

Number of international arrivals increase 175%

Total number of arrivals - domestic and international - through Oman airports up 135%

Our Correspondent Muscat

The number of international flights arriving and departing from airports in Muscat, Salalah and Sohar recorded an increase of 113 per cent to reach 20,640 by the end of May 2022, compared to 9,679 flights in the same period in 2021.

Data released by the National Centre for Statistics and Information indicates that the number of international arrivals at Oman's airports increased 175 per cent to 1,375,018 passengers till May this year, during which time it handled 2,628,203 passengers, compared to 11,533 flights and 1,235,740 passengers in 2021.

Salalah Airport recorded a 68.9 per cent increase in the number of international and domestic flights to 2,743. The number of international flights through the airport increased 162.7 per cent to 1,219 from 464, while domestic flights increased 31.4 per cent to 1,524, compared



May.

The statistics indicate that the number of incoming and outgoing flights (international and domestic) through Muscat International Airport increased 90.2 per cent to 21,930 till May this year, during which time it handled 2,628,203 passengers, compared to 11,533 flights and 1,235,740 passengers in 2021.

Salalah Airport recorded a 68.9 per cent increase in the number of international and do-

mestic flights to 2,743. The number of international flights through the airport increased 162.7 per cent to 1,219 from 464, while domestic flights increased 31.4 per cent to 1,524, compared

to 1,160 during the same period in 2021. The number of passengers on domestic flights (incoming and outgoing) through the airport increased 57.3 per cent till May 2022.

There were 312 international flights departing from and arriving at Sohar Airport till May, while the number of passengers on international flights reached 28,101.

Duqm Airport recorded a 6.9 per cent increase in domestic

flights (departing and arriving) to 280, compared to 262 flights during the same period in 2021, while the number of passengers increased by 39.7 per cent from 18,804 to 26,263 passengers.

As for the nationality of passengers using Muscat International Airport, Indians topped the list of passengers departing and arriving (125,185) through the airport, followed by people of Bangladesh (44,671) and Pakistan (31,191) till May 2022.

AFGHAN TALIBAN MARK FIRST ANNIVERSARY



Taliban fighters hold weapons as they ride on a humvee to celebrate their victory day in the Sherpur area of Kabul on Monday. Fighters chanted victory slogans next to the US Embassy in Kabul as they marked the first anniversary of their return to power in Afghanistan following a turbulent year that saw women's rights crushed and a humanitarian crisis worsen (AFP)

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UK first country to approve Omicron-specific booster

London, United Kingdom - The UK's drug regulator said on Monday it had approved an updated Moderna vaccine against COVID-19 that targets the Omicron variant as well as the original form of the virus.

The Medicine and Healthcare products Regulatory Agency (MHRA) said in a statement it had approved the vaccine for adult booster doses "after it was found to meet the UK regulator's standards of safety, quality and effectiveness".

It is the first such "bivalent" COVID-19 vaccine to be approved by the British regulator.

MHRA's chief executive June Raine said data from a clinical trial had shown it prompted a "strong immune response" against the original virus and Omicron, and would provide a "sharpened tool in our armoury" as the virus kept evolving.

Moderna's CEO Stéphane Bancel said in a statement that the US biotech company was "delighted" by the decision, "the first authorisation of an Omicron-



The adapted COVID-19 vaccine targets two different coronavirus variants – the original virus from 2020 and the Omicron variant

containing bivalent vaccine".

While vaccines have helped lower hospitalisations and deaths from COVID, which first emerged in China in late 2019, the current jabs are mainly aimed at the earlier strains of the disease.

The World Health Organization warned in July that the pandemic was "nowhere near over", due to the spread of Omicron subvariants and to the lifting of

control measures.

Half of the Moderna vaccine targets the original 2020 virus and half the Omicron variant, which is officially known as BA.1.

'Bivalent' vaccines

MHRA said the vaccine was also found to generate a "good response" against two Omicron subvariants, BA.4 and BA.5, which have partly driven a wave

of new cases of the disease in Europe and the United States.

The vaccine had the same "typically mild" side effects as the original Moderna jab, it added.

Moderna said in June that its "bivalent" vaccine performed better against both Omicron and the original virus compared to its original COVID-19 vaccine - Spikevax. The EU's medicines watchdog said that month it had started to review the new shot.

Moderna said it had also submitted the vaccine to regulators in Australia and Canada and was expecting further authorisation decisions in the coming weeks.

The European medical agency is also studying a rival adapted jab developed by Pfizer/BioNTech, which may be approved this autumn. The Pfizer/BioNTech jab is adapted for the BA.4 and BA.5 subvariants of the virus.

These were first discovered in South Africa and spread rapidly despite high population immunity conferred by prior waves and vaccinations.

AFP

Omani researcher in Australia builds 3D simulation model of cancer cells

Our Correspondent Muscat

An Omani researcher has had promising results in building a 3D cellular model simulating the complex biological and chemical natural environment of cancer cells in the human body.

The results of the three-year study were published in June in the Swiss scientific journal Gels.

"Tumours are complex cellular ecosystems with different types of cells, fibres and proteins that effect the rapid and

continuous growth of cancer cells," Dr Noora al Balushi, a researcher at School of Health and Biomedical Sciences, RMIT University in Melbourne, Australia, told ONA.

Cancer immunology is especially difficult to model because the immune system is exceedingly complex. It contains multiple types of cells, and each cell type has several subtypes and a spectrum of activation states. Several immune cell types interact with cancer cells and other components of the tumour, ultimately influencing disease outcome.

Noora informed that she synthesised a 3D cellular environment similar to that found in a tumour by culturing cancer cells, fibres, immune cells and special proteins that form an array of functionally programmed peptide sequences into a gel known as a hydrogel.

Noora studied the behaviour and characteristics of cells, such as their growth, movement, division and interaction with various factors surrounding them in the laboratory environment, including chemical and biological materials, using advanced radiological and analytical devices.



"This 3D cancer cell model

helped a lot in understanding the nature and behaviour of these cells compared to the traditional 2D model," Noora said.

"This approach shows prom-

ise as a cancer model, enhancing current understandings of how tumours progress and spread over time within their microenvironment."

She added that this low-cost cellular environment can be used to test cancer treatment drugs and prove their efficacy before moving to the next and most expensive step, which is experimenting on laboratory animals before trials on human patients.

Noora pointed out that the results can be used to study the

characteristics and behaviour of cancer cells in relation to speed of growth, proliferation and division. "The model will contribute to accelerating the production of highly effective cancer treatments, in addition to facilitating an understanding of the multiple and changing characteristics of different cancer cells."

The research was supported by the Ministry of Higher Education, Research and Innovation, the Ministry of Health, RMIT University and Deakin University in Australia.

India's 76th Independence Day celebrated on board INS Chennai and INS Kochi

Our Correspondent
Muscat

India's 76th Independence Day was celebrated with patriotic fervour on board two Indian warships – INS Chennai and INS Kochi – docked at Sultan Qaboos Port in Muttrah on Monday.

Indian Ambassador H E Amit Narang hoisted the Indian tricolour on a common deck of the warships in the presence of high level dignitaries, members of the diplomatic corps, special invitees from the Indian diaspora and Omani guests, as the Indian naval band played the national anthem.

To mark the milestone of the 75th anniversary of the country's independence, Indian naval warships are docked in various nations to symbolise India's commitment to friendly maritime relations and diplomatic ties.

Speaking at the event, H E Narang said, "We are proudly celebrating this occasion in Oman on board two most modern and ingeniously build warships of India. Indian Navy, as part of the 75 years of India's independence being celebrated worldwide as 'Azadi ka Amrit Mahotsav', is celebrating this glorious day by placing its vessels in the six continents, in a



(Supplied photo)

We are proudly celebrating this occasion in Oman on board two most modern and ingeniously build ships

H E AMIT NARANG

truly global manner. We in Oman are happy to have not one but two Indian vessels in the waters of Oman."

He described the deployment of two of Indian Navy ves-

sels as testimony to the special and unique bonds of friendship between the two countries and the special place for Oman in India's maritime and security outlook.

He added that the two countries are neighbours bonded by the Arabian Sea and that the relationship dates back to several thousand years. "Our earliest contact was through the seas

and trade, and this friendship has continued till date," H E Narang said.

Rear Admiral Sameer Saxena, NM Flag Officer Commanding Western Fleet, said, "I'd like to share the collective sense of good fortune, friendship, joy and enthusiasm that all the officers and men of these two Indian Naval ships share for being here."

He described 'Azadi ka Amrit Mahotsav' as the elixir of life conceived during the struggle for independence. "The motivation we receive from the freedom warriors of the past is catalyst for fresh ideas and commitment in the present. It is a festival to promote global peace, security and development."

According to Rear Admiral Saxena, as Oman is the world's foremost seafaring nation, it is only fitting that the Indian Navy celebrates this momentous occasion with its maritime neighbour because of the deep, strategic and historic ties these countries share.

"We have ships deployed across the world but nowhere do we have a larger and greater presence than here, in Muscat, Oman," Rear Admiral Saxena added.

75KM RIDE TO CELEBRATE 75TH INDIAN INDEPENDENCE ANNIVERSARY



The Muscat Indians bikers group celebrated 75 years of India's independence on Monday by cycling 75km from Ruwi to Al Mouj and back. The Indian community held several events in Muscat to mark the occasion (Supplied photo)

3 MoUs signed to support Oman Science Festival 2022

Our Correspondent
Muscat

The Ministry of Education signed three memoranda of understanding (MoU) on Monday with private sector institutions supporting the Oman Science Festival 2022.

H E Dr Abdullah bin Khamis Ambusaidi, Undersecretary for Education in the Ministry of Education, signed the MoUs with Occidental Oman, the ITHCAA Group and the Asyad Group.

H E Ambusaidi stated that the support provided by the three companies for the implementation of the third edition of Oman Science Festival will give the event, which will be held in October, the desired effect and contribute to motivating schools, colleges and universities to focus on science, innovation and creativity.

"The festival will help the future generations carry science and technology forward and build society."

He added that the Ministry of Education believes that the success of any national event is based on the cohesion of efforts of various institutions, "which is what the ministry is working on by organising this event".

The festival, H E Ambusaidi informed, will attract the interest



(Supplied photo)

Oman Science Festival, being held in October this year, will help the future generations carry science and technology forward and build society

H E DR ABDULLAH
AMBUSAIIDI

of all segments of society, targeting school and college students in particular, "enabling them to learn about the latest developments in science, technology and innovation, and display their skills and abilities in dealing with technology for society and its various institutions".

The MoUs, he added, aim to spread scientific temperament among society, and encourage presentation of contemporary scientific ideas in an interactive and simple way.

Oman Air increases frequency of flights to Istanbul, Trabzon

Muscat – Following an increase in demand, Oman Air has increased flights between Muscat and its Turkish destinations – Istanbul and Trabzon.

The airline has increased frequency between Muscat and Trabzon from three weekly flights to five, and between Muscat and Istanbul from seven weekly flights to eight.

The additional Istanbul flight departs Muscat at 14.35 and arrives at 19.00 on Sunday, while the return flight leaves Istanbul on Sunday at 0.55 and reaches Muscat at 6.50.

The additional Trabzon flights depart Muscat at 9.35 and arrive at 12.45 on Friday and Sunday, while the return flights leave Trabzon on same days at 14.00 and reach Muscat at 19.05.

The airline offers wide-body service, including Boeing 787 Dreamliner in addition to Boeing 737 between Muscat and Istanbul. The airline's single-aisle Boeing 737 fleet operates between Muscat and Trabzon. Guests are



advised to check omanair.com for the most up-to-date flight schedules and times, as these are subject to change.

Guests can also book a customised Istanbul and Trabzon

holiday package through Oman Air Holidays. Guests travelling to/from Muscat should ensure they are aware of official requirements to enter or transit through the country.

More public sector jobs announced

Our Correspondent
Muscat

The Ministry of Labour (MoL) announced more than 60 new job vacancies in several government units for various levels of educational qualification on Monday.

In a statement, MoL said, "The Ministry of Labour announces the availability of 69 jobs in a number of government units, including 59 jobs for Master's degree, Bachelor's degree and post-General Education Diploma holders."

A total of 10,017 employment opportunities were offered to citizens in the first quarter of 2022 - 4,126 in the public and 5,891 in the private sector. "With this, 29 per cent of the total jobs targeted in 2022 has been achieved," MoL stated.

Fish worth RO36mn produced in Dhofar in 2021

Our Correspondent
Muscat

A total of 83,753 tonnes of fish, worth RO36mn, was landed in Dhofar in 2021 with small pelagic fish accounting for about 52 per cent and demersal fish 26 per cent of the catch.

There were 11,632 fishermen in Dhofar in 2021, in addition to those working in allied sectors such as transporting, selling fish, fish factory workers, ports, shops selling fishing supplies and others.

Rashid bin Saeed al Ghafri, director general of Directorate General of Agricultural, Fisheries and Water Resources in Dhofar, said, "The ministry is working to encourage the optimal use of the diverse marine resources that are abundant in the governorate to ensure its sustainability and development in accordance with the Oman Vision 2040."

Fisheries activities are important in Dhofar due to its diverse and rich marine wealth. Ghafri also stressed on the importance of establishing fisheries projects

and industries in the governorate that serve the local community and support the national economy.

"The Directorate General of Agricultural, Fisheries and Water Resources in Dhofar is working to develop the sector through several projects and programmes, including fish control along the coasts, and support for fishermen and workers in the sector," he said.

There were 4,477 fishing boats and 79 artisanal fishing vessels in the governorate in 2021.

RO3.5mn inspection station for agri, food products opens in Sohar



Our Correspondent
Muscat

Sohar Logistics Station for inspection of agricultural, fishery, livestock and foodstuff consignments in the Governorate of North Batinah was opened on Monday. The project costs RO3.5mn.

The opening ceremony was held under the auspices of H E Dr Saud Hamoud al Habsi, Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Water Resources, who affirmed the significance of the facility in serving beneficiaries from the governorates of North Batinah, South Batinah, Buraimi and Musandam, among other gover-

norates and adjoining ports. H E Habsi informed that Sohar Logistics Station will contribute to the marketing and export of agricultural, fishery and food products. The facility is the outcome of a partnership between the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Water Resources and Al Madina Logistic Services

Company. "It serves as an example of services rendered to the private sector in terms of import, export and follow-up of products when exiting or entering the sultanate," he said. Sohar Logistics Station comprises several refrigerated units where consignments of fresh fish

and marine products are inspected alongside other products like vegetables and fruit. The facility also inspects livestock and offers customs clearance, lab services and container services. It includes parking facilities for trucks, cold storage, business outlets and client service counters.



Registration open for National Research Award

Muscat - Registration for the ninth edition of the National Research Award, organised annually by the Ministry of Higher Education, Research and Innovation (MoHERI), is open for interested applicants until September 25, 2022.

The National Research Award (NRA) is presented in two categories - best published research led by a PhD holder or equivalent (senior specialist or higher in the medical field) and best published research led by a young researcher (a non-PhD holder).

The research areas within the ambit of the award include Education and Human Resources; Information and Communication Technologies; Health and Social Services; Cultural, Social and Basic Sciences; Energy and Industry; and Environmental and Biological Resources.

Criteria for acceptance include the research being of relevance to Oman and in the field of Education and Human Resources; Information and Communication Technologies; Health and Social Services; Cultural, Social and Basic Sciences; Energy and Industry; or Environmental and Biological Resources. The published research must not have won any other award nationally or internationally.

NRA aims to encourage researchers to conduct high quality and relevant research in areas of national interest and increase the level of awareness about MoHERI and its various initiatives and programmes to support research and innovation.

The research must have been published after March 15, 2019, in a refereed journal, indexed in either Scopus, Web of Science or in one of the Arabic periodicals listed in the award's website.

Interested applicants can apply through <https://orp.trc.gov.om/awards/nra/sub>

Applicants can find additional information and updates through NRA's official website (www.trc.gov.om), email nra@trc.gov.om or 22305848 /22305305.

Simplifying science to enlighten society

Our Correspondent
Muscat

Simplifying science for the layman and encouraging scientific thinking is something that comes naturally to Prof Haider Ahmed Jaffar al Lawati from Sultan Qaboos University.

Prof Lawati has taken upon himself the responsibility of simplifying science and communicating with the public through social media platforms, his Twitter account in particular, to share his scientific insights.

He holds myths responsible for impeding development of societies and the reason behind some individuals resorting to illogical ways to find solutions for the challenges faced in life.

