

► NEWS BRIEF

OMAN CONDEMNS TERRORIST ATTACK IN EGYPT

Muscat - Oman has condemned the terrorist attack that targeted Egyptian Armed Forces west of Sinai in Egypt on Saturday.

A statement issued by the Foreign Ministry said, 'The ministry expresses the Sultanate of Oman's solidarity with the sisterly Arab Republic of Egypt and its support for the measures it is taking to maintain its security and stability. The terrorist attack targeted one of the water pumping stations which is located west of Sinai. It resulted in the death and injury of a number of members of the Egyptian Armed Forces.'

The ministry expressed its sincere condolences and sympathy to the families of the victims and to the government and people of Egypt, wishing the injured a speedy recovery.

Student startup creates crowdfunding platform

Our Correspondent
Muscat

Eleven Omani students have created the first Omani platform to facilitate crowdfunding and help entrepreneurs and businesses to source investments.

Named Semsar, the startup by students of University of Technology and Applied Sciences in Sohar, was recently showcased at the Injaz Oman exhibition.

Ibtihal al Yahmadiyah, one of the members of the startup, informed that the platform aims to create an environment suitable for investment and facilitate the investment process, linking entrepreneurs and investors in an easy and smooth manner.

"Semsar operates on a crowdfunding system that was approved in Oman in November 2021," Ibtihal said.

She described it as the first Omani platform facilitating



crowdfunding with an all-Omani staff and management team. "Semsar provides strong support for sourcing funds and works in several fields, including biotechnology, artificial intelligence, finance, entertainment, industry, retail, logistics, healthcare, education, commercial technology

and hospitality." The platform targets entrepreneurs looking to raise capital, investors who want to put their money in successful projects, as well as jobseekers eager to work in the field of investment and entrepreneurship. "The platform will soon be

available on mobile phones, and the process of completing investment operations will be 100 per cent electronic without human intervention. We are also working on being a finance source for commercial projects in Oman and the other Gulf countries," Ibtihal said.

TRA to measure fixed broadband performance

Our Correspondent
Muscat

The Telecommunications Regulatory Authority (TRA) plans to measure the performance of fixed broadband services in the sultanate.

To this end, the authority is inviting qualified companies to submit bids for the tender 'Fixed Broadband Performance Measurement Programme'.

Technical and financial proposals are to be submitted separately, TRA stated in the tender document.

The last date for submission of bids is May 17.

According to Speedtest by Ookla, a world leader in analysis of Internet access performance metrics, Oman's fixed broadband is ranked 77th in the world with a download speed of 43.91Mbps and upload speed of 17.30Mbps.

Earlier in February this year,

TRA and Ookla had a collaborative arrangement as part of the authority's aim to leverage the latest technologies to gauge mobile and fixed broadband performance across Oman.

The collaboration will help drive network improvements in Oman, delivering significant new value to local mobile operators who build the networks and consumers who rely on them.

"Ookla's unique data insights will help TRA identify weak spots and consequently guide network operators to improve their networks, in turn creating a better experience for people in Oman," said Ahmed Hassan al Haddabi, executive manager of TRA's Strategic Planning Unit.

"We look forward to leveraging Ookla's data to assist us in making informed decisions to advance Oman's ranking internationally in support of the government's Oman Vision 2040."

BAGGING DATES TO KEEP CITY CLEAN



At the peak of summer, date fruits ripen and fall to the ground, staining footpaths. To prevent this, Muscat Municipality has contracted a landscaping company and launched a drive across Muscat to bag the fruits on palm trees to keep the city clean (Syed Fasiuddin/Muscat Daily)

ROP, family of Omani citizen appeal for information on missing person

Our Correspondent
Muscat

Royal Oman Police (ROP) and the family of Mohammed bin Nasser bin Mohammed al Maamari from the wilayat of Sur are seeking information on him. Maamari has been missing since April 28.

Speaking to *Muscat Daily*, Maamari's father said, "My son, 30 years old, went out in his rubber boat to the sea on April 28.



Mohammed al Maamari

He has not returned until now. He loves to fish and knows diving and swimming well. I request anyone with any information on his whereabouts to contact us."

Maamari's father can be contacted on 99810454/ 92117266.

ROP has also called on all to assist in locating Maamari. 'Those who know anything about him are kindly requested to contact the Police Operations Centre at 9999 or the nearest police station,' ROP stated.

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E-registration for Hajj starts today: MARA

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Schools solar energy projects save 40% in electricity bills

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Oman-India bilateral trade surges in 2021

FIFA World Cup Trophy to arrive in Oman on May 13

Our Correspondent
Muscat

As part of the FIFA World Cup Trophy Tour, the iconic trophy will arrive in Oman on May 13, according to Oman Football Association.

A statement issued by the association said, 'For the first time in its history, the FIFA World Cup Trophy will come to Oman on May 13. Fans across the sultanate will be able to see the renowned trophy.'

The association urged football fans not to miss the opportunity 'to get up close and personal with the original trophy and click pictures'.

Many enthusiasts welcomed the announcement. Speaking to *Muscat Daily*, Marhoon al Saidi, a private sector employee, said, "Football is an industry now, and the sultanate hosting the trophy is an opportunity for the world to learn about Oman's civilisation and its archaeological sites. We must take advantage of this opportunity to promote Oman in terms of tourism and the economy by attracting investors and



The tour of the trophy in Oman is a historic moment and evidence of the sultanate's global standing

ALI AL SHEYADI

increasing national income.' Sultan al Rawahi, a private sector employee, said, "I am very happy and excited to see the World Cup Trophy and take photos with it. I hope the concerned authorities take advantage of this opportunity to promote Oman." According to Rawahi, Oman

should host big ticket sporting and cultural events in the future. "I hope that we will take advantage of the khareef season in Salalah to host a friendly international match - maybe between France and Spain - to promote Omani tourism."

Ali al Sheyadi, former captain of Suwaiq's Muntaser, described the tour of the trophy in Oman as a 'historic moment and evidence of the sultanate's global standing'.

"We must take advantage of this moment to promote Oman," Sheyadi said.

"Hosting the trophy is recognition of the fact that the sultanate is able to organise big tourism and sports events. The sultanate has already succeeded in organising many world sailing and equestrian championships. I hope we host a major event in football too."

The 2022 World Cup in Qatar will kick off on November 21 at the Al Thumama Stadium when Senegal takes on the Netherlands in a Group A fixture. Thirty-two teams will compete in eight groups.

Announcement

Due to the expiry of all VAT registration dates, the Tax Authority would like to draw the attention of those who are subject to VAT whose debts exceed the amount of Rial Omani thirty eight thousand and five hundred (RO 38,500), with the importance of speeding up registration through the electronic portal of the Tax Authority: www.taxoman.gov.om. Note that the registered taxpayers have the right to impose a tax and deduct the income tax, and they are entitled for a refund of the tax in some cases in accordance with the provisions of the Value Added Tax Law.

omantax www.taxoman.gov.om 24746996



The Directors' Report to the Shareholders on Condensed Interim Financial Information

Dear Shareholders

The Board of Directors (hereinafter referred to as 'the Board') of Takaful Oman Insurance S.A.O.G (hereinafter referred to as 'the company'), are pleased to present before you the unaudited financial statements of the Company for the three months ended March 31, 2022.

Financial Highlights:

Particulars		Actual IQ22	Actual IQ21	Variance Amount	%
Participants	Gross contributions	9,900,886	9,021,427	879,459	10%
	Net retained contributions	5,157,496	4,132,297	1,025,199	25%
	Net underwriting results	1,335,668	127,035	1,208,633	951%
	Investment & other income	78,408	36,563	41,845	114%
	Deficit from takaful operations	(56,778)	(1,468,693)	1,411,916	96%
Shareholders	Wakala Fees	1,463,094	1,623,857	(160,763)	-10%
	Investment & other income	128,744	162,272	(33,528)	-21%
	Profit after tax	49,667	660,549	(610,882)	-92%
	Total Comprehensive income	90,314	685,275	(594,961)	-87%
	Cumulative financial results	33,537	(783,418)	816,955	N/A

Performance Review:

During this quarter ended March 31, 2022, The Company performed to grow its top line by 10% registering Gross contributions of RO 9.9 million (IQ21: 9.0 million). It merits highlighting that the company stands at being the 4th largest amongst the listed insurers in Oman by Gross contributions during this given period. Medical LOB was the strongest contributor to the top line, followed by Life LOB during this period. The Company has recorded a growth of 25% in the Net retained contributions while retention ratios have increased to 52% (IQ21: 46%) this period.

Net loss incurred (NLI) decreased by 22% as compared to IQ21 due to prudent underwriting and robust claims management. While Net underwriting results have improved as compared to IQ21 mainly due to a decrease in NLI and the commission expenses charged to the Shareholders' fund. This has resulted in a decrease in Deficit from takaful operations which currently stands at RO 0.06 million as compared to RO 1.47 million in IQ21.

The Shareholders' fund top line is derived from the Wakala fees. During IQ22, the shareholders' fund recorded Wakala fees of RO 1.46 million (IQ21: 1.62 million), registering a decline of 10% due to the reduction of Wakala fees rate w.e.f. 11th Feb 22 from 18% to 13% following compliance with CMA guidelines.

The Shareholders' fund has reported a profit after tax of RO 0.09 million (IQ21: RO 0.69 million), further earnings per share stand at RO 0.0005 (IQ21: 0.0066 per share).

Investment Portfolio & Income

The company has a strong investment portfolio of RO 13.6 million in the Shareholders' Fund and RO 3.0 million in the Participants' Fund. 88% of the total combined investment portfolio of RO 16.6 is placed as Wakala Deposits with reputed Dedicated Islamic Banks and Islamic windows of commercial banks.

The company has generated an investment income of RO 0.11 million from the Shareholders' fund and 0.04 million from the Participants' fund in the IQ22.

Outlook:

The Company is now set on the path of success with resilient initiatives by the present management team of experienced individuals. We are optimistic to continue to focus on profitable growth. Moreover, through efficient underwriting, robust Re-takaful arrangements, up-scaling workforce, introducing of innovative products, enabling digitalization, and ensuring a customer-centric approach our Company aims to take advantage of available opportunities and progress rapidly.

Acknowledgment

The Board wishes to extend their sincere gratitude to His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tariq al Said for his exceptional leadership and vision.

The Board would like to express their deep appreciation to the shareholders who have shown continued confidence in the Company and its management team. They also like to express their gratitude to the Capital Market Authority (CMA), Muscat Stock Exchange (MSX), the Re-Takaful operators, and all the Participants for their continued guidance and support.

In addition, The Board wishes to place on record their sincere appreciation and gratitude for the commitment, dedication, and innovative thinking put in by every member of our Takaful Oman family, with full confidence that they will continue to do so in the future.

On behalf of the Board of Directors

Mr. Mohammed Abdullah Al-Khonji
Chairman of the Board.

Condensed consolidated interim statement of shareholders' comprehensive income for the period ended 31 March 2022 (Unaudited)		
	2022 RO	2021 RO
Wakala fees	1,463,094	1,623,857
Investment and other income	128,744	162,272
	1,591,838	1,786,129
General and administrative expenses	(903,767)	(793,624)
Ijarah financing expense	(14,170)	(17,163)
Wakala financing expense	(81,144)	-
Acquisition cost	(544,345)	(314,793)
Profit before taxation	48,412	660,549
Taxation	1,255	-
Profit for the period	49,667	660,549
Other comprehensive income		
Items that may be reclassified to profit or loss		
Changes in fair value of financial asset at fair value through equity	40,647	24,726
Total other comprehensive income	40,647	24,726
Total comprehensive income for the period	90,314	685,275
Earnings per share attributable to shareholders - basic and diluted	0.0005	0.0066

Note: The complete accounts will be delivered or sent by mail to any shareholder who requests them, in either Arabic or English as requested, within seven days of receipt of the request. Requests to be sent to the following address:

Takaful Oman Insurance SAOG,
P.O. BOX 207, Postal Code 134,
Bareeq Al Shatti, Sultanate of Oman
Tel.: 00968 22303000, Fax: 00968 24699511

Condensed consolidated interim statement of financial position as at 31 March 2022 (Unaudited)				
	Shareholders RO	General Takaful RO	Participants 2022 Family Takaful RO	Total RO
ASSETS				
Cash and bank balances	968,810	83,460	45,364	128,824
Financial asset at fair value through equity	556,542	-	-	-
Receivable from participants' fund	16,792,494	-	-	-
Takaful balance receivables	-	6,280,425	1,763,946	8,044,371
Other receivables and prepayments	1,476,641	259,261	24,987	284,248
Retakaful contract assets	-	12,736,767	5,791,880	18,528,647
Deferred policy acquisition costs	619,025	-	-	-
Wakala bank deposits	11,519,000	1,500,000	1,500,000	3,000,000
Investment carried at amortised cost	1,500,000	-	-	-
Property and equipment	299,022	-	-	-
Intangible assets	352,150	-	-	-
Deferred tax asset	1,048,899	-	-	-
Right of use assets	1,432,257	-	-	-
Total assets	36,564,840	23,153,221	12,417,380	35,570,601
LIABILITIES, PARTICIPANTS' FUND AND EQUITY				
Liabilities				
Takaful contract liabilities	-	24,614,974	7,256,612	31,871,586
Payable to shareholders' fund	-	11,505,259	5,287,235	16,792,494
Payable to retakaful	-	5,063,403	1,169,471	4,232,874
Accounts and other payables	369,986	3,976,167	2,701,617	6,677,784
Wakala financing	6,090,037	-	-	-
Deferred income from retakaful contracts	-	22,923	3,275	26,198
Employees' end of service benefits	59,206	-	-	-
Ijarah liabilities	915,131	-	-	-
Total liabilities	7,434,360	43,182,726	16,418,210	59,600,936
Participants fund				
Deficit in participant's funds	-	(20,029,505)	(4,000,830)	(24,030,335)
Equity				
Capital and reserves				
Share capital	10,000,000	-	-	-
Legal reserve	1,436,740	-	-	-
Investment fair value reserve	115,151	-	-	-
Retained earnings	11,578,589	-	-	-
Total equity attributable to Shareholders'	23,130,480	-	-	-
Perpetual Sukuk eligible as additional capital	6,000,000	-	-	-
Total equity	29,130,480	-	-	-
Total liabilities, participants fund and equity	36,564,840	23,153,221	12,417,380	35,570,601
Net assets per share attributable to shareholders	0.231			

Condensed consolidated interim statement of financial position as at 31 December 2021 (Audited)				
	Share holders RO	General Takaful RO	Participants 2021 Family Takaful RO	Total RO
ASSETS				
Cash and bank balances	326,860	195,897	158,569	354,466
Financial asset at fair value through equity	515,895	-	-	-
Receivable from participants' fund	15,598,047	-	-	-
Takaful balance receivables	-	3,142,020	256,513	3,398,533
Retakaful balance receivables	-	2,313,239	3,579,209	5,892,448
Other receivables and prepayments	1,451,504	377,334	6,574	383,908
Retakaful contract assets	-	14,895,827	3,917,157	18,812,984
Deferred policy acquisition costs	479,051	-	-	-
Wakala bank deposits	11,519,000	1,500,000	1,500,000	3,000,000
Investment carried at amortised cost	1,500,000	-	-	-
Property and equipment	336,338	-	-	-
Intangible assets	373,594	-	-	-
Deferred tax asset	1,048,899	-	-	-
Right of use assets	1,449,240	-	-	-
Total assets	34,598,428	22,424,317	9,418,022	31,842,339
LIABILITIES, PARTICIPANTS' FUND AND EQUITY				
Liabilities				
Takaful contract liabilities	-	25,604,947	5,250,468	30,855,415
Payable to shareholders' fund	-	12,007,526	3,590,521	15,598,047
Payable to retakaful	-	2,688,369	2,350,130	5,038,499
Accounts and other payables	698,930	2,054,008	2,216,162	4,270,170
Wakala financing	3,581,956	-	-	-
Deferred income from retakaful contracts	-	47,009	6,756	53,765
Employees' end of service benefits	74,385	-	-	-
Ijarah liabilities	947,292	-	-	-
Total liabilities	5,302,563	42,401,859	13,414,037	55,815,896
Participants fund				
Deficit in participant's funds	-	(19,977,542)	(3,996,015)	(23,973,557)
Equity				
Capital and reserves				
Share capital	10,000,000	-	-	-
Legal reserve	1,436,739	-	-	-
Investment fair value reserve	74,505	-	-	-
Retained earnings	11,784,621	-	-	-
Total equity attributable to Shareholders'	23,295,865	-	-	-
Perpetual Sukuk eligible as additional capital	6,000,000	-	-	-
Total equity	29,295,865	-	-	-
Total liabilities, participants fund and equity	34,598,428	22,424,317	9,418,022	31,842,339
Net assets per share attributable to shareholders	0.233			

Condensed consolidated interim statement of participants' revenues and expenses for the period ended 31 March 2022 (Unaudited)			
	General Takaful RO	2022 Family Takaful RO	Total RO
Takaful revenue			
Gross contributions	6,414,400	3,486,486	9,900,886
Contributions ceded to retakaful	(2,052,048)	(2,691,342)	(4,743,390)
Net retained contributions	4,362,352	795,144	5,157,496
Movement in unearned contribution reserve - net	(2,110,110)	167,113	(1,942,997)
Income from retakaful contracts	51,039	35,785	86,824
Total takaful revenue	2,303,281	998,042	3,301,323
Takaful expenses			
Gross claims settled	(6,195,225)	(1,740,433)	(7,935,658)
Retakaful share in claim settled	3,779,951	1,547,563	5,327,514
Net claims settled	(2,415,274)	(192,870)	(2,608,144)
Movement in outstanding claims reserve - net	572,620	(170,224)	402,396
Movement in other reserves	368,403	(128,310)	240,093
Net claims incurred	(1,474,251)	(491,404)	(1,965,655)
Other takaful expenses	(5,030)	(2,729)	(7,759)
Wakala fee expense	(941,360)	(521,734)	(1,463,094)
Total takaful expenses	(2,420,641)	(1,015,867)	(3,436,508)
Profit on Wakala deposit	24,920	13,545	38,465
Other income / (Expenses)	40,477	(535)	39,942
Deficit from takaful operations	(51,963)	(4,815)	(56,778)
		2021	
Takaful revenue			
Gross contributions	7,086,263	1,935,164	9,021,427
Contributions ceded to retakaful	(3,398,932)	(1,490,198)	(4,889,130)
Net retained contributions	3,687,331	444,966	4,132,297
Movement in unearned contribution reserve - net	(953,635)	(13,109)	(966,744)
Income from retakaful contracts	76,677	20,691	97,368
Total takaful revenue	2,810,373	452,548	3,262,921
Takaful expenses			
Gross claims settled	(3,237,691)	(1,474,088)	(4,711,779)
Retakaful share in claim settled	1,078,832	1,290,545	2,369,377
Net claims settled	(2,158,859)	(183,543)	(2,342,402)
Movement in outstanding claims reserve - net	(67,274)	(108,883)	(176,157)
Movement in other reserves	-	-	-
Net claims incurred	(2,226,133)	(292,426)	(2,518,559)
Acquisition costs amortised during the period	(486,137)	(131,901)	(617,327)
Other takaful expenses	(7,188)	(1,246)	(8,434)
Wakala fees expense	(1,275,528)	(348,329)	(1,623,857)
Total takaful expenses	(3,994,986)	(773,191)	(4,768,177)
Other income	36,563	-	36,563
Deficit from takaful operations	(1,148,050)	(320,643)	(1,468,693)

E-registration for Hajj starts today



Our Correspondent Muscat

The Ministry of Awqaf and Religious Affairs (MARA) has announced that citizens and residents of Oman who wish to perform Hajj this year can register starting from May 9 to 14 via the electronic system for pilgrims.

