

Ukraine crisis to affect agri sector, inflation

Russia's invasion of Ukraine and the steep spike in oil prices in recent days are expected to trigger higher food prices

Our Correspondent
Muscat

The Russian invasion of Ukraine and the resultant high oil prices will see inflation grow as well as affect the agriculture sector in Oman, according to experts.

The situation is expected to lead to a spike in prices of products and food commodities - especially wheat - some minerals and agricultural raw materials in coming months.

International wheat prices have already soared to record highs, overtaking levels seen during the food crisis of 2007-08. Almost a third of the world's wheat exports are from Russia and Ukraine. Since Russia's invasion of its neighbour, ports in the Black Sea have come to a



standstill.

Speaking to *Muscat Daily*, Saed Abdullah Rashid al Kharusi, chairman of Omani Agriculture Association, said, "The prices of food products had begun to rise with the rise in oil prices before the political crisis between

Ukraine and Russia. The countries that produce crops are importers of oil, and with the increase in oil prices, they have converted part of their strategic crops such as wheat, corn, soy and barley into bio fuel to operate industrial machines, and consequently, the supply of these crops decreased, which led to an increase in prices, in general."

He added that "there is no doubt" that Oman will be affected, like other countries, by the rise in wheat prices. "The Russia-Ukraine war will spike

wheat prices and raise these to record levels because the two countries are among the world's biggest exporters of major commodities, including wheat," said Kharusi.

In his estimation, the situation will lead to an increase in prices of other food commodities, too, as a result of the high price of transport, shipping and insurance. "The price of agricultural raw materials such as seeds, equipment and pesticides, will also rise. All of these factors will be reflected in the prices of foodstuff in local markets."

Kharusi said that as an association, they demand the government have a clear direction on increasing wheat cultivation. "The government should also give subsidies to farmers to encourage them to grow wheat and help achieve self-sufficiency," he said.

Hussain al Farsi, a banker, too, expects the situation to lead to an increase in prices of food and imported goods, and thus a rise in inflation, affecting the purchasing power of families directly. "We must rationalise our consumption and raise awareness among members of society on the impending situation."

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Sayyid Badr delivers HM's message to Tanzanian President



Zanzibar - His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik has sent a written message to President Samia Suluhu Hassan of the United Republic of Tanzania, dealing with the bilateral relations between the two countries and their peoples.

The message was handed over by Sayyid Badr Hamad al Busaidi, Foreign Minister, when he was received by the Tanzanian President at the Presidential Palace in Zanzibar on Tuesday.

Sayyid Badr conveyed greetings of His Majesty the Sultan to President Samia, along with His Majesty's best wishes of permanent health and happiness to her. His Majesty also wished the people of Tanzania continuous progress and prosperity.

On her turn, President Samia asked Sayyid Badr to convey her greetings and best wishes to His Majesty the Sultan and the Omani people.

The two sides underlined the

advanced relations between the two countries and expressed their keenness on the continuation of cooperation in various spheres which serve the peoples of the two countries. They also discussed regional and international developments of common interest.

The meeting was attended by Liberata Mulumula, Minister for Foreign Affairs and East African Cooperation, and the delegation accompanying Sayyid Badr and several Tanzanian officials.

Sayyid Badr also held a session of talks with Minister Liberata.

"Good discussions today with my colleague Hon Liberata Mulumula. We exchanged views to take Oman and Tanzania relations further. We discussed regional and international issues, among them global peace and security, climate change, and health challenges," Sayyid Badr tweeted.

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9-YEAR OLD TURNS FAMILY HOME INTO MUSEUM

A family home in the wilayat of Al Qabil, North Sharqiyah, has been converted into a museum by a nine-year old to display artefacts and pottery dating back more than 90 years.

Arwa Mohammed al Maliki showcases more than a hundred artefacts reflecting the wilayat of Al Qabil and Oman's rich traditions in her family home museum.

Bait Muzna Museum, named after the mother of the Late Sultan Qaboos, has become a tourist and cultural destination in Al Qabil, she informed.

Among the exhibits are books, coins, kitchen utensils, handicrafts, manuscripts, silverware, bracelets, pottery and mandoos boxes. "I have always been passionate about preserving the heritage of the country," she said.

Her efforts have been hailed by many, including the Palestinian ambassador in Oman. She was also allocated space by Children First Association in its store in the just concluded Muscat International Book Fair to display some of the museum's pieces.



Over RO1mn saved through water waste detection

Muscat - Oman Water and Wastewater Services Company saved RO1,030,234 in 2021 through the use of water waste detection techniques, a strategic approach adopted by the company to achieve its annual goals.

The assessment was based on data and statistics collected by specialists, whose efforts also led to the recalibration of meters of major consumers, and modification and repair of defective meters or replacement of the same with electronic meters.

Saleh Mohammed al Kindi, director of operations and maintenance in the wilayat of Muttrah, said that the water waste detection project targets technical operation of networks to help improve functioning, cut down commercial waste and update information in the invoicing system.

"The process involves field surveys and visits of technical teams to areas where high water waste is detected, so that the common causes could be studied and analysed," Kindi informed.

The project was carried out in Area 1 of the wilayat of Amerat, the industrial estate of Wadi Kabir in the wilayat of Muttrah, and the areas of Al Bustan and Qantab in the wilayat of Muscat.

Currently, field studies are being conducted in Wadi Adai (Muttrah), Al Nahda City (Amerat) and Al Shahbari, Al Ainain, Afa and Al Dhahir in Quriyat.

ONA

Current school curricula lack focus on future technologies

Our Correspondent
Muscat

A study on the reality of application of future technologies and entrepreneurial education in schools in Oman has revealed that overall there is a lack of understanding and focus for such programmes. The study also found that the current curricula are not up to date with global trends in the field.

Titled 'Reality of pioneering education and future technology



Most of future technologies covered in schools are presented to students in a theoretical manner

YASIR AL SHUHUMI

in school education in the Sultanate of Oman', the study was conducted by Yasir al Shuhumi from the Ministry of Education. It won the Ministry of Higher Edu-

cation, Research and Innovation's National Research Award in the Education and Human Resources category for Young Researchers.

Shuhumi's study revealed that

there is no clear formal application of future technologies and entrepreneurship courses in schools. "Only 28 per cent of future technologies are covered in school curricula, and most of these are presented to students in a theoretical manner. This does not help students in acquiring the necessary skills in these technologies for entrepreneurship."

Shuhumi further noted that the study showed the absence of organised and planned projects or activities for school principals,

educational activity specialists and career guidance specialists in the field of future technologies. "Even vocational guidance centres in schools do not have any current programme dedicated to training and mentoring students in the future technology fields."

Shuhumi recommended the Ministry of Education adopts a clear strategy and vision to include entrepreneurship in the field of future technologies in school education, develop infor-

mation technology curricula in line with global trends, and integrate educational activities and vocational guidance programmes to train students in technologies that are not covered by information technology curricula.

Additionally, strengthening cooperation with public and private institutions specialised in the field of technology will support and enhance education in the field of future technologies through training and competitions.

Incubators to be set up for SMEs at Sohar University

Our Correspondent
Muscat

To stimulate the small and medium enterprises sector, the Authority for Small and Medium Enterprises Development (ASMED) has signed four contracts to set up incubators for SMEs engaged in manufacturing activities at Sohar University.

The authority said that the 12-month programme aims to create institutions with strong technical capacity in the field of manufacturing. Four SMEs - Oman Therm, Cimat Global, Al Barwah and Recycling Services - will be incubated at Sohar University and provided support.

"The programme aims to provide a stimulating environment, administrative and technical



(Image for illustrative purpose)

support, training and marketing consultation, and help develop manufacturing plans and select equipment. The programme will also support the establishment of a system for knowledge transfer and protect intellectual prop-

erty," an ASMED official said.

Based on the agreement, incubating companies will have multiple means of support to develop their startup projects and operate sustainably following economic feasibility studies. The agreement includes mentoring programmes, administrative and technical support, marketing strategies and provision of office space.

The agreement is in line with ASMED's efforts to launch three incubators and business centres in the special economic zones and free zones in Duqm, Sohar and Salalah to chart the future of entrepreneurship in the logistics sector and in activities of the free and economic zones of the sultanate.

Additionally, to support

Omani craftsmen, ASMED is holding a handicrafts exhibition at Royal Opera House Muscat from March 8 to 10.

The exhibition aims to promote handicraft products of 20 SMEs, presenting their products in creative and innovative ways. The exhibition includes products made of silver, wood, copper and palm fronds.

According to the latest data, there were more than 24,000 craftsmen in the sultanate at the end of 2020, of which more than 88 per cent were women.

The total number of SMEs registered with ASMED in 2022 was 66,769 at the end of January, compared to 49,337 SMEs during the same period of 2021, accounting for a growth of 35.3 per cent.



(Supplied photo)

Oxy Oman sponsors national platform for freelancers

Muscat - Oxy Oman recently signed an agreement with AWJ Innovation (Sustainable Technologies & Innovation Development - STID), to develop a national freelancer platform, which is designed to provide opportunities for freelancers and fresh graduates in the market to present their skills and capabilities to companies registered on the platform.

The signing event was held at AWJ Innovation's headquarters. Saif al Busaidi, VP of admin, human resources and corporate social responsibility at Oxy Oman, represented the company at the agreement signing, while Dr Yousuf al Balushi, CEO of AWJ, represented AWJ Innovation.

The freelancer platform will enable clients to get expertise and services from skilled and

qualified registered workers. In addition, the platform will showcase freelancers' profiles to employers and facilitate employment opportunities.

The platform will be developed to advance the goals of Oxy Oman's exclusively sponsored .NXT training programme, which continues in its second year to target fresh graduates with training in frontier technologies and entrepreneurship, through workshops and online technical courses. The platform will also service .NXT programme graduates to find future career opportunities and have access to the job market.

"We are proud to sponsor the development of a national freelancer system, as a unique service to connect employers with fresh graduates and jobseekers,

and to display their skills and capabilities," said Stephen Kelly, president and general manager at Oxy Oman.

"The freelancer platform builds on Oxy's commitment to investing in national capacity development and prioritising the training of fresh graduates for entry into the job market, as we continue to support jobseekers with internship programmes, on-the-job training and other specialised programmes such as .NXT," he added.

This sponsorship is under the umbrella of strategic partnerships and continuous collaboration with key stakeholders, and is part of Oxy Oman's endeavour and long-term commitment to support programmes to enhance economic growth and sustainable development.

Ukraine crisis to affect agri sector, inflation

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Analysing the situation, Nasser Saeed Salem, an economy analyst and businessman, said the rise in oil prices to record levels will be in the interest of the sultanate's public finances as the current prices exceed the price estimated in the state's general budget.

"This will accelerate programmes to achieve financial sustainability, control deficit, and even record a budget surplus. But this will also lead to an increase in shipping costs and inflationary waves throughout the world, including Oman."

Salem suggested the government works to strengthen the food security system in the country by increasing investment in meat and poultry projects, dairy and milk product processing, setting up animal feed factories and allocating land for agricultural and livestock investment, besides maximising use of water resources.

"I hope the government continues with these projects and develops specialised programmes to meet any exceptional circumstances in the future," Salem said.

Elaborating further on ways to

avert a food shortage, Kharusi said Oman should also look for alternatives to wheat. "We already have alternative crops such as al dukhnan (a type of grain) that is grown in the country. It is known to be of better quality than wheat and has been planted by Omanis for ages. We hope to expand its cultivation to larger areas to produce bread of high nutritional value."

He also informed of the need to raise awareness on rationalising consumption, supporting the Omani products and reducing imports to be prepared for any exceptional and unexpected crisis.



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OPINION

SALEH MIRI, MUSCAT DAILY COLUMNIST, IS AN ARCHITECT WHO CAME TO OMAN IN THE EARLY 1980S

In 1945 after World War II, the United Nations organisation was created and five members - China, France, Russia, the UK and the US - who had fought Germany became the permanent Security Council members with veto rights. They had been selected because they were united against the German regime and quite powerful then.

Seventy-seven years later, we still have the same members, although the world and the population of the world have totally changed. The UK and France have veto powers, representing a population of around 60mn each. At the same time, on the same planet, we have Indonesia with 275mn people, Nigeria with 211mn people, and Brazil with 195mn people, obliged to obey the decision of those members. When one of them does not agree, the decision cannot be implemented as we have witnessed with Russia's veto in the Ukrainian conflict.

In 2022, we as the habi-



WAKE UP CALL

tants of this unique planet are not able to take common decisions to protect our world and transfer it in a better form to the future generations, similarly to what our ancestors have done for us. This is a shame. When are we going to grow up and realise that it took thousand years for our planet to be what it is today? We have obligations to the future generations. Nobody in any position has the right to dictate his wishes on the rest of the world, without the ap-

proval of the majority of the world's inhabitants.

The objective of the United Nations has to be modified and all countries need to be represented according to the size of their population. Ideally, we would need one single government to run our world and not 240 governments who see the interests of those who have voted for them. The world has changed and we need to adapt ourselves to these changes. The United Nations needs to have a "united" decision on how to run this planet. It should represent what the majority of the world's population want and not be dictated by few countries that wish to dictate their wishes.

At a time when technology has taken over our habits and telecommunications are available anywhere, why did we lose our most important value, which is generosity? We can do wonders with our computers and our mobile phones but we cannot stop a ruthless war in a country?

The views and opinions expressed in this column are solely those of the author and do not necessarily represent those of Muscat Daily or Apex Press & Publishing



Relief for expats as India opens commercial flights

Our Correspondent
Muscat

The government of India has decided to resume scheduled commercial international flights to and from India, hence revoking Air Bubble arrangements from March 27, 2022, according to Jyotiraditya M Scindia, Union Minister for Civil Aviation of India.

"After deliberations with stakeholders and keeping in view the decline in the COVID-19 caseload, we have decided to resume international travel from March 27 onwards. Air Bubble arrangements will stand revoked

thereafter. With this step, I am confident the sector will reach new heights!" tweeted Scindia.

Indian expats in Oman have been eagerly looking forward to the reopening of commercial flights by India, which were discontinued since the beginning of the pandemic that resulted in a limited number of flights between India and other countries, including Oman.

Jamal Sadiq, a sales executive, was relieved to finally hear the news. "International flights were first suspended in March 2020 by India after a nationwide lockdown was imposed to tackle the first wave of the coronavirus

pandemic. Since then, each month the government would announce further extension of the ban. This caused immense trouble to most expats, as airfares skyrocketed across destinations in India."

Surya Muduli, general manager, Royal Crown Hotel, said, "The authorities should have allowed private airline operators to restart their services which were grounded for the last two years. The worst affected were the working class and students who had to face high airfares and had to indefinitely postpone their travels."

An official of Majan Interna-

tional Agencies Travel & Tourism, said, "We were expecting the Air Bubble to be removed soon as it has been a serious cause of trouble for travellers and mainly for the ones who travel in emergencies."

Mohammed Adil, director of operations at First Link Consulting, said, "We are approaching the end of the pandemic. We have been hit hard economically over the past two years due to COVID-19. It was high time the authorities had a rethink on the decision. Hopefully, the pressure on airfares would ease and we all can think of flying frequently to our homes again."

Asian currencies fall, expats see best time to remit cash

Our Correspondent
Muscat

With South Asian currencies depreciating heavily in the pass few days against the US dollar, the remittance sector sees this as a good opportunity for expatriates to send money back home. There is already an increase in footfall in exchange houses in Muscat, according to officials from the sector.

One US dollar fetched 76.98 Indian rupees (INR) on Tuesday, while the sharpest fall was witnessed in the Sri Lankan rupee (US\$1=202.74). With the depreciation, RO1 was equal to INR200, 466 Pakistani rupees, 527 Sri Lankan rupees and 223 Bangladeshi taka.

According to K J Prabhu, general manager, Mustafa Sultan Exchange, INR hit a lifetime low on Tuesday after the previous record low reported during the COVID-19 pandemic. "If crude prices cross US\$130 and stay there, then the INR can even touch US\$78.50. Other than India, South Asian currencies of Pakistan,

Philippines,

Bangladesh, Nepal etc have also depreciated against the US dollar. The Sri Lankan rupee had the sharpest drop," he said.

Talking about the opportunity for expats to send money back home, an official from Global Money Exchange said, "We have seen an increase in the number of customers in our exchange since yesterday and we expect more today and in next few days. There are many people who hold money for a long time and wait for the right time. We are seeing those people - mostly from India



The last few months have been difficult. But somehow I managed to save a good amount. I was waiting for this chance. I finally managed to send a big amount

ABBAS BUKHARI

Pakistan and Bangladesh - come and remit now."

Prabhu felt that the overall situation could turnout badly for the economies of these countries, "although expatriates living abroad quite naturally find this scenario favourable to remit money home."

