

TRAVEL TAKES OFF AGAIN

As international travel gains momentum, increased demand prompts higher airfares

Our Correspondent
Muscat

Airlines and airports in Oman are currently witnessing their busiest months since the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic. The sultanate and other countries lifted travel restrictions in the first quarter of this year.

The number of international flights that landed at and took off from Muscat International Airport surged more than 72 per cent to 6,080 during the first two months of 2022 from 3,530 in the same period of 2021, data re-



leased by National Centre for Statistics and Information showed.

After over 20 months in which the travel and tourism industry was crippled by the pandemic, Oman's airports and operating airlines are now attracting more passengers than at any time since the outbreak of the pandemic in March 2020.

The total number of passen-

MUSCAT INTERNATIONAL AIRPORT

72% increase in flights | **67.6% increase in passengers**

gers at Muscat airport increased 67.6 per cent in the first two months of 2022 to over 789,000 compared to 471,000 recorded

in the corresponding period last year when most of the world was grappling with the second wave of COVID-19.

More than 429,000 people arrived in Oman through Muscat airport in January-February this year, marking the strongest months for travel in the sultanate since March 2020.

Over 357,000 international passengers departed from Muscat airport in this period, a year-on-year rise of 45 per cent.

Continued on Page 03

RO11mn investment to develop fisheries sector in 2022

Our Correspondent
Muscat

The Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Water Resources (MAFWR) is investing RO11.05mn to establish fish markets in various governorates this year in efforts to develop the fisheries sector, support fishermen and increase national income.

An official of MAFWR in-

formed that the ministry has started developing the fisheries sector according to a comprehensive plan. "The ministry is investing more than RO11mn to develop the fisheries sector, which includes building wholesale and retail fish markets and fish gathering centres with high-quality design and equipment."

According to the official, the ministry has already started op-



erating four fish markets, one in the wilayat of Quriyat in Muscat, one each in Mussanah and Barka

in South Batinah and the fourth in the wilayat of Izki in Dakhliyah.

Fourteen markets are currently being developed in various governorates, including the wilayat of Khasab in Musandam, Rustaq in South Batinah, Seeb in Muscat, Al Kamil Wa al Wafi in South Sharqiyah, and Mahout in Al Wusta.

MAFWR is also developing three markets in North Sharqiyah in the wilayats of Dima Wa al

Taien, Mudhaibi and Bidiyah, one each in Al Halaniyat Islands and Salalah in Dhofar, one each in Bahla and Adam in Dakhliyah, and two in Dhahirah in the wilayats of Yanqul and Dhank.

The ministry is currently conducting a study on the prospect of setting up four fish markets in the wilayats of Haima in Al Wusta, Al Hamra in Dakhliyah, and Khabourah and Liwa in North Batinah.

'Cooperatives of consumers must to boost economy'

Our Correspondent
Muscat

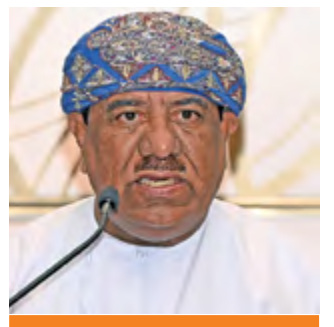
Oman Chamber of Commerce and Industry (OCCI) has stressed on the economic and social importance of consumer cooperative societies in the sultanate.

In OCCI's Ramadan Nights event held on Monday, senior officials from the Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion, business leaders and experts discussed the role of consumer cooperatives in the economy and gained insights from the experiences of developed countries in this field. Proposals were also made to frame necessary legislations for the growth of cooperatives.

Redha bin Juma al Saleh, chairman of OCCI, said that an active and integrated system of consumer cooperatives creates more choices for consumers and provides high quality goods and services at reasonable and competitive prices.

The discussion on this matter was held under the auspices of H E Qais bin Mohammed al Yousef, Minister of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion.

Consumer cooperatives are an essential element of the economic landscape, existing as self-governing organisations that democratically serve the needs



Consumer cooperatives require self-management by people united voluntarily through a joint ownership project

REDHA AL SALEH

of those who choose to belong to them. These are cooperative businesses owned by customers for their mutual benefit.

"Consumer cooperatives require self-management by people united voluntarily through a joint ownership project. The government's role is to provide an organised legislative cover to conduct our lives stably and for the prosperity of society," Saleh said.

He described the role of consumer cooperatives as important to global economies.

Continued on Page 03



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Abu Huraira reported: The Messenger of Allah ascended the pulpit and said, "Verily, Gabriel came to me and he said, 'Whoever reaches the month of Ramadan and he is not forgiven, then he will enter Hellfire and Allah will cast him far away, so say amin.' I said amin. 'Whoever sees his parents in their old age, one or both of them, and he does not honour them and he dies, then he will enter Hellfire and Allah will cast him far away, so say amin.' I said amin. 'Whoever has your name mentioned in his presence and he does not send blessings upon you and he dies, then he will enter Hellfire and Allah will cast him far away, so say amin.' I said amin."

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

days of Ramadan, and before Eid al-Adha, the markets witness an old custom called al munadah (auction) in which livestock are sold to the highest bidder. "I hope this tradition continues as it is part of our heritage," Hosni said.

Parade of Planets set to charm astronomy lovers

Our Correspondent
Muscat

A rare celestial event will charm astronomy lovers in Oman on Wednesday and Thursday, early mornings. Four planets - Jupiter, Venus, Mars and Saturn - and the Moon will be in alignment for a few minutes and be visible around 4am local time.

Abdulwahab al Busaidi, head of the observatory unit of Oman Astronomical Society, said, "This is a rare event and stargazers must watch it.

The duration of the event will be only a couple of minutes and going to a dark area away from city lights will give people a better view

ABDULWAHAB AL BUSAIDI

Though I do not have any specific record of how frequent the phenomenon is, I can say that there were similar ones involving other planets in 2020, 2016 and 2005."

He added that the difference this time is the five celestial bodies will be almost equidis-

tant to each other. "I do not remember if I have ever seen such symmetry."

He informed that an interesting aspect of the event is one does not need a telescope to view it and can be seen with the naked eyes.

"The duration will be only a

couple of minutes and going to a dark area away from city lights will give people a better view," said Busaidi.

He added that this is often called a Parade of Planets and occurs when planets of the Solar System appear in a small part of the sky at the same time from Earth's point of view.

"These planetary alignments are not rare, but they're not regularly occurring, either. So it is a great chance to enjoy the spectacle," concluded Busaidi.

Medstar to open new polyclinic

Our Correspondent
Muscat

Private healthcare provider Medstar will launch its fifth health facility in the Karsha area of Nizwa before Eid.

The new facility is a polyclinic and the biggest among all its clinics located in Ghubra, Hamriya, Samail and Al Khoudh.

Speaking at a press conference held on Sunday, AR Biju, managing director of Medstar, said, "Medstar focuses on family medicine and projects itself as a healthcare provider that provides genuine care at an affordable price."

He informed that the polyclinic's consultation charge is RO2 and all tests and medicines can be availed for less than RO7. "Medstar is a single point of con-



tact for many corporate companies before referring their patients to speciality hospitals. We also conduct PCR tests for children, who in most cases are not vaccinated."

The new branch will have visa medical facilities and health packages. Medstar currently has

12 doctors - from India and Oman - and more are likely to join its clinics in the near future.

"We chose to have a polyclinic in Karsha as there are no health facilities nearby," Biju said.

Medstar has two general medicine clinics - Ghubra and Hamriya. The facility in Samail

also has dentistry services, while the Al Khoudh branch has ayurvedic and physiotherapy services too.

Seeniya Biju, executive director of Medstar, said, "Our team of doctors and staff at Medstar focuses on providing the best care."



(Supplied photo)

Mwasalat announces Nizwa tour package for Eid holidays

Our Correspondent
Muscat

Catering to demand during Eid holidays for excursions outside Muscat governorate, Mwasalat will be starting a special bus service between Muscat and Nizwa.

Called 'A Day in Nizwa', the daily trips will be operated between May 2 and 5.

In a statement, Mwasalat said the bus service will start from Azaiba bus station at 7am and return there at 5pm. The service includes bus trips from Muscat to Nizwa and back, with stops at cultural and archaeological landmarks in the wilayat.

The service will cover Nizwa Souq, Nizwa Fort, a tour of Al Aqar village in electric carts, and Falaj Daris - the largest falaj and

one of the biggest irrigation channels in the country.

Mwasalat stated that the service was in response to increasing demand for tours to Nizwa.

"This special service highlights the pivotal role that public transportation can play in revitalising and facilitating domestic tourism and attracting new segments of visitors."

Registration for Hajj from May 9 to 14 through e-system

Our Correspondent
Muscat

The Ministry of Awqaf and Religious Affairs (MARA) has announced that citizens and residents of Oman who wish to perform Hajj in the 1443 AH season can register starting from May 9 to 14 through the electronic system for pilgrims.

The ministry indicated that the registration process is done through the link www.hajj.om directly during the specified period. The system provides three ways for direct registration: Registration by entering the civil number, entering the mobile number or reading the ID card in a card reader if the phone and personal ID card are supported by the authentication system 'Electronic PKI'.



MARA has announced that Oman's quota for this year's Hajj is 6,338 pilgrims, a reduction of 45 per cent due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

"The Permanent Hajj Committee met under the chairmanship of the Undersecretary of the Ministry of Awqaf and Religious Affairs, in which he reviewed the agreements and plans for Hajj with the Kingdom of Saudi Ara-

bia for this year's season - 1443 AH," MARA stated.

Citizens and residents can request technical support and submit their queries through the MARA hotline 80008008 during official working hours, or submit a report via the notification screen in the electronic system for registering pilgrims of the sultanate via the link www.hajj.om

'Cooperatives of consumers must to boost economy'

Continued from Page 01

Estimates indicate that there are about 1bn cooperatives of all kinds around the world, with a combined economy of an estimated US\$2.5tn, which are leading to the development of a solid and sustainable economic sector of cooperatives and contributing to raising the volume of GDP.

A group of economy experts and businessmen have submitted proposals to develop the necessary legislation and procedures for consumer cooperatives with the aim of creating an organised and integrated cooperative economy in Oman.

The Ramadan Nights event also discussed the experience of cooperative societies in Kuwait, the regulation of their activities and contribution to the economy.

OCCI announced that it is conducting a survey, with the support of International Labour Organization, of employers in Oman to identify future skill needs of employees. To participate in the survey, log on to https://actemp.syd1.qualtrics.com/jfe/form/SV_3JB-SqiVKzqon4V0?Q_

WEATHER WATCH

	Max	Min
Abu Dhabi	36	25
Doha	33	24
Kuwait City	33	24
Manama	32	23
Muscat	37	28
Riyadh	36	22

Fares spike as travel takes off again

Continued from Page 01

Passenger numbers were mainly boosted by the easing of border restrictions at the beginning of this year.

"Things are getting better. It's evident that more and more travellers are flying these days for business and pleasure. The number of flights have increased; both legacy and budget carriers have started operating now," said Sunil D'Souza, CEO of Travel Point.

However, passenger numbers are still far below the pre-pandemic levels seen in 2019. International Air Transport Association (IATA) and World Travel and Tourism Council do not expect the global travel and tourism

to reach pre-pandemic levels before 2023.

"Although IATA says it might be 2023 before we can reach 2019 levels, if the current trend continues, we could reach 85-90 per cent of the 2019 level in 2022 itself," D'Souza predicted.

He said a large number of people in Oman are travelling for business, to visit their home countries, and for holiday/leisure. "All these combined will certainly grow manifold compared to the previous years."

Salalah Airport saw 458 international flights in the first two months of this year which is more than double the 193 international flights recorded in the same pe-

riod of 2021. The number of international passengers at Salalah Airport more than tripled to over 55,000 this January-February compared to nearly 18,000 passengers in the corresponding period last year.

Sohar Airport witnessed the arrival and departure of 85 international flights in the first two months of this year with the total number of passengers reaching 15,310 during this period.

"As travel gains momentum, with more and more flights across the skies, pent-up demand for travel is making airlines register high flight loads. These factors are also contributing towards higher air fares," D'Souza said.

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Pakistani Rs	482.57
Bangladeshi taka	224.84
Philippines peso	135.50
Sri Lankan Rs	897.03

*Rates as on April 26
Source: xe.com

BRIEFS

Japan unveils \$48bn package to ease rising price pain

Japan unveiled a US\$48.6bn economic package on Tuesday that includes handouts for low-income families to help cushion the impact of rising prices and energy costs on households.

"We must avoid at all costs letting surging oil and prices sabotage our efforts for the recovery of economic and social activity from the coronavirus pandemic," Prime Minister Fumio Kishida said in unveiling the 6.2tn yen package.

Soaring energy costs linked to Russia's invasion of Ukraine, and other price rises are squeezing Japanese consumers and businesses, and the decision to unleash more spending comes ahead of a July parliamentary election.

At the heart of the package is a plan to distribute cash handouts of 50,000 yen (US\$391) per child to low-income households.

It is also expected to include measures such as expanded fuel subsidies and the extension of a zero-interest loan programme.

Moody's upgrades outlook for Omani banks as economy grows

Our Correspondent
Muscat

Global credit ratings agency Moody's Investor Service on Tuesday revised up its outlook for the Omani banking system to 'stable' from 'negative' due to an improvement in the banks' operating environment.

'We have changed our outlook for the Omani banking system to stable from negative to reflect a partial recovery in the challenging operating conditions facing the banks,' Moody's said its report.

The ratings agency expects loan growth in Oman will likely accelerate slightly as the economy recovers and strengthening business and consumer confidence increases demand for credit.

It said that Omani banks' profitability will remain steady and the banks will maintain solid capital buffers. 'Deposit growth will continue to lag loan demand, keeping funding flows relatively tight. Overreliance on government deposits remains a key risk for the banks. They have ample liquid resources, however, which are adequate to cover their market funding exposure.'

Moody's expects Oman's economic growth to accelerate to 4 per cent in 2022, fuelled by a boost in oil production, before slowing to 2.4 per cent in 2023.

'Higher oil prices and oil production will boost economic



Moody's says higher oil prices and oil production will boost Oman's economic growth this year. The ratings agency expects the sultanate's real GDP growth to accelerate to 4 per cent in 2022 before slowing to 2.4 per cent in the next year

growth this year. Oil production will expand in 2022 as an OPEC+ cut, agreed as the pandemic hit in 2020, is unwound. Consumer and business confidence are returning as most of the remaining coronavirus-related restrictions are removed and this will support recovery in the non-oil sector,' the ratings agency said.

Moody's said uncertainty

ward. 'Problem loans will rise as forbearance measures for borrowers, implemented since the onset of the pandemic, are gradually lifted. We expect sector-wide problem loans to reach around 4.5 per cent of total loans in 2022, from 3.6 per cent at the end of 2021.'

Positively, Moody's said, Omani banks built up ample loan-loss reserves reaching 110 per cent of problem loans as of December 2021 and these provide a buffer against loan losses.

Capital buffers remain strong

Moody's emphasised that capital buffers will remain solid in the Omani banking system.

'Omani banks hold high levels of capital and the banks' solid

earnings and good profit retention will keep levels strong,' it said.

Funding for Omani banks, Moody's said, will remain relatively tight and reliance on government deposits will stay high. 'Access to funding for Omani banks will remain tighter than in most other GCC countries. This is because the Omani economy is more heavily dependent on oil and a long run of low oil prices has kept deposit growth sluggish.'

Deposits from the government and its related entities will remain high, constituting around a third of total sector deposits and leaving banks vulnerable to this concentration, Moody's added.

Higher oil revenues in 2021

led to greater deposit inflows from Omani government and public bodies and drove deposits up 6.0 per cent, outpacing loan growth of 4.5 per cent for the first time in years, the agency said. Nevertheless, the loan-to-deposit ratio for the banking sector remains at a high 109 per cent as of December 2021.

Moody's noted that government capacity to support Omani banks in case of need is limited.

It said, 'The government's fiscal capacity to support the country's banks weakened during the low oil price era between 2015-2020 and remains constrained. The government's willingness to provide support will nevertheless remain high, despite the planned introduction of a bank resolution regime in the coming years.'



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BOARD OF DIRECTOR'S REPORT

On behalf of the Board of Directors, I hereby present the first quarterly report ending 31 March 2022 of the Hotels Management Company International SAOG.

The company achieved the following financial results during the period :

- The company has generated total revenue of RO. 2,549 million (vs. related period previous year RO. 0.536 million) which is an increase of 375% as compared to the corresponding period of previous year in total revenue.
- The company has Net income after income tax of RO 0.522 million vs. related period previous year net loss of RO. 0.615 million. It shows an increase of 185% as compared to the previous year of the same period.

