

SAYYID BADR MEETS UK FOREIGN SECRETARY



H E Sayyid Badr Hamad al Busaidi, Foreign Minister, met James Cleverly, Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs of United Kingdom, at the Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office on Monday. The meeting reviewed the existing relations of friendship and cooperation between the two countries. The two also explored opportunities for new partnerships and investments in renewable energy projects, technical education and innovation. The two sides affirmed their interest in encouraging the development of nascent companies, and small and medium enterprises.

South Batinah to get 3 waterfront projects to boost tourism

Our Correspondent
Muscat

The Ministry of Housing and Urban Planning (MHUP) has allocated three sites for establishment of waterfront projects in South Batinah as part of its efforts to stimulate the economy and attract investments.

An official at MHUP said that the ministry has marked a number of investment sites to support development projects in the governorate. "These include the construction of three waterfront projects, of which two - spread over 10,990sqm and 222,441sqm - are in the wilayat of Barka, while the third will be in Mussanah on an area of 180,425sqm."

He added that the ministry has approved more than 30 urban plots for various uses. According to the official, the ministry has also allocated 11 sites for establishment of various food security projects in Barka, Nakhl and Mussanah. These will include cultivation of onions, garlic, wheat, vegetables, fruits and fodder, and a honey factory on a total area of



(Supplied photo)

Of the three waterfront projects, two - spread over 10,990sqm and 222,441sqm - are in the wilayat of Barka, while the third will be in Mussanah on an area of 180,425sqm

MHUP OFFICIAL

more than 2.6mn sqm.

The Directorate General of Housing and Urban Planning in South Batinah has also launched a comprehensive plan for land alongside the Batinah Coastal Road in the governorate. "The

plan will see establishment of Batinah Market in Al Rumais Square in Barka on an area of 12,7046sqm, and a commercial complex and an integrated fuel station in Al Sawadi Square of Barka on 95,654sqm and

31,510sqm, respectively. In addition, an entertainment project spread of 131,244 sqm will be set up in Al Quraym Square in Mussanah."

About the ministry's efforts, he said that 3,000 residential plots of land are planned for various purposes in villages in South Batinah.

MHUP has stated that the value of real estate transactions in South Batinah in 2022 amounted to more than RO300.

► NEWS BRIEF

TURKEY, RUSSIA, SYRIA, IRAN TO HOLD QUADRIPARTITE MEETING TODAY

Moscow - Discussions between delegations of Syria and Iran began in Moscow on Monday in preparation of a quadripartite meeting between Turkey, Russia, Syria and Iran, which will start in Russia on Tuesday.

In mid-March 2023, Turkish media reported that delegations from the foreign ministries of Turkey, Russia, Iran and Syria will meet in Moscow.

The quadripartite meeting is the first official talks to be held at a ministerial level between Turkey and Syria since the beginning of the Syrian crisis in 2011, and the resulting tension between the two neighbours.

Finland to become NATO's 31st member on Tuesday

Brussels, Belgium - Finland's flag will be hoisted outside NATO headquarters on Tuesday when it becomes the newest member of the Western alliance, Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg said.

"Tomorrow, we will welcome Finland as the 31st member," Stoltenberg told reporters on the eve of a historic meeting of NATO foreign ministers in Brussels.

Russian President Vladimir Putin's all-out invasion of Ukraine last year upended European security and pushed Finland - and its neighbour Sweden - to drop decades of non-alignment and seek to join NATO's protective umbrella.

Objections from Turkey and Hungary held up Helsinki's bid for months, and are still blocking Stockholm, before the parliament in Ankara cleared the final obstacle for Finland with a vote last week.

Completing the ratification in



NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg speaks during a press conference at the NATO headquarters in Brussels on Monday

well under a year still makes this the fastest membership process in the alliance's recent history. Now all that is left are the last highly choreographed formalities at NATO headquarters in Brussels.

Finland's foreign minister will hand over the formal accession papers to US Secretary of State Antony Blinken, the keeper of NATO's founding treaty, and the

country's blue-and-white flag will be raised alongside those of its new allies.

Finland's President Sauli Niinisto will speak at the event, Helsinki said.

"President Putin went to war against Ukraine with a clear aim to get less NATO," Stoltenberg said. "He's getting the exact opposite."

AFP

Oman crude price jumps 8% as OPEC+ unveils output cut

Our Correspondent
Muscat

Oman crude oil prices surged more than eight per cent on Monday after top oil producers announced an output cut of more than a million barrels per day (bpd).

The official selling price of Oman crude climbed 8.4 per cent to US\$84.11 per barrel (for June delivery) at the Dubai Mercantile Exchange (DME).

The main global crude benchmarks, Brent and Western Texas Intermediate (WTI), also jumped around eight per cent at one point on Monday following the output cuts by Saudi Arabia, Iraq, the UAE, Kuwait, Algeria and Oman, which was the biggest since the group slashed 2mn bpd in October 2022.

Crude prices have come down over the past year as concerns about a possible recession caused by higher interest rates



have offset supply worries sparked by sanctions on Russia over its invasion of Ukraine.

As per a DME statement, the monthly average price of Oman crude for April delivery amounted to US\$82.23 per barrel, which is US\$1.31 higher compared to the price for March delivery.

Oman's daily average production of crude oil continued to remain above 1mn bpd during the first two months of 2023, up three per cent in comparison to daily average output recorded in

the same period of last year.

Daily average oil output during the January-February period of 2023 increased to 1.063mn bpd compared to 1.032mn bpd in the same period of 2022, according to data released by National Centre for Statistics and Information. The average price at which Oman crude sold in the first two months of 2023 rose 6.6 per cent to US\$81.8 per barrel against US\$76.7 per barrel recorded in the same period of 2022.

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ICT spending in Oman may reach \$3.5bn by 2026



Finnish centre-right leader Orpo ousts Marin

Omani educational app wins award for excellence, creativity

Our Correspondent
Muscat

An educational mobile app created by a research team at Sultan Qaboos University (SQU) to help students learn scientific concepts through interactive, game-based activities has won the Jazan Award for Excellence and Creativity, held in Saudi Arabia recently.

Called Dr Electron and funded by the Ministry of Higher Education, Research and Innovation, the app won the award in the innovation category.

Developed by Prof Sulaiman Muhammad al Balushi, supervisor of the project, and Huda Ali al Hosani, a PhD student at SQU,



(Supplied photos)



The app seeks to explain scientific concepts to students in the Arab world in an interesting and fun way

HUDA ALI AL HOSANI

the free app is now available on Google Play.

The app was developed in response to recommendations of several international studies that point to the need for a phone application based on the concept of gamification for teaching scientific concepts to students.

Speaking to *Muscat Daily*,

Huda said, "We started in 2021. This is our second app after Dr Science. Both these apps are based on gamification. For Dr Electron, we obtained the intellectual property rights from the

ducted on it."

The app, Huda said, seeks to explain scientific concepts to students in the Arab world, and dispel misconceptions in physics, chemistry, biology, environmental sciences, earth sciences, astronomy and space sciences in an interesting and fun way.

Huda explained that the gamification approach is based on the use of game elements such as badges, achievement boards, points and stages. "It is designed to help students understand scientific concepts and correct their scientific misconceptions. The app consists of more than 500 scientific questions in various fields of science."

Elaborating further on Dr Electron, she said that creating the app - one that would be distinct from the many already available - from scratch was a challenge. "We also encountered numerous difficulties in verifying the accuracy of every scientific fact, all the information and images used in the application."

The app targets students of Grades 3 to 12. "Anyone in any age group can download it and enjoy it, as it encourages self-learning outside the classroom."

The team is working on developing Dr Electron further and participating in international competitions to spread scientific awareness and concepts.

Henna in the time of Ramadan



Our Correspondent

Muscat

Women across the globe love to apply intricate henna designs on their hands and feet during Ramadan. Henna application is part of Islamic culture and tradition, more so during celebrations and festivals.

Fatima al Balushi, who looks forward to complementing her Eid and Ramadan evening finery with henna, described it as a symbol of happiness. "Our religion inspires women to embellish ourselves and look good. Allah has given us this occasion to celebrate after fasting for a month, so we should show up as our best self."

Women have been known to use henna on their nails and hands during the time of the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH). Over time, the popularity of henna as a decorative art grew across cultures. The demand for henna grows manifold, particularly during Ramadan.

Sabah Qureshi, a local self-taught henna artist who learnt the art on her mother's insistence, said, "Initially, I was not interested in henna art. But when I started practising it on my cousins and relatives, I started enjoying it."

Sabah now has her own business, promoting it through social media. Following her own experience in this line of work, she notes that parlours don't pay well for the effort henna artists put in.

"The craft is very delicate, requiring many hours of hard work and multiple sittings. If we work in parlours, the profits are split 50/50. If we apply henna worth RO10, we get paid only RO5, which is less than half of what you deserve."

Sabah also makes home visits for the conven-

ience of her clients. "Some treat us like family, while others are ruthless and drive a hard bargain. They are reluctant to pay for the hard work we do and say it's overpriced. People think that being a henna artist is easy, but only we know how we stay up late at night making henna cones. It is a very demanding job and there's a lot of hard work behind it."

With demand increasing during Ramadan, managing clients becomes difficult for some

henna artists. Sabah finishes all her bookings before Maghrib prayers. "Just days before Eid, the schedule gets really hectic. Sometimes I leave home at 7am in the morning and return at around 6pm."

Common henna motifs during the month are the Moon and lanterns on hands. Some clients also like 'Ramadan Mubarak' written. "For Eid, expats usually opt for intricate designs, while Omani ladies love Arabic designs which are

simple."

According to Sabah, applying henna for five-six customers in the same house saves time and travel.

"We adjust our schedule and make more time to pray, read and understand the Quran. You get rewarded many times over during Ramadan for every pious act, that's why this month is sacred."

In addition to applying intricate henna de-

signs, Sabah has a separate clientele loyal to her organic and handcrafted henna cones.

Adeeba Fareed, a makeup artist who also applies henna, said, "There's a lot of demand as Ramadan begins. Sometimes, people book us in advance to be sure of getting the best time. At

the beginning of Ramadan, I also see a lot of newlywed clients."

As expected of all good Muslims, especially during Ramadan, Adeeba also fulfils her charity obligations. "I target construction sites near my house. Since the workers are away from their families, I give them food for iftar. Allah will provide us many times more than what we give others."

(Contributed by Deeba Parween)



Campaign launched to distribute 10,000 Ramadan food parcels among needy

Our Correspondent

Muscat

Oman Chamber of Commerce and Industry (OCCI), through the Omani Product Promotion Committee, has launched the fifth edition of the Made in Oman Ramadan Parcels campaign.

A statement issued by OCCI said, 'The chamber, in cooperation with the Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion, launched the campaign, which aims to distribute more than 10,000 Ramadan packages among needy families in various governorates of the sultanate.

'The campaign also aims to promote Omani products and foster social solidarity among members of society.'

The chamber's branch in Al Wusta, in coordination with the Governor's Office and charity teams, distributed nearly 400 Ramadan parcels in the various wilayats of the governorate on Sunday.

Work begins to include 3 wilayats of Dakhliyah in Unesco GNLC

Our Correspondent
Muscat

The Office of the Governor of Dakhliyah held a meeting on Monday to discuss the inclusion of three Omani wilayats in the Unesco Global Network of Learning Cities (GNLC) for the year 2023.

Sheikh Hilal bin Said al Hajri, Governor of Dakhliyah, headed the meeting in the presence of the Omani National Committee for Education, Culture and Science.

The project is being implemented within the framework of Oman's efforts to raise national indicators in the education field for sustainable development and achieve the targets of the Fourth



Sustainable Development Goal (SDG 4), which is to ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities.

The project aims to highlight

the efforts of wilayats in areas related to sustainable development, such as quality education, youth empowerment and environmental sustainability.

The meeting discussed the

work mechanisms for joining GNLC, and preparing a file to be submitted within a specified period for the same.

The Unesco GNLC, which was initiated in 2012, is an interna-

tional platform that enables cities to share expertise in advocating and enhancing lifelong learning for all.

Unesco defines a learning city as one that effectively mobilises its resources in every sector to promote inclusive learning from basic to higher education; revitalises learning in families and communities; facilitates learning for and in the workplace; extends the use of modern learning technologies; enhances quality and excellence in learning; and fosters a culture of learning throughout life.

In doing so, the city enhances individual empowerment and social inclusion, economic development and cultural prosperity, and sustainable development.



Mini oases planned in Dhofar to boost tourism

Our Correspondent
Muscat

As part of its efforts to stimulate tourism, the Ministry of Heritage and Tourism (MHT), in cooperation with Dhofar Municipality, will establish a number of mini oases in several tourist sites in the governorate.

In a statement, the ministry said that with the mini oases it aims to provide services to tourists, including cafes, restaurants, facilities for children's games, and a few other services.

MHT, in cooperation with Dhofar Municipality and Omran Group, is implementing several new tourism projects in Dhofar, including the Hamreer Talalat project, the Ain Garziz development project, the Ittin Gardens camping sites project, and the Al Mughsail Beach project.

The ministry also opened up Kot al Askar, Kot Hamran, Rakhut Fort and the waterfront of Al Baleed Archaeological Park for private sector investments.

Bids invited for development of two nature reserves in Dhofar

Our Correspondent
Muscat

Environment Authority (EA) has invited bids for development of Khor al Qurm al Kabeer Reserve and Khor Taqah Reserve in Dhofar to attract investments and stimulate tourism in the governorate.

An EA official said, "As part of our efforts to support the national economy and benefit from the natural reserves in the country, the authority has floated a tender for management and development of the Khor al Qurm al Kabeer Reserve and Khor Taqah Reserve."

Khor al Qurm can be accessed via the road connecting Salalah to Raysut. It has a unique collection of diverse flora.

Khor Taqah Reserve is a suitable environment for many living organisms. It includes diverse flora - freshwater and brackish water plants, plants of the sickle family and reed plants. It also has Ghaf and ornamental trees, besides more than 200 species of



birds and about 20 species of fish in the khor.

Interested companies must submit a report on how they propose to develop the two reserves and an action plan for the management of the sites. Investors must adhere to the principles of sustainable tourism development, preserve natural and cultural heritage, and refrain from engaging in any activity that adversely affects the environmental and cultural values of the two

sites.

"Oman has 26 nature reserves, through which the authority aims to preserve the sultanate's biological diversity and promote it in the world of ecotourism," the EA official said.

Nature reserves in Oman are a major tourist attraction, offering scenic nature, camping and diving facilities to enjoy coral reefs and other underwater treasures.

The last date for submission of bids is May 18.

Pact signed to set up integrated bus and taxi stand in Buraimi

Our Correspondent
Muscat

Oman National Transport Company (Mwasalat) signed a memorandum of understanding on Monday with the Ministry of Interior, represented by the Office of the Governor of Buraimi, to set up an integrated public transport bus and taxi stand in the governorate.

The agreement was signed by Dr Hamad bin Ahmed al Busaidi, Governor of Buraimi, and Badr Mohammed al Nadabi, CEO of Mwasalat.

The MoU aims to strengthen public-private partnerships in the



transport sector. The project will include a bus station for city and intercity transport, waiting area for passengers and taxis, and a smart micro mobility station with shaded and public parking

spaces.

At the signing ceremony, Busaidi said, "With the project, we aim to link and integrate cities using the smart transportation system and strengthen partnerships between the public and private sectors in line with an urban strategy."

According to Nadabi, the mass transit lines linking Buraimi with other governorates are among the most active ones operated by Mwasalat.

Mwasalat operates eight trips per day for about 400 passengers, transporting around 12,000 passengers per month in Buraimi.

