

RO1.5bn worth of investment opportunities announced

Our Correspondent
Muscat

To stimulate the economy and attract investors, the Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion (MoCIIP) launched 18 investment opportunities in the tourism and circular economy sectors worth more than RO1.5bn on Sunday.

The launch event was held under the patronage of H E Salem bin Muhammad al Mahrouqi, Minister of Heritage and Tourism, at Oman Convention and Exhibition Centre.

The investment opportunities are being offered in partnership with Muscat National Development and Investment Company (ASAS), Omani Tourism Development Company (Omran Group), Omani Environmental Services Holding Company (be'ah) and the Jabal Busher Heights Real Estate Development Company.

According to MoCIIP, the projects aim to attract qualitative investments in economic diver-



RO974mn
worth of investment opportunities in six tourism projects

The projects aim to attract qualitative investments in economic diversification sectors and create an appropriate environment for the success and development of new projects

RO528mn
worth of investment opportunities in 12 waste management projects

sification sectors and create an appropriate environment for the success and development of new projects. 'This is also to enable and motivate the private sector to invest and contribute to increase the proportion of foreign direct investment in the gross domestic product.'

H E Asila bint Salim al Sam-samiyah, Undersecretary for Investment Promotion in MoCIIP, informed that the 18 investment opportunities include six in the tourism sector, worth approximately RO974mn, and 12 in the waste management sector worth RO528mn.

Projects to be implemented in the waste management sector include a biogas plant in Barka landfill. It will treat up to 150,000 tonnes of organic waste annually and produce 4-6mW of electricity and will be connected to the national grid.

Another project will see con-

version of used cooking oil into biofuel for use in diesel vehicles. An electrical and electronic equipment recycling plant and a waste-to-energy plant will also be developed, besides projects to recycle glass waste and green waste.

On the occasion, Hashel

Obaid al Mahrouqi, CEO of Omran Group, said that it is working to provide investment opportunities to local and international partners and attract leading brands in the field of hospitality, culture and entertainment to Oman.

He informed that the three projects proposed for investment by Omran include the second phase of the Yeti project, a business centre in Madinat al Irfan in Muscat to develop commercial facilities, and the Musandam Adventures project, which includes the establishment of an adventure centre, a marina and a hotel. The first phase of project will witness the inauguration of a zip line, which will open in 2022.

Sulaiman al Kindi, CEO of ASAS, said that the company is working on several projects, including the Al Raya complex project located in the Ministries District in Muscat. It will include the Royal Academy of Management, with capacity to accommodate 20,000 trainees annually.

HM issues 3 decrees

Muscat - His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik issued three Royal Decrees on Sunday as follows:

Royal Decree No 18/2022 on amending Royal Decree No 95/2020 defining the prerogatives of the Ministry of Information and endorsing its organisational structure.

Article (1) stipulates that the annex attached to this decree will replace Annex No 2 of the aforementioned Royal Decree No 95/2020.

Article (2) cancels all that contradicts this decree or contravenes its provisions.

Article (3) states that this decree will be published in the *Official Gazette* and enforced on its date of issue.

Royal Decree No 19/2022 on the appointment of an Undersecretary for the Ministry of Information.

Article (1) appoints Mohammed bin Said bin Mohammed al Balushi as Undersecretary in the Ministry of Information, along with his existing grade and financial allocations.

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Five-day holiday declared for Eid

Muscat - On the Royal Orders of His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik, the Eid al Fitr holiday for employees in the state's administrative apparatus and other legal entities, as well as establishments of the private sector, will be from May 1 to May 5, 2022. The Ministry of Labour stated that employers may agree on terms to engage employees on the said holiday if deemed necessary.

Apex Media launches new information and lifestyle portal

Muscat - Apex Media has announced the launch of a new online information and lifestyle portal that reflects the pulse of Oman.

Kooloman.com has been designed to provide trusted and accurate business and lifestyle information that will support those already living and working in the sultanate and as an online resource for anyone planning to visit Oman for business or pleasure, or both.

Employing the latest web technology, Kooloman.com



delivers a fine user experience and presents numerous listed businesses within its database the opportunity of a dynamic interactive presence, enhancing the engagement experience with their own existing and potential customers.

Kooloman.com will fill a void in Oman's online landscape and rapidly emerge as the much-sought-after web portal for convenient search activity for

information and quality content.

Its marketing strategy will ensure search engine optimisation through both paid and organic activity, in turn delivering valuable webpage traffic to Apex Media's commercial partners. Transactions are totally secure and simple to execute via Kooloman's online payment gateway.

Commenting on Kooloman.com's launch, Laila Zakwani, Executive Director of Apex Media,

said, "Our long publishing heritage in the sultanate has ensured that the nation trusts our brands and content, whether on or offline. We are thrilled to introduce Kooloman.com to Oman and believe that this new information service will offer an unrivalled experience that users can trust and enjoy, and above all, help find what they are looking for."

Log on to www.kooloman.com and register to be part of this new community.

See also [Page 16](#)



Over 10,000 jobseekers appointed in Q1 2022



Macron set for second term defeating Le Pen

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GENESIS

Charity group distributes 900 iftar meals daily



Our Correspondent

Muscat

The Al Ithar Voluntary Group is distributing more than 900 food baskets among needy families, laid off workers and expatriates in Seeb. This is in addition to 900 iftar meals prepared daily by the Seeb-based group for the needy in its efforts to spread social solidarity this Ramadan.

Speaking to *Muscat Daily*, Sakina al Hosani, head of Al Ithar Voluntary Group, said, “We undertook the distribution of food baskets as a new initiative this year. We also distributed vouchers worth RO30 for the purchase of food items.”

The baskets contain more than ten essential food items, including rice, flour, sugar and oil, besides meat or chicken.

"We have prepared a list of families who deserve the Ramadan basket. In the first ten days of Ramadan, we distributed around 500 baskets. Four hundred more will be given out in the coming days," Sakina informed.

"Every day, we prepare about 900 iftar meals and distribute these from



4pm to 6pm among needy families, those with limited income and some expat workers."

Al Ithar Voluntary Group has been distributing iftar meals since 2014 in Muscat. "Our group comprises eight Omani youths. This year's campaign began in Ma'abala in the wilayat of Seeb. The meals are prepared in cooperation with some Omani families."

Operating under the umbrella of the Ministry of Social Development's Committee for Social Development in Seeb, the group's other initiatives this Ramadan include sponsoring 400 orphans, paying their for food, house rent and utility bills.

The group has also collected around RO9,000 for the release of eight prisoners as part of the ongoing Fak Kurban initiative organised by the Omani

Abu Huraira said:
The Prophet would review the Quran once every year in Ramadan and he reviewed it twice in the year he passed away. The Prophet would seek spiritual retreat in the mosque for ten days every year and he secluded himself for 20 days in the year he passed away.

Ibn Abbas said:
The Messenger of Allah
was the most generous
of people and he was
even more generous in
Ramadan when Gabriel
would meet him. He
would meet him every
night of Ramadan to
study the Quran. Thus,
the Prophet would be
more generous than a
nourishing wind.

The hadiths highlighted here throw light on the status of the blessed month, its merits, rewards and special offers, as well as the Prophet's example in Ramadan.

"We will also distribute clothes and gifts on Eid al Fitr," Sakina said, and thanked all the individuals and companies that have supported the group in conducting its activities.



NUTAILA AL K HARUSI
Managing
director and
psychotherapist,
Al Harub
Medical Centre

Ramadan bonding

Ramadan is a great opportunity to increase bonding time between family members.

One way to increase that bond while still abiding to religious rituals could be setting up a competition of who completes reading the Quran first.

This activity can instill a sense of closeness in the family and make Ramadan fun so that children and youngsters actively participate and look forward to Ramadan in the future.

Second, have your family members decorate your living space with Ramadan lights and accessories and get in the spirit of occasion.

Third, carve out time to spend with family members. Don't take your family relationships for granted.

Invest time and commit yourself to spend time with your family members, especially the closest ones to you.

Fourth, involve your children and other family members while you prepare iftar. Pick a recipe that is child friendly and encourage them to as-

sist you.

Fifth, Ramadan is a time when we push ourselves to be the best we can be. Think about what your personal goals are and create a realistic to-do list, including plenty of time for rest and things you enjoy, besides spiritual matters. Ask your family members what their personal goals are. Start with very small goals and build up slowly if you feel able to.

It is important that you subjectively reward yourselves for the small wins as you work through the goals. Moreover, praise your family members as they work through their goals. This exercise can really bring you close to each other.

Lastly, as a family you can make it a habit during Ramadan to do charity together or volunteer for a cause together. This will strengthen your relationship. Committing to make someone else's life better is always a powerful learning experience, and when your family shares in these learning experiences together, it will strengthen your relationship.

QUICK IFTAR DISH

For those who love sweets, here's a delicious option that's nutritious, too

Ingredients

- | |
|------------------------------------|
| 1½ cup skinned moong dal |
| 2tbsp warm milk |
| A few strands of saffron |
| 1½ cups milk |
| 1 cup sugar |
| ¾ to 1 cup to ghee |
| 5 green cardamom pods - powdered |
| 2tbsp toasted almonds - chopped |
| 2tbsp toasted pistachios - chopped |

Method

Wash and soak the moong dal (yel-

Moong dal halwa



low split gram) overnight. Drain and grind in a mixer-grinder, without addition of water, to a thick coarse paste with small bits. Soak the saffron strands in 2tbsp warm milk in a small bowl. Keep aside.

Heat $\frac{3}{4}$ cup ghee in a non-stick pan over low to medium heat. Put the thick, coarse paste into the ghee and keep stirring it so that the lentils

paste cooks. Initially it will be a bit pasty but with a little time it should start looking crumbly and become a light golden brown - 20 to 30 minutes.

At this point, reduce heat and gently add the milk. Keep stirring for about ten minutes allowing the lentils to cook a little more. The mixture will thicken.

Add the sugar. The mixture will loosen a little but will thicken as you keep stirring. When the mixture starts leaving the sides of the pan, add 1tbsp of ghee as well as the cardamom powder and the saffron-milk mixture. Remove from heat and let it cool. Serve into serving bowls and garnish with the chopped almonds and pistachios.

INVITATION TO TENDER SOHAR ALUMINIUM	
Sohar Aluminium LLC (SA), PO Box 80, PC- 327, Sohar, Sultanate of Oman hereby invites qualified Suppliers/Contractors for the following tender:	
Tender No.	: RFP 22-005
Tender Title	: Provide Custom Clearance and delivery Service
Scope	: Sohar Aluminium imports materials and parts from the various part of the globe for its day to day operation. The Contractor shall provide customs clearance & delivery services of Non-Hazardous & Hazardous material (s) purchased by Company covering via Inland transport, Road freight, Air freight and Sea freight. This excludes all raw material import custom clearance services.
Eligibility	: Only Omani SME Vendors are eligible to participate in this Tender (Sohar Aluminium will conduct the pre-qualification process and successful vendors will be provided with the tender documents)
Tender No.	: 2022-CSR-SOW-0002
Tender Title	: Smart School solution
Scope	: Contractor shall do supply, install and commission various electronic devices under Smart School solution for Government Schools in Al Buraimi Governorate and North Al Batinah Governorate as per SA scope.
Kindly send your email and company profile to: tender@sohar-aluminium.com For list of active tenders visit: https://www.sohar-aluminium.com/en/content/tender-listing	

Omran Group launches promotion for Eid

Muscat - Oman Tourism Development Company - Oman Tourism Development Group - has launched a promotion, called Double Your Delight, offering citizens and residents an array of staycation options with a 30 per cent discount in 16 hotels spread across the sultanate.

The promotion will provide distinguished hospitality experiences and recreational and cultural activities for individuals and families, as well as encourage them to explore and enjoy the most prominent tourism components and to enjoy Oman's unique tourism offerings.

The offers will be available between April 28 to May 7, 2022, in the participating hotels, including Alila Hinu Bay, Atana Stay Salalah, City Hotel Duqm, Crown Plaza Duqm, Crown Plaza Muscat OCEC, Crown Plaza Resort Salalah, Intercontinental Muscat, Al Bustan Palace - A Ritz-Carlton Hotel, Atana Khasab Hotel, Atana Musandam Resort, Atana Stay Al Ashkara, Barcelo Mussanah Re-



sort, dusitD2 Naseem Jabal Akhdar Resort, Masirah Island Resort - Ras al Jinz, and W Muscat.

Guests are invited to book at their preferred hotels directly

through the dedicated 'Double Your Delight' online platform by visiting the hotel's websites.

Omran Group continues to work with all stakeholders and partners to activate the tourism

sector's role to boost the local economy by providing suitable tourist environments for all visitors and offering an exceptional offer for guests in Omran's hotels and resorts.

MoE invites bids to build 5 new schools in three governorates

Our Correspondent
Muscat

With an aim of developing the education sector and reducing the density of students per class, the Ministry of Education (MoE) will establish five schools in three governorates.

According to a ministry official, MoE has floated a tender to build the five schools. Muscat will get two schools, one in the wilayat of Ma'abala with 40 classrooms for students of Grades 1 to 4, while the other school will be opened in Al Mahj area in the wilayat of Amerat for Grades 1 to 4.

Two schools will be built in the wilayats of Sohar and Saham in North Batinah, with 40 classrooms for Grades 1 to 4. A 40-classroom school for Grades 1 to 4 will also be built in Barka, South Batinah.

The last date for submission of bids is May 22, 2022.

In March, MoE unveiled details of its plan to set up 76 new schools in different parts of Oman. The new schools will lower student density in classrooms and reduce the number of



(Supplied photo)

Muscat will get two schools, one in the wilayat of Ma'abala and the other in the wilayat of Amerat

MINISTRY OF EDUCATION

evening classes as well, MoE stated. Of the 76 schools, 19 will be set up in Muscat, 17 in North Batinah, 11 in South Batinah, 5 schools in Dakhliyah, 9 in South Sharqiyah, 1 school in North Sharqiyah, 2 in Buraimi, 1 in Dhahirah, 9 in Dhofar and 2 in Musandam.

'The new schools will accom-

modate about 80,000 male and female students, and will be built in light of the current number of students in each governorate and the number of evening schools in these, as well as the expected increase in the number of students at the end of the tenth Five-Year Plan in each governorate,' MoE stated

Over 10,000 jobseekers appointed in Q1 2022

Our Correspondent
Muscat

Over 10,000 citizens were recruited in both the public and private sectors in the first quarter of 2022, according to the Ministry of Labour (MoL).

The ministry said that the public and private sectors are partners in creating and generating job opportunities. The total number of Omanis employed during the first quarter of this year is 10,017; of these, 4,126 in the government sector and 5,891 in the private sector. 'With this, 29 per cent of the total jobs targeted in 2022 has been achieved,' MoL stated.

'The statistics show the ministry's keenness on employment, qualification and training associated with employment, as well as the localisation of jobs, which is the supreme goal of the government.'

Of the total, 8,007 jobseekers were hired through employment and replacement opportunities and 2,010 were employed through training, rehabilitation and employment-related training opportunities.

MoL confirmed that the re-



(Supplied photo)

placement plans in the government sector are going on well and the results are satisfactory.

The ministry targets 10,000 jobs this year through employment and replacement opportunities. Of this, 2,573 have already been offered in the first quarter of 2022 - around 20 per cent of the target.

