

Follow-up offices to ensure results of Vision 2040

Muscat - The Oman Vision 2040 Implementation Follow-Up Unit is establishing offices in government units. A familiarisation meeting to impart this concept was held on Thursday with representatives of government departments tasked with programmes, initiatives and projects of Oman Vision 2040.

The intermediary offices will cap the success of Oman Vision 2040, lending technical support and transferring knowledge and expertise about the methodologies and functions designed to enhance the goals of the long-term vision.

The meeting envisaged a model for the new offices and guiding principles in accordance with the proposed governance model.

The teams tasked with the offices will ensure performance of programmes related to Oman Vision 2040.

ONA



'Targeting 3 varsities in top 300 by 2040'

Oman focusing on quality higher education rather than quantity, particularly on education that is accessible to all

Our Correspondent
Muscat

Oman is exerting concerted efforts to upgrade its higher education sector and targets at least three universities among the top 300 universities in the world by 2040. The sultanate is focusing on quality higher education rather than quantity, particularly on education that is accessible to all and on par with global standards.

This was stated by H E Dr Bakhit bin Ahmed al Mahri, Undersecretary for Higher Education in the Ministry of Higher Education, Research and Innovation, on Thursday on Oman TV's talk show *With Youth*.

H E Dr Mahri said, "Oman Vision 2040 targets advancement of universities and colleges so that at least three universities rank among the top 300 universities in the world by the year 2040. This will not be achieved



without effort."

He informed that most private universities in Oman are not profitable despite much effort and progress made by them over the years. On its part, the ministry conducts reviews of curricula and teaching methods in higher education institutions on a regular basis.

"Out of a total of 28 in the higher education sector, nine private institutions have obtained academic accreditation. Some institutions have not yet applied for academic accreditation," he added.

On the same programme, H E Dr Saif bin Abdullah al Hadabi, Undersecretary for Research and Innovation in the Ministry of

Out of a total of 28 in the higher education sector, nine private institutions have obtained academic accreditation

H E DR BAKHIT AL MAHRI

Higher Education, Research and Innovation, said that the existence of a sound scientific research and innovation base in the sultanate linked with the higher education sector shows that the latter is on the right path. "With

higher quality of education comes quality scientific research and that results in quality innovation outputs," he said.

H E Dr Hadabi, informed that the total expenditure on scientific research in Oman amounts to about RO66mn annually, according to the latest survey of science and technology indicators submitted by the sultanate to Unesco.

"We are entering a new phase with many positives, and are proud of what the sultanate has achieved at the international level in indicators of global innovation. It is ranked 13th globally in spending on education and first in engineering and science outputs globally."

Expat ownership of property will revive real estate sector

Our Correspondent
Muscat

The decision allowing expatriates to own property will revive the real estate sector and stimulate the economy, according to experts.

The Minister of Housing and Urban Planning (MoHUP) issued a ministerial decision on Wednesday allowing non-Omani investors to own housing units outside integrated tourism complexes in the sultanate.

The decision prompted a strong reaction from citizens and those engaged in the sector. Speaking to *Muscat Daily*, Mahmoud al Mahrouqi, an investor and a member of Real Estate Development and Construction Committee in Oman Chamber of Commerce and Industry, said, "The decision came at an appropriate time to attract foreign investment that will stimulate the economy in general and revive the real estate sector in particular."

According to Mahrouqi, the population of Oman is small, so investors are needed to bring in capital that will revitalise the economic sector and lead to the creation of new developed cities.

"We need to develop infrastructure to create a new environment for the establishment of big real estate projects in specific areas. These real estate projects will bring in more investments. I



The decision will have other positive effects, including increasing demand for land in the areas where foreign ownership is allowed

DR AHMED AL JAHWARI

hope to continue facilitating the procedures to own real estate for non-Omanis to bring in as much capital as possible," Mahrouqi said.

Dr Ahmed Said al Jahwari, a legal consultant, noted that investment plays a "very important role in any economy, especially in developing countries".

With last week's decision, the sultanate has begun defining its goals towards encouraging and attracting foreign investment by supporting the Foreign Capital Investment Law.

Continued on Page 03

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Dear Shareholders,

On behalf of the Board of Directors, it is my pleasure to present the financial statements of ahlibank for the year ending 31 December 2021.

Since the beginning of 2021, we have seen the positive effects of the government's continuous efforts to mitigate the pandemic's economic impact, which has resulted in volatile markets and disrupted businesses at the onset. We are now amidst a shifting and optimistic global environment and experiencing the effects of gradual economic recovery.

Oman's banking & finance sector is undergoing a paradigm shift, achieving operational excellence and capitalizing on new opportunities to offer more efficient, secure and real-time alternative delivery and service channels while enhancing its digital capacities and capabilities to support economic recovery.

ahlibank's reported profit and asset growth in the current year is a positive indicator of this recovery. Its stability during this period is resulting from the government measures and initiatives that ensured sufficient liquidity support for the banking system. Moreover, the Bank's swift execution of its business plan, its consistent compliance with regulatory requirements, along with the strengthening of its traditional and digital banking products and services, as well as leveraging on its digital potential contributed to its growth.

The start of the year has seen the Bank's rollout of several products and services for the conventional and Islamic banking segments alongside the development and enhancement of its existing products, services and infrastructure. A key focus is the Bank's digital transformation project, which will significantly improve its services, strengthen its offerings and reinforce its current position in the market in the long term.

Moving forward, ahlibank continues to align its business activities, operations and initiatives with the goals of Oman Vision 2040 under the wise leadership of His Majesty the Sultan and is committed to support and contribute to the social and economic development of the Sultanate.

Financial Performance

ahlibank continues to grow steadily in terms of its asset portfolio and most of its key financial indicators:

	31 Dec 21	31 Dec 20	Growth %
	RO Million		
Net Loans, Advances & Financing	2,402.0	2,218.9	8.3%
Total Assets	3,052.6	2,702.5	13.0%
Customers' Deposits	2,181.4	1,924.7	13.3%
Equity	427.0	388.4	9.9%
Operating Income	82.4	71.5	15.3%
Operating Expenses	35.6	30.1	18.3%
Profit for the Period	27.6	24.0	15.2%

Amid the exceptional circumstances, the Bank's total assets grew by 13.0 per cent in 2021, reaching RO3.05 billion, compared to RO2.70 billion in 2020. Customer deposits went up by a 13.3 per cent to reach RO2.18 billion compared to RO1.92 billion. The Bank's net loans, advances, and financing grew by 8.3 per cent reaching RO2.40 billion. The Bank's operating income increased by 15.3 per cent, reaching RO82.4 million in 2021. The Operating expenses increased by 18.3%, while the profit for the period grew by 15.2 per cent, to reach RO 27.6 million.

Highlights and Key Milestones

In March 2021, the Bank raised share capital of RO 30 million through a rights issue, strengthening the Tier I capital of the Bank and meeting the Bank's capital requirement to support business growth.

ahlibank has made significant progress in building its retail and corporate business, diversifying its portfolio to cater to the demands of the corporate in the Sultanate, differentiating the needs of the premium and private banking segments as well as the SME segments, in order to support key economic growth projects.

The Bank has also launched a wide range of products and services that cater to niche segments in the society. The Bank has proven its keenness to provide more innovative, value-added conventional, and Islamic banking services to its customers.

Furthermore, the ahli Global Equity Fund was launched to cater to investors seeking avenues, at their discretion for long-term capital appreciation by investing in a diversified portfolio of high-quality businesses that offer growth-at-a-reasonable-price. The Fund provides an attractive platform for clients to invest in global markets. The Bank has also launched Mutual Funds, opening up lucrative avenues for customers to invest and seek a 'better tomorrow'. The investment vehicle will provide access to a host of global mutual funds to invest as per each customer's preference.

ahlibank has stepped up its digital roadmap, adding services such as the introduction of a new mobile app-based account opening service wherein, all new-to-bank customers can now open an account just within a minute. The ahli islamic mobile banking and Internet application, has been strengthened to include new features as well as account opening service for customers.

Apart from these digital channels, the Bank widened its current branch network with the opening of three conventional branches and three Islamic branches during the year.

ahlibank's Investment Banking division also announced the successful completion of a bond issuance as an issue manager and financial advisor. The issue has generated a positive response and widespread interest from investors.

The efforts and commitment to consistently provide quality customer service culminates in a roster of achievement awards for the year. The Bank received two awards at the prestigious OER Oman Banking & Finance Awards 2021: "Excellence in Private Banking in Oman" for ahlibank, "Excellence in Islamic Retail Banking" for ahli islamic. It also received the JP Morgan Chase "Elite Quality Recognition Award 2021" for maintaining an outstanding 99.9% modification-free rate for the Bank's remittance in USD.

Corporate Social Responsibility

ahlibank's real success is reflected in its commitment to adhere to sustainable business practices, balance business growth with its moral and social responsibilities, and to drive value through active involvement and participation in community and national initiatives. The Bank demonstrated its CSR commitment by participating in the nationwide COVID-19 vaccination campaign and the cyclone "Shaheen" relief drive.

ahlibank also remains committed to developing the skills and capabilities of the youth by providing a platform to prepare them for suitable career opportunities in the banking sector. The relaunched Graduate Development Program (GDP) "Himam" and the Bank's support to the National Leadership Program "Etimad," are proofs of this commitment.

Looking Ahead

As ahlibank marches ahead on its remarkable growth path and looks forward to a new year, it is committed to support the continuous development of Oman's banking sector and play a pivotal role in the country's progress. It will strive to sustain its growth and innovation momentum—expanding its branch network, building and diversifying its retail and corporate portfolio, and strengthening its digital capabilities and infrastructure. The Bank has also embarked on the ambitious project of expanding its head office building as a smart and innovative infrastructure, which will continue to contribute towards creating a suitable, stimulating and performance-driven work environment.

With its financial strength, human capital and consistent achievements, ahlibank looks towards establishing itself as a benchmark for professional customer service and transform itself into a leading financial institution in the Sultanate.

Acknowledgments

On behalf of the Board of Directors, I would like to thank ahlibank's stakeholders for their unwavering trust and faith in us. Their support has been instrumental in leading us to where we are now.

We share the national agenda for growth and remain fully supportive and committed to the economic development initiatives and plans of His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik under the Oman Vision 2040.

I would also wish to acknowledge the notable efforts of the Bank's Executive Management team and our employees for their dedication and contribution to the continued success and growth of the Bank. Lastly, and most importantly, I would like to thank our customers for their loyalty and trust in our services and I look forward to their patronage and support in the coming year and the years to come.


Hamdan Ali Nasser Al Hinai
Chairman

STATEMENT OF FINANCIAL POSITION
AS AT 31 DECEMBER 2021

	2021 RO '000	2020 RO '000
ASSETS		
Cash and balances with Central Bank of Oman	114,703	79,020
Due from banks	44,694	46,174
Loans & advances and financing, net	2,401,979	2,218,897
Investment securities	428,377	306,368
Other assets	36,154	29,154
Property and equipment	26,649	22,864
TOTAL ASSETS	3,052,556	2,702,477
LIABILITIES AND EQUITY		
Due to banks	262,340	135,244
Customers' deposits	2,181,391	1,924,654
Borrowed funds	92,400	159,775
Tax liability	8,643	6,458
Other liabilities	77,785	75,996
Subordinated loans	3,000	12,000
TOTAL LIABILITIES	2,625,559	2,314,127
EQUITY		
Share capital	194,966	164,966
Legal reserve	36,904	34,028
Subordinated loan reserve	3,000	11,400
Fair value reserve	(2,552)	(4,066)
Special reserve	998	998
Impairment reserve	10,127	10,127
Retained earnings	59,554	46,897
TOTAL NET EQUITY ATTRIBUTABLE TO THE OWNERS OF THE BANK	302,997	264,350
Tier 1 Perpetual subordinated bonds	124,000	124,000
TOTAL EQUITY	426,997	388,350
TOTAL LIABILITIES AND NET EQUITY	3,052,556	2,702,477
Net assets value per share (baizas)	155	160
Contingent liabilities and commitments	212,887	239,738

STATEMENT OF COMPREHENSIVE INCOME
FOR THE YEAR ENDED 31 DECEMBER 2021

	2021 RO '000	2020 RO '000
Interest income	119,896	112,604
Interest expense	(65,759)	(63,754)
NET INTEREST INCOME	54,137	48,850
Income from Islamic financing and investments	21,498	18,654
Unrestricted investment account holders' share of profit and profit expense	(10,071)	(7,410)
NET INCOME FROM ISLAMIC FINANCING AND INVESTMENTS	11,427	11,244
Fees and commission income	11,605	8,161
Fees and commission expense	(864)	(540)
Net fees and commission income	10,741	7,621
Other operating income	6,133	3,781
OPERATING INCOME	82,438	71,496
Net impairment on financial assets	(14,680)	(14,402)
NET OPERATING INCOME	67,758	57,094
Staff expenses	(21,757)	(18,591)
Depreciation and amortisation	(2,743)	(2,608)
Other operating expenses	(11,098)	(8,896)
OPERATING EXPENSES	(35,598)	(30,095)
PROFIT BEFORE TAXATION	32,160	26,999
Tax expense	(4,554)	(3,031)
PROFIT FOR THE YEAR	27,606	23,968
OTHER COMPREHENSIVE INCOME / (LOSS)		
<i>Items that will not be reclassified to profit or loss</i>		
Equity investments at FVOCI - net changes in fair value	1,010	107
Realized (loss)/gain on equity investment at FVOCI	(1,539)	31
<i>Items that will be reclassified to profit or loss</i>		
Cash flow hedge - net changes in fair value	1,678	(1,618)
Changes in fair value of FVOCI debt investments - net	1,521	1,678
OTHER COMPREHENSIVE INCOME FOR THE YEAR	2,670	198
TOTAL COMPREHENSIVE INCOME FOR THE YEAR	30,276	24,166
Basic and diluted earnings per share (baizas)	10	9

Seeb Castle to be rebuilt

Our Correspondent
Muscat

Seeb Castle that once stood on the shores of Seeb but later demolished is being built again. The older generation of Seeb citizens that had seen the castle in all its glory is excited at the prospect of it standing tall again.

