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Gradual ban on all plastic shopping bags in pipeline

Our Correspondent
Muscat

As part of its efforts to achieve Oman Vision 2040 in environmental sustainability, Environment Authority (EA), in cooperation with the Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion (MoCIIP), will ban all plastic shopping bags this year in phases, according to Dr Mohammad Majid al Kasbi, director, Department of Chemical Materials at EA.

Speaking to *Muscat Daily*, Kasbi said, "EA, in cooperation with the concerned authorities, will begin to gradually ban all plastic bags used for shopping.

"The first phase targets the health sector, such as pharmacies. This step is a complement to the decision to ban the use of single-use shopping bags from January 1, 2021."

Except for environmentally friendly polypropylene bags, he said, EA will prevent the use of plastic bags of all thicknesses for shopping completely in the sultanate.

The authority is working in tandem with several authorities, including the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Water Resources, the Con-



sumer Protection Authority and MoCIIP, to spread awareness of the importance of using environmentally friendly bags.

"We have distributed 800,000 environmentally friendly bags so far and organised 125 awareness workshop to spread a culture of using environment friendly materials and

raise social awareness about the negative impacts of plastics to man and the environment."

The authority has been running more than 63 awareness campaigns in several governorates to reduce the use of plastic since last year.

However, even with the partial ban, EA has recorded over



The Environment Authority will prevent the use of plastic bags of all thicknesses for shopping completely in the sultanate

DR MOHAMMAD AL KASBI

70 violations of shops distributing banned plastic bags. "They were warned and urged to adhere to the rules," he said.

Ban on import comes into effect

In September 2022, H E Qais Mohammed al Yousef, Minister of Commerce, Industry and In-

vestment Promotion, issued a Ministerial Decision (No 519/2022) banning the import of plastic bags, which came into effect on January 1 this year.

It warned that any individual importing plastic bags will be slapped an administrative fine of RO1,000.

"The decision aims to prevent the import of materials and goods that will harm the Omani environment and is part of a comprehensive plan agreed upon by MoCIIP with the Environment Authority," Kasbi said.

According to him, the local plastic bag factories will make up for the shortfall in the market until the complete ban is introduced.

"Eliminating plastic bags is one of the challenges that the authority seeks to overcome in cooperation with the concerned authorities and find specifications for manufacturers and suppliers to ensure the correct transition to alternatives to plastic bags that harm the environment."

Many Omani factories have started producing environmentally friendly bags to support EA's decision and promote the circular and green economy, informed Kasbi.



Sayyid Theyazin to preside over ROP Annual Day event

Muscat - Sayyid Theyazin bin Haitham al Said, Minister of Culture, Sports and Youth, will grace Royal Oman Police's (ROP) Annual Day celebrations, which falls on January 5.

The ceremony, which will take place at the military parade ground of Sultan Qaboos Academy for Police Sciences in the wilayat of Nizwa, includes the passing out of officer cadets.

The ROP has been accorded great attention by His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik, the Supreme Commander. Under His Majesty the Sultan's patronage, the ROP has undergone major transformation in different fields of police action and realised tangible success in various security, service, traffic, customs and technical aspects. ONA



National football team in Iraq for 25th Arabian Gulf Cup

Our Correspondent
Muscat

The Omani national football team arrived on Monday in Iraq to participate in the 25th Arabian Gulf Cup, which will start in Basra on Friday.

The Arabian Gulf Cup was launched in 1970 and is organ-

ised every two years. Qatar hosted the previous edition when Bahrain emerged as champions, lifting their maiden title.

The eight participating teams will vie for the coveted title from January 6 to 19.

Oman have been pooled in Group A that includes Saudi Arabia, hosts Iraq and Yemen.

Group B comprises Asian Cup champions Qatar, holders Bahrain, Kuwait and the UAE.

Oman will begin their campaign against Iraq, after the opening ceremony on January 6. In the second match, Oman will face Yemen on January 9 and its third match will be against Saudi Arabia on January 12.

Oman's maiden title came in 2009 and they won their second crown during the 23rd edition, hosted by Kuwait in December 2017-January 2018.

Iraq is hosting the tournament for the second time after the first in 1979, when it hosted the fifth edition in the capital, Baghdad, and was crowned the winner.

PCR tests for arrivals from China: Qatar

Doha, Qatar - Qatar has become the latest nation to make it mandatory for travellers from China to take a COVID-19 test before arrival, the state news agency QNA said on Monday.

From Tuesday, those arriving from China to the Gulf nation will

need to provide a negative test taken within 48 hours of departure, irrespective of their vaccination status.

Doha joins the United States, India, South Korea, Canada, Australia, Spain, France, the UK and Israel, among other countries,

which have imposed similar measures.

The restrictions come following a surge in cases in China after it relaxed the stringent 'zero-COVID' policy. Wave of infections is overwhelming hospitals and crematoriums.



Rise in COVID-19 patients prompts SQUH to make face masks must

Our Correspondent
Muscat

Sultan Qaboos University Hospital (SQUH) has issued an internal directive stipulating that all employees and visitors of the hospital must wear face masks from Monday.

In a circular, the hospital stated that the decision has been taken because the hospital administration noticed an increase in the number of patients with COVID-19 positive results in recent days.

To avert the spread of the virus among staff and patients in the hospital, it has been decided that all employees and visitors must enter the hospital from the



main entrance and they are not allowed to use the emergency department entrances," the hospital statement said.

It added that all staff and visitors to the hospital will have to wear mask from Monday.

"The hospital administration

will continue to monitor the situation to determine the next course of action," the statement said.

The hospital stated that Purple Ward is to be used for admissions of COVID-19 positive patients.

Announcement

The Tax Authority would like to draw the attention of taxpayers to file their VAT returns for the last quarter of the year 2022 in accordance with the tax return form which is available on e-services portal www.taxoman.gov.om

And attach all required documents to it, no later than **30 January 2023**.

We hope all taxpayers comply with the deadline.

MAFWR uses drones to tackle palm pests

Our Correspondent
Muscat

The Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Water Resources (MAFWR), in cooperation with OQ, has started using drones to spray pesticides in its combat against the spread of Dubas bug and red palm weevil in the wilayat of Barka.

Since mid-1980s, the red palm weevil and Dubas bug have been reported to cause serious damage to date palms in Oman and in the Gulf region.

The unique agroclimatic conditions prevailing in the Middle East and the nature of the crop, coupled with transportation of planting material, led to the rapid spread of the pest in a short period of time.

In a statement issued by MAFWR, it said that the ministry reviewed the results of the first phase of the aerial surveys by satellites and drones for the early detection of Dubas bug and the red palm weevil using spectral scanning technology, in the pres-



ence of H E Dr Ahmed bin Nasser al Bakri, Undersecretary for Agriculture in MAFWR.

The ministry wanted to de-

velop better pesticide spraying techniques and aerial surveys for early detection of agricultural pests.

According to MAFWR, the experiment culminated in good preliminary results, following which, it decided to expand pes-

ticide treatment in the next few months by 'spraying larger areas using modern methods' that the ministry assessed will contribute

The ministry reviewed the results of the aerial surveys by satellites and drones for the early detection of Dubas bug and the red palm weevil using spectral scanning technology

to raising the efficiency of spraying and overcoming some of the challenges in fighting the menace in the remote areas of Oman. The ministry also revealed the results of an integrated management programme for the first half of 2022 to curb red palm weevil infestation.

The results showed an increase of 16.4 per cent in the number of pest infested palm trees across Oman. The number of infested trees was 22,444 against the 19,278 trees found

infested last year. Efforts of field teams and the ministry's specialists led to the treatment of 18,213 palm trees, or 81.2 per cent of the total affected palms in H1 2022. 'This is 14.3 per cent more than H1 2021, when 15,937 palm trees were treated,' the ministry added.

In 2022, 4,231 infected date palms were felled, which is 18.9 per cent of the total infected palms, compared to the removal of 3,341 palms during the same period of 2021, representing 17.3 per cent of the total infected palms.

Field teams trapped 50,312 red palm weevil insects using 3,867 trapping devices in 2022, compared to 42,915 in 2021.

The ministry said economic losses to the date plantation sector were significant due to red palm weevil infestation this year. Infestation of 22,444 date palms led to a total loss of RO1.571mn, while treatment of 18,213 trees had cost RO1.274mn, while removal of 4,231 infected palms had cost the ministry RO296,170.

Open contest for theme design of Muscat Book Fair

Our Correspondent
Muscat

The Muscat International Book Fair Committee has invited design ideas from companies and creative individuals to suitably depict the theme of this year's exhibition scheduled to begin on February 22.

'The committee invites all specialised companies, Omani designers and residents to participate in the competition,' said the organisers, adding that the theme should express 'the role of Oman, its cultural depth and interests in books'.

The theme design for the 27th edition of the fair 'should be distinctive, modern and non-traditional, and should not exceed four colours', and 'should include the name of Muscat International Book Fair in Arabic and English'.

One participant can submit a maximum of two designs and the last date for submission of designs is January 22. The winner will get RO1,000.

The 2023 book fair will include a diverse range of cultural programmes appealing to the tastes of avid readers from



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MUSCAT INTERNATIONAL BOOK FAIR COMMITTEE

across different categories, including academic, cultural, literary and scientific.

The event, which will run until March 4, will include family and children's programmes fulfilling

their educational aspirations and facilitating development of skills. Emphasis will be laid on the sciences of the future, providing access to a wide repository of knowledge.

OIA highlights its achievements in 2022

Muscat - The Oman Investment Authority (OIA) has released the latest issue of its quarterly newsletter *Enjaz & Eejaz*, covering a variety of topics and highlighting key achievements of the authority and the companies functioning under its umbrella.

In his foreword, OIA President H E Abdulsalam al Murshidi commended the authority and its companies, noting that their collective efforts have led to the realisation of many goals of OIA as a whole or of its individual companies. He called upon them to continue their efforts with an even stronger resolve in 2023, in order to achieve bigger goals and aspirations, and boost OIA's contribution in developing the national economy.

The new issue of *Enjaz & Eejaz*

Mazoon Mining targets development of five mines with copper reserves amounting to 22.9mn tonnes

includes an exclusive interview with Hamad al Naamani, CEO of Oman LNG, which sheds light on the growing and successful business of the LNG industry in Oman. He hinted that the company would soon sign more binding term-sheet agreements with international companies, similar to the three contracts it recently inked with Japanese companies to deliver 2.35 metric tonnes of Omani LNG annually from 2025.

The issue also highlighted the Mazoon Mining project, one of the most promising mineral investment projects taken up to revive the copper industry in Oman. With an estimated cost of US\$300mn, the project targets the development of five mines with considerable copper reserves amounting to 22.9mn tonnes, and a production capacity of 1.5mn tonnes annually.

The project in the wilayat of Yanqul in Dhahirah governorate seeks to position Oman among the leading global copper-producing countries.

The Center for Sustainability and Circular Economy, established by Oman Environmental Services Holding Company - be'ah is a first of its kind in Oman. The latest issue of the newsletter

highlights the services offered by this centre including R&D, transfer and marketing of technology, training and consulting services.

The newsletter also focused on the successes made by OIA's Future Generation Portfolio through its IDO Investments company. Its Nebras Program provided solutions to companies operating in the oil and gas sector, helping them to reduce carbon emissions. Additionally, Carzaty landed a merger deal with Kavak, a leading used-car platform in Latin America. Most notably also is 44.01's win of Earthshot Award 2022 in the 'Fix Our Climate' category, a global environmental award launched by Prince William in 2020 to support entrepreneurs who provide innovative climate solutions.

SEZAD seizes vessel dumping hazardous waste

Our Correspondent
Muscat

The Special Economic Zone at Duqm (SEZAD) seized a fishing vessel discharging hazardous waste at the Fishing Port in Duqm, the free zone said.

'The authority seized a fishing

vessel discharging hazardous waste at the Fishing Port in Duqm', a statement issued by SEZAD said.

'Accordingly, specialists in the Environmental Regulatory Department took legal actions against the violating vessel.'

SEZAD's management called

upon all fishermen to adhere to dumping wastes in the designated areas in the Fishing Port, as legal actions, which may include imprisonment for a period of two years and a fine of up to RO50,000, will be taken against violators and those polluting marine environment, it stated.

PRAYER TIMINGS

Fajr	5.29am
Sunrise	6.49am
Duhr	12.16pm
Asr	3.17pm
Maghrib	5.38pm
Isha	6.53pm

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Aquaculture production rises 500% in 8 years: MAFWR

Our Correspondent
Muscat

Production of fish from aquaculture projects in Oman has reached 1,703 tonnes in 2022, compared to 284 tonnes in 2014, according to Dawood Suleiman al Yahyai, Director General of Fisheries Research at the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Water Resources (MAFWR). This is a whopping 500 per cent increase in just eight years.

Bestowed with a vast coastline, Oman is positioned to exploit its marine resources judiciously, making the fishing industry one of the major contributors to the sultanate's GDP.

The future growth in the industry is envisioned to come from the bustling aquaculture sector as Oman has several large-scale fish farming projects under development, valued in excess of US\$1bn.

"The ministry's efforts and focus on small-scale fish farmers contributed to the increase in the production of freshwater fish farms from five tonnes in 2014 to



353 tonnes in 2021," Yahyai informed.

Fish production from integrated fish farming and commercial fish farming projects reached 1,350 tonnes in 2022, the most significant project being that of the European seabream.

Talking about the commercial fish farming sector, the DG of Fisheries Research said, "Currently we have a big floating cage

project in Quriyat to produce seabreams, in addition to two projects for the production of shrimps in Qurun and Khuweima in South Sharqiyah and a project for abalone in Dhofar."

"The ministry has received many applications for commercial aquaculture projects, which are in various stages of approvals," he added.

On the challenges facing the

aquaculture sector, Yahyai said the fish farming like other sectors of food production faces challenges such as diseases and epidemics that may affect farms and cause large economic losses. "In some cases, it may lead to complete closure of fish farms."

He informed that globally, the economic losses due to diseases reached to US\$6bn. "Therefore, the importance of biosecurity

has emerged as one of the important aspects of fish farming."

MAFWR recently organised a workshop on the importance of biosecurity in fish farms.

"The workshop aimed at spreading awareness of the importance of biosecurity measures in fish farms, especially freshwater fish farms," he said.

Talking about plans ahead, Yahyai said, "There are currently 28 integrated freshwater fish farms in the sultanate. We expect the abalone production to start commercially in 2023."

Aquaculture projects in the sultanate are categorised into integrated aquaculture and commercial aquaculture projects.

The integrated aquaculture projects are based on the integration between agricultural activity and aquaculture. It aims to optimise the use of land and water resources in food production activity that contributes to food security.

As for commercial aquaculture projects, most of them take place at sea or on a land beside the sea.

MoL launches Ejada scheme to improve govt performance

Our Correspondent
Muscat

The Ministry of Labour (MoL) on Sunday launched Ejada scheme for measuring institutional performance of government units in the sultanate.

The new system came up with an aim to provide appropriate instruments for better performance of the government units, besides having guidelines and standardised criteria for assessing the progress made by various units in achieving their goals.

Ejada scheme seeks to spread a culture of proficiency, develop knowledge-based ways to improve the quality of public services, reward units for distinguished performances and promote the spirit of innovation and creativity in all government units.

The launch ceremony was held under the auspices of H E Dr Mahad Said Ba'Owain, Minister of Labour.

Ejada is envisaged as a



means of realising the objectives of annual plans and ensuring the sustainability of the units in their drive to identify the areas of strength and the room for improvement.

Under the scheme, the focus will be on monitoring three parameters - the extent to which government institutions strive to develop the work environment, the satisfaction of the service recipients and the level of cooperation among various government units.

By this week, Ejada would be fully implemented in all the government units, officials said.

Memories come alive as MHT invites tenders for rebuilding of Seeb Castle

Our Correspondent
Muscat

With the aim of reviving Omani heritage and promoting tourism, the Ministry of Heritage and Tourism (MHT) has invited bids to rebuild Seeb Castle that once stood on the shores of the Arabian Sea on the outer periphery of Muscat.

In 2012, the ministry began excavation works at the castle site and spent more than two months excavating. The work was focused on studying artefacts - pottery and coins dating back to the Qajar Era (1789 to 1925) - found at the site.

The ministry, as part of its plan to privatise management of forts and castles in the sultanate, is looking to partner with the private sector to rebuild Seeb Castle for which a tender has been floated, MHT informed.

The ministry confirmed that interested companies must submit a study that includes construction and maintenance works. The deadline for bid submission is February 14.

Historical sites in Oman recorded a significant increase in the number of visitors, from 7,064 in 2016 to 22,259 in 2020 - a growth of 215 per cent, according to the National Centre for Statistics and Information (NCSI).

The news of the castle being



This archive photo shows the old Seeb Castle

I have beautiful memories of time spent in it that will never be forgotten. I had a picture in my living room of the castle that I had taken in 1970s

ZAKI AL MUHARRAMI

rebuilt brought back fond memories among those who frequented it when it still stood in the 1990s.

"I am delighted to hear that Seeb Castle is being rebuilt," Zaki al Muharrami told *Muscat Daily*. "I have beautiful memories of the time spent in it that will never be

forgotten. I had a picture in my living room of the castle that I had taken in 1970s."

Muharrami claimed he used to often tell his children about the castle. "The office of the Wali of Seeb was nearby. Residents of Seeb performed Raz'ha during Eid al Fitr and Eid al Adha in front of the castle."

Ahmed al Balushi, another citizen, said, "I thank the Ministry of Heritage and Tourism for rebuilding the castle. We have beautiful memories associated with it. We used to watch football matches held at Seeb Club from the castle."

Balushi also reminisced about a souq near the castle that sold authentic Omani dishes that attracted customers from other wilayats.

Contest launched to accelerate digital transformation in Buraimi govt institutions

Our Correspondent
Muscat

The Office of the Governor of Buraimi, in cooperation with the Innovation Oases Company, launched a competition for the citizens and residents of Buraimi to share their ideas on improving the functioning of the government in their governorate.

The contest under the slogan 'Together for Simpler Procedures' was launched to involve the citizens in the process of simplifying government procedures that may eventually improve the efficiency of the government.

An official at the Office of the

Governor of Buraimi said, "The contest targets citizens and residents of the governorate with an aim to improve government services in an innovative way.

"This will be done to accelerate digital transformation and achieve higher satisfaction of the beneficiaries, while reducing paper works and time for any transaction. It targets zero service visits in government institutions," he added.

"The aim is to automate all government transactions and approvals without the need for human interventions and attracting investors and raising the ranking of Oman in government

services," the official explained.

Talking about the contest's conditions, he informed that a participant must be a resident of the Buraimi governorate, and the ideas must be related to simplifying government procedures that can be easily applied.

A participant should explain the work flow chart before and after the simplification. He/she should also present global experiences for simplifying government procedures with the use of new electronic systems.

The winner of the contest will get RO500 and participants with outstanding ideas will be honoured with certificates.

Tender Announcement

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

Tender No.	Description	Last Date of Buying	Date of Submission	DCRP Grade	Site Visit	Tender Price (OMR)
MEDC/2022/73-2	Supply & Installation of: • Fault Passage Indicators for Under Ground Cables/ • Overhead Line Conductors networks with connection of SCADA system • Motorized Actuators for the RMU with connection of SCADA system	18/01/2023	07/02/2023	B and above	22/01/2023 at 9:00 AM in MEDC Head Office (with Full PPE)	105.00
MEDC/2022/103-2	Expansion of Infoblox DDI Solution	17/01/2023	24/01/2023	Specialized	—	26.25
MEDC/2023/001	Improve Reliability at MOD MAM-B PS By Adding One New 33kV Feeder.	18/01/2023	07/02/2023	A	22/01/2023 at 9:00 AM in MEDC Head Office (with Full PPE)	105.00

The table below shows the instructions for participation: -

Participation	- Companies registered with Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion and in I Supplier with Nama Groupe may obtain Tender documents. - The amount specified above is including 5% VAT. - Riyada card holders from Small and Medium Enterprises, SME, are exempted from Tender fees - The amount specified above is Non-Refundable payment (Terms and Condition apply) - To obtain the tender document and payment procedure , please visit MEDC Website/Vendor/E-Tendering, www.medcoman.com or call 24588600 – Ext: 8577 – 8726
Enquiries	- Any inquiry can be sent to MEDC Website/Vendor/E-Tendering, www.medcoman.com, one week before bid submission date. - Any request for clarification received after the above-mentioned period will not be considered.
Tender Submission	Please follow SUBMISSION OF TENDER mentioned in clause 20.0 in Prime Document and to the supplier guideline available MEDC Website/Vendor/E-Tendering, www.medcoman.com
Guarantee	- The Tender should enclose a bank guarantee or a certified cheque issued by any bank in the Sultanate of Oman Unconditional and irrevocable and shall be disbursement as soon as it is submitted for the value of (1%) of the tender value valid for a period of at least ninety (90) days from the last date of tender submission and addressed to the CHAIRMAN OF MINOR TENDER COMMITTEE, MUSCAT ELECTRICITY DISTRIBUTION COMPANY S.A.O.C. - The bid bond should be included in the commercial proposal only as sof copy. - Riyada card holders from Small and Medium Enterprises, SME, are exempted from bid bond requirements. - After the commercial opening , the qualified bidders will be notified to submit the original (hard copy) of bid bond to MEDC office. - Any tender not accompanied by a Tender Bond shall be rejected.
Terms and Conditions	- The Tender shall be valid for a period of at least ninety (90) days from the last date of tender submission including any extension thereof. - If the submission date extended, the bank guarantee or a certified cheque shall be extended in accordance with the bid extension date. - MEDC is not bound to accept the lowest (or highest) Tenderer. - Preference of awarding the tender will be given to those bidders who achieved a high percentage of purchasing from Local Products and have a High-level percentage of Omanization - Muscat Electricity Distribution Company gives priority to award the projects to SMEs companies. - For projects whose value is less than OMR 10K, the priority to award will be given to registered companies that hold a valid certificate Of Reyadah. - Failure to comply with the instructions in tender document may lead to disqualification.

MARKET WATCH

MSX304,842.39

Sensex61,167.79

FOREX RATES

(RO1 equals)

Indian	214.53
Pakistan	588.91
Bangladesh	276.54
Philippines	144.77
Sri Lanka	949.50

*Rates as on January 02

Source: xe.com

BRIEFS

Dubai scraps 30% alcohol tax and licence fee

Dubai has scrapped its 30 per cent alcohol tax in an apparent bid to boost tourism, according to a BBC report.

It will also stop charging for personal alcohol licences - something residents who want to drink at home must have.

Dubai has been relaxing laws for some time, allowing the sale of alcohol in daylight during Ramadan and approving home delivery during the pandemic.

This latest move is thought to be an attempt to make the city more attractive to foreigners, in the face of competition from neighbours.

The two companies which distribute alcohol in Dubai, Maritime and Mercantile International (MMI), and African & Eastern, said they would reflect the cut in tax for consumers.

"Since we began our operations in Dubai over 100 years ago, the emirate's approach has remained dynamic, sensitive and inclusive for all," MMI spokesman Tyrone Reid told AP.

MSX ended 2022 as second best performing stock market in GCC

Our Correspondent
Muscat

With an yearly gain of about 18 per cent in 2022, Oman's Muscat Stock Exchange (MSX) has been the second best performing stock market in the GCC region. The benchmark MSX30 Index was surprisingly resilient in 2022 - a year that saw high global inflation, rising interest rates, and food and energy crises caused by the Ukraine war.

During 2022, the Muscat Stock Exchange continued its positive trajectory from 2021 and closed higher for the second consecutive year after having fallen for four consecutive years previously from 2017 through to 2020.

The MSX30 Index closed 2022 up by 17.63 per cent year-on-year at 4857.44 points, while the MSX Total Return Index was up by 23.38 per cent to close the year at 6194.67 points.

Amongst the sub-indices, Financial Index gained the most, closing higher by 20.15 per cent on year-on-year. Industrial Index rose 5.77 per cent and Services Index closed down by 0.26 per cent. MSX Shariah Index ended down by 4.99 per cent for the year.

Most GCC markets ended 2022 in the green territory on year-on-year basis, except Saudi Stock Exchange and Qatar Ex-



change.

Abu Dhabi Stock Exchange gained the most at 20.3 per cent year-on-year, followed by the Muscat Stock Exchange at 17.63 per cent, Bahrain market at 5.45 per cent, Dubai Financial Market at 4.39 per cent, and Kuwait Stock Exchange at 3.53 per cent. Saudi Stock Exchange closed the year down by 6.82 per cent year-on-year, while Qatar Exchange closed down by 8.13 per cent year-on-year, according to a research report from U-Capital.

'As is the case with its GCC peers, Oman's economic prospects are closely tied to hydrocarbon prices, and this correlation is also visible in the country's stock market performance,' U-Capital said in its report.

However, Oman's economy is much more resilient now as compared to the time of oil price plunge during 2014-2016.

'This is because of expedited

efforts. Oman's economy continued the recovery path during 2022, supported by both the elevated hydrocarbon prices as well as non-hydrocarbon revenues like VAT,' U-Capital said.

The report said that continued increase in economic activity has also positively impacted businesses and MSX-listed companies have registered an increase of 9 per cent in their net profits during first nine months of 2022, largely supported by the financial and services sectors.

'These developments have resulted in the appreciation of the MSX30 Index which rose 17.63 per cent year-on-year,' it

added.

U-Capital analysis showed that 19 companies on the MSX have had share capital increases in 2022 with the total increase equal to about RO590mn. Out of these companies, 11 belong to the financial sector, seven to the industrial sector and one to the services sector. Two companies have had capital decreases during 2022.

Bullish outlook

The U-Capital report forecasts a positive performance for the Muscat Stock Exchange for this year.

'Going into 2023, the Omani stock exchange is expected to continue moving in an upward trajectory, given the expectations that the country's economy will improve further, supported by government reform initiatives under the Medium-Term Fiscal Plan as well as elevated hydrocarbon prices,' U-Capital said.

The report also noted that a flurry of initial public offering (IPO) activity is planned for the MSX in 2023. Government officials have been quoted as talking about Oman Investment Authority (OIA) taking up to 35 companies public over the next few years. 'This initiative will not only support to expand the market's economic sectors available for investment, but also increase the market's capitalization,' the report said.

Oman's oil production rises 10% in 2022

Our Correspondent
Muscat

Oman's daily average production of oil increased to 1.064mn barrels per day (bpd) during the first 11 months of 2022, up by 10 per cent in comparison to 967,600 bpd output recorded in the same period of the previous year.

The sultanate's total oil production in the first 11 months of 2022 grew by 10.0 per cent to 355.47mn barrels compared to 323.174mn barrels in the same period of 2021, according to the official data released by National Centre for Statistics and Information (NCSI).

