

ECONOMY REBOUNDS

Oman’s economy bounces back in 2021 with over **16% growth** in nominal GDP

Our Correspondent
Muscat

Oman’s nominal GDP – gross domestic product at current market prices – has greatly surpassed its pre-pandemic level after growing rapidly in 2021, official data released on Tuesday showed.

Supported by strong recovery in oil prices and government’s economic stimulus measures, the sultanate’s nominal GDP grew at a solid pace of 16.1 per cent during 2021 in another sign that the economy is on a sustained recovery path from the pandemic-induced recession.

Oman’s nominal GDP surged to over RO33bn in 2021 compared with RO28.442bn in 2020 and RO29.275bn in 2019, according to data released by the National Centre for Statistics and Information (NCSI).

The economy was hit by a dual shock of the pandemic and a collapse in oil prices in 2020.

The NCSI data now shows that Oman’s economic recovery is broad-based with all major sectors – oil and gas, industry, services, and agriculture and fisheries



– recording robust growth rates during 2021.

With increased production and improved prices of oil and gas, Oman’s hydrocarbon GDP jumped by 38.5 per cent to RO10.547bn in 2021 from RO7.617bn in the previous year.

On the back of higher crude prices, the value of oil output surged by more than 46.6 per cent to RO8.998bn last year against RO6.139bn in 2020, while the value of natural gas out-

put increased 4.8 per cent to RO1.549bn.

Non-oil GDP up 8.4%

The sultanate’s non-oil nominal GDP grew by 8.4 per cent to reach RO24.044bn in 2021 from RO22.178bn recorded in the previous year. Among non-oil sectors, industrial sector output grew by 13.6 per cent to RO6.687bn, while the services sector grew by 6.5 per cent to RO16.571bn.

Within the industrial sector, manufacturing bounced back with 40.8 per cent growth to RO3.195bn in 2021 from RO2.268bn in the previous year, while the mining and quarrying sector grew by 4.3 per cent to RO230mn worth of output in 2021.

Construction sector activities, however, remained 6.8 per cent lower at approximately RO2.444bn in 2021 against the corresponding period of 2020.

Within the services sector, wholesale and retail trade recorded 15.5 per cent growth to reach RO2.847bn in 2021 from RO2.464bn in the previous year.

Omani researchers create eco pellets to desalinate seawater

Our Correspondent
Muscat

A research team led by Dr Wafa Aqib Nasser al Rawahi, senior chemistry lecturer, Applied Sciences Department in University of Technology and Applied Sciences, has created eco pellets made from agricultural waste for seawater desalination.

The project, called ‘Oxide Activated Carbon for Water Desalination and Purification using Solar Energy’ uses a new technology that can be used to speed up the desalination process with less energy consumption.

Speaking to *Muscat Daily*, Wafa said, “A group of students - Maryam al Hashmi, Marwa al Riyami and Hanadi al Aameriya - came to apply for a research proposal for funding through Oman Research Council and they wanted me to be their supervisor. They came up with an idea which was not in the scope of funding, so I suggested they try the seawater desalination project as something new.”

Oman Research Council supported their project.

“Activated carbon is a modern method that is receiving increasing interest for use in water desalination. In this project, activated carbon is converted to



Activated carbon is a modern method that is receiving increasing interest for use in water desalination

DR WAFALAWAHIAL RAWAHI

activated carbon dioxide - a new technology that can be used to speed up the desalination process with less energy consumption and in shorter time.”

According to Wafa, the principle on which it works is to reduce the boiling point of seawater below 100°C. The method formulated by the team is very efficient - using 0.1g of oxide activated carbon lowered the temperature from 100°C to

40°C.

“This eco pellet is an economical and effective method with many advantages, such as low cost, long life cycle and energy conservation. To our knowledge, this unique product has been manufactured for the first time with effective results,” Wafa said.

Large amounts of agricultural solid waste can be converted to activated carbon for numerous applications and water treatment.

The eco pellets have been tested and proven to be effective in getting rid of toxic trace metals. The pellets are currently being tested as a catalyst for certain chemical reactions.

Talking about the hurdles the team faced in its research, Wafa said, “Most of the challenges were related to the availability of chemicals we required during the pandemic. The reactor, or the furnace, needed for monitoring different gases to produce activated carbon is not available in the University of Technology and Applied Sciences, so it was prepared in Nizwa University. The laboratories facilities are not enough to do the analysis.”

The team is currently working on scaling up production of eco pellets for commercial use.

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MAFWR starts harvesting 50 tonnes of wheat crop

Our Correspondent
Muscat

The Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Water Resources (MAFWR) has begun harvesting approximately 50 tonnes of wheat in North Batinah.

An official at MAFWR said on Tuesday, "The farmers started harvesting wheat in North Batinah after their success in planting around 50 acres of wheat in one season - 2021-22. We expect to harvest 45 to 50 tonnes of wheat this season."

"The ministry is making great efforts to support farmers and di-

North Batinah farmers have kick-started the wheat harvesting season

MAFWR OFFICIAL

versify agricultural crops by providing the correct guidance for planting crops and providing improved seeds and fertilisers. The ministry also encourages farmers to grow a variety of agricultural crops, including wheat."

He added that cultivation of wheat crop is growing at a fast pace in several areas in the sultanate as a result of the efforts made by the ministry to encourage farmers to increase strategic cultivation in order to achieve the objectives of Oman Vision 2040 for food security.

Ministry statistics show that the total area of farmland under wheat cultivation in Oman is 2,449 acres, and the number of farmers increased by 5.5 per cent in the 2020-21 season.

A statement issued by



(Supplied photo)



(Supplied photo)

13 projects to stimulate agricultural sector: Ministry

Our Correspondent
Muscat

With an aim to support the agricultural and fisheries sectors, the board of directors of the Agricultural and Fisheries Development Fund has ap-

proved 13 projects in the agriculture and fisheries sectors at an estimated cost of RO1.3mn.

A statement issued by the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Water Resources, said, "The board of directors of the Agricultural and Fisheries

Development Fund approved 13 projects with a total estimated cost of RO1.3mn related to the agricultural sector (crops and livestock) and the fisheries sector. The projects will be implemented in various governorates of the sultanate."

MAFWR recently said the ministry has renewed a memorandum of cooperation with Oman Flour Mills Company to purchase wheat crop from farmers in the sultanate at RO500 per tonne.

"The ministry has set some conditions for farmers, such as the wheat crop should be of Omani variety and must be this year's production, the crop should be pure and not mixed

with any other strain and the farmer must supply the harvest himself to the company's warehouses in the wilayat of Muttrah in Muscat governorate," the statement said.



(Supplied photo)

3D McDonald's fries light up Qurm corniche

Muscat - Strollers and drivers on Al Shatti Street in Qurm could not fail to have noticed a larger-than-life, 3-D model of the world-famous McDonald's fries surprising walkers by.

In a groundbreaking move towards exceptional creativity in street advertising, McDonald's, in partnership with Muscat Municipality and JCDecaux Oman, launched an innovative advertising campaign, the first of its kind on Muscat's streets.

The McDonald's campaign is the first in an initiative to develop innovative installations of outdoor advertising across the city. It is intended to enhance the reach of advertisers to their target groups and maximise returns on their advertising spend leveraging on the use of cross-media marketing. The campaign creates a unique interaction between the product and the consumer, whereby it is more of an holistic experience than simply viewing of a flat image.

JCDecaux has a dedicated network for innovative campaigns that covers key locations centred around high traffic, foot-fall and dwell time that enables clients to target various audience segments, a press release said.

Ali Daoud, chairman and president of Al Daoud Restau-

rants, expressed delight at the first-of-its-kind animation of the French fries, stating, "It is the most famous and iconic product for McDonald's and a perfect fit for such an innovative execution. It will strengthen our position as leaders in the industry".

He said that the partnership between McDonald's and JCDecaux Oman has played a major role in the brand's growth and success in the sultanate, "We truly value the partnership between our organisations."

This particular innovation campaign will be complemented with an activation on social media to celebrate the ever-popular McDonald's fries.

Speaking on behalf of the Muscat Municipality, Sayid Shabib bin Harib al Busaidi, director general of the Directorate General of Investment and Economic Development, said that such campaigns produce an effective interaction with the public and contribute to the aesthetic aspect of the city.

Busaidi said, "This is the kind of progressive campaign that we aspire to create through the strategic partnership between the municipality and JCDecaux. We can expect to see more attractive and innovative advertising campaigns on panels and

street furniture across the city in the near future."

Bechir Chehab, managing director of JCDecaux Oman, highlighted the importance of introducing creativity and out-of-the-box thinking from the traditional forms of execution, thus focusing on innovation in advertising campaigns.

"This execution supports the general trend of innovation in the sultanate and supports Oman Vision 2040. Projects such as this will enhance the role and effectiveness of outdoor advertising and bring with it a certain energy to Muscat," Chehab said.

"In addition, such innovative campaigns leverage on the compatibility of out-of-home to digital marketing when consumer engagement extends to the social media platforms," he added.

JCDecaux Oman operates as the strategic partner of Muscat Municipality in managing and operating outdoor advertisements and street furniture programmes in Muscat governorate.

The company is also the exclusive strategic partner for managing and operating advertisements at airports in co-operation with Oman Airports Company.

TARIQ ONLINE

TARIQ HILAL AL BARWANI IS AN ICT EXPERT AND FOUNDER OF THE LARGEST COMMUNITY KNOWLEDGE-SHARING PLATFORM, KNOWLEDGE OMAN

Debate over region's 5G, O-RAN continues

Earlier this month, at the world's most influential event for the connectivity industry - Mobile World Congress 2022 - a number of telecom operators in the region were signatories to a memorandum of understanding to explore Open Radio Access Networks (Open RAN) in the development of future 5G systems. The news comes at a time when the global telecommunications industry has the mandate of exploring more use of 5G for corporates and consumers, in addition to assessing the hype around this network architecture's suitability for the coming years. As a real-world and practical implementation, is Open RAN (O-RAN) near ready in the future despite the hype and optimism? That's a debate that still continues.

What is O-RAN? It is a new technology concept that promises faster 5G implementation, improved network performance and allows different hardware and software components produced by other vendors to interact with each other seamlessly over open and interoperable network interfaces. The concept is defined and supported by a worldwide community of mobile network operators, vendors, and research and academic institutions operating in the RAN industry.

The discussion commands attention as millions of dollars are regularly being funneled to enhance 5G connectivity as part of countries' national digitalisation plans. Oman and the wider GCC were among the early global frontrunners in 5G deployments. The debate around O-RAN could change how these mobile networks are fundamentally designed and deployed.



This in turn influences the network's capability to support other industry verticals through superior service value, efficiency, and price competitiveness.

O-RAN schemes essentially call for mobile RAN to support interoperability between different vendors' equipment. It is not a standard, but a method of network implementation.

The debate around O-RAN today also factors in the fact that the region's telecommunications industry has long benefitted from strong alignment between government regulators, equipment vendors, and operators in defining standards frameworks. If the progress built on common standards is impeded, it could greatly undermine the growth of digital economies in the region.

The financial savings of the O-RAN method have, in the meanwhile, been under review. While the open-market model would in theory encourage greater competition among equipment vendors and lower network development costs, few real-world examples of this have been seen. In this model, operators must also

consider how to manage the integration of network sites of different vendors, who may no longer take responsibility for network operation and maintenance if they are only contributing to one element of an open network. There is also a need for operators to make extra investments in fibre-to-site solutions to deploy O-RAN in the first place.

Some global organisations behind the O-RAN method have admitted that it may have been too much too soon. For instance, executives at BT Group have noted that 2027 could be the earliest opportunity for urban commercial O-RAN deployment. T-Mobile's US president of technology was also among the early ones to raise doubts about the maturity of O-RAN systems. Analysts cite network performance degradation and fragmented service innovation as being among the other challenges that remain to be addressed.

European operators have carried out systems tests on O-RAN in the past few years. Meanwhile, O-RAN promises have yet to garner widespread appeal with Chinese telecom vendors who are not in a rush to join in, although their 5G technology R&D has led much of the market. The US is the main driver of O-RAN, and its carriers are now asking regulators and the government to remain technology neutral.

No doubt O-RAN presents an opportunity to evolve and disrupt the vendor ecosystem. Nevertheless, the time that is required for such a technology to evolve into a more integrated ecosystem of solutions is still debatable for it continues to be an early stage of development per se.

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. The writer can be reached at www.tariq.net



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WORLD WATER DAY

Sultanate registers water deficit of 316mn m³ annually

Our Correspondent
Muscat

Oman falls short of 316mn m³ of water every year, according to the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Water Resources (MAFWR).

The sultanate participated with countries around the world in celebrating World Water Day – observed on March 22 every year – under the slogan ‘Ground Water – Making the Invisible Visible’ on Tuesday.

MAFWR has exerted great efforts to manage and protect water resources in Oman.

According to the ministry, the annual renewable water resources of the sultanate is estimated at about 1,318mn m³ and the pressure on these resources is increasing, especially for agriculture, which claims a share of approximately 83 per cent of the annual water needs of the country.

Groundwater – mostly fed by rain – is the main source of fresh water in the sultanate. It represents 83 per cent of the fresh water in the sultanate, followed by desalinated water (ten per cent), surface water (five per cent), and treated wastewater (two per cent).

Oman’s cloud seeding efforts have seen the installation of 12 stations atop mountains in the Eastern and Western Hajar range and Dhofar governorate. Additionally, a monitoring system comprising a total of 634 rain gauges have been installed



(Supplied photo)

Groundwater - mostly fed by rain - is the main source of fresh water in the sultanate. It represents 83% of the fresh water in the sultanate, followed by desalinated water - 10%

in areas located within project impact zones.

Cloud seeding is one among several initiatives of the government in support of the sultanate’s goal to ensure sustainable fresh water supply.

Cloud seeding technology has proved successful in the sul-

tanate in enhancing rainfall in the last six years – 15 to 18 per cent more rain annually – according to official data collected from various sources, including rain gauges installed around cloud-seeding stations in various governorates.

The ministry has also imple-

mented a project to connect six rain stations in the past year.

Data for 2021 indicates there were a total of 174 dams – 56 ground recharge, 115 surface storage and three flood protection – with a combined storage capacity of 325.767mn m³.

MAFWR issued 876 licences to drill new wells in 2021.

The sultanate’s total water production in 2022 was 39.7mn m³ at the end of January, an increase of 4.6 per cent compared to the same period last year.

The ministry is currently working on implementing a proj-

ect to introduce modern irrigation systems in farms, with the aim of rationalising water use and preserving water wealth, by collecting aflaj water in ground tanks linked to a network of water channels.

MAFWR organised several events to celebrate World Water Day in the Governorate of Muscat on Tuesday, including clean-up activities in a number of aflaj in the wilayat of Bausher in which school students participated. Awareness campaigns and exhibitions were also held on the importance of water.

3-day Unity Charity Exhibition is back; starts on March 24

Our Correspondent
Muscat

The Association for Children with Disabilities will organise the sixth edition of Unity Charity Exhibition from March 24 to 26 at Fraser Suites Muscat.

H H Sayyida Hujaija Jaifer al Said, chairman of the association, informed that the exhibition wasn’t held for two years due to the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic.