"Many find this also a good time to plan investments in reliable assets back home. The remittance volume for us has been on an upward trend compared to the previous two months of 2022. The long term impacts to the economies depend on the

longevity and resolution of the current geopolitical tension."

Raqiz Kazi, an Indian expatriate working as a marketing head, said, "This is indeed an unlucky time for me; with mounting prices and salary delays and cuts, it is next to impossible for me to save and send money home."

For Abbas Bukhari, a Pakistani national working as an accountant, this is the right time. "The last few months have been difficult. But somehow I managed to save a good amount. I was waiting for this chance. I finally managed to send a big amount."

Otaxi launches female taxi service

Our Correspondent
Muscat

Otaxi officially launched its female taxi service under the auspices of H H Sayyida Hujaija bint Jaifer al Said, chairperson, Association for the Welfare of Handicapped Children, on Tuesday.

Speaking to *Muscat Daily*, Harith al Maqbali, CEO of Otaxi, said, "We have launched the female taxi service with 25 female drivers. The service in Muscat will be followed by the rest of the governorates soon."

He added, "We chose 25 Omani women who will drive nine cars in the first stage. They are well trained to work in all conditions. Working hours will start from 6am to 10pm in the pilot phase, but it will be around the clock in the near future. The decision is very important because it will create many jobs."

According to Maqbali, the second phase will include the wilayats of Sohar and Salalah, before rolling out across the country. "We will increase female drivers to reach 200 before the end of this year."

The company currently has



over 1,800 active drivers spread across all major cities, including Muscat, Sur, Nizwa, Sohar and Salalah.

Maqbali also revealed that the company has been permitted to offer its ride-hailing services in private cars in Masirah

and Halaniyat Islands. "We intend to launch services there in the second quarter of 2022."

Sri Lankan PM meets Omani business delegation

Colombo, Sri Lanka - Mahinda Rajapaksa, Prime Minister of the Democratic Socialist Republic of Sri Lanka, met with the Omani business delegation, headed by Eng Ridha Juma al Saleh, Chairman of the board of directors of Oman Chamber of Commerce and Industry (OCCI), on Tuesday.

The meeting discussed the bilateral relations binding Oman and Sri Lanka and the means of enhancing the volume of trade exchange between the two countries. The meeting also reviewed the available investment opportunities in the two countries.

The meeting was attended by H E Sheikh Juma Hamdan al Malik al Shehhi, Ambassador of Oman to Sri Lanka, Ajith Nivard



Cabraal, governor of the Central Bank of Sri Lanka, and H E Omar Lebbe Ameer Ajwad, Ambassador of Sri Lanka to Oman.

Earlier in the day, Saleh and the delegation were received by Dr Bandula Gunawardena, Min-

ister of Trade in Sri Lanka.

Further, Basil Rajapaksa, Sri Lanka's Minister of Finance, received a number of members of the Omani business delegation.

The meeting discussed means of enhancing the financial and in-

vestment cooperation between the two countries.

The Omani delegation also met with Viraj Dayaratne, chairman of the Securities and Exchange Commission of Sri Lanka. ONA

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US and Saudi firms to build air separation unit at JSIS Sohar

New unit to increase the capacity of gaseous oxygen and nitrogen by 50%

Our Correspondent
Muscat

Air Products, a Pennsylvania-headquartered company that specialises in industrial gases, together with their regional partner Saudi Arabian Refrigerant Gases Company of Saudi Arabia (SARGAS), on Monday announced that it has signed an agreement to build a new air separation unit at Jindal Shaded Iron & Steel (JSIS) facility in Sohar.

The new unit will produce a total of over 400 T/D of oxygen and nitrogen to the facility, according to a press statement.

The project, undertaken by Ajwaa Gases LLC - a joint venture between Air Products and SARGAS - represents the third air separation unit installed by Air Products at JSIS facility in Sohar. The addition of the new air separation unit will increase capacity of gaseous oxygen and gaseous nitrogen by 50 per cent; together with an increased production capability of liquid oxygen and liquid nitrogen, in Oman.

Hamid Sabzikari, vice president and general manager, Air Products Industrial Gases Middle East, Egypt and Turkey, said, "Air Products is delighted to expand our offerings at Jindal Shaded



The signing of the third air separation unit demonstrates our commitment to supporting growing customers in Oman

HAMID SABZIKARI

Iron & Steel and strengthen our association further. The successful signing of the third air separa-

tion unit demonstrates our commitment to supporting growing customers in Oman and the

Middle East region. I am proud of the teams who have shown exceptional resilience and dedication for this project during the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic and exhibits our core values of safety, speed, simplicity, and self-confidence."

Sanjay Anand, chief operating officer and plant head at JSIS, said, "We are happy to continue

our association with Air Products and congratulate the team for their commitment to safety, and reliability for supply of gases. These gases will be used in our steel melt shop and direct reduced iron (DRI) plant to improve the efficiency and production."

Khalid Hashim, general manager of SARGAS, said, "We have had a great association with Jindal Shaded Iron & Steel over the years and this new air separation unit fortifies the relationship further."

Strategically located in the industrial port of Sohar, Jindal Shaded is the largest privately-owned integrated steel producer in the GCC. This integrated steel plant has a current annual steel production capacity of 2.4mn tonnes and regarded as the preferred and trusted supplier of high-quality long steel products to clients in leading and rapidly growing economies of Oman, the United Arab Emirates and Saudi Arabia. Beyond the GCC, JSIS supplies steel products to clients in the far-flung parts of the globe, including six continents.

Air Products provides essential industrial gases, related equipment and applications expertise to customers in dozens of industries.



(Muscat Daily)

Insurance companies must include natural disaster coverage: CMA

Our Correspondent
Muscat

The Capital Market Authority (CMA) has instructed all insurance companies to include the benefit of natural calamities coverage at the conclusion or renewal of insurance policies related to properties, homes and establishments as the coverage against natural calamities is essential.

The CMA in a press statement on Tuesday instructed all insurance companies to immediately modify their insurance policies to include the coverage for natural disasters in the policies or their renewal.

The move comes as the CMA

noticed that some insurance companies are removing the coverage against the perils of natural calamities from the insurance policies of properties, homes and establishments.

As a result of the coverage removal, the property owners are deprived of an essential protection from the insured perils, which is an express violation of the insurance companies law and the regulation, CMA emphasised.

The Capital Market Authority urges all insurance companies in the sultanate to seek the consent of the CMA before making any modification in the insurance policies to avoid legal consequences.



المها للسيراميك ش.م.ع.
Al Maha Ceramics SAOG

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Invitation for the Annual Ordinary General Meeting of Shareholders

The Board of Directors of Al Maha Ceramics S.A.O.G (the "Company") is pleased to invite the shareholders to attend the Annual Ordinary General Meeting to be held at 3:00 pm on Wednesday, 23rd of March 2022, at the Crown Plaza Hotel, Muscat and via the electronic platform for general meetings which may be accessed through Muscat Clearing and Depository's website (www.mcd.gov.om). In the event that the quorum to convene the Annual General Meeting is not complete, the second general meeting will be convened at 3:00 pm on Sunday, 27th of March 2022, to discuss the following agenda:

1. To consider and approve the Board of Directors' Report on the activities of the Company and its financial status for the financial year ended on 31 December 2021.
2. To consider and approve the Board of Directors' Report on the organization and management of the Company for the financial year ended on 31 December 2021.
3. To consider the Auditor's Report on the financial statements of the Company for the financial year ended on 31 December 2021.
4. To consider and approve the proposal to distribute cash dividends (by the date of AGM) for the financial year ended on 31 December 2021 at the rate of 30% of the share capital (30 Baizas for each share).
5. To approve the sitting fees paid to the Board of Directors and Board Sub-Committees for the financial year ended on 31 December 2021 and to determine their sitting fees for the financial year ending 31 December 2022.
6. To consider and approve the proposal to distribute remuneration fees of an amount of RO 94,500/- (Omani Rial Ninety Four Thousand Five Hundred Only) for the year ended on 31 December 2021.
7. To notify the general assembly of the related party transactions entered into by the Company during the financial year ended on 31 December 2021.
8. To brief the general assembly of the contributions made to support community services during the financial year ended on 31 December 2021.
9. To consider and approve the proposal to allocate RO 15,000 (Omani Rial Fifteen Thousand) to support community services for the financial year ending on 31 December 2022.
10. To elect a member of the Board of Directors of the Company to fill the vacant seat (comprising shareholders or non-shareholders). Anyone who wishes to stand as a candidate shall complete the form prepared for this purpose and submit it to the Company at least five (5) days prior to the Annual General Meeting on Thursday, 17 March 2022. Forms submitted after this date will not be accepted.
11. To approve the criteria for the Performance Appraisal of the Board of Directors of the Company.
12. To appoint a third party for appraising the performance of the Board of Directors for the financial year ending 31 December 2022 and determine their fees.
13. To appoint the external auditor for the Company for the financial year ending 31 December 2022 and determine their fees.

Pursuant to the Articles of Association of the Company and the Rules for Convening General Meetings of Public Joint Stock Companies via Electronic Means issued by the Capital Market Authority, we would like to bring your attention to the following:

- a) Only juristic persons shall have the right to appoint a proxy to attend the Annual Ordinary General Meeting and vote on their behalf via electronic means, provided that this natural person has an investor number in the Muscat Clearing and Depository Company.
- b) Voting on any of the items on the agenda shall commence no more than three days before the date of the general meeting and until the voting process ends on the day of the meeting. If a shareholder's balance is increased or decreased, the voting process will be cancelled, and the shareholder must cast his vote again on the day of the general meeting.

Further to the above and pursuant to the instructions of the Capital Market Authority regarding the rules and procedures for convening the general meetings of public joint stock companies, shareholders or their representatives who are present at the physical location of the general meeting must register their attendance and vote on the decisions of the general meeting through Muscat Clearing and Depository Company SAOC electronic platform.

If you have any queries, please call Mr. Mohamed Juma on phone No. 99531178

Chairman

Auditors

Legal Advisor

شركة صناعة مواد البناء (ش.م.ع.ع)
Construction Materials Industries (S.A.O.G)



P.O. Box: 1791, Ruwi, Postal Code 112, Sultanate of Oman, Tel: 26752247/26752287, Fax: 26750867

Announcement of the invitation to attend the Extraordinary General Meeting and the Annual Ordinary General Meeting:

The Board of Directors of Construction Materials Industries SAOG, has the honor to invite the honorable shareholders to attend the Extraordinary General Meeting and the Annual ordinary General Meeting of the company, which are scheduled to be held at 3:00 pm on Sunday 20/03/2022 in the Global Financial Investments Holding company's hall at Ruwi, Muscat, and through the electronic platform for holding general assemblies, which you can access through the **Muscat Clearing and Depository Company website (www.mcd.gov.om)**. In the event that the quorum is not met, the Extraordinary General Meeting and/or the Annual General Meeting will be held again, at 3:00 pm on Thursday, 24/03/2022 in the hall of the Global Financial Investments Holding Co. - Ruwi - Muscat, and through the above-mentioned electronic platform to discuss the following agenda:-

Extraordinary General Meeting Items:-

- 1- Studying the proposal to reduce the issued company's capital from 8,500,000 Omani riyals to 6,250,000 Omani riyals (according to the attached explanatory bulletin)
- 2- Approval of authorizing the company's board of directors or any person duly authorized by the board to take all necessary measures to implement the reduction process
- 3- Amending Article (5) of the Company's Articles of Association, after registering the new capital with the Registrar (according to the attachment)

Annual Ordinary General Meeting Items:-

- 1- Studying the Board of Directors' report on the company's activity and financial position during the financial year ended on 31/12/2021 and approve it
- 2- Studying the report of measuring the performance of the Board of Directors for the financial year ending on 31/12/2021 and approve it (according to the attachment)
- 3- Studying and approving the company's organization and management report for the financial year ending on 31/12/2021.
- 4- Studying the auditor's report and approving the balance sheet and profit and loss account for the financial year ending on 31/12/2021
- 5- Ratification of the allowance for attending the meetings of the Board of Directors and the sub-committees that were received by the members of the Board of Directors for the financial year ending 31/12/2021, and determining the amount of the allowance for the financial year that will end on 31/12/2022 (according to the annex)
- 6- Informing the Assembly of the donations that were disbursed to support community services during the financial year ending on 12/31/2021 (according to the attachment)
- 7- To discuss and approve the proposed allocation of RO 5000 to fulfill the Company's Corporate Social responsibilities for the financial year ending on 31/12/2022
- 8- Appointing an Auditor for the financial year ending on 31/12/2022 and determining their fees In accordance with the company's articles of association and the regulations for holding general assembly's using modern technology means issued by the authority, we would like to point out

Your attention to the following:-

- (A) Only a legal person has the right to authorize a natural person to attend the general assembly meeting and vote on its behalf through technical means provided that this natural person has an investor number in the Muscat Clearing and Depository Company.
- (B) Voting on any of the items on the agenda begins no more than three days before the date of the assembly Until the end of the voting process on the day of the meeting, and in case the shareholder's balance is changed by an increase or decrease, the process will be cancelled Voting, and he must vote again on the day of the assembly meeting.

In case of any inquiries, please contact Mr. Ahmed Odeh at: 26752287.

Chairman Board of Directors,

Independent Auditor,

Legal Adviser,

**FREE
CLASSIFIED
LISTING**

Muscat Daily now offers free classified listings for individuals in the following categories:
Situations Wanted/Accommodation Wanted or Available/Sale of Household Items/ Car for Sale or Wanted/Matrimonial Alliances (Word limit is 35)Please email your listing to dailyclassifieds@apexmedia.co.om or call 99251604

MSX rises 0.5%; volumes down

Our Correspondent
Muscat

benchmark index of the Muscat Stock Exchange (MSX) rose 0.5 per cent to close at 4,223.04 points on Tuesday.

While turnover rose 14.34 per cent to RO7.7mn, volumes fell 4.43 per cent to 34.07mn shares.

While Financial index rose 0.73 per cent, Industrial and Services indices fell 0.28 per cent and 0.22 per cent, respectively. The MSX Shariah Index closed down by 0.48 per cent at 493.1 points.

Market breadth remained positive as 16 companies closed up, while 11 companies closed down. The rest 23 traded stocks closed flat for the day.

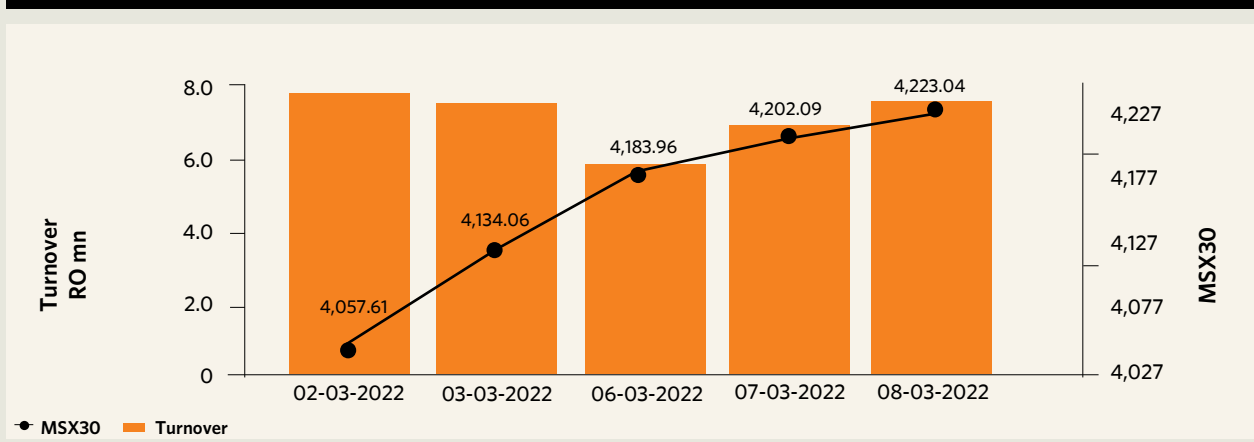
Top gainers were Construction Materials Industries (7.32 per cent), Dhofar



Generating Co (3.77 per cent), Muscat Gases (3.23 per cent) and HSBC Bank Oman (2.89 per cent).

Top losers were Al Maha Ceramics (-3.1 per cent), Renaissance Services (-308 per cent), Phoenix Power (-2.08 per cent), Galfar Engineering & Contracting (-1.37 per cent).

MSX INDEX AND TURNOVER OF FIVE TRADING DAYS



Solar investment competition in Saudi Arabia to be 'fierce'

Dubai, UAE - Data from leading renewable energy company, Finergreen, has revealed the solar photovoltaic (PV) investment opportunities and potential in Saudi Arabia, Oman, Jordan, and Egypt, as part of a report produced by SolarPower Europe.

The discussion took place at Middle East Energy as part of the Intersolar Conference, which continues at the Dubai World Trade Centre today, a press release said.

