

11-day international sculpture camp being held in Mudhaibi

Our Correspondent
Muscat

Twelve sculptors from various countries are taking part in an event called International Green Forum in Mudhaibi, North Sharqiyah. The camp commenced on January 13 and ends on January 23.

Speaking to *Muscat Daily*, Ali al Jabri, one of the participating artists, said the camp has been organised by the Al Khadra Team for the first time. The 12 artists include seven Omanis, and one each from Italy, Spain, Morocco, Bulgaria and Algeria.

"The camp is an opportunity for the sculptors to exchange expertise in the field of marble, stone and wood carving, besides building bonds with people from different cultures," Jabri said.

The works of the sculptors will be displayed at the closing ceremony of the camp on January 23.

The camp was officially open on Sunday under the patronage of the Governor of North Sharqiyah.

According to Yousuf al Rawahi, a supervisor in the camp, it aims to create a cultural movement in Omani villages, facilitate interaction and exchange with international artists, and installation of outdoor sculptures to beautify tourist locations and promote Omani tourism. "It also aims to promote sculpturing as an art form among Omani communities and young people who are interested in art," said Rawahi.



(Supplied photos)

The camp also aims to promote sculpturing as an art form among Omani communities and young people

YOUSUF AL RAWAHI

Thanking the Ministry of Culture, Sports and Youth for its continued support for such art events, Rawahi informed that Al Khadra Team plans to organise successive editions of the camp in coming years to attract artists from different countries.



(Supplied photo)

New initiative to support Omani products soon

Our Correspondent
Muscat

The Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion (MoCIIP) will launch campaigns to promote Omani products, Sami bin Salim al Sahib, director general of industry at the ministry, has informed.

"In line with its industrial strategy, the ministry aims to support national industries by creating an appropriate investment climate to establish new industries and develop existing ones by addressing existing challenges," Sahib said.

"In the coming months, the ministry will focus on promoting national products domestically and internationally through promotional campaigns."

In the domestic campaigns, promotional exhibitions and seminars will be held to introduce national products and showcase their quality and distinctiveness compared to

other Gulf or international specifications.

In reference to the Made in Oman campaign, he said, "Products participating in the campaign were widely accepted by citizens and residents alike during the promotion period from November 2021 until the end of December 2021."

The campaign was organised by MoCIIP in partnership with the Authority of Small & Medium Enterprises Development, Consumer Protection Authority, Madayn, Oman Chamber of Commerce and Industry and representatives from the business community. "It was designed to support local producers and manufacturers and encourage consumers across the sultanate to buy locally produced goods," Sahib said.

"Omani products have the quality and standard specifications qualifying them to compete in local and international markets," Sahib added.



(Supplied photo)

OQ inaugurates RO318mn LPG plant

Continued from Page 01

Oufi said that the OQ LPG plant in Salalah is one of the most important projects of Oman Investment Authority. It will contribute to improving the gas value chain in general, providing liquefied petroleum gas and exporting surplus production and some of its derivatives to global markets.

He added that the establishment of such projects in various governorates contributes to promoting economic and social development in the different regions of the country, while advancing the growth of the industrial sector. "The project, from inception, has sought to enhance ICV development in the gas sector by retaining a sizable part of the expenditure within the country. Accordingly, it contributed to developing human capabilities and strengthening the national economy," Oufi said.

"The plant paid great attention to creating job opportunities and

honing the skills of young Omanis. Total expenditure as part of ICV development reached more than RO96mn. Around 300 small and medium enterprises took part in the implementation of the plant during the procurement and construction phase."

OQ LPG has a capacity to process around 8.8mn standard m³ per day of lean gas to produce about 304 kilotonnes per year of LPG, comprising 155 kilotonnes per year of propane (C3), 111 kilotonnes of butane (C4) and 38 kilotonnes of condensates (C5+).

The plant will also meet the energy requirements of industrial and retail consumers in Dhofar. Surplus output will be exported to world markets through OQ Trading, the marketing arm of the group. The group is studying the feasibility of using LPG products to develop petrochemical industries to help optimise value creation from hydrocarbons and support downstream investment.

WEATHER WATCH

	Max	Min
Abu Dhabi	29	19
Doha	23	17
Kuwait City	19	9
Manama	22	17
Muscat	27	20
Riyadh	21	12

PRAYER TIMINGS

Fajr	5.32am
Sunrise	6.51am
Duhr	12.22pm
Asr	3.27pm
Maghrib	5.48pm
Isha	7.02pm

Over 43,000 tourists visited Land of Frankincense in 2021: Ministry

Our Correspondent
Muscat

Over 43,000 tourists visited the Land of Frankincense site in Dhofar in 2021, the Ministry of Heritage and Tourism has stated.

According to ministry statistics, 43,174 people visited the Unesco World Heritage Centre.

The statistics showed that there were 27,962 visitors to Al Baleed Archaeological Park and the Museum of Frankincense Land, 12,916 to the Samahram archaeological site, and 2,296 to the Ubar archaeological site in Shisr.

The Al Baleed Archaeological Park, Samahram, Shisr and Wadi Dokka are included in the World Heritage List under the name Land of Frankincense sites.

The Ministry of Heritage and Tourism is developing several ar-



(Supplied photo)

chaeological sites and providing utilities to promote cultural and archaeological tourism in Dhofar.

In November 2021, the ministry - in cooperation with Petro-

leum Development Oman and Geological Society of Oman - opened Oman Geological Heritage Exhibition at the Museum of Frankincense Land in Salalah.

The exhibition showcased the geology of Oman, including unique fossils from different geological periods that were found in a number of other governorates.

ESO project combats light pollution for turtles on Masirah Island

Muscat - Building on its long-term efforts to conserve the population of nesting Loggerhead sea turtles on Masirah Island, Environment Society of Oman (ESO), in collaboration with the Environment Authority and Future Seas Global SPC, has launched a new initiative to combat light pollution. Sponsored by US Fish and Wildlife Service and Sprint for Oman, the latest project aims to help local coastal communities switch to low glare lighting, while raising awareness on the effects of artificial bright lights, which remain one of the main threats to nesting and hatching turtles.

"We're grateful to all of our supporters on the project," said Suaad al Harthi, executive director of ESO.

Al Mouj Muscat supports women entrepreneurs' workshops

Muscat - A joint initiative between Al Mouj Muscat and Omani Women's Association in Seeb has given women a helping hand through workshops and training to develop their own sustainable small businesses and inspire others.

Since September 2021, 20 women from the wilayat of Seeb attended Ghinsha Workshops sponsored by Al Mouj Muscat. The workshops guided them through resin-based jewellery manufacturing skills followed by guidance on how to market their products.

The Omani Women's Association in Seeb is a social and cultural organisation which aims to advance Omani women across all social and cultural fronts. By joining forces with Al Mouj Mus-



(Supplied photo)

It has been a privilege to support Omani Women's Association in Seeb on this inspirational initiative

NASSER AL SHEIBANI

cat, the project gave participating women both the practical skills and a sense of empowerment to shape their own futures by selling their products in local

markets.

This week, the course culminated in a closing ceremony, which was an opportunity to celebrate the programme and re-

flect on what was achieved.

On the occasion, Nasser al Sheibani, CEO of Al Mouj, said, "It has been a privilege to support Omani Women's Association in Seeb on this inspirational initiative which epitomises Omani culture both from a sense of togetherness and by creating opportunities where individuals feel motivated to find, develop and

channel their artistic and entrepreneurial skills.

"It's clear that by helping these talented ladies make the most of their abilities, they have grown in confidence and will certainly continue to be an inspiration to their children and community and spread positivity and prosperity throughout our nation."



(Supplied photo)

Oman imports over 16,000 heads of livestock from Kenya

Our Correspondent
Muscat

As part of its efforts to maintain food supplies, including red meat, in the sultanate, the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Water Resources (MAFWR) has resumed importing livestock from Kenya, according to an official at the ministry.

This is the first direct import of livestock from Kenya since a ban was imposed more than 16 years ago.

"On Thursday, a shipment of livestock arrived in the sultanate through the port of Salalah, carrying about 16,000 goats and sheep, which was received by the Al Bashayer Meat Company," the official said.

"The ministry's specialists visited Kenya to discuss the conditions of export and the mechanism to implement the conditions and standards of vet-

The ministry agreed to import about 40,000 livestock heads in Phase 1. It will increase to more than 500,000 heads per year

MINISTRY OFFICIAL

erinary quarantine approved for importing live animals to ensure that they are free of disease and are suitable for local and international consumption.

"This shipment is among several shipments agreed upon with the Kenyan government. The ministry agreed to import about 40,000 livestock heads in the first phase. It will increase to more than 500,000 heads per year. The agreement aims to provide foodstuffs in the sul-

tanate, especially red meat, whether live animals or red meat," he said.

Al Bashayer Meat Company is considered one of the largest companies specialising in red meat in the region, with a capacity to handle 1.3mn heads of livestock.

In January 2021, the company, which is promoted by Oman Food Investment Holding Company, launched commercial operations in the local markets under the name 'Bushra'.

The company's farm is located in Thumrait. The integrated facility, which includes modern and disease-free farms, feedlots, a state-of-the-art abattoir and processing plant, follows exacting standards of Sharia'h compliance, safety, sanitation, hygiene and quality control to ensure purity and taste. Livestock are only fed natural feed to provide the highest quality meat.

Businesses see hope despite restrictions after new surge

Our Correspondent
Muscat

Though COVID-19 had a severe impact on social and professional life, businesses are slowly picking up in and around the city. Despite strict rules, including 50 per cent capacity and social distancing, restaurants, hotels and parks are witnessing a recovery.

Surya Muduli, general manager of Royal Crown Hotel, said, "We have been following the safety measures since the COVID-19 outbreak. We have been particularly careful since the emergence of the new variant. We follow the Ministry of Health protocol to avoid any critical situation. Of course, our hospitality sector was hit badly by the pandemic. We are not taking any chances and guiding our guests to follow the guidelines and precautions. We do not want the situation to get out of control."

During the year-end festive season, most places were full and in high spirits. Kalbu Park, Amerat Park and Riyam Park witnessed the presence of several families enjoying the weather and weekend. People maintained social distancing and had masks on



(Muscat Daily)

throughout. Saju CK, an Indian expatriate, said, "We had a good time in the park. After a short walk on the cornice, we went to Riyam Park. Most of the people did follow social distancing; that was easy as the park is big with ample space for all."

Many hotel apartments too have been busy as people preferred staycationing over travelling abroad. Anuj Singh, CEO of Manam Hotel and Apartment in Wattayah, said, "We follow every precautionary measure to give

our guests the best experiences. Other than the standard safety measures, we make sure our lobbies and rooms are cleaned in a hygienic manner. COVID-19 has indeed affected our business, but it is necessary to break the chain of COVID-19 progressing further."

Restaurants in the city have also been busy. "We insist on our guests showing their vaccine certificates and we limit guests per table," said an employee of Camilia Restaurant.

COVID-19 UPDATE

Muscat - The Ministry of Health (MoH) on Sunday announced 2,087 new infections registered in the last three days. The total number of COVID-19 cases registered in the country now goes to 312,425.

MoH said 755 new cases were reported on Thursday, 605 on Friday and 727 on Saturday.

Three deaths were reported in the last three days. 'The total number of COVID-19-related deaths in the country now is 4,122,' MoH said, adding that 720 new cases recovered, accounting for a total of 302,178 recoveries.

'There were 25 new hospitalisations in the last 24 hours, accounting for a total of 88 in health institutions, including 11 in ICUs.'

2,087
NEW
CASES

MoCIIP records 49 violations at fuel stations

Our Correspondent
Muscat

The Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion (MoCIIP) carried out an inspection campaign which included 334 fuel filling stations in various governorates.

A statement issued by the

ministry said, "Forty-nine violations were registered against stations for non-compliance."

According to the ministry, the violations included lack of shopping stores at some stations, lack of clean toilets and failure to provide air filling machines for car tyres.

According to the ministry, the

campaign aimed to ensure that fuel filling stations adhere to the regulations of providing basic services and offering the best services that reflect Oman's economic and tourism status, and to abide by the regulations issued for the establishment of filling stations.

The ministry informed that

filling stations on roads to distant destinations must have some basic services, including a place for prayer, toilets, a pharmacy, a shop, an automated teller machine (ATM) and a car wash. Stations must also have car servicing facilities, rest houses or hotels, parking for the disabled and an information centre.

TENDERS ADVERTISEMENT

Oman Electricity Transmission Company (OETC) Announce the following Tenders:

Sr.No	Tender No.	Tender Name	Last Date for Obtaining Tender Documents	Closing Date	Grade	Tender Document's Fees (Including VAT) (RO)
1	02/2022	Supply of safety helmets, HV Gloves & Safety shoes for 3 years	31/01/2022	01/03/2022	Local companies with experience in same field, Have a valid tender board registration certificate.	78.750
2	69/2021 (Extended)	Providing maintenance services for OETC Virtual environment & SAN storage	24/01/2022	08/02/2022	Local companies with experience in same field, Have a valid tender board registration certificate.	105.000

Participation:	Interested Companies may obtain Tender Document with the necessity of sending a valid Tender Board certificate in the same required field.
Buying the Tender:	The documents required for the purchase of the tender are sent by e-mail to the Tenders, Procurement and Contracts Department, to ensure the authenticity of the documents before purchasing the tender during the official working days from 8.00 hr am - 01.00 pm hr.
Fees:	Against non-refundable payment as mentioned above against each set of document. (Payment Through Bank Transfer)
The deadline for clarification:	Before (21) Days from closing date.
Submission:	Each bid should be submitted in a separate sealed envelope addressed to The Chairman of tender committee mentioning Tender Number and Name on the top of the envelope.
Terms and conditions:	- No other writing or any reference thereto should be mentioned on the envelope. - The bid should be valid for not less than (90) days from closing date. - The Tenderer should enclose a bank guarantee issued by any bank in the Sultanate of Oman for the value of 1% of the bid value and should be valid for (90) days from closing date, addressed to Oman Electricity Transmission Company (SAOC). - Any bid not comply with the required guarantee, will not be accepted. - OETC is not bound to accept the lowest or any other offers.
Offer:	The complete bid documents should be deposited in Tender Box No. (1) at the company's building before 11:00 am on the assigned date for submission of the Tenders.
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إعلان طرح مناقصات

تعلن الشركة العُمانية لنقل الكهرباء عن طرح المناقصات التالية :

م	رقم المناقصة	عنوان المناقصة	آخر موعد للحصول على مستندات المناقصة	آخر موعد لتقديم العطاءات	الدرجة	ثمن الوثيقة (شامل ضريبة القيمة المضافة) (دع)
١	٢٠٢٢/٠٢	توريد خوذ السلامة و قفازات الحماية وأحذية السلامة لثلاث سنوات.	٢٠٢٢/٠١/٣١	٢٠٢٢/٠٣/٠١	الشركات المحلية العاملة في هذا المجال والمسجلة لدى مجلس المناقصات وتسجيلها ساري المفعول .	٧٨.٧٥٠
٢	٢٠٢١/١٩ (تعديد)	توفير خدمة الصيانة للبيئة الافتراضية وشبكة تخزين البيانات في الشركة العمانية لنقل الكهرباء	٢٠٢٢/٠١/٢٤	٢٠٢٢/٠٢/٠٨	الشركات المحلية العاملة في هذا المجال والمسجلة لدى مجلس المناقصات وتسجيلها ساري المفعول .	١٠٥.٠٠٠

الاشتراك	يمكن للشركات والمؤسسات المتخصصة الحصول على مستندات المناقصة مع ضرورة ارسال شهادة مجلس المناقصات سارية المفعول وفي نفس المجال المطلوب.
طريقة الشراء	يتم إرسال المستندات المطلوبة لشراء المناقصة عن طريق البريد الإلكتروني إلى دائرة المناقصات والمشتريات والعقود . وذلك للتأكد من صحة المستندات قبل شراء المناقصة وذلك في أيام العمل الرسمية من الساعة ٨:٠٠ ص - ٠١:٠٠ م .
الرسوم	مقابل دفع المبلغ المحدد أعلاه للنسخة الواحدة - لا ترد - (الدفع عن طريق التحويل البنكي)
آخر موعد للإستفسارات	قبل (٢١) يوم من تاريخ آخر موعد لتقديم العطاءات
تقديم العروض	تقدم العروض في مظاريف مغلقة ومعنونة بإسم رئيس لجنة المناقصات مع تحديد رقم وعنوان المناقصة فقط
الشروط و الضمانات	- عدم تحديد اسم صاحب العطاء أو ما يشير إليه على المظروف. - أن تكون العروض سارية المفعول لمدة لا تقل عن (٩٠) يوماً من تاريخ تقديم العطاء . - إرفاق تأميناً في صورة ضمان مصرفي من أحد البنوك العاملة في البلاد قدره (1%) من قيمة العطاء ساري لمدة (٩٠) يوماً من تاريخ تقديم العطاء . ومعنونا بإسم الشركة العمانية لنقل الكهرباء . - كل عطاء لا يستوفي التأمين المطلوب لن ينظر فيه . - الشركة العمانية لنقل الكهرباء غير مقيدة بقبول أقل العروض أو أي عطاء آخر.
العروض المقدم	يجب وضع العروض في صندوق المناقصات رقم (١) بمبنى الشركة قبل الساعة ١١ صباحاً من التاريخ المحدد لتقديم العطاءات.
عنوان الشركة	عنوان الشركة: محافظة مسقط - الموالج رقم السكة ٢١٥٣ - مبني رقم ٤٣٠ - تفاصيل التواصل ٩٣٢٠١٥٥٨ - ٩٣٢٠١٥٥٨ - ٩٢٢١٧٨٥٦
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Sohar International to finance major copper mining project

Muscat - As part of its continued efforts to further support major industries in the sultanate, Sohar International recently signed an agreement with Al Hadeetha Resources LLC to extend RO19mn worth of financing to the Wash-hi Majazah copper mining project that seeks to provide impetus to Oman's mining industry, and thereby contribute to the economic diversification objectives in line with Oman Vision 2040.