Tender Announcement

شركة مسقط لتوزيع الكهرباء
Muscat Electricity Distribution Company
أحدى شركات مجموعة نماء
Member of Nama Group

Muscat Electricity Distribution Company S.A.O.C invites interested companies to participate in the following tenders :

Tender No.	Description	Last Date of Buying	Date of Submission	Grade	Tender Price (OMR)
MEDC/2023/015-2	Supply and Delivery of Headsets	11/04/2023	19/04/2023	Specialized	Free cost
MEDC/2023/016-2	Supplying of Jumper Connection	11/04/2023	19/04/2023	DCRP Approved Consultant Type 1 & 2	26.250

The table below shows the instructions for participation: -

Participation	- Companies registered with Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion and in I Supplier with Nama Groupe may obtain Tender documents. - The amount specified above is including 5% VAT. - Riyada card holders from Small and Medium Enterprises, SME, are exempted from Tender fees - The amount specified above is Non-Refundable payment (Terms and Condition apply) - To obtain the tender document and payment procedure, please visit MEDC Website/Vendor/E-Tendering, www.medcoman.com or call 24588600 – Ext: 8685, 8707
Enquiries	- Any inquiry can be sent to MEDC Website/Vendor/E-Tendering, www.medcoman.com , one week before bid submission date. - Any request for clarification received after the above-mentioned period will not be considered.
Tender Submission	- Please follow SUBMISSION OF TENDER mentioned in clause 20.0 in Prime Document and to the supplier guideline available MEDC Website/Vendor/E-Tendering, www.medcoman.com. - The bid amount should be submitted without VAT in the E-Tendering System.
Guarantee	- The Tender should enclose a bank guarantee or a certified cheque issued by any bank in the Sultanate of Oman Unconditional and irrevocable and shall be disbursement as soon as it is submitted for the value of (1%) of the tender value valid for a period of at least ninety (90) days from the last date of tender submission and addressed to the CHAIRMAN OF PROCURMENT COMMITTEE, MUSCAT ELECTRICITY DISTRIBUTION COMPANY S.A.O.C. - The bid bond should including 5% VAT. - The bid bond should be included in the commercial proposal only as sof copy. - Riyada card holders from Small and Medium Enterprises, SME, are exempted from bid bond requirements. - After the commercial opening , the qualified bidders will be notified to submit the original (hard copy) of bid bond to MEDC office. - Any tender not accompanied by a Tender Bond shall be rejected.
Terms and Conditions	- The Tender shall be valid for a period of at least ninety (90) days from the last date of tender submission including any extension thereof. - If the submission date extended, the bank guarantee or a certified cheque shall be extended in accordance with the bid extension date. - MEDC is not bound to accept the lowest (or highest) Tenderer. - Preference of awarding the tender will be given to those bidders who achieved a high percentage of purchasing from Local Products and have a High-level percentage of Omanization. - Muscat Electricity Distribution Company gives priority to award the projects to SMEs companies. - For projects whose value is less than OMR 10K, the priority to award will be given to registered companies that hold a valid certificate Of Reyadah. - Failure to comply with the instructions in tender document may lead to disqualification. - Any company that does not reach 30% Omanisation, including its sub-contractors, will be disqualified.

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FOREX RATES

(ROI equals)

Indian	213.83
Pakistan	741.08
Bangladesh	273.63
Philippines	141.93
Sri Lanka	839.46

*Rates as on April 03
Source: xe.com

BRIEFS

Russia says oil cuts 'in interests' of energy markets

The Kremlin said Monday oil output cuts by Russia, Saudi Arabia and other major producers that have caused prices to soar are "in the interests" of global markets.

The surprise move on Sunday came as oil prices have cooled in recent months after soaring last year following the start of the conflict in Ukraine.

"It is in the interests of global energy markets for world oil prices to remain at a good level," Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov told reporters.

"Whether other countries are happy with this or not is their business," he added.

The decision could anger the United States, which had already criticised the OPEC+ oil cartel, led by Saudi Arabia and Russia, over a previous cut in production last year.

Russia said it would extend until the end of the year its own voluntary production cut of 500,000 barrels per day.

OPEC+ announces surprise cuts of more than 1mn bpd

Riyadh, Saudi Arabia - Major oil powers led by Saudi Arabia announced a surprise production cut of more than one million barrels per day on Sunday, calling it a "precautionary" move aimed at stabilising the market.

The reductions, on top of a Russian decision to extend a cut of 500,000 barrels per day, and despite US calls to increase production, risk stoking inflation and pressure to raise interest rates.

Cuts by Saudi Arabia, Iraq, the UAE, Kuwait, Algeria and Oman from May to the end of the year will top one million barrels per day - the biggest reduction since the OPEC+ cartel slashed two million barrels per day in October.

Russia, a leading member of the OPEC+ cartel, said it was also extending an existing cut of 500,000 bpd to the end of this year, describing it as "a responsible and preventive action".

Oil prices soared almost six per cent in Asian trade on Monday morning with West Texas Intermediate jumping by 5.74 per cent to US\$80.01 a barrel and Brent climbing 5.67 per cent to US\$84.42.

A Saudi energy ministry official "emphasised that this is a precautionary measure aimed



Oman to cut oil output by 40,000 bpd from May

Muscat - Oman has announced that it will voluntarily cut production of 40,000 barrels of crude oil per day, starting from May 2023 until the end of the year.

The sultanate's oil production cut will be implemented in coordination with some countries participating in the OPEC+ agreement.

The Ministry of Energy and Minerals explained that this voluntary cut is a precautionary measure, besides the production cut agreed at the 33rd ministerial meeting of OPEC+ in October 2022.

at supporting the stability of the oil market", the official Saudi Press Agency said.

The cuts follow a drop in oil prices triggered by jitters over the banking sector, following the collapse of US lender SVB and UBS's hurried buy-out of troubled rival Credit Suisse, UAE-based oil expert Ibrahim

al-Ghitani told AFP.

Brent crude oil prices, trading just below US\$80 a barrel late last week, should bounce to above US\$80 as a result of the reductions, he said, calling prices below US\$80 "unacceptable" for OPEC+.

"The producing countries adhere to a balancing level that supports their large financial budget this year, and their next economic plans," Ghitani said.

The reductions follow a controversial decision in October by OPEC and its allies including Russia - collectively known as OPEC+ - to slash production by two million barrels per day.

That cut, the biggest since the height of the Covid pandemic in 2020, also came despite concerns it would fuel further inflation and push central banks to hike interest rates.

Saudi Arabia will cut 500,000 barrels per day, Iraq 211,000, the UAE 144,000, Kuwait 128,000, Algeria 48,000 and Oman 40,000, each country announced.

The reductions ignore calls from the United States to raise production as consumption rises and as China, the world's biggest oil consumer, reopens after its Covid shutdown.

ICT spending in Oman may reach \$3.5bn by 2026

Our Correspondent

Muscat



Jyoti Lalchandani

The information and communications technology (ICT) spending in Oman is set to reach US\$3.23bn in 2023 and US\$3.49bn by 2026, according to the latest predictions by the International Data Corporation (IDC).

Announcing its regional forecasts for the year ahead, IDC revealed that it expects telecommunications services spending in Oman to increase, with IT spending set to grow from US\$1.3bn in 2023 to US\$1.42bn in 2026. This aligns in support of Oman's endeavor to build ICT infrastructure to reduce the digital divide through its National Broadband Strategy, which envisions providing broadband service to more than 90 percent of urban areas by 2030.

"To navigate storms of disruption, organisations in Oman will need to invest in strengthening their digital resiliency so they are better positioned to succeed in new market environments as conditions continue to change," said Jyoti Lalchandani, IDC's group vice president and regional managing director for the Middle East.

"Regardless of what the econ-

omy throws at us over the coming 12 months, the implementation of further digitalisation in critical areas such as customer experience, operations, and financial management will be key to separating the thrivers from the survivors. To this end, we expect to see digital transformation spending as a share of overall IT spending continue to grow, reaching US\$1.42bn in 2026, up from US\$1.30bn in 2023," he added.

In a digital-first economy, where an enterprise's competitiveness is tied to its digital business model, leaders will avoid wholesale cutbacks in technology, IDC said. Furthermore, new tactics will be employed as tech leaders seek to realise maximum business value from their tech investments.

Trial operation begins for crude distillation unit at Duqm Refinery

Our Correspondent

Muscat

Duqm Refinery and Petrochemical Industries Company (OQ8) has announced the start of trial operations for the crude oil distillation unit at the refinery.

This step paves the way for operational readiness for all Duqm Refinery units, the most significant investment project in Oman's refining and petrochemical industries sector.

The refinery has a capacity of 230,000 barrels per day, with its design based on a hydrocracking unit and a petroleum coke unit. It will produce liquefied petroleum gas, naphtha, jet fuel, diesel, sulphur, and petroleum coke upon operation.

Hilal bin Ali al Kharusi, CEO of commercial, refining and petrochemical sector at OQ and chairman of OQ8, said that the trial operation of Duqm Refinery is a



development that moves forward according to the set plan. The trial operation goes through several phases before reaching maximum capacity, followed by commercial operation, which is expected by the end of this year.

He added that all support units in the refinery project, which has reached a completion rate of 97.5 per cent, have been operated, taking into account the priority of safe operation for all units.

Kharushi further said, "The

company has carried out several exercises to evaluate the efficiency of the integrated emergency response plan, the emergency handling system, in addition to evaluating fire-fighting, rescue, containment of hazardous materials, and the followed security procedures."

Kharusi explained that the trial operation coincides with the progress made at the Ras Markaz Crude Oil Storage project - one of OQ's projects - which has completed the main

construction works of its first phase and successfully received two crude oil ships.

Additionally, Marafiq - a subsidiary of OQ and Thai Gulf Energy Development - has completed the power and water station in Duqm. This station will provide 326MW of electricity and 36,000 cubic meters of industrial water daily, supplying energy and water to the Duqm Refinery and Petrochemical Industries (OQ8) as well as the Oman Tank Terminal Company (OTTCCO).

Kharusi affirmed that these projects are interconnected, and their completion represents a positive development and a significant step in enhancing investments in the Duqm Special Economic Zone.

Duqm Refinery and Petrochemical Industries is a joint venture between OQ Group and Kuwait Petroleum International.

Up to 30% of jobs may go in UBS-Credit Suisse merger

Geneva, Switzerland - The merger between banks Credit Suisse and UBS could see up to 36,000 jobs being cut across the world, the SonntagsZeitung weekly reported on Sunday.

The takeover by UBS of Credit Suisse was hastily arranged by the Swiss government on March 19 to prevent a global financial meltdown, following fears of contagion from the collapse of banks in the United States.

UBS announced on Wednesday it would bring back former chief executive Sergio Ermotti to handle the huge risks involved in the Swiss banking giant's controversial absorption of its troubled rival Credit Suisse.

On Sunday, citing internal anonymous sources, SonntagsZeitung said management was mulling cutting between 20 per cent and 30 per cent of the workforce, meaning between 25,000 and 36,000 jobs.



Up to 11,000 jobs could be cut in Switzerland alone, according to the weekly, which did not provide details of which posts could be targeted. Before the merger, UBS and Credit Suisse had employed slightly more than 72,000 and 50,000 people, respectively.

UBS and Credit Suisse, the second-biggest bank in Switzerland, were both among the select banks around the world considered to be global systemically important financial institutions (G-SIFIs) and therefore deemed too big to fail.

UBS chairman Colm Kelleher said this week: "There's a huge amount of risk in integrating these businesses."

Credit Suisse was embroiled in a series of scandals in the years leading up to a March 15 share price collapse, when investor confidence plunged following two bank failures in the United States.

Room for one more? Saudi moves in on Gulf aviation market

Riyadh, Saudi Arabia - Undeterred by a crowded Gulf market, Saudi Arabia is going all in on an aggressive aviation expansion, with a massive jet order and the launch of a new national carrier.

The project aligns with a bid to remake the once closed-off kingdom as a business and tourism magnet, but analysts say that even with official backing, its path to success is complicated.

Last month Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman, Saudi Arabia's de facto ruler, unveiled Riyadh Air, the new airline which is intended to transform the capital into "a gateway to the world", according to state media.

Two days later, officials said Riyadh Air and Saudia, the kingdom's existing flag-carrier based in Jeddah, would purchase 78 Boeing 787 Dreamliner jets.

The deal, which the White House valued at "nearly



New role for Riyadh

Saudia, also known as Saudi Arabian Airlines, was founded in 1945, receiving its first jet as a gift from US President Franklin Roosevelt.

At the time, instead of Riyadh, foreigners were more likely to enter the kingdom via Jeddah on the Red Sea coast, which remains the "Gateway to Mecca",

welcoming millions of Muslims performing the hajj and umrah pilgrimages each year.

Foreign embassies did not relocate to Riyadh, in central Saudi Arabia, until the 1980s.

These days, however, Riyadh is at the heart of Prince Mohammed's "Vision 2030" reform agenda intended to help transition the world's biggest crude oil

exporter away from fossil fuels.

Officials talk it up as a rival to Gulf business hub Dubai, predicting that its current population of eight million will balloon to 15-20mn by 2030.

Last November, officials announced plans for a new airport in Riyadh that is set to accommodate 120mn travellers per year by 2030, up from roughly

35mn today.

The projected growth makes Saudia's current model - in which it effectively has two hubs, Jeddah and Riyadh - untenable, Saudi Finance Minister Mohammed al-Jadaan told AFP.

"Jeddah alone needs one airline to concentrate on it with the hajj and umrah... So you need an airline that is focused on Riyadh," Jadaan said.

The new airline and airport reflect a mentality of "if you build it, they will come", said Robert Mogielnicki of the Arab Gulf States Institute in Washington.

"The question of what the demand side of this equation looks like has yet to be settled, but the Saudis must be pretty confident to push ahead with such a massive aircraft order," he said.

The convenient location of airports in the Middle East - well-placed for flights to Europe, Asia

and Africa - has helped fuel their rise as major hubs.

The trade group Airports Council International predicts the region's airports will see 1.1bn passengers by 2040, up from 405mn in 2019.

Apart from Riyadh Air, Saudi Arabia is also launching NEOM Airlines, to be based in the planned US\$500bn futuristic megacity of the same name.

Klaus Goersch, the airline's CEO, wrote in a recent blog post that it "will be operational at the end of 2024" and that NEOM itself could eventually become "a global aviation hub".

Saudi Arabia's expansion strategy hinges partly on tapping its roughly 35mn-strong population, which officials see as a major advantage over less-populated rivals like the United Arab Emirates and Qatar.

Fed says nflation outlook has worsened since start of year

Washington, US - The US inflationary picture has worsened since the start of the year, which could prolong the Federal Reserve's ongoing fight against rising prices, a top Fed official has warned.

The central bank "may have more work to do," in its inflation fight if the data "show continued strength in the economy and slower disinflation," Lisa Cook, a voting member of the Fed's rate-setting committee, said in prepared remarks to an economic conference in Ohio.

The Fed has hiked its benchmark lending rate nine times in quick succession since March 2022 as part of an aggressive attempt to bring historically-high inflation down towards its long term target of two percent.

But recent turmoil in the banking sector sparked by the dramatic collapse of Silicon Valley Bank amid concerns over its interest-rate exposure caused the Fed to rethink a bigger hike in March.

It instead opted for a smaller quarter percentage-point increase.

Fed Chair Jerome Powell suggested after the decision that the Fed may raise interest rates just once more before bringing its current hiking cycle to an end.



Federal Reseve Bank headquarters in Washinton, DC

US Fed has hiked its benchmark lending rate nine times in quick succession since March 2022 as part of an aggressive attempt to bring historically-high inflation down towards its long term target of two per cent

Data released earlier Friday showed the Fed's favored measure of inflation slowed last month, providing some relief as it attempts to balance tackling higher prices with banking concerns.

But in her speech Friday, Cook warned that core inflation, which excludes volatile food and energy prices, remains elevated well above the level the Fed would like to see.

"The inflation picture is even

less favorable than it appeared earlier this year," she said.

"Altogether, the incoming data would suggest a somewhat higher inflation rate for this year and stronger economic growth."

But Cook added that she would be "closely watching developments in the banking sector, which have the potential to tighten credit conditions and counteract some of that momentum," in the economy.

"The process of returning inflation to two percent has a long way to go and is likely to be uneven and bumpy," she said.

AFP



In this file photo a man buys bread in the Ulus district in Ankara, Turkey, on January 27, 2023 (AFP)

Turkey's inflation slows to 50% ahead of election

Istanbul, Turkey - Turkey's annual inflation rate slowed to 50 per cent in March, official data showed on Monday, delivering another boost for President Recep Tayyip Erdogan ahead May elections.

The inflation rate slowed for a fifth consecutive month from a high of more than 85 per cent, according to the state statistics agency. The official rate stood at 50.5 last month, down from 55.2 per cent in February.

The slowdown was led by a drop in the cost Turkey's energy imports, the figures showed.

But analysts warn that con-

sumer price increase may start speeding up again unless Turkey radically alters its economic policies.

Erdogan has tried to fight inflation by slashing interests rates, the opposite approach taken by central banks in other countries.

Analysts warn that the economy may start heating up as the government rebuilds huge swaths of Turkey's southeast that were hit by a massive earthquake in February in which more than 50,000 people died.

Turkey's economy must now absorb the consequences of the catastrophe which, according to

the World Bank, caused an estimated US\$34.2bn in direct physical damages - the equivalent of four percent of Turkey's 2021 gross domestic product.

