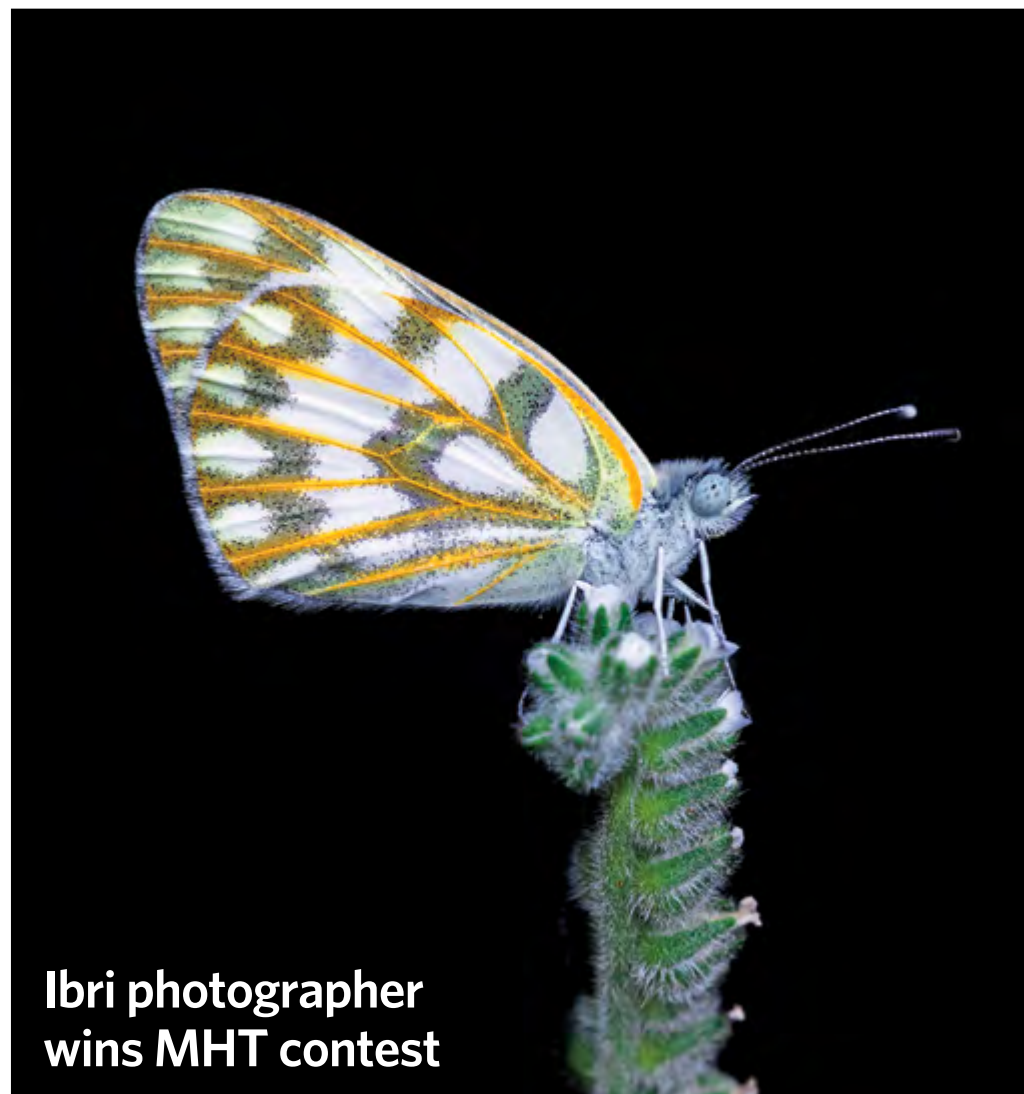
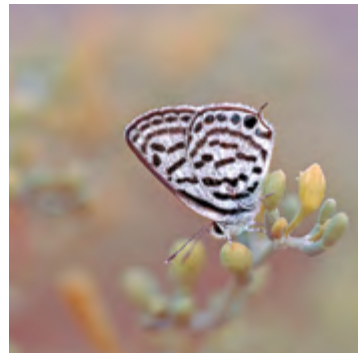
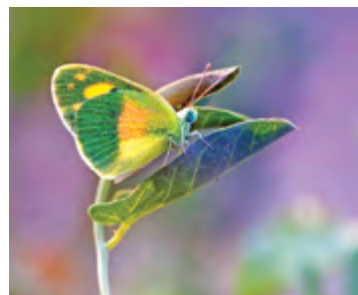




Ibri photographer wins MHT contest



Muscat - Ghaniya al Majrafi's photograph 'White Desert Butterfly' has won first place in a butterfly photography competition organised by the Ministry of Heritage and Tourism (MHT).

It launched the contest in September 2021 to document the sultanate's butterfly species in cooperation with the Ministry of Higher Education, Research and Innovation.

The competition had two categories - butterfly photography competition and recording the maximum number of butterfly species.

Ghaniya, a macro photographer from the wilayat of Ibri, Dhahirah, won the first place in the butterfly photography competition and second in recording the maximum number of species.

The last report on butterfly species in Oman dates back to 1996.



Oman, Iran to boost maritime exchange

Agreement signed for establishment of a joint shipping line and tourist flights between the two countries



Our Correspondent
Muscat

The signing of a memorandum of understanding (MoU) between the ministries of transport of Oman and Iran has paved the way for the establishment of a joint shipping line as well as boosting air and maritime connectivity between the two countries.

A MoU, in the field of transport, was signed by H E Said bin Hamoud al Maawali, Minister of Transport, Communications and Information Technology, and Rostam Qasemi, Iranian Minister of Transport and Urban Development, on Monday.

During the meeting, the two sides discussed activating agreements in maritime affairs, connecting ports and boosting air traffic between the two countries. They also reviewed prospects of future development in trade between Oman and Iran.

Revealing details of the agreement, Qasemi was quoted by IRNA as saying that it includes the establishment of a joint shipping line and tourist flights between the two countries.

"The agreement on establishment of the Iran-Oman joint shipping line must be presented to the Parliament for ratification," he said.

As per the agreement, mar-

itime link will be strengthened between Iran's Chabahar Port and Suwaiq Port in North Batinah. He added that the Islamic Republic of Iran Shipping Line Group too has gained permit to work with the ports in Salalah and Sohar.

Business meet

Iranian President Ebrahim Raisi held a meeting with Omani businessmen and their Iranian counterparts at Al Alam Palace on Monday.

President Raisi affirmed his country's keenness on expanding relations with Oman in different fields. He encouraged businessmen from both sides to enter

joint investments to help promote output and exports. He called for the establishment of an Iranian commercial representative office in Oman to provide information about investment opportunities and facilitate customs procedures.

Addressing the meeting, Redha Juma al Saleh, chairman of Oman Chamber of Commerce and Industry, affirmed that the existing cooperation, trade exchange and joint investments have been the outcome of strong relations between the governments of the two countries over the past few years.

Commercial exchange between the two countries stood at more than US\$1.3bn last year, Saleh informed, adding that the total capital invested amounted to US\$10.9bn, of which the Iranian side contributed US\$3.6bn.

The meeting underlined the importance of facilitating business flow, including the entry of goods into both the countries.

The meeting was attended by H E Abdulsalam Mohammed al Murshidi, chairman of Oman Investment Authority, and H E Qais Mohammed al Yousef, Minister of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion, besides H E Maawali.

Teenage pilot flying solo around the world to land in Oman on May 31

Our Correspondent
Muscat

A 16-year-old schoolboy, chasing the record of the youngest person to fly around the world solo, will land in Oman on May 31, according to the Civil Aviation Authority (CAA).

A statement issued by CAA said, 'The authority has given landing permission to the world's youngest pilot, 16-year-old Mack Rutherford, in his specially made plane.'

He is expected to arrive at Muscat International Airport on May 31.

Mack, who has British and Belgian nationality, started his solo flight near the Bulgarian capital Sofia on March 23 and is looking to break a Guinness World record currently held by Travis Ludlow, who was 18 when he completed a circumnavigation of the planet last year.

On May 22, Mack made an eight-hour flight - six hours over sea - and landed in Antana-



Mack Rutherford

narivo, Madagascar.

'A flight over the sea is potentially always riskier, as there are no options to divert and land in case of an issue. Mack felt comfortable with this flight,' his team stated.

Mack is being advised by experienced pilots throughout his journey. He has an Iridium Communications satellite system which allows him to communi-

cate with the flight operation team at all times.

'In fact, that is exactly what is happening during every single flight. Someone in the Flight Ops team tracks every flight, for the whole flight. Mack exchanges multiple messages with them regularly during flights about the weather, potentially unexpected events etc,' his team stated.

No monkey pox case in Oman: MoH

Our Correspondent
Muscat

No suspected or confirmed cases of monkey pox disease have been reported in Oman, the Ministry of Health (MoH) stated on Tuesday.

'The ministry is closely following the global epidemiological situation and daily reports regarding

monkey pox,' a statement said.

MoH affirmed that it is fully prepared to deal with the situation.

The ministry also urged citizens and residents to adopt the necessary precautionary measures to prevent transmission of the disease by avoiding direct contact with any person with respiratory symptoms or skin rash,

particularly those coming from countries with registered cases.

The ministry also called on everyone to wear masks and maintain hand hygiene by using water and soap or applying sanitiser.

MoH stressed on the importance of receiving information from official sources and ignoring rumours.

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Talal bin Said Al Mamari, CEO



Eng Aladdin Bait Fadhil, CCO

Omantel's service delivery approach integrated with convenience through innovation is making daily lives and business operations better.

Omantel signed key agreements that underscore the trust which entities serving national interests and driving economic diversification and growth place in the Company.

The entities with whom Omantel has entered pacts are the Ministry of Higher Education Research and Innovation (MoHERI), Energy Development Oman (EDO), Oman Airports and OMRAN.

Under these projects, which are expansive in their application scale and important for respective sectors, Omantel will provide unified communications, comprehensive technology solutions, equipment and hardware support among a host of other services. The signing of these agreements reflects Omantel commitment to driving Digital Transformation objectives and building a knowledge-based society as outlined in Oman Vision 2040.

"Omantel is proud to be the platform for their growth through digitalisation. We are partnering organisations that are driving the nation's growth in major sectors. We are delighted

with the partnerships that we created with global technology providers and our success in connecting local tech start-ups with the global companies, giving the Omani tech start-ups the opportunity to participate in the implementation of Omantel digital transformation projects. As far as automation is concerned, delivering high value to our customers through operational excellence is vital to us. Some of the opportunities lie in accelerated digitization of products and services as

more efficient and enhance user experience."

The Company has proved time and again that it has remained future-ready and hence, the most preferred digitally enabling partner for organisations.

By choosing Omantel for their ICT solutions, Enterprise customers are benefitting from economy of scale principles and receiving better value and cost-effective commercial models.

Omantel believes in product innovation, having consistently

Omantel has outperformed other players and shrunk the time an ICT innovation takes to reach its practical application for individuals as well as enterprises.

Eng Aladdin Bait Fadhil, Chief Commercial Officer, Omantel said, "We are continuously investing in infrastructure to support Oman's vision of a knowledge-based society and Digital Transformation. As the country grows, its telecom and ICT needs will diversify and evolve rapidly. Omantel, as an enabler, must be prepared for that. Omantel has positioned itself as a one-stop-shop offering telecom and ICT solutions under one umbrella, saving enterprises from the hassle of dealing with several different providers as well as additional manpower to manage their operations."

He added, "We at Omantel are proud to have earned their continued trust. The agreement with MoHERI is one such example. We thank these entities for making Omantel a part of their journey and sharing their great responsibility of nation-building with Omantel. I am confident that these partnerships will soon deliver results that will reflect positively on the people of Oman and its overall growth and its digital future."



we transition towards the future," said Talal bin Said Al Mamari, CEO, Omantel.

He further added, "The value of these projects will pass down to the people of Oman, a country which is moving rapidly on the digital highway and is seeing economic diversification through new investment, world-class education, growth in tourism and a renewed vigour in the energy sector. Our scalable solutions will make our clients' operations

been investing in the newest technologies like Data Centres, Cloud, IT Services, IOT, SDWAN, Blockchain, Big Data & Analytics, Cyber Security and Collaboration Services. The Company has always stayed ahead of the services and solutions curve by implementing beforehand what global ICT trends forecast in terms of spending, solutions, reach and access.

By responding rapidly to new emerging market demands,

Omantel, OMRAN sign MoU on enhanced ICT cooperation, sustainability and knowledge exchange



Omantel has entered into a partnership with Oman Tourism Development Company (OMRAN Group)

through a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) to explore opportunities for cooperation in the areas of developing ICT, IT infrastructure, systems and technologies, IoT solutions and mobile communications solutions for the Group's businesses, marketing, sustainability programs and sharing experiences and knowledge.

The MoU was signed at the Oman Convention and Exhibition Center by Talal bin Said Al Mamari, CEO, Omantel and Hashel bin Obaid Al Mahrouqi, CEO of OMRAN Group, and in the presence of a number of officials.

The MoU also covers exploring collaboration opportunities to provide ICT and smart city services at OMRAN Group's various projects, enhancing digital structure and exchange of knowledge and experience between the two companies through oppor-



tunities for rotation and on-the-job training. Under the MoU, the two companies will boost cooperation in areas related to marketing, promotion, social responsibility and institutional sustainability.

Commenting on the signing of the MoU, Talal bin Said Al Mamari, CEO, Omantel, said: "Through this MoU, we seek to take our existing cooperation further and explore greater opportunities in providing ICT solutions and services. As part of its strategy and responsibility to enable Oman's

digital transformation, Sultanate, Omantel adopts the best international practices and shapes frontier technologies like Internet of Things (IoT), artificial intelligence, integrating them with applications to create smart solutions and services that help the government and the people as per objectives of Oman Vision 2040."

On his part, Hashel bin Obaid Al Mahrouqi, CEO of OMRAN Group said: "This agreement reflects OMRAN Group's vision, which seeks to keep pace with technical development and implement the best innovative digital solutions in the tourism sector. The MoU is in line with the Sultanate's shift towards digital transformation. The OMRAN Group is committed to exploring opportunities to expand business and launch more projects across the Sultanate."

OMRAN Group is implementing plans to expand the tourism sector and achieve sustainable growth through strategic initiatives and partnerships. It also seeks to create more growth opportunities for SMEs and lead to the development of local communities.

MoHERI inks partnership agreement with Omantel for operating and maintaining 'OMREN'



The Ministry of Higher Education, Research and Innovation (MoHERI) have inked a contract with Oman

Telecommunications Company (Omantel) for operating and maintaining 'Omren'. The agreement was signed by HE Dr. Rahma bint Ibrahim Al Mahrooqi, Minister of Higher Education, Research and Innovation, and Talal bin Said Al Mamari, CEO of Omantel.

Under this contract, Omantel will continue to extend the network's services to higher education organizations, research centres, and other educational institutions in Oman.

Commenting on the agreement, Warda bint Sarhan Al Habsi, Acting OMREN Director, said, "We are delighted to continue our partnership with Omantel, and we feel that it will enable us to create the aspired connectivity and access between the local academic institutions on one hand and with their overseas counterparts and research networks globally on the other hand. OMREN has become an integral part of MoHERI's strategy toward achieving Oman Vision 2040 goals that are related to the development of scientific research in Oman."

OMREN has come to be a central part of a sustainable infrastructure that contributes to the emergence of an effective national innovation ecosystem. It provides the research and education community in Oman with a common network and collaboration infrastructure adapted to their



needs. Omantel is enabling OMREN to provide its members with point-to-point link to international gateways to connect the research community with international organizations such as Internet2, GEANT, APAN and ASREN.

To enrich and promote collaboration between members, OMREN further offers added value services such as video conferencing, SSL certification, federated access as a single sign-on facility, scientific publications, Masader for International scientific publications, Shuaa as Oman Research Repository, eduRoam for WiFi roaming, Minsal for large files exchange, membership of eduGain, extra broadband links, bulk SMSes, and more.

The first term of this partnership saw more than 50 members join the OMREN network. Collectively, the parties have so far achieved 90% connected universities, 93% connected researchers, 85% connected students, and 100% targeted international connectivity.