The three-day exhibition – 10am to 10pm daily – aims to raise funds to support children with disabilities for the association and women entrepreneurs running small and medium enterprises that have been affected during the pandemic. A total of 120 female entrepreneurs will take part in the exhibition.

The Unity Charity Exhibition will include multiple pavilions selling a wide variety of products.

Proceeds from the exhibition – rent for space let out to SMEs and entry fee of RO1 from visitors – will go to the association, while the SMEs will be entitled to their sales collection, H H Sayyida Hujaija informed.

The association has about 450 children – aged five to 14 – in nine centres in the wilayats of Seeb, Barka, Musannah, Azaiba, Qurriyat, Jalan Bani Bu Hasan, Dhank, Yanqul and Saham.

The association is currently



The association has played an active role in building awareness among various groups of society, private sector entities and institutions on human values

H H SAYYIDA
HUJAIJA JAIFER AL SAID

working on a continuous income source to fund its activities.

“The association has played an active role in building awareness among various groups of society, private sector entities and institutions on human values and the need to donate and provide voluntary financial support to children with disabilities since its establishment in 1991,” H H Sayyida Hujaija said.

Oman Airports signs agreement to supply green waste to Kala fertiliser factory

Muscat – Oman Airports has signed a memorandum of understanding with Oman Water & Wastewater Services Company (OWWSC) – a member of Nama Group of companies – to supply green waste from Muscat International Airport to the compost factory Kala, affiliated to (OWWSC).

The MoU was signed by Sheikh Aimen bin Ahmed al Hosni, CEO of Oman Airports, and Qais bin Saud Al Zakwani, CEO of OWWSC.

On the occasion, Hosni said that Oman Airports is working within the national efforts aimed at promoting environmental sustainability, emphasising its role in the circular economy of cities and maximising the sustainable value of environmental resources.

“In this context, we are pleased to welcome the agreement that we have signed with the Oman Water and Wastewater Services Company, one of the national companies that has a long history in consolidating the concepts of recycling, according to the latest practices worldwide,” Hosni said.

He informed that airports in countries around the world “compete to be a model that expresses the efforts of their coun-



(Supplied photo)

tries in the search for environmental sustainability solutions and their implementation”.

Specialised international organisations present certificates and accreditations within specialised programmes. “Oman Airports has achieved great progress in this field, as our endeavours are directed to enable this kind of bilateral agreements that we consider to support our position as a national institution.”

Zakwani said, “This agreement comes within a series of initiatives launched by the com-

pany to implement the concept of sustainability, through preserving the environment and maximising the economic value of our products and services. Recycling and investment in available resources have an utmost priority in the company’s operations and that of the natural compost factory Kala, affiliated to the company, which is a model for these practices.”

Zakwani informed that the recycling of resources in the sultanate contributes directly to enabling the green economy and

is actually in line with the principles of governance within Oman Vision 2040, and that the agreement will contribute in providing the basic component of the factory’s final product. The production process of the compost factory is implemented by mixing and treating of sewage wastes, which are processed with green waste according to the highest approved specifications.

Green waste, also known as biological waste, is any organic waste that can be converted to fertiliser. It mostly consists of garden waste, such as grass clippings, tree leaves, and household or industrial kitchen wastes. Green waste contains high concentrations of nitrogen and can be used to increase the efficiency of many fertilisation processes and may be added to the soil to maintain the local nutrient cycle.

In addition, green waste recycling and collection programmes reduce the amount of biodegradable material in landfills. This can be achieved by providing communities with their own compost bins. Programmes of such communities are active in composting their green waste, allowing them to play an active role in reducing the amount of food thrown in landfills.

WEATHER WATCH

	Max	Min
Abu Dhabi	33	20
Doha	30	20
Kuwait City	27	19
Manama	31	20
Muscat	33	22
Riyadh	35	18

PRAYER TIMINGS

Fajr	4.53am
Sunrise	6.08am
Duhr	12.19pm
Asr	3.45pm
Maghrib	6.24pm
Isha	7.34pm

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Municipality cracks whip on street fish vendors in Seeb

Our Correspondent
Muscat

Muscat Municipality has carried out an inspection campaign to curb street vending activities in the wilayat of Seeb.

In a statement on Tuesday, the civic body, said, ‘As part of

our efforts to reduce the phenomenon of random sale on roads and streets of the wilayat of Seeb, Muscat Municipality confiscated around 1,000kg of fish and issued seven health violation notices against street vendors.’

These measures come after

receiving repeated reports about the activities of vendors in the areas of Sur al Hadid and Hail, who sell fish in unhygienic conditions.

An MAFWR official, said, “According to Decision No 312/2014, it is illegal to sell fish outside markets and ports

specified by the ministry. Selling fish on streets can be hazardous to the environment and human health as vendors throw fish waste on the streets. Also, selling fish outside areas specified by the ministry negatively impacts sellers who abide by the rules.”



Notice Of Invitation To Attend The Extraordinary General Meeting And The Ordinary General Meeting For The Unitholders Of Ubhar Gcc Fund

The Investment Manager of Ubhar GCC Fund (the “Fund”) is pleased to invite the Fund’s unitholders to attend the Extraordinary General Meeting and the Ordinary General Meeting of the Fund to be held at 3:00 p.m., on Thursday, 7 April 2022, at Oman International Development and Investment Company (Ominvest) building in Airport Heights (near Muscat Hills) (subject to complying with the decisions of Supreme Committee tasked with tackling the developments resulting from the spread of Coronavirus (Covid-19)), and in the event that the quorum to convene the Extraordinary General Meeting and/or the Ordinary General Meeting is not complete, the second meeting shall be convened at 3:00 p.m., on Sunday, 10 April 2022, at the same venue to discuss the following agenda:

First: Extraordinary General Meeting

- To consider and approve the proposed amendment to Article 11.5 of the Fund’s Articles of Association (as per the attached annexure).

Second: Ordinary General Meeting

- To elect a new investment committee for the Fund (either from amongst the unitholders or non – unitholders). Anyone who wish to stand as a candidate for the Fund’s Investment Committee must complete the nomination form prepared for this purpose and submit it to the Fund at least (5) five days prior to the date of the Ordinary General Meeting and no later than Friday 1st April 2022. Any form submitted after this date will not be accepted.

According to the Articles of Association of the Fund, any unitholder shall have the right to authorize in writing any other person to attend the meeting and vote on the resolutions taken thereat on his/her behalf. The authorization must be on the proxy forms, which is enclosed with the invitation. Natural persons must enclose copies of their IDs. Minor unitholders and unitholders who do not have IDs shall enclose copies of their passports. Non-Omani unitholders shall enclose along with their completed proxy forms copies of their passports or their resident card. Proxy forms for juristic persons shall be signed by their authorized signatories and stamped with juristic person’s official stamp. Copies of commercial registration documents as well as ID/passport copies of their authorized signatories’ must be enclosed with their completed and stamped proxy forms.

All unitholders are kindly requested to be present at the venue of the meeting at least half an hour before the time fixed for the meeting.

In case of any inquiries, please contact Mrs. Iman Al Wahaibi, Tel: 24949030 – Fax: 24949099

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MARKET WATCH

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FOREX RATES

(RO1 equals)	
Indian Rs	197.55
Pakistani Rs	470.18
Bangladesh taka	223.30
Philippines peso	136.01
Sri Lankan Rs	738.09

*Rates as on March 22
Source: xe.com

BRIEFS

UK finances take inflation hit

UK state borrowing fell in February but debt interest ballooned on soaring inflation, data showed Tuesday on the eve of a budget update seeking to tackle surging living costs.

Public sector net borrowing dropped to £13.1bn last month, the Office for National Statistics said in a statement as reported by AFP.

That marked an improvement from £15.5bn in February one year ago, when the public purse was plagued by vast pandemic costs.

However, borrowing for last month massively overshot expectations of £8.3bn, as interest repayments eclipsed rising tax receipts.

Russia's Ukraine invasion has sent crude oil, domestic energy and food prices rocketing, exacerbating decades-high British inflation and sparking Bank of England interest hikes that have hiked state borrowing costs.

At the same time, the data showed that inflation had ramped up tax revenue owing to higher consumer prices.

Following the figures, finance minister Rishi Sunak's hands could be further tied regarding major giveaways in Wednesday's budget.

Sunak is facing widespread calls, even from fellow Tory MPs, to help ease surging living costs, with reports suggesting he could delay a jobs tax hike due next month.

Samail Industrial City gets new steel industries project

Our Correspondent
Muscat

Samail Industrial City, affiliated to the Public Establishment for Industrial Estates (Madayn), has signed an agreement with Gulf Petrochemical Services and Trading to set up a steel industries plant.

Gulf Petrochemical Services and Trading will establish steel industries project on an area of 181,000 sqm, with an investment of RO3mn for phase one of the project, Madayn said in a press statement.

Samail Industrial City is designed according to the latest international standards taking into account the environmental, civil defense, social and recreational requirements to achieve an integrated live-work-play model.

Moreover, the Medical Fitness Examination project in Samail Industrial City will be opened next June in cooperation with the Ministry of Health.

Samail Industrial City is divided into several sectors to attract a variety of industries. These sectors include food in-



Gulf Petrochemical Services and Trading will establish steel industries project on an area of 181,000 sqm, with an investment of RO3mn in the phase one of the project

dustry, plastic and petrochemical industry, steel industry, marble industry, building materials in-

dustry, and supporting services sector (e.g. warehouses). Samail Industrial City is one of the

newest industrial cities affiliated with Madayn and is the closest industrial city to the capital, Muscat. The current total area of the industrial city is 7.6mn sqm. Furthermore, the city is adjacent to Al Sharqiyah Expressway, which has three lanes, contributing logistically to land transport operations between the city and other destinations.



CBO issues RO242mn worth of treasury bills

Our Correspondent
Muscat

The Central Bank of Oman (CBO) on Tuesday announced the issuance of treasury bills worth RO242.5mn on behalf of the Omani government.

Treasury bills are short-term highly secured financial instruments issued by the Ministry of Finance, and they provide licensed commercial banks the opportunity to invest their surplus funds.

The Central Bank of Oman acts as the issue manager for treasury bills and provides the added advantage of ready liquidity through discounting and repurchase facilities (repo).

Total value of the allotted treasury bills amounted to RO242.5mn, for a maturity pe-

riod of 28 days, from March 23, 2022 until April 20, 2022. The average accepted price reached RO99.960 for every RO100 bill, and the minimum accepted price also arrived at RO99.960.

The average discount rate and the average yield reached 0.5214 per cent and 0.5216 per cent, respectively. The interest rate on the repo operations with the CBO is 0.5 per cent while the discount rate on the treasury bills discounting facility with the central bank is 0.75 per cent.

Treasury bills promote the local money market by creating a benchmark yield curve for short-term interest rates. Additionally, the government may also resort to this instrument whenever felt necessary for financing its recurrent expenditures.

Asyad Ports sets new milestone with IMS certification

Muscat - Asyad Ports, a member of Asyad Group, has reached another milestone in its journey towards operational excellence by securing the Integrated Management System (IMS) certification.

Showing outstanding capabilities, Asyad Ports met all IMS certification requirements within less than one year, with multiple audits conducted internally and by an external body.

The integrated management system increases efficiency, effectiveness, and optimizes cost while minimizing the disruption caused by repeated external au-



ditions. It also reflects a lid commitment to enhanced performance, higher employee and customer satisfaction, and continuous improvement.

"Receiving the IMS certification is a testament to our continuous efforts to increase effectiveness, streamline business processes, and ensure the highest quality of services in our facilities," said Dr Ahmed al Abri, chief executive officer of Asyad Ports.

He said, "Our extensive ISO certifications portfolio reinforces the faith our customers and part-

ners place in Asyad Ports as a trusted name for consistency and customer satisfaction. We will continue our quest to apply best sector practices and meet the highest international standards across all functions."

Abri added that the IMS certification will play a major role in attracting new shipping lines and improving Omani ports' operations.

With the addition of the IMS certification, Asyad Ports managed to build an impressive record of international certifications that reflect its commitment

to develop robust operations, ensure standardization of management processes, and apply diligent occupational health and safety practices.

Asyad Ports has previously been awarded many management and quality certifications, including the International Certificate for the Management of Occupational Health and Safety (ISO 45001), International Certificate for Environmental Management (ISO 14001) and the International Certificate of Quality (ISO 9001).
ONA

US Fed prepared to raise interest rates 'aggressively', Powell says

Washington, US - The US central bank is prepared to raise interest rates by bigger steps than the quarter-point hike announced last week if that is what's needed to contain "much too high" inflation, Federal Reserve chair Jerome Powell said.

Consumer prices in the world's largest economy have surged to the highest seen in four decades, and the Fed last week raised the benchmark lending rate for the first time since the COVID-19 pandemic began to try to tamp down inflation pressures.

"If we conclude that it is appropriate to move more aggressively by raising the federal funds rate by more than 25 basis points at a meeting or meetings, we will do so," Powell said in a speech to an economics conference.

Inflation was already rising before the Russian invasion of Ukraine added to new price pressures and supply chain impediments that could spill over to the US economy, he told the National Association for Business Economics.

"There is an obvious need to move expeditiously" to remove the stimulus the Fed provided to the American economy during the pandemic, but Powell said central bankers are prepared to go beyond "neutral" and tighten policy if needed to achieve their goal.



Federal Reserve chair Jerome Powell

Last week's rate hike was billed as the first in a series, and several policymakers have expressed willingness - or the need - to move in bigger steps.

St Louis Fed Bank President James Bullard dissented in the vote at last week's meeting of the policy-setting Federal Open Market Committee, because he wanted a half-point increase as the first move.

Atlanta Fed Bank President Raphael Bostic, who spoke to the NABE conference early Monday, said he will "adapt" his views to the data, even if it means raising

a full point.

"I'm comfortable with more aggressive movements if that's what the data and the evidence suggests is appropriate," said Bostic, who unlike Bullard is not currently a voting member of the FOMC.

"I'm going to be very, very open in terms of my approach ... it could at some point be move nothing. It could be 25; it could be 50; it could be 75; it could be one," Bostic told reporters.

Like Bostic, Powell said the key issue is containing prices, and he dismissed the idea of rais-

ing the Fed's inflation target to three per cent from two per cent.

"Inflation is much too high. We have the necessary tools, and we will use them to restore price stability," he said.

The labour market is posing challenges however, with employers struggling to fill open positions, and many people staying out to the workforce, in part to care for children.

The Fed chief noted that the sum of jobs and vacancies is about five million bigger than the size of the US labour force.

"This is a labour market that is out of balance," Powell said in response to a question, adding "We need the labour market to be sustainably tight."

He was optimistic the Fed can grind down inflation and sustain a strong job market without tipping the US economy into a recession, an elusive goal known as a "soft landing" - and he does not see "elevated" risk of recession in the next year.

Even with the oil price shock sparked by the conflict in Ukraine, he noted that "today the economy is very strong and is well positioned to handle tighter monetary policy."

But he cautioned that "very little is straightforward in the current context," and there is high uncertainty about the impact of the war.

