

An ‘exceptional’ Eid al Fitr

Our Correspondent
Muscat

Eid al Fitr was an ‘exceptional’ event for the Muslim world in general and Oman in particular, following two consecutive years of restrictions on account of the COVID-19 pandemic worldwide. It was a joyous affair as all prayer areas and mosques opened doors. On the first day of Eid al Fitr, citizens and residents in all governorates performed rituals, including slaughtering animals. On the day of Eid, His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik offered prayers at Al Zulfa Mosque in Seeb. The prayers were led by Sheikh Abdullah Mohammed al Salmi, Minister of Awqaf and Religious Affairs, who delivered the Eid sermon, which touched on the benefits of fasting and doing good deeds.

Sheikh Salmi said that Muslims have a deep-rooted heritage and civilisation. In today’s world, Muslims need to direct their attention to the formation of a global vision that is accepted by the global community, so that they can contribute to building a renewed future by forging beneficial partnerships, adhering to Islamic virtues and shaping a peaceful world based on mercy, justice and equality.

The first day of Eid usually begins with the aarsiya meal. Some people offer al migla’ai - also



The hard times seem to be over, at least for now. The traditional way of celebrating big festivals in the country is back. This was evident when I saw how people celebrated this time

ABDUL AZIZ AL ZADJALI

called al mihmas - an Omani dish prepared with liver, meat and flavoured spices. Omani halwa is served to guests in every house during Eid.

On the first day of Eid, children are given Eidiya (money) which cements the concept of Sadaqa/giving alms in their hearts and minds. On the morning of the second day of Eid, families gather to prepare a special meal of barbecue (mishkak) - meat kept in a tannour/oven, placed in a 3-4m deep hole made in the earth and taken out on the third day of Eid. This meat is shared with neighbours and

relatives.

Muhammad al Khaldi, a retired private sector employee, was on top of the world as he returned from his home town Jarda. “I can’t express how happy I am to be able to see my family all at once after such a long time following the government’s decision to lift COVID-19 related restrictions. Compared to the previous four Eids, this one was exceptional. We celebrated the way we used to before pandemic, including offering Eid prayers in big numbers,” he said.

Echoing similar views, Abdul Aziz al Zadjali, a Muscat-based

government employee, said, “The hard times seem to be over, at least for now. The traditional way of celebrating big festivals in the country is back. This was evident when I saw how people celebrated this time. No one looked much worried about the health issues that have arisen as a result of COVID-19. People enjoyed to the fullest.”

Meanwhile, Muscat Municipality organised entertainment activities at Amerat Public Park, including horse riding for children, electronic games and live cartoon characters which continued until Saturday.

Oman wins three prizes at Olive Oil Award in Zurich

Muscat - The Royal Gardens and Farms of Royal Court Affairs has bagged three prizes at the prestigious Olive Oil Award 2022 held in Zurich, Switzerland.

Held on May 5, the 20th edition of the award saw participation of over 2,200 kinds of oil made by 123 producers hailing from over 20 countries.

Oman won two bronze medals in the Coratina and Blend extra virgin olive oil product category and a silver in the Koroneiki category. The olives were produced in the Riad al Jabal farm in Jabal Akhdar.

Ten gold, 22 silver and 30 bronze medals were given away this year.

Hilal bin Mohammed al Waeli, director general of Royal Gardens and Farms, said, “This award is recognition of high quality, and we view it as a certificate of confidence. Winning these medals is a milestone in the efforts made by Royal Gardens to consistently achieve excellence in olive oil production with focus on sustainability.”

Waeli informed that the extra virgin olive oil produced from Riad al Jabal farm is clas-



sified a high quality product as it is extracted from olives grown in a cold climate. This factor contributes greatly in increasing the proportion of fatty acids that enhance health, immunity, antioxidants and multiple flavonoids. “The climate helps in maintaining the sensory or chemical specifications. To preserve quality, olives are put into the oil extraction unit immediately after harvest using the best extraction devices, ensuring the production of high quality extra virgin olive oil.”

The Olive Oil Award is considered one of the most important awards among olive oil producers around the world. Evaluation criteria include chemical, quality and taste factors.

Oman to unveil new pavilion, tourism forum at ATM Dubai

Our Correspondent
Muscat

Muscat - Oman, represented by the Ministry of Heritage and Tourism, and 14 institutions from the travel and tourism sector, will participate in Arabian Travel Market (ATM) in Dubai, from May 9 to 12.

This year, Oman will unveil a new pavilion and launch the Oman Tourism Forum at ATM.

H E Azzan bin Qassim al Bussaidi, Undersecretary for Tourism, will lead the sultanate’s delegation at the exhibition.

The international tourism exhibition, which is the largest of its kind in the Middle East, will witness presentations, meetings and bilateral agreements between visitors, participants and representatives of major international travel and tourism companies. Participants will present the latest developments in the global



tourism industry, including products, services, packages, business and investment opportunities, which is expected to exceed AED91bn.

Haitham bin Mohammed al Ghassani, director general of tourism promotion in the ministry, said, “Participation in this year’s edition of ATM will be marked by the launch of the first edition of Oman Tourism Forum and the new design of Oman’s pavilion.”

The pavilion reflects the distinct Omani architectural identity and embodies the characters of authenticity and hospitality, Ghassani added.

In addition to a tourist information centre, the pavilion includes a bedouin tent, in which hospitality will be offered to visitors, besides providing tourist information and promotional leaflets.

The four-day event will welcome more than 20,000 visitors.

MACRON BEGINS SECOND TERM



French President Emmanuel Macron signs the protocol next to Grand Chancellor of the National Order of the Legion of Honour and the National Order of Merit General Benoit Puga (left) at the Elysee Presidential Palace in Paris on Saturday, during his investiture ceremony as French President, following his re-election on April 24 (AFP)

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RO2.3mn allocation for Duqm beautification



OIA, US firm form JV for mushroom-based protein

Four Seasons, Nikki Beach hotels ink deals to debut in Oman

Our Correspondent
Muscat

Continuing to enhance Oman’s position on the global tourism map, Oman Tourism Development Company (Omran Group) recently participated in the International Hospitality Investment Forum (IHIF) 2022 in Berlin, Germany, which took place from May 3 to 5.

Omran successfully inked two strategic agreements with renowned international hotel operators - Nikki Beach to operate a five-star resort in Yiti, and Four Seasons to develop and operate another resort in the Al Bustan area in Muscat.

Hashil bin Obaid al Mahrouqi, CEO of Omran Group, who was



present at the forum, said, “At this leading gathering, Omran was successful in showcasing the

sultanate’s numerous investment projects and opportunities, in addition to sharing details about the

Nikki Beach to operate a five-star resort in Yiti, and Four Seasons to develop and operate another resort in the Al Bustan area in Muscat

sultanate’s efforts and initiatives to boost tourism. The group’s objective is to develop unique and long-term tourism destinations that will assist the country in achieving economic growth and strengthening its position as a leading tourist destination. In fact,

as a result of the agreements inked with Niki Beach and Four Seasons, the sultanate will be able to attract these worldwide hospitality operators for the first time to Oman.”

According to the stated agreement, Omran will partner with Nikki Beach Hotels and Resorts to run a resort within Yiti Integrated Tourism Development, which will have 140 hotel rooms and 30 villas, as well as meeting and event venues and a variety of recreational amenities. The resort earned the award for ‘Best New Hotel Construction and Design Arabia’ in its regional category.

As per the agreement with Four Seasons, a luxury seaside resort and private residences will be developed at a prime location

in Al Bustan in Muscat. The luxury development will comprise an urban style resort with approximately 200 rooms, and 100 private residences, along with five dining outlets and a number of recreation and sport facilities.

Omran, an active participant in the global event, displayed its progress and the critical role it plays in growing Oman’s tourism sector by developing and managing tourism sites in accordance with Oman Vision 2040 and the National Tourism Strategy. It also shed light on major investment prospects and partnership opportunities for investors.

Over 20,000 participants, C-suite executives, and global leaders from over 80 nations attended the three-day event.



On behalf of the Board of Directors, I am pleased to present the unaudited interim financial statements of ahlibank for the three months period ended 31 March 2022.

During the first quarter of 2022, Oman's banking sector started witnessing growth in total credit extended by banks and total deposits in the private sector under both conventional and Islamic segments. The sector's financial contributions to development projects is expected to increase and facilitate lending to the private sector, thereby stimulating the economic indicators that will aid in the swift recovery of the economy. Banks in Oman continue to maintain liquidity coverage and net stable funding ratios above the regulatory requirements. Owing to these and other positive driving factors of the economy, Fitch Rating agency in its latest report, has revised its outlook of Oman from negative to stable, and also upgraded the outlook of local banks rated by them. Fitch also expects Oman's Islamic banking sector to sustain its robust growth.

Amidst these developments, ahlibank has embraced and adopted innovative and customer-centric technologies and integrated them into its day-to-day operations. This has contributed to the Bank's all-round development, which is reflected in its operating performance and the expansion of its branch network across Oman. It has also helped in attracting more customers to its focussed segments, thereby increase its market share and maintaining its competitiveness in the market.

We look forward to augmenting our contributions and deepening our involvement in national and corporate social responsibility (CSR) initiatives to help strengthen Oman's economic and social development for the larger objective of Oman Vision 2040.

Financial Performance

ahlibank continues to grow steadily in terms of its asset portfolio and most of its key financial indicators:

	31-Mar-22	31-Mar-21	Growth %
	RO Million		
Net loans, advances and financing	2,435.9	2,274.2	7.1%
Total assets	3,166.6	2,821.3	12.2%
Customers' deposits	2,180.1	1,947.8	11.9%
Equity	419.3	413.3	1.4%
Operating income	22.30	19.62	13.7%
Operating expenses	9.72	8.13	19.6%
Profit for the period	7.52	6.35	18.4%

The Bank's total assets recorded 12.2% growth to RO 3,166.6 million and customer deposits increased by 11.9% to reach RO 2,180.1 million compared to 31 March 2021. Total Loans & advances and financing grew by 7.1% reaching to RO 2,435.9 million. Operating income increased by 13.6% to RO 22.30 million for the three months period 31 March 2022. The Bank's operating expenses increased by 19.6% and profit for the period increased by 18.4% to reach RO 7.52 million. The Bank continues its prudent growth strategy focusing on high quality assets and well managed liquidity.

Achievement Highlights

As part of its continuous efforts to speed up the pace of banking transactions for corporate customers and enrich their everyday banking experience, the Bank also initiated and implemented measures to strengthen its e-channels and increased investment into digital applications and customer touchpoints with the opening of new branches.

ahlibank also introduced discount schemes for credit and debit cardholders, launched the "Wafra Plus" Daily Growth account to generate additional returns and offer attractive benefits for current and new bank customers in the conventional segment, and a salary transfer scheme for ahlibank and ahliislamic customers.

The "Outstanding Customer Service" program was also launched, which is aimed at enhancing the Bank's customer service and deepening its relationships with its customers through appropriate communication tools and techniques in order to effectively and efficiently fulfil their requirements. As testimony to its commitment to continuously serve its customers, ahlibank was recognized as the "Best Omani Brand" in the banking category at the Alam Al-Iktisaad Awards.

Corporate Social Responsibility

ahlibank's endeavours to support government initiatives that are directed towards youth empowerment has inspired the enhancement and enrichment of its Graduate Development Program, now known as "Himam." Since its launch in 2015, it has trained 64 graduates who have taken up key roles within the Bank.

The Bank has earned deserving recognition for its youth-oriented initiatives, winning the prestigious "Leadership in Youth Empowerment" Award at Oman Forum 2022 organised by Alam Al Iktisaad

ahlibank continues to make significant contributions to help drive development in the country through its sponsorships of various charity associations and involvement and participation in social, educational, health and sports cause-oriented community activities.

Looking Ahead

In line with its corporate values and vision, ahlibank is committed to provide dedicated banking solutions for its various customer segments, continuously boost its digital capabilities to enrich the customer experience, and fortify its commitment to maintain a balance between its growth objectives and the development of the community in which it operates.

The Bank is as well committed to add value by deepening its engagement with individuals, institutions and the society as a whole and by moving forward on the government's sustainable development path.

Acknowledgments

On behalf of the Board of Directors, I would like to thank ahlibank's stakeholders for their unwavering trust and faith in us. Their support has been instrumental in leading us to where we are now.

We share the national agenda for growth and remain fully supportive and committed to the economic development initiatives and plans of His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik under the Oman Vision 2040.

I would also wish to acknowledge the notable efforts of the Bank's Executive Management team and our employees for their dedication and contribution to the continued success and growth of the Bank. Lastly, and most importantly, I would like to thank our customers for their loyalty and trust in our services and I look forward to their continued patronage and support in the coming year and the years to come.



Hamdan Ali Nasser Al Hinai
Chairman

INTERIM CONDENSED STATEMENT OF FINANCIAL POSITION

AT 31 March 2022

	Unaudited 31-Mar-22 RO '000	Unaudited 31-Mar-21 RO '000	Audited 31-Dec-21 RO '000
ASSETS			
Cash and balances with Central Bank of Oman	138,441	62,237	114,703
Due from banks	51,835	59,228	44,694
Loans & advances and Financing, net	2,435,947	2,274,193	2,401,979
Investment securities	474,039	356,141	428,377
Other assets	39,049	45,379	36,154
Property and equipment	27,244	24,147	26,649
TOTAL ASSETS	3,166,555	2,821,325	3,052,556
LIABILITIES			
Due to banks	341,241	175,808	262,340
Customers' deposits	2,180,063	1,947,814	2,181,391
Borrowed funds	111,650	159,775	92,400
Tax liability	10,040	6,511	8,643
Other liabilities	101,273	106,106	77,785
Subordinated liabilities	3,000	12,000	3,000
TOTAL LIABILITIES	2,747,267	2,408,014	2,625,559
EQUITY			
Share capital	194,966	194,966	194,966
Legal reserve	36,904	34,028	36,904
Subordinated loan reserve	3,000	11,550	3,000
Fair value reserve	(3,087)	(5,707)	(2,552)
Special reserve	998	998	998
Impairment reserve	10,127	10,127	10,127
Retained earnings	52,380	43,349	59,554
TOTAL SHAREHOLDERS' EQUITY ATTRIBUTABLE TO THE EQUITY HOLDERS OF THE BANK	295,288	289,311	302,997
Tier 1 Perpetual subordinated bonds	124,000	124,000	124,000
TOTAL EQUITY	419,288	413,311	426,997
TOTAL LIABILITIES AND EQUITY	3,166,555	2,821,325	3,052,556
Net assets value per share (baizas)	151	148	155
Contingent liabilities and commitments	204,223	235,584	212,887

INTERIM CONDENSED STATEMENT OF COMPREHENSIVE INCOME
FOR THE THREE MONTH PERIOD ENDED 31 March 2022

	Three month period ended	
	Unaudited 31-Mar-22 RO '000	Unaudited 31-Mar-21 RO '000
Interest income	30,132	28,805
Interest expense	(15,537)	(16,518)
NET INTEREST INCOME	14,595	12,287
Income from Islamic financing and investments	6,221	4,924
Unrestricted investment account holders' share of profit and profit expense	(2,893)	(2,422)
NET INCOME FROM ISLAMIC FINANCING AND INVESTMENTS	3,328	2,502
NET INTEREST INCOME AND INCOME FROM ISLAMIC FINANCING AND INVESTMENTS	17,923	14,789
Fees and commission income	3,558	1,566
Fees and commission expense	(247)	(177)
Net fees and commission income	3,311	1,389
Other operating income	1,061	3,444
OPERATING INCOME	22,295	19,622
Net impairment on financial assets	(3,672)	(4,001)
NET OPERATING INCOME	18,623	15,621
Staff expenses	(6,175)	(5,232)
Depreciation	(802)	(685)
Other operating expenses	(2,745)	(2,208)
OPERATING EXPENSES	(9,722)	(8,125)
PROFIT BEFORE TAXATION	8,901	7,496
Tax expense	(1,384)	(1,145)
PROFIT FOR THE PERIOD	7,517	6,351
OTHER COMPREHENSIVE INCOME/(EXPENSE)		
<i>Items that will not be reclassified to profit or loss</i>		
- Equity investments at FVOCI - net changes in fair value	219	(411)
- Realised loss on equity investment at FVOCI	(69)	-
<i>Items that may be reclassified to profit or loss</i>		
- Cash flow hedge - net changes in fair value	265	333
- Debt investments at FVOCI - net changes in fair value	(1,019)	(1,563)
OTHER COMPREHENSIVE INCOME/(EXPENSE) FOR THE PERIOD	(604)	(1,641)
TOTAL COMPREHENSIVE INCOME FOR THE PERIOD	6,913	4,710
Basic and diluted earnings per share (baizas)	4	4

RO2.3mn allocation for Duqm beautification

Duqm - The Public Authority for Special Economic Zones and Free Zones (OPAZ) has assigned a project to design and develop the first phase of beautification, afforestation and landscaping works in the Special Economic Zone at Duqm (SEZAD) estimated to cost over RO2.3mn.

Yahya bin Khamis al Zadjali, in charge of managing operations at SEZAD, stressed that the project reflects OPAZ's keenness to improve urban lifestyle by increasing greenery in the zone, providing the best infrastructure possible and maintaining environmental balance.

The first phase of beautification and landscaping works in Duqm includes different sites on Sultan Qaboos Street over a stretch of 16km, three roundabouts, pavements of Airport Street covering 4.5km, Al Salamah Roundabout, and the



Post completion, the total green cover will be more than 60,000sqm, including over 5,000 trees

YAHYA AL ZADJALI

service road in the exhibition area covering 4km.

