

COVID-19 and education: Major impact on students' academic performance

Our Correspondent
Muscat

The COVID-19 pandemic has had a major impact on students' academic performance, especially those in primary schools, according to parents, teachers and experts.

To prevent the spread of COVID-19 among students, the Ministry of Education introduced a mix of remote and traditional classroom learning called 'blended learning' in the academic year 2020/21 that affected the performance of many students.

According to Zaki al Muharami, father of two students in Grades 5 and 8, said, "Distance education has had a great impact on our children, but we overcame it with the help of a tutor and developing their skills. Besides, their mother is a teacher, too."

Nasser Salim, father of students of Grades 7 and 8, said, "Distance education has had a great impact on our children, but we overcame it with the help of a tutor and developing their skills. Besides, their mother is a teacher, too."

Ali al Shiyadi, a teacher, noted that the pandemic affected the whole world, including Oman. "Online education has affected students' basic learning skills and



(Muscat Daily)

COVID-19 has created a wide difference in the level of academic performances among students for several reasons, including lack of readiness of the Ministry of Education to move to distance learning and educational staff who are unqualified to deal with the changes

DR THURAIYA AL BUSAIDI

academic levels."

He added that teachers are exerting great efforts to restore

students' pre-pandemic academic levels. "To fill this gap, parents of students and school

administrators must cooperate," Shiyadi said.

Speaking to *Muscat Daily*, Dr

Thuraiya al Busaidi, co-founder of Ashal, a virtual educational platform, said, "COVID-19 has created a wide difference in the level of academic performances among students for several reasons, including lack of readiness of the Ministry of Education to move to distance learning and educational staff who are unqualified to deal with the

changes."

In Dr Thuraiya's assessment, infrastructure such as communication systems and Internet were not ready for an environment conducive to learning for students. "The lack of direct education - face-to-face - for a whole semester affected their reading and writing skills, especially in students of primary

school."

Dr Thuraiya informed that the ministry made efforts to compensate for the loss of time by cancelling some portions of the curricula. "I think the gap should have been bridged by cancelling some activities - such as physical education classes, social studies and arts - and focusing on basic subjects like Arabic language, mathematics and science."

She added that students of Grade 5 must focus on self-learning to improve their skills, which must be done through follow-up between teachers and parents. "COVID-19 brought into focus the importance of teachers and physical interaction in education, especially for primary school students," she said.

Dr Moza al Shiyadi, media officer of Ashal, informed that the platform has been closely following the buzz in social media sites. "We find that there is a lot of resentment among parents over the results of their children in the last two academic years."

She noted that the need of the hour is focusing on new ideas that "emulate some of the global experiences" that have succeeded.

"It is important to evaluate gaps in the distance education system that has been implemented by the Ministry of Education during the past two years," Dr Moza said.

WWF study focuses on threats to global whale populations

Muscat - A new report from World Wildlife Fund for Nature (WWF) and partners provides the first truly comprehensive look at whale migrations and the threats they face across all oceans.

The study highlights how the cumulative impacts of industrial fishing, ship strikes, pollution, habitat loss and climate change are creating a hazardous and sometimes fatal obstacle course for the marine species.

Environment Society of Oman (ESO) has contributed towards this assessment. *Protecting Blue Corridors*, released by WWF, has for the first time, visualised the satellite tracks of over 1,000 migratory whales worldwide. The report outlines how whales are encountering multiple and growing threats in their critical ocean habitats - areas where they feed, mate, give birth and nurse their young - and along

their migration superhighways, or 'blue corridors'.

As a result of these hazards, six out of the 13 great whale species are now classified as endangered or vulnerable by the International Union for Conservation of Nature.



international Union for Conservation of Nature.

Protecting Blue Corridors calls for a new conservation approach to address the mounting threats faced by whales and safeguard

their future, through enhanced cooperation at the local, regional and international levels. The benefits from protected blue corridors extend far beyond whales. Growing evidence shows the critical role whales play in maintaining ocean health and our global climate - with one whale capturing the same amount of carbon as thousands of trees.

Since its inception in 2004, ESO has focused on developing a better understanding of the distribution and ecology of the different whales found in Oman's waters. Echoing the call made in the WWF report for a new approach to conservation for whales, part of ESO's objectives for 2022 include implementing a Conservation Management Plan and engaging with local authorities to implement alternative solutions to harmful marine practices that threaten the whales' survival.

NEW DIVERSION FOR ROADWORKS IN AL KHUWAYR SOON



Roadworks in Sultan Qaboos Street in Al Khuwayr for a stormwater channel have been completed for onward traffic from Ruwi to Seeb. However, the works will soon necessitate a temporary diversion for motorists headed to Ruwi for construction of culverts for the stormwater channel. According to an official at the site, work on the section of road on the Seeb-Ruwi side will be completed in four months. He informed that the diversion will continue until project completion and urged drivers to be cautious and follow detours as signposted (Photo and text Syed Fasiuddin)

Private UK school for girls to open in Muscat

Muscat - Opening in August 2022, Downe House Muscat in Seeb is the first girls' school which will be genuinely connected and overseen by a premium all-girls' school from Great Britain - a great achievement for Oman and a transformational opportunity for girls and young women in Muscat.

Through a partnership with Downe House in the UK, the Ministry of Defence Pension Fund is bringing UK's first independent style girls' school influenced by 113 years of British education to Oman.

Girls aged nine to 18, Grades 5 to 12, will benefit from the opportunity of a Downe House education and be inspired and challenged as they grow into confident young women preparing to play their part in the world. Downe House Muscat's values



(Supplied photo)

and approach to education will lead to excellent academic outcomes, enabling pupils to gain entry into the world's best universities. Downe House UK alumnae already graduate to prestigious universities including Oxford, Cambridge, Harvard, Yale, Brown, Durham, Manchester, Edinburgh, LSE, Imperial and NYU

among many others globally.

Girls at Downe House Muscat will join an elite group of alumnae including Dame Rosemary Murray, the first female vice chancellor of Cambridge University and Catherine, Duchess of Cambridge.

Downe House Muscat has unrivalled facilities including high-

tech science labs, design-technology workshops, fine art studios, music and performing arts spaces, recording studios, media centres and a 450-seat theatre.

Alongside this teaching and learning environment, there are first-class sports and recreation facilities, including a six-lane 25m pool, a double-sized sports hall, a dance studio, full size hockey pitch, seven-a-side football pitch, netball, basketball, badminton, volleyball and tennis courts.

H H Sayyid Shihab bin Tarik al Said, Deputy Prime Minister for Defence Affairs, said, "In line with the sultanate's vision and the National Education Strategy 2040, I am pleased to announce the opening of this prominent educational establishment, Downe House Muscat. I wish the students and parents a unique experience at Downe House Muscat."

Lord Astor of Hever, the British Prime Minister's Trade Envoy to Oman, said, "The British Independent Schools Inspectorate rates Downe House as 'outstanding' in its formal appraisals and the school features within the top three per cent of A-Level achievements. It is testament to the strong relationship between the UK and Oman that Downe House have chosen to locate in the sultanate and demonstrates a keen commitment to enhancing the traditionally strong bilateral relationship."

Michelle Scott is the founding principal of Downe House Muscat, having previously been the deputy head at Downe House UK. Her highly experienced staff will deliver the world-recognised Cambridge International curriculum as well as exceptional Arabic and Islamic studies to pupils.

11 establishments booked for running illegal hotels in Dhofar

Our Correspondent
Muscat

The Ministry of Heritage and Tourism (MHT) has registered violations against 11 establishments for running hotels without licences in Dhofar.

A statement said, "During efforts to monitor compliance of hotels and tourist establishments to the health and safety

measures to curb the spread of COVID-19, the Ministry of Heritage and Tourism, detected and issued a number of violation notices against 11 establishments, including operating hotels without tourist licences in Dhofar."

In January 2022, violation notices were issued against establishments for running hotels without licenses in Muscat and South Batinah governorates.

WEATHER WATCH

	Max	Min
Abu Dhabi	26	15
Doha	26	15
Kuwait City	26	17
Manama	25	17
Muscat	27	18
Riyadh	32	18

PRAYER TIMINGS

Fajr	5.13am
Sunrise	6.28am
Duhr	12.24pm
Asr	3.45pm
Maghrib	6.15pm
Isha	7.25pm



Barka Health City, WHO sign pact for health equality

Barka - A memorandum of co-operation (MoC) was signed between Barka Health City and World Health Organization (WHO) on Monday to improve health and social status and promote health equality.

The agreement was signed under the patronage of Sheikh Isa bin Hamad al Azri, Governor of South Batinah, in the presence of Dr Jean Jabbour, WHO representative to Oman, and several senior officials of the wilayat of Barka.

The MoC also aims to achieve WHO global healthy cities standards, according to a press release.

The initiative will contribute to creating a clean and supportive environment that includes a healthy population, in which sustainable development controls are met in the present and rights of future generations are preserved.

The signing of the memorandum comes within the framework of the Healthy Cities Programme, which works to improve health and the social situation, promote

health equality, and at the same time contribute to creating a supportive environment for health within sustainable development.

Dr Jabbour praised the role that the sultanate plays in the success of the Healthy Cities Initiative on a national level, stressing that "Oman is a pioneer as always, and it is no secret the immense importance that the sultanate attributes to the Healthy Cities Initiative as one of the initiatives that works to improve health through sustainable development".

In the early 1990s, WHO developed the necessary guidelines for establishing the Healthy Cities Initiative and put it into practice. It promotes innovation in local health, having five characteristics in common with its primary objective to improve health and quality of life.

Successful implementation of this approach requires innovative action addressing all aspects of health and living conditions and extensive networking between cities.

700 citizens come together to promote domestic tourism



Our Correspondent
Muscat

The Wadi al Qunoot Hiking Team organised a hike with close to 700 citizens on February 26 in a show of love and loyalty to the country and to promote domestic tourism.

The group regularly organises hikes and camps to encourage people to raise awareness on the significance of living healthy lifestyles.

Speaking to *Muscat Daily*, Majed al Saeed, a member of the group and participant of the hike on Saturday, said, "We want to

The 700 participants included women and children from different wilayats. They walked through plains, wadis and over mountains seeing sites not explored before

MAJED AL SAEED

promote the culture of physical fitness among people."

The group conducts activities under the umbrella of Al Khabourah Sports Club.

The 16km hike started at 7am in Ghubra, passing through various villages of Wadi al Qunoot in the wilayat of Al Khabourah,

North Batinah. "The hike began with the slogan 'Discover Wadi al Qunoot' with the participation of 44 hiking and adventure teams, as well as volunteer groups."

The event was held under the patronage of H E Dr Abdullah bin Mohammed bin Said al Sa'eedi,

Minister of Justice and Legal Affairs, in the presence of Sheikh Ishaq bin Salim al Rawahi, Wali of Khabourah.

"Citizens sang songs expressing their love for the sultanate. The 700 participants included women and children from different wilayats. They walked through plains, wadis and over mountains seeing sites not explored before," said Saeed.

The group's activities involve elaborate planning. Locations are chosen after much deliberation and research. An advance team is sent to study the site and weather conditions. "We are also

careful when deciding how many people can be taken for a particular trip," said Saeed.

Wadi al Qunoot Hiking Team was formed in November 2020. "The idea was to get people to explore new tourist attractions, such as caves, and follow in the footsteps of our earlier generations who left a rich legacy behind."

The group has organised three hikes since 2020 in North Batinah. "We want to promote Oman's tourism potential," Saeed said, urging citizens and residents to join the group in its forthcoming activities.

OOMCO opens one-stop mega service centre in Al Khoudh

Our Correspondent
Muscat

With an aim to cater to all the needs of its customers, Oman Oil Marketing Company (OOMCO) launched a mega service station in Al Khoudh near the Sultan Qaboos University (SQU) on Monday evening.

Inaugurated under the patronage of H E Hilal al Samri, representative of the wilayat of Seeb in the Majlis A'Shura, the one-stop shop has many facilities, besides fuel pumps.

The 10,000sqm project comprises a fuel station, coffee shops, a car care centre, convenience store, shopping complex with global brands, separate gyms for men and women, a children's play area, a pharmacy, a



nursery, ATMs and a business centre for students.

Speaking about the facility, Hilal Ali al Kharusi, chairman of OOMCO, said, "We are proud to

have officially opened our first mega station in Oman as it reaffirms our commitment to go 'beyond the pump'. We are dedicated to grow our non-fuel

services that contribute to the nation's social and economic development and inspire others to do the same. Our objective is to become the most customer-cen-

tric marketer in the GCC in 2027 and with this mega station, we are one step closer to achieving our goal."

Hussain Jama Bait Ishaq, acting chief executive officer of OOMCO, said, "We continue to transform the industry, enhancing both customer and shareholder value through expansion and innovation. While catering to the needs of today's fast-moving world, our mega station has been created as a destination of convenience and leisure for motorists."

"We have partnered with various popular global brands in order to offer our customers a much more exciting experience that takes them out of their usual routine when visiting a fuel station."



MAFWR restoring 26 aflaj affected by Shaheen at a cost of RO192,000

Our Correspondent
Muscat

As part of its efforts to preserve water resources, the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Water Resources (MAFWR) is restoring 26 aflaj that were affected by Cyclone Shaheen.

An official at MAFWR said, "The ministry's teams have begun work on a complete survey of the aflaj which were affected by Cyclone Shaheen in Dhahirah governorate."

"Specialists are restoring 22 aflaj, costing RO155,000. Of the total, 17 aflaj have been completed and work is in progress on the others."

Fourteen aflaj were damaged

by Cyclone Shaheen in the wilayat of Ibri, five in Yanqul and three in Dhank.

The ministry is also restoring four aflaj affected by Shaheen in the wilayat of Rustaq in South Batinah at a cost of RO37,000. One of these has been completed and work is in progress on the remaining.

The restoration project aims to support the water sector in the sultanate and help farmers irrigate their land. Aflaj are considered one of the major traditional water sources on which Omanis have depended for ages for irrigation. Aflaj types vary according to the geology and hydrology of the area. There are 4,112 aflaj spread across Oman.

Ministry calls on fishermen to register for Masirah settlement

Our Correspondent
Muscat

The Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Water Resources (MAFWR) has urged fishermen who wish to live in the fishermen's village on Masirah in South Sharqiyah governorate to register their names.

The initiative aims to provide housing and basic services to support fishermen and stimulate commercial movement.

A statement issued by MAFWR said, "The ministry announces that construction work



in the fishermen's village in the wilayat of Masirah will be completed soon. The ministry urges fishermen who wish to live in the village to register their names to benefit from the services that will be provided there."

MAFWR has set certain conditions, including fishermen should be citizens, engaged in the profession full-time, not committed any violations during the past two years and be registered with the Social Security Authority. "The fisherman must be from outside Masirah and have a lease contract for a fishing

boat," it added.

Registration opened on February 27 and will run for three weeks.

In September 2020, the ministry started the construction of the fishermen's village in Masirah on an area of 4,537sqm.

MAFWR stated that the project aims to establish special villages for fishermen to enable jobseekers to work in the profession in fish-rich areas. It also aims to support the sector contribute more to the national economy.



OCCI chief releases 'Doing Business in Oman' book

Muscat - An investor guide on doing business in Oman published by Crowe Oman was released by Eng Redha Juma al Saleh, chairman of Oman Chamber of Commerce and Industry (OCCI) on Monday at the Chamber office.

Releasing the book - *Doing Business in Oman* - Saleh said, "Without rules to regulate the establishment, functioning and dissolutions, modern businesses cannot exist. Well-designed regulations can ensure outcomes that are socially justifiable and is likely to take care of every citizen."

"The book *Doing Business* focusses on regulatory processes in Oman, its laws, rules and regulations, while elaborating on the business friendly environment," He added.

The book focusses on regulatory processes in Oman and its laws, rules and regulations

REDHA JUMA
AL SALEH

Davis Kallukaran, founding and managing partner of Crowe Oman, said, "The book provides insight and guidance on what a foreign investor would consider for business development and the key factors that will drive emerging opportunities for growth."

"The last two years have witnessed a great transformation in the history of the sultanate. The

way to the transformation has been drafted by laying down a long-term sustainable strategy, Vision 2040 by His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik. His Majesty has identified the true potential of the sultanate to attract foreign investors and accelerate the economic diversification process," he added.

"Oman Vision 2040 lays down in clear terms the direction and growth of the economy which is the vital indicator for the foreign investors planning to enter this market," said Dr Khalid Maniar, founding partner and chairman, Crowe Mak, UAE.

"This book provides a complete overview of the incorporation process of business entities across the various governorates of Oman and in the free zones," Dr Maniar added.

OGCI Climate invests in flare gas capture project at Mukhaizna Field

Our Correspondent
Muscat

OGCI Climate Investments (OGCI CI), a specialist decarbonisation investor, on Tuesday announced investment in the flare gas capture project at Mukhaizna Field operated by Occidental Oman (Oxy Oman).

The project is being developed by Flare2Value (F2V), an energy solutions company in flare abatement.

In January this year, F2V signed an agreement with Oxy Oman, the sultanate's largest independent oil producer, for the construction and operation of the project.

The flare gas capture project has the potential to significantly reduce methane emissions and their associated harmful effects on the climate.

F2V demonstrated to OGCI CI that the project could deliver significant near-term emissions reduction by eliminating methane slip at the flare and improve energy efficiency by using previously flared gas as fuel, OGCI Climate Investments said in a press statement



on its website.

Dr Pratima Rangarajan, CEO of OGCI CI, said, "We invest in projects that can deliver near-term reductions in emissions and have the ability to scale - F2V's project pipeline has the potential to do both. We look forward to working with F2V as it grows."

In F2V, OGCI CI sees an operationally and economically real-

isable business model that can be replicated.

The capital provided by OGCI CI will be used to develop the project in the Mukhaizna oil field and development activities for future projects.

F2V has a development agreement for five further projects, in which OGCI CI may participate, with a potential

emissions impact in excess of 250 kilo tonnes (KT) per annum of Carbon dioxide equivalent (CO₂e).

The project was made possible by the support from the Ministry of Energy and Minerals and F2V's partners.