Erdogan, who will try to extend his rule into a third decade in the May 14 election, put the cost of the damage at US\$104bn.

Turkey's official inflation rate is questioned by independent economists from the ENAG research group, which estimates that consumer prices increased at an annualised rate of 112.5 per cent in March, down from 126.9 per cent in February.

AFP

Iraq inaugurates new oil refinery to reduce imports

Karbala, Iraq - Iraq inaugurated an oil refinery in the central city of Karbala on Saturday, a project the government hopes will reduce its dependency on imports.

Oil Minister Hayan Abdel Ghani announced the refinery had begun "commercial production" after a ribbon-cutting ceremony led by Prime Minister Mohammed Shia al-Sudani.

It has the capacity to refine 140,000 barrels per day and "help meet local demand for petrol, kerosene and heating oil, while reducing imports", Abdel Ghani said.

Despite its immense oil and gas reserves, Iraq remains dependent on imports to meet energy needs.

The minister said the refinery, built by South Korean firm Hyundai, can produce nine million litres of fuel a day -- equivalent to more than half Iraq's daily imports of 15mn litres.

The refinery also has the capacity to produce 200 megawatts of electricity and "60 megawatts of them will be allocated to the national grid", Abdel Ghani added.



Workers go about their tasks at the Karbala oil refinery on the date it launched operations in Karbala, Iraq on Sunday (AFP)

Iraq, the second largest producer within the Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC), exports an average of 3.3mn barrels of oil per day.

Crude exports represent around 90 per cent of the government's revenue.

Ravaged by decades of conflict, Iraq's crumbling infrastructure and endemic corruption have obstructed reconstruction efforts. The Karbala refinery is "the first to be built since the 1980s with such production capacity", an oil ministry official told AFP when tests were run in September.

Three other refineries in operation across Iraq meet about half of the country's demand for refined products and the rest is imported.

In March, the prime minister announced a campaign to combat the severe impacts of climate change on the water-scarce country, including by promoting clean and renewable energy.

Sudani said Iraq was "moving forward to conclude contracts for constructing renewable energy power plants to provide one-third of our electricity demand by 2030".

AFP

Business confidence slumps among Japan's big manufacturers

Tokyo, Japan - Japan's largest manufacturers feel less optimistic about business conditions with confidence falling to its lowest level in more than two years, a key survey showed Monday.

The Bank of Japan's closely watched quarterly Tankan survey is considered the broadest indicator of how Japanese businesses are faring.

It reports the difference between the percentage of firms that are upbeat and those that see conditions as unfavourable.

Among major manufacturers, business confidence fell to plus one from plus seven three months earlier.

The reading was the lowest since December 2020, marking the fifth quarterly drop in sentiment, and was below market expectations of plus four.

Optimism grew slightly among non-manufacturers, however, from 19 to 20. A positive figure means more businesses feel optimistic than pessimistic.

During the fraught first



Among major Japanese manufacturers, business confidence fell to plus one from plus seven three months earlier

months of the Covid-19 pandemic, in June 2020, the Tankan score for Japan's big manufacturers plunged to minus 34.

Tsuyoshi Ueno, a senior economist at NLI Research Institute, had predicted a drop in the manufacturing reading ahead of the survey's release on Monday.

"Business confidence among large manufacturers is expected

to worsen markedly, given high raw material and fuel prices, as overseas demand falls and the global semiconductor market continues to deteriorate," he said.

Central banks around the world have hiked interest rates to tackle soaring inflation linked to the war in Ukraine and other factors, but the Bank of Japan has stuck to its longstanding

monetary easing policies.

The BoJ's new governor Kazuo Ueda is due to take the helm this month when Haruhiko Kuroda steps down after a decade in the job.

In February, Ueda said the continuation of monetary easing was "appropriate", warning of uncertainty in financial markets and the global economy.

AFP

Car battery recycling market gears up for future boom

Freiberg, Germany - Researcher Anna Vanderbruggen peers into a vat of dark bubbling liquid, the result of a process she has developed to recover graphite from old lithium-ion batteries.

Although graphite represents up to a quarter of the weight of the batteries, no one has yet come up with a viable plan to recycle it, according to Vanderbruggen.

The 29-year-old researcher is still fine-tuning her method but has already received an award from the European Institute of Innovation and Technology (EIT) for her efforts.

As Europe shifts gear from fossil fuel vehicles to electrified cars, recycling graphite as well as other elements in batteries is gradually becoming a major

focus.

All the more so as the continent seeks to wean itself off its reliance on countries like China for raw materials.

"Battery manufacturers were not interested" in recycled graphite up to now because "they could get it at low cost in China", Vanderbruggen told AFP.

Her method, developed at the Helmholtz Research Institute in Freiberg, Germany, involves extracting graphite from "black mass", a powder that also contains cobalt, nickel, lithium and manganese.

"You put the black mass in water and add some chemicals and air bubbles, like in a jacuzzi," Vanderbruggen, who is from France, said.

"The graphite attaches itself



French scientist Anna Vanderbruggen mixes chemicals with a pipette into the graphit recycling system in a laboratory (AFP)

to the bubbles, whereas the metals are hydrophilic and therefore remain in the water."

Vanderbruggen also works as a consultant for businesses exploring the opportunities that re-

cycling electric car batteries could bring in the future.

Rising costs

Increasing raw material costs and shortages have led to a surge

of interest in the field.

The price of lithium has increased by 13 per cent over the past five years, according to Philippe Barboux, a professor of chemistry at PSL University in Paris.

Lithium has not been recycled on a large scale up to now "because it was not profitable", he said.

But that looks set to change with 350mn electric cars expected to be on the road worldwide by 2030, up from 16.5mn in 2021, according to the International Energy Agency (IEA).

"In 10 years' time, so many batteries will be manufactured that lithium will absolutely have to be recycled, otherwise there won't be enough," Barboux said.

In theory, the technology now

exists to recycle almost all the materials that make up lithium-ion batteries, according to the experts interviewed by AFP.

German group Aurubis, one of Europe's largest suppliers of non-ferrous metals, claims to be able to recycle at least 95 per cent of the metals that make up "black mass" at a pilot plant it has set up in Hamburg.

French mining group Eramet, Belgium's Umicore and German carmaker Mercedes have also launched similar ventures.

The majority of such projects are still in their pilot stages.

'Huge growing market'

"It's a huge growing market and we want to play a role in it," said Ken Nagayama, head of business

development for battery materials at Aurubis, who is currently working on a graphite recycling process.

He believes there will be "sufficient market supply to develop a battery recycling plant in industrial scale during the second half of the decade".

Since the batteries tend to last seven or eight years, there are not yet "enough batteries at the end of their life" to feed the market, said Serge Pelissier, director of research at the Gustave Eiffel University in Lyon.

There are also many different models of car batteries, making it difficult to set up a standardised recycling system like those available for mobile phones and laptops.

AFP

ahlibank's Value Plus Account 'A'maali' to boost SME sector

Reaffirming its commitment to actively partner in Oman's Vision 2040, ahlbank has announced the launch of 'A'maali', the SME Value Plus Account, to empower small and medium enterprises with financial solutions that enhance business potentials and support new ventures.

Based on the premise that a standard offering is not enough, ahlbank has designed 'A'maali' to set a newer paradigm of growth for SMEs in the country, offering four distinct categories - Bronze, Silver, Gold, and Platinum - that suit business requirements of enterprises with varying requirements.

Depending on the classification, SMEs can avail benefits such as free cheque transactions, free remittances, and free set up of standing instructions. The Account Maintenance criteria is also commensurate with the chosen category, with minimum average monthly balance of RO5,000 for Bronze, RO10,000 for Silver, RO15,000 for Gold and RO20,000 for Platinum accounts.

Additionally, A'maali Business Debit Card has inbuilt features to provide access to company accounts 24 hours a day, enable separation of company and personal expenses, and simplify accounting processes.

It also offers a convenient and easy-to-use payment method, along with higher spending limit, to cater to the spending patterns



of SMEs and corporates. The safe and secure card can be used to make purchases, and pay bills and make withdrawals; it has worldwide acceptance; is equipped with 3D secure OTP service; and allows account holders to view card usage through online account statement using corporate channels.

Describing the account as an incentivised platform for SMEs in the country, Muneer al Balushi, AGM - head of Retail Distribution, ahlbank, said, "SMEs have and will continue to play a prominent role in the country's economy, Vision 2040 to be specific, and we at ahlbank have recognised the vast potentials of this sector in achieving the government's economic diversification agenda.

Through 'A'maali', Balushi

said the bank will fuel this role and augment the sector's successes with our innovative and effective banking solutions.

"Our primary objective is to enhance opportunities for existing and new small and medium enterprises through our SME Banking division, which is helmed by a team of experienced customer-focused relationship managers. They bring to the table their vast experience in the sector, offering customers a range of products that are structured to meet specific needs and profiles," the AGM added.

It is imperative to see the launch of ahlbank's Value Plus Account in the light of rapid economic growth in Oman and the enhanced trade relations with GCC countries and the world, which have spurred sev-

eral entrepreneurs in the country to set up new businesses as well as expand existing ones. Oman's Vision 2040 document has outlined plans to support SMEs by building strategic relationships with larger corporations, including financial institutions.

And 'A'maali' reflects the Bank's conscious efforts to align its operations with the Vision 2040, which places specific emphasis on the SME sector.

ahlibank understands how each SME is unique in terms of activity and needs, whether it is startups, family businesses or small and medium entrepreneurs, and has, through its secure and convenient digital platforms like ahliNET, ahliB2B, ahliRDC, ensured growth opportunities for SMEs.

Bank Nizwa launches Ramadan auto finance campaign

As a progressive Islamic bank that has taken concerted efforts to stay relevant to the evolving needs of the market, Bank Nizwa has announced recently Ramadan auto finance campaign for the benefit of its customers.

Considering individuals' various preferences, the offer is applicable for both new and used cars. Committed to offering customers the most competitive propositions, the campaign features a competitive profit rate of and a finance tenure of up to ten years.

The offer also extends a two-month deferral on installments, enabling customers to drive home a vehicle of their choice without having to worry about immediate payments.

Commenting on the campaign, Khaled al Kayed, Chief Executive Officer of Bank Nizwa, said as a customer-centric bank, "we always endeavour to stay abreast of our client's needs".

What makes this finance unique, he explained, is that it is based on Murabaha contract where the profit rate is fixed throughout the financing tuner.

"With the commencement of Ramadan, numerous automobile companies announce lucrative deals and Bank Nizwa wants to ensure its customers have the power to leverage these offers," the bank CEO said. "The holy month of Ramadan also draws emphasis on the values of sharia'a, and by providing meaningful sharia'a-compliant solutions that add value to the lives



of people, Bank Nizwa has been able to further promote the benefits of Islamic finance."

According to him, one of the reasons that the Ramadan auto finance campaign is gaining increasing popularity is because it gives clients the assurance of adhering to the rules of sharia'a. "Moreover, the campaign has also been appropriately timed and customised to accurately address other critical parameters that customers prioritise, primarily flexibility, convenience and long-term benefits."

He added saying, "Ramadan is a time for giving and enriching bonds. Through such campaigns that drive impact in society and help individuals achieve their aspirations, Bank Nizwa has been able to strengthen its relationships with its esteemed clients."

The campaign also comes with a host of other privileges like a credit card with zero fees for the first year. To further highlight the benefits of Shari'ah-compliant financing, Bank Nizwa's campaign extends its advantages to parallel domains, offering cus-

tomers competitive rates for Takaful insurance.

With a keen focus on making financing hassle-free, quick, and accessible, the bank has also not made it mandatory for customers to transfer their salaries to Bank Nizwa to avail the benefits of the campaign. Additionally, Bank Nizwa provides 'Instant Car Finance', making it the first in the country to offer on-the-spot approval to finance cars.

It will allow bank customers to complete their car financing procedures while visiting the showrooms of participating car dealers. This will eliminate the need to visit the bank's branches and provide customers with a faster solution to obtaining their auto finance. This is expected to further fuel the auto industry and enhance customers' purchasing power.

Revered as the pioneer and fasting growing Islamic bank in Oman, Bank Nizwa has continued to uphold the highest level of integrity, maintaining absolute transparency in operations with no hidden costs.

Celebrated chef Tristan de Boer from Amsterdam to visit Anantara

Savour the refined flavours of renowned Amsterdam restaurant 'The White Room' by Jacob Jan Boerma when Chef Tristan de Boer comes to Oman in April and May.

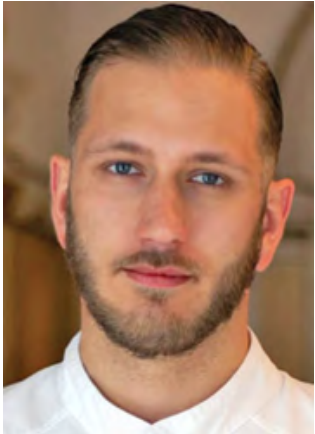
Anantara Al Jabal Al Akhdar Resort and Al Baled Resort Salalah by Anantara have collaborated with Anantara Grand Hotel Krasnapolsky-Amsterdam to bring another successful culinary experience to Oman.

'The White Room' has an incredible history that stretches back to 1885, making it one of the oldest restaurants in Amsterdam. The acclaimed Chef Tristan de Boer, who heads up the kitchen of this Michelin-starred restaurant, will demonstrate his unique talents over gala dinners and workshops at both of Oman's Anantara resorts.

He will be accompanied by Maitre d' Bram Hommes who will lead the service for these unforgettable events.

Scintillating Dining Moments at Anantara Hotels in Oman

At Anantara Al Jabal Al Akhdar Resort, diners will enjoy the pleasure of Chef Tristan's creations on April 27 and 28. A



Chef Tristan de Boer

carefully curated menu will be on offer from 7pm to 10pm each evening at Al Qalaa restaurant. Dinner is priced at RO35 per person including one glass of bubbly.

The talented chef will host two dinners at Al Baled Salalah Resort by Anantara on April 30 and May 1. Guests can enjoy five courses of fresh seasonal ingredients prepared with Chef Tristan's individual flair and served in the stunning surroundings of Mekong. These menus are priced at RO35 per person including a glass of bubbly, available from 6.30pm to 10.30pm on

both evenings. Guests can also join Chef Tristan at Sakalan at 12 noon on May 1 to learn the techniques that have helped him create his delectable dishes. Discover how he blends influences from Japan, China, Indonesia and Surinam with recipes from his home country, The Netherlands. This workshop is priced at RO15 per person.

Maren Kuehl, General Manager, Anantara Al Jabal Al Akhdar says, "It's fantastic to host Chef Tristan in both of our resorts in Oman, and to bring another wonderful culinary occasion that food lovers of the country can enjoy."

Andrea Orru, General Manager, Al Baled Resort Salalah by Anantara adds, "Diners will have the opportunity to experience the flavours of the famed restaurant, 'The White Room' in our stunning restaurants. These events are sure to be a highlight on the foodie calendar this year."

'The White Room' collaboration will take place at Anantara Al Jabal Al Akhdar Resort on April 27 and 28, and at Al Baled Resort Salalah by Anantara on April 30 and May 1.

Mazda Oman's 'So Generous, it's Inspiring' campaign catches attention of motorists

Mazda Oman's 'So Generous, it's Inspiring' campaign, which started on March 13, is offering an exciting opportunity to all the motorists in Oman to purchase a stylish and powerful Mazda this season earning cash gifts.

Cash gift starting from RO1,050 to RO3,900, and AAA roadside assistance valid for the first three years from the date of retail purchase. You can obtain an IINJAZ service package for five years or 100,000km (whichever comes first) by paying RO200 (plus VAT) for only the new Mazda model purchased from Towell Auto Centre.

The benefits will vary between model variants, model year and manufacturing year and are subject to certain conditions, the company stated. 'Whether you're looking for a sleek and stylish sedan or a rugged and reliable SUV, Mazda has a wide range of models, which includes the Mazda 6, Mazda CX-30, Mazda CX-9, and Mazda CX-5,' the company statement asserted.

Mazda 6

The Mazda 6 is a sedan that exudes sophistication and style



while offering an impressive range of features and specifications. With its elegant design, luxurious interior, and state-of-the-art safety features, the Mazda 6 stands out from its competitors in its class.

The Mazda 6 strikes the perfect balance between performance, comfort, and style, making it the top choice for discerning drivers seeking a practical yet classy sedan with priced starting from RO8,450 (after cash gift).

