

SEASON OF APRICOTS, PEACHES IN WAKAN VILLAGE

Photographer Ahmed al Hosni has been capturing images of the season of apricots and peaches in Wakan village, in the wilayat of Nakhl, South Batinah, for some years.

Wakan attracts a large number of people who visit to enjoy the season of apricots and peaches which begins in January and continues till March. The trees begin flowering in February and bear fruit in April.

Speaking to *Muscat Daily*, Hosni said, "I love photographing green landscapes in Oman. The season of apricots and peaches in Wakan village is one of my favourites. My aim is to promote domestic tourism and showcase Oman's beauty and diversity to the world - nature, the night sky over the desert, the people, camels and horses. I post my photos on Instagram and Twitter - @alhosni10 - for all to see."



Oman crude rises by \$4.78

Our Correspondent Muscat

Already high oil prices rose further on Wednesday following US President Joe Biden's ban on imports of Russian crude.

Oman crude contract price (for May 2022 delivery) at Dubai Mercantile Exchange on Wednesday, went up by US\$4.78 to reach US\$127.71 per barrel.

In Wednesday trade, Brent was sitting at around US\$130 per barrel, while West Texas Intermediate was hovering around US\$125 per barrel.

Biden has imposed an immediate ban on Russian oil and other energy imports in retaliation for Russia's invasion of Ukraine, while the United Kingdom said it would phase out imports by the end of 2022.

The latest sanctions are likely to push up oil prices - resulting in even higher prices at the pump.

"Russian oil will no longer be acceptable at US ports and the American people will deal another powerful blow to Putin's war machine," Biden said on Tuesday, adding that the decision was taken 'in close consultation' with allies.

The Russian-Ukraine crisis has fuelled fears that the fragile global recovery from COVID-19 will be replaced by a period of stagflation, in which inflation surges and economies flatline or contract.

Crude is the main worry as the removal of Russia's output will compound an already tight market. Russia is the world's third-biggest oil producer.

Warnings that Biden would put an embargo on imports from Russia sent Brent prices soaring to as high as US\$139 on Monday - about US\$8 short of a 2008 record - before they retreated.

With inputs from AFP

Non-Omanis can own real estate

Ministry decision allows expatriates to own one property outside the places licensed for non-Omanis

Our Correspondent Muscat

H E Dr Khalfan bin Said al Shu'aibi, Minister of Housing and Urban Planning (MoHUP), issued a ministerial decision on Wednesday allowing non-Omani investors to own housing units in the sultanate.

"Non-Omani investors wishing to obtain a First-Class residence card can request a certificate from the Real Estate Registry Secretariat after proving that he/she purchased one or more housing units of a total value of no less than RO500,000. For a Second-Class residence card, the value of the property has to be no



less than RS250,000,' a press statement from MoHUP said.

The housing units must be in places licensed for ownership by

non-Omanis.

The decision added that a non-Omani investor with a First-Class residence card has the right

to own one property for residential, commercial or industrial use outside the places licensed for non-Omanis to own, which can

be transferred to others without prejudice to the law prohibiting non-Omanis from owning land and real estate in places specified in Royal Decree 29/2018 and the Executive Regulations issued pursuant to Ministerial Resolution 292/2020.

Places where non-Omanis are prohibited ownership include the governorates of Musandam, Buraimi, Dhahirah, Al Wusta and Dhofar (except for the wilayat of Salalah), and the wilayats of Liwa, Shinas, Masirah, Jabal Akhdar and Jabal Shams, and any other mountainous area of strategic importance as determined by the competent authorities.

Non-Omanis are also prohib-

ited ownership on islands, sites near palaces, security and military installations, as well as archaeological and old heritage sites.

The decision does not include land and real estate located in integrated tourism complexes (ITC) in all governorates of the sultanate.

It is in line with previous decisions including one related to regulations on sale of residential real estate units using usufruct contracts in multi-storey residential and commercial buildings, the ownership system in integrated tourist complexes, and the system of ownership in Gulf countries outside prohibited places.

Oman adopts new strategy to develop minerals sector

Our Correspondent Muscat

Oman is adopting concrete steps to exploit the full potential of its mineral resources and be a leader in mining in the region. It has identified and offered 21,480sqkm of concession areas for mining of metals, including copper, gold and chromium, as well as industrial minerals like dolomite, silica, gypsum and limestone.

The Ministry of Energy and Minerals (MEM) and Minerals Development Oman (MDO), an affiliate of Oman Investment Authority, signed 12 exploration-to-mining concession agreements on Wednesday, paving the way for a new strategy to develop the mining sector.

The concession agreements are among projects that will contribute to enhancing the sector and economic growth in Oman, MEM stated.

H E Dr Mohammed al Rumhy, Minister of Energy and Minerals, said MEM is working towards the

The ministry has adopted a new methodology to develop this sector by establishing mining concession agreements

H E DR MOHAMMED AL RUMHY

development and management of the minerals sector in an effective and professional manner in line with the sector's aspirations as one of the economic diversification sectors.

"The ministry has adopted a new methodology to develop this sector by establishing mining concession agreements - including legal, technical and financial terms - of large areas similar to the practice in the oil and gas sector. These areas will be offered to local and international companies specialised in exploration and



minerals extraction as per an exploration and mining concession agreement," he said.

H E Dr Rumhy made the comments while signing the 12 concession agreements. "The agreements are linked with the creation of in-country value in mineral ores in Oman, and establishment of downstream mining and manufacturing industries, in addition to creating more job opportunities," he said.

MEM is working towards regulating investments in the mining sector to ensure optimal utilisation

of mineral reserves in Oman and the sector's sustainability.

The ministry envisages regulating the licensing system and issuing period through ready-for-investment mining opportunities that will be offered in concession areas which will help develop an investment portfolio and an organised sector, in addition to reducing environmental impact. The presence of a clear regulatory environment will effectively contribute to achieving the optimal utilisation of the sector.

RO107mn given to social security sector in 2021

Our Correspondent Muscat

The Ministry of Social Development (MoSD) has stated that the total amount paid to the social security sector in 2021 was RO107,546,810.

According to a statement issued by the ministry, a total of RO7,681,915 is being disbursed monthly among 72,707 applicants of different categories of the social security sector this year.

MoSD informed that the social security sector includes orphans, widows, elderly, deserted women, divorced women, unmarried girls, persons with disability and families of prisoners.

In 2021, there were 30,233 individuals in the elderly category who were paid a combined amount of RO3,329,843 per month, 21,555 individuals in the disability category who were paid a combined amount of RO2,420,811 per month, and 11,439 divorced women who received a combined amount of RO92,059 per month.

A total of 3,492 widows re-

ceived a total of RO429,172 per month, and 3,396 unmarried girls received a total of RO291,378 per month.

There were 2,300 orphans who received a total of RO247,459 per month, 169 prisoners' families (RO26,260 per month) and 35 individuals with disabilities (RO4,675 per month).

In the statement, MoSD reaffirmed its commitment to enhancing social work by supporting and empowering the needy, building effective mechanisms for social protection, strengthening social solidarity, activating community partnership, and raising the efficiency of resources to provide high quality social services.

The ministry hailed the Royal Directive last week of His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik to pay an additional salary to social security categories during Ramadan, to work to mitigate the impact of high prices of goods and services on them, and expedite the review of social programmes to facilitate adequate livelihood for them.

NEWS BRIEF

MOL ANNOUNCES 325 NEW JOB OPPORTUNITIES IN PRIVATE SECTOR

Muscat - Based on a directive issued by His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik to recruit citizens, the Ministry of Labour (MoL) on Wednesday announced 325 new job opportunities in the private sector for jobseekers who don't have prior work experience.

Of the announced jobs, 136 are for holders of Bachelor's degree, 64 vacancies for post-General Education Diploma holders, 117 for GED holders, and eight for basic education graduates.

03



7 projects worth RO2.5mn inked for North Sharqiyah

'Urgent action needed to maintain gender equality'

Our Correspondent
Muscat

Work-life balance, breaking the glass ceiling, support from male family members and colleagues, and challenges overcome in the past were some of the experiences shared by five women from different backgrounds at an event held to mark International Women's Day on Tuesday.

The event was hosted by H E Veronique Aulagnon, Ambassador of France to Oman, at her residence.

Speaking about her challenges, Hon Lujaina Mohsin Darwish, Member of the State Council and chairperson of Mohsin Haider Darwish LLC, said, "I remember a time when my father was upset that we were three sisters and demanded a boy child from our mother. But eventually, he did pass on the family business to us and we took our responsibilities well."

She also revealed her long cherished dream of being an ambassador of Oman and thus have the privilege of showcasing Oman in other countries.

She thrilled the lively audience of close to a hundred by narrating an account of her first election campaign with five senior sheikhs in Yiti. "Young and inex-



I remember a time when my father was upset that we were three sisters and demanded a boy child from our mother. But eventually, he did pass on the family business to us and we took our responsibilities well

HON LUJAINA MOHSIN DARWISH

perienced, I promised them a road from Hamriya to Yiti. I realised I could gain trust only with my words, so my words must have worth. Although it was quite challenging to get permission and funds, I did manage to get the road built. And with that, I won over their trust," she said.

"Over the years, I have realised that we need to first take care and organise ourselves and the home before taking care of the world outside," she concluded.

On her turn, H E Federica Favi, Ambassador of Italy to Oman, noted the need for urgent action in every culture to maintain gender equality. "I believe that women have not reached the

right places yet and for this I favour quotas to fill the gap. Equal opportunities must be provided to every woman. We are different to men and that is why our values, ideas and priorities are also different. It is because of this we can add value to politics, diplomacy as well as armed conflict," she explained.

The discussion included questions from the audience which had a fair share of men actively participating.

According to Dr Zainab al Qasbi, head of Diplomatic Institute in the Foreign Ministry Affairs, it is a matter of pride that almost 45 per cent of Omani diplomats are female. "This is women empowerment in the

true sense. Here in Oman, we do not need to demand rights because we already have it under wise leaderships."

She claimed young female candidates are trained for diplomatic jobs not just for numbers to add up but they also achieve targets. "I am also happy to note that many of the ambassadors in Oman, including the current US, French, Italian and former Nepali ambassadors were women."

Moderated by Mohana Prabhakar, CEO of Meissa Creative Services, the other two members in discussion were Sabrina al Bakri, CFO at OQ, and Sophie Nassir, business development and asset manager at Total Energies.



Dutch lensman gifts photos from starting of Omani Renaissance

Our Correspondent
Muscat

Dutch photographer Eric van Scherpenzeel, who documented the beginning of Omani renaissance from 1970 to 1974, recently presented his photos as a gift to the sultanate. The photos captured an important stage of modern Omani history for posterity.

In an interview with ONA, Scherpenzeel spoke of he great love for Oman and its the beauty, and hence his decision to gift these to the sultanate.

He visited Oman for the second time in the 1990s to photograph specific areas, which he recently published as a comparative study in a book titled *Oman's Past and Present*.

"During the four years I spent in Oman, I was able to document many scenes, features and various details reflecting social and cultural aspects of Omani people across several governorates," he

told ONA.

He was in Oman in June 1970, three weeks prior to the Late Sultan Qaboos bin Said's accession to power.

"Life in Oman was marvelous; the people were gentle, noble, sociable and truthful in their friendship," said Scherpenzeel, adding that visitors could travel in the fascinating landscape at will and sleep safely on sand dunes under stars in the desert.

When H E Dr Abdullah Salim al Harthi, Oman's Ambassador to the Netherlands, visited Scherpenzeel at his home to thank him for the gift, he was surprised by his reaction. "It was as if he had known me for a very long time," the ambassador said.

H E Dr Harthi was struck by what he saw in Scherpenzeel's home. Every corner had photographs of Oman. "Not only that, his bedroom was bedecked with historical paintings, books, mementos and even old rifles from Oman," he said.

Board of Directors' Report for the year ended 31 December 2021

Dear Shareholders,

On behalf of the Board of Directors, I would like to present your Bank's full year financial results for 2021.

Performance Summary

Our performance shows a net profit of RO18.3 M for the year ended 31 December 2021 compared with a net loss of RO8.2 M for 2020. This has been driven mainly by a favourable movement in the expected Credit Losses (ECL), and other credit impairment charges. This reflects more optimism in the macro-economic environment, coupled with a sustained rise in oil prices that supports positive sentiment in the region. But, we remain cautious amid worries surrounding the rapid spread of the Omicron variant, both locally and globally, which may cloud the global recovery outlook. We will continue to monitor the situation throughout 2022.

Net interest income was down 3.2% to RO32.1 M for the year compared with RO33.8 M for the same period in 2020. Interest income was impacted negatively by the low interest rate environment, partly offset by new interest exposure. But, fee income increased by 7.0% to RO5.4 M for the period ended 31 December 2021, compared with RO0.1 M for the same period in 2020 owing to higher fees from account services, cards and advisory.

Net trading income was down 31.5% to RO8.1 M compared with RO3.9 M for the same period in 2020, owing mainly to lower interest rates and swap volumes.

A net release of RO7.5 M has been reported to the Bank's ECL and other credit impairment charges compared with a net charge of RO19.0 M for the same period last year. The Bank released RO7.0 M of Wholesale ECL and RO0.5 M of Retail ECL. As explained above, the release was due to the improvement in the economic outlook.

Operating expenses fell by 13.1% to RO55.0 M owing mainly to the lower impairment charge of non-financial assets in 2021 compared with the prior year.

Loans and advances to customers decreased by 1.2% to RO1,347.2 M compared with RO1,359.6 M as at 31 December 2020.

Customer deposits slightly decreased by 0.2% to RO1,901.1 M compared with 2020. Our liquidity remains strong, as shown by an Advances to Deposit ratio (ADR) of 70.8% at the end of 2021. HEON's Capital Adequacy Ratio (CAR) stood at 22.7% for the year ended 31 December 2021, compared with 20.9% as at 31 December 2020.

The Board of Directors proposes a total cash dividend of RO10.8 M, with a dividend per share of 50.9%.

Delivering the best customer experience

We continued to support our customers during these challenging times. Set of measures continue to be in place for customers impacted by COVID-19, including the deferral of loan installments and fee waivers.

In Wealth and Personal Banking (W&P), we launched key initiatives focused on customer acquisition, and we launched a marketing campaign encouraging potential customers to switch to HSBC by promoting Premier and Advance flagship benefits, loan up rates and credit cards.

We also continued to deepen our relationships through our Employee Banking Solutions programme, which is a collaboration with our Wholesale business, through preferential pricing and personalised relationships with our top corporate customers.

In line with HSBC Group's sustainable finance agenda, we launched Green Personal Loans offering our customers short term loans at very low rates to buy solar panel equipment for their homes.

On the wholesale side of the business, we continued to support our clients on their transition journeys with sustainable financing and investment to help their businesses develop sustainably. In 2021 we announced the first Sustainability-linked loan (SLL) for MFNAs in the Services Industry. The SLL includes a tranche in Oman that is a first of its kind in the Sultanate.

During the year, we signed an agreement with the SME Development Fund to provide small and medium-sized enterprises in Oman with OMR 5 million in financing. The agreement aims to help accelerate the growth of SMEs throughout the Sultanate by giving them access to financing at an attractive rate.

We are glad that our efforts were recognised by a number of awards that we won during the year. HSBC Bank Oman was named the Best Investment Bank in Oman at the 2021 Eurononey Middle East Awards for Excellence. The Bank was also voted as Market Leader by corporates in the Sultanate of Oman for the tenth consecutive year in the annual Eurononey Cash Management Survey.

