



His Majesty issues three Royal Decrees

Muscat - His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik has issued three Royal Decrees reading as follows:

Royal Decree No 26/2022 directs military promotions and placements in the Royal Office. **Article 1** appoints Maj Gen Nasser Saleh Saud al Ma'awali as Secretary-General of Liaison and Coordination.

Article 2 promotes Brig Idris Abdulrahman Hamoud al Kindi to the rank of Maj Gen and appoints him as Secretary-General of the National Security Council.

Article 3 states that this decree will be published in the Official Gazette and enforced from its date of issue.



Royal Decree No 27/2022 on the establishment of an Academy for Strategic and Defence Studies and promulgating its system of functioning.

Article 1 stipulates that an academy to be named 'Academy for Strategic and Defence Studies' will be established and that it will have a legal identity and enjoy financial and administrative autonomy. The academy will report to the Ministry of Defence and apply the system attached to this decree.

Article 2 states that the Academy for Strategic and Defence Studies will have its headquarters in the Governorate of Muscat and that, with a decision from the academy's Board of Trustees,

it may have branches in other governorates.

Article 3 states that all allocations, assets, rights and obligations of the National Defence College, the Joint Command and Staff College and the Centre for Strategic and Defence Studies will be transferred to the Academy for Strategic and Defence Studies.

Article 4 states that employees of the National Defence College, the Joint Command and Staff College and the Centre for Strategic and Defence Studies will be moved to the Academy for Strategic and Defence Studies, along with their existing job status and financial allocations. **Article 5** states that the chair-

man of the academy's Board of Trustees will issue the academy's internal bylaws and decision necessary for the implementation of provisions of the system attached to this decree. Till such time, the existing bylaws and decisions will continue to be applied without prejudice to the provisions of this decree or the system attached.

Article 6 cancels Royal Decree No 2/2013, as well as all that contradicts this decree and the system attached or contravenes their provisions.

Article 7 states that this decree will be published in the Official Gazette and enforced from its date of issue.

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Omani scales Mt Everest

Our Correspondent
Muscat

Adventurer Suleiman bin Hamoud al Naabi has made Oman proud by becoming the second Omani man to climb Mount Everest.

Naabi added another feather to his cap by scaling Lhotse, the fourth highest mountain in the world, on the same trip and inched closer to his dream of scaling the seven highest summits in the world.

Hailing from Wadi al Ma'awel in South Batinah, Naabi began his adventure on April 4. Speaking to *Muscat Daily* from the Mt Everest base camp in Nepal, Naabi said, "We summited on May 12 at 5.30am. On May 13, I scaled Lhotse, which is 8,516m above sea level."

His adventure is part of the Explorer's Grand Slam challenge in which climbers aim to scale 'Seven Summits' - the seven highest mountains on each of the seven continents (Everest, Kili-manjaro, Aconcagua, Vinson Massif, Elbrus, Denali and



(Supplied photo)

Kosciuszko or Puncak Jaya) as well as reach the North Pole and South Pole.

Elaborating on the challenges encountered on his way up, Naabi said that the symptoms which mountaineers suffer were his biggest hurdle, including altitude sickness causing headaches and shortness of breath.

"The climb was tough as the weather was unpredictable. It

was cold and windy. The thought of waving Oman's flag and a photo of His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik atop the world's highest peak kept me going."

He described climbing Everest as "one of the most difficult challenges testing ability and determination".

Besides Mt Everest and Lhotse, Naabi has scaled five of

the Seven Summits - Mt Kosciuszko in Australia, Mt Kili-manjaro in Africa, Mt Aconcagua in Argentina, Mt Elbrus in Russia and Mt Denali in the US. He has also been atop Mt Mont Blanc in France.

Khalid al Siyabi was the first Omani to climb Mt Everest in 2010; Nadhira al Harthy was the first Omani woman atop the highest peak in the world in 2019.

23,474 apply for Hajj, four times Oman's quota

Muscat - The number of applicants for Hajj this year totalled 23,474, including 21,429 applications from Omanis and 2,045 from residents.

This is almost four times the quota of 6,388 granted to the sultanate this year.

Dakhliyah governorate recorded the highest number of applicants with 4,008 applications, while Musandam governorate had the lowest with 191 applications. Of the total applicants, 14,037 are male and 9,437 female.

E-registration started on May 9 and closed on May 14.

The Ministry of Awqaf and Religious Affairs had announced that the sultanate's quota for this year's Hajj was reduced by 45 per cent due to the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic.

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Bank credit grows 2.8% in March; deposits up 4.7%

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Phase 1 of Al Nakheel ITC to start in 2022

Our Correspondent
Muscat

With 1,436 residential apartments, villas and town houses that will be available for ownership to both citizens and expatriates, the Al Nakheel ITC project spread over 500,000sqm will be ready in 10-15 years.

Phase 1 (A) of the project was launched at a ceremony held at W Hotel Muscat on Sunday. Construction of Phase 1 (A) of the project, which includes internal roads and other infrastructure, Crystal Lagoon with recreational facilities, a four-star hotel with 188 keys, a traditional souk, apartments and residential villas will start in 2022.

The launch event was held under the patronage of H E Salim bin Mohammed al Mahrouqi, Minister of Heritage and Tourism, in the presence of Muradha Ahmed Sultan, member of the Board of Directors of Towell Group, partner in ALARGAN Towell Investment Company and primary investor in the project, Khaled al Mashaan, CEO and vice-chairman of the Board of Directors of ALARGAN International Real Estate Company, and Mohammed Moosa al Abri, CEO of Al Nakheel project.

On the occasion, H E Mahrouqi said, "The project aligns with the ministry's plan to build a diversified tourism sector that meets the needs and requirements of the domestic and regional tourism industry."

He added that the project will enhance competitive capabilities of the country, combining natu-



(Supplied photo)

The project aligns with the ministry's plan to build a diversified tourism sector that meets the needs and requirements of the domestic and regional tourism industry

H E SALIM AL MAHROUQI

ral, historical, cultural, heritage and social elements that are unique to the Gulf region. "The ministry is working at various levels to accomplish similar projects in several governorates, thanks to approved directions and policies to build an economy based on diversified revenue streams that enhance the labour market and local content."

The Al Nakheel ITC project is located in Al Rumais, which links Muscat governorate with the wilayat of Barka. The development is distinguished by an

830m waterfront overlooking the Sea of Oman. It includes a shopping mall, an international school, several speciality restaurants, an aqua park and other entertainment and service facilities.

Highlighting the project's location on the beach of Al Rumais, Abri said, "It aims to create a tourist destination in Barka that is attractive to citizens, residents and tourists visiting Oman. In addition to the Crystal Lagoon and its other design characteristics, the Al Nakheel ITC project will

be distinct from other ITC projects by virtue of reasonable pricing of residential units which will be within the reach of citizens and residents alike."

According to Sultan, the project aims to strengthen infrastructure of the tourism sector, increase the number of hotel rooms, create rewarding employment opportunities for Omanis, and achieve other goals that are related to the development of the tourism sector in the sultanate in line with Oman Tourism Strategy 2040.

ALARGAN Towell Investment Company, the main investor in the project, was founded in 2003 in Oman as a strategic alliance between WJ Towell and ALARGAN International Real Estate Company. This partnership led to the construction of several successful integrated projects.

Municipal waste rose by 30% during Eid holidays: be'ah

Our Correspondent
Muscat

Although Eid al Fitr is an occasion for spiritual pursuits, there is an uptick in food wastage during this period, which is of concern to the socially and environmentally conscious. Data reveals there is significant food wastage globally during social and religious occasions and Oman is no exception.

Oman Environmental Service Holding Company (be'ah), which specialises in managing municipal solid waste, enhanced its efforts during the recent Eid al Fitr holidays. It stated that the total amount of municipal waste received by landfills increased by an estimated 30 per cent during the days of Eid al Fitr.

According to Khamis bin Marhoon al Siyabi, head of operations, Municipal Waste Sector



(Supplied photo)

at be'ah, the company emptied garbage bins before Eid and transferred the waste to the engineered landfills in order to avoid any accumulation.

"During holidays, the company sees an increase in the dumping of slaughter waste in bins as well as in open spaces and next to public roads, which is one

of the most important challenges we face," Siyabi said.

He informed that be'ah's landfills received more than 40,000 tonnes of municipal waste during the Eid al Fitr period, with an estimated daily average of more than 6,600 tonnes, which called for an increase in the number of working hours for the company.

MHUP registers real estate trade worth RO580mn in Q1 2022

Our Correspondent
Muscat

Real estate worth RO587.5mn was traded in the first quarter of 2022 and more than 60,000 title deeds were issued in this period, according to a report from the Ministry of Housing and Urban Planning (MHUP).

Of the total of RO587.5mn, mortgages comprised RO284.5mn, while sales contracts accounted for RO99.1mn and swap contracts RO3.9mn.

The value of real estate traded decreased by 15 per cent compared to the fourth quarter of 2021, when RO691.2mn worth of

transactions were registered. "The majority of real estate activities was concentrated in Muscat, which accounted for 46.5 per cent of the total trading volume, followed by South Batinah - 15.3 per cent," the MHUP report stated.

Among wilayats in Muscat, Seeb witnessed the highest value of trade during the first quarter in real estate mortgages, worth RO44.4mn, while Bausher registered the highest value of sales transactions, worth RO75.6mn.

The report added that value of the average real estate contracts rose to RO15,500 in this quarter,

compared to RO14,300 in the previous quarter. However, the average value of mortgage contracts decreased to RO60,300, down from RO93,400.

The number of title deeds issued in the governorates during the first quarter of this year was 60,493, including 12,170 in Muscat, 2,792 in Dhofar, 588 in Musandam, 1,255 in Buraimi, 7,626 in Dakhliyah, 10,377 in North Batinah, 12,761 in South Batinah, 3,512 in South Sharqiyah, 4,331 in North Sharqiyah, 4,180 in Dhahirah, and 689 in Al Wusta, in addition to 212 properties for citizens of Gulf Cooperation Council countries.

SMALL CHANGE, BIG IMPACT

Following introduction of Value Added Tax (VAT) in Oman on April 16 last year, the sultanate was counted among over 150 other countries that impose the tax. Experts expect VAT to provide an additional source of support to the treasury. Introduction of VAT was in line with the government's commitment to Oman Vision 2040, which aims to diversify the economy away from oil to non-oil sectors such as manufacturing, logistics and tourism. The Tax Authority has exempted more than 100 food items from VAT. However, have the common people been affected by the introduction of VAT? Here is what Muscat Daily readers had to say:

YOUR SAY

Abdullah al Khaldi
Private sector employee

VAT has affected my shopping power, especially when shopping for luxury items. I feel things are more expensive now. But I'm not sure if it is VAT or some other factor that has led to less business for items that come with VAT.

Sawsan al Ajmi
Bank employee

Despite helping in government revenues, VAT has not only affected buyers but also sellers. People now are choosy about what to buy and this is affecting spending power.

Salim al Barwani
Private sector employee

For common people, VAT is not a big issue as the charges are negligent. However, for businessmen and start-ups, the additional expense is indeed a challenge. It is tough to convince some clients about VAT. Also, when raw material is needed for new ventures, the additional cost in the form of VAT often demotivates buyers. Personally, I am not affected by VAT.

Jay Prakash
Private sector employee

VAT has not impacted me personally, but professionally it has. It happens whenever we negotiate with clients for new orders. They want more discount to cover the five per cent VAT. This has affected incentives and margins.

Suresh Kumar
Sales executive

VAT has no affected me personally. The percentage charged is nominal. I understand that there is no income tax, so such a small percentage of VAT adds value to the development of the country and I welcome it.

Saif Harthy
Businessman

I'm in the construction business. Customers always request discounts to manage the VAT. They feel it is an additional expense and must not be included in the overall cost. Some of my customers are family and friends, with who I have been doing business for long. It is very difficult to

make them understand and so the money goes from my pocket.

Ramesh P Nair
Accountant

VAT has not affected me in anyway. Indeed, I do not feel any difference when I purchase household items in large quantities from supermarkets. However, it hurts when I need to pay extra for one or two items.

VIA INSTAGRAM

Fayazuddin

The cost of living has increased, so blue-collar workers are most affected as their salaries are the same as earlier.

Fruit basket Oman

The cost of living has increased as everyone has increased prices.

Reshma Khot

Not happy with VAT. Food items and groceries should be exempted from VAT.

NEXT ON YOUR SAY

Do you think Oman has enough entertainment facilities? What can be added to make the country more tourist-friendly?

The views stated here are those of the respondents and not endorsed by Muscat Daily. If you feel strongly about the issues discussed here, you can email your comments to muscatdaily@apexmedia.co.om You can also log on to our Facebook page or tweet us your comments on the issue.

SEND YOUR COMMENTS

Share your comments in not more than 50 words along with your full name and profession before next Sunday, 10am, via WhatsApp, Facebook or Instagram

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Advertisement No. (11 / 2022)

specialized Companies in the field of tender shown below and registered with Tender Board, may obtain tender documents from the website through the following link: (<https://etendering.tenderboard.gov.om>) against non-refundable fees until the end of deadline stipulated below.

Tender No.	No E-Tender	Description of Tender	Tender Fee	Last date to collect the tender	Tender return date	Grade
PRE/22/001	2022/MM/HQ-3	Construction of Roads in Misfah Industrial Area (Phase - 1) (E- Tender)	200	04/06/2022	23/06/2022	Excellent
PRE/22/028	2022/MM/QS-14	Traking Path Development (Hiking) in Riyam (E- Tender)	25	04/06/2022	23/06/2022	This tender has been allocated for (S M E) contractors registered in Third grade
PRE/22/035	2022/MM/QS-15	Site preparation for street vendors in Wilayat Bousher (E- Tender)	25	04/06/2022	23/06/2022	second
PRE-21-039	2022/MM/QS-16	Design And Construction Of The Widening Of Ai Qurm Street (E- Tender)	45	26/05/2022	06/06/2022	First

Tender Conditions :-

- Bidders shall submit their offers electronically accompanied with an electronic copy of bond issued by any local bank in Oman addressed to Muscat municipality. The bond shall be (1%) of the tender value valid for ninety (90) days starting from the date of bids submission. Any tenders which do not meet the required bond shall not be accepted.
- Tender Bonds shall be E-Bond and to be submitted through E-Tendering system, addressed to Muscat Municipality.
- For any inquiries regarding tenders, please visit e-tendering website: (<https://etendering.tenderboard.gov.om>) .
- For technical support of e-tendering system please send an email to (etenderhd@mtcit.gov.om) or call (+96824402200).
- For technical support of E-Bond through e-tendering system please send an email to (esnad@gstb.gov.om) or call (+96824402200/24402330).

200m cave, the deepest in Dhofar, found in Rakhout

Our Correspondent
Muscat

A group of speleologists credited with the discovery of over one hundred caves in the sultanate has now found the deepest cave in Dhofar.

In the last five years, the Omani Caves Exploration Team (OCET) has documented more than a hundred caves.

Speaking to *Muscat Daily*, Dr Mohammed al Kindi, geologist and member of OCET, said, "Located in the foothills of Jabal al Qamar, near Ajaroot village in the wilayat of Rakhout, we have named the cave Imbaort."

It is near a rocky fault that borders the southern side of Jabal al Qamar on the Arabian Sea. "This fault line was formed by a rupture of the Gulf of Aden and the Indian Ocean, which occurred millions of years ago."

Over 200m deep, the cave has remarkable stalagmite and stalactite formations. "Going down is tricky and needs expert caving skills. The team has documented at least 200m of vertical descent into the cave so far," Kindi informed.

There are many small openings to the cave with water gushing down these. "This water penetrates further into the cave, and over the years this process led to the solidification of the cave walls."

Unsured of its actual depth and



(Supplied photo)

Going down Imbaort is tricky and needs expert caving skills. The team has documented at least 200m of vertical descent into the cave so far

DR MOHAMMED AL KINDI

the number of openings, Kindi said, "The cave may extend to the sea level, and openings may also be found at higher altitudes of Jabal al Qamar."

In his estimation, Imbaort is the deepest cave found in Dhofar so far. The cave gradually narrows as it deepens to just 1m in width.

OCET is hopeful that Imbaort and other newly discovered natural geological wonders in Dhofar add to the tourism potential and attraction of the governorate.

The team will soon return to the cave to complete its exploration and documentation.

Besides its mission of exploring caves in the sultanate and documenting these, the team is keen to spread the culture of adventure among members of the community and promoting tourism.



(Muscat Daily)

Municipality invites bids to establish walkway in Riyam

Our Correspondent
Muscat

Muscat Municipality will set up a mountain walkway in the Riyam area of Muscat in efforts to create recreational areas and encourage sports activities among community members.

A municipality official said, "Muscat Municipality has called for bids to set up a mountain walkway in the Riyam area in the wilayat of Muscat."

He informed that bids are also invited for preparation of sites for street vendors in Bausher.

"Additionally, a tender has been announced for construction of internal roads in Al Misfah Industrial Area in the wilayat of Bausher," municipality official said

The deadline for submission of bids for these projects is June 23.

Muscat Municipality announced recently that it will start Phase 1 of a project called Golden Jubilee Walk in Seeb. Spread over 84,400sqm, the project will be developed in the middle of the wilayat close to the already vibrant areas of Mawaleh, Al Hail and Al Khoudh.

Three Royal Decrees issued

Continued from Page 01

Royal Decree No 28/2022 directs military promotions and placements at the Ministry of Defence.

