

97 trucks of food aid for Yemen

Our Correspondent
Muscat

The sultanate, represented by Oman Charitable Organization (OCO), has sent food aid to Al Mahra in Yemen to provide iftar meals for fasting people in solidarity during the month of Ramadan.

A statement issued by OCO said, 'The aid is part of a programme to organise aid for Yemen. The aid convoy consists of 97 trucks loaded with supplies, including 26,400 food parcels with iftar meals.'

Oman has been at the forefront, politically as well as on the ground, to provide all kinds of assistance to the people of Yemen.

The eight-year conflict has devastated the country and left thousands dead or maimed for life. In Salalah, the Arabian Prosthetics Centre is providing a healing touch and restoring hope among those who have been crippled.



Oman has been at the forefront, politically as well as on the ground, to provide all kinds of assistance to the people of Yemen

The centre has so far helped over 900 Yemenis injured in war get back on their feet.

In 2020, Oman was the hub

Over 35,000 vouchers for Oman

Muscat - OCO has distributed over 35,000 vouchers among needy families in Oman since the beginning of Ramadan this year. It is giving vouchers worth RO30 for purchase of food-stuffs for iftar to needy families.

According to OCO, more than a thousand families benefit from its iftar meals annually. More than RO700,000 has

been raised through the donate.om portal from 34,919 donors this year for different charitable activities.

It called for donations for its Ramadan Iftar Programme through Bank Muscat (0331010930310021), Bank Dhofar (01040609090001), NBO (1049337798005) or www.donate.om

of the World Food Programme (WFP) for air shipments directed to Yemen in response to the COVID-19 emergency.

"WFP transported items such as PPE, hand sanitiser, oxygen cylinders, ventilators and emergency medical supplies to Yemen from Oman on behalf of the International Organization for Migration, the United Nations Population Fund, the Unicef, the WHO and Oxfam," a WFP spokesperson told Muscat Daily.

Port of Salalah too has been a facilitator, being the gateway to Yemen. In November 2022, it partnered with global shipping giant Maersk to launch a new multimodal transport solution to Al Mazyunah Free Zone.

The new service reduces lead time and allows access to multiple markets, helping Yemeni importers save costs and transit time. It also aims to support the growth of SMEs in Oman and Yemen and attract new investors.

School transport law on the anvil: MoE

Our Correspondent
Muscat

To curb school bus accidents, the Ministry of Education will soon announce a law on school transport, according to H E Dr Abdullah Khamis Ambusaidi, Undersecretary for Administrative and Financial Affairs in the Ministry of Education (MoE).

In an interview with Radio Sultanate of Oman focused on school bus accidents, H E Ambusaidi informed that MoE has over 17,000 buses, running which needs RO80mn. "The ministry has tried to negotiate with Mwasalat to transport students, but contracting a transport company will more than double the cost to around RO180mn, which is expensive."

According to H E Ambusaidi, the ministry is currently dealing with school transport matters in joint efforts with Ministry of Transport, Communications and Information Technology, Royal Oman Police, and oil and gas firms.



"The Ministry of Education has set safety standards for student transportation and the Ministry of Transport will soon issue a new school transportation law."

Recent school bus accidents have caused much concern among parents. On March 19, a student fell from a running school bus belonging to the Directorate of Education in North Batinah. The student did not suffer any serious injuries. On February 27, another student fell from a running school bus belonging to a school under the Directorate of Education in Dakhliah.

Last year on September 4, the first day of the 2022-23 academic year, a student in Mabela died when a speeding car hit her as she was getting off a bus.



'Mega-strike' disrupts travel in Germany

Saudi, Iranian foreign ministers plan to meet during Ramadan

Riyadh, Saudi Arabia - The Saudi and Iranian foreign ministers have vowed to meet before the end of Ramadan to implement a landmark reconciliation deal, the two countries said on Monday.

Saudi Prince Faisal bin Farhan and his Iranian counterpart, Hossein Amir-Abdollahian, held their second phone call in less than a week and discussed "a number of common issues... in light of" the surprise agreement brokered



Hossein Amir-Abdollahian



Prince Faisal bin Farhan

by China announced on March 10, the official Saudi Press Agency reported.

"The two ministers also agreed to hold a bilateral meeting between them during the current month of Ramadan", which ends in the third week of April, SPA said.

Iran's foreign ministry said the two men "discussed the latest status of the agreement between the two countries" and "talked about a joint meeting in the holy

month of Ramadan".

"They also discussed the constructive path of relations between the two countries," the Iranian statement said.

Neither statement specified the exact date or location of the highly anticipated meeting, which Saudi officials have said is the next step in restoring ties seven years after they were severed.

Riyadh cut relations after Iranian protesters attacked Saudi

diplomatic missions in 2016 following the Saudi execution of Shiite cleric Nimr al Nimr - just one in a series of flashpoints between the two longstanding rivals.

The deal is expected to see Iran and Saudi Arabia reopen their embassies and missions within two months and implement security and economic cooperation deals signed more than 20 years ago. AFP



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Quran a global necessity to remove hunger from world: Zakir Naik

Our Correspondent
Muscat

A large gathering of citizens and expatriates turned out for a lecture by Indian Islamic televangelist Zakir Naik at Oman Convention and Exhibition Centre on Thursday, the first day of Ramadan.

His lecture - titled 'The Holy Quran is a Global Necessity' - focused on the values of Islam and how these are needed to make the world a better place.

Speaking about the holy month, Naik said, "Ramadan is indeed a time for cleansing the soul and the body. It is like a full body 'servicing'. Fasting for one month detoxifies the body. Fasting was prescribed long before as a means of cleansing, but it is only now that science has come and psychologists today say that if one can control hunger, one can control desires. It is through fasting that one can learn about having a good conscience. Fasting is indeed a training for us to be more pious."

On prayers, Naik said that one must not take the meaning of 'salah' literally as prayers or to seek help. "Salah is a way of programming towards righteousness. It is not merely seeking help. We see evil everyday and it is the programming - five times a day - that can keep us away from evil and sins. Salah helps keep us in the straight path and have our 'appointment' with God."

On charity, Naik said that every Muslim must contribute 2.5 per cent of his annual income to charity. "Zakat is an integral part of every Mus-



Zakat is an integral part of every Muslim. If every rich individual followed this, there would be no poverty in our world; no single person would die of hunger. That is why the Quran is a global necessity to remove hunger from the world

ZAKIR NAIK

lim. If every rich individual followed this, there would be no poverty in our world; no single person would die of hunger. That is why the Quran

is a global necessity to remove hunger from the world."

According to Naik, the majority of Hindus in

India adore and respect him. "Whenever I go for any talks in India, there are thousands of people and out of them almost 20 per cent are Hindus," he said.

Naik fled India - where he is accused in numerous cases and is a fugitive from justice - in 2016.

Among the attendees were people from different backgrounds and communities. Sheikh Ismail, a businessman from Bangladesh based in Al Khoudh, said, "I have followed Naik since

2015 and love his talks. People often call him a controversial figure, but I didn't find anything objectionable or disrespectful to anyone in today's speech. He cited verses from the Holy Book and gave us hope and optimism. We are very lucky to have him here during Ramadan."

In his second lecture in Muscat - at Sultan Qaboos University on Saturday - Naik spoke on 'Prophet Muhammad, A Mercy to Humankind'.

Naik's lectures were organised by the Ministry of Endowments and Religious Affairs.

Staying healthy during Ramadan



Ramadan is an ideal time to recharge our spiritual energy, purify our hearts and clear our minds as we rid our bodies of toxins. Although the holy month provides a chance to cleanse our body through fasting, people who suffer from chronic ailments like kidney disease, diabetes, high blood pressure and heart disease should consult their doctor to decide whether they can fast.

Advanced kidney disease, heart failure, severe diabetes, very high blood pressure, severe heart disease, cancer patients, those on chemotherapy, and those suffering from acute serious illness are exempted from fasting.

Blood donation

Healthy adults can donate blood during Ramadan. It should be done soon after iftar and donors must make sure to drink plenty of water after donation.

Pregnant/nursing women

Pregnant women should be exempted from fasting. Healthy nursing mothers can fast, provided they are able to breast feed the baby and take plenty of nutritious food.

Ideal meal

An ideal meal contains a good amount of complex car-



Dr Basheer Alikaparambil

HOD, Internal medicine & Diabetology
Badr al Samaa Hospital, Ruwi

bohydrates like wholemeal flour and par-boiled rice with beans, lentils, green vegetables etc. Fibre-rich food digest slowly and release energy slowly - apricots, green beans, vegetables and fruits with skin, prunes and figs are few examples.

Drink fresh juices and plenty of water till suhoor. Avoid carbonated drinks, fried foods, fast foods and processed food as these take out plenty of water from your body and don't digest easily, which may precipitate low sugar and fatigue.

Iftar

Start with 1-2 dates following a prophetic tradition, which provides a burst of energy, followed by a cup of fresh juice, fruits and a little traditional snacks with less oil. The next meal should be after prayers, which should be a balanced meal with plenty of fibre-rich food. One can have rice and whole wheat based preparations; meats should preferably be curry based or grilled rather than fried. Drink plenty of water.

Suhoor

Suhoor should be a wholesome meal to provide you enough energy for long hours of fasting ahead. The diet should be slowly digesting type. Keep a gap between suhoor and fajr to give you enough time to drink plenty of water.

FAK KURBAH

Anonymous donor helps release of 38 prisoners in Dhahirah

Muscat - For the seventh year in a row, an anonymous generous individual has donated for the release of all indebted prisoners in Dhahirah who met the eligibility criteria for the Fak Kurbah initiative run by Omani Lawyers' Association.

'A philanthropist, who wants to remain anonymous, took care of the release of 38 people who were sentenced by courts in Dhahirah governorate to imprisonment,' a Fak Kurbah statement said.

In 2022, the same donor helped set free 61 prisoners in the governorate.

Being held this year under the slogan 'Because we believe everyone deserves a second chance,' the initiative aims to collect donations to secure the release of those who have been imprisoned due to financial, civil, commercial or labour cases.

To make the initiative easily accessible to donors, Dr Mohammed al Zadjali, Chairman of Omani Lawyers' Association, launched a website - <https://www.fakkrba.om> - for online donations before the advent of Ramadan. Direct bank account transfer continues as an option.

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Aquaculture industry set for major growth

Singapore's Blue Aqua is partnering with BSTL and MIH for aqua projects in Oman

Our Correspondent
Muscat

Blue Aqua International, Bahwan Services and Trading LLC (BSTL), and Muscat Investment House (MIH) have announced a strategic partnership to develop major aquaculture projects in Oman and Singapore.

The partnership aims to support the sustainable growth of the aquaculture industry and ad-



dress the global food security concerns.

Singapore-based Blue Aqua International will partner with BSTL and MIH on multi-phase

aquaculture development projects in Oman. These include the country's first state-of-the-art aqua feed mill with a production capacity upwards of 30,000

tonnes, a high-tech trout farm with a capacity to produce 3,000 tonnes and a super-intensive shrimp farm using Blue Aqua's patented Mixotrophic System to

produce 1,000 tonnes of shrimp annually.

With this partnership, the three companies aim to support Oman's Vision 2040 by creating a world-class aquaculture project in the country, which will contribute to the economic diversification and growth of Oman while also addressing the increasing demand for sustainable seafood products globally.

"This partnership is a significant step towards the development of Oman's aquaculture sector and underscores the potential of the country to become a major player in the global seafood market," said Dr Farshad Shishehchian, CEO of Blue Aqua International.

"With our cutting-edge technology and BSTL's expertise in project management and execution, we are confident that we can create a sustainable and profitable aquaculture project in

Oman."

A BSTL representative said, "We are thrilled to announce our new aquaculture project partnership. By combining our expertise and resources, we are poised to make a significant impact in sustainable seafood production. Our shared commitment to responsible aquaculture practices will not only benefit the environment but also provide high-quality, nutritious seafood to consumers in Oman and around the world. We are confident that this partnership will drive innovation and growth, and we look forward to the positive impact we will make together."

In addition to BSTL's stake in the Blue Aqua Singapore, MIH is also owning a ten per cent stake in the same entity.

These investments will support the development of Singapore's first high-tech trout farm, which is expected to produce up-

ward of 3,000 metric tonnes annually in a space of 1.6 hectares using super-intensive technology. The project is expected to be completed in 2024 and will contribute to Singapore's '30 by 30' food security initiatives.

An MIH representative said, "We are excited to announce our new partnership in the aquaculture industry. Our mission is to provide sustainable and responsible seafood to meet the growing demand while preserving our oceans' delicate ecosystems."

With this partnership, the MIH representative said, "we are committed to leveraging our collective expertise to drive innovation and efficiency in our operations, delivering top-quality products that meet the highest standards."

"Together, we will create a brighter, more sustainable future for both our business and the environment."

Oman can generate RO530mn from recyclable waste annually: Municipality

Our Correspondent
Muscat

The Sultanate of Oman generates recyclable waste to the tune of 2.3mn tonnes per year, and if it is recycled locally it can generate a revenue of RO530mn annually, the Muscat Municipality stated.

Emphasising on the need to lower the impact of plastic on the environment, the civic body urged people to recycle those products entering their households, besides choosing environmentally friendly alternatives wherever possible.

Plastic dominates the list of the most harmful wastes for the environment for containing non-degradable chemicals that allow it to remain in the environment for a long time and, thus affect



the ecosystem, it stated.

The impact of plastics goes beyond damaging the soil and water. It poses a threat to the living organisms in the marine environment such as plants or fish which feed on discarded plastics

directly or indirectly.

A study published by be'ah in the company's 'Sustainability Report for 2022' indicated that one of the prominent ways - which helps decrease the impact of plastic - is recycling and use of

environmentally friendly alternatives.

'The volume of circular economy investments in the sultanate is estimated at about RO577mn,' municipality said.

Some good practices may make the difference in solving the menace, it added.

'The problem can be tackled by raising awareness among the community members of their role towards the environment. The society needs to adopt optimal and effective waste management to minimise the use of unnecessary plastics in everyday life.

'A serious thought needs to be given before buying plastics, and making an effort to replacing it with other biodegradable and reusable materials,' the Muscat Municipality added.

Value of real estate deals in Oman rise 17.4% in February: NCSI data

Our Correspondent
Muscat

The value of real estate transactions in the sultanate increased 17.4 per cent to RO447.3mn in February, compared to RO381.1mn during the same period in 2022, according to the latest data released by the National Centre for Statistics and Information (NCSI).

Fees collected for legal transactions amounted to RO12.5mn at the end of February, constituting an increase of



22.8 per cent when compared to the corresponding period of 2022.

The value of sale contracts amounted to RO207.5mn, the value of mortgage contracts rose to RO238.3mn, while the value of swap contracts reached RO1.5mn.

The number of title deeds issued in February reached 39,79, while the number of title deeds issued to citizens of GCC countries increased 41.9 per cent to 210 compared to 148 in February 2022.

Heavy rains expected, schools closed in 4 governorates

Our Correspondent
Muscat

Heavy rains are expected over large parts of the sultanate for two days from Tuesday, the Civil Aviation Authority (CAA) said.

The Ministry of Education issued a decision to suspend classes in all public and private schools in the governorates of Musandam, North Batinah, Buraimi and Dhahirah on Tuesday due to anticipated heavy rains.

The National Multi Hazard Early Warning Centre of the Directorate General of Meteorology informed that the sultanate will be affected by a low pressure trough on Tuesday and Wednesday. 'Rain, occasional thunder-showers, fresh winds and flash floods in wadis are expected in Musandam, North Batinah, Buraimi and Dhahirah,' CAA added.

Registration opens for London International Youth Science Forum

Our Correspondent
Muscat

The Ministry of Higher Education, Research and Innovation has announced the opening of registration for the London International Youth Science Forum 2023 - to be held under the theme 'Science for Unity' from July 26 to August 9.