In 2021, we opened our new building in Al Khawar, which is designed based on employees' feedback and brings a number of key benefits to our people and our business. The new building helps us better use our working space, and provides a modern and high standard 'future of work' work environment that will help to attract and retain staff while meeting the expectations of a modern workforce.

Investing in our people and community

We continued to make progress in supporting the country's Organisation agenda, achieving 34% Organisation rate by 31st December 2021. During 2021, we have appointed nine Omani nationals into senior positions in the Bank as part of our commitment to developing our local talent.

Throughout the year, we continued to invest in our staff training programmes. Our Future Skills training sessions to support our strategy to create a "Bank Fit for the Future" continued with engagements on the strategic themes of Curiosity, Connectivity, Creativity, Resilience and Growth Mindset.

We also rolled out a Frontline Leaders Academy, with an initial curriculum of Change Management, Coaching and Digital Skills in Wealth and Personal Banking.

As part of our Corporate Sustainability commitment, we rolled out a number of initiatives throughout the year in cooperation with local NGOs. We partnered with Injaz Oman to deliver the 'Injaz Challenge 2021' with 17 teams involved from all GCC countries. The objective of the programme was to test participants' ability to come up with innovative solutions for different challenges that businesses face today.

We also partnered with Outward Bound Oman in launching the 'Build your Resilience Programme', which aims to improve the mental well-being of people who are directly or indirectly impacted by the pandemic.

We continued our partnership with Sharjah Fund for Development of Youth Projects in the Istisdaa Programme, which aims to support entrepreneurs to grow sustainable businesses and integrate ESG into their business models.

Conclusion

On behalf of the Board of Directors, I would like to thank all of our customers for their trust in us, our staff and management for what they have achieved, as well as the Central Bank of Oman and the Capital Market Authority for their continued support and guidance.

Sir Sherard Cowper-Coles
Chairman

Statement of comprehensive income for the year ended 31 December

	2021	2020
	RO'000	RO'000
Interest income	67,192	70,163
Interest expense	(15,134)	(15,378)
Net interest income	52,058	54,774
Fee income	12,934	11,484
Fee expense	(3,516)	(3,410)
Net fee income	9,418	8,068
Net trading income	6,144	8,916
Changes in fair value of financial investments measured at Fair Value Through Profit and Loss (FVTPL)	49	(106)
Dividend income	3	11
Other operating income - net	39	(388)
Net operating income before change in expected credit losses and other credit impairment charges	67,711	70,076
Change in expected credit losses and other credit impairment charges	7,500	(17,378)
Net operating income	75,211	52,698
Employee compensation and benefits	(22,640)	(22,575)
General and administrative expenses	(25,196)	(23,014)
Depreciation and impairment of property, equipment and right-of-use assets	(2,146)	(11,096)
Amortisation and impairment of intangible assets	(3,058)	(4,303)
Total operating expenses	(53,040)	(60,988)
Profit / (loss) before tax	22,171	(8,288)
Tax expense	(3,839)	877
Profit / (loss) for the year	18,332	(7,411)
Other comprehensive income		
Items that may be reclassified subsequently to profit or loss		
Cost instruments at Fair Value Through Other Comprehensive Income (FVOCI)		
- Fair value (loss) / gain	(206)	423
- Expected credit losses recognised in income statement	(134)	713
- Income tax	31	(64)
	(309)	1,072
Items that will not be reclassified subsequently to profit or loss		
Remeasurement of defined benefit liability	(22)	36
Other comprehensive (loss) / income for the year - net of tax	(331)	1,108
Total comprehensive income / (loss) for the year	18,001	(6,303)
Earnings / (loss) per share - basic and diluted	RO0.009	RO(0.004)

Statement of financial position as at 31 December

	2021	2020
	RO'000	RO'000
Assets		
Cash and balances with central bank	282,721	220,486
Due from banks	213,700	227,448
Loans and advances to customers - net	1,347,188	1,363,582
Financial investments	448,962	433,580
Other assets	34,078	38,610
Intangible assets	-	-
Property and equipment	20,342	19,498
Deferred tax assets	2,256	4,405
Total assets	2,349,247	2,355,587
Liabilities and equity		
Liabilities		
Due to banks	48,444	63,774
Deposits from customers	1,901,094	1,905,771
Current tax liabilities	5,339	4,202
Other liabilities	48,883	54,354
Total liabilities	2,003,760	2,028,101
Equity		
Share capital	200,031	200,031
Legal reserve	47,777	45,944
FVOCI reserve	1,380	1,689
Retained earnings	96,299	79,822
Total equity	345,487	327,486
Total liabilities and equity	2,349,247	2,355,587

The above annual financial results for the year ended 31 December 2021 are subject to the approval of the shareholders of the bank



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Opening up a world of opportunity



(Supplied photo)

7 projects worth RO2.5mn inked for North Sharqiyah

Our Correspondent
Muscat

Sheikh Ali bin Ahmed al Shamsi, Governor of North Sharqiyah and chairman of the Tender Committee, signed seven agreements worth RO2,566,035 with local companies to implement a number of service and development projects in the governorate.

Office said, "The first agreement is for design and implementation of internal roads in a number of villages in the wilayat of Mudhaibi at a total estimated cost of RO1.3mn, and the second aims to establish a municipal slaughterhouse in the wilayat of Mudhaibi on an area of 100sqm at an estimated cost of RO70,388.

to supply interlocking tiles and cement barriers to make sports tracks and beautify the gates of the wilayats of the governorate, at a total cost of RO289,000." Under the sixth agreement, equipment to the municipality of North Sharqiyah will be supplied at a cost of RO690,000, while the seventh agreement is for a study and design of a project for a central market for livestock and fodder in Mudhaibi at a cost of RO20,000.

PDO marks 10 year anniversary of its ICV programme launch

Our Correspondent
Muscat

Petroleum Development Oman (PDO) held its annual In-Country Value (ICV) Day to mark the tenth anniversary of the launch of its ICV programme and to celebrate the winners of the Raoul Restucci ICV Award, who have gone the extra mile in supporting Oman's economic development.



(Supplied photo)

highlighted PDO's main achievements in ICV in the past ten years. Speaking at the occasion, Steve Phimister, PDO managing director, said, "This is truly a special event that recognises the excellence of our partners who contribute to ICV and support a

positive and competitive business culture where the words 'local content' are a badge of distinction." Winners of the Raoul Restucci ICV Award, previously known as the ICV Awards, were also announced during the ceremony.

The award consists of five categories and the winners are: Arabian Industries Clad (Best Local Manufacturing Facility); Al Shawamikh Oil Services (Best National Objectives Employer); Al Baraka Oilfield Services (Best Contractor in ICV Delivery); Al Ghalbi International (Best Performing Local Community Contractor); and Rihal - Data Migration and Services (Best Performing SME).

Electricity production increased 8.1% in 2021

Muscat - Oman's electricity production increased by 8.1 per cent by the end of December 2021 to reach 41,409.6 GW per hour compared to a year ago, when the total production was 38,341.4 GW per hour, according to data issued by the National Centre for Statistics and Information (NCSI).

The Governorate of Dakhliyah recorded the highest rise in electricity production from 24.5 GW per hour at the end of December 2020 to 389.1 thousand GW per hour by the end of December 2021. The Governorate of Muscat came second by recording a growth of 24.1 per cent, followed by the Governorate of Al Wusta with a growth of 24 per cent.

Electricity production in the Governorate of Dhofar fell by 5.6 per cent from 3,823.9 GW per hour in 2020 to 3,611.7 GW per hour at the end of December 2021. The governorates of North Batinah, South Batinah and Dhahirah recorded the highest volume of production - 25,688.6 GW per hour. The governorates of North and South Sharqiyah came second with 9,209.9 GW per hour.

Meanwhile, water production in Oman went up by 2.1 per cent to reach 484,726.7mn cubic metres by December 2021.

ONA

Launching

SUBLUE

Underwater Scooters

Whiteshark Mix

Navbow+ Phantom Grey

Navbow+ Flame Orange

Swii - Orange

Introducing a new lifestyle of exploring the underwater worlds with the innovative underwater scooters from Subblue. Go further to meet new experiences with the smart, durable and agile underwater scooters that redefine enjoyment and take adventure to the next level.

Visit our showroom at Qurum City Centre to check out the Subblue range of underwater scooters or call us at 2447 0497 to know more!

Chronic kidney disease projected to be among top 5 causes of death by 2040

Our Correspondent
Muscat

Chronic kidney disease (CKD) is one of the leading causes of death worldwide and is projected to be among the top five causes of death by 2040, according to Dr Pelin Incesu, area vice president, Middle East and Africa, AstraZeneca.

On the occasion of World Kidney Day, which falls on March 10 annually, when thousands of people join forces to highlight kidney health, Dr Pelin told *Muscat Daily* that "sadly, few people are even aware of this silent disease, where patients can lose up to 90 per cent of kidney function before experiencing any symptoms".

Diagnosed late or left untreated, CKD can progress to kidney failure, where highly invasive dialysis or kidney transplants are needed with an enormous impact on patients' quality of life. Despite the huge global burden of CKD on patients and health systems, Dr Pelin said the disease is unfortunately rarely prioritised by decision-makers and few countries have a national strategy for improving CKD care - including fewer than



Dr Pelin Incesu

20 per cent of countries in the Middle East. "In the Middle East, the burden of CKD and related kidney failure remains high and is growing, currently affecting five to ten per cent of the population," she said. The last few years have generated significant corporate involvement and created tremendous energy locally, with

a great number of organisations choosing to get involved on the day, or in the run up to the day. According to Dr Pelin, AstraZeneca has chosen the day to help drive global action against the rising burden of CKD by hosting the Chronic Kidney Disease Summit at Expo 2020 in Dubai. "As a company invested in saving lives from renal diseases and in researching CKD treatments of the future, it felt right to put this silent disease high up the agenda on this unique global stage. At the same time, the summit serves as a convening point on CKD strategy in the Middle East, with delegates from the Gulf Cooperation Council countries, Egypt, Lebanon, Jordan and Iraq coming together to explore regional solutions," she said. "The UAE happens to host one of the oldest kidney registries in the world, established in 1980. But among Arab countries, only Oman has a registry dedicated to CKD. This leaves a gap in high-quality, regionalised data that demonstrates the true socio-economic and environmental impact of the disease," she said.

WEATHER WATCH			PRAYER TIMINGS	
	Max	Min	Fajr	5.06am
Abu Dhabi	37	23	Sunrise	6.21am
Doha	30	22	Duhr	12.22pm
Kuwait City	27	21	Asr	3.46pm
Manama	29	22	Maghrib	6.19pm
Muscat	30	21	Isha	7.29pm
Riyadh	38	24		

SEND YOUR COMMENTS TO

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مدائن

madayn

Tender Announcement

The Public Establishment for Industrial Estates (Madayn) announces the following Tender:

Tender Number	Tender Name	Last date of buying	Date of submission	Type of work	Register Degree	Fee (R.O)
3/2022/PEIE/HQ-3	Pre Qualification Tender For The Development Of The Industrial Survey System	20-03-2022	31-03-2022	Information Technology Services	Fourth	25

Interested Companies registered with Tender Board may obtain the Tender documents from the E-Tendering website: <https://etendering.tenderboard.gov.om> against non-refundable payment as mentioned above for each set of document. Tenders should be submitted on line on given website. The Tenderer should enclose scan copy of Bank Guarantee issued by any bank in the Sultanate of Oman for the value of 1% of the Tender value validity for (90) days, and addressed to The Chairman of Tender Committee mentioned in above tenders.

- Tender Inquiry: All correspondence pertaining to the TENDER Inquiry must be online at eTendering System.
- eTendering System Inquiry: All correspondence pertaining to the eTendering System technical support must be directed to the following helpdesk email address and phone number: etenderhd@ita.gov.om and +968 24402200 Note: Bid Submission will be online only.

No Document can be accepted as Manual except Original Tender Bond. Scan Copy of Tender Bond needs to be attached in system and original needs to be deposited before Bid Opening.

Madayn is not bound to accept the lowest or any other Offer and has the right to cancel these tenders and the tenderers have no right to claim for any compensations.

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in t f y o

Ministry of Energy and MDO sign 12 mining concession agreements

Our Correspondent
Muscat

The Ministry of Energy and Minerals, and Minerals Development Oman (MDO), an affiliate of Oman Investment Authority (OIA), signed 12 exploration-to-mining concession agreements on Wednesday.

The agreements were signed by H E Dr Mohammed al Rumhy, Minister of Energy and Minerals, and Dr Badar al Kharusi, chairman of MDO. A representative from OIA was also present during the signing ceremony, according to a press statement.

This step comes as the Ministry of Energy and Minerals adopted a new strategy to develop the minerals sector through concession agreements by including legal, technical, and financial terms to be signed between the ministry and investors as an investment management method to manage the minerals exploration in concession areas.

The total size of the concession areas included in the agreements is around 21,480 sqkm. They include a number of potential minerals, mainly strategic minerals (metallic) such as copper, gold, and chromium. The agreements cover eight sites mostly located in North and South Batinah, Dhahirah, Buraimi, Dakhiliyah, and North and South Sharqiah. One site located



in the wilayat of Yanqul with an area of 20 sqkm is a copper concession area that has reached the advanced exploration phase to be ready for mining.

The industrial minerals (non-metallic) included in the agreements are dolomite, silica, gypsum, and limestone in four other areas located in the governorates of Muscat and Dhofar. Three of the concession areas, which have reached the advance exploration phase to be ready for mining are located in Shaleem with a total area size of 1,489 sqkm and include ores like

MDO will launch an airborne geophysical survey, followed by geochemical studies, to identify the potential of minerals

DR BADAR AL KHARUSI

dolomite, limestone, and gypsum.

H E Rumhy stated that Ministry of Energy and Minerals is working towards the development and management of minerals sector in an effective and professional manner that goes in line with the sector's aspirations

as one of the economic diversification sectors. "The ministry has adopted a new methodology to develop this sector through establishing mining concession agreements of large areas similar to the practice in oil and gas sector. Those areas will be offered to local and international compa-

nies specialised in exploration and minerals extraction as per an exploration and mining concession agreement. The agreements are linked with the creation of In-Country Value (ICV) in mineral ores in the sultanate, and establishment of downstream mining and manufacturing industries, in addition to creating more job opportunities."

Dr Kharusi stated that signing of these agreements mark a significant milestone for MDO's future. "MDO has promising aspirations to invest in exploration activities across Oman targeting

several strategic commodities and we hope that the promising results of these exploration activities will be a solid cornerstone to attract strategic investors and ultimately promote the Omani mining sector, in collaboration with our esteemed partner Ministry of Energy and Minerals."

He added that these agreements are a starting point for exploration and evaluation of the current and new mineral resources. "MDO will launch an airborne geophysical survey, followed by geochemical studies, which are aimed at identifying the potential of several minerals in these areas. Moreover, these concessions will enable mining and exploration of resources, especially copper in the wilayat of Yanqul and industrial minerals in wilayat of Shaleem."

The ministry through identifying the concession areas in minerals sector, aims to overcome the challenges faced in licensing (which is now limited to public sites only) through:

- Contributing in creating an integrated database that includes geological, geophysical, and exploration surveys that cover most of the sultanate in order to create an organised and sustainable source of mining opportunities in Oman where the investor can explore all the minerals available in the concession areas.