OGCI CI views the F2V investment and relationship as a catalytic example of how the broader industry can address the potential global 265mn tonnes of CO₂ opportunity from flare mitigation, with an additional 240mn tonnes CO₂e related to methane emissions.

Dr Frigyes Lestak, co-founder and CEO of F2V said, "This project will provide the blueprint for our future projects both in Oman and beyond. OGCI CI's investment is vital to its success, and we are excited to partner with such a highly qualified investor. Our novel business model delivers standardised flare gas utilisation solutions that both reduce emissions and provide economic value."

OGCI CI's investment in F2V is the direct result of its recent public call for proposals from methane abatement projects.

HORIZONS PREMIER FUND

Horizons Capital Markets Office 51, 5th Floor, Way 357, Al Maha St., Al Khuwair Muscat, Sultanate of Oman.
Tel: +968 24826000 Fax: +968 24826099

Fund's Management Body Report for the year ended 31st December, 2021.

On behalf of the Fund's Management Body, it gives great pleasure to present the financial statements for the year ended 31st December 2021.

GCC financial markets witnessed a sharp recovery in the Financial Year 2021 with Abu Dhabi General Index outperforming its global peers with yearly return of 68.2%. The region showcased a broad based recovery with the greatest part of economic growth originating from the cyclical recovery led by stronger crude oil prices as the global economy recuperates from the pandemic. All GCC indices reported double digit gains during the year. Saudi Tadawul, Dubai Financial Markets and Kuwait Premier closed with gains of 29.8%, 28.2% and 26.2% on YTD basis respectively. The returns in GCC equities were driven by listing of state-owned firms, further strengthening of investor sentiments, initiation of large scale projects, improving regional fiscal situation and progress in regional governments' planned reforms push.

Muscat Stock Exchange (MSX) index recorded a return of 12.9% in FY21 after long consecutive periods of market decline. During the year, trading activity on the exchange recovered significantly to RO 818mn with increase of 85.5% as compared with RO 441mn recorded last year. The IMF projected that Oman's GDP would grow at 2.5% in FY21 and 2.9% in FY22. The global rating agency Fitch affirmed stable outlook on Oman's economic supported by government medium term fiscal plan (MTFP), economic diversification program, introduction of 5% VAT in April, 2021, and gradual normalization from covid-19 related restrictions.

Horizons Premier Fund delivered a superior return of 21.0% during the year. The Net Asset Value (NAV) per unit stood at RO 1.219 (After deduction of Bzs 0.070 dividends paid per unit) for Dec'21 compared to RO 1.077 in Dec'20. Fund's positive performance was mainly attributed to selective exposure in Retail and logistics sectors during the year. Your fund is heavyweight on Retail, Real Estate and Logistics sectors which accounts for 22%, 21% and 17% of invested capital respectively. On the geographical allocation, the fund remains largely invested in Saudi Tadawul listed stocks, which accounts for approximately 33% of its AUM in Dec'21 as compared to 31% in Dec'20. The future outlook for equity markets in the year 2022 will be dependent on corporate earnings recovery, continued strength in crude oil prices and further economic growth; while short term volatility can't be ruled out due to global central banks sudden rate tightening. The fund strategy at current valuations is to regularly rebalance to capitalize on opportunities presented in pockets of strong earnings surprises, capex revival and cyclical names.

Declaration of cash dividend for the year 2021

The Fund Management Body of Horizons Premier Fund on 15th February 2022 has approved the distribution of cash dividend of 100 Baizas (Hundred Baizas only) per unit for the financial year ended 31st December 2021 to the registered unitholders as on 1st March 2022

STATEMENT OF FINANCIAL POSITION AS AT 31 DECEMBER 2021

	2021 RO	2020 RO
Assets		
Financial assets at fair value through profit or loss	1,915,729	1,595,679
Cash and cash equivalents	383,379	404,905
Other receivables	1,563	7,465
Total assets	2,300,671	2,008,049
Liabilities		
Accruals and other payables	32,374	8,986
Net assets attributable to the unitholders	2,268,297	1,999,063
Total liabilities and net assets attributable to the unitholders	2,300,671	2,008,049
Net assets value per unit attributable to the unitholders	1.219	1.077

STATEMENT OF COMPREHENSIVE INCOME FOR THE YEAR ENDED 31 DECEMBER 2021

	2021 RO	2020 RO
Income		
Dividend income	59,761	51,460
Interest income	521	1,914
Foreign exchange gain	1,783	-
Other income	-	54
Total income	62,065	53,428
Net realised gain on sale of financial assets at fair value through profit or loss	80,520	40,083
Net unrealised gain on financial assets at fair value through profit or loss	309,542	173,816
Net investment income	452,127	267,327
Expenses		
Management fees	(21,955)	(17,353)
Transaction costs	(2,226)	(3,689)
Custodian and administration fees	(7,204)	(7,000)
Performance fees	(21,743)	-
General and administrative expenses	(5,243)	(6,567)
Total expenses	(58,371)	(34,609)
Profit and total comprehensive income and increase in net assets attributable to the unitholders for the year	393,756	232,718
Profit per unit	0.212	0.125



Saudi Exports Development Authority organises commercial mission to Oman

Riyadh, Saudi Arabia - Saudi Exports Development Authority (SAUDI EXPORTS) on Monday organised a commercial mission for over 30 Saudi senior manufacturers and exporters in the constructions and foodstuff sectors to Oman.

Organising this mission, which targets 70 Omani companies, follows the two countries' signing of memorandum of understanding worth US\$30bn with the aim of developing cooperation in various economic fields on the sidelines of Saudi Arabia's Crown Prince, Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Defence, Mohammed bin Salman bin Abdulaziz's official visit to Muscat in December, 2021.

Abdulrahman al Othman, deputy secretary general for strategy and planning at SAUDI EXPORTS, said that the commercial mission to Oman will enhance cooperation aspects between the two countries, boost commercial and economic relations, and provide Saudi exporters with available opportunities in the Omani market for all sectors, mainly the constructions and foodstuff sectors.

He noted that the Saudi Arabia's non-oil exports reached SAR3.5bn till November 2021, where the foodstuff topped sectors exporting to Oman with SAR884mn, followed by the petrochemicals with SAR709mn and the constructions sector

with SAR529mn.

This step aims to continue efforts of the SAUDI EXPORTS and its endeavours to empower export capabilities, support local producers and exporters through promoting their products, facilitate their access to international markets, and increase the rate of non-oil exports from 16 per cent to 50 per cent of the non-oil GDP.

This is in line with plans to diversify the economy and revenue resources that the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia is adopting according to the targets of Saudi Vision 2030, where increasing non-oil exports is one of its basic elements.

SPA

Canderel

١٠٠٪ استمتاع، بدون سكر مضاف

100% INDULGENCE, 0% ADDED SUGAR



Distributed by
CATERING SOLUTIONS TRADING LLC
Please contact
+968 22060236/237

Oil prices jump, Europe stocks sink on Ukraine invasion

London, UK - World oil prices rallied and European equities sank on Tuesday with investors unnerved by key crude producer Russia's attack on Ukraine.

Brent oil surged more than 5 per cent to top US\$103 per barrel and approach recent 2014 peaks, on the eve of a key output meeting of OPEC and non-member producers including Russia.

West Texas Intermediate (WTI) crude futures were up 3.4 per cent at US\$98.96 per barrel.

Oman crude on the Dubai

Mercantile Exchange (DME), for May 2022 delivery on Tuesday rose to US\$100.85 recording a jump of US\$4.81 compared to the previous day of trading.

Frankfurt and Paris stock markets meanwhile accelerated losses to shed around 3 per cent in early afternoon deals.

Frankfurt - DAX closed down 2.7 per cent at 14,072.50 while Paris - CAC 40 was also down by 3 per cent at 6,456.29.

London slid 1.4 per cent, as investors shrugged off Asian gains.

“European stocks are once again heading lower with Russia/Ukraine headlines continuing to hurt sentiment,” City Index analyst Fiona Ciccotta told AFP.

“Losses on the FTSE are modest, thanks to a strong performance from resource stocks, as commodity prices rise.”

Frankfurt's steeper losses were ‘unsurprising given Germany's reliance on Russian energy’, she added.

Bitcoin gained 5 per cent to US\$43,603 with strong support



for the world's most popular cryptocurrency in Russia, where many investors are seeking shelter from the nation's sanctions-ravaged economy.

Key European stocks indices had also fallen on Monday after world powers imposed new sanctions on Russia.

With no let-up in the assault on its neighbour, Russia has been pummelled by a series of widespread and debilitating sanctions. The measures have sent the ruble crashing to a record

low, hammered Russia's stock market and forced the central bank to more than double interest rates to 20 percent.

The Moscow Stock Exchange remained shut on Tuesday in an attempt by authorities to stave off another widely expected dramatic sell-off.

The crisis has also ramped up fears about supplies of crucial commodities from the region including wheat and nickel but particularly crude.

AFP

New Air India CEO Ayci's appointment annulled, says Tata

Mumbai, India - Former Turkish Airlines boss Ilker Ayci will not take the helm at freshly-privatised Air India after all, despite being named the airline's CEO last month, owners Tata group said on Tuesday.

Ayci - who oversaw extensive cost-cutting at Turkish Airlines - was chosen as the debt-ridden carrier's first foreign CEO in mid-February after Tata group bought it back from the government following 69 years in state ownership.



Ilker Ayci

But a Hindu nationalist group with close ties to Prime Minister Narendra Modi's ruling party criticised his appointment over his connections to Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan, calling on the government to block it.

India and Turkey's relationship has been strained in recent years over Erdogan's criticism of New Delhi's rule in Indian-administered Kashmir.

“I can confirm that Ayci will not be taking up the post,” a spokesperson for tea-to-steel conglomerate Tata told AFP, without commenting further.

In a written statement to Turkish media, Ayci reportedly stated that he had been 'closely

following the efforts to give another meaning to my appointment', without giving details.

He added that it was 'not appropriate to take this position as long as these debates are ongoing' and that he had come to the decision after a 'long and detailed consideration' and following discussions with N Chandrasekaran, chairman of Tata Sons.

Ayci led Turkish Airlines from 2015 to January 2022 and oversaw its return to profitability last year following the coronavirus pandemic.

He was an advisor to Erdogan in 1994 and the Turkish president acted as a witness at Ayci's wedding in 2018.

AFP

Trudeau announces Canada ban on Russian oil imports

Ottawa, Canada - Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau announced on Monday a ban on Russian oil imports, saying oil revenues have helped to prop up President Vladimir Putin and Russian oligarchs and wage war against Ukraine.

He said Ottawa would also be supplying Ukraine with anti-tank weapons and ammunition, in addition to three previous arms shipments.

“Today, we are announcing a ban on all imports of crude oil from Russia, an industry that has benefited President Putin and his oligarchs greatly,” Trudeau told a news conference.

“And while Canada has imported very little amounts in recent years, this measure sends a powerful message,” he added.

Canada, with the fourth largest reserve in the world, is a net oil exporter, but still imports significant amounts from countries including the United States and Saudi Arabia, and until recently Russia too, for domestic consumption.

According to government and industry data, Canadian oil imports from Russia fell from more than 17,000 barrels in 2019 to nearly zero the following year.

Trudeau noted that the Russian oil sales account for about one-third of Moscow's government revenues.



Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau

“Our message is clear,” Trudeau said. “This unnecessary war must stop now. The costs will only grow steeper. And those responsible will be held accountable.”

“We have seen over the past couple of days that Putin made a grave miscalculation. He thought it would be easy to conquer Ukraine... He thought the West would be divided and uncertain in its response,” he said. “He was terribly wrong on both counts.”

Defence Minister Anita Anand said 100 shoulder-mounted Carl Gustaf anti-tank weapons and 2,000 rockets would be delivered to Ukraine ‘as quickly as possible in the coming days’.

AFP



Everything in harmony

Chairman's Report

Dear Shareholders,
Assalamu alaikum wa rahmatullahi wa Barakatuh!
(May the Peace, Mercy and Blessing of Allah be with you!)

On behalf of the Board of Directors, and Management team of Al Madina Insurance Co (“Al Madina”), I am pleased to present to you the results achieved by your Company for the financial year ended on 31 December 2021.

2021 was perhaps one of the most challenging years for the Insurance industry in Oman in the recent times, where the sector faced impact of Covid 19 on the already difficult global-economic situation, devastating impact of Cyclone Shaheen and witnessed the resultant hardening of the reinsurance market and some capacity withdrawals in the GCC. Despite these factors, the local market continued to be extremely soft, where the average Insurance premiums, especially in the retail segment, came down significantly. Oman continued to be affected by natural catastrophes such as cyclone- Shaheen which caused significant material damages across Oman. Al Madina was notified with large numbers of claims in both Motor and Property but with Al Madina's strong back-to-back reinsurance arrangements, the financial risk was well mitigated. Your Company with its strong liquidity, is well positioned to fulfill its commitment to policyholders.

During the prolonged lockdown in mid-2021, your Company continued to deliver uninterrupted sales and Claims servicing through its various digital platforms such as website, mobile app, and social media handles. A comprehensive range of preventive measures were undertaken to maintain health & safety of employees as well as to support customers and stakeholders.

Al Madina's successful adaptation to the new normal and several timely measures to mitigate the effects of the pandemic yielded operational efficiencies that contributed positively to the Company's growth. Your Company retained its position of being 3rd largest Insurance Company in Oman with Gross written contributions (GWC) of RO 44.1 million, a remarkable 11% growth over the last Financial Year despite the challenging business environment. This reflects on Al Madina's strength as Oman's Top takaful provider.

The 2021 financial results delivered by your Company reflect our intent to deliver consistent surplus from Insurance operations so that the Policyholder's interest is safeguarded while we continue to reward our shareholders. In the year 2021, the shareholders provided Hiba amounting to RO 3.1mn to support the policyholder's fund (General Takaful RO 2.5mn and Family Takaful RO 0.6mn). This was done to reduce the deficit in the policyholders account and in compliance with the new takaful regulations.

The overall Profit after Tax stood at RO 1.4mn inspite of uncertain backdrop of 2021, emerging circumstances that accompanied the spread by COVID-19 variants and the tropical storm Shaheen. In the year 2021, the shareholders provided Hiba amounting to RO 3.1mn to support the policyholder's fund (General Takaful RO 2.5mn and Family Takaful RO 0.6mn). This was done to reduce the deficit in the policyholders account and in compliance with the new takaful regulations.

Operating Environment
The listed Insurance Companies in Oman saw an increase in top line of 4% in FY 2021, with premium volumes increasing from RO 357 million in FY 2020 to RO 403 million. However, the Insurance sector, which had experienced good profitability in FY2020 due to Covid induced reduced activity, saw significant hit on profitability as normalcy returned alongside the competitive pressures in the market which pulled the prices down. In this tough economic environment, and the pricing challenges prevailing in the insurance market, your Company delivered another successful year and accomplished 11% growth in Gross Written Contributions of RO 44.1 million as against RO 39.6 million in 2020. The retained Contributions has also grown up by 6% from RO 13.9 million to RO 14.6 million in 2021. This was achieved through strict underwriting discipline, and a focused sales strategy for successful conversion of new business opportunities.

Results from Operations
Your Company continues to deliver stable growth while strengthening adequacy & sufficiency of its reserves. The underwriting surplus from Takaful operations before investment income, mudarib share and Wakala fees after adjustment of commission expenses amounted to RO 4.9 million. This was achieved through Prudent underwriting, Effective risk selection and Efficient claims administration backed by high-quality global Reinsurance arrangements.

Al Madina is continuously improving its core competencies and maintains a healthy well-balanced portfolio across all lines of business. Your Company is constantly enhancing its customer experience by ongoing process efficiency, quick turnaround, professional expertise, top of the line claims servicing and adopting best international practices in the field of insurance operations.

Investment Income
The investment environment continued to remain very volatile and unpredictable with equities and real estate yields being under pressure. In this challenging environment, your Company demonstrated a resilient investment performance and achieved an impressive 28% growth in investment income. The total investment income

(shareholders and policyholders) registered by your Company is RO 1.35 million compared to RO 1.06 million as of Dec 2020. This was mainly achieved due to prudent investment strategy adopted by your Company with its investment portfolio being well diversified across different asset classes with varied sources of return.

Shareholders' profit
Al Madina succeeded in achieving and producing distinguished financial performance. Your Company reported a 34% increase in profit attributable to the shareholders amounting to RO 955K as compared to previous year profit of RO 715K.

Risk Management
Your Company constantly evaluates its risks associated with the insurance business as well as its investments and adopts necessary measures to manage these risks.

Dividend policy
Your Company adopts a well-balanced dividend policy for the distribution of profit and remains committed to delivering value to your investments. Your Company has a track record of consistent dividend payments over the last five years, this reflects our continuing financial strength even in this most subdued market conditions.

Company's Outlook & Vision
Insurance industry in Oman will see the tail effect of Pandemic mainly on its revenue as there may be reduction in premium rates in corporate products too which will pose challenges for insurance industry. We have seen improvement in Oil Prices, which is a welcome development, and we are optimistic about the future. Our emphasis will be on stability and sustainable growth while keeping the focus on Customer service, launching of new products, technological innovations and regulatory changes will be key drivers. Much will also depend on how the Global Reinsurance market responds to large scale losses in Oman due to the twin impact of Covid related claims and Cyclone Shaheen. The rapid frequency of Natural catastrophic events will impact reinsurance pricing in addition to the availability of Reinsurance capacities and issues of risk concentrations. Apart from these, public spending, foreign investment and opening of Global economy in post pandemic era will also be crucial factors for the Insurance industry. Market credit issue and cash flow will continue to be a challenging concern to most Industries. Globally, recovery of aviation and hospitality sector will take some more time which may hamper the non-oil-based revenue forecast.

Our position in the market, combined with strong underwriting fundamentals will enable us to continue our endeavor to provide sustained growth and profitability to all stake holders in 2022. We expect to maintain our market position in line with our projection for 2022 by strengthening the distribution channels and our Supply chains. Mandatory health insurance is expected to launch in 2022 and it will give a thrust to Health Insurance market. Al Madina has fulfilled the licensing requirement and awaits further instructions of Capital Market Authority.