The ministry added that the percentage in the private sector reached 34 per cent (5,434 employed), where the target is 16,000. Of the 5,434, 1,806 job opportunities were offered to holders of General Education Diploma, and 1,785 were employed as managers, specialists and technicians.

In the training and rehabilitation sector, MoL targets 2,000

jobs this year. With 1,553 jobs already offered, the percentage of employment in this category has reached 78 per cent.

In the private sector, the target is 7,000 jobs, of which 457 or seven per cent have been offered in the first quarter of 2022.

Meanwhile, the General Federation of Oman Workers' latest data shows that jobs of 45,708 citizens were saved in 2021.

By the end of December 2021, as many as 40,000 Omanis were hired, bringing the total number of jobseekers within the range of 50,000.

MoL is aiming to provide 35,000 job opportunities through recruitment, replacement and training for citizens in 2022.

HOW ARE YOU PREPARING TO CELEBRATE EID?

For the third successive year, Muslims will mark Eid in the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic. However, with the number of cases significantly low and most restrictions relaxed in Oman, many are looking forward to celebrate Eid like they did before the pandemic. Set to begin early next week, Eid celebrations are the most anticipated time for many. Here is what *Muscat Daily* readers had to say about Eid preparations:

YOUR SAY

Warda al Jahdhani
Procurement officer

This Eid is special because after two years of lockdowns and many ups and downs, we get to visit our families in the interiors, make traditional shuwa meat and meet elders. Now it's time to celebrate with precautions in mind. We will be in Masjid Eid prayers on the morning of the first day of Eid and cannot wait to hear the Takbeera.

Bader al Harthi
Private sector employee

This Eid, I shall visit my distant relatives in my village. For the last two years I have not visited them and this has always pained me. I shall take all my three daughters to visit my brothers, uncles and their families. It's been long since I have been to the rural areas. I, along with my brothers, shall prepare some good shuwa.

Suraj Kumar
Hotel staff

I work in the hospitality sector and all these days I have been working round the clock. The holidays will be a good break for me. I plan to be at home with a select bunch of friends. No fixed plans but random ones including going to beaches, theatres and taking life easy without any routine or timetable.

Mohan Anandan
Banking sector employee

It's a matter of great relief and joy that we get to celebrate this Eid without any restrictions after two years of agonising times. However, it should be kept in mind that COVID-19 is not yet over, as evident from what's happening in China now. Prudence thus calls for caution and taking care of ourselves while celebrating the blessed Eid.

Ahmed al Balushi
PRO

This Eid, I plan to visit Dubai. Thankfully the travel restrictions are eased and I shall get a few days break from work too. My brother is in Abu Dhabi and I'm planning to pay him a visit too. I have not been out of Oman for the last two years and I shall make my first trip after the COVID-19 pandemic memorable with the Eid holidays. While in Dubai, I shall definitely visit the famous Miracle Garden and the Dubai Frame.

Ruskeen S
Private sector employee

Four Eids went without much celebration. More planning is needed for this Eid to enjoy properly. I don't have any plans for an outbound trip as flight ticket prices are still high. I will spend the holidays in Oman and explore new areas.

Faisal Khan
Private sector employee

This Eid I plan to visit Pakistan, my home country. I have not visited my family for the last two years and going in Eid means a lot. I have already started my shopping and in talks with a travel agency for my tickets.

Jayatee Choudhury
Student

Eid celebrations this year for me will be on a low key due to my board exams. I will duly follow the COVID-19 precautionary measures imposed by the authorities while celebrating Eid. I will be praying for those who lost their dear ones and their livelihood during this coronavirus pandemic.

Oman secures release of 14 from Yemen

Our Correspondent
Muscat

Oman has mediated the release of 14 foreigners who were held in Yemen and transferred them to Muscat on Sunday, the Foreign Ministry stated.

In a statement, the ministry said that the release was facilitated in compliance with the Royal Orders of His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik to work to meet the requests of the governments of the United Kingdom, Indonesia, India and Philippines to release 14 of their nationals.

'The detainees were held in Yemen for various reasons. Oman coordinated with the con-

The release was facilitated in compliance with Royal Orders

cerned authorities in Sanaa, which responded to these endeavours.

'After communicating with the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia to facilitate the issuance of the necessary permits, the detainees were transferred from Sanaa to Muscat on a Royal Air Force of Oman flight, in preparation for their return to their countries.'

Sayyid Badr al Busaidi, Foreign

Minister, tweeted that he was delighted to confirm the release of the 14 people. 'All of them are now safe in the care of Oman. We are deeply grateful for the noble and humanitarian efforts made by many parties in good faith, not least the Yemeni leadership in Sanaa, to bring this to fruition. Let's hope we are entering a new and better phase in Yemen.'

Following news of the release, Liz Truss, UK Foreign Secretary, tweeted, 'I am pleased that Luke Symons, who was unlawfully detained, without charge or trial since 2017 in Yemen, has been released. Luke was 25 when he was detained by the Houthis.'

HM issues 3 decrees

Continued from Page 01

Article (2) states that this decree will be published in the *Official Gazette* and enforced from its date of issue.

Royal Decree No 20/2022 on extending the membership of Oman Human Rights Commission.

Article (1) states that the membership of Oman Human Rights Commission will be extended till December 31, 2023.

Article (2) states that this decree will be published in the *Official Gazette* and enforced from its date of issue.

ONA



**SULTANATE OF OMAN
MINISTRY OF HEALTH**




ANNOUNCEMENT

The Ministry of Health (Al masarra Hospital) invites specialized companies to participate in the following Tenders through Esnad electronic tendering service: -

Tender Ref.	Description	Last date for Collection of tender Document	Bid Submission Closing Date on/ Before 08:00 am Sunday	Eligibility	Tender Fee (Non-Refundable)
893/2022/MOH /AMH-4(20916)	Maintenance of the Fire Alarm System, Fire Extinguishers and Hose Reel at AlMasarra Hospital and Halfway house Center	12-05-2022	05-06-2022	Specialized Companies registered with the General Secretariat of the Tender Board	25,000 Per Set
892/2022/MOH /AMH-3(21323)	Maintenance work for Halfway house Center Buildings	12-05-2022	05-06-2022		

- Tenders should be submitted on line on <https://etendering.tenderboard.gov.om> enclose **Electronic Bank Guarantee** issued by a Local bank for not less than One percent (1%) for the Tender value validity for (90) days from the Tender Submission date, addressed to The Chairman of the Tender Committee.
- Ministry is not bound to accept the lowest tender and reserves the right to accepts or reject any tender.
- For any Clarification, you may contact via Telephone: 24402200 , or E-mail at etenderhd@ita.gov.om

? NEXT ON YOUR SAY

How has Value Added Tax affected you personally since its introduction in Oman a year ago?

The views stated here are those of the respondents and not endorsed by *Muscat Daily*. If you feel strongly about the issues discussed here, you can email your comments to muscatdaily@apexmedia.co.om. You can also log on to our Facebook page or tweet us your comments on the issue.

SEND YOUR COMMENTS

Share your comments in not more than 50 words along with your full name and profession before next Sunday, 10am, via WhatsApp, Facebook or Instagram

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Omantel Group's Q1 profit increases 12% to RO62mn

Our Correspondent
Muscat

Oman Telecommunications Company (Omantel) on Sunday announced that its group net profit increased by 11.6 per cent year-on-year for the three months period ended March 31, 2022.

Omantel Group reported net profit of RO62.5mn for the first quarter of 2022 compared with RO56mn posted in the corresponding period of 2021, according to the company's preliminary financial results submitted to the Muscat Stock Exchange.

Group revenues increased 5.3 per cent to RO634.8mn during the January – March period of this year from RO602.7mn recorded in the same period of last year.

Net profit margin of the group slightly increased to 9.8 per cent in the first quarter of 2022 compared to 9.3 per cent reported for the same period of 2021.

Net profit attributable to the shareholders of Omantel came



at RO18.5mn in the first three months of 2022, an increase of 9.5 per cent from RO16.9mn in the same period of 2021.

Omantel said its subsidiary Zain Group generated consolidated revenue of US\$1.3bn for the three months ended March 31, 2022, while Zain Group's consolidated net income reached US\$156mn during the same period.

Domestic performance

Omantel's net profit from domestic operations recorded a

relatively slow growth of just two per cent during the first quarter of this year.

The company's domestic net profit increased to RO19.5mn in January – March quarter of 2022 compared to RO19.1mn reported for the same period of the previous year.

Omantel's net profit margin increased to 15 per cent for the first quarter of this year as compared to 14.5 per cent reported in the same period of last year.

Total revenue from domestic operations inched up 1.4 per cent to RO133.3mn for the three

months period ended March 31, 2022 against RO131.4mn in the same period of 2021.

'The increase in net profit is predominantly on account of sustainable revenue growth in postpaid mobile and fixed broadband revenue, cost optimisation measures and reduction in impairment provision against receivables,' Omantel said.

The figures showed that Omantel's postpaid mobile revenue grew by 11.6 per cent and fixed broadband revenue increased by 2.1 per cent during the first quarter of 2022.

OPAZ commends ACME for winning world's first green hydrogen certificate

Our Correspondent
Muscat

Oman's Public Authority for Special Economic Zones and Free Zones (OPAZ) has commended ACME Group – a leading renewable energy firm which is setting up a green hydrogen and ammonia project in Duqm – for receiving the first-ever international certificate accredited for commercial production of green hydrogen and ammonia in the world.

ACME Group has been awarded this green certification for its green hydrogen and ammonia project in the Special Economic Zone at Duqm.

The company received this green hydrogen certification from the German Technical Services Company, TÜV Rheinland, the leading international provider of inspection services, which is one of the global agencies specialised in independent certification services in the renewable energy sector.

The evaluation process, conducted by the German inspec-



tion company for ACME's green hydrogen project in Duqm, proved that the project meets all the standards set to be globally certified. The process included reviewing the various specified production methods, transportation methods and the different hydrogen applications in the project.

'This international certification for commercial production of green hydrogen and ammonia allows the potential customers of this promising industry to ensure that the ammonia and hydrogen of these plants have been produced from renewable energy

resources such as wind and sunlight,' OPAZ said in a press statement.

OPAZ believes that the world's first-ever certificate accredited for commercial production of green hydrogen and ammonia in Duqm will help in attracting various international companies to invest in Oman's renewable energy sector.

'It also promotes the government's efforts to boost the sultanate's position on the global map in the field of green hydrogen production and export as the first country in the world to be awarded this international certificate,' OPAZ said.

Manoj Upadhyay, chairman of ACME Group, said, "We are happy to receive the world's first green hydrogen certification from TÜV Rheinland for our commercial-scale green hydrogen and ammonia project in Duqm. This is a major milestone for our project in Duqm. The green hydrogen certification will pave the way for defining the criteria and process for the green certification."



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CHAIRMAN'S REPORT FOR THE 1ST QUARTER ENDED 31ST MARCH 2022

It is my privilege to present to you the operating results for the 1st quarter ended 31st March 2022.

Review of Operations & Finance Performance:

Revenue for this period stood at RO 7.66 M and net profits at RO 1.95 M.

Over all the performance for the 1st quarter of this year has been satisfactory. The imposition of the antidumping duty in KSA & UAE has resulted in strong order flows from there. We continue to be market leaders in our home market in Oman. The inflationary pressures on input costs are being countered with enhancing operational efficiencies and improving realisations.

We continue to focus on cost competitiveness which we believe is the key to superior profitability.

Corporate Governance:

I am pleased to report that your company has adhered to all the regulations covering corporate governance in Oman. We remain committed and aspire to becoming model corporate citizens.

Future Outlook:

Our first phase of expansion plan is on track to be completed by Second quarter of 2022. We believe that the timing is correct as the markets can absorb the additional output. The second phase of the expansion is taken up and expected to be completed as per our earlier disclosure. These expanded capacities will help us to both reduce costs by way of better amortization of fixed costs and improve realisations by the introduction of new sizes at higher price points. Our outlook for the medium term continues to be encouraging. We are grateful to the government of Oman and all the support that we receive from them and wish Oman further progress under the leadership of Sultan Haitham bin Tariq.

Hussain Ali Habib Sajwani
Chairman

STATEMENT OF COMPREHENSIVE INCOME (Unaudited) for the period ended 31st March 2022

	2022 RO	2021 RO
INCOME		
Revenue from contract with customers	7,657,711	7,105,665
Cost of Revenue	(4,273,931)	(4,016,240)
Gross profit	3,383,780	3,089,425
Other income	7,988	30,203
	3,391,768	3,119,628
EXPENSES		
General and Administrative Expenses	(648,782)	(574,653)
Selling and distribution Expenses	(794,623)	(745,289)
Net finance charges	(6,111)	(2,967)
	(1,449,516)	(1,322,909)
Profit from Operation	1,942,252	1,796,719
Investment Income	352,453	577,514
Profit for the year before taxation	2,294,705	2,374,233
Taxation	(344,206)	(359,135)
Net profit for the year	1,950,499	2,015,098
Fair value changes in fair value through other comprehensive income investments	65,332	90,664
Total comprehensive income for the year	2,015,831	2,105,762
Basic earnings per share	0.009	0.007

STATEMENT OF FINANCIAL POSITION (Unaudited) - at 31st March 2022

	31st March 2022 RO	31st March 2021 RO
ASSETS		
Non-current assets		
Property, plant and equipment	11,584,066	13,084,059
Capital Work in progress	6,548,679	—
Right of use of Asset	3,706,178	528,882
Fair value through other comprehensive income investment	12,916,956	6,881,305
Total non-current assets	34,755,879	20,494,246
Current assets		
Debt instruments at amortised cost	—	10,885,830
Inventories	3,532,995	3,356,165
Trade & Other receivables	10,668,988	9,421,034
Bank balances and cash	2,116,854	979,283
Total current assets	16,318,837	24,642,312
Total assets	51,074,716	45,136,558
EQUITY AND LIABILITIES		
Equity		
Share capital	22,000,000	29,621,368
Legal reserve	7,333,333	7,100,236
Retained earnings	2,675,505	2,200,297
Equity Investment reserve	(757,612)	(623,733)
Total equity	31,251,226	38,298,168
Liabilities		
Non-current liabilities		
Non current portion of lease liabilities	3,667,314	461,931
Employees' end of service benefits	1,022,515	889,480
Deferred tax liability	240,261	326,198
Term Loan	3,514,839	—
Total non-current liabilities	8,444,929	1,677,609
Current liabilities		
Current portion of lease liabilities	207,222	92,597
Short Term loan	2,000,000	—
Accounts and other payables	4,346,229	3,884,958
Taxation	1,526,736	1,183,226
Bank overdraft	3,298,374	—
Total current liabilities	11,378,561	5,160,781
Total liabilities	19,823,490	6,838,390
Total equity and liabilities	51,074,716	45,136,558
Net assets per share	0.142	0.129

MSX drops 0.4% as turnover jumps

Our Correspondent
Muscat

The benchmark index of the Muscat Stock Exchange (MSX) dropped 0.38 per cent on Sunday to close at 4,219.30 points. The decline in the main index was contributed by all sectors.

All the sectoral indices closed in red on Sunday with Services index declining the most by 0.72 per cent. Financial and Industrial indices decreased 0.30 per cent and 0.25

per cent, respectively. MSX Sharia index also dropped 0.31 per cent to close at 481.97 points.

