



MoHUP starts training 100 real estate brokers

Our Correspondent
Muscat

The Ministry of Housing and Urban Planning (MoHUP) began a two-week training programme for 100 real estate brokers on Sunday in its efforts to develop the Omani real estate sector.

A statement issued by MoHUP said, 'The programme aims to develop skills, enhance knowledge of real estate laws and legislation, and facilitate opportunities in the sector.'

The programme also aims to encourage those engaged in real estate brokerage to obtain a legal licence and more citizens to work in the sector. Among the 100 trainees in the programme, some



(Supplied photo)

currently work as realtors.

According to the National Centre for Statistics and Information (NCSI), the total value of property transactions in the sultanate in 2021 till the end of August was RO1,744,100,000, an increase of 14.2 per cent over the same period in 2020.

The government collected RO50.3mn in real estate transaction fees in 2021 in the January-August period, which was an increase of 21 per cent compared to the same period in 2020.

The traded value of sales contracts increased 51.1 per cent to RO770,700,000, and the num-

ber of sales contracts increased 74.4 per cent to 56,611 in 2021, compared to 32,460 contracts during the same period in 2020.

On Sunday, MoHUP also launched a trial run of its real estate platform 'Tatwir' which provides digital services related to the real estate sector.



WIN-WIN SITUATION

Is the revised labour visa fee the long-awaited impetus for the revival of the economy and stimulus for the private sector?

Following His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tariq's directive to reduce visa fee for expatriate employees, the Ministry of Labour reduced the fee by more than 85 per cent for companies committed to Omanisation targets.

The previous decision to hike visa fee - Ministerial Decision No 12/2021 issued in January 2021 - affected the private sector. The new directive is expected to stimulate trade and the economy.

The revised visa fee for expat manpower will reduce the burden on the private sector and support its role in employing national workforce. The decision will also improve the business environment, raise competitiveness of the sultanate and aid in attracting investments.

His Majesty's directive to start implementing development projects in the governorates will boost overall economic development, because each project will be accompanied by several supporting projects, which will have a positive effect on the business environment and increase opportunities for the private sector and small and medium enterprises.

Reacting to the decision, *Muscat Daily* readers said:

Anwar Jamal
Private sector employee

The move is a visionary measure by the government as it will improve businesses in Oman, thereby not only giving opportunities to expats but also more jobs for Omanis. It's a win-win situation for all.

Dr Sanjay D Dalal
Family physician

Right reversal of decision. It will definitely help the economy though it will take a long time. A couple of more decisions/rules and regulations currently stagnating the economy need to be reviewed, too. We all pray for the speedy recovery of Oman's economy.

Jayatee Choudhury
Student

The revised fee will provide economic impetus through private sector and SMEs stimulation, national workforce recruitment, foreign investment, economic renaissance through expat contribution and agricultural sector revival. Private companies must start diversified projects and maintain Omanisation rate to benefit from the directive and reassure foreign investors.

Mohan Anandan
Bank employee

The revised visa fee will definitely act as stimulus for attracting more investments to the country. Struggling small and medium enterprises would also get some relief by way of reduction in their overhead expenses on this account.

Ruskeen S
Sales manager

It is definitely going to help the private sector. SMEs will benefit a lot from His Majesty the Sultan's directive. The continuing pandemic and rising labour recruitment charges have been a big concern.

Jay Prakash
Private sector employee

The government has taken a visionary step by revising the old fee. This will help in early completion of projects that have been in the pipeline. Business houses and the private sector must welcome the move by the government and at the same time increase the wages of staff to make the working environment conducive.

? NEXT ON YOUR SAY

Are the RO500,000 and RO250,000 minimum investment criteria for investor visas in the sultanate too high?

The views stated here are those of the respondents and not endorsed by *Muscat Daily*. If you feel strongly about the issues discussed here, you can email your comments to muscatdaily@apexmedia.co.om You can also log on to our Facebook page or tweet your comments on the issue



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(Supplied photo)

MHT launches book on sultanate's natural treasures

Our Correspondent
Muscat

The Ministry of Heritage and Tourism (MHT) launched a book titled *Oman - Splendors of the Sultanate - Scent of the Past, Vision of the Future* in the presence of H E Sayyid Saud bin Hilal al Busaidi, Minister of State and Governor of Muscat, and H E Salim Mohammed al Mahrouqi, Minister of Heritage and Tourism.

A statement issued by MHT said the book, authored by Hani J Samaha, stands out for the accuracy of its contents, richness of information, attention to detail, and high-quality photographs capturing various locations around Oman. The book has also been translated into English.

On the occasion, H E Busaidi said, "This book is a knowledge addition to the Omani, Arab and international literary space, because it contains selected images and background details that contribute to the knowledge

The book 'Oman - Splendors of the Sultanate - Scent of the Past, Vision of the Future', is a knowledge addition to the Omani, Arab and international literary space

H E SAYYID AL BUSAIDI

about the governorates in terms of their unique natural treasures."

H E Mahrouqi said that the book represents authentic Omani heritage, the luxury and diversity of tourism activities offered by Oman and invites visitors to explore the beauty of the land.

He said the book will contribute to supporting the promotional efforts undertaken by the

ministry, both locally as well as internationally, within the framework of implementing a comprehensive tourism development plan adopted by it.

MHT will work to ensure the distribution of the book through its tourism representation offices in 16 countries, as well as through embassies of Oman.

"We have tried to convey a part of the greatness of the sultanate with solid and comprehensive details of the nation's march, its tourism, cultural and economic achievements," Samaha said.

"Our work will not stop here. We will soon do a series of documentaries that will showcase the renaissance of Oman in various sectors."

Photography for the book started on September 18, 2017, and ended on August 22, 2018, beginning in the Governorate of Dhofar, covering all the governorates before ending in Muscat.

Dhofar wheat production to grow 1,000 tonnes this season

Our Correspondent
Muscat

Wheat harvest in the farms of the Najd area in Dhofar is set to reach nearly 1,500 tonnes in the 2021-22 season, an increase of more than 1,000 tonnes over the last season, according to the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Water Resources (MAFWR).

On Sunday, Rashid bin Saeed al Ghafri, director general of the Directorate General of Agriculture, Fisheries and Water Resources in the Governorate of Dhofar, said, "The expected production of this season's wheat crop in the Najd area in the wilayat of Thumrait in Dhofar is about 1,500 tonnes, an increase of more than 1,000 tonnes over last season."

He added, "The cultivation area for wheat crop was 600 acres last season. Wheat harvesting for this season has started in 35 farms spread on an estimated area of 1,547 acres -



an increase in cultivation area by about 61 per cent over the last season."

The cultivation of wheat crop is growing at a fast pace in the Najd area as a result of the efforts made by the ministry to encourage farmers to increase strategic cultivations in order to achieve the objectives of Oman Vision 2040 for food security.

According to Ghafri, the Najd

area in Dhofar is important for wheat cultivation due to the availability of water, the quality of soil and appropriate climate.

He stressed that wheat tops the list of strategic food crops in the world, and its cultivation area accounts for 28 per cent of the total grain growing area in the world, and is the main food for more than half of the world's population.

Oman produced 2,649 tonnes of wheat in the 2020-21 farming season, 19 per cent more than the 2019-20 season, according to statistics released by MAFWR.

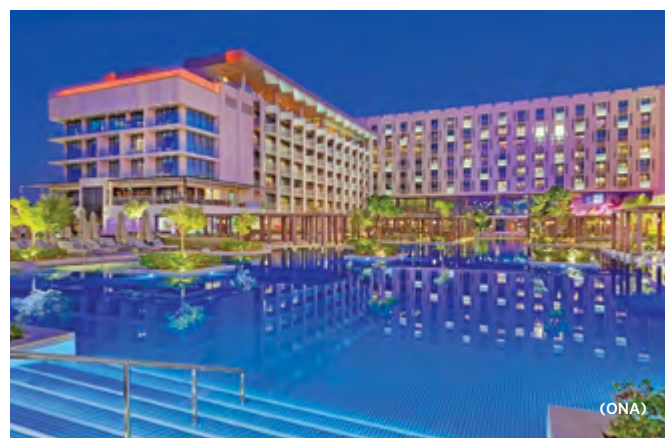
Ministry statistics show that the total area of farmland under wheat cultivation in Oman was 2,449 acres, and the number of farmers increased by 5.5 per cent in the 2020-21 season.

Hotel guests up 19.1% in January

Muscat - The total number of guests in three-five star hotels in Oman in January 2022 stood at 97,956, accounting for a rise of 19.1 per cent, compared to January 2021, according to the latest data issued by the National Centre for Statistics and Information (NCSI).

Total revenues of three-five star hotels grew by 91.6 per cent in January this year - over the same period last year - to RO12.264mn. Hotels occupancy rate also went up by 51.3 per cent in the same period.

The number of European guests saw the highest increase



by 641.5 per cent from 3,584 guests in January 2021 to 26,571 guests this January. This was fol-

lowed by a surge in GCC guests by 270.6 per cent to reach 5,548 guests, compared to

1,497 in 2021.

Meanwhile, the number of Omani guests declined by 24.9 per cent from 60,759 guests in 2021 to 45,628 guests in January 2022. Furthermore, the number of Asian guests declined by 3.2 per cent to stand at 9,223 guests, compared to 9,531 guests in 2021.

The number of guests from Oceania registered a slight growth of 3.4 per cent to reach 733 in 2022, while the number of guests from Africa rose by 69.6 per cent to reach 698 guests in January 2022.

ONA

Organ transplant procedures

Continued from Page 01

"Patients with organ failure and their families suffer a lot. They have to visit health institutions even as the patient's health deteriorates. Organ transplantation is a ray of hope for these children, patients, their families, and the entire community. Patients who receive organs get a new lease of life," Dr Neven said.

"After death, a donor can save the lives of eight people by donating the heart, kidneys, pancreas, liver, lungs and small intestine. After death, a donor can donate tissues, too, such as corneas and heart valves.

"Currently, the sultanate allows transplantation of kidney and liver for adults and children. We are working in cooperation with the MoH to complete the establishment of an integrated national system for organ donation," Dr Neven informed.