Antonie Poussard, manager partner, Finergreen, revealed that with the ambitious renewable energy targets, increased market liberalisation, and the enormous solar potential, the solar PV sector in the Middle East is set to boom over the next five years.

Speaking at the Intersolar Conference on Tuesday, Pous-

sard said, "Saudi Arabia plans to increase its installed PV capacity by adding 9.5GW by 2023. Achieving this goal will result from policymakers reshaping the legal framework governing foreign investments and renewable energy. This, coupled with continued market liberalisation, is how Saudi Arabia will unlock its full solar potential."

According to the report, Saudi Arabia's National Renewable Energy Programme (NREP) will be the mechanism for delivering the country's Vision 2030, which forecasts energy consumption to increase threefold between 2016 and 2030.

"Thanks to the Ministry of Energy's aim to increase the share of natural gas and renewable energy sources by approximately 50 per cent by 2030, there are

ample opportunities for private sector investment and public sector partnerships which have already attracted the attention of the likes of Acwa Power, EDF, Masdar and JinkoSolar," added Poussard.

The report also highlighted Jordan's plans to decrease its dependency on fossil fuel imports with an ambitious renewable energy target with electricity generation from renewables set to reach 31 per cent by 2030.

Oman has also resumed its ambitious development plan for renewables after successfully securing financing for its first utility-scale solar plant, which will be essential for the success of the country's energy transition.

Middle East Energy concludes tomorrow.

Budget carrier Flydubai back in the black

Dubai, UAE - The Emirati budget carrier flydubai on Monday announced it is back in the black, posting US\$229mn in profits in 2021, after heavy losses suffered by the world's COVID-hit airline industry.

Flydubai, which is owned by Dubai like the giant airline Emirates, carried 5.6mn passengers last year, a 76 per cent leap from 2020 when it lost US\$186mn at the height of the coronavirus pandemic.

Dubai, a tourism and trading hub, has since October been hosting the delayed Expo 2020 world fair, which ends



on March 31.

In July 2020 Dubai became one of the world's first locations to reopen to foreign travel. Dubai airport last year re-

mained the world's busiest in terms of international passengers, numbering about 29.1mn in 2021. AFP

Moderna to build vaccine facility in Africa

Nairobi, Kenya - US vaccine maker Moderna announced on Monday that it would build its first mRNA jab-manufacturing facility in Africa after signing an agreement with Kenya's government to produce up to 500mn doses a year.

The company said it expected to invest US\$500mn in the new facility, which will produce vaccines for the continent of 1.3bn people whose population has been largely shut out of access to COVID-19 jabs.

"Battling the COVID-19 pandemic over the last two years has provided a reminder of the work that must be done to ensure global health equity. Moderna is committed to being a part of the solution," the company's CEO Stephane Bancel said in a statement.

Moderna said it hopes to use the facility to supply doses of its COVID-19 jab to African nations as early as next year, in a bid to boost vaccine coverage on the



world's least immunised continent.

"Moderna's investment in Kenya will help advance equitable global vaccine access and is emblematic of the structural developments that will enable Africa to become an engine of sustainable global growth," Kenya's President Uhuru Kenyatta said.

More than a year after the world's first COVID-19 shot was

administered and two years into the pandemic itself, just 12.7 per cent of Africans have been fully immunised, according to the Africa Centres for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC).

The pandemic has exposed Africa's huge dependence on imported vaccines and its tech weakness compared with Europe, China and the US.

Moderna's announcement follows a decision by the World

Health Organization (WHO) to create a global mRNA vaccine hub in South Africa last year, with Kenya among six African nations selected to be the first recipients of technology aimed at enabling local manufacturers to make jabs.

WHO chief Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus has repeatedly called for equitable access to vaccines in order to beat the pandemic, and attacked wealthy nations for hogging doses.

Currently only 1 per cent of the vaccines used in Africa are produced on the continent.

African - and other developing nations are pushing at the World Trade Organization for a temporary intellectual property waiver to allow the generic production of COVID-19 vaccines and treatments.

Europe has opposed the move, arguing that the first priority was to build up production capacity in poorer countries.

AFP

Walk or drive slower: Europe adapts to soaring fuel prices

Paris, France - The conflict in Ukraine has sent fuel prices soaring in Europe, hitting people's pocketbooks, prompting some to walk more and forcing taxis to change their routines.

With prices rising above €2 per litre at the pump, Paris taxi driver Aziz Brahmi said he now avoids driving around to look for passengers.

"The only thing I can do is to limit driving in an empty car," said Brahmi (38), who usually travels around 200km per day. "We wait for clients to come to us and we no longer look for them," he said near Paris' ring road.

London cabbies have adopted the same strategy.

"Prices have impacted me since I need to make more stops in order to cover the costs," said Gary Bollister, who has driven the iconic black cabs for 22 years.

"I have to pay the bills so I need to work harder. On top of all that there are a lot of roadworks



The price of petrol and diesel fuels are displayed on a board outside a petrol station in Storrington, southern England on March 2 (AFP)

going on in the city making driving times even longer, which means I use more fuel," he said.

The price of a barrel of oil flirted with its US\$140 record on Monday after the United States said it was in talks with allies about banning Russian oil.

Colin, a 55-year-old courier in the British capital, said he spent US\$26 per day to fill up his car, almost double the usual cost.

"I'd rather walk than keep losing money," he said.

Swedish drivers face the highest prices in Europe, with diesel there exceeding €2.31 per litre at many stations.

The average price of petrol in Germany is at around €1.83 per litre.

Marius Scheidemann, a 23-year-old landscaper, needs his car for some errands.

His solution: Drive at no more than 100km per hour on the highway to consume less fuel. AFP

NATIONAL REAL ESTATE DEVELOPMENT AND INVESTMENTS CO. S.A.O.G			
P.O. Box 84, Muscat-100, Sultanate of Oman			
Phone: 24702133/24701454, Fax: 24703826, C.R.No.1/02478/7			
Director's Report for the year ended 31 December 2021			
Respected shareholders, On behalf of the Board of Directors, I take the opportunity to welcome you to our 47th Annual General Meeting to present before you the financial result of National Real Estate Development and Investments Company SAOG ("the Company") for the year ended 31 December 2021.			
Operational Result – 2021 During the year 2021, the Company has recorded net profit of RO 1,022,043 (2020: Loss: RO 1,907,813).			
During the year 2021, net asset per share is RO 4.166 as at 31st Dec 2020 compared to RO 3.586 as at 31st Dec 2020.			
Implementation of the restructuring plan & Financial Performance.			
The Management has made its best efforts under the circumstances to minimize cost and maximize shareholders value.			
The following table provides some key financial details:			
	2021 RO	2020 RO	% change
Total Assets	8,620,517	7,403,471	16.44
Total non-current liabilities	1,273,908	1,079,434	18.02
Total Current liabilities	4,213	3,684	14.36
Net Assets per Share	4.166	3.586	16.17
Future Plans:			
• To sell the land at Al Khuwair Phase 2, plot No:2070 and get reasonable price based on current market.			
• To find a suitable investor to build a commercial and residential building.			
Finally, on behalf of the shareholders and the Board I wish to express our sincere gratitude and appreciation to His Majesty Sultan Haitham Bin Tareq Bin Taimour for his wise leadership and guidance.			
Thanking you with our best wishes.			
Chairman			
NOTE: The complete accounts will be sent by mail to any shareholder on request either in Arabic or English within 7 days of receipt of the request.			
STATEMENT OF FINANCIAL POSITION AS AT 31 DECEMBER 2021			
	2021 RO	2020 RO (Restated)	
ASSETS			
Non-current assets	-	-	
Investment in an associate	-	-	
Investment property	8,500,000	7,200,000	
Total non-current assets	8,500,000	7,200,000	
Current assets			
Trade and other receivables	1,606	66,442	
Other financial asset at amortised cost	100,000	125,000	
Cash and bank balances	18,911	12,029	
Total current assets	120,517	203,471	
Total assets	8,620,517	7,403,471	
EQUITY AND LIABILITIES			
Equity			
Share capital	1,762,500	1,762,500	
Legal reserve	587,500	507,274	
Revaluation reserve	7,637,254	7,637,254	
Accumulated losses	(2,644,858)	(3,586,679)	
Total equity	7,342,396	6,320,353	
Liabilities			
Non-current liabilities	-	-	
Deferred tax liability	1,272,751	1,077,751	
Employees' end of service benefits	1,157	1,683	
Total non-current liabilities	1,273,908	1,079,434	
Current liabilities			
Trade and other payables	4,213	3,684	
Total current liabilities	4,213	3,684	
Total liabilities	1,278,121	1,083,118	
Total equity and liabilities	8,620,517	7,403,471	
Net assets per share	4.166	3.586	
STATEMENT OF COMPREHENSIVE INCOME FOR THE YEAR ENDED 31 DECEMBER 2021			
	2021 RO	2020 RO (Restated)	
Other income	2,115	4,945	
Administrative expenses	(21,549)	(21,752)	
Business development expenses	(1,410)	(1,270)	
Operating loss	(20,844)	(18,077)	
Share of loss on equity accounted investments	-	(422)	
Allowance for impairment of investment in an associate	-	(182,632)	
Allowance for impairment of due from related party	-	(6,682)	
Allowance for impairment of advance	(62,113)	-	
Change in fair value of investment property	1,300,000	(2,000,000)	
Profit/(loss) for the year	1,217,043	(2,207,813)	
Income tax	(195,000)	(300,000)	
Total comprehensive income/(loss) for the year	1,022,043	(1,907,813)	
Basic and diluted profit/(loss) per share	0.580	(1.082)	

Nissan wins Oman's Most Trusted Brand award

Nissan has been conferred with Oman's Most Trusted Brand 2021 in the crossover category at a recently held ceremony at held at Al Bustan Palace, a Ritz-Carlton Hotel.

Nissan, considered a premium and trusted name in the market, is the only brand to have won the recognition for five times in the automobile category. Oman's Most Trusted Brand Awards is a confirmation of the public trust in a brand and the respected honour is presented to the most trusted brands in the country by Apex Media, a press release said.

The award is based on the results of a month-long extensive survey which was open to general public for voting. This year, the survey attracted more than 700,000 votes for 45 categories.

Nissan's crossover range which includes Kicks, X-Trail and Pathfinder stand out for their superior performance, fuel efficiency, great mileage, wide range of innovation, reliability and versatility.

Stating that the award underlines the trust and confidence consumers have the brand, a



senior official of Nissan Oman, from the house of Suhail Bahwan Automobiles (SBA), said, "We are delighted and honoured to be chosen as Oman's most trusted brand. Being counted among Oman's Most Trusted Brands is

a compliment and we thank our customers for this. Nissan Oman will remain committed to guaranteeing top customer satisfaction and high-level service for our customers. Over the years, Nissan has won the confidence and

hearts of millions of customers for its quality, reliability, performance, design, technical innovation and safety elements."

Powered by the next generation technologies, the Nissan brand provides the best of

worlds in terms of efficiency and performance when it comes to its crossovers. Proudly wearing the Nissan badge, all the crossovers are a living proof of Nissan's commitment to providing fuel-efficient cars.



Al Mouj partners with Thawani Pay

An agreement was signed between Al Mouj Muscat and Thawani Pay, Oman's leading digital payment company, which makes it possible for residents to start paying for services by smartphone.

This announcement is the latest strategic partnership where digital innovation is transforming life at the sultanate's leading lifestyle destination and is creating opportunities for enterprise, a press release said.

A local start-up success story, Thawani Pay is the sultanate's first non-banking financial company (NFBC) to be granted a Payment Service Provider (PSP) license by the Central Bank of Oman (CBO).

The Fintech payment app can now be used by Al Mouj Muscat residents to securely and easily pay for services such as service charges and cooling charges. Through the application, they will be able to navigate and find Al Mouj Muscat's tab and be able to enter their residential details to settle their outstanding payments.

Nasser bin Masoud al Sheibani, CEO, Al Mouj, said, "The agreement demonstrates our commitment to SMEs, which are critical to the successful diversification of our economy and so it is extremely rewarding to be able to support Thawani Pay by providing them with a platform for increased visibility."

Zoho Platform provides low-code solutions

Zoho Corporation, a leading global technology company, announced the latest version of its low-code offering - Zoho Creator Platform, an all-in-one solution that bridges the gap between business users and IT teams by providing a comprehensive low-code solution-building experience regardless of technical know-how. The launch was held at the Sheraton Hotel Oman on Thursday.

Ali Shabdar, MENA regional director of Zoho Corporation, said, "The bulk of low-code application development, from customisation to automation, can be handled today by users with moderate technical knowledge. Where we see a gap, especially for the mid-market and



enterprise, is between building and deployment. Outside of Zoho's Creator Platform, few, if any, low-code solutions on the market allow business users or IT to engineer tools while simultaneously enabling IT teams to manage ongoing challenges of security, compliance, integra-

tion, and governance. Combining these two disciplines and user profiles is where we see the unique value of the Creator Platform."

The Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region continues to witness a soaring demand for business software

development as companies strive to automate operations. But they are limited with either scarce IT and software developers skills or high costs for implementation and long development cycle, forcing some organizations to outsource talents from abroad.

"During the pandemic we saw a massive increase in the our services from Oman and we are sure that our services shall benefit the SMEs efficiently. The new Creator Platform will help organisations in the MENA become self-sufficient in developing applications and enable teams within organisations to work alongside one another to create solutions that cater to their digital needs," he said.



Muscat Stock Exchange celebrates Women's Day

The Muscat Stock Exchange (MSX) celebrated International Women's Day, on March 8, under the theme is 'Gender equality today for a sustainable tomorrow', along with about 112 financial markets around the world which agreed to ring the bell for the start of this day's trading to celebrate the occasion simultaneously.

Stock exchanges and securities authorities worldwide, in co-operation with International Finance Corporation (IFC), Sustainable Stock Exchanges initiative (SSE), UN Global Compact, UN Women, and the World Fed-

eration of Exchanges (WFE), took part in this observance, a press release said.

The bell-ringing activities aim to raise awareness in the areas of women's economic empowerment and opportunities to support gender equality in the various sectors with the aim of improving sustainability practices and encouraging participants to commit to promoting gender equality in markets, in order to achieve the sustainable development goals related to the principles of women's empowerment.

Representatives from the

Muscat Stock Exchange, the Capital Market Authority, the Ministry of Social Development, the Authority of Small and Medium Enterprises Development and the Muscat Clearing and Depository Company rang the bell at the start of the trading session in the exchange at 10 am.

Haitham bin Salem al Salmi, CEO of the Muscat Stock Exchange, said "This year's celebration comes as our first step in our initiatives related to tripartite governance, diversity and inclusion, seeking to achieve its principles in the stock exchange first and then the listed companies."



OTC awards winners of chef contest

Oman Tourism College (OTC) celebrated the awards ceremony of the 4th edition of 'Oman Chef', a culinary competition supported by OMRAN Group in collaboration with the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), that aims to encourage and promote the consumption of Omani food products to enhance the local products' efficiency and competitiveness.

The awards ceremony was organised under the auspices of Eng Mohammed bin Salim al Busaidi, chairman of OMRAN Group, at the OTC campus in

Muscat, in the presence of a number of officials from OMRAN Group and the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), managers of hotels and resorts of OMRAN Group, in addition to other officials from government institutions, and the participants of the competition from various tourism institutions and the hospitality sector in the sultanate.

The Oman Chef competition received a remarkable turnout and active participation of 89 chefs from 32 institutions, including the hotels and resorts

owned by OMRAN Group, and other hospitality organisations operating in the sultanate. Aimed at promoting Omani products and ingredients, the competition showcased true Omani hospitality, and inspired contestants to demonstrate their culinary creativity using a variety of national ingredients, a press release said.

Busaidi said, "The Oman Chef competition is part of OMRAN Group initiatives aiming at increasing In-Country Value by supporting the Omani food industries and empowering the workers in the tourism sector."

Ooredoo makes travel more exciting

Ooredoo's popular Nojoom programme now includes the Majan Lounge at Muscat International Airports, a press release said.

With travel getting easier all the time, Nojoom members can enjoy a more memorable trip by redeeming their points through the award-winning app and getting luxury VIP access to the lounge while waiting for their flights, without any charge. Those who haven't signed up yet can start earning points after just three months.

Always looking for new ways to add value to subscribers digital lives, Ooredoo continues to connect with their customers' favourite outlets and service partners in Oman through the Nojoom loyalty programme. These partnerships are a great opportunity to reward loyal customers as the company aims to deliver better quality, more benefits and amazing value.

By simply making calls, sending SMSs, paying Ooredoo bills or using any of the telecoms services, subscribers can earn Nojoom points that can be used at popular outlets and service partners in Oman.

Kairali club organises blood camp

A blood donation camp was jointly organised by Kairali Arts Club, Ruwi and Wadi Kabir groups. The event, held on March 1 at an Omani school on Ruwi Street, was inaugurated by Dr Bashir, an internist at Badr Al Sama Hospital.

