.

Central Bank of Sri Lanka Governor Nandalal Weerasinghe said there will be no debt servicing until the country was able to restructure its US\$51bn external debt.

"We hope to be able to reach an agreement with our creditors in about six months," Weerasinghe said.

"Our position is very clear. Until they come to (a) restructure (agreement), we will not be able to pay."

He said the mob violence that claimed nine lives last week and the government's failure to finalise a finance minister under a new cabinet could delay negotiations with creditors and the IMF.

The governor said bailout talks with the International Monetary Fund were under way, but a final agreement required approval by a finance minister the



Nandalal Weerasinghe

country is yet to appoint.

Prime minister Mahinda Rajapaksa resigned last week following pressure over the acute economic hardships faced by the 22mn population.

His successor Ranil Wickremesinghe has attempted to cobble together a "unity cabinet", but has inducted only four ministers, all from President Rajapaksa's SLPP party, and none from the opposition.

Wickremesinghe Thursday asked state sector employees to stay at home on Friday and take a long weekend as the country faced an acute shortage of petrol.

AFP

اس ام ان باور القابضة ش.م.ع.ع SMN POWER HOLDING SAOG				
Unaudited Consolidated Financial Statements For the three-month period ended 31 March 2022				
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 unaudited consolidated financial statements for the three-month period ended 31 March 2022.				
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 first three months of 2022, 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 SAOG ("SMN Barka") and Al Rusail Power Company SAOG ("Al Rusail"), is measured by their reliability which is the ability to deliver the declared capacity as per the contract. In the first quarter of 2022, the reliability at SMN Barka Plant was 97.3% (98.2% in 2021) for power and 91.4% (96.9% in 2021) for water. The reliability at Al Rusail Power Plant was 99.6% (100% in 2021) for the same period. The Company produced over the three-month period of 2022 an aggregate net power volume of 350 GWh (657 GWh in 2021) and a total volume of 7,955,000 m³ of potable water was delivered (7,113,000 m³ in 2021). All necessary annual maintenance activities of key equipment, including major outage of gas turbine 1 and gas turbine 2, were performed in accordance with Original Equipment Manufacturers' recommendations, while applying the best industry standards and practices for health & safety and maintenance, during the 2021-2022 winter 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. Moreover, the Company and STOMO team are closely monitoring the situation to ensure plant availability and reliability.				
Financial Results Total Revenues for the three-month period of 2022 amount to RO 12.6 million (RO 17.4 in 2021), representing a decrease of RO 4.8 million compared to 2021, primarily due to reduction in capacity of Al Rusail plant from approx. 665 MW to approx. 186 MW. 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 1.36 million during the three-month period of 2022 compared to a net profit of RO 2.16 million for 2021. The decrease in net profit of RO 0.80 million is mainly due to the following unfavorable variances compared to the same period in 2021: - Al Rusail Gas Turbine 1 to Gas Turbine 6, 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. 186MW; - Lower commercial availability at SMN Barka power plant compared to last year due to higher forced outages primarily on water plant. These downsides were partially offset by the following positive variance compared to 2021: - Reduction in finance costs following the scheduled repayments of the term loan facilities for the two project companies. 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 9 months of the financial year 2021 under the fuel settlement arrangement agreed with OPWP for both SMN Barka and Al Rusail plants.				
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(WJPA) 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 last 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 as required by generation license, such participation has no impact on the Company's cash-flows until the time Al Rusail and SMN Barka will remain under the P(WJPA) framework. - For Al Rusail, as foreseen in the Power Purchase Agreement between Al Rusail Power Company SAOG 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. 186MW. - 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 186 MW capacity to OPWP as per RFP timeline and secured an extension up to end of October 2022. - 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(WJPA) 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(WJPA) 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, 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. 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				
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				
Statement of financial position as at 31 March 2022 (Unaudited)				
	Parent Company		Consolidated	
	31 March 2022	31 Dec. 2021	31 March 2022	31 December 2021
	RO '000	RO '000	RO '000	RO '000
ASSETS				
Non-current assets				
Property, plant and equipment	-	-	137,442	139,459
Right-of-use-assets	-	-	335	285
Long-term prepayment	-	-	-	27
Investment in subsidiaries	27,405	27,405	-	-
Goodwill	-	-	14,952	14,952
	27,405	27,405	152,729	154,723
Current assets				
Inventories	-	-	2,868	2,901
Trade and other receivables	70	54	8,608	44,069
Finance lease receivables	-	-	-	316
Fixed term cash deposits	-	-	3,200	7,390
Cash and bank balances	8	24	3,154	3,067
	78	78	17,830	57,743
	27,483	27,483	170,559	212,466
Total assets	27,483	27,483	170,559	212,466
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	43,392	42,036
Hedging Reserve	-	-	(1,214)	(2,560)
Net equity	27,409	27,409	68,833	66,131
LIABILITIES				
Non-current liabilities				
Term loan	-	-	57,539	64,832
Lease liabilities	-	-	391	353
Derivative financial instruments	-	-	423	1,529
Provision for end of service benefits	-	-	86	84
Provision for site restoration	-	-	3,594	3,558
Deferred Operating Income	-	-	808	808
Deferred tax liability	-	-	15,455	15,447
	-	-	78,296	86,611
Current liabilities				
Term loan	-	-	14,300	13,795
Lease liabilities	-	-	44	20
Derivative financial instruments	-	-	1,006	1,484
Trade and other payables	74	74	4,942	41,517
Current tax payable	-	-	3,138	2,908
	74	74	23,430	59,724
	74	74	101,726	146,335
Total liabilities	27,483	27,483	170,559	212,466
Total equity and liabilities	27,483	27,483	170,559	212,466
Net assets per share (RO)	0.137	0.137	0.351	0.344
Statement of profit or loss and other comprehensive income for the period ended 31 March 2022 (Unaudited)				
	Parent Company		Consolidated	
	31 March 2022	31 March 2021	31 March 2022	31 March 2021
	RO '000	RO '000	RO '000	RO '000
Revenue	-	-	12,593	17,438
Operating costs	-	-	(9,931)	(13,389)
GROSS PROFIT	-	-	2,662	4,049
General and administrative expenses	(61)	(65)	(267)	(312)
(LOSS)/PROFIT FROM OPERATIONS	(61)	(65)	2,395	3,737
Finance charges	-	-	(902)	(1,284)
Other income	61	65	117	122
PROFIT BEFORE TAX	-	-	1,610	2,575
Income tax	-	-	(254)	(419)
NET PROFIT FOR THE YEAR	-	-	1,356	2,156
Other comprehensive income				
Items that may be reclassified to profit or loss in subsequent periods:				
Fair value of cash flow hedge adjustments – net	-	-	1,001	212
Reclassification to profit or loss – gross	-	-	583	745
Deferred tax liability – current period change	-	-	(238)	(144)
Other Comprehensive Income/expense for the year, net of tax	-	-	1,346	813
TOTAL COMPREHENSIVE INCOME FOR THE YEAR	-	-	2,702	2,969
Basic and diluted earnings per share (RO)	0.000	0.000	0.007	0.011

SBA offers exclusive service for summer

Suhail Bahwan Automobiles (SBA)'s special service scheme 'Happy Wednesday' and 'Exciting Thursday' has received a great response from customers. The service scheme also helps customers better prepare their vehicle to deal with summer conditions.

A senior official of SBA said, "Giving our customers more choices and new service schemes to make the ownership experience better is a top priority. The 'Happy Wednesday' and 'Exciting Thursday' will extend the best service to our customers. As customer centric brand, we are delighted to extend this exclusive service schemes. Our technical team will use Genuine Nissan Parts to ensure quality and reliability during service as they have access to di-



agnostic equipment, designed to keep your vehicle performing to optimum standards especially during the summers."

Under 'Happy Wednesday' customers who visit their nearest Suhail Bahwan Automobiles Service Centre with prior appointment on any Wednesday during the campaign period can avail exciting benefits, including 20% discount on window film, ceramic coating and interior cleaning, a press release said.

Additionally, all customers who visits workshop on Wednesday with prior appointments will get a chance to win any of the assured service through 'scratch and win' including free next periodic maintenance service, free body polish, free interior cleaning and free rust proofing. They have a

chance to win their next periodic maintenance service through a raffle.

As per the 'Exciting Thursday' scheme customers with prior appointment on any Thursday during the campaign period can avail exciting benefits for model year 2016. They will get 20% discount on periodic maintenance service and 20% discount on value added services. Value added services include window film, ceramic coating, anti-bacterial treatment, interior cleaning, rust proofing, headlight polishing and many more.

Through a raffle draw customers have a chance to win their next periodic maintenance service. The offer is eligible for model year 2016 and prior.

The special scheme is valid up to May 26.

Omani boy receives autologous bone marrow in India

HCG Cancer Hospital, one of the leading cancer chain hospitals in India, successfully performed an autologous bone marrow transplantation of a two year old pediatric patient from Oman who was suffering from Medulloblastoma, a cancerous brain tumour that starts in the lower part of the brain.

The expert team was led by Dr. Intezar Mehdi, director and head of department, Senior Consultant - Pediatric Hematology - Oncology & BMT, and a team of doctors at HCG Cancer Hospital Bengaluru, a press release said.

Saad (name changed) was referred to HCG Cancer Hospital Bengaluru from Oman with a medical history of being diagnosed to have infant medulloblastoma brain tumour in May 2021 and had undergone surgery at a hospital in Oman for the removal of tumour.

He also underwent VP shunt insertion. Post removal of the tumour, the patient was administered chemotherapy according to protocol. It was completed in November 2021. In such cases where patients are young, radiotherapy cannot be given and hence, they are treated with high doses of chemotherapy with autologous BMT. After this, he was referred to HCG Cancer Hospital Bengaluru for autologous bone marrow transplantation due to



Dr Intezar Mehdi

the case being a complex pediatric case.

At HCG Cancer Hospital, the child underwent a pre-BMT workup and neurological consultation to rule out any syndromic association and to evaluate global developmental delay. EEG was performed which showed normal analysis. MRI brain and spine screening were also performed to look for any residual disease. PET scan and MRI did not show any recurrence of the tumour and so a transplant was suggested.

After the availability of all the reports done at HCG hospital, the patient's family was counseled for autologous bone marrow transplantation. Autologous bone marrow transplantation is a procedure in which a patient's healthy stem cells (blood-forming cells) are collected from the bone marrow/peripheral blood before treatment, stored, and then given back to the patient.

Abu Dhabi celebrates world's largest mammal reintroduction

The Environment Agency - Abu Dhabi (EAD) continues to progress with the world's largest mammal reintroduction programme. During last March the Agency has successfully translocated 20 Scimitar-Horned Oryx (SHO) and 25 Addax to Chad's Ouadi Rime-Ouadi Achim Game Reserve.

Currently, there are 460 Scimitar-Horned Oryx in the wild, with 15 calves born so far this year, as well as 96 wild Addax, with 5 calves born to the herd, also this year, a press release said.

Furthermore, for the first time ever EAD successfully translocated five Dama Gazelle on March 14, which have joined the herd of other captured wild Dama Gazelle in the Agency programme.



As part of the monitoring programme for the animals, EAD successfully darted seven wild animals - six SHO and one Addax - and fitted them with satellite tracking collars, enabling close monitoring to witness survival and reproduction.

Dr Shaikha Salem al Dhaheri, secretary general of EAD, said,

"This pioneering project was inspired by the insightful vision of the late Sheikh Zayed bin Sultan al Nahyan, who noticed that SHO numbers were declining rapidly and wished to see them flourish once again. Today we are seeing continued success thanks to the support of our wise leadership through the regular



translocation of both breeds to their natural habitat in Chad. Both herds of animals are now thriving very well in their natural habitats."

She added, "We are currently very close to achieving our goal of having a herd of 500 SHO in Chad and, due to the success of this project, we are aiming to go

beyond this figure and ensure that the numbers in the wild increase even further. We are working closely with the government of Chad to also reintroduce Addax and Dama Gazelles, and in time we will witness increased numbers of these species, hopefully paving the way for their removal from the extinction list."

