



HM meets UK Foreign Secretary

Muscat - His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik gave an audience to Elizabeth Truss, Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs of the United Kingdom at Al Barakah Palace on Wednesday.

Cordial talks were exchanged and historical relations of friendship binding the two countries were also reviewed during the meeting.

Discussions also explored means of promoting these relations towards broader horizons of bilateral cooperation to serve the interests of the two countries' peoples.

Views on several issues of interest to the two sides were also exchanged in light of the ongoing international developments.

The meeting was attended by Sayyid Badr Hamad al Busaidi, Foreign Minister, Sayyid Faisal Hamoud al Busaidi, Advisor at the Diwan of Royal Court and Bill Murray, Ambassador of the United Kingdom to Oman.

Later, Elizabeth was received by Gen Sultan Mohammed al Nu'mani, Minister of the Royal Office, in his office.

Gen Nu'mani welcomed the British guest, who expressed her pride and appreciation for the cooperation and the role played by Oman in various political and security spheres, particularly the efforts made to release British citizens detained in Iran. She also commended the strong historical relations binding Oman and the UK.

Gen Nu'mani thanked the British guest for her efforts in enhancing the existing relations between the two countries.

ONA

Only 10% citizens have taken boosters

Our Correspondent Muscat

H E Dr Ahmed Mohammed al Sa'eedi, Minister of Health, has stated that only 10 per cent of citizens in vaccine target groups have taken the booster.

"While 97 per cent of the population in Oman has been vaccinated with one dose of COVID-19 vaccine and 90 per cent received both doses, unfortunately the percentage of citizens who have taken the booster dose is very low," he said.

Addressing a press conference on Wednesday, H E Dr Sa'eedi informed that over 8mn doses of COVID-19 vaccine have been reserved and a total of 7,544,929 doses have been administered.



We ask everyone to get vaccinated, especially those who suffer from chronic diseases and the elderly

H E DR AHMED AL SA'EEDI

"No serious side effects have been observed in those who have taken both first and second doses of the vaccine."

He reiterated that 'vaccination is the way to prevent severe infection and even death'.

Ninety-six per cent of those admitted in intensive care were unvaccinated or received a single dose, and 90 per cent of COVID-19 related deaths in Oman were unvaccinated individuals.

H E Dr Sa'eedi also said that European countries have made the booster dose mandatory for travellers if the last dose was taken more than six months ago.

He added that there is no conclusive evidence proving vaccines cause heart attacks. "We ask everyone to get vaccinated, especially those who suffer from chronic diseases and the elderly."

Bader Saif al Rawahi, director of Communicable Diseases in Ministry of Health (MoH), said, "Studies are being conducted for administering a fourth dose/booster dose to reduce complications arising from COVID-19."

He noted that the sultanate has not yet reached the stage of community immunity against the virus. "The booster dose raises immunity from 75 per cent to 80 per cent and MoH is now prioritising vaccination of children aged between five and 11 years."

H E Sa'eedi informed that the manufacturer supplying vaccines for children has delayed delivery. "We hope to receive the doses in the first half of the year."

See also [page 02](#)

4 more workers found dead, taking Dhahirah toll to 10

Our Correspondent Muscat

Four more bodies were recovered from the site where a rock-slide took six lives on Sunday in the wilayat of Ibri in Dhahirah governorate. With this, the total number of deaths from the accident now stands at ten. The search is underway for four other people, according to the Civil Defence and Ambulance Authority (CDAA).

A statement issued by CDAA, said, "Four more bodies were recovered from the rubble following the rock collapse that took place in the Wilayat of Ibri on March 27. Search is still going on for four other people trapped under the rubble. Five people were earlier rescued on Sunday."

An official at CDAA said that the mountain collapse occurred in a quarry in the village of Al Arid last Sunday. "The CDAA, in cooperation with the Ministry of Defence, is continuing to search for missing persons."

"Rescue teams faced a great challenge in removing the huge boulders that had fallen. But with the use of high-tech equipment, we retrieved the bodies," he said.





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TERMS AND CONDITIONS APPLIED

'End of pandemic not in sight'

Shaddad al Musalmi
Muscat

Contrary to the earlier assumption that Omicron is the beginning of the end of the COVID-19 pandemic, H E Dr Ahmed Mohammed al Sa'eedi, Minister of Health, has stated that the end is not yet in sight and that the decisions of the Supreme Committee for this Ramadan are aimed at ensuring public health, not to create hindrances.

"The pandemic is continuing, so we must be cautious. The decisions related to the Holy Month of Ramadan are aimed at protecting public health," H E Dr Sa'eedi said addressing the media on Wednesday.

On the day, the Ministry of Health (MoH) announced 50 COVID-19 cases registered in a 24-hour period, taking the total number of cases in Oman to 388,279. No deaths were reported in this period. The total COVID-19 related deaths in the country stands at 4,250.

H E Dr Sa'eedi explained that

the reason behind the Supreme Committee's decision preventing children under 12 from entering mosques for Taraweeh prayers is to protect them as many in this age group are unvaccinated. "We should not put our children at risk. Hence the Supreme Committee decided to prevent children under 12 years of age from attending Taraweeh prayers in mosques," he said.

He added that gatherings, be it in mosques or public places, will help the virus spread further.

On the pressure on healthcare systems due to the pandemic, H E Dr Sa'eedi said, "Medicine and medical equipment manufacturing companies have been affected. Oman has stocks which we sometimes have to tap on. But there are enough medicines in Oman to save lives."

He also spoke of exhaustion among healthcare workers, leading to several resignations - from citizens and expatriates - in the health sector. "Therefore, we will face some challenges on the manpower front," he said.

26 dengue cases reported in Muscat



MoH launched a campaign to combat dengue mosquitoes in Al Hail South, Ghubra and Al Ansab

Our Correspondent
Muscat

Twenty-six cases of dengue were reported in the last few days, H E Dr Ahmed bin Mohammed al Sa'eedi, Minister of Health, stated on Wednesday.

Addressing a press conference held by the Supreme Committee tasked with tackling the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, the minister said, "On Tuesday, 17 dengue cases were registered in the wilayat of Bausher, seven in the wilayat of

Seeb, and two in the wilayat of Amerat."

"We should not create an environment conducive for Aedes aegypti mosquitoes to spread. I urge citizens and residents to get rid of water collecting in bins, tyres and such

places in their homes."

The Ministry of Health (MoH) has informed that dengue is not transmitted from person to person directly, but transmitted to humans through the bite of Aedes aegypti mosquitoes. It stated that dengue fever was recorded in the sultanate in 2019 and 2020 in Muscat and Dhofar, too.

Issuing guidelines to prevent dengue, it stated, "The ministry urges people to wear clothes with long sleeves that cover the body, use mosquito repellent on exposed parts of the body (caution with history of allergy, read product leaflet) and use window nets. Houses can also be sprayed with insecticides."

MoH, in cooperation with Muscat Municipality, launched a joint campaign recently to combat Aedes aegypti mosquitoes in Al Hail South, Ghubra and Al Ansab.

Omani citizens can now use Civil ID to cross land ports: ROP

Our Correspondent
Muscat

Citizens are now allowed to use their Civil ID cards to cross the land ports on the Oman-UAE border, the Royal Oman Police (ROP) announced on Wednesday. The use of Civil IDs had earlier been stopped due to COVID-19.

In a statement, ROP said, "The Royal Oman Police draws the attention of the citizens that it is now possible to use the Civil ID to cross the land ports with the United Arab Emirates."

ROP said that nationals of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) countries can use their ID cards to enter Oman via land ports.

"We will return to the system of using the ID card to move between the land ports of countries in the GCC. This has been agreed upon with the Inspector General of Police and Customs," H E Dr Ahmed bin Mohammed al Sa'eedi, Minister of Health said on Wednesday.

SAYYID ASAAD BIDS FAREWELL TO SYRIAN ENVOY



On behalf of His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik, Sayyid Asaad bin Tarik al Said, Deputy Prime Minister for International Relations and Cooperation Affairs, Personal Representative of His Majesty the Sultan, received in his office Dr Bassam al Khatib, Ambassador of the Syrian Arab Republic to Oman, to bid him farewell at the end of his tour of duty on Wednesday. The ambassador expressed his thanks to His Majesty the Sultan for the support extended to him during his tour of duty in Oman from His Majesty, the government and the Omani people, which enabled him to carry out his assignments (ONA)

Dibba waterfront's work to start in April

Our Correspondent
Muscat

The construction works of the Dibba waterfront in the Wilayat of Dibba in the Musandam governorate will start on April 13 and continue for a year, according to Sheikh Ahmed bin Ali bin Saud al Habsi, Wali of Dibba.

"The project cost is RO674,387. It will be an entertainment destination for the people and residents and contribute to the development of tourism. The project will provide job opportunities for young people by using some of the sites designated along the project to establish small kiosks and cafes," he said.

According to Sheikh Habsi,



Supplied photo

the project, spread over an area of 1,250m, aims to attract beachgoers and thus revitalise the economic and tourism potential of the site. "It includes a number of vital facilities such as a concrete barrier to break the waves, a walkway, sites for sports and games for children, sites for entrepreneurs, green spaces and landscaping, seating areas, and an open-air theater that can accommodate 200 people."

The project will also have 5m-high 150 lighting poles along the walkway. Sheikh Habsi added, "We will complete another part of the waterfront in front of the areas of Tawahi and Qastaniya, with a length of approximately 800m. This area will include a walkway, a concrete barrier to stop the waves, and lighting poles."



Supplied photo

ICT Group launches its commercial identity

Muscat - Oman Communications and Information Technology Group (OICT) celebrated on Tuesday, at the Royal Opera House, the launch of its new commercial identity - 'ITHCA Group'.

The launch was held under the patronage of HH Sayyid Loay bin Ghalib bin Khalid al Said, and in the presence of Sayyid Kamil bin Fahd bin Mahmoud al Said, chairman of the board of directors of ITHCA Group.

The event was attended by Eng Said bin Abdullah al Mandhari, CEO of ITHCA Group, a number of ministers, undersecretaries, CEOs, investors and entrepreneurs interested in the technology and communications sector, a press release said.

ITHCA Group was established in 2019 with the aim of developing the infrastructure of the communications and information technology sector, expanding the range of networks, and

enhancing digital capabilities in the sultanate through integration and partnership between the public and private sectors and international companies.

The group will also expand investments in emerging technologies, AI, Internet of Things, fintech and other technologies of the Fourth Industrial Revolution.

In a statement, Sayyid Kamel said that most of the group's investments are in modern technologies. "These efforts come within the objectives of Oman Vision 2040, in promoting investments and geographical expansion of companies operating in the sector locally, regionally and internationally through partnership with the private sector."

The new identity was chosen to reflect the group's commitment to investing in modern technologies and enabling the employment of information and communication technology in the Oman.

Omran launches \$1bn sustainable city in Yiti

Muscat - Oman Tourism Development Company (Omran Group) celebrated the launch of The Sustainable City - Yiti in partnership with Diamond Developers - the leading company in developing sustainable communities - on Wednesday.

With an investment value of nearly US\$1bn, the fully-integrated, urban, mixed-use master project reflects the group's goals towards driving the social and economic development through sustainable tourism projects that attract foreign direct investment (FDI) in line with Oman Vision 2040 and the National Tourism Strategy.

Spread over an area of 1mn sqm, The Sustainable City - Yiti - will be developed within the Phase 1 of the Yiti Integrated Tourism Development Masterplan.

Slated for completion by 2025, the project will feature 1,657 eco-friendly and energy-efficient residential units including 300 villas. Designed for comfort, practicality, and contemporary style, the spacious three and four bedroom villas will also offer significant savings on utility bills.

"It is the first project in Oman that meets the global green practices and is in adherence to the highest sustainability standards," according to a press release.

Commenting on the inauguration, Eng Mohammed Salim al



(Supplied photo)

Busaidi, chairman of Omran Group, said, "Our partnership with Diamond Developers to launch The Sustainable City - Yiti is a unique milestone in our journey as we continue to invest, develop, and maximise the limitless potential of Oman's tourism sector. As it's being developed within one of the largest urban developments in the Middle East, it will open avenues for numerous lucrative investment opportunities for both local and international investors in line with the directions of Oman Investment Authority."

Eng Faris Saeed, chairman of Diamond Developers said, "The Sustainable City - Yiti is not only a benchmark for sustainable urban development, it is a working model for future cities. It is a thriving community made up of thousands of residents, visitors, students, researchers, and entrepreneurs" he added.

"The project is expected to be one of the region's most sustainable cities, and by adopting the latest solutions in energy production, vertical farming, humidity harvesting, and autonomous transportation, we aim to

achieve carbon neutrality by 2040, in line with Oman Vision 2040. At Diamond Developers, we remain committed to empowering and supporting partners around the world to realise the cities of tomorrow, today to deliver a more sustainable future for all of us."

While being completely energy independent with solar panels and biogas meeting 100 per cent of its energy requirements, self-sustenance is also an integral element of the project through the incorporation of productive farming areas and green

houses. Private farming slots will be allocated for residents to encourage them to grow their own produce. The city is also designed to recycle 100 per cent of its waste and water.

Inspired by the local values of authenticity, togetherness, and community living, the city is positioned as a premium destination for wellness and includes facilities for jogging and cycling, an equestrian club, and a horse track. Providing an all-inclusive experience, it also includes a plaza with a fine selection of commercial outlets.



Muscat, Oman - The Zubair Automotive Group recently organised a major event for its partners and commercial clients at the Shangri-La Barr Al Jissah Resort & Spa, Muscat.

In attendance were, the members of the Board of Directors of the Zubair Automotive Group, the Chief Operating Officer and the senior management team of the Zubair Automotive Group as well as executive managers and managers from private and government institutions, and a number of businessmen from various sectors who are in partnership with the Zubair Automotive Group. The International Heavy Equipment, Dhofar Automotive, and the General Automotive Company also participated in the event.

The event was held at the Shangri-La Barr Al Jissah Hotel amphitheatre at 7:00 pm on March 29th, and began with a warm welcome to all in attendance, followed by a speech by the COO of the Zubair Automotive Group.

The attendees enjoyed beautiful and informative presentations made by the Zubair Automotive Group's team on the latest product offerings. This was followed by the award ceremony, to honour the group's best commercial clients for their immense contribution and continuous cooperation and support, which reflected in the overall business growth as well as with the addition of services, that has brought great satisfaction to customers.

An informative tour of the latest models was then organised for all in attendance, followed by a lavish dinner accompanied by a live performance by the Hotel's musical ensemble.

Commenting on organising such an event, Mohammad Al Farei, Chief Operating Officer of Zubair Automotive Group said, "Today we are gathered to renew and enter a new phase of partnership. The objective is to provide solutions to meet the ever-changing demands of our society and to improve business performance. I am proud to say that despite the pandemic the Zubair Automotive Group never stopped providing our partners and clients with innovative business solutions and services. Through our products, the group envisions a better partnership with you."