Innovative App puts Airports cab rides at your fingertips



When it comes to projects of national importance that involve the convenience, ease of work and business and security of people, Omantel becomes the first choice because of its great track record, superior services, state of the art infrastructure and robust security.

Omantel has been chosen by Oman Airports as the one-stop technology service provider to deploy comprehensive end-to-end fully managed solution including mobile connectivity. The agreement to this effect was signed by Talal bin Said Al Mamari, CEO of Omantel, and Sheikh Aimen bin Ahmed Al Hosni, CEO of Oman Airports, on the sidelines of COMEX 2022.

Among the solutions will be the convenient seamless app for booking airport taxis. As a leading company committed to enabling economic diversification and boosting ICV, the Company has brought on board a local software SME which has partnered with Streamax, a technology service provider from China, known for deploying one of the best AI-powered surveillance solutions.

Omantel and Streamax's solutions will soon enable Oman Airports to manage Muscat International Airport's fleet of 154 taxis and equip its drivers to enhance passenger experience and provide real-time information and data through an



App. Streamax is successfully running this solution in airports of countries like China, Turkey, Thailand, Ecuador, Macau, the UAE and Saudi Arabia. This taxi management solution can be integrated into Oman Airport's existing mobile application and website for passengers and be used as a separate app for taxi drivers. The intuitive system will offer passengers a seamless experience for booking a ride from the airport. This solution will gradually be replicated in other airports managed by Oman Airport.

Commenting on this agreement, Sheikh Aimen bin Ahmed Al Hosni, CEO of Oman Airports said, "The scale, agility and security of the solutions that Oman Airports requires to roll out at all airports across the nation could only be provided by Omantel. These are very important digitalization projects that require efficient and innovative solutions as they are directed as enhancing the passenger experience and boosting Oman's image."

Omantel and EDO sign agreement for communication services and advanced ICT solutions



Omantel, the Sultanate's first and leading telecom and ICT solutions provider signed an agreement with

Energy Development Oman to provide unified communication services to EDO. The agreement was signed by Aladdin Abdullah CCO at Omantel and Sultan bin Ali Al Mamari Chief Financial Officer at EDO.

As the first step, Omantel has facilitated unified communication solutions, besides setting up modern video conferencing rooms and providing ubiquitous connectivity across the EDO head office.

Omantel will scale up the range of services provided enabling EDO to cater for its future needs and will be leveraging its suite of service solutions to meet EDO ever requirements as its marks its growing presence across the sultanate.

Sultan bin Ali Al Mamari Chief Financial Officer at EDO said, "Advanced ICT solutions are essential for the success of any business as they make the functioning of organizations easier and on a secure platform. We are pleased at EDO to



partner with Omantel for our unified communications services for the head office."

Omantel is the Sultanate's first and leading integrated telecommunications and technology services provider, enabling the digital society to flourish, allowing new ways of doing business and delivering a world of information, news and entertainment. While striving to ensure optimum customer satisfaction, Omantel plays a key social role to provide the required support and subsidy to all sectors of the Omani society.

Student company creates heat insulation coating

Our Correspondent
Muscat

Summers are difficult for all but there's no denying cars bear the brunt of the soaring temperatures. No one enjoys getting into a vehicle that has been parked in the open under the sun.

To tackle the problem, a student company has created a transparent heat insulation coating for glass that reduces cabin temperature by up to 15°C.

Adding novelty and an indigenous element is the fact that the coating is made from palm fronds, making it an environmentally friendly product.

Speaking to *Muscat Daily*, Nabras Hamdan al Shukaili of Sadan Company from Sultan Qaboos University, said, "The team consists of 15 students from various disciplines in SQU. We have separate departments for product development, human resources, marketing etc."

Nabras said that the idea took hold at the beginning of the year when the team was brainstorming and identifying common problems faced by people. "At that time, we heard about cases of vehicle fire that led to loss of material as well as lives."

The team also found that Oman produces an estimated 140,000 tonnes of palm frond annually. "Putting the two together, the idea of recycling plant waste such as palm fronds to produce a thermal insulator



(Supplied photo)



Adding novelty and an indigenous element is the fact that the coating is made from palm fronds, making it environmentally friendly

made sense."

Nabras explained that glass is coated with Sadan paint after ensuring it is dry and completely dust free. "Leave it to dry and then feel the difference in the

temperature inside the car."

One of the main challenges the team encountered was extracting oil from the palm fronds. "Our supervisor Dr Jamal al Sabahi helped us with that. The

university provided us laboratory facilities and the tools necessary to produce the initial product."

She thanked Injaz Oman Foundation for conducting a workshop that helped with formation of the company.

Sadan also won an award in an Injaz Oman Foundation exhibition and recently claimed the Al Araiimi Boulevard Innovation Award in the category for universities and colleges.

Nabras is confident the product will serve the Omani society. "The coating can also help reduce temperatures inside homes, which will help reduce electricity bills."

34 initiatives to boost business environment

Our Correspondent
Muscat

The Oman Vision 2040 Implementation Follow-Up Unit has announced that it is working on 34 initiatives and projects within the Business Environment Improvement Programme in efforts to attract foreign investment and support the economy.

A statement said, "The unit, in cooperation with competent government agencies, is following up on the implementation of 34 initiatives and projects since the beginning of 2021. These are related to the economy; development, governance and institution of programmes to improve the overall business environment."

Mohammed bin Saaid al Masrouri, general supervisor of Business Environment Sector in the unit, informed that the three

The unit is implementing eight initiatives to empower the investment sector in the sultanate

MOHAMMED
AL MASROURI

business environment improvement programmes aim at planning and developing investment tools and opening markets, as well as simplifying and digitising government services.

"The unit, in cooperation with the Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion, is implementing eight initiatives to empower the investment sector in the sultanate and

motivate investors. One of these is an initiative to grant permanent residency to investors. This programme has been completed. More than 200 visas were granted to investors in this programme."

According to Masrouri, a working group of eight trainers has been formed to review government procedures, re-plan and simplify operations. The initiative started in April 2021 and targeted 12 government agencies.

"The procedures for simplifying 84 services have been completed, including three institutions that have simplified all related procedures.

"The electronic transformation initiative of 'Qada' platform was also restructured in 2021. Work is underway to implement the remaining projects according to an approved plan."



Royal Oman Police

Directorate of Public Relations
& Security Information

ANNOUNCEMENT

The Royal Oman Police - Department of Relations and Security Information - announces the establishment of a public auction for the sale of camels, which will be held under the leadership of the Cavalry Police in Al-Wattia, starting from four o'clock in the afternoon during the period from (5/6/2022) until (7/6/2022), and the camels can be viewed from (29/ 5/2022) to (2/6/2022) during official working hours only.

The successful bidder must:

- Pay the camel value and auction fees (3%) online immediately after the auction is awarded.
- Transporting camels within a maximum period of one day from the date of awarding the auction, and a fine of (30) riyals is calculated for each day of delay after the specified period. The Royal Oman Police does not bear any responsibility for the camels after the sale.

Oman, Austria hold political consultations session

Muscat - The first round of political consultation sessions was held between the Sultanate of Oman and the Republic of Austria on Tuesday in Muscat.

During the session, the Omani side was headed by H E Sheikh Khalifa Ali al Harthy, Undersecretary for Diplomatic Affairs in the Foreign Ministry, while the Austrian side was headed by Gregor Koessler, Political Director of the Federal Ministry for European and International Affairs



of Austria.

The two sides reviewed bilateral relations and affirmed their respective countries' keenness on developing these relations in

various fields. They also exchanged views on several regional and international matters of mutual interest.

The session also saw the participation of H E

Christian Brunmayr, Ambassador of Austria to Oman, and several officials from the foreign ministries of the two countries.

Symposium on monotheism, atheism at SQU

Muscat - A two-day symposium on atheism and the reality of monotheism kicked off at Sultan Qaboos University (SQU) on Tuesday. Co-organised by Jabir bin Zaid Waqf Foundation and Dar al Kalima Attayiba, it focuses on the vision of monotheism and its interpretation.

Lecturers and researchers from Oman and abroad are participating in the symposium with a view to instilling awareness about monotheism and laying the foundation for a scholarly model that enables dialogue and refutes atheist claims.




DR. HUSSEIN EL-BERNAWI

Consultant
General and Bariatric Surgeon

Fellow of the Royal College of Surgeons in Ireland (FRCSI)
Master of Minimally Invasive Surgery (Msc) Catania - Italy
Diploma of Laparoscopic Surgery - Strasbourg - France

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جامعة التكنولوجيا والعلوم التطبيقية

University of Technology and Applied Sciences

Electronic Local Auction Announcement

The Internal Tender Committee at the University of Technology and Applied Sciences (Ibra Technical College) announces the offering of the practices shown in the following table:

M	practice number	Subject	Companies that are eligible to participate	Document's Price	Last date for electronic purchasing	Last date bid submission
1	10/2022 GTA T/ KTA MA-1	Providing a team to service and operate the buildings of the University of Technology and Applied Sciences (Ibra Technical College)	Companies and institutions specialized in this field and registered with the Tender Board first degree	(25) Twenty five Riyal Omani	02/06/2022 14:30 pm	08/06/2022 at 10:00 am

- Establishments specialized in the above-mentioned works can obtain electronic auction documents from Wednesday 25/05/2022 starting form (07:30 am) through the link:
<https://etendering.tenderboard.gov.om/>
- All bidding companies must attach with their bids electronic temporary tender bond in the form of a bank guarantee or a cheque certified by one of the banks operating in the Sultanate, not less than (1%) of the bid value, addressed to the name of the Chairman of the Internal Tender Committee, and valid for a period of (90) days from the date of bid submission. The bid must be submitted sealed by the authorized person, and submitted with the electronic bidding system of the University of Technology and Applied Sciences in the name and number of the tender only.
- Preference in awarding will be given to small and medium enterprises registered with the Authority for SME development and whose bid includes the biggest percentage of Omanisation and a biggest purchase percentage of national products.

The University shall not be bound to accept the highest or any other bid.

WEATHER WATCH		
	Max	Min
Abu Dhabi	38	26
Doha	36	27
Kuwait City	38	27
Manama	33	26
Muscat	43	31
Riyadh	39	23

PRAYER TIMINGS	
Fajr	3.56am
Sunrise	5.21am
Duhr	12.09pm
Asr	3.30pm
Maghrib	6.51pm
Isha	8.11pm

Send your comments to muscatdaily@apexmedia.co.om

Women's national football team unveiled

Muscat - The first Omani women's national football team was unveiled on Tuesday at a glittering ceremony at Al Bustan Palace, a Ritz-Carlton Hotel.

The launch was a culmination of years of hard work by Oman Football Association (OFA) and Omani girls who have passionately followed their heart to beat all odds and represent Oman internationally.

"Since childhood, I have been playing football and it was a dream to represent Oman, which has come true now. I am really happy that we got this opportunity to represent Oman and be part of the first Omani women's national football team," said goalkeeper Husna al Musawi.

A fan of Ali al Habsi, Husna looks up to him for inspiration. "We did meet him once, and hope to meet him more in the future and learn from him."

Like Husna, her teammate Maather al Harthy is also a fan of Habsi and her favourite club is Seeb. She said, "Talks about women's teams have been going on since 2008. We kept on trying and finally it happened."

Maather feels more excited than nervous. "I have loved football since I was young. My father,



Uncut: Hon Lujaina Mohsin Darwish, board member of OFA and chairperson of Women's Football Committee, said, "Since I be-

came a member of OFA, one of the tasks given to me was to create the Omani women's national team."

Forty clubs from all over Oman went through the selection process and 14 teams played in the first Omani women's football tournament held recently. "After the tournament, we sat as a committee and handpicked the 18 best players for the national

Since I became a member of OFA, one of the tasks given to me was to create the Omani women's national team

HON LUJAINA MOHSIN DARWISH

side," Hon Lujaina said.

Maha Hamad Janoud, head coach, said, "This is a good team, but they need to work hard for the skills required to compete in international games."

Hon Lujaina thanked H H Sayyid Theyazin bin Haitham al Said, Minister of Culture, Sports and Youth, for his support. "It gave us courage to take on the challenge and helped us form the national team. Thanks also go to Salim bin Said al Wahaibi, chairman of OFA, for all his efforts and support."

She congratulated the team and wished it luck for its first official participation in an international tournament in Saudi Arabia next month.

(Photo and text by Syed Fasiuddin)

Dust storms: Experts caution chronic asthma patients

Our Correspondent Muscat

With dust squalls blowing over many areas of the region and humidity rising as air thickens with allergens such as pollens and silica, experts are warning chronic asthma patients to be cautious to prevent triggering respiratory distress.

Asthma is a lifelong chronic disease affecting the lungs and respiratory system that can lead to breathlessness, chest tightness and cough. The condition has several risk factors and triggers that can affect patients, including genetics, tobacco exposure, occupational exposure, air pollution, respiratory infection, and failure to administer prescribed treatment.

Dr Nasser al Busaidi, president of Oman Respiratory Society and senior consultant pulmonologist at The Royal Hospital, informed that chronic asthma patients are prescribed a series of medications that may include an inhaled corticosteroid inhaler (ICS) to prevent inflammation of the respiratory tract, and a broncho-dilator medicine to reduce airway inflammation during attacks.

He emphasised that administration of inhalers increases asthma symptom control and reduces exacerbations, thereby helping decrease healthcare cost, hospitalisations and mortality, while improving the quality of life. "Patients can reduce risk of an asthma attack and ensure



Patients can reduce risk of an asthma attack and ensure their condition is well-managed by scheduling regular check-ups with their doctor

DR NASSER AL BUSAIDI

their condition is well-managed by scheduling regular check-ups with their doctor."

Although asthma cannot be cured, it is important for people living with it to manage their condition in order to reduce symptoms and prevent attacks, also called episodes. In the Gulf region, approximately half of the people reported living with asthma are not managing their

condition adequately, a new study by global healthcare company GlaxoSmithKline (GSK) has revealed.

The study shows that sustained airway protection with low systemic side effects can be achieved with proactive regular dosing with inhaled ICSs. High adherence level (100 per cent) to the treatment regimen with ICSs provided 100 per cent protection.

"Although inflammation is present even in patients with mild asthma, patients tend to be poorly adherent to daily controller therapy, which may lead to long-term safety implications," said Dr Averyan Vasylyev, medical director, GSK Gulf.

"High adherence to asthma medication ensures patients live a good quality of life with the least disruption to their daily activities."

Amouage inaugurates new flagship store

Muscat - Under the patronage of Sayyid Fatik bin Fahr al Said, Special Envoy of His Majesty the Sultan, Amouage inaugurated its new flagship store at Mall of Oman and launched a reshaped Library Collection.

The event also saw the attendance of Sayyid Khalid bin Hamad al Busaidi, chairman of Sabco Group.

Inspired by the omniscient allure of a library and mankind's insatiable quest for knowledge, the Library Collection turns a new page in its legacy.

Staying true to its original ethos, the collection will now orbit around four fragrances: two iconic Opuses, Opus V and Opus VII, along with Rose Incense and Silver Oud, renamed Opus XII and Opus XIII respectively.

In the future, these will be joined by new Opuses as Amouage chief experience officer Renaud Salmon's own olfactory explorations unfold and a raw material or accord has been



pushed to its expressive paroxysm.

Since 2010, the Library Collection has been a freestanding, specific territory of expression within the Amouage repertoire to freely explore the possibilities of perfumery by pushing certain ingredients and accords beyond their limits. This trailblazing approach has allowed Amouage to

author audacious, daring and artistic olfactory propositions that are the antithesis of conventional perfumery and have since received critical praise.

Uniting these roots with the house's renewed focus on Omani heritage and excellence, the four Eaux de Parfum are now housed in Amouage's iconic khanjar inspired bottle, a unique

Omani symbol.

Their organic ceramic finish, in earthy truffle and cashmere colours, is a reflection of the craft and authenticity of the sultanate. Original artworks created by Louise Mertens adorn the new packaging and are an integral part of a series of analog art visuals shot by Valentin Abad, and movies shot by Thomas Savary.