The Company continues to maintain its steady track record of having always been driven by and supportive of national objectives, such as in job creation and Omanization.

Al Madina will continue to invest in technology-driven innovation, IT upgrades, process automation and increase digitalization of insurance processes. The Company, with its well-planned growth strategy is well positioned to achieve stable growth and Operational Profit in 2022 through disciplined underwriting, Process efficiency, focused sales planning, and superior customer service.

The Company will continue to look at growing opportunities within the Islamic finance space to generate stable yield on its investment book and achieve the targeted investment returns for shareholders and policyholders.

Acknowledgements
It gives me immense pleasure to express the appreciation on behalf of the Board, we extend our thanks to our customers, business partners, shareholders, Sharia Supervisory committee and staff members for their support and contributions during the year 2021. We also thank and appreciate the Capital Market Authority for their constant support and their initiatives oriented towards the Insurance Market, with special emphasis on the development of Takaful Insurance in the country. We also take this opportunity to thank the Ministry of Health and express our sincere gratitude to those on the frontline for their unwavering commitment and immensely appreciate the measures taken by the Government of Oman in managing the pandemic COVID-19.

On behalf of the Board, I take this opportunity to express our most sincere gratitude to His Majesty Sultan Haitham Bin Tariq Al Sai for his dynamic and progressive leadership. We are confident that under the leadership of His Majesty the Sultanate will continue to march toward further progress, development, and prosperity.

May God Bless you all.

Dr. Mohammed Ali Al Barwani
Chairman of the Board.

STATEMENT OF FINANCIAL POSITION AS AT 31 DECEMBER 2021											
	Shareholders' fund		Participants' fund						Grand total		
	2021 RO	2020 RO	General takaful		Family takaful		Total participants' fund		2021 RO	2020 RO	
			2021 RO	2020 RO	2021 RO	2020 RO	2021 RO	2020 RO	2021 RO	2020 RO	
ASSETS											
Cash and bank balances	1,883,878	1,132,259	4,769,100	5,954,229	613,196	173,898	5,382,296	6,128,127	7,266,174	7,260,386	
Investments carried at fair value through profit or loss	1,252,303	1,212,211	-	-	-	-	-	-	1,252,303	1,212,211	
Takaful balance receivable	-	-	15,208,309	11,095,636	1,058,288	920,514	16,266,597	12,016,150	16,266,597	12,016,150	
Retakaful / reinsurance balance receivable	-	-	222,890	452,375	649,132	27,731	872,022	480,106	872,022	480,106	
Receivable from participants' fund - Family takaful	-	-	1,563,545	394,204	-	-	1,563,545	394,204	1,563,545	394,204	
Receivable from participants' fund	2,666,587	1,637,332	-	-	-	-	-	-	2,666,587	1,637,332	
Due from retakaful / reinsurance companies in connection with takaful liabilities	-	-	60,664,527	43,332,129	1,647,732	1,434,019	62,312,259	44,766,148	62,312,259	44,766,148	
Deferred policy acquisition cost	776,080	7,875	13,711	762,721	724	53,358	14,435	816,079	790,515	823,954	
Other receivables and takaful assets	587,373	68,512	1,182,090	784,766	501,227	499,722	1,683,317	1,284,488	1,943,000	1,943,000	
Investments at fair value through equity	2,266,624	2,225,974	-	-	-	-	-	-	2,266,624	2,225,974	
Bank deposits	3,350,000	5,600,000	8,025,000	5,525,000	1,075,000	575,000	9,100,000	6,100,000	12,450,000	11,700,000	
Investments carried at amortised cost	6,229,113	6,229,587	-	-	100,000	-	100,000	-	6,229,113	6,229,587	
Deferred tax asset	201,925	135,551	-	-	-	-	-	-	201,925	135,551	
Investment in real estate	5,170,000	5,468,630	-	-	-	-	-	-	5,170,000	5,468,630	
Property and equipment	656,092	729,154	-	-	-	-	-	-	656,092	729,154	
Total assets	25,069,975	25,037,275	91,649,172	68,301,060	5,645,299	3,684,242	97,294,471	71,985,302	122,364,446	97,022,577	
LIABILITIES, PARTICIPANTS' FUND AND SHAREHOLDERS' EQUITY											
LIABILITIES											
Takaful liabilities	-	-	73,349,399	55,351,342	2,023,619	1,802,065	75,373,018	57,153,407	75,373,018	57,153,407	
Unearned retakaful commission	-	-	162,408	160,625	-	-	-	160,625	162,408	160,625	
Retakaful/reinsurance payables	-	-	12,674,381	8,580,189	140,950	892,730	12,815,331	9,472,919	12,815,331	9,472,919	
Accounts and other payables	1,762,731	1,065,584	4,213,971	3,299,072	969,008	775,187	5,182,971	4,074,259	6,945,710	5,139,843	
Charity fund payable	6,327	38,177	-	-	-	-	-	-	6,327	38,177	
Payable to shareholders	-	-	1,259,707	1,198,047	1,406,880	439,285	2,666,587	1,637,332	2,666,587	1,637,332	
Payable to participants' fund - general takaful	-	-	-	-	1,563,546	394,204	1,563,546	394,204	1,563,546	394,204	
Employees' end of service benefits	572,083	531,831	-	-	-	-	-	-	572,083	531,831	
Total liabilities	2,341,141	1,635,592	91,659,866	68,589,275	6,104,003	4,303,471	97,763,869	72,892,746	100,105,610	74,528,338	
PARTICIPANTS' FUND											
Deficit in participants' fund net	-	-	(10,694)	(288,215)	(458,704)	(619,229)	(469,398)	(907,444)	(469,398)	(907,444)	
Total participants' fund	-	-	(10,694)	(288,215)	(458,704)	(619,229)	(469,398)	(907,444)	(469,398)	(907,444)	
SHAREHOLDERS' EQUITY											
Capital and reserves											
Share capital	17,500,000	17,500,000	-	-	-	-	-	-	17,500,000	17,500,000	
Share premium	1,380,151	1,380,151	-	-	-	-	-	-	1,380,151	1,380,151	
Legal reserve	1,167,573	1,072,093	-	-	-	-	-	-	1,167,573	1,072,093	
Investment fair value reserve	863,465	741,124	-	-	-	-	-	-	863,465	741,124	
Retained earnings	1,817,645	2,708,315	-	-	-	-	-	-	1,817,645	2,708,315	
Total shareholders' equity	22,728,834	23,401,683	-	-	-	-	-	-	22,728,834	23,401,683	
Total liabilities, participants' fund and shareholders' equity	25,069,975	25,037,275	91,649,172	68,301,060	5,645,299	3,684,242	97,294,471	71,985,302	122,364,446	97,022,577	
Net assets per share attributable to shareholders	0.130	0.134	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	

STATEMENT OF PARTICIPANTS' REVENUE AND EXPENSES FOR THE YEAR ENDED 31 DECEMBER 2021						
	General takaful		Family takaful		Total participants' fund	
	2021 RO	2020 RO	2021 RO	2020 RO	2021 RO	2020 RO
Takaful revenue						
Gross contributions	41,305,979	36,963,467	2,818,090	2,635,318	44,124,069	39,598,785
Retakaful/reinsurance share	(27,067,768)	(23,584,191)	(2,221,329)	(2,015,909)	(29,289,097)	(25,600,096)
Retained contributions	14,238,211	13,379,276	596,761	619,413	14,834,972	13,998,689
Net movement in unearned contributions reserve	(512,417)	310,715	18,464	(2,901)	(493,953)	307,814
Net earned contributions	13,725,794	13,689,991	615,225	616,512	14,341,019	14,306,503
Income earned from retakaful contracts	447,354	411,931	-	-	447,354	411,931
	14,173,148	14,101,922	615,225	616,512	14,788,373	14,718,434
Takaful expenses						
Gross claims settled	(14,103,250)	(16,515,961)	(3,160,991)	(1,052,242)	(17,264,241)	(17,568,203)
Claims recovered from retakaful/reinsurance	7,280,848	9,678,634	2,744,110	904,057	10,024,958	10,582,691
Net claims settled	(6,822,402)	(6,837,327)	(416,881)	(148,185)	(7,239,283)	(6,985,512)
Net movement in outstanding claims	(153,242)	160,407	(26,305)	(9,504)	(179,547)	150,903
Net claims incurred	(6,975,644)	(6,676,920)	(443,186)	(157,689)	(7,418,830)	(6,834,609)
Commission expense	(749,010)	(1,659,450)	(52,634)	(134,910)	(801,644)	(1,794,360)
	(7,724,654)	(8,336,370)	(495,820)	(292,599)	(8,220,474)	(8,628,969)
Surplus from takaful operations	6,448,494	5,765,552	119,405	323,913	6,567,899	6,089,465
Fees and other income	124,710	114,534	486	403	125,196	114,937
Provision for impairment of receivables	(448,691)	(240,000)	(10,000)	(10,000)	(458,691)	(250,000)
Takaful expense	(239,871)	(449,190)	(180)	(26,540)	(240,051)	(475,730)

Madayn signs cooperation pact with Sohar University

The Public Establishment for Industrial Estates 'Madayn' has signed a cooperation programme with Sohar University to enhance the partnership between public and private sectors and its contribution to the industrial sector, and explore coordination mechanism to promote entrepreneurship in the Sultanate of Oman.

The agreement was signed by Hilal bin Hamad al Hasani, CEO of Madayn, and Dr Hamdan bin Sulaiman al Fazari, acting vice chancellor of Sohar University, a press release said.

The cooperation programme aims at exploring the developments in plastic technologies in line with the objectives of both sides by providing an industrial base for plastic industries in Sohar with the aim of achieving the added value of high-volume production of plastic raw materials in Oman, and thus contribute to providing tech support and industrial solutions to the existing companies, encouraging investments in plastic manufacturing, and providing more job opportunities.

The cooperation programme



also aims at planning and developing a technical training programme for the workforce of factories and companies based in the industrial cities of Madayn within the specialisations and technical capabilities available in Sohar University and Industrial Innovation Academy.

As per the agreement, Madayn will promote Intaj Sohar - the industrial innovation hub based at Sohar University -

through encouraging the companies in the industrial cities to benefit from the available manufacturing and R&D services.

Madayn also endeavours to facilitate access to training opportunities for undergraduate students at Sohar University in the companies investing in the industrial cities.

Madayn shall also encourage these companies to offer scholarships for general diploma grad-

uates to pursue undergraduate and postgraduate studies that meet the employment requirements of the companies and factories.

Moreover, Madayn officials will take part in advisory boards at Sohar University with the objective of expertise exchange and contribution to the development of academic programmes in line with the needs of the labour market.

NBO offers discount on Talabat

National Bank of Oman (NBO) is offering its credit card customers 40% off on talabat. Between February 28 and March 6, users of the popular food delivery app can get 40% off up to the value of RO1 when paying using an NBO credit card.

With access to hundreds of dining outlets and stores across Oman, it's just one of many unmatched rewards that come with having an NBO credit card, a press release said.

Maha al Raisi, AGM - head of Products at NBO, said, "As we continue finding ways to make day-to-day banking more rewarding and enjoyable, our partnerships, such as the latest with talabat, provide our customers with more choice and more perks than ever.

A smarter, safer alternative to



This offer with NBO is a welcome addition and will allow us to provide even more value on our customers' food and grocery purchases."

Providing cashless convenience, tailor-made to meet the needs of its customers, NBO's suite of credit cards have no annual fee as long as the spending threshold is reached.

Cardholders are rewarded with Nuqati points for every transaction they make, in addition to other benefits like discounts on movie tickets, dining and hotel discounts, free travel insurance, and airport lounge access.

Moreover, with the bank's new multi-purpose banking kiosks, customers are able to renew and print out their cards, without having to visit a branch.

cash, our credit cards offer unique advantages that go beyond transactions, while helping our customers live more comfortable financial lives."

Mohamed Zourob, managing director at Talabat Oman said, "At Talabat, our goal is to build strategic partnerships that enable our customers to have the best shopping experience possible.

Lulu kicks off World Food'22

Lulu Hypermarket has launched the first season of 'World Food'22', an annual event that celebrates the unique flavours from across the globe.

The first season of the annual food fest 2022, which runs from February 21 till March 5, provides customers an opportunity to discover unique eats and treats from all over the world, join the festivities, and win gift coupons, a press release said.

The two-week festival, which is held across all Lulu hypermarkets, will give customers a chance to be part of online cookery contests, fun activities, and e-affle promotions. Activities such as live cooking demos, free sampling sessions and exhibitions will be held as part of the event. Special in-store sampling counters will be put up throughout the promotion, offering customers an opportunity to sample a variety of food products on display. Customers can also witness live cooking demos, learn to cook, and receive culinary tips, tricks and tantalising recipes.

As part of the World Food'22, 250 customers stand a chance to win Lulu ShoppinGift Card worth RO50 on purchase of food prod-



ucts worth RO10 from any of the Lulu Hypermarkets in Oman including Lulu online. The winners are selected through a digital raffle draw. Customers can also avail special discounts and offers on groceries, frozen products, Special import food products, pastries, breads, fresh food products, crockery, appliances and more.

There is also a special section for combo meals and ready-to-cook boxes. The combo meals are balanced and complete live meals suitable for the whole family. The fresh and nutritious ready-to-cook meals are for consumers who lack both, the time and the inspiration, for cooking, providing them the taste of a home cooked meal without

spending hours on cooking.

Shabeer K A, regional director - Oman, said, "We launch the food fest every year to take our customers on an appetising journey to savour an array of culinary delights from around the world, be part of some fun activities, as well as take home amazing prizes. We also have big discounts and stunning offers on food products, crockery, and appliances during this period.

"There's no better way to connect with people than food and so we have launched the food fest to connect with customers. During this food fest, every corner will have something to tickle taste buds. This is the right time to enjoy a feast of the world's best gastronomic delights."

FIRE Fit to light up Oman fitness scene

Horizon has announced the addition of FIRE Fit to its portfolio of brands, bringing a new and exciting boutique fitness experience to Oman which is expected to set the local fitness scene alight.

Scheduled to open in the second half of 2022, the five-studio boutique gym will offer a number of signature programmes across several modalities including boxing, cycling, HIIT and a specialist personal training studio, a press release said. FIRE Fit makes it debut in Muscat as a result of a master licensing agreement between Evolution Wellness Group (Evolution Wellness), Asia's leading fitness and wellness

group, and Horizon Fitness, the largest fitness operator in Oman. The agreement gives Horizon Fitness exclusive rights to open FIRE Fit boutique gyms throughout Oman, beginning with the initial development of a flagship five-studio location.

Azzan al Barram, CEO, Horizon, said, "We are delighted to partner with Evolution Wellness Group in this venture and grow our portfolio of fitness brands. The Omani fitness landscape has experienced substantial growth especially in the last decade, owing to growing awareness and consciousness about the need to lead an active lifestyle not just for

good health but for overall quality of life, and we feel that there is a lot of opportunity to add vibrancy to the local fitness scene.

"Having been on the lookout for the right addition to our portfolio for some time, the FIRE Fit brand was the only option that ticked every box for us, because it allows us to deliver a range of specialist classes in dedicated studios, all at one location, meaning we have maximum market appeal. Along with the personal training option, we feel these unique selling points are the perfect complement to Horizon's portfolio."

"Evolution Wellness is excited

to announce the award of a master license with the leading fitness brand in Oman and a significant player in the regions fitness industry," said Nad Myan, director of Growth and Innovation, Evolution Wellness. "We are committed to working closely with the Horizon team to ensure that the FIRE Fit brand is brought to life as a true reflection of such an exciting brand with our unique signature programs and incredible fan engagement. The unique FIRE Fit proposition and extensive support structure allows us to successfully scale around the world at rapid pace," Nad said.

Bait Al Zubair participates in Muscat Book Fair

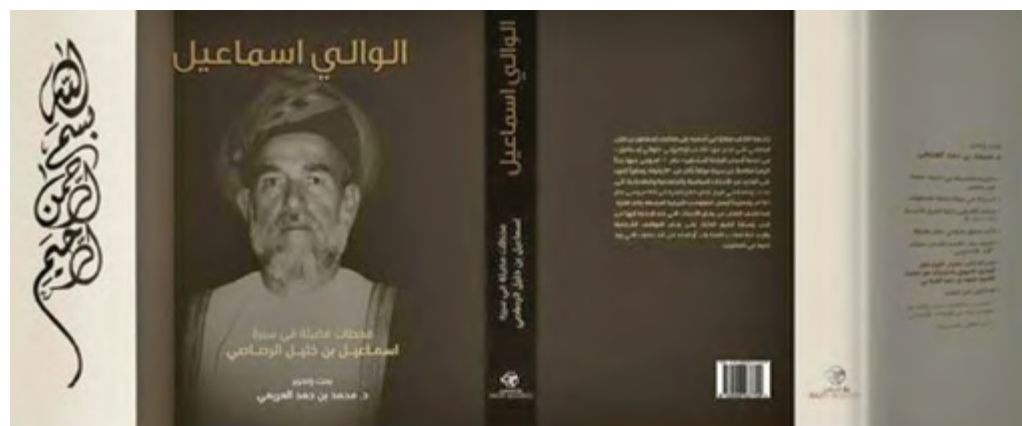
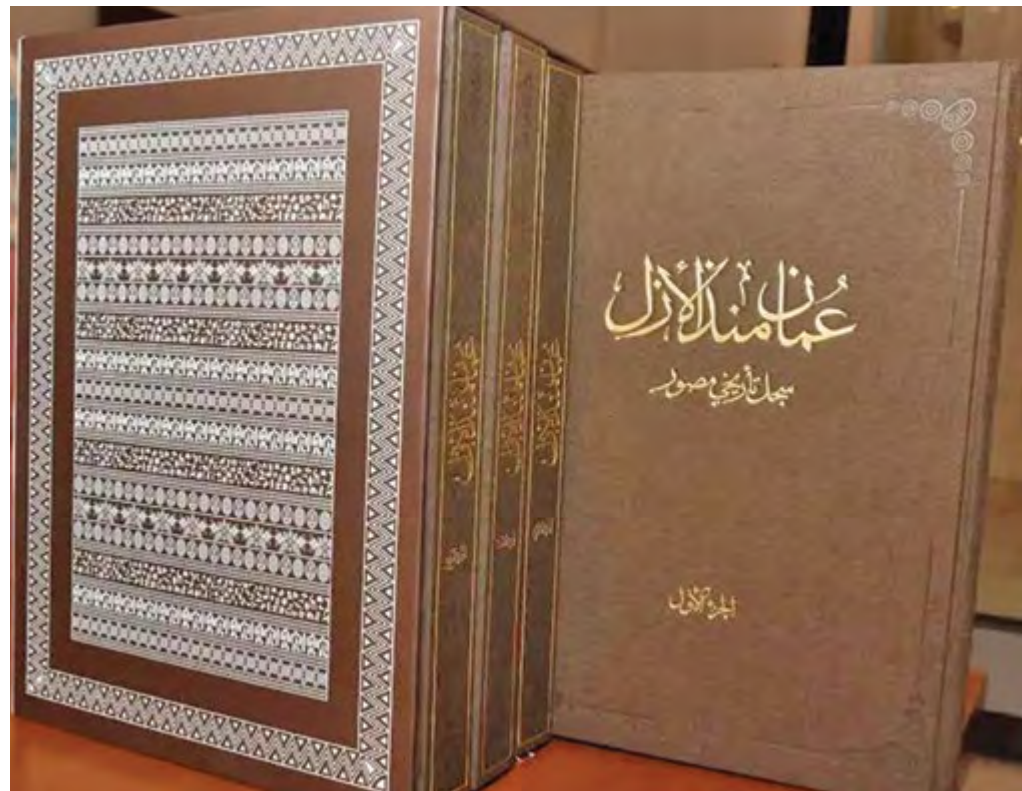
Bait Al Zubair Foundation and Baz Publishing announced the availability of the encyclopedias 'Oman since time immemorial' and 'Oman's Mountains' in Bait Al Zubair's booth at the Muscat International Book Fair (3C 7-8).