Balakrishnan, Kairali general secretary, Santosh Kumar, Indian Social Club Oman Kerala Wing convener, Kairali leaders Reju Marakath, Reji Shahul, Kunhambu, and Khalid al Hashmi, the school director, addressed the gathering presided over by Nishanth.

The organisers said Kairali was very happy to be able to run such a camp in collaboration with the Bausher Blood Bank at a time when there is a shortage of blood in the current COVID-19 situation. Hundreds of people, in-



cluding locals, were able to donate blood at the camp.

The social welfare event was

supported by the Unimoni Exchange, a leading financial institution in Oman.

INFINITI QX55 SUV debuts in Oman

INFINITI Oman has launched the all-new QX55 SUV featuring bold, stylish and tech-savvy look and innovative new technologies befitting its luxury status.

From a provocative design perspective, the Infiniti QX55 is the spiritual successor to brand's iconic FX series. Now available in Infiniti Oman showroom, the vehicle's striking roofline and unapologetic shape are in tune with equally bold buyers, a press release said.

A senior spokesperson at Infiniti Oman said, "We are pleased to announce the launch of Infiniti QX55 in Oman. The provocative all-new QX55 returns to the soul of Infiniti — bringing the legendary crossover coupe shape of the FX back to life. The Infiniti QX55 has an entirely new shape with more stylish details and a modernised interior."

The QX55 inserts Infiniti back into a category it helped to create with a refined design language, and sporty styling. The signature double-arch grille is complemented by a stunning, origami-inspired mesh pattern that delivers visual depth and showcases modern Japanese-inspired artistry. Flanked by standard LED headlights that mimic the human eye, the QX55 announces its arrival in style.

The elegant and flowing lines of the all-new model reach from the hood, over the front fenders, across the doors, and over the rear wheels. Twenty-inch wheels are standard on all QX55 models,



els, which fill the wheel arches and assert the SUV's dynamic presence.

The rear of the QX55 accentuates the subtlety of the automaker's design and interpretation of Japanese minimalism by coupling an uncluttered liftgate with handsome, understated technology to deliver a lasting impression. Digital 'piano key' taillights combine 45 separate LEDs in a single housing to create an elegant light signature. The Infiniti logo on the tailgate is similarly advanced and houses the power liftgate release, which further frees the rear end from clutter.

Under the hood of the QX55 is Infiniti's award-winning and innovative Variable Compression Turbo four-cylinder engine that outputs 268hp and delivers enhanced efficiency or on-demand power, based on the driver's needs. That power is shifted through a confident Continuously Variable Transmission with manual shift mode and delivered to Infiniti's Intelligent All-Wheel Drive system, which is standard on all QX55 models.

The all-new QX55 has a suite of intelligent safety technology, like Predictive Forward Collision Warning, Lane Departure Warning and Prevention System, Forward Emergency Braking with Pedestrian Detection to Blind Spot Warning and Intervention and Backup Collision Intervention. The QX55 will be available in three categories - Luxe, Essential and Sensory.

شركة زجاج مجان ش.م.ع.ع.
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Tel: +968 26751654/5/6, Fax: +968 26751658, E-mail: info@majanglass.com

Extraordinary General Meeting And Ordinary Annual General Meeting Agenda Meeting

The Board of Directors of Majan Glass Company SAOG ("Company") is pleased to invite the shareholders to attend the company's extraordinary general meeting and the ordinary annual general meeting to be held at 5:00 pm on Tuesday, 22/03/2022, at Grand Millennium Muscat, diamond meeting room and via the electronic platform to hold general meetings which can be accessed through the website of the Muscat Clearing and Depository Company (www.mcd.gov.om), if the quorum of the meeting is not completed, a second meetings will be held at 5:00 pm on Monday 28/03/2022, at Grand Millennium Muscat, diamond meeting room, and via the mentioned electronic platform, to discuss the following agenda:

First: the Extraordinary general meeting

- To consider the company's financial situation and to approved the measures according to the proposal of the Board of Directors (as per the explanatory note).

Second: the annual ordinary general meeting

- To consider and approve the Report of the Board of Directors for the financial year ended on 31/12/2021.
- To consider and approve the Company's Corporate Governance Report for the financial year ended on 31/12/2021.
- To consider the auditor's report and approve the balance sheet and profit and loss account for the financial year ended on 31/12/2021.
- To approve sitting fees to the board of directors' meetings and its sub-committees for the financial year ended on 31/12/2021 and to determine the fees for the forthcoming financial year ending on 31/12/2022 (as per the Annexure).
- To consider and approve the transactions entered into by the company with related parties during the fiscal year ended on 31/12/2021 (as per Annexure)
- To consider and approve the transactions the company will enter into with related parties during the financial year ending on 31/12/2022 (as per Annexure)
- To consider the amounts allocated and spent for the company's social responsibilities for the year ended on 31/12/2021. (as per the attachment)
- To consider and approve the allocation of an amount of OMR 500 for the company's social responsibility programs, for the year ending on 31/12/2022
- To Approve the criteria for measuring the performance of the Board of Directors for the financial year ending 31/12/2022 (as per Attachment)
- To appoint an independent entity to evaluate the performance of the Board of directors for the fiscal year ending on 31/12/2022, and determine their fee.
- The appointment of the Auditors for the Company for the financial year ending 31/12/2022 and determine their fee.

According to the Company's Articles of Association and the controls for holding General Meetings using modern technology issued by the Capital Market Authority, we would like to draw your attention to the following:

A. A legal person, exclusively, has the right to delegate a natural person to attend the General Meeting and vote on its behalf through technical means, provided that this natural person has an investor number in MCDC.

B. Voting on any of the agenda items begins no more than three days before the date of the General Meeting until the voting process ends on the day of the General Meeting. If the shareholder's shares are increased or decreased, the voting process will be canceled, and the shareholder will have to vote again on the day of the General Meeting.

For further information please contact Mr. RIYADH GHULAMALI MOHAMMED AL LAWAT' phone No. 99220757.

Chairman

Legal Advisor

External Auditor

شركة زجاج مجان ش.م.ع.ع.
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REPORT OF THE BOARD OF DIRECTORS

Dear Shareholders,

On behalf of the Board of Directors, I welcome you to the 26th Annual General Meeting of your Company to present and discuss the Annual Report and Audited Financial Statements for the year ended on 31 December 2021.

The company faced some cost headwinds during the year 2021 given price increases worldwide in many commodities and logistics costs due to supply-demand mismatch and sudden increase in requirements in the many markets, Covid-19 issues affecting manpower availability and logistics constraints.

Financial Results and Company Performance:

The company progressed significantly in its plan implementation to increasingly drive its twin strategy of increasing sales to the food sector and also higher export sales to more developed markets.

Covid-19 impacted the business in multiple ways. The increased pace of vaccination and subsequent economic rebound given anticipation of faster re-opening in some of its key western markets led to increased demand but logistics issues played a dampener in the offtake. As per market estimates, Logistics issues had a major impact for the full year 2021 and is expected to continue further during 2022. The company is pushing for more E-works/FOB sales to mitigate the issue.

The company had to take a hit in expenses in the second half of the year due to increased prices for raw materials and packaging materials as a result of demand supply imbalance, high energy cost and logistics issues.

The Management conservatively estimates the bottom-line impact due to Covid-19 to be in the range of 270 K OMR and that the financial results do not fully reflect the improvement in company performance in terms of positive improvement in product and customer mix with more increasing sales to higher priced developed markets and sales growth in the food category

Quarter wise Performance Highlights:

Particulars	Q1 03-21	Q1 06-21	Q1 09-21	Q1 12-21	Total Yo 2021	Total Yo 2020
Sales Million	76.868	88.588	92.698	98.554	356.708	382.892
Production Million Bottles	94.821	84.43	83.01	93.097	355.358	392.828
OPERATIONAL HIGHLIGHTS - (All Amounts in RO Millions)						
Sales	2,576	2,744	2,789	3,515	11,624	12,139
Cost of Goods Sold	2.12	2.552	2.614	2.813	10.099	10.652
Gross Profit	0.456	0.192	0.176	0.702	1.526	1.486
Net Profit / (Loss) Before Tax	(0.042)	(0.373)	(0.445)	0.017	(0.843)	(1.180)
Income tax				(0.225)	(0.225)	.0133
Net Profit/(Loss) after Tax	(0.042)	(0.373)	(0.445)	(0.208)	(1.069)	(1.047)
EBIDTA	0.349	0.051	(0.033)	0.412	0.779	0.564

It can be noted that during the quarter 4 of the year (01 October 2021 till 31 Dec 2021 QV 12-21) the company achieved breakeven performance at Profit Before tax level. The charge of income tax for the year 2021 is due to the reversal of Deferred tax credit taken in year 2017.

Dividend

After considering the financial performance and taking account of the company's cash flow requirements for various capital expenditures envisaged in 2022, the Board of Directors do not recommend any dividend for the financial year ended 31 December 2021.

Future Outlook:-

I am happy to mention we are cautiously optimistic about the year 2022 with a good order booking/forecasts from customers to secure almost its total manufacturing capacity for 2022. Our focus continues to optimise our Customer/Market Mix to drive higher pricing and further grow the food category

We expect operational improvements to continue, including increased output and increased efficiency.

Corporate Social Responsibility:-

The company believes that giving back to society is extremely important. We provide monetary and intangible support and guidance to the organizations that are dedicated to improving the quality of life for the concerned people in the society and will continue to do so.

Internal Control:-

The Management regularly reviews the effectiveness of internal controls in discussion with the Audit Committee, Statutory Auditors, and External Internal Auditor, in line with the approved company policy and the charter. The company presently has an External Internal Audit agency, which keeps on reviewing internal controls in various areas of operations under the Audit Committee's guidance. The Board of Directors is pleased to inform the shareholders that, in their opinion, adequate and effective internal control systems are in place.

Omanisation :

The company is committed to recruiting and providing training to Omani employees to enable them to undertake responsibilities in various Operations and Administration areas. The Company had an Omanisation percentage of around 42% at the end of 31 December 2021.

Acknowledgments:-

On behalf of the Board of Directors and Management of the Company, we thank His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tariq bin Taimur for his leadership and vision- God protect him, to work for Oman and its dear people for a brighter and more prosperous future.

The company also acknowledges the continuous support and commitment from its Shareholders, Customers, Suppliers, Bankers, and the Management & the Employees' constant efforts.

Chairman
Dated: 27 February 2022

Statement of Comprehensive Income for the year ended on 31st December 2021 (AUDITED):

	For the year ended 31st December 2021 RO '000s	For the year ended 31st December 2020 RO '000s
INCOME		
Sales	11,624	12,139
Cost of Sales	(10,098)	(10,661)
	1,526	1,478
Damage losses	-	-
Other income	99	128
	1,625	1,606
Expenses		
General and administration expenses	(976)	(937)
Selling and distribution	(1,079)	(1,406)
Depreciation	(31)	(39)
Amortisation	(2)	(6)
	(2,087)	(2,388)
Loss from operations	(462)	(782)
Finance cost	(381)	(398)
Loss for the year Before Taxation	(843)	(1,180)
Taxation	(225)	133
Net Loss for the year	(1,069)	(1,047)

Statement of Financial Position as at 31st December 2021 (AUDITED):

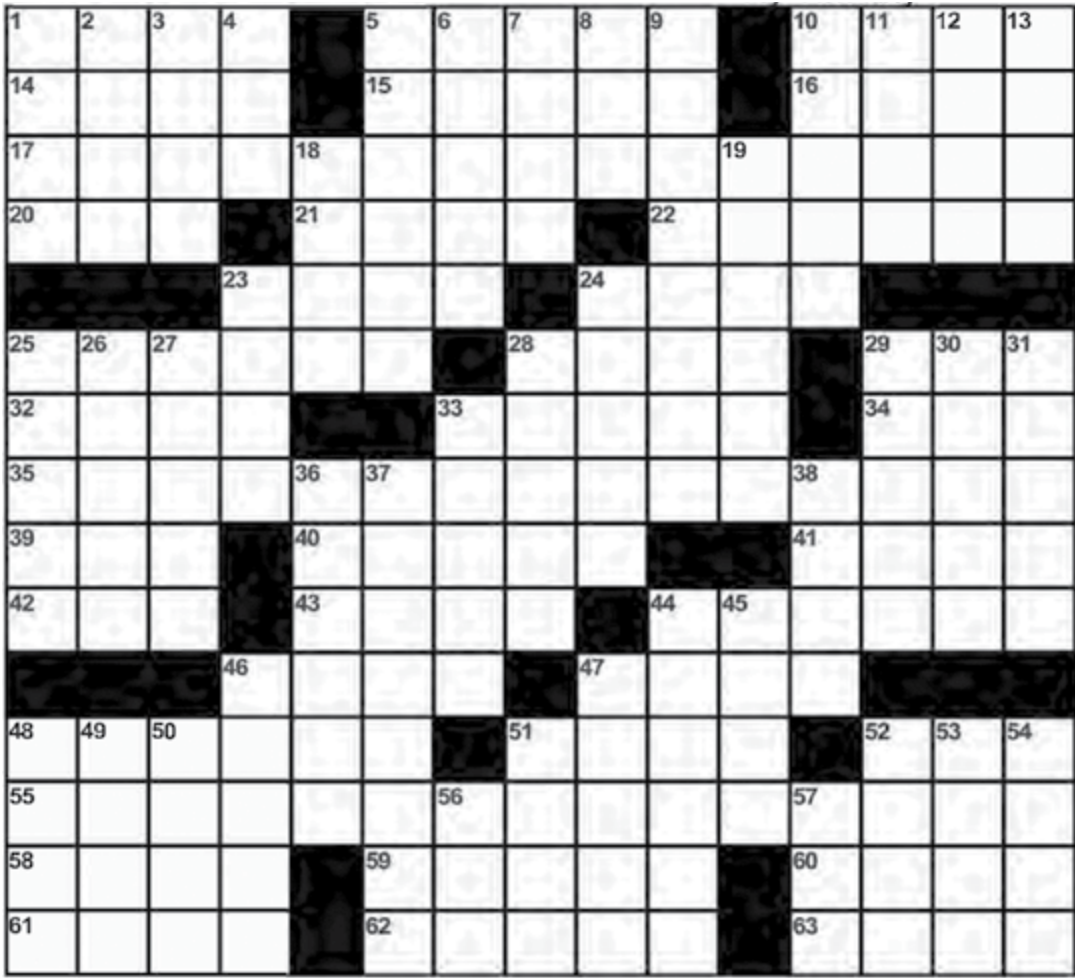
	31st December 2021 RO '000s	31st December 2020 RO '000s
ASSETS:		
Non-current Assets		
Property, Plant & Equipment	3,729	4,167
Intangible asset	0.68	3
Right of use assets	173	274
Deferred taxation	709	934
Total non-current assets	4,612	5,379
Current Assets		
Inventories	3,852	4,058
Accounts & other receivables	3,415	1,695
Prepayments	82	101
Bank balances & cash	26	463
Total current assets	7,375	6,317
Total Assets	11,987	11,696
Current Liabilities		
Current portion of term loan	813	955
Current portion of Lease rent payables	111	100
Bank borrowings	1,947	1,474
Accounts & other payables	4,797	3,269
Total current liabilities	7,668	5,799
Non-current Liabilities		
Employees' end of service payables	280	311
Non-current portion of Lease rent payables	64	178
Non-current portion of term loan	1,847	2,210
Total non-current liabilities	2,190	2,699
Total Liabilities	9,858	8,498
Net Assets	2,129	3,198
Shareholders' equity		
Share capital	4,202	4,202
Legal reserve	1,273	1,273
Retained earnings	(3,347)	(2,278)
Total shareholders' equity	2,129	3,198

Notes:

- All amounts are in RO '000s.
- Previous year figures are regrouped /rearranged wherever required.
- The complete Financial statements of the Company would be made available to any shareholder or interested party on request in Arabic or in English within 7 days from the date of request. The request applications can be sent on the above mentioned address.

