



SAYYID FAHD RECEIVES ISESCO DIRECTOR GENERAL



On behalf of His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik, Sayyid Fahd bin Mahmoud al Said, Deputy Prime Minister for the Council of Ministers, received Dr Salim Mohammed al Malik, Director General of Islamic Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (ISESCO), on Tuesday. Malik expressed his appreciation for the achievements made by Oman and the sultanate's constructive role in supporting ISESCO (ONA)

Oman's inflation falls to lowest level in two years

Our Correspondent Muscat

Oman's annual inflation rate in April dropped to its lowest level in two years, thanks to slower increase in food prices and stability in utilities, fuel, rent and transportation bills.

The inflation rate, as measured by the sultanate's Consumer Price Index (CPI), dropped to 1.1 per cent in April 2023 from 1.6 per cent in March and 1.9 per cent in February this year, according to data released by the National Centre for Statistics and Information (NCISI).

Oman's annual inflation has been consistently declining in the past few months due to easing global inflation and government measures that capped prices of fuel and essential commodities.

Consumer price inflation for food items, which have nearly 24 per cent weightage in Oman's CPI, rose at a slow pace of 2.7 per cent in April, as opposed to 4.1 per cent in March. The 19-month low food inflation is mainly attributed to a sharp nine per cent drop in vegetable prices in April compared to a year ago.

Among food items, prices of cooking oil and fats rose 7.4 per cent year-on-year in April, but bread and cereal prices grew at a lower rate of 3.3 per cent. Meat prices recorded a slow increase of 0.9 per cent, while prices of



(Muscat Daily)

fish and seafood products jumped 10.3 per cent in April year-on-year. Consumer prices for fruits increased 1.9 per cent.

On the other hand, cost of housing, water, electricity, gas and other fuels remained stable in April this year compared to April 2022. Prices in the transportation group, which has a percentage weight of more than 19 in the CPI, edged down by 0.15 per cent in April compared to the same a year ago.

Lowest inflation in GCC

The International Monetary Fund (IMF) expects Oman's annual inflation to further decelerate this year, thanks to subsidies, price caps on certain products and a

strengthening US dollar to which the Omani rial is pegged.

Oman is expected to record an average inflation of 1.9 per cent for 2023, the lowest inflation in the GCC, according to the IMF. The sultanate witnessed the second-lowest average inflation rate among GCC countries in 2022 at 2.8 per cent, following Saudi Arabia, which registered an inflation rate of just 2.5 per cent last year.

In its latest *Regional Economic Outlook Report*, IMF projects inflation in the GCC countries will further decrease in the next two years, averaging 2.9 per cent in 2023 and 2.3 per cent in 2024.

'Lower inflation in GCC countries is mainly attributed to gov-

ernmental interventions such as price caps on certain products, subsidies on key products or utilities, and strengthening of the US dollar, to which all GCC countries have pegged their currencies, except for Kuwait, which has linked its currency to a basket of currencies including the US dollar,' the IMF said.

According to a report from Kuwait-based Kamco Investment, the combination of persistent high oil and gas prices and interest rate hikes by GCC central banks, largely in unison with the US Federal Reserve rate increases, has been another key factor that kept inflation rates significantly lower in Oman and GCC countries.

Electronic voting for Majlis A'Shura elections

Our Correspondent Muscat

Elections to decide members of Majlis A'Shura will be held electronically later this year, according to the Ministry of Transport, Communications and Information Technology (MTCIT).

On the sidelines of the first edition of the Government Digital Transformation Forum held on Tuesday, Abdulaziz al Kharousi, Director of Government Digital Transformation Programme at MTCIT, informed



that voting for Majlis A'Shura members will be held via mobile phones following a similar process employed for municipal

council elections.

For the first time in December last year, municipal elections were held electronically through the Intakhib app launched by the Ministry of Interior. The app was designed to security standards to ensure complete confidentiality in the election process. It makes casting votes an easy and convenient process.

Intakhib runs on smartphones having the NFC feature and Internet connection, and the voter must be registered in the electoral register.

FDI in Oman surpasses RO19.6bn

Muscat - The latest data released by the National Centre for Statistics and Information (NCISI) reveals that foreign direct investment (FDI) in Oman reached a significant total of RO19.620bn in 2022, representing an increase of RO1.860bn compared to the previous year's figure of RO17.760bn.

The oil and gas sector claimed the largest share of FDI in 2022 amounting to RO14.166bn, marking a substantial growth from RO12.177bn in 2021.

Following closely behind was the manufacturing sector, accounting for RO1.549bn, experiencing a decline from RO1.705bn in 2021. The financial sector was third with RO1.481bn, down from RO1.648bn in 2021.

Real estate activities saw an increase in FDI from RO990.6mn in 2021 to RO1.037bn in 2022. Other sectors also experienced



The oil and gas sector claimed the largest share of FDI in 2022 amounting to RO14.166bn, marking a substantial growth from RO12.177bn in 2021

growth, from RO1.240bn to RO1.388bn.

Among the countries contributing to FDI, the United Kingdom emerged as the top investor with a substantial investment of RO10.156bn. The United States of America followed closely behind with RO2.735bn, while the United Arab Emirates was third with RO1.083bn. Kuwait invested RO927.5mn, China RO896.8mn, Bahrain RO370.3mn, Qatar RO327.7mn, India RO255.2mn, the Netherlands RO241.1mn, Switzerland RO171.1mn and RO2.458bn by other countries.

These FDI figures indicate a positive trend for Oman's economic growth and signify the country's attraction for international investors. The increase in FDI underscores the confidence and trust placed in Oman's business climate and investment opportunities.

TENDER NOTICE



The Internal Tender Committee of Emdad Logistics Company SAOC., hereby announces the following Tender:

Tender No.	Description	Date of Bid Submission	Suppliers	Tender Fee OMR (Inclusive of VAT 5%)	Place of Submission
EMDAD/ITC/ 004/2023	Supply of Aircraft & Vehicle Shelters	5th June 2023	Only Specialized Companies	Free of Cost	Emdad Logistics Company, 3rd floor

Taking into consideration the following:

All specialized companies that wish to participate in the tender should send a request to procurement@portofduqm.om and attach a copy of the Commercial Registration Certificate and the contact details of the authorized individual (business card) to the address presented below. From 08:00 - 13:00 and 14:00 - 17:00 (Sunday - Thursday).

Complete Tender documents should be submitted in sealed envelope with red wax with tender number and title and addressed to the "Chairman of Internal Tender Committee". The envelope should not make any reference to the bidder details. All applicants are required to submit the Tender in the Tender box in the main office of Emdad Logistics Company S.A.O.C. at or before 16:00 PM on the assigned date for submission of the Tender. Tenders submitted after the above-mentioned date and time shall not be considered.

- Overseas Companies can submit their offer via e-mail by sending it to procurement@portofduqm.om
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Sudan: Blasts dim hopes for latest ceasefire



Coronation tiara crowns Geneva jewels auction

MoCIIP unveils RO13mn in investment opportunities to boost food sector

Our Correspondent Muscat

In a collaborative effort with the private sector, the Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion (MoCIIP) has introduced four investment opportunities in the food sector aiming to enhance national income and stimulate economic growth.

An official from MoCIIP stated, "These investment opportunities comprise four projects, including a fish products manufacturing factory, a food technology training, testing and development centre, an evaporated and condensed milk production unit, and a date



processing and packing facility. The total investment value of these projects exceeds RO13mn."

The primary objective of these investments is to diversify the economy, facilitate development in the governorates, and create an enabling environment for successful investments. "Additionally, the investments aims to

empower the private sector, attract foreign direct investment, and establish Oman as a favourable destination for various food industries."

Detailing the investment prospects, the official said, "The manufacturing facility for fish products will be established in the Special Economic Zone at Duqm, spread over an area of 1,000sqm. The project is worth RO4.2mn and offers a return on investment of 13.9 per cent."

He informed that the food technology training, testing and development centre, situated in Muscat, will be set up on an area of 20,000sqm with an investment of RO3.9mn.

Continued on Page 03

Dumbphones aren't so dumb after all

Our Correspondent
Muscat

Digital detox, safety and more family time are among the many reasons for which smartphones are being replaced by dumbphones. Once called feature phones, these devices can only make and take calls, send and receive messages, and have a flashlight and maybe a camera.

When smartphones entered the consumer market in the mid-1990s, there was a sudden and steep decline in dumbphone sales globally. However, dumbphones have regained a slice - albeit very small - of the market pie in the last few years.

For many youngsters, dumbphones are bliss allowing them to remain focused and safe, while a section of their parents' generation is appreciating the advantages of these outdated devices in maintaining privacy.

Indian expatriate student Jeff Jochan, who used a feature phone when he was preparing for the National Institute of Technology entrance examination, said, "Smartphones come with infinite possibilities but the problem is that they can be very distracting, which would have affected my exam preparations. So I used a dumbphone for basic communication and to stay focused."

The 2022 global shipments of smartphones declined by 12 per



To stay disconnected after work is very essential for family folks. There has been a very bad trend in corporate life to continue work even after office hours

SAM MEHTA

cent to 1.2bn units, the lowest since 2013, according to Hong Kong headquartered global industry analysts Counterpoint Research. Almost 80 per cent of feature phone sales in 2022 came from the Middle East, Africa and India.

As a new trend takes hold and numbers change, more and more young people around the world are downgrading to dumb or minimalist phones. BBC recently reported that global purchases of such phones hit the 1bn mark in 2021 from 400mn in 2019.

A 2021 study by accountancy firm Deloitte found that one in ten mobile phone users in the UK

had a dumbphone.

Blogger and TikTok Sam Mehta noted that dumbphones are in vogue in many countries. "Influencers on TikTok argue that flip phones are nostalgic and safer to use on a night out since it wouldn't have bank, credit card or other such data."

Referring to the huge volume of content available online on dumbphones, Mehta said, "Influencers like Jose Briones of Dumbphone Finder educate us on how smartphones adversely affect the mental health of users and that this is why Gen Z is trying to cut back and opting for digital detox."

Continuous alerts and pop-ups on smartphones add to stress. Being engaged with phones even at family time affects both mental health and family bonding, another reason why people carry a dumbphone after work. "To stay disconnected after work is very essential for family folks. There has been a very bad trend in corporate life to continue work even after office hours. Continuous messages are annoying. At the same time, we are addicted to alerts from news sites and social media apps," Mehta admitted.

Realising that most of this information is of little relevance and a waste of time, Mohammad Abri, sales executive of a home rental business, decided to carry a dumbphone after work and on weekends. "I am quite relaxed now."

Another factor triggering the dumbphone trend is the aim to maintain professionalism at the workplace. Many companies are adopting policies mandating dumbphones at the workplace.

According to Anitha C Varghese from Aster Hospital, nurses like herself use dumbphones. "Nokia phones are given to us for use during our work hours. We don't take them home. They serve only as a communication tool for when doctors have to call us."

(With inputs from Shivani Praveen)



(Supplied photo)

Muscat Municipality unveils Mu'een WhatsApp service

Our Correspondent
Muscat

Muscat Municipality launched a WhatsApp service called 'Mu'een' at Oman's official technology show COMEX 2023 on Tuesday. This innovative service aims to streamline communication channels and simplify procedures between beneficiaries and the municipality.

An official at Muscat Municipality told *Muscat Daily*, "We are proud to introduce Mu'een, a trial version of our WhatsApp platform that offers automated responses and five key services. These services include pest control reports, renewal of building permits, company registration, parking ticket cancellation re-

The municipality has made significant progress in merging or eliminating over 30 services. Work is currently underway to develop a unified system encompassing all sectors

MUSCAT MUNICIPALITY OFFICIAL

quests, and reports related to electronic services."

According to the official, the municipality has made significant progress in merging or eliminating over 30 services. Work is currently underway to develop a unified system encompassing all

sectors related to municipal work. "This unified system will contribute to smart governance, efficient management and sustainable practices. Moreover, it will be linked to the broader smart city project and supported by artificial intelligence technologies."

Since implementation of digital transformation of services, human errors have considerably decreased, while the speed of obtaining licences has increased remarkably by over 200 per cent, according to the official.

COMEX 2023, from May 22 to 25, has attracted participants from both the public and private sectors to showcase their electronic services and technological advancements in various fields.

MTCIT holds first forum on government digital transformation

Muscat - Deliberations of the first edition of the Government Digital Transformation Forum began at Oman Convention and Exhibition Centre on Tuesday with the participation of ten government units.

As many as 200 participants and 25 speakers are taking part in the forum organised by the Ministry of Transport, Communications and Information Technology (MTCIT).

At the two-day event, new digital services, solutions and products in the government sector will be launched.

The forum will highlight efforts and achievements of the government sector in Oman in the field



(Supplied photo)

of digital transformation, review distinguished regional and global practices, ways of improving institutional cooperation and building government relations, as well as exchanging experiences in digital transformation.

The forum will address the most important challenges and

obstacles facing the implementation of government digital transformation and propose new solutions to overcome these, in addition to exploring new tools that empower national competencies to ensure sustainability, continuous improvement and keeping pace with global

changes.

The event will have four main themes - digital transformation, advanced technologies and maximising benefits of modern technologies to accelerate digital transformation, user's digital experience, and data analysis.

A dialogue session was held

on Tuesday with the participation of a number of stakeholders from government units. The session addressed prospects of government digital transformation.

The session also discussed the importance of managing the culture of digital change to create a flexible and innovative govern-

ment apparatus equipped for the future, the need to hone national skills, empower digital capabilities and promote government digital innovation.

The forum is expected to come up with a set of recommendations to support government digital integration. It will also present new proposals to accelerate digitalisation of government services, transfer and exchange of knowledge on best practices in the field of digital transformation, and provide feedback on the challenges facing the implementation of digital transformation, while creating an updated database for specialists in the field of digital transformation.

ROP launches service for online transfer of mulkia

Muscat - In efforts to make its services more accessible, Royal Oman Police (ROP) has announced that vehicle owners can now transfer mulkia - vehicle registration licence - online.

ROP released a video to inform the public about the new online mulkia transfer facility.

"To facilitate provision of services around-the-clock, Royal Oman Police has activated a service of electronically transferring vehicle licences to individuals and institutions," ROP stated.

For details, log on to www.rop.gov.om



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MOH No: 558/2023

Omani students shine at global science fair in US

Our Correspondent
Muscat

Students from Oman showcased exceptional talents at the International Science and Engineering Fair (ISEF), which was held in Dallas, US, from May 13 to 19. ISEF, the largest innovation competition for school students worldwide, awarded over US\$8mn in prizes across 17 fields with nearly 2,000 participants from various countries. Oman made its mark with two groundbreaking innovations. Dohat Al-Adab School secured fourth place in environmental engineering with their innovation 'Utilising animal bones for 3D printer filaments'. Al-Amal School for Basic Ed-

Our research encountered multiple obstacles before alternative paths presented themselves... Our experience highlights the significance of relentless effort in pursuit of the goal

SHATHER AL KHAROUSI

ucation achieved remarkable success in biomedicine, earning a financial scholarship at King Fahd University of Petroleum and Minerals and a grant from Sigma Xi. Their research will be published in Sigma Xi's scientific journal and presented at the International Forum for Scientific Research in November this year.

ISEF is a renowned international science fair held annually in the US, attracting pre-university students worldwide. It nurtures talents in scientific fields, including engineering design, mathematics, and technology. Oman's active involvement reflects the Ministry of Education's commitment to advancing



students and providing opportunities for engagement in scientific forums.

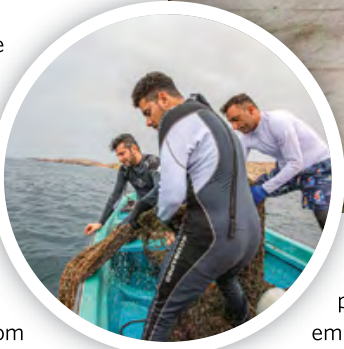
Mariam al Rahbia, an 11th-grade student of Dohat Al-Adab School, felt honoured to be able

to represent Oman in that global event. Their project aimed to reduce plastic usage by converting

animal bones into 3D printer threads. "We aspire to establish a dedicated factory for production," she added. Shather al Kharousi, also an 11th-grade student from the same school, said she felt proud in elevating Oman's reputation. "The project made us realise the importance of perseverance, as our research encountered multiple obstacles before alternative paths presented themselves. Our experience highlights the significance of relentless effort in pursuit of the goal." Iman al Rahbi, a physics teacher and the supervisor of the team, said she along with the students acquired invaluable knowledge and exposure by participating at ISEF.