The two encyclopedias were launched last year at the National Museum and the Royal Opera House Muscat. They were prepared under the supreme directives of the late HM, Sultan Qaboos bin Said.

The Encyclopedia of 'Oman since time immemorial' is available in four large volumes that tell the illustrated history of Oman since 7,000 years, while the Encyclopedia of 'Mountains of Oman' is available in three large volumes that provide scientific and illustrated documentation of the mountains in Oman.

In the current season of the Muscat International Book Fair 2022, Bait Al Zubair Foundation presents several books in various fields in cooperation with Baz Publishing, through which it seeks to provide an intensive dose of cultural and literary knowledge to its visitors. Baz announced the release of the book 'Al Wali Ismail', which tells the biography of Governor Ismail bin Khalil al Rasasi, which was researched and edited by Dr Muhammad bin Hamad al Araimi, in addition to an art book by the artist Saud al Hanini.

The publications of the Bait



Al Zubair Foundation in culture, art, heritage, and philosophy are also available, in order to consolidate the approach taken by

the foundation by contributing to knowledge production and consolidating its identity by working on issuing quality books

in various fields of culture.

Bait Al Zubair booth also holds signature ceremonies for a number of these publications.

Al Omaniya Financial Services (SAOG)
Values stronger than money

P.O. Box 1087, Jibroo, PC 114, Sultanate of Oman. Tel: 24724700, Fax: 24813258

NOTICE OF INVITATION TO ATTEND THE ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING

The Board of Directors of Al Omaniya Financial Services (SAOG) have pleasure to invite all Shareholders to attend the Annual General meeting of the company, which will be held on Monday, 20 March 2022 at 5.00 pm at Crowne Plaza Muscat, Al Mandaloon Hall and virtual attendance through website (www.mcd.gov.om) for AGM Meeting. In the event that the quorum requirement is not met, a second meeting of the Annual General Meeting shall be held on Sunday, 27 March 2022 to discuss the following:-

Agenda:

- Review and approval of the Board of Directors Report for the year ended 31st December 2021.
- Review and approval of the Corporate Governance Report for the year ended 31st December 2021.
- Review and approval of Auditor's report and the audited annual financial statements for the year 2021.
- Approval of the Board recommendation to distribute cash dividend of 7 baisas per share of the paid up capital as of the AGM date.
- Approval of the Board recommendation to distribute (5 bonds for every 100 shares) unsecured non convertible redeemable bonus stock bonds to share holders as on AGM date, a total of 14,596,759 bonds (value 100 baisas per bond) to be paid from Retained Earnings (as per the attached explanatory note).
- To ratify the sitting fees that has been paid to the Board and it's sub-committees during last year and to determine the sitting fees for the current year (as per attachment).
- Inform the annual general meeting on the Related Party Transactions that took place during the financial year 2021 (as per attachment).
- To appoint the External Auditors for the financial year 2022 and agree their fees.
- Approve the criteria to appraise the company's Board of Directors during the term of the Board.
- To appoint an independent third party to evaluate the Board's performance during the coming tenure and agree their fees.

As per the Article of Association of the company and the rules to use of the new electronic means, to inform you with the following:

- Only natural person can authorize any person (except board members) to attend the meetings and vote on his / her behalf through the electronic portal. The natural person must have an investor number at Muscat Clearing and Depository Company (MCD).C).
- The voting on any of the agenda items shall start (3) days prior the meetings and finish at the day of the meeting. Any changes to the holding shares (plus/minus) the voting shall be cancelled and need to revoke on the day of the meeting.

For further information, please contact Mr. Braik Al Amri on phone No.24724777 / 24724700 Fax No.24813258.

LEGAL ADVISOR

EXTERNAL AUDITOR

CHAIRMAN TO THE BOARD

Sayyid Theyazin visits Stemazone pavilion at MIBF

H H Sayyid Theyazin bin Hai-
tham al Said, Minister of Culture,
Sports and Youth, was among
the distinguished guests who vis-
ited Khimji Ramdas (KR)
Eshraqa's Stemazone pavilion at
the 26th Muscat International
Book Fair (MIBF) at Oman Con-
vention and Exhibition Centre
(OCEC).

Students interested in
Stemazone's avant-garde educa-
tional programme have been
making a beeline for its interac-
tive booth 1K1 and 1K2 at the fair
- open until March 5 - where
they are getting acquainted with
its hybrid learning experience, a
press release said.

Stemazone encourages chil-
dren to explore the vibrant world
of science, technology, engineer-
ing, arts, and math (STEAM)
through a physical centre located
at the Children's Museum, and a
state-of-the-art online learning
system, available at
www.stemazoneoman.om. Both
experiences offer delightful and
engaging sessions of creativity
and learning for children be-
tween 6 to 16 years, with pro-
grammes designed to draw their
focus towards development of



skills and knowledge in coding,
electronics, 3D design, IoT, smart
cities, and design thinking. The
sessions also aim at building

confidence, teaching public
speaking and imbibing leader-
ship, teamwork, and collabora-
tion skills.

Speaking on the sidelines of
the MIBF - Nailesh Khimji, direc-
tor - Khimji Ramdas Group,
stated, "Considered one of the

most important regional fairs in
the Arab world - given the in-
creasing number and diversity of
titles and publications on display



- the Muscat International Book
Fair is an unmissable cultural
forum that has returned after a
one year hiatus. T
"he sheer strength in the num-
ber of children and parents
swarming Eshraqa's Stemazone
booth at the Fair is a testimony to
the exceptional turnout it is wit-
nessing this year. We hope to
have even more children visit our
booth and reimagine the world of
science, technology, engineering,
arts, and math, while partaking in
the exciting activities we have
lined up especially for them, in-
cluding our workshops on Cod-

ing and Robotics."
Discussing the significance of
Stemazone, he elaborated, "Our
innovative STEAM programme
aims to teach and inspire young
minds to imbibe skills required in
the local and global labour mar-
ket, in line with Oman Vision
2040. This comes within the ob-
jectives of the national agenda
that aims to build an effective
ecosystem of Omani talent when
it comes to scientific research,
creativity and innovation,
through interactive learning ses-
sions and workshops."

Italy opens up for new tourist visas

Considering the favourable
evolution of the epidemiologi-
cal situation at the interna-
tional and national levels,
following the recent European
Union recommendations, the
Italian Minister of Health, H E
Roberto Speranza, issued new
travel rules that open up the
Italian territory for tourism to
citizens of foreign countries,
including the Sultanate of
Oman.

The entry requirements
from all EU and non-EU coun-
tries as of March 1 states that
adult travellers will have to
complete the digital Passen-
ger Locator Form (PLF) to be
shown to the travel provider,
and present COVID-19 official
certifications (certificate of

vaccination, or certificate of
recovery or negative molecu-
lar or antigenic test, a press
release said.

Travellers who do not com-
ply with the above-mentioned
requirements can enter the
Italian territory, but must un-
dergo a five-day quarantine
period at the address indi-
cated in the PLF. The quaran-
tine will finish after taking a
PCR test or a rapid test with a
negative result.

Holders of visas will remain
subject to the said conditions
at their sole individual respon-
sibility, so that the Italian visa
offices will not have to check
the appropriate health docu-
mentation during the exami-
nation of visa applications.

GOjuniors Tour 2022 held at Ghala Golf Club

The second event of the 2022
GOjuniors Tour took place at
Ghala Golf Club last weekend.

Established by the Oman Golf
Association and supported by
Oman LNG and all the golf clubs
in Muscat, the GOjuniors Tour
provides an opportunity for jun-
ior golfers to compete and to
meet golfers from other clubs.
Besides the ten events held
throughout the year there is a
running Order of Merit across
the three age divisions, a press
release said.

In the oldest age group, the
under 18's, there were three play-
ers tied in the gross category (the
score without any golfing handi-
cap adjustment) with rounds of
82. In this instance the tie is re-
solved by looking at the players
last 9 holes. After doing this, it
was Junior National Team player
Ayman al Busaidi who took the
win ahead of James Acebedo



and Rayaah Ahmed.

Ayman's round had started
poorly with a first 9 holes of 45.
However, he rallied well on the
back 9 holes to post a one over
par 37 for a total of 82 and the
top spot in the gross category on
'countback'. There was some
consolation for James who, when
taking handicaps into account,

was awarded the best net score
with a level par net 72.

In the under-15 division, the
winners of the first event at Al
Mouj Golf both claimed the
same positions at Ghala Golf
Club. In the gross division Adam
al Barwani narrowly held off
Mahir Sampat (96) and Juan
Moreno (96) with his round of

94 to claim victory. The net divi-
sion was a little more clear cut
with Pransh Jagwani once again
taking the top spot with a very
fine nine under par net 63.

Once again, the under-13 divi-
sion attracted the biggest field
and whilst their older counter-
parts competed over the full 18
holes of Ghala Golf Club, the

younger golfers took on just the
first 9 holes. In the gross division
Krish Pawani held his nerve to
par his final hole and edge out Ja-
cobo Moreno by a single stroke.
With handicaps factored in it
was Mohib al Kathiri who won
the net division on countback
over Jacobo.

Jamie Wood, technical direc-
tor of the Oman Golf Associa-
tion, said, "Our thanks go to
Ghala Golf Club for hosting us
and to our programme sponsor,
Oman LNG, and partners, Sohar
Aluminium and Moore, for al-
lowing us to offer this fantastic
opportunity to all of our junior
golfers. As the season pro-
gresses, I'm sure the GOjuniors
Tour Order of Merit will become
hotly contested with all of the
players trying for the top spot".

The 2022 GOjuniors Tour
features ten events spread
around the courses in Muscat.

Huawei's Super Device now available on Huawei PCs

Huawei announced the global
roll out of Super Device concept
for Smart Office, a new solution
that greatly enhances cross-
device connectivity and collabora-
tion amongst supported Hua-
wei devices.

The software-driven feature
arrives in line with Huawei's push
towards a Seamless AI Life, which
the company envisions across
five major scenarios - Health and
Fitness, Easy Travel, Smart Office,
Entertainment, Smart Home, a
press release said.

As one of the key scenarios of
Huawei's Seamless AI Life, Huawei
brings the vision of Boundless
Creation and Seamless Commu-
nication to the Smart Office, aiming
to enable a digitally efficient work
life experience by synergising the
two core Huawei capabilities - Cross-
Device Collaboration and Ecosys-
tem Integration.

Cross-device collaboration
enables users to connect multi-
ple devices together into a singular
experience, while ecosystem
integration closes the gap be-
tween Windows and mobile
platforms, stimulating creativity
and improving communication
efficiency.

Thanks to the Super Device



interface in the control panel, the
connection between PCs, smart-
phones, tablets, monitors and
smart TV is established by a simple
drag-and-drop.

Super Device pairing is initi-
ated by simply clicking on the
control panel icon at the lower-
right corner of the PC, and drag-
ging the icons of nearby devices
towards the PC icon.

As consumers own more and
more smart devices, users often
find themselves juggling two dif-
ferent and fragmented ecosys-
tems - laptops for work and
smartphones for entertainment.

With no single device fully
supporting all of a user's daily
needs, the ability for devices to

leverage each other's strengths
and create a single unified expe-
rience has become more impor-
tant than ever.

This is especially important
with the rising demand for main-
taining productivity while con-
sumers are on the move.

Cross-Device Collaboration
makes connection between de-
vices more seamless and fuss-
free.

Today, Huawei is set to elimi-
nate inter-device barriers by
bringing the Super Device, to the
Smart Office, allowing all com-
patible devices to work as one.

Ecosystem Integration is an-
other core capability of Smart
Office.

With mobile apps excelling in
content consumption needs, the
Huawei Mobile App Engine
brings access of AppGallery's
wealth of popular productivity
and entertainment apps to
Huawei laptops.

Now, the Super Device is
available on Huawei PCs via the
Super Device's easy drag-to-
connect interface in the PC's
Control Centre, enabling speedy
access to your phone images and
files, as well as quick and con-
venient smart screen connectiv-
ity for presentations.

This allows a focused and ef-
ficient workflow for the user who
is now able to process tasks with
ease across devices.

MEC holds graduation ceremony for 2020 batch

Middle East College (MEC) cel-
ebrated the graduation of its
2020 batch on February 26, at
the MEC Student Hub, Knowl-
edge Oasis Muscat.

Around 1,219 students gradu-
ated across several Undergradu-
ate and Postgraduate progra-
mmes in Engineering, Science
and Technology, Business and
Management, and Archives and
Records Management.

The programmes they gradu-
ated from, were offered in aca-
demic collaboration with
Coventry University, UK, Breda
University for Applied Sciences,
Netherlands and the University
of Wolverhampton, UK, a press
release said.

Held under the guidelines is-
sued by the Supreme Committee
and the Ministry of Higher Edu-
cation, Research, and Innovation,
the graduation was attended by
members of the management,
members of the College Board,
parents of graduates, faculty
members, academic support
staff, and the professional服-
ices team.

Dr Kiran G R, Dean of MEC,
congratulated the graduates on
their achievements and said,
"You have undertaken your aca-
demic journey during one of the
most difficult times that human-



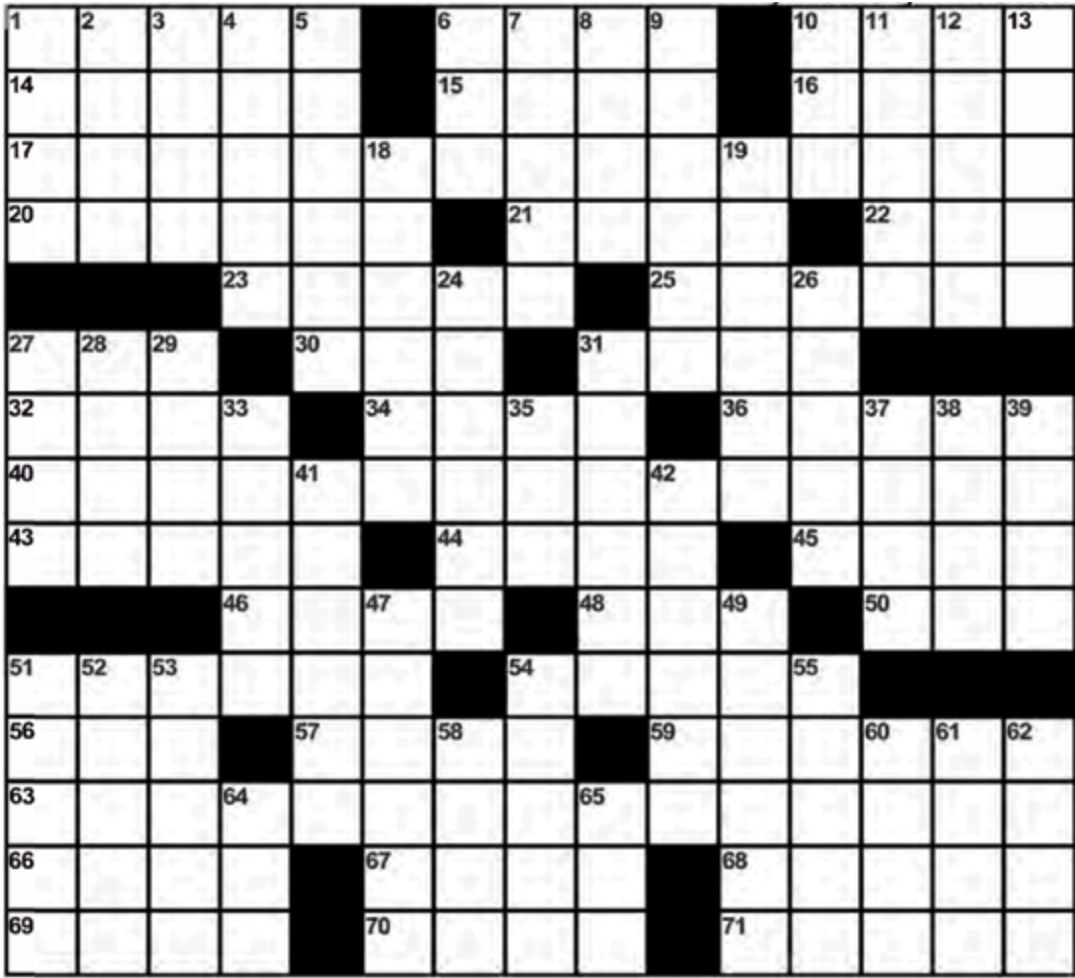
ity has ever witnessed. Yet your
agility and capability to embrace
change have made you success-
ful.