ISG students make foray into international literary arena

Three students from Indian School Ghubra have created a record of sorts by emerging victorious in the International category of the 'Grow Your Buds Poetry Rendition Contest 2021' conducted by Motivational Strips, the world's most active forum under the aegis of a reputed educational group of India, Soundarya Educational Trust.

Seethalekshmi Kishore, Gouri Reghu, and Anika Govil students of classes 9 and 8, have achieved this phenomenal feat by writing their own poetry and presenting it in the forum. They were de-



clared winners from among more than 130 entries across the globe.

To commemorate the occasion of Children's Day, the

founder of Motivational Strips, well-acclaimed author, Shiju H Pallithazheth, decided to conduct this unique contest to highlight the relevance of an authentic and

dedicated approach to determine greater quality in literature.

The elite panel of judges, comprising prominent literary figures, in consensus, spoke that

the poetry rendition videos had to be repeatedly watched before deriving final results.

The students were praised for their poems and renditions, highlighting the relevance of intonation, language accuracy, and presentation. The trio from Indian School Ghubra grabbed top honours from among five winners in the International category.

Seethalekshmi's poem titled, 'Thank you Corona', Gouri's poem, 'The Rarest Phoenix' and Anika's poem, 'The Beach' were judged the winning entries.

Turkish Week begins at Grand Millennium

Grand Millennium Muscat, a luxury five-star hotel located at the heart of Muscat, has teamed up with the Turkish embassy and Turkish Airlines to celebrate and showcase the rich culture of Turkey.

For the first time, celebrity Turkish chef Sinem Ozler and her team will showcase their expertise in authentic Ottoman dishes in the Sultanate of Oman, a press release said.

In addition to the intriguing Turkish cuisine, there will be live santoor and traditional Turkish musical instruments performed by Sedat Anar and art exhibitions by renowned local artists such as Turkish ceramics (Çini), miniature art, Ebru (water marbling) art, Turkish calligraphy, and illumination art.

The event will take place from May 21 to 26. The hotel will offer breakfast from Sunday to Thursday from 6.30am to 10.30am and A La Carte dinner from Saturday to Wednesday from 6.30pm to 10.30pm. On May 26, the hotel will unite the two



Chef Sinem Ozler

countries' well-known dishes with a theme of 'Grand Ottoman & Oman Night' at Taybat restaurant.

Luca Medda, cluster general manager at Grand Millennium Muscat, said, "In every opportunity, we always strive to find ways to create a concept that is new, unique, and fun in order to

deliver an exceptional guest experience.

Our focus is to make Grand Millennium hotel a place where food, culture, arts, and music collide. With the help of the Turkish Embassy and Turkish Airlines, this event allows us to keep bringing special moments to our guests at Millennium."

NBO wins MEA Finance award for innovation

National Bank of Oman (NBO) has won the award for 'Best Innovation in Corporate Banking and Finance' at the MEA Finance Banking Technology Awards 2022.

The award recognises the bank's achievements in delivering smart banking solutions, namely its Corporate Internet Banking (CIB) platform, online trade channel, the first-of-its-kind Merchant App, and the recently launched direct debit service, as well as its overall efforts to drive growth in an increasingly competitive regional market, a press release said.

Using technology and security features, NBO's Corporate Internet Banking (CIB) platform allows companies to make instant transactions, payments and transfers, access account balances and complete transaction history on all company's accounts, delegate authority and restrict user's functions.



Meanwhile, the first-of-its-kind Oman Merchant App allows merchants to receive payments through a dynamic QR code raised through the app. Through Direct Debit Service, companies can now automate their monthly payments, eliminating the need for cheques. These services are regularly updated to provide customers with a distinctive banking experience.

Mohammed Yahya al Jabri, AGM, head of Global Transaction Banking at NBO, said,

"Putting our clients first and offering tailored services that meet their evolving banking requirements are key objectives for us at NBO. We continue to employ the latest innovations and technologies to ensure they have access to the best service possible.

This prestigious award recognises our efforts and spurs us on to achieve even more when it comes to digitizing our banking services and ultimately, creating value for the industry."



Ahlibank felicitates graduates from Etimad leadership programme

Enhancing its pioneering role in developing the leadership skills of its employees, throughout empowering Omani youth, and supporting their career development, eight employees of Ahlibank, have recently graduated from the Etimad Leadership Development programme.

The employees were felicitated by the bank's senior management and the in-house Talent Management Committee (TMC). The ceremony was overseen by Said Abdullah al Hatmi, CEO of Ahlibank, along with several members of the executive management and senior staff of the bank, a press release said.

The new graduates from the second batch of Etimad Pro-

gramme symbolise the bank's growing focus on human capital development. Having fielded a team of eight employees in the program last year, Ahlibank followed it with a new batch of talented employees to demonstrate its alignment with the national objectives for youth empowerment and Omanisation.

As a national leadership programme, Etimad aims to create qualified Omani leaders - middle and senior management - in the private sector. The programme represents a strategic collaboration between the public and private sectors in Oman, and Ahlibank's participation reaffirms its commitment to upskill Omani team members for com-

petitive roles in the future.

On the sidelines of the felicitation ceremony, the bank also conducted a discussion panel to exchange knowledge and expertise among the employees who enrolled into the Etimad programme. The employees, occupied in leadership and supervisory positions, assured the team members that they would leverage their training to move up the career ladder and take on roles that define their professional development.

Presiding over the discussion, Said al Hatmi, outlined Ahlibank's alliance with the government in realizing the larger objectives of Oman Vision 2040. He noted that the bank's unde-

terred focus has and will always be on achieving sustainable human resource development by raising the levels of education and enhancing the potentials of the local youth, in the regional and global employment market.

Complementing the government's efforts to build the national workforce with training and development initiatives like Etimad, he said it helped motivate private sector organisations to collectively forge the path ahead. He also thanked the bank's management team and TMC for their intuitive knowledge in assessing the needs of the market and responding to it with initiatives that refine employee skills and hone their tal-

ents.

Hana al Kharusi - GM Corporate Banking and chairperson of TMC, said, "This is a proud moment for us at Ahlibank. Eight of our qualified employees have gained exposure and skills to take on more responsible jobs and excel in their respective fields. We celebrate their success in the program and encourage them on to reach for newer milestones. They are a testament of Ahlibank's quest to ensure sustainable human development; not only in the organisation but further on a national level. As empowered employees, they will now share their knowledge and contribute to the progress of our bank."

Omantel provides Generation Z Programme

The Generation Z training programme offered by Omantel provides fresh graduates in Oman the opportunity to have the perfect start to their career. This programme gives graduates the opportunity to gain practical insights into the operations of the company through various rotations, projects, and mentorships.

For the first and second batches of the Generation Z programme, the one-year programme has been a life-changing experience for many graduates, including those who were able to find jobs after completing the programme. In addition to chances of employment, members of the programme gained the opportunity to manage real-life projects and were able to handle increased responsibilities entrusted to them, a press release said.

Graduates enrolled in this programme can perform a number of tasks that would place them in the shoes of actual employees. These trainees were given tasks, such as designing cables and revising the coordinates of 4G and 5G towers, which are all relevant to the tasks performed by regular employees. Additionally, this programme helps trainees develop critical and practical skills.

Mohammed al Yaqoubi, a former first batch Generation Z trainee and current employee in the Consumer Customer Care Department at Omantel, stated, "This programme helped me improve my communication skills, personal skills, and critical thinking skills. Through the Generation Z programme, I was able to learn how top officials handle meetings and a lot of other things related to the business."

Moreover, this programme signifies the importance of delegating work to trainees, which not only shows the trust placed on them by mentors and supervisors but also makes them understand the concept of responsibility in the workplace.

"This training helped us realise that there is empowerment at every level of work. Through the training, we were required to handle meetings on our own in front of superiors. We were also given a chance to be part of meetings with new vendors as well as attend the signing of new contracts," al Yaqoubi added.

Members of the Generation Z programme could also connect with other members from different departments. These gradu-



Abdullah al Fadhil



Noor al Shukairi



Mohammed al Yaqoubi

ates, who come from various universities, could learn from each other while working on projects. In addition, they are able to take advantage of the contacts they make through the program which would eventually help them in the future, even after being employed or whenever they require assistance.

"This programme helped me connect with others in a professional manner, making it a win-win situation for everyone. The training program was created in such a way that trainees would have rotations within different units and get exposed to various tasks. Not only was that helpful technically, it also helped build a network of connections that can greatly benefit trainees," said Abdullah Amer al Fadhil, part of the second batch Generation Z programme, Technology Unit.

Noor Al Shukairi, a second batch Generation Z trainee in the Technology Unit at Omantel, described the personal growth she has experienced since starting the programme.

"One of the biggest changes that I have noticed in myself is that currently I am a much better programmer than when I first graduated," said Noor. "My sense of confidence and leadership have been enhanced."

OTC organises Academic Major Fair

Oman Tourism College (OTC) organised an exhibition for academic programmes and a forum for students' parents on May 18, at its facilities.

The event was in line with OTC's keenness to familiarise students and their parents with the academic programmes offered by the college and the job opportunities associated with them in the labour market and the promising opportunities in the tourism sector, a press release said.

Commenting on the importance of holding such events, Mohamed Shamis al Rawahi, head of Internships and Placement said, "The aim of the Academic Major Fair and Parents Forum was to introduce the foundation students to the programmes offered by OTC and the career opportunities associated with them in the future. This is because the



tourism sector is one of the key focused economic sectors within Oman Vision 2040. "In this context, the forum sought to help students make the right decision that will determine their career path. In addition, it also stems from the college's educational

role in providing assistance and support to its students in choosing the academic major, in line with their aspirations and capabilities, which will then represent the beginning of their career path to form a successful future. Alongside the fair, the

event included a forum for parents to introduce them to the specialisations so they can help their children choose and build a successful future for them." OTC offers programmes that keep pace with the needs of the market and support the objectives

and pillars of Oman's Vision 2040 as well as the sultanate's tourism strategy in graduating Omani workforce to lead the tourism sector. Offered programmes include a bachelor's degree with honours and a diploma in four major disciplines.

SalamAir launches flights to Bursa, Turkey

SalamAir has announced non-stop flights from Muscat to Bursa starting from June 16 as the first direct flight between these two cities. Bursa becomes the third destination SalamAir flies to in Turkey after popular destinations Istanbul and Trabzon.

SalamAir will fly to Bursa thrice weekly on Tuesdays, Thursdays, and Saturdays. SalamAir will take off from Muscat at 10:05am and arrive at Bursa at 2:05pm local time. It will take off from Bursa at 2:50pm and arrive in Muscat at 8:30pm, A press release said.

Bursa will now be part of SalamAir's popular summer destinations in addition to Phuket, Istanbul, Trabzon, Tehran, Alexandria, Baku, and

Sarajevo.

Captain Mohamed Ahmed, CEO of SalamAir, said it always gives me great pleasure to welcome new destinations to our network. We are consistently looking at destinations that pose significant interest to our adventurous customers. Our customer feedback and commercial viability are at the forefront of our decisions to offer exciting destination choices. As such, Bursa is the third destination we are introducing in our operations in Turkey.

"We are sure it will appeal to our frequent passengers to Turkey, mainly Istanbul, because of the proximity between Istanbul and Bursa, which can be easily accessed with an array of ground travel

options. Our customers are looking to explore more destinations as part of their leisure travel experience. The charming city of Bursa offers many tourist attractions, from adventure and sightseeing to shopping and the pleasant weather offers an enjoyable holistic experience."

He continued, "We continue to be highly committed to our expansion plans in prompting Oman and achieving our goals in meeting Oman Vision 2040 while continuing to connect the network better; we are in the process of adding more aircraft to the fleet to serve more destinations and increase frequency whereby offering convenience, greater choice, and while maintaining affordability.

Through Italian Eyes exhibition opens May 22

Dr Luca Moretti and Dr Lucia Oliva (two Italian artists living in Muscat), along with Italian opera and art journalist Alessandra Giorda (owner of TV2 Art Gallery), have organised a week long exhibition titled 'Through Italian Eyes', at Crowne Plaza OCEC, beginning May 22.