AFP

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#liveforthestory

MSX gains 0.3%; volumes rise

Our Correspondent
Muscat

The benchmark index of the Muscat Stock Exchange (MSX) increased 0.28 per cent on Tuesday to close at 4,314.35 points. Trading activity at the Muscat bourse improved compared to the previous day.

The gains in the main index were supported by all sub-indices. Financial index rose 0.33 per cent while Industrial and Services indices gained 0.45 per cent and 0.08 per cent, respectively. MSX Sharia index also inched up 0.14 per cent to close at 489.52 points.

Total trading volumes increased by more than 27 per cent to 12.3mn shares on Tuesday compared with 9.65mn shares traded on Monday. Market turnover increased 45.9 per cent to RO4.64mn against RO3.18mn recorded in the previous trading session.

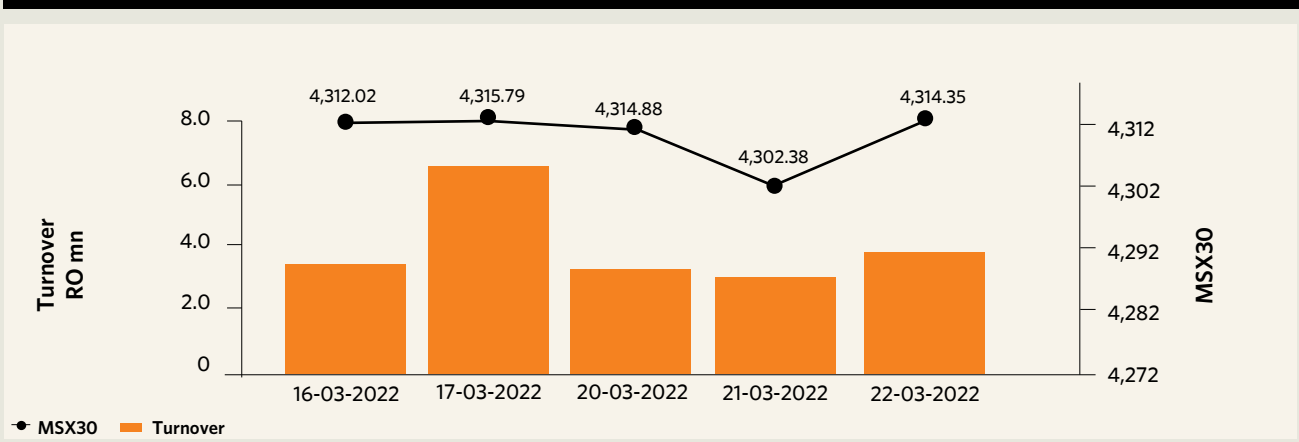
Market breadth of the MSX remained positive with nine advancing stocks to six decliners. As many as six traded stocks closed flat for the day.

Top gainers of the day were Raysut Cement (4.0 per cent), Oman Cables Industry (3.45 per cent), Al Suwadi Power (2.08 per cent), Ahlibank (1.64 per cent) and National Bank of Oman (1.45



per cent). Top losers were Al Madina Investment (-8.33 per cent), Oman Fisheries (-3.49 per cent), Global Investment Holding (-2.86 per cent), National Aluminium Products (-2.38 per cent) and Al Batinah Power (-2.04 per cent).

MSX INDEX AND TURNOVER OF FIVE TRADING DAYS



Russia warns oil embargo would 'hit everyone'

Moscow, Russia – An embargo on Russian oil imports, pushed for by some European countries over Moscow's military action in Ukraine, would have a direct impact on everyone, the Kremlin said Monday.

Some EU countries including Baltic states have called for an embargo on Russian oil and gas, while Germany has opposed an outright halt on Russian energy imports.

EU foreign ministers on Monday are meeting to discuss the situation in Ukraine and possible tightening of sanctions.

US President Joe Biden is set

to attend an EU summit on Ukraine on Thursday in Brussels that will debate energy prices and supply security.

Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov told journalists that an oil embargo "is a decision that will hit everyone".

"Such an embargo will have a very serious impact on the world energy market, it will have a very serious negative impact on Europe's energy balance," he said.

The United States this month announced a ban on Russian oil and gas, while Britain has said it will cut out Russian oil imports by the end of this year.

Peskov said that the Americans will be less affected by such a measure, and "will feel much better than the Europeans. It will be tough for the Europeans".

Oil prices steadied on Tuesday as investors tracked developments in the war in Ukraine and digested the US Federal Reserve chief's warning of a possible sharp interest rate hike. Crude futures had soared more than seven per cent Monday on supply worries as European leaders debated banning imports from Russia, but they were more or less flat in Tuesday trading.

AFP

Elon Musk to hand over first 'made in Germany' Teslas

Berlin, Germany – US electric car pioneer Tesla will today inaugurate its new "gigafactory" near Berlin, with CEO Elon Musk flying in to present customers with the first Model Y vehicles made in Europe.

"Excited to hand over the first production cars made by Giga Berlin-Brandenburg tomorrow!" Musk tweeted on the eve of the red ribbon ceremony.

The opening caps an arduous two-year approval and construction process that saw Tesla run into a series of administrative and legal hurdles, including complaints from locals about the site's environmental impact.

Having started construction at its own risk, Tesla finally won the formal go-ahead from regional authorities to begin production earlier this month.

The "gigafactory" in Gruenheide, in Germany's eastern state of Brandenburg, is Tesla's first production site in Europe, and local officials are hoping it will help the region position itself as a hub for electric vehicle production.



Tesla aims to eventually employ some 12,000 workers at the site who will churn out around 500,000 Model Y cars annually.

The first 30 of the all-electric, compact SUVs to roll off the assembly line will be delivered to customers during Tuesday's ceremony.

German Chancellor Olaf Scholz and Economy Minister Robert Habeck will also be in attendance.

Tesla's arrival is likely to jolt Germany's flagship auto industry, setting the stage for fierce competition with rivals Volkswagen, BMW and Mercedes-Benz

as they pivot from traditional engines to cleaner electric vehicles.

Tesla's focus on Europe comes as the continent grapples with sky-high energy costs that have sent petrol prices soaring, prompting drivers to take a closer look at electric alternatives.

But as with other carmakers, shortages of raw materials and supply chain disruptions linked in part to Russia's invasion of Ukraine are weighing on Tesla.

Musk said last week that the company was facing "significant recent inflation pressure".

AFP

Biden tells US businesses to 'harden' defenses against Russia cyber threat

Washington, US – President Joe Biden on Monday warned of intelligence pointing to a growing Russian cyber threat and urged US businesses to "immediately" prepare defenses.

"If you have not already done so, I urge our private sector partners to harden your cyber defenses immediately," he said in a statement.

Biden cited "evolving intelligence that the Russian government is exploring options for potential cyberattacks," including in response to Western sanctions over Moscow's launching of the war in Ukraine.

"It's part of Russia's playbook," he said.

Biden said the US government would "continue to use every tool to deter, disrupt, and if necessary, respond to cyberattacks against critical infrastructure."

However, he underlined that most critical infrastructure in the country is owned and operated by private entities, which cannot be compelled to take specific cyber security measures.

"Owners and operators must



US President Joe Biden delivers remarks at the Business Roundtable's CEO Quarterly Meeting in Washington, DC on Monday (AFP)

accelerate efforts to lock their digital doors," he said.

"You have the power, the capacity, and the responsibility to strengthen the cybersecurity and resilience of the critical services and technologies on which Americans rely. We need everyone to do their part," Biden said.

Later, Biden told a meeting of US business leaders that Russia has "a very sophisticated cyber capability" and an attack was

one of the tactics President Vladimir Putin "is most likely to use."

Referring to a summit last year in Geneva, where he warned Putin against cyber attacks on US critical infrastructure, Biden said "we had a long conversation about if he uses it, what will be the consequence."

"But the point is, he has the capability. He hasn't used it yet," he added.

US authorities have said that everything from fuel supply routes to water supplies are at risk from cyber attacks, and have identified Russian hackers as one of the main threats.

Deputy National Security Advisor for Cyber and Emerging Technology Anne Neuberger told reporters that despite Biden's warning, "there is no certainty that there will be a cyber incident on critical infrastructure."

There has been "preparatory activity" detected, but no sign of a "specific" attack.

And, despite efforts by the government to bolster coordination and assistance in the cyber security sphere, "there's so much more we need to do to have the confidence that we've locked our digital doors," she said.

In some areas the gaps are "deeply troubling," she said.

Neuberger reiterated previous White House warnings that if Russia does target critical infrastructure, the US "will be prepared to respond."

AFP

In climate fight, rich nations must give up oil first: report

Paris, France – Rich countries must end their oil and gas production by 2034 to cap global warming at 1.5 degrees Celsius and give poorer nations time to replace fossil fuel income, according to a report released Tuesday.

The 70-page analysis from the Tyndall Centre for Climate Change Research comes as nearly 200 nations kicks off a two-week negotiation to validate a landmark assessment of options for reducing carbon pollution and extracting CO2 from the air.

The overarching objective, enshrined in the 2015 Paris Agreement, is to cap global warming "well below" 2C, and 1.5C if possible.

A torrent of research since 2015, along with a crescendo of deadly extreme weather across the globe, has confirmed that the lower aspirational target is by far a safer threshold.

Some poorer nations produce only a tiny percentage of global output but are so reliant on fossil fuel revenues that rapidly removing this income could undercut their economic or political stability, the Tyndall Centre report shows.

Countries such as South Sudan, the Republic of Congo and Gabon have little economic revenue apart from oil and gas production.

By contrast, wealthy nations that are major producers would remain rich even if fossil fuel income were removed.

Oil and gas revenue, for example, contribute eight percent to US GDP, but the country's GDP per capita would still be about US\$60,000 – second highest in the world among oil and gas producing nations – without it, according to the report.

"We use the GDP per capita that remains once we've re-



moved the revenue from oil and gas as an indicator of capacity," lead author Kevin Anderson, a professor of energy and climate change at the University of Manchester, told AFP.

There are 88 countries in the world that produce oil and gas. "We calculated emissions

phase-out dates for all of them consistent with the Paris Agreement temperature goals," Anderson said.

"We found that wealthy countries need to be at zero oil and gas production by 2034."

First coal, then oil and gas. The very poorest countries

can continue to produce out to 2050, according to the calculation, and other countries such as China and Mexico are somewhere in between.

When countries signed the Paris climate treaty, it was accepted that wealthy nations should take bigger and faster

steps to decarbonise their economies and provide financial support to help poorer countries wean themselves of fossil fuels.

The principle has already been applied to coal-power generation, with the UN calling on rich OECD countries to phase out coal use by 2030, and the rest of the world by 2040.

The new report, Phaseout Pathways for Fossil Fuel Production, applies the same approach to oil and gas.

For a 50/50 chance of limiting the rise in global temperatures to 1.5C, 19 countries in which per capita GDP would remain above US\$50,000 without oil and gas revenue must end production by 2034.

Included in this tranche are the US, Norway, Britain, Canada, Australia and the United Arab Emirates.

Another 14 "high capacity" nations where per capita GDP would be about US\$28,000

without income from oil and gas must end production in 2039, including Saudi Arabia, Kuwait and Kazakhstan.

The next group of countries – including China, Brazil and Mexico – would need to end output by 2043, followed by Indonesia, Iran and Egypt in 2045.

Only the poorest oil and gas producing nations such as Iraq, Libya and Angola could continue to pump crude and extract gas until mid-century.

"This report illustrates only too clearly why there also needs to be an urgent phase-out of oil and gas production," said Connie Hedegaard, former European Commissioner for climate, and Danish minister for climate and energy. The Russian invasion of Ukraine, she noted, has "made it abundantly clear that there are numerous reasons why the world needs to get off its dependence on fossil fuels."

AFP

Omani trail runner completes 560km challenge

Hamed al Harthi, one of Oman's most experienced trail runners, crossed the finish line in Sur at 5.30pm on March 2 after completing his epic 560km 'Border to Coast' self-challenge in eight days.

Starting from Um Zumul, on the border of the Sultanate of Oman, the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates, on March 13, he was joined by local runners and well-wishers throughout the journey and raised money for donate.om, Oman's donations portal for charitable organisations, a press release said.

After pushing the limits and going above and beyond age, Hamed confirmed his arrival in Sur by posting 'mission accomplished!' on his Instagram account (@hamedalharthi1) where he had been charting his progress throughout the challenge and sharing footage of the run captured by his own team and those running alongside him. In total, he managed to raise donations from 107 people through the donate.om portal.

Speaking after completing the challenge, Hamed said, "The



challenge was very tough and our plans had to change. I was hoping to finish in six to seven days, but the temperatures in the desert were hotter than expected and that slowed down my progress. It was very, very hot and I could only sleep for three hours every day. This as well as

injuries was the hardest part. "Sometimes, the wind was on our side, so I could increase my speed, and catch up. And the support team was fantastic. Without them, I would not have achieved my goal. They kept me on track and motivated. I am grateful for their assistance

throughout and very happy to have completed this challenge!" The route took Hamed from Um Zumul close to the border area, through to Lekhwair and Fahud before reaching the Wilayat of Adam. From there, he ran to Sinaw, Mudaybi, Qabil, Wasil and then through to the

final destination in Sur. On each stage, he was supported by a technical and logistics team to ensure his safety and maintain the correct course, and cheered on by supporters.

Sixty-three year-old Hamed, a life-long runner, said that this achievement stands alongside



the greatest achievements in his career and the challenge of different terrains, high daytime temperatures, and cold nights in the desert was unlike anything he had encountered before.

Hamed had competed in Oman by UTMB and Ushuaia by UTMB in Argentina in 2019,

UTMB Mont-Blanc in 2021, and reached the summit of Mount Kilimanjaro the same year. He plans to continue taking on epic challenges all around the world and will now turn his attention to recovery before planning more.

The current challenge was supported by Dhofar Insurance.



Al Maha signs agreement with Vision Insurance

Al Maha Petroleum Products Marketing Company signed a partnership agreement with Vision Insurance Company during a press conference at W Hotel, in the presence of media representatives and officials from both companies, on March 16.

The agreement was signed by Engineer Hamad bin Salem al Maghdari, CEO, Al Maha Oil Products Marketing Company, and Issam Mouslimani, CEO, Vision Insurance, a press release said.

The agreement will offer additional benefits to Al Maha cus-

tomers who hold prepaid Al Maha fuel cards - a free voucher for car care from M3 Spa for vehicle care, in addition to three discount vouchers for car care from Vision Insurance

Eng Hamad al Maghdari said, "Al Maha Oil Products Marketing Company has strengthened its services by offering quality products according to the needs of the market in line with the strengthening of the economic sector as per Oman 2040 vision.

He added, "The Al Maha Petroleum Products Marketing Company has witnessed a signif-

icant growth in the local market with the expansion of service station networks across, which led to gaining the loyalty of many customers who continue to trust the quality of products and services that are of the highest specifications."

Al Maha Oil Products Marketing Company has succeeded in doubling its sales volume over the past two years by following a special strategy, which is to enhance its presence, increase the number of customers, and have partnership with different sectors.

DIFC Art Nights to display digital art

DIFC Art Nights returns this week with the theme 'The Future is Here'. The 13th edition of the much-anticipated biannual event will showcase creative and visionary artworks from talented local and international artists.