You have received support
and care from your parents, fam-
ily, and close relatives, perhaps
unlike any other batch. You are
hence a blessed batch. Spread
your wings and fly, high and far."
Jawaher Rabia Mubarak al
Qarmashi, a graduate in Archives
and Records Management and
the winner of the Best Outgoing

Student Award in her batch, said,
"All praise is due to Allah, I won
the Best Outgoing Student
Award and graduated with high
grades. I would like to share my
happiness with my family and
colleagues.

We will not stop here, and our
educational journey shall con-
tinue. Thanks to Middle East Col-
lege, today we are well-equipped
and are ready to develop and
contribute to the development of
our beloved country, Oman."

DAILY CROSSWORD



ACROSS

1) Disorderly, fussy outbursts
6) Part of an escalator
10) Attempt, in slang
14) Heep created by Dickens
15) Blanched
16) More than a gofer
17) Set the date, in a way
20) Jacket part
21) Break stone
22) Wrinkle maker
23) Providing details of current events
25) Vodka cocktail
27) Bleat
30) Part of two sts.
31) Pin one's hopes (on)
32) Arm bone
34) Go upward
36) Donor's offering
40) Fall short
43) Get ready to drive
44) Certain breads
45) Goes quickly
46) Pertness
48) Do something
50) It can cause quite a bang
51) Rip off
54) Community

standards
56) Prepare to pull the trigger
57) Frau's partner
59) Constructs, as a building
63) Makes a soccer faux pas
66) South American monkey
67) Where Marco Polo explored
68) Bring together
69) Restrain
70) Put an edge on
71) Guided a gondola

18) New Jersey city
19) Final words (var.)
24) Many Colorado tourists
26) Gold and frankincense complement
27) Sacrifice between the lines
28) Ubiquitous lotion ingredient
29) Poker chip, sometimes
31) Prepare, as leftovers
33) Charm
35) Muddy home
37) Dressage display
3 8) Gulf off the coast of Yemen
39) Cardinal's residence
41) Cochise, famously
42) Have nothing to do with
47) It may be near a slide
49) Shredded
51) Willingly avoids meals
52) Allowed by the courts
53) Be theatrical
54) "Sesame Street" resident
55) Music-score sign

58) Foolhardy and hasty
60) Make like a snake
61) England's national art gallery
62) Coaster in the cold
64) Backboard attachment
65) Common grain unit

NOTE PAD

YOUR DAILY HOROSCOPE

 **ARIES** MARCH 21-APRIL 19

Excessive? Unwilling to stop at just one of anything? You bet. The sky's the limit for you. You won't be short on company, however. Your personal fire persuades others to come and bask in your glow. Add the stars' charming input, and you'll be downright impossible to refuse, even to a certain person who's recently tried to put some distance between you two.

 **LEO** JULY 23-AUGUST 22

If you're feeling sluggish in the morning, don't despair. The universe is sending a huge dose of high energy your way, and it should hit right after lunchtime. If you were planning to go to the gym in the morning, you might want to try to switch it to the afternoon. You'll have a lot more fun while you huff and puff if you've got the energy to back it up. Good physical energy will boost your emotions and you're in for a very fulfilling evening.

 **SAGITTARIUS** NOVEMBER 22-DECEMBER 21

Today, you could be given an opportunity to take control, but you shouldn't necessarily take it. You have a lot of drive right now, but there's no point in moving forward if you're not totally sure where you're going. You'll only end up lost and frustrated. So try not to control anything right now. Just let whatever will be, be. Take a "wait and see" approach and be patient. For the moment, it's much healthier to let things unfold as fate dictates.

 **TAURUS** APRIL 20-MAY 20

Do some investigating into your recent financial ventures and you may find that someone hasn't been entirely on the up-and-up in the accounts payable department. Does this mean you should cut them out of your life completely? That certainly depends on the gravity of the offence and on whether or not they're a repeat offender. But you still might want to cut back their privileges. No TV, no ATM card, no gummy bears, and so on.

 **VIRGO** AUGUST 23-SEPTEMBER 22

Big, messy emotions are on the agenda today, most unlike your meticulous, detail-oriented and choosy self. This could well leave you feeling a bit on the deranged side, but only if you try to fight it. So don't. Right now, anything goes. Let yourself feel what you're feeling. Your only responsibility is to be as nice as possible while you're letting it all hang out. Deal?

 **CAPRICORN** DECEMBER 22-JANUARY 19

You and someone you usually work quite well with might hit a bit of a rough patch today. It seems that you two are mismatched in terms of your attitudes. One of you is feeling positive about how things are going, but the other one isn't so sure. Your energies may be different, but that isn't a bad thing. Don't think of it as a barrier to clear communication. It's a chance for each of you to help the other perfect their ideas.

 **GEMINI** MAY 21-JUNE 21

A very intense situation that comes up at work could lead you to wonder if you should say what you know or just keep quiet, and isn't that always a dilemma? In this case, since you may be feeling you've kept this particular secret for far too long, think about what might happen once the truth is revealed. The good news is that in the end, the truth always comes out anyway. Your mission is to decide whether you want to be the instrument now.

 **LIBRA** SEPTEMBER 23-OCTOBER 22

It's not easy to get you down. In fact, you're better at seeing the bright side of things than almost every other sign. That trait will be running on high now, and there's definitely someone who'll be able to benefit from it. So when the world seems too dark and full of unhappiness for them to bear, it's up to you to inform them that the glass is definitely half full and ready for you to top it off.

 **AQUARIUS** JANUARY 20-FEBRUARY 18

That higher-up who seems to have it in for you? The one who seems to have you constantly under a microscope? You might be right about them watching you carefully, but their reasons are probably a lot less devious than you imagine. You have a knack for dealing with people, and that's one of the things they've been paying attention to. Why? You'll find out soon, and it won't be bad when the truth emerges.

 **CANCER** JUNE 22-JULY 22

Work has probably been less than easy to concentrate on lately. The stars are encouraging you to think of far more interesting topics. But now you can't think of anything you'd rather do than apply the pants to the chair and the nose to the grindstone. Should your family voice their complaints, let them know this is temporary and that you have faith in their ability to boil water.

 **SCORPIO** OCTOBER 23-NOVEMBER 21

Excessive when it comes to shopping? Well, not usually. But every now and then you do tend to have your days. This might be one of them. If you're not financially up for it, consider channeling this energy in another direction. After all, if you have to be excessive about something, why not choose your own specialty? Sensuality and closeness, that is. See? Not such a bad choice, is it?

 **PISCES** FEBRUARY 19-MARCH 20

Get out of the office or wherever as soon as you possibly can. You won't be in the mood to put up with anyone who doesn't see things the way you do, and you will be in the mood, for once, to let them know they're flat-out wrong. That reputation about you being mild mannered and easy to get around? Let them know they're wrong. That's someone else, not you.



TEST YOUR KNOWLEDGE

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

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

2. According to the Guinness Book of World Records in 2010, what is the most watched TV series, ever?

A. Bay Watch
B. Dallas
C. Star Trek
D. Coronation Street

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

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

Answers: 1.a 2.a 3.c

KIDS COLOURING

BOGGLER

E	A	R	B
E	U	R	Y
L	S	E	K
Y	P	E	M

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

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

WORD BUILDER



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

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

SUDOKU EASY ANSWER

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

Russia strikes Ukrainian cities as troops mass near Kyiv, invites further sanctions

Kyiv, Ukraine - Russian forces struck cities in eastern Ukraine and massed armoured vehicles and artillery near the capital Kyiv on Tuesday, as Western powers promised further sanctions to bring down Russia's economy.

On the sixth day of Russia's invasion, officials in Ukraine's second city, Kharkiv, said the Russian army had shelled the local administration building, killing at least ten people.

An AFP reporter saw emergency services carrying a body out of the building, which was surrounded by rubble and whose windows were completely shattered. "This is state terrorism on the part of Russia," Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky said in a video statement in which he called the defence of Kyiv 'the key priority for the state'.

Ukrainian emergency services said at least ten people were killed and more than 20 wounded, with ten people discovered alive under the rubble as rescue workers cleared debris.

EU foreign policy chief Joseph Borrell said the shelling of Kharkiv 'violates the rules of war'.

Armed clashes and bombings were also reported in various cities in southern Ukraine.

Mariupol on the Azov Sea was left without electricity, while Kherson on the Black Sea reported Russian checkpoints around the city.



A car is seen destroyed by recent shelling on a check-point in the city of Brovary outside Kyiv on Tuesday (AFP)

'Shattered peace in Europe'

Russian President Vladimir Putin has 'shattered peace in Europe', NATO chief Jens Stoltenberg said during a visit to an airbase in neighbouring Poland.

"Russia's aim is clear - mass panic, civilian victims and the destruction of infrastructure. Ukraine is valiantly fighting back,"

Mykhailo Podolyak, an adviser to Zelensky, said on Twitter.

More than 350 civilians have been killed since the Russian invasion began, including 14 children. New Delhi said an Indian student was among the victims, killed by shelling in Kharkiv on Tuesday.

More than 660,000 people have already fled abroad, the UN

refugee agency said, estimating that a million people are displaced within Ukraine.

Russia has defied international bans, boycotts and sanctions to press ahead with an offensive which it says is aimed at defending Ukraine's Russian speakers and toppling the leadership. Defence Minister Sergei Shoigu said Russia would con-

tinue 'until set goals are achieved' after initial ceasefire talks between Moscow and Kyiv failed to secure a breakthrough.

He vowed to 'demilitarise and de-Nazify' Ukraine and protect Russia from a 'military threat created by Western countries'.

Western powers are planning ever more stringent sanctions. "We will bring about the col-

lapse of the Russian economy," French Finance Minister Bruno Le Maire told the Franceinfo broadcaster. The British government said Western sanctions would remain 'for as long as it takes' and warned Putin himself could face prosecution for war crimes.

'Bombing kept us up all night'

As the conflict intensifies, fears are growing of a possible Russian assault to capture Kyiv - a city of 2.8mn in normal times.

Satellite images showed a long build-up of armoured vehicles and artillery starting 29km north of the city. The column is more than 65km long and covers the entire road from near Antonov airport outside Kyiv to the town of Pryborsk, US satellite imaging company Maxar said.

"Some vehicles are spaced fairly far apart while in other sections military equipment and units are travelling two or three vehicles abreast on the road," Maxar said.

In the city, makeshift barricades dotted the streets and residents formed long queues outside the few shops with essentials that remained open.

"We will greet them with Molotov cocktails and bullets to the head," bank employee Viktor Rudnichenko told AFP. "The only flowers they might get from us will be for their grave."

In the village of Shaika near Kyiv, Natasha, 51, opened a canteen in the local church to feed soldiers and volunteers.

"The shelling and the bombing kept us up all night," she said.

Of the hundreds of thousands of people who have fled abroad, neighbouring Poland alone has taken in nearly 400,000 people.

Iryna Plakhuta, a pregnant 43-year-old executive, had to leave her family behind in the capital because of fears over her safety.

"Our husbands stayed in Kyiv," she said. "They are protecting Ukraine. It's so hard."

Badr Tawil, 23, a student, was among a group of Israelis evacuated from Ukraine who landed on Tuesday at Ben Gurion airport outside Tel Aviv.

"We just woke up once and we heard the sounds around us. Bombs everywhere. So we decided to leave, just to leave Ukraine," he said.

Putin's demands

Putin announced his demands to bring the war to an end in a phone call with his French counterpart Emmanuel Macron on Monday.

They included recognition of Russian sovereignty over Crimea and Ukraine's demilitarisation.

Instead, Western nations have moved to increasingly isolate Russia, responding with an intensifying diplomatic, economic, cultural and sporting backlash.

AFP

UN seeks \$1.7bn for urgent Ukraine aid

Geneva, Switzerland - The United Nations (UN) launched an emergency appeal on Tuesday for US\$1.7bn to provide urgent humanitarian aid to people caught up in the Russian invasion of Ukraine and refugees fleeing the fighting.

The UN estimates that 12mn people inside Ukraine will need relief and protection, while it projected that more than 4mn Ukrainian refugees may need help in neighbouring countries in the coming months.

"This is the darkest hour for the people of Ukraine," UN humanitarian chief Martin Griffiths said in a statement.

"We need to ramp up our response now to protect the lives and dignity of ordinary Ukrainians. We must respond with compassion and solidarity."

The UN's flash appeal wants US\$1.1bn to assist 6mn people inside Ukraine for an initial three months.



Refugees arriving from Ukraine including African and Indian students of Kyiv University get off a train at the railway station in the Hungarian-Ukrainian border town of Zahony on Tuesday (AFP)

The aid programme includes cash for the most vulnerable people, food, water and sanitation, support for health care and education services, and shelter

assistance to rebuild damaged homes.

The plan also aims to support the authorities in maintaining and setting up transit and

reception centres for displaced people.

"Families with small children are hunkered down in basements and subway stations or running

for their lives to the terrifying sound of explosions and wailing sirens. Casualty numbers are rising fast," Griffiths said.

Ukraine says more than 350 civilians have been killed since the Russian invasion began six days ago.

More than 660,000 refugees have fled Ukraine for safety in neighbouring countries, while around a million people are estimated to be internally displaced, the UN refugee agency, UNHCR, said on Tuesday.

"We are looking at what could become Europe's largest refugee crisis this century," said UNHCR chief Filippo Grandi.

"While we have seen tremendous solidarity and hospitality from neighbouring countries in receiving refugees, including from local communities and private citizens, much more support will be needed to assist and protect new arrivals."

AFP

Israelis, Arabs, Iranians in harrowing exodus from Ukraine

Tel Aviv, Israel - Israelis, Iranians and Tunisians landed back in their home countries on Tuesday to the tearful relief of relatives, as evacuations of nationals caught up in the Russian invasion of Ukraine gathered pace.

The evacuees had all been forced to make harrowing escapes by land through the war zone to board repatriation flights in neighbouring countries, after Ukraine closed its airspace to civilian traffic at the start of the invasion last week.

One of the first repatriation flights bringing home Israeli evacuees landed at Ben Gurion airport from Romania.

Badr Tawil, 23, a student who fled Ukraine's under-fire second city Kharkiv, said he had escaped chaos. "We just woke up once and we heard the sounds around us. Bombs everywhere. So we decided to leave, just to leave



A student evacuated from Ukraine is embraced by her family upon her arrival at the Tunis-Carthage airport on Tuesday (AFP)

Ukraine," he said.

Israeli Foreign Minister Yair Lapid said on Monday his office had helped 4,000 Israelis leave Ukraine since Russia invaded.

"We will do everything to not leave any Israeli behind, or any

Jew behind," he told journalists.

Many of the Israelis repatriated on Tuesday were members of the Arab minority, who make up 20 per cent of the Jewish state's population.

A student, who identified him-

self only as Hussein, described a terrifying escape. "For four days, we have been sleeping in staircases and train stations," he said.

"We had a really difficult time without food. I was in Ukraine in Kharkiv. It is the last year of my studies, but now I left everything to return." The Foreign Ministry said on Monday that one Israeli had been killed in Ukraine, when the convoy he was travelling in came under fire as he tried to reach neighbouring Moldova.

'Nightmare'

Iran's state media said a first repatriation flight carrying 100 students and other nationals fleeing Ukraine landed in Tehran on Tuesday. They included at least one family with a child, television footage from the arrivals hall showed.

In Tunis, a group of 106

Tunisian students and a baby arrived on a special repatriation flight by military aircraft from the Romanian capital Bucharest.

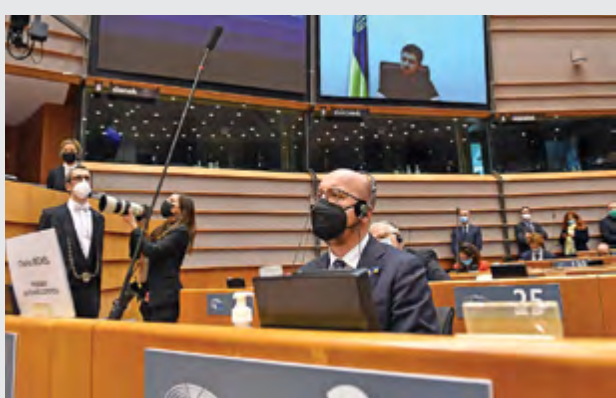
In emotional scenes, they were welcomed by relatives.

Foreign Minister Othman Jerandi, who was at the airport, said a further 480 Tunisian students would be repatriated in the coming days via Romania or Poland.

"We went through a nightmare, through a war," said engineering student Aymen Badri.

Fellow engineering student Hamdi Boussaa said the situation inside Ukraine had escalated very quickly. "At first, we told each other that we couldn't just leave and abandon everything. But on the second day... we began to be afraid. Our families and friends were worried and that made us worry."

AFP



Charles Michel (centre) listens to Volodymyr Zelensky speaking in a video conference at the EU headquarters in Brussels on Tuesday (AFP)

EU says Europe's 'fate in the balance' over Ukraine war

Brussels, Belgium - The EU's leaders accused Russia of 'geopolitical terrorism' on Tuesday over its invasion of Ukraine, warning that it is not just Kyiv's fate but also Europe's that 'lies in the balance'.

The strident tone in speeches at the European Parliament underlined the European Union's transformation over the past week from lumbering talk shop into a quick-footed powerhouse.

In a video address to the meeting, Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky expressed gratitude for the unprecedented measures Brussels has deployed against Russia and in support of his armed forces, including the funding of arms deliveries.

"Without you, Ukraine is going to be alone. We have proven our strength. We have proven that, at a minimum, we are exactly the same as you are," Zelensky said from Kyiv.