"Deviation from correct scientific thinking and sound analysis



Simplifying science is a great way to deliver knowledge to all segments of society in order to build a conscious person and a society enlightened by science

PROF HAIDER AHMED JAFFAR AL LAWATI

does not allow them to find practical solutions to meet these challenges."

One of the reasons for the absence of correct scientific thinking in society, he noted, is the lack of understanding of correct scientific concepts. "This is why simplifying science and linking it to the daily reality of life is vital," he said.

Prof Lawati stressed that simplifying scientific concepts plays an important in making science appealing to young people.

He emphasised the role of researchers in actively encouraging scientific thinking. "A skilled researcher is able to simplify scientific concepts and share the results of their research with the community through various available means."

Prof Lawati has a dedicated Twitter account - Sciences from AI - through which he strives to frequently tweet on matters related to science, in addition to publishing scientific articles periodically.

He presented a radio programme *Tales of Science* last Ramadan, in which he dealt with various scientific concepts.

He has also published a book titled *The Wonders of Science*, in which he presents a number of scientific concepts in a simple manner.

"Simplifying science is a great way to deliver knowledge to all segments of society in order to build a conscious person and a society enlightened by science."

Kaspersky reports 12% rise in exploit detection cases in Oman in Q2 2022

Our Correspondent
Muscat

Kaspersky Security Network data indicates that the number of exploits detected in Q2 2022 in the Middle East increased compared to Q1. The company's security solutions detected 1,258,283 cases in April-June 2022.

Oman saw a 12 per cent rise in exploit detection cases to 16,871, with the share of affected users decreasing nine per cent.

Exploits are programs or pieces of code written by cybercriminals that are designed to take advantage of a bug or vulnerability in an application or operating system running on a local or remote system (PC, server, mobile device, IoT device, etc.). Using an exploit, attackers gain unauthorised access to the applications or operating systems on these systems.

Bahrain saw the most significant increase in exploit detections in Q2 compared to Q1 among the Middle East countries - up 137 per cent to 22,186 cases, with the share of affected users rising 36 per cent. It was followed by Saudi Arabia - exploit detection saw an increase of 57 per



cent to 523,367, while the share of affected users decreased nine per cent," a Kaspersky press statement said.

'Oman saw a 12 per cent rise in exploit detection cases to 16,871, with the share of affected users decreasing nine per cent. In the United Arab Emirates, the number of detections remained almost unchanged in Q2 at 192,959 (one per cent increase from Q1), and the share of users affected by exploits decreased ten per cent,' it added.

Zero-day exploits - those relying on vulnerabilities that were previously unknown to the software vendor - are often used for cyberespionage on different organisations and are particularly

dangerous for large businesses, government agencies, and individuals with access to valuable data.

In 2021, Kaspersky found four zero-day vulnerabilities in Microsoft products that cybercriminals could exploit - CVE-2021-28310, CVE-2021-31955, CVE-2021-31956, and CVE-2021-40449. These were discovered with Kaspersky's Exploit prevention technology, which detects not only known exploits, but suspicious anomalies in programs' behaviour as well - and therefore helps cybersecurity practitioners reveal new vulnerabilities.

On the contrary, the most significant decrease in exploit detec-

tions in Q2 compared to Q1 in the Middle East countries happened in Egypt - down 19 per cent to 450,828 cases, with the share of users affected by exploits decreasing 11 per cent. Qatar saw a decrease in exploit detections of 12 per cent to 38,140 (seven per cent decrease in the share of affected users). Kuwait saw a decrease of eight per cent in exploit detections to 13,932 cases, however, the share of users affected rose 12 per cent.

"Over the last years we have seen the attackers' firm interest in zero-day exploits - vulnerabilities previously unknown to vendors that pose a serious threat to all users, home and corporate. These exploits give attackers easy access to victims. That's why it is important not only to constantly update your systems, but also to install security solutions that proactively discover unknown threats. Of equal importance is providing your cybersecurity team with access to the latest threat intelligence and regular professional trainings," said Dr Amin Hasbini, Kaspersky's head of Global Research and Analysis Team, Middle East, Turkey and Africa region.

PRAYER TIMINGS	
Fajr	4.23am
Sunrise	5.43am
Duhr	12.16pm
Asr	3.42pm
Maghrib	6.45pm
Isha	7.59pm

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MUSCAT DAILY

MARKET WATCH

MSX30 4,652.42

FOREX RATES
(RO1 equals)

Indian	206.44
Pakistan	559.65
Bangladesh	246.79
Philippines	145.07
Sri Lanka	942.75

*Rates as on August 15
Source: xe.com

BRIEFS

Vietnam considers \$59n high-speed railway

Vietnam is considering building a high-speed railway that runs along the country's length with a possible price tag of up to US\$58.7bn, the government said on Sunday.

The Southeast Asian country's transport ministry will next month submit a proposal to build the 1,545km railway to the Politburo, the powerful decision-making body of the ruling Communist Party of Vietnam, the government said in a news release, Reuters reported.

Vietnam, a regional manufacturing hub, is ramping up its investment in transport infrastructure to support its fast-growing economy.

The first two sections with combined length of 665km (413 miles) and total investment of US\$24.72bn would be open to traffic by 2032, the government said.

The entire project would be completed by 2045-2050, it added.

Oman's National Gas plans to exit UAE operations

Our Correspondent
Muscat

National Gas Company, the pioneer in liquefied petroleum gas (LPG) marketing in Oman and the region, has decided to exit from its UAE operations, mainly due to continuous reduction in margins in the UAE market.

'Considering the non-availability of LPG supplies from Oman for exports and the oversupply of gas in the UAE market, causing the continuous reduction in margins, the company has decided to exit its operations in the UAE region,' National Gas said in a disclosure submitted to the Muscat Stock Exchange on Monday.

The decision to exit UAE - which is in line with the company's business expansion and continuity policy in the commercial geographies - has been taken after closely monitoring the market positions year-over-year, where the rebound in the scenario is not expected in the short or medium term, National Gas noted.

It further said that the management is evaluating the financial impact (of the UAE exit) as per the IFRS 5 - non-current assets held for sale and discontinued operations, and the necessary adjustments to the carrying value of the investment in the books will be made in the current quarter ending September 2022.

'The management will keep



National Gas said the decision has been taken after closely monitoring the market positions year-over-year, where the rebound in the scenario is not expected in the short or medium term

the shareholders informed of further developments,' the company added.

National Gas operates LPG filling plants and is engaged in the marketing and selling of LPG in the sultanate.

National Gas Company's UAE business has been consistently witnessing dropping realisations despite significant quantity ramp-ups in the wake of tough business conditions, the company had said in its recently released quarterly financial report. In the report it added

that there were strategic plans that the directors are working on to restructure and reorganise the group operations with respect to the UAE business.

At the group level, National Gas' total revenue for the six months ended June 30, 2022 increased to RO52.74mn as compared to RO42.29mn for the same period in the previous year. The group, however, saw a net loss position of around RO279,000 with lower realisations while the businesses are still opening up post pandemic.

Earlier this year, considering the pandemic situation, overall economic scenario and increasing prices and escalation in the project construction activities, National Gas decided to exit from the Indian investment too. The company's board of directors resolved to dispose its investment in Indian subsidiary NGC Energy India Pvt Ltd and classified the investment as assets held for sale.

National Gas is currently in the process of finalising the documentation for the disinvestment of its 60 per cent shareholding in NGC Energy India Pvt Ltd. The share transfer process is expected to be completed in the third quarter of 2022, according to the company's second quarter financial report.



Oman Fisheries profit gets a boost from sale of subsidiary

Our Correspondent
Muscat

Oman Fisheries Company has reported a net profit of RO2.35mn for the first six months of 2022 compared to a net loss of over RO730,000 in the corresponding period of last year.

Net profit this year is mainly driven by the sale of Oman Fisheries' subsidiary Al-Ameen Stores and Refrigeration Company, according to the company's financial report submitted to the Muscat Stock Exchange on Monday.

In April, Asyad Group acquired the 100-per cent stake of Al-Ameen Stores and Refrigeration Company from Oman Fisheries in a deal worth RO3.1mn.

Oman Fisheries achieved a consolidated turnover of RO7.695mn from operations in the first half of this year compared to RO5.825mn turnover

recorded in the same period of last year.

The company procured a total 14,252 tonnes of fish from artisanal fishermen and other sources in the first half of 2022 compared with 13,213 tonnes in the same period of 2021.

Oman Fisheries' export sales represented 85 per cent of the total sales while local sales represented 15 per cent of the total sales.

'The company achieved a gross margin of 21 per cent driven by the continuous efforts of the management to penetrate higher value markets, rigorous stock and inventory management and diligent revenue planning and management,' Oman Fisheries said.

Oman Fisheries said it has completed an agreement with Irish firm Atlantic Dawn to start commercial fishing operations in Oman which are anticipated to commence in the third quarter of 2022.

Oil prices tumble on possible Iran deal, stuttering China economy

London, UK - Oil prices slumped more than five per cent Monday on the rising prospects of a return of Iranian oil to the market and data showing China's economic recovery stuttering under Covid-19 restrictions and a slumping property sector.

Global oil benchmark Brent crude dropped 5.1 per cent at US\$93.15 per barrel on Monday, while US benchmark West Texas Intermediate fell 5.3 per cent at US\$87.23 per barrel.

Stock markets drifted lower and the dollar traded mixed as investors welcomed signs of cooling US inflation, which nevertheless remains at the highest level in decades.

"It's been an underwhelming start to the week in financial markets with the eternal optimism of investors clashing with the reality of Chinese economic data," noted OANDA senior market analyst Craig Erlam.



The figures showed China's industrial production and retail sales growth for July came in lower than expected. Industrial production was up 3.8 per cent year-on-year, but down from 3.9 per cent in June and well below analysts' forecasts.

"The risk of stagflation in the world economy is rising, and the foundation for domestic economic recovery is not yet solid," China's National Bureau of Statistics warned. Stagflation refers

to long-running high inflation combined with rising unemployment and weak growth.

Beijing's rigid adherence to a zero-Covid strategy has held back economic recovery as snap lockdowns and long quarantines batter business activity and a recovery in consumption.

"This weakness in the Chinese economy comes against the struggle to adapt to a zero-Covid policy, which the government shows little sign of relaxing, against a backdrop of rising cases," said CMC Markets analyst Michael Hewson.

Meanwhile, Iran's foreign minister said Tehran will deliver its "final" proposal later Monday on talks to revive its 2015 nuclear accord with world powers, after Washington had accepted key demands.

A deal would mean that Iran's crude output of 2.5mn barrels per day would no longer be

under international sanctions and help relieve supply constraints that have been pushing up prices.

Oil prices, which had already been sharply lower on the Chinese data, pushed even further lower and recording daily drops of more than five per cent.

Europe's main equity markets were lower in afternoon trading while Wall Street stocks fell back at the opening bell.

Market analyst Fawad Razaqzada at City Index and FOREX.com said talk of a US recession is back after a key manufacturing survey plunged into the negative, a signal of worsening business conditions.

Markets are also keenly awaiting the release Wednesday of the minutes from the Fed's last policy meeting in July for clues to the US central bank's interest rate plans.

AFP

Bank Muscat wins Best Bank in Oman award from Euromoney

Muscat - Bank Muscat, the leading financial services provider in the sultanate, has been awarded the Best Bank in Oman award by Euromoney.

The award - which was presented to the bank after a thorough evaluation based on a number of different criteria including the product mix, financial performance, asset and revenue quality, customer satisfaction, and digital offerings - adds to the list of accolades and achievements received by the Bank Muscat in 2022.

Award winners were chosen by the editors after extensive consultations with corporate financial executives and bankers, banking consultants and analysts across the world.

The recognition by Euromoney is the result of the bank's adoption of global best practices and its customer-centric approach in banking as it celebrates 40 years of success and



achievements in the service of Oman and its people, Bank Muscat said in a press release.

Bank Muscat has won multiple awards in the recent past from a number of prestigious international journals and publications. The awards criteria have included growth in assets, profitability, geographic reach, strategic relationships, new business development and innovation in products.

In 2022, Bank Muscat was ranked by Forbes Middle East as

one of the top 100 listed companies in the Middle East for the second consecutive year. Earlier in 2021, the bank was rated as one of the top 50 banks in the region by Forbes Middle East and also as the Best Trade Finance Provider in Oman by Global Finance.

Bank Muscat posted a net profit of RO99.26mn for the six months ended June 30, 2022 compared to RO94.65mn reported during the same period in 2021, an increase of 4.9 per cent.



Global youth unemployment to slip to 73mn in 2022: UN

Geneva, Switzerland - The total global number of unemployed youths should fall to 73mn in 2022, down by two million from the year before, the United Nations said.

However, the figure is still six million higher than the pre-pandemic level of 2019, with the recovery in youth unemployment lagging behind the bounceback in other age groups, the UN's International Labour Organization said.

Between 2019 and 2020, those aged 15 to 24 experienced a much higher percentage loss in employment than

the rest of the labour market, the ILO said in a report.

Their 300-page "Global Employment Trends for Youth 2022" update on key youth labour market indicators and trends said the pandemic exacerbated the market challenges generally facing young people.

Many dropped out of the labour force, or failed to enter it altogether, due to the difficulty of finding a job during Covid-19 lockdowns and while businesses were closing due to the pandemic.

"The Covid-19 crisis has re-

vealed a number of shortcomings in the way the needs of young people are addressed, especially the more vulnerable such as first-time job-seekers, school dropouts, fresh graduates with little experience and those who remain inactive not by choice," said Martha Newton, the ILO's deputy director-general for policy.

"What young people need most is well functioning labour markets with decent job opportunities for those already participating in the labour market, along with quality education and training opportunities

for those yet to enter it."

The report said that 27.4 per cent of young women were projected to be in work in 2022, compared to 40.3 per cent of young men.

This gender gap "has shown little sign of closing over the past two decades", the ILO said.

The gap is largest in lower-middle-income countries, at 17.3 percentage points, and smallest in high-income states, at 2.3 points.

The share of youth not in employment, education or training in 2020 - the latest

year for which a global estimate is available - rose to 23.3 per cent, up 1.5 percentage points from 2019 to a level not seen in at least 15 years.

The global youth unemployment rate is projected to be 14.9 per cent in 2022. The report highlighted the differences in youth unemployment between the regions.

In Europe and central Asia, the rate is predicted to be 16.4 per cent, "but the actual and potential shocks of the war in Ukraine are highly likely to affect the results".

AFP

China cuts interest rates as recovery remains weak

Beijing, China – China's central bank slashed key interest rates Monday in a bid to kick-start the country's stuttering economic recovery as data showed factory output and retail sales for July came in weaker than analysts' expectations.

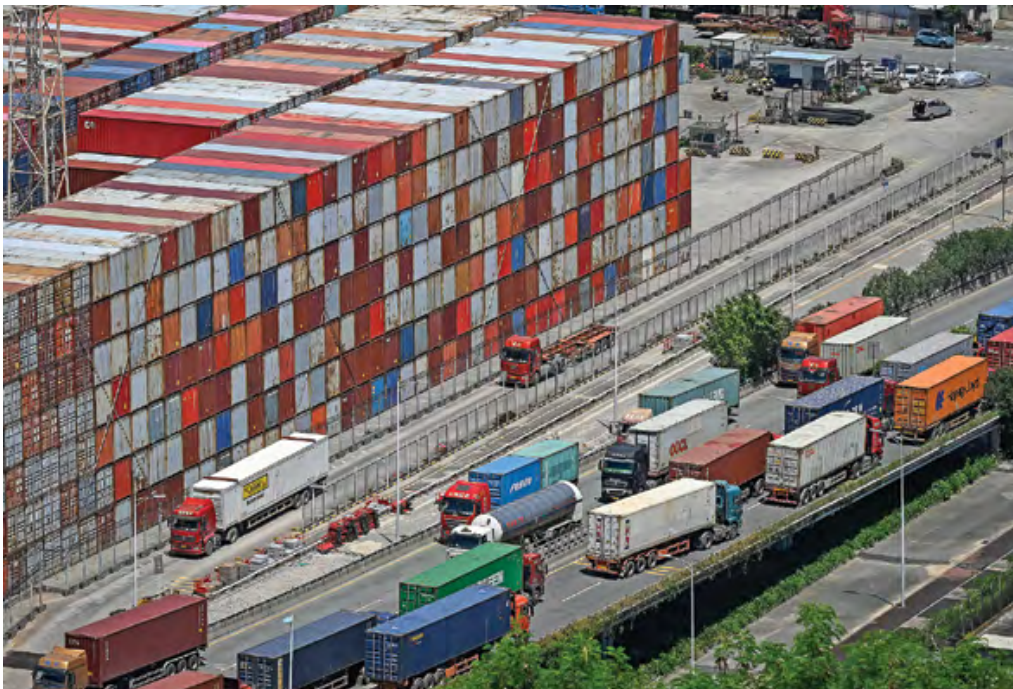
The world's second-biggest economy saw a bounce in business activity as some coronavirus restrictions eased in June, but the boost is fading and Beijing remains welded to a zero-Covid policy of snap lockdowns and long quarantines, which has battered sentiment.