Quriyat Divers remove over 500kg of marine waste to save coral reefs

Muscat - Ten members of a volunteer diving team removed over half a tonne of marine waste off the coast of Oman within the Muscat governorate. Dedicated volunteers from Quriyat Divers, in collaboration with the Ministry of Agriculture and Fisheries, successfully removed 510kg of marine waste in their continuous effort to save coral reefs from pollutants, besides raising environmental awareness.



Throughout the year 2023, Quriyat Divers has undertaken a series of cleanup campaigns to retrieve debris, waste and fishing nets from the bottom of the sea. The most recent cleanup was done on Saturday, at Quriyat Port, with the participation of ten skilled divers. Speaking to *Muscat Daily*, Juma Khamis al Amri, head of Quriyat Divers, said that this particular event marked their 20th cleanup dive. "During our latest dive in Quriyat Port, we managed to remove 510kg of fishing nets,

iron pieces, plastic, and empty cans. The dive, which commenced at 2:30pm, concluded at 7pm," he informed. Amri highlighted that the cleanup initiative in Quriyat was aimed at removing the waste generated due to fishing activities, besides increasing awareness about the importance of preserving coral reefs, and encourage fishermen to adhere to

fishing laws. Reflecting on the challenges faced during the dive, he said, "The frigid water at a depth of 30m and the powerful currents posed significant obstacles for our divers. However, their determination and patience allowed them to overcome these difficulties." Established in January 2019, Quriyat Divers conducted their inaugural cleanup dive at Ras Abu Dawood in Quriyat, successfully removing 800kg of

nets, anchors, and ropes. It remains passionate about their mission to cleanse Oman's seas. "The Sultanate boasts numerous breathtaking diving sites that attract visitors from around the globe. We implore fishermen to keep our seas clean," Amri said. By engaging in cleanup efforts, Quriyat Divers is playing a crucial role in preserving the delicate marine environment and promoting sustainable practices among the fishing community.

MoCIIP unveils RO13mn in investment opportunities to boost food sector

Continued from Page 01

"The centre aims to address gaps in the food safety and control system, while supporting the growth of Oman's food industry," the MoCIIP official said. The evaporated and condensed milk facility will produce an Omani brand. The unit will be constructed on a 8,000sqm plot in Sohar Free Zone with an in-

vestment of RO3mn and a return on investment of 14.1 per cent. The date processing and packing facility will be built in the industrial area of the wilayat of Samail, Dakhliyah. Spread over 5,000sqm, this project will see an investment of RO2.1mn with a return on investment of 17.4 per cent. Highlighting the ministry's efforts to enhance national income and stimulate economic

growth, the official said, "MoCIIP conducts thorough studies of target markets, analyses promising economic sectors, and identifies investment opportunities within these." Additionally, the ministry organises promotional events and its trade delegations showcase Oman's investment environment to attract local and foreign investors across various sectors.

Daleel Petroleum: A Journey of Excellence

Daleel's journey began in 2002 with a mission to study and explore the hydrocarbon potential of Block 5, underpinned by a goal to harness these resources for the advancement of the Omani economy. It paved the way for 20 years of excellence - a milestone that was recently celebrated. In addition to securing a 15-year extension for Block 5, Daleel has also recently added to its portfolio by signing of an agreement with PDO to develop the Lekhwair Small Field.

From the outset, Daleel has been committed to safety, operational excellence, empowerment and business growth throughout our challenging journey. Guided by a sustainable advancement strategy, our goal is to optimize value creation from our assets by unlocking new opportunities and maintaining our successful track record while maximizing stakeholder value as well. Leveraging the latest technologies, Daleel has succeeded in tapping the hydrocarbon resources of the Daleel, Bushra, Shadi, Mazoon, Furat and more recently the Thahab fields. These efforts were complemented by the deployment



of EOR technology, which helped boost oil production to around 50,000 bpd presently, up from 5,000 bpd in 2002. In recognition of these accomplishments, Daleel was conferred with the Gas and LNG Middle East Summit Award for the 'Most Efficient Oil and Gas Industry Developer in Oman'. Adding to the haul of awards received by the company were the MB Chairman Award for Excellence in 2018, 2019 and 2022, and the OPAL Best Practice Awards for Operational Excellence in 2018, 2020, 2021 and 2022. Also noteworthy are Daleel Petroleum's robust HSE safeguards. In 2022, for example, Daleel achieved its goal of eliminating Routine Zero Flar-

ing - eight years ahead of target. This was made possible by investments to extract associated natural gas and condensates with a capacity of 40 million cubic feet per annum. Omanisation has been one of our proudest achievements that presently stands at 97%, up from 69% in 2011. This success was applauded at the 17th GCC Ceremony to Recognize Companies & Establishments in the area of Nationalization Practices and Implementations. As we begin a new chapter in our growth, we are committed as ever before to contribute to a brighter, more ambitious, future for the Sultanate of Oman in partnership with our shareholders.

Fak Kurbah secures release of 925 prisoners

Our Correspondent
Muscat

Fak Kurbah - an initiative by the Omani Lawyers Association (OLA) to assist people who are either imprisoned or are on the verge of getting imprisoned for financial issues - facilitated the release of yet another batch of prisoners from various governorates in Oman. The OLA announced the tenth edition of the initiative, which closed on Monday night, marked a significant milestone on getting 925 prisoners released from jail. "Once again, this edition of the initiative showcased the solidarity and generosity of Omani



society," said Dr Mohammed bin Ibrahim al Zadjali, chairman of OLA and supervisor of Fak Kurbah, adding that over the course of ten editions, "we have released a total of 5,894 prisoners who were either imprisoned or on the verge of imprisonment due to financial claims." "We extend our heartfelt thanks and appreciation to indi-

viduals and institutions whose efforts contributed to the success of this initiative." Muscat governorate witnessed the highest number of those released, with 194 individuals regaining their freedom. It was followed by 191 cases in North Batinah, 122 in South Batinah, 97 in Dhahirah, 87 in Buraimi, 79 in Dakhiliyah, 59 in

North Sharqiyah, 40 in South Sharqiyah, 33 in Dhofar, 20 in Wusta, and three in Musandam. "Empowering the community within Omani society has been a primary objective of our initiative," emphasised Zadjali. "We deeply value the constructive co-operation and collaboration from government and private institutions, journalists, and social media influencers who have played a significant role in spreading our humanitarian message." The success of the Fak Kurbah initiative highlights the collective efforts of Omani society in promoting compassion and justice, the group stated.

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BRIEFS

US stocks dip as bond yields tick higher

Wall Street stocks dipped early Tuesday following the latest round of negotiations to lift the US debt ceiling as treasury bond yields ticked higher.

President Joe Biden and House Speaker Kevin McCarthy described Monday night's talks as productive.

Despite that constructive tone, "the market remains concerned that the extreme positions from both sides of the aisle can still demand their positions to be satisfied," said Quincy Krosby of LPL Financial.

Markets also remain on guard about potential further Federal Reserve actions, with the rise in US Treasury yields implying expectations for more interest rate increases.

About 10 minutes into trading, the Dow Jones Industrial Average was down 0.4 per cent at 33,155.97.

The broad-based S&P 500 dipped 0.3 per cent to 4,178.62, while the tech-rich Nasdaq Composite Index also shed 0.3 per cent to 12,689.22.

Among individual companies, Broadcom advanced 1.9 per cent after Apple announced a new multi-year multibillion dollar agreement for Broadcom to develop new 5G radio components. Apple dipped 0.9 per cent.

Lowe's advanced 1.6 per cent despite lowering full-year projections due to "softer-than-expected consumer demand for discretionary purchases."

PDO hosts conference of Gas Producers Association

Muscat - The 29th annual conference and exhibition of the Gas Procedures Association - GCC Chapter kicked-off on Tuesday under the patronage of H E Dr Abdullah bin Ali al Amri, chairman of the Environment Authority, with the participation of executives, engineers, and experts in the gas sector at regional and global levels.

Hosted by Petroleum Development Oman (PDO), the conference is being held at the Oman Convention and Exhibition Center (OCEC) for the period from May 21 to May 25.

Under the theme 'Expanding possibilities towards excellence in the gas value chain', this year's conference of the Gas Procedures Association brings together more than 700 participants to exchange experiences, knowledge, and best practices related to developing the gas industry's value.

The welcome speech at the inauguration of the conference was delivered by the chairman of the Gas Processors Association - GCC Chapter Hamad al Zuwayer, while the conference's keynote speech was delivered by PDO's gas director Moutaz al



This year's conference of the Gas Procedures Association brings together more than 700 participants

Riyami.

The opening ceremony also included a panel discussion titled 'Future of gas in energy transition' followed by the awards ceremony for the winning technical papers in the 28th edition of the event hosted last year in Kuwait.

The accompanying exhibition, in which more than 21 local and global institutions participated, was also opened on Tuesday.

Speaking at the event, Riyami said, "This year's conference themes and technical papers have been carefully curated to address emerging challenges and opportunities within the gas value chain. Our aim is to enable the highest possible value while supporting our journey towards becoming more carbon and cost-competitive in a sustainable manner."

The Gas Producers Association - GCC Chapter was founded

CBO issues treasury bills worth RO25mn

Our Correspondent
Muscat

The Central Bank of Oman (CBO) issued two tenders of the government treasury bills this week to raise a total RO25mn.

In the first tender, the value of allotted treasury bills amounted to RO5mn, for a maturity period of 28 days. The average accepted price reached RO99.650 for every RO100, and the minimum accepted price arrived at RO99.650 per RO100. The average discount rate and the average yield reached 4.5625 per cent and 4.5785 per cent, respectively.

For the second tender, the



value of the allotted treasury bills amounted to RO20mn, for a maturity period of 91 days. The average accepted price reached RO98.761 for every RO100 bill, and the minimum accepted price arrived at RO89.760 per RO100. The average discount rate and the average yield reached 4.9706 per cent and 5.0329 per cent, respectively.

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

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

The interest rate on the repo operations with the CBO is 5.75 per cent while the discount rate on the treasury bills discounting facility with the central bank is 6.25 per cent.

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

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

Thawani's robust growth draws investment from Ominvest

Our Correspondent
Muscat



This acquisition will support Thawani's entry into new markets and expand beyond the region's borders. It is expected to create significant growth opportunities for both parties and contribute to the development of fintech sector in Oman

MAJID AL AMRI

Oman International Development and Investment Company (Ominvest) has announced the acquisition of a stake in Thawani Technologies, an Omani company specialised in providing smart payment solutions.

The acquisition by Ominvest comes as a response to the increasing use of financial technologies (fintech) globally and Thawani's significant growth and technological innovation since its establishment. The acquisition aims to support Thawani's growth and regional reach, Thawani said in a press statement.

Abdulaziz al-Balushi, CEO of Ominvest said, "We are delighted to have partnered with Thawani, whose impressive growth over the years, as well as their innovative approach to providing best in class services to the local market, aligns with our goal of developing the group to meet the needs of the market and investors. This collaboration reinforces our commitment to leveraging technology in our operations and supporting the growth and expansion of emerging Omani companies."

Eng Majid al Amri, founder and CEO of Thawani Technologies, said, "We appreciate Ominvest's interest in start-ups that align with its aspirations to integrate Thawani's innovative services within its operations. This agreement will support Thawani's entry into new markets and expand beyond the region's borders. The acquisition is expected to create significant growth opportunities for both parties and contribute to the development of the fintech sector in Oman."

Ominvest is one of the largest listed investment companies in the region. It has been consistently profitable and has an enviable track record of

uninterrupted dividend payments to shareholders.

Founded in 2016, Thawani Technologies is an Omani company specialising in providing smart payment solutions while holding a global certificate in card security. Licensed by the Central Bank of Oman, the company has been providing innovative payment solutions in financial technology to expedite payments processes, improve user experiences, and make payments safer, faster, and easier.

In addition to the basic payments system, Thawani provides innovative payment solutions to meet the needs and challenges institutions face. The company also provides services through its platform to pay bills, top-up credit, pay tuition fees, and social insurance.

Amazon Payment Services expands its services to Oman

Muscat - Amazon Payment Services, a regional leader in digital payments operating across the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region, has expanded its services to Oman. Amazon Payment Services' merchants can now accept online payments from all locally-issued debit cards in Oman to expand their reach and attract customers in the sultanate, while continuing to be able to accept payments from other major globally-issued cards.

Powered by the Central Bank of Oman, OmanNet is a safe, convenient, and reliable payment solution enabling shoppers in the country to conveniently pay with their debit card. OmanNet debit cards comprise 95 per cent of all cards in the sultanate, and with this launch, OmanNet cardholders are now able to shop on thousands of merchant websites enabled for digital payments by Amazon Payment Services.

Through this launch, Merchants will also enable the OmanNet payment option on the Payment Link invoicing product offered by Amazon Payment Services which allows merchants to collect payments from anywhere online by generating a link which can be easily sent to customers via email or SMS.



Peter George

Commenting on the launch, Peter George, Managing Director for Amazon Payment Services in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA), said, "At Amazon Payment Services, we strive to facilitate seamless and secure payments across the region. The addition of OmanNet to our portfolio is an important step toward achieving this vision, enabling our merchants to accept payments through a prominent card-based payment gateway in Oman. With this launch, we are supporting our existing merchants to drive better conversion in the sultanate, while enabling more Omani merchants to utilise our range of innovative payment products to accept online payments and grow their business."

The launch also reinforces Amazon Payment Services' commitment to strategic forward-thinking to help merchants prepare for the future. Oman is experiencing rapid growth in digital payment adoption, presenting a burgeoning opportunity for online retailers in the region. Specifically, more Omani customers are opting to use debit cards, with online payment and point-of-sale transactions found to represent 81 per cent of card transactions in Oman in 2021, whereas ATM cash withdrawals accounted for only 19 per cent, according to this data from the Central Bank of Oman.

Enabling payments from locally issued debit cards as well as from globally issued cards will help local and regional merchants to process online payments in Oman and grow their businesses, supporting them to expand their reach and provide their customers with multiple choices.

Amazon Payment Services enables payments on Amazon stores in the MENA region including Amazon.ae, Amazon.sa and Amazon.eg, in addition to supporting thousands of other merchants and businesses across the region.

OPAZ launches Eltizam compliance system

Our Correspondent
Muscat

The Public Authority for Special Economic Zones and Free Zones (OPAZ) inaugurated its Centralized Compliance System 'Eltizam' on Tuesday, on the sidelines of Oman's official technology show COMEX 2023.

The event was held under the patronage of H E Dr Ali bin Amer al Shidhani, Undersecretary of the Ministry of Transport, Communications, and Information Technology for Communications and Information Technology, and was attended by several dignitaries.

The launch of the Eltizam system aims to automate follow-up procedures and practices in the field of control and compliance, particularly regarding environmental and labour control, inspection of buildings and projects, monitoring, compliance, issuance of violations and reports.

The system also includes an e-payment feature.

The Centralized Compliance System will be initially implemented in the Special Economic Zone at Duqm (SEZAD) as the first phase, in order to automate various follow-up procedures. These procedures include environmental compliance, pollution control, waste and hazardous



Eltizam System will be initially implemented in the Special Economic Zone at Duqm to automate various follow-up procedures (Supplied photo)

materials management, project control, labor control, and building control.

The system is designed not only for inspectors but also for representatives of companies, consultants, and contractors, who can access it using tablets or mobile phones.

Through the system, users can schedule field visits, distribute compliance follow-up tasks electronically, specify inspection sites accurately, prepare field visit reports, and add attachments and images directly on-site without returning to the office.

Eltizam also enables direct

communication between the inspection team, the follow-up team, and companies, facilitating inspection follow-ups. Companies can also send inspection requests based on the stages of their projects.

Mohammed bin Abdulmajeed al Hooti, in-charge of managing the digital transformation program at OPAZ, said, "The Centralized Compliance System is part of OPAZ's plan for digital transformation and its continuous efforts to re-engineer the procedures in place in the Special Economic Zone at Duqm, where the system was first implemented. In a later phase, the fol-

low-up procedures in the zones affiliated with OPAZ will be unified according to this system."

