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▶ **NEWS BRIEF**

OMAN ASSUMES PRESIDENCY OF ARAB INTERIOR MINISTERS COUNCIL

Tunis, Tunisia - Oman assumed the presidency of the Arab Interior Ministers Council at its 39th session on Wednesday, in the presence of Tunisian President Kais Saied, Arab interior ministers and representatives of the Arab League and the GCC.

Oman called for further cooperation to address global challenges and enhance stability and development in Arab countries.

In a speech, delivered to the council by H E Sayyid Hamoud Faisal al Busaidi, Interior Minister, he said the session was being convened in the backdrop of many challenges which called for further cooperation among Arab countries.

Oman crude over $110

International crude surges past US$113 per barrel

Muscat - Oman crude contract price (for May 2022 delivery) at Dubai Mercantile Exchange (DME) on Wednesday, jumped by US$10 to reach US$110.81 per barrel. It had breached the US$100 mark on Tuesday, the first time since 2014.

International crude also surged past US$113 per barrel on Wednesday and equities around the world sank with investors growing increasingly fearful about the Ukraine war's impact on global energy supplies and the economic recovery.

Russian President Vladimir Putin's invasion of his neighbour has sent world markets into a spiral over the past week, further fraying nerves on trading floors caused by runaway inflation and tighter central bank monetary policies.

The crisis has seen numerous countries hammer Moscow with a series of wide-ranging sanctions that have isolated Russia and threaten to crash its economy.

The measures have injected a huge amount of uncertainty into markets with supplies of crucial commodities, including metals and grains, soaring. The price of global staple wheat is sitting at a 14-year high having risen 30 per cent in the past month.

But the main source of unease on trading floors is crude, which has rocketed since Russia began preparing to invade. On Wednesday, global benchmark Brent oil topped US$110 per barrel for the first time since 2014 and the US oil benchmark West Texas Intermediate (WTI) crude followed suit hours later to hit a 2013 high.

In afternoon Asian trading, Brent rose as high as US$113.02 per barrel and WTI peaked at US$111.50 per barrel.

Incoming sanctions have fuelled worries that exports will be cut off from Russia, the world's third-biggest producer of the commodity.

The conflict in eastern Europe comes with prices already elevated owing to tight supplies and a strong recovery in global demand as economies reopen from pandemic-induced lockdowns.

(With inputs from AFP)

See also Page 09

His Majesty the Sultan issues two Royal Decrees

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

Royal Decree No 10/2022 establishes free zones at Muscat International Airport and in the airports of Sohar and Salalah.

Article 1 states that free zones will be established as follows:

1. A free zone at Muscat International Airport to be named 'Muscat International Airport Free Zone'.

2. A free zone at Sohar Airport to be named 'Sohar Airport Free Zone'.

3. A free zone at Salalah Airport to be named 'Salalah Airport Free Zone'.

The free zones will be set up on designated land according to the layouts attached, which are specified in the concluded concession agreements.

Article 2 states that the Council of Ministers will determine the Operating Party for the above-mentioned free zones (specified in Article 1 of this decree) from among the companies reporting to Oman Investment Authority. These firms may seek the assistance of departments and companies specialised in the development, marketing, management and operation of those free zones.

Article 3 states that both the Operating Party and firms will be granted the incentives and privileges stipulated in the Law on Free Zones promulgated under Royal Decree No 56/2002.

Article 4 states that the Operating Party and the firms will be granted a 15-year income tax waiver for each separate project, extendable for a further five years. In all cases, this waiver is not valid for banks, financial institutions, insurance and reinsurance companies or projects providing services in telecommunications, land transport or contracts.

Article 5 states that the waivers stated in Article 4 of this decree will be issued vide a decision by the Chairman of the Tax Authority and in accordance with the rules, regulations and procedures endorsed by the Board of the Public Authority for Special Economic Zones and Free Zones, after the approval of the Ministry of Finance.

Article 6 states that the operating companies will pay dues to the Operating Party in return for the services that the Operating Party renders to them. The Operating Party has to specify the value of the service fee and the method of its collection, after the Board of the Public Authority for Special Economic Zones and Free Zones approves the same.

Article 7 states that the Operating Party will stick to governing aerial affiliation regulations and requirements for safety and security of civil aviation under the supervision of the Civil Aviation Authority.

Continued on Page 03

02

Rescue of Indian students stranded in Ukraine coordinated from Oman

02

MoE, Unicef"s Child Friendly Education to roll out across govt schools

MoE to build 42 schools under PPP

Our Correspondent
Muscat

The Ministry of Finance (MoF) has invited qualifications for the design, construction, finance, operations and maintenance of 42 schools under private-public partnership (PPP) agreements.

In a statement, MoF, said, 'The ministry is entrusted with the supervision of implementing public-private partnership agreements to encourage the private sector to invest in infrastructure and public services.

'In this regard, the Ministry of Education seeks to engage the private sector in developing its schools, which would contribute to fostering service innovation and achieve sustained growth.'

The Ministry of Education seeks to engage the private sector in developing its schools, which would contribute to fostering service innovation and achieve sustained growth

Local and international companies can obtain the qualification document by sending an email to ppp.schools@mof.gov.om

The last date for obtaining the qualification document is March 15, 2022, and deadline for submission is April 28, 2022.

In January, the Ministry of Education (MoE) floated a tender to build four schools in three governorates. The tender was for one school in the wilayat of Musannah in South Batinah with 36 classrooms for male students of Grades 5 to 10, while a second one in the same governorate was for a school for Grades 5 to 9 in the Sawadi al Hikman area of the wilayat of Barka.

The other two included schools for girls; one in the wilayat of Suwaiq, North Batinah governorate, with 36 classrooms for Grades 2 to 11, and a 18-classroom school for Grades 10 to 12 in the wilayat of Al Ashkhara, South Sharqiyah governorate.

According to the latest statistics, there were 56,569 Omani teachers in government schools in 2021 – 17,881 male and 38,688 female – accounting for an Omanisation rate of 84.8 per cent.

There were 10,878 Omani administrators and technicians, accounting for an Omanisation rate of 99.8 per cent.

Additionally, there were 57 Omani male and 250 Omani female teachers in special education schools, accounting for 90.6 per cent Omanisation, and 69 Omani administrators, accounting for 85.5 per cent Omanisation.

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HM GREETS PRESIDENT OF TUNISIA

Sayyid Hamoud Faisal al Busaidi, Minister of Interior, conveyed greetings of His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik to President Kais Saied of the Republic of Tunisia on Wednesday when the latter received Arab interior ministers who are taking part in the 39th meeting of the Arab Interior Ministers Council. On his turn, President Saied asked Sayyid Hamoud to convey his sincere greetings to His Majesty the Sultan, along with his wishes for good health and wellbeing. He also wished the Omani people progress and prosperity (ONA)

SAYYID SHIHAB RECEIVES AMBASSADORS OF BRAZIL AND MALAYSIA

H H Sayyid Shihab bin Tarik al Said, Deputy Prime Minister for Defence Affairs, received envoys of Brazil and Malaysia in his office in Al Murtafaa Garrison on Wednesday. H H Sayyid Shihab wished H E Ligia Maria Scherer (above), Ambassador of the Federative Republic of Brazil to Oman, and H E Shaiful Anuar Mohammad, Ambassador of Malaysia to Oman, success in their tours of duty in Oman. The two ambassadors reviewed the bilateral relations between their countries and Oman and exchanged views on matters of mutual interest (ONA)

Child Friendly Education to roll out across govt schools

Our Correspondent
Muscat

(Supplied photo)

Following the success of a pilot educational project - Child Friendly Education (CFE) - conducted in 29 schools in five governorates, a nationwide rollout of the programme was announced at a special event in W Hotel Muscat on Sunday.

The pilot project was conducted in South Batinah, Muscat, Musandam, Dakhliyah and Dhofar. Students from the schools where the pilot project was conducted showcased their acting and musical talents and held a round-table discussion on Children's Parliament during the announcement.

An initiative of the Ministry of Education (MoE) and Unicef, the CFE model will now be introduced in all government schools - Grades 1 to 12 - across Oman. H H Sayyida Hujaija al Said, chairperson of board of directors of Association for Children with Disabilities, described CFE as a "very important step" towards improving the quality of education in Oman and "supporting all children to thrive".

"CFE is a model that promotes the quality of education to enable all children to achieve their full potential. It asserts that all children have a right to education, regardless of gender, ethnicity, race, disability or wealth," H H Sayyida Hujaija said.

> *CFE is a model that promotes the quality of education to enable all children to achieve their full potential*
>
> **H H SAYYIDA HUJAIJA AL SAID**

The model of CFE is based on six core principles: child-centredness, participation, inclusiveness, protection, equity and equality, and resilience and sustainability.

On the occasion, H E Abdullah bin Khamis Busaidi, Undersecretary in MoE, said, "The achievements of the education sector in the past 50 years in Oman have been spectacular. The education system has gained close to universal enrolment and has excellent facilities, good quality services, and sustained high levels of investment.

"The nationwide rollout of the CFE model is the logical next step as we strive for excellence in education, improve learning outcomes, and prepare our young people to contribute fully to our nation's continued prosperity and development and achieving Oman Vision 2040."

As part of the project, Unicef experts supported MoE develop a manual for schools to implement CFE. Unicef also supported MoE develop structures at all levels of the education system to implement and monitor the guidelines, and a training programme for teachers.

Also at the announcement, Liibaan Dahir, Unicef Oman's social policy manager, said, "Unicef is proud of the technical expertise we have been able to bring to bear in support of CFE in Oman."

He added that the rollout of CFE will catalyse progress towards Sustainable Development Goal 4 to ensure quality education for everyone in the country.

Citizens arrested for poaching

Our Correspondent
Muscat

Wildlife rangers of Environment Authority (EA) and Royal Oman Police have arrested Omanis for poaching in two separate incidents this week.

On Monday, the Directorate General of Environment in North Sharqiyah, in cooperation with Royal Oman Police (ROP), arrested poachers for killing wild birds in the governorate.

In a statement, EA said, 'The Directorate General of Environment in North Sharqiyah arrested several people for hunting wild birds in the wilayat of Al Qabel. Those arrested were referred to competent authorities for legal action against them.'

Weapons and a vehicle used in the criminal activity were confiscated from the hunters.

On Wednesday, the Directorate General of Environment in the Najd area of Dhofar, in cooperation with ROP, arrested a number of citizens for hunting birds and animals.

In a statement in its official Twitter handle, EA said, 'These actions are in clear violation of the Law on Nature Reserves and Wildlife Conservation and punishable by imprisonment and a fine.'

It called on visitors to nature conservation areas to report any violations they witness to the hotline 80071999.

Rescue of Indian students stranded in Ukraine coordinated from Oman

(Supplied photo)

Our Correspondent
Muscat

When patriotism and the sense of humanity are strong, help transcends borders and the impossible becomes possible. As uncertainty, fear and anxiety grew among Indian students stranded in Ukraine following its invasion by Russia, the World Malayalee Federation's branches in Ukraine, Poland, Romania, Moldova, Hungary, Slovakia and Oman came to their rescue.

Members of World Malayalee Federation (WMF) in Poland teamed up to assist the students stuck in the middle of the war. The effort was coordinated in Oman by Muscat resident Dr J Retnakumar, global president of WMF, and an international team mostly based in Europe.

"As global president of WMF, I have been on my toes the last few days coordinating the logistics and safe movement of several Indian students. We formed a WMF Ukraine help desk. Our national councils in Ukraine, Poland, Romania, Moldova, Hungary and Slovakia coordinated rescue operations of the Indian students in Ukraine, liaising with NORKA and Indian government officials," Dr Retnakumar said. NORKA, or Department of Non-Resident Keralite's Affairs, is a Government of Kerala entity that looks into grievances of non-resident people of the southern Indian state both in India and abroad.

"WMF members worked around the clock to get the students to safety and provide them food and shelter. Federation members were in touch with various authorities to facilitate the operation," Dr Retnakumar said.

Harikrishnan Namboothiri, CEO of NORKA, supported the WMF Ukraine help desk by updating the federation members on the latest advisories issued by the Indian government.

Chandu Nallur, from WMF Poland, was among the first who swung into action and arrived at the Ukraine-Poland border to help the students. "We moved about 1,500 students from Ukraine to Poland. They then safely boarded Air India flights back to home," Nallur informed *Muscat Daily*.

Headquartered in Austria with presence in 162 countries across the world, WMF was founded by Dr Prince Pallikunnel, a resident of Austria, in 2016.

Social media paves way for SMEs in Oman

Small businesses are all about personalisation, a factor which social media helps enhance via its reach

Our Correspondent
Muscat

Small and medium enterprises (SMEs) in Oman are increasingly using social media to notch up sales. They employ creative and strategic tactics that allow them to build long-term relationships with customers and grow their consumer base via Instagram, Facebook and WhatsApp.

According to several entrepreneurs who *Muscat Daily* spoke with, these platforms have given businesses an opportunity for one-on-one engagement.

"Timing, relevance and creativity are the key to connecting with customers and building a community in today's digital era," said Mudrik Mohammed Mushrif al Hasani, a local tour guide and owner of Skipper Tours (@skipper_tours).

"Through social media, we can easily bridge the gap between where we are today and where we want to be by staying in constant touch with the target audience and getting a fair idea about their likes. It helps us drive people to our business, increase our reach and popularity," he added.

Manisha Joshi, another business owner of an events management company, saw Oman's untapped potential while exploring the sultanate during COVID-19. With this in mind, she started Creator's Circle LLC (@creatorscluboman) last year and began organising outdoor events, including camping and hiking. Social media helped the business grow in a short span of time.

(Supplied photos)

> *Through social media, we can easily bridge the gap between where we are today and where we want to be by staying in constant touch with the target audience*
>
> **MUDRIK MOHAMMED MUSHRIF AL HASANI**

"Thanks to Facebook, Instagram and WhatsApp groups, we were able to manage staff, earn customer loyalty and get feedback for our events that gained popularity through common friends, friends of friends and hashtags. Now we get bookings for events through references and social media handles," Manisha said.

A closer look at the cosmetic industry in the sultanate helped Maida Montoto realise that organic products have a niche market. She started an organic beauty and personal care business - Verde & Green (@verde_and_green) – on her own with no contacts and used social media as her only marketing tool. It worked 'wonders' for her business.

"Being new in Oman, I didn't have any contacts or friends. Social media, like Instagram, helped me a lot. I managed to meet like minded environmentally conscious consumers, other vendors and natural products makers, which helped me lead customers to my products and establish my identity in the market," she said.

Small businesses are all about personalisation, a factor which social media helps enhance via its reach. Social media has become a playground that brings together all demographics, offering access to a wide range of potential customers who are increasingly getting tapped by SMEs' effective usage of it.

Omani student creates new type of bioplastic using natural materials

Our Correspondent
Muscat

Neeam al Harrasi, a student from the wilayat of Rustaq in the Governorate of South Batinah, has created a new type of bioplastic using natural materials available in the sultanate, such as rice water and fish scales, to make the mass production of bioplastics more affordable.

The school project in which Do'aa al Hashmi, another student, also took part, aims to develop a decomposable plastic that is of similar quality to industrial plastic and to meet the challenges arising from the ban on single-use plastics in Oman and all over the world.

(ONA)

As per a statement on the World Intellectual Property Organization (WIPO) website, by using local materials, Neeam's project would make the mass production of bioplastics more affordable. It will also save oceans from plastic pollution.

WIPO added that the first version of the bioplastic Neeam developed was too weak, but she improved it into a hard and durable material that could be used, for example, to make plastic cutlery.

Neeam said, "I made it stronger over time after doing more research and learning that oil makes plastic weaker. I then tested out the new version of the bioplastic in my school lab to make sure it works better."