The two-day DIFC Art Nights will take place on March 24 and 25 at Gate Village from 6pm onwards. The event will feature established as well as upcoming artists from around the world, a press release said.

In line with this edition's theme, futuristic installations will be on display and will include non-fungible tokens (NFTs), digital artworks, and artists' depiction of what the 'future' means to them.

The artworks and installations will be on display both, outdoors as well as in some of Dubai's



most prestigious art galleries, such as Opera Gallery, Sconci Art Gallery, Tabari Art Space, Christie's, and Sotheby's Art among others.

The Artiana Gallery will exhibit a medley of evocative virtual art pieces that will transport visitors to the future. The

gallery's first NFT-selling exhibition - The Mythical Metaverse - features the artworks of prominent artist Sakti Burman. The NFTs are based on the artist's oil paintings and are now being presented as digital versions.

Artworks will be exhibited across Gate Village and will

showcase the works of a variety of artists including Christopher Fiorentino, popularly known as Flore, a celebrated American contemporary fine artist whose distinct style fuses pop and street art. Through his pieces, Flore strips away all the filters that society places on one's life.

Oxy Oman sponsors Sustainability Week

Oxy Oman representatives recently attended Oman Sustainability Week (OSW), which comprises a series of events centered on sustainability, including an awards ceremony, conference, and exhibition, where Oxy served as a silver sponsor.

The OSW was organised by be'ah and the Ministry of Energy,

and aimed to highlight Oman's commitment to sustainability through engaging with national and global stakeholders with the themes of sustainable development and leadership, a press release said.

The opening ceremony was held under the auspices of H H Sayyid Theyazin bin Haitham al Said, Minister of Culture, Sports

and Youth. Said bin Khamis al Balushi, senior vice president, Technical, Oxy Oman, attended the event, along with other senior representatives of the company.

The OSW hosted an exhibition showcasing global companies and organisations, including an Oxy booth, featuring the company's efforts in sustainability and long-term investments to

achieve net-zero emissions.

In addition, the OSW featured presentations and panel discussions on the latest sustainability technologies, solutions, and initiatives from across the world, and covered topics such as biowaste and food security, strategic planning for sustainable development, sustainability and the 4th industrial revolution, etc.

Bank Nizwa concludes first Leadership Development Programme

Bank Nizwa places utmost importance on employee skill enhancement as an indispensable part of its human capital development. Acknowledging the role its employees play in helping realise the long-term ambitions of the bank, Bank Nizwa encourages continuous learning and a healthy competitive environment for employees in order to prepare them for more challenging positions.

In adherence to its fundamental values of promoting employee wellbeing and growth, the bank, last year, introduced a leadership programme - HiPo. This innovative programme was initiated to identify, target and promote middle management employees to executive management posts, a press release said.

Geared at high potential employees who had demonstrated



their unfaltering dedication to achieving organisational goals, proven their abilities at different tasks, and exhibited leadership

traits by handling complex work scenarios, the programme was yet another strategic initiative to encourage employees to strive

for excellence at the workplace. With the first batch of employees graduating on March 21, Bank Nizwa applauded their ef-

forts and congratulated them on completing the programme.

Haifa al Lawati, assistant general manager, Human Resources,

Bank Nizwa, said, "Bank Nizwa has always placed great emphasis on continued learning, charted well-defined roadmaps

for career progression and imbued amongst its workforce the zeal to excel as leaders. The HiPo leadership programme not only helps capable employees assume new leadership roles at the executive management level but also ensures healthy competition amongst the workforce, motivating them to perform at their optimum levels.

"By investing in our human capital today, we will be able to create visionary leaders and managers for tomorrow. The sultanate has an ambitious local workforce who have showcased utmost diligence in executing their responsibilities, and reserves the skills to achieve sustainable results. Through platforms like HiPo, we want to support the long-term aspirations of our team and aid in their personal and professional growth."

Omani products showcased at Carrefour, Muscat City Centre

The Public Establishment for Industrial Estates - Madayn - is organising a six-day Omani Products exhibition at Carrefour, City Centre Muscat as part of its 'Made in Oman' Campaign.

The opening ceremony was held on Tuesday under the auspices of Hilal bin Hamad al Hasani, CEO of Madayn. The exhibition, which will continue till March 27, aims at providing the needs of the consumers for the blessed month of Ramadan, a press release said.

The series of 'Made in Oman' exhibitions in the various local hypermarkets and commercial centres play a key role in generating awareness among the local and foreign community on the quality and competitive features of the locally manufactured products, and emphasising the significant role played by supporting the local made products in advancing the national economy.



OMNIYAT reveals iconic AVA project at Palm Jumeirah

Drones illuminated Dubai's sky on Monday with one of the greatest light shows in the Middle East to reveal OMNIYAT's latest ultra-luxury real estate project, the soon to be developed AVA Palm Jumeirah.

Boasting 17 hanging palaces with a uniquely innovative architectural character, the project is set to re-shape the real estate

development industry and its luxury market. AVA will further elevate extravagant lifestyles for local and international high net worth individuals, with the newly innovated palace living experience that it provides, a press release said.

Running until March 24, the show's first edition took place at a grand celebration attended by

several local and foreign media representatives. For the first time in Dubai, and in the world, drones have been deployed to display a 3D architectural design and to characterize luxury across the city sky.

To portray remarkable and astonishing canvases of the new AVA project - which is managed by the iconic hospitality brand,

Dorchester Collection Dubai - 500 drones, flying 130m above the ground, captivated the eyes of residents and guests at Palm Jumeirah, Jumeirah Beach, and Dubai Marina.

With its 17 ultra-luxury hanging palaces, AVA is the latest addition to Omniyat Group's AED 15bn investment portfolio. Additionally, it is Omniyat's second

project at Palm Jumeirah, following its remarkable One at Palm Jumeirah, Dorchester Collection, Dubai.

The region's leading ultra-luxury real-estate developer, Omniyat, revealed the AVA project in conjunction with the celebration of delivering One at Palm Jumeirah, Dorchester Collection, Dubai.

NBO launches special finance for Ramadan

National Bank of Oman (NBO) launches Car Finance for new and pre-owned cars with special Ramadan offers and rates starting at just 4.75% p a on reducing balance, valid until May 31.

The bank launched the facility at a special event at its headquarters in Azaiba, which was attended by the bank's partner automobile dealerships from across Oman.

Adding to its portfolio of competitive financing solutions, NBO's new car loans offer attractive rates and are extended to salary and non-salary transfer customers, Omani nationals and residents, a press release said.

Tariq Atiq, chief Retail and Digital Banking officer at NBO, said, "We are delighted to launch our new car financing facility and give our customers the chance to buy their dream car, at special rates. What's more, we are partnering with dealers across the country, to add to the exclusive deals available when signing up."

"Meanwhile, we continue to enhance our suite of products and services, which are designed to support our customers to plan and manage their financial lives, while providing them with extra value and a superior customer experience."



Tariq Atiq

NBO's car finance is part of the bank's commitment to delivering hassle-free, competitive financial solutions to fit all. Processed quickly and efficiently, the bank also provides borrowers a host of benefits including flexible payment terms, additional financing, and much more.

In addition, NBO has partnered with V-Kool Oman and lamJohnson to offer their customers 25% discount.

Tariq further said, "What matters most to our customers is the convenience, affordability and benefits associated with the product. At NBO, we want to offer something for everyone when it comes to meeting customers' financing requirements whether auto, home or personal."

ESO calls to join Global Earth Hour

In solidarity for the future of the environment, the Environment Society of Oman (ESO) is inviting the local community to join them in supporting the global Earth Hour movement by turning off all non-essential lights on March 26 from 8.30pm to 9.30 pm.

In addition, the non-profit organisation is supporting the Wildlife Fund for Nature's (WWF) Earth Hour movement theme for 2022, - Shape our future - with a social media campaign which aims to engage and promote environmentally sustainable behaviours that people can take to preserve the planet, a press release said.

"The year 2022 is set to be a critical year for the future of our planet. We are calling on world leaders to take this unique opportunity and secure a nature-positive world by 2030 so that there is more nature by the end of the decade than there is today," explains Marco Lamber-



тини, director general, WWF International.

"Now is our biggest chance to course correct towards a safer and better future for all. We need transformational changes to the way we produce and consume food, energy, and other natural resources. By taking part in Earth Hour, we want to do our part,

putting an end to nature being taken for granted," he said.

"The idea behind Earth Hour goes beyond just turning off the lights for 60 minutes. It reminds us of our shared responsibility towards protecting the environment. That's why, we encourage everybody to challenge themselves to think about the deci-

sions they make in their daily lives and the actions they can take to contribute in its preservation, like saying no to single-use plastic, avoiding littering, and looking for chances to recycle," said Sayyida Tania al Said, president of ESO. "We are proud to partner with WWF in our shared mission to stop the degradation of the earth's natural environment and build a future in which humans live in harmony with nature. This is our time to celebrate nature and help shape our future for generations to come."

Organized by WWF, Earth Hour is the world's largest grassroots movement for the environment. It has inspired worldwide initiatives for the protection of nature, climate, and the environment, helping drive awareness, action and policy change. The movement also offers the opportunity for the global community to make their voices heard in this pivotal year and demand a nature-positive future.



Al Sahwa School holds 'Market Day'

Students of Al Sahwa Schools (IB MYP 5 (Grade 10) and GED Grade 11) and students of Al Injaz Private School, together organised a 'Market Day' on March 17 to showcase their creativity skills.

The students stepped outside their day to day study programmes to devise novel solu-

tions in designing products that are used in our daily lives. The different products created by them included origami calendars, herbal glue, jewellery, art decor, clothes, tote bags, games and phone accessories, a press release said.

The event also allowed students to strengthen their entre-

preneurial way of thinking by giving them the opportunity to own and operate a start-up for a designated period of time.

In keeping with the Oman 2040 vision, Al Sahwa Schools recognises the importance of developing entrepreneurial skills in students to promote future economic development of Oman.

All-new Nissan Kicks 2022 gets a style and technology boost

Nissan Oman has announced the arrival of the all-new Nissan Kicks 2022 in the sultanate, refreshed with style and technology upgrades, designed to meet the growing needs of urban customers in the country.

A senior official of Nissan Oman, from the house of Suhail Bahwan Automobiles (SBA) said, "We pleased to let fans of Nissan Kicks know the arrival of their favourite model in an all new avatar. The Nissan Kicks has always had a finger on the pulse of the young urban commuter, combining style and technology with a value for money that has made it a fast favourite in Oman. The new Kicks 2022 dials up both, connectivity and customi-



sation, while infusing it with the latest Nissan Intelligent Mobility technology - making this an even more formidable model within the SUV-B segment."

He added, "The attractiveness of Kicks is reflective of the increasing customer demand for crossover SUVs, as they seek space and versatility akin to SUVs, with the size and practicality of a sedan. These expectations, coupled with growing desire amongst younger drivers to always stay connected, have helped us create a refreshed 2022 Nissan Kicks and we are excited to see our customers across the region take this nimble model out on the streets."

Placing a large focus on en-

hancing connectivity, innovation and personalisation, the new Nissan Kicks allows drivers to further express their personal style as they cut through the city with precise handling and available advanced driver assist features.

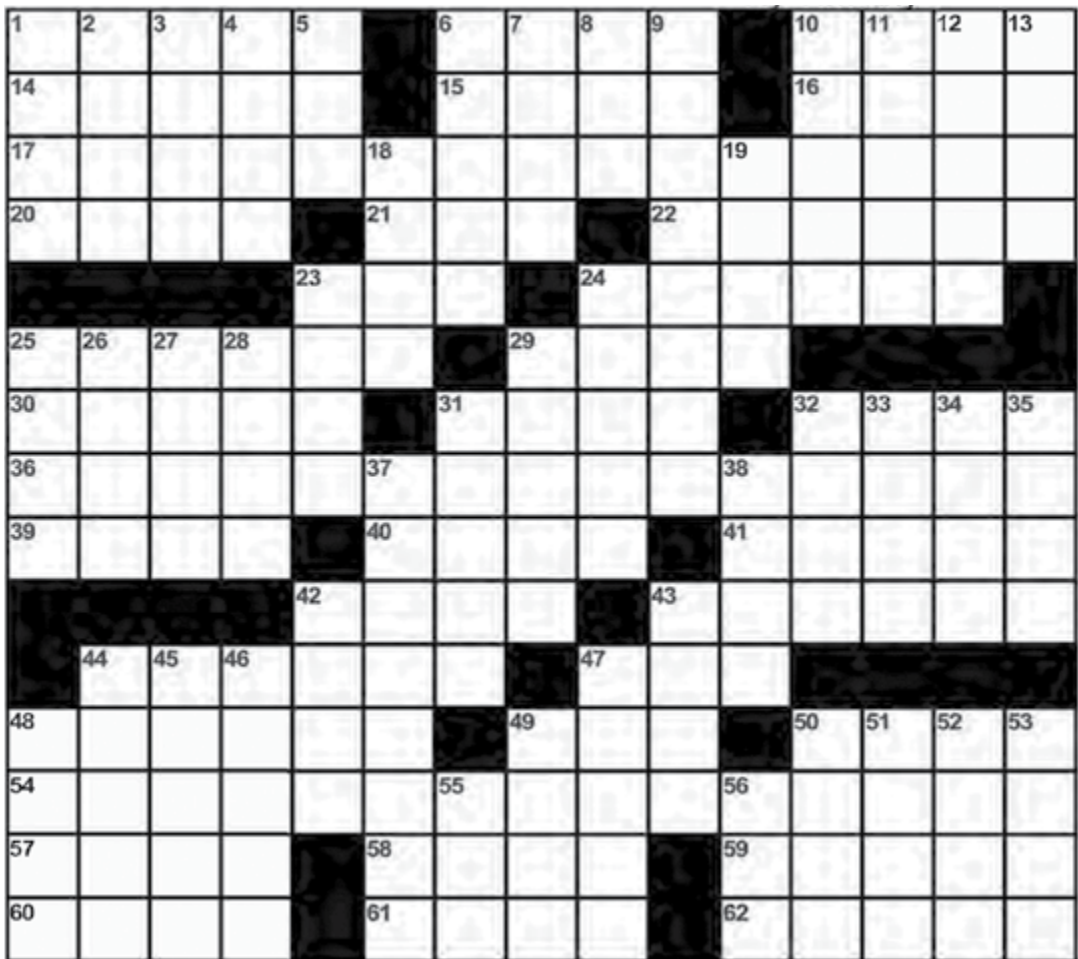
Since its introduction to Oman in 2017 as the entry model to Nissan's lineup of crossovers and SUVs, Kicks has attracted young, enthusiastic drivers to the brand. It quickly established a reputation for offering an impressive array of class-leading features with equally attractive value - even securing 11% year-on-year market share increase in the SUV-B segment during fiscal year 2020 (April 2020 - March

2021).

Maintaining that momentum, the new Nissan Kicks 2022 has been refreshed with updates to provide even more features, technology, customised style and value that buyers seek in a compact crossover. The exterior sees an aesthetic upgrade with the integration of Nissan's Double V-motion grille, new front and rear bumpers and an array of bold new colours, including new two-tone combinations.