Achievement:

- The Chedi Muscat aced in all its three performance indexes compared to its competitors and came number one in the Market Penetration index, Average rate index, and Revenue generating index for the first quarter of the year.
- Despite German-speaking markets not performing to their full potential, The Chedi managed to drive occupancy from its secondary markets to achieve much better figures than budgeted.
- Diversifying the market mix, collaborating with the right partners, and continuing its Sales and Marketing activities in various source markets even during the pandemic were critical in this remarkable turnaround.

Outlook

Historically the month of Ramadhan has been considered a low season for The Chedi, mainly due to it falling at the peak of summer and other local restrictions. However, this year the property is running at nearly full occupancy on several days of Ramadhan due to an attractive pricing strategy and Easter falling during Ramadhan.

Q2 has started well, with April achieving the budget and May looking well with a decent business on the books.

Not having daily direct flights from main source markets will hinder achieving the post covid figures. If the current business levels are of any indication, we can expect a buoyant demand in Q4. However, the airlines should be able to support the destination by resuming wide-bodied daily flights from all major source markets.

Ministry of Heritage and Tourism has re-established all Market-based representatives and partnered with diligent agencies. This is a major boost to the tourism sector as their activities will create a buzz and put the destination back in people's minds.

Appreciation

The members of the Board of Directors join me in acknowledging sincere thanks to our valued guests and shareholders for their continuous confidence in our hotel.

We wish to convey our sincere thanks and appreciation to the Ministry of Commerce and Industry, Capital Marketing Authority, Muscat Securities Market and the Ministry of Heritage and tourism for their prudent supervising and guidance on our endeavors.

We also thank the Ministry of Health and affiliated for the enormous work of handling the COVID-19, and the Hotel's management and staff for their dedication and commitment.

We salute and pledge our allegiance to His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tariq Al Said as he takes the country on continued progress and prosperity.

The Chairman
Hotels Management Company International SAOG

UNAUDITED STATEMENT OF FINANCIAL POSITION AS AT 30 JUNE 2021

	31-Mar 2022	31-Mar 2021
Non-current Assets	8,961,862	6,915,754
Property, plant and equipment	5,841,761	6,665,932
Fixed deposits - long term	2,600,000	0
Deferred tax Asset	520,101	249,822
Current Assets	4,699,411	2,662,253
Inventories	425,890	460,687
Debtors and Prepayments	1,240,337	307,117
Due from related parties	26,384	50,927
Bank and cash	3,006,800	1,843,522
Total assets	13,661,273	9,578,007
Current Liabilities	2,221,580	1,157,398
Creditors and Accruals	2,004,775	1,039,481
Due to related parties	124,668	117,917
Income Tax payable	92,137	0
Non-current liabilities	3,937,348	402,388
Term Loan	3,500,000	0
End of service benefits	437,348	402,388
Total liabilities	6,158,928	1,559,786
Net assets	7,502,345	8,018,221
Equity		
Share capital	3,000,000	3,000,000
Legal reserve	1,000,000	1,000,000
Retained earnings/(accumulated losses)	3,502,345	4,018,221
Total equity	7,502,345	8,018,221

Unaudited Statement Of Comprehensive Income
For The Period Ending 30 September 2021

	31-Mar 2022	31-Mar 2021
Turnover/ Revenue	2,549,132	536,024
Operating costs	(1,695,682)	(1,097,536)
Operating profit	853,450	(561,512)
Administration & selling expense	(146,251)	(62,421)
Impairment loss/reversal of loss on trade receivables	(4,287)	0
Management & licence fees	(91,106)	(5,982)
Net Operating Profit	611,806	(629,915)
Interest expense	(45,308)	
Interest income	40,882	15,140
Profit on disposal of property, plant and equipment	6,867	
Profit for the period	614,247	(614,775)
Taxation	(92,137)	0
Profit after tax provision	522,110	(614,775)
Earnings per share	0.174	(0.205)

Note: The complete accounts will be sent by mail to any shareholder who request the company in either Arabic or English as requested within 7 days of receipt of the request.

CBO issues RO160mn treasury bills

Our Correspondent
Muscat

A tender of the government treasury bills (issue number 160) was issued this week by the Central Bank of Oman.

Total value of the allotted treasury bills amounted to RO160mn, for a maturity period of 182 days, from April 27 until October 26. The average accepted price reached RO99.228 for every RO100 bill, while the minimum accepted price arrived at RO99.100.

The average discount rate and the average yield reached 1.5479 per cent and 1.5601 per cent, respectively.

The interest rate on the repo operations with the CBO is 0.75 per cent, while the discount rate on the treasury bills discounting facility with the central bank is 1.25 per cent.

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



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

Furthermore, treasury bills promote the local money market by creating a benchmark yield curve for short-term interest rates.

The government may also resort to this instrument whenever felt necessary for financing its recurrent expenditures.

UAE-based DAMAC Group gears up to enter Metaverse

Dubai, UAE - Leading UAE-based business conglomerate DAMAC Group has announced plans to embark into the world of Metaverse and build its own digital cities, becoming one of the pioneers in the GCC to do so.

"We are expanding our offerings into the Metaverse realm to avail of the many opportunities it presents. We are keen to pioneer the possibilities that the Metaverse offers in ways which allow us to be more connected and involved with our customers and their interests," said Hussain Sajwani, founder of DAMAC.

DAMAC Group plans to invest capital up to US\$100mn for the project.

The group will be run under the banner, 'D-Labs', and will be led by Ali Sajwani, CEO of D-Labs and DAMAC's general manager. The initiative forms part of the company-wide ambitions to move into digital assets and non-fungible tokens, and he is tasked in delivering the organisation's goal to be a leading global digital brand.

Since last year, DAMAC Group's real estate arm, DAMAC Properties, has been offering home buyers a 3D virtual experience that utilises virtual reality (VR) and augmented reality (AR) technology.

This is a stepping stone into the Metaverse realm, considered to be a digital universe made up of VR, AR and extended reality (XR).

Through this move, the DAMAC Group hopes to branch out its services to cater to the needs of the entire group when it comes to digital assets.



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Advertisement

School canteen rental (2022-2023)
Egyptian school Muscat announces about a tender for school canteen rental for the academic year (2022-2023) according to the conditions and regulations mentioned in the tender book. Getting and handing the tender book is from the Egyptian school in Al-Ansab in maximum two weeks from the date of the advertisement. A copy of the commercial register should be brought.

Tel: 24202221

Elon Musk reaches deal to buy Twitter for \$44bn

New York, US – Elon Musk, the world's richest man, struck a deal Monday to buy Twitter for US\$44bn, capping a saga complete with hostile takeover threats before delivering him personal control of one of the most influential social media platforms on the planet.

Twitter famously served as a megaphone for former US president Donald Trump before the platform banned him, and Musk – a self-proclaimed “free-speech absolutist” – has said he wants to reform what he sees as the platform’s over-zealous content moderation.

“Free speech is the bedrock of a functioning democracy, and Twitter is the digital town square where matters vital to the future of humanity are debated,” Musk said in a statement released by Twitter. “I also want to make Twitter better than ever by enhancing the product with new features, making the algorithms open source to increase trust, defeating the spam bots and authenticating all humans.”

However advocacy groups were wary of the type of content Musk might allow on the platform, and Derrick Johnson, president of the NAACP civil rights organization, tweeted, “Do not allow Twitter to become a petri dish for hate speech, misinfor-



mation or disinformation. Protecting our democracy is of utmost importance.”

At the White House, Press Secretary Jen Psaki said “no matter who owns or runs Twitter,” President Joe Biden – himself a Twitter user – is “concerned about the power of large social media platforms.”

Musk bought a nine-per cent stake in Twitter earlier in April, then offered to buy the whole company outright, citing a mission of preserving free speech.

While the firm’s board initially said it was reviewing his offer, it later rebuffed him and adopted a “poison pill” plan that would have made it harder for Musk to acquire a controlling position.

But last week, Musk – whose immense wealth stems from the popularity of Tesla electric vehicles as well as other ventures – said he had lined up US\$46.5bn in financing comprised of debt, a margin loan and his personal fortune.

AFP

HSBC profits slide as Ukraine war worsens inflation

London, UK – HSBC profits slid in the first quarter, the Asia-focused bank announced Tuesday after it was hit by bad debts as Russia’s invasion of Ukraine sent inflation rocketing further.

Net profit dropped more than a quarter to US\$2.8bn from the first three months of 2021, London-headquartered HSBC said in an earnings statement. Pre-tax profit fell by a similar proportion to US\$4.2bn.

HSBC said “the Russia-Ukraine war has exacerbated inflationary pressures, and increased uncertainty on the forward economic outlook, contributing to higher expected credit loss” for the bank in the first quarter.

The lender reported a credit loss of US\$600mn, which compared with the release of bad debt provisions totalling



US\$400mn one year earlier as the economy began to recover from the pandemic-induced slump.

HSBC said its business in Russia is “on a declining trend”, adding that further restrictions could make its operations in the country “untenable”.

“This could generate additional losses which are not currently provided for in the balance sheet,” the bank warned.

Nevertheless, HSBC revenue dropped four percent in the first quarter to US\$12.5bn.

AFP



BOARD OF DIRECTORS’ REPORT

We are pleased to present the Board of Directors’ Report of Dhofar Generating Company SAOG (the “Company” or “DGC”) for the three months ended 31 March 2022.

Overview

The business achieved excellent commercial availability factors of 99.95% and 99.93% during the first quarter of the year for the 273MW and 445MW power plants respectively. From a financial perspective, the contractual revenue is highly seasonal during the calendar year, with higher revenue in the summer period compared to the winter period. Summer months include April, May, June, September and October. The financial results are reflective of the business’s contractual arrangement and are in line with expectations.

The Annual Performance Test for both 273MW and 445MW power plants for the Contract Year 2022-2023 was completed in March as per the schedule provided by the offtaker.

The team has maintained the zero lost time incident (“LTI”) safety record and zero environmental exceedance since acquisition by the founders in June 2015.

The key concern being faced by your business at the moment is the crisis presented by the pandemic COVID-19 virus along with its emerging variants which has a multi-dimensional impact on all aspects of business and life. The management and the operator, with support from the Directors and the founding shareholders, have instituted a strict and proactive programme to manage the risks presented by this crisis.

As reported in previous quarter, the Company and the EPC Contractor has agreed upon commercial positions to close out the EPC Contract, including to set out the EPC Contractor’s liability in exchange for the closure of all outstanding works and open claims. The Company has issued the Final Completion Certificate to the EPC Contractor.

Plant performance during the period

	273MW		445MW	
	2022	2021	2022	2021
31 March				
Reliability Factor	99.95%	99.99%	99.93%	99.94%
Load Factor	11.72%	2.19%	35.29%	35.43%
Energy Exported (GWh)	69	13	338	339

273MW OCGT Power Plant

The team has managed to deliver a very low forced outage factor of 0.05% during the first three months of 2022 [2021: 0.01%]. The load factor of the plant was significantly higher than the corresponding period of 2021 which is as per grid demand and grid security.

445MW CCGT Power Plant

The CCGT power plant has achieved a reliability factor of 99.93% in Q1 2022. Load factor is dependent on the grid demand and based on load dispatch centre instructions.

Plant performance is a direct result of the operator’s proficient approach towards operations, maintenance and HSE principles.

Maintenance activities during the period

The three months of the first quarter of the year are considered as winter months under the Power Purchase Agreement (“PPA”) between the Company and the offtaker. The PPA allows a winter downtime of 15% is allowed for planned maintenance to ensure healthiness of the machines. The operator has utilized this downtime to conduct routine preventive and predictive maintenance activities such as boroscopic inspections, calibration, and cleaning activities.

All activities were routine in nature and there was no major maintenance during the quarter.

Financial highlights

Income Statement in OMR ‘000	Three Months Ended	
	31-Mar-22	31-Mar-21
Total revenues	8,230	7,264
Operating costs	(7,617)	(6,657)
Gross profit	612	607
Other costs	(1,879)	(2,422)
Loss after tax	(1,267)	(1,816)
Loss per share – Bz/share	(6)	(8)

Revenues

The revenue for the first quarter has increased by OMR 1m due to higher fuel revenue on account of higher load compared to the corresponding period in 2021 and finance lease amortization.

Operating Costs

Operating cost has increased by OMR 1m mainly due to higher fuel cost on higher load compared to the corresponding period in 2021.

Other Costs

Other costs are lower by OMR 0.6m mainly due to lower deferred tax expense by OMR 0.5m and OMR 0.1m general admin and finance expense.

Net profit after Tax

Net profit is reflective of the variances noted above.

Balance Sheet OMR Mn	Period Ended 31-Mar-2022	Year Ended 2021
Total assets	204.1	220.7
Net shareholder’s equity	44.9	42.6
Paid up capital	22.2	22.2
Cash	2.2	4.4
Current ratio	0.87	0.98
Gearing ratio	3	3.2
Net assets per share – OMR	0.202	0.192

Cash flow and cash equivalents, at the end of the Period

The Company has met its obligations to the lenders by the timely debt service of OMR 5.4m during the period. Interest payments are on a quarterly basis while principal payments are due in July and January of each year.

The Cash Sweep Mechanism under the financing agreements commenced from 28 October 2021 impacted the ability of the Company to make any future dividend distributions including the dividend distributions of September 2021 and March 2022 proposed at the Annual General Meeting held on 9th March 2021.

The Cash Sweep Mechanism will remain effective until the balloon amount is fully prepaid, which is expected to continue for the remaining term of Power Purchase Agreement (i.e. expiring on 1 January 2033).

In view of the above, the Company will not be able to make future dividend distributions unless the Cash Sweep Mechanism is reversed, which is subject to (1) arrangement of acceptable Backstop DSRA LC, and (2) unanimous approval of project lenders.

The financial statements were approved by a resolution of the Board of Directors on 25 April 2022.



شركة ظفار لتوليد الكهرباء ش.م.ع.
Dhofar Generating Company SAOG

PO Box: 1571, PC: 211, Salalah, Sultanate of Oman.
www.dgcoman.com

Future outlook

The upcoming quarter will fall in the summer period under the PPA. The Company and operator will continue their proactive approach towards plant operations to ensure a high reliability factor which is of paramount importance for all stakeholders.

The key challenge for your Company will be to remain vigilant to proactively address any adverse impact of coronavirus on its business, people and stakeholders.

Acknowledgement

The Board would like to thank the entire team for its diligent efforts which has resulted in the excellent performance. Finally, the Board of Directors would like to conclude by expressing their immense gratitude for the privilege of the vision, guidance, wisdom and crucial support of His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik and His Government.

Ahmed Syahrani Sulaiman
Chairman

STATEMENT OF FINANCIAL POSITION AS AT 31 MARCH 2022

	31-Mar-22 RO	31-Dec-21 RO
ASSETS		
Non-current assets		
Property, plant and equipment	145,328,964	146,323,283
Finance lease receivable	40,023,867	40,691,883
Right-of-use assets	1,771,087	1,787,985
Major maintenance accrued revenue	1,894,613	2,033,125
Prepaid connection charges	603,377	573,452
Total non-current assets	189,621,908	191,409,728
Current assets		
Inventories	5,632,873	5,690,349
Finance lease receivable	2,583,184	2,530,967
Major maintenance accrued revenue	481,724	481,724
Trade and other receivables	3,381,051	15,717,962
Advances and prepayments	270,727	447,644
Cash and cash equivalents	2,198,315	4,439,759
Total current assets	14,547,874	29,308,405
TOTAL ASSETS	204,169,782	220,718,133
EQUITY AND LIABILITIES		
EQUITY		
Share capital	22,224,000	22,224,000
Legal reserve	723,584	723,584
Retained earnings	23,952,927	25,220,568
Cash flow hedge reserve	(1,974,976)	(5,561,527)
Net equity	44,925,535	42,606,625
Non-current liabilities		
Long term loan	123,146,435	127,221,502
Fair value of the cash flow hedge	1,963,358	4,841,799
Provision for decommissioning costs	5,020,798	4,958,813
End of service benefits	112,329	116,797
Lease liabilities	1,899,697	1,881,501
Deferred tax	9,858,543	9,323,996
Total non-current liabilities	142,001,160	148,344,408
Current liabilities		
Long term loan	10,465,769	10,130,225
Fair value of the cash flow hedge	360,142	1,701,173
Lease liabilities	152,716	152,716
Trade and other payables	6,261,467	17,779,993
Income tax payable	2,993	2,993
Total current liabilities	17,243,087	29,767,100
Total liabilities	159,244,247	178,111,508
TOTAL EQUITY AND LIABILITIES	204,169,782	220,718,133
Net assets per share	0.202	0.192

STATEMENT OF PROFIT OR LOSS AND OTHER COMPREHENSIVE INCOME FOR THE THREE MONTHS PERIOD ENDED 31 MARCH 2022

	3 months ended 31-Mar-22 RO	3 months ended 31-Mar-21 RO
Revenue	8,229,852	7,264,287
Operating costs	(7,617,642)	(6,657,676)
Gross profit	612,210	606,611
General and administrative expenses	(297,980)	(329,186)
Finance cost	(1,730,867)	(1,801,244)
Finance income	50,622	58,260
Loss before tax	(1,366,015)	(1,465,559)
Income tax	98,374	(350,354)
Net loss for the period	(1,267,641)	(1,815,913)
Other comprehensive income		
Items that may be reclassified subsequently to profit or loss Fair value gain arising during the year on cash flow hedge - net of tax	3,586,551	2,739,173
	2,318,910	923,260
Total comprehensive income for the period	(0.006)	(0.008)
Basic and diluted loss per share	(0.006)	(0.008)

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CLASSIFIED LISTING**

Muscat Daily now offers free classified listings for individuals in the following categories: **Situations Wanted/Accommodation Wanted or Available/Sale of Household Items/ Car for Sale or Wanted/Matrimonial Alliances (Word limit is 35)** Please email your listing to dailyclassifieds@apexmedia.co.om or call 99104346

DISCLAIMER

Oman Electricity Transmission Company (OETC) would like to announce the following amendment for the tender below which was announced on Wednesday 06/04/2022:

Sr.No	Tender No.	Tender Name	Last Date for Obtaining Tender Documents	Closing Date	Grade	Tender Document's Fees (Including VAT) (RO)
1	07/2022 Extended	Provision of printing services for 5 years	12/05/2022	24/05/2022	Local companies with experience in same field, Have a valid tender board registration certificate.	105.000

Company Address: Muscat - Al Mawaleh
Way No: 2153 – Building No. 4230 Block No: 321
Web site: www.omangrid.com, E-mail: tenders@omangrid.com
GSM: 99105413

تنويه

نعلن الشركة العُمانية لنقل الكهرباء بأنه تم تعديل اشتراطات الحصول على المناقصة المذكورة ادناه التي تم الإعلان عنها بتاريخ 06/04/2022م.