The ministry stated that registration will be done through the

link www.hajj.om directly during the specified period. The system provides three ways for direct registration - by entering civil number, mobile number or ID card, if the phone number and personal ID card are supported by the electronic PKI.

MARA had earlier announced that Oman's quota for this year's Hajj is 6,338 pilgrims, a reduction of 45 per cent due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

SAYYID BADR RECEIVES 5 ENVOYS



H E Sayyid Badr al Busaidi, Foreign Minister, welcomed ambassadors of Switzerland, Angola, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Armenia and Côte d'Ivoire to Oman and received copies of their credentials on Sunday. H E Sayyid Badr wished the envoys success in performing their duties, and further progress and development in the bilateral relations between Oman and their respective countries (Supplied photo)

Solar energy projects in schools save 40% in electricity bills

Our Correspondent Muscat

As part of its efforts to develop schools and spread awareness on the importance of clean energy, the Ministry of Education (MOE) has installed more than 500 solar panels in two schools in Buraimi governorate.

Asim bin Abdullah al Alawi, from the Projects Department of MOE, informed that the solar energy project in Buraimi is important for the ministry, having initiated it in 2017.

A total of 246 solar panels were installed on car park shades, with a production capacity of 106kW, in the Sultanate School, and 300 panels, with production capacity of 120kW, in

Sultan Qaboos School.

The installed panels are of different shapes and sizes, equipped with highly efficient energy-generation systems and the ability to self-clean.

According to Alawi, the solar energy projects in schools have contributed to a 40 per cent reduction in electricity bills, while increasing students' awareness of the importance of renewable energy, in addition to creating job opportunities for entrepreneurs who own small and medium enterprises.

"The solar energy projects implemented by the ministry in various governorates aim to diversify clean energy sources in cooperation with local companies," Alawi added.

COVID-19 UPDATE

147 cases reported in 10 days

Muscat - The Ministry of Health (MoH) has announced that 147 new cases of COVID-19 were registered in the last ten days. One COVID-19 related death was reported in this period, while 243 patients recovered, taking the total number of recoveries in the sultanate to 384,486. The recovery rate now stands at 98.8 per cent.

'The total number of cases in Oman has now increased to 389,273, and the total number of deaths to 4,259,' MoH stated.

Twenty-three COVID-19 cases were admitted to health institutions in the last ten days and currently, there are 14 patients in hospitals, including three in intensive care units across the sultanate.

**FREE
CLASSIFIED
LISTING**

Muscat Daily now offers free classified listings for individuals in the following categories:

Situations Wanted/Accommodation Wanted or Available/Sale of Household Items/Car for Sale or Wanted/Matrimonial Alliances (Word limit is 35)

Please email your listing to dailyclassifieds@apexmedia.co.om or call 99104346

The Diana Award introduced to inspire youth in Oman

Our Correspondent
Muscat

Oman has joined the ongoing celebrations of Mental Health Awareness Month in May. To create more awareness on mental health and encourage youngsters to engage in social work, The Diana Award was introduced at the National Museum on Sunday.

Addressing a gathering at the launch, H H Sayyida Basma al Said, founder of Whispers of

Serenity Clinic and organiser of the event, said, "I have had the honour of being the first and only Arab judge for this prestigious award. The event is for the youth and by the youth with the aim of establishing a world full of compassionate young people."

She described Princess Diana as being one of the strongest role models for many. "Lady Diana said that young people have the potential to change the world and this has been the aim of the award. The art of giving back is



the need of the hour; we must dare to be different. The princess taught us the importance of giving back to society, mainly in the field of mental health. The award is designed to honour as well as carry her legacy forward, including in Oman," H H Sayyida Basma said.

The Diana Award was launched in 1999 to inspire young people to service their communities. Awardees are given access to a unique development programme which aims

to further increase their already proven capacity for innovation, leadership and social change.

Present at the event were Tessy Ojo, CEO of The Diana Award Charity, and Dr Yvonne Thompson, founder and president of WinTrade Global Women.

"Introducing The Diana Award will spark the minds and hearts of young people to create positive change in their community. The youth are the hope of our future, now is the right time

to publicly recognise our young change-makers," Tessy said.

She presented examples from different parts of the world of youngsters and expressed how The Diana Award supports them.

In reference to recent global developments, Yvonne, who has been working with women in business for the last two decades, said, "It is time we take responsibility and stand in solidarity with the less fortunate ones in Palestine and Ukraine."

3.7mn sqm of greenery planned in S Batinah



(Supplied photo)

Our Correspondent
Muscat

Ninety-five environmental permits were issued to individuals in South Batinah in 2021.

A statement issued by Environment Authority (EA) said, 'Of the 95 permits issued, 71 were for logging and 24 for raising wildlife. Additionally, permits were also issued for cultivation and distribution of nearly 13,000 wild seedlings.'

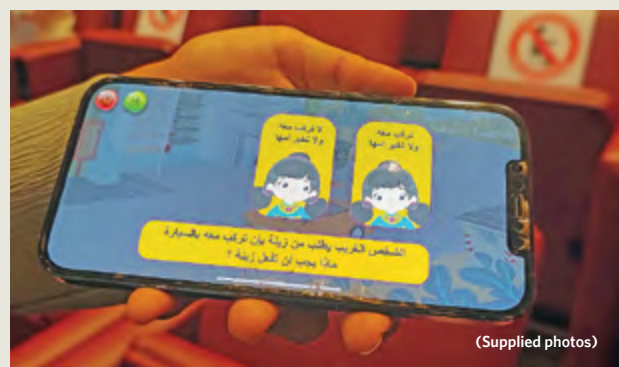
According to Salim bin Said al Maskari, director of the Environment Department in South Batinah, the authority is working to establish green spaces in the governorate with the possibility of converting these into investment opportunities in partnership with the community and the public

and private sectors. This plan is part of the national initiative to plant 10mn wild tree seedlings in ten years that started in January 2020.

The Environment Department in South Batinah has secured three plots of land of approximately 3.7mn sqm for green areas in Al Araqi in the wilayat of Rustaq, among others.

In 2021, the authority held 128 awareness programmes addressing issues such as the need to limit cutting trees and diving activities in the Daymaniyyat Islands Nature Reserve.

Maskari emphasised the significance of community cooperation to preserve the environment, including beach cleaning campaigns and reporting environmental violations.



(Supplied photos)

Child abuse app gets good response from Oman, GCC

Our Correspondent
Muscat

An app developed and made in Oman with the aim of safeguarding children from abuse has received good response not only in the sultanate, but the other GCC states, besides Jordan and Egypt. The app - named Ziad and Zina - teaches children to deal with situations of abuse through fun games and has been downloaded several hundred times outside Oman.

Committed to children's right to a safe and happy childhood, Whispers of Serenity Clinic and the 'Not Alone' campaign launched the app recently in cooperation with MB Group.

Available in PlayStore and iStore, the app is currently in Arabic. It offers various situations to users, who can choose to play as a boy (Ziad) or a girl (Zina). It tests children's intel-

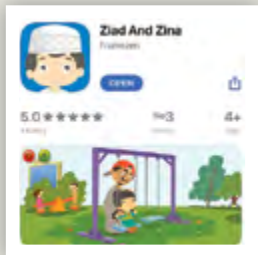
ligence, impromptu response, decision-making skills, instincts and cleverness, while training them to deal with awkward or challenging situations when left alone.

"The app teaches children how to respond to dangerous situations with potential abuse and the importance of telling their parents of these situa-

tions. Users are presented scenarios of dangerous interactions with strangers, such as what to do if a stranger asks them to step into a car or approached in a

park and asked to go somewhere with them. Children score points in the game by making the right decision in these scenarios," said Iman al Barwani, co-founder of the app.

She informed that the app was very popular in Oman when launched. Currently there is a steady increase in downloads from other GCC and some Arab countries.





شركة المها لتسويق المنتجات النفطية ش م ع ع

Al Maha Petroleum Products Marketing Co. SAOG

P.O.Box: 57 , P.C: 116 , Mina Al Fahal , Sultanate of Oman

Tel: 24610200, Fax: 24610201, Website: www.almaha.com.om

Chairman's Report

Dear Shareholders,

On behalf of the Board of Directors, I am pleased to present the interim unaudited Financial Statements for the I Quarter ended 31 March 2022.

FINANCIAL PERFORMANCE (RO'000)

	I Qtr 2022	I Qtr 2021	Inc /(dec)	Inc/(dec) %
Sales	99,908	81,623	18,285	22%
Cost of Sales	(94,381)	(76,625)	17,756	23%
Gross profit	5,527	4,998	529	11%
Other income	1,824	1,409	415	29%
Total expenses	(6,431)	(5,968)	445	7%
Net profit	920	421	499	119%

Earnings per share (RO)	0.013	0.006	0.007	119%
Book value per share (RO)	0.612	0.639	(0.027)	(4%)
Retained earnings (RO'000)	30,952	32,792	(1,840)	(6%)
Total equity (RO'000)	42,256	44,096	(1,840)	(4%)

With the country returning to normalcy after almost 2 years of Covid 19 crisis and oil prices reaching its highest level since 2014 crossing the\$ 100 mark – both boosting the economic recovery and making the future outlook brighter.

With this background, your Company’ has also registered an impressive performance by achieving a growth of 22% in sales and posting a net profit of RO 920 k during the I Quarter 2022 compared to RO 421 k recorded in I Quarter 2021; an increase in profit by RO 499 K i.e., by 119%.

MARKETING PERFORMANCE

Retail segment continues to be our top priority, as we target to increase our filling station network through-out the country. New customer centric initiatives to increase retail sales have been taken up. The segment has improved its performance significantly during the period as many supporting businesses gradually returning to normalcy.

Commercial segment : Your Company continues to be a major player in the direct commercial business-line, which handles Gasoil bulk sales to the various economic sectors namely, Construction sector, Electric power plants, Desalination plants and transportation sector. Fierce competition and low demand from the construction & infrastructure customers have slowed down the growth of this segment.

Aviation segment is now firmly back on track with the relaxation of travel restrictions by major airlines. Oman Air and other major airlines have resumed their services to many destinations that has contributed significantly to the sales growth during the period.

Lubricant Segment has also improved its performance during the period with the wider acceptance and popularity of the Al Maha brand lubricants both in the local and export market.

Quality, Health, Safety and Environment (QHSE)

Quality, Health, Safety, and Environment are the cornerstone of the company's operations to ensure the continuity and growth of our business without risks, which made the challenge of achieving the goal of zero Lost Time Injuries is not impossible to achieve, and this was achieved through raising the efficiency of employees, continuous training and effective management, which has been practically translated into The ground by applying the International Organization for Standardization (ISO) standards (ISO 9001:2015 Quality Management System, ISO 14001: 2015 Environmental Management System Certificate and ISO 45001:2018 Occupational Health and Safety Management System Certificate).

Annual General Meeting / Dividend

In the Annual General Meeting of the Company held on March 09, 2022 the shareholders approved a cash dividend of 40 baisa per share (40% of share capital) totalling RO 2.760 million for the year ended December 31, 2021, which was fully paid before the end of March 2022.

Future Outlook

The return to normalcy evidenced by the all the sectors of the economy and increased oil prices provides a reasonable base for optimism for strong growth ahead and your Company strategically positioned itself to capitalise on the opportunities that are being created by the changing market environment and confidently looks forward to the achievement of its strategic business objectives in the days ahead.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

On behalf of the Board of Directors and executive management, I take this opportunity, to express our most sincere gratitude and loyalty to His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tariq and his efforts in continuing the legacy of His Majesty Sultan Qaboos towards a prosperous Oman.

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

Dr. Saif Salim Saif Al-Harthi

Chairman

28 April 2022

Interim Condensed Statement Of Financial Position

As at 31 March 2022

	31 March 2022 RO'000 (Unaudited)	31 December 2021 RO'000 (Audited)
ASSETS		
Non-current assets		
Property, plant and equipment	28,344	28,859
Investment property	529	541
Right of use asset	4,441	4,058
Contract assets	3,253	3,353
Deferred tax assets	2,695	2,722
Total non-current assets	39,262	39,533
Current assets		
Inventories	4,011	3,878
Trade and other receivables	52,597	58,428
Contract assets	1,952	1,952
Bank balances and cash	28,144	32,906
Total current assets	86,704	97,164
TOTAL ASSETS	125,966	136,697
EQUITY AND LIABILITIES		
Equity		
Share capital	6,900	6,900
Legal reserve	2,300	2,300
Special reserve	2,104	2,104
Retained earnings	30,952	32,792
Total equity	42,256	44,096
LIABILITIES		
Non-current liabilities		
Lease liabilities	3,680	3,174
Contract liabilities	480	785
Employees' end of service benefits	212	199
Total non-current liabilities	4,372	4,158
Current liabilities		
Trade and other payables	46,833	43,062
Short term loan	29,031	42,000
Lease liabilities	1,069	1,156
Contract liabilities	1,347	1,343
Income tax payable	1,058	882
Total current liabilities	79,338	88,443
Total liabilities	83,710	92,601
TOTAL EQUITY AND LIABILITIES	125,966	136,697
Net assets per share (RO)	0.612	0.639

Interim Condensed Statement Of Comprehensive Income

For The Three Months Period Ended 31 March 2022

	Three months ended 31 March 2022 RO'000 (Unaudited)	2021 RO'000 (Unaudited)
Revenue	99,908	81,623
Cost of sales	(94,381)	(76,625)
Gross Profit	5,527	4,998
Other Income	1,355	1,052
Operating and administration expenses	(5,727)	(5,443)
Operating Profit	1,155	607
Finance Income	469	357
Finance costs	(501)	(469)
Profit before income tax	1,123	495
Income tax expense	(203)	(74)
Profit and total comprehensive income for the period	920	421
Basic and diluted earnings per share (RO)	0.013	0.006

Note:

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

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

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

Our Correspondent

Muscat

The bilateral trade between Oman and India recorded robust growth in 2021 and both countries are now aiming to further strengthen their economic cooperation and boost trade and investment. Oman's non-oil exports to India reached US\$1.2bn in 2021, a jump of 172 per cent when compared to 2020 figures.

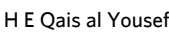
The sultanate's imports from India hit US\$2bn in 2021, recording a 94 per cent growth on 2020,

according to a statement issued by the Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion.

Led by H E Qais bin Mohammed al Yousef, Minister of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion, a high level Omani trade and investment delegation will head for India on Tuesday to participate at the 10th Oman - India Joint Commission Meeting in New Delhi. This annual gathering aims to further develop trade and investment links between Oman and India. The official visit program of high-level

meetings and events will commence with H E Yousef addressing an Oman - India B2B networking session on May 11 at the Leela Palace Hotel in New Delhi, according to a press statement.

