

STILL ON GUARD

Following relaxation of most COVID-19 restrictions, are you still observing safety protocols?

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Muna Basheer al Zadjali
Private sector employee

COVID-19 continues to infect people so the risk of contracting the disease still exists even for those of us who are fully vaccinated. We need to continue observing all safety measures, including wearing masks, washing hands frequently and maintaining social distance to save ourselves, our families and friends. This is a serious illness and it must be taken seriously.



Mohan Anandan
Bank employee

Although we are better off today in fighting the virus, prudence demands that we stick to the advisory issued by health authorities. Practices such as washing hands frequently and avoiding touching eyes and face should be ingrained hygiene practice. Use of masks in enclosed environments must be made compulsory till we get an all-clear signal from health authorities.



Ruskeen S
Private sector employee

Easing of restrictions is necessary, but at the same time we have to follow the basic precautions. My small establishment and I are still following the basic safety requirements and use hand sanitiser, wear face masks and maintain social distancing.



K M Gurnani
Private sector employee

Yes. Prevention is always better than cure. We should not be careless just because COVID-19 cases have gone down and the government has relaxed many restrictions. Cases have come down, not disappeared from the world. So it is better to be careful and cautious.



Govind Arjan
Communication and content specialist

Having managed to avoid being infected in the last two years by following all recommended protocols, I am not ready to let my guard down as we are not yet out of the woods. I wear a mask, both indoors and outdoors, avoid crowded places, and spend more time outdoors in beaches and parks.



Shaandar Bukhari
Private sector employee

Economies all over the world are reopening but COVID-19 still exists. It has affected lives of millions. People have adapted to the new ways in their lives. Instead of shaking hands, they gesture in different ways to greet each other. Wearing face masks, washing hands frequently and such other hygiene protocols are in practice everywhere.



**? NEXT ON
YOUR SAY**

Is the revised labour visa fee the long-awaited impetus for the revival of the economy and stimulus for the private sector?

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

**DISCOVER THE UNEXPLORED
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400 volunteers band together to destroy mesquite trees in Dhofar

Our Correspondent
Muscat

Four hundred volunteers in Dhofar have joined forces to destroy mesquite trees with the aim of preserving the natural environment and protect livestock.

Speaking to *Muscat Daily*, So-hail Salim Said, a team member of Titam volunteer team, informed that the ongoing campaign started in mid-October. "We have removed more than a thousand mesquite trees in the area between the wilayats of Mirbat and Mughsail," Said said.

Volunteer teams cut down and burn the pestilent shrubs and trees, often facing the challenge of strong winds that endanger vegetation in the immediate surrounding.

Khalid Tabook, a member of the Qairoon Hairitti volunteer team, described the species as a "menace that threatens indigenous flora, competing for water and soil nutrients". Leaves of mesquite shrubs and trees con-



(Supplied photo)

tain a toxic substance, and the thorns cause serious injury to human beings.

According to Tabook, mesquite pollen has been identified as a respiratory allergen, and consumption of the pods by animals leads to teeth decay. The shrubs and trees also affect soil salinity.

"We also aim to spread environmental awareness in the community and motivate young people to participate in voluntary work. Additionally, volunteers have replanted trees after severe climatic conditions."

Tabook noted the need of spreading awareness on afforestation and increasing green

coverage in the country. "We encourage parents to inculcate a culture of environmentalism in children by joining our initiatives and growing trees."

Urging citizens and expatriates to cooperate in the volunteers' endeavours to save the environment, he thanked those who support them.

Large quantity of khat seized, thieves arrested: ROP

Our Correspondent
Muscat

Royal Oman Police (ROP) foiled an attempt to smuggle a large consignment of khat into the country on Sunday. Legal procedures are being completed against four smugglers of the contraband.

"Coast Guard Police boats of Dhofar Governorate Police thwarted the smuggling of more than 2,100 packs of khat by four



(Supplied photo)

intruders on a boat that was seized on the shores of the wilayat of Sadah," ROP stated.

In another incident, ROP arrested seven foreigners for entering the sultanate illegally and robbing five shops in the wilayat of Haima, Al Wusta.

"Money and electronic devices they stole were seized from their possession. Legal procedures are being completed against the accused," ROP stated.

HIS MAJESTY MEETS SHEIKHS OF MUSCAT, SOUTH BATINAH AND MUSANDAM



15m-deep new cave found in Jabal Akhdar

Our Correspondent Muscat

A group of speleologists has discovered a new cave in Jabal Akhdar in the wilayat of Nizwa, Dakhliyah governorate, adding to the list of Oman's subterranean treasures.

The cave was discovered as part of the pioneering efforts of the Omani Caves Exploration Team (OCET), which in the last five years has explored and documented more than a hundred caves in the sultanate.

OCET recently launched a bilingual book - Arabic and English - titled *A Guide to the Caves of Oman* at the recently concluded Muscat International Book Fair.

Speaking to *Muscat Daily*, Dr Mohammed al Kindi, geologist and member of OCET, said, "The new cave is located in the village of Safi Sahraa in Jabal Akhdar; so we named it Khaslat Safi Sahraa."

OCET found the cave with the help of Salim bin Ahmed al Awaimari from Safi Sahraa village.

Formed by sedimentation of limestone dating back to the Cretaceous period, the 15m-deep cave boasts of remarkable stalagmites and stalactites formations. "Going down is tricky and needs expert caving skills," Kindi said.

The cave opening is almost circular - 2.5m in diameter - leading to two chambers.

Kindi added that Khaslat Safi Sahraa is among many caves that have been found in Dakhliyah and has potential of being a significant tourist attraction.

Besides exploring caves in the sultanate and documenting



Formed by sedimentation of limestone dating back to the Cretaceous period, the new cave is located in the village of Safi Sahraa in Jabal Akhdar; so we named it Khaslat Safi Sahraa

DR MOHAMMED AL KINDI

these, OCET endeavours to spread the culture of adventure among members of the commu-



nity and promote tourism.

OCET is currently working on the second edition of *A Guide to*

the Caves of Oman, updating information on the caves featured in it.



Al Rahma Association seeks donations for new building

Our Correspondent Muscat

Al Rahma Association for Maternity and Child Care's Al Khair Waafi Initiative on Sunday announced that it is seeking donations to construct a residential and commercial building - with the aim of using its income to fulfil the needs of the orphans in Oman on a permanent basis.

The Al Khair Waafi team started fund raising initiatives in 2018. In 2019, funds were raised to provide school clothes during Eid al Fitr and Eid al Adha for orphans in different wilayats in the sultanate.

After the success of the 2018 and 2019 editions of the initiative, the team came together in 2020 in efforts to construct a commercial building so that its monthly proceeds could be used

to serve several programmes directed towards helping as many as 1,600 orphans registered with Al Rahma Association.

The Al Khair Waafi Initiative 2022 aims to construct a charitable building (residential and commercial) on land obtained by the association from the Ministry of Housing and Urban Planning in Mawaleh.

Speaking at a press conference to announce the 2022 initiative, Sana al Khanjary, general manager of Al Rahma Association, said, "This initiative comes from the belief of the association in providing support to the needs of orphans through voluntary efforts in our dear country."

"We look forward to donations from everyone - private, government sector and philanthropists - in order to construct the building."

"The idea of the Al Khair Waafi Initiative came from a group of Omani women entrepreneurs who have experience and successful business careers."

Areej Mohsin Darwish, a member of the initiative, said, "We already have RO300,000 and plan to raise RO300,000 more. There are many ways in which one can contribute to the building. Donations can be made to the initiative by purchasing coupons worth RO5 and RO25. The coupons are being sold at Mall of Muscat, City Centre Muscat, Al Arahimi Boulevard and Muscat Grand Mall from March 10 to March 25."

An exhibition of small and medium enterprises will be held on March 26, proceeds of which will go to the Al Khair Waafi Initiative.

'Sohar Eat' food festival to kick off on March 17

Our Correspondent Muscat

After the success of Muscat Eat, one of the biggest food festivals in Oman held over the past few years, the Ministry of Heritage and Tourism (MHT) has announced that a similar event will be held in Sohar.

'Sohar Eat' festival will be held at Sohar Amusement Centre, in the wilayat of Sohar,

North Batinah governorate, on March 17, MHT stated.

The ministry will organise the festival in cooperation with Celebrate Oman Foundation from March 17 to 19 and from March 24 to 26. The event will be held from 4pm to 12 midnight.

Celebrate Oman Foundation was instrumental in organising Muscat Eat, the last of which was held in December 2021.

The festival hosts many competitions and entertainment events, theatrical shows, performances and games for children, all aimed at attracting visitors across different age groups.

The festival also supports SMEs, as it includes the participation of mobile food cart owners where they present different types of food and live cooking shows.

WEATHER WATCH		
	Max	Min
Abu Dhabi	35	21
Doha	29	20
Kuwait City	25	15
Manama	27	20
Muscat	33	22
Riyadh	33	19
PRAYER TIMINGS		
Fajr	5.02am	
Sunrise	6.17am	
Duhr	12.21pm	
Asr	3.46pm	
Maghrib	6.20pm	
Isha	7.30pm	

ANNOUNCEMENT

Internal Tender Committee, Ministry of Labour, invites the following Tender:

Tender No.	Tender Description	Last date for electronic purchasing	Last date of tender submission	Documents fee (RO)
3 /2022	Providing cleaning services For the General Directorate of Labor building in Dhofar Governorate	Wednesday 23/03/2022 at 02:00 pm	Monday 28/03/2022 at 10:00 am	R.O 25/=

Specialized establishments can obtain electronic documents from this link below, starting from Monday 14/03/2022, 7:30 AM.

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

Each bid is to be attached with a bank guarantee or a certified cheque from one of the banks operating in the Sultanate of (1%) of the value of the tender for the Ministry of Manpower, valid for a period of (90) days from the date of submission of the tender.

Tenders envelopes will be opened at 11:00am on the same day.

(The ministry is not bound to accept the lowest price of or any tender)

labour_OMAN

Oman to list 35 state-owned firms on MSX in next 5 years

Our Correspondent
Muscat

Oman is planning to give a major boost to its capital market sector and make the sultanate's stock exchange globally competitive and attractive for foreign investors.

Under a five-year plan, the sultanate's government is planning to list as many as 35 state-owned companies on the Muscat Stock Exchange (MSX) with one or two oil sector firms likely to be listed during 2022, according to Haitham bin Salem al Salmi, CEO of MSX.

"There is a government plan to list 35 companies in the market over a period of five years. The plan is expected to begin in the second half of this year. We are focusing on listing one or two companies from the oil sector during the current year," Salmi told CNBC Arabia in an interview on Sunday.

Meanwhile, Muscat Stock Exchange announced raising the limits of foreign ownership in the joint stock companies to 100 per cent. The move is a part of MSX's completion of the technical requirements to be included in the Emerging Markets Indices.

Salmi said that Muscat Stock Exchange is working to fulfil all requirements for listing the MSX in the Global Emerging Market Indices.

"The decision to raise the percentage [limit] of foreign investment in the publicly listed companies is one of the most im-



portant steps on the road to be included in the global emerging market indices," he said.

Foreign investors currently account for 14.5 per cent of total trading value on the MSX.

In the CNBC Arabia interview, Salmi explained that 98 per cent of the listed companies on the MSX have no limits for foreign investment in them. He stressed



We are focusing on listing one or two companies from the oil sector during the current year

HAITHAM AL SALMIY

that the next step will be to work to boost the liquidity and market

value of the MSX. He also hinted about the pos-

sible announcement of a market maker and a liquidity fund in the current month or next month.

Oman's banking sector accounts for 58 per cent of the Muscat Stock Exchange's market capitalisation, which makes it the most attractive for foreign investors, the CEO of the Muscat Stock Exchange noted.



Oman Insurance to sell its Turkey operations

Muscat - Oman Insurance Company announced recently that it has entered into an agreement with VHV Reasürans, Turkey, a company of VHV Group, Germany, to fully sell its insurance operations in Turkey.

This transaction represents a continuation of Oman Insurance's transformation and simplification strategy with the objective to focus company's resources to specific markets and segments. Part of this transaction is also a commercial agreement where Oman Insurance and VHV Reasürans will seek to partner together on insuring specific risks in Turkey as well as in the UAE, according to a press release.

Oman Insurance Company currently owns 100 per cent of Dubai Sigorta that has been active in Turkey since 2008. The company has 70 employees and distributes its products through brokers and agents. Dubai Sigorta is a commercial underwriting company that specialises in construction and liability insurance, ranking amongst the top five insurers in Turkey in these respective areas. Gross revenues

for the company amounted to 298mn Turkish lira in 2020.

Jean-Louis Laurent Josi, Oman Insurance's CEO, said, "This transaction is aligned with our strategy to focus on our core markets. VHV Reasürans being a company of one of the most important insurers in Germany and the leader in the construction sector in Europe, I am convinced that our operations in Turkey will immensely benefit from VHV Reasürans's expertise and will be able to accelerate their growth in the country. I am also thrilled that both our firms will cooperate in the future to insure specific risks together, both in Turkey and in the UAE."