- The concessions include all the terms related to the competent government entities such as environmental conditions, which will enable investors to obtain the approvals from the relevant entities to smoothly move from exploration to mining phase.
- Providing the required size and quantities of the primary metallic ores so it can be commercially invested in the minerals processing operation to increase the concentration levels, and consequently increase its market value. These quantities of minerals reserves will facilitate the creation of ICV in the mineral ores available in Oman through establishing downstream mining and manufacturing industries.
- Facilitating funding from the banking sector for investment in mining sector through developing a long-term agreement with the investor.
- Focusing ministry's efforts and resources in the high strategic minerals (metallic minerals) especially the ones related to the Fourth Industrial Revolution, while enhancing industrial mineral production (non-metallic minerals) by attracting international specialised companies and enabling the establishment of mining industries and creating various job opportunities.



Nama Group to take part in Oman's first Sustainability Week

Muscat - Nama Group, which is committed to play an instrumental role in national sustainability goals, will mark its presence in the forthcoming Oman Sustainability Week (OSW) under the auspices of Ministry of Energy and Minerals, from March 13-17.

As a strategic sponsor, Nama Group will provide visitors with a firsthand narrative of its ongoing sustainability ventures and highlight its achievements in key Oman Vision 2040 projects, including renewable energy and North South interconnection project (Rabt). Additionally, there are three papers which will be presented by Nama Group executives and their knowledge partners.

Suleiman Khamis al Qasmi, chief of planning and asset management, at Oman Water and Wastewater Services Company (OWWSC), will focus on integrated water resources management. His session will address the market-ready innovations that can contribute to making the water sector sustainable and

We are aware that our business operations can have a far-reaching and positive impact, within and outside the sultanate

GHADA AL YOUSEFI

help identify which ones are particularly suited to be deployed in a specific region. OWWSC intends to meet the requirements of 98 per cent of customers through water networks connections. Currently, four strategic transmission projects are underway to provide upstream transmission infrastructure till 2040 and beyond. In addition to major networks projects, OWWSC is executing a significant number of small and medium size networks.

Sharing his views on sustainable energy, and energy positive

communities, Rodrigo Costa, chairman and CEO, REN (Portugal), will share major technological innovations that are enabling energy provision for the masses, and what is needed to deploy these at scale in the regions.

Discussing regional and national success stories, Eng Yaqoob al Kiyumi, CEO of Oman Power and Water Procurement Company, will speak on national and international programmes for science, technology, and innovation. His session will focus on concrete regional and national programmes that support transition to sustainable industrial development and circular economy. He will also highlight specific success story with the introduction of Ibri II in 2021.

"Considering the scale of Nama Group's operations in Oman, we are aware that our business operations can have a far-reaching and positive impact, within and outside the country," said, Ghada al Yousef, executive manager, group communication and sustainability.

OPAZ uses drones to conduct survey at commercial berth of Duqm port

Muscat - The Public Authority for Special Economic Zones and Free Zones (OPAZ) recently held discussion sessions targeting amateurs and companies specialised in the use of unmanned aircrafts (drones), to introduce them to the Artificial Intelligence (AI) Zone in the Special Economic Zone at Duqm (SEZAD), covering 18 sqkm.

These sessions are streamlined with OPAZ objectives to benefit from AI techniques in the work of SEZAD. It also gives an opportunity for local companies working in unmanned aircrafts field, as well a chance for Omani youth to develop their skills and abilities in the use of drones, according to a press release.

In line with this initiative, an experiment was conducted by the GreenBird 3D Company for underwater surveying and inspection. The commercial berth at Port of Duqm was inspected by a special drone by which underwater photographs were captured to determine the levels of dust complies on the berth and dry dock. In addition to that, the places of rust and leakage could be surveyed by using this drone and modern technologies instead of employing divers.



Another experiment was also carried out on the cranes of the Duqm port, in which the drone was used to carry out an examining survey of the cranes to detect the possibility of cracks or rust in the crane arms. The drone was also used to inspect high places that are difficult for maintenance workers to reach.

Commenting on these experiments, Mohammed bin Salim bin Nasser al Riyami, manager of Geomatics Department at

GreenBird 3D Company, said, "An attempt was made, during these experiments, to discover opportunities where modern technologies and artificial intelligence could be implemented in various marine works in SEZAD. We highly value the efforts of OPAZ to support local companies specialised in using artificial intelligence techniques and urge them conduct their experiments in Duqm."

Organising these sessions came to identify the key interests

and experiences of the participants in the various uses of drones, in addition to presenting their proposed initiatives that could be implemented in the Artificial Intelligence Zone. Likewise, the participants touched on the most important challenges and issues they face, mainly when obtaining permits and following up the relevant procedures to use these aircraft in different fields. Therefore, the major difficulties and the possible ways of overcoming them, in cooperation with other concerned authorities, were discussed during the sessions too.

Issa bin Hamood al Sumri, secretary of the Steering Committee for Supervising the Artificial Intelligence Zone, pointed out, "These sessions came in line with OPAZ vision to enhance the role of modern technology and applying the latest standards of technical developments and artificial intelligence in developing businesses in SEZAD. During the sessions, the competencies of companies and individuals working in this field were highlighted, as well as they proposed the different experiments that can be applied in the zone along with the future business opportunities".

Galfar Engineering wins RO9mn tender

Our Correspondent
Muscat

Galfar Engineering & Contracting Company, Oman's largest construction and contracting firm, has been awarded a new contract worth RO9mn.

"We are pleased to inform our esteemed shareholders that the

Sustainable Development & Investment Company has awarded to Galfar the tender for the construction of the infrastructure, grading and earthworks at the Sustainable City Yiti," the company said in a disclosure filed to the Muscat Stock Exchange recently.

According to Galfar, the exe-



cution period of the project is 15 months effective from March 2.

"We take this opportunity to express our appreciation to Sustainable Development & Investment Company for the confidence vested on Galfar through the award of this project," Galfar Engineering said in the disclosure.

Biden orders to work on future digital dollar

Washington, US - President Joe Biden on Wednesday ordered government agencies to begin work on creating a digital US dollar, weighing the risks and benefits of a move that could be a game changer for the global financial system.

Coming amid the explosive rise of private cryptocurrencies like Bitcoin, the US effort will be 'placing urgency on research and development of a potential United States CBDC', according to a White House statement.

The world's largest economy will join more than 100 countries that are exploring or have launched pilot programmes with their own central bank digital currency (CBDC), including China's digital yuan.

Treasury Secretary Janet Yellen said agencies will 'evalu-

ate the potential financial stability risks of digital assets and assess whether appropriate safeguards are in place'.

And due to the global implications of using digital assets, Washington will work with other governments on the effort that 'will also address risks related to illicit finance, protecting consumers and investors, and preventing threats to the financial system and broader economy', Yellen said in a statement.

Governments and investors around the world rely on the US greenback as a secure investment, and the dollar is central to commerce as well, including the global oil market.

White House economic advisor Brian Deese said 'maintaining US global leadership' is a central goal of the effort.



However, the study also will look for 'unintended consequences', he said on CNBC.

Officials rejected the notion that Washington is late to the ef-

fort to create a government-backed digital currency.

"We've got to be very, very deliberate about that analysis because the implications of our

President Biden's executive order called on agencies including the Treasury Department to examine issues including consumer protection, financial inclusion and use of digital assets for illicit activities

moving in this direction are profound for the country that issues the world's primary reserve currency."

President Biden's executive

order called on agencies including the Treasury Department to examine issues including consumer protection, financial inclusion and use of digital assets for illicit activities.

The reporting deadlines are staggered, ranging from 30 to 180 days, and will include consultations with the private sector.

The United States 'can move quickly, but we can also move in a way that's smart and that's inclusive', the official said.

The officials downplayed competition from Beijing, saying the US dollar 'has been and will continue to be crucial to the stability of the international monetary system as a whole' and those issued by foreign central banks 'do not threaten this dominance'.

In addition to China, Nigeria in October launched its own virtual money.

Need for oversight

Digital assets, including cryptocurrencies, have seen explosive growth in recent years, surpassing a US\$3tn market cap last November, from just US\$14bn just five years prior.

The White House said around 16 per cent of adult Americans - approximately 40mn people - have invested in, traded or used cryptocurrencies.

However, "Without oversight the explosive growth in cryptocurrency use would pose risks to Americans, to the stability of our businesses, our financial system and our national security," the official said.

AFP

Germany calls on OPEC to increase oil output

Frankfurt, Germany - German Economy Minister Robert Habeck on Tuesday issued an 'urgent appeal' to OPEC oil producers to ramp up output following a spike in prices and supply fears due to the Ukraine crisis.

Habeck called on top oil producing nations to 'increase production in order to create relief on the market'.

'That would be a contribution' to easing the stress on firms and households, he said at a Berlin press conference, adding that it was 'an urgent appeal' to OPEC.

Crude oil prices surged on Tuesday as the United States banned Russian energy imports.

While remaining below Monday's peak of US\$139.13 a barrel, the main international oil contract, Brent, jumped 4.7 per cent to close at US\$128.06, below the high point of the day.

The main US contract, WTI, rose by 4.1 per cent to



US\$124.36.

At last week's OPEC+ meeting, the 13 members of the Saudi-led OPEC group and their ten allies, including Russia, agreed to hold firm on plans to stick to existing output targets through April.

Europe is heavily reliant on Russian energy imports, and

Western sanctions against Russia have so far not targeted oil and gas.

German Chancellor Olaf Scholz has called Russian energy supplies 'essential importance' for people's daily lives in Europe's biggest economy.

President Joe Biden announced a ban on US imports of Russian oil while Britain said it will phase them out by the end of the year.

Russia accounts for less than 10 per cent of US imports of oil and petroleum products, which means the impact on the world's largest economy would be easier to bear than for European economies.

The OPEC+ oil cartel plans to boost production by just 400,000 barrels a day in April, the same pace as in recent months.

Their next meeting is on March 31.

AFP

McDonald's and Coca-Cola join US companies halting Russia operations

New York, US - McDonald's, Coca-Cola and Starbucks on Tuesday bowed to public pressure and suspended their operations in Russia, joining the international corporate chorus of outrage over Moscow's invasion of Ukraine.

Several of these companies, symbols of American cultural influence in the world, have been the subject of boycott calls on social media as investors have also begun to ask questions about their presence.

'We cannot ignore the needless human suffering unfolding in Ukraine,' the fast-food giant said, announcing the temporary closure all 850 restaurants in Russia, where it employs 62,000 people.

Starbucks, Coca-Cola and PepsiCo announced their own decisions to halt or restrict business in quick succession, noting the growing human cost of the invasion.

PepsiCo said that despite



Women walk in front of a McDonald's restaurant in central Moscow (AFP)

halting sales in Russia of its flagship beverage, as well as 7Up and Mirinda, it would continue to offer products like milk and baby food.

"By continuing to operate, we will also continue to support the livelihoods of our 20,000 Russian associates and the 40,000 Russian agricultural workers in our supply chain,"

PepsiCo chief executive officer Ramon Laguarta said in a statement.

Starbucks, which has 130 Kuwaiti conglomerate-run coffee shops in Russia, said all operations, including product shipments, will be suspended.

A team from Yale University that keeps a list of companies with a significant presence in

Russia said about 290 have announced withdrawal from the country since it invaded neighbouring Ukraine, reminiscent of 'the large-scale corporate boycott of Apartheid South Africa in the 1980s'.

About 30 multinationals still remain on the list of companies with significant exposure to Russia.

Some companies, however, have noted the limits of their influence is halting business.

Yum! Brands, whose 1,000 or so KFC restaurants and 50 Pizza Hut locations in Russia are almost all independently owned, announced on Tuesday that it was halting operations at company-owned KFC locations.

It said it was 'finalising an agreement' to do the same with its Pizza Hut restaurants, adding that all profits from operations in Russia will be redirected to 'humanitarian efforts'.

AFP

MSX rises 0.83% amid weak activity

Our Correspondent
Muscat

The benchmark index of the Muscat Stock Exchange (MSX) rose 0.83 per cent to close at 4,258.16 points on Wednesday.

Trading activity deteriorated from the previous session as turnover declined 26.95 per cent to RO5.62mn and volumes fell 18.2 per cent to 27.87mn shares.

While Services index fell 0.75 per cent, Financial and Industrial indices rose 1.32 per cent and 0.64 per cent, respectively. The MSX Shariah Index closed up by 0.08 per cent at 493.5 points.

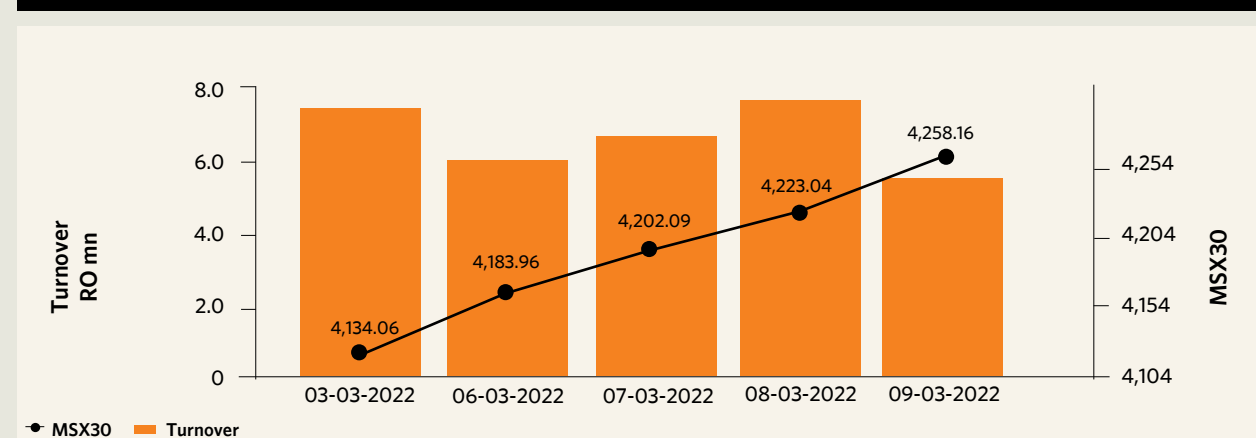
Market breadth remained positive as 16 companies closed up, while 12 companies closed down. The rest 19 traded stocks closed flat for the day.



Top gainers were Al Omaniya Financial Services (6.58 per cent), Oman Cables Industries (3.66 per cent), HSBC Bank Oman (2.8 per cent) and National Bank of Oman (2.58 per cent).

Top losers were SMN Power (-4.55 per cent), Shell Oman (-4.35 per cent), Al Madina Investment (-2.13 per cent) and Oman Investment & Finance Co (-1.94 per cent).

MSX INDEX AND TURNOVER OF FIVE TRADING DAYS



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ROHM announces upcoming opera ‘L’Elisir d’Amore’ – The Factory of ideas

The Royal Opera House Muscat is delighted to announce the upcoming opera to be performed at the Royal Opera House Muscat, L’Elisir d’Amore – The Factory of Ideas.

The opera, based on the L’Elisir d’Amore composed by Gaetano Donizetti (1797 – 1848), will be performed by the internationally renowned company As.Li.Co Teatro Sociale di Como. Returning to Muscat for the 4th time, the company is widely acknowledged as the most successful touring company developing new and young audiences for opera, a press release said.

L’Elisir d’Amore – The Factory of Ideas explores Donizetti’s classic opera with an eye for capturing the imagination and attention of children. The opera has been reworked so that elements of the singing can be interactive, and so that the stage cast can appeal directly to children in the audience for their contribution and involvement in the story.

Schools across Muscat have been collaborating with As.Li.Co, culminating in a series of performances exclusively for schools in a fascinating learning journey, featuring significant artistic commitment from the schools, teachers and especially the children of Muscat.