Registration is open for students between 19 and 21 years of age to represent Oman in the forum for the fifth time.

To register, an applicant should be fluent in spoken and written English, enrolled in one of the fields of science, technology, engineering and mathematics in university, active in research projects or scientific competitions, pass the personal interview with the evaluation committee, and be able to represent the sultanate in international forums.

The participant should also



not have participated in the forum in previous years.

Interested applicants can register through <https://orp.trc.gov.om/awards/liysf/sub> - from March 26 to April 16.

Participants of the forum will be able to attend lectures, workshops at the University of Oxford, the University of Cambridge and Imperial College London, and visit scientific laboratories,

institutes and international companies in the UK.

The participation of the sultanate's youth in the forum comes as part of the ministry's efforts to raise scientific awareness among young researchers by giving them the opportunity to meet with their peers from different countries, and to inform them of the latest findings of scientists in various fields of research and knowledge.

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Source: xe.com

BRIEFS

China will account for one-third of global growth in 2023: IMF

China is projected to give a significant boost to the world economy, accounting for about a third of global growth in 2023, the managing director of the International Monetary Fund said.

"The robust rebound means China is set to account for around one third of global growth in 2023 - giving a welcome lift to the world economy," Kristalina Georgieva said at the 2023 China Development Forum in the capital Beijing.

According to the IMF analysis, a 1 percentage point increase in GDP growth in China will lead to a 0.3 percentage point increase in growth in other Asian economies, she said.

Although uncertainties are exceptionally high, she said news of the world economy is not all bad as there are some "green shoots," including in China.

Oman's oil output rises 3% in February, but exports decline

Our Correspondent
Muscat¹

Oman's daily average production of crude oil continued to remain above 1mn barrels per day (bpd) during the first two months of this year, up by three per cent in comparison to daily average output recorded in the same period of last year.

Daily average oil output during the January-February period of 2023 increased to 1.063mn bpd compared with 1.032mn bpd in the same period of 2022, the data released by National Centre for Statistics and Information (NCSI) showed.

The sultanate's total oil production in the first two months of 2023 grew by 3.0 per cent to 62.75mn barrels compared to 60.93mn barrels in the same period of last year.

Of the total production, crude output rose by 2.9 per cent year-on-year to 49.39mn barrels during the January-February period, while condensates output increased 3.5 per cent to 13.35mn barrels during the first two months of 2023.

The sultanate's total oil production for the full year 2022 had increased by nearly 10 per cent to 388.4mn barrels compared to



354.5mn barrels recorded in 2021.

Oil exports decline 6.9%

Oman's oil exports declined by 6.9 per cent during January-February this year to 49.71mn barrels compared with 53.38mn barrels recorded in the corresponding period of 2022.

In contrast, total oil exports for the full year 2022 had increased by 10.6 per cent to 319.5mn barrels in comparison with 288.9mn barrels in 2021, the NCSI data showed.

Exports to China, the biggest buyer of Oman's crude, accounted for 89.5 per cent of the sultanate's total oil exports in the first two months of 2023. However, total exports to China decreased by 4.3 per cent to 44.49mn barrels during January-February this year compared to 46.51mn barrels in the same month of 2022.

On the other hand, exports to India also dropped by 67.4 per cent to 1.71mn barrels in the first two months of 2023 from 5.26mn barrels in the same period of 2022.

recorded in the same period of 2022.

However, average oil price for February remained lower at US\$77.4 per barrel compared with the January price at US\$86.2, the NCSI data showed.

Oman crude price (for May delivery) on Monday decreased 0.5 per cent to close at US\$74.81 per barrel at the Dubai Mercantile Exchange (DME).

Global oil prices have softened in recent months from their above US\$100 per barrel levels recorded during last year. The average price at which Oman sold its crude during 2022 surged to US\$95.4 per barrel from US\$64.3 per barrel recorded in the previous year.

As a result of high oil revenues, Oman posted a budget surplus of RO1.146bn for the full year 2022 against an estimated deficit of RO1.550bn in the beginning of last year. Oman crude prices closed the year 2022 with a second straight annual gain.

As a precaution against oil price volatility, Oman's 2023 state budget is based on an average oil price estimate of US\$55 per barrel and average oil production of 1.175mn barrels per day.

Israel says UAE free trade deal to take effect April 1

Jerusalem - Israel and the United Arab Emirates have signed a customs agreement, Israeli officials said, the final step of a free trade deal inked after the two countries normalised ties.

Signed in May 2022, the free trade deal is set to take effect on April 1 and is the first of its kind between Israel and an Arab country, Israeli authorities said.

Hailing the "historic" free trade pact, Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu said it would "reduce customs duties, lower the cost-of-living and inject energy into business between Israel and the UAE".

A statement from the Israeli foreign ministry said the free trade deal would see customs duties "lowered or cancelled on approximately 96 per cent of goods and will allow Israeli companies to gain access to UAE government tenders".

Bilateral trade between the two countries last year registered more than US\$2.5bn, excluding software and services, making the Gulf country "Israel's 16th largest trading partner" the ministry added.

AFP

SPIEF 2023: A major platform for Omani entrepreneurs to develop business relations in Russia

Muscat- Entrepreneurs from Oman have a unique opportunity to participate in the St Petersburg International Economic Forum (SPIEF) set to take place from June 14 to Junr 17, 2023, in the city of Saint Petersburg in Russia.

The SPIEF provides a platform for global leaders and financial honchos to engage, connect, reach out, and resolve issues. This annual forum is the world's biggest and most important business conference and is an invitation-only event. Participants include world leaders, CEOs of major companies, key industry experts, scientists, philanthropists, civil society, and start-ups.

'St. Petersburg International Economic Forum is an excellent opportunity for entrepreneurs from Oman to establish new business contacts, discuss current economic issues, and establish relationships with the business community and the authorities. It is a major platform to develop business relations, and an excellent opportunity to participate in a discussion platform,' the organisers of SPIEF 2023 said in a press release. The event is an opportunity to occupy a vacant niche in Russia and unites entrepreneurs from all over the world in one place.

The forum provides a unique opportunity to learn about the latest trends in the global economy, meet with colleagues, and establish new business contacts.

'We welcome entrepreneurs from the dultanate to join global business leaders at this wonderful platform. The

A man in a suit is talking on a mobile phone while standing in front of the SPIEF banner.

Saudi National Bank chairman resigns after Credit Suisse buyout

Riyadh, Saudi Arabia - The chairman of Saudi National Bank, the main shareholder of troubled lender Credit Suisse which was bought out this month, has resigned, a statement said on Monday.

The Saudi bank's board of directors "accepted the resignation" of Ammar AlKhudairy "due to personal reasons", said the statement published on the Saudi stock exchange.

Credit Suisse's shares plummeted on March 15 after AlKhudairy said the Saudi bank would not raise its stake from 9.8 per cent due to regulatory constraints.

The following day, Credit Suisse rallied on the stock market after grabbing a US\$54bn central bank lifeline in a bid to restore investor confidence.

But fears about the health of the broader financial sector led to its takeover by domestic rival UBS on March 19.

In the aftermath of his comments, AlKhudairy tried to minimise what he described as a "panic".

"If you look at how the entire banking sector has dropped, unfortunately, a lot of people were

Ammar AlKhudairy

just looking for excuses," he told CNBC television.

"It's panic, a little bit of panic. I believe completely unwarranted, whether it be for Credit Suisse or for the entire market."

Saeed Mohammed al Ghamdi, who had been serving as Saudi National Bank's CEO, will replace AlKhudairy as chair, Monday's statement said.

Talal Ahmed al Khereiiji has been appointed acting CEO, it said. The Wall Street Journal reported last week that Saudi Na-

Saudi Finance Minister Mohammed al-Jadaan did not comment on specific financial institutions but said "multiple failures" including on the regulatory front had fuelled troubles in the banking sector - "whether it is supervisory, whether it is management, whether it is concentration, whether it is mismatch of asset liability".

He added that he did not believe those risks applied to Saudi Arabia.

"Just focusing on Saudi, you will go back to history, and you will hear a lot of comments that the two regulators in Saudi Arabia are quite conservative. And that's what we then benefit from in a situation of distress," he said.

A media report on Sunday said the Swiss financial regulator Finma was probing how to hold bosses at Credit Suisse to account following its emergency takeover by UBS.

"We are not a penal authority but we are exploring the corresponding possibilities," Finma chair Marlene Amstad was quoted as saying in an interview with NZZ am Sonntag weekly.

AFP

Swiss regulator vows to hold Credit Suisse bosses to account

Zurich, Switzerland - Swiss financial regulator Finma is probing how to hold bosses at Credit Suisse to account following its emergency takeover by rival UBS, a media report said on Sunday.

"We are not a penal authority but we are exploring the corresponding possibilities," said Finma chair Marlene Amstad was quoted as saying in an interview with NZZ am Sonntag weekly.

Switzerland, whose vibrant banking scene is a key part of the country's culture, has been shocked to the core by the enforced merger of Credit Suisse

with UBS at the government's behest.

A number of observers have voiced fears the new entity emerging from the shotgun marriage will be not so much too big to fail as too large to succeed - even though the SNB central bank maintains the merger avoided triggering a wider banking crisis.

Amstad - who noted the new entity's capital and liquidity demands would need to grow progressively in accordance with its new size - did not hold back on criticism of the culture which had led to its predicament.

The upheaval adds to wide banking turbulence caused by the recent collapse of three US banks.

"The problems were not limited to a sole part of the business but spread across various

bank's woes on social media, something Amstad rejected.

"The social media storm was clearly not the cause of the problem at Credit Suisse. These go back a long way.

"The causes were various scandals and mistakes by management in recent years," she said.

"The bank was already in a crisis of reputation and confidence. At the end of the day, (Credit Suisse) failed because of numerous scandals and bad management decisions.

"The bank's management cleaved for a long time to a high-risk strategy but was not

able to deal with those risks in adequate fashion.

"The problems went on for several years," Amstad said, adding she was "not naming names."

Some sector observers have blamed the authorities for not acting sooner but Amstad said Finma had been working behind the scenes and that its actions were not always made public.

She concluded by stressing: "A deficient enterprise culture and strategic appreciation errors on the part of management cannot be totally eliminated by strict regulation."

AFP

Collapsed Silicon Vally Bank bought by rival First Citizens

Whashington, US - US bank First Citizens said Monday it has agreed to purchase much of Silicon Valley Bank, whose collapse this month sparked global fears about the sector.

SVB, a key lender to the tech industry since the 1980s, became the biggest US bank to fail since 2008.

Regulators seized it after a sudden run on deposits, creating Silicon Valley Bridge Bank. That entity will be taken over by First Citizens from Monday.

First Citizens said it had agreed to purchase "substantially all loans and certain other assets, and assume all customer deposits and certain other liabilities of Silicon Valley Bridge Bank."

It said the 17 former branches of SVB will open on Monday as "Silicon Valley Bank, a division of First Citizens Bank."

The transaction includes the sale of US\$72bn in assets at a discount of US\$16.5bn, the US Federal Deposit Insurance Corporation (FDIC) said in a statement.

Depositors of SVB will "automatically become depositors of First Citizens Bank," added the FDIC, which will continue to insure deposits.

All of the entity's loans and deposits will now be managed by



First Citizens, while the FDIC will retain some US\$90bn in securities and other assets.

SVB's collapse sparked a crisis of confidence among the customers of similarly sized US banks, with many withdrawing their money and depositing it into bigger institutions seen as too big for the government to not bail them out in a crisis.

The FDIC said it estimates the cost of SVB's failure to its De-

posit Insurance Fund (DIF) to be approximately US\$20bn.

"This has been a remarkable transaction in partnership with the FDIC that should instill confidence in the banking system," Frank Holding Jr, chief executive of First Citizens, said in a statement according to Bloomberg.

Along with the FDIC, the United States Treasury and Federal Reserve had set out plans to ensure SVB customers would be

able to access their deposits, while the Fed introduced a new lending tool for banks in an effort to prevent a repeat of SVB's quick demise. The turmoil also spread to Europe, where troubled Swiss lender Credit Suisse was taken over by UBS.

Most recently, shares in long-troubled Deutsche Bank fell heavily on Friday on the lender's surging cost of default cover, reigniting fears about a widening

banking sector crisis.

Despite global contagion fears, central banks have pushed on with monetary tightening as they focus on fighting inflation - even though the troubles in the banking sector have been linked to their rate hikes.

SVB took a US\$1.8bn loss in the sale of a bond-heavy portfolio whose value dropped dramatically due to the rate hikes.

AFP



This file photo taken on October 8, 2018 shows car traffic on the ring road in Berlin (AFP)

EU backs fossil fuel car ban, as Germany lifts veto

Brussels, Germany - The 27 EU member states approved Monday a deal between Brussels and Germany that lifted Berlin's block on a planned phaseout of sales of new fossil fuel cars by 2035.

A spokesman for Sweden, which holds the EU presidency, said ambassadors backed the agreement. Energy ministers are expected to give the final green light on Tuesday during a meeting in Brussels.

Germany, one of the world's biggest car manufacturers, had irked its EU partners by blocking a deal that had already been approved under the bloc's standard legislative process.

The ban on internal combustion engines is key to the EU's ambitious push to become a "climate neutral" economy by 2050, with net-zero greenhouse gas emissions.

Germany blocked the deal at the 11th hour, calling for an exemption for cars that run on synthetic fuels, as divisions inside Berlin's coalition government undermined the EU process.

The fuels for which Germany wanted an exemption are still under development and should be produced using low-carbon electricity, but environmentalists oppose them.

German Chancellor Olaf Scholz gave in to pressure from his liberal partners to maintain the unity of his fragile coalition, which also includes the Greens, and pushed for the fuels that would make it possible to extend the use of combustion engines.

With such a key text on the line, the European Commission clambered to break the impasse with Berlin by holding weeks-long talks with the German transport ministry.

On Saturday, the EU and Berlin hailed their deal to resolve the dispute.

German Transport Minister Volker Wissing said vehicles with combustion engines could continue to be registered after 2035 but only if they use fuels that are neutral in their CO2 emissions.

AFP

Economists expect US recession this year

Washington, US - The United States will likely enter a recession this year and face high inflation well into 2024, a majority of economists predicted in their response to a semiannual survey.

More than two-thirds of respondents to the National Association for Business

Economics (NABE) Policy Survey also see inflation remaining above four percent at the end of this year. The survey summarized the responses of 217 NABE members, and was conducted between March 2 and March 10, the organization said in a statement.

The US Federal Reserve has raised rates 4.75 percentage points in a bid to tackle rising inflation, which reached its highest level in decades last year.

Price rises slowed slightly to an annual level of 6.0 per cent in February, which is well above the Fed's long-term target of two

percent.

Amid the gloomy economic forecast, there was also some good news, with just five percent of respondents believing the US is currently in the midst of a recession, "far fewer" than the 19 per cent in its previous economic survey, the NABE president Julia

Coronado said in a statement.

Economists also slightly raised the chances of the Fed achieving a so-called "soft landing" - bringing down inflation while avoiding a recession - from 27 per cent in August to 30 per cent in March this year.

AFP

Musk puts Twitter's value at just \$20bn

New York, US - Elon Musk has put the current value of Twitter at US\$20bn, less than half the US\$44bn he paid for the social media platform just five months ago, according to an internal email seen by American news media.

The email to employees referred to a new stock compensation program in the San Francisco-based company and the allocation of shares to employees of X Holdings, Twitter's umbrella company since Musk purchased it in late October.

The compensation plan values the platform at US\$20bn, slightly more than Snapchat's parent company Snap (US\$18.2bn) or Pinterest (US\$18.7bn), both of which are publicly traded, unlike Twitter.

Musk, who is also the chief executive of Tesla Inc and aerospace group SpaceX, said that Twitter would allow its employees to cash in shares every six months. A query from AFP emailed to Twitter's communications department generated an automatic response in the form of a poop emoji.