Of the total production, crude output jumped by 13.5 per cent year-on-year to 283.53mn barrels during the first 11 months of 2022 from 249.76mn barrels recorded in the same period a year ago. Condensates output,



Oman sold its crude at an average price of \$95.8 per barrel during the first 11 months of 2022 against \$62.7 per barrel recorded in the same period of 2021

however, decreased by 2.0 per cent to 71.94mn barrels during January - November period of 2022.

Earlier in June 2022, Oman announced that the new discov-

eries of oil reserves by companies operating in Oman will help the sultanate increase its daily oil output between 50,000 - 100,000 bpd over the next two to three years.

Oman's daily average oil production has consistently remained above one million barrels per day during the first 11 months of 2022.

Exports jumps 12.7%

The sultanate's total oil exports grew by 12.7 per cent during the first 11 months of this year to 293.94mn barrels as compared with 260.80mn barrels recorded in the corresponding period of 2021, the NCSI data showed.

Total exports for the full year 2021 had inched up 0.7 per cent to 288.96mn barrels from 287mn barrels in 2020.

Oil exports to China, the biggest buyer of Oman's crude, accounted for over 80 per cent of the sultanate's total oil exports during January - November period last year.

Total exports to China grew by 7.9 per cent at 237.76mn barrels during the first 11 months of this year compared with 220.29mn barrels recorded in 2021. Shipments to Japan surged by 215 per cent to 10.69mn barrels against 3.38mn barrels in the same period a year ago.

On the other hand, oil exports to India jumped by over 23.2 per cent at 29.88mn barrels during January - November period of 2022 from 24.26mn barrels in the same period of 2021.

The average price at which Oman sold its crude during the first 11 months of 2022 was 53 per cent higher at US\$95.8 per barrel against US\$62.7 per barrel recorded in the same period of 2021.

Russian gas exports outside ex-Soviet states fell 45%

Moscow, Russia - Russian gas exports to countries outside a group of former Soviet republics plunged by 45.5 per cent in 2022, figures from gas giant Gazprom showed on Monday.

Gazprom said in a statement that exports outside the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) totalled 100.9bn cubic metres compared to 185.1bn in 2021.

Europe was previously Gazprom's main export market but supplies have been drastically reduced because of sanctions following Russia's offensive in Ukraine in 2022.

Gazprom CEO Alexei Miller said the company had been steadily increasing supplies to China during the year but did not give details on the quantities.

"From January 1 we are on a fundamentally new level of gas supplies to China," Miller said in the statement.

President Vladimir Putin last month inaugurated the Kovykta natural gas field in eastern Siberia that will allow Russia to increase its exports to China.

Russia does not have pipelines to transport gas from its Western Siberian and Arctic gas fields - which have served Europe - to China.

But Russia began efforts around a decade ago to develop new fields and build the Power of Siberia pipeline to deliver to the rapidly expanding Chinese market.

AFP

Jobs for Emiratis: UAE pushes work for own citizens

Dubai, UAE - With foreign workers making up the vast bulk of private sector jobs in the United Arab Emirates, the Gulf's second-largest economy wants to boost opportunities for its own citizens.

The UAE - like other oil-rich Arab Gulf states - has often used the public sector as an employment vehicle for its nationals.

But times are changing, said 34-year-old Emirati researcher Khalifa al-Suwaidi, who has himself been looking for a private sector job since quitting a government post in June.

"We've reached a point where we have a diversity among Emiratis in terms of skill sets and expertise," said Suwaidi.

"The public sector can no longer accommodate many of those talents".

Just 12 per cent of the coun-

try's more than nine million residents are UAE nationals, with over 90 per cent of private sector jobs taken by foreigners, according to International Labour Organization figures.

Suwaidi, author of a forthcoming book titled "UAE after the Arab Spring", said he believed some employers overlooked his application because they presumed an Emirati would demand the high wages often paid in lucrative government posts.

"The private sector needs to be more accommodating," he said. "I've been applying for jobs for a while to no avail."

'Larger push'

The government is now strong-arming private firms into hiring local talent, with the aim of ensuring Emiratis make up 10 per cent of the private sector work-



In Dubai, Emirati unemployment rose from 2.5 per cent in 2012 to 4.2 per cent in 2019

force by 2026.

Next month, firms with more than 50 employees that fail to fill two per cent of their skilled jobs with Emiratis face being fined.

That has sparked a hiring drive, with recruiters noting a "flood of vacancies" from companies - many of which won't be able to meet their targets.

"It's going to be a tough run," said Hamza Zaouali, the founder of recruitment agency Iris Executives, but noting it was "not possible" for the UAE government to keep growing and hiring.

"The more sustainable way is to make sure the economy continuously absorbs, trains and works with Emiratis," Zaouali said.

It is part of a wider trend, said Eman Alhussein, a non-resident fellow with the Arab Gulf States Institute in Washington.

The UAE is joining "a larger push in the Gulf to change the

dynamics of state-society relations" and wean citizens away from government jobs, she said.

"Gulf states want citizens to alter their expectations, give back to the state and accept jobs with longer hours and perhaps reduced income," Alhussein said.

In November, the UAE's Minister of Human Resources and Emiratisation, Abdulrahman al Awar, said that more than 14,000 Emiratis had entered the job market in 2022, with an average of 100 finding jobs each day.

The government also announced a salary support scheme that provides Emiratis in the private sector with up to AED7,000 (US\$1,900) extra if monthly wages are less than AED30,000.

There is no national minimum wage for Emiratis, but in Sharjah, one of the country's seven emirates, they are entitled to a monthly minimum of AED25,000.

The UAE, a top regional hub for multinational companies, ranked among the 10 richest countries in the world in 2020, according to the United Nations.

In 2022, it boasted a per capita GDP of more than US\$47,000, higher than Britain and France, according to the International Monetary Fund.

It has one of the lowest unemployment rates in the Middle East, but data on nationwide joblessness among Emiratis is not publicly available.

In the UAE's financial hub Dubai, Emirati unemployment rose from 2.5 per cent in 2012 to 4.2 per cent in 2019, according to the Dubai Statistics Center.

AFP

Third of world economy will be in recession this year: IMF

While the US is the most resilient of those three and may avoid recession, Georgieva said this may be a "mixed blessing."

"We see the labour market remaining quite strong. This is, however, mixed blessing because if the labour market is very strong, the Fed may have to keep interest rates tighter for longer to bring inflation down. The EU has been very severely hit by the war in Ukraine. Half of the European Union will be in recession next year," she explained.

Noting that the EU was "very severely" hit hard by the ongoing war in Ukraine, Georgieva said that half of the bloc would be in recession next year.

She added that the outlook for emerging markets in developing economies was even direr due to interest rate hikes and a strong US dollar.

The IMF chief noted that the world's second-largest economy, China, was likely to expand at or below the global growth rate for the first time in 40 years as COVID-19 cases climb after the relaxation of restrictions.

"That has never happened before. And looking in to next year for three, four, five, six months



IMF managing director Kristalina Georgieva

The year 2023 will be tougher than last year for most of the world economy as the US, EU and China slow down simultaneously, IMF chief Kristalina Georgieva said

plained. Georgieva expects that there would be counterweight from the sheer opening of China's economy, because up to now, the biggest impact on global value chains came from restrictions due to COVID.

"When you close down a big city or a big port, the repercussions for the economy is- are significant. Now, we would have the impact of people getting sick, not going to work, but the economy would be open. So the expectations we have for China is to gradually move to a higher level of economic performance, and finish the year better off than it is going to start the year," she added.

Georgieva noted that the world has relied on China's growth for a very long time. Before COVID, China would deliver up to 40 per cent of global growth.

"It is not doing it anymore. It is actually quite a stressful for for the Asian economies. When I talk to Asian leaders, all of them start with this question, what is going to happen with China? Is China going to return to a higher level of growth?," she said.

Agencies



US stocks sink in worst yearly show since 2008

New York, US - Wall Street stocks marked a gloomy end to 2022, slumping to close lower in their worst annual showing in years.

Surging inflation and steep interest rate hikes to cool demand have battered markets and investor sentiment this year, on top of global shocks like Russia's invasion of Ukraine.

"The last trading day of the year just confirmed what we had all year, a horrible stock market," said Peter Cardillo of Spartan Capital Securities.

Key US indices saw their poorest performances since 2008, with the S&P 500 and Nasdaq both seeing double-digit drops over the past year.

The Dow Jones Industrial

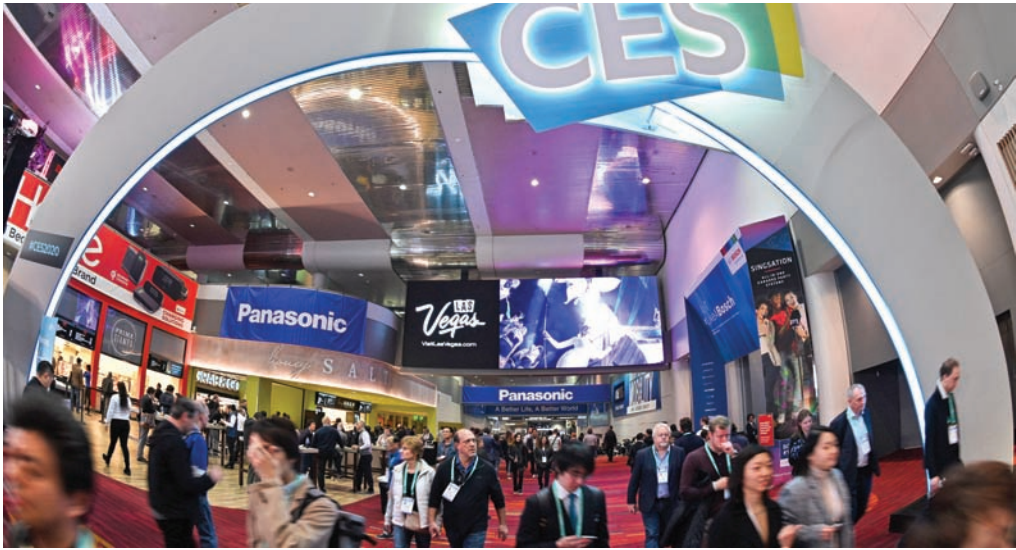
Average shed 0.2 per cent to 33,147.25, while the broad-based S&P 500 lost 0.3 per cent to 3,839.50.

The tech-rich Nasdaq Composite Index dropped 0.1 per cent to 10,466.48 after bigger losses earlier in the day.

A year-end rally "looks to have eluded us this year" given the shocks of 2022 and vast uncertainty ahead, said Craig Erlam of the OANDA trading platform. While analysts expect the worst of Federal Reserve rate hikes to be over, some caution that the coming months will remain tough.

"The possibilities of any strong rally in the first quarter is probably very limited," said Cardillo.

AFF



AI infused everything on show at CES gadget extravaganza

Las Vegas, US - The latest leaps in artificial intelligence in everything from cars, robots to appliances will be on full display at the annual Consumer Electronics Show (CES) opening Thursday in Las Vegas.

Forced by the pandemic to go virtual in 2021 and hybrid last year, tens of thousands of showgoers are hoping for a return to packed halls and rapid-fire deal-making that were long the hallmark of the annual gadget extravaganza.

"In 2022, it was a shadow of itself - empty halls, no meetings in hotel rooms," Avi Greengart, an analyst at Techspotential told AFP.

"Now, (we expect) crowds, trouble getting around and meetings behind closed doors - which is what a trade show is all about."

The CES show officially opens on January 5, but companies will begin to vie for the spotlight with the latest tech wizardry as early as Tuesday.

CES will be spread over more than 18 acres (seven hectares), from the sprawling Las Vegas Convention Center to pavilions set up in parking lots. Ballrooms and banquet rooms across Sin City will be used to hustle up business.

With transportation now

computing's new frontier, next generation autos, trucks, boats, farm equipment, and even flying machines are expected to grab attention, according to analysts.

"It's going to feel almost like you're at an auto show," said Kevan Yalowitz, head of platform strategy at Accenture.

More than ever, cars now come with operating systems so much like a smartphone or laptop computer, Accenture expects that by 2040 about 40 percent of vehicles on the road will need software updated remotely.

And with connected cars come apps and online entertainment as developers battle to grab passenger attention with streaming or shopping services on board.

Electric vehicles enhanced with artificial intelligence will also be on display "in a big way," Greengart said.

"What has really been the buzz is personalized flying machines," said independent tech analyst Rob Enderle.

"Basically, they are human-carrying drones."

Led by Zuckerberg's Meta, immersive virtual worlds referred to as the metaverse are seen by some as the future of the ever-evolving internet, despite widespread criticism that the

billionaire CEO is over-investing in an unproven sector.

After being a major theme at CES last year, virtual reality headgear aimed at transporting people to the metaverse are expected to again to figure prominently.

Formerly known as Facebook, Meta will be allowing selected guests to try its latest Oculus Quest virtual reality headset, trying to persuade doubters that the company's pivot to the metaverse was the right one.

Gadgets or services pitched as being part of the next-generation of the internet - or "Web 3" - are also expected to include mixed reality gear as well as blockchain technology and NFTs.

Web 3 promises a more decentralized internet where tech giants, big business or governments no longer hold all the keys to life online. "The idea of how we are going to connect is going to be part of the big trend at CES," said Creative Strategies analyst Carolina Milanesi.

Analysts had expected cryptocurrencies to be touted among Web 3 innovations at the show, but there "could be pullback" because of the implosion of cryptocurrency platform FTX and arrest of its boss Sam Bankman-Fried, according to Milanesi.

AFF

European gas prices fall to lowest level since Ukraine war

Brussels, Belgium - Europe's wholesale natural gas prices fell Monday to their lowest level since Russia invaded Ukraine, which had driven them to a record high last year.

A mild winter has enabled countries to tap less gas from stocks that were built up in anticipation of cuts in supplies from Russia, which was Europe's main supplier before the war.

The benchmark European contract -- Dutch TTF gas future for the coming month -- soared to a record 345 euros per megawatt hours in March. It still reached as high as 342 euros in August.

But prices have been falling since then, hitting 73 euros on

Monday -- 50 per cent down from a month ago and the lowest level since before the war on February 21.

Gas exports by Russian energy giant Gazprom to the European Union and Switzerland fell by 55 per cent last year, the company said Monday.

Europe was previously Gazprom's main export market but supplies have been drastically reduced because of sanctions following Russia's offensive in Ukraine in 2022.

European nations filled up their gas storage facilities and launched campaigns to encourage consumers to save on energy during the winter.

European storage levels were at 83 per cent on Monday, reducing the need to buy

more gas for now.

The EU has scrambled to find new sources of natural gas in efforts to cut its heavy reliance on Russian supplies.

EU nations have also adopted a mechanism to cap natural gas prices, but analysts say it will likely have only a limited impact on reducing what businesses and households pay.

Experts have warned that a cold snap could still send gas prices rising again.

Russian President Vladimir Putin could also cause more commotion in the markets.

"He could send less (gas) but he could also send more to certain destinations in the hope of dividing European countries," said Thierry Bros,

an energy market analyst who teaches at the Sciences Po school in Paris.

Europe would struggle to fill up stocks this summer if it does not receive 30bn cubic metres of Russian gas, Bros said.

"Prices risk rising again," he said.

Europe is better prepared than in January 2022 when storage was only at 54 per cent capacity, Bros added.

Competition between Europe and Asia for imports of liquefied natural gas could also send prices higher, said Nicolas de Warren, president of the French association of industries that consume the most energy.

AFF

Huawei says back to 'business as usual' despite US sanctions

Beijing, China - Chinese tech giant Huawei said it had returned to "business as usual" despite US sanctions as it estimated annual revenues to remain flat for 2022.

A leading supplier of telecom gear, smartphones and other advanced equipment, Huawei was hammered during a crackdown by the administration of previous US president Donald Trump over cybersecurity and espionage concerns.

His successor Joe Biden has added to that pressure with regulations that threaten Huawei's access to global semiconductor supply chains.

But Huawei's chairman Eric Xu sounded a positive note in a New Year's message.

"In 2022, we successfully pulled ourselves out of crisis mode. US restrictions are now our new normal," he said in the letter.



"We're back to business as usual."

The company estimated annual revenue for 2022 at 636.9bn yuan (US\$92bn), up only slightly from the 636.8bn yuan in 2021.

Huawei has moved to diversify revenue streams after US-

led sanctions took a major chunk out of its telecom equipment and smartphone businesses.

Its 5G gear has been blocked in major markets including the United States, Britain and Japan over security concerns. Huawei has denied allegations that its equipment carries risks of sabo-

tage and spying.

And the company - once the world's top smartphone maker - has seen sales slump after the United States cut off access to key parts and also barred it from using Google's Android operating system.

Huawei has since moved into the cloud computing sector - with an aim to invest in data centres around the world - and also focused on offering consumer tech such as smartwatches in addition to phones.

The firm has also boosted its footprint in the auto sector as a supplier.

The company did not provide details about its net profit or a breakdown of figures from its various divisions.

Huawei is not publicly listed and its accounts are not subject to the same audits as companies traded on the stock market.

AFF



Bank Muscat wins Insights Best Call Centre Award

In recognition of its customer-centric vision, Bank Muscat, the leading financial services provider in the sultanate, has been announced as the regional winner for the Best Call Centre (Banking) at the prestigious Middle East Call Centre/CX Awards 2022, which was recently held in Dubai.

Instituted by Insights, the leading call centre based professional services organisation in the region, the awards symbolise unmatched validation and peer-

judging processes that enable winners to build and strengthen world-class call centre teams and showcase continuous, ongoing improvement, a press release said.

Speaking about the outstanding achievement, Talal Abdul Hameed al Zadjali, deputy general manager – Operations, Bank Muscat, said, “I would like to take this opportunity to thank Insights for this prestigious award, which endorses the bank’s customer-centric strategy and recognises

our efforts to continuously improve and set new benchmarks. As a vital link between our valued customers and the bank, the bank’s Contact Centre continues to provide various services around the clock, seven days a week, with minimal waiting period.

“I would like to express my sincere appreciation to all the Contact Centre employees for their dedication and efforts to enhance the implementation of the bank’s customer-centric vi-

sion and the overall customer experience.” He added that the bank would strive to attract qualified and talented Omani cadre to the Contact Centre and continuously upgrade it with the technologies.

Bank Muscat operates the largest Contact Centre in the banking sector in the Sultanate with over 160 team members and enjoying 99 per cent Omanisation and a male to female ratio of 65:35. Featuring the best-in-class technology, the Contact

Centre handles over 5.4 million interactions and 1.3 million social media queries annually through its Interactive Voice Response (IVR) system as well as customer service champions who answer inbound queries via phone calls and WhatsApp chats. It is indeed a matter of great pride that the vast majority of incoming telephone calls are responded to within as little as 20 seconds. To enhance the customer experience, language options include Arabic and Hindi.

National Finance announces tie-up with Danube Home



National Finance, Oman’s leading finance company, has signed an agreement with Danube Home, a major home improvement and furniture retail brand in Oman, to offer consumer-financing options to customers for home refurbishments.

This financing option enables both partners to serve a broader customer base and boost sales, as well as allow customers to purchase high-quality items and pay later for the furniture, a press release said.

Lina Mubarak al Abdulsalaam, head of Marketing and Corporate Communication, said “Our goal at National Finance is to help individuals meet their needs. As a result of our strategic partnership with Danube Home, we aim to offer more financing options to a wider range of customers. We believe that customers will find refurbishing their spaces easier and more rewarding than ever before. As part of our commitment to providing financing solutions, we plan to partner up with various furniture brands to assist clients in meeting their needs.”

This strategic partnership builds on National Finance’s mission to offer the wider society access to seamless financial solutions that facilitate their day-

to-day activities and enhance their lifestyle. In addition, it affirms the company’s vision of becoming the Sultanate’s non-banking leading financial services provider. With top-notch customer service, cutting-edge solutions and technology-driven initiatives and solutions, the company strives to deliver the best quality experience in a convenient and timely manner.

Shubhojit Mahalanobis, director, Danube Home, asserted that “Danube Home understands the importance of Consumer Financing in the region very well and was eager to partner with National Finance to provide a more seamless and hassle free shopping experience to its customers. With this partnership, customers can select their products and avail the finance facility immediately from National Finance to buy them without a salary transfer or saving account with National Finance. Danube Home’s partnership with National Finance will greatly increase our customer base with its convenient to buy now and pay later option.”

For over 35 years, National Finance has provided worry-free financing solutions by offering easy financing schemes.



Al Maha’s ‘Fill & Win’ winner announced

Al Maha Petroleum Products Marketing Company has announced the winners of their month-long ‘Fill & Win’ raffle contest.

This special promotion, commemorating the sultanate’s 52nd National Day, shortlisted 55 lucky winners through an electronic lucky draw rewarding 52 individuals with e-rail cards

worth RO52 each, while 2 others received iPhones-14 and one lucky winner received a Changan Alsvin car, the campaign’s grand prize.

Ahmed Bakhit al Shanfari, division head - Marketing & Business Development, Al Maha, handed over the Changan Alsvin to Sameeh al Bareiki, winner of the grand prize, a press re-

lease said.

Ahmed said, “The Fill & Win campaign was just a medium to celebrate National Day with our valued customers, and the response we received, in turn, was tremendous.”

He added, “We are happy with the results of this campaign and glad to have organised it successfully.”

INMECC and OCCI to work together

The chairman of Oman Chamber of Commerce and Industry (OCCI) Faisal al Rawas met with Davis Kallukaran, founder director of Indo Gulf Middleeast Chamber of commerce (INMECC) and the Oman chapter Secretary Chander Khanna in the presence of OCCI board member Abdul Latheef at the chamber office.

Davis and Al Rawas discussed the synergy of both chambers working together for the development of trade and services between Oman and India. Rawas emphasised on the skill set development of the Omani youth by inviting INMECC to facilitate the setting up of universities of higher education in Oman, a press release said.

Davis said, “As announced by Dr Sharafudeen, chairman of INMECC, and endorsed by V Muralidharan, minister of state for foreign affairs, Government of India, in last week’s meeting held in Cochin, INMECC is taking forward the



project of ‘Sick industrial units Revival’. This is also being initiated in Oman.

“The units have become sick because of weaknesses in application of technology, mismanagement of funds, lack of availability of raw materials and lack of marketing capabilities or access to markets etc. If we take the thousands of units that are sick, we can see

that the strength of many units in certain areas above mentioned could be serious weaknesses in Certain other units. INMECC in association with OCCI can bridge this gap by mentoring the entrepreneurs to bring about synergy which is very much required.”

Davis informed the chairman that INMECC is establishing Chapters across the

multiple states in India and abroad.

The chapters are already established in Oman, UAE, Saudi, Kuwait, Maharashtra and Kerala. The Oman Chapter is headed by Suresh Virmani former CEO of Bahwan Engineering, supported by Mohiyuddin Mohammed Ali as vice chairman and Chander Khanna as secretary.

ROHM presents L’Elisir d’Amore conducted by Jordi Bernacer

The Royal Opera House Muscat is delighted presents Gaetano Donizetti’s beloved opera, L’Elisir d’Amore performed by the Orchestra and Chorus of Teatro Lirico di Cagliari conducted by Jordi Bernacer.

The opera features an incredible all-star cast, including Erwin Schrott in the role of the wicked charlatan Dulcamara, a press release said.

L’Elisir d’Amore tells the story of Nemorino, a simple country lad, who yearns for his childhood



friend to return his love. He is convinced by the promises of a

travelling ‘doctor’, who offers him a mysterious elixir, one

which will render him irresistible to his true love. Time is against



him, and as his love welcomes the flirtatious advances of a

dashing soldier, in haste he sells himself into the army to fund an-

other bottle of the potion.

The theatrical extravaganza, with vibrant staging and beautiful costumes has Nina Minasyan singing Adina, René Barbera singing Nemorino, while Germán Enrique Alcántara takes the role of Belcore. L’Elisir d’Amore will take place at the Royal Opera House Muscat on January 5 at 7pm and Saturday January 7, at 4pm for a matinee performance. A pre-performance talk will take place one hour ahead of the show.

Muzn's Shari'a Supervisory Board holds Q4 meet

Committed to creating an effective and Shari'a compliant customer experience, Muzn, National Bank of Oman's (NBO) Islamic banking window, recently held its 4th Shari'a Board Meeting.

Chairman Sheikh Muhammad Zubair Usmani, was joined by other board members, including H H Sayyid Adham bin Turki al Said, Sheikh Abdul Rahman Abdullah al Saadi, and Sheikh Saleh al Kharusi, to discuss performance data, Muzn's long-term strategy and other relevant topics on the board's agenda, including digital transformation. The discussion included the approvals of the Shari'a Compliance Report, Shari'a Audit Report, and Fatawa Pronouncement Guidelines.

Salima al Marzouqi, chief Islamic Banking officer, said, "We understand that good corporate governance and taking a long-term perspective are essential to the further expansion of the country's fast-growing Islamic finance sector. Shari'a compliance is at the heart of what we do and through frequent meetings with



our effective and knowledgeable Shari'a board members, we are creating new experiences for our customers, which should not only be seamless but also in keeping with their integrity and values. We have a lot planned for the business year 2023 and we are keeping abreast with emerging technologies because we know that the digital transformation is driving the customer experience."

Muzn offers a host of innovative, competitive and quality financial solutions with the values of Islamic Shari'a at the core. Among its latest are its Islamic Personal Financing facility, Kids Wakala account, and enabling cash deposits through a diverse network of CCDMs operated by its parent organisation NBO. Moreover, its pioneering digital services continue to grow, with a new Wallet Transfer feature, enabling users to send and receive money locally and instantly using a mobile number, and Scan & Pay using QR codes.

IDEX and NAVDEX 2023 to showcase exciting features

Under the patronage of H H Sheikh Mohamed bin Zayed Al Nahyan, President of the UAE, ADNEC Group is set to host the 16th edition of the International Defence Exhibition and Conference (IDEX 2023) and the 7th edition of the Naval Defence Exhibition and Conference (NAVDEX 2023), which will take place between February 20-24.

Organised by ADNEC Group at the Abu Dhabi National Exhibition Centre, in association with the UAE Ministry of Defence, the events are set to showcase a wide range of new features and attract leading participants and exhibitors from the international defence industry, a press release said.

The upcoming edition of IDEX marks the 30th edition of the event and, along with NAVDEX these events have become the largest of their kind in the world. The events are expected to host high-calibre participation, including leaders, decision-makers, ministers and senior officials, as



well as industry experts and professionals from all over the world.

As part of the event week, in a first of its kind, ADNEC will host a series of high-level round table discussions with prominent industry thought leaders and commentators. These leading industry experts will gather to discuss recent and critical topics around the defense and naval industries, with an outcomes based objective to collaborate on focused industry reports.