The exhibition includes the works of some other Italian artists for the first time in Oman - like Alina Ciuciu, Gabriele D'Aloisio, Enrico Tubertini who were represented at the last IDF Oman - Art Space - held at the Oman Convention and Exhibition Centre, a press release said.

Before the artworks leave Oman back to Italy, the artists planned a fitting closing gala event to gather artists and art lovers in Oman to view the rich series of paintings and sculptures by the Italian artists, including Fabio Cuffari.

The event will be opened in the presence of Mahmood



Alia Ciuciu

Harith al Nabhani, the guest of honour and will include a surprise performance by Lucia Oliva and Luca Moretti who are also popular for their dance shows, besides their artworks. The exhibition will be on till May 29.

The artworks on display include those of Alina Ciuciu, an incredibly gifted artist who



Enrico Tubertini

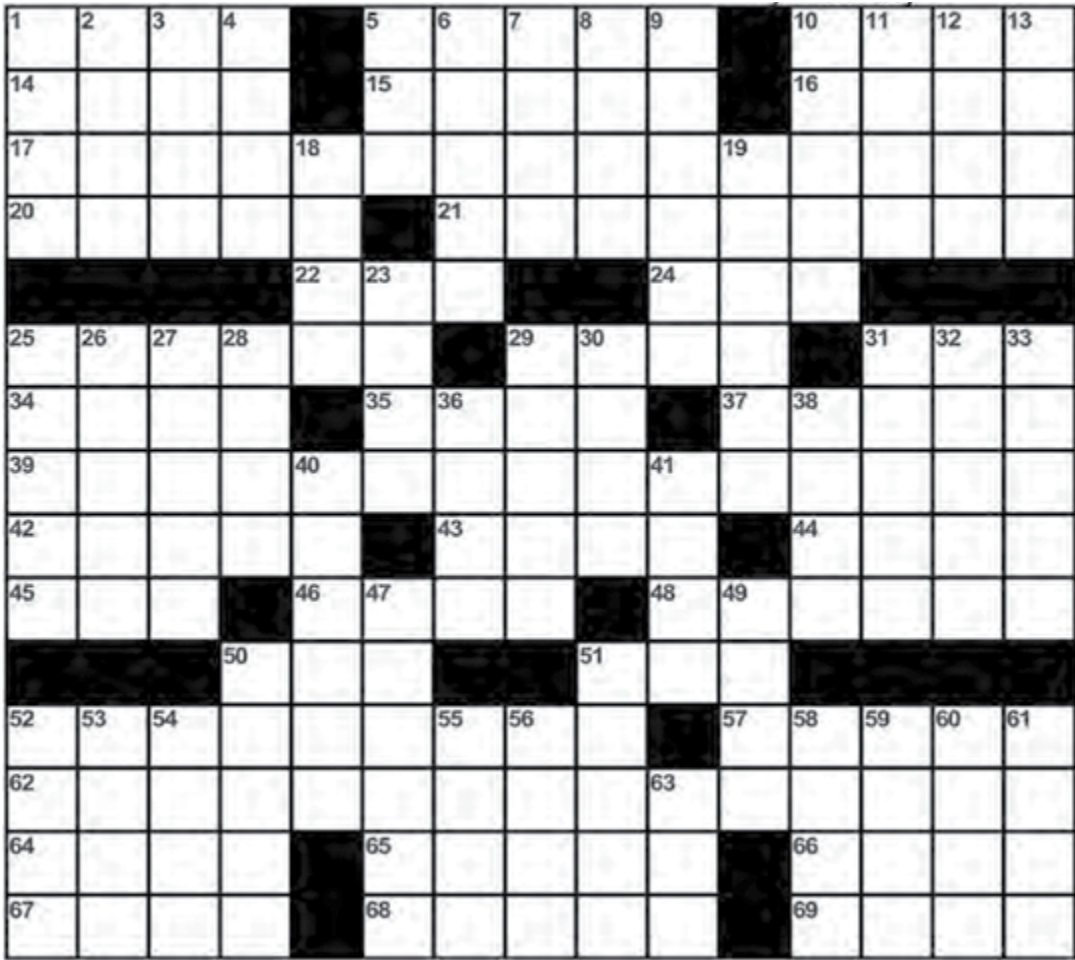
demonstrates a mastery of painting in a wide range of styles and unusual, extraordinary topics; Fabio Cuffari, who says 'Music allowed me to have incredible experiences, visiting all of Italy and getting to know many people and acquiring a new awareness of myself; Gabriele D'Aloisio, a modern self-taught



Lucia Oliva

entrepreneur devoted to art, who believes that every free moment is an excellent opportunity to totally immerse yourself in your world; Enrico Tubertini, whose 'catofotographic' works (a term he coined) date back to that period, besides those of Lucia Oliva, a talented artist-sculptor and choreographer.

DAILY CROSSWORD



ACROSS

1) Beach goers catch them

5) Hair-raising place?

10) Milky, iridescent gem

14) Object of worship

15) Hatchet man's opposite

16) One of the sexes

17) Bids adieu

20) Hardly underplay on stage

21) Engages in chit-chat

22) Noisy bustle

24) Madam of 2-Down

25) Kind of chop

29) Edible root of the taro

31) Uncle of an entire country

34) "Planet of the_"

35) Like old recordings

37) Lobe in the mouth

39) What all drivers should be in

42) DNA strand's shape

43) Display intense anger

44) Creative mental spark

45) Equip for war

46) 24-can unit

48) Some pole bearers

50) Put on TV

51) Slop spot

52) Most vigorous and cheerful

57) Accumulate

62) Go "humph!"

64) Japanese soup

65) Brownish gray

66) Like many horror films

67) One-dish meal

68) Exposed publicly

69) Type of terrier

DOWN

1) "All_!" (court phrase)

2) First mate?

3) Toy that does tricks

4) Coin opening

5) That girl

6) '50s TV "Kid"

7) Jason's fabled craft

8) Author Uris

9) Shown to be true

10) Game played with a deck of 40 cards

11) Reduces debt

12) On the safe side, at sea

13) With a discount of

18) Tidy

19) Gobble up

23) Audition tape

25) Buckwheat porridge

26) More fitting

27) Coin of the_ (a country's money)

28) Spumante lead-in

29) Follow as a consequence

30) Gloom partner

31) Glove material, sometimes

32) Change to fit

33) "You_ well" ("Why not?")

36) Does in, gangland-style

38) A sundial hour

40) Cause enthusiasm

41) Better than good

47) Noble prefix with "crat"

49) Burmese currency

50) Cupid's projectile

51) Mining excavation

52) Does some tailoring

53) Departure

54) Church area

55) Son of Isaac, in Genesis

56) Cottontail's tail

58) Capacity units, these days

59) Run_ (go nuts)

60) Agile

61) Eyelid affliction

63) Flanders on "The Simpsons"

NOTE PAD

MORAL AGES SLAT
ALINE PUNT WILE
RECOVERYVEHICLE
SOONER OPINION
RASPY PETTY
HOER LAST
ARTERIAL ROTATE
RANDOMVARIABLES
PLASMA DOORSTEP
MAIM PONY
TIARA UNPEG
ANGOLAN LOCUST
RUNVICTORIOUSLY
TREE TINE FREAK
SEWS SEEM SEDGE

YOUR DAILY HOROSCOPE

 **ARIES** MARCH 21-APRIL 19

You want some time alone. No, it's fairer to say that you need some time alone and you'll do whatever it takes to get it. So, if a loved one asks you for something you really can't provide, your answer will be matter-of-fact, firm, and quite clear. It's just not possible now. Don't you dare feel bad about it. After all, when was the last time you said no to anyone under any circumstances? Exactly. It's time to think of yourself.

 **LEO** JULY 23-AUGUST 22

Your friends have your back, and not just when you ask for it. They're willing to take your side even before you ask. That's a good feeling, and you'll have a chance to enjoy it now, especially once the bunch of you starts rehashing the whole experience from start to finish. Don't let them think for one second you take them for granted. Show them your appreciation.

 **SAGITTARIUS** NOVEMBER 22-DECEMBER21

It's time to wake up and admit that your dreams are telling you something! The confusing images you've been seeing in recent nights have really been clues about a problem you need to solve, and today you'll finally be able to put the pieces together and fully understand what you need to do. Don't waste time working on a solution, because you know who you should talk to and what you should say. Trust your gut today. It knows what it's talking about!

 **TAURUS** APRIL 20-MAY 20

A whole new way of earning your daily bread may well be within your reach now, so if someone comes along with a good offer, don't automatically turn it down. That goes double if the offer arrives after a certain person notices just how talented you are at something other than your actual vocation. Your hobby, for example. Wouldn't it be nice to get paid for what you love to do? It's not out of the question, you know.

 **VIRGO** AUGUST 23-SEPTEMBER 22

When someone says something that strikes you as combative, do your level best to give them the benefit of the doubt. If you show them that you have an honest desire to maintain goodwill between you, then they'll try to do the same. You're responsible for deciding whether or not a disagreement goes to the next level, so you should appreciate the power you have and not take it for granted. Snapping back at someone could cost you today.

 **CAPRICORN** DECEMBER 22-JANUARY 19

Your attitude could be mismatched with others today. The people around you will be on a completely different wavelength than you. Luckily, that won't bother you one tiny bit! Your tolerance for diversity is very high right now, and you can effortlessly get along with anyone. To you, their oddball behavior is interesting to the point of almost being charming. This is a good time for you to learn how other people see the world and find out if you could see it that way too.

 **GEMINI** MAY 21-JUNE 21

That cave you were in is all but forgotten now. You've left it behind, that and anything that even remotely reminds you of the dark. Yes, you're done hibernating and ready to celebrate by being as excessive as possible in every category imaginable. And it won't be tough to find someone who will be more than happy to go along with you for the ride.

 **LIBRA** SEPTEMBER 23-OCTOBER 22

An opportunity you've been dreaming about could arrive soon, so prepare yourself. If you're not sure about any part of what's offered, however, don't be shy about asking for some time to think it over, and then get in touch with someone you know and love who's qualified to help you make your decision. Something terrific is on its way to you. All you have to do is recognize it even if it arrives in disguise.

 **AQUARIUS** JANUARY 20-FEBRUARY 18

Complicated ideas are swirling around your mind today. It can't be helped. The Universe is sending you a rapid influx of mental energy, and your brain is going to need big ideas to keep it occupied. By the end of the day, you'll come up with an exciting new plan that you'll be dying to tell all your friends about. A new person in your life is also interested in what you have to say, although for reasons that might not be immediately apparent.

 **CANCER** JUNE 22-JULY 22

Your skills at negotiation and mediation are unparalleled and quite well known. You're usually the first person anyone thinks of when they need a third party to help them smooth over a bad situation or prevent one from occurring. But if someone comes to you with that request now, you'd better come clean and let them know you might not be quite on your game at the moment. You might startle them, but it's better they know what they're dealing with.

 **SCORPIO** OCTOBER 23-NOVEMBER 21

Doing your work well and not making waves is a great strategy for getting ahead in your career or getting better grades, but when you keep your head down all the time, you're liable to not get noticed! As much as you abhor style over substance, today you have to get some face time with the people in power. Strike up a conversation with a teacher in the hallway or a boss in the elevator. Let them see the whole person you are, not just the role you play at work or school.

 **PISCES** FEBRUARY 19-MARCH 20

A family member or dear old friend is about to reveal something that will absolutely knock your socks off. Of course, you won't want them to know how you feel, at least, not the extent of your surprise. But if you're determined to keep it under wraps, you'd better start practicing now because it won't be easy. Once the word is out and you've had a chance to digest it, you'll probably be too delighted to even think about keeping it secret.