Maximilian Stahl, CEO of VHV Reasürans and board member of VHV International, said, "This transaction will help VHV to grow by two separate entities: one as a regional reinsurer and the other as a local primary insurer. Dubai Sigorta is an excellent strategic fit for VHV Reasürans and VHV Group."

Following this transaction, Oman Insurance Company will not own any shares in the 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 MCDC.

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

Duqm Material Market 40% completed

Duqm - The Special Economic Zone at Duqm (SEZD) hosts the first-of-its-kind Material Market in Oman and the first phase of the project has recorded 40 per cent completion so far.

Duqm Material Market consists of workshops, showrooms for retail and wholesale businesses and warehouse facilities.

This project aims to bring Chinese commodities and manufacturing capacity to the sultanate. Its focus will be mainly on wholesale demands for local and international markets in terms of exporting products.

Upon its completion, the Duqm Material Market will attract various companies around the world to Duqm and place it as a hub for marketing and selling their products.

Being one of the first projects in the Sino-Omani Industrial Park in SEZAD, the project is jointly



developed as a strategic partnership between Oman Wanfang, developer and operator of the China-Oman Industrial Park in Duqm, Al Thabat Holding Company, an investment company active in infrastructure activities, and Oman Company for the Development of Special Economic

Zone at Duqm (Tatweer).

This remarkable project is well-received by many companies from China, which expressed their interest to come onboard. The project's first phase is spreading over 30,000 sqm out of the total 80,000 sqm of area allocated for Duqm Ma-

terial Market.

However, the other two phases of the project will be developed in the far future as planning these phases depends on the function of phase one and the potential demands from the market. ONA

Samail Industrial City signs agreement for metal products manufacturing project

Muscat - Samail Industrial City, which pertains to the Public Establishment for Industrial Estates (Madayn), signed an agreement with Fatfat and Yaghi Construction to set up a project for the manufacturing and installation of metal products on an area of 11,225 sqm with an investment value touching RO350,000.

This brings the total number of the signed investment pacts in Samail Industrial City in 2022 to six pacts in various sectors, according to a press release.

Samail Industrial City received 27 investment applications in 2021 representing industrial, service and commercial projects.



Of these applications, 19 projects were localised in the industrial

city and are expected to provide 300 new job opportunities.

Samail Industrial City, in cooperation with the competent bodies, aim at increasing employment opportunities for the national cadres in the industrial city.

In 2021, the investment volume in Samail Industrial City increased from RO85mn to RO115mn, and is expected to touch RO120mn upon the completion of the new projects this year.

Moreover, the existing projects in the industrial city seek to expand and introduce new production lines.

Omani investors in the industrial city account for 75 per cent of the total investing projects in Samail Industrial City.

MSX rises 0.5%, volumes down

Our Correspondent
Muscat

The benchmark index of the Muscat Stock Exchange (MSX) rose 0.5 per cent to close at 4,349.97 points on Sunday.

Trading activity deteriorated from the previous session as turnover declined 34.39 per cent to RO5.76mn and volumes fell 40.66 per cent to 21.91mn shares.

Financial index rose 0.68 per cent, Industrial index climbed 0.46 per cent and Services index rose 0.26 per cent. The MSX Shariah Index closed down by 0.12 per cent at 492.92 points.

Market breadth remained positive as 15 companies closed up, while 13 companies closed down. The rest 18 traded stocks closed flat for the day.

Top gainers were National Gas (9.23

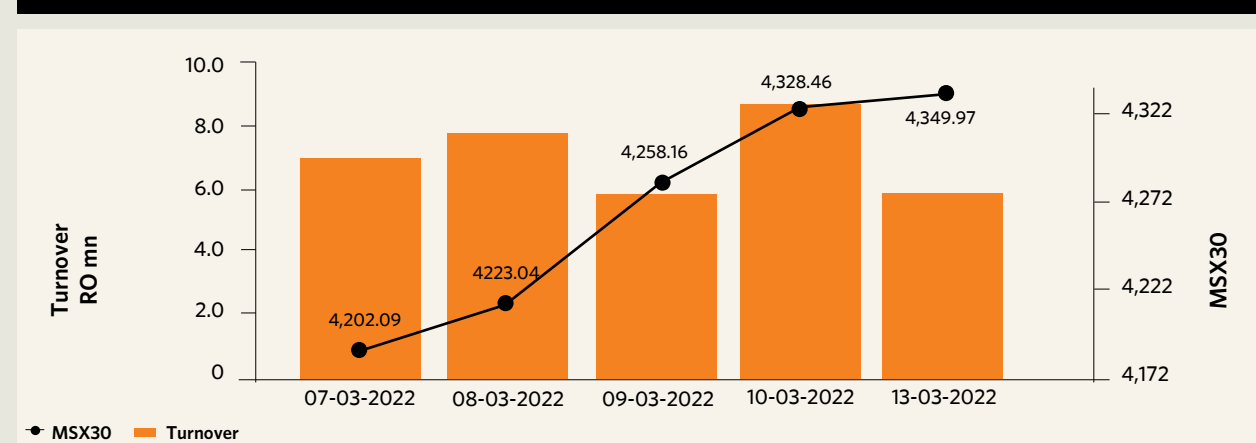


per cent), Oman Fisheries (9.21 per cent), Al Sharqia Investment (7.5 per cent) and Al Jazeera Steel (3.85 per cent).

Top losers were Global Financial Investments (-8.86 per cent), Dhofar Inter-

national Development & Investment Holding (-8.33 per cent), Vision Insurance (-8.26 per cent) and Oman Investment and Finance Company (-2.0 per cent).

MSX INDEX AND TURNOVER OF FIVE TRADING DAYS



Aramco JV to develop major refinery and petrochemical complex in China

Dhahran, Saudi Arabia - Aramco has taken the final investment decision to participate in the development of a major integrated refinery and petrochemical complex in Northeast China.

Huajin Aramco Petrochemical Company (HAPCO), a joint venture between Saudi Aramco, North Huajin Chemical Industries Group Corporation and Panjin Xincheng Industrial Group, will develop the liquids-to-chemicals complex, Aramco said in a press release.

The project, which presents



an opportunity for Aramco to supply up to 210,000 barrels per day of crude oil feedstock to the complex, is expected to be operational in 2024.

It will combine a 300,000 barrels per day refinery capacity

and ethylene-based steam cracker, a building block petrochemical used to manufacture thousands of everyday products.

The facility, which will be built in the city of Panjin, in China's

Liaoning Province, will help meet the country's growing demand for energy and chemical products.

Mohammed al Qahtani, Aramco senior vice-president of downstream, said, "China is a cornerstone of our downstream expansion strategy in Asia and an increasingly significant driver of global chemical demand. Continued energy security remains a shared priority and this partnership represents another major milestone in our journey together."

IMF expects to cut global growth forecast due to Ukraine war

Washington, US - The International Monetary Fund (IMF) expects to cut its global growth estimate due to the economic damage caused by Russia's invasion of Ukraine, managing director Kristalina Georgieva said.

"You all see the horrific toll on people, loss of lives, human suffering, massive increase in refugees. But there is also a significant economic toll," the head of the Washington-based crisis lender told reporters.

In addition to the damage to Ukraine, the sanctions Western countries have imposed on Moscow in response to the war will lead to a 'sharp contraction' of the Russian economy, Georgieva said.

Russia is 'moving into a deep recession' with massive depreciation of the ruble and sinking purchasing power for its citizens, she said, adding that a debt default is no longer 'an improbable event'.

The IMF in January cut the global growth forecast for 2022 to 4.4 per cent due to the negative impacts of the Omicron variant of COVID-19, after worldwide GDP rose by 5.9 per cent last year.

The IMF is due to publish an updated World Economic Outlook next month which will include 'a downward revision of our growth projections', she said.

The war and sanctions, which include a US ban on Russian oil imports, are spilling over to the global economy, causing costs for energy and other key commodities like wheat, fertilisers and metals to surge, the IMF chief explained.

And that comes 'on top of already high inflation', which is 'causing grave concern in so many places around the world', Georgieva said.

"We got through a crisis like no other with the pandemic. We



Kristalina Georgieva

You all see the horrific toll on people, loss of lives, human suffering, massive increase in refugees. But there is also a significant economic toll

KRISTALINA GEORGIEVA

are now in an even more shocking territory. The unthinkable happened: We have a war in Europe."

Faster, further

On Thursday, Oleg Ustenko, chief economic advisor to Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky, said the Russian invasion has so far destroyed about US\$100bn in roads, bridges and businesses in Ukraine, a huge hit to its economy.

"The situation in terms of economic growth is going to be really very depressing, even if the

war immediately stops," he said in a virtual speech to the Peterson Institute for International Economics.

Georgieva said the fund is ready to do more to help the country rebuild.

The IMF on Wednesday approved US\$1.4bn in fast-disbursing aid for Ukraine, and the World Bank released nearly US\$500mn of what is expected to be a US\$3bn financing package.

Georgieva said the most immediate spillovers of the war will be felt by neighbouring countries, who will receive an influx of over 2mn refugees and bear the brunt of disrupted trade flows that cause prices to surge.

"It's especially dangerous for families that are living in poverty, for whom food and fuel are a higher proportion of their expenses," she said.

And central banks, which already were beginning to raise interest rates to tamp down inflation pressures, may have to 'go faster and go further'.

AFP

US Fed to hike rates to tame inflation

Washington, US - Surging prices for fuel, food and housing have sent US inflation to the highest in four decades, and the Russian invasion of Ukraine has made the situation worse, so the US Federal Reserve is preparing to take action this week.

But the central bank's efforts to put out the inflation fires will be complicated by the prospect the war and wide-ranging sanctions imposed on Russia will disrupt trade flows and undermine the US economic recovery.

The policy-setting Federal Open Market Committee holds its two-day policy meeting this week, with an announcement set for Wednesday when it is poised to begin raising the benchmark lending rate that was cut to zero at the start of the COVID-19 pandemic in March 2020.

That would be the first in a series of rate hikes, but amid the rising uncertainty, some economists think policymakers may move less aggressively than previously expected as they weigh the competing forces on the economy.

"The Fed is being tugged in two different directions by the massive increase in energy prices that's taken place over the last few weeks," David Wilcox, a former senior advisor to three successive Fed chairs,



Jerome Powell (AFP)

told AFP.

While higher inflation justifies the tightening moves, 'the reduction in purchasing power that households are experiencing... would call for a more accommodative stance of policy, a more cautious approach', said Wilcox, now with the Peterson Institute for International Economics and Bloomberg Economics.

Markets are pricing in about six rate hikes this year, but Grant Thornton chief economist, Diane Swonk expects seven, while Wells Fargo raised their forecast from five to six - which would still leave the policy rate below 2 per cent.

'Thunderstruck'

Prior to Russia's invasion of Ukraine, some economists - and even some Fed officials -

said the first move in the tightening cycle could be a half point increase to send a strong signal to markets that the central bank was committed to keeping inflation from raging out of control.

But Fed chair Jerome Powell last week declared his intention to call for a quarter-point increase - a stunningly direct comment from a central bank chief, who typically keeps their plans close to the vest.

Wilcox said he was 'thunderstruck' by the statement which tamped down speculation of a more aggressive move.

While Wilcox remains cautiously optimistic that inflation will come down, he stressed that the Fed will have to be 'absolutely clear' that it will act as forcefully as necessary should

price pressures accelerate.

And in the short term, economists warn that things will get worse before they get better.

"The disruptions we are seeing are adding fuel to a well kindled inflation fire that goes well beyond the energy sector and could touch much more of our daily lives," Swonk said.

"The timing couldn't be worse for the Federal Reserve, which is already chasing inflation for the first time since the 1980s."

Supply chain snarls caused shortages of key products as the global economy was returning to normal from the pandemic, and while the increases initially were driven by cars and housing, energy prices have spiked as well, especially in the past month. The annual consumer price index in February hit 7.9 per cent.

"Just about everything that makes up inflation is going bonkers to the upside," Adam Sarhan of 50 Park Investment told AFP, adding he fears it's the kind of rapid increase that can lead to a recession.

The IMF last week warned that the fallout from the war will slow global growth, but the US economy enters the latest crisis in strong position with low unemployment after expanding by 5.7 per cent last year.

AFP

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New Mercedes-Benz C-Class - larger and bolder

Welcome to a more digital and efficient world - the new C-Class creates a future-proof comfort zone in a time of worldwide transformation.

As the first classic model series from Mercedes-Benz, the new C-Class is electrified throughout, thanks to plug-in hybrids and mild hybrids with 48-volt technology and integrated starter-generator, a press release said.

Due to a high-efficiency battery system, it achieves an electric range of about 100km (WLTP) as a plug-in hybrid. That is unprecedented in this category to date. It also sets standards with respect to sustainability. And because the C-Class is one of the company's highest-volume model series, this systematic electrification has a correspondingly strong effect on the carbon footprint. Other technical refinements include optional features such as digital light and rear-axle steering.