IDEX and NAVDEX will introduce IDEX Next_Gen, a space dedicated for startups which will enable entrepreneurs to demonstrate their solutions and technologies in defence/naval sector.

Oppo Band 2 offers range of health-based functionalities

The year 2023 will be the year where resolutions last, thanks to the OPPO Band 2. Equipped with an ultra-clear large screen, colourful watch faces, two-colour strap design, and a full range of health-based functionalities, it's the only device needed to smash those New Year resolutions with ease.

For fitness beginners or enthusiasts, the band supports 100 workout modes and auto-detection of four modes - walking, running, elliptical machine, and rowing machine. Moreover, the OPPO Band 2 includes improved health modes including a tennis mode that can record five types of data including strokes, racket swings, activity duration, heart rate, and calories burned, a press release said.

The smart gadget offers an upgraded running functionality, with heart rate monitoring that will help users run safely and efficiently while users can also stay up to date on their exciting



data through the HeyTap Health App for increased motivation on their progress.

The OPPO Band 2 has a 1.57-inch ultra-clear large screen with a pixel density of 302 PPI, a screen-to-body ratio 47% higher than the previous generations, and an over 74% larger display area, making interactions simpler and easier. The screen brightness is up to 500 nits, ensuring a clear display even in strong outdoor light.

Ooredoo offers 20% off on Shahry plans

Looking for a customised mobile plan with lots of internet and no strings attached? Ooredoo customers can enjoy 20% off on Shahry postpaid plans through the Ooredoo eShop where they can find the best plan suited to you and your needs.

Customers can choose from the Endless 10 Data Only Plan for only RO8 all the way up to the exclusive Omanuna 100 plan for only RO80. The discounted subscription fees are valid for 4 months only, a press release said.

Ooredoo's Shahry plans offer the most competitive data, voice and SMS prices in convenient fixed monthly plans to suit all requirements and budgets. With no contract, Shahry plans come with generous local and GCC Internet and world roaming data, and a free subscription to STARZPLAY on certain Omanuna plans.

NCCMLTF approves risk assessment on money laundering

In coordination with the National Counter-Terrorism Committee (NCTC), the National Committee for Combatting Money Laundering and Terrorism Financing (NCCMLTF) approved a number of substantive risk-assessment reports on the crimes of money laundering, financing of terrorism and proliferation of weapons of mass destruction.

The approved reports are a culmination of effective coordination between all relevant AML/CFT entities and a clear realisation of the national strategies, aimed at improving the prevention and control systems in the Sultanate of Oman and in consistence with the developments at the local and regional levels, a press release said.

It is noteworthy that the approved reports are meant to identify, assess and understand the risks resulting from the crimes of money laundering, financing of terrorism and financing proliferation of weapons of

mass destruction. This is in addition to understanding the risks that might be faced by the legal entities and arrangements, and service offices in Oman. It is further to be noted that the two national committees aim to utilise the assessments in order to update and develop the national strategies and action plans for combating such crimes.

The outcome of these assessments would effectively contribute to the allocation of the available risk management resources, reinforcement of the capabilities of national authorities, including the pre-emptive measures and operational procedures. Besides, the outcome would also enhance the capabilities of the relevant authorities, expand the scope of their legal framework, capability and preparedness to keep pace with latest local, regional, and international developments related to combatting these crimes in compliance with international requirements.

Bank Nizwa opens new branch in Mawaleh

Bank Nizwa, a leading Islamic Bank in the sultanate, has inaugurated its 18th fully functional branch in Mawaleh.

Strategically located, the new branch constitutes the bank's latest step towards redefining the banking experience for people in the sultanate by offering Shari'ah-compliant products and services within the convenience of their communities, a press release said.

Commenting on the recent branch expansion, Arif al Zaabi, assistant general manager of Retail Banking at Bank Nizwa, said, "We are delighted to announce the opening of a new branch in Muscat. Al Mawaleh is a rapidly growing and strategically critical market. This move supports the Bank's strategy to extend its reach and provide exceptional consumer banking experiences throughout Oman."

"Bank Nizwa is planning further branch expansion across the sultanate in view of the vast potential of Islamic finance. Through this brand-new branch, customers can manage and grow their wealth whilst enjoying the bank's innovative and re-



sponsive products and services."

The new branch brings Bank Nizwa's total number of branches in Muscat Governorate to six. In addition to in-branch solutions, the branch will offer online and digital solutions to meet the banking preferences of its customers.

The branch will provide a wide range of products and services for consumers and businesses, as well as wealth management products. A pioneer in introducing Shari'ah-compliant products and services in the country, the bank offers a wide variety of unique products tailored to its customers' needs.

As Bank Nizwa expands across the sultanate and offers its excellent Islamic banking experience to customers in all corners of the country, it has also remained committed to investing in its human resources.

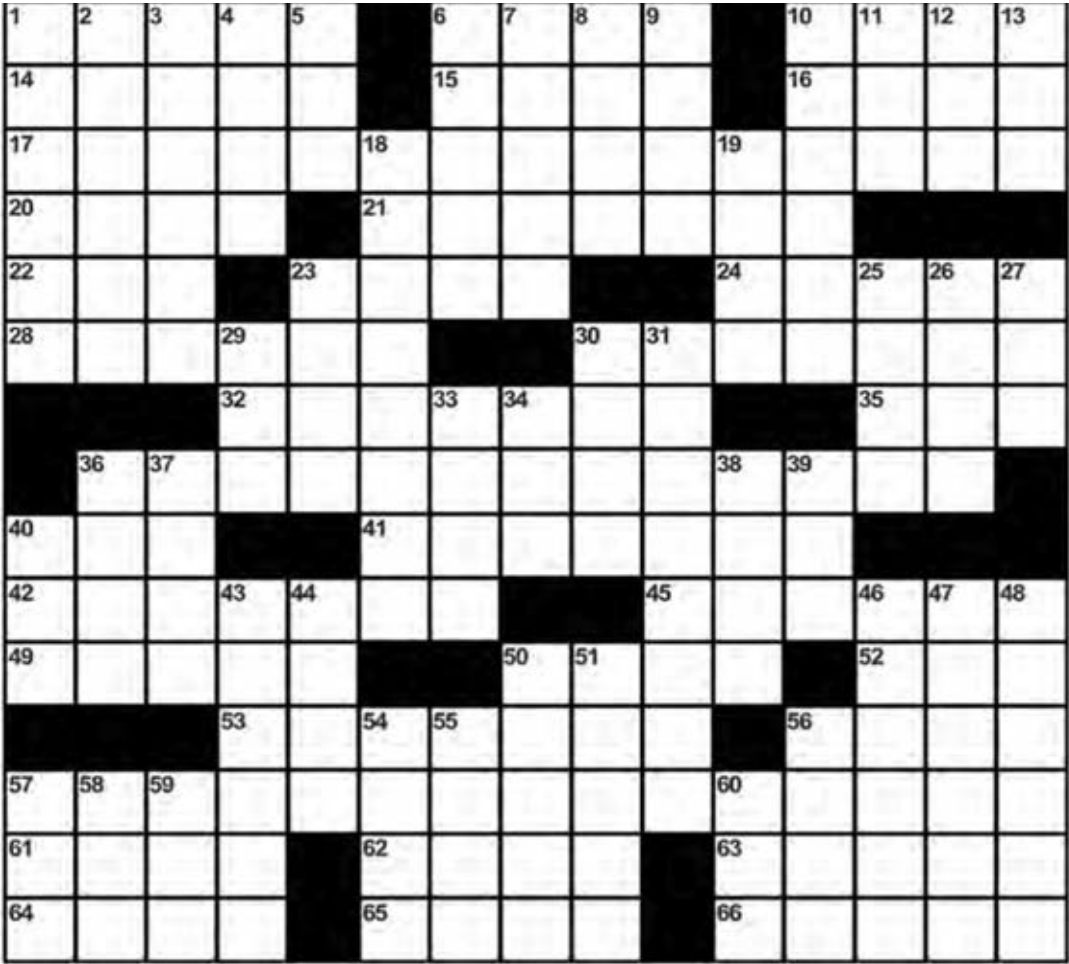
The newly opened Mawaleh branch is staffed with qualified, well-trained and experienced Omani employees who not only possess the skills, aptitude, and knowledge to address varying customer needs but also have an in-depth understanding of the local community.

At the forefront of digitalisation and innovation, the branch is also well-equipped with the latest technological solutions to ensure all processes are seamless, quick and convenient.

Bank Nizwa will continue its nationwide initiatives to make Islamic finance more accessible to various community segments and empower the public with the necessary knowledge to make sound financial decisions that meet their needs and beliefs.

Today, Oman's first and leading full-fledged Islamic Bank enjoys a robust network of branches and ATMs across the sultanate.

DAILY CROSSWORD



ACROSS

- 1) Inclination
- 6) Middle Eastern monarchy
- 10) Iranian currency
- 14) Some soft drinks
- 15) Tree trunk
- 16) Land o' the shamrock
- 17) How some lay it on?
- 20) Tear apart
- 21) Property recipient, in law
- 22) Satisfied one's hunger
- 23) "A likely story!"
- 24) Apogee's antithesis
- 28) Common volcanic rock
- 30) Six-stanza verse form
- 32) Is generous
- 35) Mighty high peak
- 36) Almost certifiable
- 40) Suffers from
- 41) Cough drop flavor
- 42) Like a glutton
- 45) Calculator of a sort
- 49) Leisurely walk
- 50) Blanched
- 52) Anti-apartheid party, for short

- 53) Certain singer
- 56) Certainly not often
- 57) What a hint is
- 61) Like a tie score
- 62) Bookie's quote
- 63) Ration out
- 64) Lightbulb unit
- 65) Not messy at all
- 66) Dabbling ducks
- DOWN**
- 1) Sacred beetle of ancient Egypt
- 2) Controversial Nabokov novel
- 3) Bartender's supply
- 4) High-priced spread
- 5) "To the max" indicator
- 6) Daggers, in printing
- 7) Recurring theme
- 8) Common skin cream ingredient
- 9) Attention-getting light
- 10) Warm, as leftovers
- 11) Three, on old clocks
- 12) Not quite a circle
- 13) Albanian dollar
- 18) It may follow Tom, Dick or Harry
- 19) Easy math column

- 23) Much
- 25) Cameron of Holly-wood
- 26) In a thorough manner
- 27) Music category
- 29) Commercial
- 30) Paving stone
- 31) Type of onion (Var.)
- 33) Tucked in for the night
- 34) Plating material
- 36) Coffee, slangily
- 37) Functions
- 38) It prevents exposure
- 39) In the way of
- 40) Emulate a rabbit
- 43) Forwarded
- 44) Plowable snowfall
- 46) Kind of oil
- 47) Not hip
- 48) Perfumes
- 50) Type of "bear"
- 51) Anxiety
- 54) Unit measuring loudness
- 55) Kings Dominion attraction
- 56) Eye up and down
- 57) Make a cuff

- 58) Eggs, to biologists
- 59) Big Apple athlete
- 60) Meal source?

NOTE PAD



YOUR DAILY HOROSCOPE



ARIES MARCH 21-APRIL 19

When was the last time you contemplated what your future was going to look like? Visualizing what you want is not a waste of time. It's a very smart way to plan. Don't assume that because things are going a certain way now that they'll continue in that direction forever. Every day offers you an opportunity to mix things up and move things around, and today presents you with a very obvious opportunity. Play the "what if" game and imagine what would happen if you grabbed your chance.



LEO JULY 23-AUGUST 22

Today, you need to ask yourself what the biggest issue is in your relationships. The answer will be illuminating, to say the least. If you find that the issue is the same with everyone, then you know you need to start examining what you're doing and why you might be doing it. If the answer depends on who the person is, then you know that the problem might reside in their attitudes more than yours. Either way, taking time to reflect on how you relate to others is valuable now.



SAGITTARIUS NOVEMBER 22-DECEMBER 21

New ideas don't always come at convenient times, so you can't keep waiting around for inspiration to strike. Instead, you have to keep yourself busy until inspiration lands in your lap and then try to roll with it whenever and however you can. Go on with your typical daily activities, and right when you least expect it you'll be given an opportunity to try something adventurous. Don't worry about being unchallenged. It's not a problem that you're likely to have for very long!



TAURUS APRIL 20-MAY 20

An idea you used to think was radical won't seem so radical today. In fact, it will make a lot of sense to you! You're not the same person you used to be, and you should celebrate the ways you've evolved. Looking back at old photos, reading old journal entries, or just checking in with long lost friends will help you gain perspective on how far you've come. Yay for you! Why not celebrate your wonderfulness by treating yourself to a little gift you've had your eye on?



VIRGO AUGUST 23-SEPTEMBER 22

Being set up with someone you don't really like, whether in a romantic, business, or school situation, is not a prison sentence! If you can be open-minded about this person, you might have a pleasant surprise in store. Try hard to set aside the negative feelings you have about this person, and focus on completing the task, date, or project at hand. The two of you can have a very successful experience. You might never be lifelong friends, but at least you can get along.



CAPRICORN DECEMBER 22-JANUARY 19

Before you get involved in any type of new arrangement or commitment today, get a clearer picture of what you're really getting yourself into. Take a long, hard look at the people involved. Do you trust them? Do you like them? Can you learn from them? You can't take other people's recommendations about what to do at face value. Everyone has a ulterior motive right now. They see things through their own filter and don't totally understand what is important to you.



GEMINI MAY 21-JUNE 21

Making a decision isn't always the same thing as coming to a conclusion. A recent choice you made might be coming back to haunt you today when new information causes you to doubt your previous sentiment. You need to have the self confidence to examine this new evidence to determine if you were wrong before. Your opinions are changeable, so you should feel comfortable changing them every once in a while when the facts force you to.



LIBRA SEPTEMBER 23-OCTOBER 22

Take a break from taking things seriously today. Avoid getting too heavy with your friends or family members. Keep things light and breezy. Doing so will not only keep you popular, it will create an easy and pleasant environment in which you and your favorite people can have an awful lot of fun! If someone tries to rehash old issues or stir up trouble, ask them to save it for another day. You're just not in the mood for introspection or debate.



AQUARIUS JANUARY 20-FEBRUARY 18

By speaking the truth, you can really inspire people to make important changes today. Step up and be counted when the authority figures want to find out what's on everyone's mind. You might think you're helping someone by keeping their secret, but you aren't. The truth will not only set you free, but it could very well set them free as well. You might suffer the silent treatment for a while, but eventually you'll be credited with helping someone instigate a very good move in their life.



CANCER JUNE 22-JULY 22

A difficult personality who used to figure more prominently in your life than they do now has learned to be a lot more flexible. So if they make overtures to come back into your life, you should seriously consider giving them a second chance. You know from personal experience that people can change, and your generous heart can't let you pass up the chance to see it proven yet again. Open up your life just a little bit to let this person show you who they have become.



SCORPIO OCTOBER 23-NOVEMBER 21

New clothes are great, and new cars are fabulous, so why not new ideas? They hold just as much shiny goodness as anything you can pick up shopping, but they're totally free! Get rid of your old, outdated ideas today and embrace concepts you've never explored before, such as scientific phenomena, controversial political stances, unusual religions. Be open to new ideas and explore concepts that make you really question the status quo. You will only end up wiser.



PISCES FEBRUARY 19-MARCH 20

You need to let the world see the real you today. In order to do so, step out and give everyone a good, long look. Show off both your hotness and your intellect. In situations where you might have usually played dumb in an effort not to look like a know-it-all, today you shouldn't be afraid to own up to the fact that most of the time (if not all the time), you're the smartest person in the room. There's no point in trying to avoid intimidating people who aren't as smart as you.



TEST YOUR KNOWLEDGE

01. Which cricket ground was the home ground of the Manchester Cricket Club from 1856 until it became the home of the Lancashire County Cricket Club when that was founded in 1864?

- A. Twickenham
- B. Lords
- C. Old Trafford
- D. Wembley Stadium

02. What is the engineering term for a shallow masonry construction used to carry the supports of a timber super-structure?

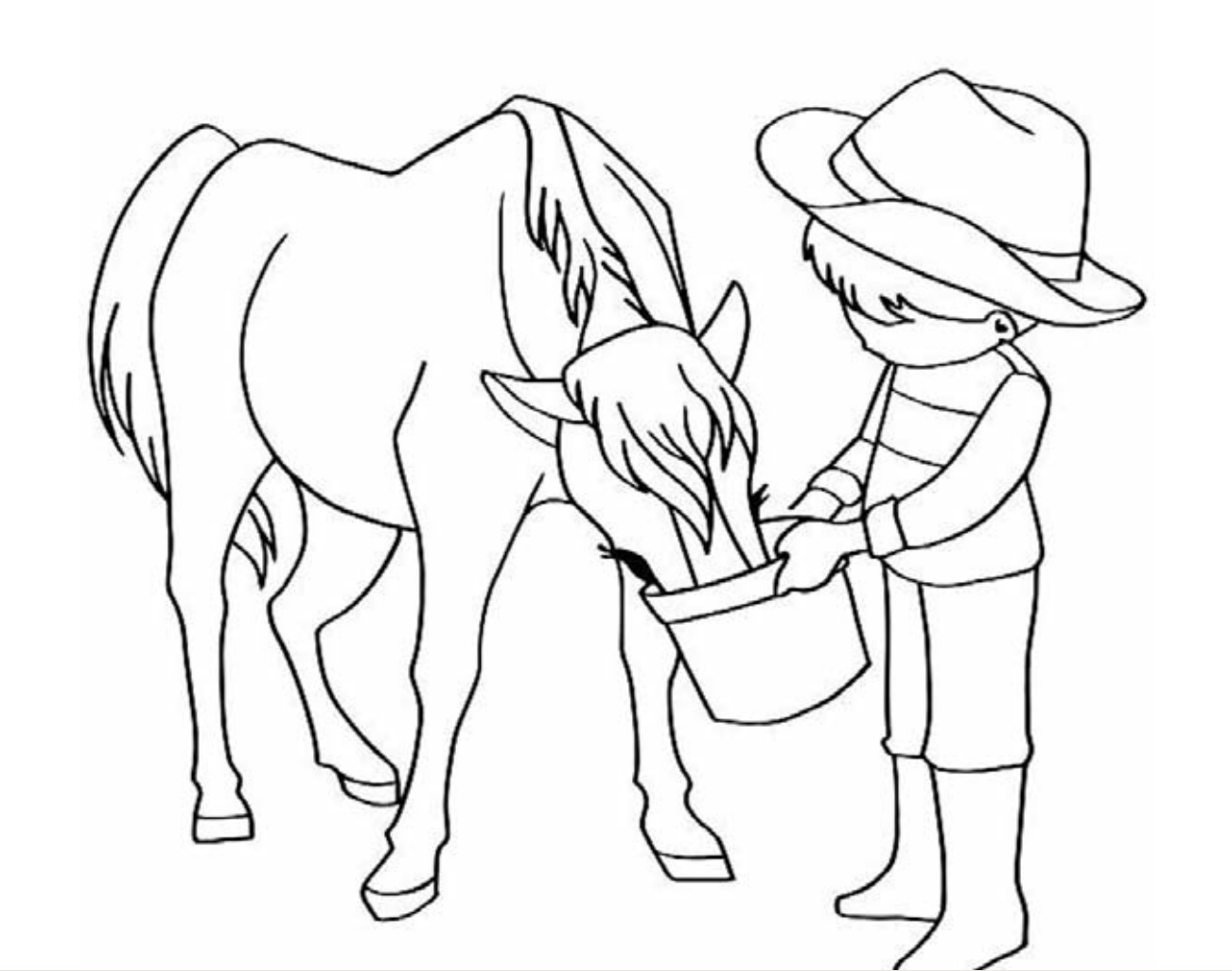
- A. Tourney
- B. Stack
- C. Fleet
- D. Plinth

03. The first commercial (non-state) flights to carry a civilian to the edge of space happened in which year?

- A. 2020
- B. 2021
- C. 1984
- D. 1973

Answers: 1. C 2. D 3. B

KIDS COLOURING



BOGGLER

E	O	S	A
A	G	I	R
C	U	S	T
N	T	I	P

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

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

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

Thousands pay tribute to ex-pope Benedict

The body of the former pope will lie in state at St Peter’s Basilica before his funeral on Thursday

Vatican City, Holy See - Thousands of Catholics paid their respects on Monday to former pope Benedict XVI at the Vatican, at the start of three days of lying-in-state at St Peter’s Basilica before his funeral.

They began queueing before dawn to view the German theologian’s body, which was transferred early on Monday from the monastery in the Vatican grounds where he died on Saturday aged 95.

“I arrived at 6am, it seemed normal to come and pay homage to him after all he did for the church,” said an Italian nun, sister Anna-Maria, near the front of the queue that snaked around the edge of the vast St Peter’s Square.

Benedict led the Catholic Church for eight years before becoming the first pope in six centuries to step down in 2013, citing his declining health.

His successor Pope Francis will lead the funeral on Thursday in St Peter’s Square before his remains are placed in the tombs beneath the basilica.

Benedict’s body, dressed in red papal mourning robes and a gold-edged mitre, was laid out on a catafalque draped in gold fabric in front of the altar of the church,



People wait in line to pay respect at the body of Pope Emeritus Benedict XVI lying in state in the St. Peter’s basilica in the Vatican, on Monday (AFP)

I arrived at 6am, it seemed normal to come and pay homage to him after all he did for the church

ANNA MARIA

flanked by two Swiss Guards.

Many of those filing past took pictures on their smartphones, while some prayed or made the sign of the cross.

“The atmosphere is very intimate,” Francesca Gabrielli, a pilgrim from Tuscany in central Italy, told AFP inside the basilica.

She said Benedict was ‘a great pope, profound, unique’.

Lord, I love you

Benedict died at the Mater Ecclesiae monastery where he had lived for the past decade, his last words in the early hours of Saturday said by the Vatican to have been ‘Lord, I love you!’

His body will lie in state for three days, with members of the public allowed in during the day, passing first through the metal

detectors used routinely to screen visitors to St Peter’s Basilica. Among the visitors Monday were curious tourists, including Valerie Michalak, on holiday with her family from Benedict’s native Germany.

“It’s a once in a lifetime chance to be part of this big ceremony,” she said.

Thursday’s funeral is unprece-

dented in modern times in that it will be presided over by a sitting pontiff.

Benedict’s shock resignation created the extraordinary situation of having two ‘men in white’ - him and Francis - at the Vatican. Papal deaths usually trigger the calling of a conclave of cardinals to elect a successor, but this time Francis remains in post, and

will lead proceedings.

The Vatican has yet to release details of the guest list, beyond saying that it will include delegations from Italy and Germany.

Italian Prime Minister Giorgia Meloni, who at the weekend joined world leaders from Joe Biden to Vladimir Putin in paying tribute to Benedict, was among the first to visit his body on Monday morning.

She was greeted by Archbishop Georg Gaenswein, Benedict’s long-time aide.

The last papal funeral, of John Paul II in 2005, drew a million faithful and heads of state from around the world.

But Benedict has been an ex-pope for longer than he was pontiff - and he was a more divisive figure.

A brilliant theologian, he alienated many Catholics with his staunch defence of traditional values and as pope struggled to impose his authority on the church as it battled a string of crises, including over clerical sex abuse.

His successor cuts a very different figure, an Argentine Jesuit who is most at home among his flock and has sought to forge a more compassionate church.

AFP

Israeli strikes on Syrian capital’s airport kill four

Beirut, Lebanon - Israeli missile strikes on the Syrian capital’s airport on Monday killed four people including two soldiers and closed the runways for several hours, a rights monitor said.

This is the second time in less than seven months that Damascus International Airport - where Iranian-backed armed groups and Lebanese Hezbollah fighters are present has been hit by Israel

The attack around 2am (2300 GMT) put the airport out of service until 9am (0600 GMT), Syria’s state news agency SANA and officials said.

Israel carried out the strike with ‘barrages of missiles targeting Damascus International Airport and its surroundings’, a military source told SANA, which reported that two Syrian soldiers were killed and two others wounded.

But the Britain-based mon-

itoring group Syrian Observatory for Human Rights, which relies on a wide network of sources on the ground in Syria, said ‘four fighters including two Syrian soldiers were killed’.

The missiles also hit ‘positions for Hezbollah and pro-Iranian groups inside the airport and its surroundings, including a weapons warehouse’, said Rami Abdul Rahman, head of the Observatory.

Flights later resumed after repairs of ‘the damage caused by Israeli aggression’, Syria’s transport ministry said in a statement.

“Air traffic has returned after we restored work on one of the runways, while the process of repairing the second runway continues,” transport ministry official Suleiman Khalil told AFP.

‘Persistent military action’

Since civil war broke out in

Syria in 2011, Israel has carried out hundreds of air strikes against its neighbour, targeting government troops as well as allied Iran-backed forces and fighters from Lebanon’s Shiite militant group Hezbollah. The Israeli army, which said on Monday that ‘it does not comment on foreign reports’, has repeatedly said it will not allow its archfoe Iran to gain a foothold in Syria.

On December 28, the head of the Israel Defense Forces Operations Directorate, Major General Oded Basiuk, presented the military’s ‘operational outlook’ for 2023, where he said that the force ‘will not accept Hezbollah 2.0 in Syria’, the army said on Twitter.

“Our course of action in Syria is an example of how continuous and persistent military action leads to shaping and influencing the entire region,” Basiuk added.

AFP

Exiled Iran opposition figures in united message predicting victory

Paris, France - A group of prominent exiled Iranian pro-opposition figures have issued a coordinated message predicting 2023 will be a year of ‘victory’ with the regime shaken by protests.

Those sending the message include leaders from the fields of culture, human rights and sports.

The Iranian diaspora has long been seen as lacking unity, split into different political factions and strategies for dealing with the Islamic republic, that ousted the shah in 1979.

But with protests still continuing in Iran over 100 days after they were sparked by the death of young Iranian Kurdish woman Mahsa Amini, the message appears an attempt to find a long-sought unity. “The year 2022 was a glorious year of solidarity for Iranians of every belief, language and orientation,” it said.

“With organisation and solidarity, 2023 will be the year of victory for the Iranian nation. The year of freedom and justice in Iran.” The message was sent si-



Iranians protesting in the city of Zahedan in the country’s Sistan-Baluchistan province last week (AFP)

multaneously on social media by a variety of figures, ranging from the influential US-based dissi-

dent Masih Alinejad to the son of the ousted shah, Reza Pahlavi, who also lives in the United

States.

Prominent actors Golshifteh Farahani and Nazanin Boniadi also tweeted the message, as did Zar Amir Ebrahimi, who won the best actress award at the Cannes Film Festival in France last year.

“We are united to reach freedom,” Farahani wrote on her Instagram account. “We will stand together and will not be silent.”

Prominent rights activists to post the message included Nobel Peace Prize laureate Shirin Ebadi, and Hamed Esmaeilion, who has led the Canada-based campaign for justice for the victims of the Ukraine Airlines flight shot down by Iran in January 2020.

