

► NEWS BRIEF

ODB APPROVES 10
LOANS WORTH OVER
RO23MN

Muscat - Oman Development Bank (ODB) has approved ten development loans to the tune of RO23.18mn, among them three worth around RO13.88mn.

The loans cover projects in various sectors, including industry, tourism, health and entertainment.

The projects are expected to generate more than 700 new employment opportunities, with an Omanisation rate of up to 40 per cent.

The loans were approved during the fourth meeting of ODB's Board of Directors for 2023, held on Monday. The meeting was chaired by Mohammed Abu Bakr al Ghassani, Chairman of ODB Board of Directors.



Kerala: 22 killed after tourist boat capsizes in Malappuram

All tourists with licence allowed to drive: ROP

Our Correspondent
Muscat

All foreign visitors and tourists, who hold valid licences issued by their country, are allowed to drive in Oman, Royal Oman police (ROP) stated on Monday.

An ROP official said, "Foreign visitors and tourists who hold valid international driving licences or licences issued by their countries are allowed to drive in Oman."

The official stressed that any visitor can drive up to three months - from the date of his/her entry into the sultanate - with a foreign licence.

Muscat Daily spoke to a few owners of car rental companies to find out about their opinion on the decision.

Ahmed al Kalbani, from Malik al Nabhani Car Rental in Al Kho-ud, said, "The decision is good because it will revive tourism and the car rental market in Oman. But we prefer to rent our cars to those who hold an international licence to ensure the safety of our cars from accidents."

Nasser al Rahbi, owner of Sa-fari Car Rental in Muscat, believes the decision will help revitalise the car rental market, especially after the lull due to the COVID-19 pandemic. "This deci-



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AHMED AL KALBANI

sion is set to revive tourism, especially since the number of tourists coming to Oman is increasing now after the pandemic."

Driving instructor Nasser al Hosani said the roads of the sultanate are safe and world-class, allowing anyone to adjust to the conditions easily. "I feel the deci-

sion will support the tourism sector in particular, boost the economy and allow tourists to move easily around the sultanate."

In 2021, ROP issued a decision allowing nationals of 103 countries to visit Oman visa-free for 14 days, a major catalyst in promoting tourism in Oman.

The visa exemption is subject to certain requirements, including a prior and confirmed hotel booking, health insurance and a return ticket.



Iran army chief in Oman to promote regional security

Muscat - H H Sayyid Shihab bin Tarik al Said, Deputy Prime Minister for Defence Affairs, received in his office at Al Murtafaa Garrison on Monday Maj Gen Mohammad Hossein Bagheri, Chief of Staff of the Armed Forces of the Islamic Republic of Iran.

The two sides reviewed bilateral relations and exchanged views on several matters of common interest.

The meeting was attended by Vice-Admiral Abdullah Khamis al Raisi, Chief of Staff of Sultan's Armed Forces (SAF), the Iranian Ambassador to Oman and the Military Attaché at the Iranian Embassy in Muscat.

Maj Gen Bagheri and his military delegation arrived in the country on Sunday evening on an official visit lasting several days. Upon his arrival at Seeb Air

Base, the Iranian general was received by Vice-Admiral Raisi. Iran's Tasnim News Agency reported that Maj Gen Bagheri's visit will focus on promoting peace, cooperation and security in the region.

Speaking to reporters upon his arrival in Oman, the Iranian general said an opportunity has come for expansion of cooperation between the Iranian and Omani armed forces.

The main topic during talks with Omani authorities will be regional issues and ways to promote peace, cooperation and security across the region, he stated.

"This visit will definitely have significant effect on the enhancement of cooperation and advancement of peace and friendship in the region."

Drugs worth \$30mn seized in Sea of Oman

Manama, Bahrain - A US Coast Guard ship seized more than US\$30mn of heroin and methamphetamine from a fishing vessel transiting the Sea of Oman on Monday.

Operating in support of Combined Task Force (CTF) 150, USCGC Glen Harris seized 580kg of methamphetamine and 35kg of heroin from a vessel transiting international waters. CTF 150 is one of four task forces that form the world's largest multinational naval partnership, Combined Maritime Forces.

Naval forces supporting CTF 150 have seized illegal drugs worth a combined estimated US street value of nearly US\$200mn in 2023. On April 21, US Navy guided-missile destroyer USS Paul Hamilton caught a fishing vessel attempting to smuggle US\$42mn in illegal drugs while

transiting the Sea of Oman. The fishing vessel was smuggling 802kg of methamphetamine and 1,000kg of hashish.

Glen Harris arrived in the Middle East last year and operates from the US Navy base in Bahrain where CMF is headquartered.

The ship is part of a contingent of US Coast Guard ships forward-deployed to the region under Patrol Forces Southwest Asia (PATFORSWA), which deploys Coast Guard personnel and ships alongside US and regional naval forces throughout the Middle East.

"The dedication and expertise of Glen Harris's leadership and crew embody our commitment to interdict and remove illicit narcotics from the sea, denying malign actors the ability to destabilise the region," said Capt Eric Helgen, PATFORSWA's commander.

US officials praise Oman's efforts in human rights

Our Correspondent
Muscat

Several human rights officials of the United States of America have appreciated the efforts of the sultanate in the field of human rights.

This came during a meeting of a delegation of Oman Human Rights Commission (OHRC) with a number of US State Department and House of Representatives officials in Washington, DC.

The delegation, headed by Sheikh Abdullah bin Shuwain al Hosni, Chairman of OHRC, held separate meetings with Ambassador Cindy Dyer, Director of Office to Monitor and Combat Trafficking in the US State Department; Scott Turner, Deputy Assistant Secretary for the Bureau of Population, Migration and Refugees; Rashad Hussain, Head of the Office of International Re-



ligious Freedom; Christopher Le Mon, Deputy Assistant Secretary in the Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights and Labour; Daniel Benaim, Deputy Assistant Secretary of State for Arabian Peninsula Affairs; and Thea Lee, Deputy Undersecretary for Labour Affairs.

The delegation discussed an annual report issued by the US State Department on human rights and freedom in the world.

It highlighted mechanisms and

steps taken by OHRC in response to these reports after coordinating with the authorities concerned in the sultanate.

The delegation also explained the steps of the Omani government currently being taken to update legislation and laws related to human rights.

The delegation visited US research centres and civil society organisations, and held an open meeting with the president and members of the Middle East Pol-

icy Center.

It presented a report on all work mechanisms and responsibilities shouldered by Oman to protect and preserve human rights, the role of the commission in monitoring reports related to human rights, and its contribution to finding appropriate solutions and settling these in cooperation with the competent authorities and concerned institutions. Additionally, it provides legal advice on human rights to individuals

who communicate with OHRC through various means of communication.

The delegation informed that OHRC conducts field visits in various wilayats and governorates, including the Central Prison, detention centres, workplaces, workers' residences and in response to reports by individuals.

Hosni stressed the importance of strengthening efforts related to the protection of human rights, especially those concerning women, children, the disabled and the elderly, in addition to combating human trafficking and protecting the rights of workers, immigrants and refugees.

"All these foundations of human rights can only be achieved through more guarantees of security and peace, justice and equality, freedom of expression, and combating human trafficking," Hosni said.

BRITAIN HOLDS BIG HELP OUT TO CONCLUDE CORONATION FESTIVITIES



Britain's Prime Minister Rishi Sunak (C) chats with people as he and his wife Akshata Murty (not seen) take part in the Big Help Out, during a visit to a lunch club at Mill End Community Centre in Rickmansworth, northwest of London on Monday, where the couple helped to serve food and drinks. People across Britain were on Monday asked to do their duty as the celebrations for King Charles III's coronation drew to a close with a massive volunteering drive (AFP)

See also Page 10

GCC committee reviews economic unity by 2025

Muscat - The committee of undersecretaries of the ministries of finance in GCC states held its 68th preparatory meeting for the 119th meeting of the Financial and Economic Cooperation Committee in Muscat on Monday.

The meeting was chaired by H E Abdullah Salim al Harthy, Undersecretary of the Ministry of Finance.

H E Harthy said that the meeting aimed at consolidating financial and economic cooperation and integration among GCC countries.

The meeting also reviewed the development of a programme designed to achieve economic unity among GCC states by 2025.



The meeting discussed various topics, including recommendations submitted by several GCC panels. These included the Committee of Central Banks' Governors, the Committee of Heads and Directors of Tax Departments, the Customs Union Authority and the Gulf Common Market Committee.

ONA

Experts warn AI threatens privacy and data breach, not just job loss

Our Correspondent
Muscat

The threat to mankind from artificial intelligence (AI) has become a much-discussed topic. Besides the widely perceived threat to jobs and decadence in original content, another intimidating factor is that of compromise of privacy.

IT expert Tariq Hilal al Barwani describes the situation akin to re-creating a real *Terminator* from the reel *Terminator*. “The time is not far when man will indeed be fighting back machines - and AI - in a cruel battle. Artificial intelligence will be impacting our daily lives in unprecedented ways.”

Barwani warns that the increased threat to privacy will be evident to all soon. As AI collects and stores vast amounts of personal information, there is risk of cybercriminals accessing this information and using it for malicious purposes.

“Additionally, there is risk of government surveillance, as AI can monitor and track individuals with excellent accuracy.”

Explaining the process, Barwani said that AI websites collect



large amounts of data available on the Internet and provide it to those seeking it. “A lot of personal information is stored in the cloud. In sheer innocence, we have provided our phone numbers, address, DOB and other critical information, which are used now in a manner of theft.

Cybercriminals can use this information for identity theft, financial fraud and even blackmail. With AI, attacks have the potential of becoming much more sophisticated,” he said.

ChatGPT has opened the door to multiple AI options - Midjourney, DALLE2, Bard, Bing AI and

the much talked about Adobe Firefly. Hundreds of new AI software are being launched in the market every other day. Ramesh Babu, another IT expert working with malware, digital currency and CCTV, said, “AI-based surveillance systems are becoming increasingly popular. These sys-

tems use facial recognition technology and other AI tools to track individuals’ movements, activities and even thoughts.”

It is these monitoring capabilities of AI that raise concerns about the loss of individual freedom and privacy.

For Muscat-based filmmaker Mohammd Khalfan, the biggest threat to image generation comes from deep fake. “One can easily create an image of a person fighting some war and frame him. Though such AI needs expertise, we must remember that current developments are in beta stage.”

Khalfan describes the latest advancements in AI as “bliss and curse to all”.

“It will surely take away jobs for the inefficient and lazy, but for others, it will be very helpful - like an excellent assistant to hard-working people. For the latter, it will be more of a tool, like a camera or filter, to make the output much better.”

One advice common to all from experts in the field is the need to limit providing personal information and pictures on the Internet. It’s the only safeguard as of now.



MAFWR uses drones to combat coconut leaf beetle in Dhofar

Our Correspondent
Muscat

The Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Water Resources (MAFWR) launched a month-long programme to combat an infestation of coconut leaf beetles (*Brontispa longissima*) in Dhofar region on Monday.

The Directorate General of Agriculture, Fisheries and Water Resources in Dhofar launched the programme after emergence of several sites of infestation. ‘The campaign will continue till June 15,’ the ministry stated.

The coconut leaf beetle attacks palms of all ages, but tender ones are more susceptible because the leaves of

mature and old palms are firm and less suitable for the beetle to breed in.

Rashid Said al Ghafri, Director General of Agriculture, Fisheries and Water Resources in Dhofar, “Twelve fieldwork teams have been formed, equipped with all that is necessary to carry out ground and air spraying using drones to combat the bug.”

Inspection teams also determined sites of infestation of white flies - a tiny, sap-sucking insect that may become abundant in vegetable and ornamental plants, especially during warm weather - in the wilayats of Salalah and Taqah with the aim of determining an appropriate pest control method.



EA installs tracking device on endangered vulture species

Our Correspondent
Muscat

To study the Lappet-faced vulture and its habitat in the sultanate, Environment Authority (EA) has installed a tracking device on a specimen of the species in Buraimi.

Lappet-faced vultures (*Torgos tracheliotos*) are the largest bre-



eding birds in Oman (wingspan 2.8m, weight 6-8kg), and are globally endangered.

A statement issued by EA said, ‘The Office for Conservation of Environment succeeded in installing the first tracking device on a Lappet-faced vulture in Buraimi. The device is powered by solar energy and fitted on the back of the bird. The tracker is linked to an

electronic programme to send periodic data and indicators to measure its temperature, activities and determine its location.’

The vulture is endemic in some governorates of Oman, including Buraimi, owing to a suitable environment for nesting and reproduction, EA stated.

In 2021, Anglo-Omani Soci-

ety provided funding to Faisal al Lamki to study the vulture’s status and ecology. Environment Society of Oman (ESO) also won a grant from Disney Conservation Fund to carry out similar work that year.

Since 2021, a field team has identified close to 100 nesting sites. In 2021-22, 25 of these nesting sites were productive, yielding at least one egg.

Floward wins SPIA 2023 Award



Floward, the go-to online flowers and gifts delivery destination in MENA and UK, won a silver Sports Industry Award (SPIA) under the category ‘Best Sponsorship Collaboration’ for its sponsorship of Al Hilal Club.

Held on May 3rd, the award ceremony, organised by Sports360X, at Atlantis Resorts in Dubai, was attended by various Floward team members, including Chief Growth Officer, Mr Mohamed Al Arifi who also accepted the award.

This innovative sponsorship collaboration between Floward and Al Hilal showcases the perfect fusion of sports and e-commerce, resulting in a significant increase in brand engagement, awareness, and customer loyalty, granting the flowers and gifting company the award. The nominees of this award had to be sponsors that clearly demonstrated a positive business outcome such as enhanced brand awareness, wider client base, and consumer loyalty through sport sponsorship.

The partnership introduced ground-breaking activations, such as the direct gifting campaign and player-designed boutiques, fostering an exclusive connection between fans, players, and the club. Through the direct gift-

ing campaign, Floward featured Al Hilal players on its website and app, and fans were given the unprecedented opportunity to send personalised gifts to their favourite players, fostering a sense of intimacy and loyalty. As for the player-designed boutique, Al Hilal players were able to create flowers and gifts arrangements reflecting their own distinct personality and taste. These exclusive collections resonated deeply with fans.

Integrating Floward into the sports industry, and Al Hilal into e-commerce, this collaboration forged a mutually beneficial relationship for both, Floward and Al Hilal Club. It allowed Floward to meet its objectives of tapping into the male audience segment by partnering with one of the biggest football clubs in Asia.

Mr Arifi said, “We are honoured to be receiving this highly valuable award for our sponsorship of Al Hilal, the biggest football club in Saudi Arabia, and we are very proud of all the achievements we garnered through this collaboration. Our goal was to gain the interest of the male audience and boost our brand engagement and awareness, which we were able to fulfill within our first year itself.”

Revenues of star hotels up 50% to RO73mn

Muscat - Revenues of 3- to 5-star hotels increased 50 per cent to RO73.4mn till the end of March this year, compared to RO48.9mn in the same period of 2022.

According to the latest figures of the National Centre for Statistics and Information (NCSI), the number of guests in star hotels registered an increase of 25.6 per cent to 522,753 till March 2023, compared to 416,287 in March 2022, while occupancy rate was 56.4 per cent.

Based on the data, in terms of number of guests, Omanis topped the list with 181,369, down 1.5 per cent from 184,060. Guests from Oceania recorded the highest growth, while Europeans were the highest number among nationalities that visited the s-



tanate till the end of March 2023.

The NCSI data shows that the number of visitors from Europe during this period witnessed a growth of 41.8 per cent - from 119,432 at the end of March 2022 - to 169,334 till the end of March 2023, followed by Asian guests

whose number grew by 53.4 per cent from 42,157 to 64,686.

The number of guests from Oceanian countries was 12,558, registering an increase of 210.2 per cent compared to the same period in 2022, while the number of guests from GCC and other

Omanis topped the list with 181,369, down 1.5% from 184,060. Guests from Oceania recorded the highest growth, while Europeans were the highest number

Arab countries was 33,021 and 21,639 respectively, up 30.9 per cent and 38.1 per cent respectively.

The star hotels welcomed 17,053 American guests, up 6.4 per cent compared to the same period in 2022.

INVITATION TO TENDER

Sohar Aluminium LLC (SA), PO Box 80, PC- 327, Sohar, Sultanate of Oman hereby invites qualified Suppliers/Contractors for the following tender:

Tender No.	: RFP 2023-ENG-SOW-0005
Tender Title	: New belt conveyor to proposed SPL crusher
Scope	: Sohar Aluminium Co. LLC (SA) manufactures and produces liquid and solid metals and requires service providers in its reduction department for new belt conveyor to connect proposed cone crusher to SPL. SA is undertaking project for a new crusher which can reduce the materials size from 200 mm to 25 mm. Design, supply, delivery, commissioning of one belt conveyor with a design capacity of 100 ton/hr and of minimum belt width 1000 mm. The belt should connect the outlet of proposed new crusher to the existing feeder of SPL. The Contractor who will be identified for this work shall be able to provide a comprehensive design, supply, delivery, commissioning of belt conveyor that meets the requirements.
Document Issue Date	: 23 May 2023
Last Date For Applying	: 21 May 2023

Kindly send your email and company profile to: tender@sohar-aluminium.com
For list of active tenders visit: <https://www.sohar-aluminium.com/en/content/tender-listing>

NCSI discusses development of childhood data with Unicef

Muscat - Dr Khalifa Abdullah al Barwani, CEO of National Centre for Statistics and Information (NCSI), received in his office Adele Khodr, Unicef Regional Director for the Middle East and North Africa, on Monday.