"Rejuvenated with leading-edge features and a sharp,

dynamic design, the new C-Class is larger, bolder and more innovative than before. We are proud to offer our customers the best of the best, offering a new kind of luxury while ensuring optimal safety," said Shaun Michael, CEO at Mercedes-Benz Oman.

The new C-Class already looks to be in motion at a standstill with its dynamic proportions, thanks to the combination of short front overhang, long wheelbase and rear overhang. The sporty bonnet with power domes accentuates this urge of forward motion.

The windscreen and passenger cell have been moved to the rear for these classic proportions known in the industry as 'cab-backward design'. The preceding model was already a great step forward in terms of a high-value appeal in the interior, and the new C-Class goes even further with respect to modern luxury. The interior adopts highlights from the new S-Class, adding a sporty touch.



NBO extends work hours for select branches

Continuing to find ways to meet the needs of its customers' busy lives, National Bank of Oman (NBO) has extended the opening hours of its CBD and Al Khoudh branches.

Between Sunday and Thursday, the branches will now be open from 8am until 8pm, with staff able to provide a range of services including account management, card issuance, and inquiries, as well as remittance services through its e-channels, a press release said.

Tariq Atiq, Chief Retail and Digital Banking officer at NBO,

said, "Although our digital channels are equipped to manage a variety of tasks, many people still prefer to conduct their banking face-to-face. That is why we decided to extend our hours of service at two of our most frequently visited branches. By doing so we are making banking more accessible for our customers, all while providing them with the best banking experience possible."

NBO provides a full suite of innovative and high-quality banking solutions through 60 branches across the country, as

well as a wide network of 199 ATM and deposit machines. Having built a rich history of innovative banking services that keep pace with the needs of its customers, it continues to modernise and evolve, in readiness for the future.

Excluding cash, services are available in-branch through the staff of the Direct Sales Unit. In addition, the Direct Sales Unit boasts a dedicated team of customer service professionals who can also visit customers who cannot make it to the bank to process select services.

National Finance introduces new WhatsApp service

Oman's leading finance company, National Finance, recently introduced an automated WhatsApp service to cater to its clients' various requirements. The enhanced service comes in line with the company's vision toward adopting digital transformation and improving customer experience.

To avail the service, customers need to add the WhatsApp number to their contact list. Once added to the contact

database, the customer can chat and get an immediate response. The service will be available 24x7, it will allow customers to send inquiries and request details on certain services. The inquiries will be answered automatically in a timely manner, a press release said.

Speaking on this enhanced service feature, Tariq al Farsi, CEO of National Finance, said, "WhatsApp platform is consid-

ered one of the fastest-growing and most popular network channels among all segments due to its speed, ease and security. While the company has remained steadfast in its mission to boost the interaction with clients and surpass their expectations, it also seeks to keep up with the latest developments in the market by harnessing technology in its operations in order to deliver fast, easy and flexible solutions."

Bank Muscat continues to provide innovative digital banking solutions

Bank Muscat continues to launch innovative digital banking solutions and services that are transforming banking for its Institutional and Corporate Banking clients.

Over the past few years, the bank has launched a number of digital banking solutions that are able to meet the varied and complex needs of government institutions, large organizations as well as small businesses, a press release said.

The bank's Corporate Internet Banking, Business to Business (B2B) Connect solution, Direct Debit solution, Virtual Accounts, Sweeps solution, Remote Deposit Capture (RDC), Point of Sales and Payment Gateway are being increasingly leveraged by the bank's customers to rapidly transform businesses and enhance efficiencies. These solutions optimise cash flow, provides complete control and visibility of funds thus making working capital management more predictable.



Wafa Ibrahim al Ajmi

Speaking about the bank's cutting-edge digital solutions, Wafa Ibrahim al Ajmi, assistant general manager, Transaction & Government Banking, said, "At Bank Muscat, we succeeded in building a solid technological infrastructure and have created a digital culture that have embedded in all of our operations, products, and services. We are committed to empowering our customers with innovative digital solutions to bring efficiency in their

business and achieve scale.

"The bank's digital strategy aims to offer the latest financial services and solutions in line with global financial trends to its large number of customers. It is our sustained effort to enhance our value proposition to customers by investing in digital and digitising the entire customer journey, thus improving both value and customer convenience.

We are very happy to note that our Corporate Customers are quickly adopting the bank's state-of-the-art digital banking solutions to speed up transactions, optimise the efficiency of their employees, minimise data-entry related risks in payment processes, improve overall security and maintain business continuity."

As part of its digital journey, the bank has crossed an important milestone with the launch of its next-generation 'Integrated Transaction Banking Platform' platform, which offers a comprehensive suite of

advanced digital solutions including payments, account services, collections and receivables, liquidity and trade solutions.

The platform delivers a seamless user experience with easy-to-use interface. It provides full visibility and control over fund positions across geographies in multiple currencies through account services dashboard.

The collections and receivables solutions provide benefit of flexibility and predictability in collections of funds through Direct Debit and Virtual Accounts resulting in bringing agility in finance and treasury functions.

The liquidity management through Sweeps helps in automating the management of funds efficiently through sweeps mechanism leading to finding a right balance of liquidity for efficient utilisation of funds. Easy reconciliation is supported through straight through reconciliation tools.

Alshaya Group, UN-Habitat ink MoU on sustainable development

Alshaya Group, one of the world's leading international franchise operators and United Nations Human Settlements Programme (UN-Habitat) have signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) for attaining sustainable development.

The MoU, which covers all GCC and Arab cities, was signed between Alshaya Group and Dr Erfan Ali, Regional Representative Arab Region ROAS at UN-Habitat, a press release said.

The MoU provides a cooperative framework for both organisations to work together to accomplish initiatives that improve the quality of the environment in the countries that Alshaya Group operates in.

The document defines joint cooperation programmes for carrying out projects promoting the 17 SDGs (United Nations Sustainable Development Goals) and the New Urban Agenda, such as tree planting and urban rejuvenation projects, organising seminars and workshops to dis-



cuss the environmental challenges, and activating sustainability awareness across the region.

Speaking about the partnership, Seneca Cottom, head of Sustainability at Alshaya Group, said, "We look forward to a fruitful, mutually beneficial partnership through the MOU that will

not only support our commitment to sustainable development but will also inspire innovative efforts and streamline solutions for a better environment."

Dr Ameera al Hassan, head of Mission of UN-Habitat for GCC states, welcomed the partnership saying, "UN-Habitat stands

ready to support Alshaya Group, by providing its technical expertise and mobilise its network of partners at the different levels in the various cities where we have established our presence. We look forward to working with Alshaya group for a fruitful partnership that will raise the cities' resilience in the region."



Grand basketball tourney enters second round

The 5x5 basketball tournament, organised by Grand Global Investment at Oman Club, entered the second round over the weekend.

The tournament was launched under 'Evaluate Yourself' initiative in cooperation with the Filipino community, a press release said.

Chief organiser Ali al Alawi, CEO of Grand Global Investment, expressed satisfaction over the tournament's progress. "We will bring out more exciting basketball action for the fans, the community and the sponsors who support and enjoy good

basketball competition. We will work in cooperation with the Oman Basketball Association in this regard," Ali said.

On Thursday, in the first match, Lots Cafe beat Jebel Sifah 86-49. Mateo Singko netted 22 points to become the best player of the game. In the second match, Sagpo edged out Kabayan Cargo 66-63. Ryan Janda scored 19 points to emerge best player.

On Friday, Mediacom prevailed over Excellence 69-64 points. Jason Cortez top-scored with 22 points. Winning Octal beat SNB 69-64 in the next



match. Rommel Alarcon was best player with 30 points. Lastly, Barangay Ginebra defeated LSB comprehensively with a 24-point lead at 98-74. Anthony Espiritu top-scored with 20 points.

On Saturday, Mustafa Sultan Exchange dominated Jebel Allied Logistics to win the first match 105-52. Jobert Maraya of MSE was selected as the best player. Travel Buddies Holidays came good against Al Khoud Warriors 98-93 in the second match. Robert Millena of Travel Buddies Holidays with 22 points became the best player.

Ahlibank floats 'Outstanding Customer Service'



Ahlibank has launched its 'Outstanding Customer Service' programme to train select frontline personal bankers across the bank's branch network in the sultanate. The on-the-job training programme begun with 100 employees of Ahlibank and Ahli Islamic.

The programme aims to enhance their understanding of excellent customer service, communication skills, and emotional intelligence quotient. It also looks toward developing their problem-solving skills and innovation, for achieving greater customer satisfaction. Each day, the Bank's employees will participate in workshops that focus on developing employees' skills in customer service and care essentials, customer needs and expectations, the programme's vision, policy, and practices, service recovery as well as customer service excellence and development, a press release said.

"At Ahlibank, we continue to invest in programmes and

initiatives that improve the skills and capabilities of our human resources, recognising them as active ambassadors of the bank. Through the 'Outstanding Customer Service' programme, the bank seeks to further strengthen its relationships with various client categories, employ appropriate techniques to manage communication with current and potential customers, analyse their needs, reach a deeper understanding of target customer behaviours, and therefore, make meaningful decisions in order to meet any requirements more quickly and effectively.

"With this programme, Ahlibank aims to redefine customer service and set new benchmarks in employee skills enhancement," said Ruqaiya al Lawati, head of Change Management. "We are confident that our nominated employees will be able to apply tools and techniques that will help manage customers in a professional way."



Bybit supports Art Dubai 2022

Bybit, the world's fastest growing cryptocurrency exchange, has supported the digital art chapter of Art Dubai 2022 at Madinat Jumeirah, Dubai.

After a three-year break, the global platform for artistic expressions from the Middle East and Global South goes beyond the realms of physical art to empower creatives in the digital dimension in its 15th edition, its most ambitious and extensive to date, a press release said.

Bybit is the Lead Partner of Art Dubai Digital, a new section of the iconic art fair to bridge between the rapidly-developing crypto-sphere and the international art market.

Bybit and Art Dubai meet at the intersection of digital art forms and human creativity amidst the paradigm shift of our times. Artists and creatives are no strangers to digital innovations and the blurring of boundaries between visions and realities, with roots in digital artistry going back to the 1980s. The global pandemic has accelerated the building of new worlds and the coming together of new artistic communities in the digital space.

The new Art Dubai Digital section brings to life art forms

transcending conventional constraints. Showcasing 17 presentations from both, traditional galleries and digitally native ones, the digital section gives a voice to emerging artists and market participants, many of whom are first-timers at an international art fair.

Art lovers looking to experience the art or support an artist can join the fair through the Bybit NFT Marketplace, now offering 15 artworks from the participating galleries of Art Dubai.

Art Dubai 2022 also presents Bybit Talks, a new addition to facilitate dialogues between the crypto space and the art world to make crypto, web3 digital practices and NFTs concepts and opportunities more accessible to the public.

Bybit's presence at Art Dubai 2022 includes a limited run of NFTs at the booth featuring artists and art collectives MIRL (Made in Real Life), Song Ting, Viiia Yeon, Maruchef, Hyuck, S.R Innovation Lab, Oscar Oiwa, Yeo Huang Joo, Saule Dyussenbina, Ziyang Wu, Yasuo Nomura, Kevin Heisner and SIM_Moby.

The timely drive for digital art highlights the zeitgeist of a post-pandemic world of mixed realities. The Bybit NFT Marketplace

provides an integrated one-stop destination for artists, creators and collectors, to create, and sell or trade on the Ethereum ERC-721 standard through their spot accounts — providing the tools of digital ownership to collectors of all knowledge and skill levels.

"Art Dubai's admirable work in elevating talent to the global stage, particularly with artists from underrepresented regions, echoes Bybit's endeavor to democratize next level trading for the broader public. NFTs are one of the new tools to reinvent and rewire the art market, and a new generation of artists and art patrons are drawn to a new parallel world that rewards authenticity and the imaginative minds," said Igneus Terrenus, Head of Communications at Bybit.

"There are two important legs in the projects. We have galleries from the physical world and galleries that only exist in the metaverse. And to complement these and help understand what they're going to be showcasing, we have one of the most exciting educational programs today, among them is Bybit Talks by Bybit, the sponsor of the digital section, and the Global Art Forum," said Pablo del Val, artistic director of Art Dubai.

Air cargo growth continues at slow pace

The International Air Transport Association (IATA) recently released data for global air cargo markets showing slower growth in January 2022.

Supply chain disruptions and capacity constraints, as well as a deterioration in economic conditions for the sector dampened demand, a press release said.

Global demand, measured in cargo tonne-kilometers (CTKs), was up 2.7% compared to January 2021 (3.2% for international operations). This was significantly lower than the 9.3% growth seen in December 2021 (11.1% for international operations).

Capacity was 11.4% above January 2021 (10.8% for international operations). While this is

in positive territory, compared to pre-COVID-19 levels, capacity remains constrained, 8.9% below January 2019 levels.