Hooti added, "OPAZ is committed to developing the digital environment by standardising procedures in all its affiliated zones.

This effort aims to expedite and complete all transactions, facilitate economic activities, and transition from paper to electronic transactions, thus promoting digital transformation. Furthermore, this system demonstrates OPAZ's dedication to achieving transparency and flexibility in providing services to investors."

Biden and McCarthy call debt talks 'productive,' but no deal

Washington, US - A top US Republican and President Joe Biden both said their first one-on-one talks in months to avert a calamitous debt default were "productive," but that disagreements were still blocking any potential deal.

The White House meeting came after Biden returned from a trip to Asia early to hammer out an agreement ahead of the US Treasury's June 1 cut off date for Congress to authorize more borrowing.

"I felt we had a productive discussion. We don't have an agreement yet, but I did feel the discussion was productive in areas (where) we have differences of opinion," House Speaker Kevin McCarthy said after the talks.

McCarthy told reporters that negotiators were going to "work through the night" to move the sides closer and that he and Biden would "talk every day to try to find a way to get this done."

Debt limits are raised periodically to cover repayments on loans that have already been approved and spent, but House Republicans are insisting this time that averting a default must be paired with deep cuts to bring down the country's US\$31.8tn debt.

As they sat down for the meeting, Biden said "I am optimistic we are going to make some progress," adding both sides understood they have "a significant responsibility" to solve the impasse.



US President Joe Biden meets with US House Speaker Kevin McCarthy (left) to talk about the debt ceiling, in the White House on Monday (AFP)

Afterwards the president used similar language as McCarthy in a statement, calling the meeting "productive," while adding that "areas of disagreement" remain.

'Red line'

The on-again, off-again discussions sputtered through the weekend, with McCarthy's team and White House negotiators meeting for more than two hours on Sunday night and another three on Monday.

Biden and McCarthy also spoke by phone Sunday as the president flew home from a G7 summit in Japan.

After Monday's Oval Office meeting and McCarthy's description of the talks as productive, his team hardened its tone,

with Republican congressman and negotiator Patrick McHenry telling reporters: "What I sense from the White House is a lack of urgency."

Republicans insist on spending less money in fiscal year 2024 than 2023, calling it a "red line."

The White House has offered a freeze for 2024 in exchange for Republicans supporting tax increases for corporations and wealthy Americans but McCarthy has rejected the idea.

The Biden administration has proposed limiting spending on some domestic programs but wants the Pentagon to share in the cuts.

Republicans have pushed for boosted military and border security spending, with major roll-

backs to non-defense programs.

Disputes also remain over what a White House official characterized as increasingly hard-line Republican demands for beefed-up work requirements for social welfare programs.

Biden points out that Republicans raised the borrowing cap three times under his predecessor Donald Trump without threatening to default on the country's debt obligations.

If lawmakers fail to raise the borrowing cap, the government will careen into default for the first time in history, with potentially catastrophic results.

Many experts say that in a worst-case scenario global stock markets would melt down as the US economy lurches into a downward spiral, killing millions

of jobs.

June 1 deadline

The president is being pressured by progressives in his party to rely on the US Constitution's 14th Amendment - which states that the validity of public debt "shall not be questioned" - to bypass Congress and increase the limit on his own.

But he and Treasury Secretary Janet Yellen cautioned that the courts would not be able to resolve any legal disputes quickly enough to meet the deadline. Yellen sent a letter to Congress on Monday warning again that the United States could find itself unable to pay its bills as soon as June 1.

Even if McCarthy and Biden can hammer out a broad deal, anything they agree to will need to be shepherded through the House of Representatives, where they face pressure from hardliners on both sides not to make too many concessions.

Further complicating the timeline, the Democratic-controlled Senate is out this week, while the House is slated to be in recess Friday ahead of Memorial Day weekend.

McHenry, the GOP negotiator, described a "very challenging situation" to reach a deal that clears a divided Congress and gets signed into law in the next 10 days.

"I don't want brinksmanship. It is not in America's interest," he said. AFP

'Worst yet to come' for Europe energy shortages: Qatar energy minister

Doha, Qatar - Qatar's energy minister warned on Tuesday the "worst is yet to come" for Europe's oil and gas shortages, saying a warm winter had prevented greater difficulties in recent months.

Saad al-Kaabi and his Saudi counterpart Prince Abdulaziz bin Salman said a lack of investment in oil and gas, as the world tries to transition to cleaner fuels to prevent global warming, risked causing an energy crunch.

"The only thing that saved humanity and Europe this year was a warm winter, and the slow-down in the economy," Qatari Energy Minister Saad al-Kaabi told the Qatar Economic Forum.

"If the economy starts churning back up in (2024) and you have just a regular winter, I think the worst is yet to come."

After Russia's invasion of Ukraine sparked an energy supply crisis, Europe dodged serious problems this past winter largely because of milder-than-expected temperatures.

But Kaabi and Prince Abdulaziz of Saudi Arabia, the world's biggest oil exporter, both told the conference further problems were looming.

"If (European leaders have) a proper plan and sit down with producers, and oil and gas companies are not demonised, reality will kick in and we'll have a sensible solution," Kaabi said.

Qatar has announced a series of major gas supply deals and is engaged in developing North Field, which contains the world's



Saad al-Kaabi

biggest natural gas deposits, raising its production to 126mn tonnes per year by 2027.

Demand is so great that all the expanded production for the North Field East and North Field South could be tied up in long-term deals by the end of the year, Kaabi said. "There is a potential that we will run out of all the gas from the NFE and NFS by the end of the year, as far as long-term contracts," he said. "That's obviously a very big demand."

Saudi Arabia's Prince Abdulaziz also said Europe was "rescued by a gift of God" last winter, and said global energy security was at risk from "kicking the can policies".

"Energy security is being shackled. We're running out of capacity, because countries are not investing both in oil and gas," he said, mocking the push for cleaner fuels including green hydrogen, which is produced using renewable energy.

AFP



US criticises China restriction on Micron chips

Washington, US - The United States on Monday criticised China for restricting sales of chips from American giant Micron, the latest move in a feud between the two powers on semiconductors.

"We have very serious concerns with the reports that the PRC has restricted the sale of Micron chips to certain domestic industries," State Department spokesman Matthew Miller said, referring to the People's Republic of China.

"Broadly, this action appears inconsistent with the PRC assertions that is open for business and committed to a transparent regulatory framework," Miller told reporters.

He said that the Commerce Department was addressing US concerns with China.

Beijing's decision on Sunday move came on the eve of a visit to Washington by Commerce Minister Wang Wentao, a rare trip by a senior official from Beijing.

China's cybersecurity watch-

dog on Sunday instructed operators of "critical information infrastructure" to stop buying from Micron, one of the world's largest chip manufacturers.

Micron's products "have relatively serious potential network security issues, which pose a major security risk to China's critical information infrastructure supply chain and affect China's national security," the cybersecurity administration said in a statement.

The United States last year imposed sweeping restrictions on China's access to high-end chips, citing national security concerns.

Washington has expressed fear that China will use US technology to develop advanced military equipment.

The Netherlands and Japan - US allies that are both leading manufacturers of specialized semiconductor technology - have both announced their own restrictions on exports, but without explicitly naming China.

AFP

Eurozone econommic growth slows

Brussels, Belgium - Economic growth in the eurozone edged down in May to a three-month low because of a drop in industrial production, according to a closely watched survey published on Tuesday.

For the fifth month in a row, growth in the 20-country single currency zone remained in positive territory, but growth is now at its lowest level since February.

Meanwhile, inflation remains stubbornly high, maintaining pressure on the ECB to raise rates.

Data from the flash Eurozone purchasing managers' index (PMI) survey published by S&P Global fell to 53.3 in May from 54.1 in April. A figure above 50 indicates growth.

Cyrus de la Rubia, chief economist at Hamburg Commercial



Eurozone inflation remains stubbornly high, maintaining pressure on the ECB to raise rates

Bank (HCOB), said the eurozone's gross domestic product seems to have grown in the second quarter of 2023 "thanks to

the healthy state of the services sector".

"However, the manufacturing sector is a powerful drag on the

momentum of the economy as a whole," the economist added. HCOB partners with S&P Global to put out the PMI survey.

Services' strong showing came even as inflation in the eurozone bubbles far above the European Central Bank's two-per cent target.

Official EU data earlier this month showed annual inflation in the eurozone rising to seven per cent in April, the first increase after five consecutive months of falls.

The services sector in eurozone heavyweight Germany led the region's growth in May. Private sector activity there posted its strongest expansion for 13 months while manufacturing suffered a sharp fall.

"German companies from the sector are particularly hard on

the brakes," said de la Rubia.

France, the eurozone's second-largest economy, saw growth in overall activity slow to its lowest level in four months, weakening in both services and manufacturing.

Andrew Kenningham, analyst for Capital Economics, said that for the overall eurozone, "growth is being supported almost exclusively by the services sector, where the expansion may have lost a little momentum but remains very strong by historical standards."

"In contrast, the manufacturing sector appears to be contracting at an accelerating pace, as new orders and the backlog of work both declined sharply, suggesting that the post-pandemic surge in activity has now ended."

AFP

8 EU countries oppose bloc's car emissions limits

Brussels, Belgium - Eight EU member states including France, Italy and Poland urged Brussels to scrap its planned vehicle emissions limits, warning they risked hurting investment in a document seen by AFP Monday.

The EU proposed changes late last year, known as the "Euro 7" standards, to reduce air pollution from new vehicles sold in Europe with limits to pollutants such as nitrogen oxides and carbon monoxide.

The caps were set to enter into force in July 2025.

"We oppose any new exhaust emission rules (including new testing requirements or new emission limits) for cars and vans," the countries -- Bulgaria, Czech Republic, France, Hungary, Italy, Poland, Romania and Slovakia -- wrote.

"These new rules would di-



vert the industry's investments from achieving the net-zero transition pathway," they added in a letter sent to member states.

France and Italy have large auto industries, but not as big as Germany's.

The EU agreed on a planned

phaseout of sales of new fossil fuel cars by 2035 earlier this year as it pushes for 100 per cent electric vehicles.

The ban on internal combustion engines is key to the EU's ambitious plans to become a "climate neutral" economy by

2050, with net-zero greenhouse gas emissions.

Air pollution linked to road transport is responsible for 70,000 deaths each year, according to the EU.

The draft calls for a reduction in the emission of NOx, the ni-

tric oxide and nitrogen dioxide that cause smog and acid rain, by 35 per cent from cars and 56 percent from trucks and buses compared to previous rules.

The automotive industry opposes tougher petrol and diesel vehicle standards, insisting they will have very little positive environmental impact since the industry is moving towards electric cars.

The sector employs 13mn people in Europe.

Environmental activists say the EU's limits are not enough to tackle air pollution, accusing Brussels of acquiescing to pressure from the auto lobby.

The 27 member states must find a common position despite their differences before they can begin what will likely be tense negotiations with the European Parliament.

AFP

COMEX 2023

Bank Muscat showcases digital solutions for individuals, corporates in exhibition

Bank Muscat, the leading financial service provider in the sultanate is participating in the COMEX 2023 exhibition and showcasing some of its cutting-edge, digital services and products at this premier technology, communications, innovation and digital exhibition, which offers exhibitors and visitors a comprehensive and highly specialised platform for industry-leading discussions, knowledge-sharing and B2B meetings.

The bank continues to participate in the exhibition over the years because of its great importance in introducing modern digital services and its keen support for the digital transformation efforts in the country.

“By participating in COMEX annually, the bank is able to introduce modern financial products and services to the exhibition visitors and the general public in line with the rapid digital transformation happen-

ing in the sultanate,” said Abdullah Hamood al Jufaili, assistant general manager of Bank Muscat’s Digital Banking.

“Bank Muscat services and products enjoy great popularity, and today more than 1.6mn customers are using Bank Muscat Internet and Mobile Banking services. Digital banking is also helping enhance financial inclusion for various segments of society and increasing the advantages and number of benefits available to our customers.”

He also thanked the organisers and invited all exhibition visitors to visit the bank’s stall and get familiar with various new digital services and products provided by the bank. He added that bank employees at the stall would be delighted to answer any queries they may have regarding the huge number of digital services available to them.

Wafa Ibrahim al Ajmi, assistant general manager, Transaction & Government Banking,



Bank Muscat, affirmed that the bank would continue to develop and innovate to keep pace with the latest developments in digital banking. She pointed out that the bank has been steadily adding to the number of digital services and solutions, which are available to corporates and institutions.

With state-of-the-art solutions and services like the Trade Portal, Liquidity Management solution, Business-to-Business (B2B) Connect platform, Corporate Online Banking platform, Direct Debit solutions and Remote Deposit Capture, Bank Muscat’s Corporate Banking offer secure ‘best-in-class’ digital solutions and services, which are based on customer feedback and needs as well as global trends.

Corporate and institutional customers are benefiting immensely from the latest devices,

solutions and technological advances made available to them through the implementation of cutting-edge technology. This is reflected in the transactions processed through the Corporate Online Banking platform, which soared to an unprecedented RO8bn in 2022, and continue to show a rising trend at present.

Wafa al Ajmi thanked customers for their strong confidence and trust in the bank, which have further strengthened the bank’s implementation of modern digital services.

Bank Muscat has invited all COMEX 2023 attendees to visit its stall, which will be open till Thursday, and learn more about the digital banking services, modern self-service machines and new services such as QR-code based payments.

Customers can use the bank’s electronic channels to make a number of transactions including bill payments, local and international fund transfers and payments, blocking or enabling debit cards, updating Know Your Customer data, transferring Zakat and other charity payments.

It must be noted that the bank has won appreciation and admiration from the global financial community for its outstanding performance in developing the level of banking services and facilities available to people in the sultanate.

The bank’s pioneering implementation of digital banking services has resulted in it getting the Best Consumer Digital Bank in Oman and the Best Institutional/Corporate Banking in Oman awards from Global Finance multiple times over the past few years. ‘Bank Muscat will continue to support its customers to make the best use of technology and processes to transform and supercharge the way they conduct their banking’, it stated.

Vodafone opens world of innovations

Vodafone is showcasing how 5G is going to revolutionise the world at COMEX 2023. Imagining a world where traffic signals respond in real-time to the situation on the road, where drone delivery services is an option, and where immersive gaming can make racing through the streets of Monaco a feel-like-real experience, the digital operator’s showcase has been purposely-built to bring 5G to life, inviting visitors to dive into a world of innovation that engages with them and responds to their movements and thoughts.

Taking centre-stage this year is a first of its kind simulator IVR that offers an interactive multi-sensory virtual reality experience entirely designed and manufactured in Oman by Innovation Factory.

Without the need for headsets, the simulator seamlessly brings the virtual world into reality using unparalleled advanced technology. Visitors are



also invited to unleash the power of their minds and enjoy a digital experience that uses real-time neural feedback data to create unique and ever-changing works of art.

Partnering with Ericsson, Vodafone is also demonstrating how people communicate with each other and with machines will completely change in the future. Bringing demos from MWC Barcelona, visitors of COMEX in Oman, will be able to

interact with holograms and make 3D calls.

“Our participation at COMEX this year is centred on showcasing the limitless potential of 5G, grounded in real impact. Each experience we have at our booth is a glimpse of what we aim to enable and how we envision a digital life in Oman to be in the near future,” said Sayyid Fahad Abdul Aziz Saud al Busaidi, Chief Corporate Affairs Officer at Vodafone Oman.

Powered by Vodafone in its 32nd edition, COMEX 2023 has brought together local and international brands to offer a new perspective on the world of technology.

This year’s agenda includes a host of events and activities including Exhibitions, Conferences, Awards, Workshops, Seminars, Certified Training Programs, Gaming, B2B Meetings and Attractions, under the theme ‘Future Tech Redefined’.

Microsoft brings latest innovations in cloud, data, AI

Microsoft is participating in COMEX as the official Innovation Partner, where it will demonstrate industry-leading technological innovations and highlight the key role artificial intelligence (AI) plays in the successful digital transformation journeys of governments and businesses.

Being held at the Oman Convention and Exhibition Centre in Muscat, Microsoft’s booth at COMEX reflects the company’s commitment to supporting the accelerated adoption of technology amongst individuals, organisations, and across key sectors in line with Oman Vision 2040’s goal to transition the nation into a knowledge-based community.