The meeting reviewed areas of cooperation between the two sides on childhood data development. They also explored ways of enhancing cooperation in various fields.

Higher Education Law sets high standards: Minister

Muscat – The Higher Education Law, which was promulgated by a Royal Decree on Thursday, constitutes one of the most important mechanisms and tools to regulate higher education in Oman.

This was stated by H E Dr Rahma Ibrahim al Mahrouqi, Minister of Higher Education, Research and Innovation, while affirming that the law applies to all academic, vocational, technical and professional fields in line with the National Qualifications Framework.

"The Higher Education Law corresponds to the future goals of Oman Vision 2040 and supports its implementation. It figures high among the top priorities of Oman Vision 2040, which views education, research and development of national



The Higher Education Law corresponds to the future goals of Oman Vision 2040 and supports its implementation

H E DR RAHMA IBRAHIM AL MAHROUQI

competencies as pillars for the development of individuals and the society at large," she said.

"This approach is undertaken within a strategic plan designed to implement a comprehensive

and sustainable system of education, learning and research that leads to the realisation of a knowledge-based society."

H E Dr Rahma pointed out that the law deals with all the regulations and functions of higher education institutions in terms of establishment, specialisations, programmes, quality, scholarships and other mechanisms aimed at consolidating the higher education system in Oman.

The minister explained that the law was drafted after consulting laws and regulations in Oman, as well as models of such statutes applied in other countries. "When the law was being drafted, emphasis was laid on its sustainability and its ability to accommodate all related provisions cited in executive and organisational regulations/bylaws."

Indian schools across Muscat enrol 4,677 pupils for 2023-24

Our Correspondent
Muscat

The Indian School Board has announced enrolment of 4,677 children in all schools across Muscat for the 2023-24 academic year.

"All those who applied for admission to Indian schools in the capital till date have been allotted seats," the board stated.

"The centralised admission system with online registration introduced by the board facilitated the entire admission process, making it convenient for parents and schools to take care of the rush for admissions," said Dr Sivakumar Manickam, chairman of the Board of Directors, Indian Schools in Oman.

"The board is committed to ensuring that no child would be deprived of admission in our schools," he added.

The online registration for ad-



missions in Indian Schools in the capital area is still open for new applicants.

For admissions in the international wing of Indian School Al Wadi Al Kabir and Indian School Al Ghubra, parents can approach these schools directly, the board informed through a statement.

Admissions for children with special needs are open at Care and Special Education (CSE) located on the Indian School Muscat premises.

Parents can approach the CSE administration directly for admission (www.cseoman.com), the release added.

22 countries take part in Muscat health meeting

Our Correspondent
Muscat

The Quadripartite Regional Meeting to accelerate the implementation of 'One Health' in the Eastern Mediterranean Region kicked off on Monday in Muscat under the patronage of H E Dr Said bin Harib al Lamki, Undersecretary for Health Affairs at the Ministry of Health.

Oman, represented by the Ministry of Health, is hosting the four-day regional meeting in cooperation with the Regional Office of the World Health Organization (WHO) for the

Eastern Mediterranean and the WHO European Region.

H E Lamki pointed out that the 'One Health' approach aims to sustainably balance and optimise the health of humans, animals, plants, and the general ecosystem. It recognises the health of humans, domestic and wild animals, plants, and the wider environment as closely linked and interdependent, he added.

Senior management and decision makers from key representatives from 22 countries of the region are participating in the meeting to exchange experience and fulfill targeted objectives.

Key areas addressed by 'One Health' include control of emerging and re-emerging zoonotic diseases; control of endemic zoonotic, neglected tropical and vector-borne diseases; strengthening food safety; curbing antimicrobial resistance; and integrating environment progressively into the 'One Health' agenda.

"The 'One Health' approach could only be achieved through close cooperation among various sectors such as the human health sector, animal health sector, vectors, food safety sector, environment sector, and munic-

ipality sector by developing joint plans to avoid transmission of infectious diseases and control them, unifying the health education and activities focusing on the role of social media, preparing studies and research on common infectious diseases and health events, and organising conferences and workshops on 'One Health'," H E Lamki added.

The meeting aims to update the countries on global and regional progress in the area of 'One Health' and share experience and best practices for implementation of 'One Health' in these countries in the region.

RNO begins joint naval exercise off Oman coast

Our Correspondent
Muscat

The Royal Navy of Oman (RNO) began the joint annual naval drill 'Sharp Dagger' on Monday along the Batinah coastal area in the country's north.

The drill will continue till May 11.

A number of vessels of the naval forces of friendly countries participated in the drill on the first day with the support aircraft of the Royal Air Force of Oman.

The exercise comes within the annual training plans and policies of the Royal Navy of Oman.

The vessels participating in the exercise sailed from Said bin Sultan Naval Base towards the marine operations site set for the drill.



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CONDENSED INTERIM STATEMENT OF FINANCIAL POSITION AS AT 31 MARCH 2023					
	Unaudited 31-Mar-23 RO'000	Audited 31-Dec-22 RO'000	Unaudited 31-Mar-23 RO'000	Audited 31-Dec-22 RO'000	
Cash and balances with central bank	154,012	99,913	79,179	31,034	
Due from banks	58,344	53,671	62,230	48,161	
Loans, advances and financing to customers	3,180,847	2,067,053	2,290,398	2,164,984	
Investment securities	334,741	339,596	270,981	268,428	
Investment in subsidiary	-	-	8,714	10,744	
Property and equipment	38,700	38,496	38,029	35,859	
Intangible assets	6,022	6,900	-	-	
Other assets	92,889	84,031	60,440	55,454	
Total assets	3,864,935	2,668,030	2,866,447	2,710,862	
Due to banks	83,767	94,941	64,319	59,921	
Customer deposits	2,142,328	2,992,180	2,215,918	2,089,284	
Other liabilities	129,554	94,495	91,995	71,194	
Taxation	4,073	3,423	4,073	3,423	
Total liabilities	2,360,122	3,084,639	2,376,329	2,223,828	
Share capital	166,941	165,941	166,941	165,941	
Share premium	36,595	36,595	36,595	36,595	
Legal reserve	48,570	48,570	47,808	47,506	
General reserve	20,560	20,560	20,560	20,560	
Special reserve	3,837	3,837	3,837	3,837	
Fair value reserve	(2,449)	(3,161)	52,481	(3,169)	
Impairment reserve	9,130	9,130	9,130	9,130	
Retained earnings	78,070	71,330	68,957	62,719	
Shareholders' equity	369,032	358,798	352,615	348,148	
Perpetual Tier 1 capital bonds	158,033	158,033	158,033	158,033	
Total equity	527,065	516,831	510,648	506,181	
Total equity and liabilities	3,864,935	2,668,030	2,866,447	2,710,862	
Net assets value per share (RO)	0.219	0.215	0.212	0.209	
Contingent liabilities and commitments	443,279	593,241	320,634	272,193	

CONDENSED INTERIM STATEMENT OF COMPREHENSIVE INCOME FOR THE PERIOD ENDED 31 MARCH 2023					
	Unaudited 31-Mar-23 RO'000	Unaudited 31-Mar-2022 RO'000	Unaudited 31-Mar-23 RO'000	Unaudited 31-Mar-2022 RO'000	
Interest income	33,494	30,257	33,544	30,257	
Interest expense	(16,320)	(12,436)	(16,324)	(12,436)	
Net interest income	17,174	17,821	17,220	17,821	
Net income from Islamic financing	6,487	6,202	-	-	
Net fee and commission income	4,581	4,273	3,477	3,504	
Net income from investment securities	39	143	32	143	
Other operating income	864	1,169	716	1,074	
Total income	29,106	29,568	21,435	22,542	
Operating expenses	(19,879)	(18,313)	(13,774)	(13,521)	
Net allowances for credit losses	(4,718)	(7,234)	(3,664)	(6,467)	
Profit before tax	4,509	4,021	4,007	2,559	
Income tax expense	(1,078)	(643)	(769)	(416)	
Net Profit for the period	3,431	3,378	3,238	2,143	
Other comprehensive income / (loss)					
Items that will not be reclassified to profit or loss in the subsequent periods					
- Equity investment at FVOCI - net changes in fair value	45	(21)	45	(21)	
Items that are or may be reclassified to profit or loss in the subsequent periods					
- Debt investment at FVOCI - net changes in fair value	674	(1,206)	584	(1,203)	
Other comprehensive income / (loss) for the period	719	(1,227)	629	(1,224)	
Total comprehensive income / (loss) for the period	4,150	2,151	3,867	939	
Earnings per share:					
Basic and diluted (RO)	0.003	0.002	0.002	0.001	

Rashed Al Zubair
Chairman of Board of Directors

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*Rates as on May 08

Source: xe.com

BRIEFS

World food prices rise in April: UN

Global food prices increased in April for the first time in a year, led by higher prices of sugar, meat and rice, the UN's Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) said.

The FAO Food Price Index, a trade-weighted index that tracks international market prices of five major food commodity groups, averaged 127.2 points, up 0.6 per cent from March but down 19.7 per cent from a year ago.

The sugar price index jumped 17.6 per cent month-on-month, reaching its highest level since October 2011 and the index for meat increased 1.3 per cent. The FAO Cereal Price Index, on the other hand, dipped 1.7 per cent from March. "The increase in rice prices is extremely worrisome and it is essential that the Black Sea initiative is renewed to avoid any other spikes in wheat and maize," said Maximo Torero, the chief economist at FAO.

The vegetable oil price index decreased by 1.3 per cent in the month, seeing its fifth consecutive monthly decline.

Oman data centre market seen growing to \$428mn by 2028

Our Correspondent
Muscat

The size of Oman's data centre market was valued at US\$247mn in 2022 and is expected to reach US\$428mn by 2028, growing at a compound annual growth rate (CAGR) of 9.6 per cent over the next six years, according to a new research report.

The sultanate's data centre market is being driven by a rise in cloud service adoption, significant growth in digitisation, increasing submarine cable connectivity, and the adoption of technologies such as big data, IoT, and artificial intelligence.

The increasing demand for migration to cloud platforms by various sectors is attracting local and global cloud service providers in Oman's data centre market. For instance, global cloud service operators such as AWS, Microsoft, Oracle, and Google have a presence with local operators in Oman, according to the report released by Arizton Advisory and Intelligence, a global cloud and data centre advisory firm.

"The Oman data centre market size will witness investments of US\$428mn by 2028, growing at a CAGR of 9.6 per cent during



Oman's data centre market has the presence of several local and global operators, such as Equinix, Oman Data Park, Ooredoo, Datamount and Cloud Acropolis

Oman's data centre market – which was valued at \$247mn in 2022 – is being driven by a rise in cloud service adoption, significant growth in digitisation, increasing submarine cable connectivity, and the adoption of technologies such as AI, big data and IoT

the forecast period. Oman is among the major digital hubs, driven by government digitisation initiatives, cloud-based serv-

ices, the adoption of advanced technologies such as big data IoT and AI, and robust submarine cable connectivity,' Arizton said. According to the report, Oman's on-premises data centre is increasing, and government entities are migrating their workloads to third-party colocation data centres.

Arizton identified seven existing data centres and five upcoming data centres in Oman. The Oman data centre market has the presence of several local and

global operators, such as Equinix, Ooredoo, Datamount, Cloud Acropolis, and Oman Data Park. 'The prominent growth potential of the industry has also attracted several new entrants; for instance, Gulf Data Hub is expanding its footprint across the Middle Eastern region, where the company also has two pipeline projects in Oman,' Arizton said. It noted that Muscat is the primary location for developing data centre facilities in the country. 'In 2022, other cities such as Barka, Salalah, and Sohar have also witnessed three data centre

investments from Ooredoo. Additionally, Equinix partnered with Omantel to invest in a facility in Salalah.'

According to the report, Oman's data centre market has the presence of global and local construction contractors such as DC Pro Engineering, Direct Services, Turner & Townend, AECOM, and Hill International, which are involved in developing data centre facilities in the country.

'Government entities and private and public companies are taking initiatives to educate people and upgrade their data centre skill set in Oman. Microsoft's ecosystem is expected to create over 15,000 jobs across the sultanate by 2024,' Arizton added.

The report cited the Omani government's targets to increase the digital economy's contribution to around 10 per cent of the total GDP and the contribution from information technology to around 35 per cent by 2040.

In December 2022, the Ministry of Transport, Communications and Information Technology (MTCIT) in Oman signed a memorandum of understanding (MoU) with Amazon Web Services (AWS) for the launch of cloud service data centres in the country.

Bank Muscat wins Best Private Bank in Oman Award from EMEA Finance

Muscat – In recognition of its excellence in providing diversified and outstanding solutions for wealth management, Bank Muscat, the leading financial services provider in Oman, was awarded as the Best Private Bank in Oman by EMEA Finance.

EMEA Finance is a well-known publication specialised in reporting financial and banking developments in Europe and the Middle East. The award sheds light on the professional standards achieved by the bank, in accordance with international standards and practices.

In a press release, Bank Muscat said the award is an acknowledgment of the effective role and unique services of the bank that provide enriching solutions in the field of private banking.

Bank Muscat offers a wide range of private banking options, exclusive for high net-worth customers including investment offerings that cover global markets and all asset classes, through a robust execution platform administered by experienced and dedicated relationship man-



agers. The offerings also cover stocks, bonds, exchange-traded funds (ETFs) and mutual funds across global markets.

Abdulnasir al Raisi, general manager – premier banking, Bank Muscat, said, "We are proud for being recognised again as the Best Private Bank in Oman by EMEA Finance. This reflects

expectations and deliver excellence in all aspects. The bank's efforts to maintain high-level standards of professionalism, wealth management and investment solutions have been applauded by pioneer institutions around the world."

Bank Muscat offers private banking customers a complete suite of services including private equity funds, real estate funds, ETFs, offshore banking and portfolio management through reputed global counterparties. Bank Muscat Private Banking also sends regular research reports to its customers as part of new initiatives to improve customer experience.

These reports cover investment ideas, global macroeconomic outlook and updates on key economic and geographic events impacting performance of various asset classes.

The private banking services include conventional accounts, term deposits, currency exchange, domestic and international transfers, online banking and regular asset monitoring.

Oil prices rise on subdued recession fears from US data

Muscat – Oil prices increased on Monday with the release of positive economic indicators from the US, the declining value of the US dollar and a supply cut forecast from OPEC+ countries.

International benchmark Brent crude traded at US\$75.97 per barrel in early morning trade in London, a 0.89 per cent increase from the closing price of US\$75.30 a barrel in the previous trading session.

The US benchmark West Texas Intermediate (WTI) traded at the same time at US\$72.02 per barrel, up 0.95 per cent from the previous session's close of US\$71.34 per barrel.

The US Labor Department's data showed a 53-year low in its unemployment rate on Friday at 3.4 per cent, easing recession concerns.

The US dollar index, which measures the value of the American dollar against a basket of currencies, including the Japanese yen, British pound, Canadian dollar, Swedish krona and Swiss franc, declined 0.13 per cent to 100.865 early Monday.



A weaker dollar makes dollar-indexed crude oil cheaper for buyers using other currencies.

On the supply side, expectations of an agreement by the OPEC+ group on output cuts during its June meeting aided the price rise.

The group is set to meet on June 4. The OPEC+ group, led by Saudi Arabia and Russia, decided to make voluntary cuts of approximately 1.6mn barrels per day as of May, in addition to a production cut of 2mn barrels per day that has been in place since October.

The International Energy Agency (IEA) recently kept its global oil demand forecast unaltered from the previous report, with demand set to rise by 2mn barrels per day (bpd) this year to a record 101.9mn bpd.

Global oil demand returned to growth in the first quarter of 2023, climbing by 810,000 bpd as the Chinese economy emerged from lockdowns, the IEA said in its monthly oil market report.

According to the report, growth will gather momentum over the course of the year, with gains of 2.4mn bpd in the second half of 2023, lifting demand to 103.1mn bpd.

According to the IEA, global oil supply in March fell by 450,000 bpd to 101.21mn bpd.

The daily crude oil production of the OPEC group decreased to 29.09mn bpd in March, a drop of about 140,000 bpd compared to the previous month. Non-OPEC production also saw a decline of around 310,000 bpd to 66.77mn bpd in March.

Agencies

Shell caps blazing profits season for global energy firms

London, UK – Shell unveiled a sharp jump in profits, capping a blockbuster first-quarter earnings season for global energy majors that have shrugged off weaker gas and oil prices.

BP and Shell in Britain, Exxon-Mobil and Chevron in the United States, and TotalEnergies in France have together logged more than US\$40bn in net profits for the three months to March.

"Looks as though earnings have held up much better than expected, largely it seems down to bumper trading revenues and much tighter cost control than in the past," said Finalto analyst Neil Wilson.

At US\$70-80 per barrel, "crude still trades higher than just about any time since 2014 – October 2018 aside – so relatively speaking, pricing is still strong in terms of where it has been in the last decade," he told AFP.

For Shell, profit after tax surged 22 per cent to US\$8.7bn from a year earlier, when it faced a US\$3.9bn charge over its exit from Russia after Moscow invaded Ukraine.

The company benefited from falling costs and a better performance at its chemicals division, as it also unveiled a US\$4bn stock buyback.