WEATHER WATCH

	Max	Min
Abu Dhabi	30	17
Doha	30	17
Kuwait City	25	17
Manama	26	18
Muscat	30	20
Riyadh	31	18

PRAYER TIMINGS

Fajr	4.55am
Sunrise	6.10am
Duhr	12.19pm
Asr	3.45pm
Maghrib	6.23pm
Isha	7.33pm

Send your comments to muscatdaily@apexmedia.co.om

Tender No.	No E- Tender	Description of Tender	Tender Fee	Last date to collect the tender	Tender return date	Grade
PRE/22/015	2022/MM/QS-9	Public Parking Project at (Bousher hay albydha) (E- Tender)	Rial 25	09/04/2022	28/04/2022	Second
PRE/22/018	2022/MM/QS-10	Construction of pedestrian Walkway and Parking along alsahil Road in Quriyat (E- Tender)	Rial 35	09/04/2022	28/04/2022	First

Tender Conditions :-

- Bidders shall submit their offers electronically accompanied with an electronic copy of bond issued by any local bank in Oman addressed to Muscat municipality. The bond shall be (1%) of the tender value valid for ninety (90) days starting from the date of bids submission. Any tenders which do not meet the required bond shall not be accepted.
- Tender Bonds shall be E-Bond and to be submitted through E-Tendering system, addressed to Muscat Municipality.
- For any inquiries regarding tenders, please visit e-tendering website: (<https://etendering.tenderboard.gov.om>) .
- For technical support of e-tendering system please send an email to (etenderhd@mtcit.gov.om) or call (+96824402200).
- For technical support of E-Bond through e-tendering system please send an email to (esnad@gstb.gov.om) or call (+96824402200/24402330).

MARKET WATCH	
MSX30	4,314.87
FOREX RATES	
(RO1 equals)	
Indian Rs	197.37
Pakistani Rs	469.09
Bangladeshi Taka	224.13
Philippine Peso	136.59
Sri Lankan Rs	720.94

*Rates as on March 20
Source: xe.com

BRIEFS

China's auto exports soar in Jan-Feb

China's automobile exports surged 75 per cent year-on-year in the first two months of 2022, data from the China Association of Automobile Manufacturers showed.

A total of 412,000 vehicles were exported in the period, of which passenger car exports soared 84 per cent to 331,000 units.

In February alone, automobile exports totaled 180,000 units, down 21.9 per cent from January, but up 60.8 per cent from the same period last year. The growth of new energy vehicle exports contributed 52 percent to the surge, the data showed.

German gas supply concerns mount

Germany, which relies heavily on Russian gas, has major concerns over securing supplies for next winter and is doing all it can to secure alternatives, Minister for Economic Affairs Robert Habeck said on Saturday.

"If we do not obtain more gas next winter and if deliveries from Russia were to be cut then we would not have enough gas to heat all our houses and keep all our industry going," warned Habeck.

Supplies are 'not yet completely guaranteed', he told Deutschlandfunk radio.

He added that the government of Europe's biggest economy was preparing for the possibility of shortages 'which we hope can be avoided'.

Foundation stone laid for solar-powered integrated inspection facility in Sohar

Our Correspondent
Muscat

Hutchison Ports Sohar on Sunday laid the foundation stone for the solar-powered integrated inspection facility project at Sohar Port. The new facility aims to develop inspection services for incoming and outgoing containers and enhance the logistics position of Oman.

Covering an area of 37,000 sqm, the US\$30mn new facility is due for completion in mid-2023. Once ready, it is set to be the largest and first integrated one-stop inspection facility for all the relevant government authorities to handle clearances in the sultanate.

The ceremony was held under the auspices of H E Eng Khamis bin Mohammed al Shamakhi, Undersecretary for Transport in the Ministry of Transport, Communications and Information Technology.

Mark Geilenkirchen, CEO of Sohar Port, the management team of Hutchison Ports Sohar, representatives of a number of government and private organisations also attended the



groundbreaking ceremony.

The inspection station contains an area dedicated to the process of safe and clean laboratory tests to ensure food safety monitoring of the increasing imports and exports in Oman.

The station also works on

controlling the temperature of the inspection facility and equipping it with scanners at the inspection platforms.

"Congratulations to Hutchison Ports Sohar for breaking ground on a new integrated inspection facility project at Terminal C,"

Sohar Port and Freezone said in a Tweet.

H E Shamakhi, said that this initiative by Hutchison Ports Sohar illustrates a true partnership of the company with the Omani government to facilitate smoother and timely handling

and clearance of goods by adopting new simplified processes and standards. "We are looking forward to see the inspection facility's impact and it will also result in improvements to our domestic and global logistics performance as per the Logistics Performance

Index and its key dimensions," he said.

Anacin Kum, CEO of Hutchison Ports Sohar, said, "This integrated inspection facility project will be transformative for the clearance process but more importantly, it will significantly expand terminal's ability to serve the growing community needs through a superior one-stop shop service station."

The inspection facility will be temperature controlled and out-fitted with cargo scanners at the inspection platforms. Out of the 66 container inspection bays, a dedicated section of about 1/3 of the total inspection facility will be reserved for refrigerated and foodstuff inspection. The three X-ray container scanner portal units and Container Radiation Monitor System will be integrated with the security control system for scanning of containers.

Solar energy system will be installed on the new infrastructure, existing buildings and car parking areas which will result in a reduction of approximately 5,000 tonnes of CO2 emissions per year.

CMA, Moroccan authorities hold green financing meeting

Our Correspondent
Muscat

An official meeting was held on Sunday between the Capital Market Authority (CMA), the Moroccan Capital Market Authority and a number of related entities in the sultanate, to discuss ways of cooperation and exchange of expertise in the field of green and sustainable financing, a press statement issued by the CMA said.

The meeting was attended by Oman Investment Authority, Ministry of Finance, Environment Authority, Civil Aviation Authority and Oman Tourism Development Company.

The meeting reviewed the Moroccan experience and acquainted with the key legislative and technical areas for such green financing products beside the discussion of the economic feasibility of offering green bonds and sukuk, as well as



the key requirements to launch green financing products in the Omani capital market to ensure the readiness of the legislative infrastructure.

The meeting preceded the seminar on the Moroccan experience in green and sustainable financing scheduled to be held on Monday at the Oman Chamber of Commerce and Industry. The Moroccan Capital Market Authority will present a working paper on the regulatory

frameworks for the regulation of green financing.

During the seminar, Moroccan Capital Market Authority will highlight its contribution in directing the investments toward the economic activities that strike balance between the economic, environmental and social objects to improve the welfare of human being and to limit the impact of climate change, the CMA statement said.

Oil giant Saudi Aramco says annual profit more than doubled in 2021

Riyadh, Saudi Arabia - Saudi Aramco's net profit soared 124 per cent last year as global growth recovered from the COVID-19 downturn, the oil giant announced on Sunday, hours after Yemen's Houthi rebels targeted some of its sites.

Aramco, the crown jewel of Saudi Arabia's oil-dependent economy, did not say if the cross-border attacks, which targeted diverse locations in the kingdom, caused damage to its own facilities.

A Saudi-led coalition that supports Yemen's government against the rebels reported no casualties but 'damage' from air defence systems intercepting missiles and armed drones, without specifying whether Aramco's infrastructure was among sites affected.

'Aramco's net income increased by 124 per cent to US\$110bn in 2021, compared to US\$49bn in 2020,' the company said in a statement.

The oil giant achieved a net income of US\$88.2bn in 2019 before the coronavirus pandemic hit global markets, resulting in huge losses for the energy and aviation sectors, among others.

A strong rebound last year saw demand for oil increase and prices recover from their 2020 lows, and Brent crude has lately repeatedly spiked above US\$100 per barrel, driven by supply con-



cerns centred on Russia's invasion of Ukraine.

One of the world's largest producers of gas and one of the biggest oil producers, Russia is grappling with mounting Western sanctions.

"Our strong results are a testament to our financial discipline, flexibility through evolving market conditions and steadfast focus on our long-term growth strategy," Aramco president and CEO Amin Nasser said, acknowledging also that 'economic conditions have improved considerably'.

Drone, missile attacks

Yemen's Iran-backed Houthi rebels said on Sunday that they launched cross-border drone and missile attacks on the kingdom, targeting a number of 'vital and important' establish-

ments -- including Aramco facilities.

The Saudi-led military coalition, meanwhile, said it intercepted and destroyed ballistic missiles launched towards Jizan in southern Saudi Arabia as well as nine armed drones targeting other areas in the kingdom.

'Initial investigations indicate the militia used Iranian cruise missiles that targeted Al-Shaqeeq desalination plant and Aramco's Jizan bulk plant,' it said in a statement, adding other targets included a Dhahran Al-Janoub power station, a gas station in Khamis Mushait and an Aramco gas plant in Yanbu.

It said that the 'hostile attacks' and scattered debris after interception caused 'some material damage', without specifying which sites were damaged.

The Houthis have repeatedly

targeted Saudi Arabia, including Aramco's sites.

In 2019, aerial assaults on two Aramco facilities in the eastern region temporarily knocked out half of the kingdom's crude production, underscoring the vulnerability of its infrastructure.

The six-nation Gulf Cooperation Council plans to hold talks in Riyadh from March 29 in the latest bid to end Yemen's conflict. The Houthis, while saying they are not opposed to talks, have said they won't travel to 'enemy' territory.

Big investment plans

CEO Nasser cautioned that the company's outlook remained uncertain due in part to 'geopolitical factors' and, in an allusion to the effect of the recent price spikes on consumers, also noted that 'energy security is paramount for billions of people'.

"We (therefore) continue to make progress on increasing our crude oil production capacity, executing our gas expansion programme and increasing our liquids to chemicals capacity," Nasser added.

Saudi Aramco's statement said capital expenditure in 2021 was up 18 per cent on 2020 at US\$31.9bn, a figure it expects to rise to approximately US\$40-50bn this year, before further growth.

AFP

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MSX inches down on weak activity

Our Correspondent
Muscat

The benchmark index of the Muscat Stock Exchange (MSX) inched down 0.02 per cent to close at 4,314.88 points on Sunday.

Trading activity deteriorated from the previous session as turnover declined 50.97 per cent to RO3.21mn and volumes fell 38.93 per cent to 9.7mn shares.

While Financial index fell 0.33 per cent, Industrial and Services indices rose 0.29 per cent and 0.25 per cent, respectively. The MSX Shariah index closed up by 0.11 per cent at 491.25 points.

Market breadth remained slightly positive as eight companies closed up, while seven companies closed down. The rest 15 traded stocks closed flat for the day.