Signing the agreement on part of the bank was Ahmed al Musalmi, chief executive officer of Sohar International, whereas Sayyed Khalid bin Hamed bin Saif al Busaidy, chairman of Al Naba Holding, Devaki Gulabsi Khimji, managing director of Al Tasnim Group and Atmavishvar Sthapak, managing director of Alara Resources Ltd represented the company.

Al Hadeetha Resources LLC, a joint venture between Alara Resources, Al Hadeetha and Al Tasnim, is the first international joint venture company that has been awarded a copper mining licence in Oman for the Wash-hi Majazah project. Located in the Governorate of North Sharqiyah, the Wash-hi Majazah copper deposit has been evaluated under JORC standards for over 16mn tonnes of copper resources and 10mn tonnes of mineable reserves, according to a press release.

Commenting on the signing ceremony, Musalmi, said, "Mining is one of the government's key focus sectors as per the economic diversification plan, and Oman's mining industry has attracted both, foreign and local operators. As a bank that has been strongly aligned with Oman Vision 2040, it gives us immense pleasure to support and finance such projects that contribute towards the overall long-term vision of the nation.



(Supplied photo)

Located in the Governorate of North Sharqiyah, the Wash-hi Majazah copper deposit has been evaluated for over 16mn tonnes of copper resources and 10mn tonnes of mineable reserves

Regarded as one of the major mining projects in the sultanate, the scale of its operations will contribute significantly to the overall economy, creating in-country value, job opportunities and much more. At Sohar International, we remain invested in supporting ventures that provide sustainable socio-economic benefits to the community enabling people to prosper and grow."

With an increase in global demand for copper, the Wash-hi

Majazah project provides various channels of growth and prosperity in the economy as well as socio-economical benefits to the sultanate and local communities such as providing employment for approximately 200 Omanis, local skill developments, opportunities for local suppliers and vendors, infrastructure development and much more.

The factory will be inaugurated in November of this year, coinciding with the country's celebrations of the National Day.

"A project of this scale requires the right kind of support, and we are grateful to Sohar International for extending their project financing services to ensure that our operations are carried out without any hindrance," said Busaidy.

"Supported by the government represented by the Ministry of Energy and Minerals implementing favourable reforms to support the mining industry in Oman, we are certain that developments in this sector

will be promising. While the economic benefits from the mining sector will be far-reaching, such mega projects compliment the government's agenda to establish a decentralised local administration resulting in the various regions of Oman to prosper and grow. It is also important to note that Wash-hi Majazah project will contribute immensely to the generation of job opportunities and increasing employment for the local workforce. Apart from individual job seekers, the project will provide ongoing business prospects to local SMEs and vendors," Busaidy added.

With equity contribution of RO8mn bringing up the total valuation of the project at approximately RO27mn, Wash-hi Majazah project will generate cash flows of RO200mn for a period of ten years. The project will empower the local community in North Sharqiyah and create significant in-country value that will have an impact on the neighbouring governorates and re-

gions harnessing local capabilities and creating a strong value chain impacting everything from skills to infrastructure development such as upgradation of local STP plants, power, road and water. This project will also contribute in general to support the financial sector and the country's cash flow.

"We are always looking at the opportunities that will boost in-country value and we are proud to invest in local cooper mining projects in Oman with our esteemed partners. We appreciate Sohar International for their trust in this project," said Devaki.

A V Sthapak, MD of Alara Resources said "Alara wishes to thank Sohar International, our fellow JV partners for their valuable support and disciplined approach towards realising our mission of becoming a mid-tier mineral producer with a focus on mineral deposits and projects in Oman. Al wash-hi Majazah Project is destined to write a new chapter for Oman copper."



(Supplied photo)

OWWSC and Al Hadeetha sign agreement

Muscat - Oman Water and Wastewater Services Company (OWWSC) signed an agreement with Al Hadeetha Resources LLC to supply the Wash-hi Majazah copper mining project in the Wilayat of Mudhaibi with treated water during the project's estimated period of 10 years. Also, Al Hadeetha Resources LLC will invest by upgrading the capacity of Al Mudhaibi Sewage Treatment Plant (STP) to 1800 cubic meters per day, a press release said.

The agreement was signed by Qais bin Saud al Zakwani, CEO of OWWSC and Eng Avigyan Bera, CEO, on Behalf of Al Hadeetha.

Zakwani, said: "In the first phase, the OWWSC will supply the mining project with 300 cubic meters per day of treated water from Al Mudhaibi STP. After increasing the plant capacity, the volume of treated water that it will be supplied will increase from 300 cubic meters per day to 1200 cubic meters per day."

"The mining company will benefit from this agreement to control the dust resulting from the daily operational works. In addition, TE will be used in mining operational works for copper production, as well as using it to make the project area greener."

Oman's gas production increases by 9.2%

Muscat - Oman's production of natural gas (including imports) by the end of November 2021 reached 46.05bn cubic metres compared to 42.186bn cubic metres in November 2020, comprising a rise by 9.2 per cent, according to the data released by the National Centre for Statistics and Information (NCSI).

The increase is attributed mainly to the rise of associated gas by 26.2 per cent to reach 8.499bn cubic metres compared to 6.736bn cubic metres by the end of November 2020 and the increase of non-associated gas

(including imports) by 5.9 per cent to reach 37.550bn cubic metres compared to 35.449bn cubic metres a year ago.

Gas usage in electricity power plants went up by 8.9 per cent to reach 7.384bn cubic metres by the end of November 2021 compared to 6.778bn cubic metres by the end of November 2020.

The use of gas in industrial zones reached 201mn cubic metres by the end of November 2021 compared to 128mn cubic metres in 2020, constituting a surge by 57.2 per cent.

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Libya oil, gas exports hit 5-year high of \$21.5bn

Tripoli, Libya - Libya's lifeline oil and gas exports raised revenues of more than US\$21.5bn in 2021, the highest level in five years, the National Oil Corporation (NOC) announced on Saturday.

Total net revenues for oil and gas exports last year amounted to US\$21.5bn as well as €30mn in non-dollar sales, the state-run NOC said in a statement.

It said record levels were achieved in November and December, raising a combined US\$4.3bn in the two last months of 2021.

'The end of the year 2021 recorded a recovery, and oil prices achieved their largest annual gains since 2016, driven by the recovery of the global economy from the state of stagnation' due to the coronavirus epidemic, NOC chief Mustafa Sanalla said.

A decade of violence since the 2011 revolt that overthrew and killed dictator Moammar Gadhafi, armed groups have frequently blockaded or damaged oil installations.

Oil production has recovered to 1.2mn barrels per day, as opposed to between 1.5mn and 1.6mn bpd before the NATO-backed uprising of 2011.

AFP

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MSX falls 0.62% on weak activity

Our Correspondent
Muscat

The benchmark index of the Muscat Stock Exchange (MSX) fell 0.62 per cent to close at 4,240.53 points on Sunday.

Trading activity deteriorated from the previous session as turnover declined 69.71 per cent to RO1.77mn and volumes fell 47.28 per cent to 11.48mn shares.

All the sectoral indices closed in red territory. Financial index fell 0.61 per cent, Industrial index declined 0.19 per cent and Services index fell 0.81 per cent. MSX Shariah index fell 0.84 per cent at 519.21 points.

Market breadth remained negative as six companies closed up, while 24 companies closed down. The rest 17 traded stocks closed flat for the day.

Top gainers were Taageer Finance (4.0 per cent), Al Jazeera Steel Products (2.55 per cent), National Bank of Oman

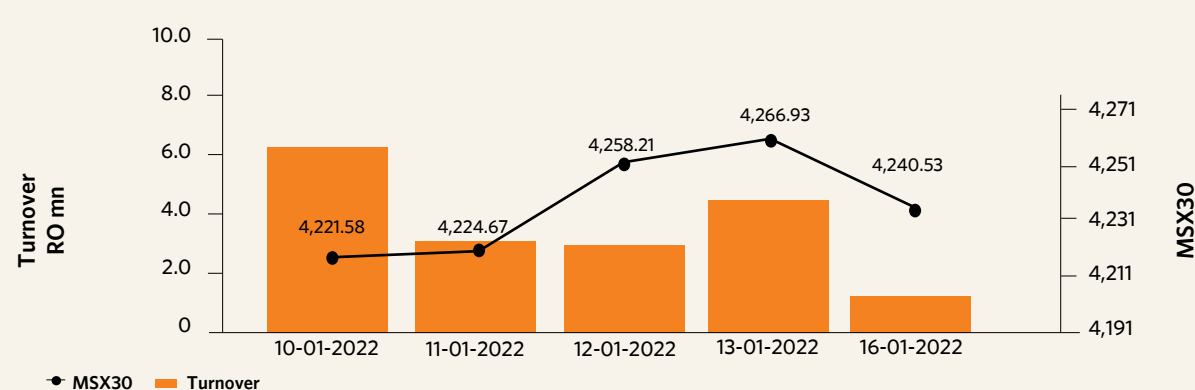


(1.91 per cent), United Finance (1.7 per cent) and Oman National Engineering & Investment Co (1.03 per cent).

Top losers were Al Batina Development & Investment Holding (-18.0 per

cent), Voltamp Energy (-9.17 per cent), Al Ahlia Insurance (-8.94 per cent), National Aluminium Products Company (-8.87 per cent) and A'Saffa Foods (-8.09 per cent).

MSX INDEX AND TURNOVER OF FIVE TRADING DAYS



Growth of hydrogen economy hints at new power dynamics

Abu Dhabi, UAE - Rapid growth of the global hydrogen economy can bring significant geoeconomic and geopolitical shifts giving rise to a wave of new interdependencies, according to new analysis by the International Renewable Energy Agency (IRENA).

The 'Geopolitics of the Energy Transformation: The Hydrogen Factor' report sees hydrogen changing the geography of energy trade and regionalising energy relations, hinting at the emergence of new centres of geopolitical influence built on the production and use of hydrogen, as traditional oil and gas trade declines.

Driven by the climate urgency and countries' commitments to net zero, IRENA estimates hydrogen to cover up to 12 per cent of global energy use by 2050. Growing trade and targeted investments in a market dominated by fossil fuels and currently valued at US\$174bn is likely to boost economic competitiveness and influence the foreign policy landscape with bilateral deals diverging significantly from the hydrocarbon relationships of the 20th century.

"Hydrogen could prove to be a missing link to a climate-safe energy future", Francesco La Camera, director-general of IRENA said. "Hydrogen is clearly riding on the renewable energy revolution with green hydrogen

emerging as a game changer for achieving climate neutrality without compromising industrial growth and social development. But hydrogen is not a new oil. And the transition is not a fuel replacement but a shift to a new system with political, technical, environmental, and economic disruptions."

"It is green hydrogen that will bring new and diverse partici-

Fossil fuel exporters like Oman, Australia, Saudi Arabia and the UAE consider clean hydrogen an attractive way to diversify their economies

IRENA

pants to the market, diversify routes and supplies and shift power from the few to the many. With international co-operation, the hydrogen market could be more democratic and inclusive, offering opportunities for developed and developing countries alike."

IRENA estimates that over 30 per cent of hydrogen could be traded across borders by 2050, a higher share than natural gas today. Countries that have not

traditionally traded energy are establishing bilateral energy relations around hydrogen. As more players and new classes of net importers and exporters emerge on the stage, hydrogen trade is unlikely to become weaponised and cartelised, in contrast to the geopolitical influence of oil and gas.

Cross-border hydrogen trade is set to grow considerably with over 30 countries and regions planning for active commerce already today. Some countries that expect to be importers are already deploying dedicated hydrogen diplomacy such as Japan and Germany. Fossil fuel exporters increasingly consider clean hydrogen an attractive way to diversify their economies for example Australia, Oman, Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates. However, broader economic transition strategies are required as hydrogen will not compensate for losses in oil and gas revenues.

The technical potential for hydrogen production significantly exceeds estimated global demand. Countries most able to generate cheap renewable electricity will be best placed to produce competitive green hydrogen. While countries such as Chile, Morocco, and Namibia are net energy importers today, they are set to emerge as green hydrogen exporters.

WAM

Equinor, BP sign deal for offshore wind projects

New York UK - Equinor and BP finalised the purchase and sale agreements (PSAs) with the New York State Energy Research and Development Authority (NYSDERA), for Empire Wind 2 and Beacon Wind 1 offshore wind projects, companies announced on Friday.

The PSAs set the terms under which Empire Wind 2 will deliver 1,260 MW of renewable offshore wind power and Beacon Wind 1 will provide 1,230 MW of renewable offshore wind power while investing in New York's infrastructure.

Equinor and BP's current offshore wind project portfolio including Empire Wind 1, Empire



Wind 2, and Beacon Wind 1, will generate enough electricity to

power about 2mn New York homes and generate more than

US\$1bn in economic activity for the city once finished.

This includes port and infrastructure investments that will strengthen New York's position as the regional offshore wind industry hub and a leading example of economic activity fueled by the energy transition.

"Today's milestone is a critical step forward and we will continue to work hard to deliver the Empire Wind and Beacon Wind projects, providing clean energy and stable returns for decades to come," Felipe Arbelaez, BP's senior vice president for zero carbon energy, was quoted as saying in the statement.

Anadolu Agency

UK economy recovers to above pre-pandemic level

London, UK - Britain's economy has surpassed its pre-pandemic level after recording strong growth in November, official data showed on Friday.

"Gross domestic product is estimated to have grown by 0.9 per cent in November 2021 and is above its pre-coronavirus pandemic level for the first time," the Office for National Statistics (ONS) said in a statement.

The UK economy is 0.7 per cent above its level in February 2020, the ONS added.

