

Road to prosperity

MTCIT working on mega projects to stimulate national economy

Our Correspondent
Muscat

Announcing major development plans for 2022, the Ministry of Transport, Communications and Information Technology (MTCIT) said on Monday efforts are currently under way looking into the prospects of a metro service in Muscat, besides work on a causeway bridge is Masirah and a railway connection between Sohar and Khazaen Economic City in Barka.

Addressing the media at a press conference, H E Saeed al Maawali, Minister of Transport, Communications and Information Technology, said a committee has been formed for the metro project in Muscat. "The committee includes representatives of all relevant authorities."

The press meet was also attended by H E Dr Ali bin Amer al Shaidani, Undersecretary for Communications and Information Technology in MTCIT, and H E Khamis bin Mohammed al Shamkhi, Undersecretary for Transport in the ministry.

H E Maawali



New projects under review, including a causeway bridge to link Masirah and a new road for Jabal Akhdar

H E SAEED AL MAAWALI

added that there are new projects under review, including a causeway bridge to link Masirah and a new road for Jabal Akhdar. "The ministry is also planning to organise the taxi and truck sectors this year. The ministry will establish special roads for trucks."

Additionally, the ministry will launch a national platform to receive suggestions and complaints from people.

He confirmed that the performance indicators point towards an increase in direct import of containers in 2022 of about five per cent, while land and marine transport revenues increased ten per cent.

The minister also informed that the number of vessels received by Omani ports rose by 1.3 per cent, while TEU container handling grew by two per cent, and that four fuel stations will soon be opened on Batinah Expressway.

H E Shamkhi confirmed that a new investment in railways is currently being

looked into to connect the logistical hubs of Sohar and Khazaen City. Another, which was announced earlier, will link Oman with Saudi Arabia.

H E Shamkhi noted that there are approximately 17,000km of unpaved roads compared to 16,000km of paved roads in the sultanate, "so it is necessary to work on strategic investment opportunities".

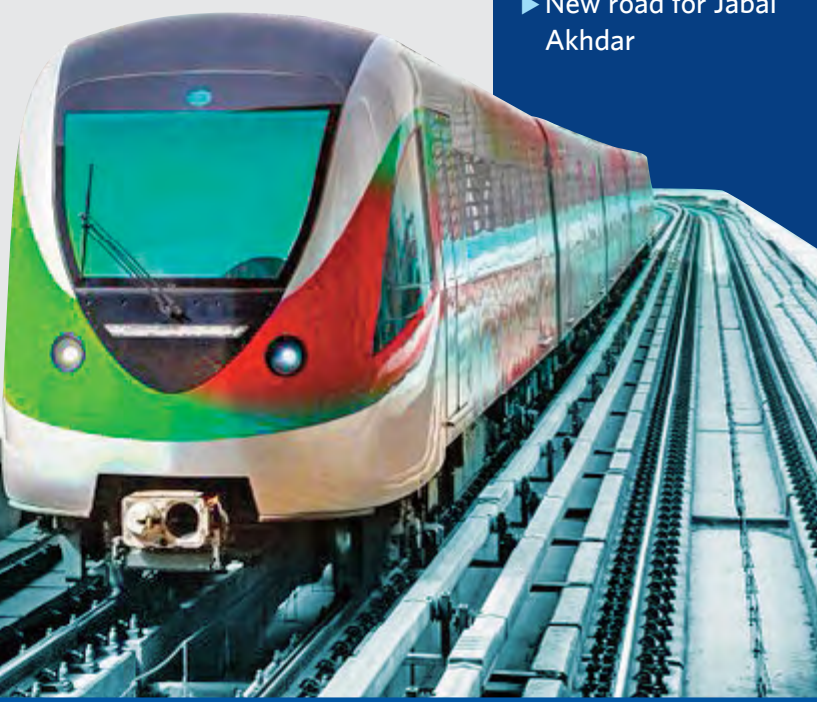
The ministry will identify feasible locations to develop water taxi services in Muscat and Musandam. "A team from the Ministry of Transport will visit some governorates to discuss the establishment of projects like special pathways for bicycles," he said.

MAJOR PROJECTS UNDER REVIEW

- ▶ Metro for Muscat
- ▶ Sohar-Khazaen railway line
- ▶ Masirah causeway bridge



- ▶ Water taxi in Muscat, Musandam
- ▶ New road for Jabal Akhdar





National space policy on the anvil

Muscat - Addressing a press meet on Monday, H E Dr Ali bin Amer al Shaidani, Undersecretary for Communications and Information Technology in Ministry of Transport, Communications and Information Technology, said work is underway to finalise a national space policy.

According to H E Shaidani, the ministry seeks to establish a space club, establish a section on space exploration in the Children's Museum in Muscat, develop a document on space and astronomical concepts, and launch a platform that includes open satellite data in 2022.

The ministry also plans investment in cybersecurity services, apps and AI services, training nationals and honing the skills specialised in modern technologies.

"The government's digital transformation programme for 2022 includes the launch of the first phase of a unified national portal project for e-government services, that will see the launch of 88 electronic services provided to citizens and the business sector. The ministry will also launch the Jadarah Initiative to facilitate access of government institutions and companies to locally developed technical products," the undersecretary said.

Major achievements in road transport

The year 2021 saw the partial opening of the Adam-Haima-Thamrait dualisation project, opening of the Suwaiq-Hoqain dualisation project and the Rub al Khali carriageway opening door for social and economic integration between Oman and Saudi Arabia.

► NEWS BRIEF

FRENCH NAVY CHIEF VISITS NDC

Muscat - Air Vice Marshal Saleh Yahya al Maskari, Commandant of National Defence College (NDC), received Admiral Pierre Vandier, Chief of Staff of the French Navy, and his accompanying delegation, on Monday.

The guest and his accompanying delegation toured NDC's facilities and were briefed on its training equipment designed according to the latest specifications and the best educational systems.

OMAN PARTICIPATES IN GCC DEVELOPMENT MEETING

Dubai, UAE - The sultanate, represented by the Ministry of Economy, took part on Monday in the third meeting of high-ranking officials of the GCC Economic and Development Affairs Authority at Expo 2020 Dubai.

Oman's delegation in the meeting was headed by H E Dr Nasser Rashid al Maawali, Undersecretary in the Ministry of Economy.

The meeting discussed several topics, namely the roadmap of reaching economic unity between the GCC countries by 2025.

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MTCIT to offer investment opportunities in 7 ports

MoCIIP to start Tejarah Talks on challenges to businesses on Feb 23

Our Correspondent
Muscat

The Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion (MoCIIP) will launch Tejarah Talks on Wednesday at the Civil Aviation Authority Training Centre in Al Hail North. Tejarah Talks will bring together business and thought leaders in a series - seven in all - of evening sessions to explore issues shaping Oman's business landscape, impacting investment and driving non-oil exports, the ministry stated.

"From measuring and reducing CO2 emissions to green finance, carbon capture and waste reduction, our Tejarah Talks will cover many different aspects of sustainability," it stated.

Maymuna al Adawi, director and organiser of Tejarah Talks, said, "Through this inspiring initiative, we look forward to showing

The first session of the series will focus on the topic 'Sustainability: A Nice-to-have or a Need-to-have?'

casing the dynamism of business and industry in Oman and highlighting how under the wise guidance of His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tariq, Oman Vision 2040 is creating the conditions where more than ever investors in our country can grow, succeed and thrive."

Tackling topics directly relevant to business, industry and investment in Oman, economic diversification and job creation, besides pressing global issues, Tejarah Talks will explore post-

COVID-19 company culture, the evolving world of manufacturing, cracking export markets, green transition, creative industries, and marketing in the new data-led world. The first session of the series will focus on the topic 'Sustainability: A Nice-to-have or a Need-to-have?' on February 23.

Supported by Sohar Port and Freezone, HSBC and Oman Business Forum, the first session will be moderated by Dr Adham al Said, founder of The Firm. The panelists include Mazin al Saadi, HSSE manager of Mazoon Dairy; Mark Geilenkirchen, CEO of Sohar Port and Freezone; Dr Firas al Abduwani, VP of clean energy, OQ Alternative Energy; Simon Adcock, head of commercial Banking, HSBC; and Dr Michael Tsang, founder of Three Pillars Consulting.

To register, email contacts details to TT@tejarah.gov.om

AUSTRALIA REOPENS BORDERS AFTER 2 YEARS



Staff offer souvenirs to passengers upon arrival at Sydney International Airport on Monday, as Australia reopened its borders to fully vaccinated visa holders, tourists and business travellers (AFP)

See also [Page 11](#)

All indicators for brighter outlook of Oman's economy in 2022

Shaddad al Musalmiy
Muscat

With Oman's government finances improving on higher oil prices in 2021 and average oil prices likely to be much higher than the levels estimated in the 2022 budget, coupled with state incentives for businesses, there is a brighter outlook for the year ahead.

The price of Oman oil on Monday exceeded US\$92. 'Oman oil price (April 2022 delivery) was US\$92.24, comprising an increase by US\$1.35 from the price of last Friday, which was US\$90.89,' ONA stated.

To boost the economy, several government bodies have slashed or cancelled fees across more



than 500 services offered to investors and members of the public. The move was part of an initiative to make Oman more competitive, strike a balance between the services and fees paid, rationalise government spending, streamline fee structure and improve the value of services offered to customers.

According to Redha bin Juma al Saleh, chairman of Oman Chamber of Commerce and Industry, implementation of the unified guide of service fees reduction, which has the blessings

of His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tariq, will catalyse the business environment encouraging entrepreneurs and innovators to start business ventures.

"The unified guide will also attract foreign investment, in addition to raising the sultanate's indicators of competitiveness and ease of doing business. We urge the private sector and business owners to contribute to strengthening the national economy and to take advantage of the simplified processes and procedures to avail government services to support the ongoing economic diversification efforts," he said.

Oman's budget deficit dropped sharply to RO1.22bn (four per cent of GDP) in 2021, according to preliminary estimates, compared to a RO4.4bn (15.8 per cent of GDP) shortfall recorded in 2020. The main driver for reduction in the deficit was the improvement in oil and gas revenues last year. The deficit in the 2022 budget is estimated to be RO1.5bn and the Ministry of Finance (MoF) has affirmed that the most significant objective in drafting public spending estimates was to maintain spending on basic services like education, health, housing and social welfare.

Khalid al Busaidi, media and communications director in MoF, attributed the service fees reduction to an objective of helping the economy while noting that the move will have no impact on government revenues. "Service fees have been reduced by 17 to 96

per cent across various sectors."

Oman's labour market has been established as a key sector supporting the economy and in 2021, as many as 40,000 Omanis were employed limiting the total number of jobseekers in the range of 50,000. Dr Mahad bin Said bin Ali Ba'owain, Minister of Labour, said recently, "We are working around the clock to ensure that jobseekers get the right placement."

He also noted that the government is not inclined to "pressurise the private sector by asking them to raise minimum wage because that would affect employment figures. Instead of hiring three Omanis, companies would hire only one".

@shadadn

22 artists take part in International Sculpture Camp

Our Correspondent
Muscat

Twenty-two sculptors from different countries are taking part in the 9th International Sculpture Camp running from February 18 to 27 at Wadi al Jizzi in Sohar. The camp this year includes a special day for teachers. On February 24, sculptors and teachers will paint a graffiti wall together.

Speaking to *Muscat Daily*, Ali al Jabri, supervisor of the camp, said, "Among the 22 artists, 13



On Teacher's Day - February 24 - the sculptors and teachers will create a graffiti on a 10sqm wall

ALI AL JABRI

are from Oman. The others are from Bahrain, UAE, Nepal, Iran, Egypt, Tunisia, Ecuador and

Syria."

The finished sculptures will be displayed at the closing ceremony at the camp, some in Sohar Market and the remaining in Crowne Plaza Sohar.

"This year's event is dedicated to teachers and Teacher's Day will be celebrated, which is observed on February 24 every year. The sculptors and teachers will create a graffiti on a 10sqm wall on the day."

According to Jabri, the graffiti will put the spotlight on Arabic

calligraphy.

"The camp aims to encourage artistic pursuits in the sultanate while supporting tourism. It will be a chance to exchange sculptors' expertise in marble, stones and wood sculpting, besides helping strengthen bonds between the sultanate's and international artists," Jabri said.

For the first time this year, the camp includes iron sculpting, besides workshops in wood and marble sculpting and visits to marble quarries in Sohar.



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Chairman's Report

Dear Shareholders,

On my behalf and the Company's board of directors, I am pleased to congratulate His Majesty Sultan Haitham Bin Tariq Al Said on His Majesty's second anniversary of assuming leadership of the Sultanate and guiding us in the path of progress.

The year 2021 witnessed a gradual and steady recovery of Oman's economy as the vaccine rollout gradually restored economic activities, alongside the recovery of the international oil prices.

Despite the continuing challenges posed by the resurgence of Covid-19 through its new variants, the Sultanate of Oman, under the leadership of His Majesty Haitham bin Tariq, has witnessed an improvement in financial and monetary indicators, an increase in GDP, and a decline in public debt, an increase in foreign currency reserves and a decrease in the fiscal deficit, which led to an improvement in the Sultanate's rating with credit rating agencies.

Your Company navigated successfully through the challenges posed by the pandemic and ensured an uninterrupted supply of petroleum products at all times.

On behalf of the Board of Directors, I am pleased to present the 18th Annual Report of your Company, together with the audited financial Statements for the year ended 31 December 2021.

FINANCIAL PERFORMANCE (RO'000)

	2021	2020	Inc /(dec)	Inc/(dec) %
Sales	372,907	333,762	39,145	12%
Cost of Sales	(350,067)	(313,673)	36,394	12%
Gross profit	22,840	20,089	2,751	14%
Other income	6,317	4,907	1,410	29%
Total expenses	(26,397)	(24,133)	2,264	9%
Net profit	2,760	863	1,897	220%

	2021	2020	0.027	220%
Earnings per share (RO)	0.040	0.013	0.027	220%
Book value per share (RO)	0.639	0.599	0.040	7%
Retained earnings (RO'000)	32,792	30,032	2,760	9%
Total equity (RO'000)	44,096	41,336	2,760	7%

HIGHLIGHTS

Total sales during the year 2021 recovered & reached RO 372.9 million (2020: RO 333.8 million), an increase by RO 39.1 million, i.e., by 12%. The increase in sales is mainly attributed to the partial recovery of economic activities due to the decreased pandemic effect & the recovery of oil prices.

- As a result of increased economic activities, net profit increased to RO 2.760 million (2020: RO 0.863 million), i.e., increase by RO 1.897 million (i.e., 220%) over 2020.
- Earnings per share is increased to RO 0.040 in 2021 compared to RO 0.013 in 2020, an increase by RO 0.027 (i.e., 220%).
- Book value per share also increased from RO 0.599 in 2020 to RO 0.639 in 2021, a growth of 7%, as a result of increase in net profit in 2021.
- Total equity has also increased to RO 44.096 million in 2021 from RO 41.336 million in 2020 registering a growth of 7%.

SEGMENTS PERFORMANCE

• **Retails segment:**

Focus on "SMART FILLING STATIONS"

With the growth of cities & young urban society, Retail stations continue to grow and expand. The Company continue to build new filling stations in areas that have high potential for growth and expansion.

Customer convenience and digitalization remained Al Maha's primary focus, and your Company took various initiatives across the Retail segment to remain the preferred choice for customers. The Company has made great strides in digitizing most fuel stations and hopes to finish it in early 2023.

During the year, the Company launched the "Fuely" service as a new initiative to take the delivery of fuel to the doorsteps of the customer. Even though launched to cater to the demands of the B2C segment, this "First in Oman" initiative has been attractive to the B2B segment also.

• **Commercial segment:**

Despite the challenges, the commercial sector has emerged as a growth leader in good performance due to the Company's customer-centric approach. The Company's strategy of aligning business with customer expectations and continuous improvement in operations and efficiency has had tangible results in terms of business performance.

During the year, the Company also secured major commercial contracts, expanding its client base to remain a leader in this highly competitive market.

• **Aviation segment**

The aviation segment has been the worst hit during the continued pandemic period, due to the restrictions on international travel. These restrictions on international flights still continue to a large extent, except for the partial resumption of flights to certain countries. As per projections by global agencies, pre-COVID levels are likely to be reached only by 2024.

• **Lubricant segment**

Despite the challenging external environment, Al Maha lubricants performed par excellence in the automotive and industrial segments and gained popularity both in the local & export market.

• **NFR (Non-Fuel Retailing) segment** continues to be the high priority area. We continue to focus on redesigning of C Stores, construct / develop Commercial buildings in the fuel outlets to fully capitalize on the growth opportunity it offers to support our retail business. The partnership agreement signed with Enhance to replace and manage our existing C Stores with the popular "Noor Express" shops in our filling station courtyards has already received much public appreciation and support.

DIVIDEND

In line with our consistent dividend policy of maintaining a sustainable dividend payment, the Board of Directors has recommended a cash dividend of Bzs 40 per share, representing 40% of share capital, subject to the approval of the shareholders' Annual General Meeting.

CORPORATE GOVERNANCE

Our corporate philosophy on Corporate Governance has been to ensure fairness to the Stakeholders through transparency, full disclosures, empowerment of employees and collective decision making. The Corporate Governance Report highlighting these endeavors has been incorporated as a separate section, forming part of the Annual Report.

SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY

Your Company is committed to the communities around it and through various CSR programmes. During the past year, the Company launched many programs within the framework of social responsibility and supported several charitable institutions and non-profit organisations serving the country. In addition, the Company immediately responded to assist those affected by cyclone Shaheen in early October 2021.

HSE

Health, Safety, Security, and Environment are the indispensable constituents of our activities. Your Company strives to improve personal and process safety by continuous monitoring and effective management. The target is to achieve zero occupational incidents, and the primary focus is laid on the Safety Management System.

Your Company has received a trio of certifications from the International Organisation for Standardisation (ISO) viz.,

- 1) ISO 9001 : 2015 certification for Quality Management System,
- 2) ISO 14001 : 2015 for Environmental Management System, and
- 3) ISO 45001 : 2018 for Occupational Health and Safety Management System.