Article 1 appoints Air Vice Marshal (Eng) Saleh Yahya Mas'oud al Maskari as Head of the Academy for Strategic and Defence Studies.

Article 2 promotes Brig Hamid Ahmed Said Sakroon to the rank of Maj Gen and appoints him as Commandant of the National Defence College.

Article 3 states that this decree will be published in the Official Gazette and enforced from its date of issue.

ONA

'Shireen served Palestine cause in her life and death'

Muscat - The Palestinian Embassy in Oman organised a condolence meeting for the slain Palestinian-American Al Jazeera journalist Shireen Abu Akleh.

She was killed by Israeli forces on Wednesday while covering Israeli army raids in the city of Jenin in northern occupied West Bank.

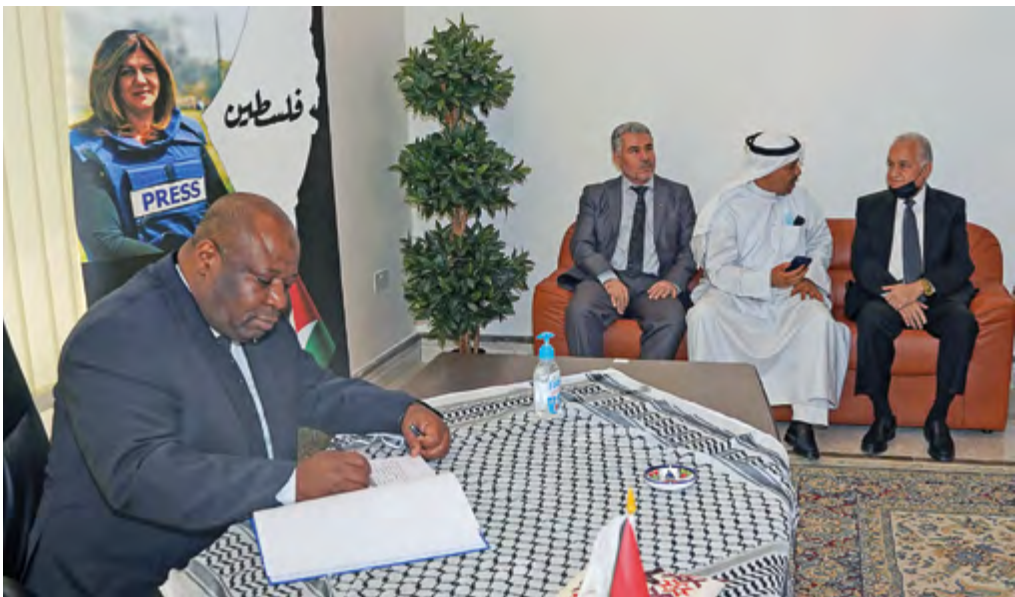
A Palestinian Embassy statement said, 'Mourners expressed their strong condemnation of this terrible double crime, which was the execution of Shireen, as well as the assault on the sanctity of her funeral and the brutal suppression of mourners.'

It added that those who gathered at the meet praised what Shireen stood for in the Arab

media, embodying the Palestinian cause and the suffering of the Palestinian people under Israeli occupation.

Among the mourners was H E Abdallah Abasi Kilima, Ambassador of Tanzania to Oman. "I am here to express our solidarity with the Palestinian people in this tragic event and to show to the world that Palestinians are not alone in their hour of grief. We are working with the international community to see that Palestinian suffering comes to an end with the two-state solution."

Also present was Alessandro Garbellini, Deputy Head of Mission, Embassy of Italy. He conveyed Italy's sincere condolences



H E Abdallah Abasi Kilima, Ambassador of Tanzania, signs the condolence book at the Palestinian Embassy

to the Palestinian authorities and people for the assassination of Shireen. "Protecting freedom of information is fundamental and it was suppressed with violence. Italy condemns the use of disproportionate use of force. There is an urgent need to find a solution to restore peace between Palestine and Israel."

On his part, H E Dr Tayseer Ali Farhat, Palestinian Ambassador, said that as much as Palestinians were sad on the death of Shireen, "We are proud of what she has provided through out her media career, putting the Palestinian cause on the world map."

"Shireen served the cause of Palestine in her life. She also

served it after her death. She unified all the Palestinian people and exposed their occupation when the Israeli army attacked mourners at her farewell march - the first time this has happened. No one can accept this. It is against all international laws and it is against humanity."

Officials of several diplomatic and consular missions, including Algeria, Morocco, Mauritania, Egypt, Kuwait, Saudi Arabia, Senegal, Brazil, China, Uzbekistan, Qatar, Sudan, Jordan, Lebanon, USA and Pakistan, in addition to Palestinian and Arab community members visited the embassy to offer condolences.

(Text and photo by Syed Fasiuddin)

400 migratory species registered in Oman

Our Correspondent
Muscat

To mark World Migratory Bird Day, celebrated on May 14, the Environment Authority announced that more than 400 migratory bird species have been registered in Oman.

A statement issued by the Environment Authority said, "The number of bird species registered in Oman is 535, with migratory birds representing 80 per cent of these or more than 400 species. The remaining 20 per cent are resident species."

Migratory birds arrive with the onset of winter as these fly from cold northern regions to the warmer south. The sultanate is en route the West Asia-East Africa migration path that brings birds to the sultanate.

The Bar al Hakman Wetland Reserve in Al Wusta is one of the most prominent sites for migra-



(Supplied photos)



tory

birds in

Oman. It re-

ceives more than

half a million birds during the winter season.

Several threatened species are

found in the sultanate, including the sociable lapwing, Egyptian vulture, great knot, golden eagle, collared kingfisher, lesser white-fronted goose and the Socotra cormorant.

'Globally, artificial light is increasing at least two per cent every year and is known to nega-

tively affect many bird species. Light pollution is a major threat to migratory birds, causing disorientation in flight at night, collision with buildings, disturbance in their internal clocks, or interference with their ability to make long-distance migrations,' the Environment Authority stated.

TENDER NOTICE

Oman Water & Wastewater Services Company hereby announces the following Tender:-

Tender No	Description	Eligibility	Tender Fee (RO)	Last Date of Sale Tender Documents	Bid Submission Date
T/06/OWWSC/2022	Design and Construction of Water Distribution Networks in Wilayat Manah in Al Dakhliya Governorate	Local Companies registered with Government Tender Board and International Companies specialized in the works mentioned	RO 2,500/- (Plus 5% VAT) Non-refundable	1/6/2022	1/8/2022

Interested Companies may obtain a soft copy of the tender documents through an online shared link (One drive) against non-refundable payment as mentioned above for each set of documents. The Tenders may be collected on any working days between 07:00 am – 3:00 pm hours.

The tender fee shall be accepted through online bank transfer for the account details provided below

- Account Number 0423 01092 130 0017
- Account holder's name: Oman Water & Wastewater Services
- Bank : Bank Muscat SAOG
- Branch : Corporate Branch
- Place : Ruwi
- Country : Sultanate of Oman
- SWIFT CODE : BMUSOMRXXXX

- All applicants who have paid the tender fee can obtain a soft copy of the tender documents through an online shared link (One drive).
- Both Technical and Commercial Proposals along with required documents shall be submitted in hardcopy in a sealed envelope & soft copy (CD) bearing the project name, Tender number and address of Oman Water & Wastewater Services Company at Head Office building near Panorama Mall.
- The Tenderer should enclose a Bank Guarantee issued by any bank in the Sultanate of Oman for the value of 1% of the Tender value and addressed to the Chairman of the Tender Committee.
- Duly filled Form of Tender and Bid Bond shall be submitted in a sealed envelope bearing the project name, Tender number and address of Oman Water & Wastewater Services Company shall be placed in Oman Water & Wastewater Services Company not later than 2:00 pm on the date specified above.
- Preference shall be given to the Companies, which comprise the required percentage of Omanization and possible purchase of Omani National Products.
- For more details refer to Tender Page of our website <https://owwsc.nama.om> or Email to: tenders@owwsc.nama.om

[owwsc.om](https://owwsc.nama.om)

SBA offers attractive EMIs on Nissan Altima

Nissan Oman from the house of Suhail Bahwan Automobiles (SBA) has announced a low EMI on Nissan Altima. Customers can now avail an exceptionally low EMI rate of RO120.

Altima starting EMI is calculated on the price of the SV variant with 20% down payment, 2.75% rate of interest for 10 years loan tenure through Bank Muscat, a press release said.

Nissan Altima is also cherished by owners in Oman for its good looks, striking exterior, colour range, spaciousness and fashionable interior have brought the car a lifetime of fans.

As part of the special scheme, customers of Nissan Altima can also avail free periodic vehicle service packages, free insurance, assured gift voucher, and free registration.

The offer, which is available on models purchased for personal use, will go on till May 19.



Vehicles purchased with commercial registration will not be eligible for this scheme.

Vehicles bought for taxi, driving school, ministries, fleet and rent-a-car usage will also not be eligible for this scheme.

A senior official of Nissan Oman said, "We are delighted to offer low EMI on a model that offers effortless power while furthering remarkable fuel economy.

Nissan Altima is a model known for its excellent drive, superior handling, and thoughtful

technology solutions. Its good looks, striking exterior, colour range, spaciousness and fashionable interior have brought the car a lifetime of fans. Its powerful high-performance engine and a range of other options adds to its appeal."

All customers purchasing Nissan Altima during this scheme period will be eligible for free periodic maintenance service package for three years/60,000km (whichever is earlier), limited to six services only.

This offer includes only the service intervals of 10,000km.

All customers buying Nissan Altima during this scheme will be eligible for Value Added Service (VAS) gift vouchers up to RO100.

Voucher can be redeemed for purchase of any value-added service products, services contracts and parts at SBA service centres.

Bait Al Zubair launches Philosphy Forum

The activities of Bait Al Zubair Philosophical Forum (May 16-19) started at Bait Al Zubair with the participation of several Arab intellectuals, philosophers, and researchers.

The opening ceremony is being held under the patronage of H H Sayyid Dr Fahd bin Al Julandi al Said - President of Sultan Qaboos University. Its objectives are aimed at creating an interactive and communicative atmosphere between researchers and specialists from various philosophical references and formations.

The forum includes the opening of an exhibition of philosophical and intellectual books, with the participation of several Omani libraries.

The opening of the forum was preceded by a philosophical workshop for children entitled 'Big Ideas for Young Ages' presented by Dalia Tounsi, director general of the Baseera al Afkar Foundation for Educational Consultations, in Saudi Arabia.

The first day programme included the inauguration of the Philosophy Project for children, represented in translating several books by the French philosopher Oscar Brenifier, in cooperation with the Nathan French publishing house, and the Lebanese translator Marie Tawk, who translated three books, in addition to books for youth written by Moroccan writer and translator Mohamed Ait Hanna.

Alizz Islamic Bank donates RO20,000 to charity

In line with the resolution of the Ministry of Commerce, Industry & Investment Promotion to allocate at least (20%) twenty per cent of the corporate social responsibility budget to Oman Charitable Organisation (OCA), Alizz Islamic Bank announced that it donated an amount of RO20,000 to the organisation in the presence of the bank's CEO, Sulaiman Hamad al Harthi and Mohammed bin Hammoud al Dhuhi, CEO of OCA, at the OCA headquarters Al Khuwayr.

Prior to the handover of the amount, a meeting was held between both sides to discuss details of OCA's activities and the role it plays towards the community with regard to receiving and collecting donations, gifts and other obligatory and voluntary charity in order to help those in



need. Also discussed were finance projects that care for children, orphans or the elderly, support and social welfare projects and programmes that benefit citizens and provide urgent aid (relief) to victims of disasters, fires or accidents, whether individuals or institutions, inside and outside the sultanate.

OCA also offers aid to social and charitable institutions and the poor and the needy inside and outside the sultanate. The bank's CEO was also briefed on the programmes held by OCA.

Comex to launch 'Tariq Clinic'

COMEX, Oman's official technology event, in partnership with Oman's popular ICT expert, Tariq Hilal al Barwani, is all set to launch 'Tariq Clinic', an exclusive and engaging technology workshop run daily at the Oman Exhibition and Convention Centre (OCEC) from May 23 to 25.

The exclusive clinic is aimed at educating and supporting the participants on opportunities, prospects and growth pertaining to their personal and professional technology development, a press release said.

"Technology is a powerful tool that improves, supports, and transforms our lives on a daily basis. I am honoured to work closely with the organisers at COMEX to bring technology education closer to the society," said Barwani, a multi-award winning technology expert and motivational speaker, who will be running the engaging sessions at



Tariq al Barwani

the clinic.

COMEX is considered Oman's leading technology event that provides engaging and networking platforms for young talent, development leaders, learning heads, human resources professionals and business leaders to bridge the gaps and find solutions in several areas of the digital ecosystem. The event

aims to highlight the digital transformation in Oman through hosting ministries, authorities, and companies to participate and showcase their achievements and opportunities for innovation in technology and their steps towards Oman Vision 2040.

Tariq Clinic is an exclusive COMEX initiative that will be launched this year to educate the society on what it takes to become an IT expert, learn and develop oneself in IT, as well as make use of IT in running a business.

"Tariq has created innovative projects in technology and has gained valuable experience that has impacted the society at large. It is our privilege to partner with Tariq to bring his experience and knowledge closer to the society" said Amr bin Abdullah Baabood, CEO of OITE, the organiser of COMEX 2022.



Fatma al Kharousi

New digital market in Oman

In the aftermath of the pandemic, a homegrown brand - Lamha - has been conceptualised to help businesses of all sizes grow. Literally meaning 'a moment of vision', Lamha is the brainchild of its young founder Fatma Salim al Kharousi.

"In order to deliver sustained In-Country Value (ICV) for the sultanate, Lamha seeks opportunities to create value chains for, and with, merchant partners. We are also keen to assist in developing and promoting newly established Omani companies, especially SMEs, through our platform," says Fatma.

Lamha, is an easy-to-use, interactive and secure web platform that enables visitors to discover and shop for local products and services, as well as international products throughout Oman. It realises how valuable SMEs are for the development and growth of the country.

FUSO offers free AC checks

General Automotive Company (GAC), the official distributor of FUSO in Oman, has launched a free air-conditioning and cooling system check-up campaign for FUSO vehicle owners throughout the country.

As part of the campaign, GAC will also be offering customers a complimentary 15-point vehicle health check together with discounts on labour and parts for all work that needs to be carried out.

Commenting on the launch of

this campaign, Ashraf Mustafa Osman, National Service Manager of GAC, said, "As the official dealers of FUSO vehicles in Oman, and as one of the most customer-focused automotive brands in the country, we are dedicated to providing a service that matches and exceeds all expectations.

Campaigns such as these perfectly complement the capabilities of our factory approved service centres and well-trained staff, thereby offering our cus-

tomers the best possible value in terms of a total ownership experience."

The complimentary check-up includes a complete diagnostic and general health check of the vehicle's AC and cooling system. As a value-added benefit, GAC will also conduct a comprehensive 15-point vehicle health check for trucks together with a complete vehicle wash.

Remedial measures will also be suggested to keep the vehicle and its AC operating well.



Zubair EDC highlights first quarter achievements for 2022

The Zubair Enterprises Development Centre (Zubair EDC) recently highlighted its achievements for the first quarter of the year.

The centre provided consultancy services for more than eight businesses, which included small and medium-sized enterprises and home-based businesses that have the potential to grow and be a part of several different sectors like e-commerce, manufacturing, craft industries, agricultural, education, food and others, a press release said.

The consultations were aimed at identifying the challenges faced by these businesses and developing appropriate solutions to address them in the areas of restructuring, marketing, business plans, and feasibility study. Zubair EDC, through such services, endeavours to establish



local businesses and helps them play a major role in the growth of the economy of the Sultanate of Oman.

Nabiha al Mandhari, communication specialist at Zubair EDC, said, "Our services aims to provide support and assistance to small and medium-sized enterprises so that they can succeed in their businesses, establish themselves in the market, and

achieve their goals. The centre provides business consulting services to SMEs on an ongoing basis. The efforts made by the centre's advisors, in terms of continuous communication and follow-up, contributes to the achievement of small enterprise goals in regards to future planning, identifying challenges and developing solutions for the same. We strive to achieve this and more in the near future."

The advisory services provided by the centre are diverse and include helping small businesses develop their establishment plans, making sure they adhere to the regulations and legislations placed upon them, and creating their financial plans for up to 5 years, which reflects the performance of the business and in turn, helps achieve profitability.

Vodafone ties with Mzadcom Smart Auction Solutions

Vodafone recently signed an agreement with Mzadcom Smart Auction Solutions, an online auction platform. The agreement was signed between Sayyed Fahad al Busaidi, chief support services officer at Vodafone and Ibrahim al Junaibi, CEO of Mzadcom.

This partnership is aimed at allowing individuals to bid and purchase distinctive 'Diamond' and 'Gold' numbers of their preference, in line with TRA rules and regulations, a press release said.

Highlighting the importance of the signing, Busaidi stated, "Vodafone is committed to ensuring the highest levels of service extended to its customers, by giving them the option to choose and own exclusive Diamond and Gold numbers.

This step is aligned with the procedures set by the Telecommunication Regulatory Authority (TRA) as per the Telecommunications Regulatory



Act Decision (No. 1/2018), which sees the allocation of Diamond and Gold numbers to be carried out through auctions to allow for greater transparency in the allocation process of telecommunications numbers to beneficiaries.