Joining the New Delhi delegation include senior representatives from Oman Investment Authority, Public Authority for Special Economic Zones and Free Zones and Oman Chamber of Commerce and Industry as well as Omani companies from the construction, manufacturing, retail, automotive, renewable en-



ergy, pharmaceutical and tourism sectors.

Speaking ahead of the departure, H E Yousef emphasised the importance of trade and invest-

ment missions in promoting Oman's world-class goods and services in international markets as well as the many investment opportunities open to foreign investors in Oman. He said, "On this visit we look forward, in particular, to sharing the potential of the pro-business and investment environment flourishing in Oman under the guidance of His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tariq and the possibilities that have already opened up in the sultanate as a result of Oman Vision 2040, our framework for development and growth."

Noting that this year marks India's 75 years of independence, a period in which the country has become a global business leader and a US\$3tn plus economy, H E Yousef expressed his delight to be visiting New Delhi at this time to congratulate the Indian people in person and to engage with government and business officials on growing economic ties.

"Holding this Joint Commission Meeting at this time presents a real opportunity to support and strengthen the long-standing trade partnerships that connect us - helping both sides fully em-

fully expect to see further growth in Oman-India trade as both countries emerge from the COVID-19 pandemic," he added.

From an investment perspective, H E Yousef said, "India is already a large inward investor into Oman, but there are significant opportunities to increase this even further. In fact, there are great complementarities between India's needs and Oman's offer, particularly in logistics, mining, tourism, manufacturing and renewables. These are all areas ripe for Oman-India collaboration.

Muscat - The Indian government has signed a commercial logistics agreement with Emdad Logistics Company in Oman.

The agreement was signed at the Port of Duqm Company's headquarters in Duqm between Emdad Logistics Company and the Indian government.

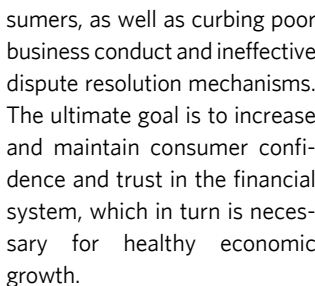
Indian government to invest in logistics in the Special Economic Zone at Duqm (SEZAD).

The agreement will deepen the existing close relations between Oman and India and contribute to the realisation of their shared vision of a prosperous region.

ONA

Our Correspondent

The Central Bank of Oman (CBO) has issued the Financial Consumer Protection Regulatory Framework (FCPRF) for licensed banks and finance and leasing companies in the sultanate.



consumer confidence in the sector, thus creating healthy competitive financial markets and adopting the best international practices to protect the financial consumers,' CBO said.

It added that the FCPRF ensures fair delivery of financial products and services to con-

sumers, as well as curbing poor business conduct and ineffective dispute resolution mechanisms. The ultimate goal is to increase and maintain consumer confidence and trust in the financial system, which in turn is necessary for healthy economic growth.

The Financial Consumer Protection Regulatory Framework includes five principles: Disclosure and transparency; fair treatment and business conduct; data protection and privacy; dispute resolution mechanisms; and financial education and financial capability.

Riyadh, Saudi Arabia - Saudi
Minister of Industry and Mineral
Resources Bandar Alkhoravef

said that the ministry has a goal to attract investments worth US\$32bn to its mining and minerals sector through nine new projects, state news agency SPA reported. The kingdom is seeking to diversify its economy away from oil by investing hundreds of billions of dollars into a plan called Vision 2030.

supporting supplies of mineral products to local and international markets, according to SPA.

Alkhorayef added that the ministry is currently studying 145 applications for exploration licenses from foreign companies, SPA said. The minister said the projects would create over 14,500 jobs and added the ministry is now processing 145 exploration license applications from foreign companies.

WAM

EU wrangles over details of Russia oil embargo



A worker controls the water system at the Duna (Danube) Refinery of Hungarian MOL Company located about 30km south of Budapest on May 5 (AFP)

Brussels, Belgium – European diplomats were locked in difficult negotiations on the terms of the EU's sixth round of sanctions against Russia on Sunday, with several members seeking guarantees for their oil supplies.

The package suggested last week by the European Commission would have seen most EU members halting oil imports from Russia by the end of the year, to punish Moscow for invading Ukraine.

But several member states, most vocally Hungary, demanded exemptions from the ban and or support to help them escape their long-standing dependence on a single pipeline for Russian crude. Prime Minister

Viktor Orban has declared the package as presented crossed a "red line" for Hungary, but diplomats in Brussels insist the technical negotiations are not blocked. Ambassadors were to meet again on Sunday, but hopes that the package will be ready before Monday – to send a signal to Moscow on Russia's Victory Day celebrations – were fading.

EU foreign policy chief Josep Borrell has said that if there is no agreement over the weekend he will call a meeting of foreign ministers next week.

Any decision on sanctions would have to be approved unanimously by member state governments.

"There is no political blockage,

but the need to guarantee alternative sources of supply to landlocked countries dependent on Russian oil by pipeline. And it is not easy," a European diplomat told AFP.

"These are new infrastructure and technological changes, which require not only European funding, but agreements between several member states. We are making progress, but that automatically takes time."

Hungary, Slovakia and the Czech Republic have been offered permission to continue importing Russian oil until the end of 2024, but they also want help securing new sources of oil and retooling their refineries.

AFP

Xi warms up China's economy, but virus narrows options

Beijing, China – President Xi Jinping has offered state backing for tech, infrastructure and jobs to revive China's economy, but analysts warn growth will continue to wilt until Beijing drops its rigid virus controls.

Two and a half years since the coronavirus first emerged in Wuhan, China is the last major economy still closed off to the world, despite its relatively low death toll.

Lockdowns across dozens of cities – from the manufacturing hubs of Shenzhen and Shanghai to the breadbasket of Jilin – have wreaked havoc on supply chains over recent months, crushing small businesses and trapping consumers at home.

That has imperilled Beijing's full-year growth target of about 5.5 per cent, with forecasters anticipating that around one percentage point may be shaved off that figure. "We remain deeply concerned about growth," Nomura analysts said this week. "We believe the Omicron variant and zero-Covid strategy represent the dominant challenges to growth stability."

Yet China's Communist leadership insisted that the country will stick "unswervingly" to zero-Covid, with a meeting chaired by Xi declaring that "persistence is victory".

To curtail the growing economic damage, Beijing has offered words of respite to the tech sector from rolling regulatory crackdowns and promised to pump prime the economy with an "all-out" infrastructure campaign.

But observers say rallies may be temporary as long as the state's reflex remains to hammer down the virus caseload at all costs.



China's President Xi Jinping

"(The measures are) all very welcome... but how many more sports stadiums are going to help us in creating an environment of predictable growth?" European Chamber president Joerg Wutke told reporters on Thursday.

While many cities have bounced back after short, targeted lockdowns, other areas such as agricultural base Jilin province have been slow to recover from waves of restrictions.

"That precedent (Jilin) could mean a longer-lasting impact from Shanghai's highly disruptive lockdown," said Ernan Cui of Gavekal Dragonomics in a report Friday.

Analysts are waiting for details of the delivery behind sweeping promises of support from Beijing's policymakers. China's tech firms have been under the state's microscope on concerns over data misuse and monopoly.

But shares of major tech firms soared as the government called for "healthy development" of the sector and shifted its language on completing its "rectification".

It is unclear if that signals an end to a punishing round of regulatory scrutiny.

Markets also cheered on as the government announced sup-

port for real estate and an infrastructure push to buoy economic and social development.

But China "does not have much room for further infrastructure building, (or) government borrowing on the local level," said Dan Wang, chief economist at Hang Seng Bank China.

"In reality, there's not much room to grow."

While it harks back to Beijing's four trillion yuan (\$600 billion at today's rates) stimulus package after the 2008 financial crisis -- which included massive infrastructure investment -- Zhaopeng Xing of ANZ Research said "we doubt the authorities will carry it forward at the cost of rising debts".

China's State Council has also said it would give cash handouts to jobless migrant workers and urged stronger support for small firms harried by lockdowns and shrivelling consumer demand.

But re-inflating the economy is a big task made more complicated by each new level of virus control, experts say.

"Those easing measures, even on a large scale, may not achieve their intended impact due to lockdowns and logistics disruptions," Nomura added in its note. AFP



OMAN REINSURANCE COMPANY S.A.O.C

Post Box 1968, Postal Code 114, Ruwi, Sultanate of Oman, Telephone: 24397700 Fax: 2439 7777

For the 3 months ended 31 March 2022

Dear Shareholder,
After Compliments,

The Board of Directors is pleased to present the unaudited results of Oman Reinsurance Company S.A.O.G. ("Oman Re" or "the Company") for the three months period ended 31st March 2022.

The Financial Highlights for three months ending 31st March 2022 are summarized below:

	31 March 2022 OMR	31 March 2021 OMR
Gross Written Premium (GWP)	15,255,650	12,392,863
Underwriting results	675,832	779,876
Investment and other income	470,433	562,702
Expenditure – General and Admin Expenses	613,887	830,483
Net Profit after tax	290,272	381,342

Premium and underwriting performance

The company continued to increase its Gross Written Premium (GWP) during the first quarter of 2022. The GWP for the three months ending 31 March 2022 was OMR 15.2 million which is 23% higher than OMR 12.4 million figure for same period last year. Underwriting performance has been resilient achieving an underwriting profit of OMR 676k for Q1 2022 compared to OMR 780k for Q1 2021. The higher claims ratio of 59% in Q1 2022 vs 56% for Q1 2021 along with higher acquisition cost ratio of 28% for Q1 2022 vs 23% for Q1 2021 is the main reason for a lower underwriting profit.

General and Administrative Expenses

During Q1 2022, the total expenditure amounted to OMR 614k as against OMR 830k for the same period in 2021. The general and admin expenses as a percentage of GWP is 4% for Q1 2022 vs 6.7% for Q1 2021.

Investment Income

The Investment and Other income for the quarter amounted to OMR 470k vs OMR 562k for the same period last year. The main reason for the decline is that the company did not do trading during the quarter of its debt portfolio mainly on account of higher market volatility in debt markets.

Net Profitability

The Company's net profit after tax for the first quarter 2022 was OMR 290k compared to OMR 381k for the same period last year. The volatile currency environment resulted in a foreign exchange loss of OMR 191k for the period ended 31 March 2022 compared to OMR 54k for the period ended 31 March 2021. The higher foreign exchange loss was the main contributor for lower net profit after tax.

Acknowledgements and Appreciation

The Directors of Oman Re wish to acknowledge the valuable guidance and assistance received from the Capital Market Authority, Ministry of Commerce and Industry, and the support received from clients and business partners. We look forward to receiving their continued support and encouragement.

The Directors also wish to extend their thanks and appreciation and express their gratitude for the continuing commitment and dedication of its strategic shareholders, the Executive Management and employees at all levels. The Directors are thankful to the esteemed shareholders for their support and the confidence placed in the Company and the Board.

On behalf of the Board of Directors, the Executive Management and the Staff Members, we are honoured to express our sincere gratitude to His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik Al Said for his visionary leadership during these difficult times and we pray to the Almighty God to grant him every strength to continue to lead the Sultanate on the path of sustainable development.

Dr. Juma Bin Ali Al Juma

Chairman of the Board

Condensed interim statement of financial position as at 31 March 2022

	31 March 2022 RO (Un-audited)	31 March 2021 RO (Audited)
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ASSETS

Non-current assets		
Property, plant and equipment	128,187	137,643
Investment property	1,900,000	1,900,000
Investment property under development	184,592	184,592
Intangible assets	148,396	163,913
Investments at fair value through other		
comprehensive income	21,307,888	19,788,547
Non-current portion of bank deposits	14,250,000	12,288,000
Total non-current assets	37,919,063	34,462,695
Current assets		
Investments at fair value through profit or loss	556,477	576,615
Insurance and other receivables	8,871,092	8,360,858
Accrued income	17,772,620	11,870,135
Deferred policy acquisition costs	5,404,392	3,081,338
Reinsurers' share of insurance funds	26,899,260	29,898,209
Current portion of bank deposits	11,703,268	11,165,268
Cash and cash equivalents	3,896,113	5,556,548
Total current assets	75,103,222	70,508,971
Total assets	113,022,285	104,971,666

EQUITY AND LIABILITIES

Capital and reserves		
Share capital	32,615,926	32,615,926
Legal reserve	478,729	478,729
Investment fair value reserve	(706,005)	(102,368)
Contingency reserve	4,216,914	4,216,914
Accumulated losses	(7,658,243)	(7,948,515)
Total capital and reserves	28,947,321	29,260,686
Non-current liabilities		
Employees' benefit liabilities	258,213	243,373
Deferred Tax liability	68,358	68,358
Total non-current liabilities	326,571	311,731
Current liabilities		
Technical provisions	70,687,135	62,460,289
Reinsurers' premium and other payables	12,723,597	12,581,149
Deferred commission income	337,661	357,811
Total current liabilities	83,748,393	75,399,249
Total liabilities	84,074,964	75,710,980
Total equity and liabilities	113,022,285	104,971,666
Net assets per share	0.09	0.09

Condensed interim statement of profit or loss and other comprehensive income for the three month period ended 31 March 2022 (un-audited)

	Period from 1 January 2022 to 31 March 2022 (Un-audited)	Period from 1 January 2021 to 31 March 2021 (Un-audited)
Income		
Gross premiums written	15,255,650	12,392,863
Net underwriting results	675,832	779,876
Investment and other income, net	470,433	562,702
	1,146,265	1,342,578
Expenses		
General and administrative expenses	(613,887)	(830,483)
Foreign exchange losses, net	(190,882)	(54,136)
	(804,769)	(884,619)
Net profit before tax for the period	341,496	457,959
Income tax expense	(51,224)	(76,617)
Net profit after tax for the period	290,272	381,342
Other comprehensive income:		
Items that will not be reclassified to profit or loss:		
Valuation (losses)/gain on fair value through other comprehensive income on equity investments	(132,039)	86,979
Items that will or may be reclassified to profit or loss:		
Valuation (losses)/gains on fair value through other comprehensive income on debt instruments	(471,598)	(153,962)
Other comprehensive income for the period	(603,637)	(66,983)
Total comprehensive income for the period	(313,365)	314,359
Earnings per share – basic and diluted	0.001	0.013

**FREE
CLASSIFIED
LISTING**

Muscat Daily now offers free classified listings for individuals in the following categories:
Situations Wanted/Accommodation Wanted or Available/Sale of Household Items/ Car for Sale or Wanted/Matrimonial Alliances (Word limit is 35)
Please email your listing to dailyclassifieds@apexmedia.co.om or call 99104346



Muscat Finance (S.A.O.G)

P.O.Box: 108, Ruwi, P.C. 112, Sultanate of Oman, Tel: 24625300, Fax: 24625310

Audited Financials for the year Ended December 2021

DIRECTOR'S REPORT 2021

Dear Shareholders,

On behalf of the Board of Directors, I am pleased to present the Annual Report for the year ended December 31, 2021. As lockdowns and economic challenges caused by the outbreak of COVID-19 continued during the first three quarters of 2021, there was only modest improvement in business activity towards the latter part of the year. On a positive note, a strong recovery in oil prices combined with many forward looking government initiatives for economic revival, which favourably improved confidence across sectors.

Relief in debt repayment provided by Central Bank of Oman was extended to effected borrowers throughout the year. This helped many of your company's customers to manage their cash flows during a challenging period.

Muscat Finance is optimistic about the Sultanate's vision 2040 of diversifying the economy into non-hydrocarbon areas, resulting in a diverse source of revenue streams and a more vibrant economy going forward. This will translate into a wider opportunity for Muscat Finance SAOG and the finance sector in general.

Business Results

Despite a difficult operating environment, your company has posted a net profit of RO 1.173 mld during the year 2021. Net operating income increased by 10% over the previous year, while operating profit increased by 3%. The income increase was attributed to reduction in interest expenses, while maintaining margins on new advances during the year.

Your company generated RO 16.5 mld as net cash flow from operating activities, much of which was utilized to reduce liabilities with banks and depositors from RO 79 mld as of Dec 2020 to RO 62 mld by end of year.

There was a marked improvement in control over provisions from new and existing non-performing loans through a sharp focus on collection and remedial efforts. Non-performing loans slightly reduced compared to end of last year.

A full day off site strategy workshop was conducted including Board directors as well as an extended management team to build consensus on the way forward for Muscat Finance. The key points of alignment were greater use of technology in improving customer experience and operational efficiency, building a performance based culture across the organization and greater emphasis on risk management through improvement in controls and enhanced collections.

Due to prevailing operating environment, Muscat Finance adopted a conservative approach towards new advances. In Retail finance, opportunities for lending were capitalized both through our dealership referral network as well as through digital sourcing channels. While the market experienced new car stock shortages due to global supply chain disruptions, locally consumers are turning to the pre-approved car market. The company expanded its sales reach through new dealer alliances as well as by leveraging on existing client base. A revamped website and social media channels were launched during the year to strengthen the company's digital presence. The company also embarked on improving process times through greater efficiency, and create market leadership under a larger digitization mandate.

On the corporate front, new advances were selective with our resources mobilized towards existing clients in offering payment deferrals where merited and helping them navigate a difficult year. The company continues to offer the Small Medium Enterprise businesses owned and run by Omani entrepreneurs, which aligns with the Government's initiatives to strengthen the segment.

The company made an effort to diversify its sources of funding by inducing bank borrowings and growing its corporate deposits during the year. Corporate deposits grew by 65% while maintaining overall cost of borrowings similar to the preceding year.