Send your comments to
muscatdaily@apexmedia.co.om

DAILY CROSSWORD



ACROSS

1) Volcanic anagram for "ante"
5) Where something can be flat or sharp
10) Military lockup
14) Asian cuisine choice
15) Chocolate source
16) An apple on a computer, for one
17) One taking others to great heights
20) Color attribute
21) Brought into the world, as eggs
22) Dough or bread
23) Deeply engrossed
24) Give in to pressure
25) Chant
28) Certain beach bird
29) Monopolist's portion
32) "..._lender be"
33) Painful pang
34) Deception
35) Good feature for cars stuck in the snow
39) Tall Australian bird
40) Raise, as a flag
41) Bibliographical abbr.
42) Fink
43) First-class
44) Not-quite-round shapes

46) Jekyll's alter ego
47) Kind of individual pricing
48) Certainly not alert
51) Mixed assortment
52) Schuss, e.g.
55) Some supports for motorists?
58) Kai's place, often
59) Legendary actress Sophia
60) "... not always what they..."
61) Places of rejuvenation
62) Decorative jugs
63) Amazes

DOWN

1) Carve in stone
2) Holier than who?
3) Soon-to-be parents' concern
4) Order between "ready" and "fire"
5) Knee abrasion
6) Implied but not verbalized
7) Battery contents
8) Air-traffic control org.
9) Poppycock
10) Place for a hunter
11) Casting director's handout
12) Fictional hunchback
13) "..._Jail" (Monopoly bummer)
18) Brio or panache
19) Immobilized (with "down")
23) Bookbinding leather
24) Certain chapeau
25) Derive by reasoning
26) _ Jean (Marilyn Monroe)
27) "Rainbow" fish
28) All the ones before us?
29) Accused's need
30) Enraged
31) City on the Aire
33) Biblical possessive
36) "Casey at the Bat" poet
37) Stack of fireplace logs
38) Reason for tear gas
44) Veggies sometimes served in rings
45) Cello's little relative
46) Complies with, as advice
47) Gastric woe
48) Some dangerous snakes
49) Cease
50) Legendary entertainer Home
51) Shrek, for one

52) Type of duck
53) "Trick" joint
54) "Capital" and "alcohol" endings
56) "..._ what?"
57) "Made in the "

NOTE PAD

YOUR DAILY HOROSCOPE

ARIES MARCH 21-APRIL 19

A recent event has made it clear to you that you need to put your priorities in order on all levels. Emotionally speaking, of course, family, true friends, and loved ones necessarily take the number one spot in your heart. And since you're prioritising, spend some time with them and spoil them a bit for absolutely no other reason than to simply let them know how much you care.

LEO JULY 23-AUGUST 22

When all else fails today, talking things out will help. From blameless fender benders to convoluted industrial-sabotage conspiracies, your communication abilities will go a very long way toward easing any tensions and perhaps even solving the problem altogether. You have a lot more influence over the attitudes of other people than you may realize. Try flashing a smile. You might be surprised by how it inspires people.

SAGITTARIUS NOVEMBER 22-DECEMBER 21

With your emotions running as high as they are right now, pushing your buttons will be a lot easier than it usually is. Fortunately, anyone new at work who tries to get one over on you will have the steadfast loyalty of your co-workers to contend with, and since you've always thought of them as family, you can promptly expect the play-by-play report of exactly what was said, in which location, and in which tone.

TAURUS APRIL 20-MAY 20

After days of mulling things over, shuffling around the house in your jammies (okay, and maybe pouting just a tad too), you're ready to stop this nonsense, get the show on the road, and let those feelings out. You've kept quiet for long enough. It is what's keeping you in hibernation, if you admit it to yourself. It's time to say what's on your mind and free yourself up. Make the appropriate calls.

VIRGO AUGUST 23-SEPTEMBER 22

You're thinking great big thoughts about great big issues: Politics, religion, and education, for starters. When you're in this kind of mood, you need to spend your time with kindred spirits, people who share your feelings. If you can't get the whole crew together at your place, you can at least make plans with them. Remember, though, that your sweetheart might like to hear all those ideas privately before you share it with usual suspects.

CAPRICORN DECEMBER 22-JANUARY 19

Ever since you declared yourself off duty from being responsible for others, it's been eerily quiet around your place. The good news is that you're starting to relax. Now how about taking it a step further and planning some actual recreation? This stands every chance of being a great day, but only if you decide to make it happen. Call the one person you're sure will be happy to work tirelessly on that project with you.

GEMINI MAY 21-JUNE 21

Your personal philosophy holds that the festivities in general shouldn't be limited to just weekend evenings. Judging by the way you feel this morning, you probably proved that again last night, and a good time was had by all. You've decided, however, that you either can't or don't want to keep tonight's date, leaving you with quite the dilemma. Oh, well. Not to worry. Keeping them hungry for more is the best way to handle any audience.

LIBRA SEPTEMBER 23-OCTOBER 22

In your book, at the moment, anyway, nothing exceeds like excess. If one of anything is good, then two is better, and three or more would probably be just terrific. At the moment, it's the department of relationships where this trait will emerge. If you're already involved, lavish extravagance can be quite flattering. If you're not attached, don't endanger a friendship or new relationship by pushing the envelope too far too fast.

AQUARIUS JANUARY 20-FEBRUARY 18

Your recent interest in beautifying your home isn't coincidental. You've made some new friends, one of whom you find especially interesting. Whether you've admitted it to yourself or not, all that puttering around means you're preparing to have them over, and you want to make a good impression. You can devote yourself to the project in earnest and start thinking of irresistibly interesting ways to phrase the invitation.

CANCER JUNE 22-JULY 22

You're in the mood to stay home, but you also feel restless, and you definitely won't be turning in early. Sounds like an impromptu party at your place is simply your only option. It certainly would be the best of both worlds. Besides, isn't there someone you'd like to get to know better, someone you don't feel comfortable being completely alone with just yet? A group situation would be the perfect icebreaker.

SCORPIO OCTOBER 23-NOVEMBER 21

Someone in your life who is usually very perceptive and sharp is suddenly oblivious to something very important despite the conspicuous clues you've been providing. Try not to let this unusual thickheaded behaviour frustrate you. You'll just have to be very clear when communicating what you want this person to know. Your hints have been too vague, and you mustn't waste more time hoping that your message will be understood.

PISCES FEBRUARY 19-MARCH 20

Right in the middle of your personal renaissance, someone you love has called in need of advice that apparently only you can give. Of course, it's understandable. You're as solid as a rock, and your advice is always grounded in reality. That wonderfully soothing voice you use to deliver it doesn't hurt either. You don't need anyone to tell you to do what you can. You may need to be reminded to save a bit of energy for yourself.

TEST YOUR KNOWLEDGE

1. What nationality is the soccer player Dennis Bergkamp?
A. Belgian
B. Dutch
C. German
D. Austrian

2. Which bank, which had opened in 1762 (and was the oldest merchant bank in London) collapsed in 1995 after one of the bank's employees lost £827mn speculating primarily on futures contracts?
A. Lloyds Bank
B. Abbey National
C. Barings Bank
D. Midland Bank

3. Christine de Pizan (1364 – c. 1430) was France's first what?
A. Court chef
B. Saint
C. Professional woman of letters
D. Professional fencing tutor

Answers: 1.B 2.C 3.C

KIDS COLOURING

BOGGLER

T	L	A	N
M	I	L	W
L	S	O	E
B	G	B	U

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

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

DO YOU SUDOKU?

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

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

WORD BUILDER

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

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

SUDOKU EASY ANSWER

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

Ukrainians flee besieged cities as number of refugees hits 2mn

Kyiv, Ukraine - Desperate civilians fled besieged Ukrainian cities on Tuesday after Russia offered 'humanitarian corridors', as the number of refugees leaving the country since Moscow's invasion passed two million.

Civilians boarded buses out of the north-eastern city of Sumy, where 21 people were killed in air strikes overnight, while others took an unofficial escape route out of the bombed Kyiv suburb of Irpin.

But Ukraine accused Russia of attacking an evacuation corridor out of the beleaguered southern port city of Mariupol, where aid workers said tens of thousands were living in 'apocalyptic' conditions.

Kyiv has branded the corridors from four cities a publicity stunt as many of the exit routes lead into Russia or its ally Belarus. Both sides accuse each other of ceasefire violations.

President Vladimir Putin's invasion has sparked fears of a wider European war, and unleashed the continent's fastest growing refugee crisis since World War II as people flood across Ukraine's borders.

Western allies have imposed sweeping sanctions on Moscow and poured in weapons to Ukraine, while oil giant Shell became the latest among scores of businesses to pull out of Russia.

Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky denounced what he called unkept promises by the West to protect his country, and renewed calls for a no-fly zone that leaders have so far dismissed.

"It's been 13 days we've been hearing promises, 13 days we've been told we'll be helped in the air, that there will be planes," Zelensky said on a video broadcast on Telegram.



Ukrainian soldiers help an elderly woman to cross a destroyed bridge as she evacuates the city of Irpin, northwest of Kyiv, on Tuesday (AFP)

"But the responsibility for that rests also on those who were not capable to take a decision in the West for 13 days," he added. "On those who have not secured the Ukrainian skies from the Russian assassins."

'Hiding in the basement'

Despite the sound of nearby shelling in Irpin, seen as a critical

point for Russia's advance on Kyiv, civilians fled in icy wind and a thick snowfall, AFP reporters saw.

People waited in a long line to cross over the Irpin river on makeshift walkways of planks and mangled metal, after the Ukrainians blew up the bridge leading into the capital to hamper any Russian advance. "I didn't want to leave, but

there's nobody left in the homes around us, no water, no gas and no electricity," Larissa Prokopets, 43, told AFP.

She said she was leaving after several days spent 'hiding in the basement' of her home, which kept 'shaking' due to bombardment nearby.

Russia had refused calls for a humanitarian corridor in Irpin and the nearby suburbs of Bucha

and Gostomel 'although we had everything ready for this', Ukrainian interior ministry official Anton Gerashchenko said.

Evacuations had however begun in Sumy, near the Russian border and 350km east of Kyiv, where Russia had formally declared a humanitarian corridor, officials said.

Dozens of buses had already left in the direction of Lkhvytsia,

to the southwest, said the interim chief of the Poltava region, Dmitry Lunin. The corridor is designed to evacuate civilians, including Chinese, Indians and other foreigners, officials said.

The evacuation came after 21 people, including two children, were killed in Sumy when 'enemy planes' insidiously attacked apartment buildings', Ukrainian rescue services said.

Ukrainian girl dies of thirst under rubble of home: Mayor

Dnipro, Ukraine - A six-year-old girl has died from dehydration under the rubble of her destroyed home in the besieged Ukrainian city of Mariupol, the city council said on Tuesday.

Mariupol is surrounded by Russian forces, who have bombarded the port city despite promises of a ceasefire to allow civilians to be evacuated.

It is not known how long the girl, named only as Tanya, had been under the ruins of her home before she died, but her mother was found dead at the scene.

"In the last minutes of her life she was alone, exhausted, frightened and terribly thirsty," Mayor Vadym Boychenko said on the city's Telegram channel.

"This is just one of the many stories of Mariupol, which has been surviving a blockade for eight days," he added.

AFP

Ukraine also accused Russia of violating a ceasefire around Mariupol on Tuesday, describing it as 'nothing other than a genocide'. "The enemy has launched an attack heading exactly at the humanitarian corridor," the defence ministry said on Facebook, adding the Russian army 'did not let children, women and elderly people leave the city'.

AFP

'Air strike kills nine in Ukrainian city Sumy'



A man walks between houses destroyed during air strikes on the Ukrainian city of Bila Tserkva on Tuesday (AFP)

Kyiv, Ukraine - An air strike killed at least nine people, including two children, in the Ukrainian city of Sumy, where a humanitarian corridor was to be set up on Tuesday, authorities said.

The corridor from Sumy to Poltava is designed to evacuate civilians, including Chinese, Indians and other foreigners, but Ukraine's vice prime minister accused Russia of planning to disrupt the route.

The air strike in Sumy, near the Russian border east of the Ukrainian capital Kyiv, took place late on Monday, Ukraine's rescue services said.

"Enemy planes insidiously attacked apartment buildings," they said on Telegram after arriv-

Manipulations are being prepared to force people to take another route, which is not coordinated

IRYNA VERESHCHUK

ing on the scene at 11pm.

Sumy, 350km east of Kyiv, has experienced heavy fighting for days, but no other details about the attack were immediately available.

Iryna Vereshchuk, Ukraine's vice prime minister, said the Russian defence ministry had

agreed to start the corridor early on Tuesday in a letter to the International Committee of the Red Cross.

"We have information that the Russian side has planned to disrupt the corridors," she added. "Manipulations are being prepared to force people to take another route, which is not coordinated and dangerous," the vice prime minister said.

She said the corridor was also designed to channel the delivery of food and medicine. The vice prime minister said the first convoy was supposed to begin at 10am, one hour after the start of what Ukraine hopes is a ceasefire that is due to last until 9pm.

AFP

Visa centre for refugees being set up in France: UK

London, UK - The UK government on Tuesday said it was setting up a visa centre for Ukrainian refugees in northern France, after confusion and anger that some were being turned away.

Foreign Secretary Liz Truss told parliament a 'pop-up' site would be located in Lille, some 110km from Calais where scores of Ukrainians have flocked.

Disappointed Ukrainians arriving in the Channel port city this week in the hope of getting to the UK have instead been told to go



Liz Truss arrives to attend a Cabinet meeting on Tuesday (AFP)

to Paris or Brussels to apply.

That has put pressure on the government in London to establish a bespoke visa application centre in Calais to cater specifically for people fleeing the Russian invasion.

But Home Secretary Priti Patel sowed confusion on Monday by stating first that the centre in Calais was already operational, then moments later that it was not yet ready.

She also said the centre would be 'away from the port' to pre-

vent a 'surge', given ongoing pressures of migrants seeking to cross the Channel.

The Pas-de-Calais local authority in northern France told AFP on Tuesday that the situation remained unchanged.

'At this stage' visa applications are still being handled at the UK embassy, it added.

Patel's department then confirmed that visa applications were still only being handled by the UK embassy in Paris.

AFP

Georgia, a bleak new home for Russian exiles

Tbilisi, Georgia - Sitting at a windswept terrace of a tiny bar in Georgia's capital Tbilisi, Russian exile Roman Mikhailov said he had no choice but to leave his country 'immediately' when Moscow invaded Ukraine.

The 25-year-old logistics manager said the attack on Ukraine, which shocked the world, was a point of no return for some Russians who oppose President Vladimir Putin's long-time rule.

He is among those Russians who fled in large numbers to Georgia within days - or even hours - of Moscow's invasion, to escape asphyxiating Western sanctions and a feared escalation in repression by the authorities.

"The majority of Russians support Putin and it's very hard to be even politically neutral," he told AFP from the Russian expats' favourite bar, deep in the labyrinth of Tbilisi's narrow



Russians who fled their country wait for a taxi at the airport upon their arrival in Tbilisi in Georgia on Monday (AFP)

streets.

"I am against Putin and the only prospect I have in Russia is to end up in prison - like Navalny."

Opposition leader Alexei Navalny, who led the biggest protests against Putin that Russia has seen in recent years, has been jailed and his political or-

ganisations banned.

There are few routes out of Russia for those wishing to leave now. Western airspace is largely closed to Russian carriers.

But Tbilisi has for years served as a hub for Russian opposition circles, and Georgia is one of the few countries where Russians can stay for a year without a visa.

Sipping her beer at a nearby table, computer programmer Marina Boldyreva said she was on holiday in the Black Sea country when Putin announced the attack.

Hearing the news, she decided not to return home to Saint Petersburg, Russia's second city, and turned her break into 'an immigration'.

It will be 'impossible to live in Russia', the 26-year-old said. "It will face a terrible economic crisis," she added.

AFP



Tehran on Tuesday announced it successfully placed a military satellite in orbit as talks reviving a 2015 nuclear deal between major powers reach a critical stage (AFP)

Iran launches new military satellite amid nuke talks

Tehran, Iran - Iran announced on Tuesday it had successfully placed a military satellite in orbit, as talks on reviving a 2015 nuclear deal between Tehran and major powers reach a critical stage.

"Iran's second military satellite - named Nour-2 - has been launched into space by the Qassed rocket of the aerospace wing of the Revolutionary Guards and successfully placed in orbit 500km above the Earth," the official IRNA news agency reported. The Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps described the Nour-2 as a 'reconnaissance satellite' in a statement on its Sepah News website.

It said the satellite was launched from the Shahroud desert in Semnan province, some 300km east of the capital.

Telecommunications Minister Issa Zarepour hailed the suc-

Iran's second military satellite - named Nour-2 - has been launched into space by the Qassed rocket of the aerospace wing of the Revolutionary Guards

IRNA NEWS AGENCY

cessful launch. "The first signals from Nour-2 have been successfully received by ground stations," he said in statement on IRNA. "This reconnaissance satellite will orbit the Earth every 90 minutes, and its mission will last at least three years."

The United States has repeatedly voiced concern that such launches could boost Iran's ballistic missile technology.

But Iran insists it is not seeking nuclear weapons and that its satellite and rocket launches are for civil or defensive purposes only. Iran successfully put its first military satellite into orbit in April

2020, drawing a sharp rebuke from Washington.

Sepah News said on Tuesday that the Nour-1 was 'still fully operational and transmitting data'.

At the end of December, Iran announced it had failed to put in orbit 'three research cargos' carried by Simorgh (Phoenix) satellite carrier as the rocket was unable to reach the required speed.

In January, Iran tested a solid-fuel rocket for its satellite programme, state media reported.