For July, China's industrial production rose 3.8 per cent on-year, down from a 3.9 per cent jump in June, the National Bureau of Statistics (NBS) said Monday.

Retail sales grew at a slower-than-expected 2.7 per cent from a year ago, down from 3.1 per cent in June, while the urban unemployment rate fell to 5.4 per cent, the NBS said.

"The risk of stagflation in the world economy is rising, and the foundation for domestic economic recovery is not yet solid," the NBS warned in a statement.

"We think the weakness in retail sales was due to renewed virus disruptions and the blow to consumer sentiment from the problems in the property market," said Julian Evans-Pritchard, senior China economist at Capital Economics said in a note on Monday.



This file photo shows container trucks driving past stacked cargo containers at Yantian port in Shenzhen, China's southern Guangdong province (AFP)

The virus remains a risk, with zero-Covid meaning that "targeted lockdowns will remain commonplace, depressing consumer activity and spending," he said, while slow progress in expanding vaccination among the elderly means this policy will not be abandoned soon.

"July's economic data is very alarming," Raymond Yeung, Greater China economist at Australia & New Zealand Banking Group Ltd, told Bloomberg TV.

China's property sector has been teetering, with frustrated homebuyers across dozens of

cities taking part in mortgage boycotts as cash-strapped developers struggle to complete projects.

The country's economic growth was just 0.4 per cent on-year in the second quarter – its slowest rate since the initial Covid outbreak.

And the People's Bank of China Monday cut its policy rates, bringing its seven-day reverse repurchase rate – a key rate at which the central bank provides short-term liquidity to banks – to a new low.

It also cut its one-year medium-term lending facility,

surprising forecasters, although some analysts believe this may not be enough to revive credit growth.

Credit growth in China edged down in July, with analysts at Nomura saying in a report that it did not bode well for the second half of the year.

"The combination of zero-Covid strategy and the deteriorating property sector continues to drag down the economy, even as export growth remains elevated and the automobile sector gets a boost from the purchase tax cut," they said.

AFP

Japan's GDP expands in Q2

Tokyo, Japan - Japan's economy expanded in the three months to June, official data showed Monday, after the government lifted Covid-19 curbs on businesses.

The world's third-largest economy grew 0.5 per cent quarter-on-quarter due to stronger consumption and capital investment, but the rise was below market expectations of 0.7 per cent.

While the country never imposed strict stay-at-home orders during the pandemic, the government in March removed virus restrictions primarily targeting business opening hours.

Inbound tourism remains limited to group tours, however, and the economy is facing headwinds – from the energy price crisis to fears of a global recession fuelled by biting inflation.

From April to June, private consumption grew 1.1 per cent compared with the 0.3 per cent registered in the January-March quarter, according to the data released by the Cabinet Office.

Capital spending expanded 1.4 per cent, compared with a 0.3 per cent contraction in the previous quarter.

"After the government lifted a quasi-state of emergency in late March, consumption of services showed a relatively strong rebound, while capital investment returned to growth," BNP Paribas said in a note issued before the GDP data.

Mitsubishi UFJ Research and Consulting also noted that "as the spread of the Omicron variant subsided, private consumption steadily increased, especially in-person services, and lifted the



People stroll in an underground shopping mall in Tokyo on Monday (AFP)

Japan economy grew 0.5 per cent quarter-on-quarter due to stronger consumption and capital investment, but the rise was below market expectations of 0.7 per cent

overall economy."

The data is preliminary, and GDP figures are often revised in later months.

In May, the Cabinet Office reported that the economy shrank slightly in the first quarter of 2022, but on Monday, this was revised to zero per cent. That means no change was observed following a modest rebound in the final quarter of 2021.

Consumer prices are rising in Japan, although not at the blistering rate seen in the United States and many other major

economies.

The Bank of Japan sees the price rises as temporary and is sticking to its long-held monetary easing policies in a bid to achieve stable growth, a decision that has caused the yen to plummet to 24-year lows against the dollar.

Supply chain disruption caused by Covid-19 lockdowns in China and sky-high energy costs due to the war in Ukraine have also created a challenging environment for growth.

"We now think the economy's recovery is less impressive than we had expected at the end of last year, with an unexpected resurgence of Covid-19 infections at the beginning of this year and now," Masamichi Adachi and Go Kurihara of UBS said in a statement ahead of the data release.

Japan is currently experiencing a record-breaking wave of Covid-19 infections. It has logged around 35,000 deaths from the disease overall, far lower than many other countries.

AFP

Thai economy sees weak growth despite return of tourists

Bangkok, Thailand – Thailand's economy grew 2.5 per cent in the second quarter as returning foreign tourists failed to offset high inflation and concerns over regional tensions, the country's main economic agency said Monday.

Southeast Asia's second-largest economy was hit hard during the pandemic, though visitor numbers are slowly improving with the relaxation of travel rules since May.

But the Ukraine war and now tension over Taiwan could put any economic recovery at risk, Thailand's National Economic and Social Development Council (NESDC) warned.

"We have to continue monitoring to see how long counteraction from China

over Taiwan will last," NESDC Secretary General Danucha Pichayanan said.

"The relaxing of our Covid controls, the recovery of tourism are factors that support the growth."

The agency said that gross domestic product rose 2.5 per cent in April-June compared to the same period a year ago – well below the anticipated growth of three per cent.

The NESDC also revised the expected full-year growth rate from 2.5-3.5 per cent to 2.7-3.2 per cent.

Economist Charl Kengchon, from the Kasikorn Research Centre, characterised the results as a "mixed bag", with the tourism boost failing to lift growth.

"I think that is because inflation hit a 14-year high in

June, so it is a drag on spending both (in the) household sector and business," he said.

Inflation in the month of June hit 7.7 per cent and was at 6.5 per cent for the quarter, according to the NESDC.

The impact of the Russia-Ukraine war and Taiwan tensions were also a worry, Charl said, affecting supply chains.

"We expect Thailand exports to cool in tandem with the global economic growth next year, so we have to rely so much on tourism," he said.

Thailand welcomed roughly 40mn people annually pre-pandemic, and has set ambitious targets on arrivals for the coming year in the hope of coaxing life back into the damaged tourist sector.

AFP

Iran's top automaker sets sights on Russian market for exports

Tehran, Iran - Iran's leading automaker is seeking to prioritise exports to Russia, its CEO said Sunday, as both countries reel under Western economic sanctions.

Iran Khodro unveiled the latest model of its crossover Rira vehicle at its factory west of Tehran, where CEO Mehdi Khatibi announced the manufacturer's ambitions for the Russian market.

"We are going to pay special attention to the Russian market, and we are also thinking of partnering with Russian investors," he said.

"We have held good negotiations with Moscow. The Russian market, with its capacities, will be one of our important markets," Khatibi added.

"We will begin exporting this year" to Russia, he said.

Iran Khodro had previously exported vehicles to Russia, no-



Technicians work on car production lines at the Iran Khodro auto plant, west of the capital Tehran, on Sunday (AFP)

tably between 2007 and 2009, Iranian media said.

Sunday's announcement comes after Russian President Vladimir Putin visited Tehran in July and met his Iranian counterpart Ebrahim Raisi and supreme leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei.

Russia has come under increasingly tough sanctions since its February invasion of Ukraine, while Iran has faced stringent sanctions reimposed in 2018 when the United States unilaterally pulled out of a nuclear deal between Tehran and world powers.

The two countries have responded to the sanctions by boosting cooperation in key areas to help prop up their economies.

Iran Khodro's vice president, Kianoush Pourmojib, struck an optimistic note on Sunday, pointing to increased exports to Azerbaijan over the past five years.

"We are ambitious about improving the quality of our vehicles," he told AFP.

He added that while the manufacturer hopes to compete in markets such as Azerbaijan, Oman and Iraq, "in volume, it is of course Russia that is the most important".

"This year, we will produce more than 500,000 vehicles and our goal within three years is to export 100,000 vehicles annually," compared with fewer than 20,000 currently, he said.

AFP

Has the blockchain found a use beyond crypto trading?

Paris, France - The bitcoin boom spawned new billionaires and videos of beach parties and Lamborghini's. The crypto crash brought devastation for small investors and bankruptcy for many companies.

Blockchain technology underpins crypto and has been hailed as a world-changing innovation, but does it have any use beyond creating speculative financial instruments?

AFP asked crypto critic Stephen Diehl, author of recently published "Popping the Crypto Bubble", to run the rule over some of the most popular claims made for blockchain technology.

More secure voting?

As tension and confusion en-

gulfed the United States after the 2020 election, Changpeng Zhao, billionaire founder of crypto firm Binance, had a suggestion.

A "blockchain-based mobile voting app", he tweeted, would mean "we won't have to wait for results, or have any questions on its validity".

Fellow crypto billionaire Vitalik Buterin replied that there were "significant challenges" but he thought it was "directionally 100 per cent correct".

So far, experiments have been very small scale.

For Diehl, blockchain was more likely to introduce problems than solve them.

"From the American perspective, every single district runs its own voting programme," said.

"This is seen as a feature be-



cause to corrupt any one election you would have to corrupt many, many civil servants.

"Centralising the voting system in one digital place would be pretty risky – then all you have to do is corrupt the blockchain and you could corrupt democracy."

Automated house buying?

Blockchain at heart is a ledger, a way of storing transactions that is – according to fans – secure, transparent and permanent.

Those qualities have led countless enthusiasts to pro-

pose that the technology could in effect replace paper contracts for things like house buying.

Diehl said it was "absurd" that the blockchain was "going back to things that were solved a millennium ago to justify its own existence".

"This is the system we've had since the Middle Ages – you have a government registry of land, a title and deed that get transferred when the ownership changes," he said.

"The blockchain isn't solving anything here."

Payments without banks?

The blockchain emerged from a 2008 white paper on bitcoin, which was conceived as an alter-

native to fiat currency.

The opening line reads: "A purely peer-to-peer version of electronic cash would allow on-line payments to be sent directly from one party to another without going through a financial institution."

Bitcoin was the first cryptocurrency. There are now more than 10,000 others sitting on many different blockchains.

Big firms have been desperate to find ways to accept payments in crypto.

Diehl pointed out that cryptoassets are speculative instruments not suitable for payments.

"When was the last time you paid for your coffee with Apple stocks," he asked.

"It just doesn't happen. You want something that's going to

be stable so the price of your coffee is the price of your coffee next week."

Supply chain tracking?

Want to know where your mango came from? Some supermarkets believe the best way for you to find out is to access a blockchain-based system capable of tracking the fruit from the tropics of Central America to your cornerstore.

Walmart and Carrefour are among the firms trumpeting blockchain systems.

Carrefour told AFP earlier this year that shoppers would be able to scan a QR code and discover the provenance of an array of products.

AFP

Bank Nizwa pledges support to people in flood-hit areas

In keeping with its commitment to social responsibility, Bank Nizwa, the leading and the most trusted Islamic bank in Oman, has provided aid to flood-stricken communities in Rustaq and Al Awabi in response to the severe flooding that struck the area.

The bank pledged RO40,000 to support impacted people and companies in the two wilayats. Bank Nizwa has always been at the forefront of humanitarian and disaster relief efforts, providing aid to those directly affected.

“Our commitment to giving back to our community is a core pillar of Bank Nizwa’s operations. Since CSR is an integral part of the way we do business, we strive to help those in need. In light of the floods in Rustaq and Al Awabi, the Board of Directors decided to contribute and support the communities affected,” said Sheikh Khalid Abdullah al Khalili, chairman of Bank Nizwa. “The goal is to ensure adequate resources are available to affected families and recovery activities can be carried out in the aftermath of a crisis. As a result, we are pleased to offer this assistance,” he added.

Say Hala to 10GB data for just RO2 with Ooredoo’s Sabbahi

With holiday season upon us, what better way to enjoy long summer nights than sharing with friends! Ooredoo’s Sabbahi plan is now available for just RO2, giving Hala prepaid customers 8GB of night-time data (between 11pm and 8am) plus 2GB for the rest of the day - that’s 24 hours of snapping, posting, chatting and sharing. Valid for two months, it’s one of a number of great value offers available from Ooredoo.

With an option for every kind of user, Ooredoo’s popular Hala prepaid plans come with a free SIM and offer a variety of add-ons for voice and data. Users can subscribe to a plan or add-on, change it, track their usage, recharge their balance and do lots more, anytime, anywhere, through the Ooredoo App. Combining seamless connectivity and an amazing customer experience, it’s the latest way Ooredoo is enriching its customers’ digital lives.

Customers can subscribe to the offer through the Ooredoo App or by dialling *555*28#.

ISG, ISAM celebrate India’s 76th Independence Day

Indian School Al Ghubra and Indian School Al Maabala joined the Indians across the globe to celebrate their country’s Independence Day on Monday.

While ISG celebrated the 76th Independence Day of India in the presence of the school management committee convener Sunil K A as the chief guest, ISAM organised an event with Syed Salman, the vice chairman of the Board of Directors, Indian Schools in Oman & DIC-Indian School Al Maabala, attending the same as the chief guest.

In a press statement, ISG said that their programme commenced with the National Anthem of India followed by the rendition of Yeh Desh Hai Veeron Ka Hindustan - an evergreen patriotic song - by the school choir. ISAM event also opened with harmoniously played National Anthem on violin. The March past display of the four houses of the school added colour for the day.

Volkswagen announces exclusive summer offers

Premium Motors, the exclusive dealership of Volkswagen in Oman, is committed to providing great experiences to its customers and has announced a summer offer on the brand’s popular models, which ends on September 25.

The special offer is available on Volkswagen models - Passat Trendline 2021, Golf GTI 2021, Teramont 2.0 L Trendline 2021, and T-Roc 2022. The starting price for the Passat Trendline is RO7,999 (VAT excluded). The summer offer includes three years of unlimited warranty mileage, three years’ service or 45,000kms, and three years roadside assistance. The starting price for the Teramont 2.0 Trendline 2021 is RO11,990 (VAT excluded), while the starting price for the T-Roc 2022 is RO8,995 (VAT excluded).

“We are constantly working towards enhancing our customer experience through various offers and promotions,” said Christian Nehme, General Manager of Premium Motors Oman. “We are excited to offer this promotion,” he added.

Lulu launches India Utsav in celebration of Independence Day



Lulu Oman launched 'India Utsav' in celebration of 75 years of Indian Independence. The week-long festival, which coincides with the Independence Day celebrations on August 15, will showcase the rich and diverse culture, heritage, traditions and regional flavours of the country.

The festival was inaugurated by H E Amit Narang, Ambassador of India to the Sultanate of Oman, in the presence of a host of officials from the Indian community and Lulu dignitaries at Lulu Hypermarket, Baushar. The festival will be held till Wednesday (August 17) at selected Lulu outlets across the sultanate.

The 'India Utsav' festival will offer customers a unique opportunity to experience Indian extravaganza in every category from fresh food and grocery to lifestyle and fashion. The festival will also showcase the close commercial ties between Oman and India.

There will also be amazing promotions and offers on a wide range of Indian products on display. Special stalls will be set up to familiarise and promote Indian fresh produce and other food products.

Shoppers can experience the genuine flavours of India in a variety of dishes that speak for themselves in

We are glad to organise India Utsav to showcase the beauty and diversity of Indian culture. It is also an opportunity for us to foster the cultural ties between Oman and India and strengthen and enrich the longstanding bilateral relations between the two countries.

SHABEER K A

terms of the authenticity and rich history of India. There will be special stalls for customers to savour a selection of melt-in-the-mouth Indian sweets and snacks.

Speaking during the formal opening of the event, Shabeer K A, Regional Director, Oman stated, “We are

glad to organise India Utsav to showcase the beauty and diversity of Indian culture. It is also an opportunity for us to foster the cultural ties between Oman and India and strengthen and enrich the longstanding bilateral relations between the two countries.

“We have also flown in many exclusive Indian products from our network of food processing and logistics centres across India as part of the festival,” he added.

The festival will showcase a wide range of food products, fresh fruits and vegetables, as well as meat and seafood. The event will allow the customers to enjoy many of the products that they have been accustomed to.