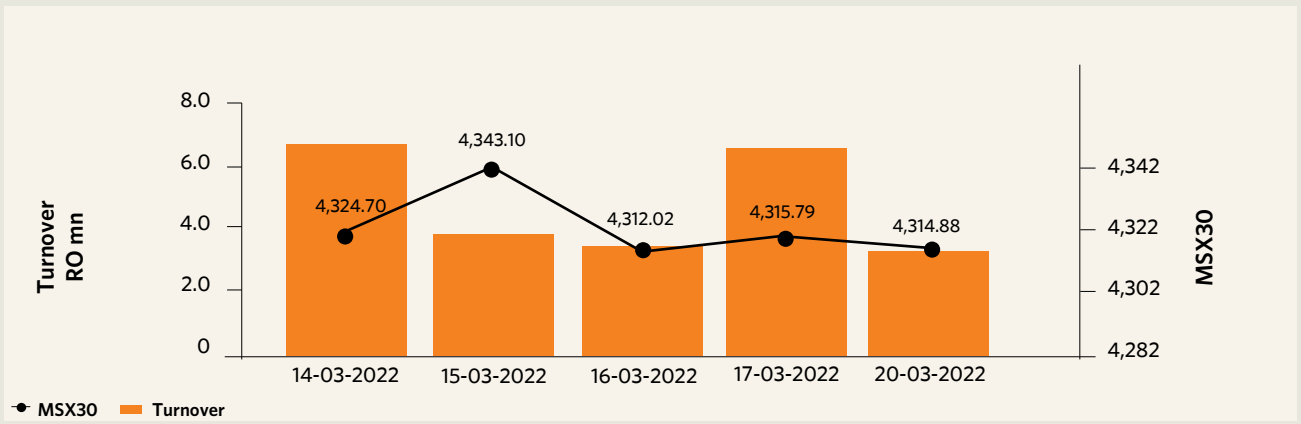
Top gainers were Voltamp Energy (4.35



per cent), National Aluminium Products Company (2.41 per cent), Ooredoo (1.77 per cent) and Al Jazeera Steel Products (0.94 per cent).

Top losers were United Finance (-2.44 per cent), Ominvest (-1.79 per cent), Oman Arab Bank (-1.43 per cent) and Oman Fisheries (-1.14 per cent).

MSX INDEX AND TURNOVER OF FIVE TRADING DAYS



BoE hikes rate again to combat inflation

London, UK - The Bank of England (BoE) on hiked its main interest rate to its pre-pandemic level to combat runaway inflation that risks soaring far higher as the Ukraine conflict fuels energy costs.

The BoE hiked borrowing costs by a quarter-point to 0.75 per cent, its third increase in a row.

The decision came one day after the US Federal Reserve carried out the first of what is expected to be a number of rate hikes this year to tackle decades-high inflation.

The UK central bank said the country's annual inflation rate could top 8 per cent this year, as the Ukraine war fuels already sky-high prices for oil, gas and other commodities.

It had previously forecast inflation to peak at 7.25 per cent in April.

The BoE even warned that, should wholesale energy prices continue to soar, inflation could potentially be 'several percentage points higher' than the prior estimate.

Eight members of the bank's nine-strong Monetary Policy Committee, including governor Andrew Bailey, voted to lift its key rate by a quarter point, while

Regarding inflation, the invasion of Ukraine by Russia has led to further large increases in energy and other commodity prices including food prices

BANK OF ENGLAND

Jon Cunliffe wanted it kept at 0.5 per cent due to worries over the soaring cost of living.

Ukraine fallout

'Regarding inflation, the invasion of Ukraine by Russia has led to further large increases in energy and other commodity prices including food prices,' the BoE said in a statement.

'It is also likely to exacerbate global supply chain disruptions, and has increased the uncertainty around the economic outlook significantly.'

The bank said global inflationary pressures would 'strengthen considerably further' over the coming months, meaning that net energy importers including

Britain would likely experience slowing growth.

The latest official data showed that UK annual inflation hit 5.5 per cent in January, the highest level since 1992.

Inflation is rocketing around the world also as economies reopen from the pandemic.

The Fed on Wednesday announced a quarter-point rate hike, the first since it slashed its rate to zero at the start of the COVID-19 crisis.

The European Central Bank last week 'significantly' lifted its inflation forecasts for the eurozone on sky-high energy prices and uncertainty over the war in Ukraine, but it gave itself time before raising interest rates.

The UK's February inflation data is due Wednesday.

This coincides with a budget update from the government, which is facing higher repayment costs on its vast pandemic bill following rate hikes.

Finance minister Rishi Sunak has already announced a major tax hike starting in April on UK workers and businesses.

That same month, a cap on domestic gas and electricity bills is set to significantly increase.

AFP

Italy's Eni raises emissions-cutting targets

Milan, Italy - Italian energy group Eni on Friday set more ambitious mid-term targets for cutting greenhouse gas emissions as it aims for carbon neutrality in 2050.

"The war in Ukraine... has created new threats to energy security which we must meet without abandoning our ambitions for a just transition," CEO Claudio Descalzi said in a statement presenting his new strategic plan.

Eni pledged to reduce emissions by 35 per cent by 2030



from 2018 levels and by 80 per cent by 2040.

The group also said it planned to reach net zero in the upstream

sector by 2030.

Another challenge posed to governments and companies worldwide by Russia's invasion of Ukraine is to reduce dependence on Russian gas.

"Our immediate response to the current crisis has been to leverage our established alliances with producing countries to find replacement energy sources for Europe's energy needs," said Descalzi.

He visited Algeria last month with Italy's foreign minister in a

bid to increase supplies from the north African country.

"We can make available to the market more than 14tn cubic feet of additional gas resources for the short to medium term," the chief executive said.

The Italian group will invest €7.7bn in 2022 and on average around €7bn a year until 2025.

In total 30 per cent of investments will be dedicated to new energy sources by 2025, rising to 60 per cent in 2030.

AFP

Indonesia starts EV production

Jakarta, Indonesia - South Korea's Hyundai has launched the first electric car assembly plant in Indonesia, as the Southeast Asian archipelago looks to exploit an abundance of resources used in EV production.

Indonesia is the world's largest nickel producer and also rich in cobalt, bauxite and copper ores, key materials in the manufacture of batteries for electric cars.

President Joko Widodo has said his government is aiming to establish an integrated EV 'ecosystem' ranging from metals mining to battery production and car assembly.

The Hyundai factory will produce the firm's newest model the IONIQ 5, with an annual capacity of 250,000 vehicles.

"I hope Hyundai's IONIQ 5 will become an important milestone in the development of Indonesia's electric vehicle ecosystem," Widodo said during an inauguration ceremony in the industrial township Cikarang.

"Moving forward, electric vehicles should be the main mode of transportation," he added.

The country is targeting production of 2mn EVs by 2025, both cars and motorcycles. The push to electric transportation is part of Indonesia's aim to achieve zero net emissions by 2060. "We have to be a key player in the global supply chain of the electric vehicle industry," Widodo said.

AFP

Russian and Ukrainian currencies lose value amid prolonged conflict

Moscow, Russia - Their economies rocked by conflict, Russian and Ukrainian authorities have deployed different tactics to defend their weakened currencies, with varying degrees of success.

The Russian ruble, which was trading around 80 to the US dollar before Moscow sent troops into Ukraine on February 24, lost 40 per cent of its value in the following days, slumping to an unprecedented level of 150 to the dollar.

It has since clawed back much of that, trading at around 105 rubles to the dollar, seemingly having profited from talks between Moscow and Kyiv to end the conflict.

Despite having been cut off from much of its foreign currency reserves due to Western sanctions, the Russian central bank has nevertheless occasionally sold some to support the ruble.

Together with strict capital controls that require exporters to sell most of their foreign currency to the central bank and limits on consumers accessing their holdings, the measures appear to be working.

"During the past 10 years the central bank intervened directly only several times, which now works in favour of the market exchange rate stabilising," said analyst Alexander Kudrin at investment bank Aton.

"The first signs of stabilisation are already appearing," he added.



The suspension of foreign exchange trading is de facto equivalent to a price freeze and... if prolonged can lead to a black market for foreign exchange and de facto multiple currency use

OUSMENE MANDENG

Russian economy expert Janis Kluge at the Berlin-based SWP thinktank tweeted recently that the ruble was strengthening thanks to strict capital controls and large oil and gas revenues following the initial sanctions 'shock'.

In Ukraine, which is under martial law, the central bank has suspended all currency trading and set a fixed exchange rate of approximately 29 hryvnia to the dollar.

It also banned foreign currency withdrawals and most cross-border payments.

Volodymyr Lepushynskiy, director of monetary policy at the Ukrainian central bank, said officials had a plan already prepared in case of conflict.

"We always hoped that we would not need to implement it, but we were ready," he told AFP.

"Thanks to the experience of working in administrative constraints, we had a clear understanding of what needs to be done to prevent destabilisation of the financial sector and to establish its effective operation under such circumstances."

Finance Minister Sergiy

Marchenko recently said on Ukrainian television that the central bank's measures created 'certain conditions under which there is exchange rate stability today'.

He also noted that Ukraine has received support from its international partners including the European Union and World Bank, adding that the International Monetary Fund has approved a US\$1.4bn emergency aid programme for Ukraine.

Ousmene Mandeng, a visiting fellow at the London School of Economics, warned that while the measures may be justified by the extreme circumstances, they carry certain risks.

"The suspension of foreign exchange trading is de facto equivalent to a price freeze and... if prolonged can lead to a black market for foreign exchange and de facto multiple currency use," he told AFP.

"A resumption of foreign exchange trading ... would be desirable to minimise implied distortions," Mandeng added.

The central bank's Lepushynskiy said it plans to relax restrictions as soon as it sees room to do so. "After the liberation of Ukraine from Russian invaders and the normalisation of the economic situation, we will resume the full operation of the foreign exchange market and lift currency restrictions to pre-war levels in the shortest possible time, he said.

AFP

Suzuki to invest \$1.3bn in India electric vehicle production

New Delhi, India - Suzuki Motor will invest US\$1.3bn into electric vehicle (EV) and battery production in India, the Japanese car maker said on Sunday, as it accelerates long-term plans to achieve carbon neutrality.