"It's amazing to see the size of the economy back to pre-pandemic levels in November - a testament to the grit and determination of the British people," said Finance Minister



Shoppers, some wearing face masks, walk past stores in Camden Market in London, on January 7 (AFP)

Rishi Sunak.

Seen as a potential successor to embattled Prime Minister Boris Johnson, Sunak urged Britons to get their booster jab to

help safeguard the economic recovery.

"We all have a vital part to play to protect lives and jobs, and I urge everyone to do theirs by

getting boosted as soon as you can," he said.

While the UK economy grew strongly in November compared with output of only 0.2 per

cent in October, this was before the Omicron variant took hold.

"GDP almost certainly dropped in December, as households hunkered down in response to the Omicron variant," noted Samuel Tombs, chief UK economist at Pantheon Macroeconomics.

The British Retail Consortium last week warned that restrictions imposed in the wake of Omicron 'wiped out' much of a recent recovery enjoyed by UK bricks-and-mortar stores.

UK supermarkets managed to avoid major fallout, however, as Omicron boosted demand for at-home celebrations.

AFP



Tender Announcement

The Egyptian School in Muscat is honoured to announce for a public tender to establish a language lab in it in which will be operating for the coming scholastic year 2022/2023.

Offers and presentations will be delivered in two weeks from the advert publication.

Note:

Terms and conditions form will be withdrawn from the school itself in Al Ansab.

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4. Mix well, Ready to be served

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Bank Muscat conducts special year-end draw for its Al Mazyona customers

Bank Muscat, the leading financial services provider in the sultanate, recently conducted its Al Mazyona End of Year draw with over RO1.5mn in high value prizes being given away to 92 lucky winners, in line with the bank's commitment to promoting a strong savings culture in the sultanate.

The winners were chosen from amongst customers across the different governorates in the sultanate, Asalah Priority Banking and Al Jawhar Privilege Banking during the special prize draws, which were conducted in the presence of Abdulnasir al Raisi, general manager - Personal Banking, Abdullah Tamman al Mashani, general manager - Products, Amjad Iqbal al Lawati, deputy general manager - Customer Segments and Taya Eid Bait Sabaea, deputy general manager - Interior Regions.

As many as 70 winners were chosen from across all governorates in the sultanate, from among customers having a minimum balance of RO1,000, with



each winner getting RO5,000 in the prize draw.

High-savings Asalah Priority Banking customers maintaining a minimum balance of RO30,000 were entered into

special draws wherein ten lucky customers won RO50,000 each.

Al Jawhar customers maintaining a minimum balance of RO10,000 were entered into special prize draws to choose the

ten lucky winners of RO20,000 each.

Two mega prizes of RO250,000 each were also given away after conducting a prize draw from among all the

customers maintaining a minimum balance of RO30,000 in their Al Mazyona accounts.

In total, more than RO1.5mn were given away during the special End of Year draw.

In 2021, a record 7,470 prizes amounting to a total of over RO11mn were given away to the winners of the Al Mazyona Savings Scheme.

The draws were held in line

with the bank's strategy of promoting a good savings habit in the country, which improves the financial stability of society and economy as a whole. It must be noted that Bank Muscat's various services and products are in line with global financial trends and enhances the ease of banking for its customers in line with its customer-centric vision 'To serve you better, everyday'.

As the leading financial services provider in the sultanate for the last four decades, Bank Muscat has the largest banking network in Oman with 174 branches and over 800 ATMs, CDMs and other devices.

Its vast array of digital banking channels including Internet Banking and Mobile Banking are helping customers meet their different financial requirements and needs. The bank's technology-driven products and services are in tune with Oman's move towards a cashless, e-payments-based society and are playing an important role in the realising the ambitious goals of Oman Vision 2040.

Qatar National Bank net profit jumps 10% to QR13.2bn

Qatar National Bank (QNB), the largest financial institution in the Middle East and Africa (MEA) region, announced that the board of directors, has approved its results for the year ended December 31, 2021.

Net Profit for the 2021 financial year reached QR13.2bn (US\$3.6bn), an increase of 10 per cent compared to 2020. Operating Income increased by 11 per cent to QR28.3bn (US\$7.8bn) driven by strong growth in top line performance. This reflects QNB Group's success in maintaining sustainable and strong growth across a number of revenue segments.

The board of directors have recommended to the general assembly the distribution of a cash dividend of 55 per cent of the nominal share value (QR0.55 per share). The financial results for 2021 along with the proposed profit distribution are subject to Qatar Central Bank approval.



Total Assets reached QR1,093bn, an increase of 7 per cent from December 31, 2020, mainly driven by strong growth in Loans and advances by 6 per cent to reach QR764bn. Robust customer deposits generation helped to increase customer deposits by 6 per cent to reach QR786bn as of December 31, 2021.

QNB Group's strong asset lia-

bility management capabilities enabled QNB Group to improve its loans to deposits ratio from 98.0 per cent to 97.2 per cent as of December 31, 2021 reflecting the improvement in the Group's overall liquidity.

The Group's drive for operational efficiency continues to result in cost-savings and strong revenue sources that has helped QNB Group to improve effi-

ciency (cost to income) ratio from 24.3 per cent to 22.2 per cent, which is considered as one of the best ratios among large financial institutions in the MEA region.

The ratio of non-performing loans to gross loans remained stable at 2.3 per cent as of December 31, 2021, one of the lowest amongst financial institutions in the MEA region, reflecting the

high quality of the group's loan book and the effective management of credit risk. Also during the year, QNB Group increased its loan loss provision charge by QR7.1bn, as QNB Group remains cautious on the external environment with respect to potential risks that may arise from key markets where QNB Group operates.

This helped the Group to increase its coverage ratio to 117 per cent, which reflects the prudent approach adopted by the Group towards non-performing loans.

Group capital adequacy ratio (CAR) as of December 31, 2021 amounted to 19.3 per cent higher than the regulatory minimum requirements of the Qatar Central Bank and Basel Committee.

QNB Group supported by 27,000 staff resources operating from approximately 1,000 locations and 4,500 ATMs.

10% cash reward for salary transfer customers of ahli islamic

Assessing the needs of its customers to continue providing them with offers that provide added benefits, ahli islamic has announced a cashback reward of 10 per cent of up to RO500 when transferring monthly salary of at least RO1,000 with the bank.

Once the monthly salary has been transferred to ahli islamic, all current and new Omani customers and expatriates will be eligible to receive a one-time cash reward.

The offer is part of the bank's initiatives to enhance its services, maximising benefits for its customers, within a framework that conforms to the Islamic-sharia'a principles.

Through its new salary transfer campaign, which will run for two months starting January 2022, ahli islamic aims to provide its customers with Islamic banking products and services that suit the ever-evolving choices of today's customer.

Yousuf bin Salim al Rawahi, deputy general manager and head of ahli Islamic said, "The bank's cashback reward to its salary transfer customers is an exclusive opportunity that allows customers to make a wise choice and invest their money in line with their conviction. It also serves the national priority of financial inclusion among the community, especially among youth."

Alibaba Cloud recognised for its critical cloud abilities by Gartner

Alibaba Cloud, the digital technology and intelligence backbone of Alibaba Group, has been recognised for its critical cloud abilities of compute, storage, network and security among global cloud service providers on the newly released 2021 Gartner Solution Scorecard for Alibaba Cloud International IaaS & PaaS.

Alibaba Cloud's IaaS (infrastructure as a service) + PaaS (platform as a service) offerings were recognised with the thirs highest overall solution score of 81 per cent among all evaluated international vendors in this market.

Alibaba Cloud scored 86 per cent in the required criteria in the 2021 scorecard.

It also met 74 per cent of the preferred criteria and 58 per cent of the optional criteria respectively.

The scorecard is a highly recognised industry assessment and evaluates selected service providers that meet a defined set of inclusion criteria against their latest solutions for cloud integrated IaaS and PaaS in nine categories, including computing, storage, network, and security, across 270 criteria.



This marked the third consecutive year that Gartner has published a Solution Scorecard about Alibaba Cloud.

Alibaba Cloud believes this year's scores reflect its increased infrastructure and marketing presence outside China, as well as differential global products.

"We have continued to be recognised in the Gartner Solution Scorecard in the past two years by broadening our international offerings and our infrastructure options. In our opinion, these efforts, as reflected in the scorecard, have given us a competitive advantage over other global players," said Jeff Zhang, president of Alibaba Cloud Intelligence.

"Going forward, we will strengthen our core IaaS+PaaS features and step up the rollout of new services and features in all regions, with the aim of providing the best cloud experience to our customers worldwide."

Alibaba Cloud currently has 80 availability zones in 25 regions, serving millions of customers across the globe. It has been strengthening its capabilities in computing, storage, net-

work, and security.

The fourth generation of ApsaraCompute Shenlong Architecture unveiled in October 2021, carries leading capabilities in terms of container elasticity, storage, input/output (IO) performance, latency and chip-level security hardening features. It is equipped with the industry's only large-scale Remote Direct Memory Access (RDMA), which can reduce network latency as low as 5 microseconds.

In terms of storage, Alibaba Cloud's proprietary distributed storage system Pangu provides excellent scalability and automated load balance with extremely high data availability. It has built Luoshen, an innovative cloud network architecture that provides products and services for various cloud network scenarios to support the deployment of millions of customers.

Owning more than 80 security and compliance accreditations worldwide, Alibaba Cloud also provides an array of security products, including DDoS protections, Web application firewall, cloud security and business risk management, for businesses worldwide.

Barr Al Jissah's artificial reef project scales new successes

Launched in July 2021 by the Barr Al Jissah resort Company, the sultanate's most luxurious address, the artificial coral reef project has scaled new successes.

The project aims to achieve sustainable development of marine life in Barr Al Jissah and the surrounding areas, improve bio-cover and biodiversity, and rehabilitate marine life. Given the extent of destruction of these reefs, the initiative will also raise awareness about the importance of maintaining the marine environment and its long-term sustainability.

Commenting on the project success, Firas Matraji, CEO of Barr Al Jissah Resort Company said, "The artificial reef project saw realisation through the co-operation of marine biologists and several local organisations. We have built several structures with artificial coral reefs, lowered them on to the seabed, and provided the right circumstances for them to thrive. We hope to create an adequate environment for the long-term survival of marine life and coral reefs in the waters of the sultanate."

"We have collaborated with a group of expert divers to monitor the coral reefs on a regular basis. The goal of these trips is to guarantee that these reefs can continue to



offer sustenance and habitat for other marine species. We also liaised with Shangri-La and Extra Divers to promote environmental awareness about this project and its importance in reducing the effects of over-fishing, environmental pollution, and the irresponsible use of small boats, through communication with fishermen and the

local community. We are pleased with the recent positive reports of the project, which confirmed the acceleration of coral reef growth and the emergence and repopulation of many new marine organisms in the region." He added.

Situated in a secluded bay - where the Sea of Oman meets the dramatic mountainous

coastline - Barr Al Jissah is the prestigious business behind Oman's leading luxury destination.

Barr Al Jissah project brings together high-end homes with three luxury hotels managed by Shangri-La, complemented by an entertainment centre with open-air amphitheatre - ideal for outdoor concerts - and a pri-

vate marina, offering the perfect base to explore Oman's pristine coastline.

Located just a few minutes away from Muscat, the destination combines the romance of Arabia with the considered elegance and tranquillity of the Mediterranean, to create a unique lifestyle destination in the region.



Medlab Middle East exhibition to return as standalone event in 2023

Informa Markets, organisers of Medlab Middle East, have announced the MENA region's leading exhibition for the laboratory industry will return to a standalone event in 2023, following unprecedented demand from exhibitors and visitors for the 2022 edition of the show, which takes place at the Dubai World Trade Centre from January 24-27, 2022.

As a result of the pandemic, Medlab Middle East and Arab Health co-located in 2021 to provide a platform for both the laboratory and general healthcare industries to come together, reconnect and do business face-to-face in a safe and secure environment.

However, following high-level demand from leading laboratory companies to showcase their offering in a dedicated space, and from attendees keen to capitalise on the latest laboratory releases, the event will now revert to a standalone format, with dates confirmed for February 7-9, 2023.

Tom Coleman, exhibition director of Medlab Middle East, said, "Advances in the medical laboratory have been pivotal in the defence against the continued threat that COVID-19 poses to industries around the world. Due to the speed at which the laboratory industry has responded to these threats by developing solutions, products and technology to counter the impact of the pandemic, we have seen a surge in companies wanting to showcase their latest innovations and from buyers eager to capitalise on these advances."

"As a result of this demand, following the 2022 edition of the show, which will be held from January 24-27, Medlab Middle East will return as a

standalone event in 2023 with a total of six halls, showcasing the latest innovations and new technologies being utilised in the laboratory industry," Coleman added.

The 2022 edition of Medlab Middle East is expected to welcome more than 400 exhibitors, a 100 per cent increase from 2021. Key players participating in this edition include Roche, Siemens, Beckman Coulter, Abbott, Biomerieux and Mindray. In addition to the growth in exhibitors, which is expected to increase to over 500 in 2023, country pavilions have risen from nine in 2021 to ten in 2022, with that figure expected to increase to 14 in 2023.

Fueling the surge in exhibitors is the anticipated growth in the global laboratory industry. According to the Global Clinical Laboratory Market - Analysis by test, end-user, by region, by country (2021 edition), the global laboratory market is expected to grow by a compound annual growth rate (CAGR) of 6 per cent between 2021 and 2026, which puts the predicted value of the global laboratory market at US\$33.07bn by 2026.

The report attributed the growth rate to the increasing number of lifestyle-related ailments and chronic illnesses, and spurts of infectious diseases in different parts of the world.

The introduction of accurate and technologically advanced products, such as companion diagnostics, biochips, and microarrays, has bolstered the demand for early disease detection. Moreover, rapid technological advancements to enhance productivity and reduce costs are anticipated to boost the market further.

Majliya: New brand identity of Jawahir Oman

Passionately dedicated to uncompromising quality for more than 40 years, Jawahir Oman recently revealed its new brand identity, 'Majliya', in a bid to make the brand experience more accessible to customers in the Middle East and beyond. During a special event, attended by Majliya customers, the new Majliya store was unveiled in the commercial district of Al Qurum.

Commenting on this exciting rebrand, Marco Belgrado, general manager of Majliya, said, "Jawahir Oman was established in 1977 to continue the legacy of the sultanate's famed jewellery makers through the craftsmanship of refined jewels and exclusive gifts that are the very essence of Oman. In the last four decades, the brand has become a leader in the luxury jewellery and gift segment, synonymous with uncompromising quality and passion. Today, we proudly take our brand experience to the



next level by making our high-end keepsakes available to anyone in the region, even the world. Through Majliya, we build on four decades of master craftsmanship in the hope to inspire our customers to be true to themselves and discover a unique Middle Eastern luxury brand with global reach."

Majliya is the story of an extraordinary Omani icon with big aspirations: Creating timeless

masterpieces that honour the wishes of its clientele and are as individual in spirit as they are. With great respect for local traditions and customs, each brand element is a story in itself. Colour, design lines, harmony between heritage and modernity, all contribute to the success of this eternal luxury brand that celebrates bridging history and time with a glorious future.

"Majliya continues on a legacy

that makes us stand out. As patrons of high-end luxury keepsakes that present a lifetime of stories and memories, our success is the unquestionable proof of the attraction Oman's heritage has on customers around the world. We help each chronicle their very own story by translating imagination into contemporary jewellery and gifts that play a profound role in their life. In an ever-changing world, we want to foster authenticity," Belgrado added.

The brand-new Majliya brandship store in Al Qurum extends over an area of 252 sqm. It features a wide range of luxury jewellery and gifts crafted to inspire, drawing from past culture to fashion handcrafted collections with the utmost precision and care, ensuring true emotional value that transcends. The in-store lounge gives customers an exceptional experience on all fronts, while maintaining the

highest levels of privacy and exclusivity.