The Ministry of Heritage and Tourism (MHT) recently began excavation works at the castle site. Speaking to *Muscat Daily*, Nasser al Hosni, MHT archaeology specialist and a member of the excavation team, said, "We spent more than two months excavating the site. The work is focused on studying artefacts - pottery and coins dating back to the Qajar era - found at the site."

The excavation team has presented a report on its findings and suggestions on how to ensure the preservation of the complex.

"The ministry will rebuild the castle according to the original design with the aim of reviving Omani heritage and promoting tourism," said Hosni.

He informed that the ministry is exerting great efforts to restore forts and castles to attract tourists and stimulate tourism.

News of the castle being rebuilt brought back fond memories among those who frequented it when it still stood in the 1990s.

Zaki al Muharrami told *Muscat Daily*, "I am delighted to hear that Seeb Castle is being rebuilt. I have beautiful memories of time spent in it that will never be forgotten. I had a picture of the castle that I took in 1970s in my living room."

Muharrami claimed he often told his children about the castle.

"The office of the Wali of Seeb was nearby. Residents of Seeb performed Raz'ha during Eid al



The ministry will rebuild the castle according to the original design with the aim of reviving Omani heritage and promoting tourism

NASSER AL HOSNI



Fitir and Eid al Adha in front of the castle."

The traditional sword dance

performed at weddings and national events, besides Eid, attracted large crowds. The

male-only dance, comprised two teams - host and guest - standing in parallel rows facing each other. Two fencers representing the two teams squared off in the space between the two rows.

Ahmed al Balushi, another citizen, said, "I thank the Ministry of Heritage and Tourism for rebuilding the castle. We have beautiful memories associated with it. We used to watch football matches held at Seeb Club from the castle."

Balushi also reminisced about a souq near the castle that sold authentic Omani dishes that attracted customers from other wilayats.



(Supplied photo)

2,200 houses given to those displaced by Batinah road

Our Correspondent
Muscat

A total of 2,200 houses have been handed over to citizens affected by the Batinah Coastal Road project till date, according to an official of the Ministry of Housing and Urban Planning.

In the governorates of North and South Batinah, the ministry has completed handing over 498 houses in the wilayat of Suwaiq, 350 in Khabourah, 201 in Shinas, 300 in Sohar, 250 in Musannah, 200 in Barka, and 400 in Saham.

"Compensation for houses affected by the Batinah Coastal Road project was of two types, based on the choice of house owners. The compensation was cash in addition to land or compensation in kind with alternative housing," a ministry

official informed.

The ministry has also completed compensation for farmland with alternative plots in North Batinah.

Ninety-four per cent of farmers affected by the coastal road in Suwaiq, 82 per cent in Sohar, 93 per cent in Saham, 53 per cent in Shinas, 91 per cent in Khabourah, and 62 per cent in Liwa have been handed over alternative farmland.

In the wilayats of Musannah and Barka in South Batinah, the official added, all farmers affected by the road project have been handed over alternative farmland.

"Removal of construction waste of the demolished housing units affected by the project is currently in process," the ministry official said.

WEATHER WATCH

	Max	Min
Abu Dhabi	33	21
Doha	28	20
Kuwait City	23	15
Manama	25	18
Muscat	31	21
Riyadh	33	18

PRAYER TIMINGS

Fajr	5.03am
Sunrise	6.18am
Duhr	12.21pm
Asr	3.46pm
Maghrib	6.20pm
Isha	7.30pm

Remnants of 5th century fort unearthed in Al Fulaij

Our Correspondent
Muscat

Remnants of a fort have been unearthed at the Al Fulaij archaeological site in North Batinah, according to the Ministry of Heritage and Tourism (MHT).

A statement issued by MHT said, "The ministry, in cooperation with a joint archaeological team from Sultan Qaboos University and Durham University, UK, discovered remnants of a fort surrounded by circular towers at the Al Fulaij archaeological site in the wilayat of Saham."

The site includes furnaces



(Supplied photo)

dating back to the 5th century, and burial grounds from the 3rd and 1st millennium BC. Excava-

tion will continue at the site till the end of March 2022, the ministry statement added.



(Supplied photo)

Novelists, poets, musicians enthrall Omani-American Press Forum audience

Washington, US - A three-day event of the Omani-American Press Forum concluded on Thursday with a cultural evening in which novelist Bushra Khalfan, poet Aisha al Saifi and violinist Tahra Jamal participated representing Oman.

The American side was represented by poet Sandra Beasley and musician Dr Anne

Rasmussen.

The event kicked off on March 8 and saw the participation of media personnel, academics and writers from the two countries.

The forum was organised by the Omani Journalists Association at the Sultan Qaboos Cultural Centre in Washington, US.

The event included presenta-

tion of several papers on Oman-US relations from different periods of history, an exhibition and a presentation on the civilisation and culture of the sultanate.

The event was attended by H E Moosa al Tai, Omani Ambassador to the US, diplomats, journalists, writers, poets and others interested in Omani culture.

Expat ownership of property will revive real estate sector

Continued from Page 01

Jahwari informed that MoHUP recently issued several decisions to stimulate economic activity and develop the investment and real estate sector in the sultanate, including selling residential units under usufruct contracts, allowing property ownership in integrated tourist complexes, and permitting ownership of land to Gulf citizens outside prohibition places.

"All of these decisions aim to increase the state's sources of income, diversify the economy, create a competitive business environment to attract foreign investment, and expand real estate development projects," Jahwari said.

"Many investors prefer to own real estate in the country in which they invest their money, and therefore this decision will preserve their capital within the sultanate. The decision will revitalise the real estate market by injecting cash into the market, as well as by circulating investors' money internally."

He added that such decisions will enable Oman highlight its presence on the map of real estate projects that are most attractive to investors in the region. "The sultanate also enjoys a strategic location, economic stability, an environment which provides the highest levels of security and safety, and laws that preserve the rights of all," Jahwari said.

"The decision will have other positive effects, including increasing demand for land in the areas where foreign ownership is allowed, providing a competitive business environment that attracts investors, and injecting cash into the real estate market to raise its performance rates."

Announcement

"Operation and Maintenance of Static and Mobile Machineries (Shredders) for Waste Management"

Oman Environmental Services Holding Company S.A.O.C (be'ah) was established in 2007. In 2009, Royal Decree No. 46/2009, granted be'ah the mandate and the legal status as the entity responsible for solid waste management in the Sultanate of Oman. be'ah strives towards a vision to conserving the environment of a beautiful Oman for future generations. Within this umbrella, be'ah works on moving towards sustainable waste management practices as per the international standards.

As part of achieving its vision, be'ah would like to invite Omani firms and SMEs in the field of electrical, electronic and mechanical work to participate in the expression of interest for the "Operation and Maintenance of Static and Mobile Machineries (Shredders) for Waste Management".

Please send the following information with supporting document to the e-mail:
tenders@beah.om

- 1-Company name
- 2- Commercial registration number
- 3- Name/number/e-mail of the contact person
- 4- Company's experience in this field
- 5- Number of manpower in the company

Last date for submitting data: **24/3/2022**



MARKET ANALYSIS - OMAN

MSX closes the week on green note

The benchmark index of the Muscat Stock Exchange (MSX) ended the week higher by 4.70 per cent. All indices closed high for the week, except services index. The Financial index closed on a very good note by 6.85 per cent. Industrial index ended higher by 1.85 per cent. Services index closed lower by 1.13 per cent. The MSX Shariah index closed lower by 0.60 per cent. GCC and, to some extent, foreign investors were net buyers on the bourse and bought a net US\$0.95mn worth of securities.

Local News

►Raysut Cement Company to issue a secured rated debt instrument Raysut Cement Company board of directors resolved and agreed by circulation on March 9, 2022 to issue a secured rated debt instrument (bond/sukuk) in 2 tranches under a new debt programme to raise up to US\$600mn (RO231mn). Funds from this programme will be utilised to repay existing bilateral debt and support growth initiatives of the Group, including but not limited to financing acquisitions identified by the management in growth markets. Proposed bond/sukuk will be issued in Singapore by RCC Holdings PTE, Singapore, a wholly owned subsidiary of Raysut Cement. Management has been advised that the initial rating estimates for RCC Holdings PTE for this issuance is expected to be between BB-/BB+, based on new acquisitions.

►Rusail Power Company has been notified by OPWP about amendment agreement award for the power purchase agreements (PPA) for seven months beyond the current PPA term ending March 31, 2022. The PPA amendment agreement

will start on April 1, 2022. The board of directors believes that the financial terms of the amendment agreement of the PPA are in the best interest of the company and its shareholders.

►Dhofar-based Salalah Mills, the nation's largest flour mill, plans to set up a flour-based food processing hub at Khazaen Economic City near Barka with an initial investment of RO12.5mn. The project, due to come into operation in the third quarter of 2023, is expected to augment Khazaen's appeal as a destination for, among other activities, food related investments. In line with its growth strategy, Salalah Mills – which is listed on the MSX – is also expanding the capacity of its packaging plant to 100mn bags per annum, up from 75mn bags presently, at a cost of RO3mn. The new capacity will come online before the end of the year. An animal feed line enhancement project became operational in January this year.

►Oman banking sector's total credit stood at RO27.87bn (+0.4 per cent month-on-month and +4.4 per cent year-on-year) at the end of financial year 2021. Total deposits stood at RO25.36bn (+0.3 per cent month-on-month and +5.7 per cent year-on-year) as at the end of November 2021. Loan-to-deposit ratio dropped to 108.8 per cent in December 2021 compared to 109.7 per cent in December 2020.

►The Ministry of Energy and Minerals, and Minerals Development Oman (MDO), an affiliate of Oman Investment Authority (OIA), signed 12 exploration-to-mining concession agreements last week. This step comes as the Ministry of Energy and Minerals adopted a new strategy to develop the minerals



sector through concession agreements by including legal, technical, and financial terms to be signed between the ministry and investors as an investment management method to manage the minerals exploration in concession areas. The total size of the concession areas included in the agreements is around 21,480sqkm. They include a number of potential minerals (metallic) such as copper, gold, and chromium. The agreements cover eight sites mostly located in North and South Batinah, Dhahirah, Buraimi, Dakhiliyah, and North and South Sharqiah. One site located in the wilayat of Yanqul with an area of 20 sqkm is a copper concession area that has reached the advanced exploration phase to be ready for mining.

►H E Dr Khalfan bin Said al Shu'aibi, Minister of Housing and Urban Planning, issued a ministerial decision on

Wednesday allowing non-Omani investors to own housing units in the sultanate. 'Non-Omani investors wishing to obtain a First-Class residence card can request a certificate from the Real Estate Registry Secretariat after proving that he/she purchased one or more housing units of a total value of no less than RO500,000. For a Second-Class residence card, the value of the property has to be no less than RO250,000,' a press statement from the ministry said. The housing units must be in places licensed for ownership by non-Omanis.

►After commencing its trial operations on December 30, 2021, Vodafone commemorated the official launch of its operations in Oman on March 6. Vodafone strives to deliver meaningful in-country value, either through employment opportunities for local talents within its team, which currently stands at 95 per cent Omanisation or by extending opportuni-

ties to small and medium enterprises and other local companies.

►A Norwegian renewable power producer, Scatec signed an agreement with India's Acme Group to establish a 50/50 joint venture to design, develop, build, own and operate a large-scale green ammonia facility in the Duqm Special Economic Zone in Oman. The first phase of the facility is expected to produce 100,000 tonnes of green ammonia annually with about 300MW of electrolyser capacity and powered by 500 MW of solar. Once fully developed the facility is expected to produce up to 1.2mn tonnes of green ammonia annually.

GCC Markets

Major Global Indices move to remove Russian Stocks from their Standard Global Indices; Foreigners forbidden to sell Russian equities in the short term. We believe that once foreigners are allowed to sell their

Russian equities, we might see an Emerging Market reshuffle or inflow to other EMs, including the GCC (at about 10 per cent or US\$27bn), to the tune of US\$200-250bn. Furthermore, any new allocations will likely pour into EMs other than Russia as well, having most likely started already. Since correlation between GCC Stock Markets and oil prices is high, we explore the effect on Index performance. The GCC economies are expected to run fiscal surpluses in 2022, as Government expenditure remains largely in line with the Budget announcements at the start of the year. We expect double-digit fiscal surpluses in Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, the UAE, and Qatar, a mid-single digit surplus in Oman, and a small surplus for Bahrain.

Qatar's real GDP growth is expected to accelerate to 3.2 per cent in 2022 as economic recovery gains strength on the back of rebounding domestic demand, higher hydrocarbon prices, and the preparation for the 2022 FIFA World Cup, according to the International Monetary Fund (IMF). The global fund had previously penciled in a 4 per cent GDP growth rate for the gas-rich Arab state. The Qatari authorities' strong response to the pandemic has helped to minimise the negative impact of the pandemic and facilitate the recovery, the global lender said in an end-of-mission statement last week. On the state on the banking sector in Qatar, IMF said it remains well-capitalised and liquid, with relatively low levels of non-performing loans (NPLs).