From the field of sports, they were joined by former Iranian international football star Ali Karimi, who has been a vociferous supporter of the protest movement.

The protest movement sparked by the death of Amini is presenting the clerical leadership with its biggest challenge since the 1979 revolution.

AFP

Iran issues warning on mandatory headscarf

Tehran, Iran - Iranian police have resumed warnings that women must wear mandatory headscarves even in cars, media reported on Monday.

Fars news agency quoted a senior police officer who said the ‘new stage’ of the Nazer-1 programme - ‘surveillance’ in Persian - was being rolled out ‘across the country by the police’.

The Nazer programme, launched in 2020, concerns the ‘removal of hijab in cars’, Fars added. When it was launched in 2020, car owners would be sent an SMS text message alerting them of a dress code violation in their vehicle and warning of ‘legal’ action if repeated.

AFP

Israel kills two Palestinians in West Bank: Palestinian ministry

Palestinian Territories - The Israeli army killed two Palestinians in a West Bank raid on Monday as it demolished the homes of two Palestinians accused of killing an Israeli soldier, Palestinian officials said.

The Palestinian health ministry announced the deaths of ‘Mohammad Samer Hoshieh, 22, after being shot in the chest, and Fuad Mohammad Abed, 25, after being shot in the abdomen and thigh’ during a raid by the Israeli army near Jenin.

Israeli soldiers had entered the village of Kafr Dan ‘in order to demolish the residences of the assailants who were involved in the shooting adjacent to the Gilboa (Jalame) Crossing, in which Major Bar Falah was killed’, Israel’s military said.

Clouds of smoke engulfed the small village as two houses were levelled with explosives shortly after sunrise on Monday.



Israeli soldiers are pictured in the Palestinian village of Kafr Dan in Jenin, in the occupied West Bank, on Monday, during an operation to demolish the homes of two Palestinians accused of killing an Israeli soldier (AFP)

The army later said ‘a violent riot was instigated’ when troops entered the village.

“Rioters burned tyres, shot live fire and hurled rocks, Molotov cocktails and explosive devices at the forces, who responded with riot dispersal means and live fire,” the state-

ment said. “Hits were identified,” it added.

Palestinian news agency Wafa reported that 18 others were arrested by the Israeli army in overnight raids across the West Bank. Falah, the Israeli major, was killed in September 2022 during clashes with Pales-

tinian gunmen at the Gilboa checkpoint between Israel and the occupied West Bank.

After he was killed, the Al-Aqsa Martyrs’ Brigades - the armed wing of Palestinian president Mahmud Abbas’ Fatah party - claimed responsibility.

Ahmed Abed, 23, and Abdul

Rahman Subhi Abed, 22, whose family homes were demolished on Monday, were also killed in the September clashes in which Falah died.

New government

Israel regularly destroys the homes of individuals it blames for attacks on Israelis.

Human rights activists say Israel’s policy of demolishing the homes of suspected attackers amounts to collective punishment, as it can render non-combatants, including children, homeless.

But Israel says the practice is effective in deterring some Palestinians from carrying out attacks. The two deaths are the first in the West Bank for 2023.

According to United Nations data, 2022 was the deadliest year for Palestinians since the 2002-2005 uprising, known as the Second Intifada,

with at least 150 Palestinians and 26 Israelis killed across Israel and the West Bank, including Israeli-annexed east Jerusalem.

The new government of Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, one of the most-right wing in Israel’s history, has sparked fears of a military escalation in the West Bank, occupied by Israel since 1967. Two of Netanyahu’s far-right coalition partners, sworn in on Thursday with the rest of the new government, will take charge of critical powers in relationship to Palestinians in the West Bank.

Bezalel Smotrich will take charge of Israeli settlement policy in the West Bank, and Itamar Ben-Gvir is the new national security minister with powers over border police, which also operates in the territory. Both have a history of inflammatory remarks about Palestinians.

AFP

Lula da Silva returns vowing to rebuild Brazil, fight for poor

A sea of supporters braved the scorching heat to flood Brasilia, cheering Lula

Brasilia, Brazil - Luiz Inacio Lula da Silva took office on Sunday for a third term as Brazil's president, vowing to fight for the poor and the environment and 'rebuild the country' after far-right leader Jair Bolsonaro's divisive administration.

The 77-year-old veteran leftist, who previously led Brazil from 2003 to 2010, took the oath of office before Congress, capping a remarkable political comeback for the metalworker-turned-president less than five years after he was jailed on controversial, since-quashed corruption charges.

A sea of red-clad supporters braved the scorching heat to flood Brasilia, exuberantly cheering Lula as he was driven through the ultra-modern capital in a black convertible Rolls-Royce, accompanied by First Lady Rosângela 'Janja' da Silva and Vice President Geraldo Alckmin.

Giving a blistering overview of the past four years under Bolsonaro - who snubbed the ceremony, in a break with tradition - Lula said his government would work to undo a legacy of economic decline, surging poverty and funding cuts in health, education and science. "Upon these terrible ruins, I pledge to rebuild



Brazil's new President Luiz Inacio Lula da Silva waves at supporters after receiving the presidential sash at Planalto Palace after his inauguration ceremony at the National Congress, in Brasilia, on Sunday (AFP)

the country, together with the Brazilian people," he said, vowing to fight for poor Brazilians, racial and gender equality, and zero deforestation in the Amazon rainforest, where destruction surged under Bolsonaro.

The swearing-in began with a minute of silence for Brazilian football legend Pele and former pope Benedict XVI, who both died in recent days.

Wearing a blue suit and tie, the charismatic but controversial Lula was then driven from Congress to the Planalto presidential palace, escorted by dozens of bodyguards.

There, he received the presidential sash from eight citizens selected to represent the Brazilian people, including a schoolteacher, a disabled man, a precocious 10-year-old and renowned Indigenous leader

Raoni Metuktire.

An emotional Lula broke down in tears, thanking the Brazilian people for their faith in him and vowing to fight for a more just country.

He also extended an olive branch to the many Brazilians who did not vote for him in the election, which he won by a razor-thin 50.9 per cent to Bolsonaro's 49.1 per cent.

"I will govern for all 215mn Brazilians," he said.

"There aren't two Brazils. We are one country, one people."

'Historic day'

It is the first time since the end of Brazil's 1965-1985 military dictatorship that an incoming leader has not received the yellow-and-green presidential sash from his predecessor.

Bolsonaro, who has not explic-

I will govern for all 215mn Brazilians. There aren't two Brazils. We are one country, one people

LULA DA SILVA

itly acknowledged his loss or congratulated Lula, left Brazil for the US state of Florida on Friday.

The snub hardly dampened the party spirit of the New Year's Day ceremony, which included a massive concert featuring acts from samba legend Martinho da Vila to drag queen Pablo Vittar.

Wearing a red hat, attendee Lurdiana Araujo called it a moment of 'rebirth' - for both Brazil and Lula, who had become a political pariah until the Supreme Court quashed his corruption

convictions in 2021, ruling the lead judge in the case had been biased. "We've spent the past four years suffering. Now we are witnessing a rebirth of democracy," the 51-year-old said.

Foreign dignitaries including 19 heads of state were in attendance. They included the presidents of a raft of Latin American countries, Germany, Portugal and the king of Spain.

French President Emmanuel Macron, who did not attend, posted on Twitter a photo of himself with Lula, saying 'Order and Progress' - the words which adorn the Brazilian flag.

He added: "Brazil lives up to its motto. Congratulations dear President, dear friend."

US Secretary of State Antony Blinken also tweeted his congratulations, saying: "Here's to a bright future for our countries—and the world."

Security was exceptionally tight for the ceremony, after a Bolsonaro supporter was arrested last week for planting a tanker truck rigged with explosives near the capital's airport.

But no major incidents were reported.

Lula got straight to work with a flurry of measures to bolster gun-control regulations slashed by Bolsonaro, revoke the president's rollbacks of environmental protections, and revive the internationally backed Amazon Fund to protect the rainforest.

Lula faces numerous urgent challenges in Latin America's biggest economy, which looks little like the commodities-fueled dynamo he led in the 2000s.

AFP



Relatives of inmates react outside the prison of Ciudad Juarez number 3 after an attack in Ciudad Juarez, Chihuahua state, on Sunday (AFP)

Armed attack on Mexican prison leaves 14 dead

Ciudad Juárez, Mexico - Gunmen attacked a prison in the northern Mexican city of Ciudad Juarez on Sunday, leaving 14 people dead and allowing 24 inmates to escape, the Chihuahua state prosecutors' office said.

An unknown number of gunmen aboard armoured vehicles took part in the attack, and the dead included 10 prison guards and security agents, the office said in a statement.

About five hours after the dawn incursion began, security forces managed to control the situation, which had also erupted into fighting between inmates within the sprawling state prison, near Mexico's border with the United States.

Moments before the attack, armed men fired on municipal police along a nearby boulevard, setting off a car chase that ended with the seizure of a vehicle and four men, the state-

ment added. Later, assailants in a Hummer fired on another group of security agents outside the prison, it said.

Scenes of chaos ensued as relatives of some prisoners waited for New Year's visits outside the compound.

Inside, some rioting inmates set fire to various objects and clashed with prison guards, local media reported.

Prosecutors said the outbreak of violence at the prison, where inmates from differing criminal bands and drug cartels are housed in separate cell blocks, also left 13 people injured. Four people were detained, prosecutors said, without specifying if they were inmates or armed assailants.

Details were not immediately available about how the 24 inmates were able to flee or who they were.

AFP

Two helicopters collide in Australia, killing four

Sydney, Australia - Two helicopters collided in mid-air, killing four people on Monday at Australia's Gold Coast tourism hotspot, officials said, with images showing one of the aircraft's rotors lying on a sandbar.

Three other people were in critical condition, police said, describing how bystanders had rushed to haul passengers from an upside-down helicopter. One helicopter had flipped over on the exposed sandbank a few feet from the shore, images on public broadcaster ABC showed.

The aircraft was shorn of its rotors, which lay a short distance away.

The other helicopter appeared to be largely intact at the accident scene, which is near the Gold Coast's popular Sea World marine theme park.

A bright yellow rescue helicopter had landed on the sand nearby, its rotors spinning, images of the aftermath showed, with scores of rescuers deployed around the area.

Several small police and rescue boats were moored on the exposed sandbank, which was strewn with bits of the destroyed helicopter.

"Those two aircraft, when collided, have crash landed, and landed, on the sandbank just out from Sea World resort," Queensland police service acting inspector Gary Worrell told a news conference at the scene.

"As a result of that, four people have lost their lives today," he said. "Three others are critical in hospital."

Investigation launched

One of the helicopters appeared to have been taking off as the other was landing, Worrell said, adding that the facts were yet to be determined by air accident investigators.

The helicopter that landed safely had lost its windscreen, the police office said. "The other airframe has crashed and it was upside down."

"Members of the public and police tried to remove the people and they commenced first aid to try and get those people to safety (from) the airframe

Two aircraft have crash landed, and landed, on the sandbank just out from Sea World resort

GARY WORRELL

that was upside down."

Access to the scene was complicated by the sandbank's location, Worrell said.

"I would like to thank all those that attended and made (it) possible to get those people to emergency care like they did."

Australia's transport safety bureau said it had already launched a probe into the mid-air collision. Investigators would examine the wreckage and map the site, as well as recover components for examination, it said in a statement.

AFP

Willing to normalise US ties, says Venezuela leader

Caracas, Venezuela - Venezuelan President Nicolas Maduro said in an interview broadcast on Sunday that he is willing to work towards normalising relations with the United States, despite the continued sanctions crippling his country.

Maduro's remarks come days after the South American country's opposition voted to dissolve an 'interim government' led by Juan Guaido, who had been recognised by many countries - including the United States - as Venezuela's legitimate leader following disputed 2018 elections.

"Venezuela is ready, totally ready, to take steps towards a process of normalisation of diplomatic, consular and political rela-



Nicolas Maduro greeting and decorating army officers at the Defence Ministry in Fuerte Tiuna, in Caracas on December 28, 2022 (AFP)

tions with the current administration of the United States and with administrations to come," Maduro said in an interview broadcast on Venezuelan state

television. Maduro broke off relations with Washington in 2019, when the administration of then-president Donald Trump recognised Guaido as Venezuela's

Venezuela, Colombia finalise border reopening

Ureña, Venezuela - Venezuela and Colombia reopened the last stretch of their shared border on Sunday after settling a diplomatic dispute that had kept it closed for years.

Cars honked and passengers waved flags as vehicles with license plates from the two South American countries traversed the Atanasio Girardot bridge - previously blocked by shipping containers amid high tensions.

Also known as Tienditas, the bridge was the final step necessary for a full reopening of the border since the countries restored diplomatic ties last year.

A ceremony, which included a blessing by bishops, was held on Sunday to reinaugurate the border crossing, with officials from both sides in attendance wearing white guayaberas and carrying balloons with their countries'



Colombian Trade Minister German Umana (left) and Tachira State Governor Freddy Bernal greet each other at the Atanasio Girardot International Bridge on Sunday (AFP)

shared national colours - yellow, blue and red. The neighbours share a 2,200km (1,350-mile) border through a region riddled with armed groups contending for lucrative drug trafficking and

smuggling routes.

Transport over the border was partially closed seven years ago and then completely blocked in 2019 when Venezuelan leader Nicolas Maduro broke off diplo-

matic ties after Colombia under then-president Ivan Duque questioned his 2018 re-election.

Many other countries, including the United States, did not recognise Maduro's victory in an

election widely condemned as rigged. After assuming power last year as Colombia's first-ever left-wing president, Gustavo Petro immediately sought to re-establish ties with Venezuela and pushed to reopen the border.

On September 26, goods trucks were allowed through border crossings that had been open only to pedestrians.

Air links have also since resumed. "We have taken important steps," Maduro said in an interview broadcast on Sunday on Venezuelan state TV.

Silvano Serrano, governor of Colombia's Norte de Santander department where the bridge is located, said that 'as a single territory, today we join the historical, cultural and social brotherhood that has always identified us'.

AFP

Russia admits scores of its soldiers killed

Soldiers were killed in a Ukrainian strike on Russian-controlled territory in a bloody New Year’s weekend

Kyiv, Ukraine - Russia on Monday admitted dozens of its soldiers were killed in a Ukrainian strike on Russian-controlled territory in a bloody New Year’s weekend for both sides of the conflict.

In an extremely rare announcement, the Russian defence ministry said that 63 Russian servicemen were killed ‘as a result of a strike by four missiles’ in the occupied city of Makiivka in eastern Ukraine.

It was the biggest loss of life reported by the Russian side so far in a conflict that has dragged on since President Vladimir Putin ordered Russian troops to invade on February 24 last year.

The Russian defence ministry did not say when the strike took place but Ukrainian forces are believed to have struck as Russian troops rang in the New Year.

The ministry said US-supplied Himars rocket systems had been used and the target was a temporary deployment point.

Without claiming the strike, Ukraine’s military put the death toll much higher, claiming nearly 400 troops were killed.

Russian strikes in different parts of Ukraine on New Year’s Eve and New Year’s Day killed at least five people. The Ukrainian capital again came under fire from Iranian-made drones on Monday, although Ukrainian forces claimed the majority were shot down by air defences.

Kyiv Mayor Vitali Klitschko reported an explosion in north-eastern Kyiv and said emergency



A member of the Ukrainian Red Cross prepares a barbecue on a street in the southern city of Kherson, on Sunday, amid the Russian invasion of Ukraine (AFP)

services were dispatched.

“An injured 19-year-old man was hospitalised in the Desnianskyi district of the capital,” he said. Authorities later said he was hit by the falling debris.

Following the strikes, the

power company Ukrenergo said the situation with the electricity supply in Kyiv was now ‘more complicated’. “That is why emergency shutdowns are now in effect,” it said on social media.

Russia’s New Year assaults -

which targeted downtown areas of large cities - show a change in tactics, said an adviser to Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky. “Russia no longer has any military goals and is trying to kill as many civilians as possible and

destroy more civilian facilities,” Mykhailo Podolyak tweeted. “A war to kill.”

Hospital strike

On Saturday, Russian artillery hit the village of Naddiprianske

outside the southern city of Kherson, severely wounding a 13-year-old boy. Then the Russian army struck the hospital where the boy was lying in intensive care, smashing the windows. “What did the 13-year-old boy

do to these inhumans that they tried to kill him twice?” governor Yaroslav Yanushevych said on messaging app Telegram.

The Russian onslaught damaged the Kherson hospital and also left the city and the surrounding settlements without electricity. Russian forces in November withdrew from Kherson, the only regional capital held by Moscow, but have continued to batter the city.

In Kyiv, police chief Andriy Nebitov at the weekend released a picture of the wreckage of a downed drone that featured the words ‘Happy New Year’ in Russian. “That is everything you need to know about the terror state and its army,” he wrote.

‘Extreme hardship’

After suffering a series of humiliating battlefield defeats, Moscow started to target electrical and other critical infrastructure in October.

The strikes have caused sweeping blackouts and cut off water supplies and heating to civilians as the temperature in some regions dropped below freezing.

The UN’s human rights chief has warned the campaign has inflicted ‘extreme hardship’ on Ukrainians, and also decried probable war crimes by Russian forces.

But Putin declared during his midnight address on New Year’s Eve that ‘moral, historical rightness is on our side’.

AFP

10 killed in Indian Kashmir violence

Srinagar, India - Ten people have been killed within six days in a sudden uptick in violence in the usually more peaceful Hindu south of disputed Indian-administered Kashmir, officials said on Monday.

Rebel groups in the Muslim-majority Himalayan region have for decades fought for its independence or merger with Pakistan, which controls a smaller portion of the divided territory.

About half a million Indian soldiers are deployed in Kashmir, and its southern portion, Jammu, is mostly Hindu and comparatively peaceful.

But two gunmen suspected to be anti-India rebels opened fire on houses in the remote village of Dangri on Sunday, leaving four residents dead and five injured, police officer Mukesh Singh told reporters.

Police and security forces launched a manhunt in the area close to the Line of Control that



Indian army soldiers conduct a search operation in the remote village of Dangri in Rajouri district on Monday (AFP)

divides Kashmir between India and Pakistan.

On Monday a seven-year-old

child and another person were killed in an explosion near one of the houses, another police officer

told AFP on condition of anonymity as he was not authorised to speak to media.

An unexploded device was also found nearby and neutralised by a specialist squad, officers said.

The deaths followed a firefight between government forces and suspected rebels at a checkpoint in Jammu city on Wednesday.

Police said four suspected rebels were killed while the driver of their truck escaped and was on the run.

Officials said at least 172 suspected rebels and 26 armed forces personnel were killed in fighting last year.

Indian Kashmir has been without an elected government for over five years and has been directly controlled by New Delhi since 2019. India regularly blames Pakistan for supporting the rebels, an allegation denied by Islamabad, which says it only provides diplomatic support to Kashmir’s struggle for the right to self-determination.

AFP

Spain sees hottest year on record in 2022

Madrid, Spain - Spain in 2022 experienced the hottest year since records began, the country’s national weather service said on Monday, as global warming stokes temperatures around the world.

Nations across the globe grappled with extreme weather including scorching temperatures and drought across Europe which fuelled wildfires, damaged crops and led to water use restrictions.

Spain recorded an average temperature for the year of nearly 15.5 degrees Celsius (59.9 Fahrenheit), the highest since records began in 1916, national weather office Aemet said in a tweet.

It was the first time that the average yearly temperature surpassed 15 degrees celsius, the office added.

Spain saw temperatures surge repeatedly in successive heat waves from May and into October, with the mercury soaring above 40 degrees Celsius across large swathes of the country.

Except for March and April, the remaining months of 2022 were ‘warmer than normal, especially May, July and October which were extremely warm’, the weather office said in a preliminary report last month.

Spain also recorded one of its driest years in 2022, with only 2005 and 2017 having received less precipitation, it added. The country’s reservoirs were at 43 per cent capacity at the end of December, below a 10-year average of 53 per cent, according to the environment ministry.

AFP

Death toll from Philippine floods, landslides rises to 51

Manila, Philippines - The death toll from recent floods and landslides across the disaster-prone Philippines has risen to 51, officials said on Monday, as authorities distribute food packs to the hardest hit communities.

The number of fatalities could rise further as rescuers search for 19 people still missing more than a week after heavy rain pounded central and southern regions over the Christmas weekend, according to the national disaster agency.

Bad weather struck as the Catholic-majority nation of 110mn people prepared for a long Christmas holiday.

More than 270,000 people had to seek emergency shelter

as downpours inundated rural villages, left more than 4,500 houses damaged or destroyed, and wiped out over 7,000 hectares (17,300 acres) of crops.

Instead of celebrating with loved ones, thousands of families found themselves cleaning up their dwellings and shops after the floodwaters subsided.

Most of the fatalities have been in the province of Misamis Occidental, on the southern island of Mindanao, where 19 people died from drowning or rain-induced landslides.

The Philippines is ranked among the most vulnerable nations to the impacts of climate change.

AFP

Cambodia orders safe zones to save rare dolphins

Phnom Penh, Cambodia - Cambodian premier Hun Sen on Monday ordered the creation of conservation zones on the Mekong river to protect critically endangered dolphins, after three were killed by fishing nets and lines last month.

The Irrawaddy dolphins, known for their bulging foreheads and short beaks, once swam through much of the mighty Mekong but in recent decades have been limited to a 190km (118-mile) stretch from northeast Kratie province to the border with Laos.

Their population has been in steady decline since the first census was taken in 1997, dropping from 200 that year to around 90 currently due to habitat loss and destructive fishing practices.

Speaking at a ceremony in



This file photo shows a dolphin in the Mekong river in Kratie province on December 6, 2012 (AFP)

The Mekong river must be well managed so that dolphins will not die... in gillnets

HUN SEN

Kratie, Hun Sen ordered authorities to set up floating markers around designated protection zones, in which there will be an ‘absolute ban’ on all fishing.

“The Mekong river, which is home to near-extinct dolphins and fish species, must be well managed so that dolphins will not die from entanglement in gill-

nets,” he said. Gillnets are nets strung across parts of the river to snare fish.

“The dolphin areas must be protected completely,” he said, adding that the animals’ presence contributed to local tourism.

Three healthy breeding-age dolphins died within a week of

each other last month. The deaths alarmed conservationists, who called for both day- and night-patrols in order to protect the remaining dolphins from being killed by illegal fishing.

Eleven dolphins died in 2022, bringing the total number of dead dolphins to 29 in the last three years, according to the World Wildlife Fund (WWF).

In a statement, WWF called on all relevant authorities ‘to enact and roll-out appropriate measures to urgently address the mortality’ caused by the threats of gillnets and electro-fishing that take place in the dolphin conservation areas.

Cambodia is home to the largest population of Irrawaddy dolphins, which are also found in rivers and lakes in Myanmar, Indonesia, India and Thailand.

AFP

I REALLY BELIEVE I CAN DO IT: RAFA

No panic for Nadal after second loss at United Cup, Swiatek cruises

Sydney, Australia - Reigning Australian Open champion Rafael Nadal said he was “not too alarmed” on Monday after he lost a second straight singles match in the United Cup warm up event.

“Honestly, I’m not too alarmed or too negative about what happened. There was a real chance to lose these kinds of matches,” said Nadal after falling to Alex de Minaur in Sydney.

“There is room to improve. I really believe I can do it.”

Nadal dropped six consecutive games after leading a set and 1-0 against de Minaur as the Australian turned the match around for a 3-6, 6-1, 7-5 upset in Sydney.

Nadal also lost to Cameron Norrie in his country’s first tie at the mixed-teams event as Spain were beaten by Great Britain at the weekend.

With his singles run over at the inaugural edition of the competition, being played in three cities, 22-time Grand Slam winner Nadal is keen to get to Melbourne and train for his Open title defence starting in a fortnight.

“I have two weeks before the start,” Nadal said. “I can’t say the situation is ideal, but I can’t say that it’s very negative.

There was also more misery for former world number two Alexander Zverev, who, like Nadal, suffered a second loss to start his season, this time at the hands of Taylor Fritz.

The mixed-team tournament features 18 countries playing in Sydney, Brisbane and Perth.



Spain's Rafael Nadal dropped six consecutive games after leading a set to go down to Australia's Alex De Minaur at the United Cup tennis tournament in Sydney on Monday (AFP)

The winners of the two groups in each city advance to a city final on Wednesday, with whoever comes through that making the final four.

Neither Spain nor Australia can progress from Group D in

Sydney, with Norrie’s Britain already the confirmed winner.

They will play the United States in the city final after Fritz and Madison Keys put their country through against Germany.

Rusty

World number nine Fritz beat Zverev 6-1, 6-4 in just 64 minutes.

It followed the German’s loss to 81st-ranked Czech Jiri Lehecka on Saturday in his first competi-

tive match since tearing three right ankle ligaments during his French Open semi-final against Nadal in June.

“It was tough to judge my level because I feel he’s coming back from injury, he’s a bit rusty, he was giving me a lot of free points,” said Fritz, who had a break-through year in 2022 with titles at Indian Wells, Tokyo and Eastbourne.

“But I’m really happy with it.”

Keys swept past Jule Niemeier 6-2, 6-3.

World number one Swiatek gave Poland a 1-0 lead against Switzerland in a winner-takes-all tie that will decide Group B in Brisbane, beating Belinda Bencic 6-3, 7-6 (7/3).

“I’m a perfectionist, but I’m super happy with my performance today,” said Swiatek.

“On this fast surface it was really, really hard so I’m really happy that I could close it.”

Italy need a win against eliminated Norway in Group E to advance to Brazil’s expense with Martina Trevisan delivering them an early lead by dispatching Malene Helgo 7-5, 3-6, 6-4.

In Perth, Belgium need to defeat Greece at least 4-1 to qualify from Group A and Alison Van Uytvanck held off an inspired Despina Papamichail 7-5, 2-6, 6-3 to give them a 1-0 lead.

But world number four Tsitsipas continued his good early form with a 6-3, 6-2 win over David Goffin to level the tie.

“Playing David is never easy,” Tsitsipas said. “I was relaxed and hung in there point after point.”

AFP



Australia's Alexei Popyrin celebrates after defeating Canada's Felix Auger-Aliassime at the Adelaide International on Monday (AFP)

Auger-Aliassime, Rune suffer shock first-round exits in Adelaide

Adelaide, Australia - Australian qualifier Alexei Popyrin stunned second seed Felix Auger-Aliassime in the first round of the season-opening Adelaide International on Monday as Novak Djokovic was given a hero’s welcome in a rare doubles appearance.

On a day of upsets, world number 11 Holger Rune also crashed out, as did women’s third seed Daria Kasatkina and fifth seed Danielle Collins.