The launch of Majliya was accompanied by the unveiling of brand-new jewellery collections - Orbit, Opera, and Shalal, introduction of new jewellery lines within the Ahjar and Asrar Collections, as well as showcasing other iconic luxury jewellery collections. Another feather in its cap, the launch of our state-of-the-art e-commerce website, highlights Majliya as one of the pioneer luxury regional brands in the jewellery industry.

"We are proud of this momentous milestone, as we endeavor to inspire authenticity with our original Omani brand amongst other markets. We are committed to making Majliya available outside the sultanate, with plans to open showrooms throughout the GCC. Our next store will be in Doha, Qatar, and is set to open in the first quarter of 2022," Belgrado concluded.

Up to 62% of MENA-based digital workers actively job hunting: Report

Although unexpected circumstances have led to economic difficulties over the past two years, digital talent has emerged relatively unscathed, eager to explore their options and ultimately pursue new opportunities. This widespread appetite has emerged as a key takeaway following a global survey of employees in digital roles conducted by Boston Consulting Group (BCG) and The Network, a global alliance of recruitment website.

The subsequent report, titled 'Decoding the Digital Talent Challenge,' sheds light on the key factors behind people's aspirations to move to pastures new, providing a comprehensive analysis of major international markets, the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) included.

As per the survey, part of BCG's Decoding Global Talent series, as many as 62 per cent of MENA employees working in digital fields are actively job hunting, with better career opportunities in other roles (72 per cent), looking for a new challenge (66 per cent), feeling undervalued in current positions (40 per cent), and searching for a company more aligned with personal beliefs (32 per cent) the main motivations behind people looking for a new role. For digital employees, good relationships with colleagues and learning and skills training are among the most valued aspects of their jobs, while diversity, inclusion, and environmental issues have also increased in importance over the latest year.

Of the digital employees sur-

veyed across the region, 78 per cent revealed that diversity and inclusion have become more important to them in the last 12 months, and 55 per cent added they would not consider potential employers that did not share the same views in this area. Moreover, 66 per cent revealed that employers' environmental responsibility has become more important to them since the same period a year ago, with 47 per cent unwilling to consider companies that do not share their environmental views.

"Much like other markets around the world, the MENA region boasts a vibrant and opportunistic landscape for digital employees. The pandemic has accelerated digital transformation and increased reliance on related technologies, creating



Leila Hoteit

supplementary positions," said Leila Hoteit, managing director and partner, BCG Middle East. "However, the evolving digital climate has also seen employee preferences and perspectives manifest and multiply. Rather than money being the primary

influencer behind personal motivation and professional decisions, other factors including diversity, inclusion, and the environment have become key forces for work-related happiness or dissatisfaction, as have options to work abroad and remote working."

On the subject of relocation, the number of digital field employees willing to move to another country for work is considerable from a regional standpoint - standing at 83 per cent. Canada is the most preferred destination where digital workers would like to relocate (16 per cent), followed by the UAE (12 per cent), and Germany (10 per cent). In terms of the UAE, its appeal among digital talent also ranks among the leading nations worldwide, with

Dubai and Abu Dhabi ranked sixth and ninth, respectively, as the most attractive cities for digital workers.

Furthermore, remote working possibilities are similarly attractive.

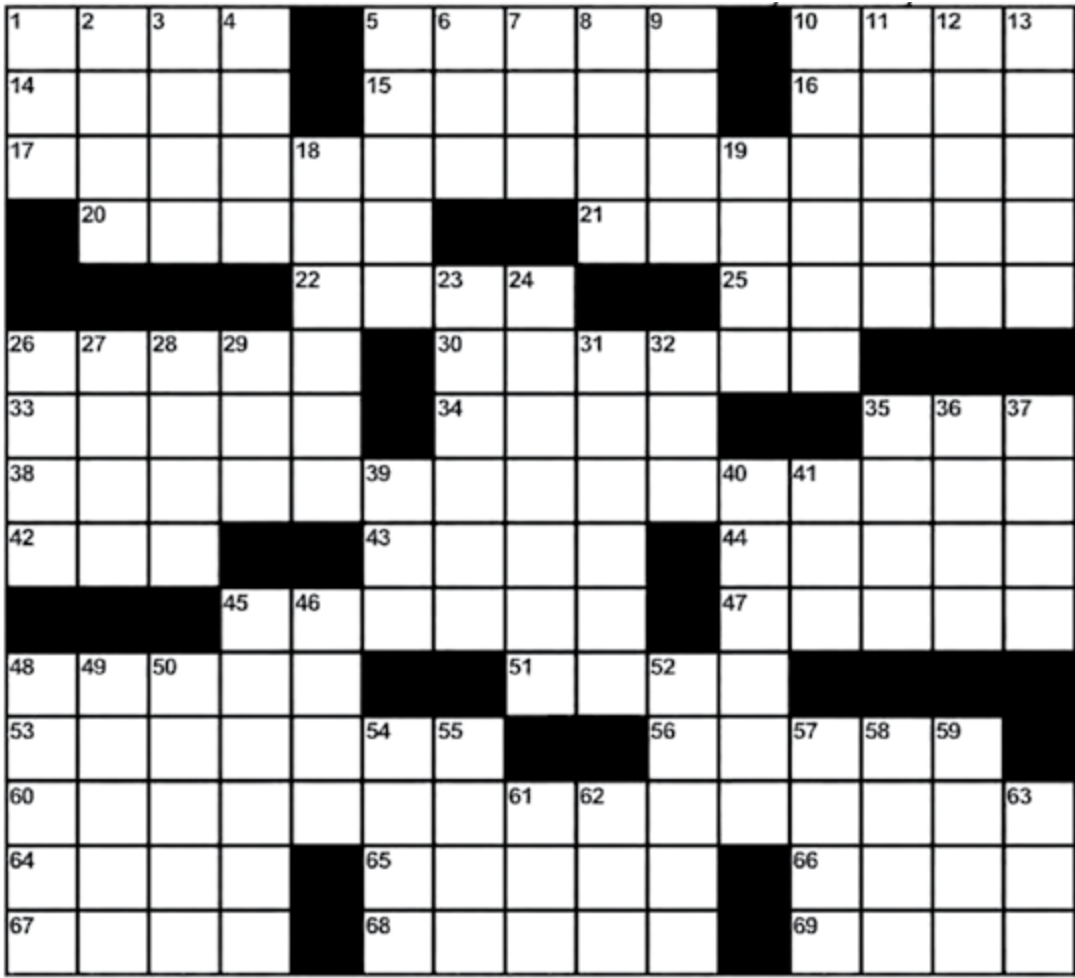
The survey found that 66 per cent of MENA talent are willing to work for remote employers with no physical presence in their country. Canada, France, Germany, and the UAE top the list where digital workers would look for remote jobs, while the convergence of fixed and flexible working would be a popular proposition.

Although the COVID-19 crisis did not impact technology employees' working patterns to the same extent as the general workforce, manoeuvrability here would be welcomed, nonetheless.

Of the respondents, 54 per cent would like to work remotely for 2-3 days per week, with 52 per cent listing their desired flexibility as a combination of fixed and flexible working hours.

"Looking ahead, it's clear that recruiting and retaining digital talent rests with employers introducing a comprehensive strategy for the same, one that presents employees with the benefits they seek and ensures their most cherished values are adopted and upheld," added Christopher Daniel, managing director and partner, BCG Middle East. "In due course, the digital marketplace will become even more competitive, driven in part by employee curiosity, expectations, and demands."

DAILY CROSSWORD



- ACROSS**
1) Bag with plenty of room
5) Gloomy atmospheres
10) Sealing material
14) Purposefully overlook
15) Freeze over, as a windshield
16) Yemen neighbor
17) Small fractional unit
20) "Gandhi" role
21) Kind of rug
22) Stunning aquarium fish
25) With cunning
26) Handled clumsily
30) As yet
33) Shah of Iran, once
34) Samovar's cousin
35) Socrates' T
38) Fruits and vegetables, e.g.
42) 157.5 degrees from N
43) Utilising a liner
44) Bert's Muppet pal
45) Film-script instruction
47) Hatchlings' homes
48) V-8 you cannot drink
51) It has a wide spine
53) Of a reproductive organ
- 61) Society column word
62) Perfect score, some-
times
63) "Oedipus_"
- DOWN**
1) Zenith
2) Writing on the wall
3) Firestone item
4) Delineate
5) Cheesecake picture
6) It may be hard to follow
7) Meadow
8) Carries a heavy load
9) On_ (without a guaranteed sale)
10) Play a piccolo
11) "Jaws" resort
12) Game show group
13) Webster's listing
18) Creates naturally, as a gorge
19) "Present" and "future" partner
23) "Relax, soldier!"
24) Nevertheless,
archaically
26)_ up (invigorates)
27) Gives the heave-ho
28) Send money, in a way
29) Yale student
31) FDR's middle name
32) "_ you out of your mind?"
35) A heck of a lot
36) Mine opening
37) Finds a purpose for
39) Used to own
40) Biological subdivisions
41) Metallic rock
45) Previous
46) Showstopper for a diva
48) Broods
49) In plain sight
50) Bones below the tibia
52) Certain ballroom dance
54) Common connections
55) Salamander family member
57) Ruffles one's feathers
58) Card game for three
59) Slithery and slimy

NOTE PAD



YOUR DAILY HOROSCOPE

ARIES MARCH 21-APRIL 19
Angry? Wishing the world would just leave you alone and stop handing over choices you don't feel ready to make? The good news is that you have options. You can arrange for a break in the action, and you'll definitely be able to find someone in a similar mood who's game to play hooky with you. Oh, well. You're due for a day off anyway. Put some distance between you and whatever is irritating you.

LEO JULY 23-AUGUST 22
Stop worrying about what might happen 'if'. That dreaded 'if' isn't going to happen. Even if your dealings with a certain higher-up have been less than amicable, you'll be able to smooth things over nicely. Show up a couple minutes early, ask for five minutes, and have a nice heart-to-heart chat. Bet you'll end up even better off, professionally and personally speaking, than you were before.

SAGITTARIUS NOVEMBER 22-DECEMBER 21
You are feeling intellectually curious right now, and this could be one of the most enlightening periods of your life. In order to make the most of your mindset, you need to keep probing into areas that confuse or even frustrate you. If you have a lingering question about something, ask it. If you don't understand something, you need to figure it out. Don't stop until you feel educated.

TAURUS APRIL 20-MAY 20
While you were brushing your teeth this morning, you may have looked in the mirror and suddenly decided there was something you'd like to change about yourself. Well, good for you. You can do it and you know it. What you may not know is that if you start the project now, you'll see results in an amazingly short amount of time. That goes for eating habits, cosmetic changes, or even attitude adjustments. Get busy.

VIRGO AUGUST 23-SEPTEMBER 22
You want to make things better, and you're ready to give in and admit you were wrong, this time, if they agree to a couple of tiny 'conditions'. For example: 1.) There will be no more pouting when you offer suggestions about how to make something better. 2.) There will be no more pouting when it turns out that you're right. Your mission is to present your suggestions without even a hint of criticism in your tone.

CAPRICORN DECEMBER 22-JANUARY 19
If any sign is ordinarily the very soul of discretion, self-control, and discipline, it's you. Still, it won't take much arm twisting to talk you into a little recreation at this particular moment in time. It will take even less persuasion if you happen to be at the mercy of someone you've been dying to spend a few quality hours alone with for a long time. Go ahead. But lose the guilt first.

GEMINI MAY 21-JUNE 21
You're not in the mood for angry words, bright lights, or loud music, and no rushing around either. This will amaze your friends, who have come to expect nonstop activity and commotion as your absolute favorite state of affairs. Still, you're perfectly entitled to silence when you want it. Could it be time for a trip to the country? Or maybe just a day alone with the headphones on and the phone turned off?

LIBRA SEPTEMBER 23-OCTOBER 22
You can definitely expect at least one more wonderful day and one more wonderful evening too. Better stock up on all the things you'll need to create the ambience you're after, including food, music, and maybe some scented candles. It's also a perfect time to munch on your favourite snacks and watch a movie. Better also make a couple of phone calls to the friends who ordinarily call you at least once every evening.

AQUARIUS JANUARY 20-FEBRUARY 18
You've been looking at your life lately and wondering if it's at all the way you want it to be. If you're not sure any more, you have options. You can either seek out a realtor in the city or state of your choice, or you can start looking at a world map to find a country you might like to get to know better for a couple of years. Less drastic? Redecorate. You can create an entirely new home right where you are.

CANCER JUNE 22-JULY 22
The heavens have a plan to bring you close (or even closer) to both your friends and/or your lover, closer than you've been in some time, which is really saying something for your affectionate sign. You'll probably also end up in a long heart-to-heart chat regarding a dispute that's taken far too long to resolve. Whether you're delivering or accepting the apology, expect a happy ending.

SCORPIO OCTOBER 23-NOVEMBER 21
Don't let any confusion you encounter today frustrate you. Instead, treat it as a valuable clue that's pointing you toward changes you might need to make in your life. If a certain disorderly situation is making you feel confused, perhaps you need to get rid of some emotional clutter. Throw out the bad attitudes and negative feelings. If your schedule is confusing you, you should start paying more attention to being prompt.

PISCES FEBRUARY 19-MARCH 20
The heavens have arranged for every word you utter to emerge sounding firm, grounded, and absolutely impossible to argue with. That goes double for emotional issues, which will undoubtedly be the subject. Fortunately, there's no time like the present for a heart-to-heart talk with the person you love most. Stop mulling and start talking. Make the call and clear the air. You'll feel much better afterward.