"The signing with Mzadcom further reinforces our vision of being a completely technology-

driven company, since the bids will be conducted via an e-auction platform as well as entering into key partnerships with companies that have already built a strong foundation in Oman."

Junaibi, added, "We are proud to be a part of Vodafone's efforts to transform the face of the local telecommunications sector. Vodafone, as a brand,

operates on a global scale and brings with it a world-class experience that augments our already existing facilities.

We would like to thank them for their collaboration and anticipate the positive impact that our partnership might bring, not only with regard to digitalisation in Oman but also when it comes to enriching customer experi-

ence." Mzadcom is an electronic platform for e-auctions, with a host website that provides users to sell or bid for products online. Item previews take place through exhibitions of the respective institutions, either governmental or private.

Mzadcom is managed by Webware, an Omani company specialised in digital solutions.



Meethaq Islamic Banking continues financing offers

In line with its customer-centric vision and commitment to offering the best value proposition to its customers, Meethaq, the pioneer of Islamic banking in Oman from Bank Muscat, has announced that the special offer on a number of Islamic financing products which are compliant with the provisions of Shari'a will be available till 30 June.

Customers can apply for a variety of Meethaq financing options including Home Finance, Auto Finance, Personal Goods Finance, Education Finance, Marriage Finance, Travel Finance, and Takeover Finance, and take advantage of the attractive profit rate starting at just 4.99%, a press release said.

The offer, which is based on excellent feedback from customers, is available to both new and existing Meethaq customers working

in government institutions as well as semi-government and Tier 1 companies. Customers who apply for any of the products will benefit from quick processing and minimal documentation.

Meethaq customers are eligible for up to 80 per cent financing for home or auto financing, while 100 per cent financing is available for Travel, Marriage, Education and Personal Goods Finance. Applications may be submitted at any of Meethaq's 24 state-of-the-art branches across the sultanate.

In line with its full commitment to offer a world-class Islamic banking experience to customers in every corner of the country, Meethaq has established the largest Islamic branch network in Oman consisting of 12 branches in the Governorate of Muscat and 12 branches across other governorates.

Alfardan Motors delivers first batch of Maserati MC20

Alfardan Motors, the official importer of Maserati in the sultanate, has announced the delivery of the first Maserati MC20 units.

Charly Dagher, general manager, Alfardan Sports Motors, said, "We are very delighted to deliver the first MC20 units to our customers in Oman. Customers who ordered our new

super sports car are among the first in the Middle East to receive their cars. With refined aerodynamics, spectacular performance, and luxurious amenities, the MC20 is built to impress and we are certain that our customers will enjoy their cars."

The superb looks of MC20 don't conceal an uncompromisingly sporty soul, with the pow-



erful 3ltr 630 horsepower V6 Nettuno engine that delivers 0-100 kmph acceleration in 2.88 seconds and a top speed over 326kmph. A patented, 100% Maserati engine, benefiting from the MTC (Maserati Twin Combustion) technology; the innovative combustion system developed by the brand, evolved from the pre-chamber technology.

Rise of Gen Z



Nadia al Zakwani

Representing 9.5% of GDP, employing over 200,000 people and exported to more than 130 countries, manufacturing is at the heart of Oman Vision 2040 and the topic of discussion for Wednesday evening's Tejarah Talks at the Civil Aviation Authority in Al Hail North.

Breathing new life into the sector is the growth of Gen Z managed micro-manufacturers - small Omani businesses typically employing fewer than 10 people that are catering to a specialised market, one generally neglected or forgotten by larger companies. They are often innovative twists on old ideas, completely new innovations or throwbacks to lost ways of doing things.

According to Maymuna al Adawi of the Ministry of Commerce, Industry & Investment Promotion (MoCIP) and Tejarah Talks organiser, though small in size, many of these micro-manufacturers are becoming an economic force to be reckoned with. A revolution in manufacturing is coming. The power of automation and the dropping of the costs of tools is altering how things get made in Oman.

Mercedes-Benz Oman starts buyback offer



Mercedes-Benz Oman has introduced a new opportunity to help owners sell their Mercedes-Benz vehicles back to the dealership promptly and at market value. The service allows customers to have their Mercedes-Benz cars professionally assessed and appraised with the assistance of a trusted dealer.

The service is available to all Mercedes-Benz models originally sold by ZTC Mercedes-Benz Oman with GCC specification, under five years old, and with a full-service his-

tory. This offer is available and initiated from the Mercedes-Benz Oman website, a press release said.

Scott Shears, general manager, Passenger Cars at Mercedes-Benz Oman, said, "Our goal is to make the process as simple as possible. Mercedes-Benz Oman is offering an impartial and confidential evaluation with no obligation to agree to a sale. Our dedicated team of Mercedes-Benz expert evaluators will provide a value based on the local market."



The Egyptian School Muscat

The Egyptian school - Muscat announces its need for the following vacancies for the new academic year (2022-2023):-

- 1-Physics Teacher For Igcse
- 2-Chemistry Teacher for IGCSE
- 3-An Biology Teacher For Igcse
- 4- An English teacher
- 5-A Math teacher
- 6- Computer Teacher

All applicants should have the following:-

- A degree of education
- Experience not less than 5 years
- IELTS
- Deadline is within one week of the advert date.
- Applications should be submitted to :

<https://forms.gle/tXLAZkfoseV2cdZBA>





**بنك عُمان العربي
OMAN ARAB BANK**

Dear Shareholders,

I am delighted to present to you the financial results of Oman Arab Bank for the first quarter of the year, ended on 31 March 2022.

As we enter 2022, after more than two years of the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic, the economies of the Arab Gulf region appear to be taking a positive turn, and is expected to continue pushing the region's GDP in the right direction. The pace of recovery will, of course, vary for each state based on their oil revenues, and on their ability to diversify their sources of income. It is also expected that these economies will follow the path of recovery by increasing the demand for goods and services, thus resuming commercial activities of all kinds. On the other hand, the current conflict in some part of the world will have a material impact on economic activity and inflation. The prospects of the world economy may be slower than what was expected before the outbreak of the conflict.

The economic data released by the Ministry of Finance has indicated that the state's general budget for 2021 achieved the lowest deficit since 2014. In the same context, the country's general budget recorded a financial surplus of around 250 million riyals at the end of February 2022, compared to a final deficit of 497 million riyals in February 2021, mainly due to the measures taken by the government in managing public finances and the increase of oil prices.

Recent statistics from government bodies indicate a growth in the foreign assets of the Central Bank of Oman and an increase in the domestic liquidity. Moreover, the total private sector deposits of commercial banks and Islamic windows have increased. Statistics also indicated a rise in total commercial bank loans and financing, which are pointing towards economic recovery.

The international credit rating agency "Capital Intelligence" has recently revised the outlook for the long-term foreign currency and stable ratings of the Bank from negative to stable. This follows the revision of the outlook for the Sultanate's sovereign rating from negative to stable. The Agency also revised the Bank's long-term foreign currency rating from BB to B respectively. The agency noted that the Bank's ratings are based on its strong deposits, resilient asset quality metrics and solid capital position following the issue of perpetual bonds in the past year.

The Bank will continue to diversify its activities and strengthen its financial position by following a wise policy and a highly focused approach to risk management as it looks forward to further development and growth in all areas.

Financial Performance

For the first three months ended 31 March 2022, the bank generated a consolidated net profit of OMR 1.5 million compared to OMR 3.3 million during the same period in 2021 showing an increase of 5%.

Net interest income from conventional banking and net income from Islamic financing services reached OMR 241 million for the three-month period ended March 31, 2022, up by 17% compared to the same period in 2021, driven by healthy growth in the loans portfolio. Non-interest income increased by 17% to reach OMR 6.5 million in the first quarter of 2022, mainly due to healthy growth in the fee and foreign exchange income.

Operating expenses for the three-month period ended 31 March 2022 reached OMR 19.3 million compared to OMR 16.9 million for the same period in 2021.

Net allowances for credit losses recorded OMR 72 million in 1Q 2022 compared to OMR 64 million in 1Q 2021. This increase was driven by higher expected losses in the wholesale segment, and in line with the cautious approach under current market conditions. Net loans and advances, including Islamic finance, rose by 7% to OMR 2,844 million compared to OMR 2,654 million as of 31 March 2021. Customer deposits reached OMR 2,846 million by the end of the first quarter of 2022, up by 4% compared to OMR 2,746 million as of 31 March 2021.

On 29 January 2022, the Bank has redeemed perpetual subordinated bonds amounting OMR 30 million, which it had originally issued on 29th December 2016 at an interest rate of 7.75% per year, after the expiration of its five-year term.

Parent Company Performance

Oman Arab Bank recorded a net profit of OMR 21 million in 1Q 2022, 5% higher than the same period last year. Total operating income increased by 12% to reach OMR 23.3 million supported by a growth of 5% in the net interest income and 22% in the fee income. Operating expenses reached OMR 14.3 million in 1Q 2022 compared to OMR 12.6 million in 1Q 2021. This was translated into a growth of 17% in the net operating income. Net loans and advances to customers grew by 8% to reach OMR 2,546 million as of 31 March 2022 compared to OMR 1,938 million for the same period last year. Customer deposits reached OMR 2,002 million in 1Q 2022 compared to 1,972 million in 1Q 2021.

Alizz Islamic Bank

During the first quarter of 2022, Alizz Islamic Bank achieved a net profit of OMR 14 million compared to For more information, please contact us on IR@oman-arabbank.com

**Rashed Al Zubair
Chairman**

CONDENSED INTERIM STATEMENT OF FINANCIAL POSITION AS AT 31 MARCH 2022

	Consolidated		Parent Company	
	Unaudited 31-Mar-22 RO'000	Audited 31-Dec-21 RO'000	Unaudited 31-Mar-22 RO'000	Audited 31-Dec-21 RO'000
ASSETS				
Cash and balances with the Central Bank of Oman	139,363	188,904	85,554	105,954
Due from banks	75,067	50,972	63,872	54,480
Loans, advances and financing activities for customers	2,843,622	2,753,434	2,046,368	1,901,031
Investment securities	304,405	302,496	241,940	240,031
Investment in subsidiary	-	-	107,344	107,344
Intangibles	7132	7290	-	-
Property and equipment	42,528	43,303	39,496	40,337
Other assets	100,888	89,540	68,186	59,358
Total assets	3,513,005	3,435,059	2,652,490	2,568,315
LIABILITIES				
Due to banks	72,702	13,259	70,777	13,359
Deposits from customers	2,845,629	2,810,412	2,012,321	1,965,987
Other liabilities	95,001	84,498	74,758	66,064
Taxation	3,338	3,051	3,338	3,051
Total liabilities	3,016,670	2,911,220	2,161,194	2,047,671
EQUITY				
Share capital	166,841	166,841	166,841	166,841
Share premium	36,565	36,565	36,565	36,565
Legal reserve	46,921	46,921	46,482	46,482
General reserve	25,560	25,560	25,560	25,560
Special reserve	3,837	3,837	3,837	3,837
Fair value reserve	(2,308)	(1,080)	(2,241)	(1,077)
Impairment reserve	9,130	9,130	9,130	9,130
Retained earnings	70,886	67,663	66,279	64,543
Total equity attributable to the equity holders of the Bank	367,532	355,536	352,483	351,841
Provisional Tier 1 capital bonds	138,603	168,803	138,603	168,803
Total equity	496,135	524,339	491,296	520,644
Total equity and liabilities	3,513,005	3,435,059	2,652,490	2,568,315
Net assets value per share (RO)	0.214	0.215	0.211	0.211
Contingent liabilities and commitments	420,834	451,053	310,428	344,920

CONDENSED INTERIM STATEMENT OF COMPREHENSIVE INCOME FOR THE THREE MONTHS PERIOD ENDED 31 MARCH 2022 (UNAUDITED)

	Consolidated		Parent Company	
	Unaudited 31-Mar-22 RO'000	Unaudited 31-Mar-21 RO'000	Unaudited 31-Mar-22 RO'000	Unaudited 31-Mar-21 RO'000
Interest income	30,257	29,600	30,257	29,600
Interest expense	(12,436)	(13,326)	(12,436)	(13,326)
Net interest income	17,821	16,274	17,821	16,274
Net income from Islamic financing	6,252	5,081	-	-
Net fee and commission income	5,185	4,531	4,259	3,547
Net income from investment securities	143	29	143	29
Other operating income	173	994	1,078	905
Total income	30,574	26,836	23,301	20,752
Operating expenses	(19,251)	(16,903)	(14,306)	(12,825)
Net allowance for credit losses	(2,202)	(6,384)	(6,445)	(5,879)
Profit before tax	4,121	3,549	2,550	2,248
Income tax expense	(643)	(226)	(419)	(226)
Profit for the period	3,478	3,323	2,131	2,022
Other comprehensive income / (loss):				
Items that will not be reclassified to profit or loss in the subsequent periods (net of tax):				
Equity investment at FVOCI - net change in fair value	(21)	(206)	(21)	(206)
Items that are or may be reclassified to profit or loss				
Debt investment at FVOCI - net change in fair value	(1,206)	26	(1,203)	-
Other comprehensive loss for the period	(1,227)	(180)	(1,224)	(206)
Total comprehensive income for the period	2,251	3,143	907	1,816
Earnings per share:				
Basic and diluted (RO)	0.002	0.002	0.001	0.001

Al Harthy makes history, takes ELMS GTE pole on Imola debut

Muscat - History-making Ahmad Al Harthy entered his name into the motorsport record books on Saturday after sensationally becoming the first Omani to qualify on pole position at the prestigious European Le Mans Series.

Delivering a flawless performance in the GTE qualifying session for round two of the season at Autodromo Internazionale Enzo e Dino Ferrari in Imola, Italy, the Oman Racing driver secured the GTE pole for the four-hour race by just under 0.4 seconds.

Having been quick throughout practice, Al Harthy and teammates Sam De Haan and Marco Sorensen made good progress with the set-up of the No.69 Aston Martin Vantage GTE and in the standalone run for bronze graded drivers Al Harthy topped the times - a lap of 1m42.712 seconds.

Carrying the hopes of the Oman Racing into qualifying, Al Harthy, backed by the Oman Ministry of Culture, Sports and Youth, OQ, Omantel and MHD-ITICS, went on to produce another exemplary showing to



Oman's Ahmad Al Harthy was in scintillating form in qualifying at Imola on Saturday

dominate the session. Posting a time of 1m42.299 seconds on his first flying lap, almost half a second clear of his nearest rival, Al Harthy sliced more than three tenths of a second with his second lap, a superb time of 1m41.974 seconds - placing him an incredible 0.8 seconds ahead. Ultimately ending the session

competitiveness and consistency. "I'm really happy with our performance, it's great to have my first ELMS pole and it's obviously a very proud moment for me to fly the flag for Oman in this way", said an elated Al Harthy, "It's great to be here at Imola, my first time as well, and the team did a great job in getting the car where

I'm really happy with our performance, it's great to have my first ELMS pole and it's obviously a very proud moment for me to fly the flag for Oman in this way

AHMAD AL HARTHY

0.383 seconds clear, with that second lap, the Omani was elated to achieve his first European Le Mans Series pole position, on his first ever visit to Imola. The tremendous showing follows on from a top two qualifying performance during the ELMS championship curtain-raiser at Circuit Paul Ricard in France last month, underlining Al Harthy's

we wanted it - honestly, perfect, perfect teamwork. "We've worked all weekend throughout the practice sessions to make sure we have a good race car, so I'm really looking forward to the race now and getting a good result. As always, a huge thank you to my incredible partners for enabling us to be here in the ELMS this year."