Canada’s Auger-Aliassime was in top form towards the end of 2022, winning three tournaments in October and November before leading Canada to Davis Cup glory when they beat Australia in the final.

He rose to number six in the world and said before the tournament he wanted to ride the wave of momentum into the 2023 season.

But he came unstuck against Popyrin, who dropped out of the top 100 last year, slumping 6-4, 7-6 (7/5).

The 23-year-old Australian attacked at every opportunity, hitting 32 winners, including 12 aces.

Popyrin broke Auger-Aliassime once in the first set and although he went down an early break in the second, he was able to claw back then clinch the tiebreak on his first match point.

“I had a really, really tough season last year,” Popyrin said.

“So to come out in my first main draw match of the year and beat a player of his quality, it just shows that the work I did in the off-season is paying off.”

Popyrin now plays American Marcos Giron who beat French veteran Richard Gasquet 7-6 (7/5), 6-7 (6/8), 7-5 on Sunday.

Japan’s Yoshihito Nishioka downed fifth seed Rune -- the ATP Newcomer of the Year in 2022 after claiming three titles -- in three sets.

Rune, 19, won the first set comfortably but his serve went off the ball and Nishioka came back to win the next two and take the match 2-6, 6-4, 6-4.

In other singles action, Serbia’s Miomir Kecmanovic beat Australian Christopher O’Connell 6-4, 6-4 and Frenchman Quentin Halys eased past wildcard Jordan Thompson 6-3, 6-4.

Earlier, fans gave Djokovic a raucous welcome during his first match in Australia in almost two years.

Playing with Canada’s Vasek

Yoshihito Nishioka downed fifth seed Holger Rune - the ATP Newcomer of the Year in 2022 - in three sets

Djokovic given warm welcome in Adelaide

Adelaide, Australia - Tennis fans gave Novak Djokovic a raucous welcome during his first match in Australia in almost two years when he made a rare doubles appearance at the Adelaide International on Monday.

Playing with Canada’s Vasek Pospisil, they lost to doubles specialists Tomislav Brkic and Gonzalo Escobar 4-6, 6-3, 10/5 but enjoyed overwhelming crowd support along the way.

The Serbian superstar was deported from the country before the 2022 Australian Open for not being vaccinated for Covid and was subsequently barred from re-entering for three years.

When Djokovic arrived in Australia for the 2022 tourna-



Serbia's Novak Djokovic exults after winning a point in his first-round doubles match with Canadian Vasek Pospisil in Adelaide on Monday (AFP)

ment, government rules required anyone entering the country to be vaccinated - unless they had a valid medication exemption.

Djokovic, who was detained by the Australian Border Force on entering the country and forced to stay at an immigration hotel, claimed he had obtained a medical exemption to defend his title without being vaccinated because he had recently recovered from Covid.

However, after 10 days of legal argument, the government ruled he did not meet the requirements for entry, so his visa was cancelled and he was automatically banned from entering Australia until 2025.

But the ban was lifted in No-

vember and he will be attempting to win a 10th Australian Open title later this month.

The match was played on a packed outside court, with the spectators who managed to get in firmly behind Djokovic.

He walked out to loud cheers and fans chanting “Novak, Novak”.

While there were plenty of Serbian flags courtside, it became obvious that everyone was barracking for the 35-year-old, who stayed behind to sign autographs and pose for selfies after the match.

Djokovic will now focus on his first singles of the year, against Frenchman Constant Lestienne.

AFP

Venus Williams makes winning return at Auckland Classic

Auckland, New Zealand - Seven-time grand slam winner Venus Williams overcame a player less than half her age on Monday in a vintage performance in the first round of the Auckland Classic.

Playing her first match in four months, the 42-year-old unearthed some trade-mark power to notch a first win in more than a year, adding another footnote to a professional career that has stretched into a 27th season.

An hour-long rain interruption worked in Williams’ favour, as she resumed in style to beat fellow American Katie Volynets

7-6 (7/4), 6-2.

Volynets, who turned 21 on New Year’s Eve, was leading the first set tiebreaker when play was suspended but she faded in a match that stretched late into the evening.

The former world No.1 is using this week to prepare for her 25th tilt at the Australian Open, having accepted a wildcard entry to the tournaments in Auckland and Melbourne.

She admitted the stoppage worked in her favour although it didn’t feel that way at the time.

“It’s hard when you’re all fired up and just suddenly you have to stop,” said Williams,

whose previous match was a first-round loss at the US Open.

“I was so mad on the rain break. My coach could barely talk to me so I’m going to try to improve my attitude.”

Williams has slipped outside the top 1,000 in the rankings but she showcased glimpses of her former class - and some creditable fitness - during the second set against 114th-ranked qualifier Volynets.

The tournament is being staged for the first time in three years, with the 2020 edition having been won by re-tired great Serena Williams - Venus’ younger sister.

Williams will face China’s Zhu Lin in the second round, after she upset American sixth seed Madison Brengle 4-6, 7-6 (8/6), 6-4.

Third seed Canadian Leylah Fernandez notched a rapid win, dropping just 14 points in a 6-1, 6-1 defeat of 15-year-old Czech wildcard Brenda Fruhvirtova.

Top-seeded American and world No.7 Coco Gauff opens her campaign on Tuesday.

Also in action are three former Grand Slam winners - Briton Emma Raducanu and US pair Sloane Stephens and Sofia Kenin.

AFP



Venus Williams

LEEWAY AFTER CONWAY

Pakistan halt New Zealand on 309-6 after Devon Conway's brilliant century in second Test

Karachi, Pakistan - Off-spinner Agha Salman and pacer Naseem Shah helped Pakistan derail New Zealand to 309-6 Monday after opener Devon Conway scored a brilliant hundred on the first day of the second Test in Karachi.

Salman grabbed 3-55 and Naseem took 2-44 to trigger a New Zealand middle order slump which saw the tourists lose five wickets for 45 runs during the final session, slumping from 234-1 to 279-6.

At close, Tom Blundell and Ish Sodhi were batting on 30 and 11 respectively as they try to revive New Zealand's innings.

"We did win those first two sessions, but the way Pakistan bounced back in that last session certainly brought them back in the game," said Conway.

"Personally, it's been a good ride so far. It's just nice to get an opportunity to play and con-



Pakistan players celebrate after the dismissal of New Zealand's Henry Nicholls (not pictured) on the first day of their second Test against New Zealand in Karachi on Monday (AFP)

tribute for the team," he added.

Conway, who scored 122, put on 134 for the opening wicket with Tom Latham (71) after New Zealand won the toss on a National Stadium pitch that had traces of grass but did not initially support bowlers.

He steadied the innings with another 100-run stand for the second wicket with Kane Williamson who made 36, but Pakistan pulled back after the visitors were 226-1 at tea.

Salman had Conway caught behind by Sarfaraz Ahmed soon after, to make it 2-234 before six runs later Naseem dismissed Williamson in the same manner.

Conway struck 16 boundaries and a six in his 257-minute stay at the crease.

Salman then struck twice, beating Daryl Mitchell's defence for three and had Henry Nicholls

caught behind with a turning delivery for 26.

"Whenever I get to bowl I want to contribute," said Salman, who completed 100 wickets.

"This pitch is different from the one used in the first Test and once it dried it took more turn."

Abrar Ahmed took his only wicket by trapping Michael Bracewell for nought.

The two-match series is tied at 0-0 after the first Test - also in Karachi - ended in a tame draw.

In the morning, Pakistan's three-pronged pace attack looked helpless until Naseem struck in the sixth over after lunch, trapping Latham leg-before with a sharp incoming delivery.

Latham, who scored 113 in the first match, hit nine boundaries in his 100-ball knock, his 24th Test half-century.

Conway was lucky to survive a sharp chance when Saud Shakeel failed to hold on to a mis-cued drive off Hasan Ali on 89.

Pakistan brought on Abrar Ahmed in the ninth over, but there was no sign of turn as Conway smashed a boundary and a six off the spinner's second over.

The hosts picked Naseem and Hasan in place of spinner Naurman Ali and fast-bowler Mohammad Wasim after the first Test, while New Zealand picked pacer Matt Henry over Neil Wagner.

AFP

New Year resolution to win a World Cup, says India's Hardik Pandya

Mumbai, India - Winning a world title in any format is top of Hardik Pandya's target list as he leads a new-look India Twenty20 team against Sri Lanka, he said Monday.

All-rounder Pandya was appointed captain of the 16-member side, who will be without regular skipper Rohit Sharma and star batsman Virat Kohli, for the three T20 matches starting Tuesday in Mumbai.

Both Rohit and Kohli will return for the three one-day internationals to follow as India begin preparations to host the 50-over World Cup later this year.

India also remain in the hunt to qualify for the World Test Championship final in June, after losing the inaugural edition to New Zealand in 2021.

"The biggest new year resolution is to win the World Cup," Pandya told reporters on the eve of the Sri Lanka series.

India would try to "go out there and give everything", he said, adding: "I think things are



India's Hardik Pandya is having fun at a practice session at the Wankhede Stadium in Mumbai, India, on Monday (AFP)

looking bright."

India, led by Rohit, were hampered by England in the semi-finals of last year's T20 World Cup in Australia, ending their hopes of a first world title since the 2013 Champions Trophy.

The 29-year-old Pandya, who

led debutants Gujarat Titans to an Indian Premier League crown last year, said he still had ambitions to fulfil.

He was restored to the national team early in 2022 after recovering from a career-threatening back injury and said it had been "a magical year for me".

"Going forward there is a lot to achieve. I have not achieved anything. There will be multiple World Cups in multiple years, so the goal always will be to win the World Cup."

Dasun Shanaka's Sri Lanka outplayed India in last year's Asia Cup T20 tournament in the United Arab Emirates, but Pandya said the tourists would not have it easy in India.

"We are not looking to settle anything, it's just that we want to play good cricket," said Pandya.

Pandya wished Rishabh Pant a "speedy recovery" as the wicket-keeper-batsman continues treatment in a hospital in Dehradun for injuries from a horrific car crash last week.

Qatar's Al Attiyah survives rocky route to win Dakar stage

Al-Ula, Saudi Arabia - Defending champion Nasser Al Attiyah (Toyota) used all his experience of the rocky conditions to win a tough 430km second stage from Sea Camp to Al-Ula in the 45th Dakar Rally on Monday.

As many of his rivals were held up by a series of punctures, including Sebastien Loeb (Prodrive) who lost almost an hour and a half, the Qatari Al Attiyah ploughed to a provisional 14-second win over Erik Van Loon (Overdrive).

Carlos Sainz (Audi) was third man home, 5 minutes 5 seconds back, which was enough to give the Spaniard the lead in the provisional general classification, 2min 12sec ahead of Al Attiyah.

Mathieu Serradori (Century) is running third, 24min 55sec behind Sainz.

"It was absolutely the time to attack and drive a good stage," said Al Attiyah.

"It was not an easy day. There were a lot of rocks and the navi-

It was not an easy day. There were a lot of rocks and the navigation wasn't easy

NASSER AL ATTIAH

gation wasn't easy. We had one flat tyre, one puncture at the beginning, but after that we tried to be really careful in the stony places. In the sand we pushed and I'm quite happy."

Loeb's hopes of competing for a first ever Dakar title hang in the balance after a stage he described as a "car wreck".

"The whole special was hell," said a stony-faced Loeb as he stepped out of his car which was missing its bonnet, torn off during an impact.

"At the driving level, (it was) completely uninteresting, driving in rocks in slow motion, trying to

cross without puncturing and, well, we had three punctures.

"We did everything to drive slowly but there was nothing we could do, it was not at all suitable for a car like ours."

The nine-time world rally champion, who finished second last year, is now down in 31st in the overall standings 1hr 21min off the lead.

Meanwhile, American rider Mason Klein took the overall lead in the motorcycling category after winning Monday's stage.

"Most of the day I was just following the other guys and then at the last part they were making jokes about me leading out or not leading out and letting them all do the work," said Klein. "So, I said, fine, I'll take my turn and I just left them and it was good."

His compatriot Ricky Brabec had led overnight but could post only the 15th fastest time and was 8min 19sec slower than KTM rider Klein.

AFP

Brazil begins paying final respects to football legend Pele

Santos, Brazil - An emotional Brazil began paying its final respects Monday to football legend Pele with a wake at the stadium where he first took the world's breath away with his dazzling skill.

Hundreds of fans lined up Monday morning to file through the Vila Belmiro, home to Pele's long-time club, Santos, where the coffin bearing the remains of "O Rei" (The King) was displayed in the centre of the field.

Pele, a three-time World Cup winner widely considered the greatest footballer of all time, died Thursday at the age of 82 after a long battle with cancer.

Carlos Mota and his 12-year-old son Bernardo travelled more than 500 kilometres (300

miles) from Rio de Janeiro to Santos, a south-eastern port city in Sao Paulo state, to pay tribute to their late hero.

"My whole childhood was influenced by what Pele did for Brazil, by his World Cup wins. He was a national idol," Mota, 59, told AFP.

"I never saw Pele play, but I've seen the videos. He's the greatest player who ever walked the Earth," said Bernardo.

FIFA president Gianni Infantino and Alejandro Dominguez, head of the South American football confederation CONMEBOL, were among the first to pay their respects at the open coffin, which was displayed under an awning and surrounded by bouquets of white



FIFA President Gianni Infantino (2-L) and Conmebol President Alejandro Dominguez (3-L) attends the wake of Brazilian football legend Pele at the Urbano Caldeira stadium in Santos, Brazil, on Monday (AFP)

flowers.

The oceanside stadium of the team nicknamed "Peixe" - "fish" in Portuguese - opened its doors at 10:00 am (1300 GMT) for a 24-hour wake, to be followed by a funeral procession through the streets of Santos on Tuesday, then a private interment.

Known as Vila Belmiro after the neighbourhood where it is located, the black-and-white stadium has a capacity of 16,000 people.

In the stands, three giant flags were displayed, one with an image of Pele sporting his famous number 10 on his jersey.

Another bore the message "Long live the king"; the third said simply, "Pele 82 years."

Tuesday's funeral procession

will pass by the house of Pele's mother, 100-year-old Celeste Arantes, who is still alive but unconscious and unaware that her son has died, according to family.

The procession will end at a cemetery in Santos, where Pele will be interred in a special mausoleum.

Born Edson Arantes do Nascimento, Pele is the only player in his tory to win three World Cups and defined the "beautiful game" with his talent.

His death sparked a global outpouring of tributes.

Wreaths of flowers left by his fans have brought a splash of colour to Vila Belmiro, which houses a bust and a statue of the football great.

AFP

ALZHEIMER'S BIOMARKER

A group of neuroscientists led by a University of Pittsburgh School of Medicine researcher developed a test to detect a novel marker of Alzheimer's disease neurodegeneration in a blood sample.

The biomarker, called 'brain-derived tau', or BD-tau, outperforms current blood diagnostic tests used to detect Alzheimer's-related neurodegeneration clinically. It is specific to Alzheimer's disease and correlates well with Alzheimer's neurodegeneration biomarkers in the cerebrospinal fluid (CSF), a recent report in Science Daily stated.

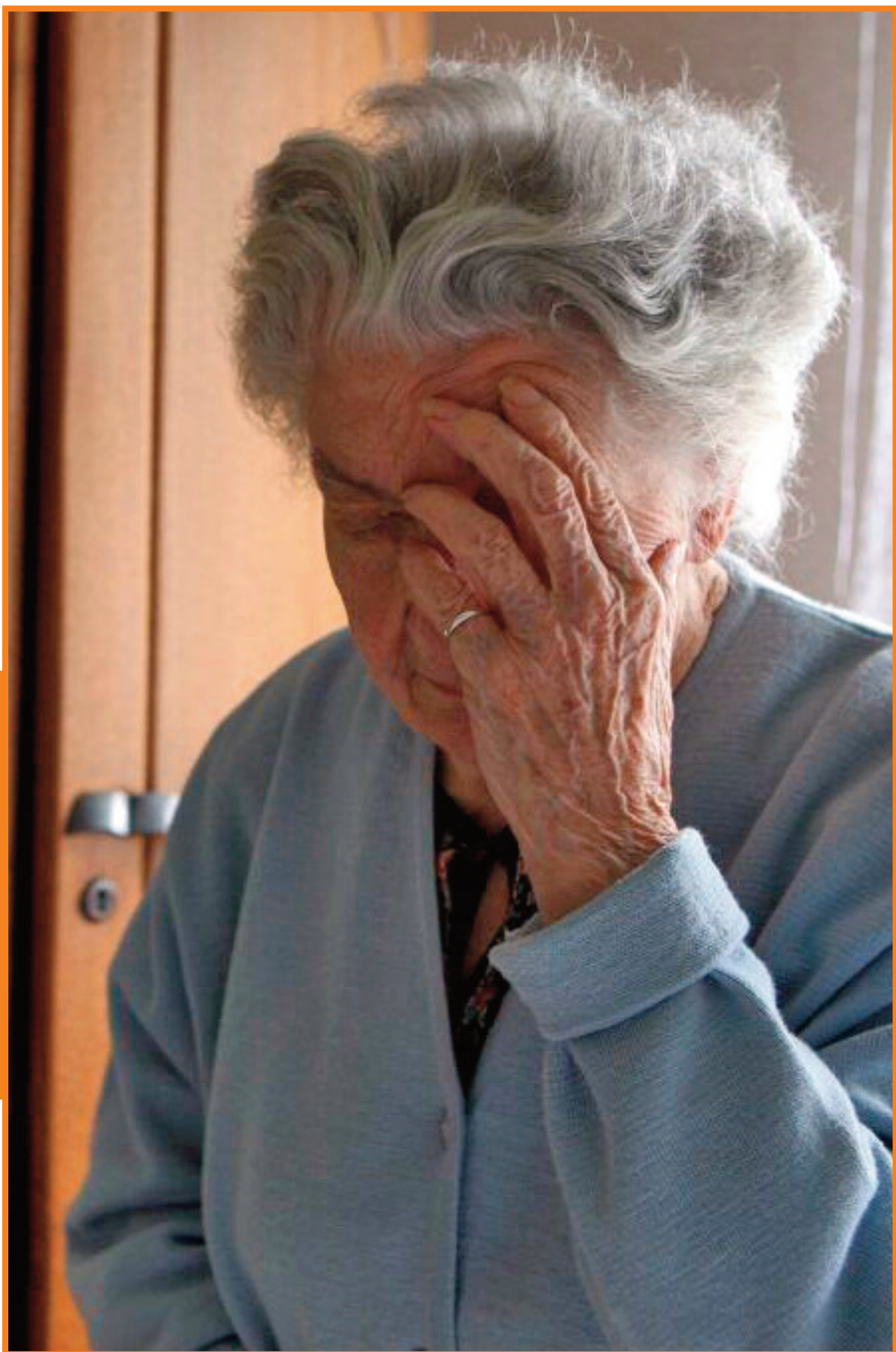
"At present, diagnosing Alzheimer's disease requires neuroimaging," said senior author Thomas Karikari, assistant professor of psychiatry at Pitt. "Those tests are expensive and take a long time to schedule, and a lot of patients, even in the US, don't have access to MRI and PET scanners."

development of simple tools detecting signs of Alzheimer's in the blood without compromising on quality is an important step toward improved accessibility, said Karikari.

"The most important utility of blood biomarkers is to make people's lives better and to improve clinical confidence and risk prediction in Alzheimer's disease diagnosis," Karikari said.

Current blood diagnostic methods can accurately detect abnormalities in plasma amyloid beta and the phosphorylated form of tau, hitting two of the three necessary checkmarks to confidently diagnose Alzheimer's. But the biggest hurdle in applying the AT(N) Framework to blood samples lies in the difficulty of detecting markers of neurodegeneration that are specific to the brain and aren't influenced by potentially misleading contaminants produced elsewhere in the body.

For example, blood levels of neuro-



proteins produced by cells outside the brain.

To do that, they designed a special antibody that selectively binds to BD-tau, making it easily detectable in the blood. They validated their assay across over 600 patient samples from five independent cohorts, including those from patients whose Alzheimer's disease diagnosis was confirmed after their deaths, as well as from patients with memory deficiencies indicative of early-stage Alzheimer's.

The tests showed that levels of BD-tau detected in blood samples of Alzheimer's disease patients using the new assay matched with levels of tau in the CSF and reliably distinguished Alzheimer's from other neurodegenerative diseases. Levels of BD-tau also correlated with the severity of amyloid plaques and tau tangles in the brain tissue confirmed via brain autopsy analyses.

Scientists hope that monitoring blood levels of BD-tau could improve

Binding
'BD-tau'

Currently, to diagnose Alzheimer's disease, clinicians use guidelines set in 2011 by the National Institute on Aging and the Alzheimer's Association. The guidelines, called the AT(N) Framework, require detection of three distinct components of Alzheimer's pathology - the presence of amyloid plaques, tau tangles and neurodegeneration in the brain - either by imaging or by analyzing CSF samples.

Unfortunately, both approaches suffer from economical and practical limitations, dictating the need for development of convenient and reliable AT(N) biomarkers in blood samples, collection of which is minimally invasive and requires fewer resources. The

filament light, a protein marker of nerve cell damage, become elevated in Alzheimer's disease, Parkinson's, and other dementias, rendering it less useful when trying to differentiate Alzheimer's disease from other neurodegenerative conditions. On the other hand, detecting total tau in the blood proved to be less informative than monitoring its levels in CSF.

By applying their knowledge of molecular biology and biochemistry of tau proteins in different tissues, such as the brain, Karikari and his team, including scientists at the University of Gothenburg, Sweden, developed a technique to selectively detect BD-tau while avoiding free-floating 'big tau'



The most important utility of blood biomarkers is to make people's lives better and to improve clinical confidence and risk prediction in Alzheimer's disease diagnosis

THOMAS KARIKARI

NEW BIOMARKER TEST CAN DETECT ALZHEIMER'S NEURODEGENERATION IN BLOOD – A BIG LEAP IN REDUCING DIAGNOSTIC COSTS FOR THE DEGENERATIVE BRAIN DISORDER

clinical trial design and facilitate screening and enrollment of patients from populations that historically haven't been included in research cohorts.

"There is a huge need for diversity in clinical research, not just by skin colour but also by socioeconomic background," said Karikari. "To develop better drugs, trials need to enroll people from varied backgrounds and not just those who live close to academic medical centers. A blood test is cheaper, safer and easier to administer, and it can improve clinical confidence in diagnosing Alzheimer's and selecting participants for clinical trial and disease monitoring."

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EXERCISE FOR SENIORS

Don't just sit on a garden seat every evening and watch children frolicking around or youth enjoying a spirited game of football. If you are above 60 years, don't write yourself as 'not suited' for regular exercise - that is a sure way of getting consigned to a rocking chair within four walls.

According to a recent article in Harvard Health, whether you were once much more physically active or have never been one to exercise regularly, now is a great time to start an exercise and fitness regimen. Getting and staying in shape is just as important for seniors as it is for younger people.

Why is exercise important for older people? Getting your heart rate up and challenging your muscles benefits virtually every system in your body and improves your physical and mental health in myriad ways. Physical activity helps maintain a healthy blood pressure, keeps harmful plaque from building up in your arteries, reduces inflammation, improves blood sugar levels, strengthens bones, and helps stave off depression.

In addition, a regular exercise programme can make your sex life better, lead to better quality sleep, reduce your risk of some cancers, and is linked to longer life.

Familiarity breeds confidence

Many older adults hesitate to get moving because they're unfamiliar with the types of exercise and fitness that are effective and safe, and aren't sure how much exercise they need to do. The good news is that any kind of movement is better than being sedentary, so there's nothing wrong with starting small and working your way up to longer workouts, though familiarity with routines does build confidence.

Your goal should be no less than 150 minutes of moderate intensity activity per week, but if you can't start at that level, work up to it (and then past it). While there are many dedicated forms of exercise and fitness for adults, you also want to stay physically active throughout the day by taking the stairs, doing yard work, and playing with your grandkids.

When it comes to exercise and fitness for seniors, most can begin without consulting a doctor but there are exceptions. If you have a major health condition like diabetes, high blood pressure, heart or lung disease, osteoporosis or a neurolog-

Exercise is as important for seniors as it is for youngsters, to stay fit, healthy, be mobile, and have a positive mindset. You might be grey, have a paunch or a frail physique, but you're never too old to exercise

Grey, and a tummy?



ical disease, definitely talk to your doctor first. People with mobility issues such as poor balance or arthritis should also get advice from their doctor.

Best types of exercise

While there are endless forms of exercise, experts categorise physical activity into four broad types based on what each calls upon your body to do and how the movement benefits you:

Aerobic exercise

Aerobic exercise is marked by an increased heart rate. Although most aerobic exercises require you to move your whole body, the main focus is on your heart and lungs (Aerobic exercise is often called "cardio" because it challenges and benefits your cardiovascular system). Activities like walking, swimming, dancing and cycling, if done at sufficient intensity, get you breathing faster and your heart working harder. Aerobic exercises burn fat, improve your mood, reduce inflammation and lower blood sugar.

Strength training

Strength training, sometimes called resistance training, should be performed two to three times a week. Squats, lunges, push-ups and the exercises performed on resistance machines or using weights or bands help maintain and even build muscle mass and strength. Strength training also helps prevent falls, keep bones strong, lower blood sugar levels, and improve balance. Do a combination of both isometric and isotonic exercises. Isometric exercises, such as doing planks and holding leg lifts, are done without movement. They are great for maintaining strength and improving stability. Isotonic exercises require you to bear weight throughout a range of motion. Bicep curls, bench presses and sit-ups are all forms of isotonic exercise.

Stretching exercises

Stretching exercises keep your muscles and tendons flexible, preserve your posture, and improve mobility, especially as you age. Stretching can be done every day.

Balance exercises

Balance exercises call on the various systems that help you stay upright and oriented, such as those of the inner ear, vision and muscles and joints. Tai chi and yoga are great forms of balance exercises that can help you avoid falls and stay independent well into your senior years.

How much is good enough

How much exercise you should be getting depends on several factors, including your current level of fitness, your fitness goals, the types of exercise you're planning to do, and whether you have deficits in such areas as strength, flexibility or balance.

As a general rule, 150 minutes of moderate intensity aerobic activity (or 75 minutes of vigorous exercise) is recommended as a weekly minimum. As you become more fit, you'll want to exceed that in order to reap maximum benefit.

A natural way of splitting up the 150 minutes might be to do a 30-minute session five times per week, or you can break it up and do two 15-minute sessions during a single day. Adopt whatever schedule fits your lifestyle.



DR SANGEETHA MOHANAKRISHNAN
Specialist Internist
Badr Al Samaa Medical
Centre, Al Khuwayr

Snoring may indicate obstructive sleep apnea

Snoring is a common happening which occurs during sleep and we presume that it is a sign of comfortable, sound sleep. In reality it is not so.