Pact signed to accelerate Sanad centres' digital services

Our Correspondent Muscat

The Authority for Small and Medium Enterprises Development (ASMED) signed a cooperation agreement with Public Authority for Social Insurance (PASI) on Tuesday to expand the services provided through Sanad Service Centres.

The agreement was signed by Dr Faisal bin Abdullah al Farsi, director general of PASI, and Younis bin Muhammad al Nasri, assistant vice-president for finance and investment at ASMED.

The cooperation programme will provide 49 electronic services to PASI through the electronic portal of Sanad Service

Centres, and 16 services related to the initiative of 'Primary Partner'.

PASI launched the 'Primary Partner' initiative recently. It aims to enhance digital transformation, improve services, and allow some Sanad centres to represent the authority officially to provide insurance services through its electronic portal ac-

cording to specific criteria.

The initiative also aims to expand the provision of services provided by PASI, facilitate access and make these available to various segments of society, besides supporting the local community by contributing to the revitalisation of business and commercial activities of small and medium enterprises.

Lulu launches 'Kingdom of Mangoes' festival; 50 varieties in stock

Muscat - Lulu Hypermarket Oman has announced a festival called 'Kingdom of Mangoes' across all its stores in the sultanate.

Being held from May 24 to June 2, the festival is a celebration of the 'king of fruits'.

The festival was inaugurated by H E Amit Narang, Ambassador of India to Oman, at Lulu Hypermarket Bausher, in the presence of Waleed Khalfan al Mamari, Director of Plant Quarantine Department in the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Water Resources, Lulu staff and



customers.

'Kingdom of Mangoes' features several varieties of mangoes from different parts of the world. Customers can also relish special mango treats in the hot food, bakery, sweets and grocery sections.

Pickled mangoes, mango preserves, smoothies, pulp, juices, jellies and jams will also be available during the promotion.

A press release said Lulu has flown in more than 50 varieties of the tropical fruit from across the world, including India, Indonesia, Vietnam, Thailand, Sri

Lanka, Kenya, Yemen and more, but Omani mangoes are the highlight of the festival. The promotion will also feature deals and offers on freshly imported mangoes across all Lulu stores.

On the occasion, Shabeer K A, regional director of Lulu Hypermarkets Oman, said, "For the past several years, Lulu has been promoting Festival of Mangoes and this year's Kingdom of Mangoes is sure to be a popular event among our customers. We have coordinated with our sourcing centres worldwide to

help us bring in this delicious fruit for our customers at the most affordable prices. The varieties available are loved equally by customers of all nationalities.

"Whether in the form of pulp, juices, shakes, ice creams or desserts, this is the perfect opportunity for our customers to indulge in mouth-watering mangoes."

Lulu's state-of-the-art food sourcing network and logistics chain help provide and sustain the supply of global products at the most competitive rates.

MARKET WATCH

MSX30 4,119.76
Sensex 54,052.61

FOREX RATES

(RO1 equals)

Indian Rs	201.70
Pakistani Rs	523.55
Bangladeshi taka	228.86
Philippines peso	136.11
Sri Lankan Rs	936.77

*Rates as on MAY 24
Source: xe.com

BRIEFS

Germany sees Russian oil embargo deal in a 'few days'

A European agreement on a Russian oil embargo is possible "within a few days", the German economy minister has said, as the bloc struggles to reach a consensus on a boycott.

"There are only a few states left who have issues, Hungary above all," Robert Habeck told public broadcaster ZDF on Monday night.

"I think we will achieve a breakthrough within the next few days," Habeck said as AFP reported, adding that discussions were "continuing". A Russian oil embargo in response to the invasion of Ukraine was "within reach," he said.

Brussels initially proposed that most member states halt Russian crude imports over the next six months and refined fuels by the end of the year.

UAE firm inks airport deal for Afghanistan

A UAE company signed a contract with the Taliban authorities Tuesday to provide ground handling services at Afghanistan's three airports, officials said, as the country seeks to resume international transit.

Capital Kabul's only airport was trashed in August when tens of thousands of people rushed to evacuate as the US-led forces withdrew. While some domestic and international flights are still operating out of the facility, it needs significant upgrades for major foreign airlines to restart full service.

The full operation of Kabul airport is crucial for reviving Afghanistan's shattered economy.

Oman's oil reserves increase by 4% to 4.9bn barrels

Omanisation in oil and gas sector increased to 88%

Our Correspondent
Muscat

Oman's total estimated reserves of crude oil and condensates increased by four per cent to reach 4.876bn barrels at the end of 2021 in comparison with expected reserves recorded in the previous year, according to the Ministry of Energy and Minerals.

Crude oil and condensates reserves in the sultanate were estimated at 4.706bn at the end of 2020, according to the ministry's data.

Oman's total oil production in the year 2021 stood at 354.5mn barrels with daily average production of 971,000 barrels per day. The sultanate exported about 289mn barrels of oil and condensates during 2021.

For 2022, Oman's daily average production of oil continued to remain above 1mn barrels per day mark during the first four months of 2022, up by more than 9 per cent in comparison to the daily average output



recorded in the same period of 2021.

The sultanate's total oil production in the first four months of 2022 grew by 9.2 per cent to

124.8mn barrels compared to 114.3mn barrels in the same period of 2021, the data released by the National Centre for Statistics and Information showed.

Natural gas reserves

According to the Ministry of Energy and Minerals, total reserves of natural gas in Oman are estimated at 23tn cubic feet at the end of 2021, a significant decrease from the previous year's estimated reserves of 24tn cubic feet.

The sultanate's daily average production of natural gas reached to 132mn cubic meters per day for the year 2021, the ministry said.

The ministry's data showed that the overall Omanisation ratio in the sultanate's oil and gas sectors have reached 88 per cent. Of the total 19,943 people working in the oil and gas sectors, Omanis account for 17,565 workers and expatriates for 2,378 workers.

Total workforce in the oil sector stood at 14,491 people in the end of 2021 with an Omanisation ratio of 90 per cent. For the gas sector, where total workforce stood at 5,452 workers, Omanisation stood at 84 per cent.

Thawani Technologies highlights Fintech potential at COMEX 2022

Muscat - Thawani Technologies, Oman's pioneering digital payments platform, is participating in the Communications and Information Technology Exhibition 'COMEX 2022', which is being held at the Oman Convention and Exhibition Center from May 23 to May 25.

Throughout the exhibition, Thawani is presenting its innovative products and services that utilise the latest financial technology (Fintech) solutions while partaking in a workshop focusing on 'The Role of Emerging Technology Companies in Developing the Banking Sector', under the umbrella of the Central Bank of Oman's banking and financial technology department.

"The rapid technological advancements have been developing the financial sector in an unprecedented manner, while also making people's lives easier. That's why, through our partici-



pation at COMEX this year, we aim to reach a wider segment of the public and familiarise them with Fintech solutions and highlight the role it plays in the development of the banking sector," said Eng Majid al Amri, founder and CEO of Thawani Technologies.

"In addition, we will also showcase our diverse portfolio and latest products and services,

as well as an application update to enhance customers' experience ensuring maximum security, reliability and convenience offering users new billing services and electricity recharge options.

Further, using NFC technology, we will showcase a 'touch' feature developed by Thawani that would enable customers to pay in stores with any bank

card," he said.

In order to continue providing convenient solutions for its customers, Thawani, in partnership with Bank Dhofar, recently launched the first-of-its-kind 'Mojab Debit Card'. Connected to Thawani's virtual wallet, Mojab, the prepaid card offers consumers a rapid, safe, and secure solution for local and international payments and transactions.

Founded in 2016, Thawani Technologies is an Omani company that specialises in providing smart payment solutions, while holding a global certificate in card security. Licensed by the Central Bank of Oman, the company has been providing innovative payment solutions in financial technology, in order to expedite payments' processes, improve user experiences, and make payments safer, faster, and easier.



CBO issues RO30mn worth of treasury bills

Our Correspondent
Muscat

A tender of the government treasury bills (issue number 161) was announced by the Central Bank of Oman this week.

Total value of the allotted treasury bills amounted to RO30mn, for a maturity period of 182 days (from May 25, 2022 until November 23, 2022).

The average accepted price reached RO99.015 for every RO100 worth of treasury bill, and the minimum accepted price also arrived at RO99.015. The average discount rate and the average yield reached 1.9754 per cent and 1.9950 per cent, respectively.

The interest rate on the repo operations with the CBO is 1.5 per cent while the discount rate

on the treasury bills discounting facility with the central bank is 2.0 per cent.

Treasury bills are short-term highly secured financial instruments issued by the Ministry of Finance and they provide licensed commercial banks the opportunity to invest their surplus funds. The Central Bank of Oman acts as the issue manager and provides the added advantage of ready liquidity through discounting and repurchase facilities (repo).

Furthermore, treasury bills promote the local money market by creating a benchmark yield curve for short-term interest rates. The government may also resort to this instrument whenever felt necessary for financing its recurrent expenditures. ONA

MSX drops 0.33%; volumes jump

Our Correspondent
Muscat

The benchmark index of the Muscat Stock Exchange dropped 0.33 per cent on Tuesday to close at 4,119.76 points.

Most of the sectoral indices closed in red territories led by Financial Index which lost 0.65 per cent for the day. Services Index decreased by 0.36 per cent, while Industrial Index inched up 0.1 per cent. MSX Sharia index was down by 0.22 per cent at 463.52 points.

Total volumes jumped by nearly 112 per cent to 28.9mn shares against 13.7mn shares traded on Monday.

Market turnover surged by 251.7 per cent to RO14.33mn compared with RO4.07mn

recorded in the previous trading session.

The market breadth of the MSX remained negative with eight advancing stocks to 14 decliners. As many as 28 traded stocks closed flat for the day.

The gainers for the day were Gulf Mushroom Products (8.5 per cent), Oman Packaging (8.33 per cent), A'Saffa Foods (7.81 per cent), Construction Materials Industry (6.58 per cent) and Galfar Engineering and Contracting (4.81 per cent).

Top losers were Al Omaniya Financial Services (-9.58 per cent), Dhofar International Development and Investment (7.9 per cent), Ominvest (-1.9 per cent) and Raysut Cement (-1.77 per cent).

IMF warns economic fragmentation would inflict steep costs

Davos, Switzerland - IMF leaders have warned that growing pressures undermining global integration, including an increase in trade barriers, threaten economic growth worldwide.

In a message to officials gathering in Davos, Switzerland, IMF chief Kristalina Georgieva and her deputy, Gita Gopinath, said, "The costs of further disintegration would be enormous across countries. And people at every income level would be hurt."

The global economy faces a "confluence of calamities" with the fallout from the COVID-19 pandemic compounded by the war in Ukraine, but they warned that the trend towards restricting exports or breaking up global supply chains would undo years of progress. Globalisation tripled the size of the worldwide economy and lifted 1.3bn people out of extreme poverty, but since the Russian invasion of Ukraine in late February, 30 countries have

imposed restrictions on trade in food, energy and other key goods, the IMF officials said.

They called on global leaders to resist those pressures and focus on improving cooperation and reducing trade barriers while also combating climate change and the growing debt burden in developing nations.

And rather than dismantling supply chains, or "reshoring" in favor of domestic producers, companies should diversify their imports, which can cut in half the economic losses due to supply disruptions. "As policymakers and business leaders head to Davos, the global economy faces perhaps its biggest test since the Second World War," they wrote.

"We have a choice: Surrender to the forces of geoeconomic fragmentation that will make our world poorer and more dangerous. Or reshape how we cooperate." AFP

Samsung commits \$356bn in investments

Seoul, South Korea - South Korean conglomerate Samsung Group on Tuesday unveiled a massive 450tn won (US\$356bn) investment blueprint for the next five years aimed at making it a frontrunner in a wide range of sectors from semiconductors to biologics.

The new figure is an increase of more than a third over its investments spent over the past five years.

The tech giant is South Korea's largest chaebol - the family-run conglomerates that dominate the economy - and its overall turnover is equivalent to a fifth of the national gross domestic product.

Samsung Electronics, its flagship subsidiary, is the world's biggest smartphone maker.

The investment plan would bring "long-term growth in strategic businesses and help strengthen the global industrial ecosystem of crucial technology", Samsung said in a statement.

The 80,000 new jobs would be created "primarily in core businesses including semicon-



This file photo shows the Samsung flag (right) and South Korean national flag fluttering outside the company's Seocho building in Seoul (AFP)

ductors and biopharmaceuticals" through 2026.

It also noted the investment would "bring forward the mass production of chips based on the 3-nanometer process", the latest technology to further shrink the size of semiconductors and boost computing power.

It will also invest heavily in biopharmaceuticals with its affiliates Samsung Biologics and Samsung Bioepis.

The new plan represents a 36

per cent increase in investment over its total investments over the past five years.

Of the 450tn won Samsung plans to spend over the next five years, it will commit 360tn won to South Korea.

Biden visit

The announcement comes after US President Joe Biden toured Samsung Electronics' massive Pyeongtaek semiconductor factory on Friday, underscoring the

South Korean giant's role in securing global supply chains of microchips.

South Korea and the United States need to work to "keep our supply chains resilient, reliable and secure," Biden said, calling semiconductors manufactured there as "a wonder of innovation" and crucial to the global economy.

Lee Jae-yong, the firm's vice-chairman and the de facto leader of the wider Samsung conglomerate, escorted Biden and newly sworn-in South Korean President Yoon Suk-yeol inside the assembly line, and introduced the two to an audience in English.

It was Lee's highest-profile public appearance since his release on parole in August.

He had served more than half of a two-and-a-half-year sentence for bribery, embezzlement and other offences in connection with a corruption scandal that brought down ex-South Korean president Park Geun-hye.

Samsung employs about 20,000 people in the United States and work is under way to build a new semiconductor plant

in Texas, scheduled to open in 2024.

The vast majority of the world's most advanced microchips are made by just two companies - Samsung and Taiwan's TSMC - both of which are running at full capacity to alleviate a global shortage.

Many major industrial powers such as the United States, Europe, China and Japan are scrambling to build semiconductor plants on their own soil to diversify supplies.

Samsung's massive infrastructure promise comes two weeks after Yoon, a fiscal conservative and a vocal supporter of the chaebols, was sworn in as South Korea's new president.

"It's a classic way of Korean companies to appeal to a new president," Park Ju-gun, head of Leaders Index, a Seoul-based research institute, told Bloomberg News in reference to Samsung's investment announcement.

"Investors need to check whether the promised amount of investments are actually executed or not."

AFP

Oman Avenues Mall expansion nears completion

On track with its transformational journey, Oman Avenues Mall is gearing up to host Oman's first IKEA megastore through its mall expansion development.

The redevelopment project comprises large-scale infrastructure enhancements, including the introduction of a dedicated flyover extension to the development as well as bridges and the expansion of adjacent roads that will connect the property to major population-centric areas. The road connectivity and expansions are being completed under the prudent leadership of Al Taher Group, the developers of Oman Avenues Mall, a press release said.

The developer has announced that the enhancement of the rear side road, behind the mall, to a four-lane road, will be completed in the next few days whilst the two bridges connecting the subject road to either direction of Sultan Qaboos street are also fast progressing. The extension of the flyover connection to the mall is expected to be completed in the latter part of the year. However, the new street-level connection from Sultan Qaboos



street to the lower ground parking will be completed soon. These plans to expand the road network around the mall will contribute to enhancing the shopping experience.

"We are pleased that the expansion works of Oman Avenues Mall are on schedule. Al Taher Group is dedicated to delivering

result-driven outcomes and this is because we are fully equipped to take on new global market prospects," said Eng Saud Mohammed al Khalili, development director, Al Taher Group. "This project is a landmark development in Muscat that is advantageously situated to meet local demand in a burgeoning catch-

ment area with a youthful demography and positioned to serve Oman's flourishing business and leisure visitor numbers," he added.

In preparation for a projected increase in footfalls, new parking spaces are being created, which include 550 bays on the roof level and Lower ground level.

This will horizontally integrate the parking area to the second level and directly to the cinemas, food court and family entertainment center. Likewise, an extension to the lower ground level parking will also connect another 500 spots to the mall, which will seamlessly link to the open parking on the mall's north wing.