On March 12, the show is open to everyone. Families and opera fans from across the region can expect a vibrant and entertaining show, providing the perfect introduction to the opera genre. All visits to the opera house are conducted under the guidelines of the Supreme Committee responsible for measures to tackle the development of Covid-19.



Hisense launches smart phone



Hisense, one of the largest Consumer Electronic brands globally, has launched its Smart Phone category in the Sultanate of Oman.

The company has partnered with Four Season United, a modern age technology distributor of mobile devices, smart phones, tablets & accessories in the region, a press release said.

In order to leverage its strengths in developing smart technology and innovative products, smart-phones have been an extension of Hisense’s highly competitive product offerings. This has led to market penetration and consumer acceptance in various regions across the Middle East.

Hisense has been on a trajectory route to expand and has

recognised high potential and excellent opportunity in the Sultanate of Oman. Through this regional expansion, the brand is making a stronger impact in the mid-tier segment of mobile category with its array of features to enhance the consumer experience.

Four Seasons United, technology distributor, established in

2018, has grown from strength to strength due to its inherent understanding of distribution in emerging markets like Oman, UAE, and other GCC countries.

Tamer, managing director of Four Seasons United said, “Our main focus is to support the B2B and B2C customers through quality customer service across the Sultanate of Oman.”

Khedmah offers smart solutions in South Dakhliyah

Oman Investment and Finance Company ‘Khedmah’ boasts of a robust network of 68 branches across Oman along with its digital platforms. Through these channels, the company seeks to meet clients’ needs and exceed their expectations.

Over the recent period, Khedmah has constantly worked toward fulfilling the payments needs of all segments of the community by expanding its network and providing smart solutions, a press release said.

In South Dakhliyah region, Khedmah delivers its unique services through 10 branches. These branches are located in Bahla, Adam, Manah, Ghafat, Hamra, Birkat Al Mouj, Bisiya, while two branches are in Nizwa - in Firq and Daris. Through these branches and other digital platforms, customers can easily pay their electricity, water and telephone bills, recharge their phones, and also pay their electricity prepaid meter bills. In addition, customers can make payments to the Public Authority for Social Insurance (PASI) and recharge any entertainment sub



scription.

Salim bin Salam al Jadidi, assistant regional manager of Dakhliyah region for OIFC said, “Throughout my professional career in Khedmah, which lasted more than 30 years, I witnessed a strategic transformation in the operations, services provided to clients and expansion of platforms, particularly the digital ones.

These milestones are a result of the company’s sterling efforts to keep abreast with the latest developments in the market by

conducting detailed studies on branch locations and customers’ satisfaction levels. Khedmah branches have a qualified Omani workforce trained to address clients’ needs as per the highest standards in the customer service field.”

Along with Khedmah’s wide array of solutions, Customers interested in subscribing to Awasr and Omantel home internet products as well as Omantel postpaid packages can also easily do so at any of the Khedmah branch offices.

Anantara welcomes two GMs

Anantara announced the appointment of new general managers at its two Oman resorts - Al Baleed Resort Salalah by Anantara and Anantara Al Jabal Al Akhdar Resort - as they continue to lead the way in leisure hospitality in the country and the surrounding region, a press release said.

Andrea Orrú, general manager Al Baleed Resort Salalah by Anantara started his career as a luxury hotel Food & Beverage director in the United Kingdom. He has been part of the team at Minor Hotels, Anantara’s parent company, since 2013, and comes with a wealth of experience in hotel operations across food and beverage and hotel management in countries including Thailand, Maldives, China and South Korea. He moves to Oman from his most recent position as general manager at Anantara Rasananda Koh Phangan Resort in Thailand.

“I couldn’t be more excited about the opportunity to begin working at such an incredible



resort as Al Baleed Resort Salalah by Anantara. Not only am I looking forward to welcoming new and loyal guests to the unrivalled luxury and beauty of the resort, but I am eager to begin working with the team to deliver the next steps towards

an even better experience for every visitor,” said Orrú.

Maren Kuehl, general manager, Anantara Al Jabal Al Akhdar Resort, has been a member of the Anantara family since 2014 when she began working as Hotel Manager for Anantara The Palm Dubai Resort, after gaining over a decade of experience in luxury hospitality throughout the region.

“I feel honoured to have been appointed general manager at Anantara Al Jabal Al Akhdar Resort. The possibilities for combining uncompromising luxury with bold initiatives in sustainability and guest wellness presents opportunities I am eager to pursue.

The addition of a water bottling plant and drive to better manage waste, particularly to reduce plastic waste, are initiatives I consider the essential responsibility of luxury resorts around the world. A responsibility which is particularly apparent in a beautiful and unspoiled landscape such as this,” she said.

A’Safwah Dairy offers flavoured milk packs

A’Safwah, Oman’s oldest and most popular dairy company, celebrated with students as they returned to school to continue their second semester.

Recognising the importance of incorporating healthy beverages into students’ diets, A’Safwah offers its range of flavoured milk in convenient 125ml and 200ml packs, thus making it the perfect companion for breakfast, and a refreshing choice for snack time at school, a press release said.

A’Safwah Dairy has remained committed to diversifying its product portfolio to encourage both adults and children to adopt healthy eating habits. As students return to school, A’Safwah urges mothers to add flavoured milk to their kids’ daily meals in order to boost their physical health and give them the energy to learn and play.

A’Safwah’s flavoured milk comes in three delicious flavours - strawberry, chocolate and banana, which are popular options



for adults and children. The easy-to-carry single serve packs - 125ml and 200ml packs - makes it’s a convenient on-the-go choice, whether it is in school or between activities.

Addressing the start of a new term in school, a spokesperson

from A’Safwah said, “We understand the critical roles mothers play in encouraging children to follow healthy eating habits and A’Safwah has been their trusted brand for years. We have, therefore, introduced our 125 ml packs that are space-saving.”

Ooredoo offers Shahry Business Digital plans

Making it quick and easy, Ooredoo’s build-your-own Shahry Business Digital plans are giving business customers the ultimate in flexibility.

With an abundance of options to choose from, businesses can select from a set of ready-made packages, or they can build their own plan, with multiple options for data, voice and data roaming, depending on their unique needs. Plus, with add-ons made directly through the Ooredoo App, customers will enjoy an easy end-to-end digital experience, a press release said.

Suitable for every budget, the standalone plans start from just RO10 per month till RO30 a month. For those that want to customise their plan, they can select the data quota and voice minutes required, and even data roaming. As the first-of-its-kind such solution in Oman, it offer unique flexibility.

Sayyid Bilarab inaugurates new ABA Al Irfan campus

ABA Oman International School's new world-class campus at Madinat Al Irfan was officially inaugurated by H H Sayyid Bilarab bin Haitham bin Tarik al Said yesterday.

Sayyid Bilarab, an alumnus of ABA from the graduating class of 2012, unveiled the foundation stone to mark the new beginnings of the ABA Al Irfan campus. He was given a tour of the campus, accompanied by Lamya al Kiyumi, ABA Board chair and Craig Williamson, ABA head of School.

H E Ahmed Mohammed al Humaidi, chairman of Muscat Municipality, Honourable Lujaina bint Mohsin bin Haider Darwish al Zaabi, Member of the State Council, H E Bill Murray, Ambassador of UK, H E Thomas Friedrich Schneider, Ambassador of Germany, H E Amit Narang, Ambassador of India, and corporate officials were among the dignitaries present.

ABA's new campus is located in Madinat Al Irfan, Airport Heights, in close proximity to the new Muscat International Airport at Seeb, Muscat Hills, and Al Mouj Muscat. The expansive



campus spread over 3.5 hectares includes a contemporary Learning Centre, a state of the art Athletics Centre, an avant-garde

Performing Arts Centre, and interactive indoor and outdoor learning spaces that enable facilitation of a truly global education

to local and expatriate students.

In her inaugural address, Lamya al Kiyumi, said, "Over the past 35 years, ABA has seen re-

markable growth and we are delighted to begin the next chapter of our story at our new Al Irfan campus. To everyone who has been a part of our ABA family, this campus is the result of the vision and the culmination of the efforts of numerous Heads of School, Board directors, teachers, staff, families, volunteers, architects, engineers and project managers. We are beyond excited for our children's first day here on March 27 and we look forward to the happy memories they will create in their new home."

Craig Williamson, head of the school, added, "The ABA Al Irfan campus was built with the vision to provide our students with an enriching environment that is conducive to holistic growth. It took a team of dedicated individuals many years of hard labour to realise this long-harboured dream and the result is truly incredible. We continue to constantly strive to ensure that our ABA community has access to the best learning facilities where students thrive and flourish, building on their skills to realise their true potential."



JLL shares key insights on Saudi property

JLL, a leading professional services firm that specialises in real estate, investment management and development consultancy services, has shared insights on what is on the horizon for the Saudi property market in 2022 at its real estate outlook event in Riyadh.

Hosted under the theme 'A Reset for the Real Estate Sector', Thierry Delvaux, CEO of JLL Middle East, Africa and Turkey, and JLL experts provided an overview of the outlook for the property market, a deep dive into the Saudi's construction market, and shared insights on the workforce of the future, a press release said.

Sharing the macroeconomic overview at the event, Delvaux commented, "Globally, the pandemic has provided new impetus to many of the trends and themes that were already reshaping our cities - from changing work and lifestyle preferences to the core role of the digital economy and the need for more resilient, inclusive and sustainable communities. In the KSA, the Saudi government has actively been spearheading ini-

tiatives and giga projects, as part of Vision 2030, to create a vibrant society, with more lifestyle developments coming into the picture.

This has helped stimulate growth across the Kingdom, and we expect this to continue to positively impact the property market in 2022 as well."

The JLL event in Riyadh follows the firm's recent announcement that it has appointed a non-executive board of leading business figures in Saudi Arabia. The newly created board will assist JLL in driving its medium and long-term strategic direction in Saudi, whilst also advising on key business developments for the firm in the Kingdom.

Joining JLL will be Jehad Alkadi, CEO of Arriyadh Development Company in the capacity of a board chairman, Hawazen Nazieh Nassief, vice president ESG and External Affairs, National Energy Services Reunited Corporation (NESR), Mohammed al Khars, chairman of Innovest Properties, and Musaab al Muhaidib, CEO of Al Muhaidib Entertainment Ventures.

Wizz Air offers summer promotions

Wizz Air Abu Dhabi, the ultra-low-fare national airline of the UAE, has launched exciting new seasonal routes to Santorini, Greece and Salalah (Oman) providing UAE residents exciting travel opportunities and experiences over the summer period and beyond.

To capitalise on the increasing demand for travel, Wizz Air Abu Dhabi is offering an exciting promotion with 20 per cent off on selected flights from Abu Dhabi until the end of September with bookings made between March



8 and 9, a press release said. Flights to Santorini start from June 3 on Mondays and Fridays and flights to Salalah start on April 29 on Mondays and Saturdays with fares starting as low as AED179.

The exciting 20 percent discount provides customers affordable, efficient travel and incredible value for money. The promotion allows adventurous travellers to book reduced ultra-low-fare tickets on all flights from/to the UAE including the recently launched routes.

Alizz Islamic Bank floats 'money back' offers for credit card use

Alizz Islamic Bank continues to offer its customers exciting Shari'a compliant offers and services with its ongoing credit card cashback offering.

Alizz Islamic Bank customers can get 2.5% cashback on fuel every day of the week when they use their credit card

to pay at any petrol station in Oman. Additionally, Alizz Islamic Bank offers all its credit card customers 2.5% cashback on grocery spends every Friday and Saturday, a press release said.

Customers with a World or



World Elite credit card can avail 15% cashback every Friday and Saturday when they use their credit cards to pay at any restaurant in Oman and customers with a Titanium or Platinum credit card can avail 10% cash-

back every Friday and Saturday when they use their credit cards to pay at any restaurant in Oman.

Alizz Islamic Bank offers a variety of unique benefits, rewards and exclusive experiences with its credit cards, including cash with-

drawals of up to 80% of the card limit, secure protection when shopping online and access to airport lounges at selected airports around the word as well as some exclusive discounts from MasterCard.v.

Volkswagen 'Service Cam' offers convenience

To improve ownership experience, increase transparency and offer convenience to customers, Volkswagen Oman, represented by Premium Motors, has introduced a 'Service Cam' programme.

This initiative allows the Volkswagen Oman's service centre to inform and seek approval from its customers for additional repairs to their car. This is done via a video recording through Service Cam link which the service centre sends to the customers with repair or replacement requirement list. By sending the video footage to customers' via email or SMS, the service centre simplifies the service and repair process, and at



the same time breaks down the communication gap between the



two parties. After thoroughly viewing the

video, Service Cam link enables the customer to approve the repair suggested and costs associated with them. Only once the customer approves the repairs, the services will be undertaken on their vehicle.

Christian Nehme, general manager of Premium Motors Oman, said, "The Service Cam programme confirms Volkswagen Oman's commitment to convenience and transparency. At Volkswagen, our top priority is to ensure we provide a pleasant ownership experience along with a robust value proposition through the services we offer. We are pleased to offer transparency and convenience to our customer through this facility."

Gallery Sarah holds 'A Fragment of Feelings' solo exhibition

Under the patronage of the Honourable Lujaina bint Mohsen Darwish, Member of the State Council, an art exhibition - 'A Fragment of Feelings' - by artist Zahra al Ghatrifi opened at Gallery Sarah, on March 7.

The artist is showcasing more than thirty artworks in which she evokes ancient stories through her use of materials from the environment and Omani heritage which she transformed into a contemporary artistic subject with a highly harmonious output in her artwork, with reliance on earthy and vibrant colours, a press release said.

Zahra has been a member of the Oman society of Fine Arts (OSFA) since 2003, and participated in almost all the exhibitions of OSFA and The Omani Youth Studio as well. It is worth mentioning that the artist won many local awards and her works were collected by some of governmental and private institutions and individuals.

"During the quarantine period that we found ourselves forced to stay at home and adapt with the pandemic, artists were the biggest beneficiaries, as the positive impact of the crisis was re-

flected in the artist's isolation by exploiting and translating it into the production of artistic and creative works. Personally, I created three sets of a series of artworks of nostalgia, evoking its stories by recycling some old fragments of wood and fabric crumbs, besides old environmental and heritage materials that I collected from my father's old house in the village of Al Aqar, Nizwa.

"All these crumbs carry with them memories and stories of intrinsic values that deserve to be told. We humans are a group of feelings from our past that re-

flects what we are in now." In some of her works, the artist employed the remains of an old tool she had taken from her father's farm called Al Manjour - a serrated wooden wheel that rotates around an axis (where a farm animal constantly drags the rope back and forth along an inclined path).