During the event, the Zubair Automotive Group celebrated

Zubair Automotive Group celebrates its commercial clients and showcases latest models at special customer event



the success partners of its main clientele. Al Tasnim Group won the Best Client Award for the year 2022, while Galfar Engineering & Contracting won the

Enterprising Customer of the year 2022. The Loyal Customer Award of the year 2022 went to the Gulf Petrochemical Services, while the Emerging Customer

Award of the year 2022 went to OHI Group (Budget RAC), and finally, the Oman Water and Wastewater Services Company won the Public Customer of the year 2022 award.

The event also witnessed the inauguration of the flagship model of the all-new Mitsubishi Outlander, 2022, presented by the General Automotive Company, the official distributor of Mitsubishi vehicles in the Sultanate. The vehicle carries the legacy of past Mitsubishi SUV models, making it an exception-

ally powerful and dynamic model with an all-new design.

The fine details in its design is an embodiment of beauty, which is coupled with a performance that gives the driver and passengers an enjoyable experience on the road. The all-new Outlander comes with several features, like an advanced wheelbase, spacious cabin, and driver assistance systems to enhance control and safety, as well as six different driving modes to ensure the best performance in all conditions. The cabin interior prom-

ises passengers an atmosphere of comfort and convenience. The all-new Outlander's horizontal instrument panel comes with a 10.8-inch front-screen display, or a 12.3-inch fully digital display, as well as an intelligent navigation system and a high-quality audio system that connects with the phone and its applications to keep the driver connected on the road. The all-new Outlander is available in 5 variants in terms of specifications and equipment, including Premium +, Premium, High Line +, High Line and

Midline.

The sales team from the group of companies represented by the International Heavy Equipment, Dhofar Automotive and the General Automotive Company, in addition to representatives from the manufacturers, communicated directly with the audience and responded to all customer inquiries with detailed information that included guidance and support about the latest products on offer.

The event provided an ideal opportunity for brand managers to consolidate relationships and build bridges of trust with customers, thereby enabling a fruitful partnership and a prosperous future for all parties involved.

With over 200 in attendance, the evening witnessed the distinguished presence of representatives from the government and private sector. The guests had the opportunity to see all of Dhofar Automotive's flagship models, which included the Grand Cherokee L, the Gladiator and Wrangler models, the Dodge Charger and Challenger, the Ram 1500, Fiat 500 Cabriolet and the Alfa Romeo Stelvio and Giulia.

The General Automotive Company had the pleasure of presenting the Mitsubishi Xpander, Montero Sport, Outlander, the ASX models, in addition to the L200 commercial vehicle. Four Fuso models were also present during the event, including the Rosa bus, TF Titan, FX4, Fuso FK and FM.

The products and equipment of the International Heavy Equipment company were also displayed for all in attendance. The latest trucks from Renault and Volvo were showcased, which included tankers, mixers, pump carriers and huge dumpers. A wide range of other models and equipment were also on display from Bobcat and Jungheinrich and were well received by the audience.

The COO of the Zubair Automotive Group ended his speech, saying, "Our business culture is anchored on the principle of "We rise by lifting others." When you succeed, we succeed with you. Thank you to all our partners who have been part of our humble company's success story. You are our source of strength to keep moving forward despite all the challenges, and we take the opportunity every year to come together here and celebrate our partnership. I wish all of you a wonderful evening."



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*Rates as on March 30 Source: xe.com	

BRIEFS

Flooding causes \$82bn of damage in 2021

Flooding caused US\$82bn of damage worldwide in 2021, Swiss reinsurance giant Swiss Re announced Wednesday, warning that the amount of uninsured losses was only likely to grow with climate change.

The Zurich-based group, which acts as an insurer for insurers, said last year's floods in Germany and its neighbours generated economic losses of more than US\$40bn - only US\$13bn of which were covered by insurance. "Floods affect nearly a third of the world population, more than any other peril," Martin Bertogg, head of catastrophe perils at Swiss Re, said in a statement.

NBO shareholders approve capital raising plan, dividend

Our Correspondent
Muscat

The shareholders of National Bank of Oman (NBO) on Wednesday approved the bank's plan to raise up to US\$300mn capital.

NBO held its annual general meeting (AGM) and an extraordinary general meeting (EGM) on Wednesday at the bank's headquarters. Presided over by Amal Suhail Bahwan, chairperson of NBO, the meeting was attended by the board members, senior management and shareholders.

During the meeting, NBO's shareholders approved the payout of 3.7 per cent cash dividend for 2021 at the rate of 3.7bz per share. Shareholders also approved the appointment of the members of the Shari'a Supervisory Committee of Muzn, NBO's Islamic window, in addition to the appointment of the external auditors and an independent consultant to evaluate the performance of the board for the fiscal year ending December 31, 2022.

The bank's EGM saw the ap-



The bank's EGM saw the approval of capital raising plans which may take the form of a new issue of additional tier 1 capital for a benchmark size in the region of up to US\$300mn

proval of capital raising plans which may take the form of a new issue of additional tier 1 capital for a benchmark size in the region of up to US\$300mn. Such instruments may be listed locally on the MSX, internationally on a foreign exchange and/or issued on a private placement basis, NBO said in a

press statement.

"Overall, we have been pleased with the bank's performance during 2021. Our core business remains strong and we have further diversified revenue streams and maintained a strong balance sheet. We believe it is a sign of our agility on the one hand, and our growing global

reputation as a safe investment, on the other," Amal Suhail Bahwan, chairperson of NBO said.

She added, "As we embark on our 2022 objectives, NBO is resolved to identify further opportunities of growth and take critical steps towards protecting the legacy we have built in the market as a future-ready and world-class bank that continues to create value for our customers, employees and the wider community."

In 2021, NBO achieved a net profit of RO30.3mn, an increase of 66.8 per cent compared to the previous year.

Net interest income for the

year 2021 came at RO91.6mn, showing an increase of 0.7 per cent over last year.

NBO's fee income for the year 2021 stood at RO31.8mn compared to RO26.1mn last year, a strong growth of 21.9 per cent due to robust performance across various fee lines.

The bank reported net impairment of RO24mn for the year 2021, compared to RO31.3mn for the last year, a decrease of 23.4 per cent.

The reduction is on account of the conservative provisioning approach undertaken at the time of the pandemic.

NBO's gross loans and advances as at December 31, 2021 were at RO3.2bn, with a growth of 6.4 per cent over last year, as the bank continued to support the borrowing needs of its customers.

Customer deposits correspondingly grew to RO2.9bn, showing a growth of 15.5 per cent over last year.

The bank's core equity and total capital adequacy ratio as of December 2021 stands at 11.8 per cent and 15.8 per cent, respectively.

Khazaen signs deals for factory

Muscat - Khazaen Economic City on Wednesday signed two agreements with Jana International Company which will invest around RO2mn to set up a factory and warehouses in the city.

The first agreement is related to establishing a factory to produce consumable and commercial plastic packaging materials, while the second agreement pertained to setting up warehouses.

The agreements cover the first phase which will be built on an area of 50,000 square meters, according to an Oman News Agency report.

The agreements were signed by Eng Salim Sulaiman al Thuhli, CEO of Khazaen and Mohammed Hassan, general manager of Jana International Company.

Thuhli said that the inked agreements come within the framework of Khazaen's constant efforts in attracting foreign investments.

These projects in particular, he added, will contribute to supporting supply chains in the region and increasing In-country Value by using raw materials produced through converting industries in Oman.

Qatar to invest \$5bn in Egypt

Cairo, Egypt - Qatar is to invest US\$5bn in Egypt, the government in Cairo announced Tuesday, in another sign of a growing rapprochement following last year's restoration of ties.

The announcement came after talks between President Abdel Fattah al Sisi and visiting Qatari Foreign Minister Mohammed bin Abdulrahman al Thani, who also met Prime Minister Mostafa Madbouli.

A government statement said Qatar was to plough US\$5bn in "investments and partnerships"

in Egypt, without giving specifics. However, QatarEnergy released a statement announcing an agreement with ExxonMobil to acquire a 40-per cent interest in a gas exploration block off Egypt in the Mediterranean.

The two countries restored diplomatic relations in 2021, after Egypt, Saudi Arabia, the UAE and Bahrain severed relations with Qatar in 2017 over its alleged support for radical Islamist groups and being too close to Iran, charges denied by Doha.

Egypt's own relations with Qatar had been strained ever since the 2013 military ouster of Egypt's Islamist president Mohamed Morsi, who was backed by Doha.

In January 2021, Saudi Arabia signalled an end to the diplomatic rift, and the four boycotting countries agreed to lift a blockade.

The rapprochement has since been oriented towards investment.

AFP

Oman-Bahrain Business Forum explores investment opportunities

Muscat - The Oman-Bahrain Business Forum, which held in Muscat on Wednesday, explored investment opportunities and incentives offered for investors. Both countries seek to enhance bilateral trade exchange and investments.

Several presentations were given by officials from Oman Chamber of Commerce and Industry (OCCI) and other government units on the investment opportunities in Oman.

Dr Saleh Said Masn, Commerce and Industry Undersecretary said that Oman has gone a long way in terms of enacting legislations to attract investments. He added that in Oman, there are legal and financial guarantees for the inbound and outbound capital. Oman launched several initiatives to ease investment, Dr Saleh said.

On his turn, Eng Ridha Juma al Saleh, chairman of OCCI, said that the forum is an oppor-



tunity to enhance business and investment partnership between the private sector of the two countries. Saleh further said that the Oman-Bahrain Investment Holding Company with a capital of RO10mn is an embodiment of this partner-

ship.

Business-to-business (B2B) meetings were held on the sidelines of the forum to sign agreements and establish partnerships, as well as expanding cooperation between the two sides.

Foreign direct investment (FDI) from Bahrain to Oman reached RO389.8mn during the third quarter of 2021. The volume of trade exchange between the two countries by the end of 2021 hit RO323.35mn.

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Lulu Group plans IPO for listing in 2023: Report

Our Correspondent
Muscat

Lulu Group International, which runs one of the Middle East's largest supermarket chains, is considering an initial public offering (IPO) early next year in the UAE, according to a Bloomberg report which quoted people familiar with the matter.

Lulu Group - valued at more than US\$5bn in 2020 - has asked global banks to pitch for roles for potential listings, the people said, asking not to be identified discussing confidential information.

The group may opt for multiple listings in the Gulf stock exchanges, one of the people said, as reported by Bloomberg.

Deliberations are ongoing and no final decisions have been made on the venue or details of the offering, the people said. It wasn't immediately clear if Lulu Group wants to list parts of the

business or the entire firm.

Abu Dhabi-based Lulu Group was founded by Indian entrepreneur Yusuff Ali, who set up the first Lulu store in the early 1990s during a years-long oil boom in the Gulf region. The company also operates shopping malls and other businesses including hospitality, shipping and real estate.

"We don't want to comment on market rumors," said V Nandakumar, Lulu Group's director of communications, Bloomberg reported.

Lulu Group, which has an annual revenue of about US\$8bn, employs more than 57,000 people and mainly operates in 22 countries located across the

Middle East, Asia, the US, and Europe.

Saudi Arabia's sovereign wealth fund is exploring a potential investment in LuLu Group International. This comes after ADQ acquired almost a fifth of LuLu Group International for just over US\$1bn in late 2020.

Saudi-Russian tandem holds firm on oil policy despite Ukraine war

London, UK – Saudi Arabia and Russia, the twin pillars of the OPEC+ group of oil producers, look set to hold firm in refusing increases in crude production despite appeals to boost supply and stabilise price volatility.

The thirteen members of OPEC proper will meet their ten allies from the OPEC+ grouping – chief among them Russia – on Thursday for their monthly stocktake of the oil market.

Prices have seen several spikes since Russia's invasion of neighbouring Ukraine began on February 24, at one point reaching US\$139.13 for the benchmark Brent North Sea crude contract and US\$130.50 for the American WTI, close to all-time records.

Despite this analysts say OPEC+ is unlikely to deviate from the policy of cautious increases it has set out for the months ahead.

"The war in Ukraine reminded the world that we are still dependent on OPEC+ to provide the world's energy supplies," says Edward Moya, analyst at Oanda.

'Holding the world hostage'

When prices have been rising, Riyadh has profited, ignoring the



warnings from the G7 about the "key role" the cartel has in regulating prices.

The International Energy Agency has also been vocal on the need for Thursday's meeting to produce "good messages which would help to relieve the strain in the oil markets".

More so than any other member of OPEC+, "the Saudis have no real incentive to boost production as they are benefiting from the high oil prices and strong demand," says Moya.

Another consideration for Saudi Arabia is a desire not to alienate Russia.

Coming out in favour of a big boost in production would at this moment be read as a signal that Saudi Arabia was lining up beside its traditional ally, the US.

"As the war rages, any measure which removes oil as a weapon for Putin will be read in Moscow as a provocation," Philippe Sebillé-Lopez, head of the Geopolia consultancy, told AFP.

Indeed, "by not compensating for Russia's oil shortage", Saudi Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman appears to be allowing Russian President Vladimir Putin to hold "the importing world in hostage to Russian oil and gas," says Stephen Innes, analyst at SPI Asset Management.

While the US and some other states such as the UK have announced embargoes on Russian energy imports, much of Europe has not been able to follow suit, reliant as it is on Russia for 30

per cent of its oil imports.

Shifting loyalties

Innes says that the latest Saudi moves could also "be interpreted as a shift in loyalties from the US to Russia". He adds that the current crisis is "exposing gaps in its long-standing partnership with the United States."

Riyadh has thus far avoided criticising Russia's invasion and has re-iterated its commitment to OPEC+.

During his election campaign,

US President Joe Biden had called Saudi Arabia a "pariah" over the grisly killing of journalist Jamal Khashoggi in the Saudi consulate in Istanbul in October 2018.

But Innes says the real heart of the problem is around Iran, Saudi Arabia's biggest regional rival.

Iran and the US are currently locked in indirect negotiations to see if the 2015 nuclear deal between Tehran and world powers can be revived.

"It is fair to assume that the nuclear deal negotiations with Iran may not necessarily be entirely welcome by the Saudis," says Bjornar Tonhaugen of Rystad Energy.

The fact that Yemen's Iran-backed Huthi rebels were recently taken off the US list of designated terrorist organisations has also cooled US-Saudi relations.

Despite its historic closeness to Riyadh, recently Washington has tried to distance itself from Saudi involvement in Yemen's bloody civil war. "The crown prince might be unwisely siding with the Kremlin, hoping that Russia would back him up if Iran and Saudi re-engage in deadly conflict," says Innes.