Mazda CX-30

The Mazda CX-30 is a stylish SUV and it is built with a modern design that exudes confidence on the road. Its innovative features such as adaptive LED headlights, lane departure warnings, and a 360-degree camera make driving this car a safe and enjoyable experience. The Mazda CX-

30 is also equipped with an efficient Skyactiv engine, which delivers excellent fuel economy without compromising on performance. So, what are you waiting for? This is your time to crossover to the next level with Mazda CX-30 by availing cash gift offer, starting from RO 8,650 (after cash gift).

Mazda CX-9

The Mazda CX-9 is a turbocharged 7-seater SUV that combines style, performance, and practicality. It is equipped with Mazda's i-Activ all-wheel-drive system that provides excellent traction and stability in any road condition.

The CX-9 features a sleek and modern exterior design with a spacious and luxurious interior that can accommodate up to seven passengers comfortably.

So, why not level up the thrill with Mazda CX-9 - turbocharged 7-Seater SUV, starting from RO 11,900 (after cash gift).

Mazda CX-5

The Mazda CX-5 is a mid-segment SUV that offers an impressive combination of style, performance, and comfort. The CX-5 offers a range of advanced safety features, such as blind spot monitoring, rear cross-traffic alert, and lane departure warning. Its comfortable and spacious interior, advanced infotainment system, and excellent fuel economy make it a standout option in the highly competitive SUV segment in the country. So, experience the fusion of elegance and toughness with the Mazda CX-5 starting from RO 9,350 (after cash gift).

'Golden Gift' offers from Malabar Gold & Diamonds

Malabar Gold & Diamonds, the 6th largest jewellery retailer globally with an extensive retail network of 312 outlets across ten countries, has just unveiled their 'Golden Gift' offers ahead of the festive season.

With this offer, customers can get assured gold coins with gold & diamond jewellery purchase. Malabar Gold & Diamonds will also be showcasing an exquisite array of jewellery collections in gold, diamond and precious gems across their numerous sub brands such as Mine, Era, Precia, Viraa, Ethnix & Divine etc., which are assured

to be a huge hit amongst their customers.

The limited period offer can be availed across all Malabar Gold & Diamonds outlets in the Middle east, Far east and the USA from March 30 to April 23.

For every diamond or precious gem jewellery purchase worth RO500 will get free 1gm Gold Coin and for diamond and precious gem jewellery purchase worth RO300 they will be eligible for 0.5gm Gold Coin.

The special array of jewellery collection that the brand has unveiled ahead of the festive season presents jewellery lovers



with an enthralling array of designs in gold, diamond and pre-

cious gem jewellery.

The special design has been

made available across a wide range of sub-brands such as Mine, Era, Precia, Viraa, Ethnix and Divine, comprising of 22k gold, diamonds and precious gem jewellery.

Elegant designs crafted in contemporary fashion have also been introduced in the 18K gold category. Furthermore, Malabar Gold & Diamonds is also offering 8g gold coins with zero making charges as part of the offers.

"As Malabar Gold & Diamonds celebrates 30 years of providing an exemplary jewellery shopping experience to its customers all over the world,

the Golden Gift offer that we have unveiled is yet another example of our ardent commitment towards adding joy to their celebrations.

"The immense collection of festive jewellery that we have launched for the season combined with the free gold coin offers on diamond and precious gem jewellery will ensure that festive shopping becomes even more exciting," commented Shamlal Ahamed, managing director - International Operations, Malabar Gold & Diamonds.

Malabar Gold & Diamonds

has also introduced Gold Rate Protection offers, wherein customers can protect themselves from fluctuating gold rates by paying just ten per cent as advance, valid till April 23.

If the gold rate goes up during this period, customers can purchase at the blocked rate and if the rate happens to go down, customers can draw mileage from the low rates.

Customers can also block gold rates by paying 50 per cent or 100 per cent advance, which will be valid for a period of three months and six months respectively.

Knowledge Oman presents its Community Give-Back programme exclusively for MTC

As part of its annual community giving back programme that is specifically organised during the holy blessed month of Ramadan, Knowledge Oman, the leading community knowledge sharing platform, held an exclusive interactive lecture for the Military Technological College, that attracted over 400 college students and faculty members.

Yousif al Hassani, a coach in international protocol, was also hosted at the event to share a speech on 'The impact of charisma on relationships'.

"Knowledge Oman is committed to supporting the Community Giving-Back programme for the fifth year running after the positive impact the programme continues to have on the society, specifically the youth," he said during his speech.

"Our multinational voluntary team are as excited as ever to do their part in uplifting the next generation. The idea behind the interactive event was in alignment with the spirit of the holy month of Ramadan, in which the purpose is about giving back to the community," Hassani added.

The interactive talk with the students and faculty members



aimed to introduce to the attendees "the different types of personalities, and the impact of charisma on these relationships, especially with the rewards one is given during the blessed month of Ramadan". Since 2008 Knowledge Oman has actively introduced various initiatives that positively impact society through projects that encourage love, care and support for children, the elderly, and the disadvantaged.

Knowledge Oman Talks hope to bridge the gap between academia and society, to develop skills that can positively contribute towards the development of society, and cultivate loving attitudes in individuals which will allow them to access their potential to change the world.

OQ to fund project of planting 250,000 wild trees with MAFWR



OQ, the global integrated energy group, signed an agreement with the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Water Resources (MAFWR) to plant 250,000 seedlings of wild trees.

This agreement aims to enhance efforts to expand the green area by planting 10mn wild trees as part of OQ's Green Initiative.

The Agricultural Development Fund will oversee and follow up on the implementation of this agreement.

The agreement was signed by H E Dr Saud bin Hamoud al Habsi, Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Water Resources; and Talal Hamid al Awfi, OQ Group CEO.

On this occasion, H E Habsi expressed his appreciation for OQ's efforts to enhance the pursuits of governmental enti-

ties in expanding the green area in the Sultanate of Oman its green initiative.

The initiative aims to promote public awareness about the importance of vegetation and effectively contribute to supporting these efforts to achieve their desired objectives. He pointed out the effective cooperation between the Ministry and OQ in many initiatives including the projects of propagating economic types and varieties of fruits and combating pesticides using drones.

This agreement will contribute to planting a quarter of a million wild seedlings as part of the project to plant ten million trees in the Sultanate. The project aims to create a balance between environmental components and reduce carbon emissions. The concerted

efforts of the government and the private sector would result in achieving this objective.

OQ seeks to enhance efforts to expand the green area through the social investment programme, in which the environment is the main pillar. The agreement embodies the social investment pillar and seeks to implement OQ's green initiative launched by the Group in an attempt to contribute to the environmental sustainability efforts by supporting many qualitative agricultural and environmental projects.

OQ moves forward to enhance the effective community partnership and support efforts made to add high value to developmental projects. These efforts will play a great role in achieving the Sultanate's strategic objective to reach carbon neutrality by 2050.

Over 150 entrepreneurs to take part in Souq al Wathbah at Bank Muscat head office

The SMEs Development Authority and Bank Muscat, the leading financial services provider in the Sultanate, have teamed up to organise Souq al Wathbah for this year at the Bank Muscat Head Office at Airport Heights. The Souq will be held for three days, from Thursday (April 6) to Saturday (April 8).

This annual CSR initiative aims at providing a supportive avenue for home-based projects and entrepreneurs, give them the opportunity to display their different products and expand their relationships through networking with other entrepreneurs to exchange expertise for the sake of business development.

More than 150 entrepreneurs, small and start-up businesses will participate in this year's edition of Souq al Wathbah, where various products encompassing



fashion, health and beauty products, home decorations and accessories, food and beverages, traditional wares and perfumes will be showcased at competitive prices.

The three-day souq will be open from 8 pm to 12 midnight.

The Ramadan souq constitutes one of the key steps to support small and start-up businesses and is one of the

most important forums for entrepreneurs. It also comes within the strategies of both the SMEs Development Authority and Bank Muscat to support Omani entrepreneurs and SMEs and startups.

The Ramadan souq is expected to witness excellent participation from the public and the media, especially as it is one of the well-known souqs held during the month of Ramadan.

Bank Muscat is committed to implementing its strategic plans to support SMEs.

For this particular purpose, it has launched many other initiatives including Al Wathbah Academy, Al Wathbah Businesswomen's Forum etc.

Al Wathbah SME department offers a comprehensive suite of tailor-made finance solutions and non-financial services targeted at small and medium enterprise in the areas of education, coaching, networking opportunities and workshops.

Bank Muscat is continuously partnering with both government agencies and the private sector to promote entrepreneurship in Oman, particularly amongst the youth, as part of its focus on supporting the strategic goals of Oman Vision 2040.

Huawei releases 2022 financial results

Huawei released its 2022 annual results indicating that the company has maintained steady operations and its performance was in line with the forecast. The technology major's revenue remained stable and grew slightly, having generated US\$92.37bn in revenue and US\$5.12bn in net profits. Huawei continues to strengthen investment in R&D, with an annual expenditure of US\$23.22bn in 2022, representing 25.1 per cent of the company's annual revenue and bringing its total R&D expenditure over the past ten years to more than US\$140.55bn.

These financial indicators show that Huawei's consumer business is stabilising while its ICT infrastructure business continues to expand steadily. The digital power sector and Huawei Cloud both experienced rapid development, which raised the components' competitiveness and user-friendliness.

By aiding in the digital transformation of various industries,



Eric Xu

Huawei has been able to sustain growth. It has done this by utilising its robust and resilient business portfolio to lay the groundwork for the digital economy, promote green and sustainable development, and generate value for its customers, partners, and society as a whole.

"In 2022, a challenging external environment and non-market factors continued to take a toll on Huawei's operations," said Eric Xu, Huawei's Rotating Chairman, at the company's annual report press conference.

"In the midst of this storm, we kept racing ahead, doing everything in our power to maintain



Sabrina Meng

business continuity and serve our customers. We also went to great lengths to grow the harvest - generating a steady stream of revenue to sustain our survival and lay the groundwork for future development."

Also present at the event was Sabrina Meng, Huawei's CFO. "Despite substantial pressure in 2022, our overall business results were in line with forecast. At the end of 2022, our liability ratio was 58.9 per cent and our net cash balance was US\$25.35bn," she noted.

In addition, Sabrina said, "our balance of total assets reached US\$0.15tn, largely composed of

current assets such as cash, short-term investments, and operating assets. Our financial position remains solid, with strong resilience and flexibility".

"In times of pressure, we press on - with confidence," Huawei's CFO asserted, further informing that "in 2022, revenue from Huawei's carrier, enterprise, and consumer businesses was US\$40.84bn, US\$19.15bn, and US\$30.84bn, respectively".

Huawei is a strong proponent of growing together with its ecosystem partners, and believes that openness and collaboration lead to shared success.

In Oman, Huawei recently launched its innovative cloud services. Its long-standing partnership with Omantel continues to explore various collaboration opportunities on cloud business.

As part of their strategic co-operation, Omantel and Huawei have come together to conduct market insight analysis of Cloud Business in Oman.

Finnish centre-right leader Orpo ousts Marin in election victory

Helsinki, Finland - Finland's centre-right leader claimed victory in Sunday's tight general election that saw the far-right post a record score to come in second, as Prime Minister Sanna Marin's Social Democrats finished third.

"This was a great victory," the 53-year-old head of the conservative National Coalition Party, Petteri Orpo, told his cheering supporters.

"On the basis of this election result ... we will start negotiating a government in Finland," he said.

Orpo could choose to build a government either with the far-right Finns Party or the Social Democrats, though he is at odds with both on various issues.

With 99 per cent of votes counted, the centre-right was credited with 48 of the 200 seats in parliament, the far-right with 46 and the Social Democrats with 43.

In terms of votes, the result was even closer with the centre-right winning 20.6 per cent, the far-right 20.1 per cent and the Social Democrats 19.9 per cent.

The biggest party in parliament traditionally gets the first chance to build a government, and since the 1990s that party has always claimed the prime minister's office.

Orpo, whose comfortable lead in the polls shrank in the final stages of the campaign, has made the economy his top priority.

Finland's debt-to-GDP ratio has risen from 64 per cent in 2019 to 73 per cent, which his



The National Coalition Chairman Petteri Orpo speaks to supporters at the party's parliamentary election party, following the Finnish parliamentary elections, in Helsinki on Sunday (AFP)

National Coalition wants to address by cutting spending by six billion euros (US\$6.5bn).

Meanwhile, amid cheers of 'Finland! Finland!', the 45-year-old head of the anti-immigration Finns Party, Riikka Purra, thanked her supporters for the party's 'best election result ever'.

The party, which first served in government in 2015, has seen its support surge since last summer with the cost of living crisis following Russia's invasion of Ukraine.

Purra even managed to secure the highest number of direct votes in the election, with her 38,000 beating out the 35,000 cast for Marin, whom polls have ranked as Finland's most popular

prime minister this century.

The eurosceptic Finns Party, which appeals overwhelmingly to male voters, wants a hard line on immigration.

Purra alleges that recent arrivals are behind a rise in street gangs and has pointed to neighbouring Sweden as a cautionary tale.

The Finns Party sees 'Fixit' - an exit from the European Union - as a long-term goal and wants to postpone Finland's target of carbon neutrality for 2035.

Tough talks ahead

Marin, who became the world's youngest prime minister in 2019 at the age of 34, has struggled to convert her overwhelming per-

sonal popularity into support for her SDP.

"Congratulations to the National Coalition Party, congratulations to the Finns Party. Democracy has spoken," she said as she acknowledged defeat.

Negotiations to build a government are expected to be thorny and could last several weeks.

Orpo has said he will keep his options open, and could cooperate either with the left or the far-right, whom Marin has qualified as 'openly racist'.

Orpo's National Coalition is at odds with Marin's SDP on budget austerity, and clashes with the Finns Party on immigration, the EU and climate policy.

'Rock star's days are over'

Making headlines internationally for her hard line against Finland's eastern neighbour Russia, Marin has been a popular speaker at the World Economic Forum in Davos in recent years and has been featured on the cover of *Time Mag-*

This was a great victory. On the basis of this election result ... we will start negotiating a government in Finland

PETTERI ORPO

azine and in *Vogue*.

Yet while some view her as a strong leader who deftly navigated the COVID-19 pandemic and the NATO membership process, others see the rising public debt on her watch and backlash over video clips of her partying as signs of inexperience.

"I liked Marin... but I don't personally believe that her ideas about economic policy are something she and her government can actually achieve," 29-year-old Kasper Kylmala told AFP after casting his ballot.

Antti Piispanen, a 30 year-old salesman, put it more bluntly: "The 'rock star' Marin's time is over, she did nothing good."

AFP



Passengers wait to board the first train, since a deadly train disaster, to leave from Athens' main station to Thessaloniki, in Athens on Monday (AFP)

Greece's trains resume at site of deadly train crash

Athens, Greece - Five weeks after Greece's worst rail disaster, which killed 57 people, a partial service resumed on Monday on the main train line linking Athens and Thessaloniki, the country's second city.

The route was the scene of a head-on collision on February 28 between a freight train and a passenger train with more than 350 people on board, many of them young students. The crash triggered weeks of angry protests and is set to weigh heavily on national polls in May, in which Prime Minister Kyriakos Mitsotakis is seeking re-election.

In a bid to reassure passengers, Transport Minister Giorgos Gerapetritis travelled on the first train between Athens and the central town of Kalambaka on Monday morning, along with the head of the rail network company and representatives of privatised train company Hellenic Trains.

While the disaster has been largely blamed on human error by the stationmaster on duty near the site of the crash in Tempe, central Greece, it has

also highlighted government delays in modernising rail safety systems.

"Our duty is to have a rail service that lives up to everyone's expectations, a modern rail service that can develop and be among the best in Europe," Gerapetritis told the media. "It's the government's duty. But it's also a debt we owe to the victims of this tragic accident whose lives were so unjustly cut short."

Mitsotakis has vowed, if re-elected, to install electronic safety systems on the rail network by the end of September.

Some safety measures have already been put in place - trains have been slowed down, there are fewer services per day, and each station now has two station managers and two engineers on duty. "An enormous effort has been made to ensure all the contracts for signals and remote controls are completed on time, so that by end of September we will have a network that is completely safe and meets international standards," Gerapetritis said.

AFP

S Sudan officials named for rights abuses

Nairobi, Kenya - A panel of UN rights experts on Monday named several high-ranking South Sudanese officials who warrant criminal investigation and prosecution for their part in grave atrocities against civilians.

Top government and military leaders were identified in a new report by the UN Commission on Human Rights in South Sudan that details state responsibility for widespread murder, rape and sexual slavery.