The Company received these prestigious certifications as a result of its commitment to adhering to the highest international standards of quality, environment, health, and safety in an endeavour to ensure its consistent and sustainable growth.

FUTURE OUTLOOK

With the increase in global oil prices and positive expectations for GDP growth, reduced restrictions on movement, and a high rate of immunization against the Covid-19 virus locally and internationally, reasonable expectations indicate optimism for positive growth of the Company's business under its strategy to take advantage of emerging opportunities in the changing business environment.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

On behalf of the Board of Directors and the Executive Management, I take this opportunity, to express our most sincere gratitude and loyalty to His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tariq and for his efforts towards a prosperous Oman.

We thank the Ministry of Energy and Minerals, the Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion, OQ Refineries, our shareholders, customers, the officials of the Capital Market Authority, the Muscat Stock Exchange, and Muscat Clearing & Depository Company for their valuable support and co-operation. We also appreciate the dedicated and committed service of our staff members

Juma Ali Juma Al-Juma
Chairman
14 February 2022

STATEMENT OF FINANCIAL POSITION AS AT 31 DECEMBER 2021

	2021 RO'000	2020 RO'000
ASSETS		
Non-current assets		
Property, plant and equipment	28,859	30,366
Investment properties	541	588
Right-of-use assets	4,058	4,072
Contract assets-non current	3,353	3,708
Deferred tax assets	2,722	2,387
	<u>39,533</u>	<u>41,121</u>
Current assets		
Inventories	3,878	3,383
Trade and other receivables	58,428	42,301
Contract assets - current	1,952	1,159
Bank balances and cash	32,906	41,234
	<u>97,164</u>	<u>88,077</u>
TOTAL ASSETS	<u>136,697</u>	<u>129,198</u>
EQUITY AND LIABILITIES		
Equity		
Share capital	6,900	6,900
Legal reserve	2,300	2,300
Special reserve	2,104	2,104
Retained earnings	32,792	30,032
Total equity	<u>44,096</u>	<u>41,336</u>
Liabilities		
Non-current liabilities		
Lease liabilities – non current	3,174	2,946
Contract liabilities – non current	785	2,222
Employees' end of service benefits	199	211
	<u>4,158</u>	<u>5,379</u>
Current liabilities		
Trade and other payables	43,062	34,003
Short term borrowings	42,000	44,731
Lease liabilities – current	1,156	1,329
Contract liabilities – current	1,343	2,032
Income tax payable	882	388
	<u>88,443</u>	<u>82,483</u>
Total liabilities	<u>92,601</u>	<u>87,862</u>
TOTAL EQUITY AND LIABILITIES	<u>136,697</u>	<u>129,198</u>
Net assets per share (RO)	<u>0.639</u>	<u>0.599</u>

STATEMENT OF COMPREHENSIVE INCOME FOR THE YEAR ENDED 31 DECEMBER 2021

	2021 RO'000	2020 RO'000
INCOME		
Revenue	372,907	333,762
Cost of sales	(350,067)	(313,673)
GROSS PROFIT	<u>22,840</u>	<u>20,089</u>
Other income	4,332	3,991
Operating and administration expenses	(23,567)	(22,165)
OPERATING PROFIT	<u>3,605</u>	<u>1,915</u>
Finance income	1,985	916
Finance costs	(2,283)	(1,810)
Profit Before Income Tax	<u>3,307</u>	<u>1,021</u>
Income tax expense	(547)	(158)
Profit and total Comprehensive Income for the year	<u>2,760</u>	<u>863</u>
Basic and diluted earnings per share (RO)	<u>0.040</u>	<u>0.013</u>

Note:
The complete report is available in Muscat Stock Exchange website and Company's website.

The complete report will be sent to any shareholder who requests them either in Arabic or English as required within 7 days of receipt of the request.

The request should be sent to the Chief Financial Officer (CFO) at the above mentioned address.



371 violations of fishing law in January: MAFWR

Our Correspondent
Muscat

A total of 371 violations of fishing law were reported in January 2022, according to statics released by the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Water Resources (MAFWR).

"In all, 361 items were seized, including boats, engines, nets and other fishing equipment," a MAFWR official said. A total of 57.2kg of fish was confiscated in January. Specialists of the ministry arrested 143 expatriates for violating provisions of the Marine Fishing Law and Protection of Living Aquatic Resources.

Besides 269 violations of fishing licence regulations, there were 50 cases of using prohibited fishing methods and posses-

sion of unauthorised equipment, eight violations of fishing in prohibited areas and time, 19 cases of employing unlicensed expatriate workers, ten instances of non-compliance with placement of registration plates on boats and fishing vessels, and 15 other violations.

MAFWR recently conducted several campaigns to arrest violators of the fishing law in various governorates.

On Monday, the fisheries control team in the Governorate of Dhofar carried out inspection campaigns in the Arabian Sea off the wilayats of Salalah, Taqa and Mirbat and confiscated equipment to trap lobsters outside the fishing season. Legal measures were initiated against the violators.

Registration for admissions to Indian schools close on Feb 28

Muscat - The Board of Directors of Indian Schools in Oman has announced that online registration for admissions in Indian schools in the capital area for the next academic year (2022-2023) will close on February 28.

Parents who seek admission for their wards in Indian schools in the capital area can visit <http://indianschoolsoman.com/our-services/admission-2022-23/> for more details regarding the admission procedures.

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

Online registration for admissions is applicable to seven Indian Schools in the capital area -

Indian School Bousher, Indian School Muscat, Indian School Darsait, Indian School Al Wadi Al Kabir, Indian School Al Ghubra, Indian School Al Seeb and Indian School Al Maabala.

Admission is open to children of Indian and other expatriate communities with valid resident visa. Children who have completed three years as of April 1, are eligible for admission in Kindergarten.

Admissions for children with special needs are open at Care and Special Education (CSE) at Indian School Muscat. Parents can approach the CSE administration directly for admission (www.cseoman.com).

Considering the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic, admission procedures are entirely online, including submission of documents and remittance of admission processing fee.

WEATHER WATCH			PRAYER TIMINGS	
	Max	Min		
Abu Dhabi	23	15	Fajr	5.19am
Doha	24	14	Sunrise	6.35am
Kuwait City	23	14	Duhr	12.25pm
Manama	22	15	Asr	3.44pm
Muscat	26	18	Maghrib	6.11pm
Riyadh	23	9	Isha	7.22pm

MTCIT to offer investment opportunities in 7 ports

Our Correspondent
Muscat

As part of its efforts to stimulate the economy and increase the country's national income, the Ministry of Transport, Communications and Information Technology (MTCIT) will develop seven ports.

H E Saeed al Maawali, Minister of Transport, Communications and Information Technology, said, "The ministry will offer investment opportunities to develop and manage a number of ports - Khasab, Shinas, Shaleem, Shanna, Masirah, Manji and Sadah.

"The ministry will also prepare a study for the establishment of yacht marinas, the establishment of a berth in the port of Shinas, and the inauguration of the Oman Logistics Platform."

He further said that MTCIT will launch the 'Logistics Land Bridge' initiative which aims to create a link between North Bati-



(Supplied photo)

nah and Dhahirah governorate, and between North Batinah and Buraimi. This will raise the efficiency of the roads that lead to the borders.

According to H E Maawali, the ministry will also launch an initiative to link strategic tourist areas

with main roads. The initiative includes some proposed projects such as the Wakan village road in the wilayat of Nakhl in South Batinah, Al Hamra-Hat road that connects the Governorate of Dakhliyah and South Batinah, Jabal Akhdar road in the wilayat

of Nizwa, and Jabal Shams road in the wilayat of Al Hamra.

Speaking at a press conference on Monday about the most important roads under construction, H E Khamis bin Mohammed al Shamkhi, Undersecretary for Transport in MTCIT, said that the ministry is currently working to improve the Bidbid-Rusayl road. The two-lane road will be expanded to four lanes each on both sides to reduce congestion at the entrance to the Governorate of Muscat.

"The ministry will soon complete work at the Aswad border crossing with the United Arab Emirates," H E Khamis informed.

According to the ministry, several initiatives in maritime affairs, including a new navigation system, establishment of small marine industrial zones for the maintenance of medium and small vessels, and the Al Nomanani project to register ships will stimulate Oman's national income.



(Supplied photo)

300 people come together to clean beaches in North Batinah

Our Correspondent
Muscat

Environment Authority (EA) launched a beach cleanup campaign in several wilayats in North Batinah governorate recently, in its efforts to preserve the environment and keep Oman's beaches clean and pristine.

The campaign was carried out by EA in cooperation with civil and voluntary organisations to clean several beaches in North Batinah.

"To complement the efforts of the Environment Authority in keeping beaches clean, the Environment Department in North Batinah governorate organised a campaign to clean beaches of the wilayats of Saham and Khabourah. This was done with the participation of 300 people from of governmental and private groups, associations and community members," said Nizar bin Salim al Aarimi, director of the department.

The campaign began in the

Khor Al Malah area in Saham and the Qasabiya al Zaab area in Khabourah. "Plastic items and other litter, some of which pose a risk to beachgoers, besides spoiling the beauty of the beaches were collected," Aarimi said.

According to Aarimi, the campaign aims to preserve beaches and coastal areas and protect the environment for the sustainability of the sultanate's natural resources in line with the national priorities of Oman Vision 2040.



Two infiltrators arrested: ROP

Muscat - Two Asians have been arrested by Royal Oman Police (ROP) for attempting to enter the sultanate illegally.

"The Coast Guard Police in the Governorate of South Batinah arrested two infiltrators for trying to enter the country illegally in a boat. Large quantities of crystal meth and hashish were seized in their possession. Legal measures have been taken against the accused," ROP said in a statement.

SAF chief receives Qatari naval commander



(ONA)

Muscat - Vice Admiral Abdullah Khamis al Ra'eesi, Chief of Staff of Sultan's Armed Forces (SAF), received in his office at Al Murtafa'a Garrison, Rear Admiral Abdullah Hassan al Sulaiti, Commander of the Qatari Emiri Naval Forces, on Monday.

The two sides exchanged views on several military matters of common interest.

The meeting was attended by Rear Admiral Saif Nasser al Rahbi, Commander of Royal Navy of Oman (RNO), and Com-

modore Issa Salim al Owaisi, Assistant Chief of Staff for Administration and Supply.

Later in the day, Rear Admiral Sulaiti visited the Military Technological College (MTC).

The guest was accompanied during the visit by Rear Admiral Rahbi.

On his arrival at MTC, Rear Admiral Sulaiti was greeted by Air Commodore Mohammed Abdulaziz al Seyabi, Commandant of MTC. ONA

Citizen arrested for illegal logging in S Sharqiyah: Environment Authority

Our Correspondent
Muscat

The Environment Authority (EA) has arrested a citizen for illegal logging in South Sharqiyah.

A statement issued by the authority on Monday said, 'The Wildlife Protection Unit in Al Saleel National Park in South Sharqiyah arrested a citizen for

logging without permission. Legal measures have been taken against him.'

According to an EA official, under Omani law it is illegal to cut trees and damage the green cover.

"Additionally, our laws facilitate activation of programmes to combat desertification in cooperation with international organ-

isations. The authority is exerting all efforts to reduce damage to the environment, including logging and burning. Any person who cuts or burns a tree or damages vegetation in any region will be punished with imprisonment and a fine," he said.

Citizens can report any violations of wildlife via the hotline 80071999.

COVID-19 UPDATE

Muscat - The Ministry of Health (MoH) announced 1,036 new infections registered in a 24-hour period on Monday, taking the total number of COVID-19 cases registered in Oman to 376,724. Three deaths were also reported in this period. 'The total number of COVID-19 related deaths in the country now stands at 4,234,' MoH stated.

ANNOUNCEMENT

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

Tender No.	Tender Description	Last date for electronic purchasing	Last date of tender submission	Documents fee (RO)
2 /2022	Providing gardening, cleaning services for the Ministry's building in North Batinah	Tuesday 01/03/2022 at 02:00 pm	Sunday 06/03/2022 at 10:00 am	R.O 25/=

- Specialized establishments can obtain electronic documents from this link below, starting from Monday 21/02/2022, 7:30 AM.
<https://etendering.tenderboard.gov.om/>
- Each bid is to be attached with a bank guarantee or a certified cheque from one of the banks operating in the Sultanate of (1%) of the value of the tender for the Ministry of Manpower, valid for a period of (90) days from the date of submission of the tender.
- Each electronic bid is to be attached with a copy of the bank guarantee and the original bank guarantee must be submitted at Internal Tender Committee, ground floor at the Ministry's Building at Airport Heights, no later than the date of submission.
- Tenders envelopes will be opened at 11:00am on the same day.

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

labour_OMAN

شركة المها لتسويق المنتجات النفطية ش م ع

Al Maha Petroleum Products Marketing Co. SAOG

P.O.Box: 57 , P.C: 116 , Mina Al Fahal , Sultanate of Oman
Tel: 24610200, Fax: 24610201, Website: www.almaha.com.om

Notice Of Annual Ordinary General Meetings

The Board of Directors of Al Maha Petroleum Products Marketing Co. SAOG (the "Company") is pleased to invite all shareholders of the Company to attend the Annual Ordinary General Meeting (AGM) of the Company scheduled to be held at 03:00 PM on Wednesday, 09th of March 2022 at the Crowne Plaza Hotel In Al Irfan city, Al-Dham Hall , in addition through the electronic platform hosting Annual General Meeting, which can be accessed through Muscat Clearance and Depository Company's website (www.mcd.gov.om).In case the number of the attendees does not meet the required quorum, the Annual General Meeting will be held at 03:00 PM on Wednesday, 16th of March 2022 at the Crowne Plaza Hotel In Al Irfan city, Al-Dham Hall, in addition through above electronic platform ,to discuss the following agenda:

Agenda for Annual Ordinary General Meeting:

- To consider and approve the report of the Board of Directors' Report for the financial year ended 31st December 2021. (as per the attachment).
- To consider and approve the Corporate Governance Report for the financial year ended 31st December 2021. (as per the attachment).
- To consider and approve the Auditor's report on the Company's audited Financial Statements for the financial year ended 31st December 2021. (as per the attachment).
- To consider and approve the proposal of distribute cash dividends of Baisa 40 per share to the shareholders.
- To approve the sitting fees of the Board of Directors and sub-committees payable to the Board of Directors for the financial year ended on 31 December 2021 and to determine the sitting fees for the next financial year (as per the attachment).
- To consider and approve the proposal of distribute annual remuneration to the Board of Directors members amounting to RO165,000 (Riyals Omani One Hundred sixty-five thousand) for the financial year ended on 31st December 2021.
- To consider the transactions entered into by the Company with related parties during the financial year ended 31st December 2021 (as per the attachment).
- To consider and approve the transactions that the Company will enter into with related parties during the financial year ending 31 December 2022 (as per the attachment).
- To inform the General Meeting about expenditure in support of social services activities during the financial year ended 31 December 2021 (as per the attachment).
- To consider and approve the proposal of allocating RO 50,000 to support social services activities for the financial year ending 31 December 2022.
- To elect Members of the new Board of Directors of the Company.

Any person who wishes to be nominated to the Board of Directors of the Company is required to fill in a Director's Nomination Form. And the completed Form should be delivered to the Company at least Five (5) days prior to the date of the Annual General Meeting of the Company (by the end of business hours on Thursday 3rd of March 2022). The candidate must comply with the prescribed requirements for membership in the Company's Board of Directors.

- To appoint the auditors for the Company for the financial year ending 31st December 2022 and fix their remuneration.
- To Appoint an independent external consultant to evaluate the performance of the Board of Directors for the Financial year that will be ending on 31st December 2022 and fix their fees.

In accordance with the company's Articles of Association and CMA's regulations on holding annual general meetings using the electronic platform, we would like to bring to your attention to following:

- The juridical person is entitled to authorise any other natural person to attend the meeting and vote on their behalf through the electronic platform, provided that this natural person has an investor number in the Muscat Clearing and Depository Company.
- (B) Voting on any of the agenda items mentioned in the notice commences 3 days before the date of the meeting and until the end of the voting process on the day of the meeting. In case the shareholder's balance changes whether increase or decrease, the voting is cancelled, and he/she shall vote again on the day of the meeting.

If you have any queries please contact Mr. Asad Issa Abdullah Al Harthy, on telephone 24610260 or 24610200.

Dr. Juma Ali Juma Al Juma
Chairman

Ernst & Young
Auditor

Manie Al Sadoun Advocates & Legal Consultants
Legal Advisor



6,260 business activities in Oman during Q3 2021

Muscat - The number of business activities in various governorates of Oman registered with the Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion (MoCIIP) during the third quarter of 2021 reached 6,260.

The Information, Data and Statistics Department of MoCIIP indicated that the movement of

business activities during the third quarter of 2021 were concentrated in the Governorate of Muscat, accounting for 40.69 per cent of the total volume of business activity in Oman. It was followed by the Governorate of Dhofar (19.57 per cent), North Batinah (12.76 per cent), and the remaining percentage was dis-

tributed among the rest of the governorates according to the volume of the business activity.

The ministry indicated that the number of business activities registered in Muscat governorate during the third quarter of last year reached 2,547. As many as 1,225 activities were registered in Dhofar, 799 in

North Batinah, and 494 in South Batinah governorate.

In the Governorate of Dakhiliyah, 343 activities were registered, 271 in South Sharqiyah, 204 in North Sharqiyah, 191 in Dhahirah, 102 in Buraimi, 59 in Al Wusta and 25 in the Governorate of Musandam.

ONA

Campaign against oil and gas short-sighted: Saudi

Riyadh, Saudi Arabia - Prince Abdulaziz bin Salman, Saudi Arabia's Energy Minister on Monday said that the campaign against oil and gas is short-sighted, and the kingdom will continue to invest in oil and gas and will work to raise its production capacity.

Taking part in the International Petroleum Technology Conference (IPTC) 2022 panel discussion on the main topic of 'Enhancing global recovery through sustainable energy', Prince Abdulaziz said that Saudi Arabia is also working to achieve net-zero emissions.