The news came after rival BP



announced last Tuesday that it rebounded into net profit of US\$8.2bn in the first quarter, after a record loss a year earlier sparked by its own exit from Russia.

The surging profits prompted outcry from critics as Britons face a cost-of-living crisis, which has topped the agenda for

Thursday's local elections in England.

They have also rekindled calls for more taxation to help offset sky-high household energy bills caused by key producer Russia's war on Ukraine.

The Unite trade union, which campaigns for pay increases that keep pace with rampant UK inflation, slammed the "obscene" profits generated by the industry.

"The scale of profiteering displayed today by Shell and earlier this week BP is one of the corporate scandals of our times," said Unite general secretary Sharon Graham, urging the UK government to expand its windfall tax on energy-sector profits.

Environmentalists meanwhile slammed BP and Shell over the climate impacts of their operations.

"It's time for the oil giants to start feeling the heat," said Greenpeace UK climate advisor Charlie Kronick.

"The UK government should... force Shell and the rest of the industry to start using their obscene profits to pay for the damage that their fossil fuel habit is causing to lives and livelihoods around the world."

France's TotalEnergies saw net profit advance 12 per cent to US\$5.6bn in the first quarter.

US giants benefitted from refining activities and cost-cutting,

with ExxonMobil more than doubling profit to a first-quarter record of US\$11.4bn, while Chevron chalked up US\$6.6bn.

But the earnings came as energy majors have also drawn fire over their plans for transitioning away from hydrocarbons, particularly after BP decided to slow its move toward cleaner energy sources.

That has prompted derision by critics over its longstanding ambition to achieve net zero carbon emissions by 2050.

Analysts warn that the global energy sector now faces a massive struggle to transition to clean energy.

AFP

Yellen warns of 'chaos' if US fails to raise debt ceiling

Washington, US – US Treasury Secretary Janet Yellen has warned that unless Congress acts soon to raise the nation's debt ceiling, "financial and economic chaos would ensue."

Republicans have been pressing President Joe Biden to strike a deal to provide spending cuts in exchange for lifting the national borrowing limit, but Yellen insisted the onus remains on US lawmakers.

"It simply is unacceptable for Congress to threaten economic calamity for American households and the global financial system as the cost of raising the debt ceiling," she told ABC talk show "This Week."

Yellen had warned on Monday that the United States could run out of money to pay its financial obligations as early as June 1.

The ceiling on US public debt is legally fixed and can be raised only by passage of congressional legislation signed into law by the president.

The Republican-led House of Representatives, positioning itself for a showdown with Biden, voted in late April to lift the borrowing limit but only with drastic cuts to rein in what that party sees as excessive spending.

The bill has no chance of being adopted in the Senate, with



US Treasury Secretary Janet Yellen

its Democratic majority.

Biden has so far refused to negotiate, noting that the debt ceiling has routinely been raised scores of times over the years – including under former Republican president Donald Trump.

But Republicans insist Biden's refusal to talk is the principal obstacle.

"The president has refused to negotiate," Senator James Lankford, a Republican on the Senate Appropriations Committee, told

ABC. "That has been the most stunning part about this."

Biden is set to meet on Tuesday with the leaders of both parties in Congress.

"I know he wants to set up a process in which spending priorities and levels are discussed," said Yellen, "but these negotiations should not take place with a gun pointed at the head of the American people."

She sidestepped questions about the possibility Biden might

use a novel interpretation of the US Constitution to simply keep paying the nation's bills, saying that in the absence of congressional action, "there are simply no good options."

The impasse has raised the possibility of the country's first-ever default, with profound implications for the US and global economies.

Analysts say markets would be shaken and interest rates would lastingly rise, causing

households and businesses to pull back on spending.

A default, Biden's economic

It simply is unacceptable for US Congress to threaten economic calamity for American households and the global financial system as the cost of raising the debt ceiling

JANET YELLEN



Recession fears mount as German industrial output falls

Frankfurt, Germany – German industrial production declined more than expected in March due to a heavy fall in car manufacturing, official data showed Monday, deepening fears Europe's top economy faces a sharp downturn.

Output dropped 3.4 per cent on the previous month, seasonally adjusted figures from the federal statistics agency Destatis showed.

It follows two strong months of growth in January and February, and was worse than the one percent decline forecast by analysts surveyed by financial data firm FactSet.

The news comes after data released last week showed a surprise plunge in new orders at German factories, as the country's vast industrial sector is pummelled by high energy prices following Russia's invasion of Ukraine.

While hopes had been growing that Germany could dodge a

downturn, the latest batch of negative data has fuelled fears a recession may be on the cards.

"After production in the industrial sector developed dynamically at the beginning of the year the beginning of the year, there was an unexpectedly sharp decline in March," the economy ministry said in a statement.

The automotive industry was a major contributor to the decline in March, with the manufacture of vehicles and parts falling 6.5 percent.

That compared to a 6.9 per cent increase in February. Germany is home to carmakers including Volkswagen, BMW and Mercedes-Benz, and the auto sector is a pillar of the country's industry.

There were also heavy decreases in the manufacture of machinery and equipment, as well as production in the construction sector.

AFP

Quakes define legacy of Turkey's 'Erdonomics'

Istanbul, Turkey – The earthquake's frightening rumble came deep in the night. Its ferocity killed thousands of people in their sleep and helped bring down a Turkish government.

Fury over the scale of the 1999 disaster fed into broader economic discontent that ultimately propelled Recep Tayyip Erdogan to power.

The Turkish leader now hopes a similar mix of economic despair and anguish over an even deadlier pre-dawn quake in February does not push him out in elections next Sunday.

"They came with an earthquake and they might leave with an earthquake," Ankara University assistant professor Melih Yesilbag said of Erdogan's Islamic-rooted party.

"The AKP took power after an earthquake. Modernising the infrastructure was one of its main promises from the start. And 20 years later you see this happen," he said.

The 1999 calamity killed more than 17,000 people and put the shoddiness of Turkey's buildings on soul-crushing display. But it also made a more profound impact.

The AKP's election victory in 2002 and the rise of Erdogan a year later heralded a new economic model based on construction that changed the way Turkey worked.

The vast country entered a building frenzy that became central to a growth policy dubbed "Erdonomics".

Erdogan and a clique of construction companies that consolidated around his rule ended up erecting more than 10mn housing units over 20 years.

"This is an incredible amount," Yesilbag said. "This is more than half of all the EU countries combined over the same period."

Some of those houses toppled in the February quake that killed more than 50,000 people. The disaster exposed a flagrant disregard for beefed-up building standards for all to see.



A woman stands in front of an election campaign banner with a portrait of Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan hanging on historical Sur castle in Diyarbakir, Turkey, on May 1 (AFP)

Erdogan and constructors made a natural fit.

"The AKP's original base was small businesspeople. Anatolian businesspeople. These people were excellent in property development, property transactions and trade," said analyst Atilla Yesilada of the GlobalSource Partners consulting firm.

"It was only natural that Erdogan, who also had a business background, looked at the immense possibilities of land development in Turkey."

This boom accelerated when the global financial crisis of 2007-2008 prompted the United States and Europe to slash lending rates to zero.

It was manna for Turkey. The inflow of billions of dollars of nearly free loans allowed Erdogan's government to reshape city skylines and interconnect provinces with highways and airports. The building frenzy plugged less educated Turks into the workforce and created a new base of political support.

"It really worked for Turkey," Yesilada said.

"It boosted wealth and created a new class of wealthy AKP supporters who became urban dwellers, joining the middle and upper class."

'Incestuous relationship'

Turkey's economic growth ex-

ploded in the first decade of Erdogan's rule.

The World Bank estimates that per capita GDP grew from US\$3,640 the year the AKP came to power to US\$12,507 at its zenith in 2013.

Construction and the various industries connected to it made up nearly a third of that figure.

"The construction sector is labour intensive, so it generates employment for the masses in the short term," said urban planning professor Osman Balaban at the Middle East Technical University. But it did not last.

A 2018 crisis in relations with Washington and a gradual rise of interest rates across the West set off a lira slide that made all those dollar loans expensive to pay off.

"The cost of construction became very high," Yesilbag said. This created a quandary that remains unresolved to this day.

Contractors continued supporting Erdogan's government in return for new projects whose economic returns did not add up.

"Eventually it turned into a sort of incestuous relationship where the construction companies felt obligated to support Erdogan's re-election campaign," said Yesilada.

"Over the years the system had a negative marginal return."

AFP

Apple reports \$24bn profit in first quarter on rising iPhone sales

San Francisco, US – Apple said iPhone sales and money made from services powered its quarterly earnings that beat forecasts, despite inflation pressure and the slowing global economy.

The iPhone maker's bottom line capped a successful earnings season for US tech giants, with Meta, Google and Amazon also beating expectations after suffering a painful spell of lower sales and profits.

The smartphone titan reported profit of US\$24bn on revenue of US\$94.8bn in the first three months of this year.

The overall revenues for the period were lower than a year before, though this was expected.

"We are pleased to report an all-time record in services and a March quarter record for iPhone despite the challenging macro-economic environment," Apple chief executive Tim Cook said in an earnings release.

Sales of iPhones were up two per cent and tallied US\$51.3bn in the quarter, according to earnings figures.

"The iPhone base has well over a billion active devices... We feel great about the size of it and the rate that it's growing," Cook told analysts after the earning result.



Apple chief executive Tim Cook

Analysts said this was at least in part due to the reopening of China after a long period of Covid-19 restrictions that hurt economic growth.

Though Apple has made noise with its expansion into India, China remains the iPhone maker's crucial supplier and a key market.

Apple was deeply affected by the years of Chinese Covid-related closures and is only now seeing its complex supply chain returning to normal.

India is 'major focus'

The company founded by Steve Jobs is making a very publicised push into India, with Cook himself attending the country's first Apple Store openings last month.

"India is an incredibly exciting market. It's a major focus for us.

I was just there, and the dynamism in the market, the vibrancy, is unbelievable," Cook said. The country is home to the second-highest number of smartphone users in the world and efforts there help to deflect attention from the company's dependence on China.

Sales of Macs slipped to about US\$7.2bn as belt-tightening around the world hit the entire personal computer market.

Shipments of Apple Macs and MacBooks, which are in the premium segment of the market, shrank more than 40 per cent in the quarter, research firms IDC and Canals have reported.

Even though iPhones have been the heart of Apple's money-making machine, the company has made a priority of bringing in more revenue from

content and services sold to users of its devices.

Apple said revenue from services stood at US\$20.91bn, defying predictions that demand for streaming entertainment would fall steeply with the end of Covid restrictions.

Though the pile has diminished over recent years, Apple has US\$57bn in cash on hand, which fuels market speculation that Cook will swoop in to buy up companies or invest further in services.

Apple also authorized an additional US\$90bn stock buyback which will be welcomed by Wall Street as it pumps up the share price and the company's profit potential. Asked about the future of artificial intelligence, as apps like ChatGPT take the world by storm, Cook insisted it was "very important to be deliberate and thoughtful in how you approach these things."

"There's a number of issues that need to be sorted... but the potential is certainly very interesting," he added.

Apple has largely refrained from joining the AI arms race that has seen its big tech rivals roll out new products to the alarm of some governments and regulators.

AFP

ANNOUNCEMENT

The perfect International Home company , which is registered with Commercial Register No (1473405) announces that it is in the process of amending its legal form from an individual trader to a limited liability company.The company confirms that anyone who refuses this matter must submit his objection to the Commercial Registry Secretariat at the Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion in Muscat within thirty days from the date of publication of this advertisement.

Anadolu Agency

Oman Visitors, Holiday House sign agreement

Oman Visitors announced signing of a new tourism promotion agreement with Holiday House Travel and Tourism.

This partnership is a step forward in promoting tourism in the Sultanate of Oman and will benefit both companies in their pursuit of greater success in the tourism industry, a press statement said.

Under the agreement, Oman Visitors and Holiday House will work together to promote tourism in Oman and globally, focusing on providing visitors with unique and memorable experiences.

This will include joint marketing campaigns, special promotions, and collaborative efforts to highlight the best the region has to offer.

Through social media channels that are widely popular and monthly newsletters, Oman Visitor Portal, which has been in business for more than ten years, has been able to shed light on the aesthetics and potentials of the sultanate for tourist attractions and promising investment opportunities for the world.

The agreement with Holiday House Travel and Tourism affirms the continuity of existing efforts by various parties. Holiday Home, which has an Omani identity, supports and encourages domestic tourism throughout the sultanate. Furthermore, it offers exceptional deals in



partnership with hotel facilities in the sultanate and other Omani tourism companies specialising in marine and adventure tourism.

Holiday House also provides integrated tourism programmes outside the sultanate through numerous agencies and agreements.

Combined, the two companies aim to establish the sultanate as a leading destination that combines the past with the

present.

Oman Visitor Portal, a distinguished technical project to promote and introduce the sultanate at an international level. In addition, it highlights the aesthetics of domestic tourism through wide networks of Omani photographers, using digital marketing developments that reach the sultanate to wider horizons globally.

Holiday House travel and tourism is one of the leading

tourism companies in the sultanate under Omani management. Their team works hard to provide enjoyable and memorable travel experiences for visitors. It provides its services to both internal and external tourists through tourism programs, including hotel reservations, transfers and various tourist tours.

It also organises various tourist trips to different governorates of the sultanate.



Five students to represent Oman in London forum

The Ministry of Higher Education, Research and Innovation on Monday announced the five winners that will represent the Sultanate of Oman at the London International Youth Science Forum 2023, at an event at Innovation Park Muscat.

During the event, 34 candidates presented their projects in the fields of science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM) in front of an evaluation panel. Out of the 34 candidates, five participants were chosen by the ministry to represent the Sultanate of Oman for the fifth time at this forum.

The evaluation panel have selected Ilaf Yahya al Kindi from Sultan Qaboos University with her project 'Treating Oil Spills and Produced Water Using a Plant Derived Extracts and Powders', Ibrahim Amur al Barwani from Military Technological College with his project 'Rocket

Propulsion - Breaking the Bounds of Gravity', Hamed Saleh al Kalbani from Sultan Qaboos University with his project 'Smart and Integrated Mobile Application Service for Community Waste Handling Using Image Processing', Nabras Hamdan al Shukaili from Sultan Qaboos University with her project 'Producing highly efficient biodiesel from unused plant seeds and recycling all production derivatives', and Abdullah Said al Hasni from National University Of Science and Technology with his project 'Smart Gas Regulator' to represent the Sultanate of Oman at the London International Youth Science Forum 2023.

Under the theme of 'Science for Unity', the London International Youth Science Forum will be held from July 26 to August 9 this year.

Participants of the London International Youth Science Forum

2023 will be able to attend lectures, workshops and field visits to the University of Oxford, the University of Cambridge and Imperial College London, and visit scientific laboratories, institutes and international companies.

It is worth noting that the participation of the sultanate's youth in the London International Youth Science Forum comes as part of the ministry's efforts to raise scientific awareness among young researchers by giving them the opportunity to meet with their peers from different countries of the world, and to inform them of the latest findings of scientists in various fields of research and knowledge, and provide an opportunity for young Omani researchers to benefit from successful research experiences and distinguished scientific programs that are offered to the youth around the world.

Ahlibank's Al Nukhba offers wealth management services

ahlibank's Al Nukhba banking facility, classified as an effortless and flexible financial solution, has been transforming the concept of everyday banking for privileged customers, who consciously seek customised products and services.

It has, in a very short span of time, augmented its customer base with an impressive service credo and continues to forge ahead with regular upgrades.

Equipped with extensive regional and international experience, ahlibank capitalised on its growing popularity with Al Nukhba banking, which made its mark in the market early on with an impressive 100mn deposit portfolio. It has since grown into a formidable segment, catering to the growing market for wealth banking.

Through this exclusive portfolio, customers are able to manage their wealth in convenient and secured ways, with a host of banking solutions and tailor-made products that suit their investment needs.

"From the very beginning, Al Nukhba has been a major draw among our elite and savvy customers; customers who have clear understanding of global banking standards and seek the same from their local sector - which is exactly what Al Nukhba provides with its array of tailored products," said Muneer al Balushi, AGM - head of Retail Distribution, ahlibank.

"It is specifically designed to meet the growing market for wealth management. It is no surprise that this impressive segment has managed to set a

new benchmark in banking with its dedicated team of professionals to guide and shape the fortunes of our customers - our most important stakeholders."

Explaining further, he added: "Al Nukhba banking account is an extension of our customer-centric approach to banking. We understand the changing needs and requirements of our growing customers and, accordingly, update and upgrade our products to match global trends and fit the local demands. Through Al Nukhba, we have demonstrated our categorical decision to partner with our customers and support their banking agendas through a range of financial and non-financial packages that are aimed at enhancing their wealth."

ISC Salalah organises community meet



Indian Social Club Salalah organised a community meet for the Indian residents in Dhofar region, on May 6.

H E Amit Narang, Ambassador of India to Oman; and Praveen Kumar, the second secretary (Economic & Commercial) at the Indian Embassy attended the meeting, a press release said.

ISC Salalah general secretary Dr Sandeep Ojha in his welcome

address extended his sincere gratitude to H E Narang and the second secretary along with all those who generously came forward to make this event a big success. ISC Salalah president Rakesh Kumar Jha welcomed H E Narang and Kumar by presenting mementoes and appreciated all the members who turned up for the event.

Coordinator Suvarna presented bouquet to the two

guests from the embassy.