م	رقم المناقصة	عنوان المناقصة	آخر موعد للحصول على مستندات المناقصة	آخر موعد لتقديم العطاءات	الدرجة	لنم الوثيقة (شامل ضريبة القيمة المضافة) (رو)
١	٢٠٢٢/٠٧ تجديد	توفير خدمات طباعة لمدة ٥ سنوات	٢٠٢٢/٠٥/١٢	٢٠٢٢/٠٥/٢٤	الشركات المحلية العامة في هذا المجال والمسجلة لدى مجلس المناقصات وتسجيلها ساري المفعول .	١٠٥.٠٠٠

عنوان الشركة	عنوان الشركة: محافظة مسقط - الموالح رقم السكة ٢١٥٣ - مبنى رقم ٤٢٣٠ - هاتف - ٩٩١٠٥٤١٣
البريد الالكتروني	tenders@omangrid.com
الموقع الالكتروني	www.omangrid.com

Bank Nizwa signs MoU with Oasis Trading

As the leading and most trusted Islamic bank in Oman, Bank Nizwa has played a critical role in broadening the concept of inclusive growth and has supported many industries through innovative Sharia'a-compliant financing. In line with the same, the bank signed a memorandum of understanding (MoU) with Oasis Trading and Equipment Company to extend financing to the company's customers and help them in buying Caterpillar vehicles.

The agreement was signed by Khaled al Kayed, CEO of Bank Nizwa and Bashrah Ahmed Aref al Barghouti, general manager of Oasis Trading and Equipment Company in the presence of R Narasimhan, general manager of wholesale banking, Khalid al Barwani, Deputy general manager Wholesale Banking Group and other senior officials



from both entities.

Commenting on the signing of the agreement, Kayed said, "Bank Nizwa's Wholesale Banking Group has been at the forefront of financing SMEs, corporates and specialised project financing and our multi-industry portfolio is a testament to

the growing preference for Islamic banking. We are indeed delighted to have signed an MoU with Oasis Trading and Equipment Company as they mirror similar values of excellence, integrity, and sustainable development. At Bank Nizwa, we are strongly aligned with the targets

set in Oman Vision 2040 and we will continue to support the various industries major segments like construction, power system and material and many others with aim to contribute to achieving immediate economic objectives of Sultanate of Oman, through Sharia'a-compliant solu-

tions that have, time and again, proven to be resilient despite the changing economic scenarios."

As per the agreement, Bank Nizwa will be providing structured Islamic financing facilities to customers of Oasis Trading and Equipment Company to enable them to buy 'CAT' machines

at subsidised rates. As a company with over 60 years of experience in the Middle East, Oasis Trading and Equipment Company deals in various CAT machinery, heavy equipment, and power systems, which are used for a wide variety of applications, including earthmoving, building and construction, mining, road making, demolition, waste and scrap handling, electric power generation, and marine propulsion.

In line with Bank Nizwa's growth strategy and contribution to the sultanate's economic diversification goals, the Wholesale Banking Group offers services to an extensive range of clients in the construction, marine, oil and gas, infrastructure, power generation, healthcare, tourism, logistics amongst many more. CAT and its equipment cater to all these key sectors.

Many customers rely on CAT's products to advance sustainable progress and improve living standards. The MoU will, therefore, provide a significant impetus to several key projects in various sectors where the company provides its services, particularly to Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs) to buy CAT machines and equipment at competitive finance costs.

Barghouti said, "In business, it is quintessential to have a good financial partner that not only provides you with the needed advisory and assistance but also helps you support customers with their financing needs. More so, the bank honours and resonates with our core values. Bank Nizwa has been that very partner for us, and we are certain that this MoU will further strengthen our position in the market."

Golden Palm Oasis launches Eid promotions

Golden Palm Oasis, the only licenced luxury boutique desert camp South of Sharqiyah, has launched its Eid promotion 'Stay Closer, Discover More'. Only 265km from Muscat via the scenic Quriyat and 65km from Sur, the luxurious destination will be packed with on-site and off-site activities.

With the anticipation of a week-long holiday, guests can choose from any of the well-appointed Palm Deluxe Rooms or spacious Royal Palm Suites, with breakfast and dinner plus an evening tea at the Rose Garden served with dates and luqaimat, a popular Arabic dessert.

The pet-friendly resort camp is closer to the Arabian Sea and



promises cooler weather for guests to enjoy various fun-filled activities such as sunrise or sunset dune bashing. If the guests opt for sunrise, a trip will be arranged 8km deep into the desert for a visit to a Bedouin

home and camel hub. The trip to Abu Rashidin will certainly give visitors a profound sense of gratitude after seeing how the locals are able to get by with the very basics of life.

Al Wadha al Hina, CEO of

Golden Palm Oasis says: "I have been running Golden Palm Oasis for a good five years now and it gives me immense pleasure in welcoming guests of different nationalities. Omani hospitality is known all over the world and our desert camp has been consistently receiving excellent reviews, a testament to our commitment to providing a memorable experience."

Rates start from RO70 for a Palm Deluxe Rooms, RO85 for a Suites, and RO145 for a Family Suite suitable for five persons. All room rates are inclusive of all applicable taxes and service charges and are based on a half-board for meal plans.

Premium Motors organises iftar event for its employees



To connect and share the joy of the spiritually rewarding month of Ramadan, Premium Motors, official dealer for the German car brands Audi and Volkswagen in Oman, organised an iftar for the

members of its management and employees.

The traditional social gathering was held to strengthen and promote the values and principles of one team. Christian

Nehme, general manager of Premium Motors spoke on the occasion and reinforced the importance of social values among the valuable staff of Premium Motors.

This Ramadan, SBA extends its offers on Nissan after-sales



To further improve after-sales experience for customers, Nissan Oman from the house of Suhail Bahwan Automobiles (SBA), has announced four exclusive Ramadan Service Schemes to mark the special season.

The four customer-centric schemes on offer are Service Contract Promotion, Happy Wednesday, Exciting Thursday and WhatsApp No. Promotional Campaign.

The special scheme is valid up to May 26.

A senior official of Nissan Oman, from the house of SBA said, "Being customer centric, we are focused on providing the best service to our customers. We always extend best customer service practices, and we are pleased to launch this exclusive service schemes. We are happy to provide these benefits since we understand the importance of providing unique value-added services to our discerning customers."

Under the Service Contract Promotional campaign if the customer buys a minimum of four services, he will get 20 per cent discount on value added services and free interior cleaning.

In Happy Wednesday, cus-

tomers who visit their nearest Suhail Bahwan Automobiles Service Centre with prior appointment on any Wednesday during the campaign period can avail exciting benefits including 20 per cent discount on window film, ceramic coating and interior cleaning.

In addition all customers who visits workshop on Wednesday with prior appointments will get a chance to win any of the assured service through 'scratch and win' including free next periodic maintenance service, free body polish, free interior cleaning and free rust proofing. They have a chance to win their next periodic maintenance service through a raffle.

Under the Exciting Thursday scheme customers with prior appointment on any Thursday during the campaign period can avail exciting benefits for model year 2016. They will get 20 per cent discount on periodic maintenance service and 20 per cent discount on value added services. Value added services include window film, ceramic coating, anti-bacterial treatment, interior cleaning, rust proofing, headlight polishing and many more.

Through a raffle draw cus-

tomers have a chance to win their next periodic maintenance service. The offer is eligible for model year 2016 and prior.

As part of 'WhatsApp number promotional campaign' customers who join WhatsApp Broadcast list, will get 20 per cent discount on window film and anti-bacterial treatment. They also have a chance to win next periodic maintenance service free. To avail this scheme, customer can add the WhatsApp no 94963943 to contact list as SBA service and then send a WhatsApp message 'Please Add' followed by customer name and vehicle details.

Book a home test drive

Nissan Oman is extending a 'book a home test drive' service for its prospective customers. The service enables potential customers to schedule their test drive online as per their convenience. A home test drive can be booked simply by logging on to the official SBA Nissan Oman website on the link <https://en.nissanoman.com/services/book-a-home-test-drive.html> or through customer service toll free number 800500011.

Unaudited Interim condensed financial statements for the three-month period ended 31 March 2022

**MUSCAT CITY
DESALINATION
COMPANY SAOG**

BOARD OF DIRECTORS' REPORT

Dear Shareholders,

On behalf of the Board of Directors of Muscat City Desalination Company SAOG ("MCD" or the "Company"), I am pleased to present the Directors' Report together with the unaudited financial statements of the Company for the three-month period ended on 31 March 2022.

Health, Safety and Environment (HSE)

The HSE performance of the Company to date has been satisfactory, with no Lost Time Accidents ("LTA"). The operator entity, Muscat City Desalination Operations and Maintenance Company LLC ("MCDOMC") has completed 2224 days without any LTA since the plant's commercial operations commenced on 19 February 2016. Similarly, there were no environmental incidents for the same period.

Operations

During the first three months of 2022, the Company achieved a higher availability of 97.09%, compared with 88.93% during the same period in 2021. The water dispatch during the first three months of 2022 was 16,706,424 m³, an increase of 11.15% compared with 15,030,302 m³ during the same period in 2021. The total forced outage rate for the three-month period ending on 31 March 2022 is 0.35% (31 March 2021: 0.35%).

Meanwhile, the Covid-19 lockdown has not had any material impact on the plant's performance for the reporting period. The Company and its operator, MCDOMC, have implemented all measures recommended by the authorities to prevent Covid-19 infections within the Plant and have re-organized the day-to-day activities at the plant to comply with the measures recommended by the Supreme Committee for Covid-19. Moreover, all MCD and MCDOMC's employees who are working in the plant have fully been vaccinated.

Financial Results

The Company's revenue for first three months of 2022 was RO 4.211 million whilst the direct operating cost was RO 2.668 million. Accordingly, the gross profit for the period was RO 1.543 million, which is 1.0% higher compared with the corresponding period last year. General and administrative expenses for the first three months of 2022 was RO 0.212 million, which is higher by 1.9% compared with the corresponding period last year. Finance costs for the first three months of 2022 was RO 0.667 million, which is 3.1% lower than the finance costs incurred for the corresponding period last year.

The Company recorded profit before tax (PBT) of RO 0.665 million which is 4.6% higher than the PBT for the same period last year. Overall, the Company achieved profit after tax of RO 0.561 million for the period compared with profit after tax of RO 0.673 million for the corresponding period in 2021.

As at 31 March 2022, the share price of MCD was 117 Baizas (31 March 2021: 85 Baizas).

Pursuant to the authority granted by the shareholders at the Annual General Meeting held on 29 March 2022, the Board of Directors, at its meeting held on 25 April 2022, have resolved the distribution of cash dividends of value 7.715 baizas per share out of the retained profits for the period ended 31 December 2021 to the shareholders who are registered in the Company's register as at 15 May 2022.

Corporate Governance

The Board has appointed an Internal Auditor to head the Company's Internal Audit Unit effective from 2 January 2022.

During the first quarter 2022, the Company's Annual General Meeting was held on 29 March 2022 at Dentons & Co Oman Branch, Salam Square, Madinat Al Sultan Qaboos, Muscat, Sultanate of Oman and also through the electronic platform of Muscat Clearing and Depository Company.

Future Outlook

All reasonable and prudent measures have been and will continue to be taken by the Company to ensure high standards of health, safety and environmental compliance, and to sustain and improve reliability and availability going forward.

On behalf of the Board of Directors, I would like to extend our utmost appreciation and gratitude to His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik bin Taimur Al Said and His Government for their continued support and encouragement to the private sector by creating an environment that allows the Company to participate effectively in the growth of the Sultanate's economy and to contribute in the building of a strong nation.

Tamer Cankardes

Chairman of the Board

Unaudited interim condensed statement of financial position as at 31 March 2022

	Unaudited 31 March 2022	Audited 31 December 2021
	RO'000s	RO'000s
ASSETS		
Non-current assets		
Property, plant and equipment	83,808	84,431
Lease asset (right of use assets)	241	243
Deferred tax	847	1,225
Total non-current assets	84,896	85,899
Current assets		
Trade and other receivables	1,706	1,622
Cash and cash equivalents	4,612	4,486
Total current assets	6,318	6,108
Total assets	91,214	92,007
EQUITY AND LIABILITIES		
Equity		
Share capital	15,555	15,555
Legal reserve	2,252	2,196
Retained earnings	3,113	2,608
	20,920	20,359
Hedging Reserve	(1,094)	(3,398)
Net Equity	19,826	16,961
Non-current liabilities		
Non-current portion of term loans	48,979	49,900
Non-current portion of fair value of derivative financial instruments	1,202	3,743
Provision for decommissioning obligation	390	384
Deferred tax	5,202	5,070
Lease liability - non-current portion	251	252
Shareholders' bridge loans	7,760	7,718
Shareholders' stand-by equity loans	754	754
End-of-service benefits	14	12
Total non-current liabilities	64,552	67,833
Current liabilities		
Current portion of term loans	3,482	3,387
Current portion of fair value of derivative financial instruments	84	255
Lease liability - current portion	3	3
Shareholders' bridge loans	729	729
Trade and other payables	2,538	2,839
Total current liabilities	6,836	7,213
Total liabilities	71,388	75,046
Total equity and liabilities	91,214	92,007
Net assets per share (RO)	0.127	0.109

Unaudited condensed statement of profit or loss and other comprehensive income for the three-month period ended 31 March 2022

	Unaudited 2022	Unaudited 2021
	RO'000s	RO'000s
Operating revenue	4,211	3,975
Operating cost	(2,668)	(2,448)
Gross profit	1,543	1,527
Other income	1	5
Administrative and general expenses	(212)	(208)
Finance costs (net)	(667)	(688)
Profit for the period before tax	665	636
Income tax	(104)	37
Profit for the period	561	673
Other comprehensive income / (loss) for the period - Items that may be reclassified subsequently to profit or loss		
Changes in fair values of derivative financial instruments	2,710	2,629
Deferred tax on changes in fair values of derivative financial instruments	(406)	(395)
Other comprehensive income / (loss) for the period net of income tax	2,304	2,234
Total comprehensive income / (loss) for the period	2,865	2,907
Earnings per share - basic and diluted	0.004	0.004

Note: The complete accounts will be sent by mail to any shareholder who requests them either in Arabic or English to the company's address at PO Box: 1935, PC: 114, Muscat, Sultanate of Oman or go to our website www.mcdcoman.com

QIBL C-190-1932024

Ominvest promotes employee engagement

In a bid to elevate employee's happiness and foster a culture of productive performance, Ominvest - the leading investment company in the sultanate - recently organised its first ever sports tournament as part of its Employee Engagement Initiative, which aims to foster team collaboration and encourage workplace flexibility.

The football tournament, which took place between April 19-25, was held at the Al Amal Sports Club and saw six Ominvest Group companies participating to win: Ominvest, Ubhar Capital, National Life & General Insurance Company, National Finance, Oman Arab Bank and Al Ahlia Insurance. With all the teams competing for the top spot, Oman Arab Bank emerged champions.

The intention behind organising this tournament was to encourage leadership, sportsmanship, collaboration and more importantly, strengthen the ties between Ominvest employees and employees of its group companies as well.