The Saudi Energy Minister added, "If we do not achieve our collective goals, we will not achieve our individual goals, and the kingdom continues to invest and expand its production capacity, noting that focusing on specific elements such as alternative energy alone would be a huge mistake and the world must look at all energy sources."

The panel also saw the participation of Suhail al Mazrouei, UAE Minister of Energy and Infrastructure; Dr Mohammad Abdul Latif Fares, Kuwaiti Minister of Oil; Mohammed bin Khalifa bin Ahmed al Khalifa, Bahraini Minister of Oil; Ihsan Abdul Jabbar Ismail, Iraqi Minister of Oil; and Tarek El Molla,



Prince Abdulaziz bin Salman, Saudi Arabia's Energy Minister

Egyptian Minister of Petroleum and Mineral Resources.

Kuwaiti Oil Minister, Fares said, "We hope the issue of OPEC and OPEC+ ends this year and they should have a cooperation agreement that should be implemented through a correct approach in coordination in this changing sector."

"The balance of supply and demand and the market and economy needs are met and we will respect the agreement of OPEC and OPEC+, and there is a mechanism to reach an agreement, where we will show the world that we can ensure a reaction through a mechanism that will clearly show how we can deal with the world in a monthly way, stressing that Riyadh and the entire region are

now preparing a capital for energy transformation and its use in the best way next year," Fares added.

Iraqi minister, Ismail, highlighted the importance for OPEC+ to commit to the current agreement for the interest of the energy market with the current multilateral discussions, referring to the way of achieving balance in the market between supply and demand to avoid any surprises in the future in a way that serves the interests of all.

Meanwhile, UAE's Mazrouei said that hydrogen will be a promising and attracting market, where the UAE seeks to be part of this future and has projects in around 40 countries worldwide.

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Investcorp invests \$17.5mn in India's V-Ensure Pharma Technologies

Muscat - Investcorp, a leading global alternative investment firm, on Monday announced its investment in V-Ensure Pharma Technologies, in a transaction valued at ₹1.3bn (approximately US\$17.5mn). The round was led by Investcorp along with participation from Asia-based private investment firm, Tanas Capital. This marks Investcorp's third healthcare investment in India and its first in the pharmaceutical sector.

This investment will fund V-Ensure's objective of pursuing growth opportunities across North America, Europe and other global markets for the development and launch of its products. The investment also reinforces Investcorp's commitment to invest in market-leading business services, information technology and healthcare businesses in India and accelerate their expansion and competitive positioning globally, a press release said.

Founded in 2010, V-Ensure is a leading developer of specialty pharmaceutical formulations focused on complex generics for regulated markets. The company's core competence lies in development of complex molecules for regulated markets without infringing



Gaurav Sharma

on any existing patents. It does so by leveraging its superior knowledge of formulation technologies. It also specialises in developing the right strategies to obtain regulatory approvals for commercialisation of these molecules by managing all the necessary processes and documentation required by the regulator, end to end.

V-Ensure has developed solid oral, liquid oral and injectable products for more than 45 clients across Europe, North America, China, Australia and Brazil.

Gaurav Sharma, head of private equity, Investcorp India, said, "As our first pharmaceutical deal in India, we are confident that healthcare globally will continue to be center stage

for the future. V-Ensure is a renowned name among India-based pharmaceutical research organisations which aims to tap global markets with its own products. Investcorp's global presence and knowledge will potentially help V-Ensure as they look to establish their presence directly in the US market."

"We look forward to this partnership and supporting the company in scaling its operations, both in India and globally, drawing upon our global mid-market expertise."

Over the last ten years, V-Ensure has maintained its position as a leading contract research organization (CRO) with newer technologies as it continues to support clients with core formulation technologies and global regulatory framework. With a team of over 150 scientists heading pharmaceutical development programs for world's major pharmaceutical markets, V-Ensure takes pride in solving problems in R&D and manufacturing.

Satyanarayana Vemula, CEO of V-Ensure, added, "We are delighted to partner with Investcorp as we expand our business from a CRO to a fully integrated specialty pharma-

ceutical company. We will continue to deliver patient centric solutions through our proprietary technology and competence in developing complex generics for regulated markets. With the backing of Investcorp's experienced team and global network, we believe that we will be well positioned to significantly accelerate our growth. I look forward to a successful partnership with Investcorp."

Investcorp has been active in the mid-market private equity space in India since 2019, investing across the healthcare, businesses services, financial services, consumer & retail, and technology sectors. In January 2022, Investcorp issued its 2021 Responsible Business Report which outlines its approach to responsible investing and progress against its Environmental, Social, and Governance (ESG) commitments. The firm's capital deployment in India is an integral part of its ESG strategy.

Its investments over the last four years include Nephroplus, Wingreens, Intergrow Brands, Bewakoof.com, FreshToHome, Zolostays, InCred, Citykart, ASG Eye Hospital, Unilog, Xpressbees, and Safari Industries.

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Kuwait Airways raises Airbus order to 31 jets in \$6bn deal



Kuwait City, Kuwait - Kuwait Airways announced on Monday an expanded US\$6bn deal with Airbus for 31 planes, restructuring an agreement reached in 2014.

The deal comes after what the airline labelled occasionally 'heated' negotiations following probes over allegations of kickbacks surrounding the initial order.

"We have managed to agree on a monumental restructuring that will position Kuwait Airways in a much stronger place to succeed for the next 15 years," Ali al Dukhan, chairman of the company told a news conference.

The new agreement, which adds three new aircraft to the existing order of 28, includes nine Airbus A320neo, six A321neo, three A321neoLR, four A330-800neo, seven A330-900neo and two A350-900.

Dukhan said the reshaped deal, aimed at giving the airline greater flexibility after the travel industry was rocked by the coronavirus pandemic, now carried a 'total value of about US\$6bn'.

"Although corrections were made in 2018, the deal needed further corrections to suit Kuwait Airways' future, especially with the need to transition and become more flexible in a post-COVID aviation industry," he said.

Negotiations took place against the backdrop of bribery allegations that cost Airbus billions of dollars in settlement fees in other countries in 2020.

Record profits

"As we initiated the negotiations, we knew we were already the underdogs going in as 40 per cent of the deal's value had already been paid and the delivery had started," Dukhan said.

He added, "We entered four months of serious, professional negotiations, which did get heated at times, but always maintained respect and understanding of each other's wants and needs."

Kuwait Airways had initially ordered 15 Airbus A320neo and 10 A350 in 2014, with delivery beginning in 2019.

In February 2020, Kuwait's parliament opened a fact-finding panel to probe allegations of kickbacks, after Airbus paid huge fines to settle bribery cases in French, British and American courts.

Under the settlement, Airbus agreed to pay US\$4.1bn in fines to settle corruption probes into some of its aircraft sales.

Last week, the European giant announced record profits of US\$4.8bn in 2021, after two straight years of losses during the pandemic.

Deliveries of aircraft rose eight percent to 611 planes, Airbus said in an earnings statement.

AFP



Eurozone growth jumps as virus restrictions ease

Brussels, Belgium - Economic growth in the eurozone jumped sharply in February as coronavirus restrictions were eased, a key survey showed on Monday.

Growth accelerated to a five-month high, IHS Markit said in its closely watched monthly survey - but it also noted that persistent supply constraints and soaring energy prices also pushed inflation to a record level.

Its purchase managers' index (PMI) surged 3.5 points to 55.8, higher than the 52.3 recorded in January. A figure above 50 indicates growth.

The rise was attributed to the eurozone - the 19 EU countries using the euro - exiting two months of tough restrictions designed to slow the spread of the Omicron variant.

Omicron is now the dominant strain in Europe, but governments regard it as less grave than previous variants because widespread vaccinations and booster jabs have muted its impact. After two months of curbs that hit the eurozone economy, 'February saw these restrictions ease to the lowest since November,' IHS Markit said.

The service sector led the newfound optimism, as increased travel and tourism pushed it to its highest level since last November.

Manufacturing increased 'also accelerated slightly, attaining the fastest expansion since last September, thanks in part to improved supply availability' and a rise in demand.

However, supply constraints remained, causing backlogs, and average prices for goods and services spiked to the highest level recorded in the PMI surveys.

"Soaring energy costs and rising wages have added to inflationary pressures, resulting in the largest rise in selling prices yet recorded in a quarter of a century of survey data history," said IHS Markit's chief economist, Chris Williamson.

'The intensification of inflationary pressures will add to speculation of an increasing hawkish stance' at the European Central Bank, he said.

The survey showed that growth in the eurozone's powerhouse Germany was at a six-month high, with an index reading of 56.2.

The second-biggest economy, France, was doing even better, with growth at an eight-month high and an index reading of 57.4.

AFP

RECALL CAMPAIGN FOR FUSO TRUCK

Date of Campaign Start : 22/02/2022

Campaign type : Safety

Campaign section : Front Suspension Bracket

Product Description

Number of affected vehicle	VIN Number	Model	The year of Production
23	MEC0574P0JP024642 to MEC0574PXKP034595	Fuso FI	From 2017 up to 2019

Description
A forging mark on the suspension bracket is leading to improper seating of said bracket. The suspension bracket is to be replaced for better torque retention.

Procedure
Replacement of the suspension bracket.

For more information
Customers with chassis numbers mentioned above are requested to please contact M/S General Automotive Company LLC to have the defective parts replaced.

Contact Details
Call 24 500 500 or 24 500 502 from Sunday to Thursday between 08:00 am to 06:30 pm.

MITSUBISHI FUSO Authorised Distributer
General Automotive Company LLC
www.fusooman.com

Musandam Power Company SAOG
PO Box 799, PC 133, Al Khuwair, Muscat, Sultanate Of Oman.
www.musandampower.com

INVITATION TO ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING OF MUSANDAM POWER COMPANY SAOG

The Board of Directors of Musandam Power Company SAOG invites its respective shareholders to attend the Annual General Meeting ("AGM") which shall be held at 3:00 pm, on 10/03/2022 at Crowne Plaza Hotel Al Qurum, Al Sindibad Hall, Muscat Governorate, and on the e-portal for convening general meetings which may be accessed through the Muscat Clearing and Depository SAOC ("MCD") website (www.mcd.gov.om). The Agenda include the following:

Failing quorum of the AGM, a second AGM shall be convened at 3:00 pm, on 15/03/2022 at Crowne Plaza Hotel Al Qurum, Al Sindibad, Muscat Governorate, and on the e-portal for convening general meetings which may be accessed through the Muscat Clearing and Depository SAOC ("MCD") website (www.mcd.gov.om). The agenda include the following:

- To consider and approve the report of the Board of Directors for the financial year ended on 31 December 2021.
- To consider the Corporate Governance Report for the financial year ended 31 December 2021.
- To consider the Auditor's report and to approve the Financial Statements in respect of the Company for the year ended on 31 December 2021.
- To approve the proposal authorizing the Board of Directors' to determine and distribute cash dividends to the Company's Shareholders who are registered with the MCD as of the dates to be decided by the Board of Directors in March 2022 and September 2022 out of the retained earnings as per the audited financial statements for the financial year ended 31 December 2021, provided that the amount shall not be more than 29.8 Baisas per share (13.8 Baisas per share in March 2022 and 16 Baisas per share in September 2022).
- To disclose the transactions that the Company entered into with related parties during the financial year ended on 31 December 2021 (Annexure 1).
- To consider and approve the proposed transactions to be entered by the Company with related parties during the financial year ending on 31 December 2022 (Annexure 2).
- To ratify the payment of sitting fees to the Board of Directors and Sub-Committees for the financial year ended 31 December 2021 and to determine the sitting fees of the Board of Directors and Sub-Committees for the next financial year ending on 31 December 2022 (Annexure 3).
- To ratify the payment of Directors' remuneration for an amount of RO 142,200 (Rials Omani a Hundred forty two thousands and two hundred) for the financial year ended on 31 December 2021.
- To appoint the statutory auditors for the financial year ending on 31 December 2022 and approve its fees.
- To elect new Board of Directors from amongst the shareholders or non - shareholders.
- Any person who wishes to nominate himself/herself to the Board of Directors should complete a nomination form available with the Company. The nomination form can be obtained from the Company's head office. The completed forms should be delivered to the Company minimum five days prior to the AGM date. Nomination forms received after 5pm on Thursday, 3rd of March 2022 shall not be accepted.
- To approve the independent consultant report for the annual appraisal of the performance of the Board of Directors during the year ended 31 December 2021.

In accordance with the Rules for Convening General Meetings via Electronic Means, issued by the CMA we would like to call your attention to the following:

- only a corporate person may authorize a natural person to attend and vote on its behalf on decisions/resolutions of the AGM general meeting, through electronic means, provided such natural person must have an investor number at MCD;
- voting on any item of the agenda shall commence prior to the convention of the AGM general meeting at a maximum of three (3) days and ends on the day of the AGM. If a shareholder's balance is changed either by increase or decrease the voting process shall stand canceled and must revoke at the AGM.

Please attend at the venue or online at least 30 minutes prior to the AGM

For more information, please contact Mr. Abdulhamed Al Jabri of Musandam Power Company on telephone No. 24063555.

Chairman

Auditor

Legal Advisor

Bank Muscat extends finance offers

Bank Muscat is steadfastly working towards financial inclusion of various segments of society in Oman. Having expanded its range of products and services over the years, the bank currently offers a number of financing facilities including Personal Finance, Sayyarti Auto Finance, Baituna Home Finance, Education Finance, Green Finance and the Woqar banking package for pensioners.

The bank recently announced an extension of its highly competitive offers on Personal, Auto and Baituna home financing options for Omani nationals working in the government sector, government-related entities and select corporates as part of its commitment to improving the quality of life of people in the sultanate. The extension, which is effective till 28 February 2022, also includes takeover



Abdullah Tamman

options on personal and home loans, a press release said.

Customers will be particularly enthused by the fact that the bank is at present offering highly competitive rates, starting at just 3.5 per cent for Auto Finance, 3.75 per cent for Personal Finance and 4.95 per cent for Baituna Home Financing.

Speaking on the occasion, Abdullah Tamman al Mashani,

general manager - Products, Bank Muscat, said, "Bank Muscat endeavours to provide the best banking and financing products and services in Oman in line with the needs of different customer segments.

"We are delighted to extend our highly competitive offers on various financing options in keeping with the needs of our valued customers and aligned to the bank's aim of facilitating a high standard of living for people in Oman.

"We would like to thank our customers for their strong confidence in the bank's products and services as well their constant feedback, which helps Bank Muscat to continue innovating and offering new products and services in line with the bank's customer-centric vision." Bank Muscat has the largest banking network in Oman with 174 branches.

Spar Supermarket opens at Muscat Bay

Muscat Bay, Oman's premier lifestyle destination recently announced the opening of global retail brand, SPAR supermarket in heart of Village Square.

SPAR is the latest addition to a portfolio of convenient amenities and facilities offered to residents.

The new outlet will deliver rigorous quality, a plethora of merchandise, and a seamless shopping experience to the Muscat Bay residents, a press release said.

Speaking at the event, Abdullah al Nasiri, Muscat Bay vice president - Customer Experience, said, "As a growing and thriving community, our core purpose is to highlight and augment customer convenience.

This new pathway built together with SPAR will offer Muscat Bay residents with greater convenience and choices within their own neighbourhood." Paul Jessup, senior vice president - Sales and Marketing, Muscat Bay, added, "Our vision for Muscat Bay is to offer our residents and visitors a vi-



brant, comprehensive community with a focus on bringing well-established local and international brand names into the fold. With the launch of SPAR and other brands to come, our residents will soon be immersed in engaging shopping, entertainment, and leisure experiences

that defines Muscat Bay as the extraordinary destination it is."

M Sridhar, CEO of SPAR Oman, said, "The opening of our latest store at Muscat Bay marks a major milestone for SPAR, and another significant achievement towards our growth throughout the s-

tanate.

As we grow, we remain committed to our core purpose of providing a wide range of fresh, wholesome products to our customers. As a trusted local partner, we look forward to becoming an integral part of the communities we serve."

NBO clarification

In the report 'NBO opens new branch in Bukha', published in Muscat Daily (page 6) on February 20, it was inadvertently mentioned that the branch

opened under the auspices of Sayyid Ibrahim bin Saeed al Busaidi, Minister of State and Governor of Musandam. National Bank of Oman clari-

fies that the branch opened under the auspices of Sheikh Abdullah Ahmed al Malik al Shehhi, Shura Council member from the wilayat of Bukha.

Air Arabia 'Airline of the Year'

Air Arabia, the Middle East and North Africa's first and largest low-cost carrier (LCC) operator, has been named 'Airline of the Year' at the 2022 Air Transport Awards that took place in Athens, Greece, with the participation of industry leaders.

The winners of the Air Transport Awards were voted for by the readers of Air Transport News and a jury of international aviation experts, a press release said.

The honour recognises Air Arabia's consistent efforts to enhance the customer experience and its focus on delivering exceptional value for its passengers. It also celebrates the airline's commitment in building and pioneering a sustainably profitable business model.

Adel al Ali, Group CEO, Air Arabia, said, "We are honoured to be named as the 'Airline of the Year' at the Air Transport Awards, a prestigious recognition that underlines our commitment to operational



excellence and customer service excellence. In addition to the value that we deliver as a low-cost carrier, we have consistently focused on enhancing the customer experience and in further strengthening our operations during a very challenging period for the global aviation industry".

He further said, "We are firmly committed to creating

long-term value for our stakeholders and continue to expand our operations to key global markets, thereby creating value for all the economies we operate in. This recognition is dedicated to everyone at team Air Arabia for their commitment, dedication and hard work."

Air Arabia currently operates 170 routes from its hubs in the UAE, Morocco, and Egypt.

AJIA holds blood donation drive

Al Jenaibi International Automobiles (AJIA), the official importer of BMW Group vehicles in Oman, successfully conducted its third blood donation drive at its Muscat showroom on February 17.

The initiative welcomed 34 donors, including AJIA employees, their friends and family members besides BMW and MINI customers.