Many branded garments will also be on offer during the festival. Shoppers can grab trendy fashion garments as well a unique collection of designer wear suitable for festivals and weddings for a complete Indian culture experience. To add entertainment to the overall shopping experience, various cultural programs and shows as well as live cooking demos and other fun activities will be held during the festival period. The 'India Utsav' festival is part of Lulu’s commitment to bring the best of the world to shoppers, no matter where they are.

Kalyan Jewellers marks India’s Independence Day with up to 75% off on diamond jewellery

Kalyan Jewellers, one of the most trusted and leading jewellery brands, extended bumper discounts to mark the 75th year of India’s Independence. The exciting offers allowed patrons to register instant benefits on their jewellery purchases from Kalyan Jewellers.

As part of the Indian Independence Day Offer, the jewellery brand has announced up to 75 per cent off on making charges for gold jewellery purchases, while patrons could avail up to 75 per cent off on diamond jewellery purchases adding further delight to the shopping experience. These one-of-its-kind offers ran across Kalyan Jewellers’ showrooms in the region from August 11 to 15.

Talking about the announcement, Ramesh Kalyanaraman,

Executive Director, Kalyan Jewellers said, “At Kalyan Jewellers, it gives us immense pride and joy as India is about to complete 75 years of Independence on 15th August.”

As a global jewellery brand that was born in India, he pointed out that the group “wanted to mark the occasion by offering a distinctive shopping experience to the brand’s patrons in the region”.

Since the company’s inception, “we have been pioneers in empowering consumers by introducing revolutionary customer-centric programmes,” Kalyanaraman said, exhorting that the group “aspire to continue taking major strides in that direction. With the launch of the special Independence Day Offer campaign, we aim to take another step in that direc-



tion, enabling customers to maximise benefits from their jewellery purchases on this momentous occasion.”

The jewellery retailed at Kalyan Jewellers go through multiple purity tests and patrons also receive the Kalyan

Jewellers 4-Level Assurance Certificate which guarantees purity, free lifetime maintenance of ornaments, detailed product information and transparent exchange and buy-back policies.

The certification is part of the brand’s commitment towards offering the very best to its loyalists.

Kalyan Jewellers’ showrooms stock popular house brands such as Tejasvi (Polki jewellery), Mudhra (hand-crafted antique jewellery), Nimah (Temple jewellery) and Glo (dancing diamonds). Other sections at the showroom include Ziah (Solitaire-like diamond jewellery), Anokhi (uncut diamonds), Antara (wedding diamonds), Hera (daily wear diamonds) and Rang (precious stones jewellery).

Al Ahlia starts Oman’s first ‘paperless’ motor insurance solution

In yet another ‘Oman’s First’ innovation, Al Ahlia has launched a 100 per cent paperless motor insurance process for its retail customers for an easier, digital and secure way of issuing motor policies.

The launch of this innovative paperless solution underpins Al Ahlia’s digitisation agenda and has multi-pronged benefits for all stakeholders. For customers, paperless insurance allows for a much better and faster experience compared to the traditional paper-based experience.

Speaking on the occasion, Praveen Kumar - CEO, Al Ahlia Insurance Co SAOG said, “Embedded in our brand strategy, Al Ahlia has been amplifying its efforts with the introduction of direct-to-customer e-services that

enhance user experience with innovative tech interventions.

This new paperless insurance is a testament to that thinking. Living a ‘digital life’ is a norm today, and as a leading Omani insurer, we proactively ensure our systems are capable to provide the best customer service and maintain strong governance of customers’ private data.”

Company’s IT director Arif Zadjali said, “Our paperless insurance process is developed on Cloud-based Enterprise Content Management (ECM) solutions which we are already using in our claims processes. Today when remote working is common, only cloud technology allows us the desired scalability and flexibility required for the multi-nodal functioning of our teams.”

Alizz Islamic Bank launches AlizzRemit with Mastercard

Alizz Islamic Bank has partnered with Mastercard to launch AlizzRemit, a fast and secure Cross Border Remittance Service. AlizzRemit is integrated with Mastercard Send, a global money transfer platform that allows participating banks to use Mastercard's network to send money swiftly and easily to beneficiary bank accounts, mobile wallets or cash-out points across the world.

AlizzRemit is now available on Alizz Islamic Bank's mobile banking application and offers an unmatched user experience, enabling both retail and corporate banking customers to conduct seamless transactions from the comfort of their homes.

Speaking at the launch event, Mohammed al Ghasani, Chief Consumer Banking Officer, Alizz Islamic Bank, said, "Alizz Islamic Bank is proud to be at the forefront of adopting new digital tools that enhance the customer experience and AlizzRemit is another cutting-edge service launched in this direction.

"AlizzRemit offers competitive rates across corridors, as well as near real-time settlements round the clock to multiple destinations, including the UK, India, Nepal Sri Lanka and more during the working hours of the bank."

J K Khalil, Cluster General Manager, MENA East, Mastercard, said: "Through our partnership with Alizz Islamic Bank, we are pleased to deliver on these expectations and reimagine the way people send and receive funds. We are proud to support Oman's 2040 vision."

Destination Dhofar: The tropical side of Oman



With the lifting of COVID-19 restrictions on international travel, as well as the launch of the advanced digital VisitOman.om platform to serve the regional and international B2B travel and tourism sector, Oman is poised to welcome visitors back in droves during the current khareef season in the Governorate of Dhofar.

Hawana Salalah, the largest Integrated Tourism Complexes (ITC) in the country, is built and operated by internationally acclaimed builder of fully-integrated towns, Muriya, a joint venture between Oman Tourism Development Company (OMRAN) and Orascom Development Holding (ODH). It currently features 1,200 hotel rooms spread across luxurious four- and five-star beachfront hotels. With tourism once more picking up pace, in the first six months of 2022 alone, Hawana Salalah welcomed 30,532 visitors.

"As part of our pledge to Oman, we have dedicated our strategy to develop Hawana Salalah which aims to unlock the potential of Dhofar and provide the catalyst for further investment in the Governorate, while unlocking new opportunities in investment and tourism promotion," Mohamed Abdelaziz, Acting Chief Executive Officer of Muriya, said. Hawana Salalah is Muriya's flagship destination and has introduced a platform for job creation.

Floward appoints Samer Elsahn Chief Product Officer

Floward, the go-to online flowers and gifts delivery destination in MENA and UK announced the appointment of its new Chief Product Officer (CPO) Samer Elsahn in a move to improve and elevate the customer journey and features offered by Floward.

Elsahn brings to Floward over 20 years of experience across a wide range of industries including startups, corporates, and governments in MENA. He worked as a CPO and CTO at Nana grocery app in KSA, and as Product Director for the Captain Domain at Careem. He also worked at Souq.com as a Lead Product Manager heading various teams. Elsahn also worked as the Head of Product Authority for TAMM Project owned by the Government of Abu Dhabi. "We are overjoyed to welcome Samer to Floward's family and we look forward to what he will add to Floward," said Floward Chairman & CEO Abdulaziz B al Loughani.

Muzn holds Q2 Sharia'a Supervisory Board meeting



Salima al Marzouqi

Continuing to provide its customers with the latest Sharia'a compliant solutions, Muzn, National Bank of Oman's (NBO) Islamic banking window, recently held its Sharia'a Board Meeting. Sheikh Dr Muhammad Zubair Usmani, chairman - Sharia'a Board, was joined by board members, His Highness Sayyid Dr Adham bin Turki al Said, Sheikh Dr Abdul Rahman Abdullah al Saadi, and Sheikh Saleh al Kharusi, to discuss the bank's products, which include the approval of term based Wakala Bil Istithmar mode, reserves creation in the Wakala product, and the approval of the Internal Sharia'a Audit Plan.

Salima al Marzouqi, chief Islamic Banking officer, said, "We are committed to fostering the development of the country's growing Islamic finance sector. Shari'a compliance is at the heart of what we do and through ongoing collaborations with our learned Shari'a board members, we are creating new possibilities for our customers while ensuring their banking experience is not only seamless but is in keeping with their values. We have a lot planned in the upcoming months as we continue to adapt to new technologies and meet the evolving needs of our customers."



ahlibank celebrates Al Nukhba's 100mn deposit portfolio

Ahlibank's resilient second quarter performance received a thumping response from branch managers at its recently concluded Retail Banking Meeting, held to review the Bank's retail performance and explore newer avenues to enhance customer experience.

With an impressive net profit of RO15.8mn in the second quarter (an increase of 18.6 per cent over the same period last year), the meeting applauded the role played by each branch in bolstering the bank's strong growth curve.

Attending branch managers also charted the successes over the course of 2022 to emerge as one of the most preferred banks in the country. The meeting also celebrated Al Nukhba segment's achievement of RO100mn in the deposit portfolio and highlighted the significance of upgraded e-channels in structuring its current and future growth.

Commenting on the proceedings of the meeting, Muneer al Balushi, AGM – Head of Retail Distribution, ahlibank, said, "It is heartening to note that we have forged ahead in our mission to exceed our customers' expectations and deliver outstanding shareholder value, while ensuring all-round development of our staff. This buoyant phase has been possible, thanks to the concerted efforts and dedication of our team members.

"In the coming months, we need to fortify our resources and grab the opportunities to grow manifold in the local and regional financial sector. This will be possible with the team spirit that we bring to the table and with our focused approach to customer-centric operations. Our recent investments in high-tech digital products and fintech solutions have well demonstrated our intent to be in the driving seat of customer service bandwagon, and to partner with the government in its economic development initiatives. We will continue this path diligently, serving the community we operate in."

While second quarter performance was the key feature of the meeting agenda, it also saw the management cadre discuss topics ranging from branch control and e-channel, Change management and customer experience to complaint-management and digital transformation and marketing. The latter has propelled ahlibank's strategic endeavour to integrate its growing footprints in the country. On the marketing front, the Bank has found a unique niche among the youth and the SME sector, which it has leveraged with a portfolio of innovative products and services.

Participating branch managers also lent their expertise while discussing ways to enhance operations and effectively manage loan and credit risk and enhance customer experience. The interactive session was reflective of the Bank's vision to manage and sustain its progress with a team of responsive and responsible managers and professionals who are committed to meet and exceed the needs of its customers.

The meeting concluded with a celebration to mark Al Nukhba segment's 100mn deposit portfolio, and an award ceremony to commend individual efforts in shaping the Bank's success story. ahlibank has cultivated and nurtured a culture of innovation, and the range of products and services it has implemented and upgraded over the years is a testimony of its pursuit of excellence.



Oman Arab Bank sponsors the 'Little Tourist Forum'

In line with its sustainability strategy, Oman Arab Bank recently sponsored the third edition of the Little Tourist Forum. Organised by the Ministry of Heritage and Tourism, the two-week event took place from 17 to 28 July and included several workshops and activities related to tourism.

Designed to target the next generation of young Omanis, several interactive programmes, activities and field trips, focused on the tourism sector, were held this year. The forum aimed at equipping the participants with the necessary skills and knowledge to excel in the tourism industry. Moreover, it sought to utilise children's free time during the summer holiday with valuable activities.

Commenting on the initiative, Sulaiman Ali al Hinai, Head of Treasury, Investments & Government Relations Division said, "We are delighted to support the Little Tourism Forum. There is no doubt that the forum will develop the skills of our talented young children in the tourism industry.

"This will enable them to serve as ambassadors for this vital sector, whose enormous potential for stimulating the economy is vital to the government."

"At Oman Arab Bank, we believe that public-private sector partnerships are crucial for achieving national socio-economic goals. Therefore, to maximise our positive impact, we will continue to support national initiatives as part of our sustainability strategy," he further stated.

OAB's sustainability strategy was designed to strengthen the Bank's social impact within its three main strategic pillars: community partnerships, environmental responsibility and financial inclusion. The strategy was developed to boost the Bank's social contribution in line with its business growth. The Bank will remain steadfast with its commitment towards delivering impactful initiatives over the years.

Weekend 'daycation' at Jumeirah's luxury resort

Nestled within the secluded cove of Bandar Jissah between the dramatic Al Hajar mountains and the sparkling Arabian Sea, just 15 minutes from Muscat, Jumeirah Muscat Bay combines sublime restaurants, stunning views, magnificent pools and Oman's finest beaches to deliver the ultimate Daycation this summer.

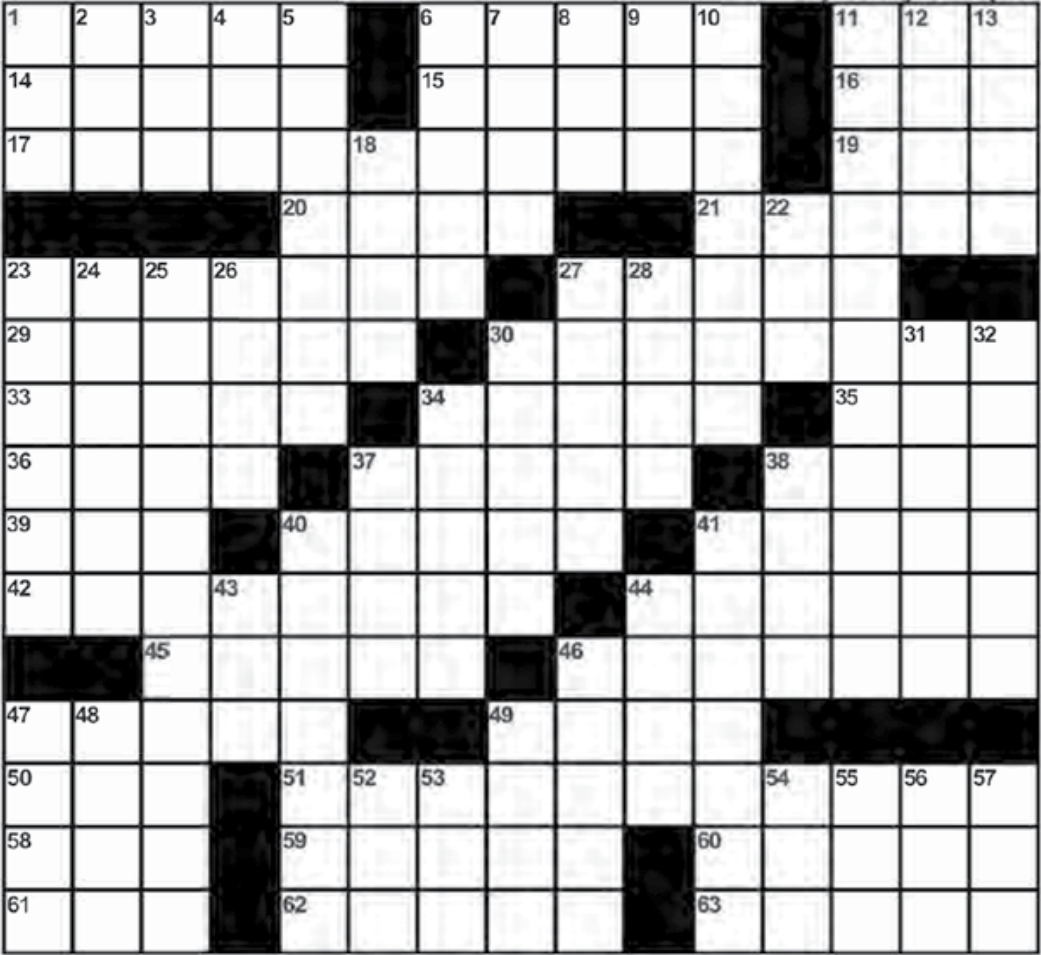
Valid every Friday until September 30, guests at Jumeirah Muscat Bay can enjoy an exquisite brunch paired with pool and beach day access, providing the definitive day experience for couples, friends and families to kick back and relax at Muscat's newest luxury address.

Set against a backdrop of azure ocean views and overseen by Culinary Director Claudio Dieli, Peridot brunch features interactive live cooking stations showcasing fresh and healthy favourites from all over the world, an exquisite seafood tower and sushi selection, plus refreshing gelato selection, alongside a mouth-watering crepes station.

Live music and a kids' entertainment area with a variety of board and card games, drawing activities, a cookie baking station and a specially curated kids menu provide the perfect ambience and ensure little ones are kept amused at this must-visit spot for Friday brunch.

Guests can also take advantage of Day Pool & Beach access, with a special rate of RO10 per person. Boasting three alluring, temperature-controlled swimming pools, including adults only, kids and family pools, plus wide expanse of pristine beach and plush sunbeds, visitors can enjoy a blissful day soaking in the magnificent surroundings and outstanding service.