Supply chain disruptions resulted from flight cancellations due to labour shortages, winter weather and to a lesser extent the deployment of 5G in the USA, as well as the zero-COVID policy in mainland China and Hong Kong.

"Demand growth of 2.7% in January was below expectation, following the 9.3% recorded in December. This likely reflects a shift towards the more normal growth rate of 4.9% expected for this year. Looking ahead, however, we can expect cargo markets to be impacted by the Russia-Ukraine conflict. Sanc-



stop direct connectivity to many markets connected to Russia. Overall, the impact on global markets is expected to be low as cargo carried to/from within Russia accounted for just 0.6% of the global cargo carried by air in 2021. Several specialised cargo carriers are registered in Russia and Ukraine, particularly those involved with heavy lift operations.

Asia-Pacific airlines saw their air cargo volumes increase 4.9% in January 2022 compared to the same month in 2021. This was significantly below the previous month's 12.0% expansion. North American carriers posted a 1.2% decrease in cargo volumes in January 2022 compared to January 2021.

Dubai WoodShow to feature 400 stalls

Dubai WoodShow, which has carved a niche for itself as the region's only dedicated business-to-business meeting place for the wood and woodworking machinery industry, is all set to take off on March 15 for three days, presenting an impressive line-up of exhibitors, brands and products, besides highlighting new concepts, technologies and innovations in the field.

Providing a perfect platform for suppliers, manufacturers, machinery and tool companies to showcase their products, innovative technologies, production scenarios and large scale machinery, Dubai WoodShow will provide access to both, local and international, players from the industry under one roof, a press release said.

The high profile show this year will witness participation from over 35 countries including Australia, Canada, Denmark, Egypt, France, Germany, India, Japan, Kuwait, Malaysia, Poland,



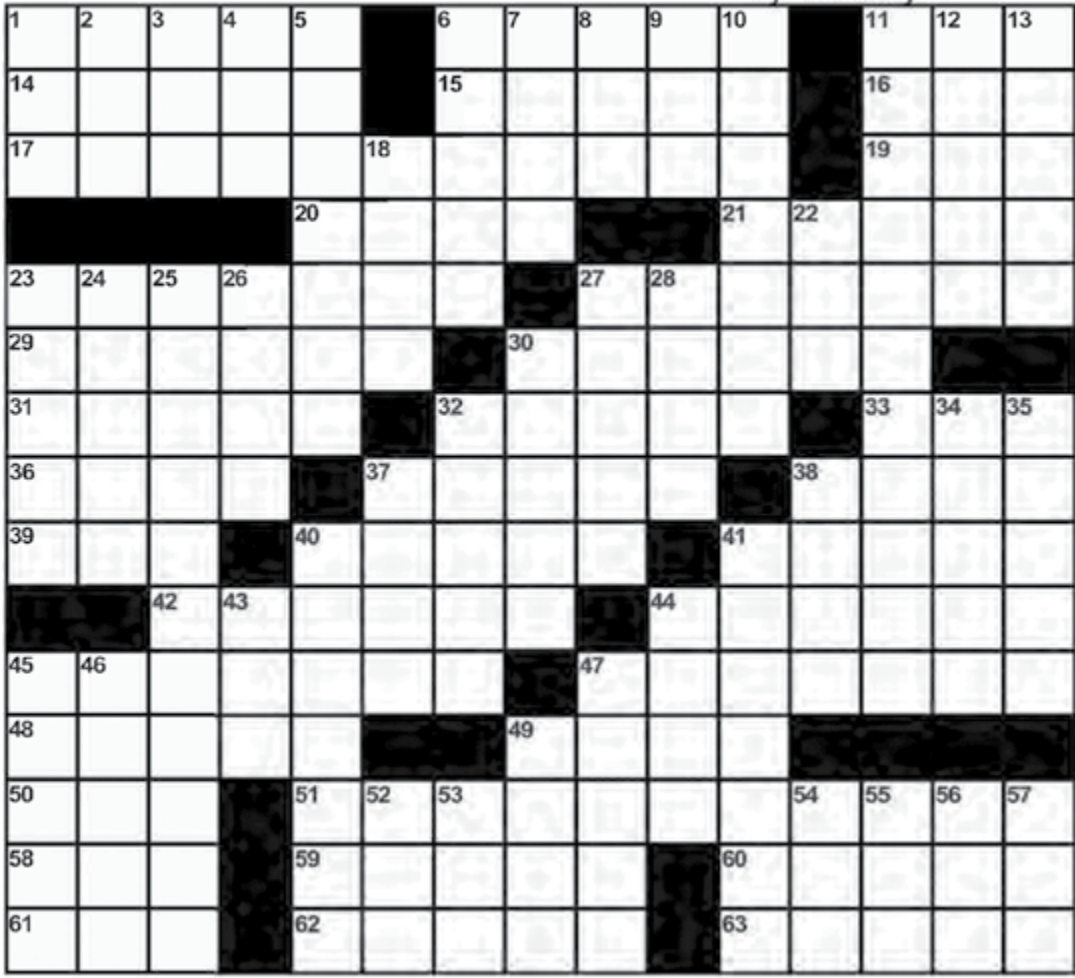
Romania, Spain, Turkey, United Kingdom, United Arab Emirates, United States of America, Vietnam and more. The show will witness over 400 exhibitors and provide the perfect opportunity for the regional and international companies to showcase and

learn about wood and wood-working and to build new strategic relationships with buyers, traders and investors.

"Dubai WoodShow has become a hugely popular convergence point for manufacturers, traders, suppliers, machinery

companies and end-users in the wood industry chain. The range of products being showcased include wood products, machinery, blades, tools, abrasives, industry solutions, etc," said Dawood al Shezawi, president of Strategic Exhibition and Conference.

DAILY CROSSWORD



ACROSS

1) Killed, gangster-style
6) Montezuma, for one
11) Dashboard abbreviation
14) Key in Florida
15) _-cotta
16) "I can't believe my eyes!"
17) Prepare to stop crying
19) Charged particle
20) Bank heist units
21) Indian social class
23) _ oblongata (brain part)
27) Simple shelters
29) Humiliates
30) Martin with an Oscar
31) Easy wins
32) Audacity
33) Backstabber
36) First-rate
37) Ratty or flea-bitten
38) Booby trap component
39) Leave white tracks
40) Dude kin
41) Certain mast (var.)
42) Arrange tidily
44) Mum

45) Some socks
47) Vast frozen expanses
48) Runway figure
49) Andean land
50) Busy bother
51) Be seductive, in a way
58) Use a needle and thread
59) Come to mind
60) Spooky
61) Member of the family, often
62) Marina sight
63) All-out attack

DOWN

1) Way past voting age
2) Wide's partner
3) Swelter
4) Teamwork inhibitor
5) Computer attachments
6) Baffled on the Pacific?
7) Zorro's marks
8) "Don't give up!"
9) Before, in poetry
10) Rush down in vast quantities
11) Certain skin cream
12) Quick snap
13) Fine-tunes

18) Slithering sea creatures
22) "Santa" tail
23) Convenient places to shop
24) Digital novel
25) Discouraging or dissuading
26) They often deliver good news
27) The "L" of XL
28) Jealousy
30) He's there late in Red Square
32) Directory contents
34) "Gladiator" setting
35) Army shelters
37) Bit of dust
38) Uncontrolled
40) Bedroom separator, often
41) Some simple math signs
43) CBS logo
44) "Certainly!"
45) Accumulate
46) Event with lots of bucks
47) Article of faith
49) Fancy-schmancy
52) Victorian, for one

53) First syllable of a simple game
54) Hawaiian giveaway
55) Anger
56) County fair animal
57) "Comprende?"

NOTE PAD

YOUR DAILY HOROSCOPE

 **ARIES** MARCH 21-APRIL 19

As usual, regardless of which you choose, you'll speak your mind. Why bother trying not to? It never works anyway. At this point you can say what you're interested in with wisdom, compassion, and love, or you can lash out at someone you're absolutely, positively sure has never deserved it more. Of course, you probably have plans for the evening. Spend the day preparing and tending to all those details you love.

 **LEO** JULY 23-AUGUST 22

Are you ready for a day that's perfect for no other reason than that you're happy to be you? Well, good. We're all entitled to one of those days, and you of all people should be set to enjoy it. Of course, feeling this good means you really should share it with someone you care about, and the more the merrier too. Bet you know just the people to invite over. Lucky them! it's going to be a fabulous evening.

 **SAGITTARIUS** NOVEMBER 22-DECEMBER 21

As you well know, life is a series of extended vacations that we're fortunate enough (hopefully) to take alongside a number of carefully chosen, well-suited travel companions, aka our friends, family members, and select strangers that don't stay in that category for long. You're due to meet someone new and wonderful now, at least one new someone, that is, who will want to go along for the ride on the next leg of your trek.

 **TAURUS** APRIL 20-MAY 20

Several of your most famous qualities could be called upon now, and while many others don't have what it takes, you most certainly do. You'll need to be silent while others are babbling about absolutely nothing. You'll need to speak the truth when you're asked and recognise unfounded jealousy when you see it. Fortunately, those things come easily to you. Try not to be too smug as you watch others struggle to keep quiet.

 **VIRGO** AUGUST 23-SEPTEMBER 22

You're not prone to making decisions without carefully thinking them through, especially when it comes to career matters. Still, something that's been offered to you recently just sounds too good to pass up. If you're interested and ready to move along (and you most certainly are, internally, at least), investigate the possibilities. You don't have to do anything you're not comfortable with right now. Soon, maybe, but not right now.

 **CAPRICORN** DECEMBER 22-JANUARY 19

Your sign is often associated with royalty, due to your regal, royal bearing and the mantle of authority you wear so easily and so well. So you have every right to decide who to let into your world and who to banish from it. If there's someone who's been trying to edge their way in, don't hesitate to give them a good shove back out. If they're this pushy to start with, imagine how they'll be a bit further down the road.

 **GEMINI** MAY 21-JUNE 21

Lighthearted banter is what you enjoy most, after all. Okay, that and getting involved in a conversation that's full of good-natured arguing, including but certainly not limited to all those taboo topics one never discusses at the dinner table like politics, religion, and sports. You're going to be especially witty and convincing for your 'team' now, whoever they may be. Be sure your audience knows you're only in it for the mental workout.

 **LIBRA** SEPTEMBER 23-OCTOBER 22

The way you two met was magical. They know it and you know it. Just about everything that's happened since also seems to have carried that lovely, magical tone too. So today, when one or both of you suddenly feel the touch of the green-eyed monster, don't you dare let that endanger what you've got. A little bit of jealousy can be a compliment. It means you love someone enough to value them. A lot means you're insecure.

 **AQUARIUS** JANUARY 20-FEBRUARY 18

Whether or not you believe in reincarnation doesn't matter. We've all had the experience of feeling like we've known someone forever even if it's only been a few months. Or weeks. Or even moments. You, of course, have learnt to pay careful attention to that sort of thing, so when you cross paths now with someone who seems familiar, you won't hesitate to mention that and ask them where they've been all your life.

 **CANCER** JUNE 22-JULY 22

In your mind, secrets are good for only one thing: Uncovering. You enjoy uncovering them most especially if the truth you bring to the surface by the revelation brings about a big, positive change to the course of events unfolding, and if that course is currently taking a distinctly underhanded path. At the moment, that's what's going on, and whether or not you happen to be directly involved in the situation means absolutely nothing to you.

 **SCORPIO** OCTOBER 23-NOVEMBER 21

You're not ordinarily famous for your love of lighthearted conversation. In fact, when it comes to conversation, you tend to use one word for every three other folks blurt out without even thinking about it. At the moment, however, you've got an awful lot to say, and while your sweetheart will be amazed and astounded, there's no doubt that they will sit still and listen, which is exactly what you're after, right?

 **PISCES** FEBRUARY 19-MARCH 20

More often than not, emotional situations don't work out the way they should, like they do in the movies, that is, but now, thanks to something that happened recently under highly unusual circumstances, a magical ending could actually be on the agenda. Your job is to refuse to make an opera out of anything that could ruin that happy ending. Do your part. Dreams do come true.



TEST YOUR KNOWLEDGE

1. Which of these cities is the furthest from London?
A. Brussels
B. Athens
C. Paris
D. Rome

2. Which chemist, engineer, and armaments manufacturer invented dynamite and a detonator for it and then founded a longstanding series of world prizes for, among other things, promoting peace?
A. Alfred North Whitehead
B. Alfred Russel Wallace
C. Alfred, Lord Tennyson
D. Alfred Nobel

3. The following people died from what cause: Eva Braun, Wallace Carothers, Odilo Globocnik, Joseph Goebbels, Hermann Göring, Heinrich Himmler, Günther von Kluge, Erwin Rommel, Alan Turing and the residents of Jonestown?
A. Asphyxiation
B. Gunshot wounds
C. Cyanide poisoning
D. Strychnine poisoning

Answers: 1. B 2. D 3. C

KIDS COLOURING



BOGGLER

A	G	E	G
E	S	A	N
W	T	O	Y
M	K	A	S

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

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

WORD BUILDER



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

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

SUDOKU EASY ANSWER

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

Russia strikes Ukraine's military base near Polish border, city of Mykolaiv



Firemen work on the aftermath of air strikes on residential buildings in Chernihiv early on Sunday (AFP)

Lviv, Ukraine - Russian air strikes killed 35 people at a military base outside Ukraine's western city of Lviv, local officials said on Sunday, in an attack that brings the conflict dangerously close to the Polish border.