“The Sultanate of Oman is setting up necessary infrastructure to accelerate economic diversification and introduce a series of digital innovations



across vital sectors”, said Sheikh Saif Hilal al Hosni, Country Manager, Microsoft Oman and Bahrain.

“AI is a defining technology of our time, and we are optimistic about what AI can do for industries and the society in the sultanate. Microsoft has long been a trusted partner in digital change across The Sultanate of Oman; and at this year’s COMEX, we shall devote ourselves to helping delegates get ready for AI and make it work.”

COMEX serves as an opportunity for regional IT stakeholders to network with other innovators and share use case stories, allowing each to strengthen their own digital transformation programmes.

Microsoft’s focus on AI readiness will further strengthen best practices and ensure that all delegates can return to their organisations with value-adding knowledge.

Opportunities in Omani market: Elm

Elm, the leading company in digital solutions, is participating in the 32nd edition of the official technology, communications, innovation and digital transformation (COMEX 2023), sponsored by the Omani Ministry of Transport, Communications and Information Technology (MTCIT).

Elm’s spokesperson and VP of Marketing, Majid bin Saad al Arifi, confirmed Elm’s interest in taking part in the event due to the promising opportunities embedded in the Omani market. Elm seeks to participate through a bunch of digital systems and services and innovative solutions in the fields of health, municipality, transport and industry, amongst others.

Arifi added that Elm aims to expand globally and create new opportunities in the region, as COMEX is a market-ing platform to introduce Elm



to the Omani market. COMEX is expected to increase opportunities for co-operation between Elm and local private and government entities in Oman.

In its pavilion, Elm will display digital products, including the unified digital medical file that creates reports, monitors key performance indicators, and saves time and resources by providing accurate and central data to create correct analysis and extrapolations while monitoring fraud and reducing misuse and human errors.

ODP highlights latest technical, digital services

Oman Data Park, the sultanate’s first cloud services and managed cyber security provider, is participating in the 32nd edition of COMEX 2023 underway at the Oman International Convention and Exhibitions Centre in Muscat.

ODP’s participation in COMEX 2023 comes in line with the sultanate’s efforts in the digital transformation processes in the country, as the Ministry of Transport, Communications and Information Technology (MTCIT), recently announced a five-year government digital transformation programme in accordance with Oman Vision 2040 and in light of the declaration of Muscat as an Arab digital capital.

ODP displays through the new COMEX 2023 exhibition some of its high-tech services that contributes to accelerate the digital transformation in the country, including as an example, its capabilities in the field of: Cloud services and transformation, the artificial intelligence Services, and the collaboration



services so-called Nebula collaboration in partner with Cisco to addresses large customer bases that demands VoIP, PBX and video conferencing in elastic approach and based on demands,

It also highlight on the Digital Authentication solution in partnership with Uqodo eKYC, which will contribute to accelerate the digital transformation in the Sultanate of Oman for identify management.

In the same exhibition, ODP displays the Healthcare First-pass services as the first of its kind unified platform to enhance interaction between patients and their doctors, and the big data and analytics solutions for healthcare, banking, oil and gas sector and government solutions.

It also highlights in the same event, many of its other cloud transformation services, hosting services, managed services and other specialized services such as ‘5 years total cost ownership’ (SYTCO) consultation and transformation in the field of information technology, as well as its pioneering experience in managing its cyber security center known as cyber security park, which contributes to provide high-quality services to various public and private sector organizations and meet their needs for managed and cloud hosting services and other advanced technical services.

In the same exhibition ODP

also shed the light on its a new and the first license that granted to the company by the Telecommunications Regulatory Authority (TRA), to provide voice or video telecommunication services over Internet protocol (VoIP), which contributes to expand the base of services provided via Internet Protocol in the Sultanate of Oman.

It also focuses on the company exerted efforts to improve the capacity of its data center to exceed 1000 RACKs at the power of 5.5MW within two years.

“Our participation in this year’s edition of COMEX confirms our readiness and continuous efforts to cooperate in implementing the government digital transformation program adopted by the Ministry of Transport, Communications and Information Technology in accordance with Oman Vision 2040 and in line with declaring Muscat the Arab Digital Capital for the year 2022,” said Oman data Park CEO Maqbool bin Salem al Wahaibi.



KR Eshraqa trains govt employees

Khimji Ramdas (KR) Group's social development arm - Eshraqa - announced the successful completion of the second session of its 'Personal Excellence' workshop, aimed at enhancing the skills and capabilities of government sector employees.

The training, which kicked off earlier this year in Nizwa, has garnered significant success, with its second session being held at the Oman Chamber of Commerce and Industry (OCCI) in Ibri.

The workshop was attended by Varun Khimji, Director of Khimji Ramdas Group, and staff

members from the Ministry of Labour.

The 'Personal Excellence' workshop is designed to shed light on best practices in self-development, equipping participants with the tools and techniques necessary to achieve personal excellence and cultivate highly productive workforces within the government sector.

Comprising a total of six sessions, the third session is expected to take place in Sohar. Each session will focus on sharpening individual skills, fostering personal growth, and creating

more efficient work environments.

Emphasising the value of such initiatives in enhancing the skills and capabilities of the nation's workforce, Khimji Ramdas Group director Varun Khimji said that the workshop not only equips individuals with essential skills for personal growth but also strengthens the collaboration between the public and private sectors, fostering a brighter future for Oman.

"We are delighted to witness the positive impact of these workshops on participants from

the government sector. The aim is to create a more productive work environment that develops the capabilities of individuals and supports the realization of Oman Vision 2040," he added.

Saif Said Rashid al Badi, chairman of the OCCI board of directors - Ibri, said that the workshop has received favourable feedback from participants, serving as motivation for all of us.

"We recognise the importance of partnering with the private sector and believe that these workshops will significantly contribute to upgrading

the skills of our government staff members."

KR's Eshraqa has been established on the premise that the private sector has a responsibility towards the development of local communities and empowering talented individuals in the sultanate.

By working towards nation-building at the grassroots, Eshraqa aspires to contribute meaningfully to socio-economic progress by building infrastructure and talent that will lead to the enhancement of knowledge, skills, and capabilities in society.

Visa's 'She's Next' programme launched in Oman

Visa, the world's leader in digital payments, is bringing the Saudi Arabia edition of its 'She's Next' initiative to women-owned businesses in Oman in partnership with Bank Muscat.

'She's Next', empowered by Visa, is a global advocacy programme that aims to support women-owned small businesses through funding, training and mentorship. 'Women entrepreneurs from all industries and sectors in Oman can apply for the 'She's Next' grant until June 23', a press release stated.

One winner from each market will receive a grant of US\$20,000, a tailored training programme, and access to 'She's Next' club resources such as a workshop library and community of entrepreneurs.

Ali Bailoun, Visa's regional general manager for Saudi Arabia, Bahrain and Oman, said, "Women entrepreneurs in Oman require additional funding and support in today's business landscape. That's why we're proud to bring 'She's Next' for the first time to Oman and we are grateful to Bank Muscat for their support in bringing this important initiative to women owned businesses in these important markets."

Ilham Murtadha al Hamaid,



Ali Bailoun

general manager - Corporate Banking, Bank Muscat, "As the leading financial services provider in the Sultanate of Oman, Bank Muscat is proud to partner with Visa for the first 'She's Next' edition open to women-owned SMBs in Oman.

"The bank is committed to supporting women entrepreneurs embark on sustainable self-employment business initiatives, which will strengthen our society and the economy. This program will go a long way in recognising outstanding business achievements today, and also serve to inspire a whole new generation of women entrepreneurs in the future."

Since 2020, Visa has invested over US\$3mn in more than 250 grants and coaching for women SMB owners through the 'She's Next' grant programme globally.

Noted ophthalmologist joins Muscat Eye Laser Center

Muscat Eye Laser Center is thrilled to announce the addition of Dr Zoilo Cuellar, a highly accomplished ophthalmologist with an exceptional legacy of success, to their team.

"With his extensive experience and expertise in refractive, ocular surface, and cataract surgery, Dr Cuellar brings a wealth of knowledge to benefit patients in Oman," the eye centre stated.

Dr Cuellar hails from a distinguished lineage of ophthalmologists, with his father, grandfather, and great-grandfather all revered members of the ophthalmology community. Carrying forward this tradition of excellence, he has accumulated an impressive career spanning over 30 years.

Throughout his esteemed career, Dr. Cuellar has demonstrated his commitment to the prevention of blindness, both locally and internationally. He has



Dr Zoilo Cuellar

designed and implemented programs aimed at preserving vision and has been instrumental in creating awareness about ocular health in various communities.

In addition to his surgical expertise, Dr Cuellar is also an accomplished author, having penned a book on the history of ophthalmology in Colombia. His extensive contributions to the field of ophthalmology include

numerous presentations and publications on topics such as blindness prevention, ophthalmology, and medical education.

Dr Cuellar has played vital roles within the medical community, serving as a peer evaluator of Master's and specialisation programs for the Ministry of Education. He has also held positions as the Executive Secretary of the Board of Directors for the Colombian Society of Ophthalmology and as a founding member of the Colombian Association for the Prevention of Blindness.

Muscat Eye Laser Center, a renowned eye care facility in Muscat, Oman, has been serving the community for 21 years. It is proud to be the only Eye Clinic in Oman with International accreditation by the Australian Council on Healthcare Standards (ACHS), the centre stated.

Bangladesh School recruits foreign principal

Bangladesh School Muscat (BSM) recruited a foreign principal as part of its long-term development strategy.

James Edward Honiball, a South African, was recently employed by the Board of Directors (BoD) of Bangladesh Schools in Sultanate of Oman. The newly appointed principal is the second foreign principal in the 27-year's history of the school.

James Honiball is a high-profile principal with about 43 years of teaching experience as well as principal in different national and international educational institutions. He started his career as a teacher in 1980 in South Africa and then moved to the Middle East in 2005. He worked as English teacher and principal in different international schools in Qatar and Oman.

After completing Bachelor of Arts in English language and literature from University of Potchefstroom, South Africa,



Honiball achieved Higher Education Diploma Degree from the same university. From the School of Language, South Africa, he completed TEFL-Diploma as well.

James Honiball was handed over the charge of the school by the outgoing acting principal Nasrin Sultana. On his very first day in the school, a grand reception was given to him by the board of directors, staff and students of BSM. He was welcomed

with a flower wreath as token of love from BSM family.

In his welcome speech, in the school multipurpose hall, the delighted principal expressed his gratitude to the board, staff and students for giving a grand and memorable reception.

"This is amazing! Beyond my imagination! The way I was received, I really feel proud of becoming a member of BSM family. My heartfelt gratitude to the chairman and other directors

of the board for considering me the best fit for leading such an esteemed institution," said the new principal.

"I am sure, our collective effort will make BSM one of the top ranked schools in the Sultanate. We all will work together to accomplish our goals," he added.

The school organised a reception ceremony at the school multipurpose hall on the occasion of the arrival of new principal. Teaching and non-teaching staff were present and introduced themselves to the new principal.

Kazi Emdad Hossain, the chairman, board of directors of Bangladesh Schools in the sultanate, expressed his contentment for a successful recruitment. He assured the new principal regarding all ways support from the school in his tenure.

Chairman along with other members of the board were also present in the ceremony.

Stylish coupe Bestune B70S crossover launched in Oman

Gulf Great Sands LLC (Bestune Oman) recently launched the stylish coupe Bestune B70S crossover. Customers looking to purchase the sleek Bestune B70S can enjoy an exceptional low EMI of RO135 for six years (terms and conditions apply). This offer is based on a 20 per cent down payment for a six-year loan tenure and is subject to credit approval. This exclusive deal is only valid for models intended for personal use.

The model, which offers class-leading handling experience in its segment comes in two power-train options including 2.0-litre and 1.5-litre turbocharged engine respectively.

A spokesperson for GGS LLC said, "We are thrilled to showcase our newly launched model B70S crossover and customers has the opportunity to avail low EMI on the incredibly sporty, stylish, and spacious B70S crossover, which boasts a long list of safety features, innovative technology, roomy seats, intelligent connection, and an excep-

tional driving experience. The Bestune B70S also offers excellent control and stability."

B70S Comes with two model-variants the 2.0-litre turbocharged engine generates 215 horsepower and 340 torque equipped with a six-speed transmission. The 1.5-litre turbocharged engine produce 158hp and mated with 7-speed Dual Clutch Transmission. The Bestune B70S is constructed on the FMA architecture and boasts several active safety technologies, with a length of 4,555mm, width of 1,850mm, and height of 1,515mm, the Bestune B70S has a 2,750mm long wheelbase.

The Bestune B70S features a sleek coupe SUV design with an overall agile and futuristic ap-

pearance. The front of the car is characterized by a robust build and a super-sized trapezoidal lower grille, accentuated by sharp headlights that create an impressive visual effect. The wide and flat tail further enhances the sporty vibe of the car, contributing to its trendy and



range of impressive features, including a panoramic sunroof, LED combination headlights, LED daytime running lights, LED tail-lights with rhythm, automatic

headlights, electrically adjustable exterior rearview mirrors, automatic folding mirrors, intelligent rain-sensing technology for sun-roof closing, rear window heating and defrosting, front windshield intelligent camera, rear wiper, and welcome lights (for the main driver).

The Bestune B70S boasts an impressive range of safety features, including front airbags, front seat airbags, side air cur-

tain, electronic stability program (ESP), electric park brake, automatic parking (AUTO HOLD), anti-lock braking system (ABS), electronic brake-force distribution (EBD/EBV), emergency brake assist (BA), traction control system (TCS/ASR/TRC), hill assist control (HAC), front parking radar, rear parking radar, and a 360° panoramic image.

Offering supreme comfort, the interior of the B70S has a top-grade feel and offers customized leather, driver's seat six-direction power adjustment, front passenger manual four-direction seat, heated front seats, driver's seat memory, automatic rear sliding of driver's seat.

The dashboard comes with 12.3-inch full-colour HD central control screen plus 7-inch LCD instrument cluster. It also has adaptive cruise control (ACC), automatic parking, mobile phone wireless charging and Bluetooth key.

Gulf Great Sands (GGS) LLC represents Bestune Brand, a pop-

ular automotive global brand, in Oman. Bestune Brand is owned by the Chinese automaker FAW Group which is ranked 66 among global fortune 500 companies. Bestune is positioned as a mid-to-high-end brand in the mainstream automobile market. FAW Group produces and distributes passenger cars, commercial trucks and buses. Established in 1953, the company is China's oldest and largest automotive company.

FAW Group will utilize Suhail Bahwan Automobiles Trading LLC Sohar Free Zone Warehouse facility for storage and supply of FAW-Bestune vehicle parts in the region.

Bahwan group has good experience in the MENA region for operations of aftersales (Service and Spare Parts). FAW Group regional parts operation partnership in Oman will therefore go a long way in setting up timely parts availability and enhance customer satisfaction for buyers of Bestune brand in Oman and across MENA region.

IN BRIEF

Seven dead as roof collapses in Thai storm
Bangkok, Thailand - Seven people, including four children, were killed when a roof over a school sports field collapsed in a storm in Thailand, officials said on Tuesday. The children, aged between six and 13, were playing in the open-sided building at a school in Pichit province on Monday, watched by a number of spectators.

At about 6:30pm (1130 GMT) the storm struck, according to local media, and heavy rain and high winds caused the roof to collapse suddenly. The fatally injured adults were two parents and a janitor, the provincial office of public relations told AFP, while 18 people were injured.

A video shared on the Facebook page of the local public relations office showed a twisted mess of metal, with poles and corrugated iron lying crumpled on the ground.

No survivors in Chinese fishing vessel capsizing
Beijing, China - There were no survivors after a fishing vessel carrying 39 crew members from China, Indonesia and the Philippines capsized last week in the Indian Ocean, according to an initial government probe released on Tuesday.

The Chinese vessel overturned on May 16, with 17 Chinese, 17 Indonesians and five Filipinos on board.

"From an analysis of the ship's capsizing... it is preliminarily judged that there are no survivors from the ship," Beijing's transport ministry said in an official social media post.

The boat capsized within Australia's vast search-and-rescue region, 5,000km (2,700 nautical miles) to the west of Perth, the state capital of Western Australia.