The commission, which conducted an investigation across six states in South Sudan, and released a partial summary of its findings in March, said none of those named in the final report had faced any accountability for their crimes. "Over several years, our findings have consistently shown that impunity for serious crimes is a central driver of violence and misery faced by civilians," commission chair Yasmin Sooka said.

"So we have taken the step of naming more of the individuals who warrant criminal investigation and prosecution for their role in gross human rights violations." The report identifies Joseph Monytil, governor of Unity State, and Lieutenant General Thoi Chany Reat of the South Sudan People's Defence Forces, in relation to state-sanctioned killings in Mayom County in August 2022.

AFP

Headmistress guilty of sexual abuse at Australian school

Melbourne, Australia - A former headmistress was found guilty on Monday of sexually assaulting two sisters at an ultra-orthodox Jewish school in Australia, 15 years after she escaped arrest by fleeing to Israel.

Malka Leifer was guilty on 18 charges, the jury said, including raping a student during a sleep-over and sexually assaulting another teenage pupil during a school camp.

She was cleared of a further nine charges.

Leifer was the principal of the Adass Israel School in Melbourne when she was first accused of sexual assault in 2008.

A dual Israeli-Australian citizen, Leifer fled to Israel before she could be arrested, sparking a drawn-out court battle spanning more than 70 extradition hearings.

The fugitive mother-of-eight



Sisters Elly Sapper (left), Nicole Meyer (centre) and Dassi Erlich speak to the media outside the County Court in Melbourne on Monday (AFP)

was finally flown back to Australia in 2021 and was put on trial in February this year.

Prosecutors alleged during the trial that Leifer sexually assaulted three sisters who were studying at the Adass Israel School, which is part of a reclusive Jewish sect

on the city's outskirts.

After a seven-week trial, and seven days of deliberations, the jury convicted Leifer of sexually assaulting two of the sisters.

Leifer, who has maintained her innocence throughout, sat with her hands folded and stared

straight ahead as the verdicts were read.

Abuse of power

Leifer's abuse 'held us hostage for many years', said one of the sisters, Dassi Erlich.

"Today we can start to take that power back that she stole from us as children," she told reporters outside the court.

Another sister, Elly Sapper, said justice had been served.

"She abused the three of us for so many years and while today's verdict may not properly reflect that, today Malka Leifer was finally found accountable," Elly Sapper said.

The court heard how Leifer had abused her high standing within the Adass community to prey on the sisters.

According to an indictment, Leifer raped one student in 2006 after inviting her home to 'sleep

over for kallah lessons' - a kind of pre-wedding etiquette class that includes sexual education.

On other occasions Leifer told the students she was preparing them to be wives, prosecutor Justin Lewis told the court in his opening statement.

"This will help you for your wedding night," Leifer said after one sexual assault, according to Lewis.

"This is what is good for you," she allegedly said during another incident.

Leifer fled Australia in 2008 after one of the students confided in her therapist about the sexual assaults.

She eventually settled in the ultra-orthodox Emmanuel settlement in the occupied West Bank.

Secretly filmed

Australian police filed charges against Leifer in 2012 and re-

quested her extradition from Israel two years later, sparking a lengthy legal saga.

Leifer claimed that crippling depression had left her catatonic and that she was mentally incapable of standing trial.

The extradition process was suspended - until a private investigator secretly filmed Leifer going about her daily chores, apparently unaffected by the mental illnesses she had claimed.

She was eventually extradited to Melbourne in 2021.

Defence lawyer Ian Hill previously said Leifer denied 'all of the criminal conduct alleged by each of the complainants' and that her interactions with the students were 'professional and proper'.

"We deny that they are telling the truth," he said.

AFP

Thai poll hopefuls register, opposition vows constitutional reform

Bangkok, Thailand - Candidates began registering on Monday for Thailand's upcoming general election, in which Prime Minister Prayut Chan-O-Cha faces a tough fight against the opposition parties vowing to rewrite the kingdom's army-scripted constitution.

Former army chief Prayut, who came to power in a coup in the year 2014, insisted the country needed an experienced leader as he accompanied prospective MPs from his United Thai Nation.

He faces a difficult challenge from a resurgent opposition fronted by Paetongtarn Shinawatra, daughter of billionaire former PM Thaksin Shinawatra.

Prayut, 69, arrived on an open-top truck with supporters and candidates in lively scenes at a Bangkok sports hall.



Supporters of Prachachat party hold placards during the first day of the constituencies candidates registration for the upcoming general election, in southern Thai province of Narathiwat on Monday (AFP)

Thailand 'needs people who know how to do the job. If they have never done it, they can't do it', Prayut told Thairath TV.

Thais go to the polls on May 14 for the first election since the kingdom was rocked by major youth-led protests in 2020 call-

ing for political reform.

Prayut and his party are lagging in the polls behind Paetongtarn's Pheu Thai and the progressive Move Forward Party led by Pita Limjaroenrat.

But while opposition parties are riding high in the polls, Thai-

land's junta-scripted 2017 constitution gives army-favoured parties a big advantage when it comes to forming a government.

To become prime minister, a candidate must win a majority of the 500 elected lower-house MPs as well as 250 military-ap-

pointed senators.

Reform pledges

Pheu Thai has said it is targeting a landslide victory in the election to prevent the military establishment from blocking its route to power, as happened in 2019 when it won most seats but was shut out of government.

And it wants to hold public hearings to decide how to redraft the constitution.

"There is no way that this country can become democratic as long as we have an undemocratic constitution," Chusak Sirinin, a Pheu Thai deputy leader, said last week.

The Move Forward Party has made a similar pledge, with leader Pita Limjaroenrat saying he would aim to hold a referendum on rewriting the charter within 100 days of taking

power. Under Prayut, the kingdom has struggled to bounce back from the economic impact of COVID-19.

Thailand is the only country in Southeast Asia - apart from coup-hit Myanmar - where GDP has not yet recovered to pre-pandemic levels, according to the World Bank.

Paetongtarn - who is eight months pregnant - came to support Pheu Thai candidates as they registered on Monday, though neither she nor Prayut is running as an MP.

The 2017 constitution does not require the prime minister to be an elected lawmaker.

If successful, the 36-year-old would be following both her father and her aunt Yingluck - whom Prayut ousted in his 2014 coup - in becoming PM.

AFP

Wagner claims ‘legal’ capture of Bakhmut

Russia’s paramilitary group claimed it captured the city hall in Ukraine’s eastern town

Moscow, Russia - Russia’s Wagner paramilitary group on Monday claimed it had captured the city hall in Ukraine’s eastern town of Bakhmut, giving it ‘legal’ control, but Kyiv said its forces still held the town.

The battle for Bakhmut has raged for months with Wagner supporting Russian troops and Ukraine warning the fall of the town would lead to the loss of huge swathes of its territory.

Wagner head Yevgeny Prigozhin posted a video on his Telegram channel showing him holding a Russian flag, which he said his forces would plant on Bakhmut’s city hall.

“This is the Wagner private military company, these are the guys who took Bakhmut. In a legal sense, it’s ours,” Prigozhin said.



Wagner paramilitary group head Yevgeny Prigozhin holding a Russian flag in an undisclosed location on Monday (AFP)

Ukrainian military leaders said on Monday after Prigozhin’s video was released that enemy troops had tried to take control of the town, but their forces had ‘repelled more than 20 enemy attacks’. President Volodymyr Zelensky earlier on Sunday praised Ukrainian troops’ defence of the city, much of which now lies in ruins.

“I am grateful to our warriors who are fighting near Avdiivka, Maryinka, near Bakhmut... Especially Bakhmut! It’s especially hot there today!” Zelensky said on Telegram.

In Kostyantynivka, a town about 27km (17 miles) from Bakhmut, a ‘massive attack’ of Russian missiles left three men and three women dead and eleven wounded on Sunday, Ukrainian authorities said.

The attack targeted residential areas where ‘ordinary civilians’ were living, Zelensky said.

There was a large crater in a yard and windows were shattered from ground to top floors in

two 14-storey tower blocks, while private homes nearby had smashed roofs, AFP journalists saw.

Liliya, a 19-year-old psychology student, stood outside her severely damaged high-rise block.

“Everything is bombed out. And I think it’s like that in every flat, in fact. Because it was such an impact that it was very hard for anything to stay unbroken.”

This is the Wagner private military company, these are the guys who took Bakhmut. In a legal sense, it’s ours

YEVGENY PRIGOZHIN

Blogger killed

Earlier on Sunday, a leading Russian military blogger and fervent defender of the military offensive in Ukraine was killed by a bomb attack at a cafe in St Petersburg, investigators said.

Vladlen Tatarsky was reportedly killed after receiving a gift rigged with an explosive device

at an event organised by Cyber Front Z, which refers to itself on social media as ‘Russia’s information troops’.

The explosion occurred at ‘Street Food Bar No. 1’, located along the Neva river not far from the historic city centre, with the interior ministry saying police had been called to the scene at 6:13pm (1513 GMT).

Officers cordoned off the street outside the building with around 20 police cars, alongside six ambulances as well as fire trucks, according to an AFP journalist at the scene.

Around two dozen other people were injured.

Russia’s foreign ministry paid tribute to Tatarsky on Sunday, saying he was among ‘defenders of the truth’ and lashing out at Western governments for failing to react to the attack.

“Russian journalists constantly feel the threat of reprisals from the Kyiv regime,” spokeswoman Maria Zakharova said on Telegram.

Western ‘hype’

Moscow condemned on Sunday the Western ‘hype’ around the arrest of US journalist Evan Gershkovich on espionage charges, dismissing Washington’s latest call for his release.

Russia’s foreign minister Sergei Lavrov told his US counterpart Antony Blinken that Gershkovich had been ‘trying to receive secret information’ when he was arrested this week.

Gershkovich, a *Wall Street Journal* reporter, is believed to be the first foreign journalist held for spying in post-Soviet Russia, and his arrest is expected to escalate the Kremlin’s confrontation with the West.

His arrest on March 30 has drawn outrage from the West and is being seen as a serious escalation of Moscow’s sweeping crackdown on the media.

“The timing of the arrest looks like a calculated provocation to embarrass the US and intimidate the foreign press still working in Russia,” the *Wall Street Journal*’s board of opinion editors said.

The White House has condemned the allegations as ‘ridiculous’ and has warned Americans currently in Russia to leave for their own safety.

Several other US citizens are in jail in Russia, including Paul Whelan, a former Marine, who was arrested in 2018 and handed a 16-year sentence on espionage charges that he denies.

AFP

Israeli forces kill two Palestinians

Nablus, Palestinian Territories - Israeli forces shot dead two Palestinians on Monday in a morning raid in the occupied West Bank, the Palestinian health ministry said, in what the army described as ‘counterterrorism activity’.

“Two martyrs shot by the occupation (Israel) in Nablus,” the ministry confirmed in a brief statement, without elaborating on their identities.

The Israeli army said it had carried out the raid to apprehend two individuals linked to a shooting attack in which two Israeli soldiers were injured last month in the West Bank town of Huwara.

“During the activity, a number of armed gunmen fired at the forces who responded with live fire. Hits were identified,” the army statement said, adding that two individuals were arrested.

Israeli forces have carried out a number of deadly raids in the flashpoint city of Nablus in recent months with the emergence of a fighter group dubbed the



Israeli soldiers fire teargas during clashes with Palestinians following a raid by Israeli forces in the city of Nablus in the occupied West Bank on Monday (AFP)

Lions’ Den, which has been blamed for a number of attacks on Israeli targets.

In a Monday statement, the Lions’ Den said its members were involved in ‘confronting the occupation forces’ storming of the city of Nablus’.

The raid came two days after a peak in violence that saw two killed in confrontations with Israeli forces, amid fears of escalation in the conflict during the Muslim holy month of Ramadan.

Since the start of the year, the Israeli-Palestinian conflict has claimed the lives of at least 90 Palestinians, 15 Israelis and one Ukranian, according to an AFP tally based on official sources

from both sides.

These figures include, on the Palestinian side, combatants and civilians, including minors, and on the Israeli side, mostly civilians including minors and two members of the Arab minority.

Israel has occupied the West Bank since 1967.

AFP

Modern Australia’s trailblazing Aboriginal leader dies aged 74

Sydney, Australia - One of modern Australia’s most important Aboriginal leaders, Yunupingu, died on Monday aged 74, with supporters describing the Indigenous rights trailblazer as a ‘giant of the nation’.

Yunupingu played a pivotal role in Aboriginal Australians’ fight for ancestral land rights throughout the 1960s and 1970s, and was recognised as a ‘national living treasure’ in 1998.

He spent decades advocating for Aboriginal Australians to be recognised in the country’s constitution - an issue that will finally be decided through a national referendum at the end of 2023.

Prime Minister Anthony Albanese called Yunupingu - whose family asked that his given name not be used after his death, in keeping with Aboriginal tradition - ‘one of the greatest Australians’.

“Yunupingu walked in two worlds with authority, power and grace, and he worked to make



Yunupingu (AFP)

them whole together,” Albanese said.

“With his passing consider what we have lost. A leader. A statesman.”

Yunupingu, who died after a long illness, was part of the Yolngu people from Arnhem Land in northern Australia - a remote region spanning tropical coastlines and sprawling inland savannas.

In the early 1960s he helped draft the Yirrkala bark petitions,

in which the Yolngu people sought to stave off foreign mining projects by asserting their ownership of the land.

The petitions, framed by traditional bark paintings, would inspire a generation of Aboriginal land rights activists across the country.

“Yunupingu was a master of the ceremonies and a keeper of the songlines of the Yolngu people,” said the Yothu Yindi foundation.

“A giant of the nation whose contribution to public life spanned seven decades, he was first and foremost a leader of his people, whose welfare was his most pressing concern and responsibility.”

Indigenous Australians settled in the country an estimated 65,000 years ago, but have suffered widespread discrimination and oppression since the arrival of the British more than two centuries ago.

AFP

Malaysian MPs vote to axe mandatory death penalty

Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia - Malaysia’s parliament passed a bill on Monday to remove mandatory death sentences, with rights groups welcoming the vote as an ‘important step’ that could have a knock-on effect elsewhere in Southeast Asia.

Convictions for several offences, including murder and drug trafficking, previously came with automatic death penalties, giving judges no leeway. The bill does not scrap death sentences, but grants judges the option to instead impose lengthy prison sentences of between 30 to 40 years under certain conditions.

Speaking before the lower house of Malaysia’s parliament, Deputy Law Minister Ramkarpal Singh said: “We cannot arbitrarily ignore the existence of the inherent right to life of every individual.”

Malaysia has had a moratorium on executions since 2018, but courts have continued to

send inmates to death row. The reform will still have to clear the senate, but is widely expected to pass without major opposition.

Human Rights Watch deputy Asia director Phil Robertson called Monday’s vote an ‘important step forward for Malaysia’, and hopes it will add pressure for other Southeast Asian nations to follow suit.

“This is an important breakthrough that will cause some serious conversations in the halls of upcoming ASEAN meetings,” he told AFP, referring to the 10-member Southeast Asian bloc.

“Malaysia should show regional leadership by encouraging other governments in ASEAN to re-think their continued use of the death penalty, starting with Singapore which has recently gone on a post-COVID execution spree.”

AFP

Trump heads into unknown as NY arraignment looms

West Palm Beach, US - Donald Trump is expected to fly on Monday to New York for his historic arraignment on criminal charges, taking the United States and the office of the presidency into uncharted and potentially volatile territory.

The 76-year-old billionaire was indicted last week by a grand jury on a series of counts related to a hush-money payment made to an adult film star during the 2016 election campaign.

The Republican Party provocateur, who has already started a 2024 White House bid, is the first sitting or former US president ever charged with a crime.

His aides say Trump will decamp from his Mar-a-Lago home in Florida and fly on Monday to New York, his former base of operations.

There, as part of his arraignment scheduled for Tuesday afternoon, he will undergo the standard booking procedure of being fingerprinted and photographed, likely to result in one of the most famous mugshots of the modern era.

Trump, who plans to make



Former US President Donald Trump sits in the rear of his limousine as he departs Trump International Golf Club in West Palm Beach, Florida, on Sunday (AFP)

public remarks Tuesday at 8:15pm (0015 GMT Wednesday) from Florida, denounced the legal proceedings as a ‘witch hunt’ and ‘political persecution’, and assailed the judge assigned to hear it.

It remains to be seen whether the famously unpredictable Trump will follow the script, or find a way to upend events.

‘Up in the air’

The New York Police Department is on high alert ahead of the extraordinary arraignment, with a potential for street protests by Trump supporters and detractors.