Total trading volumes decreased by 7.91 per cent to 24.95mn shares on Sunday compared with 27.1mn shares traded on Thursday.

Market turnover more than doubled to RO7.19mn against RO3.53mn recorded in the previous trading session.

Market breadth of the MSX remained negative with five advancing stocks to 21 declin-

ers.

As many as 23 traded stocks closed flat for the day.

Top gainers of the day were Dhofar Generating (4.84 per cent), National Aluminium Production (2.25 per cent), Voltamp Energy (1.98 per cent) and Bank Muscat (1.12 per cent).

Top losers were Sembcorp Salalah (-4.88 per cent), National Finance (-3.2 per cent), National Bank of Oman (-2.86 per cent) and Al Anwar Investment (-2.25 per cent).



JBL

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EU agrees deal to tame internet 'Wild West'

Brussels, Belgium – The European Union finalised new legislation to require Big Tech to remove harmful content, the bloc's latest move to rein in the world's online giants.

The Digital Services Act (DSA) – the second part of a massive project to regulate tech companies – aims to ensure tougher consequences for platforms and websites that host a long list of banned content, from hate speech to disinformation and child sexual abuse images.

EU officials and parliamentarians finally reached agreement at talks in Brussels early Saturday on the legislation, which has been in the works since 2020.

"Today's agreement on DSA is historic," European Commission chief Ursula von der Leyen tweeted on Saturday night.

"Our new rules will protect users online, ensure freedom of expression and opportunities for businesses. What is illegal offline will effectively be illegal online in the EU."

"Yes, we have a deal!" European Commissioner for the Internal Market Thierry Breton tweeted.

"With the DSA, the time of big online platforms behaving like they are 'too big to care' is coming to an end. A major milestone for EU citizens," said Breton, who has previously described the internet as the "Wild West".

The EU's provisional agreement reached Saturday remains subject to formal approval by the



European Commission chief Ursula von der Leyen

27 member states and the European Parliament.

The regulation is the companion to the Digital Markets Act (DMA), which targeted anti-competitive practices among tech behemoths such as Google and Facebook and was concluded in late March.

The legislation had faced lobbying from the tech companies and intense debate over the extent of freedom of speech.

Obligations for large platforms

Tech giants have been repeatedly called out for failing to police their platforms – a 2019 New Zealand terror attack live-streamed on Facebook caused global outrage, and the chaotic insurrection in the US last year was promoted online.

The dark side of the internet also includes e-commerce platforms filled with counterfeit or defective products.

For its part, the large digital business lobby CCIA said Saturday that "a number of important details" need to be "clarified" so "the final legislation allows all businesses, large and small, to comply with the rules in practice".

The regulation will require platforms to swiftly remove illegal content as soon as they are aware of its existence. Social networks would have to suspend users who frequently breach the law.

The DSA will force e-commerce sites to verify the identity of suppliers before proposing their products.

While many of the DSA's stipulations cover all companies, it lays out special obligations for "very large platforms", defined as those with more than 45mn active users in the European Union.

While the list of companies has not yet been released it will include giants such as Google,

Apple, Facebook, Amazon and Microsoft, as well as Twitter and probably the likes of TikTok, Zaland and Booking.com.

These players will be obliged to assess the risks associated with the use of their services and remove illegal content.

They will also be required to be more transparent about their data and algorithms.

The initiative is "a world first in the field of digital regulation", the European Council, which represents the 27 member states, said in a statement.

"The DSA follows the principle that what is illegal offline must also be illegal online. It aims to protect the digital space against the spread of illegal content, and to ensure the protection of users' fundamental rights," the statement continued.

Hillary Clinton, the former US secretary of state and presidential candidate, has applauded the EU for taking action.

"For too long, tech platforms have amplified disinformation and extremism with no accountability," Clinton tweeted. "The EU is poised to do something about it."

The European Commission will oversee yearly audits and be able to impose fines of up to six percent of their annual sales for repeated infringements.

Among the practices expected to be outlawed is the use of data on religion or political views for targeted advertising.

AFF

Losing Russian energy would weigh on Europe's economy

Washington, US – Europe can get by without Russian gas for six months, but beyond that, the economic impact would be severe, a senior IMF official told AFP.

Alfred Kammer, head of the IMF's European Department, urged countries in the region to take a series of steps to ease the blow, including reducing consumption to build up inventory.

The region relies on Russia for the vast majority of its energy needs, especially natural gas, and IMF economists looked at the economic cost of losing Moscow's supply.

"Over the first six months, Europe can deal with such a shut off (by) having alternative supplies (and) using existing storage," he said in an interview on the sidelines of the spring meetings of the IMF and World Bank.

"However, if that gas shut off were to last into the winter, and over a longer period, then that would have significant effects" on the European economy, he said.

Western countries have considered putting an embargo on Russian energy in retaliation for its invasion of Ukraine, while Moscow could also shut off exports to hit back at the damaging sanctions already imposed on the government.

The International Monetary Fund projects that a total loss of Russian gas and oil supplies could cost the European Union three percent of GDP, depending on the severity of the winter.



He called for steps to prepare for the possibility.

"There is no single option, which has a large impact, but lots of smaller measures will have a larger impact," he said, including by finding alternative suppliers, which some countries already have begun to do.

Consumers also have an important role to play and governments can raise awareness among their population through "public campaigns to reduce energy consumption."

"The consumer can act now," he said, and reducing consumption means more fuel can be stored in case supplies are interrupted.

Although the war in Ukraine has slowed growth sharply, Kammer said it "will not derail the recovery" and he does not expect a Europe-wide recession.

The major eurozone economies, with the exception of Spain, will be "weak in 2022" and will see a quarter or two of near-

zero growth or even a technical recession with two negative quarters.

But the IMF expects these economies to recover in the second half of this year.

The Russian attack on its neighbor also has caused a flood of about five million refugees, creating a challenge for European countries which face strains on their budgets as they deal with the influx.

Poland, which which has taken in the most Ukrainians, is particularly affected.

What happens to those people, mostly women and children, after the war remains a question.

"Some of these refugees will stay in Europe, I'm sure about that," said Kammer, who noted that could be "a boon" for countries faced with an aging populations and a lack of workers.

"But it could be a bad for Ukraine if too many of the refugees are going to stay."

AFF

Russia's economic outlook worsens

Moscow, Russia – Russia's economic outlook has worsened as a central bank survey showed a deeper contraction than previously expected and inflation soaring to 22 per cent this year.

While President Vladimir Putin insists the economy has managed to weather the barrage of unprecedented sanctions imposed since he sent troops to Ukraine on February 24, economists believe that the worst impact of the sanctions is still to come. Speaking in parliament, central bank governor Elvira Nabiullina warned of "difficulties" and the "structural transformation" of the Russian economy



due to debilitating sanctions.

"Difficulties are appearing across all sectors, in both big and small companies," she said.

Nabiullina said the transformation of the economy, which has relied heavily on imports of manufacturing equipment and consumer goods, had begun.

"Due to sanctions, Russian

consumers and manufacturers are losing access to markets for the import and export of finished products and components," she said. "Problems may arise even when production has a high degree of localisation, when there is a sufficiently high degree of import substitution," she said.

In the latest survey taken by the Bank of Russia on April 13-19, economists forecast an economic contraction of 9.2 per cent this year while inflation is now expected to accelerate to 22 per cent.

In a previous poll in March, economists had expected gross domestic product to fall by eight

percent this year and for the annual inflation rate to reach 20 per cent. In their latest assessment, the economists also trimmed their growth outlook for next year to zero from one percent previously.

According to the survey, unemployment will grow to 6.9 per cent at the end of the year from 4.3 per cent in late 2021.

The ruble, which has recovered after plunging to an unprecedented level of 150 to the dollar following the sanctions, is expected to trade at 85 rubles this year, 90 rubles in 2023 and 96 rubles in 2024.

AFF

TENDER NOTICE

The Internal Tender Committee of Port of Duqm Company SAOC., hereby announces the following Tenders:

Tender No.	Description	Last Date of receiving Specifications	Date of Bid Submission	Suppliers	Tender Fee OMR	Place of Submission
ITC/T/006 /2022	Providing of Cleaning and Housekeeping Service for Port of Duqm	09th May 2022	26th May 2022	Only Specialized Companies	80/- OMR Non Refundable	Port of Duqm Company 3rd floor
ITC/T/007 /2022	Supply, installation, configuration and migration of Server and Storage Infrastructure	09th May 2022	29th May 2022	Only Specialized Companies	35/- OMR Non Refundable	Port of Duqm Company 3rd floor
ITC/T/008 /2022	Providing Handling Services at Port of Duqm on Need Basis	09th May 2022	26th May 2022	Only Specialized Companies	100/- OMR Non Refundable	Port of Duqm Company 3rd floor

Taking into consideration the following:

All specialized companies that wish to participate in the tender must deposit the tender amount into the bank account of the Company (details of the bank account is set out hereunder) and submit the original payment receipt of the tender along with a copy of the Commercial Registration Certificate and the contact details of the authorized individual (business card) to the address presented below. From 08:00 - 13:00 and 14:00 (Sunday – Thursday).

Payment Information:

1-Bank Transfer:

Account Name	Port of Duqm Company S.A.O.C
Account Number	0423047518510013
Bank Name	Bank Muscat
Branch	Ghala Corporate Branch
Bank ID Code	BMUSOMRXXXX

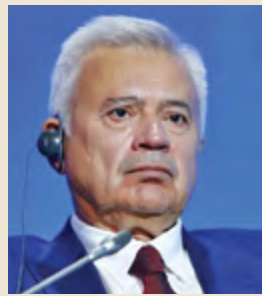
Complete Tender documents should be submitted in sealed envelope with red wax with tender number and title and addressed to the "Chairman of Internal Tender Committee". The envelope should not make any reference to the bidder details.

All applicants are required to submit the Tender in the Tender box in the main office of Port of Duqm Company at or before 02:00 PM on the assigned date for submission of the Tender. Tenders submitted after the above mentioned date and time shall not be considered.

- The company is not obliged to accept the lowest offer or any other offer without any justifiable reasons.
- The company reserve the right to issue the order either in part or full for the quoted items without any justifiable reasons.
- The company reserve the right to reject the tenders not complying with the tender documentation requirement. For any clarification, please contact us through tenders@portduqm.com

Port of Duqm Company S.A.O.C.

PO Box: 2409, PC: 111, Sultanate of Oman,
Almashreq Building, 18 November Street, N. Azaila
T: (+968) 25468666 | www.portofduqm.om



President of Lukoil resigns

Moscow, Russia – Russia's largest private oil company Lukoil announced the resignation of its president Vagit Alekperov on Thursday.

The company confirmed that the respective resignation notices were sent to the chairman on Thursday.

Alekperov is not a controlling shareholder in Lukoil but he owns significant stake in the company.

As of March 31, Alekperov owns 3.12 per cent of the voting shares in Lukoil.

Anadolu Agency

SULTANATE OF OMAN
MINISTRY OF CULTURE, SPORTS and YOUTH
MINISTRY OF CULTURE, SPORTS and YOUTH, Muscat, hereby give notice of tenders for the following projects

Tender No.	Project Category	Location	Fees R.O	Grade In Tender Board Registration
5/2022	Services	Book Printing Bayyan Almshkel	25/- OMR	First Grade

Companies, which are registered with the Tender Board and engaged in same category with experience in and same Grade as noted above, can obtain the Tender Documents at the Tender Board E-tendering digital portal link (<http://etendering.tenderboard.gov.om>) until 30/04/2022.

The last date of tender submission on above E-tendering site at 09:00am 16/05/2022

A Tender Bond equivalent to 1% of the tender sum issued from a registered bank, in the prescribed form, in Sultanate of Oman and valid for 90 days should enclosed with the tender.

Any tender without the bond will be reject and the tender committee is not bound to accept the lowest or any tender received.

INTERNAL TENDER COMMITTEE OF MINISTRY OF CULTURE, SPORTS and YOUTH

Any participants have doubt in adopting e-tendering can contact over the phone **24402200** or through email etenderhd@ita.gov.om

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- The company is not obliged to accept the lowest offer or any other offer without any justifiable reasons.
- The company reserve the right to issue the order either in part or full for the quoted items without any justifiable reasons.
- The company reserve the right to reject the tenders not complying with the tender documentation requirement. For any clarification, please contact us through tenders@portduqm.com

Port of Duqm Company S.A.O.C.

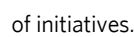
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The annual Souq Al Wathbah organised by Bank Muscat and the Authority for SME Development at the bank's head office from April 21-23 received an excellent response from Omani SMEs and the general public with hundreds of visitors thronging the over 120 SME stalls at the 3 day event.

The Ramadhan Souq featured many products and services encompassing fashion, beauty, food and health products and was organised as part of the bank's Social Corporate Responsibility (CSR) and its strong commitment to promoting SMEs and public-private partnership.

Earlier, the Souq was inaugurated by H E Halima bint Rashid al Zaria, CEO, Authority for SME Development, in the presence of Sheikh Waleed Khamis al Hashar, chief executive officer, Bank Muscat and other officials from both institutions.

Ibrahim Khamis al Balushi, senior assistant general manager – SME, Bank Muscat, said, “SMEs are a pillar of support and creator of jobs in Oman. Bank Muscat, which is celebrating its 40th anniversary in 2022, has been playing an important role in supporting this vital segment by providing a large number of highly essential financial and non-financial support, which improves overall financial inclusion and economic stability in the Sultanate. We are delighted to play our role in public-private partnership to create opportunities for local entrepreneurs to successfully grow the market for their products and services through a number



We thank Authority for SME Development for the strong support and partnership in hosting the annual Souq Al Wathbah thereby enabling SMEs to play an important role in the further progress and development of Oman."

Balushi added that the Souq was organised in 2022 after a long gap because of the COVID-19 pandemic. Fortunately, the event witnessed excellent participation from both Omani entrepreneurs and visitors thereby

contributing to the overall success of the event, which was held after abiding with the regulations set by the Supreme Committee for Dealing with COVID-19.

He further explained that this year's edition witnessed an excellent diversity in products offered as well as competitive prices. In addition, a number of new entrepreneurs participated in the event.

He wished all success to the participants and MSME and assuring them that the bank would

continue offering the best banking services and facilities for their financial needs.

The bank's AI Wathbah SME department offers a comprehensive suite of tailor-made finance solutions and non-financial services targeted at small and medium enterprises (SMEs). Credit facilities, both funded and non-funded in nature, are available to all sectors.

Further support is extended through non-financial services in areas of education, coaching, networking opportunities and

workshops. Earlier in 2021, the bank organised a free VAT Registration and Advisory desk at the Head Office for the benefit of its large numbers of SME customers.

It must be mentioned in this regard that Bank Muscat is continuously partnering with both government agencies and the private sector to promote entrepreneurship in Oman, as part of its focus on supporting the strategic goals of the ambitious Oman Vision 2040.



Porsche Middle East and Africa FZE, a wholly owned subsidiary of Dr. Ing. h.c. F. Porsche AG, Stuttgart, enjoyed a buoyant start to 2022 with a 25 per cent increase in new car deliveries between January and March when compared to the same period in 2021. The results marked also the region's highest first quarter order intake since the foundation of the Dubai-based office in 1999.

In total, the regional office delivered 2,572 new cars in the first three months, the highest result since 2013. With 1,051 new cars handed over to customers in March alone, the organization also recorded its best March results over nine years.