Psychiatric exams for 'Kishida attacker'
Tokyo, Japan - A man accused of throwing an explosive at Japan's prime minister last month will undergo a three-month psychiatric examination, a regional court said on Tuesday. Ryuji Kimura, 24, was arrested in April for allegedly hurling a pipe bomb-like explosive toward Fumio Kishida as the premier campaigned in the western city of Wakayama.

Kishida escaped unscathed, but the incident horrified a nation still haunted by the assassination of Japan's former prime minister Shinzo Abe, who was gunned down last year while giving a speech.

AFP

Sudan: Blasts dim hopes for latest ceasefire

The latest one-week humanitarian truce formally entered into force late on Monday

Khartoum, Sudan - Explosions again shook Sudan's capital on Tuesday, dimming hopes that a US and Saudi-brokered humanitarian ceasefire will take hold on the ground after more than five weeks of fighting.

The latest, one-week truce formally entered into force late on Monday, but it was quickly violated, like a series of previous such agreements since the war between two rival generals erupted on April 15.

"We can hear the sound of artillery fire," a Khartoum witness told AFP on Tuesday. "Every few minutes, there's a blast."

Residents had also reported combat in northern Khartoum and air strikes in the east of the capital shortly after the deadline at 9:45pm (1945 GMT) on Monday.

In some parts of Khartoum an uneasy silence held Tuesday as residents desperately hoped for a pause in combat to allow in life-saving humanitarian aid, or to enable more people to flee the embattled city of five million.

The fighting has pitted the army, led by Sudan's de facto leader Abdel Fattah al-Burhan, against the paramilitary Rapid



People board a bus as they evacuate southern Khartoum on Tuesday after a one-week ceasefire between Sudan's army and paramilitary Rapid Support Forces officially went into force (AFP)

Support Forces commanded by his former deputy Mohamed Hamdan Daglo.

The battles have left about 1,000 people dead, forced more than a million to flee their homes and sparked mass evacuations of foreigners and major refugee flows into neighbouring countries.

People have run low on water, food and basic supplies, and the war has left more than half the population, 25mn people, in need of humanitarian aid, according to the UN.

'Broken promises'
A foreign aid group voiced frustration with the fighting that has piled new misery on the already poverty-stricken northeast African nation.

"Beyond official announcements, Sudan is still pounded and

Security Council on Monday that 'fighting and troop movements have continued even today, despite a commitment by both sides not to pursue military advantage before the ceasefire takes effect'. While no previous truce has held, the United States and Saudi Arabia, which brokered the deal, said this agreement was different because it was 'signed by the parties' and would be supported by a 'ceasefire monitoring mechanism'.

According to the text released by the United States, warring sides were to use the two days before it took effect to 'inform their respective forces' about it and 'instruct them to comply'. Neither side has yet blamed the other for violating the truce, as they did within minutes after the previous ceasefires unravelled.

'Victory or martyrdom'
Hours before the truce was to start, Daglo released a voice message on social media in which he told his fighters: "It is either victory or martyrdom, and victory will be ours."

Addressing reported violations by his forces - including rampant looting, targeting of civilians and attacks on churches - he blamed 'coup plotters' in the army.

Major fighting has rocked the western Darfur region near Chad, where the UN has reported hundreds of civilians killed in the West Darfur capital El Geneina.

Perthes in his Security Council address warned that 'the conflict risks to expand and prolong ... with implications for the region'.

"In parts of the country, fighting between the two armies or the two armed formations has sharpened into communal tensions, or triggered conflict between communities," he said, after reports of civilians being armed in Darfur.

Sudan has a long history of military coups and the army in 2019 overthrew the veteran Islamist autocrat Omar al-Bashir after mass protests against his rule. Sudanese were promised a gradual transition toward civilian rule, but Burhan and Daglo staged another coup in October 2021 before simmering tensions between the two men flared into the current round of bloody fighting.

AFP

East Timor independence hero's party wins parliamentary election

Dili, East Timor - East Timor independence hero Xanana Gusmao's party won the parliamentary election but is short of an outright majority, official results showed on Tuesday.

The opposition National Congress for Timorese Reconstruction (CNRT) led with 41.6 per cent of the votes, while its main rival and incumbent coalition leader Fretilin got 25.7 per cent, according to the electoral commission.

The result of Sunday's election paves the way for a return to power for the 76-year-old Gusmao, East Timor's first president, if he can form a coalition.

If there is no outright winner, the constitution gives the party with the most votes the opportunity to form a coalition.

Voters cast their ballots for 65 seats in parliament, hoping to end years of deadlock in Asia's youngest country.

CNRT secured 31 of those seats, and will have to work with one or more other parties.

It won the presidential election last year, with Gusmao's ally and Nobel Peace laureate Jose Ramos-Horta taking the post.

But Fretilin, formally the Revo-



Former East Timorese leader Xanana Gusmao gestures after voting during the general election in Dili, on Sunday (AFP)

lutionary Front for an Independent East Timor, led the incumbent coalition government going into the Sunday election.

Fretilin fought for an end to Indonesia's occupation of East Timor, and Gusmao led its military wing.

He spent the final years of the occupation behind bars, and was elected East Timor's first president in 2002 after the country gained independence.

He split from Fretilin in 2007 to found CNRT. That year, he became prime minister and served in that post until 2015.

The US State Department

longer than in previous elections.

More than two decades after independence, East Timor is still struggling with poverty, the aftermath of the COVID pandemic and devastating natural disasters, including a 2021 cyclone that killed at least 40 people.

The former Portuguese colony's budget is heavily dependent on oil revenues, but earnings from existing fossil fuel projects are soon expected to run dry.

The next government will need to decide on allowing the development of the Greater Sunrise project, which aims to tap trillions of cubic feet of natural gas.

Gusmao and former prime minister Mari Alkatiri, Fretilin's leader and also an independence movement icon, have been locked in a bitter feud for decades.

Younger voters make up a large part of the electorate in a country where 65 per cent of the population is below 30.

Many had expressed hope on Sunday that the next government would focus on fighting poverty and improving infrastructure.

AFP

MOUNT MERAPI ON FIRE



Indonesia's Mount Merapi, one of the world's most active volcanoes, spews lava during an eruption as seen from Dadap Ngori hamlet in Magelang on Tuesday (AFP)

Fire that killed 19 in Guyana school dorm may have been set 'maliciously'

Georgetown, Guyana - The fire at a schoolgirls' dormitory that killed 19 people in Guyana may have been started 'maliciously', police said on Monday, as anger grew in the small South American country the day after the blaze.

Sunday's inferno gutted a building housing girls aged 11-12 and 16-17.

Guyana Police Commissioner Clifton Hicken said during a press conference on Monday afternoon that an 'initial investigation suggests... that (the fire) was maliciously set'.

"Our investigation is continuing," Hicken told reporters, joined by President Irfaan Ali, who declared three days of national mourning.

No suspects have yet been identified, Hicken added, though he told AFP he expects to have more information in the next 48 hours. "Fourteen youths died at

the scene, while five died at the Mahdia District Hospital," according to a statement from the fire department.

The government had previously said 20 people died in the blaze at the Mahdia Secondary School in the central part of the country.

Guyana, with a population of 800,000, is South America's only English-speaking nation. It is a former Dutch and British colony which recently discovered it holds the world's largest per capita oil reserves.

After the weekend tragedy, more than a dozen children received hospital treatment locally while six serious cases were airlifted to the capital Georgetown.

"Two children remain in critical condition, while four are nursing severe injuries as a result of the incident," added the fire brigade.



Relatives and friends of the victims of a fire on the eve that killed at least 19 youths and injured about 20 others in a schoolgirls' dormitory, cry during a meeting with Guyana's President Irfaan Ali, in Mahdia, Guyana, on Monday (AFP)

There were 63 pupils inside the building when the fire broke out. "This is a major disaster. It is horrible, it is painful," Ali said on Sunday night.

Ali said he had ordered arrangements to be made in Georgetown's two major hospitals 'so that every single child

who requires attention be given the best possible opportunity to get that attention'.

At Monday's press conference Hicken said autopsies had already been performed on the bodies of at least six of the victims, and that all of them would undergo DNA testing.

'Pain, agony, trauma'
Around 50 relatives and friends of the victims demonstrated on Monday in Chenapau, a village close to Mahdia that is home to many of the school's pupils.

"The sheer pain, the agony, the trauma," Michael McGarrell, who lost two nieces in the blaze, told AFP by telephone. "Who will be held responsible?"

Protesters held up banners demanding justice and compensation, and criticising the fact that the dormitory had barred windows. "Why are school chil-

dren grilled up in death traps? What are we going to tell the parents?" said McGarrell, an activist with the Amerindian People's Association (APA) that is often at odds with the government over land rights.

"Firefighters did manage to rescue some 20 students by breaking holes in the north-eastern wall of the building," the fire service said.

Private and military planes have been sent to Mahdia, located about 200km (125 miles) south of Georgetown, as the region is affected by heavy rains.

At least one plane with three evacuees arrived back in Georgetown, according to an AFP journalist. The government said officials were supporting efforts at Ogle airport in the capital to 'receive the critical patients and coordinate an emergency plan of action'.

AFP

ISS welcomes its first Saudi astronauts, in private mission

Washington, US - A SpaceX capsule carrying two Saudi astronauts docked with the International Space Station on Monday, as part of a private mission chartered by Axiom Space.

Rayyanah Barnawi, a scientist who became the first Saudi woman to go into space, and Ali Al-Qarni, a trained fighter pilot, are the first two people from their country to fly to the orbital outpost.

“Greetings from outer space, I’m here not only representing myself, but representing the hopes and dreams of everyone back home, everyone in the region,” said Barnawi.

“We really are excited to be here,” added mission commander Peggy Whitson, a former NASA astronaut who made the voyage three times in the past.

“It was a great launch, a great ride, we had a lot of fun on the



Astronauts, Peggy Whitson, John Shoffner, Ali Alqarni, and Rayyanah Barnawi, gather for a crew greeting ceremony aboard ISS (AFP)

way up and we’re really excited to get a lot of work done up here.” The fourth crew member is American businessman John Shoffner.

About two hours after docking, the quartet entered the ISS, where they joined the seven astronauts - three Russians, three Americans and an Emirati - already on board.

The SpaceX rocket blasted off from Florida on Sunday, and the

trip to the ISS, which orbits around 250 miles (400km) above the Earth, lasted about 16 hours.

This mission, named Ax-2, is the second fully private mission to visit the space station, following a first in April 2022. The members of Ax-2 will stay about 10 days and carry out some 20 experiments.

NASA is trying to seed a commercial space economy in the region of space known as ‘Low Earth Orbit’, allowing it to focus its own energies on missions deeper into the solar system and beyond. The Axiom Mission 1 launched last April, with the seats for three private astronauts accompanying an Axiom-employed astronaut reported to cost US\$55mn each. The cost of seats for Ax-2 has not been disclosed.

AFP

Civilians flee, Kremlin ‘concerned’ after clashes over Ukraine border

Russia said the Belgorod border region came under sustained artillery and mortar fire

Moscow, Russia - Moscow on Tuesday voiced deep concern on the second day of the most serious armed incursion to date over its border with Ukraine, after explosive strikes forced civilians to flee.

Russia said the Belgorod border region had come under sustained artillery and mortar fire during fighting with a group that it claimed had crossed from Ukraine.

Belgorod’s governor said civilians have been evacuated from nine border villages in the region, which has previously faced shelling attacks that have killed dozens of people since Moscow launched its offensive last year.

“What happened yesterday is a cause for deep concern and once again confirms that Ukrainian militants continue their activities against our country,” Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov told reporters on Tuesday. Members of the anti-Kremlin Freedom of Russia Legion have claimed responsibility for the incursion into Belgorod, while Ukraine’s deputy defence minister Ganna Malyar said ‘we are not waging war on foreign territories’.

In a video released by a Telegram channel claiming to represent the anti-Kremlin



Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky talking with officers during his visit to the forward positions of the Armed Forces of Ukraine in the Vugledar-Maryinka defense zone, Donetsk region, on Tuesday (AFP)

group, a camouflaged spokesman, surrounded by armed men in fatigues, said: “Russia will be free!” - a slogan frequently used by Russian opposition activists.

“We want our children to grow up in peace and be free,” the spokesman added, with the channel claiming that two settlements including Graivoron had been attacked.

Too soon to return
Security operations were ongoing on Tuesday in the border areas, said governor Vyacheslav Gladkov, who previously reported eight people had been injured.

Several drones struck houses and a government building overnight but no one was killed or wounded, said Belgorod’s governor as Ukraine’s leader visited

the eastern front line.

Gladkov added on Tuesday that it was too soon for residents who fled to return to their homes and said that authorities would give the all-clear when it was safe.

On Monday, Russia said its troops were battling a ‘sabotage’ group that entered from Ukraine and introduced an ‘anti-terror regime’ in Belgorod, a first since the start of Moscow’s campaign in Ukraine in February 2022.

Britain’s Ministry of Defence noted that ‘Russia is facing an increasingly serious multi-domain security threat in its border regions, with losses of combat aircraft, improvised explosive device attacks on rail lines and now direct partisan action’.

Ukrainian presidential advisor Mikhaylo Podolyak suggested that Russian ‘guerrilla groups’

From today, we are significantly increasing the potential of the marines and creating a marine corps

VOLODYMYR ZELENSKY

could be responsible.

“The only driving political force in a totalitarian country of tightened screws is always an armed guerrilla movement,” he said on Monday.

Zelensky visits front
The ‘anti-terror regime’ gives special powers to security services and entails the enforcement of a number of restrictions and

measures including beefed-up security and communications surveillance.

A similar regime was in place in Chechnya between 1999 and 2009, when Russian authorities battled insurgents during Moscow’s second military campaign in the mountainous region.

The attack on Russia’s region was reported ahead of a widely expected Ukrainian offensive, though President Volodymyr Zelensky has said his country is not yet ready.

The timing and focus of Ukraine’s offensive have been the subject of months of speculation, while Kyiv has said almost nothing except that it needs more weapons from its backers.

At the same time, Russia has been reinforcing hundreds of kilometres of front line with tank barriers, trenches and troops.

Zelensky on Tuesday visited Ukrainian troops on the frontline in the eastern region of Donetsk, where Russian forces have concentrated their efforts to capture territory.

“Every day on the battlefield, Ukrainian marines prove that they are a powerful force that destroys the enemy, liberates Ukrainian land and performs the most difficult tasks in the most difficult conditions,” Zelensky said.

“And we need more of this force. So, from today, we are significantly increasing the potential of the marines and creating a marine corps,” Zelensky said.

Ukrainian troops held back Russian forces around Vugledar during Moscow’s winter offensive that gave the Kremlin only limited gains in the battle-scarred Donetsk region.

AFP



Indonesian President Joko Widodo and his Iranian counterpart Ebrahim Raisi during a meeting at the Presidential Palace in Bogor on Tuesday (AFP)

Indonesia, Iran ink trade pact during Raisi visit

Jakarta, Indonesia - Indonesia and Iran signed a trade agreement on Tuesday in Jakarta, where President Joko Widodo hosted his Iranian counterpart Ebrahim Raisi.

Tehran is aiming to boost its international trade ties to try and offset the economic impact of heavy Western and international sanctions.

Raisi’s two-day visit to Indonesia, Southeast Asia’s biggest economy, comes in the shadow of fresh European Union sanctions this week on Iran’s Revolutionary Guard.

“We believe that sanctions and threats cannot stop us in any way,” the Iranian president said on Tuesday after a signing ceremony at the Bogor Palace for a total of 10 agreements, including trade.

“Cooperation and relations with neighbouring countries, Muslim countries, and countries that are aligned with us in various fields is our priority.”

Under the pact, Iran will provide easier access for Indonesian exports including vegetable oil, cocoa, coffee and tobacco, ac-

cording to the Indonesian trade ministry.

In return, Jakarta would lower tariffs on Iranian exports to Indonesia, including oil and its derivative products, minerals, chemicals and iron.

“I hope (the agreement) will expand the trade between Indonesia and Iran,” Indonesian President Joko Widodo said at the signing ceremony.

Raisi said the goal was to raise the value of two-way trade between Indonesia and Iran to US\$20bn. In 2022, the total trade value between the two was just over US\$250mn.