Finally, although a regulatory approval was received to adjust our legal reserves against accumulated losses, the company has decided not to exercise this option as a prudent measure.

A detailed review of the operational results of the Company has been covered in the Management Discussion and Analysis Report.

Capital Management & Dividend

The Company's history of dividend payments over the last 5 years is as follows:

Year	Cash Dividend %	Stock Dividend %	Total %
2016	10.00	7.00	17.00
2017	8.00	5.00	13.00
2018	6.25	2.50	8.75
2019	-	-	-
2020	-	-	-
2021	-	-	-

Change in the Composition of the Board

During the year, one member of the Board resigned and the respective juristic person has filled the vacancy by replacement. Mr. Naveen Kumar Goyal has been replaced by Mr. Kalesh Gendharai Beshi to the Company through the Board and its different sub-committees.

Accordingly the sub-committees of the Board have been reconstituted. The details are provided in the Report on Corporate Governance.

Rating Update

Capital Intelligence, an independent credit rating agency, which has been rating our company in the past, has maintained a National Scale rating of omv- Long Term and A2 Short Term.

HR and Our People

With health and safety of our employees an utmost priority, I am pleased to report that all Muscat Finance employees were fully vaccinated during the year under company sponsorship. The company also facilitated a vaccination drive for the families of the employees who volunteered.

The company continues to invest in building local talent with Omanisation ratio standing at 87.2% as at year end. This is well above the 80% requirement of the Central Bank of Oman.

During the year, Mr. Hussain Al Lawati was appointed as CEO to lead the company under a new transformation mandate. The organization was instructed to strengthen both business and collection arms within the team.

Information Technology

The company has upgraded its core financial management ERP system this year. The new system is going through a stabilization phase, after which it promises to bring improved functionality, reduced process time through automation and stronger operational controls. The company is looking ahead to build stronger digital capabilities as part of a larger digital transformation mandate.

Corporate Social Responsibility

The company acknowledges its responsibility towards contributing to the community, stemming from its strong belief that the society at large is the reason for the success of Muscat Finance.

After the devastating cyclone Shaheen, Muscat finance staff volunteered participation in the rebuilding effort for residential

NOTE > The complete accounts will be sent by mail to any shareholder or other interested party who requests them, in either Arabic or English, within 7 days of such
Chief Executive Officer
Muscat Finance (SAOG)
P.O.Box 108, P.C 112 Sultanate of Oman



شركة الباطنة للتنمية والاستثمار القابضة ش.م.ع.ع.
Al Batinah Development & Investment Holding Co. SAOG

Board of Directors Report

Dear shareholders,
On behalf of the board of directors, I present the report of Board of Directors and the unaudited financial statements for the first Three months ended March 31, 2022.

Financial performance of the parent company and the group:
The parent company's income for the first quarter ended 31 March 2022 amounted to OMR 58,396 compared to OMR 54,813 for the same period of last year 2021. The parent company achieved a net profit of OMR 29,177 compared to a net profit of OMR 27,294 for the same period of last year.

The group's income during the first quarter was OMR77,510 compared to OMR 98,321 for the same period of last year 2021, and the group incurred a net profit after tax of RO 26,836 compared to a net profit of RO 50,090 Last year. The Net shareholders' equity amounted to RO 2,474,195 and net assets per share 82 Baisa, compared to 2,275,717 RO 75 Baisa, respectively, for the same period last year 2021.

Finally, I have the honors on behalf of the members of the Board of Directors and the shareholders to extend our deepest thanks and gratitude to His Majesty Sultan Haithem bin Tariq for his wise leadership and guidance and pray to God to keep Oman and its people in peace and prosperity. I would also like to thank the esteemed shareholders for their support and continued encouragement of the company and the Capital Market Authority, the banks and all the entities that the company deals with.

Best regards,

Salah Bin Hilal Al-Mawally
Chairman

Unaudited Consolidated and parent company statement of financial position as at 31 March 2022

	Group		Parent Company	
	As on 31 March 2022	As on 31 March 2021	As on 31 March 2022	As on 31 March 2021
	OMR	OMR	OMR	OMR
Non-Current Assets	2,022,023	1,837,234	1,640,557	1,519,219
Current Assets	741,193	823,165	701,010	668,161
Total Assets	2,763,216	2,660,399	2,341,567	2,187,380
Share Capital	3,000,000	3,000,000	3,000,000	3,000,000
Legal Reserve	340,450	333,545	203,563	202,757
Special Reserve	24,541	24,541	24,541	24,541
Retained earnings	(742,218)	(763,706)	(1,021,371)	(1,024,115)
Investment fair value reserve	(148,578)	(318,663)	(148,578)	(327,877)
Non-Controlling Interest	(19,494)	(17,761)	-	-
Total Shareholders' equity	2,454,701	2,257,956	2,058,155	1,875,306
Total non-current liabilities	113,504	108,903	25,228	22,437
Total current liabilities	195,011	293,540	258,184	289,637
Total equity and liabilities	2,763,216	2,660,399	2,341,567	2,187,380

Unaudited Consolidated and Parent Company statement of profit or loss and other comprehensive income for the Three months ended 31 March 2022

	Group		Parent company	
	Three months ended 31 March 2022	Three months ended 31 March 2021	Three months ended 31 March 2022	Three months ended 31 March 2021
	OMR	OMR	OMR	OMR
Total income	77,510	98,321	58,396	54,813
Salaries and other staff costs	(20,443)	(20,188)	(13,622)	(11,980)
General and administrative exp.	(26,200)	(22,526)	(13,845)	(12,321)
Finance cost	(1,699)	(3,208)	(1,632)	(3,098)
Depreciations and	(2,332)	(2,309)	(120)	(120)
Amortizations	(50,674)	(48,231)	(29,219)	(27,519)
Total expenses	26,836	50,090	29,177	27,294
Net profit before tax	-	-	-	-
Income tax expenses	26,836	50,090	29,177	27,294
Net profit after tax				
Unrealized fair value gains / (Loss) on financial assets through other comprehensive income	(25,851)	(31,717)	(25,851)	(34,099)
Total comprehensive / (loss) income for the period	985	18,373	3,326	(6,805)
Net earnings per share	0.001	0.001	0.002	0.001

On request by any shareholder, the complete accounts either in English or Arabic will be sent by mail within 7 days of receipt of such request to P.O.Box 68 pc 117 al wadi al kabir, Muscat, sultanate of Oman tel. 24856658 , fax 24856698.

Special Ramadan offer on INFINITI Q60



INFINITI Oman has launched a special Ramadan offer on Infiniti Q60, the premium sports coupe that combines expressive design with exhilarating performance and dynamics, and stands out for its a beautiful design, new technology, safety features, and outstanding performance.

Infiniti Q60 is powered by an award-winning 3ltr twin-turbo V6 engine that produces 300 or 400 maximum horsepower, and combines expressive design with exhilarating performance and dynamics. A V6 engine that makes 300 horsepower at 6,400rpm, paired to a 7-speed automatic transmission, powers the Luxe, Q60 red sport 400, and turns up the wick to 400 maximum horsepower.

A senior spokesperson at Infiniti Oman said, "Infiniti has always been at the forefront of daring design and pioneering technology - and the Q60 offers both.

The sports coupe stands out for its a beautiful design, technology, safety features, and outstanding performance. Infiniti Q60 embodies dedication to developing new and innovative driving technologies that delivers a confidence-inspiring and personalised experience behind the wheel."

The range of offers on Infiniti Q60 includes free registration, assured gifts vouchers, periodic vehicle maintenance, manufacturer's warranty, AAA/road assistance card, digital promotion, Infiniti loyalty programme and reference programme.

The special offer will be available till May 19.

NBO offers credit card customers chance to win FIFA tickets

National Bank of Oman (NBO) is offering Visa credit card customers a chance to win an 'all expenses paid' trip to a FIFA World Cup Qatar 2022 quarter-final match, courtesy of Visa.

From May 8 to 20, customers will receive one free entry to a prize draw for every purchase of RO20 or more using the Visa credit card.

The prize includes two match tickets, return flights to Doha, accommodation, and much more, a press release said. Maha al Raisi, head of Product at NBO Retail Banking, said, "In partnership with Visa, the official payment services partner of FIFA, we are pleased to offer the trip of a lifetime.

NBO customers can experience the biggest sporting event of the year in person just by using their NBO Visa credit card. NBO is committed to providing value, convenience and flexibility, as well as inspiring customers to do more with their payment products and we frequently add extra value by offering a wide range of exclusive value-added lifestyle benefits and exclusive prizes just for being an NBO Visa cardholder." To be eligible for the prize draw, customers must spend RO20 or more in one transaction on their eligible Visa credit cards. The draw will take place two weeks after the closing date and winners will be published on social media and contacted by the bank with details about how to claim the prize.



Sri Lankan ambassador donates plants to Central Plant Nursery

H E Ameer Ajwad, Ambassador of Sri Lanka to the Sultanate of Oman, donated different varieties of Sri Lankan ornamental plants to the Central Plant Nursery of the Royal Gardens and Farms (Royal Court Affairs) of the Sultanate of Oman.

A variety of Sri Lankan ornamental plants - orchids, leather-ferns, aspidistras, cane palms, butterfly palms and cast iron plants were presented by H E Ajwad to Engineer Saleh Abdullah Azzan al Jahdhami, director, Department of Plant Nurseries of the Royal Gardens and Farms of Royal Court Affairs, at the Central Plant Nursery located at Zulfa, Mabela. These popular Sri Lankan ornamental plants are to be planted in the Royal Gardens and Farms in Salalah.

The Sri Lankan Embassy in Oman arranged this donation by the Peradeniya Botanical Garden, which is the largest and elegant botanical garden in Sri Lanka, in coordination with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Ministry of Tourism of Sri Lanka on a request made by the Foreign Ministry of the Sultanate of Oman. Presenting the plants, H E Ajwad stated that Sri Lanka and Oman have huge potential synergies in the field of agriculture and farming and that he was pleased to initiate cooperation in this field between the two friendly countries by donating the popular Sri Lankan ornamental plants.



Mercedes-Benz C-Class exudes timeless style

Discover a new kind of luxury - the all-new C-Class Sedan brings comfort to your life during a time of worldwide transformation.

As the first classic model series from Mercedes-Benz, the new C-Class exudes this timeless style while setting a new standard for progress. Electrified throughout, thanks to the plug-in hybrids and mild hybrids with 48-volt technology and integrated starter-generator, this design is an expression of sportiness and combines progressiveness with luxury. Valid until May 31, customers can benefit from the Mercedes-Benz Ramadan Package to receive exceptional benefits to match their brand-new car, a press release said.

The on-board high-efficiency battery system achieves an electric range of about 100km (WLTP) as a plug-in hybrid, which is unprecedented in this category to date. It also sets new standards in sustainability, and because the C-Class is one of the company's highest-volume



model series, this systematic electrification also makes it one of the most environmentally-friendly in the range. Other technical refinements include Mercedes-Benz Intelligent Drive systems such as DIGITAL LIGHT, rear-axle steering and Active Stop-and-Go Assist available as optional extras.

"The new C-Class is larger, bonder and more innovative than ever before. Its design is dynamic and luxurious with numerous comfort highlights to make your journey relaxed and



comfortable. The ultra-modern technical advances and safety features offer increased peace of mind while retaining the essence of this classic Mercedes-Benz vehicle. While modern and refined, the new C-Class is assuredly a Mercedes-Benz and makes each drive an oasis of relaxation in every situation," said Shaun Michael, CEO at Mercedes-Benz Oman.

With the Ramadan package, customers can drive away with one of the most coveted vehicles, with the exception of the Mercedes-AMG G-Class, and enjoy a five years/75,000km service package, four years Mobilo on-road assistance service, three years unlimited mileage warranty, free registration for the first year, and a complimentary gift from the Mercedes-Benz Lifestyle Collection. The offer is available on stock range.

Ooredoo's Goodwill Journey distributes 'Kiswat al Eid'

With excitement and happiness in the air, Ooredoo volunteers celebrated Eid al Fitr by spreading compassion and kindness to underprivileged families in Samail and Bousher - in Al Misfah, as part of this year's Goodwill Journey.

Working together with the Nidaa Charity Team and local branches of the Omani Women's Associations, the team distributed shopping coupons, gifts and toys to over 175 families in the area ensuring everyone enjoyed the Eid festivities with their loved ones, a press release said.

Now in its 18th year, the Ooredoo Goodwill Journey is the cornerstone of activities designed to support the community, bring joy, and create new opportunities for sustainable social development. Each year, volunteers from Ooredoo travel the length and breadth of the country to assist charitable associations with their programmes and provide much-needed supplies to empower families in need.

This year, the Goodwill Journey focused on supporting the



elderly, the youth, people with disabilities, and launched a women's incubator which will create new opportunities for small businesses to grow in Jalan Bani bu Hassan. Ooredoo volunteers also distributed food supply boxes to over 600 families in Salalah and Mirbat, as well as Barka, Mussanah, Nizwa and Yangal, as well as shared Iftar Sa'am boxes to drivers stopped at traffic signals in Sohar and organised a special celebration for

Qarraqasho at the Al Wafa Rehabilitation Centre for Disabled Children in Al Amerat.

First launched in 2005, the Ooredoo Goodwill Journey has enriched the lives of tens of thousands of people in Oman every year by providing essential appliances, educational equipment, and vital supplies. The initiative has also supported SME incubators and helped to launch female-driven businesses and projects promoting growth.

OMINVEST backs social entrepreneurship

With a commitment towards the development and growth of Omani communities and the society, OMINVEST - a leading investment company in the Sultanate of Oman - has extended support to Al Rahma Association by providing project management services through its fully owned real estate subsidiary - ORIS.

The support includes conducting technical due diligence to the project and supporting in preparing specifications for the overall project and analysing the same for tendering, as well as assessing tender submissions for the selection of the consultants and contractors for the new Al Rahma Centre, a building which will include approximately 20 shops for leasing. The total construction built-up area is 6,229sqm for a total cost of RO1.6mn. The centre will also include administrative offices for the association and meeting rooms, while also acting as a venue for workshops that families looking to sell home-made products can use.

Al Rahma Centre is scheduled to be established on usufruct land granted by the Ministry of



Housing and Urban Planning in the Al Khoudh area. The new centre will be the association's largest sustainable project, one of a number of projects for which ORIS is providing technical support.

The centre will act as a social enterprise for Al Rahma Association, with the generated income expected to cover the association's initiatives, including payment of bills, purchasing of required equipment for the centre, study aids for university students, besides Iftar spreads and gifts for Eid.

Commenting on OMINVEST's contribution to the project, AbdulAziz al Balushi, Group CEO, said, "We believe in working closely with social impact partners that align with OMINVEST's social responsibility strategy, which in turn is built on our corporate vision of 'Transforming Businesses to Enrich Societies'.

He added, "We commend Al Rahma Association for their contribution to communities across the sultanate. Their efforts to provide financial and non-financial support to families in need is

honourable and praiseworthy. Businesses such as ours can be significant catalysts for creating scalable social value by supporting sustainable social entrepreneurship projects and programmes, such as theirs".

To further lend support to Al Rahma Association, and to encourage employee engagement, OMINVEST also promoted the 'Riyalak Million' campaign to its staff and companies within the OMINVEST Business Centre during Ramadan, with aims to assist the association in collecting funds for Al Rahma Centre.

Graubunden attracts GCC tourists for a cool summer

ss region of Graubunden is aiming to attract a record number of GCC visitors this summer, with a focus on the great outdoors, health, and wellness for the whole family.

Graubunden's summer campaign highlights a range of summer breaks targeting GCC travellers wanting to enjoy a more relaxed and healthier, family-orientated vacation. Visitors will be able to experience outstanding natural beauty, thermal spas and outdoor pursuits, in a mild climate, offering a welcome break from the intense summer heat in many parts of the GCC region.

In addition, there is a wide range of hotels and serviced apartments, Michelin-starred restaurants and immersive cultural experiences, making it the perfect destination for GCC families this summer.

"After the restrictions brought on by the pandemic, visitors from the GCC are returning in large numbers once again and we are anticipating a significant increase in demand this summer," said head of Business Development at Visit Graubunden, Tamara Lo-



effel. "Graubunden is famed for some of the very best health and wellbeing experiences anywhere in the world and what's more, Graubunden is also very familiar with Arabic culture - many of its 170 restaurants offer halal menu options and most hotels also have Arabic speaking staff," added Loeffel.

The largest source markets from the GCC, are the UAE and Saudi Arabia, each accounting for a 35% share, Kuwait and Qatar contribute approximately 12% each, with visitors from Bahrain and Oman, making up the remaining 6%.

According to the latest figures released by Switzerland Tourism, UAE residents staying overnight in Switzerland have al-

ready surpassed pre-pandemic levels. Comparing figures between July to December 2021 with the same period in 2019, the number of bed-nights recorded increased 20.8% from 188,384 to 227,482.

The number of UAE arrivals also grew from 75,084 to 85,632, during the same period, 2019 versus 2021. Moreover, a

recent survey conducted by YouGov, highlighted Switzerland as the top ranked overseas destination for UAE residents.

"In the years prior to the pandemic, GCC tourists were typically responsible for approximately one million overnight stays per annum in Switzerland, with daily expenditure of around US\$466 each per day. According to Statista, a German company specialising in market and consumer data, the GCC accounted for 9% of all arrivals in 2021.