Dr Manfred Bräunl, chief executive officer at Porsche Middle East and Africa, said the strong start to 2022 is encouraging and continues the drive from a solid 2021. "Last year we saw a great demand for our products that accelerated the strong start leading into this year. Our first quarter results show the potential of the region thanks to our innovative, exciting and desirable products

that fulfil the dreams of many customers, one at a time."

Continuing its sales momentum from 2021, the Cayenne premium SUV gained further ground over last year with an 86 per cent increase in sales over the first quarter of 2021. A total of 1,140 units were delivered to customers across the region representing 44 per cent of total deliveries. The SUV segment overall has shown no signs of relinquishing its popularity among buyers; the Macan remained its rank as the second best-selling model recording 32 per cent share of total deliveries. In total, the Macan saw an increase of 16 per cent over the first three months compared to last year.

The iconic 911 was Porsche's third best-selling model with a model share of 11 per cent, followed by the all-electric Taycan which enjoyed a stable trajectory. The Panamera, showed significant growth over the first quarter of last year with deliveries up by 92 per cent. The recent launch of the 718 Cayman GT4 RS has further boosted the appeal of the 718 model range.

MAY HIS SOUL REST IN
ETERNAL PEACE



MATERIAL EVENTS

In the annual general meeting of the company held on 15 March 2022 the shareholders declared cash dividend to the shareholders at the rate of seven Omani Baiza for every share.

MATERIAL CHANGES IN FIGURES

Sales – During the period the company achieved a sales turnover of RO 2.469 million compared to RO 1.818 million for the same period last year, an increase of about 36%.

Gross Profit – During the period the company made a Gross Profit of RO 1.313 million compared to a Gross Profit of RO 0.833 million for the same period last year, an increase of about 58%.

Selling & Distribution Expenses – During the period the company incurred RO 167,000 as Selling & distribution expenses compared to RO 133,000 for the same period last year, an increase of about 26%.

General & Administration Expenses – During the period the company incurred RO 261,000 as General & administration expenses compared to RO 231,000 for the same period last year, an increase of about 13%.

Profit before tax – During the period the company earned Profit before tax of RO 662,000 compared to Profit before tax of RO 240,000 for the same period last year, an increase of about 176%.

Income tax – During the period Company provided Income tax of RO 100,000 compared to RO 36,000 provided for the same period last year, an increase of about 176%.

Profit after tax – During the period company earned a profit after tax of RO 562,000 compared to profit after tax of RO 204,000 for the same period last year, an increase of about 176% for above reasons.

Chief Executive Officer

	31/03/2022	31/03/2021
	RO	RO
Non-current assets	12,388,955	12,740,449
	12,388,955	12,740,449
Current assets		
Inventories	1,513,735	1,258,620
Receivables & Prepayments	1,581,862	1,233,352
Bank and Cash	279,850	352,585
Total current assets	3,645,447	2,844,566
Total assets	16,034,402	15,585,015
Current liabilities		
Bank overdraft/Wakala	450,000	-
Term loans	1,211,242	875,663
Trade & Other creditors	1,178,337	980,411
Lease liability	7,755	7,755
Taxation	203,748	34,277
Total current liabilities	3,051,082	1,898,106
Non-current liabilities		
Term loans	3,840,826	5,431,584
Deferred Tax	569,171	545,369
Lease liability	17,004	25,073
End of service benefits	380,235	340,934
Total non-current liabilities	4,807,276	6,342,960
Total liabilities	7,858,358	8,241,067
Net Assets	8,176,044	7,343,948
Shareholders' funds		
Share capital	4,160,527	3,782,297
Legal Reserve	936,949	824,616
Special Reserves	12,405	12,405
Revaluation Reserve	1,379,890	1,379,890
Accumulated Profit	1,686,273	1,344,740
Total shareholders' equity	8,176,044	7,343,948
Net assets per share (RO)	0.197	0.177

	3 Months ended 31/03/2022 RO	3 Months ended 31/03/2021 RO
Turnover/Revenue	2,469,423	1,818,029
Direct Expenses	(1,156,433)	(985,232)
Selling & distribution expense	(166,899)	(132,913)
Indirect expenses	(260,683)	(231,431)
Other income	3,552	3,576
Profit before depreciation & net financing costs	888,960	472,029
Depreciation	(158,068)	(152,170)
Profit before net financing costs	730,892	319,859
Net financing costs	(68,537)	(79,934)
Profit before tax	662,355	239,925
Income tax	(100,309)	(36,370)
Profit for the period	562,046	203,555
Other comprehensive income	-	-
Total comprehensive income for the period	562,046	203,555
Profit per share (RO)	0.014	0.005

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

M/s Gulf Mushroom Products Co. SAOG
P.O. Box: 383, Postal Code: 320, Barka, Sultanate of Oman, Fax: 00968 26883955,
Email: info@gulfmushroom.com

Alizz Islamic Bank holds its first Sharia'a Supervisory Board meet

The sharia's supervisory board of Aizz Islamic Bank held its first meeting for the year 2022 at the bank's headquarters in the Central Business District of Ruwi. The meeting was attended by Sheikh Dr Ibrahim al Sawafi, the newest member of the sharia's supervisory board.

During the meeting, the CEO of Alizz Islamic Bank, Sulaiman bin Hamad al Harthi presented and discussed the bank's performance during the first quarter of this year and the most important developments in Alizz Islamic Bank. Highlighting that the performance was in line with the strategic plan despite the challenges witnessed in the opening months of the year. This is due to the tireless efforts made in terms of business realignment, cost optimisation, financial discipline and asset quality improvement.

The board also discussed in its meeting the audit reports, sharia'a compliance and sharia'a risks for the first quarter of this



year, in addition to discussing and approving a number of new products and taking the appropriate decisions regarding them.

The meeting also saw the discussion of a number of requests to reschedule financings related to companies and individuals and to determine its rationale in order to facilitate the owners and take appropriate measures and decisions for them to ensure the

enforcement of these decisions.

Commenting on the occasion, Issa bin Salem al Riyami, head of the sharia'a compliance and audit department at Alizzz Islamic Bank, said, "Islamic banks do not compromise on sharia'a principles, even though it is an institution that seeks to achieve a desired profit for shareholders and depositors, because Islamic banking is a system of trade

through which the sale is carried out. Purchasing goods and services and investing capital by taking risks in order to obtain legitimate profits. It is based on the principles of Islamic sharia'a that permits trade and prohibits usury."

Riyami added, "This meeting is held regularly to obtain the sharia'a supervisory board's opinion about the bank's com-

mitment to its decisions and to ensure the avoidance of any violations to the sharia's principles. I would like to thank the sharia's supervisory board for all their efforts aiming to ensure that the transactions at Alizz Islamic Bank are not conflicting with the various Islamic principles, enhancing the value of our products and the transparency of our transactions and performance."



Three teams qualified for quarter final of Pran Frooto series

The Pran Frooto Ramadan Tennes Ball Cricket Tournament saw some exciting games in day five of the tournament where Muscat Rockers won the toss and elected to field first, the Pran Oman bat first managed to score 44 in 8 overs & loss of nine wickets in reply Muscat Rockers scored 39 runs in 8 overs loss of 6 wickets and lost the match by 5 runs. Nazmul from Pran Oman CT declared Man of match.

The second match played between Ayan CT & Landmark group, The Landmark Captain Vineeth won the toss and elected to Field first. The Ayan CT bat first scored 45 runs loss

of 4 wickets in 8 overs where Mr. Shafeeq scored 17 runs in 17 balls with SR 100, Ijaz scored 12 runs. In replied Landmark Group scored 18 runs with loss of 9 wickets in 8 overs. The Ayan CT won the match by 27 runs qualified to next round, Waqas declared man of the match from Ayan CT.

The last match played between Al Fatah 11 & MCC, Al Fatah 11 won the toss and elected to bat first scoring 64 lost 7 wickets in replay, MCC scored 46 loss of 9 wickets in 8 overs and lost the match by 18 runs. Matti declared Man of match scored 36 runs in 17 balls hits 4 sixes).

Avail special Ramadan offer on INFINITI Q60 sports coupe



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

INFINITI Q60 is powered by an award-winning 3.0-litre twin-turbo V-6 engine that produces 300 or 400 maximum horsepower, it combines expressive design with exhilarating performance and dynamics. A V-6 engine that makes 300 horsepower at 6,400 rpm paired to a 7-speed automatic transmission powers the Luxe, Q60 RED SPORT 400 turns up the wick to 400 maximum horsepower at 6,400 rpm.

A senior spokesperson at INFINITI Oman said, "INFINITI has always been at the forefront of daring design and pioneering technology - and the Q60 offers both the sports coupe stands out for its a beautiful design, technology, safety features and outstanding performance. INFINITI Q60 embodies dedication to developing new and innovative driving technologies that delivers a confidence-inspiring and personalised experience behind the wheel."

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

The special offer will be available till May 19, 2022. The scheme is applicable for all the customers purchasing INFINITI vehicles for personal use only.

Vehicles purchased with commercial registration will not be eligible for the scheme. Vehicles bought for taxi, driving school, ministries, fleet, and rent-a-car usage will not be eligible for this scheme. The scheme is applicable for retail billing only.

Free registration

All customers purchasing INFINITI Q60 during the scheme period will be eligible for free first year vehicle registration.

Assured gifts vouchers

All customers purchasing INFINITI Q60 during the scheme period will be eligible for Value Added Service (VAS) gift vouchers of RO200. Voucher can be redeemed for vehicle service at SBA workshop, purchase of value-added service products at SBA workshop, purchase of parts/accessories at SBA workshop and purchase of service contracts from SBA workshop. VAS voucher will have to be utilised fully in one go and cannot be fragmented. Any additional expenses on top of the voucher amount will be paid by the customer separately. VAS voucher will have a limited validity period and will have to be used before October 31, 2022. VAS Voucher is transferable and will be in denomination of RO50. Multiple vouchers will be issued for RO200. VAS Voucher can be redeemed only at SBA Workshop and the amount cannot be discounted in cash.

Periodic vehicle maintenance

Customers purchasing INFINITI Q60 in the scheme period will get free Periodic Vehicle Maintenance.

Manufacturer's warranty

INFINITI Q60 purchased during the scheme period will have a 3 years/100,000km manufacturer's warranty.

**AAA/ road assistance
card**

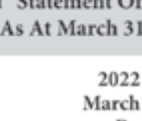
Free AAA/road assistance card will be given on the purchase of INFINITI Q60 for the first year only and as supported by AAA Oman and UAE.

Digital promotion

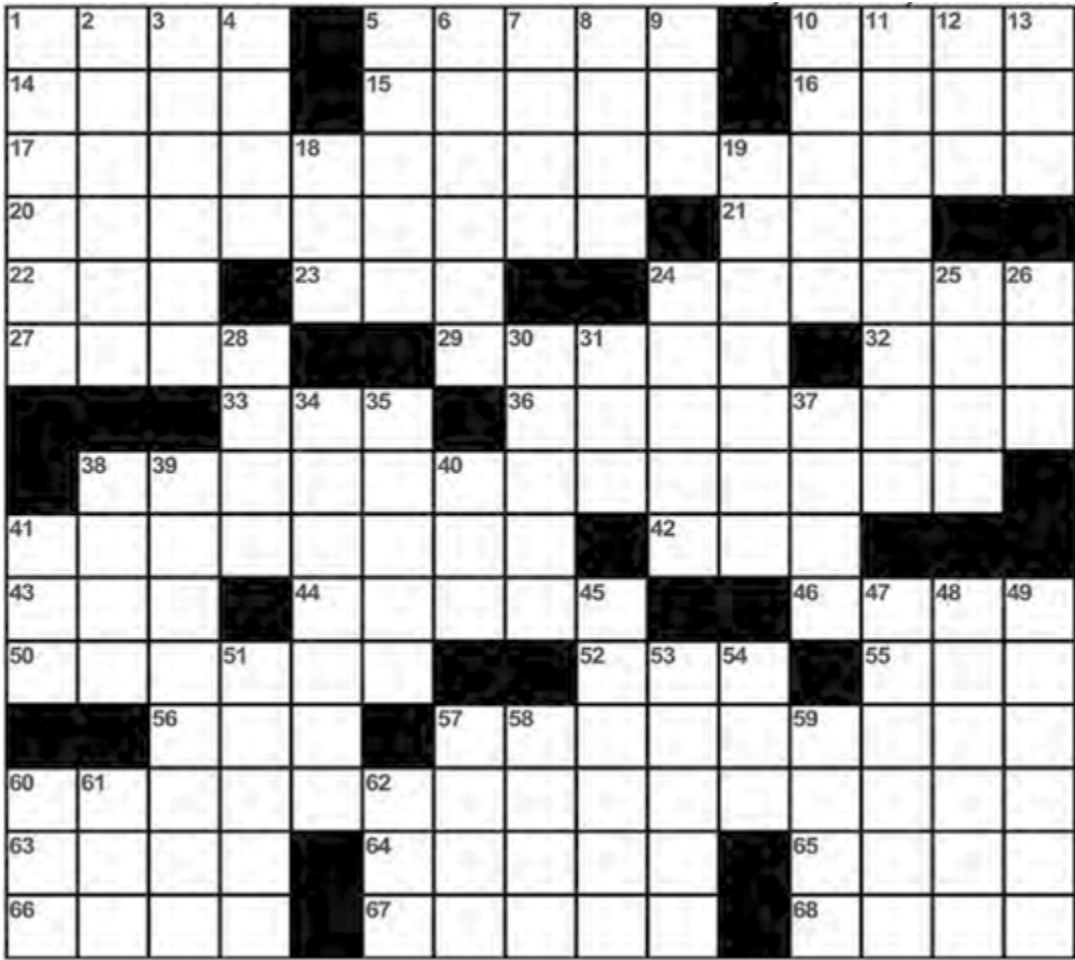
Two winners from all the social media users who will participate in the Ramadan campaign, Contest and other online challenges on Instagram (@sbainfinitoman) and Facebook (@sbainfinitoman) will get BOSE EarBuds.

Loyalty programme

All INFINITI existing owners and their immediate family members [father, mother, son(s) and unmarried daughter(s)] will be eligible for the following additional benefits on purchase of another INFINITI vehicle. Diamond members will get a loyalty Bonus on trade-in price of INFINITI vehicle of RO3000 and platinum will get RO4000. Special in-house finance rate for diamond members is 3.75 per cent and platinum is 3.50 per cent. Diamond members will get a special accessories package of window tinting and platinum members will get window tinting and paint protection.