Raisi’s trip - his first official visit to Indonesia - comes in the shadow of fresh Western penalties on Tehran.

On Monday, the European Union froze the assets of the investment arm of Iran’s Revolutionary Guard over the brutal crackdown on the protests sparked by the death of Mahsa Amini.

It was the eighth round of EU sanctions over the repression of those demonstrations.

AFP

Syria’s Assad should be tried, says France FM

Paris, France - Syrian President Bashar al-Assad should be put on trial following ‘hundreds of thousands of deaths’ and ‘chemical arms use’ during the country’s civil war, the French foreign minister said on Tuesday.

Asked during a television interview if she wanted Assad to be tried, Catherine Colonna said ‘the answer is yes’, adding that ‘the battle against crime, against impunity is part of French diplomacy’.

Assad last week returned to the regional scene with an appearance at a summit of the Arab League, an international organisation he had been banned from for a decade.

Colonna nevertheless said Paris would not be changing its policy towards the Syrian

ruler.

“We have to remember who Bashar al-Assad is. He’s a leader who has been the enemy of his own people for more than 10 years,” she said.

A lifting of European Union sanctions on the Syrian regime was ‘certainly not’ planned, she added.

“So long as he doesn’t change, so long as he doesn’t commit to reconciliation, to the fight against terrorism, the fight against drugs... so long as he doesn’t fulfil his commitments, there’s no reason to change our attitude towards him,” Colonna said.

“I think it’s up to him to change, it’s not up to France to change our attitude,” she added.

AFP

Russian PM in China for talks with Xi, business forum

Shanghai, China - Russia’s prime minister on Tuesday hailed economic ties with China during a visit in which he will meet with President Xi Jinping and ink a series of trade deals.

The two nations have in recent years ramped up economic and diplomatic cooperation, with ties growing closer since Moscow’s invasion of Ukraine despite Beijing’s insistence it is neutral in the conflict.

Mikhail Mishustin arrived late on Monday in Shanghai, the Russian foreign ministry said, before attending a Russian-Chinese Business Forum in the financial hub the next morning.

Also invited to the forum were a number of Russian tycoons subject to Western sanctions, including from the key fertiliser, steel and mining sectors, Bloomberg reported.

“Last year Russia was subjected to sanctions pressure on an unprecedented scale... We withstood and also continue progressive development,” Mishustin told the event.

“I am convinced that deepen-



Russian Prime Minister Mikhail Mishustin meets with Dilma Rousseff, Chair of the New Development Bank, in Shanghai on Tuesday (AFP)

ing Russian-Chinese ties and increasing cooperation will have a positive effect on the economies of both countries,” he said, according to video released by Russia’s foreign ministry.

China is Russia’s largest trading partner, with trade between the nations reaching a record US\$190bn last year, Beijing customs data shows.

“I am sure that this year we’ll accomplish the goal set by the heads of our states Vladimir Putin and Xi Jinping to get mutual

turnover to US\$200bn,” Mishustin added, referencing a goal set at a summit in March.

China last year became Russia’s top energy customer as Moscow’s gas exports otherwise plummeted due to a flurry of Western sanctions over the invasion of Ukraine.

Deputy Prime Minister Alexander Novak, who handles energy policy, was also present at the Tuesday forum in Shanghai. According to Russian state media, Novak said Russian en-

ergy supplies to China would increase by 40 per cent year-on-year in 2023.

There was tight security as the Russians arrived in the city, with an AFP journalist reporting an increased police presence around the Russian consulate and the nearby conference centre where the forum was taking place.

A heavy security presence was also in place at an exclusive hotel on Shanghai’s historic Bund waterfront, with the road to the entrance blocked off and guests having to approach on foot.

Xi meeting

Mishustin will next travel to Beijing, where he will meet with Xi and Premier Li Qiang, Russian state media TASS said.

He is set to ink a series of deals on infrastructure and the economy.

Western nations have been leaning on Beijing to use its influence to pressure Moscow to end the invasion of Ukraine, but China has continued to push for further economic cooperation with Russia.

Asked to comment on whether Russia-China ties might ruffle feathers in the West, Chinese foreign ministry spokeswoman Mao Ning said it was ‘normal economic and trade cooperation... on a basis of equality and mutual benefit’.

“We have always opposed unilateral sanctions unauthorised by the UN Security Council,” she added.

“China-Russia cooperation does not target any third party, nor does it allow interference or coercion by any third party.”

Analysts say China holds the upper hand in the relationship with Russia, and that its sway is growing as Moscow’s international isolation deepens.

In February, Beijing released a paper calling for a ‘political settlement’ to the Ukraine conflict, but Western countries said it could enable Russia to hold much of the territory it has seized.

During their March summit in Moscow, Xi invited Putin to visit Beijing.

AFP

Australia fetes India's Modi as 'the boss'

It was an unusually personal show of support for Narendra Modi, who faces re-election next year

Sydney, Australia - Australia offered Narendra Modi a rock-star welcome on Tuesday, during a visit by the Indian leader that was heavy on praise and light on his domestic controversies.

Modi hosted a 12,000-strong campaign-style in a Sydney arena on Tuesday, with Prime Minister Anthony Albanese playing warm-up act and emcee.

Lured by the world's most populous market and a counterweight to China's growing military, diplomatic and economic clout, Australia's prime minister turned on the charm.

To chants of 'Modi! Modi! Modi!' Albanese introduced his 'dear friend' to a jazzed-up crowd of Indian-Australians, who he praised for making Australia 'stronger and more inclusive'.

"The last time I saw someone on the stage here was Bruce Springsteen and he didn't get the welcome that Prime Minister Modi has got," Albanese said.

"Prime Minister Modi is the boss!" he said, breaking into a broad smile and boasting the pair had met six times in the past year.

It was an unusually personal show of support for Modi - a nationalist leader who faces re-election next year and has been criticised for sustained democratic backsliding and discrimination against India's hundreds of millions of non-Hindus.

Modi reciprocated his host's lavish welcome, offering a long list of interests that bind the two countries: from cricket to curry, yoga to Masterchef.

"The most important founda-



India's PM Narendra Modi and Australia's PM Anthony Albanese wave as they leave from an event with members of the local Indian community at the Qudos Arena in Sydney on Tuesday (AFP)

The last time I saw someone on the stage here was Bruce Springsteen and he didn't get the welcome that Prime Minister Modi has got. Prime Minister Modi is the boss

ANTHONY ALBANESE



tion of our ties is mutual trust and mutual respect," he said, promising trade between the two countries would double in the next five years.

Behind the flattery and mutual backslapping lie some hard-headed strategy and politics for both men.

As Australia struggles with a more assertive China, it is looking for economic and political partners in an increasingly rough-and-tumble neighbourhood.

India's economic performance has been mixed in the past decade, with missteps curbing growth. But hundreds of millions

of people have been lifted out of poverty.

India is now the second-fastest growing economy in the G20 and a multi-trillion-dollar market.

And for both Modi and Albanese, the Indian diaspora offers a rich font of votes and

campaign donations, according to Ian Hall, an international relations professor at Brisbane's Griffith University.

"What we saw with this joint appearance in Sydney is an intermingling of Australian and Indian domestic and foreign policy," he told AFP.

"Both leaders are looking for funds and support, with the Indian diaspora centre-stage, and using the bilateral partnership almost as leverage."

Indian-Australians make up the country's fastest-growing and second-largest diaspora, with 673,000 Indian-born citizens in a population of 26mn.

Almost 90,000 Indian students are enrolled at Australian universities, the largest overseas contingent after China.

But Albanese's warm embrace of Modi has raised questions, too.

Under Modi 'the world's largest democracy' has become much less free and more dangerous for his critics, according to Human Rights Watch's Elaine Pearson.

"Modi's Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP)-led government has been tightening its grip on civil society, using draconian laws to arrest and intimidate activists, journalists, opposition leaders, academics, peaceful protesters, and critics of government policies," she said. Rights groups say India's 200 million Muslims have also faced increased discrimination and violence since Modi and his Hindu nationalist BJP swept to power in 2014.

AFP

G20 MEET IN KASHMIR



Foreign delegates arrives to attend a G20 tourism meeting at the SKICC convention centre in Srinagar, India, on Tuesday. The meeting began on Monday under tight security in Indian-administered Kashmir, as New Delhi seeks to project an image of normality in a region wracked for decades by violence (AFP)

UK targets overseas students to cut 'growing' immigration

London, UK - The UK government on Tuesday announced a package of measures aimed at international students, including a ban on some family members, as ministers come under growing pressure to cut immigration.

After a drop during the pandemic, net migration has been steadily on the rise and is reportedly expected to hit a record high this year.

Official figures published last November estimated net migration to June 2022 at just over 500,000.

Under the new proposals, only students on postgraduate courses designated as research programmes will be able to bring dependants to the UK while they study. Overseas students will be prevented from switching 'out of the student route into work routes' before their studies have been completed.

There will also be 'improved



Britain's Home Secretary Suella Braverman (AFP)

and more enforcement activity' and a clamp down on 'unscrupulous agents' using education as a cover for immigration, according to a government statement.

Some 136,000 visas were issued to the dependants of international students last year - up eight-fold from the 16,000 in 2019, Home Secretary Suella Braverman said in a written statement to parliament.

The minister - a Brexit hard-liner whose rhetoric on immigra-

tion has caused controversy - said overseas students played an important part in supporting the UK economy.

But she added that it should not come at the cost of the government's 'commitment to the public to lower overall migration and ensure that migration to the UK is highly skilled and therefore provides the most benefit'.

Braverman said the proposals struck the 'right balance' and would likely see net migration 'fall to pre-pandemic levels in the medium term'.

Uncontrolled immigration from the European Union was one of the main battlegrounds of the Brexit referendum in 2016 which saw the UK leave the bloc.

Since 2018, the country has seen thousands of people successfully cross the English Channel in small boats to claim asylum.

AFP

Last wartime 'comfort woman' dies at 92: Taiwan

Taipei, Taiwan - Taiwan's last known survivor of Japan's wartime sexual slavery has died at the age of 92, the island's foreign ministry said on Tuesday, calling the issue a 'wound in human history'.

Referred to as 'comfort women', more than 200,000 women were sexually enslaved by Japan's military during World War II, mostly from South Korea but also from other parts of Asia. In Taiwan, which Japan ruled from 1895-1945, nearly 60 women had come forward over the years as survivors, according to Taipei's Women's Rescue Foundation. However, it estimates there were at least 2,000.

The foundation said on Monday the island's last known survivor, referred to as 'grandma', died on May 10 at the age of 92.

"The 'comfort woman' issue is a wound in human history and the government has attached great importance to the dignity and welfare of former Taiwanese (survivors)," Ministry of Foreign Affairs spokesman Jeff Liu said on Tuesday.

"(The government) has continued to express concerns to the Japanese government... and urge the Japanese side to face our demand to apologise and compensate Taiwanese 'comfort women' and their families," he said. Japan's wartime enslavement of women is a politically charged issue across Asia.

AFP

Pakistan: Six killed in attack on energy firm

Peshawar, Pakistan - Six Pakistan security personnel were killed in an overnight siege by dozens of militants on a Hungarian-owned oil and gas exploration site, police said on Tuesday.

About 50 fighters attacked a site owned by the Budapest-headquartered MOL Group around midnight in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province, district police chief Asif Bahadur told AFP. The dead included four members of paramilitary police assistance force the Frontier Constabulary and two Pakistani private security guards for the firm.

AFP

US states reach agreement to protect Colorado River

Los Angeles, US - Western US states said on Monday they have reached an agreement to cut the amount of water they take from the dwindling Colorado River, which is threatened by a quarter of a century of drought and worsening climate conditions.

The plan comes after years of bitter wrangling, with states refusing to give ground even as the water course has reached crisis point, threatening drinking water supplies for 40mn people and imperiling electricity generation across the American West.

Under the proposal, the federal government will pay a reported US\$1.2bn to water districts, Native American Tribes and cities in California, Nevada and Arizona to use less water



The Colorado River wraps around Horseshoe Bend in the in Glen Canyon National Recreation Area in Page, Arizona, on February 11, 2017 (AFP)

over the next three years.

The states themselves will also cut their use, though they will not be compensated.

all the water it supplies.

An acre-foot refers to an acre covered in water a foot deep - around 326,000 gallons (1.23mn liters) or about half an Olympic-size swimming pool.

"The entire Western United States is on the frontlines of climate change - we must work together to address this crisis and the weather extremes between drought and flood," California Governor Gavin Newsom said in a release welcoming the agreement. "California has stepped up to make significant cuts to water usage and now, this historic partnership between California and other Lower Basin states will help maintain critical water supply for millions of Americans as we work together to ensure the

long-term sustainability of the Colorado River System for decades to come."

President Joe Biden hailed the agreement as 'an important step forward in our efforts to protect the stability of the Colorado River System in the face of climate change and historic drought conditions'. The Colorado River runs through seven US states and Mexico, supplying drinking water and hydropower, and irrigating some of the country's most fertile farmland.

But what was one of the world's great rivers has now shrunk. Human-caused climate change means the once-bountiful snowpack that feeds the river has dwindled.

AFP

1	2	3	4		5	6	7	8	9		10	11	12	13	
14					15						16				
17					18						19				
20										21					
22					23					24				25	26
27				28			29	30	31				32		
				33	34	35		36				37			
		38	39				40								
41									42						
43					44				45			46	47	48	49
50				51					52	53	54		55		
			56				57	58				59			
60	61					62									
63						64						65			
66						67						68			

- 1) Trodden way
- 5) All excited
- 10) Places to get pampered
- 14) Beehive's kin?
- 15) Computer-telephone hookup
- 16) Bearer of the Golden Fleece
- 17) Downright evasive
- 20) Recover a fumble?
- 21) It is in most dialogue?
- 22) End of Jack Homer's boast
- 23) Delay
- 24) Commendation
- 27) Sailor's septet
- 29) Archaic word for ant
- 32) "Barely making it" grade
- 33) Functioned as
- 36) One who works with specs
- 38) Apollo 13's mission
- 41) Hot rod contest
- 42) Early touring car
- 43) Puppy bark
- 44) Foaming at the mouth
- 46) Criticize severely

- 19) When the show must go on
- 24) Fizzle (with "out")
- 25) Astin of "The Lord of the Rings"
- 26) Nighttime, in poetry
- 28) Sip from a flask
- 30) Bach composition
- 31) Letters on a speeding ticket
- 34) Conceived beforehand
- 35) Brenda of the comics
- 37) Whispers sweet nothings
- 38) Quick job for a barber
- 39) Lowered oneself via rope
- 40) "L' del Cairo" (Mozart opera)
- 41) Change hair color
- 45) Make evident
- 47) More frilly, in a way
- 48) Flare-bottomed dresses
- 49) Got by
- 51) Add up
- 53) "Come in!"
- 54) Not-shabby link
- 57) Fit of chills and fever
- 58) In perfect condition

61) Blood type letters
62) Affinnative action

The first step in the process of identifying a problem is to recognize that a problem exists. This is often done by comparing current performance with a desired state or goal. Once a problem is identified, the next step is to define the problem more precisely. This involves determining the scope of the problem, the resources available, and the constraints that may be affecting the problem. The third step is to analyze the problem. This involves identifying the causes of the problem and the relationships between the different elements of the problem. The fourth step is to develop a solution. This involves identifying the different options available and evaluating the pros and cons of each option. The fifth step is to implement the solution. This involves putting the solution into action and monitoring the results. The sixth step is to evaluate the solution. This involves comparing the results of the solution with the desired state or goal and determining whether the solution has been successful.



You owe a debt of gratitude to the people who have helped you in your life, all those teachers, relatives, friends, bosses, and other influential folks who challenged you and pushed you in the right direction. The best way to repay that debt is to offer that same type of inspiration to the one or two people you know right now who could use encouragement or a big kick in the pants, whichever you think would be more effective. Tough love may be required.



You have a strong grasp of what you want in the future, but you will have to wait before you can get started. Luckily, your impatience will fade away later in the day when something happens that causes one of the people you care about to react emotionally or fly off the handle. Keep a cool head and you'll be able to see how you can help them and help yourself at the same time. Your instincts are right on target about things, so trust them like you always do.