DAILY CROSSWORD



ACROSS

- 1) Gal's guy, slangily
6) Enjoyed a fine meal
11) Worker who serves a queen
14) Letter through a filter
15) Turn on the dramatics
16) "... be an honor"
17) Some nice soaks
19) Blossom
20) Did one-third of a triathlon
21) Dr. Sabin studied it
23) It goes around the world
27) _ dog (zesty frank-furter)
29) Cedar tree
30) Sinks
33) Hot, glowing coal
34) Birthplace of Charles de Gaulle
35) Pod occupant
36) Turns on the water-works
37) Jazz variation
38) Fake bedding item?
39) Full of trickery
40) Half a sawbuck
41) Engraved fabric
42) Held, as a dissolved substance

- 44) Ringlet producer
45) Corpulent
46) Sheens
47) Get-up-and-go
49) "Arf!" or "Woof!"
50) Pub pitcherful
51) Tall plant with tiny white or pink flowers
58) Lancelot's title
59) Foaming at the mouth
60) Licoricelike flavor
61) Call to the Coast Guard
62) Preoperative delivery of old
63) Part-time employees, for short
- DOWN
- 1) Black History mo.
2) Bird in a herd
3) Certain retriever, briefly
4) "Ad" add-on
5) Dream team pick
6) Exclude from practice
7) Muslim chief
8) "... too shabby"
9) Suffix on ordinal numbers
10) Be unable to stand
11) Lover of books

- 12) Vanity case for milady
13) Edible root of the taro
18) Still life subject, perhaps
22) Prehistoric
23) Texas oil city
24) Shape anew
25) Early Frank Sinatra fans
26) Bad day for Caesar
27) Use a crayon
28) Endangered one's cry
30) Was compatible
31) Eyeglass_ (optometry patient)
32) Identifiers
34) Flood embankment
37) Babies' protectors
38) Work with mail
40) Comped thing
41) Marsh denizen
43) Belt's relative
44) Street part
46) High-tech surgery tool
47) Kind of production
48) Miscellany
49) Computer file measure
- 52) It may be modem
53) Cry of contempt
54) Ship's dir., sometimes

- 55) Deadeye's forte
56) 1/6 of an ounce (Abbr.)

- 57) "...just one of the guys"

NOTE PAD



YOUR DAILY HOROSCOPE



ARIES MARCH 21-APRIL 19

Sharing your life with someone is a choice. Friends and partners in your past have always provided you with the support you need, but right now someone could be morphing from a supporter into a controller. Look at your social calendar. Who's been making all the rules? Before things get out of hand, start flexing your own muscle and making your own choices. If you get some attitude about it, slowly ease this person out of your plans. Life's too short.



LEO JULY 23-AUGUST 22

Make yourself available for invitations, propositions, deliveries, and opportunities. Answer every phone call, email, or knock at your door, because people are looking for someone exactly like you. There's an empty slot in a different location that you could fit into perfectly. A big romantic push is on its way into your life, and if you're looking in the right place at the right time, something you've been imagining lately could finally become a sweet reality.



SAGITTARIUS NOVEMBER 22-DECEMBER 21

You know that release you feel when you unbutton the top of your jeans after a huge feast? An unexpected cancellation, postponement, or change in plans will give you that same wonderful sense of relaxation and relief now. Make the most of it and fill up your newly flexible time with the things that need to be addressed. A quick shuffle will prioritize things in the right order and line everything up so you can neatly knock things down.



TAURUS APRIL 20-MAY 20

No one has better instincts than you, but be careful how much you rely on them. Instincts are based on emotions, and there is an unpredictability around emotional thinking, especially right now. In everything you do at work, at school, or in your social adventures, keep your emotions in check. Feel what you feel, but make sure you're not pushing things in a certain direction based on what you want. Think about what is best for everyone.



VIRGO AUGUST 23-SEPTEMBER 22

The nonverbal communication of coworkers or fellow students is speaking louder than words. Avoid email and the phone and try to keep all conversations face-to-face. Open your eyes and you'll see true meanings that others don't. This could give you a big advantage over the next few days. Despite some excellent camouflage, you won't be fooled for one minute. Hold on to what you know to be true, but don't act on it. A better time is coming soon.



CAPRICORN DECEMBER 22-JANUARY 19

Your latest wish is a big one, but it could come one giant step closer to becoming a reality. Give it some nudges here and there and see what develops. If you've done the proper groundwork, things could finally start happening. The littlest efforts you make can create a major result, so write off any suggestions that get thrown your way. You're known for keeping an open mind in tough situations, so live up to your reputation.



GEMINI MAY 21-JUNE 21

With all that's been on your mind lately, you could use an emotionally significant conversation. Talk things out with someone you trust. Skip past the usual folks whose shoulders you so often lean on and instead look to someone you have a more professional relationship with. Subtly toss out a few thoughts, and if they push you on the details, keep going. Be careful not to step past the boundary you've put between work and private life.



LIBRA SEPTEMBER 23-OCTOBER 22

Sometimes the best part of making a long climb up a steep hill isn't the view at the top, it's the blast you can have speeding down the other side! Keep that in mind when the ending of a process or attainment of a goal signals a long period of fun, relaxing, and fast-paced joy. You can toss your cares aside, take your hands off the handlebars, and let out a nice loud "whreeeeeeee!" to let the world know that you're loving it.



AQUARIUS JANUARY 20-FEBRUARY 18

A celebrity or well-known mover and shaker is doing something that you want to be doing, and there's nothing stopping you from doing it. No great resources are required, just a lot of creativity. Get out and realize your potential. There is a strong current of productivity around you now, and you need to take advantage of it. It's a good time to flesh out your ideas, move forward into a new career path.



CANCER JUNE 22-JULY 22

Buckle up and get ready for a storm to hit. There is a strong wave of confusion and resentment coming, and you might be right in its path. You won't be victimized by this angry energy, but your life will be affected a bit. Everyone's emotions are touchy right now, and you might lose your temper too, but it's to be expected. Ride this wave of unpredictability for as long as it takes. You'll come out on the other side with a few lessons under your belt.



SCORPIO OCTOBER 23-NOVEMBER 21

The last few miles of any journey are always tough, but lately you've been discovering that the last few inches can present the biggest challenge. Lucky for you, this morning will bring a bright energy burst that could put you right over the hump and across the finish line! Give up a little bit of free time so you can go full steam ahead. This day could bring the completion you've been working so hard toward. Plan for an intimate celebration tonight.



PISCES FEBRUARY 19-MARCH 20

Settling into some private quiet time will be harder than you thought it would be now. Social invitations could start piling up early, so you'd better decide if you want to climb out of your shell or stay away from the real world a little longer. Getting away from the hustle and bustle of life should still be a top priority, so put off doing anything new unless doing so would require you to give up a life-changing opportunity.



TEST YOUR KNOWLEDGE

01. In the Shavian alphabet what graphics represent vowel sounds?

A. Tall
B. Wide
C. Short
D. Deep

02. Where is Singapore?

- A. Africa
B. Asia
C. Europe
D. Antarctica

03. Murine typhus, Rocky mountain spotted fever and Bouton-neuse fever are illnesses in a family known collectively as what kind of disease?

- A. Influenza
B. Haemorrhagic
C. Coronaviruses
D. Rickettsial

Answers: 1. C 2. B 3. D

KIDS COLOURING



BOGGLER

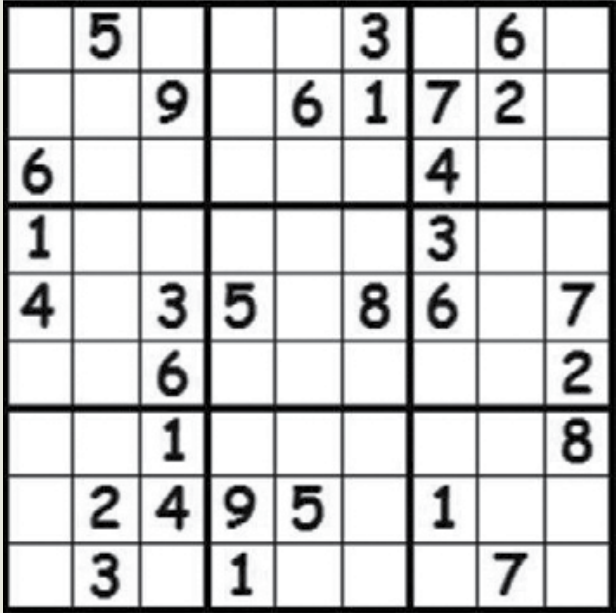


Each game will present you with a matrix filled with letters. The objective is to form words by linking adjacent letters - to the left, right, on top, bottom, or diagonal to each other. The Boggles Classic game uses a 4 x 4 matrix. Words are valued at one point for each letter in excess of two letters. 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



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



Israel security forces kill Palestinian in east Jerusalem raid

Jerusalem - Israeli security forces shot dead a Palestinian man they said had tried to stab officers during a home raid to locate weapons in east Jerusalem early on Monday.

"A suspect who tried to stab our fighters was neutralised," police said, adding that the man, identified by Palestinians as Mohammed al-Shaham, 21, had died in an Israeli military hospital. The man's father, Ibrahim al-Shaham, told AFP that his son was shot in the head at point-blank range and was left bleed-

ing for 40 minutes.

According to al-Shaham, police knocked on their door at 3:30am and 'we didn't manage to make it to the door, Mohammed got there first, and the door exploded'.

"They (police) started shooting inside the house, the first shot was in Mohammed's head," he said, adding that police left him bleeding before arresting him and taking him away.

Jerusalem Border Police said it launched the raid to locate



Sister of Mohammed al-Shaham carries her brother's bloodied shirt as she mourns on Monday (AFP)

weapons in the town of Kafr Aqab, which is part of Israeli-annexed east Jerusalem but located on the West Bank side of the security barrier.

Al-Shaham said that one of the police officers had told him that they got the wrong house. Police did not immediately reply to a request for comment on the father's claims, and did not say whether they found any weapons in the house.

The Palestine Liberation Organisation's new secretary general, Hussein al-Sheikh,

called for 'an immediate and urgent international investigation' into what he labelled a 'criminal execution'.

On Sunday, eight Israeli and US citizens were wounded when a Palestinian gunman opened fire on a bus just outside Jerusalem's Old City.

That shooting came a week after the end of a deadly three-day conflict between Israel and Islamic Jihad fighters in the Palestinian coastal enclave of Gaza.

AFP



Members of right-wing organisations gather on the grounds of Yasukuni Shrine in Tokyo on Monday, to mark the 77th anniversary of Japan's surrender in World War II in 1945 (AFP)

Japanese ministers anger China, South Korea with war shrine visit

Tokyo, Japan - Two Japanese ministers paid respects on Monday at a controversial war shrine, infuriating China and South Korea where the site is seen as a symbol of past militarism, especially during World War II.

The Yasukuni Shrine in Tokyo honours 2.5mn war dead, mostly Japanese, who perished since the late 19th century - but it also enshrines convicted war criminals.

Trips to the shrine by government officials have long angered countries that suffered at the hands of the Japanese military before and during the war, particularly South Korea and China.

Chinese foreign ministry

China urges Japan to seriously learn from history, cut off militarism, and avoid further losing trust with its Asian neighbours

WANG WENBIN

spokesman Wang Wenbin reacted angrily to Monday's visits, calling them a 'serious provocation'. "China urges Japan to seriously learn from history, cut off militarism, and avoid further losing trust with its Asian neighbours and the international community," he said.

The South Korean government also expressed 'deep disap-

pointment' at the visit to the shrine, 'which glorifies Japan's past wars of aggression and enshrined war criminals', according to a foreign ministry statement.

Sanae Takaichi, the hawkish minister for economic security, and Kenya Akiba, minister for reconstruction in the disaster-hit northern Tohoku region, offered their respects at the shrine on the

77th anniversary of Japan's WWII surrender.

Takaichi is a regular visitor to Yasukuni and was close to former prime minister Shinzo Abe, whose assassination last month shocked the world.

"This year, there is war in Ukraine. I prayed that no more people will die in wars," Takaichi told reporters, saying she had offered her 'gratitude' to the war dead enshrined there.

Trade minister Yasutoshi Nishimura also visited the shrine at the weekend.

But Prime Minister Fumio Kishida, who took office in October, opted to make a traditional

cash offering on Monday.

A Japanese prime minister has not appeared at Yasukuni since 2013, when Abe sparked fury in Beijing and Seoul and earned a rare diplomatic rebuke from close ally Washington.

Kishida's office told AFP he gave the offering at his personal expense and 'through a proxy, in the capacity of president of the Liberal Democratic Party'.

In recent months, Kishida has urged warmer ties with South Korea, saying the two countries 'can't afford to waste time' in improving relations, following years of tensions over wartime issues.

AFP

South Africa's Zuma appeals ruling to send him back to jail

Johannesburg, SA - South Africa's former leader Jacob Zuma on Monday asked a top court to overturn a ruling that ordered him back to jail to serve a sentence that had triggered protests and looting.

Zuma, 80, was released on medical parole last September, just two months into a 15-month term he was handed for snubbing anti-corruption investigators.

In December, the High Court reversed his release, describing the decision as 'unlawful'.

The Supreme Court of Appeal, sitting in the central city of Bloemfontein, on Monday started hearing Zuma's bid for his medical parole to be restored.

Attorney Maribolla Mphahlele, representing the prisons services, said a doctor had established that Zuma suffered 'from a terminal disease or a condition that is chronic and progressive'.

The doctor recommended parole due to 'incapacity', as Zuma's condition had 'progressively deteriorated since 2018 and (Zuma) is unable to perform the activities of daily living or self-care', Mphahlele said, without giving details.

While in prison, Zuma was taken to hospital for surgery to treat an undisclosed ailment. He did not physically appear in court on Monday.

Zuma was jailed in July for 15 months for contempt of court after he refused to give testimony to a graft inquiry.

His jailing sparked violent protests and looting in his home province of KwaZulu-Natal that spread to the fi-

nancial hub Johannesburg in July, claiming over 350 lives and dealing a crippling blow to South Africa's economy.

It was the deadliest social unrest in South Africa since the end of white-minority rule in 1994.

Zuma ascended to the presidency in 2009 but was toppled nine years later as his tenure sank deeper into corruption scandals.

The attorney representing the prison services said a doctor had established that Zuma suffered from a terminal disease or a condition that is chronic and progressive

For many South Africans, his name resonates with graft and 'state capture' - the embezzlement of government-owned assets - but he remains a hero to many grassroots members of the ruling African National Congress (ANC).

His successor, Cyril Ramaphosa, described the unrest as an orchestrated attempt to destabilise the country.

The appeal case has become a high-stakes political issue. The largest opposition party, the Democratic Alliance, describes it as 'a test of the principle of equality before the law'.

AFP

3 dead on migrant boat off Canaries

Madrid, Spain - Spanish rescuers on Monday found three dead migrants and 45 survivors, mostly Moroccan and some in very bad condition, on a boat off Fuerteventura in the Canary Islands, the coastguard said.

Rescuers from Salvamento Maritimo were called out to a boat in trouble off the island and reached the vessel just after midnight, a spokesman said.

He said the crew had found 45 survivors - 42 men, two women and a child - and three bodies. "All those rescued were Moroccan, with the exception of one sub-Saharan African man," he told AFP. The 112 emergency services said five of those on board were in bad condition, adding that six people had been taken to hospital.

AFP

Mechanical elephants, homemade howitzers as India turns 75

New Delhi, India - India marked the 75th anniversary of independence on Monday with Prime Minister Narendra Modi giving a speech from Delhi's historic Red Fort, which was decorated with portraits of freedom fighters and guarded by mechanical elephants.

Following a 21-gun salute, reportedly executed using howitzers made domestically for the first time under Modi's 'Make In India' industrial strategy, the prime minister said Indians should shed 'colonialism in our minds and habits'.

"Hundreds of years of colonialism has restricted our sentiments, distorted our thoughts. When we see even the smallest thing related to colonialism in us or around us, we have to be rid of it," Modi said in a 90-minute speech from the ramparts of the fort in the Indian capital.

Wearing a cream-coloured

turban speckled with the colours of the Indian flag, Modi also said India should crush the 'termite' of corruption and nepotism, follow an 'India First' mantra and ensure that 'in speech and conduct, we do nothing that lowers a woman's dignity'. "Self-reliant India is the responsibility of every citizen, every government, every unit of society," he said.