AFP

Russia will gradually transfer gas payments to rubles

Moscow, Russia – The Kremlin said Wednesday Russia will not immediately require its natural gas buyers to pay in rubles after Moscow said it will now only accept payments in its national currency.

"Payments and deliveries are a time-consuming process," Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov told reporters.

Russian President Vladimir Putin said last week that Moscow will now only accept rubles as payment for natural gas deliveries to "unfriendly" countries, which include the European Union.

On Thursday, the Russian government, its central bank and energy giant Gazprom are expected to present Putin with a system that will allow gas payment to be conducted in rubles.

"It's not like... what will be delivered tomorrow, must be paid for by the evening," Peskov said.

Asking about the possibility of transferring to ruble payments for other Russian exports, Peskov said this was "an idea that certainly needs to be explored".

"This is an area in which our government is also working," Peskov added.

AFP

Poland urges EU nations to tax Russian oil and gas

Warsaw, Poland – Poland on Wednesday urged the EU to impose a tax on Russian energy imports and said it planned to end its own purchases this year, calling the dependence on Moscow a "stupidity".

The EU has so far avoided following the United States in banning Russian oil and gas, with Germany opposed as it relies heavily on supplies from the country.

"We don't want this dependence, but others use these raw materials, without worrying about the cruel war, the Russian aggression against Ukraine and blackmail," Polish Prime Minister Mateusz Morawiecki said at a press conference.

"We can no longer return to this stupidity, this bad and criminal policy which turned (countries) dependent on Russia," he said.

Morawiecki said it was crucial to "take this blackmail tool, this war tool away from Putin" as Russia used proceeds from energy exports to "build a war arsenal and be able to attack its neighbours".

The EU has announced plans to slash its imports of Russian gas by two-thirds this year.

Around 40 per cent of the EU's gas supplies came from Russia last year.

Before the Ukraine war, Germany imported 55 per cent of its natural gas from Russia, half its coal and around 35 per cent



A file photo shows a view of the Gascade Gas Receiving station adjoining the Nord Stream 2 Pipeline Inspection Gauge (PIG) receiving station in Lubmin, northeastern Germany (AFP)

of its oil.

Morawiecki said an EU tax was necessary because Germany and other European countries were unwilling to stop buying Russian energy products, which tended to be cheaper, and the levy would "equalise energy prices in all of the European Union".

"Today I call on the European Commission to establish a tax on Russian hydrocarbons so that commerce and economic rules in the single European

market can function in an equitable manner," Morawiecki said.

"I will strongly push for this idea in the European Union so that the situation is equitable from the point of view of market competition," he said.

The prime minister said Poland was hoping to wean itself off Russian oil and gas by the end of the year.

Morawiecki said legislation proposed by the government to ban Russian coal imports could

come into force in April or May.

Climate Minister Anna Moskwa said Poland was technically ready to give up Russian sources of energy thanks to its network of pipelines and storage facilities.

Germany, meanwhile, raised the alert level under its emergency gas plan on Wednesday as fears rose that Russia could cut off supplies if Western countries refused to make payments in rubles.

AFP

ECB's Lagarde sees living costs spiral with Ukraine war

Nicosia, Cyprus – European Central Bank president Christine Lagarde warned Wednesday that a prolonged Ukraine conflict will keep energy prices and the cost of living spiralling, blighting a post-COVID recovery.

The Russia-Ukraine war has introduced "considerable uncertainty" into the outlook for the EU economy, she said during a visit to Cyprus.

The ECB chief said the war has stunted a quicker-than-expected rebound from the COVID-19 pandemic due to a job-rich recovery.

"The economic impact of the war is best captured by what economists call a "supply shock", which is a shock that simultane-



Christine Lagarde

ously pushes up inflation and reduces growth," Lagarde told a news conference.

She said energy prices are expected to stay higher for longer, with gas prices already up by 52 per cent since the start of the year and oil prices up 64 per

cent.

Pressure on food inflation is also likely to increase.

Russia and Ukraine account for nearly 30 per cent of global wheat exports, while Belarus and Russia produce around a third of the world's potash, a key ingredient in producing fertiliser, thereby exacerbating supply shortages. "Global manufacturing bottlenecks are likely to persist in certain sectors," she said.

Russia is the world's top exporter of palladium, which is key for producing catalytic converters, while Ukraine supplies around 70 per cent of the world's neon gas, critical for semiconductor manufacturing.

AFP

IMF launches mission in Lebanon

Beirut, Lebanon – An International Monetary Fund (IMF) delegation kicked off talks in Beirut Wednesday as part of a two-week mission aimed at securing progress towards funding for crisis-hit Lebanon.

The government is hoping to secure a rescue package to exit a deep financial crisis that started

in 2019 and has seen most of the country's population fall into poverty.

"We hope that a preliminary deal will be reached after two weeks of discussions," Deputy Prime Minister Saade Chami, who heads Lebanon's delegation to the IMF, told AFP.

AFP

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Al Madina Takaful launches HSR initiative for children with Down Syndrome

Based on the concept of human social responsibility (HSR) and with an aim of creating inclusive opportunities for children with Down Syndrome, Al Madina Takaful, Oman's first Takaful insurance provider, has teamed up with Dorat Al Khaleej Private School to launch a special HSR initiative.

A well-known pioneering educational institution in Oman, Dorat Al Khaleej Private School has a dedicated programme for special needs.

The programme is designed to meet the needs of special students. The curriculum has been set in parallel with the objectives of subjects across the different educational stages with consideration to the needs and difficulties the student possesses.

The Al Madina Takaful HSR initiative called 'Walitasnae Ealaa Eaynay' aims to support children with Down Syndrome.



25 children from Dorat Al Khaleej Private School between the age of seven and 14 with Down Syndrome will be supported through this activity.

A group of employees will

be responsible for supporting these children throughout the year of 2022 as their guide/mentor.

Commenting on the initiative, Usama Al Barwani, CEO of Al

Madina Takaful said, "We at Al Madina Takaful are very passionate about creating an ecosystem which is inclusive in nature and aligns to our values. Giving back to the society has al-

ways been an important part of the overall ethos at our company. This initiative is an opportunity for us to empower those who have special needs and will definitely motivate the larger com-

munity to recognise the importance of including them in the mainstream."

He added, "At Al Madina Takaful we believe inclusion of people with Down Syndrome

should be reflected in the ethos of the society and backed by a consistent policy of inclusion in our daily lives.

I would like to commend the work being done by Dorat Al Khaleej Private School which offers support to children and families as they navigate the challenges of understanding and coping with Down Syndrome."

Usama Al Barwani and employees of Al Madina Takaful visited the school and engaged with children on the occasion of World Down Syndrome Day on March 21.

Al Madina Takaful has been at the forefront when it comes to supporting corporate social responsibility initiatives. In supporting its communities, the company continues to contribute to key initiatives under education, special needs, charity, health, welfare platforms.



Enjoy 'Layali Ramadan' at Al Bustan Palace Hotel

Capturing the true spirit of the holy month, Al Bustan Palace, a Ritz-Carlton Hotel is celebrating with a collection of authentic Ramadan dining experiences designed to bring families and friends together, with 'Layali Ramadan'.

Combining stunning natural surroundings and lavish interiors, the palatial resort is the perfect setting for making magical memories. Indulge in a traditional Iftar,

breaking fast in festive style, and ease into the early morning hours with a leisurely Suhur by the shore. From delectable menus to entertaining events, Ritz Kids fun and night time glitter, the joyful season is always a grand affair at Al Bustan Palace, a Ritz-Carlton Hotel.

Celebrate Iftar at Al Khiran Kitchen, where local and international cuisine is served in a five-star setting. An exuberant buffet

is available to take guests on a culinary journey of delight, with live entertainment and mouth-watering stations that showcase the best the season has to offer. Move into the latter part of the evening for the ultimate, chic Suhur at The Pavilion.

The beautiful beach restaurant will play host to scenic views, delectable dishes, as well as festive fun from shisha and henna to palm reading.

Mysk al Mouj gears up for Ramadan

The flagship hotel of Mysk by Shaza is a contemporary and trendy theatre of life. This Ramadan, Mysk by Shaza gears up to welcome its guests for a lavish iftar at its Salt & Pepper restaurant.

The menus chosen for Iftar have been inspired by the Silk Route that would take the diners on a culinary journey of flavours.

At Mysk by Shaza food is a culture and a passion. It is a satisfying culinary performance with character and motifs from the East and West. Iftar at Mysk by Shaza isn't just a meal, rather it is an experience that would reflect the values like Karam/ generosity.

Priced at RO15 including taxes and beverages for Iftar and RO8.5 Net for Suhoor. During the holy month of Ramadan, to express our gratitude, we would also be donating a part of the revenues earned to a charitable organisation.



Be a part of the ever-evolving theatre of life and experience an

Iftar like never before. Shaza is the leading hotel

management company dedicated to offering true Arabian hospitality inspired by the traditions and culture of various countries along the Silk Route and reflected by the supremely elegant Middle Eastern style décor and serene ambience that is appreciated by the most discerning travellers.

With four hotels already operational in the Middle East – Shaza Makkah in the Holy city, the multiple award-winning Shaza Al Madina, the newly opened Shaza Riyadh and the flagship hotel under the 'Mysk by Shaza' brand Mysk Al Mouj in Muscat – the brand is expanding rapidly with the opening this year of the Sharjah Collection, followed by Shaza Doha, Shaza Salalah and Mysk The Palm in Dubai.

Shaza is a member of Global Hotel Alliance (GHA), the world's largest alliance of independent hotel brands.

Bank Muscat extends support to Al Ahad Al Mashreq Shooting Championship

In line with its strong commitment to promoting Omani heritage and culture and extending strong support to various sporting, cultural and social events, Bank Muscat, the leading financial services provider in the sultanate, participated in the successful organisation of Al Ahad Al Mashreq Shooting Championship recently. The competition for traditional Omani weaponry was held at the shooting range in Nakhl in the governorate of South Batinah from March 22-26, and saw an excellent turnout of over 1,440 shooters representing the sultanate's different governorates. H E Salem bin Mohammed al Mahrouqi, Minister of Heritage and Tourism, was the chief guest at the event. He handed over prizes to the winners in the presence of a number of Their Excellencies, Sheikh Waleed K al Hashar, the chief executive officer of Bank Muscat, a number of sheikhs as well as large numbers of fans of traditional sports.

Bank Muscat is always at the forefront of participating and supporting various activities and events, which further promote and preserve Oman's traditional heritage and culture. As the sultanate's leading financial services provider, Bank Muscat seeks



to utilise opportunities in reaching out to people and familiarising them with the country's heritage and traditions. Over the course of the last four decades, Bank Muscat has been keenly providing and launching new cutting-edge financial products and services for the benefit of the people in the sultanate.

Bank Muscat focuses on a long-term strategy which aims to provide benefits to the community and the nation. The bank is particularly committed to developmental and social responsibility

within the framework of partnership and support to all segments of society and actively seeks to set an example in Public-Private Partnership. As part of this commitment, Bank Muscat has contributed to the success of various sporting events including the annual Sayyid Abbas Golf Tournament, which is one of the most well-known tournaments in Oman. The bank has also been a constant supporter of the Muscat International Book Fair including the 2022 edition. Earlier, the bank also participated in

Comex 2021 by extending support to the Banking and Financial Technology (Fintech) corner and co-sponsored the Frankincense Project at Expo 2020.

It is worth noting that Bank Muscat's programmes and initiatives have been well appreciated in the past by local, regional and international organisations. Bank Muscat has been honoured by various government and private institutions in appreciation for the leading role it takes in participating in different social events.



Michael XI clinch Grand Challenge Cup

Michael XI claimed the inaugural Challenge Cup tennis ball T10 cricket tournament organised by the Grand Investor Group (GGI) at the Al Hail CC grounds on Saturday.

In the final, Michael XI edged past Kingfisher Cricketers by four wickets.

Sent into bat first, Kingfisher scored 90 for 7 wickets in 10 overs. In reply, Michael XI reached the target with three balls to spare for the loss of six wickets. Ruben of Michael XI was the man of the match in the final.

In the semifinals, Michael XI thrashed Matco XI Barka by eight wickets and Kingfisher thumped Proline Knight Riders by the same margin.

A total of 48 teams took part in the men's Challenge Cup

knockout and five teams participated in the Women's Cup organised as part of Grand cricket tournament from March 4 to 26.

Dr Mohammed Humaid al Alawi, administration and financial manager at Jalan Bani Bu Ali Hospital, was the chief guest for the concluding ceremony in presence of chief organiser Ali Humaid al Alawi, CEO of GGI.

Chief organiser Alawi thanked all the teams for competing in the first Grand tournament.

"I congratulate the winners and thank all teams for making this tournament a success."

"We will start our bigger tournament, Corporate Cup cricket in April," Alawi announced.

Technical director Sanjit Kanojia said the Corporate Cup

is planned with 30 teams.

Pradeep of Kingfisher was selected as the man of the series. Akbar of Michael XI was the best batsman of the tournament, Shafik of Matco XI claimed the best bowler award and Ajay of Kingfisher became the best fielder.

Indian Social Club (ISC) Oman emerged winners of the Women's Cup round-robin event by winning all their four matches. Wadi Kabeer Women finished runners-up with three wins.

Tripti Pawde of ISC won the women of the series award. Shreya of Wadi Kabeer claimed the best batswomen award, teammate Radhika was selected as the best fielder and Yukta of ISC became the best bowler of the tournament.

Apollo Super Specialty Hospital-Al Hail opens



In an august gathering, V T Saileswaran announced the opening of the First Apollo Super Specialty Hospital in Al Hail, Muscat. This is a 10000 sqm facility offering super specialty and subspecialty service with over 25 clinical departments.

The Apollo Hospitals Muscat has been serving the Sultanate of Oman for over 18 years and the new hospital is part of the group's focus to skew towards absolute super specialty space.

Speaking at the soft launch ceremony, Saileswaran, expressed his profound gratitude

to His Majesty, Sultan Haitham bin Tarik for his leadership and the vision for the people of Oman. He further thanked the authorities of the Ministry of Health and the Ministry of Manpower for their guidance and support.

Saileswaran explained about the way disease profiles are changing and the need for the healthcare industry to fathom the need for increasing disease burden. He stated that the Apollo Super Specialty will extend an absolutely patient centric care plan and will have the best of multinational clinical acu-

men to serve the patients. He further remarked that the Apollo Hospitals Muscat family is reiterating its unfailing commitment to the people of Oman by expanding its clinical bandwidth with the underlying objective of reversing the outbound medical travel from the sultanate.

He also announced free registration and consultation service for all Oman nationals throughout the Holy month of Ramadan.