The project includes two parks in the commercial district (Rock Garden District and Al Saada park), construction of several public facilities - green spaces for children's activities and family gatherings, and facilities for various sports, cultural and social activities. These will be irrigated by a modern system that is part of the development project.

"The current green areas in

SEZAD cover about 26,000sqm. The new projects will add 35,000sqm. Post completion, the total green cover will be more than 60,000sqm, including over 5,000 trees of species adaptable to Duqm's climate," Zadjali said.

He added that OPAZ accords special attention to works related to developing the masterplan of SEZAD. Such works are aimed to increase green cover, afforestation and landscaping. In view of the environmental importance of green cover, OPAZ introduced several projects and initiatives earlier, including the 'Plant a Tree' initiative focused on beautification works in some areas. This makes the zone a model for integrated economic cities that mix industrial, commercial, tourism and social projects with high priority to environmental and health aspects, as well as providing various services for the community.

TRA averts dismissal of 42 Omanis

Our Correspondent
Muscat

The Telecommunications Regulatory Authority (TRA) averted the dismissal of 42 citizens in April.

A statement issued by TRA said, 'The authority met with the concerned parties, the Ministry of Labour and the trade unions of

TRA is keen on regulating the telecommunications and postal sectors to develop a workforce and build national capabilities

the concerned companies to settle the disputes between the companies and employees and prevented layoffs.

'The services of these employees were due for termination at the end of April as their project contracts were coming to an end. This initiative resulted in the extension of contracts of the Omani employees.'

TRA has stated that it is keen on regulating the telecommunications and postal sectors in line with the authority's objectives of developing a workforce and building qualified national capabilities.

The authority stressed the need to support and encourage initiatives to employ Omanis in these sectors.

S Batinah announces 11 development projects

Our Correspondent
Muscat

With an aim to stimulate the economy and create recreational facilities, South Batinah governorate is offering 11 projects for development.

An official of the governorate, said, "South Batinah has called on bidders to set up markets in the wilayats of Wadi al Ma'awel, Al Awabi and in Tawi al Hara in the wilayat of Rustaq.



Tenders have also been announced for construction of walkways in the wilayats of Nakhla, Wadi al Ma'awil and Barka.

Tenders include maintenance work of a number of internal roads in the wilayats of Barka and Mussanah, and developing and implementing the Ayn al Thawara project in Nakhla.

The last date for submission of bids is June 2, 2022.

According to Sheikh Issa

Hamad al Azri, Governor of South Batinah, the governorate aims to achieve the objectives of the Governorate Development Programme, which has received the attention of His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tariq.

His Majesty the Sultan raised the amount allocated to the Governorate Development Programme from RO10mn to RO20mn for each governorate for the current Five-Year Plan (2021-2025), starting from

2022.

The governor confirmed that 36 projects have started to develop landmarks, some of which are in final stages of completion.

The governorate also recently signed 11 agreements to implement investment projects at a cost of over RO4mn. South Batinah will also offer 20 investment sites this year for projects aimed at providing public services, supporting SMEs, and providing job opportunities.

FORESIGHT



SYED ADIL ABBAS

Abbas, an MBA graduate from Cardiff Metropolitan University (UK), is currently based in Muscat, and has over 20 years of international experience working with the public and private sectors in the Middle East, Far East, Africa and India.

Bioconvergence is a transdisciplinary field in which researchers from various scientific disciplines in areas such as medicine, nanotechnology and biology work closely together and across usual silos, to create significant breakthroughs in the development of new medical treatments. Several rare, hereditary diseases and chronic disorders that today have few or no treatment options may soon be a thing of the past, thanks to the use of bioconvergence as a model for scientific collaboration.

This is evident in Boston city's dynamic life sciences ecosystem, which is packed with companies, research institutes and organisations that have already integrated bioconvergence as an approach and a method.

One example is Intellia Therapeutics, which specialises in genetic diseases. Earlier this year, Intellia presented a solution to the disease ATTR amyloidosis, which results due to a genetic defect. With one simple treatment, one expects to soon be able to cure the disease.

The treatment is based on the CRISPR/Cas9 system, the now well-known cut-and-paste tool for changing gene sequences. The gene-editing tool and gene therapy are delivered directly and intravenously into the patient's liver cells in a harmless capsule of fatty acids. This is the first time that genetic changes have been made directly in the cells of a living person. That fact alone is completely revolutionary.

Intellia uses bioconvergence in its approach to innovation, research and product development, and the new treatment has therefore been developed by a team of experts from a wide range of disciplines.

The gene sequence to be inserted to repair the patient's cells has been identified and designed by bioinformatics scientists,

with the help of databases using artificial intelligence. Molecular biologists ensure that the CRISPR guide and the Cas9 enzyme are in stable and functional form. Nanotechnologists are developing the biomaterial in the lipid capsule in which the system is delivered.

Intellia's new technology can probably be used to cure countless other serious genetic diseases. In December 2021, it published results showing that the same type of treatment can help in relation to the disease HAE (hereditary angioedema).

Another Boston based company, Moderna, has developed its COVID-19 RNA vaccine through bioconvergence. The extremely rapid development was the result of a cross-sectoral collaboration between bioinformatics, virologists and medical technologists.

BIOCONVERGENCE

A bioconvergence approach meant that researchers in biology, chemistry and nanotechnology could together create the lipid nanoparticles in which the drug, in this case the RNA vaccine, is delivered. At the same time, bioinformatics and molecular biologists worked intensely to develop and prepare a wide range of gene sequences that quickly matched the original SARS-CoV-2 virus.

At the Wyss Institute at Harvard University, researchers, product developers and businessmen with roots in both the academic world and industry work side-by-side to solve challenges in areas such as biodiagnostic technology, immunological materials, living cell devices, synthetic biology, predictive bioanalysis, 3D organ development and molecular robotics.

Several discoveries at Wyss Institute have revolutionised drug development. For example, the development of hydrogels,

which ensure efficient and safe delivery of drugs to a specific treatment site in the patient, without the drug having to pass through the digestive system first in the form of pills. The dosage is thus more precise and the medicine works as locally as possible. Hydrogels are extremely beneficial for the treatment of tumors.

Boston's successful experience with bioconvergence is an excellent inspiration for the actors in the Omani ecosystem who work with research and development and the innovative solutions to the health challenges of the future.

By bringing together Omani academic researchers from different disciplines, industry researchers, engineers with experience in product development and business developers, a solid foundation can be formed for accelerating scientific discoveries with commercial potential.

Research successes should not only be measured by the traditional academic parameters but should also include IP rights, concluded business alliances, licensing agreements, spinouts and new technologies.

Such an approach will help Oman in fulfilling the objectives laid down in Oman Vision 2040 such as building an effective national system that nurtures scientific research, innovation and creativity to build a knowledge-based economy and society and building technology-driven medical systems and services in the country.

There is huge potential for the Omani healthcare sector to be inspired by the bioconvergence model. One of the biggest challenges lies, among other things, in a comprehensive culture and mindset change as well as in the establishment of the right structures that support cross-sectoral cooperation.

The key to success lies in interdisciplinary collaboration around well-defined strategic challenges and strong partnerships.

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GCC central banks hike interest rates

Our Correspondent
Muscat

The US Federal Reserve on Wednesday announced its biggest rate hike since the year 2000, with a half percentage point increase as it works to control soaring inflation. In response to the Fed's action, all central banks in the GCC – except Oman – followed suit.

The central banks of Saudi Arabia, the UAE, Qatar and Bahrain hiked their key interest rates by 50 basis points (bps) on Wednesday, while Kuwait's central bank increased its rate by only 25 bps.

Reuters reported on Wednesday that the Central Bank of Oman (CBO) is 'widely expected' to increase interest rate so soon.

All the GCC countries have their currencies pegged to the US dollar, except Kuwait which keeps its currency pegged to a basket of currencies that includes US dollar. Due to the fixed exchange rate regime with US dollar, GCC central banks always maintain their monetary policies in line with the US Fed.



The Saudi Central Bank raised its repo rate by 50 bps to 1.75 per cent and its reverse repo rate by

50 bps to 1.25 per cent. The Central Bank of the UAE increased its overnight deposit

rate by 50 bps to 2.25 per cent. The Central Bank of Qatar said it would raise its deposit and

repo rates by 50 bps to 1.5 per cent and 1.75 per cent, respectively. Qatari apex bank's lending

rate will increase by 25 bps to 2.75 per cent.

In Bahrain, the Central Bank of Bahrain raised its interest rate by 50 bps to 1.75 per cent. It also raised its overnight deposit rate by 50 bps to 1.5 per cent, the four-week deposit rate by 75 bps to 2.5 per cent and the lending rate by 50 bps to 3.0 per cent.

The Central Bank of Kuwait raised its discount rate by 25 bps to 2.0 per cent.

serve Chair Jerome Powell sent a message directly to the American people, expressing concern for the pain caused by rising prices, and pledging to use all available tools to bring them down.

But he told reporters he remains confident the economy is strong enough to withstand rate increases without tipping into a recession.

After a quarter-point hike in March, the US central bank's pol-

The US Federal Reserve raised its interest rates by 50 basis points to 0.75 per cent, the biggest rate hike since the year 2000

The GCC central banks tend to raise their policy rates in response to the US Federal Reserve's actions. Some Gulf central banks raised their rates in March, the last time the Fed hiked rates.

The US Fed on Wednesday raised its interest rates by 50 bps to 0.75 per cent. The move is aimed at fighting the fast rising inflation in the United States.

With inflation at the highest rate in four decades, Federal Re-

incy-setting Federal Open Market Committee (FOMC) pushed the benchmark interest rate above 0.75 per cent as it works to cool the economy, and confirmed more increases 'will be appropriate.'

The interest rate hike will raise the costs of all types of borrowing, from mortgages to credit cards to car loans, cooling demand and business activity. (With inputs from agencies)

OPEC+ agrees modest oil supply boost amid demand concerns

Vienna, Austria – Saudi Arabia, Russia and other key oil producers agreed Thursday on another marginal increase in output, bolstered by risks to demand amid coronavirus restrictions in China. Russia's invasion of Ukraine has added to supply concerns, which have increased with Europe's announced moves on a potential Russian oil embargo.

OPEC+ members confirmed they'll stick to their strategy of modestly boosting output, adding another 432,000 barrels per day for June.

In short back-to-back meetings via video conference, the group "noted the continuing effects of geopolitical factors and issues related to the ongoing pandemic", it said in a press release.

Prices had soared last week, with the Brent North Sea contract closing above US\$110 a barrel on Wednesday, its highest level in two-and-a-half weeks.

At around 1400 GMT on Thursday, Brent stood at US\$113.25 a barrel and American WTI at US\$110.64 a barrel.

Inability to meet quotas

Analysts had widely expected



the Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC), led by Riyadh, and their 10 partners led by Moscow to stay the course.

"In any case, the decision by OPEC+ to raise its output quota in June is only as relevant as its ability to meet that quota. In recent months, it has failed to do so," Edward Gardner, a commodities economist for Capital Economics, said.

Between a lack of investment in oil infrastructure in some member countries and operational problems, the cartel regularly fails to meet its production quotas.

The cartel's strategy dates back to the spring of 2021 when

the economy began recovering and oil market stabilised after the drastic cuts imposed amid the shock of the pandemic.

Largely spared for two years, China in recent weeks has been battling its worst coronavirus outbreak since the spring of 2020 which has strained its zero-Covid strategy.

Beijing on Wednesday closed dozens of metro stations and residents fear their city will be locked down, as is already the case in Shanghai, the country's largest city with 25mn people.

"The slowing activity in China is certainly a factor that will justify their decision to stay put, faced with the mounting international pressure to increase production

to address the worsening global energy crisis," Ipek Ozkardeska, an analyst at Swissquote bank, told AFP ahead of the meeting.

As for the new economic sanctions planned against Russia, they were also not expected to move the needle for the moment.

In its sixth package of sanctions, the European Commission is seeking a ban on all Russian crude oil and refined products transported by sea and pipeline by the end of 2022, European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen told the European Parliament.

That prospect threatens supply in an already tense European market.

While unanimity among the 27 EU member states is required for the sanctions to go forward, Hungary, which is highly dependent on Russian deliveries, rejected the project in its current form.

"If it (the EU) manages to convince its members to ratify the plan... then this will have a huge impact on Russian oil exports," Fawad Razaqzada, analyst at City Index and Forex.com, said ahead of the meeting.

AFP



OIA and US food tech firm form JV to produce mushroom-based protein

Our Correspondent
Muscat

Oman Investment Authority (OIA) and US-based food technology company MycoTechnology have established a joint venture (JV) that will use locally-grown dates to produce high-quality mushroom-based protein.

The two parties will collaborate on building a state-of-the-art production facility in Oman to scale up and commercialise this novel source of nutritious, sustainable protein, the Colorado-based firm said in a press statement.

MycoTechnology creates products from mushroom mycelia that solve the biggest challenges in the food industry.

"It represents the next generation of innovation driven by MycoTechnology's proprietary fermentation platform, which harnesses mushroom mycelia to create transformative ingredients," the company said.

Oman is one of the world's top ten producers of dates, growing about 400,000 tonnes per year. However, more than half goes to waste or animal feed. The new joint venture is expected to upcycle a significant portion of these excess dates, using the natural sugar present in the fruit as a source of carbon to

fuel the production of mushroom-based protein.

The construction of the new facility is due to start in the first half of 2023 on a 10-hectare site. Commercial production is scheduled to begin by the second quarter of 2025, with up to 16,000 tonnes of dates to be processed each year, according to MycoTechnology.

Once operational, the partners intend for the new facility to

highly innovative food oasis in the desert. It represents a breakthrough in the quest to bring food security to Oman and the wider region."

"This initiative will be transformative – and not just for the Middle East. We are foraging for the future, unlocking the ancient power of culinary mushrooms to feed the world's growing population with a solution that's been beneath our feet all along," he added.

Ibrahim al Eisri, Director of private equity at OIA, said, "In our international investments at OIA, we target localizing advanced modern technologies. Our partnership with MycoTechnology will deliver substantial local benefits as we pioneer the proteins of tomorrow. It will support our mission to enhance food security, diversify the Omani economy, and create well-paying jobs in an eco-friendly new sector."

"This joint venture will be the foundation that enables Oman to foster a new generation of talent in the sphere of food technology, here and further afield."

The world's leading explorer of mycelia, MycoTechnology is dedicated to increasing the availability of healthy, sustainable, clean label, and high-quality food options through natural mushroom fermentation.

Oil propels Saudi GDP growth to near 10% in first quarter

Riyadh, Saudi Arabia – Saudi Arabia reported its fastest economic growth rate in a decade Sunday, as a booming oil sector fuelled a 9.6 per cent rise in the first quarter over the same period of 2021.

The preliminary results come after the world's biggest oil exporter resisted US entreaties to raise output in an attempt to rein in prices that have spiked since the Ukraine war began.

"Oil activities led the real Gross Domestic Product (GDP) of Saudi Arabia to achieve the highest growth rate in [the] last 10 years," the Saudi statistics authority said in initial estimates published online.

Growth in the oil sector reached 20.4 per cent year-on-



year in the first quarter, while the non-oil sector expanded 3.7 per cent year-on-year, it said.

The agency noted that data for the quarter was "still incomplete" and could be revised.

The Ukraine war and the re-

sulting rise in crude prices has been a boon to oil-producing states like Saudi Arabia, whose GDP is expected to grow by 7.6 per cent in 2022, the International Monetary Fund said last week.

As the war in Ukraine got underway, Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates stressed their commitment to the OPEC+ oil alliance, which Riyadh and Moscow lead, underscoring Riyadh's and Abu Dhabi's increasing independence from long-standing ally Washington.

Last month, ratings agency Fitch predicted that the kingdom would record a budget surplus in 2022 for the first time since 2013.

But Fitch noted that, despite efforts to diversify the economy, Saudi Arabia's oil dependence "remains high", accounting for more than 60 per cent of total budget revenues.

AFP

EU ban on Russian oil could lead to supply 'disruptions'

Meseberg, Germany – German Economy Minister Robert Habeck said that a gradual EU ban on Russian oil imports could lead to supply "disruptions" and price increases but backed the measure as necessary step to sanction Moscow.

"I have said a few times that we can of course not guarantee in this situation that there won't be disruptions, primarily regional disruptions," he told reporters after a cabinet meeting on Wednesday.

He stressed, however, that Berlin backed the bloc's measure as a response to the Ukraine invasion.

Habeck, whose brief also includes energy policy, cited specifically the PCK refinery in the eastern town of Schwedt as one that could feel the impact.

It supplies around 90 per cent of the oil consumed in Berlin and the surrounding region, including Berlin-Brandenburg international airport.

Russian oil giant Rosneft, controlled by the Kremlin, is a majority shareholder in the site – a complicated situation Habeck said would have to be "resolved politically".



Habeck noted that the gradual implementation of the ban should help cushion shocks to oil markets. "It is possible they have already been priced in," he said. "But of course prices could also significantly rise."

The European Union's executive unveiled on Wednesday plans for a gradual ban on Russian oil imports as part of a raft of new sanctions to punish

Moscow for invading Ukraine. If approved, the oil ban would be the EU's toughest move yet against Russia's strategic energy sector that helps the Kremlin finance its war, but will still not touch its huge gas exports.

The embargo is part of the bloc's sixth sanction package, and would be phased-in over the rest of the year to help countries adapt.

Germany has ruled out an immediate embargo on all Russian energy, especially gas. But it aims to end Russian oil imports by the end of this year.

Russian supplies now make up 12 per cent of Germany's oil imports compared to 35 per cent previously, according to data provided by the economy ministry on Sunday.

AFP

World food prices fall from record high over Ukraine war

Paris, France – World food prices fell slightly last month after hitting a record in March but remain high due to the Ukraine war, the UN's Food and Agriculture Organization has said.