With the aim of giving back to Omani society, AJIA

plans to continue holding blood donation drives.

Ibrahim al Habsi, senior general manager-Sales, said, "Oman continues to battle an ongoing blood shortage due to COVID-19 restrictions."

Ooredoo bags award for Best Telecommunications Company

Ooredoo has been awarded winner for 'Best Telecommunications Company Oman 2022' in the Middle East by the annual Global Business Magazine Awards 2022.

Evaluated alongside over 10,000 companies, it's the latest in a string of awards Ooredoo has been given for digital innovation and transformation, which is demonstrated through an ever-evolving portfolio of fantastic digital products and services as well as an awesome digital-first customer experi-



ence, a press release said. Guided by its vision to enrich people's lives, Ooredoo has made it its mission to leverage

the power of communications to stimulate economic and social development.

As such, it continues to provide an enhanced experience for both, the Ooredoo family and its customers across the sultanate, positioning itself as one of Oman's most recognised and admired companies.

Meanwhile, it continues to stay ahead of the curve by introducing new ways to hone and improve communications and cater to the needs of an ever-evolving market.

Gulf Mushroom Products Co. (S.A.O.G.)

Board of Directors Report

Dear Shareholders

On behalf of the Board of Directors, I am pleased to present the twenty fourth annual report of Gulf Mushroom Products Co. (SAOG) for the financial year ended 31 December 2021

The Board of directors, executive management and staff of Gulf Mushroom congratulate His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik for steering Oman's economy safely through the challenging period of Covid-19 and supporting the private sector to survive the liquidity crisis. His Majesty's wise leadership has strengthened Oman's economic and fiscal outlook as well as its credit rating.

Regional focus

Pandemic has disrupted international logistics and trade, prompting dynamic changes in business strategies and methods. Your Company has successfully adapted its business strategies and strengthened its presence in the GCC markets and emerged as a regional market leader with increased revenues and price competitiveness.

Preview of Results

The revenues of the company for the year ended 31 December 2021 were RO 7.869 million compared to RO 6.087 million in 2020, an increase of 29%. Earnings before depreciation and finance costs in 2021 was RO 1.833 million compared to RO 1.315 million in 2020, an increase of 39%

Net profit after tax for the year ended 31 December 2021 was RO 765,000 compared to RO 272,000 in 2020, an increase of 181%.

The net assets of the company (including land revaluation reserve) as at 31 December 2021 were RO 7.905 million compared to RO 7.140 million as at 31 December 2020

During the year your Company achieved a total production of 5,005 metric tons of different varieties of fresh mushrooms compared to 3,859 metric tons in the previous year, an increase of 30%.

Exports during the year 2021 were RO 6.820 million (88% of total sales) compared to RO 5.099 million (85% of total sales) during 2020.

Oman Vision 2040

Company is proud of its humble contribution to the success of Oman Vision 2040 in improving financial sustainability and economic diversification through its large exports of premium quality fresh mushrooms and generating substantial employment opportunities for the Omani youth.

Technical Expertise

Production of compost and cultivation of mushrooms is carried out in a controlled environment involving hi-tech climate control systems and micro-biological processes. Your Company has a strong technical team and also retains the services of international consultants.

Quality and safety certifications

Company is strictly following a standard food safety management program and is holding HACCP and Global GAP certifications issued by reputed bodies. Company's operations are regularly subjected to external surveillance and audits by quality auditors.

Dividends Policy

Company uses its cash reserves to re-invest in growth and to provide regular returns to its shareholders. For the year ended 31 December 2021 the board of directors is pleased to propose cash dividend at 7% of paid-up share capital subject to approval from appropriate authorities and shareholders. Share price and dividend history for the last twelve years is shown in the table below-

Year	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021
Share price at year end (RO)	0.520	0.478	0.510	0.430	0.426	0.386	0.336	0.306	0.306	0.306	0.306	0.263
Cash Dividend	40%	25%	25%	-	-	-	-	-	5%	5%	-	7%*
onus shares	-	10%	10%	20%	10%	15%	10%	-	-	-	10%	-

* subject to approval from appropriate authorities and shareholders.

Corporate Governance

Company strictly adheres to the corporate governance regulations issued by the Capital Market Authority and exercises strong governance through its board of directors, well documented policies and procedures and sound internal control systems. During the year there were 22 meetings of the board of directors and its committees. Reference may be made to the Management Discussion and Analysis Report and Report on Corporate Governance which are enclosed.

Human resources

Company is proud of its skilled and motivated employees which includes 150 Omani citizens representing 38.46% of total employees. Besides hiring Omani workers, Company has employed Omani commerce and technical graduates across all business functions and in different levels. Company follows best industry practices for improving employee motivation, performance and growth through periodic performance appraisals, incentives and rewards and training programs.

Corporate Social Responsibility

Company has a CSR policy and contributes to social causes within the CSR budget approved by the shareholders every year.

Outlook

Business around the globe is fast evolving to overcome the impact of covid19. Consumption of goods and services is expected to grow significantly in the coming years due to pent-up demand. Regional economies are implementing major economic expansion built around substantial investments in infrastructure and innovation. The opening of the new direct road between Oman and Saudi Arabia will further boost Omani exports to Saudi Arabia. Government has taken successful measures to improve liquidity, promote foreign investment, economic activity and employment in the country. Your company is the leading producer of fresh mushrooms in the entire GCC region and will continue to scale up its production to maintain and strengthen its position and continue to achieve a positive growth in revenues and profitability in the years to come.

Thanks and Gratitude

We express our gratitude and loyalty to His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik May God protect him and guide him for the benefit of Oman and its people.

We express our gratitude and thanks to the Ministry of Commerce and Industry and Investment Promotion, the Ministry of Agriculture and Fisheries and all officials for their guidance and support extended to the company.

We specially thank the Supreme Committee in charge of discussing the mechanism of dealing with developments resulting from the spread of covid 19 to take measures to prevent spread of the pandemic and keep the business and production continuous

We thank the shareholders for their constant support to the company. We also thank the management team and staff of the company for their dedication and sincere efforts towards achieving the goals of the company.

Chairman of the Board of Directors

Statement of financial position as at 31 December 2021		
	2021 RO	2020 RO
ASSETS		
Non-current assets		
Property, plant and equipment	12,488,624	12,769,330
Right-of-use asset	29,046	36,801
Total non-current assets	12,517,670	12,806,131
Current assets		
Inventories	1,214,459	1,323,869
Trade and other receivables	1,486,220	1,170,756
Cash and bank balances	468,176	313,010
Total current assets	3,168,855	2,807,635
Total assets	15,686,525	15,613,766
EQUITY AND LIABILITIES		
Equity		
Share capital	4,160,527	3,782,297
Legal reserve	880,744	804,260
Special reserve	12,405	12,405
Revaluation reserve	1,379,890	1,379,890
Retained earnings	1,471,669	1,161,541
Total equity	7,905,235	7,140,393
LIABILITIES		
Non-current liabilities		
Government soft loan	441,939	594,804
Deferred Government grant	30,196	47,806
Commercial loan	3,952,319	4,891,416
Lease liability	16,744	24,882
Deferred tax liability	564,720	538,251
End-of-service benefits	359,517	326,489
Total non-current liabilities	5,365,435	6,423,648
Current liabilities		
Government soft loan	152,865	149,057
Commercial term loan	691,179	706,927
Lease liability	7,778	7,400
Short term borrowings	-	335,000
Trade and other payables	1,456,142	846,316
Provision for income tax	107,891	5,025
Total current liabilities	2,415,855	2,049,725
Total liabilities	7,781,290	8,473,373
Total equity and liabilities	15,686,525	15,613,766
Net assets per share	0.190	0.172

Statement of profit or loss and other comprehensive income for the year ended 31 December 2021

	2021 RO	2020 RO
Sales	7,868,663	6,087,041
Cost of sales	(4,382,429)	(3,376,427)
	3,486,234	2,710,614
Selling and distribution expenses	(615,881)	(573,817)
Administrative expenses	(1,071,564)	(843,565)
Other income	33,814	22,191
Depreciation of property, plant and equipment	(620,132)	(635,200)
Amortisation of right-of-use asset	(7,755)	(7,755)
Finance costs	(305,506)	(356,996)
Profit before income tax	899,210	315,472
Income tax	(134,368)	(43,611)
Profit for the year	764,842	271,861
Earnings per share - basic and diluted	0.018	0.007
Other comprehensive loss:		
Items that will not be reclassified subsequently to profit and loss		
Loss on revaluation of land	-	(33,000)
Total comprehensive income for the year	764,842	238,861

The complete accounts of Gulf Mushroom Products Co. SAOG will be delivered to any shareholder or other interested party who requests them, in either Arabic or English, as requested, within 7 days of receipt of written request.

M's Gulf Mushroom Products Co. SAOG

P.O. Box: 383, Postal Code: 320, Barka, Sultanate of Oman, Fax: 00968 26883955, Email: info@gulfmushroom.com

Nissan Sunny exceeds the 20,000 sales mark in M E

Solidifying customer admiration of the Nissan Sunny, Nissan Middle East celebrated a sales milestone last month with over 20,000 units of the popular sedan being sold within the first nine months of the company's 2021 Fiscal Year (April 2021 – March 2022).

Representing a significant overall increase of 77.6 per cent compared to the same period in the previous fiscal year, the Sunny sales success is strongly echoed across the region's markets, including Abu Dhabi, Bahrain, Dubai, Jordan, Kuwait, Lebanon, Oman, and Qatar, a press release said.

Accelerated by the increase in sales and building on its enviable market share in the region, the Sunny witnessed an increase of 20.4 per cent in Oman and an increase of 19.6 per cent in Kuwait from April to December 2021, as compared to the same period of the previous year.

This was supported by strong growth in other markets as well, including Bahrain which accounted for an increase of five per cent in segment market share in the country during the first nine months of FY21.

Experiencing the largest increase in sales and leading the



way in the region, Kuwait recorded an increase of over 135 per cent in Sunny sales during the first nine months of the 2021 Fiscal Year

(FY21), closely followed by the UAE which more than doubled sales. Logging an impressive increase in sales were also Bahrain, Oman, and Qatar, recording a rise of 38 per cent, 37 per cent, and 20 per cent respectively.

Thierry Sabbagh, managing director, Nissan Middle East, said, "The Sunny is a core part of

Nissan line up in the Middle East and has served a variety of fleet and private customers across the region for nearly three decades. The stellar sales results witnessed so far this year are testaments to the popularity of the Sunny and our dedication to continuously offer customers advanced features and mobility solutions across all our core models."

Since its introduction to the region in 1994, the Nissan Sunny has continued to revolutionise

the B-segment by offering customers class-leading features and unbeatable value for over 25 years.

Continuing the legacy, the latest 2022 model stands out with features that are uncommon to the segment, including intelligent automatic emergency braking, intelligent forward collision warning, intelligent blind spot warning, and intelligent rear cross traffic alert, all of which form part of Nissan Intelligent Mobility.



Bank Nizwa offers lowest profit rate on finance

Amplifying its brand equity as Oman's most trusted Islamic Bank, Bank Nizwa has announced a comprehensive 'Lowest Profit Rate Campaign', with a 4.85 per cent profit rate, to cater to customers seeking affordable home, auto, and personal finance.

With its benchmark services that go beyond fulfilling financing needs of individuals, Bank Nizwa partners with its customers to enable their choices and help them meet their aspirations. The Bank's advisory services are a testament to the role it plays in the life of individuals, providing them with evolved Shari'a compliant banking, a press release said.

The period of this campaign, effective between February 16 and June 2022, has been structured to provide attractive and feasible options for customers striving to enhance their living standards. The promotion aims to stimulate customers to explore easier and convenient Islamic financing options without

restraining their dreams and aspirations.

Upholding high values of customer service embedded in its sharia-compliant products and services, Bank Nizwa is going the extra mile to fulfill its customers' aspirations of securing comfortable lifestyles for themselves and their loved ones. The offer of lowest profit rate of 4.85 per cent, to procure a dream house or a cherished vehicle, or even to meet and manage personal financial responsibilities, is a major boost for customers requiring easy finances for big purchases.

Commenting on the campaign and highlighting the Bank's intent to meet specific requirements of its growing client base, Arif al Zaabi - AGM Retail Banking, Bank Nizwa, said, "As Oman's premier Islamic bank, we are committed to grow and achieve significant milestones together with our customers. As has been proven earlier, Sharia-compliant financial options are perfect to indulge."

Omantel promotes development of talented human resources

The Sultanate of Oman has always placed significant importance for the development of its national human resources so as to address any challenges it might face in its pursuit for progress and prosperity.

Omantel is one of such leading organisations in Oman that attributes great priority to the development of human resources. Since its inception, Omantel has always sought to provide its employees with a conducive environment for development and growth, a press release said.

It has also been among the leading organisations in Oman to establish an in-house training centre back in 1978. The centre has provided the entire telecom sector with talented Omanis who are currently holding leadership positions in different organisations in the sultanate.



Omantel's investment in the development of human resources has been in accordance with its clear strategy aimed at establishing a work culture that promotes innovation, attracts and retains the best talent, as well as provides a world-class HR services for employees.

The company's new human resources strategy started in 2008 during the integration of

operations of Omantel and Oman Mobile and the transfer of both entities employees to the company's previous headquarters in Mawaleh in 2010.

This strategy, which is a reflection of the main objectives of the company's general strategy, covered many aspects related to human resources, the most important being creating a unified business culture.

Ericsson to extend network exposure to the edge

Ericsson launches Edge Exposure Server to enable new enterprise and consumer services through simple and enriched APIs for edge applications.

The 5G and edge computing are opening a world of new revenue opportunities across manufacturing, transport, gaming and mission-critical services. Combined they enable new services requiring low latency, high bandwidth and capabilities such as device processing and data offload. Edge computing consists of five technology areas including edge infrastructure, user plane, routing, orchestration and exposure, a press release said.

Exposure makes network capabilities, such as location and quality of service, and data easily available for the ecosystem to innovate on to improve existing services or create new services.



Edge exposure is a function with enriched APIs specifically for edge applications requiring quick API responses and secure communication between application and devices.

Since providing new services based on 5G and edge computing often involves several companies in the ecosystem, for example application developers and hyperscale cloud infrastruc-

ture providers, there is also a need to support flexible business models catering for the needs of all involved parties.

Ericsson Edge Exposure Server is an addition to the current product Ericsson Cloud Core Exposure Server and provides network exposure capabilities to support simple and developer-friendly APIs to edge application ecosystems.



FINCORP AL AMAL FUND

FINANCIAL STATEMENTS FOR THE YEAR ENDED 31 DECEMBER 2021

CHAIRMAN'S REPORT FOR THE YEAR ENDED DECEMBER 31, 2021

Dear Unit holders,

On behalf of the Investors' Committee, I hereby present to you the audited financial results of Fincorp Al Amal Fund (AIGI), for the year ended December 31, 2021.

Fund Performance

Figures in OMR	31-Dec-21	31-Dec-20
Fund Income	1,691,005	42,219
Fund Expenses	-324,631	-205,059
Net Profit / (Loss)	1,366,374	-162,840

Figures in OMR	31-Dec-21	31-Dec-20
Net Asset Value	5,669,135	8,207,833
Units Outstanding	4,837,436	7,880,507
Net Asset Value per unit	1.172	1.042
Fund Performance (net of fees)	19.24%	-1.86%
S&P GCC Composite Price Index	31.45%	-1.72%

Q4 2021 Performance

Global markets were stronger in the last quarter of 2021 buoyed by positive economic data and largely optimistic earnings announcements. However, markets declined slightly during the Q4, 2022 owing to rising cases of the Omicron variant and likely faster pace of Federal Reserve's asset tapering.

European markets were mostly higher despite the introduction of restrictions on travel and tourism sectors. Emerging markets corrected on worries of the impact of the new variant on the economy. Crude oil prices continued to remain resilient supported by the supply-demand mismatch. GCC markets continued to show strength driven by elevated oil prices and improving economic outlook.

During Q4 2021, Al Amal Fund gained 3.44% compared to the benchmark's gain of 1.02%. For the whole year, your Fund rose 19.24% compared to 31.45% rise in S&P GCC Index. International indices such as S&P 500 and MSCI ACWI gained 26.89% and 16.79%, respectively.

Market Outlook

Despite a very strong year, GCC markets remain well positioned going into 2022. Government spending in GCC economies is likely to be strong amid high oil prices.

Further, the tapering of Federal Reserve stimulus and expected interest rate hikes augur well for GCC's banking sector. Emergence of new Covid variants would present a threat for the economic recovery, however, initial data of Omicron suggest the pandemic is easing.

High inflation poses risk for richly valued growth stocks. However, return to normalcy in post-Covid era could reduce inflationary pressures. In such a scenario, 2022 could provide an opportunity to accumulate growth stocks at reasonable valuations for a long term prospective.

Investment Strategy

The fund's investment strategy seeks to build a portfolio of stocks with superior fundamentals, comfortable valuations, and attractive dividend yields, while actively managing downside risk in case of market setbacks.

Beginning Q3 2020, Al Amal Fund expanded its investment mandate from being only GCC to include the U.S. market. In the long run, this strategy will aid long term capital appreciation with growth in secular international stocks supported by low value and high dividend stocks in the GCC.

Considering the current environment, your Fund is well positioned to take advantage of opportunities in line with the fund's strategy to protect the capital and enhance the wealth.

Dividend

The Fund declared an interim Dividend of 70 baiza per unit which was approved by the unit holders in the General Meeting held on 13th September 2021.

Considering the profits for the year ended, Fund proposes a final cash dividend of 50 bz subject to the approval of the unit holders in the Annual General Meeting.

In Conclusion

The Investors' Committee would like to express its appreciation and gratefulness to His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tariq Al Said and the Omani Government for providing a secure and stable economic environment focused on driving growth and continued prosperity for all.

The Committee also wishes to thank the Capital Market Authority and Muscat Securities Market for their sustained and continued efforts in building a vibrant capital market and the management team for their diligence and dedication in managing the fund successfully in a challenging economic environment.