Furthermore, the Swiss federal government has announced that visitors from the GCC are no longer required to provide an entry form, vaccine certificate, or negative PCR test. Social restrictions have also been eased in Switzerland, masks and COVID certificates are not needed when entering hotels, restaurants or shops.

"This summer in particular, the fresh air, outstanding natural beauty, mild climate and healthy outdoor activities such as hiking, cycling, and sailing make Graubunden, an ideal location for families wanting to get away.

OAB financial literacy series on

Oman Arab Bank (OAB) recently launched a unique 'Financial Literacy' series across all its social media platforms to promote financial well-being among Omani youth.

The series of videos address major financial decisions, such as buying a house, buying a car, getting married, saving, and running a business. This initiative by OAB is aligned with one of the bank's sustainability pillars - Financial Inclusion, a press release said.

Commenting on the series, Leen al Atassi, head of Corporate Communications at OAB, said, "Financial inclusion is vital for our economy to flourish and is key to the success of Oman Vision 2040. Through our research, we have found that one of the biggest obstacles to financial inclusion amongst the youth is a lack of understanding of the financial sector and the various services they have at their disposal. Through this series, our objective is to offer Oman's youth guidance and direction on how to manage their finances responsibly."

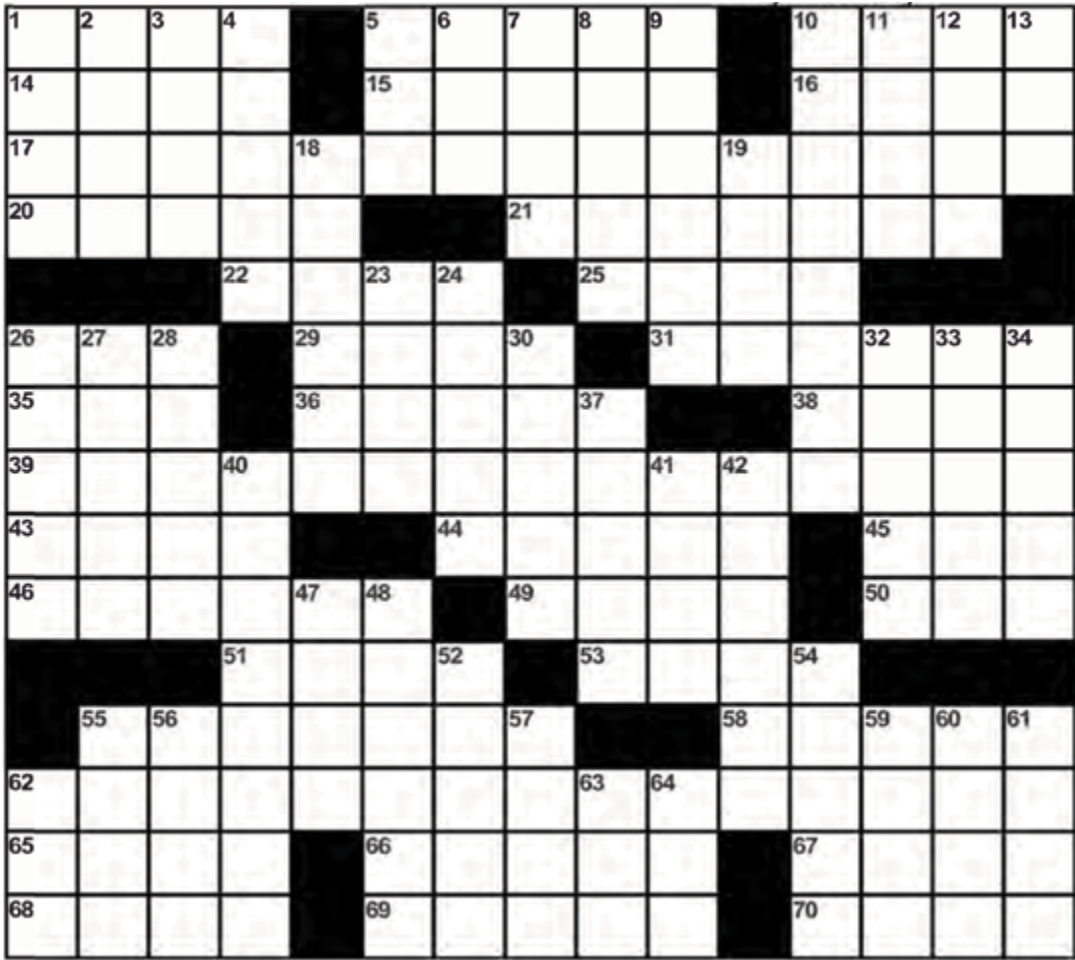
She added, "What makes this series unique is that it addresses real challenges that people face in their day-to-day lives, and it is a testament to our commitment to putting customers at the heart of our business."

The episodes were developed with the youth in mind - the content is simple, fun, easy to understand, and locally relevant.

Atassi added, "At the beginning of their career, people often resort to indulgent spending and borrowing to finance their dream car or house. This often leads to a cycle of debt that the borrower may find challenging to settle. Through this financial literacy series, we aim to help individuals plan and define their short and long-term goals to ensure financial well-being."

The Financial Literacy series will be broadcast across the Bank's social media channels and the OABistidama website. OAB has been promoting financial literacy through workshops with SMEs and various NGOs.

DAILY CROSSWORD



ACROSS

1) What you're filling in
5) Site of a Muslim pilgrimage
10) Had a sensation
14) One way to serve a steak
15) Hope for a nominee
16) "I had no..."
17) Like a neat, perfect arrangement
20) It's spotted in Westerns
21) Fish-eating birds
22) Rosemary or thyme
25) Use a bayonet
26) Hardly a gentleman
29) Was a blabbermouth
31) Quenches
35) Biochemistry abbr.
36) "Sacro" follower
38) "Damn Yankees" femme fatale
39) Extremely naive
43) Flexible mineral
44) Satan (with "the")
45) Astrological carnivore
46) Cheated at hide and seek

49) Scarf material
50) Auction merchandise, sometimes
51) Bird of old Rome
53) Soil type
55) Current measures
58) Baggy
62) Between a rock and a hard place
65) Relax on a couch
66) It gives one a leg up
67) Proceeds from a heist
68) "Trick" joint
69) Heavy British weight
70) Certain voiced votes

DOWN

1) Get a handle on
2) Member of Indian royalty
3) Modern Persia
4) Swimming pool measurement
5) Content starter
6) Yearling's mother
7) Crime boss
8) Prefix with "cross"
9) Human aces
10) Bright meteor
11) Duane or Nelson
12) Directors Spike and

Ang
13) Sailor, in slang
18) Kind of license
19) Face-to-face exam
23) Lady Macbeth or Hamlet
24) Hunter's hiding place
26) Finish a pie crust
27) "Tomorrow" musical
28) Do the running man
30) Oasis fruit
32) Bearlike marsupial
33) "... Gantry"
34) Wooden shoe
37) Raise trivial objections
40) Spongy tree gall
41) Tall fodder holder
42) Acid-neutralizing compound
47) "... happily_ after"
48) Most desperate
52) Brief quarrel
54) Coffee order, sometimes
55) Soon, to a bard
56) Having X and Y chromosomes
57) He's "the Man" of baseball
59) "Works for me"

60) Pivot
61) Congers
62) Breed

63) Half of the tai chi symbol
64) "Adolescent" start

NOTE PAD

TRITE PACTS ORB
HERON ABORT VEE
OVERTIME PAY EVA
YAN RUM RUN
CLUEING AMITIES
RAN LILY AEON
ADD SNEER SODOM
SLED Gaped TUNE
SERIF NICER LAW
TREK DATA GIL
REHEARS PETERS
ALE TOE SRI
NOG UNDERTAKERS
CPU REEVE CINCH
HEN ERRED ESSAY

YOUR DAILY HOROSCOPE

 **ARIES** MARCH 21-APRIL 19

Trying to eat your feelings instead of dealing with them? That's dangerous for both your emotional and physical health. Take a small step toward recognizing what's going on and put down the cookie that you automatically grabbed when things became a little stressful. If necessary, you can have it later. But for now, think about what triggered that automatic response toward food. Was it actual hunger? Didn't think so.

 **LEO** JULY 23-AUGUST 22

Astrological influences are working busily to push your agenda, refine your ideas, and polish your reputation with the powers that be. You're simply divine, and anyone who crosses your path is dazzled by your light. While you've definitely got the goods to back up your celestial PR, make sure that your ego doesn't get so big that you trip over it. Remember to be courteous and respectful and you can't go wrong

 **SAGITTARIUS** NOVEMBER 22-DECEMBER 21

Some pretty combative personalities might be playing in your personal sandbox, and the resulting noise is enough to make you want to duck and cover permanently. Go ahead and hole up in private, preferably with someone whose shoulder you can cry on, but make sure you have on your game face in public. Develop a thicker hide in public, and those noisy types will start respecting your personal space.

 **TAURUS** APRIL 20-MAY 20

Speak up if you've got a problem. It's important that you're able to accurately identify and voice areas in your life that aren't working. Go ahead and put your feelings on the line. Constructive change only happens when you're honest with yourself and others. Otherwise, the universe might take matters into its own hands, and the results could be far more dramatic. The outcome will be far less frightening and more beneficial than you think.

 **VIRGO** AUGUST 23-SEPTEMBER 22

Isn't it time you connected with some people who want to change the world as much as you do? Eclectic, creative types like yourself thrive when they're surrounded by similar mental and emotional energy, so look for ways to hook up with others who have the same kind of altruistic impulses that you do. The stars definitely say that being grounded in some satisfying group interaction is exactly what you need at this time.

 **CAPRICORN** DECEMBER 22-JANUARY 19

Right now you feel like you're in limbo, but think of it as more of an astrological waiting room rather than a gray area. You're actually preparing to do something rather daring or out of character. Perhaps you're ending an old friendship or relationship that's too limiting, or you're ready to renew an alliance that has some life in it yet. The stars encourage (and reward) bravery, so get ready, get set, go!

 **GEMINI** MAY 21-JUNE 21

Joint finances and any money matter closely related to loved ones can be a potentially touchy topic. This means you might need to take a firm stand with anyone (especially family members or old friends) who hasn't proved to be financially responsible in the past. While you might feel momentarily guilty for not helping them out, the amount of trouble you've saved for everyone more than makes up for it.

 **LIBRA** SEPTEMBER 23-OCTOBER 22

Ideas you've got, and the people around you are clamoring to hear them. Most of them want to know how they can materially improve their lives, but you know that the concepts you have to share go beyond satisfying material needs. However, it's important to remember that not everyone will be able to grasp the immediate importance of your thoughts, so temper your words and suggestions to suit your audience

 **AQUARIUS** JANUARY 20-FEBRUARY 18

Expect some changes at work. You may receive a promotion or an offer you can't refuse from a rival firm or see an opportunity to strike out on your own. Whatever the circumstances, it's a chance to shine in a new setting, so set your timidity aside and say yes to all that life offers you. While it's true there are no guarantees, you can use the element of risk to give yourself an edge, and you'll come out on top.

 **CANCER** JUNE 22-JULY 22

You're the center of attention in a big way right now. It's a good thing that the stars give you a double dose of communication skills, because everyone wants to hear what you have to say. The focus is actually so intense that you might feel a touch discombobulated by the glare from being in the spotlight. Let the pressure roll off your back and speak from the heart. You'll wow the crowd and impress a few important types too.

 **SCORPIO** OCTOBER 23-NOVEMBER 21

If you'd rather be at home, don't try to be the life of the party. Current celestial influences encourage quiet contemplation and deep thinking. It may feel like social exile, especially for a people-loving type like yourself, but it may be exactly what you need, especially if there are some weighty matters on your mind that need unburdening. Any time you take for yourself right now will prove to be invaluable.

 **PISCES** FEBRUARY 19-MARCH 20

Is there a whole lotta shakin' going on? Well, that's no surprise, especially since you've seen fit to start making some big changes in your life. Initially, things might seem crazier or more unsettled, but you just have to hold on past these disruptions. All change is stressful, even change for the better. You could be revamping old patterns or foundations that had been in place for a very long time. Stay calm and it will get better soon.



TEST YOUR KNOWLEDGE

01. Which polemical and lastingly influential book about writing and freedom was published in England in 1644 at the height of the English Civil War by a scholar and philosopher later known and celebrated more for poetry?

A. Oronoko
B. Some Thoughts Concerning Education
C. Leviathan
D. Areopagitica

02. Which is an official spoken language of China?

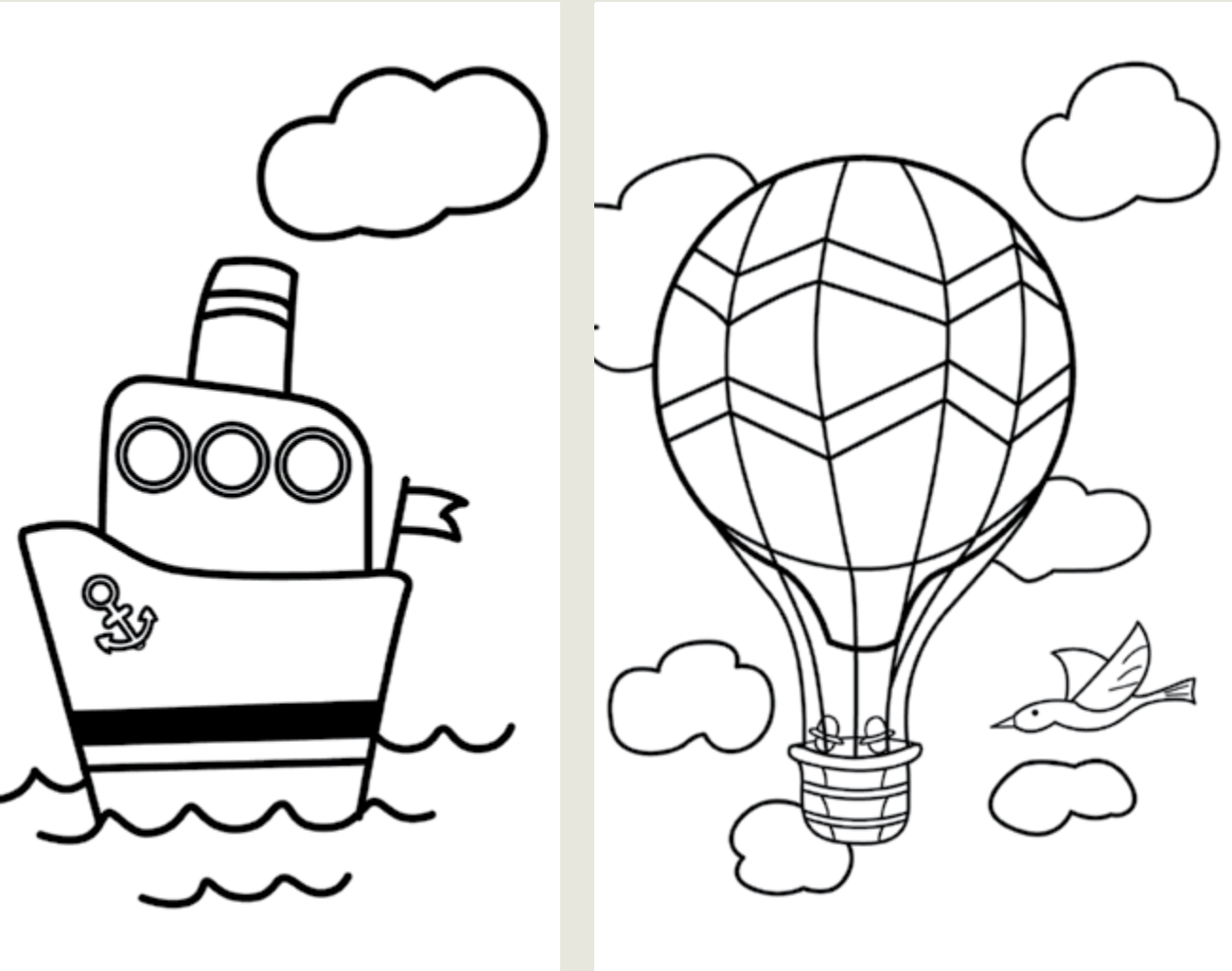
A. Pashto
B. Mandarin
C. Tamil
D. Messapian

03. Who choreographed (and directed) the 1972 film "Cabaret"?

A. Martha Graham
B. Jerome Robbins
C. Bob Fosse
D. Merce Cunningham

Answers: 1. D 2. B 3. C

KIDS COLOURING



BOGGLER

N	T	E	U
R	E	R	O
P	A	E	R
S	E	K	S

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

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

DO YOU SUDOKU?

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

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

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

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

Israel arrests 2 Palestinians suspected of axing 3 to death

Elad, Israel - Israeli security services on Sunday arrested two Palestinians suspected of axing to death three Israelis after a more than two-day manhunt, the latest in a spate of deadly attacks.

The security services - who previously identified the suspects as Assad Yussef al-Rifai, 19, and Subhi Imad Abu Shukair, 20 - said the pair were spotted near a quarry just outside the central town of Elad, where the axe attack took place on Thursday. "We said we would get the terrorists, and so we did," Prime Minister Naftali Bennett said ahead of his weekly cabinet meeting on Sunday.