She has filed a patent for her bioplastic innovation with the Intellectual Property Department.

MoHUP promotes Sorouh project at book fair

Our Correspondent
Muscat

As part of its efforts to promote housing projects in Oman, the Ministry of Housing and Urban Planning (MoHUP) held a workshop to promote the Sorouh Integrated Residential Neighbourhood Project at Muscat International Book Fair.

A statement issued by the ministry said that workshop aimed to promote the first phase of the project in Hai Al Naseem in the wilayat of Barka .

The first Sorouh project will be developed in an area of 355,000sqm in Barka near the Wali's Office. The project will have 1,051 residential units designed in an ecosystem that balances nature and tradition with modern living standards.

In 2021, MoHUP had called on investors to submit requests to design and implement real estate development projects (Sorouh) in the governorates of Muscat, Dakhliyah and South Batinah.

WEATHER WATCH

	Max	Min
Abu Dhabi	27	16
Doha	26	19
Kuwait City	27	19
Manama	27	20
Muscat	27	19
Riyadh	33	20

PRAYER TIMINGS

Fajr	5.12am
Sunrise	6.27am
Duhr	12.24pm
Asr	3.45pm
Maghrib	6.15pm
Isha	7.26pm

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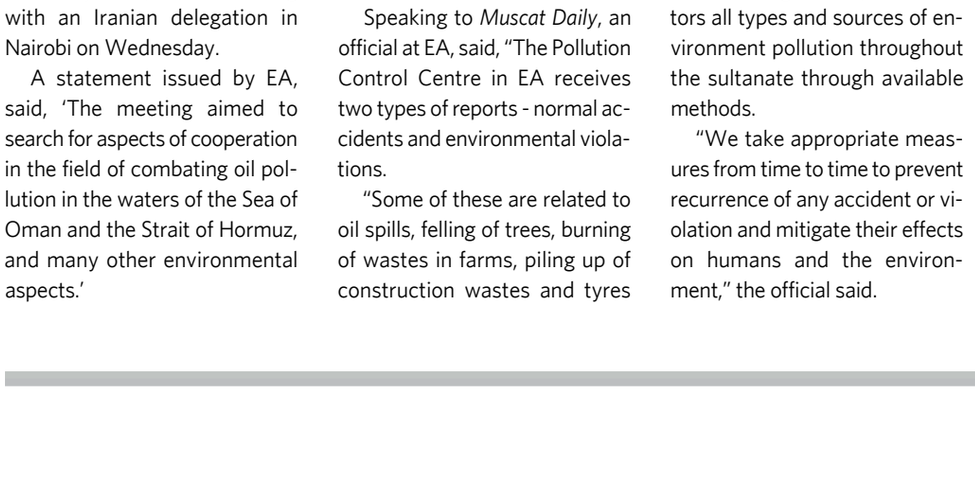
EA holds meeting to combat oil pollution in Sea of Oman



(Supplied photo)

Our Correspondent
Muscat

In an effort to combat oil pollution in Omani waters and Strait of Hormuz, Dr Abdullah Ali al Omari, chairman of Environment Authority (EA), held a meeting with an Iranian delegation in Nairobi on Wednesday.

A statement issued by EA, said, 'The meeting aimed to search for aspects of cooperation in the field of combating oil pollution in the waters of the Sea of Oman and the Strait of Hormuz, and many other environmental aspects.'

In 2021 , EA had announced that it received 361 complaints related to pollution in the past three years, with the maximum being lodged in 2019.

Of these, 96 were registered in 2018, 195 in 2019 and 70 in 2020.

Speaking to *Muscat Daily*, an official at EA, said, "The Pollution Control Centre in EA receives two types of reports - normal accidents and environmental violations.

"Some of these are related to oil spills, felling of trees, burning of wastes in farms, piling up of construction wastes and tyres near residential areas, emissions from quarrying sites and crushers, encroachment in wildlife areas, sewage discharge near residential areas, as well as discharge of oil residues by ships in Oman's marine environment."

According to him, EA monitors all types and sources of environment pollution throughout the sultanate through available methods.

"We take appropriate measures from time to time to prevent recurrence of any accident or violation and mitigate their effects on humans and the environment," the official said.

Two Royal Decrees issued

Continued from Page 01

The Operating Party has to coordinate with the Public Authority for Special Economic Zones and Free Zones to achieve the measures deemed necessary for the safety of individuals, operating companies, installations, goods and commodities within the purview of each zone, in addition to fully cooperating with the Public Authority for Special Economic Zones and Free Zones to observe the regulations governing the safety of the environment and the establishment of security.

Article 8 states that this decree will be published in the Official Gazette and enforced on the day following its date of publication.

Royal Decree No 11/2022 on the ratification of an agreement between the governments of the Sultanate of Oman and Hungary on the encouragement and mutual protection of investments, signed in Muscat on February 2, 2022, after presenting the same to Majlis A'Shura.

Article 1 ratifies the above-mentioned agreement in accordance with the version attached to this decree.

Article 2 states that this decree will be published in the Official Gazette and enforced on its date of issue.

ONA

Sultanate of Oman
Ministry of Labour

ANNOUNCEMENT

Internal Tender Committee, Ministry of Labour, invites the following Tender:

Bidding No.	Bidding Description	Last date of tender submission	Docments fee (RO)
01/2022 (Re-tender)	Management and operation of a site to provide Sanad Services at the ministry's general office at Airport Heights	Sunday 17/03/2022 at 10:00 am	R.O 25/=

- Specialized establishments can obtain bidding documents No. (1/2022 Re-tender) from the Treasury Department on the third floor of the Ministry's building at Airport Heights.
- In return for the amount against the bidding (not returned), as of Thursday 3/3/2022 .
- Each bid shall be accompanied by a bank guarantee from one of the banks operating in the Sultanate at a rate of (1%) of the bid value in favour of the Ministry of Labor and valid for a period of (90) days from the date of bid submission.
- Bids are submitted in sealed envelopes sealed with red wax, addressed to the name of His Excellency the Chairman of the Internal Tender Committee, and written on the outside with the number and name of the bid, with no reference to the bidder.
- Bids shall be placed in the box designated for tenders at the Secretariat of the Internal Tender Committee on the third floor of the Ministry building at Airport Heights, at the latest on the date specified for the auction, provided that bids are opened at eleven o'clock on the same day.

(The Ministry is not bound to accept the lowest price of or any tender)

labour_OMAN

Oman spearheads ME power sector with electricity market

Muscat - In a landmark for the Middle East, the first spot market for electricity in the region has begun operating in Oman, helping the country in its efforts to lower the cost of electricity and water, increase the efficiency of power and water procurement, and support the energy transition.

In most countries in the region, the price paid to electricity and water producers is set by power purchase agreements that are signed when a power or water production plant is first developed. While this structure provides certainty to both the generating company and the buyer, it doesn't provide an ongoing mechanism to lower the cost of electricity.

By contrast, a spot market creates incentives for producers to drive improvements and efficiencies so they can offer a lower price in the spot market. This helps decrease the cost of electricity and water for households, manufacturers, and other businesses, while improving the efficiency of the entire sector, according to a press release from GE Digital.

What's more, because fuel is the largest component of a conventional power plant's operating expenses, greater efficiency can mean less CO_2 per kilowatt hour of electricity produced.

While competitive electricity and water markets are common in the United States, Europe, and parts of Asia, until now, they were not present in the Middle East.

That has changed, when in January this year Oman formally launched a spot market for electricity and water. The spot market is operated by the Oman Power and Water Procurement Company (OPWP), the sole buyer of electricity and water in the sultanate.

The spot market in Oman makes it possible for generating companies, including those with ongoing power and water purchase agreements, as well as those whose agreements have expired, to sell uncontracted output to the market at the most competitive prices. This creates new revenue opportunities for these companies, a particular benefit for solar and wind projects because it can help speed their return on investment.

Electricity and water producers access the spot market via a single unified portal, where they can participate in the daily market operations that contract for supply for the following 24-hour period.

The digital infrastructure enabling the system was developed, commissioned, and configured by GE Digital's Grid Software business in collaboration with OPWP. The system is flexible enough to incorporate OPWP's market rules, updates to the rules, changes in the number of market participants, and real-time issues such as grid congestion and transmission capacity.

This flexibility also means the system can manage the expiry of existing power purchase agreements, as OPWP pursues its roadmap toward an increasingly liberalised electricity market.

"With the launch of its spot electricity market, Oman is in the vanguard of market liberalisations and innovations that are happening in the utility sector in the Gulf region," said Talal Eskandar, senior director, VP Sales at GE Digital. "The system supports OPWP in achieving its long-term goals regarding more competitive pricing and improved efficiency around electricity and water procurement."

While Oman is the first country in the region to introduce an electricity market, it is not the only one pursuing this goal. Saudi Arabia also is developing the digital infrastructure, market rules and other components required for a spot electricity market. These steps further liberalise efforts over the past 15 years that shifted the market from one dominated by government-owned generating assets to one primarily served by independent power [and water] producers that are privately developed, owned, and operated.

"The spot market gives OPWP the ability to swiftly and efficiently adjust to changes in supply, demand and transmission capacity, while at the same time encouraging sector-wide efficiency improvements, lower costs to end users, and reduced carbon intensity of the sector," said Eskandar.

GE Digital's Advanced Market Management System (AMMS), which includes scheduling, trading, and settlement components, is hosted in Muscat. It provides a framework to master energy trading by integrating Core Market operations, Modeling, and Analytics into one modular solution.

Currently, the market mechanism is open to generating companies connected to the country's Main Interconnection System (MIS), which operates in most of the country. It is anticipated that once an interconnection line is completed to link the MIS with the Dhofar grid system in the country's south, generating companies in that system also will be able to participate.

"In Oman, we are witnessing the future of the power and water. As the country begins to experience the benefits of this system, their example will encourage other regional markets to speed their liberalizations, creating a cascade of benefits flowing across the entire region," Eskandar said.

CMA boosts efforts of anti-money laundering

Muscat - The Capital Market Authority (CMA) intensified its efforts in anti-money laundering and combating financing terrorism through developing legislative and regulatory frameworks to protect the capital market and safeguard institutions from criminal transactions.

Those efforts come as part of the national efforts exerted by the National Committee for Combating Money Laundering and Financing Terrorism.

Majid Mohammed al Kiyoumi, director of Anti -Money Laundering and Combating Financing Terrorism Department at the CMA said that the authority has taken many steps in this regard, pursuant to the Royal Decree No 30/2016. It also instructed all entities governed by the CMA to apply electronic payment methods and circulate report forms issued by the National Centre for Financial Information to detect suspected transactions of money laundering or crimes of financing terrorism.

Kiyoumi added that the CMA is aware that the first line of defence is the dissemination of awareness. To this end, CMA organised eight workshops on risk based approaches, suspected transactions and the method of reporting.

He added that the Department analysed the data of 81 companies and prepared a risk matrix to identify the companies exposed to high risk and developed an audit and examination plan based on the outcome of the analysis. A comprehensive audit was carried out for 13 companies and another thematic audit for four companies, while meetings were held with 8 companies.

ONA

Sembcorp Salalah
سيمبكورب صلاله

INVITATION TO ATTEND THE ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING OF SEMBCORP SALALAH POWER & WATER COMPANY SAOG

The Board of Sembcorp Salalah Power & Water Company SAOG (the "Company") has the pleasure to invite the shareholders of the company to the Annual General Meeting ("AGM") to be held at 3p.m. on 22 March 2022, at Hormuz Grand Hotel, Muscat Governorate, and on the e-portal for convening general meetings which may be accessed through the Muscat Clearing and Depository SAOC ("MCD") website (www.mcd.gov.om).

Failing quorum of the AGM, a second AGM shall be convened at 3 p.m. on 28 March 2022 at Hormuz Grand Hotel, Muscat Governorate, and on the e-portal for convening general meetings which may be accessed through the MCD website (www.mcd.gov.om), to discuss and consider the following agenda:

1 To consider and approve the Board of Directors' Report for the financial year ended 31 December 2021.
2 To consider and approve the Report on Corporate Governance for the financial year ended 31 December 2021.
3 To consider and approve the Auditor's Report and the Balance Sheet and Profit and Loss Account of the Company for the financial year ended 31 December 2021.
4 To approve the proposal authorizing the Board of Directors to determine and distribute cash dividends to the Company's Shareholders who are registered with the MCD on 1 November 2022 out of the retained earnings as per the audited financial statements for the financial year ended 31 December 2021, provided that the amount shall not be more than 6 Baisas per share.
5 To ratify the payment of sitting fees to the Board of Directors and Sub-Committees for the financial year ended 31 December 2021 and to determine the sitting fees for the financial year ending 31 December 2022.
6 To consider and approve directors' remuneration amounting to RO 104,455 for the financial year ended on 31 December 2021.
7 To disclose the transactions that the Company entered into with related parties during the financial year ended 31 December 2021.
8 To inform the meeting of the donations made to support community services during the financial year ended on 31 December 2021.
9 To consider and approve a proposal to spend the total sum of RO 60,000 to support community services during the financial year ending 31 December 2022.
10 To appoint the auditors of the Company for the financial year ending 31 December 2022 and determine their fees.
11 To elect new Board of Directors from amongst the shareholders or non–shareholders.
Any person who wishes to nominate himself/herself to the Board of Directors should complete a nomination form available with the Company. The nomination form can be obtained from the Company's head office. The completed forms should be delivered to the Company at least five working days prior to the AGM date. Nomination forms received after 5 pm on 15th of March 2022 shall not be accepted.

In accordance with the Rules for Convening General Meetings via Electronic Means, issued by the CMA we would like to call your attention to the following:

(a) only a corporate person may authorize a natural person to attend and vote on its behalf on decisions/resolutions of the AGM through electronic means, provided such natural person has an investor number with the MCD;
(b) voting on any item of the agenda shall commence (3) days prior to convening of the AGM and ends on the day of the AGM. If a shareholder's balance is changed either by an increase or decrease, the voting process shall stand cancelled and must re-vote at the AGM.

Please attend at the venue or online at least 30 minutes prior to the AGM.
For more information, please contact Mr. Tariq Bashir on telephone number 93215022.

Chairman **Auditor** **Legal Advisor**

Sembcorp Salalah Power & Water Company SAOG
P.O. Box 1466, Salalah, Postal Code 211, Sultanate of Oman, Tel: +968 2323 8510; Fax: +968 2323 8512, www.sembcorpsalalah.com.om

OHLB CR No. 1077337

NATIONAL MINERAL WATER COMPANY (SAOG)

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Notice and Invitation to attend the Annual General Meeting

The Board of Directors of National Mineral Water Company S.A.O.G (**the Company**) has the pleasure to invite all the Shareholders to attend the Annual General Meeting **(AGM)** of the Company scheduled to be held at 3 p.m. on Tuesday, 15 March 2022, at Sheraton Hotel Ruwi and via electronic platform for holding General Meetings, which you can login through the website of Muscat Clearing and Depository Company (**www.mcd.gov.om**); and in the event that quorum was not achieved for the AGM, the second AGM, shall be held at 3 p.m. on Wednesday, 16 March 2022 at Sheraton Hotel Ruwi, and via same electronic platform above to discuss the following agenda items:

1. To consider and approve the report of the Board of Directors on the business of the Company and its financial position for the financial year ended 31 December 2021.
2. To consider and approve the Company's Corporate Governance Report for the financial year ended 31 December 2021.
3. To consider and approve the Auditor's Report about the Company's audited financial statements for the financial year ended 31 December 2021.
4. To approve the sitting fees being availed by the members of the Board of Directors and members of the Board's sub-committees for the previous financial year and to fix the sittings fees for the next financial year.
5. To notify the general meeting of the related parties' transactions entered into during the financial year ended 31 December 2021.
6. To notify the general meeting of the amounts allocated and spent for the Company's social responsibilities for the year ended 31 December 2021.
7. To discuss and approve the proposed allocation of OMR 7,000 to fulfil the Company's social responsibilities for the year ending 31 December 2022.
8. To approve the appointment of the statutory auditors for the financial year ending 31 December 2022 and the proposed remuneration.
9. To appoint an independent entity to evaluate the performance of the Board of directors for the fiscal year ending 31 December 2022 and determine their fee.