Dhofar Automotive floats special offers on MOPAR Services

Dhofar Automotive, the official distributor of Jeep, Dodge, Chrysler, RAM, Fiat, Alfa Romeo vehicles and MOPAR brand, the official supplier of spare parts and aftersales services of Stellantis in Oman, announced the launch of attractive MOPAR offers.

Dhofar Automotive will be offering several benefits and incredible discounts on original spare parts and maintenance services from MOPAR to its customers who conduct periodic inspections of their cars, to ensure safety. The offer now allows Jeep Wrangler 'JK' owners to get up to 20% off on brake pads and discs, in addition to providing valuable gifts to all customers when purchasing or using MOPAR engine oils. These offers are valid until the end of May 30.

Hatem al Najjar, general manager of Dhofar Automotive said, "MOPAR aims to encourage customers to periodically check their vehicles and ensure that all parts are safe and ready to go in perfect performance. This is because vehicle owners tend to take trips within the Sultanate as well as abroad during this time of year and spend holidays in remote places, travelling long distances in high temperatures. Therefore, the vehicle must be fully inspected and the appropriate maintenance carried out to ensure its readiness. We at Dhofar Automotive place the comfort and safety of our customers

as our top priority and ensure that their vehicles are always ready and in the best possible condition, through the approved inspection of vehicle safety points as well as providing an integrated set of maintenance services and original spare parts from MOPAR at affordable prices."

He further said, "We are pleased to invite all our valued customers to take advantage of MOPAR offers. We recommend that they conduct periodic inspections and maintenance that their vehicles require while enjoying the offers that will continue until May 30. All MOPAR lubricants products are now provided with API GF-6 grade, the latest and most advanced API specified engine oil developed and recommended by engineering for Chrysler, Dodge, Jeep and RAM vehicles. This high-quality and special process formulated oils are among the most advanced and best products within the industry. It provides maximum protection under all types of operating situations, reduces local emissions and environmental impact, better starting performance in low temperatures and engine noise reduction. Dhofar Automotive assures the provision of high-quality inspection and maintenance services, with an expert team of technicians specialised in vehicle maintenance, as well as using only original MOPAR spare parts.

Oxy Oman representatives attend Awtad 3D

Oxy Oman representatives recently attended the closing ceremony event for the company's exclusively - sponsored 'Awtad' 3D Printing Educational Programme and competition.

Awtad has trained teachers and 10th grade students in 3D printing technology to help develop their skills in the field. The programme is under the supervision of the Ministry of Education, and organised by InnoTech, an Omani SME in the 3D printing



and technology field, a press release said.

The closing event was held at the Ministry of Education under the auspices of H E Majid bin Said al Bahri, Undersecretary of the Ministry of Education for Administrative and Financial Affairs, and attended by Said al Balushi, senior vice president - Technical at Oxy Oman, along with senior representatives of the company.

The closing event celebrated

the winning 3D projects created by the participating students as part of Awtad's final 3D Printing Competition. Awtad held a series of practical workshops to engage over 230 students, as well as teachers from across the country in designing and creating 3D printed products and objects. The programme aims to create high level awareness of 3D printing across schools in the Sultanate, as well as its uses and benefits.

Fuel prices irk UAE residents' interests

Rising fuel prices have led to a significant shift (52%) in UAE residents' attitude towards hybrid and electric vehicles (EVs), according to a survey commissioned by Audi Abu Dhabi. Petrol prices in the UAE continued to progressively rise from February to April, as global oil prices surged beyond US\$100 a barrel.

While residents' intent to buy an EV seems strong, nearly 25% stated that they are waiting for more options to be launched in the market to make a purchase. 14% said they recently bought a petrol car but wished they would have purchased a hybrid/ EV instead, a press release said.

The YouGov survey of 1000 UAE residents explored how the rise in fuel prices is impacting the way consumers are thinking about their means of transportation.



ortation.

Residents are planning their car journeys more carefully with a quarter saying they use public transport a lot more now, while 14% of drivers have purchased an electric scooter/ bike to use over short distances. Remote and flexible working options are

also helping residents mitigate rising fuel costs, with 19% saving more on fuel expenses by working from home.

"Interest in EVs has continued to grow organically over time, however increasing petrol prices has certainly accelerated the shift in consumers attitude to-

wards EV adoption," said Mark Austin, Audi Abu Dhabi general manager. "When considering energy efficiency across the full life-cycle of producing, transporting and using fuel - typically referred to as "well to wheel" - electric vehicles offer high efficiency and the lowest carbon emissions."

Al Maha Petroleum signs MoU with Asyad Group

A Maha Petroleum Products Marketing Company, along with other fuel marketing companies and Al Mouj Muscat, has signed a memorandum of understanding with Oman Post and Asyad Express, a member of Asyad Group.

The MoU reinforces that Oman Post & Asyad Express wish to explore and expand customer accessibility of its wide range of postal and logistics services, ultimately aimed at improving their customers' experience and convenience. The most prominent of the services to be introduced is the Oman Post & Asyad Express E-locker Parcel Machine network across Oman. This will be the first E-locker net-



work which offers the customer with the ultimate 24x7 flexibility to receive their parcels and documents., a press release said.

Nasser al Sharji, Oman Post & Asyad Express CEO, said, "We always look to provide our customers with increased flexibility and access to all our postal and logistics services, utilizing the lat-

est technologies to make the user experience as seamless as possible. Our customers will have 24x7 access to pick up and drop off their parcels and documents at strategic locations across all Oman. The E-locker concept also supports environmental sustainability, which is a key focus area for us."

WOW Cinema opens in Barka

The sultanate's own cinema brand is all set to enrich the entertainment landscape in Batinah region. Oman's homegrown theatre brand WOW Cinema is now open at Barka Grand Centre in Barka.

The six-screen multiplex is part of Grand Entertainment, a subsidiary of Al Tamman Investments. Bringing all the latest blockbusters, WOW Cinema is set to enhance the entertainment landscape in the Batinah region, a press release said.

WOW Cinema features a va-

riety of theatre experiences for movie lovers. Featuring a state of the art expansive cinema lobby, the multiplex features Kids, a cinema concept created for the little ones. WOW XL provides cinemagoers with the chance to watch all the latest motion pictures on a larger screen that measures 16.20m x 6.77m with the latest Dolby-Atmos sound system.

For those looking to watch movies in the lap of luxury, WOW Gold Class provides all the facilities that include exclu-

sive Gold Class Lounge access, in-seat service, and reclining seats to elevate the cinema experience. WOW Gold Class also doubles up as a fine space to host private parties and get-togethers.

"WOW Cinema has been conceptualised to redefine the movie-watching experience. We are thrilled to open the first homegrown multiplex in Batinah and thereby bring world-class cinema experience to the people ther," said Tushar Bajpai, business head, Grand Entertainment.



Bahwan Services and Trading signs US\$3bn collaborative agreement with Saudi's Abilitii

Bahwan Services and Trading (BST), an affiliate of Sheikh Ahmed Suhail Bahwan's group of companies, and Ajlan & Brothers Holding Group (Abilitii), from Saudi Arabia, have signed a collaboration agreement to establish joint investments in both countries, and announced a new era of partnerships for key sectors towards Saudi Vision 2030 and Oman Vision 2040.

The Sultanate of Oman and Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, under the leadership of His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik al Said and the Custodian of the Two Holy Mosques, King Salman bin Abdulaziz al Saud, of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, and alongside the dynamic young leader HRH Prince Mohammad bin Salman, are witnessing enormous momentum in economic and investment cooperation between two countries in various sectors after the visits of both leaders and their respective business delegations during 2021. Trade between the two nations is continuously on the rise, a press release said.

The proprietors of BST and Abilitii yesterday signed economic, commercial, and technical collaboration agreements. The various projects of mutual interests come under the field of industrial manufacturing of



lithium-ion batteries for electric vehicles and stationary energy storage, renewable energy, healthcare and food security initiatives in both countries, and joint investments within and outside the GCC.

Sheikh Mohammed Abdulaziz al Ajlan, vice chairman of Abilitii along with Eng. Ali al Hazmi, Group CEO, and the senior management team of Abilitii

are on a three-day visit to Muscat to discuss and sign collaboration agreements with BST. Sheikh Abdullah Ahmed Suhail Bahwan, executive director-BST, signed the agreements from his side. The move aims to strengthen existing economic relations between the two groups by developing effective programmes and mechanisms for collaboration in efforts for all

future projects of mutual interests for initial five years and thereafter.

Both groups will co-operate and work together in the fields of trade, investment, knowledge exchange, and facilitate joint economic efforts during the next stage, thereby promoting sustainable economic development in both countries. During the ceremony, Sheikh Ahmed Suhail

Bahwan emphasised that this agreement will pave the way for a joint economic co-operation between the two countries in line with respective countries' visions for future growth.

This partnership with Abilitii is being built on the principles of flexibility, openness, and international economic collaboration in various vital sectors for self-sustainability, new technologies

and to invest together in future economic growth sectors.

Sheikh Ahmed Suhail Bahwan's group of companies have been operational in the automobile sector in Saudi Arabia for more than 12 years, and it now aspires to expand into other businesses along with its trusted partner - Abilitii.

Sheikh Ajlan said, "Led by the Custodian of the Two Holy

Mosques, King Salman Bin Abdulaziz and the Crown Prince, HRH Prince Mohammad Bin Salman, Saudi economy reported huge growth in all aspects. In line with the true vision of His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik al Said, the economy of Sultanate of Oman is strongly placed to grow at a rapid rate, as per IMF's latest prediction, is the highest in GCC at 5.6% in 2022.

"We believe, the sultanate is a prominent economic destination for investments and an important trade partner of the Kingdom in the GCC. Abilitii is eager to be part of this growth story and commit itself to partner with the well-respected BST.

Abilitii, by teaming with a local trustworthy partner, wants to collaborate on various identified projects with an investment potential of about US\$3bn in the near future.

The signing of this new collaboration agreement is a milestone in the economic relations between the two countries.

We will continue this collaboration and our efforts in future to achieve shared goals of both the organisations, in line with the economic development aspirations of both the countries to create local employment and self-sustainability in key sectors."



ISM appoints junior prefects

May 16 was a much awaited day for the young leaders of the Middle Section of Indian School Muscat as they walked back home with their newly earned title of Junior Prefect.

In the new multipurpose hall of Indian School Muscat, the four House Flags stood firmly beside the School Flag, corroborating the promise to uphold the pride of the school.

The presence of the proud

parents and grandparents added to the aura of the Junior Prefect Investiture ceremony.

The thrilled audience were entertained with the video 'Chance to Lead' where the candidates for elections of the Prefects, Vice-Captain of the four houses, and the Head Girl and Head Boy were presented.

The audience was given a bird's eye view into the process of election, focusing on 'The

right to contest' and 'The right to vote'.

Nilesh Lekchand Khokle, defence advisor, Embassy of India, was the chief guest while the oath of office was administered by Dr Rajeev Chauhan, principal. The Chief Guest then pinned the Head Boy - Gurjap Singh Dhanoa and the Head Girl - Diya Mehnaz Jasmine with their coveted badges, followed by the House Master of the Red

House.

Dr Chauhan then invested the vice captains of the four houses - Mayooka Manoj Kandyan (Red house), Ruth Jane Mathew (Green House), Evanna Susan Mathew (Yellow House) and Nabeela Fatima (Blue House). In all, 27 students from class 5, 29 students from class 6, 26 students from class 7 and 25 students from class 8 were invested.

OOMCO partners deal with OITE and ARB



Oman Oil Marketing Company (OOMCO) has signed a partnership agreement with Oman International Trade & Exhibitions (OITE) and Arabian Research Bureau (ARB) to support Oman's most influential events.

The agreement ensures that OOMCO remains at the forefront of Oman's exhibition and convention sector and a prominent ambassador for the nation's key industries, a press release said.

As Diamond sponsors of COMEX 2022, under the theme 'Embracing Future Technologies', the leading company will be exhibiting throughout the event, highlighting the technological opportunities of the Smart

Ahlain, OOMCO World App, Ahlain Smart Screens and more.

"Oman Oil Marketing Company prides itself on innovation, utilising the latest technology and the power of digital to make people's lives easier. Our partnership with OITE and ARB will allow us to reach more customers and new markets, as well as provide a high-profile platform to demonstrate our commitment to technology and convenience.

"We look forward to working with both companies to demonstrate further advances in the customer experience and accelerating the digital transformation across the region," said Tarik Mohammed al Junaidi, CEO at Oman Oil Marketing Company.

Amr Baabood, Group CEO at OITE and ARB, said, "We are thrilled to have entered into this partnership with OOMCO, which will help us propel our company to the next level. Securing a prominent exhibitor from the nation's most important industry will share Oman's capabilities with a world of visitors to the country while also showcasing the very latest technology.

"Combining our amenities with OOMCO's cutting-edge technology and advanced solutions will allow us to provide better services to a much wider customer-base, especially as OITE, ARB and OOMCO all prioritize quality and customer-centricity."

Bank Muscat showcases latest digital solutions at COMEX 2022

Bank Muscat is participating in the COMEX 2022 Expo at the Oman Convention and Exhibition Centre - OCEC.

COMEX is the largest Technology, Communications, Innovation and Digital Transformation show in the Sultanate of Oman and offers exhibitors and visitors a comprehensive and highly specialised platform for industry leading discussions, knowledge-sharing and B2B meetings and the bank's participation and support are in line with its role in strengthening national development and digitalisation of the economy as part of the ambitious Oman Vision 2040.

The opening ceremony was

held under the patronage of H E Dr Khamis Bin Saif al Jabri, chairman, Implementation Support and Follow-up Unit and was attended by dignitaries and business leaders from the sultanate and the region. COMEX is celebrating its 31st anniversary this year and will feature an exhibition, an Artificial Intelligence (AI) conference, workshops, seminars, certified training programmes, gaming, Business to Business meetings and other attractions.

Through its strong presence at the 3-day long exhibition, Bank Muscat is showcasing some of its cutting-edge, customer-centric services and features. Bank customers will be able to apply



(through self-service) and receive replacement / new debit cards on the spot by using the all new Multifunction Kiosk. The

bank is also highlighting its recently-launched SmartPay Payment Gateway platform that accepts local/international

debit/credit cards making the transaction experience much more efficient for the bank's merchant partners and their cus-

tomers.

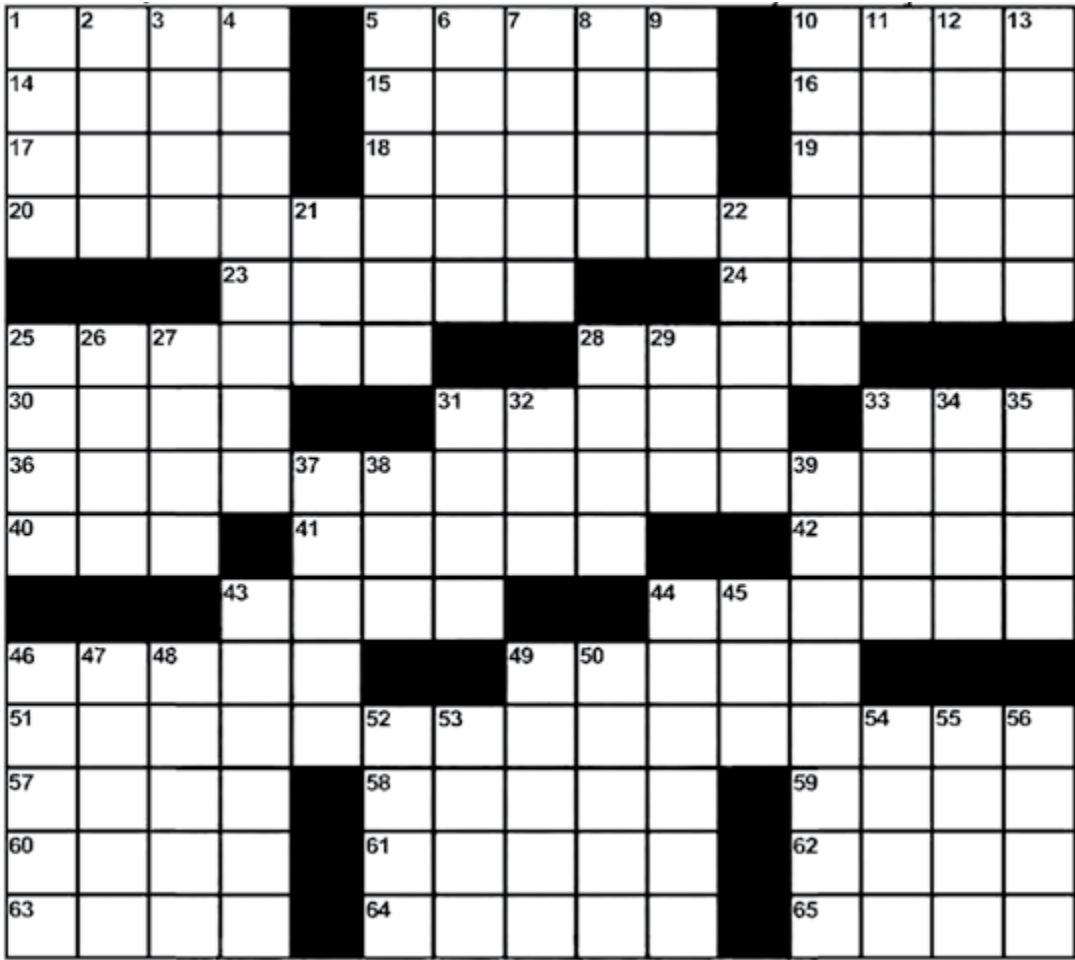
The bank also takes the opportunity to demonstrate its secure QR code e-payments solution, which is very helpful for small and micro businesses in meeting the latest regulations on providing e-payment options to their customers. Members from the bank's Saeed team were also available at the bank's stall to help existing clients applying for loans / credit cards and non-customers to apply for a new account from the site.