In a deal signed with the Indian state of Gujarat in the presence of visiting Japanese Prime Minister Fumio Kishida and Indian counterpart Narendra Modi, Suzuki said it planned to increase production capacity for electric vehicle manufacturing in the state.

It aims to begin operations in 2025.

The company will also build a plant manufacturing EV batteries

on land near its Gujarat plant, while a joint venture - Maruti Suzuki Toyota India - will construct a vehicle recycling facility at the same site, the statement said.

"Suzuki's future mission is to achieve carbon neutrality with small cars," the company's president Toshihiro Suzuki said.

The announcement comes as major automakers move to boost production of green cars in a bid to reduce emissions.

Early this month US car titan Ford said it would separate its conventional and electric-auto businesses as it steps up production of emission-free vehicles.

AFP

SRI LANKAN COMMUNITY
SULTANATE OF OMAN

ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING 2022

Dear Members of the Sri Lankan Community in the Sultanate of Oman

The Sri Lankan Community Social Club (SLCSC) hereby announce that the Annual General Meeting (AGM) for the year 2022 will be held on 30th March 2022 @ 7 pm by Zoom. Zoom link will be shared in the website www.slcsc.org.

Please contact the General Secretary of SLCSC for further information

Email: slcscmuscat@gmail.com

Concerted efforts initiated to diffuse biases among coastal women in Oman

Global food systems face many complex challenges, including hunger, malnutrition, degraded ecosystems and the impacts of climate change. There is an urgency to act to shape agri-food systems to deliver the quality diets needed for good health, relieve pressure on the planet's natural resources, and drive inclusive economic growth.

This transformation also presents many opportunities, including through the development of fisheries and aquaculture sectors. Women have played a vital role in these fields for centuries and are now making strides in seizing opportunities to start their own businesses and seek management roles.

In order to recognise the efforts of these women and increase their visibility and contribution to these globally important sectors, Food and Agricultural Organisation of the United Nations (FAO) joined forces with the Ministry of Higher Education, Research and Innovation and Bait Al Zubair to organise an event called 'Women and the changing tide: breaking the bias - Lessons from Omani small-scale fisheries'. The occasion was held in the Bait Al Zubair Foundation under the patronage of H E Prof Rahma Bint Ibrahim al Mahrouqi, Minister of Higher Education, Research and Innovation.

The event served as a celebration of the many roles that women occupy in the fields of fisheries and aquaculture, as well as their contribution to achieving food security and nutrition,



poverty eradication and sustainable natural resource management. This occasion offered a platform to simultaneously commemorate both, International Year of Artisanal Fisheries and Aquaculture (IYAFA 2022) and International Women's Day, which is celebrated on March 8 every year.

Dr Nora Ourabah Haddad stated, "Women's work is essential to thriving coastal fisheries. Together with Bait Al Zubair Foundation, we wanted to take this opportunity to highlight the imperative role that coastal women play along the fisheries value chain." She added, "We call on everybody to build a world in which coastal women are fully recognised and empowered to



continue their contributions for human well-being, food systems, and poverty alleviation through the responsible and sustainable use of fisheries and aquaculture resources."

A unique feature of this event was that it was conducted in a hybrid physical and virtual setting, which was broadcast to a live audience and also throughout the world, and featured a wide array of activities all devoted to empowering coastal women.

The activities included presentations conducted in a TEDx format, followed by an interactive discussion with notable local and international personalities and experts in field. The celebration offered an opportunity to enhance dialogue between different actors and to strengthen small-scale producers to collaborate with one another and make themselves seen, heard and included in decision-making that shapes their everyday lives - all the way from local community level up to international and global fora.

Dr Mohammed bin Abdul Karim al Shahi, general manager of the Bait Al Zubair Foundation, said, "This event represents the longstanding partnership between the foundation and FAO, which previously included various joint activities aimed at establishing cultural awareness of food and agricultural systems. He added, "Finding common ground in the fields of culture and tradition, and food and agriculture is a key factor that Bait Al Zubair seeks to promote."



KR's Fujitsu General wins Oman's Most Trusted Brand Award

Fujitsu General has been Oman's favourite air-conditioning brand of 2021. With an eye on innovation, modern technology, and unparalleled designs, General ACs have become the most admired brand of air-conditioners in the Sultanate of Oman, a press release said.

Ravi Dhulipala, chief operating officer, KR Infrastructure Cluster, said, "We are delighted to win two awards at OMTB 21. For both, the air-conditioning and sanitaryware segments. For over five decades now, Khimji Ramdas (KR) has played a vital role in establishing the 'General' brand in Oman. Today, it is a household name for air-conditioners by virtue of its performance in extreme climatic conditions across Oman and the Middle East."

"New-age consumers desire a range of premium and connected products that deliver energy-efficient, easy-to-use, and easy-to-monitor products. General has become the natural choice for them, he added.

Oman's Most Trusted Brands

(OMTB) Awards survey measures public sentiment towards different brands in the country. It allows the general public and consumers to vote for their favourite brands. The winners of the 2021 edition were felicitated at a special ceremony held at Al Bustan Palace, a Ritz-Carlton Hotel, recently, under the auspices of H E Dr Mohammed al Rumhy, Minister of Energy and Minerals.

"With a contemporary range of energy-efficient air conditioners, with over 100 channel partners and six KR-owned showrooms across Oman, we serve a clientele ranging from residential villa owners to large residential, commercial establishments and complexes. We are proud to share this award with our valued partners, customers, and dedicated employees. Winning the 2021 Most Trusted Brand Award is a testament to General's product quality, service network, and consumer confidence," said Sunil Vishnu, GM, KR Infra.

Coimbatore Ayurvedic Centre opens 5th branch in Mabela

The Coimbatore Ayurveda Centre (CAC) opened its fifth branch at Mabela this week under the aegis of Dr Muhanna Nasser al Muslahi, director general of private health establishment, ministry of health.

Those present on the occasion included H E Amit Narang, Ambassador of India, besides C. Devidas Varier, managing director, AVP, Coimbatore, a press release said.

With this launch, CAC seeks to consolidate its top slot as the biggest ayurveda centre in Oman and provide wholesome wellbeing through effective ayurvedic treatments and remedies.

It is the vision of CAC to open an in-patient service hospital for long-term treatments and to add four more centres across Oman over the next five years.



'In conformation with Oman Vision 2040, we guarantee sincere, unconditional service, authentic treatments, safe and best medicines - all of which efficiently administered by a team of well qualified professionals,' the promoters said, accrediting these values as

reasons for their success. "With this launch, we are poised to become the biggest ayurveda centre in Oman. We will also guarantee exceptional services and aspire to develop as the best ayurvedic centre in Oman," Bijesh Kolora, CEO, CAC, said.

Lulu launches latest campaign to promote 'Made in Oman' products

Lulu Oman has launched a campaign to promote 'Made in Oman' products. The campaign to 'Think, Buy, and Go Local' was flagged off at Lulu Hypermarket in Mall of Muscat on March 20, under the patronage of Engineer Hilal bin Hamed al Hasani, CEO of Madayn.

The campaign aims to promote Made in Oman products in the local markets and boost their consumption rate. It also introduces customers to national products in local and international markets as Omani products are always a preferred option for those who look for quality and excellence. By promoting local products, Lulu intends to support SMEs, open up job opportunities for locals and create added value for the national economy.

Ananth A V, director of LuLu Hypermarkets Oman & India, stated, "The campaign is an ex-



cellent step towards marketing Made in Oman products. It is one of Lulu's promotional campaigns that contribute to support local businesses, boost sales of Omani manufacturers, maintain better

returns for the national economy, as well as contribute to providing direct and indirect job opportunities for locals.

"This campaign is in line with our commitment towards the

society and an important step in our efforts to enable customers to 'Think, Buy, and Go Local.' This is also an initiative to encourage consumers to buy locally produced goods."

Under-18's take silver at GCC Golf Championships in Abu Dhabi

The 2022 GCC Golf Championships concluded on March 17 at Abu Dhabi Golf Club.

The course, which has tested some of the world's best golfers during the 16 consecutive HSBC Golf Championships held there, played host to the top Men's and Under-18 amateur golfers from the six participating nations - Oman, UAE, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Bahrain, and Kuwait, a press release said.

The Under-18's division, in its 13th edition, was played over three rounds with the best two scores from the team of three each day being combined to give the overall team score. Oman's team of Ayman al Busaidi, Al

Munther al Hinai, and Mohamed al Naamani produced three consistent days of golf to secure the silver medal position, the team from the UAE were the overall winners and Bahrain finished in third place. Individually, Busaidi finished in sixth place after rounds of 80, 80, and 86, with Hinai a further place back in seventh spot and Naamani in ninth.

Peter Bailey, Oman's National Team manager said, "The 2022 GCC Championships were very encouraging for Oman, it was great to see our team of players pulling together and playing with pride and passion. I am sure that the Under-18 result will inspire many other youngsters to come



and try golf, a game where you challenge yourself and can mix with friends of all ages. We have worked hard on allowing the players to focus more on the process, rather than the result, and I am very proud of how they have all performed this week."

The Men's event was played over four rounds. On each day, the best three scores from the teams of four players were counted. Oman, represented by Azaan al Rumhy, Badar al Amri, Mohammed al Busaidi, and Fahad al Kitani, finished the tournament in fifth place. With Qatar dominating to take the gold medal by ten strokes over Saudi Arabia (which took silver), and

with Bahrain winning bronze.

In the individual category Saleh al Kaabi from Qatar struggled a little on the final day but having opened with two very strong rounds of golf, including a very impressive six under par 66 on day 2, secured the gold medal, Oman's Azaan al Rumhy finished seventh, after rounds of 75, 74, 78, and 82.

Mundhir al Barwani, chairman of the Oman Golf Association, said, "We are very pleased to have been able to participate in the GCC Championships and must extend our gratitude to MHD ITICS and the Honourable Lujaina Mohsin Darwish for her support."

Zubair Leasing gives Mitsubishi fleet to Galfar

Zubair Leasing, a subsidiary of Zubair Automotive Group, recently handed over a fleet of Mitsubishi pickup trucks to Galfar Engineering and Contracting.

Commenting on this partnership, Rashid Bin Abdullah al Hooti, head of Corporate Affairs in Zubair Automotive Group, said, "We are pleased to join hands with Galfar Engineering and Contracting, one of the largest multi-industry companies.

The fleet consists of 78 Mitsubishi pickup trucks that were delivered in 4 batches starting from January 22.