Commenting on the tournament, AbdulAziz al Balushi,



Group CEO at Ominvest, said, "I congratulate the champions for putting their best foot forward, and I wish the rest of the teams' better luck next time. I also thank all the tournament's participants for the roles they have played in making this sporting event a great success. Moving forward, we will continue working on other initiatives to further engage our employees and as a result improve collaboration within Ominvest Group companies."

Also commenting on the significance of this tournament,

Waleed al Yarubi, chief people officer (CPO) at Ominvest, said, "We believe in creating a workplace culture that helps people realise their full potential and enables them to make the most of their skills and abilities. The tournament's main aim was to foster people engagement, break down barriers and drive collaboration, a key value that is well entrenched in the company's corporate culture and instrumental in driving overall success. Moreover, the happiness and wellbeing of our employees is central to

our success as an organisation. When we work together as a team, we achieve our goals together."

Founded in 1983, Ominvest is one of the largest investment companies in the region. Its vision is to be an eminent investment group with significant global reach and impact. The company seeks to create value for all its stakeholders by prudently investing in growth sectors and markets while implementing innovative solutions and impactful initiatives.

NBO awarded Best CSR Bank and Best Mobile App

In acknowledgement of its commitment to the community and customers, National Bank of Oman (NBO) has been awarded Best CSR Bank 2022 and Best Mobile App 2022 at the World Business Outlook awards. The app, first launched in 2015, has frequently been enhanced and updated to meet the changing needs of customers, and in 2021 it took on a whole new level as customers were empowered to take care of all their finances conveniently at any time and anywhere. Meanwhile, the bank continues to deliver on its long-term commitment to supporting the community through its CSR efforts.

Tariq Atiq, chief retail and digital banking officer at NBO, said, "To win such awards from such a respected figure in the global business community reinforces our vision for a customer-centric and community-focused approach. We accelerated our innovation plans to meet their needs. Our digital services have been invaluable in empowering customers, providing the same exceptional experience found in every NBO branch in the pocket of every customer, and showing customers that they can count on us in any situation."



Each year, NBO has continued to evolve by introducing new contactless services, including several first-of-their-kind solutions such as the first multi-purpose banking kiosk, which enables customers to interact directly with the bank and utilize the 24/7 services. Customers were able to open new accounts, pay utility and credit card bills, apply for products and make transfers through the app, while using the scan and pay feature to pay at QR-enabled terminals nationwide. Most recently, the bank launched its new digital onboarding service, which allows customers to digitally open a new account through the NBO mobile banking app and receive their new cards in person at any kiosk or via home delivery.

Adding to a long list of initiatives focused on responding to crises, youth empowerment, social and economic development and education, NBO has donated over RO1.5mn in the past two years to support the Ministry of Health, as well as providing a vaccination program for staff and their spouses and a fleet of ambulances. The bank also supported the community in the aftermath of Cyclone Shaheen. Furthermore, NBO launched an e-library in partnership with the Ministry of Education to provide reading material to approximately 650,000 students and 56,385 employees nationwide, and NBO's scholarship programme has continued to support students from low income families..

Hitam Sports Team wins title of Ramadan Football Tournament 2022 in Duqm

Hitam Sports Team won the title of Ramadhan Football Tournament 2022. The team won the final match (2-1), which was played with the Special Economic Zone at Duqm and both teams showed excellent performance in the match.

The Tournament brought together 16 sports teams this year, which were divided into different groups.

The first match of the tournament, which was held at Durat Duqm Stadium, kicked off on the

second day of Ramadan. The Tournament witnessed great excitement in its rounds that included a number of teams from the wilayat of Duqm, as well as other teams formed by players from the different companies operating in the Special Economic Zone at Duqm.

Organising this Tournament was supported by Al Team Company for Investment and Real Estate Services, in cooperation with the Special Economic Zone at Duqm.



ISD pilots stress management programme

Stress management among students is a hit-or-miss matter. In order to tackle this matter most of the educational institutes schedule optional stress management classes, but students often lack the time to attend.

To overcome the stress and anxiety caused during exams, a series of online interactive sessions on stress management and exam anxiety were conducted by Dr Nita Joseph, counsellor and HoD - inclusive education for the students of classes X and XII from April 12-18 2022. "The objective of the session is to equip the young aspirants with the skills and strategies to manage exam stress in various ways, so that they could deal the stress and most importantly, be at ease and confident for the upcoming board examination" said Dr Nita.

Students are facing many types of stresses such as exam anxiety, timely submission of assignments and lack of free time. Stress is a frustrating condition where it contains an excess of work and an overload which reduces the concentration, mentality and the normal working condition of any students.

Indian School Darsait teachers walked an extra mile to make the students' minds at ease and feel at home. Motivational sessions were also conducted on career prospects in the field of science and commerce.

A'Safwah expands its product range: Introduces mineral water

An Omani household brand that has been revered for its commitment to premium quality, fresh and wholesome products, A'Safwah has established itself as a market leader in the production and distribution of dairy and beverages in the sultanate. With a keen focus on promoting healthy living, A'Safwah recently added yet another product line to the mix - refreshing, natural, and pure mineral water.

Acknowledging the importance of water, especially during the holy month of Ramadan, A'Safwah's bottled water is created keeping refreshment, hydration, and invigoration in mind. With a balanced blend of minerals, the mineral water is crisp, clean, and fresh. While its elegant packaging and fresh colours are a reflection of the brand's identity, the mineral water comes in easy-to-carry bottles of 1.5 l, 500 ml, and 250 ml, making it the perfect hydration partner for a hot, summer day. Its convenient size and quality packaging also attest to the brand's attention to detail.

The introduction of A'Safwah's bottled mineral water is in line with the company's strategy to maximise the brand potential, augment its beverage portfolio, and serve its customers better. As consumers are now showing an increasing preference for brands that promote overall well-being, A'Safwah has ensured that it continues to



maintain excellence in its products while encouraging consumers to adopt a healthy lifestyle. Nurturing a community that is conscious of good living is also in line with Oman Vision 2040 which places much emphasis on the health and wellbeing of its citizens.

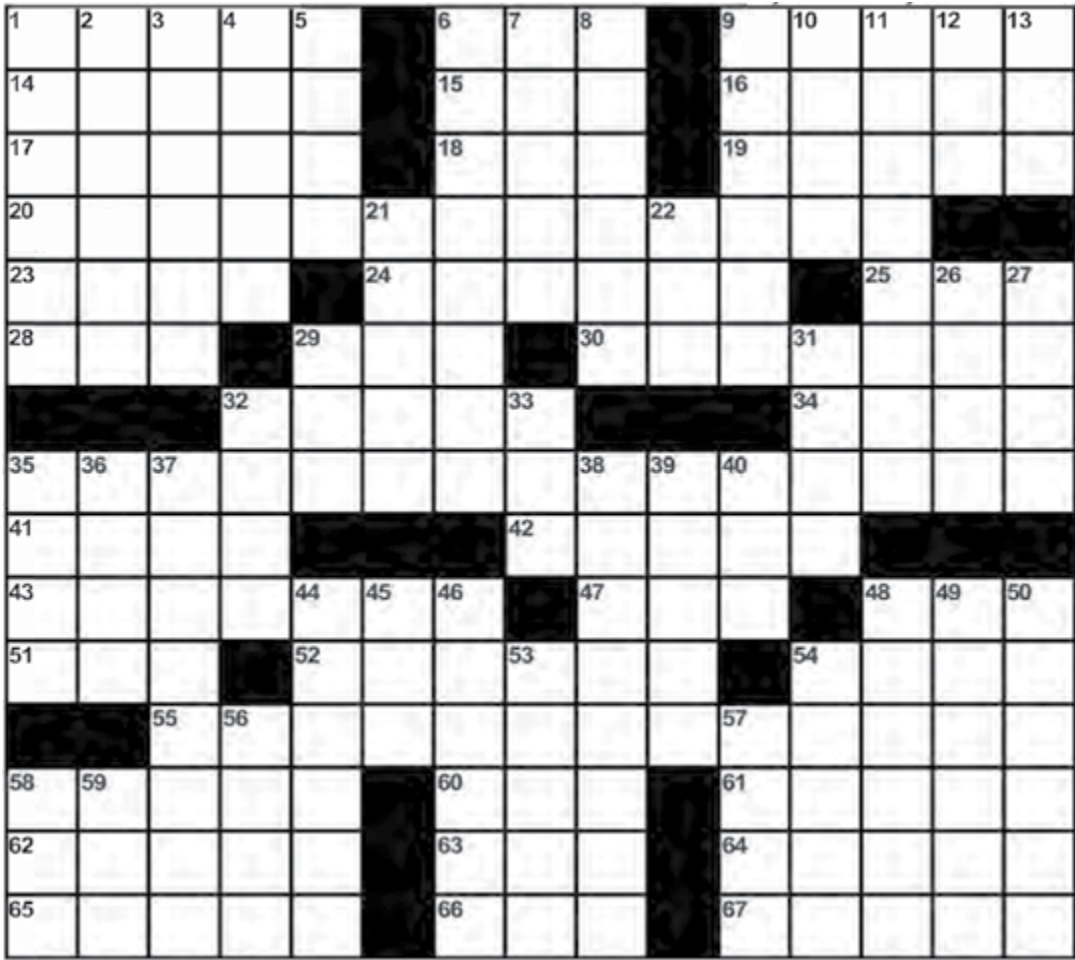
A'Safwah's mineral water has less than 5 ppm of sodium and, therefore, qualifies as low-sodium water. Water with low sodium content is especially suited for those trying to reduce sodium intake while maintaining normal blood pressure. Rich in magnesium and calcium, the water has a host of other health benefits like helping regulate blood glucose levels and nerve

functions while also strengthening bones.

The sultanate has also seen an acceleration in consumer consciousness about how products are sourced and distributed and A'Safwah's has kept pace with evolving market demands. By producing mineral water that is of the highest quality, fresh and local, the company has also leveraged its strong distribution network to ensure that its newest product is easily accessible and well-positioned to cater to all segments of consumers. With a keen focus on logistics, its well-equipped delivery vehicles, and supply chain, also ensure proper storage and timely transportation.

شركة التغليف المحدودة (ش.م.ع.) Packaging Co Ltd. (SAOG)		
CHAIRMAN'S REPORT	Un Audited Statement Of Financial Position For The First Quarter Ended 31.03.2022	
On behalf of the Board of Directors, we present the Chairman's Report of Packaging Co Ltd (SAOG) for the 1st quarter ended on 31.03.2022	31.03.2022	31.03.2021
	RO	RO
The 1st quarter, ended with revenue of RO. 2,748,528/- and net profit of RO.32,174 (before tax) as against revenue of RO. 2,340,120/- and net profit of RO.167,573/- in the same period of previous year. The profit before depreciation for the period under review was RO.175,508/- compared to profit of RO.283,647/- before depreciation in the same period of previous year.		
The non-availability of paper and increase in paper prices has impacted our production which has reflected in company's profitability.		
We would like to place on record our thanks to all our employees for their dedication and hard work.		
We would like to take this opportunity to express our sincere thanks to all of you for the patience and confidence reposed in the company. We also thank the Ministry of Commerce and Industry and the Muscat Securities Market for their support.		
On behalf of the Board or Directors, we would like to express our sincere gratitude to His Majesty for his vision and growth oriented policies aimed at bringing about a prosperous national economy.		
Chairman of the Board of Directors		
Note: The Complete accounts will be sent by mail to any shareholder who request them either in Arabic or English within 7 days of the receipt of the request at the company's address at PO Box No 2818, Ruwi, Postal Code 112, Sultanate of Oman.		
Un Audited Statement Of Comprehensive Income For The First Quarter Ended 31.03.2022		
	31.03.2022	31.03.2021
	RO	RO
REVENUE	2,748,528	2,340,120
Cost of sales	(2,419,158)	(1,880,730)
GROSS PROFIT	329,370	459,389
Depreciation	(2,290)	(1,149)
General and administration expenses	(151,949)	(150,567)
Selling and distribution expenses	(96,122)	(103,491)
PROFIT FROM OPERATING ACTIVITIES	79,009	204,182
Finance costs	(46,835)	(36,609)
NET PROFIT FOR THE YEAR BEFORE TAX	32,174	167,573
NET PROFIT FOR THE YEAR AFTER TAX	32,174	167,573
Basic earning per share	0.011	0.056

DAILY CROSSWORD



ACROSS

1) Cutting comments
6) Impressive degree, briefly
9) Monthly bill, for many
14) “Nixon In China,” for one
15) Bit of deception
16) Barbecuer’s cover-up
17) Type of battery
18) Priestly garb
19) Butcher’s stock in trade
20) Tough chances for outfielders
23) “If all_ fails ... “
24) Expulsion from office
25) Rocks in a bar
28) Comment from Homer Simpson
29) “When We Were Kings” hero
30) Finish a Big Gulp
32) Absurd
34) Assistant
35) Like an equivocal
41) Shrek, e.g.
42) “Summer of ‘69” singer Adams

43) Forcefully urgent
4 7) Performed
48) “Dear” man
51) Prepare to fire
52) A B vitamin
54)_ fide
55) Butcher’s tool
58) Sedate
60) Actress Lupino
61) Hawaiian island
62) Multitude or throng
63) Elevator unit
64) Words of agreement on Sundays
65) Toadies’ chorus
66) Cunning
67) Bed on board

DOWN

1) Ordered around
2) Early NASA program
3) Hotdog topper, sometimes
4) Knee steadier
5) Dress in India
6) Tormenting incessantly
7) Some things to climb
8) Accounting minuses
9) Smartphone feature

10) Impressionist
11) South American capital city
12) He had a salty wife
13) Annapolis grad’s rank, briefly
21) Baseball legend Ryan
22) Still in its original packaging
26) “Buffalo” Bill
27) Some farm females
29) Singer DiFranco
31) Bowling green?
32) Anything on a list
33) Emulate a tide
35)_-Cola
36) Certain Jamaican fruit
37) Some British transports
38) Everyday
39) Pulling even with
40) Possessed
44) Places of residence
45) Barely beat
46) Talking points
48) Oklahoma athlete
49) Chant
50) Debonair

53) Kind of wave
54) Hold responsible
56) Take cover

57) Divulge a secret
58) Not outgoing
59) Little piggy

NOTE PAD

YOUR DAILY HOROSCOPE

ARIES MARCH 21-APRIL 19

After dealing with someone else’s secrets lately, you’re all warmed up to deal with your own, right? If you’re not, the least you can do for yourself is find someone you not only trust implicitly, but whose advice and counsel you know in your heart is solid and reliable. The tough part is you’re usually the person everyone else turns to for those things. Someone had to teach you those traits, though. Call that person.

LEO JULY 23-AUGUST 22

When times are tough, or at least tricky, the cosmos often sends hints your way via coincidental circumstances, recurring dreams, or the appearance or reappearance of someone whose presence makes you feel a certain way. It’s up to you now to figure out what those coincidences and dreams are all about. You know you can do it. If anyone is an expert at unraveling such things for others, it’s you. Do it for yourself now.

SAGITTARIUS NOVEMBER 22-DECEMBER21

You do love to chat. There’s no arguing that fact. But the one thing you actually love more is taking action. Now that you can see the possibility of making a positive change happen, you’re eager to do something about it, not just talk about it. If you’ll be acting with a partner and they’re doing more talking than planning, see what you can do to get the show on the road. Otherwise, you might have to turn this into a solo venture.

TAURUS APRIL 20-MAY 20

When it comes time to tell someone a secret, most people who know you turn to you for several reasons. First, it takes quite a bit to shock you. Second, you’re completely trustworthy. Third, you’re also quite wise. So when a sibling or neighbour approaches you with that look on their face, you’ll know immediately what’s needed. Invite them in, make some coffee, and turn off the phone. This could take a while.

VIRGO AUGUST 23-SEPTEMBER 22

Sometimes you have to believe; you know, have a little faith. Scientists provide us with a lot of answers, but you of all people know there’s more to life than what science has to offer. And with your intuition, you know that when you believe in something, it’s probably true. So when someone unusual comes along with a message, take a step away from your apparent reality and listen to them.

CAPRICORN DECEMBER 22-JANUARY 19

You’ve decided to give yourself exactly what you need, which might be a change of scenery and some new people and experiences to enjoy. Still, you’re duty bound to make sure everything at home will run without a hitch in your absence. Before you board that plane or hop in your car, be sure the person you trust most is in charge of everything. You won’t be able to enjoy yourself or concentrate at hand if you don’t.

GEMINI MAY 21-JUNE 21

You’d much rather spend money than keep track of it. In your mind, that’s what monthly bank statements are for and that’s why accountants were invented. At the moment, however, you might need to take stock of some finances yourself. If you’re not fond of numbers, it won’t be a good time, so give yourself some incentive to get through this, a reward you absolutely can’t have until the project is done. No cheating.

LIBRA SEPTEMBER 23-OCTOBER 22

Relationships are complicated. There’s just no way they can’t be. So when someone comes along who’s very different, you often spend more time than you probably should worrying about those differences instead of concentrating on all the wonderful things you have in common. Someone special in your life could well end up being there for a long while. Focus on the positives.