TEST YOUR KNOWLEDGE

01. What city is the subject of "The Book of the City of Ladies" (finished 1405)?

A. The perfect city between the clouds in "The Birds" by Aristophanes, Cloud-Cuckoo-Land

B. The city formed by the book itself

C. Cockayne

D. The Garden of the Hesperides

02. Someone is unsuccessfully trying to look well-dressed is said to be "dressed up like a" what?

A. Budgie's dessert

B. Elephant's breakfast

C. Dog's dinner

D. Gerbil's lunch

03. Which composer created "Le Bœuf sur le toit" (The Ox on the Roof) as "fifteen minutes of music, rapid and gay, as a background to any Charlie Chaplin silent movie", although in fact it premiered in 1920 as a short ballet?

A. Darius Milhaud

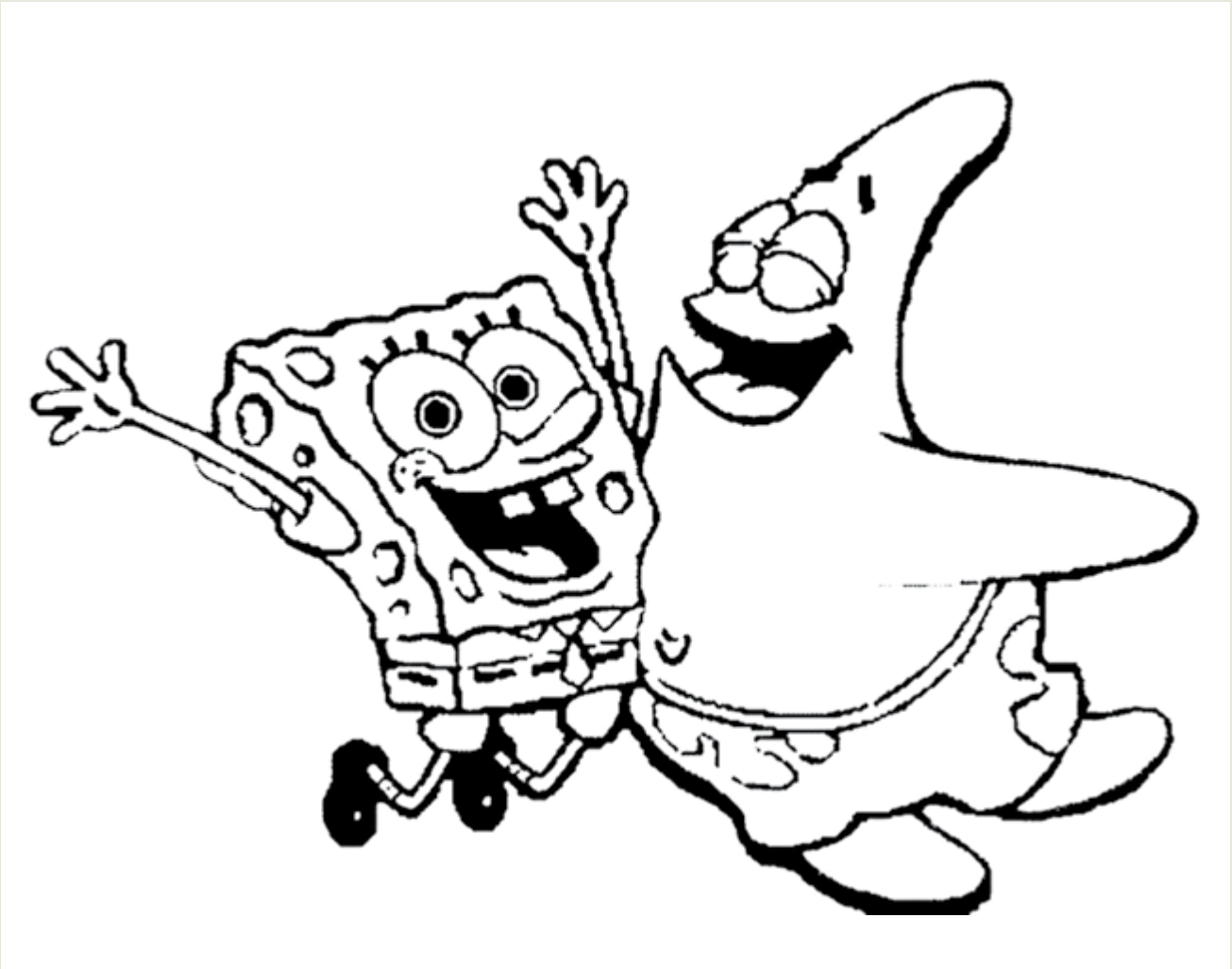
B. Erik Satie

C. Aaron Copland

D. George Gershwin

Answers: 1.B 2.C 3.A

KIDS COLOURING



BOGGLER

M	U	C	S
N	O	G	D
O	E	S	G
O	U	I	I

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.

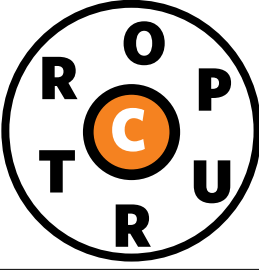
Solution 20-25 words: Excellent, 15-20 words: Very good, 10-15 words: Good, 5-10 words: Average

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

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

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

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

Millions stranded as worst floods in decades hit Bangladesh's northeast

Sylhet, Bangladesh - Rivers in Bangladesh have burst their banks and caused the worst floods in the country's northeast for nearly two decades, with about two million people marooned by rising waters, officials said on Saturday.

Floodwater rushing from India's northeast breached a major embankment on the Barak River, inundating at least 100 villages at Zakiganj in Bangladesh, said Mosharraf Hossain, the chief government administrator of the Sylhet region.

"Some two million people have been stranded by floods so far," he told AFP, adding that at least 10 people have been killed this week.

Many parts of Bangladesh are prone to flooding, and experts say that climate change is increasing the likelihood of extreme weather events around the world.

Every extra degree of global warming increases the amount of water in the atmosphere by about seven per cent, with inevitable effects on rainfall.

In Zakiganj bus driver Shamim Ahmed, 50, told AFP: "My house



A house is seen under water beside the banks of Surma River following heavy rainfalls in Sylhet on Friday (AFP)

is under waist deep water. There is no drinking water, we are harvesting rain water.

"Rain is simultaneously a blessing and a curse for us now."

People were seen fishing on submerged roads and some residents took their cattle to flood shelters. All the furniture in widow Lalila Begum's home was

ruined, she said, but she and her two daughters were staying put, hoping the waters would recede within a day or two.

"My two daughters and I put

My house is under waist deep water. There is no drinking water. Rain is simultaneously a blessing and a curse for us now

SHAMIM AHMED

one bed on another and are living on top of it," she said. "There's scarcity of food. We're sharing one person's food and one meal a day."

Floodwater has entered many parts of Sylhet city, the largest in the northeast, where another official told AFP about 50,000 families had been without power for days.

Hossain, the chief administrator, said the flooding was driven by both rains and the onrush of water from across the border in the Indian state of Assam.

But officials said the broken embankment on the border at Zakiganj could only be fixed once the water level dropped.

AFP

'Israeli missile strikes kill three near Syria capital'

Damascus, Syria - Israeli surface-to-surface missiles killed three people near the Syrian capital Damascus on Friday, state media said quoting a military source.

"The Israeli enemy carried out an aggression... that led to the death of three martyrs and some material losses," Syria's official news agency SANA quoted the source as saying.

The missiles came from the Israeli-occupied Golan heights and were intercepted by the Syrian air defences, the military source said.

AFP correspondents in the Syrian capital said they heard very loud noises in the evening.

The Syrian Observatory for Human Rights war monitor said that the three people killed were officers and that four other members of the air defence crew were wounded.

The Israeli strikes targeted Iranian positions and weapon depots near Damascus, the monitor said.

A fire broke out one of the positions near the Damascus airport, where ambulances were seen rushing to the site

of the strikes, according to the Observatory.

The latest strike follows one on May 13 that killed five people in central Syria, and another one near Damascus on April 27 which, according to the Observatory, killed 10 combatants, among them six Syrian soldiers, in the deadliest such raid since the start of 2022.

Since civil war broke out in Syria in 2011, Israel has carried out hundreds of air strikes there, targeting government troops as well as allied Iran-backed forces and fighters of Lebanon's Shiite group Hezbollah.

While Israel rarely comments on individual strikes, it has acknowledged carrying out hundreds of them.

The Israeli military has defended them as necessary to prevent its arch-foe Iran from gaining a foothold on its doorstep.

The conflict in Syria has killed nearly half a million people and forced around half of the country's pre-war population from their homes.

AFP

Palestinian teen killed by Israeli forces in West Bank

Ramallah, Palestinian Territories - A Palestinian teenager was shot dead by Israeli forces as clashes erupted during an army raid on Saturday in Jenin in the occupied West Bank, the Palestinian health ministry said.

"A 17-year-old boy was killed and an 18-year-old was critically wounded by the Israeli occupation's bullets during its aggression on Jenin," the ministry said in a statement.

The official Palestinian news agency Wafa identified the teenager as Amjad al-Fayed.

The Israeli army said that during 'operational activity' near Kafr Dan, a village northwest of Jenin, 'a number of suspects shot live fire at... soldiers from a passing vehicle. "The suspects also hurled Molotov cocktails and an explosive device toward the soldiers," it said in a statement.

"The soldiers responded with live fire toward the suspects," it added. "Hits were identified."

The Palestinian Islamic Jihad claimed Fayed as a member and a 'son', praising him in a statement for confronting the Israeli



Family members mourn the death of 17-year-old Palestinian Amjad Al-Fayed, during his funeral in the refugee camp of Jenin, on Saturday (AFP)

soldiers with gunfire and explosive devices. At Fayed's funeral in the Jenin refugee camp, armed members of the fighter group carried his coffin.

Palestinian prime minister Mohammed Shtayyeh condemned Fayed's killing, stressing in remarks relayed by Wafa that 'the international community should hold Israel accountable for its acts'.

A hub of armed Palestinian groups, the Jenin area in the northern West Bank has been repeatedly raided by Israeli forces since a wave of anti-Israeli at-

tacks in late March, with many of the perpetrators coming from there. The operations to track down suspects and clashes with Palestinians have often turned deadly for both sides.

Al Jazeera journalist Shireen Abu Akleh, a Palestinian-American, died when she was shot in the head near the Jenin refugee camp on May 11 while covering an Israeli raid.

Israel captured the West Bank from Jordan during the 1967 Six-Day War and controls all entry points to the territory.

AFP

US lawmakers seek FBI probe into killing of Palestinian journalist

Washington, US - More than 50 US lawmakers on Friday called on the FBI to investigate the killing in the West Bank of Al Jazeera reporter Shireen Abu Akleh, despite Israeli promises of a probe.

The 57 House members, largely left-leaning Democrats and led by Representative Andre Carson, noted that Abu Akleh held US citizenship and pointed to divergent accounts on how she died on May 11.

"Given the tenuous situation in the region and the conflicting reports surrounding the death of Ms. Abu Akleh, we request the State Department and the Federal Bureau of Investigation launch an investigation into Ms. Abu Akleh's death," they wrote in a letter.

"As an American, Ms. Abu Akleh was entitled to the full protections afforded to US citizens living abroad," they wrote to Secretary of State Antony Blinken and FBI Director Christopher Wray.

Al Jazeera and Palestinians



Palestinian youth hold a mock funeral for journalist Shireen Abu Akleh in Gaza City last week (AFP)

say Israeli forces killed Abu Akleh, a prominent journalist, as she covered an Israeli army raid in Jenin, in the north of the occupied West Bank.

Israel says she may have been killed by Palestinian gunfire or a stray shot from an Israeli soldier.

The Israeli ambassador to Washington, Michael Herzog, said he was 'disheartened' by the

letter and that Israel had sought a joint investigation with the Palestinian Authority that would include a US observer role.

"Our call was flatly rejected by the PA, which is cynically using Ms. Abu Akleh's death to instigate an anti-Israel propaganda campaign," he said.

He called instead for Congress to press the Palestinian

side on an investigation, adding that Israeli troops 'would never intentionally target members of the press'.

The State Department has said that it believes Israel can conduct a credible investigation but Blinken has also criticised the Israeli police for its use of force during Abu Akleh's funeral.