This agreement is the first-of-its-kind between the two companies aligned within a strategic partnership, as we seek to enter into major collaborations during the upcoming period. Galfar Engineering and Contracting selected the Mitsubishi vehicles based on the specifications of the



vehicles and their off-road performance."

A spokesperson from Galfar Engineering and Contracting said, "We are pleased to enter into a partnership with Zubair Automotive and choose the Mitsubishi pickups in addition to the company's fleet of cars.

These vehicles were selected based on their specifications, in addition to meeting the needs of Galfar.

Mitsubishi enjoys a notable reputation in the local market thanks to its strong performance and off-road capabilities, allowing Galfar employees to reach their destination, regardless of the terrain."

INFINITI launches Ramadan offers



Continuing with the tradition of rewarding its valued customers during the Holy Month of Ramadan, INFINITI Oman has introduced special offers across its product range in the sultanate

The range of offers on specific Infiniti models include free registration, free insurance, assured gifts vouchers, periodic vehicle

maintenance, manufacturer's warranty, aaa/road assistance card, digital promotion, Infiniti loyalty programme, and reference programme. The special offer, which started on March 20, will go on till May 19, a press release said.

The scheme is applicable for all the customers purchasing Infiniti vehicles for personal use

only. Vehicles purchased with commercial registration will not be eligible for the scheme. Vehicles bought for taxi, driving school, ministries, fleet, and rent-a-car usage will also not be eligible for this scheme.

A senior spokesperson at Infiniti Oman, said, "we are happy to put together a great deal as part of our celebrations of the

holy month. Our special offers give customers the opportunity to buy their dream Infiniti with a combination of great incentives. Infiniti vehicles continue to be amongst the best-selling vehicles in Oman for obvious reasons - they are an excellent choice for anyone looking for powerful performance, safe drive, and comfortable interiors."

Oxy Oman sponsors SQU Photo Society Week activities

Oxy Oman representatives recently attended the SQU Photo Society Week, which was organised by the Sultan Qaboos University (SQU) Photo Society and sponsored by Oxy Oman.

The Photo Society Week included a photography competition and exhibition, and is among a group of activities the Photo Society is conducting for the 2021/2022 academic year, all of which Oxy Oman is exclusively sponsoring, a press release said.

The week-long event showcased student photography through a public exhibition at the university, and hosted a competition and awards event for winning photos in several categories.

The awards event was held at



the SQU Exhibition and Conference Hall under the auspices of Dr Nasser bin Mosbeh al Zaidi, vice president for Administrative and Financial Affairs at SQU. Nasser al Maskari, Corporate Social Responsibility manager at Oxy Oman attended the event, along with other senior repre-

sentatives of the company.

This marks Oxy Oman's second consecutive year of sponsoring the SQU Photo Society.

The Society regularly hosts workshops, trips, and exhibitions to promote the art of photography, and to raise art awareness and emerging talents in Oman.



OABC hosts business networking evening

The Oman American Business Center (OABC) hosted an evening of business networking at Fresco Al Marina. Over 80 OABC members from companies in every sector of Oman's business community enjoyed the lovely sea breeze, delicious food and drinks, and an evening of connecting with new people, a press release said.

"What stood out to our team the most about this event was the incredible number of new faces," says Rebecca Olson, executive director of the OABC. "We've had over a dozen new member companies sign up since our last networking

evening just a month ago. It's important to OABC members to always see old connections and also new ones at each event - it ensures the time of networking is interesting and effective."

Live music was provided by the incredibly talented duo, Amore Faris, and a number of great raffle prizes added some fun to the end of the evening. After drawing names for prizes from Harub Dental Center, Nafahat Aloud Almalysi, and Fresco, the team picked one lucky winner to win a round trip ticket to Europe, courtesy of TravelPoint, a long-time Premium Member of

the OABC.

"This event was our opportunity to welcome our fellow OABC members to experience Fresco," says Giselda Abate, the restaurant's founder, and owner. "We were proud to host such a large group of businessmen and women, and watch those unique connections happen at our venue."

As the official affiliate of the US Chamber of Commerce in Oman (AmCham Oman), the OABC promotes understanding, partnerships & other matters of mutual economic interest between business communities in Oman and the United States.

International poets show their skills

The Poetry and Literary Group (PLG) recently staged an English Poetry Meet, which was presided over by Tufail Ahmad, global president, in which poets from countries all around the world - Oman, India, Canada, Tanzania, Bahrain and UAE - efficiently presented their own English poems.

Since the last two years, PLG has been organising weekly poetry and literary programmes on a large variety of topics, wherein there is no age limit for participation.

The programme ran for two hours, its central attraction being the international poets and a group of five students of the same class from Grade 10 Indian School Muscat.

Adhering to convention, the beginning of the programme was heralded by an address by Ahmad and then the baton was



handed over to Yusuf Baramatiwala, the anchor of the day, a press release said.

Participating in the event were - from India, Nandita Majee

Sharma, Pramila Krishnan, Poorvi Rajak, Rounak Agarwal, Zoeb Dalal, and Vibha Hasija. From Oman, B R Dogra, Jayatee Choudhury, Humairah Salman,

Soha Alam Khan, Alishba Khan, and Anwesha Chakraborty participated, besides Alinuru Yasin from USA, Dua Aly from Canada, and Sakina Shabs from Tanzania.

City Centre Qurum launches pop-up experience

City Centre Qurum, owned and operated by Majid Al Futtaim in Oman, has launched a brand-new pop-up experience. Welcoming visitors of all ages, the colourful space, which is open until March 26, is the perfect family destination to discover F&B, designs from home-grown talent, and experience fun-filled activities.

Helping local business owners and SMEs to grow their presence in one of Oman's most prominent shopping centres, the new pop-up at City Centre Qurum will bring the community to-

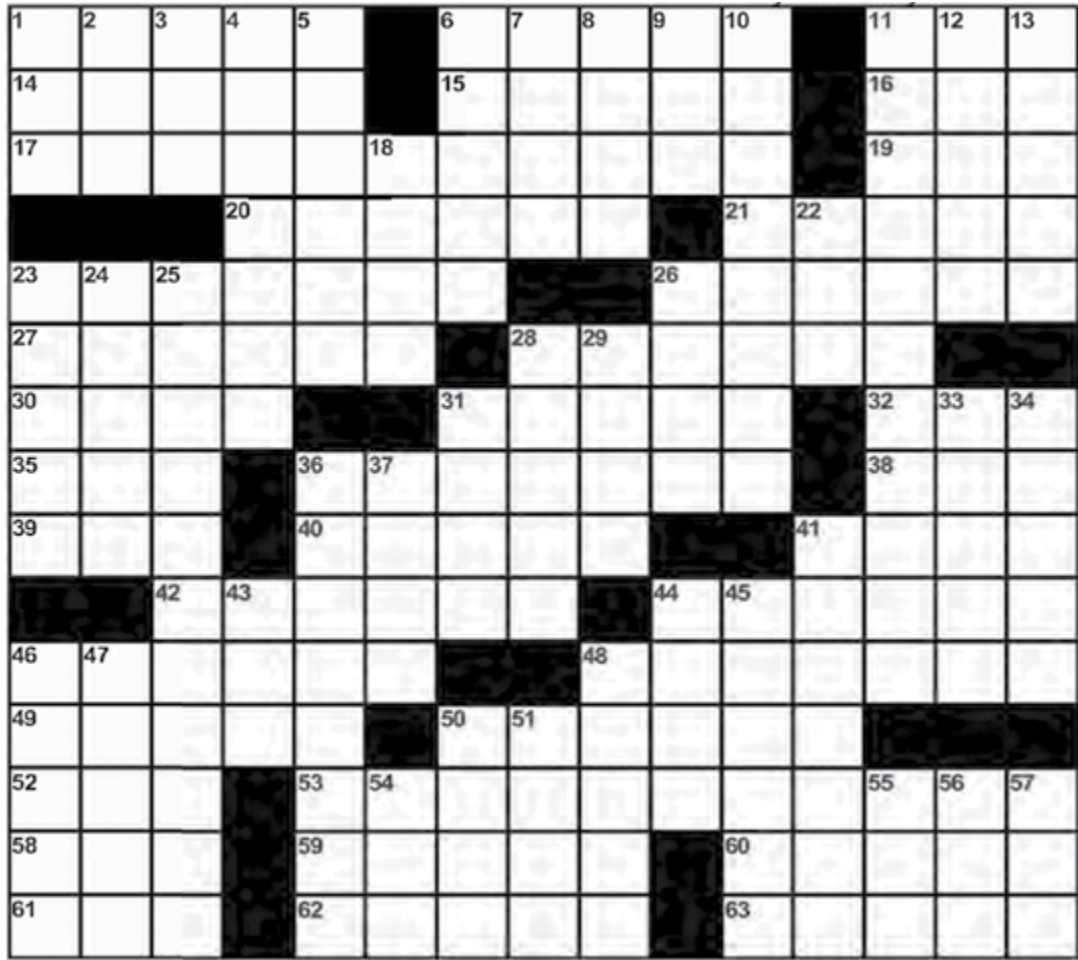


gether to create memorable moments shared with loved ones, a press release said.

Those visiting City Centre Qurum this month can explore a selection of local retailers including Tamar and Lowz for healthy snacks.

Families can enjoy free weekend entertainment options, including arts and crafts, and a kid's PlayStation corner in partnership with Fox Football Academy. Other food and beverage options include Juice Box and Mai's Salads serving delicious smoothies and salads.

DAILY CROSSWORD



ACROSS

1) Viewed anew
6) Poppa's significant other
11) Go up and down, as an apple
14) Furious
15) Par _ (French airmail)
16) You-here separator
17) Corrosive in cells
19) Even the score
20) Make possible
21) Prefix with "state"
23) Net work?
26) Fairy-tale bridge minders
27) Is a keynote speaker
28) Moe, famously
30) Bits of food
31) Lord of literature
32) Automobile
35) "Stupid me!"
36) Charlotte team
38) H.S. biology topic
39) _ Lanka (Ceylon)
40) Virtually guaranteed, as a victory
41) Catcher's offering
42) Present occasions
44) "Dallas" role
46) John Hancock,

famously
48) Confuses and entertains
49) English exam finale, often
50) Gazed steadily and impolitely
52) 19th letter of the Greek alphabet
53) Some cheap hooch
58) Mai _ (rum cocktail)
59) WWII sub
60) Treetop dwelling
61) 10 of calendars, briefly
62) Semiaquatic salamanders
63) Botanical swelling

11) Wartime motivators
12) Large bay window
13) Chasers, at times
18) Detested rodents
22) Christmas drink
23) Cabin location, often
24) Overthrow, e.g.
25) Skimpy beach attire
26) Barfly's binge
28) Lip-_ (mouths the words)
29) Arboretum item
31) Camembert's kin
33) Protractor's measure
34) _ fast (caught in a race)
36) Baker's sweet
37) A single time
41) Blurred, as a signature
43) Put _ show
44) Andean land
45) One-celled creatures (var.)
46) Brief quarrel
47) Bartender on TV's Pacific Princess
48) Sheets of cotton
50) Stash away
51) " _ does it!"