"Prove you are with us, do prove that you will not let us go."

The EU's two top officials, European Council President Charles Michel and European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen, expressed full

backing.

"It's not only Ukraine that is under attack," Michel said.

"International law, the rules-based international order, democracy, human dignity are also under attack. This is geopolitical terrorism, pure and simple," he said.

Von der Leyen called it 'a moment of truth for Europe'.

"The destiny of Ukraine is at stake, but our own fate also lies in the balance," she said.

As part of the EU's response, she said, Brussels would provide US\$560mn in extra funding to help deal with the 'humanitarian consequences' of the war, including the flow of refugees into the bloc.

Michel and von der Leyen underlined the measures the EU has already taken in coordination with the US, Britain, Canada and Japan.

They include sanctions that are causing Russia's economy to buckle, for example banning transactions with its central bank, targeting President Vladimir Putin and some of his top ministers and aides as well as oligarchs propping up his rule.

AFP

UN Security Council extends Yemen arms embargo to all rebels

United Nations - The UN Security Council voted on Monday to extend to all of Yemen's Houthi fighters an arms embargo that until now targeted only some leaders of the rebel group.

Yemen has since 2014 been embroiled in a civil war between the Iran-backed Houthis and the internationally recognised government, supported by a Saudi-led military coalition.

Monday's resolution - proposed by the United Arab Emirates, which is part of the coalition - was adopted with 11 votes in favour and four abstentions. Although the UAE withdrew ground troops in 2019, it remains a key player in the grinding conflict.

The UAE has been on heightened alert since a Houthi drone and missile attack killed three oil workers in the capital Abu Dhabi on January 17, the first in a string of attacks on what is usually viewed as a safe haven.

The Houthis have also regularly launched attacks against Saudi Arabia.

The resolution 'strongly condemns the cross-border attacks by the Houthis, including attacks on Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates striking civilians and civilian infrastructure, and demanding the immediate cessation of such attacks'.

The UAE mission to the UN said the 'resolution will curtail the military capabilities' of the Houthis.

Saudi Arabia and its ally the United States have long accused Iran of supplying the Houthis with sophisticated weapons, a charge the Islamic republic denies.



This file photo shows armed Yemeni supporters of the Iran-backed Houthi movement, brandishing their weapons as they rally in the capital Sanaa on January 27 this year (AFP)

Hundreds of thousands of people have been killed directly and indirectly in the war in Yemen and millions have been displaced, in what the UN calls the world's worst humanitarian crisis.

UN experts have accused both sides in Yemen's conflict of

war crimes.

Russia-Ukraine link

Russia, which is close to Iran, voted in favour of the resolution targeting the rebels.

Diplomats said this suggests a deal was cut between Moscow and the UAE, for the latter to abstain in upcoming UN votes on the Russian invasion of Ukraine.

One diplomat speaking on condition of anonymity called this 'cynicism at its max'.

The resolution states that the Houthi rebels in their entirety will now be subject to an arms embargo, first declared in 2015 on some of their leaders.

Targeting of the rebels runs the risk of making the UN seem to lose its neutrality in the war in Yemen, experts say.

While important politically, the extension of the arms embargo will not change things much on the ground in the war itself, a diplomatic source said.

Russia's position is linked to that of the UAE on the war in Ukraine, diplomats said.

Western countries 'were very disappointed with the Emirates' abstention twice, on Friday and Sunday, on votes on resolutions in the Security Council on the war in Ukraine', said one Western diplomat, speaking on condition of anonymity.

The UAE did this in order to keep Russia from vetoing the adoption of the broader arms embargo against the Houthis, the source added.

"We are very angry with the Emirates and convinced they made a dirty deal with Russia" that links the Houthis and Ukraine, another diplomat said.

AFP

Israel forces kill 2 Palestinians during West Bank arrest raid

Ramallah, Palestinian Territories - Israeli forces killed two Palestinians after coming under fire during an arrest raid in the northern West Bank, Israeli border police and Palestinian health authorities said on Tuesday. Israeli border police said officers and undercover police entered the Jenin refugee camp to arrest a suspect 'wanted for terrorist activity'.

"After the arrest of the suspect, as the forces left the house, heavy fire was opened from several directions, and undercover forces operating at the scene responded with live fire," police said. They said as police reached their vehicles, another assailant shot at the forces, 'who responded with accurate fire'.

The Palestinian Health Ministry said two men were killed in the fighting. Official news agency Wafa identified them as Abdullah al Hosari, 22, and Shadi Khaled Najm, 18.

Troops arrested Imad Jamal Abu al Hejja, a freed prisoner, Wafa reported. The news agency said the killing of the two Palestinians sparked a 'massive and angry march' in Jenin.

The arrest raid is one of several recent high-profile Israeli incursions into West Bank cities.

Last month, Israeli troops killed three Palestinian suspects during a daylight raid in the northern West Bank city of Nablus.

Israel captured the West Bank from Jordan in the Six-Day War of 1967. It has since built a string of settlements across the territory that are considered illegal under international law but are home to some 475,000 Israelis.

AFP



Women mourn a Palestinian man killed by Israeli forces, during his funeral in Jenin on Tuesday (AFP)

11 killed, 2 rescued as fire rips through Syrian shopping mall

Damascus, Syria - A nighttime fire in a shopping centre in the Syrian capital Damascus killed at least 11 people, the Interior Ministry said on Tuesday, in one of the deadliest blazes in recent years. Many of those killed were security guards or staff who were on duty overnight in the six-storey building, said Ahmad Abbas, the director of civil defence.

The cause of the fire was not immediately clear. "Eleven people have died as a result of the fire in the La Mirada mall, and two people have been rescued," the Interior Ministry said.

The fire caused 'extensive material damage', it added, ripping through stores that sold clothes, leather goods and cosmetics - many of which were highly flammable. "Investigations are underway to determine the cause of the blaze," the ministry statement read.

Fires in the Syrian capital are relatively frequent, some caused by electrical short-circuits, others by unsafe heating methods.

One witness, Hani, 52, who asked to be identified only by his first name, said the fire broke out at around 3am (0100 GMT).

"The fire started on the top



People gather as firefighters extinguish a blaze that broke out at the La Mirada Mall building in Damascus on Tuesday (AFP)

floor and started to spread quickly to other levels," he said.

'My livelihood is gone'

Twenty fire engines helped douse the blaze, said Abbas, the director of civil defence.

"It took around four hours for us to bring the fire under control," he said, adding that the victims died either of suffocation or of severe burns. "They were all guards working at the mall, or workers on duty," Abbas said.

Mohammad Aboulreesh, from the Hospital of Damascus, said they had received seven corpses that had been badly burnt and were yet to be identified, according to the official SANA news agency.

An AFP correspondent saw fire trucks stationed outside the charred facade of the shopping mall, where dozens of businesses had been destroyed.

"We have asked everyone to stay away from the area to facilitate civil defence operations," a fire department official told AFP on condition of anonymity.

Despite the security cordon, dozens flocked to the scene, including business owners who rushed to check on their shops.

One shop owner collapsed when he saw the damage.

"My livelihood is gone... my money is gone," he wailed.

AFP

Desperate Afghans resort to selling their kidneys to feed families

Herat, Afghanistan - Jobless, debt ridden, and struggling to feed his children, Nooruddin felt he had no choice but to sell a kidney - one of a growing number of Afghans willing to sacrifice an organ to save their families.

The practice has become so widespread in the western city of Herat that a nearby settlement is bleakly nicknamed 'one kidney village'.

"I had to do it for the sake of my children," Nooruddin told AFP in the city, close to the border with Iran. "I didn't have any other option."

Afghanistan has been plunged into financial crisis following the Taliban takeover six months ago, worsening an already dire humanitarian situation after decades of war.

The foreign aid which once propped up the country has been slow to return, with the headline Islamists also cut off from Afghan assets held abroad.

The trickle-down effect has particularly hurt Afghans like Nooruddin, 32, who quit his factory job when his salary was slashed to 3,000 Afghanis (US\$30 approx) soon after the Taliban's return, mistakenly believing he would find something better.



Afghan men, who sold their kidneys over a period of the last four years, show their scars in the Injil district of Herat province on February 4 this year (AFP)

But, with hundreds of thousands unemployed across the country, nothing else was available. In desperation, he sold a kidney as a short term fix.

"I regret it now," he said outside his home, where faded clothes hang from a tree, and a plastic sheet serves as a window pane. "I can no longer work. I'm in pain and I cannot lift anything heavy."

His family now relies on their 12-year-old son for money, who polishes shoes for 70 cents a day.

A kidney for \$1,500

Noorudin was among eight people AFP spoke to who had sold a kidney to feed their families or pay off debt - some for as little as US\$1,500.

It is illegal to sell or buy organs in most developed nations, where donors are usually related to the recipient or are people acting out of altruism.

In Afghanistan, however, the practice is unregulated.

"There is no law... to control how the organs can be donated or sold, but the consent of the

donor is necessary," said Professor Mohammad Wakil Matin, a former top surgeon at a hospital in the northern city of Mazar-i-Sharif.

Mohamad Bassir Osmani, a surgeon at one of two hospitals where the majority of Herat's transplants are performed, confirmed 'consent' was the key.

"We take written consent and a video recording from them - especially from the donor," he said, adding hundreds of surgeries have been performed in Herat over the past five years.

"We have never investigated where the patient or donor comes from, or how. It's not our job."

The Taliban did not respond to requests by AFP for comment on the practice, but Osmani said the country's new rulers have plans to clamp down on the trade and are forming a committee to regulate it. Afghans desperate for money are usually matched by brokers with wealthy patients, who travel to Herat from across the country - and sometimes even from India

and Pakistan.

The recipient pays both the hospital fees and the donor.

Azyta's family had so little food that two of her three children have recently been treated for malnourishment.

She felt she had no choice but to sell an organ, and openly met a broker who matched her with a recipient from the southern province of Nimroz.

"I sold my kidney for 250,000 Afghanis (US\$2,500 approx)," she said from her small damp room. "I had to do it. My husband isn't working, we have debts," she added.

Now her husband, a daily labourer, is planning on doing the same.

"People have become poorer," he said. "Many people are selling their kidneys out of desperation."

'One-kidney village'

On the outskirts of Herat lies Sayshanba Bazaar, a village made up of hundreds of people displaced by years of conflict.

Known as 'one-kidney village', dozens of residents have sold their organs after word spread among destitute families of the money to be made.

From one family, five brothers sold a kidney each in the last four years, thinking it would save them from poverty. "We are still in debt and as poor as we were before," said Ghulam Nebi, showing off his scar.

In developed nations, donors and recipients usually go on to lead full and normal lives, but their after-surgery health is usually closely monitored - and also dependent on a balanced lifestyle and diet.

That luxury is often not available to poor Afghans who sell a kidney and still find themselves trapped in poverty - and sometimes in ill-health.

Professor Matin said only some donors arranged for follow-up checks. "There are no public health facilities to register kidney sellers and donors for regular examinations to check on implications for their health," he added.

Shakila, already a mother of two at 19, underwent the procedure shortly before the Taliban seized power, bypassing a broker by searching out a patient at a Herat hospital.

"We had no choice because of hunger," she said, made up with black eyeliner with a scarf covering the rest of her face.

AFP

'Rain bomb' in Australia: 9 dead, thousands flee homes

Grafton, Australia - Deadly floods swept Australia's east coast on Tuesday, stranding people on bridges and rooftops and forcing tens of thousands to flee their homes.

Dozens of emergency warnings are in effect across the states of Queensland and New South Wales, where a week-long 'rain bomb' has dumped a metre of water on some areas.

Several waterways have burst their banks or broken through levees, inundating towns and forcing residents to evacuate or seek safety on higher ground.

Nine people have died and more than a thousand people have been rescued. Authorities have warned that more fatalities are likely.

The latest victim was a woman in her 80s whose body was found by police inside a home in the country town of Lismore.

"She is yet to be formally identified," said New South Wales Police.

In the usually laid back surf town of Byron Bay, Hannah Leser had enjoyed the weekend celebrating her wedding with 150 guests.

But the new bride and groom are now rescuing friends stranded in the nearby towns of Ballina and Mullumbimby in a borrowed four-wheel-drive.

About 30 people are camped at a house where the couple were to spend their honeymoon.

"It's chaos but all of our friends and family are safe," she told AFP. "This is not quite the honeymoon I expected but it is what it is."

Australia's military has de-



Rescuers on a boat evacuates people along a flood street around Maryborough in Queensland on Monday (AFP)

ployed two MRH-90 Taipan helicopters to aid the rescue effort.

In one daring aerial rescue, the crew plucked two people to safety as muddy waters lapped at the corrugated metal roofing of their home.

Live television images on public broadcaster ABC showed a rescuer sitting on the roof with the pair, preparing to strap them to the chopper's winch.

"We've seen people stranded on roofs for hours, we've seen children being rescued, we're seeing people stranded on bridges," said New South Wales Premier Dominic Perrottet.

Sailing past roofs

Emergency services were over-

whelmed by calls for help and flotillas of makeshift rescue boats fanned out across towns as people tried to ferry their neighbours to safety.

In Lismore, local member of parliament Janelle Saffin had to swim to safety after she was stranded in the floodwaters.

"We went to the verandah, hanging on to the rafters," she told *Nine Newspapers*.

Local resident Danika Hardiman was rescued on Monday after she woke up to find floodwaters had reached the balcony of her second-floor apartment in the town's main street.

She and her partner managed to climb up to the roof and were eventually rescued by 'two guys

in a boat, two locals', she told AFP, describing the scenes in Lismore as 'horrific'.

"Imagine you're in a boat sailing past people's roofs," she said.

Makeshift evacuation centres have been set up in primary schools, recreation centres and retired service members' clubs.

Travis Lavdaras headed for Ballina Airport, where the departure lounge was filled with families, holidaymakers and the elderly trying to escape.

"There were big lakes' worth of water on either side of the highway" on the way to the terminal, he said, with many flights cancelled and an evacuation ordered for the area nearby.

Near the town of Grafton, the scale of the disaster was thrown into stark relief by the sight of buildings submerged almost to roof level, roads washed away and cattle roaming around abandoned.

Further south in Sydney, residents endured another day of torrential downpours and were warned to brace for 'major flooding'.

Australia has been on the sharp end of climate change, with droughts, deadly bushfires, bleaching events on the Great Barrier Reef and floods becoming more common and intense as global climate patterns change.

AFP



A resident undergoes a nucleic acid test for COVID-19 in Wuhan in China's central Hubei province on February 22 (AFP)

Top scientist says China should drop zero-COVID tactics

Beijing, China - China should aim to co-exist with the virus and could move away from its zero-COVID strategy 'in the near future', a top Chinese scientist said in a possible sign that the country's leadership is rethinking its strict approach.

The country where the coronavirus was first detected in 2019 is now one of the last places still clinging to a zero-tolerance approach, responding to small outbreaks with snap lockdowns and cutting off most international travel. But fatigue over disruptions to everyday life as well as semi-autonomous Hong Kong's struggle to contain a mass Omicron outbreak have raised questions about the sustainability of Beijing's approach.

China's strategy against COVID-19 cannot 'remain unchanged forever' and 'it is the long-term goal of humanity to co-exist with the virus' at tolerable death and illness rates, Zeng Guang wrote on social media platform Weibo on Monday.

Zeng is the former chief scientist of China's Centre for Disease Control and Prevention and one of the experts behind the coun-

try's initial COVID-19 response.

Zeng said that while China's approach had prevented the early chaos of widespread infection experienced by many Western countries, its low infection rate was now a 'soft spot' as far fewer people had built up natural immunity.

He said Western countries were now showing 'commendable courage' in exploring how to live with the virus and that China should 'observe and learn' even though there was still 'no need to open the country's doors at the peak of the global pandemic'.

"In the near future, at the right time, the roadmap for Chinese-style co-existence with the virus should be presented," Zeng said.

His comments are unusual for an official in China's government, which has touted its low infection rates to the Chinese public as a sign of the superiority of its approach. Experts who previously questioned 'zero COVID' have faced a backlash, including prominent scientist Zhang Wenhong who was attacked by online trolls and probed for plagiarism after a similar Weibo post in July.

AFP



People queue up at a Taxi rank outside of Liverpool Street station in London on Tuesday (AFP)

London Underground paralysed by staff strike

London, UK - London's underground Tube railway was suspended on Tuesday, the capital's transport body said, as staff strike over fears of job cuts and pension changes due to a funding crisis.

"All tube lines are suspended," a Transport for London spokesman told AFP, as the organisation urged commuters to work from home or use alternative public transport.

Members of the RMT transport trade union are staging separate walkouts on Tuesday and Thursday in a bitter dispute that has sparked travel chaos, with knock-on effects also expected on Wednesday and Friday.

The action comes as the British government handed TfL a new financial lifeline last week after COVID lockdowns shattered revenues.

The RMT warns that any spending cutbacks as a result of the deal will lead to hundreds of job losses, reductions in pensions and affected working conditions. London mayor 'Sadiq Khan should be standing up to Tory ministers who want to needlessly attack jobs, pensions and conditions of key transport workers', said RMT General Secretary Mick Lynch.

"It is this political failure that has left tube workers with no choice but to strike this week."

Taxpayers will provide TfL with £200mn in a fourth extraordinary funding settlement that helps TfL through to June 24, the government had announced on Friday.

Britain has now provided TfL with close to £5bn in emergency funding since March 2020 when the UK first went into lockdown.

TfL also runs bus and overground railway services throughout London.

Its revenue crashed by 95 per cent at the height of the first coronavirus wave in 2020, while in recent months the Tube has been plagued by strikes.

AFP

Panic buying in HK as lockdown looms

Hong Kong, China - Hong Kongers stripped shop shelves bare on Tuesday as panic buying set in following mixed messaging from the government over whether it plans a China-style hard lockdown this month.

The latest disarray came as the city's top medical school estimated just under a quarter of all residents had been infected with COVID-19 since the start of the year.

Photos circulating on social media showed people had trouble finding a variety of items including meat, vegetables, frozen food, noodles, paracetamol and testing kits.