Oil prices bounced on Thursday from a sharp drop in the previous session after the United Arab Emirates backtracked on statements saying

that OPEC and its allies might increase output to help to plug the gap in exports from Russia. Uncertainty over where and when supply will come from to replace crude from the world's second largest exporter Russia in a tight market has led to wide ranging forecasts for oil prices between US\$100 and US\$200 a barrel. Three-month nickel on the London Metal Exchange jumped last week to a record high above US\$100,000 a metric ton, before paring gains. Commodity prices have been spiraling upward on supply fears related to Russia's onslaught of Ukraine, with the ongoing war and an array of Western sanctions raising disruption fears.

Recommendation

During the week, US stocks sometimes failed and sometimes succeeded to continue a rally and whipsawed in volatile sessions. Oil and energy stocks moved in almost completely the opposite price dynamic. As long as this countertrend dynamic remains in place, investors can expect the market to continue its current downward trend.

GCC markets continue to outperform other equity indices, in line with the historical correlation between GCC indices and oil prices, with anecdotal evidence suggesting a correlation of over 35 per cent in Saudi Arabia, Qatar, and Kuwait, with a 10 per cent move in oil prices coinciding with a 3.5 per cent move in index levels. The GCC economies are expected to run fiscal surpluses in 2022, which is supporting the positive sentiment in the markets.

Oman's market saw some foreign inflows this week. We expect the market's positive trajectory to continue, supported by attractive valuations.

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Notice and Invitation to attend the Annual General Meeting

The Board of Directors of Muscat City Desalination Company S.A.O.G (the Company) has the pleasure to invite all the Shareholders to attend the Annual General Meeting (AGM) of the Company scheduled to be held at 3 p.m. on Tuesday, 29 March 2022 at Dentons & Co Oman Branch, Salam Square – South, 3rd floor, Madinat Al Sultan Qaboos, Muscat, Sultanate of Oman and also through the electronic platform for holding General Meetings, in which you can login through the website of Muscat Clearing and Depository Company (MCD) (www.mcd.gov.om). Shareholders have the flexibility to attend the AGM in person at the above venue or join remotely through the MCD website; and in the event that quorum was not achieved for the AGM, the second AGM, shall be held at 3 p.m. on Monday, 4 April 2022 at the same venue and electronic platform above to discuss the following agenda items:

- To consider and approve the report of the Board of Directors about the business of the Company, its financial position for the financial year ended 31 December 2021.
- To consider and approve the Company's Corporate Governance Report for the financial year ended 31 December 2021.
- To consider and approve the Auditors Report about the Company's audited financial statements for the financial year ended 31 December 2021.
- To approve the sitting fees payable to the members of the Board of Directors and members of the Board's sub-committees for the previous financial year and to fix the sitting fees for the next financial year.
- To consider and approve transactions to be conducted with related parties during the financial year ending 31 December 2022 and authorise the Board and executive management to undertake the necessary steps to implement the transactions.
- To notify the general meeting of the amounts spent for the Company's social responsibilities activities for the financial year ended on 31 December 2021.
- To consider and approve the proposal of allocating RO 2,000 for corporate social responsibility activities for the financial year ending 31 December 2022.
- To authorise the Board of Directors to determine and distribute cash dividends to the shareholders in May 2022 of value 7.715 baizas per share out of the retained profits for the period ended 31 December 2021 to the shareholders who are registered in the Company's register as at a date to be determined by the Board of Directors.
- To approve the appointment of the statutory auditors for the financial year ending 31 December 2022 and the proposed remuneration.
- To elect new members to the Board of Directors. Anyone who wishes to nominate himself/herself for the position must complete the election form, which was made for this purpose and can be obtained from the CMA website and should be in compliance with the Company's Articles of Association and CMA regulations and submit it to the Company at its Head Office Building at least 5 working days prior to the AGM date and that is before the end of the working day 4 pm on Tuesday 22 March 2022. No nomination form will be accepted after that date.

As per the Company's Articles of Association, the regulations of the convening of the AGMs through electronic platforms, issued by the Capital Market Authority (CMA), we would like to attract your kind attention to the following:

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

For any queries please contact Malaak Al Balushi on +968 9389 2854 or e-mail at: malaak.albalushi@dentons.com

Chairman

Legal Advisor

Auditor

Renault Koleos 2022 builds customer confidence

Renault's first SUV - Koleos - remains a favourite among customers and those looking for something different, which speaks volumes about the innovativeness that the car was built on.

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

A spokesperson for Renault Oman, from the house of Suhail Bahwan Automobiles, said, "The 2022 car is engineered to demand attention and make heads turn. Offering off-road capability with its all-wheel drive transmission, Renault Koleos stands out with its assertive exterior design and enhanced interior comfort.

"With its athletic profile, robust front end, roomy seats, taut lines underscored with chrome, Renault Koleos allows owners to take their journey with confidence. Featuring a powerful and efficient new engine and more on-board technologies Renault Koleos fully embodies the values



of the top of the Renault line-up."

The all-mode 4x4-i transmission results in a car that promises owners all the power and comfort they would require on the road. The engine can be switched between two- and four-wheel driving giving drivers the liberty and flexibility to

choose their own experience.

The car is engineered to mirror the comfort of being home, with spacious leg space, ventilated memory seats, a breathable cabin. With a choice of colours for the seats, owners can choose what defines them the best — for a roomier feeling, one

can opt for lighter shades, while darker ones can be picked for more assertive looks. The 2022 Koleos also comes with all-new black titanium trims that replace its predecessor's wooden trims.

The car's ambient lighting, Apple CarPlay/Android Auto connectivity, R-LINK 2 all make

for a memorable drive each time.

The 2022 Renault Koleos is certainly a notch above when it comes to contemporary SUVs that set out to offer a bit of everything to cater to all customers. It also comes with additional features, such as rich acoustics with the BOSE audio system.

Samsung launches Galaxy S22 in Oman

Samsung Gulf Electronics launched the Galaxy S22 Series across Oman. Galaxy S22, S22+ and S22 Ultra are all equipped with the latest technologies to power you through your day, and night whilst offering a sleek display and revolutionary camera features to inspire creative experiences, a press release said.

Osman Alhora, head of Mobile Experience Division, Samsung Gulf Electronics, said, "We at Samsung are absolutely thrilled to announce that the one-of-a-kind Galaxy S22 series is now available throughout Oman. The new range is a token to our continued aim to develop the most innovative features for our consumers, to accompany them every day in the best of ways.



"The new S series comes in three models, the Galaxy S22, S22+ and S22 Ultra and offers revolutionary camera features, outstanding battery life and an incredibly high-speed charging capacity which make our days

more flexible, less bulky and more mobile. Samsung is always committed to exceeding all expectations, and I am delighted the Galaxy S22 series is now available for all to enjoy."

From work to home, Galaxy

S22 and S22+ are designed to power you through even the busiest days. Galaxy S22 is built with a robust all-day battery and 25W super-fast charging that never slows you down, and Galaxy S22+ features a super

powerful battery that can last even longer than a day on a single charge and supports 45W super-fast charging.

With Nightography features for smoother, clearer nighttime video and photos, the phone sets out to take your creativity to another level, starting with your smartphone camera, while also powered by advanced VDIS technology which minimises shakiness, so you get smooth, sharp footage even when you're on the move.

Both devices come equipped with a Dynamic AMOLED 2X adaptive 120Hz display, designed for the best in gaming and watching. Secured by Samsung's powerful Knox Vault security platform, the S22 series also introduces new security features.

Oman Design and Build Week from March 14

The most definitive networking and sourcing event for the building, construction and real estate industry in Oman, Oman Design and Build Week (ODBW), incorporating Oman Real Estate Exhibition, is set to begin on March 14 at the Oman Convention & Exhibition Centre (OCEC).

Organised under the patronage of the Ministry of Housing and Urban Planning Oman and supported by the Oman Real Estate Association and Muscat Municipality, the three-day event will run until March 16, with exhibits in Halls 3, 4 and 5, at OCEC, a press release said.

ODBW will witness over 250 exhibitors and will showcase the latest products, advanced services and emerging solutions from the building,

construction, and real estate industry. Techno will assume its role as the Platinum Sponsor of the event, whereas Wujha will be the OREX Lead Sponsor, Sakan will be the OREX Registration Sponsor and Al Mouj will be OREX Strategic Sponsor.

ODBW will provide exhibitors and visitors an excellent platform to network with industry peers, target suppliers and distributors and gain insights into the market. The event will also see in attendance a number of architects, consultants, engineers, contractors, distributors, procurement managers and decisions makers, therefore, providing an opportunity to manufacturers to showcase their unique building materials and varied solutions.

MOTF to host TIME100 Gala and Impact Awards

The Museum of the Future (MOTF) will host the inaugural TIME100 Gala and Impact Awards on March 28, sponsored by the World Government Summit.

The event that recognises extraordinary individuals who are using their influence to build a better future, will be the first major event at Dubai's MOTF since its opening on February 22, and will be attended by regional leaders, influencers, and visionaries alongside members of the global TIME100 community, a press release said.

The World Government Summit and FTX, exclusive crypto partner for the event, are premier sponsors of the TIME100 Gala and Impact Awards.

Mohammad al Gergawi, chairman of MOTF and chairman of the World Government Summit Organisation (WGS), said, "Through our partnership with TIME to host the TIME100 Gala and Impact Awards in Dubai, the Museum of the Future further cements its position as a global platform to shape a better future. The most im-

portant aspect about the future is enabling people and celebrating talent to work tirelessly in creating a positive impact for future generations, which is why we are pleased to collaborate with TIME on this endeavour".

The event comes close on the heels of TIME's highly successful return to in-person programming last year, which included events marking the United Nations Climate Change Conference in Glasgow and TIME Person of the Year reveal in New York.

"The TIME100 is a community of hundreds of leaders from across the years and around the world," said Dan Macsai, editorial director of the TIME100. "We're so excited to grow that community even further in Dubai, and to spotlight the ways they are shaping our future."

The TIME100 Gala and Impact Awards is the latest expansion of the TIME100 franchise, following the launch of TIME100 Most Influential Companies in 2021, TIME100 Talks in 2020 and TIME100 Next in 2019.

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SUMMARY OF ASSETS & LIABILITIES JOYALUKKAS EXCHANGE LLC (MONEY CHANGING ESTABLISHMENT) AS OF 31.12.2021					
Implementation & Follow-up Section		(In RO 000's)			
ASSETS	31.12.2021	31.12.2020	LIABILITIES	31.12.2021	31.12.2020
1. Cash in hand	949	583	1. Capital & Reserves	4,049	3,278
2. Deposits with Central Bank of Oman	110	110	2. Borrowings from Banks	-	1
3. Precious Metals		-	3. Balances due to Branches	-	-
4. Balances due from Banks and Money Changers	3,269	2,781	4. Balances due to banks and Money changers	274	335
5. Balances due from Branches		-	5. Loans and Advances payable	-	-
6. Cheques and drafts purchased		-	6. Cheques and Drafts issued & outstanding	-	-
7. Loans and Advances		-	7. Other Liabilities	518	323
8. Investments		-			
9. Fixed Assets	311	343			
10. Other Assets	202	120			
TOTAL	4,841	3,937	TOTAL	4,841	3,937
H.O. CR No. 1048446, PO Box:583, Postal Code:117, Ruwi, Sultanate of Oman +968 24794017/18, Fax: +968 24794019, Email: customercare@joyalukkasexchange.com Website: www.joyalukkasexchange.com					

ISWK students participate in ROHM opera

The Royal Opera House Muscat (ROHM), in celebration of its tenth anniversary, had extended an invitation to all students from the capital's schools to participate in their art and music event - L'elisir d'amore - The factory of Ideas, one of the most loved of all Gaetano Donizetti's operas. However, only one school availed of the opportunity - Indian School Wadi Kabir (ISWK).

The ISWK team encouraged their students to participate in this musical opera, considering it as a very unique venture for them. The team of teachers at ISWK and ISWK-international took up this challenge and trained 58 young stars to perform four songs for the musical opera - three in English and one in Arabic, a press release said.

The performance, which took place on March 9 at ROHM, was an exceptional experience for the children from the school. The amazingly interactive singing by the children and their involvement in preparing the required props for the event, gave them the feeling of being active participants in the play. They remained



connected with the main characters of the story, and this gave them a sense of contentment for contributing towards the musical opera.

Collaborating with the inter-

nationally renowned As. Li. Co-production, and singing under the direction of the Music Conductor Azzurra Steri, was not only a fascinating experience for the children and teachers of the

ISWK team but also a wonderful learning experience with plenty of key takeaways from the Opera - to nurture creativity, take responsibility for one's actions, be sincere and kind, etc.

Lulu ushers in ‘Season of blessings’

Lulu has rounded up a list of essentials, activities and offers to ring in the ‘Season of blessings’ and to help its customers prepare for a happy and blissful Ramadan. The retail giant has launched ‘Ramadan Souq’ as part of its Ramadan preparations.

The formal inauguration of Ramadan Souq was done by Sheikh Mohamed Humaid al Ghabshi, Wali of Al Amerat, on Thursday, in a grand event at the Lulu Hypermarket in Nujum Mall, Al Amerat. Yahya al Ghadani, assistant director general, Al Amerat Municipality, and senior officials of Lulu Group attended the event, a press release said.

Ramadan Souq at Lulu is a traditional Omani style market which will have special offerings from dates, honey and other grocery items to household and decoration products, home appliances, and furnishings, with a wide range of curtains and carpets. All other essentials needed for Ramadan are available at the souq.

This year, Lulu has organised a ‘Shop & Win’ promotion, alongside other multiple offers and discounts, to give away cash prizes worth RO100,000 to its customers. This first-of-its-kind promotion, which will run from March 10 to May 7, will give 281 customers the opportunity to win amazing cash prizes.

There will be a Grand Prize of RO10,000 in cash, as well as Weekly Cash Prizes of RO5000, RO750, RO500, RO200, and RO100, with multiple winners each week.