AFP

Women TV presenters defy Taliban order to cover faces on air

Kabul, Afghanistan - Women presenters on Afghanistan's leading TV channels went on air on Saturday without covering their faces, defying a Taliban order that they conceal their appearance to comply with the group's austere brand of Islam.

Since surging back to power last year the Taliban have imposed a slew of restrictions on civil society, many focused on reining in the rights of women and girls.

Earlier this month Afghanistan's supreme leader Hibatullah Akhundzada issued a diktat for women to cover up fully in public, including their faces, ideally with the traditional burqa. The feared Ministry for Promotion of Virtue and Prevention of Vice ordered women TV presenters to follow suit by Saturday.

Previously they had only been required to wear a headscarf.

But broadcasters including TOLONews, Shamshad TV and

1TV aired live programmes Saturday with women presenters' faces visible.

"Our female colleagues are concerned that if they cover their faces, the next thing they will be told is to stop working," said Shamshad TV head of news Abid Ehsas.

"This is the reason they have not observed the order so far," he told AFP, adding the channel had requested further discussions with the Taliban on the issue.

Taliban orders such as this have caused many female journalists to leave Afghanistan since the hardline Islamists stormed back to power, a woman presenter said.

"Their latest order has broken the hearts of women presenters and many now think they have no future in this country," he said, requesting not to be named.

"I'm thinking of leaving the country. Decrees like this will force many professionals to leave."



Afghans hold a placard as they gather to demand help from the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) for asylum abroad, in Islamabad on May 12, this year (AFP)

'Implement the order'

Mohammad Sadeq Akif Mohajir, spokesman for the vice ministry, said the women presenters were

violating the Taliban directive.

"If they don't comply we will talk to the managers and guardians of the presenters," he told AFP.

"Anyone who lives under a particular system and government has to obey the laws and orders of that system, so they must implement the order," he

Earlier this month Afghanistan issued a diktat for women to cover up fully in public, including their faces, ideally with traditional burqa. The ministry ordered women TV presenters to follow suit by Saturday

said.

The Taliban have demanded that women government employees be fired if they fail to follow the new dress code.

Men working in government also risk suspension if their wives or daughters fail to comply.

Mohajir said media managers and the male guardians of defiant women presenters would also be liable for penalties if the

order was not observed.

During two decades of US-led military intervention in Afghanistan, women and girls made marginal gains in the deeply patriarchal nation.

Soon after they took over, the Taliban promised a softer version of the harsh Islamist rule that characterised their first stint in power from 1996 to 2001.

Since the takeover, however, women have been banned from travelling alone and teenage girls barred from secondary schools.

In the 20 years after the Taliban were ousted from office in 2001, many women in the conservative countryside continued to wear a burqa.

But most Afghan women, including TV presenters, opted for the Islamic headscarf.

Television channels have already stopped showing dramas and soap operas featuring women, following orders from Taliban authorities.

AFP

Biden, Yoon signal expanded military presence due to North Korea ‘threat’

Seoul, South Korea - US President Joe Biden and South Korea's new President Yoon Suk-yeol signalled on Saturday an expanded military presence in response to the 'threat' from North Korea, while also offering to help the isolated regime face a COVID-19 outbreak.

After meeting in Seoul on Biden's first trip to Asia as president, the two leaders said in a statement that 'considering the evolving threat posed by' North Korea, they 'agree to initiate discussions to expand the scope and scale of combined military exercises and training on and around the Korean peninsula'.

The possible beefing up of joint exercises comes in response to North Korea's growing belligerence, with a blitz of sanctions-busting weapons tests this year as fears grow that Kim Jong Un will order a nuclear test while Biden is in Asia.

Biden and Yoon also extended an offer of help to Pyongyang, which has recently announced it is in the midst of a COVID-19 outbreak, a rare admission of internal troubles.

The US-South Korea statement said the two presidents 'express concern over the recent COVID-19 outbreak' and 'are willing to work with the international community to provide assistance' to North Korea to help fight the virus.

On Saturday, North Korean state media reported nearly 2.5mn people had been sick with 'fever' with 66 deaths as the country 'intensified' its anti-epidemic campaign.

Biden, while adding that he would not exclude a meeting with Kim if he were 'sincere', indicated the difficulty of dealing with the unpredictable dictator.



Korean President Yoon Suk-yeol (right) and US President Joe Biden hold a joint press conference at the People's House in Seoul on Saturday (AFP)

dedicated the difficulty of dealing with the unpredictable dictator.

"We've offered vaccines, not only to North Korea but to China as well and we're prepared to do that immediately," Biden said at a press conference with Yoon. "We've got no response."

For his part, Yoon stressed that the offer of COVID aid was according to 'humanitarian principles, separate from political and military issues'.

Elected on a strongly pro-US message, Yoon emphasised the need to reinforce South Korea's defences.

According to Yoon, he and

Biden 'discussed whether we'd need to come up with various types of joint drills to prepare for a nuclear attack'.

Talks are also ongoing on ways to 'coordinate with the US on the timely deployment of strategic assets when needed', he said, reaffirming commitment to North Korea's 'complete denuclearisation'.

The strategic assets should include 'fighter jets and missiles in a departure from the past when we only thought about the nuclear umbrella for deterrence', he said.

Any such deployments, or a

ramping up of US-South Korea joint military exercises, is likely to enrage Pyongyang, which views the drills as rehearsals for invasion.

Biden-Yoon 'personal relationship'

Biden began his day by paying respects at Seoul National Cemetery, where soldiers killed defending South Korea, including many who fought alongside US troops in the Korean War, are buried.

He then held closed-door talks with Yoon ahead of the joint press conference and a

state dinner.

A US official said that in addition to tensions over North Korea and the US-led campaign to punish Russia for invading Ukraine, Biden's main focus on Saturday was establishing 'a strong personal relationship' with Yoon, who is less than two weeks into his presidency.

Like Japan, where Biden flies on Sunday, South Korea is seen as a key player in US strategy to contain China and maintain what Washington calls the 'free and open Indo-Pacific'.

Biden's Asia trip 'is about demonstrating unity and resolve

and strengthening the coordination between our closest allies', a senior US official told reporters on condition of anonymity.

In Japan, Biden will meet with Prime Minister Fumio Kishida and the emperor.

On Monday, he will unveil a major new US initiative for regional trade, the Indo-Pacific Economic Framework for Prosperity. A day later, he will join a regional summit of the Quad - a grouping of Australia, India, Japan and the United States.

Cutting-edge investments

On arrival on Friday in South Korea, Biden accompanied Yoon on a tour of a massive Samsung semiconductor factory.

The microchips are a vital component in almost every piece of sophisticated modern technology, and South Korea and the United States need to work to 'keep our supply chains resilient, reliable and secure', Biden said.

For the US leader, whose Democratic Party fears a possible trouncing in midterm elections in November, snarled supply chains are an acute domestic political challenge, with Americans increasingly frustrated over rising prices and setbacks in the post-COVID pandemic recovery.

Biden emphasised Samsung's decision to build a new semiconductor plant in Texas, opening in 2024.

In the southern US state of Georgia, the governor on Friday announced that South Korean auto giant Hyundai will build a US\$5.5bn plant to produce electric vehicles and batteries.

AFP

Easter Island to be reopened on August 1

Santiago, Chile - Popular Pacific Ocean tourist destination Easter Island will reopen to the world on August 1, after more than two years closed due to the pandemic, the Chilean government said on Friday.

The island, located 3,500km west of the coast of Chile, is world-famous for its 'moais', huge stone statues in human form partially buried in the earth.

"It has been agreed that the opening of Rapa Nui (Easter Island) would take place on Monday, August 1, 2022," said a statement from the ministry of economy, development and tourism. The original reopening date was February, but that plan did not materialise under the government of former president Sebastian Pinera.

Authorities drew up a new plan to reopen the island after leftist President Gabriel Boric took office in March.

The island's main source of revenue was domestic and international tourism before flights to and from it were grounded on March 16, 2020, following the first reported cases of coronavirus in the country. Easter Island currently has only one weekly flight, operated by the Latam airline. From August 1, up to three flights per week will be operated by Latam to transport tourists, the ministry said.

The Chilean government has set a precondition that the local COVID-19 vaccination rate must reach 80 per cent in order for tourism to reopen. The current vaccination rate among the island's 10,000 inhabitants is approximately 73 per cent.

AFP

Monkeypox cases could 'accelerate', warns top Europe health official

Paris, France - A top European health official warned on Friday that cases of the rare monkeypox virus could accelerate in the coming months, as the virus spread across Europe.

WHO regional director for Europe Hans Kluge said that 'as we enter the summer season... with mass gatherings, festivals and parties, I am concerned that transmission could accelerate'.

The virus, which causes distinctive pustules but is rarely fatal, has previously been seen in central and west Africa.

But over recent weeks cases have been detected in European countries including Portugal and Sweden as well as the United States, Canada and Australia, Kluge said, calling the spread 'atypical'.

"All but one of the recent cases have no relevant travel history to areas where monkeypox is endemic," he added.

The health official warned that transmission could be boosted by the fact that 'the cases currently being detected are among those engaging in sexual activity', and many do not recognise the symptoms.

Most initial cases of the disease have been among men who have sex with men and sought treatment at sexual health clinics, Kluge said, adding 'this suggests that transmission may have been ongoing for some time'.

The World Health Organization (WHO) has said it is investigating the fact that many cases

reported were people identifying as gay, bisexual or men who have sex with men.

The official's statement came as France, Belgium and Germany reported their first cases of monkeypox and Italy confirmed it now had three linked cases of the disease.

Belgium's three confirmed cases of monkeypox were on Friday linked a large-scale fetish festival in the port city of Antwerp, organisers of the Darklands Festival said.

French authorities said the virus had infected 29-year-old man living in the area that includes Paris.

In Spain, the health ministry has reported seven confirmed cases, and has said it is awaiting confirmation on 23 more.

But a regional health official said the authorities had recorded 21 confirmed cases in the Madrid region, most linked to a gay-friendly sauna in the heart of the capital. It was likely these figures had not yet been included in the nationwide tally.

Portugal has recorded 23 confirmed cases.

UK health officials on Friday reported 11 more confirmed cases in England, taking its total to 20.

The UK Health Security Agency's chief medical adviser, Susan Hopkins, said she expected 'this increase to continue in the coming days and for more cases to be identified in the wider community'.

AFP

Tokyo protests to Beijing over East China Sea construction

Tokyo, Japan - Japan has lodged an official protest with China after discovering what it claimed were efforts by Beijing to develop gas fields in disputed waters in the East China Sea.

Tokyo's foreign ministry said on Friday it had confirmed that Beijing was building in the area - where the two countries' exclusive economic zones (EEZ) overlap - and submitted a complaint to the Chinese embassy.

Japan 'strongly urged an early resumption of negotiations over the implementation' of a 2008 bilateral agreement regarding the development of resources in the East China Sea, it added.

That agreement saw Japan and China agree to jointly develop undersea gas reserves in



The construction of a platform for gas extraction is going on in disputed waters in the China East Sea (AFP)

the disputed area, with a ban on independent drilling by either country. But negotiations over how to implement the deal were suspended in 2010.

"It's extremely regrettable that the Chinese side is unilaterally proceeding with develop-

ment in the waters," the ministry said.

"The borders of the economic exclusive zones and the continental shelf are yet to be settled in the East China Sea," it added.

Beijing opts for more extreme COVID restrictions

Beijing, China - Thousands of COVID-negative Beijing residents were relocated to quarantine hotels overnight due to a handful of infections, as the capital begins to take more extreme control measures resembling virus-hit Shanghai.

Beijing has been battling its worst outbreak since the pandemic started. The Omicron variant has infected over 1,300 since late April, leading city restaurants, schools and tourist attractions to be closed indefinitely.

China's strategy to achieve zero COVID cases includes strict border closures, lengthy quarantines, mass testing and rapid, targeted lockdowns.