شركة صناعة مواد البناء (ش.م.ع.) Construction Materials Industries (S.A.O.G) 		P.O. Box: 1791, Ruwi, Postal Code 112, Sultanate of Oman, Tel: 26752247/26752287, Fax: 26750867																																																																																																	
MANAGEMENT REPORT		"Un Audited" Statement Of Financial Position As At March 31, 2022																																																																																																	
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DAILY CROSSWORD



ACROSS

1) "Beg pardon ..."
5) Much, slangily
10) It's far from a flattop
14) Handed-down history
15) Hole-_ (golf coup)
16) Common roller-coaster feature
17) They include numerators and denominators
20) Providing bearings
21) Tiny carpenter
22) Thing picked up at the beach
23) Animated Olive
24) Drunk, in slang
27) Not us
29) Short choral composition
32) Tokyo oflong ago
33) "Much _ About Nothing"
36) Fence for defense
38) It includes angles and shapes
41) Jon Bon Jovi, for one
42) "What_ the odds?"
43) Notable period of history
44) Golden Horde member
46) D.C. veterans

50) Spanish capital
52) Clairvoyant's favorite letters?
55) Lobster eggs
56) Moray, e.g.
57) Evolution adherent
60) X = 3, X + 2 = 5, and others
63) Pavarotti solo
64) Tossed with force
65) Singing club
66) Like much lingerie
67) Make fun of
68) Half a matched set

DOWN

1) March family creator
2) "Yippeel" alternative
3) Ferret's cousin
4) Humorous internet image
5) Full of dryer fluff
6) Photographed or taped
7) In a quandary
8) It might produce a run
9) Former nuclear power agcy.
10) Flared dress style
11) Shoes, sandals, sneakers, etc.
12) Director Howard
13) Photo_ (media events)
18) Plastic_ Band

19) More moth-eaten, e.g.
24) Historic Alabama city
25) Challenge to a canoer
26) Bambi's mother, e.g.
28) Bit of Halloween attire
30) Musical with its own glasses?
31) "The _ of Pooh"
34) Concentrate, in a way
35) Group of eight
37) It's used to take flight?
38) When doubled, a Society Island
39) Campus VIP
40) Gangster's gun in old films
41) Sleep phenomenon
45) "The Twilight Zone" telecasts, today
47) Baltimore's bird
48) Body shop convenience
49) Has a hunch
51) One way to get out of debt
53) Metal-shaping tool
54) Place for an orchestra

57) Take out, to an editor
58) Lung opening?
59) Approaching, in romantic poetry

60) "Do the Right Thing" pizzeria owner
61) Common savings vehicle
62) Little salamander

NOTE PAD

YOUR DAILY HOROSCOPE

 **ARIES** MARCH 21-APRIL 19

Why struggle with this? You've been trying not to say what's on your mind just as soon as it pops into your head, but you're not having much luck with it. In fact, the stronger you feel about something, the more difficult it becomes to really keep quiet. What should that tell you? Well, that you're not supposed to be keeping quiet, for starters! Stop wasting your energy on silence and put it toward sharing your opinions constructively.

 **LEO** JULY 23-AUGUST 22

Your conservative side has been in power for a long time, so today it's time to let your wild child out! For inspiration, get with your nuttiest friends and let them lead the way toward a wackier life for a while. You need a vacation from organisation, a break from the staid stuff of life, and a mood renovation. It's time to revisit your childhood and stop taking things so seriously. The big things in life will iron themselves out.

 **SAGITTARIUS** NOVEMBER 22-DECEMBER21

The thing about new beginnings is that they can be kind of scary sometimes! If you're entering any new relationships or business ventures, today, you can expect a bumpy (but interesting) ride. Don't let this dissuade you from moving forward. You're entering a phase where challenges will enrich you like never before. Remember that forewarned is forearmed and take comfort in the fact that you can handle any curve ball !

 **TAURUS** APRIL 20-MAY 20

Okay, so it's expensive. And really quite lavish. But it's not for you; it's for someone else. Doesn't that help justify the expense? Maybe, maybe not. Just be sure you really can afford it before you throw down the cash. If you're doubtful, settle for something a little less expensive but equally meaningful. They really couldn't care less about how much it costs, by the way. They're far more interested in your thoughtfulness.

 **VIRGO** AUGUST 23-SEPTEMBER 22

A higher-up who's always seemed a bit more reckless than you are has just said or done something that removed all doubt from your mind. Now you're officially wondering what to do about it. Should you keep working for them knowing what they're capable of or duck out now? The answer really depends on one thing: your ability to magically produce money. Can't do it? Then try to be patient.

 **CAPRICORN** DECEMBER 22-JANUARY 19

Even when you're not consciously working at it, there's something about you that's tough to resist. It happens without any effort at all. So when you're consciously and passionately involved in the outcome of a situation, as you are now, you're positively lethal, which means your willing hostage will say or do just about anything to stay in your presence. Seeing exactly what that might be would certainly be fun, but would it be fair?

 **GEMINI** MAY 21-JUNE 21

You have a growing understanding of the situation around you, but you aren't the only one. Be on the lookout for a rising star who might steal some of your thunder and possibly some of your credit. Don't be paranoid, but do be cautious about who you share your ideas with right now. Someone could misunderstand you and think that you're giving them ideas when in fact you're only sharing your ideas. Make the difference crystal clear.

 **LIBRA** SEPTEMBER 23-OCTOBER 22

Whether you're going to have a boring or exciting day is up to you. Either extreme is completely possible; the only variable is your attitude. The fact that this day has the potential to be good or bad shouldn't make you feel like the weight of the world is on your shoulders. There is a lot of power inside of you, and it will feel liberating to utilize it. You're the one who will decide how things go, and that's a blessing, not a curse.

 **AQUARIUS** JANUARY 20-FEBRUARY 18

The line between your real life and fantasy life will blur greatly today when some amazing coincidences lead you to believe that the hands of fate are pushing you in a very particular direction. This will create a building sense of energy, and your job today is to give it some place to go! Get involved in a project, the more artistic the better, and let your creativity take advantage of all the exciting feelings that are starting to blossom inside you.

 **CANCER** JUNE 22-JULY 22

Here is another day that was tailor-made by the universe to help you learn the tricks of your trade: the art of restoring synchronicity. So when a tough situation comes up demanding that someone fix it, guess who will quietly spring into action? That's right, you will. Just be sure you're not doing all of this at your own expense. You must tend to your own needs too, you know.

 **SCORPIO** OCTOBER 23-NOVEMBER 21

You need to be sure that anything you even come close to signing is exactly what it's cracked up to be. That goes double for anything of a joint financial nature. For the most part, you'll do just fine with any agreement, but if a deal comes along that just doesn't smell right, even if it sounds sweet, go with your gut. Check it out with someone you trust who knows what they're doing.

 **PISCES** FEBRUARY 19-MARCH 20

One of your exes is back on the scene, and now it looks like they might be off the market. News of their sizzling affair shouldn't upset you, though. Remember why things ended, and be grateful that they did. The best way to move on is to turn your head away from distractions like jealousy and focus on where you want to go with your life. Stop worrying so much about what other people are doing with their lives. It's pointless.



TEST YOUR KNOWLEDGE

01. In 2016 UNESCO marked a four-cave complex in the sheer limestone cliffs of eastern Gibraltarl as a World Heritage Site for its place in preserving and demonstrating what?

A. Record of bird life over 100 million years
B. Evolution of prehistoric cave painting
C. The culture and life of Ne-anderthal humans over a span of 100,000 years
D. Late Iron Age religious communities

02. The computer game, the aim of which is to peel something (usually a fruit or vegetable), is known as what?

A. Peelers
B. Peel the Apple
C. Peel-I-Span
D. I Peel Good

03. If an animal bears live young it is termed what?

A. Vital
B. Vivid
C. Vituperative
D. Viviparous

Answers: 1.C 2.D 3.D

KIDS COLOURING

BOGGLER

C	V	E	T
R	G	O	R
K	S	A	E
O	G	A	H

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

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

WORD BUILDER

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

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

SUDOKU EASY ANSWER

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

First commercial flight from rebel-held Yemen since 2016 postponed indefinitely

Sanaa, Yemen - The first commercial flight out of Yemen's rebel-held capital in six years was indefinitely postponed on Sunday, after failing to obtain permits from the Saudi-led coalition, the national carrier said.

Yemen's government blamed the Iran-backed Houthi rebels for the postponement, claiming they had tried to 'smuggle' members of Tehran's Revolutionary Guards and Lebanese fighter group Hezbollah onto the flight.

Authorities in Sanaa, though, accused the coalition of trying to keep Yemeni civilians 'in a large prison', and said the denial of permits was a 'violation' of a fragile truce.

The capital's airport was due to receive the commercial aircraft on Sunday morning, reviving hopes that the war-torn country could resume some normal operations.

A brutal seven-year conflict pitting Yemen's Saudi-backed government against Shiite Houthi rebels has killed hundreds of thousands of people and pushed the country to the brink of famine.

UN special envoy Hans Grundberg voiced concern and



Passengers, travelling onboard a United Nation airplane, arrive at the Sanaa International Airport on Sunday, after the first commercial flight out of Yemen's rebel-held capital in six years was indefinitely postponed (AFP)

called on the warring parties to work with his office 'to find a solution that allows the flights to resume as planned'.

A renewable two-month truce that went into effect in early April

'is meant to benefit civilians including through reducing violence, making fuel available, and improving their freedom of movement to, from and within their country', Grundberg said.

Trading blame

The plane, operated by national carrier Yemenia, was expected to take off from the government-controlled southern port city of Aden, stop off in Sanaa, and

transport passengers in need of medical treatment to Jordan's capital Amman.

But hours before the flight, the airline said 'it has not yet received operating permits'.

Yemenia said it hoped 'all problems will be overcome in the near future', without specifying a date. There was no immediate reaction from the military coalition that controls Yemen's airspace. But Yemen's Information Minister Moammar al-Eryani said the Houthis were responsible for the flight being scrapped, Yemen's official Saba news agency reported.

Eryani accused the Houthis of trying to take advantage of the flights to 'smuggle' members of Lebanese fighter group Hezbollah and Iran's Revolutionary Guards onto the plane using 'fake names and forged documents'.

While the government had approved 104 passengers, the Houthis 'refused' and insisted on adding 60 more 'passengers with unreliable passports', he added. The flight 'faltered due to the Houthi terrorist militia's non-compliance with the agreement stipulating the approval of passports issued by the legitimate government', Eryani said.

The Saudi-led coalition accuses Iran and Hezbollah of smuggling weapons to the rebels and sending operatives to

Yemen to train them to use drones and ballistic missiles against the government and against Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates, another member of the coalition.

In Houthi-controlled Sanaa, airport director Khaled Al-Shayef said the passports issue was a 'baseless justification' for barring the flight. The deputy head of civil aviation Raed Talib Jabal said the coalition's refusal to allow Sunday's flight was 'a violation of the truce'. "The coalition insists that the Yemeni people remain in a large prison," he added.

The flight postponement was a setback for a truce deal that has provided a rare respite from violence in much of the country, and has also seen fuel tankers begin arriving at the port of Hodeida, potentially easing fuel shortages in Sanaa and elsewhere.

The Houthis seized control of Sanaa in 2014, prompting the Saudi-led military intervention to support the government the following year, igniting a war that has caused what the United Nations terms the world's worst humanitarian crisis.

AFP

India PM holds first public event in Kashmir since security clampdown

Srinagar, India - India's prime minister promised peace and development for Jammu and Kashmir on Sunday, during his first public event in the disputed territory since it imposed a sweeping security clampdown nearly three years ago.

Narendra Modi's Hindu nationalist government has sought to quell a long-running insurgency in Indian-administered Kashmir and strengthen its hold over the Muslim-majority region, which is also claimed by neighbouring Pakistan.

India nullified the area's limited autonomy in August 2019, when authorities arrested thousands and imposed the world's longest internet shutdown, seeking to forestall local opposition to the move.

Tight security was in place for Modi's appearance at Pelli village in Jammu, the Hindu-majority southern part of the territory, which celebrated New Delhi's in-



India's PM Narendra Modi addresses a public rally on National Panchayati Raj Day at Pelli village on the outskirts of Jammu on Sunday (AFP)

roduction of direct rule as a defence against Kashmir's separatist movement.

As he inaugurated new road and hydropower projects, Modi told the gathered crowd of thousands that his government had put the restive region on the path to prosperity.

"I want to tell the youth of the

Its last chief minister was detained during the clampdown and only released more than a year later.

Modi's government has long said its decision to end Kashmir's limited autonomy was aimed at fostering a lasting peace and bringing investment into the troubled region, where tens of thousands of people have been killed over the years.

Today, it is the most militarised part of India, with more than half a million soldiers and paramilitaries deployed across the fractious territory.

Police say violence has declined since Kashmir's status was changed, but almost 1,000 people have been killed since 2019 - among them soldiers, militants and civilians.

Young men continue to join rebel groups that have fought Indian rule of Kashmir for more than three decades.

AFP

Leopard shot dead after attacking policeman in northern Iranian city

Tehran, Iran - A leopard was shot dead in the northern Iranian city of Ghaemshahr on Sunday after attacking and injuring a policeman, state media reported.

The endangered big cat 'was killed by two bullets to save the life of the police officer', said Moslem Ahangari, head of the Mazandaran province Environmental Protection Unit, according to the IRNA news agency.

The health of the police officer was reported to be 'stable', it added.

Earlier, the province's environment protection spokesman, Kamyar Valipur, had reported that the leopard had 'attacked and injured a policeman before fleeing towards a garden', IRNA reported.

The leopard was then taken to a wildlife centre but died of the gunshot wounds.

A video posted on social

media shows the leopard crouched on the city street outside a bank. Panicked, the animal jumps a few seconds later, and flees.

The endangered big cat was killed by two bullets to save the life of the police officer, whose health is reported to be stable, said IRNA

The inhabitants are seen terrified, screaming and running in all directions, according to the images.

According to the IRNA agency, the province's environment department is investigat-

ing whether the animal entered the city from forested areas or was being illegally kept in a local household.

Persian leopards are listed as an endangered species on the Red List of the International Union for Conservation of Nature. They are a panther subspecies native to Turkey, Iran, Afghanistan and the Caucasus. Fewer than 1,000 are believed to exist in the wild, with another 200 in captivity.

Many wild animals, including wolves and foxes, have been seen in urban areas in Iran in recent weeks, according to *Hamshahri*, the daily newspaper of Tehran's municipality.

The newspaper notably reported the sighting of a bear in the southern town of Marvdasht and a wolf attack on two elderly women in Khalkhal, northwest Iran.

AFP

Nigerian oil blast kills at least 80

Lagos, Nigeria - An explosion at an illegal oil refinery in southern Nigeria has killed at least 80 people, the emergency services said on Sunday. The blast occurred late on Friday at the illegal site between the southern oil states of Rivers and Imo, police said.

"We recovered at least 80 badly burnt bodies at the scene," Ifeanyi Nnaji of the National Emergency Management Agency in the area, told AFP, adding that the toll could rise.

"We learnt many bodies are in nearby bushes and forests as some illegal operators and their patrons scampered to safety."

Many people had 'severe burns', he said, adding some later died in hospital. Nnaji said several burnt vehicles and jerry-cans used in scooping stolen crude and petroleum products littered the scene of the carnage.

Local media said more than 100 people, mostly youths, were burnt to death. Police confirmed

the explosion happened late on Friday at the site of an illegal refinery where operators and their patrons had gathered for business but did not provide figures on how many died.

Idris Musa, head of the of state-run National Oil Spills Detection and Response Agency told AFP an investigation was under way. He said the explosion 'claimed several lives, especially those engaged in illegal oil refining and bunkering'.

An NGO in the oil-producing Niger delta said corpses of the victims littered the area, but could not immediately say how many were killed. "Several bodies burnt beyond recognition lay on the ground while others who may have attempted to run for safety are seen hanging on some tree branches," said Fyneface Dumnamene, executive director of Youths and Environmental Advocacy Centre.