During the meeting, local Indian residents raised various issues and the dignitaries from the embassy assured all support to address them.

The ambassador felicitated members of the Indian community, who actively participated in the SEVA UTSAV 2022 and praised the support and contribution of Indian Social Club Salalah to organise various

events in association of embassy.

H E Narang also met a group of Omani alumni who studied in India under various programmes.

Omani alumni shared their memories and experiences, which they gained during their studies in India.

ISC Salalah vice president Sunny Jacob proposed a vote of thanks.

New, dynamic Mercedes-Benz GLC makes impact with electrified drive

Modern, sporty luxury, the new GLC embodies this in every detail. It is the most dynamic model in the successful SUV family from Mercedes-Benz. Even at first glance, this is underlined by its design with unique proportions, dramatic surfaces, precisely moulded edges and a clearly laid-out, high-quality interior. It also impresses with its driving performance and efficiency.

The GLC is at home on any terrain: whether on or off the road in Oman or abroad, it impresses with its comfort and agility. The new rear-axle steering makes it even more manoeuvrable and safe. Off the road, it scores with numerous features such as the standard 4MATIC, purely electric off-road driving in the plug-in models, the off-road screen and the 'transparent bonnet'.



Mercedes-Benz entered the mid-size SUV segment in 2008, with the GLK. Its exterior design was unmistakably derived from

the G-Class, the forefather of all Mercedes-Benz SUVs. In 2015 the brand presented its successor under the name GLC. This

also impressed with the excellent safety typical of the brand, state-of-the-art assistance systems, energy efficiency and high dy-

namics. Since the GLC's introduction and its direct predecessor, the GLK, Mercedes-Benz has sold more than 2.6 million exam-

ples worldwide. The GLC presented now is the third generation, and seamlessly continues this success story.

One of the defining design highlights of the GLC is the redesigned front end, with headlamps that connect directly to the radiator grille to emphasise the vehicle's width. DIGITAL LIGHT headlamps with additional daytime driving light ellipses and new blue trim, plus active floor lighting, are available as optional extras.

The typical Mercedes SUV radiator grille with redesigned cut-out has a chrome surround. This frames a sporty louvre in matt grey with chrome trim and the grille with vertical louvres in high-gloss black. From the AMG Line upwards, a radiator grille with Mercedes-Benz pattern is

available: a three-dimensional star pattern with high-gloss chrome surfaces. The new simulated underguard in chrome at the front emphasises the vehicle's width and accentuates the off-road look.

The body design is characterised by a full, spanned surface design enriched with precisely shaped edges in the sides. These emphasise the proportions as well as the muscular wheel arches and create a balance between elegance and off-road performance. Wheel arch liners in the vehicle colour are available from the AMG Line upwards for the first time. These accentuate the sportiness of the AMG Line.

Other features of the sporty, confident appearance are the wide track and flush wheels in 18- to 20-inch size.

Generative AI driving investment in tourism

Generative artificial intelligence (AI) and environmental, social and governance (ESG) activities are attracting the highest levels of investment in travel technology at present, according to innovation specialist Plug and Play.

Experts from the Silicon Valley-headquartered firm shared a range of insights into the latest investment trends on the Travel Tech Stage at Arabian Travel Market (ATM) 2023, at Dubai World Trade Centre (DWTC).

Speaking on the third day of the show, innovation specialists explored how travel startups are being affected by macroeconomic headwinds and fears of a global recession as part of the 'Investment Trends Leading Travel Tech' session.

Kristie Choi, Early Stage Tech Investor at Plug and Play, noted that venture capital (VC) investment witnessed a 'dramatic pull-back' in the second half of 2022, a trend that continued into Q1 2023.

"While this looks pretty scary, there are still billions of dollars of dry powder out there to be gained," she told attendees. "Travel tech round dynamics tend to follow similar patterns as the wider tech market, and we are seeing an increased focus on profitability and cash efficiency in this segment."

Choi said that the travel sector was leading the curve in terms of generative AI investment and adoption. This technol-



ogy is being leveraged to enhance the customer experience by facilitating trip planning, automating refunds and back-office processes, and supporting content creation.

ESG is also a major focus for the travel technology sector, she explained, with sustained investments in transparent data reporting and sustainable aviation

fuel (SAF) serving to bolster the growth of responsible tourism. The influencer economy, meanwhile, is 'driving business away' from online travel agencies (OTAs), according to Choi, as companies look to attract the Gen Z market by integrating direct booking into the channels of content creators.

Following Choi's presentation,

Mike Sung, Director, Partner Success - Travel & Hospitality at Plug and Play, joined Natalie Seatter, Chief Product Officer at OAG on the ATM Travel Tech Stage for a conversation about travel technology investment trends.

Speaking on the growing importance of artificial intelligence to the tourism industry, Sung noted, "It's going to be very inter-

esting to see how generative AI is leveraged, especially among travel suppliers in the metaverse. There's a lot of experimentation happening in the metaverse, and for generative AI, it's not just about text. It's also about audio, video and graphics.

"I think this technology is going to ramp up the velocity of [Web3] solutions, especially for

travel and hospitality."

Commenting on the need for investment in data transparency, Seatter said, "The big elephant in the room is the large cloud-based data warehouses [the industry] is using to power platforms. It's either really hard to understand the carbon-emission cost of these platforms or no one wants to tell you how big it is - or maybe it's a

bit of both. I think that's certainly one of our challenges."

The day-three session followed the 'Plug and Play: Sustainable Tech - Startups Pitch Battle' on day two of ATM 2023, which saw six new ventures compete for a range of industry support and data.

Sustainable commercial food waste solutions company, Winnow, beat off stiff competition from CarbonClick, Eilago, Hotelverse, OACIS Middle East Limited LLC and Thrust Carbon to be crowned this year's winner.

The 30th edition of ATM was held recently as part of Arabian Travel Week, a festival of events dedicated to enabling industry professionals from all over the world to collaborate and capitalise on market opportunities through exhibitions, conferences, breakfast briefings, awards, product launches and networking events.

Those attending ATM 2023 in person can get involved in the conversation online by using the hashtag #ATMDubai when posting on social media channels.

ATM 2023 is being held in conjunction with Dubai World Trade Centre, and its strategic partners include Dubai's Department of Economy and Tourism (DET) as the Destination Partner, Emirates as the Official Airline Partner, IHG Hotels & Resorts as the Official Hotel Partner, and AI Rais Travel as the Official DMC Partner.

Omantel joins hands with experts to publish SubOptic white papers

Omantel, the leading provider of integrated telecommunication services in the Sultanate of Oman, has strengthened its role as an enabler of innovation in subsea cable technology by participating in two key industry white papers along with Infinera and Jio.

The first white paper details a novel technique known as Automatic Fast System Optimization which demonstrates the ability to recover affected services on a subsea system with multiple branches, when one or more indirect branches experience a failure.

Since subsea cable faults usually take months to repair, the implemented solution reduces the impact to a very large extent, by limiting the outage to only branches directly related to the fault while services on the indirect branches will be recovered and work as normal.

This innovative solution shall enhance the overall efficiency level of operations and maintain service quality for a major part of the affected subsea cable, leading to better customer experience management.

The second white paper presents the case study of how modulation formats with wide range and fine granularity can be used in combination with electrical and optical switching techniques to improve the spectral efficiency of multi-branched subsea cable systems.

The study also reveals how the same hardware can be re-configured to withstand dynamic changes in the traffic demands. It can be concluded from this research that there are cases whereby existing subsea cables can cater for growing traffic demands without having to immediately invest in



Willy George

new subsea systems, which again leads to better utilisation of investments and assets in a rapidly expanding market.

Omantel co-authored the white papers, through its representative Willy George (Senior Strategist Wholesale) being the Co-chair of the Technical Working Group for the Asia-Africa-Europe 1 (AAE-1) subsea cable consortium.

The collaboration was facilitated by Infinera, a top global provider of optical transmission equipment, with innovative infrastructure solutions that enable carriers, cloud providers and other institutions to scale network bandwidth, accelerate service innovation and automate network operations.

"Omantel has already established its position as a global provider through its Wholesale Business Unit. Now, we are positioning ourselves as an enabler of innovation, driven by our proven expertise and track record," said Willy George.

"These studies will have wide ramifications on the industry. We are among the first operators in the MENA region to contribute directly to the creation of these solutions that help to further enhance and monetise our subsea cable investments," he further commented.

Bangladesh Social Club organises Eid reunion

Senior members of the Bangladesh Social Club Oman urged Bangladeshi expatriates to work more responsibly in order to demonstrate trustworthiness and obedience towards the rules and regulations of Sultanate of Oman.

They requested the community not to get involved in any activity under any circumstance that goes against the law and 'thus enhance the brotherly relation between Oman and Bangladesh', a press release stated.

Leaders of the Bangladeshi community and prominent expatriates emphasised on these issues in a gathering of the community on the occasion of Eid reunion held recently.

The newly formed Greater Noakhali Wing - under Bangladesh Social Club - organised a social event at Al Nahda Resort and Spa, Barka, to celebrate the formation of the wing.

Tuing Aye, second secretary and head of Chancery of Bangladesh Embassy Muscat attended the even as the chief guest on behalf of H E Md Nazrul



Islam, the Ambassador of Bangladesh.

Bangladesh Social Club chairman Sirazul Hoque, vice-president Azimul Haque Babul (CIP) and secretary M N Amin attended the programme as special guest.

Cholim Uddin Selim, the convener of the Greater Noakhali Wing, presided over the celebration, while chief advisor Iftakher ul Hasan Chowdhury was a spe-

cial guest. Joint convener Gazi Polash and member secretary of the wing Abu Yusuf were present on the stage as well.

In his address, chief guest Tuing Aye emphasised on the loyalty of expatriates towards rules and regulations of Oman. He requested all Bangladeshi expats not to violate any rule or regulation of the country in any situation and help strengthen the relationship between the two

brotherly countries.

Bangladesh Social Club president Sirazul Islam said, "Oman is one of the most peaceful and safe country in the world. We are lucky that we have a very good brotherly relation with Omani people.

"I request all Bangladeshi expatriates to show case highest level of loyalty towards this country at all means in all circumstances."

Gulf Overseas Exchange Co CEO Iftakher ul Hasan Chowdhury, the wing's chief advisor, urged the community to follow the law of the land, avoid illegal gathering.

He also urged the Bangladeshi expatriates to send money through legal channels.

"We are now the highest among all expatriates in Oman, so, our responsibilities are more and we must have more commitment. Our lawful and responsible activities will help us to build a strong bridge of friendship between Oman and Bangladesh. At the same time, sending money to Bangladesh through proper channels will help to boost our economy."

The Greater Noakhali region predominately includes the districts of Noakhali, Feni and Lakshmipur in Bangladesh.

In 1984, the district of Noakhali was divided into three districts for administrative convenience.

A significant number of Bangladeshi expats from Greater Noakhali are engaged in different leading occupations in Oman.

Al Injaz Private School's project exhibition wows visitors

Al Injaz Private School celebrated its 'Annual Project Exhibition' with great success, a release stated.

Waleed Said al Azki, senior manager of Human Resources at Ahli Bank, graced the event as the chief guest. The school community showcased their knowledge, creativity, and talent in various exhibits, inspiring visitors.

The exhibition featured the work of learners from different grades, who put their skills and knowledge to the test, resulting in innovative and insightful projects that highlighted their understanding of various academic disciplines.

From Science and Mathematics to Islamic Studies and the arts, the exhibition demonstrated the depth and breadth of Al Injaz



Private School's academic programme. The learners confidently presented their projects, demonstrating their public speaking skills and passion for

learning. Visitors, including Waleed Said al Azki, admired the learners' creativity, knowledge, and dedication, which shone through in their exhibits.

Azki praised the school's efforts in providing such fantastic learning opportunities for its learners', saying, "It is inspiring to see how Al Injaz Private School is

committed to nurturing the talents and skills of its students.

"The projects on display are a testament to the school's dedication to providing an exceptional learning experience for its students," he added.

The exhibition's success is the efforts of the team of committed staff, and responsible learners of Al Injaz Private School, said school director Amita Sharma.

The school's educators and staff deserve special recognition for their tireless efforts to provide a high-quality education fostering creativity, critical thinking, and innovation.

Al Injaz Private School looks forward to hosting many more successful exhibitions in the future as it continues to provide an exceptional learning experience for its learners.

IN BRIEF

NASA launches two small satellites to track hurricanes

Washington, US - NASA launched two small satellites designed to track tropical cyclones hour by hour from a base in New Zealand on Monday, in a project that could improve weather predictions on devastating storms.

The new storm trackers, sent into orbit on a rocket built by US company Rocket Lab, can fly over hurricanes (or typhoons in the Pacific) every hour, compared to every six hours with current satellites. Researchers will be able to see storms evolve on an hourly basis, said NASA scientist Will McCarty at a press conference for the first launch of the TROPICS mission.

"We still need the large satellites," he added. "What we get from this is the ability to add more information to the flagship satellites that we already have."

At least 27 dead in Peru gold mine fire

Yanaquihua, Peru - At least 27 workers were killed in a fire at a remote gold mine in southern Peru, authorities said on Sunday, as grief-stricken relatives gathered near the site awaiting news of their loved ones.

The blaze was sparked by a short circuit and quickly engulfed one of the tunnels, leading to one of the worst mining tragedies in the South American country's recent history. Police and the public prosecutor's office confirmed that the fire at the La Esperanza 1 mine in the Arequipa region, was caused by a short circuit.

Canada wildfires force more evacuations

Montreal, Canada - Western Canada's spreading wildfires prompted fresh evacuation orders on Sunday as authorities registered over 100 active blazes.

Around 30,000 people have been told to leave their homes in Alberta, where more than two dozen fires have not yet been brought under control.

AFP

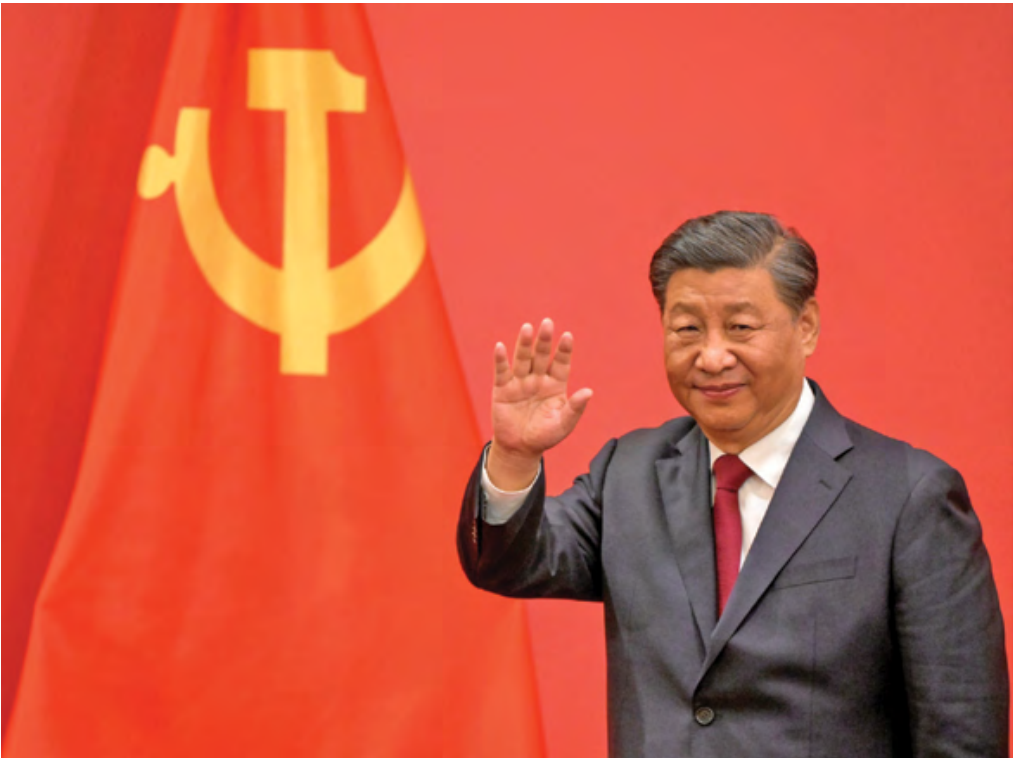
Jinping to host first China-Central Asia two-day summit this month

Beijing, China - President Xi Jinping will host a two-day summit with the leaders of five Central Asian nations next week, Beijing said on Monday, as China moves to increase its influence in the region. Leaders of Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan are expected to attend the China-Central Asia Summit from May 18 to 19, said China's foreign ministry.

The summit in the historic city of Xi'an on the ancient Silk Road is the first of its kind since the establishment of formal relations 31 years ago, according to the ministry, and will focus on strengthening economic and diplomatic ties with Beijing.

China, the world's second-largest energy consumer, has invested billions of dollars to tap natural gas reserves in Central Asia. Rail links connecting China to Europe criss-cross the region and are key to the success of Xi's trillion-dollar global infrastructure project, the Belt and Road Initiative.

Foreign ministry spokesman Wang Wenbin said on Monday



China's President Xi Jinping would deliver a keynote speech at the summit, billed as China's first major diplomatic event of the year, and the leaders would jointly sign 'important political documents' (AFP)

that Xi would deliver a keynote speech during the summit, billed as China's first major diplomatic event of the year, and the leaders would jointly sign 'important political documents'.

"The heads of state will review the development of China-Central Asia relations and exchange views on China-Central Asia cooperation in various fields and on major international

and regional issues of common concern," Wang told a regular briefing.