The 'Jewel in the Crown' of the British Empire became independent in 1947 after two centuries of colonial occupation and exploitation. With Britain in dire financial straits at the end of World War II - in which about 90,000 Indian soldiers died - the country was hurriedly split in two: Muslim-majority Pakistan and a mostly Hindu India.

Partition

This precipitated one of the biggest-ever movements of humanity as millions of people, up-



Children hold Indian national flags during independence day celebrations in Amritsar on Monday (AFP)

rooted from areas their families had inhabited for generations, rushed to be on the right side of the new border.

It also unleashed a cataclysm of sectarian violence in which at least a million people were killed. Entire trains full of people were massacred and huge numbers of

US lawmakers visit Taiwan; China conducts fresh drills around island

The new visit after a similar trip by the US Speaker triggered a furious response from Beijing

Beijing, China - China staged fresh military drills around Taiwan on Monday, slamming a new visit by United States lawmakers to the island days after a similar trip by House Speaker Nancy Pelosi triggered a furious response from Beijing.

The unannounced two-day trip by senior members of Congress prompted China to renew its rhetoric that it would 'prepare for war' over Taiwan, a self-ruled democracy that Beijing's leaders claim and have vowed to one day seize. The five-member congressional delegation - led by Senator Ed Markey of Massachusetts - met with President Tsai Ing-wen on Monday, according to Washington's de facto embassy in Taipei.

"The delegation had an opportunity to exchange views with Taiwan counterparts on a wide



Taiwan President Tsai Ing-wen (right) greeting US representative delegation at the Presidential Office in Taipei on Monday (AFP)

range of issues of importance to both the United States and Taiwan," it said.

Tsai told the lawmakers she wants 'to maintain a stable status quo across the Taiwan Strait' and 'jointly maintain the prosperity and stability of the Indo-Pacific region', her office said in a statement.

She said Russia's invasion of Ukraine demonstrated 'the threat that authoritarian states pose to the world order', according to her

office, and also thanked Washington for its support in the face of Chinese military threats.

The bipartisan trip sparked another bellicose response from Beijing, which said it had carried out a fresh round of 'combat readiness patrol and combat drills in the sea and airspace around Taiwan island' on Monday. "The Chinese People's Liberation Army continues to train and prepare for war, resolutely defend national sovereignty and

territorial integrity, and resolutely crush any form of 'Taiwan independence' separatism and foreign interference attempts," Wu Qian, a spokesman for China's defense ministry, said.

"We warn the US and the DPP authorities: 'Using Taiwan to contain China' is doomed to failure," he added, referring to Taiwan's ruling Democratic Progressive Party.

In a defiant response, Taiwan's defence ministry vowed to

face the latest drills 'calmly and seriously and defend national security'. "Apart from expressing condemnation (of China's drills), the Ministry of National Defence will comprehensively grasp the movements in the sea and airspace around the Taiwan Strait," the ministry said.

It added that its forces had detected 30 Chinese planes and five ships operating around the strait on Monday. Of those, 15 planes crossed the median line -

an unofficial demarcation that Beijing does not recognise.

Monday's drills followed days of huge exercises around Taiwan in the wake of Pelosi's visit, which saw Beijing send warships, missiles and jets into the waters and skies near the island. Taipei condemned those drills and missile tests as preparation for an invasion.

China's Communist Party has never ruled Taiwan but says it will use force if necessary to take the island and bristles at any perceived treatment of it as a sovereign nation state.

'Evil neighbour'

That decades-old threat was reiterated in a white paper published last week, when China's Taiwan Affairs Office said it would 'not renounce the use of force' against its neighbour and reserved 'the option of taking all necessary measures'.

Taipei has remained defiant throughout the standoff with Beijing, with Premier Su Tseng-chang saying the island welcomed 'all countries and friends across the world' who want to support it. "We shouldn't be too afraid to do anything, afraid to let visitors come and afraid to let our friends come, just because we have an evil neighbour next door," he said.

AFP

Five die in blast in Ecuador blamed on crime gangs

Quito, Ecuador - Five people died and 16 were injured in an explosion on Sunday in the Ecuadoran port city of Guayaquil in an attack the government blamed on organised crime, officials said.

President Guillermo Lasso declared a state of emergency in the country's second largest city of Guayaquil, where eight houses and two cars were destroyed in the blast.

Lasso warned on Twitter that his year-old government would 'not allow organized crime to try to control the country'.

The state of emergency will be in force from Sunday in the southwestern coastal city, and will last for 30 days, said security secretary Diego Ordonez at a press conference.

Interior Minister Patricio Carrillo said the five dead had been identified and none had a criminal record.

He also said that 17 were wounded in the blast, which he blamed on 'organized-crime mercenaries,' long involved in illicit drug traffic. "It is a declaration of war against the state," Carrillo added on Twitter.

Located between Colombia and Peru, the world's two largest cocaine producers, Ecuador is facing a drug-fueled crime wave that has produced scenes of horror, including decapitated bodies hanging from bridges.

AFP



This file photo shows Aung San Suu Kyi at the Presidential Palace in Naypyidaw on January 17, 2020 (AFP)

Myanmar court jails Aung Suu Kyi for six years for corruption

Yangon, Myanmar - A Myanmar junta court jailed ousted civilian leader Aung San Suu Kyi for six years for corruption on Monday, according to a source close to the case.

Suu Kyi, 77, has been detained since the generals staged a coup and toppled her government on February 1 last year, ending the Southeast Asian country's brief period of democracy.

She has since been hit with a series of charges, including violating the official secrets act, corruption and electoral fraud, and she faces decades in jail if convicted on all counts.

Suu Kyi was sentenced to 'six years imprisonment under four anti-corruption charges', said the source, who requested anonymity because they are not authorised to speak to the media.

She appeared in good health and did not make any statement following her latest sentencing, the source added.

The Nobel laureate has already been sentenced to 11 years in jail for corruption, incitement against the military, breaching COVID-19 rules and breaking a telecommunications law.

Journalists have been barred from attending the court hearings and Suu Kyi's lawyers have been banned from speaking to the media.

The coup sparked widespread protests and unrest which the military sought to crush by force.

According to a local monitoring group, the crackdown has left more than 2,000 civilians dead and seen some 17,000 arrested.

Suu Kyi has been the face of Myanmar's democratic hopes for more than 30 years, but her earlier six-year sentence already meant she is likely to miss elections to be held by next year.

In June, she was transferred from house arrest to a prison in the capital Naypyidaw, where her trial continues in a courthouse inside the prison compound.

She remains confined to jail in the capital, with her link to the outside world limited to brief pre-trial meetings with lawyers.

Many of her political allies have also been arrested since the coup, with one chief minister sentenced to 75 years in jail.

Last month, the junta stoked renewed international condemnation when it executed Phyto Zeya Thaw, a former lawmaker from her National League for Democracy (NLD) party for offences under anti-terrorism laws.

Suu Kyi learned of the execution at a pre-trial hearing, a source with knowledge of the matter said, but has yet to speak on the matter.

AFP

Cairo church fire: Anger flares at slow response

Cairo, Egypt - Egyptians voiced outrage on Monday over reports that firefighters and paramedics took over an hour to respond to a blaze that tore through a Coptic Christian church and killed 41 people.

Grief has spread over Sunday's fire among Copts, the Middle East's largest Christian community, which makes up at least 10mn of Muslim-majority Egypt's population of 103mn.

But many other Egyptians have also voiced outrage over the disaster in the now scorched Abu Sifin church, located in the greater Cairo neighbourhood of Imbaba west of the Nile River.

As debate flared on social media, one Twitter user charged that the reportedly slow response time 'is not just negligence, it's complicity'.

"My cousin's children died,"

I know that the ambulance could have been there in three minutes. It took them an hour and a half. All we want is justice

MOHA EL HARRA

video creator Moha El Harra said in a widely shared online livestream after Sunday's blaze, which was blamed on an electrical fault.

"I'm from the area. I know that the ambulance could have been there in three minutes. It took them an hour and a half. All we want is justice - for the local ambulance authority, the fire services, civil defence. All of them



Egyptian mourners react during the funeral of victims killed in Cairo Coptic church fire, in the Giza Governorate on Sunday (AFP)

need to be held to account."

Smoke inhalation

Health Minister Khaled Abdel-Ghaffar had declared on Sunday that 'paramedics were informed of the fire at 8:57am' and the first ambulance 'arrived at the site at

exactly 8:59am'.

But many challenged this, with eye-witnesses saying it took 'an hour and a half' for emergency services to arrive.

"No, the ambulance did not arrive within two minutes," one local resident, Mina Masry, told

AFP. "If the ambulance had come on time, they could have rescued people," he added, stressing that many lives were lost to smoke inhalation, not burns.

A statement from the public prosecutor's office confirmed that asphyxiation caused all of the 41 deaths as the corpses bore 'no other visible injuries'.

Another local witness, Sayed Tawfik, said that, as the inferno raged, some panicked people inside 'threw themselves out of windows to escape the fire'.

He pointed to a car parked on the street with a deep indentation which he said was 'left by a person who is now lying in the hospital with a broken arm and back'. Residents said bystanders braved flames and smoke to save children from the burning building.

AFP

Taliban mark first anniversary of return to power

Kabul, Afghanistan - Taliban fighters chanted victory slogans next to the US embassy in Kabul on Monday as they marked the first anniversary of their return to power in Afghanistan following a turbulent year that saw women's rights crushed and a humanitarian crisis worsen.

Exactly a year ago, the hard-line Islamists captured Kabul after a nationwide lightning offensive against government forces just as US-led troops were ending two decades of intervention in a conflict that cost tens of thousands of lives.

"We fulfilled the obligation of jihad and liberated our country," said Niamatullah Hekmat, a fighter who entered the capital on August 15 last year just hours after then-president Ashraf Ghani fled the country.

"It's the day of victory and happiness for the Afghan Muslims and people. It is the day of conquest and victory of the white flag," government



Taliban fighters and supporters ride in a convoy to celebrate their victory day in Kandahar on Monday (AFP)

spokesman Bilal Karimi said on Twitter. The chaotic withdrawal of foreign forces continued until August 31, with tens of thousands of people rushing to Kabul's airport hoping to be evacuated on any flight out of

Afghanistan.

Images of crowds storming the airport, climbing atop aircraft - and some clinging to a departing US military cargo plane as it rolled down the runway - aired on news bulletins around

the world.

Authorities have so far not announced any official celebration to mark the anniversary, but state television said it would have a special programme later on Monday to mark the event.

Many Taliban fighters gathered in Kabul's central Massoud Square, where they displayed the regime's white banners and performed a traditional dance, some holding weapons and others taking pictures on their mobile phones.

"We all are happy that we are celebrating our independence in front of the US embassy," Aminullah Sufi Omar told AFP.

Taliban fighters expressed happiness that their movement was now in power - even as aid agencies say that half the country's 38mn people face extreme poverty.

"The time when we entered Kabul, and when the Americans left, those were moments of joy," said Hekmat, now a member of the special forces guarding the presidential palace.

For many ordinary Afghans, however, the return of the Taliban has only increased hardships - especially for women.

AFP

France completes withdrawal from Mali

French forces have been supporting Mali against insurgents for nearly a decade

Paris, France - The last soldiers belonging to France's Barkhane operation in Mali have now left the African country, the French chiefs of staff said on Monday.

French forces have been supporting Mali against insurgents for nearly a decade, but President Emmanuel Macron decided to pull out after France and the Malian junta fell out in the wake of a military takeover.

"Today at 13H00 Paris time (1100 GMT) the final contingent of the Barkhane force still on Malian territory crossed the border between Mali and Niger," the statement said.

The army had met the 'major military logistics challenge' of the pull-out 'in an orderly and safe fashion', it added.

After ties ruptured between Paris and the junta that took power in Mali in August 2020, France began to withdraw its troops in February, as militant violence surged in the Sahel.

Friction developed over the junta's delays in restoring civilian



This file photo shows A C-130 Hercules aircraft flying by the Barkhane military camp in Timbuktu during the handover of the French camp to the Malian army on December 14, 2021 (AFP)

rule and escalated when Mali brought in Russian paramilitaries - personnel described by France as 'mercenaries' from the pro-Kremlin Wagner group.

'Prevented caliphate'

Macron on Monday congratulated the military on its nine years in Mali, saying it had 'pre-

vented the establishment of a territorial caliphate, and fought against terrorists that attack local populations and threaten Europe'. Most high-ranking members of the 'terrorist groups' had been 'neutralised', he said, adding that 59 French soldiers had died in Mali in total.

More than 2,000 civilians

have been killed in Mali, Niger and Burkina Faso since the start of the year, according to an AFP tally based on the findings of non-governmental organisation ACLED.

At its peak, France's Barkhane mission had 5,100 troops among five Sahel allies, all former French colonies - Burkina Faso, Chad,

Mali, Mauritania and Niger.

The forces have provided key support in air power, troop transport and reconnaissance. France has an air base in Niger's capital Niamey where it has deployed drones.

After the Malian pullout, the mission will have 'around 2,500' troops, Barkhane commander

General Laurent Michon said last month. The reconfigured mission will emphasise 'more cooperative operations', he said.

Frontline Niger

France will keep more than 1,000 men in Niger, where a tactical group will continue to work in partnership with the Nigerien

forces. Niger is a frontline state in the fight against militancy as the unstable region struggles with a string of military coups.

"The democratic regression in West Africa is extremely worrying," French Foreign Minister Catherine Colonna told French MPs ahead of a trip to the region in July. "However, in spite of these events (and) the withdrawal from Mali, France will continue to help West African armies fight terrorist groups."

Niger is one of the biggest recipients of French aid, receiving €143mn (US\$146mn) last year.

The two sides will sign agreements for a French loan of €50mn and a grant of €20mn.

Niger, the world's poorest country by the benchmark of the UN's Human Development Index, has been badly hit by the militant insurgency that began in northern Mali in 2012 and then swept to neighbouring countries.

Niger is facing insurgencies both on its western border with Mali and Burkina Faso and on its south-eastern frontier with Nigeria. More than a thousand troops will be deployed in Niger, providing air support and training, according to French sources.

French troops are also in Gabon, Ivory Coast and Senegal, as well as in the east of Africa, in Djibouti. Macron in June asked the government and military chiefs 'to rethink our overall presence on the African continent by the autumn'.

AFP

UK PM under fire for 2nd holiday in 2 weeks

London, UK - Outgoing Prime Minister Boris Johnson drew fresh criticism on Monday over his handling of multiple crises afflicting Britain, after taking a second summer holiday just weeks before he leaves office.

The main opposition Labour party accused Johnson, who is due to leave office on September 6, of having 'one big party' as many Britons struggle with a surging cost-of-living crisis.

With inflation at its highest rate in decades and the UK predicted to slump into recession, people across England are also struggling with the impact of a drought officially declared on Friday. But Johnson, who only returned to his Downing Street desk last week after enjoying a five-day belated honeymoon with wife Carrie in Slovenia, opted to take another break this week in Greece.

A Greek website posted



UK PM Boris Johnson (AFP)

footage of the British leader shopping at a supermarket in a coastal town near Athens, stocking up on items including food and wine.

"It's all just one big party for Boris Johnson while the country struggles to pay their bills," a spokesman for Labour said.

Confirming Johnson was on holiday this week, his spokesman told reporters he would 'obviously be kept informed on any urgent issues and make deci-

sions particularly those (related to) national security for example'. He noted deputy prime minister Dominic Raab could deputise for Johnson in any meetings, 'but as far as I'm aware there are no such meetings currently scheduled'.

Johnson will soon have a lot more free time after he hands power over to either Liz Truss or Rishi Sunak as the next Conservative leader in three weeks.

He was forced to announce his departure from office earlier this summer following dozens of resignations from his government over a slew of scandals.

Truss is currently the favourite to win a summer-long leadership contest set to be decided by approximately 200,000 Conservative party members. The result will be announced on September 5, with the victor to replace Johnson the following day.

AFP

Spain fights fierce fire fanned by winds

Madrid, Spain - Firefighters were battling strong winds on Monday as a huge forest fire burnt out of control in southeastern Spain while another blaze in the north was stabilised.

Both fires broke out late Saturday, with more than 350 firefighters engaged against the wildfire in the northern Aragon region that has so far devastated an area of 6,000 hectares forcing at least 1,500 people from their homes.

But as they managed to steady the Aragon blaze after successfully preventing it from entering a protected nature reserve, the wildfire in the south-eastern Valencia region continued to spread.

Hundreds of firefighters backed by 25 planes and helicopters were tackling the flames in the Vall de Ebo, 50km north of the coastal resort of Benidorm.