Another nine people were also killed in a strike on the southern city of Mykolaiv, the regional governor said, while the capital Kyiv braced for possible encirclement by Russian forces.

In a video address posted on social media late Saturday night, President Volodymyr Zelensky was adamant that the Russians would not take Ukraine.

"The Russian invaders cannot conquer us. They do not have such strength. They do not have such spirit. They are holding only on violence. Only on terror," he said.

For the first two weeks following its February 24 invasion, Russia's forces had focused on eastern and southern areas of Ukraine, notably the strategic and heavily besieged port of

Russian invaders cannot conquer us. They do not have such strength. They do not have such spirit. They are holding only on violence. Only on terror.

VOLODYMYR ZELENSKY

Mariupol.

In recent days they moved to the centre, striking the city of Dnipro, and now the west, edging close to the frontier with EU and NATO member Poland.

Overnight, missiles struck a military training ground in Yavoriv near Lviv, about 20km from the Polish border, regional governor Maxim Kozitsky said.

He said 35 people were killed and 134 injured in the attack on the base, which was a training



Ukrainian servicemen carry the body of a comrade on a stretcher in the city of Irpin on Sunday (AFP)

centre for Ukrainian forces with foreign instructors, including from the United States and Canada.

'Relentless defence'

The Russians have advanced far

enough to raise fears of Kyiv becoming encircled imminently.

Other cities have already fallen or been surrounded, with civilians targeted in what the United Nations warned could amount to war crimes.

In his video address, Zelensky appealed for more aid.

"I keep reiterating to our allies and friends abroad; they have to keep doing more for our country, for Ukrainians and Ukraine. Because it is not only for Ukraine,

US journalist shot dead in Ukraine: Medic, witnesses

Irpin, Ukraine - A US journalist was shot dead and another wounded on Sunday in Irpin, a frontline northwest suburb of Kyiv, medics and witnesses told AFP. Danylo Shapovalov, a surgeon volunteering for the Ukrainian territorial defence, said one of the Americans died instantly and he had treated the other.

AFP reporters in Irpin saw the body of the victim. A third victim, a Ukrainian who had been in the same car as the Americans, was also wounded. Papers found on the American reporter's body identified him as 50-year-old video documentary shooter Brent Renaud, of New York.

A New York Times identity card was among the papers, leading to reports he worked for the paper, but the US daily



Brent Renaud (AFP)

said he was not working for it at the time of his death.

"Brent was a talented photographer and filmmaker who had contributed to The New York Times over the years," said a statement tweeted by deputy managing editor Cliff Levy. "Though he had contributed in the past, he was not on assignment for any desk at The Times in Ukraine."

AFP

being brought in on buses from bombed-out suburbs.

Chemical attacks

Ukrainian officials accused Russia at the weekend of using phosphorus chemical bombs in the eastern Donbas region, while a separate air strike on a monastery sheltering civilians wounded 30.

International law prohibits the use of white phosphorus shells in heavily populated civilian areas but allows them in open spaces to be used as cover for troops.

Oleksii Biloshytsky, head of police in Popasna, around 100km west of Lugansk city, said late on Saturday that Russian forces had used the chemical weapon in his area.

"It's what the Nazis called a 'flaming onion' and that's what the Russists (amalgamation of 'Russians' and 'fascists') are dropping on our towns. Indescribable suffering and fires," he wrote on Facebook.

AFP

More than 250 people detained in Ukraine protests across Russia

Moscow, Russia - Russia detained more than 250 people for protesting Moscow's 'military operation' in Ukraine on Sunday, as the conflict continues for a third week.

OVD-Info, which monitors arrests during protests, said police had detained 268 people during demonstrations in 23 Russian cities.

An AFP journalist present at a protest in the capital Moscow witnessed at least a dozen arrests and said police were taking away anybody without press papers. A young woman was shouting 'peace to the world' as she was taken away by two policemen, the journalist saw.

Some of the riot police had the letter 'Z' in the colours of the Russian flag on their helmets, the AFP reporter said.

The letter, seen on Russian tanks and vehicles in Ukraine, has become a symbol of support for what Moscow calls its 'special military operation'.

In Russia's second city Saint Petersburg, AFP saw multiple arrests, including a protester being



Police officers detain a man during a protest against the conflict in Ukraine, in Manezhnaya Square in central Moscow on Sunday (AFP)

dragged across the ground.

The city's central Nevsky Avenue was closed off by police with a dozen police vans parked along the road.

According to AFP, several journalists were detained.

Dressed in a yellow hat and blue jacket, 20-year-old Kristina said she was 'expressing her protest' by wearing the colours of the Ukrainian flag.

"It's scary to go outside, of course, they are detaining everyone. Many of my friends have been detained in the past few days, some were even expelled from university," she told AFP.

Last weekend, police arrested more than 5,000 protesters across Russia. Protesters risk fines and possible prison sentences by taking to the streets.

AFP

UK invites Britons to open homes to refugees

London, UK - Stung by criticism of its lacklustre approach to refugees fleeing Russia's invasion of Ukraine, the UK on Sunday unveiled a new scheme to allow them to stay with Britons for up to three years.

The 'Homes for Ukraine' programme will allow 'tens of thousands' to gain access to work, healthcare and education, cabinet secretary Michael Gove said. Some 3,000 have already been given visas to join Ukrainian relatives living in Britain under an existing family scheme, he told Sky News.

With the new scheme, the government wanted to try to ensure that 'every available home' is opened up 'to those who are fleeing persecution', said Gove, whose portfolio includes housing. "There are a large number of people in this country, generous hearted and in a position to provide homes, and businesses and charities as well."

AFP



Ukrainian servicemen carry rocket-propelled grenades and sniper rifles in the city of Irpin, Kyiv, on Sunday (AFP)

Guns, not talks, will determine Ukraine war outcome: Experts

Paris, France - Russia entered negotiations with Ukraine only days after invading the country but experts say the ongoing talks are unlikely to yield progress until one side feels it has momentum on the battlefield.

The latest attempts at finding a negotiated end to the bloodshed saw the Russian and Ukrainian foreign ministers sit down for talks on Thursday in the Turkish resort city of Antalya.

Although there was no breakthrough, Ukrainian President Zelensky said on Saturday there had been a 'fundamentally differ-

ent approach' from the Russians in the latest discussions, while Putin claimed there were 'some positive shifts' in the dialogue.

Experts say Russia's approach has so far entailed making ultimatums, insisting that Ukraine agree to de-militarise, renounce its ambitions to join NATO, and recognise Russian territorial claims in eastern Ukraine.

Ukraine rejects these demands and there appears to be little incentive for anyone to compromise until one side builds a dominant military position.

"It's a kind of deadlock or

standstill because Russia still hopes that Ukraine will accept its demands," said Oleg Ignatov, a Russia specialist at the International Crisis Group, a think-tank. "Both sides consider the military scenario as the main scenario: Ukraine is not losing this war and Russia is not winning this war."

Natasha Seskuria, a Russia expert at the Royal United Services Institute, said it was hard to imagine a diplomatic solution when the two sides are struggling to agree on humanitarian corridors or local ceasefires.

AFP

Missile attack on Iraq's Arbil targeted Israeli site, says Iran

Arbil, Iraq - Iran claimed responsibility for a missile strike on Sunday on the northern Iraqi city of Arbil, saying it targeted an Israeli 'strategic centre'..

Authorities in Iraq's autonomous Kurdish region had earlier said 12 ballistic missiles rained down on Arbil in a pre-dawn attack targeting US interests that slightly wounded two civilians and caused material damage. The missiles came from beyond Iraq's eastern border, Kurdistan's counter-terrorism unit announced - in effect saying they were fired from Iran, a nation which wields considerable political and economic influence over Baghdad.

Iran's Revolutionary Guards later confirmed they fired the projectiles, claiming they were targeting sites used by Israel, a top ally of the US.

A 'strategic centre for conspiracy and mischiefs of the Zionists was targeted by powerful precision missiles fired by the Islamic Revolutionary Guards Corps', the Guards said in a statement.

Sunday's assault comes nearly a week after the Guards - Iran's ideological army - vowed to avenge the death of two of their officers killed in a rocket attack in Syria they blamed on Israel. Iran backs the government in Syria's civil war.

Israel, the Guards said at the time, 'will pay for this crime'.

There was no immediate reaction from Israel to Sunday's missile attack and Kurdish authorities insisted that the Jewish state has no sites in or anywhere near Arbil.

Kurdish authorities said the target of the attack was the Arbil consulate of the United States.

'Baseless allegations'

Arbil governor Oumid Khouchnaw told a news conference that two people, a taxi driver and a the custodian of a farm, were injured.

Speaking before Iran claimed

We have been hearing for sometime that Israeli sites are present. These are baseless allegations. There are no Israeli sites in the region. Missiles damaged buildings and homes

OUMID KHOUCHNAW

the attack, he dismissed however as 'baseless allegations' the presence of Israeli sites in and around Arbil. "We've been hearing for sometime that Israeli sites are present. These are baseless allegations. There are no Israeli sites in the region," Khouchnaw said.

He said the missiles fell into vacant lots but that buildings and homes were damaged.

The interior ministry in Arbil

said a 'new building' housing the US consulate in a residential suburb of the city was the target of the attack.

Washington, a foe of Iran with troops on the ground in Iraq, said there was 'no damage or casualties at any US government facility'. "We condemn this outrageous attack and display of violence," a State Department spokesperson said.

Taxi driver Ziryan Wazir said he was in his car when the missiles struck. "I saw a lot of dust, then I heard a very loud noise. The windows of my car exploded and I was injured in the face," he said, his head swathed in white gauze and a bloody scar running the length of his cheek.

Local television channel Kurdistan24, located near the US consulate, posted images on social networks of its damaged offices, with collapsed sections of false ceiling and broken glass.

An AFP correspondent in Arbil said he heard three explosions before dawn.

Regional tensions

Iraq, including the Kurdistan re-

gion, is home to a dwindling number of US troops who led a coalition fighting the Islamic State militant group.

Washington has routinely blamed rocket and drone attacks against its interests in Iraq on pro-Iran groups who demand the departure of the remaining troops.

But cross-border missile fire is rare.

Masrour Barzani, prime minister of Iraqi Kurdistan, decried the 'terrorist attack' in Arbil, and appealed for calm.

Iraq saw a surge in rocket and armed-drone attacks at the beginning of the year.

It coincided with the second anniversary of the killing of Iran-

ian General Qassem Soleimani in a US drone srike near Baghdad airport.

Soleimani, killed alongside his Iraqi lieutenant Abu Mahdi al-Muhandis, headed the Quds Force, the Revolutionary Guards' foreign operations arm.

In late January, six rockets were fired at Baghdad International Airport, but did not cause any casualty.

Iran itself responded to the January 2020 killing of Soleimani by firing missiles at military bases in Iraq housing US forces.

Sunday's assault also comes amid a pause in negotiations between Iran and world powers to revive its 2015 nuclear deal.

AFP

'Tigrayan man burnt alive by govt forces'

Nairobi, Kenya - The Ethiopian Human Rights Commission (EHRC) said on Sunday that government forces were responsible for burning a Tigrayan man to death, a barbaric act circulated in a widely-shared video that sparked outrage on social media.

Ethiopia's government on Saturday vowed to investigate and take action against anyone involved in 'the extremely savage act' depicted in the video, which shows an unarmed man being set on fire as a group of people, including some wearing army uniforms, taunt him.

On Sunday, the EHRC said the victim was a Tigrayan man who was 'burnt alive... with the participation of government security forces and other people'.

The atrocity occurred on March 3 in the northwestern region of Benishangul Gumuz, which borders Sudan and South Sudan. It followed an attack a day earlier that left at least 20 people dead, the state-affiliated independent rights body said. Security officials later captured and shot dead eight Tigrayans suspected of involvement in that assault, it added.

"The bodies of the deceased were taken by security forces to a nearby forest and burned," the EHRC said in a statement, citing eyewitness testimony.

"In between this, an ethnic Tigrayan who was suspected of having contact with the deceased, was arrested... and thrown (on the pyre) with the deceased, with him dying of fire burns," the EHRC quoted eyewitnesses as saying.

AFP



A woman inspects the damage in the children's room at home following an overnight attack in Arbil on Sunday (AFP)

Mounts of discarded batteries in Gaza pose growing health risk

Gaza City - At a landfill in southern Gaza, mounds of discarded batteries pile up, rusting cells that pose a growing health risk to Palestinians in the enclave.