In addition to ramadan souq, lulu has special offers and discounts on a wide array of products, including groceries, frozen



foods, fresh food, hot food & bakery, cleaning & accessories, home furnishings & decor, garments as well as household and home appliances – both in-store and online, for shoppers to take their pick.

Special Ramadan kits containing groceries, such as rice, milk powder, sugar, oil and other essentials, will also be available at less than the regular market price. Ramadan is also a time of giving and sharing, for which there are discounts on perfumes, watches, sweet boxes, and assorted gift baskets that serve as easy gifting options for customers keen on making their loved ones feel special.

All Lulu stores will be stocked up with everything that shoppers need under one roof, making it the most affordable one-stop destination for customers. The hypermarket chain also offers a



user-friendly online shopping experience where customers can purchase all their Ramadan essentials right from home.

Speaking about the promo-

tion, Ananth A V, director of LuLu Hypermarkets, Oman and India, stated, “Ramadan is a very special time for our customers, and we are glad to offer them

special deals on a wide range of products during the holy month. We are making all necessary arrangements to ensure that our customers have a convenient

and safe shopping experience. We have also introduced a dedicated Ramadan section ‘Ramadan Souq’ to offer customers everything that they need for Ramadan. We have stocked up on all essential food/grocery products and ensured that the prices of these are not affected. We wish all our shoppers a blessed Ramadan.”

Shabeer K A, regional director – Oman, said “This year’s Ramadan promotion is quite different as we have launched a first-of-its-kind ‘Shop & Win’ promotion to appreciate and thank our customers for their continued support, and as a promise to serve them better in future. The intention behind organising such a promotion is to reward more customers who shop at Lulu. I am sure the enthusiasm and excitement will continue to build up during the promotional period.”

Airports Council International meet on March 26

The Sultanate of Oman will host the first meeting of the Board of Directors of the Airports Council International (ACI) in its new session on March 26 and 27

The meeting, which will be held at Al Bustan Palace hotel, will be attended by members of the Board of Directors of the Airports Council International, which consists of 30 CEOs of major airports in the world, in the presence of the International General Director of the Airports Council International, Luis Felipe de Oliveira who will conduct a number of executive meetings with the board members, and a number of invited personalities from the aviation and airports sector regionally and internationally, a press release said.

The sultanate will preside over this session of the council’s round, and will be represented by Sheikh Aimen bin Ahmed al Hosni, the CEO of Oman Airports and chairman of the Board of Directors of the Airports Council International. It is hoped that the Board of Directors will discuss several sustainability related topics, methods to enhance cooperation between airports, international aviation organisations and various partners, with the aim to find innovative methods to enhance efficiency in the airports and aviation sector, especially after the COVID-19 pandemic which impacted the airports and aviation sector worldwide.

The world’s airports CEOs will also discuss the projects submitted by the regional councils, in addition to approving work plans.

Meethaq’s ‘Neswa account’ offers benefits for women

On the occasion of International Women’s Day (celebrated on March 8), Meethaq Islamic Banking from Bank Muscat, has greeted all women in the sultanate for their extraordinary achievements over the last 5 decades.

To celebrate the occasion, Meethaq has also invited women in Oman to discover the advantages of using its Neswa account, a special women’s account that is designed for both everyday needs and personalised services, a press release said.

Sami Arfah, assistant general manager – Meethaq Personal Banking, said, “Meethaq is particularly proud of the role that Omani women play in various sectors. By achieving their full potential, Omani women are contributing greatly to the economic progress and development of the sultanate. With women being one of its important customer segments and in line with its customer-centric vision, Meethaq offers unique products and services aimed at enriching the lives of women

from different sectors. Today, the need for specific banking products and services for women is more than ever, and Neswa addresses this need by offering a personal and comfortable banking environment for women.”

Neswa account holders have access to a wide range of features, which include a Visa Debit Card with an ATM withdrawal limit of RO800, access to the largest network of ATMs and CDMs across Oman, complementary Takaful life cover up to RO10,000, coverage up to

RO1,000 for loss of wallet or handbag resulting in misuse of cards and coverage up to RO100 for loss of ID cards and keys.

Account holders can also receive attractive indicative profit rates on their average monthly balance and are eligible for up to 50% discount on the first year’s rental charge for safe deposit lockers. All Omani and resident women above the age of 18 are eligible to open a Neswa savings account with a minimum balance amount of RO300 or a minimum salary transfer of RO500.

Al Maha launches new promotion

Al Maha Petroleum Products Marketing Company has launched its marketing campaign for its customers using Al Maha prepaid cards, which will continue throughout the month of March, out of its keenness to strengthen the relationship with the community and their trust and choice of Al Maha stations and its various products.

CEO of Al Maha Petroleum Products, Hamad bin Salem al Maghdari expressed his happiness over the launch of the marketing campaign for the year 2022 which gives an opportunity to win free fuel for a year, a press release said.

He stressed that Al Maha Petroleum Products is one of the leading companies that actively contributes to supporting the wheel and growth of the production base of the national economy in the sultanate, as well as its continuous support for small and medium enterprises, as it keeps pace with the



economy, population and urban movement in all the governorates of the sultanate.

The Al Maha marketing campaign, in its third edition, is distinguished this year by a weekly draw for four winners

who get free fuel for a year. In addition, users of Al Maha cards, while filling fuel at Al Maha filling stations in the Sultanate, get additional free fuel. There is also a weekly draw for lucky customers of Al Maha

stations to give them fuel cards worth 5 rials for free.

Al Maha prepaid cards, also provides its owners with 15% discounts at Oman International Hospital and 5-10% at Bima Insurance Company.



AREEJ VEGETABLE OILS & DERIVATIVES SAOC
P.O. Box 22, P.C. 124, Rusayl, Sultanate of Oman email: mail@avod.com.om

ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING (“AGM”) AGENDA

The Board of Directors of Areej Vegetable Oils & Derivatives SAOC (Company) is pleased to invite the shareholders to attend the company’s annual ordinary general meeting (AGM), which is scheduled to be held at 10 am on Wednesday, 30th March 2022, via the electronic platform to hold general meetings which can accessed through the website of the Muscat Clearing and Depository Company (www.mcd.gov.om) if the quorum of the meeting is not completed, a second annual ordinary general meeting will be held at 2 pm on Monday, 4th April 2022 to discuss the following agenda:

1. To consider and approve the report of the Board of Directors on the activity of the company and its financial position during the financial year ended 31/12/2021.
2. To consider the auditors’ report and to approve the balance sheet and profit & loss account for the financial year ended 31 /12/ 2021.
3. To consider and approve the distribution of cash dividend to the shareholders as per the AGM date an amount of (200 Baiza for each share), for the financial year ended on 31/12/ 2021.
4. To approve the sitting fees payable to the members of the Board of Directors for the financial year ended 31/12/2021 and to specify the sitting fees for the next financial year ending on 31/12/2022.
5. To consider and approve the transactions entered into by the Company with related parties during the fiscal year ended 31/12/2021.
6. To consider and approve the transactions which the Company will enter into with related parties during the fiscal year ending 31/12/2022.
7. To appoint the Company auditors for the financial year ending on 31/12/2022 and to determine their fees.

According to the Company’s Articles of Association and the controls of holding General Meetings using electronic platform issued by the ministry of commerce and industry, we would like to draw your attention to the following:

a) Juristic persons only, have the right to appoint a natural person as a proxy to attend the General Meeting and vote on its behalf through technical means, provided that this natural person has an investor number in MCD.

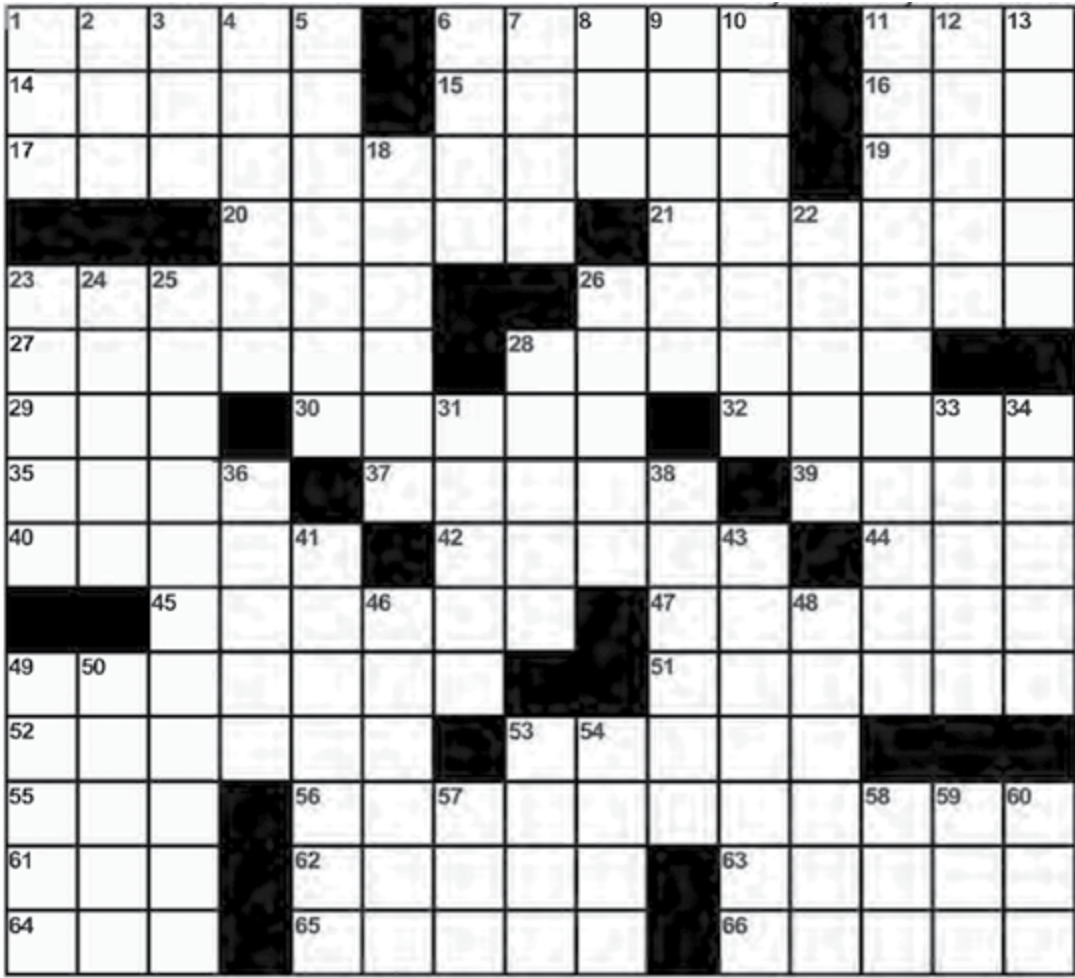
b) Voting on any of the agenda items begins no more than three days before the date of the General Meeting until the voting process ends on the day of the General Meeting. If the shareholder’s shares are increased or decreased, the voting process will be canceled, and the shareholder will have to vote again on the day of the General Meeting.

For further information, please contact to Mr. Mohammed Yaqoob As-Sarriri at Telephone Number 24448013.

Important Notice: Joint stock companies shall deposit amounts due to investors which have not been claimed by the investors after the expiry of six months of the due date with the Investors Trust Fund. Therefore, each shareholder is kindly requested to check with Muscat Depository and Securities Registration Company situated within the Muscat Securities building in order to enquire about any amounts which may be due to him.

Chairperson	Auditor	Legal Advisor
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DAILY CROSSWORD



ACROSS

1) Flat-bottomed harbor boats
6) It's a matter of taste
11) Parking place
14) Chicago landing spot
15) Alistair or Sam
16) Words said before a pastor
17) Drives recklessly ...
19)Mauna_
20) Cursed
21) Scenic walking paths
23) Opposite of a crooner
26) Far-off
27) Elevates
28) Beyond ordinary understanding
29) Inquire
30) Evil spirit
32) Casino bandits?
3 5) Average grades
37) Traditional bodies of knowledge
39) Blockhead
40) Creme de la creme
42) Comes up short
44) "Much_ About Nothing"

DOWN

1) Costa del
2) "Tai" follower
3) Common deciduous tree
4) Takes from by force
5) Sushi wrap
6) Surgery evidence
7) Top-notch
8) Finger food of the islands

9) Giraffe relatives
10) Hires different actors
11) Runs from a battle ...
12) Classic movie theater name
13) Breakfast staple
18) Tasty crumb
22) Artificial leg?
23) Crutch, essentially
24) Artist's stand
25) A critic's job is to critique ...
26) Force units
28) Definitely not a rocket scientist
31) Grinder in the back
33) Kind of wave
34) Lifted, so to speak
36) Confined to a pig pen
38) Parody
41) Surround completely
43) Chefs sprinkle, sometimes
46) Doc
48) "That's a lie!"
49) Slight smell
50) Artist Matisse
53) Heavy, durable furniture wood
54)_ good race (competed well)

57) Kenan's Nickelodeon co-star
58) Biochemistry abbr.
59) Propel on water, in a way
60) "Don't give up!"

NOTE PAD

SKAT TACKS DEAL
LULU ERROL ELBA
ADAR TRALA FLAT
BURNERAWAYTEETH
CLAYS WANES
AGEOLD DUET
SERA AMUSE GPA
EASTOFFROADROOM
ARE GLASS ISLE
SLUR SIPHON
ENSUE CANOE
DOWNDOORCOUNTRY
GOAL FLOUR ERIE
ANTI FLITE SELL
REST SAXES SLEEP

YOUR DAILY HOROSCOPE

ARIES MARCH 21-APRIL 19
When it comes to saying what you're thinking, you've never been shy. That goes double now when you're even more curious about a certain subject and even more likely to ask questions, even if they're not politically correct. If you're sure there's no other way to solve this situation than to go after the facts, and you're more than willing to risk tarnishing your reputation (temporarily) to get the answers you're after, be sure you're alone when you ask.