Nuclear talks

Major powers involved in talks

on bringing Washington back into the Iran nuclear deal after then president Donald Trump's 2018 withdrawal have said that an agreement is close.

Iran and the UN nuclear watchdog said on Saturday they had agreed an approach for resolving key outstanding issues but new Russian demands stemming from the Ukraine conflict may delay a deal.

Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov said on Saturday that, before it backs a revived deal, Moscow wants written assurances from Washington that Western sanctions imposed over the Ukraine war will not affect its economic and military cooperation with Tehran.

The following day, US Secretary of State Antony Blinken said such demands were 'irrelevant'. Sanctions on Russia over its invasion of Ukraine 'have nothing to do with the Iran nuclear deal', he

said.

The Russian demands have cast doubts on whether negotiations in Vienna, which have reached critical stages, could be concluded swiftly.

As with the original agreement, Moscow is expected to play a key role in the implementation of any fresh deal with Tehran, for example by receiving shipments of enriched uranium from Iran.

Formally known as the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action, the 2015 deal gave Iran sanctions relief in exchange for curbs on its nuclear activities to guarantee it could not develop a weapons capability - an ambition it has staunchly denied. But Washington's withdrawal from the accord and its reimposition of biting economic sanctions prompted Tehran to begin rolling back on its own commitments.

AFP

Florida officials take into custody Haitian migrants



Crews respond to aground vessel carrying migrants off of Ocean Reef near Miami, Florida, on Sunday (AFP)

Miami, US - Florida authorities had 356 Haitian migrants in custody on Monday after the group arrived in a wooden boat that ran aground near a private club the day before, US border officials said.

The boat, which was packed with people, became stranded around 1pm local time (1800 GMT) on Sunday in front of the upscale Ocean Reef Club in North Key Largo, on the southern tip of the US state.

"One hundred fifty-eight of the migrants ended up swimming to the shore," US Customs and Border Protection spokesman Alan Regalado said via telephone. "The ones that swam to the shore are taken to custody by US Border Patrol."

The other 198 people stayed on board the boat, he said.

"Those who remained on the vessel were safely transferred over to a US Coast Guard cutter and they were let into their custody," Regalado said.

Authorities are currently processing the migrants' fingerprints and other information, he said. All of them are 'in good health'.

US Customs and Border Pro-

tection had on Sunday called the incident a 'maritime smuggling event'. Chief Patrol Agent Walter N. Slosar of the US Border Patrol had shared a photo on Twitter on Sunday of the vessel crowded with people and listing sharply to one side.

Another picture showed some 20 people wrapped in striped towels clustered on the shore, with piles of what appear to be wet clothes nearby.

The arrival was the third time US authorities had detained Haitian migrants trying to reach the United States in a week.

On Friday, the Coast Guard intercepted 123 people onboard a small vessel off Anguilla Cay, in the western Bahamas, and last Sunday, it detained more than 140 people off the coast of Andros, the largest island in the Bahamas. Human smugglers are known to use the Bahamas - a group of islands near the Florida coast - as a jumping-off point for getting people, many from other Caribbean countries such as Haiti, into the United States, in what can often be a treacherous journey.

AFP

US Congress passes bill to make lynching a hate crime

Washington, US - US lawmakers have passed a bill that would make lynching a federal hate crime, after more than a century of failed attempts to introduce such legislation.

The bill is named after Emmett Till, an African-American teenager whose brutal killing galvanized the US civil rights movement in the 1950s.

The Senate voted unanimously on Monday to pass the bill, which will now be sent to President Joe Biden to be signed into law.

The maximum sentence under the law will be 30 years. "After 100+ years & 200+ failed attempts to outlaw lynching, the Senate took long-overdue action by passing the Emmett Till Anti-Lynching Act," said Democratic Senate Majority Leader Chuck Schumer.

"This is an important step, but that it's taken so long is a stain on America," he tweeted.

Till, a 14-year-old from Chicago, was abducted and murdered in August 1955 while visiting relatives in the southern state of Mississippi.

His mutilated body was found three days later in a local river. Till's mother famously insisted that her son's remains be displayed in an open casket to show the world what had been done to her boy.

Till was murdered several days after a white woman,



After 100+ years & 200+ failed attempts to outlaw lynching, the Senate took long-overdue action by passing the Emmett Till Anti-Lynching Act, which is an important step

CHUCK SCHUMER

Carolyn Bryant, alleged that he had propositioned her in a store and touched her on the arm, hand and waist.

Two white Mississippi men, Roy Bryant, Carolyn Bryant's husband, and J.W. Milam, his half-brother, were arrested for Till's murder but acquitted by an all-white jury.

The pair later admitted in a magazine interview that they had killed the boy.

Roy Bryant died in 1994 and Milam died in 1981.

The Justice Department reopened its probe into Till's murder in 2018 after Carolyn Bryant, now known as Carolyn Donham, had recanted portions of her testimony in interviews with an author of a book on the case.

But the Justice Department said Donham 'denied to the FBI that she ever recanted her testimony and provided no information beyond what was uncovered during the previous federal investigation'.

In December, the department ended its investigation into the murder.

"The government's re-investigation found no new evidence suggesting that either the woman or any other living person was involved in Till's abduction and murder," it said.

Democratic Senator Cory Booker, who introduced legislation to make lynching a federal crime in 2018, said on Monday that lynching was 'a shameful instrument of terror used to intimidate and oppress Black Americans'.

"This legislation is a necessary step America must take to heal from the racialised violence that has permeated its history," his statement read.

AFP

Afghanistan marks muted women's day under country's new Taliban rulers

Kabul, Afghanistan - Afghanistan marked International Women's Day in muted fashion on Tuesday, with activists cowed by the threat of arrest or detention at the hands of the country's new Taliban rulers.

Since returning to power on August 15 the Taliban have rolled back two decades of gains made by the country's women, who have been squeezed out of government employment, barred from travelling alone, and ordered to dress according to a strict interpretation of Q'uran.

"The Taliban have taken away the sky as well as the ground from us," said an activist from the Woman's Unity and Solidarity Group, asking not to be named.

While the Taliban have promised a softer version of the harsh Islamist rule that characterised their first stint in power from 1996-2001, restrictions have been creeping in - if not at the national level, then implemented locally at the whim of regional officials. "If you care about women's rights - anywhere in the world - you should be watching Afghanistan with deep alarm," said Heather Barr, of Human Rights Watch.

"It's been shocking to see how fast the progress of the last 20 years has been yanked back and how little the international community has done to stand up for Afghan women," she told AFP on Tuesday.

Some Afghan women initially pushed back strongly against Taliban restrictions, holding small



Members of the Afghan women's peace and freedom organisation pray during an event on the occasion of International Women's Day in Kabul on Tuesday (AFP)

demonstrations and protests where they demanded the right to education and work.

But the Taliban soon wearied of the spectacle and rounded-up several of the ringleaders, holding them incommunicado even while denying they had been detained.

Since their release, most have gone silent, although the Taliban distributed videos of some purporting to confess they had been encouraged to protest by activists abroad, who said it would help them gain asylum.

Several rights groups said the alleged confessions were forced, calling them 'hostage videos'.

The Taliban at least acknowledged International Women's

Day, with the foreign ministry calling it 'auspicious', adding they would be provided with 'an honourable and beneficial life in light of the noble religion of Islam and our accepted traditions'.

Protests banned

Zabihullah Mujahid, the Taliban's chief spokesman, tweeted the day was 'a great opportunity for our Afghan women to demand their legitimate rights' - even though protests are banned unless permission is given.

Soon after taking power, the new government abolished the Ministry of Women's Affairs, replacing it with its dreaded religious police - the Ministry for the Promotion of Virtue and Preven-

tion of Vice.

Behind the walls of the sprawling United Nations compound on the outskirts of Kabul, an exhibition jointly organised by the UN and the Afghan Women's Chamber of Commerce and Industry showcased goods made by local female-owned businesses.

"It's a hope and a positive thing," said Tayeba Mashal, 47, owner of a firm that bears her name.

"We are hopeful that the women who are hiding in their homes because of the fear of insecurity will rise again in the society, resume their work, and resume their activities."

AFP

Thousands told to evacuate flood-hit Sydney

Sydney, Australia - The death toll from week-long floods battering Australia's east coast rose to 20 on Tuesday, after the bodies of a man and a woman were discovered in floodwaters in Sydney.

Police said the pair were believed to be a missing mother and son whose car was abandoned in a stormwater canal.

Tens of thousands of Sydney residents have been told to evacuate their homes as severe storms and flash flooding inundated swathes of Australia's largest city on Tuesday.

The national weather bureau warned of 'a tough 48 hours ahead' for Sydney, with 60,000 people subject to evacuation orders and warnings, and the city's Manly Dam beginning to spill.

Intense rainfall across Sydney flooded bridges and homes, swept away cars and even collapsed the roofs of a shopping centre and a supermarket.

In the riverside suburb of Georges Hall vehicles were semi-submerged and police had to rescue people stranded in their cars by rising floodwaters.

A 'watery' Black Summer

State emergency services have been stretched thin as the tor-



A resident looks at cars stranded in floodwaters due to heavy rain in southwestern suburb of Sydney on Tuesday (AFP)

rental rain and intense storms continued into a second week - with flood warnings in place on Tuesday for the entire 2,000km coastline of New South Wales. "It's very much the watery

equivalent of the 'Black Summer' bushfires," emergency services spokesperson Phil Campbell told AFP. In the past week the scale of the damage to property and wildlife has been similar to those

devastating bushfires, he said, which ravaged Australia's east for months in late 2019 and early 2020.

"We have also had a similar effect on communities in terms

of dislocation with roads closed, infrastructure damaged, power outages," Campbell said.

In the past 24 hours, emergency services have been called to 100 flood rescues across the

state, a number that is expected to rise as the full force of the storms bears down on Sydney on Tuesday.

In the city's north, flood researchers were evacuated from their lab as water from the nearby Manly Dam began to spill over into suburban areas.

The University of New South Wales facility uses water from the dam to run large-scale experiments about one-in-100- and one-in-1,000-year flooding scenarios. "Ironically, the conditions were happening just outside," researcher Mitchell Harley told AFP. When he arrived at work in the morning, floodwaters were already rising but soon the downpour caused 'significant flooding' in the lab.

"We haven't seen impacts of that magnitude in the 60 years of the laboratory," Harley said.

He said the flooding that had inundated Sydney in recent days showed the need to consider the impact of climate change on the coastal city of more than five million people.

"We have a lot of ageing infrastructure in Sydney which were designed for historical flood events," he said.

"A lot of this infrastructure needs to be re-evaluated in the

context of climate change."

'No way to rebuild'

In the northern reaches of New South Wales - where floodwaters this week destroyed homes, washed away cars and stranded hundreds of locals on their roofs - a long, slow clean-up is under way. There are 800 people in emergency accommodation in the state's Northern Rivers region alone, said state emergency services commissioner Charlene York.

According to emergency services, almost half of the 5,000 flood-ravaged homes inspected in the region in the wake of the disaster are uninhabitable.

In Mullumbimby, a town cut off from phone service, internet and outside help for days by the floods, local Casey Whelan told AFP that 'lots of people in my street can't get flood insurance'. "They will have no way to rebuild," he said.

Australia has been at the sharp end of climate change, with droughts, deadly bushfires, bleaching events on the Great Barrier Reef and floods becoming more common and intense as global weather patterns change.

AFP

UN rights chief to visit Xinjiang, China in May

Geneva, Switzerland - The UN rights chief said on Tuesday she would make a long-delayed visit to China in May, including to Xinjiang, where Western lawmakers have accused Beijing of genocide.

"I am pleased to announce that we have recently reached an agreement with the government of China for a visit," Michelle Bachelet told the UN Human Rights Council. She said that the UN rights agency, OHCHR, and Beijing had 'initiated concrete preparations for a visit that is foreseen to take place in May'.

There have long been calls for the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights to visit Xinjiang.

Rights groups say that at least 1mn mostly Muslim minorities have been incarcerated in 're-education camps' in Xinjiang, a far-western region where China is accused of widespread human rights abuses including forced sterilisations of women and forced labour.



The government has also accepted the visit of an advanced OHCHR team to prepare my stay in China

MICHELLE BACHELET

The US government and lawmakers in five other Western countries have declared China's treatment of the Uyghurs in Xinjiang a 'genocide' - a charge denied by Beijing. China says it is running vocational training centres in the region designed to

counter extremism.

'Unfettered access'

The Chinese government has for years said that Bachelet was welcome to visit Xinjiang, but an agreement on her demand for 'meaningful and unfettered access' has until now appeared elusive. On the sidelines of the Winter Olympics, UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres told leaders in Beijing last month that he expected them to allow Bachelet to make a 'credible' visit to China, including to Xinjiang.

And on Tuesday, the UN rights chief said an agreement had been reached.

"Preparations will have to take into account COVID-19 regulations," she told the rights council.

"The government has also accepted the visit of an advanced OHCHR team to prepare my stay in China, including on-site visits to Xinjiang and other places," she said.

AFP

After two decades, mentally ill inmate from Guantanamo repatriated to Saudi

Washington, US - A mentally ill inmate from Guantanamo Bay has been repatriated to Saudi Arabia, the US Department of Defense announced on Monday.

Suspected of being Al Qaeda's intended 20th hijacker for the September 11, 2001 attacks against the United States, Mohammed al Qahtani was tortured by interrogators at the US military base in Cuba where he has been detained for nearly two decades. The government dropped its case against him in 2008 due to the abuse he experienced at the prison. In February, US authorities recommended he be released and repatriated.

"On February 4, 2022, Secretary of Defense Austin notified Congress of his intent to repatriate Qahtani to Saudi Arabia. In consultation with our Saudi partners, we completed the requirements for responsible transfers," the Defense Department said in a statement.

"The United States appreciates the willingness of Saudi Ara-



This file photo shows the razor wire-topped fence and a watch tower at the abandoned 'Camp X-Ray' detention facility at the US Naval Station in Guantanamo Bay, Cuba on April 9, 2014 (AFP)

bia and other partners to support ongoing US efforts toward a deliberate and thorough process focused on responsibly reducing the detainee population andulti-

mately closing of the Guantanamo Bay facility.'

Qahtani was one of the first prisoners sent to Guantanamo in January 2002.

He had flown to Orlando, Florida on August 4, 2001, but was denied entry to the country and sent back to Dubai.

AFP

'Sexism exists': S Korea feminist presidential candidate's lonely crusade

Seoul, South Korea - Solid political credentials, scandal-free, and an excellent debater: Sim Sang-jung is one of South Korea's most established woman politicians. But as a left-wing feminist from a minor party, she doesn't stand a chance of becoming president on Wednesday.

In socially conservative South Korea, every president except one has been male and come from one of the country's two major parties. The next president will also be a man - the front runners are both male.

As a four-time parliamentarian and seasoned labour and women's rights activist with not a whiff of scandal about her, Sim is a stark contrast to her gaffe-prone rivals - Yoon Suk-yeol from the opposition People Power Party, and Lee Jae-myung of the ruling Democratic Party.

From Yoon's suspected links to dodgy shamans to widely re-

ported allegations against Lee of mafia ties, the leading candidates have thrown so much mud at each other on the campaign trail that some local media have branded it the 'election of the unfavourables'.

Still, Sim doesn't stand a chance of winning - her approval rating has never left the single digits. As a self-identified feminist, Sim is the antithesis of the PPP's Yoon, who has vowed to abolish the ministry of gender equality - claiming, despite the evidence, that women do not face systemic discrimination.

"Sexism clearly exists in South Korean society," Sim told AFP by email.

Yoon's stated objectives risk fanning dangerous misogynistic sentiment and will, ultimately, damage South Korean democracy, she said.

"We already know the historical consequences of election campaign strategies that encourage hate," she added.



Sim Sang-jung (centre) waves to her supporters during an election campaign in Seoul on Sunday (AFP)

'Patriarchal society'

Despite its economic and technological advances, South Korea remains socially traditional and patriarchal, and has one of the

world's thickest glass ceilings for women. It has the highest gender wage gap in the OECD club of developed economies and only 3.6 per cent of board

members at the country's conglomerates are female.

Similarly in politics, women hold just 18.6 per cent of assembly seats in parliament - putting

South Korea in 125th position in a global ranking maintained by the Inter-Parliamentary Union, just a few seats ahead of North Korea in 130th place.

"Korea is still a patriarchal society, and it is very hard for any female politician to rise to the top," Gi-Wook Shin, a sociology professor at Stanford University, told AFP.

The country's sole woman president, Park Geun-hye, in office from 2013 to 2017, 'was an exception, who rode on the legacy of her father', the late dictator Park Chung-hee, he said.

Sim's second key handicap as a viable candidate is that she hails from the small, left-wing Justice Party, which holds six seats in the National Assembly.

South Korea, which uses a first-past-the-post election model, has a strong two-party system, and every president has come from that duopoly.