Batteries are an essential power source in Gaza, where public electricity supply is sparse and infrastructure has decayed since an Israeli blockade of the enclave began in 2007, the year Hamas Islamists seized control.

"The batteries have been piling up for 15 years," said Ibrahim Baraka, who works at the 2,000sqm landfill in Khan Yunis, where residents of surrounding houses can peer in to see piles of lead and mercury waste accumulating daily.

Gaza, home to 2.3mn Palestinians, has only one power plant that runs on diesel. Fuel deliveries are unreliable, largely due to the blockade. The plant was also bombed by Israeli fighter jets during a 2006 conflict with Hamas. Mohamed Masleh, director of resources at Gaza's Environment Ministry, estimated that there are 25,000 tonnes of used batteries in Gaza that need to be recycled.

Most are at sites not suited for storing dangerous materials.

A dangerous 'farce'

Battery collection is also a source of income for the impoverished



A Palestinian man picks discarded batteries to resell in Khan Yunis in southern Gaza Strip, on February 14 (AFP)

territory, where unemployment rates hover around 50 per cent.

On a crisp morning, Zakaria Abu Sultan meandered his horse-drawn cart through the streets of Gaza City, shouting his mission through a loudspeaker.

"Anyone with damaged batteries to sell?" he called out.

"I've been wandering since dawn to buy damaged batteries. I buy them at best for 50 shekels (US\$15), and sell them to the scrap dealer for 70 shekels," he told AFP.

Typically, damaged cells are taken to landfills, like the one in

Khan Yunis where Baraka works, which dismantle them for materials like plastic that are then sold to factories.

Ahmed Hillis, director of Gaza's National Institute for Environment and Development, said that while he understood there was profit in discarded batteries, the trade was extremely dangerous.

"Tonnes of batteries are accumulating in dumps," he said.

"Batteries are found among people and on animal carts, children are carrying them around," he told AFP.

"Sometimes we find a father and son trying to open them up with a screwdriver. It is a farce and chaos," he added.

Israel used to play a role in managing toxic materials from Gaza, but that stopped with the Hamas takeover in 2007.

Last month, the Israeli defence ministry body responsible for civil affairs in the Palestinian territories (COGAT) said that a second iron shredding machine had become operational at the Kerem Shalom crossing between Israel and Gaza.

AFP

Saudi women drive for extra cash as living costs rise in the kingdom

Riyadh, KSA - Like other Saudi women, Fahda Fahd couldn't legally drive until 2018, but her lime-green Kia is now a route to extra cash as living costs rise in the conservative kingdom.

When she's not working full time at a healthcare call centre, the 54-year-old picks up fares in the capital Riyadh from a ride-hailing app exclusively for women.

Fahd said her family was supportive of her second job, on two conditions: no long trips or men as passengers.

"I decided to work as a taxi driver to earn extra income," said Fahd, wearing a black head covering and an anti-coronavirus face mask.

"My salary is not enough for my three children, and especially for my daughter who has special needs," she told AFP.

Sweeping social reforms, including lifting the infamous ban on women driving, have transformed life for many Saudis, but rising costs are increasingly problematic.

Fahd says her salary of 4,000 Saudi riyals (US\$1,066) a month from her regular job is not enough - but driving brings in another 2,500 riyals.

She usually hits the road before her shift starts at 2pm, sometimes accepting passengers on her way home at 10pm,



Saudi taxi driver Fahda Fahd goes into her car in Riyadh, on February 8 (AFP)

and says she appreciates the flexible hours.

"It has allowed me to help my retired husband pay monthly bills and for my children's school needs," she said, checking her phone for the latest fare.

'New chance at life'

Costs are creeping up in Saudi Arabia, which is on a drive to reduce its economic reliance on oil and in July 2020 hiked value added tax to 15 per cent.

Last December, transport costs were up 7.2 per cent year-on-year, part of a 1.2 per cent rise in consumer prices.

At the same time, millions of Saudi women are finding jobs as female employment gains acceptance in the deeply patriarchal society.

Women made up more than a third of the workforce last year for the first time, government figures showed.

They are among the Saudis now commonly seen serving customers in restaurants, cafes and shoe stores, filling jobs formerly done by foreigners as the government pursues its 'Saudisation' plan for the economy.

Traditionally, Saudi women were forbidden from mixing with men outside their extended family. Insaf, a 30-year-old mother of three, said she turned to driving after her husband died suddenly.

"He didn't leave us a fortune, so I had to work to support my children," she told AFP, preferring to use a pseudonym for privacy reasons.

AFP

Millions locked down in Chinese cities

People endure lockdowns in the face of the worst outbreak in two years

Beijing, China - Millions of people across China endured lockdowns on Sunday as virus cases doubled to nearly 3,400 and anxiety mounted over the resilience of the country's 'zero-COVID' approach in the face of the worst outbreak in two years.

The nationwide case surge has prompted authorities to close schools in Shanghai and lock down central neighbourhoods in southern tech powerhouse Shenzhen as well as whole northeastern cities, as almost 18 provinces battle clusters of the Omicron and Delta variants.

In China's most populous metropolis Shanghai, individual housing compounds were being locked down one by one as the city ramped up efforts to contain infections and test suspected close contacts.

Jilin - the city at the centre of the outbreak in the northeast - was partially locked down on Saturday, while residents of Yanji, an urban area of nearly 700,000 bordering North Korea, were confined to their homes on Sunday.

China, where the virus was

first detected in late 2019, has maintained a strict 'zero-COVID' policy enforced by swift lockdowns, travel restrictions and mass testing when clusters have emerged.

But the latest flare-up, driven by the highly transmissible Omicron variant and a spike in asymptomatic cases, is testing the efficacy of that approach.

Zhang Yan, a Jilin health commission official, conceded that the response from local authorities had been lacking.

"The emergency response mechanism in some areas is not robust enough," he said at a Sunday press briefing.

"There is insufficient understanding of the characteristics of the Omicron variant... and judgment has been inaccurate."

Residents of Jilin have completed six rounds of mass testing, with the city reporting more than 2,200 cases of the Omicron variant since Saturday.

The neighbouring city of Changchun - an industrial base of nine million people - was locked down on Friday, while at least three other small cities



This file photo shows a man and a boy entering a nucleic acid sample collection centre for COVID-19 in Shenzhen on September 26, last year. The southern Chinese tech hub was put under a citywide lockdown on Sunday (AFP)

have been locked down since March 1.

The mayor of Jilin and the head of the Changchun health commission were dismissed from their jobs on Saturday, state media reported, in a sign of the pressure placed on local authorities to contain virus clusters.

COVID-zero?

But the strain is showing, with officials increasingly urging softer and more targeted measures to contain the virus, while economists warn tough clampdowns are hurting the economy.

In Shanghai, authorities have locked down a number of hous-

ing compounds - with some residents told the measure will last two days - as well as individual schools, businesses, restaurants and malls over close-contact fears. Authorities also said on Sunday that people cannot leave or enter the city without a negative test from the past 48 hours.

"I have friends who I hung out with a few days ago but were suddenly quarantined recently," Shanghai resident Serena Li told AFP. The government's approach will 'protect citizens', she said, adding: "In the long run, it's good."

Long lines were seen outside

hospitals as people rushed to get tested. "There's no other way. We definitely have to do what the government has arranged," said a data analytics worker surnamed Zhang.

In Shenzhen, the southern city of around 13mn bordering Hong Kong, residents are nervous over the renewed outbreak and swift, draconian measures to quash clusters. "It's the worst since 2020," a Shenzhen resident surnamed Zhang told AFP. "The closures are too sudden, my friend woke up in the morning to find her building was sealed overnight without warning. Her boss had to mail her laptop to her."

The Shenzhen subdistrict of Futian, which is home to 300,000 people, was locked down on Sunday. It shares a land border crossing with Hong Kong, where the caseload over recent weeks has soared, alarming officials in Beijing.

Hong Kong currently has one of the world's highest death rates from the virus, as the Omicron variant cuts through its elderly population among whom vaccine hesitancy proliferates.

As cases rise, China's National Health Commission announced on Friday that it would make rapid antigen tests available for citizens to buy online or from clinics for 'self-testing'.

AFP

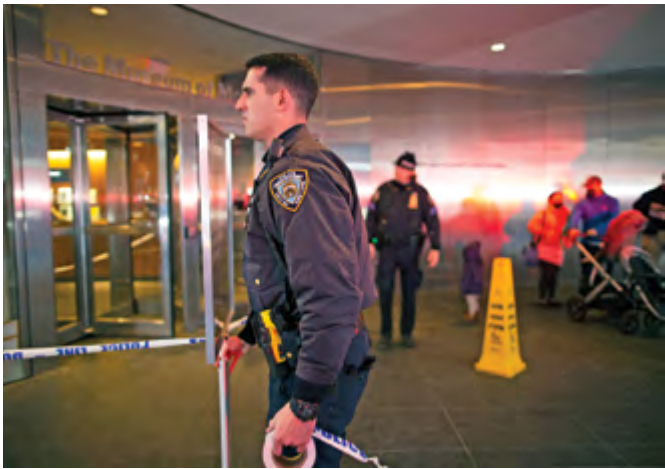
Two stabbed inside NY's Museum of Modern Art

New York, US - Two female employees were stabbed inside New York's prestigious Museum of Modern Art on Saturday, allegedly by an angry patron, police said, causing the museum to be evacuated.

The women were injured 'in the back, in the collarbone, in the back of the neck' but are both 'going to be ok', said John Miller, New York police department deputy commissioner of intelligence and counterterrorism.

The suspect, who had not been arrested as of late on Saturday afternoon, was known to police as a regular visitor to MoMA, whose membership card had been expired after 'two incidents involving disorderly conduct' in recent days, Miller said.

On Saturday, when the man was refused entry, 'he became upset... then jumped over the reception desk and proceeded to attack and stab two employees of the museum multiple times',



A New York City police officer closes the entrance of the Museum of Modern Art in New York City on Saturday (AFP)

Miller added.

The two were rushed to the hospital following the attack, which occurred around 4:15pm (2115 GMT).

Officers put up a police cordon, and the museum remained closed for Saturday.

Multiple news outlets, as well as social media posts, showed

images of people standing outside the museum, a popular tourist destination, after being evacuated.

MoMA includes artwork by artists such as Vincent Van Gogh, Pablo Picasso, Andy Warhol and Frida Kahlo, to name a few.

AFP

Thousands march for climate in France

Paris, France - Tens of thousands of people protested across France on Saturday to call for more attention to the climate crisis in the runup to presidential polls next month.

'Look up', read one message in giant orange letters demonstrators held up in Paris, urging politicians to make protecting the planet a priority.

The sign was a nod to Netflix hit *Don't Look Up*, in which astronomers who discover a comet will wipe out the earth try in vain to get politicians to take the threat seriously.

"When are we going to talk about it?" read another sign.

The climate crisis took up only 1.5 per cent of talking points in media coverage of the election campaign from February 28 to March 6, a recent survey by climate justice NGOs has found.

Organisers said 80,000 protesters took part across the country, including 32,000 people in Paris. The interior ministry however said just around



People take part in a 'Look up' march, to call on the presidential candidates to take into account the climate emergency, in Toulouse on Saturday (AFP)

40,000 demonstrated, of whom 11,000 in the capital.

In the northern city of Lille, Lydie Lampin Bernand described the climate crisis as 'worse than

critical'. "I'm only 34 years old, and even I've seen the planet slapped in the face with a shovel," she said.

"We have to protect the land

we'll leave to our children," she added, but politicians had not so far shown they were up to tackling the challenge.

AFP

Thousands of Russians scramble to leave Thailand as sanctions hit

Bangkok, Thailand - Thousands of Russian tourists in Thailand are struggling to find a route home, Thai officials said on Sunday, as international sanctions imposed over the war in Ukraine hit holiday-makers.

Russia's invasion in February provoked a host of international measures targeting businesses and banks, with some Russian carriers cancelling flights and global payment firms suspending services.

Russian tourists have been among the largest group of visitors to return to Thailand's beachside resorts since pandemic restrictions eased, but many now find themselves without a return ticket.

Tourism Authority of Thailand (TAT) official Chattan Kunjara Na Ayudhya said 3,100 Russians were stuck in Phuket, while just over 2,000 were in Samui, and smaller numbers

were in Krabi, Phang Nga and Bangkok.

The ministry was working on helping those who wanted to return home, he said, including 'discussion on return flights which could be regular or special flights'.

Russian tourist and mother-of-three Evgenia Gozorskaia said her family discovered their return Aeroflot tickets had been cancelled.

"We are very nervous because the children are very small, we don't have enough money to live here," said the 41-year-old psychologist who arrived from Moscow with her husband and three children - aged seven, four and two - on February 27.