54) Presidential nickname
55) Anger
56) Game with matchsticks
57) Caribbean, e.g.

NOTE PAD

DONNA TULIP MBA
AVOID OZONE ALL
MATCHSTICKS TAG
HEY HIE USA
IMMERSE SET FREE
CIA ETCH RARE
EST DELAY SOYAS
USED MARES MEME
PYRES TESTS AID
INCH MEAT RNA
SMASHUP STEPSON
TEL EMU URL
ALI MATINEE IDOL
FEZ ANODE ONEUP
FEE SENSE SKATS

YOUR DAILY HOROSCOPE

ARIES MARCH 21-APRIL 19

If you have a project at work that's wrapping up or even coming close to the final stage, today is the day to attend to all the details. If you're developing a new cupcake flavour, start testing the icing. Don't go back to the mixer with a whole new recipe! Whatever you have, you've tested it enough to know it's good. Don't let doubts distract you from the important questions.

LEO JULY 23-AUGUST 22

Plans are shifting out of place today, but don't waste your good energy trying to figure out why. The reason is probably out of your control. Instead, direct all your good energy towards formulating the most effective reaction to the new situation. You can't afford to have a 'whatever' attitude about any surprises throughout the day. If something bothers or frustrates you, take charge and get rid of it.

SAGITTARIUS NOVEMBER 22-DECEMBER 21

Good energy is extremely contagious today, so if you aren't feeling as revved up as you usually do, get with the people who have the biggest smiles on their faces. Get to the bottom of what's made them so darned happy, and you'll get a charge out of solving the mystery. Group situations are good for you right now, and it's a great day to go to a church, library or any other place where people are quietly exercising their mind and soul.

TAURUS APRIL 20-MAY 20

If others are misinterpreting what you say, accept part of the blame. Giving an unclear explanation of what you're feeling and then getting annoyed when they don't understand you isn't productive. Get more specific in your communication and a marvelous thing will happen: people will know what you want and work harder to give it to you. This is especially true in romantic relationships, but it applies everywhere else too.

VIRGO AUGUST 23-SEPTEMBER 22

Maybe you have a plan for a fantastic new approach at work. Maybe you've been letting that plan incubate for quite a while now. You've been making sure that the temperature stays just right. Maybe today your little hatchling is going to make a few little cracks with its little beak in its little eggshell. Maybe today's the day your great idea bursts forth and shows everybody its wings. Bravo!

CAPRICORN DECEMBER 22-JANUARY 19

You have a real caretaker's streak in you. Do you take care of business? Of people? Your family? Your friends? Your neurotic co-workers? Be careful not to let your inner caretaker take over; that is, only take care of others when it's appropriate. When it's not (maybe with your neurotic officemate who is an adult and should do their own caretaking), don't give in to the urge to jump in and fix everything.

GEMINI MAY 21-JUNE 21

Dissonance at your job or school might cause you some stress or discomfort at first, but once you accept the fact that everyone is entitled to their own opinion, you'll be fine. Your relationships can withstand some healthy debate, so don't hold back when it comes to disagreeing with them. Just be kind and don't get personal about it.

LIBRA SEPTEMBER 23-OCTOBER 22

If you're fixing somebody's plumbing, they're going to be grateful. Ditto if you're reconfiguring their computer. Ditto if you're helping them decide what to wear to a career-altering interview. Ditto if you're lending an ear while they go over the problems in their relationship. You have lots of talents, and your ability to solve problems is one of them. The folks in your vicinity are sure lucky to have you!

AQUARIUS JANUARY 20-FEBRUARY 18

It's not surprising that people turn to you when they have a conflict they can't resolve alone. After all, you give good advice. And a lot of the time you just listen, which is what most people need most of the time anyway. If a co-worker comes to you, lend them an ear, but hold off on lending them money. It might be the kind of fix that doesn't fix things for them (or you) in the long term.

CANCER JUNE 22-JULY 22

You will leave most people impressed today, although you can't avoid having one or two misunderstandings. You can't have a perfect record all the time, so let yourself be happy with your performance even if it's not as exceptional as you'd hoped it would be. Also be careful about how friendly you get with new people. They could assume you want more from them than you do, and this type of misunderstanding isn't acceptable right now.

SCORPIO OCTOBER 23-NOVEMBER 21

You're a good person to have in charge. Why? Because, for one thing, you're a very responsible human being. If you have something to accomplish, you'll accomplish it. Also, you're a good person to put in charge because you pay attention to the little things and the big things and all the things in between. This is no small challenge and no small accomplishment. Pat yourself on the back, baby. It's good to have you here.

PISCES FEBRUARY 19-MARCH 20

You have a kind of sixth sense for when other people are stressed. You automatically respond by extending an offer of compassion, whether in words, with a gesture, or just by silently acknowledging what they're going through. It might be time for you to start expecting the same kind of deference to sensitive feelings for yourself. And expecting something is more than half the way to receiving it.

TEST YOUR KNOWLEDGE

1. Hat type of apple was adopted by The Beatles' 'Apple Records' as its symbol?
A. Gravenstein
B. Braeburn
C. Golden Delicious
D. Granny Smith

2. Sunspots on the sun are the result of what?
A. Magnetism
B. Flares
C. Nearby swarms of asteroids
D. Concentrations of helium

3. The first Pierre de Coubertin medal awarded was to Eugenio Monti who competed in what discipline in the 1964 Winter Olympics?
A. Bobsled
B. Bobtail
C. Bobbing for apples
D. Bobbidi

Answers: 1.D 2.A 3.A

KIDS COLOURING

BOGGLER

D	E	S	U
B	A	T	E
H	Qu	E	K
A	E	A	C

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

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

WORD BUILDER

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

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

SUDOKU EASY ANSWER

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

Russia accused of bombing school sheltering hundreds in Mariupol

Kyiv, Ukraine - Ukrainian authorities said on Sunday that Russia had bombed a school sheltering 400 people in the besieged port of Mariupol, as Moscow claimed that it had again fired hypersonic missiles in Ukraine, the second time it had used the next-generation weapon on its neighbour.

Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky said that the siege of Mariupol, a strategic mostly Russian-speaking port in the southeast where utilities and communications have been cut for days, would go down as a war crime. He also warned Russians that thousands of their soldiers had died in the conflict.

The war in Ukraine, which Russian President Vladimir Putin launched on February 24 to stamp out pro-Western leanings in the ex-Soviet country, has sparked the largest refugee crisis in Europe since World War II.

Relations between Russia and the West have plunged to Cold War-era lows, and is wreaking havoc in the world economy still recovering from the coronavirus pandemic.



Local residents retrieve what is left in their destroyed apartments, located in a five-storey residential building that partially collapsed after shelling the day before by Russian troops in Kyiv on Sunday (AFP)

‘Madman of a leader’

“Yesterday, the Russian occupiers dropped bombs on an art school No 12,” the Mariupol city council said on messaging app Telegram on Sunday, adding that around 400 women, children and elderly people had been sheltering there from bombardments. “Peaceful civilians are still under the rubble,” it said, adding that the building had been destroyed.

City authorities also claimed that some residents of Mariupol were being forcibly taken to Russia and stripped of their Ukrainian passports.

“The occupiers are sending the residents of Mariupol to filtration camps, checking their phones and seizing (their) Ukrainian documents,” Pavlo Kyrilenko, head of the Donetsk regional administration said, adding that more than 1,000 Mariupol residents had been deported. “I appeal to the international community: put pressure on Russia and its madman of a leader,” he said on Facebook.

Hypersonic missile used again

Russia’s defence ministry said on Sunday that Moscow had again fired its newest Kinzhal (Dagger) hypersonic missile, destroying a fuel storage site in the southern Mykolaiv region.



A woman carries a child as Ukrainian refugees cross the Ukrainian-Romanian border in Siret, northern Romania, on Sunday (AFP)

If confirmed, the strike would mark the second time Russia had used the sophisticated weapon in combat, a day after it said it used it to destroy an underground missile and ammunition storage site in western Ukraine close to the border with NATO member Romania.

Humanitarian conditions continued to deteriorate in the mostly Russian-speaking south and east of the country, where Russian forces have been pressing their advance, as well as in the north around the capital Kyiv.

Aid agencies have warned they are struggling to reach hundreds of thousands of people trapped by the invading Russian forces.

‘Hell’

The port of Mariupol has been one of the worst hit cities as it occupies a key strategic position. Its capture would link the Crimean peninsula, which Russia seized from Ukraine in 2014, with the separatist eastern regions of Donetsk and Lugansk, which broke away the same year and are controlled by Moscow-backed rebels.

Thousands of civilians are thought to be trapped inside the city, where communication, water, electricity and gas have been cut. Russia said on Saturday it had broken through the city’s defences and its troops were inside. Last Wednesday, a theatre where more than 1,000 people had sheltered was hit, with hun-

dreds still presumed missing in the rubble.

“This is no longer Mariupol, it’s hell,” said resident Tamara Kavunenko, 58. “The streets are full with the bodies of civilians.”

In his daily video message, Zelensky said that the Mariupol siege ‘is a terror that will be remembered even in the next century’. The Ukrainian president, who has gained world-wide fame and admiration for staying in his capital in the face of the Russian advance, warned the Russian people that some 14,000 of their servicemen had been killed.

“And (the number of) victims will only continue to rise,” he warned.

The latest toll provided by Russia in early March said nearly 500 servicemen had been killed. The latest toll provided by Ukraine on March 12 said some 1,300 Ukrainian troops had died.