LEO JULY 23-AUGUST 22
You've been going over this for a while now, trying to decide whether to keep quiet or just say what needs to be said. At the moment, and only if you're intuitively inspired to believe that opening up is the right thing, you'll go for it and announce what's going on to just about anyone handy. Careful, though. Stop short of hiring a skywriter. And do you really want to live down that story for the rest of your life?

SAGITTARIUS NOVEMBER 22-DECEMBER21
You gravitate toward far-off places, people, and cultures, and when you're not on the road, your only consolation is to be in touch with someone or something that either amuses and interests you or reminds you of a distant place you love. So when it comes to long-distance communications, you always manage to make room for them on your list of most favourite things. That said, do you think you might be ready?

TEST YOUR KNOWLEDGE

1.Where are the Nicobar Islands?
A.Mediterranean Sea
B. Pacific Ocean
C. Atlantic Ocean
D. Indian Ocean

2.It was released as a video game in 1994, was restructured as a subscription-based MMORPG in 2004, and in February 2012 had more than 10mn subscribers. Which is it?
A. Star Wars: the Old Republic
B. Warcraft
C. EVE Online
D. Final Fantasy

TAURUS APRIL 20-MAY 20
You could be zooming along at a brisk pace all day today, that is, until you run headfirst into a wall of emotions. Triggered by a fiery argument, a surprising revelation, or even a simple bit of news, these emotions will stop you in your tracks and cause you to put your life on pause for a little while. Just go slowly and work your way through these feelings. Let yourself process things however you need to. Ask for time alone if you need it.

VIRGO AUGUST 23-SEPTEMBER 22
A certain person has you sighing, smiling and staring out the window at nothing. It's been going on for a while now, it certainly does feel wonderful and you'd like nothing better than to tell the entire world all about it - but don't. Not just yet. Keep it yours for just a little bit longer. You have forever to share the news - and plenty of time to make sure you're right about the feeling being mutual.

CAPRICORN DECEMBER 22-JANUARY 19
You'd rather keep your mouth shut and play the fool than open it and remove all doubt. That's why you've never been much for emotional chitchat, revealing secrets or confiding business matters to anyone not qualified to hear them. It's time to reveal something now, though, so while the next 24 hours may not be surprising to you, expect that your actions could still shock, amaze, and astound a loved one.

GEMINI MAY 21-JUNE 21
You're so ready to get the show on the road that your enthusiasm has caught on with at least one of your dear friends. They may even be thinking of doing something that's similar to what you're up to or asking if they might follow your lead, quite literally. If you manage to combine your plans and make a team effort of it, so much the better. What could be better than making a new start with an old friend?

LIBRA SEPTEMBER 23-OCTOBER 22
Love has been in the air lately. You, of course, specialise in this subject, even when it comes to making sure your friends are realistically happy and that they truly will be forever spoilt with love and attention from the person in question. If they're pouting because you haven't given your blessing just yet, don't be swayed. After all, you have to protect your loved ones like they're children sometimes, especially when they're in love.

AQUARIUS JANUARY 20-FEBRUARY 18
If anyone loves the spontaneous side of life, it's you, and that goes double for people who aren't afraid to act on impulse, like you, for example. Well, you're due to meet up with quite a few of those types right now, and you won't find a single one of them boring. You might need to mediate a few disputes about who really did ask you to dinner first, but you'll have to excuse the rest of us if we're not all that sympathetic to this plight.

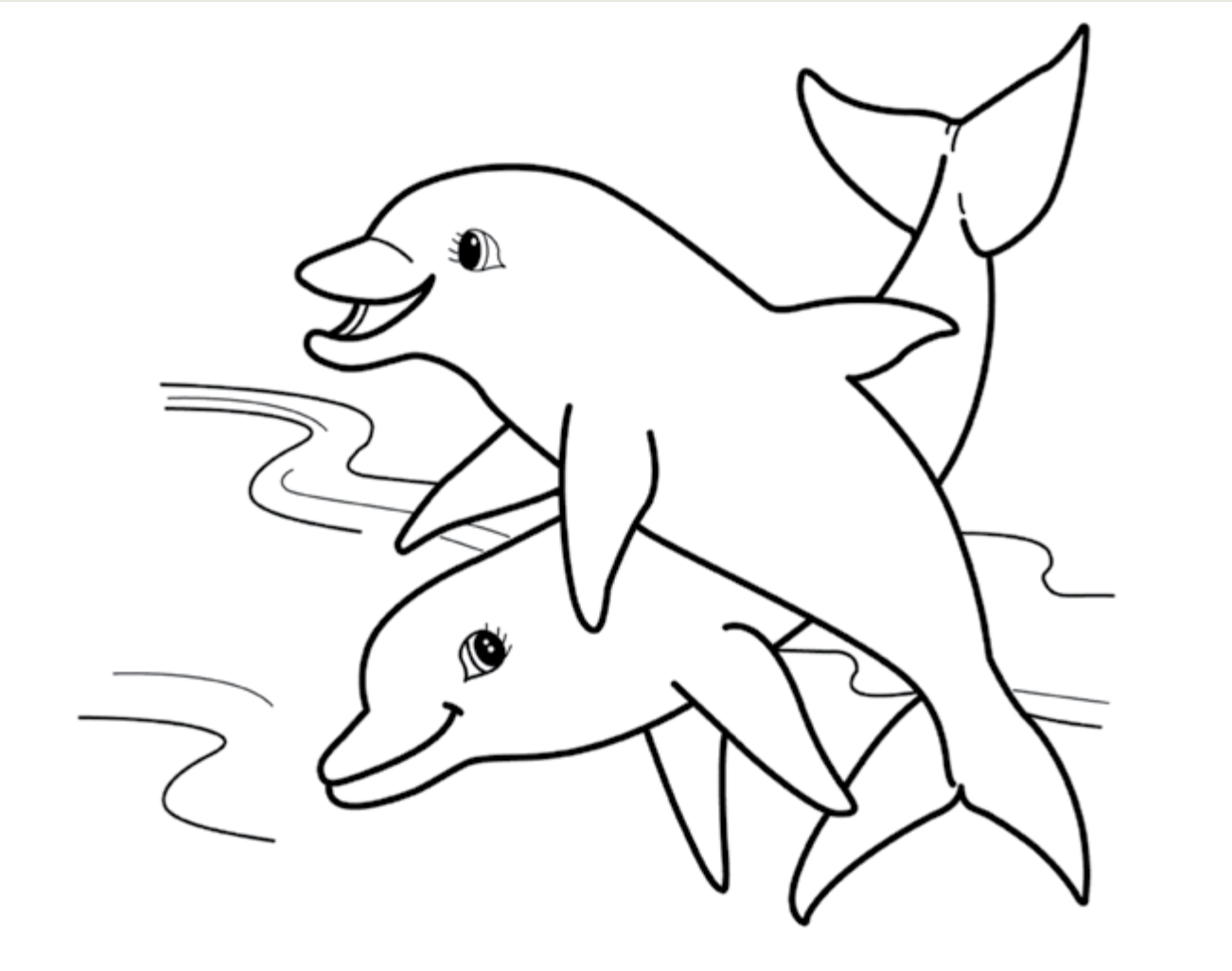
CANCER JUNE 22-JULY 22
Even your usually shy self occasionally feels the urge to let go and let the world see just how good you are at what you do. You don't often give in to that urge, but right about now your loved ones will just about insist. If that's the case, don't argue. You've worked long and hard to get where you're going and become the expert you are in your area of proficiency. Why keep hiding your light under a barrel?

SCORPIO OCTOBER 23-NOVEMBER 21
Stop worrying about that authority figure who's been avoiding you whenever you ask for a meeting about that raise, promotion, or bonus. When the time is right, they'll be supportive and quite helpful. Keep the conversation informal, friendly, and casual. Once the subject does come up, and they'll raise it if you give them a chance, it will go along smoothly.

PISCES FEBRUARY 19-MARCH 20
No one has ever accused you of not having a big heart. You have a huge one. You have enough room in that heart for not just those you love, but for anyone who needs you, and anyone who needs anyone, for that matter. Your mission now is to help those in that latter category to find what they're after without feeling obligated to provide it yourself. In other words, don't try to go out and get them what they need. Guide them toward it.

Answers:1.D 2.B 3.A

KIDS COLOURING



BOGGLER

C	P	A	R
K	N	E	S
G	S	L	A
O	P	I	P

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

DO YOU SUDOKU?

LEVEL EASY: Fill in the grid so that every row, every column and every 3x3 box contains the digits 1 to 9 and only one instance of each number

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

WORD BUILDER

P
N
S
G
R
I

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

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

SUDOKU EASY ANSWER

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

Russian forces squeeze Kyiv, surround Mariupol

The situation in Mariupol remains ‘desperate’, with no water or heating, and food supplies dwindling

Kyiv, Ukraine - Russian forces upped pressure on Kyiv on Saturday, pummeling civilian areas in other Ukrainian cities, amid fresh efforts to get aid to the devastated port city of Mariupol.

Russian strikes destroyed the airport in the town of Vasyliiv on Saturday morning, about 40km south of Kyiv, while an oil depot was also hit and caught fire, the mayor said.

The northwest suburbs of the capital, including Irpin and Bucha, have already endured days of heavy bombardment while Russian armoured vehicles are advancing on the northeastern edge. Ukrainian presidential adviser Mykhailo Podolyak on Friday called it a ‘city under siege’, while Mayor Vitali Klitschko said on Saturday Kyiv was reinforcing defences and stockpiling food and medicine.

Buses were continuing to bring refugees into the city from the hard-hit suburbs Klitschko said in a video message, adding: “We will not give up.”

Other cities have already fallen or been surrounded following Russia’s invasion of its neighbour on February 24, with civilians targeted in what the United Nations warned could amount to war crimes.

The southern port city of Mariupol is facing what Ukrainian Foreign Minister Dmytro Kuleba called ‘the worst humanitarian catastrophe on the planet’, with more than 1,500 civilians dead in 12 days.

Kyiv said on Saturday that Russian forces shelled a mosque in Mariupol where 80 civilians, including Turkish citizens, had taken shelter.

However, this was denied by Ismail Hacıoglu of the local mosque association, who told Turkish television the area was under fire but the mosque was not hit.

A humanitarian convoy carrying food and medicine for around 400,000 residents in Mariupol on Saturday left Zaporizhzhia, to



A Ukrainian police officer helps an elderly woman to cross a destroyed bridge as she evacuates Irpin, northwest of Kyiv, on Saturday (AFP)



An abandoned doll is seen lying next to a car riddled with bullets in Irpin, north of Kyiv on Saturday (AFP)

the north east, city officials said, with buses to bring civilians back.

Clergy from the Orthodox Church would accompany the convoy, they said, after Ukraine’s President Volodymyr Zelensky accused Russia of targeting previous similar efforts.

Meanwhile an AFP reporter in the southern city of Mykolaiv said a hospital in the northern district of Ingulski came under fire, while heating is out in the area, forcing many residents to flee.

“They shot at the civilian areas, without any military objective,” said the hospital’s head, Dmytro Lagochev, adding: “There’s a hospital here, an orphanage and an ophthalmological clinic.”

Mykolaiv, which lies on the road to the strategic port city of Odessa, has been under attack for days.

Pay the price

The United Nations estimates that 2.5mn people had fled Ukraine since the invasion, most of them to Poland, in the worst refugee crisis since World War II.

As Russia widens its bombardment and talks between Moscow and Kyiv seemingly go nowhere, Zelensky’s pleas for NATO to intervene have grown increasingly desperate.

Washington and its EU allies have sent funds and military aid to Ukraine, taken action against its economy and oligarchs, and a cultural and sporting boycott has

squeezed Russia’s soft power.

But US President Joe Biden on Friday again ruled out direct action against nuclear-armed Russia, warning that it would lead to ‘World War III’.

Instead, Washington added more layers of sanctions to those already crippling Russia’s economy, this time ending normal trade relations and announcing a ban on signature Russian goods vodka, seafood and diamonds.

The United States and the European Union also suspended the export of their luxury goods to Russia.

Russian President Vladimir ‘Putin must pay the price’, Biden said from the White House.

‘Cinders in his lungs’

The situation in Mariupol remains ‘desperate’, according to Doctors Without Borders, with no water or heating - and food supplies dwindling.

“Hundreds of thousands of people... are for all intents and purposes besieged,” Stephen Cornish, one of those heading the medical charity’s Ukraine operation, told AFP in an interview.

“Sieges are a medieval practice that have been outlawed by the modern rules of war for good reason.”

The central city of Dnipro, an industrial hub of one million inhabitants, saw its reputation as a relatively safe haven shattered when three missiles hit civilian buildings on Friday.

Images of its charred or destroyed buildings - including a kindergarten with windows blown out - now join those from Kharkiv and Mariupol in illustrating the brutality of the conflict.

In Kharkiv, in the east, doctors at a hospital described spending two days pumping ash from the stomach of an eight-year-old child whose home was struck by a Russian missile.

“He still has cinders in his lungs,” Dima Kasyanov’s doctor told AFP.

AFP

Kyiv calls on ‘partners’ to help abducted mayor

Kyiv, Ukraine- Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky called on Saturday on the leaders of France and Germany to help secure the release of the mayor of Melitopol who Kyiv says was abducted by invading Russian forces.