Dr Waleed al Zadjali, medical director of Apollo Group Muscat, said, "We have a combination of a highly specialised clinical team

with the best of infrastructure, technology and digital framework. We will benchmark our clinical outcomes with the best of the west and going forward we will publish our clinical scorecards too. We will also diversify in our healthcare journey. You would soon see us straddling across the healthcare spectrum."

The hospital has 80 rooms and with the soft launch, it will offer services across 25 specialties. The facility has a dedicated preventive health centre and has a unique re-invent, COVID recovery clinic.

Oxy Oman concludes its participation in OPES

Oxy Oman representatives concluded their participation in the Oman Petroleum & Energy Show (OPES). The three-day-event was held at the Oman Convention and Exhibition Centre, and was inaugurated by H H Sayyid Taimur bin Asaad bin Tariq al Said, chairman of the Central Bank of Oman board of governors. Stephen Kelly, president and general manager of Oxy Oman attended the opening event along with other senior representatives of the company.

Oxy Oman representatives took part in the exhibition section of OPES, as well as the Technical Conference that was organised by the Society of Petroleum Engineers (SPE), with the theme 'Shaping the Future of the Energy Industry'.

In the technical conference, Oxy Oman representatives discussed the company's global technological innovations, including its Direct Air Capture (DAC) technology, as well as its long term investments to achieve net zero emissions. Visitors to the Oxy Oman stand at the exhibition were briefed on the company's technologies, achievements with In-Country Value and social responsibility initiatives, as well as its local and international operations.

"The Oman Petroleum & Energy Show highlights the Sultanate's profile and achievements in the Energy sector, and we're proud of Oxy's continuous



presence and support at the conference as we highlight our industry leading operations and technologies. OPES serves as an important platform for knowledge exchange among professionals in the global energy industry on important developments and strategies within the sector, and key challenges and solutions for the future," said Kelly.

This sponsorship falls under Oxy Oman's umbrella of strategic partnerships and continuous collaboration with key stakeholders, and is part of Oxy Oman's endeavor and long-term commitment to support programs that enhance economic growth and sustainable development and that yield a positive impact in the neighbouring communities.



Majan University College wins accolades at GHEDEX

Majan University College (MUC) excelled at the annual GHEDEX event, which took place at the Oman Convention and Exhibition Centre from March 27 to 29, under the patronage of H H Sayyid Fahar bin Fatik al Said. MUC claimed four awards: Three in the specific areas of advanced technology, student support, and best exhibitor, plus a fourth in the 'best of the best' category.

Majan's well-designed and strikingly colourful stand at-

tracted the eyes of large numbers of attendees, many of whom were also aware of the college's reputation and achievements since it was founded in 1995. A wide range of MUC staff attended GHEDEX, mingling with prospective students and colleagues from other institutions so as to promote the College's attractive portfolio of undergraduate and postgraduate programmes, and the bespoke training opportunities it can offer.

MUC also took a prominent part in GHEDEX's International Conference on Quality in Higher Education, under the patronage of H E Sheikh Nasr bin Amer al Hosni, Undersecretary of the Ministry of Labour on March 28.

The College's deputy dean for academic affairs, Nabila al Macki, and its head of the Faculty of Business Management, Dr Ammar al Balushi, both gave well-received presentations that stimulated interest and provoked debate.

Justice ministry organises seminar



The Ministry of Justice and Legal Affairs on Tuesday organised a seminar on 'Renewable Energy' in cooperation with Trowers & Hamblins where he provided an update on the renewable energy projects in the Sultanate of Oman, and a discussion of how rooftop solar installations can be developed and

entities.

The seminar was delivered by Tom Wigley a Partner at Trowers and Hamblins where he provided an update on the renewable energy projects in the Sultanate of Oman, and a discussion of how rooftop solar installations can be developed and

structured from a legal perspective.

This lecture is part of a series of monthly public lectures organised by the Ministry of Justice and Legal Affairs as part of its legal awareness programme. It aims to contribute to the development of the Omani legal re-

searchers' capabilities by benefiting from Oman's previous experiences in raising awareness of the practical areas of legal tasks, sharing practical experiences in all sectors and collaborating with international expertise in order to enrich the Omani experience in the legal field.

Tejarah Talks: Corporate purpose the direct route to success?

Corporate culture is one critical item that should be on every Omani business leader's radar post-COVID 19. This is the key message that emerged from Wednesday evening's Tejarah Talks held at the Civil Aviation Authority Training Centre in Al Hail North.

Organised by the Ministry of Commerce, Industry & Investment Promotion in association with Oman Business Forum and supported by HSBC and SOHAR Port & Freezone Wednesday's Tejarah Talks was moderated by H H Sayyid Dr Adham al Said, founder, The Firm.

He was joined on stage by Sir

Charles Shaw, CEO, Bondoni; Shatha al Maskiry, MD, Protiviti Oman; Dr. Ghalib al Hosni, chief people officer, Omantel; and Saif al Manji, managing consultant, Quintal Ventures.

Thanking Sayyid Dr Adham and the panelists for their valuable contributions to the success of the evening, Maymuna al Adawi, MoCIIP director and Tejarah Talks organiser said:

"We knew corporate culture would be an important topic for discussion at Tejarah Talks, given the shift we have seen in people's expectations over the past two years of the



Shatha al Maskiry

organizations they work for, buy from and invest in. Employees, consumers and shareholders right across Oman are on the look out for businesses that are grounded in purpose and committed to delivering long-term value for their communities. At the end of the day, people want to be associated with businesses that are a force for good."

Sayyid Dr Adham was in agreement with Adawi noting: "In today's environment, to keep staff engaged and attract values-driven Omani consumers, company actions must be led by purpose."

"Purpose", he went on to say "is the galvanising force - something bigger than a company's commercial offering.

I like to think of it as an employee's North Star - this idea of having a sense of direction, intention and understanding that the contribution you are making is going somewhere.

I thought the questions raised by the audience tonight around whether Omani companies are giving brand purpose and values enough attention were valid and important."

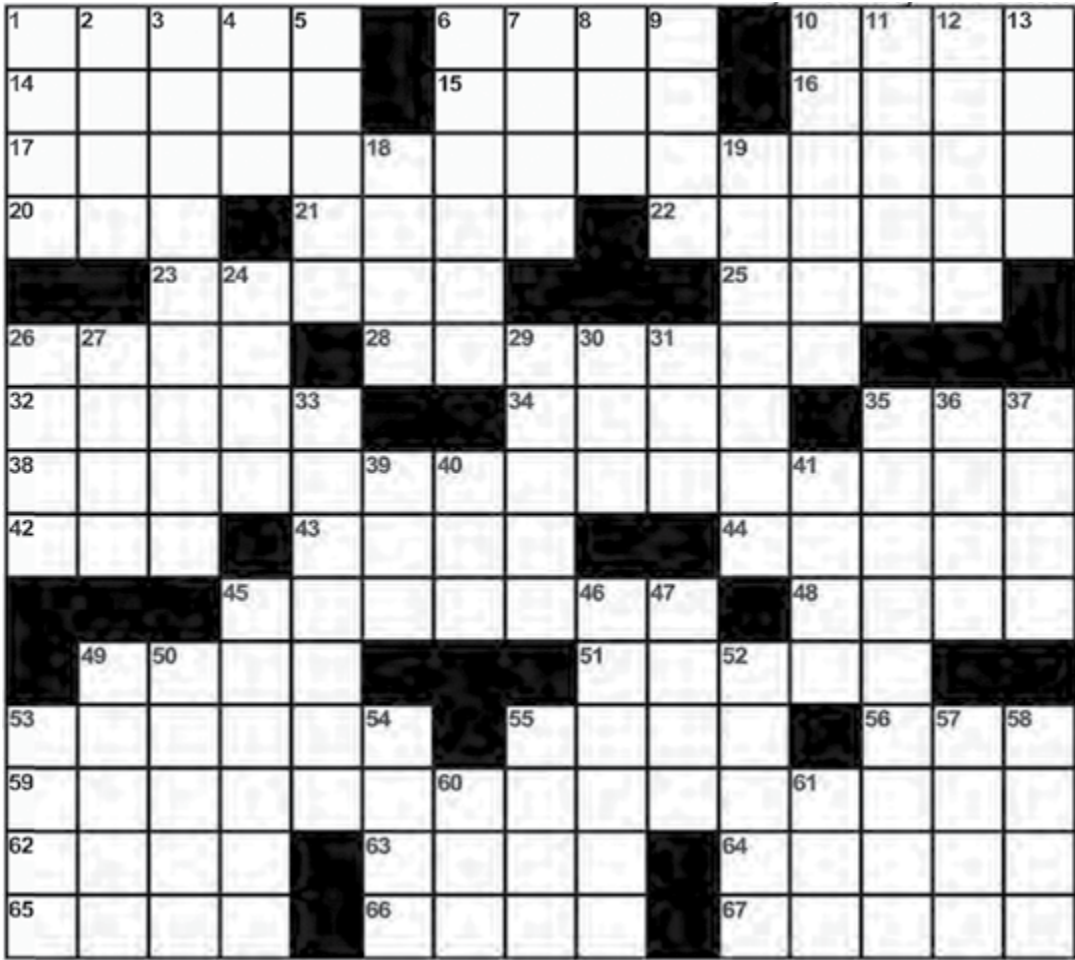
In agreement with Sayyid Dr Adham was panelist Shatha

who pointed out that stakeholders will only believe in a company when its employees are true believers and who behave on brand at every turn.

"To rise to this challenge, Omani management needs to build a purpose-driven corporate culture - specifically, one that is energized by a compelling purpose for good."

"At the end of the day, leaders have to understand that their role is create a work environment where people enjoy what they do because when they enjoy what they do, they will do it better."

DAILY CROSSWORD



ACROSS

1) Nebraskan city
6) Jungle primates
10) Davenport
14) Group of nine
15) Bus money
16) Parts of history
17) Three magic things
20) Word before a maiden name
21) "... and make it fast!"
22) Superdome team
23) Deep cavity
25) They're under the table
26) Completely fill
28) Bad news from car-makers
32) Dodge successfully
34) Johnny Cash's "... Named Sue"
35) After-school grp.
38) Two magic things
MAGIC ACT
42) Planning center?
43) "Yup" opposite
44) Old caulking material
45) Thing tugged by a tyke

48) Infamous fiddler
49) Yarn lump
51) Low point
53) Metal fastener
55) Remove, as a rind
56) Org. involved with many touchdowns
59) Three magic things
62) Insistent impulse
63) Crime boss
64) Russian country house
65) Bouncy gait
66) Try, as a case
67) Luster

DOWN

1) "Do not take... empty stomach"
2) "Encore!"
3) Long-snouted formicary consumers
4) "For... a jolly ..."
5) Cornered
6) Burning
7) Insect's sense organ
8) "... he drove out of sight"
9) Mounts, as a gem
10) Any weekly TV show

11) Round sealing gasket
12) Truisms
13) Emulates a quizmaster
18) Khrushchev's country
19) Fox-hunter's cry
24) Road shoulder
26) Call at home?
27) Bard of... (Shakespeare's title)
29) Ship of the desert
30)... Dhabbi (Persian Gulf sheikdom)
31) "Angeles" header
33) Like pianos and car engines
35) Bluff concealer
36)... de force
37) Armory supply, briefly
39) Chaney Jr. or Sr. of old horror films
40) Befitting
41) Indian princess
45) Marionette kin
46) Fill with affection
47) Clothing
49) Beatie Ringo
50) Key..., Florida

52) Accomplishments
53) Rabbit's tail
54) Carve in stone
55) Insect stage

57) Advil target
58)... impasse (stymied)
60) Scottish denial
61) "Go team!"

NOTE PAD

ATTIC SHACK MOP
CHICO HANOI IRE
TOPER DITION DIE
MOONS LEWDER
ASSENT RESELLS
SPINET MURINE
SAD RECON STORK
ACES ROTOR AFAR
MERIT MINIS TWO
UNICEF PEAHEN
CABANAS SEVERE
AMBITS SPADE
VIL YELLOWBRICK
ENS PITON ESTOP
DOH ENDED DEATH

YOUR DAILY HOROSCOPE

 **ARIES** MARCH 21-APRIL 19

Try to immerse yourself in music today, because it will enliven the humdrum everyday world that surrounds you. If possible, put on your headphones if you must be around other people. You need to stimulate your imagination, and good music can help. Specifically, you should choose music that affects your emotions and songs that feature lyrics about love and affection. Pay attention to the way they make you feel.

 **LEO** JULY 23-AUGUST 22

Here comes your second wind just a little too late for your tastes. Of course, now that it's here, you won't be able to live with yourself if you don't at least try to do something with it. It's okay, just let it go. You'll feel far worse if you exhaust yourself by doing anything at all. Besides, you won't believe how much you'll get done after a little relaxation. Rest is crucial for a brain like yours.

 **SAGITTARIUS** NOVEMBER 22-DECEMBER 21

As of this evening, you'll be feeling even more curious than your nature already ensures and more than willing to investigate all your options. You'll be eager for new information and new experiences. There could be a stumbling block or two on your way, but you learned a long time ago to treat stumbling blocks as simple bumps in the road. Besides, if anyone out there knows exactly how to navigate obstacles via shortcuts, it's you.

 **TAURUS** APRIL 20-MAY 20

Even though you want to get along, it might not be entirely possible at this moment. An emotional tug-of-war seems imminent. The good news is you're confident enough to stop tugging when you realize someone could get hurt, someone who isn't nearly as well armed as you, for example. On one of your bad days, that could be just about anyone. And this is a good day.

 **VIRGO** AUGUST 23-SEPTEMBER 22

You've never been good at waiting and hoping. It's what other people do, lesser people who are more easily appeased. No, taking action has always been your favourite tactic. At the moment, however, you'll have to learn the virtue of patience. You'll also have to understand that you can't be responsible for anyone else's actions. That will be a bit trickier to do.

 **CAPRICORN** DECEMBER 22-JANUARY 19

If you didn't take an oath or write your promise in blood, you might want to consider changing your plans for tonight, mostly because a startling message or event this morning could convince you that wherever you were planning to be isn't where you really want to end up. You have a new beginning on tap. Better get busy making it everything you know it can be. After all, you're the only person who can.

 **GEMINI** MAY 21-JUNE 21

Speaking of being frugal, you might need to pull back your emotions just a bit, even if you were just getting ready to let them out, and it certainly looks as if you were. But no matter what else is going on, pay close attention to your emotional instincts. If they tell you to charge ahead, go for it. If not, sit tight, regardless of what anyone else says. After all, when has your intuition ever let you down?

 **LIBRA** SEPTEMBER 23-OCTOBER 22

Hurry up and wait. One step forward and two steps back. That's how you're feeling today. And even though you can be patient if you try really hard, you're not feeling especially tolerant right now. The good news is once you're over this irritating hump, once you're done spinning your wheels, you'll be out of a rut and able to see things clearly. And with any luck, this particular situation shouldn't come around again.