"We are like ants going home, grabbing a bit at one spot at a time," a woman, who gave her surname Wu, told AFP on Tuesday in a supermarket where most vegetables and meat had been snapped up.

One of the most densely populated cities on Earth, Hong Kong has supermarkets with limited backroom storage space.

Apartments are also some of the smallest in the world, leaving little space to stock up.

The vast majority of Hong Kong's food is imported from mainland China and the current supply crunch has been worsened by cross-border truckers getting infected by the highly transmissible Omicron variant.

Delay testing appeal

The 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.

More than 190,000 infections have been recorded in the last two months, compared with just



People shop at a supermarket in Hong Kong on Tuesday (AFP)

12,000 for the rest of the pandemic.

Authorities plan to test all 7.4mn residents this month and isolate all infections either at home or in a series of camps that are still being constructed with mainland help.

City leader Carrie Lam had initially ruled out a mainland-style lockdown, where people are confined to their homes during the testing period.

But on Monday, health chief Sophia Chan confirmed it was still on the table.

Multiple Hong Kong media said authorities were planning a variety of lockdown options for the test period, citing sources.

The *South China Morning Post* said the current favoured option was a nine-day 'large-scale lockdown' where most residents would only be allowed out to buy food.

Experts from the University of Hong Kong published new modelling data on Tuesday which estimated the current number of infections at 1.7mn.

They warned that mass testing should be delayed a month rather than under current plans when the wave would be at its peak with as many as 183,000 daily cases.

"Doing so earlier, especially when case numbers will still be too high to properly and appropriately isolate and care for, paying particular attention to population mental and emotional wellbeing in HK's unique context, would not be recommended," Gabriel Leung, dean of HKU's medical school, wrote on Twitter.

'So many questions'

The government says food supplies are stable and that residents will soon be informed of plans.

"We will notify everyone in advance so you can be well prepared," number two official John Lee told reporters at the opening of a 3,900-bed isolation facility where mild infections will be treated.

But analysts said uncertainty

and distrust were fuelling consumer habits.

"We have so many questions but all answers are 'to be confirmed'," Chan Ka-lok, an international politics scholar at Baptist University, wrote on social media.

Faith in government assurances is low in Hong Kong, where authorities have carried out a two-year crackdown on dissent after huge democracy protests, and have a history of back-peddalling on promises.

The decision on mass tests was itself a U-turn.

It is not yet clear when testing will take place and what the government will do with all the cases it finds.

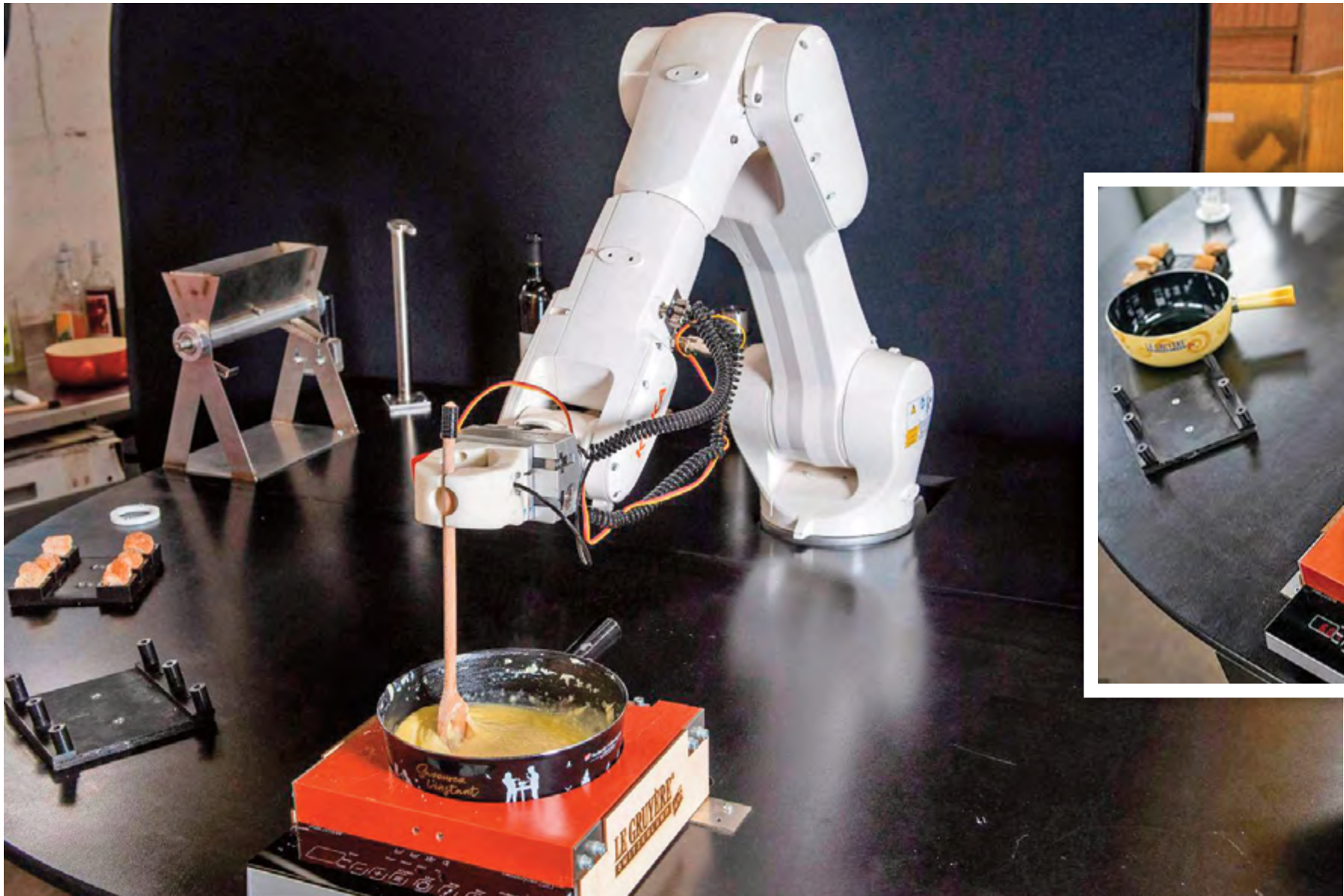
Some 70,000 isolation units for mild cases are due to come online in the coming weeks, in requisitioned hotels, public housing units and camps.

At Hong Kong's current official caseload, that would cover roughly two days' worth of new infections.

AFP

FONDUE'S *fortune*

Switzerland's popular dish, fondue - a simmering pot of heart-warming melted cheese - may now be stirred up and served by a robot, thanks to some hi-tech wizardry



A Swiss workforce has been beaver away on Bouebot - a robotic creation - placing a futuristic twist on an Alpine custom. Outside in the Rhone glacial valley bisecting Switzerland's southern Wallis area, crisp mountain air blows down from the glistening snowy peaks. But inside Workshop 4.0's headquarters in Sierre, beneath the Crans-Montana ski resort, the air is scorching from Bouebot's whirring servers and thick with the scent of melted cheese.

The robot is ready to make its grand debut on the Paris International Agricultural Show, one of many world's main meals manufacturing commerce festivals, which runs from February 26 to March 6. Bouebot is for demonstration functions solely and is way from showing in kitchenware shops.

The whole undertaking value 250,000 to 300,000 Swiss francs (US\$270,000 to US\$325,000) includes the cost of the robot arm alone as 80,000 francs.

Cheese ardour

Workshop 4.0 co-director Nicolas Fontaine, 30, who wears a black baseball cap studying 'cheese ardour', stated Bouebot had been almost two years in the making.

"We needed to do an undertaking that mixed innovation with Swiss custom, and fondue was the proper alternative," Fontaine said.

"For the Swiss, fondue is emblematic. It's one thing very emotional too as a result of it is a part of our 'ID', our know-how. Fondue is one thing convivial... it is a good alternative to draw folks in to discuss robotics and the way it may be used," he said.

Whether at home, in a restaurant, or in an Alpine cabin, sharing a fondue stays the center of Swiss social life. Bouebot is called after the bouebos - teenage boys who spent the summer time up in the mountain chalets, serving to herdsman whereas they took care of constructing cheese.



We needed to do an undertaking that mixed innovation with Swiss custom, and fondue was the proper alternative

NICOLAS FONTAINE



Grate, stir, eat, repeat

Pivoting on six totally different axes, Bouebot swings into motion. It glugs the correct amount of white wine into the 'caquelon' pot, then locations it below the cheese grater. The basic fondue combine is known as a half-and-half - a good quantity of Vacherin Fribourgeois and Gruyere cheese.

The undertaking's technical supervisor Ludovic Aymon, utilising his management pad, manoeuvres the robot arm down in direction of every cheese triangle, which is lifted up by creating a vacuum on the highest. After shearing off the rind on a round blade, it begins swiping the underside down the grater.

Back on the heater, Bouebot does some vigorous

figure-of-eight stirring because the cheese melts, then wipes off the spoon and sprinkles in some pepper. It then picks up a steel spike, pierces a piece of bread, swipes it across the caquelon earlier than inserting it in a holder for fondue-lovers to attempt earlier than the gooey cheese drips down.

Aymon stated the largest problem was to get a precision mechanical robot to deal with imprecise natural materials.

The cheese wedges are usually not completely flat, nor the identical peak, whereas Vacherin is far softer than Gruyere. However, there isn't a likelihood of the normal duo being modified for extra robot-friendly cheeses - not if the creators needs to keep alive, jokes Aymon.

Rise of the robots

When seeing Bouebot at work, some onlookers are thrilled by the longer term potentialities for such expertise, whereas others fear about machines encroaching into the human sphere.

"The impact I discover essentially the most attention-grabbing is concern... that concern of being changed by one thing extra highly effective," Aymon said. "Robotics shouldn't be to the detriment of human beings. It ought to assist people."

It may assist somebody prepare dinner in the longer term. It exhibits that it may very well be executed, for individuals who cannot do it themselves.

With every run-through, Aymon spots tiny modifications to make, requiring but extra slabs from the cheese-stuffed fridge.

"I am unable to simply work with a 3D simulation, like I may with a number of industrial processes. I've to do actual assessments," he said. And with each fondue made, the top end result has to be eaten rapidly.

"I feel I'll, by no means, be sick of fondue. However there are occasions when I simply can't stand the scent of cheese in right here any longer," Aymon said.

AFF

CLASSIFIEDS

SITUATION WANTED

Sri Lankan teacher with expertise in teaching Science, Maths and English with more than 15 years experience looking for a suitable job. Please contact only via WhatsApp: 95858946

Send your request for Birthday/ Anniversary wishes to wish@apexmedia.co.om with your resident card copy (It's free of cost)

VAT

VAT Registrations, Quarterly Returns, Taxation Consultancy & Audit
Gulf Center Consultancy & Audit
Chartered Accountants

Contact: 92469602/93949235

Offices at Muscat, Salalah, Sohar & Sur

BIRTHDAY WISHES



SYED AYAAN RIZVI
March 01

Dear Ayaan,
Wishing you a very Happy Birthday!!
May God bless you always.
With lots of love and blessings-
Grandparents, Papa, Mamma & Rida

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

FOOTBALL ROUND-UP

Man Utd say 'thorough process' under way to find new manager

London, United Kingdom - Manchester United football director John Murtough says a "thorough process" is under way to find their next permanent manager, pledging the club remains focused on challenging for "top trophies" again.

United, who announced their latest financial results on Tuesday, have endured another difficult season despite the return of superstar forward Cristiano Ronaldo to Old Trafford.

A top-four finish is the best the English giants can hope for domestically, but they only managed a draw against lowly Watford on Saturday and

are just two points ahead of West Ham and Arsenal -- the Gunners also have three games in hand.

United have a tough set of fixtures coming up, including meetings with title-chasing Manchester City and Liverpool as well as the second leg of their Champions League tie with Atletico Madrid, which is delicately poised at 1-1.

The club, who have not won a trophy since 2017, have been working under interim manager Ralf Rangnick since December, when the German succeeded Ole Gunnar Solskjaer after a poor start to the campaign.



The new manager will take charge this summer, with the objective to get us back to challenging for those domestic and European titles

JOHN MURTOUGH



Murtough said he had been heartened by the "improved results" as they look to secure Champions League qualification.

"We know that consistency is key as we strive for a top-four finish this season," he said.

"I want to reiterate however that this is not the ultimate ob-

jective for Manchester United, and everyone at the club is focused on challenging for the top trophies.

"We are now conducting a thorough process for the appointment of a new permanent manager who will take charge this summer, with the objective to get us back to challenging for

those domestic and European titles."

Paris Saint-Germain boss Mauricio Pochettino and Ajax coach Erik ten Hag are among the favourites to permanently succeed Solskjaer.

Richard Arnold echoed Murtough's sentiments as the chief executive commented publicly

for the first time since taking up the role on February 1, when executive vice-chairman Ed Woodward departed.

"We have a clear vision and we are implementing a strategy to win with an empowered leadership team to drive that forward," he said.

"We will foster a culture of excellence through a world-class football environment, while strengthening the role of fans at the heart of the club."

United's second-quarter results for fiscal 2022, for the period ending December 31, showed the club paid £10 million (\$13.4 million) in "except-

tional items", which included compensation to former manager Solskjaer and certain members of the coaching staff.

The results show an operating profit of £5.4 million for the quarter, with total revenue of £185.4 million -- a 7.3 percent rise on the same period the previous year, with crowds back in stadiums after the coronavirus shutdown.

United's net debt has increased to £494.8 million - up 8.6 percent - and wages rose 19.6 percent to £97.7 million "due to investment in the first team playing squad".

AFP

Referees' chief apologises to Everton over Man City errors

London, United Kingdom - England's referees' chief has apologised to Everton manager Frank Lampard for mistakes made in Saturday's defeat by Manchester City, according to British media reports.

An angry Lampard labelled VAR official Chris Kavanagh a "professional who cannot do his job right" after the 1-0 loss to the Premier League champions at Goodison Park.

Kavanagh failed to alert referee Paul Tierney over a handball by Rodri that would have given the Toffees a late chance of an equaliser from the penalty spot.

Everton chief executive Denise Barrett-Baxendale wrote to the Premier League on Monday to ask for an apology.

It has been reported that Riley, managing director of Professional Game Match Officials



Everton's English manager Frank Lampard watches the play during the EPL match between Everton and Manchester City on Feb 26 (AFP)

Limited, subsequently called both Lampard and Everton chairman Bill Kenwright to apologise for the mistakes made relating to the Rodri incident.

Lampard, speaking after the match, said, "The decision is incredible and that loses us the opportunity to get what we deserved."

"That's a VAR call. That's Chris Kavanagh. It wouldn't have needed more than five seconds to know it was a penalty. He (Kavanagh) should have either told the referee to give it or told him to go look at it."

"We've lost a point because of a professional who cannot do his job right."

Everton are 17th in the table, one place and one point above Burnley, who host Leicester in the Premier League on Tuesday.

AFP

Leeds name former Leipzig boss Marsch as new manager

London, United Kingdom - Premier League strugglers Leeds named American Jesse Marsch as their new manager on Monday, a day after sacking Marcelo Bielsa.

The 48-year-old former RB Leipzig boss arrives with Leeds sitting just two points above the relegation zone.

The club said Marsch had been appointed "pending international clearance" on a deal running until June 2025 and that he would take charge for Saturday's league game at Leicester.

"We have a long-term plan and firmly believe he can take Leeds United to the next level and are excited for what the future holds," said director of football Victor Orta.

Leeds are deep in relegation trouble after Bielsa's reign imploded with five defeats in their last six games.

They conceded 20 goals in



Jesse Marsch

Bielsa's final five matches, culminating in the 4-0 home defeat by Tottenham on Saturday that proved the last straw for the Leeds board.

Bielsa was hampered by injuries to key players Calvin Phillips, Patrick Bamford and Liam Cooper.

But his refusal to change his attacking philosophy despite Leeds' defensive problems was just as damaging.

Marsch has little time to fix those issues with just 12 games left in the Premier League season. "I know what a big club Leeds is," Marsch said in a video on the club's Twitter account.

"I have ex-players that have played here, I've watched this club from afar for many years and I'm really honoured and excited to be here."

With a return to the Championship looming ominously into view after only two seasons back in the top flight, Leeds fans remain to be convinced Marsch is the man to save them from the drop. He was dismissed by Leipzig in December after a disappointing five-month spell with the Bundesliga club.

Marsch had earned the Leipzig job after leading Red Bull Salzburg to the Austrian league and cup double in both 2020 and 2021.

AFP

YORK

INSTALL CONFIDENCE

Experience The Same Cooling Comfort In Every Corner Of Your Room

MUSCAT 97693496, 96742452

SALALAH 79011363

Available at Major Hypermarkets & Electronics Retailers



Gianluigi Buffon has signed a new deal with Parma which will keep him with club until 2024

Italy great Buffon extends Parma deal until 2024

Milan, Italy - Gianluigi Buffon signed a new deal with Parma on Monday that will keep the veteran former Italy captain at the Serie B club until 2024.

The one-year extension to his deal means Buffon, who is Parma's first choice goalkeeper, will continue as a professional footballer until beyond his 46th birthday. "Gigi is a great player, one of Italy's three best goalkeepers and his renewal is a great pleasure for us," said Parma president Kyle Krause.

"His passion and dedication for Parma and the city are obvious every time you see him."

Italian football icon Buffon re-

turned to Parma from Juventus last summer two decades after leaving the club where he started his professional career.

The 44-year-old has a record 176 caps for his country, and also holds the record for Serie A matches played with 657 starting with his debut with Parma in 1995 as a 17-year-old.

He has won 27 trophies, including the 2006 World Cup and the 1999 UEFA Cup for Parma as part of possibly the best team in the club's history.

Parma were among Italy's top clubs in the 1990s under the ownership of dairy company Parmalat, winning three major Euro-

pean titles.

After Parmalat collapsed in 2003 following a huge financial fraud scandal, the club went bankrupt. They sank to Serie D in 2015. Three successive promotions put them back in the top flight in 2018, but they were relegated after finishing bottom of Serie A last season.