Speaking on the occasion, Abdullah Hamood al Jufaili, assistant general manager, Digital Banking, Bank Muscat, said, "In close alignment to the goals of the landmark Oman Vision

2040, Bank Muscat is delighted to extend strong support to COMEX, which is the premier technology, innovation and digital transformation show in Oman. Oman's technology and communications capabilities are being developed at an amazing pace, and this is fueling the digital transformation of our nation. As the leading financial services provider in Oman, we are committed to offering the latest financial services and solutions in line with global financial trends.

The consistent rise in active customers on our e-channels is a reflection of the popularity of both Mobile and Internet Banking as well as other digital banking channels."

DAILY CROSSWORD



ACROSS

1) "X" may mark it
5) Food quality
10) Haifa fl. oz.
14) Three Bears patriarch
15) Ninth rock from the sun, once
16) Like word-of-mouth
17) Significant periods of history
18) Spritely tunes
19) Long skirt
20) Easygoing attribute
23) Female family nickname
24) Silly goose
25) 15-Across, once
28) Like a shepherd's staff
30) Indian dress
31) Immature egg
33) Barnyard bellow
36) Longtime beau
40) Some submerged leaves
41) Train lines?
42) Chanel of fashion
43) Far from bored
44) Adolph Coors, famously

46) Not on the level
49) Infant's abdominal woe
51) Nonmoving picture
57) The Hawkeye State
58) Major blood line
59) Mark's replacement
60) "That's an order!"
61) Piece for nine
62) Bone-dry
63) "What_ can I say?"
64) San Antonio hoopsters
65) Fancy wheels

DOWN

1) On_ (with an eye toward selling)
2) "Legal" prefix
3) Gemstone for many Libras
4) Island off Australia
5) Fracture immobilizer
6) Choice invitees
7) Like dime novels and some orange JUICe
8) "Beetle Bailey" dog
9) One of the "Friends"
10) Small songbird
11) You can't join Mensa without one

12) Anglo-____
13) The Elder or Younger of Roman history
21) Expected in
22) Word with "strength" or "city"
25) Quiet "Check this out!"
26) Fit for night owls
27) Length x width, for a rectangle
28) Accepts as true
29) Lego las of Middle Earth, e.g.
31) Final notice?
32) Remote control abbr.
33) Siamese-speak
34) More than never
35) Nose wrinkler
37) Trait of a South-erner's speech
38) Big, fat mouth
39) Common dessert
43) Empathize
44) Swells out of proportion
45) Convoy member
46) "All kidding _ ..."
47) Bar fixture
48) Fuzzy fruits

49) Hom-shaped thing
50) Freshwater carnivorous mammal
52) Some kitchen utensils
53) Target for Carmelo
54) Psychic's read, supposedly
55) Bluenose
56) Mortar troughs

NOTE PAD

YOUR DAILY HOROSCOPE

 **ARIES** MARCH 21-APRIL 19

You need to brace yourself even if you know exactly what the situation requires. Someone's in charge here and, unfortunately, that someone isn't you (even though you'd do a stellar job). Try to be patient while the supervisors work out the kinks with the plan, as frustrating as it may be. If you can suggest an alternative in a diplomatic matter, by all means do so. Don't just barrel ahead and try to force people to go along with your plan, no matter how good you think it is.

 **LEO** JULY 23-AUGUST 22

You're absolutely unshakable in your current belief, but you might want to rethink that attitude a bit before it hardens into intransigence. Narrow-mindedness won't get you anything but trouble right now, so make sure you give a fair hearing to all opinions, even the ones that are in direct opposition to yours. You don't necessarily have to change your mind, but you do have to know what's out there.

 **SAGITTARIUS** NOVEMBER 22-DECEMBER 21

You see money as something to be enjoyed, shared, and used for the common good, but right now you sense a more fiscally conservative side of your personality emerging. It may not be a bad thing either! After all, generosity is wonderful, but in order to be generous, you have to be sure that you have resources to draw on. Bust out a calculator and work your finances to make sure you can take care of yourself as well as others.

 **TAURUS** APRIL 20-MAY 20

Get outside and try to stay there as long as possible. Too many hours cooped up indoors leave you feeling disconnected with the things that really matter, and you need regular contact with nature more than most people. If you've got something to mull over, take a hike (literally) and do your thinking around a lot of trees and fresh air. You'll find that all that natural growth makes your thoughts grow in surprising and enlightening ways.

 **VIRGO** AUGUST 23-SEPTEMBER 22

You've got a fierce urge to take a little walk on the wild side. Right now, though, it's best to acknowledge the urge but come back to it later. Instead, concentrate on putting in some big-time effort so you can see some big-time rewards. While it might be momentarily frustrating to sublimate your need for freedom, you'll be glad you did later when you see the results.

 **CAPRICORN** DECEMBER 22-JANUARY 19

Your secret of success, one you often share with others, is to take your work seriously but never yourself. So, while you're enjoying your well-deserved success right now, remember that it's important not to get a big head. Not only could that alienate you from potential allies for your next venture, but it might cloud that remarkably sharp mind that's been the key to so much of your good work.

 **GEMINI** MAY 21-JUNE 21

A sweetheart or partner has something on their mind that they're not talking about, and it's giving you a bit of anxiety, especially if they're trying to cover it up too obviously. Ask them directly if they've got something that needs discussing and just see where it goes from there. Under no circumstances should you let them drive the agenda, especially if you sense there's something dark brewing.

 **LIBRA** SEPTEMBER 23-OCTOBER 22

You've been so busy double-checking the bottom line and figuring out all the tiny details that you forgot to check in on that little thing called your life. It's true that others depend on you, but you have to take care of yourself if you want to take care of them. Right now is an ideal time to work on ways to expand your horizons so you don't feel so stifled by your daily routine. Find ways to flex your freedom no matter how small.

 **AQUARIUS** JANUARY 20-FEBRUARY 18

Some people like to think there's a reason for everything, and if you happen to run across one of them soon, you're likely to give them a good talking-to. There have been a few too many recent events that make you question what the heck is going on and what exactly you're supposed to do about it. It may be that the Universe is telling you to do nothing, to just accept the events without judgment. For now, that'll have to do.

 **CANCER** JUNE 22-JULY 22

You need to confront the widening gap between your professional and domestic lives. You might need to spend more time in one place than another or it could cause real problems. You've got a two steps forward, three steps back kind of situation right now, which might seem more frustrating or even alarming than you'd like. However, with your prowess, you can turn these back-and-forth movements into a graceful tango.

 **SCORPIO** OCTOBER 23-NOVEMBER 21

When you put your mind to something, you can get it done one way or another. You've got a definite goal in your sights right now, and you're absolutely determined to make it there, no matter what. Rest assured that your task is easily achievable, especially with the your drive and perseverance. Make sure you exercise your tact and use a little diplomacy and things will go especially smoothly in your business dealings.

 **PISCES** FEBRUARY 19-MARCH 20

Practical matters are at the top of your to-do list, which makes for a pleasant day because you can easily cross off quite a few tasks. You're happily getting your hands dirty as you set about solving problems and tying up loose ends that may have been tripping you up for ages. Tackle your tasks with enthusiasm while this can-do energy is flowing through you, but make sure to quit when it's quitting time.

Answers: 1.B 2.C 3.C

KIDS COLOURING



BOGGLER

I	Y	W	S
S	H	S	S
E	T	T	E
H	R	O	B

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

WORD BUILDER



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

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

SUDOKU EASY ANSWER

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

Xinjiang leak sheds new light on China's mass detention facilities

Beijing, China - A leak of thousands of photos and official documents from China's Xinjiang has shed new light on the violent methods used to enforce mass internment in the region, researchers said on Tuesday.

The files, obtained by academic Adrian Zenz, were published as UN human rights chief Michelle Bachelet begins a long-awaited and controversial trip to Xinjiang.

Activists say Chinese authorities have detained more than one million Uyghurs and other mostly Muslim minorities in a network of detention centres and prisons in the region, which Beijing has defended as training centres.

But the trove of police photographs and internal documents - sent to Zenz by an anonymous source who hacked into official databases in Xinjiang - add to evidence that the mass internments were far from voluntary, with leaked documents showing top leaders in Beijing including President Xi Jinping calling for a forceful crackdown.

The files include a 2017 internal speech by Chen Quanguo, a former Communist Party secretary in Xinjiang, in which he allegedly orders guards to shoot to kill anyone who tries to escape, and calls for officials in the region to 'exercise firm con-



UN human rights chief Michelle Bachelet (left) speaking with China's FM Wang Yi (right) in the southern Chinese city of Guangzhou on Monday (AFP)

trol over religious believers'.

A 2018 internal speech by public security minister Zhao Kezhi mentions direct orders from Xi to increase the capacity of detention facilities.

After initially denying their existence, Beijing has claimed the facilities are vocational training schools, attended voluntarily and aimed at stamping out religious extremism.

But the leaked documents

give an insight into how leaders saw the minority population as a security threat, with Zhao warning that more than two million people in southern Xinjiang alone had been 'severely influenced by the infiltration of extremist religious thought'.

Mugshots

More than 2,800 police photos of Xinjiang detainees included minors such as 17-year-old Zey-

tunigul Ablehet, detained for listening to an illegal speech, and 16-year-old Bilal Qasim, apparently sentenced for being related to other detainees.

The details echo a separate police list leaked earlier to AFP which showed the government crackdown snaring hundreds of people at a time from villages, often many from the same household.

"The sort of paranoid threat

perception comes out in these files, and the internal justification for why one has to move against an entire population," said Zenz in video comments published alongside the leaked files.

Zenz works for the US-based non-profit organisation the Victims of Communism Memorial Foundation.

The files, parts of which have been verified by multiple news organisations including the BBC

The files, obtained by academic Adrian Zenz, were published as UN human rights chief Michelle Bachelet begins a long-awaited and controversial trip to Xinjiang

and Le Monde, also provide a window into life in detention facilities. Photos appear to show officers restraining hooded and shackled inmates with batons, while other guards wearing camouflage stand by with firearms.

UK Foreign Secretary Liz Truss on Tuesday called the details of the newly leaked documents 'shocking', and urged China to grant Bachelet 'full and unfettered access to the region so that she can conduct a thorough assessment of the facts on the ground'.

But China's foreign ministry dismissed the leaked documents as 'cobbled-together material' by 'anti-China forces smearing Xinjiang', with spokesman Wang Wenbin accusing media of 'spreading lies and rumours'.

AFP

Israel foils ' Hamas plot to kill lawmaker'

Jerusalem - Israeli security forces said on Tuesday a Hamas cell in Jerusalem had planned a series of attacks on Israeli targets, including assassinating a controversial Jewish far-right member of parliament.

According to the Shin Bet internal security agency, five Hamas members from annexed east Jerusalem had planned to kill lawmaker Itamar Ben-Gvir, bomb the Jerusalem light rail with a drone and kidnap soldiers.

One of the five, who were arrested during April, had 'established a network of activists in Jerusalem aimed at disturbing the peace in east Jerusalem and on the Temple Mount during the month of Ramadan', a Shin Bet statement said.

Clashes between Israeli police and Palestinians at the volatile Al-Aqsa mosque compound, referred to by Israel as the Temple Mount, killed one Palestinian and wounded nearly 300 people, most of them Palestinians, during April, when Ramadan fell this year. The five had also taken part in rioting at the mosque compound, the Shin Bet said.

It said officers had confiscated a drone they suspected had been obtained for use in the alleged bomb plot. Some of those arrested had also undergone shooting training, it added.

AFP

Two killed, 120 injured in Abu Dhabi gas explosion

Abu Dhabi, UAE - Two people were killed and 120 injured in a gas cylinder explosion in a restaurant in the United Arab Emirates capital Abu Dhabi, police said.

Initial reports 'showed that 64 people sustained minor injuries, 56 others were moderately wounded, and two people died', police tweeted.

The blast on Monday set off a fire that damaged the facades of six buildings and a number of stores before being brought under control, they added. Four of the damaged buildings were 'safely' evacuated, with efforts underway to find their residents temporary housing 'until the buildings are completely secured', the police said. Pictures released by Abu Dhabi police showed first responders tending to a person on a gurney, and debris and broken glass strewn

across the pavement. A witness told *The National* newspaper that he heard two explosions around lunchtime.

"The first sound was small and people started calling the fire and police," said the man, who was not identified.

"Then soon, there was a big blast. It was a really big sound. The windows shook and in some offices, the windows shattered." The authorities gave no indication of foul play.

However, the UAE has been on heightened alert since a Yemen rebel drone and missile attack killed three oil workers in Abu Dhabi on January 17.

Authorities have since thwarted three similar attacks, including one claimed by a little-known militant group believed to have ties with pro-Iran armed factions in Iraq. AFP

SA paraglider makes first legal flight off Everest

Kathmandu, Nepal - A South African paraglider has made the first legal flight off Mount Everest, an expedition organiser said on Tuesday, opening doors for 'climb and fly' adventurers on the world's highest mountain.

Pierre Carter, 55, leapt off near the summit at an altitude of nearly 8,000 metres (26,247 feet) last week, cruising above the Himalayas as other mountaineers descended on foot.

Carter flew down at a top speed of 80km per hour, taking only 20 minutes to land near the small settlement of Gorakshpet at 5,164 metres. "It was a beautiful flight down. Above the clouds and then through the clouds and down," Carter told AFP.

Weather conditions dissuaded Carter from climbing all the way to the top of Everest's 8,849-metre (29,032-foot) summit before his flight from the South Col ridge around noon.

"Once you're in the air it is all relative," Carter said.

"But the take off's always difficult the higher you are... your



South African paraglider Pierre Carter gliding off from the South Col Mt Everest as he flies back to Gorak Shep in Solukhumbu Everest region on May 15 (AFP)

glider doesn't want to fly as easily," Carter began climbing as a teenager and soon became interested in paragliding.

Since 2005, he has flown off five of the seven mountains that make up the tallest summits on their respective continents, beginning with Russia's Mount El-

brus. Carter reached the summit of Alaska's Denali in 2016 but was not permitted to fly. He next aims to repeat the feat off Mount Vinson in Antarctica.

There have been only three recorded flights off Everest, all without government permits.

French alpinist and pilot Jean-

Marc Boivin was the first person to paraglide down from Everest in 1988. A French couple made a tandem flight from the summit in 2001 in a feat that was repeated a decade later by a pair of Nepali climbers.