TEST YOUR KNOWLEDGE

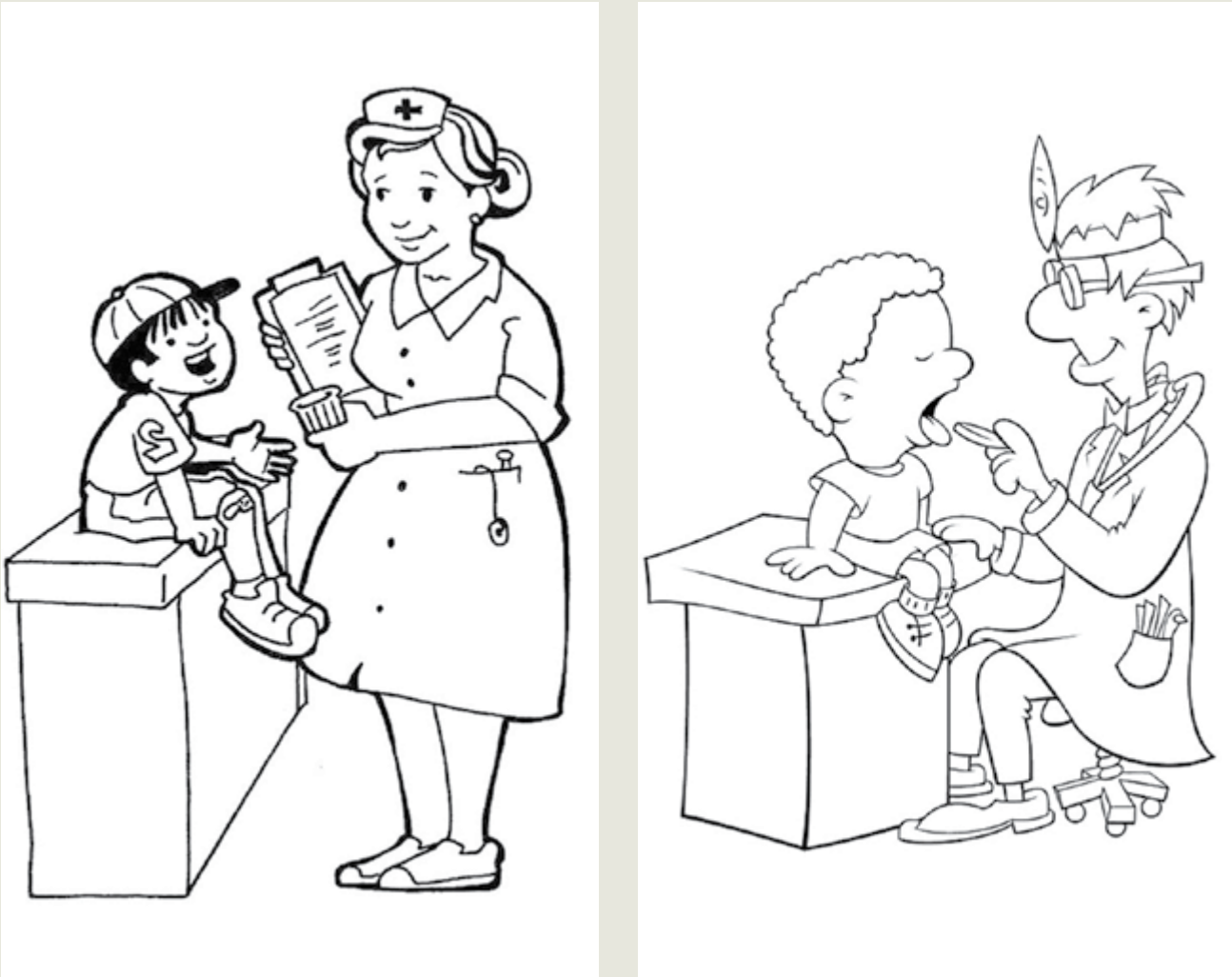
1. The Pilotless target aircraft, fabricated at the Aeronautical Development Establishment, Bangalore, is
a. Lakshya
b. Cheetah
c. Nishant
d. Arjun

2. The treaty which ushered in NATO, was signed by the member nations at
a. Geneva
b. London
c. Paris
d. Washington

3. The unit of current is
a. ohm
b. watt
c. ampere
d. None of the above

Answers: 1. a 2. d 3. c

KIDS COLOURING



BOGGLER

S	R	U	S
E	R	E	B
N	O	V	I
R	E	I	Y

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

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

WORD BUILDER

S
U
S
U
R
R
A

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

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

Hostages freed in Texas synagogue standoff

All four hostages are unharmed after a ten hour-standoff, and their suspected captor is dead: Police

Colleyville, US - All four people taken hostage in a more than ten-hour standoff at a Texas synagogue have been freed unharmed, police said late on Saturday, and their suspected captor is dead.

The siege in the small Texas town of Colleyville - in which the suspect was apparently demanding the release of a convicted terrorist - had sparked an outpouring of concern from Jewish organisations in the United States and the Israeli government.

Colleyville police chief Michael Miller told a news conference a 'rescue team breached the synagogue' on Saturday evening and rescued three remaining hostages - all adults - being held inside. A first hostage had been released unharmed a few hours earlier.

"The suspect is deceased," Miller told reporters.

FBI Dallas Special Agent Matt DeSarno said the four hostages - who included a much-loved local rabbi, Charlie Cytron-Walker - did not need medical attention.

"He did not harm them in any way," he said.

There were reports from journalists at the scene of a loud explosion and gunshots at the synagogue shortly before the press conference.

That was more than ten hours after police were alerted to the emergency at the Congregation Beth Israel in Colleyville, about 40km west of Dallas.

Officers evacuated the syna-

gogue's surroundings and cordoned off the area, the police force said.

ABC News reported that the hostage-taker was armed and had claimed to have bombs in unknown locations. That was not confirmed by police although Miller said that 'bomb techs are clearing the scene'.

At about 3.00am local time (0800 GMT) the police force tweeted that it was 'now safe for residents who were evacuated to return'.

Quoting a US official briefed on the matter, ABC reported the man was demanding the release of Aafia Siddiqui - a Pakistani scientist who in 2010 was sentenced by a New York court to 86 years in prison for the attempted murder of US officers in Afghanistan.

She is currently being held at a prison in Fort Worth, Texas.

DeSarno told the news conference the suspect had been identified, but did not disclose his identity.

The FBI special agent did not confirm the suspect's demands, but said they were 'focused on one issue that was not specifically threatening to the Jewish community' - and that he did not believe there was an ongoing threat.

ABC initially said the man claimed to be Siddiqui's brother, but later clarified her brother is in Houston - while experts said the word the man used in Arabic was more figurative and meant 'sister' in the Islamic faith.



An armoured truck is parked in the parking lot of Colleyville Middle School in Colleyville, Texas on Saturday (AFP)



Rescue team breached the synagogue and rescued three remaining hostages - all adults - being held inside. A first hostage had been released unharmed a few hours earlier. The suspect is deceased

MICHAEL MILLER

Siddiqui's lawyer said she 'has absolutely no involvement' in the hostage situation in a statement to CNN.

The lawyer confirmed that the man was not Siddiqui's

brother and said she condemned his actions.

DeSarno said police negotiators 'had a high frequency and duration of contact with' the hostage-taker.

"There were times when it stopped for periods of time and like many hostage situations, the relationship between the negotiators and hostage-taker had been floating a little bit and

sometimes got intense," he said.

'Horrible'

A live stream of the congregation's Shabbat morning service, available on Facebook for around four hours during the standoff, appeared to capture audio of a man talking loudly - although it did not show the scene inside the building. He could be heard saying, 'You get my sister on the phone,' and 'I am gonna die'.

He was also heard saying: "There's something wrong with

America."

Beth Israel congregation member Ellen Smith described the situation as 'shocking and horrifying' in a CNN interview.

She said the congregation was a 'tight' community, and the rabbi in particular was 'the best human I think anyone could ever meet'.

But she said it was 'not shocking' the crisis occurred in a Jewish community.

"Cases of anti-Semitism have risen lately, but since Jews were first walking the Earth, we have been persecuted," she said.

President Joe Biden pledged to 'stand against anti-Semitism and against the rise of extremism in this country'.

"I am grateful to the tireless work of law enforcement at all levels who acted cooperatively and fearlessly to rescue the hostages," he said.

Israeli Prime Minister Naftali Bennett tweeted: 'This event is a stark reminder that antisemitism is still alive and we must continue to fight it worldwide.'

'To the Jewish community in Colleyville and around the world: You are not alone - we stand united with you.'

'No one should ever be afraid to assemble in their place of worship,' the Jewish Community Relations Council said in a statement, while the Council on American-Islamic Relations said it was in contact with Colleyville Jewish leaders to 'provide any assistance possible'.

AFP



People greet Kyrgyz troops as they return from Kazakhstan - where they were deployed following Kazakhstan's request, in Tokmak on Friday (AFP)

225 people have died during unrest, says Kazakhstan

Nur-Sultan, Kazakhstan - Violent unrest in Kazakhstan that began with peaceful protests in early January over energy prices has left 225 people dead, authorities said on Saturday, in a dramatic increase on previous tolls.

The demonstrations spiralled into unprecedented clashes between security forces and anti-government protesters in the energy-rich ex-Soviet state, prompting President Kassym-Jomart Tokayev to declare a state of emergency and call in help from a Russian-led military bloc.

"During the state of emergency, the bodies of 225 people were delivered to morgues, of which 19 were law enforcement officers and military personnel," Serik Shalabayev, a representative of the state prosecutor, said at a briefing on Saturday.

Others were 'armed bandits who participated in terrorist attacks', Shalabayev added.

"Unfortunately, civilians have also become victims of acts of terrorism."

Kazakhstan had previously acknowledged fewer than 50 fatalities - 26 'armed criminals' and 18 security officers in the conflict that exposed infighting at the very top of the government.

A higher death toll of 164 that appeared on an official Telegram channel last week was

quickly retracted. Asel Artakshinova, a spokeswoman for the Health Ministry, said that more than 2,600 people had sought treatment at hospitals, with 67 currently in a serious condition.

Authorities in Kazakhstan have blamed the violence on bandits and international 'terrorists' that they said hijacked the protests that saw the epicentre of unrest move from the west to the country's largest city Almaty.

They have not provided evidence about who the alleged foreign bandits and terrorists were.

The protests have been the biggest threat so far to the regime established by Kazakhstan's founding president Nur-sultan Nazarbayev, who stepped down in 2019 and hand-picked Tokayev as his successor.

Much of the popular anger has appeared directed at Nazarbayev, who is 81 and had ruled Kazakhstan since 1989 before handing over power.

Many protesters shouted 'Old Man Out!' in reference to Nazarbayev, and a statue of him was torn down in the southern city of Taldykorgan. Tokayev this week launched an attack on Nazarbayev, saying his mentor had failed to share the Central Asian country's vast wealth with ordinary Kazakhs.

AFP

Lebanon's Hezbollah 'ready for government meetings'

Beirut, Lebanon - Lebanese group Hezbollah and its ally the Amal movement said on Saturday they were ready to return to government meetings after three months of political deadlock that has exacerbated the country's economic crisis.

'We announce our agreement to participate in cabinet meetings to approve the national budget and discuss the economic rescue plan and all that concerns improving the living conditions of the Lebanese,' the two Shiite movements said in a joint statement.

Lebanon's government was formed in September after a 13-month political impasse.

But it has not met since October 12 due to a boycott by Hezbollah and Amal amid ten-



Hezbollah supporters fly the group's flag during an event marking the anniversary of the end of the 2006 war with Israel, in Khiam (AFP)

sions over an investigation into a catastrophic explosion at Beirut's port in 2020.

Hezbollah and Amal said Saturday's decision was a 'response to the needs of the citizens', cit-

ing 'the collapse of the Lebanese pound's exchange rate, the decline of the public sector' and crumbling incomes and purchasing power.

The country is in the throes of

an economic meltdown that the World Bank has said is likely among the world's worst since the mid-19th century.

About 80 per cent of the population now lives in poverty and the local currency has shed more than 90 per cent of its value on the black market.

Reacting to the parties' announcement, Prime Minister Najib Mikati said he would convene a cabinet meeting as soon as the finance ministry had sent through a draft budget.

The two groups had been boycotting Cabinet sessions in objection to the judge tasked with investigating the August 2020 port blast, Tarek Bitar, demanding he be replaced.

The explosion of a shipment of ammonium nitrate fertiliser

stored haphazardly in a port warehouse for years killed at least 215 people and disfigured the capital.

Efforts by Bitar to interrogate ex-ministers have been challenged with lawsuits, while Hezbollah and Amal have accused him of politicising the probe.

Families of the victims and survivors of the blast have grown increasingly angry and have accused politicians of seeking to hamper the investigation to escape accountability.

Lebanese President Michel Aoun in late December called for an end to the government boycott, implicitly criticising his ally Hezbollah for blocking the Cabinet meetings.

AFP

Twitter bans account linked to Iran leader over video threatening Donald Trump

Washington, US - Twitter said on Saturday it had permanently suspended an account linked to Iran's supreme leader that posted a video calling for revenge for a top general's assassination against former US president Donald Trump.

"The account referenced has been permanently suspended for violating our ban evasion policy," a Twitter spokesperson told AFP.

The account, @KhameneiSite, this week posted an animated video showing an unmanned aircraft targeting Trump, who ordered a drone strike in Baghdad two years ago that killed top Iranian commander General Qassem Soleimani.

Supreme leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei's main accounts in various languages remain active. Last year, another similar account was suspended by Twitter over a post also appearing to reference revenge against Trump.



Donald Trump socks are displayed for sale ahead of the first rally of the year by former US President Donald Trump, at the Canyon Moon Ranch festival grounds in Florence, Arizona, on Saturday (AFP)

The recent video, titled 'Revenge is Definite', was also posted on Khamenei's official website.

According to Twitter, the company's top priority is keeping people safe and protecting the health of the conversation on the

platform.

The social media giant says it has clear policies around abusive behaviour and will take action

when violations are identified.

As head of the Quds Force, the foreign operations arm of Iran's Revolutionary Guards, Soleimani was the architect of its strategy in the Middle East.

He and his Iraqi lieutenant were killed by a US drone strike outside Baghdad airport on January 3, 2020.

Khamenei has repeatedly promised to avenge his death.

On January 3, the second anniversary of the strike, the supreme leader and ultraconservative President Ebrahim Raisi once again threatened the US with revenge.

Trump's supporters regularly denounce the banning of the Republican billionaire from Twitter, underscoring that accounts of several leaders considered authoritarian by the United States are allowed to post on the platform.

AFP

Climate change worsening toll of humid heat on outdoor labour: Study

Paris, France - A punishing mix of heat and humidity that makes outdoor labour difficult and dangerous is causing around 677bn lost working hours a year around the world, according to a new study released on Thursday that warns climate change is making it worse.

Researchers in the United States, who estimated the current cost at US\$2.1tn every year, said that the negative effects of stifling temperatures on people doing heavy work in agriculture and construction had been underestimated.

The new figures comes amid a growing focus on the severe health impacts of climate change, not just as projections of future harm from heatwaves and other extreme events, but also as consequences already playing out across a warming world.

The study, published in the journal Environmental Research Letters, looked at data on humid heat - particularly dangerous because the body is less able to cool down by sweating.

Researchers estimated the number of workers exposed to unsafe levels over the 20 years to 2020, as well as the impact on labour compared to the period 1981 to 2000.

Researchers incorporated the findings from laboratory-based research published last year that suggest productivity drops off at lower temperature and humidity levels than previously thought.

They found that between 2001 and 2020, exposure to high humidity and heat was linked to approximately 677bn lost working hours a year in heavy outdoor labour.

It suggested almost three quarters of the global working-age population are already living in locations where background climate conditions are associated with about a hundred hours

of heat-associated lost work per person per year.

"If outdoor workers are losing productivity at these lower temperature and humidity levels, then labour losses in the tropics could be as high as 500 to 600 hours per person per year, which is over twice as high as previous estimates," said lead researcher Luke Parsons, of Duke University.

The research found that India currently loses around 259bn hours annually due to the impacts of humid heat on labour, while China loses 72bn hours and Bangladesh loses 32bn hours.

Warming 'magnifies impacts'

Over the last four decades, as global temperatures have risen, the study found heat-related labour losses have increased by at least nine per cent.

The authors estimate that climate change is to blame for an additional 25bn working hours lost annually in India over the last 20 years compared to the previous 20 years, and an extra 4bn hours a year in China over the same period.

Parsons said other hot and humid regions such as the south-eastern United States could also be experiencing 'significant' labour losses as well.

"These results imply that we don't have to wait for 1.5 degrees Celsius of global warming to experience impacts of climate change on labour and the economy," he said.

"The warming we've already experienced may be associated with large-scale background labour losses. Additional future warming magnifies these impacts."

The Lancet's annual Countdown on Health and Humanity report last year warned that overall some 295bn hours of potential work were lost due to extreme heat exposure in 2020, with the average potential earnings lost in poorer countries equivalent to between four and eight per cent of national gross domestic product (GDP).

Research published last year in the journal Nature Climate Change suggested around 100,000 heat-related deaths per year were caused by climate change.

Last year, the UN Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change warned that global heating is virtually certain to pass the Paris agreement threshold of a 1.5 degree Celsius cap, probably within a decade.

AFP

Taliban fighters pepper spray women demanding rights

Kabul, Afghanistan - Taliban forces on Sunday fired pepper spray at a group of women protesters in Afghanistan's capital demanding rights to work and education, three demonstrators told AFP.

Since seizing control of the country by force in August, the Taliban authorities have imposed creeping restrictions on Afghans, especially on women.

Around 20 women gathered in front of Kabul University, chanting 'equality and justice' and carried banners that read 'Women's rights, human rights', an AFP correspondent reported.

The protest however was later dispersed by the Taliban fighters who arrived at the scene in several vehicles, three women protesters told AFP.