Reminiscing about the past is a great way to learn about where to go in the future. So get together with old friends or family members and share some special memories with them. Even if you just send a message off to an old friend with the subject line "remember when," you'll unlock an important memory that will teach you about who you are now and who you want to evolve into. You're on a journey forward, but looking backward every now and again is a wise thing to do.



01. Where is the 2.5-acre (10,000 m2) landscaped area dedicated to the memory of musician John Lennon, called "Strawberry Fields"?

- A. Next to the airport, Liverpool
B. Central Park, New York City
C. Hyde Park, London
D. Candlestick Park, San Francisco



You might think that you have an understanding with another person, an unspoken agreement that both of you will stick to the plan and have each other's back. But do you really? Don't take anything for granted! It's not that you can't trust this person, it's just that they could be misunderstanding the plan or the goal. Check in with them today to confirm what's going on between the two of you. Put a little effort into keeping things on track. It's much better to be safe than sorry.



You can expect the feverish pace of your life to slow down quite a bit, and not a moment too soon! This throttling down is going to happen organically, and it will offer you the chance to recharge your drained batteries. You can look forward to letting the craziness of the world pass you by you while you kick back and relax with the friends who know how to help you unwind. The forecast is for sunnier, more social times ahead.



Your strong compassion will come into play today when you feel the urge to come to the defense of someone. This person's ideas or actions aren't popular with the group right now, and some people could be giving them the cold shoulder, socially speaking. Follow your gut and show them that while other people aren't willing to give them the benefit of the doubt, you are. You always benefit when you embrace the unique qualities of the people you interact with.



The career goals you have right now might be set too high. Being so focused on such major challenges could be causing some disruption in the lives of the people who love you most. They miss you! So take it down a notch and work to separate your professional and personal worlds. Try not to take your frustrations out on people who have nothing to do with them. Putting things into proper balance will help you maintain a happier personal life.



Are you too hungry for power right now? While you're busy fighting for all the control that you want, you could be losing sight of the important people around you. You have to make your personal relationships your top priority right now. Sure, this might require you to give up something you think you really want, but is that such a big deal? In order to find the harmony you need, you'll have to sacrifice a little bit now, but you'll get a lot more later.



Do you fear that a friend or coworker is going down a very dangerous road? Make an extra effort to get some quiet time alone with them today so you can share all your concerns. Be careful not to come off as preachy or like you know everything, because you most certainly don't. Be compassionate and make it clear that you aren't judging them. You're just concerned about them. If they don't choose to open up to you, don't look on it as a failure. You tried.



Surround yourself with the right kinds of people today. How? Just think about what type of good energy you want in your life, and then cozy up to whoever you think can give it to you. Don't be afraid to share more of yourself with these people. You can and should trust them. The attention you get will be flattering, and it could help you see yourself in a whole new light. Get ready for big demands on your time coming from many different directions.



A coworker or person in your social circle has been wondering about you for quite a while. Why not end the mystery for them today? Playing hard to get can become boring after a while, so make it easier on them. Start a conversation and you'll make their day! They'll probably have a lot of questions for you, but resist turning the exchange into a one-way street. Ask as many questions as they do, and make sure that you get as much out of the exchange as they do.



Your mind is extremely sharp today, and it's eager to organize! Now don't go out of your way to look for chaotic situations, but you should by all means welcome new ideas, changes in plans, and new additions to the schedule. Get ready to start one of the most challenging and rewarding phases of life than you've had in a very long time. This is a powerful time for collaboration too. If anyone out there wants to pitch in on your projects, you should let them!

Answers: 1. B 2. A 3. C

A black and white line drawing of a camel standing in a desert. The camel is facing left, looking back over its shoulder with a friendly smile. It has a large, textured hump on its back and a long, curved neck. The background features simple horizontal lines representing the ground and a single circle representing the sun in the upper right corner.

E	A	U	J
R	G	S	S
U	E	R	U
E	T	P	H

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

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

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

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

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

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

SUDOKU EASY ANSWER

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

BACK IN ELITE GANG

Newcastle in Champions League for first time in 20 years

Newcastle, United Kingdom - Eddie Howe hailed Newcastle's "incredible" players as they qualified for the Champions League for the first time in 20 years after a 0-0 draw against relegation-haunted Leicester on Monday.

Fifth placed Liverpool's draw with Aston Villa on Saturday meant Newcastle needed just one point from their last two games to be assured of a Champions League place.

Howe's third placed side achieved their target at the first attempt at a jubilant St James' Park.

Howe and his players embarked on a lengthy lap of honour after the final whistle as they soaked up the acclaim from the Toon Army.

"It's a big relief actually, an amazing night. You always hope and you have to dream. But we didn't feel we were ready for the top four," Howe said.

"After last season's relegation battle, it was whether we could consolidate and become a better team.

"I have to compliment the whole squad because physically it's been a big demand. They've seen the fruits of their own labour."

Newcastle's remarkable rise



Newcastle United's Saudi Arabian chairman Yasir Al-Rumayyan (C), members of staff, and players celebrate at the end of their match against Leicester City at St James' Park on Monday (AFP)

"It's a big relief actually, an amazing night. You always hope and you have to dream. But we didn't feel we were ready for the top four"

EDDIE HOWE

from relegation candidates to a top four finish in the Premier League in just 18 months is a tribute to Howe's management and financial might of the club's Saudi-backed ownership group.

The Magpies also reached the

first domestic final since 1999 this season, losing to Manchester United in the League Cup.

After two decades in Premier League purgatory since Bobby Robson last led Newcastle into the Champions League, the

Magpies will believe they can maintain their transformation into trophy contenders now they are back among Europe's heavyweights.

"The lads have been unbelievable for me. I can't praise them enough. Their attitude, their mentality," Howe said.

"I'm just grateful to have the opportunity to manage here. We've had great success and that's satisfying."

Just seven years after their fairytale Premier League title tri-

umph, Leicester are on the verge of being relegated from the top-flight for the 12th time in their history.

That would equal the English record held by Birmingham, sending them back to the Championship for the first time since 2014.

Dean Smith's third from bottom team have won just one of their last 15 league games.

They sit two points behind fourth bottom Everton and will go down if the Toffees win their

last game against Bournemouth, regardless of Leicester's result in their final match against West Ham.

"What we have done is taken it to the last game and made Everton need to win. That's what we had to do. I make no apologies for the way we played," Smith said.

Newcastle seige

Smith sprang a major surprise as he left James Maddison and Harvey Barnes on the bench in a bid to be "harder to beat", while

Newcastle lost Joelinton to an injury suffered in the pre-match warm-up.

They nearly had to do without Joelinton's fellow Brazilian Bruno Guimaraes as well as the midfielder escaped with an early yellow card after a studs-up challenge that smashed into Boubakary Soumare's thigh.

Newcastle held 80 percent of the possession throughout the game, but Leicester sat deep to frustrate them.

AFP

Gundogan urges Man City to stay focused before climax to treble bid

London, United Kingdom - Ilkay Gundogan has urged Manchester City to stay focused as the Premier League champions prepare for the climax to their treble bid.

City were crowned English champions for the fifth time in six seasons on Saturday when second placed Arsenal lost at Nottingham Forest.

Pep Guardiola's side enjoyed their title party on Sunday with a 1-0 win against Chelsea before skipper Gundogan lifted the trophy.

With their third successive title in the bag, City can focus on emulating the Manchester United team that won the Premier League, Champions League and FA Cup in 1998-99.

But before that City must finish their league campaign with trips to Brighton and Brentford on Wednesday and Sunday respectively.

City, winner of their last 12 league matches, are unbeaten in 24 games and German midfielder Gundogan is wary of losing momentum.

"We haven't lost any games for so many weeks and that's the standard that we have to set for ourselves," he said.



Manchester City captain Ilkay Gundogan lifts the trophy as his team-mates join him in celebration at the presentation ceremony after their English Premier League match against Chelsea on Sunday (AFP)

"We do nothing different - we do the same things that we've done in the last few weeks and hopefully it can be a really special end to the season. "I love the club and being part of this amazing team. Obviously, we want to finish the season with two more trophies.

"We have two more big finals,

and the last two games of the Premier League season are going to be preparation for that. We don't want to drop anything. I would love to lift two more trophies."

City's treble chase comes down to two matches as they face Manchester United in the FA Cup final at Wembley on June 3,

and Inter Milan in the Champions League final in Istanbul seven days later.

Belgium midfielder Kevin De Bruyne, who like Gundogan is now a five-time Premier League winner, is confident City can do something "special" at the end of their latest triumphant campaign.

AFP

Newcastle's Champions League return only the start for ambitious Howe

London, United Kingdom - Eddie Howe has targeted a period of sustained success for revitalised Newcastle after the ambitious boss ended his club's 20-year absence from the Champions League.

Fuelled by Howe's astute management and the financial muscle of their Saudi-backed owners, Newcastle have enjoyed a remarkable rise over the last 18 months. A 0-0 draw against Leicester on Monday sparked raucous celebrations at St James' Park as Howe's third placed side confirmed their qualification for next season's Champions League.

Once regarded as the laughing stock of the Premier League, Newcastle are emerging as a genuine force for the first time since Kevin Keegan's 'entertainers' came close to winning the title in the 1990s.

It is an astonishing transformation for a team who were mired in the relegation zone when Howe was hired just weeks after the £305 million (\$376 million) takeover from unpopular former owner Mike Ashley in October 2021.

Saudi's Public Investment



Newcastle United coach Eddie Howe celebrates at the end of their English Premier League match against Leicester City

Fund holds an 80 percent stake in Newcastle, with their presence in the Premier League still a bone of contention for groups who have complained about the country's human rights record. But as the public face of Newcastle's renaissance, the articulate and engaging Howe has helped the club navigate that PR problem.

The 45-year-old has guided Newcastle into the Champions League in his first full season in charge, while also taking them to their first domestic final since 1999.

However, returning to Europe's elite club competition

and losing to Manchester United in the League Cup final is not nearly enough to satisfy Howe. The Newcastle boss has his sights set on winning the club's first major trophy since the 1969 Inter-Cities Fairs Cup.

"All I can think of is that next challenge coming and then being prepared for it because you can't sit back and say: 'Right, I'm going to take a month off and go and relax on a beach'," Howe said.

"It's the opposite, it's: 'Okay, how can we best succeed in that next phase?' So it is very much you're always on a cycle of trying to improve."

Spain opens investigation into racist abuse of Vinicius

Madrid, Spain - Spanish prosecutors have opened an investigation into the racist abuse hurled at Real Madrid forward Vinicius Junior as Brazil made a formal protest on Monday.

The 22-year-old Brazilian international has often been targeted by opposition fans in Spain's La Liga and was once more in a 1-0 loss at Valencia on Sunday.

The game was held up for several minutes and the referee wrote in his post-match report that shouts of "monkey" had been directed at Vinicius.

The prosecutor's office in Valencia is investigating a possible hate crime, a judicial source told AFP. Real Madrid said earlier it had filed a complaint "in order that the facts be investigated and those responsible be held ac-

countable".

The club said the chants, in its view, "constitute a hate crime".

Brazil formally protested to the Spanish ambassador and will lodge an official complaint with authorities in Madrid.

There is growing anger in Brazil, where the lights of the Christ the Redeemer statue in Rio de Janeiro were turned off for one hour in solidarity with the

player. "Black and imposing," Vinicius tweeted of the darkened statue, saying he was moved and thanked followers for their support. "But I want, above all, to inspire and bring more light to our fight," he added.

Vinicius has been racially abused at several stadiums this season in Spain. On one occasion, an effigy of him was hung from a bridge by Atletico Madrid

fans. During the Valencia match, Vinicius stood in front of home fans behind one goal and pointed to an apparent culprit. Play was delayed for several minutes in the second half.

Referee Ricardo de Burgos Bengoetxea spoke to Mestalla stadium officials, who made an announcement calling for racist insults to stop before play resumed 10 minutes later.



Vinicius Junior

Oman begin World Cup qualifying campaign with Ireland match on June 19

Muscat - Oman have been clubbed with former World Cup winners Sri Lanka, Ireland, Scotland and neighbours UAE in Group B as the ICC Men's Cricket World Cup Qualifier 2023 fixtures were released on Tuesday afternoon.

Hosts Zimbabwe, West Indies, Netherlands, Nepal and United States make up Group A with the ten teams competing for the final two spots at ICC Men's Cricket World Cup 2023 in India.

The ten-nation World Cup Qualifier will be held in Zimbabwe from June 18 - July 9 across four venues in Harare

and Bulawayo.

Oman, who are aiming to qualify for the Cricket World Cup for the first time, will begin their campaign on June 19 in Bulawayo against Ireland followed by a game against UAE on June 21.

On June 23, Oman will take on 1996 World Cup winners Sri Lanka before concluding the league stage with a match against Scotland on June 25.

Each side will play the other teams in their group once with the top three from the groups progressing to the Super Six stage.

The teams each play three



Oman are optimistic about their chances

Super Six matches against the sides they did not meet in the group stage. All points won in

the groups will be carried over to the Super Six stage apart from those gained against the bottom

two from each group. The finalists will both progress to the ICC Men's Cricket World Cup 2023.

The Super Six stage will commence on June 29, while the bottom two teams from each group will compete in the play-off.

For the first time at this event, DRS will be used for all matches from the Super Six stage.

The Qualifier will begin with hosts Zimbabwe taking on Nepal and two-time World Cup winners West Indies meeting USA on June 18.

Each match will be high stakes, with the top two teams qualifying for the global one-day

showpiece and assured of nine guaranteed matches in India.

Queen's Sports Club and Bulawayo Athletic Club in Bulawayo, Harare Sports Club and Takashinga Cricket Club in Harare will share 34 matches between them, with Harare Sports Club staging the final on July 9. The Qualifier is the culmination of four years of hard-fought competition and brings together the bottom five teams from the ICC Men's CWC Super League, three automatic qualifiers from ICC Men's CWC League 2 and two teams who gained entry from the ICC Men's CWC Qualifier playoff.

Ahead of the Qualifier, all the teams will also feature in two warm-up matches to be played on June 13 and 15.

OMAN'S FIXTURES: (All matches begin at 11am, Oman time)

JUNE 19 (Monday):
IRELAND VS OMAN,

Bulawayo Athletic Club

JUNE 21 (Wednesday):
OMAN VS UAE,

Bulawayo Athletic Club

JUNE 23 (Friday):
SRI LANKA VS OMAN,

Queen's Sports Club

JUNE 25 (Sunday):
SCOTLAND VS OMAN,

Bulawayo Athletic Club

JOKIC TRUMPS LEBRON

Nuggets beat Lakers to reach NBA Finals for the first time

Los Angeles, United States - Nikola Jokic outduelled LeBron James as the Denver Nuggets completed a 4-0 Western Conference championship sweep over the Los Angeles Lakers on Monday to reach the NBA Finals for the first time in franchise history.

Two-time NBA Most Valuable Player Jokic bagged a 30-point triple double as the Nuggets overturned a 15-point half-time deficit to send James and the Lakers crashing out of the post-season with a 113-111 victory at the Crypto.com Arena.

James had looked to be single-handedly keeping the Lakers' season alive after scoring 31 points in a magnificent first-half display that left the 17-time NBA champions leading 73-58 at half-time.

But Jokic led a resurgent Nuggets offense in the third quarter, scoring 13 points as the Western Conference top seeds outscored the Lakers 36-16 to turn the contest on its head.

A dramatic fourth-quarter finale saw Jokic put Denver 113-111 ahead with a typically barnstorming driving layup through heavy

traffic with 51.7sec remaining.

With four seconds left James had one last chance to tie it up and force overtime, but his attempted driving floater was blocked by Denver's Aaron Gordon to leave the Nuggets celebrating a famous win.

Denver - one of 11 teams in the league who have never won the

gressive, scoring easily and didn't miss basically.

"But in the second half we turned the page and everybody stepped up. It was a collective effort, it's not just one guy."

Jokic finished with 30 points, 14 rebounds and 13 assists while Jamal Murray added 25 points. All of Denver's starters finished

We don't give up. I've been saying this for five years - when we were bad or when we were good - we don't give up. And that's what happened today

NIKOLA JOKIC

NBA championship - will face either the Miami Heat or Boston Celtics in the finals.

Miami lead Boston 3-0 and can clinch their place in the finals with a victory at home on Tuesday.