The updated interior features a new centre console, Apple CarPlay and Android Autocompatibility and BOSE headrest speakers. It also includes a number of Nissan Intelligent Mobility (NIM) technology upgrades.

DAILY CROSSWORD



- ACROSS**
1) Certain sorority woman
6) Catchall abbr.
10) Soon, to a bard
14) Everglades bird
15) Colored part of the eye
16) _ Scotia
17) Three smart things
20) Highland head warmers
23) "Emergency!"
24) Aviary sounds
25) Duplicate a duplicate, e.g.
29) Persia, now
30) Sometimes consumed bacteria
31) Husk relative
32) Have a decisive chess win
36) Three smart things
39) Performance for one
40) Wordplay-based jokes
41) Address a convention
42) Mental keenness
43) Human's first home?
- 44) 7-Up alternative
47) Land of presidents
48) Enter a pool
49) Lt's subordinate
50) What bodybuilders count
54) Three smart things
57) Advocate
58) Unit of pressure
59) Encourage
60) "_ of the d'Urbervilles"
61) Unattractive pond feature
62) Batman's Bruce
- DOWN**
1) Didn't offer for sale
2) _Khan
3) Big event for a senior
4) Composes or authors
5) Absorbed, as a cost
6) Some farm beasts
7) Singer and actor Burl
8) "Hold on a_!"
9) Easy victory
10) Battery terminal
11) Fairly large-sized musical group
12) Do-_ (replays)
13) Some House votes
18) "Hello, sailor!"
19) Way of carrying oneself
23)_ & Span (household cleanser)
24) Performing threesomes
25) 45s and 78s (abbr.)
26) Sound rebound
27) Refrigerate
28) Mishmash
29) Works on wrinkles
31) Between 0 and 90 degrees, as an angle
32) _ mortals
33) Biology lab gel substance
34) Ballerina's garb
35) Visual pair
37) Bad names?
38) Little amount
42) "When You_ Upon a Star"
43) " Back in the_" (Beatles hit)
44) Fern-to-be
45) Promotes
46) Hotel posting
47) Deprive of weaponry
48) Censored material
49) Almond or eggshell relative
50) Capital in the Baltics
51) Trendsetting
- 52) Menial laborer
53) All there mentally
55) Med school
grad
56) Morning drops on blades

NOTE PAD



YOUR DAILY HOROSCOPE

ARIES MARCH 21-APRIL 19
It's time to relax and have some fun, but certainly not alone. Get ready to focus on a partner and relationship today. The stars are urging you to spend some time with just one quality person -- someone you've been dying to get to know. So instead of dragging yourself out and pretending to have a good time with a crowd when you know you're not in the mood, snuggle up, kick back, and enjoy a quiet evening.

LEO JULY 23-AUGUST 22
When you least expect it, a touch of anger could enter into a conversation that started out sane and civil. Your mission, should you choose to accept it, is to temper the rhetoric of all parties concerned with a bit of tact by translating. You know, it's the "what he really meant to say was" kind of thing. Fortunately, you'll have some very valuable help. The stars are bumping up your skills with conversation and diplomacy.

SAGITTARIUS NOVEMBER 22-DECEMBER 21
Does this sound familiar? Someone you know and love gets ticked off by something that you say quite off the cuff and in an entirely playful way, something that you meant as a joke. Easy, there. Don't hurt a friend inadvertently. They'll undoubtedly forgive you, but why risk it? Think before speaking, just for a second. Think about how you'd feel if the tables were turned.

TAURUS APRIL 20-MAY 20
You're due to catch someone's eye and touch their heart in a very nice way thanks to the sentimental stars. As a result, your already sensual nature will be running on high, but you'll also be ready to have a nice heart-to-heart chat. If there's something you need to say to either create or improve the closeness between you, go right ahead. There's no time like the present.

VIRGO AUGUST 23-SEPTEMBER 22
You've probably already got more penciled into your social calendar than you can possibly pull off unless you're careful with your time, and you usually are. That said, don't go over the top. The invitations to come out and play will continue to pour in, and you really should save just a few hours for the delightful offers that haven't yet presented themselves.

CAPRICORN DECEMBER 22-JANUARY 19
An older relative or authority figure who's had their eye on you for a while now is just about ready to let you know how well you've been doing, especially based on recent stressful situations that you've passed through with flying colours. In the meantime, don't ignore someone new and who's due to come along soon, sent by the charming stars to take your mind off this situation and anything that's even remotely unpleasant.

AQUARIUS JANUARY 20-FEBRUARY 18
You're about to rush headlong into something you were never expecting: an intimate encounter with someone who's so interesting and unusual and fascinating that you might actually see yourself hanging out with them for more than a few dates. If that's truly the case, don't bother making plans to see a movie. Why waste valuable getting-to-know-you time in silence? Plan to have coffee or wine instead. At your place.

GEMINI MAY 21-JUNE 21
Thinking about going somewhere with a partner? Well, it's no surprise. And what a great time to start planning! The stars are in a romantic, partner-oriented mood, and they're especially excited about love affairs, by the way. Why not pull out all the stops? If you both are due some time off, it certainly might be the right time to use it. This is going to be a memorable romantic adventure.

LIBRA SEPTEMBER 23-OCTOBER 22
Don't be surprised if you're attracting an awful lot of admiring attention for at least the next couple of days. The stars turn up the volume on your personality, bringing out your most sociable, charming qualities. Needless to say, you might be beating off your admirers, but it won't exactly be hellish for you. In fact, one admirer in particular might let it be known that you're exactly what they've been wishing for.

CANCER JUNE 22-JULY 22
Family matters could be tricky, but that won't keep you from getting involved and possibly being able to solve something that's been ignored for far too long. This mediation ability comes to you courtesy of the stars, which are big on home and family right now. You're equipped to talk anyone into anything at the moment. Why not use it to help heal an age-old wound? You know you want to.

SCORPIO OCTOBER 23-NOVEMBER 21
Communication is the name of the game, especially regarding secrets, at least for starters. It's all about undercover encounters and enticing partners. So, one little clandestine meeting couldn't hurt, right? Well, it might, so sit tight. In the meantime, you could end up with some really lovely communications that are more fit for public knowledge. But if you just can't resist? Well, keep quiet about it.

PISCES FEBRUARY 19-MARCH 20
The stars are all about peace and cooperation, inspiring one and all to make amends and deliver or accept apologies. If you've been feeling the need to try to put an end to a dispute between dear ones, rest assured that with just a tiny bit of effort, you can. Since you're famous for having the most sensitive instincts, you're a shoo-in for the position, especially since you'll probably offer to do it anyway. They'll no doubt accept.

TEST YOUR KNOWLEDGE

1. What is the name of a musical form and genre created within the African-American communities in the deep south of the USA at the end of the 19th century?
A. Oranges
B. Reds
C. Blues
D. Greens

2. What word describes a retail dealer in special supplies or equipment for ships?
A. Ostler
B. Haberdasher
C. Milliner
D. Chandler

3. In Noh theatre what is the name of the main protagonist role?
A. Koken
B. Hayashi
C. Jiutai
D. Shite

Answers: 1. C 2. D 3. D



BOGGLER
Each game will present you with a matrix filled with letters. The objective is to form words by linking adjacent letters - to the left, right, on top, bottom, or diagonal to each other. The Boggles Classic game uses a 4 x 4 matrix. Words are valued at one point for each letter in excess of two letters. A three letter word is worth one point, a four letter word is worth two points, and so on. Valid words must be at least three letters long.
Solution 20-25 words: Excellent, 15-20 words: Very good, 10-15 words: Good, 5-10 words: Average

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

WORD BUILDER
You have three minutes to find all the words contained in this word.
Rules: Words should be at least four letters long, proper nouns and duplicates don't count

SUDOKU EASY ANSWER

Ukraine eyes Mariupol evacuation attempt as capital Kyiv locks down

Kyiv, Ukraine - Ukrainian authorities announced a new bid on Tuesday to rescue civilians from besieged port city Mariupol which has been under heavy bombardments since Russia's invasion began almost a month ago, as capital Kyiv hunkered down in a curfew.

More than 200,000 people are trapped in the city described by those who managed to escape as a 'freezing hellscape riddled with dead bodies and destroyed buildings', Human Rights Watch said, quoting data provided by a local official.

"We know that there will not be enough space for everyone" on Tuesday, but "we will try to carry out the evacuation until we have gotten all the inhabitants of Mariupol out," vowed Deputy Prime Minister Iryna Vereshchuk in a video address.

As Russian troops continued their relentless assaults on their neighbour, Ukrainian leader Volodymyr Zelensky said all issues would be on the table if Russia's Vladimir Putin agreed to direct talks to end the war, including contested Crimea and Donbas. But he warned his country would be 'destroyed' before it surrenders.

The Kremlin in return said it would like to see negotiations with Kyiv to be 'more active and substantial'. With Russia's military appearing to make little headway in capturing key targets, fears are growing that Putin may resort to even more drastic means to turn the tide.

US President Joe Biden warned that Putin was considering using chemical and biological weapons in Ukraine as he held talks with European leaders on Monday on what he called Moscow's increasingly 'brutal tactics'.

The US leader is due to travel



Ukraine army Chaplain Mikola Madenski walks through debris outside the destroyed Retroville shopping mall in a residential district in Kyiv on Monday (AFP)

We know that there will not be enough space for everyone. But we will try to carry out the evacuation until we have gotten all the inhabitants of Mariupol out

IRYNA VERESHCHUK

to Brussels on Thursday for a series of summits gathering NATO, EU and G7 leaders, before heading to Poland, which has received the bulk of the three million Ukrainians fleeing war in their

country.

'Desperate bid'

Since Russia launched its invasion on February 24, at least 117 children have been killed in the

war, Ukraine's federal prosecutor said.

Some 548 schools have been damaged, including 72 completely destroyed. But both Western and Ukrainian experts believe the war was not going the way the Kremlin had expected.

Moscow has stepped up its military activity, flying 300 sorties in the past 24 hours, in a 'desperate' bid to turn the tide against the Ukrainian resistance, a senior US defence official said.

Ukraine's army command said

Russian troops now had ammunition, food and fuel to last just three days.

Three hundred Russian soldiers have defected in the north-eastern Sumy region, added the army command on Facebook.

But even in areas Russia has captured, resistance has continued, with Ukraine's leaders on Tuesday accusing Russian troops of firing on unarmed protesters in the occupied southern city of Kherson.

A series of videos posted on

social media and the messaging app Telegram showed citizens gathering in Kherson's 'Freedom Square' protesting against Russia's recent seizure of the city.

Russian soldiers could be seen firing into the air, and video footage showing a bleeding elderly man being carried away, though local officials said there were no fatalities.

'Massive war crime'

On the frontlines, authorities said evacuation of residents from

Mariupol will be the priority on Tuesday. Three routes have been drawn up linking the port city to Zaporizhzhia, Vereshchuk said.

European Union foreign policy chief Josep Borrell had described as a 'massive war crime' the siege of Mariupol, which had killed more than 2,000 people.

Russia had given Mariupol until 5am on Monday to surrender, but Kyiv rejected the ultimatum and said the city's resistance was bolstering the defence of all of Ukraine. Mariupol is a pivotal target in Putin's war - providing a land bridge between Russian forces in Crimea to the south-west and Russian-controlled territory to the north and east.

While little progress had been made from diplomatic efforts to solve the conflict, Zelensky once again renewed a call for direct discussions with his Russian counterpart.

"If I have this opportunity and Russia has the desire, we would go through all the questions," he told Ukrainian journalists in an interview published by media outlet Suspilne. "Would we solve them all? No. But there is chance, that we partially could - at least to stop the war," he added.

Zelensky said he was even willing to discuss Russian-occupied Crimea and the breakaway Russian regions in Donbas, though he insisted he still believes they must be returned to Ukraine. "At the first meeting with the president of Russia, I am ready to raise these issues," he said, adding that any agreement involving 'historic' changes would be put to a national referendum.

"This is a very difficult story for everyone. Crimea and Donbas... And to find a way out, we need to take this first step, which I spoke about: security guarantees, the end of the war," he said.

AFP

Russian opposition leader Navalny sentenced to 9 yrs



Russian opposition leader Alexei Navalny (left) is seen on a video-linked screen during the verdict in his embezzlement and contempt of court trial at the IK-2 prison colony in Pokrov on Tuesday (AFP)

Pokrov, Russia - A Russian court Tuesday found jailed Kremlin critic Alexei Navalny guilty of additional charges of embezzlement and contempt of court and sentenced him to nine years in prison as Moscow seeks to wipe out remaining pockets of dissent.

The sentencing came on the 27th day of what Moscow has termed a 'special military operation' in pro-Western Ukraine, with thousands killed and some 10mn displaced.

"Navalny committed fraud - the theft of property by an organised group," judge Margarita Kotova said, according to an AFP reporter present at the hearing held inside Navalny's penal colony outside Moscow.

The judge also found Navalny guilty of the less severe charge of contempt of court. His lawyers were detained by police outside the prison following the verdict, according to an AFP reporter.

Navalny, President Vladimir Putin's most vocal domestic critic, will serve his new sentence in a 'strict-regime' penal colony which will place him in much harsher conditions.

The nine-year sentence will run concurrently with the term he is already serving.

Last year the Russian opposition leader was sentenced to two and a half years for violating parole over old fraud charges while recovering from a poison attack with Novichok nerve agent that

he blames on the Kremlin.

Navalny will also have to pay a fine of 1.2mn rubles (US\$11,500), the judge said. Navalny appeared in the makeshift court wearing his black prison uniform, with journalists watching via a video link.

He listened closely as judge Kotova read out the verdict, sometimes smiling, an AFP reporter said. Investigators accused Navalny of stealing for personal use several million dollars' worth of donations that were given to his political organisations.

The prosecutor had last week called for Navalny's sentence to be extended to 13 years as well as for his transfer to a strict-regime penal colony.

AFP

Russian Nobel laureate donates medal for refugees

Moscow, Russia - The joint Russian winner of last year's Nobel Peace Prize, Dmitry Muratov, said on Tuesday he will donate his medal to help Ukrainian refugees.

Muratov, editor of Russia's leading opposition newspaper *Novaya Gazeta*, was awarded the 2021 prize alongside Maria Ressa of the Philippines for their efforts 'to safeguard freedom of expression'.

Writing on Telegram, he said

that he and the newspaper had decided to donate the gold medal to a fund to help Ukrainian refugees.

"We ask auction houses that can put this world-famous award on sale to get in contact," he wrote.

Muratov said he wanted to share the medal 'with peaceful refugees and wounded and sick children who need emergency treatment'.

In his message, the journalist



Muratov with his Nobel Peace Prize diploma and medal (AFP)

also called for a ceasefire and prisoner exchange, the return of the bodies of those killed and provision of humanitarian corridors and aid.

Novaya Gazeta said after conflict broke out in Ukraine it would not cover the events, citing new legislation on reporting on the military, which means media must describe Russia's actions in Ukraine as a 'military operation'.

AFP

Swedish police seek motive in school attack

Malmö, Sweden - Police in Sweden were on Tuesday attempting to determine why an 18-year-old student allegedly killed two teachers at a high school a day earlier in an attack that has shaken the country.