In the internal email, Musk describes the brutal contraction in Twitter's value. He says the platform faced such grave financial difficulties that at one point it was on the verge of bankruptcy.

"Twitter was trending to lose -\$3bn/year," Musk said in a message posted Saturday on the platform.



Elon Musk

He cited a revenue drop of US\$1.5bn a year and a debt-servicing burden of the same amount - leaving it with "only 4 months of money."

Musk, Twitter's majority shareholder, added simply: "Extremely dire situation."

But he then said that "It looks like we will break even" in the second quarter of the year, with advertisers - many of whom fled the platform after the mercurial billionaire bought it - now beginning to return.

Since taking control, Musk has sharply cut the group's payroll from 7,500 employees to fewer than 2,000.

He said in the email that he sees a "clear but difficult path" to a valuation of US\$250bn, without specifying how long that might take.

AFP



بنك برودا

Bank of Baroda

(Oman Branches)

PROFIT AND LOSS ACCOUNT FOR THE YEAR ENDED DECEMBER 31, 2022

(R.O. '000)

Details	Current Year (2022)	Previous Year (2021)
Gross Interest Income	2647	2285
Interest Expense	(1,201)	(1,328)
Net Interest Income	1446	957
Other Operating Income		
1. Dividend Income		
2. Net Fee & Commission Income	259	211
a) Fee and Commission Income	259	211
Less: b) Fee and Commission Expense		
3. Net Foreign Exchange Income	228	110
a) Income	228	110
Less: b) Expense		
4. Net Income from dealing in securities		
a) Gain / (loss)		
Less: b) Expense		
5. Net Income from Investment Securities	834	580
a) Income	834	580
Less: b) Expense		
Gross Income	2767	1858
General Administrative Expenses	(1,042)	(1,330)
Depreciation	(6)	(7)
Total Operating Costs	(1,048)	(1,337)
Net Operating Profit (Profit on ordinary activities before provisions)	1719	521
Income from Subsidiaries		
a) (Loss) from Islamic financing		
b)		
Income from Associate Companies		
a)		
b)		
Income from Other Licensed Activities		
- Investment Activities		
Profit from sale of non-banking assets		
Bad debts Written off	120	(1,433)
ECL Allowance (net) charged for Loans & Advances	(1,589)	(1,879)
ECL Allowance (net) charged for Investments		
ECL Allowance (net) charged for Placements		
ECL Allowance charged (net) for Off-balance sheet items	36	196
ECL Allowance charged (net) for Others (if any)		
Provision for diminution / Gain in value of investments		
Profit for the year after loan loss provisions	286	(2,595)
Taxation	124	0
Net profit after tax	162	(2,595)
Other Comprehensive Income for the year		
- Movement in fair value of available for sale / FVOCI investment for the year		
-Effect of currency translation for the year		
-Any other comprehensive income for the year (please specify)		
Total Comprehensive Income for the year	162	(2,595)

ASSETS AND LIABILITIES FOR THE THE YEAR ENDED DECEMBER 31, 2022

(R.O. '000)

Assets (Net of total ECL)	2022	2021
1. Cash	285	232
2. Balances with CBO	18698	21203
3. Capital Deposit with CBO	500	500
4. Government & other Securities	-	-
5. Treasury Bills & Other Bills	-	-
6. Due from H.O., branches, principal shareholders & affiliates abroad	4003	3568
7. Due from banks:	4000	4000
i) Placements	4000	-
ii) Loans & Advances	-	-
8. Other Money Market Placements	-	-
9. Investments	7985	20032
10. Loans and advances	53047	47812
11. Tangible Fixed Assets	34	34
12. Losses carried forward	-	-
13. Other Assets	2801	2433
Total Assets	91353	95814
Liabilities	2022	2021
1. Deposits (incl. Govt.)	63798	57951
a) Demand	15247	14011
b) Savings	4533	5316
c) Time	44018	38624
2. Certificate of Deposits	-	-
3. Due to H.O., branches, principal shareholders & affiliates abroad	-	-
4. Due to Banks:	0	9625
i) Placements		
ii) Borrowings(Due to Affiliates)	0	9625
5. Other Money Market Deposits	-	-
6. Borrowings from CBO	-	-
7. Capital	24500	24500
8. Reserves	1432	1432
9. Retained Earnings	-1259	-1421
10. Capital Bonds	-	-
11. Other Liabilities	2882	3727
Total Liabilities	91353	95814

W MUSCAT OBSERVES EARTH HOUR



W Muscat hosted a candlelight event at Meduse Lounge in observance of the Earth Hour on March 25. The event was held to raise awareness about climate change and promote sustainable practices by turning off non-essential lights and enjoying a candlelit evening and stargazing. The hotel expressed pride in having this 'small step' taken for creating a brighter, greener, and more sustainable future



Mercedes-Benz announces Ramadan offers until April

Mercedes-Benz Oman has announced limited-time special offers for Ramadan.

The offers, which began on March 1 and to run until April 30, include a five-year/75,000km service package, four years of Mobilo on-road assistance service, three years of unlimited mileage warranty, free registration for the first year, and a complimentary gift from the stylish Mercedes-Benz Lifestyle Collection.

Customers can also benefit from special services at the showrooms, as part of its commitment to creating a seamless and convenient luxury experience for its customers.

"The Holy month of Ramadan is a special time of the year. And during this time, in true Mercedes-Benz fashion, we want to consistently place customers and their needs front and centre," said Shaun Michael, Chief Executive Officer at Mercedes-Benz Oman.

"We welcome customers to visit our showrooms, where our dedicated specialists are willing to delight customers with our wide range of products."

The exclusive Ramadan offers extend across the Mercedes-Benz and Mercedes-AMG Cars and SUVs stock range - except for the Mercedes-AMG G-Class and Mercedes-Maybach.



STARZLAY's CricLife 1 to live telecast TATA IPL

STARZPLAY, ranked consistently among the region's top subscription services, has announced that it is adding The TATA Indian Premier League (IPL) 2023 to its unrivaled cricket lineup via CricLife, from March 31 to May 28. Fans can watch the matches live on CricLife 1 on their smart TVs, smartphones, or tablets in HD quality on the STARZLAY app.

This TATA IPL 2023 season looks to be the most hotly contested yet, with last year's winners, the Gujarat Titans, aiming to retain the TATA IPL crown after their TATA IPL 2022 final win over the Rajasthan Royals in their debut TATA IPL season.

The Punjab Kings have invested heavily with English all-rounder Sam Curran, who became the most expensive player in the history of the TATA IPL during the 2023 mega-auction as the side shelled out an unprecedented ₹185mn (US\$2.25mn approx) for Curran, whose base reserve price was ₹20mn.

Danny Bates, Chief Operations Officer, STARZPLAY, said, "We're delighted that CricLife has added the TATA Indian Premier League 2023 to their channel, further enhancing the unrivaled lineup of cricket on STARZPLAY. Cricket is a huge part of our sports offering, and we've witnessed a spike in subscribers for tournaments like the ICC Men's T20 World Cup.

Bank Muscat wins gold award at sustainability week

In recognition of its pioneering role in the field of sustainability, Bank Muscat won the Gold Award in the Mid to Large Business category at the Oman Sustainability Week Awards 2023, held recently at the Oman Convention and Exhibition Center (OCEC).

The award was handed over by H E Eng Salim Nasser al Afi, Oman's Minister of Energy and Minerals, to Hamza Abbas al Ajmi, Deputy General Manager - Credit, Bank Muscat, at a glittering ceremony attended by top government officials as well as CEOs and senior executives from some of the top institutions and corporates in Oman.

Held under the patronage of the Ministry of Energy and Minerals, the second edition of Oman Sustainability Week aimed to highlight Oman's commitment to leadership in sustainability through innovative strategies, which are aligned with the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and the landmark Oman Vision 2040.

The award ceremony brought together key stakeholders including policy makers, sustainability experts and industry leaders to focus on sustainability



as a national objective and to develop a new model of sustainable development that benefits Oman and its people.

The ceremony was part of the Oman Sustainability Week and provided a platform for the participating organisations to map out their current sustainability status in comparison to industry peers and identify medium and long-term risks and opportunities.

The in-depth evaluation of participating organisations was conducted by highly specialised sustainability assessors from the US-based Centre for Sustainability and Excellence.

Speaking on the occasion, Hamza al Ajmi expressed the team's delight in having this prestigious award, "which reaffirms Bank Muscat's pioneering role in promoting sustainability in Oman".

In the past, the bank has undertaken many initiatives to promote sustainability including development of its employees and national human resources.

"It is also continuously incorporating other sustainable practices within its business operations like replacing lamps with LED lights, reducing Greenhouse Gas emissions, water and paper consumption as well as electronic waste," Ajmi said.

Going ahead, he affirmed that the bank "will continue to strengthen cooperation and partnership with various government and private sector institutions to strengthen sustainability as part of its long-term strategy, which is closely aligned to Oman Vision 2040."

During its successful four decade long journey, Bank Muscat has made its mark in the fields of sustainability and CSR in serving different segments of society. The bank runs a number of initiatives in this regard including the landmark Green Sports programme, the Tadamun programme to provides household appliances to social welfare families, and the Al Wathbah SME Academy, which equips Omani entrepreneurs with business skills and help them acquire internationally-accredited certification.

It is a matter of great pride that the bank has been well recognised both locally and internationally for its sustainability practices, winning accolades from the Ministry of Social Development, the Oman Chamber of Commerce and Industry and EMEA Finance for its pioneering efforts.

Travel Point hosts musical extravaganza at Sheraton in Muscat

Travel Point organised a major concert entitled 'Music From Distant Lands' at Sheraton Muscat Hotel on March 18, hosting renowned musicians from Oman, India, Cuba and the Philippines.

"We are pleased with the success of this artistic concert, which was organised to celebrate the accomplishments of our company over the past two years, especially in light of the challenges that the world faced as a result of the pandemic," said Travel Point CEO Sunil D'Souza.

Despite these circumstances, he said, "Travel Point succeeded in maintaining its level of business as one of the major travel and tourism agencies in the Sultanate, and even achieved noteworthy success and results."

Travel Point has been the proud recipient of Apex Media's Oman's Most Trusted Brand Award for three consecutive years in the Travel and Tourism category, with the latest one being for the year 2022.

"One of our biggest achievements is that during the period of (COVID-19), through brainstorming and teamwork, we were among the first companies



to offer repatriation flights for expats wishing to travel during the intensification of the crisis," D'Souza noted.

"We succeeded in organising and arranging 246 evacuation flights to about 20 countries, through coordination with civil aviation, immigration, government institutions, embassies, and other relevant parties," the Travel Point CEO informed.

"We are also proud that we contribute to protecting the environment and working on sustainability, through our work on an important project to plant trees as a contribution to preserving the environment," he added.

To conclude, he said, "This event was hosted as a celebration of not only these achievements, but also our commercial and financial success as well as our incredible team at Travel Point who have worked tirelessly to bring us to where we are today. We wanted to take a moment to acknowledge and appreciate our employees for their



contribution towards our accomplishments."

D'Souza mentioned that the ceremony witnessed a large attendance of more than 350 people representing CEOs, general managers, and directors of major companies in the Sultanate, including partners, supporters and collaborators of the company.

The CEO of Travel Point said, "The concert was a welcome break and source of refreshment for everyone invited, as well as an event to support the business that we do and extend our support to small and medium-sized Omani businesses working in the field of travel and tourism.

"We are carrying out an important project; a partnership between Travel Point and SMEs across all governorates of the sultanate, so that any agency can collaborate with Travel Point and any tickets that you sell through our company can get a commission or a fee, as well as an additional amount from the other party," he added.

Zubair hosts ‘Tajribiti’ on digital transformation

The Zubair Enterprises Development Centre (Zubair EDC) recently held its March ‘Tajribiti’ discussion at the Bait Al Zubair Corporation in collaboration with Mazen Mohammed al Hadrami, the founder of Omani agency ‘Let’s M’.

The session was attended by a group of entrepreneurs interested in Digital Transformation along with consultants of the Zubair Enterprise Development centre.

The session focused on the application of Digital Transformation in different business areas from administrative to marketing and customers relations. The discussion was extended to the role e-commerce plays in the Digital Transformation process.

Commenting on the session, Thuraya al Mahruqi, a business associate at ZEDC, reminded that ‘Digital Transformation’ is what drives growth and sustain-



ability in the private sector especially for SMEs.

Through this session, she said, the group wanted to empower entrepreneurs in the sultanate by highlighting the importance of

Digital Transformation and the way they can take full advantage of the opportunities it can offer for the growth of their business projects.

The monthly ‘Tajribiti’ ses-

sions are a platform for participation, interaction and exchange of experiences and knowledge among SMEs entrepreneurs, specialists, and academics in the field of entrepreneurship.

She also expressed ‘great pleasure’ to welcome Mazen al Hadrami, the founder of ‘Let’s Go’ and ‘Let’s M’, to this session.

“We hope that our participants gained a better under-

standing of Digital Transformation and its application for their businesses.”

Hadrami was also ‘pleased’ to participate in ZEDC ‘Tajribiti’ session on the importance of Digital Transformation for SMEs.

“The objective (of the session) was to showcase how a full Digital Transformation can have a significant impact on SMEs’ performance by using technologies which support management and marketing processes and enhance their customers’ experience,” he said, adding, “during this session, we provided valuable advice and information to participants to help them begin their journey towards Digital Transformation”.

Hadrami hoped that this meeting provided an opportunity for participants to learn the basics of Digital Transformation and identify steps they can take to achieve success in their day-to-day operations.

According to him, this session was a great opportunity to connect and interact with entrepreneurs and those who are interested in Digital Transformation with engaging and valuable discussions.

“At ‘Let’s Go’ and ‘Let’s M’ Agency, we are keen to support and assist these companies in achieving their business objectives by leveraging modern tools and technologies,” he added.

The Zubair Enterprises Development Centre (Zubair EDC) is one of the initiatives of The Zubair Corporation in the field of social responsibility, which runs many specialised programmes and a consulting center for entrepreneurs.

Zubair EDC is keen to build strategic relationships with a number of its strategic partners from the public, private and academic sectors in order to support entrepreneurship in the Sultanate of Oman.

Floward wins silver at MENA Stevie Awards

Floward, the go-to online flowers and gifts delivery destination in MENA and UK, won a silver Stevie Award in the Innovative Achievement in Growth category in the fourth annual Middle East & North Africa Stevie Awards sponsored by the Ras Al Khaimah Chamber of Commerce & Industry.

With more than 800 nominations from organisations across the Middle East and North Africa, Gold, Silver, and Bronze Stevie Award winners were determined by the average scores of more than 150 executives around the world acting as judges on six juries.

The gala event took place on March 18 at the Waldorf-Astoria Hotel in Ras Al Khaimah, the UAE to celebrate the winners.

Since its establishment, Floward has experienced exponential growth where it went from operating in only one country to almost 40 cities across nine countries in the MENA region and the UK.

In addition to that, the company has grown more than ten times its size in the past two



years and recruited more than 600 talented employees in 2022 bringing the total number of its team members to over 1200.

The company has recently raised US\$156mn in its Series C Pre-IPO investment round where it plans to utilise the funds to fur-

ther enhance its operations upholding its title as an innovative achiever in growth.

Floward Chairman and CEO, Abdulaziz B al Loughani said, “We are honoured to receive the Stevie Award, the sole awards programme in the MENA region

that acknowledges workplace innovation. As a company that values innovation at its core, we are constantly pushing ourselves to create new and thoughtful solutions for our clients.”

Established in 2017, Floward is a full-fledged e-commerce solution that offers prime fresh-cut flowers sourced from the best growers and farmers around the world and arranged locally by a team of florists and designers.

Floward also offers cakes, chocolate and perfumes curated by the region’s most exciting designers bundled with its flower arrangements and manages last-mile same-day delivery to ensure the best customer experience.

The Middle East and North Africa Stevie Awards are the only business awards program to recognise innovation in the workplace in 18 nations in the Middle East and North Africa.