The suspects had been hiding in a forested area, near the quarry, and did not fight with security forces as the arrest was carried out, security personnel at the scene told AFP.

The deadly attack in Elad, populated by mainly ultra-Orthodox Jews, was the sixth in which Israelis have been targeted since March 22.

Witnesses said two assailants leapt from a car swinging axes at passers-by, leaving three dead and four wounded, before fleeing



Israeli security forces use all-terrain vehicles during a manhunt in a forest area near city of Elad, on Sunday (AFP)

in the same vehicle.

The manhunt included 'intelligence and special forces units' from the police, domestic security agency and the army, along with helicopters and drones, the security forces said.

Army chief Aviv Kohavi praised the operation, vowing 'to strengthen the security... of Israeli civilians'.

Israel has identified the three dead as Yonatan Habakuk, 44,

and Boaz Gol, 49, both from Elad, as well as Oren Ben Yiftach, 35.

The bloodshed unfolded as Israel marked the 74th anniversary of its founding, which has previously been a tense day in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

For Palestinians, the anniversary of Israel's 1948 declaration of independence marks the Nakba, or 'catastrophe', when more than 700,000 fled or were expelled during the war surrounding Israel's creation.

rounding Israel's creation.

Hamas threats

The Elad killings followed a tense period in which the Muslim fasting month of Ramadan, the Jewish festival of Passover and the Christian holiday of Easter overlapped.

Tensions have boiled over into violent clashes between Israelis and Palestinians at the Al-Aqsa mosque compound, a highly

contested site in Jerusalem's Israeli-annexed Old City.

Palestinian president Mahmud Abbas had condemned the Elad attacks, warning that the murder of Israeli 'civilians' risked fuelling a broader cycle of violence.

But the Gaza Strip's Islamist rulers Hamas and Islamic Jihad, another Palestinian armed group, praised the latest violence, calling it a consequence of unrest at Al-Aqsa. Neither claimed responsibility.

"This operation demonstrates our people's anger at the occupation's attacks on holy sites," Hamas spokesman Hazem Qassem said of the Elad attack.

"The storming of the Al-Aqsa mosque cannot go unpunished."

Hamas last week threatened Israel with rocket fire and attacks on synagogues if its security forces carry out further raids on the Al-Aqsa mosque compound.

"Whoever has a rifle must have it ready, and whoever does not have a rifle must prepare their knife or their axe," said Yahya Sinwar, Hamas chief in the Israeli-blockaded Gaza Strip. AFP

First cholera outbreak since 2017 in S Sudan

Juba, South Sudan - Cholera has killed one child and infected 30 people in South Sudan, the first resurgence of the illness in nearly five years, health officials said late on Saturday.

"The Ministry of Health would like to inform the public that the cholera outbreak has been declared in Rubkona county, Unity State," the ministry said in a statement.

'To date, a total of 31 cases including one death have been reported from Rubkona town and Bentiu IDP camp' and health officials are investigating whether there are any others, it said.

The fatality was a seven-year-old child who died on March 25. All others infected have been treated and released from hospital, it said.

The outbreak followed a

steady rise in diarrhoea cases in the affected areas, it said.

It marked the first cholera cases in the country since December 2017, which marked the end of an outbreak that began in June 2016 and killed 436 people.

Cholera is an acute form of diarrhoea that is treatable with antibiotics and hydration but can kill within hours if left untreated. It is caused by a germ that is typically transmitted by poor sanitation. People become infected when they swallow food or water carrying the bug.

The World Health Organization (WHO) said in early 2021 there were between 1.3mn and four million cases of cholera per year around the world, leading to between 21,000 and 143,000 deaths. AFP

Russian climber dies on Mount Everest

Kathmandu, Nepal - A Russian climber has died on Mount Everest, the officials said on Sunday, in the second fatality on the world's highest peak this season.

The man, who has not been named, died on Saturday after falling ill while acclimatising at a camp below the summit at 6,553 metres.

"His body has been brought to the base camp and will be flown to Kathmandu once the weather improves," Bhisma Raj Dhungana, an official at Nepal's tourism department, told AFP.

"Though the cause of the death is not known yet, it could be due to complications related to altitude sickness."

The fatality was also confirmed by Mingma Gelu Sherpa of Seven Summits Treks, the agency that handled the Russian climber's expedition.

It was the second death on

the Nepal side of the 8,848-metre mountain this climbing season.

Last month a Nepali climber, Ngimi Tenji Sherpa, who was carrying equipment uphill, was found dead on the mountain.

Eleven Nepali climbers reached the summit on Saturday, the first of hundreds of climbers expected to scale the world's highest mountain from its southern approach in the coming weeks.

Nepal has issued 316 permits to mountaineers including 17 Russians for this year's spring climbing season, which runs from mid-April to the end of May.

On average, around five climbers die every year on the world's highest peak.

But in 2019, 11 people died, with four of the deaths blamed on overcrowding that year. AFP

Record 12.3mn Syrian children need aid: UN

Beirut, Lebanon - More Syrian children are in need than at any time since a devastating civil war erupted over a decade ago, but funding for them is 'dwindling', the United Nations warned on Sunday.

"Syria's children have suffered for far too long and should not suffer any longer," the UN children's agency said in a statement, noting that 12.3mn were in need of aid both inside the country and in the wider region where they had fled.

"More than 6.5mn children in Syria are in need of assistance,

the highest number recorded since the beginning of the crisis, more than 11 years ago," it added.

Syria's war is estimated to have killed nearly half a million people and displaced millions since it began with a brutal crackdown of anti-government protests in 2011. It escalated to pull in foreign powers and global militants.

"Children's needs, both inside Syria and in neighbouring countries, are growing," said Adele Khodr, UNICEF's Middle East chief.

"Many families struggle to



Displaced Syrian children are seen with clothes donated by a local charity organisation at a camp in Idlib province, on April 30 this year (AFP)

make ends meet. Prices of basic supplies including food are skyrocketing, partially as a result of the crisis in Ukraine."

Children are among the most vulnerable and the UN warned they are bearing the brunt of the impact.

"In Syria's neighbouring countries, strained by political instability and fragility, nearly 5.8mn children depend on assistance, their lives riddled with poverty and hardship," Khodr added.

UNICEF said they faced a severe cash shortfall to provide aid. AFP

Saudi King Salman enters hospital for 'examinations'



Saudi King Salman bin Abdulaziz (AFP)

Riyadh, KSA - Saudi Arabia's ageing King Salman has been admitted to hospital for unspecified tests, state media reported on Sunday.

The kingdom has generally sought to quell speculation over the health of the 86-year-old monarch, who has ruled the top oil exporter and the Arab world's biggest economy since 2015.

King Salman entered King Faisal Specialist Hospital in the coastal city of Jeddah on Saturday 'to conduct some medical examinations', according to an official report, citing a royal court statement.

"May God preserve the Custodian of the Two Holy Mosques and may he enjoy health and wellness," the statement said.

It is rare for the secretive kingdom to report on the health of

the monarch.

In 2017, Saudi Arabia dismissed reports and mounting speculation the king was planning to abdicate in favour of his son Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman, the country's de facto ruler.

King Salman underwent surgery to remove his gall bladder in 2020.

He was most recently hospitalised in March, for what state media described as 'successful medical tests' and to change the battery of his pacemaker.

Under his rule, Saudi Arabia has launched ambitious economic reforms for a post-oil era and given more rights to women, while adopting a more assertive foreign policy including entering a war in neighbouring Yemen. AFP

Between searing drought and Ukraine war, Iraq watchful over wheat harvest

Jaliha, Iraq - Iraqi farmer Kamel Hamed looks at the golden ears of wheat waving in the wind, unable to hide his anguish over the baking heat that is decimating his harvest.

"The drought is unbelievable," said the 53-year-old in a white dishdasha robe and keffiyeh head covering at his farm in Jaliha village of central Diwaniya province. "Even the well water can't be used, it's salt water."

Searing heat and a lack of rain were already threatening his harvest. Then came Russia's invasion of Ukraine in February, driving up the cost of fuel, seeds and fertiliser.

Like all farmers in Iraq, Hamed must follow the instructions of the state authorities who are the main grain buyers.

They determine the areas to be planted and the level of irrigation, depending on rain and water reserves. This year, due to water shortages, Iraq has reduced the area under cultivation by half.

As a result, Hamed has planted just one quarter of his 100 donums (10 hectares), where the combine harvester was now throwing grain into a truck bed. "This year we didn't even get 500kg of wheat from one donum," - less than half the usual harvest - he said.



Iraqi farmer Kamel Hamed works on harvesting wheat at his farm in Diwaniya province, on April 26, this year (AFP)

The war in Ukraine has 'pushed up the price of motor oil and of high-yield seeds', he added - yet 'another financial burden for farmers'.

"I don't know how to support my family. No salary, no job, where can I go?"

'Abandon the land'

After decades of war and insurgency, Iraq faces another huge challenge: severe water scarcity driven by climate change.

It is highly sensitive issue for Iraq and its 41mn people, who feel the impacts on a daily basis, from depleted rivers to rapid de-

sertification and more intense sandstorms.

Iraq's big rivers, the Tigris and Euphrates, and their tributaries originate in Turkey and Syria as well as Iran, which dam them upstream, reducing the flow as they enter Iraq.

Irrigated by the Euphrates, Diwaniya province, where Jaliha is located, normally receives 180 cubic metres of water per second.

This year the volume has been at least halved to '80 to 90 cubic metres', said Hani Shaer, who heads a farmers' collective responsible for distributing the water. The result can be seen in

the stagnant water in the main irrigation canal, which serves the 200,000 donums of surrounding land, with some gullies now completely dry.

Shaer denounced a lack of support from authorities, charging that the agriculture ministry provided just five kilograms of fertiliser this season, down from 40kg in previous years. "The farmer will leave, abandon the land and head to the city to look for any kind of work," he said.

Collapsed harvest

Agriculture ministry spokesman Hamid al-Nayef said the state

was helping by raising the purchase price in order to pay producers around US\$500 per tonne of wheat.

In 2019 and 2020, wheat harvests had reached five million tonnes, enough to guarantee 'self-sufficiency' for Iraq, he told AFP.

This season, Iraq may only grow 2.5-3mn tonnes of wheat, 'not enough for a whole year for the Iraqis', Nayef acknowledged.

"We will have to import," he said. Iraq will be confronted with the vagaries of the world market and prices driven up by the conflict in Ukraine, even though Baghdad imports its cereals mainly from Canada, Australia and the United States.

"With the interplay of supply and demand, prices are rising even in the United States and other countries," Nayef said.

Back in Jaliha, another farmer, Ahmed al-Jelhawi, was questioning his life choices. He said he used to harvest 500 tonnes of wheat, but this year expects just 50-75 tonnes. "I gave up my studies to devote myself to agriculture," he lamented. "But this year, agriculture is zero."

"Between the low production and the rising prices, we probably won't be able to plant next year." AFP

Beijing loyalist and ex-security chief John Lee anointed HK's next leader

Hong Kong, China - A former security chief who oversaw the crackdown on Hong Kong's democracy movement was anointed the business hub's new leader on Sunday by a small committee of Beijing loyalists.

John Lee, 64, was the only candidate in the Beijing-backed race to succeed outgoing leader Carrie Lam.

The elevation of Lee, who is under US sanctions, places a security official in the top job for the first time after a tumultuous few years for a city battered by political unrest and debilitating pandemic controls.

Despite the city's mini-constitution promising universal suffrage, Hong Kong has never been a democracy, the source of years of public frustration and protests since the 1997 handover to China.

Its leader is instead chosen by an 'election committee' currently comprised of 1,461 people - roughly 0.02 per cent of the city's population.

After a brief secret ballot on Sunday, 99 per cent (1,416 members) voted for Lee while eight voted against, according to officials.

Political pluralism

Beijing hailed the near-unanimous result, saying it showed 'Hong Kong society has a high level of recognition and approval' for Lee.

"This is a real demonstration of democratic spirit," the Hong Kong and Macao Affairs Office



John Lee and his wife Janet celebrate after Lee was named as the city's new leader in Hong Kong on Sunday (AFP)

said.

The European Union's representative in Hong Kong countered that the selection process was a 'violation of democratic principles and political pluralism'.

Under President Xi Jinping, China is remoulding Hong Kong in its own authoritarian image after huge and sometimes violent democracy protests three years ago.

Beijing deployed a sweeping national security law to stamp out dissent and rolled out a new 'patriots only' political vetting system to guarantee anyone standing for office is considered

suitably loyal.

Protests have been largely outlawed, with authorities enforcing an anti-coronavirus ban on public gatherings of more than four people as well as the security law.

The League of Social Democrats - one of the only remaining pro-democracy groups - held a three-person protest before polls opened on Sunday, chanting 'Power to the people, universal suffrage now'.

"We know this action will have no effect, but we don't want Hong Kong to be completely silent," protester Vanessa Chan

said as dozens of police officers looked on.

A troubled city

While the democracy movement has been crushed, much of the population still resent Beijing's rule and chafes at the city's entrenched inequality.

Hong Kong also faces economic difficulties thanks to two years of strict pandemic curbs that have damaged its business hub reputation and left residents cut off as rivals re-open.

Lee was asked by reporters on Sunday whether he lacked a genuine mandate.

"I do understand there will be time that is needed for me to convince the people," he replied.

"But I can do that by action." He said he planned to build a Hong Kong that is 'full of hope, opportunities and harmony' now that authorities had 'restored order from chaos'.

So far, his campaign has been light on concrete policy details - in particular how he plans to re-open Hong Kong to both international and mainland travel at a time when China is doubling down on its strict zero-COVID strategy.

Laos drops entry curbs for fully vaccinated

Bangkok, Thailand - Laos will drop COVID-19 entry restrictions for fully vaccinated tourists from Monday after the country reported falling coronavirus cases and deaths, senior officials said. The small Southeast Asian nation saw an 80 per cent downturn in international traveller numbers in 2020 - 4.7mn foreign tourists visited the previous year.

From January travellers had been required to complete seven days of quarantine, present a negative COVID-19 test, and were limited to travelling within certain areas with officially sanctioned tour groups.

Deputy Minister and Deputy Head of the Prime Minister's Office Thippakone Chanthavongsa said on Saturday that a task force's recommendations that 'measures for entering Laos PDR and relaxation for locals' had been approved.

"The Government sees it is time to develop the economy," she said. The relaxed measures will see international checkpoints re-opened for Laotian citizens and foreigners, provided they are fully vaccinated.

Unvaccinated visitors must produce a Rapid Antigen Test issued within 48 hours of leaving their origin country.

Tourists will also have to pay for their own medical treatment should they become COVID-19 positive.

Laos officials added that pubs and karaoke bars could reopen.



Firefighters and rescue workers remove debris from the ruins of the Saratoga Hotel, in Havana, on Saturday (AFP)

Havana luxury hotel blast death toll climbs to 27

Havana, Cuba - Rescuers combed through what remained of a luxury Havana hotel on Saturday, as the death toll after a powerful blast due to a suspected gas leak climbed to 27, authorities said.

No survivors were found in the upper floors of the prestigious Saratoga Hotel, and rescuers said they were now concentrating their efforts on the jumbled debris filling the two-level basement of the neoclassical building. Authorities reported on Saturday that 37 people had been hospitalised, down from an earlier number of 46.

There was meanwhile some confusion after a Red Cross official gave a death toll of 32, but the higher number was later reported to be 'an error'.

The hotel had been closed for business during renovation work, and many victims of Friday's explosion were either construction workers or hotel employees preparing for its reopening.

But a 29-year-old Spanish tourist, who had been walking nearby, died in the blast.

So far, 11 hotel employees have been identified among the dead, said Roberto Enriquez

Calzadilla, a spokesman for the state-run tourism group Gaviota, which operates the hotel.

He said the explosion happened while a gas tank was being refilled by a tanker truck.

A cry for help

Officials said the dead included four children and adolescents. More than a dozen of those hospitalised were listed in critical or serious condition.

With the search now turning toward the building's basement levels - a woman's cry for help was heard emanating from there on Friday afternoon - tons of smoking debris have complicated the task. "My daughter works in the Saratoga - she's been there (under the rubble) since... yesterday morning, and in all this time I still don't know anything," an anguished Yaumara Cobas told journalists, adding that she had checked with a hospital and the morgue.

"We've got to push on," said longtime Politburo member Ramiro Valdes, a veteran of the Cuban revolution. "Some of our comrades could still be down there - alive."

AFP

Acclaimed comic book artist George Perez dies at 67

New York, US - George Perez, an acclaimed comic book artist and writer known for his influential work on such superhero titles as the *Avengers*, *Wonder Woman* and the *Teen Titans*, has died, Marvel and DC Comics announced.

Perez was 67. He revealed last year that he was battling pancreatic cancer.

"George Perez was an artist, a writer, a role model and a friend," Marvel Entertainment said on Twitter. "His work paved seminal



George Perez (AFP)

stories across comics, and his legacy of kindness and generosity will never be forgotten."

DC Comics tweeted that Perez's contributions 'were pivotal in both driving and reinventing DC's long and rich history.'

Perez and writer Marv Wolfman had created such characters as Cyborg, Raven and Starfire.

Their *Crisis on Infinite Earths*, a reboot, 'saw several major characters killed off in a multiverse saga that still resonates in popular culture', according to Dead-

line.com.