'Mutual support'
Beijing adheres to a policy of

The heads of state will review the development of China-Central Asia relations and exchange views on cooperation in various fields and on international and regional issues of common concern

WANG WENBIN



'good-neighbourliness and friendship' with regard to Central Asia, Foreign Minister Qin Gang said during a meeting with his regional counterparts in Xi'an last month.

"All parties reiterated... firm mutual support on issues concerning each others' core interests, stern opposition to external interference in internal affairs, and resolute rejection of... force creating chaos and turbulence in

Central Asia,' according to a Chinese foreign ministry report on the meeting.

The republics of Central Asia were part of the Soviet Union and have been dominated by Moscow since the mid-19th century.

But Russia's influence has been increasingly challenged since its invasion of Ukraine, with Beijing courting Moscow's traditional allies in the region.

In 2022, China's exports to Central Asia grew 60 per cent year-on-year to US\$1.4bn, according to data released by the Chinese ministry of commerce last month.

In September last year, the Chinese president travelled to Kazakhstan on his first trip abroad since the outbreak of the coronavirus pandemic.

Countries, including Kazakhstan, that border China's northwestern region of Xinjiang have remained quiet over accusations of various human rights violations by Beijing targeting the Uyghurs and other Muslim minorities.

AFP

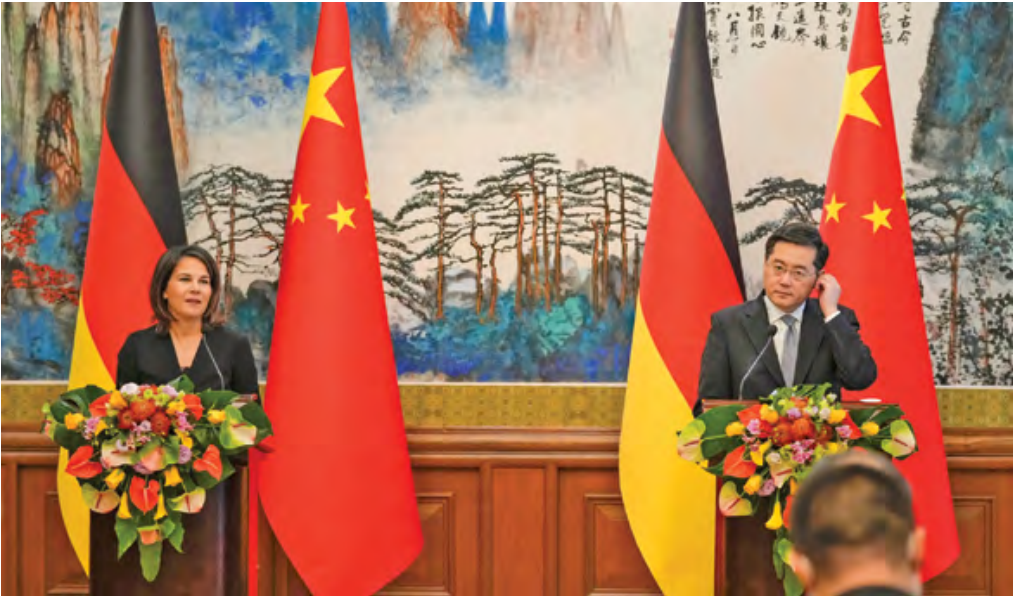
China's foreign minister to visit Europe this week

Beijing, China - Chinese Foreign Minister Qin Gang will visit Europe this week, Beijing said on Monday, as China pushes to act as a mediator in the Ukraine conflict.

Qin will hold meetings with counterparts from Germany, France and Norway from Monday to Friday, foreign ministry spokesman Wang Wenbin said, without giving further details of his itinerary.

"At the invitation of German Foreign Minister Annalena Baerbock, French Foreign Minister Catherine Colonna and Norwegian Foreign Minister Anniken Huitfeldt, state councillor and Foreign Minister Qin Gang will visit Germany, France and Norway from 8 to 12 May," Wang said.

The trip comes two weeks after China insisted it respects the sovereignty of all former Soviet countries, following comments by its ambassador to



This file photo shows Chinese Foreign Minister Qin Gang (right) and Germany's Foreign Minister Annalena Baerbock attending a joint press conference at the Diaoyutai State Guesthouse in Beijing on April 14 (AFP)

France that drew anger in Europe and threw into question Beijing's efforts to position itself as neutral in the Ukraine war.

Ambassador Lu Shaye said countries that emerged after the

fall of the Soviet Union 'don't have effective status under international law because there is not an international agreement confirming their status as sovereign nations'. His comments to

French broadcaster LCI appeared to be referring not just to Ukraine, which Russia invaded in February 2022, but to all former Soviet republics that emerged as independent nations after the fall

of the Soviet Union in 1991.

EU foreign policy chief Josep Borrell said the explanation from Beijing had 'duly clarified' the issue and that China was not calling into question the sovereignty of ex-Soviet states.

Chinese President Xi Jinping spoke with his Ukrainian counterpart Volodymyr Zelensky by phone shortly after the furore over Lu's comments, the first call between the two leaders since Russia's invasion.

The nearly one-hour discussion, which reportedly included Xi advocating for peace negotiations, was met by Russian accusations that Ukraine was undermining efforts to end the fighting.

A 12-point 'position paper' published by China in February was seen by many Western governments as skewed towards Russia, and a friendly Moscow visit in March by Xi to meet Russian President Vladimir Putin

led to widespread criticism.

Beijing says it is neutral in the Ukraine conflict. Xi has never condemned the Russian invasion but the Chinese leader has come under increased pressure from Western nations to step in.

Baerbock, on a visit to Beijing last month, urged China to ask 'the Russian aggressor to stop the war' in Ukraine and said 'no other country has more influence on Russia'. She also said she had expressed concerns about human rights issues and warned of the dangers of escalating tensions with Taiwan.

Her visit to the Chinese capital came a week after that of French President Emmanuel Macron and the head of the European Commission Ursula von der Leyen, who also urged Beijing to play a greater role in resolving the crisis in Ukraine. Colonna was part of a delegation accompanying Macron on the trip.

AFP

Chile: Far-right voted to 'rewrite' constitution

Santiago, Chile - Chile's far-right Republican Party finished in first place on Sunday in a nationwide vote to choose the 50 members of a committee that will draft a replacement to the country's dictatorship-era constitution, according to an official count.

The Servel election authority reported that with almost all ballots counted, the Republican Party had won 35 per cent of the vote, corresponding to 22 seats on the constitutional rewrite committee.

Traditional right-wing parties won a further 21 per cent, giving conservatives an additional 11 seats, while the left-wing coalition supported by President Gabriel Boric finished with 29 per cent, or 11 committee members.

It is the second time that voters in the South American country have been called to take part in the rewriting of the 1980 constitution, adopted under the Augusto Pinochet dictatorship.

In September, a previous text produced by a constitutional assembly made up mostly of political independents was rejected by 62 per cent of voters.

The results by the far-right

Republican Party, which has always opposed the constitutional rewrite process, was 'much more than any forecast had expected', Claudia Heiss, head of the Political Science programme at the University of Chile, told AFP.

There were 350 people vying to be elected to the 50-member constitutional committee.

"The ideas of common sense have triumphed," said Republican Party leader Jose Antonio Kast, who founded the party in 2019 and lost to Boric in the December 2021 presidential runoff.

Kast has expressed kinship with other populist conservative leaders such as Brazil's Jair Bolsonaro, Donald Trump in the United States and Spain's far-right Vox party.

With 22 committee members, the Republican Party 'does not need to negotiate with anyone, they can write the Constitution they want' and 'have the power to veto any modification', Heiss said.

No 'vendettas'

The new committee will be given a preliminary text, drawn up by



Supporters of the far-right Republican Party celebrate the victory of their candidates, at the party headquarters in Santiago on Sunday (AFP)

experts, that includes 12 essential principles that cannot be modified.

The committee must then come up with a new constitution that will be put to a public vote in December.

In a speech after the results were announced on Sunday, leftist Boric called for members of the committee to act 'with wisdom and temperance' and to avoid the uncompromising posi-

tions that led to failure in the first rewrite attempt - then led by a leftist coalition.

"The previous process failed, among other things, because we were unable to listen to those who thought differently," said Boric, who also called for the process to be launched without 'vendettas'.

The government of conservative former president Sebastian Pinera had agreed to hold a ref-

erendum on a new constitution in a bid to ease mass protests that broke out in October 2019 against social inequality.

"As a country, we have a historic opportunity to reconcile ourselves after the fractures we've lived through and to advance toward a developed and inclusive country," Boric said ahead of the vote.

At age 35, Boric rode the wave of public discontent to be elected Chile's youngest-ever leader in late 2021.

Unlike the previous constitutional assembly, elected in May 2021, only candidates of political parties were allowed to stand in Sunday's election.

The final committee, which must be made up of 25 men and 25 women, will begin its work in June.

According to polls, only 31 per cent of Chileans are interested in the process of writing a new constitution.

Despite that general apathy, around 80 per cent of the more than 15mn eligible Chileans took part in the election on Sunday, according to official figures.

AFP

A BIRD'S PARADISE IN SINGAPORE



A chestnut and black weaver bird clings outside its nest at the new Bird Paradise park in Mandai Wildlife Reserve during its official opening in Singapore on Monday (AFP)

Iran charges two more actresses over hijab violations: Media

Tehran, Iran - Iran has charged two more actresses for violating the country's dress code for women, the latest in a series of similar indictments against celebrities in the Islamic republic, local media reported on Monday.

Separate legal cases against Baran Kosari, 37, and Shaghayegh Dehghan, 44 - both known for roles in Iranian cinema - were filed after they appeared in public without headscarves in recent days, according to media reports.

If prosecuted, the actresses could face fines or prison terms. Kosari's case was 'sent to the judiciary' after she attended the funeral of actor Hesam Mahmoudi without a headscarf on Friday, Tasnim news agency said.

"Her photos were immediately published on the internet and some media," the news agency added.

Dehghan was similarly charged for 'not wearing a hijab in a cafe', Mehr news agency reported on Monday.



This file photo shows women walking along a street in Tehran on April 19

"Earlier legal cases had been filed against actresses Katayoun Riahii, Pantea Bahram, Afshaneh Baygan and Fatemeh Motamed-Aria for removing their headscarves," the agency added.

Some of the indicted actresses have won awards for their work in Iranian cinema, including at the country's leading industry event, the Fajr International Film Festival.

The number of women defying Iran's dress code has increased since a wave of

protests following the September death in custody of Kurdish-Iranian Mahsa Amini, 22, after her arrest for allegedly breaching it.

On Sunday, Iran's lead prosecutor asked the country's transport minister to ensure women on planes observe the dress code, the IRNA state news agency reported.

Also on Sunday, the head of Iranian athletics resigned following a controversy caused by women competing in events without the mandatory head-

scarves, IRNA reported.

The requirement for women to wear the headscarf in public was imposed shortly after the Islamic revolution of 1979.

Last month, authorities said they had closed 150 commercial establishments whose employees were not complying with the dress code.

Iran's police also said in April they would begin using 'smart' technology in public places to spot women violating the mandatory dress code.

AFP

Zelensky says Russia will be defeated 'as Nazism in 1945'

Kyiv, Ukraine - President Volodymyr Zelensky vowed on Monday that Russian forces would be defeated in Ukraine just as Nazi Germany was beaten in 1945, during an address commemorating the end of World War II.

His speech recorded at a war memorial in Kyiv comes one day ahead of Victory Day in Moscow, a Soviet war anniversary to be marked by an army parade through Red Square with security on high alert.

Ukrainian forces meanwhile said they had downed nearly three dozen Russian attack drones, spurring explosions and air raid sirens in the capital overnight.

"All the old evil that modern Russia is bringing back will be defeated just as Nazism was defeated," Zelensky said in a video at Kyiv's World War II memorial and park.

"Just as we destroyed evil together then, we are destroying a similar evil together now," he added.

Zelensky was speaking on the anniversary of Nazi Germany's surrender to allied forces on May 8, 1945, Victory in Europe Day.

He said he had submitted a bill to parliament to formally commemorate World War II in Ukraine also on May 8, which for years was marked on May 9 like in Russia and other ex-Soviet countries.



Kharkiv's mayor Igor Terekhov (second from right) with other people lay flowers to Memorial of Glory in Kharkiv on Monday on the 78th anniversary of the victory against the Nazis and the end of the World War II in Europe (AFP)

Just as we destroyed evil together then, we are destroying a similar evil together now

VOLODYMYR ZELENSKY

'Our victory'
The move is just the latest in a series of steps Ukraine has taken in recent years to distance itself from Moscow, including by re-

naming streets and towns named after Soviet figures.

Zelensky said Ukraine would instead mark Europe Day on May 9, which promotes peace and unity on the continent.

The EU welcomed the move, and said European Commission head Ursula von der Leyen would visit Kyiv for talks with Zelensky on Tuesday.

It came as Brussels proposed a fresh round of sanctions on Russia. A spokesman said the measures would seek to tackle 'the evasion of sanctions'.

The Kremlin has leaned on World War II rhetoric to justify its invasion, saying in February last year it was launching the war to 'de-Nazify' Ukraine.

But the Ukraine leader said the Kremlin was responsible for 'aggression and annexation, occupation and deportation', as well as 'mass murder and torture'. "All of this will be answered by our victory - the victory of Ukraine and the free world."

Fresh strikes
The address came hours after

Ukrainian forces said they had downed 35 drones launched by Russia in an attack that left five people wounded in Kyiv.

AFP journalists on the scene after the attack saw a gutted apartment damaged by debris in the Svyatoshynsky district of the capital.

Vadym, a 47-year-old resident of the neighbourhood, said he heard air raid sirens and the shaking of his neighbouring building when the debris hit.

"We've been at war for a year. It's always scary. Not as scary as on the front line. But of course it's scary. Terrible for children," he told AFP. He said his own children had just arrived for a visit hours before the attack.

In the southern region of Odessa, officials said a Russian strike had hit a warehouse, leaving one dead and several injured.

In the eastern Donetsk region, Ukraine said Russian forces had deployed phosphorus munitions in Bakhmut, the epicentre of fighting for several months.

Victory Day, a key event on the Russian political calendar under President Vladimir Putin, is going ahead despite a series of recent sabotage attacks in the country. Events in several Russian cities have been cancelled over security concerns, as well as in hubs controlled by Russian forces on the annexed Crimean peninsula.

AFP



Police work at the scene after a driver crashed into several people in Brownsville, Texas, on Sunday (AFP)

At least 8 people killed as SUV rams group outside Texas migrant centre

Brownsville, US - At least eight people were killed and several others injured on Sunday when an SUV ran a red light and plowed into a group waiting at a bus stop outside a migrant aid centre in the US state of Texas, police said.

Law enforcement said they were treating the incident as an accident for now, although a witness told AFP the driver had yelled insults at the group before accelerating.

The gray sport utility vehicle 'went through a red light and ran over several people' at around 8:30am (1330 GMT) in Brownsville, a border city at the southernmost tip of the state, police spokesman Martin Sandoval told AFP.

He said seven people died and 'nearly 10' others were injured. US media later reported that one person had died from injuries at

a local hospital.

Witness Luis Herrera, whose arm was hurt in the incident, told AFP the crash was 'sudden'.

"A woman went by in a car and warned us to get out of the way," he said.

"It was a matter of moments. The killer came (through) in the car, gesturing at us, insulting us," the 36-year-old Venezuelan said.

Herrera then described the driver as accelerating the car with full force.

The motorist, whom Sandoval said was also taken to the hospital, was detained by witnesses until police arrived. He has been charged for now with reckless driving. "More than likely there's going to be other charges coming on later," Sandoval earlier told a local ABC affiliate, without clarifying what the additional charges might be.

AFP

'Air strike in Syria kills major drug trafficker'

Beirut, Lebanon - An air strike killed a major drug smuggler and his family in southern Syria on Monday, a war monitor said, attributing the strike to Jordan though Amman did not immediately confirm.

Drug dealer 'Marai al-Ramthan, his wife and six children were killed in the region, and the number one smuggler of drugs, including captagon, into Jordan' from that area, said the Observatory, which relies on a wide network of sources inside Syria. Jordan has not yet commented on the strike.

It comes on the heels of a May 1 meeting with several Arab foreign ministers in Amman, during which Damascus had agreed to 'enhance cooperation' with neighbouring countries 'affected by drug trafficking and smuggling

across the Syrian border'.

Damascus said it would cooperate with Jordan and Iraq to identify sources of drug production and smuggling on its borders with the two countries, according to a statement from Jordan's foreign ministry.

It would also seek to 'take necessary steps to end smuggling operations', the statement said. On Sunday, the Arab League welcomed Syria back into the bloc after a more than decade-long suspension, securing President Bashar al-Assad's return to the Arab fold after years of isolation.

An AFP investigation in November found that Syria has become a narco state, with the US\$10bn captagon industry dwarfing all other exports and funding both Assad and many of his enemies.

The main destinations are oil-rich Gulf countries, but Jordan has also become a transit route for the captagon trade.

Jordan's army had said last year that drug trafficking from Syria into Jordan had become 'organised'.

AFP

Truce talks yield no progress; air strikes rock Sudan

Khartoum, Sudan - Air strikes again shook Sudan's capital on Monday while the latest truce talks in Jeddah have yielded no progress, with a Saudi diplomat saying both sides consider themselves 'capable of winning the battle'.