The Stevie Awards are widely considered to be the world’s premier business awards, conferring recognition for achievement in programmes such as The International Business Awards for 20 years.



Al Jenaibi International Automobiles launches special Ramadan offers

Al Jenaibi International Automobiles, the official importer of BMW Group vehicles in Oman, has launched some ‘incredible offers’ on selected BMW models and the full range of MINI models.

Offering unmissable deals during the Holy Month of Ramadan, Al Jenaibi International Automobiles is offering new owners a hassle-free purchase where they will be offered a BMW service for five years/100,000km (whichever comes first), BMW warranty for five years/200,000km (whichever comes first) and BMW service mobile and roadside assistance for five

years/200,000km (whichever comes first).

Additionally, Al Jenaibi International Automobiles is offering one-year complimentary insurance and registration for selected BMW models and all MINI models. New customers will also receive complimentary window tinting from AutoSpa.

Commenting on the incredible range of offers, Rachid al Zamani, Managing Director of Al Jenaibi International Automobiles, said, “As Ramadan represents the month of joy and giving, we are delighted to launch a hassle-free offer to continue to provide our customers with an exceptional purchasing experi-

ence and service, providing them with additional value when purchasing their dream car.”

The promotions for both selected BMW and all MINI models are valid from March 13 to April 20.

Customers looking to purchase a brand-new BMW as part of the Ramadan offer can book their vehicle by visiting the Jenaibi BMW showroom in Qurm.

Mini customers looking to cruise into their most memorable Ramadan can book their vehicle by visiting the Al Jenaibi International Automobiles Mini showroom in Qurm, where dedicated specialists will be glad to assist them.

Ramadan Nights offer makes Grand Millennium Muscat Hotel glitter

The spirit of Ramadan gripped the guests of Grand Millennium Muscat with the Layali Ramadan package creating unforgettable memories for them.

With the offers in place, Grand Millennium Muscat invited guests to celebrate Layali Ramadan, meaning ‘Ramadan Nights’ in Arabic.

The package offers an opportunity to create unforgettable memories with loved ones during this special month. It includes carefully created iftar and suhoor buffets, luxurious accommodations, and a range of other exclusive benefits..

Guests can start their Ramadan festivities with the ‘Grand Iftar Buffet’ being hosted daily at Taybat and Bahriyat restaurants. The iftar buffet is priced at RO19 net per person, RO9.5 net for children aged 6-12, and free for children under six years of age.

Guests can also take advantage of a special group gathering offer, where for every nine adults, the 10th booking is complimentary.

For suhoor, guests can indulge in the ‘Suhoor Grand Buffet’ at the Mazaj Terrace from the 7th of Ramadan, priced at RO10 net per person.

The Layali Ramadan overnight package includes well-appointed



rooms, with iftar and suhoor buffets. Guests can choose from a selection of luxurious rooms with rates starting from RO55 for a Classic Room for double occupancy.

In addition to comfortable accommodation, guests can enjoy a delectable ‘Grand Iftar Buffet’ until 9.30pm and the ‘Suhoor Grand Buffet’ from 11.00pm to 2.00am.

“We are excited to offer our guests an unforgettable Ramadan experience with our Layali Ramadan package,” said Luca Medda, General Manager of Grand Millennium Muscat.

“Our Iftar and Suhoor buffets, combined with luxurious accommodation, are designed to help guests relish special moments with their loved ones during this month of giving.”

Monity Beauty Center celebrates Mother’s Day, its 17th anniversary

Monity Beauty Center celebrated the Mother’s Day on March 21 together with its 17th anniversary at the Centara Hotel Oman, a release said.

The beauty centre’s owner Jagruti Joshi organised a special event inviting chief guests and long-term loyal customers for celebrating the beauty and spirit of womanhood.

The evening - compered by MC Aarshita Kothari - was full of fun, entertainment, make-up demonstration, fashion show, and performances by Angels Dance Group, choreographed by Dhanlaxmi, the release further informed.

In her address, Jagruti Joshi expressed her idea of personifying beauty that already exists in each woman, and her beauty centre was ready to enhance this ‘beauty’ further up.

The journey for Jagruti was not an easy one. However, her passion, enthusiasm, ambition, efforts, patience and hard work brought Monity Beauty Center from where it was to where it is today.

As a young woman on her first arrival in Oman in 2000, she began to set her own business along with taking care of her family of four. Her patience



helped her to cater to both her work and her family.

Until 2005, her hard-work paid off when she qualified to work as a professional beautician in one of the best beauty salons, drawing in a good number of satisfied customers.

By 2018, besides being the owner of Monity Beauty Center, she took up modeling and took part in various Fashion Shows. In 2019, she became the first runner-up in Ms Gujarat United, while in 2022, she became the first runner-up in Ms India Fashion Icon contest.

“Tirelessly, Jagruti always had time for her clients, she gave her

personal touch to every order and every request, never allowing her customers to leave the premises unsatisfied. She even maintained a hectic social working life involving herself with support and assistance towards children in need, donations to needy organizations, etc.’ the release added.

Jagruti developed passion and excelled at every step on the way. Encouraging the well-established women present that evening, Jagruti proudly shared a motto she follows - ‘we can all be successful in whatever we do whether we are Mothers, Wives, Sisters, Professionals or even En-

trepreneurs, as long as we put our heart, mind and soul into whatever we want to achieve in life’.

The guests for the evening were Fatma Murtadha al Mohssin, assistant regional manager for South Capital Region, Bank Muscat; Sara al Mamari, manager of Beauty & Fitness Center - Al Ghizlan Oman; Kanta Mahindra Gandhi, owner of Red Rose and sponsor of Monity Beauty Center; Amani Yahya Shaheen, trainer and manager of Moremo from Italy; and Anna Rebello, one of the top ten happy customers of Monity Beauty Center.

Fresh protests erupt in Kenya despite ban

Security was tight, with riot police stationed at strategic points in Nairobi and patrolling the streets

Nairobi, Kenya - Police fired tear gas to disperse anti-government protests on Monday over the high cost of living, after the opposition vowed demonstrations would go ahead despite a police ban.

Security was tight, with riot police stationed at strategic points in Nairobi and patrolling the streets, while many shops were shut and train services from the capital's outskirts into the central business district were suspended.

Veteran opposition leader Raila Odinga has urged people to take to the streets every Monday and Thursday, even after protests a week ago turned violent and paralysed parts of Nairobi.

Police clashed with stone-throwing demonstrators in Nairobi's largest slum Kibera, where protesters set tyres on fire, defying a warning by the Inspector General of Police Japhet Koome who said on Sunday that the rallies were 'illegal' and would be banned.

The situation was calmer elsewhere in the city, with a heavy police presence in neighbourhoods where protests had taken place last week.

During last Monday's clashes in Nairobi and opposi-



A protester gestures on a street during a mass rally called by the opposition leader Raila Odinga who claims the last Kenyan presidential election was stolen from him and blames the government for the hike of living costs, in Kibera, Nairobi, on Monday (AFP)

tion strongholds in western Kenya, a university student was killed by police fire while 31 officers were injured as running battles erupted between riot police and demonstrators.

More than 200 people were arrested, including several senior opposition politicians, while protesters - as well as Odinga's own motorcade - were hit with tear gas and water cannon.

'Mother of all demonstrations'

It was the first major outbreak of political unrest since President William Ruto took office more than six months ago after defeating Odinga in an election his rival claims was 'stolen'.

Despite the police ban, Odinga called on Sunday on Kenyans to join what he has described as 'the mother of all

demonstrations'. "I want to tell Mr Ruto and the IG Koome that we are not going to be intimidated," he said. "We are not going to fear tear gas and police." Odinga also accused Deputy President Rigathi Gachagua of orchestrating an operation to cause 'mayhem' at Monday's rallies. Nairobi residents were wary after the previous violence. "I may have to close too because I have seen most of my neighbours are closed," said Mercy Wangare, an Mpesa (mobile money) kiosk attendant at an electronics shop. "I am just weighing the situation before I decide because the sight of these policemen patrolling around is a sign that it may not end up well." The Communications Author-



ICE high speed trains are parked near the central station in Munich, southern Germany, during a strike on Monday (AFP)

'Mega-strike' disrupts travel in Germany

Berlin, Germany - A major strike brought much of Germany's air traffic, rail service and commuter lines to a halt on Monday as workers demand wage hikes in the face of brisk inflation.

Workers at airports, ports, railways, buses and metro lines throughout much of Europe's top economy heeded a call by the Verdi and EVG unions for the 24-hour walkout. "A labour struggle that has no impact is toothless," Verdi boss Frank Werneke told public broadcaster Phoenix.

He acknowledged the stoppage would inflict pain on many commuters and holidaymakers, 'but better one day of strain with the prospect of reaching a wage agreement than weeks of industrial action'. Berlin's usually bustling central train station was mostly quiet on Monday morning, after the national railway cancelled long-distance and regional links across the country.

Arrival and departure boards at Frankfurt airport, the nation's biggest, and Munich airport showed rows of cancelled flights.

As the industrial action was largely publicised, many commuters had switched to other modes of transport.

In Berlin, Simon, 31, a student, said he was expecting 30 minutes more of commuting time as he had to use two buses rather than the regional train which had been cancelled. But he said he found 'the strike legitimate' as 'many people have mobilised for better working conditions'.

Retiree Gloria Bierwald, 73,

said however that 'the strike goes to far'. "What the strikers are asking for is relatively exaggerated. I am of the opinion that people should be satisfied when they have a job.'

Ill-tempered dispute

To prevent supply gaps, Transport Minister Volker Wissing had ordered states to lift restrictions on truck deliveries on Sunday, while asking airports to allow late-night takeoffs and landings 'so stranded passengers can reach their destinations'.

Verdi represents around 2.5mn public sector employees, while EVG represents 230,000 workers on the railways and at bus companies. The rare joint strike marks an escalation of an increasingly ill-tempered dispute over a pay packet to blunt the impact of surging inflation.

Employers, mostly the state and public sector companies, have so far refused the demands, instead offering a rise of five per cent with two one-off payments of €1,000 (US\$1,100) and €1,500, this year and next.

Verdi is demanding a rise of 10.5 per cent in monthly salaries, while EVG is seeking a 12-per cent increase for those it represents. Martin Seiler, head of human resources at state-owned rail company Deutsche Bahn (DB), has described the nationwide strike as 'groundless and unnecessary' and urged the unions to return to the negotiating table 'immediately'.

AFP

North Korea fires short-range ballistic missiles: South Korea

Seoul, South Korea - North Korea fired two short-range ballistic missiles on Monday, South Korea's military said, the latest in a flurry of weapons tests that Pyongyang says are in response to major US-South Korea defence drills.

The two allies were conducting a joint amphibious landing exercise on Monday, days after concluding Freedom Shield, their largest combined military drills in five years.

North Korea views such exercises as rehearsals for invasion, and has repeatedly warned it would take 'overwhelming' action in response.

"Our military detected two short-range ballistic missiles fired from around Chunghwa area in North Hwanghae province from 07:47am (2247 GMT) towards the East Sea," South Korea's Joint Chiefs of Staff (JCS) said, referring to the body of water also known as the Sea of Japan.

The missiles each flew around 370km (230 miles), it added, calling their launch a 'serious act



A woman walks past a television showing a news broadcast of a North Korean missile test, at a railway station in Seoul on Monday (AFP)

of provocation damaging peace and stability of the international community as well as the Korean peninsula'. The Japanese defence ministry also confirmed the launch, with Japanese media citing officials as saying both missiles fell outside the country's exclusive economic zone.

North Korean state media last week said the US-South Korean military drills called for 'stronger war deterrents', including a 'multi-faceted and offensive nuclear attack capability'.

The North Korean military has carried out multiple drills of its own in recent weeks, including the test-fire of what state media described as an underwater nuclear-capable drone, and its second launch of an intercontinental ballistic missile this year.

State media said the 'underwater nuclear attack drone' drill, personally overseen by North Korea's leader Kim Jong Un, was staged 'to alert the enemy to an actual nuclear crisis'.

AFP

Japanese national detained for espionage, says China

Beijing, China - China said on Monday that it was detaining a Japanese national on suspicion of espionage, after Tokyo urged Beijing to release one of its citizens.

"Relevant Chinese authorities took criminal coercive measures this month against a Japanese citizen, in accordance with the law," foreign ministry spokesperson Mao Ning told a regular press briefing. "This Japanese citizen is suspected of engaging in espionage activities, in violation of the criminal law and the anti-espionage law of the People's Republic of China," Mao said.

"China is a country under the rule of law. All foreign nationals in China must abide by Chinese laws, and offenders are prosecuted according to law," she added.

Japanese government spokesman Hirokazu Matsuno told reporters earlier on Monday that Tokyo's embassy in China had been informed 'this month that a

Japanese man in his fifties was detained in Beijing'.

He gave no details on the man's identity, his alleged crime, or when he had been arrested.

"Ever since we learned about this case, the Japanese government has been strongly urging the immediate release of this Japanese national," Matsuno said.

He added that Tokyo was also seeking consular access to the man, who has not been named publicly.

The man is an employee of the Japanese pharmaceutical firm Astellas, a spokesman for the company told AFP, declining to offer any further details.

The company was working with Tokyo's foreign ministry to gather more information and take appropriate action, he added.

Local media described the man as a veteran expat in China who had worked in the country for two decades.

AFP

Myanmar junta chief vows no let up in crackdown

Naypyidaw, Myanmar - Myanmar's junta chief, flanked by tanks and missile launchers, vowed no let up in a crackdown on opponents and said on Monday elections would be held, weeks after the military conceded it did not control enough territory to allow a vote.

Myanmar has been in turmoil since the military deposed Aung San Suu Kyi's civilian government more than two years ago after making unsubstantiated claims of electoral fraud. The putsch sparked renewed fighting with ethnic rebels and birthed dozens of anti-junta 'People's Defence Forces' (PDFs), with swathes of the country now ravaged by fighting and the economy in tatters.

The military will take 'decisive action' against its opponents and ethnic rebels supporting them, Min Aung Hlaing told an audience of around 8,000 service



General Min Aung Hlaing stands in a vehicle as he attends a ceremony to mark the country's 78th Armed Forces Day in Naypyidaw on Monday

members attending the annual Armed Forces Day parade in the capital Naypyidaw.

"The terror acts of NUG and its lackey so-called PDFs need to be tackled for good and all," he said, referring to the 'National Unity Government', a body dom-

inated by ousted lawmakers working to reverse the coup.

The junta would then hold 'free and fair elections' upon the completion of the state of emergency, he said.

The military announced last month a six-month extension of

a two-year state of emergency and postponed elections it had promised to hold by August because it did not control enough of the country for a vote to take place. 'Serenity and stability are vital' before any election could go ahead, Min Aung Hlaing told the parade.

Russian jets

Armed Forces Day commemorates the start of resistance to the Japanese occupation during World War II. It usually features a military parade attended by foreign officers and diplomats.

Workers made last-minute inspections of the parade ground early on Monday, the hulking statues of three of Myanmar's empire-building kings looming out of the dark.

Planes later trailed smoke in the yellow, red and green of the national flag as Russian-made

Yak and Sukoi Su-30 jets made several flyovers.

Marching bands played bagpipes and brass, at times duelling with each other, and state media images showed women lining the streets to garland marching soldiers with flowers.

New junta chief Min Aung Hlaing was inspecting the parade two years ago when troops launched a countrywide crackdown on those protesting against the coup that had ousted Suu Kyi's government.

Around 160 protesters were killed in the violence, according to a local monitoring group, sparking widespread international condemnation.

Rights groups and opponents have since accused the military of torching villages and using air and artillery strikes as collective punishment for opponents.

AFP

Israel faces general strike over push to overhaul justice system

Jerusalem - The hard-right government of Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu faced more protests and a general strike on Monday against its controversial push to overhaul the justice system.