AQUARIUS JANUARY 20-FEBRUARY 18

The best part of socializing with your peers is that you often run into people who are on the same career path or on paths that necessarily cross every now and then. You’ve had several encounters along those lines lately, and it has just dawned on you that one of them might be mutually beneficial. Give them a call and see if they’re on the same page. Bet they are, or else they know someone who is.

CANCER JUNE 22-JULY 22

Every so often you wake up and find yourself smack in the middle of a day when everyone seems to be out for one thing and one thing only: to be pleasant to each other. Which is the way you are every day, actually. It doesn’t happen often, but when it does your peaceful soul just loves it. This is one of those days. For the first time in a while, you might actually feel as if you’re living on a planet with kindred spirits.

SCORPIO OCTOBER 23-NOVEMBER 21

For some reason, you’ve been thinking a lot lately about either going back to school on a regular basis or taking a class or two that will add to your already impressive resume. Of course, anything you can do to add to your skills is a good idea, but if you happen to be in the mood to do it, so much the better. Now, while you have both the enthusiasm and a good reason to start, why not at least investigate it?

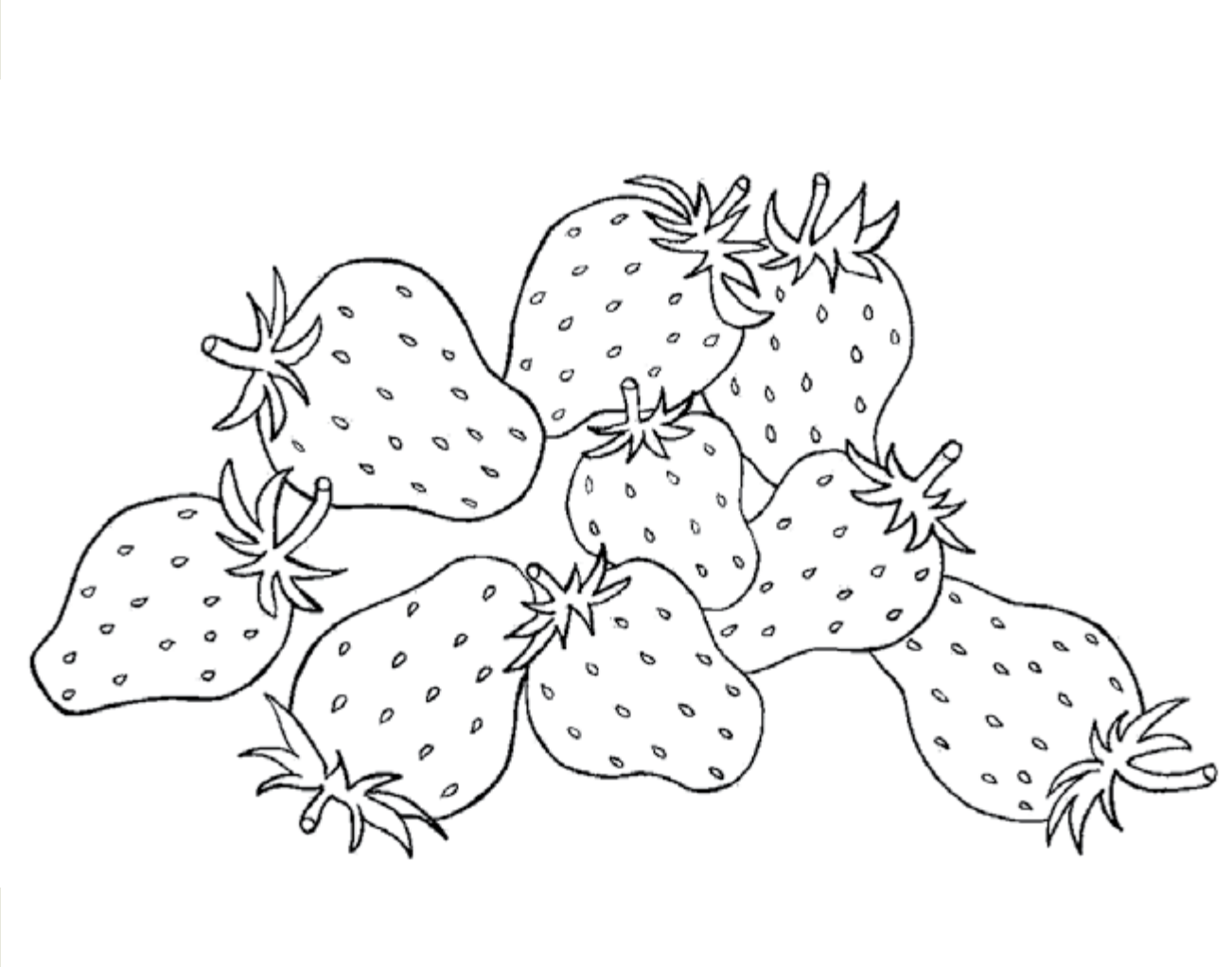
PISCES FEBRUARY 19-MARCH 20

Being brazen has its advantages. First of all, it’s extremely appealing to prospective suitors and an absolute magnet for friends. It’s fire, and whether it’s in a fireplace or a person’s attitude doesn’t matter. That hypnotic quality is still there. Someone who wants to woo you for a variety of reasons will show you more than a little bit of fire right now, and you’ll find it quite appealing. Play the game, though. Don’t let on just yet.

TEST YOUR KNOWLEDGE

01. Who played the lead character in the surreal 1998 film *The Truman Show*?
- A. Kevin Kline
B. Johnny Depp
C. Jim Carrey
D. Robin Williams
02. When the first pay toilets were established in the UK, at the Crystal Palace exhibition in 1851, the penny charge included using the hygiene facilities and what else?
- A. A clean seat, a towel, a comb and a shoe shine
B. A clean floor
C. An attendant to take messages
D. Unlimited supply of paper for hygiene
03. What is a Russian Blue?
- A. Gerbil
B. Parrot
C. Cat
D. Pig
- Answers: 1. C 2. A 3. C

KIDS COLOURING



BOGGLER

R	G	U	O
K	G	E	S
F	A	E	Y
E	R	A	H

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

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

DO YOU SUDOKU?

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

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

WORD BUILDER



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

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

SUDOKU EASY ANSWER

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

Turkish court jails Erdogan critic Kavala for life



Demonstrators hold placards reading in Turkish 'do not obey' during a protest against a Turkish court decision to sentence leading activist Osman Kavala to life in prison in Istanbul on Tuesday (AFP)

Istanbul, Turkey - A Turkish court on Monday sentenced leading activist Osman Kavala to life in prison on controversial charges of trying to topple the government that had already seen him jailed without a conviction for more than four years.

The panel of three judges also jailed seven other defendants for 18 years each on the charge of aiding the attempt to overthrow then-prime minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan's government during large-scale protests in 2013.

The ruling drew swift condemnation from some of Turkey's main allies, as well rights campaigners - some of whom emerged from the packed Istanbul courtroom in tears.

Washington said it was 'deeply troubled' by the 'unjust' conviction.

"The United States is deeply troubled and disappointed by the court's decision," US State Department spokesman Ned Price said in a statement.

Germany said the 64-year-old intellectual and campaigner

must be 'freed immediately', while two leading European parliamentarians who coordinate ties with Ankara said the 'regrettable' ruling showed there was 'little to no EU perspective for the current Turkey'.

The bloc's chief diplomat, Josep Borrell, condemned the sentence for ignoring orders for Kavala's release from the European Court of Human Rights.

"Today, we have witnessed a travesty of justice of spectacular proportions," said Amnesty International's Europe director Nils Muiznieks.

'Judicial assassination'

The Paris-born philanthropist told the court by video link from his high-security prison near Istanbul that he viewed the entire process as a 'judicial assassination'. "These are conspiracy theories drafted on political and ideological grounds," Kavala told the court moments before the sentence.

The marathon hearing has been gnawing on Turkey's strategic but tempestuous ties

with its main Western allies since Kavala's unexpected arrest in October 2017.

Kavala was then best known as a soft-spoken businessman who was spending part of his wealth to promote culture and projects aimed at reconciling Turkey and its arch-nemesis Armenia. But Erdogan portrayed him as a leftist agent of the Hungarian-born US billionaire George Soros and accused him of using foreign money to try and overthrow the state.

"We can never be together with people like Kavala," Erdogan declared in 2020.

Kavala was one of tens of thousands of Turks who were either jailed or fired from their jobs in purges that followed a bloody coup attempt against Erdogan when he was already president in 2016. But the seemingly arbitrary nature of the alternating charges filed against Kavala made him a symbol for rights groups - as well as Western governments - of Erdogan's increasing authoritarian streak in the second decade of his rule.

AFP

Palestinian killed during Israeli West Bank raid; Erez crossing reopened

Ramallah, Palestinian Territories - One Palestinian was killed on Tuesday when Israeli forces stormed a refugee camp in the occupied West Bank, in what the army called a 'counter-terrorism' operation that sparked violent riots.

The incident is the latest in wave of unrest rocking the West Bank and Israel as the Muslim holy month of Ramadan and the Jewish holiday of Passover overlapped this month.

The Palestinian health ministry said 20-year-old Ahmed Ibrahim Oweidat 'succumbed to critical wounds sustained by live bullets to the head, at dawn



Palestinian workers wait at the last station in Beit Hanun in the northern Gaza Strip following the re-opening of Erez crossing on Tuesday (AFP)

today in Aqabat Jaber camp' which is near Jericho.

The official Palestinian news agency Wafa said three men were injured when the 'undercover' forces raided the camp

overnight.

Gaza workers

Israel on Saturday had closed the Erez crossing with Gaza in retaliation for the rocket fire, blocking

the 12,000 Palestinians with permits to enter Israel from going to work.

But Erez re-opened on Monday 'following a security assessment', the defence ministry said, warning that a sustained opening was conditioned on 'the continued preservation of a stable security situation'.

No rockets have been fired from Gaza since Saturday morning. Concerns of fresh Al-Aqsa clashes are building, though, ahead of Friday prayers at the compound, with the end of Ramadan also approaching at the beginning of May.

AFP

Texas court stays Wednesday's execution of mother of 14

Houston, US - A court in Texas on Monday stayed the execution of Melissa Lucio, a mother of 14, who was due to be put to death on April 27 for the 2007 murder of her two-year-old daughter after a controversial trial. Pregnant with twins at the time, Lucio was immediately suspected by police after her daughter Mariah's body was

found at the family home covered in bruises.

Lucio, 53, claims a confession was coerced by police during a five-hour interrogation and that the toddler's death was actually caused by an accidental fall down a staircase.

"This is a first step to obtaining a new trial, but a new trial has not been granted," Lucio's

lawyer Vanessa Potkin said during a press conference, explaining that despite the ruling, Lucio is currently still on death row.

Her case has been championed by the Innocence Project, which fights for the wrongly convicted, and reality TV star Kim Kardashian, who has urged Texas Governor Greg Abbott to

grant clemency for Lucio.

'The Texas Court of Criminal Appeals has just issued a Stay of Execution for Melissa Lucio' and ordered a lower court to consider new evidence, her lawyers said in a statement.

"She was sobbing and was beyond words," Potkin said of Lucio's reaction to the news.

AFP

Overuse and climate change kill off Iraq's Sawa Lake

Sawa Lake, Iraq - A 'No Fishing' sign on the edge of Iraq's western desert is one of the few clues that this was once Sawa Lake, a biodiverse wetland and recreational landmark.

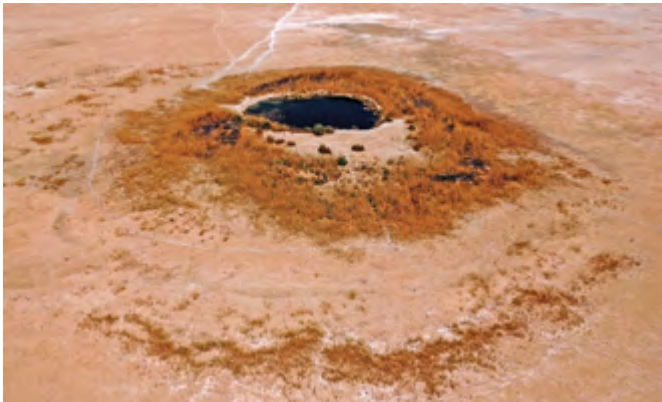
Human activity and climate change have combined to turn the site into a barren wasteland with piles of salt. Abandoned hotels and tourist facilities here hark back to the 1990s when the salt lake, circled by sandy banks, was in its heyday and popular with newly-weds and families who came to swim and picnic.

But today, the lake near the city of Samawa, south of the capital Baghdad, is completely dry.

Bottles litter its former banks and plastic bags dangle from sun-scorched shrubs, while two pontoons have been reduced to rust. "This year, for the first time, the lake has disappeared," environmental activist Husam Subhi said. "In previous years, the water area had decreased during the dry seasons."

Today, on the sandy ground sprinkled with salt, only a pond remains where tiny fish swim, in a source that connects the lake to an underground water table.

The five-square-kilometre lake has been drying up since 2014, says Youssef Jabbar, environmental department head of



An aerial view shows a pond remaining at the dried-up Sawa Lake in Iraq's southern province of al-Muthanna on April 19 (AFP)

Muthana province.

The causes have been 'climate change and rising temperatures', he explained. "Muthana is a desert province, it suffers from drought and lack of rainfall."

1,000 illegal wells

A government statement issued last week also pointed to 'more than 1,000 wells illegally dug' for agriculture in the area.

Additionally, nearby cement and salt factories have 'drained significant amounts of water from the groundwater that feeds the lake', Jabbar said.

It would take nothing short of a miracle to bring Sawa Lake back to life. Use of aquifers would have to be curbed and, following three years of drought,

the area would now need several seasons of abundant rainfall, in a country hit by desertification and regarded as one of the five most vulnerable to climate change.

The Ramsar Convention on Wetlands, a global treaty, recognised Sawa as 'unique... because it is a closed water body in an area of sabkha (salt flat) with no inlet or outlet. "The lake is formed over limestone rock and is isolated by gypsum barriers surrounding the lake; its water chemistry is unique," says the convention's website.

A stopover for migratory birds, the lake was once 'home to several globally vulnerable species' such as the eastern imperial eagle and houbara bustard.