Zelensky, a former actor and comedian, has become the first national leader to lead a fully-fledged information front on social media during a war, posting daily video messages -

Often selfies - on various platforms

Unshaven and wearing his trademark army green T-shirt or other casual garb, the 44-year-old who grew up a native Russian speaker in eastern Ukraine has appealed

in live video addresses to lawmakers and rallies in the US and Europe.

Each time he has personalised the message according to the audience, garnering crucial sympathy and public opinion for his cause.

Ukraine’s outmanned and outgunned military has put up an unexpected and fierce resistance that has slowed Russia’s advance, stalling its forces outside the capital Kyiv and several other cities, making Moscow’s supply lines vulnerable to Ukrainian attacks.

In Kyiv’s Okhmatdyt children’s hospital, paediatrician Svitlana Onysko said her and her colleagues ‘live in the hospital’ following the outbreak of war.

“Day, night, morning, evening, we hurry up to help the kids, and it’s really terrible and difficult,” she said.

In the encircled northern city of Chernigiv, the mayor said early on Sunday that a hospital had been hit in the latest shelling, killing dozens of civilians.

“The city is suffering from an absolute humanitarian catastrophe,” mayor Vladislav Atroshenko said on television.

Aid agencies are struggling to reach people trapped in cities ringed by Russian forces where the UN says the situation is ‘dire’.

AFP



People gather near a gymnasium where witnesses and relatives of victims are received in Strepv-Bracquegnies, on Sunday (AFP)

Six killed in Belgium as car ploughs into carnival crowd

Brussels, Belgium - A car ploughed into a crowd of early morning carnival-goers in Belgium on Sunday, killing six people and injuring dozens of others, authorities said.

The tragedy took place just after 5:00am (0400 GMT) at the carnival of Strepv-Bracquegnies, a district of the former industrial town of La Louviere.

“At this stage of the investigation, we know that a vehicle slammed into a group (of carnival goers) and that there are six dead and 26 injured, including 10 people whose life is in danger,” prosecutor Damien Verheyen told reporters in La Louviere.

The main suspects, who were arrested, were born in 1988 and

1990, he said, adding that terrorism was not at this stage considered a motive. The suspects came from La Louviere and are not known to authorities for similar acts, Verheyen said.

Belgian Prime Minister Alexander De Croo deplored the ‘horrible news’ on Twitter, saying ‘a community gathering to celebrate has been hit in the heart’.

De Croo was expected to visit the scene later on Sunday accompanied by Belgium’s King Philippe, the prime minister’s office said. Belgian towns and villages host many street carnivals around the season of Lent, with the parades in Binche and Alost the most known internationally.

AFP



Migrant workers sitting on a boat during a rescue operation at sea in North Sumatra water off the coast of Indonesia on Saturday (AFP)

Two migrants dead in Indonesia boat mishap

Medan, Indonesia - At least two people are dead and 26 others are missing after a ferry carrying dozens of migrants sank off the coast of Indonesia, an official said on Sunday.

The wooden fishing boat was carrying 89 onboard when it departed for neighbouring Malaysia through an unguarded route. But it sprung a leak soon after departing before being hit by strong waves and sinking.

A man and a woman were found dead while 61 others were rescued and immediately transported to hospitals for treatment.

The remaining passengers are still missing.

“We have deployed our personnel to search for the 26 missing victims but our efforts haven’t been fruitful so far,” head of local search and rescue team Ady Pandawa told AFP on Sunday, adding that the damaged boat had been evacuated to the nearest port.

The passengers had come from across Indonesia and were seeking work in Malaysia without proper documentation, he added.

AFP

Mexico City’s ‘controversial’ airport set for bumpy takeoff

Mexico City, Mexico - Three weeks before facing a midterm recall referendum, Mexican President Andres Manuel Lopez Obrador will on Monday inaugurate his first major infrastructure pet project - a controversial new airport for Mexico City.

Built at a military air base outside the capital, Felipe Angeles International Airport is meant to take the pressure off the city’s Benito Juarez airport.

But so far only a few airlines have agreed to use it, for a small number of mostly domestic flights.

Benito Juarez, which handled a record 50.3mn passengers in 2019 before the COVID-19 pandemic and is located within Mexico City, is one of the busiest airports in Latin America.

Felipe Angeles, named after a general in the Mexican revolution, divided opinion from the start.

After taking office in 2018, Lopez Obrador canceled another



This file photo shows a view of the control tower of the new international airport which will be called ‘General Felipe Angeles’ in the Santa Lucia Air Force Base in Zumpango, near Mexico City on January 21, 2022 (AFP)

airport project launched by the previous government that was already one-third complete.

Lopez Obrador branded the US\$13bn project a ‘bottomless pit’ rife with corruption and de-

cided instead to turn the Santa Lucia military air base into a second airport for the sprawling

Mexican capital.

Lopez Obrador tasked the military with overseeing construction of the new airport at a cost of around US\$3.7bn.

The army is also involved in the construction of a tourist train in the Yucatan Peninsula - another one of the president’s major infrastructure projects, which also include an oil refinery in the southeastern state of Tabasco.

Lopez Obrador has hailed the new airport as an example of his government’s austerity and efficiency, with zero cost overruns.

“It’s a modern airport built by military engineers in record time, at a low cost and with the most advanced technology and quality materials,” he said ahead of the opening. Airport officials acknowledge that Felipe Angeles is not expected to be profitable until 2026.

In the meanwhile, it will be funded with public money.

Voters to have say

The opening comes as Mexicans prepare to vote on April 10 in a referendum championed by Lopez Obrador on whether he should stay in office.

While the president argues that the vote is an important democratic exercise, critics accuse him of wasting resources and even plotting to circumvent the constitutional limit of a single six-year term.

Lopez Obrador, who took office in December 2018, has promised not to seek reelection, following accusations by opponents that the referendum is a step towards trying to stay in power. He enjoys a public approval rating of around 58 per cent, according to opinion polls.

Lopez Obrador has overseen a series of referendums since taking office on controversial issues including his ‘Maya Train’ railroad project and canceling the partially finished Mexico City airport. Felipe Angeles air-

port will begin operating with only eight daily flights from national airlines Volaris, VivaAerobus and Aeromexico, as well as Venezuela’s Conviasa - the only international service.

On Friday, Lopez Obrador said that he had personally invited the president of Delta Air Lines to operate from the new hub, though it is unclear if the US carrier will accept.

Benito Juarez’s location in eastern Mexico City is far more convenient for many residents of the capital than Felipe Angeles, which is located about 40km north of the city’s historic district.

A planned rail link to connect the airport with the capital’s suburban train network is not scheduled to be completed until the second half of 2023.

The government admits that it will take longer to get to Felipe Angeles, so it has promised to reduce the time it takes to check in.

AFP

Houthi attack on Aramco facility in Saudi: Coalition

The latest round of attacks comes after an oil refinery in Riyadh was targeted on March 10 by drone

Riyadh, KSA - Houthi rebels launched multiple attacks into southern Saudi Arabia on Saturday, including one on a facility run by oil company Aramco in Jizan, the Saudi-led coalition fighting the rebels in Yemen said in a statement.

Quoted by the Saudi Press Agency (SPA), the coalition said that four drones had been launched into the region, which is regularly targeted by Houthi drone and missile attacks.

There was no loss of life, it said.

As well as the Aramco facility, the rebels also hit a desalination plant in Al-Shaqeeq.

In later statements, the coalition announced that the Dhahran Al-Janoub power station near Jizan had also been attacked - with the SPA posting photos and a video clip showing firefighters tackling a blaze at the site.

The fourth target was a gas station in Khamis Mushait.

The drones were intercepted and destroyed near Yemen after the attacks, with a ballistic missile fired towards the city of Jazan also stopped, the coalition

said.

The latest round of attacks comes after an oil refinery in the Saudi capital Riyadh was targeted on March 10 by a drone, an operation claimed by the Houthis.

Earlier this week, the Houthis rejected an invitation from the six-nation Gulf Cooperation Council to attend talks on the Yemen conflict, to be held in Riyadh from March 29.

Saudi Arabia is leading a military coalition in Yemen in support of the internationally recognised government, which has been engaged in a bloody conflict against the Houthis since mid-2014.

The war has cost hundreds of thousands of lives, directly or indirectly, and displaced millions, in what the United Nations has called the world's worst humanitarian crisis.

On Wednesday, the UN voiced disappointment after a donors' conference raised US\$1.3bn, far short of the US\$4.27bn target.

Houthi rebels often target airports and oil facilities in Saudi Arabia, one of the world's largest



This file photo shows investors standing in front of the logo of Aramco during the 10th Global Competitiveness Forum in Riyadh on January 25, 2016 (AFP)

Four drones had been launched into the region. Rebels also hit a desalination plant in Al-Shaqeeq. The Dhahran Al-Janoub power station near Jizan had also been attacked. The fourth target was a gas station in Khamis Mushait

COALITION

oil exporters, against the backdrop of the kingdom's leadership of the military coalition against them.

This latest attack comes as Aramco prepares to announce its 2021 results on Sunday.

Global oil markets are in a state of disarray over the impact of the Russian invasion of Ukraine and the effect it will have on energy supplies.

AFP



This file photo shows Rhoo IDP camp, 60km from Bunia, the provincial capital of Ituri on December 21, 2021 (AFP)

14 displaced people, including 7 children, killed in DR Congo

Bunia, DR Congo - Fourteen civilians, including seven children, were killed in a camp for displaced people in northeastern Democratic Republic of Congo, the local Red Cross said on Sunday.

Seven adults and seven children, including a two-year-old, were all killed in the machete attack on Saturday in the Ituri re-

gion, according to a Red Cross list seen by AFP.

Jean D'Zba Banju, a community leader in the Djugu area of Ituri, said CODECO militiamen entered Drakpa where they killed 12 people with machetes.

"CODECO militiamen entered Drakpa and started to cut people with machetes. They did not fire shots in order to operate

calmly," Banju told AFP.

"The victims are displaced people who had fled Ngotshi village to set up in Drakpa," he said, adding that five other people were wounded.

CODECO is a political-religious sect that claims to represent the interests of the Lendu ethnic group.

AFP

Jewish tycoons 'linked' to Putin quit major philanthropy group Genesis

Jerusalem - Three Jewish oligarchs with suspected ties to Russia's president have resigned from a major philanthropy group that funds causes in Israel as they face sanctions tied to Russia's invasion of Ukraine.