Chairman | Legal Advisor | Auditor

In accordance with the company's articles of association and the regulations for holding general assembly's using modern technology means issued by the authority, we would like to draw your attention to the following:

A. Only juristic persons may deputize a natural person to attend the AGM and vote on their behalf through the electronic systems, provided that the deputized natural person has an investor number at Muscat Clearing and Depository Company.

B. Voting on the subject items offered for voting in the agenda starts before a period of not more than 3 days and until the end of the voting process on the meeting's day. If the investor's balance of shares increased or decreased during, his/her voting will be cancelled and they should vote again on the AGM's date.

For any queries please contact Malaak Al Balushi on 24573043 or e-mail at: **malaak.albalushi@dentons.com.**

Send your comments to
muscatdaily@apexmedia.co.om

MSX inches up; volumes surge

Our Correspondent
Muscat

The benchmark index of the Muscat Stock Exchange (MSX) was marginally up by 0.05 per cent to close at 4,057.61 points on Wednesday.

Trading activity improved from the previous session as turnover jumped by 209.6 per cent to RO7.89mn and volumes surged 386.11 per cent to 42.23mn shares.

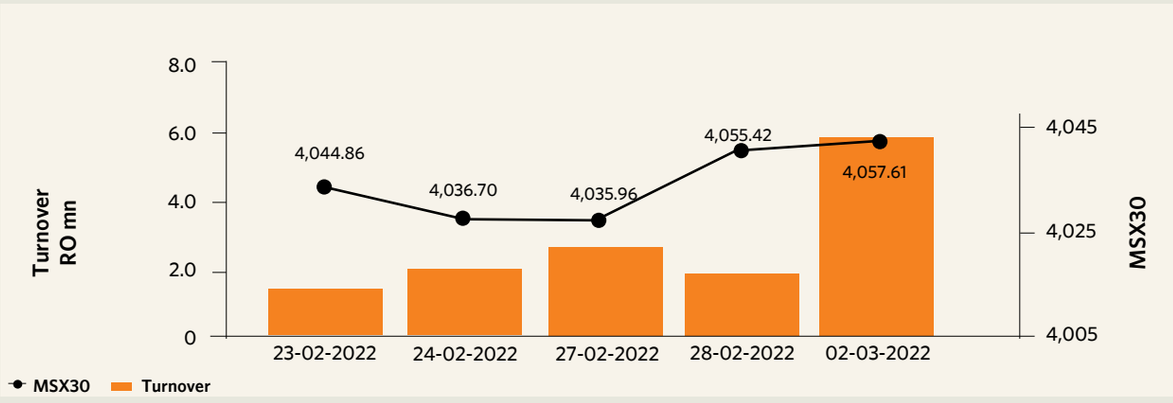
While Industrial index rose 0.58 per cent, Financial and Services indices fell 0.05 per cent and 0.55 per cent, respectively. The MSX Shariah Index closed up by 0.48 per cent at 491.96 points.

Market breadth remained positive as 15 companies closed up, while 10 companies closed down. The rest 31 traded stocks closed flat for the day.

Top gainers were Dhofar Generating Co (7.41 per cent), Al Maha Ceramics (4.78 per cent), Al Anwar Investment (3.9 per cent) and United Finance (3.66 per cent).

Top losers were Oman Investment & Finance Co (-8.5 per cent), Al Sharqia Investment (-6.17 per cent), National Finance (-3.28 per cent) and Muscat Desalination (-1.79 per cent).

MSX INDEX AND TURNOVER OF FIVE TRADING DAYS



Top oil producers hold course despite Ukraine-Russia war

Vienna, Austria - Saudi Arabia, Russia and other top oil producers on Wednesday agreed to hold firm on only gradually opening the taps despite Russia's assault on Ukraine sending prices spiralling.

Both West Texas Intermediate (WTI) crude and Brent broke above US$110 a barrel on Wednesday. Brent is at a high last seen in 2014, while WTI is at levels not seen since 2013.

OPEC+ - at monthly back-to-back meetings that lasted less than an hour - decided to stick to a decision from last year for an output target of 400,000 barrels per day for April as well, the group said in a statement.

Analysts had widely expected the 23-member group to stick to its guns. A next meeting will be held on March 31, the group said.

On Sunday, Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC) leader Riyadh confirmed the commitment of the 13-country group to the agreement with its 10 partners, led by Moscow, which faces international criticism and sanctions over its invasion of Ukraine.

Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman 'affirmed the kingdom's keenness on the stability and balance of oil markets', according to the Saudi Press Agency.

'Risk for disruptions'

Wednesday's meetings, held via video conference, come a day after International Energy Agency (IEA) countries agreed to release 60mn barrels of oil to stabilise global markets.

The United States will contribute half of the amount, President Joe Biden announced.

But the move has failed to assure markets, and analysts had low expectations that OPEC+ would take any decision to rein in surging prices.

"The war in Ukraine is getting very ugly and destructive and hostilities between the West and Russia are intensifying. High risk for disruptions to both crude and natural gas," Bjarne Schieldrop of Seb said ahead of the meeting.

'Paper promise'

OPEC+ has so far resisted pressure from major oil consumers, such as the US, to open the taps more as some of its members, including Nigeria and Angola, struggle to meet quotas.

Between December and January, OPEC members boosted their production by 64,000 barrels per day (bpd), far below their 400,000 bpd agreement, according to the organisation's last monthly report.

"The pledge from OPEC+ to increase supply is so far a paper promise... adding to the shortness in the supply market and further stoking the bullish price environment," Louise Dickson of Rystad Energy said.

OPEC, whose secretariat is based in Vienna, had drastically slashed production in 2020 as the COVID-19 pandemic began to spread through the world, pummelling demand and prices.

Wednesday's meeting takes place at a key moment as negotiations to revive the 2015 Iran nuclear deal are widely expected to come to a head in the coming days.

The deal provided sanctions relief for Tehran in return for strict curbs on its nuclear programme but has been disintegrating since former US president Donald Trump withdrew from it in 2018 and reimposed sanctions, including on Iran's oil exports.

AFP

Eni to pull out of Russia-Turkey pipeline

Milan, Italy - Italian oil giant Eni said on Tuesday it would withdraw from the Blue Stream gas pipeline linking Russia to Turkey, in which it has a 50 per cent stake.

'Eni intends to sell its stake' in Blue Stream, a company spokesman said, following moves by rivals BP and Shell to divest from Russia-linked projects after Moscow invaded Ukraine.

The company controls the gas pipeline - which links the two countries via the Black Sea - equally with Russian energy giant Gazprom.

'Eni's current presence in Russia is marginal' and joint ventures with Russian energy giant Rosneft linked to exploration licences in the Arctic 'have already been frozen for years' due to sanctions imposed on Russia since 2014.

Russia launched an invasion of Ukraine last week, triggering a wave of international condemnation and Western economic sanctions against Moscow.

Shell announced on Monday it would sell its stake in all joint ventures with Gazprom, after Russia launched the operation.

That included its 27.5 per cent share in the oil and gas project Sakhalin-2, on Sakhalin island in Russia's far east.

It would also end its 50 per cent interests in the Salym oilfield development in western Siberia, and the Gydan exploration project in the Gydan peninsula, in northwest Siberia.

On Sunday, BP announced it was pulling its 19.75 per cent stake in Rosneft, and CEO Bernard Looney said he was resigning from the Russian firm's board with immediate effect.

AFP

Al Anwar Ceramic Tiles SAOG

Al-Shams

P O Box : 143 PC :118 Muscat, Sultanate of Oman
Tel : 24649091- 24649093 Fax: 24649097
email : ceramics@omantel.net.om web site : alshams.org

Notice for Annual General Meeting

The Board of Directors of Al Anwar Ceramic Tiles Company SAOG ("Company") is pleased to invite the shareholders to attend the annual ordinary general meeting of the company, which is scheduled to be held at **5:00 pm on Wednesday, 23/3/2022, at Ibri-Sur Meeting room at Sheraton Oman Hotel Ruwi Muscat** and via the electronic platform to hold general meetings which can accessed through the website of the Muscat Clearing and Depository Company (www.mcd.gov.om) if the quorum of the meeting is not completed, , a second annual ordinary general meeting will be held at **5:00 pm on Tuesday 29/03/2022 at at Ibri- Sur Meeting room at Sheraton Oman Hotel Ruwi Muscat**, and via the mentioned electronic platform, to discuss the following agenda:

1. To consider and approve the report of the Board of Directors for the financial year ended on 31/12/2021.
2. To consider and approve the company's Corporate Governance Report for the financial year ended on 31/12/2021.
3. To consider the auditor's report and approve the balance sheet and profit and loss account for the financial year ended on 31/12/2021.
4. To consider and approve the proposed cash dividend to the shareholders, as on the date of the meeting, amounting 25 baisa for each share for the financial year ended 31 /12/2021
5. To approve sitting fees to the board of directors' meetings and its sub-committees for the financial year ended on 31/12/2021 and to determine the fees for the forthcoming financial year ending on 31/12/2022 (as per the attachment).
6. To consider and approve the proposal of distributing a total sum of RO 10,000 as remuneration for the Board of Directors of the Company for the year ended 31 /12/ 2021.
7. To consider the amounts allocated and spent for the company's social responsibilities for the year ended on 31/12/2021 (as per the attachment).
8. To consider and approve the allocation of an amount of RO (20,000) for corporate social responsibility programs, for the year ending on 31/12/ 2022.
9. The appointment of the Auditors for the Company for the financial year ending 31/12/ 2022 and approve their fees.
10. To appoint an independent expert to evaluate the performance of the Board for the financial year ending on 31/12/2022 and to determine their fees.

According to the Company's Articles of Association and the controls for holding General Meetings using modern technology issued by the capital market authority , we would like to draw your attention to the following:

A. A legal person, exclusively, has the right to delegate a natural person to attend the General Meeting and vote on its behalf through technical means, provided that this natural person has an investor number in MCDC.
B. Voting on any of the agenda items begins no more than three days before the date of the General Meeting until the voting process ends on the day of the General Meeting. If the shareholder's shares are increased or decreased, the voting process will be canceled, and the shareholder will have to vote again on the day of the General Meeting.

For further information please contact Mr Khalfan Al Sabahii, contact phone number 25449966.

Chairman **Auditors** **Legal consultants**

الأولية
AL-AWALIA

Invitation to Tender

Tender Number	Subject	Tender Document Fees (Non-refundable)	Tender Bond	Tender Offer	Closing Date
QPMC.EXC.2022.02	Call-Off Agreement for the Supply of Dune Sand Materials (CIF) for Qatar Primary Materials Company ("Supplies")	N/A	QAR 1,000,000	Two Bids (Technical & Commercial)	16 March 2022 01:00 PM

In accordance with the following conditions:

1. Tender Documents can be collected from our head office located at Al-Saad, Suhaim bin Hamad St., Qatar First Bank Building, 10th Floor (Sunday: Thursday) between 08:00 to 13:00.
2. Bids are to be submitted in two separate and sealed (in red wax) envelops (Technical& Commercial) and addressed to **Excom Committee**. Tender reference number and subject are to be clearly written on the envelops, provided that the last date for submitting bids is **one o'clock in the afternoon on the closing day**. Any bids submit after this date will not be accepted.
3. Tender Documents will be released only after delivery of Authorization Letter to the delegated person signed by authorized person as per Computer ID, Copy of commercial Registration (CR), Business License and Computer ID.
4. Tender Bond (Bank Guarantee/ Manager Cheque) must be valid for 120 days after closing date and must be submitted in separate & sealed envelope along with Technical bid and a photo copy is to be attached with commercial bid. Bids without tender bond will be rejected.
5. Bids must be valid for 90 days after closing date and are to be submitted in two copies (Original & Duplicate).
6. Any queries relating to the Tender Documents must only be raised in writing, preferably by email, to the address specified in the respective Tender Document. Any response issued by QPMC will be in the form of a question and answer and will be distributed to all Tenderers without revealing the identity of the originator of the query(ies) in the Form of Tender Bulletins or Circulars. Queries must be received at the address specified in the respective ITT Documentation at least five (5) calendar days prior to the Tender closing date. Any queries received after such date will be ignored.
7. The amount of the Performance Bond to be provided by the awarded bidder is (10% of the contract value) and its validity period; must remain valid under the contract implementation period and the validity will be according to the terms of the tender.
8. The Technical Bids shall be opened within one week from the closing date.
9. QPMC has the right, during the contract period, to request an increase or decrease in the amounts of the items, works or services by a percentage not exceeding (20%) of the contract value with the same conditions and prices, provided that the increase is of the same type of contracted items, works or services.

For further Inquiry, please send your queries at Fax Number: **44479559** or email to **s.committee@qpmc.qa** or visit QPMC website @ **www.qpmc.qa**

FREE CLASSIFIED LISTING

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

Porsche presents first Macan T sports car

Porsche expands its sports car offering in the compact SUV range with the new Macan T.

Previously reserved for 911 and 718 models, this marks the first time a four-door sports car bears the special designation. Ever since the legendary Porsche 911 T from 1968, the letter T has represented a unique form of dynamic driving at Porsche. It stands for 'Touring' and identifies models that offer an especially authentic driving experience thanks to precise tuning, exclusive equipment and efficient engines, a press release said.

Following in the footsteps of its two-door predecessors, the new Macan T features an incredibly dynamic set-up paired with a lightweight, two-litre turbo engine, in addition to an athletic design and a range of standard equipment that is ideal for a sporty driving style. This concept positions the Macan T between the Macan and the Macan S.

The two-litre, four-cylinder turbo engine of the Macan T combines great agility, low weight and a compact design to create a package that offers an ideal balance of weight and performance. Compared to the 2.9ltr biturbo V6 engine in the Macan S and GTS models, the powertrain in the Macan T weighs 58.8kg less on the front axle. This gives the vehicle an excellent start-off performance and optimum cornering ability.

The Macan T has an output of 195kW (265 PS) and 400Nm of torque – performance indicators that suit the precise vehicle design and deliver an exhilarating drive. As is generally the case with the compact SUV, the engine is coupled with a fast-switching seven-speed dual clutch transmission (PDK) and the Porsche Traction Management (PTM) all-wheel drive system. A broad spread of torque provides responsive acceleration in all driving situations. When fitted with the standard Sport Chrono Package including the mode switch and Sport Response button on the steering wheel, the Macan T accelerates from 0 to 100 km/h in 6.2 seconds and reaches a top speed of 232 km/h.

The interior of the Macan T has its own distinct ambience. The standard, eight-way electrically adjustable sports seats feature exclusive upholstery based on the Black leather package. The centres of the front seats and the outer rear seats are delivered with the Sport-Tex Stripe pattern, while the front headrests feature an embossed Porsche crest. The contrasting colour from the exterior continues inside the vehicle in the form of decorative silver stitching on the seats, headrests and steering wheel.

The Macan T is available to order now, with deliveries starting in the second quarter of the year. Information on the basic retail price, model specifications and local availability can be obtained at the nearest Porsche Centre.

Ahlibank announces cash rewards for salary transfers

Ahlibank has announced a new offer under which the customers who start transferring their salaries to Ahlibank will receive an immediate one-time cash reward of 10% of their monthly salary, with maximum cash reward amount capped at RO500.

Under the three-month offer, which started on January 10 and runs until end of March, the bank offers its Omani and expatriate new salary transfer customers the opportunity to enjoy a lucrative benefit. Customers who transfer their monthly salary to the bank with an amount of RO1,000 or above are eligible for this reward offer, a press release said.