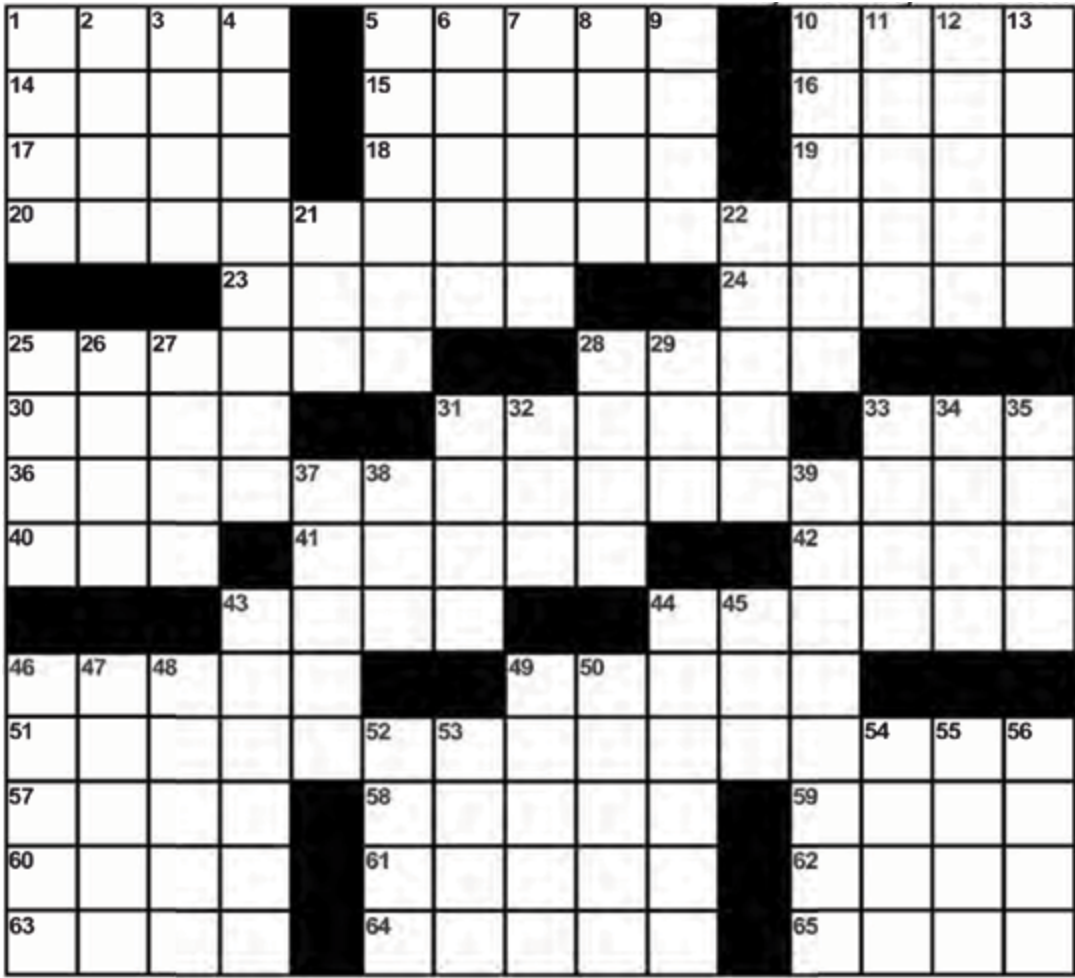
Laila Muhammad Al Najjar, curator, said "The use of the Al Manjour has a philosophical and profound human dimension more than just using it in the artwork as an ancient material. The artist sheds light on the simple and primitive human thought at

that time in finding smart and creative solutions to improve life in the manufacture, and creative thought in the design and engineering of Al Manjour as a tool to be used to facilitate the process of extracting water from the well and developing productivity.

"In addition to this, the artist reflects core values, which are the principle of charity and patience, which the generation of grandparents and fathers exemplified in their work. The artist was able to convey the warmth of a bygone era by presenting the subject in a contemporary artistic style."



DAILY CROSSWORD



ACROSS

1) Three-player card game
5) Thumbnails
10) "Then it's settled"
14) "Little" girl of early comics
15) Flynn of old Hollywood
16) Napoleon exile spot
17) Jewish month after Shevat
18) Sung syllables
19) Like a useless tire
20) Back fill x 3
23) Sculpting materials
24) Decreases in strength
25) Ancient
28) A pair's air
30) "Buona..." (Italian greeting)
31) Cause to laugh
33) Scholastic stat
36) Back fill x 4
40) "What... the odds?"
41) Fabled slipper material
42) Place of desertion
43) Bit of defamation
44) Steal gas, in a way

DOWN

1) Concrete section
2) African antelope
3) Winged
4) Traitor
5) Group of four
6) Deck out
7) Sticking points on crows?
8) Caffeine-containing nut
9) Kill, as a dragon
10) Beat in competition
11) DeGeneres of TV
12) Decrease
13) Plasterwork backers
21) Addition shape, sometimes
22) Dinner jacket material, sometimes
25) Fishing in the Atlantic, e.g.
26) Reverse or drive, e.g.
27) Scottish Gaelic
28) All couples
29) Apollo letters
31) Way, way off
32) Title for a married woman
33) "Fancy that!"
34) Game played with horses and mallets
35) Prayer's end
37) Like bodies on beaches
38) Winter ailment
39) Something tested on the vine
43) Naturally bright
44) Makes noise at night
45) Letters from a poor gambler
46) Painter Degas
47) Not a soul
48) Belts, as flies
49) _ de Guerre (French military award)
50) Type of angle or pain
52) Cut-_ (short shorts)

53) _ podrida (Spanish stew)
54) Fruit bearer
55) Make upset
56) Cry like a pup

NOTE PAD

YOUR DAILY HOROSCOPE

ARIES MARCH 21-APRIL 19

You're in the mood to hibernate, big time, which is quite unusual for you. In fact, it has you worried. Could a permanent change in your personality be coming on? Of course not. Stay snuggled up in those pj's just as long as you want. Soon, you'll be yourself again: in the mood to wear something red and eager to make up for lost time. In fact, expect to be burning the candle at both ends again, as usual, in just a day or so.

LEO JULY 23-AUGUST 22

It's time to dig deep and face each and every encounter with an eye toward getting to know new people on a personal level, because right about now there's an awful lot you have to offer each other. Even if you've been finding personal encounters tricky lately, don't worry about it. You're craving intimacy, so share a secret. You know who to trust. Things are going to be pretty interesting afterwards.

SAGITTARIUS NOVEMBER 22-DECEMBER 21

Occasionally, your skills at talking a family member down off the ledge are called upon, and this is one of those times. Remember that if you stay calm, they will too. Usually. However, if the situation turns out to be a bit more than you can handle, don't be afraid to ask for help. The good news is that you might not have to ask. Mention the situation and know that someone will probably offer to help.

TAURUS APRIL 20-MAY 20

If anybody loves comfort, which includes the constancy and ease of routine, it's most definitely yours. Your regular habits bring you close to the people you've come to know, enjoy, and in some cases love. In fact, you probably look forward to every stop on your daily or weekly schedule as much as some of us look forward to vacations. If you're not already keeping company with a dedicated group, go out and find those kindred spirits.

VIRGO AUGUST 23-SEPTEMBER 22

Are you still holding on to some silly superstitions when it comes to romance? Get this through your head: You and your partner or potential partner are in charge of creating the rules of your romance, and no one else! Books, advice blogs, and videos can provide ideas and broad guidelines, but as long as you feel as though you're getting what you deserve, that is all that matters!

CAPRICORN DECEMBER 22-JANUARY 19

Your vision of the future is a bit cloudy right now, but that doesn't mean you need to panic. It's natural to have a few periods of confusion or apathy about where you want to go next. Don't obsess about not knowing what you want to do! Stay focused on the big picture. You'll find yourself contemplating some very deep stuff in the near future. Stay aware of your thoughts and you'll start to get some ideas.

GEMINI MAY 21-JUNE 21

Impressing your superiors with your ability to take charge of any and all situations may get you where you think you want to be, but don't push too hard. You don't have to. You may not see it coming, but they're already preparing to have a nice, long chat with you, quite impromptu, at which point you'll discover just how indispensable you've already made yourself to them.

LIBRA SEPTEMBER 23-OCTOBER 22

You've got a hard day of work ahead of you, so stay focused and then this evening you can be totally off duty, and it's not like you haven't earned it. Keep that in mind when someone waltzes in late this afternoon with a huge pile of work or a really big job to be done and that look on their face. Before you agree to give up your evening, though, think about your companion's response.

AQUARIUS JANUARY 20-FEBRUARY 18

You're usually the very soul of objectivity, but today you're in an extremely unusual mood. You're feeling nostalgic and sentimental, which is totally unlike you. And believe it or not, all it's going to take to get you sniffing is a commercial with a cuddly puppy or an endearing human face. Oh, well, even your totally rational sign is entitled to gush a little every now and then. It's your turn.

CANCER JUNE 22-JULY 22

When you watch a cooking show on TV, do you wonder who chopped all those carrots or sliced all those onions so perfectly while the host was in the makeup chair? The behind-the-scenes realities of life are intriguing to you right now, and it could occur to you that, like those unseen choppers and slicers, you spend a lot of time making someone else look good. It's time you got in front of the camera.

SCORPIO OCTOBER 23-NOVEMBER 21

It started a couple of days ago, but that doesn't mean you should stop now, not just yet anyway. For a few more short hours, you're free to chase after any totally hedonistic quests and be ensured success. Get your chores done and done well. That way you won't have anything else to think about except conjuring up something new, creative, and interesting.

PISCES FEBRUARY 19-MARCH 20

Sometimes the best conversations are those you have with people who disagree with you. Too many people fall into the comfortable trap of hearing only what they believe parroted back to them, but not you! You understand (now more than ever) that healthy debate with a person you wouldn't normally connect with can offer you a great deal of satisfaction and education. So seek out different viewpoints today.

TEST YOUR KNOWLEDGE

1.A group of young early 20th century composers working in Montparnasse who became known as Les Six, included Georges Auric, Louis Durey, Arthur Honegger, Francis Poulenc, Germaine Tailleferre and which other?

A. Béla Bartók
B. Maurice Ravel
C. John Cage
D. Darius Milhaud

2.What was the name of the Liverpool club where the Beatles played in the early 1960s?

A. Abyss
B. Trench
C. Hole
D. Cavern

3.What London establishment was created in 1753 by Sir Harris Sloane?

A. London Zoo, Regents Park
B. The British Museum
C. The National Portrait Gallery
D. The Royal Society

Answers: 1.D 2.D 3.B

KIDS COLOURING



BOGGLER

M	E	M	Y
W	O	A	R
O	A	P	E
N	A	B	R

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

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

WORD BUILDER



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

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

SUDOKU EASY ANSWER

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



Slovak volunteers help Ukrainian refugees near the Slovak-Ukrainian border crossing in Vysne Nemecke, eastern Slovakia, on Wednesday (AFP)

Fresh evacuation efforts for devastated Ukraine cities

Kyiv, Ukraine - Russia and Ukraine agreed to open more humanitarian corridors on Wednesday to evacuate terrified civilians from bombarded cities as Moscow said some progress was being made in talks with Kyiv.

After air-raid sirens rang out again in Kyiv overnight, the plan was to open safe routes out of five Ukrainian areas including two suburbs of the capital that have been devastated by Russian shelling. But previous ceasefire efforts have been bedevilled by violations, with Moscow apparently determined to push for

ward a 14-day-old invasion of its neighbour that has shocked the world. Russia's war has sent around 2.2mn refugees across Ukraine's borders in what the UN has called Europe's fastest-growing refugee crisis since World War II, and sparked fears of wider conflict.

The West has responded with punishing sanctions, with the United States banning imports of Russian oil as it unleashed one of its biggest economic weapons against Moscow. Major brands have continued to pull out of Russia, with McDonald's, Coca-Cola, Starbucks and Heineken

among the latest to join the international chorus of outrage.

But Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky's appeals for air support remain unanswered, with Washington rejecting an offer from NATO ally Poland to give Kyiv jets.

Russia insisted on Wednesday that Moscow's troops were not working to 'overthrow' the Ukrainian government.

"Some progress has been made' in three rounds of negotiations with officials from Kyiv to resolve the conflict, Russian foreign ministry spokeswoman Maria Zakharova said during a

press briefing.

Evacuation routes

Ukrainian Deputy Prime Minister Iryna Vereshchuk said Moscow vowed to respect the truce from 9am to 9pm around six areas that have been heavily hit by fighting.

Vereshchuk said Ukraine has had a 'negative experience' of ceasefires not being respected, adding that residents had asked Russia to 'keep its promises'.

One of the evacuation routes is from Sumy, where some 5,000 civilians were able to escape on Tuesday, with some 60

buses able to leave the stricken town east of Kyiv near the Russian border, officials said.

For the first time the corridors also include Irpin, Bucha and Gostomel, a cluster of towns on the northwestern outskirts of Kyiv that have been largely occupied by Russian forces.

"I didn't want to leave, but there's nobody left in the homes around us, no water, no gas and no electricity," Larissa Prokopets, 43, told AFP on Tuesday.

The routes out of the city on Wednesday would lead to Kyiv, the regional administration said. AFP



Director General of IAEA Rafael Grossi is seen at the quaterly Board of Governors meeting in Vienna, on Monday (AFP)

Power cut at Ukraine's Chernobyl: No critical safety impact, says UN

Vienna, Austria - Power has been cut to the Chernobyl power plant, the site of the world's worst nuclear disaster, Ukraine said on Wednesday, but the UN's atomic watchdog said there was 'no critical impact on safety'.

The plant 'was fully disconnected from the power grid', Ukraine's energy operator Ukrenergo said in a statement on its Facebook page, adding that military operations meant 'there is no possibility to restore the lines'. It said that there was also no power to the site's security systems.

On February 24, Russia invaded Ukraine and seized the defunct plant, site of a 1986 disaster that killed hundreds and spread radioactive contamination west across Europe.

The UN atomic watchdog, the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) said in a tweet that while the development 'violates (a) key safety pillar', in this case it saw 'no critical impact on safety'. On Tuesday the IAEA had said that the site was no longer transmitting data and voiced concern for staff working

under Russian guard.

The situation for the staff 'was worsening', the IAEA said, citing the Ukrainian nuclear regulator.

The defunct plant sits inside an exclusion zone that houses decommissioned reactors as well as radioactive waste facilities.

Ukrainian Foreign Minister Dmytro Kuleba tweeted on Wednesday that 'reserve diesel generators have a 48-hour capacity to power' the plant but added that 'after that, cooling systems of the storage facility for spent nuclear fuel will stop'.

More than 2,000 staff still work at the plant as it requires constant management to prevent another nuclear disaster.

IAEA Director General Rafael Grossi on Tuesday called 'on the forces in effective control of the site to urgently facilitate the safe rotation of personnel there'.

He also repeated his offer to travel to Chernobyl or elsewhere to secure 'the commitment to the safety and security' of Ukraine's power plants from all parties.

AFP



Ukrainian servicemen look towards Russian positions outside the city of Brovary, east of Kyiv, on Wednesday (AFP)

Urban warfare 'nightmare' looms if Russia troops into cities in Ukraine

Paris, France - The next step in Russia's invasion of Ukraine could lead to urban warfare, an immense challenge for even numerically superior armies with deadly consequences for civilians caught up in the fighting, experts say.

Nearly two weeks after the start of the Russian offensive, fears are growing that troops are preparing to launch major moves on Ukrainian cities that have so far escaped their grasp.

Russian artillery and rockets have been striking cities including the capital Kyiv, as well as smaller regional centres such as Kharkiv, Mariupol and Chernihiv.

Inhabitants there, as well as in the southern port of Odessa, another strategic target, are now

Nearly two weeks after the start of the Russian offensive, fears are growing that troops are preparing to launch major moves on Ukrainian cities

preparing for possible ground attacks.

"You still see them (Russians) holding back compared to what they could be doing," said Michael Kofman, a specialist on the Russian military at the US-based Center for Naval Analyses (CNA).

"But I'm fairly concerned that that might actually turn into some smaller or lesser version of Grozny," he said, referring to Russia's offensive against the capital of separatist-controlled Chechnya in the 1990s.

"I doubt that they will try to level cities the way they did in Chechnya but nonetheless I think they're going to see heavy destruction if they attempt an urban assault."

Lance Davies, a defence specialist at the Royal Military Academy Sandhurst in Britain, said that ground operations in hostile cities were 'notoriously difficult to fight'.