International sanctions against Russia as well as export flow disruptions resulting from the February 24 invasion have sparked fears of a global hunger crisis.

Russia and Ukraine, whose vast grain-growing regions are among the world's main breadbaskets, account for a huge share of the globe's exports in several major commodities, including wheat, vegetable oil and corn.

The FAO's food price index, which had reported records for both March and February, dipped 0.8 per cent in April compared to the previous month, the agency said in a statement.

"The small decrease in the index is a welcome relief, particularly for low-income food-deficit countries, but still food prices remain close to their recent highs, reflecting persistent market tightness and posing a challenge to global food security for the most vulnerable," FAO chief economist Maximo Torero Cullen said.

The modest drop was led by vegetable oil prices, with the



The FAO's food price index, which had reported records for both March and February, dipped 0.8 per cent in April compared to the previous month, the agency said in a statement

FAO's vegetable oil price index down 5.7 per cent in April. However, the FAO said that

prices remain very high amid "uncertainties about export availabilities out of Indonesia, the world's leading palm oil exporter".

Indonesia's decision to suspend palm oil exports in the face of domestic shortages has pushed vegetable oil prices to new highs, further tightening a market already on edge due to the war in Ukraine and global warming.

The index is a measure of the monthly change in international prices of a basket of food commodities.

AFP

India's Reliance rakes in \$100bn annual revenue

Mumbai, India – Reliance Industries became the first Indian company to cross US\$100bn in annual revenues after the oil-to-telecoms giant reported strong quarterly results across its energy, telecoms and retail businesses Friday.

The conglomerate, which is owned by Asia's richest man Mukesh Ambani, reported a net profit of 162.03bn rupees (US\$2.1bn) between January and March, 22.5 per cent higher than the same period last year.

Revenues from operations increased 36.8 per cent year-on-year to 2.12tn rupees, aided by both its legacy energy business and newer ventures such as retail.

Income in the quarter helped gross revenue cross 7.93tn rupees (US\$104.6bn) for the financial year ended March 31.

"Despite the ongoing challenges of the pandemic and heightened geopolitical uncertainties, Reliance has delivered a robust performance," chairman



Mukesh Ambani

and managing director Ambani said in a statement.

"Our O2C (oil-to-chemical) business has proven its resilience and has demonstrated strong recovery despite volatility in the energy markets," the billionaire added.

Revenues from Reliance's oil refinery and petrochemicals business – which accounts for more than half of total income – benefited from higher crude oil prices, rising 44.2 per cent year-on-year to 1.46tn rupees.

The energy giant's smaller oil and gas exploration and production business saw revenues jump

136.8 per cent year-on-year to 20bn rupees, helped by higher gas prices.

But India intervening to keep domestic fuel prices low even as global oil prices skyrocketed in the quarter hurt Reliance's nascent petrol pump partnership with British oil and gas major BP, the company said.

Net profit from telecoms arm Reliance Jio rose 22.9 per cent to 43.13bn rupees, boosted by tariff hikes undertaken in December 2021, even as its customer base shrunk by 10.9mn subscribers in the quarter.

Revenues from Reliance's retail business hit a fresh all-time high of 580.17bn rupees, helped by an early summer and strong demand for clothing and groceries.

Reliance's multi-billion-dollar fortune has been powered by oil and petrochemicals businesses, but the company has diversified into new areas including telecoms and retail in recent years.

AFP

Shell Oman Marketing Company SAOG

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DIRECTORS' REPORT FOR THE PERIOD ENDED 31ST MARCH 2022

In its meeting held on 26 April 2022, the Board of Directors approved the Company's unaudited financial results for the period ended 31st March 2022.

SUMMARY FINANCIALS

In OMR'000	Quarter			3 Months		
	Q1/22	Q1/21	%	2022	2021	%
Revenue	112,068	92,754	20.8%	112,068	92,754	20.8%
Gross profit	8,378	7,871	6.4%	8,378	7,871	6.4%
Add: Other income	913	1,143	(20.2%)	913	1,143	(20.2%)
Less: Selling, distribution and administrative expenses	(7,133)	(6,712)	6.3%	(7,133)	(6,712)	6.3%
Less: Financing and taxation	(723)	(699)	3.5%	(723)	(699)	3.5%
Profit and comprehensive income	1,435	1,603	(10.5%)	1,435	1,603	(10.5%)

- Three Months Revenue was OMR 112.068 million, 20.8% higher than the same period last year.
- Three Months Gross Profit was OMR 8.378 million, 6.4% higher than the same period last year mainly due to higher sales volumes during the first quarter of 2022 in comparison to the same period last year.
- Three Months Profit and Comprehensive Income was OMR 1.435 million. This is lower than the same period in 2021 mainly due to the increase in the overall expenses during the first quarter by roughly 6%.

BUSINESS PERFORMANCE

Mobility Business while industry demand remains challenged, the mobility business remained the largest revenue generator in the company. The business continues to provide customers with a world class experience through a nationwide network of strategically located Shell service stations. The business opened its Shell Liva Express Service Station in Q1 2022 which is not only the company's first service station for the year but also the first service station on the Batinah Expressway. This site marks the first out of four Shell services stations targeting to provide motorists access to our high-quality fuels and services and enhance their mobility experience. This strategic highway provides a vital link between the various logistical hubs, industrial projects and economic zones in the country, and we expect the service stations to benefit immensely from the expected footfall and growth.

The quarter also witnessed a recognition for our best performance and efficiency fuel, Shell V Power, which was awarded "Top Omani Brand" in the "Fuels" category during Alom Al-Hikmah Top Omani Brand Awards ceremony. The Shell Recharge at Al Bandar service station marks a first in our EV roadmap and it will redefine EV charging in Oman. As a leading player in the sector, Shell Oman will continue to invest in energy transition to support Oman's Carbon Control Target Plan which is rooted in the Oman Vision 2040. It remains our endeavour to collaborate with the relevant authorities and stakeholders to realise the goals of the National Energy Strategy and accelerate the gradual transition to a lower carbon economy and an energy matrix with lower carbon emissions.

Non-Fuel Retail (NFR) continues to play an important role in improving consumer experience and satisfaction. In line with this, the company opened the first 2 branches of Shell Café in Oman at Al Bandar and Wadi Adai Service Stations.

Fleet Solutions Business remained resilient with steady contribution to the Mobility business. It continues to focus on signing new customers and addressing evolving customer needs through acceleration of its digitalisation journey, its commitment to delivery promises, operational excellence and leveraging the Cards Management System to provide better transactional controls as well as improved customer experience through the Vehicle Recognition System (VRS).

Commercial Fuels Business challenges facing the Business to Business (B2B) market environment continue with limited commercial and infrastructure projects but gradual improvement in economic activities was noted with deals signed for new upcoming infrastructure projects. The company remains committed to support its customers through its outstanding operational excellence, effective and diverse mobility solutions and efficient cashflow management.

Marine Business the company's focus remains on strengthening its position in this sector and developing new business opportunities to expand its footprint across all major ports in the Sultanate. The company remains committed to the highest HSE and operational excellence standards leveraging its global expertise to ensure successful delivery of bunkering solutions to its local and international marine customers.

Lubricants Business despite the continuous challenges imposed by COVID-19 and global lubricants supply restrictions which affected the overall cost of finished lubricants and products availability, the lubricant business continued to leverage its ISO 9001-certified Shell lubricant blending plant in Mina Al Fahal, enhancing In-Country Value (ICV) and customer value proposition. The commercial lubricants segment maintained its market leadership and grew volume in the market focusing on winning new accounts in the construction and franchise workshops sectors and partnering with customers in the Government and Oil and Gas sectors. In addition to this, the business conducted various marketing campaigns in this quarter in collaboration with its distributors and indirect sales channel to increase its market share and brand preference. To support its customers in the transition to lower carbon emission future, the business introduced its new range of Helix Ultra OW carbon neutral lubricants to major car dealers and premium independent workshops across the Sultanate.

Aviation Business is still reflecting an early stage of recovery from the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic whilst restrictions on air travel further eased in Q1 2022, the global aviation and tourism sectors continued to witness limited air travel albeit better than the last 2 years. Volumes from both domestic and foreign travels increased slightly but remained challenged. During this time, the company focused on securing new contracts in the cargo sector and retaining key contracts with international airlines at Muscat International Airport and Salalah Airport.

HEALTH, SAFETY, SECURITY AND ENVIRONMENT (HSSE)

The company ended the quarter with Zero Recordable Incident and Zero Loss of Primary Containment (LOPCs), a testament to its commitment to health, safety, security and the environment. Continuing its "Goal Zero" journey of "No Harm, No Leaks" and care for people and the environment and in pursuit of its commitment to sustain and develop the safety culture internally and with its stakeholders, the company carried out a number of activities in the first quarter with our staff, partners and frontlines. Some of these activities included: contractor accreditation programs, security engagement sessions, permit to work refresher, working at heights refresher, first aid sessions, emergency response drills, product discharge and defensive driving trainings focused on promoting awareness and building capabilities to strengthen the safety behaviour culture in the company whilst also remaining focused on its primary goal of producing cleaner energy including the work with its road transport partners on decarbonation initiatives and solutions.

CORPORATE SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY

With the pandemic restrictions easing both locally and globally, the first 3 months of 2022 saw an active resumption of bigger scale social initiatives and face to face functions. Shell Oman Marketing Company SAOG continues to be committed to playing its role as a responsible corporate citizen through a number of

collaborative initiatives with different stakeholders and partners, including charitable groups and associations. During Q1, Shell Oman sponsored the Oman Partnership and Social Responsibility Forum as well as the Second Governance Conference by the Oman Centre for Governance and Sustainability. As for the company's support to NGOs, Shell Oman Marketing sponsored the annual fund raising event of the Oman Association for Children with Disabilities. In the spirit of the holy month, the company continued its annual tradition of contributing to the society in which it operates by distributing ration packs in collaboration with a number of charity organizations and groups.

The Company has successfully rolled out the first phase of installing solar panels in our facilities in Mina Al Fahal by completing the mechanical and electrical installation of PV panels in our newly constructed head office. Other energy efficiency initiative and solutions are being explored and evaluated in order to further reinforce the company's commitment to its powering progress strategy and Shell's target is to become a net-zero emissions energy business by 2050, in step with society's progress.

As the country and the wider economy recovers from the impact of the pandemic, the Company will continue to collaborate and work with all stakeholders to reinforce its role and do its part in serving Oman and its people under the leadership of His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik and to support his vision for the Sultanate.

Walid Hadi
Chairman, Shell Oman Marketing Company SAOG

Muscat, April 26, 2022

Unaudited Financial Statements for the 3 months ended 31 March 2022

STATEMENT OF COMPREHENSIVE INCOME FOR THE 3 MONTHS ENDED 31 MAR 2022				
	Unaudited 3 months ended 31 Mar 2022	Unaudited 3 months ended 31 Mar 2021	Audited 12 months ended 31 Dec 2021	
	OMR'000	OMR'000	OMR'000	OMR'000
Revenue	112,068	92,754	398,429	
Cost of sales	(103,690)	(84,883)	(368,390)	
Gross profit	8,378	7,871	30,039	
Other income	913	1,143	4,035	
Selling, distribution and administrative expenses	(7,133)	(6,712)	(28,030)	
Operating profit	2,158	2,302	6,044	
Interest expense	(475)	(421)	(1,797)	
Interest income	5	4	20	
Profit before income tax	1,688	1,885	4,267	
Income tax expense	(253)	(282)	(656)	
Profit and comprehensive income for the period	1,435	1,603	3,611	
Basic and diluted earnings per share (OMR)	0.014	0.016	0.036	

STATEMENT OF FINANCIAL POSITION AT 31 MAR 2022

	Unaudited At 31 Mar 2022	Unaudited At 31 Mar 2021	Unaudited At 31 Dec 2021	Audited At 31 Dec 2021
	OMR'000	OMR'000	OMR'000	OMR'000
ASSETS				
Non-current assets				
Property, plant and equipment	57,423	53,803	56,843	
Right-of-use assets	28,971	28,994	27,986	
Intangible assets	105	63	49	
Deferred tax assets	42	20	-	
Total non-current assets	86,541	82,880	84,878	
Current assets				
Inventories	8,554	6,704	8,551	
Receivables and prepayments	41,749	32,853	39,222	
Cash at bank and in hand	17,589	7,357	8,796	
Total current assets	67,892	46,814	56,569	
Total assets	154,433	129,524	141,447	
EQUITY				
Share capital	10,000	10,000	10,000	
Legal reserve	3,587	3,587	3,587	
Retained earnings	37,748	37,905	39,913	
Total equity	51,335	51,492	53,500	
LIABILITIES				
Non-current liabilities				
Long-term loans	3,334	6,667	3,334	
Long-term lease liabilities	25,811	25,334	24,216	
Deferred tax liabilities	-	-	38	
Employee terminal benefits	286	289	280	
Total non-current liabilities	29,431	32,290	27,868	
Current liabilities				
Short-term loans	13,000	-	3,333	
Short-term lease liabilities	2,730	3,144	3,063	
Payables and accruals	56,816	41,788	52,890	
Income tax payable	1,000	611	667	
Provisions	121	199	126	
Total current liabilities	73,667	45,742	60,079	
Total liabilities	103,098	78,032	87,947	
Total equity and liabilities	154,433	129,524	141,447	
Net assets per share (OMR)	0.513	0.515	0.535	

* The complete financial statements are available from the Muscat Stock Exchange (MSX).
* The complete accounts will be sent by mail to any shareholder on request, in either Arabic or English, within 7 days of receipt of the request. The request should be sent to the Chief Financial Officer at the address shown above.

Elon Musk secures \$7.1bn to finance Twitter acquisition

New York, US – Elon Musk has raised US\$7.1bn for his Twitter acquisition from investors that include Oracle founder Larry Ellison and Saudi Prince Alwaleed bin Talal, according to a securities filing Thursday.

Musk, chief executive of Tesla and SpaceX, listed 18 investors who agreed to cash investments including Ellison (US\$1bn), Sequoia Capital (US\$800mn) and Vy Capital (US\$700mn).

The Saudi prince, the head of the Kingdom Holding Company conglomerate, agreed to contribute about 35mn Twitter shares worth US\$1.9bn so as to retain a stake in the company post-acquisition, the filing said.

Alwaleed had previously balked at Musk's US\$54.20

Elon Musk

per share offer as too low, but praised Musk on Twitter on Thursday, saying "I look forward to roll our -US\$1.9bn in the 'new' @Twitter and join you on this exciting journey."

The investments will reduce a US\$12.5bn margin loan organized through Morgan Stanley and other banks to

US\$6.25bn, the filing said.

The new financing means less of Musk's Tesla shares will be used as collateral under the margin loan.

Musk "may receive additional financing commitments to fund additional portions of the total Merger Consideration," the filing said, adding that the Tesla chief is in talks with former Twitter Chief Executive Jack Dorsey and others who may contribute shares to maintain an equity stake.

The Twitter takeover is expected to close later in 2022.

CNBC reported that upon completion of the deal, Musk is expected to serve as temporary CEO of Twitter for a few months, the network said, citing unnamed sources.

AFP

INFINITI Oman extends Eid al Fitr greetings to customers

INFINITI Oman has extended greetings to its customers and members of the community on the occasion of the Eid al Fitr.

A senior spokesperson at INFINITI Oman, said, "It gives us great pleasure to convey Eid al Fitr greetings to all our customers and community. We wish everyone a joyous celebration and hope that this festival brings plentiful joy, good health and happiness in their life. May you enjoy a blessed time with your loved ones this Eid al Fitr."

He added, "We take this opportunity to convey our deep gratitude and appreciation to our customers for their dedication to the brand."

"We would like to reiterate that INFINITI Oman will remain committed to providing premium vehicles and quality service to its customers. Delivering a truly exceptional luxury experience - from the moment a customer walks in the door, throughout the entire ownership cycle - is our top priority."

Continuing with the tradition of rewarding its valued customers during the holy month of Ramadan, INFINITI Oman has introduced special offers across its INFINITI product range.



Range of offers on specific INFINITI models include free registration, free insurance, assured gifts vouchers, periodic vehicle maintenance, manufacturer's warranty, AAA/ Road assistance card, digital promotion, INFINITI loyalty programme, reference programme

The special offer which started on March 20 will go on till May 19, 2022.

The scheme is applicable for all the customers purchasing INFINITI vehicles for personal use only. Vehicles purchased with commercial registration will not be eligible for the scheme. Vehicles bought for taxi, driving school, ministries, fleet, and rent-a-car usage will not be eligible for this scheme.

The scheme is applicable for retail billing only.

Kalyan Jewellers announces special bonanza

Kalyan Jewellers, one of India's most trusted and leading jewellery brands, has announced a special festive offer in line with the auspicious occasions of Eid, Akshaya Tritiya and the approaching wedding season. This season also marks the 10th anniversary of Kalyan Jewellers' association with the legendary actor - Amitabh Bachchan.

To commemorate the occasion, Kalyan Jewellers has introduced special limited edition gold coins as a tribute to the superstar.

The unique offer will have 50 lucky customers take home the special limited edition Gold Coins throughout the festive season, on basis of a raffle draw. This season, every customer will receive a free raffle draw coupon for every RO150 worth of jewellery purchases from Kalyan Jewellers.

Adding further delight to the customers' festive purchases, the jewellery brand has announced that it will be giving away three coupons for diamond jewellery purchases worth RO150 and two coupons for uncut and precious stone jewellery purchases worth RO150. While, customers purchasing gold jewellery worth RO150 will receive one raffle coupon from Kalyan Jewellers.