Muneer al Balushi, AGM – head of Retail Distribution, said, "We are pleased to announce this offer, which seeks to strengthen and establish our relationship with our existing and new customers. The promotion reflects Ahlibank's leadership in being innovative when it comes to enhancing customer experience and providing solutions that meet various customer requirements through tangible benefits. These could be in the form of cash rewards, cashbacks, lifestyle promotions, and more."

"This is not just a one-time benefit, but a strategic step encouraging customers to adopt practices which will bring them added value in the long-term," Balushi further stated.

As the number of new entrants to the labour market increases, Ahlibank, as Oman's fastest growing bank, looks to provide the best services that enhance its preferred status. This scheme is an effective step that reflects the bank's contribution to supporting the financial stability efforts of beneficiaries, thereby enhancing the economic and social levels for individuals and society at large.

FINCORP AL AMAL FUND

Invitation for attending The Ordinary General Meeting

The Management of Fincorp Al Amal Fund has the pleasure to invite the shareholders to attend the Ordinary general meeting of the Fund, which is scheduled to be held at 5:00 pm on Monday, March 21, 2022, through the electronic platform of the General meetings, which can be accessed through Muscat Clearing and Depository website (www.mcd.gov.om), and in person at Fincorp office, Azaiba. If the quorum not satisfied, a second annual general assembly will be held at 3:00 pm on Sunday, March 27, 2022, to discuss the following agenda:

1. To consider and approve the fund's management body report for the financial year ended December 31, 2021.
2. To consider the Auditors' Report and to approve the Financial Statements, Balance Sheet and Profit & Loss Account, for the financial year ended on December 31, 2021
3. To consider and approve the proposal to distribute cash dividends of 50 baisas for each unit to unitholders on the date of the general meeting.
4. To approve the sitting fees of the fund's management body meetings paid to them for previous financial year, and to determine the sitting fees for the next fiscal year.
5. To consider and approve the proposal for the annual remuneration for the Fund Management amounting to RO 70,000 for the fiscal year ended on 31 December 2021.
6. To consider and approve the transactions entered into by the fund with related parties during the financial year ended 31 December 2021.
7. To consider and approve the transactions will enter into by the fund with related parties during the financial year ended 31 December 2022.
8. To elect new members of the fund's management from unit holders or others, and whoever wishes to nominate himself must complete the form prepared for this purpose and hand it to the fund manager, at least five (5) days before the date of the assembly, no later than the end of the work on Tuesday corresponding to March 15, 2022, and the candidate must take into account the fulfillment of the prescribed requirements for membership in the fund management.
9. To appoint the fund's auditors for the financial year ending on 31 December 2022 and to approve their fees.

In accordance with the fund's statute and the regulations for holding general meetings using modern technology means issued by the authority, we would like to draw your attention to the following:

(A) Only a legal person has the right to authorize a natural person to attend the general assembly meeting and vote on his behalf through technology, provided that this natural person has an investor number in the Muscat Clearing and Depository Company.

(B) Voting on any of the items on the agenda begins no more than three days before the date of the assembly and until the end of the voting process on the day of the meeting.

In case of any inquiries, please contact Mrs. Harsha Jethmalani on the phone number: 92923107.

Chairman | Auditor | Legal Advisor

Investment Manager & Administrator
FINCORP
The Financial Corporation Co. saoc
Brokerage | Asset Management | Corporate Finance and Advisory | Research

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Indian embassy felicitates Amity University graduates in Oman

An award ceremony was recently held to hand over certificates to students who graduated from Amity University. Anuj Swarup, second secretary (Political & Education) of the Embassy of India, was the chief guest at the event and handed over the certificates to the students who completed their MBA in online and distance education modes, facilitated through Bridge Academy - Oman.

Speaking on the occasion, Swarup mentioned about the high standard of Indian Universities. Students from Indian Universities are highly placed globally in different organisations, he said, adding that the ambience and infrastructure of Bridge Academy showed their focus on quality, a press release said.

Amarjeet Majumdar, managing partner of Bridge Group pointed out that online and distance education has become very popular and students can now get Bachelors or Masters' degree from renowned Indian Universities from Oman. He emphasized on the open schooling system, by which even a student in Class X or XII can take admission & attend board exams from Oman from a central government board in India - NIOS – which is at par with CBSE and hase equivalent value regarding eligibility for further education or immigration.

Prof Bindu Menon, centre director of Bridge Academy, said that she was content that the students have achieved the much sought after degree. She wished the students a great future ahead and added that success of the students is the success of the teachers and the institute.

ACUD to showcase plans at Dubai's IPS 2022

With preparations in full swing for the hugely popular International Property Show, IPS 2022, to be held in Dubai from March 24 to 26, the owner and developer for the new administrative capital in Egypt - Administrative Capital For Urban Development (ACUD) - is all geared up to participate in the event and showcase its major plans and lucrative investment opportunities in the Egyptian real estate market.

Egypt is witnessing a boisterous growth in its real estate investment and purchasing, with US$231.1mn net foreign investment being used for purchase of real estate properties in Egypt in 2021, a press release said.

The IPS 2022 will provide a stupendous platform, bringing all key stakeholders and decision-makers in the real estate industry under one roof for the best returns on investments.

Egypt's new Administrative Capital is a transformative project and extension of Cairo, as one of the world's largest urban developments at 700sqkm with an expected population of 6.5 million on completion. Designed as a super smart and sustainable city of the future, it will also house a new presidential district, government district, diplomatic district, headquarters of the House of Representatives, and 20 residential areas.

"Egypt is certainly a promising market for real estate investment and purchasing. We are glad to have ACUD on board with us. Their presence and display of the new capital will be a stellar offering at the show. We are confident that for real estate developers in Egypt, exhibiting in IPS is a golden chance to reach global buyers," said Dawood al Shezawi, president of Strategic Exhibition and Conference and head of the organising committee of IPS.

Egypt's real estate sector has grown by 8% since the beginning of the year, and IPS is a true melting pot that gives ACUD the opportunity to tap a large group of real estate investors.

"The new capital is developed with the strategic vision for a smart city integrating its smart infrastructure to provide many services to citizens. Our participation at IPS is an effort to highlight Egypt's undiscovered beauty, as well as tap high net worth individuals and serious buyers interested in investing in Egypt," said Ahmed Zaki Abdeen, ACUD chairperson.

IPS 2022 is set to attract more than 20,000 visitors from over 40 countries.

Sayyid Bilarab celebrates with Outward Bound Oman

Under the auspices of H H Sayyid Bilarab bin Haitham al Said, the British Embassy and Outward Bound Oman celebrated a new partnership to equip 500 young Omanis with a broad understanding of the importance of sustainability, and the causes and impact of climate change, with a focus on solutions, mitigation and opportunity.

The ceremony took place in Outward Bound Oman's training centre in Muscat to celebrate the Climate Shapers programme with the presence of His Excellency Bill Murray, the British Ambassador in Oman and other VIP guests, a press release said.

Using Outward Bound Oman's equipped training centres in the Sharqiyah Desert and Jabal Akhdar, the Climate Shapers programme builds upon COP26 outcomes and aims to equip young Omanis with the knowledge to positively impact, influence and inspire the communities around them.

Established in Oman in May 2009 by founding partners Dentons, Shell and Suhail Bahwan, and supported by many of the leading corporates in Oman as part of their social investment programme, Outward Bound Oman is part of an international network that uses challenging outdoor journeys to develop the national talent of Oman. Each year, some 200,000 people from different countries around the world take part in an Outward Bound course in one of 34 countries.

Outward Bound Oman provide variety of courses to different age groups starting from school students through Skills for Life course, enhancing the employability of young people throughout The Sultanate in the Next Generation course, and it also provide bespoke training courses for the emerging talent and leadership teams of many leading companies and institutions in Oman.

Meethaq extends its exclusive financing offers

Meethaq, the pioneer of Islamic banking in Oman from Bank Muscat, has announced that its current promotional offer on a number of financing products will be extended till March 31.

Meethaq has decided to extend the offer period after receiving excellent feedback from its customers. An attractive profit rate of only 4.99% is available to all customers who apply for home, auto and personal financing facilities. All new and existing Meethaq customers availing fresh financing from the bank can benefit from this offer, which is available for Omani nationals working in government institutions as well as semi-government and Tier 1 companies.

Speaking about the extension of promotional period, Sami Bait Rashid, assistant general manager - Personal Banking, Meethaq, said, "Meethaq is delighted to extend its attractive offers on home, auto, and personal financing facilities in line with our customer-centric vision and commitment to innovation. We encourage all customers who are considering financing options for their various needs to take full advantage of this offer which allows them to access quality financing solutions at highly-competitive rates."

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 12 branches in the Governorate of Muscat and 12 branches across other governorates. In addition to its already excellent network of branches, Meethaq has a dedicated network of over 40 ATMs and CDMs and also provides free access to more than 740 plus ATMs and CDMs of Bank Muscat across the country for customers to conduct their banking transactions with ease.

Meethaq Islamic Banking has been recognised as the Best Islamic Bank in Oman.

Zubair Furnishing hands over latest project

The Zubair Furnishing Company, one of the subsidiaries of The Zubair Corporation, announced the handover of its latest project in the hospitality sector in the capital.

The project is the four-star Avani Muscat Hotel, located in Al Mabela, in Wilayat of Seeb, which is owned by Safari International Group and managed by Minor Hotels.

On this occasion, Rami Farhat, general manager of Avani Muscat said, "We are pleased to open the four-star Avani Muscat Hotel in the capital. The hotel encompasses an area of 20,000sqm and comprises 206 rooms (161 rooms in hotel and 45 rooms in apartment). It also includes a ballroom for events that can accommodate up to 900 people and several meeting rooms and other facilities. The new hotel is owned by Safari International Group and managed by Minor Hotels, which is renowned for its world-class hospitality services. We are pleased to join hands with The Zubair Furnishing, which has a long and expansive history in this field and which was showcased in the implementation of this project."

Mohammed Hassan al Tamari, deputy general manager of The Zubair Furnishing, said, "We are pleased to collaborate once again with Thai-based Minor Hotels with the launch of Avani Muscat Hotel, having previously worked with the group for the launch of sister property Anantara Salalah.

"Avani Muscat is Minor Hotels' third hospitality venture in the sultanate, in addition to two Anantara resorts in Jabal Al Akhdar and Salalah. We believe that this cooperation stems from their confidence in The Zubair Furnishing."

The National Detergent Co. S.A.O.G.

P.O.Box 3104, Ruwi, Postal Code 112, Sultanate of oman

DIRECTORS' REPORT

Dear Shareholders,

On behalf of the Board of Directors and management, I am pleased to welcome you to the 42nd Annual General Meeting of The National Detergent Co. SAOG and to present the Annual Report along with the Auditor's Report for the year 2021.

The Highlights of 2021

Overall Company

The sales were lower and input cost were higher leading to reduction in margins and profit. Company was able to take effective measure to reduce various cost and overheads to partially cover reduction in contribution.

The Company's operations continued safely during the year and Company had taken all safety measures during pandemic, as advised by the concerned authorities.

The Consumer Products Division

The Consumer Products Division registered over RO. 16 million in sales in 2021 a degrowth verses last year sales of RO. 19 million. Higher sales and demand for health and hygiene care products in 2020 have now reduced and returned to normal level during the current year.

The flagship BAHAR brand maintained its market share overall, and it has once again won "Oman's Most Trusted Brand Award 2021" as it is well accepted by the consumers in Oman. Farah brand is also recognized one of the best brand in health and hygiene products like sanitizers and antiseptic products.

The Sulphonation Division

The Sulphonation Division has registered growth in both volume and value sales and grown by morae than 30% in revenue compared to the last year. Despite of disruptions, this division has reported higher profit over last year by 19%.

The Industrial & Institutional Division

The division has reported loss during the year due to no new contract in Oil & Gas business, however managed to get good sales in construction chemicals and trading. The long-term outlook for this business segment remains positive.

Omanization

The Company has maintained the Omanisation rate at 44% well over statutory requirement including at senior management. The Company is making determined efforts to improve the Omanisation at various levels of the organization including the senior and middle levels, with adequate training inputs, continued during this period.

Dividend

The Board of Directors has not recommended cash dividend for the year. The details of the past dividends are below:

Year	Dividend
2020	Bzs. 50
2019	Bzs. 45
2018	Bzs. 50

Compliance with Internal Regulations and Control Systems

Your Company has put into place internal control systems commensurate with best practice and the size and ever more complex nature of the business. M/s. Moore Stephens LLP, an audit firm, was appointed to conduct an independent review of the internal control systems and the Board / Audit Committee efficiently overseas the process at regular intervals. The most reviews during 2021 confirm the Company is running in full compliance.

Future Outlook

NDC is focusing on revenue growth, controlling costs and introducing new products that closely meet consumers' needs. Further efforts are being made for cost efficient sourcing and strengthening human resources.

We are seeing a gradual growth of sales volume in near future, with pressure on cost of raw materials and packaging . During the year 2021 high materials prices have impacted margins and there is no immediate sign of softening of these prices and hence net margin in the coming year could remain under pressure. The Company is making its relentless efforts to control its cost and maintain a better profitability.

The Company has plan for introducing few new products in coming period to expand its products' base and also making efforts to enter new markets.

Oman Social Responsibility Initiative

The Company is a socially responsible corporate citizen and as such is supporting various social initiatives to enhance the Omani Society. Programs that continued in the last years included the well-known "Bahar Clean Oman School" initiative. These programs will restart when it is safe to do so and will do so in full compliance.

Future Social Responsibility

The Company is very proudly Omani and will continue to participate in social and educational programs run by various government departments and will contribute time, money and effort for the betterment of Oman.

Acknowledgement

On behalf of the Board of Directors, Senior Management, all of the employees of the Company and myself, I thank His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik Al Said for his support and encouragement to the industrial sector in the Sultanate of Oman.

Also, I would like to express our gratitude to all the Ministries and the Muscat Municipality for their support. In addition, would also like to thank all the employees of the Company and our customers for their patronage. Finally, and importantly, I would like to thank the shareholders for their confidence in our company and its leadership.