"This is the first time Nepal has issued a flight permit on its

mountains," Dawa Steven Sherpa of Asian Trekking told AFP.

Sherpa said he expected more climbers to follow Carter next season, now that Nepali authorities have shown a willingness to permit flights off the Himalayas.

"Many climbers are also paragliders and the idea of climbing and flying down is gaining popularity," Sherpa said.

"Authorities now see this can boost Nepal's tourism industry, especially after COVID," Sherpa said.

The country only reopened its peaks to mountaineers last year after the coronavirus pandemic shut down the industry in 2020.

A rare window of good weather has already allowed hundreds of climbers and guides to reach the Everest summit since a team of Nepali climbers opened the route on May 7.

At least three climbers, including a Russian and two Nepalis, have died on Everest since the season began.

AFP

Kenya video gamers face uphill battle to make their mark

Nairobi, Kenya - For years, the virtual world of video games was the only place where Kenyan gamer Brian Diang'a felt safe from his abusive, alcoholic father and their unhappy home in Kibera, Africa's largest slum.

"Gaming was my only escape," Diang'a told AFP, describing a childhood mired in poverty and violence. Popularly known by his online avatar Beast, the 28-year-old discovered video games when he was nine.

"My dad had become an alcoholic and he would come back home in a drunken stupor and beat up my mom. Home became somewhere I did not want to be."

His daily visits to gaming dens worried his mother, who believed they were a bad influence on her son and a distraction from his schoolwork.

"I would receive a beating

from my mom every time she found me in these gaming parlours," Diang'a said.

Far from being a gateway to the world of drugs and crime, his childhood pursuit has instead taken him to tournaments and offered lucrative opportunities to work with tech brands.

Today, he earns around 50,000 Kenyan shillings (US\$430) a month in a country where youth unemployment remains a huge problem.

Diang'a never imagined that his childhood passion could lead to a professional career, until 2013. "I bumped onto YouTube videos where I saw gamers abroad playing Mortal Kombat - a game that I frequently played to pass time - and getting paid up to US\$5000 to compete," he said. So he decided to try and join their ranks.



Contestants react during a gaming session at an exhibition of gaming electronics in Nairobi on October 22, last year (AFP)

Unconventional career

Diang'a is one of several Kenyan gamers trying to find their feet in a multi-billion dollar industry that is slowly making its way onto international platforms such as the

inaugural Commonwealth esports championships, which is expected to feature Kenyan participation. But they are outliers in a society that has traditionally seen academic performance or exceptional athletic ability as the

only route to success.

Law graduate Sylvia Gathoni told AFP her gaming accomplishments still surprised her parents.

In 2018, Gathoni, who plays Tekken under the name Queen Arrow, became the first Kenyan gamer to be signed by an international team, and is currently contracted to US-based UYU.

"The older generation has been wired to think that to be successful you have to go through a specified path which is - go to school, work hard in your academics and then pursue a particular career," Gathoni said.

Instead the 25-year-old has travelled around the world to take part in international tournaments featuring some of the biggest names in the industry including France's Marie-Laure Norindr, better known as Kayane.

'No structure'

But the sector still faces major hurdles in Africa. The continent has struggled to capitalise on its large youth population - 60 per cent of Africans are aged under 25, figures that usually attract sponsors drawn to the prospect of a young, growing fan base.

Many players battle slow internet speeds and time lags compared to their overseas counterparts, who live in developed countries where the vast majority of game servers are located.

Gamers and their dens also encounter police scrutiny in Kenya where the law does not differentiate between esports and gambling.

"In my research, I found that the law needs to catch up with technology - there are a lot of loopholes," said Gathoni, who

hopes to specialise in esports law so she can get involved in policy-making.

Furthermore, while Kenyan gamers regularly meet to play informal tournaments and win cash prizes, the absence of any structure makes it difficult for them to pursue the sport professionally.

"There's no structure at the moment, it is simply a group of friends who come together to play," said tournament organiser Ronny Lusigi. "For video gaming to transition into esports, it has to be organised and competitive," he told AFP.

Nevertheless Diang'a, who now mentors young gamers in Kibera and organises tournaments around Kenya, hopes to see video gaming 'explode in Africa'.

AFP

Quad nations warn against ‘change by force’

A joint statement avoided any direct mention of China’s growing military power in the region

Tokyo, Japan - Leaders of Japan, India, Australia and the United States warned on Tuesday against attempts to ‘change the status quo by force’ as concerns grow about whether China could invade self-ruled Taiwan.

A joint statement by the so-called Quad bloc avoided any direct mention of China’s growing military power in the region, but left little doubt about where its concerns lie.

The carefully worded document also made reference to the conflict in Ukraine, but without offering any joint position on the Russian invasion that India has pointedly declined to condemn.

The Quad’s other members have been less coy about their view that a strong response to Russia’s war is needed, one that would send a message that will deter other countries, including China. “As Russia’s invasion of Ukraine is shaking the fundamental principles of the international order... (we) confirmed that unilateral attempts to change the status quo by force will never be tolerated anywhere, particularly in the Indo-Pacific region,” Japan’s Prime Minister Fumio Kishida said, using another term for the Asia-Pacific.

The group’s statement made no mention of Russia, or China, but listed a range of activities that Beijing has regularly been accused of in the region.

“We strongly oppose any coercive, provocative or unilateral actions that seek to change the



(L-R) Australian Prime Minister Anthony Albanese, US President Joe Biden, Japanese Prime Minister Fumio Kishida and Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi wave to the media prior to the Quad meeting at the Kishida’s office in Tokyo on Tuesday (AFP)

status quo and increase tensions in the area, such as the militarisation of disputed features, the dangerous use of coast guard vessels and maritime militia and efforts to disrupt other countries’ offshore resource exploitation activities,” it said.

The four nations are attempting to build their loose grouping into a more substantive counterweight to China’s rising military and economic power, despite their differences. They unveiled plans to invest at least US\$50bn into regional infrastructure proj-

ects over the next five years and a maritime monitoring initiative seen as intended to bolster surveillance of Chinese activities.

The moves come with worries over recent efforts by China to build ties with Pacific nations including the Solomon Islands, which signed a security pact with Beijing last month.

China’s foreign minister will visit the Solomon Islands this week, with reports suggesting he could add stops in other Pacific nations including Vanuatu, Samoa, Tonga and Kiribati.

‘Democracies versus autocracies’

In a nod to those concerns, Kishida earlier urged Quad members to ‘listen carefully’ to regional neighbours, including the Pacific islands. “Without walking together with countries in the region, the Quad cannot be successful,” he said.

Australia’s newly elected Prime Minister Anthony Albanese also said the bloc needed to ‘push our shared values in the region at a time when China was clearly seeking to exert more in-

fluence’. The Quad met a day after US President Joe Biden raised eyebrows and the regional temperature by saying Washington was ready to intervene militarily to defend Taiwan against any Chinese attack. He insisted on Tuesday that his comments did not mean a change to Washington’s longstanding ‘strategic ambiguity’ on how it might respond to a Chinese invasion, prompting another fierce response from Beijing. Foreign ministry spokesman Wang Wenbin accused Washington of

China, Russia jets flew nearby as Quad met: Japan

Tokyo, Japan - Chinese and Russian fighter jets carried out joint flights over the Sea of Japan and the East China Sea on Tuesday as leaders of the Quad bloc met in Tokyo, Japan’s defence minister said. Nobuo Kishi said Tokyo had expressed ‘grave concerns’ to Russia and China over the flights, which took place while leaders from the United States, India, Australia and Japan held talks on regional security.

“Two Chinese bombers joined two Russian bombers in the Sea of Japan and made a joint flight to the East China Sea,” Kishi told reporters. “After that, a total of four

aircraft, two presumed (new) Chinese bombers - which replaced the two Chinese bombers - and two Russian bombers, conducted a joint flight from the East China Sea to the Pacific Ocean.”

Kishi said a Russian intelligence-gathering aircraft also flew off northern Hokkaido to the Noto Peninsula in central Japan on Tuesday, calling the moves especially ‘provocative’ given the summit in Tokyo.

“We communicated through diplomatic routes our grave concerns from the perspective of our country’s and the region’s security,” he said. AFP



A supporter of PTI party, waves flags beside containers stacked to block the Red Zone ahead of the sit-in planned in Islamabad, on Tuesday (AFP)

Hundreds arrested ahead of protest, march: Pakistan’s opposition party

Islamabad, Pakistan - Pakistani police detained hundreds of supporters of ousted prime minister Imran Khan’s Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf party ahead of a major sit-in planned by the former leader, senior party members and police sources said on Tuesday.

Khan, a cricket star turned populist politician, was kicked out of power last month through a vote of no-confidence, but has heaped pressure on the country’s fragile new coalition government by staging mass rallies across the country since then. “More than 200 supporters of PTI (Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf) have been arrested in Punjab,” a police official in Lahore, the capital of Pakistan’s largest province, told AFP on condition of anonymity. “We have raided their houses and have arrested many of them.” A second official, asking not to be named, provided the same information, adding that those arrested had been booked on public order offences and remain in detention.

Khan has alleged that he was removed through a ‘foreign conspiracy’, and plans on Wednesday to lead an anti-government march from his power base in the northwestern city of Peshawar to the capital Islamabad,

with tens of thousands expected to attend. Khan said he would stage a sit-in until the government dissolves parliament and sets a date for fresh elections.

Fawad Chaudhry, the former information minister in Khan’s government, accused police of carrying out the overnight raids without warrants and put the number of arrested at more than 400. “More than 1,100 houses were raided overnight. Police entered the houses without any warrants and insulted women and children,” he tweeted.

Police have not officially commented on the arrests or allegations. On Tuesday, Khan tweeted that his supporters had a right to peacefully protest. “The brutal crackdown on PTI (leaders) & workers in Punjab & Islamabad has once again shown us what we are familiar with - the fascist nature of PMLN when in power,” he said in a tweet, referring to the party of current Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif.

On Saturday, senior PTI leader and former minister Shireen Mazari was arrested near her house in the capital over a decades-old land dispute. She was briefly detained before a court ordered her release.

AFP

Taiwan man invents stroller for fish to ‘explore land’

Taichung, Taiwan - Jerry Huang’s aquatic pets rarely feel like two lost souls swimming in a fishbowl because they get to go for regular strolls.

In Taiwan’s Taichung City, Huang can be seen pushing his latest invention: a goldfish bowl on wheels.

“In the past, people walked their dogs and cats, now they take their parrots for walks, also snakes, lizards,” Huang, 31, told AFP.

“Is there a chance for underwater creatures to explore the land above water?” he asked himself.



Jerry Huang, maker and fish enthusiast, poses with his fish tank trolley at a park in Taichung, central Taiwan, on May 19 (AFP)

Huang, an avid aerial drone photographer who makes a liv-

ing making content for his YouTube channel, soon came

up with a solution.

After spending weeks in his workshop tinkering with the design, the goldfish stroller actually came together in just a few days, cobbled together from spare parts he had lying around.

The space-age-looking contraption (estimated cost US\$300-400) consists of a large, water-filled acrylic cylinder for the fish to reside in, combined with a battery-powered filtration and oxygen system plunked on a specially built trolley.

“I have done a lot of research before I started making this fish tank. It’s not a spur of the mo-

ment thing. You need to understand fish,” he said.

He decided goldfish, which are hardy and not especially frightened of humans, were the best test subjects.

Huang is fairly confident his goldfish enjoy the adventures.

“We all have this urge to explore other, uninhabitable exotic worlds, that’s why we send spaceships to the universe,” he beamed.

“If I were a goldfish, I would definitely be super thrilled if someone invented a thing for me to go explore other worlds.”

AFP

Political tensions rise ahead of DR Congo’s presidential election

Kinshasa, DR Congo - DR Congo’s presidential election is over a year away, but political tensions are escalating in the vast and volatile country as candidates line up and fears grow the vote will be fraudulent.

Elections in the central African nation frequently turn violent, with dozens of protesters killed. They are also often criticised by observers. But the last presidential election in the Democratic Republic of Congo, in 2018, heralded the first peaceful transfer of power in Kinshasa since independence from Belgium in 1960.

The vote was nonetheless marred by accusations of irregularities and the European Union and others cast doubt over its credibility. According to official results, incumbent President Felix Tshisekedi won, replacing former leader Joseph Kabila after 18 years in power.

Tshisekedi has declared he will stand for president again in a poll planned for late 2023.

However, fears of tampering are already stalking the electoral process, and pressures around political circles in the capital have



People react as DR Congo President Felix Tshisekedi (not in picture) is welcomed at the Melchior Ndadaye International Airport in Bujumbura on Saturday (AFP)

begun to mount. Tshisekedi’s ruling coalition in the national assembly recently rejected an amendment to electoral law that would have banned politicians from distributing money during campaigns, for example.

It also struck down an effort to force the publication of votes by polling station. At present, DR Congo’s electoral commission publishes a single tally of results.

“With these rejections, the

electoral law enshrines tampering and fraud,” said opposition MP Claudel Lubaya.

Martin Fayulu, a politician who claims he was robbed of victory in the 2018 election, told AFP that if Tshisekedi wins the 2023 poll ‘the country will be at war’. Fayulu, along with former president Kabila, who retains swathes of popular support, have both announced that they will contest the coming election.

On May 10, the president of the constitutional court Dieudonne Kaluba was removed from his position after a process of drawing lots for the role.

The unusual method for picking the role had never before been used in the country, and it raised suspicion the government was trying to control the court, which has the final say over disputed elections.

AFP

Two pilots killed in jet crash in Iran

Tehran, Iran - Two Iranian air force pilots were killed on Tuesday when their F-7 training aircraft crashed in Isfahan province south of Tehran, the state broadcaster reported.

“The aircraft’s two pilots were killed in the accident which took place this morning in Anarak district,” the broadcaster’s website said.

The fighter jet was on a training mission when it crashed, the province’s deputy governor Mohammad-Reza Jannessari told the official IRNA news agency.

An investigation has been opened into the cause, he added.

The Iranian air force has suffered several crashes in recent years. Officials have complained of difficulties in acquiring spare parts to keep its ageing fleet in the air.

In February, an Iranian F-5 jet crashed in a residential area of the northwestern city of Tabriz killing three people, including its two-man crew.

AFP

Moscow intensifies attack on Donbas; war enters 4th month

Since invasion began in late February, the support from West has helped Ukraine hold off its neighbour’s advances in many areas

Kyiv, Ukraine - Russian forces on Tuesday stepped up their offensive on the last pocket of resistance around Lugansk in Ukraine’s eastern Donbas region, as the conflict entered its fourth month.

Since Moscow’s invasion in late February, Western support has helped Ukraine hold off its neighbour’s advances in many areas, including the capital Kyiv. Russia is now focused on securing and expanding its gains in Donbas and the southern coast. “The coming weeks of the war will be difficult, and we must be aware of that,” Ukraine’s President Volodymyr Zelensky said in his nightly address on Monday after regional leaders and residents reported heavy bombardments. “The most difficult fighting situation today is in Donbas,” Zelensky said, singling out the worst-hit towns of Bakhmut, Popasna and Severodonetsk. Ukraine’s armed forces said Russian troops were conducting non-stop ‘offensive operations’ in the region.



Smoke and dirt ascends after a strike at a factory in the city of Soledar at the eastern Ukrainian region of Donbas on Tuesday (AFP)

Too late to leave

The governor of Lugansk said Russia had sent thousands of troops to capture his entire region and that Severodonetsk was under massive attack. He warned an estimated 15,000 civilians still in the city that it was too late to leave. “At this point I will not say: get out, evacuate,” Sergiy Gaidai said on Telegram. “Now I will say: stay in a shelter, because such a density of shelling will not allow us to calmly gather people and come for them.” The Ukrainian presidency said on Tuesday that four people in one house had been killed and four others wounded in the

shelling of Severodonetsk, while another three people were killed and six hurt in Donetsk region. Residents of Bakhmut, a crucial junction that serves as a command centre for much of the Ukrainian war effort, told AFP of the aerial onslaught they had suffered. “I looked up from my prayers and heard a frightening sound,” 82-year-old Maria Mayashlapak said next to the splintered remains of her home.