Perez was known for his clean, dynamic and realistic style.

"George Perez never went half way, in art or life. He pushed the limit of what a comic could do: his style was somehow, impossibly both overwhelmingly powerful and subtly graceful," tweeted Tom King, a comic book writer who, like Perez, had won a coveted Eisner Award, an accolade akin to an Oscar in the industry.

Perez's family had moved in the 1940s from Puerto Rico to

New York, where his father found work in a factory.

His talents emerged early; Perez began working as an assistant at Marvel before turning 20, and was soon working on titles including *Astonishing Tales* and *The Avengers*.

DC publisher Jim Lee said Perez's art style was 'both dynamic and incredibly expressive... the perfect storytelling canvas for some of the most important events in DC history'.

AFP

Philippines on alert ahead of presidential poll, four killed

Manila, Philippines - More than 60,000 security forces in the Philippines were on alert on Sunday to safeguard ballots and polling stations on the eve of the presidential election, after police reported four people killed in an outbreak of violence.

Elections are a traditionally volatile time in a country with lax gun laws and a violent political culture, but the national police said this season has been comparatively peaceful.

In one of the worst incidents, four people were killed on Saturday in a gun battle between armed supporters of mayoral rivals in Magsingal town in the northern province of Ilocos Sur, said police spokesman Brigadier-General Roderick Alba. Another four were wounded.

Police in the northern province of Nueva Ecija also arrested two dozen people and seized weapons, including five M-16 rifles, a 12-gauge shotgun and 15 handguns, following a shoot-out between bodyguards of two candidates running for mayor of General Tinio.

Five people were wounded in the incident, which also left the same number of sports utility vehicles riddled with bullets, Alba said.



A security guard stands outside a room storing ballot boxes at a junior high school ahead of the May 9 presidential election in Manila on Sunday (AFP)

More than 18,000 posts, from president to town councillor, are up for grabs in the elections.

The son of former dictator Ferdinand Marcos looks set to win the presidential vote by a landslide, returning the clan to the pinnacle of political power.

Rights groups, Catholic church leaders and opponents see the elections as a make-or-break moment for the country's democracy, amid fears Marcos Junior could rule with a heavy fist.

Personnel from the police, armed forces and coast guard have fanned out across the archipelago to help secure polling stations and ballots, escort election officials and guard checkpoints.

The security deployment involves around 48,000 soldiers and 16,000 police, officials said.

"Based on our planning... we are confident that we'll have a secure and orderly election," said armed forces spokesman Colonel Ramon Zagala.

There have been 16 'validated

election-related incidents' since January 9, including four shootings and a 'slight illegal detention', Alba said.

That compares with 133 incidents during the 2016 presidential elections and 60 in the 2019 mid-term polls.

Police spokeswoman Colonel Jean Fajardo attributed the sharp drop to a heightened security presence, as well as military and police operations targeting 'loose firearms' and private armed groups.

The election commission largely prohibits the carrying of weapons during the election period that lasts until June 8.

Experts say the explosion of social media, which has made it easier to report incidents, and the growing domination of political dynasties, which smother electoral competition, have helped tamp down election violence. In the country's deadliest single incident of political violence on record, 58 people were massacred in 2009 as gunmen allegedly belonging to a local warlord in the southern Philippines attacked a group of people to stop a rival filing his election candidacy.

Thirty-two of the victims were journalists covering the contest, making the attack also the deadliest on record against media professionals.

The introduction of electronic voting in 2010 has made it harder for widespread vote-rigging that has historically plagued Philippine elections.

But Marcos Jr, who still insists he was cheated of victory in the 2016 vice presidential race, has warned of electoral fraud in these polls and urged his supporters to be alert.

AFP

Ukraine battles to hold east ahead of Moscow's Victory Day parade

Shelling and missile strikes have been intensified in the build up to the World War II anniversary

Severodonetsk, Ukraine - Ukrainian forces braced on Sunday to defend their final bastion in the devastated port city of Mariupol, desperate to deny Russia a symbolic win on the eve of Moscow's Victory Day celebrations.

Shelling and missile strikes have intensified in the build up to the World War II anniversary, and rescuers are searching for 60 Ukrainian civilians feared killed in the bombing of a village school.

President Volodymyr Zelensky marked the anniversary on the end of the World War by comparing Ukraine's battle for national survival to the region's war of resistance against its former Nazi occupiers.

"Decades after World War II, darkness has returned to Ukraine, and it has become black and white again," Zelensky said, in a



Smoke rises from a burning train station in Seversk, eastern Ukraine on Sunday, after the facility was targeted by missile strikes four days ago (AFP)

monochrome social media video shot against the backdrop of a bombed out apartment block.

"Evil has returned, in a different uniform, under different slogans, but for the same purpose," he warned, trying to turn Russia leader President Vladimir Putin's 'anti-Nazi' rhetoric back on itself.

Russia, meanwhile, was gearing up for a Victory Day parade designed to associate the invasion of its neighbour with the national pride felt over the Soviet Union's defeat of Germany.

"Today, our soldiers, as their ancestors, are fighting side by side to liberate their native land

from the Nazi filth with the confidence that, as in 1945, victory will be ours," Putin said.

Zelensky was also to meet G7 leaders via video conference to discuss the crisis, and European diplomats will meet again next week to hammer out the details of their latest sanctions package

against Moscow. On the ground, the key battles were being fought in Ukraine's east.

Tunnel network

Civilians have now been evacuated from Mariupol's Azovstal steelworks, leaving a small force of defenders holed up in its

sprawling network of underground tunnels and bunkers.

The complex - the final pocket of Ukrainian resistance in the port city - has taken on a symbolic value. "We, all of the military personnel in the garnison of Mariupol, we have witnessed the war crimes performed by Russia, by the Russian army. We are witnesses," said Ilya Samoilenko, an intelligence officer with the far right Azov regiment, which is defending the steel works.

"Surrender is not an option because Russia is not interested in our lives," he said.

Taking full control of Mariupol would also allow Moscow to create a land bridge between the Crimean peninsula, which it annexed in 2014, and regions run by pro-Russian separatists in the east. In one of those regions, Lugansk, Ukrainian forces are now mounting a last ditch defence of the city of Severodonetsk, formerly an industrial city of 100,000 people, now Russia's next target.

In the same region, governor Sergiy Gaiday said 60 civilians were feared dead after a school in the village of Bilogorivka was hit in an air strike. "The bombs fell on the school and unfortunately it was completely destroyed. There were a total of 90 people, 27 were saved," he said. AFP

Gunmen kill 48 in Nigeria attacks: Local official

Kano, Nigeria - Gunmen killed at least 48 people in attacks on three villages in northwest Nigeria's Zamfara state, a local official and residents said on Sunday.

Northwest and central Nigeria have been terrorised for years by criminal gangs known as bandits who raid and loot villages, steal cattle and carry out mass abductions of residents for ransom.

"A total of 48 people were killed by the bandits in the three villages (Damri, Sabon Garin and Kalahe) attacked Friday afternoon," said Aminu Suleiman, administrative head of Bakura district where the villages are. Dozens of gunmen on motorcycles entered the three villages in coordinated attacks, shooting people as they tried to flee, Suleiman said.

The worst hit was Damri where the gunmen killed 32 people, Suleiman told AFP, including patients at a hospital. "They burnt a police patrol vehicle, killing two security personnel." Troops deployed in the area engaged the attackers in a gun battle, forcing them to withdraw, Suleiman added.

AFP



Enraged crowd loot a truck transporting cooking gas cylinders in Colombo on Sunday (AFP)

Crowds jeer Sri Lankan PM on rare outing

Colombo, Sri Lanka - Boos and heckles greeted Sri Lankan Prime Minister Mahinda Rajapaksa on Sunday on his first public outing since nationwide protests erupted demanding his ruling family resign over the worsening economic crisis.

Months of blackouts and acute shortages of food, fuel and medicines have caused widespread suffering across the South Asian island in its worst economic downturn since independence in 1948.

On Sunday, the premier visited one of the holiest Buddhist temples - housing a reputedly 2,300-year-old tree - in Anuradhapura. But dozens of people carried hand-written placards and chanted slogans demanding that 'thieves' be banned from the sacred city, 200km north of Colombo.

"We will worship you if you stand down (as Prime Minister) and leave," one man shouted.

Heavily armed Special Task Force (STF) commandos were deployed while police moved to clear the road for Rajapaksa's convoy of six vehicles. Officials said the premier returned to the capital by helicopter.

Several major roads in the country are blocked by people protesting the lack of cooking gas, petrol and diesel.

In the capital, a truck transporting cooking gas was looted on Sunday by crowds who had

been waiting in line overnight for supplies.

Outnumbered police watched helplessly as men climbed onto the truck and got away with 84 cylinders of gas, officials said.

The government imposed a state of emergency granting the military sweeping powers to arrest and detain people on Friday, after trade unions brought the country to a virtual standstill in a

Several major roads in the country are blocked by people protesting the lack of cooking gas, petrol and diesel

bid to pressure President Gotabaya Rajapaksa to step down.

The defence ministry said in a statement on Sunday that anti-government demonstrators were behaving in a 'provocative and threatening manner' and disrupting essential services.

Unions said they would stage daily protests from Monday to pressure the government to revoke the emergency. Union leader Ravi Kumudesh said they will mobilise both state and private sector workers to storm the national parliament when it opens its next session on May 17. AFP

N Ireland in limbo after Sinn Fein triumphs

Belfast, UK - Northern Ireland's feuding leaders came under pressure on Sunday to unite in a new government after the Irish nationalist party Sinn Fein secured an unprecedented election win.

Once the political wing of the paramilitary IRA, Sinn Fein won enough seats in the devolved legislature to nominate its Northern Ireland leader Michelle O'Neill as first minister.

The result from Thursday's election for the Stormont assembly marked a potentially seismic shift, a century after Northern Ireland was carved out as a Protestant fiefdom under British rule. O'Neill said the result 'ushers in a new era' for the divided territory, and Sinn Fein said it wanted a referendum on reuniting Ireland within five years.

But only the UK government can grant a referendum, and Northern Ireland Secretary Brandon Lewis noted that a majority of voters overall still backed the constitutional status quo.

Ahead of convening party leaders for talks in Belfast on



Deputy First Minister of Northern Ireland and Irish republican Sinn Fein party member Michelle O'Neill (centre) celebrates with party members in Magherafelt, Co Londonderry, on Friday (AFP)

Monday, Lewis recognised nevertheless that Sinn Fein's triumph was a 'significant moment for Northern Ireland'. "I think it is an important moment to show that everybody can work together, regardless of who is first and deputy first minister," he said.

"That's what democracy is

about," Lewis added, urging the leaders to 'work with each other to find a way to come back into Stormont (and) form the executive'. The Irish and US governments also urged Northern Ireland's leaders to form a new power-sharing executive, under the terms of a 1998 peace deal

that ended three decades of bloodshed.

Johnson under pressure too

With all 90 Stormont seats filled from Thursday's proportional voting, Sinn Fein won 27 seats, ahead of the Democratic Unionist

Party (DUP) on 25 and the cross-community Alliance party on 17. "The people have spoken, and our job is now to turn up. I expect others to turn up also," O'Neill told reporters.

But DUP leader Jeffrey Donaldson demanded Prime Minister Boris Johnson first 'deliver on his word' and scrap post-Brexit trading rules with the EU, which unionists fear are casting Northern Ireland adrift from the UK.

Lewis said the government still preferred to negotiate a solution with Brussels - but reserved the right to act unilaterally to protect intra-UK trade and Northern Ireland's constitutional status. "It's very disappointing that what we're hearing is the EU is already saying it won't show any flexibility," the minister said.

While Sinn Fein will get to nominate a first minister, Northern Ireland's government can only form under the 1998 deal if the DUP agrees to take part and serve in the role of deputy first minister.

AFP

Australia PM says will 'ensure' no China base on Solomons

Sydney, Australia - Australia would work with its allies to prevent China setting up a military base in the Solomon Islands, Prime Minister Scott Morrison vowed on Sunday during a heated debate before May 21 elections.

China's growing clout in the Pacific has become a hot political issue in Australia ahead of the polls, following Beijing's announcement last month that it had signed a security pact with the Solomons.

The China-Solomons deal has not been publicly released but a leaked draft alarmed countries in the region, particularly sections that would allow Chinese naval deployments to the Solomons - less than 2,000km from Australia.

The deal sparked fears China may set up a military base in the



Australian PM Scott Morrison (right) and Opposition Leader Anthony Albanese attend federal election campaign debate in Sydney on Sunday (AFP)

Pacific state, though the Solomon Islands government has insisted this is not on the cards.

Morrison, whose conservative government is trailing the oppo-

sition in latest opinion polls, has been criticised for failing to prevent China from signing the deal in a region where Australia has traditionally had great influence.

Opposition Labour Party

leader Anthony Albanese described it in the televised debate as a 'massive foreign policy failure'.

The prime minister has warned that establishing a Chinese military base in the Solomons would be crossing a 'red line'.

Pressed during the debate on what that red line means, Morrison said: "Australia would work with partners to ensure that that type of an outcome would be prevented."

Morrison added, however, that it would be 'unwise' to speculate about specific measures that Australia might take to prevent a military base being established on the Solomons.

"The Solomon Islands government themselves have made it very clear to us that that is not an outcome that they are seeking or

supporting either. I believe it is not in their national interest to have such a presence," he said.

'Lack of transparency'

During Sunday's testy debate, the Australian prime minister and opposition leader also sparred over the rising cost of living, how best to tackle global warming and anti-corruption measures.

But China's political and military sway in the Pacific region have emerged as a major foreign policy concern.

Australia's foreign minister Marise Payne held talks with her Solomons counterpart in Brisbane on Friday night during which she repeated Australia's 'deep concern' over the China security agreement and the 'lack of transparency' over its content. AFP

LONG-HAUL FLIGHTS

Living in air

Long-haul, non-stop flights can span any length of time from five hours to 20 hours. And though the final destination might hold much promise, most people dislike them for being confined to a seat

Have you looked out of an aircraft window and seen the night arrive twice within the same flight? Have you had three meals on a flight, six visits to the washroom and yet not been able to grab 40 winks?

The travails of a long-haul flight are many. And they all depend on each individual's own forbearance and fortitude. A two-hour flight can be unbearable for some while an 18-hour flight can be a great refresher for others who look at it as an escape from the hullabaloo of the city and its cares.

The class of travel also has a great bearing on one's comfort level. Some people envy the comforts of first class and business class travel (as against economy seats) but some feel distressed even though they

enjoy a bed in the sky and luxurious meals on board at their beck and call.

Qantas has now revealed plans for the world's longest-duration commercial flight by the end of 2025, ferrying passengers between Sydney and London on Airbus A350s in just over 19 hours.

Only a handful of airlines fly non-stop over such vast distances, which present a host of challenges including the capability of planes, commercial viability, and even the health of crew and passengers.

Here are some of the longest-duration flights in the world today:

Singapore to New York
18hrs 40min
Singapore Airlines Flight SQ24 to New York's John F

Kennedy International airport is currently the longest commercial journey in the world, taking passengers more than 15,000km from the city-state to the eastern United States on Airbus A350-900s. It also operates the second-longest journey - Flight SQ22, also on A350-900s, to Newark in the US state of New Jersey is scheduled at 18 hours and 25 minutes.

Darwin to London
17hrs 55min
The longest current Qantas route - QF9 - connects Darwin in northern Australia with London daily, with passengers covering almost 14,000km on Boeing 787 Dreamliners. The flights were originally operated between London and the western city of Perth, but were moved to Darwin because of Covid-linked travel re-

strictions in Australia.

Los Angeles to Singapore
More than 17hrs
Singapore Airlines Flight SQ35 takes passengers more than 14,000km over the Pacific Ocean from Los Angeles on the US West Coast to the Asian city-state in 17 hours and 10 minutes.

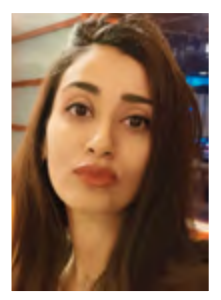
New York-Hong Kong
16-17hrs
Cathay Pacific said in March that it was planning to alter its New York-Hong Kong route over the Atlantic instead of the Pacific Ocean, making it a longer journey than Singapore Airlines Flight SQ24 to JFK. The flight path will cover 'just under 9,000 nautical miles'.



AMITA SANGHVI
Teacher-poet
I do not like long flights, so I avoid them as far as possible - especially travel to US or Canada. The last few hours are just unbearable due to being seated too long and, somehow, I also constantly feel thirsty throughout the flight.
My last longest flight was to Toronto (Canada) - straight 14 hours.



HAMDAH AL SHAMSI
Financial coach-writer
I used to hate long flights, when I was younger and travelled by economy as a student to the United States, and later Australia. But now, since I travel by Business Class, I don't mind as most airlines have seats that turn into comfortable beds. I also take sleeping pills with me.
The longest flight I had taken was to Panama, but I booked a hotel in Amsterdam airport and took the next day off. Otherwise, I don't think I would take that trip.



DR LAILA AL KHARUSI
Dentist, MD-Harub Dental Surgery
Long flights are exhausting, let alone when you are travelling with your children. The time of travel also plays a huge role - overnight flights are the worst. And now, with having to wear masks, it becomes even more tiresome.
The longest flight I had taken was to Australia from Muscat, But I was 16 then, and it didn't feel bad. In the end, the destination is what makes the journey worthwhile.