 **AQUARIUS** JANUARY 20-FEBRUARY 18

Still making that to-do list and checking it twice? Of course you are. You're the very soul of diligence and perseverance, which will come in handy later. Oh, and if you need help, don't forget that age-old expression, a favourite of business managers across the globe: delegate! Certain individuals are more than happy to take over part of the job. Don't be shy.

 **CANCER** JUNE 22-JULY 22

If anyone has a right to be impatient with roadblocks, it's you. You always try your best to keep things running smoothly, and for the most part you do a fine job. But some things even you can't fix, and you're about to encounter one of them: the immovable will of someone who doesn't understand the concept of bending. Don't be impatient with them. Their help will be invaluable when it comes to keeping a relationship together.

 **SCORPIO** OCTOBER 23-NOVEMBER 21

Speaking of plans, don't be put off if you run into a snag in yours. For the next couple of days, getting where you want to be could be tough, and getting in touch with someone you're trying to reach could be even tougher. That doesn't mean you should give up. Your perseverance is the stuff of legends, and anyone who is deliberately avoiding you would obviously have to be a glutton for punishment.

 **PISCES** FEBRUARY 19-MARCH 20

The universe seems to be deliberately tossing obstacles between you and the object of your affection. Whether it's a thousand miles, an ex who just won't let go, or someone's responsibilities to family, don't let it get to you. You've been up against worse challenges. Nothing is insurmountable if you really want to be together. Find a way around the roadblocks. It'll make a great story for your grandkids.



TEST YOUR KNOWLEDGE

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

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

2. What is the engineering term for the slope of a structure, slightly out of the vertical?

A. Batter
B. Slide
C. Fletch
D. Strom

3. The Gregorian calendar was named after what public figure at the time?

A. King of France
B. Britain's Astronomer Royal
C. Pope
D. Holy Roman Emperor

Answers: 1. B 2. A 3. C

KIDS COLOURING



BOGGLER

L	T	E	P
D	R	I	I
L	N	A	A
E	S	G	I

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

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

WORD BUILDER



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

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

SUDOKU EASY ANSWER

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

‘All night’ shelling throws doubt on Russia’s de-escalation pledge



A Ukrainian serviceman stands near a destroyed Russian tank in the northeastern city of Trostianets, on Tuesday. RIGHT: Rescuers conducting search operations and dismantling debris of a government building in Mykolaiv which was hit by Russian rockets on Tuesday (AFP)



Kyiv, Ukraine - Ukraine on Wednesday accused Russia of shelling a city where it had promised de-escalation, dampening hopes of any resolution to a conflict that has killed thousands and displaced millions.

Ukraine and Western powers had already cast doubt on Russia's pledge to reduce military activity around Chernigiv and Kyiv, made during face-to-face talks in Istanbul on Tuesday. "Chernigiv was shelled all night," regional governor Vyacheslav Chaus wrote on social media.

AFP reporters on Wednesday could also hear frequent explosions coming from the direction of the suburban town of Irpin to the northwest of Kyiv.

Ukrainian forces have said they are in control of the town but emergency services said it was still too dangerous for civilians to access.

"The area might be within

mortar range so it is still dangerous," said Petro Kyseliov, acting head of the State Emergency Service of Ukraine in Kyiv.

Russian officials had pledged to 'radically' reduce attacks because of progress in negotiations on 'the neutrality and non-nuclear status' of Ukraine - two central concerns for Moscow.

Both sides called the Istanbul meeting 'meaningful' and 'positive' but the Kremlin on Wednesday played down hopes of a breakthrough.

"We cannot state that there was anything too promising or any breakthroughs," Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov told reporters. "There is a lot of work to be done," Peskov said.

Stock markets, which had been buoyed up by Tuesday's more hopeful comments, slid again and oil prices rose back up on supply concerns.

The Pentagon said Russia had

merely repositioned a 'small number' of forces near Kyiv, and could be preparing a 'major offensive' elsewhere. The 'vast majority' of Russian forces around Kyiv remained in place, said Pentagon spokesman John Kirby.

Ukraine's military also warned the withdrawal of Russian troops around Kyiv and Chernigiv 'is probably a rotation of individual units and aims to mislead'.

Still, the talks in Istanbul marked the first sign of progress in discussions to end the conflict, with Kyiv's negotiator David Arakhmia saying there were 'sufficient' conditions for Zelensky to meet Russian President Vladimir Putin.

‘We’ll see’

But Ukraine's Western allies said they had no plans to ease measures taken to punish Russia for the invasion.

"We'll see if they follow

through on what they're suggesting," US President Joe Biden said on Tuesday after speaking with the leaders of Britain, France, Germany and Italy, who vowed no let-up in sanctions.

On Wednesday, Poland urged the European Union to impose a tax on Russian hydrocarbon imports while Germany raised the alarm level under its emergency gas plan over fears Russia could cut supplies to countries that refuse its demand to be paid in rubles. Russia meanwhile worked on shoring up support from allies. On a visit to China on Wednesday, Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov said: "We, together with you, and with our sympathisers will move towards a multipolar, just, democratic world order."

Ukraine says Russia, which launched its invasion on February 24, is on the back foot.

In recent days, Ukraine's fight-

ers have recaptured territory including Irpin. "The Russians were slowly backed off from Irpin... So now the priority task is to go there and bring back the bodies of those killed," Kyseliov said.

"The bodies are still lying around the streets, they are starting to decay and smell and dogs and other animals are starting to eat them," he said.

Some 20,000 people are believed to have been killed in the conflict so far, according to Zelensky, though the number of casualties could not be independently verified.

On Tuesday a Russian missile strike on the southern town of Mykolaiv left at least 14 dead, Ukrainian officials said.

There was also no progress for the estimated 160,000 people still trapped with little food, water or medicine in the devastated port city of Mariupol.

AFP

Russia’s Lavrov to visit India as pressure over Ukraine invasion builds

New Delhi, India - Russia's foreign minister will visit India for a two-day visit beginning on Thursday, officials said, likely to press New Delhi to resist Western pressure to condemn the Ukraine invasion.

India has abstained from UN resolutions censuring Russia and continues to buy Russian oil and other goods. US President Joe Biden last week described India as 'somewhat shaky' on Russia.

Sergei Lavrov's trip coincides with visits by British foreign secretary Liz Truss and Daleep Singh, Washington's chief sanctions strategist.

Truss and Singh, the US Deputy National Security Advisor for International Economics, were expected to urge India to assist in Western efforts to isolate Russia economically. Singh 'will consult closely with (Indian) counterparts on the consequences of Russia's unjustified war against Ukraine and mitigating its impact on the global economy', the White House said.

shaping of global relations 'we, together with you, and with our sympathisers will move towards a multipolar, just, democratic world order', Lavrov said.

Lavrov was due to attend meetings hosted by China about Afghanistan involving diplomats from the United States and the Taliban-led country's neighbours - but not India, which was not invited.

India's relations with China deteriorated sharply after 20 Indian troops and four Chinese soldiers died in a brawl on their disputed Himalayan border in 2020, although Wang visited India last week.

‘New world order’

Lavrov was due to arrive in India from China, which has also refused to condemn the invasion and has provided a level of diplomatic cover for an increasingly isolated Russia.

In a video released ahead of a meeting with Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi, Lavrov said the world was 'living through a very serious stage in the history of international relations'. At the end of this re-

Old friends

India and Russia have had a close relationship for decades.

New Delhi, which describes Moscow as its 'longstanding and time-tested friend', sources most of its key military hardware from Russia.

India's Russian-origin arsenal includes about 3,500 battle tanks, most of its combat Sukhoi and MiG aircraft, its only aircraft carrier in service, eight non-nuclear submarines and four destroyers.

India also has large Russian orders pending including a US\$5bn deal for S-400 air defence systems - of which the first deliveries began last year - as well as four frigates and one nuclear-powered submarine. India has however been diversifying with big imports from France, the US and Israel.

AFP

‘Over 4mn Ukrainians have fled war’

Geneva, Switzerland - More than four million Ukrainians have now fled the country to escape Russia's 'senseless war', the United Nations said on Wednesday.

UNHCR, the UN refugee agency, said 4,019,287 Ukrainians had fled across the country's borders since the February 24 invasion, with more than 2.3mn having headed west into Poland.

"Refugees from Ukraine are now four million, five weeks after the start of the Russian attack," UNHCR chief Filippo Grandi said on Twitter.

"I have just arrived in Ukraine. In Lviv I will discuss with the authorities, the UN and other partners ways to increase our support to people affected and displaced by this senseless war."

The number of refugees has surpassed UNHCR's initial estimate that the war could create



Residents wait for food outside a church in the northeastern city of Trostianets in Ukraine, on Tuesday (AFP)

up to four million.

The agency says the speed and scale of the displacement is unprecedented in Europe since World War II.

Women and children account

for 90 per cent of those who have fled. Ukrainian men aged 18 to 60 are eligible for military call-up and cannot leave.

The UN's International Organisation for Migration (IOM)

said that in addition to Ukrainian refugees, close to 200,000 non-Ukrainians living, studying and working in the country have also left.

And as of March 16, some 6.48mn people were estimated to be internally displaced within Ukraine, according to an IOM representative survey.

"They need urgent life-saving aid," the organisation said on Wednesday.

"In response to the war in Ukraine, IOM has scaled up its effort to prevent the trafficking of persons both in the country and among those moving throughout the region," it added.

Before Russia's February 24 invasion, Ukraine had a population of 37mn in the regions under government control, excluding Russia-annexed Crimea and the pro-Russian separatist regions in the east.

AFP

UN atomic watchdog chief visits Ukraine nuclear plant

Kyiv, Ukraine - UN atomic watchdog chief Rafael Grossi visited a nuclear power plant in southern Ukraine on Wednesday on his first trip to the country since Russia's invasion raised fears of a nuclear accident.

Grossi has repeatedly warned of the dangers of the conflict - the first in a country with a vast nuclear estate.

Russian forces seized control of the defunct Chernobyl nuclear power plant site - where radioactive waste is still stored - on February 24, the first day of the invasion. They also captured Europe's largest nuclear plant at Zaporizhzhia on March 4, sparking alarm when shelling caused a fire at a training facility.

"I'm at South Ukraine Nuclear Power Plant to meet Ukrainian government officials and staff, and start IAEA technical assis-



This file photo shows Rafael Grossi pointing on a map of Zaporizhzhia nuclear power plant during a press conference in Vienna, Austria, on March 4 (AFP)

tance for safety and security of country's nuclear facilities," the International Atomic Energy Agency head wrote on Twitter on Wednesday.

"Vital to be on the ground to provide effective support to in these extremely difficult times."

Grossi also thanked the staff of the facility - Yuzhnoukrainsk nuclear plant - for 'their en-

durance and resilience'.

"I want to say that we are here with you, that we are ready to support you in whatever way and form we can," he said in a video message also posted on Twitter.

The director of the Ukrainian energy firm Energoatom said on Wednesday that Russian actions were jeopardising safety.

AFP

Britain apologises for hospital scandal over 200 baby deaths

London, UK - More than 200 babies could have survived had they been given better care at birth, a damning report into Britain's biggest maternity scandal said on Wednesday, prompting a government apology.

The report listed a catalogue of repeated failings at the Shrewsbury and Telford Hospital NHS Trust over a 20-year period from 2000 to 2019.

Babies were stillborn, died shortly after birth or were left severely brain-damaged, according to the review, which was ordered in 2017 after concern at the high rates of neonatal deaths at the hospital group.

It also disclosed that nine of 12 mothers who died during the pe-

riod could have had 'significantly' better treatment, and others were made to have natural births when they should have been offered Caesarean sections.

But the state-funded group, which operates several hospitals in Shropshire, central England, either failed to investigate sufficiently or learn from the cases.

The report's author, maternity expert Donna Ockenden, said that meant 'the true scale of serious incidents... went unknown over a long period of time'.

"To all the families that have suffered so gravely, I am sorry," Health Secretary Sajid Javid told parliament, vindicating years of campaigning by those affected.

"The report clearly shows that



Britain's Health Secretary Sajid Javid reacts as he leaves after attending the weekly Cabinet meeting at 10 Downing Street, in London, on March 23 (AFP)

you were failed by a service that was there to help you and your loved ones to bring life into this world."

‘Repeated failures’

Javid and the hospital trust promised to implement the report's dozens of recommendations, acknowledging that the care and even compassion given was not up to standard.

He vowed that those responsible for 'serious and repeated failures' would be held to account. A police investigation is looking at some 600 cases, he added.

The report outlined how some babies suffered skull fractures, broken bones or developed cere-

bral palsy after traumatic forceps deliveries.

Other newborns were starved of oxygen and experienced life-changing brain injuries, according to the review of cases involving nearly 1,500 families and nearly 1,600 clinical incidents.

Of the 498 stillbirths examined, it found that one in four had 'significant or major concerns' over the maternity care given.

Had the care been managed appropriately, they could have had a different outcome, it added. Forty per cent of the stillbirths were never investigated by the trust.

Ockenden said midwifery staff were 'overly confident' in

their abilities, were reluctant to involve senior staff, repeatedly failed to monitor babies' heart rates, and did not use drugs properly in labour.

Caesarean rates were consistently 8-12 per cent below the English average, and staff were determined to keep rates down, despite the risks involved.

Affected families were kept in the dark about reviews of their cases and often treated without compassion and kindness, the 250-page report outlined.

In some cases, some women who died were blamed for their own deaths, while bereaved parents were ignored when they raised concerns.

AFP

Yemen war: Saudi hosts talks sans Houthis

The talks come after the Saudi-led coalition said it would cease military operations during Ramadan

Riyadh, KSA - Talks on Yemen’s devastating war started in the Saudi capital on Wednesday, but without the Houthi rebels, hours after the Riyadh-led coalition announced a ceasefire for the Muslim holy month of Ramadan.

The week-long discussions in the Saudi capital are hosted by the six-nation Gulf Cooperation Council headquartered there and include United Nations envoy Hans Grundberg and Washington’s Tim Lenderking.

The talks come after the Saudi-led coalition backing the Yemeni government said it would cease military operations during Ramadan, which starts when the crescent moon is spotted on Friday or Saturday.

The Iran-backed Houthis - who rejected joining talks held on the territory of its enemy - days ago also made a surprise offer of a truce and of a prisoner swap. The ceasefire, the first since April 2020 in Yemen, has been respected so far.