Australia cricketer Andrew Symonds dies in car crash

Sydney, Australia - Australian cricket was reeling Sunday after swashbuckling former all-rounder Andrew Symonds was killed in a car crash - another tragic blow after the recent deaths of fellow greats Shane Warne and Rod Marsh. The 46-year-old, who played 26 Tests and 198 one-day internationals from 1998 to 2009, was involved in a single-car accident outside Townsville in Queensland state on Saturday night. Police said emergency services attempted to revive him, but he died from his injuries after the

car left the road and rolled. Pictures published by the Brisbane Courier-Mail showed a vehicle on its roof and skid marks on the road. "We are still in shock - I'm just thinking of the two kids," his tearful wife Laura told the newspaper, referring to their young children. "He was the most laid-back person. Nothing stressed him out." Cricket Australia chairman Lachlan Henderson said the sport had lost "another of its very best". "Andrew was a generational talent who was instrumental in Australia's success at World

He was a cult figure to many who was treasured by his fans and friends

LACHLAN HENDERSON

Cups and as part of Queensland's rich cricket history," he added. "He was a cult figure to many who was treasured by his fans and friends." Symonds' fatal crash comes just months after the deaths of

fellow Australian greats Warne and Marsh, who both died unexpectedly from heart attacks. "Unfortunately I've been here too often this year under these circumstances. I actually can't quite believe it, to be honest," former Australia captain Mark Taylor told Channel Nine. "Another tragic day for cricket." The larger-than-life Symonds was hugely popular, not only for his hard-hitting approach to the game but also for his easy-going personality. He was widely considered one of the most skilled all-rounders Australian cricket has seen,

bowling both off-spin and medium pace, while playing many match-winning hands with his explosive middle-order batting. Symonds was also a top-rate fielder and was a key part of Australia's back-to-back 50-over World Cup triumphs in 2003 and 2007. Domestically, he played for Queensland for 17 seasons, while appearing for Gloucestershire, Kent, Lancashire and Surrey in the English County Championship and for Deccan Chargers and Mumbai Indians in the Indian Premier League. AFP



Andrew Symonds

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Cartoon alien aims to ease World Cup culture shock for Qatar's residents

Doha, Qatar - A cartoon series on an alien who crash-lands in World Cup host Qatar aims to ease a culture clash between more than a million foreign football fans and the conservative state's residents. Like the arriving fans, Kawkabani, star of the series launched by Qatar's first animation studio, has to learn Arabic pronunciation, how to drink coffee -- and to discover that Qataris prepare way too much food for their guests. Creators Hossein Heydar and Amal al-Shammari hope the series will help Qataris to be more understanding of the 1.4 million football fanatics expected to besiege them in November and December. Conservative Qataris prefer sipping on speciality coffee and fruit juices while European football fans are known for their beer fuelled good times in the street. Kawkabani seeks "to explain to Qataris that there must be acceptance of these cultures... and help them (visitors) coexist or understand the Qatari culture as well," said Shammari, who wrote the scripts. The first two 10-minute episodes of "Kawkabani" - which means "The Planet Person" in Arabic - have already been launched on YouTube by their company, Nefais Animation. "As an animation studio, we looked at content in the region,



The series will help Qataris to be more understanding of the 1.4 million football fans expected to besiege them

even in Qatar, and we felt there was a lack of content that represents Qatari culture," said Shammari, Nefais's creative director. Arabic words were sometimes garbled and costumes not always quite right. "We felt like we need a studio in Qatar that pays attention to all these details and represents Qatari culture in the right way," he said. Tiny Qatar's triumph in securing the right to host the World Cup gives it the opportunity to show off its customs. "When the Alien falls into Doha, again he is an alien so he

doesn't know anything so we are not expecting him to understand the Qatar society and in the Qatar society we have," said Shammari, who wrote the script. "We want to explain a lot of things and share our culture with the visitors." Nefais only hired artists from the Middle East with knowledge of Arabic culture, added Heydar, in charge of animation. Besides Kawkabani, the series has three main Qatari characters representing what the creators consider to be the main strands of the 270,000-strong indigenous community, which lives

alongside more than 2.5 million foreign workers. Faisal is a traditional bedouin, the community that used to inhabit the desert. "You know they're more proud of their culture, and then they sometimes overreact," said Shammari. But "they would support you no matter what. They'll always be there for you." Saad, another of the Qatari characters, is a more "modern" city dweller. "He is open to different cultures, he's open to people, he wants to be a businessman," said the writer. AFP

Man City stage escape act

Thrilling fightback helps leaders Man City keep title fate in their hands despite Mahrez penalty miss

London, United Kingdom - Manchester City came from 2-0 down to salvage a vital point in a 2-2 draw at West Ham to keep the Premier League title in their hands as Tottenham moved into the top four on Sunday.

City travelled to the London Stadium knowing they needed a maximum of four points from their final two games of the season to guarantee a fourth title in five years.

However, the Hammers took full advantage of City's injury crisis at the back as the pace and poise of Jarrod Bowen put Liverpool right back in the title race.

Pep Guardiola was without Ruben Dias, John Stones and Kyle Walker and a makeshift defence was easily cut open on the counter-attack.

Bowen burst onto Pablo Fornals' ball over the top to round Ederson and put City behind in a league game for the first time since February.

City did not learn their lesson as Bowen broke the offside trap once more in the final seconds of the first half to fire low past Ederson. The champions were rattled but responded to keep the des-



Manchester City's Fernandinho controls the ball in front of West Ham United's Michail Antonio on Sunday (AFP)

tiny of the title in their own hands.

Jack Grealish has failed to live up to his £100 million (\$123 million) price tag, but came up with

his biggest City goal four minutes into the second period to get the comeback started.

West Ham still had huge

chances to restore their two-goal lead as Bowen hit the side-netting from a narrow angle and Michail Antonio's lob drifted wide with

just Ederson to beat.

City had fortune on their side to get level when Vladimir Coufal turned Riyad Mahrez's free-kick

into his own net.

But Guardiola's men missed the chance to complete the comeback and move to the brink of the title when Mahrez's penalty was saved by Lukasz Fabianski four minutes from time.

City move four points clear of Liverpool at the top of the table, but the quadruple-chasing Reds have a game in hand away to Southampton on Tuesday.

"Now there is no debate about goal difference, just win our game and we will be champions," said Guardiola.

Spurs apply pressure

At the Tottenham Hotspur stadium, Harry Kane's penalty moved Spurs into fourth with a nervy 1-0 win over Burnley.

Antonio Conte's men move two points ahead of north London rivals Arsenal, who travel to Newcastle on Monday, in the battle for a place in next season's Champions League.

Tottenham still need a slip up from the Gunners to return to the Champions League next season, but upped the pressure on Mikel Arteta's men.

AFP



Liverpool players wheel away in celebration on Saturday

Klopp calls for quadruple push after FA Cup victory

London, United Kingdom - Jurgen Klopp urged Liverpool to give one last push for the quadruple after they beat Chelsea on penalties in the FA Cup final to keep their history bid alive.

Klopp's side won 6-5 in the shoot-out following an enthralling 0-0 draw after extra-time at Wembley on Saturday.

Having already beaten Chelsea on penalties in the League Cup final, Liverpool remain in contention to become the first English team to win all four major trophies in a single season.

"The quadruple, it's outstanding that we can talk about it, it's crazy," Klopp said.

AFP



Indian players celebrate after beating Indonesia in the Thomas Cup final on Sunday (AFP)

Ruthless India thrash Indonesia to win first Thomas Cup crown

Bangkok, Thailand - India made history by winning the Thomas Cup for the first time with a ruthless 3-0 upset of reigning champions Indonesia in Bangkok on Sunday.

India, competing in their debut final of the men's team championship, sealed the title when world number 11 Kidambi Srikanth defeated higher-ranked Jonatan Christie 21-15, 23-21.

A devastated Indonesia, the tournament's most successful

team having previously won it 14 times, could not keep pace with the fire brought by the Indian team - who joyfully rushed the court following Srikanth's win.

India were already 2-0 up, with Lakshya Sen beating Anthony Ginting in the first singles match and then Satwiksairaj Rankireddy and Chirag Shetty defeating Mohammad Ahsan and Kevin Sukamuljo in the doubles.

It fell to Christie, an Asian

Games gold medalist now in his fourth Thomas Cup campaign, to save Indonesia's flagging title hopes.

But the eighth-ranked Christie couldn't do it and seemed overcome with nerves at the onset of his do-or-die match against Srikanth. The 29-year-old Srikanth took full advantage, bearing down relentlessly on Christie in the second game.

AFP

Swiatek retains Italian Open to claim a fifth straight title

Rome, Italy - Iga Swiatek swept to victory at the Italian Open on Sunday, beating Ons Jabeur 6-2, 6-2 to retain the title and claim her fifth tournament crown in a row.

World number one Swiatek dropped to her knees in tears of joy after winning her 28th match in a row, and is red-hot favourite for Roland Garros which starts later this month.

"I'm going to celebrate with a lot of tiramisu!" Swiatek joked on court before adding "see you at the French Open".

The 20-year-old Pole has dropped just one set in her last 20 matches and made light work of Jabeur, ranked seven in the world, in a largely one-sided final in Rome.

Jabeur had come into her first Rome final on a roasting Foro Italico centre court on the back of



Italian Open champion Iga Swiatek (L) and runner-up Ons Jabeur (AFP)

two thrilling comeback wins over Daria Kasatkina and Maria Sakkari.

Tunisia's Jabeur had made history last week after becoming the first Arab or African woman to win a WTA 1000 title but could not extend a career-best

11-match winning streak against her relentless opponent.

Meanwhile, Novak Djokovic won his sixth Italian Open title on Sunday after a straight-sets victory over Stefanos Tsitsipas, 6-0, 7-6 (7/5).

AFP

NATIONAL MINERAL WATER COMPANY (SAOG)				
Post Box No. 2740, Ruwi, Postal Code: 112, Sultanate of Oman, Tel: +968 24628900, Fax: +968 24628990 Email: contact@tanufwater.com, Web: www.nmwc.om				
DIRECTOR'S REPORT				
Dear Shareholders, On behalf of the Board of Directors, the Company hereby reports the unaudited financial results for the three-month period ended 31st March 2022.				
Review of Operations: The consolidated financial statements include the results and the financial position of the Parent company, National Mineral Water Company SAOG and its subsidiary, Valuedeal Trading LLC, for the three months ended 31st March 2022 (together referred to as the Group).				
Sales and Operational Performance: The Parent Company's sales revenue for the three months ended 31st March 2022 is RO 1,883,776 compared to RO 1,570,810 in the previous period, the 20% growth is mainly delivered by the increase of productivity and new commercial strategies. The Parent Company's net profit for the three months ended 31st March 2022 is RO 27,939 against a loss of RO (33,488), the significant positive results are driven by the increase of revenue, production efficiencies and cost-saving initiatives despite the challenges still being faced from the previous year of increased PET Resin prices which are key input raw materials to the Parent Company's products and supply chain costs. The sales revenue of the Group for the three months ended on 31st March 2022 is RO 1,900,147 compared to RO 1,667,525 in the previous period. The Group's net profit for the period ended 31st March 2022 is RO 30,156 and this was a net loss of RO (31,796) in the previous period.				
Subsidiary Company: Valuedeal Trading LLC (VDT): The Company trades in plastic and other confectionery items.				
Future Outlook Despite the continued and rapid increase of Raw material costs, along with the worldwide supply chain challenges specially PET Resin that is a major component to our business, the group financial performance for the Q1 has improved significantly and the Management is looking forward to maintaining same positive performance over the year through a very solid plan that includes increasing efficiencies, productivity as well as relaunching a new diversified portfolio with new categories.				
Human Resources The Company is currently employing 50% Omani Staff and will continue to support this initiative of employing more Omanis. The Company recognizes the importance of human assets to achieve its objectives.				
Internal Control System The board continues to review the effectiveness of the existing internal control systems and considers the controls to be adequate for the size and nature of the business operations.				
Corporate Governance Code The company has complied with CMA directives on the Corporate Governance Code.				
Acknowledgment On behalf of the Board of Directors, I wish to thank our patrons, customers, bankers and shareholders for all the support they have extended to us during this period. I also take the opportunity to thank the management for their continued efforts in growing the Company. On behalf of the Board of Directors, I would like to express our sincere gratitude to His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tariq and his Government for the support extended to the private sector.				
Sayyid Khalid bin Hamad bin Hamoud Al Busaidi Chairman				
1) The complete accounts, in either Arabic or English as requested, will be sent by mail to any shareholder within 7 days of written request at the above address. 2) The complete accounts have been uploaded on Website of MSM. 3) Any shareholder who is having incorrect address or not having any address in the company's register or Co. (MDSRC) may approach the registered office to register their correct address. Register maintained by Maintained by Muscat Depository Securities Registration.				
Separate and consolidated statement of financial position for the period ended 31 March 2022				
	Parent Company	Group	Parent Company	Group
	31.03.2022	31.03.2021	31.03.2022	31.03.2021
ASSETS				
Non-current assets				
Property, plant and equipment	2,596,034	2,695,641	2,596,455	2,696,416
Right-of-use assets	77,873	88,160	77,873	88,160
Intangible assets	18,237	22,079	18,237	22,079
Investment in a subsidiary	95,000	95,000	-	-
Total non-current assets	2,787,144	2,900,880	2,692,565	2,806,655
Current assets				
Inventories	905,429	772,317	905,429	772,317
Trade and other receivables	2,169,277	2,664,082	2,338,923	2,805,719
Due from related parties	166,197	153,314	19,805	14,423
Cash and bank balances	113,901	53,072	129,141	76,673
Total current assets	3,354,804	3,642,785	3,393,298	3,669,132
Total assets	6,141,948	6,543,665	6,085,863	6,475,787
EQUITY AND LIABILITIES				
Capital and reserves				
Share capital	2,700,304	2,700,304	2,700,304	2,700,304
Share premium	135,169	135,169	135,169	135,169
Legal reserve	478,388	478,388	478,534	478,534
Accumulated losses	(1,085,044)	(657,151)	(1,151,179)	(726,529)
Equity attributable to shareholders of the Parent Company	2,228,817	2,656,710	2,162,828	2,587,478
Non-controlling Interest	-	-	1,527	1,352
Total capital and reserves	2,228,817	2,656,710	2,164,355	2,588,830
Non-current liabilities				
Employees' benefit liabilities	232,318	330,621	232,318	330,621
Bank borrowings	931,504	851,503	931,504	851,503
Lease liabilities - non-current portion	68,359	76,699	68,359	76,699
Capital expenditure payable	-	243,982	-	243,982
Total non-current liabilities	1,232,181	1,502,805	1,232,181	1,502,805
Current liabilities				
Lease liabilities - current portion	14,400	14,400	14,400	14,400
Trade and other payables	1,072,525	883,741	1,080,902	883,743
Bank borrowings	1,578,143	1,486,009	1,578,143	1,486,009
Income tax payable	15,882	-	15,882	-
Total current liabilities	2,680,950	2,384,150	2,689,327	2,384,152
Total liabilities	3,913,131	3,886,955	3,921,508	3,886,957
Total equity and liabilities	6,141,948	6,543,665	6,085,863	6,475,787
Net assets per share	0.083	0.098	0.080	0.096
Separate and consolidated statement of profit or loss and other comprehensive income for the period ended 31 March 2022				
	Parent Company	Group	Parent Company	Group
	31.03.2022	31.03.2021	31.03.2022	31.03.2021
Revenue	1,883,766	1,570,810	1,900,147	1,667,525
Cost of revenue	(1,223,654)	(972,427)	(1,223,654)	(1,040,355)
Gross profit	660,112	598,383	676,493	627,170
Other income	-	-	-	-
	660,112	598,383	676,493	627,170
Expenses				
Selling and distribution expenses	(484,494)	(478,980)	(491,613)	(492,562)
General and administrative expenses	(100,494)	(108,894)	(107,540)	(122,407)
	(584,988)	(587,874)	(599,152)	(614,969)
Operating profit for the period	75,124	10,509	77,341	12,201
Finance costs	(47,185)	(43,997)	(47,185)	(43,997)
Net (loss) / profit before tax	27,939	(33,488)	30,156	(31,796)
for the period	-	-	-	-
Taxation	-	-	-	-
Net (loss) / profit attributable to:				
equity holders of the Parent Company	-	-	30,045	(31,881)
Non-controlling interest	-	-	111	88
Basic and diluted (loss) / earnings per share attributable to equity holders of the Parent Company	0.001	(0.001)	0.001	(0.001)



RR V LSG

Boult leads the charge as Rajasthan beat Lucknow to move to second



BRIEF SCORES:
Rajasthan Royals 178 for 6 in 20 overs (Yashasvi Jaiswal 41 (29) 6x4, 1x6, Devdutt Padikkal 39 (18) 5x4, 2x6; Ravi Bishnoi 2 for 31) beat Lucknow Super Giants 154 for 8 in 20 overs (Deepak Hooda 59 (39) 5x4, 2x6, Krunal Pandya 25 (23) 1x4, 1x6; Trent Boult 2 for 18) by 24 runs

TODAY'S MATCH
(6PM)

 VS 

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Gujarat down Chennai to seal top-two league finish

Mumbai, India - Wriddhiman Saha's unbeaten 67 led Gujarat Titans to a thumping seven-wicket win over Chennai Super Kings on Sunday and a top-two finish in the IPL league stage.

Chasing a tricky 134 for victory, table-toppers Gujarat reached the target with five balls to spare on the back of Saha's 57-ball knock at Mumbai's Wankhede Stadium.

A disciplined attack led by fast bowler Mohammed Shami set up the win for Gujarat.

The pacer returned figures of 2-19 including the key wickets of Devon Conway, for five, and skipper Mahendra Singh Dhoni, for seven, to restrict title holders Chennai to 133-5.

The four-time winners slumped to their ninth loss in 13 matches to stay just one spot above bottom-placed Mumbai Indians in the 10-team table.

Gujarat, one of two newcomers to the Twenty20 tournament and the first team to qualify for the play-offs, now have 10 victories in 13 matches.

The top two teams among the final four in the play-offs will have



David Miller congratulates Wriddhiman Saha after the opener made an unbeaten 67 to lead Gujarat to victory

a second shot at making the title clash even if they lose their first qualifier on May 24.

They will play the winner of the eliminator - between teams three and four - in the second

qualifier to have a chance of entering the final scheduled for May 29 in Ahmedabad.

Wicketkeeper-batsman Saha stood firm during the chase despite losing his opening partner

Shubman Gill for 18 and then Australia's Matthew Wade, for 20.

Sri Lanka medium-pace bowler Matheesha Pathirana took two wickets including that

of skipper Hardik Pandya for seven but Saha kept the chase on track and hit the winning boundary.

Chennai earlier faltered with the bat when they failed to build on a gritty 53 by opener Ruturaj Gaikwad.

The Gujarat bowlers squeezed the flow of runs as

A disciplined attack led by fast bowler Mohammed Shami set up the win for newcomers Gujarat

Chennai managed just 24 from the final five overs with Rashid Khan, Alzarri Joseph and Ravishrinivasan Sai Kishore each taking one wicket.

Players from both teams wore black armbands in memory of Australia's white-ball great Andrew Symonds who tragically died in a car crash on Saturday.