‘Ruthless battle’

More than six million people have fled Ukraine and eight million have been internally displaced since the war broke out, according to the United Nations.

Zelensky said in his address that Russia had carried out nearly 1,500 missile strikes and more than 3,000 airstrikes against Ukraine in the first three months of the war. He claimed most were aimed at civilian targets. Ukraine’s prosecutor general said 234 children had been killed since the war began, and 433 injured. Western countries have sent huge amounts of weapons and cash to Ukraine to help it repel Russia’s assault, and punished Moscow with unprecedented economic sanctions. But Ukraine is demanding swifter delivery of arms and tougher action against Russia.

Ukrainians were ‘paying dearly for freedom and independence’, Zelensky said in a video address on Monday to world business and political leaders gathered at the World Economic Forum in Davos, Switzerland. He called for an international oil embargo on Russia, as well as punitive measures against all its banks and the shunning of its IT sector. Ukrainian Foreign Minister Dmytro Kuleba echoed his comments on Tuesday, saying the “Russian offensive in the Donbas is a ruthless battle, the largest one on European soil since WWII. AFP



Britain’s PM Boris Johnson (AFP)

UK PM under fire over ‘Partygate’ photos

London, UK - UK Prime Minister Boris Johnson on Tuesday faced renewed accusations of lying, after photos emerged of him drinking at a Downing Street gathering during lockdown in 2020. The revelations came as a senior civil servant was expected to publish her long-awaited full report into the ‘Partygate’ scandal, despite allegations that Johnson was trying to have it dropped.

A slew of revelations earlier this year about lockdown-breaking parties caused widespread political and public anger, and put Johnson’s position in jeopardy. But the heat was taken out of a potential mutiny from his own MPs by the war in Ukraine and his hawkish support for President Volodymyr Zelensky. The photos published late on Monday by ITV News were taken during a leaving event for Johnson’s communications director Lee Cain on November 13, 2020, days after the government ordered a second COVID lockdown and banned households from mixing. Johnson can be seen raising a glass and chatting with several people around a table with bottles of wine and food. Police have investigated the leaving event as part of their probe into ‘Partygate’ and fined one person - but not Johnson. When he was asked in parliament last December about the gathering, the prime minister insisted there had been no party on that date and that no rules had been broken. The police did fine Johnson over a surprise birthday party he attended at Downing Street in June 2020 but he has not been fined for any other event. In total, they issued more than 100 fines related to multiple

gatherings in an around the prime minister’s residence and place of work. The BBC’s Panorama programme on Tuesday quoted people who attended Cain’s leaving party as saying it developed into ‘about 30 people, if not more, in a room. Everyone was stood shoulder to shoulder, some people (sitting) on each other’s laps’. The event was on a Friday, when the prime minister press office organised regular ‘WTF’

The revelations came as a senior civil servant was expected to publish her report into the ‘Partygate’ scandal

(‘Wine-Time Friday’) drinks starting at four o’clock in the afternoon, some of the people who attended told the BBC. A Downing Street security guard was mocked when he tried to stop a party in full flow, they said. “People made fun of him because he was so worked up that this party was happening and it shouldn’t be happening.” The deputy leader of the main opposition Labour party, Angela Rayner, said it was ‘astonishing’ that Johnson was not fined for the November gathering. AFP

London’s long-delayed commuter rail link opens

London, UK - Long delayed and over budget, the Elizabeth line rail link finally opened in London on Tuesday, with hopes that the speeded up journey times will provide a much-needed economic boost. Hundreds of people queued outside Paddington station in west London to be on the first train, which departed to cheers at 6:33am (0533 GMT). By 10am, there had been some 130,000 journeys, operator Transport for London (TfL) said. London Mayor Sadiq Khan was one of those on board, and told AFP that the line was a ‘game-changer for our country and our city’. Khan’s predecessor as mayor, Prime Minister Boris Johnson, said the project is forecast to boost the UK economy by £42bn (US\$52bn).

Only one of the line’s three branches has opened so far, from Paddington to Abbey Wood in southeast London. There, commuters wanted to reap the benefits of the new line from a sprawling hinterland ill-served with fast transport links. “I’m excited just to see how quick it actually is,” said Niyana Saratatt, 45, who works in central London. “At the moment I need to take a train, a bus and a Tube. This will cut my journey in half. Everyone’s happy,” she added, predicting a rise in local house prices. The usual bleary-eyed rush hour was replaced - for one day at least - by wide-eyed excitement, as commuters packed the early services.

AFP

Kremlin critic Navalny loses appeal against jail term

Moscow, Russia - Jailed Kremlin critic Alexei Navalny on Tuesday lost his legal appeal against a nine-year prison sentence that he and his allies condemn as politically motivated. His sentencing came as Moscow pushes on with its military offensive in neighbouring Ukraine and Russian authorities seek to silence remaining government critics. A Moscow court ruled to ‘leave the sentence without changes’ and for it to enter into force immediately, meaning that the leader of Russia’s embattled opposition will be transferred to a strict-regime penal colony with harsh conditions, including few family visits. President Vladimir Putin’s arch-critic appeared before the court via video-link from behind bars at his prison colony outside Moscow. Wearing a black prisoner uni-



Alexei Navalny appears on a screen set up at a courtroom of the Moscow City Court via a video link from his prison colony during the hearing, in Moscow on Tuesday (AFP)

form, the 45-year-old looked grim and listened attentively, leaning against his bars, as the judge read out his sentence. During the hearing, he dismissed his trial as ‘meaningless’, saying: “I despise your court, your system.” “It’s you, your system and Putin who are traitors against the Russian people,” said Navalny. “I am ready to sit in jail to

prove that not everyone in Russia is like this.”

‘Burn in hell’

Navalny used his final words to condemn the Kremlin and its military campaign in Ukraine. “What Putin is doing is pointless,” he said. “One crazy thief has seized hold of Ukraine, and no one understands what he wants to do with it. “Your time will pass and you will burn in hell,” he concluded his speech. In late March, Navalny had his jail time extended to nine years after he was found guilty of embezzling donations to his political organisations and contempt of court. He was already serving two-and-a-half years in a prison around 100km east of Moscow for violating parole on old fraud charges. The new sentence will replace

the one he was handed in February 2021, meaning Navalny will remain behind bars for another eight years. Navalny told the court that the judge who sentenced him last year had later passed him a message expressing her regrets, before dying in September. The hearings started last week but Navalny was granted a week’s postponement so he could have a family visit. His lawyer Olga Mikhailova told the court the sentence should be annulled as it is ‘unjust’ and ‘contradicts international law’. After the ruling, she said his legal team would appeal to the country’s constitutional court, focusing on the risk to Navalny of moving to a strict-regime colony. “Alexei often said there was a threat to his life, so we will be going there,” she said. AFP

Tedros, from ‘child of war’ to two-term WHO Director-General

Geneva, Switzerland - Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus, who is all but guaranteed to secure a second term as WHO chief Tuesday, describes himself as a man of peace, shaped by a childhood in war. The first African to head the World Health Organization and the sole candidate on the ballot for the next five-year term has become a familiar face as he spearheads the global response to the coronavirus pandemic. But while COVID and other pandemic threats continue to feature prominently in his

speeches, Tedros has in the run-up to Tuesday’s election increasingly focused on the heavy toll war and conflict like the ones raging in Ukraine are taking on global health. “More even than pandemics, war shakes and shatters the foundations on which previously stable societies stood,” the 57-year-old former Ethiopian minister of health and foreign affairs said on the first day of WHO’s main annual assembly on Sunday. “And it leaves psychological scars that can take years or



Tedros Ghebreyesus (left) shares hand sanitizer with Kenya President Uhuru Kenyatta at the WHO annual assembly in Geneva on Sunday (AFP)

decades to heal,” he said, stressing that he had experienced this firsthand. “I am a child of war,” he said, the emotion palpable in his voice.

‘Pain and loss’

“The sound of gunfire and shells whistling through the air; the smell of smoke after they struck; tracer bullets in the night sky... These things have stayed with me throughout my life, because I was in the middle of war when I was very young.” Years later in 1998, when war

returned to Ethiopia, “I felt the same fear as a parent myself .. and my children had to hide in a bunker to shelter from the bombardment.” And, he said, ‘I feel the same pain and loss again now’, with the conflict that has been raging in his home region of Tigray since late 2020. “Not only a child of war, but following me throughout,” said Tedros. One thing was clear, he said: ‘where war goes, hunger and disease follow shortly behind’.

AFP

Simple yet sumptuous

Turkey is famous for its cuisine, from grilled meats to salads, made with simple ingredients with stunning flavours



Karniyarik (stuffed eggplant)

Ingredients

3 Italian eggplants - halved, 2tsp salt, 1tbsp olive oil, 1 yellow onion - diced
400g ground beef, 1 green bell pepper - diced, 3 cloves garlic - minced
4tbsp tomato paste - divided, 2tsp sea salt, 1tsp Aleppo pepper (or red chilli flakes)
1tsp paprika, 3 tomatoes - diced, ½ cup chopped parsley
2-3tbsp oil, 1 green chilli - sliced, ½ cup water

Method

Preheat oven to 200° C. Cut a slit down the center of the halved eggplants without piercing the skin. Sprinkle the eggplants with salt and set them aside. This will help them release excess water. Heat a large skillet over medium-high heat. Add the olive oil, and once it's hot, add the diced onion and saute for 3 minutes. Add the ground beef and saute for 2 to 3 minutes or until most of the pink is gone. Add the diced bell pepper and saute for 2 minutes. Then add 2tbsp tomato paste, sea salt, Aleppo pepper, and paprika to the skillet. Stir continuously for 30 seconds till the tomato paste is incorporated. Stir in the grated tomatoes and then bring the mixture to a low simmer for 5 minutes.

Remove the skillet from the heat and stir in the chopped parsley. Using a paper towel, remove any excess water from the eggplants. Heat 2tbsp oil in a large skillet or cast iron pan. Fry the eggplants cut side down until they are browned and a little crisped. Flip them and cook the skin side for 2 minutes. Remove and set on a paper towel. Place the eggplants on a large, rimmed baking sheet or in a large baking dish. Top with the meat and pepper mixture. Place a slice or two of green chile on top of each eggplant.

Stir together the remaining 2tbsp of tomato paste and 1/2 cup of water together, then pour in the bottom of the rimmed baking sheet or baking dish.

Cover the eggplants with aluminium foil. Bake covered for 20 minutes. Then, remove the foil and bake for an additional 10 minutes. Serve hot and crisp.



Homemade Doner Kebab

Ingredients

1 large onion, 1 kg ground beef, 2tsp salt, ½tsp black pepper
½tsp cumin, 1tsp oregano, 1tsp garlic powder, ½tsp or paprika
4tbsp yogurt, 2tbsp milk, 2tbsp butter

Method

Puree the onion in a food processor and sieve only its juice into a large mixing bowl. Add the ground beef, all seasoning powders, salt, yogurt and milk in the same bowl. Combine them well using your hand. Give it a log shape, transfer it on a baking paper, and wrap it tightly. Let it rest in the fridge for 2 hours. Then transfer it to the freezer and let it sit there for 8 hours or overnight.

Remove it from the freezer and let it sit on the counter for 5 minutes. Hold the doner log with a piece of baking paper and carefully make large thin slices using a sharp knife. Heat one teaspoon butter in a non stick pan over high heat. Line sliced doner pieces in a single layer and cook both sides until nicely brown. Cook in batches to fry evenly.

Enjoy as it as a snack or add in a wrap with onion rings, lettuce, and tomato slices.

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OTTOMAN CUISINE



TURKISH

Treat

Grand Millennium hosts a Turkish Cultural and Cuisine Week, with Ottoman themed food churned out by celebrity Turkish Chef Sinen Ozler and team, and culminating in a 'Grand Ottoman and Oman Night' on May 26



Hubert Vaz

The tingling strains of the santoor played by popular Turkish musician Sedat Anar seem to usher in a mood that's relaxed, yet mystifying...and the smoky aromas of grilled meats and tantalising mezzes that escort you to your table promise an evening of bliss.

When you enter Bahriyat restaurant at Grand Millennium where a Turkish Cultural and Cuisine Week is currently underway, you realise that food is just one element in relation to the vibrant cultural cauldron of Turkey. At the entrance, there are artists who display their prowess with porcelain as well as canvases with traditional designs and murals that convey, not just legendary Turkish arts and crafts, but also the pulse of a populace that's hospitable and friendly to the core.

As Anar's renditions set the tone for evening, you realise that his belief in music as a 'divine calling' stems from the fact that it appeals to the heart, sans language barriers. And as you take delight in the traditional music, you soon find your appetite building up, and the magnetic pull from the buffet table eventually gets you there.

The food on display included a vibrant spread of cold mezzes that included colourful salads and labneh-based dips, sesame crusted breads, kebabs, popular baked egg-

We have organised this event to showcase the culture and cuisine of Turkey to people from different countries in Oman

H E AYSE SOZEN USLUER

plant dishes with couscous and tomato-based sauces, grilled lamb shanks, stuffed chicken breasts, beef stew, chicken rice, baked beans, lentils balls, and a variety of typical Turkish desserts, including the ever-popular baklava and milk and date-based puddings.

Chef Vito Fornelli, the resident Executive Chef, said, "The cuisine and menu has been decided by the visiting Chef Sinem Ozler. This includes Ankara Casserole (oven baked lamb shanks), chicken breast stuffed with chicken mince and spinach, Albanian liver, and chicken with rice."

Asked what distinguishes Turkish cuisine from other cuisines in the Middle East and Europe, Chef Vito said, "Basically, Turkish cuisine is very simple and natural.



H E Ayse Sozen Usluer, Turkish ambassador with H E Abdullah Saud al Anzi, Saudi ambassador



The chefs want the ingredients themselves to speak - so there is not too much of marination or use of spices. It is simple food with its original taste. Ottoman cuisine is just like classic 'mamma-made' food without too much of mixing or blending with other cuisines. However, the final night will have a big spread and live stations of Turkish and Omani cuisines - both, recipes from the visiting chef as well as from the hotel."

The Turkish Cultural and Cuisine Week, with allied events at Bait al Zubair Museum, has been organised in association with the Embassy of Turkey and Turkish Airlines which has flown in Turkish artists and celebrity chef Sinem Ozler who has taken great care to create a cuisine for this event that presents the best of traditional Ottoman Turkish cuisine.

And, as H E Ayse Sozen Usluer, Ambassador of Turkey, puts it, "Turkey has a vibrant culture and we have organised this event to showcase the culture and cuisine of Turkey to people from different countries in Oman. It will create an interest for them to visit Turkey."

The highlight of this week, however, is the 'Grand Ottoman and Oman Night' at Taybat restaurant on May 26 wherein guests will have an opportunity to savour delicious dishes from Turkey and Oman in a bid to celebrate the friendly cultural ties between both nations. There will be special musical renditions and art displays, too.

West Ham’s Kurt Zouma pleads guilty to kicking pet cat

London, United Kingdom - West Ham defender Kurt Zouma admitted kicking and slapping his pet cat at a London court hearing on Tuesday after disturbing footage posted on-line by his brother caused public outrage across Britain.

The 27-year-old France international pleaded guilty to two counts under the Animal Welfare Act at Thames Magistrates’ Court in east London.

Zouma was said to have targeted the male Bengal cat after blaming it for damaging a chair at his home.

Two cats have since been signed over to be re-homed.

The court was told that the “premeditated” attack was filmed by Zouma’s younger brother, lower-league footballer Yoan Zouma, 24, who sent it to a woman he was due to go on a date with.

But the woman was so shocked that she called off their meeting, telling him: “I don’t think hitting a cat like that is OK - don’t bother coming today.”

Yoan Zouma admitted one count of aiding, abetting, counselling or procuring his older brother to commit an offence.

The pair were released on bail ahead of their sentencing at the same court next week.

Kurt Zouma’s lawyer, Trevor Burke, said the footballer had been subject to racist abuse and threats, had lost a “substantial” sponsorship deal with Adidas, was fined £250,000 (\$312,000) and had not been picked for the France national team since.

The court was told about the disturbing video of the incident, filmed at Zouma’s home and posted on Snapchat on February 6.