The two victims, both women in their 50s, were teachers at Malmö Latin, a creative arts high school with more than 1,000 students in Sweden's third-biggest city, police said at a press conference on Tuesday.

Media reports said the suspect, whose name has not been disclosed, was armed with a knife and an axe, though police have not confirmed that information.

Police chief Petra Stenkula said police had seized 'several weapons that are not firearms' at the scene. Investigators were now trying to determine whether the suspect specifically targeted his victims or chose them at ran-



Bouquets of flowers lie on stairs as people hug outside the Malmö Latin School in Malmö, Sweden on Tuesday (AFP)

dom, and whether he had planned to attack more people.

"We don't know yet if he had any connection to these employees", Stenkula told reporters.

The student 'has no criminal

record', she said, adding that police were looking into his background and movements prior to the attack. Investigators were on Tuesday searching the suspect's home in the nearby town of

Trelleborg, she added.

Police were alerted to the attack at 5:12pm (1612 GMT) and a first patrol was able to enter the school minutes later. About 50 students and teachers were inside at the time, and news footage showed heavily equipped and armed police inspecting the interior of the building.

The suspect was arrested on the third floor just 10 minutes after the first alert, putting up no resistance, Stenkula said.

His two victims were lying on the floor nearby, she added.

The teachers were rushed to hospital for treatment but their deaths were announced later in the evening. According to daily *Aftonbladet*, the alleged attacker called emergency services to say where he was and that he had laid down his weapons, and confessed to the killings.

AFP

At least 16 killed by militants in Nigeria

Kano, Nigeria - Police in north-west Nigeria said gunmen from gangs of cattle thieves on Sunday killed 16 people in an attack on a remote village, in the latest raid by the militants in the region.

Northwest and central Nigeria are a hub of criminal gangs of cattle thieves and those kidnapping for ransom who raid villages, killing and abducting residents after looting and burning homes.

The criminals who are known as bandits and who maintain camps in a vast forest, straddling Zamfara, Katsina, Kaduna and Niger states have recently intensified mass abductions of students in schools for ransom.

Dozens of bandits on motorcycles invaded Ganar-Kiyawa village in Bukkuyum district, shooting dead 16 residents, according to Mohammed Shehu, the Zamfara state police spokesman.

"The terrorists killed 16 people in the attack and fled before the deployment of police personnel," Shehu said on Monday.

"The police and the military are in the area to forestall further attacks and pursue the bandits."

A statement from the Zamfara state governor's office confirmed the attack, saying 'many lives were reportedly lost and many others got injured', without giving details.

However, local media put the death toll as high as 37, including the village chief, with dozens kidnapped from the village which has been repeatedly targeted by the gangs.

The gangs which have officially been declared terrorists continue to attack villages and abduct travellers at bogus checkpoints on highways despite the deployment of troops and government amnesty.

AFP



Rescuers search for the black boxes at a plane crash site in Tengxian County, south China's Guangxi Zhuang Autonomous Region on Tuesday (Xinhua)

Recovery teams sift debris of crashed China Eastern jet

Wuzhou, China - Chinese recovery teams on Tuesday picked through the debris of a crashed China Eastern jet after it inexplicably plummeted from the sky into a mountainside with 132 people on board.

Hopes of finding any survivors had all but vanished a day after the Boeing 737-800 passenger jet nosedived into the mountain - likely making it China's deadliest air crash in nearly three decades.

Questions mounted over the cause of the crash, which saw the stricken jet drop 20,000 feet in just over a minute before plunging into rugged terrain in southern China on Monday afternoon.

The airline has acknowledged that some aboard the jet, which was travelling from the city of Kunming to the southern hub of Guangzhou, had died, but there

Hopes of finding any survivors had all but vanished a day after the Boeing 737-800 passenger jet nosedived into the mountain

has been no official confirmation of the number of dead.

President Xi Jinping quickly called for a full probe following the crash as search teams armed with drones descended upon the site in a forested, rural area of Guangxi province.

On Tuesday, scorch marks were visible from the crash and resulting fire, rescue workers told AFP, with one speculating that passengers had been 'totally incinerated' from the intensity of

the blaze.

A villager near the sprawling crash site, giving only his surname Ou, recounted hearing a 'sound like thunder' followed by a blaze that blistered the surrounding hills.

State media showed uniformed search teams clambering over upturned earth, blasted trees and scattered debris, including a section of plane bearing the carrier's blue and red livery.

A torn wallet and a burned camera lens were among the eviscerated possessions captured on video by a reporter from the state-run *People's Daily* who was able to enter the crash site.

But AFP journalists were blocked at a hillside checkpoint by a group of men identifying themselves as Communist Party members who said they had 'orders from above' to prevent ac-

cess. The disaster occurred after a high-speed vertical nosedive, according to a video carried by Chinese media. AFP could not immediately verify the video's authenticity.

Flight MU5735, which took off from Kunming shortly after 1pm (0500 GMT), lost contact over Wuzhou, a city in the Guangxi region, according to China's aviation authority.

The foreign ministry said on Tuesday they believed all passengers on board were Chinese nationals.

In Guangzhou airport, staff assisted loved ones of the 123 passengers and nine crew members aboard the plane, which stopped sending any flight information after dropping a total of 26,000 feet in altitude in just three minutes.

AFP

Sisi hosts UAE, Israeli leaders at Red Sea resort



(L to R) Crown Prince of Abu Dhabi Mohamed bin Zayed Al Nahyan, Egypt President Abdel Fattah al-Sisi and Israel PM Naftali Bennett (AFP)

Cairo, Egypt - Egyptian President Abdel Fattah al-Sisi hosted talks on Tuesday with Israeli Prime Minister Naftali Bennett and the UAE's de facto ruler, Abu Dhabi Crown Prince Mohammed bin Zayed, his office said.

The meeting, which took place in the Red Sea resort of Sharm el-Sheikh, included discussions on 'energy, market stability, and food security', Egyptian presidency spokesman Bassam Radi said.

The first three-way summit of its kind comes at a crucial time for the Middle East after Russia's invasion of Ukraine sparked concerns about stability and sent commodity prices soaring.

"Against the backdrop of the recent developments in the world and the region, the leaders discussed the ties between the three countries and ways to strengthen them on all levels," said a statement from Bennett's office. Bennet and Sheikh Mohammed had arrived in Egypt on Monday. Israeli media said the leaders would also discuss reports that Iran and Western powers, including the United States, are close to a deal to revive the 2015 nuclear accord.

Bennett is vehemently op-

posed to the deal which is designed to prevent Israel's arch foe Iran from acquiring an atomic bomb - a goal the Islamic republic has always denied.

Bennett also travelled to Sharm el-Sheikh in September last year, in what was the first visit in over a decade by an Israeli prime minister.

Egypt was the first Arab country to sign a peace treaty with Israel in 1979, after decades of enmity and conflict.

The official Emirati news agency WAM said the meeting 'discussed ways of enhancing relations between the three countries'. It also addressed 'the importance of cooperation and coordination to drive development and enhance stability in the region, as well as bolstering global energy security and market stability'.

The three leaders also 'exchanged views on a number of regional and global issues of mutual concern and relevant developments', said WAM.

Sheikh Mohammed hosted Bennett in a landmark visit to Abu Dhabi last December, just over a year after the UAE normalised ties with Israel.

AFP

Freed British-Iranian flays UK government's release efforts

London, UK - A British-Iranian charity worker held in Tehran for six years said on Monday that the UK government could have helped free her earlier, and called for all 'unjustly detained' prisoners in Iran to be released.

Speaking publicly for the first time since returning home, Nazanin Zaghari-Ratcliffe said the UK government knew that Tehran wanted a historic £400mn (US\$530mn) debt to be paid for her to be liberated.

"I think it was week two or week three that I was arrested, like six years ago, that they (Iran officials) told me, 'We want something off the Brits. We will not let you go until such time that we get it,'" she told a news conference.

"And they did keep their promise," said Zaghari-Ratcliffe, who flew home last Wednesday with retired engineer Anoosheh Ashoori, 67, after London agreed to settle the sum paid by the Shah-era Iranian government for tanks in the 1970s, before the Islamic revolution.

She described herself as 'a pawn in the hands of two governments' who had been caught up in a wider dispute that had 'nothing to do' with her, and said all those unfairly detained in Iran in similar circumstances should be freed.

"The meaning of freedom is never going to be complete



Nazanin Zaghari-Ratcliffe and her husband Richard Ratcliffe attend a press conference in London, on Monday (AFP)

(until) such time that all of us who are unjustly detained in Iran are reunited with our families," she added.

"Other dual nationals, members of religious groups, or prisoners of conscience... there are so many other people we don't know their names who have been suffering in prison in Iran."

Accused of plotting overthrow

Zaghari-Ratcliffe, flanked by her husband, Richard, said little of her experience in prison, including in solitary confinement, but said it would 'always haunt' her.

She worked for the Thomson Reuters Foundation, the philanthropic arm of the news and data agency, and was arrested in Tehran on a visit to see family in 2016, accused of plotting to overthrow the regime. Ashoori, a retired en-

gineer from southeast London, was arrested in 2017 and jailed for 10 years on charges of spying for Israel.

Dual nationals from Austria, Canada, France, Germany, Sweden and the United States have also been arrested in similar circumstances.

Zaghari-Ratcliffe criticised UK diplomatic efforts over the years to get her out, during which time five foreign ministers promised to secure her release.

"I was told many, many times that 'Oh we're going to get you home,'" she said.

"What's happened now should have happened six years ago... I shouldn't have been in prison for six years," she said.

Another British-Iranian, Morad Tahbaz, who also has a US passport, is still being held in Iran.

AFP

Pakistan PM Khan trumpets Islamic credentials amid domestic battle

Islamabad, Pakistan - Pakistan Prime Minister Imran Khan trumpeted his Islamic credentials on Tuesday at a meeting of foreign ministers from Muslim nations, even as he battles the most serious domestic challenge to his rule since coming to power.

The Organisation of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) is meeting in Islamabad with an ambitious agenda that seeks approval for over 100 declarations, including aid for financially strapped Afghanistan and support for the Palestinians and Kashmir.

The meeting is also attended by China's Foreign Minister Wang Yi, despite Beijing being accused of detaining more than a million Uyghur and other Turkic-speaking Muslims in political re-education camps across Xinjiang.

"China and the Islamic world have found a path of friendly co-existence and win-win cooperation between different civilisations, which serves as a model for a new form of diplomatic ties," Wang said.

Khan is hosting the conference whilst scrambling to fight a no-confidence vote in the National Assembly as early as next week, with the opposition accusing him of mismanaging the economy and foreign policy.

In an address to dozens of foreign ministers, he partly blamed Muslims for allowing Islamophobia to spread, saying they had not united against actions deemed blasphemous for fear of being labelled extremist.



Pakistani Prime Minister Imran Khan speaks during the 48th session of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) Council of Foreign Ministers, in Islamabad on Tuesday (AFP)

China and the Islamic world have found a path of friendly coexistence and win-win cooperation between different civilisations, a model of a new form of diplomatic ties

WANG YI

"There is a perception that there is different types of Islam," he told the 57-nation IOC gathering. "The moment you say you are a moderate Muslim, you acknowledge extremism," he added, saying this suggested there was division on the issue of blasphemy.

Violent protests have broken out across Pakistan in recent years over Western acts deemed blasphemous, including the publishing of cartoons of the Prophet Mohammed.

Khan long campaigned against growing anti-Muslim

sentiment, and takes credit for the UN's move last week to adopt an International Day to Combat Islamophobia.

In a speech that at times seemed aimed more at a domestic audience than a gathering of foreign diplomats, Khan said he was inspired to enter politics by the example of the 'perfect' society that Prophet Mohammed attempted to create in Medina centuries ago.

He also railed against corruption among the elite and what he called permissiveness in Pakistan, a state that has grown in-

creasingly conservative and patriarchal over the past four decades.

Army leadership concerned

Khan won office in 2018 through an electorate weary of the two-party dynasties that have dominated Pakistan politics since independence - periods of power punctuated by military coups - but with inflation skyrocketing and a feeble rupee, he has struggled to maintain support.

Political analysts say he has also lost the backing of the powerful military.

"I think the army leadership must be extremely concerned seeing what is happening on the political scene at the moment," said Talat Masood, a retired general-turned-political analyst.

AFP

Sri Lanka deploys troops as fuel shortage sparks protests

Colombo, Sri Lanka - Sri Lanka ordered troops to petrol stations on Tuesday as sporadic protests erupted among the thousands of motorists queuing up daily for scarce fuel.

The South Asian island nation is grappling with its worst economic meltdown in over seven decades, with rolling electricity blackouts and essential goods such as food and cooking gas also in short supply.

Soldiers were deployed after angry crowds blocked a main artery in Colombo and held up traffic for hours because they were unable to buy kerosene oil on Monday, government spokesman Ramesh Pathirana said.

Footage of the incident shared on social media showed

a group of angry women blockading a tourist coach to protest shortages of kerosene needed for cooking stoves

"We saw tourists being held up, we are also hearing that some people may be hoarding oil and that is why the government decided to deploy the military," Pathirana told reporters in the capital.

The troop call also follows the stabbing murder of a motorcyclist by another driver after a dispute over his place in a long queue for fuel outside Colombo.

"Temper are getting frayed as queues get longer," a top defence official told AFP on condition of anonymity.

"A decision was made last night to call out soldiers to reinforce the police. This is to dis-



A soldier guards a fuel station in Colombo on Tuesday (AFP)

courage any unrest."

Three elderly people have dropped dead at fuel queues since Saturday, police said, adding that numerous petrol stations saw people camping overnight to wait for diesel and gasoline purchases.

Military officials said soldiers were deployed at pumping stations of the state-run Ceylon Petroleum Corp, which accounts for two-thirds of the fuel retail business in the nation of 22mn people. President Gotabaya Rajapaksa's office announced a summit of all political parties on Wednesday to discuss the economic crisis, but opposition groups said they planned to boycott the meeting.

Sri Lanka's financial crisis stems from a critical shortfall of

foreign currency, leaving traders unable to finance imports.

The COVID-19 pandemic throttled the island's tourism sector - a key foreign exchange earner - and remittances from Sri Lankans working overseas have also declined sharply.

Rajapaksa announced last week that the country will seek a bailout from the IMF, which says the government's foreign debt burden of US\$51bn is unsustainable. The government announced on Tuesday that it was seeking to restructure this debt and was looking for an international law firm to advise on the legal implications.

Shortages of foreign exchange have wrought havoc on almost every aspect of daily life.

AFP

Pandedmic: China locks down city of 9mn

The country reported 4,770 new infections

Beijing, China - China locked down an industrial city of 9mn people overnight and reported more than 4,000 virus cases on Tuesday, as the nation's 'zero-COVID' strategy is confronted by an Omicron wave.

Health authorities reported 4,770 new infections across the country, the bulk in the north-eastern province of Jilin, as the city of Shenyang in neighbouring Liaoning province was ordered to lock down late on Monday.

China has moved fast in recent weeks to snuff out virus clusters with a pick-and-mix of hyper-local lockdowns, mass testing and citywide closures. It reported two COVID-19 deaths on Saturday, the first in over a year.