"Urban operations are the worst nightmare for military forces, commanders and political

leaders," he said.

"The likelihood of becoming bogged down in brutal house-to-house fighting is almost guaranteed - and an assault on Kyiv would require a huge commitment in resources and manpower, but more importantly place Russian forces in close contact with legally protected civilian populations and critical infrastructure."

Resources

There remain doubts about whether Russia has the resources needed to capture and hold urban areas in Ukraine, and whether the country and President Vladimir Putin are ready to accept mounting casualties.

AFP

UK readies more missiles for Ukraine to resist Russian tanks and aircraft

London, UK - Britain said on Wednesday it was preparing to send more portable missile systems to help Ukrainian forces destroy Russian tanks and aircraft.

However, the UK denied it was escalating the conflict.

Defence Secretary Ben Wallace said the UK had so far delivered 3,615 Next Generation Light Anti-tank Weapons (NLAWs) 'and continue(s) to deliver more'.

"We will shortly be starting the delivery of a small consignment of anti-tank Javelin missiles as well," he told parliament.

Wallace added that 'in response to Ukrainian requests, the government has taken the decision to explore the donation of Starstreak high-velocity man-portable anti-air missiles'.

Like NLAWs, the British Starstreak missiles are a mobile system designed to be fired by troops in the field, targeting helicopters and planes.

"We believe that this system will remain within the definition of defensive weapons but will

allow the Ukrainian force to better defend the skies," the minister said.

"I want to assure the House (of Commons) that everything we do is bound by the decisions to supply defensive systems and are calibrated not to escalate to a strategic level."

Britain will also increase its supplies of rations, medical equipment and other 'non-lethal' military aid to Ukraine, Wallace said.

Prior to Russia's invasion on February 24, Britain had sent a

contingent of military trainers to instruct Ukrainian forces on using the anti-tank weapons.

The United Kingdom has sent 800 troops to Estonia to shore up NATO's eastern flank, and has another 1,000 on standby if the the humanitarian crisis worsens in Ukraine's neighbours.

But like other NATO allies, Britain has rebuffed Ukraine's demands to impose a no-fly zone, fearful of the risk of all-out war with nuclear-armed Russia.

AFP



Members of the Ukrainian Territorial Defence Forces examine new armament, including NLAW anti-tank systems and other portable anti-tank grenade launchers, in Kyiv on Wednesday (AFP)

Herzog lands in Turkey to ‘restart’ ties; first visit by an Israeli head since 2007

Ankara, Turkey - Israel's president landed in Ankara on Wednesday to meet Turkish leader Recep Tayyip Erdogan, the first visit by an Israeli head of state since 2007, as the countries seek to mend fractured ties.

President Isaac Herzog's visit to the Turkish capital and Istanbul was planned weeks before Russia invaded Ukraine, but the conflict could feature at the talks, with both Israel and Turkey playing mediation roles in recent days.

But bilateral issues are likely to dominate following more than a decade of diplomatic rupture between the Jewish state and majority Muslim Turkey, a vocal supporter of the Palestinian cause. "We will not agree on everything, and the relationship between Israel and Turkey has certainly known ups and downs and not-so-simple moments in recent years," Herzog said before departing. "But we shall try to restart our relations and build them in a measured and cautious manner," he added.

Major issues on the agenda for the two-day trip will likely include gas sales to Europe, a topic that has acquired added urgency amid the Ukraine conflict.

Relations froze after the death of 10 civilians following an Israeli raid on the Turkish *Mavi Marmara* ship, part of a flotilla trying to breach a blockade by carrying



Israel President Isaac Herzog (centre) and his wife Michal Herzog (left) arrive in Ankara on Wednesday (AFP)

aid into the Gaza Strip in 2010.

A 2016 reconciliation agreement that saw the return of ambassadors all but collapsed in 2018 in the wake of Gaza border clashes that killed dozens of Palestinians.

Turkey recalled its diplomats and ordered Israel's envoy out of the country.

Asli Aydinintasbas, fellow at the European Council on Foreign Relations, told AFP it was 'quite likely' that the reappointment of ambassadors will be announced during Herzog's trip.

‘Turning point’

The rapprochement began following Herzog's inauguration in

July. Israel's presidency is a largely ceremonial role, but Herzog, a veteran of the left-wing Labour party, has taken on an outsized diplomatic role and has spoken to Erdogan several times in recent months.

Israeli leaders were wary of Turkey's outreach.

But Erdogan's move to secure

the release of an Israeli couple arrested in Istanbul in November on espionage charges proved a 'turning point', said Gallia Lindenstrauss of Tel Aviv University's Institute for National Security Studies.

The matter 'essentially opened the opportunity for improved relations', said Linden-

strauss, a senior researcher and Turkey expert.

Following the 2010 crisis, Israel created a strategic alliance with Greece and Cyprus - two states with long-standing acrimony towards Erdogan's Turkey - holding in recent years regular trilateral meetings and conducting joint military drills.

The trio were part of the 'East Mediterranean Gas Forum' established in 2019 with other states, including Egypt, Jordan and the Palestinian territories - without Turkey.

In 2020, Israel, Greece and Cyprus signed the EastMed deal for a pipeline to ship gas from the eastern Mediterranean to Europe, triggering objections from Ankara.

The United States has since also raised concern about the project, citing possible issues over its 'commercial viability'.

For Turkey, that frustration over its exclusion from the gas talks - as well as an internal economic crisis, and a more confrontational US administration since President Joe Biden's election - has pushed Ankara closer to Israel, Lindenstrauss said.

Ukraine, Greece, Cyprus

Israeli officials have said that Herzog and Erdogan may discuss prospects of exporting Israeli gas to Europe through Turkey - a notion raised by Erdogan in January - amid fears of impaired supply following Russia's invasion of Ukraine.

Regional ties also remain sensitive, and Herzog visited both Greece and Cyprus ahead of his Turkey trip to reassure the two Israeli allies.

AFP

‘Big threat’: Air defences take centre stage at Saudi arms show

Riyadh, KSA - Air defence systems have been front and centre at Saudi Arabia's first defence show as drone and missile attacks increase in the energy-rich Gulf.

Deadly strikes on Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates claimed by Yemeni rebels have been the talk of shows held in the two countries in recent weeks.

Six hundred companies from about 40 countries showed off the latest military technology at the World Defense Show in the Saudi capital Riyadh this week.

"There is very much high interest in the region for the capabilities to defeat drones and IEDs," said Bobby Strawbridge of US firm Allen-Vanguard, which makes equipment to block radio-controlled weaponry.

Saudi Arabia has since 2015 led an international coalition supporting Yemen's government against Houthi rebels. It has regularly come under attack along its southern border with Yemen.

Visitors to the Riyadh show are zooming in on anti-drone and air defence systems, according to Tomas Kossowski, chief operating officer for Advanced Protection Systems.



Military drones are displayed at Saudi Arabia's first World Defense Show, north of the capital Riyadh, on Tuesday (AFP)

The Polish firm sold its infrastructure-defence products to Saudi Arabia's national telecoms operator in 2019 and has since been in negotiations with other potential customers. Kossowski said interest from the Gulf in 'defending critical infrastructure' was growing every month.

"There is a big threat here from the constant attacks from drones in the region," he told AFP. "The Yemen border is under constant threat and with our solutions we are able to prevent drone attacks."

The Saudi-led coalition says Houthi rebels have fired more

than 400 missiles and 850 armed drones into Saudi Arabia over the past seven years, killing 59 civilians.

According to the Yemen Data Project, the coalition staged 401 air raids into Yemen in January alone, and about 9,000 civilians have been killed in raids since 2015.

The UAE, which is part of the coalition, was the target of an attack in January that killed three people.

"Houthi attacks have become more frequent and dangerous, that is why more advanced solutions are needed to confront

them," said a Western military attache, speaking on condition of anonymity.

Drones have become the big new threat facing the region because they are cheap, easy to build and difficult to intercept, making them attractive to radical groups, the diplomat added.

Israel said last month that it had fired at a drone launched by Lebanese group Hezbollah, while in November Iraqi Prime Minister Mustafa al-Kadhemi escaped an assassination attempt by a bomb-laden drone.

Arms companies are gearing up in response. One company at the Riyadh show was selling a portable system that can block the radio signal used to control drones. That offers the possibility of setting up a drone-free zone over a military base or a moving convoy.

Saudi Arabia, the world's biggest arms importer between 2016 and 2020, according to the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute, on Monday announced an accord with US giant Lockheed Martin to build an air defence system in the kingdom.

AFP



Members of the Democratic Party of Korea react as they watch a television report on an exit poll for presidential election at the National Assembly in Seoul on Wednesday (AFP)

South Korea votes in tight presidential race with inequality as top concern

Seoul, South Korea - South Koreans were voting on Wednesday in a tightly fought presidential election with the deciding votes set to be cast by young people, whose top concerns are economic inequality and unemployment - not recent sabre-rattling from the nuclear-armed North.

Official figures showed high turnout of about 65 per cent by 2 pm (0500 GMT), after record early voting, following a cam-

paign dominated by mud-slinging between the two front runners, the incumbent Democratic Party's Lee Jae-myung and the opposition conservative People Power Party's Yoon Suk-yeol.

The pair, both so unpopular local media have branded it the 'election of the unfavourables', have been neck and neck in the polls for months.

The choices of young swing voters will probably prove deci-

sive, analysts said, adding the demographic's top concerns were skyrocketing house prices in the capital Seoul, social inequality and stubborn youth unemployment. "I'm really worried about housing prices in Seoul and I hope the new president will focus on making people's lives easier and better," Park Ki-tae, 38, told AFP after casting his ballot.

AFP

Freedom choice for Afghans: Over the wall or through the desert

Zaranj, Afghanistan - Amid a roar of engines and clouds of dust, Sattar Amiri clambers into a pickup truck with his wife and infant son in a remote Afghan frontier town, ready for a perilous drive through the desert.

Like the thousands of desperate migrants around him, he has only one goal - to reach Iran.

"I have no choice," says 25-year-old Sattar.

"There is no future in Afghanistan."

In Zaranj, a border town in southwestern Afghanistan, people smugglers say the flow of

would-be exiles now reaches 5,000 to 6,000 a day - four times more than before the Taliban's return to power in August.

At night, the most daring try to scale the imposing wall that separates this arid city from Iran, despite the risk of being shot by border guards.

But when the sun comes up, thousands of men, women and children pile into old four-wheel-drive vehicles on a longer journey through mountains and deserts via Pakistan.

Afghanistan has been plunged into financial crisis following the

Taliban takeover six months ago, worsening an already dire humanitarian situation after decades of war.

Many Afghans are scrambling to leave the country for Iran or beyond in search of work to send money back to their families.

Others fear being targeted by the Taliban because of their association with the previous Western-backed regime or the US-led foreign forces who finally withdrew on August 31.

Sattar lost his job as an army mechanic when Afghanistan's military collapsed six months ago



Afghan migrants ride in pickup trucks through a desert road toward the Afghanistan-Iran border in Nimruz on February 17 (AFP)

and since then says he has 'not even managed to earn 1,000 Afghanis' - about US\$10.

In desperation, he sold his house in Mazar-e-Sharif to finance his family's escape to Iran, where he plans to take any job he can get.

Nearly a million Afghans left their homes between August and December last year in an attempt to flee, according to a recent report by the International Organization for Migration (IOM).

This exodus has transformed Zaranj into a people-smuggling

den of misery.

In the city's dilapidated hotels, migrants sleep on carpets while waiting their turn to cross, despair and fear etched into their faces. Mohammad, a former policeman, is trying to reach Iran after having twice been beaten by the Taliban, who demanded a service weapon he had already handed in.

"If they come a third time, they will really kill me," says the 25-year-old from Daikundi province, declining to reveal his full name.

AFP



Menson Bound, Director of Exploration of Endurance22 expedition (left) and John Shears, Expedition Leader, with SA Agulhas II in the background (AFP)

Shackleton's shipwreck found off Antarctica after a century

Johannesburg, South Africa - One of the famous shipwrecks in history, Ernest Shackleton's *Endurance*, has been discovered off the coast of Antarctica more than a century after its sinking, explorers announced on Wednesday.

Endurance was discovered at a depth of 3,008 metres in the Weddell Sea, about six kilometres from where it was slowly crushed by pack ice in 1915.

"We are overwhelmed by our good fortune in having located and captured images of *Endurance*," said Mensun Bound, the expedition's director of exploration. "This is by far the finest wooden shipwreck I have ever seen. It is upright, well proud of the seabed, intact, and in a brilliant state of preservation. You can even see 'Endurance' arched across the stern," he said in a statement.

The expedition, organised by the Falklands Maritime Heritage Trust, left Cape Town on February 5 with a South African icebreaker, hoping to find the *Endurance* before the end of the Southern Hemisphere summer.

As part of Shackleton's Imperial Trans-Antarctic Expedition between 1914 and 1917, 's crew was meant to make the first land crossing of Antarctica. But their three-masted sailship fell victim to the tumultuous Weddell Sea.

Just east of the Larsen ice shelves on the Antarctic peninsula, the timber vessel became

until the ice cracked open, and then took to lifeboats.

They sailed first to Elephant Island, a bleak and treeless place where most of the men were dropped off and set up a camp.

Using just a sextant for navigation, Shackleton then took five others in the strongest and most seaworthy boat on a 1,300km

ter drones to find and film the shipwreck in the merciless Weddell Sea, which has a swirling current that sustains a mass of thick sea ice that can challenge even modern ice breakers.

Shackleton himself described the site of the sinking as 'the worst portion of the worst sea in the world'.

The region remains one of the most difficult parts of the ocean to navigate. "This has been the most complex subsea project ever undertaken," said Nico Vincent, the mission's subsea project manager.

Ship's helm

The underwater drones produced stunningly clear images of the 44 metre-long ship.

Amazingly, the helm has remained intact after more than a century underwater, with gear piled against the taffrail as if Shackleton's crew had only recently left it.

The ship's timbers, while damaged from the crush of ice that sank it, still hold together. A mast had snapped into two across the deck, and portholes

hinted at what secrets may still lurk inside. Sea anemones, sponges and other small ocean life made homes on the wreck-age, but did not appear to have damaged it.

Photographs of the expedition showed South Africa's *Agulhas II* icebreaker surrounded by ice, with crew lifted by crane over the frozen sea.

Under international law, the wreck is protected as a historic site. Explorers were allowed to film and scan the ship, but not to touch it at all - meaning no artefacts may be returned to the surface. The team used underwater search drones known as Sabertooths, built by Saab, which dove beneath the ice into the farthest depths of the Weddell Sea.

During the mission, scientists also researched climate change, documenting ice drifts and weather patterns.

Stefanie Arndt, a sea ice researcher from Germany's Alfred Wegener Institut, said on Twitter that she was returning with 630 ice and snow samples. 'An incredible number', she said.

AFP



The new Austrian Health Minister Johannes Rauch (left) poses with President Van der Bellen after being sworn in, in Vienna on Tuesday (AFP)

Austria suspends mandatory COVID vaccination law

Vienna, Austria - Austria said on Wednesday it is suspending mandatory COVID-19 vaccinations for all adults saying the pandemic no longer poses the same danger, just weeks after the law took effect in an EU first.

The Alpine nation of nine million people was among few countries in the world to make jabs against the coronavirus compulsory for all adults.

The law took effect in February and called for fines up to \$3,940 from mid-March for those who do not comply.