AFP

Sembcorp Salalah سيمبكورب صلالة			
MANAGEMENT DISCUSSION AND ANALYSIS			
For three-month period ended March 31, 2022 (1Q2022), the Company has recorded a profit after tax (PAT) of RO 4.33 million as compared to RO 3.85 million earned in corresponding period in 2021 (1Q2021). The profit after tax increased mainly due to lower finance cost in 1Q2022 as compared to 1Q2021.			
Financial performance			
Key financial performance indicators are shown below:			
	1Q2022	1Q2021	
	RO million	RO million	
Revenue	16.89	16.66	
EBITDA	10.18	10.08	
PBIT	7.43	7.32	
Profit after tax	4.33	3.85	
1Q2022 Profit after tax			
Profit after tax has increased from RO 3.85 million in 1Q2021 to RO 4.33 million in 1Q2022.			
A brief analysis and characteristics of the major components of the profit or loss is presented below:			
Revenue			
Power contributed 52% (excluding fuel charge), water 24% and fuel charge 24% to the total revenue. Revenue was increased by RO 232K mainly due to increase in fuel charge revenue, variable water output charge revenue and capacity charge revenue as compared to the corresponding period previous year. Fuel charge revenue increased by RO 168K mainly due to increase in the gas price and increase in plant heat rate. Fuel charge revenue is a pass through and is calculated based on consumption of natural gas as computed by the plant's contractual Fuel Demand Model. Actual heat rate is better than the contracted Fuel Demand Model. Variable water output charge increased by RO 25K due to increase in the startups during the period. Capacity charge revenue increased by RO 44K mainly due to better plant reliability.			
Cost of sales			
Cost of sales mainly comprises depreciation of property, plant and equipment, fuel cost, operations & maintenance (O&M) cost and Long Term Service Agreement (LTSA) cost. Cost of sales increased by RO 136K compared to the same period in 2021, mainly due to the lower higher fuel cost and LTSA cost. Increase in fuel cost was in line with the increase in the fuel charge revenue. LTSA cost increased due to increase in chargeable Factor Fired Hours.			
Net finance cost			
Net finance cost decreased by RO 455K in 1Q2022 compared to 1Q2021 due to the scheduled repayment of part of the term loan in line with the financing documents.			
Income tax expense			
Income tax expenses increased due to increase in profit for 1Q2022 as compared to the corresponding period previous year.			
Business outlook			
The commitment to safe and reliable operations will remain the Company's top priority. At the same time, the Company will remain focused on maximising shareholder returns through a continued watch on the financial and operational performance of the Company.			
statement of profit and loss and other comprehensive income for three month period ended 31 March 2022			
	Unaudited For three months period ended 31 March 2022	Unaudited For three months period ended 31 March 2021	
	RO	RO	
Revenue from contracts with customers	16,892,013	16,659,519	
Cost of sales	(9,345,588)	(9,209,143)	
Gross profit	7,546,425	7,450,376	
Administrative and general expenses	(157,456)	(155,009)	
Other income	40,046	26,496	
Profit before interest and tax	7,429,015	7,321,863	
Finance income	25,925	33,155	
Finance costs	(2,361,038)	(2,823,295)	
Profit before income tax	5,093,902	4,531,723	
Income tax expense	(766,052)	(680,944)	
Profit after tax for the period	4,327,850	3,850,779	
Other comprehensive income			
Items that may be reclassified to profit or loss			
Fair value of cash flow hedge adjustments - gross	2,901,243	1,243,306	
Reclassification to profit or loss - gross	1,029,778	1,202,006	
Deferred tax asset on change in fair value of cash flow hedge	(589,653)	(366,797)	
Other comprehensive income for the period	3,341,368	2,078,515	
Total comprehensive income for the period	7,669,218	5,929,294	
Earnings per share:			
Basic and diluted earnings per share	0.0045	0.0040	
Statement of financial position as at 31 March 2022			
	Unaudited 31 March 2022	Unaudited 31 March 2021	Audited 31 December 2021
	RO	RO	RO
Assets			
Non-current assets			
Property, plant and equipment	256,774,441	267,423,951	259,434,928
Right of use assets	667,879	694,862	674,532
Intangible assets	900	22,333	2,965
Total non-current assets	257,443,220	268,141,146	260,112,425
Current assets			
Inventory	5,584,930	5,711,383	5,461,052
Trade and other receivables	8,268,919	10,808,456	19,577,001
Bank deposits	15,583,373	15,538,497	21,209,320
Cash and cash equivalents	868,798	3,171,221	1,002,770
Total current assets	30,306,020	35,229,557	47,250,143
Total assets	287,749,240	303,370,703	307,362,568
Equity and Liabilities			
Equity			
Share capital	95,457,195	95,457,195	95,457,195
Legal reserve	13,293,292	11,415,519	12,860,507
Retained earnings	29,117,368	16,322,073	25,222,303
Shareholders' funds	137,867,855	123,194,787	133,540,005
Hedging reserve	(3,078,382)	(9,732,316)	(6,419,750)
Net equity	134,789,473	113,462,471	127,120,255
Liabilities			
Non-current liabilities			
Long term loans	87,260,982	114,461,941	100,589,975
Long term lease liability	532,071	499,605	523,572
Asset retirement obligation	744,532	699,229	732,664
Deferred tax liability	24,111,034	22,337,629	23,417,106
Derivative financial instruments	1,668,455	7,121,972	4,803,570
Total non-current liabilities	114,317,074	145,120,376	130,066,887
Current liabilities			
Current portion of long term loans	27,780,298	25,804,057	26,735,713
Short term borrowings	-	3,850,000	-
Current portion of derivative financial instruments	1,953,171	4,327,810	2,749,077
Trade and other payables	5,670,251	8,897,883	18,113,440
Current tax payable	3,238,993	1,908,106	2,577,196
Total current liabilities	38,642,673	44,787,856	50,175,426
Total liabilities	152,959,767	189,908,232	180,242,313
Total equity and liabilities	287,749,240	303,370,703	307,362,568
Net assets per share	0.144	0.129	0.140
Sembcorp Salalah Power & Water Company SAOG P.O. Box 1466, Salalah, Postal Code 211, Sultanate of Oman, Tel: +968 2323 8510; Fax: +968 2323 8512, www.sembcorp.salalah.com.om			

At vast military parade, Kim vows to boost North Korea's nuclear arsenal

Seoul, South Korea - North Korea will rapidly accelerate development of its nuclear arsenal, leader Kim Jong Un said while overseeing a vast military parade showcasing his most powerful intercontinental ballistic missiles, state media reported on Tuesday.

Despite biting sanctions, North Korea has doubled down on Kim's military modernisation drive, test-firing a slew of banned weapons this year while ignoring US offers of talks - as analysts warn of a likely resumption of nuclear tests.

Dressed in white military uniform trimmed with gold brocade, Kim watched as tanks, rocket launchers and his largest ICBMs were paraded through Pyongyang late on Monday for the founding anniversary of North Korea's armed forces, state media reported.

Kim vowed to 'strengthen and develop our nation's nuclear capabilities at the fastest pace', according to a transcript of his speech at the event published by the official Korean Central News Agency. Repeated negotiations aimed at convincing Kim to give up his nuclear weapons programmes have come to nothing, and he warned on Monday that he could use his atomic arsenal if North Korea's 'fundamental interests' were threatened. "The basic mission of our nuclear force is to deter war, but our nuclear weapons cannot be bound to only one mission," he said, according to the KCNA transcript.

North Korea had paused long-range and nuclear tests while Kim met then-US president Don-



Vehicles carrying missiles take part in the military parade held to celebrate the 90th anniversary of the founding of the Korean People's Revolutionary Army at Kim Il Sung Square in Pyongyang on Monday (AFP)

ald Trump for a bout of doomed diplomacy, which collapsed in 2019. Last month Pyongyang test-fired an ICBM at full range for the first time since 2017, and satellite imagery shows signs of activity at a nuclear testing site, which was purportedly demolished in 2018 ahead of the first Trump-Kim summit.

Kim's messaging on the purpose of his nuclear weapons could be a response to South Korea's new hawkish, conservative President-elect Yoon Suk-yeol, who takes office on May 10, analysts said.

"It's noteworthy that Kim is now talking more specifically about the purpose of his nuclear weapons," said Yang Moo-jin, a professor at the University of North Korean Studies.

"South Korea's president-elect Yoon has threatened a pre-emptive strike on Pyongyang if needed, and Kim seems to be in-



North Korean leader Kim Jong Un (centre) attending the military parade at Kim Il Sung Square in Pyongyang (AFP)

directly saying that he may have to respond with nuclear tactics should Yoon indeed proceed."

Cheong Seong-chang, a senior researcher at the private Sejong Institute, told AFP Kim could have been sending a coded mes-

sage by wearing his white uniform with the marshal's star - North Korea's highest military rank. "It symbolises his ultra-strong stance to the incoming Yoon Suk-yeol administration, who has identified the North as

its enemy and said it plans to develop the ability to launch pre-emptive strikes."

Nothing new?
Photographs showed huge black-and-white missiles on mo-

bile launchers driving through Pyongyang's Kim Il Sung Square, as North Koreans in traditional dress waved flags and flowers. KCNA said the parade had showcased the North's most sophisticated weaponry, including the Hwasong-17 ICBM, which it claims to have successfully tested on March 24.

At the time, state media trumpeted the 'miraculous' launch of the country's most advanced ICBM, publishing dramatic photos and videos of leader Kim personally overseeing the test.

But analysts identified discrepancies in Pyongyang's account, and South Korean and US intelligence agencies have concluded that North Korea actually fired a Hwasong-15 - a less-advanced ICBM which it had already tested in 2017.

"For all the hype and months of practice, Monday's North Korean military parade didn't really show many novel capabilities," said Chad O'Carroll of Seoul-based specialist website NK News. "Stills suggest this was largely a re-rerun of the spectacular and ground-breaking Oct. 2020 parade, albeit with a handful of new items thrown into the show," he added in a tweet.

North Korea stages military parades to mark important holidays and events, often featuring thousands of goose-stepping troops followed by a cavalcade of armoured vehicles and tanks and culminating with the key missiles Pyongyang wants to display.

Observers closely monitor these events for clues on North Korea's weapons development. AFP

Japan PM for warmer ties with S Korea

Tokyo, Japan - Japan's Prime Minister Fumio Kishida told a South Korean delegation on Tuesday that the countries 'can't afford to waste time' in improving relations, following years of tensions over wartime issues.

The meeting in Tokyo represents a cautious step towards mending ties ahead of expected visits to the two US allies by President Joe Biden, and with growing regional security threats from North Korea and China.

"Given the current international situation, where the rules-based international order is under threat, now is a time when strategic cooperation... is needed more than ever," Kishida told the delegation, according to a foreign ministry statement.

"We can't afford to waste time in improving the Japan-South Korea relationship," he added.

Japanese media reports said the seven-member delegation of lawmakers, academics and ex-diplomats handed Kishida a letter from conservative president-elect Yoon Suk-yeol, whose inauguration is on May 10. Japan and South Korea are democratic market economies and US allies, but their relationship has been strained at times over disputes related to Tokyo's 1910-45 colonial rule of the Korean peninsula.

Ties have been particularly frosty under outgoing South Korean president Moon Jae-in, noted Daniel Snieder, a lecturer in East Asian Studies at Stanford University. AFP

Beijing expands testing as strict lockdown looms



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

Beijing, China - Beijing on Tuesday launched mass coronavirus testing for nearly all its 21mn residents, as fears grew that the Chinese capital may be placed under a strict lockdown like Shanghai.

Under its zero-COVID policy, China has used lockdowns, mass testing and travel restrictions to stamp out infections.

Its biggest city, Shanghai, has been almost entirely locked down for weeks, and the mass testing order in Beijing has sparked worries the capital will be placed under similar restrictions.

"Shanghai's situation has gone beyond everyone's imagination, and many people think it's absurd that a modern metropolis... has handled the situation like that," said Beijing resident Ms Zhao as she did her regular shopping at a supermarket. "I believe our situation will not be as bad... but to be honest, we also bought some rice, noodles, grains and oil. We've made preparations for at least one to two weeks," the 35-year-old human resources professional told AFP. Beijing has ordered residents of the 12 central districts

home to most of its population to undergo three rounds of testing after dozens of infections were found in recent days.

The capital's most populous district, Chaoyang, was the first to order mass testing from Monday, with people waiting in long lines to be swabbed by health workers in protective gear.

Eleven more districts began testing on Tuesday.

The testing order for Chaoyang sparked panic buying on Sunday night, with residents lining up at supermarkets with full carts as state media tried to reassure the public there were plentiful supplies.

Beijing residents told AFP they feared a repeat of the sudden lockdown in Shanghai, where people have struggled to obtain food and medical care for non-COVID conditions. Some residential compounds have been sealed off in Chaoyang, much like parts of Shanghai. One resident of the district, who declined to be identified for fear of reprisal, told AFP he felt 'a little anxious' after fences were suddenly put up in his neighbourhood. AFP

'Only a handful of people' have seen China-Solomons deal: US

Sydney, Australia - US officials who visited the Solomon Islands are convinced 'only a handful of people in a very small circle' have seen the final version of its controversial new security deal with China.

The high-level delegation arrived in the Pacific nation for talks with Prime Minister Manasseh Sogavare last Friday, three days after Beijing announced the deal had been signed.

A draft version of the pact, leaked on social media in March, prompted a flurry of lobbying by longtime Solomons' allies the United States and Australia, which have long-feared an expansion of Chinese military reach in the region.

Quizzed on Tuesday about

whether the delegation had asked to see the deal during talks with Sogavare, US Assistant Secretary of State for East Asian and Pacific Affairs Daniel Kritenbrink said: "I think it's clear that only a handful of people in a very small circle have seen this agreement."

He added it was a source of concern that Sogavare had stated publicly he would 'only share the details with China's permission'.

Kritenbrink was critical of the 'complete lack of transparency behind this agreement', saying other Pacific nations as well as 'friends inside the Solomon Islands' were similarly concerned the deal had been inked behind closed doors.

"What precisely are the moti-



A high-level US delegation visited Solomon Islands last Friday (AFP)

ations behind the agreement? What exactly are China's objectives?" Kritenbrink asked.

"I think they are completely

unclear, because this agreement has not been scrutinised, or viewed, or subject to any kind of consultation or approval process by anyone else."

The opposition Solomon Islands Democratic Party has asked for the deal to be made public, citing a security arrangement with Australia that has been available online for several years.

Sogavare has repeatedly said the pact was related to domestic security issues and would not involve the building of a Chinese military base in the Solomons.

But provisions in the leaked draft deal have stoked fears of a more permanent military presence - particularly measures that would allow Chinese naval de-

ployments to the Pacific nation, which lies less than 2,000km from Australia.

The United States has said it will 'respond accordingly' if China sets up a military base in the Solomons, but Kritenbrink declined to expound on the matter when pressed as to what that might entail.

He said that 'we do know that the PRC is seeking to establish a more robust overseas logistics and basing infrastructure that would allow the PLA (People's Liberation Army) to project and sustain military power at greater distances'.

The United States will 'continue to monitor the situation closely', he said. AFP

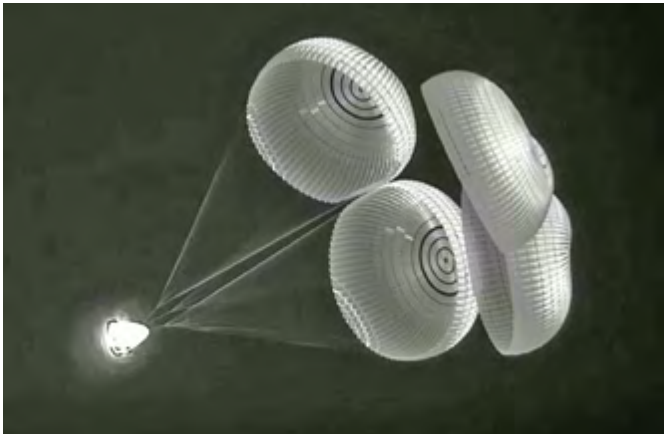
Crew of first private flight to ISS return to Earth

Washington, US - Three wealthy businessmen and a former NASA astronaut splashed down Monday off the Florida coast after spending more than two weeks aboard the International Space Station, in a landmark mission for the commercial sector.

After a dizzying descent, a SpaceX Dragon capsule carrying the Axiom-1 gently floated down to the Atlantic Ocean near Jacksonville at 1:06pm (1706 GMT) on four huge parachutes.

The spaceship was affectionately referred to as a 'toasted marshmallow' because of the scorch marks on its heat shield from re-entering the atmosphere at 17,500 miles per hour (28,000km per hour).

The crew was quickly retrieved by a waiting ship, marking the official end of the first fully private mission to the orbiting outpost - and a turning point



This screengrab shows the Dragon capsule splashing down in the Atlantic Ocean with the Axiom-1 crew on Monday (AFP)

in US space agency NASA's goal to commercialise the region of space called low Earth orbit (LEO).

"We proved that we can prepare the crew in a way that makes them effective and productive on orbit, and we're ready to go do it again," Derek Hass-

mann, operations director of Axiom Space, told reporters on a press call.

Axiom Space paid SpaceX for transport services and NASA for use of the ISS, while charging the three tycoons a reported US\$55mn each for the privilege. "Welcome home, Axiom-1!"

tweeted NASA chief Bill Nelson. "#Ax1 and all of the progress we've seen in the commercial space sector wouldn't be possible without NASA's collaboration with private industry."

NASA is increasingly looking to private industry to handle operations in LEO, leaving itself free to focus on exploration missions to the Moon and eventually to Mars. American real estate mogul Larry Connor, Canadian financier Mark Pathy, Israeli impact investor Eytan Stibbe and veteran Spanish-American astronaut Michael Lopez-Alegria had blasted off on April 8.

They were originally scheduled to spend only eight days on the space station but bad weather forced repeated delays.

In total, the crew spent 17 days in orbit, 15 of those on the ISS - but Hassmann said Axiom and its crew did not incur addi-

tional costs because of the delay.

Research, not tourism

Axiom had been keen to stress its mission shouldn't be considered tourism, unlike the recent, attention-grabbing suborbital flights carried out by Blue Origin and Virgin Galactic.

On board the ISS, which orbits 250 miles (400km) above sea level, the quartet carried out research projects, including an MIT technology demonstration of smart tiles that form a robotic swarm and self-assemble into space architecture.

Another experiment involved using cancer stem cells to grow mini tumours, then leveraging the accelerated aging environment of microgravity to identify early changes in those tumours, to help improve screening methods. AFP

Three Chinese nationals among 4 killed by woman suicide bomber in Pakistan

Responsibility for the attack on a mini bus was claimed by the Baloch Liberation Army

Karachi, Pakistan - A woman suicide bomber from a Pakistan separatist group killed four people, including three Chinese nationals, in an attack on a minibus carrying staff from a Beijing cultural programme at Karachi University on Tuesday.

The Baloch Liberation Army - one of several groups fighting for independence in Pakistan's biggest province - claimed responsibility, saying it was their first suicide attack by a woman assailant.

Chinese targets have regularly been attacked by separatists from Balochistan, where Beijing is involved in huge infrastructure projects as part of its Belt and Road Initiative.

CCTV footage broadcast by local channels showed a woman standing near the gate of a Confucius Institute - the cultural programme that China operates at universities around the world - as a minibus pulls up.