The Justice Party campaigns on issues such as climate jus-

tice, as well as labour rights -- all considered radical in South Korea.

Sim entered politics after spending more than two decades on the front lines of South Korea's turbulent labour rights movement, going underground as a factory worker to organise unions while a student.

In 1985 she helped lead a groundbreaking strike and was rewarded by being put on the 'most wanted' list of the country's then authoritarian government. Her key policy as a presidential candidate reflects this background: she proposes a four-day work week, a revolutionary idea in a country where workers endure notoriously long hours.

Polling suggests her strongest support is among women in their 20s, but her overall approval ratings hover woefully low at around two to three per cent.

AFP

GOING SOLO

Omani trail runner Hamed al Harthi will take up a 560km ‘Border to Coast’ challenge from March 13 to spread awareness on fitness and charity

Hubert Vaz

Hamed al Harthi, a 63 year old trail runner, believes that a new phase of life begins after 60... And he is out to chart new horizons for himself by taking on challenges that not only bring out the best in him but also take him face to face with new truths of life. “For some people, life begins at 40, for some at 50, 60, and for yet a few, even at 80. This is a new phase of my life but I have a long association with running right from the 70s when I was a national athlete in the long distance running team,” says Hamed who has over the years represented Oman in many prestigious events, including the Asian Games in 1982.

Considered one of Oman’s best and most experienced trail runners, Hamed has set himself the daunting challenge of running 560km in seven days. Starting from Um Zumul, the border town where Oman meets the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates, on March 13, he aims to arrive in Sur by March 19. This solo expedition is in aid of Donate.om - Oman’s donation portal for charitable organisations.

“I have always been passionate about challenging myself and inspiring others through running. The Border to Coast event is an opportunity to engage with runners from across the country and raise awareness of the sport in each governorate, while raising funds for charitable causes within Oman. It is a unique challenge across the entire width of our nation, covering a variety of different surfaces and communities, and I hope to see many more runners along the way as they come together to share this journey with me,” says Hamed.

Preparation and plans

“I have been preparing for this expedition since the past six months. Such expeditions need a combination of mental and physical preparation, besides



I have always been passionate about challenging myself and inspiring others through running

HAMED AL HARTHI

getting the logistics arranged,” disclosed Hamed, explaining, “I will be running non-stop, between 155-160km everyday, and I will only take one-hour breaks for sleep every 24 hours. I have been practising what is known as ‘sleep deposit’ – sleeping 7-8 hours for days before the expedition as a back up for endurance during the expedition.”

Hamed, hopes to complete his expedition within 5 days, though he has set a seven-day target. He is also aware of the many pitfalls in running non-stop, without adequate breaks – one of which is the possibility of hallucinations and is gearing up to avoid them. Having experienced hallucinations during past expeditions, he knows that the key to overcoming these is taking short, 15-minute power naps in between.

The route he has chosen will pass through the village of Al Khuwayr in the Al Dhahira Governorate, Uwayfiyah, and Adam – the halfway point of the journey. From there, he will head to Al Mudhaibi and Al Qabil, in North Al Sharqiyah Governorate, and then proceed to Sur. The journey offers varied challenges of different terrains, landscapes and temperatures to contend with.

Hamed will be accompanied several running enthusiasts in each governorate en route, besides receiving assistance from a technical and logistics team that will help his stay safe and on track. He also has able backing for his expedition from Dhofar Insurance.

Hamed has spent a good part of his life running for fitness as well as for deserving causes, including some of the most challenging races in the world. In 2018, he competed in OMAN by UTMB and in 2019, he took part in Ushuaia by UTMB in Argentina. Also, after a break in 2020 due to the current pandemic, he participated in UTMB Mont-Blanc as well as reached the summit of Mount Kilimanjaro in 2021.

As a contingency plan, Hamed says, if he faces any hurdle like a major medical emergency – like a serious injury or any other condition due to running in the heat, he would have to abandon his trip. The support team will be carrying food, water, and first aid but there is no doctor in the team to help out in case of any emergency.

The twin messages that Hamed will be propagating through this trip is - making fitness a way of life and being open to charitable causes. He hopes that the younger generation, and the not so young, would be inspired by his initiative.



That's Hamed

- Best moment in life:** Accomplishing my first UTMB run in 2018 when I was clueless about everything.
- Most difficult time:** My first climb of Mt Kilimanjaro 2007 – 15 hours up and down – a unique record.
- Most sad moment:** When I lost my brother in 2011 – he was my partner for adventures.
- Biggest challenge:** During a race in France, when my watch stopped and I had to take short cuts to complete on time.
- Biggest support:** My wife and kids, they support me when I take up any adventure.
- Unfulfilled dream:** Ten years ago I wanted to climb Mt Everest, but I did not get sponsors for it.
- Favourite city:** Buenos Aires (Argentina) because of its history and heritage.
- Recurring fear:** The fear of death – especially when I'm in the midst of mountains.
- To me fitness is...** Wealth! If you are fit, it is the biggest blessing from God.



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EAT WELL

If nothing but a hearty meal can satisfy your weekend appetite, go for some hotstuff that will leave you sweating after the last lick. Try these sumptuous main course dishes:



Sticky Lamb Ribs

- Ingredients
- 2 lamb short rib racks

1tbsp grated ginger

2tbsp Worcestershire sauce

1tsp sesame oil

3tbsp hoisin sauce

1tbsp honey

1tsp soy sauce

2tsp toasted sesame seeds

Salt, to taste

Method

Place the ribs into a large container with the ginger, Worcestershire sauce, sesame oil and 2 tbsp of hoisin sauce. Stir well, cover and leave to marinate for 3 hours or overnight.

Preheat the oven to 180° C. Place the racks and marinade into a large baking dish, cover tightly with foil and cook for 2 hours or until very tender. Set the racks aside and allow to cool slightly.

Increase the temperature to 220° C.Using a large, heavy knife, cut the racks into individual ribs. Place the ribs onto a large baking sheet covered with baking paper. Mix the remaining hoisin sauce with the honey and soy sauce and brush onto the ribs. Cook for 5 minutes or until dark and sticky.

Sprinkle with the sesame seeds and serve.

Beef Black Pepper Roast

- Ingredients
- For marination

500g beef

½tsp turmeric powder

1tsp chilly powder

2tsp coriander powder

1tsp black pepper powder

Juice of 1 lemon

Salt, to taste

2tsp ginger-garlic paste

- For roasting
- 2 onions – sliced

2 large cloves of garlic

10-12 shallots - each cut into 2 pieces

1tsp fennel seeds

1 tomato - sliced

2-3 green chillies - slit

2tsp ginger-garlic paste

½tsp turmeric powder

1tsp red chilli powder

3tsp coriander powder

1½tsp garam masala

2 sprigs of curry leaves

2tbsp toasted coconut chips

2tbsp coconut oil

Salt, to taste

Method

Cut the beef into slices or chunks and marinate with marination ingredients for one hour. Pressure cook the marinated beef with 2 cups of water - about 20 to 30 minutes till cooked well, yet firm. Set aside.

Heat coconut oil in a pan and splutter fennel seeds. Crush the garlic cloves and add. Fry for one minute. Add sliced onions, shallots, green chilly and curry leaves. Saute well. Sprinkle some salt to saute it quickly.

Add sliced tomato. Stir until onion turns brown. Add ginger garlic paste and coconut chips, and saute it for some time. Add chilly powder, turmeric powder, coriander powder and garam masala. The raw smell will fade eventually.

Add cooked meat with juices and mix well. Cook on medium flame. Add curry leaves and slow roast until beef becomes dry and dark and juices dry up. Serve hot with rice or roti.

Hotstuff

Turkey Meatloaf

- Ingredients
- 800g ground turkey

1½tbsp olive oil - divided

1¼ cups minced onion

1tbsp minced garlic

¾ cup bread crumbs

1/3 cup chicken broth

½ cup finely grated Parmesan cheese

1½tbsp Worcestershire sauce

1/3 cup + 1tbsp ketchup - divided

1tbsp Dijon mustard

3-4tbsp chopped fresh parsley

½tsp dried thyme

1 large egg

1 large egg yolk

1tsp salt and ½tsp ground black pepper

Method

Preheat oven to 200° C, line a baking sheet with aluminum foil, and spray with non-stick cooking spray. Heat 1tbsp olive oil in a skillet over medium-high heat. Add onion and saute until slightly golden brown.Add garlic and saute 30 seconds longer.

Meanwhile, in a large mixing bowl stir together bread crumbs and chicken broth. Add cooked onion mixture to bread crumb mixture and stir. Transfer to fridge to let cool completely - about 15 to 20 minutes. To cooled mixture add Parmesan, Worcestershire sauce, 1tbsp ketchup, Dijon, parsley, thyme, egg, egg yolk, salt and pepper. Stir mixture to blend well.



Add ground turkey and using your hands toss and mix until well combined.

Shape mixture into a loaf on a prepared baking sheet. Brush with remaining olive oil, and bake in preheated oven for 45 minutes. Remove meatloaf and brush with remaining 1/3 cup ketchup and return to oven, Bake for 10 to 20 minutes.

Remove and let rest 5 minutes. Sprinkle with a little chopped parsley and cut into slices. Serve warm. (Note: Turkey may be replaced with ground beef/chicken)

Chicken Kolhapuri (Spicy Chicken Curry)

- Ingredients
- 500g chicken – cut to large pieces

3tbsp oil

A pinch of asafoetida

5-6 dry Kashmiri red chillies

½ cup tomato puree

¼ cup coriander leaves

1 cup coconut milk

1tbsp ginger garlic paste

- For marinade
- 2tbsp red chilli powder

1tsp turmeric powder

2tbsp ginger-garlic paste

1tbsp lemon juice

Salt, to taste

- For masala paste
- 2 onions - chopped

1tbsp cumin seeds

2tbsp coriander seeds

2tbsp grated coconut

4-5 cloves

½ tsp black pepper

3 green cardamoms

2 inch cinnamon stick

Method

Marinate the chicken in the marinade for 30 minutes. In a pan, heat oil and fry the onions till brown and keep aside. Dry roast the masala paste ingredients, including the red chillies, for 2 minutes and when they



give out a nice aroma grind them into a coarse paste with the fried onions. Add 1tbsp of oil in a wok and add the paste. Add ginger garlic paste and fry for 2 minutes. Add tomato puree and red chilly powder. Fry till the oil separates. Then add marinated chicken, cover and cook for 15 to 20 minutes on low flame until the chicken is tender and oil floats. Add the coconut milk and simmer for 2-3 minutes. Garnish with chopped green chillies and coriander leaves and serve hot with roti or naans.

FOOTBALL ROUND-UP

Kane targets Champions League place after Spurs humble Everton

London, United Kingdom - Harry Kane has outlined his desperation to return to the Champions League as Tottenham launch a late bid to finish in the top four of the Premier League following a frustrating season.

The England captain tried to leave Spurs last year after the club's alarming slide and, after another trophyless season, he may not be willing to settle for another year in second or third-tier European competitions.

Spurs' 5-0 home win against Everton on Monday - in which Kane scored twice - left them just three points behind fourth-placed Arsenal, who have a game in hand.

The forward reiterated his admiration for Italian manager Antonio Conte, who took over from the sacked Nuno Espirito Santo in November.

"I really enjoy working with him, so it's down to us players to take that responsibility," said Kane. "A lot of us want to be playing in the Champions League. We haven't played in it now for a couple of years but it's where we think the club should be."

Kane said Spurs, who reached the Champions League final in 2019 under former boss Mauricio Pochettino, needed to put to-

gether a run of wins despite tough fixtures coming up, starting with top-four rivals Manchester United on Saturday.

The forward's two goals on Monday moved him above Thierry Henry in the all-time list of Premier League goalscorers. He now has 176 goals -- with fourth-placed Sergio Aguero's tally of 184 firmly in his sights.

A lot of us want to be playing in the Champions League. We haven't played in it now for a couple of years

HARRY KANE

"I feel like I'm in a great place," said Kane. "I'm 28 now, I feel like physically I'm in a really good place. I feel mentally, my game understanding and my awareness on the pitch is at a really high level from just gaining experience over the years."

"Antonio has definitely given me more strings to my bow. I'm always someone who tries to improve. When I'm 35, 36 I'll still be trying to improve."

AFP



Tottenham Hotspur's English striker Harry Kane celebrates scoring his team's third goal during the English Premier League match against Everton in London, on March 7 (AFP)

Modric: Every player would like to play with Mbappe

Madrid, Spain - Luka Modric has admitted he would love to play with Kylian Mbappe at Real Madrid ahead of Wednesday's crunch Champions League game against Paris Saint-Germain.

Madrid trail PSG 1-0 from the first leg in Paris, when Mbappe scored a stunning late winner to give the French side the advantage as they bid to reach the quarter-finals.

Mbappe's involvement at the Santiago Bernabeu is in doubt after he reportedly suffered an injury in training on Monday.

Carlo Ancelotti said Madrid are "preparing as if Mbappe is going to play".

The 23-year-old's PSG contract expires in the summer, when he is widely expected to join Real Madrid instead of signing an extension.

"We all want to play with great players and obviously



Luka Modric

Kylian is one of those," said Modric in a press conference on Tuesday.

"Of course I would like to play with him in my team but let's see what happens. He plays for Paris. For us it's very difficult to talk about players who aren't here - other teams get angry, can interpret it badly - but of course I don't think there is a player that exists that doesn't want to play with him on their team."

AFP



File photo taken on February 15 shows PSG's Kylian Mbappe during the UEFA Champions League match against Real Madrid (AFP)

Man City face defensive crisis ahead of Sporting clash, says Guardiola



Manchester City's Spanish manager Pep Guardiola (AFP)

Manchester, United Kingdom - Pep Guardiola says Manchester City face a defensive crisis ahead of the second leg of their Champions League tie against Sporting Lisbon on Wednesday as his men prepare to defend a 5-0 lead.

Defender Kyle Walker is sus-

He added: "We have just three defenders... so we have to adapt with the second team. We will see what we are going to do."

Guardiola, whose team lost to Chelsea in the Champions League final last season, said the tie was not over despite City's comfortable lead.

We have just 14 players available. We have problems with a suspension for Kyle and Joao is sick and cannot play. We will see what we are going to do

PEP GUARDIOLA

ended as he serves a three-game and Joao Cancelo is out ill, while Nathan Ake and Ruben Dias remain on the injury list.

"We have just 14 players available," Guardiola said at his pre-match press conference on Tuesday. "We have problems with a suspension for Kyle and Joao is sick and cannot play."

"Football is unpredictable in many cases -- can be red cards, can be distractions or the qualities of the opponent and that's why we will take a top side as much as possible," he said.

England international Walker is serving the second match of a three-game ban for his sending-off in City's final group match

against RB Leipzig and Guardiola admitted the dismissal was still a sore point.

The City boss said: "He deserved it, Kyle Walker deserved the three... I'm not so kind to Kyle in this kind of action. I still am so angry with him, so angry."

He added: "The club appealed, I do not agree... Hopefully he will learn for the future."

Guardiola said he would have no concerns about playing Oleksandr Zinchenko if he were needed, even though the Ukraine international has been badly affected by Russia's invasion of his country. "He is ready," said the City boss. "Of course it is not an easy period for him, absolutely not, but I think he will be ready just in case he has to play."

Goalkeeper Ederson said it has been difficult to see Zinchenko suffer in recent weeks

"It is hard to see your teammate suffer," he said. "We try to give him strength but we know in these times it is difficult."

AFP

Former Everton manager Gordon Lee dies aged 87

London, United Kingdom - Former Everton manager Gordon Lee has died at the age of 87, the Premier League club announced on Tuesday.

Lee was in the hot seat at Goodison Park from 1977 to 1981, leading the team to a League Cup final, two FA Cup semi-finals and two top-four finishes in the English top-flight.

Lee, who also managed a number of other clubs including Blackburn and Newcastle, signed a number of high-profile players including Graeme Sharp and gave debuts to Kevin Ratcliffe, Kevin Richardson and Steve McMahon.



Gordon Lee

Retired Scotland international Sharp said on evertonfc.com: "I will always be grateful to Gordon Lee for bringing me to Everton Football Club. He showed faith in me and gave me my debut as a young footballer."

"Gordon was a massive part of my development and I always enjoyed meeting up with him later in life. I am deeply saddened by his loss and extend my sympathy to his family."

Former Everton captain Ratcliffe said: "Gordon loved to give young players an opportunity and I will forever be grateful that he gave me mine at Everton."

"He was ahead of his time with some of his coaching methods and with a bit more luck would have brought honours to the club. He left his mark on Everton and his passing is a very sad one."

AFP

Premier League ends deal with Russia over Ukraine invasion

London, United Kingdom - The Premier League announced Tuesday it was suspending its deal with its Russian broadcast partner following the invasion of Ukraine.