But minister Karoline Edtstadler said the law's 'encroachment of fundamental rights' could no longer be justified by the danger posed by the pandemic. "After consultations with the health minister, we have decided that we will of course follow what the (expert) commission has said," Edtstadler told reporters after a Cabinet meeting.

"We see no need to actually implement this compulsory vaccination due to the (Omicron) variant that we are predominantly experiencing here."

The highly-contagious variant is widely believed to be less severe than previous strains of the virus, and so far Austrian hospitals have been able to cope with a surge in cases.

This has led to the government to drop most coronavirus restrictions in recent weeks.

The government has stressed it needs to act flexibly in line with the epidemiological situation.

"Just like the virus keeps on changing, we need to be flexible and adaptable," Edtstadler said.

The decision to suspend the law will be reviewed in three months, said Johannes Rauch, who took over as health minister this week as the third since the start of the pandemic.

Tens of thousands have demonstrated in regular week-end rallies across the country since the government said last November that it would seek to force people to get jabbed in an effort to boost the staggering vaccination rate. But the rate of those considered fully protected against the virus has hardly changed in recent week.

AFP



Rescue volunteers patrol around the flooded houses in Windsor suburb of Sydney on Wednesday (AFP)

Protesters rally as Australian PM tours flood disaster zone

Sydney, Australia - Scores of protesters in a flood-wrecked city in eastern Australia vented their fury on Wednesday as Prime Minister Scott Morrison visited the disaster zone.

Demonstrators demanded more help and stronger climate action as Morrison toured Lismore, which endured some of the worst flooding in a near two-week deluge along the east coast that has killed at least 21 people.

"We need help!" protesters chanted as Morrison visited the city. Many held placards with messages blaming the climate crisis including: 'Coal and gas did this' and 'This is what climate change looks like'.

After the second major floods in a year, chunks of rubble and discarded, water-damaged furniture were piled high along the city's streets.

Many people had to clamber onto their corrugated metal roofs to escape the fast-rising water last week as floods peaked in the city in northern New South Wales.

Some waited for hours to be

rescued by locally improvised boat patrols, emergency services vessels or army helicopters as the waters surged around them.

Floodwaters across much of the east coast retreated as rainfall eased on Wednesday, but major flood warnings were still in force in some areas including at the Hawkesbury River west of Sydney.

'Hard to live in'

Evacuation orders affecting about 40,000 people in New South Wales were in force in the morning. More than 90,000 people had been allowed to return to their homes.

The death toll from the east coast deluge rose to 21 as police discovered the body of a 50-year-old delivery truck driver in floodwaters in Sydney's west.

Facing pointed questions at a news conference in the city, Morrison defended his government's climate record by stressing its commitment to achieving net zero greenhouse gas emissions by 2050.

AFP

'IS suicide bomber of Pakistan mosque was Afghan'

Peshawar, Pakistan - An Islamic State (IS) suicide bomber who killed 64 people at a Shiite mosque in northwest Pakistan last week was an Afghan exile who returned home to train for the attack, police said on Wednesday.

There have been warnings Afghanistan could become a recruiting ground and staging post for militants since the Taliban returned to power last year following the hasty withdrawal of US-led forces.

The Taliban have pledged they will not allow Afghan soil to be used to plot attacks on other nations, but last month the UN Security Council said 'terrorist groups enjoy greater freedom there than at any time in recent history'.

Two senior Pakistan police officials told AFP that the suicide bomber responsible for Friday's blast at the Shiite mosque in Peshawar had prepared the attack in Afghanistan.

It was claimed by IS, whose Is-



Shiite Muslims take part in a protest, against the attack on a Shiite mosque, in Peshawar on Sunday (AFP)

lamic State-Khorasan affiliate has been active for years in both Pakistan and Afghanistan.

The officials said the attacker was an Afghan national in his 30s who moved to Pakistan with

his family decades ago.

"The bomber went to Afghanistan, trained there and returned without informing his family," one of the senior police officials told AFP.

"Islamic State-Khorasan is becoming a strong threat for us, they are operating from Afghanistan but they have sleeping cells here," he added.

Taliban officials did not imme-

diately respond to requests for comment.

Police said they had killed three 'facilitators' of the attack in an overnight operation, and arrested 20 others suspected of involvement.

IS also claimed responsibility for what it said was a suicide blast on Tuesday that killed seven paramilitary troops near a site in southwestern Pakistan where the president had visited less than half an hour earlier.

Since the Taliban's return to power, Islamabad has acted as a key broker between the hardliners and the international community.

Pakistan was one of just three nations to officially recognise their first regime from 1996 to 2001.

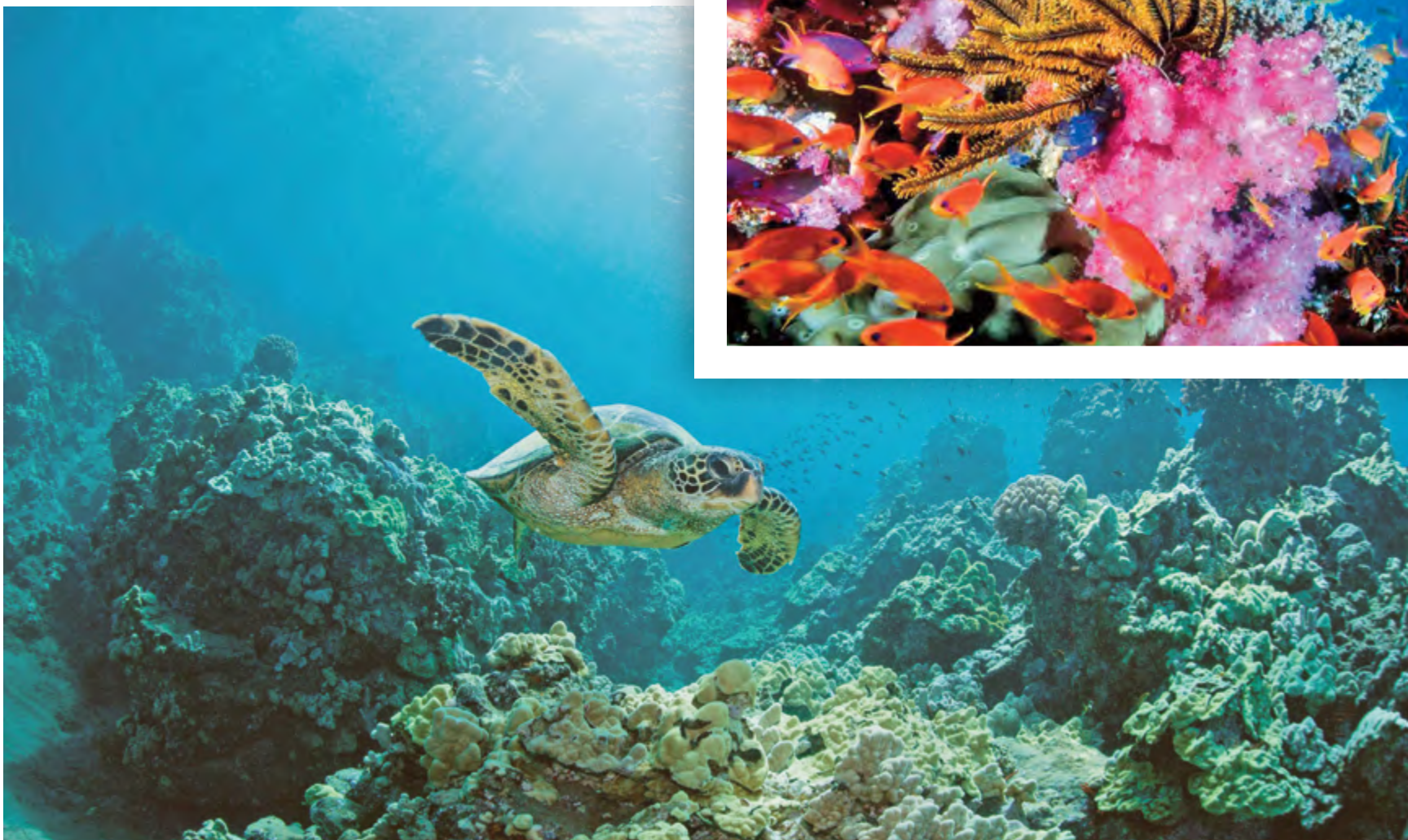
Its own version of the Taliban, the Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan, have also staged attacks from hideouts in Afghanistan, testing their current diplomatic relationship.

AFP

SOUNDSCAPES

mysteries on music

Scientists are calling for quaint underwater sounds to become more widely accessible



Underwater guitar

After many months investigating the strange seagrass croaker, Di Iorio and her colleagues were able to point the finger of suspicion at the scorpionfish. But they struggled to explain how it was making such an unusual noise - and it refused to perform for them.

They tried catching the fish and recording it in a carrier. They sunk sound equipment onto the seabed next to the fish. They even listened in to aquariums that contained scorpionfish. "Nothing," she said.

Eventually colleagues from Belgium took a camera that could record at low light and staked out some seagrass in Corsica. They were able to capture the kwa! kwa! sound as well as video of the fish making a shimmying motion.

Back in the lab, they dissected a scorpionfish and found that they have tendons strung along their bodies. Their hypothesis is that the fish contracts these muscles to produce the sound. "It's a guitar, an underwater guitar," said Di Iorio. But there are many more mysteries where that came from.

Di Iorio said, in the Mediterranean, up to 90 per cent of noises in a given recording might be unknown. "Every time we put a hydrophone in the water we're discovering new sounds," she added.

AFF

When marine researchers started recording sounds in the seagrass meadows of the Mediterranean Sea they picked up a mysterious sound, like the croak of a frog, that resounded within the dense foliage - and nowhere else.

"We recorded over 30 seagrasses and it was always there, and no-one knew the species that was producing this kwa! kwa! kwa!" said Lucia Di Iorio, a researcher in ecoacoustics at France's CEFREM. "It took us three years to find out the species that was producing that sound."

The melodious songs of whales might be familiar music of the world's underwater habitats but few people will have heard the hoarse growl of a streaked gurnard or the rhythmical drumbeat of a red piranha.

Scientists are now calling for those sounds and many thousands more to become more widely accessible. They say a global database of the booms, whistles and chatter of the sea will help to monitor diversity in aquatic life - and help put a name to mystery sounds like the one Di Iorio and her colleagues investigated.

Experts from nine countries are working to create what they have dubbed the Global Library of Underwater Biological Sounds or GLUBS.

This would gather together recordings held all over the world and open them up to artificial intelligence learning and mobile phone apps used by citizen scientists.

While experts have been listening to life underwater for decades, the team behind GLUBS say that audio collections tend to be narrowly focused on a specific species or geographical area.

Their initiative is part of burgeoning work on marine 'soundscapes' - collecting all the sounds in a particular area to discern information about species types, behaviour and overall biological diversity. Scientists say these soundscapes are a non-invasive way to 'spy on' life underwater.

In a paper published recently in the journal Frontiers in Ecology and Evolution, the GLUBS team said many fish and aquatic invertebrates are mainly nocturnal or hard to find, so acoustic monitoring could help conservation efforts.

"With biodiversity in decline worldwide and humans relentlessly altering underwater soundscapes, there is a need to document, quantify and understand the sources of underwater animal sounds before they potentially disappear," said lead author Miles Parsons of the Australian Institute of Marine Science.

Sonic communication

Scientists believe that all 126 marine mammal species emit sounds, as do at least 100 aquatic invertebrates and some 1,000 fish species.

The sounds can convey a wide range of messages - acting as a defence mechanism, to warn others of danger, as part of mating and reproduction - or just be the passive noise of an animal munching a meal.

Di Iorio, a co-author on the GLUBS paper, said while marine mammals, like humans, learn their language of communication, the sounds made by invertebrates and fish are 'just their anatomy'.

Many fish produce a distinctive drumming sound using a muscle that contracts around their swim bladder. "This dum-dum-dum-dum-dum, the frequency, the rhythm, and

With biodiversity in decline, there is a need to document, quantify and understand the sources of underwater animal sounds before they potentially disappear

JULIETTE LOTTHÉ DE THOMSON

the number of pulses vary from one species to another. It's very specific," Di Iorio said. "It's like a barcode."

Scientists can recognise families of fish just from these sounds, so with a global library they might be able to compare, for example, the thrumming calls of different grouper fish in the Mediterranean to those off the coast of Florida.

But another key use for the library, they say, could be to help identify the many unknown sounds in the world's seas and freshwater habitats.



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GREY CELLS



TRAIN

For Your Brain

Latest research suggests that physical activity, like running, may protect your brain as you age, enhancing learning and memory. There's no need for intense workouts, normal fitness activities can help your brain remain younger

It is wellknown that regular exercise and a healthy diet leads to a good level of fitness and overall good health. But, it may not be enough to maintain your health as you age... New research shows that physical activity could help protect cognitive abilities, and it doesn't have to be intense exercise to make an impact.

Exercise affects the brain in many ways. It increases heart rate, which pumps more oxygen to the brain. It aids the release of hormones which provide an excellent environment for the growth of brain cells. Exercise also promotes brain plasticity by stimulating growth of new connections between cells in many important cortical areas of the brain.

A study from Stockholm also showed that the antidepressant effect of running was also associated with more cell growth in the hippocampus, an area of the brain responsible for learning and memory. The study went as far as to say "Thus, suppression of cell proliferation in the hippocampus could constitute one of the mechanisms that underlie depression, and physical activity might be an efficient antidepressant."

According to a research paper published in www.sciencedaily.com, new research from the University of Georgia suggests that you need not start running marathons, just regular running is good enough to improve the growth of cells in the brain. Lead author of the study, Marissa Gogniat, from the Franklin College of Arts and Sciences, asserts, "If you get more steps, if you're moving around your environment a little bit more, that can be helpful to your brain health and keep you more independent as you age."

Exercise improves brain function

A study published in *Sport Sciences for Health* followed 51 older adults, tracking their physical activity and fitness measurements. The participants performed tests specifically designed to measure cognitive functioning and underwent MRIs to assess brain functioning.

They also wore a device that measured the intensity of the wearer's physical activity, number of steps taken and distance covered. The researchers assessed fitness through a six-minute walking test, during which participants walked as quickly as they could to cover the most distance possible within the time limit.

"We've always been told it's good to exercise, but I think this is some evidence that exercise can actually change your brain," Gogniat said. "And that impacts the way you're able to function in your daily life."



ally change your brain," Gogniat said. "And that impacts the way you're able to function in your daily life."

Brain networks improve with physical activity

The brain is made up of a bunch of distinct networks. Those networks are in constant communication, sending information to each other. But different parts of the brain are active at different times.

The network that is active when the body is at rest, for example, flips off when a person starts trying to complete a task. At that time, another network kicks on. While one of these networks is active, the other should be shut off. If it's not, that's a sign that a person's brain isn't functioning as well as it should be.

These networks are the key to being able to perform basic tasks in daily life, such as remembering

important information and exhibiting self-control. But as people age, these tasks often become more difficult.

This study was the first to examine how these networks interact with physical activity and fitness to impact how the brain functions.

"This paper is exciting because it gives us some evidence that when people whose brain networks aren't functioning optimally engage in physical activity, we see improvement in their executive function and their independence," Gogniat said.

"We're not saying you need to radically change your life. May be just take the stairs on the way to work. Stand up and walk around a little bit more. That's where you get the most bang for your buck, not crazy, high-intensity exercise," she argues.

The study was co-authored by Talia Robinson, Kharine Jean and Stephen Miller, from UGA's Department of Psychology.

10 BRAIN EXERCISES

Apart from physical activity to sharpen your brain, try these brain exercises to keep your grey cells in good shape:

01 Test your recall
Make a list — grocery items, things to do, or anything else that comes to mind — and memorise it. An hour or so later, see how many items you can recall.