Sudan was thrown into deadly chaos when fighting broke out on April 15 between the forces of army chief Abdel Fattah al-Burhan and his deputy turned rival Mohamed Hamdan Daglo, who heads the paramilitary Rapid Support Forces (RSF).

The battles have since killed hundreds, wounded thousands and left millions barricaded inside their homes amid dire shortages of water, food and basic supplies. The feuding generals have sent representatives to Saudi Arabia for talks on establishing a humanitarian truce in an effort also backed by the United States, but to no avail so far.

By Monday, the talks had yielded 'no major progress', a Saudi diplomat told AFP, speaking on condition of anonymity.

"A permanent ceasefire isn't on the table... Every side believes it is capable of winning the battle," the diplomat added.

In Khartoum, a city of five million, terrified residents reported



People wait with their luggage at a bus stop in southern Khartoum on Monday as fighting continues between Sudan's army and the paramilitary forces (AFP)

more combat, now in its fourth week, as they hid out in their homes amid power outages and sweltering heat. A southern Khartoum resident told AFP the family could hear 'the sound of airstrikes which appeared to come from near a market in central Khartoum'.

'Dangerous everywhere'
The fighting has sparked a mass exodus of foreigners and of Sudanese, in both air and sea evacuations and arduous overland

journeys to Egypt, Chad, South Sudan and other neighbouring countries.

"It's very dangerous everywhere," said Rawaa Hamad, who escaped from Port Sudan on an evacuation flight to Qatar on Monday carrying 71 people.

In Sudan, she said, there is 'no safety now, unfortunately', with its people enduring 'a lack of everything - a lack of water, lack of fuel, lack of medicine, lack of even hospitals and doctors'.

The battles have killed more than 750 people and injured over

A permanent ceasefire isn't on the table... Every side believes it is capable of winning the battle

A SAUDI DIPLOMAT

5,000, according to a count by the Armed Conflict Location and Event Data Project.

The United Nations has

warned of a widening humanitarian crisis after fighting has already displaced 335,000 people and created 117,000 refugees.

More than 60,000 Sudanese have fled north into Egypt, 30,000 west to Chad, and over 27,000 to South Sudan, according to the UN. Top humanitarian official, Martin Griffiths, has travelled to the Saudi coastal city of Jeddah, the site of what Washington and Riyadh have labelled 'pre-negotiation talks'.

A UN official said on Monday that Griffiths had 'asked to join the negotiations' between the warring sides, but that his request had not been approved so far. Saudi Arabia is pushing for 'a timetable for expanded negotiations to reach a permanent cessation of hostilities', its foreign ministry said.

The Jeddah talks, which are set to continue 'in the following days', aim to reach 'an effective short-term halt' to the fighting, facilitating aid delivery and restoring basic services, it added.

A major breakthrough would be to secure humanitarian corridors to allow aid through Port Sudan on the Red Sea coast to Khartoum and to the strife-torn Darfur region bordering Chad.

AFP

INDIA

Kerala: 22 killed after tourist boat capsizes in Malappuram

Malappuram, Kerala - At least 22 people died when a tourist boat capsized in Kerala, officials said on Monday, with many of those on board thought to be children.

It was not clear why the double-decker boat carrying at least 30 people tipped over in the southern state of Kerala's Malappuram district late on Sunday. Dozens of people searched for survivors in and around the stricken vessel all night, which was partially submerged, and the search continued into Monday.

Some used ropes to stabilise the boat while others were in the water, desperately looking inside the vessel's windows for any survivors.

"We have recovered 22 bodies, including 15 females and seven males. There are around six people in the hospital. Rescue operations are on," a police officer told AFP.

Local publication Onmanorama reported that 11 people from one family, including three children, had died in the accident.

Rajisa, who was on the boat with her husband and daughter,



Onlookers gather near the site of the boat accident in Tanur, in Malappuram district on Monday (AFP)

told the publication most of the passengers on board were children and that there was smoke coming from the boat during the journey. "We survived only because we were wearing life jackets," Rajisa, who bruised her neck after hitting the boat, was quoted as saying.

She said three life jackets were brought to her and her

family, and four jackets were given to children on the boat's top deck. "The boat swerved sometime after it set sail. Everyone was thrown off to one side as the boat wobbled," she told Onmanorama.

"I fell before my child and sank into the water. The boat overturned on top of the people who had fallen into the water.

There were mostly children on the boat," she said.

Broadcaster NDTV said rescue teams, including personnel from National Disaster Response Force and the Indian Coast Guard, were using underwater cameras to look for those still missing.

VD Satheesan, a politician from the opposition Congress

party in the state, said the accident was 'man-made' and called for a probe.

"Nobody even knows if the boat had a licence or not," he said on Monday, speaking to reporters. A case has been registered against the boat's owner for alleged culpable homicide, media reports said.

Kerala's sports and fisheries minister V Abdurahiman, who was helping to coordinate rescue efforts, said most of the victims were children on school holidays.

Police said that there were around 30 people on board.

But NDTV reported that 40 people had tickets, although there were many others on the vessel who did not.

Abdurahiman said four people were taken to hospital in critical condition, according to the Press Trust of India news agency.

"Pained by the loss of lives due to the boat mishap in Malappuram, Kerala. Condolences to the bereaved families," Prime Minister Narendra Modi said on Twitter, adding that families would get compensation.

AFP



IAF and Rajasthan police officials at the spot where a MiG-21 fighter aircraft crashed in Hanumangarh on Monday (ANI)

Three dead after MiG jet crashes

New Delhi - Three people on the ground died in Hanumangarh, Rajasthan, on Monday when a Russian-made MiG-21 military aircraft suffered an "onboard emergency" and obliterated a house, authorities said.

India's air force has seen a string of crashes in recent years, many of them linked to decades-old planes supplied by the former Soviet Union.

The MiG fighter jet crashed onto the house in the western state of Rajasthan and three villagers died, police officer Sudhir Chaudhary told AFP.

The Indian Air Force (IAF) said that the pilot ejected safely and the accident happened shortly after take-off in a routine training sortie.

The pilot 'experienced an onboard emergency, following which he attempted to recover the aircraft as per existing procedures', an IAF statement said.

"Having failed to do so, he initiated an ejection, sustaining minor injuries in the process," it said.

"The IAF regrets the loss of lives and offers its deepest condolences to the bereaved families. A Court of Inquiry has been constituted to ascertain the cause of the accident."

'Flying coffins'

The crash was the latest in a series of accidents suffered by the Indian military.

Last week, an Indian-made army helicopter with three

people on board crashed in Jammu and Kashmir region.

In July 2022, two pilots were killed when a MiG-21 crashed in a training sortie in Rajasthan.

That crash was the sixth MiG-21 aircraft to have gone down since January 2021, with five pilots killed.

Russian-made MiG-21 jets first entered Indian service in the 1960s during the Cold War and for decades served as the backbone of the country's air force. Numerous crashes in the past few decades have led to the planes being dubbed 'flying coffins'.

The IAF regrets the loss of lives and offers its deepest condolences to the bereaved families

IAF STATEMENT

Two Indian Air Force fighter jets crashed in January, killing one pilot and injuring two others, in an apparent mid-air collision while on exercises south of New Delhi.

It involved a Russian-made Sukhoi Su-30 and a French-built Mirage 2000.

India's defence chief, General Bipin Rawat, was among 13 people killed when his Russian-made Mi-17 helicopter crashed while transporting him to an air force base in December 2021.

AFP

West Bengal becomes first state to ban *The Kerala Story*

Kolkata, West Bengal - The Trinamool Congress government in West Bengal banned the film *The Kerala Story* citing 'maintenance of peace' and to avoid incidents of 'hatred and violence' in the state.

West Bengal became the first state to ban the film, which narrates the ordeal of three women who are trafficked to ISIS camps after being converted to Islam through marriage. There's a continuing political outcry around the movie even as it has been made tax-free in BJP-ruled Madhya Pradesh.

On the decision to ban the



People walk past the poster of the movie *The Kerala Story* outside a cinema hall, in New Delhi on Monday (ANI)

film, West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee said: "It is to avoid any incident of hatred and violence, and maintain peace in the state."

Also raking up the *Kashmir Files*, a film on the alleged genocide of Kashmiri Pandits, which ran to packed houses despite evoking protests from the Opposition, the Bengal CM said, "What was *The Kashmir Files*? It was meant purely to humiliate a particular section of society. What is *The Kerala Story*? It is a distorted story."

The CM directed the state chief secretary to remove the

movie from all theatres where it is being screened.

Reacting to the ban, Vipul Amrutlal Shah, the producer of the film, said they will pursue legal options against the decision. "If state government won't listen to us, we will explore legal avenues. However, whatever course we take will be based on legal advice," Shah told ANI.

Helmed by Sudipto Sen and produced by Vipul Amrutlal Shah, the film evoked sharp opposition from Kerala Chief Minister Pinarayi Vijayan, who called it 'RSS propaganda'.

ANI

3 missing after Nepal avalanche

Kathmandu, Nepal - Three people are missing and 12 others were injured after an avalanche hit northwestern Nepal, where the group was picking 'Himalayan Viagra', officials said on Monday.

Every year, thousands of villagers in Nepal and Tibet harvest the parasitic fungus *Cordyceps sinensis*, known locally as yarchagumba, which grows on the body of a caterpillar.

It can fetch huge sums in neighbouring China, where it is used in herbal medicines, and is only found at certain elevations for a few weeks each year.

The group of 15 were in search of yarchagumba in the highlands of the Mugu district when they were hit by an avalanche on Saturday. Rescuers were hiking to the remote site after a helicopter was unable to land because of snowy weather, district official Mohan Bahadur Thapa told AFP on Monday.

Yarchagumba, which means 'summer plant, winter insect' in Tibetan, is only found at altitudes above 3,500 metres (11,500 feet).

Chinese herbalists believe it boosts sexual performance.

AFP

UK coronation party draws to close with volunteer drive

London, UK - People across Britain were on Monday asked to do their duty as the celebrations for King Charles III's coronation drew to a close with a massive volunteering drive.

After the pomp and majesty of Saturday's service, and the concert and street party fun of Sunday, Britons were urged to join in the 'Big Help Out', billed as a lasting volunteering legacy to mark Charles's crowning.

The coalition of volunteer and faith groups organising the initiative hope that hundreds of thousands of people will join in, with more than 1,500 charities involved.

While Charles will take a break from the public glare on Monday, his son William will take part in a puppy class at the Guide Dogs for the Blind Association Training Centre as part of the volunteer programme.

"While wholly supportive of the Big Help Out initiatives taking place right across Britain... (the King and Queen) will not be attending any events in-person," Buckingham Palace said.

The king was the guest of honour at Sunday's star-studded concert, watched by 20,000 people at Windsor Castle and millions more across the country and world.

Charles, 74, and Queen

Camilla, 75, watched on from a royal box in the grounds of the castle west of London, as Lionel Richie, Katy Perry and the British band Take That topped the bill of performers.

Screens erected nationwide broadcast the televised event - featuring a 70-piece orchestra, choirs and several unique dramatic performances - to communities, while organisers said it would also be seen in over 100 countries.

'Proud mother'

Amid the music and video message tributes from an array of public figures, Prince William took to the stage to pay tribute to his father the day after Charles was formally crowned king.

William said his late grandmother, Queen Elizabeth II, was 'up there, fondly keeping an eye on us', adding she would be 'a very proud mother'.

"For over 50 years, in every corner of the UK, across the Commonwealth and around the world, he has dedicated himself to serve others, both current and future generations," the heir to the throne said.

"Pa, we are all so proud of you."

Charles's coronation on Saturday as monarch of the United



Prince Louis of Wales takes control of a wheelbarrow as he helps his mother, Catherine, Princess of Wales, take part in 'Big Help Out' in Slough on Monday

Kingdom and 14 Commonwealth countries was the first in Britain in seven decades.

The glittering Westminster Abbey ceremony, steeped in 1,000 years of tradition and ritual, was attended by global royalty and world leaders as well as hundreds of UK community and charity representatives.

After the pomp and majesty of Saturday's service, and the concert and street party fun of Sunday, Britons were urged to join in the 'Big Help Out', billed as a lasting volunteering legacy to mark Charles's crowning. The coalition of volunteer and faith groups organised the initiative

Thanking all those involved, Buckingham Palace said Charles

and Camilla had been 'deeply touched' by it.

However, there has been criticism over the arrest of republican supporters before Saturday's ceremony.

Graham Smith, chief executive of campaign group Republic, was one of those detained, and told the BBC on Sunday that 'the whole thing was a deliberate attempt to disrupt and diminish our protest'.

Monday has been declared a public holiday to mark the final day of celebrations - meaning people could enjoy Sunday unencumbered.

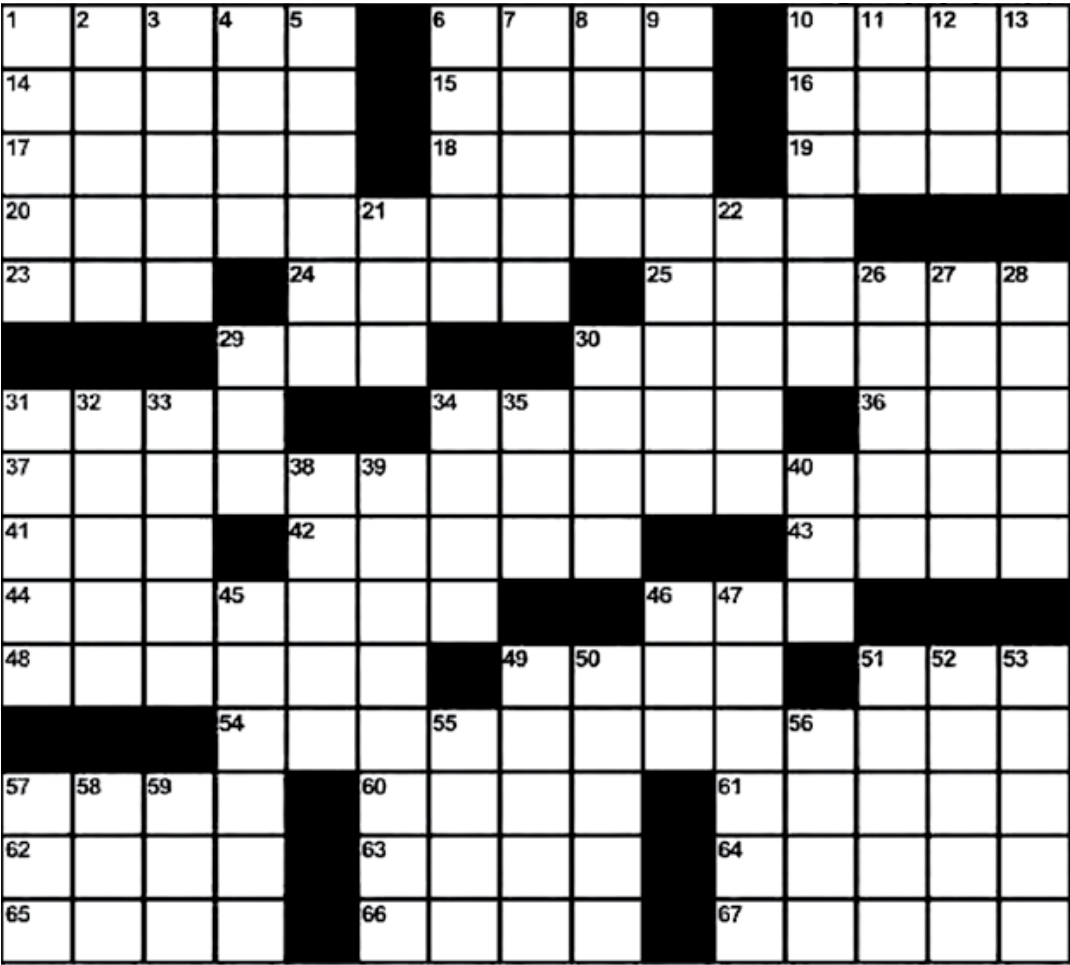
Earlier on Sunday, partygoers flocked to tens of thousands of street celebrations and 'Big Lunch' events looking to bring modern Britain's communities closer.

More than 67,000 big lunches were planned, according to organisers Eden Project Communities, with Coronation Quiches - the specially created baked savoury tart featuring spinach, broad beans and taragon - encouraged.

The evening also featured 'Lighting up the Nation', in which well-known locations across Britain were illuminated using projections, lasers and drone displays.