AFP



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OPEC LOWERS
OIL FORECAST

Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC) has revised down its global oil demand forecasts for 2022 by around 210,000 barrels per day compared to last month's assessment

CHAIRMAN'S STATEMENT Q1 2022

OUR VALUES: SAFETY | SERVICE | INTEGRITY | EFFICIENCY | CARING



On behalf of the Board of Directors, I present the unaudited accounts for Renaissance Services SAOG, for the three-month period ended 31 March 2022.

We have made a positive start to 2022. Financial performance for Q1 is encouraging, and we have a resilient supply chain focused on mitigating global inflationary pressures while we continue to grow the business. We have also made good progress with strategy implementation towards what we term Renaissance 2.0.

FINANCIAL PERFORMANCE
RS CONSOLIDATED

	RO Million		USD Million	
	2022	2021	2022	2021
Revenue	29.9	25.8	77.7	67.0
EBITDA	7.0	5.7	18.2	14.8
Operating profit	5.1	3.9	13.2	10.1
Net profit after tax	4.1	2.7	10.6	7.0
Net profit after non-controlling interest	3.5	2.1	9.1	5.5

CONTRACT SERVICES

Renaissance has an excellent track record for client and contract retention. Successful contract bidding, extensions and negotiations during 2021 have yielded good outcomes which are evident in Q1 2022 results. In 2022 we must do this all over again, with many of those extensions now subject to re-tender in a post-COVID market environment.

We sincerely appreciate the trust and confidence placed in us by our clients, manifest in our contract retention record and our Net Promoter Score (NPS) of 94 for 2021. Clients have understood and accepted the necessary recalibration of contract rates, proven by our consistent low bidder status in retained re-tenders and our record of high standards and customer experience.

Net Promoter Score (NPS) is an internationally recognised independent benchmark that measures customer experience and predicts business growth. NPS is a proven metric using customer feedback, measured on a scale of 1-10, where 'Detractors' (those rating the company between 0-6) are deducted from 'Promoters' (those rating the company at 9 or 10) to produce the net result.

So far this year, we have secured contract awards of RO 10.5M while another c. RO 90M is in the pipeline at various stages of negotiation with clients. We are, of course, unlikely to win or retain every opportunity for which we compete. But we are always a serious contender. The current sales pipeline can potentially increase the order backlog in our pure contract services business (excluding our Renaissance Villages) by 150%. Current backlog is RO 59.7M, which could increase to c. RO 149.7M, subject to our degree of success.

In any event, we are confident our services business, carried out by 100% operating subsidiary, Tawoos Industrial Services Co. SAOC, shall deliver continuing year-on-year performance improvement.

OCCUPANCY IN THE OIL & GAS SECTOR

Occupancy levels in the oil & gas fields are up at 90%, but still below pre-pandemic levels. Nevertheless, the outlook is positive as most producers and operators increase activity.

OCCUPANCY AT RENAISSANCE VILLAGE DUQM (RSVD)

Occupancy at RSVD stands at 65%. Whilst this delivers positive performance, we remain frustrated as contractors continue to house several thousands of workers in sub-standard accommodation below the approved minimum standards set by The Special Economic Zone at Duqm (SEZAD) and OQ8. The reality is RSVD could be at 100% occupancy today if all concerned would enforce the rules for which we were commissioned to build compliant facilities.

Not just at Duqm, but throughout our accommodation service offerings, Renaissance has developed a winning formula to deliver worker welfare at a sensible and affordable cost. This is the direction of travel globally as people recognise investing in UN-ILO accredited minimum humane standards of worker welfare, for all to live and work in dignity, is not cost punitive, but cost optimum. In the long run, humanity shall prevail

on this issue aside of the national imperatives around reputation and international financing.

Meanwhile, we do have many outstanding clients who understand the paramount need of caring for their people. We are pleased to confirm we have agreed a long-term 5-year contract with Oman DryDock (ODC) to continue to accommodate their workforce at RSVD. ODC has been a valued anchor tenant at RSVD since the facility opened in 2017. We currently care for > 3,000 ODC residents at RSVD and this number is expected to rise to > 4,500 as the dry dock at Duqm grows and prospers as a world class facility delivering the spirit of vision for SEZAD.



NATIONAL HOSPITALITY INSTITUTE SAOC (NHI)

NHI had a very difficult operating period during the pandemic with shareholder funds completely eroded over the last two years. As the predominant shareholder, Renaissance has decided to step in to acquire the shares from fellow shareholders for a nominal fee. We thank all shareholders for the journey we have shared together over the years. NHI remains the gold standard for hospitality training in Oman, thanks to the contribution of all involved. The Renaissance intervention serves to protect the rights and security of NHI employees, and the NHI brand. We seek to ensure NHI has a safe home to continue its important role in the Tourism and Hospitality sector - an industry conducive to meaningful job creation, in a sector where the Sultanate of Oman can be globally competitive.

RENAISSANCE 2.0

At Renaissance our purpose is to transform every life we touch. We do that in many ways: delivering value to shareholders; giving outstanding service to clients and customers; valuing employees and caring about the families that stand behind them; nurturing and appreciating our supply chain and service providers; making a difference to local communities; and transforming the living conditions, wellbeing, and dignity of the weakest cadre in our family of customers.



Renaissance 2.0 is the engine for how we deliver that purpose in the future: setting the template for the next generation of the company. The initiative includes improving bench-strength of our senior cadre of leaders for growth and succession. It includes broadening capabilities to turbo-charge strategy implementation, modernisation and exponential growth. It is driving a green, digital, innovative culture that has positive impact on our industry leadership, shareholder value and customer and colleague experiences.

The full definition of Renaissance 2.0 is in the Annual Report 2021, available on our website www.renaissanceservices.com

Key drivers include our agendas for a digital, innovative, and sustainable future, guided by our commitment to Diversity, Equality and Inclusivity (DEI) and Environment, Social Responsibility, Governance (ESG). In Q1 we have made substantial progress mapping the details of our strategy and action plans. We are completing the process of onboarding new leaders to join our existing team in the roles of Chief People Officer (CPO), Chief Corporate Affairs Officer (CCAO), Chief Commercial Officer (CCO) and Chief Facilities Management Officer (CFMO). We are now seeking a Chief Digital Officer (CDO) to complete the current team transformation.

We are developing criteria for investing in what we term 'EDGE' projects: innovative start-up opportunities, at home and abroad, that speak to our values and a modernising, digital, automated and green agenda. These may be pure shareholding investments, JV partnerships or stakeholdings obtained through merger or acquisition (M&A) initiatives.

OUTLOOK

The Oman economy is benefitting from the government's economic reforms and the current windfall of higher oil & gas prices. We are seeing growth opportunity at home in Oman, while pursuing selected opportunities in the region.

Over the past year, we have been able to regain contracts, through re-tender or re-negotiation, incorporating into the revised pricing, the significant increases in cost of doing business of recent years. However, 2022 is bringing its own new wave of inflationary pressure.

The ongoing global issues of the Russia-Ukraine war, COVID lockdowns in China, and increased oil prices have materially affected the global supply chain, fuel, freight, commodity prices and commodity availability. Our 2022 Q1 performance has been impacted by these new inflationary pressures. The potential impact for the full year of 2022 could be higher, as prices of key products, such as poultry, mutton, cooking oil, rice and flour are on the rise. However, we have formed a special task force to

implement mitigating actions, without compromising standards and contract compliance. Renaissance has the scale and agility to pass through this period of turbulence.

Even during 2021, as we implemented reality readjustment into contract pricing, we respect the fact that many clients were hoping for a state of perpetual price freezes or continuous reductions. Nevertheless, our revised pricing remained highly competitive, achieving lowest technically competent bidder status in every contract regained.

Clients are right to be fearful of further increases in line with inflationary pressure beyond anyone's control. However, for many years we have offset cost rises through operational and supply chain optimisation. Now, Renaissance 2.0 is designed to deliver a culture of further continuous improvement for our customers, creating higher standards at lower costs - not just through our economies of scale, but through innovation and transformation of how we deliver 21st century services.

Similarly, we shall continue to promote the potential for cost savings and efficiencies of greater private sector outsourcing on a long-term Integrated Facilities Management (IFM) basis. This allows time and incentive for investment in technology, innovation and automation; and setting OKRs (Objectives and Key Result areas) that deliver increased In-Country Value (ICV), including more jobs for Omanis and opportunities for Small to Medium Enterprises (SMEs). We continue to assess Public Private Partnership (PPP) and privatisation opportunities, as they arise. Renaissance remains ready to invest in opportunities that afford us a long-term IFM services role both in Oman and the region as our ability to deliver quality at the right price gains recognition across borders.

TRIBUTE

We express our thanks and support for His Majesty Sultan Haitham. His Majesty's leadership in implementing necessary measures to drive economic and structural reform provides a platform for local and international investment in Oman's future, backed by the confidence and optimism of Vision 2040.



Samir J. Fancy
Chairman

CONSOLIDATED STATEMENT OF FINANCIAL POSITION
AS AT 31ST MARCH 2022

	2022	2021
	Rial '000	Rial '000
Non-current assets		
Property, plant and equipment	142,053	145,512
Intangible assets	1,945	1,963
Investments	5,320	4,552
	149,318	152,027
Current assets	78,048	71,657
Current liabilities	52,124	53,662
Non-current liabilities		
Term loans excluding current maturities	76,983	80,238
Non current payables and advance	10,448	10,490
	87,431	90,728
Net assets	87,811	79,294
Equity		
Share capital	23,641	23,641
Treasury shares	(6,853)	(6,853)
Share premium	26,936	26,936
Legal reserve	8,831	8,574
Subordinated loan reserve	1,500	2,250
Other reserves	537	331
Retained earnings	11,563	4,861
	66,155	59,740
Non controlling interest	21,656	19,554
Total equity	87,811	79,294

CONSOLIDATED STATEMENT OF PROFIT OR LOSS
FOR THE THREE MONTHS ENDED 31ST MARCH 2022

	2022	2021
	Rial '000	Rial '000
Revenue	29,899	25,765
Operating expenses	(24,763)	(21,909)
Profit from operations	5,136	3,856
Net finance costs	(1,209)	(1,123)
Profit before tax	3,927	2,733
Tax	172	(7)
Profit for the period	4,099	2,726
Net profit attributable to:-		
Shareholders of the Parent Company	3,468	2,125
Non-controlling interest	631	601
	4,099	2,726

Note:
1) The complete accounts will be sent by mail to shareholders within 7 days of receipt of request.
2) The complete set of financial results can be accessed at www.renaissanceservices.com

Bank credit grows 2.8% in March; deposits up 4.7%

Our Correspondent
Muscat

Oman's banking sector recorded a credit growth of 2.8 per cent in March 2022 compared to the same period a year ago, according to the Central Bank of Oman.

Total outstanding credit extended by the banking sector (both conventional and Islamic banks) grew by 2.8 per cent to RO27.9bn in March 2022 against the same month of the previous year, CBO said in its monthly bulletin issued on Sunday.

Of the total outstanding credit, bank credit to the private sector demonstrated a sluggish growth of 0.7 per cent year-on-year to reach RO23.5bn. Non-financial corporations and household sector received the highest shares of total private sector credit, at approximately 45.4 per cent each, at end-March 2022.

The share of financial corporations was 5.4 per cent and other sectors received the remaining 3.8 per cent of the total private sector credit.

Fitch Ratings last week said that Omani banks' credit fundamentals are recovering as pressures on the operating environment have eased and economic activity is gradually picking up amid higher oil prices.



Another global ratings agency Moody's also recently revised up its outlook for the Omani banking system to 'stable' from 'negative' due to an improvement in the banks' operating environment.

Conventional banks' total outstanding credit grew by 1.4 per cent year-on-year in March this year. However, conventional banks' credit to the private sector decreased 0.3 per cent to RO19bn while their overall investments in securities rose 13.5 per cent to RO5.2bn, the CBO data showed.

Banks' investment in government development bonds increased by 14.6 per cent year-on-year to RO2.1bn, while their investments in foreign securities declined 18.6 per cent to RO790mn at the end of March 2022.

On the other hand, total banking sector deposits grew by 4.7 per cent to RO25.9bn at the end of March 2022 against the same period a year ago.

Total private sector deposits increased by 2.4 per cent to RO17.5bn. In terms of sector-wise composition of private sector deposits, the biggest contribution was from household deposits at 51.9 per cent, followed by non-financial corporations at 30.2 per cent, financial corporations at 15 per cent and other sectors at 0.8 per cent.

Aggregate deposits held with the conventional banks increased by 3.4 per cent year-on-year to RO21.5bn at end-March 2022.

Private sector deposits, which accounted for 68.3 per cent of total deposits with conventional banks, increased by 0.4 per cent

as of March 2022 to reach RO14.7bn.

Government deposits with conventional banks witnessed an increase of 9.7 per cent at RO4.9bn and deposits of public enterprises increased by 16.2 per cent to RO1.5bn.

Total assets of Islamic banks and windows increased by 10.7 per cent on a year-on-year basis to reach RO6bn at the end of March 2022. Islamic assets now constitute about 15.4 per cent of the total banking system assets in Oman as of the end-March 2022.

Islamic banking entities provided financing of RO4.9bn at the end of March 2022, recording a growth of 9.6 per cent over that a year ago. Total deposits held with Islamic banks and windows increased by 11.7 per cent to RO4.5bn.



Indo Gulf & Middle East Chamber of Commerce forms Oman chapter

Muscat - Indo Gulf & Middle East Chamber of Commerce (INMECC) has announced the formation of its Oman chapter. The announcement was made during a meeting of INMECC delegates with H E Qais al Yousef, Oman's Minister of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion in Mumbai on Thursday.

H E Yousef appreciated the formation of the Oman chapter of INMECC and assured all support for the promotion of Indo Gulf & Middle East Chamber of Commerce in the sultanate, according to a press release.

A high level Omani trade delegation to India, led by H E Yousef, held a meeting with the

delegates of INMECC at Hotel Oberoi Mumbai on Thursday.

During the meeting with INMECC, the minister said that India is one of the best trading partner for Oman and both countries are crucial allies in the Gulf region and have seen bilateral trade ties growing stronger in the past few years.

He announced the formation of INMECC Oman Chapter and agreed to sign a MoU between INMECC and the Oman Chamber of Commerce and Industry (OCCI) soon.

The visit of Oman's trade mission to India comes at a time when the bilateral trade between the two countries has grown by 82 per cent to reach US\$9.94bn in 2021-2022.

INMECC chairman Dr N M Sharafudeen said that the Indo Gulf & Middle East Chamber of Commerce is an initiative of professionals and business leaders from India and the Middle East countries to create a platform dedicated to connect and promote economical, industrial, commercial and cultural activities in India and the Middle East region.

INMECC has chapters in difference cities in India, UAE, Oman, Saudi Arabia, Kuwait and Qatar. Oman chapter of INMECC is headed by Suresh Virmani, with Mohiuddeen Mohamed Ali, Aftab Patel, Warith al Kharusi, Chander Khanna and Ahmed Rayees as board members.

MSX closes flat amid weak trading

Our Correspondent
Muscat

The benchmark index of the Muscat Stock Exchange remained almost flat on Sunday to close at 4,144 points.

Sectoral indices posted mixed performance on Sunday. While Financial Index decreased 0.19 per cent, Industrial Index rose 0.32 per cent and Services Index inched up 0.01 per cent. MSX Sharia Index was down by 0.04 per cent at 470.33 points.

Trading activity remained weak on Sunday as volume dropped by 21.1 per cent to 7.97mn shares against 10.1mn shares traded on Thursday.

Market turnover also fell by nearly 40 per cent to RO1.66mn compared with RO2.77mn recorded in the previous trading session.

The market breadth of the MSX remained positive with



11 advancing stocks to six decliners. As many as 24 traded stocks closed flat for the day.

The gainers for the day were Al Hasan Engineering (25 per cent), A'Saffa Foods (9.84 per cent), Galfar Engineering and Contracting (2.75 per cent), SMN Power Holding (2.27 per cent) and Muscat Desalination (1.68 per cent).

Top losers were Gulf Mushroom (-2.42 per cent), Al Anwar Investment (-2.41 per cent), Al Batinah Power (-2.0 per cent), Ahlibank (-1.67 per cent) and National Aluminium Products (-1.14 per cent).

Aramco Q1 profits jump 82% to \$39bn as oil prices surge

Riyadh, Saudi Arabia - Saudi Aramco on Sunday posted an 82 per cent jump in first quarter profits, buoyed by a global surge in oil prices that has made it the world's most valuable company.

The announcement continued a string of recent positive economic news for Saudi Arabia, where a booming oil sector is fuelling the fastest growth rate in a decade.

Aramco's net income of US\$39.5bn was up from US\$21.7bn compared with the same period in 2021, "primarily driven by higher crude oil prices and volumes sold, and improved downstream margins," it said in a press release.

The latest financial results were published four days after Aramco dethroned Apple as the world's most valuable company, with shares worth US\$2.42tn compared to Apple's US\$2.37tn.

In March, Aramco reported a 124 per cent net annual profit increase for 2021.

But the firm, the kingdom's "crown jewel" and primary source of government revenue,



has faced security challenges from the war which involves a Saudi-led military coalition against Yemen's Huthi rebels who have repeatedly targeted the kingdom, including Aramco sites. A two-month truce in the war has generally been holding since it started in April, but in 2019 Huthi-claimed aerial assaults on two Aramco facilities in eastern Saudi Arabia temporarily knocked out half of the kingdom's crude production.

A March attack by the Huthis on facilities of the largely state-owned firm caused a "temporary" drop in production.