Studies show that around 24 per cent of males and 14 per cent of females snore during sleep, of which 4 per cent have Obstructive Sleep Apnea (OSA) - the cessation of airflow through nose and mouth during sleep affecting the brain, lungs and heart. Even sudden death can occur.

How does snoring occur?

When a person goes to sleep all the muscles of the body relaxes including the muscles in the airway leading to the inward pulling of the loose areas in the mouth. The loose tissue in the oral cavity and the surroundings vibrate to produce a noise which we call as snoring. This is commonly seen in males, alcoholics and obese people.

Snoring and OSA

All patients who snore do not have OSA but OSA is commonly seen in snorers and is one of the first symptoms of OSA. The intensity of snoring increases when a person goes into deep sleep and at the peak of snoring the person goes into a state where there is cessation of breathing which we

call apnea. At this stage the person gets up from his sleep and starts to breathe, and again falls asleep. This event occurs repeatedly during sleep at the rate of 5-40 per hour of sleep.

Types of sleep apnea

- Central sleep apnea
- Obstructive sleep apnea
- Mixed sleep apnea

Features of sleep apnea

- Excessive daytime sleepiness (EDS) while working, seeing TV, driving etc.
- Headache, usually in the mornings
- Impaired memory
- Inattentiveness
- Involuntary movement of hands and legs during sleep
- Hypertension, heart failure, heart attack

Causes of OSA

OSA is commonly seen in obese patients, and to know how obese you are, body mass index (BMI) is calculated. BMI more than 25 is suggestive of obesity.

Other causes include hypothyroidism, alcoholism, nasal diseases like deviated nasal septum and diseases of the throat like enlarged tonsils, etc.

How to diagnose?

Polysomnography - The most im-

portant investigation to differentiate between a common snoring and OSA is polysomnography. The changes which occur during sleep can be studied in a hospital set up in a sleep lab.

The gadgets used to monitor various changes during sleep include electroencephalogram (EEG), electrocardiogram (ECG), electromyogram (EMG). Pulse oximetry, in addition to measurement of movement of chest and abdomen during respiration.

Endoscopy of nose and throat - It's useful in analysing the measurement of airway space and any obstruction in these areas.

MRI - It has a major role in analysing any narrow segment in airway during sleep. Pulmonary function test and thyroid function tests - These tests are also necessary to rule out any abnormality in lung function and thyroid function.

Treatment

In obese patients, weight reduction is the most important factor in the treatment of OSA. Alteration of lifestyle and regular exercise is the key factor in weight reduction.

Moreover avoidance of alcohol and smoking plays a vital role in the treatment of OSA as supporting factors. Treating diseases like hypothyroidism also provides relief to patients.

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MUSCAT DAILY

LOOKING 2022 BACK

From restrictions to reassurances, tragedies to jubilation, the year 2022 had its share of ups and downs, making way for 2023 filled with new promises for the Sultanate of Oman



Friday prayers halted, conferences suspended

January 23

Our Correspondent
Muscat

A sharp surge in the number of Omicron infections coupled with a spike in hospitalisations has led the Supreme Committee tasked with tackling developments resulting from the COVID-19 pandemic to announce new restrictions which will last two weeks with effect from Sunday.

The Supreme Committee reviewed reports on the epidemiological situation of the disease and noted a significant rise in the number of patients afflicted with Omicron and resultant hospitalisations in different governorates.

'The current readings point to the probability of a further rise in numbers of patients and hospitalisations, particularly among children who have not yet been vaccinated,' it said.

New measures

- ▶ Limiting the number of employees in government and public entities to 50 per cent.
- ▶ Suspending all conferences and exhibitions.
- ▶ Suspending congregational activities and



advise to organisers to hold these without audience ensuring that participants abide by the precautionary measures announced earlier, including showing proof of vaccination.

▶ Suspension of Friday prayers. However, mosques are allowed to hold the five daily prayers at 50 per cent capacity in line with the procedures announced by the Ministry of Awqaf and Religious Affairs in coordination

with the Ministry of Health.

The Supreme Committee urged all establishments (restaurants, cafeterias, commercial complexes, trade outlets and public halls) permitted to engage in their activities to adhere to the measures set for such activities, especially operating at 50 per cent capacity, showing proof of vaccination, observing physical distancing and wearing face masks, among other precautions.



Oman crude jumps to 7-year high

January 19

Our Correspondent
Muscat

With global oil prices rising to record levels, Oman crude prices on Tuesday rose to US\$86.70 per barrel, a level not seen since October 2014.

According to data from Dubai Mercantile Exchange, where Oman crude is traded, Oman crude (for March 2022 delivery) contract price rose by US\$1.76 on Tuesday compared to US\$84.94 per barrel on Monday.

European crude benchmark Brent North Sea reached US\$88.13 per barrel, while US contract WTI hit US\$85.74 - the highest levels since October 2014.

Also supporting the prices was the claim of an attack by Yemen's Huthi rebels in Abu Dhabi that triggered a fuel tank blast killing three people on Monday, with the group warning civilians and foreign firms in the United Arab Emirates to avoid 'vital installations'.

The news fuelled concerns about supplies from the crude-rich region.

"The suspected drone attack in Abu Dhabi underscores the ongoing threat against civilian and energy infrastructure in the region amid heightened regional tensions," said Torbjorn Soltvedt at risk intelligence company Verisk Maplecroft.

Brent and West Texas Intermediate have climbed more than ten per cent so far this year as investors become increasingly confident that the demand will increase as the world slowly returns to normal and economies reopen.

Oil prices that rallied 50 per cent in 2021 will power further ahead this year, analysts predict, saying a lack of production capacity and limited investment in the sector could lift crude above US\$100 a barrel.

Goldman Sachs expects oil prices to hit US\$100 per barrel in the second half of this year, citing a lower than expected hit to demand from the Omicron coronavirus variant coupled with increased supply disruptions and OPEC+ shortfalls.

With inputs from AFP

Unvaccinated account for 90% of COVID-19 deaths

January 19

Our Correspondent
Muscat

Around 90 per cent of the COVID-19 related deaths in Oman are currently among unvaccinated people, according to the Ministry of Health (MoH).

A statement issued by MoH said COVID-19 vaccines reduce hospital admissions and mortality, in case of infections in those who have taken the jabs.

Around 94 per cent of the total target population in Oman, from the age of 12 years and above, have received at least one dose of vaccine. The percentage of those who received two doses is 87 per cent.

'Around 90 per cent of the deaths were among unvaccinated people, while the death

rate among vaccinated people was very low - 7.5 per cent of those who received one dose and 2.5 per cent of those who received two doses. The majority of deaths and inpatients belonged to groups that did not receive the vaccine and during the period prior to the commencement of the nationwide vaccination campaign,' the statement said.

The percentage of unvaccinated COVID-19 inpatients in the sultanate has risen to 89 per cent, while the percentage of COVID-19 inpatients with a single dose does not exceed seven per cent and is 2.5 per cent among those vaccinated with two doses, the ministry statement said.

The ministry reiterated that it is possible to reduce the number of COVID-19 infections by taking



the booster dose.

Several Omani doctors have confirmed that a stimulating dose can limit the spread of the virus. Dr Zakaria bin Yahya al Balushi, infectious diseases consultant at The Royal Hospital, tweeted, "The number of recorded cases

of COVID-19 in many countries of the world began to decline following administration of the booster dose. The rate of vaccination in Oman with two doses is considered excellent, according to statistics published by the Ministry of Health.



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Oman-Belgium ties reinforced

February 06

Muscat - His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik hosted an official luncheon at Al Alam Palace in honour of Philippe Leopold Louis Marie, King of the Belgians, on the occasion of his visit to Oman on Thursday.

Prior to the luncheon, His Majesty the Sultan conferred the Oman Civil Order, 1st Class, on King Philippe as His Majesty the Sultan's appreciation for the king and the deep bilateral relations between the two friendly countries.

Exchange of commemorative gifts

His Majesty the Sultan and the King of the Belgians exchanged commemorative gifts in presence of the Honourable Lady and Mathilde Marie Christine Ghislaine d'Udekem d'Acoz, Queen of the Belgians.

His Majesty the Sultan presented King Philippe an Omani sword, while the King of the Belgians presented His Majesty the Sultan a piece of art representing Belgian



cultural heritage.

The luncheon was attended by members of the Royal Family, chairmen of the State Council and Shura Council, ministers and senior officers of the Sultan's Armed Forces and Oman Royal Police.

Official talks

Earlier on Thursday, His Majesty the Sultan and King Philippe held an official session of talks at Al Alam

His Majesty Sultan Haitham conferred the honour of Oman Civil Order, 1st Class, on King Philippe; held closed-door meeting

Palace.

The talks reviewed the good relations binding the sultanate and Belgium. The talks also touched on the fruitful cooperation between the two countries in various spheres which serve the interest of the Omani and Belgian friendly peoples. They also exchanged views on several matters of common interest.

The talks session was attended from the Belgian side by Queen

Mathilde, Sophie Wilmès, Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs, Tinne Van der Straeten, Minister of Energy, Pol De Witte, Secretary General of the Household of the King of the Belgians, Jeroen Cooreman, Director General for Bilateral Affairs, Machteld Fostier, Secretary to the Queen of the Belgians, and Dominique Minior, Ambassador of Belgium to the sultanate.

Non-communicable diseases cost Omani economy RO1.1bn annually

February 06

Our Correspondent
Muscat

The Ministry of Health (MoH) released a study titled 'The Case for Investment in the Prevention and Control of Non-Communicable Diseases' on Thursday. It found that non-communicable diseases (NCDs) cost the Omani economy RO1.1bn annually.

The study was released at a meeting attended by senior MoH and Gulf Health Council officials.

The study was conducted in view of the significant burden of NCDs in society. NCDs cause 72 per cent of all deaths in the sultanate.

An estimated one in five adults - under the age of 70 - dies of an NCD. The study revealed that NCDs cost the Omani economy RO1.1bn every year, which was equivalent to 3.59 per cent of the GDP in 2019. This annual cost in-



cluded RO609mn in healthcare expenditure and RO486mn in lost productive capacity due to premature mortality and disabilities.

In 2017, the NCD causing the most deaths in Oman was cardiovascular disease, accounting for 36 per cent of all deaths, followed by cancer - 11 per cent deaths - and diabetes - eight per cent deaths.

The study indicated that Oman

could reduce its burden of NCDs by investing in four cost-effective and proven policy and intervention packages over the next 15 years (till 2034).

In doing so, Oman could save RO671mn in economic output losses. Furthermore, by investing in these four interventions and policy packages, Oman could save at least 18,724 lives.

13 murders, 107 cases of funds misuse in 2021

February 01

Muscat - H E Nasr bin Khamis al Sawai, Public Prosecutor, said on Monday that 107 cases of misuse of public funds were registered in 2021. Thirteen murder cases were recorded in Oman in the year, compared to nine in 2020.

Speaking to reporters virtually, H E Sawai informed that of the 107 cases of misuse of public funds, 52 have been referred to courts, 15 have been convicted and 40 cases settled by the Public Prosecution. Three were acquitted and 15 other cases are under investigation.

According to H E Sawai, the Public Prosecution is coordinating with the state's Financial and Administrative Control Authority to monitor such crimes. In reference to a murder committed in Bidiyah in 2019, he said the suspect has been arrested and is being tried in India for allegedly killing an Omani family comprising father, mother and three sons. Relatives found the bodies



after two days only to raise an alarm by which time the suspect had fled.

Addressing media personnel, H E Sawai said rumours spread through social media can harm society.

He added that the Public Prosecution is currently working in coordination with the National Centre for Statistics and Information and other authorities to find out the reasons for the rise in criminal cases in 2021. "However," he noted, "the number of crimes is not dangerous."

The number of felony cases in 2021 increased by 6.2 per cent over 2020.



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Oman's first electric car launched

February 21

Our Correspondent
Muscat

Mays Motors, in cooperation with Oman Technology Fund, launched the sultanate's first electric car at Al Bustan Palace, A Ritz-Carlton Hotel, on Sunday. Priced at RO25,000, hundred units have been pre-booked in the first stage of production.

Speaking to Muscat Daily, Haider bin Adnan al Zaabi, co-founder of Mays Motors, said, "We are proud to unveil Oman's first electric car - Mays iE1 - today."

According to Zaabi, Mays Motors' electric car is the beginning of a new and promising sector in the sultanate. "We have a team with more than 15 years of experience in the automotive field and are offering an opportunity to establish the first factory for the electronic car industry in the sultanate with an investment of RO5mn."

Zaabi claimed he and the Mays Motors team visited more than 130 car factories across Italy, Germany, China, USA, and India to arrive at the final design and specifications of Mays iE1, and that experts at Tesla, Maserati, BMW and Porsche have complimented the design of the car. "They predict global success for Mays iE1. It can accelerate from zero to 100km in a less than four seconds"

The two-seater has a large dash with displays and controls, including door functions. Its battery can be charged at home and has a driving range of 500km+.

Zaabi described the car with a carbon fibre body as "loaded with a lot of technology similar to international brands such as Lamborghini and Ferrari".

Though the starting is RO25,000, "similar cars abroad cost anywhere near RO50,000", Zaabi said.

He informed that the car complies with international standards and specifications. Zaabi added that the company is currently operating in a small factory in Barka. "We will start production at the end of 2023. We expect to make about 600 cars in the first five years. We have hired international marketing experts to promote our car."

Zaabi is hopeful that manufacturing of the electric car will contribute to building an integrated system of industries related to the automotive sector in the sultanate, exploiting locally available raw material and creating more than 800 job opportunities for small and medium companies.

"The company also has plans to make electric motors for boats."

Mays Motors has signed a cooperation agreement with the Renewable Energy Research Centre at Sultan Qaboos University to validate the sustainability of self-charging technology.

"We call on investors in Oman to invest in the car manufacturing industry, not for Oman only, but for profitability as well" Zaabi said.



Friday prayers resume with 50% capacity: Supreme Committee

February 10

Our Correspondent
Muscat

The Supreme Committee tasked with tackling developments resulting from COVID-19 has allowed Friday prayers to resume after a two week suspension but with only 50 per cent capacity in mosques.

It has also allowed organisers to hold conferences, exhibitions and mass gatherings with 70 per cent capacity at venues. Attendance in

government offices will return to 100 per cent as opposed to 50 per cent announced two weeks earlier.

In a statement, the Supreme Committee said it is imperative for all to abide by the conditions it has set to engage in these activities, especially not exceeding 70 per cent capacity at venues of conferences, exhibitions and mass gatherings.

The committee informed that the Ministry of Education will issue a statement on a decision on school education for the second semester of the 2021/2022 academic year.

It emphasised the need for government and private institutions - including malls, restaurants, other commercial activities and organisers of cultural, sports and other group events - to ensure entry to vaccinated individuals only.

The committee also urged all citizens aged 12 and older to take a booster dose against COVID-19.

It noted that vaccine uptake in this age group is still low and stands at a mere nine per cent among citizens, compared to 24 per cent among expatriates.

Travel to Oman gets easier with more restrictions relaxed

February 23

Our Correspondent
Muscat

With several COVID-19 restrictions eased, travel procedures to Oman are returning to pre-pandemic normalcy.

The Civil Aviation Authority (CAA) has announced that travellers to the sultanate can present the mandatory COVID-19 PCR negative report upon arrival or within 24 hours of arrival. It has also cancelled the pre-registration requirement for all arrivals via the Ministry of Health link, which was earlier necessary before travel.

'Based on the decisions of the



Supreme Committee for tackling the impact of COVID-19, the Civil Aviation Authority hereby informs all passengers and aircraft operators in Oman that passengers travelling to the sultanate are not required, with immediate effect, to register in <http://travel.moh.gov.om>,

CAA stated. 'All passengers aged 18 and older travelling to Oman are required to present a negative result of COVID-19 PCR test, upon arrival or within 24 hours after arrival, besides a health insurance covering COVID-19.'

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March 06

Muscat - His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik chaired a meeting of the Council of Ministers at Al Barakah Palace on Thursday.

His Majesty the Sultan underscored the significance of all individuals and parties exerting diligent efforts and collaborating towards the realisation of more accomplishments.

Then, His Majesty the Sultan reviewed the situation on the domestic front. Following his Royal attention to social sectors and his keenness on improving living conditions, His Majesty the Sultan, through his speech, stressed the need to sense citizens' requirements and listen to the people, notably Social Security Scheme categories and low-income groups.

His Majesty the Sultan gave a directive to accelerate the revision of social programmes and the social security allocations in a manner that provides appropriate living standards for those segments. In this context, His Majesty the Sultan issued an order to disburse an additional pay for Social Security Scheme beneficiaries upon the advent of the holy month of Ramadan and to help alleviate the impact, on this group, of the high price of commodities and services.

As part of his Royal vision that economic prosperity prevails in all governorates of the sultanate, His Majesty the Sultan issued an order to set up an economic zone in Al Rowdha in the wilayat of Mahdha, Governorate of Buraimi, with the prime aim of activating the local

Royal directive to cut down labour fees



economy within the wilayat and the governorate. The economic development drive envisages the foundation of projects, the attraction of investments and capital and the creation of employment opportunities for citizens.

In culmination of previous Royal directives to stimulate the national economy, spruce up the investment climate, consolidate business and industrial activities and improve the status of private sector firms, His Majesty the Sultan gave a directive to cut down some of the fees of the labour sector.

In keeping up with global developments towards diminishing carbon emissions and, given the diverse uses of green hydrogen in producing electrical power and providing energy for local industries and fuel for means of public transport, with options for export to international markets, His Majesty the Sultan gave a set of directives in this regard.

His Majesty the Sultan called for consistent follow-up of global developments in green hydrogen technologies, the acceleration of steps to regulate this sector, devising legal frameworks for it, drafting policies for its growth and allocating suitable sites for the production of green hydrogen with the aim of enhancing foreign investment and localising these technologies. He also gave directives to conduct necessary studies, create a new directorate general for clean energy and hydrogen power in the Ministry of Energy and Minerals and to establish a company for the development of this lucrative sector.

Oman crude surges past \$125, highest since 2008

March 08

Our Correspondent
Muscat

Oil prices soared to their highest since mid-2008 due to delays in the potential return of Iranian crude to global markets and as the United States and European allies considered banning imports of Russian oil.

Oman crude contract price (for May 2022 delivery) at Dubai Mercantile Exchange on Monday jumped by US\$16.29 to reach US\$125.16 per barrel.

In the first few minutes of trading on Sunday, both benchmarks rose

to their highest since July 2008 with Brent at US\$139.13 a barrel and West Texas Intermediate (WTI) at US\$130.50. Both contracts hit their highest in July 2008 with Brent at US\$147.50 a barrel and WTI at US\$147.27.

Oil prices soared more than ten per cent in early Asian trade on Monday as the prospect loomed of European and US bans on Russian crude imports in protest against Moscow's invasion of Ukraine.

US Secretary of State Antony Blinken said that the US was in "active discussions" with European nations about possibly banning Russian oil imports.

'Taraweeh' allowed after two years

March 29

Our Correspondent
Muscat

Special night prayers during Ramadan - Taraweeh - will resume in mosques after a two-year hiatus due to the pandemic, the Ministry of Awqaf and Religious Affairs (MARA) has announced.

According to an internal memo issued by the ministry, directions have been given to assign preachers and religious supervisors to lead worshippers for Taraweeh in mosques where currently there are no imams.

A MARA official told Muscat Daily, "We thank God for the return



of Taraweeh prayers, because it is an important part of the month of Ramadan."

There was relief among the devout following the decision. Seeb resident Sultan al Rawahi said, "I'm

really excited for the month of Ramadan to begin from next week and offer Taraweeh prayers."

He added that every Muslim should try offering Taraweeh regularly.

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H M meets sheikhs of Muscat, Batinah

March 14

Muscat - In pursuance of His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik's attention to citizens and his keenness to have firsthand knowledge of their needs and aspirations, His Majesty the Sultan held a meeting at Al Alam Palace with sheikhs of the governorates of Muscat, South Batinah and Musandam on Sunday.

At the outset of the meeting, His Majesty the Sultan gave thanks and praise to the Almighty Allah for the bounties He bestowed on Oman and its noble people. He prayed to the Almighty Allah to bless Oman's comprehensive and sustainable development march, so people can continue to relish the riches in the present and the future.

Then, His Majesty the Sultan issued a directive to cut down fees charged against the issuance and renewal of non-Omani manpower work permits in a manner that corresponds to the Government Services Pricing Index. This applies to government services

aimed at boosting the business climate and upgrading the sultanate's competitiveness in attracting investments and easing burden on the private sector.

The move also seeks to support firms committed to Omaniisation percentages, as well as small and medium enterprises to help enhance their contribution to the national economy.

His Majesty the Sultan exhorted the private sector to benefit from the fee reduction to provide more room for the employment of Omani jobseekers.

His Majesty the Sultan also affirmed the government's keenness to follow up on all that relates to the stability of citizens' livelihood matters.

In this context, His Majesty gave a directive to add 25 more food commodities to the list of food items that are 100 per cent exempt from Value Added Tax (VAT), thereby taking the total number of zero-VAT items to 513.

This was followed by His Majesty the Sultan granting an audience to the sheikhs of the

three governorates, who informed about affairs in their respective wilayats and the services and projects their citizens aspire to.

His Majesty the Sultan commanded the immediate commencement of development projects that are urgently needed by citizens, with other projects to follow in accordance with the actual needs of those wilayats, depending on available government solvency.

The meeting was attended by Sayyid Theyazin bin Haitham al Said, Minister of Culture, Sports and Youth, Sayyid Khalid bin Hilal al Busaidi, Minister of the Diwan of Royal Court, Gen Sultan bin Mohammed al Nu'amani, Minister of the Royal Office, Sayyid Hamoud bin Faisal al Busaidi, Minister of Interior, Sultan bin Salim al Habsi, Minister of Finance, Dr Hamad bin Said al Aufi, Head of the Private Office, Sayyid Saud bin Hilal al Busaidi, Minister of State and Governor of Muscat, and Sayyid Ibrahim bin Said al Busaidi, Minister of State and Governor of Musandam



No need for PCR test for vaccinated travellers

March 02

Our Correspondent
Muscat

In a major development, the mandatory PCR test requirement for fully vaccinated passengers coming to the sultanate has been done away with by the Supreme Committee.

In a statement, the Supreme Committee on Monday said travellers need to present an approved COVID-19 vaccination certificate indicating that he or she has been vaccinated with two doses. 'The de-

cision comes into effect from March 1, 2022,' it stated.

The committee also said wearing face masks will be optional in open areas. 'Wearing face masks will still be mandatory in enclosed spaces,' the statement said.

It also allowed hotels to operate at 100 per cent capacity in addition to allowing the resumption of direct education - 100 per cent capacity - for all grades starting from March 6, 2022. The committee stressed the need for hall and tent owners, organisers of conferences and exhibitions to continue operating at 70 per cent capacity.



Students stranded in Ukraine rescued

March 03

Our Correspondent
Muscat

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

Members of World Malayalee Federation (WMF) in Poland teamed up to assist the students

stuck in the middle of the war. The effort was coordinated in Oman by Muscat resident Dr J Retnakumar, global president of WMF, and an international team mostly based in Europe.

"As global president of WMF, I have been on my toes the last few days coordinating the logistics and safe movement of several Indian students. We formed a WMF Ukraine help desk. Our national councils in Ukraine, Poland, Romania, Moldova, Hungary and Slovakia coordinated rescue operations of the Indian students in Ukraine, liaising with NORKA and Indian government officials," Dr Retnakumar said.



Money laundering in real estate

April 24

Our Correspondent
Muscat

Oman Chamber of Commerce and Industry (OCCI) has called for a review of the legislation governing real estate investments and protecting the sector from money laundering crimes.

In OCCI's Ramadan Nights event held last week to discuss money laundering and its reper-

cussions on the real estate sector, Redha bin Juma al Saleh, chairman of OCCI, said that money laundering is a crime that threatens global economies.

The discussion was held under the auspices of H H Sayyid Mohammed bin Salim al Said, Chief of Protocol Department, Foreign Ministry.

"The crime of money laundering, which is the transfer of funds derived from the proceeds of crime with the aim of concealing and le-

gitimising its illegal source, is threatening global economies," Saleh said.

"Funds obtained from money laundering represent a purchasing power that is not generated by real economic activity, and therefore it is a source of pressure on domestic prices and leads to inflationary pressures that threaten the future of economic and social development."

According to the OCCI chairman, the real estate sector is used

by those involved in money laundering crimes. "This requires awareness of the methods used by money launderers to enter this vital sector, especially considering many countries grant residency to real estate investors."

Saleh stressed the need of reviewing the legislation governing real estate investments and securing the sector from these crimes. "OCCI plays a major role in addressing this crime through awareness-raising efforts and

emphasising caution and attention in dealings, before concluding foreign partnerships."

On his part, Salim bin Nasser al Busaidi, member of Public Prosecution, said the judicial authority has dealt with four crimes related to money laundering this year and 14 in 2021.

He informed that crimes of this nature decreased in the past two years owing to COVID-19, the global financial crisis and a noticeable drop in economic movement.

Over 300,000 workers in Oman laid off in 2020/21

April 04

Our Correspondent
Muscat



Over 300,000 workers in Oman were laid off in 2020 and 2021 due to the pandemic, according to H E Dr Said bin Mohammed al Saqri, the Minister of Economy.

In an interview with Oman TV, H E Saqri, said, "The huge impact of the pandemic was not expected by anyone in the world, and there is no doubt that the economy was affected, especially the private sector."

"We shouldn't measure the performance of the private sector in 2020 and 2021 due to the pandemic conditions, low demand and other reasons that led to the exodus of about 300,000 workers from their jobs. Of them, around 7,500 were Omanis."

H E Saqri added that the private sector is expected to witness in the coming period a great economic movement that will contribute to the development of the various economic sectors and the growth of the gross domestic product, thus becoming an attractive sector for Omani job seekers.

According to H E Saqri, the volume of foreign investment in Oman increased during the year 2021, which confirms the interest of foreign companies to invest in various sectors in the sultanate.

The development of the governorates is one of the priorities and strategic objectives of the tenth five-year plan. An amount of RO20mn has been allocated to each governorate to be disbursed during the years of the plan.

Oman's Venice Biennale pavilion opens; tourism promotion drive launched

April 24

Our Correspondent
Muscat

H H Sayyid Theyazin bin Haitham al Said, Minister of Culture, Sports and Youth, inaugurated the national pavilion of Oman at the 59th Venice Biennale in Italy - one of the most prestigious art festivals in the world - on Thursday.

Coinciding with the biennale, the Ministry of Heritage and Tourism (MHT) launched a promotion campaign that will continue till November.

Launched with an aim of promoting Oman as a safe tourist destination in the Italian market, the campaign makes use of public transport buses, water taxis as well as major sites like Venice Marco Polo Airport, Santa Lucia railway station and the Ponte degli Scalzi bridge.