When the vehicle gets to



Police inspect a site around damaged vehicles following a suicide bombing near the Confucius Institute affiliated with the Karachi University, in Karachi on Tuesday (AFP)

within a metre she turns her back on it and detonates a bomb strapped to her body.

"We were having a meeting at the dean's office when we heard the deafening blast," said Naeema Saeed, a professor at

the criminology department of the university.

"It seemed that the roof was falling or the earth was torn. We all rushed outside. We looked around and saw smoke rising."

Baloch separatists have long

harboured resentment against lucrative mining and energy projects in the region, saying locals do not see the benefits and are being pushed off their land.

The 'Baloch Liberation Army accepts responsibility of today's

self-sacrificing attack', the group's spokesman, Jeeyand Baloch, said in a statement published in English on Telegram.

The group released a picture of the woman they said was the bomber, naming her as 'Shari

Baloch alias Bramsh'. She is dressed in military fatigues and a cap, smiling broadly and raising two fingers. Karachi police confirmed four people had died, including the minibus driver and three staff from the Confucius

Institute.

PM condemns attack

Pakistan's new Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif immediately condemned the attack.

"I am deeply grieved on the loss of precious lives including of our Chinese friends in the heinous attack in Karachi today," he tweeted.

Sharif only took over as premier after Imran Khan was ousted by a no-confidence vote earlier this month, and tackling a resurgence in militancy will be one of his biggest challenges.

"I strongly condemn this cowardly act of terrorism," Sharif said, adding 'the perpetrators will surely be brought to justice'.

In February, Baloch separatists staged four days of attacks across two locations in the province, killing nine soldiers. Tensions have flared in recent years in Balochistan following a massive influx of Chinese investment.

China is upgrading energy links and infrastructure as part of a US\$54bn programme known as the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor, with both nations wary of security threats to the projects.

In April 2021 a suicide bomb attack at a luxury hotel hosting the Chinese ambassador in Quetta, the provincial capital of Balochistan, killed four and wounded dozens.

AFP



A Ukrainian soldier sits on an armoured personnel carrier near Sloviansk, eastern Ukraine, on Tuesday (AFP)

US hosts weapons summit for Ukraine

Ramstein Air Base, Germany - Top US officials hosted emergency talks with allies in Germany on Tuesday on supplying Kyiv with more weapons to fend off Russia's assault, as the UN's chief headed to Moscow in a bid to avert further escalation of the conflict.

The meeting of 40 countries at the US Ramstein Air Base in Germany comes after Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov accused Ukraine of only 'pretending' to negotiate a cease-fire and warned of a 'real' risk of a new world war.

Moscow's invasion of its neighbour, now in its eighth week, has triggered widespread outrage among Western nations who have provided weapons and other assistance to Ukraine's embattled President Volodymyr Zelensky.

But the Western powers have been reluctant to deepen their direct involvement, wary of drawing Moscow's ire and sparking military confrontations be-

yond Ukraine's borders.

"We believe that they can win if they have the right equipment, the right support," US Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin said following his visit to Kyiv on Sunday with Secretary of State Antony Blinken.

The two officials promised US\$700mn in new aid to

Germany said it would supply anti-aircraft tanks, which is a clear shift after refusing for weeks to provide more advanced equipment

Ukraine, after months of pleas by Zelensky for heavier firepower. And Germany said it would begin supplying anti-aircraft tanks, a clear shift after refusing for weeks to provide more advanced equipment, and a sign

that Berlin was abandoning its cautious approach towards Moscow.

Military specialists said Western allies wanted to equip Ukrainian forces to halt the long-range bombings by Russia in the eastern Donbas region.

Attack drones, anti-aircraft missiles and sophisticated intelligence from Western agencies could prove vital for slowing the advance of Russia's military might, they said.

But stoking fears of a wider conflict, several blasts were reported on Tuesday in the neighbouring ex-Soviet state of Moldova, in the Russian-backed separatist region of Transnistria.

In Moscow, UN Secretary General Antonio Guterres was to hold his first in-person talks with Putin since the fighting began on February 24.

"We are extremely interested in finding ways in order to create the conditions for effective dialogue," Guterres said.

AFP

Myanmar junta court to give verdict in Suu Kyi corruption trial

Yangon, Myanmar - A Myanmar junta court will hand down a verdict in the corruption trial of Aung San Suu Kyi on Wednesday, according to a source with knowledge of the matter, in a case that could see the Nobel laureate jailed for 15 years.

Suu Kyi, 76, has been detained since a military coup ousted her civilian government in February last year, ending the country's brief period of democracy. She has since been hit with a raft of criminal charges, including violating the official secrets act, corruption and electoral fraud, and she faces more than 150 years in jail if convicted on all counts.

A verdict in the corruption trial, in which Suu Kyi is accused of accepting a bribe of US\$600,000 cash and gold



Aung San Suu Kyi (AFP)

bars, had been scheduled for Tuesday, said a source close to the case. But the hearings were 'adjourned' without a verdict, which is now scheduled for Wednesday, the source added.

Suu Kyi has already been sentenced to six years in jail for incitement against the military, breaching COVID-19 rules and

breaking a telecommunications law - although she will remain under house arrest while she fights other charges.

Journalists have been barred from attending the special court hearings in the military-built capital Naypyidaw and Suu Kyi's lawyers have been banned from speaking to the media.

Suu Kyi is facing a total of 10 corruption charges - each with a possible 15-year jail term.

She is also on trial for breaching the official secrets act, where she is accused alongside detained Australian academic Sean Turnell.

More than 1,700 people have been killed and over 13,000 arrested in a crackdown on dissent since the coup, according to a local monitoring group.

AFP

Two Iranian students get 16 years for 'sabotage'

Tehran, Iran - Two Iranian students have been sentenced to 16 years' jail on charges including sabotage and collaboration with outlawed anti-regime groups, judicial authorities in the Islamic republic announced on Tuesday.

Ali Younessi and Amir-Hossein Moradi of Tehran's Sharif University of Technology received 10-year terms for 'destruction of public installations', five years for 'cooperation with hostile groups', and another for propaganda against the Islamic republic.

AFP

Cash-strapped Sri Lanka to sell 'golden' visas

Colombo, Sri Lanka - Cash-strapped Sri Lanka announced on Tuesday it would sell long-term visas to attract desperately needed foreign currency after the island nation ran out of dollars to pay even for food and fuel.

Foreigners who deposit a minimum of US\$100,000 locally will be granted permission to live and work in Sri Lanka for 10 years under the 'Golden Paradise Visa Programme', the government said.

But any income from the scheme is likely to be dwarfed by the scale of the current crisis, with acute shortages of food, fuel and medicines that have triggered widespread protests.

Thousands of people remained camped outside President Gotabaya Rajapaksa's seafont office to demand his resignation.



Muslim devotees break their fast while protesting along with others near the president's office in Colombo on Monday (AFP)

Trading at the Colombo Stock Exchange was halted three times on Tuesday as prices plunged, with the blue-chip S&P index closing down 9.75 per cent.

That came on top of a near-13 per cent drop on Monday, the first day of trading since a two-

week break during which the government hiked interest rates and defaulted on its US\$51bn foreign debt.

Fuel prices have almost doubled since December and the government on Tuesday announced an 81 per cent increase in the price of cooking gas.

Cement, soap and detergents went up on Monday by between 17 and 100 per cent.

The latest price increases came as the main opposition launched a six-day protest march from the central city of Kandy to the capital, a distance of 115km.

Under the programme, the money payable will need to be deposited in a local bank account for the duration of the visa, the government said in a statement. "This scheme will help Sri Lanka at a time when we are facing the worst financial crisis since our independence," media minister Nalaka Goda-hewa told reporters in Colombo.

The government also approved the granting of five-year visas to any foreigner spending a minimum of US\$75,000 to buy an apartment on the island.

AFP

Head of stores and sales at Hussain Showaiter Sweets Mohammed Gharib shows the various kinds of Bahraini sweets at the Muharraq island store in northern Bahrain



BAHRAINI SWEETS

Sugar-coated Tradition

Bahrainis with a sweet tooth have long been spoiled for choice between a wide array of dessert franchises, but traditional confectioners still hold their ground, especially during Ramadan

A worker prepares halwa, a Bahraini sweet made primarily from sugar, corn starch, saffron and nuts at Hussain Showaiter Sweets at the Muharraq island store in northern Bahrain



Today, technology helps us disseminate everything we want to preserve of our popular heritage by making it known to future generations

DALAL AL SHROUQI



A worker at the Saleh Radhi al Halwachi sweet shop makes Bahraini saffron and cardamom cakes known as Khanfarroosh, at his shop in Jid Hafs village in Manama

peal to a younger clientele.

Saleh al Halwaji, who works in his family-owned shop, says, "My father used to work in confectionery and I used to help him after school. Today, we work in the same field with our own children," he said.

Halwaji says he strives to evolve the sweets and keep up with the times while maintaining their popular character.

"We still make everything ourselves and perhaps that is what attracts so many of our customers, who come to buy sweets but also to watch us make them behind the glass," he said.

Dalal al Shrouqi, an expert in Bahrain's popular heritage, says, "Today, technology helps us disseminate everything we want to preserve of our popular heritage by making it known to future generations."

Shrouqi, who has written several books on her country's traditional cuisine, said that while innovative twists are popular, people still prefer the sweets in their traditional form.

"Things evolve, but the original is still the basis," he adds.

AFP

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BIRYANI TRAIL

festive dinner



With Eid al Fitr round the corner, its time to plan your festive dinner. Here are some of the most popular biryanis which enjoy universal appeal:

Karachi Chicken Biryani

Ingredients

For the korma

1kg chicken - cut into big pieces, 1tbsp ginger-garlic paste, 3 large tomatoes - sliced
7 to 8 green chillies, 1 cup mint leaves, 7 to 8 dried plums or apricots, 4 medium onions - sliced
1 chicken bouillon cube, 1tbsp salt, 1tsp red chili powder, 1tbsp Kashmiri red chilli powder
2tsp cumin powder, 1½tsp coriander powder, ½tsp turmeric powder, 1tsp garam masala powder
2tbsp kewra water, 1 cup yogurt, ¾ cup oil, ½tsp mace and nutmeg powder, 1 cup water

For the rice

¾kg long grain basmati rice - soaked in water for 20 minutes, 3 to 4 bay leaves, 10 black peppercorns
5 cloves, 3 black cardamom, 5 green cardamom, 1 stick of cinnamon, 1tbsp vinegar, 2tsp salt

For garnish

¼ cup milk - mixed with orange food colour, 1 tomato cut in slices
4 green chillies, ¾ cup chopped coriander leaves, ¾ cup chopped mint leaves
½ cup brown fried onions, 1 mace, 1 nutmeg

Method

First prepare the korma. Blend the green chillies with the yogurt to form a smooth paste and set aside. Heat oil in a pot and fry sliced onion and mint leaves on medium flame till the onions turn golden brown. Remove roughly about ½ cup of brown onions for garnish. Then, add 1/4th cup water in the onions to stop frying. Add all the spices (except nutmeg and mace powder) and tomatoes. Saute for a minute, add ¾ cup water, and cover the pot to allow the tomatoes to soften - 5 minutes. Using a hand blender, blend the tomatoes and onions together. Now add the chicken, garlic ginger paste, dried plums, chicken cube, and the yogurt chilli mix. Mix everything well. Cover the pot and let the korma simmer for 15 to 20 minutes on medium to low flame. Remove the lid and check if the chicken is cooked. Turn off flame and add kewra water and mace-nutmeg powder, and slightly mix.

To prepare the rice, in a large pot, boil water on high flame. Add the whole spices, vinegar, salt and bay leaves. Once the water starts bubbling, add in the pre-soaked basmati rice. Boil the rice for 5 minutes and check a grain of rice. You should be able to break the grain of rice with fingers but the grain should still be hard and in-edible. That's the perfect rice for biryani layering. Strain the rice and set aside.

To assemble the biryani for the final cooking, take a large pot. Add 1/3 of the rice to layer the bottom of the pot. Garnish the rice with mint, chopped coriander, slices of tomatoes, 1 green chili and a sprinkling of mace-nutmeg powder. Then, add ½ of the chicken korma on the rice, spreading it out as evenly as possible. Add another 1/3 of the rice on top of this layer and repeat the garnish. Add another layer of the remaining chicken korma and cover with the last portion of rice. Drizzle the rice with the coloured milk in streaks. Garnish the top layer and add the fried onions, as well. Cover the pot with foil and then add the lid to make a strong seal. Place an old pan or tawa under the pot on the stove to reduce direct heat. Turn on the flame to high for 5 minutes, then reduce to medium low for another 10 minutes. Remove the lid and open the foil slightly to check if you can see steam. If you can see steam, that means your biryani is done. Remove from fire, cover the foil and lid, and let it rest for another 10 minutes before serving with raita and salad.



Mango Raita

Ingredients

2 cups yoghurt, ½ cup mango pulp
1 cup chopped up ripe mango

For tempering (optional)

2tsp oil, 1 red chilli - broken to bits, ½tsp mustard seeds
½tsp cumin seeds, 4-5 curry leaves, a pinch of salt

Method

Blend the yoghurt and mango pulp to get a smooth, thick mixture. Take a large bowl, add the yoghurt mixture and the mango chunks, and mix lightly. For the tempering, heat oil in a small pan and add the mustard, cumin, curry leaves, red chilli and salt. Pour the sizzling mixture over the mango mixture and mix a little to spread the tempering. (The mango raita is delightful even if you avoid the tempering.)



Lucknowi Mutton Biryani

Ingredients

1kg lamb meat with bones, 750g basmati rice, 2 potatoes - peeled, cut to quarters
6tbsp ghee, 4 onions - finely chopped, 5 black cardamom, 5 green cardamom
10 black peppercorn, 2cm sticks of cinnamon (two pieces), 8-10 cloves
2tsp fennel seeds, 2tsp kewra essence, 1 cup milk, 5-6 saffron strands, 2tsp salt

For the marination

2 onions - finely chopped, 4tbsp ginger-garlic paste, 2tsp coriander powder
2tsp red chilli powder, 2tsp garam masala powder, juice of 1 lime
1½ cup yogurt, 2tsp salt

For garnish

2tbsp fried onions, 2-3 sprigs of coriander - chopped

Method

Mix all ingredients under marination, add to the mutton pieces, and mix well. Let it marinate for at least 6 hours or overnight. Soak the basmati rice for at least 30 minutes. Boil six cups of water with the whole spices, then strain out the spices and set aside this flavoured water. Heat ghee in a large pan, add in the soaked rice, cook for 3-5 minutes till rice turns opaque. Crush and add 2 saffron strands, flavoured water, and bring the rice to a boil. When a little more than half done, remove and strain. Now, take another heavy bottomed pan and add ghee and the sliced onions. Saute till onions turn translucent. Add in the marinated mutton, stir and cook for a few minutes. Cover with a lid and simmer it for half an hour. Add the potatoes and cook for another 15 minutes, till tender. Take a huge pot and lay a layer of rice. Add in some of the mutton pieces with some gravy. Repeat this alternate layering of rice and mutton pieces, finishing with a layer of rice on top. Warm the milk slightly with green cardamom pods. Crush and add the saffron to it and pour this mixtures over the final layer of rice. Sprinkle the kewra essence, too. Cover with a lid and seal the sides by applying a dough made with wheat flour all around. Cook on very low flame for about half an hour. Remove, break seal, and serve straight from the pot, garnished with fried onions and chopped coriander.

'We have nothing to lose'

Villarreal midfielder Etienne Capoue says the giant killers will continue playing without a care in the world despite the daunting Liverpool challenge

Villarreal, Spain - "I said 'Where is Villarreal?'" explains Etienne Capoue, who describes it like he was scanning a map of the world and pointing his finger down.

"I was told it was in the sun, just there, next to Valencia. So I said 'alright, let's go!'"

Capoue's last two games for Watford were in England's second tier against Norwich and Huddersfield.

He left in January 2021 and his last two games of that season for Villarreal came against Real Madrid and Manchester United.

"Winning the Champions League? We never had the audacity to say we could win the Champions League," Capoue tells AFP laughing.

"We're the smallest club in the semi-finals, we were the smallest club in the quarter-finals. We're just making our merry way. And we have nothing to lose."

Villarreal, known as Yellow Submarine, knocked out Juventus in the last 16 and Bayern Munich in the quarters, two clubs that together own twice as many European Cups - eight - as Villarreal

Anfield is hell, you have to say it how it is. It's hell. It's the worst stadium I've been to in England. Whether it's the atmosphere, the way they play... For 90 minutes, you live in hell.

ETIENNE CAPOUE



Etienne Capoue at the Ciudad Deportiva Villarreal on Monday (AFP)

Villarreal made for Champions League: Klopp

Liverpool, United Kingdom - Jurgen Klopp has dismissed the idea that Liverpool have a dream Champions League semi-final draw as they prepare to face Villarreal in the next stage of their quest for an unprecedented quadruple.