This file photo shows Afghan women taking part in a protest march for their rights under the Taliban rule in the downtown area of Afghanistan's capital Kabul on September 3, last year (AFP)

Ukraine says has 'evidence' Russia behind cyberattack

Kyiv, Ukraine - Ukraine said on Sunday it had 'evidence' Russia was behind a massive cyberattack that knocked out key government websites this past week, while Microsoft warned the hack could be far worse than first thought.

Tensions are at an all-time high between Ukraine and Russia, which Kyiv accuses of having massed troops on its border ahead of a possible invasion.

Some analysts fear the cyberattack could be the prelude to a military attack.

On Friday, Washington also accused Russia of sending saboteurs trained in explosives to stage an incident that could be the pretext to invade its pro-Western neighbour.

'All the evidence points to Russia being behind the cyberattack', the Ukrainian digital transformation ministry said in a statement. 'Moscow is continuing to wage a hybrid war.'

The ministry urged Ukrainians not to panic, saying their personal information was protected.

The purpose of the attack, it added, 'is not only to intimidate society. But to also destabilise the situation in Ukraine, halting the work of the public sector and crushing Ukrainians' trust in the authorities'.

The Kremlin rejected the claims and said there was no evidence Russia was behind the attack.

"We have nothing to do with it. Russia has nothing to do with these cyberattacks," President Vladimir Putin's spokesman, Dmitry Peskov, told CNN. "Ukrainians are blaming everything on Russia, even their bad weather in their country," he said in English.

Kyiv said late on Friday it had uncovered preliminary clues Russian security services could have been behind the cyberattack. The SBU security service said the attacks in the early hours of Friday had targeted a total of 70 government websites.

Microsoft warning

Microsoft warned on Sunday that the cyberattack could prove destructive and affect more organisations than initially feared.

The US software giant said it continued to analyse the malware and warned it could render government digital infrastructure inoperable.

"The malware, which is designed to look like ransomware but lacking a ransom recovery mechanism, is intended to be destructive and designed to render targeted devices inoperable rather than to obtain a ransom," the US software giant said in a blog post.

Microsoft said it had not so far identified a culprit behind the attacks but warned that the number of affected organisations could prove larger than initially thought. "Our investigation teams have identified the malware on dozens of impacted systems and that number could grow as our investigation continues," Microsoft said.

AFP



Six Russian officers are charged in the US for cyberattacks on Ukraine's power grid, 2017 French elections and 2018 Winter Olympics (AFP)

Bangladesh arrests brother of Rohingya insurgency leader

Cox's Bazar, Bangladesh - Bangladesh police said on Sunday they had arrested the brother of a notorious insurgent leader whose organisation has been blamed for murders and drug trafficking in sprawling Rohingya refugee camps.

The country is home to around 850,000 members of the stateless Muslim minority, who live in patchwork and overcrowded settlements after fleeing violence in neighbouring Myanmar.

The Arakan Rohingya Salvation Army militant group has been accused of assassinating political opponents, running narcotics and instilling a climate of fear in the camps.

Mohammad Shah Ali, arrested late on Saturday by the elite Armed Police Battalion, is the half-brother of ARSA's infamous leader Ataullah Abu Ammar Jununi.

He was caught in a camp near the coastal city of Cox's Bazar with 'arms and drugs', the battalion said in a statement.

Commanding officer Naimul Haque told AFP that Ali had admitted his links with ARSA and that 'Ataullah was in regular contact with him'.

He also said police had rescued one person kidnapped by



Rohingya refugees wait to disembark from a navy ship in Bhashan Char - their new settlement in Noakhali early this month (AFP)



Mohammad Shah Ali (AFP)

brutal Myanmar military crackdown - now subject to a genocide investigation at The Hague - that began after ARSA attacks on Myanmar police posts in 2017.

Ali's capture was the most high-profile arrest of an ARSA member since the group was accused of murdering Rohingya community leader Mohib Ullah in September, and killing seven others at an Islamic seminary.

Bangladesh authorities launched a dragnet in the camps after the murders, arresting hundreds of people.

Tom Andrews, the UN special rapporteur for Myanmar, visited the camps last month and blamed ARSA for much of the crime committed there.

AFP

Former Haiti senator arrested in Jamaica over president's murder

Miami, US - A former Haitian lawmaker who is a suspect in the assassination of the country's president has been arrested in Jamaica, Jamaican authorities said on Saturday.

Ex-senator Jean Joel Joseph, wanted in the July 7, 2021, killing of president Jovenel Moise, was arrested on Friday evening, the Jamaica Constabulary Force (JCF) said in a statement.

The JCF "can confirm that a Haitian national; Jean Joel Joseph and three other members (of) his family were arrested in Jamaica on immigration related charges," the statement said.

Jamaican investigators contacted Haitian authorities who said Joseph was "wanted in Haiti as a suspect in the alleged assassination of the Haitian President in 2021," it added.

Joseph was arrested at a house in St. Elizabeth, a parish in the southwest of the island.

A Jamaican police source told AFP that Joseph is 'being detained at the moment'.

The source said Jamaican police acted in conjunction with 'international law enforcement partners' and that 'joint investigations' had been underway.

Moise, who was unpopular in Haiti, was killed and his wife was



This file photo shows a cop standing guard outside the presidential residence in Port-au-Prince after Moise's murder in July last year (AFP)

seriously wounded when a commando of around 20 men burst into the presidential residence and shot them in July.

Dozens of suspects had been arrested previously over Moise's murder, but much about the assassination remains murky, especially who ordered it.

An arrest warrant was issued for Joseph right after the killing, with authorities describing him

as 'armed and dangerous'.

Joseph was an opposition senator and fierce critic of the president.

More than 40 people, including more than a dozen Colombians and some Americans of Haitian origin, have been arrested in connection with the assassination.

The killing deepened an already dramatic crisis in Haiti, which is suffering from a lack of security, soaring gang violence and a spate of kidnappings.

Prime Minister Ariel Henry, who has in effect been running the country since Moise's death, told AFP this month that he too had been targeted in an assassination attempt, during national day celebrations.

Earlier this month, US authorities charged a retired Colombian soldier in connection with Moise's killing.

The Justice Department said 43-year-old Mario Palacios, along with others, 'participated in a plot to kidnap or kill the Haitian President'.

US prosecutors said the plot against Moise 'initially focused on conducting a kidnapping of the president as part of a purported arrest operation', but it 'ultimately resulted in a plot to kill'.

The US Congress on Thursday ordered a probe into Moise's assassination.

The Senate voted unanimously on Thursday to order the State Department to issue a report within 180 days that would provide a 'detailed description' of the circumstances surrounding Moise's killing.

AFP

COVID-19 PANDEMIC

UK points to lifting of restrictions

London, UK - Britain's government said on Sunday it hopes to lift its latest COVID-19 restrictions for England later this month with the Omicron surge of infections apparently fading.

Last month, England switched to 'Plan B' restrictions, re-imposing guidance to work from home and a requirement for attendees to show vaccination passports on entry to larger events. The government will lift those on January 26, but a mandate to wear face masks may continue, according to reports.

Government minister Oliver Dowden, co-chairman of Prime Minister Boris Johnson's Conservative party, said the 'signs were encouraging'.

"It has always been my hope that we would have the Plan B restrictions for the shortest period possible," he said on Sky News.

"I'm under no doubt the kind of burdens this puts hospitality, wider business, schools and so on under, and I want us to get rid of those if we possibly can."

After the Omicron variant emerged, Britain's daily case-load for COVID-19 topped a record 200,000 infections in early January, but has now dropped to less than half that.

The upcoming relaxation will reportedly form part of plans by Johnson to relaunch his premiership as he battles a slew of



A pedestrian walks past a site for the construction of a temporary field hospital, on the complex of The Royal Preston Hospital, in northwest England on Friday. Fuelled by the Omicron variant, daily cases of COVID-19 are rising in the northern part of the country (AFP)

I am under no doubt the kind of burdens this puts hospitality, wide business, schools and so on under and I want us to get rid of those if we possibly can

OLIVER DOWDEN

allegations about 'partygate' lockdown breaches in Downing Street.

Opposition Labour leader Keir Starmer agreed with the need to lift the restrictions 'as soon as possible' if government scientists agree, but noted the backdrop of political scandal.

"I want them to be lifted be-

cause the medical science says they should be lifted, not simply because the prime minister is in a real mess and he's desperately trying to get out of it," he told the BBC.

Many Conservative MPs are up in arms about the reports of rule-breaking in Downing Street, and had already warned Johnson he cannot count on their support to extend COVID-19 restrictions.

Facing restive Tory back-

benchers, the prime minister rebuffed calls by some scientists to impose a full lockdown in December, and allowed sporting events to continue with capacity crowds in England.

The devolved governments of Scotland and Wales did impose bans on large crowds at sports fixtures last month, but have now lifted that rule in time for the Six Nations rugby tournament starting next month.

AFP



Conservative party chairman Oliver Dowden on the BBC's Sunday Morning show criticised Boris Johnson for the party (AFP)

PM 'broke the law': UK Labour leader

London, UK - Britain's main opposition leader on Sunday accused Prime Minister Boris Johnson of breaking the law, but the government vowed changes after a bruising series of revelations about lockdown-breaching parties.

In the latest, Johnson's wife Carrie was photographed on the front page of *The Sunday Telegraph* newspaper embracing a friend at a September 2020 party, in apparent violation of the then rules on social distancing.

At least six lawmakers in Johnson's Conservative party have now called publicly for him to quit, while others say they are awaiting the findings of an internal inquiry by senior civil servant Sue Gray.

Labour leader Keir Starmer, who is enjoying an opinion poll surge on the back of the Downing Street 'partygate' allegations, said the facts were already clear.

"I think he broke the law. I think he's as good as admitted that he broke the law," Starmer told BBC television. Gray only has the remit to establish the facts, he added, calling for the police to look into a possible criminal inquiry once her report is out.

"The Prime Minister has degraded the office of prime minister and he has lost full authority not only in his own party, but in the country," Starmer said.

Government minister Oliver Dowden, the Conservatives' co-chairman, con-

ceded that the Downing Street parties were 'completely unacceptable'.

But Dowden backed Johnson to stay in office, while stressing he would take 'full responsibility' once Gray releases her findings.

"I can tell you that when he responds to the House of Commons, as he has committed to do so, he will make sure that we address the kind of culture that has allowed that to happen in the first place," he told Sky News.

Conservative MPs, many of whom were spending the weekend back in their home constituencies, say they are being deluged with messages from voters outraged at the accounts of rule-breaking in Downing Street.

After weeks of denials and stonewalling, the Prime Minister this week apologised in parliament for at least one boozy event organised by his staff which he attended in May 2020, when Britons were banned from socialising.

Two other parties were held in April 2021 as Queen Elizabeth II prepared to bury Prince Philip, her husband of 73 years. Downing Street sent apologies to Buckingham Palace, calling them 'deeply regrettable'.

But those were not isolated events, says Saturday's *Daily Mirror*, which published a photograph of a fridge being delivered to a Downing Street back door in December 2020 for 'Wine time Fridays'.

AFP

Covax scheme delivers one billionth dose of vaccine

Geneva, Switzerland - The Covax scheme aimed at equitable global access to COVID-19 vaccines hit a 'key milestone' on Saturday when it delivered its one billionth dose, one of its key backers said.

The Covax facility was set up in 2020 by the World Health Organization, Gavi the Vaccine Alliance and the Coalition for Epidemic Preparedness Innovations to ensure that poorer countries can access the vaccines needed to battle the pandemic.

"Covax has delivered its first billionth dose of COVID-19 vaccines to 144 countries & territories across the world," Gavi chief executive Seth Berkley tweeted.

"It's a key milestone in the largest and most rapid global vaccine rollout in history."

Berkley said that when the plane carrying the shipment with the one billionth dose had touched down in Kigali, Rwanda



This file photo shows workers loading boxes of vaccines - under Covax scheme - at Ivato Airport in Madagascar, on May 8 last year (AFP)

on Saturday evening, "I felt proud but also humbled knowing how far we have to go to protect everyone and solve vaccine inequity".

Covax hit the one-billionth mark less than a year after delivering its first vaccine dose late last February - to Ghana.

All countries have been permitted to order doses through the mechanism, but lower-income countries have received the jabs free of charge.

Berkley said in a statement on Saturday that he was 'proud that nearly 90 per cent of the first billion doses Covax has de-

livered have been full-funded doses sent to the low and lower-middle countries".

Omicron could 'unravel' progress

But while reaching that one-billion milestone is impressive, Covax has fallen far short of its initial objective of delivering 2bn doses by the end of 2021.

That is because it has been forced to compete with rich countries willing to pay a high price and hoarding doses.

In a speech on Thursday, WHO chief Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus pointed out that while more than 9.4bn vaccine doses had been administered around the world, more than 85 per cent of people in Africa have yet to receive a single dose.

Health experts warn that allowing COVID-19 to spread unabated in some places dramatically increases the chance of new, more dangerous variants emerging.

WHO said late last month that nearly half of its 194 member states had missed its target of vaccinating 40 per cent of their population by the end of 2021. It has called for a redoubling of efforts to ensure all countries manage to hit its second target, of vaccinating 70 per cent of their populations, by mid-2022.

But experts warn that the current imbalance risks deepening further as many countries now rush to roll out additional doses to respond to the fast-spreading coronavirus variant Omicron. "We cannot afford to let Omicron and the increased demand for boosters unravel the progress we've made," Berkley tweeted, urging the world to 'work together to #breakCovid now'.

AFP

Protesters hit French streets to fight new vaccine pass

Paris, France - Thousands demonstrated in cities across France against tighter restrictions on people not vaccinated against COVID-19, as parliamentary wrangling continued over a draft law.

But turnout was significantly lower than the previous weekend's demonstrations according to official estimates, with interior ministry estimates putting the national figures at half that of last week.

In the capital Paris, the largest single gathering on Saturday set off from near the Eiffel Tower, called by far-right anti-EU presidential candidate Florian Philippot.

Other demonstrations harked back to the 2018-19 'yellow vests' protests against President Emmanuel Macron's perceived favouring of the wealthy.

There were also marches in major cities including Bordeaux,

Toulouse and Lille.

People in the crowd chanted 'no to the vaccine' or 'freedom for Djokovic', seizing on the case of men's tennis number one Novak Djokovic, who is fighting the Australian government to compete unvaccinated in next week's Grand Slam Australian Open.

"Novak is kind of our standard-bearer at the moment," demonstrator Pascal told AFP in Bordeaux.

He was marching alongside parents with children at a tennis club in the western city, where he said the tennis coach risked losing his job for refusing vaccination.

'It's Nazism, it's apartheid'

In Paris, demonstrators bore French and regional flags, with banners bearing messages like 'it's not the virus they want to control, it's you'.

"It's Nazism, it's apartheid, I haven't been jabbed and I'm against vaccines in general,"



People demonstrate against health pass and COVID-19 vaccines, in the French capital Paris on Saturday (AFP)

"It's Nazism, it's apartheid, I haven't been jabbed and I'm against vaccines in general," said Claire, a demonstrator in her sixties.

Two others, Laurence and Claire, told AFP they were vaccinated "but we're against the pass for teenagers. We don't

see why they're being vaccinated because they aren't in danger."

According to figures gathered by the police and released by the interior ministry on Saturday, the turnout was 54,000 across France, compared to 105,200 a week ago.

Demonstrators had hoped to keep up the pressure after Macron's declaration earlier this month that he wanted to 'piss off' the unvaccinated with new restrictions until they accepted a coronavirus shot.

The latest stage of that policy came into force on Saturday. The government-issued 'health pass' has been deactivated for tens of thousands of people who have not received a booster vaccination within seven months of their first course of shots.

The pass is required for access for everything from bars and restaurants to cinemas and other public buildings, as well as for travel on France's high-speed rail network.