AFP

North Korea boasts of 'invincible power' under Kim

Seoul, South Korea - North Korea's state media boasted on Sunday that its armed forces had 'gained invincible power' under leader Kim Jong Un as it prepares for a major army holiday that analysts say could be marked with a military parade or major weapons test.

North Korea on Monday celebrates the 90th anniversary of the founding of the Korean People's Revolutionary Army and the nuclear-armed country has staged military parades in the past to mark key holidays.

Pyongyang has carried out more than a dozen weapons tests this year, including firing an intercontinental ballistic missile at full range for the first time since 2017.

A report by the North's official Korean Central News Agency listed the history of the country's military achievements, from its battles against the United States in the 1950-53 Korean War to smaller conflicts.

"All the people of the country



This handout satellite photo taken on April 15 and released by Planet Labs PBC on April 19 shows preparations for an upcoming military parade at Kim Il Sung Square in Pyongyang (AFP)

are looking back deeply on the history of the 100 victory of our revolutionary armed forces," it said. The report added Kim had further propelled the country's military might with his 'genius military ideology, excellent military command and unparalleled courage and guts'.

"Our revolutionary armed

forces have gained invincible power that the world cannot ignore," it said, in an apparent reference to the North's nuclear arsenal.

Signs that Pyongyang was preparing for its 'biggest ever military parade' to mark the upcoming anniversary have been detected, Yonhap news agency

reported, citing multiple unnamed government sources.

The parade was likely to take place at midnight, the report said, involving around 20,000 troops and the North's most sophisticated weaponry including the 'monster' Hwasong-17 ICBM as well as hypersonic and submarine-launched ballistic mis-

siles.

North Korea had been widely expected to showcase its military strength to mark the 110th anniversary of the birth of its founding leader and Kim's grandfather Kim Il Sung on April 15, but instead, the day was celebrated with a civilian parade.

Satellite imagery has also shown continued preparations, with thousands of North Korean troops and scores of military vehicles marching in formation at a parade training ground in Pyongyang.

"Typically, troops depart the training ground as soon as the parade is complete, so their presence further indicates an upcoming event," Martyn Williams, a fellow at the Stimson Center, wrote on the 38 North website.

US and South Korean officials and analysts have also warned Pyongyang could resume nuclear weapons testing for the first time since 2017, citing renewed activity at its key testing site.

AFP

China COVID death toll rises as Beijing warns of 'grim' situation

Shanghai, China - Shanghai reported 39 COVID deaths on Sunday, its highest daily toll despite weeks of lockdowns, while China's capital Beijing warned of a 'grim' situation with rising infections.

The world's second-largest economy has been struggling to stamp out its worst outbreak in two years with a playbook of harsh lockdowns and mass testing as it sticks to a strict zero-COVID policy, taking a heavy toll on businesses and public morale.

The cosmopolitan business hub of Shanghai has been almost entirely locked down since the start of the month, snarling supply chains, with many residents confined to their homes for even longer as it became the epicentre of the outbreak.

China's biggest city only announced its first fatalities from the outbreak on April 18, despite reporting thousands of cases each day in recent weeks.

It reported 39 more deaths on Sunday, National Health Commission data showed, bringing its total toll to 87, while the country logged nearly 22,000 new local virus cases.

Shanghai's previous highest daily toll since lockdown was 12, reported a day earlier.

The city of 25mn has struggled to provide fresh food to those confined at home, while patients have reported trouble accessing regular medical care as thousands of health staff were deployed for COVID testing and treatment.

Health officials have warned of the particular risks of COVID to the country's older and largely unvaccinated population, saying the average age among fatalities in Shanghai's outbreak was 81.

Five of those who died had been vaccinated, though authorities have said the deaths involved people who had severe underlying diseases and who were in critical condition.

Doubts have been raised over



A worker sprays disinfectant during the COVID-19 lockdown in the Jing'an district in Shanghai on Sunday (AFP)

the efficacy of China's home-grown vaccines, and Beijing has not imported any foreign-made jabs.

Online backlash
Censors have battled to scrub

an online backlash against the prolonged lockdown in Shanghai, including the rapid censorship of a viral video by residents outlining their daily challenges to eat and access essential services. On Saturday evening,

a residential building fire sparked fear and criticism on social media, given that many exits in compounds have generally been sealed as part of COVID controls. Meanwhile 22 more infec-

tions were reported in Beijing, after warnings from an official on Saturday that the city must take urgent action.

Health official Pang Xinghuo said preliminary observations suggested COVID had been 'spreading invisibly' within the capital for a week now, affecting 'schools, tour groups and many families'. "The risk of continued and hidden transmission is high, and the situation is grim," Tian Wei of Beijing's Municipal Party

The cosmopolitan business hub of Shanghai has been almost entirely locked down since the start of the month, snarling supply chains, with many residents confined to their homes for even longer as it became the epicentre of the outbreak

Committee told a press briefing. "The whole city of Beijing must act immediately."

Targeted lockdowns have already been imposed on some communities where COVID cases have been found, while some fitness studios in the capital said they were suspending classes indefinitely.

Beijing has also imposed tight controls on entry to the city, with travellers required to have a negative COVID test from within 48 hours.

People who have travelled to cities or counties where just a single COVID case has been reported in the past two weeks are barred entry.

AFP



A Lebanese vessel enters the port of Tripoli, allegedly carrying victims from a boat of around 60 migrants on Sunday (AFP)

At least 6 dead, 48 rescued after ship capsizes off Lebanon

Tripoli, Lebanon - At least six people died, including a little girl, and almost 50 others were rescued after a migrant boat capsized off Lebanon, state media said, in the latest tragedy at sea off the crisis-hit country.

The boat capsized on Saturday night near the northern port city of Tripoli, the departure point for a growing number of people attempting a potentially lethal sea escape. The deadly accident, weeks ahead of parliamentary elections scheduled for May 15, is not the first of its kind for the crisis-hit country grappling with its worst-ever financial crash.

But it marks a grim reminder of the suffering behind a growing number of people, including Lebanese nationals and Syrian refugees, risking their lives at sea in search of a better future abroad. "The army's naval forces managed to rescue 48 people and retrieve the body of a dead girl... from a boat that sank while trying to illegally smuggle them out," the army said in a statement. It said the boat that sailed out of the Qalamoun region south of Tripoli capsized because of overcrowding and high water levels that nearly flooded the vessel.

"Most people on board were rescued," the army said, without

specifying their nationalities or how many remained missing.

"Sea, land and aerial operations are ongoing to rescue those who remain missing," it said.

The army said one man has been arrested for his suspected involvement in the smuggling operation. The army retrieved five corpses off Tripoli's coast on Sunday, the state-run National News Agency reported, revising an earlier tally of eight dead, hours after the body of a little girl was returned to shore.

One of the survivors claimed an army boat was chasing the migrant ship causing it to sink.

"The patrol boat crashed into us twice...to drown us," the man told AFP at the port, before he was silenced and carried off by a crowd of survivors' relatives.

Last November, a boat carrying dozens of would-be migrants also sank off Tripoli's coast after being chased by the Lebanese army. The passengers were rescued and towed back to shore.

Lebanon, which has a 'turn-back' agreement with Cyprus to prevent crossings, is in the grips of an unprecedented financial crisis, with the currency losing more than 90 per cent of its value and the majority of the population living below the poverty line.

AFP

10 dead, 16 missing in Japan sightseeing boat accident

Tokyo, Japan - At least 10 people were confirmed dead on Sunday after a sightseeing boat sank in frigid waters off Japan's northeast, the coast guard said, with the search continuing for 16 others still missing.

"We have confirmed the deaths of all 10 people" who have so far been retrieved, a coast-guard spokesman told AFP.

In a statement, the coast guard added that those found so far had been identified as seven men and three women.

The *Kazu I* sightseeing boat sent a distress signal on Saturday afternoon after it began taking on water off the remote northeastern tip of Japan's Hokkaido region. A search-and-rescue operation began immediately, but hopes soon began to fade for the 26 people on board, including two children and two crew, because of the cold temperatures in the region.

The boat had set out on Saturday morning on a sightseeing cruise of the sort that is popular in the Shiretoko Peninsula, a designated UNESCO World Heritage site for its pristine natural environment and diverse wildlife.

The tour went ahead despite high winds and waves that reportedly prompted even some local fishing boats to return to shore to avoid the worsening conditions.

"It was clear that the conditions at sea would worsen, so I



Personnel conducting a search and rescue operation for those on board the missing tourist boat *Kazu I* in Hokkaido's Shiretoko peninsula (AFP)

told them not to go," a local tour boat operator told NHK. "But they did (went) anyway. I told the captain not to."

The boat issued a distress call at around 1:15pm (0415GMT) on Saturday, with coast guard helicopters and vessels arriving in the area several hours later.

By nightfall though, as the air temperature dropped to around zero degrees Celsius, there was no sign of either the boat or those aboard, though the search continued overnight with infrared and thermal equipment.

Local police and Japan's Self Defense Forces have joined the rescue operation, and the first four people from the boat were located early on Sunday, with six more being retrieved in the following hours.

Some were found in the water, while others were spotted along the rugged shoreline,

where images from national broadcaster NHK showed rescue workers combing the coast as waves crashed into the shore.

Images released by the coast guard showed rescuers crouched in a crevasse along the rocky shoreline inspecting an area, as well as items clearly marked *Kazu I* washed up on a beach, with ice still visible on the shore.

Those rescued so far have been taken to hospitals, and NHK showed images of at least one person being transferred from a helicopter to an ambulance with officials holding up a blanket to shield their identity.

The Shiretoko Peninsula was designated a UNESCO world heritage site in 2005. It is well known for its unique wildlife, including the endangered Steller sea lion, as well as migratory birds and brown bears.

AFP

China bribing to win deals, says Australia

Sydney, Australia - Australia's defence minister on Sunday accused China of paying bribes to win international deals but refused to say if the corruption extended to Beijing's newly signed defence pact with the Solomon Islands.

Peter Dutton made the remarks as his conservative government faced questions in the run-up to May 21 general elections about how China apparently outmanoeuvred Australia by securing the agreement.

The deal shocked the Solomon Islands' traditional allies Australia and the United States, which fear it may give China a military foothold in the South Pacific less than 2,000km from Australia's coast.

"The Chinese don't play by our rules," Dutton said.

"If you look at what has happened in Africa, there are corrupt payments being made," he told Sky News Australia. "We can never compete with that sort of playbook. We have values and we have the rule of law that we abide by."

Asked specifically if he believed corrupt payments were made to forge China's deal with the Solomon Islands, which was announced by Beijing on April 19, the minister said he could not comment.

"The reality is that China has changed," he added.

"China's incredibly aggressive acts of foreign interference, the preparedness to pay bribes to



US National Security Council's Indo-Pacific coordinator Kurt Campbell leaves after a meeting with Solomon Islands government in Honiara on Friday (AFP)

beat other countries to deals: that's the reality of modern China."

A draft of the pact shocked countries in the region when it was leaked last month, particularly measures that would allow Chinese naval deployments to the Solomons.

Senior opposition Labour Party MP Jim Chalmers accused Prime Minister Scott Morrison's government of 'undermining our national security with all of this chest-beating on China at the same time as their incompetence has meant that China is setting up on our doorstep'.

A White House delegation visited the Solomon Islands cap-

ital Honiara on Friday to warn of repercussions if China was to establish a permanent military presence in the Pacific nation under the new agreement.

The White House said the officials had told Prime Minister Manasseh Sogavare that the recently signed pact had 'potential regional security implications' for Washington and its allies.

'No military base'
"If steps are taken to establish a de facto permanent military presence, power-projection capabilities, or a military installation, the delegation noted that the United States would then

have significant concerns and respond accordingly," the White House said in a statement.

National Security Council Indo-Pacific Coordinator Kurt Campbell and Assistant Secretary of State for East Asian and Pacific Affairs Daniel Kritenbrink led the delegation, which also included Pentagon officials.

According to the White House statement, 'Sogavare reiterated his specific assurances that there would be no military base, no long-term presence, and no power projection capability, as he has said publicly'.

Sogavare's government severed ties with Taiwan in September 2019 in favour of diplomatic relations with China, unlocking investment but stoking inter-island rivalries. Last November, protests against Sogavare's rule sparked violent riots in the capital, during which much of the city's Chinatown was torched.

While the unrest was partly fuelled by poverty and unemployment, anti-China sentiment was also cited as playing a role.

When asked about China's influence in the Pacific, Australia's prime minister told reporters on Friday that Beijing was exerting 'enormous pressure' on leaders of Pacific island nations.

Chinese foreign ministry spokesman Zhao Lijian in turn accused 'Australian politicians' of 'coercive diplomacy' in the region.

AFP

Macron set for second term defeating Le Pen in French election

Paris, France - French President Emmanuel Macron was on course Sunday to win a second term by defeating far-right leader Marine Le Pen in presidential elections, projections showed.

Macron was set to win 57.0-58.5 per cent of the vote compared with Le Pen on 41.5-43.0 per cent, according to projections by polling firms for French television channels based on a sample of the vote count.

The result is narrower than their second-round clash in 2017, when the same two candidates met in the run-off and Macron polled over 66 percent of the vote.

The relatively comfortable margin of victory will nonetheless

give Macron some confidence as he heads into a second five-year mandate, but the election also represents the closest the far-right has ever come to winning power in France.

A victory by Le Pen, accused by opponents of having cosy ties with Russian President Vladimir Putin, would have sent shockwaves around the world comparable to the 2016 polls that led to Brexit in Britain and Donald Trump's election in the United States.

The outcome, expected to be confirmed by official results overnight, will cause immense relief in Europe after fears a Le Pen presidency would leave the continent rudderless following Brexit and the departure of Ger-



Supporters react after the victory of French President and La Republique en Marche party candidate for re-election Emmanuel Macron in France's presidential election, in Paris, on April 24 (AFP)

man chancellor Angela Merkel.

Left-leaning EU leaders including German Chancellor Olaf Scholz had pleaded with France in the run-up to the vote to choose Macron over his rival, in an unusual intervention published in Le Monde newspaper.

Macron will be the first French president to win re-election since Jacques Chirac in 2002 after his predecessors Nicolas Sarkozy and Francois Hollande left office after only one term.

High ambitions

Macron will be hoping for a less complicated second term that will allow him to implement his vision of more pro-business reform and tighter EU integration

after a first term shadowed by protests, then the pandemic and finally Russia's invasion of Ukraine.

But he will have to win over those who backed his opponents and the millions of French who did not bother to vote.

On the basis of the official figures, polling organisations estimated that the abstention rate was on course for 28 per cent which, if confirmed, would be the highest in any presidential election second-round run-off since 1969.

The outcome of the first round on April 10 had left Macron, 44, in a solid but not unassailable position to retain the presidency.

AFP

Israel committed to holy site status quo: Minister

Israel FM Yair Lapid said Muslims will pray on the Temple Mount while others will only visit



Israeli Foreign Minister Yair Lapid speaks during a press briefing at the Foreign Ministry in Jerusalem, on Sunday (AFP)

Jerusalem - Israeli Foreign Minister Yair Lapid said on Sunday that Israel was 'committed' to the status quo at the flashpoint Jerusalem holy site at the heart of a recent wave of violence.

"Muslims pray on the Temple Mount, non-Muslims only visit," Lapid said, using the Jewish term for the Al-Aqsa Mosque compound, the holiest place in Judaism and the third-holiest in Islam. "There is no change, there will be no change - we have no plans to divide the Temple Mount between religions," he told journalists.