"We want to go tomorrow to the airport, but I don't know what the situation will be," she said from Phuket, adding that they were supposed to fly home



This file photo shows people walking along Patong Beach on the Thai island of Phuket on June 29, last year (AFP)

on March 28. She said while some people had their tickets replaced others - including her family - had not been so lucky.

"They say that they cannot do it and put the phone off," she said. While Thailand has not banned Russian flights, interna-

tional airspace restrictions have seen some firms - such as Russia's flagship Aeroflot - cancelling services, leaving tourists

Russian tourists have been among the largest group of visitors to return to Thailand's resorts since restrictions eased, but many are now without a return ticket

to seek alternative routes, such as through the Middle East with different carriers.

Many tourists have also been hit by Visa and Mastercard suspending operations.

"We have seen instances of difficulty in card payments by Russians in Phuket due to how Mastercard and Visa have suspended services in Russia," said Bhummikitti Ruktaengam,

president of the Phuket Tourist Association.

He said officials were considering adopting the Mir system - a Russian electronic fund transfer structure - as well as digital currencies.

Local communities across Thailand were also stepping in.

"We will pay for water, electric, everything for them," said Archimandrite Oleg, representative of the Orthodox Church in Thailand, who said they were helping at least one family with four children stranded in Koh Samui.

Pandemic travel curbs have hammered the kingdom's tourism-dominated economy, but 2022 saw a surge of visitors as restrictions eased. Around 23,000 Russians travelled to Thailand in January this year, according to the country's Tourism and Sports Ministry.

AFP

HYBRID ENERGY



Thailand makes a green push with a floating hydro-solar power project

Floating HYDRO SOLAR FARM

A vast array of solar panels floats on the shimmering waters of a reservoir in northeast Thailand, symbolising the kingdom's drive towards clean energy as it seeks carbon neutrality by 2050.

The immense installation, covering 720,000sqm of water surface, is a hybrid system that converts sunlight to electricity by day and generates hydropower at night.

Touted by the authorities as the 'world's largest floating hydro-solar farm', the Sirindhorn dam project in the northeastern province of Ubon Ratchathani is the first of 15 such farms Thailand plans to build by 2037.

The kingdom is stepping up efforts to wean itself off fossil fuels, and at the COP26 climate conference in Glasgow last year, Prime Minister Prayut Chan O Cha set the target of carbon neutrality by 2050 followed by a net-zero greenhouse emissions by 2065.

The Sirindhorn dam farm - which began operations last October - has more than 144,000 solar cells, covering the same area as 70 football pitches, and can generate 45MW of electricity.

"We can claim that through 45MW combined with hydropower and energy management system for solar and hydro powers, this is the first and biggest project in the world," Electricity Generating



Authority of Thailand (EGAT) deputy governor Prasertsak Chergchawano told AFP.

The hybrid energy project aims to reduce carbon dioxide emissions by 47,000 tonnes per year and to support Thailand's push toward generating 30 per cent of its energy from renewables by 2037, according to EGAT.

Green shift

Hitting these targets will, however, require a major revamp of power generation.

Thailand still relies heavily on fossil fuel, with 55 per cent of power derived from natural gas as of October last year, compared with 11 per cent from renewables and hydropower, according to the Energy Policy and Planning Office, a department of the ministry

of energy.

EGAT plans to gradually install floating hydro-solar farms in 15 more dams across Thailand by 2037, with a total power generation capacity of 2,725 MW.

The US\$35mn Sirindhorn project took nearly two years to build - including COVID-19 hold-ups caused by delays to solar panel deliveries and technicians falling sick.

Most of the electricity generated by the floating hydro-solar farm goes to the provincial electricity authority, which distributes power to homes and businesses in provinces in the lower northeastern region of Thailand.

Tourism potential

As well as generating power, officials hope the giant solar farm will also prove a draw for tourists.

A 415m long 'Nature Walkway' shaped like a sunray has been installed to give panoramic views of the reservoir and floating solar cells.

"When I learned that this dam has the world's biggest hydro-solar farm, I knew it's worth seeing with my own eyes," tourist Duangrat Meesit, 46, said.

Some locals have reservations about the floating hydro-solar farm, with fishermen complaining they have been forced to change where they cast their nets.

"The number of fish caught has reduced, so we have less income," village headman Thongphon Mobmai, 64, said. "But locals have to accept this mandate for community development envisioned by the state."

The electricity generating authority, however, insists the project will not affect agriculture, fishing or other community activities.

"We've used only 0.2 to 0.3 per cent of the dam's surface area. People can make use of lands for agriculture, residency, and other purposes," said EGAT's Prasertsak.

AFP

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AROUND
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WORLD



Catching a dream

An Argentine family comes home after a 22-year drive around the world in a 1928 jalopy



The Zapp family travels alongside its dog Timon, and cat Hakuna, in their family car, a 1928 Graham-Paige, near Gualaguaychu, Entre Rios province, Argentina. Paloma (R) and Wallaby (L) Zapp draw as they travel in the car

two kids born (Pampa, now 19, came into this world in the US and Tehue, 16, during a visit back to Argentina), they enlarged the car by actually cutting it in half and adding 40 cm of length and another seat. That made room for the arrival of Paloma, now 14 and born in Canada, and Wallaby, 12, down under in Australia.

The last additions to the family were a dog named Timon and a cat called Hakuna during a stay in Brazil, where the Zapps were stranded for a while in 2020 because of COVID-19.

More on that car, which looks like

something out of a gangster movie - the trunk acts like a kitchen storage area, and the heat of the engine is used to cook or heat water. Clothes and tools are stored under the seats. And for all these years, it was home sweet home.

"It is a small house but with a huge backyard, with beaches, mountains and lakes. If you do not like the view, you can change it," Herman quipped.

On the side of the car is a sign that reads "A family traveling around the world." The Zapps usually stayed as guests at people's houses - they estimate around 2,000 altogether.

"Humanity is incredible," Candelaria said of people's hospitality. "Many helped just to be part of a dream."

It was, however, not all easy going. Herman once caught malaria, the family drove across Asia during the bird flu outbreak, and had to deal

with Ebola in Africa and dengue fever in Central America.

Friends en route

Here on the streets of Gualaguaychu, people honk their horns when they see the Zapps' old Graham-Paige. Vintage car buffs have their picture taken with it. Some buy a copy of the book the Zapps have written about their adventure, entitled 'Catching a Dream'. They have sold about 100,000 copies and say this is their main source of revenue for all this traveling.

For the record, they did the Americas, Africa, Oceania, Asia, and Europe. They also touched Mount Everest, ate duck eggs in Asia, danced with native people in Namibia, entered the tomb of King Tut in Egypt and sailed across many a sea.

For the kids, it was an unforgettable experience. They did their studies remotely and with home learning with Candelaria. Now, in-person classes await them.

AFP



This file photo taken on July 19, 2007 shows Candelaria (2-L) and Herman Zapp (R), and their children Pampa (L) and Tehue (2-R), standing next to their 1928 Graham-Paige automobile near the US Capitol in Washington DC

An Argentine family yesterday completed a trip of a lifetime - they covered five continents in a 1928 jalopy on an adventure that began in 2000 while bringing into the world and raising four kids who are now adolescents.

The Zapp family - Herman and Candelaria, and their children - have driven a total of 362,000km and have now stopped off in a town on the border with Uruguay before their scheduled arrival Sunday back where they started on January 25, 2000 at the Obelisk, a monument in downtown Buenos Aires.

"I have very mixed feelings. We are ending a dream, or fulfilling a dream," Herman told AFP. "What will come now? Thousands of changes, thousands of options," said the 53-year-old, who is already thinking of sailing around the world.

Candelaria, who was 29 when the trip began and is now 51, said her biggest and best discovery was the people encountered along the way. "People are wonderful. Humanity is incredible," said Candelaria.

She said the family visited no fewer than 102 countries, although sometimes they had to take detours because of wars or other kinds of conflict.

Good in cities

The couple had been married six years, had good jobs and had just built a house, with plans to have kids, too, when wanderlust hit. Their round-the-world journey began with a backpacking trip in Alaska.

And somebody offered them a car, a 1928 model of an American make called Graham-Paige. The engine was bad and the paint looked terrible. "It would not even start," said Candelaria Zapp.

"The seats are not great, nor is the muffler. It does not have air conditioning, either. It is a car that you have to keep your eye on. It does not look comfortable, but it was marvelous," said Herman. "It was good in cities, in mud and on sand," he added.

They went through only eight sets of tyres in 22 years and only twice needed to do major engine work.

Herman shows off the roadster by opening up a canvas on the top that forms a sort of tent for the kids to sleep under when it was time to camp out.

"It is nicer now than when it first came out," he said of the modified uber-vintage vehicle.

While out on the road, and with the first



CRICKET ROUND-UP

Rampant India set Sri Lanka daunting 447 target for victory

Bangalore, India - Half-centuries from Shreyas Iyer and Rishabh Pant combined with inspired bowling on Sunday's day two helped India eye a big win in the pink ball Test against Sri Lanka.

The tourists were 28 for one at stumps while chasing a daunting 447 for victory in Bangalore. Kusal Mendis on 10 and skipper Dimuth Karunaratne on 16 were batting at close of play.

Fast bowler Jasprit Bumrah trapped Lahiru Thirimanne lbw for nought to take his wickets tally to six in the match before three fans ran on the pitch to get a selfie with Virat Kohli.

India declared their second innings on 303-9 in the final session after Iyer made 67 and Pant smashed a 28-ball 50 - a Test record for Indian batsmen.

Iyer, who hit 92 in India's first innings total of 252, raised his third Test fifty in his fourth match with a cracking boundary.

He put on key partnerships including a 45-run stand with Pant and 63 runs with Ravindra Jadeja, who made 22, before falling lbw to Lasith Embuldeniya.

Mohammed Shami hit an unbeaten 16 before skipper Rohit Sharma him back to the pavilion after the fall of Axar Patel. India lost Rohit for 46 and Kohli for 13 but Pant extended India's domination in his knock studded with seven fours and two sixes.

Rohit, who used his sweep and reverse sweep to good effect against the spinners, missed out on his fifty after being caught at long on while attempting a big hit off Dhananjaya de Silva.

He walked back as a huge roar erupted from a crowd welcoming Kohli, a former captain and star player for the local Royal Challengers Bangalore IPL team.

SCOREBOARD	
India 1 st Innings 252	
Sri Lanka 1 st Innings 109	
INDIA 2 nd INNINGS	
M Agarwal	c de Silva b Embuldeniya22
Rohit Sharma	c Mathews b de Silva 46
H Vihari	b Jayawickrama 35
Virat Kohli	lbw b Jayawickrama 13
Rishabh Pant	c & b Jayawickrama 50
Shreyas Iyer	lbw b Embuldeniya 67
R Jadeja	b Fernando 22
R Ashwin	c Dickwella
	b Jayawickrama 13
Axar Patel	b Embuldeniya 9
M Shami	not out 16
Extras:	(b 8, lb 1, nb 1) 10
TOTAL:	(68.5 Ov, RR: 4.40)303/9d
Fall of wickets:	1-42, 2-98, 3-116, 4-139, 5-184, 6-247, 7-278, 8-278, 9-303
Bowling:	5 Lakmal 10-2-34-0, Lasith Embuldeniya 20.5-1-87-3, V Fernando 10-2-48-1, D de Silva 9-0-47-1, Praveen Jayawickrama 19-2-78-4
SRI LANKA 2 nd INNINGS	
L Thirimanne	lbw b Bumrah 0
D Karunaratne	not out 10
K Mendis	not out 16
Extras:	(lb 2) 2
TOTAL:	(7 Ov, RR: 4.00) 28/1
Fall of wickets:	1-0
Bowling:	J Bumrah 3-1-9-1, Mohammed Shami 3-0-13-0, R Ashwin 1-0-4-0

But Kohli - who has not scored an international century since India's first ever day-night Test in November 2019, and made 23 in the first innings - did not last long as he fell lbw to Praveen Jayawickrama.

The star batsman's Test average has fallen below 50 for the first time since 2017 and he has gone without a century for 73 international innings.

In the morning, Sri Lanka, who were already struggling after re-summing at 86-6, were dismissed for 109 inside half an hour during the first session to concede a lead of 143. Bumrah added two more to his first day's tally of three wickets to bag his eighth five-wicket haul in 29 Tests and first on home soil.

India lead the two-match series 1-0.

AFP



India's Shreyas Iyer watches the ball after playing a shot during the second day of the second Test cricket match between India and Sri Lanka at the M. Chinnaswamy Stadium in Bangalore on March 13 (AFP)



India's Rishabh Pant hits a six during the second day of the second Test cricket match between India and Sri Lanka (AFP)

Carey misses hundred as Australia pile 505/8 in second Test

Karachi, Pakistan - Wicket-keeper Alex Carey hoped cracks on the pitch would help spinners take 20 wickets after Australia piled up 505/8 on the second day of the second Test against Pakistan in Karachi on Sunday.