Talking about the offers, Ramesh Kalyanaraman, executive director, Kalyan Jewellers, said, "This festive season, we mark the milestone of a decade-long association with superstar Amitabh Bachchan. It has been a delightful experience for us to have Amitabh Bachchan represent brand Kalyan Jewellers and the values, ethics as well as principles that we stand for. Looking back at the past decade, we have grown from strength-to-strength, widening our brand presence, regional footprint and market share across India and the Middle East. Today, Kalyan Jewellers is truly a household name and the contribution of Bachchan in this journey has been enormous."

"With this unique offer, we aim to spread happiness and cheer with the brand's patrons in the region, who are an integral part of the success achieved by us. We are grateful for the trust and faith bestowed upon us by our customers and continue to strive hard in providing them with best-in-class jewellery with an unmatched retail experience."

These offers are valid until May 30, 2022, and the names of the 50 lucky winners will be announced on June 6, 2022 on the brand's social media pages.

The jewellery retailed at Kalyan Jewellers goes through multiple purity tests and patrons also receive the Kalyan Jewellers 4-Level Assurance Certificate which guarantees purity, free lifetime maintenance of ornaments, detailed product information and transparent exchange and buy-back policies.

Wizz your way to tropical oasis Salalah this summer

Wizz Air Abu Dhabi, the ultra-low-fare national airline of the UAE, has launched an exciting new route from Abu Dhabi to Salalah, Oman's exotic tropical paradise.

The new destination, in the southernmost region of Oman, provides affordable, hassle-free travel for tourists and residents in both the UAE and Oman with year-round travel opportunities to the sub-tropical paradise.

Tickets are already on sale on wizzair.com and the airline's mobile app with fares starting as low as AED39.

Salalah, most attractive during



the wet and green Summer season between June and September, boasts outstanding natural beauty with rich wildlife unique to the region. Sitting on a long sandy beach, Salalah is close to both mountains and the desert, offering adventurous travellers

ample opportunities for exploration. With a long history as a centre of frankincense, Salalah is a thriving historical centre with outstanding attractions that will ensure a wonderful travelling experience.

Blessed with the famous warm Omani hospitality, Salalah offers unrivalled landscapes unlike elsewhere in the region with the sub-tropical magic of exotic fruit plantations and coconut palms.

Michael Berlouis, managing director of Wizz Air Abu Dhabi, said, "Salalah is a unique travel destination with the best summer weather in the region and abundant wildlife."

"Travellers to Salalah will experience unmissable nature with a plethora of options for exploration along both the coastline and in the mountains. We are delighted at the variety of destinations in our expanding network with incredible historical and cultural experiences awaiting adventurous travellers in Salalah. We look forward to sharing our love of travel and seeing you on board our aircraft for more convenient, affordable travel soon," he added.



Towell Auto Centre introduces all-new sporty JAC JS4 in Oman

JAC JS4 is a Sporty turbocharged crossover that boasts of a futuristic design, equipped with the latest technologies to guarantee comfort and wellness.

The exterior of JS4 looks stunning, youthful, proportional, and bold. The out of the box futuristic design which since its launch has caught the imagination of enthusiasts around the world. Words are not enough to describe it, but to sketch out some idea for you, the intricate front has a sharply divided head optics, a stylish front grille, and a elevated bumper with chrome fangs, and

its lean stern flaunts boomerang lanterns, connected by a horizontal bar and a raised trunk lid inverted led lights, designed in 7 shape giving it a visible distinguished look.

Five doors balance the profile's dynamic appearance with a lower line of glass flying towards the falling roof, rounded square wheel arches framed by undyed plastic instituting the floating roof effect.

The interior of the compact SUV is in full accordance with modern fashion trends making it look attractive and flamboyant -

a multifunction steering wheel giving you easy command over the car with a three-spoke rim flattened at the bottom, a virtual instrument cluster and a laconic center console with a 10.25 inches' media center touchscreen and two rows of auxiliary buttons. The Second row of the seats supports 4/6 all down, flexible storage accommodating up to 520 liters of luggage.

The Cruise Control simply enhances the driving convenience, the sunroof makes it a pleasant experience to gaze at the night stars, the Android Auto / Apple

CarPlay makes the syncing very smooth, the 360-degree camera adds a crucial layer of safety with the electrically adjustable seats and remote controlled windows just adding a whole new dimension to the already well priced and value for money product.

The JAC JS4 is powered by a 1.5L turbocharged engine that puts out 147HP along with 210 Nm torque with 2 variants in Oman, Prestige and Standard.

Its stylish and turbocharged combination makes it a go-to car for everyone who wants power and style together!

Oman Technology Fund signs agreement with COMEX Group

Oman Technology Fund (OTF) signed an agreement with COMEX Group of Events to invest US\$1mn in startups in the COMEX Pitch Battle. The agreement was signed by Dr Yousef bin Abdullah al Balushi, acting CEO of OTF, and Amr bin Abdullah Baabood, CEO of OITE - organiser company of COMEX2022.

COMEX: Oman's official technology event, is coming in its 31st edition this year from May 23 to May 25 at the Oman Convention and Exhibition Centre, Muscat. This event is one of the leading exhibitions to highlight the digital transformation of ministries, authorities, and companies by showcasing their achievements and opportunities for innovation in technology and their steps towards Oman Vision 2040. The exhibition is considered to be one of Oman's initiatives to provide the most engaging and networking platform for youth talent development leaders, learning heads, human resources and business leaders to bridge the gaps and find solutions in several areas of the digital eco system, such as AI, Cybersecurity, IoT, Innovation, Drones, Future Mobility, Blockchain, Coding and more, which correspond to the Oman Vision 2040 and Muscat's digital capital goals.

For the first time, COMEX will have a dedicated zone for startups called Comex Tech Venture, where many startups from across the region will have the opportunity to showcase their products and services. With the support of OTF, the COMEX



group of events will focus on enhancing the investment opportunities in ICT startups locally and globally within the framework of Oman Vision 2040. The jury members will select the top 40 startups to exhibit at Comex and they will compete with the other startups. Only 10 startups will qualify for the finals, which will be presented to the fund's investment committee to evaluate

the possibility of receiving investment from OTF.

Startups specialising in different areas in the ICT field, such as gaming, e-commerce, e-lifestyle, business, entertainment, health and fitness, education, travel, utilities, fintech, biotech, and logistics tech, and other areas are all welcome to register for the Pitch Battle until May 17.

Meethaq Islamic Banking hosts customer events across Oman to enhance communication

In line with its commitment to further strengthen its partnership and communication channels with its customers, Meethaq Islamic Banking from Bank Muscat, hosted a number of iftar gatherings across different cities in Oman on the occasion of the holy month of Ramadan. It was attended by a number of Meethaq customers, who were also able to provide their opinions and feedback on Islamic banking services to senior Meethaq officials who were present at the event.

Speaking on the occasion, Sami Bait Rashid, assistant general manager – Meethaq Personal Banking, expressed his appreciation to all the customers at the iftar and thanked them for their confidence in Meethaq's various products and services. He added that Meethaq is always delighted to listen to its



customers and offer them various Islamic banking services and facilities, which comply with the principles of Sharia'a and are aligned to their needs and global trends.

It must be noted that Meethaq has launched a number of special offers featuring attractive profit rates on the occasion of the holy month of Ramadhan for the benefit of its customers. These are applicable on a wide variety of financing options including home finance, auto finance, personal goods finance, education finance, marriage finance, travel finance, and takeover finance. Customers who apply for any of the products will benefit from quick processing and minimal documentation.

Meethaq customers are eligible for up to 80 per cent financing for home or auto financing while 100 per cent financing is available for travel, marriage, education and personal goods finance. Applications may be submitted at any of Meethaq's 24 state-of-the-art branches across the sultanate to take advantage of the offer, which will run till June 30, 2022 and offers advantageous repayment plans.

Meethaq Islamic Banking has been well recognised for its prominent role in providing banking services and facilities that are compliant with the principles of Islamic Sharia'a. Accolades won in the past include the Best Islamic Bank in Oman award from Islamic Finance News (IFN) and Oman's Most Trusted Brand (Islamic Banking) from Apex Media in 2021. The various accolades are a keen reflection of customer confidence in Meethaq's products and services.

Arabian Travel Market to open tomorrow



Tourism professionals from around the world will return to Dubai this week when Arabian Travel Market, the leading event for the travel industry in the Middle East, returns to the Dubai World Trade Centre on May 9.

The event will welcome more than 20,000 visitors and over 1,500 exhibiting companies during the four-day tourism showcase, which concludes on May 12. Hundred and twelve countries will be featured on the show floor ranging from Japan to Jamaica and South Africa to Italy. Industry professionals will have the opportunity to meet and discuss the latest trends from a cross-section of travel, including technology, transport, sustainability, events and business.

Danielle Curtis, exhibition director ME – Arabian Travel Market, said, "Arabian Travel Market 2022 will reiterate the impor-

ance of the travel industry as we continue to address the challenges of COVID-19 while also outlining how we drive the industry forward. The tourism industry has rebounded incredibly well. As a result, we have seen a clear uptick in participation, with floor space increasing by over 85 per cent compared to the previous year and Middle East exhibitor space eclipsing 2019 levels. We now have the perfect opportunity to hear from industry professionals on the latest trends helping the industry recover and flourish in many instances."

In line with this year's theme of 'The future of international travel and tourism', ATM 2022 will unveil new technology that will eliminate the need for business cards and allow exhibitors and visitors to share details and marketing material via innovative scanners and badges.



Ayan International wins Pran Frooto Cricket Tournament

The final of Pran Frooto Cricket Tournament was held on April 28. In an exciting final played between Ayan International and Friendly Stars on April 28. Ayan International defeated Friendly Stars by 43 runs and won the Pran Frooto Ramadan Cricket Tournament organised by Al Hail Cricket Team.

In the Final match, Ayan XI captain Z Haider won the toss and selected to bat first. Ayan XI went on to score 85 runs in stipulated 8 overs for the loss of 4 wickets, while Haider top scored

with 31 runs and other useful contribution came from Nasir Siddiq with 27 runs and Shafeeq with 9 runs.

For Friendly Stars, Bilal took 3 wickets giving away 22 runs respectively. In reply, Friendly Stars fumbled to a measurable 42 at the end of 8 overs losing 2 wickets. Bilal was the top scorer with 20 runs while Irfan from Ayan XI was the pick of the bowlers destroying the Friendly Stars top line.

Zulqarnain Haider of Ayan International was declared as

man of the tournament and best batsman.

SK Firoz Ahamed, marketing and business development manager of PRAN Food Oman presided as the chief guest and Doshambe al Balushi, Ismail Waleed, Captain of OCT Al Hail CT and Khalid al Balushi, senior board member of Al Hail were also presented for the award ceremony. The tournament is sponsored by PRAN foods Oman and supported by Cricket Cottage and Baab Al Hail Trading.

Ooredoo shares spirit of holy month of Ramadan and Eid



Embodying the giving spirit of Ramadan, Ooredoo has travelled the length and breadth of the country to bring joy and happiness during the holy month. From introducing great value offers including double data on weekends for 4G Home Internet customers and boosted speeds for Fibre Home Internet subscribers, to introducing generous roaming packages for customers visiting the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia for Umrah and three months free subscription to the Shahid streaming app, Ooredoo continues to offer great value, high speeds and unmatched coverage.

With 'Caring' one of the company's values, Ooredoo's Goodwill Journey, now in its 18th year, saw a team of volunteers distribute food items, appliances and gifts in support of women, youth,

elderly people, people in hospital and children with disabilities. It also launched a women's incubator in Jalan Bani bu Hassan which will provide opportunities for 500 women to develop their own small businesses.

The Ooredoo Goodwill Journey came to a close in Al Amerat as volunteers joined children from Al Wafa Rehabilitation Center for Disabled Children to celebrate Qarraqasho, with sweets, gifts, games and entertainment.

Ooredoo also supported community activities during Ramadan, including the League of Legends Ramadan Tournament, held online using Ooredoo's fantastic network, and football tournaments in Muscat, Nizwa and Salalah, as well as a tournament organised by the Tawasul Theatre Group.

The new Porsche 911 Sport Classic: Back to the future

The new 911 Sport Classic is the second of four collector's items that Porsche has presented from its Heritage Design strategy.

A total of 1,250 examples of the limited-edition model by Porsche Exclusive Manufaktur will revive the style of the 1960s and early 1970s. Like its immediate predecessor, the 997-based 911 Sport Classic presented in 2009, the appearance of this model is inspired by the original 911 (1964 - 1973) and the 1972 911 Carrera RS 2.7.

"The Heritage Design models represent the most emotionally driven concepts of the Porsche product strategy," said Alexander Fabig, Vice President Individualization and Classic.

"This unique approach sees the Style Porsche design department working with Porsche Exclusive Manufaktur to reinterpret iconic 911 models and equipment from the 1950s

through to the 1980s and to revive design features from those decades."

Porsche is launching four limited-edition models over an extended period. The first of these was presented in 2020: The 911 Targa 4S Heritage Design Edition with design elements from the 1950s and 1960s.

Porsche Design has also created a high-quality chronograph exclusively available to drivers who purchase the collector's edition vehicle. The watch seamlessly picks up on numerous details from the new 911 Sport Classic design. As part of the Heritage Design Classic package, selected interior elements of the new 911 Sport Classic will also be available for most current 911 models.

Reinterpreting historical design elements

The wide body – otherwise re-



served for the 911 Turbo models – a fixed rear spoiler in the style of the legendary 'ducktail' Carrera RS 2.7 and the double-bubble roof underscore the distinctiveness of the new 911 Sport Classic.

As with the first 997-generation 911 Sport Classic launched in 2009, the designers were inspired by the Fashion Grey paintwork of the early Porsche 356 when choosing the exclusive paint finish for the new limited-edition model.

"The new 911 Sport Classic is the first vehicle to feature Sport Grey Metallic paintwork," said Michael Mauer, vice president Style Porsche. "Grey is never boring, quite often a statement

and always cool."

As an alternative to the exclusive Sport Grey Metallic finish, the new 911 Sport Classic is also available in solid Black, Agate Grey Metallic, Gentian Blue Metallic or Paint to Sample. Twin stripes painted on the bonnet, roof and rear spoiler in light Sports Grey emphasise the car's sporty design.

In the interior, the iconic Pepita pattern can be found on the door panels and seat centres, while two-tone, semi-aniline leather upholstery in Black/Classic Cognac provides an elegant contrast with the exterior colour.

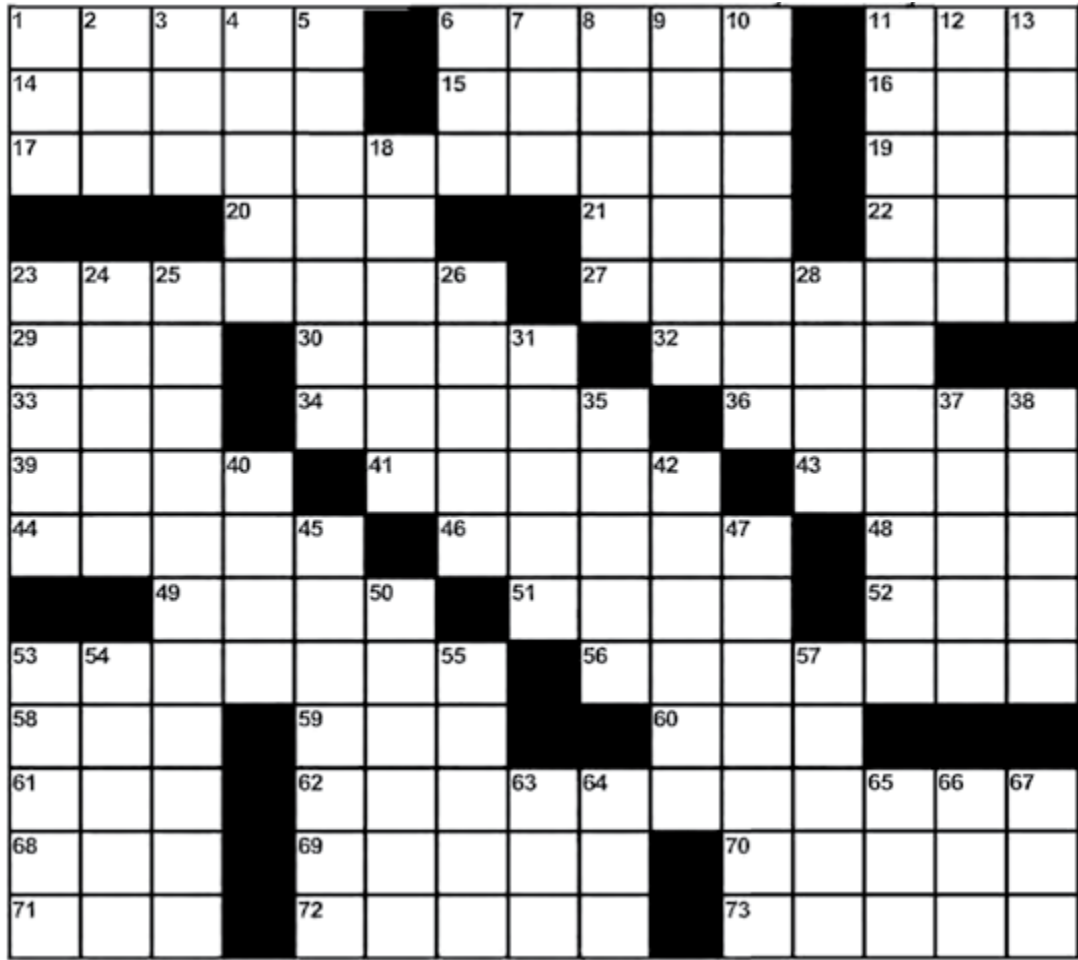
550 PS for the most powerful manual 911 yet

The powertrain concept is equally unique: The 3.7-litre, twin-turbo flat-six engine transmits its 405 kW (550 PS) to the

road via the rear wheels only. In combination with the seven-speed manual gearbox, the new 911 Sport Classic is the most powerful manual 911 available today. The gearbox has an auto-blip function that compensates for engine-speed differences between the gears with a brief burst of revs when shifting down. The standard sports exhaust system is specially tailored to the model for an even more emotive sound experience.