Palestinian protesters have repeatedly clashed with Israeli riot police at the Al-Aqsa compound since the middle of the month, as the Muslim holy month of Ramadan coincided with Jewish Passover. Those clashes have come against a backdrop of wider violence in Israel and the Palestinian territories that since late March has killed 38 people.

Terrorist organisations have been trying to hijack the Al-Aqsa Mosque in order to create an outbreak of violence in Jerusalem and a violent conflict across the country

YAIR LAPID

Attacks by Palestinians and Israeli Arabs have killed 14 people in Israel, while 24 Palestinians have been killed, including perpetrators of attacks and also in raids by Israeli security forces.

Palestinians have been angered by an uptick in Jewish visits to the Al-Aqsa compound in Israeli-annexed east Jerusalem, where by long-standing conven-

tion, Jews may visit but are not allowed to pray.

Palestinian officials and militants have repeatedly accused Israel of seeking to divide the site into Jewish and Muslim sections or visiting times, as with another sensitive holy site in nearby Hebron. They have voiced anger at repeated incursions by Israeli security forces into the mosque

compound.

But Lapid blamed renewed tensions at the site on 'terrorists' trying to incite violence.

"Terrorist organisations have been trying to hijack the Al-Aqsa Mosque in order to create an outbreak of violence in Jerusalem and from there a violent conflict across the country," he said.

He accused Islamist groups Hamas and Islamic Jihad of sending 'extremists' with weapons and explosives to use the Al-Aqsa compound 'as a base to incite violent riots'.

"They have done this to create a provocation, to force the Israeli police to enter the mosque and remove them," he said.

"The only reason police have entered the mosque in recent weeks is to remove them."

He also said Israel was committed to letting Muslims pray at the site, saying that hundreds of thousands had done so throughout Ramadan. Violence in Jerusalem had sparked fears of another armed conflict similar to an 11-day war last year between Israel and militants who control the Palestinian enclave of Gaza.

Israel said on Saturday it would close its only crossing from the Gaza Strip for workers in response to rocket fire from the besieged Palestinian territory, but stopped short of carrying out the usual retaliatory strikes, in an apparent bid to ease tensions.

AFP



A man fishes at Pasauran beach on Sunday, while Mount Anak Krakatau spews thick smoke into the air (AFP)

Indonesia's Anak Krakatoa volcano erupts, spews ash

Jakarta, Indonesia - The offspring of Indonesia's infamous Krakatoa volcano erupted on Sunday, spewing a towering volcanic ash cloud some 3,000 metres into the sky.

Mount Anak Krakatoa, which means Child of Krakatoa, belched thick ash over the strait that separates the islands of Java and Sumatra forcing authorities to warn nearby residents to wear masks outside.

"We are still recording continuous eruptions with thick clouds towering at between 500 to 3,000 metres from the peak," Deny Mardiono of Indonesia's Geological Agency told AFP.

Anak Krakatoa has erupted at least 21 times in recent weeks but Sunday's eruption was the largest yet, Mardiono said.

Authorities ordered people to stay out of a two-kilometre exclusion zone around the volcano, which is currently graded at level two of Indonesia's four-tiered volcanic alert system.

"People, including tourists, should adhere to the recommendation from the Geological Agency, which prohibits anyone to be within a two-kilometre radius from the crater," he added.

The volcano has been sporadically active since it emerged from the sea at the beginning of

last century in the caldera formed after the 1883 eruption of Mount Krakatoa.

That disaster was one of the deadliest and most destructive in history with an estimated 35,000 people killed.

Anak Krakatoa last erupted in 2018, generating a tsunami that killed 429 people and left thousands homeless.

Indonesia, a Southeast Asian archipelago nation, sits on the Pacific Ring of Fire where the meeting of continental plates causes high volcanic and seismic activity. The country has nearly 130 active volcanoes.

AFP

Sri Lanka students mob PM's home over economic crisis

Colombo, Sri Lanka - Thousands of Sri Lankan university students mobbed Prime Minister Mahinda Rajapaksa's home on Sunday demanding his resignation over the island nation's worsening economic crisis.

Months of lengthy blackouts, record inflation and acute food and fuel shortages have sparked increasing public discontent in Sri Lanka, which is dealing with its worst economic downturn since independence in 1948.

Sunday's protest saw student leaders scale the fence of Rajapaksa's compound in Colombo after police erected barricades on various roads around the capital to stop them from linking up with demonstrators elsewhere. "You can block the road, but can't stop our

struggle until the entire government goes home," one unidentified student leader said while standing on top of the walls.

Facing off against rows of police holding riot shields, protesters tried to pull down the barricades preventing them from entering the residence.

Some carried signs that said 'Go Home Gota' - the nickname for President Gotabaya Rajapaksa, who is Mahinda's younger brother - while others wore the Guy Fawkes mask that have become synonymous with anti-establishment movements.

Police said Mahinda Rajapaksa, the head of Sri Lanka's ruling clan, was not on the premises at the time and the crowd left peacefully.

AFP

Biden describes Armenian massacres as genocide

Washington, US - US President Joe Biden used Sunday's occasion of Armenian remembrance day to describe past mass atrocities by Ottomans as genocide, repeating his controversial description from a year ago when he ended decades of American equivocation.

The categorisation infuriates Turkey, which refuses to recognise the 1915-16 killings of more than a million Armenians as genocide.

But Biden, who earlier this month said Russia's atrocities committed during its invasion of Ukraine amounted to genocide, again used the precise term to describe the massacres of Armenians during World War I.

"On April 24, 1915, Ottoman authorities arrested Armenian intellectuals and community leaders in Constantinople. Thus began the Armenian genocide - one of the worst mass atrocities of the 20th century," the president said in a statement.



A man cries at the Tsitsernakaberd Memorial in Yerevan on Sunday (AFP)

Today we remember the one and a half million Armenians who were deported, massacred, or marched to their deaths

JOE BIDEN

"Today, we remember the one and a half million Armenians who were deported, massacred, or marched to their deaths in a campaign of extermination, and mourn the tragic loss of so many lives."

Biden said people should remain 'vigilant against the corrosive influence of hate in all forms', and urged Americans to 'recommit ourselves to speaking out and stopping atrocities that leave lasting scars on the world'.

As many as 1.5mn Armenians are estimated to have been

killed from 1915 to 1917 during the waning days of the Ottoman Empire, which suspected the Christian minority of conspiring with adversary Russia in World War I.

Armenian populations were rounded up and deported into the desert of Syria on death marches in which many were shot, poisoned or fell victim to disease, according to accounts at the time by foreign diplomats.

Turkey, which emerged as a secular republic from the ashes of the Ottoman Empire, acknowledges that 300,000 Armenians may have died but strongly rejects that it was genocide.

Biden infuriated Ankara one year ago when he became the first sitting US president to describe the massacres as genocide. He had informed Turkish leader Recep Tayyip Erdogan of the decision the day before, in a move seeking to limit fury from the NATO ally.

AFP

TREK TO SAFETY

Ukraine family shares their tiresome tale of escaping from Mariupol, 125km on foot

EPIC ESCAPE



Evgueni Tichtchenko (centre), Tetiana Komissarova (2nd left) and their children Ivan, Ioulia, Anna, and Sashko prior to boarding an evacuation train to Lviv

As Russian bombardments devastated their hometown of Mariupol, Yevgen and Tetiana decided they had only one way to escape with their four children - on foot.

Talking to AFP in the Ukrainian city of Zaporizhzhia, as they waited for a train westwards, the family recounted through tears and laughter all along their miraculous 125km trek to safety.

For weeks as the bombing laid waste to Mariupol, the parents tried to prepare their children - Yulia, 6, Oleksandr, 8, Anna, 10, and Ivan, 12 - for the perilous journey they faced.

"We explained to them for two months, while we were in the cellar, where we would go... We prepared them for this long journey," said Tetiana Komissarova, 40. "They saw it as an adventure."

Last Sunday, together with her husband Yevgen Tishchenko, a 37-year-old technician, they finally thought the time had come to make their move.

Nervously, they led the children out of their building. It was the first time they had all left together since the Russian invasion began on February 24.

Around them they found a terrifying scene of utter destruction. "When the kids saw, they walked in silence," Yevgen said. "I don't know what was going on in

their heads. Maybe they too couldn't believe that our city no longer existed."

Life underground

The adults already had a sense of what awaited them. They had sneaked out of the house to take food and water from bombed out shops and been confronted by the corpses littering the streets.

"It seemed less frightening to die in a bombing raid than of hunger," said Tetiana. A shell had hit the roof of their apartment block, and for the children, life had been lived entirely underground.

"We brought them books in the basement. The light was so dim that I could hardly see, but they managed to read," Tetiana said.

Mischievous 10-year-old Anna described moments of lightness playing with friends from a neighbouring flat. "Sleeping on the concrete was not great," recalled the ponytailed girl.

She insisted bravely that when the bombs fell they weren't so scared. "The building was shaking a lot and there was a lot of dust," she said. "It was not pleasant to breathe."

Leaving Mariupol

Finally leaving the basement and the city was hard, said Anna. "We had to carry our bags and they were heavy," she said.

That was on the first day, at least, before her dad discovered what the family called 'the golden cart'. In reality, it was a rusted and creaking three-wheeled trolley, but it made the walk much easier.

"My wife pushed our youngest girl on her tricycle. And I pushed the cart, often with one of the children perched on the bags," Yevgen said. "The other two walked beside me."

In five days and four nights of travel, the family passed through numerous Russian checkpoints, telling the soldiers that they were heading to their relatives.

"They didn't treat us as enemies, they tried to help," Yevgen said. "But every time they asked us, 'Where are you from? From Mariupol? But why are you going in this direction, why aren't you going to Russia?'"

At night, the family slept in the homes of local people who opened their doors along the route and were well fed. During the day, they moved on, against all odds.

Eventually they got lucky and came across Dmytro Zhirnikov, who was driving through Polohy, a Russian-occupied town located about 100km from Zaporizhzhia.

"I saw this family pushing a cart on the

We had just one goal: that our children could live in Ukraine. They are Ukrainians, we can't imagine that they could live in another country

TETIANA KOMISSAROVA

side of the road," said Zhirnikov, who regularly travels Zaporizhzhia to sell the vegetables his family produces. "I stopped and told them to put their things in my trailer."

After 125km on foot, Tetiana, Yevgen, and their little ones finished their journey in his battered van. Zhirnikov remembered the elation they felt when they emerged from Russian-controlled territory and saw Ukrainian soldiers.

"When we passed the first checkpoint, everyone started crying," he said. "We had just one goal: that our children could live in Ukraine. They are Ukrainians, we can't imagine that they could live in another country," Tetiana insisted.

On Friday, the family crammed themselves and their meagre possessions into a crowded train heading for the western city of Lviv. They plan to move to Ivano-Frankivsk, another large city in western Ukraine, to try to rebuild a normal life.

"I want to find a job. My wife will take care of the children and try to find them a school," Yevgen said. "We can never forget what we have been through. We must not. But we must keep our spirits up."

AFP

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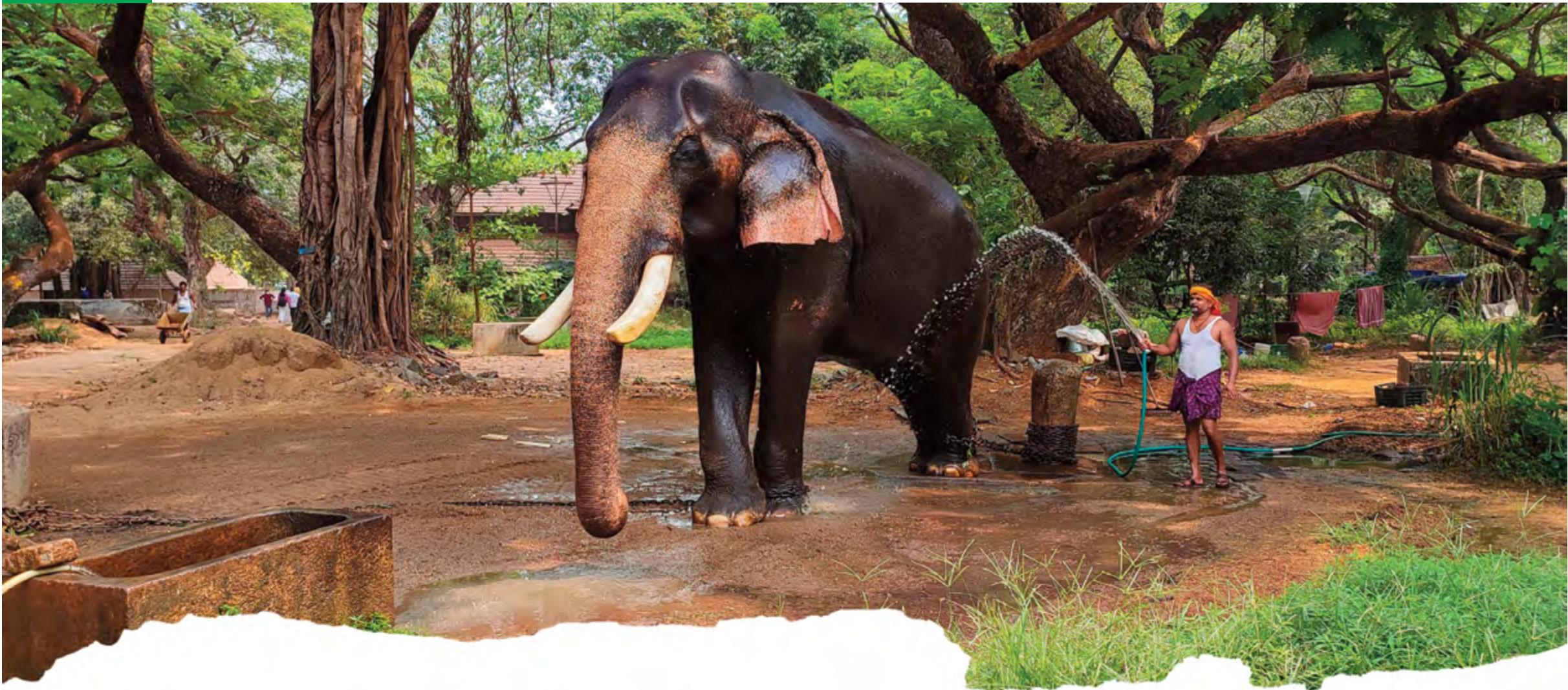
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KERALA



GREEN LAGOON



By Anirban Ray

The fragrance of fresh jasmines and the heady aromas of freshly brewed coffee seems to greet you everywhere... And, if greenery revives your spirits, there is an overdose of it in every nook and corner!

With COVID-19 infections ebbing, travel restrictions eased, and Eid holidays round the corner, one of the easiest, yet fulfilling, get-aways for people from Oman could be Kerala, in India, which welcomes people from around the world for relaxing retreats all through the year.

You could pack in a punch into your week-long Eid holiday with a quick, four-day trip to this greenland, often referred to as 'God's own country', and come back refreshed, rejuvenated, yet with an insatiable desire to return at the next opportunity.

Just about a three-hour flight from Muscat, the southern state of India offers numerous packages of varied experiences for anxious individuals and families who have been bogged down with two years of uncertainties, lock-downs, and restrictions in movement. One can tailor a trip to suit one's own timeframe as tour operators are flexible in creating varied experiences for different type of tourists.