The recent flurry of statements brings a glimmer of hope in a brutal war that has killed hundreds of thousands and left millions on the brink of famine in Yemen, long the Arab world’s poorest country. “The success of Yemeni consultations is not an option but a reality that must be reached,” said GCC secretary-



This file photo shows Saudi-backed government troops repelling a Houthi rebel offensive on oil-rich Marib, some 120km east of Sanaa on February 14 last year (AFP)

general Nayef al-Hajraf in opening remarks.

‘Sense of urgency’

Both the UN and US envoys welcomed the GCC initiative and praised the warring sides’ pledges to temporarily cease hostilities.

Lenderking said the US supports UN efforts to advance a ‘durable, inclusive resolution’ and backs its truce proposal ‘as a first step towards a comprehensive

ceasefire and a new, more inclusive, political process’. Grundberg said he continues to engage ‘with the parties with a sense of urgency to reach this truce by the beginning of Ramadan’.

On Tuesday night, the coalition announced a ‘cessation of military operations in Yemen beginning at 6am (0300 GMT) on Wednesday’.

This, it said, ‘coincides with the launch of Yemeni-Yemeni consultations with the aim of

creating the appropriate conditions for their success and creating a positive environment during the holy month of Ramadan for peace making in Yemen’.

The rebels had on Saturday called a three-day truce and offered peace talks, but only on condition the Saudis end their blockade and air strikes and remove coalition forces from Yemen. A day later they said a prisoner swap was agreed that

would free 1,400 of their fighters in exchange for 823 pro-government personnel - including 16 Saudis and three Sudanese.

The last prisoner swap in Yemen’s war was in October 2020, when 1,056 were released on each side, according to the International Committee of the Red Cross.

Yemen’s devastated economy and its complex political situation as well as military matters and humanitarian aid are all on

the table at the talks in Riyadh, even as possible outcomes remain unclear. “It is not clear where the Riyadh consultations will lead,” said Maged al-Madhaji, director of the Sanaa Centre for Strategic Studies.

“The meeting’s agenda is still very general, and the discussions will be limited to one party and will not include the Houthis.

“With regard to the peace track, it will not lead to anything because the Houthis are not

there.”
An ‘absent party’
In the Houthis’ view, the meeting ‘has nothing to do with the issue of peace’, Ahmed Al-Emad, a spokesman of the rebels’ foreign ministry, told AFP.

With the rebels absent, the talks ‘are missing an important part of the equation’, a Riyadh-based Arab diplomat told AFP on condition of anonymity.

According to the diplomat, the talks are ‘an attempt to unite all the forces within the pro Saudi-led coalition camp against the absent party’.

The view was shared by Ahmed Nagi of the Malcolm H. Kerr Carnegie Middle East Center in Beirut.

“The main goal of these consultations is to arrange the anti-Houthi side so that there is a shared position and some clarity of vision,” he told AFP.

“These talks do not aim to reach a settlement with the Houthis as much as they aim to rearrange the pro-Saudi coalition side.” Yemen’s 30mn people are in dire need of assistance. A UN donors conference this month raised less than a third of the US\$4.27bn target, prompting dark warnings for a country where 80 per cent of the population depend on aid.

AFP

Israel warns of terror ‘wave’ after shooting rampage

Bnei Brak, Israel - Prime Minister Naftali Bennett warned of a ‘wave of murderous Arab terrorism’ ahead of funerals on Wednesday for two of five people killed in a Palestinian shooting rampage in central Israel.

The shooting of four civilians and a police officer in Bnei Brak, an ultra-religious city near Tel Aviv, was the third fatal attack in the Jewish state in the past week.

“Diaa Armashah, 27, a Palestinian from the West Bank village of Yabad, arrived at Jabotinsky Street in Bnei Brak armed with an M-16 assault rifle,” Israeli police said.

Advancing to a nearby street, he shot dead two Ukrainian nationals aged 32 and 23, and then killed two Israelis before being confronted by police, with one of the officers dying in a gunfight that ensued, they added.

Bennett, who heads a disparate coalition government ranging from Jewish nationalists to Arabs, said that Israel was ‘facing a wave of murderous Arab terrorism’.



Israeli mourners attend the funeral of Avishai Yehezkel, one of the five people killed, in Bnei Brak, on Wednesday (AFP)

The premier will convene an emergency meeting with top security officials on Wednesday to review the situation.

Police said its forces were put on the highest level of alert, and the army said it would deploy extra units in and around the West Bank.

‘Condemned by all’

Tuesday’s shooting brings to 11 the overall number of deaths from several attacks in Israel over the past week, excluding perpetrators.

The latest were identified as Yaakov Shalom, 36, and Avishai Yehezkel, 29, both ultra-Ortho-

dox residents of Bnei Brak, and Amir Khoury, 32, an Arab Christian policeman from Nof Hagalil.

The two slain Ukrainians have yet to be named, with the Ukrainian embassy in Israel confirming their nationality and condemning the ‘heinous terrorist attacks’.

Israel is home to around 15,000 Ukrainian nationals, but since Russia invaded Ukraine on February 24, it has received nearly 20,000 refugees from Ukraine, an interior ministry spokeswoman said. A Ukrainian diplomatic source told AFP they were seasonal workers who had been in Israel for a number of years, rather than war refugees.

An eyewitness said he had seen two dead men outside a cafe where Ukrainian construction workers often gather, as well as the body of his neighbour slumped in a car.

Shlomo Alperin, 23, said he had come across the gruesome scene when the gunfire had subsided and he left his home to investigate.

“It’s painful. It’s your neighbours,” said Alperin. “My neighbour lost his life for nothing.”

The funerals of Yehezkel and Shalom were taking place on Wednesday morning, while Khoury was set to be laid to rest in Nazareth on Thursday.

AFP

Iran again denies women entry to football stadium

Tehran, Iran - Iran has once again denied women entry to a football stadium to watch an international match, leaving hundreds of ticketed fans locked out, Iranian media said.

The World Cup qualifier against Lebanon on Tuesday night, won 2-0 by Iran, was played at the Imam Reza stadium in the northeastern city of Mashhad. “About 2,000 Iranian women, who had bought tickets for the Iran-Lebanon match, were present in the perimeter of Imam Reza stadium, but could not enter the stadium,” ISNA news agency said.

“For this match, 12,500 tickets were sold, of which 2,000 were for women,” it added. Mohsen Davari, governor of Mashhad, told IRI state television: “I apologise that many people couldn’t enter the stadium...”

“Unfortunately, a large

number of people outside the stadium were deprived of watching the game.”

In the face of the controversy, President Ebrahim Raisi on Wednesday ordered the interior ministry to look into the incident.

In January, women were allowed to attend an international for the first time in almost three years, for a World Cup qualifier against Iraq. The Islamic republic has generally barred female spectators from football and other sports stadiums since it was established in 1979.

Clerics, who play a major role in decision-making, argue women must be shielded from the masculine atmosphere and sight of semi-clad men.

But world football’s governing body FIFA ordered Iran in September 2019 to allow women access to stadiums.

AFP

Singapore executes ‘mentally disabled’

Singapore - A Singaporean drug trafficker was hanged on Wednesday in the city-state’s first execution since 2019, campaigners said, despite appeals for clemency from the United Nations and rights groups.

It was the first in what activists fear is a looming wave of executions and came just a day after a mentally disabled Malaysian man lost his final death sentence appeal.

Abdul Kahar Othman, sentenced to death in 2015, was executed early on Wednesday, according to a Singaporean campaigner against capital punishment. “Rest in peace,” tweeted the activist Kirsten Han. “We should all be ashamed of what the state did in our names today.”

AFP

‘North Korea faked launch of so-called monster missile’

Seoul, South Korea - North Korea faked the launch of what analysts have dubbed its ‘monster missile’ last week, Seoul’s military said on Wednesday, adding that the test was, in reality, likely the same intercontinental ballistic missile Pyongyang fired in 2017.

North Korea last Friday claimed to have successfully test-fired a Hwasong-17 missile - a long-range ICBM that analysts say may be capable of carrying multiple warheads - which it first unveiled at a military parade in 2020.

But South Korea’s defence ministry told AFP that Seoul and Washington have now concluded that the launch was actually a Hwasong-15, an ICBM that Pyongyang test-fired in 2017.

“US and South Korean intelligence has determined that what was fired on March 24 was a Hwasong-15,” the defence ministry official told AFP.

Both ICBMs are potentially



This file photo shows North Korean leader Kim Jong Un (centre) walking near an inter-continental ballistic missile (ICBM) before its test launch at an undisclosed location in North Korea on March 24 (AFP)

capable of hitting the mainland United States.

Seoul and Tokyo had separately confirmed at the time that the March 24 missile had flown

higher and longer than any previous test - but analysts later pointed to discrepancies in North Korea’s account.

The false announcement was

likely an attempt by Pyongyang to compensate for a failed launch on March 16, when a missile, which analysts said was actually the Hwasong-17, exploded

shortly after launch.

According to Seoul-based specialist website NK News, debris from the failed test fell in or near Pyongyang as a red-tinged ball of smoke zigzagged across the sky. ‘Pyongyang residents must have been shocked’ by the failed launch, and it may have affected public opinion of the Kim regime, lawmaker Ha Tae-keung of the conservative opposition People’s Power Party (PPP), told reporters.

North Korea’s state media - Rodong Sinmun and KCNA news agency - did not report on the failed launch at the time.

They typically carry reports on successful weapons tests within 24 hours of launch, often with photographs.

But the March 24 launch was trumpeted in state media, with KCTV releasing a slick video purportedly showing the giant missile being successfully test-fired.

Analysts have pointed out discrepancies in the footage which

may indicate parts of the March 24 launch were faked.

‘Propaganda value’

The isolated country’s economy is reeling from UN sanctions over leader Kim Jong Un’s weapons programmes and a two-year-long self-imposed COVID blockade. “Not only does the Kim regime derive pride and legitimacy from its nuclear and missile programmes, it portrays building military strength against external threats as moral justification for domestic economic suffering,” Leif-Eric Easley, a professor at Ewha University in Seoul, told AFP. The ‘successful’ launch as portrayed in state-controlled media has significant ‘propaganda value’ for the Kim regime, he added.

Analysts have warned that North Korea will likely launch a military reconnaissance satellite and conduct tactical nuclear warhead tests later this year.

AFP

Pakistan PM's future in doubt as coalition ally switches sides

Islamabad, Pakistan - Pakistan Prime Minister Imran Khan's future looked increasingly in doubt on Wednesday after a key coalition partner switched allegiance ahead of a parliamentary no-confidence vote this weekend.

The cricket-star-turned premier was expected to address the nation in the evening, as weeks of political turmoil come to a head - including allegations of foreign interference.

No prime minister in the country's history has seen out a full term, and Khan is facing the biggest challenge to his rule since being elected in 2018, with opponents accusing him of economic mismanagement and foreign-policy bungling.

Debate on the no-confidence motion is due to start on Thursday, leaving Khan scrambling to keep his own Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) members on side - as well as a slew of minority parties.

On paper the PTI and coalition partners have 176 seats in the 342-member assembly, but on Wednesday the Muttahida Qaumi Movement (MQM-P) said its seven lawmakers would vote with the opposition, which has a combined 163 seats.

More than a dozen PTI lawmakers have also indicated they will cross the floor, although party leaders are trying to get the courts to prevent them from voting on Sunday.

In the past, Pakistan parties have also resorted to physically preventing lawmakers from voting against key legislation by blocking access to the national assembly, leading to cat-and-mouse chases and even accusa-



A supporter of ruling Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf party holds a placard with a picture of PM Imran Khan during a rally in Islamabad on Sunday (AFP)

tions of kidnapping.

Senior MQM-P leader Faisal Subzwari tweeted on Wednesday that his party had finalised an agreement with the opposition, led by the Pakistan People Party (PPP) and Pakistan Muslim League (PML-N).

Hours later, MQM-P heavyweight Syed Amin-ul-Haque announced his resignation as tech minister in Khan's cabinet.

Feuding dynasties

The PML-N and PPP dominated national politics for decades until Khan forged a coalition against the usually feuding dynastic groups.

He was elected after promising to sweep away decades of entrenched corruption and

cronyism, but has struggled to maintain support with inflation skyrocketing, a feeble rupee and crippling debt.

Some analysts say Khan has also lost the crucial support of the military - claims both sides deny - and Pakistan's army is key to political power.

There have been four military coups - and at least as many unsuccessful ones - since independence in 1947, and the country has spent more than three decades under army rule.

If Khan loses next week's vote, a new government could be headed by PML-N's Shehbaz Sharif, the brother of former prime minister Nawaz Sharif, who has not returned since being released from jail to get

medical treatment abroad.

Also given a senior role will likely be the PPP's Bilawal Bhutto Zardari, son of assassinated former prime minister Benazir Bhutto and ex-President Asif Zardari.

One card up Khan's sleeve could be to call an early election - the next one must be held before October 2023.

"The best option in this situation would have been fresh elections to enable the new government to handle economic, political and external problems faced by the country," said political analyst Talat Masood, a retired general.

"The country is heading towards something unpredictable... where there is going

to be a lot of chaos and problems," he said.

Hassan Askari, another political analyst, agreed.

"The long-term political repercussion of the evolving situation will be instability, continued conflict in politics and inability to cope with economic challenges that Pakistan is currently facing," he said.

Imran Khan has railed against his domestic opponents for weeks, but on Sunday told a rally in the capital that a 'foreign conspiracy' was also plotting his removal. "We have been threatened in writing but we will not compromise on national interests," he said, without offering evidence or details.

AFP



A woman waits in a queue to buy kerosene for home use at a service station in Colombo last week (AFP)

Sri Lanka imposes 10-hour blackouts, hospitals stop routine surgeries

Colombo, Sri Lanka - Sri Lanka on Wednesday began imposing record nationwide 10-hour daily power cuts as more hospitals announced the suspension of routine surgeries in response to severe shortages of fuel and life-saving medicines.

The South Asian nation of 22mn people is in its worst economic crisis since independence in 1948, sparked by an acute lack of foreign currency to pay for imports. The state electricity monopoly said it was imposing the 10-hour power cut, up from a seven-hour outage since the start of the month, because there was no oil to power thermal generators.

More than 40 per cent of Sri Lanka's electricity is generated from hydropower, but most of the reservoirs were running dangerously low because there had been no rains, officials said.

Most electricity production is from coal and oil. Both are imported but in short supply, as the country does not have enough foreign exchange to pay for sup-

plies. At least two more hospitals reported suspending routine surgeries because they were dangerously low on vital medical supplies, anaesthetics and chemicals to carry out diagnostic tests, and wanted to save them for emergency cases.

The country's biggest medical facility, the National Hospital of Sri Lanka, said it had also stopped routine diagnostic tests.

An official added however that the facility continued to receive power supply from the national grid.

No diesel for two days

Sri Lanka's main fuel retailer meanwhile said there would be no diesel, the fuel most commonly used for public transport, in the country for at least two days. Officials from the state-owned Ceylon Petroleum Corporation told motorists waiting in long queues at petrol stations to leave and return only after imported diesel is unloaded and distributed.