Over 13,000 residents of the locked-down Nanxinyuan residential compound in southeast Beijing were relocated to quarantine hotels overnight on Friday



A health worker gets a swab sample from a man to be tested for COVID-19 at a swab collection site in Beijing on Thursday (AFP)

due to 26 new infections discovered in recent days, according to photos and a government notice widely shared on social media.

"Experts have determined that all Nanxinyuan residents undergo centralised quarantine beginning midnight May 21 for

seven days," authorities from Chaoyang district said on Friday.

"Please cooperate, otherwise you will bear the corresponding legal consequences."

Social media photos showed hundreds of residents with luggage queueing in the dark to

board coaches parked outside the compound.

"Some of us have been locked

down for 28 days since April 23, and we all tested negative throughout," wrote one resident on the Twitter-like Weibo.

"A lot of my neighbours are elderly or have young children."

"The transfer really makes us feel like we're in a wartime scene," resident and real estate blogger Liu Guangyu posted on Weibo early on Saturday.

Liu told AFP that they were only notified of the move half a day in advance, but said he was satisfied with the hotel. Residents were told to pack their clothes and essential belongings, and that their homes would be disinfected afterwards, according to screenshots shared on Weibo. Last month, thousands of COVID-negative Shanghai resi-

dents were bussed to makeshift quarantine centres far away as the metropolis of 25mn doubled down on efforts to contain the spread of the virus.

Weibo users expressed widespread anxiety that Beijing authorities were taking a similar approach to Shanghai, where residents have chafed under a months-long lockdown that has denied many people adequate access to food and medical care.

The Weibo hashtag 'All residents of Nanxinyuan compound were dragged to quarantine' was blocked by Saturday morning.

"This is exactly the same as Shanghai, the first step is to cut off water and electricity, then demand keys... then disinfect homes. Appliances, furniture, clothes, food - they're all done for," read one comment.

AFP

Australia ends decade of conservative rule

Prime Minister Scott Morrison accepted a ‘humbling’ day for his Liberal party

Sydney, Australia - Australia's conservative Prime Minister Scott Morrison conceded election defeat on Saturday, hours after voters issued a stinging rebuke of his party's inaction on climate change.

Morrison acknowledged a ‘difficult’ and ‘humbling’ day for his Liberal party, which has governed Australia for the last decade.

“Tonight I have spoken to the leader of the opposition and the incoming prime minister, Anthony Albanese, and I have congratulated him on his election victory,” he told supporters in Sydney.

With almost half the votes counted, Albanese's centre-left Labour was assured of forming the largest party in parliament, but had yet to secure an outright majority.

The balance of power could yet rest with a string of climate-focused independent candidates who routed Morrison's Liberals in a string of once-safe conservative urban seats.



Australian Opposition Leader Anthony Albanese (right), accompanied by his partner Jodie Haydon, addresses Labour supporters at the Federal Labour Reception in Sydney on Saturday (AFP)

The so-called ‘teals’ - mostly highly qualified women - ran on pro-environment, anti-corruption and pro-gender equality tickets.

Their success came after three years marked by a pandemic and

climate-worsened bushfires, drought and floods that upended life for millions of Australians.

“People are saying the climate crisis is something they want action on,” said an elated Australian

Greens leader Adam Bandt. “We have just had three years of drought, and then fires and now floods and then floods again. And people can see it, that this is happening and it’s unfolding.”

Albanese has vowed to end Australia's ‘climate wars’, adopt more ambitious emissions targets and introduce a federal corruption watchdog - all key demands of the teals.

But he has refused calls to phase out coal use, or to block the opening of new coal mines.

He may now have to cut deals with independents demanding deeper commitments that would

risk the ire of the pro-coal and mining union factions of his party.

Earlier on Saturday, Albanese asked voters to give his centre-left party a ‘crack’ at running the country, and urged people to spurn a ‘divisive’ prime minister.

Australians ‘want someone who is fair dinkum, someone who will ‘fess up if they make a mistake,” said the Labour leader.

Speaking in Adelaide during a four-state election-eve blitz, Albanese welled up as he reflected on his personal journey - from the son of a single mum living in Sydney public housing to the threshold of the highest office in the land.

“It says a lot about this country,” he said on Friday, voice cracking with emotion. “That someone from those beginnings... can stand before you today, hoping to be elected prime minister of this country tomorrow.”

Albanese often notes he would be the first Australian with a non-Anglo or Celtic surname to be prime minister.

Voting is compulsory, enforced with a Aus\$20 (US\$14) fine but also rewarded at many booths that fired up barbecues to offer people a ‘democracy sausage’.

The election decides who controls the House of Representatives, the Senate and who lives in the prime minister's ‘Lodge’.

AFP

After 7 years of civil war, disabilities ‘skyrocketing’ in war-torn Yemen

Paris, France - The number of people with disabilities is soaring in Yemen after seven years of civil war, with amputations in particular rising from attacks on urban areas, the aid group Handicap International said on Friday.

Millions have been forced from their homes in the brutal conflict pitting the Saudi-backed government against Iran-backed Houthi rebels, which has sparked widespread food shortages and ravaged the country's infrastructure. “The rate of disabilities has skyrocketed since the beginning of the conflict,” said Yasmine Daelman, the lead author of a the Handicap International report that was provided to AFP.

Extensive use of explosive weapons in strikes, mines and stray bullets in populated areas have led to large numbers of amputations, according to the France-based group, and people with disabilities are always ‘the first to be forgotten’, Daelman said. Psychological traumas and mental health problems have



Children walk past a shrapnel-ridden vehicle, in Yemen's rebel-besieged third city of Taez, on Friday (AFP)

also greatly increased as the war drags on, the report said.

The United Nations estimates that around 4.8mn people suffer from at least one disability in Yemen out of a population of

30mn, up from around three million before the war - though the numbers are impossible to verify due to a lack of official data.

A ‘complete collapse of the health system’ means people

with disabilities are not being protected as they should be, Daelman said, with access to hospitals and health services severely reduced.

The disabled sometimes have

to travel for three days on dangerous roads for basic healthcare.

“It is quite shocking to see how they face very different challenges,” Daelman said, citing the case of deaf people who no longer dare to leave their homes since they cannot hear attacks or explosions. Around 380,000 people have died in the violence and millions have been displaced, the UN says.

Meanwhile the war in Ukraine has led to a drastic increase in the price of wheat and consequently bread, worsening the situation in a country where millions are on the brink of famine.

On Wednesday, Houthi rebels said they were considering renewing a UN-brokered truce with the government that is set to expire in two weeks.

And this week the first commercial flight in nearly six years took off from the rebel-held capital of Sanaa, a major step forward in a peace process that has provided rare relief from conflict.

AFP

Six killed in Iraq drone strikes blamed on Turkey

Sulaimaniyah, Iraq - Drone strikes targeting Kurdish rebels killed at least six people, including three civilians, in northern Iraq on Saturday, local officials and the rebels said, blaming Turkey for the attack.

Turkey routinely carries out attacks in northern Iraq, where the outlawed Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK) has bases and training camps.

Saturday's drone strikes targeted mountainous areas of Chamchamal district, west of the city of Sulaimaniyah, and the Makhmur refugee camp, the officials said.

There was no immediate comment from the Turkish authorities.

“Two Turkish drones struck twice,” said Heimin Bahjat, mayor of the village of Agjalar. “The second strike hit a pick-up truck, killing five people, including two civilians.”

A medical source confirmed that the bodies of two civilians had been brought to Cham-

chamal hospital.

A PKK spokesman said: “Three... guerrillas were targeted by the Turkish armed drones and heavily wounded.

“When the civilians ran to help them and take them to hospital, they were also targeted by the drones. Two civilians lost their lives, along with the three wounded guerrillas.”

Later in the day, another suspected Turkish drone strike hit a vehicle in Makhmur refugee camp, killing a resident, camp director Nechirvan Mahmoud told AFP.

The camp, which houses Kurdish refugees who fled Turkey in the 1990s, has been a repeated target of attacks by the Turkish military, who claim it has become a recruiting ground for the PKK.

Repeated Turkish operations targeting Kurdish rebels in northern Iraq have tested relations between Baghdad and Ankara, key trade partners.

AFP

Pakistan police probe ‘honour killing’ of sisters

Lahore, Pakistan - Police were on Saturday investigating the murder of two Pakistani-Spanish sisters as an ‘honour killing’, a brutal patriarchal practice that sees women put to death for bringing ‘shame’ on their families.

Police in the eastern city of Gujrat said they are investigating the murder of Aneesa Abbas, 24, and Arooj Abbas, 21, as the latest in a grim litany of honour killings.

A spokesman told AFP both were seeking separation from their Pakistani husbands and were lured back from Spain to Gujrat where they were strangled and shot on Friday night. “The family created a story to convince them to come to Pakistan for a couple of days,” said Gujrat police spokesman Nauman Hassan.

AFP

Ukraine President Zelensky says only diplomacy can end war

Kyiv, Ukraine - Ukraine's President Volodymyr Zelensky warned Saturday that only a diplomatic breakthrough rather than an outright military victory could end Russia's war on his country.

“There are things that can only be reached at the negotiating table,” Zelensky said, just as Russia claimed its long-range missiles had destroyed a shipment of Western arms destined for Ukraine's troops.

After just over 12 weeks of fierce fighting, Ukrainian forces have halted Russian attempts to seize Kyiv and the northern city of Kharkiv, but are under renewed and intense pressure in the eastern Donbas region.

Moscow's army have flattened and seized the southeastern port city of Mariupol and subjected Ukrainian troops and



Smoke rises during shelling in the city of Severodonetsk, eastern Ukraine on Saturday (AFP)

towns in the east to a remorseless ground and artillery attack. Zelensky's Western allies have shipped modern weaponry to his

forces and imposed sweeping sanctions on the Russian economy and President Vladimir Putin's inner circle.

But the Kremlin has responded by disrupting European energy supplies, and on Saturday cut off gas shipments to Finland,

The conflict will be bloody, there will be fighting but will only definitively end through diplomacy
VOLODYMYR ZELENSKY

which angered Moscow by applying to join the NATO alliance.

‘It will be bloody’

Against this backdrop, Zelensky told Ukrainian television the war would end ‘through diplomacy’.

The conflict, he warned, ‘will be bloody, there will be fighting but will only definitively end through diplomacy’ - promising only that the result would be ‘fair’ for Ukraine.

“Discussions between Ukraine and Russia will decidedly take place. Under what format I don’t

know - with intermediaries, without them, in a broader group, at presidential level,” he said.

On the ground in Ukraine, the fighting is fiercest in the eastern region of Donbas, a Russian-speaking area that has been partially controlled by pro-Kremlin separatists since 2014.

“They completely ruined Rubizhne, Vonokvakha, just as they did Mariupol,” Zelensky said on Friday, adding that the Russians were ‘trying to do the same with Severodonetsk and many other cities’.

In Severodonetsk, a frontline city now at risk of encirclement, 12 people were killed and another 40 wounded by Russian shelling, the regional governor said.

Zelensky described the bombardment of Severodonetsk as ‘brutal and absolutely pointless’.

AFP

GRAND FINALE

Leaders Manchester City aim to end Liverpool’s quadruple bid in Premier League climax

Manchester, United Kingdom - Manchester City have the destiny of the Premier League title in their hands heading into Sunday’s final day showdown, with the defending champions holding a slender one-point lead over quadruple-chasing Liverpool.

Pep Guardiola’s men will claim a fourth English title in five years of a dominant era for Abu Dhabi-backed City with victory over Aston Villa.

“It’s difficult to control your emotions when you know what you are playing for,” said City manager Guardiola.

“The players are human beings but it’s football, when you think that it is over it is not over.” City know that to their cost

Jürgen Klopp’s men have already lifted the League Cup and FA Cup.

“Imagine somebody tells you before the season you’re going to be in all three cup finals and want to fight for the league,” said Liverpool manager Klopp.

“The boys did it -- fed by the people here in the building, by our supporters, by all these kind of things.

“It’s a fantastic time for a Liverpool supporter and now we have to make sure we enjoy the last two games as well,” the German added.