“During the night and today we are talking to our partners about the situation with our mayor. Our demand is clear: he must be released immediately... I have already phoned (German) Chancellor Olaf Scholz. I have spoken to (French) President



We are talking to our partners about the situation with our mayor. Our demand is clear: he must be released immediately... I will speak to all the necessary people to get our people released

VOLODYMYR ZELENSKY

Emmanuel Macron... I will speak to all the necessary people to get our people released,” Zelensky said in a video released by the Ukrainian presidency.

“We expect world leaders to show us how they can influence

the situation.”

According to the Ukrainian president and parliament, mayor Ivan Fedorov was abducted on Friday by Russian soldiers occupying Melitopol, a town in southern Ukraine halfway between

Mariupol and Kherson, because he ‘refused to cooperate with the enemy’.

According to the Ukrainian parliament, the mayor was arrested while at the city’s crisis centre tackling supply issues.

Zelensky said 2,000 Ukrainians demonstrated in Melitopol on Saturday against the Russian invasion and to demand the release of their mayor.

“Do you hear, Moscow? If 2,000 people demonstrate in Melitopol against the occupation, how many are there in Moscow against the war?” he said in his video.

Before the Russian invasion began on 24 February, Melitopol had a population of just over 150,000.

AFP



Children look out of a train window at the Medyka border crossing at the Polish-Ukrainian border, southeastern Poland on Saturday (AFP)

2.6mn people flee Ukraine war: UN

Geneva, Switzerland - The number of refugees fleeing Ukraine since the Russian invasion two weeks ago is now nearly 2.6mn, the UN said on Saturday.

2,597,543 refugees

The UN High Commissioner for Refugees said there were 2,597,543 refugees who had fled Ukraine so far, in the latest update on Saturday afternoon.

Poland

Poland is hosting over half the Ukrainian refugees with 1,575,703 crossing into the country since the invasion.

Hungary

Hungary is hosting 235,576 refugees so far. It has five border posts with Ukraine and several frontier towns where local authorities have turned public

buildings into emergency centres for the refugees.

Slovakia

A total of 185,673 have entered Slovakia from Ukraine. Slovak authorities said 9,581 people entered the country on Friday.

Russia

As of Thursday, 106,000 people from Ukraine had sought shelter in Russia.

Moldova

Many Ukrainians fleeing their country transit through Moldova. A total of 104,929 refugees arrived as of Thursday.

Romania

As many as 85,000 refugees had been recorded in the country as of March 8.

AFP

In Ukraine ghost city, florist stays open to ‘cheer people up’

Mykolaiv, Ukraine - Most business owners have shut up shop and fled Ukraine’s Mikolaiv, but florist Angela Kalisnik continues to sell tulips and roses just a short drive away from the front-line.

“We didn’t know the war was coming,” says the 25-year-old. “Flowers continue to bloom in our region and we don’t want to throw them away.”

Snow falls on the wide streets of the deserted city, and only a few people have ventured out in the bitter cold.

Outside the city, soldiers are fighting off invading Russian forces.

But inside Kalisnik’s shop, multicoloured bouquets line the wall.



This video grab taken from a footage of AFP TV shows Angela Kalisnik being interviewed in her store in Mykolaiv on Friday (AFP)

And against all odds, there have been customers.

A man steps out the door with a huge bouquet for his mother’s birthday.

A few days ago, a passer-by dropped in to buy a bunch for a woman who had found and re-

turned his lost wallet.

And many soldiers flocked in to buy flowers for their girlfriends for Women’s Day on Tuesday, she says.

Kalisnik says she closed her shop a week after Russia invaded her country on February

24, but then decided to open back up.

“War is war, but people continue to live, to celebrate birthdays,” she says.

“We need to cheer people up and keep the economy going.”

A short walk away, dozens huddle in a queue for an ATM. Some have been waiting for more than two hours.

Vitaly is annoyed.

“I don’t understand, two days ago, everything was normal,” he says, without giving his second name. “But now we can only take out 400 hryvnia (US\$13) at a time,” so have to withdraw several times in a row.

No flowers for Russia

For several days, the Russians

have bombarded Mykolaiv, which lies on the road to the strategic port city of Odessa some 130km down the Black Sea coastline. But the Ukrainians have managed to repel the Russians at their gates, the region’s governor Vitaly Kim says, and ‘the battle is being won’.

At a news conference on Friday in front of the city hall, the young politician assures those attending that the Russians have been pushed back to 15-20km outside the city.

“They thought we’d welcome them with flowers, they didn’t expect such resistance,” says Kim, who admits he did ‘not know anything about war 15 days ago’.

AFP

Don't 'exploit' Iran talks, warn European powers



Iran's chief nuclear negotiator Ali Bagheri Kani (centre) is seen leaving the Coburg Palais, the venue of the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) in Vienna on Friday (AFP)

Paris, France - Britain, France and Germany warned on Saturday against moves to 'exploit' the Iran nuclear negotiations - a tacit warning to Russia which is accused of delaying an agreement to gain leverage in its invasion of Ukraine.

Negotiators in Vienna said on Friday they had halted talks despite having almost sealed a deal to revive the 2015 Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) to contain Iran's nuclear activities.

The setback came after Russia said it was demanding guarantees that the Western sanctions imposed on its economy following its invasion of Ukraine would not affect its trade with Iran.

"Nobody should seek to exploit JCPOA negotiations to obtain assurances that are separate to the JCPOA," said a statement on Saturday from the spokespersons for the British,

Iran says US has failed to stop oil exports

Tehran, Iran- Iran said on Saturday that US attempts to seize its tankers and oil cargo had failed to stop exports that are subject to sanctions imposed by its arch foe.

The comments by Iran's oil minister, Jawad Owji, came after US court documents showed the United States had

seized the cargo of two tankers accused of carrying Iranian crude. 'Attempts by the enemy to reduce Iran's oil exports and capture the country's ships have taken place many times' in past months, Owji said.

"When the enemy saw that it was helpless and could not stop our exports and contracts,

it went for our ships," he said, quoted by the government's Iran newspaper.

Court documents that have been made public showed US authorities seized several weeks ago 700,000 barrels of oil which they said had left Iran in 2020 before being transferred to other vessels to avoid

detection. The United States had previously issued a number of warrants to seize the cargo of tankers carrying Iranian oil to different countries.

It confirmed in August 2020 the seizure of fuel aboard four tankers sent by Iran to Venezuela.

AFP

French and German foreign ministries - the three European parties to the negotiations.

"This risks the collapse of the deal, depriving the Iranian people of sanctions lifting and the international community of the assurance needed on Iran's nuclear programme," they added.

The current round of negotiations started in late November in the Austrian capital Vienna be-

tween Britain, China, France, Germany, Iran and Russia, with the US taking part indirectly.

After the talks halted on Friday, the United States put the ball in Iran and Russia's court.

"We are confident that we can achieve mutual return to compliance... (if) those decisions are made in places like Tehran and Moscow," State Department spokesman Ned Price told re-

porters. Russia's ambassador to the UN in Vienna, Mikhail Ulyanov, told reporters outside the talks venue that he rejected 'attempts to put all the blame on the Russian Federation', insisting that other parties to the talks 'need additional time'.

The JCPOA aimed to ensure Iran would not be able to develop a nuclear weapon, which it has always denied seeking.

It unravelled when former US President Donald Trump withdrew from the deal in 2018.

Trump reimposed sanctions on Iran, prompting it to start disregarding the curbs laid down in the deal on its nuclear activity.

"A fair and comprehensive deal is on the table ready for conclusion," the European statement said on Saturday.

AFP



UNHCR special envoy Angelina Jolie greeting a child in the Yemeni capital of Sanaa last week (AFP)

47 children killed, maimed in Yemen in two months: UN

Dubai, UAE - Forty-seven children were 'killed or maimed' in Yemen's civil war in January and February following a surge in violence, the United Nations children's fund said on Saturday.

Children are the 'first and most to suffer', UNICEF said, adding that a total of at least over 10,000 minors have been killed or injured in a war that has raged since 2015.

"Just over the first two months of this year, 47 children were reportedly killed or maimed in several locations across Yemen," Philippe Duamelle, UNICEF representative to Yemen, said in a statement. "Since the conflict escalated in Yemen nearly seven years ago, the UN verified that more than 10,200 children have been killed or injured. The actual number is likely much higher."

In the Ukraine war, at least 71 children have been killed and more than 100 wounded in two weeks since Russia's invasion on February 24, a Ukrainian parliament official said on Thursday.

Hundreds of thousands of people have died as a direct or indirect consequence of Yemen's war between Iran-backed Houthi rebels and a government forces backed by a Saudi-led coalition.

In November, the UN Development Programme said 377,000 lives would have been lost through fighting, hunger, unclean water and disease by the end of 2021. "Violence, misery

Since the conflict escalated in Yemen nearly seven years ago, the UN verified that more than 10,200 children have been killed or injured

PHILIPPE DUAMELLE

and grief have been commonplace in Yemen with severe consequences on millions of children and families," Duamelle said.

"It is high time that a sustainable political solution is reached for people and their children to finally live in the peace they so well deserve."

The conflict has caused a collapse in basic services such as healthcare and education, with millions of people displaced and 80 per cent of the population dependent on aid.

More than 2,500 schools are unusable, according to UNICEF, as they have been destroyed, converted for military purposes, or used to shelter the displaced.

A report released by the UN Security Council in January said nearly 2,000 children recruited by the rebels had died on the battlefield between January 2020 and May 2021.

AFP



Turkey's Foreign Minister Mavlut Cavusoglu (right) shaking hands with Armenia's Foreign Minister Ararat Mirzoyan during the Antalya Diplomacy Forum in Antalya on Saturday (AFP)

Turkey, Armenia pledge to pursue normalising relations

Antalya, Turkey- Turkey and Armenia have pledged to pursue the normalisation of ties in what the Turkish foreign minister Mevlut Cavusoglu described as a 'productive and constructive' meeting on Saturday.

After talks with his Armenian counterpart, Ararat Mirzoyan, Cavusoglu said that Azerbaijan also 'supports the process' of normalisation.

Armenia and Turkey have no diplomatic relations, a closed land border and a deep-seated hostility rooted in the mass killing

of Armenians under the Ottoman Empire during World War I. But in December, the two countries appointed special envoys to normalise relations, spurred by support from regional powerbroker Russia and Armenia's arch-foe Azerbaijan.

The push came a year after Azerbaijan used the help of Turkish combat drones to recapture most of the territory it lost to ethnic Armenians in a 1990s war in the disputed region of Nagorno-Karabakh.

A Russian-brokered truce that

ended the second conflict removed Turkey's main objection to talking to Armenia - namely, Yerevan's support for the local Nagorno-Karabakh government's claim of independence from Azerbaijan.

The first commercial flights for two years resumed in early February between Turkey and Armenia, but the land border between the two countries has remained closed since 1993, forcing trucks to transit through Georgia or Iran.

AFP

Clouds over Merkel's legacy as Russian invasion of Ukraine lays flaws bare

Berlin, Germany- Up to the final hours before Russia began its invasion of Ukraine, former chancellor Angela Merkel had been touted as the person favoured by Germans to try to talk President Vladimir Putin out of the conflict.

But as Russian bombs fell on Ukrainian cities, a shadow has fallen on Merkel's 16 years in office, with some observers now questioning if her detente policies with Putin had in fact left Germany, and Europe, vulnerable. Once hailed as the leader of the free world, the veteran centre-right leader has been accused by some of increasing Europe's reliance on Russian energy and neglecting Germany's defence in what appeared to be a devastating miscalculation of Putin's ambitions.

Merkel's push for diplomacy and bids to bind regimes to treaties and business contracts now look like 'an error', conservative daily Die Welt, long critical of Merkel, charged.

"What Germany and Europe has experienced over the last days is nothing short of a reversal of Merkel's policies of guaranteeing peace and freedom through treaties with despots," it wrote.

Over the last decade, Germany's energy reliance on Russia rose from 36 per cent of its total gas imports in 2014 to 55 per cent currently, with the deal for



This file photo shows Angela Merkel greeting Vladimir Putin upon his arrival to attend a peace summit on Libya, in Berlin on January 19, 2020 (AFP)

A shadow has fallen on Merkel's 16 years in office, with some observers now questioning if her detente policies with Putin had in fact left Germany, and Europe, vulnerable

the controversial Nord Stream 2 signed after the Kremlin's annexation of Crimea from Ukraine.

That has left Germany nearly helpless to follow allies like the United States and impose an oil and gas embargo against Russia.

And Germany's defence profile had been blunted by successive years of under-investment. That has drawn the ire of the United States and allies which have repeatedly pressed Europe's biggest economy to meet the NATO defence spending

target of 2 per cent of national output.

One of Merkel's closest aides and former defence minister, Annegret Kramp-Karrenbauer, has condemned Germany's 'historical failure' to bolster its military over the years.

"After Georgia, Crimea, and Donbas, we have not prepared anything that would have really deterred Putin," she tweeted, referring to incursions carried out by Russia while Merkel was in power.

'Terrible mistake'

Merkel took power in 2005 after beating Social Democrat Gerhard Schroeder at the polls.

Schroeder himself has been pilloried for his friendship with Putin, and his refusal to quit key posts at Russian energy giants Rosneft and Gazprom.

But her critics say that while Schroeder had started the ball rolling on Nord Stream 1, a pipeline funnelling Russian gas to Germany, Merkel signed off on Nord Stream 2.

The controversial US\$11bn pipeline is disputed because it bypasses Ukraine, depriving Kyiv of gas transit fees. It has been put on ice in the wake of the invasion.

Merkel 'must take her share of the blame with her eagerness to seek close economic ties to Russia' as it led to Germany's dependency on Russian energy, *Sueddeutsche* daily concluded.

"We are now seeing the consequences of that terrible mistake," it said.

On the geopolitical front, her government's reluctance in admitting Georgia and Ukraine to the NATO fold in 2008 was now also under scrutiny. Joerg Forbrig, director for central and eastern Europe at the German Marshall Fund, rejected the notion that Merkel may have been too naive about the Kremlin boss.