AFP

Australian beach town of Byron Bay inundated by floodwaters

Sydney, Australia - The Australian coastal enclave of Byron Bay, known for its celebrity residents and idyllic beaches, was inundated by floodwaters on Wednesday as severe storms again battered the country's east.

Torrential rain that began on Monday proved unrelenting, with nearly 300mm falling in the area in 24 hours, forcing many shops in the Byron Bay town centre to close as roads were cut off by rising water levels.

Byron's normally buzzing high street - lined with popular restaurants, bars and clothing stores - was all but empty, transformed into a river by the metre-high, mud-brown floodwaters.

In the nearby town of Alstonville, 420mm of rain fell in 24 hours.

By Wednesday afternoon, there were 16 evacuation orders in place across the affected region, urging thousands of people to leave their homes for higher ground.

For weeks Australia's east has been smashed by extreme weather, fuelled by La Nina weather patterns and climate change.

Record rainfalls and deadly flooding have killed at least 22 people since early February.

In Lismore, which last month was devastated by record 14.3-metre floods, the town's levee was breached on Wednesday morning, sweeping away any progress made by a weeks-long clean-up effort.

The town's local member of parliament Justine Elliot warned residents on social media that the levee's siren would not sound because of a malfunction.



An Australian Army Bushmaster moves through floodwaters to conduct evacuation tasks in New South Wales town of Lismore on Wednesday (AFP)

"You MUST get out now," she wrote on Twitter.

'Compounding trauma'

Lismore business owner and community organiser Sally Flannery told AFP that water levels in the town had reached the second storey of some homes and businesses, as they did last month during record floods.

"It's almost 12 metres now, and it's still rising," she said.

Flannery said the renewed flooding was 'compounding trauma' in the town as many people who lost their homes just weeks ago have now had to evacuate from their emergency accommodation.

"It's becoming almost impos-

sible to live here," she said, fearing 'a mental health crisis' in the wake of these rolling disasters.

"I'm a staunch Lismore advocate and I don't know that I'll be going back to live in the flood zone."

But with rental prices on high ground skyrocketing, 'there's not a lot of other options', she said.

During a visit to Lismore in the aftermath of last month's floods, Australia's prime minister Scott Morrison said the country was 'getting hard to live in because of these disasters'.

"We are dealing with a different climate to the one we were dealing with before. I think that's just an obvious fact," he said at the time.

AFP

'Mesmerising' Shane Warne bid farewell at state memorial service

Melbourne, Australia - Shane Warne was remembered as 'mesmerising' and a 'genius' at a state memorial service in Melbourne on Wednesday attended by tens of thousands of spectators and legendary players, with music superstars Elton John and Chris Martin performing by video link.

The well-loved Australian cricketer died at a luxury resort in Thailand this month from a suspected heart attack, aged 52, eliciting shock and grief from his millions of fans as well as prime ministers, rock stars and fellow players.

The larger-than-life 'king of spin' was honoured at a two-hour service at the Melbourne Cricket Ground with more than 50,000 free tickets handed out. It was beamed live to cricket grounds across Australia and watched around the world.

"Looking forward to a future without Shane is inconceivable," his heartbroken father Keith said after batting great Donald Bradman's granddaughter Greta sang the national anthem to kick off proceedings.

"But we take comfort in knowing that Shane packed more into his life of 52 years, five months and 19 days than most people would in two lifetimes."

Warne's son Jackson said there was 'no other better place in the whole world' to hold the memorial than the famous MCG where Warne made so many memories, including a hat-trick in an Ashes Test against England and taking his 700th Test wicket.

"It's very special for a lot of us, especially our family," he said.



Shane Warne's daughter Brooke Warne receives guests during the state memorial service for the former Australian cricketer at Melbourne Cricket Ground (MCG) in Melbourne on Wednesday (AFP)

A stand at the ground was officially re-named after Warne, who in the eyes of many is second only to Bradman in Australia's long list of sporting greats.

Some fans attending wore their cricket kit, while others donned Warne t-shirts with emotions running high as they snapped pictures in front of his statue outside the venue.

One woman showed off her new thigh tattoo of Warne, which she had done last week.

Mark Taylor, who captained him for Australia, said the huge interest showed 'how admired Shane Warne was'.

"The fact he had that rough diamond character about him made him what people like to see. People like to see something a bit different, and they got that

with Warnie," Taylor told reporters. Fellow Australian captain Allan Border called him 'a genius'.

"I don't know how the Oxford dictionary defined genius, but he's as close as I've been to genius, the way he developed his game and just transcended everything," he said. "He's left us with a flood of memories and such great times."

'Loved life'

Current Australian Test captain Pat Cummins released a moving tribute online, reading a poignant poem written about Warne while one-day skipper Aaron Finch pointed to his fellow Victorian's charity work.

"His cricketing ability was one thing, but his generous heart for second to none," Finch said from

Pakistan.

Music stars Elton John, Martin, Robbie Williams and Ed Sheeran all played songs via video link.

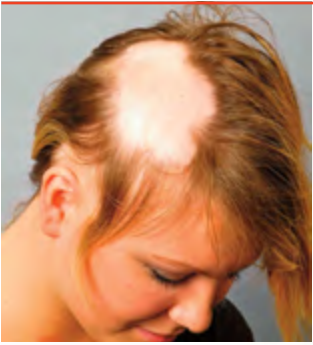
"It's a sad day today but it's not in some ways because his legacy lives on and he will live on through future generations because he was mesmerising, brilliant and loved to play cricket and loved life," said John before singing *Don't Let The Sun Go Down On Me*.

A barefoot Martin, at the piano, performed *Eulogy*, a piece he wrote for Warne, before a solo acoustic rendition of Coldplay's *Yellow*. Hollywood star Hugh Jackman was among others appearing remotely, as was golfer Greg Norman and surfing giant Kelly Slater.

AFP

STRESSED ABOUT TRESSES

HAIR LOSS AMONG WOMEN IS PAINFUL, DEPRESSING AND EMBARRASSING, SAY A HOST OF CELEBRITIES WHO HAVE GONE PUBLIC WITH THEIR FEELINGS. THE TRUTH IS – THERE IS NO CURE FOR ALOPECIA



TYPES OF ALOPECIA

Symptoms of hair loss are similar in both males and females. However, the treatment for alopecia may vary. The common forms of alopecia in women are:

- Diffuse Alopecia Areata**
This is when hair loss is found over the entirety of the scalp
- Areata Monolocularis**
Limited to one area on the scalp
- Aeata Multicocularis**
Found on several different areas of the scalp.
- Ophiasis**
Found in waves around the circumference of the scalp.
- Areata Barbae**
Loss of hair limited to simply the face and neck region.
- Alopecia Totalis**
A total loss of hair to the scalp region.
- Alopecia Universalis**
A total loss of hair including all body hair.

ALOPECIA

The subject of hair loss has rushed into the public consciousness after Will Smith slapped comedian Chris Rock for making a joke about his wife Jada Pinkett Smith's lack of hair at the Oscars earlier this week. Pinkett had spoken out for the first time in 2018 about her diagnosis of alopecia - a medical term referring to the loss of hair. "It was one of those times in my life where I was literally shaking with fear," the actress and director said on her online show *Red Table Talk*. "And that was when I was like, 'Oh, my God. Am I going bald?'" Democratic Congresswoman Ayanna Pressley, who went public with her diagnosis in 2020, also took to Twitter last Monday.

"Let's talk about what it's like to live with #alopecia," she posted. "The deeply vulnerable and difficult moments that our families see. Appreciation post for those who hold us down and support us when we're at our lowest points. They see us, fully."

As Hollywood inches towards a healthier balance between female beauty ideals and the lived reality, more actresses have begun speaking out about the impact of losing their hair - due to stress, hormonal changes after giving birth and even COVID-19.

"This is so not glamorous, but it's true: I need to take longer showers so that I can collect the hair that falls out and throw it away so I don't clog the drain. Why do actresses never talk about that?" Selma Blair told *People* magazine in 2011 after giving birth. Alyssa Milano, who says she lost her hair after being infected with coronavirus, said it had affected her whole sense of self. "It's hard, especially when you're an actor and so much of your identity is wrapped up in those things like having long silky hair and clean skin."

Actress Ricki Lake wrote on Instagram in 2020 that she had struggled for her whole life with hair loss. "It has been debilitating, embarrassing, painful, scary, depressing, lonely, all the things. There have been a few times where I have even felt suicidal over it."

Oscar winner Viola Davis said she had tried to hide the effects of her alopecia with wigs. "I had a wig I wore around the house. I had a wig that I wore to events. I had a wig that I wore when I worked out," she told an interviewer. "I never showed my natural hair... I was so desperate for people to think that I was beautiful."

Davis, who has been more open about the subject in the last decade, even included it in the series *How to Get Away with Murder*, when her character, a strong-willed lawyer and teacher, removes her wig exposing her very short hair.

The National Alopecia Areata Foundation (NAAF) in the US called Monday for more people to learn about the condition. It said alopecia areata, a specific type of balding caused by an autoimmune disorder that makes hair often fall out in clumps, affects about seven million people in the United States and about 147 million worldwide.

"It can be unpredictable and cause significant physical, emotional/mental health, psycho-social, and financial burdens -- and there is no cure, effective treatment or standard of care," the NAAF said.

"Alopecia areata does not discriminate and can affect anyone at any age and may be a temporary or life-long condition. Many people living with the condition are suffering, and we must do better to support this community and erase the stigma, discrimination, and societal barriers that persist."

AFP



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MUAY THAI



JUST FOR KICKS

Wadha Abdallah Ahmed al Harthi, the first Omani youth to attain the title of a 'Guru' in Muay Thai – a martial art and combat sport – is all set to pass on what he learnt to those interested in Oman

Hubert Vaz

The journey had been long, the quest for attaining perfection relentless, and the determination to succeed against all odds was the only fuel that enabled Wadha Abdallah Ahmed al Harthi follow his dream with unflinching zeal. From 'guy next door' to 'Guru' it was an achievement ten years in the making but the satisfaction from doing so is now limitless for him.

Being the first Omani to attain the title of 'Guru' in Muay Thai, Wadha believes that martial arts like this have universal acceptance and varied application for people of all ages and genders in the current age. It's not intended so much for engagement in a critical situation as it is for instilling discipline in life and gearing up the individual to sharpen his/her intellect and instincts for suitable use in any situation. An exponent of Muay Thai will use all the skills at his disposition to avoid a combat, but when it is inevitable, he is ready to deliver a fitting lesson to his/her opponent, he asserts.

A full time event planner at the Oman Convention and Exhibition Centre and a part-time advisor for Oman Investments Au-

thority, Wadha currently runs his own gym – Muscat Mixed Martial Arts Gym – where he is a founding partner and coach in Muay Thai and Kickboxing. He is also a 'Kru' (teacher/guru) at Kru Muay Thai Association and member of the World Muay Thai Boran Association – the first Omani to receive this honourable title.

Awestruck by martial art movies

"It's only curiosity which motivated me to learn Muay Thai. I was very interested in watching martial arts related movies of Jackie Chan and Bruce Lee and, somehow, it created an interest in me to pursue training in this regard," said Wadha, disclosing that he had to travel far and wide to learn various martial arts after doing substantial research on the internet about the best fighters and the best places to learn various martial arts.

In 2012, he had his first brush with Muay Thai when he visited Thailand for a month to learn the basics of this form of kickboxing. That sparked his passion for martial arts and he soon proceeded to Nepal where he stayed in a monastery in the mountains and learnt Kung Fu Nan from the monks.

He also proceeded to Sri Lanka to learn 'Angampora' – a local martial art that combines combat techniques, self-defence, sport, exercise, and meditation – from an 88-



With the 'Angampora' teacher in Sri Lanka and (right) receiving his coach certificate in Thailand



Those who initiate a fight are those who have never learnt martial arts. The foundation of martial arts is about communicating well in a critical situation, not fighting

WADHA AL HARTHI

year old exponent, a legend in his own right. He also went to the Netherlands to learn Dutch Kickboxing from the popular Jimmy's Gym, besides Dubai and Bahrain to learn mixed martial arts.

Wadha said he wanted to learn different martial arts from the places where they have originated or become popular and so felt the urge to travel around to pursue his goals.

"I wanted to go deep to the roots and to live and learn from the people where different martial arts originated. I believe, martial

arts is not just one discipline, rather a combination of different techniques which you learn before you create your very own style," said Wadha, admitting that his desire to learn martial arts did not stem from any incident of bullying or harassment, as many other exponents confess.

"I wanted to learn martial arts only because I was awestruck by some movies when I was young. But later on, I discovered that it gives you discipline, confidence and helps you refine your lifestyle. I took this up

without any specific goal but I now want to teach it to my students to help them benefit from it," he asserted, adding that he is confident of being able to share his skills even with those employed in the police or defence services, if his services are sought.

Those who learn martial arts can use it to improve their own life skills and it is beneficial even for those with special needs, Wadha said, adding that his students comprise people who fall in two categories – those who want to participate in combat sports and those who are just passionate about learning it.

The best war is 'no war'

He also disclosed that he has trained students who needed it to defend themselves against unknown opponents as well as in case of domestic violence within the home. Quoting a proverb by Bruce Lee, who said, 'I prefer being a warrior in a garden than being a gardener in a war', he asserted, "The purpose of learning martial arts is not for being ready to handle any incident or for fighting. The author of 'The Art of War' – Sun Tzu – said 'the best war is no war'. In the same way, a martial artist will never fight, he will use his skills to control a situation to avoid a fight. Those who initiate a fight are those who have never learnt martial art," he said, adding that women who learn martial arts do so not to be able to fight with anyone, rather to be able to control a situation skillfully. "The foundation of martial arts is about communicating well in a critical situation, not fighting."

Wadha also admitted that martial arts helped him develop discipline, confidence, emotional intelligence, to be able to focus on tasks, to work under pressure, to solve problems, communicate effectively as well as multi-task without crumbling under a workload. Hence, there are many benefits of learning martial arts which help one deal with life and its challenges in a better manner.



Naomi Osaka of Japan reacts during her Women's Singles match against Danielle Collins of the United States (AFP)

Osaka breezes into last four at Miami

Miami, United States - Naomi Osaka moved into the Miami Open semi-finals with another impressive performance as an out-of-sorts American Danielle Collins was brushed aside at the Hard Rock Stadium on Tuesday.

The clinical Japanese star, yet to drop a set in this tournament, won 6-2, 6-1 and will meet Swiss Olympic gold medal winner Belinda Bencic in the last four.