On behalf of the Investors' Committee, I would also like to take this opportunity to thank all the unit holders for their continued support and confidence.

On Behalf of the Investors Committee

Aymen bin Hamed Al Busaidi
Chairman
Dated: February 9, 2022.

AUDITED STATEMENT OF FINANCIAL POSITION AT

	2021 RO	2020 RO
ASSETS		
Financial assets at fair value through profit or loss	5,520,597	7,672,960
Receivables	166,999	43,857
Cash and cash equivalents	178,402	533,184
Total assets	5,865,998	8,250,001
LIABILITIES		
Current liabilities		
Amounts due to related parties	187,437	31,763
Accruals and other payables	9,426	10,405
Total liabilities	196,863	42,168
Total net assets attributable to the Unitholders	5,669,135	8,207,833
Net asset value per unit	1.172	1.042

AUDITED STATEMENT OF COMPREHENSIVE INCOME

	2021 RO	2020 RO
INCOME		
Dividend income	136,862	200,052
Net realised gain / (loss) on investments at fair value through profit or loss	385,691	(723,411)
Fair value changes in investments at fair value through profit or loss	1,130,992	534,780
Interest income	383	22,487
Redemption charges	17,288	639
Foreign exchange gain (net)	19,789	3,943
Other income	--	3,729
	1,691,005	42,219
EXPENSES		
Performance fees	90,271	--
Investors' Committee's remuneration	70,000	--
Management fees	41,328	42,365
Administration fees	33,814	34,662
Advisory fees	33,814	34,662
Investors' Committee's meeting attendance fees	11,700	9,900
Brokerage commission expenses (transaction cost)	10,021	50,145
Custodian service fees	9,251	12,019
General and administration	24,432	21,306
	324,631	205,059
Net profit / (loss) and total comprehensive income for the year	1,366,374	(162,840)
Net profit / (loss) per unit	0.212	(0.002)

Note:
The complete accounts, either in Arabic and English as requested, will be sent by mail within 7 days of request to any unitholder who requests the Fund at the address: PO Box 782, PC 131, Sultanate of Oman, Tel.: +968 24822327, Fax: +968 24822390

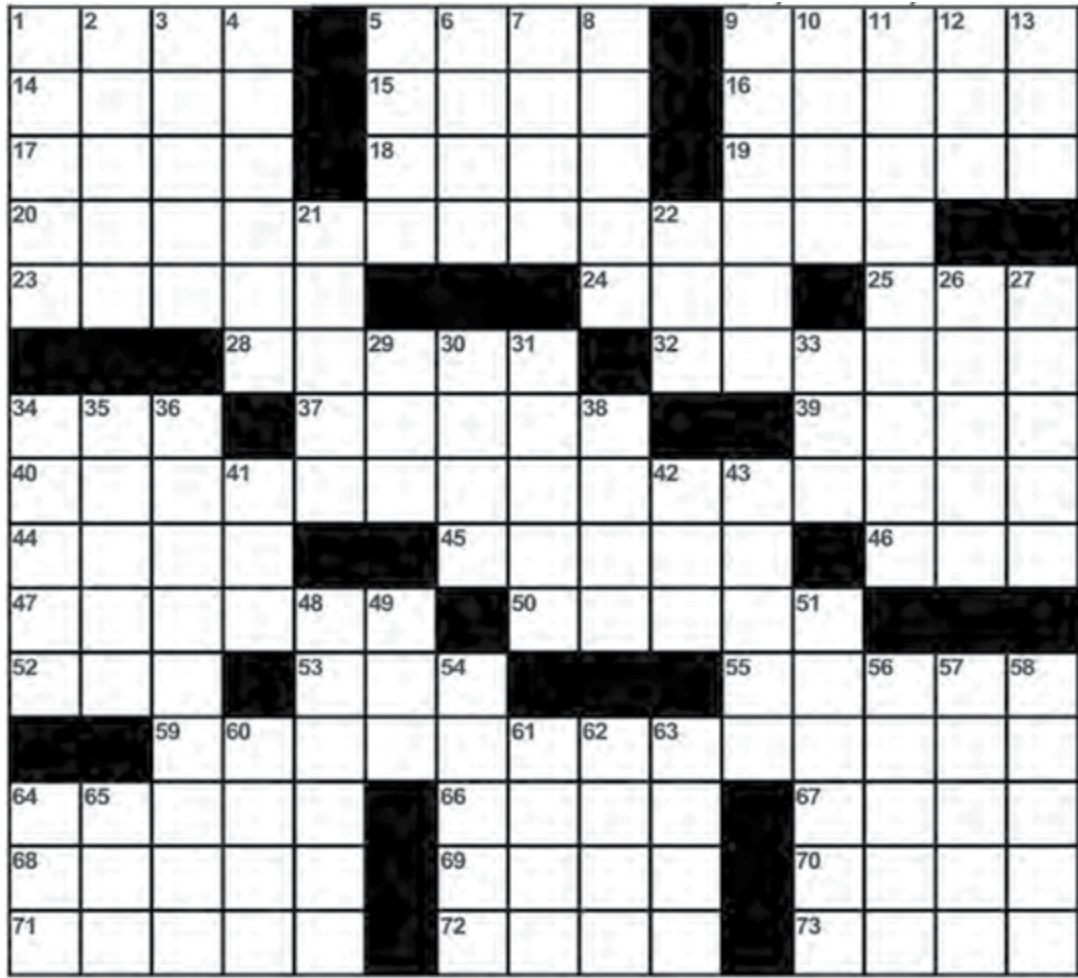


شركة المركز المالي ش.م.ع.
The Financial Corporation Co. SAOG

ادارة الاصول | وساطة | تمويل الشركات والاستشارات | بحوث
Asset Management | Brokerage | Corporate Finance and Advisory | Research

P.O. Box 782, PC 131,
Sultanate of Oman, Phone: (968) 24822327,
Fax: (968) 24822390, E-mail: fincorp@fincorp.org,
Website: www.fincorp.org

DAILY CROSSWORD



ACROSS

1) English dude
5) Instrument with some heft
9) Not a heavyweight
14) Frau's partner
15) Got dirty going home?
16) Blotto
17) Jason's ship
18) Title character with the King of Siam
19) Battery terminal
20) Dilly-dalliers' activities
23) "Come in!"
24) " ... and you know the rest"
25) Spigot
28) Perform incorrectly
32) Force out of office
34) Word with "photo" or "black"
37) Extremely long films
39) Voice in the choir
40) The art of putting things off for tomorrow
44) Member of the Jackson 5
45) Glitterati member, briefly
46) Bawl

47) Acted badly
50) Like illegally parked cars, often
52) Don'ts partners
53) "Much _ About Nothing"
55) Come to mind
59) Delays leading to rescheduling
64) Bloodhound's guide
66) Material in a gym
67) Mine entrance
68) At a good clip, in poetry
69) Pre-owned
70) 5,280 feet
71) Word with "film" or "home"
72) Cushiony forest growth
73) Fortune-teller, supposedly

DOWN

1) Make sore by rubbing
2) "Great white" bird
3) Slanguage
4) For the time being
5) The last one was Nicholas II
6) Arm bone
7) Type of cherry
8) "Love is blind," e.g.

9) Batting position
10) Type of valuable vase
11) Relating to the Pope
12) Hallucinogenic drug
13) Caustic drain opener
21) Less humid
22) "... be an honor"
26) Mary of "The Maltese Falcon"
27) Indiana's state flower
29) Where to get a muddy face
30) LP or CD, e.g.
31) Santa's reindeer, collectively
33) Butter unit
34) Made a choice
35) First-rate, slangily
36) In a way
38) Fodder holder on a farm
41) Bunk
42) Not yet unwrapped
43) Crosswise, on deck
48) Resurrection Day
49) Banned bug killer
51) Enters REM sleep
54) Codeine source
56) Low-budget film, often
57) Attendance counter
58) Banana oil, for one

60) Fairy-tale opener
61) About
62) Words of denial
63) Concludes

64) First name on "Cheers"
65) Bean counter, for short

NOTE PAD

YOUR DAILY HOROSCOPE

ARIES MARCH 21-APRIL 19

A new person on the scene provides a great deal of entertainment, so hang out with them for a while. They'll distract you from a burning secret you're just dying to tell everyone. Having fun will help you hold on to this valuable information. Still, accidents do happen. You can't beat yourself up forever if you accidentally let a juicy tidbit of gossip fall from your lips. All you can do is make the best of an awkward situation.

LEO JULY 23-AUGUST 22

Good energy is coming your way today, which is great because you'll need it to help you prepare for something big that's coming your way later on. Fun, creativity, and even a tiny bit of exciting drama are all in your near future, but you'll have to get rid of all the boring tasks first. Hit the ground running. The sooner you get the work done, the sooner you'll get to the good stuff. You're going to be on a roll!

SAGITTARIUS NOVEMBER 22-DECEMBER 21

Things are definitely changing for the better. The tide is starting to turn in your life. But are you ready to take advantage of the new opportunities coming your way? You are if you have a path to follow and a plan to guide you. Now is the right time to build that plan and ask around for advice from friends and mentors. They know what you need and can tell you in a way you'll understand.

TAURUS APRIL 20-MAY 20

Being overly emotional isn't a productive frame of mind for you. You should seek some sort of distraction to help you work your way through it. Someone from your past could trigger some weird feelings today, and you might not know what to do about it. Switch your focus from matters of the heart to analytical data, numbers, and dates. This is the perfect day to balance your checkbook or pay bills.

VIRGO AUGUST 23-SEPTEMBER 22

You'll meet way more people out and about than in an office today. Social and entertainment endeavors are favoured over business aspirations right now. You'll feel a strong energy to initiate something new, which is perfect because you're in a superb phase to begin new projects and new relationships. Enlist the help of a friend who has stellar connections. Plan on making lots of progress if you start a major task today.

CAPRICORN DECEMBER 22-JANUARY 19

If you want more peace in your life, spend more time with altruistic people. Ignore the drama queens you encounter today. Every time you get involved in their issues, you're fueling their toxic behaviour, and it's always a waste of your energy. The troublemakers and the takers cause waves and create problems, forcing your attention their way. Instead, focus on the people who give back. They deserve more of your time.

GEMINI MAY 21-JUNE 21

You could find yourself moving into an introverted mood, but that's okay, especially under the circumstances. Don't be surprised if you're forced into a partnership with someone you don't know well or don't like very much. Unfortunately, you can't change the situation. Summon your positive attitude and work on finding a bright side to this arrangement. Seek tasks you can work on without your partner's interference.

LIBRA SEPTEMBER 23-OCTOBER 22

Friendships are elective relationships. They don't always have to be lifelong commitments. People change over time, and unfortunately, they don't always grow in the same direction. You're having issues with a certain someone and you're wondering what you ever saw in this person. You can accept who they are becoming, but you don't have to keep them in your life if they're not enriching it.

AQUARIUS JANUARY 20-FEBRUARY 18

Your eye for detail will help you notice things no one else pays attention to today. Hold on to these little revelations until a time when they'll be more useful to you. Your mouth, however, is another story. Don't be surprised if you accidentally divulge classified info today. It was just a slip! The best move after a boo-boo like this is to smile and offer a heartfelt apology. You have the tact and charm to get anyone on your good side.

CANCER JUNE 22-JULY 22

It's an excellent day for planning and fact finding, so you might want to sit yourself in front of the computer for a while. It's exciting knowing that all the answers you need are right at your fingertips. Your brain is ready to soak it all in. You'll have to wrangle with lots of details, but you can flourish under the pressure and impress people with your abilities! You'll have a blast and the time will fly by.

SCORPIO OCTOBER 23-NOVEMBER 21

Step out and go somewhere you've never been before with a few of your favourite people. They want to spend some time with you, so why not grace them with an hour or two of your time? If your social life is starting to feel too boring, it's your responsibility to liven it up. Why not take a walk on the wild side? The people over there seem so much more interesting, don't they?

PISCES FEBRUARY 19-MARCH 20

Follow-through will be your worst enemy today. You'll start things and work on things, but completion is a whole other matter. Focus on what you can do, but don't burden yourself with too many details or deadlines. That way, you can keep the momentum moving forward without getting overwhelmed. Checking things off your list is going to be a struggle, but you can still feel a sense of accomplishment.



TEST YOUR KNOWLEDGE

English artist Alison Lapper, MBE, who with her son also featured in a BBC documentary series 'Child of our Time', has what rare medical condition?

A. Best Disease
B. Fibrodysplasia ossificans progressiva
C. Schnitzler Syndrome
D. Phocomelia

2. Which were the last Olympic Games in which East Germany took part as a country?

A. 1992
B. 1988
C. 1984
D. 1982

3. What Greek letter is used to denote the ratio of the circumference of a circle to its diameter?

A. Pi
B. Rho
C. Delta
D. Theta

Answers: 1. d 2. b 3. a

KIDS COLOURING

BOGGLER

A	O	E	O
T	O	S	U
O	B	N	L
Y	R	B	S

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

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

DO YOU SUDOKU?

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

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

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

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

Iran President makes maiden Gulf trip for gas, nuclear talks

Doha, Qatar - Iran's President Ebrahim Raisi arrived in Qatar on his first visit to a Gulf Arab state on Monday for a major gas summit that will be dominated by tensions over Ukraine.

Raisi and Qatar's Emir, Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad al Thani, a close US ally, are also expected to discuss growing efforts to revive a stalled international deal to regulate Iran's nuclear programme.

Tuesday's Gas Exporting Countries Forum will be overshadowed by growing tensions around Ukraine which have boosted demand for gas as well as the price paid by consumers.

Producing nations say they will not be able to provide substantial amounts of gas to Europe if Russia, which has been accused of preparing an attack on Ukraine, cuts supplies in any sanctions showdown.

Raisi has not travelled in the Gulf region since taking office in June, and it is only his fourth trip abroad. Qatar authorities imposed stringent security for his arrival at Doha airport, where he was met by the emir.

Qatar has added the Iran nuclear dispute to its list of diplomatic hotspots where it has taken a behind-the-scenes mediation role.

Earlier this month Qatari Foreign Minister Sheikh Mohammed bin Abdulrahman al Thani went on an unannounced visit to Tehran after the emir met US President Joe Biden in Washington.



Qatar's Emir Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad al Thani (right) welcomes Iranian President Ebrahim Raisi upon his arrival in Qatar on Monday (AFP)

'Common concern'

The Qatar government said that the emir and Raisi would discuss issues of 'common concern' without giving details. Diplomats said, however, that the nuclear talks would be on the agenda.

In 2015, Iran and six world powers including the United States reached a landmark nuclear agreement that offered Tehran sanctions relief in exchange for curbs on its atomic programme.

The United States unilaterally

withdrew from the deal in 2018 under then president Donald Trump and reimposed heavy economic sanctions.

Talks on reviving the deal known as the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA), have been held in the Austrian capital Vienna since late November, involving Britain, China, France, Germany and Russia directly and the United States indirectly. Raisi and the Qatari emir will be joined at Tuesday's summit by Algeria's President Abdel-

madjid Tebboune and Trinidad and Tobago's Prime Minister Keith Rowley. Energy ministers from the other seven forum members who include Russia will also take part.

Ministers from the 11-member group were to meet later on Monday to approve a summit statement that industry analysts predicted would touch on the lack of spare supplies that could help Europe, where consumers are already paying record prices for gas. Qatar and other coun-

tries have insisted that massive investment is needed in gas, and that they need the certainty of long-term contracts to be able to guarantee supplies to Europe.

The European Union has long resisted the 10, 15 and 20-year contracts signed by other major customers for Qatar's gas, who include China, Japan and South Korea. The United States has asked Qatar to help Europe by preparing emergency supplies if the Ukraine crisis erupts.

AFP

Pakistan introduces new law against 'fake news'

Islamabad, Pakistan - Pakistan's government has introduced a new cybercrime law that could see social media users jailed for up to five years for posting 'fake news' about the military, judiciary or public officials.

Critics say the legislation is the latest example of creeping restrictions on freedom of expression in the nation, already ranked among the world's most dangerous for media workers.

It was approved by Prime Minister Imran Khan's Cabinet and swiftly adopted into law by President Arif Alvi over the weekend, an official in the presidential office said on Monday.

The legislation takes effect immediately but must be presented to parliament within 90 days for approval, though it is expected that Khan's coalition government will easily pass it.

In recent years the space for dissent in Pakistan has shrunk with the government cracking down on social networks and traditional media outlets, who say pressure from above has resulted in widespread self-censorship.

Criticism of the security establishment has long been seen as a red line and rights groups say the new law further shields it - and other state institutions - from scrutiny.

"It will... inevitably be used to clamp down on dissenters and critics of the government and state institutions," said the Human Rights Commission of Pakistan, which called the legislation 'undemocratic'.

The law amends existing defamation rules forbidding false online information that 'intimidates or harms the reputa-



Pakistan's PM Imran Khan

tion or privacy' of an individual.

It broadens the scope to include 'any company, association or body of persons' and 'institution, organisation, authority or any other body established by the government'.

The maximum penalty has also been increased from three years to five and suspects will not be granted bail, meaning the accused will await trial in jail.

On Sunday Justice Minister Farogh Naseem said 'rumours that it is an attempt to gag media are baseless'.

"You are free to criticise, but the issue is that there should be no fake news," he told reporters.

The Pakistan Federal Union of Journalists vowed to challenge the 'draconian amendments' in court.

It said the changes aim 'to shrink space for freedom of press and expression which is already compromised in the country'.

Governments around the world are battling with the issue of disinformation and misinformation spread on social media, and some have seized on so-called 'fake news' as a pretext for dismissing unfavourable reports and bolstering propaganda.

AFP



Authorities transport containers of garbage to be returned to Britain in Colombo on Monday (AFP)

Sri Lanka returns final batch of illegal waste to Britain

Colombo, Sri Lanka - Sri Lanka shipped out to Britain on Monday the last of several hundred containers filled with thousands of tonnes of illegally imported waste, officials said.