The suspension, based on that of the 911 Turbo and 911 GT3 models, meets high performance requirements: Thanks to the standard Porsche Active Suspension Management (PASM), its shock absorbers respond to dynamic changes at lightning speed. PASM is combined as standard with the sports suspension, which features a 10-millimetre-lower ride height.

DAILY CROSSWORD



ACROSS

1) No longer original
6) Good-will agreements
11) Sun, moon or sphere
14) Bird with a curved neck
15) Cancel, as a rocket launch
16) Positive sign?
17) It starts after 40 hours, for many
19) Mendes of Hollywood
20) Get what you bask for
21) Coke's alcoholic partner
22) Bleed in the wash
23) Crossword constructor's activity
27) States of friendliness
29) Did 22-Across
30) Catchy tune
32) One billion years (var.)
33) Make sense (with "up")
34) Snobbish expression
36) Original sin city
39) Slope slider
41) Rubbernecked
43) Correct the pitch of
44) Calligrapher's stroke
46) More friendly

48) Order's counterpart
49) Difficult expedition
51) Spreadsheet contents
52) Gerard of "Buck Rogers"
53) Tries anew
56) Some children at kidfriendly zoos
58) Pub order, often
59) One little piggy
60) _Lanka
61) Eggy Christmas libation
62) They have grave responsibilities
68) Brains of a PC
69) "The Canterbury Tales" character
70) Virtual certainty
71) Barnyard figure
72) Committed a faux pas
73) Student's composition E. Parker

8) Dried coconut meat
9) Emergency room concern
10) Hinders the progress of
11) Not stop when one should
12) Musical show
13) They may be refried
18) Unit of six outs
23) Boorish
24) Big dipper
25) Feeling great pressure
26) Gather little by little
28) Harbor sound
31) Not too hot
35) Closing news segment
37) How the euphoric walk
38) Cries weakly
40) Desperate, as circumstances
42) Can't stand
45) Highlight
47) Stressful corporate routine
50) Danish coins
53) Dressing option
54) Run away to wed
55) Exodus commemoration
57) Hawaiian lights

63) First mate
64) One side in checkers
65) Printer's widths

66) Zenith competitor of old
67) A verse to first moves

NOTE PAD

BARBS PHD CABLE
OPERA LIE APRON
SOLAR ALB MEATS
SLICING LINERS
ELSE OUSTER ICE
DOH ALI SWALLOW
TINANE AIDE
CUTTING BOTHWAYS
OGRE BRYAN
CLAMANT DID SIR
AIM BIOTIN BONA
CHOPPING BLOCK
ST AID IDA LANAI
HORDE CAR AMENS
YESSES SLY BERTH

YOUR DAILY HOROSCOPE

ARIES MARCH 21-APRIL 19

Maybe you have your eye on a promotion at work. Maybe your ambition is pointing you in another direction altogether. Are you considering changing workplaces entirely? Or maybe you've been nursing some sweet dreams of a career switch. Whatever your goals, today is a good day for moving forward. Don't forget that an important step toward realizing your ambitions is to be realistic about what's really happening now.

LEO JULY 23-AUGUST 22

Your insight is extremely sharp today. Where other people see calm and peace, you can see the underlying problems that will pop up. Go ahead and try to prevent these things from happening if you can. Being proactive will feel a little bit like a risk, but it is one that will pay off. The act of taking charge should feel good for you, and by the end of the day you could find that you've developed a taste for solving problems.

SAGITTARIUS NOVEMBER 22-DECEMBER 21

You're meant for big things, yes. But maybe they aren't going to happen today. Or at least, there's nothing you can do to make them happen today. But that doesn't mean they aren't getting closer every day in every way. It's just that sometimes you can't do much to give them a push. So relax, kick back and let big things come to you. Now's your chance to enjoy a little breather.

TAURUS APRIL 20-MAY 20

Today, you may well experience sudden bright flashes of light and a few rolling, thunderous sounds. It's not an electrical storm that could knock out the power. No, it's a brainstorm. Your brainstorm! You have a mind-bending, brain-shaking idea headed your way. Go ahead and share it as soon as you can. It could lead to some big changes down the road for you and the people around you.

VIRGO AUGUST 23-SEPTEMBER 22

A person from the past comes back into your life today, and you could find that they've radically changed. Give them the benefit of the doubt and make some time to find out what they've been up to. Find out what caused the transformation. Foreign influences can also have a positive impact on your life, so reach out and explore different cultures. Experiencing unfamiliar customs, foods, and music will enlighten you.

CAPRICORN DECEMBER 22-JANUARY 19

There's magic in the details, so why not slow down and take them all in? You'll find great joy in the little things you witness today, and a big part of this joy is in noticing something that no one else notices. Find a nice spot in a public park and watch the world go by. Be on the lookout for parents playing with children. Who knows? You might witness a little cutie take their first steps! You shouldn't miss the magic that is all around you.

GEMINI MAY 21-JUNE 21

Try not to confuse your opinions with the truth. Not everyone agrees with your ideas right now, and if you assume that they do, you run the risk of really ticking a few people off. So be sure to double-check with everyone before moving forward on any group activities. Hasty action on your part will probably leave some brittle egos feeling left out and cause a few sabotage plans to be hatched. A little extra consideration will help you stay popular.

LIBRA SEPTEMBER 23-OCTOBER 22

What used to feel like a family obligation is starting to feel like a treat you're lucky to be a part of, and this is a sure sign that you're feeling much more in sync with relatives. If you're contacted by one of them today, give them as much time as you possibly can. They need a dose of the good common-sense medicine that you provide on a consistent basis. It's easy for you to cut through the fog and help others see clearly.

AQUARIUS JANUARY 20-FEBRUARY 18

If there's a festering disagreement nobody wants to get into, and it's plaguing one of your relationships, don't let it fester any longer than it has already. A wound has to be cleaned, no matter how painful the process may be, before it can heal. In this case, the cleansing process can only start after you've broached the subject. Bring it into the light. Give it a little fresh air. You'll be glad you did.

CANCER JUNE 22-JULY 22

You might want to touch base with a close friend, somebody who knows you really well. They might be just the right helper for what you want to do, which is examine a few of the goings-on in your inner life. Are you happy? Are you happier than in the past? Are you less happy? Are you being honest about how happy you are, who you are, what you want? A friend could really lend a helpful perspective, so dig out your contact list and call them.

SCORPIO OCTOBER 23-NOVEMBER 21

Your work ethic is admirable, but keep in mind that always prioritising your responsibilities over having fun is going to knock your personality way out of balance. If you can, pull back on the work-related duties today. Postpone some projects or delegate them to other folks. If you can free up some of your time, you'll be able to get the alone time you need to reenergise. Then you can reappear on the social scene in full force.

PISCES FEBRUARY 19-MARCH 20

There's no question that you can handle pressure. You have before and you will now. The question is how you handle it. Do you make sure you maintain a healthy diet even if work is totally stressful? Do you keep up with your workouts? Do you give yourself enough downtime? Do you leave notes of encouragement on your bathroom mirror? You should do all these things.

01. Where was the centennial Winter Olympics held?

A. Lillehammer, Norway
B. Atlanta, Georgia, USA
C. There were no Winter Olympics Games in the centennial year
D. Nagano, Japan

02. When did the self-governing Dominions of the British Empire achieve the right to have legislative independence from the United Kingdom?

A. 1899
B. 1945
C. 1931
D. 1960

03. Which is not another name for allspice?

A. Pimento
B. Jamaica pepper
C. Clove
D. Newspace

Answers: 1.C 2.C 3.C

BOGGLER

H	A	N	I
T	G	W	N
B	R	W	L
A	S	A	O

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

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

DO YOU SUDOKU?

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

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

WORD BUILDER

H G I
N F S

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

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

SUDOKU EASY ANSWER

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

France's Macron vows new method to govern at 2nd term inauguration

Paris, France - French President Emmanuel Macron on Saturday vowed a new start to face immense challenges in foreign and domestic policy, as he was inaugurated for a second term after his election victory over the far right.

In a ceremony at the Elysee Palace, Macron was confirmed by Constitutional Council chief Laurent Fabius as the winner of April election and then signed the formal re-investiture document. Attended by 450 people, including his wife Brigitte and his only surviving predecessors Francois Hollande and Nicolas Sarkozy, the ceremony was relatively modest but marked the first time a French leader is serving a second term in 20 years.

Macron faces a daunting agenda of implementing the reforms he vowed when he came to power as France's youngest-ever president in 2017, as well as dealing with the Russian assault against Ukraine.

"Rarely has our world and our country been confronted with such a combination of challenges," he said, referring to the Russian invasion, the pandemic and the ecological emergency.

He vowed to be a 'new president' for a 'new mandate' and create a 'stronger France'.

"Every day of the mandate

that lies ahead I will have just one compass point. And that is to serve."

'Worn-out rites'

He also suggested a more inclusive and understanding style of ruling after his first term saw critics complain the former investment banker had abrasive and arrogant methods.

He vowed a 'new method' to govern, far from the 'worn-out rites and choreography' of the past.

In a tradition dating back to the Middle Ages, 21 cannon shots were fired from the Invalides military memorial complex to celebrate the inauguration.

With no drive down the Avenue des Champs-Elysees or long red carpet, the ceremony resembled the re-inaugurations of Francois Mitterrand in 1988 and Jacques Chirac in 2002, the last French president to win a second term.

Macron's second term will only start officially when the first one expires at midnight on May 13.

He is set to keep playing a leading role in efforts to stop Russia's war against Ukraine, while he carries an immense burden of expectation as a leader on the European stage with Ger-



Emmanuel Macron reviews troops in the gardens of the Elysee presidential palace in Paris on Saturday (AFP)

many still finding its footing in the post-Angela Merkel era.

Macron vowed to 'act to avoid any escalation following the Russian aggression in Ukraine, to help democracy and courage to prevail, to build a new European peace and a new autonomy on our continent'.

On the domestic front, Macron must deal with the crisis over the rising cost of living and also brace for possible protests when he finally tackles his cher-

ished pension reform, raising France's retirement age.

He reaffirmed a vow for full employment in France and vowed to fight against inequality by reforming the health and school systems as well as against 'daily insecurities and terrorism that is still there'.

Attending the ceremony were the parents of teacher Samuel Paty who was beheaded by an extremist in 2020. His mother was moved to tears when the

president embraced them.

'Having difficulty'

Macron won the second round of presidential polls on April 24 with a score of 58.55 per cent against far-right rival Marine Le Pen.

The ceremony comes at a time of political flux in the wake of Macron's election victory, as France gears up for legislative polls that swiftly follow in June.

Macron is expected to name a

Five dead as fires break out in Siberia

Moscow, Russia - Several fires have broken out in southern Siberia, affecting about 200 buildings and causing at least five deaths on Saturday, said local authorities who declared a state of emergency. The fires in the Krasnoyarsk region spread to some sawmills and a children's playground, the regional ministry for emergencies said on Telegram.

Regional governor Alexandre Uss said high winds of up to 40 metres per second, had brought down trees and power lines across large swathes of the region, sparking the fires which authorities said 300 firemen backed by 90 vehicles were fighting. "We have called for help from neighbouring territories but are aware that will in the best case not arrive for some hours," said Uss, adding temporary shelters were being opened for people in the worst-hit areas with medical and psychological support units also being made available. "I have given the order to cut off electricity in part of the region - save for survival facilities, service stations and water supply systems," he said. "Extinguishing (the fires) is being complicated - violent winds are fanning the flames and preventing them from being put out," the ministry stated.

AFP

US probes child deaths, cases linked to mysterious disease

Washington, US - The US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention is investigating 109 childhood cases of a mysterious form of hepatitis, including five reported deaths, the agency said on Friday.

It is part of an unexplained global phenomenon involving hundreds of cases, with Indonesia this week also reporting three deaths.

Britain on Friday announced its case count had increased to 163, the majority aged under five, with no deaths. "Investigators both here... and around the globe are working hard to determine the cause," said Jay Butler, deputy director for infectious

diseases for the CDC.

Health authorities think the cases might be linked to a wave of type of virus called adenovirus, but are trying to confirm the theory.

Ninety per cent of the US cases have involved hospitalisation, with 14 per cent requiring liver transplants. The median age of the cases is two-years-old, and the majority fully recovered.

The CDC issued a health alert in late April notifying doctors and public health authorities to be on the lookout for similar cases, and began examining records extending back to October 1, 2021.

AFP

Palestinian home destroyed for 'killing Israeli'

Palestinian Territories - Israeli forces on Saturday destroyed the home of a Palestinian accused of killing an Israeli settler last year, sparking clashes.

Explosives destroyed the apartment of Omar Jaradat in Silat al-Harithiya village, near the flashpoint town of Jenin in the northern occupied West Bank, according to a statement by the Israeli army.

It said Palestinians clashed with Israeli forces, throwing stones and firebombs, which soldiers responded to with semi-automatic fire.

Two Palestinians were wounded, according to an AFP photographer at the scene.

The clashes add to tensions in Israel and the West Bank as a large-scale manhunt continued



A Palestinian man sits in a house demolished by Israeli security forces in the village of Silat al-Harithiya in the occupied West Bank, on Saturday (AFP)

for a pair of Palestinians suspected of killing three Israelis in an axe attack on Thursday night near Tel Aviv.

Over the past month police and Palestinians have also

clashed at the Al-Aqsa mosque compound in Jerusalem's Israeli-annexed Old City.

Explosives punched a hole in the pink exterior wall of Jaradat's apartment and blew out interior

walls, leaving the floors strewn with grey rubble.

Israel accused Jaradat and two of his family members of killing religious student Yehuda Dimentman, 25, on December 16, 2021. Gunmen sprayed a car with bullets as it drove out of the wildcat settlement outpost of Homesh. Two others were wounded in the attack.

Security forces have previously demolished three other homes of Jaradat family members in Silat al-Harithiya.

Those operations in February and March also led to clashes, in which the army shot dead a Palestinian teenager.

Israel regularly destroys the homes of individuals it blames for attacks on Israelis.

The practice has been con-

demned by critics as a form of collective punishment. Israel insists it deters attacks.

Around 475,000 Jewish settlers live in the West Bank in communities widely regarded as illegal under international law, alongside around 2.9mn Palestinians,

A string of anti-Israeli attacks since March 22 have killed 18 people, including an Arab-Israeli police officer and two Ukrainians. Two of the deadly attacks were carried out in the Tel Aviv area by Palestinians.

A total of 27 Palestinians and three Israeli Arabs have died during the same period, among them perpetrators of attacks and those killed by Israeli security forces in West Bank operations.

AFP

Taliban order Afghanistan women to cover fully in public

Kabul, Afghanistan - The Taliban on Saturday imposed some of the harshest restrictions on Afghanistan's women since they seized power, ordering them to cover fully in public, ideally with the traditional burqa.

The militants took back control of the country in August last year, promising a softer rule than their previous stint in power between 1996 and 2001, which was marked by human rights abuses.

But they have already imposed a slew of restrictions on women - banning them from many government jobs, secondary education, and from traveling alone outside their cities.

On Saturday, Afghanistan's supreme leader and Taliban chief Hibatullah Akhundzada approved a strict dress code for women when they are in public.

The decree said the best way for a woman to cover her face and body was to wear the chadari, a traditional, blue, all-covering Afghan burqa.

"They should wear a chadari as it is traditional and respectful," said a decree approved by

Akhundzada and released by Taliban authorities at a ceremony in Kabul.

"Those women who are not too old or young must cover their face, except the eyes, as per sharia directives, in order to avoid provocation when meeting men who are not mahram (adult close male relatives)," it said.

The order was expected to spark a flurry of condemnation abroad.

Many in the international community want humanitarian aid for Afghanistan and recognition of the Taliban government to be linked to the restoration of women's rights. Akhundzada's decree also said that if there was no reason for women to step out of their homes then it was 'better they stay at home'.

During their first regime, the Taliban made the burqa compulsory for women.

Since their return to power, their feared Ministry for the Promotion of Virtue and Prevention of Vice has issued several 'guidelines' on what women should wear, but Saturday's edict was one of the harshest national or-



This file photo shows an Afghan burqa-clad woman walking with a child in Kabul on April 28, this year (AFP)

ders restricting women's rights.

"Islam never recommended chadari for women," said a women's rights activist who

asked not to be named.

"I believe the Taliban are becoming regressive instead of being progressive. They are

going back to the way they were in their previous regime."

Another women's rights activist Muska Dastageer said Tal-

Taliban chief Akhundzada approved a strict dress code for women when they are in public. The decree said the best way for a woman to cover her face and body was to wear the chadari, a traditional, blue, all-covering Afghan burqa

iban rule had triggered 'too much rage and disbelief'.

"We are a broken nation forced to endure assaults we cannot fathom. As a people we are being crushed," she said on Twitter. The headline Islamists triggered international outrage in March when they ordered secondary schools for girls to shut, just hours after they reopened

for the first time since their seizure of power.

Officials have never justified the ban, apart from saying girls' education must be according to 'Islamic principles'.

That ban was also issued by Akhundzada, according to several Taliban officials.

Women have also been ordered to visit parks in the capital on separate days from men.

Some Afghan women initially pushed back strongly, holding small demonstrations and protests where they demanded the right to education and work.