'Vaccine pass'

The government is working to transform the health pass into a 'vaccine pass', under a bill currently being debated in parliament, which will require proof of vaccination.

Negative coronavirus tests or proof of recovery from a bout with COVID-19 will no longer be enough.

The tougher measures have been pushed hard by the government as it faces a wave of infections with the faster-spreading Omicron variant.

On Friday, 330,000 new COVID-19 cases were confirmed in France, with an average of almost 300,000 over the preceding week. But the pressure on hospitals has not grown at the same pace.

AFP



QUEEN OF ARTS

Queen Margrethe, the face of an open and hard-working monarchy, allowed her sons to marry commoners, and has herself been involved in Denmark's cultural scene

With sparkling blue eyes and a broad smile, she is known for her relaxed and playful side, occasionally answering reporters' questions with a mischievous grin.

A painter as well as a costume and set designer, Denmark's Queen Margrethe II has worked with the Royal Danish Ballet and Royal Danish Theatre on numerous occasions.

A fluent speaker of English, French, German and Swedish, she has taken part in elaborate translation projects, including the 1981 Danish version of Simone de Beauvoir's "All Men are Mortal" under a pseudonym in cooperation with her French-born husband, Prince Henrik. But it is primarily her paintings and drawings that have earned her accolades.

She has illustrated several books, including a Danish 2002 edition of J.R.R. Tolkien's "The Lord of the Rings", and her paintings have been exhibited in museums and galleries in Denmark and abroad.

With her 82nd birthday approaching in April, Margrethe has repeatedly insisted she will never step down from her duties.

"I will stay on the throne until I drop," she has said, as the Queen celebrated 50 years on the throne with scaled-down festivities limited by COVID-19 restrictions despite the huge popularity of the artistic, chain-smoking monarch.

At 81 years old, the always elegant Margrethe, with her trademark white-haired bun, is the second longest-serving monarch in Danish history - and the first woman to hold the position of reigning queen.

She came to power amid waning support for the royals in 1972 but is now beloved for her unifying presence.

"We are unfortunately fewer marking the day than we would have wanted," parliament speaker Henrik Dam Kristensen told a socially distanced ceremony, the



first of just two events celebrating Friday's milestone.

Guests, who included Prime Minister Mette Frederiksen, Crown Prince Frederik and his Australian-born wife Crown Princess Mary, sat in chairs spaced apart.

Fredriksen said the queen was "elected by the people" in a "democratic vote in 1953", when a change to the Danish succession law enabled women to inherit the throne.

A bundled-up Margrethe later took part in a wreath-laying ceremony at her parents' grave at the red-brick Roskilde Cathedral, west of Copenhagen, under sunny but blustery skies.

She was again accompanied by her two sons and their wives.

Larger celebrations have been postponed until September and include a palace dinner, a parade through Copenhagen, service at Copenhagen Cathedral and gala performance at the Royal Theatre.

figurehead for all parts of society".

A 2018 Voxmeter poll found that more than three-quarters of Danes supported the monarchy, while only 14.6 percent wanted the Scandinavian country to become a republic.

'Duty and destiny'

"When she became queen, only 45 percent of Danes were in favour of the monarchy," journalist Gitte Redder, who has authored several books on the Danish royals, told AFP.

"They didn't believe in a monarchy in a modern democracy." That has changed. "The basis of her popularity is that the queen is absolutely non-political," historian Lars Hovebakke Sorensen told AFP.

"She has managed to be a queen who has united the Danish nation in a time of large changes: globalisation, the appearance of the multicultural state, economic crises in the 1970s, 1980s and again in 2008 to 2015, and the pandemic," he said.

At age 31, the crown princess acceded to the throne on a foggy January day upon the death of her father Frederik IX. The grief-stricken mother of two young boys - she now has eight grandchildren - was the first woman to become a reigning queen in Europe's oldest monarchy.

She took her reign name Margrethe II after Margrethe I who ruled Denmark from 1375-1412 but never formally held the title.

"She has a strong sense of duty and never questioned her destiny," said historian Tom Buk-Swienty.

Widowed in 2018, the Queen, affectionately nicknamed Daisy by her subjects, has gradually modernised the monarchy to keep it relevant, without diminishing its status. She has been the face of an open monarchy, allowed her sons to marry commoners, and has herself been involved in Denmark's cultural scene. AFP

The basis of her popularity is that the queen is absolutely non-political

LARS HOVEBAKKE SORENSEN

In her five decades on the throne, Margrethe has sidestepped scandal and helped to modernise the institution, making the Danish royal family one of the most popular in the world.

Bo Petersen, a 58-year-old royalist who was in the crowd to see the queen at the cathedral, called her "a

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ZEFFIRELLI

TRIBUTE TO A THEATRICAL WIZARD



Exhibits on display include costumes worn in some of the classic operas staged around the world in the past

Hubert Vaz

There was an air of nostalgia all around and every whiff put one into a trance – a trance that transcends continents, though the essence of what was on display was bound by the same cord of theatrical mastery.

The House of Musical Arts, adjacent to the Royal Opera House Muscat, currently showcases a unique collection of mystical exhibits, all of which point towards the sheer mastery of a legend and his illustrious career – Franco Zeffirelli. The exhibition, titled Zeffirelli, marks the 10th anniversary of the Royal Opera House Muscat which had opened with Zeffirelli's 'Turandot' in its inaugural season'. It is also a fitting tribute to the legendary Italian director, known for his penchant for creating magic on stage as well as on celluloid, who died in 2019 at the age of 97.

On display are illuminated slides (texts and photographs) which illustrate the highlights of his 70 year long career during which he delivered legendary films and immortal theatrical masterpieces, and a select set of costumes used on stage for some of the finest operas of all time.

This exhibition is a self-guided exhibition that is divided into five periods showcasing the explicit works of Zeffirelli across UK's Covent Garden and Glyndebourne, The Metropolitan Opera – the first in New York City, Arena di Verona – the largest open-air opera in the world in Rome, Italy's Teatro Alla Scala in Milan and finally, the Royal Opera House Muscat, disclosed Dr Nasser al Taie, advisor to the ROHM Board of directors for Education and Outreach.

"You will be able to see the progress (of Zeffirelli's work), not necessarily in chronological order, but you can see how this man was extremely talented, and don't forget, that the late HM Sultan Qaboos bin Said had awarded Zeffirelli the first medal of honour (in this field), Dr Nasser said.

He further told Muscat Daily, "This is a special exhibition by one of the greatest operatic producers and directors – Franco Zeffirelli. It also coincides with the celebration of ten years of the establishment of the Royal Opera House Muscat and that Franco Zeffirelli was instrumental in the production of the premier 'Turandot' in 2011.

"We are now also happy to present his last production of Gieuseppe Verdi's 'Rigoletto' – a work that he was unable to finish because of his demise in 2019. However, the Zeffirelli Foundation has completed it and we are bringing it to Muscat for the first time next Thursday (January 20). This is a celebration of a great artist and a celebration of ten years of musical achievements of ROHM."

The current exhibition will be open to the public from 10am to 9pm everyday until March 20, he added.

An explicit exhibition showcasing the illustrious seven decade journey of late Franco Zeffirelli, the legendary director of esteemed operas, takes visitors on a unique mystical journey – beginning in Britain and ending in Muscat – at the House of Musical Arts

This is a celebration of a great artist and a celebration of ten years of musical achievements of ROHM."

DR NASSER AL TAIE



An important moment

Franco Zeffirelli's adopted son, Pippo Zeffirelli, who currently heads the Franco Zeffirelli Foundation and who was present at the inauguration of the exhibition in Muscat, said, "It's an important moment for us to be back in Oman to bring back a lot of work of Zeffirelli who was a great artist in the field of opera, whose creations were extraordinary, and who created great masterpieces that are recognised all over the world."

He further expressed joy that Zeffirelli's great works could be staged in Oman and were well appreciated by patrons in Oman though it was quite challenging for the artist himself (due to his age and ailments) to be away from Italy and from his medical obligations when he came to Oman at a time when the ROHM was being built. He was quite impressed by the ultra modern theatre and all the advanced technological arrangements provided to promote opera in Oman, he said.



DISAPPOINTED NOLE!

Djokovic on a flight to Dubai after deportation



Melbourne, Australia - Novak Djokovic was deported from Australia on Sunday having lost a sensational legal battle over his coronavirus vaccination status and with his dream of clinching a record 21st Grand Slam in tatters.

An 'extremely disappointed' Djokovic said he would comply with a unanimous Federal Court decision to uphold his visa cancellation over fears he could stoke anti-vaccine sentiment.

"I cannot stay in Australia and participate in the Australian Open," he said on the eve of a tournament that he has dominated for a decade.

"I hope that we can all now focus on the game and tournament I love."

An AFP reporter captured images of Djokovic at Melbourne's Tullamarine airport late on Sunday, as the humbled star boarded a flight for Dubai.

EK409 took off at 10.51pm local time (1151 GMT).

Just hours earlier, in a few dry words, the chief justice of Australia's Federal Court, James Allsop, dispensed with the unvaccinated tennis superstar's attempt to reinstate his cancelled visa and to make tennis history.

"The orders of the court are that the amended application be dismissed with costs," Allsop said in understated remarks that ended a week of legal high drama.

Three Federal Court justices had listened to half a day of feisty legal back-and-forth about Djokovic's alleged risk to public order in Australia.

Immigration Minister Alex Hawke claimed Djokovic's stance could inspire anti-vaccine sentiment, leading some people to face the pandemic without vaccination and inspiring anti-vaxxer activists to gather in protests and rallies.

Hawke welcomed Sunday's verdict, saying: "Australia's strong border protection policies have kept us safe during the pandemic."

"(They) are also fundamental to safeguarding Australia's social cohesion," he said.

The player's high-powered legal team tried but failed to paint Australia's effort to deport him as 'irrational' and 'unreasonable'.

Despite the star being unvaccinated, lawyer Nick Wood insisted

his client had not courted anti-vaxxer support and was not associated with the movement.

The government 'doesn't know what Mr Djokovic's current views are', Wood insisted.

The court did not endorse the government's decision, but ruled the action was legal under rules that give the minister exceptional and almost unquestionable executive power.

Anti-vaccination 'icon'
The Australian Open defending champion and first seed had been scheduled to play against fellow Serbian Miomir Kecmanovic on Monday evening.
But Djokovic has spent much of

been almost impossible to appeal.

Scott Morrison's government had tried and failed to remove Djokovic once before - on the grounds he was unvaccinated and that a recent COVID-19 infection was not sufficient for a medical exemption.

A lower circuit court judge ruled that officials at Melbourne airport made procedural errors when cancelling his visa.

For a few days, Djokovic was free to train - before a second visa revocation and a return to a notorious Melbourne immigration detention facility.

Fellow tennis player Andy Murray hopes the 'mess' around Djokovic's deportation from Australia ahead of the Australian Open will not be repeated.

Former world number one Murray told the BBC in Melbourne 'the situation has not been good all round for anyone' and regretted Djokovic had been held in a detention facility.

"There are obviously going to be a lot of questions about what has happened here and the situation he has been in," said Murray.

"Novak is someone I have known since we were 12 years old, he is someone who I respect and have competed against. I don't like he is in this situation and I don't like he has been in detention."

'With or without him'

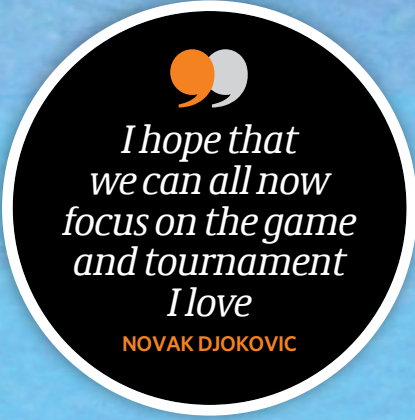
Many Australians - who have suffered prolonged lockdowns and border restrictions - believe the player gamed the system to dodge vaccine entry requirements.

The case has been seized on by culture warriors in the roiling debate over vaccines and how to handle the pandemic.

The tennis ace contracted COVID-19 in mid-December - allowing for the medical exemption - and, according to his own account, failed to isolate despite knowing he was positive.

Public records show he attended a stamp unveiling and a youth tennis event, and granted a media interview around the time he got tested and his latest infection was confirmed. Djokovic is tied with Roger Federer and Rafael Nadal with 20 Grand Slam titles each.

AFP



the last week in immigration detention, with his visa twice being revoked by the government over his refusal to get a COVID-19 vaccine before arrival - a requirement for most visitors.

Government lawyer Stephen Lloyd said the fact Djokovic was not vaccinated two years into the pandemic and had repeatedly ignored safety measures - including failing to isolate while COVID-19 positive - was evidence enough of his anti-vaccine views.

"He has now become an icon for the anti-vaccination groups," Lloyd said. "Rightly or wrongly he is perceived to endorse an anti-vaccination view and his presence here is seen to contribute to that."

In a written submission the government also pointed out that Djokovic chose not to give evidence at the hearing.

"He could set the record straight if it needed correcting. He has not - that has important consequences." Because of the format of the court, the justices' decision would have

Family, Serbians rail against deportation

Belgrade, Serbia - The deportation of Novak Djokovic sparked outrage in Serbia with political leaders, sports bodies and family members rounding on the Australian authorities' decision to revoke the tennis superstar's visa.

Serbian President Aleksandar Vucic said Australia had 'humiliated themselves', while the country's Olympic Committee called the move a 'scandalous' decision as fellow Serbs added their voice to a chorus of disapproval over the court ruling that saw Djokovic deported.

The family members said they were 'disappointed' by the court's decision.

"We are very disappointed by a federal court ruling and the fact

that Novak has to leave Australia,' the family said in a statement published by Serbian media outlets. 'These are difficult moments, notably for Novak, but what we all have to do - namely us, his family - is to give him support more than ever', the family added.

President Vucic lambasted the decision saying, "They think that they have by this, this mistreatment of ten days humiliated Djokovic, but they have humiliated themselves. Djokovic can return to his country with his head held high."

Vucic has remained steadfast in his support for Djokovic throughout the drama, calling the earlier detention of the unvacci-

nated tennis star a 'political witch hunt'.

The Serbian Olympic Committee also made their disgust clear as they sought to rally support for Djokovic.

"We are proud of Novak Djokovic and the way he coped with these extremely difficult and unpleasant circumstances. Despite this scandalous decision, we believe Novak came out as the winner again," the committee said in a statement.

Miomir Kecmanovic, who was set to face nine-time champion Djokovic in the first round of the Australian Open, called the incident a 'bitter pill to swallow'.

"Our little Serbian team here in Melbourne is upset and disap-

pointed and I think we have to make an extra effort to somehow avenge our best representative who was prevented from being here," Kecmanovic wrote on Instagram.

The ruling stoked resentment among Djokovic's fans in Serbia, where hundreds have rallied in support of their native son after he was first detained by authorities. "It's a farce ... All this has nothing to do with the sport," Nebojsa Viskovic, a journalist covering notably tennis, said.

"All the criticism about whether he was vaccinated or not doesn't hold water."

Many other Serbs echoed the view.

AFP



Djokovic supporters hold Serbia's national flags as they gather in front of Federal Court building during the tennis player's hearing, in Melbourne on Sunday (AFP)

Liverpool beat Brentford to move up to second



Liverpool's Takumi Minamino jumps on the back of teammate Roberto Firmino after scoring his team's third goal against Brentford on Sunday (AFP)

ENGLISH PREMIER LEAGUE
Liverpool, UK - Liverpool kept their slim hopes of reeling in Manchester City at the top of the Premier League alive by seeing off Brentford 3-0 at Anfield to move up to second in the table on Sunday.

Fabinho, Alex Oxlade-Chamberlain and Takumi Minamino

scored the goals as the Reds coped without the absence of Mohamed Salah and Sadio Mane at the Africa Cup of Nations.