Netanyahu was due to address the nation later on Monday, a day after sacking his defence minister who had broken ranks over the divisive issue, and following President Isaac Herzog urging an immediate stop to the reform push.

Israeli media speculated that Netanyahu may temporarily back down from the reforms, with Justice Minister Yariv Levin saying he will 'accept any decision that Prime Minister Netanyahu makes' on the legislation.

Israel's top trade union chief had on Monday called a general strike over the package, which would weaken the powers of the judiciary and which demonstrators have for months decried as a threat to Israel's democracy.

"I am calling a general strike," Histadrut chairman Arnon Bar-David said in a televised address. "We have a mission to stop this legislative process and we will do it," he added, vowing to 'continue to fight'.

The Israel Medical Association quickly followed suit, announcing 'a full strike in the health system' that will impact all public hospitals.

The stoppage was also affecting flights at Ben Gurion International Airport near Tel Aviv, where an AFP journalist saw multiple delayed departures.

The nationwide walkout was called hours after Herzog pressed for an immediate halt to the judicial programme, following demonstrations in Tel Aviv overnight.

"For the sake of the unity of the people of Israel... I call on you to halt the legislative process immediately," Herzog said in a



Protesters clash with the police during a rally against the Israeli government's judicial reform in Tel Aviv, Israel on Monday (AFP)

statement.

The plan to hand more control to politicians and diminish the role of the Supreme Court has ignited months of protests and sparked concern from Israel's top allies including the United States.

'Everyone should strike'

Yoav Gallant, the former defence minister and staunch ally of Netanyahu, earlier called for a halt to the reforms.

"The growing social rift has

the south.

Despite the upheaval, Israel's extreme-right national security minister warned the legislative process 'must not be stopped'.

"We must not surrender to anarchy," Itamar Ben-Gvir wrote on Twitter, amid Israeli media reports that he was threatening to quit the government if the overhaul is put on ice.

Thousands of Israelis rallied outside parliament in Jerusalem on Monday, where demonstrator Keren Mimran said 'every-one should strike today'.

"We are calling on the government to stop this mad reform," the 57-year-old high-tech worker told AFP.

Trevor Galor, who owns a tourism firm, said he 'can't believe what's going on in Israel'.

"This reform... is completely crazy, and Israel has become a very dangerous place to be in at the moment," said Galor, 52, holding an Israeli flag.

Gallant, a former general, was appointed in December as

part of Netanyahu's coalition with extreme-right and ultra-Orthodox allies. Yuli Edelstein, a Likud lawmaker who chairs the parliamentary committee for foreign affairs and defence, said 'given the security situation, it's not the moment to change the minister of defence'.

Opposition leader Yair Lapid on Monday renewed his support for Israelis 'who are standing up to the insanity of the coalition'.

Lawmakers are scheduled to vote this week on a central part of the proposals, which would change the way judges are appointed.

A parliamentary committee has amended the draft law to make it more acceptable to opponents, but the opposition has ruled out backing any part of the reform package until all legislative steps are halted. Netanyahu last week vowed to 'responsibly advance' the reforms and 'end the rift' they have caused.

AFP



An ambulance carries victims from near the site of a suicide attack in Kabul on Monday (AFP)

Six civilians killed in suicide blast in Afghan capital

Kabul, Afghanistan - A suicide attack on Monday near Afghanistan's foreign ministry killed six civilians and wounded several others, the interior ministry said.

Security has dramatically improved since the Taliban stormed back to power in August 2021, ousting the US-backed government and ending their two decade insurgency, but the Islamic State group has proved an increasing threat.

The attacker was identified by Afghan forces who shot at him in front of a business centre near the foreign ministry, interior ministry spokesman Abdul Nafy Takor tweeted.

"With his killing, the explosives carried by the attacker also exploded which killed six civilians and wounded a number of others," he said.

Italian NGO Emergency, which operates a hospital in the capital, confirmed it had received two dead and 12

wounded, including a child.

No group has claimed responsibility for the attack.

Monday's blast was the second attack near the foreign ministry in Kabul in less than three months, and the first since the Muslim holy month of Ramadan began on Thursday in Afghanistan.

On January 11, a suicide bomber blew himself up near the foreign ministry, killing 10 and wounding 53 people, according to the United Nations.

The Taliban authorities, who have often tried to play down attacks challenging their rule, had said that five people were killed in that attack, claimed by IS.

The group has increasingly become a major challenge, killing and wounding hundreds of people in several attacks, some targeting foreigners or foreign interests in a bid to undermine the Taliban government.

AFP

Iraq changes electoral law, sparking opposition anger

Baghdad, Iraq - Iraq's parliament voted on Monday to restore electoral laws that were scrapped after 2019 anti-government demonstrations, sparking anger from independent lawmakers who see it benefiting larger parties.

The law, which parliament said in a statement was 'adopted' without detailing the votes, revives the electoral law of 2018 and sweeps away one of the gains of the mass protest movement which shook Iraq.

After the protests, a new system favoured the emergence of independent candidates, with some 70 independents winning seats in the 329-member parliament in the last legislative elections in 2021.

Parliament is dominated by the Coordination Framework,

an alliance of powerful pro-Iran Shiite factions, from whose ranks Prime Minister Mohammed Shia al-Sudani emerged. The new law removes 83 electoral districts and creates 18 seats, one for each of Iraq's provinces.

This 'makes it easier for top party politicians to win seats', analyst Sajad Jiyad said on Twitter. Conversely, it will make it 'harder for candidates in smaller parties and independents to compete' because they will be running at a provincial rather than a local level, he added.

During the debate, which ran from Sunday into the early hours of Monday, several angry independent lawmakers were expelled from the debating chamber, according to videos they filmed themselves.

AFP

Kazakhstan ruling party victorious in snap election

Astana, Kazakhstan - Kazakhstan's ruling party secured nearly two-thirds of seats in the Central Asian country's parliament, according to final election results published on Monday.

The snap vote held earlier this month in the vast ex-Soviet country was called by President Kassym-Jomart Tokayev as he moved to turn the page after deadly riots last year.

A new system was introduced for this election, with 69 deputies - out of the 98 in the Majilis, the lower house of par-



President Kassym-Jomart Tokayev casting his vote in Astana (AFP)

liament - elected by proportional representation.

The other 29 were elected by the first-past-the-post system with independent candidates on the ballot for the first time in nearly two decades.

Deputies of the ruling Amanat party will take 62 seats in the Majilis, according to Kazakhstan's Election Commission.

A total of six parties will be represented in parliament compared to three in the current one, but opposition parties were barred from the vote.

The five other parties will have between four and eight deputies, while seven seats will be taken by independent candidates.

Following the vote, the Organisation for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) welcomed progress in Kazakhstan's parliamentary elections but said more democratic reforms were needed.

The OSCE noted that the voting 'was organised in a smooth manner overall' but that 'significant procedural irregularities were observed'.

Videos of alleged ballot box stuffing in several regions of Kazakhstan appeared on social media after the vote and the Election Commission confirmed a few instances on Monday.

President Tokayev announced the early vote as part of a 'modernisation' drive introduced after protests against fuel prices erupted in January last year.

The demonstrations were crushed and 238 people died, according to the official toll.

AFP

Cuba says voter turnout ticked up in legislative elections

Havana, Cuba - Cuba's government managed to mobilise voters on Sunday for National Assembly elections, the results of which were a foregone conclusion, as it pushed back against a recent abstentionist trend in the communist-ruled nation.

As many as eight million eligible voters selected from the 470 candidates on the ballot - 263 women and 207 men - are vying for the 470 seats in the congress.

But what was really in play was the number of Cubans refusing to vote.

The opposition had called on citizens to abstain, with one opposition Twitter account branding the vote a farce.

Voting is not obligatory and abstention has risen steadily in recent years. On Sunday the na-

tion's 23,648 polling stations closed at 7pm (2300 GMT), an hour later than initially announced by authorities.

According to the latest provisional figures released by the National Election Council, as of 5pm turnout stood at 70.33 per cent.

That marked a modest increase from the 68.5 per cent who voted in last November's municipal elections, the lowest turnout since the island's current electoral system was set up in 1976.

Last September about 74 per cent of eligible Cubans voted in a referendum on a new family code, down from the 90 per cent turnout in the 2019 referendum on a new constitution.

Cuba's communist government does not allow opposition,



Cuban President Miguel Diaz-Canel casting his vote at a polling station in Santa Clara, Cuba, on Sunday (AFP)

so most parliamentary candidates are members of the Communist Party of Cuba (PCC).

Candidates still must receive 50 per cent of votes to be elected.

Voters had two choices: they could tick the names of any number of individual candidates, or they could select the 'vote for all' option.

'I voted for the unified vote be-

With united vote we defend unity of the country, the unity of revolution, our future, our socialist constitution

DIAZ-CANEL

cause, despite the needs, the difficulties that this country can have, I could not imagine' ab-

staining, Carlos Diego Herrera, a 54-year-old blacksmith in Havana, told AFP.

He said abstaining would be like voting 'for those that want to crush us, the Yankees'.

Dissidents skeptical

Washington has imposed sanctions on the island nation since 1962, three years after the communist revolution that saw Fidel Castro take power after overthrowing US-backed dictator Fulgencio Batista.

Student Rachel Vega, 19, also said she voted for all candidates, considering it 'a step forward right now' that would 'improve the situation in the country'.

President Miguel Diaz-Canel is among the candidates, as is his predecessor, 91-year-old Raul

Castro.

"With the united vote we defend the unity of the country, the unity of the revolution, our future, our socialist constitution," said Diaz-Canel, 62, after voting in Santa Clara, 175 miles (280km) southeast of Havana.

The opposition scoffed at the turnout figures, with dissident Manuel Cuesta Morua of the Council for the Democratic Transition in Cuba warning about 'the government's electoral mathematics'. "At 9am it reports that 18.2 per cent of the electorate has voted. At 11am it says 41.66 per cent - that is, in less than two hours the turnout increased by 23.46 points, he said on Twitter. "Impossible!!! The polling stations are empty."

AFP



Newly appointed leader of the Scottish National Party (SNP), Humza Yousaf speaks at Murrayfield Stadium in Edinburgh on Monday (AFP)

Humza Yousaf wins Scottish leadership race

Edinburg, UK - Humza Yousaf on Monday won the race to become Scotland's new leader, the youngest and first from a minority ethnic background, charged with reviving a faltering independence movement after Nicola Sturgeon's long tenure.

Yousaf emerged victorious with 52 per cent of Scottish National Party (SNP) members' preferentially ranked votes, following a divisive leadership battle triggered by Sturgeon's surprise resignation announcement last month.

He is set to be sworn in as first minister on Wednesday, becoming the first ethnic minority leader of a devolved government and the first Muslim to lead a major UK party.

He is also Scotland's youngest leader, taking the helm months after Rishi Sunak became the youngest UK prime minister in modern times when he entered Downing Street aged 42.

The 37-year-old vowed to continue pursuing the SNP's central policy - independence for Scotland - which Sturgeon has championed since the party lost a 2014 referendum on the issue

by 10 points.

"The people of Scotland need independence now, more than ever before, and we will be the generation that delivers independence for Scotland," Yousaf said in his victory speech.

He added his 'immediate priority' was protecting Scots from Britain's cost-of-living crisis and reforming public services.

"I will aim to lead Scotland and the interests of all of our citizens, whatever your political allegiance," Yousaf insisted, noting he would look to work 'constructively' with the UK's Conservative government.

Yousaf, who was health minister in Sturgeon's cabinet, narrowly beat finance minister Kate Forbes to become SNP leader once party voters' second preferences had been added to their tallies. Ash Regan, a former minister in the cabinet, finished a distant third.

Polling indicates that around 45 per cent of Scots are currently in favour of Scotland leaving the United Kingdom, after 55 per cent of Scots rejected such a move in a 2014 vote.

AFP

India's parliament adjourned after protests over Rahul's expulsion

New Delhi, India - India's parliament was adjourned twice on Monday after lawmakers held rowdy protests and threw paper at the speaker following the expulsion from the house of top opposition figure Rahul Gandhi.

Gandhi lost his parliamentary seat on Friday after being convicted in a case that critics say shows how the rule of law is under threat in the world's largest democracy under Prime Minister Narendra Modi.

The speaker called off proceedings less than a minute after opposition MPs wearing black erupted in shouting, some of them throwing bits of paper at him.

"I want to run the House with dignity," Speaker Om Birla said.

The session resumed several hours later only to be abandoned again after about 10 minutes as opposition MPs chanted anti-Modi slogans and waved 'Democracy in danger' placards.

It was the latest in a string of stoppages in recent weeks in India's often raucous parliament among lawmakers representing India's 1.4bn people.

Opposition MPs have been demanding a probe into potential links between Modi and the business empire of tycoon Gautam Adani, which has been hit by allegations of accounting fraud.

Debates have also descended into shouting matches over comments made by Gandhi in Britain in early March that Indian democracy is 'under attack'.

Opposition lawmakers from different parties also staged protests in New Delhi on Monday, the latest in a series of re-



Police detain an activist and supporter of India's Congress party during a protest in New Delhi on Monday (AFP)

The speaker called off proceedings less than a minute after opposition MPs wearing black erupted in shouting, some of them throwing bits of paper at him

cent demonstrations.

Piyush Goyal, trade minister and a member of Modi's ruling Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), on Monday accused the opposition of 'cheap politics' and 'trying to mislead people'. Gandhi 'has no right to consider himself above the law of the country', Goyal told reporters.

Scion

Gandhi, 52, is the leading face of the opposition Congress party, once the dominant force of Indian politics, and is the scion of India's most famous political dynasty.

But Congress has for years been repeatedly crushed in elections by Modi's BJP and its

nationalist appeals to India's Hindu majority.

The lower house of parliament ruled Gandhi ineligible to sit as an MP on Friday, a day after he was sentenced to two years for defamation.

He is appealing. The conviction stemmed from a remark made during the 2019 election campaign when Gandhi had asked why 'all thieves have Modi as (their) common surname'.

His comments were portrayed as a slur against the prime minister and against all those with the same surname, which is associated with the

lower rungs of India's caste hierarchy. A BJP spokesman said on Thursday the court acted with 'due judicial process' in arriving at its ruling in the case, one of several Gandhi is facing.

Legal action has been widely deployed against opposition party figures and institutions seen as critical of the Modi government during its nine years in power.

Domestic and international media have also come under growing pressure. Last month, tax inspectors raided the local offices of Britain's BBC.

AFP

After clocks confusion, Lebanon to shift to summer time

Beirut, Lebanon - Lebanon's caretaker government moved on Monday to clear up widespread confusion over daylight saving that left the crisis-hit country with two time zones and growing concerns over sectarian divisions.

Daylight saving time will now start 'at midnight on Wednesday to Thursday', caretaker prime minister Najib Mikati said, noting the need for 'a period of 48 hours to fix technical issues'. Lebanon had been scheduled to roll clocks forward by one hour last weekend - but authorities then announced in a surprise move late last week that the switch would be delayed by about a month.

The 11th-hour move - meant to support Muslims during the fasting month of Ramadan -



A Church's clock tower (front) next to the governmental palace in Beirut indicates the new summer time on Monday (AFP)

was promptly rejected by the Maronite Church as well as some broadcasters, schools, businesses and even several politicians. Lebanon shares power among its 18 recognised

religious communities, and its political woes are often blamed on the sectarian tensions that were the key driver behind its 1975-1990 civil war.

Mikati said on Monday that

the initial decision was indeed 'intended to relieve those who are fasting during Ramadan', issuing the government's first formal justification of the move.

"I absolutely did not take this decision for sectarian reasons," he added in remarks following a cabinet meeting called on the issue. "A decision like this should not have triggered such sectarian responses."

The last-minute delay last week sparked widespread confusion, forcing institutions, businesses and residents to revise their schedules or scramble to keep up with who was and wasn't adhering to the change.