So far, more than 6,500 hectares of land have been destroyed and more than 1,200 fled from their homes, with firefight-



A Canadair firefighting plane drops water to put out a wildfire in the Moncayo Natural Park, near the village of Borja on Monday (AFP)

ing efforts complicated by strong winds in terrain that is difficult to access, the regional administration said.

"It is a very complex fire and very complicated terrain. We evacuated more than 1,000 people yesterday and last night, we had to evacuate 70 or 80 more homes," regional emergency chief Jose Maria Angel told Cadena SER radio saying the fire's perimeter was 'progressively increasing'.

In the Aragon blaze, officials had feared the flames could reach the Moncayo nature reserve some 80km west of Zaragoza but that had been successfully headed off, with official saying on Monday the situation was 'evolving favourably'.

With the winds expected to drop during the day after a blustery weekend, civil protection officials said they were hopeful the stabilisation of the fire could see the 1,500 evacuees to return home.

AFP

Iran denies link with Rushdie's attacker, blames writer

Tehran, Iran - Iran on Monday denied any link with the attacker of British author Salman Rushdie but blamed the writer himself for 'insulting' Islam in the novel *The Satanic Verses*.

"We categorically deny" any link with the attack and 'no one has the right to accuse the Islamic Republic of Iran', said foreign ministry spokesman Nasser Kanani in Tehran's first official reaction to Friday's stabbing.

"In this attack, we do not consider anyone other than Salman Rushdie and his supporters worthy of blame and even condemnation," he said at his weekly press conference in Tehran.

"By insulting the sacred matters of Islam and crossing the red lines of more than 1.5bn Muslims and all followers of the divine religions, Salman Rushdie has exposed himself to the anger and rage of the people."



UPMC Hamot Surgery Center in Erie, Pennsylvania, where Salman Rushdie is being treated (AFP)

Rushdie, 75, was left on a ventilator with multiple stab wounds after the attack at a literary event Friday in upstate New York.

But by Sunday he was off the ventilator and 'on the road to re-

covery', though with severe injuries, his agent Andrew Wylie said. The prize-winning writer had spent years under police protection after Iranian leaders in 1989 called for Rushdie's killing

over his portrayal of Islam and the Prophet Mohammed in the novel. The suspected assailant, 24-year-old Hadi Matar from New Jersey, was wrestled to the ground by staff and audience

members before being taken into police custody.

He was later arraigned in court and pleaded not guilty to attempted murder charges.

In 1989, Iran's then-supreme leader, Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini, issued a religious decree, or fatwa, ordering Muslims to kill Rushdie for 'the blasphemous nature' of *The Satanic Verses*. The fatwa was never officially lifted and translators of the novel were attacked.

Deeply inflammatory

The stabbing of Rushdie comes at a sensitive moment in Iran's talks with major powers on reviving a 2015 nuclear deal abandoned by the United States in 2018, in return for the re-lifting of crippling US sanctions.

The foreign ministry spokesman Kanani on Monday stressed the position that

Rushdie, not Iran, was to blame for the attack against him.

Commenting on the novel, Kanani said that 'the anger at that time at this inappropriate action was not limited to Iran and the Islamic Republic'.

"Millions of people in Arab, Islamic and non-Islamic countries reacted with anger.

"Condemning the action of the attacker on the one hand and absolving the action of the one who insults sacred and Islamic matters on the other is completely contradictory." More than 30 years after its publication, the book and its author remain deeply inflammatory in Iran.

Iranians at Tehran's book market, when asked by AFP on Saturday to comment on the attack, did not openly condemn the stabbing, which has sparked outrage in the West.

AFP

Armenian blast death toll rises to 6, 61 injured

Yerevan, Armenia - The death toll from an explosion at a bustling market in the Armenian capital Yerevan rose to six on Monday as search operations continued for people believed trapped under rubble.

Another 61 people were injured and 15 were missing after Sunday's blast that led to the collapse of a building at the Surmalu wholesale market, Armenia's Emergency Situations Minister Armen Pambukhchyan said.

Rescue operations were continuing 'very carefully' with people still believed to be trapped beneath the debris, he added.

AFP

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Activated charcoal has the ability to both prevent absorption of toxic substances and eliminate poisons that have been absorbed by the body. *It dislodges dirt and grime, eliminates outbreaks, and is suitable for sensitive skin, too*



If you've tried a variety of remedies to enhance your complexion, from natural poultices to fairness creams and never been really satisfied with the results, how about trying activated charcoal - a well-kept beauty secret that's now more than just common sense in the world of beauty.

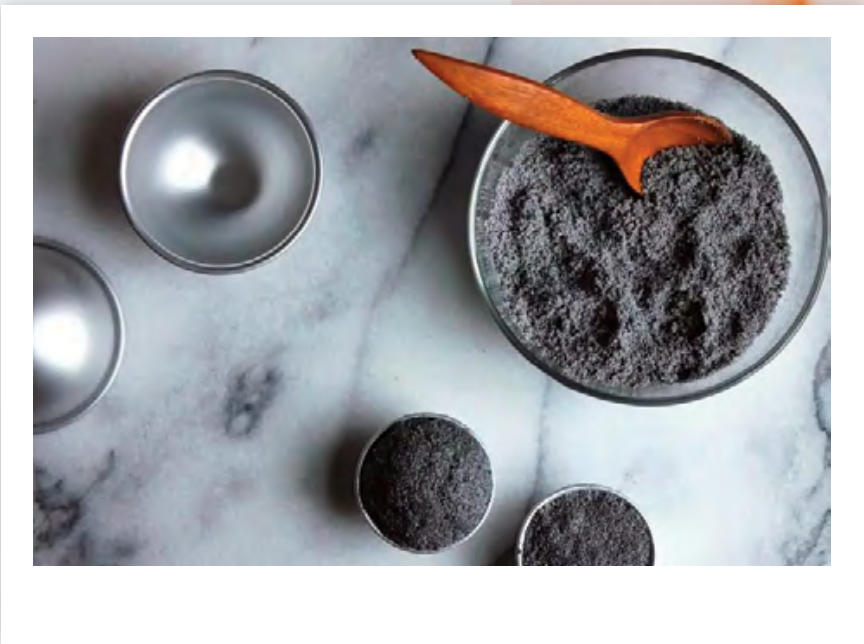
Activated charcoal is a byproduct that occurs when common charcoal is heated to high temperatures in the presence of oxygen. This process creates small pores that increase the surface area of the charcoal, and therefore, its absorption properties. Like standard charcoal, it can be made from coconut shells, bamboo, peat, coal, olive pits, sawdust, or other ingredients. Activated charcoal, however, is quite different from what you would use for an outdoor grill. Because of its wider available surface area for reactions, it is this charcoal variant that is often used as a main ingredient in many beauty products.

Essential medicine
According to studies, the extensive abilities of charcoal have been of great help to mankind, finding the origins of its use in ancient traditional medicine. Due to its ability to both prevent absorption of toxic substances and eliminate poison that has already been absorbed by the body, activated charcoal has been proven useful in treating both poisonings and drug overdoses. For this reason, activated charcoal can be found on the World Health Organization's List of Essential Medicines. Activated charcoal is also commonly used in detox regimens, teeth whitening and water filtration, among other things. Applied topically, activated charcoal does this same work for your skin that is done for your insides. Because of the incredible absorption properties that it has to offer, the beauty and cosmetic industry have made sure to include this ingredient

at every chance they get. Activated charcoal has also become the latest on-trend addition to most skin treatments from beauty brands across the board.

Cleanses and exfoliates
Bacteria, viruses, dirt, dead skin cells and other pollutants form a thin layer on your face daily. If these are left unattended to, they will build up and cause the skin to become dirty, greasy, oily, and irritated. Soaps with activated charcoal, however, have natural detoxifying and renewing effects on the skin. The charcoal absorbs impurities, toxins while its mildly coarse texture is also perfect for gently scrubbing your face, acting as an exfoliant.

Sensitive-skin friendly
Being a toxin absorber, activated charcoal soap is the most ideal option for people with sensitive skin. Activated charcoal is inherently inert, so its properties will not interfere with the intricate balance required



to maintain delicate skin. Being inert also means that it is incapable of triggering allergic reactions. It's a natural way to keep your face clean and maintain a healthy and glowing complexion.

Reduces facial pores
Every day we are exposed to an overwhelming number of environmental pollutants, many particles of which enter our pores and clog them shut. The dirt, dust and smoke in our environment then continues its onslaught, next settling on top of our clogged pores, irritating them and enlarging

them in appearance. When these impurities are not addressed, your complexion is altered and facial pores get enlarged.

Treats oily skin
We need oil to keep our skin soft and block out irritants. However, when our sebaceous glands produce too much oil it becomes an issue, leaving the skin feeling greasy, with clogged pores and acne. Also, once oily skin takes hold it can be hard to regulate, and sufferers try multiple products trying to find one that works for them. Activated charcoal is now the best solution.

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CITAYAM FASHION WEEK



CROSSWALK CATWALK

AT A JAKARTA CROSSWALK, INDONESIAN TEENS TAKE TO THE CATWALK TO PROMOTE LOCAL FASHION



A pedestrian crossing turned viral catwalk has become a site for Jakarta's young fashionistas to express themselves, while attracting the disapproval of police in the traffic-clogged Indonesian capital.

The informal downtown gathering has drawn sartorial adventurers from across the suburbs of the metropolis, including from Citayam, leading it to be dubbed 'Citayam Fashion Week'.

And with their poses and struts all being shared on TikTok and Instagram, some Citayam pioneers have found instant fame, earning modelling jobs, endorsements and an army of adoring fans.

"I feel like this is the place where I can express my style and create content. It is so much fun because there are so many peo-

ple and I can meet new friends here. I don't even want to go home," 18-year-old student Ricat Al Fendri told AFP.

He and some friends had taken a morning train to the central meeting spot, tucked between sleek skyscrapers and trendy cafes, to flaunt their outfits for the day.

Police, who previously moved to ban the use of the crosswalk as a runway, now regularly shout through a loudspeaker to ward the crowd off the street. But that does not deter girls who don wide-legged jeans and colourful sunglasses - and boys in leather jackets, stylish sneakers and faux-fur coats - from filming their struts for social media.

Some of the more enthusiastic teenagers have been caught sleeping on the area's sidewalks at night after missing the last train home.

"We have the right to hang

Marginalised teenagers used to resort to violence or illegal racing, now they choose fashion instead. This is a positive thing and I think it's beautiful

DEVIE RAHMAWATI

out here. It's a public space, and for me, it's a great stress reliever from school exams," said Al Fendri.

Copycat crowds

The outfits on display have begun to draw crowds, with



news of the phenomenon spreading by word of mouth in the megacity of 30 million people.

Saera Wulan Sari, a 15-year-old school dropout from North Jakarta who makes a living selling clams, comes to watch the

crowds with her friends.

"I am always amazed by other people's outfits, they are so much cooler than me and their clothes are very stylish," Sari said.

The gathering has been likened to a smaller version of

Tokyo's famed Harajuku fashion district. The movement has become so popular that copycat gatherings have spread elsewhere in Java - Indonesia's most populous island - in cities such as Semarang and Bandung.

And its viral fame has attracted attention from celebrities and influencers, as well as public officials including President Joko Widodo, who said young people should be able to express themselves creatively.

Stars of the movement

Local brands are now starting to take note and capitalise on the momentum by advertising their

products and endorsing the 'stars' of the movement, providing free clothes, shoes, and publicity.

"Teenagers are searching for their identity and they need recognition and validation. These teens saw that the quick and easy way to earn them is through likes and shares," Devie Rahmawati, a social affairs expert from the University of Indonesia told AFP.

"Marginalised teenagers used to resort to violence or illegal racing, now they choose fashion instead. This is a positive thing and I think it's beautiful."

For many, the booming street fashion scene has also become an affordable arena for fashionable experimentation, set against the backdrop of the city's most affluent district.

Teenagers from poor households who cannot afford designer outfits can join the gathering without judgement, Khairul Badmi, a 22-year-old aspiring actor, told AFP.

"To be a part of Citayam Fashion Week, you don't have to wear certain outfits or brands that empty your wallet," he said.

AFP



Lisowska and Ringer claim Euro marathon golds, Mayer bombs

Munich, Germany - Poland's Aleksandra Lisowska claimed the first title at the European championships, winning the women's marathon on the streets of Munich on Monday.

The 31-year-old Pole clocked 2hr 28min 36sec, Croatia's Matea Parlov Kostro taking silver, at 7sec, with Nienke Brinkman of the Netherlands claiming bronze, a further 10sec adrift.

The men's marathon title went the way of host nation Germany as Richard Ringer produced an extraordinarily well-judged final burst past Ethiopian-born Israeli Maru Teferi for gold.

Ringer dug deep in front of thousands of onlookers to time 2:10.21, with Teferi taking silver, 2sec behind, and another Ethiopian-born Israeli, Gashau Ayale, claiming bronze a further 6sec adrift.

The opening day of the athletics championships had opened in dramatic style as world decathlon champion Kevin Mayer's bid for a first European title came to a shuddering halt as he pulled up in the opening 100m.

World record holder Mayer, twice world champion and a two-time Olympic silver medallist, had warned that he would withdraw from the gruelling two-day event should he feel even the slightest pain.

And so it proved as the Frenchman took the foot off the pedal after 70 metres of the 100m, the first of 10 events at Munich's Olympic Stadium.

"I did a decathlon three weeks ago," he said in reference to his world title-winning effort in Eugene, Oregon, dubbing his bid to add the continental title to his



Poland's Aleksandra Lisowska wins the women's marathon at the European Athletics Championships in Munich on Monday (AFP)



Germany's Richard Ringer celebrates winning the men's marathon (AFP)

Kristof Milak storms to 100m butterfly gold in Euros

Rome, Italy - Hungary's Kristof Milak won the men's 100m butterfly in 50.33 seconds at the European Championships in Rome on Sunday.

The 22-year-old Olympic silver medallist pipped Switzerland's Noe Ponti in second place with Poland's Jakub Majerski in third.

Milak was in line to beat his own continental record of 49.68sec at the halfway stage before slowing down in the final 50m in the open-air pool at the Foro Italico complex.

"I wanted to win this, but with a better time. I always want to go under 50sec which I was unable to do today," Milak said.

"I want to improve all the time, I want to do 49s all the time," he added.

Elsewhere, France's Analia Pigree claimed the women's 50m backstroke in 27.27sec, almost 0.30sec slower than the world record with Italy's Silvia Scalia in second and the Netherlands' Maaik de Waard taking bronze.

"I'm totally happy, I'm in shock," 21-year-old Pigree said.

"It's my first long-course championships and my first

medal, and this gives me strong motivation to carry on," she added.

Britain's James Wilby claimed gold in the men's 200m breaststroke after starting in lane number eight in 2min 08.96s with Finland's Matti Mattson in second and home favourite Luca Pizzini in third.

Wilby, 28, also raced in the world championships earlier this summer and in the Commonwealth Games with the competitions having been rescheduled due to the Covid-19 pandemic.

In the women's 200m freestyle, the Netherlands' Marrit Steenbergen swam a personal best of 1min 56.36 to win with Wilby's compatriot and 2019 champion Freya Anderson taking silver and Germany's Isbael Marie Gose claiming bronze.

In the final race of the day in the Italian summer heat, hosts dominated the men's 4x100m freestyle final in a time of 3min 10.50.

Milak's Hungary were almost two seconds slower in second with Britain in third as France were disqualified for an illegal handover.

AFP



Hungary's Kristof Milak is on his way to gold in the men's 100m butterfly at the European Aquatics Championships in Rome (AFP)

haul as a "mission impossible".

"I pulled up before injury. I had a hundredth of a second to decide: carry on and I injure myself, or I stop. It's very hard.

"I gave myself every chance to have a great time again because, regardless of the fears and stress it could generate, on the track I have so much fun!

"I wanted to give myself a chance to get there, I didn't succeed, it doesn't matter: I'm world champion, my season has been a success, which was unexpected given my injuries."

The evening session at the Olympic Stadium sees medals up for grabs in both the men and women's shot put, as well as the women's 10,000m.

AFP

Masterful Carreno Busta triumphs in Montreal



Pablo Carreno Busta celebrates his victory against Hubert Hurkacz in the final of National Bank Open on Sunday

Montreal, Canada - Pablo Carreno Busta seized his first ATP Masters title Sunday, spoiling Hubert Hurkacz's perfect record in ATP finals with a Montreal Masters triumph.

The 23rd-ranked Spaniard beat eighth-seeded Hurkacz 3-6, 6-3, 6-3 to become the first unseeded winner in Canada in two decades. Carreno Busta notched his seventh ATP title, but his first in an elite Masters 1000 event in his first opportunity.