AFP

DAILY CROSSWORD



ACROSS

- 1) Diameter divisions
- 6) Appropriately named citrus fruit
- 10) -bodied
- 14) Beautify
- 15) Indian bread
- 16) Outward appearance
- 17) Large-eyed lemur
- 18) "Jake's Thing" author
- 19) Long-legged wading bird
- 20) It can hinder employment
- 23) "For_a jolly ... "
- 24) Flees
- 25) Fitted well together
- 29) One good curl
- 30) In an energetic manner
- 31) Insignia on many rock-ets
- 34) Bring out
- 36) Half a sawbuck
- 37) Where the optimistic look
- 41) Genetically coded stuff, for short
- 42) Dreary sound
- 43) Avails of
- 44) Weasels' cousins
- 46) Leg, to an old gangster

- 48) Allergic disorder
- 49) Close, as an envelope
- 51) "... the season ... "
- 54) Not-quite-far-enough place
- 57) Eye layer
- 60) Just a smidge
- 61) Fit for Friday the 13th
- 62) After-bath powder
- 63) Story that's longer than most
- 64) Examine again, as a pa-tient
- 65) Satie or Estrada
- 66) On its way
- 67) Avoid, as an issue
- DOWN**
- 1) Fiennes of "The English Patient"
- 2) Esteem to the extreme
- 3) Roberts who played Ray-mond's mom
- 4) Western blue flag, e.g.
- 5) Boot part
- 6) Deprived of weaponry
- 7) "Let the_ begin!"
- 8) Flock member
- 9) To such a degree
- 10) During
- 11) Protector for a baby
- 12) Floral necklace
- 13) Lt.'s inferior
- 21) It refreshes
- 22) Change, as a clock
- 26) Old stereos
- 27) Drop vowels while speaking
- 28) Units of force
- 29) Word from a cheer-leader
- 30) Olympic sled
- 31) Bellini opera heroine
- 32) Koumikova and Kendrick
- 33) Begin
- 34) Blunders
- 35) Archaeological site
- 38) Swelling in plants
- 39) Some stars
- 40) Total
- 45) Pummel
- 46) Nearly choke
- 47) Does a tailor's task
- 49) Kind of campus protest
- 50) Legislate
- 51) Anklebones
- 52) More likely to cool off
- 53) Type of shooting
- 55) "Forget it!"
- 56) Need a bath in the worst way

57) Slang for an off-road vehicle

58) Alt. spelling hint

59) Connecticut collegian

NOTE PAD

ARTIBREAMASPS
PORTGUAVA SWAP
SOURPUSSSESERA
ESCALATE TRIERS
STEVENS LEAST
ABAVERTICAL
ELSIESEALS ONE
RIALTANSY ERNE
GELFAITH RUNES
OUTLASTSRAT
YOUTH SIDEWAY
UNDONE SEPARATE
TOOKBITTERPILL
ALGABUNION ETAL
HOSTBARNSSS

YOUR DAILY HOROSCOPE

ARIES MARCH 21-APRIL 19

A group effort can be a magical thing, helping many people do more together than they could do alone. But a group effort can also be a quagmire of conflicting egos and battling agendas. Today, keep that in mind and be on the lookout for members of your group who are only out for themselves. These agitators will be easy to spot. They're the ones praising the leader the loudest. Call them out before they steer things too far off the track that's right for the majority.

LEO JULY 23-AUGUST 22

Resist the urge to get too deep in your own thoughts and muck about too much in your own subconscious right now. Being introverted isn't going to help you feel more content, but helping others might. Someone you care about very much is in need of a good listener and maybe even a shoulder to cry on, so reach out. Send some messages and find out what's going on with the people in your life. Be the supportive person everyone knows you to be, and enjoy the distraction.

SAGITTARIUS NOVEMBER 22-DECEMBER21

Use all the authority you have today. It shouldn't be difficult at all for you now. You're in a good phase where your confidence is concerned, and you've already had a taste of power. Build on your reputation by making the tough decisions today. Don't go on any power trips. Deliver your demands in the form of a request. Think the best of the people you're in charge of and you'll send a supportive and respectful message. But don't back down from what you need.

TAURUS APRIL 20-MAY 20

You and your companions will have very different energy levels today, but you all know each other so well that it shouldn't be much of an issue at all. When one person slows down, the others will help them keep pace. And if one person zooms too far ahead, everyone can quickly get them back in step and in the loop. Everyone is in this thing together, and your support system is super strong. You can rely on each other to stay sane, focused, and smiling!

VIRGO AUGUST 23-SEPTEMBER 22

Today is a great day to hang out with a troubled friend and cheer them up. There has been a lot of drama in their life recently, and you can provide them with the quiet normalcy they need so badly. Schedule something fun but mellow that the two of you can do together. A meal, a long hike, or even just some time sitting in a park together will give them the chance to share their thoughts with you. And it will give you the chance to listen with your full attention.

CAPRICORN DECEMBER 22-JANUARY 19

Explore a more concrete way of thinking right now, and you'll reach important answers. Find facts and figures that offer objective information today. Visual art, music, and your own dreams aren't going to offer you the clarity you need to flesh things out and make them more understandable. In a school or professional context, this means that you should brainstorm less and research more. Right now, your mind is best suited for analysis and planning.

GEMINI MAY 21-JUNE 21

Everyone makes mistakes once in a while, so don't be too rough on yourself. You can't possibly stay on top of every little detail. If you forgot someone's birthday, called an authority figure by the wrong name, or did some other equally embarrassing thing, don't worry about it. Apologize, move on, and then distract yourself from the blunder by focusing on daily details and errands. Keep yourself busy and you'll forget about not being perfect.

LIBRA SEPTEMBER 23-OCTOBER 22

Have you been holding back about what you truly feel about someone? Today, you simply have to spill it. It's time to communicate what you're angry about, worried about, or even happy about. This person isn't going to be upset or annoyed by what you have to say! They're a good listener, and they're ready to have the conversation that you want to have. Start out slowly. Don't just jump right into the meat of the matter. Ease your way into things and you'll have a great talk.

AQUARIUS JANUARY 20-FEBRUARY 18

If you're put in charge of planning or researching anything now, you're going to have a blast! Nothing will delight you more than finding facts, nailing down commitments, making reservations, settling arrangements, and handling all those other details that so often drive most people absolutely batty. Your brain is like a steel trap right now, and you're able to gather and process numbers, names, and dates with grace and ease.

CANCER JUNE 22-JULY 22

Cleaning up around your house could be more challenging than you thought. Getting rid of your unwanted possessions could take longer than expected, mostly because you'll be easily distracted by the meaning behind the material. But moving slowly isn't necessarily a bad thing right now, so feel free to take your time and do it in the manner and time frame that makes you feel most comfortable. And keep in mind that in the process of cleaning up, you often make a bigger mess (temporarily).

SCORPIO OCTOBER 23-NOVEMBER 21

Keep your wits about you today and pay attention! You're going to find yourself smack dab in the middle of a juicy situation, and you'll need to follow the action closely. It shouldn't be too difficult, though, because things are going to be pretty entertaining! The small details of this exchange will be hilarious to you. People don't realize how silly they can be. This event has the makings of a very good story you can tell your friends some day.

PISCES FEBRUARY 19-MARCH 20

The Universe can give you whatever you need, but you need to have the courage to ask for it first! Just do it today. Vocalize your plans to as many people as you can, and find out who's willing to join you in your quest or give you the moral support that could make all the difference. Prepare yourself to get what you want, because all signs point to some good news coming your way soon. Your attitude is changing and the momentum is growing.



TEST YOUR KNOWLEDGE

- When Dartmoor Prison first opened in 1809 what was its purpose?
A. To house prisoners-of-war
B. To house serious offenders
C. A correctional house for young offenders
D. A workhouse
- Which of these describes a boisterous, knockabout style of humour?
A. Bostick
B. Yardstick
C. Slapstick
D. Chapstick
- Who was the first British monarch of the House of Windsor?
A. George V
B. Victoria
C. Edward VII
D. Stephen

Answers: 1. A 2. C 3. A

KIDS COLOURING



BOGGLER

L	H	I	R
L	O	T	F
L	H	R	L
G	E	I	I

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

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

DO YOU SUDOKU?

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

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

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

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



Manchester City manager Pep Guardiola (L) speaks to Erling Haaland and Rodri (AFP)

Revenge mission

Man City turn to Haaland as difference maker in Champions League semis against Real

Manchester, United Kingdom - As Manchester City plot a revenge mission against Real Madrid in the Champions League semi-finals they can draw confidence from the presence of Erling Haaland as the major difference from when the sides met 12 months ago.

City seemed set for a second consecutive final when they led 5-3 on aggregate heading into stoppage time of the second leg at the Santiago Bernabeu last season.

But they were stunned by two goals in two minutes by Rodrygo before Karim Benzema's penalty completed the comeback in extra-time as Madrid went on to

When you provide him (Haaland) with chances, he scores in all situations. Penalties, crosses, combinations, transitions. He can do many, many things

PEP GUARDIOLA

lift the European Cup for a 14th time.

A late defensive collapse was only part of the story. City also paid for not taking a series of chances to kill the tie off over both legs without a natural goalscorer.

Less than a week later, City announced they had won the race to arguably the greatest

guarantee of goals in the world right now by beating off Madrid to sign Haaland.

The Norwegian has more than justified the hype with 51 goals in all competitions during his first season in England.

"With Erling we knew he scored everywhere," said City boss Pep Guardiola after Haaland set a new Premier League

record of 35 goals in a season last week.

"When you provide him with chances, he scores in all situations. Penalties, crosses, combinations, transitions. He can do many, many things. That's why he scored a lot of goals. I have the feeling he wants to score goals because of his mentality."

Despite rewriting the record books, Haaland has made clear his desire is for trophies to remember the season by rather than personal milestones.

City are closing in on matching Manchester United's feat of being the only side to win the Premier League, Champions League and FA Cup in the same

season in 1998/99.

Three wins from their final four games will retain the Premier League title for a third consecutive season. United will have their shot at stopping the treble in the FA Cup final on June 3.

But most see Madrid as the biggest hurdle left for Guardiola's men to scale with either AC Milan or Inter Milan awaiting the winners in the Champions League final.

Madrid maintain their aura under the lights of the Bernabeu on a Champions League night, while City are still waiting for Guardiola to conquer Europe seven years into his reign.

AFF



Paris Saint-Germain's Kylian Mbappe celebrates after scoring against Troyes on Sunday (AFP)

Troubled PSG beat Troyes to take control of Ligue 1

Paris, France - Paris Saint-Germain got their bid for a record 11th French league title back on track by beating Troyes 3-1 on Sunday after a troubled week for the Qatar-owned club.

After PSG lost to Lorient at home the previous weekend, angry fans protested outside the club's headquarters and at the home of injured Brazilian star Neymar.

Adding to the sense of crisis, the club suspended Lionel Messi for a reported two weeks after he made an unauthorised trip to Saudi Arabia.

But the win at relegation-threatened Troyes, combined with Marseille's 2-1 defeat at Lens on Saturday, gave PSG a six-point cushion over second-placed Lens.

Kylian Mbappe scored first with a close-range header after seven minutes, drawing level with Lyon's Alexandre Lacazette on 24 league goals this season.

Vitinha's right-footed finish on 58 minutes seemed to have put PSG on the way to victory but they lowered their guard and allowed Xavier Chavalerin to pull a goal back for Troyes when he headed past Gianluigi Donnarumma.

PSG poured forward looking for a third goal and after Mbappe's poked finish from Renato Sanches was saved, Fabian Ruiz curled in the rebound to make the three points safe.

Coach Christophe Galtier said: "That looked far more like what we have to do to take control of games and have consistency. It was an important win."

That looked far more like what we have to do to take control of games and have consistency

CHRISTOPHE GALTIER

Four-goal Lacazette

Former Arsenal forward Lacazette had a remarkable day, scoring four goals including a penalty with the last kick of the match as Lyon fought back from three goals down to beat Montpellier 5-4.

"I believed in it," said Lacazette. "I believed because I know a game is never over and lasts 90 minutes."

AFF

Osimhen sinks Fiorentina at Napoli's Serie A title party

Naples, Italy - Napoli fans hailed the return of their Serie A title-winning heroes on Sunday as Victor Osimhen shot Napoli to a 1-0 win over Fiorentina in their first home match since being crowned kings of Italy for the first time in 33 years.

Nigeria striker Osimhen lashed home the winning penalty in the 74th minute, after missing from the spot just after half-time, to take his league-leading tally to 23 just a few days after netting the goal which sealed Napoli's third Scudetto with a record-equalling five matches to play.

The 24-year-old is now the highest scoring African player in the history of Serie A after overtaking George Weah and lapped up the applause of Napoli fans as the team did their post-match lap



Napoli's Victor Osimhen celebrates after scoring against Fiorentina on Sunday (AFP)

of honour.

"I had the confidence I would score the second one. It's a good feeling to get the goal," said Osimhen to DAZN.

A party mood has enveloped Naples since Thursday's draw in Udine, and on Sunday afternoon fans let off fireworks and flares in the jammed streets around the stadium named after their icon Diego Maradona on a gorgeous sunny day in southern Italy.

Packed bars and restaurants did a roaring trade with locals and tourists alike decked out in blue as a festive but relaxed mood dominated the city.

Before kick-off supporters put on a display of the Italian flag with the number three in honour of their title wins and hailed their team with loud chants of "we are

the champions".

But once the match got underway a torpor slowly washed over the ground, not helped by two teams with nothing to play for going through the motions and Napoli creating next to nothing.

However Osimhen saved the day when Khvicha Kvaratskhelia's weaving dribble towards goal was stopped illegally by Nicolas Gonzalez and the striker duly punished Fiorentina.

Flares were lit all around the ground and blue smoke filled the air to hail a win which takes Napoli's massive lead at the top of the table to 17 points over detested rivals Juventus.

The team were greeted with huge cheers from the crowd as the players trotted around the stadium's athletics track, taking it

in turns to give piggy backs to Hirving Lozano who suffered a potentially serious knee injury towards the end of the first half.

Supporters in the ground were then treated to music from local pop stars while Oscar-winning director Paolo Sorrentino cut through an over-the-top spectacle which featured flames, powerful fire works, a light show and a pulsating electronic Italian flag flashing on the running track.

"We've won this Scudetto because Maradona showed us how it's done," said Sorrentino.

Owner Aurelio De Laurentiis promised that Napoli would try to win the Champions League next season and that Napoli needed to "repeat, repeat, repeat, win, win and win".

AFF

David De Gea blunder against West Ham costs Manchester United dear

London, United Kingdom - David De Gea made a huge goalkeeping howler as Manchester United suffered a 1-0 defeat at West Ham on Sunday that threatens to send their season into a tailspin.

Just a few days ago United were heavy favourites to finish in the Premier League's top four but now they are wobbling badly while the Hammers have edged closer to safety.

The result hinged on a catastrophic first-half error by De Gea, who let a tame shot from

Said Benrahma squirm past him in the 27th minute after his team had largely dominated the opening period.

De Gea's blunder came on the day on which he became the most-capped goalkeeper in Manchester United's history, appearing for the 540th time to move ahead of Alex Stepney.

United, who suffered the pain of conceding a last-gasp penalty in their defeat at Brighton on Thursday, had been boosted by Arsenal's 2-0 win at third-placed

Newcastle earlier in the day.

They are still in fourth place but are now just one point ahead of red-hot Liverpool in the race to qualify for next season's Champions League, even though they still have a game in hand.

A disappointed Erik ten Hag defended his beleaguered goalkeeper but said his team were still in control of their destiny this season with four league games left to play.

"Mistakes are part of football and in this team you have to deal

with it and bounce back because it is a team sport," the United manager told BT Sport.

"Over the season he is the one with the most clean sheets and also we did it as a team. It can happen, it's football but everybody has to take responsibility."

West Ham, who play in the Europa Conference League semi-finals this week, are now seven points clear of the relegation zone.

AFF



West Ham United's Said Benrahma (2nd R) celebrates with team-mates after scoring against Manchester United on Sunday (AFP)

RED HOT RED BULL

Verstappen comes from ninth on grid to beat team-mate Perez and win Miami Grand Prix

Miami Gardens, United States - World champion Max Verstappen powered from ninth on the grid to beat team-mate Sergio Perez and extend Red Bull's all-conquering start to the season with victory at the Miami Grand Prix on Sunday.

The win - Red Bull's fifth from five races this season - extends Verstappen's lead at the top of the standings to 14 points and follows his triumph in the inau-

gural Miami race last year.

The 1-2 for Red Bull is their fourth in five races so far this year as the team utterly dominate the sport leaving their rivals to battle for the third podium position.

Aston Martin's Spanish veteran Fernando Alonso took third for his fourth podium in five races this season as he continues to enjoy his late career revival.

Verstappen had to work hard

I took the cars off one by one and then I could stay out really long on the hard tyres and that's where we I think made the difference. For sure winning a race from P9 is always very satisfying

MAX VERSTAPPEN



Red Bull Racing's Max Verstappen celebrates on the podium after winning the Miami Grand Prix on Sunday (AFP)

compound tyres and coming out 1.2 seconds behind.

It took just two laps for Verstappen, who won the inaugural Miami Grand Prix a year ago, to take advantage of his fresher tyres with better grip as, after a brief joust, he overtook the Mexican, on 25-lap-old tyres, to take the lead.

Verstappen's 38th win for Red Bull equals the team record set by Sebastian Vettel and is the first time a driver has won from exactly ninth on the grid since Niki Lauda at the French Grand Prix in 1984.

"I took the cars off one by one and then I could stay out really long on the hard tyres and that's where we I think made the difference," said Verstappen.

"For sure winning a race from P9 is always very satisfying," he said.

It was a disappointing day for Perez, who after his victory in Baku last week, had a great chance to win from pole but was left frustrated with the tyre choice.

"I think the medium initially was really poor. It wasn't expected and that really compromised our pace," said Perez.

"Then, in all honesty, I think Max had tremendous pace on that hard tyre and I have got to analyse what happened today because we simply didn't have the pace," he added.

Mercedes had some consolation at the end of a difficult week with George Russell taking fourth place ahead of Ferrari's Carlos Sainz and team-mate Lewis Hamilton finishing sixth.