Though the state offers a diverse landscape and gastronomic delights in a space of every 20km, a smart traveller can choose his destinations wisely and also get an opportunity to refresh his body and soul in merely four days. Travel will not be hectic as the state is well connected with public transport as well as private transport options like Uber,

Ola, and private cars.

I made a quick trip to Kerala, travelling via Abu Dhabi and landing directly in the capital Kochi. The city, like any other metro, has fancy high-rises, restaurants, malls (including the familiar Lulu), night clubs, OYO stay options, busy traffic, and busier office-goers.

It was my very first experience, and the vast stretches of coconut trees, the pleasant sea breeze, and the sight of colourful scooters, reminded me of my trips to Phuket, Gale and Salalah.

For most of us, travelling equals a break from the Babel tower of deadlines and commitments. My first stop was at Munnar – a hill station known for its vast tea plantations. En route, I also dropped by the famous Guruvayur temple and visited the famous elephant park where the jumbos are protected by the temple trust and are looked after like children.

It was an exciting experience to watch the jumbos enjoy showers and play mischief with their mahouts. We were told to stay alert and not antagonise the gentle giants in our enthusiasm to take selfies – but can you avoid doing so!

On the way to Munnar, you see pleasing waterfalls among the wild hills. Known for its tea plantations, and cool fog every morning and evening, this hill station is located in Idukki district, around 1,600m above sea level. A popular honeymoon destination, Munnar offers serenity and wilderness within a small radius.

Several resorts and cottages are available at prices to suit one's pocket and preferences. And the beauty of the place gets enhanced

Four days during the upcoming Eid break are enough for a quick trip to Kerala for a refreshing experience, just three hours across the Arabian Sea

after dusk when insects of varied hues take over the evening with high-pitched renditions that are both, pleasant as well as irritating.

If you are outdoors after dusk, be prepared to get caught amid fog and navigate yourself safely back to your lodge. There are twelve spots to see in Munnar within one day – this includes the Elephant Pass, a stretch of land in the forest where families of elephants pass every day around 5pm, a rose garden, a spice garden, and a romantic 'Echo Point'. One can also get acquainted with the process of making tea and taste some of the world famous blends at some outlets in the area.

My next stop was Allepy and I was lucky enough to reach there when a beach festival was on. I had expected a carnival as in Goa but was a bit disappointed as the beach party was merely a family affair with street food, folk songs and traditional revelry. You must try some of the local fruit juices, as well as wander along the beach, though with caution, as the high tide can be ruthless in drenching you in an instant.

After experiencing the hills and the sea-side, I then headed for the most celebrated experience of spending a day on a houseboat in the backwaters of Kumarakom. With a red carpet welcome from the owner (Switen George), this experience was something not



to be missed on a trip to Kerala.

With the luxury of a hotel within, the boat traversed across the backwaters revealing interesting sights all day along the emerald green waters. Village houses, flower gardens, orchards and small markets along the route added colour to the experience. One can stop by to purchase fruit, fish and mementos sold by village folk as well as enjoy traditional food cooked by a cook on board.

Our captain Pollan, who doubled up as a cook as well as a handyman, prepared fresh fish (caught off the backwaters) with steamed rice and vegetables as per traditional recipes and also delighted us with sumptuous deserts made from rice, coconut milk and immensely fragrant cardamoms.

The deck was equipped with a music system and one could use it as a discotheque if accompanied by a group of revellers. You could also catch glimpses of other houseboats in the vicinity with TikTok stars and vloggers having a field day.

On the two sides, churches, temples and

mosques decked the shores. The early morning greets with Bhajans followed by Azans and next follows the bells of small chapels. A few big churches have sculptures of Michaelangelo, and for the faithful, La Pieta in shining marble make us believe that God doesn't only dwell in Rome.

By 6pm, the houseboats drop anchor for the night and one can enjoy an early dinner followed by a night under the stars, wherein you have a story-telling or sing-song session, till you are ready for a calm night's sleep in air-conditioned comfort in your cabin.

As darkness falls, the coconut trees along the sides sway with an eerie stride and the distant lights from a coffee shop seem to signal the end of a pleasant day. The shrill cries of homecoming birds and the twinkling stars seem to whisper, "Life's a boat...keep sailing, make your journey memorable."

Kerala is much more than this – the options to relax and relish nature's glory are many – it's up to you to plan your package of delights and gather memories to cherish.



Emilia Romagna GP champion Max Verstappen (L) celebrates with runner-up Sergio Perez

Verstappen wins in Imola to rekindle title defence

Imola, Italy - World champion Max Verstappen rekindled his title defence on Sunday with an accomplished victory ahead of team-mate Sergio Perez in a dominant one-two triumph for Red Bull at the Emilia Romagna Grand Prix.

In a rain-affected race, the pole-sitting 24-year-old Dutchman came home more than 16 seconds ahead of his team-mate as Charles Leclerc and Ferrari endured a disappointing day in front of passionate fans at the Autodromo Enzo e Dino Ferrari.

Leclerc, who started second on the grid, finished sixth after making a poor start and spinning in the closing laps while running third, allowing Lando Norris to finish third for McLaren.

George Russell produced a stirring drive for Mercedes to come home fourth after starting 11th, fending off Valtteri Bottas's Alfa Romeo at the finish, while team-mate and seven-time champion Lewis Hamilton finished a distant 14th.

It was Verstappen's second win this season after Saudi Arabia, which has also included two retirements, and the 22nd of his career. He reeled off a grand slam weekend with pole position, victory and fastest lap as well as victory in Saturday's sprint race.

He moved up to second in the title race behind Leclerc, reducing his deficit from 45 points to 27 to set up the prospect of an intense duel this year.

AFP

Oman Cricket administrator Iqbal Ariwala passes away

Muscat - Iqbal Ariwala, International Cricket and Admin Manager at Oman Cricket, passed away on Saturday.

Ariwala took the post of Domestic Head and Admin Manager in December 2015 but was an honorary member of Oman

Cricket for the two decades prior. His passion and commitment to the cause of improving the standard of cricket in the sultanate distinguished him as one of Oman Cricket's finest operators.

He discharged his duties dili-

gently and was one of the foundation pieces of its success story. On a personal level, he was an affable and approachable man who brought zeal and energy to the workplace.

Duleep Mendis, Chief Development Officer, Oman Cricket,

said, "I've lost a close friend and confidant today. Iqbal was one of the most genuine and hard-working individuals I've ever known - one who devoted his life to Oman Cricket. My thoughts and prayers are with his family. May his Soul Rest in Peace."

Ariwala has left an indelible mark on the sport and his contributions will continue to live on in the hearts and minds of everyone associated with Oman Cricket. His demise has left an enormous void in the cricketing fraternity of the country.



CONSOLATION PRIZE

Pais Saint-Germain wrap up record-equalling 10th Ligue 1 title despite Lens draw

Paris, France - Paris Saint-Germain secured a record-equalling 10th Ligue 1 title on Saturday, moving level with Saint-Etienne, despite being held to a 1-1 home draw by 10-man Lens.

Lionel Messi looked to have curled in a fine winner in the 68th minute, but Lens dampened the already muted title party at the Parc des Princes through Corentin Jean with two minutes left.

PSG have an unassailable 16-point lead over second-placed Marseille with four matches remaining.

"The atmosphere is a shame," captain Marquinhos told Canal+.

"Football is our passion, we started very young. We'll try to have as much fun as possible. It's a shame that won't be with the supporters but we have to deal with it."

Mauricio Pochettino's men reclaim the crown from Lille, who were shock champions last season.

It is the capital giants' eighth Ligue 1 triumph in the last 10 seasons, powered by the investment of their Qatari owners.

This season will still be seen as a failure for PSG, though, after collapsing to a dramatic loss to Real Madrid in the Champions League last 16, after also suffering a surprise French Cup loss to Nice.

On Saturday, an inevitable league title was confirmed in a strangely non-celebratory at-



Paris Saint-Germain's Lionel Messi (3R) celebrates with teammates after scoring against Lens in their Ligue 1 match at The Parc des Princes Stadium in Paris on Sunday (AFP)

Football is our passion, we started very young. We'll try to have as much fun as possible. It's a shame that won't be with the supporters but we have to deal with it

MARQUINHOS



mosphere in Paris, with some 'ultras' leaving early in protest after the Champions League exit.

"That's something I don't understand," said midfielder Marco Verratti. "I know that they

were disappointed about Madrid, but at some point you have to move on."

Attention in the French capital will now turn to the future of Kylian Mbappe, with the star forward still to decide whether to stay at PSG or leave for Real Madrid before next season.

Lens started brightly, with Seko Fofana firing an early strike just over the crossbar.

PSG grew into the game, though, with visiting goalkeeper Jean-Louis Leca forced into smart saves from Achraf Hakimi and Messi.

It was Messi who finally gave the match a moment to remember, bending a trademark finish over Leca from the edge of the box.

The Argentinian has now scored four Ligue 1 goals in a dis-

appointing first season for PSG since leaving Barcelona.

But, perhaps fittingly, the hosts conceded a late equaliser as Jean slid in at the back post to divert home Deiver Machado's low cross. European hopefuls Lens pushed for a winner which would have kept PSG waiting for at least another 24 hours, but the home side held on.

AFP

Bayern down Dortmund to win 10th straight league title

Berlin, Germany - Bayern Munich were crowned Bundesliga champions for the 10th consecutive season on Saturday after a 3-1 home win over second-placed Borussia Dortmund.

First-half goals by Serge Gnabry and Robert Lewandowski put Bayern in control at a sold-out Allianz Arena before Emre Can converted a penalty after the break for Dortmund.

But teenager Jamal Musiala fired in a late goal to spark early celebrations in the home crowd.

This is the first time a club has won 10 straight titles in one of Europe's top five leagues.

"The year wasn't that easy. That's why I'm happy that we crowned it with the championship title," said Bayern coach Julian Nagelsmann, who was drenched in beer by his players.



Bayern Munich players celebrate their Bundesliga triumph after beating Borussia Dortmund on Sunday (AFP)

The Bavarian giants' eighth successive win over Dortmund leaves Bayern an unassailable 12 points clear with three games left.

The title capped an up-and-down season for Bayern, who

were dumped out of the Champions League in the quarter-finals by Villarreal earlier this month.

"It was important that we finished things off after being knocked out by Villarreal," said

Bayern captain Manuel Neuer. "Everyone wanted it, that's what's special in our team."

Thomas Mueller, who claimed a record-breaking 11th Bundesliga winner's medal, said: "We were able to get a few

things off our chest. Now it's wonderful."

Bayern dominated the opening half and Gnabry fired a magnificent volley into the top corner from the edge of the box to give them a 15th-minute lead.

Gnabry had a second effort disallowed before Lewandowski doubled the advantage 11 minutes before half-time.

It was the Poland striker's 27th goal in 26 matches against Dortmund, who he left for Bayern in 2014.

But his future is in doubt, with Lewandowski's contract up next year and Barcelona reportedly interested in taking him to the Camp Nou.

"Something will happen soon. The only thing I know is that there will be a meeting (with Bayern)", he told Sky.

AFP



Tyson Fury lands a punch to knockout Dillian Whyte (AFP)

Fury beats Whyte to retain WBC heavyweight crown

London, United Kingdom - Tyson Fury stopped British rival Dillian Whyte in the sixth round to retain his WBC heavyweight crown at Wembley on Saturday.

In his first fight on UK soil in four years, Fury was treated to a hero's welcome by a 94,000-capacity crowd and largely dictated the tempo before ending proceedings in devastating fashion.

A vicious uppercut caught Whyte flush on the chin before he was pushed over on to his back, and while he beat the count, referee Mark Lyson waved off the fight.

"Dillian is a warrior and I believe he will be a world champion," said Fury. "Unfortunately, he had to fight me tonight."

AFP

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IPL 2022



LSG V MI

Ton-up Rahul, bowlers ensure Mumbai Indians remain winless



BRIEF SCORES:

Lucknow Super Giants 168 for 6 in 20 overs (KL Rahul 103* (62), 12x4, 4x6, Manish Pandey 22 (22) 1x6; Kieron Pollard 2 for 8) beat Mumbai Indians 132 for 8 in 20 overs (Rohit Sharma 39 (31) 5x4, 1x6, Tilak Varma 38 (27) 2x4, 2x6; Krunal Pandya 3 for 19) by 36 runs

TODAY'S MATCH (6PM)



PUNJAB KINGS

VS



CHENNAI SUPER KINGS

Bangalore confident Kohli 'will come back strong'

Mumbai, India - Virat Kohli's second successive golden duck in the IPL saw Royal Challengers Bangalore crash to 68 all out and lose to Sunrisers Hyderabad by nine wickets on Saturday but the team insisted their star batter will bounce back.

Kohli, who also fell to a first-ball duck against Lucknow Super Giants on Tuesday, came to the crease in the second over after South African pace bowler Marco Jansen bowled Bangalore captain Faf du Plessis for five.

Kohli pushed hard at a ball angled across him by the left-arm quick, and edged to Aiden Markram at second slip, who pouched a comfortable catch.

Kohli, the standard bearer for Indian cricket who has been replaced by Rohit Sharma as India's captain across formats, has now scored just 119 runs from eight matches.

"He is somebody who has performed consistently for a number of years at this franchise. I think he is going through a rough patch in the sense things are not going his way at the moment," said Bangalore head



I think he is going through a rough patch in the sense things are not going his way at the moment

SANJAY BANGAR

coach Sanjay Bangar.

"It's a tough phase for him certainly but we are very confident that he will come back strong."

Former India coach Ravi Shastri had suggested that an "overcooked" Kohli should take a break from the sport, but Bangar said he is taking enough breaks (in international cricket) and needs "a bit of luck to get going".

Former England batter Kevin Pietersen said Kohli, who has

failed to score a century in over 100 matches across formats, has come to a point where the ex-India captain is questioning his own form.

'Lonely place'

"It's very a lonely, lonely place, especially when you have got all eyes," said Pietersen on Saturday.

"That camera not only right here but every single thing is Kohli, Kohli, Kohli and so he is in

that dark place. I just hope it ends quickly because the game needs him to score runs."

Three balls after Kohli's dismissal, the same Jansen-Markram combination accounted for opener Anuj Rawat to leave Bangalore reeling at 8-3. Jansen finished with 3-25 from his four overs.

Bangalore were unable to recover and kept losing wickets to go down to the lowest total of

this season in 16.1 overs. It was the sixth lowest total ever in the IPL.

Only Glenn Maxwell (12) and Suyash Prabhudessai (15) got into double figures.

Hyderabad romped home with 12 overs to spare and move second in the 10-team table led by Gujarat Titans who beat Kolkata Knight Riders by eight runs in the first match of the day.

Bangalore, still searching for their maiden title in the Twenty20 tournament, hold the dubious record of the lowest ever score of 49 against Kolkata Knight Riders in 2017.

Meanwhile, India's cricket chief Sourav Ganguly said the play-offs of the 15th edition of the IPL will be hosted by Kolkata and Ahmedabad, likely at full crowd capacity.

The first qualifier will be in Kolkata on May 24 followed by the eliminator on May 26.

The second qualifier on May 27 and then the final on May 29 will take place at the world's biggest cricket stadium in Ahmedabad.

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