The net income for the first quarter was a record for Aramco since its initial public offering in 2019.

Also on Sunday, Aramco announced it was issuing 20bn bonus shares to shareholders - one share for every 10 shares already owned.

A dividend of US\$18.8bn will be paid in the second quarter, it said.

"Against the backdrop of increased volatility in global markets, we remain focused on helping meet the world's demand for energy that is reliable, affordable and increasingly sustainable," Aramco president and CEO Amin Nasser said.

mand for energy that is reliable, affordable and increasingly sustainable," Aramco president and CEO Amin Nasser said.

Oil-fuelled boom

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

The world's biggest oil exporter has resisted US entreaties to raise output in an attempt to rein in prices that have spiked since the Ukraine

war began.

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

Saudi Arabia's GDP is expected to grow by 7.6 per cent in 2022, the International Monetary Fund said in April.

Saudi Arabia has sought both to open up and diversify its oil-reliant economy, especially since Mohammed bin Salman's appointment as crown prince in 2017.

Aramco floated 1.7 per cent of its shares on the Saudi bourse in December 2019, generating US\$29.4bn in the world's biggest initial public offering.

In February, the kingdom shifted four per cent of Aramco shares, worth US\$80bn, to the country's sovereign wealth fund - a move analysts saw as a possible prelude to further opening up the oil giant.

AFP

Emirates announces 'significantly' lower \$1.1bn annual loss

Dubai, UAE - Emirates airline announced a "significantly reduced" annual loss of US\$1.1bn dollars, five times lower than a year before, as pandemic travel restrictions ease.

Losses came in at AED3.9bn (US\$1.1bn) in the 2021-2022 financial year to March, with revenues up 91 per cent, as the airline expanded its global capacity and reinstated flights, Emirates said in a statement.

The Middle East's largest carrier said it received a capital injection of US\$954mn from its owner, the government of Dubai, to help it survive the crisis.

"This year, we focussed on restoring our operations quickly and safely wherever pandemic-related restrictions eased across our markets," said its chairman

and chief executive, Sheikh Ahmed bin Saeed al Maktoum.

"Business recovery picked up pace particularly in the second half of the year. Robust customer demand drove a huge improvement in our financial performance compared to our unprecedented losses of last year and we built up our strong cash balance."

In Friday's statement, it said the Emirates Group - which includes ground-handling firm Dnata - recorded an annual loss of AED3.8bn (US\$1.0bn), but with revenues up by 86 per cent and "strong customer demand".

Over the fiscal year, Emirates carried 19.6mn passengers, up from 6.6mn in the same period of the previous year.

"2021-22 was also a significant year as the UAE marked its 50th anniversary and hosted the world at Expo 2020 Dubai which generated increased global engagement and visitation to the UAE," Sheikh Ahmed said.

In the previous year, Emirates posted a US\$5.5bn annual loss,

its first in more than three decades, after the pandemic devastated the aviation industry. Like many other major air-



lines, it announced heavy layoffs when its fleet was grounded.

In Friday's statement, it said that as operations ramped up, "employees previously on furlough or made redundant were recalled and rehired, and new recruitment drives were held".

The group's total workforce increased by 13 per cent to 85,219 employees, it added.

Emirates specialises in long-haul flights, with its fleet solely composed of large Airbus A380 and Boeing 777 aircraft, dozens of which it grounded amid a lack of passenger traffic. It added that the group invested US\$2.2bn in new aircraft and facilities and received its final five new A380 plane during the financial year.

Emirates is currently flying to 140 destinations, almost its full

travel network of 158 destinations in 85 countries before the pandemic. Tourism has long been an economic mainstay of Dubai, which welcomed more than 16 million visitors in 2019. Before the pandemic, the aim had been to reach 20mn.

After an initial strict lockdown, life in the Gulf emirate - one of the first destinations to welcome visitors again in July 2020 - has returned to largely normal, with restaurants and hotels up and running and beaches open to the public.

The United Arab Emirates, made up of seven emirates including Dubai, has launched an energetic vaccination drive with some of the highest inoculation rates worldwide.

AFP

New UAE president meets France's Macron

World leaders streamed in to the oil-rich Gulf state to pay tribute to Sheikh Khalifa bin Zayed al Nahyan

Abu Dhabi, UAE - The UAE's new president, Sheikh Mohamed bin Zayed Al Nahyan, held talks on Sunday with French counterpart Emmanuel Macron as world leaders streamed in to the oil-rich Gulf state to pay tribute to his late predecessor.

Emmanuel Macron, on his first foreign trip since his second term started last week, expressed his condolences to the leader dubbed 'MBZ' following the death of his half-brother Sheikh Khalifa on Friday after a long illness.

Macron, the first Western leader to pay his respects, will be followed by British Prime Minister Boris Johnson, US Vice President Kamala Harris and Secretary of State Antony Blinken, Israel's president and the king of Spain, among a long list of dignitaries.

The United Arab Emirates has begun wielding increased influence in the Middle East and further afield due to its wealth, oil resources and strategic location.

MBZ has been quietly running the country since 2014 when Sheikh Khalifa, his 73-

year-old half-brother, was sidelined by a stroke. The cause of his death was not announced.

Presidents and monarchs from Egypt, Iraq, Jordan, Oman and Tunisia and Sudan's de facto ruler were among the leaders to offer their condolences on Saturday. On Sunday, Qatar's emir, Bahrain's king and the Palestinian, German and Indonesian presidents were among more than 20 senior officials expected.

Macron, in his talks with Sheikh Mohamed, 61, expressed his 'sincere condolences to his family and the people' over Sheikh Khalifa's death, according to the French presidential office.

"The United Arab Emirates are a strategic partner for France, a fact that is borne out by the degree of our cooperation in areas as varied as defence, culture and education," it added.

Flags at half-mast

Flags are at half-mast around the country, which is observing 40 days of mourning for Sheikh Khalifa who took over after the death of his father, founding president Sheikh Zayed bin Sul-



French President Emmanuel Macron (left) meets newly-elected president of the United Arab Emirates Sheikh Mohammed bin Zayed Al Nahyan at Al Mushrif Palace in Abu Dhabi on Sunday (AFP)

tan, in 2004.

Sheikh Mohamed was chosen to head the government of the

desert state in a unanimous vote on Saturday by leaders of the country's seven emirates, as had

been widely expected.

MBZ's close ally, Saudi Arabia's de facto leader Crown

Prince Mohammed bin Salman, called to congratulate the new president and India's Prime Min-

ister Narendra Modi tweeted to commend his 'dynamic and visionary leadership'.

Blinken and Harris were due Monday for a visit that could help repair ties strained since President Joe Biden replaced Donald Trump in the White House. The two sides have been at odds over Abu Dhabi's refusal to condemn Russia's invasion of Ukraine and Washington's re-opening of nuclear talks with Iran, long accused by Gulf states of creating regional chaos.

Both Macron and Johnson were making their second visits to Abu Dhabi in recent months. Johnson's visit in March failed to convince the UAE and Saudi Arabia to pump more oil after Russia's war in Ukraine sent markets into turmoil.

The wealthy UAE has emerged as a leader of a reshaped Middle East, forging ties with Israel and joining a Saudi-led war against Iran-backed rebels in Yemen.

The UAE signed a €14bn contract for 80 Rafale warplanes during Macron's previous visit in December.

AFP



A Palestinian woman holds a poster of slain journalist Shireen Akleh, during a rally marking the 74th anniversary of 'Nakba', in Ramallah, on Sunday (AFP)

Palestinians mourn Israel's creation amid outcry over brutality at funeral

Jerusalem - Palestinians rallied on Sunday to mark the 'Nakba', or catastrophe, 74 years after Israel's creation, with condemnation over a police raid on the funeral of a slain journalist.

The annual demonstrations across the occupied West Bank, annexed east Jerusalem and inside Israel came with tensions high over the killing of 51-year-old Al Jazeera reporter Shireen Abu Akleh.

The Palestinian-American was shot dead on Wednesday during an Israeli raid in Jenin, a West Bank flashpoint. A prominent Palestinian leader wounded in clashes there, Daoud al-Zubaidi, died from his injuries in an Israeli hospital on Sunday.

Israeli police have vowed to investigate the chaos that marred the day of Abu Akleh's funeral, after television footage seen across the globe showed pallbearers struggling to stop the casket from toppling to the ground as baton-wielding police descended upon them, grabbing Palestinian flags.

The scenes on Friday sparked international condemnation, including from the United States, European Union and United Nations. Late South African Archbishop Desmond Tutu's foundation said Israeli police 'attacking pallbearers' was 'chillingly reminiscent of the brutality' seen at the funerals of anti-apartheid activists.

As Israel reopened following the Shabbat pause, local commentators joined the chorus lambasting the raid as Abu Akleh's coffin emerged from Jerusalem's St Joseph's hospital.

'The footage from Friday', wrote Oded Shalom in leading Israeli daily *Yediot Ahronot*, 'documented a shocking display of unbridled brutality and violence'.

"The Jerusalem District Police decided to come down like a tonne of bricks on anyone who dared to hold a Palestinian flag," Shalom wrote. 'As if holding up a flag - a mere piece of cloth, for God's sake - at a funeral procession for an hour or two could have had any impact whatsoever' on Israeli claims to control over Jerusalem, he added.

Israel forbids public displays of Palestinian flags in Jerusalem and regularly cracks down when they are hoisted.

Prime Minister Naftali Bennett has yet to comment on the raid, avoiding the controversy in public remarks before his Sunday weekly cabinet meeting.

The 'Nakba'

Al Jazeera on Sunday posthumously aired a piece produced by Abu Akleh on the Nakba, which marks Israel's 1948 declaration of independence.

A highly respected reporter, she was killed while wearing a helmet and a bulletproof vest marked 'Press'.

Israel's army said an interim investigation could not determine who fired the fatal bullet, noting that stray Palestinian gunfire or Israeli sniper fire aimed at militants were both possible causes. The Palestinian public prosecution said an initial probe had shown that the 'origin of the shooting was the Israeli occupation forces'.

AFP

Kenya presidential hopeful Ruto picks ex-Kenyatta aide as running mate

Nairobi, Kenya - Kenya's Deputy President William Ruto on Sunday picked a former aide turned fierce critic of President Uhuru Kenyatta to be his running mate in the country's high-stakes election in August.

Rigathi Gachagua, who served as Kenyatta's personal assistant between 2001 and 2006, was picked after a months-long, secretive process marked by intense lobbying that stretched late into the night on Saturday.

"The consensus pointed to an individual who scored excellent points on every evaluative parameter... an astute debater with prodigious persuasive responsibility," Ruto told a televised press briefing at his home in the capital Nairobi.

Gachagua said he was 'honoured by the responsibility and faith' Ruto had placed in him, vowing to 'deliver Kenyans from economic oppression'.

Prior to becoming a lawmaker in 2017, Gachagua served as an



William Ruto (AFP)

administrator in the authoritarian government of Daniel arap Moi and is regarded as an effective campaigner.

But he has also faced corruption allegations and was charged last year with acquiring more than 7.3bn Kenyan shillings (US\$62.8mn) suspected to be proceeds of crime. The case is ongoing.

This year's presidential contest is shaping up to be a two-horse race between Ruto and Raila Odinga, a former political prisoner and prime minister who has secured Kenyatta's support.

Ruto, 54, was initially anointed by Kenyatta as his successor but found himself marginalised after the 2018 pact between the president and former foe Odinga.

Since then Ruto has positioned himself as a leader looking to upend the status quo and stand up for the 'hustlers' trying to survive in a country ruled by 'dynasties' - a reference to the Kenyatta and Odinga families which have dominated politics for decades.

Tribal allegiances

The choice of a deputy president will play a key role in determining the winner of the August 9 poll, with tribal and community allegiances affecting the outcome of previous elections.

The East African powerhouse has traditionally been ruled by presidents from the dominant Kikuyu tribe like Kenyatta or the Kalenjin tribe like Ruto.

Gachagua - a Kikuyu - hails

from the populous Mount Kenya region, which has produced three of the country's four presidents since independence in 1963.

With its diverse population and ethnic voting blocs, elections in Kenya have often been marred by violence.

Both Kenyatta and Ruto had been indicted by the International Criminal Court on crimes against humanity charges for their alleged role in orchestrating post-poll violence in 2007 that cost more than 1,100 lives.

The case collapsed in 2016 after the court declared a mistrial citing troubling incidences of witness interference.

After post-election fighting in 2017 left dozens dead, Kenyatta and Odinga announced a rapprochement, saying they hoped to end repeated cycles of poll-related violence. Odinga, who belongs to the Luo tribe, is expected to announce his running mate on Monday.

AFP

Israel reopens Gaza crossing

Jerusalem - Israel reopened on Sunday its only crossing with the Gaza Strip to Palestinian workers nearly two weeks after closing it over unrest, the defence ministry said.

"Following an assessment of the security situation, it has been decided... to open Erez Crossing for passage of workers and permit holders from the Gaza Strip into Israel, beginning Sunday," said COGAT, a unit of the Israeli defence ministry responsible for Palestinian civil affairs.

The crossing is used by 12,000 Palestinians with permits to enter Israel for work.

Israel had closed the crossing on May 3 ahead of Israel's national memorial and independence days, and amid Palestinian violence in the occupied West Bank, although the Gaza front was quiet.

AFP

Lebanon votes in first election since crisis

Beirut, Lebanon - Lebanon voted on Sunday in its first election since multiple crises dragged it to the brink of failed statehood, a major test for new opposition groups bent on removing the ruling elite.

Observers have warned not to expect any seismic shift, with every lever of power firmly in the hands of traditional sectarian parties and an electoral system rigged in their favour.

After an underwhelming campaign stifled by the nation's all-consuming economic turmoil, queues of voters started forming when polling stations opened at 7am (0400 GMT).

The army deployed across the country to secure a parliamentary election Lebanon's donors have stressed was a pre-requisite for financial aid crucial to rescue it from bankruptcy.

A new generation of independent candidates and parties are hoping to kindle the change that an unprecedented anti-corruption uprising in 2019 failed to deliver.

"I am with change because we



A voter casts his ballot in the parliamentary election at a polling station in Lebanese city of Tripoli, on Sunday (AFP)

tried this current political class before and now is the time to bring in new faces," Nayla, a 28-year-old who only gave her first name, said after casting her vote in Beirut.

Independents can hope for more than the lone seat they clinched in 2018 but most of parliament's 128 seats will remain in the clutches of a political elite blamed for the country's woes.

The outgoing chamber was dominated by the Iran-backed

Shiite movement Hezbollah and its two main allies: the Shiite Amal party of speaker Nabih Berri who has held the job since 1992, and the Christian Free Patriotic Movement of President Michel Aoun.

"It seems almost impossible to imagine Lebanon voting for more of the same - and yet that appears to be the likeliest outcome," said Sam Heller, an analyst with the Century Foundation.

Lebanon was mutilated by an

August 2020 blast at the Beirut port that went down as one of the largest non-nuclear explosions in history and deepened one of the most spectacular economic downturns of our time.

Corruption

The Lebanese pound has lost 95 per cent of its value, people's savings are blocked in banks, minimum wage won't buy a tank of petrol and mains electricity comes on only two hours a day.

Despite assurances from the interior ministry that polling stations would be powered on election day, local media reported power cuts in some centres.

Videos shared online showed people sporting their candidate's colours and shepherding voters into polling booths, continuing a decades-old trend of vote buying. More than 80 per cent of Lebanon's population is now considered poor by the United Nations, with the most desperate increasingly attempting perilous boat crossings to flee to Europe.

Once described as the Switzerland of the Middle East, Lebanon ranked second-to-last behind Afghanistan in the latest World Happiness Index released in March. Despite international pressure to reform Lebanese politics, the corruption that sank the country is still rife, including in the electoral process.

At one candidate's rally in the northern city of Tripoli, some well-wishers disappointed by the lack of cash handouts made off with the plastic chairs.

AFP

Sri Lanka lifts countrywide curfew for Buddhist festival

Colombo, Sri Lanka - Sri Lankan authorities lifted a nationwide curfew on Sunday for an important Buddhist festival, but celebrations were muted as the island nation's new premier struggled to find his footing and tackle a worsening economic crisis.

A countrywide stay-home order has been in place for most of the week after mob violence left nine dead and over 225 wounded, sparked by attacks on peaceful demonstrators by government loyalists.

Protesters across the Buddhist-majority nation have for weeks demanded the resignation of President Gotabaya Rajapaksa over Sri Lanka's worst-ever economic crisis.

Shortages of food, fuel and medicines, along with record inflation and lengthy blackouts, have brought severe hardships to the country's 22mn people.

Sunday marks Vesak, the most important religious event on Sri Lanka's calendar, which celebrates Buddha's birth, enlightenment and death.

The government has declared a two-day holiday and announced it was lifting the curfew for the day without saying when or whether it would be reimposed.

But the ongoing crisis prompted the government to cancel its plans to celebrate the festival, which had been scheduled at a temple in the island's south.

"Given the economic situation of the government and other constraints, we are not having this year's state festival at the Kuragala temple as planned," a Buddhist Affairs ministry official told AFP.

The official said Buddhists were free to hold their own celebrations, including the mass meditation and Buddhist sermons traditionally organised during the festival.



Buddhist devotees offer prayers at the Kelaniya Temple during the Vesak festival in Colombo on Sunday (AFP)

Worshippers usually set up soup kitchens, lanterns and 'pandal' bamboo stages bearing large paintings depicting stories from Buddha's life.