The left-hander became Pakistan skipper Babar Azam's only second Test wicket as he missed the part-timer's straight delivery and was bowled for 93 with just two overs left before close.

When stumps were drawn, Mitchell Starc was batting on 28 with touring skipper Pat Cummins yet to get off the mark after Usman Khawaja hit a memorable 160 in the country of his birth.

"There are some cracks opening," said Carey. "I still think there's opportunities for us to pick 20 wickets going into tomorrow and day four and five."

On missing a hundred, he said, "I am always disappointed when I get out. It was so close. Unfortunately, it's the way it

goes."

When the wily Pakistan spinner Sajid Khan produced a sharp turning delivery that beat Khawaja's defensive push on the back foot to clip the top of the off stump, Pakistan had thought they would wrap up the Australian innings soon.

But Carey and Starc frustrated the home team during their eighth-wicket stand of 98 as the National Stadium pitch offered slow turn and low bounce.

Carey batted for 187 minutes, hitting seven boundaries and two sixes in his highest Test score, improving upon his previous best of 51 against England at Adelaide in December last year.

Sajid's spin partner Nauman Ali bowled Cameron Green for 28 in the last over before tea but Pakistan's plans to bat today were spoiled by Carey and Starc.

Pakistan took the third new ball after 163 overs with Australia's total at 453.7 but none of



Australia's Alex Carey (C) plays a shot during the second day of the second Test cricket match between Pakistan and Australia at the National Cricket Stadium in Karachi on March 13 (AFP)

the pace bowlers could get the breakthrough.

Ashraf (2-55) and Sajid (2-151) were the main wicket takers

in Pakistan's 180 overs of hard work. This is the first time Australia have batted 180 overs in Asia since their 179.3 overs, scoring 577 against India in the Delhi Test of 2008.

Sajid had given Pakistan a double break in the post-lunch

SCOREBOARD	
AUSTRALIA 1 st INNINGS	
D Warner	c M Rizwan b F Ashraf36
U Khawaja	b Sajid Khan 160
M Labuschagne	run out (Sajid Khan) 0
S Smith	c F Ashraf b Hasan Ali 72
Nathan Lyon	b Faheem Ashraf 38
Travis Head	lbw b Sajid Khan 23
C Green	b Nauman Ali 28
Alex Carey	b Babar Azam 93
M Starc	not out 28
P Cummins	not out 0
Extras:	(b 10, lb 5, nb 7, w 5) 27
TOTAL:	(180 Ov, RR: 2.80) 505/8
Fall of wickets:	1-82, 2-91, 3-250, 4-304, 5-347, 6-360, 7-405, 8-503
Bowling:	S S Afridi 30-8-85-0, H Ali 24-7-67-1, F Ashraf 21-4-55-2, S Khan54-10-151-2, N Ali 45-6-115-1, B Azam4-0-7-1, A Ali 2-0-10-0

session with the wickets of a stubborn Khawaja and Travis Head for eight. Until then, Khawaja had defied Pakistan's attack for nine hours and 12 minutes in an anchoring role since Australia won the toss and opted to bat on Saturday.

The left-hander from Queensland smashed 15 boundaries and

a six in his third 150-plus masterly knock.

Sajid had earlier dismissed Head, leg-before wicket off a sharp delivery, while night-watchman Nathan Lyon was bowled by Ashraf in the first session for 38.

It was a dull morning session as Australia added 81 after re-summing on 251-3 as the pitch held its flat nature.

Khawaja added 54 for the fourth wicket with Lyon to frustrate the Pakistan bowlers who were looking for early wickets to halt Australia's progress.

Ashraf could have dismissed Lyon on 31 but failed to hold on to a return catch to his left.

Lyon capitalised on the reprieve with a sweetly-timed boundary but Ashraf had the last laugh three overs later, with a delivery that clattered into the stumps after brushing the Australian's pads.

AFP



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Nadal escapes, Medvedev cruises, Osaka exits Indian Wells in tears

Indian Wells, United States - Rafael Nadal pulled off another great escape Saturday, rallying from two breaks down in the third set to beat young American Sebastian Korda in the second round at Indian Wells.

As Daniil Medvedev - the man Nadal beat with an epic comeback in the Australian Open final - cruised to victory in his first match as the world's top-ranked player, Nadal was made to work by 21-year-old Korda, ranked 38th in the world.

"I feel very, very lucky today to be through," Nadal said after a 6-2, 1-6, 7-6 (7/3) victory in the prestigious WTA and ATP Masters hard court tournament.

"Sebastian was playing some fantastic tennis. I didn't play my best match without a doubt (but) a lot of credit to him that he played so aggressive and he put me in a lot of trouble."

The night ended with four-time Grand Slam champion Naomi Osaka departing Stadium Court in tears after she was heckled early in a 6-0, 6-4 second-round loss to Veronika Kudermetova.

Osaka, who put athlete mental health in the spotlight during a tumultuous 2021, said it wasn't so much the "Naomi, you suck" shout from the crowd but the fact that it reminded her of how Venus and Serena Williams were jeered at the same tournament in 2001.

"To be honest I feel like I've been heckled before, it didn't really bother me," she told the crowd after the match.

"But, like, I've watched a video of Venus and Serena being heck-



Rafael Nadal of Spain in action against Sebastian Korda of the United States in their second round match in Indian Wells, California (AFP)

led here. If you've never watched it you should watch it," Osaka added, choking back tears.

"I don't know why, but it went into my head and it got replayed a lot."

Osaka asked the chair umpire to intervene after the incident, to no avail, and at 0-3 down the former world number one's emotions briefly spilled over.

She pulled herself together and even though she raised her

game in the second set she couldn't find a way past Kudermetova.

A great feeling

Medvedev had opened the action on Stadium Court and after saving a break point in the opening game had little trouble with 21-year-old Czech qualifier Tomas Machac, ranked 158th in the world.

The US Open champion



Daniil Medvedev of Russia reacts to a point against Tomas Machac of Czech Republic during the BNP Paribas Open at Indian Wells Tennis Garden on March 12 (AFP)



Naomi Osaka in tears after her loss to Veronika Kudermetova (AFP)

beat Serbian Filip Krajinovic 6-3, 6-4.

Nadal, who won a record 21st Grand Slam at the Australian Open in January, improved his perfect season's start to 16 straight victories with a gritty display that owed more to experience.

Korda led the third set 5-2 and twice served for the match. But he couldn't conjure a match point as Nadal reeled off four games in a row.

"I think it's true that probably he got a little bit more nervous," said Nadal, who next plays Britain's Dan Evans, a 6-2, 6-0 winner over Argentina's Federico Coria.

Tsitsipas pushed to the limit

Nadal was joined in the third round by rising young compatriot Carlos Alcaraz, who beat American Mackenzie McDonald 6-3, 6-3.

The 18-year-old Alcaraz, coming off a title at the Rio Open, converted five of his nine break-point chances and rallied from a break down in the second set.

Fifth-seeded Stefanos Tsitsipas was pushed to the limit by Jack Sock, overcoming 28 forehand winners by the American in a 7-6 (7/5), 3-6, 7-6 (7/5) victory. Defending men's and women's champions Cameron Norrie and Paula Badosa both advanced.

Britain's Norrie, seeded 12th, defeated Pedro Martinez 6-3, 6-3 to earn a rematch of last year's final against Georgia's Nikoloz Basilashvili.

AFP

Oman National Teams to compete in GCC Golf Championships

Muscat - Oman's Men and Under 18 National Amateur Teams are in the United Arab Emirates to play in the GCC Golf Championships, which starts on March 14-17.

The 2022 event, hosted by the UAE General Authority of Sports and the Emirates Golf Federation, marks the 24th GCC Golf Championships for men and the 13th edition for the Under 18's.

Men will be playing four rounds and the Under 18's playing three. Players from Oman, Bahrain, Kuwait, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, and the hosts UAE are competing for both team and individual medals.

The Omani delegation, headed by Oman Golf Association Board Member Ghalib al-Busaidi, includes National Team Coach Peter Bailey, Men's players Azaan al Rumhy, Badr al Amri, Mohammed al Busaidi and Fahad al Kitani and Under 18 players Mohamed al Naamani, Al Munthir al Hinai, and Ayman



Oman's team ready for the game in UAE

al Busaidi.

Mundhir al Barwani, Chairman of the Oman Golf Association said, "We are extremely grateful for the support that has been extended to us by Mohsin Haider Darwish ITICS and in particular to Hon Lujaina Mohsin Haider Darwish. This generous support will allow our Men's and Under 18's National Teams to travel and compete in the GCC Golf Championships at Abu

Dhabi Golf Club."

Hon Lujaina, Chairperson, MHD ITICS, stated that MHD ITICS is honoured to be a sponsor to the National Team for the GCC Golf Championship. "As an organisation, we strongly believe that competitive sports are one of the best builders of youth temperament in the country. May these talented individuals succeed and bring more glory to our beloved homeland," she said.

Amri targeting podium finish in Kuwait International Rally

Muscat - Omani rally driver Zakaria al Amri, along with his navigator Mohamed al Amri, is looking forward to be in action at the Kuwait International Rally, the third round of FIA Middle East Rally Championship (MERC), and top his group N.

He will be looking to make early gains at the three-day rally that starts on March 17 in Subaru Impreza (N14). Amri currently stands in the second position of group N ranking in the championship after finishing Qatar International Rally second behind the Kuwaiti driver Meshari Althefairi.

'As Althefairi jumped to R5 in Kuwait International Rally, this time behind the seat of Skoda Fabia, Amri has the chance to climb up to lead the group if he finishes the rally on top,' stated a press release.

The rally, which will resume after three years of stoppage



Rally driver Zakaria al Amri

due to the pandemic and 2019 event due to cancellation, will consist of 10 special stages, two of them in desert area.

Omani driver Abdullah al Rawahi, who is standing in the second place overall in MERC behind the Qatari Nasser al Attyah, will try to continue his excellent performance and to be at top in this rally also.

Amri is supported by Oman United Insurance and AlFayha Real Estate Development, has stated that he is working with his team to be ready and prepare the car for Kuwait rally.

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Race Walking in Muscat a big hit

Oman has shown it is a highly capable host for a variety of sporting events, says CEO of Oman Sail

Muscat - Over the weekend of March 4-5, over 361 athletes from 46 countries took to the landscaped gardens of the Oman Convention & Exhibition Centre for the first ever World Athletics Race Walking Team Championships held in Oman.

Organised jointly by the Oman Athletics Association, Oman Sail and host venue OCEC, the event will go down in Oman's sporting history as one of the most successful events to ever take place in the country.

Planned and delivered at short notice due to the impact of COVID-19 elsewhere, the Organising Committee proved their capability and the country's readiness to host major world sporting events and liaise with global governing bodies in order to coordinate everything required for a successful event. The potential for Oman to compete on the global stage for international events was evident with every detail considered and praise from all corners, including Lord Sebastian Coe, President of World Athletics.

Lord Coe said, "As President of world athletics, I know I speak on behalf of everybody in the World Athletics family when I say how delighted we are to be here in Oman for our World Race Walk Team Championships. These championships were delivered at very short notice and I know that my whole team here are incredibly grateful for the immense work that has been achieved in such a short space of time, both from the OCEC and



Over 361 athletes from 46 countries took to the Oman Convention & Exhibition Centre for the first ever World Athletics Race Walking Team Championships held in Oman on March 4 and 5



supported by the great team at Oman Sail."

He added, "Bringing our world championships into new territories is really important for us, we are delighted to be here, we want this to be a bridgehead for further events, particularly in track and field. We're delighted that you have chosen us as one of the sports that you want to focus on in the Oman Sports Strategy to 2024 and that is something we cherish."

Dr Khamis al Jabri, CEO of Oman Sail, said, "It was a great honour for Oman and the city of Muscat to step in to ensure the dreams of so many athletes from around the world could be fulfilled. We appreciate the trust placed in us by World Athletics and the competitors, and hope that the experience of hosting this event will be the gateway to more high-profile events visiting our country. The team at Oman Sail, OCEC and our partners have

This event was delivered at a short notice. I know that my whole team are incredibly grateful for the immense work that has been achieved in such a short space of time

LORD SEBASTIAN COE

proven themselves as highly capable hosts and Oman itself as an attractive venue for a wide variety of events. We anticipate a

bright future for sport in the Sultanate."

Sheikh Salim Al Amri, President of the Oman Athletics As-

sociation, said, "Oman has a lot of potential to grow into a world-class host of sporting events, especially in athletics. We are blessed with perfect conditions during the winter months when many parts of the world are not conducive to outdoor events. It is a proud moment for the Oman Athletics Association to join with Oman Sail and OCEC to deliver such a national success. We are equally as proud to have formed a national team for what is a new

athletics discipline within the country. Our hope is that this event, and the events that are sure to follow, serve as inspiration for generations of Omani athletes to compete at the highest level."

The event also provided a huge boost to the national economy, particularly in hotel occupancy, inbound arrivals and the hospitality sector, proving the impact that hosting major events can have on all sectors.

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