02 Let the music play
Learn to play a musical instrument or join a choir. Studies show that learning something new and complex over a longer period of time is ideal for the aging mind.

03 Do math in your head
Figure out problems without the aid of a pencil, paper, or computer. You can make this more difficult — and athletic — by walking at the same time.

04 Take a cooking class
Learn how to cook a new cuisine. Cooking uses a number of senses — smell, touch, sight, and taste — which involve different parts of the brain.

05 Learn a foreign language
The listening and hearing involved stimulates the brain. What's more, a rich vocabulary has been linked to a reduced risk for cognitive decline.

06 Create word pictures
Visualise the spelling of a word in your head, and then try to think of other words that begin (or end) with the same two letters.

07 Draw a map from memory
After returning home from visiting a new place, try to draw a map of the area. Repeat this exercise each time you go somewhere new.

08 Challenge your taste buds
When eating, try to identify individual ingredients in your meal, including subtle herbs and spices.

09 Refine your hand-eye coordination
Take up a new hobby that involves fine motor skills, such as knitting, drawing, painting, or assembling a puzzle.

10 Learn a new sport
Start doing an athletic exercise that requires both mind and body, such as yoga, golf, or tennis.

FOOTBALL ROUND-UP



Inter Milan's Croatian midfielder Ivan Perisic (R) vies with Liverpool's Egyptian midfielder Mohamed Salah during their UEFA Champions League match (AFP)

Liverpool edge through despite defeat to Inter

Liverpool, United Kingdom - Mohamed Salah admitted Liverpool might have suffered from complacency as they crept into a fourth Champions League quarter-final in five years despite a rare 1-0 defeat at Anfield to Inter Milan on Tuesday.

The Italian champions were unable to scale the mountain they had to climb after losing the first leg 2-0 at home three weeks ago despite Lautaro Martinez's sensational strike into the top corner just after the hour mark.

Alexis Sanchez's red card shortly afterwards punctured any Inter momentum and Liverpool comfortably held out with the extra man despite slipping to just a third defeat in 44 games in all competitions this season.

The Reds had been on a 12-game winning run to keep alive their hopes of a historic quadruple of trophies.

After lifting the League Cup last month, Jurgen Klopp's men are now into the last eight of both the Champions League and FA Cup and have a game in hand to cut Manchester City's six-point lead at the top of the Premier League.

And Salah hopes they can learn from a rare off night in front of goal as they failed to score for just the fourth time this season.

"We lost the game and maybe that will give us a push," said the Egyptian, who hit the post twice in the second half with glorious chances.

"Maybe in the back of our

minds we were overconfident. It's a good game for us to learn from."

Inter were left to rue conceding two late goals in Milan three

Maybe in the back of our minds we were overconfident. It's a good game for us to learn from

MOHAMED SALAH

weeks ago after they had enjoyed the better of the game for much of the first leg.

"We've got to this stage for

the first time in 10 years. We played against the strongest team in Europe in this time & were their equals," said Inter boss Simone Inzaghi.

"Sometimes it just takes a single episode to change the course of a game."

The Italian champions again controlled the first half, but Liverpool had the better chances as Joel Matip crashed a header off the bar before, from the resulting corner, Virgil Van Dijk's goalbound effort was deflected wide.

After a subdued first 45 minutes, Liverpool were fired up by Klopp at the break and should have taken the lead on the night minutes after the restart when Salah turned a loose ball inside

the box onto the post.

At the other end, Martinez looked to have wasted the chance to get Inter back in the tie when he dragged a shot wide from the edge of the area.

But the Argentine made amends in spectacular fashion when he arrowed an effort into the top corner from outside the box on 62 minutes.

Inter's joy lasted barely a minute before they were reduced to 10 men by Sanchez's ill-discipline.

The Chilean had been lucky to escape with just a yellow card for a dangerous lunge on Thiago Alcantara just before half-time and stupidly dived in on Fabinho to earn a second yellow.

AFP

Bayern blast into Champions League quarterfinals

Munich, Germany - Robert Lewandowski scored a record-breaking 11-minute hat-trick to send Bayern Munich sailing into the Champions League quarterfinals with a 7-1 win at home to Red Bull Salzburg on Tuesday.

The Polish striker had three goals to his name by the 23rd minute - the earliest anyone has ever completed a hat-trick in a Champions League game - as Bayern shook off their early nerves to crush Salzburg.

"This was definitely a statement from us, and it gives us hope that there is more like this to come," Bayern captain Manuel Neuer told Amazon Prime after his side reached the last eight for a record 20th time.

Austrian champions Salzburg had held Bayern to a 1-1 draw in the first leg, but their hopes of an upset in Munich were left in tatters

when Lewandowski scored a tap-in and two penalties to send Bayern on their way to a famous victory.

With just ten minutes and 27 seconds between Lewandowski's first and third goals, it was the fastest of the six hat-tricks the Pole has now scored in the Champions League.

"We knew we had to attack the box early today and get Lewy into the game, because he is so hard to defend against," said Thomas Mueller.

"We all knew how important this game was today. If we had been knocked out, it would have been a very sad next three months for us," he added.

Bayern started with an attack-heavy 3-5-2, but they looked nervy at the back and there were chances at both ends in the opening minutes.

AFP



Bayern Munich's Polish striker Robert Lewandowski gestures as he plays the ball during the match against Salzburg in Munich (PDF)

Five-goal Fulham too strong for Swansea in English Championship

London, United Kingdom - Championship leaders Fulham took another stride towards promotion to the Premier League with a 5-1 win away to Swansea on Tuesday.

Victory left the Cottagers, relegated from the lucrative English top flight last season, 14 points clear of second-placed Bournemouth, albeit the Cherries have two games in hand.

Only the top two clubs at the end of the regular season are guaranteed promotion to the Premier League.

London club Fulham, fresh from a 2-0 win over promotion rivals Blackburn Rovers last weekend, found themselves with a man advantage in south Wales

when Swansea defender Ryan Manning received a straight red card for a foul on Harry Wilson shortly before half-time.

Wilson then helped Fulham go ahead early in the second half when his cross allowed Aleksandar Mitrovic to score his 35th league goal of the season.

An own-goal from Swansea's Ben Cabango saw Fulham double their lead before Bobby Decordova-Reid headed in to make it 3-0 with 17 minutes left.

Joel Piroe pulled a goal back for Swansea, only for Fulham to seal an emphatic win thanks to two goals late on from on-loan Liverpool defender Neco Williams.

Bournemouth endured a frus-



Fulham took another stride towards promotion to the Premier League with a 5-1 win away to Swansea.

trating evening after being held to a 1-1 draw by bottom-of-the-table Peterborough.

They fell behind to a goal from Jack Marriott on the half hour and although the Cherries were level early in the second period through Ryan Christie but could not press on.

Sheffield United overwhelmed play-off rivals Middlesbrough 4-1 as former Blades manager Chris Wilder suffered a thumping defeat on his return to Bramall Lane. Sander Berge gave Sheffield United a 23rd-minute lead before Blades captain Billy Sharp soon made it 2-0 with his 15th goal of the campaign.

Jack Robinson volleyed in a third on the hour before Boro

substitute Folarin Balogun reduced the deficit in the 62nd minute with his first goal since a loan move from Arsenal.

Morgan Gibbs-White, however, put the result beyond doubt 11 minutes from time as Sheffield United moved up to fifth and Boro dropped out of the top six.

Luton continued their play-off push with a 1-0 win at Coventry while Blackburn held in-form Millwall to a goalless draw at Ewood Park that ended the Lions' five-match winning streak.

Relegation-threatened Barnsley's hopes of a valuable win were dashed by a stoppage-time equaliser in a 1-1 draw at home to Stoke.

AFP

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Bairstow's 140 anchors England recovery after dismal start

ENGALND VS WEST INDIES
1ST TEST

Antigua and Barbuda - Jonny Bairstow was last out for 140 as England extended their first innings by another 43 runs to be dismissed for 311 on the second morning of the first Test against the West Indies in Antigua on Wednesday.

Jayden Seales struck twice in three balls to finish with the best innings figures of four for 81 for the home side, while fellow fast bowler Alzarri Joseph finally enjoyed some success with the last two wickets of the innings half an hour before lunch.

West Indies openers Kraigg Brathwaite and John Campbell then got off to a bright start in reply, reaching 44 without loss off 10 overs.

Bairstow's controlled innings ended via a well-judged catch by Jason Holder running back from slip to short third-man, as the right-hander sliced an attempted heave to the on-side.

As at the end of the first day when he finished unbeaten on 109, he left the field to a standing ovation from the strong contingent of English supporters along with his appreciative teammates.

His six-and-a-half hour occupation of the crease was highlighted by 21 fours off 259 deliveries.

Resuming at the overnight position of 268 for six, Bairstow and Chris Woakes extended their seventh-wicket partnership by another 17 runs to 71 when Seales struck.

One of the few England players to emerge with any credit from an abysmal Ashes cam-

paign which ended in Australia just two months earlier, the 32-year-old Yorkshireman displayed the resolve which earned him a century in his previous Test at the Sydney Cricket Ground.

Bairstow received invaluable support from Ben Stokes (36) in putting on 67 for the fifth wicket to trigger the resistance.

That was followed by an even more productive association with Ben Foakes (42) as 99 runs were added for the sixth wicket before another all-rounder Chris Woakes (24 not out) ensured the Englishmen capitalised on a tiring Caribbean side with an unbroken seventh-wicket stand already worth 54 runs.

"We've spoken about partnerships and how invaluable they can be, not just up at the top but throughout the order and it's very important for us to continue that effort tomorrow," said Bairstow at the end of the first day.

"I think there's plenty still in it (for the bowlers) so we have to continue to bat well again."

In stark contrast to the opening exchanges when the West Indies seemed capable of doing no wrong, the next two sessions of the day belonged to the visitors as 211 runs were added for the loss of just two more wickets.

Even the advent of the second new ball in the last half-hour of the first day failed to dent the resolve of Bairstow and Woakes as pacers Kemar Roach, Jayden Seales and former captain Jason Holder, who had taken two wickets each earlier, posed little threat to the well-set pairing.



Jonny Bairstow, of England, celebrates his century during the first day of the 1st Test between England and West Indies at the Vivian Richards Cricket Stadium in North Sound, Antigua and Barbuda, on March 8 (AFP)

On the second day, replacing senior pacer Kemar Roach who opened the morning's bowling effort with Holder, the 20-year-old produced a lifting delivery which Woakes gloved to wicket-keeper Joshua da Silva and departed for 28.

He was joined in the pavilion two balls later by Craig Overton as the tail-ender pushed off his hip to Nkrumah Bonner at short-leg before he had scored.

Bairstow went into limited-overs mode in seeking to eke out as many runs as he could, putting on 20 with Mark Wood until an attempted pull by the lower-order player off Joseph resulted in a comfortable catch for Veerasammy Permaul at cover.

Frustrated through the first day when he went wicketless, Joseph then had even more reason to force a smile when Bairstow's determined effort ended, the excellence of Holder's catch coming in sharp contrast to much of the West Indies' catching through the innings.

AFP

SCOREBOARD		
ENGLAND 1 ST INNINGS		
Alex Lees	lbw b Roach	4
Zak Crawley	c J Da Silva b Seales	8
Joe Root (c)	b Roach	13
Dan Lawrence	c Blackwood b Holder	20
Ben Stokes	b Seales	36
J Bairstow	c Holder b Joseph	140
B Foakes	lbw b Holder	42
Chris Woakes	c Da Silva b Seales	28
Craig Overton	c Bonner b Seales	0
Mark Wood	c Permaul b Joseph	1
Jack Leach	not out	4
Extras:	(b 1, lb 9, nb 5)	15
TOTAL:	(100.3 Ov, RR: 3.09)	311
Fall of wickets:	1-12, 2-17, 3-27, 4-48, 5-115, 6-214, 7-285, 8-285, 9-305, 10-311	
Bowling:	K Roach 21-3-86-2, J Seales 22-6-79-4, J Holder 21-11-24-2, A Joseph 20-3-2-70-2, V Permaul 13-4-35-0, K Brathwaite 3-1-7-0-2	



Shane Warne

Shane Warne state funeral set for March 30 at MCG

Sydney, Australia - Australian cricket superstar Shane Warne will be honoured with a state funeral at the Melbourne Cricket Ground on the evening of March 30, the Victorian state government said Wednesday.

Warne died at the age of 52 on the Thai holiday island of Koh Samui on Friday. His body is to be repatriated. An autopsy found he had died of natural causes following a reported heart attack.

A state funeral for the legendary leg-spinner will be held at the Melbourne Cricket Ground, with tickets open to the public, said a statement by the Victorian government.

Warne "didn't just inspire a cricketing generation - he defined it," it said.

Further details were still being finalised, the state government added.

"There's nowhere in the world more appropriate to farewell 'Wannie' than the 'G'," said Victorian Premier Daniel Andrews.

AFP

Djokovic entered on Indian Wells draw but participation status unclear

Indian Wells, United States - Novak Djokovic was entered into the draw for this week's ATP/WTN Indian Wells tournament on Tuesday but it is unclear whether he will take part in the tournament, organisers said.

A statement from tournament organisers said officials were in contact with Djokovic's team to determine whether he would play in California or even be allowed to enter the United States because he has not been vaccinated against the coronavirus. "Novak Djokovic is on the tournament entry list, and therefore is placed into the draw today," tournament chiefs said.

"We are currently in communication with his team; however, it has not been determined if he will participate in the event by getting CDC approval to enter the country."

Djokovic is a five-time champion at Indian Wells, where organisers have said



Novak Djokovic

proof of full vaccination will be required for spectator entry into the grounds for the tournament in the California desert.

Under US government regulations, all non-US citizen travellers entering the US must be vaccinated against COVID-19.

Djokovic was barred from the Australian Open in January as he did not meet requirements for unvaccinated travellers trying to enter the nation.

Djokovic's visa was eventually canceled and, after a legal appeal failed, he departed without playing.

While Djokovic's status remains up in the air, Tuesday's draw raised the possibility of another blockbuster showdown between newly minted world number one Daniil Medvedev and 21-time Grand Slam champion Rafael Nadal.

AFP

Oman Cricket announces start date for D10 League

Muscat - Oman Cricket on Wednesday announced that the long-awaited inaugural edition of the D10 league in partnership with ITW ProdG, which will commence on March 12, 2022.

All the matches will be played on Turf 1 of the Oman Cricket Academy Ground with a round-robin format employed for the entire league stage.

Speaking on the launch, Pankaj Khimji, Chairman of Oman Cricket said, "ITW and Oman Cricket had a phenomenal run with the D20 league. The tournament far exceeded our expectations and now we feel very excited for the forthcoming D10 edition, which I'm sure will surpass expectations even further - both from the players' perspective and from the team owners' perspective.

"We, at Oman Cricket, are

thrilled to experiment with various new forms of local leagues and I wish everyone all the very best."

The D10 tournament will be contested by the same eight teams that took part in the D20 tournament last December - namely Qurum Thunders, Amarat Royals, Azabiba XI, Bousher Busters, Khuwair Warriors, Ghubrah Giants, Darsait Titans and the winners Ruwi Rangers. The point of major difference as the name suggests, will be the format, with each innings consisting of 10 overs instead of 20.

All the 35 games of the D10 league will be shown live on FanCode - the destination for sports fans in India. In addition, it will also be carried by Sports Eye (a regional cricket broadcasting portal) and other premium platforms globally.



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