Flag carrier Middle East Airlines, while earlier implementing the government-ordered delay, had said it would move departure times by one hour to

adhere to international flight schedules.

One large gym had said its branches in Muslim-majority areas of the capital would abide by winter time, while those in Christian areas would adhere to daylight savings time.

Crisis-hit Lebanon has been run by a caretaker government with limited powers since legislative elections in May last year. The president left office at the end of October and sectarian leaders have been squabbling over a replacement ever since. "The problem is not summer time or winter time.... The problem is the presidential vacuum," Mikati said, blaming 'religious and political leaders' as well as parliamentarians for failing to come to an agreement.

AFP

Nearly 200 Rohingya refugees land in western Indonesia

Peureulak, Indonesia - At least 184 Rohingya refugees, including many women and children, landed in Indonesia's westernmost province on Monday, officials said, after they were dropped at sea by boat and made to swim ashore.

Thousands of the mostly Muslim Rohingya, heavily persecuted in Myanmar, risk their lives each year on long and expensive sea journeys, often in poor-quality boats, in an attempt to reach Malaysia or Indonesia.

Locals in the East Aceh town of Peureulak alerted police on Monday morning after discovering the group that of-

ficials said included 94 men, 70 women and 20 children.

"There was no boat on the beach when they arrived," Nasri, the head of Peureulak subdistrict who, like many Indonesians, has one name, told AFP. "There are some refugees who look weak, they probably have not been eating for days."

At least five were taken to hospital, while others were taken to a mosque compound for shelter, food and medical treatment, he said.

An official from East Aceh social affairs agency, Saharani, confirmed the same arrival total to AFP.

AFP

Privacy claim: Prince Harry, Elton John appear at London court

London, UK - Prince Harry and pop superstar Elton John appeared at a London court on Monday, delivering a high-profile jolt to a privacy claim launched by celebrities and other figures against a newspaper publisher.

The publisher of the *Daily Mail*, Associated Newspapers (ANL), is trying to end the high court claims brought over alleged unlawful activity at its titles. Harry, who now lives in California after quitting royal duties in 2019 and launching a barrage of criticism of the British royal family, was pictured arriving at the court in central London.

Adrian Beltrami, representing ANL, told the court in a written submission that Harry's

case argued 'suspicion and paranoia' caused by the articles containing private information led to friends being 'lost or cut off as a result and everyone became a suspect'.

Others taking part in the legal action include actresses Liz Hurley and Sadie Frost as well as John's husband David Furnish, Doreen Lawrence - the mother of murder victim Stephen Lawrence - and former Liberal Democrat deputy leader Simon Hughes.

Lawyers for the group told the court the publisher of the *Daily Mail* commissioned the breaking and entry into private property, illegally intercepted voicemail messages and obtained medical records.

"The claimants each claim



English singer Elton John exits a car as he arrives at Britain's High Court, in central London on Monday (AFP)

that in different ways they were the victim of numerous unlawful acts carried out by the de-

fendant, or by those acting on the instructions of its newspapers, *The Daily Mail* and *The*

Mail On Sunday," lawyer David Sherborne said in written submissions to the court.

The alleged unlawful included 'illegally intercepting voicemail messages, listening into live landline calls, obtaining private information, such as itemised phone bills or medical records, by deception...', using private investigators to commit these unlawful information gathering acts on their behalf and even commissioning the breaking and entry into private property', Sherborne said.

The alleged wrongdoing dates from 1993-2011, but some went on as late as 2018, he added. Harry, also known as the Duke of Sussex, sat near the back of the court, two seats away from fellow complainant Frost.

ANL has described the allegations as 'preposterous

smears' and a 'pre-planned and orchestrated attempt to drag the *Mail* titles into the phone-hacking scandal'.

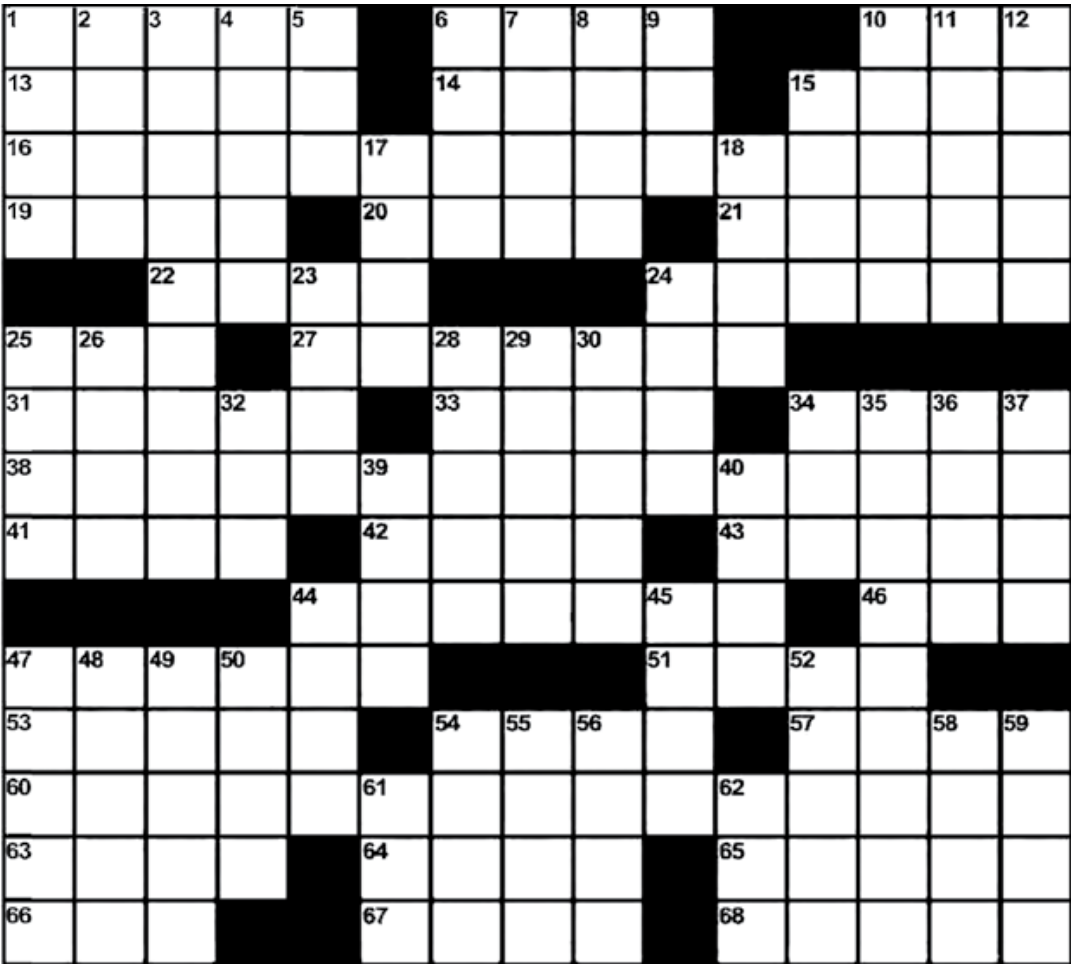
Britain's phone hacking scandal, which first blew up in 2006, saw journalists at the Rupert Murdoch-owned *News of the World* hack into the voicemails of royals, celebrities and murder victims.

It triggered the closure of the mass-selling Sunday tabloid, a mammoth police investigation, a judge-led inquiry and criminal charges that gripped Britain for years.

A spokesperson for ANL also said the allegations were 'unsubstantiated and highly defamatory claims, based on no credible evidence'.

AFP

DAILY CROSSWORD



ACROSS

1) "Manage" lead-in
6) Office note
10) Lightning-fast punch
13) Perform without preparation
14) Met highlight
15) MatadorA's adversary
16) Appetizer: What Jesus fed 5,000 with
19) Thought of nothing_
20) Mingo portrayer Ed
21) Speaks with much armwavg
22) Mushroom part
24) Child's rocker, in child-speak
25) Convenient money source
27) Repeated part of a song
31) Jenny of weight loss
33) Of the finest quality
34) Hold firmly
38) Entree: Cowpoke's staples
41) Gives the once-over
42) Active Sicilian volcano
43) Neglects to include
44) Given a hard time
46) Sodom fugitive
4 7) Lead-sharing actor
51) Change course sud-

denly
53) Computer character code
54) Do a secretary's job
57) The majority
60) Dessert: Birthday party treats
63) Standing in the military?
64) Electric guitar attachments
65) Change the hue anew
66) Miner's find
67) School administration?
68) Nodded answers

DOWN

1) Like canaries that sing
2) Word with "teen" or "matinee"
3) Fellow pupil
4) Hold, as attention
5) Award bestowed by the queen, for short
6) Palindromic form of address
7) Long-winged shore eagle
8) USNA students
9) Clumsy one
10) Candy and Hancock
11) Sharp, narrow mountain ridge
12) Given to ordering people about

15) Onetime Russian ruler
17) Copycat's request
18) Stuff to pump
23) "I conclude that ..."
24) Took off quickly
25) Cause for a massage
26) Donahue or Aikman
28) Purposely eschews meals
29) Colorful equines
30) Year's chronicle
32) Much-faked items
34) Diamond, pearl or sap-phire
35) Sante Fe and Amtrak
36) "And lead us not_ ..."
37) "Do you want to hear a secret?"
39) Toothed wheel
40) Foreshadow
44) Barbershop floor collection
45) All tied up
47) City on the world's longest river
48) "Sesame Street" grouch
49) Script part
50) Bloodsucking insect
52) "And now ..." sayer
54) Starlet's dream
55) Little tricksters
56) Farthest from first

58) Type of terrier
59) Shirts with messages
61) "Dig in!"
62) Towel off

NOTE PAD

YOUR DAILY HOROSCOPE

ARIES MARCH 21-APRIL 19

You're in a better place than you've ever been in terms of your ambition. It's healthy, it's smart, and today it's going to show you where you need to point your energies next. If you suddenly get an urge to climb a mountain, invent a cure for the common cold, learn a new language, or do something equally ambitious (like clean out all your closets), don't be surprised! This is a day when you'll get your greatest satisfaction out of doing something that no one else really thought you could do.

LEO JULY 23-AUGUST 22

There is too much information coming at you right now, so it's no wonder that you're feeling a little confused about important issues. If you're looking for total clarity on any single thing, then you might have to lower your expectations. If you think laterally and look at just the facts, you'll get closer to the truth. Ignore arguments based on negative things like fear or suspicion. Consider the source. Be skeptical when things are presented as being black or white.

SAGITTARIUS NOVEMBER 22-DECEMBER21

Today could offer up some simple pleasures that remind you just how delightful life can be sometimes! Strangers will be smiling at you everywhere you go, and you're going to have a wonderful time. Enjoy all the little surprises that help create a lovely day. Keep an eye out for things like a great parking spot, the perfect cup of coffee, or a big sale at one of your favorite stores.

TAURUS APRIL 20-MAY 20

You can tell your friends anything and they'll understand. After all, that's why they're your friends, right? So why are you keeping your feeling all to yourself right now? Instead of holding them inside, you need to share them. Get them out there into the world. Bounce them off the people who know you best and they'll help you find a way to sort them all out. All you have to do is make the time. Call up a friend and see if they have some time to talk.

VIRGO AUGUST 23-SEPTEMBER 22

Some constructive criticism is coming your way today, and you should take it seriously. When someone takes the time to give you a helpful tip, be grateful, not defensive. Listen carefully to what they tell you, and if you disagree with what they say, speak up, but be diplomatic about it. They're doing you a favor by giving you feedback, so respect that. Have a dialogue with them and trust that they have your best interests at heart, because they do.

CAPRICORN DECEMBER 22-JANUARY 19

Change doesn't have to be dramatic. If you're looking to mix it up in your life and make things work differently, you don't have to completely transform everything. If that's hard for you to wrap your head around, it gives you a good excuse to not even try, right? Wrong! Take baby steps toward the life you want. For example, if you want to lose weight, cut out fast food and fit in a walk every day. You don't have to join a gym and eat nothing but celery!

GEMINI MAY 21-JUNE 21

Obsessing too much about getting to the next rung of the corporate ladder isn't going to help you get to it any faster than you should. These things take time. Today, you need to stop worrying so much about what will happen at your next review or if you'll get that big promotion. Just focus on the day-to-day stuff. Do your best every day and you'll be rewarded. Trust in that. This new point of view will help you relax and have a better time at work.

LIBRA SEPTEMBER 23-OCTOBER 22

Making an intellectual connection with someone all but ensures that you'll make an emotional connection with them as well. If you're looking to start a new romance, talk to the person on a higher level and skip the small talk. But if you aren't looking to start up anything love related, keep in mind that someone who's on your same intellectual wavelength might be wishing things could go a littler further. If you aren't interested, let them know.

AQUARIUS JANUARY 20-FEBRUARY 18

The more attractive you feel, the more attractive other people find you. It's a simple fact. If you're trying to turn the head of a potential love interest, impress someone at your job, or prove to someone in authority that you're somebody who can be trusted, just believe in yourself. Remind yourself that you are the person you want other people to see. Your ability to convince others is extremely high right now, so why not make the most of it?

CANCER JUNE 22-JULY 22

Is saving money on your mind? If it isn't, maybe it should be! Your expenses might be getting out of hand right now, and it's time to reevaluate your budget and spending habits before things get too far out of your control. Trim back one or two things. Do you have to get coffee or lunch out every day? Are you paying too much for phone, cable, or streaming services? There are many painless changes you can make. Find at least one today.

SCORPIO OCTOBER 23-NOVEMBER 21

It's quite nice when you and all your family members agree on things, but complete harmony at home isn't always possible. This is a fact, so don't fear that there's some massive dysfunction going on. It's just life. Roll with it and it will all be better soon. There's no point in hiding or glossing over your true feelings in order to avoid conflict. It just isn't worth it. And besides, the people who care about you deserve to know what you really think.

PISCES FEBRUARY 19-MARCH 20

You have to learn how to budget your time today. You have had a tendency to overbook yourself, and it's only going to exacerbate your stress level if you continue down this path. Prioritize. Decide when to just let things go until another day. Today, you might want to help lots of people, but you won't have the time. Don't feel guilty for not being able to get to every single person who wants a moment with you. They will understand.