Several Asian countries have in recent years been pushing back against an onslaught of refuse from wealthier nations and have started turning back unwanted shipments.

The waste from Britain arrived in Sri Lanka between 2017 and 2019 and was listed as 'used mattresses, carpets and rugs'.

But in reality it also contained biowaste from hospitals including body parts from mortuaries, according to customs officials.

The containers were not chilled and some of them gave off a powerful stench.

The 45 containers loaded onto a ship at a Colombo port on Monday were the final batch of 263 containers holding around 3,000 tonnes of waste.

"There could be fresh attempts to import such hazardous cargo, but we will be vigilant and ensure that this does not happen again," customs chief Vijitha Ravipriya said.

The first 21 containers holding

medical waste were returned to Britain in September 2020, according to customs.

A local company had imported the waste from Britain, saying it planned to recover the springs from used mattresses as well as cotton to be reshipped to manufacturers abroad.

But customs failed to find credible evidence of such 're-source recovery'.

A local environmental activist group filed a petition demanding the waste be returned to its sender and Sri Lanka's Court of Appeal upheld the petition in 2020.

Customs maintained that all the containers had been brought into the country in violation of international law governing the shipment of hazardous waste, including plastics.

A Sri Lankan investigation in 2019 found the importer had re-shipped about 180 tonnes of waste brought into the island to India and Dubai in 2017 and 2018.

The Philippines, Indonesia and Malaysia have also returned hundreds of containers of refuse back to their countries of origin.

AFP

Iranian fighter jet crashes into school, three killed

Tehran, Iran - An Iranian F-5 fighter jet crashed into a school compound in the northwestern city of Tabriz on Monday, killing two crew and a passerby, authorities said.

"Luckily the school was closed because of the COVID-19 pandemic," local official Mohammad-Bagher Honarvar told state television.

The aircraft was on a training mission when it went down around 9am (0530 GMT) in the city's central district of Monajem, said Honavar, who heads a crisis management unit in East Azerbaijan province.

The head of the local Red Crescent organisation said the plane crashed into an external wall, and that one of the dead was a nearby resident.

A blaze broke out at the crash site and firefighters were seen



Firefighters put out a blaze at the crash site of an Iranian fighter jet in Tabriz on Monday (AFP)

battling the flames as a crowd looked on, in video footage by the official news agency IRNA.

The charred remains of the warplane could be seen amid the

rubble of the school's blackened facade.

The plane had been stationed at the Shahid Fakouri air base in Tabriz, base commander Gen-

eral Reza Youssefi told the broadcaster, adding that it was heading back from the training mission when it encountered a technical problem that pre-

Taiwanese skater in trouble for wearing China suit

Taipei, Taiwan - Taiwan's government has denounced one of its Olympic flagbearers after the speed skater was seen in an online video wearing the suit of the Chinese national team, with one lawmaker calling her attire the 'uniform of the enemy'.

China and Taiwan have been at odds for decades as Beijing regards the island as its territory, vowing to seize it one day - by force if necessary.

Self-ruled, democratic Taiwan is often held up as a bastion of liberalism but authorities have said Olympian Huang Yu-ting could be punished after she hit a nerve in January when she posted a clip of herself in the Chinese suit.

She removed the video following a barrage of criticism, explaining later that a Chinese friend had given her the uniform



Taiwan's Huang Yu-ting competes in the women's speed skating 1000m event during 2022 Winter Olympics in Beijing last week (AFP)

and she wore it 'for friendship'.

As the Beijing Winter Olympics drew to a close over the weekend, an official said Huang will be investigated and faces 'appropriate punishment' at the orders of Taiwanese Premier Su Tseng-chang.

Su on Monday reiterated that a probe into Huang's conduct was underway. "Athletes on the national team... should maintain our national dignity and honour," the premier told reporters.

"Her conduct was extremely improper and failed to meet pub-

lic expectations."

The 33-year-old was among four Taiwanese athletes competing at the Olympics over the last two weeks.

She drew more ire during the Games when she said in an interview with Chinese media that she felt 'at home' competing in Beijing.

Huang defended herself on her Facebook page - which she has since deleted.

"Let sports be sports. In sports, we do not distinguish nationalities," she had written. "We are all good friends in private."

A lawmaker from Taiwan's ruling Democratic Progressive Party on Sunday said Huang had worn 'the uniform of the enemy'.

"Huang doesn't give a damn about Taiwan where she was born and raised - she embraces

China," lawmaker Chiu Chih-wei said on Facebook.

Hints also cropped up of Taiwan and China's political tussle in the lead-up to the Olympics.

A Chinese spokeswoman referred to Taiwan's delegation as the 'China, Taipei' team - a diplomatic departure from the more linguistically ambiguous 'Chinese Taipei' used in the international arena to sidestep sovereignty disputes. Taiwan reacted by calling on the International Olympic Committee to 'prevent the interference of any political factors to suppress and belittle (Taiwan's) status'.

The island's relations with Beijing have been especially frosty since President Tsai Ing-wen came to power in 2016, as she rejects the stance that the island is part of a single China.

AFP

Kremlin rebuffs Ukraine peace summit plan

Putin’s spokesman said it was premature to talk about any specific plans for organising such summits

Kyiv, Ukraine - The Kremlin warned on Monday there are no concrete plans for a summit between the Russian and US leaders, as diplomats scrambled to head off the threat of a Russian invasion of Ukraine.

The idea of a meeting between presidents Vladimir Putin and Joe Biden has been championed by France and cautiously welcomed by Ukraine as a way to avert a catastrophic war in Europe.

But Putin’s spokesman Dmitry Peskov said: “It’s premature to talk about any specific plans for organising any kind of summits” adding that no ‘concrete plans’ had been put in place.

A French presidential official later called on Putin to make a decision on the meeting, calling the situation ‘very dangerous’.

“It is today possible to move towards a summit... it is up to President Putin to make his choice,” the source said, asking not to be named.

Separately, Moscow’s FSB security service stirred tensions by claiming that Ukrainian forces had shelled a Russian border facility, an allegation dismissed as ‘fake news’ by Kyiv’s military.

France’s President Emmanuel Macron called Putin on Sunday and afterwards his office said that both the Russian leader and Biden were open to the idea.

But in Washington, a senior US administration official told AFP: “Timing to be determined. Format to be determined. So it’s



Servicemen of Ukrainian Military Forces on the front-line with Russia-backed separatists near Novognativka village, Donetsk region, examine a Swedish-British portable anti-tank guided missile NLAW that was transferred as part of Britain’s assistance, on Monday (AFP)

all completely notional.”

Germany’s Chancellor Olaf Scholz plans to talk to Putin later on Monday and his call would be ‘closely coordinated’ with the French efforts, his spokesman said.

Visiting Brussels, Ukraine’s foreign minister welcomed the French effort.

“We believe that every effort

aimed at a diplomatic solution is worth trying,” Dmytro Kuleba said ahead of a meeting with EU counterparts.

“We hope that the two presidents will walk out from the room with an agreement about Russia withdrawing its forces from Ukraine,” he said.

Defence Minister Oleksiy Reznikov said there was no sign

of Russian forces withdrawing from the border, and that Moscow-backed rebels continue to shell Ukrainian positions.

“As of 09:00 am, 14 attacks have already been recorded, 13 of them from weapons prohibited by the Minsk agreements,” he told reporters in Kyiv.

“One of our soldiers was wounded,” he said.

Russia annexed the Ukrainian region of Crimea in 2014 and Moscow-backed separatists hold an enclave in the eastern districts of Lugansk and Donetsk.

In recent weeks, according to US intelligence, Moscow has massed more than 150,000 troops and sailors around Ukraine’s borders in Belarus,

Russia, Crimea and the Black Sea. Biden has said that US intelligence believes that Putin has made a decision to invade Ukraine and that commanders are readying units to attack within days.

Russia has long denied this, but state media accuse Kyiv of preparing a murderous assault against the rebel enclave, and has started evacuating civilians from the area.

Kyiv and Washington accuse the Russians of plotting a ‘false flag’ operation to fake Ukrainian atrocities in order to serve as a pretext for an all-out assault.

Meanwhile, Ukraine and Russia continue to blame each other for a spike in shellings on the frontline separating Kyiv’s forces from Moscow-backed separatists. The bombardments have sent Ukrainians fleeing to cellars and other shelters, while some civilians have been evacuated.

The idea for a summit came moments after Macron held his second marathon call with Putin of the day. During their first, 105-minute discussion, Putin blamed the increase in violence on the front line on ‘provocations carried out by the Ukrainian security forces’, according to a Kremlin statement.

Putin repeated a call for ‘the United States and NATO to take Russian demands for security guarantees seriously’.

But Macron’s office also said the two had agreed on ‘the need to favour a diplomatic solution to

the ongoing crisis and to do everything to achieve one’.

The second time the pair spoke, late on Sunday evening, it was for an hour, the French presidency said. The announcement of the summit came shortly after.

‘Shelling again’

In Zolote, a frontline village in the Lugansk region, an AFP reporter found residents hiding in an earth-floored cellar roughly furnished when the separatist conflict erupted in 2014.

“These weeks they started shelling harder. Now they are shelling again,” said 33-year-old handyman Oleksiy Kovalenko.

Fears of escalation mounted on Sunday when Belarus said Russian forces would remain on its soil after Sunday’s scheduled end to joint drills, within striking distance of Ukraine.

The Moscow-backed separatists have accused Ukraine of planning an offensive into their enclave, despite the huge Russian military build-up on the frontier.

Kyiv and Western capitals ridicule this idea, and accuse Moscow of attempting to provoke Ukraine and of plotting to fabricate incidents to provide a pretext for Russian intervention.

The rebel regions have made similar claims about Ukraine’s forces and ordered a general mobilisation, evacuating civilians into neighbouring Russian territory.

AFP

Death toll from storms in Brazil rises to 165

Rio de Janeiro, Brazil - The death toll from torrential rains that triggered flash floods and landslides in the scenic Brazilian city of Petropolis has risen to 165, authorities said on Sunday, as more violent storms killed two people in another region nearby.

Rescue workers and residents searching for their missing relatives continued digging through mountains of mud and rubble in Petropolis, which President Jair Bolsonaro said on Friday looked like it had been through a ‘war’.

It is unclear how high the steadily rising death toll will go. It is unlikely any more survivors will be found beneath the wreckage, authorities say. The dead include at least 28 children, police said.

Weather chaos continued to batter Brazil as more violent rains lashed the southeastern state of Espirito Santo on Sunday.

The new storms killed at least two people, said emergency offi-



Firefighters and volunteers are seen during a rescue mission at Caxambu in Petropolis on Saturday (AFP)

cials in Espirito Santo, which borders Rio de Janeiro state, where Petropolis is located.

One person was crushed by a collapsing wall and killed in the city of Alegre, and another swept away trying to retrieve a car from severe flooding in the city of

Nova Venecia, officials said.

The storms forced more than 1,200 people to evacuate their homes and destroyed another 43 people’s houses, they said.

They are the latest in a series of deadly storms to hit Brazil, which experts say are made

worse by climate change.

In the past three months, at least 219 people have died in severe rainstorms, mainly in the southeastern state of Sao Paulo and the northeastern state of Bahia, as well as Petropolis and now Espirito Santo.

Pope Francis sent his latest message of condolences on Sunday following his Angelus prayer at Saint Peter’s Square in the Vatican. “I express my closeness to those people hit in previous days by natural calamities,” he said, mentioning ‘devastated’ Petropolis as well as Madagascar, hit recently by deadly cyclones.

“Lord, welcome the dead in peace, comfort the family members and support those who offer aid,” he said.

The storm turned streets in Petropolis into violent rivers that swept away trees, cars and buses, and triggered deadly landslides in poor hillside neighbourhoods that ring the city of 300,000 people.

It dumped a month’s worth of rain in several hours on the picturesque tourist town, which was the 19th-century summer capital of the Brazilian empire.

AFP



Firefighters transporting a body from the burned Italian-flagged Euroferry Olympia, off the coast of Corfu, on Sunday (AFP)

Greek rescuers resume search for ferry fire survivors

Corfu, Greece - Greek rescuers on Monday resumed the search for 10 people still missing from a ferry fire that has killed at least one truck driver.

Television footage showed smoke still billowing from the Italian-flagged Euroferry Olympia, more than three days after a fire ripped through the vessel as it sailed from Igoumenitsa in Greece to Brindisi in Italy with nearly 300 people aboard.

Most of the passengers were quickly evacuated, and a 21-year-old Belarusian truck driver emerged alive on Sunday.

But 10 other truck drivers - seven Bulgarians, two Greeks and one Turk - remain unaccounted for. The body of a Greek truck driver was recovered on Sunday, the first confirmed fatality of the accident.

On Monday, more than 40 firefighters were taking part in the search and rescue operation with tugboats and coastguard vessels on standby nearby, amid reports that the weather was due to deteriorate later on Monday.

“It is a very difficult operation,” a fire department spokeswoman told AFP. “There is major thermal stress and a lot of smoke.”

Rescue coordinator Dimitris Kontogiannis told Greek public television ERT that temperatures

on board the ferry ‘are over 400 degrees Celsius in some areas’.

Two of those rescued were Afghan nationals not on the ferry manifest, sparking fears that more undocumented passengers might also have been onboard.

The missing drivers reportedly slept in their vehicles because cabins on the ferry were unsuitable, according to the Greek truck drivers’ union. “We had many complaints about living conditions for the drivers,” said union chairman Akis Dermatis.

“The cabins are, to put it mildly, like stables,” the wife of one of the missing Greek truckers, Vana Bekiari, told reporters at Corfu harbour as she waited for news on the rescue operation.

“Four drivers are placed in a single cabin in the midst of a pandemic,” she said.

The ferry’s owner, Grimaldi Lines, rejected the accusations, saying in a statement on Sunday that there was plenty of cabin room, and that an inspection by the authorities in the port of Igoumenitsa two days before the fire had been ‘satisfactory’.

Greek daily Kathimerini over the weekend said the Greek trucker union had since June 2017 warned about conditions on the Euroferry Olympia.

AFP

Trump’s new social media app begins slow rollout

San Francisco, US - Donald Trump’s new social media app started a gradual rollout late on Sunday and should be ‘fully operational’ by late March, potentially raising the former president’s profile more than a year after he was banned by major platforms.

“This week, we will begin to roll out to people on the Apple App store,” said Devin Nunes, CEO of the Trump Media & Technology Group (TMTG), parent company of the new app Truth Social.

The former Republican congressman was speaking on Sunday on conservative Fox News.

“I think, by the end of March, we’re going to be fully operational - at least within the United States,” added Nunes, who resigned from the US House to lead the Trump group.

Trump has described Truth Social as an alternative to Face-



This file photo shows a person checking the App Store on a smartphone for ‘Truth Social’, in Los Angeles on October 20, last year (AFP)

book, Twitter and YouTube, all of which banned him following the assault on the US Capitol by his supporters on January 6, 2021.

The former president has been accused of inciting his followers to use force in a bid to overturn the result of the 2020 election.

On Sunday, the App Store

was allowing visitors to pre-order Truth Social starting on Monday, the Presidents Day holiday in the United States.

Later on Sunday, the app was reported as available to some of those who had pre-ordered.

“It’s actually very moving for me to see people that are on the platform that have had their voice canceled,” Nunes said.

‘The truth is coming’

“We want (customers) to tell us what they would like to have on the platform, which is the opposite of some Silicon Valley tech oligarch freak telling people what they want to think and deciding who can or cannot be on the platform,” he said.

Trump and his wife Melania Trump also plan on Monday to offer for sale 10,000 NFTs, or non-fungible tokens, illustrating key moments in the Trump presidency. NFTs are certified digital images that can be bought and sold. “TRUTH is coming...” congresswoman Elise Stefanik, the third-ranking House Republican, tweeted on Friday, in an allusion to the ominous ‘Winter is coming’ catchphrase of television series Game of Thrones.

She posted a screen grab of her message on Truth Beta, the test version of the new site, saying, “I’m so excited to be on

TRUTH!”

And Donald Trump Jr. celebrated on Twitter, posting, ‘Time for some Truth!!!’ and including what he said was his father’s first post on Truth Social: “Get Ready! Your favourite President will see you soon!” TMTG, asked for comment by AFP, did not immediately respond.

The group reportedly has a US\$1.25bn treasure chest as it seeks a niche in a crowded conservative social-media marketplace, currently served by platforms such as Gettr, Parler and Gab. Before being banned by Twitter, Trump had some 89mn followers there and used the platform constantly, both for presidential statements and to attack rivals.

Trump, who is 75, has hinted but never definitively said whether he will seek the presidency again.

AFP

COVID-19 PANDEMIC

'Fortress Australia' reopens to tourists after two-year closure

Sydney, Australia - Jubilant visitors returned to Australia on Monday as the country reopened its borders to vaccinated tourists, nearly two years after the island nation imposed some of the world's strictest COVID-19 travel restrictions.

At the country's two major international airports in Sydney and Melbourne, tired but elated family and friends rushed from gates to embrace loved ones after years apart.

Bernie Edmonds was emotional as he hugged his eight-year-old granddaughter, Charlotte, who had just landed in Sydney.

"It's great to have her back," he said. "She's got to go again but we'll get her back again."

The country closed its borders to almost everyone except citizens and permanent residents in March 2020, trying to slow surging COVID-19 case numbers.

The travel ban - which also barred citizens from going overseas without an exemption and imposed a strict cap on international arrivals - earned the country the nickname 'Fortress Australia'.

Sydney's Jody Tuchin was excited to pick up her best friend, who she had not seen since 2018. "He made it back just in time for my wedding in four days," she told AFP.

Meanwhile, Qantas pilot Paul Grant said it was 'nice to have passengers back on again'.

A Qantas flight from Los Angeles was the first to touch



A man hugs his granddaughter upon arriving at Sydney International Airport on Monday (AFP)

down in Sydney at 6:20am (1920 GMT) followed by arrivals from Tokyo, Vancouver and Singapore. "It's fair to say we've all been waiting a long time to welcome visitors back to Australia," Qantas chief executive Alan Joyce said.