Victory lifts Jurgen Klopp's men to within 11 points of the runaway leaders, but they also have a game in hand on City.

Liverpool failed to take advantage of an extra man for over an

hour as Thursday's League semi-final, first leg against Arsenal ended 0-0, sparking fears of how they will cope for the rest of the month without two of their main sources of goals.

But a Brentford side that have not won a league game away from home since early October never threatened to cause an

upset.

Klopp made just two changes from the Arsenal stalemate as Curtis Jones and Oxlade-Chamberlain were recalled to add extra creativity and dynamism to the midfield.

He was rewarded with a bright start as Diogo Jota headed over, Trent Alexander-Arnold

flashed a shot just off target and Alvaro Fernandez made a brilliant save to deny Virgil van Dijk.

However, the crowd were growing restless until Brentford allowed Alexander-Arnold's corner to bounce inside the area and Fabinho headed in at the back post.

The Bees went toe-to-toe with Liverpool in a pulsating 3-3 draw when the sides last met in September.

But the visitors only created one big chance to get back in the game when Bryan Mbuemo turned Joel Matip and shot inches wide.

Jota hit the post and then should have scored when firing too close to Fernandez in a one-on-one.

There was no doubt over the outcome, though, once Oxlade-Chamberlain's diving header turned Andy Robertson's perfect cross into the bottom corner.

Brentford were architects of their own downfall for the third goal as Fernandez's pass out from the back was seized upon by Roberto Firmino and he teed up Minamino to slot home from close range.

The home fans could relax for the final 15 minutes and pointedly took the chance to chant the name of former manager Rafael Benitez, who was sacked by rivals Everton on Sunday.

The Toffees are in danger of falling into a relegation battle after one win in 13 league games.

Brentford, by contrast, still enjoy a 10-point cushion over the bottom three in their first season in the top-flight for 74 years but remain in 14th.

AFF



Leeds United's midfielder Jack Harrison walks off with the match ball after scoring a hat-trick in the match against West Ham on Sunday (AFP)

Harrison's hat-trick fires Leeds to victory at West Ham

ENGLISH PREMIER LEAGUE
London, UK - Jack Harrison hit a hat-trick as Leeds boosted their bid for Premier League survival with a 3-2 win against West Ham on Sunday.

Harrison put Leeds ahead at the London Stadium and netted again after Jarrod Bowen's equaliser. When Pablo Fornals hauled West Ham level in the second half, Harrison had an instant response as the midfielder completed his treble.

Marcelo Bielsa's side made it two successive league victories to climb nine points clear of the relegation zone.

It was sweet revenge for Leeds, who were knocked out of

the FA Cup in the third round at West Ham just a week ago.

West Ham had won three consecutive league games and four in all competitions, but their bid to finish in the top four suffered a major setback thanks to Harrison.

David Moyes' team remain fourth, however they are now just two points ahead of Arsenal, who have two games in hand, while Tottenham are four points back with four games extra to play.

Leeds had scored just eight goals in nine away league fixtures this season, but Bielsa's men made a flying start and took the lead in the 10th minute.

AFF



Rafael Benitez

Benitez sacked as Everton manager

London, UK - Rafael Benitez was sacked as Everton manager on Sunday after just 200 days in charge of the struggling Premier League club.

Benitez was an unpopular appointment in June last year after his long spell with Everton's Merseyside rivals Liverpool.

The Spaniard paid the price for a dismal run of nine defeats in Everton's last 13 league matches, culminating in a 2-1 loss at lowly Norwich on Saturday.

'Everton Football Club can confirm the departure of Rafael Benitez as first-team manager,' a club statement said. Benitez had joined Everton in June 2021.

AFF

Musa Barrow converts late penalty to snatch draw for Gambia against Mali

AFRICA CUP OF NATIONS

Limbe, Cameroon - Musa Barrow converted a 90th-minute penalty for Gambia to snatch a 1-1 draw against Mali with the matchday 2 result set to take both teams through to the second round of the Africa Cup of Nations.

Mali went ahead after 79 minutes in Limbe when Ibrahima Kone scored from another penalty, both of which were awarded after the Moroccan referee watched replays on a VAR monitor.

The draw keeps Gambia and Mali level at the top of Group F with four points each. Pointless sides Tunisia and Mauritania meet later on Sunday and a win for either country will bring them into contention.

Group winners and runners-up after three matchdays qualify for the round of 16 along with the best four third-placed sides.

"I am thrilled with our results so far. We have beaten Mauritania and drawn with Mali, a team 97 places above us in the world



Gambia's midfielder Musa Barrow (second from right) celebrates with teammates after scoring the goal on a penalty against Mali on Sunday (AFP)

rankings," said Belgium-born Gambia coach Tom Saintfiet.

"This Gambian team is packed with talented players and one of them, Musa Barrow, showed great calmness to score from the penalty."

Debutants Gambia are the lowest ranked of the 24 teams in Cameroon and needed a penalty shootout victory over Djibouti to book a place in the group phase of qualifying.

Brighton midfielder Yves Bis-souma, who came off the bench in a matchday 1 win over Tunisia, was promoted to the starting line-up by Mali coach Mohamed Magassouba.

The other Premier League player in the Mali team, Southampton winger Moussa Djeneo, retained his place as the west African nation sought a ninth win in 19 matches in all competitions against Gambia.

Slow pace

In 32°C early afternoon heat and 75 per cent humidity at the 20,000-seat Stade Omnisport it was no surprise that the match began at a slow pace.

Mali were more impressive in the early exchanges with Bis-souma firing a free-kick wide and Djeneo having a header saved by Modou Jobe, who plays in the South African second division.

After being on the back foot, Gambia were awarded a 35-metre free-kick and Musa Barrow unleashed a thunderbolt that rattled the crossbar.

After a slow start to the second half, the match burst into life with Mali having three scoring opportunities in quick succession and Gambia one. A Gambian counterattack threatened to break the deadlock until they were dispossessed on the edge of the Mali box. Then came the two penalties with Kone and Barrow holding their nerve to send the goalkeepers the wrong way.

AFF



Australia seal Ashes 4-0

Cameron Green, Pat Cummins ignite under lights; Mark Wood's career-best figures of 6 for goes in vain

Hobart, Australia - Australia's seamers, sparked by an electric Cameron Green spell, ran through England to win the fifth and final Test in Hobart by 146 runs inside three days and seal the Ashes 4-0.

Despite Mark Wood's best efforts to keep his side in the contest with a six-wicket haul that contained England's target to 271, the tourist were found sorely wanting as they lost 10 wickets for 56 runs in 22.5 overs.

Rory Burns and Zak Crawley started the chase brightly enough, but once Green dismissed Burns on the stroke of tea, they collapsed to be all out for 124. Green finished with 3 for 21, while Scott Boland and Pat Cummins also took three wickets apiece in a dominant display by Australia.

Wood did everything in his power to give England a chance with a relentless short-ball barrage that began with a vicious bouncer that removed Usman Khawaja, caught behind off the glove as he took evasive action late on the second evening, and which yielded five more wickets on Sunday to give him career-best figures of 6 for 37 as Australia were bundled out in their second innings for 155.

That it fell to England's brittle batting line-up to finish the job was beyond his control, although in keeping the target under the 300-mark which the tourists had failed to reach all series he gave



Australian players celebrate with the trophy after defeating England 4-0 in the five-Test Ashes, in Hobart on Sunday (AFP)

a glimmer of hope. That their failure to even threaten came as no surprise at all rammed home the running theme of this Ashes.

In truth, Wood had switched to a short-ball tactic earlier, after tea on the opening day, to snatch three first-innings wickets after

bat he increased his haul to 17 at an average of 26.64. Wood's extra pace and bounce did for nightwatchman Boland, who feathered a catch to wicket-keeper Sam Billings and first-innings centurion Travis Head, caught down the leg side. When

23 before Wood sealed his five-wicket haul with the scalp of Mitchell Starc, caught by Ollie Pope at short leg. Wood almost had two in two when his next ball - a swift yorker - struck Cummins on the boot to be given out lbw, but Cummins had the decision overturned with replays showing the ball was missing off stump.

Adding to the drama on a pulsating day, Alex Carey was the beneficiary of two technology-led decisions that saw him reprieved on 19 and 30. On the first occasion, Carey dragged a Chris Woakes delivery onto his stumps and began making his way off the field only to return when it was deemed that Woakes had overstepped with replays showing no definitive images of any part of his foot behind the line. Carey then had an lbw decision off Broad overturned when the DRS confirmed that the ball had

pitched outside leg stump.

Carey went on to top-score for the innings, falling one run shy of his fifty when Broad had him caught behind. Wood then claimed his sixth, with a length ball that was bang on target as Cummins played and missed.

Burns was back in the side for the first time since he was dropped after the second Test in Adelaide, sporting an untethered hairstyle as he and Crawley played with some freedom to take England to 68 without loss at more than four runs an over.

It was the highest opening stand by either side in the series. With Cummins dismissing Ollie Pope, Wood and last man Ollie Robinson to finish as the leading wicket-taker for the series with 21 at an average of 18.04. Boland was third-highest behind Starc with 18 at 9.55.

Cricinfo

Ashes series win just the beginning says Cummins

Hobart, Australia - Australia may have beaten England 4-0 in the Ashes series but captain Pat Cummins believes they need to test themselves in all conditions and against all countries.

The rampant Australian side took 10 wickets for 56 runs to destroy England in the fifth Ashes Test in Hobart Sunday to wrap up the series 4-0.

It was a spectacular comeback for the Australians, who were beaten at home by India this time last year.

Cummins said the Test team, which did not tour in 2021 due to COVID-19, was building well and needed to test itself in all conditions. "These were quite foreign conditions to what we normally expect in Australia," Cummins said of the Hobart Test, where Australia slumped to 3-12 on the first morning.

"It was a green seaming wicket but I think the way Mar-



Pat Cummins

nus (Labuschagne), Travis Head and Cam Green took on the game was a really good template for any conditions that are foreign to what we might expect. We can be the type of team that is brave enough to take that positivity overseas if we need to. I think that puts us in a great place."

Australia travel to Pakistan in March and April for three Test matches along with three ODIs and a T20 clash.

AFP

Root vows to continue as captain despite disaster

Hobart, Australia - England's Joe Root has vowed to continue as Test captain despite suffering a 4-0 mauling at the hands of the Australian team in the Ashes series.

There have been increasing calls for Root to stand down as captain and concentrate on his batting, allowing someone with fresh ideas to take the helm.

But the only standout candidate for the role, Ben Stokes, said earlier in the series he didn't want the job and threw his support behind Root.

Speaking after the loss in Hobart, Root was in no doubt he wanted to add to his record tally of 61 Tests in charge of England.

"I'll admit it, we're going through a really tough stage as a



Joe Root

group," Root said. "Our performance and focus haven't been good, but I want the opportunity to turn things around. I honestly believe that I'm the best person to take this team forward, but if that decision is taken out of my hands, so be it."

AFP

Muscat too good for Majees; Waqas stars in Al Jadidi win

LOCAL CRICKET ROUNDUP

Muscat - Star-studded Muscat CT showed its batting prowess in a 96-run drubbing of Majees CT when four of its top five batters struck sizzling fifties in a 50-over Premier Division League match at Oman Cricket Turf 1 in Amerat on Saturday.

Shoaib Khan (75), Jatinder Singh (72), Kashyapkumar Prajapati (69) and Sandeep Goud (51) all batted brilliantly as Muscat posted an impressive 325 for 5 on the board. Amanpreet Singh took 2 for 49.

Majees struggled to stay on course despite a superb 112 by Ravindra K'Ratne before being dismissed for 229 in the 45th over. Chonira Aiyappa, Ganesh Chandrashekhar and Samay Shrivastava all claimed two wickets each.

BRIEF SCORES

(Premier Division 50 overs): Muscat CT 325 for 5 in 50 overs (Shoaib Khan 75 - 6x4, 3x6, Jatinder Singh 72 - 5x4, 3x6, Kashyapkumar Prajapati 69 - 7x4, Sandeep Goud 51 - 2x4, 4x6, Amanpreet Singh 2-49) beat



Rahul Chadha and Haja Hussain of Vanderlande (Supplied photo)

Majees 229 all out in 44.3 overs (Ravindra K'Ratne 112 - 12x4, 5x6, Chonira Aiyappa 2-23, Ganesh Chandrashekhar 2-26, Samay Shrivastava 2-52) by 96 runs.

Rahul Chadha lifts Vanderlande

In another C Division match at Muscat Municipality ground 1, Vanderlande rode on a superb 54 by its star performer Rahul Chadha and 3 for 24 by Haja Hussain to defeat Design Group Engineering Consultants by 30 runs.

Vanderlande's 205 for 6 included top-scores of 54 by Rahul and 37 by Barathwaj Vinayagam. Amir Mohammed and Satham Hussain took two wickets each.

Design Group fought well but fell short by 30 runs, scoring 175 for 7 in 20 overs. Parvez Beg (52) and Muhammed Althaf (45) were its main scorers. Haja Hussain and Vignesh Kumar claimed three and two wickets respectively.

BRIEF SCORES

(C Division): Vanderlande 205 for 6 in 20 overs (Rahul Chadha 54 - 7x4, 2x6, Barathwaj Vinayagam 37 - 4x4, Amir Mohammed 2-38, Satham Hussain 2-39) beat Design Group Engineering Consultants 175 for 7 in 20 overs (Parvez Beg 52 - 5x4, 1x6, Muhammed Althaf 45 - 2x4, 1x6, Haja Hussain 3-24, Vignesh Kumar 2-22) by 30 runs.

Akbar steers Ideal to big victory

Akbar Shaikh's magnificent 97 and Ruban Durai's 4 for 7 powered Ideal International to a massive 180-run victory against OCT Al Amerat in a C Division T20 clash at Muscat Municipality ground 2 on Friday.

Ideal's huge 253 for 2 included top scores of 97 from Akbar, 53 by Salman Khan, 41 by Wasim Jamadar and 39 from Ruban Durai. Anaya Allah bagged 2 for 38.

No batter from OCT Amerat could stay on to fight except Sulaiman Haider who struck 33 as the whole side was restricted to 73 for 7 in 20 overs. Apart from Ruban's destructive spell, Sachin Mamnani bowled exceptionally well, taking 3 for 8.

BRIEF SCORES

(C Division): Ideal International 253 for 2 in 20 overs (Akbar Shaikh 97 - 14x4, Salman Khan 53 - 9x4, 1x6, Wasim Jamadar 41 - 6x4, 2x6, Ruban Durai 39 - 7x4, 1x6, Anaya Allah 2-38) beat OCT Al Amerat 73 for 7 in 20 overs (Sulaiman Haider 33 - 4x4,

Ruban Durai 4-7, Sachin Mamnani 3-8) by 180 runs.

Waqas helps Al Jadidi win

Splendid 57 by Muhammed Waqas and Shaheer Najeeb's 3 for 13 were the highlights of Al Jadidi Stars' comfortable 7-wicket win over Ernst and Young in a T20 game of A Division League at OC Turf 2 on Saturday.

Ernst and Young failed to prosper, getting bowled out for 112 due to brilliant bowling by Shaheer, Ali Muhammed (3 for 21) and Aneermon (2 for 18).

Al Jadidi raced to the target in 16.2 overs, scoring 116 for 3 thanks to top knock by Waqas. Alkesh Joshi picked up 2 for 23.

BRIEF SCORES

(A Division T20): Ernst & Young 112 all out in 18.2 overs (Krishnan Karthik 35 - 2x4, 2x6, Issa al Balushi 27 - 5x4, 1x6, Shaheer Najeeb 3-13, Ali Muhammed 3-21, Aneermon Abdulrahman 2-18) lost to Al Jadidi Stars 116 for 3 in 16.2 overs (Muhammad Waqas 57 - 8x4, 1x6, Alkesh Joshi 2-23) by 7 wickets.

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