Collins, who appeared to be struggling with a neck injury and has been suffering with a viral infection, will return to the top 10 when the rankings are released on Monday having briefly been there following her run to the Australian Open final earlier this year.

But Osaka, the four-time Grand Slam champion, has been in fine form in south Florida and on this evidence will take a lot of stopping if she is to be denied the title this weekend.

"I hope she is ok," said Osaka after her victory over the struggling Collins.

"This was my first night match so I didn't know what the conditions were like but I was fine and the fans were great," added Osaka who hit 12 aces in a match that lasted exactly one hour.

Bencic, the world number 28, who beat Australia's Daria Saville 6-1, 6-2, said: "I have played Osaka before, so I know how it feels to play her."

"I'm really happy I achieved a great result here and everything else is a bonus. I'm going to enjoy and do the best I can."

In Wednesday's remaining WTA quarter-finals, American Jessica Pegula will play Spain's Paula Badosa while Czech Petra Kvitova takes on world number one Iga Swiatek of Poland.

AFP

Mane sinks Egypt again, Partey sends Ghana to World Cup

Diamniadio, Senegal - Liverpool star Sadio Mane converted a shoot-out penalty on Tuesday to take African champions Senegal to the 2022 World Cup in Qatar at the expense of Egypt.

Cameroon, Ghana, Morocco and Tunisia also booked their places in the finals on a frantic night of play-off action.

Senegal won the second leg of the African play-off 1-0 in Diamniadio thanks to a fourth-minute goal from Boulaye Dia and the teams finished level at 1-1 on aggregate after extra time.

As was the case in the Africa Cup of Nations final last month, Mane was entrusted with taking the crucial fifth Senegal kick and once again he made no mistake to give his side a 3-1 shoot-out victory.

Among the three Egyptians who failed to score in the shoot-out was Sane's Liverpool teammate Mohamed Salah, who uncharacteristically blazed his kick over the crossbar.

Only four of the nine penalty takers were successful with captain Kalidou Koulibaly and Saliou Ciss missing for Senegal and Salah, 'Zizo' and Mostafa Mohamed for Egypt.

As Senegal celebrated a second straight qualification for the World Cup, Egypt were left to lament another dramatic loss to Senegal this year.

There were no goals in the Cup of Nations final that went to extra time in Yaounde last month, leading to a shoot-out which Senegal won 4-2 with Mane converting the fifth penalty for his side.

"It was important to get off to a good start, something we had not done in Cairo," said Senegal coach Aliou Cisse.



Senegal's Sadio Mane (C) controls the ball during the World Cup 2022 qualifying match against Egypt in Diamniadio on March 29

There is not much to say - just nice words for the players for the game they played.

Congratulations to Senegal

CARLOS QUEIROZ

"This team is better equipped (than the one which qualified for the 2018 finals). We (should have been) able to qualify in regular time given the chances we missed."

Egypt coach Carlos Queiroz said, "There is not much to say -- just nice words for the players for the game they played. Con-

gratulations to Senegal."

The drama in Diamniadio came soon after Arsenal midfielder Thomas Partey scored the goal that took Ghana to the World Cup as they forced a 1-1 draw in Nigeria to win the play-off on away goals.

Partey struck after 10 minutes in Abuja and although an-

other Premier League star, William Troost-Ekong, levelled from a 22nd-minute penalty, Nigeria failed to score again. The first leg ended goalless.

Goalkeeping howler

But the home team fell behind early on when Partey's shot from outside the box slipped between the hands of goalkeeper Francis Uzoho and into the net.

Troost-Ekong was the calmest person in the cauldron of noise midway through the opening half as he sent Ghana goalkeeper Jojo Wollacott the

wrong way from the penalty spot to equalise.

Napoli forward Victor Osimhen had the ball in the net for Nigeria soon after, but it was ruled offside after a VAR check.

Nigeria applied constant second-half pressure, but could not break down a Ghana defence marshalled by Leicester City centre-back Daniel Amartey.

Karl Toko Ekambi scored in the fourth minute of added time at the end of extra time to gave Cameroon a dramatic 2-1 win over Algeria in Blida and qualification on away goals.

AFP

Portugal and Poland book spots in World Cup Qatar 2022

Paris, France - Portugal beat North Macedonia 2-0 and Poland saw off Sweden by the same score in play-off finals on Tuesday to book their places in the 2022 World Cup in Qatar.

Bruno Fernandes scored both goals for Portugal to overcome the Balkan nation that had knocked out European champions Italy in a stunning result last week. Italy's shock exit had North Macedonia dreaming of their first ever appearance at a World Cup finals but Portugal proved a step too far in Porto.

Fernandes set Portugal on their way at the Estadio do Dragao by finishing off Cristiano Ronaldo's pass in the first half and then put the victory beyond doubt in the second, connecting



Portugal's forward Cristiano Ronaldo (L) and defender Pepe celebrate qualifying for the World Cup 2022

with a sublime cross from Diogo Jota. The victory means Portugal extend their run of qualifying for all six of the World Cups since

the turn of the century while Manchester United forward Ronaldo is on course for his fifth, aged 37. Ronaldo's best previous



Poland's players react after winning the FIFA World Cup Qatar 2022 qualifying final first Leg over Sweden

result was reaching the semi-finals in 2006, when Portugal were beaten by Germany.

Portugal coach Fernando San-

tos said: "I would like to congratulate the players for their attitude and their quality. We controlled the match in a very clear way.

"Now, having already won the Euro and the Nations League we have a dream of bringing enormous joy to Portugal."

Lewandowski inspires Poland

Robert Lewandowski stroked home a second-half penalty as Poland booked their berth in front of a fervent home crowd in Chorzow.

After the Poland captain converted a spot kick, Piotr Zielinski completed the scoring with a superb second goal for the hosts.

Poland go into Friday's draw for the group stages of the World Cup finals, from November 21 to December 18, after dominating the second half.

The Poles were awarded the

crucial penalty just after half-time when midfielder Sebastian Szymanski rolled the ball to substitute Grzegorz Krychowiak, who was fouled by Jesper Karlstrom.

The referee pointed straight to the spot and Lewandowski casually arced his run, waited for Robin Olsen to move and then slotted the ball to the left of the Swedish goalkeeper.

It was his 75th goal for Poland and arguably one of his most important. "It was really tough. I mean, this pressure!" Lewandowski said. "Even though I have taken many penalties in my career, this was one difficult." I knew this moment would have so much significance.

AFP



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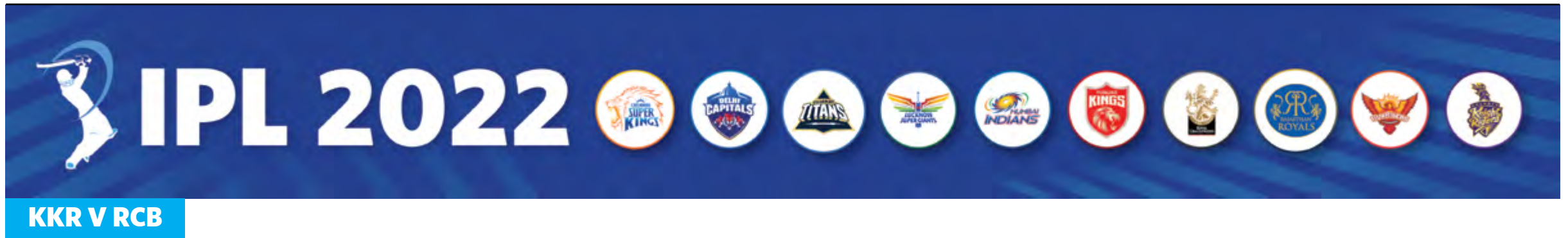
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KKR V RCB

Challengers win low-scoring thriller against Knight Riders



BRIEF SCORES:

Kolkata Knight Riders 128/10 in 18.5 overs (Andre Russel 25 (18) 1 x 4, 3 x 6; Wanindu Hasaranga de Silva 20/4; Akash Deep 45/3) lost to Royal Challengers Bangalore 132/7 in 19.2 overs (Shahbaz Ahmad 27 (20) 3 x 6; Dinesh Karthik 14 (7); Umesh Yadav 16/2; Tim Southee 20/3) by 3 wickets

TODAY'S MATCH (6PM)



LUCKNOW SUPER GIANTS

VS



CHENNAI SUPER KINGS

Clash of Kings and Giants: Both out to prove positives matter

Mumbai, India - Newbies Lucknow Super Giants and oldies Chennai Super Kings both lost their opening games of IPL 2022, but neither side would be fussed just yet. In fact, Super Giants' captain KL Rahul went on to say they "couldn't have started the campaign in any better way".

Obviously it is early days in the tournament but the main reason behind Rahul saying so was Super Giants' middle order stepping up after a top-order collapse. On paper, the middle order is one of their weak areas but Deepak Hooda and Ayush Badoni played crucial knocks and helped them recover from a precarious 29 for 4. One thing Rahul might rue is his use of Dushmantha Chameera. Chameera was Super Giants' most threatening bowler on the night but didn't even get to bowl his full quota.

Super Kings anyway have a



Super Kings have a reputation for being calm and composed irrespective of the results. They too found positives in the defeat against KKR. MS Dhoni struck 50 off 38 balls and Dwayne Bravo picked up 3 for 20.

reputation for being calm and composed irrespective of the results. But they too found positives in the defeat against Kolkata Knight Riders. MS Dhoni struck an unbeaten 50 off 38 balls and Dwayne Bravo picked up 3 for 20 from four overs. Both have retired from international cricket and their striking form straightaway is a good sign for the franchise.

After getting their feet wet, both sides will now be eyeing first points.

In the news

Super Giants will once again be without Jason Holder, who will only be available from their next match. There is no official word on Andrew Tye though. If available, he could replace Mohsin Khan given they had picked only three overseas players in their last game.

Super Kings will have Moeen Ali back. He missed their first

game because of visa issues but is now likely to come in for Mitchell Santner.

Strategy punt

At the 2021 T20 World Cup, Moeen was impressive with the ball in the powerplay. In 11 overs in that phase, he picked up five wickets at an economy rate of 5.7. Super Kings can pit him against de Kock. While de Kock has taken 53 runs off 38 balls against Moeen, the offspinner has dismissed him four times in eight T20 innings.

Krunal Pandya could be Super Giants' trump card against Super Kings' middle order. In all T20s, Krunal has conceded 37 off 33 against Robin Uthappa (two dismissals), 28 off 25 against Ambati Rayudu (two dismissals), 15 off 15 against Ravindra Jadeja (two dismissals) and 17 off 24 against Dhoni (no dismissal).

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'Monster' Inoue to face Donaire in sequel to boxing classic

Tokyo, Japan - Japan's Naoya Inoue will face Nonito Donaire in a bantamweight title unification fight in Japan in June, adding a sequel to their classic 2019 encounter.

The unbeaten Inoue's WBA and IBF titles and Donaire's WBC belt will all be on the line when they meet on June 7 in Saitama, the same venue where Inoue beat Donaire three years ago at the World Boxing Super Series. That bout was hailed as one of the fights of the year and saw Inoue recover from a fractured eye socket and double vision early on to floor Donaire in the 11th round and seal a unanimous points win.

The excitement and action of that fight left the entire boxing world wanting more. The ferocious-punching Inoue, known as "Monster" and regarded as one of boxing's best pound-for-pound fighters, is unbeaten in all his 22 bouts, winning 19 by knockout.

He said the rematch with Donaire (42-6) "feels like we're continuing... the 13th round" after their previous fight went the distance.

"I'm looking forward to seeing how he comes at me," Japanese media quoted Inoue, 28, as saying on Wednesday.

Inoue's last fight was in Tokyo in December, when he defended his titles with an eighth-round technical knockout of unheralded Thai challenger Aran Dipaen.

Donaire continues to impress at age 39 and retained his WBC title with a thunderous knockout of countryman Rey-mart Gaballo in December.

Donaire, who moved to the United States when he was 11, became the oldest world champion at 118 pounds when he beat Nordine Oubaali for the title in May 2021.

AFF



File photo of Naoya Inoue and Nonito Donaire fight

Women's cricket in Saudi Arabia: A story that is just getting started

Muscat - The GCC Women's T20i Championship Cup held at the Oman Cricket Academy from March 20 to 26 was Saudi Arabia Women's first-ever international cricket tournament.

It was also a chastening one. They finished in last place and were beaten comfortably in all of their outings. In addition, they were on the receiving end when fellow debutants Bahrain recorded a score of 318/1 - the highest-ever in Women's T20i history.

However, this competition was always seen by them as one to gain exposure from. Speaking of his side's experience in Oman, head coach Kabir Khan said, "It is a learning step for the girls. It is a young team. The average age is around 15-16. All of them started playing cricket around two months ago with tennis balls and 30-40 days ago with hard balls."

Khan added, that the team was not taking that as an excuse.

"We wanted to bring our team here even though we knew they were not ready. We think of this tournament as a learning for us and for the girls to see and explore cricket, to see what type of cricket the other GCC countries are playing."

He informed that because of shortage of time, he couldn't go around the whole kingdom and have proper selections. "There were a lot of big cities that were left out, not to mention the schools that had exams going on. There are about 30 to 35 international schools and we only had a chance to visit four. Once we go back, these girls will focus on their cricket and while they are doing that, we will be getting other girls ready as well."

The culture and attitude in Saudi Arabia towards women's sport has undergone a sea of positive change in the recent past. Kabir continued, "Saudi culture is changing. It is a special in-



struction from our Crown Prince to grow, support and develop women's cricket and all of



We took this tournament as a learning for us and for the girls, to see and explore cricket

KABIR KHAN

country for so long whereas all the other GCC countries have been playing for close to 10-15

years. Which means that records will be made against us, but that is a part of growing and improving."

Speaking on the development of sporting infrastructure in the country for cricket to flourish further, he added, "At the moment we have about four proper grounds. There are plans in place for academies and other facilities. Within a year or two, Saudi will have the most grounds in the region. We are planning for about seven-eight stadiums. I have visited the grounds myself and they are impressive."

Khan revealed that infrastructure is growing, the government's support is tremendous, and the funds are coming in. "The focus is on growing cricket as a whole too, not just one type of cricket so that would be men's, women's, youth level, domestic, international etc. So a lot is to be done in a short space of time but things are going in the right direction."

Ending on a positive note, Kabir said, "When you get a team of this age group, they will be busy all year round, so with age group cricket as well as international cricket. So the improvement process will be a bit quicker than others. These girls have time and a lot of potential. They want to play. It's not like when they lose a game, they lose hope as well."

"Every time they come in to give their best and I, as a coach, can see that there is an improvement from performance to performance."

Bowling 20 overs, batting for 20 overs, these are little milestones that mean a lot for the team at this moment, he added. "With the government's support, the girls' passion and our coaching as well, they are going to be a completely changed team in six months' time."

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