But Sri Lanka has been unable to properly stage Vesak for years, with the Easter Sunday attacks dampening celebrations in 2019 and the last two years affected by the coronavirus pandemic.

"Everybody knows that it is Lord Buddha's special day today," said Chamila Perera, a housewife in the capital Colombo.

"We are hoping good things will happen," she told AFP. "But

I'm feeling very sad."

Newly appointed Prime Minister Ranil Wickremesinghe is struggling to form a unity government ahead of Tuesday's parliamentary session, the first since he took office.

Opposition leader Sajith Premadasa has already formally rejected an overture to join the new administration.

"The demand from the streets is that President Rajapaksa should step down," Premadasa said. "We will not join any government with him in it."

But he added that his party would not block legitimate 'solutions to the economic problems' in parliament.

Rajapaksa on Saturday appointed four new ministers, all from his own Sri Lanka Podujana

Peramuna (SLPP) party, but the all-important finance ministry remains vacant.

Official sources said the new prime minister could take the finance portfolio to spearhead ongoing negotiations with the International Monetary Fund for an urgent bailout.

'They are all the same'

Wickremesinghe, a veteran politician who was sworn in as prime minister for a sixth time on Thursday, has already met with diplomats from Britain, the United States, Japan, China and India to seek financial aid.

He said last week that shortages will get worse in the coming weeks, with reserves of useable foreign exchange needed to im-

port essential goods falling below US\$50mn.

His appointment has so far failed to quell public anger at the government for bringing Sri Lanka to the brink of economic collapse.

"All these people are hand-in-glove," Fareena, a resident of the capital Colombo, said of the new premier. "When one goes, they bring another one of their guys in," she told AFP. "But to us, they are all the same."

Long queues stretched outside the few fuel stations that were still open on Sunday as motorists waited for rationed petrol.

Heavily armed troops are patrolling the streets with a state of emergency still in effect.

AFP



A health worker gets a swab test sample from a woman to be tested for the COVID-19 at a swab collection site in Beijing on Sunday (AFP)

Decline in COVID cases: Shanghai businesses to reopen 'in stages'

Shanghai, China - Shanghai announced a gradual reopening from Monday of businesses, though it remains unclear when the millions of people still locked down in China's economic capital will finally be allowed out of their homes.

Confronted with its worst COVID-19 outbreak since the beginning of the pandemic, China - the last major economy still closed off to the world - put the city of 25mn under heavy restrictions in early April.

The rigid strategy to root out virus cases at all costs has wreaked havoc on supply chains, crushed small businesses and imperilled the country's economic goals.

For many Shanghai residents, some of whom were already confined to their homes even before April, the frustrations have included problems with food supplies, access to non-COVID medical care and spartan quarantine centres, and many are venting their anger online.

Shanghai vice mayor Chen Tong on Sunday announced a reopening of businesses 'in stages' from May 16.

Chen however did not specify if he was referring to a gradual

resumption of activity in the city or if it was conditional on certain health criteria.

Under China's zero-COVID strategy, any lifting of restrictions is generally conditional on seeing no new positive cases for three days, outside of quarantine centres. Shanghai authorities were aiming for this goal by mid-May.

Infections appear to be on the decline, with 1,369 new cases reported on Sunday in Shanghai, way down from more than 25,000 at the end of April.

In some areas of the city, however, restrictions have been tightened in recent days.

Some 1,200km north, residents of Beijing fear they could face a similar lockdown after more than a thousand cases were recorded in the capital since the end of April.

Beijing has repeatedly tested its residents and locked down buildings with positive cases and closed metro stations and non-essential businesses in certain neighbourhoods.

In an attempt to curb the outbreak, Fangshan district in the southwest of Beijing, which has 1.3mn residents, suspended taxi services from Saturday.

AFP

3 children among six killed in Pakistan blast

Islamabad, Pakistan - A suicide bomber killed three children and three soldiers in an attack on a military vehicle in Pakistan's restive northwestern region bordering Afghanistan, officials said on Sunday.

The mountainous frontier separating Pakistan and Afghanistan has long been a hive of militant activity, with fighters using the porous border to escape state security forces. On Saturday evening a suicide bomber detonated in a small market near Miran Shah in North Waziristan, just 26km

southeast of Afghanistan.

Pakistan's army said three children aged between four and 11 years-old were killed in the 'suicide blast' alongside three soldiers in the heavily militarised area.

"The bomber came by foot and blew himself up when a vehicle of security forces passed by," a local government official told AFP on condition of anonymity. Pakistan prime minister Shehbaz Sharif said that 'murderers of innocent children are enemies of humanity and Islam'.

AFP

N Korea reports 15 more deaths amid COVID outbreak

Seoul, South Korea - North Korea on Sunday reported 15 additional deaths from 'fever', days after officially confirming its first-ever COVID-19 cases and ordering nationwide lockdowns.

The outbreak, which leader Kim Jong Un has said is causing 'great upheaval', leaves a country with one of the world's worst healthcare systems on the edge of potential disaster.

North Korea has no COVID vaccines, antiviral treatment drugs or mass-testing capacity.

While it has maintained a rigid coronavirus blockade since the pandemic's start, experts have said that massive Omicron outbreaks in neighbouring countries meant it was only a matter of



This file photo shows employees disinfecting surfaces at the Pyongyang Children's Department Store in Pyongyang on March 18 this year (AFP)

time before COVID snuck in.

Despite activating a 'maximum emergency quarantine system' to slow the disease's spread through its unvaccinated popula-

tion, Pyongyang is now reporting large numbers of new cases daily.

Official state media KCNA on Sunday said 42 people had died

since the outbreak's beginning, with 820,620 cases and at least 324,550 receiving medical treatment. The news agency reported that 'all provinces, cities and counties of the country have been totally locked down and working units, production units and residential units closed from each other'.

North Korea first revealed the highly contagious Omicron variant had been detected in the capital on Thursday, with Kim ordering nationwide lockdowns after an emergency meeting of the country's Politburo.

A large number of the deaths have been due to 'a lack of knowledge and understanding of the stealth Omicron variant virus

infection', KCNA said, adding 'urgent' measures were being being taken to educate the public.

Sunday's KCNA report did not specify whether the new cases and deaths tested positive for COVID-19, but experts say the country will struggle to screen and diagnose on a massive scale.

North Korea's healthcare system ranked 193 out of 195 countries in a 2021 Johns Hopkins University survey. "With the current very backward and inaccurate testing method, it's impossible for North Korea to detect asymptomatic infections and contain the outbreak," said Cheong Seong-jang, a researcher at the Sejong Institute.

AFP

Pope canonises 10 including hermit, martyr and journalist

Vatican City, Holy See - Pope Francis on Sunday canonised a Frenchman murdered in the desert, a Dutch priest killed in a Nazi concentration camp and an Indian lay convert among 10 new saints officially proclaimed on Sunday.

Thousands of people from around the world crowded into St Peter's Square in the Vatican for the canonisation mass, presided over by the 85-year-old pontiff and attended by delegations including France's interior minister Gerald Darminin and Italian president Sergio Mattarella.

The pictures of the 10 new saints were hung on the facade of the world's biggest basilica.

Unlike in recent days, Francis - who was surrounded by around 50 cardinals and 300 bishops and priests - did not appear in a wheelchair.

Under a sunny sky, groups of pilgrims had begun to converge on the square, some wearing shirts or scarves with the picture of one of the new saints.

Under the rules of the Catholic Church, all 10 have already been beatified, or named 'blessed', but had to then be attributed a miracle to take the final step to sainthood.

The new saints included Charles de Foucauld, a French soldier and explorer, who became a Catholic priest and lived among Trappist monks in Syria,



Pope Francis blesses communion wafer as he leads a canonisation mass at St. Peter's Square in The Vatican on Sunday (AFP)

in Palestine, and finally among the Tuaregs in the Algerian desert.

He was murdered by bandits on December 1, 1916, but his works outlasted him and he became one of France's most celebrated men of faith.

Men of faith

Another who made the step to sainthood was Dutch Carmelite priest, theologian and journalist Titus Brandsma, who took a stand against the Nazis during World War II.

He spoke out against them before Germany invaded the Netherlands in 1940 and afterward, encouraging Catholic Dutch newspapers to resist the

occupiers' propaganda.

Brandsma was arrested in January 1942 and ended up in the Dachau concentration camp, where he died on July 26 of that year, after being injected with carbolic acid.

He was beatified in 1985 after being declared a martyr, and was subsequently found to have enacted a miracle in healing a Carmelite priest.

Devasahayam Pillai, known as Lazarus, was the first Indian layman to become a saint, according to the Vatican.

A Hindu from what is now the southern state of Tamil Nadu, he converted to Catholicism in 1745 while working at the royal palace, where he met a captured Dutch

commander who taught him about Christianity.

But his faith, and his preaching of equality of all peoples - a revolutionary view at the time - caused a stir and when he refused to renounce his new religion, he was arrested, according to the Vatican.

After almost three years of imprisonment and torture, during which he began to be visited by pilgrims, he was shot dead in a forest on the orders of the king on January 14, 1752.

He was declared a martyr and beatified in 2012, before being later attributed the miracle of resuscitating a foetus in the 20th week of pregnancy.

AFP

NATO assures Ukraine unlimited military aid

Kyiv, Ukraine - NATO on Sunday pledged open-ended military support for Ukraine, as Finland hailed its 'historic' bid to join the alliance and with Western claims that Russia had suffered heavy losses in its push east.

The promise came after Finland jettisoned decades of military non-alignment for a bulwark against Russia, redrawing the balance of power in Europe and angering the Kremlin.

On the ground in Ukraine, Russia announced air strikes in the east, as well as in Lviv, near the Polish border in the west which has largely been spared the destruction of elsewhere.

At a meeting of alliance foreign ministers in Berlin, Germany's Annalena Baerbock said it would provide military assistance 'for as long as Ukraine needs this support for the self-defence of its country'.

"Ukraine can win this war. Ukrainians are bravely defending their homeland," NATO chief Jens Stoltenberg added.

Finland's move to join NATO is expected to be followed by neighbouring Sweden as soon as on Monday, despite concerns from member state Turkey which has accused both countries of harbouring Kurdish extremists.

Stoltenberg said the alliance would look to provide both with interim security guarantees while the applications are processed, including possibly by increasing



NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg is seen on a video screen as German FM Annalena Baerbock addresses a press conference after the meeting of NATO FMs in Berlin on Sunday (AFP)

The promise came after Finland jettisoned decades of military non-alignment for a bulwark against Russia, redrawing the balance of power in Europe and angering the Kremlin

troops in the region. US Secretary of State Antony Blinken, in Berlin for talks between NATO foreign ministers, said he heard 'almost across-the-board, very strong support' for the bids.

The Kremlin insists the Nordic nations have nothing to fear, in apparent retaliation, has pulled the plug on electricity supplies to Finland, with which it shares a 1,300km border.

Earlier, Western intelligence claimed that Russia has suffered huge military losses in Ukraine and that it will get bogged down in the strategic east because of stiff local resistance.

Away from the conflict, Ukraine was basking in the morale-boosting glory of the landslide win of its entry to the Eurovision Song Contest, the world's biggest live music event.

'Lost momentum'

On the battlefield, Russia's defence ministry claimed it had carried out 'high-precision' missile strikes on four artillery munitions

depots in the Donetsk area in the east of Ukraine.

Airstrikes had also destroyed two missile-launching systems and radar, while 15 Ukrainian drones were taken out around Donetsk and Lugansk, it added.

In Lviv, the regional governor, Maksym Kozytsky, said four Russian missiles hit military infrastructure near the border with Poland. No casualties were reported and Ukrainian armed forces said they destroyed two cruise missiles over the region.

Lviv was last hit by Russian missiles on May 3.

UK defence chiefs said Russia's offensive in the eastern Donbas region had 'lost momentum'.

Demoralised Russian troops had failed to make substantial gains and Moscow's battle plan was 'significantly behind schedule', UK Defence Intelligence said.

"Russia has now likely suffered losses of one third of the ground combat force it committed in February. "Under the current conditions, Russia is unlikely to dramatically accelerate its rate of advance over the next 30 days."

Exact, reliable casualty figures have been hard to come by, with Ukraine and Russia regularly publishing claims of enemy dead.

Kyiv says its troops have killed nearly 20,000 Russian troops. Moscow on March 25 said its forces had killed at least 14,000 Ukrainian military personnel.

But both figures are widely suspected to be inflated, and have not been verified by AFP or independent conflict monitors.

The Kremlin said in late March that some 1,351 of its troops had been killed. A senior NATO military official estimated at the same time that between 7,000 and 15,000 Russian soldiers could have been killed in the fighting up to that point.

AFP

2,000 attend new Tunisia opposition alliance demo

Tunis, Tunisia - A crowd estimated at more than 2,000, lower than expected, took part on Sunday in the first demonstration of a new alliance to oppose a power grab by President Kais Saied.

'We shall overcome', and 'We are united, not divided', read banners of the National Salvation Front protesters gathered in front of the municipal theatre on Bourguiba Avenue, a traditional hub of demonstrations in central Tunis.

"The people want... respect for the constitution and a return to democracy," they chanted.

Veteran opposition figure Ahmed Nejib Chebbi announced the formation of the new alliance on April 26 to 'save' Tunisia from deep crisis following Saied's power grab last year. Chebbi, 78, was an opponent of dictator Zine el Abidine Ben Ali's rule.

Demonstrators said they were disappointed by the numbers that turned out for the first public show of support for the alliance.

'A larger crowd' was expected, said Salah Tzaoui, a 57-year-old teacher, especially by those who had lived under Ben Ali who was ousted in a 2011 popular uprising



Tunisian protesters wave flags and raise placards as they demonstrate in the capital Tunis, on Sunday (AFP)

that sparked the Arab Spring revolts around the region.

Saied - a former law professor elected in 2019 amid public anger against the political class - on July 25 sacked the government, suspended parliament and seized wide-ranging powers.

He later gave himself powers to rule and legislate by decree, and seized control over the judiciary. "He wants to govern alone. It's not possible. I'm here for my

children and grandchildren," Tzaoui told AFP. Khaled Benabdelkarim, a 60-year-old fellow teacher who voted for Saied three years ago, said the president had 'betrayed the people and stolen democracy. He has no political project, no economic project'.

The National Salvation Front comprises five political parties including Saied's nemesis the Islam-inspired Ennahdha party, along with five civil society

groups involving independent political figures.

Saied's initial power grab was welcomed by many Tunisians sick of the often-stalemate post-revolution political system.

But an increasing array of critics say he has moved the country down a dangerous path back towards autocracy in what was the only democracy to emerge from the Arab Spring.

AFP

Ankara critical of Sweden, lauds Finland

Ankara, Turkey - Turkish Foreign Minister Mevlut Cavusoglu on Sunday lauded Finland's conciliatory approach but criticised Sweden for 'provocative' statements during talks in Berlin on the two countries joining NATO.

Turkey on Friday threatened to block NATO's enlargement process with the two Nordic countries, which requires the unanimous approval of the alliance's members.

"The Swedish foreign minister's statements are unfortunately not constructive. She continues to make provocative remarks," Cavusoglu told reporters in Berlin on the sidelines of an informal meeting of NATO foreign ministers.

The minister struck a more conciliatory tone towards Finland, which he described as 'very respectful' in the face of Ankara's 'concerns'. "But we don't see the same thing in Sweden," he insisted.

AFP



People attend the 'Youth Career Festival 2022' employment fair hosted at the University of Mosul in the northern Iraqi city on Sunday (AFP)

Job fair offers hope to unemployed in Iraq

Mosul, Iraq - In an Iraqi province where unemployment is about 40 per cent, a lucky few hoped to find work on Sunday at a university job fair attended by French firms alongside local companies.

The three-day event is taking place at the University of Mosul in Iraq's war-ravaged second city, where reconstruction has been slow five years after the Iraqi army backed by US-led coalition air strikes pushed out Islamic State militants.

Laith Abdallah, 24, was among dozens of students wandering on the campus lawn among stands set up by about 40 companies, most of them locally-based but including Carrefour and Schneider Electric from France.

Abdallah said he'd been looking for work since 2019 when he graduated in petroleum engineering. "Our number increases each day and the opportunities are rare," he said of the unemployed. "A young person has to get married and help his parents."

Statistics from Nineveh province, of which Mosul is the capital, say unemployment is around 40 per cent generally and 20 per cent for those aged 24-45.

Joblessness is similarly high elsewhere in the country which is trying to move past decades of war but is hobbled by corruption and other problems.

AFP

United States mourn victims of racist mass shooting at grocery store

Buffalo, US - Shocked residents of Buffalo, New York gathered on Sunday at vigils and church services to mourn 10 people shot and killed by an alleged white supremacist teenager in an act one official described as 'domestic terrorism, pure and simple'.

The shooter, identified as 18-year-old Payton Gendron, was arrested at the scene, a grocery store in a heavily Black neighbourhood after police rushed to respond to emergency calls.

He had driven from his home town of Conklin, more than 200 miles (320km) away, police said.

Gendron was arraigned late on Saturday on a single count of first-degree murder and held



Payton S. Gendron

without bail, the Erie County district attorney's office said.

The shooter was wearing body armour, carried an assault rifle and live-streamed the attack, police said, adding that of the 10 dead and three wounded, 11 were African Americans.