The force has ordered its 36,000 officers to be in uniform and ready to deploy, NBC News reported, citing official sources.

An arraignment is a practiced, established ritual, but there is no roadmap for a former president’s surrender to court authorities.

“It’s all up in the air,” Trump lawyer Joe Tacopina said on CNN on Sunday.

While a ‘perp walk’ - in which a defendant is escorted in handcuffs past media cameras - is unlikely for an ex-president under

US Secret Service protection, ‘I anticipate them trying to get every ounce of publicity out of this that they can get’, Tacopina said.

“Hopefully this will be as painless and classy as possible for a situation like this.”

But Trump is girding for battle, Tacopina added.

While the specific charges still remain under seal, the case brought by Manhattan District Attorney Alvin Bragg revolves around the investigation of US\$130,000 paid to porn star Stormy Daniels ahead of the 2016 election.

Trump’s former lawyer and aide Michael Cohen, who has since turned against Trump, testified before Congress that he arranged the payment to Daniels in exchange for her silence about a tryst she says she had with Trump in 2006.

Trump, who was already married to his wife Melania at the time, denies the affair.

But the Daniels case is only one of several investigations threatening Trump.

AFP

INDIA



Congress leader Rahul Gandhi at the Surat District Court after filing an appeal against his conviction, in Surat on Monday (ANI)

‘Truth is my weapon’, says Rahul Gandhi

Surat, Gujarat - Opposition leader Rahul Gandhi appealed on Monday against the defamation conviction that resulted in his expulsion from parliament two weeks ago.

Gandhi, 52, who was sentenced to two years imprisonment in a case about remarks he made in 2019 seen as insulting to Prime Minister Narendra Modi and those sharing his surname, is looking to overturn the conviction before elections due next year. The sentence also renders Gandhi ineligible to stand in the poll, which the ruling Bharatiya Janata Party is widely expected to win convincingly.

Modi’s government is widely accused of using the defamation law to silence critics, and the case in the premier’s home state of Gujarat is one of several lodged against his chief opponent in recent years.

“This is a fight against the era of favouring friends, saving democracy. In this regard truth is my weapon, truth is my sanctuary,” Gandhi tweeted after filing his appeal to the court in Surat.

It is scheduled to be heard next week.

Critics say the defamation conviction came after Gandhi repeatedly raised the issue of Modi’s relationship with business tycoon Gautam Adani both inside and outside parliament.

The two men - both Gujaratis - have been close associates for decades, but Adani’s business empire has been subject to renewed scrutiny this year after a US investment firm accused it of ‘brazen’ corporate fraud, which it denies.

Gandhi is the leading face of the opposition Congress party. AFP

Kerala train fire: Police release sketch of suspected assailant

Thiruvananthapuram, Kerala - Kerala police on Monday released a sketch of the suspect who had allegedly poured petrol and set on fire his co-passengers on the moving Alappuzha-Kannur Express train, a day ago.

The Railway police conducted a search for the accused at a government district hospital in Kannur, according to officials. The search was done on the basis of a report that a person resembling the sketch of the accused released by police had sought treatment in the hospital on Sunday night. Police, however said that the person who sought treatment at Kannur district hospital did not resemble the sketch, created on the basis of CCTV footage.

At least eight other persons sustained injuries in the April 2 incident and according to police three persons, including a one-year-old child and a woman, were found dead on the tracks near the Elathur railway station in Kozhikode district, hours after the fire incident.

The suspect, who is yet to be identified, is still at large. State police DGP Anil Kant addressing a press briefing earlier on Monday said a special investigation team has been constituted to investigate the incident. Chief Minister Pinarayi Vijayan has condemned the attack and directed the police to conduct a comprehensive investigation into the incident.

“The attack is very sad and shocking. I have directed the police to conduct a comprehensive investigation into the incident and bring all the details of the crime before the law. For this, a special investigation team will be formed. Efforts are being made vigorously by the police to nab the assailant. The state police chief himself is supervising it,” said Vijayan.



Forensic experts inspecting the spot where the bodies of three people were found near a railway track, in Kozhikode on Monday (ANI)

At least eight other persons sustained injuries in the April 2 incident and according to police three persons, including a one-year-old child and a woman, were found dead on the tracks

Union Minister Ashwini Vaishnaw termed the incident as ‘unfortunate’ and said that he

had spoken with the CM in this connection. “He is constituting a special investigating team, which will collaborate with the Railway Protection Force (RPF) and the Government Railway Police (GRP) to nab the culprits,” he said.

Kerala Governor Ari Mohammad Khan expressed his condolences to the families of the victims.

“...Three people lost their lives. This is heart-rending. I express my condolences to the bereaved families. Security will have to take note of this,” Khan said.

Prominent political leaders also wrote to the Union Railway Minister to do a thorough enquiry and give adequate compensation to the victims. Five people sustained burnt injuries in the attack.

CPI MP Binoy Viswam and Kerala Pradesh Congress Committee (KPCC) chief and MP from Kannur K Sudhakaran were among those who wrote to the Union Minister for Railways urging his intervention. Leader of Opposition in the As-

sembly V D Satheesan said that Central and state agencies should work together to investigate the case

“The incident that happened in the train last night has shocked everyone. This is something that is not common in Kerala. It is full of mysteries. A serious inquiry should be made. Central and state agencies should work together to investigate all aspects of this.”

He stated that the safety of rail passengers is of importance and such an incident taking place in a peaceful state like Kerala has ‘caused a big shock’.

“Let there be a serious investigation,” he said. ANI

‘CBI has emerged as brand for truth, justice’, says Prime Minister Modi

New Delhi - Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Monday said that the Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI) has emerged as a brand for justice and given hope and strength to the common citizen.

Addressing the diamond jubilee celebrations of the agency the prime minister said: “People hold protests to demand CBI inquiry as CBI has emerged as a brand for truth and justice.”

The prime minister said that the central agency’s scope has increased manifold ‘but the main responsibility of the CBI is



Prime Minister Narendra Modi attends the Diamond Jubilee celebrations of the CBI, in New Delhi on Monday (ANI)

to make the country corruption free’. “India cannot move forward without professional and efficient institutions like the CBI. From bank frauds to wildlife-related frauds, the CBI’s scope of work has increased manifold,” he said.

Training his guns at the previous governments at the Centre, the prime minister said that corrupt practices had ‘ruined the basis of our economy and banking system in the period before 2014’.

“Ten years ago, there was a competition to do more and

more corruption. Big scams took place during that time but the accused were not scared because the system stood by them... After 2014, we worked on a mission mode against root causes of corruption and hoarders of black money,” he said.

“Where there is corruption, the youth do not get proper opportunities. Only a special ecosystem flourishes there. Corruption is the biggest enemy of talent and it is from here that nepotism get strengthened,” he added.

The Prime Minister said that

the government has ensured utmost transparency in the systems and the processes of allocation of 2G and 5G spectrum reflect the government’s commitment towards this. Modi said there had been times of disbelief and policy paralysis in the country but ‘since 2014, the government’s primary goal has been to reinstate, nurture and strengthen people’s belief in the system’.

The prime minister said that in the last six decades, the CBI has earned recognition as a ‘multi-dimensional’ and ‘multi-

disciplinary’ investigation agency.

“The CBI’s scope of work today, has widened to a greater scale; from metro cities to forests, from banks to wildlife protection, CBI has been investigating almost each and every aspect. Also, even cyber crimes are being dealt with by this agency,” he said.

“I know that the people against whom you are taking action are very powerful, they have been part of the government and system for years.”

ANI

Three dead as powerful earthquake strikes PNG

Sydney, Australia - At least three people were killed after a 7.0-magnitude earthquake shook a remote region of northwestern Papua New Guinea before dawn on Monday.

The country’s National Disaster Centre said dozens of homes were also affected as emergency crews continued to assess the damage across difficult terrain.

The quake struck at a depth of 62km (38 miles) near the Chambri Lake system in the sparsely populated region of East Sepik Province, the US Geological Survey said.

“Chambri lake is boiling and the continuous quake is still happening right now,” a member of parliament in the area, Johnson Wapunai, said in a message on social media several hours after the quake

struck. The lawmaker urged people to watch out for falling objects or trees, and to be on alert for further seismic activity. No tsunami warning was issued.

Colles Pinga, who lives not far from the epicentre, told Australia’s national broadcaster that three homes in his village were destroyed and people have been injured.

“There’s landslides along the riverbanks... it’s quite frightening,” Pinga told the Australian Broadcasting Corporation. The quake also left cracks on the interior floors of a new regional hospital that was nearing completion about 60km away, and also un-

lodged the building’s paving stones, according to photographs taken by a doctor at the scene. AFP

UK passport workers launch walkout over pay

London, UK - UK passport office workers launched a five-week stoppage on Monday, the latest walkout in strike-hit Britain as the country reels from the worst cost of living crisis in a generation.

The Public and Commercial Services union (PCS) accused the government of failing to deal even-handedly with public sector workers.

The UK has been hit by a wave of industrial action across the economy in recent months ranging from ambulance staff and rail staff to doctors, teachers and dock workers.

Unions say their members have been hit by a combination of decades-high inflation and stagnating wages that has left them struggling to pay their bills.

Ministers had failed to ‘hold any meaningful talks’ with civil servants despite negotiations having been opened with unions representing health workers and teachers, PCS general secretary Mark Serwotka said.



Members of the PCS union stand on a picket line on the first day of a five-week strike, in London on Monday (AFP)

“They’re treating their own workforce worse than anyone else. They’ve had six months to resolve this dispute but for six months have refused to improve their two per cent imposed pay rise, and failed to address our

members’ other issues of concern,” he said.

“They seem to think if they ignore our members, they’ll go away. But how can our members ignore the cost-of-living crisis when 40,000 civil servants are

using foodbanks and 45,000 of them are claiming the benefits they administer themselves?” he added.

The union wants talks about pay, jobs, pensions and conditions. More than 1,000 members

of the PCS civil servants union are due to take part in the walk-out with picket lines mounted outside eight sites.

A nationwide walkout of more than 130,000 civil servants is also planned for April 28.

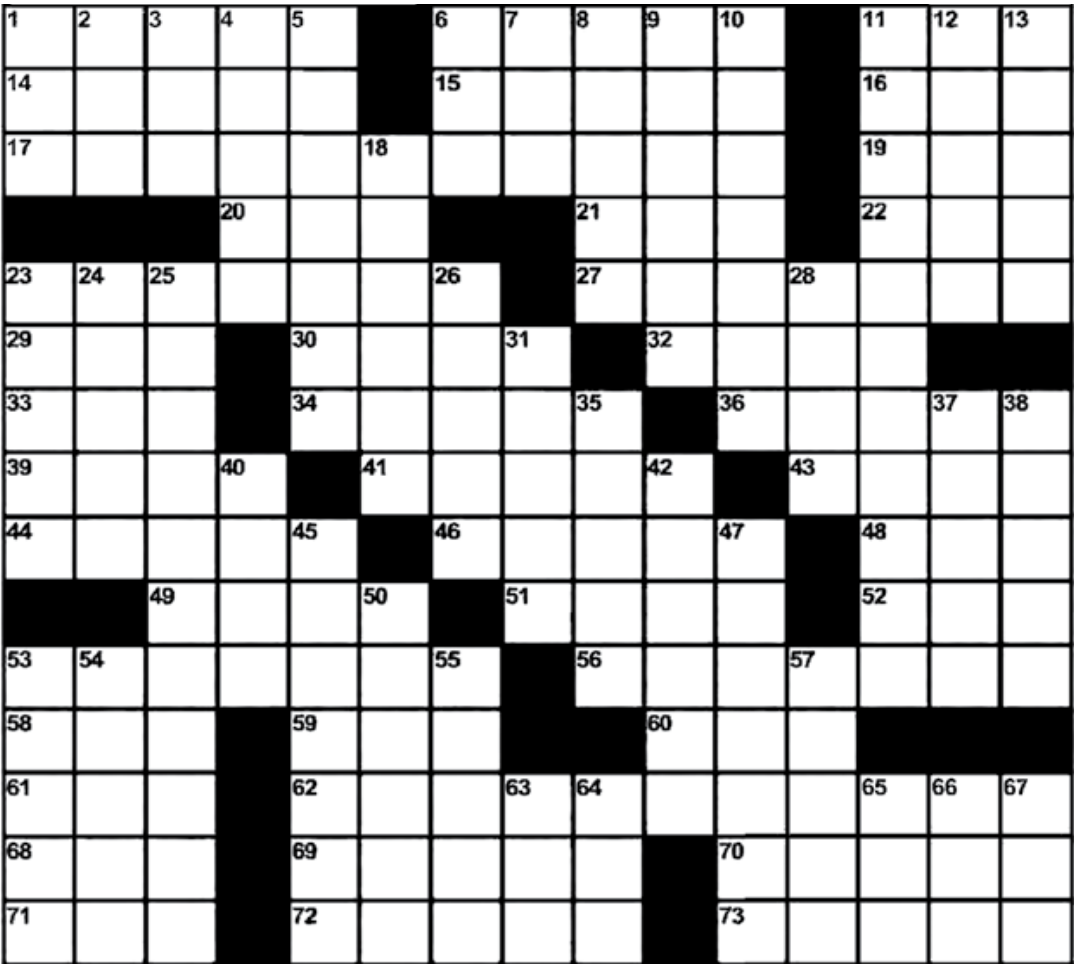
Prime Minister Rishi Sunak has rejected demands for big pay hikes in the public sector, saying they are unaffordable and will fuel inflation.

The UK government and teaching unions earlier this month agreed to hold ‘intensive talks’ a day after health unions said they had reached a deal on pay.

But teacher union leaders said on Monday that they rejected the latest pay offer and announced further walkouts.

The government had offered teachers a £1,000 (US\$1,231) one-off payment for the current school year and an average rise of 4.5 per cent pay rise for next year. AFP

DAILY CROSSWORD



ACROSS

1) Give a lift up
6) Like some transit or fire
11) Having lived many years
14) Equestrian
15) Do a make-up job?
16) "Seinfeld" uncle
17) Broken-in slippers, a wellworn sofa, etc.
19) VHS successor
20) Pedal digit
21) "The Raven" writer's monogram
22) Gig segment
23) Succeed financially
27) Bit of slalom gear
29) Costa del_
30) Just makes, as a living (with "out")
32) Son of Isaac and Rebekah
33) Suffered with
34) "Jurassic Park" mosquito preserver
36) Artist Max
39) Advil target
41) Participate in a debate
43) Europe's tallest active volcano

44) Some impact sounds
46) Little kids
48) Be in a bad way
49) Cambodian currency
51) Poland's Walesa
52) Bar rocks
53) North American hawk
56) Gets smaller, as a sweater
58) Mythical monster
59) _-Wee Herman
60) Christmas holiday drink
61) Sine_non (necessary condition)
62) Crumbly road part?
68)_ and downs
69) Scalawag
70) Dinner-table protector
71) Ending for many ordinal numbers
72) Jacket material, sometimes
73) Amiens is its capital

DOWN

1) "My man!"
2) Black gold
3) Not even
4) Religious divisions
5) Highway cruiser
6) Churchill's "so few," briefly
7) From_Z
8) Small skin openings
9) Amount eaten
10) Really dislike
11) Ararat or Sinai?
12) Carpenter's tool
13) Artful move
18) More humble
23) "Don't give me that!"
24) Invasive household insect
25) Twenties from the '20s?
26) Change, as a clock
28) Reduce, as expenses
31) Female oracle
35) Cooks in the microwave
37) Small cut
38) Accounts
40) Give off, as light
42) Electronic music genre
45) Baltimore is one
47) Covers or hides
50) Remain in hiding
53) Mallet-and-ball game
54) Blow, as a volcano
55) Pigeon's city perch
57) Block house?
63) Take to court
64) Pronominal contraction
65) Like a faint light
66) "A Nightmare on_ Street"
67) Bread variety

NOTE PAD

T	O	G	A	S	T	E	A	K	S	H	A	H
A	L	U	M	C	A	L	L	A	L	A	V	A
L	I	R	E	U	N	I	T	Y	E	N	O	S
C	O	U	N	T	R	Y	D	O	O	R	D	O
A	U	R	A	E	A	G	I	S	T			
F	L	A	B	B	Y	M	I	R	E			
R	O	I	L	E	L	A	T	E	S	A	D	
E	N	D	E	A	S	T	E	N	T	R	A	N
T	E	E	T	A	C	K	Y	I	A	M	B	
		A	R	C	H			C	A	R	P	E
O	M	A	N	I	S	L	U	S	H			
P	A	C	K	P	O	C	K	E	T	P	E	D
A	R	I	L		M	A	U	V	E	A	O	N
R	I	D	E		I	S	L	E	S	D	I	N
T	E	S	T		T	A	L	L	Y	S	T	A

YOUR DAILY HOROSCOPE

ARIES MARCH 21-APRIL 19

Forget about being able to communicate effectively via phone or computer today. They are going to be useless for the type of message you need to send to a certain someone. Don't assume that words typed on a screen are going to adequately convey what you mean. They won't. Even if you aren't thrilled by the idea, you need to talk this issue over in person. You can make the conversation more enjoyable by scheduling it over lunch or dinner.