Redha Baqir Al Lawati

Chairman, Board of Directors

Statement of financial position as at 31 December 2021

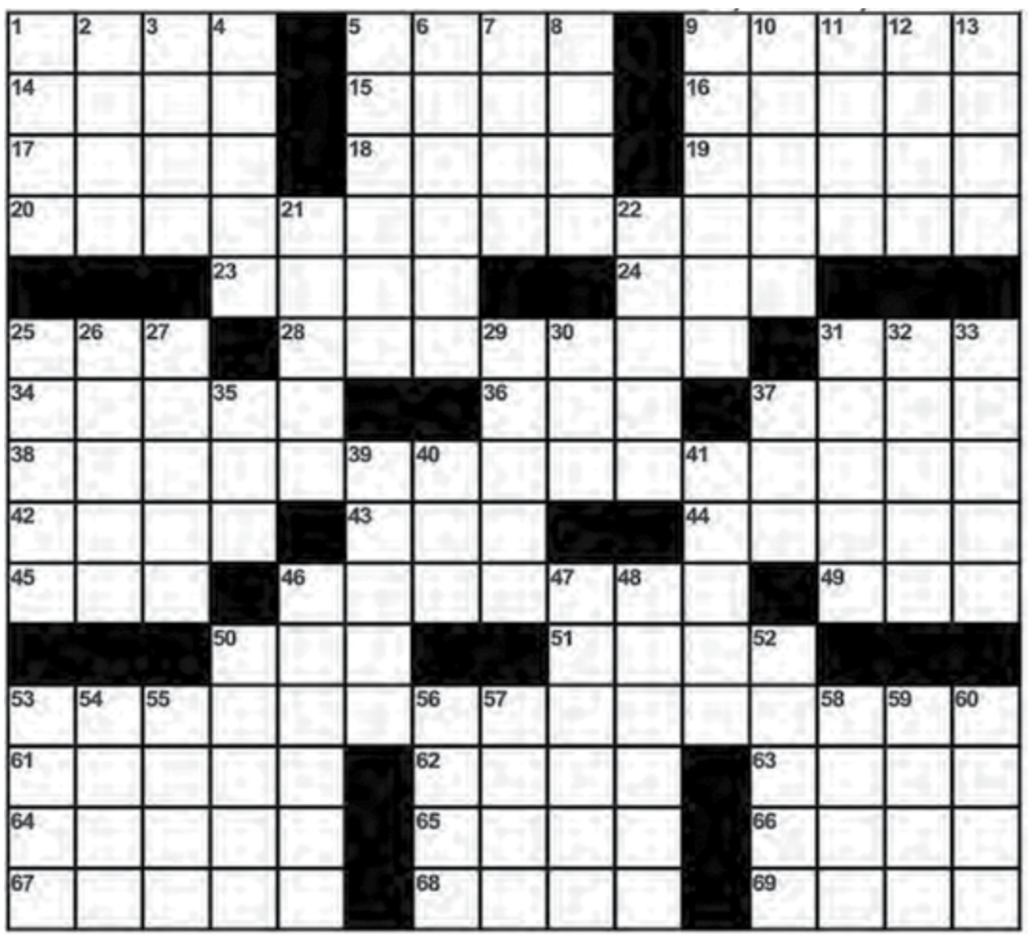
	2021 RO	2020 RO
Assets		
Non-current assets		
Property, plant, and equipment	**17,989,648**	14,930,105
Advance for capital purchases	**11,418**	72,828
Right-of-use assets	**1,278,417**	770,818
Total non-current assets	**19,279,483**	15,773,751
Current assets		
Inventories	**4,040,670**	4,538,741
Other current assets	**304,328**	358,646
Trade receivables	**5,580,420**	5,779,215
Other receivables	**37,238**	37,546
Cash and cash equivalents	**523,380**	966,037
Total current assets	**10,486,036**	11,680,185
Total assets	**29,765,519**	27,453,936
Equity and liabilities		
Equity		
Share capital	**1,701,250**	1,701,250
Share premium	**364,263**	364,263
Legal reserve	**567,083**	567,083
Revaluation reserve	**10,892,250**	7,917,250
Retained earnings	**2,971,770**	3,880,298
Total equity	**16,496,616**	14,430,144
Liabilities		
Non-current liabilities		
Provision for employees' end of services benefits	**765,383**	744,112
Deferred tax liabilities	**2,182,419**	1,679,695
Lease liabilities	**1,096,715**	653,113
Total non-current liabilities	**4,044,517**	3,076,920
Current liabilities		
Trade and other payables	**5,077,941**	6,716,986
Current tax liabilities	**18,396**	136,532
Lease liabilities	**128,049**	93,354
Short term loans	**4,000,000**	3,000,000
Total current liabilities	**9,224,386**	9,946,872
Total liabilities	**13,268,903**	13,023,792
Total equity and liabilities	**29,765,519**	27,453,936
Net assets per share	**Bz 970**	Bz 848

Statement of profit or loss and other comprehensive income for the year ended 31 December 2021

	2021 RO	2020 RO
Revenue	**17,768,828**	20,395,674
Cost of sales	**(13,209,698)**	(14,297,894)
Gross profit	**4,559,130**	6,097,780
Selling and distribution expenses	**(3,250,736)**	(3,563,330)
Administrative and general expenses	**(1,162,180)**	(1,281,346)
Finance costs on borrowings	**(297,123)**	(250,229)
Other income	**89,107**	42,565
Foreign exchange gains	**19**	**3,605**
(Loss) / profit before income tax	**(61,783)**	1,049,045
Income tax credit / (charge)	**3,880**	(157,357)
(Loss) / profit for the year	**(57,903)**	891,688
Other comprehensive income		
Items that will not be reclassified subsequently to profit or loss		
Gain on property revaluation	**3,500,000**	-
Deferred taxation impact on property revaluation	**(525,000)**	-
Other comprehensive income for the year, net of income tax	**2,975,000**	-
Total comprehensive income for the year	**2,917,097**	891,688
Basic and diluted (loss) / earnings per share	**BZ (3)**	Bz 52

Note:
1. The complete accounts will be sent by mail to any shareholder on request either in Arabic or English within 7 days of receipt of the request.
2. Shareholders and investors are advised to read the full financial statements.
3. Certain comparative figures have been reclassified in order to conform to the presentation for the current period.

DAILY CROSSWORD



ACROSS

1) Lockable fastener
5) Hue fit for a duck
9) Toyota of old
14) " ... happily_ after"
15) Continental cash
16) Judge, at times
17) Big name in building blocks
18) Indeterminate long time
19) Crosswise to a ships middle
20) Accepts a proposal
23) Telling sign
24) Buddhist discipline
25) Scratch, as furniture
28) Persevere
31) Cobblers need
34) Belittle
36) Baskers quest
37) Skin lotion ingredient
38) Unwanted welcome
42) Like Mr. Claus cheeks
43) Profit ender?
44) Implant snugly
45) Vein glory?
46) Involve deeply
49) Recognizes
50) Royal flush card
51) Lifted, as an anchor
53) Things issued before peoples "big day"
61) Ferric_ (rust)
62) Connect
63) Turn over_ leaf
64) Icicle sites
65) Clarinet kin
66) Pepsi, for one
67) Nobodys fool
68) "Ahem" alternative
69) Cookbook abbr.

DOWN

1) "SOS!"
2) Affirmatively allege
3) Lily variety
4) Trailer, briefly
5) Relative of 4-Down
6) Oregon city
7) "Iliad" deity
8) Type of cause
9) Pollen-bearing organ
10) Like city residents
11) Dock
12) Raise, as younguns
13) Private organization?
21) Move forward
22) Ultraviolet index factor
25) Computer shortcut
26) Dislike, and then some
27) Aggressive poker bet
29) Metric unit of volume
30) Bunt that moves one along, briefly
31) Accuseds need
32) Courted
33) Advances
35) Using trickery
3 7) Where to get your balance
39) Adens country
40) Sleep cycle acronym
41) Annoy
46) Superlatively slippery
47) Thick-skinned behemoths, briefly
48) Bulbs place
50) Snake that puts two and two together?
52) Legislate
53) Travails
54) Academic challenge
55) Opera star
56) Hardly haute cuisine
57) Ad_ (improvises)
58) High-hatter
59) Congers
60) Cashless deal

NOTE PAD

YOUR DAILY HOROSCOPE

ARIES MARCH 21-APRIL 19
You don't usually ask for anyones help to get things done - not that you'd take it, even if you did. Oh, just buckle down and accept it! Skip explaining to yourself why you couldnt manage this alone. You need to cross this bridge and accept that while you're the very soul of capability and responsibility, you're not omnipotent. Every now and then, a good dose of other peoples generosity is just what the doctor ordered.

TAURUS APRIL 20-MAY 20
Let go of all those what ifs you've been allowing to keep you from doing exactly what you really want to do. The stars guarantee that you'll be smart enough to only take well-calculated risks. So whether it strikes you that this would be the perfect time to try skydiving, bungee-jumping, telling that long-distance lover that you want them to come home now or something equally precarious, if it feels right, do it.

GEMINI MAY 21-JUNE 21
Youre famous for being the first in line to try anything new, and for making it look easy to talk just about anybody into joining you. So when you refuse an ordinarily irresistible offer, don't be surprised if your friends look worried. They can all rest easy, though. This is only a temporary affliction. Its just that the stars are working their hardest to keep you out of trouble - for a couple of days, anyway. After that, you're back to your old merry ways!

CANCER JUNE 22-JULY 22
Every now and then we all have a chance to step into the spotlight when it comes to relationships - to either make one, break one or take one to a brand-new, deeper level. It's officially your turn now, and you'll surely make the best of it. The good news is that there are lots of reasonable, practical heavenly influences on duty who'll be more than happy to help. Your common sense will get you through every situation.

LEO JULY 23-AUGUST 22
You're never happy to see the good times come to an end, but just this once, it may come as something of a relief. You work hard at your reputation as a fun-loving free spirit who'll try anything at least once. But yesterday you woke up in the mood to work. Fortunately, you may have been able to temporarily bank that urge, so your status within your circle is still intact. Now you have an excuse to buckle down and be serious.

VIRGO AUGUST 23-SEPTEMBER 22
Your love life is currently a very busy place - and a pleasantly crowded one, too. Youre entertaining four earthy, practical astrological energies in your house of love, all of them intent on getting you together with someone whose just as respectable, responsible and practical as yourself. If youre single, your chances of meeting someone you'll actually find intelligent and interesting are really, really good.

LIBRA SEPTEMBER 23-OCTOBER 22
This current astrological lineup is famous for beginnings of the emotional variety - and its occurring right now in your house of family, home and emotions. Well. Needless to say, there's a lot going on in your life, even if it isn't quite obvious to others at the moment. Do yourself a favour, though. Take the bull by the horns, and take the first step yourself. You'll be so proud of yourself if you get the show on the road on your own.

SCORPIO OCTOBER 23-NOVEMBER 21
Puzzles, riddles and intrigue most of all are at the very top of your list when it comes to what you enjoy on a daily basis. So if anyone foolishly entertains the thought of trying to outwit, trick or manipulate you, even just for a moment - well, let's just say you'll be able to straighten them out without even blinking an eyelash. With the stars emphasizing your whiplash tongue, they won't stand a chance.

SAGITTARIUS NOVEMBER 22-DECEMBER21
If any sign is famous for always being game to try something new, it's you. But with the power of the stars subtly yet powerfully insisting that you do something new and different in your house of financial matters, it's you whose begun thinking about making a bit of cash on the side doing something you consider fun. With so many diligent, hardworking energies in your house of money matters, you're set.

CAPRICORN DECEMBER 22-JANUARY 19
So you thought you were serious yesterday? And totally unwilling to crack a grin, much less let anything slide? Well then, batten down the hatches, because you ain't seen nothing yet. That was practice. Youre now fully prepared to do whatever it takes to grab hold of the steering wheel and hang onto it, especially if you feel that whoever is currently driving isn't up for the challenge. Go ahead. Grab that wheel.

AQUARIUS JANUARY 20-FEBRUARY 18
Its all about secrets today, which means that for yet another day, you'll be dealing with someone else's privacy issues - and doing your best to guard them with a passion. With the substantial planetary help you've got at the moment, youre sure to pull it off, but if youre doubtful, there's only one thing to do: Call an elder - someone you trust - and get it off your chest. You're no good to anyone if youre not sleeping right.

PISCES FEBRUARY 19-MARCH 20
Still leading the pack? Bet you are. Suddenly, you've decided that rather than being a follower - you're better suited to be a leader. Well, good for you. Bet your appreciative audience agrees, not to mention the folks under your command who are amazed and astounded at your leadership abilities.
See? Just because you're quietly powerful doesnt mean you're not effective.

TEST YOUR KNOWLEDGE

1. Who, in 2004, riding the prototype KTM 250-SXF four stroke, won the MX2 World Championship?
A. Marc DeReuver
B. Antonio Cairoli
C. Tyla Rattray
D. Ben Townley

2. In probability theory, a stochastic process is what kind?A. A guess, still to be proven
A. A guess, still to be proven
B. Random
C. Slow-moving
D. Interrupted

3. Drakensberg is a name for an escarpment in what area??
A. The Swiss Alps
B. Southern Africa
C. The Balkans
D. The Maghreb

Answers: 1. d 2. b 3. b

KIDS COLOURING

BOGGLER

E	E	D	I
G	A	D	I
B	N	M	N
O	Y	O	D

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

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

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

Fire rages from the Economy Department building of Karazin Kharkiv National University after shelling by Russia, on Wednesday (AFP)

Fighting rages in Ukraine; Russia claims city

Ukraine says more than 350 civilians, including 14 children killed in conflict

Kyiv, Ukraine - Russian forces said they had captured a port on the Black Sea on Wednesday as Russian and Ukrainian troops battled for another city and Ukraine's leader said Moscow wanted to 'erase' his country.

The Russian army said it had taken control of Kherson, as its troops advanced and pounded cities across southern and eastern Ukraine, defying sanctions and international isolation.

Russian paratroopers also landed in Kharkiv, Ukraine's second-biggest city, triggering clashes in the streets, Ukrainian forces said. The emergency services said four people were killed in the city on Wednesday and there was now 'mass shelling and bombing' in the centre.

In a video address, Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky said Russian forces wanted to 'erase our country, erase us all'.

Zelensky said Tuesday's strike on a television mast in the capital Kyiv demonstrated Russia's threat to Ukrainian identity.

Five people were killed in the attack on the tower at Babi Yar, the site of a Nazi massacre in which over 33,000 people were killed - most of them Jews.

The 44-year-old Zelensky, who is himself Jewish, urged Jewish people around the world to speak up. "Nazism is born in silence. So, shout about killings of civilians. Shout about the murders of Ukrainians," he said.

Civilians take shelter at an underground metro station in Kyiv on Wednesday (AFP)

'Russian dictator'

Ukraine says more than 350 civilians, including 14 children, have been killed in the conflict and the International Criminal Court has opened a war crimes investigation against Russia.

In his first State of the Union address on Tuesday, US President Joe Biden warned the sanctions campaign to cripple Russia's economy would escalate and its oligarchs were being targeted. Biden hailed the resolve of the Western alliance and voiced solidarity with Ukraine as lawmakers in the US Congress gave a standing ovation to the Ukrainian people.

"A Russian dictator, invading a foreign country, has costs around the world," Biden told lawmakers, promising 'robust action to make sure the pain of our sanctions is targeted at Russia's economy'.

Fight for Kharkiv

Russian troops rolled into Ukraine last week to achieve Putin's mission of overthrowing Zelensky's government and 'denazifying' the pro-Western country. But Ukrainian troops have fought back hard and prevented Russia from capturing any of the country's biggest cities.

On Wednesday, however, Russian Defence Ministry spokesman Igor Konashenkov said Russian forces were in now 'full control' of Kherson, a city with a population of 290,000 people. He said talks were under way between the Russian army and local authorities on maintaining order, protecting the population and keeping public services functioning.

Ukraine's army said there was a battle in the country's second city Kharkiv, in northeast Ukraine near the Russian border with a population of 1.4mn.

"There is an ongoing fight between the invaders and the Ukrainians," the army said on messaging app Telegram.

AFP saw rocket damage on security, police and university buildings in Kharkiv. Ukrainian forces said Russian strikes hit a residential block and a government building in the city on Tuesday killing 18 people, drawing comparisons to the massacres of civilians in Sarajevo in the 1990s and condemnation for what Zelensky called a 'war crime'.

AFP

UK calls Putin a war criminal, urges UN to decry invasion

London, UK - British Prime Minister Boris Johnson on Wednesday called Russian President Vladimir Putin a war criminal and urged UN unanimity to condemn his invasion of Ukraine.

His comments came in parliament, where MPs gave a standing ovation to Ukraine's ambassador in attendance.

Johnson wore a UK-Ukraine flag pin, and many lawmakers wore clothing in Ukraine's blue and yellow colours. "What we have seen already from Vladimir Putin's regime, in the use of the munitions that they have already been dropping on innocent civilians, in my view already fully qualifies as a war crime," he said.

UK ministers have been warning that Putin, his cronies and commanders could face prosecution at the International Criminal Court in The Hague, which has already opened a probe into the invasion.