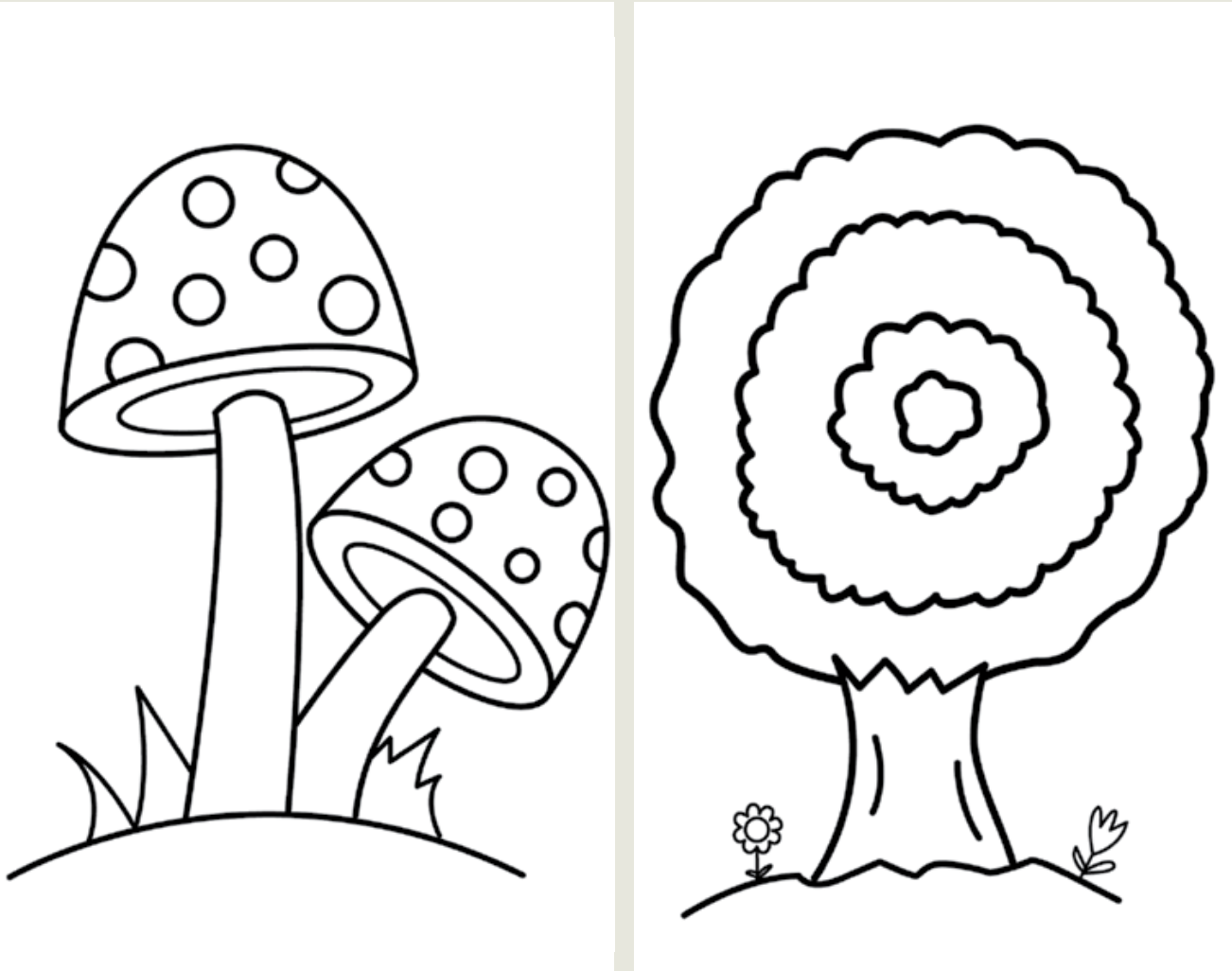


TEST YOUR KNOWLEDGE

01. Denmark has a land border with which of these countries?
A. Netherlands
B. Belgium
C. Poland
D. Germany
02. In the first Olympic Games in which Arts were part of the programme there were five categories; how many medals were awarded?
A. 11
B. 14
C. 6
D. 10
03. In 2003, a congestion charge was introduced to reduce traffic volumes in which city centre?
A. London
B. New York
C. Rome
D. Madrid

Answers: 1.D 2.C 3.A

KIDS COLOURING



BOGGLER

M	E	M	Y
W	O	A	R
O	A	P	E
N	A	B	R

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

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

FINISH WITH A FLOURISH

'Wonderful' Afghanistan thump Pakistan to claim T20I series

Sharjah, United Arab Emirates - Afghanistan overcame late nerves in the closing overs to beat Pakistan by seven wickets in the second Twenty20 international on Sunday and take an unassailable 2-0 lead in the three-game series.

Needing 30 off the last three overs, and 22 from the last two, Najibullah Zadran and Mohammad Nabi hit a six each off pace bowler Naseem Shah in the penultimate over to reduce the target to five runs.

Zadran then hit the winning boundary off Zaman Khan's last over to chase down the 131-run target with one ball to spare.

"It's a great honour and pleasure to lead this wonderful team," said Afghanistan skipper Rashid Khan.

"It was a great effort with the ball, and then we took it deep and finished it."

He added: "I think 130 was a good total. We tried our best to take it deep and finish it. Our strategy was to go out there and make sure you take responsibility. We have players to finish it like Nabi and Najib."



Afghanistan's Najibullah Zadran and Mohammad Nabi celebrate after their victory against Pakistan in the second T20 match on Sunday

We have players to finish it like Nabi and Najib."

Pakistan's 130-6 in 20 overs was built around a sedate 57-ball 64 not out by all-rounder Imad Wasim - his maiden T20I half century.

This was Afghanistan's first bilateral T20I series against any of the top six teams - India, England, Pakistan, South Africa, New Zealand and Australia.

They have previously won a T20I series each against the

West Indies and Bangladesh and five in five against Zimbabwe.

Rahmanullah Gurbaz (44 off 49 balls) and Ibrahim Zadran (38 off 40 balls) set the platform during their 56-run second wicket stand.

I think 130 was a good total. We tried our best to take it deep and finish it. Our strategy was to go out there and make sure you take responsibility

RASHID KHAN

However, their slow batting left Afghanistan needing to score 46 off the last 30 balls. Najibullah (23) and Nabi (14)

remained unbeaten to seal the victory. "Our motive for this series was to check out talented young

players and we have to back them in the future," said Pakistan captain Shadab Khan.

Earlier, Pakistan's recovery was led by Imad who hit two sixes and three boundaries to rescue Pakistan from 63-5 after winning the toss and batting.

Imad and Shadab (32) added 67 for the sixth wicket.

Pakistan had got off to a disastrous start with left-arm pacer Fazalhaq Farooqi claiming Saim Ayub and Abdullah Shafique, both for nought, in the first over of the innings.

Farooqi finished with 2-19 in his four overs.

Shafique has now been dismissed for nought on four successive occasions in five T20Is since making his debut in November 2020.

Mohammad Haris hit a six and two boundaries in his nine-ball 15 while Tayyab Tahir scored a 23-ball 13.

The stockily built Azam Khan, who rose to fame with his power hitting in the recent Pakistan Super League, fell to spinner Rashid Khan, scoring just one after his nought in the first game.

Shadab, who is deputising for rested skipper Babar Azam, hit three boundaries in his 25-ball knock.

Imad's previous best of 47 had come against Sri Lanka in Lahore in 2019.

AFP

Sciver-Brunt leads Mumbai to WPL title

Mumbai, India - England's Nat Sciver-Brunt on Sunday hailed the "special group of girls" of Mumbai Indians after her unbeaten 60 powered them to a seven-wicket victory over Delhi Capitals in the final of the inaugural Women's Premier League.

Mumbai restricted Delhi to 131-9, a total they overhauled with three balls to spare at their Brabourne Stadium home after a key 72-run third-wicket stand between Sciver-Brunt and skipper Harmanpreet Kaur (37).

Kaur was run out in the 17th over but Sciver-Brunt raised her third half-century of the tournament to anchor the team home with Amelia Kerr, who made 14 not out, for company in an unbeaten stand of 39.

Sciver-Brunt hit the winning boundary as the Mumbai dugout erupted in celebrations as the women added to the record five IPL crowns of the men's team for the franchise owned by Nita Ambani, wife of India's richest man, Reliance Industries billionaire Mukesh Ambani.

"It (the win) means everything. At the start of the competition I didn't know what to expect," player of the match Sciver-Brunt said.

"Coming together with a spe-



Mumbai Indians' players pose with the trophy after beating Delhi Capitals in the final of the 2023 Women's Premier League Twenty20 in Mumbai on Sunday (AFP)

cial group of girls with the Mumbai Indians, really special to be standing here."

Kaur said: "It feels like a dream, for everyone here. So many people were asking when will the WPL come and that day is here, and we are so happy and proud."

England pace bowler Issy Wong and West Indies off-spinner Hayley Matthews set up the victory as they claimed three wickets each to flatten the oppo-

sition after Delhi elected to bat first. Mumbai lost their openers inside four overs but Kaur and Sciver-Brunt soaked up the pressure as players from the men's team led by Rohit Sharma looked on along with a nearly packed house at the 20,000-capacity stadium.

The stand was broken with Kaur's run out after she attempted to steal a single only to fall well short at the non-striker's

end but there was no stopping Sciver-Brunt.

Delhi crumbled under pressure despite a late blitz from Shikha Pandey (27 not out) and Radha Yadav (27 not out) lifted the team from a precarious 79-9 to bat out the innings.

Wong rattled the opposition top-order and then Matthews demolished the Delhi batting as she returned figures of 3-5.

AFP

Bangladesh beat Ireland by 22 runs after Taskin burst

Chittagong, Bangladesh - Taskin Ahmed claimed three wickets in an over as Bangladesh kept their cool to beat Ireland by 22 runs in a rain-affected first Twenty20 international in Chittagong on Monday.

Bangladesh posted 207-5 in 19.2 overs before rain ended their innings, halting the game for more than an hour and forcing officials to set Ireland a revised target of 104 runs in eight overs. Ireland finished with 81-5 despite making a flying start with 18 runs in the first over.

Taskin forced the visitors to slow down with his three-wicket burst in the fourth over before claiming another wicket in the final over to finish with 4-16, his career-best figures in T20Is.

Gareth Delany top-scored for Ireland and was unbeaten on 21.

"(The pitch) looked tricky at some points, but got flatter and flatter. Disappointing to still come out on the wrong side," said Ireland's stand-in captain Paul Stirling.



Ravindra Jadeja

Jadeja promoted to top category in India cricket contracts

New Delhi, India - All-rounder Ravindra Jadeja has been promoted to the highest grade of annual contracts by India's cricket board after his stellar showing following a comeback from injury.

Jadeja, a left-arm spinner and an attacking batsman, is now alongside captain Rohit Sharma, Virat Kohli and Jasprit Bumrah in the A plus category, meaning an annual salary of \$850,000.

The Board of Control for Cricket in India announced the list of players for the four grades including A, B and C late Sunday for the period from October

2022 to September 2023.

The 34-year-old Jadeja, who has moved up from grade A, took 22 wickets and scored 135 runs in a recent four-Test series against Australia and kept up his batting form in the three ODIs.

Senior batsman KL Rahul has been dropped from A (\$607,000) to B (\$364,000) after his poor showing with the bat in the Test matches where he made 38 in two matches before being dropped.

Jadeja's spin twin Axar Patel has been pushed to grade A alongside Hardik Pandya.

AFP

'Pretty crazy' as South Africa defeat Windies in record T20 run chase

Centurion, South Africa - South Africa set a new record for chasing in international T20 cricket when they scored 259 for four to beat West Indies by six wickets at Centurion on Sunday in a game described as "pretty crazy".

Johnson Charles smashed a 39-ball century for the visitors as they posted an imposing 258 for five, the joint sixth-highest total in T20 internationals.

However, Quinton de Kock responded with 100 from 44 balls, a maiden T20I century, while fellow opener Reeza Hendricks hit 68.

"It was pretty, pretty crazy. When we came off halfway, we thought we had enough," said West Indies skipper Rovman Powell.

"But credit to Quinton de Kock and Reeza Hendricks. They applied pressure from ball one."

South Africa captain Aiden Markram (38 not out) saw his side home with seven balls to spare.

The previous highest run chase was Bulgaria's 246 to beat Serbia in 2022 while Australia made 245 to beat New Zealand in 2018.

"It was quite special. Reeza

Credit to Quinton de Kock and Reeza Hendricks. They applied pressure from ball one

ROVMAN POWELL

was the silent assassin. When I got out he said, 'We just did something really special and we should be proud of what we've done,'" said De Kock whose innings was laced with nine fours

and eight sixes. "We have played together for so long. We know what he can do."

De Kock shared an opening stand of 152 in 10.5 overs with Hendricks to set up the win.

Hendricks' 28-ball assault on the West Indies bowlers featured 11 fours and two sixes.

De Kock clubbed three sixes off successive balls from Sheldon Cottrell in a second over which yielded 29 runs.

South Africa scored 102 runs in the six-over power play, a record in matches between Test nations.

AFP



South Africa's Quinton de Kock (L) is congratulated by Reeza Hendricks after his century on Sunday (AFP)

'IT WAS TOUGH'

Alcaraz made to work hard by Lajovic in round of 32 at Miami, Ruud ousted

Miami Gardens, United States - World number one Carlos Alcaraz moved into the last 16 of the Miami Open after beating Serbia's Dusan Lajovic 6-0, 7-6 (7/5) on Sunday as he remains on track for tennis' "Sunshine Double."

The 19-year-old Spaniard, who beat Daniil Medvedev to win the title in Indian Wells last week, looked in top condition as he out-classed Lajovic in the first set to keep his Miami title defence on track.

But the Serb was able to provide some tension towards the end of the second set, breaking to make it 5-5 with Alcaraz paying the price for a sloppy return.

Alcaraz was 6-2 up in the tie-break, but Lajovic won the next three points before the Spaniard's big back-hand winner settled the 91-minute contest.

"Everything was under control or I thought it was but, you know, in the match it's never easy," Alcaraz said.

"The nerves came out. I made a few mistakes that I hadn't done during the whole match. So it was tough to win the match. But I'm really happy with the level that



Carlos Alcaraz of Spain plays a forehand against Dusan Lajovic of Serbia in their third round match in Miami on Sunday (AFP)

Everything was under control or I thought it was but, you know, in the match it's never easy. The nerves came out. So it was tough to win the match

CARLOS ALCARAZ

I'm playing and it was a good match," he added.

Alcaraz will face Tommy Paul in the last 16.

American Taylor Fritz rolled into the fourth round for the third consecutive year after clinching a 6-4, 6-4 win against Canada's

Denis Shapovalov.

In a hard-hitting encounter, with both players blasting from the baseline, Fritz did not face a break point during the 81-minute encounter. Fritz has already won one tournament in Florida this year, taking the title last month at

Delray Beach and in the fourth round, the American will be up against 19-year-old Holger Rune in who beat Argentine Daniel Schwartzman 6-4, 6-2.

As always at Miami, there is a large contingent of Argentine tennis fans and they were vocal in

their support for Schwartzman.

But Dane Rune converted all four break points he earned in the hot afternoon sun.

Dutchman Botic van de Zandschulp triumphed for the third time in four meetings with Norway's world number four Casper

Ruud, emerging with a 3-6, 6-4, 6-4 victory. The tight encounter, with a 75 minute third set, turned decisively towards Van de Zandschulp when he held to go 5-4 up with Ruud going wide at the end of a long rally.

AFP

Andreescu and Sabalenka march into round of 16 at Miami Open

Miami Gardens, United States - Former US Open winner Bianca Andreescu and world number two Aryna Sabalenka cruised into the last-16 of the Miami Open on Sunday with straight sets victories at Hard Rock Stadium.

Sabalenka's power was simply too much for Czech Marie Bouzkova, with the Belarussian breaking serve twice in the opening set on the way to a 6-1, 6-2 victory.

Any chance of a comeback from Bouzkova vanished when she was broken in the opening game of the second set and Sabalenka was in no danger on her serve, not facing break point at any time in the 66 minute encounter.

"There were really great things from me," said an upbeat Sabalenka.

"I felt like everything I was doing was right and I am super happy with the level," she added.

Sabalenka had been hampered by a groin injury in her previous match, receiving medical attention and wincing at moments in her win over Shelby Rogers, but she said the injury, while not resolved, had improved.



Bianca Andreescu of Canada plays a forehand against Sofia Kenin of the United States in their third-round match at Hard Rock Stadium in Miami, Florida, on Sunday (AFP)

"We are working on that. I would say I have the best team and I really trust them and believe that they can fix it. It definitely felt much better," she said.

"My team did everything to make sure that I am not focusing on the leg and I am focusing on the match," she added.

Andreescu will face Russian

Ekatrina Alexandrova in the next round after she beat world number nine Belinda Bencic of Switzerland 7-6 (10/8), 6-3.

In a good day for Russian women, qualifier Varvara Gracheva reached her second straight WTA 1000 fourth round with a straightforward 6-1, 6-2 win over Polish lucky loser Mag-

dalena Frech.

The 22-year-old Gracheva also made it to the last 16 as a qualifier at Indian Wells.

There will also be a strong Czech presence in the fourth round with Petra Kvitova, Barbara Krejckikova and Marketa Vondrousova all winning on Sunday.

AFP

Burns routs Young 6&5 to win WGC Match Play final

Washington, United States - Sam Burns captured the biggest title of his career by winning the WGC Match Play Championship on Sunday, routing Cameron Young 6&5 in an all-American final.