LEO JULY 23-AUGUST 22

Are you getting a reputation as someone who's too stubborn? Now more than ever it's important to open yourself up to new ideas and new ways of doing things. Sometimes change is bad, but most of the time change is good. It demonstrates that when you're made aware of new information, you factor it into your philosophy accordingly. Sticking with one idea no matter what the facts say isn't admirable. It's dangerous. Moving forward in your life requires you to move forward in your thinking.

SAGITTARIUS NOVEMBER 22-DECEMBER 21

Why are you doubting their position in your social circle right now? You need to have a little bit more faith that you're still loved by your friends. Sure, you should watch how you deal with other people right now, but that's only because they have weird stuff going on in their lives, not because there is anything wrong with you. A new beginning is coming quite soon, something that will excite your friends and unite all of you in a common cause.



TEST YOUR KNOWLEDGE

TAURUS APRIL 20-MAY 20

If someone just isn't getting the message you're trying to send them, it's time for you to give up, at least for a while. They might be ready to listen soon, but you shouldn't hold your breath. You don't really need them, and it's a waste of your time to keep knocking on their emotional doors if they won't let you in. What you wanted might still happen, but not with their assistance. That's okay. You're ready for a new cast of characters in your life anyway.

VIRGO AUGUST 23-SEPTEMBER 22

Someone in your life is going through some demanding work issues right now. This stress could be affecting their personality. It could be leaking into your relationship and affecting it in a negative way. Let this person know that you're concerned, but don't rush at them with demands to shape up or else! The last thing they need is more pressure. Just be compassionate. Let them know that you'll be patience and supportive for as long as they need you to be.

CAPRICORN DECEMBER 22-JANUARY 19

Try to avoid flighty people today, especially in social situations. Their unfocused energy could cause you to lose your focus too, and that wouldn't be good for the positive momentum you've been enjoying! If a certain friend has promised to meet you somewhere but you have a feeling they either won't show or will make you wait longer than you want, call them and reschedule or cancel outright. Friends who are true friends won't have a problem with it.

01. Which major record label was created in 1901, using the name of an 1898 painting of his friend's pet by Francis Barraud?

A. Columbia
B. HMV
C. EMI
D. BMG

GEMINI MAY 21-JUNE 21

Generating ideas is easier than ever today thanks to your unique way of looking at things. Some people see a blank sheet of paper and panic about how they're going to fill it up. Today, you'll see that same blank sheet of paper and immediately ask for another in order to have enough space to get down everything that's going on inside your head. All this activity is great for your attitude, but be careful. It will also make the time fly!

LIBRA SEPTEMBER 23-OCTOBER 22

Today, you need to explore areas that you know little or nothing about. Experience new things, and you'll become a more interesting person. If a conversation you're in drifts into political issues or world events that you know nothing about, don't walk away or change the subject to something you're more familiar with. Keep listening. Ask questions so that you can be on the same level as everyone else. People will love the chance to tell you what they know.

AQUARIUS JANUARY 20-FEBRUARY 18

There is more than one way to get a connection going with someone else. Why do you insist on trying the same tactics over and over again? Your style might not be the same as everyone else's, so stop comparing yourself to others. Don't try to mimic what they do. The people who (in your eyes) are more attractive, more intelligent, or more entertaining are following their own paths. If you follow your own path, everyone will finally see what a gift you are.

02. What is or was scapulamancy used for?

A. Cosmetics
B. Preparing medicines
C. Inducing dreams
D. Divination

CANCER JUNE 22-JULY 22

Be wary of a friend whose lifestyle is getting a bit extreme in your eyes. They represent a cautionary tale that you don't need to learn. You have taken your educational walks on the wild side, and may again, although right now is not the appropriate time to do so. You don't need to relieve anything through this person. If you need to get some distance from them temporarily, don't feel guilty about it. Do what's right for you. They wouldn't expect you to do anything less.

SCORPIO OCTOBER 23-NOVEMBER 21

Don't make assumptions about the state of your financial situation right now. It could be better than you think, but then again, it could be worse than you think. Before you start shopping, check your accounts to make sure you know where you stand financially speaking. If you don't make sure you're flush, you're taking a big risk, and taking that risk may not pay off. There is a possibility that some of your money is tied up in an automatic payment snag.

PISCES FEBRUARY 19-MARCH 20

The clarity you had about your feelings for someone is dissolving a little bit today, but have no fear. This confusion you're experiencing is a totally normal part of the deliberation process. You've come across new information about them, and it's only natural that this revelation makes you think twice about who you thought they were. No one is perfect, so if you thought they were, you now know you were wrong. Can you still accept them once you've seen their imperfections?

03. What country has an official residence called Blair House, kept for guests of the leader of the country?

A. UK
B. USA
C. Australia
D. Canada

Answers: 1.B 2.D 3.B

KIDS COLOURING



BOGGLER

N	T	W	O
O	I	T	G
B	D	G	L
D	H	O	Y

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

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

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

CAUSE FOR CONCERN

Messi jeered as PSG suffer another home defeat, falling 1-0 to Lyon

Paris, France - Paris Saint-Germain suffered a second home defeat in a row Sunday, falling 1-0 to Lyon as their World Cup winning superstar Lionel Messi was jeered by a section of supporters.

After losing 2-0 at home to Rennes two weeks ago, it was Lyon's Bradley Barcola who inflicted the latest loss for PSG at the Parc des Princes.

The goal by Barcola - who had come on as replacement for injured Amin Sarr - made up for a missed penalty by Alexandre Lacazette in the first half.

It is the Parisians' fifth Ligue 1 loss this season, all of them in 2023, and leaves Christophe Galtier's side just six points ahead of both second-placed Lens and Marseille in third.

The night started in controversial circumstances.

As the team line-ups were announced over the loudspeaker, whistling greeted Messi's name in one part of the stadium.

Fans in another area, however, shouted in response 'Messi'.

Messi (35) is nearing the end of his two-year contract with the Paris club.

Talks have begun on a possible renewal but he has also been linked with a return to Barcelona.

In two seasons, the veteran has played 67 matches with PSG including Sunday's game against ninth-placed Lyon and scored 29 goals.

"The whistles, I find that hard," said Galtier. "Leo is a player who gives a lot and who has given a lot since the start of the season."

He added, "With a stroke of genius, Leo is able to deliver the right ball, to provide an assist, to score a goal. I never once



Paris Saint-Germain's forward Lionel Messi reacts after Lyon's forward Bradley Barcola scored a goal (AFP)

thought about taking him off."

PSG midfielder Danilo acknowledged the team had hit 'a difficult phase', which they had to find a way out of, given their rivals were closing in.

"We have to wake up. The title is not guaranteed at all, there are still a lot of matches," he said.

"There are lot of things to change, not just the mindset, but it's not up to me to say what."

PSG have been severely hampered by injuries, with Neymar recovering from ankle surgery and their defence decimated.

On Sunday, PSG called up 17-year-old central defender El Chadaille Bitshiabu but he was overawed, giving away the ball too often.

Kylian Mbappe failed to pull off a repeat of his late scoring heroics as he had done in recent games against Strasbourg and Brest. "We can't expect everything from Leo and Kylian," said Galtier. "It's our eighth defeat in 2023, it's far too many."

Monaco's 3 in 11 min

Monaco kept up their push for a Champions League spot with a rollercoaster 4-3 home win over lowly Strasbourg.

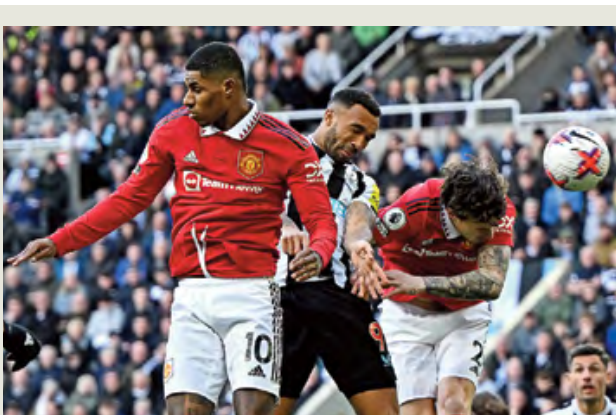
Monaco trailed 2-1 at the interval despite taking an 18th-minute lead through Vanderson.

Lebo Mothiba and an own-goal by Chilean defender Guillermo Maripan gave Strasbourg the edge.

Eliesse Ben Seghir and Edan Diop, and Youssouf Fofana then hit three goals inside an 11-minute spell in the second half to give Monaco a 4-2 lead.

Habib Diallo's stoppage-time strike was only a consolation for Strasbourg.

AFP



Newcastle United striker Callum Wilson (centre) heads home their second goal during the match against Manchester United (AFP)

Newcastle up to third after beating Man Utd, West Ham out of bottom three

London, UK - Newcastle avenged their League Cup final loss against Manchester United as Joe Willock and Callum Wilson clinched a 2-0 win that lifted the Magpies into third place in the Premier League on Sunday.

Eddie Howe's side were beaten 2-0 by United at Wembley five weeks ago in their first major final for 24 years.

But Newcastle might swap silverware for a lucrative Champions League berth and second half goals from Willock and Wilson at a raucous St James' Park moved them closer to that ambition.

Newcastle's third successive league win - and their first against United since 2019 - took them above their fourth placed opponents on goal difference.

They sit one point ahead of fifth placed Tottenham, who visit Everton on Monday, as the race heats up to qualify for next season's Champions League via a top four finish.

It is 46 years since Newcastle last finished above United, but the Magpies, fuelled by Howe's astute management and the financial backing of their Saudi owners, now have a rare chance to emulate that feat.

"We were frustrated not to lead at half-time, but I felt if we performed the same way it would come. Thankfully it did," Howe said.

West Ham boost

In Sunday's other game, West Ham scrambled out of the relegation zone as Nayef Aguerd's first goal for the club sealed a crucial 1-0 victory against fellow strugglers Southampton.

David Moyes' side kicked off at the London Stadium languishing second bottom of the table, with Southampton in last place.

But Morocco defender Aguerd's maiden goal since signing from French club Rennes last year lifted the Hammers up to 14th.



Graham Potter during the match against Aston Villa on Saturday (AFP)

Chelsea sack Potter after just seven months in charge

London, UK - Coach Graham Potter paid for Chelsea's poor form as the Englishman was sacked on Sunday after just seven months in the job.

The Blues had slipped to 11th in the Premier League table after a 2-0 home defeat to Aston Villa on Saturday despite spending over £500mn (US\$616mn) on new signings this season.

Former Brighton defender Bruno Salto has been placed in interim charge.

Chelsea have won just three games in their last 11 but have progressed to the quarter-finals of the Champions League where they face defending champions Real Madrid.

That tie may have been the decisive factor in the club's new American owners pulling the trigger now, with the first leg in Madrid just ten days away.

"We have the highest degree of respect for Graham as a coach and as a person. He has always conducted himself with professionalism and integrity and we are all disappointed in this outcome," co-owners Todd Boehly and Behdad Eghbali said.

"We have 10 Premier League games remaining and a Champions League quarter-final ahead. We will put every effort and commitment into every one of those games so that we can end the season on a high."

Milan slam brakes on Napoli's title charge with four-goal thumping

Milan, Italy - AC Milan hammered runaway Serie A leaders Napoli 4-0 on Sunday in an incredible performance which slammed the brakes on their opponents' charge to a first league title in over three decades.

Rafael Leao outshone Khvicha Kvaratskhelia in the battle of the wing wizards with a brilliant brace while Brahim Diaz and Alexis Saelemaekers netted the other goals for the rampant defending champions who move up to third. The biggest win of the Serie A season for Stefano Pioli's side was also a third league defeat for Napoli, whose huge lead at the top of the table has been cut to 16 points after second-placed Lazio beat Monza 2-0 earlier on Sunday.

A difficult 2023 has left Milan 20 points off the pace but they have struck first blood in a trio of matches against Napoli which will conclude this month with the Champions League quarter-final between the two Italian teams.

"It's an incredible feeling, but even if I hadn't scored today, we still played very well," said Leao after his first goals since mid-January.

Napoli were without injured star striker Victor Osimhen but an otherwise first choice line-up was humbled by Milan who have boosted their chances of qualifying for next year's edition of Europe's top club competition.

Milan are however only a point above local rivals Inter Milan and Roma.

AFP



Real Madrid forward Karim Benzema scores his team's fourth goal during the Spanish league football match against Real Valladolid (AFP)

Benzema hits hat-trick in Madrid rout; Atletico, Villarreal win

Madrid, Spain - Karim Benzema scored a stunning hat-trick in a seven-minute salvo as Real Madrid thumped Real Valladolid 6-0 on Sunday in La Liga.

Champions Real Madrid, second, sit 12 points behind leaders Barcelona after the Catalans beat Elche on Saturday, with 11 games remaining each.

The race for a top four spot intensified as Villarreal, sixth, beat fourth-place Real Sociedad 2-0, and Atletico Madrid earned a 1-0 win over Betis in fifth.

Carlo Ancelotti's Madrid warmed up for their Copa del Rey semi-final clash on Wednesday

with arch-rivals Barcelona in style by dismantling Valladolid, 16th and a point above the drop zone.

Rodrygo Goes opened the scoring early on, before Benzema's hat-trick, including a spectacular acrobatic effort, with Marco Asensio netting the fifth in the second half and Lucas Vazquez adding another late on.

"Karim is a spectacular player, a world-class star, he's been here 14 years and year after year he scores goals," Vazquez told DAZN.

"Year after year he's been Madrid's number nine, there's

not much left to say about him, I'm very happy for him and enjoying (playing with) him in each game."

Starting in a central attacking midfield role, Rodrygo slotted home the opener after 22 minutes after being teed up by Asensio to open the floodgates.

Vinicius Junior set up two goals for strike partner Benzema, who took them with aplomb.

The French forward completed his hat-trick after 36 minutes when he pulled off an impressive overhead effort from inside the six-yard box for his 14th goal of the season in La Liga.

The 35-year old became the division's second top goalscorer, behind Barcelona's Robert Lewandowski on 17.

Ancelotti's attacking line-up paid dividends and the coach said he was delighted with his forwards.

"The four up front delivered, in all aspects," said Ancelotti. "Everyone combined very well, alternating movements, with mobility, attacking from deep, that's what we were looking for."

The coach said he might start Rodrygo against Barcelona at Camp Nou.

AFP

MED RUSH

Daniil Medvedev wins fourth title of year with Miami Open triumph over Sinner

Miami Gardens, US - Russian Daniil Medvedev claimed his fourth ATP title of the year with an emphatic victory over Italy's Jannik Sinner in the final of the Miami Open on Sunday.

Sinner had upset world number one and defending champion Carlos Alcaraz in Friday's semi-final, but the 21-year-old struggled in the heat against the fourth seed Medvedev, who triumphed 7-5, 6-3.

The win was Medvedev's 19th career ATP title and his fifth in a Masters 1000 event and confirmed his dominance on hard courts in 2023.

Sinner, also beaten in the Miami final two years ago and now with a 0-6 record against the Russian, said he had not been at 100%.

"We woke up this morning not at my best, I felt a little bit sick... unfortunately today I couldn't play at my best," said the Italian who, however said there had been no question of him pulling out of the contest.

"No, it was not that bad. But, you know, with the heat, when you run a lot, it gets a little bit worse and worse. Obviously the first half an hour we played in the sun also," he said.

Medvedev, who had already won three titles in three weeks at Rotterdam, Doha and Dubai before losing to Alcaraz in the Indian Wells final, started confidently, holding serve to love while Sinner's first service game was a real battle.

Sinner had to save a break point and fought through a 26-shot rally before coming through at the end of a 10-minute game.

In contrast, Medvedev again served to love but Sinner was showing signs of settling as he held his serve and then the Italian broke Medvedev to go 3-2 up, with a deft touch volley.

Medvedev immediately broke back, however, with Sinner's effort clipping the net and going out and after the Russian held again, the Italian had attention from the ATP trainer.