The majority of Buffon's success came over 19 seasons at Juve, with 10 Serie A titles, five Italian Cups and Serie B in 2007.

He also won Ligue 1 with PSG in 2018-2019 before returning to the Turin giants but he has never won the Champions League.

AFP

Klopp plays down 'crazy' Liverpool quadruple talk

London, United Kingdom - Liverpool manager Jurgen Klopp says it is "crazy" to even think about an unprecedented quadruple of trophies as he prepares his League Cup winners for Wednesday's FA Cup tie against Norwich.

The Reds beat Chelsea 11-10 in a dramatic penalty shootout at Wembley on Sunday to win the first piece of domestic silverware on offer in the English season and are still chasing glory on three other fronts.

Victory against Premier League strugglers Norwich would take Liverpool through to the FA Cup quarter-finals, while they are 2-0 up after the first leg of their elite European Champions League last-16 game against Inter Milan.

Klopp's men are six points behind Premier League leaders Manchester City, with a match in hand, after a run of six consecutive league wins.

But the German is not entertaining the thought of winning all four trophies, with months of the season still to come.

"No team in the history of English football has won the quadruple, right? That is because it is incredibly difficult. We are still behind Manchester City (in the Premier League). We are not close to thinking about any crazy stuff like that," Klopp said.

AFP

WC ban, refusal to play Russians: Sport reacts to Ukraine invasion

Paris, France - Russia's invasion of Ukraine has sparked widespread reaction in the sports world, with the country booted out of this year's World Cup and the IOC calling for a global sporting ban.

A look at some of the main developments:

Football

Russia is expelled from the 2022 World Cup after being suspended from all international competitions, FIFA and UEFA announce in a joint statement. The decision also affects Russian clubs in European tournaments.

The Russian men's team was due to play in qualifying play-offs in March for the World Cup in Qatar later this year, while its women's side had qualified for the European Championship in England, to be held in July.

UEFA also announces that it is ending its partnership with Russian state energy giant Gazprom, which was believed to have been paying around \$45mn a year in a deal due to run until 2024.

Saint Petersburg were stripped as hosts of UEFA's Champions League final set for May 28. The game has been switched to the Stade de France in Paris.

IOC

The International Olympic Committee urges sports federations and organisers to exclude Russian and Belarusian athletes and officials from international events. A ban of this kind would see Russia join the Yugoslavia of Slobodan Milosevic and South Africa under apartheid rule as



Members of the Russian cross country ski team are seen outside their hotel in Fornebu, near the Norwegian capital Oslo on March 1, 2022 (AFP)

major sporting pariahs.

Tennis

Ukraine's Elina Svitolina becomes the first tennis player to refuse to play a Russian. The former world number three says she will not face opponents from Russia or Belarus. She had been due to face Russian Anastasia Potapova in Monterrey on Tuesday.

Formula One

The Russian Grand Prix, sched-

uled for September 25, was cancelled, a day after defending world champion Max Verstappen and four-time champion Sebastian Vettel publicly declared their opposition to driving in the race. "When a country is at war, it's not right to run there," Vettel said.

Ice Hockey

The International Ice Hockey Federation suspends all Russian and Belarusian national teams and clubs from its competitions

until further notice. It also strips Russia of the hosting rights for the 2023 junior world championships.

Judo

Russian President Vladimir Putin was suspended as honorary president of the International Judo Federation (IJF). Putin, an accomplished judoka who was awarded an eighth dan in 2014 - one of the highest levels in the sport, had been honorary president since 2008.

Boxing

Boxing's four major sanctioning bodies - the International Boxing federation, World Boxing Council, World Boxing Association and World Boxing Organization - said in a joint statement they will not sanction bouts in Russia.

Rugby

Boxing's world governing body banned Russia and Belarus from all international rugby "until further notice". Russia's member-

ship of World Rugby was also suspended indefinitely, meaning the country's slim hopes of qualifying for next year's World Cup in France are over.

Badminton

The Badminton World Federation (BWF) strengthened within a matter of hours their measures against Russia and Belarus having originally cancelled all sanctioned tournaments in Russia and Belarus they announced a ban on athletes and officials rep-

resenting the two countries from participating at tournaments sanctioned by the world federation.

Swimming

Putin like in other sports has had his personal award the FINA Order withdrawn by the governing body. However, FINA the governing body stopped short of barring all Russians and Belarusians competing saying they could be "accepted only as neutral athletes or neutral teams."

Taekwondo

World Taekwondo said Tuesday they were stripping Vladimir Putin of an honorary black belt, as Russia's attack on Ukraine goes against the sport's motto: "Peace is more precious than triumph". The body also said no Russian or Belarusian national flags or anthems will be displayed and played at events, nor will any future events be organised in the two countries.

Ice Skating

Russian and Belarus ice skaters have been barred from all competitions by the International Skating Union (ISU). Russia is a powerhouse in ice skating most recently winning six medals - two of them gold - at the Beijing Winter Olympics.

Volleyball

Russia has been stripped of hosting the men's Volleyball World Championships in August and September by the International Volleyball Federation (FIVB).

AFP

Saudi-backed Asian Tour series tees off in Thailand this week

Bangkok, Thailand - The first in a new series of Saudi-backed golf tournaments gets under way in Thailand this week, even as the oil-rich kingdom's plans for a big-money super league flounder in the face of rejection by top stars.

The 10-event International Series tees off at the beach resort of Hua Hin on Thursday, with Australian great Greg Norman promising it will make the Asian Tour, with which it is partnered, a "powerful new force" in the global game.

But the tournament risks being overshadowed by the ongoing row over the Saudi-backed bid, fronted by Norman, to create a golf Super League.

Norman last week accused the PGA Tour of bullying its players into shunning the upstart league, after a host of top names including Dustin Johnson, Bryson DeChambeau, Rory McIlroy and world number one Jon Rahm publicly turned their backs on it.

Despite a bumper \$1.5 million



Golf legend Greg Norman backs the Asian Tour

purse, the entry list for this week's tournament in Thailand is largely composed of Asian Tour regulars, with Japan's Ryosuke Kinoshita, 77th in the world standings, the highest ranked player to feature.

Earlier this month Norman announced that his LIV Golf Investments organisation, which is backed by the Saudi sovereign wealth fund, was boosting its financial commitment to the

Asian Tour to \$300 million over the next 10 years.

That's an increase of \$100 million from the previously announced figure of \$200 million, and will see the International Series bolster the Asian Tour calendar to "at least 25 events" in 2022-23.

But Saudi Arabia's dramatic entry into the golfing world has not been universally welcomed.

AFP

Skating star Hanyu to miss world tourney

Tokyo, Japan - Figure skating star Yuzuru Hanyu will miss this month's world championships because an ankle sprain he suffered at the Beijing Olympics has not fully healed, the Japan Skating Federation said Tuesday.

The two-time Olympic gold medallist fell twice in the figure skating final at the 2022 Winter Games in the Chinese capital, where he finished fourth in the men's individual competition.

He had been due to compete at the ISU World Figure Skating Championships in southern France from March 21-27, but Kao Miura will be sent in his place, the JSF said in a statement.

The organisation said Hanyu could not skate at the event because "the sprain of his right ankle joint, injured at the Beijing Olympics, hasn't healed".

Hanyu, 27, had been chasing a third gold at the Games in February and went for broke



Japan's Yuzuru Hanyu performs in the figure skating gala during the Beijing Winter Olympics (AFP)

with a free skate that included an attempt at a quadruple axel - something no skater has ever landed in competition.

But the Japanese "Ice Prince" tumbled twice, once trying to nail the notoriously

difficult jump.

"Honestly, it feels like everything has gone wrong this time around, but I did my best," he told reporters in Beijing after the competition, in which US star Nathan Chen won gold.

Hanyu's right ankle ligaments have given him trouble for years, having hurt the same ankle just months before the 2018 Pyeongchang Games.

AFP

S. Korea's Kim upbeat on defending Singapore golf title

Singapore, Singapore - South Korea's Kim Hyo-joo struck an upbeat tone Tuesday as she gears up to defend her HSBC Women's World Championship title in Singapore in the face of stiff competition.

The 26-year-old staged a late fightback by overcoming a five-shot deficit to triumph in last year's tournament by one shot, snapping a five-year winless drought.

The event at the Sentosa Golf Club, from Thursday to Sunday,

will be her first tournament since November, when she finished tied 53rd in the CME Group Tour Championship.

But she sounded confident going into the competition.

"I practised on the front nine yesterday and the course conditions are great, similar to last year. I feel I'm ready to play well this week," she told a press conference.

"Before my victory last year, I was not feeling confident. But after winning the tournament, I

I'm so happy to be back at this golf course, and I want to do well again

KIM HYO-JOO

could feel that my confidence was returning. I'm so happy to be back at this golf course, and I want to do well again."



South Korea's Kim Hyo-joo attends a press conference for the HSBC Women's World Championship golf tournament in Singapore (AFP)

Among her rivals is New Zealand's Lydia Ko, who is chasing her first win at the Singapore tournament after coming close on several occasions, including a second-place finish in 2015.

The former world number one is on good form, having won her 17th LPGA title at Gainbridge LPGA at Boca Rio in January.

"I play my best golf when I'm enjoying my time out there and being relaxed. Keeping that kind of mindset and just focusing on that one shot in front of me al-

lows me to play the best golf I can," said Ko.

Meanwhile South Korea's Park In-bee will be chasing her third win at the competition, having triumphed in 2015 and 2017.

While familiarity with the course might give the 33-year-old an advantage, she is wary of the challenges posed by her younger rivals.

"Sentosa is one of the golf courses where I can play well as it really suits my game," she said.

AFP

South Africa outsmart New Zealand to win by 198 runs, draw series



South Africa's players congratulate each other after winning the second cricket Test match against New Zealand at Hagley Oval in Christchurch on March 1, 2022.

Christchurch, New Zealand - South Africa outwitted and outplayed New Zealand in a crushing 198-run second Test victory in Christchurch on Tuesday to draw the two-match series 1-1.

New Zealand, facing a record fourth-innings chase of 426 to win, were all out for 227 eight balls after tea on the final day.

It completed a remarkable turnaround for South Africa who

read the conditions far better than New Zealand after being thrashed by an innings and 276 runs in the first Test on the same ground.

Captain Dean Elgar set the tone when he became the first captain to win the toss and bat first at Hagley Oval, demanding his side "front up" after that humiliation and they obliged.

"It paid off for us. I am one for

taking risks. This is a big one in terms of playing well away from home," he said.

"We needed to rise up and level the series. We have shown in the past that we have a lot of character in the team."

In terms of South African Test victories "it ranks quite high," he added. A century by Sarel Erwee laid the base for a first innings 364, Kagiso Rabada took five for

60 as New Zealand folded 71 in arrears and an unbeaten 136 from Kyle Verreynne in the second innings tightened the clamp on New Zealand.

A disappointed New Zealand captain Tom Latham, who saw the chance of a history-making first series win over South Africa slip away, put the blame on his batsmen,

"Our blueprint is about put-

ting a big first innings score on the board, if we were able to do that things might look slightly different," he said.

"Unfortunately we were not able to build partnerships in the first or second innings."

Forlorn hope

New Zealand started the final day at 94 for four and while Devon Conway and Tom Blundell were at the crease they held hope they could salvage a draw.

But it was a forlorn hope and their 85-run partnership ended shortly before lunch when Conway went leg before wicket for 92. New Zealand's hopes of salvaging a draw rose again at 227 for nine when rain forced the players from the field, but it was a brief respite.

The South African-born Conway, who averages a remarkable 63.91 from 12 innings, had added 32 to his overnight 60 and was in sight of his fourth Test century when Lutho Sipamla claimed the wicket with a pinpoint yorker.

Blundell pressed on with Colin de Grandhomme and went to lunch looking set on 44 only to be removed soon after the resumption without adding to his score.

It started a rich spell for Jansen who also took the wickets of Colin de Grandhomme for 18 and Kyle Jamieson for 12.

AFP

SCOREBOARD	
South Africa 1 st Innings 364	
New Zealand 1 st Innings 293	
South Africa 2 nd Innings 354/9d	
NEW ZEALAND 2 nd INNINGS	
Tom Latham c van der Dussen b Rabada	1
Will Young c Bavuma b Rabada	0
Devon Conway lbw b Sipamla	92
Henry Nicholls b Maharaj	7
Daryl Mitchell b Maharaj	24
Tom Blundell c Bavuma b Jansen	44
C de Grandhomme c Mulder b Jansen	18
Kyle Jamieson c Rabada b Jansen	12
Tim Southee c Sipamla b Rabada	17
Neil Wagner not out	10
Matt Henry lbw b Maharaj	0
Extras: (lb 1, nb 1)	2
Total: (93.5 Ov),	227
Fall of wickets: 1-1, 2-6, 3-25, 4-81, 5-166, 6-187, 7-188, 8-201, 9-220, 10-227	
Bowling: K Rabada 19-5-46-3, M Jansen 23-6-63-3, K Maharaj 31.5-9-75-3, L Sipamla 14-5-29-1, W Mulder 6-1-13-0	

New Zealand's Test crown teetering after South Africa defeat

Christchurch, New Zealand - New Zealand's hopes of defending their World Test Championship suffered a major setback when South Africa crushed them by 198 runs in the second Test in Christchurch on Tuesday.

It was New Zealand's third defeat in six Tests over the past three months, and their second at home, where they have enjoyed being almost unassailable in recent years.

A defeat in India in December was followed by a shock first defeat to Bangladesh at Mount Maunganui in January before being outclassed by South Africa at Hagley Oval.

An emphatic victory in the first Test against the Proteas last week had given New Zealand hopes of a winning their first series against South Africa in 17 attempts dating back 90 years.

But captain Tom Latham said on the eve of the second Test that a series win was a side issue.

New Zealand's focus was on gaining World Test Championship points to put themselves in a position to defend the title they won by beating India in the final in England last year.



OMAN'S MOST TRUSTED BRAND AWARDS

Thank you for your trust for the 5th time

oman OASIS
BALANCED DRINKING WATER

TOLLFREE 800 71 222

C.R.No.: 1365452



Oman Women's Cricket Academy pose with the trophy after winning their game against ISC Women

OWCA Women win League Final

Muscat - Oman Women's Cricket Academy (OWCA) beat Indian Social Club (ISC) Women by 47 runs in the final of the Women's League Season 2021/22.

Electing to bat first after winning the toss, OWCA put up a formidable first innings score of 157/2 in 20 overs.

ISC Women started the match on the front foot, sending Nitya Joshi back for a golden duck in the very first over. But a 138-run third wicket partnership between newcomer Nayan Anil and Sakshi Vijaya Shetty turned the tide in OWCA's favour. Sak-

shi top scored with a 66-ball 78 that included 9 boundaries. Nayan ended the innings unbeaten on 57.

They were clinical and composed under pressure and by the time ISC managed to break their stand in the 19th over, the damage had already been done. As it turned out ISC Women fell well short, mustering 110/6 after 120 deliveries. Suhaani Dadhwal top scored with 35 runs.

Trupti Pawde was dismissed cheaply in the powerplay, but Suhaani and Priyanka Mendonca kept ISC in the game. Priyanka was the pick of the ISC bowlers

in the first innings too and followed up her figures of 1/25 with a 28-ball 31. Suhaani scored at a much slower pace, but she locked down the other end of the wicket and the pair managed to erect a 64-run stand.

However, Priyanka's run-out in the 14th over ended all hopes of a successful run-chase. The asking rate was sky high, and with boundaries proving elusive, the ISC batters looked for risky singles and doubles to keep the scoreboard ticking. OWCA took advantage and inflicted two further runouts to put the result beyond doubt.

Smith fit; looking to replicate Ashes heroics with bat in Pakistan

Islamabad, Pakistan - Star Australian batsman Steve Smith said Tuesday he was "feeling good" after recovering from concussion and hopes to replicate his big scoring from the Ashes during Australia's tour of Pakistan, their first in 24 years.

The 32-year-old fell heavily and banged his head attempting a boundary catch in the second Twenty20 against Sri Lanka in Sydney last month, ruling him out of the rest of that series.

Smith, who is expected to be a batting mainstay for the tourists in the three-match Test series starting in Rawalpindi Friday, said he is looking forward to some big scores.

"I've progressed really nicely," Smith told a virtual press conference from the team's hotel in Islamabad.

"Now I am excited to be in Pakistan. I love getting on a roll and being able to play a lot of cricket, and just finding my groove.

"The last away tour, I per-



Steve Smith

formed really well in the Ashes and hopefully I can replicate something similar in this series," said Smith, who scored a whopping 774 in England in 2019, with three hundreds.

Smith has a good record elsewhere in Asia, with 1,200 of his 7,784 runs plundered in India, Sri Lanka, Bangladesh and the United Arab Emirates.

Now he is looking forward to the challenge of playing in unfamiliar Pakistan conditions, where Australia haven't toured since 1998 because of security issues.

AFP



oman OASIS

sifir

SODIUM FREE DRINKING WATER

The healthy choice

Call Toll-Free 800 71 222 or GSM 9275 5522

f OmanOasis @ OmanOasisOfficial v OmanOasisWater www.omanoasis.com

C.R. No.: 1365452

UNROAD YOURSELF



JEEP GLADIATOR

STARTS FROM

RO 247
PER MONTH

FREE 3 YEARS / 60,000 KMS SERVICE

FREE FIRST YEAR REGISTRATION

5 YEARS WARRANTY & ROADSIDE ASSIST

BOOK NOW

Terms and conditions apply.

Jeep
THERE'S ONLY ONE



INCREDIBLE CARS IRRESISTIBLE EMIS



MG RX5

EMI STARTING FROM
OMR 83



MG 6

EMI STARTING FROM
OMR 83



MG GT

EMI STARTING FROM
OMR 78

*T&C APPLIES

CR No. 1001990



Azaiba | Wattayah | Sohar | Sur | Salalah
Al Manuma | Ibri | Bidayah | Nizwa | Ibra | Sinaw

MG WhatsApp : 71557334



mg-om.com
/mgmotoroman
@mgmotoroman