The national carrier expects to bring more than 14,000 passengers into Australia this week - the start of what many believe will be a long, slow recovery for a tourism sector devastated by

the pandemic.

"I think we're going to see a very, very strong rebound," Tourism Minister Dan Tehan said at Sydney airport, wearing a t-shirt with the words: 'Welcome Back'.

Attracting tourists from China, previously Australia's biggest market, would be difficult while Beijing enforces a zero-COVID policy, Tehan admitted. "But as soon as that changes, Tourism Australia

have been doing a lot of work to make sure that we will be ready to encourage those Chinese visitors to come."

The Australian government has launched a AUS\$40mn advertising campaign to lure tourists back, but only 56 international flights are scheduled to land in the country in the 24 hours after the re-opening - far below pre-pandemic levels.

Prime Minister Scott Morrison said he had 'no doubt' trav-

eller numbers will scale up in time.

'Fortress Australia'

Every month under 'Fortress Australia' has cost businesses an estimated AUS\$3.6bn, according to the Australian Chamber of Commerce and Industry, with tourism particularly hard hit. Tony Walker, managing director of Quicksilver Group, which operates cruises, diving excursions and resorts across the Great Barrier Reef, told AFP he was 'very excited about being able to reopen'.

International tourists 'make up around 70 per cent' of business for tourism operators on the reef, Walker said, making the two-year border closure 'incredibly difficult'. During the pandemic, his company had to reduce its employees from 650 to the 300 it has today.

Key to Australia's reopening is a government requirement that all overseas travellers must be fully vaccinated.

At Sydney Airport, American tourist Robert Landis said this had not dissuaded him from visiting. "I've just been looking for any opportunity to get down here," he said.

However, the Australian Tourism Export Council warned this week that 'there are worrying signs consumers are wary of travelling' to Australia, with 'confusion over our various state travel restrictions and concern about snap border closures' a key issue.

AFP



A usually busy MTR station in Hong Kong's Wanchai district is seen almost empty on Monday (AFP)

Hong Kong to launch vaccine pass as Omicron outbreak rages

Hong Kong, China - Hong Kong will launch a vaccine pass scheme this week, officials said on Monday, as hospitals struggle under an Omicron-fuelled outbreak and the finance hub sees record-high departures.

The densely populated metropolis is currently in the throes of its worst-ever coronavirus outbreak, registering thousands of confirmed cases every day as hospitals and isolation units run out of space.

Starting from Thursday, all residents aged 12 and above entering restaurants and clubhouses will be required to provide proof of having at least one COVID-19 vaccine shot or a doctor's exemption.

"Everyone should carry along their vaccine record or exemptions like their ID cards," said Kevin Choi, deputy secretary of food and health, at a press conference on Monday.

Other public spaces - including wet markets, supermarkets, hospitals and government premises - will not require a show of proof, but will be subjected to spot checks by authorities and fines.

Later phases of the scheme will include requiring eligible residents to have received three vaccine shots, they added.

City leader Carrie Lam had said last month she hopes the scheme could push the vaccine-hesitant to get the jab.

"If you choose not to get vaccinated... you must bear some of the consequences," she said.

Hong Kong, which follows China's 'zero-COVID' policy, enjoyed months of no local infections last year.

But few preparations were made for a mass outbreak and health policy experts say more efforts should have been spent boosting its meagre vaccination rate - particularly among the elderly, whose numbers remain below 50 per cent for two jabs.

Authorities do not allow those with COVID-19 to isolate at home and are now scrambling to build new isolation facilities with the help of mainland China and requisition hotel rooms.

But it is not clear if enough rooms can be provided.

Cases are expected to rise to 'literally hundreds of thousands' in the coming weeks, said Karen Grepin of the University of Hong Kong's School of Public Health.

"All of the data seems to suggest that we are very much at an early stage in this wave," she told the city's public broadcaster RTHK on Monday.

The city is currently preparing to test all of its residents for COVID-19 - with support from the mainland - a move that came after Chinese President Xi Jinping called for 'all necessary measures' to control the virus.

Hong Kong has remained cut off from the world for much of the last two years and is also undergoing a political crackdown. With little sign of that changing, departures have soared.

Government data showed that the one-time 'Asia's World City' saw a record 27,703 departures last week - the highest rate since the pandemic started more than two years ago.

AFP

Police reclaim Canada capital after trucker siege ends

Ottawa, Canada - The last big rigs were towed on Sunday out of Canada's capital, where the streets were quiet for the first time in almost a month after a massive police operation ended a drawn-out siege by protesters opposing COVID-19 rules.

A major clean-up was underway in Ottawa's snowy downtown, where police in riot gear had faced off with trucker-led demonstrators for two full days, finally driving them out of their protest hub outside parliament.

"I'm very happy to have my city back," Jeff Lindley, who lives and works downtown, told AFP. "It's so much better today,



City employees clean up Wellington Street in front of Parliament Hill, in Ottawa, Ontario, Canada, on Sunday (AFP)

calmer and quieter without the ominous presence of all the trucks and protesters."

Ottawa interim police Chief Steve Bell told a news conference 'many of the unlawful pro-

testers are gone'. But he added, "We're not done this operation yet," explaining that authorities were on watch to "make sure that nobody returns to occupy our streets again."

A few protesters stayed late into Saturday night, singing '80s protest anthems and setting off fireworks outside a hastily erected four-meter-high security fence surrounding the parliamentary precinct.

But the last gasp protest-turned-street-party fizzled as a deep freeze gripped the city.

Early on Sunday, police were manning checkpoints restricting access to a 500-acre downtown

area, while a sizable force remained on standby to defend the ground reclaimed from the truckers. An AFP journalist saw only a handful of protesters in the area, testing the perimeter.

One who gave his name only as John said he was packing it in after wandering for hours with a Canadian flag in hand. "It's pretty locked down, all I see is cops everywhere," he told AFP.

Ottawa police issued a reminder that the core area remains off-limits except to local residents and workers, and advised any remaining protesters to leave or risk arrest.

AFP

Tensions mount behind scenes as Biden ponders Supreme Court pick

Washington, US - Intensive vetting, lobbying and even a bit of skullduggery are underway as President Joe Biden prepares to unveil his nomination for the upcoming vacancy on the US Supreme Court.

Biden, a Democrat, has pledged to nominate the first Black woman to sit on the nation's highest court and to reveal his choice before the end of February.

White House Press Secretary Jen Psaki was asked this week about the behind-the-scenes jockeying for the coveted slot on the nine-member bench. She noted that the 79-year-old Biden is no novice when it comes to placing justices on the Supreme Court.

"As the former chairman of the Judiciary Committee, as the former vice president, I believe he's probably overseen or been engaged with more Supreme Court nominee processes than anyone in history," she said.

"He is not going to be swayed

by public campaigns or public sniping or lobbying efforts," Psaki said.

"He is going to pick an eminently qualified Black woman to nominate to the Supreme Court and he has a number of potential choices that he's very excited about."

Biden has said he is focused on four candidates to replace Justice Stephen Breyer, a liberal stalwart who announced last month that he would step down in June at the end of the court's current term.

Among the favourites is Ketanji Brown Jackson, a 51-year-old US Circuit Court judge.

Jackson, a Harvard graduate spent two years as a federal public defender representing indigent defendants.

Another leading candidate is Michelle Childs, a 55-year-old judge in South Carolina who enjoys the support of influential Democratic and Republican lawmakers from her state.

Also believed to be on the



Supreme Court Justice Stephen Breyer attending an event for the 2022 Supreme Court Fellows Programme in Washington, DC, last week (AFP)

shortlist is Leandra Kruger, a 45-year-old California Supreme Court judge who has argued 12 cases for the government before

the Supreme Court.

All of the candidates are undergoing extensive background checks by the White House to

prevent any unwelcome surprises during their Senate nomination hearings.

Their resumes, their case rulings and their public statements will be given the strictest of scrutiny.

'Open mind'

The US Constitution calls for justices to the Supreme Court to be nominated by the president and confirmed by the Senate.

Confirmation used to be a mere formality but it has become the focus of bitter battles in the Senate in recent years amid heightened partisan tensions.

President Donald Trump's nomination of Brett Kavanaugh in 2018 was nearly derailed by sexual assault allegations against the nominee, charges that he hotly denied.

Democrats have only the slimmest of majorities in the Senate and the White House would like to nominate a justice who could potentially attract a few Republican votes in the

chamber.

"I'm not looking to make an ideological choice here," Biden said in a recent interview with NBC. "I'm looking for someone to replace Justice Breyer with the same kind of capacity Judge Breyer had."

The president said he was looking for someone 'with an open mind who understands the Constitution'.

Childs, the South Carolina judge, benefits from the open backing of the state's powerful Democratic congressman Jim Clyburn.

Clyburn, in exchange for his support during the 2020 Democratic presidential primary, extracted a pledge from Biden that he would nominate a Black woman to the court if there was a vacancy during his term.

"Judge Childs has everything it takes to be a great justice," Clyburn said recently.

Republican Senator Lindsey Graham of South Carolina has also openly voiced his support

for Childs. "She's the one that would get the most Republican votes," Graham told ABC's 'This Week'. "She's somebody, I think, that could bring the Senate together and probably get more than 60 votes."

"Anyone else would be problematic," Graham said.

Childs' candidacy has come under fire from some on the left, however, because of her past representation of management against employees.

Without mentioning Childs by name, two Democratic members of Congress circulated a letter saying 'for far too long, the Supreme Court has been dominated by pro-corporate justices'.

Other lobbying efforts have been a bit more underhanded.

According to Politico, a former clerk to Jackson, without her knowledge, anonymously edited the Wikipedia pages of potential rivals Childs and Kruger to 'invite liberal skepticism'.

AFP

FAST FASHION FALLOUT



Rosie Scott and Hannah Silvani, co-founders of The New Craft House, a sewing workshop studio and designer deadstock fabric shop in Hackney, East London

Time for sewing

Young people in UK have been spurred into sewing – a formidable competition for fast fashion brands

From jogging outfits to summer dresses, Lea Baecker has stitched together most of her wardrobe herself from inside her London flat, part of a burgeoning number of young amateur seamstresses.

Like many others in the growing horde of sew-it-yourself enthusiasts, she has grown increasingly disillusioned with the retail clothing industry, viewing it as too destructive.

"My main motivation was not having to buy ready-to-wear clothes anymore because I didn't want to support fast fashion," Baecker, 29, told AFP, referring to clothes made and sold cheaply to be thrown away after minimal use.

The doctoral student in neuroscience only started sewing in 2018, beginning with small bags before moving on to clothes. Four years on, she estimates about 80 per cent of clothes in her wardrobe are home-made, from pyjamas to long fleece coats, as well as jeans made with denim scraps scalped from relatives.

Baecker now buys new clothes very rarely, she added, wearing one of her self-made long, hand-sewn dresses.

Tiny competitors, big impact

The fashion and textile industry is the third most polluting sector globally after food and construction, accounting for up to 5 percent of greenhouse gas emissions, according to a 2021 report by the World Economic Forum. Low-cost fashion retailers are regularly criticised for their waste and pollution, as well as the pay conditions imposed on their workers.

Tara Viggo knows fast fashion only too well, having worked in the industry for 15 years as a pattern maker.

"I realised the scale that the fashion industry was working at and it was a bit terrifying," she told AFP. In 2017, Viggo decided to start creating her own patterns – the blueprint drawings on paper before garments are made.



She started out small, selling only around one set of patterns per year, a far cry from the four a day that she would sometimes churn out in the ready-to-wear industry.

Viggo conceded independent operators



like her were only tiny competitors to the big brands, but insisted they still could have a meaningful impact.

"The more of us that do (it), the better," she said. "It's like a trigger... People start to look at where their consumption is. Once



you know how to sew your own clothes, you can't fathom that a shirt should be £3 (US\$4.10) anymore."

Youth bandwagon

Viggo's 'Zadie' jumpsuit is now a top seller on 'The Fold Line', an online platform selling independently produced sewing patterns, according to its co-founder Rachel Walker.

Since its launch in 2015, the website has grown from about 20 designers to more than 150 today.

Rosie Scott and Hannah Silvani, who run a London workshop selling fabrics from fashion designers' unsold stock, have also seen the resurgence in sewing's popularity, particularly among young people.

"The clients have changed," said Scott. "More young people have shown interest in sewing - young people who are really in-



More young people have shown interest in sewing – young people who are really interested in making their own clothes and making them sustainably

ROSIE SCOTT

terested in making their own clothes and making them sustainably."

Women make up more than 90 percent of the clientele, she also noted. Customers can choose from some 700 designer fabrics, sold from £8 a metre for cotton voile to £110 for the same length of lace. Orders soared during the pandemic and are still going strong, Scott said.

The sector's explosive growth would not have been possible without Instagram, where the sewing community has made a pastime once seen as unfashionable much more trendy. The photo-sharing platform is really important, Baecker said, allowing sewists to post images of their designs and engage with each other.

With Baecker sharing so many of her creations, she has also inspired friends to join the growing sewing revolution.

AFP

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LONDON FASHION WEEK

STREET
STYLES,
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Hues



London Fashion Week kicked off without much steam, in the absence of big brands, as young British designers showcased street styles

Fashionistas braved gale-force winds in London on Friday to attend the first London Fashion Week shows, with a schedule dominated by up-and-coming young designers. Gusts ripped through the streets of the British capital as crowds, wrapped up in coats and hats, flocked to the week's first live shows with attendees, which make up about half of the five-day event's timetable.

It kicked off with sustainable label Sohuman, created by Spaniard Javier Aparici, who promises 'radical transparency' on the factories used to make his garments. He showed an ultra-feminine collection of cocktail dresses in red and black featuring applique flowers, sheer panels and giant bows.

Young British designers then came under the spotlight, with Saul Nash showcasing a relaxed but luxurious street wear collection of merino wool tracksuits, hoodies, puffer coats and scarves, many emblazoned with his Saul logo. With a background in dance and performance, Nash had graduated from the Royal College of Art in menswear in 2018.

Another British brand, Poster Girl, known for ultra-revealing cutaway shapewear-style dresses worn by celebrities such as Kylie Jenner and Dua Lipa, held its first catwalk show with an 'apres-ski' theme.

Poster Girl designers Francesca Capper and Natasha Somerville, who studied at the prestigious Central Saint Martins fashion college, showed their neon-hued creations in a freezing building due for demolition.

Models in tube dresses and leggings wrapped up in fake fur coats and puffer jackets. There was even a ski suit, accessorised with bright pink high heeled sandals. Fans took pictures on their phones and whistled in approval.

Brands missing

SS Daley, a brand based in Liverpool in northwest England recently founded by Steven Stokeley Daley, went for classic unisex tailoring, featuring wide baggy trousers and Sherlock Holmes-style checked overcoats.

Meanwhile Matty Bovan, another northern designer from the city of York, showed an Americana-themed collection with models wearing eccentric assemblages melding baseball jackets, gingham, denim and colourful crochet.

Missing from this week's events are several of the best-known brands in British fashion, including

Burberry, Mulberry and Victoria Beckham.

Burberry has announced that it will hold a separate live show in London in March, while Beckham has not participated in London Fashion Week, even digitally, for a year. She has complained of the high cost of catwalk shows.

Another major name in British fashion, Ozwald Boateng, announced at the last minute that he will hold a comeback show on Monday. The former creative director for Givenchy menswear, who was the first black head designer at a luxury fashion house, has not shown a collection in London for 12 years.

As sustainability and upcycling become industry buzzwords, Britain's Bethany Williams and Ireland's Richard Malone will present shows today, focusing on reused materials.

Williams' materials include abandoned festival tents for garments and book waste for bags while Malone's creations feature fragments of materials, including scrap leather.

Meanwhile, following in the footsteps of designer brands such as Gucci and Dolce & Gabbana, Serbian designer Roksanda Ilincic has announced she will sell non-fungible tokens (NFTs), offering digital ownership of a 3D image of a dress from her label.

Future stars

The event, which showcases autumn/winter 2022 collections, was held entirely virtually a year ago as it coincided with a national lockdown. Live catwalk shows resumed last September.

This time, there are nearly 40 such shows including Simone Rocha, Molly Goddard, Roksanda, Erdem and Rejina Pyo. Other designers are sticking to digital formats, such as punk icon Westwood, who will present her latest creations in a video. After being hit hard by the pandemic, the British fashion sector, which employed about 890,000 people in 2019, is seeking a route to recovery.

Caroline Rush, the chief executive of the British Fashion Council, which organises the fashion week, told AFP that the industry has had "a very challenging couple of years," exacerbated by Brexit-related changes that entered full force on January 31, 2020.

London's five-day showcase is followed by fashion weeks in Milan and Paris later this month.

AFP



FOOTBALL ROUND-UP



Barcelona's Gabonese midfielder Pierre-Emerick Aubameyang shoots the ball during the Spanish league football match against Valencia CF at the Mestalla stadium in Valencia (AFP)

Aubameyang hat-trick fires Barcelona to Valencia win

Madrid, Spain - Pierre Emerick-Aubameyang marked his first La Liga start for Barcelona with a hat-trick on Sunday as the Catalans thrashed Valencia 4-1 to climb back into La Liga's top four.

Aubameyang scored twice in the first half either side of a Frenkie de Jong tap-in as a free-flowing Barca hit Valencia with three goals in 15 minutes before the interval.

And while Valencia briefly raised hopes of a comeback

when Carlos Soler headed home Bryan Gil's cross, a long-range Pedri strike flew in off Aubameyang's back to complete an impressive victory.

In his post-match interviews, Aubameyang believed the fourth goal was Pedri's but Barcelona later confirmed the referee had attributed it to Aubameyang, giving the Gabonese striker his hat-trick.

It is the 32-year-old's first treble since August, when he put three past West Brom for

Arsenal, and the first time anyone has hit a hat-trick for Barca since Lionel Messi scored four against Eibar in February 2020.

"It's a luxury to have a player like him arriving for free," said Sergio Busquets.

"When he arrived he hadn't played many minutes but he's getting them now and I hope he helps us like he has today because he's a great player."