The Premier League star



Kurt Zouma (R) leaves after appearing at Thames Magistrates’ Court in London on Tuesday (AFP)

We hope this case will serve as a reminder that all animals deserve to be treated with kindness, compassion and respect, and that we’ll not tolerate cruelty by anybody

DERDERMOT MURPHY

could be seen kicking the Bengal cat across his kitchen before throwing a pair of shoes at it and slapping its head.

The clip contained laughing, and featured laughing emojis.

Prosecutor Hazel Stevens told the court Kurt Zouma could be heard saying: “I swear I’ll kill it, I swear I’ll kill it.”

He admitted two counts of causing unnecessary suffering to a protected animal on February 6.

Zouma arrived at court in chaotic fashion, accompanied by several security guards who emerged from a vehicle holding umbrellas to form a protective shield around the defendant.

The brothers’ addresses cannot be published because of

concerns over the threats to the pair.

In a statement, RSPCA (Royal Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals) chief inspectorate officer Dermot Murphy said: “It’s never acceptable to treat an animal in this way and we were shocked when the video was first brought to our attention.

“What makes this case even more sad is the way the video was filmed and shared, making light of such cruelty.

“We hope this case will serve as a reminder that all animals deserve to be treated with kindness, compassion and respect, and that we will not tolerate cruelty by anybody.”

AFP

FINAL WORD

Carlo Ancelotti ‘respects’ Kylian Mbappe decision, says Real Madrid focused on Champions League final



Real Madrid coach Carlo Ancelotti heads a training session at the Ciudad Real Madrid in Valdebebas, Spain, on Tuesday (AFP)

Madrid, Spain - Carlo Ancelotti said on Tuesday he “respects” Kylian Mbappe’s decision to stay at Paris Saint-Germain but insisted Real Madrid’s players are fully focused on the Champions League final.

Real Madrid were desperate to sign Mbappe when his contract expired this summer but the striker rejected a move to Spain, opting instead to sign a new three-year deal with PSG.

Ancelotti was asked on Tuesday if the hype surrounding Mbappe could affect his players, as Madrid look to defeat Liverpool on Saturday and win the club’s 14th European Cup.

“It’s quite clear for us what we have to think about,” Ancelotti said in a press conference.

“We have never talked about players from other clubs. We have total respect for everyone,

We have never talked about players from other clubs. We have total respect for everyone, we respect the decisions they take and we respect other clubs

CARLO ANCELOTTI

we respect the decisions they take and we respect other clubs.

“We have to do our jobs and it’s quite clear what we have to think about, which is the final.”

Ancelotti was reluctant to discuss Mbappe.

When asked if he was personally disappointed by the Frenchman’s decision, he said: “I understand you have to do your jobs but I never talk about players who don’t belong to Madrid and I’m not going to.”

Real Madrid won La Liga last

month with four games to spare while Liverpool were pipped to the Premier League title by Manchester City on Sunday.

Liverpool have already won the FA Cup and League Cup this season but have been hit by a handful of injuries this month, with Thiago Alcantara and Fabinho both struggling to be fit for the final.

Mohamed Salah, who has had a groin injury, and Virgil van Dijk, who has had a knee problem, both started on the bench against

Wolves on Sunday, with Salah coming on in the second half.

Ancelotti said all his players are in “good condition” while Gareth Bale and Eden Hazard both trained at Valdebebas on Tuesday.

Hazard and Bale have been on the fringes of the first team all season but Ancelotti said they could play against Liverpool.

“Hazard is training well, he can play in the final, Bale can play too, everyone is motivated,” said Ancelotti.

“The feeling in this moment is to enjoy, prepare well, for now we are calm and happy. As we get closer to the match there will be all the other things, some nerves, all very normal.

“Today there is just a lot of motivation to play in another final.”

AFP

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Manchester United finished sixth in the table with their lowest points tally of the Premier League era (AFP)

BBC apologises after ‘Manchester United are rubbish’ gaffe on ticker

London, United Kingdom - The BBC was forced to apologise to Manchester United fans on Tuesday after a message appeared on their news ticker labelling the Premier League club as “rubbish”.

The insult popped up at the bottom of the screen during a tennis update.

Later in the morning, a presenter apologised to any United fans who may have been offended.

She said the mistake had occurred as someone was learning

how to operate the ticker and was “writing random things not in earnest”.

The presenter said: “A little earlier, some of you may have noticed something pretty unusual on the ticker that runs along the bottom of the screen with news making a comment about Manchester United, and I hope that Manchester United fans weren’t offended by it.

“Let me just explain what was happening - behind the scenes

someone was training to learn how to use the ticker and to put text on the ticker, so they were just writing random things not in earnest and that comment appeared. “So apologies if you saw that and you were offended and you’re a fan of Manchester United.”

BBC presenter and Manchester City fan Clive Myrie tweeted: “I had nothing to do with this!!” with the hashtag #mfc.

AFP

Chongqing latest Chinese football club to fold

Beijing, China - Chinese Super League club Chongqing Liangjiang Athletic folded on Tuesday after the pandemic deepened its debt woes, becoming the latest team to disband in the once big-spending division.

Chongqing, where Jordi Cruyff was in charge in 2018-2019, went under barely 10 days before the season starts, dealing another blow to the fast-fading ambitions of China’s football-fan president Xi Jinping.

A succession of Chinese clubs, who were once synonymous with lavish spending, have collapsed in recent years including 2020 CSL champions Jiangsu Suning.

The impact of the Covid pandemic and the football industry’s development model had left it with unpayable debts, Chongqing said in a statement.

“It is with extreme regret that we have decided to withdraw from China’s professional football league and subsequently disband the team,” the statement said.

Attempts to reform the club’s shareholding structure had failed, leading to its accounts being frozen and staff experiencing “extreme difficulties”, the club said.

AFP

RR V DC

David Miller fireworks take Gujarat Titans into final

BRIEF SCORES:
Rajasthan Royals 188 for 6 in 20 overs (Jos Buttler 89 (56) 12x4, 2x6, Sanju Samson 47 (26) 5x4, 3x6) lost to Gujarat Titans 191 for 3 in 19.3 overs David Miller 68 (38) 3x4, 5x6, Hardik Pandya 40 (27) 5x4) by 7 wickets

TODAY'S MATCH (6PM)

LUCKNOW SUPER GIANTS

VS

ROYAL CHALLENGERS BANGALORE

DRS for wides? Chahal says yes, Taufel says no

Mumbai, India -Simon Taufel, the former ICC Elite Panel umpire, is not in favour of wides and height no-balls being referred as part of the two DRS reviews teams have in T20 cricket. Taufel's opinion is in contrast to that of India and Rajasthan Royals legspinner Yuzvendra Chahal, who believes bowlers need a "bit more help" and that teams can "take a chance" by reviewing a wide call as it can potentially be pivotal.

Talking with ESPNcricinfo, Chahal said he was at the receiving end of a potential wrong call on a wide this IPL during the April 10 league match against Lucknow Super Giants. Off the fourth delivery of his fourth over, the 18th of Super Giants' innings, Chahal bowled a wide legbreak which pitched outside the off stump of Dushmantha Chameera. It was called a wide. Chahal disagreed and even had a word with the umpire.

Chahal did trap the Sri Lankan batter lbw next delivery, but said the extra ball cost him dearly as Marcus Stoinis lofted a six off



They can make a mistake, but teams can win by a single run many times

YUZVENDRA CHAHAL

the final ball of his spell. It nearly affected the match result, too, as Royals managed to win by just three runs.

"Definitely. Even umpires are human beings. They can make a mistake, but teams can win by a single run many times," Chahal told ESPNcricinfo when asked if would want wides referred as part of the two reviews teams had. "That happened with me against Lucknow when the umpire signalled a wide, but when I saw it on replay it was not a wide. But due to that I had to bowl an extra ball and I even got hit for a six off the last ball. It became a seven-ball over and they could score seven runs. As it is T20 is a batsman-dominated

game, so if the bowlers get a bit more help, we can do that."

A few weeks later, though, Royals captain Sanju Samson was miffed in the match against Kolkata Knight Riders on May 2, when the on-field umpire Nitin Pandit signalled a wide on three occasions during the penultimate over of the game delivered by Prasidh Krishna. Samson pointed out to Pandit that the batter had moved laterally even before Krishna had released the ball.

Analysing the incident after the match, which Knight Riders won, ESPNcricinfo experts Daniel Vettori and Imran Tahir agreed that bowlers needed "avenues" to "rectify" umpiring errors through the means of the two reviews.

This season, the IPL has added an extra review making it two per innings, something Chahal said was sufficient. "If you want to take a chance, take a chance, but we are giving you only two reviews. We are happy with that."

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Russia's Daniil Medvedev serves the ball to Argentina's Facundo Bagnis during their first-round match at Roland-Garros in Paris on Tuesday (AFP)

Strange things!

Potential return to No 1 after Wimbledon ban ‘very strange’, says Daniil Medvedev

Paris, France - Daniil Medvedev said Tuesday it would feel “very strange” to reclaim the world number one ranking after Wimbledon despite the tournament banning players from Russia and Belarus over the invasion of Ukraine.

The ATP and WTA tours announced last week they would strip Wimbledon of ranking points in response to the ban, clearing the way for Medvedev to again replace Novak Djokovic at the summit.

“Very strange,” second seed Medvedev said after beating Argentina’s 103rd-ranked Facundo Bagnis 6-2, 6-2, 6-2 in the first round of the French Open.

“There are no points, I become number one, well, great for me. If there are points, I cannot become number one, I’m going to be gutted,” said the US Open champion.

“It is what it is. I cannot change some decisions, both about ATP and Wimbledon.”

The 35-year-old Djokovic stands to lose the 2,000 points he earned by winning Wimbledon last year. He has already lost 2,000 points by not being able to defend his Australian Open title.

Medvedev, who reached the last 16 at Wimbledon in 2021, trailed Djokovic by 680 points going into Roland Garros, where the Serb has another 2,000 points to defend as the reigning champion.

“I need to be honest, but yeah, as I said last time, I’d be really happy to play Wimbledon,” said Medvedev. “I love playing on grass. I will play on grass after Roland Garros. But if I cannot, I mean, just going to prepare for next tournaments, and just follow what’s happening there.”

There are no points, I become number one, well, great for me. If there are points, I cannot become number one, I'm going to be gutted. It is what it is

DANIIL MEDVEDEV

Medvedev had already ruled out taking legal action against Wimbledon but said “there are a lot of mistakes” behind the controversial ban.

‘Logical, consistent’

“About the ATP decision, it’s not easy to comment, but when I read... why they made this decision, I found it very logical what they say at least. This is what I didn’t find in Wimbledon explanations,” he said.

“I’m not saying which decision is right, but at least so far in ex-

plaining their decisions, I found ATP just more logical and more consistent.”

Medvedev hit 35 winners and broke eight times against Bagnis, who suffered a nasty slip while serving in the second set and sported a heavily strapped right calf.

“I love Roland Garros, especially since last year,” said Medvedev, who had lost in the opening round on his first four trips to Paris before reaching the quarter-finals in 2021.

“I hope this year I can go fur-

ther.”

Medvedev, in the opposite half of the draw to Djokovic, Rafael Nadal and Carlos Alcaraz, ruled himself out as a French Open title contender last week after losing his only match on clay this year in Geneva on his return from a hernia operation.

The Russian underwent surgery at the start of April after losing in the quarter-finals in Miami.

“Honestly it’s going really well because when I went under the operation I didn’t think I was going to play on clay, but I managed to get back and play last week,” said Medvedev.

“Physically I feel 100 percent, So I hope to play well.”

Medvedev, who rose to world number one for three weeks in February and March, will next play Serbia’s Laslo Djere.

AFP

Medvedev eases through as Rune strikes teen blow

Paris, France - World number two Daniil Medvedev eased into the French Open second round on Tuesday as Denmark’s Holger Rune reminded Roland Garros that Carlos Alcaraz is not the only teenager dreaming of the title.

Medvedev, who came into Paris with just one match on clay this year following hernia surgery, routed Argentina’s 103rd-ranked Facundo Bagnis 6-2, 6-2, 6-2 on the back of 35 winners and eight breaks of serve.

Rune, 19 and just a week older than the highly-rated Alcaraz, marked his main draw debut with a 6-3, 6-1, 7-6 (7/4) dismissal of 14th-seeded Canadian Denis Shapovalov.

Rune, the boys champion in 2019 and a former world junior number one, entered Paris at a career-high 40 having

started 2021 outside of the top 400.

In the current clay season, he won his first title in Munich, beating world number three Alexander Zverev on the way. Shapovalov committed 53 unforced errors in a tie played at breakneck speed.

“I didn’t really show up today but Holger played great tennis,” said Shapovalov, a Wimbledon semi-finalist in 2021.

Jelena Ostapenko, who was a shock Roland Garros winner in 2017, defeated Italy’s Lucia Bronzetti 6-1, 6-4 to end a five-match losing streak having started the year winning 14 of 18.

Ostapenko became the latest player to cast doubt on her appearance at Wimbledon after the tournament was stripped of ranking points.

AFP



Novak Djokovic returns the ball to Yoshihito Nishioka

Djokovic ‘intends to go to Wimbledon’ in ‘lose-lose’ situation

Paris, France - Novak Djokovic said Monday he ‘intends to go to Wimbledon’ to defend his title despite the controversy over the tournament being stripped of ranking points.

“Yes, I intend to go to Wimbledon,” said Djokovic after overcoming Japan’s Yoshihito Nishioka 6-3, 6-1, 6-0 in the French Open first round.

However, he added that the initial decision of the tournament to ban Russian and Belarusian players following the invasion of Ukraine was a ‘mistake’.

The 35-year-old Djokovic stands to lose 2,000 points due to the decision by the ATP and WTA tours to remove ranking points from Wimbledon in response to the player ban.

“On a personal, individual level, I have been very negatively affected,” said Djokovic.

Djokovic believes there were

other solutions available to Wimbledon which would have been less drastic than an outright ban.

“A few days ago I found out that there was a document of recommendation from the British government towards the All England Club and where they had several options,” said Djokovic.

“There was not only one on the table. They haven’t discussed it with anybody from ATP or any individual players or for that matter Russian or Belarusian players to just communicate and understand whether there is common ground where both sides could be making a compromise and something could work out.

“So I think it was a wrong decision. I don’t support that at all. It’s a lose-lose situation for everyone.”

AFP

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Indian umpire Nitin Menon

ICC to re-introduce neutral umpires soon: Official

Dhaka, Bangladesh - The International Cricket Council will soon re-introduce neutral umpires despite the Covid-19 pandemic providing an opportunity to give home umpires more exposure, chairman Greg Barclay said on Monday.

“There were some benefits (of Covid) for cricket,” Barclay told reporters in Dhaka.

“One of them was the chance to use umpires at home. It has given home umpires some exposure to international cricket.

“I think that’s good. It spread the base a little bit wider. But, we are at the other side of Covid. So we are reintroducing neutral umpire arrangement... You will see

neutral umpires back up and running again,” he said.

Umpires from host countries have been used exclusively since 2020 when the pandemic imposed worldwide travel restrictions.

The arrangement came under sharp criticism during Bangladesh’s recent tour of South Africa when the visitors raised allegations of bias against two local umpires in the Test series.

South African umpires Marais Erasmus and Adrian Holdstock stood in the series, where Bangladesh had been on the wrong end of several close calls.

AFP

Injured Olympic champion Lamont Jacobs misses Eugene Diamond League meeting

Paris, France - Italy’s 100 metres Olympic champion Lamont Marcell Jacobs has withdrawn from Saturday’s Diamond League meeting in Eugene after straining an unspecified muscle, the Italian Athletics Federation said.

The 27-year-old - who pulled off a stunning upset in last year’s 100m final in Tokyo - will need ‘10 days rest’, the federation added.

Jacobs strained the muscle when he won in Savona, Italy last week, his first 100m since winning in Tokyo.

He had a small problem with his glute muscles after the Savona race and said he had ‘felt



Lamont Jacobs

held back somehow’.

Jacobs would have faced a stellar field in Eugene, where the world championships take place in July.

AFP

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