Buffalo Police on scene at a Tops Friendly Market in Buffalo, New York on Saturday (AFP)

'Military-style execution'

Residents gathered outside the store for the vigil, while New York Governor Kathy Hochul, the state's Attorney General Letitia James and Buffalo Mayor Byron Brown addressed a service at the city's True Bethel Baptist Church.

In alternately angry and mournful tones, speakers denounced the latest eruption of racist violence and the ready availability of high-power guns in what has become a sadly familiar scene across America.

Hochul, herself a Buffalo native, described the crime as a 'military-style execution' - she said the shooter carried an AR-15 assault weapon - and said racist

messaging was 'spreading like wildfire'.

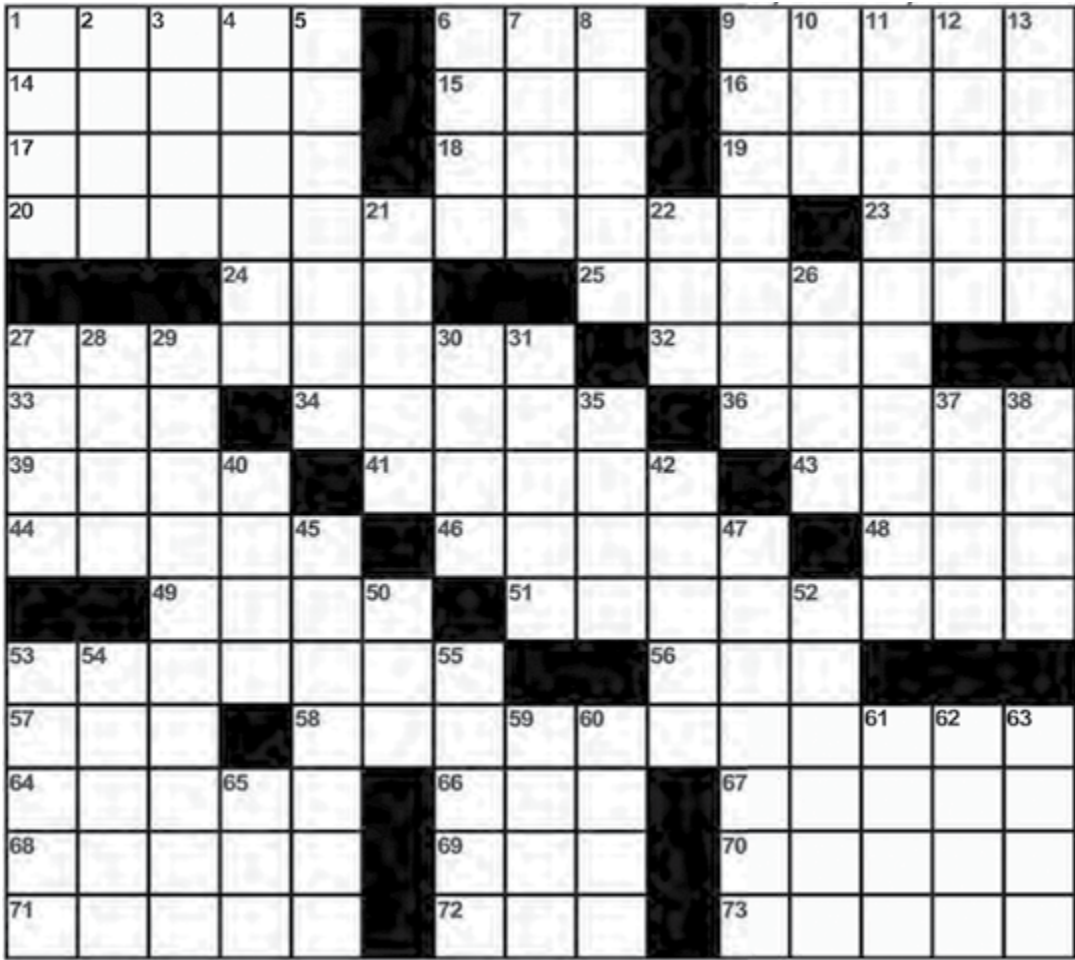
Hochul called on officials of both political parties to 'make sure these people crawl back into their holes and stay there'.

Speaking on ABC, she described social media as 'instruments of this evil', saying they allowed racist themes to 'spread like a virus'.

The attack evoked memories of some of the worst racist attacks in recent US history, including the 2015 killing by a young white man of nine worshippers in a Black church in South Carolina, and the 2019 attack by a white man in Texas that claimed 23 lives, most of them Hispanic.

AFP

DAILY CROSSWORD



ACROSS

1) Eyeglasses, informally
6) Impressive degree
9) Turkish generals
14) Artistic stand
15) Word from a finger-pointing chooser
16) Constructed
17) Jungle vine
18) Affirmative action?
19) "Tomorrow" musical
20) Aggravation at a lack of progress
23) Type of modem testing
24) Airplane passenger's concern
25) Addressed a waiter
27) Pronged weapons
32)_fide
33) It may be right above a knee
34) Down's partner
36) The time being
39) Knocks on a door
41) Begets
43) Gulf War missile
44) Stand on its head
46) Jack's nemesis
48).0000001 joule
49) Went out, as a fire
51) Jewish sect member of old
53) Small scrap

56) It can help with a housewarming
57) "Overhead" engine part
58) A dam is one, essentially
64) States with conviction
66) "... we having fun yet?"
67) First thing read, typically
68) Camelot weapon
69) One way to move quickly
70) Alpha's opposite
71) Church part
72) Tennis match segment
73) Chart anew

DOWN

1) "To thine own _ be true"
2) Au_
3) Jacob's twin
4) Used a thurible
5) Like proper venetian blinds
6) Bird that repeats (var.)
7) Cowboy's pride
8) Part of a TV feed
9) Leave high and dry
10) Big bang creator

11) Things that get in the way
12) Type of skirt that flares outward
13) "Farm" or "home" attachment
21) Some members of Indian royalty
22) Kingly sphere
26) "The Dukes of Hazard" spin-off
27) By way of, briefly
28) Acquire in the field
29) Roadblock
30) H.S. math subject
31) Bacon bit
35) "Awright!"
37) Be a good doctor
38) Competitive advantage
40) Quick haircut
42) Big mess
45) Coup participant
47) John Deere product
50) Belle of the ball, briefly
52) One of these days
53) La_ (Milan opera house)
54) Type of base
55) Autocrats no more
59) Common test answer
60) Lease

61) Agenda unit
62) Legendary gymnast Korbout
63) Tide type

65) Former electronics giant

NOTE PAD

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

YOUR DAILY HOROSCOPE

 **ARIES** MARCH 21-APRIL 19

You're definitely in the mood to take stock of who and what you have in your life and what it all means to you. Something probably comes to mind right away: You need a solid foundation you know you can rely on. You know there's only one way to have that. You need to earn it yourself. This is the day to put your plan in high gear. Get busy. Your future is waiting.

 **LEO** JULY 23-AUGUST 22

Use your imagination, your most vivid dreams, and even your wildest fantasies to help you gain the insight you've been seeking. You have been somewhat suspicious of someone for a while, but haven't been able to figure out why. Could your creativity help you connect the dots? Come up with a theory or two about what's been going on, and talk about it with mutual acquaintances. They have additional information that can help you figure out your feelings once and for all.

 **SAGITTARIUS** NOVEMBER 22-DECEMBER 21

Recent changes you've managed to navigate at work have made things a bit easier, but only just a bit. Still, you're nothing if not loyal. You were ready to walk just a short while ago, but you're not feeling quite so volatile now. In fact, a sense of serenity has taken over, probably thanks to someone you trust who somehow managed to talk you out of your mood. Try to pass that along to someone else.

 **TAURUS** APRIL 20-MAY 20

Are you used to being on center stage yet? You'd better get there quickly, because your 15 minutes of fame is just about to start up again. For some folks, it recycles itself. You may need to worry about how to handle your throngs of adoring fans for quite a while, actually, so make sure that you've got your entourage powered up and ready to go.

 **VIRGO** AUGUST 23-SEPTEMBER 22

Someone from far away is just about to cross your path, and while it might not be a tall, dark, handsome stranger (do they really exist?), appealing and exotic are definitely on the day's agenda for you. They might wreak some serious havoc in your perfectly arranged schedule, but nobody ever said that love at first sight was neat and orderly, did they?

 **CAPRICORN** DECEMBER 22-JANUARY 19

It might feel to you that things are going so well that they couldn't possibly get any better. Yet as of today and for the next few months things are going to get better. You've got nothing but helpful energy circulating within and around you, and you should be able to get exactly what (or who) you need exactly when you need it (or them). Enjoy the great energy!

 **GEMINI** MAY 21-JUNE 21

The good news today is that you know there's always a way to get your point across without saying a word. Your specialty is communication, and you indulge yourself in many ways of practicing it. If you're not in the mood to chat (which is weird but certainly possible), you find a way. You can say more with a glance or by leaving stuff unsaid than most folks can with a lecture.

 **LIBRA** SEPTEMBER 23-OCTOBER 22

Loyalty is a crucial component of any friendship, so you need to stand by your friends today when the drama goes down. Accusations could be thrown around, and as far as you know they aren't true. If you have to get combative with the accusers, then do so. Just make sure to avoid saying anything that inflames their temper. You'll only make the situation worse. You can be quite the attack dog when you want to be, and today it's okay to follow your urge to growl. Just don't bite.

 **AQUARIUS** JANUARY 20-FEBRUARY 18

After weeks of trying to keep your mouth under control -- without much success -- you finally give up. The funny thing is, no one but you cared about your bluntness. But now you may want to turn your focus toward home, family matters and all things emotional. One of the people who didn't mind hearing you say exactly what was on your mind has decided to stick around for the long haul.

 **CANCER** JUNE 22-JULY 22

For the next few days and maybe quite a while thereafter, you've got quite an intense social schedule. That means you have to be extremely diligent at work and around the house so you can play hard when you're done with your tasks. Of course, you might need a lot of power naps and an indecent amount of coffee too.

 **SCORPIO** OCTOBER 23-NOVEMBER 21

Today, someone you care about a lot will burst into your life and ask for your help. What they want could sound like a bad thing, but is it really, or are you just projecting your fears onto them? Suspicion is something that you generate on your own. It isn't really there. So open your heart and make time to do what they need you to do. You can't let your own issues block you from being the generous and helpful person that your friends know you to be.

 **PISCES** FEBRUARY 19-MARCH 20

Someone in your life is going through an emotional period right now. Their typical sunny disposition is getting clouded over, and they could start to get very irritable. Don't let this scare you away from talking to them, though. They need your input and good ideas desperately. They just don't know how to ask. A gently worded email would be a great way to remind them that you are there whenever they need you. They will love the gesture.

01. Who was on the English throne at the time of the "Gunpowder Plot" to blow up the House of Lords?

A. James I
B. William I
C. King Canute
D. Harold I

02. It originated in the 5th century BCE or earlier as training for the military, could involve up to 200 a game, was fêted for both men and women in Persian poetry and art. Which game is it?

A. Shinty
B. Lacrosse
C. Polo
D. Football

03. Before 1972, what was Sri Lanka known as?

A. East Pakistan
B. Burma
C. Ceylon
D. Persia

Answers: 1.A 2.C 3.C

KIDS COLOURING



BOGGLER

P	O	A	T
M	P	L	C
L	U	T	A
S	K	P	A

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

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

DO YOU SUDOKU?

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

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

WORD BUILDER



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

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

SUDOKU EASY ANSWER

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

RECYLED ART

Keyboard artist

Ivory Coast artist recasts old mobile phones into unique artworks

Stitching together discarded mobile phone keyboards to make art, Ivorian artist Mounou Desire Koffi hopes to raise awareness about pollution. "I wanted to contribute something new," said the artist, whose work is on display in Abidjan until July.

In his studio in Bingerville, near the Ivorian business capital, the 28-year-old describes himself as a young contemporary artist who wants to stand out from the crowd.

"I've been passionate about drawing since childhood. It was always me the teacher would send to the blackboard to illustrate lessons," he says.

When he decided he wanted to go to art school, his parents, who worked as farmers in southwestern Ivory Coast, had no idea what it was. His art teacher had to visit them to persuade them to let him go.

After graduating at the top of his class from the Abidjan Art School, he started looking for old mobile phone keyboards and screens on roadsides, in gutters and in rubbish heaps.

"Now I have a whole team that is paid according to the quality of what they turn up with," he says. "I told them, 'Stop throwing things away. Bring them to me and we can work with them.'"

Solve a problem

In his studio, someone has dropped off bags brimming with mobile phone spare parts. Koffi dives into a pile of keyboards and screens to find those he needs.

Placing them side by side on the canvas, he creates colourful human silhouettes in urban settings. Some of his works sell for up to \$1,500.

He says, the aim is to try to 'solve a problem' in a country where rubbish sorting is almost non-existent, and most household waste ends up in piles in the street.

"Most of my works reflect man's day-to-day existence in society," he said. "I think phones are the tools that are most close to us at the moment. We have almost everything stored in our phones."

The artist, who had exhibited his works in Morocco, Belgium and France, says his works seek to spark reflection about waste.

"We find all sorts of things in our dustbins... I'm trying to make people more aware."

Keen to reflect current debates, Koffi has, in his paintings, portrayed issues like pollution, but also events like floods, traffic jams and the bane of child soldiers.

One of his latest series, titled 'Life here', recounts daily life in Abidjan.

After a first exhibition in the coastal town of Bassam, his work is now on show until July at the capital's Donwahi Foundation.

AFP



Ivorian artist Mounou Desire Koffi examines an artwork he made with used telephone keyboards in Bingerville, a commune of Abidjan. Koffi (L) looks for used telephone keyboards he uses for making artworks (below)



I think phones are the tools that are most close to us at the moment. We have almost everything stored in our phones

MOUNOU DESIRE KOFFI



Koffi (R) and one of his workers cut out the image on the screen reproduction on a carpet made of used telephone keyboards

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TOURISM TENSIONS



BARCELONA

BOUNCES BACK

Tourists enjoy a tour bus ride at Plaza Catalunya in Barcelona

Mass tourism returns to Barcelona amid much debate on optimising the economic benefits and controlling the damage

Visitors are once again jamming the narrow streets of Barcelona's Gothic quarter as global travel bounces back from the pandemic, reviving tensions over mass tourism in the Spanish port city.

Hotel occupancy in the city rose in April, which included the Easter long weekend, to nearly 85 per cent, close to its pre-pandemic levels, according to the Barcelona Hotel Guild.

"There are more and more cruise ships, more and more tourism, more and more massification," said Marti Cuso, a high school biology teacher who has long campaigned against mass tourism invading the city centre.

"This has been a shock after two years of pandemic," said Cuso, 32, who had hoped the city would use the pandemic pause to change its tourism model.

Cuso, who grew up in the Gothic quarter, said he enjoyed the calm that descended on the neighbourhood, which is normally flooded with tour groups visiting its mediaeval buildings.

After receiving a record of nearly 12 million visitors at its hotels and tourist apartments in 2019, arrivals plunged by 76.8 per cent in 2020, mirroring declines across Europe.

"People reclaimed the squares, children played in the streets again," said Cuso. The pandemic also showed the dangers of having an "economic monoculture based on tourism," he said, adding, "The majority of residents who worked in tourism found themselves out of work overnight."

Tourist arrivals in Barcelona had risen steadily before the pandemic and the tourism sector accounted for around 15



We must change the model to reconcile the two worlds. We can't have the tourists' city on one side and the 'city of locals' on the other

FRANCESC MUNOZ

per cent of the economy of Spain's second-largest city before the health crisis.

Control the damage

The boom in tourism sparked a backlash, with regular protests, including one in 2017 where vigilantes slashed the tyres of an open-top tourist bus and spray-painted its windshields.

Barcelona residents identified tourism as the city's main problem in a poll carried out that year by city hall.

"We must change the model to reconcile the two worlds. We can't have the tourists' city on one side and the 'city of locals' on the other," Francesc Munoz, who heads an Observatory studying Urbanisation at Barcelona's Autonomous University, told AFP.

With terraces once again full of tourists drinking sangria, Barcelona's leftist city hall said recently it plans fresh measures to tame the sector. Access to the busiest squares could be restricted, and the circulation of tourist buses more tightly regulated.

Barcelona city hall has already cracked down on illegal listings on online rental firms, like Airbnb, and banned tour groups from entering the historic La Boqueria market during peak shopping times.

"Tourism is an important economic, social, and cultural asset for Barcelona,"

said Xavier Marce, the city councillor in charge of tourism.

"We need to optimise the benefits and control the damage. This is the debate which all European cities are having," he added.

Find a balance

Marce rejected the argument that the city did not use the two-year slump in arrivals due to the pandemic to change the city's tourism model.

"Two years have not been lost. It is very difficult to solve the problems of tourism when there is no tourism," he said.

Tour guide Eva Marti, 51, said she understands the concerns of residents, but believes formulas must be found to maintain an activity which provides a living to many locals.

"During these 13 years I have worked as a guide, it is harder and harder to show tourists around," she said in a reference to measures such as rules limiting the size of tour groups to 15 people in some areas.

"We have to find a balance," she added at a sun-drenched esplanade in the Gothic quarter before taking a tour group back to their cruise ship in Barcelona's port. Cuso, the anti-mass tourism campaigner, agreed with her.

AFP



Visitors are once again jamming the narrow streets of Barcelona's narrow Gothic quarter



People walk through the famous La Boqueria market in Barcelona



Cocktails outside a restaurant at Las Ramblas



Tourists feed pigeons at Plaza de Catalunya