"We don't give up," Jokic told ESPN. "I've been saying this for five years - when we were bad or when we were good - we don't give up. And that's what happened today.

"They jumped on us the first half, they were better, more ag-

gressive, scoring easily and didn't miss basically.

The Nuggets will head into the finals brimming with confidence that they can end their near-half-century wait for a maiden NBA crown after another composed all-round performance proved too much for the Lakers.

Lakers star James later described Denver as the best team he has faced since joining Los Angeles five years ago.

AFP



Nikola Jokic of Denver Nuggets shoots the ball over LeBron James of Los Angeles Lakers during the game four of Western Conference Finals on Monday (AFP)

Paris Olympics tickets prices mar image of Games for all

Paris, France - Athletes have joined the clamour of criticism at the high cost of tickets for the 2024 Paris Olympics, decried as undermining organisers' promises of a Games accessible to all.

Phase two of sales got underway on May 11, with nearly 1.5 million individual tickets available, after over three million were sold as multi-event packs during phase one.

Sales have been swift with two thirds of the latest batch snapped up on the first day, organisers said.

Tickets for the men's judo heavyweight final, in which France's triple Olympic gold medallist Teddy Riner is expected to compete, sold out in two hours.

"Frankly it started very strong, almost too much so. It's proof of the huge enthusiasm," the organising committee said.

But just as during phase one, there were vocal protests, particularly on social media, that the exorbitant prices conflicted with the "Games for all" promised by Paris 2024 chief Tony Estanguet. "We expected the criticism, we were warned that the sales periods were a difficult time."

Juve deducted 10 points in Serie A after initial penalty revised

Rome, Italy - Juventus on Monday were given a 10-point deduction in Serie A after a revision of their initial 15-point penalty inflicted on the club over illicit transfer activity.

The new sanction, announced by the Italian Football Federation's (FIGC) appeals court, severely dents Juventus' hopes of qualifying for next season's Champions League, pushing them out of the top four with two matches remaining this season.

Juventus have competed in Europe's elite competition in each of the past 11 seasons dating back to 2012.

In April, Italy's highest sporting court, the Sports Guarantee Board, revoked Juve's 15-point penalty inflicted by the FIGC's appeals court and sent the case for a new judgement.

It asked the appeals court to revise punishments handed down to the club and some key figures, including former vice-



The sanction severely dents the hopes of Massimiliano Allegri-coached side of qualifying for next season's Champions League

chairman Pavel Nedved who was acquitted on Monday. Juventus said they "reserve the right" to appeal the latest decision to the Sports Guarantee Board.

"While not ignoring the need for urgency, which Juventus has never shied away from during the proceedings, it is emphasised that these are facts that still have

to be evaluated by a judge," the Turin giants said on Twitter.

Long bans given to former chairman Andrea Agnelli, ex-CEO Maurizio Arrivabene and sporting directors Federico Cherubini and Fabio Paratici were upheld in April. But Juventus' hopes that the points deduction would be completely

cancelled were quashed on Monday.

Massimiliano Allegri's men, who were second in the top flight, fall to seventh in the table.

Juve are now five points behind fourth-placed AC Milan and host the losing Champions League semi-finalists in their penultimate match of the campaign this weekend. Juve then visit Udinese in their final match of the season on June 4.

The 'Old Lady' had a chance to move within two points of Milan when they took on Empoli shortly after the points deduction was announced on Monday.

But they slipped to a surprising 4-1 defeat to cap a miserable day for the two-time European champions.

The decision by the FIGC and the result at Empoli also mean that Lazio, who replaced Juve in second place, have qualified for the Champions League group stage for the first time since 2020.

Cavendish - the 'Manx Missile' who sprinted his way to cycling's peak

Paris, France - "Mark has a chip on his shoulder," once opined his friend and rival David Millar of Mark Cavendish - if so it acted like rocket fuel to propel him to extraordinary heights, especially on the Tour de France.

The 38-year-old from the Isle of Man, though, will no longer have that sense of grievance as he rides into retirement at the end of the season.

"I've lost the desire to prove people wrong," he told *The Guardian* in 2021.

By the time he retires he may have secured for himself the greatest number of stage wins in the Tour de France - he is joint record holder on 34 with the sport's all-time great Eddy Merckx.

"In terms of pure sprinters he is the Tour de France's greatest ever at that discipline," Tour director Christian Prudhomme told AFP.

As for breaking the record he shares with 'The Cannibal', it



Mark Cavendish

In terms of pure sprinters he is the Tour de France's greatest ever at that discipline

CHRISTIAN PRUDHOMME

seems the outside world is more interested than he is.

"Nah," he replied when asked by *The Guardian* whether it

would mean anything to him.

He was not just a one show pony either, being crowned road race world champion in 2011 and winning the Milan-San Remo in 2009.

Like Tour de France champions Bradley Wiggins and Geraint Thomas, he also sparkled on the track - winning three world titles in the Madison (2005, 2008 and 2016) and striking gold for the Isle of Man in the 2006 Commonwealth Games in the scratch.

The one empty space on his mantelpiece which he never filled is an Olympic title. Cavendish claimed silver in the omnium in the 2016 Games in Rio.

As a young man growing up on the Isle of Man he pored over technical guides on the art of bunch sprint finishing which was to serve him so well years later.

It was also in the Isle of Man aged 14 where he first came across Millar.

AFP



CHENNAI MARCH INTO FINAL AS JADEJA AND CO CHOKE GUJARAT

QUALIFIER 1



Chennai Super Kings' Maheesh Theekshana (C) celebrates with Deepak Chahar after the fall of Gujarat Titans' Dasun Shanaka's wicket during their Indian Premier League first qualifier at the MA Chidambaram Stadium in Chennai on Tuesday. Theekshana, Chahar, Ravindra Jadeja and Matheesha Pathirana took two wickets each as Chennai defeated Gujarat by 15 runs to march into the final. Earlier, openers Ruturaj Gaikwad (60) and Devon Conway (40) did the bulk of the scoring as Chennai made 172 for 7.

Shami succeeds flying in the face of T20 logic

Lucknow, India - Mohammed Shami is a stubborn person. WV Raman, the Bengal coach, often tells the story of how he went all out when running a 102-degree fever on a flat unresponsive pitch with a 60-over-old ball on his first-class debut. He couldn't prevent a professionals-filled Assam team from taking a first-innings lead, but that stubborn bowler had won the heart of perhaps the best coach a young cricketer can get at the start of their career. Years later, at the same Eden Gardens, Shami went ahead with his bowling in a Test and didn't even let his India team-mates know his 14-month-old daughter was in the ICU. Shami's training methods are just as stubborn. Most of it is just bowling full pelt. He does much less gym work than your usual fast bowler. During the Covid-19 lockdown, he rolled a pitch at his



Mohammed Shami home in an Uttar Pradesh village and just bowled and bowled. Shami's stubbornness in T20 cricket is now reaping handsome rewards for Gujarat Titans. ESPNcricinfo

TODAYS MATCH

QUALIFIER 2

6 PM



LUCKNOW SUPER GIANTS



MUMBAI INDIANS

CHENNAI BOWLING BANG ON SPOT

How the dazzling Super Kings filled the Dwayne Bravo-sized hole in the death overs

Chennai, India - Dwayne Bravo usually came to life at the death during his ten-season IPL stint as a player with Chennai Super Kings. Is it really a surprise then that the team he is now coaching has the joint-most wickets in the death overs in IPL 2023? April 3, 2023. CSK are back at Chepauk after four years, and the noise from the crowd is deafening. Tushar Deshpande would later admit he "couldn't hear anything". Lucknow Super Giants are 136 for 5 in 14 overs, chasing 218. Nicholas Pooran has zipped away to 18 off ten balls. CSK take a strategic time-out. Bravo runs on to the field with a message for Deshpande for his battle against his CPL team-mate: stack the off side, and bowl wide yorkers. The yorker doesn't come naturally to Deshpande, but Bravo, having worked with him since IPL 2021, when Deshpande was a net bowler with the side, backs his rookie seamer to execute the plan. Immediately after the time-out, Pooran lays into the left-arm fingerspin of Ravindra Jadeja for



Chennai Super Kings' Tushar Deshpande (2R) celebrates with Ravindra Jadeja after a wicket

two sixes. Despite that 14-run over from Jadeja and despite Deshpande leaking 18 runs in an 11-ball over in the powerplay, CSK stick to the plan. MS Dhoni gives Deshpande three fielders on the off-side boundary - deep point, deep cover and long-off - including two of his best in Mitchell Santner and Ben Stokes. Deshpande nails the wide

yorker and has Pooran carving a catch to Stokes at wide long-off. Job well done. Rajvardhan Hangargekar also executes the wide-yorker plan well in that game. Two uncapped Indian

seamers were performing the most difficult role in T20 cricket with remarkable composure. "I feel he is a legend," Deshpande recently told CSK TV about Bravo. "He's the No.1 [now No. 2] wicket-taker in the history of the IPL. So he's got tons of experience to share with our bowling group. He's pretty chilled out, so whenever he's around you or standing near your bowling mark, you feel that you're clear on top of your mark." "I think when it comes to death bowling, confidence is a very important factor," Dhoni said after CSK had sealed their playoffs spot. "If you see Tushar from the first game till now, he's somebody who has developed that death-overs bowling. And I feel the main reason is that confidence. They all execute what is needed but how many times you can execute under pressure - that's the main thing. When you have that confidence behind you, you can execute more often than not. ESPNcricinfo

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A tiara worn at two British coronations and the Star of Egypt diamond that purportedly once belonged to King Farouk sold at auction on Wednesday, crowning a week of dazzling jewellery sales in Geneva.

The historic pieces went under the hammer at Christie's, the day after Sotheby's auction house sold a Bulgari blue diamond for more than US\$25mn.

Less than a fortnight after the coronation of Britain's King Charles III, bidders fought it out for the Bessborough Diamond Tiara, which was worn at the coronations of King Charles's grandfather King George VI in 1937 and mother Queen Elizabeth II in 1953.

Vere Ponsonby, the ninth earl of Bessborough, commissioned the Parisian jeweller Chaumet to craft a tiara for his wife to mark his appointment as Canada's governor-general in 1931. She wore it to the coronations.

The platinum Art Deco headpiece sold for 945,000 Swiss francs (US\$1.06 million).

"This is as iconic as it gets in terms of the style. The workmanship is unbelievable," said Max Fawcett, the head of jewellery at Christie's in Geneva, who sold the tiara. "It's a piece of art and a piece of history," he told AFP.

The entire Christie's Magnificent Jewels sale totalled nearly 41.2mn Swiss francs (US\$45.8mn), with 11 going for more than US\$1mn each.

Bulgari diamond

On Tuesday, Sotheby's held its own Magnificent Jewels auction in Geneva, achieving total sales topping 76.7mn Swiss francs (US\$85.4mn).

The auction was led by the Bulgari Laguna Blu, an 11.16-carat fancy-vivid blue diamond, which fetched 22,625,100 Swiss francs (US\$25.2mn).

Created in 1970, it was worn in a necklace by the Indian actress Priyanka Chopra to the Met Gala fashion event in New York earlier this month. It sold

after a four-minute battle between one bidder in the room and three by telephone, one of whom ultimately grabbed the gem.

Nearly a quarter of all the lots sold featured coloured gemstones selling far above their high estimates.

"There is no doubt that high-quality high jewellery can still command sky-high prices," said Olivier Wagner, head of jewellery at Sotheby's Geneva.

Star of Egypt

The Christie's sale featured the Star of Egypt, the origins of which are shrouded in mystery. The spectacular unmounted 105.52-carat diamond was reportedly bought in 1850 by the viceroy of Egypt, who sold it in 1880. It first appeared on the London market in 1939. It was seemingly later bought by King Farouk, who ruled Egypt from 1936 to 1952. The Star of Egypt was bought alongside jewels known to be in his possession.

It had been in the same family since the 1970s and had never been auctioned before. It fetched 2,707,000 Swiss francs (US\$3.02mn) in under three minutes of bidding.

Of the 102 Christie's lots, the one with the highest estimate was a Cartier Belle Epoque natural pearl and diamond devant-de-corsage formerly owned by Australian opera singer Nellie Melba.

Made in around 1902, it was estimated to be worth 2.5 to 3.5 million Swiss francs, but went unsold, failing to attract the minimum sale price.

The highest sale price was achieved by a Chaumet ring featuring an oval-shaped ruby of 13.07 carats and pear-shaped diamonds.

It fetched 4,703,500 Swiss francs (US\$5.25mn) - blowing past its estimate of 550,000 to 750,000 francs.

The Christie's sale also featured the largest private collection of Paris-based creator Joel Arthur Rosenthal's JAR jewellery ever to come to auction.

AFP

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PURPLE HUES

One of the biggest colour trends that last year had to offer is set to remain a firm favourite for the fashion colour trends 2023. Shades of purple – lilac lavender, mauve, have adorned everything from casuals to special occasion pieces and it seems that purple tones across the spectrum are here to stay.

While the pastel iteration of the colour was by far the most popular at New York Fashion Week, richer and deeper hues broke through at Ulla Johnson and looked particularly chic paired with lighter, lavender pieces for a tonal ensemble. Tory Burch and Adam Lippes offered the palest interpretations, so soft they could be mistaken for cream, giving the now staple colourway a new lift for spring 2023.



FLORALS

Florals for spring/summer? It can be groundbreaking. When it comes to spring fashion trends 2023, florals are back and they're bigger than ever. Large-scale bloom prints were seen prominently on the runway at London Fashion Week. And while everyone put their own spin on the style, it was all about bright and punchy hues for maximum impact.

Florals are the go-to print for the spring and summer season, often popular for wedding guest dresses and nailing what to wear to a wedding. Offering timeless femininity, the bolder palettes give a nod to the dopamine dressing trend that dominated last year, giving mood-boosting colour at every opportunity.



SUMMER TRENDS

BRIGHT AND Beautiful

THE LATEST FASHION TRENDS 2023 ARE THE EASIEST WAY TO GET YOUR WARDROBE SPRING-READY. DO YOU HAVE ENOUGH OF PURPLE HUES, TASSELS, SUNSHINE SHADES, AND FLORALS TO BE 'IN' THIS SEASON?

Stop grabbing the first outfit that sticks out of your wardrobe when getting ready to head outdoors this summer. Get abreast of the trends that are in vogue and equip yourself with the right shades, fabrics and accessories.

Although designers reveal their collections to fashion editors, buyers, and style fans six months in advance of the season, the trends on the runways last September are only just coming into play, and influencing store options, according to a recent article in Woman and Home.

Spring has officially commenced and the official start of the season ushers in with it a host of new fashion trends ideal for all your spring outfit ideas, it states. The latest fashion trends 2023 are influenced by shows from the four key

fashion cities, New York, London, Milan and Paris.

Regardless of whether you wear designer clothing or not, straight-to-market brands at all levels keep a close eye on fashion week collections too, as this will help them decipher the key fashion trends that will form mainstream style tastes for that particular season, the article states.

Although designers aren't governed by anything in particular, there are often cross-over threads between collections thanks to external influences that gently and independently impact styles. And while trends used to change quite drastically every six months, we're seeing a number of the big trends from last season sticking around for spring and summer, being developed, extended, and updated for the fashion trends 2023.



SUNSHINE SHADES

Nothing says spring/summer has returned like sun rays shining through the clouds and New York Fashion Week certainly felt drenched in sunshine, even though in reality the rain clouds were never far away. For the fashion trends of 2023, expect the season to be ushered in with significant amounts of yellow, as we welcome rising temperatures back into our lives.

If yellow is one of those colours that leaves you asking 'what colour suits me', everyone can wear yellow, you just need to think about how. To make this tricky hue work universally, look out for sleek skirts or a yellow bag.



TASSELS AND LACE

Another trend extending its lifecycle from 2022 into 2023 was tassel detailing. One of our favourite summer trends, the best dresses and party pieces were treated to a fully fringed makeover for a look that will be hard to resist. Fringing is an ideal trend in the summer as it doesn't work particularly well with coats, and of course, you want the tassel detailing to be on show at all times.

Lace detailing is also a great look for a spring/summer outfit as the lighter fabric and cut-out detailing lends itself to gloriously warm weather. Artisan detailing, coupled with new technologies are popular and the combination of lace and intricate laser cutting pays homage to craftsmanship.