Ahead of a vote by the UN General Assembly in New York, Johnson added, "We call on every nation to join us in condemning Russia and demanding that Putin turns his tanks around." Johnson warned of further sanctions if the offensive continues, reprising a new three-word slogan: 'Putin must fail'.

What we have seen from Putin's regime, in the use of munitions that they have been dropping on innocent civilians, already fully qualifies as a war crime

BORIS JOHNSON

"With the heroism of Ukraine's people... and the unity of the West, I've no doubt that he will fail and we will succeed in protecting Ukraine," he said.

AFP

Nearly 875,000 refugees have fled Ukraine conflict: UN

Geneva, Switzerland - The number of refugees fleeing the conflict in Ukraine has surged to nearly 875,000, UN figures showed on Wednesday, as fighting intensified on day seven of Russia's invasion.

In all, 874,026 people have fled across the country's borders, according to the website of UNHCR, the UN refugee agency.

That marks a huge jump of around 200,000 from the 677,000 announced almost 24 hours earlier by UNHCR chief Filippo Grandi. Poland has welcomed around half of all those who have fled, according to combined tallies up to Tuesday.

UNHCR figures show that 454,000 had fled to Poland; 116,000 to Hungary; 79,000 to Moldova; 67,000 to Slovakia; 45,000 to Romania, 43,000 to Russia, and 350 to Belarus.

Meanwhile 70,000 have gone to other European countries.

Czech Prime Minister Petr Fiala said on Wednesday that his country had welcomed around 20,000 Ukrainian refugees since the conflict started.

"The military offensive in Ukraine has caused destruction of civilian infrastructure and civilian casualties and has driven many thousands of people from their homes," UNHCR said.

An elderly woman eats soup in a camp set up for Ukrainian refugees near the Slovak-Ukrainian border in Vysne Nemecke, Slovakia, on Wednesday (AFP)

"There is a clear indication that many more people are on the move. They are in need of protection and support."

UNHCR projects that more than 4mn Ukrainian refugees may eventually need help in neighbouring countries.

The UN on Tuesday launched an emergency appeal for US$1.7bn to provide urgent humanitarian aid.

AFP

United Nations entangled in US claims of Russian espionage

The UN opened a rare emergency special session of the General Assembly on Monday to discuss Russia's invasion of Ukraine (AFP)

United Nations - The United States has taken aim at Russians working at the United Nations, levelling accusations of espionage for the second day running on Tuesday, in a Cold War-like twist as tensions soar over Moscow's invasion of Ukraine.

The American mission to the UN told AFP on Tuesday that Washington asked the UN to expel an employee allegedly working as a 'Russian intelligence operative'.

Coming the day after the US said it is expelling 12 diplomats from Russia's UN mission for 'espionage', the request plunged the global body's headquarters on New York's East River - a place already described by diplomats as a 'nest of spies' - into a climate of deep suspicion.

The US 'initiated the process to require the departure of one Russian intelligence operative working at the UN who has abused their privileges of residence in the United States', a US spokesperson said.

When asked if there was any link with Russian President Vladimir Putin's invasion of Ukraine, the spokesperson said that the request, like the expulsion of the 12 diplomats, had been in the works for 'months'.

AFP

Hundreds of thousands at risk as Australian floods spread to Sydney

A submerged shed is seen on the bank of the overflowing Clarence River in Grafton, some 130km from the New South Wales town of Lismore on Tuesday (AFP)

Lawrence , Australia - Emergency services ordered some Sydney residents to prepare to flee on Wednesday as heavy rainfall barrelled down Australia's east coast, burying towns in floodwater, killing 13 and putting hundreds of thousands at risk.

A week-long torrential downpour has swollen rivers and reservoirs past bursting point, causing chaos in an area 800km long. From Brisbane to Sydney, more than 30 evacuation warnings are in place and several dams are overflowing, with some near Sydney under threat of bursting.

Terrified residents have sought refuge on higher ground, in make-shift evacuation centres, or by clambering into attics or onto rooftops praying for rescue by boat or helicopter.

In the hard-hit town of Lismore, Lucy Wise said the floods came much quicker and much higher than expected.

"The rain just wouldn't stop and the water was just coming up so fast," she told AFP.

She huddled at home as the waters rose through the night before grabbing her sleeping two-year-old son, cloaking him in a lifejacket and scrambling into the roof space of their house for safety. "We were just lying there, silently, and the rain was just pouring down. I'd never heard such heavy rain in my life."

From outside neighbours watched as the house went under water.

> *The rain wouldn't stop and water was just coming up so fast. We were lying there, silently, and the rain was just pouring down. I'd never heard such heavy rain in my life*
>
> **LUCY WISE**

"It was a few hours that I couldn't move. I could barely breathe. I was just taking it one breath at a time."

Wise and her family were eventually rescued by boat, but authorities say the floods have already claimed the lives of 13 others in Queensland and New South Wales.

The focus has now shifted to Sydney, Australia's largest city and home to more than five million people.

The Warragamba Dam, which supplies 80 per cent of the city's water, began to spill over in the early hours of Wednesday.

Several western suburbs are under major flood and evacuation warnings, and authorities have told residents across the city to stop all 'non-essential travel'.

"There are quite a few hundred thousand people affected by these warnings that we are putting out now," said State Emergency Services commissioner Carlene York.

A La Nina weather pattern has caused Sydney to experience its wettest summer in 30 years.

Meteorologist Ben Domensino of @Weatherzone described the current storm system as an 'atmospheric river' featuring a 'long area of airborne moisture that is going in one direction'.

Scientists say climate change is making Australia's floods, bushfires, cyclones and droughts more frequent and more intense.

"Despite decades of warnings from scientists about climate change, Australia is unprepared for the supercharged weather that it is now driving," said environmental expert Hilary Bambrick of the Queensland University of Technology.

AFP

Israel Prime Minister Naftali Bennett (right) and German Chancellor Olaf Scholz give a joint press conference at the King David Hotel in Jerusalem on Wednesday (AFP)

Iran deal 'cannot be postponed', says Germany's Scholz

Jerusalem - Germany's Olaf Scholz said on Wednesday that a new Iran nuclear agreement 'cannot be postponed any longer', during his first visit as chancellor to Israel, which staunchly opposes efforts to forge a deal with Tehran.

Scholz's visit, which included a ceremony at Jerusalem's Holocaust memorial Yad Vashem accompanied by Israeli Prime Minister Naftali Bennett, comes amid the geopolitical turmoil sparked by Russia's invasion of Ukraine.

The two heads of government - both relatively new to office following many years when their countries were ruled by veterans Angela Merkel and Benjamin Netanyahu - met as rapidly moving world events test their leadership.

Policy differences on Iran, long Israel's arch foe, surfaced at a Jerusalem joint press conference, with Scholz saying Germany 'would like to see an agreement reached in Vienna'.

The latest round of negotiations to salvage Iran's 2015 nuclear deal started in late November in the Austrian capital and the talks are expected to reach a crunch point in the coming days.

The so-called Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) secured sanctions relief for Iran in return for strict curbs on its nuclear programme to prevent it acquiring an atomic weapon, a goal Iran has always denied pursuing.

"Now is the time to make a decision," Scholz said. "This must not be postponed any longer and cannot be postponed any longer. Now is the time to finally say yes to something that represents a good and reasonable solution."

The original 2015 agreement unravelled when former US president Donald Trump withdrew from it, with Israeli encouragement.

Israel's Bennett has said he is 'deeply troubled' by the outlines of a new deal taking shape, fearing it does too little to stop Iran from getting the nuclear bomb, while granting it sanctions relief. Bennett stressed on Wednesday that Israel is 'following the talks in Vienna with concern' and warned that 'Israel will know how to defend itself and ensure its security and future'.

At the earlier visit to Yad Vashem, Scholz left a message in the guest book stressing Germany's historical responsibility toward the Jewish state.

"The mass murder of the Jews was instigated by Germany," he wrote. "Every German government bears permanent responsibility for the security of the state of Israel and the protection of Jewish life."

Bennett said the Holocaust 'is the wound that forms the basis of ties between Germany and Israel. From this wound we have built significant and steadfast relations'.

AFP

Iran jails prominent freedom of speech campaigner as new Internet curbs loom

Paris, France - Iran has jailed a prominent freedom of speech campaigner as parliament prepares to adopt legislation that will further severely restrict Internet freedom in the country, activists and his family say.

Hossein Ronaghi, a journalist and rights activist, vanished on February 23 and is now on hunger strike in Tehran's Evin prison, his brother Hassan wrote on social media channels.

Ronaghi had vehemently criticised legislation being discussed in the Iranian parliament which if adopted would effectively cut the country off from the global Internet, according to opponents.

"Hossein is still on hunger strike and his life is in danger," Hassan Ronaghi wrote on Twitter on Wednesday, adding that bail attempts had so far not worked and urging the authorities 'not to play with the lives of political prisoners'. Ronaghi was detained a day after tweeting on February 22 a lengthy thread denouncing the so-called 'User Protection Bill' which he said had been ordered by Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei because 'virtual space must be controlled'.

Visitors sitting on a bench, take a selfie at Parvaz park in the Iranian capital Tehran, on February 27 (AFP)

UN human rights experts on Tuesday also issued a statement urging Iran not to adopt the legislation, which they said would 'effectively isolate the country from the global Internet'.

The experts noted that if ratified by parliament, the bill will likely block any remaining websites and platforms run by foreign companies still operating in Iran, require people to use IDs to access the Internet and criminalise the distribution and sale of Virtual Private Networks (VPNs).

VPNs are widely used to access news and social media sites based abroad that are blocked in Iran. "This bill represents a worrying step towards the consolidation of a digital wall in Iran," the experts said, adding the legislation could be adopted this month in a fast-track process.

Twitter, Youtube, Facebook, Telegram and Signal are among the platforms banned in Iran.

AFP

UN inches towards 'historic' plastic treaty

Nairobi, Kenya - The United Nations (UN) is to launch formal negotiations for a global treaty to address the 'planet's 'epidemic' of plastic trash, a moment that supporters describe as historic.

The UN Environment Assembly (UNEA), convening in Nairobi, is poised to adopt a resolution creating an intergovernmental committee to negotiate and finalise a legally binding agreement by 2024.

"This is a day for the history books," said Norway's climate and environment minister, Espen Barth Eide, who chairs UNEA.

"We are about to embark on an extremely important process of negotiating a solid treaty to ban plastic pollution."

The framework for a comprehensive accord also has the approval of major plastic-producing nations, including the US and China.

A 30-foot monument, themed 'turn off the plastics tap' and erected using plastic waste, stands outside the venue of UNEA-5 in Nairobi (AFP)

Officials say it gives negotiators a strong and broad mandate to consider new rules to target plastic pollution, ranging from the phase of raw material to product design and use and, finally, disposal.

This could include limits on making new plastic, which is mainly derived from oil and gas, although policy specifics will only be determined during later talks. The mandate provides for the negotiation of binding global targets with monitoring mechanisms, the development of national plans and financing for poorer countries.

Negotiators also have the scope to consider all aspects of pollution - not just plastic in the ocean but tiny particles in the air, soil and food chain - a key demand of many countries.

The amount of plastic trash entering the oceans is forecast to triple by 2040.

AFP

COVID-19 PANDEMIC

US warns against HK travel over isolation rules

Hong Kong, China - The United States warned citizens against travelling to Hong Kong on Wednesday, citing the risk of children being separated from parents as the Chinese city imposes controversial coronavirus isolation policies.

The State Department upgraded Hong Kong to its highest 'Do Not Travel' warning 'due to COVID-19 related restrictions, including the risk of parents and children being separated'.

"In some cases, children in Hong Kong who test positive have been separated from their parents and kept in isolation until they meet local hospital discharge requirements," the State Department added.

The Asian financial hub is in the grip of its worst coronavirus outbreak, registering tens of thousands of new cases each day, overwhelming hospitals and shattering the city's zero-COVID strategy.

China has ordered local officials to stamp out the outbreak even as studies estimate that as many as a quarter of the city's residents may have been infected in the current wave.

People wearing face masks walk on a street in Hong Kong on Wednesday (AFP)

Authorities plan to test all 7.4mn residents later this month and are scrambling to build a network of isolation camps and temporary hospitals, with China's help, to house the infected.

"It remains our policy objective to subject all confirmed people to isolation at places other than their places of accommodation so as not to infect others," city leader Carrie Lam wrote in a progress report this week.

That has deepened anxieties about family separations in the months ahead and the warning by the United States is the first time the risk has been specifically cited in a travel advisory.

Spiralling infections

More than 280,000 infections have been recorded in the past two months, compared with just 12,000 for the rest of the pandemic - while Hong Kong's death rate is currently four times that of Singapore.

Wednesday saw a record official tally of 55,353 cases and 117 deaths, the first time the daily fatality rate has hit three figures.

The real infection rate is believed to be far higher in part because residents are worried about coming forward.

For two years Hong Kong kept infections largely at bay using a strict zero-COVID strategy, but an outbreak of the highly infectious Omicron variant has torn through the city since January.

The government was caught flat-footed, with few plans in place to deal with a mass outbreak despite the two-year breathing room afforded by the initial zero-COVID success.

The city has since seen overflowing hospitals and morgues, shortages of medics and ambulances, panic buying and a frantic expansion of the city's spartan quarantine camp system.

The vast majority of those dying are over 70 and unvaccinated after Hong Kong failed to raise its elderly vaccination rate despite ample supplies.

On Wednesday, officials said some 500 bodies would need to be stored temporarily in refrigerated truck containers.

Departures by foreign residents have spiked while businesses have voiced growing frustration over the city's descent into further international isolation as well as repeated government policy u-turns.

AFP

NZ protesters set ablaze own camp as riot police move in

Wellington, New Zealand - New Zealand anti-vaccination demonstrators set alight their own protest camp outside parliament on Wednesday after riot police moved to end their weeks-long occupation of the legislative precinct.

Police abandoned their light-touch approach, with hundreds of officers using perspex shields, pepper spray and water jets to force back protesters, who responded by hurling bottles, bricks and paint bombs.

When it became clear police were winning control of the makeshift tent city that sprang up on parliament's lawns three weeks ago, the demonstrators torched it themselves.

"This is not over," one man yelled, while others chanted "Shame on you" at advancing officers as a thick pall of black smoke enveloped the area.

Police deployed an ear-splitting sonic cannon and high-pressure water hoses to help disperse the crowd, although a few dozen regrouped and fought running battles with police on nearby streets into the evening.

A man faces off with police near the parliament in Wellington on Wednesday (AFP)

Prime Minister Jacinda Ardern backed the force's tough tactics, angrily denouncing the violence as a 'desecration' of parliament's grounds. "It was an attack on our frontline police, it was an attack on our parliament, it was an attack on our values, and it was wrong," she told reporters in parliament as rioting continued.

She said what began as a movement against coronavirus vaccine mandates - inspired by similar protests in Canada - had turned toxic and the demonstrators' conduct was 'disgraceful'.

Ardern said the protesters represented a small group whose extremism was fuelled by conspiracy theories and misinformation.

AFP

Philippines celebrates Ash Wednesday as curbs scrapped

Manila, Philippines - Thousands of Filipinos flocked to churches to observe Ash Wednesday, with Catholic priests and nuns daubing their foreheads with a cross for the first time since the start of the coronavirus pandemic. Most COVID-19 restrictions were scrapped this week after a sharp drop in infections and increased vaccinations, allowing churches to pack their pews and physical contact to resume.

Devotees wearing masks began lining up outside Baclaran Church in Manila before dawn to receive the ash cross on their foreheads - a ritual that signals the beginning of Lent. Churches have in the past two years sprinkled it in people's hair due to anti-COVID measures.

A Catholic nun applies ash to a woman's forehead on the observance of Ash Wednesday at a church ground in Manila (AFP)

"I feel like I am in heaven," Lydia Smith, 76, told AFP outside the church where several thousand of the faithful stood in long queues waiting their turn.