The presence of Liverpool great and now Villa manager Steven Gerrard on the opposition bench at the Etihad adds extra

We’ll go out at the weekend and give it everything we’ve got to try and get points for Aston Villa and our supporters. If that inevitably helps Liverpool, fantastic...

STEVEN GERRARD

having been minutes away from the Champions League final only to blow a two-goal lead in their semi-final, second leg against Real Madrid earlier this month.

“The importance is unnecessary to tell them,” added Guardiola. “They know it, they feel it.”

Liverpool will instead face Real in next weekend’s battle to be crowned champions of Europe in Paris as they remain in contention for an unprecedented haul of four major trophies in the one season.

intrigue to the decisive day in the title race.

Gerrard famously never won a league title in his 17-year career at Anfield, but could deliver one on a plate to his old club.

Anything other than a City win will allow Liverpool to take the title with victory at home to Wolves.

“We’ll go out at the weekend and give it everything we’ve got to try and get points for Aston Villa and our supporters,” said Gerrard.



Manchester City need a victory against Aston Villa on Sunday to win their fourth Premier League title in five years (AFP)

“If that inevitably helps Liverpool, fantastic, but my priority is to try and get points for Aston Villa.”

European places

Chelsea will join City and Liverpool in next season’s Champions League, with north London rivals

Tottenham and Arsenal still battling for fourth spot.

Spurs are in the driving seat as they just need a draw away to al-

ready-relegated Norwich to secure a return to the Champions League.

Back-to-back defeats have

seen Arsenal throw away a golden chance to get back to European football’s top table.

The Gunners have to win at home to an Everton side fresh from sealing their Premier League status and hope Spurs stumble at Carrow Road.

Manchester United and West Ham are guaranteed European football next season but their battle to be in the Europa League rather than the Conference League has also gone to the final day.

Incoming United manager Erik Ten Hag is expected to be in attendance for their trip to Crystal Palace.

Should United fail to win, the Hammers can finish sixth with victory at Brighton.

Pitch invasion fears

At the bottom of the table, one of Burnley and Leeds will be relegated.

Burnley have the advantage of just having to match Leeds’s result thanks to their superior goal difference.

The Clarets host Newcastle at Turf Moor, while Leeds travel to Brentford.

Everton’s celebration at avoiding the drop when they beat Crystal Palace in dramatic fashion on Thursday were marred by a pitch invasion at Goodison Park. Police are investigating an incident where Palace manager Patrick Vieira kicked out after being taunted by a fan.

Newcastle manager Eddie Howe is keen to avoid similar scenes should Burnley stay up.

AFP



Pep Guardiola

Guardiola says winning Premier League harder than Champions League

Manchester, United Kingdom - Manchester City boss Pep Guardiola has insisted winning the Premier League is tougher than lifting the Champions League trophy.

City are on the brink of taking their fourth domestic title in five seasons, with victory at home to Aston Villa in their final game of the season on Sunday enough for them to be crowned champions regardless of what second-placed Liverpool achieve against Wolves at Anfield.

The Spaniard, who guided Barcelona to two Champions League titles, said winning the Premier League was harder than reaching the summit of the European club game.

“I would say it’s more difficult. There’s a lot of weeks and games, struggles with injuries, good and bad moments with different situations,

tough opponents,” Guardiola explained.

“It’s satisfying because it’s every day. When you fight for the Premier League and have success right at the end, it gives you a sense that you enjoy a lot. We are happier in our lives when you win.

“When you win and win it (makes for) good training sessions, a good environment and mood. It’s not like the FA Cup or a single game, it’s a routine.”

“I’m not saying the Champions League is not important.

We’re mad, crazy to win it. We want it, we love it. “We’d love to be in Paris (for the final) next week but to win 38 games, rather than six, eight or nine games, is different,” said Guardiola. “Always I like it, since I was a player. The league is nice and we are on the verge of that.”

AFP

Mbappe chooses to stay at PSG in Real Madrid snub

Paris, France - Kylian Mbappe has decided to stay at Paris Saint-Germain despite weeks of speculation linking the forward to a move to Real Madrid, according to reports on Saturday.

The French World Cup winner has made up his mind to remain faithful to PSG and is poised to sign a three-year extension to his contract which ends on June 30, *L’Equipe* in France and Spanish sports paper *Marca* reported.

The player’s entourage refused to elaborate but reports suggest PSG could make a statement later Saturday when the club are playing Metz in their final match of the season at the Parc des Princes. The 23-year-old’s ‘will-he-won’t-he’ move to Madrid has kept fans and the two clubs on their toes over the past few months.

Mbappe has made no secret of his desire to play one day for Real.

AFP

Liverpool coach Klopp refuses to dream of stunning league triumph

London, United Kingdom - Liverpool manager Jürgen Klopp has said he has banished all thoughts of a dramatic finish to the Premier League season that sees the Reds take the title with a little help from former captain Steven Gerrard.

Liverpool, who are at home to Wolves, need to better the result achieved by City against an Aston Villa side managed by Reds great Gerrard if they are to take the title and stay on course for a remarkable quadruple of major trophies in the one season.

The Premier League was the only winner’s medal missing from former England midfielder Gerrard’s illustrious career at Anfield.

And while Klopp joked Friday he would have liked to see Gerrard still on the pitch, the German insisted he had not given much thought to all of Sunday’s possi-



Jurgen Klopp

ble scenarios.

“I can understand these kind of situations only by thinking myself in that role,” he said. “If I would play a game and could help (Borussia) Dortmund or Mainz that would be, for me, an extra motivation - but I don’t play.

“And Stevie doesn’t play. That

is a shame, much more of a shame that Stevie is not playing than I am not playing.”

Klopp added: “We are all human beings. Stevie will take it 100 percent serious, I am sure, without me calling him or whatever, I don’t have to - the rest of the club probably already did it

but I didn’t.”

The Reds manager cited the performance of Crystal Palace, who went 2-0 up against Everton only to lose 3-2 on Thursday - a result that ensured the top-flight survival of Liverpool’s near neighbours - as proof of footballers’ innate competitiveness.

“A really good example of how motivated football teams are to fulfil their own targets is last night’s game for Crystal Palace,” said Klopp.

“It was such an important game, one of the most important games in Everton’s history, and then Palace show up there and play incredible football and in the end they lost, but the effort they put in, the passion they showed -- the whole game from Palace was really good.

“We play to win and Aston Villa play to win.”

AFP

Man City's De Bruyne voted Premier League Player of the season

London, United Kingdom - Manchester City midfielder Kevin De Bruyne was named the Premier League’s Player of the season on Saturday, with his team-mate Phil Foden taking the Young Player prize for a second successive year.

De Bruyne has notched a career-best 15 league goals and 13 assists to secure the fans’ award for the second time after also winning it in 2019-20.

The Belgian finished above City team-mate Joao Cancelo, Liverpool duo Trent Alexander-Arnold and Mohamed Salah, West Ham’s Jarrod Bowen, Arse-



Kevin De Bruyne

nal’s Bukayo Saka, Southampton’s James Ward-Prowse and Tottenham’s Son Heung-min.

“To win this award for a second time is an achievement that I’m really proud of,” De Bruyne said. “There is so much quality in the Premier League and it is a pleasure to be nominated with so many other great players who have had incredible seasons for their clubs.”

De Bruyne is the fourth player to win the award twice after Thierry Henry, Cristiano Ronaldo and Nemanja Vidic.

Foden has been instrumental in City’s bid to retain the Premier

League title, scoring nine goals and producing five assists. The 21-year-old has matched his goal and assist totals from last season and could surpass them in City’s Premier League title decider against Aston Villa on Sunday.

“I’m very proud to have won this award for a second season in a row,” Foden said.

Foden finished ahead of Alexander-Arnold, Chelsea’s Mason Mount, West Ham’s Declan Rice, Arsenal duo Saka and Aaron Ramsdale and Crystal Palace pair Conor Gallagher and Tyrrell Mitchell.

AFP



IPL 2022



DC V MI

Mumbai beat Delhi to help Bangalore make playoffs



BRIEF SCORES:

Delhi Capitals 159 for 7 in 20 overs (Rishabh Pant 39 (33) 4x4, 1x6, Rovman Powell 43 (34) 1x4, 4x6; Jasprit Bumrah 3 for 25) lost to Mumbai Indians 160 for 5 in 19.1 overs (Ishan Kishan 48 (35) 3x4, 4x6, Dewald Brevis 37 (33) 1x4, 3x6, Tim David 34 (11) 2x4, 4x6) by 5 wickets

TODAY'S MATCH (6PM)

SUNRISERS
HYDERABAD

VS

PUNJAB
KINGS

Ashwin is the do-it-all man this IPL

Mumbai, India - Even before the season began, R Ashwin was told by the Rajasthan Royals management to be prepared to bat at No. 3, should they lose an early wicket. Having opened the batting in the practice matches, Ashwin previously did the job of a pinch-anchor or a pinch-hitter depending on the situation. On Friday against Chennai Super Kings, Ashwin had to deal with the unfamiliar role of finishing a chase. And finish he did, with a whole lot of smarts, establishing himself as the do-it-all man this IPL.

Bowl with the new ball? Sure. Bowl in the middle or death? Why not. Bowl to right-hand batters? Yes, sir. Bat at No. 3? Bring it on. After all, Andre Russell aside, Ashwin is the only player to do the double of taking 10 wickets and scoring 150 runs this IPL.

Closing out a high-pressure chase, with a top-two spot at stake, however, isn't up Ashwin's alley. He is no power-hitter like Russell or his Royals team-mate Shimron Hetmyer. His batting style is more suited to chipping the ball over the infield and tak-



R Ashwin played a stunning knock against Chennai on Friday

ing advantage of the powerplay restrictions.

Ashwin walked out to bat in the 12th over in Royals' pursuit of 151 to give Hetmyer and Riyan Parag ideal entry points. However, with Hetmyer holing out while trying to clear the bigger boundary for 6 off seven balls and Parag only going at a run a ball in the end overs, Ashwin cranked up the tempo, with an unbeaten 40 off 23 balls, to usher Royals home.

He dashed out of the crease on the third delivery he faced from Moeen Ali and pumped it over the shorter leg-side boundary for six. Super Kings, however, struck back through legspinner Prashant Solanki who dared Hetmyer to clear the bigger side and had him skying a catch to deep midwicket. At this point, Royals needed 39 off 22 balls, with four potential No. 11s - Trent Boult, Yuzvendra Chahal, Prasidh Krishna and Obed McCoy - in the dugout.

Ashwin knew that Solanki would now hide the ball away from his reach and deny him ac-

cess to the shorter leg-side boundary. Ashwin, however, shuffled across off, brought it within his reach and slog-swept a flat six against the turn. When Mukesh Choudhary erred too full, Ashwin got underneath the length and once again cleared the midwicket boundary for his third six - the joint-most he has hit in a T20 game.

Game over for Super Kings

Ashwin attributed his success with the bat to the hard yards he had put in at training in the recent past. Speaking to his former Tamil Nadu team-mate and good friend Abhinav Mukund on Star Sports Tamil, Ashwin revealed that he had been working on perfecting the slog sweep since the Chennai Test against England in February 2021, when he countered Moeen and Jack Leach.

"I've been playing the slog sweep for some time," Ashwin said. "I've been trusting the sweeps more regularly since the Chennai Test match."

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OLD GUARD

Superstars Djokovic and Nadal bid to derail Alcaraz hype at French Open



Novak Djokovic (L) and Rafael Nadal



Nadal 'feels better'

Djokovic starts his French Open against 94th-ranked Yoshihito Nishioka of Japan.

Nadal has played down concerns over the chronic foot issue that resurfaced in Rome last week.

On Wednesday, he practiced in front of thousands of fans at Roland Garros without any obvious discomfort.

"There is nothing to recover," Nadal told reporters Friday. "What happened in Rome is something that happened very often in my practices."

"I was suffering after that for a couple of days, but I feel better. That's why I'm here."