But the Taliban cracked down on these unsanctioned rallies and rounded up several of the ringleaders, holding them incommunicado while denying they had been detained.

In the 20 years between the Taliban's two stints in power, girls were allowed to go to school and women were able to seek employment in all sectors, though the country remained socially conservative.

Many women already wear the burqa in rural areas.

AFP

North Korea fires submarine-launched ballistic missile after US nuclear warning

Seoul, South Korea - North Korea fired a submarine-launched ballistic missile on Saturday, Seoul said, its second missile launch in three days, after the United States warned Pyongyang could be preparing for a nuclear test.

Pyongyang has dramatically ramped up its sanctions-busting missile launches this year, conducting 15 weapons tests since January including firing an inter-continental ballistic missile at full range for the first time since 2017. The latest launch comes just days before South Korea swears in a new, hawkish President Yoon Suk-yeol, who has vowed to get tough on Pyongyang and bolster the US security alliance.

Satellite imagery indicates North Korea may also be preparing to resume nuclear testing, with the US State Department on Friday warning a test could come 'as early as this month'.

"Our military detected around 14:07 (0507 GMT) a short-range ballistic missile presumed to be an SLBM fired from waters off Sinpo, South Hamgyong," Seoul's Joint Chiefs of Staff (JCS) said in a statement.

Sinpo is a major naval shipyard in North Korea and satellite



People watch a television screen showing a news broadcast with footage of a North Korean missile test, at a railway station in Seoul on Saturday (AFP)

photos have in the past shown submarines at the facility.

The missile flew 600km at a maximum altitude of 60km, the JCS added, a distance that indicates it was a short-range ballistic missile. It landed outside Japan's exclusive economic zone, Tokyo's Defence Minister Nobuo Kishi said. He added that

the 'extremely high frequency' of tests by North Korea this year was 'absolutely unacceptable'.

Pyongyang's 'remarkable development of nuclear and missile-related technology' is a regional and global security risk, he said, adding that Japan also believed 'North Korea will be ready to carry out a nuclear test

as early as this month'.

Seeking 'upper hand'

Last month, while overseeing a huge military parade, North Korean leader Kim Jong Un vowed to develop his nuclear forces 'at the fastest possible speed' and warned of possible 'pre-emptive' strikes. Pyongyang is 'preparing

its Punggye-ri test site and could be ready to test there as early as this month', the US State Department said on Friday.

The test could coincide with US President Joe Biden's visit to Japan and South Korea later this month, or with the May 10 inauguration of Yoon, the State Department added.

"The North is showing its words on nuclear strength are not without substance," said Yang Moo-jin, a professor at the University of North Korean Studies. "Recent launches show strategic intent to claim the upper hand with the new Seoul government," especially before Biden's visit, he said.

North Korea carried out six nuclear tests before embarking on a bout of high-profile diplomacy with the United States in 2018 and 2019, with former president Donald Trump meeting four times with Kim before talks collapsed. Diplomacy has since languished.

Repeated negotiations aimed at convincing Kim to give up his nuclear weapons have come to nothing. "Instead of accepting invitations to dialogue, the Kim regime appears to be preparing a tactical nuclear warhead test," said Leif-Eric Easley, a professor at Ewha University in Seoul.

"A seventh nuclear test would be the first since September 2017 and raise tensions on the Korean peninsula, increasing dangers of miscalculation and miscommunication between the Kim regime and the incoming Yoon administration," Easley

added. South Korea's conventional military capacity outstrips that of the North, and Yoon has called for more US military assets to be deployed in the South, a topic likely to be on the agenda when Biden visits Seoul.

South Korea last year tested its own SLBM, putting it among a small group of nations that have such technology.

North Korea's 'submarine technology probably remains short of being able to stay at sea for extended periods while avoiding detection', Easley said.

"But the ability to launch ballistic missiles from a submarine would further complicate missions to neutralise and defend against North Korea's nuclear forces," he added.

On Wednesday, North Korea test-fired what Seoul and Tokyo said was a ballistic missile, although Pyongyang's state media - which typically report on weapons tests - did not comment on the event.

For five years under President Moon Jae-in, Seoul has pursued a policy of engagement with Pyongyang. But for incoming leader Yoon, this 'subservient' approach has been a manifest failure.

AFP

Philippine presidential poll: Marcos Jr on verge of victory

Manila, Philippines - The son of late Philippine dictator Ferdinand Marcos was set to address hundreds of thousands of supporters on Saturday on the final day of presidential election campaigning, as polls showed him heading towards a landslide win.

Victory in Monday's election would cap a decades-long effort to rehabilitate the Marcos legacy after the patriarch was deposed and the disgraced clan chased into US exile.

But the prospect of Ferdinand Marcos Jr moving back into the presidential palace has alarmed rights activists, church leaders and political analysts who fear he could rule 'without constraint'.

The Marcoses' remarkable return from pariahs to the peak of political power has been fuelled by public anger over corruption and poverty that persisted under governments that followed the dictatorship.

Thousands of red-clad Marcos supporters braved the ferocious sun and high winds on Saturday to amass on a dusty wasteland overlooked by a gleaming luxury casino resort - a stark reminder of the country's vast income gap.

Wielding national flags or umbrellas for shade, they gathered before a stage featuring an enormous screen of the smiling candidate as Filipino reggae, hip hop and pop played at deafening levels.

Mary Ann Oladive, a 37-year-old call centre worker, said she hoped Marcos Jr would bring unity to the country.

"We hope for greater opportunity and jobs. We trust him, we hope that after the election they will give us a better future in the Philippines," she said.

'Without constraint'

Ten candidates are vying to succeed President Rodrigo Duterte in the landmark elections seen by many as a make-or-break moment for Philippine democracy.

Polls indicate Marcos Jr will win more than half the votes, which would make him the first presidential candidate to secure an absolute majority since his fa-



Supporters of Ferdinand Marcos Jr. and his running mate Sara Duterte, wave flags during a campaign rally in Paranaque City on Saturday (AFP)

ther was ousted in 1986.

Analysts warn such an outcome would lead to weaker democratic checks and balances, more corruption and a fresh attempt to overhaul the 1987 constitution - which could include scrapping the one-term limit for presidents.

Previous administrations, including Duterte's, have tried to amend the constitution but they lacked sufficient support in Congress to push through changes.

The latest poll by Pulse Asia Research showed Marcos Jr on 56 per cent - 33 percentage points ahead of his nearest rival Leni Robredo, who narrowly beat him in the 2016 vice-presidential race.

Such a winning margin would give Marcos Jr the power to 'govern the way Duterte wanted to', one long-time observer of Philippine politics told AFP.

"That is without constraint," he said.

Robredo's recent poll bump has raised hopes among progressive supporters that their volunteer-driven campaign could yet deliver an upset.

There was a carnival atmosphere in the capital's financial district on Saturday as thousands of Robredo fans wearing her pink campaign colour and waving flags and balloons packed out avenues, dancing to pop music blaring over loudspeakers.

"I think this election is very important... our next six years of life will depend on it," first-time voter Charmaine Ang, 18, told AFP.

"Surveys are not a basis of who will win."

But pollster Ana Maria Tabunda of Pulse Asia Research gave Robredo little hope.

"Our error margin is only plus or minus two percentage points - given the large gap, it's not going to be affecting the results," Tabunda told AFP.

Bitter campaign

Allegations of dirty tricks marred the last week of a bitter presidential campaign, as Marcos Jr warned of vote-rigging while Robredo accused him of being a 'liar'.

Still smarting from his 2016 loss, Marcos Jr has run a tightly-controlled campaign, skipping televised debates with rivals and largely shunning media interviews to avoid own goals before election day.

A massive and well-funded social media misinformation campaign targeting a mostly young electorate with no memory of his father's violent and corrupt rule has also sought to rewrite the family's history.

Marcos Jr's popularity has been further enhanced by a formidable alliance with vice-presidential front runner and first daughter Sara Duterte, and the backing of several rival political dynasties.

Days ahead of the election, rights defenders and many Catholic priests made a final push to stop Marcos Jr returning to the Malacanang Palace, where he grew up.

AFP

'The Rock' diamond dazzles in Geneva

Geneva, Switzerland - The biggest white diamond ever to be sold at auction, dubbed 'The Rock', will go under the hammer in Geneva on Wednesday and could fetch up to US\$30mn - or more.

The 228.31-carat stone is up for grabs alongside a historic intense yellow diamond associated for more than a century with the Red Cross, which will receive some of the profits from its sale.

The Rock is 'a truly exceptional pear-shaped diamond', said Max Fawcett, head of the jewels department at Christie's auction house in Geneva.

It is 'the largest white diamond ever to be offered at auction', he told AFP at a preview on Friday.

The Rock is currently in the hands of an unnamed owner from North America.



'The Rock', a 228.31 carats pear-shaped white diamond, will go under hammer in Geneva on Wednesday (AFP)

It could even break records when it goes under the hammer.

"It's perfectly symmetrical and is estimated at US\$20mn to US\$30mn - and I expect there be fireworks on Wednesday," Fawcett said.

The expert said that there were only a handful of diamonds of similar size and quality to The

Rock. The Christie's record for a similar white diamond is US\$33.7mn, fetched in Geneva in 2017 for a 163.41-carat gem.

Larger than a golf ball, The Rock was extracted from a mine in South Africa in the early 2000s. It has been shown in Dubai, Taipei and New York ahead of the sale in Geneva.

Red Cross gem

Bidders will also be vying for The Red Cross Diamond, a cushion-shaped, 205.07-carat canary yellow jewel, which has a price estimate of seven to 10 million Swiss francs (US\$7.09mn to US\$10.13mn). "I expect that it will achieve much more on the day of sale," said Fawcett.

A large chunk of the proceeds will be donated to the International Committee of the Red Cross, which is headquartered in Geneva. The original rough stone was found in 1901 in a De Beers company mine in South Africa and is said to have weighed around 375 carats.

As well as ranking among the largest diamonds in the world, a striking feature is its pavilion, which naturally bears the shape of a Maltese cross.

AFP

Web users turning to tricks in China

Beijing, China - From quoting the national anthem to referencing Hollywood blockbusters and George Orwell's dystopian novel 1984, Chinese web users are using creative methods to dodge censorship and voice discontent over COVID measures.

China maintains a tight grip over the internet, with legions of censors scrubbing out posts that cast the Communist Party's policies in a negative light.

The censorship machine is now in overdrive to defend Beijing's stringent zero-COVID policy as the business hub of Shanghai endures weeks of lockdown to tackle an outbreak.

Stuck at home, many of the city's 25mn residents have taken to social media to vent fury over food shortages and spartan quarantine conditions. Charlie Smith, co-founder of censorship monitoring website GreatFire.org, said the Shanghai lockdown had become 'too big of an issue to be able to completely censor'.

Hell-bent on getting their messages out, wily web users were turning to tricks such as flipping images and using word-play, he said, using a pseudonym



A health worker takes a swab sample from a man to be tested for COVID-19 at a makeshift testing site along a street in Beijing on Saturday (AFP)

due to the sensitivity of his work.

In one example, censors deleted a popular hashtag on the Weibo social media platform quoting the first line of China's national anthem: "Arise, those who refuse to be slaves."

The line was being shared alongside a torrent of anti-lockdown fury. Others hijacked a hashtag about American human rights failings to make tongue-in-cheek barbs about home confinement in China.

In a similar attempt, netizens rallied to push Orwell's fiction 1984 to the top of a list of popular titles on the Douban ratings site, before it was blocked.

Censors also raced to kill off a menagerie of memes and hashtags based on a government official who previously said foreign journalists were 'secretly loving' the fact they had safely seen out the pandemic in China.

Users then devised a series of oblique puns on that quote, eventually prompting censors to block the hashtag La La Land.

'Us against the AI'

Last month the internet police floundered in quashing viral video Voices of April that featured stories from distressed Shanghai residents in lockdown.

Web users rapidly re-edited

and shared the six-minute clip to outrun largely automated screening software, which struggled for hours to identify the different versions.

One frustrated Shanghai local said netizens shared the various formats 'to make a point' even though each post vanished within minutes. "It was us against the AI," the resident told AFP, requesting anonymity.

People in Shanghai have become more 'willing to pay the price' for airing critical views, said Luwei Rose Luqiu, an assistant professor at Hong Kong Baptist University.

AFP

Russia steps up Ukraine assaults ahead of Victory Day festivities

Zaporizhzhia, Ukraine - Ukraine tried to evacuate more civilians from a besieged Mariupol steel plant on Saturday as Russian forces unleashed new bombardments across the country ahead of Victory Day festivities in Moscow.

The Azovstal steel mill is the last pocket of Ukrainian resistance in the devastated port city and its fate has taken on a symbolic value in the broader battle since Russia's invasion.

Fighting continues on many fronts, and Ukraine's defence ministry said it had destroyed another Russian warship - a Serna-class landing craft - in the Black Sea.

"The traditional parade of the Russian Black Sea fleet on May 9 this year will be held near Snake Island - at the bottom of the sea," the ministry added. Russia did not immediately confirm the incident.

Ukraine's defence ministry had earlier said Russian forces had resumed their assault on the Azovstal site, despite talk of a truce to allow trapped civilians to flee the complex.

Vice Prime Minister Iryna Vereshchuk said rescuers would try to evacuate more civilians on Saturday.

On Monday, President Vladimir Putin will celebrate the World War II Soviet victory over Nazi Germany with a traditional Victory Day parade.

According to Russia's defence ministry, 77 aircraft will conduct a flypast, including the rarely-



Russian MIG-31BM fighter jets fly over Red Square during the general rehearsal of the Victory Day military parade in central Moscow on Saturday (AFP)

seen Il-80 Doomsday plane that can withstand a nuclear attack.

Eight Mig-29 fighter jets will fly over Moscow's Red Square forming the letter 'Z' - the mark of Russia's military assault in Ukraine.

The campaign has run into tough resistance - and provoked Kyiv's western allies into slapping massive economic sanctions on the Russian economy and Putin's inner circle.

But with Victory Day fast approaching, Ukrainian officials fear more intense missile and artillery bombardments and renewed assaults as Moscow scrambles for symbolic wins.

The Ukrainian rescue service said a missile hit a technical college in Kostiantynivka, in the eastern region of Donetsk, causing a fire and at least two deaths.

Donetsk regional governor

Pavlo Kyrylenko said there had been 'massive bombardments' along the frontline.

Strikes were also reported in the north of Ukraine near the city of Kharkiv and in the southern city of Mikoleyev, a key Russian target.

Ukrainian forces have launched a counter-offensive of their own.

Bridges down

According to the defence ministry, Russian troops were forced to demolish three road bridges near Tsyrkuny and Ruski Tyshky outside Kharkiv, to slow the Ukrainian advance.

According to British intelligence, Ukrainian forces equipped with high-end weaponry by the western allies, have been able to destroy at least one of Russia's most ad-

vanced tanks, the T-90M. "The conflict in Ukraine is taking a heavy toll on some of Russia's most capable units and most advanced capabilities," UK Defence Intelligence said.

"It will take considerable time and expense for Russia to reconstitute its armed forces following this conflict," it said, warning sanctions on advanced components would make it harder for Russia to re-arm.

The west, meanwhile, is stepping up arms deliveries to Ukraine's defenders.

US President Joe Biden on Friday announced another package of military assistance worth US\$150mn, including counter-artillery radars used for detecting the source of enemy fire.

This brings the total value of US weaponry sent to Ukraine since the Russian invasion began

to US\$3.8bn.

Biden had urged Congress to approve a further US\$33bn package, including US\$20bn in military aid, 'to strengthen Ukraine on the battlefield and at the negotiating table'.

The G7 leaders, including Biden, and Ukraine's President Volodymyr Zelensky are to meet in videoconference on Sunday to discuss Western support for Kyiv. And Biden's wife, US First lady Jill Biden, is in Romania meeting US troops and Ukrainian refugees.

The Council of Europe's human rights commissioner, Dunja Mijatovic, who has finished a four-day visit to Ukraine, including to areas just outside Kyiv, condemned 'staggering' human rights violations by Russian forces.

AFP



Firefighters and rescue workers remove debris from the ruins of the Saratoga Hotel, in Havana, on Friday (AFP)

Death toll climbs to 25 in Havana hotel blast

Havana, Cuba - The death toll after an explosion ripped through a luxury hotel in central Havana climbed to 25 people including a Spanish tourist, state television reported on Saturday, one day after the powerful blast due to a suspected gas leak.

Rescuers were still combing through what remained of the prestigious Saratoga Hotel looking for survivors. On Friday, officials had said up to 50 people were wounded in the blast.

"Tragic news has reached us from Cuba. A Spanish tourist has died and another Spanish citizen is seriously injured after the explosion at the Saratoga Hotel," Spanish prime minister Pedro Sanchez said on Twitter.

"All our love to their families and those of all the victims and injured. Our support also to the Cuban people," he added.

The search is now focusing on the interior of the hotel and the basement, the television station said.

"It is very regrettable what happened, the destruction, especially the loss of life, and also the people injured, but once again I want to highlight the speed with which the population and institutions mobilised," Cuban President Miguel Diaz-Canel tweeted.

"Solidarity has prevailed. #FuerzaCuba," he added, alluding to the many Cubans who rushed on Friday to donate blood to help the wounded.

The first four floors of the establishment, which were closed to guests while being renovated, were gutted in the late-morning blast that sent a cloud of dust and smoke billowing into the air on Friday.

The explosion also tore off large parts of the facade, blew out windows and destroyed cars parked outside the five-star hotel, which has in the past hosted celebrities such as Madonna, Beyonce, Mick Jagger and Rihanna.

The dome of a nearby Baptist church also collapsed. Inside the hotel at the time were employees preparing for its post-refurbishment reopening, which had been scheduled for next Tuesday.