"I am really happy even if it's very crowded. It's like the joy of the church has returned." The Philippines is overwhelmingly Catholic, with some 80 per cent of its people said to be believers.

Since early 2020 most devotees have been forced to follow church services online and major religious festivals have been curtailed or cancelled due to strict social-distancing rules.

But Tuesday marked the beginning of the 'new normal' in the national capital region and 38 other areas. Most restrictions have been removed, allowing places of worship, restaurants and public transport to operate at full capacity.

Local church officials gave the green light for the 'imposition of ashes on the forehead' to resume on Wednesday.

AFP

In Cameroon's arid north, climate stress boosts ethnic strife

Maroua, Cameroon - Their homes are a scattering of huts made of branches and dry leaves that seem to almost dissolve into the arid landscape.

A group of men sit on a rug, conversing in the shade of a tree, while women perching on stones under the scorching Sahel sun prepare a meal with the few ingredients they have to hand, as children play nearby.

These are some of the 4,000 ethnic Arabs in a makeshift camp at Bogo in Cameroon's Far North region.

They fled after violence erupted near Kousseri, a river town about 100km from Lake Chad.

The fighting flared in August, then again in December, pitting Choa Arab herders against Mousgoum fishermen in a fight over access to water, a precious but dwindling resource in this region.

The Mousgoum dig pools to capture water and keep fish - a practice that often causes friction with Arab herders seeking water points for cattle, but which this time spiralled out of control.

At least 67 people died and hundreds were injured, the town's cattle market was destroyed and around 100,000 people fled.

Many crossed into neighbouring Chad or headed towards Maroua, the Far North's capital, lying more than 800km northeast of the capital Yaounde.

Mahamat Sale, 60, is the leader of the group in Bogo, who say they walked some 175km to reach a place they consider safe. They have lost everything.

"We prefer to stay here rather than go back," said Sale. "Here, we are tolerated. Over there, the Mousgoums consider us to be invaders."

Climate stress

Rising temperatures and scarcer, more unpredictable rainfall are acknowledged factors in inflaming ancestral tensions in the Lake Chad area.

In a 2019 report, the Europe-based think tank Adelphi warned of 'a feedback loop' - a vicious circle, in non-technical speech - between climate change and conflict dynamics.

This file photo shows refugees at the Bogo refugee camp in Maroua on January 17 this year (AFP)

Climate stress increases pressure on communities, which undermines their ability to cope.

This in turn makes those communities more vulnerable to climate impacts and heightens competition for resources.

Armel Sambo, a professor of history at the University of Maroua, said "When the economic situation deteriorates, people fall back on their ethnicity, religion and identity issues," inflaming the risk of violence.

"Historically, the Mousgoums are the natives and the Arabs are nomadic herders, regarded as people who come along and occupy the land as intruders."

Lake Chad is an expanse of shallow water and swamps that at one time was the size of Lake Erie, extending its shores to four countries - Cameroon, Chad, Niger and Nigeria.

But it has lost more than 90 per cent of its surface area in six decades, reduced from 26,000 sq km in 1963 to less than 1,500 sq km today.

Increased irrigation and human demand for freshwater, along with less rainfall, have driven the shinkage.

The lake basin and its countless islets have also become the main haven for militants from Nigeria's Boko Haram and its dissident branch, the Islamic State in West Africa Province (ISWAP), but the Kousseri area has thus far been spared from their attacks.

Solutions

At a village near Kousseri, Mahamat Djidda Mahamat, a 20-year-old resident, said the situation had calmed down after last year's clashes.

"I don't know if it's over. I lost my father, my house, loved ones... I just want to live in peace," he said, adding that he avoided the Arabs.

"People are going home. We have secured the area," said Bakari Midjiyawa, the governor of the Far North region.

But, said Sambo, what was needed was a long-term system of water allocation and mediation so that disputes between herders and fishermen did not turn bloody.

"Efforts are being made but are not enough," he said.

"Seasonal livestock trails should be marked out, water points should be created for each community and there should be monitoring to ensure proper application of these measures," he said. "The government must become more involved, ensure the safety of movements of people in this region and promote mediation by traditional chiefs."

More widely, the disappearance of Lake Chad - a hypothesis deemed credible by experts - would deprive millions of water needed to survive through fishing, agriculture, livestock and trade.

AFP

RADIO TAISO

Morning movements

It's good to begin your day with a few stretching exercises – call it zumba, aerobics or 'radio taiso' – the latest craze picking up all over the world

When you jump out of bed, taking up a routine of stretching exercises will make you better equipped to take on the strain of the day, no matter what age group you belong to.

Before dashing off to school or work, before getting ready for daily chores at home, or even setting out for a morning walk or jog, it is highly beneficial to begin with a few simple exercises that usher in better mobility of the limbs and around the spine. Some do aerobics, some yoga or zumba; however, the Japanese call it 'radio taiso' – a routine of simple stretching exercises that can be done in just a few minutes.

Radio taiso gymnastic exercises have long played a role in health promotion in Japan, which is said to enjoy the world's longest life expectancy. These exercises, which take just about 10 minutes to do, have been practiced for nearly a decade in groups large and small.

Radio taiso gymnastic exercises are carried out in schools, workplaces and other community gathering spaces. For the Japanese, these exercises are deeply familiar. Participants carry out around thirteen types of exercises in about three minutes to recorded light piano music.

Radio taiso, literally means 'radio calisthenics', a radio programme that broadcasts a set of warm-up exercises along with music. The actual name in Japan is 'Rajio taiso' but it has been popular in China, too, and is now picking up in other parts of the world

Enhanced circulation and immunity

Bending and stretching knees and waist or twisting the upper half of the body can ease the stiff muscle, and stimulate the whole body, leading to the acceleration of blood circulation. Stimulated blood circulation enhances the basal metabolism which helps burn body fat, build muscle, and changes one's physical constitution to lose weight. The immune system, too, gets revved up.

Radio taiso, literally means 'radio calisthenics', a radio programme that broadcasts a set of warm-up exercises along with music. The actual name in Japan is 'Rajio taiso' but it has been popular in China, too, and is now picking up in other parts of the world. In Japan, NHK, Japan's public broadcasting company, broadcasts the programme from 6.30 am every morning on NHK Radio 1, and it lasts for approximately 10 minutes. It first started in 1928 with the aim to improve the health of the general public in Japan.

Benefits

Some of the benefits of radio-taiso include:

- An increase in your blood flow
- Improvement in heart function
- Better oxygenation of muscles
- Faster metabolism - to maintain a healthy weight
- Keeps stress away
- Better mobility of limbs and spine

Designed for anyone

The good part about this exercise programme is that it's been designed for anyone at any age to do on their own, without any equipment required. Everyone from children to the elderly can join in, and there's even versions that you can do while seated.

The programme is separated into two sections – the first part is aimed to improve fitness and the second half is designed to improve muscle strength, mainly targeting a younger generation.

According to a recent survey, it is estimated that about 27 million people still practice radio taiso gymnastic exercises twice or more a week in Japan. The results of a survey show that those who continue to carry out the exercises have a higher metabolic rate than those who do not. And, for the elderly, their body's internal age gets transformed to about twenty years younger than their actual age.

The principle behind radio exercising is rhythmically using your own body strength as a resistance for your muscles. This method will also increase your agility, coordination, and balance. Though ideally performed in the mornings, radio-taiso can also be done in the afternoon or evening to suit your own convenience.

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ARM-WRESTLING

technique & torque

Arm wrestling is often used as a trial of strength, a way of proving how strong you are. However, most people have no idea how to utilise it effectively. By paying attention to the right technique, one can use it to one's advantage, even when fighting against a stronger opponent

Palestinian youths compete in an arm-wrestling championship in Gaza City on February 25 - AFP

It's not just about applying side pressure to another person's arm, and trying to push it downward. Proper arm-wrestling technique involves a significant pulling motion, which isolates your opponent's arm, and places it in a position where you can easily pin it down.

Essentially, it's about making a strong pulling motion and using your back and shoulders, in addition to your arm, to get your opponent's arm close to you and away from their body. Then, rotate your shoulder and body in the direction that you want your opponent's arm to go, and apply downward pressure in order to finish it.

Positioning and posture

To ensure that you use the right technique, first make sure that your body is properly positioned. This involves doing the following things:

Stand so that your forward leg is on the same side as your competing hand. For example, if you're competing with your right arm, then you should stand with your right foot forward.

Stand with your hip close to the table, so that your arm is near your body. This will help you use your whole body when making the pulling motion, rather than just your arm.

Once the contest is about to start, engage your core muscles and keep them 'tight'. Doing this will help with the pulling motion, and will give you a minor boost in strength.

Advantageous hand position

In addition to positioning your body properly, get your hand to a position that gives you leverage over your opponent. Try to get your hand into the 'toproll' position - this involves rotating your hand over your opponent's, so that your forearm is in the prone position (facing downward), while simultaneously twisting your wrist toward your own body.

You can sort of 'climb' with your hand over your opponent's hand by loosening your hold a bit, and then moving your fingers forward and gripping tightly again, once you've advanced.

To help strengthen your grip, you can curl your thumb and try to get it underneath your own fingers. Make sure to keep a tight grip throughout the match, but don't overdo it so much that you tire out your hand. Your goal is to keep your muscles engaged and in control, but not to try and crush your opponent's hand.

The mental aspect

If you and your opponent are closely matched in terms of strength and technique, then the winner could simply be the one who refuses to give up, which a lot of people do prematurely when they think that they're about to lose, even if that's not the case. As such, as long as you still have strength left, try to hang on, and keep the match going.

Remember that if you're feeling tired, your opponent is likely feeling the same. This is where mind games come into play in arm wrestling. Essentially, you want to appear as confident as possible, even if you don't feel confident in reality.

Strength in arm wrestling

Strength does matter in arm wrestling, and when there is a big enough difference in terms of strength, no amount of technique could help you win. To take an extreme example, a professional adult bodybuilder is going to beat a 5-year-old kid at arm wrestling, no matter how good the kid's technique is.

However, most situations won't be as extreme as this one, and in most cases, the difference in strength between you and your opponent should be one that you can overcome by properly using the technical tips.

If you do choose to arm wrestle with someone, you must reduce the risk of injury by avoiding the 'break arm' position. To avoid this position, you need to keep your arm in line with your shoulder, and perpendicular to your chest. This means that you should be able to look directly at your hand as it moves during the match.

MORE TORQUE, NOT TALK

Arm-wrestling doesn't involve any talk between players, rather it is all about torque - the force needed to cause an object to rotate around its axis. In an arm wrestling match, whoever creates the most torque is likely going to win.

Three factors determine the amount of torque on an object - the force applied to the object (force vector), the distance between the axis of rotation and the force being applied (distance vector), and the angle between the force vector and the distance vector.

The relationship between force, distance, and torque can be seen in the mathematical expression: Torque = Force x Distance

To increase torque, either increase the force being applied or the distance between the point where force is being applied and the axis of rotation. In the case of an arm wrestling match, the object is your opponent's hand and their elbow is the axis of rotation. Your ultimate goal is to apply enough force on your opponent's hand so that your opponent's forearm rotates at the elbow and ends up touching the table.

So an arm wrestling match is basically a contest of who can create the most torque.

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ENGLISH FA CUP

Middlesbrough shock Spurs, Man City ease into last eight

London, United Kingdom - Middlesbrough produced another FA Cup shock to extend Tottenham's long wait for silverware with a 1-0 win after extra time at the Riverside on Tuesday, while Manchester City eased into the last eight with a 2-0 victory at Peterborough.

Boro knocked out Manchester United at Old Trafford in the fourth round and the Championship side were worthy winners to condemn Spurs to another trophyless season.

Not since a League Cup win in 2008 have Tottenham lifted a trophy and another hugely disappointing defeat poses further questions over the future of manager Antonio Conte.

The Italian only took charge in November, but has already hinted he could walk away after a run of four defeats in the past six Premier League games.

"We have to give our best for the rest of the season then we will see what is our position and the evaluation of our season," said Conte. "It is early to say something about this."

Teenager Josh Coburn came off the bench to score the only goal with a thumping finish across Hugo Lloris in the 107th minute.

"In between the win at Manchester United and here we got turned over at Barnsley. Football is a ridiculous game," said Boro manager Chris Wilder.

"The supporters gave us the energy to produce a top performance."

Harry Kane did have the ball in the net for Tottenham in the second half only to be flagged offside.

But the England captain may also be again considering his future as he waits to win the first major honour of his career.

Middlesbrough were by far the brighter side in extra time and got their reward when Coburn rifled across Lloris from Crooks' through ball.

Middlesbrough's striker Josh Coburn (R) celebrates with teammates after scoring a goal during the English FA cup match against Tottenham (AFP)

Zinchenko leads City

Earlier, Oleksandr Zinchenko captained City as classy finishes from Riyad Mahrez and Jack Grealish sent the English champions through.

Ukrainian international Zinchenko took the armband in his first appearance since Russia's invasion of Ukraine.

Fernandinho had initially been listed as City skipper for the tie, but the Brazilian, who signed from Ukrainian side Shakhtar Donetsk, offered the role to Zinchenko in a show of solidarity.

"It's not an easy period for Oleks, his family, his country, but playing football is the best for him at the moment," said City boss Pep Guardiola.

Fans hold a Ukranian flag with the name of Manchester City's Ukrainian midfielder Oleksandr Zinchenko, prior to the English FA cup match between Peterborough United and Manchester City in Peterborough, on March 1

Zinchenko and Peterborough captain Frankie Kent held a Ukrainian flag together as they led the teams out at the start of the match.

Once the action got underway, Guardiola's men took time to make the breakthrough against a side sitting bottom of the Championship.

Mahrez took his tally for the season to an impressive 19 goals in just 32 appearances as the Algerian cleverly guided the ball into the far corner from a narrow angle on the hour mark.

> *The supporters gave us the energy to produce a top performance*
>
> CHRIS WILDER

Grealish has had a far less productive season since his £100 million ($134 million) move from Aston Villa.

But he marked his return from injury with a sublime touch to control Phil Foden's long through ball before slotting past Steven Benda for his fourth City goal.

"While we were on the coach on the way to the game, I was sat next to Phil and we were scrolling through videos of (Lionel) Messi," said Grealish.

"After scoring he came up to me and said it was just like we were watching."

Crystal Palace also booked their place in the quarter-finals with a 2-1 win over Stoke.

Cheikhou Kouyate and Jairo Riedewald struck for the Eagles either side of Josh Tymon's equaliser.

AFP

Russian athletes allowed to compete at Winter Paralympics

Beijing, China - Russian and Belarusian athletes were given the all-clear Wednesday to compete at the upcoming Winter Paralympics, which open this week under the shadow of Moscow's invasion of Ukraine.

The International Olympic Committee (IOC) has urged sporting federations across the world to exclude athletes from Russia as well as Belarus, which hosted troops before the invasion.

But on Wednesday the International Paralympic Committee (IPC) held a meeting and posted a brief statement saying athletes from the two countries would be allowed to compete as "neutrals".

"They will compete under the Paralympic flag and not be included in the medal table," the committee said.

IPC president Andrew Parsons said it was a difficult time for the world and the Paralympic movement but he urged competitors to treat the "neutral athletes as they would any other athletes".

"Unlike their respective governments these athletes and officials are not aggressors," Parsons told reporters in Beijing.

He declined to say whether the IPC would take action against any athletes protesting, saying it would act on a case-by-case basis.

Britain's Culture Secretary Nadine Dorries took a dim view of the decision.

"I am extremely disappointed in the IPC - this is the wrong decision and I call on them to urgently reconsider," she said on Twitter.