The Reds, who host the Spaniards for the first leg at Anfield on Wednesday, are potentially nine games away from becoming the first side to win the Champions League, Premier League, FA Cup and League Cup.

Victory over the Yellow Submarine would mean a third Champions League final in five seasons for Klopp's men.

The German urged his players and the Anfield crowd to show the same level of desire they demonstrated in a famous 4-0 win against Barcelona in the second leg of the 2019 semi-final -- the last time they lifted the trophy.

"So many coaches, so many players out there try and work their socks off their whole life and have no chance to be in a Champions League semi-final," Klopp said on Tuesday.

"We are there so we have to cherish that, we have to appreciate of course but we



Jurgen Klopp

have to enjoy it as well."

Villarreal sit seventh in La Liga, nine points adrift of the top four with just five games to play.

However, Unai Emery's men have shocked Juventus and Bayern Munich to reach the last four and won their first ever-major trophy when beating Manchester United in last season's Europa League final.

"They're made for this competition to be honest because the way they set it up it's really, really good," warned Klopp.

"Maybe you (the media) underestimated them, but that has never happened to us and especially after these four games (against Juventus and Bayern) there's no chance."

AFP

Villarreal beat United on penalties to win the Europa League final and Capoue was named man of the match.

On Wednesday, Villarreal, the club Capoue knew nothing about, face Liverpool in the first leg of the Champions League semi-finals. A small, sleepy town on Spain's east coast now has an outside shot at being crowned kings of Europe.

have wins in the knock-out stage.

When Bayern were winning a third consecutive European Cup in 1976, Villarreal were being relegated to the Spanish fourth tier.

For some at Villarreal, the talk of fairytales and giant-killings might be wearing thin.

Villarreal is a tiny town but a big club, the Europa League champions, a team owned by a supermarket tycoon, who have

finished only one of the last eight seasons outside La Liga's top seven.

"We don't care, we know we're underdogs," says Capoue.

"Nobody will say we're favourites because we're not. Who are the other teams? What else can we say about them?"

"It's not offending anyone to say there are 50,000 people here and in their stadiums alone, they

have 70,000 seats. We don't mind, it's the truth."

Liverpool will be a step up again, with Jurgen Klopp's side still in the hunt for an historic quadruple.

And at Anfield, the challenge is one of the fiercest in football, something Capoue knows only too well. He has played four times there, all for Watford, and lost by an aggregate score of 18-1.

"Anfield is hell, you have to say it how it is. It's hell," says Capoue.

"It's the worst stadium I've been to in England. Whether it's the atmosphere, the way they play... For 90 minutes, you live in hell."

"They have this ability to transcend themselves, to cause you nothing but problems, all the time, in any part of the field."

AFP



Giorgio Chiellini after Italy's Euro 2020 triumph at Wembley

Chiellini to say 'ciao' to Italy after Argentina match

Milan, Italy - Giorgio Chiellini will bring down the curtain on his international career this summer after Italy face Argentina in the so-called 'Finalissima' at Wembley, the site of his greatest career triumph.

The 37-year-old was one of the key figures of the Azzurri's Euro 2020 victory, captaining his country to a dramatic win

over England at the iconic stadium where he will lead out his countrymen on June 1.

The Finalissima is a new match which pits the European and South American champions against each other in a one-off encounter.

"I'll say goodbye to the national team at Wembley, where I reached the highest point of

my career by winning the Euro," he told DAZN after Juventus' 2-1 Serie A win at Sassuolo on Monday night. "I'd like to say goodbye to the Azzurri with a nice memory. It will definitely be my last game for Italy."

Chiellini, who has been capped 116 times, was hoping to take part in one more World Cup before saying 'ciao' to fans,

but Italy missed out on the 2022 tournament in Qatar, hastening the centre-back's departure from the international game.

He has had a mixed Italy career, reaching the Euro 2012 final - where Italy were outclassed by Spain losing 4-0 - but had a difficult time at World Cup finals.

Italy exited in the group stage

both in 2010 -- when they were the defending champions -- and 2014 before slumping to a historic play-off defeat to Sweden in 2017 which cost them a place in the 2018 tournament.

Chiellini also suffered the ignominy of being bitten by Luis Suarez as Italy exited behind Uruguay and Costa Rica in 2014.

AFP

Late Kean strike gives Juventus important win

Rome, Italy - Moise Kean's late goal gave Juventus a hard-fought 2-1 win at Sassuolo in Serie A on Monday, allowing them to close the gap on third-placed Napoli to one point.

Sassuolo had done more than enough to claim a share of the points when Kean struck two minutes from full-time.

A long ball out of defence from Leonardo Bonucci ended with Kean, a 67th minute substitute for Alvaro Morata, turning Vlad Chiriches and firing the ball between goalkeeper Andrea Consigli's legs at the near post.

The last-gasp win keeps Juve



Paulo Dybala (L) celebrates his goal with Daniele Rugani

in fourth place, eight points adrift of leaders AC Milan but eight

points clear of Roma, who are chasing them for the final Cham-

pions League spot.

It was a frustrating loss for Sassuolo who were the better team for most of the game, posing problems from the outset when Davide Frattesi's header at the near post from a Domenico Berardi corner kissed the crossbar on its way over. Gianluca Scamacca was also sharp, forcing Juventus keeper Wojciech Szczesny into a fine save.

Juve's first real attack almost brought reward when Paulo Dybala thought he had found the net, only for Frattesi to block at the last moment.

AFP

Palace stalemate keeps Leeds in relegation danger

London, United Kingdom - Leeds held on for a 0-0 draw at Crystal Palace that did little to ease their fears of being dragged deeper into the Premier League relegation battle on Monday.

Jesse Marsch's side survived a second half barrage from a Palace team inspired by Wilfried Zaha after he was accused of diving by the visitors.

Leeds are five points clear of the relegation zone, but third bottom Everton have a game in hand to close the gap to two points.

With Leeds' next three games coming against Manchester City, Arsenal and Chelsea, there



Crystal Palace's Wilfried Zaha (R) battles with Leeds' Luke Ayling

could yet be a nerve-jangling conclusion to the season for the

Yorkshire club.

AFP

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IPL 2022



RR V RCB

Ashwin, Sen win it for Royals after Parag's rescue act



BRIEF SCORES:

Rajasthan Royals 144 for 8 in 20 overs (Sanju Samson 27 (21) 1x4, 3x6, Riyan Parag 56 (31) 3x4, 4x6; Josh Hazlewood 2 for 19) beat Royal Challengers Bangalore 115 all out in 19.3 overs (Faf du Plessis 23 (21) 3x4, 1x6, Wanindu Hasaranga 18 (13) 2x4; Ravichandran Ashwin 3 for 17; Kuldeep Sen 4 for 20) by 29 runs

TODAY'S MATCH (6PM)



GUJARAT TITANS

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Buttler tons to Kohli ducks: Hits and misses of IPL so far

New Delhi, India - The 15th edition of the Indian Premier League has passed the half-way mark after a month of high-octane action in the world's richest Twenty20 cricket tournament.

Here are five talking points from the first half of the season.

Smiling assassin

Jos Buttler has smiled his way to the top of this season's batting chart with three sparkling centuries for Rajasthan Royals.

The softly-spoken Englishman has been a bowler's nightmare with 491 runs in seven matches to take Royals into the top four of the 10-team table.

His latest 65-ball knock of 116 against Delhi Capitals puts him in with a chance of chasing Virat Kohli's 2016 record of 973 runs in a season.

"Jos has a cheat code for batting," England fast bowler Jofra Archer tweeted.

Kohli flops

The former India captain and national superstar Kohli has been struggling with the worst slump of his stellar career after two suc-



Jos Buttler has been in a league of his own so far this season

cessive golden ducks for Royal Challengers Bangalore.

Kohli has managed just 119 runs from eight matches, following his lacklustre recent form for his country with the prolific run scorer unable to manage an international century for more than two years.

Powerhouses tumble

Mumbai Indians and defending champions Chennai Super Kings have won nine of the 14 IPL titles since the league was launched.

But the powerhouse teams are languishing at the bottom of the standings with Mumbai winless and Chennai managing just two victories from eight.

Mumbai skipper Rohit Sharma, who has made just 153 runs, blamed his batsmen, including himself, after the latest loss to Lucknow Super Giants when failing to chase down 168.

Titanic debut for Gujarat

IPL debutants Gujarat Titans have been the team to beat this year and sit on top of the table with six wins out of seven

matches.

All-rounder Hardik Pandya has led from the front with 295 runs and four wickets off his pace bowling.

Afghanistan spin wizard Rashid Khan has also shone with the ball, and a match-winning batting blitz, while South African David Miller made an unbeaten 94 to stun Chennai.

Umpires get Pant fuming

Delhi Capitals skipper Rishabh Pant almost called his batsmen from the field to protest against an umpire's call against Rajasthan Royals during an ill-tempered match last week.

The drama happened on the third ball of the final over when Obed McCoy bowled a high full toss that Delhi believed should have been called a no-ball for being above the waist.

Pant and assistant coach Pravin Amre, who walked on to the pitch, were both fined 100 per cent of their match fee. Amre was also suspended for one match.

AFP

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Mickelson seeks PGA release for Saudi-backed series opener



Phil Mickelson

Los Angeles, United States - Phil Mickelson sparked intrigue about his possible return to golf on Monday after applying for a release to play in the first event of a lucrative Saudi Arabia-backed golf tour in June.

Mickelson's management company confirmed in a statement that the 51-year-old six-time major winner was seeking approval to play in the June 9-11 LIV Golf Invitational outside London -- but stressed he had not yet confirmed his participation.

The former world number one has not played since triggering uproar in February following publication of his remarks made last year to author Alan Shipnuck concerning the new Saudi-funded venture.

However his eventual return could conceivably feature participation at the LIV Golf event at Centurion Golf Club outside London.

Steve Loy, co-president of Sportfive management, said in a

Phil Mickelson currently has no concrete plans on when and where he will play

STEVE LOY

statement Mickelson was registered to play in both next month's PGA Championship, where he will be defending his title, as well as the June 16-19 US Open, which takes place the week after the LIV London event.

"Our client Phil Mickelson is officially registered to play in the PGA Championship as well as the US Open," Loy said.

"We have also filed a request on his behalf for a release to play in the first LIV Golf Invitational in London, June 9-11. This request complies with the deadline of April 25 set forth by the PGA Tour to compete in a conflicting tour event.

"Phil currently has no concrete plans on when and where he will play. Any actions taken are in no way a reflection of a final decision made, but rather to keep all options open."

Mickelson's possible return comes amid intense speculation about other players who may opt to take part in the Saudi-backed venture.

The money-spinning series will offer purses of \$25 million per tournament.

AFP

Wimbledon chiefs defend Russia player ban over 'propaganda' fears

London, United Kingdom - Wimbledon banned Russian and Belarusian players from this year's Championships to avoid "being used to benefit the propaganda machine of the Russian regime", tournament chiefs said on Tuesday.

The All England Club (AELTC), which runs the grass-court Grand Slam, announced the move last week in response to Russia's invasion of Ukraine.

It means stars such as US Open champion Daniil Medvedev, Andrey Rublev, Aryna Sabalenka and Victoria Azarenka cannot play at the event, which starts in late June.

The decision was criticised by the ATP, which runs the men's tour, and women's tour organisers the WTA, while Rublev labelled it "complete discrimination" and defending Wimbledon champion Novak Djokovic said it was "crazy".

But AELTC chairman Ian Hewitt defended the move, saying the decision was made after careful consideration, taking into account UK government guidance for sporting bodies with the aim of limiting Russia's influence.

"These are in effect two options - declining entries or allowing entries but only with specific written declarations (against the invasion of Ukraine) from individual players," he said at Wimbledon's annual media briefing.

He added: "First, even if we were to accept entries from Russian and Belarusian players with written declarations, we would risk their success or participation at Wimbledon being used to benefit the propaganda machine of the Russian regime, which we could not accept.

"Second, we have a duty to ensure no actions we take should put players or their families at



We understand and deeply regret the impact this decision will have on every individual affected and so many innocent people are suffering as a result of this terrible war

IAN HEWITT

risk. We understand and deeply regret the impact this decision will have on every individual affected and so many innocent people are suffering as a result of this terrible war.

"But... we believe we have made the most responsible decision possible in the circumstances and that, within the framework of the government's position, there is no viable alternative to the decision we have taken in this truly exceptional and tragic situation."

Hewitt rejected accusations of discrimination, saying it was a "considered view" after a

process that included conversations with players directly affected.

Downgrade?

As the Grand Slam tournaments are autonomous, possible sanctions by the ATP and the WTA could include a refusal to award ranking points at the event, which runs from June 27 to July 10.

That could reduce Wimbledon to the status of a high-profile exhibition event.

Players representing Russia and Belarus are currently allowed to take part in ATP and WTA events but are barred from com-

peting under the name or flag of their countries. Their national teams have, however, been banished from the Davis Cup and BJK Cup competitions.

The WTA and ATP are holding meetings in Madrid this week to decide how to react.

AELTC chief executive Sally Bolton said officials were in daily communication with the tours, adding: "We continue to make the case for why we have made the decision we have made and the unique set of circumstances we find ourselves in here in the UK. They absolutely appreciate that."

Bolton also revealed that discussions were taking place with the British government regarding Russian and Belarusian coaches and other officials but confirmed Russian media outlets would be banned.

Spectators and club members from the two countries will be

able to attend.

World number one Djokovic will be able to challenge for his seventh Wimbledon crown after the officials confirmed players would not be required to be vaccinated against coronavirus.

The unvaccinated Serb was deported from Australia in January after losing a last-ditch court bid to stay in the country -- denying him the chance to defend his Australian Open title.

Last year's Covid-related restrictions at Wimbledon, which included reduced crowds for most of the tournament and strict conditions imposed on the players, will all be lifted.

"We are planning to return to a normal Championships this year," said Bolton. "And so we don't intend to implement any of the Covid-19 measures that we saw last year in any substantial fashion."

AFP



Roger Federer has not played competitively since last July

Roger Federer says he will play ATP Basel in October

Paris, France - Former men's tennis world number one Roger Federer, plagued by recurring knee problems for the last two years, will play singles at the ATP Basel indoor tournament in October, organisers said.

Federer, who hasn't played competitively since losing last July in the quarter-finals at Wimbledon to Pole Hubert Hurkacz, replied to the organisers' Instagram announcement with the message: "Looking forward to playing back home."

The tournament, like the 10-time winner, will be making its return after an enforced break having not taken place for the past two years due to the Covid-19 pandemic.

"After a two-year break due to the pandemic, the Swiss Indoors Basel will return to the ATP Tour in the fall of 2022," organisers said in a statement.

"10-time singles champion

and hometown hero Roger Federer has announced his comeback to the stadium at St. Jakobshalle," adding that "the worldwide interest...is expected to be tremendous".

Federer, who turns 41 in August, is also due to play in the three-day team event Laver Cup with long-time rival Rafael Nadal in London in September.

The duo teamed up to play doubles at the inaugural event in 2017.

Federer withdrew from the Olympics last year and underwent his third bout of knee surgery in 18 months, to "suture" his right internal meniscus and "treat (his) cartilage".

Meanwhile, Nadal is to return to competitive action at next week's Madrid Open, a month out from the French Open which the Spanish legend has won 13 times.

AFP

Raducanu set for fourth coach in a year after ending association with Beltz

London, United Kingdom - US Open champion Emma Raducanu is set to appoint her fourth coach in a year after ending her association with Torben Beltz after just five months, she said on Tuesday.

The 19-year-old is due to play in the Madrid Open this week as she builds up to the French Open but said she felt she required a "new training model".

The Lawn Tennis Association's (LTA) head of women's coaching, Iain Bates, will work with Raducanu this week.

She will bid to build on her run

to the Stuttgart quarter-finals last week where she lost to world number one and eventual champion Iga Swiatek.

"I want to thank Torben for his coaching, professionalism and dedication over the last half a year," said Raducanu, who on Monday rose to her highest world ranking of 11.

"He has a huge heart and I have enjoyed our strong chemistry during the time together.

"I feel the best direction for my development is to transition to a new training model with the LTA supporting in the interim."

Beltz previously coached former world number one and fellow German Angelique Kerber when she won the Australian Open and US Open titles in 2016.

Raducanu has gone through a number of coaches in the past year since she first made her mark in reaching the last 16 at Wimbledon, even before she had received her final school exam results.

She replaced Nigel Sears with Andrew Richardson after Wimbledon, but Richardson's contract was not renewed despite Raducanu's stunning success at

the US Open.

Raducanu could turn towards Italian Riccardo Piatti, who has coached among others France's former world number seven, the mercurial Richard Gasquet, and 2016 Wimbledon finalist Milos Raonic.

He is available after cutting ties with compatriot Jannik Sinner, who he guided into the men's world top 10.

Raducanu trained at his academy prior to embarking on her clay court campaign earlier in April.

AFP



Emma Raducanu could now turn towards Italian Riccardo Piatti

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