World number 15 Burns took a \$3.5 million top prize at Austin Country Club in Texas by making eight birdies in the last 10 holes to dispatch 17th-ranked Young, last year's British Open runner-up.

"What a week. Man, I'm so tired," Burns said. "It was fun playing Cam. I know he didn't have his best stuff."

It was the fifth career PGA title for Burns, who won all seven of his matches to become the first player to capture the WGC Match Play in his debut since Australian Geoff Ogilvy in 2006.

"I just tried to stack one good swing after another," Burns said. "Really have tried to put the hard work in and it's nice to see it paying off on the golf course."

Burns dethroned top-ranked defending champion Scottie Scheffler in 21 holes in morning semi-finals while Young, last year's PGA Rookie of the Year, ousted third-ranked Rory McIlroy in 19 holes. "Felt like I found something this morning at the



Sam Burns of the United States poses with the trophy after winning the World Golf Championships-Match Play in Austin, Texas, on Sunday (AFP)

end of my match with Scottie and kind of was able to carry that on this afternoon," Burns said.

"It's huge. I haven't played my best golf the past couple months and was really struggling with my swing the past couple weeks."

Young, who chased his first PGA victory, settled for his sixth runner-up showing.

"Frustrating to lose today," Young said. "Out here you have to make a bunch of birdies and I just didn't quite do it." In the final, Young won the second hole with a five-foot birdie putt but Burns dropped his approach inches from the hole for a birdie to claim the fifth and pull level.

AFP



Matt Wallace

England's Wallace wins PGA Puntacana title with birdie binge

Miami, United States - Matt Wallace birdied four of the last six holes on Sunday to win the PGA Corales Puntacana Championship for his first triumph in nearly five years.

The 32-year-old Englishman made four consecutive birdies from the 13th through 16th holes to fire a six-under par 66 and finish 72 holes at the Dominican Republic resort on 19-under 269.

That was good enough for a one-stroke victory over Den-

I am very happy. Down those last few holes I knew I could do it. I played great all week. Just came out on top, so (I am) very lucky. This is cool

MATT WALLACE

mark's 22-year-old Nicolai Hojgaard, who missed a 20-foot birdie putt at 18 to force a play-off.

Wallace, who captured his

first US PGA Tour title, was a four-time winner on the European Tour, the most recent of those having come at Denmark in September 2018.

Wallace capped his birdie run at the windy 16th, where he dropped his approach in swirling winds within inches of the hole and tapped in for a two-stroke lead. He then closed with back-to-back pars.

"Very happy," Wallace said. "Down those last few holes I knew I could do it. I played great all week. Just came out on top, so very lucky."

"This is cool." Hojgaard, a two-time Euro-

pean Tour winner, sank a 15-foot birdie putt at the par-3 17th to give himself a chance on the final hole.

Americans Sam Stevens and Tyler Duncan shared third, two adrift on 271, with American Austin Eckroat another stroke back.

Most of the PGA's top talent was at this week's WGC Match Play Championship in Austin, Texas.

AFP



Cristiano Ronaldo celebrates his goal on Sunday

Ronaldo 'very important' for Portugal, says Martinez

Luxembourg, Luxembourg - Cristiano Ronaldo remains a "very important" player for Portugal, coach Roberto Martinez said on Sunday after the veteran striker scored a second successive brace in Euro 2024 qualifying against Luxembourg.

The 38-year-old opened the scoring for the Euro 2016 winners by turning in Nuno Mendes' header and slotted home another in the 31st minute as Portugal won 6-0.

Ronaldo, who also netted twice against Liechtenstein on Thursday, increased his records of most men's international appearances and goals to 198 and 122 respectively.

"Cristiano is a unique player in the world, with the highest number of international caps," said Martinez, who has restored Ronaldo to the starting line-up after he was dropped during the 2022 World Cup in Qatar. "The experience he has for the dressing room is very important."

AFP

SUBLIME SHOW

Saka stars as England see off Ukraine in Euro qualifying, Ronaldo nets double

Paris, France - Bukayo Saka starred and Harry Kane scored again as England made it two wins from two in Euro 2024 qualifying by beating Ukraine 2-0 at Wembley on Sunday, while Cristiano Ronaldo extended his international goals record to 122 with a double as Portugal thrashed Luxembourg.

Captain Kane, who broke Wayne Rooney's all-time England goalscoring record in mid-week, turned home his 55th international goal from Bukayo Saka's cross in the 37th minute.

In-form Arsenal winger Saka all but ended Ukraine's resistance three minutes later, turning from Jordan Henderson's pass and curling a sublime strike from outside the area into the top corner.

The victory takes England three points clear at the top of the early Group C table after winning in Italy for the first time since 1961 on Thursday.

"Two wins out of two is all we asked for at the start of the camp," midfielder Jude Bellingham told Channel 4.

"We've followed up a really good result in Italy with another one tonight and when you do that, it feels rewarding."

Gareth Southgate's men produced an accomplished performance in their first home game since an agonising World Cup quarter-final defeat by France last December.

Kane missed one great early chance before he gave England the lead.

Ukraine failed to muster a shot on target and Conor Gallagher, Harry Maguire and Jack Grealish all went close to netting a third for the hosts late on.



England's Bukayo Saka scores against Ukraine in their UEFA Euro 2024 Group C qualification match in London on Sunday (AFP)

We've followed up a really good result in Italy with another one tonight and when you do that, it feels rewarding

JUDE BELLINGHAM

England, still waiting for a first major tournament title since 1966, return to qualifying action against Malta and North Macedonia in June.

The top two teams in each group will automatically book a place in next year's European Championship in Germany.

Reigning champions Italy bounced back from their loss to England with a straightforward 2-0 away win over Malta.

Argentine-born forward Mateo Retegui followed up his debut goal against England by opening the scoring early on.

Monza midfielder Matteo

Pessina made it two before the half-hour mark and Italy comfortably saw out the victory.

Ronaldo marked his record-breaking 197th international appearance in midweek with two goals against Liechtenstein and he repeated the trick as Portugal thumped Luxembourg 6-0.

The 38-year-old diverted in Nuno Mendes' headed pass to give Roberto Martinez's men a ninth-minute lead.

Goals from Joao Felix and Bernardo Silva put the game to bed inside 18 minutes, before Ronaldo slotted home his second

from Bruno Fernandes' through ball in the 31st minute.

Ronaldo has now scored 11 goals against Luxembourg in his career.

Late strikes from substitutes Otavio and Rafael Leao, who also missed a penalty, rounded off a fine performance from Portugal who are already clear at the top of Group J.

Elsewhere in the group, Iceland bounced back from their opening defeat by Bosnia and Herzegovina by thrashing Liechtenstein 7-0.

AFP



Antonio Conte

Conte leaves Tottenham 'by mutual agreement'

London, United Kingdom - Antonio Conte has left Tottenham "by mutual agreement" after 16 months in charge, the Premier League club announced on Sunday.

His departure comes after the Italian's extraordinary post-match rant following a 3-3 draw at Southampton on March 18, a game in which they blew a 3-1 lead.

The 53-year-old, who took over in November 2021, will be replaced by his assistant Cristian Stellini until the end of the season.

"We can announce that head coach Antonio Conte has left the club by mutual agreement," a club statement read. "We achieved Champions League qualification in Antonio's first season at the club. We thank Antonio for his contribution and wish him well for the future. "Cristian Stellini will take the team as acting head coach for the remainder of the season, along with Ryan Mason as assistant head coach."

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Kylian Mbappe

Mbappe relaxed over topping Platini's France goal total

Dublin, Ireland - Kylian Mbappe will try to put thoughts of surpassing France great Michel Platini's international goal-scoring tally to one side when he faces the Republic of Ireland in a Euro 2024 qualifier.

Mbappe has now scored 38 international goals, just three fewer than playmaker Platini, but still some way short of Olivier Giroud's all-time France record of 53 goals.

"For me, it's an honour to be at this stage," Mbappe told a pre-match press conference on Sunday. "That's my next target and I'll keep going, It might be tomorrow, it might not."

AFP

Ukraine coach upbeat despite Euro qualifier defeat by England

London, United Kingdom - Ukraine interim head coach Ruslan Rotan said the "incredible" Wembley atmosphere during their 2-0 defeat against England on Sunday would inspire the team as they battle to qualify for Euro 2024.

The side from the war-torn nation were well beaten in their opening qualifier in London in front of a packed house including thousands of Ukrainian fans.

England captain Harry Kane poked home from close range in the 37th minute and Bukayo Saka scored a breathtaking long-range curler three minutes later to all but seal the Group C clash before half-time.

Despite the result, Rotan took positives from the contest against the beaten finalists at Euro 2020.

"I want to thank all the Ukrainian supporters for their incredible signals to the team, the incredible wave of support the Ukrainian team felt every minute of the game," said the caretaker



Ukraine coach Ruslan Rotan during their UEFA Euro 2024 Group C qualification match against England on Sunday

I'm grateful for the support of the England fans because it was an atmosphere like no other game

RUSLAN ROTAN

manager. "I'm also grateful for the support of the England fans because it was an atmosphere like no other international game I have ever experienced and this unique Wembley Stadium atmosphere will give an incredible boost to the Ukrainian players who experienced it first hand."

But Rotan said the current situation, in which Ukraine are

forced to play their matches at neutral venues following Russia's invasion of the country last year, made it tough.

"The logistics of moving from A to B are incredibly hard," he said. "It takes us almost 24 hours to get together and move to our training camp before the games."

"Unfortunately we have a war on our backs and we can only be grateful to the Ukrainian armed forces who make it possible for us to play games and to participate in competitions. Clearly logistics under those circumstances are of second nature, it's not the main thing. The main thing is that we need this war to end."

Rotan bemoaned the lack of recent match practice - Ukraine had not played an international since facing Scotland in the Nations League in September.

"We knew the quality and the strength of the England team but the Ukrainian boys deserve better," he said. "It's a good team and it will progress."

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AI TOOLS IN HEALTHCARE



The significant rise in the use of telemedicine during the COVID-19 pandemic was indicative of the digital revolution at the doorstep in this field, and ChatGPT is seen to be one of the latest applications that can facilitate a shift towards the remote management of healthcare.

According to a recent article in *News Medical*, ChatGPT can be helpful in the healthcare industry by developing virtual assistants to book patient appointments, help patients receive appropriate treatments, and manage their health information.

While human doctors will always be needed to make the final call on healthcare decisions, ChatGPT can assist with clinical decision support by providing real-time, evidence-based recommendations such as flagging potential drug interactions, suggesting treatment options for a specific condition, and providing relevant clinical guidelines.

Medical record keeping is another area where ChatGPT will likely improve healthcare systems. Here, it could summarise patient medical histories, effectively streamlining the record-keeping process. Theoretically, healthcare professionals could dictate to ChatGPT, which could automatically summarise the key details.

Real-time translation is another function of ChatGPT that can be leveraged in healthcare. The system's advanced language processing capabilities could be capitalised on to quickly

The potential applications of ChatGPT in healthcare may cause a profound shift in healthcare systems. But, it needs to be employed with utmost caution



and accurately translate technical terms and medical jargon, ensuring patients fully understand their diagnosis, treatment options, and medical instructions.

Clinical trials, which need numerous participants, are vital to the advancement of the healthcare system for developing new treatments, diagnostic tools, and preventative strategies. In this regard, ChatGPT could identify patients that meet inclusion criteria, helping researchers connect with patients willing to participate in the clinical trial.

There are, however, many ethical considerations to address when implementing AI tools in any industry. Those most relevant to healthcare relate to privacy and safety and these need to be given top priority.

When using ChatGPT, you are feeding it data, and in healthcare, this data will often be confidential patient information. This has huge implications for data protection, as before ChatGPT can be widely adopted in healthcare, systems must be established to ensure that patient information is kept private.

In addition, there is the risk that due to the incredible capabilities of ChatGPT, users may naturally blindly trust the system to be 100% accurate all of the time. ChatGPT should, hence, be used to assist rather than do, and all work and information it provides should be cross-checked.

In healthcare, the AI-generated information provided by ChatGPT, if incorrect, has the potential to impact a person's health. Therefore, great caution should be taken while employing it.

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CHIROPRACTIC AND YOGA

DR DOMINIK SCHEIBER, AN AUSTRIAN CHIROPRACTOR IN MUSCAT, ADVOCATES COMBINING CHIROPRACTIC WITH YOGA FOR OPTIMUM LEVELS OF FITNESS

Pain is often said to be the final symptom that indicates your body is dysfunctional. A strong nerve connection is the foundation of good health and harmony in the human body, and 'if you listen to the body when it whispers, you won't have to hear it scream.'

Take that tip from Dr Dominik Scheiber, an Austrian chiropractor who recently shifted to Oman backed by ten years of practice in Austria. Dr Dominik believes that combining yoga and chiropractic puts one on the ultimate path to fitness as good health is centred around the spine - the focus of chiropractic care.

"Chiropractic is a unique service which is not so common in Oman. It is a healing art that is interested in promoting and providing health primarily through the nervous system. I personally acknowledge anything that holds to the same philosophy that the body has an inherent ability to heal itself (homeostasis)," said Dr Dominik, adding, "I'm not a magician. Your body will be able to do the magic the moment you are connected. The magic is in-

side the body. You have all the medicines inside of you."

He explained that chiropractic care is the go-to treatment option for many medical ailments such as back pain, headache, stress, digestion, blood pressure and even those concerning irregular menstrual cycles. Emotional stress or having a low self-esteem can also result in spine misalignment.

Since yoga helps to lower blood pressure, decrease stress, and strengthen the body's core, it is considered a perfect therapy for the chiropractic patient. While chiropractic care involves bringing the spine into alignment and balance in the body, yoga strengthens the muscles sur-

rounding the spine, providing better support. So, the health benefits, particularly those concerning circulation and relaxation, help increase the effectiveness of chiropractic as a pain management tool.

Those who combine yoga and chiropractic witness accelerated recovery from ailments as chiropractic and yoga together not only enhance balance, flexibility, and mobility, but tackle these issues from different approaches to give holistic results.



*I'm not a magician.
Your body will be
able to do the magic
the moment you
are connected.
The magic is inside
the body*

DR DOMINIK SCHEIBER



Yoga not only tones and tightens the body, preparing it for much deeper levels of healing, it also stretches the muscles that have been restricted for years, often for one's entire life. It prepares the body to accept the full benefits of chiropractic care and to respond promptly.

Sitting is the new 'smoking'

Pointing out that availing of chiropractic care was not an 'expense' but an 'investment', Dr

Dominik said, "The amount of stress from outside is higher than the adaptability of your body. People working in 9-5 jobs mostly have misaligned spines. Today, sitting is the new 'smoking'. It causes pressure to build on your spinal disks, compress organs, tighten muscles, and decrease mental ability." He recommended, that people tied down to desks must take short breaks every 20-25 minutes to move around and breathe fresh air.

Referring to a common complaint these days, called 'tech neck', Dr Dominik said, "Constant use of mobile phones by young individuals causes stress on their necks and spines. As of

now, their bodies are strong and they have greater adaptability. But 20 years later, they could experience a lot of health issues. So, it is important for parents to limit the use of smartphones and devices by their children.

"Clients ask me which exercise is the best for maintaining health? That's where yoga comes into the picture. Yoga is an approach that not only works on your physical body, but also on your soul. Yoga helps you reconnect with your spiritual self. It works on the energy connection within your body and increases its inner adaptability," He said, adding, "The connection between your mind, body, and spirit is a shortcut to your happiest, healthiest, and most vibrant self. This is also where yoga and chiropractic meet.

Aligning fasting as a process of renewing oneself - just as chiropractic does, he said, "Fasting is a form of stress, the reaction to which is growth. We need a certain amount of stress to grow. A body that doesn't go through stress, dies faster. Therefore I appreciate when my patients use Ramadan to their full benefit."

(Contributed by: Deeba Parveen)



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