Nadal began the year with a 20-match winning run, capturing a second Australian Open title to claim a record 21st Grand Slam and move ahead of Djokovic and Roger Federer.

The 35-year-old's record at the French Open stands at a staggering 105 wins and just three losses since his 2005 title-winning debut.

"I just watched Rafa practice and it's funny because all of a sudden his forehand is just 20 miles an hour faster. He moves lighter on his feet," said world number three Alexander Zverev on Friday.

"There is something about this court that makes him play 30% better, just being on this court."

Nadal takes on Australia's Jordan Thompson in the first round.

Alcaraz, just 19, has rocketed to six in the world on the back of four titles - three on clay - in 2022.

He won a second Masters title in Madrid, sweeping Nadal, Djokovic and Zverev on the way.

"He definitely is special," admitted Djokovic of Alcaraz who also claimed the prestigious Miami Masters earlier in the year. AFP



Iga Swiatek

Swiatek ready to put streak to test at French Open

Paris, France - Iga Swiatek is the undeniable favourite for a second French Open title after winning her past five tournaments but says she won't be "heartbroken" if her 28-match unbeaten run comes to an end in Paris.

Since the shock retirement of world number one Ashleigh Barty, the 20-year-old Swiatek has swept aside all-comers and transformed herself into the player to beat in women's tennis.

The Pole hasn't lost since falling to another former Roland Garros champion, Jelena Ostapenko, in February. Her winning streak is the longest on the WTA tour since Serena Williams won 34 matches in a row in 2013.

"I'm aware that this streak is something that may be coming to an end soon, so I don't want to be like heartbroken when it's going to happen," said Swiatek, the 2020 French Open winner.

"I think being aware of that is pretty healthy. I haven't played a Grand Slam since the streak started. So I guess we're going to see if everything I have been doing before is going to be enough."

Swiatek became only the second player to win four WTA 1000 titles in a season after defending her Rome crown last week. AFP

Paris, France - Novak Djokovic and Rafael Nadal, with 41 Grand Slam titles between them, will attempt to derail the growing hype surrounding teenage sensation Carlos Alcaraz at the French Open from Sunday.

All three have been placed in the top-half of the draw, meaning only one will make the Roland Garros final.

Defending champion Djokovic is seeded to face 13-time winner Nadal in the quarter-finals. Al-

caraz is a potential semi-final opponent.

"I feel I am always in contention to fight for any Grand Slam trophy," said Djokovic who arrives in Paris fired up by his inability to defend his Australian Open title in January when he was deported over his vaccination status.

"Reliving the memories from last year is something that obviously gives me goose bumps and motivation to try to repli-

I just watched Rafa practice and it's funny because all of a sudden his forehand is just 20 miles an hour faster. He moves lighter on his feet.

ALEXANDER ZVEREV

cate that."

Djokovic, who turns 35 on Sunday, captured a second French Open title in 2021.

He did it the hard way, coming from two sets down to beat Lorenzo Musetti in the last-16, winning an epic four-set semi-

final against Nadal before needing to overturn another two-set deficit to see off Stefanos Tsitsipas in the final.

Djokovic has played only five tournaments in 2022 but he won't be bothered much because he arrives in Paris buoyed by a sixth Italian Open title, becoming just the fifth man to win 1,000 career matches in the process.

It was his 38th Masters triumph, two more than Nadal at the top of the all-time list.

Wimbledon left pointless as tour chiefs fight back over Russia, Belarus ban

Paris, France - Wimbledon, widely regarded as the world's most prestigious tennis tournament, was stripped of ranking points on Friday by the sport's main tours in a move which threatens to reduce the Grand Slam to the status of a high-profile exhibition event.

The decision by the ATP and WTA was in response to Wimbledon banning Russian and Belarusian players following the invasion of Ukraine.

"It is with great regret and reluctance that we see no option but to remove ATP Ranking points from Wimbledon for 2022," said an ATP statement.

"Our rules and agreements exist in order to protect the rights of players as a whole. Unilateral decisions of this nature, if unad-



dressed, set a damaging precedent for the rest of the Tour.

"Discrimination by individual tournaments is simply not viable."

When world number one Novak Djokovic won Wimbledon in 2021, he earned 2,000 points.

Wimbledon chiefs at the All England Club branded the move

by the ATP and WTA as "disproportionate".

The WTA, which operates the women's tour, joined their male colleagues in withholding points for the tournament which starts on June 27.

Wimbledon's ban has ruled out a swathe of top players, including men's world number two

Daniil Medvedev and last year's women's semi-finalist Aryna Sabalenka of Belarus as well as two-time major winner Victoria Azarenka.

The ATP, however, hinted at a resolution to the impasse.

"We remain hopeful of further discussions with Wimbledon leading to an acceptable outcome for all concerned."

WTA chief executive Steve Simon said that his organisation believed "that individual athletes participating in an individual sport should not be penalised solely because of their nationalities or the decisions made by the governments of their countries."

The All England Club expressed their "deep disappointment" with the ATP and WTA. AFP

Sindhu upstaged in badminton's Thailand Open

Bangkok, Thailand - Indian badminton powerhouse PV Sindhu toppled out of the Thailand Open Saturday at the hands of Chinese Olympic champion Chen Yufei, who booked herself a finals berth.

Chen, who is third in the world, was dominant in attack during the first game but seventh-ranked Sindhu's bid for a comeback came too little too late - losing 17-21.

The Tokyo Olympic bronze



India's PV Sindhu hits a return against China's Chen Yufei (AFP)

medallist came out firing in the second, racing off to a five-point lead ahead of the interval.

But Chen quickly clawed back and took control of rallies with some stellar smashes and net work, stealing victory 21-16. Meanwhile, Thailand's eighth-ranked Ratchanok Intanon was unable to capitalise on a home-court advantage, losing 10-21, 21-13, 21-19 to second in the world Tai Tzu-ying. AFP

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BENIN'S MURALS

GRAFFITI FRESCO

On a blue and yellow background, the graffiti artist retouches a spray-painted image of the half-man, half-shark statue of King Behanzin, one of the stolen treasures returned to Benin (a French speaking West African nation) by France late last year.

The image is just one by 26 local and international graffiti artists who have created a mural depicting Benin's history and culture stretching more than one kilometre along a wall in Benin's main city of Cotonou. Their objective is to eventually create the largest mural fresco in the world as part of a festival under the theme of 'New Benin'.

"To create the Benin of the future, we must keep the Benin of the past in our sight," said Laurenson Djihouessi, known by his artist name Mr Stone, who is the festival promoter.

Many of the graffiti artists have chosen to represent the restored treasures, which were stolen by French colonial forces and returned to Cotonou this year after negotiations with Paris.

The artefacts have been on display for the first time in Benin since



Graffiti brings Benin's walls alive with treasures from the past



Beninese artist Romario Agbo-Koffi, also known as Dr Mario, sprays on a wall at the Effet Graff festival, whose objective is to achieve one of the longest murals in the world, in Cotonou

Beninese artist Lionel Attere, also known as Lionel Davinci, poses for a portrait in front of graffiti on the wall of the Effet Graff festival

The artist said he wanted to place the Beninese woman at the heart of action and development, for them to be the 'Amazon of modern times'. But it is not only the royal history of Benin's past that is painted on the fresco that attracts dozens of passers-by.

Supported by the Claudine Talon Foundation, run by the First Lady of Benin, and the Ministry of Culture, the wall also highlights recent achievements in the West African country.

There are cranes symbolising the reform of Cotonou's port and agricultural machinery, a reference to the modernisation of the agricultural sector. Images of roads are meant to show part of the infrastructure projects touted by President Patrice Talon as one of his successes.

Since his first election in 2015, Talon has launched dozens of projects in what he calls a campaign to set his nation on the path to development. While the economy may have been modernised, Benin's opposition says the country's democracy has suffered under Talon's rule.

On her part of the wall, female artist Drusille Fagnibo also painted the building of Economic Crimes and Terrorism Court, known as Criet.

Critics say the special court, set up in 2016 in a bid to end to impunity in the political class, is used as a political weapon by the government to target opponents.

In December, the court sentenced opposition leader Reckya Madougou to 20 years in prison for terrorism, a term which her lawyers described as a political attack. The government, however, denies any claims the court is manipulated for political purposes.

More than 700m of wall have been decorated and the organisers want to expand it to 1,300m in 2023.

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SUSTAINABLE STADIUMS

QATAR'S
'DR COOL' KEEPS
WORLD CUP
STADIUMS CHILLY
WITH SOLAR-
POWERED AC

COOL CUP

Qatar has become almost a byword for scorching heat, but some fans will nevertheless take a sweater to World Cup stadiums in November because of state of the art air conditioning that, its mastermind says, will soon become the norm for mega sports events.

Saud Abdulaziz Abdul Ghani, nicknamed 'Dr Cool', worked for 13 years on the solar-powered cooling system that he says will keep the players and turf healthy and even eliminate body odour in a packed stadium.

The mercury can hit 50 degrees Celsius (122 Fahrenheit) during the Gulf state's blistering summers, which is why this year's World Cup was moved to the winter. But even with maximum temperatures down to around 25 Celsius (77 Fahrenheit) for the tournament in November and December, cool air will still be pumped out onto the players and watching fans.

Stadium cooling is nothing new. The Superdome, home of the New Orleans Saints American football team, has 9,000 tonnes of air conditioning equipment.

'Dr Cool', a professor of engineering at Qatar University who also helped develop cooling for the Ford Mondeo car, has, however, developed a system that World Cup organisers say is 40 per cent more sustainable than existing techniques.

Seven of the eight stadiums are air-conditioned at a World Cup that organisers insist will be carbon-neutral.

At the 40,000-capacity Al Janoub Stadium, which will hold seven games, including holders France's first match, Saud said a two-metre-high 'completely isolated bubble' of cool air will envelop the pitch and stands.

Inside the bubble, players and fans will be kept at 21 Celsius (70 Fahrenheit) by jets blasting air at the pitchside and under spectators' seats.



Sensors around the stadium keep the temperature constant and even adjust air flows for seats in the shade or sun.

The rising air is sucked back into the stadium cooling system, cleaned by water kept at a brisk 7 degrees Celsius (44 Fahrenheit) and pumped out again by the jets.

"The players will have the best experience of their lives," said Saud, highlighting how the chilled air would prevent injuries and illness suffered in extreme heat.

Giant solar farm

The power for the system comes from a giant solar farm in the desert outside the capital Doha, he added. The same technology is being used in greenhouses where Qatar grows increasing amounts of its own food.



The players will have the best experience of their lives

SAUD ABDULAZIZ ABDUL GHANI

"We have the best thermal insulation on our machines, the best sensory systems around the stadium," said Saud. And the air conditioning will still be needed in December, despite the cooler temperatures.

Each human generates the heat of two laptops and gives off 70g (2.5 ounces) of



Saud Abdulaziz Abdul Ghani gives a tour of the cooling system at the al-Janoub Stadium, in Doha

sweat per hour, according to Saud. He gave the example of the Lusail Stadium where 80,000 people will gather for the World Cup final on December 18.

"They are there for four hours, so that is a lot of water. And I also have the heat of 160,000 laptops in that space. So that heat must be offset irrespective of whether it is winter, summer, autumn or spring."

AC stadiums, the norm

The use of air conditioning in stadiums remains controversial, however. Russell Seymour, chief executive of the British Association for Sustainable Sport, said that while the technology and renewable energy in Qatar may work he had concerns about the wider message given by air conditioning an open space.

when people are being urged to save energy, quite often people in an office will open the windows. They want fresh air but they've also got air conditioning on and then things compete, and that's when the issues come, he said.

Saud, however, said he is happy for any expert to inspect the system and check his sustainability claims. The technology has been made free of patent restrictions for anyone to copy.

He is also certain that future World Cups - particularly in 2026 in the United States, Mexico and Canada - will soon follow suit. "In the future, for the safety of players, air-conditioned stadiums will be more of the norm," he said.

As global temperatures rise due to climate change, if you want players to complete the game without water breaks, without any interruptions, then air conditioning will be a necessity, he pointed out. AFP