Roberto Calzadilla of state company Gaviota, which owns the hotel, said the explosion happened while a gas tank was being refilled.

Ambulances and fire trucks rushed to the scene on Friday and police cordoned off the area, dispersing people who swarmed to the hotel near Havana's emblematic National Capitol Building, which housed Congress prior to the Cuban revolution.

The upmarket Saratoga Hotel has 96 rooms, two bars, two restaurants, a spa and a gym.

It was built in 1880 to house shops and converted into a hotel in 1933.

AFP

Two more statues of Iron Age boxers unearthed

Rome, Italy - Archaeologists in Sardinia have unearthed the torsos of two more limestone statues of boxers within the Iron Age necropolis of Mont'e Prama, Italy's culture ministry said on Saturday.

Culture Minister Dario Franceschini called the find at the archaeological site in Cabras, western central Sardinia, an 'exceptional discovery' that should shed more light on the ancient Mediterranean culture whose tombs and statuary have been slowly uncovered since the 1970s.

The naked torsos and other fragments have been identified as boxers, due to a shield that



A statue of boxer is seen displayed at the Giovanni Marongiu civic museum of Cabras, Sardinia (AFP)

wraps around their bodies, and are similar to another two sculptures unearthed a few metres away in 2014 and now on display at the local museum, the ministry said.

Archaeologists working on the southern part of the sprawling necropolis - first discovered in 1974 by local farmers - also found the continuation of the site's funerary road on a north-south axis, along which have been found tombs dating back to between about 950 BC to 730 BC.

While small and medium-sized fragments are being documented and recovered from the earth, 'the two large and heavy

blocks of torsos will need time to be freed from the sediment surrounding them and to be prepared for safe recovery', said the culture ministry's superintendent for southern Sardinia, Monica Stochino.

The site is believed to be part of the Nuragic civilisation that controlled the island of Sardinia for centuries beginning in the Bronze Age. The people erected mysterious stone towers called 'nuraghe' that today dot the Sardinian countryside and whose original purpose remains unknown.

Thousands of fragments and major pieces from Mont'e Prama discovered over the

decades have so far been re-assembled into about two dozen statues, each over two metres tall, that have been identified as warriors, archers or boxers.

Archaeologists still do not know precisely what the statues represent or what purpose they served.

Nor is it clear where they were originally located before being deliberately shattered in ancient times, according to researchers - who cannot agree whether by Phoenicians, Carthaginians, or by warring Nuragic groups themselves - and strewn above and near the tombs.

AFP

At least 75 killed in Haiti gang battles: UN

Port-au-Prince, Haiti - Clashes between two rival gangs in the outskirts of the Haitian capital Port-au-Prince have claimed the lives of at least 75 people, including women and children, in less than two weeks, the UN said on Friday. The United Nations said it was 'deeply concerned by the rapid deterioration of the security situation' in the city.

"According to multiple sources, at least 75 people, including women and children, have been killed and 68 others injured," the UN statement said.

It added that at least 9,000 residents of the conflict-hit northern suburbs, have been forced to flee their homes and take refuge with relatives or in temporary shelters such as churches and schools.

AFP

Diplomats urge Sri Lanka to reconsider state of emergency

Colombo, Sri Lanka - US and European diplomats on Saturday urged Sri Lanka's beleaguered president to repeal a state of emergency imposed after a general strike brought the bankrupt country to a halt.

Months of blackouts and acute shortages of food, fuel and medicines have caused widespread suffering across the South Asian island nation, which is enduring its worst-ever economic downturn.

President Gotabaya Rajapaksa declared a fresh state of emergency on Friday after weeks of protests demanding his government step down over its mismanagement of the crisis.

US ambassador Julie Chung said she was 'concerned' by the second state of emergency in as many months, adding that Sri Lanka's deepening economic crisis and political gridlock needed long-term solutions.

"The State of Emergency won't help do that," Chung said on Twitter.

The European Union said the



Policemen stand guard outside the Sri Lanka's President Gotabaya Rajapaksa office in Colombo on Saturday (AFP)

ordinance 'could have a counter productive effect' and noted that a month of anti-government protests had so far been peaceful.

A spokesman for Rajapaksa said the state of emergency was imposed to 'ensure public order' after Friday's general strike brought public transport and

economic activity to a halt.

The measure gives sweeping detention powers to the military and allows the president to make laws without parliamentary approval.

Rajapaksa declared an earlier state of emergency on April 1, a day after thousands of protesters attempted to storm his home in

the capital Colombo.

It was allowed to lapse days later, but protests have since escalated and spread to every corner of the island.

Thousands have been camped outside Rajapaksa's seafront office for nearly a month to demand his resignation.

Police fired a barrage of tear

gas and water cannon on Friday in an effort to disperse student protesters who were blockading parliament.

Political instability

The government said in a Saturday statement that Sri Lanka was facing its 'worst economic crisis and political instability ever'.

"The state of emergency was declared to ensure political stability which is a vital condition in overcoming the current socio-economic crisis," the statement added.

The emergency declaration is a blow to Sri Lanka's vital tourism industry, which had been making a slow recovery after it was crippled by the coronavirus pandemic. "Tour operators are going to be reluctant because the emergency also means higher insurance premiums applicable to trouble spots," a Colombo hotel manager told AFP.

Government sources said the president could ask his brother, Prime Minister Mahinda Rajapaksa, to stand down in an ef-

fort to clear the way for a unity administration to navigate Sri Lanka through the crisis.

But Sri Lanka's largest opposition party has already said it will not join any government helmed by a member of the Rajapaksa clan.

Sri Lanka's economic crisis took hold after the pandemic hammered income from tourism and remittances.

Unable to pay for fuel imports, utility companies have imposed daily blackouts to ration electricity, while long lines of people snake around service stations for petrol and kerosene.

Hospitals are short of vital medicines and the government has appealed to citizens abroad for donations.

Last month, Sri Lanka announced it was defaulting on its US\$51bn foreign debt.

Finance Minister Ali Sabry warned this week that the country would have to endure the unprecedented economic hardship for at least two more years.

AFP



Andy Warhol's 'shot' Monroe portrait is all set to smash records at New York sales on May 9

Christie's costliest sale

An Andy Warhol portrait of Marilyn Monroe - worth an estimated US\$200mn - headlines this month's spring sales in New York that collectors say are among the most anticipated ever. Christie's expects Warhol's 1964 'Shot Sage Blue Marilyn' to become the priciest 20th century artwork when the auction house puts it under the hammer on Monday.

Not to be outdone, competitor Sotheby's is offering US\$1bn of modern and contemporary art including the second helping of the famed MacKlowe Collection, during its marquee week in May.

"The excitement is certainly unprecedented," Joan Robledo-Palop, a collector and CEO of Zeit Contemporary Art in New York City, said about the buzz surrounding this season's auctions.

The 100cm x 100cm silk-screen Warhol is part of a series of portraits the pop artist made of Monroe following her death from a drug overdose in August 1962. They became known as the 'shot' series after a visitor to Warhol's factory studio in Manhattan fired a gun at them, piercing the portraits which were later repaired.

Alex Rotter, head of 20th and 21st century art at Christie's, has called the portrait "the most significant 20th century painting to come to auction in a generation."

The current most expensive 20th century auctioned work is Picasso's 'Women of Algiers', which fetched US\$179.4mn in 2015. The auction record for a Warhol is the US\$104.5mn paid for 'Silver Car Crash (Double Disaster)' in 2013.

Other highlights offered by Christie's include Jean-Michel Basquiat's 'Portrait of the Artist as a Young



Andy Warhol with his double portrait of Marilyn Monroe at the Tate Gallery

Derelict' (1982), expected to go for more than US\$30mn and 'Untitled (Shades of Red)' by Mark Rothko, tipped to fetch up to US\$80mn.

The auction house is also offering three Claude Monet oil on canvases that are predicted to sell for upwards of US\$30mn each.

Rothko, Picasso, Richter

"Every couple of decades you have a sale where the quality is so high that you don't see all of this at once normally. This season really grew into one of those unique moments," Rotter said.

After selling the first batch of works from the Mack-

lowe Collection - the most expensive to hit the market at US\$600mn - last fall, Sotheby's will auction the remaining 30 items when its sales open on May 16.

Highlights include Gerhard Richter's 1975 'Seascape', estimated at up to US\$35mn, and Rothko's 'Untitled' from 1960 that has a high-end pre-sale estimate of US\$50mn.

Sotheby's said its modern evening auction of 19th and 20th century works, including by Pablo Picasso and Philip Guston, is its most valuable in the category in 15 years.

Picasso's 'Femme nue couchée' is appearing at an auction for the first time, and Sotheby's expects it to

Shot Marilyns

One day in 1964, a performance artist, Dorothy Podber, strode into Andy Warhol's New York studio dressed in black motorcycle leathers and accompanied by her Great Dane.

She spotted a stack of four large, striking artworks of Marilyn Monroe propped against a wall and asked if she could shoot them. Warhol, assuming she intended to photograph the pictures, gave his assent.

Podber then drew a small pistol from her handbag and aimed briefly at the artist before turning the pistol towards the screen prints and opening fire, shooting a hole through Marilyn's forehead, right between the eyes.

'She put her pistol back, pulled on her gloves and left,' recalled a Warhol acolyte professionally known as Ultra Violet (Isabelle Dufresne) who was present that day.

Sixty years on, one of the 'shot Marilyns' - Shot Sage Blue Marilyn - goes under the hammer at Christie's. It is a pop art rendition of a photo of Monroe from the 1953 film Niagara. Warhol made the work in five colour variations.

fetch more than US\$60mn. Other highlights include a Monet view of Venice tipped to fetch US\$50mn.

Brooke Lampley, head of sales for global fine art at Sotheby's, said she expects records to be broken across categories. "The art market is very strong. That's why we see such an amazing array of works on offer this season," she said.

AFP

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EMBASSY OF THE FEDERATIVE REPUBLIC OF BRAZIL IN MUSCAT

BIDDING ANNOUNCEMENT VEHICLE SALE

The Embassy of Brazil in Muscat, located at Way 1521, Villa 1424, Madinat Al Ilam, will sell a BMW 525i vehicle, year 2009/2010, black, 4 doors, being driven 98,874 km. Rules and regulations of this bidding, to take place at 2 pm on May 10, 2022, are available at

<http://mascate.itamaraty.gov.br/en-us/News.xml>

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STREET MURALS

Beautiful BAGHDAD

Iraqi artist Wijdan al Majed has been transforming Baghdad's concrete jungle into a colour-filled city with murals depicting well-known figures from the war-scarred country and abroad. Perched on a scaffold at a busy intersection, the 49-year-old artist and instructor at the Baghdad College of Fine Arts is adding final touches to a mural dedicated to celebrated Iraqi poet Muzaffar al Nawab. Peasant women in traditional dress adorn the background of the mural, commissioned by Baghdad mayor Alaa Maan.

He launched the initiative nine months ago in a bid to bring beauty to the city and move art to the streets to get rid of the grey and dusty colours that hang over Baghdad.

Wijdan, an artist more accustomed to exhibiting her work in the cosy and reflective settings of galleries, at first, had helpers to create the street art. Later, she turned to working alone, undaunted by the huge challenges she faces as a woman in a largely conservative, male-dominated society.

"Sometimes I work late into the night," said Wijdan, wearing jeans and shoes splattered with paint. "The street is scary at night, and it's not easy for a woman to be out so late," she said.

Motorists and passers-by often slow down or stop to watch the woman on her scaffold, paintbrush in hand and hard at work.

'Iraqis accepted me'

Disparaging comments are sometimes fired her way. "I learn to live with it and ignore them," she said. "People have become used to seeing a woman paint. Iraqi society has accepted me."

Many Iraqis are happily surprised by the transformation of their capital. "This is the most beautiful Muzaffar," a motorist shouted as he drove past while she touched up the poet's mural.

Nicknamed the 'revolutionary poet', Muzaffar al Nawab, who spent years in jail for writing about successive repressive regimes in Iraq, holds a special place in the hearts of many Iraqis.

At least 16 murals have been painted across Baghdad, with one devoted to Jawad Salim, considered the father of Iraqi modern art and a celebrated sculptor, and another to the late, world-famous Iraqi-British architect Zaha Hadid. German sociologist Max Weber and Catholic saint Mother Teresa are among the foreigners celebrated on Baghdad's new murals.

Maan, the mayor and an architect by profession, chooses the subjects which Wijdan paints in vivid colours - a jarring contrast with the rest of the city.

Bringing joy to the city

Baghdad's infrastructure was laid to waste by a 13-year international embargo against the regime of late dictator Saddam Hussein - the 2003 US-led invasion that toppled him and the subsequent years of sectarian violence, culminating in the rise and fall of the Islamic State jihadist group.

Maan acknowledges that much needs to be done to rehabilitate the city, which once stood as a beacon of Arab culture but now struggles like most of Iraq with corruption and mismanagement.

"The city is the first victim: any problem elsewhere in the country is reflected here," Maan said. "When unemployment soars, you will see street vendors, and when the housing crisis flares, slums emerge."

Graffiti covers many buildings and facades in Baghdad - including political messages dating back to bloody anti-government protests that rocked the country for months from late 2019.

Cables from private electricity generators - desperately needed to make up for chronic power cuts - add to the disfigurement of the capital.

For Wijdan, however, painting murals brings joy across the city of nine million people.

In the teeming Al Sadr neighbourhood, known for its popular market, a mural depicting two men selling watermelons has won hearts.

"This is a slice of Baghdad's heritage," said textile merchant Fadel Abu Ali. The mural is a reproduction of a work by late artist Hafidh al Droubi, who often portrayed Baghdad daily life.

AFP



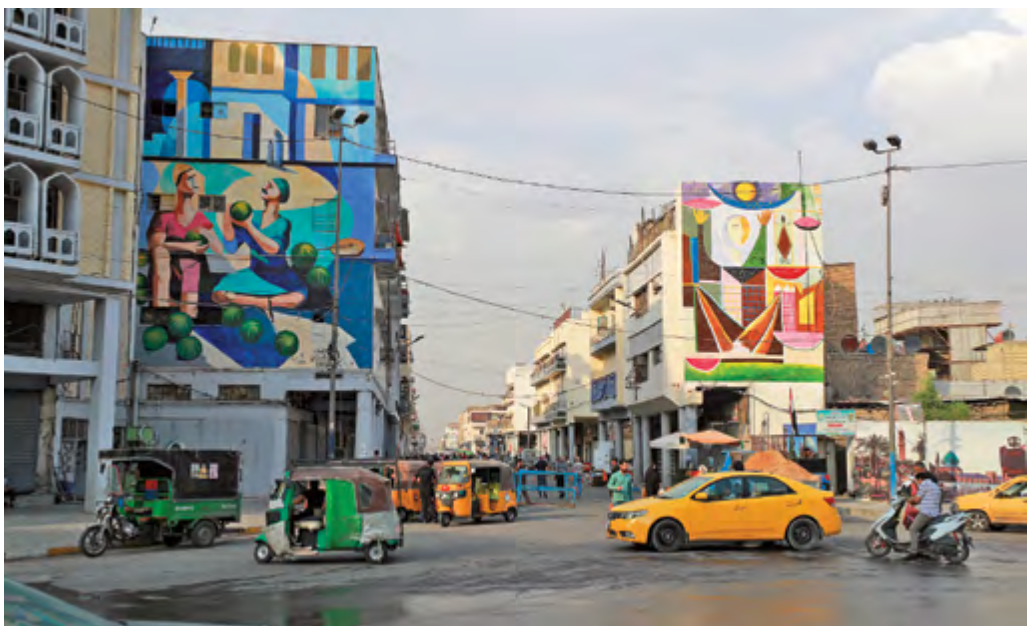
A mural depicting Iraqi architect Zaha Hadid

Iraqi artist Wijdan al Majed transforms the grey cityscape in Baghdad with her colourful murals



“Sometimes I work late into the night. The street is scary at night, and it's not easy for a woman to be out so late. But people have become used to seeing a woman paint. Iraqi society has accepted me

WIJDAN AL MAJED



Murals drawn by Wijdan al Majed, transforming Baghdad's concrete jungle into a colour-filled city



A picture of Iraqi author Ali al Wardi

Hamilton keeps nose stud after showdown with GP ‘bling’ police

Miami, United States - After threatening to skip the inaugural Miami Grand Prix over a bling clampdown, Lewis Hamilton removed almost all his jewellery in time to drive in practice Friday.

The decision to enforce rules on jewellery and underwear had stirred controversy in the pre-practice press conferences.

Hamilton threatened to spend the weekend seeing the sites of Miami instead while Sebastian Vettel said he thought the English driver was being “targeted”.

Hamilton was wearing three watches, a bracelet, necklaces and a nose stud for the press conference and said he would need to “chop my ears off” to remove his earrings.

“I couldn’t get any more jewellery on,” he joked.

“We have spare drivers, so we’re ready and prepared for the weekend. There is lots to do in this city so, I’ll be good either way!” Hamilton said of the prospect of being forced out of the race.

Yet, after making his threat, he removed most of his jewellery, including the earrings, for the practice session but scored a small victory with an exemption for the nose stud.

That exemption was reported to be for two races.

Vettel showed his feelings by wearing underpants over his race suit as a sign of protest.

Race director Niels Wittich wrote in his guidelines for Sunday’s race that driver jewellery and underwear should be checked, to ensure they comply with the FIA’s fire-proof safety standards.

In his race notes, Wittich wrote: “Metallic objects, such as jewellery, in contact with the skin



It’s platinum so it’s not magnetic and it’s never been a safety issue. I’ve had so many MRI scans, for example, and I don’t have to take out my platinum ones...