AFP

10-year travel ban for freed Saudi blogger

Riyadh, KSA - Saudi Arabia confirmed on Saturday a 10-year travel ban for freed blogger and human rights activist Raif Badawi, who has become a symbol of freedom of expression around the world.

Badawi, now 38, who was arrested and detained in Saudi Arabia in 2012 on charges of ‘insulting Islam’, was released on Friday. An interior ministry official, who spoke on condition of anonymity, told AFP on Saturday: “The sentence handed down to Raif was 10 years in prison followed by a travel ban for the same length of time. The court ruling holds up and is final.”

“Therefore, he cannot leave the kingdom for another 10 years unless a (royal) pardon is issued,” the official said.

At the end of 2014, Badawi was sentenced to 10 years in prison and 50 lashes a week for 20 weeks. His first flogging in the kingdom’s Jeddah square shocked the world and was described by the United Nations as ‘cruel and inhuman’. After the outcry, he was not lashed again.

On Friday, Badawi’s wife Ensaf Haidar, who lives in Canada with their three children, told AFP: “Raif called me. He is free.” It was later confirmed by a Saudi security official, but details of

Badawi’s release were not revealed.

‘Finally’ free

Every Friday for years, Haidar - who fled to Canada after Badawi’s arrest and has since become a Canadian citizen - held a public vigil for him.

“I jumped when I found out. I couldn’t believe it. I can’t wait to see my dad, I’m so excited,” one of his daughters, Najwa Badawi, 18, had told AFP.

Amnesty International said on Friday it would ‘actively work to have any conditions lifted’, noting that Badawi could face a 10-year travel ban. Raif Badawi’s sister, Samar Badawi, as well as activist Nassima al-Sadah, released in 2021, also remain stranded in the kingdom. “Raif Badawi, human rights defender in Saudi Arabia, has finally been released!” Amnesty International tweeted.

“Thousands of you have mobilised alongside us in the defense of Raif Badawi for 10 years. A big thank you to all of you for your tireless support.”

Colette Lelievre, a Montreal-based campaign organiser with Amnesty who has worked on Badawi’s case, said his release was ‘a great relief’. “Ensaf was at a loss for words,” Lelievre said on Friday. “She worked so hard to



This file photo shows Ensaf Haidar holding a picture of her husband Raif Badawi after accepting the European Parliament’s Sakharov human rights prize on behalf of her husband, at the European Parliament in Strasbourg, in eastern France on December 16, 2015

Raif was sentenced to 10 years in prison, followed by a travel ban for an equal term. He cannot leave the country without a (royal) pardon

INTERIOR MINISTRY

free her husband that emotions overwhelmed her.”

Canada’s Quebec province has paved the way for Badawi to come to the country if he chooses by placing him on a priority list of potential immigrants

for humanitarian reasons.

“Finally!” Quebec Premier Francois Legault tweeted on Friday about his release, adding: “I keep thinking about the children who will finally see their father!” Canadian Prime Minister

Justin Trudeau tweeted that he was ‘relieved that Raif Badawi has finally been released’.

“Our officials are now working to seek clarity on the conditions of his release,” he added.

Irwin Cotler, a former Canadian justice minister and Badawi’s international legal counsel, said in a statement he hoped that ‘Saudi authorities will compassionately allow for his reunification with his wife and young children in Canada’.

Badawi studied economics and ran an institute for teaching English and computer skills prior to his arrest, according to his wife. Known for his writings in support of freedom of expression, the blogger won the 2014 Reporters Without Borders prize in the net-citizen category.

He was also awarded the Sakharov Prize for Freedom by the European Parliament in 2015, and in 2015 and 2016, he was among the nominees for the Nobel Peace Prize.

International non-governmental groups and the UN continue to denounce the repression of dissenting voices and the imprisonment of activists in Saudi Arabia, despite the kingdom’s efforts to improve its image by undertaking certain reforms. AFP

Chile’s millennial president takes office with plans for change

Santiago, Chile - Leftist ex-student activist Gabriel Boric was sworn in on Friday as Chile’s youngest-ever president and hailed the country’s Marxist former leader Salvador Allende in his inaugural address to the nation. Standing in front of tens of thousands of supporters at La Moneda Palace in the capital Santiago, the 36-year-old said Allende - who killed himself in 1973 after Augusto Pinochet’s coup - had foreseen this moment.

“As Salvador Allende predicted almost 50 years ago, we are again compatriots, opening up great avenues where free men and women will pass to build a better society. We go on! Long live Chile!” he said.

“We would not be here without your mobilisations,” the new president said to the crowd, who chanted ‘Boric, friend, the people are with you!’.

Boric, who plans to turn Chile into a greener, more egalitarian ‘welfare state,’ takes over the reins of a country clamouring for change following mass protests in 2019 - which he supported - against deep-rooted inequality in income, healthcare, education and pensions. The protests, which left dozens dead and hundreds injured, were the catalyst for a process now under way to rewrite Chile’s dictatorship-era constitution.

Boric has vowed to relegate ‘to the grave’ Chile’s neoliberal economic model, which dates from the era of military despot Pinochet and is widely seen as sidelining the poor and working classes.

One per cent of Chile’s population owns about a quarter of its wealth.

Despite concern over his Frente Amplio (Broad Front)’s political alliance with the Communist Party in a country that traditionally votes for the centre, Boric won a surprise runaway election victory last December.

He succeeded in mobilising women and the youth, with a record voter turnout giving him



Chile’s new President Gabriel Boric arrives to La Moneda Palace after his inauguration ceremony in Santiago, on Friday (AFP)

As Allende predicted almost 50 years ago, we are again compatriots, opening up great avenues where free men and women will pass to build a better society

GABRIEL BORIC

nearly 56 per cent of the vote to beat far-right Pinochet apologist Jose Antonio Kast.

The men, polar opposite political outsiders, had polled neck-and-neck ahead of the vote.

As the stock exchange dropped on news of Boric’s victory, he vowed in his first official address to ‘expand social rights’ in Chile, but to do so with ‘fiscal responsibility’.

Generational change

Boric took the oath on Friday in Valparaiso, the seat of Congress, in a suit but no tie, appearing to hold back tears of emotion as he received the presidential sash from predecessor Sebastian Pineria. He expressed a ‘great sense of responsibility and duty to the people’ of Chile.

“We will do our best to rise to the challenges we face as a country,” the new president said.

‘Hope for the people’, read a placard borne by Maritza Lopez, a 62-year-old housewife who made the trip to Valparaiso from Coronel, hundreds of kilometers away.

A lawmaker since 2014, millennial Boric inherits an economy ravaged by the coronavirus pandemic. Much of 2021’s GDP growth was fueled by temporary pandemic grants and stop-gap withdrawals allowed from private pension funds.

The central bank has been hiking interest rates to curb inflation. Pineria finishes his term with a disapproval rating of 71 per cent, the worst recorded by a president since the return of democracy in 1990.

Boric has promised to introduce a European-style social democracy to Chile, boosting taxes to pay for social reform, all while putting the brakes on spiralling debt.

He will tackle these challenges with a cabinet comprised mainly of women and young people - their average age is 42.

The team includes two comrades with whom Boric, as a student, led countrywide protests in 2011 for free, quality education.

Boric’s defense minister is Maya Fernandez, the granddaughter of Allende, Latin America’s first elected Marxist president, who was ousted in Pinochet’s 1973 coup d’etat. AFP

El Salvador orders arrest of ex-president over killing of six Jesuits during civil war

San Salvador, El Salvador - A judge in El Salvador ordered the arrest on Friday of former president Alfredo Cristiani for alleged links to the murder of six Jesuit priests and two co-workers by the army during the country’s civil war, prosecutors said.

On November 16 1989, Salvadoran troops from the now banned Atlacatl battalion shot dead the Jesuits, five of them Spanish, at the Central American University in San Salvador. They also killed their housekeeper and her 16-year-old daughter.

On February 25, prosecutors filed charges against Cristiani, who was president in 1989-1994, and a group of soldiers for alleged involvement in the murder.

Prosecutors said on Twitter on Friday that a judge has ordered Cristiani, who is outside the country, former lawmaker Rodolfo Parker and four colonels to be put ‘under provisional detention’. The former president, whose whereabouts are unknown, denied the charges and attacked Attorney General



This file photo shows Salvadoran President Alfredo Cristiani showing his inked thumb to supporters, shortly after he voted at the main polling station of San Salvador on April 24, 1994 (AFP)

Rodolfo Delgado in a statement.

“The attorney general, in bad faith and with a clear disregard for the truth, has publicly accused me of omission and cover-up,” said Cristiani, who, in his

capacity as president, was also commander-in-chief at the time of the killing. “The truth is that I never knew of the plans they had to commit those murders.”

He said that the military

‘never informed me or asked me for authorisation because they knew that I would never have authorised Father Ellacuria or his brothers to be harmed’. AFP

Big spiders to colonise United State’s cooler climes

Washington, US - Big and scary-looking Joro spiders have spread from Asia to the southern United States and are now poised to colonise the country’s cooler climes - but they’re nothing to fear and might end up actually helping local ecosystems.

That’s according to scientists who have been studying the arachnid invaders since they first arrived in Georgia around 2013.

In a few short years, the golden webs spun by the bright yellow, dark blue and red spiders have become a common sight throughout the state, and new research suggests they will clamber up the Eastern Seaboard next.

“The reason we got involved in this project was because they literally fell in our lap,” Andy Davis, an ecologist at the University of Georgia, told AFP on Friday.



A Joro spider (AFP)

“They’re kind of everywhere here in North Georgia, they’re all over my backyard.”

Davis set about studying the new resident, comparing it to the golden silk spider, which came to the southeastern United States some 160 years ago from the tropics.

Writing in a paper published in the journal *Physiological Entomology*, he and his co-author Ben Frick found similarities but also striking differences be-

tween the relatives.

The Joro spider’s metabolic rate is about double that of its cousin, its heart beats 77 per cent faster, and it can survive brief freezes. They also grow faster.

Together, these traits mean it can better survive colder climates, which is not completely surprising, given that it is native to temperate Japan.

They’re also adept at gliding - spinning webs that act like parachutes and catch air currents - allowing them to fly up to 160km.

The paper examined records from iNaturalist, which tracks sightings of animals, and found that the spider’s range had already spread far beyond Georgia to encompass the nearby states of South Carolina, North Carolina and Tennessee.

There was even a report from faraway Oklahoma.

Left to themselves, Joros would probably work their way up the coast over 20 years, but it’ll probably happen faster if they hitchhike on vehicles, said Davis.

Call for clemency

That’s likely how they arrived in the United States in the first place - either a female stow-away laid her eggs when she landed on a ship, or an egg sac was brought over and hatched in spring.

Invasive species are often linked to destruction - such as the spotted lanternfly, a native of Southeast Asia that came to the US state of Pennsylvania in 2014 and is known to decimate fruit trees and ornamental plants. But the Joros’ exploding numbers aren’t necessarily a cause for concern, argued Davis. AFP

ART THERAPY



COLOUR your emotions

Art therapy is a specialised psychological tool that uses creative processes to explore emotions, reduce anxiety, and resolve psychological disorders

Hubert Vaz

Have you been feeling down in the dumps and not knowing how to pick yourself up? Does each day present the same fears, anxieties, and hope remains an evasive entity? The answer, or solution to bringing about a change of scene might lie in art.

"Art therapy can be an effective mental health treatment procedure for individuals who have experienced depression, trauma, medical illnesses, and social difficulties. Using art as a therapeutic tool, can be a way to achieve personal insights into problems and dilemmas, and to heal the scars of old sufferings," says Dr Zahra Akbari and accomplished artist in Oman who propagates art as a formidable asset that not only brings forth creativity but also provides refinement of the human psyche.

Art therapists are trained to lead people through the creative process in a therapeutic way, she says. However, art therapy is not merely painting or drawing your emotions, rather it contributes to engaging and expressing the mind and heart in a free style movement.

Dr Zahra points out that the pandemic proved to be a challenging time for all humanity and it made people rethink about the shape of their lives, reinvent new concepts for communities, and reflect on their personalities and



characters more thoroughly. With the help of experts at the 'Whispers of Serenity Clinic', Dr Zahra started Art Therapy sessions for individuals and groups from a variety of genders, ages and nationalities to help them overcome their personal obstacles, reunite with their community and reshape their lives. "We can use art as a medium beyond the barriers of written words as it is shared by all humans," Dr Zahra says. "The humanistic approach towards art therapy helps us preserve the wellbeing and remember the human nature in challenging the environment." Art Therapy, although new and not well-known to many, is a scientific practice to heal the pain and suffering in normal life for children



We can use art as a medium beyond the barriers of written words as it is shared by all humans

DR ZAHRA AKBARI

and adults of different ages. It tries to show that everyone has an inner artist and they can unleash their emotions and talents through simple media like art, she asserts. The sessions encourages participants to come forth with concepts for creative expression and use art as a medium to find fulfillment through the task at hand. "The therapy tries to show that everyone has an inner artist and they can unleash their emotions and talents through art. It awakens the talents and improves self-awareness and self-confidence," Dr Zahra said, adding that she is assisted by a team of experts in art, psychology, and consultancy to help the community in the Sultanate of Oman come to terms with their life situation.