The decision was made at a shareholders' meeting in London, where all 20 clubs were in agreement.

In a separate move, the Football Association has also suspended its deal with Russia, meaning this month's FA Cup quarter-finals will not be shown while the English Football League has withdrawn

broadcast access in the country. The Premier League said it would also donate £1 million (\$1.3 million) to support the people affected by the war in Ukraine.

"The Premier League and its clubs today unanimously agreed to suspend our agreement with Russian broadcast partner Rambler (Okko Sport) with immediate effect and to donate £1 million to support the people of Ukraine," a statement issued by England's top flight said.

AFP

Mira Rai: Child soldier, ultra-runner, mentor

Kathmandu, Nepal - For years Nepali child soldier turned ultra-runner Mira Rai trained alone every morning, but now she leads other young women up and down the hills, hoping the sport can help them break cycles of poverty and discrimination.

Rai, born in a farmer's home in eastern Nepal, emerged as a trail running prodigy in 2014 after her racing debut in a steep 50-kilometre race in Kathmandu.

Within a year she finished first at the 80-kilometre Mont Blanc Ultra in Chamonix, and was the second-placed woman in the Skyrunners World Series, garnering sponsorships including French sports manufacturer Salomon.

She went on to win races around the world, including the 120-kilometre Ben Nevis Ultra in Scotland in 2017, when she was named the National Geographic People's Choice Adventurer of the Year for championing women in sports.

The same year, she began the Mira Rai Initiative to train young women like her from impoverished backgrounds.

"I don't know where I would be if I wasn't lucky enough to find support," she said. "This sport can change lives for others like it did for me. That's why I have to help."

In deeply patriarchal Nepal,



Nepal's athlete Mira Rai (C) takes part in a training session with other runners on a hill on the outskirts of Kathmandu (AFP)

running is an unlikely career choice for girls, especially in rural communities - even though they grow up racing up and down hills to fetch water or to go to school.

They are instead expected to marry early, rear children and keep the home fires burning while the men work.

Some 50 percent of Nepali women aged between 25 and 49 are married by their 18th birthday, according to the Himalayan

I don't know where I would be if I wasn't lucky enough to find support. This sport can change lives, like it did for me.

MIRA RAI

nation's 2016 Demographic Health Survey, many because of poverty. Only about a quarter of Nepali women participate in the labour force.

"It is not easy to pursue sports as a woman. But girls have to be empowered," she said.

"Otherwise their potential is easily wasted and they will live a life of anonymity."

One of her first batch of trainees, Sunmaya Budha, was

heading for a teenage marriage until she persuaded her parents to delay the ceremony.

She started racing secretly before she was chosen to train with Rai, and in December she beat her coach into second place in a 110-kilometre UTMB World Series Event race in Thailand.

"My win is also hers," said Budha, who remains unmarried at 23. "She opened the doors for us."

Child soldier to runner

Rai was only 14 when she left her home in eastern Nepal to join Maoist rebels fighting to overthrow Nepal's rulers, hoping she could do something for her family.

"My family struggled for even a single meal... I always wanted to do something to rescue my parents out of that situation," Rai said.

As a child soldier, she learnt to shoot guns and disarm opponents - but also did extensive running exercises.

"They would give opportunities to girls too... So I was able to learn a lot there," she said.

But when the decade-long insurgency ended in 2006, former child soldiers such as Rai were disqualified from joining the national army.

With little cash or career prospects, she was ready to leave for a job in a Malaysian electronics factory, but her karate instructor urged her to stay.

She could not afford the 15-cent bus fare to the nearest stadium, so started with practice runs on the capital's congested roads, on one of which she was spotted and invited to enter a race.

Dressed in a cheap t-shirt and \$3 shoes, she ran for hours before she felt dizzy and stopped to

refuel with juice and noodles.

"I have been running up and down hills in my village since I was little, so it was not completely new to me," she said.

Rai won that first contest, and a pair of running shoes, kick-starting her trail-running career.

Independent girls

Now 33, injuries and the pandemic have curtailed her competitive activities, and she is concentrating more on training others.

The initiative, funded by the Hong Kong chapter of community group Asia Trail Girls, selects young girls with potential from all over Nepal for a nine-month programme in Kathmandu.

As well as athletics clothes and running shoes, they are given lessons in English, public speaking, and social media handling - with tourism guide training an optional extra.

"I am sharing what I know with girls who want to join trail running," Rai said.

"I want them to be independent, even if in future they don't become runners."

Among her current prospects is Anita Rai, 22, daughter of a farmer in Solukhumbu, the district that includes Mount Everest.

"I'm not sure what I would be doing if I didn't get selected for this," she said.

AFP

Kurdish sisters writing history for women's weightlifting sports in Iraq

Arbil, Iraq - In Iraq's autonomous Kurdistan region, sisters Ines, Israa and Oshin Muhsin have inherited a hefty mantle from their late father, using it to take their country to weightlifting glory.

"We want to write the history of women's sports and preserve our father's" memory, Ines told AFP.

At just 20, she already has six gold medals under her belt, and along with her sisters has helped place Iraq squarely on the map of Middle East weightlifting.

The regional capital Arbil hosted a championship in December that brought together 14 Arab countries including Egypt and Saudi Arabia.

The Iraqi women's national team - made up of 15 athletes, eight of them Kurdish - clinched the top spot, with nine gold medals, one silver and one bronze.

Ines and her sisters, all in their 20s, have been practising weightlifting for a decade, coached mainly by their father, who died last year of COVID-19 complications.

At her club's modest gym in Arbil, Ines gets ready to lift a 30-kilo (66 pounds) bar, raising it high above her head before letting the weights crash to the floor.

"We are already thinking of international competitions and qualification for the 2024 Paris Olympics," Ines said, adding that



Iraqi Kurdish Ines Muhsin poses with her medals during a weight lifting championship in Iraq's Kurdish regional capital of Arbil on December 28, 2021 in which 14 Arab countries participated (AFP)

the road to the Games would be "complicated".

The trio - part of a generation born after their region first gained de facto autonomy in 1991 - need a translator to communicate with their fellow Iraqi teammates, as they only speak Kurdish.

Their bilingual mother does the job for local competitions, while another club staff member takes up the baton for trips further afield.

Sister Israa, a three-time gold medalist, said she dedicated her achievements to her late father.

"When he was young, he was

Before he passed away, he told me: 'if I am no longer there, I want you to continue and to participate in competitions, to become famous and win medals'

ISRAA MUHSIN

an athlete, then he became a coach. It is thanks to him that I reached this level," the 22-year-old said.

"Before he passed away, he told me: 'if I am no longer there, I want you to continue and to participate in competitions, to

become famous and win medals,'" she added.

'Blossoming of women's sports'

Women's sports have developed at a sluggish pace across much of conservative Iraq, which

has struggled through decades of conflict.

But the Kurdistan region was spared the brunt of the violence and destruction, and its infrastructure, facilities and government funding have paved the way for a boom in professional women's sports.

After the national team's success at the Arab championship, Kurdish regional President Nechirvan Barzani received weightlifters from Arbil to congratulate them.

The club pays its athletes \$150 a month, and covers their equipment and competition expenses.

Little such support exists elsewhere in the country, where despite subsidies many see the youth and sports ministry's budget as largely symbolic.

The Kurdistan region's "climate of freedom" for young athletes and development of sports infrastructure "has contributed to the blossoming of women's sports", said Jazair al-Sahlan, adviser to Iraq's Olympic Committee.

Wajed Wadi, one of the Arbil weightlifting coaches, noted the importance of the assistance.

"With support and the appropriate environment, a promising, ambitious athlete can achieve something significant," he said.

"That's what happened in the Arab championship - our athletes captured all the attention."

AFP



Thailand's Ariya Jutanugarn plays during HSBC Women's World Championship golf tournament at Sentosa Golf Club in Singapore (AFP)

Defending champ Ariya brushes off Honda LPGA Thailand pressure

Bangkok, Thailand - Defending champion Ariya Jutanugarn on Tuesday shrugged off talk of pressure ahead of this week's Honda LPGA Thailand, insisting she was "excited" to defend her crown on home soil.

The 26-year-old finds herself plastered over billboards around the Siam Country Club in Pattaya after storming to victory last year with a blistering nine-under-par final round. But the two-time major winner, one of a crop of young Thais making waves in the LPGA, says she is looking forward to teeing off on Thursday.

"I felt like I'm more excited like what going to happen this week, not only for me, but for all the Thai players this week," she said.

"And I don't really feel pressure because I know everybody just want to support me."

The former world number one

and her older sister Moriya have been the vanguard of a surge of talented Thais, who now number 12 on the LPGA tour.

Among the 10 home golfers challenging for the \$1.6 million purse this week is Patty Tavatanakit, who last year bagged a major as her first tour victory at the Chevron Championship. "I'm very happy that I can see all the new generation, a lot of Thai girls on Tour right now," said Moriya.

"Now it feels like everywhere you walk on the golf course you (can) probably speak Thai with someone, which is such a good feeling." Elsewhere US star Danielle Kang, fifth in the world standings, is the highest-ranked competitor, while Australia's Minjee Lee and Japan's Yuka Saso will also be in the hunt.

AFP



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Cummins declines to criticise Pakistan pitch

Rawalpindi, Pakistan - Australian skipper Pat Cummins said he would leave it to fans and commentators to pass judgement on a dead wicket that saw his team's first Test in Pakistan in nearly a quarter of a century end in a tame draw in Rawalpindi on Tuesday.

"I think the players always want a fair battle between bat and ball, and that's when I think Test cricket is at its best and most rewarding," the diplomatic Cummins said when asked about a pitch that yielded 1,187 runs for just 14 wickets over five days.

"It's for fans and you guys (media) to kind of watch it from the outside and kind of judge the spectacle."

Pakistan were 252 without loss in their second innings when the match ended without a result. Australia scored 459 in reply to Pakistan's first innings score of 476-4 declared.

"Turning up to a pitch -- probably not a traditional pitch -- you get here in Rawalpindi and coming away with a draw, it's not a bad result," Cummins said afterwards.

It was Australia's first Test on Pakistan soil since 1998, having declined to visit previously on security grounds.

With a draw assured, the Pakistan openers took the opportunity for batting practice ahead of the second Test in Karachi starting Saturday.



Australia's captain Pat Cummins fields the ball during the fifth day of the first Test cricket match against Pakistan (AFP)

Haq, Shafique hit tons as Test ends in tame draw

Pakistan racked up an astounding 728 for 4 for the entire match as the Test ended 21 overs early

Rawalpindi, Pakistan - Pakistan openers Abdullah Shafique and Imam-ul-Haq hit centuries on a tedious fifth day to again grind Australia's attack into the ground on a benign Rawalpindi pitch, as the first Test petered out to a stale draw.

Dominating a mostly dull final day, as the historic series-opener inched towards an inevitable stalemate, Pakistan finished at an almost effortless 252 for 0 with Shafique 136 not out and Haq unbeaten on 111. The Test ended 21 overs early after both teams agreed to mercifully put this match out of its misery.

Pakistan racked up an astounding 728 for 4 for the entire match, as Australia unsuccessfully resorted to using nine bowlers, including rarely tried Usman Khawaja with the last over of the match.

In-form Haq and Shafique were intent on gaining a psychological edge heading into the second Test starting on March 12 on a wicket labelled as "dead" by Steven Smith and is set to be further put under the microscope post-match.

Australia toiled for just four wickets - one was a run-out - across 239 overs with skipper Pat Cummins their only quick to have success in the match.

Having nervously sat through tea on 99 not out, after being unable to notch his milestone off part-time spinner Travis Head's last three balls before the break, Shafique scored off the first ball he faced on resumption to bring up his maiden Test century in his third match.

Imam survived on 94 when replays showed he inside-edged a Nathan Lyon delivery to short leg only for Australia to resist reviewing the not out decision - the second time in the match the



Pakistan's Imam-ul-Haq (L) celebrates after scoring a century with teammate Abdullah Shafique the first Test match against Australia (AFP)

batter had been reprieved by Cummins' reluctance to call for the DRS.

The left-hander shortly after became the 10th Pakistan batter to score centuries in each innings of a Test to cap a remarkable performance, where he started as a borderline selection having endured a modest 11-Test run previously after debuting four years ago.

Australia mostly went through the motions during numerous sleepy passages of play, as David Warner attempted to summon much-needed excitement with rather dubious dance moves between overs. It failed to spark his teammates, however, as Australia continued to be thwarted by Pakistan's batters much like when they spent 162 overs in the field during the opening two days.

Sticking with their preferred pace-heavy attack, Australia jarringly failed to create opportunities even when taking in consideration the graveyard of a pitch for bowlers. Their brains trust will undoubtedly ponder whether to bring in a second spe-

cialist spinner in Karachi - either uncapped legspinner Mitchell Swepson or left-arm orthodox Ashton Agar, who played the last of his four Tests in late 2017.

With question marks over

weeks.

The heavy lifting was left to Lyon, who finished with 1 for 236 off 78 overs, having started the Test optimistically with rampant turn on the opening morning

Haq and Shafique gained a psychological edge heading into the second Test starting on March 12 on a wicket labelled as 'dead' by Steven Smith and is set to be further put under the microscope post-match

their attack, quicks Mitchell Starc and Josh Hazlewood - who returned in place of Ashes hero Scott Boland - may have been auditioning to retain their spot.

A patchy Starc conjured occasional reverse swing in the first innings, while Hazlewood had been typically miserly throughout the match but rarely threatened. They only bowled 12 overs combined in the second innings as Australia sought to provide a modest workload for their quicks given the congested three-Test series is played over just three

proving fool's gold as the pitch moulded into a road.

Even though their conservative batting in the first innings set in stone this slow-moving clash, an undermanned Pakistan were the moral victors with an almost flawless batting display while their attack outbowled Australia's star-studded bowlers.

Left-arm spinner Nauman Ali wrapped up Australia's innings early on day five with the wickets of Cummins and Lyon to finish with a career-best 6 for 107 marked by eking out Smith and

Cameron Green with defensive bowling late on day four.

Indefatigable Shaheen Shah Afridi, who was the standout quick in the match, was rewarded with the wicket of Starc to finish with 2 for 88 from an energetic 30 overs.

Australia will be encouraged by their fight back with the bat to almost reach Pakistan's mammoth first innings of 476 for 4 although none of their batters scored a century. They also lost 6 for 52 after appearing favoured to take a first innings lead after such a strong start, where Australia's top four notched half-centuries in an overseas Test for the first time since 2008 in Delhi.

Espnricinfo

SCOREBOARD		
Pakistan 1 st Innings 476/4d		
Australia 1 st Innings 459		
PAKISTAN 2 nd INNINGS		
A Shafique	not out	136
Imam-ul-Haq	not out	111
Extras:	(lb 2, nb 3)	5
TOTAL:	(77 Ov, RR: 3.27)	252
Bowling: M Starc 7-1-29-0, J Hazlewood 5-0-8-0, N Lyon 26-5-75-0, P Cummins 4-0-15-0, M Labuschagne 15-0-56-0, T Head 13-1-35-0, S Smith 2-0-15-0, C Green 4-0-14-0, U Khawaja 1-0-3-0		

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South Africa's IPL players picked for Bangladesh one-day games

Johannesburg, South Africa - Eight South African cricketers with Indian Premier League contracts will play in a one-day home series against Bangladesh before leaving for India.

Cricket South Africa on Tuesday named a 16-man squad for the three-match series, which is part of the World Cup Super League.

The series will be played between March 18 and 23.

The IPL starts on March 26

which means that the South African players may miss the start of the tournament because of quarantine requirements.

But it is not yet clear whether IPL-bound players will be available to play for South Africa in two World Championship Tests against Bangladesh which follow the one-day games and only finish on April 12.

Fast bowler Anrich Nortje, who has not played for South Africa since the T20 World Cup

in November, remains unavailable as he continues rehabilitation following a hip injury and it appears his participation in the Tests and in the IPL is in doubt.

The only change from the squad which beat India 3-0 in January is the absence of fast bowler Sisanda Magala, who failed a fitness test.

The IPL players in the squad are Quinton de Kock, Marco Jansen, Aiden Markram, David Miller, Lungi Ngidi, Dwaine Pre-

torius, Kagiso Rabada and Rassie van der Dussen.

Jansen, Markram, Ngidi, Rabada and van der Dussen would all probably feature in a full-strength Test squad.

Test captain Dean Elgar said last week he would be asking the players to put loyalty to their country ahead of the earning potential of the IPL.

South African squad: Temba Bavuma (capt), Keshav Maharaj, Quinton de Kock (wkt), Zubayr

Hamza, Marco Jansen, Janne-man Malan, Aiden Markram, David Miller, Lungi Ngidi, Wayne Parnell, Andile Phehlukwayo, Dwaine Pretorius, Kagiso Rabada, Tabraiz Shamsi, Rassie van der Dussen, Kyle Verreynne (wkt).

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