LEWIS HAMILTON

can reduce heat transmission protection and thus may increase the risk of burn injuries in the event of a fire.”

Vettel said the actions appeared to be aimed at Hamilton.

“Probably, at this stage, it’s

more of a personal thing and I feel in a way targeted to Lewis,” said Vettel.

Aston Martin’s Vettel suggested the topic was trivial.

“We spoke about underpants as well, but really is that the most

exciting thing we can talk about?” he asked.

“There’s a concern for safety, obviously, if you have stuff - and if the car does catch fire it would be unpleasant.

“But, on the other hand, to some degree it’s personal freedom and we are old enough to make our choices outside the car... We should be old enough also to make our choices inside the car.”

Hamilton said his jewellery had never been a problem.

“It’s platinum so it’s not magnetic and it’s never been a safety

issue. I’ve had so many MRI scans, for example, and I don’t have to take out my platinum ones...”

He said he wore three watches because they were set to three different time zones.

Two drivers were sanctioned at last weekend’s Monaco E-Prix in similar incidents, Pascal Wehrlein and Mitch Evans both taking penalty points on their ‘super licences’ and receiving fines of 1000 euros (\$1050) each for wearing metal chains during qualifying.

AFP

Qatar’s migrant army queues to see WC trophy

Doha, Qatar - Thousands of migrant labourers, many of whom have worked on Qatar’s new stadiums, have formed long queues to see the World Cup trophy that will be contested in the Gulf state this year.

South Asia has contributed the biggest contingent to the army of labourers that built seven new stadiums and refurbished an eighth for the first World Cup in an Arab country.

Qatar has faced strong criticism over labour rights but insists it has made big changes in recent years, leaving it the most progressive state for foreign workers among the Gulf countries.

For the latest stage of its final display in Qatar before the tournament that start on November 21, the trophy was set up in a car park near Doha’s main cricket stadium in Asian Town.

Each person had about 15 seconds on Friday to snap a picture with the cup that is currently held by France. A Bangladeshi pop group and Indian drummers entertained the waiting hordes.

Azam Rashid, a carpenter who worked on two stadiums, said he was among the many workers who could not afford tickets but was intrigued by the cup.

“The tickets may be too expensive, but Qatar and the World Cup has given me an opportunity,” he said.

“There are long lines, but it will be worth it to see the trophy,” he said.

Some tickets costing 40 riyals (\$11) have been reserved for Qatar’s 2.8 million population, most of whom are foreign workers.

Many in the line told AFP, however, that all the cheap

The trophy was set up in a car park near Doha’s main cricket stadium in Asian Town

tickets had gone and the cost of others was out of range for the mainly male workers earning Qatar’s minimum wage of \$275 a month.

“The World Cup is exciting but it is definitely too much for me,” said an administrative worker who gave his name as Tarir.

Another expat, Nasim, said he was more fortunate and obtained some \$10 tickets.

“Everyone can afford the price I paid,” he said.

AFP



A family poses next to the World Cup trophy in Doha on Friday, during an event marking the 200-day countdown of the tournament

Six Spanish tennis players get long bans for match fixing

Paris, France - Six Spanish tennis players have been banned for a total of more than 80 years after being convicted of match fixing, the International Tennis Integrity Agency said Friday.

The six players, including Marc Fornell Mestres, who has a highest ATP ranking of 236, and Jorge Marse Vidri, who has been ranked 562nd, all pleaded guilty to corruption charges in Spain.

All six were given two-year suspended prison sentences, and fined as part of a wider ongoing case involving organised crime.

Fornell was banned for 22 years and six months and fined \$250,000, with \$200,000 suspended.

Marse received a 15-year suspension and was fined \$15,000, of which \$5,000 was suspended.

The four other players, who were all unranked, were given bans of between seven years and six months and 15 years.

ITIA Chair Jennie Price said the sentences and bans showed that “match fixing can lead to a jail sentence and can end your career in tennis”.

“It also serves as a warning that organised crime is targeting sport, and governments and law enforcement agencies, as well as anti-corruption bodies in sport, need to take that threat seriously,” she said in a statement.

AFP

Fraser-Pryce clocks world-leading 10.67 to win 100m in Nairobi

Nairobi, Kenya - Jamaican sprint legend Shelly-Ann Fraser-Pryce posted the fastest 100m in the world this year as she clocked 10.67secs to win her season opener in Nairobi on Saturday.

The 35-year-old, who has won eight Olympic medals including silver in Tokyo last summer, was a comfortable winner after new sprint sensation, the 18-year-old Namibian Christine Mboma, pulled up suddenly before collapsing to the track.

Fraser-Pryce’s winning time was close to her personal best of 10.60, set in Lausanne in August 2021.

Only four other women have run the distance faster: Americans Marion Jones (10.65) and Carmelita Jeter (10.64), fellow Olympic champion Elaine Thompson-Herah (10.54), and the controversial world record



Jamaica's Shelly-Ann Fraser Pryce celebrates after winning the women's 100m race in Nairobi on Saturday

Men’s Olympic 100m champion Marcell Jacobs withdrew at the last minute

holder American Florence Griffith-Joyner (10.49).

Earlier, the men’s Olympic 100m champion Marcell Jacobs withdrew at the last minute from his long-awaited return to the track in Nairobi because of intestinal problems.

The Italian, who was a surprise winner at last year’s Olympics, was due to go head to head with silver medallist Fred Kerley for the first time since Tokyo.

AFP

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IPL 2022



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Russell heroics not enough as Lucknow thrash Kolkata to go top



BRIEF SCORES:

Lucknow Super Giants 176 for 7 in 20 overs (Quinton de Kock 50 (29) 4x4, 3x6, Deepak Hooda 41 (27) 4x4, 2x6; Andre Russell 2 for 22) beat Kolkata Knight Riders 101 all out in 14.3 overs (Andre Russell 45 (19) 3x4, 5x6, Sunil Narine 22 (12) 3x4, 1x6; Avesh Khan 3 for 19, Jason Holder 3 for 31) by 75 runs



TODAY'S MATCH
(2PM)



SUNRISERS HYDERABAD

VS



ROYAL CHALLENGERS BANGALORE

(6PM)



CHENNAI SUPER KINGS

VS



DELHI CAPITALS

Jaiswal, Hetmyer keep Royals in hunt for play-offs

Mumbai, India - Yashasvi Jaiswal's 68 and an unbeaten 31 by Shimron Hetmyer guided Rajasthan Royals to a six-wicket victory over Punjab Kings in the Indian Premier League on Saturday.

Jaiswal's 41-ball knock lay the foundation for the Royals' chase of 190 before Hetmyer steered the team home with two balls to spare in a tense finish in Mumbai.

England's Jonny Bairstow made 56 - his first fifty of this IPL season - to guide Punjab to 189 for five after electing to bat first on another hot afternoon.

The left-handed Jaiswal combined with opening partner Jos Buttler (30) to give the Royals a quick start to their chase and then kept up the charge with skipper Sanju Samson (23).

Left-arm pace bowler Arshdeep Singh returned figures of 2-29 and gave away just three runs in the 19th over, which included the wicket of Devdutt Padikkal, who made 31, to test the Royals.

But left-handed Hetmyer smashed three fours and two sixes in his 16-ball blitz to ensure



Yashasvi Jaiswal made 68 runs off 41 balls to lay the foundation for Rajasthan Royals' successful chase

The Royals bounced back from two losses and stayed third in the 10-team table.

He lost his opening partner Shikhar Dhawan to a stunning catch from Buttler, who backpedalled from mid-on and then timed his jump to pluck the ball one-handed. Ravichandran Ashwin was the bowler.

Bairstow put on key partnerships including a 42-run second-wicket stand with Bhanuka Rajapaksa before he fell lbw to Yuzvendra Chahal, who returned figures of 3-28.

Wicketkeeper-batter Jitesh Sharma kept up the attack and found Liam Livingstone's company as the duo added 50 off 26

balls for the fifth wicket.

Livingstone was bowled by Prasidh Krishna for 22 off 14 balls, but Sharma finished with a flourish as he hit a six and two fours in a 16-run 20th over.

The effort was not enough as the Royals won their first match chasing this season.

AFP

Rohit lauds Sams' steely display in Mumbai's win

Mumbai, India - Mumbai Indians skipper Rohit Sharma on Friday praised the "skills" of Daniel Sams after the Australian fast bowler defended nine runs off the last over to hand his team their second win this IPL.

"He was under the pump in a couple of games, but I have seen him for Australia and in the BBL (Big Bash League), he has a lot of skill," Rohit said of his bowler who was taken for 35 runs in an over by Kolkata Knight Riders' Pat Cummins.

"It was not easy to defend nine runs."

Mumbai, the richest and most successful side in Indian Premier League history with five titles, won their second straight match but remain bottom of the heap.

"The boys pulled it off, which is great. We wanted to take one game at a time, we know we have not played our best cricket, but that happens," Rohit said of his team which lost their first eight matches.

AFP



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Bridge over troubled water

Uncertain times over for Chelsea as Boehly group wins battle to buy the club in a £4.25 billion deal

London, United Kingdom - Chelsea have some clarity after an uncertain few months with the consortium led by LA Dodgers co-owner Todd Boehly set to buy the Premier League giants.

The Boehly group, which includes fellow Dodgers co-owner Mark Walter, Swiss billionaire Hansjoerg Wyss and US investment firm Clearlake Capital have committed to a deal worth £4.25 billion (\$5.2 billion), a record for a sports club.

A sum of £1.75 billion is earmarked for future investment in the club with the other £2.5 billion frozen due to the sanctions imposed on current owner Roman Abramovich.

The Russian oligarch has insisted his intention is for all of the proceeds to be donated to victims of the war in Ukraine.

The sale brings to an end Abramovich's 19-year reign during which the Blues have enjoyed unparalleled success.

Chelsea won five Premier League titles and two Champions League among 19 major trophies. But the Abramovich era was brought down by Russia's invasion of Ukraine as he was sanctioned by the UK government for his links to Russian president Vladimir Putin.

Here is a look at the job that lies ahead for the future Chelsea owners.

Stadium redevelopment

The bulk of the future financial commitment to the club is expected to go on redeveloping Stamford Bridge into a stadium worthy of one of Europe's elite clubs.

Abramovich shelved plans for a £1 billion redevelopment in 2018 during another dispute with the UK government over his visa.

Stamford Bridge's 42,000 capacity lags well behind Premier League rivals Manchester United, Manchester City, Liverpool, Arsenal and Tottenham.

Spurs' £1 billion home, completed in 2019, has become a sporting hub in the English capital, hosting major boxing, rugby and NFL events, as well as concerts and conferences.

Boehly's track record of both sporting success and stadium redevelopment at the Dodgers gave his bid credibility to go with the major funding behind it.

Investment in the stadium was reportedly a key part of the consortium's pitch to American bank Raine, who oversaw the sales process.

A larger ground will also be part of the long-term strategy to drive revenue and recoup their huge outlay to buy the European champions.

Stabilise the squad

Chelsea have been operating



Chelsea FC's emblem at their home stadium Stamford Bridge in London. (Below) Todd Boehly, who heads the Boehly group, their new owners.



The Boehly group, led by LA Dodgers co-owner Todd Boehly, also includes fellow Dodgers co-owner Mark Walter, Swiss billionaire Hansjoerg Wyss and US investment firm Clearlake Capital

under a special licence for the past two months since sanctions were levied on Abramovich.

Due to the restrictions applied, the Blues were not allowed to offer new contracts or sign new players.

Defenders Antonio Rudiger

and Andreas Christensen are set to leave on free transfers at the end of the season and will need to be replaced.

Abramovich's lavish spending means he leaves behind a very competitive squad.

Just a year ago, Chelsea beat Manchester City to win the Champions League and are on course to finish in the Premier League top four.

With clarity over their future, the club can now work towards assembling a squad to challenge City and Liverpool for the title next season.

"When the situation is clear you can take actions, make judgements," said Chelsea manager Thomas Tuchel on Friday.

Get fan support

Much to the dismay of politicians, Abramovich's name was still chanted by Chelsea fans following the sanctions thanks to the success he had bankrolled over the past two decades.

Winning will be the quickest way into the hearts of the Chelsea faithful for the new ownership, but there are other pitfalls to be avoided.

There are fears that to see a return on their investment, the deeply unpopular European Super League could be revived for the guaranteed income it sought to provide.

AFP

On night of comebacks in Serie A, Inter reclaim top spot and Juventus collapse

Milan, Italy - On a night of wild swings in Serie A, Inter Milan came from two goals down Friday to beat Empoli and later Juventus conceded two late goals to lose at Genoa.

In Milan, Lautaro Martinez scored twice as Inter fought back to beat Empoli 4-2 and jump to the top of Serie A.

"The team showed character. We're here," said Inter coach Simone Inzaghi on DAZN.

In the late game, Juventus dominated relegation-haunted Genoa only to concede an 87th minute equaliser and a 96th minute penalty, converted by Domenico Criscito, who had missed a late derby penalty a week earlier.

"Football gives and takes," said Criscito.

Inter moved one point ahead of rivals AC Milan and have a superior goal difference but have played a game more.

Juventus started the evening mathematically still in the title race. They ended it still in fourth, a point behind Napoli, and nine points behind Inter with two games left.

AC Milan will go back on top



Inter Milan players celebrate after their comeback victory against Empoli on Friday (AFP)

if they win at Verona on Sunday.

At the San Siro, Empoli, who are in 14th, dominated the first half-hour with Andrea Pinamonti, who is on loan from Inter, putting the visitors ahead after just five minutes.

Albanian midfielder Kristjan

Asllani added a second after 28 minutes.

Inter were level by halftime with Empoli captain Simone Romagnoli putting through his own net five minutes before the break and Martinez grabbing his first just before the whistle.

The Argentine was on target again in the 64th minute with his 19th goal of the season before former Arsenal striker Alexis Sanchez added a fourth in the dying seconds.

"This comeback victory against a very well organised op-

ponent gives me great confidence," said Inzaghi.

Genoa remained 19th and second from bottom, but closed to a point behind resurgent Salernitana in 17th.

Juventus dominated but only led by one goal, a beautiful strike by Paulo Dybala, in the 48th minute.

The Argentine later hit a post and Dusan Vlahovic and Moise Kean also squandered chances.

With the Italian Cup Final looming next week, Juventus made changes.

Vlahovic and Dybala were among stars watching from the bench by the time Albert Gudmundsson scored an 87th minute equaliser.

Six minutes into added time, Juventus defender Mattia De Sciglio conceded a penalty.

Genoa captain Criscito had been given a similar chance in the Genoa derby the week before but squandered a 96th minute penalty against Sampdoria that would have given his team a draw. But he didn't hesitate and this time scored to earn an unexpected three points.

AFP



Monaco's Youssouf Fofana celebrates after their victory against Lille

Monaco win eighth straight to climb to second in Ligue 1

Villeneuve-d'Ascq, France - Aurelien Tchouameni struck twice on Friday as Monaco won 2-1 at Lille to stretch their Ligue 1 winning streak to eight game and climb into second place.

The 22-year-old France midfielder gave the visitors the lead from outside the penalty area three minutes before half time.

Angel Gomes danced past two defenders and curled a shot inside the far post for a 69th-minute equaliser.

Six minutes later, Tchouameni settled the match with a low 30-metre rocket that flew in off the base of the near post.

Without playing well, Monaco overtook their two rivals for Champions League places, Rennes and Marseille.

"We've played sexier games!" said Monaco coach Philippe Clement.

"It was a victory of determination and team-work because we are never satisfied with a draw.

We knew it would be difficult against Lille because a wounded animal is always dangerous."

Marseille, who are third on goal difference, visit Lorient on Sunday.

Rennes, three points further back and now in a Europa League spot, have to wait until Wednesday to face local rivals and French Cup finalists Nantes.

If Monaco win their last two games, Rennes cannot catch them.

"We have to stay focused," said Clement. "Not try to become mathematicians instead of players!"

For last year's champions Lille, the downward spiral continued with a fifth straight defeat. One of the main fan groups refused to cheer, announcing their strike with a banner that read: "You are on holiday, so are we".

In addition, fans booed the names of most of the players.

AFP

FIFA reject Algeria's call to replay World Cup play-off match

Algiers, Algeria - Algeria's desperate bid to have their World Cup play-off with Cameroon replayed has been rejected by the competition organisers FIFA, the Algerian Football Federation said Saturday.

Algeria won the first leg of the play-off 1-0 in March but were beaten 2-1 in the return leg to miss out on one of the

five berths at the finals for African nations.

The Algerian federation claimed the refereeing of the second tie by Gambian Bakary Gassama was "scandalous" while the FIFA referees committee rejected this view.

"The referees decisions had no negative influence," FIFA said.

Union stun Freiburg as Bayer Leverkusen seal top-four spot

Berlin, Germany - Dutch winger Sheraldo Becker grabbed a goal and an assist as Union Berlin stunned top-four hopefuls Freiburg with a 4-1 win in a dramatic afternoon in the Bundesliga race for Europe on Saturday.

Union smashed in three goals in the first half to put themselves on course for the Europa League in sixth and dent Freiburg's hopes of a fairytale Champions League berth.

Freiburg remain in a Champions League place overnight, but will now drop out of the top four



Patrik Schick

if RB Leipzig beat Augsburg on Sunday.

While Freiburg were left to a

rue a missed opportunity, third-placed Bayer Leverkusen secured Champions League qualification as Czech striker Patrik Schick fired them to a 4-2 win at Hoffenheim.

Hoffenheim's defeat means that Cologne are also effectively guaranteed European football next season with a top-seven finish, despite losing 1-0 at home to Wolfsburg. Elsewhere, Borussia Dortmund cruised to a 4-1 win in a dead rubber game against relegated side Greuther Fuerth.

AFP

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