Benefits of art therapy

Art therapy was developed by two mental health practitioners - Margaret Naumburg and Edith Kramer - who used it as a way to help clients tap into their inner thoughts, feelings and experiences through creative expression. The therapist uses the patients' free form art expressions to encourage them to talk about the images and to begin to look to themselves for meaning and insight. Combined with 'talk therapy', it can help people deal with strong emotions, increase self-awareness and self-worth and decrease stress and anxiety. Art therapy can involve a variety of creative expression including drawing, painting, colouring or sculpting, to name a few. Research findings show that art therapy helps reduce pain, decrease symptoms of stress and improve quality of life in adult cancer patients. It also provides an improved ability to deal with pain and other frightening symptoms in children suffering from cancer or asthma, besides stimulating mental function in older adults with dementia as well as reducing depression in Parkinson's patients.

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PERMISSION TO Dance

K-Pop's BTS unleash a much sought after hysteria on stage for their first Seoul gig since the pandemic on March 10



K-POP

This handout photo shows BTS performing live at the 'Permission to Dance' concert at the Seoul Olympic Stadium

South Korean supergroup BTS on Thursday returned to the stage in Seoul for the first time since 2019, with an adoring home-grown crowd offering only applause as COVID-19 rules barred all screaming, chanting or singing.

The show is the first of three concerts for the chart-topping septet titled 'Permission to Dance on Stage - Seoul' at the capital's Olympic Stadium.

Since BTS' last performance for domestic fans in 2019, the band have gone from strength to strength despite the pandemic, with three Billboard-topping singles and two Grammy nominations.

Fans waved purple LED wands - the official colour of BTS fandom - in sync when the band appeared on stage, with rhythmic clapping filling the 60,000-capacity stadium, which was only a quarter full due to social distancing measures.

Band leader RM, whose real name is Kim Nam-joon, said they were thrilled to be performing in front of a live audience again.

"The fact that you are all seated in the stands shows a lot has changed," he said, referring to a livestream-only concert they performed to empty seats a few months ago. "When would we get a concert where we get this much clapping? This is a concert to be remembered in history."

Bandmate Kim Tae-hyung, stage name V, added, "I'm so touched and thrilled that our ARMY are here."

Tickets for the three concerts - 45,000 in all - sold out within minutes, despite stringent social-distancing requirements for the BTS fans, known as ARMY.

Chanting, singing, screaming or even standing up were all banned, as South Korea battles an Omicron spike, with more than 300,000 cases reported Thursday. But fans, including Heo Min-hee, a 25-year-old office worker, said being at the concert was a 'dream' despite the restrictions.

"I still can't believe that this is my seat whenever I look at my ticket," Heo told AFP before the concert.

Han Aeng-hee, a 53-year-old fan from Gyeonggi province, added, "I prayed every morning to secure a ticket and miraculously, I got tickets to the first and last concerts. I'm very grateful."

Necessary change

Ahead of the gig, the BTS members expressed concern over the rules but asked for fans' understanding.

"There is a certain energy that can be felt from a person's voice, and I wonder if clapping can be enough," said J-Hope, whose real name is Jung Ho-seok.

Fans were disappointed about the rules but acknowledged the changes were inevitable.

"Even though it's hard, I think it's a necessary change under the current circumstances," said Lee Chae-rim, a 28-year-old student.

"At least we can see them," added Darina, a 24-year-old student from Russia who lives in South Korea. "We can sing in our hearts."

A handful of social media posts showed some fans were trying to sell their hard-won tickets after testing positive for the virus. Many concert-goers said they had taken extra precautions, some even placing themselves in self-quarantine after securing a ticket so as not to test positive and risk missing the big event.

"I didn't go outside so I wouldn't catch

Covid," said Choi Jung-yoon, 16, who stayed home for around a week. Her friend Jung Da-yeon added, "I wore double masks when I had to go to crowded places."

Live streams

The floppy-haired musicians, all in their 20s and often sporting earrings and lipstick, appeal to a generation comfortable with gender fluidity.

They are credited with generating billions for the South Korean economy, and their label enjoyed a surge in profits despite holding fewer concerts during the pandemic.

In 2020, BTS were forced to call off what was supposed to be their largest international tour, with almost 40 gigs, though they held some concerts online.

The group's first in-person show since the pandemic began was at SoFi Stadium in Los Angeles in November, with the four-night run grossing US\$33.3mn, according to Billboard.

The first and last shows of 'Permission to Dance' will be streamed live online, while Saturday's concert could be watched in real-time at movie theatres around the world.

AFP



BTS SEPTET

BTS (Bangtan Sonyeondan, in Korean), also known as the Bangtan Boys, is a South Korean boy band formed in 2010 and debuted in 2013 under Big Hit Entertainment.

The septet - comprising Jin, Suga, J-Hope, RM, Jimin, V, and Jungkook - co-writes and co-produces much of their own output. Originally a hip hop group, their musical style has evolved to include a wide range of genres. Most of their lyrics focus on personal and social commentary, as well as troubles of school-age youth and coming of age, loss, the journey towards loving oneself, and individualism.

After debuting in 2013 with their single album '2 Cool 4 Skool', periodic hits saw BTS lead a Korean wave into the United States, breaking numerous sales records.



BTS fans at the concert venue - Olympic Stadium, Seoul

Iyer, bowlers put India on top of pink ball Test

A full-page photograph of Australian cricketer Steve Smith. He is wearing his white Test kit, which includes a long-sleeved shirt with the Australian Cricket Board (ACB) logo and a red sponsor patch, white trousers with the ACB logo, and white leg pads. He is holding a cricket bat in his left hand and a green helmet in his right hand. He is looking upwards and to the right, with a focused expression. The background is a blurred green field and a red and white striped boundary rope.

The image displays a row of seven Canderil chocolate bars, each in a different flavor. The bars are arranged horizontally against a dark background. Each bar has a red top section with the Canderil logo and a bottom section with a detailed illustration of the chocolate bar and its ingredients. The flavors are: Blueberry & Walnut, Milk & Nutty, Decadent & Creamy, Simply Dark, Fruity & Nutty, Dark & Mint, and Hazelnut & Vanilla. Each bar is labeled as 50g.

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Murray joins ATP 700 club with Indian Wells win

Indian Wells, United States - Former world number one Andy Murray notched a milestone win and US Open champion Emma Raducanu made a victorious return from injury in a one-two punch for Britain on Friday at the Indian Wells WTA and ATP Masters tennis tournament.

Murray, a three-time Grand Slam champion now ranked 88th in the world and playing on a wildcard invitation, rallied after a dismal first set to beat Japanese qualifier Taro Daniel 1-6, 6-2, 6-4 in the first round.

Raducanu, seeded 11th, reached the women's third round with a 6-1, 3-6, 6-1 victory over France's Caroline Garcia.

Murray claimed the 700th ATP match win of his career.

"Reaching that number is a really, really good achievement," said Murray, who is one of just four active players to hit the milestone after Roger Federer, Rafael Nadal and Novak Djokovic.

"It has not been easy getting there," he added, noting that he had reached 600 match wins in 2016 before his victory rate was slowed in large part by injury.

In the early going, it didn't look like a landmark day for Murray, who dropped the first set in just 28 minutes.

Unable to convert two early break points, Murray would eventually be broken at love four times before bearing down in the third set to seal the win.

It was another smidgen of revenge against the 106th-ranked Japanese player, who stunned Murray in the second round of the Australian Open before Murray turned the tables in the first



Andy Murray celebrates a point on his way to his 700th tour victory against Taro Daniel in their match at Indian Wells Tennis Garden (AFP)

round at Doha.

Raducanu got off to a strong start in a match she didn't expect to be playing when a hip injury forced her out of a match in Guadalajara two weeks ago.

Raducanu, who was hindered by a blisters at the Australian Open and was playing just her fifth match of 2022.

"It has been challenging," said the 19-year-old, who was also slowed by Covid-19 in December. "The injuries, the blisters, I think they were all a knock-on ef-

fect of getting COVID and not training for three weeks."

She got off to a smooth start, opening a 3-0 lead on the way to pocketing the first set in 26 minutes and breaking Garcia in the opening game of the second.

But former world number four Garcia clawed back, winning five straight games to take the set before Raducanu regrouped to cruise through the third.

"She plays extremely powerful and fast," Raducanu said. "As soon as I let up, she climbed on

top of it straightaway. I knew I had to make some adjustments in the third set."

Riske rewarded

British qualifier Harriet Dart also advanced, with an impressive 2-6, 6-3, 6-3 comeback over 12th-seeded Ukrainian Elina Svitolina - her first victory over a top-20 player.

In other women's action, third-seeded Iga Swiatek of Poland and former world number one Simona Halep battled to

three-set victories to reach the third round.

Swiatek dropped the opening set to Ukraine's Anhelina Kalinina but lost just one game over the next two sets to triumph 5-7, 6-0, 6-1. Halep, who lifted the Indian Wells trophy in 2015, defeated Ekaterina Alexandrova 6-2, 4-6, 6-2.

American Alison Riske shocked eighth-seeded Garbine Muguruza of Spain 0-6, 6-3, 6-1, winning 12 of the last 13 games. AFP



Mohamed Salah celebrates after netting Liverpool's second goal

Liverpool sink Brighton; Salah, Diaz score goals

Brighton, United Kingdom - Jurgen Klopp faces an anxious wait over Mohamed Salah's fitness after Liverpool closed the gap on Premier League leaders Manchester City to three points with a 2-0 win against Brighton on Saturday.

Luis Diaz opened the scoring in the first half and Salah netted with a penalty after the interval at the Amex Stadium.

Klopp's side have won their last eight league games, keeping the pressure on City, with the champions playing at Crystal Palace on Monday.

Salah has reached 20 goals in a Premier League season for the fourth time, with his latest strike coming at just the right time amid his tense contract negotiations. Klopp said on Friday it is up to Salah whether he signs a new deal, a claim that was followed by the Egypt forward's agent tweeting a series of laughing emojis just minutes later.

Salah's long-term value to Liverpool is immense, but of more immediate concern to Klopp will be the knock that saw him replaced by Diogo Jota soon after his first goal in four games.

With a testing trip to Arsenal looming on Wednesday followed by an FA Cup quarter-final at Nottingham Forest, Klopp will hope his star makes a quick recovery. "Something was not right. I think there was a situation where his foot got stretched. We'll have to see," Klopp said.

While City are in fine form, Liverpool's hot streak is equally impressive. The Reds have scored 21 goals and conceded just twice in their winning run, while also keeping a third successive league clean sheet for the first time this term.

When Salah converted from the spot, it made Liverpool only the second club to score 2,000 goals in the Premier League, emulating Manchester United.

"It was expected to be a difficult game and I'm really happy with certain moments. We were really strong and scored a great goal," Klopp said.

"We had massive counter-attacks that we didn't use but it's fine. I'm really not overly critical with the boys. "Consistency is the most important thing, but it's also the most difficult as well."

AFP

Neymar returns for Brazil World Cup qualifiers

Brasilia, Brazil - Neymar will re-join Brazil for its final two World Cup qualifiers, after missing the national team's first two matches of the year due to injury, coach Tite said Friday, announcing his squad.

The Paris Saint-Germain star, back from an ankle injury, will be looking to exorcise PSG's humiliating Champions League exit Wednesday at Real Madrid as he returns to the Selecao.

The five-time world champions, who qualified for Qatar back in November, play Chile in Rio de Janeiro's Maracana stadium on March 24 and Bolivia on March 29 in La Paz.

Tite, who recently announced he plans to leave the post after the World Cup, said Neymar had "played well in the first half" against Real Madrid, before "collapsing, like the entire team."

"He's got extraordinary quality, but he's coming off a natural process for anyone who gets injured. He's in the process of searching to get his top form back," he said.

Neymar will be joined by for-



Neymar Jr

ward Vinicius Junior of Real Madrid. New names on Tite's list include Arsenal forward Gabriel Martinelli and Juventus midfielder Arthur, back on the team after a year-long absence.

Everton striker Richarlison also rejoins the squad. Left out were forwards Gabriel Jesus of Manchester City and Gabigol of Flamengo. Brazil lead South American qualifying with 39 points. The two sides still have to play a yet-to-be-scheduled rematch, to make up for a sixth-round tie controversially called off by Brazilian health authorities over supposed Argentine violations of COVID-19 protocols.

AFP

Abramovich disqualified by Premier League

London, United Kingdom - Roman Abramovich has been disqualified as a Chelsea director by the Premier League board after the UK government sanctioned the Russian billionaire.

Chelsea owner Abramovich was one of seven more oligarchs sanctioned this week by the UK following Russia's invasion of Ukraine. The European champions have been placed under tough restrictions due to the sanctions on Abramovich.

Chelsea are unable to sign players, renew contracts or sell tickets to matches, with limits on the amount of money allowed to spend on travel to away games.

"Following the imposition of sanctions by the UK Government, the Premier League board has disqualified Roman Abramovich as a director of Chelsea Football Club," a Premier League statement said on Saturday. "The board's decision does not impact on the club's ability to train and play its fixtures."

AFP



Switzerland's Marco Odermatt competes during the first run of the Men's FIS Alpine Ski World Cup Giant Slalom race in Kranjska Gora (AFP)

Swiss Odermatt wins World Cup giant slalom crystal globe

Kranjska Gora, Slovenia - Olympic champion Marco Odermatt won his first World Cup giant slalom crystal globe after finishing second behind Norway's Henrik Kristoffersen in Kranjska Gora on Saturday.

Odermatt came in 0.33sec behind Kristoffersen with Norway's Lucas Braathen setting the same time as the Swiss skier to share second place.

France's Alexis Pinturault had posted the fastest time in the first run ahead of Braathen but finished 11th as he chased his first

win of the season.

Odermatt, Olympic champion in Beijing, had struggled in the first run in Slovenia, finishing seventh-quickest. But with two races left this season the Swiss cannot be caught with a 207-point lead in the discipline. The 24-year-old has dominated the season with four wins and two second places in six races and is also practically assured of winning the overall title as he leads 2020 champion Aleksander Aamodt Kilde by 269 points.

AFP

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