AFP

Alcaraz 'at the door' to world number one after Madrid Open defence

Madrid, Spain - Carlos Alcaraz celebrated "being almost at the door" of becoming the top ranked tennis player in the world again after defending his Madrid Open title on Sunday.

The Spaniard earned his 10th career title with a hard-fought 6-4, 3-6, 6-3 win over Jan-Lennard Struff and can reclaim the world number one ranking from Novak Djokovic simply by playing a single match at the Rome Masters next week, before the French Open. Currently ranked second, Alcaraz spent 20 weeks in the top spot after his US Open triumph in September, becoming the youngest player to reach world number one.

Djokovic's Australian Open triumph saw him depose Alcaraz but the 20-year-old confirmed he would play next week in the Italian capital.

"These are very nice achievements, winning my fourth Masters 1000, defending my title here and being almost at the door of recovering the number one spot," Alcaraz told a news conference.

"These are very big things I'm doing, and I'm very proud of the work and of these accomplishments"



Spain's Carlos Alcaraz celebrates with the trophy beating Germany's Jan-Lennard Struff in the Madrid Open final on Sunday (AFP)

These are very big things I'm doing, and I'm very proud of the work and of these accomplishments

CARLOS ALCAZAR



ing return to the top of the rankings reiterated his bright future at the game's summit.

Alcaraz said his only worry for his future in tennis is injury, rather than any mental aspects.

"You have to try to take care of yourself as much as possible," said Alcaraz. "The mental issue, of getting tired of winning, travelling or playing tennis, doesn't worry me because I know it's not going to happen."

"What may worry me in the future is the issue of injuries, which is what we are going to try to take care of together with my team."

Alcaraz was given a tricky time by his German opponent but eventually became the youngest player since Rafael Nadal in 2006 to defend an ATP Masters 1000 title. Despite being 13 years Alcaraz's senior, Struff showed nerves in the first game and conceded a break in only his second tour-level final.

Struff soon found his range and broke to love for 2-2 as he showed Alcaraz he would be no pushover, despite the strong home support and their disparity in ranking, and then won a third consecutive game.

The triumph and his impending return to the top of the rankings reiterated his bright future at the game's summit.

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The triumph and his impending



Pakistan players celebrate with trophy after winning the ODI series against New Zealand on Sunday (AFP)

Azam says Pakistan 'in good position' for World Cup after NZ mauling

Karachi, Pakistan - Captain Babar Azam says the "dominant" one-day series win over New Zealand sets Pakistan up nicely for the World Cup, despite doubts over their participation.

The hosts beat a depleted New Zealand 4-1 in the five-match series and on their way briefly reached the top of the one-day rankings for the first time.

Pakistan scored 337 in the second match - their second-highest successful chase in one-day internationals - and Azam became the fastest player to 5,000 ODI runs en route to his 18th century in the format.

Opener Fakhar Zaman meanwhile achieved the distinction of hitting hundreds in three successive ODIs, firmly establishing his place in Pakistan's top three, which also includes opener Imam-ul-Haq.

Uncertainty looms over Pakistan's participation in the World Cup in October-November because of tensions with hosts India. Despite that and defeat in the final match on Sunday, Azam was in buoyant mood.

"Winning the series is great and so is achieving number one ranking that has set us in a good position for the World Cup," said the skipper.

Asked if the uncertainty was worrying for the Pakistan team, Azam said: "We can't say anything about that, but wherever we get a chance to play, we will play."

The stand-off started last year when India announced it would not send a team to Pakistan for the Asia Cup in September, a month before the World Cup. In response, the Pakistan Cricket Board (PCB) has threatened to pull out of the World Cup.

Azam refused to accept that in missing eight of their top players - mostly due to Indian Premier League duty - New Zealand were easy to beat.

Clark captures Wells Fargo crown for first PGA victory

Washington, United States - Wyndham Clark outclassed reigning Olympic champion Xander Schauffele in a back-nine battle on Sunday to win the Wells Fargo Championship by four strokes for his first career PGA Tour triumph.

The 29-year-old American fired a three-under par 68 to complete 72 holes on 19-under 265 at Quail Hollow in Charlotte, North Carolina and defeat fifth-ranked Schauffele, who shot 70

to finish on 269.

"I'm a little choked up," Clark said as he fought back tears. "It has been a long five years to get to this point on tour. I thought I would have had one earlier but it was well worth the wait. I'm just so grateful."

Clark squandered the two-stroke lead he had when the day began, then picked up strokes on every hole from the eighth through the 12th to seize command and denied playing partner

Schauffele by matching his birdies down the stretch.

"There's so much that goes into this," Clark said. "There are so many times when I wanted to cry and break clubs, and I did break the clubs sometimes, in this journey and to get to this point is so sweet."

"It's just amazing to finally do this."

Clark said it took a lot of mental fortitude, the very thing he has worked hard upon this year, to

pull off the triumph.

"Mentally I was super strong," he said.

"Didn't start out great. I was kind of shaky. In years past I might have folded. This time I just stayed patient and hung in there and I caught fire on the back side."

Clark won the \$3.6 million top prize at the \$20 million event, surpassing his prior best PGA payday of \$485,000.

His PGA victory fulfilled a

dream he had shared with his late mother, who died of cancer while Clark was in college.

"My mom, obviously, is not here," he said. "I wish she was, but I know she's watching."

England's Tyrrell Hatton and American Harris English shared a distant third on 272 with England's Tommy Fleetwood and Australia's Adam Scott, the 2013 Masters champion, another stroke adrift.



Wyndham Clark celebrates on the 12th green as Xander Schauffele looks on during the final round of the Wells Fargo Championship



ANDRE RUSSELL BLITZ HELPS KOLKATA EDGE PUNJAB

MATCH 53



Andre Russell of Kolkata Knight Riders plays a shot during their Indian Premier League match against Punjab Kings at the Eden Gardens in Kolkata on Monday. Russell made a quickfire 42 off 23 balls to help Kolkata to a five-wicket victory against Punjab Kings. Captain Nitish Rana (51) and Jason Roy (38) also shone for Kolkata who now have 10 points from 11 games. Earlier, Shikhar Dhawan top-scored with 57 as Punjab made 179 for 7.

Samson: 'Mindset can change for few moments when you think the job is done'

Jaipur, India - After the dramatic defeat to Sunrisers Hyderabad in Jaipur, Rajasthan Royals captain Sanju Samson said that the nature of the IPL means that any team can conjure up a result even out of difficult circumstances, but admitted it hurt to bowl no-balls at crucial moments, like the last ball of the

match. Sandeep Sharma had 16 to defend off the final over, and when he had Abdul Samad caught at long-off off the final delivery the Royals players had started their celebrations. But it was premature as the no-ball siren went off and they had to go through the process once more, except

Samad had the benefit of facing a free hit. With four runs now needed, Samad drilled Sandeep back over his head to seal victory for Sunrisers. "To be very honest, we all know that that's what IPL gives you. Matches like these, that's what makes IPL so special. You can never never never feel like you've won the game," Samson told the broadcaster after the game. "I was very confident with Sandeep. He has won us a game with almost a similar situation. He did it again today but that no-ball actually ruined our result," he said. "It's a no-ball, you have to bowl it again, as simple as that. You don't think about it too much."

ESPNcricinfo

TODAYS MATCH

MATCH 54

6 PM



MUMBAI INDIANS



ROYAL CHALLENGERS BANGALORE

DRAMATIC VICTORY

Samad hits last-ball six after no ball as Hyderabad beat Rajasthan

Jaipur, India - Abdul Samad smashed a last-ball six as Sunrisers Hyderabad chased down 215 to beat Rajasthan Royals by four wickets in a dramatic IPL match on Sunday. With Hyderabad needing 17 off the final over, Samad was dropped off fast bowler Sandeep Sharma's first ball. Samad was caught off the sixth delivery but it turned out to be a no ball, which abruptly cut short Rajasthan's victory celebrations. With four needed to win on the final ball, and three to take the game into the super over, Hyderabad had the last laugh as Samad smashed a straight six in his seven-ball 17. Hyderabad had slipped to 174-5 when New Zealand's Glenn Phillips turned the game on its head with a seven-ball 25 that infused life into the chase. Phillips smashed left-arm wrist spinner Kuldeep Yadav for



Abdul Samad

three sixes and a four before he was caught by Shimron Hetmyer off the fifth ball of the penultimate over. "That was the ball I should have hit the most. I was disappointed the actual slot ball didn't go over the fence," Phillips said after being named man of the match. "I felt I left a lot out there with 17 needed off the final over, but then Samad did what he did and obviously we got that little bit of luck with the no ball." Phillips had come into the Hyderabad team for the under-performing big signing Harry Brook while England's Joe Root played his first game of the season for Rajasthan. The victory was set up by key knocks from Abhishek Sharma (55), Rahul Tripathi (47) and Heinrich Klaasen (26) as the team made its highest ever run chase. Yuzvendra Chahal's bowling figures of 4-29 went in vain.

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WOMEN AND BONE HEALTH

Bones provide basic structure or framework to the body. They protect organs, support muscles and store calcium. So, it's important to build and maintain strong and healthy bones, throughout our life, starting from childhood years to adulthood and later in old age.

Bone health is of major concern for women. Estrogen, is one of the key regulator of bone metabolism in both men and women. Menopause associated with the loss of ovarian estrogens brings about decline in bone density in women. In simple words as, women grow older, their bones start getting thinner and gradually can result in a serious condition called osteoporosis. This condition mostly affects older women, but prevention starts when one is young.

Minerals to make bones dense, are added to the bones during childhood, and early adulthood. By 30 years of age, one achieves peak bone mass.

(Vandana Chawla is an Online Nutrition Expert and a Registered Nutritionist-UKVRN)



VANDANA CHAWLA

NUTRITION & YOU



NATURAL WAYS TO BUILD UP AND MAINTAIN YOUR BONE HEALTH

- **Proteins, the key to bone health** - Around 50% of bone composition is proteins. Low protein diet can result in bone loss. One or more protein food should be part of every meal. It can be easily obtained from, foods like, eggs, meat, lentils, beans, nuts, seeds, or dairy.
- **Calcium, the bone builder** - The most important and the key mineral found in bone is calcium. Old bone cells are replaced by new cells and for this building and repair. Hence, daily intake of calcium in the diet is very important. Spread out calcium intake throughout the day for better absorption that is, include calcium-rich foods in every meal. Foods, like milk, cheese, yoghurt, paneer, sesame seeds, greens, ragi etc are all great sources of calcium.
- **Vitamin D for bone health** - This vitamin plays an important role in calcium absorption and its utilisation. Sun exposure along with foods like fatty fish, organ meat like, liver and cheese or some fortified foods are ways of getting this vitamin.
- **Low-calorie diet** - not good for bone health. Low calorie diets or fad diets can result in loss of muscle mass which, in turn, can have a damaging effect on bone health. Eating a well-balanced diet with more natural foods and less of processed foods can help in keeping bones healthy and strong.
- **Magnesium and zinc** - The other key minerals for bone health - magnesium promotes calcium absorption, while zinc helps in the formation of bone-building cells, plus prevents bone loss.
- **Physical activity good for bone health** - Engaging in physical activity on a regular basis, like walking, cycling, strength training or weight bearing exercises, can promote bone formation during the growth period and protect and preserve bone health in later years.

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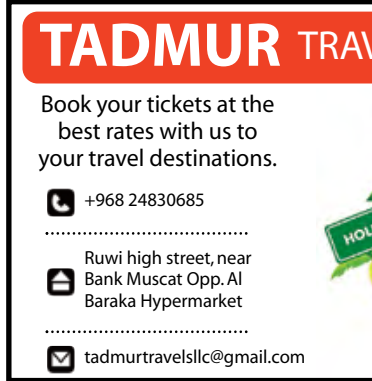


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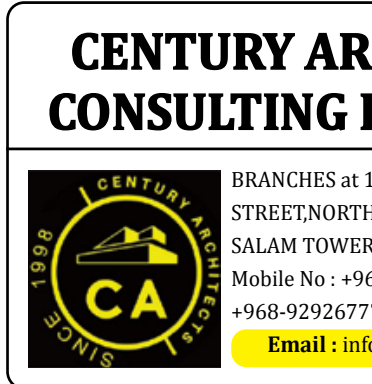
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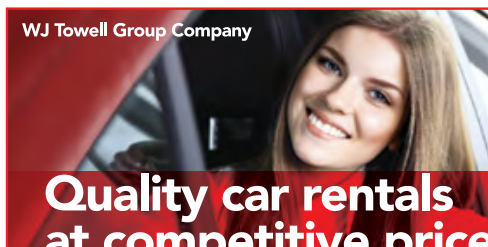




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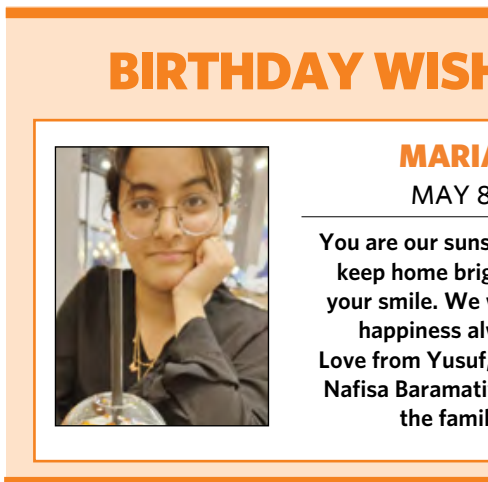
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DENTAL CARE

Americans seek cheaper dentistry in Mexico's Los Algodones



Dentist Dr Carlos Rubio speaks at the Rubio Dental Group offices in the border town of Los Algodones, Mexico, just across the border from California and Arizona

MOLAR CITY'S MOOLAH



Dentist Dr Miguel Herrera installs dental implants for an American patient at the Rubio Dental Group offices in Los Algodones

Hundreds of thousands of Americans travel across the Mexican border every year to the tiny town of Los Algodones, in search of sun and sand, but root canals and veneers.

Around 600 dentists cram the four main streets of the town, offering procedures at just a fraction of the cost in the United States.

"It's the highest concentration of dentists per square kilometre in the world," jokes one of the men jostling for customers near the border checkpoint.

Los Algodones is better known to Americans as 'Molar City', a nickname that spread by word of mouth long before the internet made shopping for healthcare easier.

The town long ago embraced the moniker, and now operates a website - mo-

In California my dentist wanted to put the equivalent of a Tesla in my mouth. He told me the whole procedure would come out to US\$57,000

RENE

larcity.org - to help potential patients choose doctors and resolve travel logistics.

Competition is fierce, with colourful signs hanging off every balcony, flyers advertising discounts for whitening, extractions and implants. Despite so many dentists, there is still plenty of demand to go around.

During its November to April high season, Molar City's 7,000 population almost doubles with day-tripping Americans. Even in the sweltering summer, around 2,000 people come daily from US border states like California, Arizona or New Mexico.

Cost of a Tesla

A look at any dentist's price list reveals just why the place is so popular.

"In California my dentist wanted to put the equivalent of a Tesla in my mouth," quips Rene, a 65-year-old from California whose first visit to Molar City is for four implants.

"He told me the whole procedure would come out to US\$57,000," laughs the Uber driver, covering his mouth with one hand.

Dr Carlos Rubio, who trained in both Mexico and the United States, says the huge price differential is what initially attracts customers.

The discount is such, the 63-year-old

says, that it more than covers the additional cost of travelling, even if a patient has to make repeated trips for multiple appointments.

US dental care is often funded through private insurance policies attached to employment, usually with annual limits on coverage.

According to the University of Illinois Chicago, around a quarter of Americans have no dental coverage, while public programmes like Medicaid do not routinely cover all forms of dental care.

David Barry, a retiree who has been getting his teeth looked after in Molar City for more than a decade, says many Americans simply cannot afford to see the dentist.

"Most people in the US don't have dental insurance, or their dental insurance doesn't cover very much - like US\$1,000 a year for a crown or so," he says.

"For something major it's not that great, so when I first came, I needed quite a bit of work - a few implants and crowns. In California they quoted me US\$35,000. I think I paid about US\$6,000 or US\$8,000 here."

The 64-year-old, who now lives in Arizona, says many people have a misperception that dentistry in Mexico is of a lower quality. In fact, he said, "The equipment here is more advanced. The dentists at home still use impressions - here they do it all electronically."

Anyone need a dentist?

On the US side of the border, a large parking lot begins to fill up early, with most visitors

seemingly older than 50.

"Morning! Anyone need a good dentist today?" a young man asks people as soon as they get out of their cars.

Before reaching the border gates, they will hear the same question - in English - three more times.

After passing through the massive border wall, a sign past the checkpoint announces their arrival in Los Algodones - a town founded in 1894.

Ten steps later, you see a pharmacy, an optician, and the start of dental clinics, plus a swarm of people offering services.

A few restaurants and shops selling hand-crafts and colourful souvenirs mark the only interruption to the sea of medical establishments.

Rubio, who had to wait four months to see his first patient, now sees between 30 and 35 people a day. He says there has been no discernible drop off after the kidnapping and murder of several Americans in Matamoros, Mexico, just over the border from Brownsville, Texas.

That high-profile event in early March shed light on the large number of US citizens participating in so-called medical tourism. No one AFP spoke to had any qualms about visiting.

"It's something that some people comment on in the United States, but I tell them that Los Algodones feels safe," says David Barry. Rubio agrees.

"In this community, we don't have that problem," he says. "We live off tourism, and we try to take care of it."

AFP



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