Asma al Hajariya, assistant director general of tourism promotion in MHT, informed that Italy is one of the biggest source markets, within Europe, for visitors to Oman. Around 726,000 European travellers visited the sultanate in 2019.



Mechanic by choice: Omani woman breaks stereotypes

April 21

Our Correspondent
Muscat

Zainab Ali al Yarubi, who hails from Masirah, has come a long way since selling vehicle spare parts to becoming an ace auto mechanic.

Zainab's father, who is also an auto mechanic, was her biggest supporter when she showed interest in this work. She watched her father work in his workshop with passion and love repairing vehicles and fell in love with the profession early in her childhood. "In 2006, I started selling spare parts in a shop attached to the vehicle repair shop," Zainab said.

Over time, while dealing with spare parts, engine lubricants and changing worn-out parts, she became skilled in repairing vehicles and mastered the knowledge needed in this physically and mentally demanding profession.

"I was afraid of consumers' reactions and was doubtful if they would accept me - a woman - working in this field. This profession requires muscle strength and time, in addition to handling heavy, sharp and dangerous tools. But with patience, determination and the encouragement of people, I overcame all the challenges and self-doubts," she said.

Zainab added, "I began the journey of becoming a mechanic by diagnosing faults, learning how to quickly disassemble and change spare parts, and by the virtue of experience I gained from selling spare parts. I was able to master a lot of vehicle repairing skills, especially identifying mechanical faults, under the supervision of my father."



Project Hajar wins \$1mn for carbon removal from Elon Musk

April 24

London, UK - Project Hajar - a collaboration between UK-based Mission Zero Technologies (MZT) and Oman-based 44.01 - has been recognised among the top 15 teams in the US\$100mn XPRIZE Carbon Removal competition.

Each of the 15 milestone winning teams has been awarded US\$1mn to recognise their efforts to date and support their continued work to scale solutions. The competition is Elon Musk and the Musk Foundation.

Project Hajar connects two complementary technologies to unlock gigatonnes of CO2 removal in the Al Hajar mountains of Oman. Under the project, CO2 will be efficiently collected from the air and then transferred to peridotite underground - a mineral widely studied for its CO2 mineralisation potential and naturally abundant in Oman.



Floward Wins the "Al Roya Award"

Floward, the go-to online flowers and gifts delivery destination in MENA and UK, won the "Al Roya Award" during the tenth edition of Al Roya Business Award Ceremony held under the patronage of His Highness Sayyed Dr. Adham bin Turki Al Said and in partnership with Oman Chamber of Commerce and Industry, which took place in Grand Millennium Muscat on Wednesday, December 21, 2022.

The ceremony was attended by Her Excellency Li Lingbing, Ambassador of the Peoples Republic of China to the Sultanate of Oman and several diplomats and distinguished figures in the private and public sectors of the Sultanate.

Floward's team in Oman received the trophy that was presented by Mr. Hatim bin Hamad Al Taie, Editor-in-Chief of Al Roya Newspaper and General Supervisor of the Award for Floward's outstanding performance in the Sultanate and in the field of e-commerce.

Floward CEO & Chairman, Mr. Abdulaziz B. Al Loughani said: "We thank Al Roya Newspaper for recognizing our efforts in contributing to the Omani economy. We are thrilled to receive this honour on the tenth edition of the Award, and we will continue to provide the



best service for our customers."

Established in 2017, Floward is a full-fledged e-commerce solution that offers prime fresh-cut flowers sourced from the best growers and farmers around the world and arranged locally by a team of florists, and de-

signers. Floward also offers cakes, chocolate and perfumes curated by the region's most exciting designers and manages last-mile same-day delivery to ensure the best customer experience.



Raisi's visit boosts ties

May 24

Muscat - His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik held a round of official talks with President Ebrahim Raisi of the Islamic Republic of Iran at Al Alam Palace on Monday.

The talks explored various aspects of bilateral cooperation and ways of enhancing the strong ties binding the peoples of Oman and Iran. They exchanged views on issues of common concern.

Then, His Majesty the Sultan and President Raisi held a closed-door session. The session was attended from the Omani side by Sayyid Badr bin Hamad al Busaidi, Foreign Minister, Dr Hamad bin Said al Oufi, Head of the Private Office, and Ibrahim bin Ahmed al Muaini, Ambassador of Oman to Iran.

From the Iranian side, it was attended by Dr Hossein Amir Abdollahian, Minister of Foreign Affairs, Mohammad Jamshidi, Deputy Head of

Historical visit by Iranian President Ebrahim Raisi paves the way for further strengthening trade ties as well as people to people relations between the two friendly neighbours; several agreements inked

the Presidential Office for Political Affairs, and Ali Najafi, Ambassador of Iran to Oman.

In a joint communique later on Monday, His Majesty the Sultan and President Raisi expressed satisfaction with the existing level of cooperation, and decided to continue strengthening it further by opening new areas of economic partnership.

The two leaders also expressed their happiness at the consensus reached at the level of joint committees for cooperation between the two countries in several fields.

His Majesty the Sultan and President Raisi

also stressed on the positive and fruitful role played by the private sector in the two countries, and expressed hope that new activities lead to an increase in the volume of investments and trade exchange between the two countries.

They stressed the importance of redoubling efforts and endeavours to ensure the continuation of security and stability in the region and the world. The two sides also stressed the importance of combating terrorism and extremism in all its forms and manifestations.

Back to normal: All COVID-19 precautionary measures in all places, activities lifted in Oman

May 23

Our Correspondent
Muscat

The Supreme Committee tasked with tackling developments arising from the COVID-19 pandemic has decided to lift all precautionary measures in all places and for all activities.

In a statement, the committee called on all to continue preventive health practices, and stay at home and not meet others in the event of a fever or any respiratory symptoms. It also urged community members to wear a mask in case of contact with a patient, and the elderly, those with immunodeficiency and chronic diseases in particular, to follow the preventive measures.

The Supreme Committee also called on citizens and residents to take the booster dose of COVID-19 vaccine.

It commended the constructive role of government, private and civil agencies in following preventive measures and their contribution to limiting the spread of the pandemic.

The Civil Aviation Authority also issued a statement. 'The authority hereby informs all passengers and aircraft operators in Oman that all precautionary measures and procedures of COVID-19 in civil aviation sector are lifted'.

The decision sparked a flurry of comments on social media. Dr Said al Muharrami tweeted, "We thank the Supreme Committee for its efforts in the last couple of years. The decision will lead to the return of normal life, the prosperity of commercial activity, improvement of the business environment, and the growth of tourism. Entrepreneurs and investors will be encouraged to expand their businesses."



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SEP 2023

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OCT 2023

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HM condoles death of Sheikh Khalifa

May 15

Abu Dhabi, UAE - His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik flew to Abu Dhabi on Saturday to extend his condolences to Sheikh Mohamed bin Zayed al Nahyan, President of the United Arab Emirates, the Al Nahyan family and the brotherly Emirati people on passing away of the late President of UAE Sheikh Khalifa bin Zayed al Nahyan.

His Majesty the Sultan expressed his condolences and sympathy for the deceased, praying to God Almighty to bless him with His vast mercy and to rest the deceased's soul in peace in Paradise and to give Sheikh Mohamed, his family and the Emirati people patience and solace.

On his part, Sheikh Mohamed expressed his appreciation to His Majesty the Sultan and his accompanying delegation for their condolences and sympathy, praying to the Almighty to preserve His Majesty in good health and to spare him and the Omani people all evil and harm.

His Majesty the Sultan was accompanied by an official delegation comprising Sayyid Fahd bin Mahmoud al Said, Deputy Prime Minister for the Council of Ministers, Sayyid Fatik bin Fahir al Said, Special Envoy of His Majesty the Sultan, Sayyid Taimour bin Asaad al Said, Chairman of the Board of Governors of Central Bank of Oman, Sayyid Bilarab bin Haitham al Said, Sayyid Khalid bin Hilal al Bu-

saidi, Minister of Diwan of Royal Court, Gen Sultan bin Mohammed al Nu'amani, Minister of Royal Office, Sheikh Abdulmalik bin Abdullah al Khalili, Chairman of State Council, Sayyid Hamoud bin Faisal al Busaidi, Minister of Interior, Sayyid Badr bin Hamad al Busaidi, Foreign Minister, Dr Hamad bin Said al Oufi, Head of Private Office, Sayyid Saud bin Hilal al Busaidi, Minister of State and Governor of Muscat, Dr Abdullah bin Nassir al Harrasi, Minister of Information, and Dr Sayyid Ahmed bin Hilal al Busaidi, Ambassador of Oman to the UAE.

His Majesty the Sultan and the accompanying delegation returned to Oman on Saturday night after paying their condolences.



Dying man gives two children new life

May 18

Our Correspondent
Muscat

The Ministry of Health (MoH) facilitated kidney transplant of two Omani children at The Royal Hospital recently.

In a statement, MoH said, 'The Royal Hospital has succeeded in transplanting kidneys in two Omani children - Durar and Aseel - who suffered kidney failure. A brain dead person donated his kidneys to the children to give them a new lease of life.'

In an interview on Oman TV, Salima Salem al Saadi, mother of Durar, said, "My daughter had been

suffering for six years. We thank God and the family of the person who donated."

According to Abdullah Saleh al Balushi, father of Aseel, his child has had kidney ailments for the last eight years. "The transplantation has been successful and we thank God that we found a donor to relieve our suffering."

Dr Neven bint Ibrahim al Kalbani, senior consultant of pediatric nephrology and head of Organ Transplant Department at The Royal Hospital, informed that such procedures are part of the national organ transplantation programme.

"The programme involves the efforts of several hospitals in the sultanate to help patients find med-

ically qualified donors to restore their lives again," Dr Neven said.

Urging people to donate organs, Dr Mohammad al Riyami, senior nephrology consultant at The Royal Hospital, said, "We have many children who need organs to save their lives."

Currently, there are approximately 2,500 patients with renal failure on haemodialysis and 200 patients on proton dialysis in the sultanate. Fifty children under the age of 13 are on some form of dialysis, according to MoH data.

Salima informed that following Durar's kidney transplant, her medication has reduced significantly and her daughter is both physical and mentally stronger.

Omani scales Mt Everest

May 16

Our Correspondent
Muscat

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

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

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

His adventure is part of the Explorer's Grand Slam challenge in which climbers aim to scale 'Seven Summits' - the seven highest mountains on each of the seven continents (Everest, Kilimanjaro, Aconcagua, Vinson Massif, Elbrus, Denali and Kosciuszko or Puncak Jaya) as well as reach the North Pole and South Pole.

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





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His Majesty welcomes Tanzanian President

June 13

Muscat - His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik welcomed President Samia Suluhu Hassan of the United Republic of Tanzania on her arrival at the Royal Airport on Sunday.

When the jet of President Samia touched ground at the airport, His Majesty the Sultan met the guest at the foot of the ramp, welcoming and wishing her and the official delegation accompanying her a pleasant stay in Oman.

Then, His Majesty the Sultan and the Tanzanian President headed to the reception hall, passing through two rows of the guard of honour of the Royal Guard of Oman.

After a short stay, the motorcade of His Majesty the Sultan and the guest left for Al Alam Palace for an official reception ceremony.

Before arrival of the motorcade at Al Alam Palace, a squadron of cavalry lined the two sides of the road heading to the gate of the palace.

Upon arrival of the motorcade of His Majesty the Sultan and President Samia at the entrance of Al Alam Palace, the Royal Guard of Oman band played a welcoming tune, to the accompaniment of trumpets, as the motorcade entered the courtyard of Al Alam Palace.

His Majesty the Sultan accompanied President Samia to the dais of honour where the Royal Anthem of

Tanzania was played, while an artillery unit fired a 21-gun salute for the guest.

Then, His Majesty the Sultan shook hands with members of the official delegation accompanying the President of Tanzania, wishing them a pleasant stay. On her turn, the guest shook hands with some members of the Royal Family, chairmen of the State Council and Majlis A'Shura, ministers, commanders of the Sultan's Armed Forces and Royal Oman Police.

The two sides exchanged points of view about ways to realise the aspirations of the two countries and elevate joint cooperation towards broader horizons.

ONA

His Majesty welcomes President Sisi

June 28

Muscat - President Abdul Fattah el Sisi of the Arab Republic of Egypt arrived on an official visit to the Sultanate of Oman on Monday.

His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik led the welcoming party for the Egyptian President. When the jet of President Sisi touched ground at the Royal Airport, His Majesty the Sultan met the guest at the foot of the ramp, welcoming him and wishing him and the accompanying delegation a pleasant stay in Oman.

Then, His Majesty the Sultan and the Egyptian President proceeded to the reception hall, passing through two rows of guard of honour of Royal Guard of Oman (RGO).

After a short stay, the motorcade of His Majesty the Sultan and President Sisi headed to Al Alam Palace for an official reception ceremony.

Before arrival of the main vehicle of the motorcade at Al Alam Palace, a squadron of cavalry lined the two sides of the road heading to the gate of the palace.

Upon arrival of the motorcade at Al Alam Palace, the RGO band played a welcoming tune to the accompaniment of trumpets.

After that, His Majesty the Sultan accompanied President Sisi to the Dais of Honour where the National Anthem of Egypt was played, while the artillery fired a 21-gun salute for the guest.

Then, His Majesty the Sultan shook hands with members of the official delegation accompanying the Egyptian President, welcoming them and wishing them a pleasant stay.

On his turn, President Sisi shook hands with some members of the Royal Family, Chairman of the State Council, ministers, commanders of Sultan's Armed Forces and Royal Oman Police.

Alongside His Majesty the Sultan, President Sisi was received by Sayyid Shihab bin Tarik al Said, Deputy Prime Minister for Defence Affairs, Sayyid Khalid bin Hilal al Busaidi, Minister of Diwan of Royal Court, Gen Sultan bin Mohammed al Nu'mani, Minister of Royal Office, Sayyid Hamoud bin Faisal al Busaidi, Minister of Interior, Sayyid Badr bin Hamad al Busaidi, Foreign Minister, Sultan bin Salim al Habsi, Minister of Finance and Head of the Mission of Honour, Abdullah bin Nassir al Rahbi, Ambassador of Oman to Egypt and its Permanent Delegation to the Arab League, and Khalid Abdul Halim Radi, Ambassador of Egypt to Oman.



HM reshuffles cabinet

Muscat - His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik on

June 16

Thursday issued 12 Royal Decrees restructuring the Council of Ministers and appointing some new positions.

According to a Royal Decree, H E Engineer Salim al Awfi has been appointed as Minister of Energy and Minerals, Dr Mohammed al Maamari as Minister of Awqaf and Religious Affairs; and Dr Hilal

al Sabti as Minister of Health. His Majesty also issued more Royal Decrees, which are as follows:

Royal Decree regulating the administration of judicial affairs.

Royal Decree issuing the governors' system.

Royal Decree defining the functions of the Ministry of Interior and approving its organisational structure.

Royal Decree transferring the jurisdiction of inventory and valuation of property from the Ministry of Interior to the Ministry of Housing and Urban Planning.

Royal decree appointing governors.



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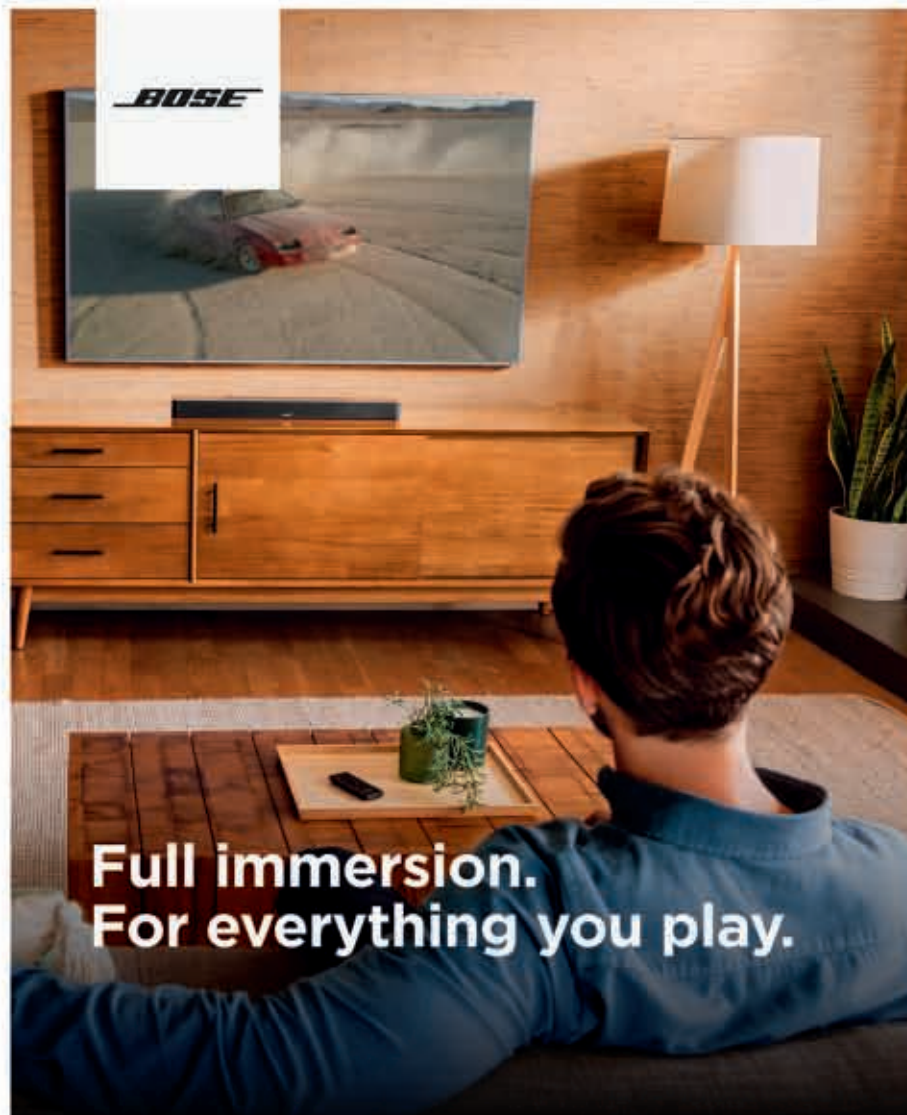
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New phase of Oman-German ties

July 17

Berlin, Germany - His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik concluded a historic visit to Germany on Friday, opening a new phase in relations between the two countries.

The new phase in bilateral relations was set in motion by a landmark summit meeting between His Majesty the Sultan, Olaf Scholz, Chancellor of Germany, and President Frank-Walter Steinmeier.

The visit bodes well for further partnership in various spheres, notably economic, investments, renewable energy, green power, and scientific and cultural fields.

On Friday, His Majesty the Sultan was accorded an official reception at Bellevue Palace in Berlin. Later, His Majesty and President Steinmeier held a round of official talks where the latter expressed his delight at His Majesty's visit to Germany. He hailed the deep-rooted relations between the two countries.

On his turn, His Majesty the Sultan expressed his appreciation for



the hospitality accorded to him and his delegation. His Majesty commended the strong ties of friendship binding Oman and Germany. The talks dealt with scope of further co-operation and studied ways of upgrading ties in various spheres in a manner that meets the aspirations of their friendly peoples.

Meeting with Scholz

On Thursday, His Majesty the Sultan and Chancellor Scholz held a meeting. Upon His Majesty's arrival at the chancellery, he was welcomed by the chancellor and senior German officials.

Then, His Majesty the Sultan attended a luncheon hosted in his honour by the German Chancellor to mark his visit.

During the banquet, His Majesty the Sultan and Chancellor Scholz reviewed the growing bilateral relations and discussed ways of upgrading existing cooperation and partnership to serve the common interests of the Omani and German peoples.

Tragic holiday



July 13

Our Correspondent
Muscat

The Eid al Adha holiday turned gloomy for families as 14 people lost their lives and 32 others were rescued in different governorates during the inclement weather experienced in the sultanate since July 7.

With a large number of people heading to Dhofar and different wadis across Oman in the rough weather, the Civil Defence and Ambulance Authority (CDAA) took an

unprecedented decision to temporarily close down all tourist sites across the sultanate on Sunday.

Rescue teams of Royal Oman Police (ROP) and CDAA continue to search for three missing persons in Dhofar.

On Tuesday, the bodies of two people, part of an Asian family of eight that was washed away in the sea at Mughsail Beach in Dhofar, were found. On Sunday, the authority received a report of a family of eight falling into the sea after they crossed the safety fence at Mughsail Beach. Three of them were rescued immediately. 'Two of the

missing persons were found dead. A search is underway for three more missing people.'

In Wadi Arbaen in Quriyat on Monday, two Asians were reported drowned. CDAA found the body of one on Monday. The second body was retrieved on Tuesday. Also on Monday, six children drowned in Wadi Andham in Mudhaibi in North Sharqiyah. Five of them were rescued, while one was found dead.

CDAA rescued seven people, including children, in different incidents after they were stranded due to rising level of rainwater.

'Rescue teams of CDAA in Dakhliyah governorate rescued four people, including children, trapped in a house in a village in Jabal Shams, due to rising rainwater,' the authority stated.

It added that it received a report about a missing person of Asian nationality in a village in Jabal Shams. The body was later found in a wadi in Al Hamra. CDAA in South Sharqiyah rescued three people after their vehicle was trapped in Wadi Shaya in Sur. An Asian person was rescued from North Sharqiyah after his truck got stuck in Wadi al Sabakh in the wilayat of Ibra.

Two children, aged nine and ten, were rescued by citizens in Wadi al Sahtan, Rustaq, but later died.



His Majesty presides over Sandhurst parade

July 24

London, United Kingdom - His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik presided over the graduation ceremony of the Commissioning Course Short 222 of Officer Cadets at Royal Military Academy Sandhurst in London, United Kingdom, on Saturday.

His Majesty the Sultan inspected the parade of which Sayyid Theyazin bin Haitham al Said and other graduates were a part.

Upon arrival of His Majesty the Sultan at the academy's headquarters, he was received by Maj Gen Duncan Capps, the academy's commander.

After that, His Majesty the Sultan

stepped on the dais accompanied by Maj Gen Capps as the column of graduates saluted them. His Majesty later inspected the column of graduates and interacted with a few.

His Majesty the Sultan praised the high level of skills they acquired during their training at the academy, calling on them to renew their determination and continue their efforts to achieve more for their countries.

His Majesty the Sultan also met the Omani officers studying in the academy, and congratulated them on graduating. He stressed on the importance of continuing to develop their skills, wishing them success in their future endeavours.

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Dhofar road trips turn tragic

August 03

Our Correspondent
Muscat

Two people died and six others were injured in a traffic accident that occurred in Al Wusta governorate on Tuesday. With this, the total death toll this year on the road leading to Dhofar during the khareef season has gone up to seven. Additionally, 26 people were reported injured in the accidents.

The Directorate General of Health Services in Al Wusta Governorate informed that on Tuesday morning, the emergency department of Haima Hospital received eight people involved in an accident. 'Two died, one was critically injured and five had moderate injuries.'

The road to Dhofar claims many lives every year when a large number of visitors take the highway to the governorate from Oman and the wider Gulf region.

Although Royal Oman Police (ROP) and the Civil Defence and Ambulance Authority create enough awareness and deploy extra manpower to monitor roads during the khareef, accidents continue to be reported, calling for maximum



The road to Dhofar claims many lives every year when a large number of visitors take the highway to the governorate

caution when travelling long distances.

ROP has deployed special patrol teams and checkpoints on roads leading to Dhofar to guide khareef visitors. The Directorate General of

Police Aviation has been supporting operations and providing air ambulance service in emergency situations, especially in accidents which require urgent transportation.

ROP has urged all visitors to

abide by traffic rules and regulations and stay within the speed limit for their safety and that of others.

'Drivers are in particular alerted to look out for sudden occurrences, like the presence of stray animals on the road at night or sand which is also likely to be deposited on roads in desert areas. Other safety requirements to be observed include keeping a first aid kit, servicing the vehicle in advance and checking brake power and tyre pressure,'

ROP stated.

Five people were injured in a road accident in Haima in Al Wusta on Sunday. Of these, three were critically injured, while two others had minor injuries.

On July 26, seven people were injured in a crash in the same region. On July 20, one person died and five others were injured on the Thumrait-Haima road, while four people died, and three injured on the same road on July 3.

Al Awabi, Rustaq bear brunt of torrential rains



ing roads affected by the torrential rains in the two wilayats with the aim of facilitating communication in cooperation with the relevant authorities.

Yousef bin Abdullah al Mujaini, Director of Projects Department in MTCIT, said that there was some damage to roads in the two wilayats; work is underway to open those that were temporarily closed.

Sheikh Saeed bin Muhammad al Harsusi, Deputy Wali of Al Awabi, said that the damage was mostly witnessed in the villages of Wadi Bani Kharus. 'Although no human casualties were recorded, the damage to property is significant.'

The damage, he added, was due to water entering homes and farms of citizens, besides washing away cars, and electricity, water and telephone poles. 'The concerned authorities started work from early morning to restore basic services. Work is progressing at an accelerated pace.'

August 03

Muscat - Authorities sprang into action on Tuesday to inspect and restore services in the wilayats of

Al Awabi and Rustaq in South Batinah, which were battered by heavy rains and overflowing wadis on Monday.

The Ministry of Transport, Communications and Information

Technology (MTCIT), along with municipal authorities and utility services personnel, worked to restore traffic to and from the governorate, besides electricity, water and telephone networks affected

by the rains.

H E Dr Ali bin Amer al Shedhani, Undersecretary for Communications and Information Technology in MTCIT, informed that the ministry is currently working on repair-

Shared vision, stronger ties

Sep 28



Muscat - UAE President Sheikh Mohamed bin Zayed al Nahyan arrived on an official visit to Oman on Tuesday.

His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik led the welcoming party for the UAE President. At the Royal Airport, Sheikh Mohamed bin Zayed was met by His Majesty the Sultan at the foot of the aircraft ramp as the UAE President disembarked, welcoming him and wishing him and the accompanying delegation a pleasant stay in Oman.

After a short stay at the airport, the motorcade of His Majesty the Sultan and the UAE President headed to Al Alam Palace for an official reception ceremony. Upon arrival of the motorcade at Al Alam Palace, the Royal Guard of Oman band played a welcoming tune to the accompaniment of trumpets.

After that, His Majesty the Sultan accompanied Sheikh Mohamed bin Zayed to the Dais of Honour where the National Anthem of the UAE was played, while an artillery divi-

His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik and UAE President Sheikh Mohamed bin Zayed al Nahyan discuss building upon fraternal relations and expanding collaboration

sion fired a 21-gun salute for the guest.