Sinner, looking uncomfortable in the bright sunshine, took a pill along with a powder in his water in the 87 F (30.5 C) heat.

Medvedev, looking composed and confident, grabbed the first set when Sinner was serving at 6-5 down and the Italian's poor shot into the net handed the Russian the crucial break.



Daniil Medvedev of Russia holds the Butch Buchholz Trophy after defeating Jannik Sinner of Italy during the Mens Finals of the Miami Open at Hard Rock Stadium, in Miami Gardens, Florida, on Sunday (AFP)



I haven't won such a big title in probably a year and a half. At the end I was quite shaky... I managed to get myself together and close the match

DANIIL MEDVEDEV

Medvedev quickly got ahead in the second set when Sinner sent a forehand long but just as quickly handed the break back to Sinner.

But Sinner was making too many errors and when Medvedev broke again to go 3-1

up, the Italian was unable to turn things around and the world number five completed his first ever win in Miami.

"I'm really happy. Today was a tough match. It was probably the hottest day and the most humid during the day," Medvedev said. "Conditions were not easy. I don't know if Jannik had a small injury or cramp. I was also struggling, tried not to show it," he added.

Medvedev's 19 ATP Tour wins have come at 19 different events, but he had not won a Masters 1000 event since Toronto in 2021.

"I haven't won such a big title in probably a year and a half. At the end I was quite shaky," he said.

"Not even tight, because I'm not scared to win. But still the hands get a little shaky so the serve is a little bit tougher... I managed to get myself together and close the match."

The 27-year-old has now won five of the six hard-court ATP Masters 1000s and has also reached the final at both hard-court Grand Slams, winning the 2021 US Open.

Now he must turn his attention to the clay courts where he has had much less success.

"I love hard courts, if it would be my choice there would be only hard courts," he joked.

AFP



Ducati rider Marco Bezzecchi shows the Argentine jersey - signed by Lionel Messi - that he was presented for his first win, on the podium of the Argentina Grand Prix MotoGP, in Santiago del Estero on Sunday (AFP)

Bezzecchi claims maiden MotoGP win for Rossi's team in Argentina

Termas De Rio Hondo, Argentina - Marco Bezzecchi claimed a maiden MotoGP win at the rain-lashed Argentina Grand Prix on Sunday, also delivering a first victory for a Ducati team owned by motorcycling legend and seven-time elite class champion Valentino Rossi.

Italian rider Bezzecchi finished ahead of Frenchman Johann Zarco with Alex Marquez, who started on pole position, rounding out an all-Ducati podium.

"Normally I'm not very good when it rains, but today the sensations were incredible," he said.

Bezzecchi (24) also took a nine-point lead in the overall standings after world champion Francesco Bagnaia, the winner of last weekend's season-opener in Portugal, crashed off the circuit on lap 17 of the 25-lap race.

He was running in second place at the time before recovering to finish in 16th. However, such a lowly position meant he leaves Argentina without a point.

"This kind of crash is difficult to explain, I was in the same position, I had the same speed, the same angle as the previous lap and I crashed. I was maybe on the limit, I was fighting for the podium," said Bagnaia.

Bezzecchi had started in second place on the grid but swept past Marquez on the opening lap and was rarely troubled to take the chequered flag by 4.085sec.

South African KTM rider Brad Binder, who won the sprint race on Saturday after starting from 15th place on the grid, was 17th and last on Sunday after a fall on the opening lap.

Zarco who had started from sixth on the grid said he was 'quite satisfied' with his performance which moved him up to third in the standings, 15 points behind Bezzecchi. "This is a circuit where we have good grip in the wet," said Zarco.

The top 10 on Sunday was rounded out by Franco Morbidelli, Jorge Martin, Jack Miller, 2022 world champion Fabio Quartararo, Luca Marini, Alex Rins and Fabio Di Giannantonio.

Former world champion Joan Mir missed Sunday's race due to injuries suffered in the sprint.

"After a morning medical check, Joan Mir was declared unfit for the Argentina GP by MotoGP and circuit medical staff due to cranial and cervical trauma," Honda said.

The Spaniard, who won the MotoGP title in 2020, crashed in the opening lap on Saturday.

Sunday's Moto2 race in Argentina was won by Tony Arbolino with Alonso Lopez and Jake Dixon filling out the podium.

AFP

Brooks Koepka warms up for Masters with Orlando LIV win

Miami, US - Brooks Koepka warmed up for next week's Masters with the second LIV Golf title of his career on Sunday after clinching a two-shot victory in the upstart circuit's Orlando event.

Four-time major champion Koepka, one of the biggest names to defect from the PGA Tour to the Saudi Arabia-backed circuit last year, fired a closing three-under 68 to claim the win at Orlando's Orange County National Course.

The 32-year-old American rattled in four birdies and one bogey to finish on 15 under and pocket the \$4 million winner's prize - \$1.3 million more than the winner of next week's first major of 2023 at Augusta will receive.

"I'm finally healthy and it's good to play some good golf," said Koepka, who has struggled with a litany of injuries in recent seasons.

"It gives me chills thinking of the capabilities of what I can do when I'm healthy. Going into next week that's what you want to see."

AFP



Four-time major champion Brooks Koepka



Renaissance Cricket Team pose for a photograph after finishing third in the Oman Cricket Premier Division

Renaissance finish third in Premier Division

Muscat - Renaissance Cricket Team defeated Yalla Shabab by four wickets to finish third in the Oman Cricket Premier Division powered by Muscat Pharmacy.

Batting first, Yalla Shabab were all out for 149 in 38.4 overs. Renaissance reached the target in 32.5 overs. Hammad Mirza's 38 of 46 balls was crucial in their victory. Earlier, Imran Ali took four wickets for 24 runs to restrict Yalla Shabab.

Hammad Mirza was the best batter for Renaissance, scoring 320 runs in 13 matches while

This is the second consecutive year that we have finished among the top three

NISAL FERNANDO

Shubo Pal made 265 runs in 12. Bilal Muhammed was their key bowler with 15 wickets from 9 matches followed by Fawad Ali claiming 11 scalps in 10.

Nisal Fernando, head coach of Renaissance, was delighted with the victory.

"This is the second consecutive year that we have finished among the top three. The boys worked very hard throughout the season, and I am thrilled at the outcome," an elated coach said.

"I attribute this success to team discipline and mentorship from senior players. Renaissance performed brilliantly this season, putting up a good fight against tougher teams and snatching key game by the slimmest of margins," he added.

"The next Premier Division season will be even tougher, but we will be going into it well-prepared and with the experience of having played all formats in 2022-23. My team and I thank the Renaissance management and colleagues across all departments for their support.

"A word of thanks also goes out to Duleep Mendis, the Oman Cricket Board and its staff, ground staff and to all competing teams for pushing us to deliver beyond our own expectations."



TODAYS MATCH

MATCH 7

6 PM

DELHI CAPITALS

GUJARAT TITANS

Rohit Sharma: ‘Can’t keep dwelling on’ Jasprit Bumrah’s absence

Mumbai, India - On a night when Mumbai Indians were in danger for a long time of being brushed aside with all of Royal Challengers Bangalore’s wickets intact, **Rohit Sharma** had to field the question around the hole losing Jasprit Bumrah leaves in his side.

Mumbai can’t dwell on that, Rohit insisted. “For the past six to eight months, I am used to playing without Jasprit Bumrah,” he said after the loss. “Of course, this is a different set-up. Someone needs to put their hand up and come in to fill that place. We can’t keep dwelling on it. You can try and control the things that are in your control and those that are not in your control, you can’t do that. Injuries are not in your control.

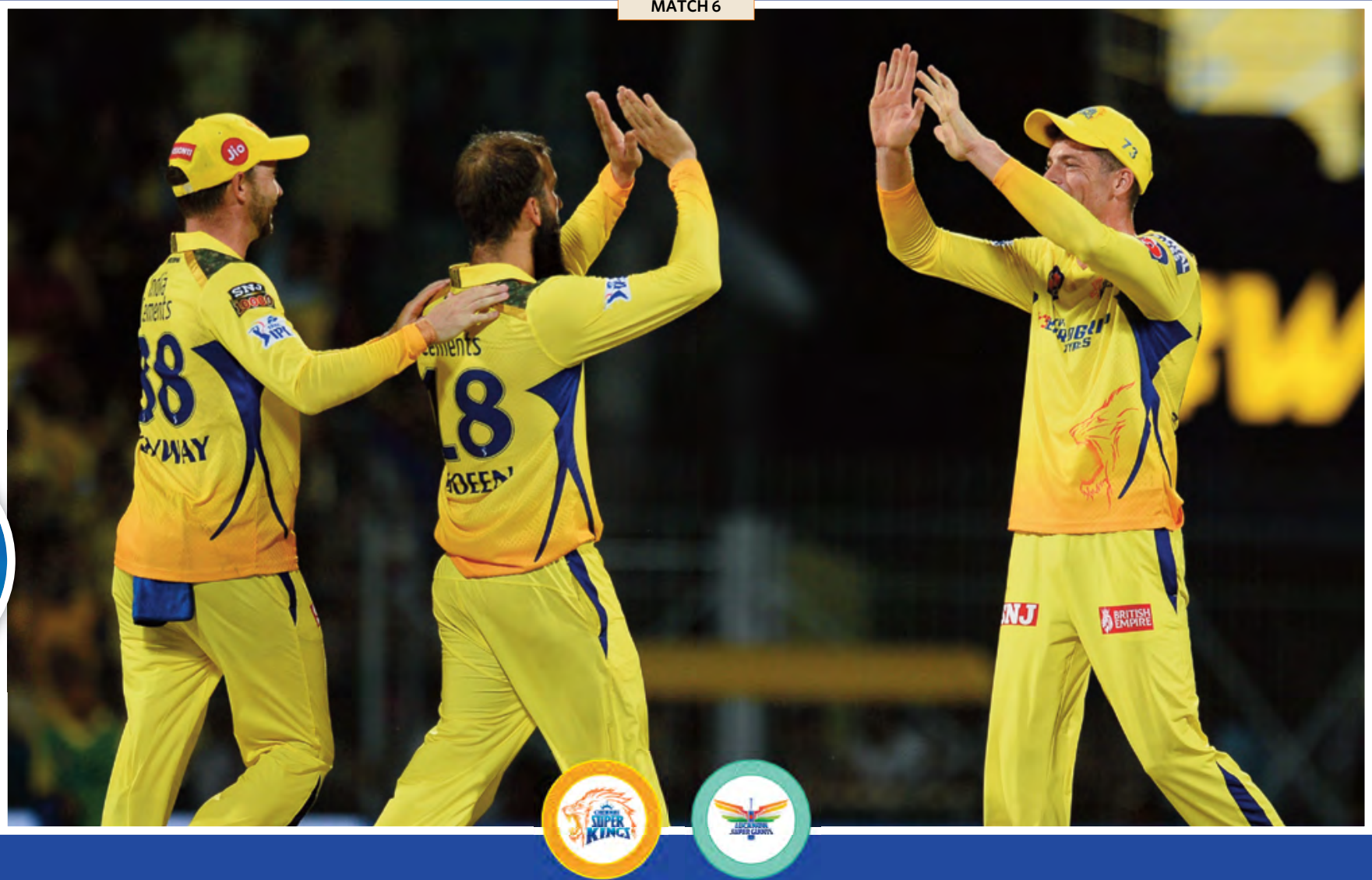
“The other guys that we have are talented. It’s just that they haven’t played a lot of IPL. We need to give them the support.”

Defending 171, each of Mumbai’s bowlers - save for experienced legspinner Piyush Chawla whose four overs went for only 26 - had an economy rate in excess of eight.

ESPNcricinfo



GAIKWAD, MOEEN STAR AS CHENNAI GET THE BETTER OF LUCKNOW TO OPEN ACCOUNT



Moeen Ali (C) of Chennai Super Kings celebrates with team-mates after taking the wicket of Lucknow Super Giants captain KL Rahul during their match in Chennai on Monday. Moeen took four wickets as Chennai got the better of Lucknow by 12 runs despite Kyle Mayers’ blazing start and enterprising rear-guard action from Krishnappa Gowtham and Ayush Badoni. Earlier Ruturaj Gaikwad blasted his second successive fifty to help Chennai make 217 for 7.

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A PHENOMENAL WIN

Virat Kohli, Faf Du Plessis lead Bangalore to thumping victory over Mumbai

Bengaluru, India - Virat Kohli and skipper Faf du Plessis led Royal Challengers Bangalore to a thumping eight-wicket drubbing of Mumbai Indians as the tournament’s big guns ruled on an action-packed Sunday at the Indian Premier League.

Kohli (82 not out) and Du Plessis (73) capped off a run-filled day with an opening stand of 148 as Bangalore achieved their victory target of 172 with 22 balls to spare in front of a raucous home crowd.

The pair bossed the chase from the start with some assured strokemaking and regular boundaries to open their IPL campaign in style.

“I thought it was a phenomenal win, a homecoming after four years. Couldn’t have asked for a better game,” an elated Kohli said as he reflected on a tournament which has reverted to a home-and-away format following a number of years impacted by the Covid pandemic.



Royal Challengers Bangalore’s Virat Kohli plays a shot during their match against Mumbai Indians on Sunday

Man-of-the-match Du Plessis, a 38-year-old South African veteran, said “My first time playing here (at M.Chinnaswamy Stadium) as a home player, especially batting with Virat Kohli. Energy bounces off him.”

Five-time winners Mumbai looked clueless despite the presence of Jason Behrendorff, who came in as the “impact player” when they fielded, and the returning England fast bowler Jofra Archer.

Du Plessis smashed six sixes in his 43-ball knock before departing in the 15th over.

New man Dinesh Karthik soon fell for a duck off Mumbai’s big-buy Cameron Green.

Glenn Maxwell then struck two sixes and Kohli smacked the winning hit over the fence as Bangalore started their hunt for a maiden IPL title in season 16 of the cash-rich T20 tournament.

Mohammed Siraj led an inspired bowling attack with figures of 1-21 to keep down five-time winners Mumbai to 171-7 despite an unbeaten 84 by Indian talent Tilak Varma.

Varma, a 20-year-old uncapped India batsman, took charge after an early collapse when Mumbai lost their top three including Green (5) and skipper Rohit Sharma (1) inside six overs after being invited to bat first.

Australia’s Green, who was the second-most expensive buy after Mumbai forked out \$2.11 million in the auction, was bowled by England left-arm quick Reece Topley.

Rohit lasted 10 balls before Akash Deep got the star batsman caught behind for one as Mumbai slipped to 20-3, but the all-format India captain praised Varma’s fightback.

AFP

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In search of ice

Arctic scientists are set to start drilling to save samples of ancient ice for analysis before the frozen layers melt away due to climate change, mission organisers said on Monday.

Italian, French and Norwegian researchers have set up camp in Norway's Svalbard archipelago in what they called a race against time to preserve crucial ice records for analysing past environmental conditions.

They will extract ice in a series of tubes from as far as 125m below the surface, containing frozen geochemical traces dating back three centuries.

Analysis of chemicals in deep 'ice cores' provides scientists with valuable data about past environmental conditions.

But experts warn that water from melting ice is leaking down and altering the geochemical records preserved in ancient ice beneath.

Ice scientists "are seeing their primary material disappear forever from the surface of the planet", Jerome Chappellaz, president of the Ice Memory foundation running the operation, told AFP.

ARCTIC SCIENTISTS RACE TO CAPTURE ANCIENT ICE MEMORY



L-R: Scientists Carlo Barbante, Patrick Ginot and Jerome Chappellaz carry a part of an ice core in Chamonix, eastern France, following the extraction of two ice cores from a glacier, as part of the 'Protecting Ice Memory project' (AFP)

"It is our responsibility as glaciologists of this generation to make sure a bit of it is preserved."

Human-caused carbon emissions have warmed the planet by 1.1°C since the 19th century. Studies indicate that the Arctic is warming between two and four times faster than the global average.

One set of ice tubes will be used for immediate analysis while a second set will be sent to Antarctica for storage in an 'ice memory sanctuary' under the snow, where the samples will be preserved for future generations of scientists. The eight specialists on the mission have set up camp at an altitude of 1,100m on the crevasse-ridden Høltedahlfonna ice field and plan to start drilling on Tuesday, Ice Memory said.

They will work for three weeks in temperatures as low as -25°C, cutting and pulling out a series of cylinders of ice, each one metre long and 10cm wide.

The €700,000 mission, partly funded by the Italian research ministry, follows a series of earlier ice core extractions by the foundation, including operations in the Alps and the Andes.

AFP

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