"It's an amazing feeling to be a Masters 1000 winner," Carreno Busta said. "It's the best title of my career for sure."

"It's not my best season this

year. I lost some matches that probably other seasons I didn't lose, but I just tried to continue believing in my team, in myself and in my game."

Carreno Busta became the first unseeded winner in Canada in two decades.

Poland's Hurkacz had been unbeaten in five finals, Carreno Busta putting the first blemish on that record in just over an hour and three quarters.

He survived 18 aces from Hurkacz to become the first Canadian champion ranked outside the Top 20 since number 43 Andrei Pavel in 2001 at Montreal.

Carreno Busta is the third

Spanish winner after five-time champion Rafael Nadal and Manuel Orantes in 1975.

The first two sets were mirror images with Hurkacz breaking in the sixth game on his way to winning the opener.

In the second Carreno Busta, who is projected to rise to 14th in the world, claimed a break in the second game and held his margin to leave the match hanging at one set each.

Two breaks in the final set sealed the win for Carreno Busta, who wrapped it up on his first match point as he broke Hurkacz for the win.

AFP



Simona Halep

Halep holds off Haddad Maia to win Toronto title

Toronto, Canada - Simona Halep kept control against unpredictable Beatriz Haddad Maia on Sunday, beating the Brazilian 6-3, 2-6, 6-3 to win a third WTA Masters 1000 title in Canada.

The former world number one from Romania added the trophy in Toronto to those she captured in Montreal in 2016 and 2018.

She needed two-and-a-quarter hours for the victory.

"Here there are many Romanians and they always come to support me. I'm really happy that I could win also here," said Halep, who was backed by chants of "Si-mo-na!" from her vocal fans throughout the match.

She shrugged of nine double-faults and broke Haddad Maia five times from 10 chances as she became the third player with at least nine WTA 1000 titles, after Serena Williams (13) and Victoria Azarenka (10).

AFP

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Benjamin Mendy arrives at Chester Crown Court on Monday (AFP)

Man City's Mendy was 'predator' pursuing women, rape trial hears

Chester, United Kingdom - An English court on Monday heard that Manchester City and France footballer Benjamin Mendy, on trial for rape and sexual assault, was a "predator" who callously pursued vulnerable women.

Mendy, 28, is on trial at Chester Crown Court in north-west England, facing eight counts of rape, one count of sexual assault and one count of attempted rape, relating to seven young women.

The Premier League star has pleaded not guilty to all the charges in a complex trial that is expected to last 15 weeks.

The jury trial opened last week and the prosecution began their opening arguments on Monday.

Prosecutor Timothy Cray told the court that Mendy and his co-defendant, Louis Saha Matturie, were "predators, who were prepared to commit serious sexual

offences" as they pursued women. Cray alleged that Mendy behaved with "callous indifference" to women who were "vulnerable, scared, isolated".

Matturie's job was "to find young women and to create the situations where those young women could be raped and sexually assaulted", he argued.

The men "turned the pursuit of women for sex into a game and if women got hurt or distressed, too bad," the lawyer said.

The alleged offences are said to have taken place between July 2012 and August last year.

Matturie, 40, has also pleaded not guilty to eight counts of rape and four counts of sexual assault.

None of the women said to have been assaulted can be named under English law, which also places restrictions on what can be reported about the case.

AFP

BEND IT LIKE DAVID!

David Alaba's free-kick goal hands Real Madrid winning start to title defence

Madrid, Spain - David Alaba scored with a stunning free-kick immediately after coming on as a substitute as reigning champions Real Madrid came from behind to beat Almeria 2-1 in their opening game of the season in La Liga on Sunday.

Carlo Ancelotti's side trailed to an early goal by Largie Ramazani away against their promoted opponents, but Lucas Vazquez equalised just after the hour mark.

The winner arrived with 15 minutes remaining at Almeria's Power Horse Stadium, as Alaba strode onto the pitch and curled a free-kick in off the upright after Luka Modric had been fouled just outside the box.

Real were made to work hard for the points against an Almeria side who won last season's second-tier title to return to La Liga after a seven-year absence.

"We had lots of shots on goal but once we got the first goal it made things much easier for us," said Ancelotti.

"I am happy with the way the game went. We were not spectacular but there were lots of things to take into account, like the game on Wednesday and the heat."

At one point it looked like Madrid might suffer a defeat in their opening league game of the season for the first time since 2008, with Ancelotti's decision to rotate his squad not initially paying off.



Real Madrid's David Alaba celebrates after scoring against Almeria in their Spanish league match on Sunday (AFP)

The Italian had made five changes to the line-up that started in Wednesday's 2-0 win over Eintracht Frankfurt in the UEFA Super Cup in Helsinki, when goals by Alaba and Karim Benzema gave the defending European champions the first silverware of the campaign.

Alaba and Modric were

among the players dropped to the bench, while close-season signings Antonio Rudiger and Aurelien Tchouameni were handed first competitive starts for their new club.

Rudiger caught out

Yet the game was just six minutes old when former Chelsea

defender Rudiger was caught out by a ball over the top and Ramazani ran through to beat Thibaut Courtois.

Ramazani, the 21-year-old Belgian winger who used to be on the books at Manchester United, ran off to celebrate in acrobatic fashion as Saudi-owned Almeria enjoyed a dream

start to their top-flight comeback.

Yet the hosts needed some inspired goalkeeping from Fernando Martinez to keep them ahead into half-time, with the standout save coming low to his left to deny Rudiger five minutes before the break.

AFP

Former European champs Benfica, PSV battle for Champions League group slots

Paris, France - The last stage of the Champions League qualifying marathon kicks off on Tuesday with three clubs who have already got their hands on the trophy eager to grab one of the last six group slots and the cheque that goes with it.

Benfica, who won the European Cup in 1961 and 1962 and have reached the final five times since then, face Dynamo Kyiv.

While Benfica coach Roger Schmidt worries whether Alex Grimaldo will recover from the dizzy spell that forced him off in Saturday's 1-0 league win at Casa Pia, the Ukrainians made clear they have weightier concerns.

The game will be in Lodz, where Dynamo are in exile following Russia's invasion of Ukraine.

The two clubs met in the group stage last season. They drew 0-0 in Kyiv in the opening round, Dynamo's only point. The Portuguese side won 2-0 at home in the last round to edge Barcelona for second in the



PSV Eindhoven's coach Ruud van Nistelrooy (AFP)

group.

Returning to the group stage this year offers a hefty reward.

Each club is guaranteed 15.64 million euros (\$16.04 million) for taking part. They can also collect 2.8m euros for every group stage victory and 930,000 euros for a draw. Teams that miss out, drop to the Europa League group stage

where they are guaranteed 3.63m euros.

PSV Eindhoven, who needed an extra-time goal to eliminate Monaco in the previous round, face Rangers.

Ruud van Nistelrooy, who replaced Schmidt as coach at the 1988 European champions, faces old international team-mate and

club adversary Giovanni van Bronckhorst, in Glasgow on Tuesday.

The two coaches were long-time Netherlands team-mates.

They played on opposite sides the last time the clubs met in the Champions League.

Rangers, with Van Bronckhorst in midfield, won home and away in the 1999 group stage. Van Nistelrooy scored PSV's goal at Ibrox as Rangers won 4-1.

The third former champions in action are 1991 winners Red Star Belgrade, who visit Macabbi Haifa on Wednesday.

The Israelis surged through the last round by scoring three times in the last 30 minutes for an eye-catching 4-0 second-leg victory at Olympiakos.

Red Star coach Dejan Stankovic, a Champions League winner playing for Inter Milan, told Serbian media he was impressed calling Macabbi "a quality team in every area. I couldn't fault with them."

AFP



Lo Celso joins Villarreal on loan

London, United Kingdom - Tottenham midfielder Giovanni Lo Celso has joined Spanish side Villarreal on loan for the rest of the season.

Lo Celso spent the second half of last season on loan at Villarreal and has returned after failing to win a place in Antonio Conte's side at the start of the new English Premier League campaign.

Tottenham have inserted a break clause into the loan deal that allows them to listen to permanent offers for Lo Celso if they want to sell the 26-year-old in January.

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Spur of the moment!

Tuchel insists no hard feelings after Conte clash which resulted in both getting sent off as Kane snatches draw for Spurs at Chelsea

London, United Kingdom - Harry Kane snatched a 96th minute equaliser to salvage a 2-2 draw for Tottenham from a feisty London derby against Chelsea on Sunday.

Both managers Antonio Conte and Thomas Tuchel were sent-off after the full-time whistle for their second physical altercation of the match.

Chelsea looked set to get a new era at Stamford Bridge off to the best possible start as they twice led through Kalidou Koulibaly and Reece James.

Tottenham were well off the level required if they are to live up to hopes of challenging Manchester City and Liverpool for the title, but showed the newfound character instilled by Conte to fight back for a point.

The Italian and Tuchel were both booked in the aftermath of Pierre-Emile Hojbjerg's first equaliser.

Tempers then flared again during a handshake after Kane nodded in with virtually the last action of the game.



Chelsea's manager Thomas Tuchel (L) and his Tottenham counterpart Antonio Conte clash after their English Premier League match at Stamford Bridge on Sunday (AFP)

"It is the Premier League and why we love it. It is emotional coaches on the sidelines," said Tuchel.

"There's no hard feelings. I feel like it was a fair tackle from him and a fair tackle from me.

"We did not insult each other, we did not hit each other, we were fighting for our teams and from my side there's absolutely

We did not insult each other, we did not hit each other, we were fighting for our teams and from my side there's absolutely no hard feelings

THOMAS TUCHEL

no hard feelings. I'm surprised that we both got a red card for that."

"I think it (the red card) was not necessary. But a lot of things were not necessary today so it is

another poor decision from the referee."

Tottenham have still only won once at Stamford Bridge in 32 years in the league, but Conte will be delighted to escape with a share of the spoils against his former club.

"There is a difference between Chelsea and Tottenham but we are here to reduce this

gap," said the Italian. "Last season we lost three times, this time we drew so it's a little step forward."

New Chelsea chairman Todd Boehly was welcomed by a huge banner from the Chelsea support and saw an early return on the near £170 million (\$206 million) investment in the transfer market since he sanctioned a

£2.5 billion takeover to buy the club from Roman Abramovich.

Chelsea outthought, outplayed and outmuscled Spurs for the first 45 minutes.

Two of their new signings combined for the opening goal as it was from Marc Cucurella's corner that Koulibaly found space to volley home.

Spurs strike back

Conte again resisted the temptation to start any of his six new signings, but it was not until the introduction of Richarlison just before the hour mark and a switch of formation that Tottenham began to threaten.

Kane had a glorious chance to level when he uncharacteristically dragged wide with only Edouard Mendy to beat.

Spurs did level 22 minutes from time in controversial fashion to light the spark between the two managers.

Kai Havertz looked to be clearly fouled by Rodrigo Bentancur before Tottenham broke forward and the ball eventually fell to Hojbjerg to fire low and hard past Mendy.

Tuchel reacted furiously to the decision and Conte's overzealous celebration.

The German fought fire with fire as he sprinted down the touchline to celebrate when James thrashed home Raheem Sterling's pass to restore Chelsea's lead 13 minutes from time.

However, Kane had the final say as he flicked in Ivan Perisic's corner deep into added time.

AFP

'Simply extraordinary' Musiala scores again as Bayern Munich beat Wolfsburg in Bundesliga

Berlin, Germany - Bayern Munich chief executive Oliver Kahn lauded 19-year-old forward Jamal Musiala's performance as "simply extraordinary" in Sunday's 2-0 win over Wolfsburg.

Musiala, who declared himself eligible for Germany in 2021 despite playing for England as a junior, scored against Wolfsburg and now has four goals in three competitive matches to start the season.

"Currently, simply extraordinary," said Kahn when asked to sum-up the teenager's performance.

Speaking after the match, Musiala said simply "it's going well for us, we play good football" while Bayern coach Julian Nagelsmann described him as "an extremely humble player".

"He always wants to learn and improve, he's well brought up. I've already said that I don't have much to do," said Nagelsmann.

"If he performs like today he's going to score a few more



Bayern Munich's Jamal Musiala gets away from Wolfsburg's Ridle Baku during their Bundesliga match in Munich on Sunday (AFP)

goals." Bayern have scored 13 goals and conceded just once in three competitive fixtures to start the season.

The 2-0 scoreline flattered Wolfsburg, with Munich going close to scoring on several occasions.

Senegalese striker Sadio Mane had two goals stuck off for offside.

Wolfsburg roared out of the blocks and almost forced a Bayern own goal when Canadian

Alphonso Davies hit the post from an attempted clearance.

The home side gradually grew into the ascendancy and Mane looked to have put Bayern 1-0 up in the 19th minute when he latched onto a bullet pass from

Serge Gnabry to convert from one metre out, but VAR ruled the goal out for offside.

Bayern then turned up the heat on the visitors, going close several times before Musiala got his team's first, guiding a strike past keeper Koen Casteels from the edge of the penalty area despite losing his footing just seconds before.

The goal was Musiala's 14th in the Bundesliga, seeing him overtake Bayern legend and former club president Uli Hoeness as the teenager with the most goals in Bayern colours.

Thomas Mueller then scored a trademark goal in the 44th minute, sticking a skinny leg out to deflect a shot from Joshua Kimmich into the back of the net.

Mane went close again in the 69th minute, but dragged a diving header just wide.

The Senegalese got the ball across the line just two minutes later, but had it chalked off for offside.

AFP



Roma's Bryan Cristante celebrates his goal against Salernitana

Roma squeeze past Salernitana, Immobile fires Lazio to Bologna win

Milan, Italy - Roma began their Serie A campaign with a hard-fought 1-0 win at Salernitana on Sunday, while Ciro Immobile shot Lazio to a comeback 2-1 win over Bologna.

Paulo Dybala and Georginio Wijnaldum both made their league debuts for Jose Mourinho's Roma but it was an older hand in Bryan Cristante who decided the match in the 33rd minute.

Italy international Cristante claimed the points with a drive from the edge of the area which took at least one deflection before nestling in the bottom corner.

Roma's margin of victory would have been larger had they capitalised on a series of chances, in particular in the first half.

"I would have been happy if we'd won 3-0 or 4-0 but what I liked was that even though we didn't score as many as we should have we had enough maturity to control the game"

AFP

Mourinho told reporters.

Dybala was unlucky not to be on target on an impressive Roma debut in which he immediately struck up an understanding with Nicolo Zaniolo and Tammy Abraham.

The Argentina forward struck the post in the dying seconds of the opening half after a winding run from Zaniolo, who could have easily had two of his own before the break in a exciting display from the 23-year-old.

Zaniolo, long considered one of Italy's brightest young talents, has had to battle back from two serious knee injuries and despite reported interest from Juventus and Tottenham looks committed to Roma.

It was far from one-way traffic at the Stadio Arechi as Salernitana, who completed a miracle escape from the drop to stay in Serie A, squeezed Roma back towards their own goal.

AFP

Alexis Sanchez makes Marseille debut in Brest draw

Paris, France - Alexis Sanchez came off the bench to make his debut for Marseille as his new club drew 1-1 with Brest in Ligue 1 on Sunday.

The Chilean forward was named among the substitutes by coach Igor Tudor for the game in Brittany, four days after signing a one-year contract.

He was introduced at the start of the second half but did not have a major influence on the game as Marseille failed to hold onto the lead given to them in the first half at the Stade Francis-Le Ble by Nuno Tavares.

Portuguese left-back Tavares



Marseille's Alexis Sanchez (C) controls the ball during their Ligue 1 match against Brest on Sunday (AFP)

scored his second goal in as many games since joining Marseille on loan from Arsenal to put his new side ahead shortly before half-time.

He converted a cross from Jonathan Clauss, only for Pierre Lees-Melou to equalise for Brest with a superb strike just after the hour mark.

Former Barcelona and Arsenal star Sanchez, who has won 143 caps for Chile, joined Marseille as a free agent after terminating his contract with Inter Milan.

He started just nine games for Inter last season, but Marseille

are hoping his experience will prove invaluable in the Champions League group stage.

Tudor's side have four points from a possible six in Ligue 1, with Sunday's draw following a 4-1 win over Reims last week.

Reigning champions Paris Saint-Germain are already two points clear at the top of the table after just two games.

They followed a 5-0 win at Clermont on the opening weekend by beating Montpellier 5-2 on Saturday, with Neymar scoring twice and Kylian Mbappe once.

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