AFP

Everton suspend sponsorship agreements with Russian billionaire Usmanov

London, United Kingdom - English Premier League club Everton said Wednesday they had "suspended with immediate effect" sponsorship agreements with several companies in which Russian billionaire Alisher Usmanov has a stake, following Russia's invasion of Ukraine.

"The club can confirm that it has suspended with immediate effect all commercial sponsorship arrangements with the Russian companies USM, Megafon and Yota," said an Everton statement.

Uzbek-born Usmanov's USM Holdings sponsors Everton's training ground, with an initial five-year deal announced in 2017. It also has an option on naming rights for the Toffees' new stadium - a deal worth £30 million ($40 million) to the Merseyside club.

Russian billionaire Alisher Usmanov

The 68-year-old Usmanov, an associate of Russian President Vladimir Putin, had already had his assets frozen by the European Union as part of sanctions imposed in response to Russia's invasion of Ukraine.

Everton added they were "shocked and saddened by the appalling events unfolding in Ukraine," as they called for a "tragic situation" to end as soon as possible.

The Toffees have an Ukrainian player in Vitalli Myolenko, with their statement saying they were providing the defender and his family with our "full support" and "will continue to do so".

An update in the Official Journal of the European Union said Usmanov, a long-time business partner of Everton owner Farhad Moshiri, was among the 26 individuals targeted with sanctions on Monday.

AFP

Swiss Wyss mulls chance to buy troubled Chelsea

Geneva, Switzerland - Hansjorg Wyss, one of Switzerland's richest men, said Wednesday he had been offered the chance to buy Chelsea, with the European football champions' Russian owner Roman Abramovich under growing scrutiny.

Wyss, 86, who founded the medical device manufacturing firm Synthes, told the Swiss newspaper Blick that he and three others had been sounded out on Tuesday.

But Wyss wants Abramovich to lower his asking price for the English Premier League side.

Hansjorg Wyss

Abramovich revealed Saturday that he plans to place his ownership of the Blues into the "stewardship and care" of the Chelsea Foundation's trustees.

Abramovich has not been named on a growing British sanctions list targeting Russian banks, businesses and pro-Kremlin tycoons in the wake of Moscow's invasion of Ukraine.

But British Prime Minister Boris Johnson has been pressed on why Abramovich has not been cited, given his familiarity with Russian President Vladimir Putin.

"Abramovich is among Putin's closest advisers and friends," Wyss told Blick.

"Like all the other oligarchs, he is panicked. Abramovich is currently trying to sell all his villas in England. He also wants to get rid of Chelsea quickly. Along with three other people, I received an offer on Tuesday to buy Chelsea from Abramovich.

"I have to wait four or five days. Abramovich is asking too much right now. Chelsea owes him £2 billion ($2.7 billion, 2.4 billion euros). But Chelsea has no money. This means that those who buy Chelsea must compensate Abramovich."

AFP

Australia step into unknown for first Test in Pakistan since 1998

Islamabad, Pakistan - Ashes-winning Australia will face unfamiliar conditions, heavy security and unpredictable, but talented, opponents when they begin their first Test in Pakistan for 24 years on Friday.

Having landed in Islamabad just three days ago to be immediately engulfed in "head of state-level security", the Australians have had little time to acclimatise to conditions in Rawalpindi, where the first Test will be played.

But they may like what they see as they practise, with a pitch often more conducive to seam bowling than the more typical spinners' wickets more usually found across Pakistan.

In three Tests played in Rawalpindi since Pakistan were allowed to host matches again in 2019, 10 years on from the fatal terror attack on the Sri Lanka team bus in Lahore, fast bowlers have snapped up 52 wickets with spinners only bagging 21.

Australia captain Pat Cummins, fresh from leading his side to a 4-0 Ashes drubbing of England in his first series in charge, admitted it would be all new to his players.

"You know most international players - and conditions - but this series comes with a few more unknowns than perhaps normally, so it's going to be interesting and challenging," said Cummins.

"I have a big belief in making sure our own game is in order. We must think that we are in great form since the Ashes and look at that, rather than on the opposition."

Australia's Josh Hazlewood (L) bowls as captain Pat Cummins (R) and teammate Ashton Agar (2R) watch during a practice session at the Rawalpindi Cricket Stadium on March 2 (AFP)

The Australian will not have encountered some of Pakistan's players before. Spinners Nauman Ali and Sajid Khan have come in to replace leg-spinner Yasir Shah and fast bowler Mohammad Abbas, who both starred in Pakistan's 1-0 win over Australia in the United Arab Emirates in 2018.

"I think the one thing with the Pakistan team is that they have some young guys who come and shine straightaway so it's a new challenge," said Cummins.

Teen sensation

Australia have not won an away Test series since their tour of New Zealand in 2016, but have an experienced line-up capable of adapting to conditions.

Opener David Warner and the prolific Steve Smith have scored 15,368 runs between them in 173 Tests, more than the Pakistan top seven batsmen's combined 13,120.

They also have the top-ranked Test batsman Marnus Labuschagne plus the in-form duo of Pakistan-born Usman Khawaja and Travis Head, who both plundered two centuries in the Ashes.

Cummins leads a world-class pace attack alongside left-armer Mitchell Starc and the fit-again Josh Hazlewood.

They are complemented by Australia's greatest off-spinner Nathan Lyon, who passed 400 Test wickets in the Ashes and has taken 95 of those in Asia.

Pakistan's batting will heavily rely on the talented trio of veteran Azhar Ali, skipper Babar Azam and in-form Mohammad Rizwan.

PAKISTAN

Babar Azam (captain), Mohammad Rizwan, Abdullah Shafique, Azhar Ali, Fawad Alam, Iftikhar Ahmed, Imam-ul-Haq, Mohammad Wasim Junior, Nauman Ali, Sajid Khan, Saud Shakeel, Shaheen Shah Afridi, Shan Masood, Zahid Mahmood, Naseem Shah

AUSTRALIA

Pat Cummins (captain), Ashton Agar, Scott Boland, Alex Carey, Cameron Green, Marcus Harris, Josh Hazlewood, Travis Head, Josh Inglis, Usman Khawaja, Marnus Labuschagne, Nathan Lyon, Mitchell Marsh, Mark Steketee, Steve Smith, Mitchell Starc, Mitchell Swepson, David Warner

But their opening pair of Abdullah Shafique, who has played two Tests, with either Shan Masood or Imam-ul-Haq, looks vulnerable.

Pakistan will miss the injured duo of pace bowler Hasan Ali and fast-bowling all-rounder Faheem Ashraf, while another quick Haris Rauf has tested positive for Covid.

It means teen sensation Naseem Shah -- who became the youngest bowler to take a hat-trick at 16 years and 359 days at the same venue against Bangladesh two years ago -- will share new ball duties with Shaheen Shah Afridi.

AFP

Rohit takes reins as India set for new era in Kohli's 100th Test

New Delhi, India - Rohit Sharma begins a new era as India's Test captain on Friday when the two-match series against Sri Lanka begins, as predecessor Virat Kohli makes a landmark 100th appearance.

Rohit is now in charge across all formats, succeeding Kohli who drove India up the world rankings but failed to lift any international silverware.

Rohit, 34, reasserted his white-ball leadership credentials with a 3-0 Twenty20 sweep of Sri Lanka on Sunday that gave India a record-equalling 12th straight win.

Batsman Shreyas Iyer lauded the new captain for his hands-on approach with players ahead of the match in Mohali.

"He is amazing. He thinks from a player's point of view," Iyer told Indian media. He has got that mindset, where he connects to every individual and knows what he needs from support staff and coaches. I really respect him a lot."

India's captain Rohit Sharma

King Kohli

The spotlight though will be on "King Kohli" who shocked fans when he quit as Test skipper following his 99th Test at the end of India's 2-1 series loss in South Africa in January.

The star batsman, who stepped down as Twenty20 skipper last year and was then sacked as ODI leader, led India to great heights including a stay at the top of the Test rankings for over three years.

But Kohli's inability to win a global trophy for a cricket-obsessed India seemed to be his undoing as leader and Rohit was an obvious successor, having led Mumbai Indians to a record five IPL titles.

At least fans will be allowed to see Kohli's milestone after the Punjab cricket association backtracked to allow crowds of up to 50 percent capacity in Mohali despite Covid-19 fears in the northern city.

India's new vice-captain Jasprit Bumrah, one of several possible younger successors to Rohit, said a win over Sri Lanka would be a perfect "gift" for Kohli.

"It's a testimony of his hard work, of his dedication to play 100 Test matches for your country. So it's a great occasion," India's vice-captain Jasprit Bumrah told reporters.

He added that despite no longer being captain, and being short of runs in recent months, Kohli "will contribute a lot in the future as well".

Iyer will be in contention for a place in the Test eleven after his three successive unbeaten half-centuries led India's T20 dominance in the Twenty20 series.

AFP

Britain's Tyson Fury

Fury says he will retire after heavyweight title fight

London, United Kingdom - Tyson Fury says he will retire after next month's defence of his WBC title against fellow British heavyweight Dillian Whyte in London, stating he has "nothing to prove".

The unbeaten two-time world champion was expected to face the winner of Anthony Joshua's rematch with Oleksandr Usyk, the holder of the WBA, IBF and WBO belts, in a unification bout should he beat Whyte.

But after Tuesday's news conference to promote the fight on April 23 at Wembley Stadium, Fury, who has hinted at walking away from boxing before, said he would be "fully retired after the fight".

"What I want to do after boxing is chill on a beach, drink pina coladas, drive Ferraris and live on boats and that's it," said the 33-year-old. "That's what I'll do."

When asked if he harboured ambitions of challenging Joshua or Usyk, he reaffirmed that he would be retiring "100 percent".

"(I'm a) two-time undisputed champion, 150 million in the bank, nothing to prove to nobody," said the self-styled "Gypsy King".

AFP

Serbia's Novak Djokovic returns the ball to Czech Republic's Jiri Vesely during their quarter-final match at the ATP Dubai Duty Free Tennis Championship, in the Gulf emirate on February 24, 2022 (AFP)

Djokovic announces split from long-time coach Vajda

Paris, France - Novak Djokovic's turbulent start to 2022 took another twist Wednesday as the 20-time Grand Slam champion revealed he had split from his long-time coach Marian Vajda after last year's ATP Finals.

Djokovic was deported on the eve of the Australian Open in January and on Monday lost his number one ranking to Russian Daniil Medvedev.

"Marian has been by my side during the most important and memorable moments in my career," said the 34-year-old Djokovic on his official website.

Djokovic began working with the Slovakian coach since he was a teenager in 2006, though they split for a year in 2017.

Marian Vajda

"Together we have achieved some incredible things and I am grateful for his friendship and dedication over the last 15 years."

Vadja stopped working with Djokovic following the tour finals in Turin in November.

He had not been seen as part of Djokovic's back-room team in Melbourne before the Serbian player was deported in a visa row over his Covid vaccination status.

"During my time with Novak, I have been lucky to watch him transform into the player he is today," said Vajda.

"I will look back on our time together with immense pride."

AFP

Athletes from 46 countries ready for Race Walking championship in Muscat

Our Correspondent
Muscat

(L to R) Sheikh Salem bin Saeed al Amri, president of Oman Athletics Association, and Lord Sebastian Coe, President, World Athletics, along with other officials at the press conference

Some of the world's top athletes have arrived in Oman to take part in the World Athletics Race Walking Team Championships Muscat 22 that will take place over March 4-5 at the Oman Convention and Exhibition Centre (OCEC).

"Friday and Saturday will see as many as 1000 athletes, walkers and sport delegates from about 46 countries participating in the tournament," said Sheikh Salem bin Saeed al Amri, president of Oman Athletics Association, in a press conference on Wednesday.

Sheikh Amri welcomed the guests as well as Lord Sebastian Coe, President, World Athletics, wishing them a pleasant stay in Oman.

"As you are aware, the sultanate has been privileged to host this major tournament which is organised by the World Athletics every couple of years. This high-profile sporting event was announced last year during Tokyo Olympics and since then, the organising committee – Oman Athletics Association, Oman Sail, Oman Convention & Exhibition Centre have made every effort to make this event a uniquely memorable legacy," he said.

The event will take place around the splendid loop courses of OCEC, which was selected as a venue for its top-class services and exceptionally accommodative facilities to enable ease of preparations for a highly professional and well-coordinated competition within an optimal time.

The championships will feature seven different race categories – 10km races for under 20 men and women, 20km races for women and 8km master relay races on the first day. On the following day there will be 35km races for men and women, 20km races for men and 10km master races.

Oman will also participate with the national team comprising 15 athletes, and 80-strong crew of referees in addition to 22 international referees to ensure compliance with the rules of the game.

Sheikh Amri said he was hopeful that the event will be a prime opportunity for Oman to reap far-reaching economic, tourism and social benefits by flaring up the local business sectors including freight, aviation, hospitality, transportation and many more. "On the promotional side, the event will be aired live on over 50 TV stations around the globe. This will effectively showcase the sultanate's profile as an ideal venue for world class sport events and actually has the potentials to host similar global athletic events in the future."

This (race) will effectively showcase Oman's profile as an ideal venue for world class sport events

SALEM AL AMRI

From the national team, runner Ayman al Hashmi said that race walking is a sport that demands a lot of expertise, effort, commitment and perseverance. "Our team had started its race-walking workouts under the supervision of professional trainers last year to compete and make national standing.

"The race provides a great opportunity for the Omani athletes to compete against the best runners in the world and get an inspiring exposure," he said.

Al Faisal al Zubair to debut in GT World Challenge Europe

Muscat - Oman's talented driver Al Faisal al Zubair will make his debut in the highly-competitive 2022 GT World Challenge Europe Powered by AWS Endurance Cup this season.

Al Faisal will be spearheading the challenge for Oman-based Al Manar Racing by Haupt Racing Team (HRT). The three-member team will comprise Germany's Fabian Schiller and Dubai-based Zimbabwean Axcil Jefferies.

The trio will be competing in the five-round GT World Challenge Europe series with the opening round to be held at Imola circuit in Italy from April 1-3.

The other stopovers for Al Manar Racing-HRT will be Paul Richard (France), Spa-Francorchamps (Belgium), Hockenheim (Germany) and Barcelona (Spain).

Following a successful campaign in the 2021 International GT Open Series - Al Faisal's Lechner Racing claimed the overall runner-up position and was placed third in drivers' championship standings – it will be a new challenge for the 23-year-old Muscat-based racer.

Al Faisal will be taking part in the Silver Cup class, along with Schiller and Jefferies, in the Endurance Series of the GT Challenge. The trio completed the first of the three testing sessions for the season at Imola circuit on Thursday.

The team will have further two more testing sessions at Paul Ricard and Hockenheim circuits before the launch of the season in April.

The highlight of the series will be the participation in the 24 Hours of Spa from July 28-31. The Belgian endurance classic combines a unique sense of history with the unparalleled sporting challenge.

The twice-around-the-clock event represents the pinnacle of global GT racing, drawing the world's best teams and drivers to the Belgian Ardennes.

While the races at Imola, Hockenheim and Barcelona will be run over three hours each, Circuit Paul Ricard 1,000km will feature a six-hour race.

Looking ahead to his debut in the GT World Challenge in Mercedes AMG, Al Faisal 'was hopeful of gaining maximum experience' while competing in one of the biggest grids in world of racing.

The 23-year-old said, "The decision to move into the GT World Challenge was a result of extensive planning. It certainly has come a bit early than what I expected but the series was always what I was looking to compete.

"It is one of the toughest GT series in the world and I am proud to be one of the possible two drivers and teams from Arab region that will take part in 2022. Flying the Oman flag in some of the world's best known circuits during the series is definitely a high point in my young career."

"With a grid of over 50 cars and the world's best automotive brands getting their best machines and drivers, my debut year will a big learning curve. The competition is extremely difficult and we will take each race as it comes in our class (Silver Cup)."