Aubameyang had made two substitute appearances in La Liga before starting against

Napoli in the Europa League on Thursday, but this was his first league start for Barcelona since having his contract terminated by Arsenal last month.

The third goal might have been Pedri's in all but name but Aubameyang was at his pin-point best for the first, as he raced clear and unleashed an emphatic finish.

Xavi singled out Pedri for special praise. "There's nobody in the world with his talent and he's only 19," Xavi said.

Barcelona's quick-fire treble began with a simple chip over the top from Jordi Alba but Aubameyang still had work to do, the striker taming the ball on its third bounce before firing it high into the net under pressure from Omar Alderete.

The second was more intricate, a superb team goal going through Busquets and Alba before Ousmane Dembele generously sidefooted across for De Jong to finish.

AFP

Lille aim to be 'party poopers' against Chelsea

Lille, France - A Lille side sitting in mid-table in Ligue 1 head to London to face Chelsea this week hoping to play the role of "party poopers" against the reigning European champions, their coach Jocelyn Gourvennec told AFP.

Recent Club World Cup winners Chelsea are heavy favourites to beat Lille in their Champions League last-16 tie as Thomas Tuchel's side look to retain the title they won by beating Manchester City in last season's final.

Lille already exceeded expectations just by reaching the last 16 of Europe's elite club competition for the first time since 2006/07 and, as they make the short trip to the other side of the English Channel for the first leg, their aim is to keep the tie alive for the return. "We are competitors so we will not be going there just

to be Chelsea's sparring partners, that's for sure," Gourvennec said.

"They are a great team but there are always surprises in cup matches and we want to be the party poopers, as we have been since the beginning of this Champions League campaign."

The side from France's far north caused a major upset by winning the French title last season ahead of star-studded Paris Saint-Germain and they then topped their Champions League section above Austrian champions Salzburg, Sevilla and Wolfsburg.

However, they find themselves in 11th place in the French top flight two-thirds of the way through this season, nine points adrift of the podium with only the top three qualifying for League.

AFP



Lille's French head coach Jocelyn Gourvennec

Allegri persuaded me to stay at Juventus: Morata

Turin, Italy - Alvaro Morata said on Monday he stayed at Juventus in January after coach Max Allegri insisted the arrival of Dusan Vlahovic would help him.

Allegri suggested in a press conference that Morata will start up front alongside Vlahovic on Tuesday, when Juve play away at Villarreal in the first leg of the Champions League last 16.

Morata was reportedly close to joining Barcelona during the January transfer window after Juventus signed Vlahovic for 80 million euros from Fiorentina.

"It's not important," said Morata when asked about Barca's interest.

"We talked with the coach during the transfer window, about his ideas, and he told me the arrival of Dusan would help me and that has been the case. I'm happy to be here. If it depended on me, I would always stay here."

On Allegri's role in persuading him to stay, Morata said: "I have always felt his confidence, since we started working together. He is the first to ask me things, but he knows what I am and what I



Alvaro Morata said coach Max Allegri insisted the arrival of Dusan Vlahovic would help him

am not.

"He told me that I had to stay and that he trusted me. Now I have to give everything to return his trust."

Vlahovic scored on his Juventus debut against Genoa earlier this month to continue a sensa-

tional season in which the 22-year-old had already hit 25 goals in 21 games for Fiorentina.

"He has given us all extra energy," said Morata. "You can see in his eyes how much Dusan is looking forward to tomorrow's match. He only brings positive

things. He is young and he has a wonderful career ahead of him. He's adapted right away."

Allegri, though, wanted to calm expectations around Vlahovic, who will be making his Champions League debut against Villarreal, the reigning

Europa League champions, who sit sixth in La Liga.

"Vlahovic is just starting in the Champions League," said Allegri. "You can't put all the responsibility on him because you need a lot of experience that he doesn't have, you have to support him."

"When he has played 60 or 70 games, he will be a totally different player. It's not just a technical question, but also a psychological one, a question of pressure."

Juventus have enjoyed an upturn in form in recent weeks, although two consecutive draws against Atalanta and Torino have dented their hopes of a late challenge for the Serie A title.

Villarreal have also improved in the second half of the season, losing only once in their last 10 La Liga games. "They're coming off a good period, like us," said Allegri, who also confirmed Leonardo Bonucci would be available after recovering from injury.

"They are a top team, with a lot of physicality. I think it will be a tactical match, decided by little details."

AFP

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Oman Racing drivers end season fifth in GT class championship

Harthy signs off Asian Le Mans Series campaign with excellent season-best top four finish

Abu Dhabi, UAE - Oman Racing's Ahmad al Harthy concluded the 2022 Asian Le Mans Series just shy of a maiden category podium at Yas Marina Circuit in Abu Dhabi on Sunday, February 20, racing to a top four result in the final race of the campaign. Partnering Sam De Haan and Charlie Eastwood, Harthy and his teammates went on to finish fifth in the GT class championship standings - with Oman Racing also the highest placed Aston

Martin entry in the points table - to cap a strong and successful ALMS challenge. "I'm really glad to end the season with the highest result so far, P4, in a very tough and respectable championship like the ALMS", said Harthy, "We've all driven extremely well and the team keep doing the best they can. It was great for me to be able to push as hard as I did and it was great to have been able to play with the strategy in my stint,

where I went longer. "I was very happy with my pace and the team were extremely happy with the pace. This is a great warm-up for what we hope to announce in the coming months for our main season, what we have done in the ALMS will make us stronger - I'm definitely looking forward to the rest of 2022." Eastwood qualified the No.69 Aston Martin Vantage GT3 sixth fastest in the GT class for the

fourth and final race of the ALMS season, although De Haan took the opening stint - as he did during the previous day's encounter. Although losing ground early on during some robust action and slipping to eighth, De Haan moved back up to seventh around the half-hour mark before then being passed by the No.17 Ferrari. In eighth when a Full Course Yellow cautionary period was called just prior to the end of hour one, De Haan pitted to hand over the car to Al Harthy. Threading back into the race in eighth position, the Oman Ministry of Culture, Sports and Youth, Omantel, OQ and MHD-

ITICS supported driver then served another pit-stop just 15 minutes or so later when another FCY was declared - taking the opportunity to refuel. Pushing hard and lapping very consistently when racing resumed, with the order shaken up due to a wide range of strategies playing out, the Omani set his sights on climbing up through the order and he kept Oman Racing firmly in contention for a strong result - and a potential podium. Around one hour 50 minutes into the race there was another FCY and Harthy continued to impress during a long stint, eventually handing over the Aston

Martin to Eastwood with roughly 90 minutes to go. Holding eighth place initially, Eastwood ran as high as second in GT with 50 minutes to go, as silverware remained tantalisingly within reach, but following the team's final pit-stop of the race he was back down to seventh. Charging through during the closing stages, the Aston Martin works driver gained three positions before the conclusion to take the chequered flag at the end of four hours just half-a-minute shy of a maiden ALMS podium for Oman Racing. Harthy will officially announce his plans for the main

2022 motor racing season in due course.

PROVISIONAL 2022 ASIAN LE MANS SERIES TROPHY
GT Drivers Standings:
5th Ahmad al Harthy/Charlie Eastwood/Sam De Haan, 40pts

PROVISIONAL 2022 ASIAN LE MANS SERIES TROPHY
GT Teams Standings:
5th Oman Racing, 40pts

After Beijing Olympics, China eyes World Cup goal

Beijing, China - After staging both a Summer and now a Winter Olympics, there is one major international sports event left for China to host - the football World Cup. Football fan President Xi Jinping has said he wants China to stage and even win the men's World Cup one day, and the country has been building and renovating stadiums in apparent anticipation. But analysts say Xi's dream faces a number of obstacles, starting with the dismal performance of the national team. The men's side have only ever qualified for the World Cup once, in 2002, when they failed to win a point or even score a goal. Their already failing 2022 Qatar World Cup hopes ended for good in a humiliating 3-1 defeat against Vietnam this month. As hosts they would automatically qualify for the World Cup, but the current Chinese side would be in real danger of humiliation. "Many believe China doesn't want to host a World Cup until



China (in white) lost to minnows Vietnam earlier this month (AFP)

they can be more confident the national team can perform well enough so as not to embarrass the country," said Cameron Wilson, founder of the Wild East Football website, which specialises in Chinese football. Chinese football became famous a few years ago for splurg-

ing on famous foreign coaches and players, but those days are now long gone. **No long-term vision** China has been naturalising players, many of them Brazilian, but the national team remain stuck in 75th in the FIFA rankings.

Qatar were also a footballing minnow in 2010 when they won the right to stage this year's World Cup. But they have improved since, going from 113th in the world to 52nd today. However, Wilson warned that the changes needed for China to

follow in those footsteps and become a football power are "massive and fundamental". "Currently, Chinese football is dying because it is controlled by political, not sporting forces," he told AFP. China needs to "reduce pressure on ordinary people so they are more willing to let their kids spend time on anything other than endless hours spent doing homework", he added. "They also need to replace their football management structure with something much less top-down which allows football people to make decisions about the sport, not politicians." Football has found itself in the crosshairs of the ruling Communist Party's purity drive in recent years, with players told to remove or cover tattoos and sometimes join military camps for drills and Marxist-style "thought education". Mads Davidsen, ex-technical director of Chinese Super League side Shanghai Port, believes China has the "facilities and logistics to handle big events". AFP

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ICC MEN'S T20 WORLD CUP QUALIFIER A

Bowlers shine as Oman and Nepal secure semi-final spots

Muscat - Bowlers dominated the afternoon session of Day 3 in the ICC Men's T20 World Cup Qualifier A at Al Amerat on Monday aiding Nepal and hosts Oman to advance to the semi-final of the tournament from Group A.

Nepal defeated Canada by eight wickets while Oman raced to a nine-wicket win over the Philippines.

At Oman Academy 2 ground, Oman missed a chance to script history. They recorded one of the largest margins of victory in a T20 International by bowling out Philippines for 36 in 15.2 overs, their lowest-ever T20 International total, the hosts chased the target in just 2.5 overs, scoring 40-1.

The huge win for Oman, with 103 balls remaining was just a ball more than the world record margin achieved by Austria. On August 31, 2019, Austria had defeated Turkey in a T20I match with 104 balls remaining in Ilfov County, Romania.

Electing to bat first, Philip-

pinos was rocked by the pace attack of - Bilal Khan, Kaleemullah and Fayyaz Butt. Khan gave away just seven runs in his three-over spell on a trot to build the pressure. Kaleemullah and Fayyaz Butt complimented each other as they sent back the top-order by the eighth over.

Khawar Ali and Aamir Kaleem then spun a magical web as wickets fell at regular intervals. Philippines, who are making their debut in the global qualifiers, were bowled out for 36 in 15.2 overs. Ali bagged four for 11 in 3.2 overs while Kaleem had figures of 2-1-2-2. Butt and Kaleemullah also bagged a brace each. Oman lost Kashyap Prajapati off the second ball of their innings but with a small total, it turned out to be a stroll in the park for the hosts.

Khurram Khan smashed a quick fire 12-ball 33, which included 5 fours and 2 sixes, and along with Jatinder Singh, wrapped up an easy win.

Daniel Smith, Philippines Captain said, "It is really tough to take - getting bowled out in the 30s. For us now, I think it is just about reflecting. We are getting to play the game we love against some of the best players and teams out there. So, we are going to take some time off tonight, reflect on how far we have come.

"We still have two playoff games to look forward to. We are going to turn up and play with some heart in those."

Smith had led the side in place of regular captain Jonathan Hull, who missed the game.

Zeeshan Maqsood, Oman Captain said, "I'm really happy with the performance today. We will try and put in similar levels of performance in the semi-finals. Despite the victory, we did make some mistakes today. So, we will be looking to correct those in the semi-finals [vs Ireland]. We have to play good and smart cricket tomorrow. We have to use our home conditions in the best possible way."



Oman chased down a target of 37 against Philippines in 2.5 overs



Nepal bowled out Canada for 80



Ireland beat Germany to qualify for the semis

Ireland, UAE through to semi-final

Muscat - Ireland and the UAE have booked their places from Group B in the semi-final of the ICC Men's T20 World Cup Qualifier A, in contrasting styles at Al Amerat on Monday.

Ireland defeated Germany by seven wickets, achieving their victory target in 13.1 overs, to boost their net run-rate (NRR) and qualify as group topper. Germany was restricted to 107/5 with only two batters managing to reach double digits.

UAE lost their concluding group match to Bahrain by two runs in a thriller but managed to advance on a better NRR after both teams finished with four points each.

Ireland also had four points



Vriitya Aravind scored a blistering 52-ball 84* for UAE against Bahrain

but finished with a NRR of +0.991 while UAE (+0.661) and Bahrain (+0.240) came second and third respectively.

The game at the Oman Academy 2 ground between UAE and Bahrain produced some excitement around a last ball finish. UAE needed 27 to win in the final over, after

Bahrain had amassed 172.

UAE's Vriitya Aravind, who has been in excellent form in the Qualifiers, hit two fours and two sixes off Shahid Mahmood's final over to bring the equation down to five off the last ball. Mahmood kept his cool to concede only two and ensure Bahrain got over the line.

Bowlers excel for Ireland

Aided by a disciplined bowling performance, Ireland openers, Paul Stirling and skipper Andy Balbirnie, took control of the run-chase with an authoritative performance at the Oman Academy 1 ground. Both the batters smashed boundaries with ease as they raced to an opening stand of 67 in 7.5 overs. Balbirnie's 32 came off 21 and Stirling's 34 off 27 ensured that the team maintained a healthy net run-rate (NRR) from the start.

Irish batsmen Harry Tector and Lorcan Tucker then steered their side to win in 13.1 overs. Earlier, all five of the Ireland bowlers picked up wickets as Germany posted 107/7.

India move past England to No.1 spot in ICC T20I rankings

Mumbai, India - India's 3-0 series sweep over West Indies at home over the past week has taken Rohit Sharma's side to No. 1 on the ICC T20I team rankings. India went past England to the top spot, with Pakistan, New Zealand and South Africa rounding off the top five. India's lead at the top, though, is a slender one. Across the 39-game period that is under consideration in the current ranking cycle, India and England are tied at 269 rating points. India are fractionally ahead by virtue of having more points (10,484 to England's 10,474).

The series ended at Kolkata's Eden Gardens - the venue for all three games - on Sunday, when India successfully defended a 180-plus total for the second game in a row. They had chased down 158 in the first T20I after a stellar debut for Ravi Bishnoi with the ball, while impressive efforts with the bat from Rishabh Pant, Virat Kohli, Venkatesh Iyer and Suryakumar Yadav did the job in the second and third games. Harshal Patel was another



India's players huddle during their match against West West Indies in Kolkata on February 20 (AFP)

newcomer to international cricket who impressed, finishing as India's top wicket-taker with five strikes and, crucially, holding his nerve against an onslaught from Rovman Powell in the second game to seal victory for India.

Australia remained in sixth place after their 4-1 series win over Sri Lanka (tied ninth with Bangladesh) at home, while West Indies stayed at No. 7 despite the shutout against India,

while Afghanistan were at eighth place.

India have the chance to extend their lead over England during the three-game T20I series against Sri Lanka later this month at home. England's next T20I assignment is against India in the summer.

Pakistan are placed at third position, with New Zealand, South Africa making the top five.

Espnccrinfo

ICC TWENTY20 RANKINGS		
Rank	Team	Matches
1	India	39
2	England	39
3	Pakistan	46
4	New Zealand	38
5	South Africa	35
6	Australia	45
7	West Indies	45
8	Afghanistan	37
9	Bangladesh	37
10	Sri Lanka	35

Sri Lanka drop three for T20 series against India

Colombo, Sri Lanka - Sri Lanka on Monday dropped three players injured in their 4-1 T20 series defeat to Australia for the forthcoming visit to India.

Avishka Fernando, Nuwan Tushara and Ramesh Mendis were all cut from the squad for the three-match tour of India, which starts on Thursday in Lucknow, the cricket board said.

Uncapped 21-year-old bowler Ashian Daniel was the sole addition, giving him a chance to make his international debut, as the squad was reduced from 20 to 18 players.

Sri Lanka squad for three match series starting in Lucknow on Thursday:

Dasun Shanaka, (Captain), Pathum Nissanka, Kusal Mendis, Charith Asalanka, Dinushka Gunathilaka, Kamil Mishara, Janith Liyanage, Wanindu Hasaranga, Chamika Karunaratne, Dushmantha Chameera, Lahiru Kumara, Binura Fernando, Shiran Fernando, Maheesh Theekshana, Jeffrey Vandersay, Praveen Jayawickrama and Ashian Daniel.

AFP



Shakib Al Hasan duuring the BPL Twenty20 final recently

Shakib, Rahim back in Bangladesh squad for Afghanistan T20Is

Dhaka, Bangladesh - Shakib Al Hasan is back in Bangladesh's T20I squad after having skipped the three-match series at home against Pakistan in November last year. Mushfiquir Rahim and Litton Das, who were both dropped for the Pakistan T20Is, also returned to the squad for the upcoming two-match series against Afghanistan.

Munim Shahriar, who was among the breakout stars of BPL 2022, was also included in the squad.

The comebacks of Mushfiquir and Litton were always on the cards, given their experience. Mumnim's presence, meanwhile, brings freshness to the group. The 23-year-old showed the willingness to take risks in the pow-

erplay and gave Fortune Barishal good starts in at least four of his six appearances this BPL.

Saif Hassan, Najmul Hossain Shanto, Nurul Hasan, Shamim Hossain, Aminul Islam and Akbar Ali were left out of the squad.

Minhajul Abedin, the chief selector, said that Shamim and Nurul could still be part of Bangladesh's plans.

BANGLADESH T20I SQUAD:

Mahmudullah (capt.), Litton Das, Munim Shahriar, Shakib Al Hasan, Mushfiquir Rahim, Afif Hossain, Mahedi Hasan, Yasir Ali, Mustafizur Rahman, Taskin Ahmed, Shoriful Islam, Nasum Ahmed, Shohidul Islam, Mohammad Naim

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