Authorities have warned of the risk posed to growth by persistent lockdowns as the country strives to balance the health crisis with the needs of the world's



A worker wearing protective gear stands next to barriers placed in the Huangpu district of Shanghai on Monday (AFP)

second biggest economy.

Shenyang, an industrial base home to factories including car-maker BMW, reported 47 new cases Tuesday as authorities put

all housing compounds under 'closed management' and barred residents from leaving without a 48-hour negative test result.

Last week Chinese President Xi Jinping stressed the need to 'minimise the impact' of the pandemic on China's economy, but also urged officials to 'stick to' the current zero-COVID ap-

proach. But Beijing's virus play-book has been stretched to the limit by the latest Omicron surge, which has forced authorities to free up hospital beds from mild-symptom patients.

Some cities such as Shanghai have avoided a full lockdown and instead imposed a web of individual building lockdowns, even as new daily asymptomatic infections there spiral into the hundreds. Jilin provincial officials announced Monday that the first 10,000 doses of Pfizer's oral COVID drug arrived on Sunday, marking the first time Paxlovid has been used in China.

The province last week imposed strict travel curbs banning locals from leaving their cities and counties, while several cities have already confined residents at home. The southern tech powerhouse of Shenzhen on Monday announced it would lift its week-long lockdown 'in an orderly manner', after having partially eased measures on Friday to minimise the impact of virus shutdowns on factories and ports.

Health officials last week revealed only around half of Chinese aged over 80 have been double-vaccinated, as the spectre of Hong Kong's dire COVID mortality rates - mainly among the unvaccinated elderly - hangs over Beijing's decision making.

AFP

Australia launches Space Command to counter China

Sydney, Australia - Australia's government on Tuesday launched 'Space Command', a new defence agency with echoes of the United States' Space Force that has been tasked with securing the country's place in an 'already contested' cosmos.

Defence Minister Peter Dutton said the new defence arm would be modest to start with, though he gave no detailed staffing or budget figures.

In a speech to the Australian Air Force, he said space 'will undoubtedly become a domain that takes on greater military significance in this century'.

"Space is becoming more congested and is already contested, particularly as the boundaries between competition and conflict become increasingly blurred through grey-zone activities."

Dutton positioned Space Command as a clear counter to China and Russia's extraterrestrial military ambitions, namechecking both nations in his speech and all 'countries that see space as a territory for their taking, rather than one to be shared'.

AFP

HK police arrest martial arts teacher for sedition

Hong Kong, China - A Hong Kong martial arts coach and assistant accused of running an armed separatist movement have been arrested for sedition, police said on Tuesday, after a raid that seized weapons including crossbows and machetes.

Police allege the coach, 59, and his 62-year-old female assistant set up a martial arts training hall to 'incite hatred' against the government and organise 'an armed force for Hong Kong independence'. "The arrested persons were deeply affected by misinformation and became self-radicalised... Now they are spreading the misinformation"

Authorities said they are also considering more serious charges for the duo under the sweeping national security law Beijing imposed on the city in response to the at-times violent demonstrations.

The suspects - arrested Sun-



Hong Kong police display crossbows and currency seized during a raid on a martial arts studio, on Tuesday (AFP)

The arrested persons were deeply affected by misinformation and became self-radicalised... Now they are spreading the misinformation

STEVE LI

day in the city's Tsim Sha Shui district - are accused of posting anti-government messages including calls to topple China's

communist regime and for a 'shadow government and self-defence force' to be established.

"With this vicious cycle, we are very worried those radicalised will go one step further and commit terrorist attacks," Li said. The arrests came after Hong Kong's National Security Department - which enforces the law - sent an undercover officer to the martial arts studio, where the two suspects were teaching 'combat tai chi'.

Police said they found unlawful weapons including an airgun, eight crossbows, 30 steel-tipped arrows and a collection of blades.

AFP

First Black woman eyed for US apex court pledges to uphold American democracy

Washington, US - US Supreme Court nominee Ketanji Brown Jackson vowed on Monday to defend the 'grand experiment of American democracy' as she launched a historic bid to be the first Black woman on the nation's highest judicial bench.

President Joe Biden's pick made the pledge as she was formally introduced at the start of televised hearings that will go on to include two days of questioning and a final day of testimony from outside witnesses.

"If I am confirmed, I commit to you that I will work productively to support and defend the Constitution and the grand experiment of American democracy that has endured over these past 246 years," the 51-year-old former public defender told the Senate Judiciary Committee.

A federal judge with almost a decade of experience on lower courts, Jackson previously served as a law clerk to Stephen Breyer, the retiring liberal justice she is being nominated to replace.

She is the first Black woman tapped for a seat on the court and would also be the only nominee of a Democratic president to be confirmed since Elena Kagan in 2010.

She assured senators at the



Judge Ketanji Brown Jackson swearing in for her confirmation hearing in Washington, DC, on Monday (AFP)

start of what can be a highly politically partisan process in the United States that she took her duty to be independent 'very seriously' and always applied the law 'without fear or favour'.

While the historic significance of Jackson's nomination is enormous, the prospects for major drama are low, with a green light from the Senate all but assured and the 6-3 conservative balance of the court not in play.

As the final word on all civil

and criminal legal disputes, as well as guardian and interpreter of the Constitution, the Supreme Court seeks to ensure equal justice under the law.

No 'character assassination'

It is also a check on the power wielded by the other branches of government and the arbiter of disputes covering all aspects of American life, from religious liberty and voting rights to gun

ownership and abortion access.

The committee is meeting through Thursday to consider Jackson's nomination, which is being conducted by a 50-50 chamber controlled by Democrats, meaning there is no room for missteps.

No red flags have been raised about Jackson's record to imperil her prospects, and Republicans have pledged to avoid any 'character assassination'.

AFP

Story of Ukrainian cuisine

Ukrainian refugees cook up a storm at Czech campsite



Ukrainian refugee Inna Ilinskaya (L) prepares a traditional Ukrainian Bograch goulash in the camp in Revnice village, on March 18, 35km near Prague. A campsite turned refugee shelter near Prague has opened a Ukrainian restaurant employing women who fled the Russian invasion of their homeland.

A steaming pot of thick soup bubbles at a campsite turned refugee shelter near Prague where Ukrainian women who fled Russia's invasion prepare delicious meals for curious locals.

There are now traditional Ukrainian dishes including borscht, a beetroot-based soup with cabbage, on the menu at the restaurant in Revnice, southwest of Prague.

"We want to tell the story of our cuisine, so we prepare and offer our Ukrainian food," said Inna Ilinskaya, who fled the southern port city of Odessa.

Ilinskaya, a 34-year-old mother of five, left Ukraine with her husband and children soon after Russia's invasion began on February 24. She ended up at the campsite owned by Stefan Orsos alongside around 40 other Ukrainian refugees, more than half of them children.

"I decided to accommodate Ukrainian refugees on February 24 when the war started," said Orsos who bought the campsite two years ago.

Today's fare is a far cry from what he offered before the war. The 49-year-old mainly offered Asian food including Vietnamese pho soups until the Ukrainians arrived.

Pizza was even on the menu which he ran after he could not organise food festivals anymore because of the coronavirus pandemic.

"We had to improvise when COVID-19 started, we lost our jobs."

Adapting

"We just improvised again with this Ukrainian restaurant, which also makes other food, but the core is Ukrainian," he said, as the laughter of children riding bicycles filled the air.

He was happy to accommodate women without any ties to the Czech Republic who have found a home at the campsite.

"We also have Ukrainian Roma people whom nobody wants to accommodate, and we have sick people here too," he told AFP.

The women, including Ilinskaya, were busy preparing pampushki or garlic buns, borscht soup, and bograch, which is a kind of goulash. In the kitchen, the cooks lovingly rolled the buns and placed them on trays before they turned a golden brown in the oven.

Ilinskaya said the restaurant had already offered golubtsy, or stuffed cabbage leaves, and pelmeni dumplings.

They also want to make varenyky, another type of dumplings, she said, as the garden restaurant filled with locals eager to try something new.

Come back for sure

Veronika Stara from Revnice relished the opportunity to visit.

"I love the idea and the borscht was just fantastic. I will come back for sure," she said. "The ladies definitely look like they know what they're doing."

The Czech Republic, which has a population of 10.7 million people, had a sizeable Ukrainian minority before the war broke out. It has so far received more than 270,000 refugees from Ukraine.

Ilinskaya expects to settle down in the Czech Republic, but her heart breaks for those she left behind in Odessa including her sister.

"I know it's terrible back there now. We managed to leave earlier so our children didn't really see what is going on there now," she said. "We are really grateful to be here."

AFP



What is borscht?

Borscht is a soup, usually made with beets, originating from Central and Eastern Europe and Northern Asia. It is especially popular in the cuisines of Russia, Poland, Lithuania, Romania, Latvia, and Ukraine.

Although the beet version is the most well known, it doesn't have to be made with beets. Borscht was a winter soup, often made with sour flavours and topped with a dollop of sour cream.

It was usually made by combining meat or bone stock with sautéed or boiled vegetables. Popular ingredients may include cabbage, carrots, onions, potatoes and/or tomatoes. Sometimes it's pureed, sometimes not. Often, there's meat in it.

The name of the ancient tart soup is now more associated with the beet-red soup of today. If you want to recreate that traditional tartness, you can serve with lemon wedges on the side or add more vinegar, to taste.

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Something NEW

OFFBEAT COOKING

When you want to get off the beaten track while planning your weekend dinner, here are some off-beat recipes. Forget regular meat, chicken, fish, go for something different within their sway, and discover a new love for the unusual

Singapore Fish Head Curry

- Ingredients**
1 fish head (red snapper/hammour)
3tbsp oil
1 medium eggplant - cut into wedges
1tbsp mustard seeds
1tbsp fenugreek seeds
2 sprigs leaves
3tbsp fish curry powder
1 cup coconut milk
1tsp sugar
1tsp salt
2tbsp tamarind paste - mixed with 50 ml water
2 cups water
1 large tomato - sliced
1tbsp coriander leaves - for garnish
- For curry paste**
1cup shallots - chopped
8-10 garlic cloves - chopped
4cm piece ginger - chopped
3cm piece galangal - chopped
2 stalks lemongrass, white part only - chopped

- 2tbsp red chilli paste
1tsp turmeric
50ml water
- Method**
For the curry paste, place all the ingredients in a blender and blitz into a smooth paste. Now, heat a drizzle of oil in a large heavy-based frying pan over high heat. Cook the eggplant wedges on both sides until golden and set aside. Reduce the heat to medium, add the remaining oil to the pan, then add the mustard seeds, fenugreek seeds, and curry leaves. Cook, shaking the pan continuously, until the mustard seeds start to pop. Add the prepared curry paste and curry powder, and cook, stirring continuously for another 5-6 minutes. When the oil starts to separate from the paste, add the coconut milk, sugar, salt, tamarind paste, and 2 cups water. Bring to a boil, then add the fish head, cover, and simmer over low heat for 8-10 minutes or until the fish is cooked through. Stir in the tomato and cooked eggplant, remove from the heat, and serve garnished with coriander leaves. Goes well with steamed rice.



Spicy Mutton Paya

- Ingredients**
4 payas (lamb trotters) - chopped to chunks
1cup - chopped tomatoes
2 red onions - sliced
1 sprig of curry leaves
Juice of half lemon
2 black cardamoms
1 stick cinnamon
4-5 cloves
1 bay leaf
1 star anise
2tbsp oil
1tbsp chopped coriander - for garnish
- For marination**
1tbsp ginger-garlic paste
1tsp ginger slivers
2 green chillies - slit
2tsp red chilli powder
1tsp turmeric powder
1tsp garam masala (allspice mix)
1tsp coriander powder
1 cup curds - whipped
½tsp salt, or to taste

Method
Add 2tbsp flour to the chopped paya and wash it well - this takes off some of the unpleasant smell. Now marinate the paya

pieces with all the marination ingredients and place in refrigerator for at least one hour.
In a pressure cooker, add the oil, and when hot enough, add the cloves, star anise, bay leaf, black cardamom and cinnamon stick. Fry for 30 seconds, then add the curry leaves and onions and saute till golden. Then add the chopped tomatoes, mix well, cover, and cook on medium-low flame for 5-6 minutes till tomatoes become soft.
Now, add the marinated paya with all the marinade, mix well, and pressure cook for one hour on medium flame till the flesh begins to fall off the bone. If the paya is not well cooked after one hour, check and continue cooking for 10 more minutes. Serve piping hot, garnished with coriander, with steamed rice or rotis.



Peri Peri Chicken Livers

- Ingredients**
8-10 chicken livers
1 red onion - sliced
1 tomato - sliced
2tbsp tomato paste or one cup tomato puree
2tbsp - Peri-peri sauce (medium/hot)
½tsp red chilli powder
¼tsp turmeric powder
1tsp minced ginger
1tsp crushed black pepper
2tsp lemon juice
Salt, to taste
1 sprig coriander - chopped
1tbsp oil

Method
In a saucepan, heat the oil and saute the onions till soft. Add the tomato slices and cook for 2-3 minutes on medium heat. Then add the minced ginger, tomato paste, chilli powder, turmeric, crushed pepper, lemon juice and half cup of water, and cook on medium-low flame, covered, for 4-5 minutes. As the gravy begins to thicken, add the chicken livers and the peri-peri sauce. Mix well and cook, covered, on medium-low flame for 3-4 minutes. Check if livers are cooked through (no red portions should be left), remove from heat and serve garnished with chopped coriander. It's an excellent dish with bread or rotis.

Pakistan steady after Naseem, Shaheen halt Australia in third Test



Pakistan's Naseem Shah reacts after a delivery during the Test match between Pakistan and Australia in Lahore Tuesday (AFP)

Lahore, Pakistan - Pace spearheads Naseem Shah and Shaheen Shah Afridi knocked over eight wickets and restricted Australia to 391 before Pakistan ended day two of the deciding Test at 90-1 in Lahore on Tuesday.

The duo led a late reverse-swing charge to close the second session as Australia lost their last five wickets for 71 runs having reached a commanding 320-5 at lunch. Naseem finished with figures of 4-58 and Shaheen 4-79.

At stumps, the game was evenly poised and the series hanging in the balance as Abdullah Shafique, 45, and Azhar Ali,

30, returned to the pavilion five overs early due to bad light.

The series is tied at 0-0 after the first two Tests in Rawalpindi and Karachi ended in high-scoring draws.

Shafique and Azhar had to rebuild after Pakistan opener Imam-ul-Haq was trapped leg-before by Australian skipper Pat Cummins on 11. But the pair looked untroubled, putting on 70 for the second wicket.

Azhar survived a stumping scare while batting on 14 but the review showed his foot was planted well inside the crease after he was beaten by a well-flighted delivery from spinner



Pakistan's Shaheen Shah Afridi delivers a ball during the second day of the third cricket Test match between Pakistan and Australia on Tuesday (AFP)

Mitchell Swepson.

Before Naseem and Shaheen brought Pakistan back into the game, Cameron Green, 79, and Alex Carey, 67, had frustrated the hosts in the morning session, adding an invaluable 135 for the sixth wicket.

Fortunes turned after spinner Nauman Ali had Carey leg-before in the fourth over after the break. The wicketkeeper-batsman had hit seven boundaries in his 175-minute knock.