Later the two leaders held an official session of talks, where the two spoke of the historical ties between the two nations and discussed ways to strengthen these relations further.

Sheikh Mohamed bin Zayed thanked His Majesty the Sultan for the warm welcome extended to him

and the UAE delegation and conveyed his best wishes to His Majesty the Sultan and the people of Oman.

The two leaders discussed opportunities for building upon the growing economic ties between the UAE and Oman and areas where the two countries can increase collaboration, including the investment, financial, industrial and cultural sectors.

Their talks centred on the two leaders' shared vision for a secure and stable region that promotes sustainable development and supports a thriving economy in which people can realise their full potential. After the official talks, His Majesty the Sultan and Sheikh Mohamed bin Zayed held a one-on-one session.

His Majesty the Sultan conferred the 'Al Said Order' on Sheikh Mohamed bin Zayed, while the UAE President bestowed on His Majesty the Sultan the 'Order of Zayed', the UAE's highest decoration.



HM in UK for Queen's funeral

September 18

His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik arrived in the United Kingdom on Friday to offer condolences on the death of Queen Elizabeth II and congratulate King Charles III of the United Kingdom

of Great Britain and Northern Ireland and Head of the Commonwealth, on the occasion of his accession to the throne.

His Majesty the Sultan is accompanied by Sayyid Khalid Hilal al Busaidi, Minister of Diwan of Royal Court, and Sayyid Badr Hamad al Busaidi, Foreign Minister.

OMAN GRINDS TO A HALT

September 06

Our Correspondent
Muscat

A power outage on Monday afternoon brought half the country to a standstill, a situation unheard of in the recent past.

The Authority for Public Service Regulations (APSR) stated that the Main Interconnected System - that covers the northern parts of Oman - faced a partial blackout, and that Oman Electricity Transmission Company was working to restore service. The authority did not immediately specify the reason behind the blackout.

Hassan al Ajmi, group business resilience manager of Nama Group, refuted rumours that the outage was the result of a cyber attack. "The outage was caused by a technical failure in one part of the network."

The outage affected operations



at Muscat International Airport, hospitals, commercial outlets, fuel stations and traffic signals, besides leaving people confused and struggling to cope with the afternoon heat.

APSR informed that the outage affected the governorates of Muscat, parts of North Batinah, South Batinah, North Sharqiyah, South Sharqiyah and Dakhliyah, with power later restored in phases. "To ensure the stability of the electrical network during the restoration process, electricity distribution companies are connecting electrical loads gradually," APSR stated.

\$3bn rail network to link Sohar Port with Abu Dhabi

September 29

Our Correspondent
Muscat

Oman Rail, the sultanate's national developer and operator of railway networks, signed an agreement with Etihad Rail, the developer and operator of UAE National Rail Network, to jointly establish an equally-owned company, Oman-Etihad Rail Company, on Wednesday.

The newly created entity will

hold an overall investment power of US\$3bn to design, develop and operate a 303km railway network connecting Sohar Port to the UAE National Rail Network.

Oman Rail, part of Asyad Group, was represented in the signing ceremony by Abdulrahman Salim al Hatmi, Group CEO of Asyad; Etihad Rail was represented by its CEO Shadi Malak.

Under the agreement, Oman-Etihad Rail will lay the groundwork and workplan for the project, including

its financial operations and schedule. The company will also handle the design, development and operation of the rail network, which will connect Sohar and Abu Dhabi. Built on the historic and strategic relations between the two countries, the joint venture is an extension of the longstanding collaboration of Oman Rail and Etihad Rail, both of which seek to create new prospects in the infrastructure, transport and logistics industries by connecting the two countries via rail.

October 25

H M in Bahrain

Manama, Bahrain - His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik was accorded a warm welcome by King Hamad bin Issa al Khalifa of Bahrain on his arrival in Manama on Monday.

The two leaders later held an official session of talks and also witnessed the signing of ten memoranda of understanding (MoUs) and seven executive programmes and agreements at Sakhir Palace in Manama.

Upon arrival of His Majesty the Sultan at Sakhir Airbase, King Hamad met him at the foot of the ramp, leading the welcoming party that received His Majesty the Sultan.

Then, the two leaders headed to the Hall of Protocols, passing be-



tween two rows of a guard of honour from Bahrain Royal Guard. His Majesty the Sultan shook hands with senior members of the welcoming party.

His Majesty the Sultan also shook hands with members of the Omani Embassy in Bahrain, with whom he exchanged cordial conversation, while King Hamad welcomed and shook hands with the official delegation accompanying His Majesty the Sultan.

After a short rest at the Hall of Protocols, His Majesty the Sultan, accompanied by the King of Bahrain, joined the motorcade which escorted them to Al Sakhir Palace.

At Al Sakhir Palace, an official reception was accorded to His Majesty the Sultan.

ONA

Seeb Club writes history, lifts 2022 AFC Cup

October 23

Muscat - Seeb Club wrote history by thrashing Kuala Lumpur City 3-0 and winning the final of the 2022 AFC Cup on Saturday in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia. This is the first time that an Omani club has won a continental tournament.

First half goals from Ali Al Buisaidi and Abdulaziz Al Maqbali put Al Seeb in control at the interval and a third from Muhsen Al Ghassani ensured the trophy would be going back to West Asia for the 16th time in the competition's 18 editions.

The win secures Al Seeb a place in the preliminary rounds of the

2023/24 AFC Champions League while breaking the hearts of the majority of the almost 28,000 fans within the cavernous stadium on the outskirts of Kuala Lumpur.

The home side almost made the perfect start after less than a minute when Paulo Josue found space behind the Al Seeb defence and with strike partner Romel Morales in space in the area. But, rather than roll the ball to the Colombian, Josue scuffed a shot across goal.

With their two-goal cushion Al Seeb were in control and with 21 minutes left, they ended any doubts over the outcome when Al Ghassani thumped home the third.

Oman commits to Net Zero by 2050

October 12

Muscat - His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik presided over a meeting of the Council of Ministers at Al Barakah Palace on Tuesday.

His Majesty the Sultan heard a briefing on the executive programme citing progress made in the National Employment Programme and related initiatives. His Majesty the Sultan expressed his satisfaction with the efforts exerted in this regard and gave directives to maximise the positive action.

His Majesty the Sultan pointed out that the draft of the new Labour Law, which was finalised by the government.

His Majesty the Sultan ad-



ressed the results of implementation of the State Budget 2022 as of August, as well as the prospects of

fiscal performance till the end of the year. In this respect, His Majesty the Sultan appreciated the steps taken by the government to cut down public debt and reduce its risks to the national economy. He also valued the efforts exerted by government establishments to accomplish balanced spending rates that kept pace with estimates endorsed since the beginning of 2022.

As part of Royal attention to improve environment performance and alleviate the impact of climate change, the year 2050 has been set as a date for net zero carbon emissions. A national plan has been drafted to achieve this goal, along with the setting up of Oman Sustainability Centre.

H M, President of Zanzibar review ties

October 13

Muscat - His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik gave an audience to Dr Hussein Ali Mwinyi, President of Zanzibar, at Al Barakah Palace on Wednesday. At the outset, His Majesty the Sultan welcomed the President of Zanzibar to Oman.

The two leaders reviewed areas of cooperation between Oman and Zanzibar and efforts exerted to promote these in various spheres.

His Majesty the Sultan and Dr Mwinyi also exchanged views on

several issues of mutual interest, following which they held a closed-door meeting.

Oman and Zanzibar have enjoyed close relations developed over thousands of years of shared cultural history and trade exchanges and the visit of Dr Mwinyi to the sultanate is expected to play a crucial role in bolstering relations further.

Dr Mwinyi's visit aims to promote and further consolidate the special bilateral bonding and cooperation between Zanzibar in particular and Tanzania in general.

King Abdullah II visits Oman

October 05

Muscat - King Abdullah II Ibn al Hussein of the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan and Queen Rania al Abdullah arrived in Muscat on Tuesday on an official two-day visit to the Sultanate of Oman.

His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik and King Abdullah reiterated their keenness on strengthening joint investments in different spheres. They voiced their support for developing economic diversification, private sector partnership and commercial exchange between



the two countries.

This was stated in a joint communique issued on Wednesday between the Sultanate of Oman and the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan.

The two sides discussed a number of regional and international issues and underlined the need to shore up the march of cooperation and integration among Arab countries.

Pomp, pageantry mark National Day

November 18

Salalah - His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik, Supreme Commander, presided over a military parade held at Al Nasr Square in the Governorate of Dhofar on the occasion of the glorious 52nd National Day on Friday.

The event saw the participation of units representing the Royal Army of Oman (RAO), the Royal Air Force of Oman, the Royal Navy of Oman, the Royal Guard of Oman (RGO), the Sultan's Special Force (SSF), the

Royal Oman Police (ROP), ground and mounted military music bands, as well as Firqah Forces.

Upon His Majesty the Sultan's arrival at the parade ground, he was received by Sayyid Shihab bin Tarik al Said, Deputy Prime Minister for Defence Affairs, Gen Sultan bin Mohammed al Nuamani, Minister of Royal Office, and Vice-Admiral Abdullah bin Khamis al Raisi, Chief of Staff of Sultan's Armed Forces (SAF).

When His Majesty the Sultan ascended the Royal dais, columns of the parade performed the military salute. The joint corps of military bands played the Royal Anthem, while the Sultan of Oman's Artillery fired a 21-gun salute to His Majesty the Sultan.

Then, the parade commander stepped forward, requesting His Majesty the Sultan to signal the start of the military show.

The joint corps of military bands representing the SAF, the RGO, the ROP and the Royal Court Affairs (RCA) played

sundry tunes as they marched before the Royal dais. Columns of the Protocols Guard joined the parade and performed ceremonial gestures to the accompaniment of melodies from the joint corps of military bands performing the military salute to His Majesty the Sultan.

This was followed by columns of personnel in camouflage uniforms, representing the SAF, the RGO, the SSF and the ROP, queued before the Royal dais, performing the military salute to His Majesty, the Supreme Commander, to the accompaniment of melodies by the joint corps of military bands.

His Majesty the Sultan watched a musical show staged by mounted bands representing the RGO and the Royal Cavalry. They passed before the Royal dais, performing the military salute to His Majesty the Sultan.

On the occasion, His Majesty the Sultan, the Supreme Commander, received a commemorative gift from the valiant armed forces. Sayyid Shihab had the honour of presenting the gift.



November 03

Our Correspondent
Muscat

As the entire Gulf region gears up for a massive boost to the travel, tourism and hospitality sector resulting from the first football World Cup ever to be held in the Middle East, Oman till date has not seen the activity it anticipated.

Hotels in Oman, which had expected to benefit from the limited accommodation options available in Qatar, have so far seen very few or no bookings. On the contrary, some have reported cancellations.

Despite the Omani authorities' best efforts to attract international fans, Dubai will be the major gateway to the event, with more World Cup attendees likely to enter Qatar via Dubai. "Hotel capacity in Qatar is fairly limited and we've got so much to offer here," CEO of Dubai Airports recently told Bloomberg News.

Unlike Oman, hotel rooms in the UAE were booked months in advance. "We have zero bookings for

Too little, too late



the World Cup at the moment. In fact, the little we had earlier were canceled. The reasons are not known but Oman needed to prepare much earlier. Oman should have done better like Dubai to attract

fans but it is too late now," said a senior official of a top hotel in Muscat.

According to an AFP report, the UAE will be a winner if there's any overspill of fans from Qatar. With

little investment, the UAE's hotels, restaurants and airlines - in Dubai in particular - stand to gain if, as expected, World Cup attendees opt to stay in the tourism hotspot instead of host Qatar during the November-

December tournament.

High accommodation prices in the Qatari capital Doha and Dubai's more permissive environment could entice fans, experts say. Budget airline flydubai will operate at least 30 return flights a day to Doha, just an hour away from Dubai. This is part of 160 daily shuttle services from cities across the Gulf region.

An official of Jumeriah Muscat Bay said, "There are almost no bookings for World Cup. Though there are bookings during the period, we can't say these are for the World Cup."

An official of Mysk Hotel said, "We do not have any reservations and neither do other hotels in Muscat. There have been no enquiries from fans. We will be busy with corporate guests and tourists at that time. We hope we get reservations from World Cup fans soon."

It's not just the top-tier hotels in Oman, but affordable ones too that have no World Cup bookings.

Like Oman, which announced activities for football fans, Dubai is also geared up with fan zones, while hotels are offering special packages.



A historic tournament for Arabs

December 19

Shaddad al Musalmey
Muscat

On Sunday, the world's biggest quadrennial sporting event concluded when 2018 winners France met Argentina. Alongside the excitement on the pitch, FIFA World Cup Qatar 2022 also provided a major boost to GCC economies.

With football's premier event wooing more than 3.7mn enthusi-

asts who attended the matches held over five weeks, this World Cup was special for a number of reasons. Among others, the World Cup had never been played in the winter season prior to 2022, and the global showpiece had never been hosted in the Middle East.

Gianni Infantino, FIFA president, has described this the 'best World Cup ever.'

"There's unanimous praise from the FIFA council for this World Cup and for the unique, cohesive power

it has shown; 3.27mn spectators attended the first 62 games. The number was 3.03mn for all the games in 2018.

This World Cup was also significant because it was the last for Lionel Messi and Cristiano Ronaldo, two giants who have ruled football for the last decade. Ronaldo, 37, announced his retirement in an interview with British broadcaster Piers Morgan before the tournament started. Messi, 35, also stated that Qatar would be his last show on

football's grandest stage.

Across Oman, both young and old celebrated the spirit of 'the beautiful game'.

"I never thought I would get to attend any World Cup because the tournament always felt out of reach and too expensive. But it always meant a lot to me. I am glad I made it to the last few games. I drove from Oman to Qatar, which added to the excitement. I could not have missed this because it was one-of-a-kind," said Moath al Saeedi, an Omani

football enthusiast from Khabourah.

For many, football is all that gives them happiness and such a big tournament held in the 'neighbourhood in Qatar' being ranked the best ever World Cup event has meant the world to them.

"I have no words to express my gratitude to the Qatari officials for the arrangements and organisation of the biggest sporting event. Qatar has shown the world that Arabs are capable," said Fadhel al Mazruui, Omani sports analyst.

Oman-based 44.01 bags Earthshot Prize

December 04

Our Correspondent
Muscat

Founded by Talal Hasan, Oman-based 44.01, which eliminates CO2 by turning it into rock, removing it from the atmosphere safely, efficiently and permanently, was on Friday named the winner of the 2022 Earthshot Prize, in the Fix Our Climate category.

This is the latest recognition for 44.01 and its process of elimination of CO2 via peridotite mineralisation. Unlike carbon 'storage', which involves burying CO2 underground in disused oil wells or aquifers, mineralisation removes CO2 forever, minimising the requirement for extensive monitoring and insurance.

Founded by Prince William and



The Royal Foundation in 2020, The Earthshot Prize is a global environmental prize to discover, accelerate and scale groundbreaking solutions to repair and regenerate the planet.

Talal, 44.01's founder and CEO, said, "We are delighted to have been recognised by the Earthshot Prize. Mineralisation can offer a safe, cost-effective way of eliminating CO2 forever."

'Intakheb' makes voting a breeze

December 04

Our Correspondent
Muscat

Elections for the municipal councils concluded on Sunday evening with 288,469 voters exercising their franchise. Voting, which was conducted via mobile application 'Intakheb' for the first time, saw a quick declaration of results soon after the voting closed at 7pm.

Talal al Saadi, rapporteur of the main committee for the elections, said, "Intakheb application reduced the number of election workers from 8,000 to 500. The whole electoral process can now be organised within a week compared to three to four months it required in the past."

According to the Ministry of Interior, 731,767 Omani voters had registered to elect 126 representatives from among 727 candidates,



including 27 women for the third term of the Municipal Council.

Saadi added that the Intakheb app will also be used in the forthcoming Shura Council elections, with some improvements.

The app provides ease of access with accuracy. "The ministry constantly strives to introduce latest technologies in every elections," said H E Sayyid Hamoud Faisal al Busaidi, Minister of Interior, at the app's launch recently.

The app was designed on par with the latest security standards, with all precautions in place to ensure secrecy. It operates in the NFC-enhanced smart phones for individuals with a valid identity card for voters listed in the Electoral Register.

For Dr Auhood al Balushi, an academic based in Muscat, voting was a breeze. "In less than a minute, I voted for who would represent me in the council."



Russia's ukraine invasion

February 24

Russian President Vladimir Putin declared a military operation in Ukraine to defend separatists in the east of the country, and 'demilitarise and de-nazify' its pro-Western neighbour.

"I have made the decision of a military operation," he had said in a surprise statement on television on that day. He went on to denounce what he called a 'genocide' orches-

trated by Ukraine in the country's east, as well as NATO's aggressive policy towards Russia.

Russia's ground forces invaded Ukraine from several directions, encircling the country within hours of Putin announcing his decision to launch an assault.

And nearly 10 months after his invasion of Ukraine began, Putin acknowledged that the conflict is 'going to take a while', as he also warned of the 'increasing' threat of

nuclear war.

Speaking at a meeting of Russia's Human Rights Council at the Kremlin, Putin said Moscow will fight by 'all available means at our disposal', in what he insists on calling a 'special military operation', but also said he saw no immediate need to mobilise more troops.

"With regard to the protracted nature of the special military operation and its results, of course, it's going to take a while, perhaps," he

said. And without categorically ruling out the first use of nuclear weapons, Putin said he viewed the Russian nuclear arsenal as a deterrent rather than a provocation.

"As for the idea that Russia wouldn't use such weapons first under any circumstances, then it means we wouldn't be able to be the second to use them either - because the possibility to do so in case of an attack on our territory would be very limited," he said.

Pakistan gets first woman SC judge



January 24

Pakistan swore in Ayesha Malik as its first woman Supreme Court judge, a landmark occasion in a nation where activists say the law is often wielded against women.

Malik attended a ceremony in the capital Islamabad where she now sits on the bench alongside 16 male colleagues at Pakistan's highest court.

Lawyer and women's rights activist Nighat Dad said Malik's promotion is 'a huge step forward'.

"It is history in the making for Pakistan's judiciary," she told AFP.

Malik was educated at Harvard University and served as a high court judge in Pakistan's eastern city of Lahore for the past two decades. She has been credited with rolling back patriarchal legal mores in her Punjab province jurisdiction.

Malik's elevation to the apex court of Pakistan may clear the way for more women to enter the historically conservative and male-dominated judiciary of the Islamic republic.

"She has broken all barriers in the judicial system and it will allow other women in the system to move forward," said lawyer and women's rights activist Khadija Siddiqi.

"I hope this will lead to more women-centric decisions by the judiciary in the future."

Last year Malik outlawed a deeply invasive and medically discredited examination linked to sexual experience. Women in Pakistan often struggle to gain justice in rape and sexual assault cases.

Macron reelected as French President

April 24

Emmanuel Macron was reelected as president of France on Sunday but a powerful showing by his far-right rival Marine Le Pen - her strongest ever - spells trouble for his second term and sends a warning shot to NATO and the European Union.

The centrist incumbent swept to victory by a comfortable margin, with some 58.5 per cent of the electorate backing him versus 41.5 per cent for Le Pen. That gave Macron a second five-year term.

But the president's victory is clouded by the fact that his rival -



an anti-immigration, nationalist candidate who advocates banning the Islamic headscarf in public, has

courted Russian President Vladimir Putin and wants to turn the European Union into an 'alliance of Eu-

ropean nations' - won more votes than any far-right candidate in the history of the French Republic.

European leaders congratulated Macron on his re-election.

"We can count on France for five more years," European Council President Charles Michel wrote on Twitter. 'I am delighted to be able to continue our excellent cooperation,' tweeted European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen.

German Chancellor Olaf Scholz said French voters 'have sent a strong vote of confidence in Europe today. I am happy that we will continue our good cooperation'.

Nasa's Webb telescope in space



January 09

Nearly a million miles from Earth, NASA's James Webb Space Telescope reached its gravitational parking spot in orbit around the Sun. The telescope intended to provide the world with an unprecedented look into the earliest stages of the universe sent stunning and images of the cosmos and many celestial choreographic events back to us.

The James Webb Space Telescope lit up 2022 with dazzling images of the early universe after the Big Bang, heralding a new era of astronomy and untold revelations about the cosmos in years to come.

The most powerful observatory sent into space succeeded the Hubble telescope, which is still operating, and began transmitting its first cosmic images in July.

"It essentially behaves better than expected in almost every area," said Massimo Stiavelli, head of the Webb mission office at the Space Telescope Science Institute, in Baltimore.

Already scientists say the Webb telescope, now orbiting the Sun at a 1.6mn kilometres from Earth, should last 20 years, twice its guaranteed lifetime.

"The instruments are more efficient, the optics are sharper and more stable. We have more fuel and we use less fuel," said Stiavelli.

Stability is vital for image clarity.

"Our requirement was similar to that of Hubble, in terms of pointing accuracy. And we ended up being seven times better," the mission office chief added.

Public appetite for the discoveries has been fed by the colouring of the telescope's images.

Light from the most distant galaxies has been stretched from the visible spectrum, viewable by the naked eye, to infrared - which Webb is equipped to observe with unprecedented resolution.

This enables the telescope to detect the faintest glimmers from the distant universe at an unprecedented resolution, to see through the veil of dust that masks the emergence of stars in a nebula and to analyse the atmosphere of exoplanets, which orbit stars outside our solar system.

18 petals

"The first year (of observation) is a way to test out the tool for the small rocky planets in the habitable zone that could potentially be like Earth," said Lisa Kaltenegger, associate professor in Astronomy at Cornell University.

"And the tests are beautiful. They're spectacular."

Webb blasted off aboard an Ariane 5 rocket at the end of 2021, crowning a 30-year project at the US space agency NASA.

En route to final orbit, Webb deployed a five-layer sunshield the size of a tennis court followed by a 6.5-metre primary mirror made up of 18 hexagonal, gold-coated segments or petals.

Once calibrated to less than a millionth of a metre, the 18 petals began to collect the light-pulsing stars. On July 12, the first images underlined Webb's capabilities unveiling thousands of galaxies, some dating back close to the birth of the Universe, and a star nursery in the Carina nebula.

Rishi Sunak becomes UK's first PM of colour

October 24

Britain chose Rishi Sunak as its first Prime Minister of colour amidst economic crisis that resulted in the implosion of Liz Truss' premiership after just 44 days.

Elected for the first time to parliament in 2015, Sunak became Britain's youngest prime minister in more than 200 years, tasked with steering the country through an economic crisis and mounting anger among some voters.



It is a remarkable return for Sunak who lost a leadership bid to Truss less than two months ago when he was accused by some in the Conservative Party of bringing down their hero, Boris Johnson.

One of the wealthiest politicians in Westminster, he entered Downing Street facing a need to make deep public spending cuts to stem a fiscal crisis, as well as tackling a cost-of-living crunch, a winter of strikes and Russia's war in Ukraine. Sunak prevailed after

Sunak became Britain's youngest prime minister in more than 200 years

Penny Mordaunt, the last rival left in the party's leadership race after Boris Johnson dramatically dropped out, failed to secure enough nominations from fellow Tory MPs.



Death of Queen Elizabeth; Succession of Charles III

September 08

Queen Elizabeth II, the longest-serving monarch in British history and an icon instantly recognisable to billions of people around the world, died at her Scottish Highland retreat. She was 96.

The eldest of her four children, Charles, Prince of Wales, who at 73 was the oldest heir apparent in British history, became king immediately.

Royal officials confirmed he is now known as King Charles III - the first king of that name to sit on the throne since 1685.

His mother's death triggered an outpouring

of condolences across the globe as world leaders paid homage to a woman whose reign spanned 70 years, straddling two centuries of seismic social, political and technological upheaval.

Hundreds of flowers and flickering candles were left at the gates of Buckingham Palace in central London, as billboards lit up in tribute across the capital with images of the queen.

In his first words as monarch, Charles called her death 'a moment of the greatest sadness for me and all members of my family'.

"We mourn profoundly the passing of a cherished Sovereign and a much-loved Mother," he added in a statement signed 'His

Majesty the King'. "I know her loss will be deeply felt throughout the country, the Realm and the Commonwealth and by countless people around the world."

Buckingham Palace announced the queen's death in a short statement, triggering ten days of national mourning and a global outpouring of tributes to her long life and record-breaking reign.

'The Queen died peacefully at Balmoral this afternoon,' said the statement issued at 6:30 pm (1730 GMT) on September 8.

'The King (Charles) and The Queen Consort (Camilla) will remain at Balmoral this evening and will return to London tomorrow.'

COP27 summit in Egypt

November 20

A fraught UN summit in Egypt wrapped with a landmark deal on funding to help vulnerable countries cope with devastating climate impacts - but also anger over a failure to be more ambitious on cutting emissions.

The two-week talks in Egypt's Red Sea resort of Sharm el-Sheikh, which at times appeared to teeter on the brink of collapse, delivered a major breakthrough on a fund for climate 'loss and damage'.

Tired delegates applauded when the fund was adopted as the Sun came up following almost two extra days of round-the-clock negotiations.

But jubilation over that achievement was countered by stern warnings.

Catastrophic floods, crop-wilting droughts and record heatwaves this year have shown that climate change warnings are increasingly becoming reality and this is "just the beginning", experts say, as international efforts to cut planet-heating emissions founder.

The year did see some important progress, with major new legislation particularly in the US and Europe as well as a deal at UN talks to help vulnerable countries cope with an increasing onslaught of devastating climate impacts. But the goal of keeping warming within a safer limit of 1.5°C since the pre-industrial era appears in peril, with carbon dioxide emissions from fossil fuels - the main driver of global heating - on track to reach an all-time high in 2022.

Mahsa Amini's death and protests in Iran

September 16

Mahsa Amini - a young Iranian woman, who was in a coma after being arrested by the Islamic republic's morality police, succumbed to her injuries resulting in a nation-wide protests that eventually forced.

Mahsa Amini (22) was on a visit to Tehran with her family when she was detained by the specialist police unit that enforces the strict dress code obligatory for women since shortly after the Islamic revolution of 1979.

State television broadcast images appeared showing her falling to the ground inside a large hall full of women while arguing with one of the female instructors about her dress.

Mahsa Amini's death in hospital on Sep-



tember 16, three days after her arrest, sparked the biggest protests in Iran in years.

Young women and girls have defiantly removed their Islamic headscarves, or hijabs, in standoffs with the security forces that have left dozens dead, according to human rights groups.

On October 2, to mark the end of the traditional period of mourning, columns of people pour into Amini's hometown to pay tribute at her grave.

As protests break out, Iranian security forces open fire on the crowd, according to a rights group and verified videos.

On December 4, after more than two months of women-led protests, Iran's attorney general said that the country's morality police have been abolished.

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