An Airbus A350-1000 aircraft on the tarmac at Sydney international airport on May 2, to mark a major fleet announcement by Australian airline Qantas

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WHITE DRAGON

Vietnam's spectacular, new glass-bottomed bridge – the world's longest such bridge – opens

Don't look down! Enjoy the spectacular view and tread cautiously... Vietnam launched a brand new attraction for tourists with a head for heights last week, with the opening of a glass-bottomed bridge suspended 150m above a lush jungle.

The Bach Long pedestrian bridge - whose name translates to 'white dragon' - in north-west Son La province, snakes around dizzying cliff faces before spanning a dramatic valley between two peaks, hitting a total length of 632m.

The floor of the bridge is made from French-produced tempered glass, making it strong enough to support up to 450 people at a time, while giving them a spectacular view of the greenery in the gorge far below.

"When standing on the bridge, travellers will be able to admire the beauty of nature," Hoang Manh Duy, a representative of the bridge's operator said.

The company says it is the world's longest glass-bottomed bridge, surpassing a 526m structure in Guangdong, China. Officials from Guinness World Records are expected to verify the claim next month.

Vietnamese tourism chiefs are seeking to lure visitors back after two years of COVID-19 shutdowns that kept out virtually all foreign travellers.

In mid-March, the country ended quarantine for international visitors and resumed 15 days of visa-free travel for citizens from 13 countries.

Vietnam is also set to host the Southeast Asian Games in two weeks - with more than 10,000 athletes and sports staff from countries in the region en route. And Bach Long is Vietnam's third glass bridge, a big draw for tourists.

"I hope the bridge will lure more domestic and international tourists to our area," local resident Bui Van Thach said after walking across it.

AFP



The looking glass

Bach Long bridge is located in Moc Chau District, Son La Province, Vietnam — 124 miles west of Hanoi. The area is one of Vietnam's most-popular tourist destinations and is known for its forests, bat caves, waterfalls, lakes, and tea plantations.

The structure of the bridge has two sections - One expanse stretches 290m directly between two mountains while the other 342m section runs along the side of a mountain. The bridge's glass bottom is made of three layers of super-tempered glass panels from French specialists Saint-Gobain. Each panel is 4cm thick and clear, so visitors can look at the valley floor below.

The bridge can support up to five tonnes, and so, only 500 people will be allowed on it at a time, the Vietnam National Administration of Tourism stated.



ONS JABEUR, THE TRAILBLAZER

Tunisian star becomes the first Arab or African woman to win a WTA 1000 title as she sharpens quest to inspire more Arab women to take up tennis

Paris, France - Ons Jabeur's long-stated goal is that her historic exploits on court lead to more Arab women taking up tennis - becoming the first Arab player to win a Grand Slam in next month's French Open final would do wonders to achieve that.

The 27-year-old Tunisian became a front-rank contender for tennis's greatest prize on clay with her gutsy three-set victory over American Jessica Pegula in the Madrid on Saturday.

In doing so the engaging and highly expressive Jabeur wrote another piece of tennis history.

Her 7-5, 0-6, 6-2 victory made her the first Arab or African woman to win a WTA 1000 title.

Her title in Birmingham last year was the first for an Arab woman player on the circuit and she is the first Arab player - man or woman - to crack the top 10.

Indeed, she will return to her previous highest ranking of seven on Monday.

With a tour-leading 12 victories on clay so far this season - and with Australia's world number one Ashleigh Barty having retired - the omens seem positive for her.

However, she has another glass ceiling to crack in reaching the last four of a Grand Slam for the first time - so she has two quarter-finals to her credit in Australia in 2020 and Wimbledon last year.

Jabeur - the junior champion at Roland Garros in 2011 - is, though, armed with a powerful weapon apart from her stroke-play.

"Definitely all those matches I've won on clay will give me a lot of confidence," she said as she



Being the only Arab is not easy to be on tour right now. I just want to say if I did it, it's not impossible. Like I said before, I always try to inspire other generations.

ONS JABEUR



absorbed her Madrid victory.

"When you're confident like that and you win a lot of matches, I think I should take this opportunity to go, like, really forward and win."

Jabeur admits to not watch-

ing much tennis when she was growing up and it was her husband Karim Kamoun who was more "obsessed by Roland Garros."

Kamoun was on hand in Madrid - he planted a kiss on her

cheek courtside after her triumph - as were her siblings and the head of the Tunisian tennis federation to see her momentous win.

Jabeur welcomes such attention but she would like to see more company in the locker room on the tour as Arab female players have been a rarity. Her compatriot Selima Sfar reached a career high of 75 in the world in 2001 but there was little progress for other Arab women players until Jabeur came on the scene.

"Being the only Arab is not easy to be on tour right now," she

said at Wimbledon last year.

"I just want to say if I did it (succeed on tour), it's not impossible. Like I said before, I always try to inspire other generations."

Jabeur's favourite player of all time is America's three-time Wimbledon finalist and 2003 US Open champion Andy Roddick - but it is Morocco's four-time Grand Slam quarter-finalist Hicham Arazi who has been her role model.

Jabeur said just as Arazi inspired her, so she hopes she can do the same for Arab women.

AFP



Carlos Alcaraz exults after winning a point against Novak Djokovic

Alcaraz downs Djokovic to reach Madrid final

Madrid, Spain - Carlos Alcaraz believes the sky is the limit after becoming the first player to beat Rafael Nadal and Novak Djokovic at the same tournament on clay as he stormed into the Madrid Open final on Saturday.

The 19-year-old Spaniard reached his second ATP Masters final in five weeks and claimed his first win over a reigning world number one, overcoming Djokovic 6-7 (5/7), 7-5, 7-6 (7/5) in front of a sell-out home crowd at the Caja Magica.

Alcaraz has a tour-leading seven wins against top-10 players this season. He enters Sunday's final against defending champion Alexander Zverev carrying a nine-match winning streak, having triumphed in Barcelona a couple of weeks ago.

He is the youngest player to beat a world number one in 17 years.

Asked if he sees a limit to what he can achieve, Alcaraz said: "I don't think so. Tomorrow I will go for the final as I did in Miami. I'm really happy to be able to play a second Masters 1000 final."

"I would say that I feel ready to compete against them (the top players) in every single tournament, in every single surface," added the Miami champion.

Zverev moved into his third Madrid final with a 6-4, 3-6, 6-2 win against Greek world number five Stefanos Tsitsipas, in a clash that finished at 1:06 am local time (2306 GMT Saturday).

The German second seed, a champion in the Spanish capital in 2018 and 2021, extended his Madrid winning streak to nine consecutive matches. Zverev has won both of his previous meetings against Alcaraz.

A calm and collected Alcaraz kicked off the match against Djokovic with a service break, thanks to a well-timed cross-court backhand passing shot.

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Ferrari's Leclerc grabs pole in Miami

Miami, United States - World championship leader Charles Leclerc praised the enthusiasm of Ferrari's many American fans Saturday, but warned of a tense battle ahead after leading the Italian team to a front-row lock-out at the inaugural Miami Grand Prix.

The 24-year-old Monegasque claimed pole position ahead of his Ferrari team-mate Carlos Sainz after world champion Max Verstappen made a rare error and slipped to third on the grid for Red Bull at a packed Miami International Autodrome.

"The fans are crazy," said a beaming Leclerc. "But it's incredible to be here in the United States and to see how much the sport has grown over the last few years.



Charles Leclerc is flanked by second-placed qualifier Carlos Sainz (L) and Max Verstappen, who came third (AFP)

"The last race weekend wasn't great for me. I made a mistake in that race. But today it

went well. "We are starting on pole and we need to finish the job tomorrow.

"Red Bull are extremely quick in the straight lines, but we are quick in the corners and it will be a tight challenge tomorrow. We feel very motivated as there are so many Ferrari fans here."

Leclerc clocked a fastest lap in one minute and 28.796 seconds to outpace team-mate Sainz by two-tenths.

Verstappen was third after making a slight mistake on his final flying lap. His Red Bull team-mate Sergio Perez was fourth with Valtteri Bottas fifth for Alfa Romeo and seven-time champion Lewis Hamilton sixth for Mercedes.

It was Leclerc's third pole this year and the 12th of his career. For Sainz it was the second time he had secured a front-row start.

AFP

Coleman secures first 100m win after ban

Tokyo, Japan - US sprint star Christian Coleman took first place in his 100-metre debut after returning from a ban for breaching anti-doping rules, clocking a "pretty decent" 10.09sec in Tokyo on Sunday.

The reigning 100m world champion made his comeback in January after the 18-month suspension for failing to adhere to whereabouts requirements, which kept him from last summer's Tokyo Olympics.

On Sunday the 26-year-old finally hit the track in Japan's Na-

tional Stadium for his first 100m this season -- an experience that left him feeling "pretty good" overall.

"I feel excited to have opened up my season with a pretty decent time... it's definitely something I can continue to build off," Coleman said after the race at the Golden Grand Prix 2022.

"This is my first 100 in a few years. So I put a lot of expectations on myself, and so I feel like I give myself a B+ overall."

Japan's Yuki Koike took second place in 10.22sec, and Aus-



Christian Coleman

tralian Rohan Browning came third in 10.23sec. The 100m sea-

son best is held by Kenya's Ferdinand Omanyala, who ran it in 9.85sec on Saturday in Nairobi.

Spectators were barred from Olympic athletics events over Covid-19 concerns, but on Sunday fans filled the stadium's lower stands, clapping enthusiastically for their favourites.

"To come here and compete in the Olympic Stadium is always exciting, and it's a blessing," said Coleman, who in March took silver in the 60m at the World Indoor Championships.

AFP



IPL 2022



CSK V DC

Conway, Moeen star as Chennai Super Kings thrash Delhi Capitals



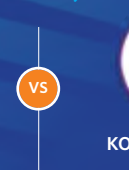
BRIEF SCORES:

Chennai Super Kings 208 for 6 in 20 overs (Ruturaj Gaikwad 41 (33) 4x4, 1x6, Devon Conway 87 (49) 7x4, 5x6; Anrich Nortje 3 for 42) beat Delhi Capitals 117 all out in 17.4 overs (Mitchell Marsh 25 (20) 4x4, 1x6, Rishab Pant 21 (11) 4x4; Moeen Ali 3 for 13) by 91 runs

TODAY'S MATCH (6PM)



MUMBAI INDIANS



KOLKATA KNIGHT RIDERS

Kohli falls for third golden duck but Bangalore win big

Mumbai, India - Superstar cricketer Virat Kohli's miserable batting form extended with a third golden duck this IPL season on Sunday but his team Royal Challengers Bangalore hammered Sunrisers Hyderabad by 67 runs.

Kohli got caught out first ball of the match with a mistimed hit to short midwicket, but skipper Faf du Plessis hit an unbeaten 73 to guide Bangalore to 192-3 in Mumbai.

Sri Lankan spinner Wanindu Hasaranga then returned figures of 5-18 to help dismiss Hyderabad for 125 in 19.2 overs as Bangalore, who are searching for their maiden Indian Premier League title, stay strong at fourth in the 10-team table.

Hyderabad, led by Kane Williamson, slumped to their fourth straight loss as the Twenty20 tournament moves towards the business end and teams jostle for play-off spots.

Bangalore recovered quickly from Kohli's opening blow, when left-arm spinner Jagadeesha Su-

RCB V SRH



Wanindu Hasaranga returned figures of 5 for 18 to destroy Sunrisers

chith prised out the star batter with a pitched delivery.

It was Kohli's third dismissal in the current IPL on the first ball, after two in successive matches last month. The 33-year-old former India captain has scored just 216 runs in 12 matches with just one half-century.

Du Plessis and Rajat Patidar, who made 48, then put on 105 runs to take the attack to the opposition bowlers with speedster

Umran Malik going for 25 runs off his two overs.

Du Plessis reached his second half-century of the season with a boundary, but Suchith denied Patidar his fifty to return figures of 2-30 from his four overs.

Du Plessis kept up the attack and found company in Glenn Maxwell, who hit two sixes before getting out in the 19th over for 33.

AFP

Gayle hits out at IPL 'lack of respect'

Mumbai, India - West Indies cricket star Chris Gayle says he pulled out of this year's Indian Premier League draw due to a lack of "respect" in his previous two seasons of the Twenty20 tournament.

The big-hitting self-styled "Universe Boss" has long been a popular fixture of the IPL, hitting the most sixes - 357 - of any player in the competition.

He played 10 matches for Punjab Kings in the previous Covid-hit edition before "bubble fatigue" forced him to leave.

"For the last couple of years, the way the IPL went about, I felt like I wasn't treated properly," Gayle was quoted as saying by British daily *The Mirror*.

"So I thought 'okay, you (Gayle) didn't get the respect you deserved after you did so much for the sport and IPL.'

"So I said 'okay, that's it, I'm not going to bother to enter the draft,' so I left it as it is. There is always going to be life after cricket so I'm just trying to adapt to normality."



Chris Gayle

Gayle did not put his name up for this season's auction that had top stars from across the globe.

But the 42-year-old Jamaican, who holds the record for the IPL's highest score of 175 in 2013, wants to return to the tournament next season.

"Next year I'm coming back, they need me!" he said.

"I've represented three teams in the IPL, Kolkata, RCB (Royal Challengers Bangalore) and Punjab. Between RCB and Punjab, I would love to get a title, with one of those two teams."

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LIVERPOOL WILT IN BRIGHT SONLIGHT

Son’s goal help Tottenham hold Liverpool and land a big blow to Reds’ title dreams



Tottenham Hotspur's Son Heung-Min celebrates after scoring against Liverpool in their English Premier League match at Anfield on Sunday (AFP)

Liverpool, United Kingdom - Jurgen Klopp said Liverpool cannot give up hope in the Premier League title race after a 1-1 draw against Tottenham despite admitting he cannot see Manchester City slipping up.

Klopp's side edged ahead of City on goal difference after dropping points at Anfield for the first time since February.

But the English champions can now afford to draw one of their remaining four games and still retain their title.

Pep Guardiola's men can re-

take top spot and open up a three-point lead when they host Newcastle on Sunday.

"It is an important point but we all know the situation," said Klopp.

"We are now top of the table and if we and City lose all the rest of our games then great, but we all know that will not happen.

"I would love to sit here and say yes City will drop points, the problem is I can't see it."

A share of the spoils took Tottenham to within a point of fourth-placed Arsenal who in-

creased the gap to four with victory against Leeds on Sunday and Spurs' chance of a top-four finish now also rely on the Gunners dropping points in two of their final three games.

Son Heung-min rounded off a brilliant team move to put Spurs in front on 56 minutes.

Luis Diaz's deflected shot levelled 16 minutes from time, but Liverpool failed to find a winner.

"It is not easy to play in this moment against an amazing team in an amazing atmosphere," said Tottenham boss An-

tonio Conte.

"The have a lot of energy despite playing every three days, it is incredible. They are deserving of everything they are reaching this season.

"To have a good result is positive but we have to be disappointed because we had the chances to win the game."

Twenty-one points separate the sides, but Spurs have made a habit of saving their best for the big occasion.

Conte's men are unbeaten in all four meetings with City and

Liverpool this season.

Liverpool did not start like a side fatigued by reaching the Champions League final in their 57th game of the season against Villarreal in midweek, as the intense press from the home side penned Tottenham in.

But their best effort came from a corner as Virgil van Dijk hit the crossbar.

Spurs also hit the woodwork in the first-half when Pierre-Emile Hojbjerg took aim from long range.

AFF



Arsenal's Eddie Nketiah (L) celebrates with teammates after scoring their second goal against Leeds in London on Sunday (AFP)

Arsenal boost top four bid as Leeds slump into relegation zone

London, United Kingdom - Eddie Nketiah boosted Arsenal's bid to finish in the Premier League's top four with a brace in their 2-1 win against Leeds as the Yorkshire club dropped into the relegation zone after Everton's 2-1 victory at Leicester on Sunday.

While second placed Manchester City waited for their chance to go three points clear of leaders Liverpool with a win against Newcastle later on Sunday, the focus in the day's early games was on the top four and the relegation battle.

Nketiah netted twice in the first 10 minutes at the Emirates Stadium as Mikel Arteta's side earned their fourth successive win. Leeds had skipper Luke Ayling sent off and, although Diego Llorente got one back, it was too little, too late for Jesse Marsch's strugglers.

Fourth placed Arsenal are four points clear of fifth placed Tottenham, with three games left for both teams in the race to qualify for next season's Champions

League via a top four finish.

Tottenham's gritty 1-1 draw at Liverpool on Saturday had kept them in the hunt, but Arsenal will visit their north London rivals on Thursday knowing a win would guarantee they finish above Antonio Conte's men.

Arteta signed a three-year contract extension on Friday and he is on course to repay that faith by leading Arsenal to their first Champions League campaign since 2016-17.

Nketiah spent time on loan at Leeds earlier in his career, but the Arsenal forward showed no mercy to his old club.

In the fifth minute, Nketiah punished a poor touch from Illan Meslier, closing down the Leeds keeper and tapping into the empty net.

Nketiah hardly celebrated out of respect for Leeds, but he struck again five minutes later, this time meeting Gabriel Martinelli's cross with a fine finish from 12 yards.

AFF



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