Green was then bowled by Naseem after a resolute 223-minute stay intermittently lit up by nine boundaries.

"He bowled really well all

day," Green said of the 19-year-old Pakistani pacer.

"He was getting the ball to reverse pretty largely both ways. Unfortunately just lack of concentration when you've been batting out there for a while," he said. "I thought I saw the ball go away from me but it came back in. That's kind of what you face over here."

Pakistan were looking to make early inroads at the start of play with the second new ball only five overs in.

But Australia, who resumed at 232-5, took advantage of a placid Gaddafi Stadium pitch to bat through 28 overs unscathed.

SCOREBOARD		
AUSTRALIA 1 st INNINGS		
David Warner	lbw b S S Afridi	7
U Khawaja	c B Azam b Sajid Khan	91
M Labuschagne	c M Rizwan b S S Afridi	0
S Smith	lbw b Naseem Shah	59
T Head	c M Rizwan b N Shah	26
C Green	b Naseem Shah	79
Alex Carey	lbw b Nauman Ali	67
Mitchell Starc	c N Ali b S S Afridi	13
Pat Cummins	not out	11
N Lyon	b Naseem Shah	4
M Swepson	b S S Afridi	9
Extras:	(b 13, lb 4, nb 8)	25
TOTAL:	(133.3 Ov, RR: 2.92)	391
Fall of wickets: 1-8, 2-8, 3-146, 4-187, 5-206, 6-341, 7-353, 8-369, 9-374, 10-391		
Bowling: S S Afridi 24.3-3-79-4, H Ali 20-5-61-0, N Shah 31-13-58-4, N Ali 24-4-77-1, S Khan 33-4-97-1, B Azam 1-0-2-0		
PAKISTAN 1 st INNINGS		
A Shafique	not out	45
Imam-ul-Haq	lbw b Cummins	11
Azhar Ali	not out	30
Extras:	(b 1, nb 3)	4
TOTAL:	(39 Ov, RR: 2.30)	90/1
Fall of wickets: 1-20		
Bowling: M Starc 8-3-10-0, P Cummins 10-2-27-1, C Green 7-2-17-0, N Lyon 8-2-15-0, M Swepson 6-1-20-0		

Pakistan thought they had removed Carey for 27 when umpire Aleem Dar gave him out caught behind off fast bowler Hasan Ali but the Australian reviewed straight away.

The replay showed he had missed the ball, which had also not carried to wicketkeeper Mohammad Rizwan.

Carey took full advantage of his reprieve by smashing spinner Sajid Khan for two boundaries before reaching his third Test fifty with a single.

Shaheen described the pitch as "really good for batting" and that the bowlers needed to remain patient. "We tried to bowl the right areas and in partnership so after they had a good stand we got the breakthrough and got success," he said.

"We have got a good start to our batting, so we need to take the total to 450-500 and then bowl our team to success."

AFP



Australia's captain Meg Lanning (left) with teammate Annabel Sutherland walk from the field after their win on Tuesday (AFP)

India boost World Cup semi-final hopes as Australia crush S Africa

Hamilton, New Zealand - India boosted their Women's Cricket World Cup semi-final prospects with a crushing 110-run win over Bangladesh on Tuesday, as a century from Australia captain Meg Lanning powered the tournament favourites to a five-wicket victory over South Africa.

India set Bangladesh a target of 230 in Hamilton and then skittled them for 119 in 40.3 overs to keep alive their playoff hopes.

In Tuesday's other match, in Wellington, Lanning smashed an unbeaten 135 as Australia cruised past South Africa's 271-5.

It leaves previously unbeaten South Africa in a scrap for the three other semi-final berths with India, the West Indies and England. Australia were already into the last four.

India chose to bat and appeared to be cruising at 74 without loss in the 15th over when Smriti Mandhana was dismissed for 30.

It sparked a mini-collapse which saw India lose two wickets in successive balls without adding to the score as

Shafali Verma was stumped on 42 and Mithali Raj caught for a first-ball duck.

India entered the last 10 overs at 165-5 and their scoring momentum appeared to have stalled when Yastika Bhatia was dismissed for 50.

But Pooja Vastrakar and Sneha Rana came together for a useful 48-run stand that helped give India's bowlers a respectable total to defend.

Bangladesh's run chase never ignited in the face of tight bowling from India highlighted by four wickets for 30 from Rana.

The match between Australia and South Africa brought together the only two undefeated teams at this year's tournament.

With Australia already through to the semi-finals, South Africa had more to play for as a win would have sealed a spot in the top four.

They set a solid target of 272 off the back of 90 from Laura Woolvardt but Australia's formidable batting line-up easily overhauled the target with 28 balls to spare.

AFP



Marc Marquez is transferred to the hospital after crashing during the warm up session on Sunday (AFP)

Marquez suffers from vision problems after Indonesia fall

Madrid, Spain - Six-time MotoGP world champion Marc Marquez is suffering from double vision again after falling heavily in the warm-up for last week's Indonesian Grand Prix, he said on Tuesday.

The Spaniard suffered a concussion after a spectacular crash in Mandalika on Sunday, when his Honda cartwheeled end-over-end as it disintegrated, before he landed heavily on his left arm and smacked his helmet on the ground.

Marquez also suffered from diplopia, or double vision, at the end of last season.

"It seems that I am experienc-

ing deja vu," he wrote on Twitter. "During the trip back to Spain, I began to have discomfort with my vision."

"We decided to visit Dr Sanchez Dalmau, who confirmed

that I have a new episode of diplopia."

"Fortunately, it is less severe than the injury I had at the end of last year. But now it's time to rest

and wait to see how the injury evolves."

Marquez had to be airlifted to hospital after his crash at the weekend, although he did walk away from his ruined Honda.

The next race is in Argentina on April 3, with Marquez now a serious doubt.

Honda said he would undergo further medical tests before de-

ciding how long he will need to recover.

The 29-year-old has struggled with a series of injuries in recent seasons.

He missed almost the entirety of the 2020 campaign after breaking his right arm in the season-opening race.

Marquez also sat out the first two Grands Prix last year before struggling to recapture his best form when he returned.

However, he did win back-to-back races before the initial bout of diplopia forced him to miss the last two dates on the 2021 schedule.

AFP

We decided to visit Dr Sanchez Dalmau, who confirmed that I have a new episode of diplopia

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TENNIS ROUND-UP



Daniil Medvedev



Aryna Sabalenka



Rafael Nadal

Nadal says will be out 'four to six weeks' with injury

Madrid, Spain - Rafael Nadal said on Tuesday he would be out of action for between four and six weeks with a stress fracture in one of his ribs.

"This is not good news and I did not expect this," tweeted Nadal, who will miss the start of the claycourt season.

The Spaniard will be ruled out of the Monte Carlo and Barcelona tournaments although he could potentially return for the Madrid Masters on May 1-8.

Nadal, who won the Australian Open title this year, lost to American Taylor Fritz in the final of the Indian Wells Masters on Sunday, ending his perfect 20-0 run to start 2022.

He said he had played Indian Wells with 'discomfort' and so had undergone medical checks on his return to Spain.

"I have a stress fracture in one of my ribs and will be out for 4 to 6 weeks," Nadal said.

AFP

Medvedev, Sabalenka top seeds at ATP and WTA Miami Open

Miami, US - Daniil Medvedev will try to reclaim the world number one ranking and top seed Aryna Sabalenka chases her first final in 10 months at the ATP and WTA Miami Open.

Men's play starts on Wednesday and women's play begins Tuesday in the hardcourt tournament at Hard Rock Stadium, where highest seeds receive first-round byes.

Serbia's Novak Djokovic moved into the top spot of the rankings this week, bumping out

reigning US Open champion Medvedev after a three-week stay following his third-round exit at Indian Wells.

The 26-year-old Russian, runner-up at the past two Australian Opens, would return to the top spot with a semi-final run at Miami.

Medvedev only reached his first Miami quarter-final last year, when he lost to Roberto Bautista Agut, so a last-four spot would mark a best-ever run in Miami.

Serbia's Novak Djokovic moved into the top spot of the rankings this week, bumping out reigning US Open champion Medvedev after a three-week stay following his third-round exit at Indian Wells

And Medvedev has a potential second-round matchup with former world number one Andy Murray, provided the Briton gets past Argentina's Federico Delbonis.

Murray, a 34-year-old Scotsman and three-time Grand Slam champion, won the Miami crown in 2009 and 2013 but lost his only meeting with Medvedev in Brisbane in 2019.

Also in Medvedev's quarter of the draw is defending champion Hubert Hurkacz of Poland.

Germany's Alexander Zverev is the second seed with Greece's Stefanos Tsitsipas third and Italy's Matteo Berrettini fourth.

Sabalenka, of Belarus, fell to fifth in this week's rankings and has not reached a WTA final since last May on Madrid clay.

Poland's Iga Swiatek is the second seed with Estonia's Anett Kontaveit third and Greece's Maria Sakkari fourth.

Australia's top-ranked Ashleigh Barty is not in the field, but former world number ones Naomi Osaka and Simona Halep are in the draw. Romania's Halep could face Britain's 19-year-old Emma Raducanu, the reigning US Open champion, in the third round. Japan's Osaka could meet Canada's 19-year-old Leylah Fernandez, the 2021 US Open runner-up who ended Osaka's title defense last year at New York, in the third round.

AFP

Sen breaks into world badminton rankings

India's top men's badminton player climbed two spots to reach No 9 in singles rankings

London, UK - India's Lakshya Sen has broken into the top 10 of the men's singles badminton world rankings for the first time, taking up the ninth spot in the latest standings.

The young shuttler's ranking has been on an upward trajectory since his impressive run started in the latter half of last year.

Most recently, the 20-year-old Sen finished second in a strong field at the All England Open on Sunday, beating defending champion Lee Zee Jia and world bronze medallist Anders Antonsen on the way to the final.

This was his third straight final appearance at a BWF World Tour event since winning the Super 500 India Open at the start of the year and a second-place finish at the German Open.

Sen's exploits in the last six months also include a bronze medal at the world championship and a podium finish at the BWF World Tour Final and Hylo Open.



India's Lakshya Sen returns the shuttlecock to Denmark's Viktor Axelsen during the men's singles final at the All England Open Badminton Championship at the Utilita Arena in Birmingham, on Sunday (AFP)

He is now the highest-ranked Indian in the men's singles badminton, above world silver medallist Kidambi Srikanth at 12

and Tokyo Olympian B Sai Praneeth at 19.

Along with Sen, India's top men's doubles pair of Chirag

Shetty and Satwiksairaj Rankireddy also moved up a spot to equal their career-best ranking of seventh.

The Chirag-Satwik duo won the India Open, finished third at the Super 1000 Indonesia Open and also represented India at Tokyo 2020.

In the women's doubles, the teenage team of Treasa Jolly and Gayatri Gopichand also reached

Lakshya Sen is now the highest-ranked Indian in the men's singles badminton

its career-best ranking of 34, jumping 12 places since the previous update. The two won the Odisha Open 2021 and came second at the Syed Modi 2022, before reaching the semi-finals at the All England Open.

The other Indian pair of Ashwini Ponnappa and N Sikki Reddy lost a place but are still the highest-ranked women's doubles team from India at world No 20.

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Oman national team in Vietnam for World Cup qualifiers

Muscat - Oman national football team arrived in Hanoi, Vietnam on Monday night as the team is set to face its Vietnamese counterparts in the remaining match of Group B of the final Asian qualifiers for the 2022 World Cup in Qatar.

The match will be held on Thursday, March 24, at 4pm, Oman time in My Dinh National Stadium, Hanoi. Oman will have three training sessions in Hanoi before the game.

The competition for the two direct qualification cards in the



group was limited to Saudi Arabia, the leader with 19 points, Japan, second, with 18, and Australia, third, with 15 points, and Oman ranked fourth with 8

points.

The list of players called up for the match includes: Arshad al Alawi, Ahmed al Rawahi, Amjad al Harthy, Khaled al Bu-

raiki, Mohsen al Ghassani, Muhammad al Ghafri, Fahmi Bait Saeed, Ibrahim al Mukhaini, Ahmed al Khamisi, Omar al Fazari, Mahmoud al Mushafiri,

Ayman Dahi, Omar al Maliki, Abdullah Fawaz, Moataz Saleh, Mohsen Jawhar, Ahmed al Kaabi, Muhammad al Ghafry, Abdul Rahman al Rasheed al Ghasani and Khaled Khaled Zaher al Aghbari, Jamil al Yahmadi, Hareb al Saadi, Juma al Habsi and Salah al Yahyai.

The technical staff of the national team decided to exclude both Issam al Sobhi and Al Mundhir al Alawi who had suffered injuries, and the player Marwan Taib was rested.

ONA

Strong Omani team ready for 11th GCC Sailing Championships in Kuwait

Muscat - Sixteen of Oman Sail's best young prospects will compete against sailors from across the region at the 11th GCC Sailing Championship which is taking place from March 22-26 at Messilah Beach in Kuwait. The Omani squad includes sailors under the age of 17 in the Optimist, ILCA 4, ILCA 6 and ILCA 7 classes, all of whom earned their place in the team by finishing in top positions in a recent rankings race event held in Mussanah.

The Omani team comprises: Tameem Suleiman al Balushi (Optimist), Abdul Latif Zeyad al Qasmi (Optimist), Hassen Nasser al Wahaibi (Optimist), Feras Haitham al Nabhani (Optimist), Alaa Hassan al Hinae (Optimist), Hood Saad al Nofali (Optimist), AbdulRahman Khalid al Hadi (Optimist), Aous Maher al Busaidi (Optimist), Elyas Bader al Fadhly (ILCA 4), Nebras Ahmed al Owaisi (ILCA 4), Al Salim Ali al Hamdani (ILCA 4), Ahmed Hassan al Bulushi (ILCA 6), Zakariya Suleiman al Wahabi (ILCA 6), Musaab Mohaed al Hadi (ILCA 7), Abdulmalik Gharib al Hinae (ILCA 7) and Al



Omani team poses for a photograph before heading to Kuwait



Nawaf al Ghadani



Sultan al Zadjali

Moutasem Hamood al Farsi (ILCA 7).

The sailors will be joined by Nawaf Yaqood al Ghadani (Team leader), Sultan AbdulAziz al Zadjali (Optimist coach),

Muthir Issa al Kindi (ILCA 4 coach) and Hashim Hamed al Hashmi (ILCA 6 and ILCA 7 coach).

Nawaf al Ghadani, said, "This is a great opportunity for our ris-



This photo shows the preparations in Mussanah ahead of the GCC Championship event

ing stars to test themselves against the best young sailors in the region. It allows each sailor a chance to gain experience of high level competition, how to handle the pressure and put into prac-

tice the technique we have been working on in training. We have a strong squad and we're looking forward to the Championships in Kuwait."

Sultan al Zadjali, Optimist

coach, said, "The GCC Sailing Championship is an important step in the journey toward becoming an elite sailor. Everyone representing Oman has earned their place by excelling in ranking

and we are hopeful of a good showing during the week. Each day is a new opportunity to improve, learn from the day before and help the sailors to reach their potential."

(From March 13 to April 13)

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