Mikhail Fridman, Petr Aven and German Khan will relinquish their roles at Genesis Philanthropy Group, the organisation has said.

"In order to assure the ability of GPG to stay true to its mission and build on the foundation we have created over the past 15 years, all three have resigned from the board of directors," the group's chairman of the board Gennady Gazin and CEO Marina Yudborovsky said in statement seen by AFP on Saturday.

Genesis is registered in the United Kingdom but is a major funder of causes in Israel including the Yad Vashem Holocaust memorial.

The three men have been slapped with international sanctions over suspected ties to Russian President Vladimir Putin.

Ukrainian-born Fridman, one of Russia's richest men, and Russian-born Aven stepped down earlier this month from the LetterOne investment fund they co-founded. They deny any 'financial or political relationship' with the Russian president.

Ukrainian-born Khan and



Israeli Prime Minister Naftali Bennett (centre) holds a weekly cabinet meeting in Jerusalem, on Sunday (AFP)

Fridman are co-founders of Alfa Bank, Russia's largest private lender.

Genesis, which says it 'seeks to strengthen Jewish identity among Russian-speaking Jews worldwide', has pledged US\$10mn to help Jews 'impacted by the crisis in Ukraine'.

Ukrainian-born Gazin, who is not targeted by the sanctions, said in the note which was first reported on Friday that he would stay on and that the resignations would not impact Genesis's commitments.

Moscow's invasion of Ukraine

has put a new spotlight on wealthy Jewish Russians in Israel said to be connected with Putin.

The Yad Vashem Holocaust memorial suspended ties with billionaire Roman Abramovich this month, just weeks after it had announced a historic partnership that museum officials said made him their second-largest donor.

Abramovich, who holds Israeli citizenship, was photographed in Tel Aviv airport on Monday.

Israeli Prime Minister Naftali Bennett flew to Moscow to meet

with Putin this month and has attempted to mediate between the Russian leader and Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky.

Israel has resisted imposing sanctions on Russia, despite requests from Ukraine and the United States. Israeli leaders say they need to preserve security coordination with Moscow, which has troops operating in neighbouring Syria.

Zelensky is scheduled to speak via video call to Israel's Knesset, or parliament, later on Sunday.

AFP

South Korea's president-elect ditches 'imperial' Blue House office

Seoul, South Korea - South Korea's president-elect said on Sunday he will relocate his office from the 'imperial' Blue House, in a move critics charged is linked to his belief in shamanistic spiritual practices.

Yoon Suk-yeol, who won a tight election earlier this month, pledged on the campaign trail that he would move presidential business out of the Blue House - home to South Korea's leaders since 1948.

The former prosecutor has accused the hilltop headquarters of fostering an 'imperial' presidency and undermining

communication with the public.

He is not the first to try to relocate. Outgoing President Moon Jae-in also pledged to move out 'to eradicate the authoritarian presidential culture' but faced security and logistical hurdles.

Those hurdles remain - the move has raised concerns for its reported cost of around 50bn won (US\$41mn), and because roads in crowded Seoul would have to be closed every day during the presidential commute.

Yoon's critics have said his desire to move is tied to his be-



South Korea's president-elect Yoon Suk-yeol speaks during a press conference at his transition team office in Seoul on Sunday (AFP)

lief in feng shui, a traditional religious practice which stresses the importance of harmony between humans and nature.

The former prosecutor has been dogged by accusations of ties to a shaman, which he has denied.

The Blue House has long been rumoured to foster bad luck for its residents, given the impeachment, corruption trials and imprisonment that have befallen the successive South Korean presidents.

At a press conference on Sunday, Yoon said he will start to work from the defence min-

istry compound after his inauguration on May 10. "It's a difficult task, but it's a decision I made for the future of the country," Yoon told reporters.

Yoon said the defence ministry compound was equipped with the necessary national security facilities and would minimise inconvenience compared to other possible new offices.

Addressing the concerns around the move, he said his decision was aimed at making the president more accessible and approachable.

"If I move into the Blue

House compound, I think it will be harder to be free from the imperial power that is symbolic of the Blue House," he said.

The Blue House will be fully open to the public starting May 10, he added.

Perched in the mountains of northern Seoul and named for its azure roof, the grounds around the Blue House were home to royalty as well as the colonial governor-general during Japan's annexation of Korea. It then became home to South Korea's president in 1948.

AFP

China orders millions more to stay at home as COVID spreads

More than 4,000 new infections reported across China on Sunday

Beijing, China - China on Sunday imposed stay-at-home orders on millions more people in the country's northeast as it battles its biggest COVID-19 outbreak in two years.

The country has largely kept COVID at bay since it brought to heel its initial outbreak in 2020 using targeted lockdowns, mass testing and travel restrictions.

But the Omicron strain has broken through its defences in recent months and taken hold in multiple cities.

Jilin, the second-biggest city in Jilin province, will lock down about 4.5mn inhabitants for three days from Monday night, local authorities announced.

More than 4,000 new infections were reported across China on Sunday - with two-thirds in Jilin province, which borders Russia and North Korea.

Provincial capital Changchun said on Saturday it would also tighten restrictions for three days. Since March 11, Changchun's nine million people have only been allowed out once every two days to buy



A health worker gets a swab sample on a woman to be tested for COVID-19 at a swab collection site in Beijing on Sunday (AFP)

food.

The new measures mean only medical personnel and other anti-epidemic workers will be authorised to leave their homes.

It comes after China recorded its first two deaths from COVID in more than a year on Saturday.

Tens of millions of people are currently in lockdown in other

Chinese regions and authorities are scrambling to create hospital beds, fearing the outbreak could put the healthcare system under strain. Jilin province has built eight temporary hospitals

and two quarantine centres.

East of the capital Beijing, the city of Tangshan banned traffic for 24 hours on Sunday in an effort to slow the virus' spread.

AFP



British Prime Minister Boris Johnson (AFP)

Britain to roll out fourth COVID shot, says NHS

London, UK - England will begin rolling out its fourth coronavirus vaccine shot this week, the National Health Service (NHS) announced on Sunday, with millions of the country's most vulnerable people being offered jabs.

The latest booster shot will be made available to care home residents, people aged over 75 and the immunosuppressed.

Around five million people are expected to be offered the jab, and 600,000 are being invited to book their appointments next week, according to the NHS.

"Our phenomenal vaccination programme has saved countless lives and built a wall of defence which has allowed us to learn to live with COVID," Health and Social Care Secretary Sajid Javid said.

"Following the massive success of the rollout so far, we are now offering over-75s and the most vulnerable a spring booster dose to top up their protection against

We are getting ready for the fourth jab, because we are going to need it

BORIS JOHNSON

this virus."

Cases are soaring once again across Britain due to a rampant Omicron variant, with around 1 in 20 people currently infected.

Hospitalisations are once again rising, but the number of people in high-dependency care remains low.

Speaking at his Conservative Party's Spring conference, Prime Minister Boris Johnson on Saturday said: "We're getting ready for the fourth jab, because we're going to need it." Britain has been one of the world's hardest hit countries during the pandemic, with more than 163,000 people dying after contracting the disease.

AFP



People watch a television screen showing a news broadcast with footage of a North Korean missile test, at a railway station in Seoul on March 16 (AFP)

North Korea fires 'multiple rocket launchers', says Seoul

Seoul, South Korea - North Korea fired multiple rocket launchers on Sunday, Seoul said, the latest in a series of provocations by the nuclear-armed nation to heighten tensions in the region.

Pyongyang launched a string of banned weaponry this year and tested what it claimed were components of a 'reconnaissance satellite' - although Seoul and Washington have described them as a new ICBM system.

"There were shots suspected to be from North Korea's multiple rocket launchers this morning," said the Joint Chiefs of Staff in a text message to reporters.

"Our military is maintaining our defence readiness while closely following related devel-

opments," it added, without further detail.

Four shots were fired into the western waters during a span of an hour from 7:20am from an unspecified location in South Pyongan province, Yonhap news agency reported citing unnamed officials.

The intention of the firing was being evaluated, the report added. South Korea's National Security Council held an emergency meeting and called for a tight readiness posture to 'prevent security vacuum during the government transition period', according to a statement from the presidential Blue House.

President-elect Yoon Suk-yeol will be inaugurated on May 10 after winning the March 9 polls.

Pyongyang has long pos-

sessed the ability to devastate Seoul - which is only around 60km from the border - with artillery fire.

The US stations 28,500 troops in South Korea, a security ally, to protect it against its nuclear-armed neighbour, many of them based south of Seoul at Camp Humphreys in Pyeongtaek - its biggest overseas military facility.

Sunday's firings come just days after Pyongyang carried out a suspected failed ballistic missile test, in what analysts say could be the country's new intercontinental ballistic missile.

The US and South Korea have said North Korea is preparing to fire an ICBM at full range for the first time since 2017, possibly disguised as a space launch.

AFP

Deadly attacks on women rise sharply in Iraqi Kurdistan

Sulaimaniyah, Iraq - A woman burned alive by her husband, others shot dead by a father or a teenage brother - bloody violence against women has spiked in northern Iraq's Kurdish region.

The autonomous area, keen on projecting an image of a relative haven of stability and tolerance in war-battered Iraq, has seen a sharp rise in femicide, killings motivated by gender.

"In the past two months, there has been an increase in femicide compared to the previous year," said Hiwa Karim Jwamir of the Kurdish General Directorate for Combating Violence Against Women.

In the first two months of 2022, 11 women were killed in autonomous Iraqi Kurdistan, most of them shot, said the official based in Sulaimaniyah.

Forty-five women were killed in 2021, up from 25 the previous year, said Jwamir.

On a Friday before dawn, a 15-year-old teenager was fatally wounded by six bullets fired by her father in the village of Soran. The man told police his daughter 'went out with two boys late at night', according to a domestic violence unit which also records so-called 'honour killings'.

Across Iraq, gender-based violence rose 125 per cent to over 22,000 cases between 2020 and 2021, says the UN children's agency UNICEF, which has also pointed to 'a worrisome increase



This file photo shows Iraqi women attending a conference on violence against women in Arbil on November 19, 2008 (AFP)

in depression and suicide among women and girls'.

Last December, a 16-year-old girl was disfigured with acid in Baghdad by an adult who wanted to marry her but had been rejected. For years, activists have denounced violence against women and forced marriages in Iraq, which remains a conservative and patriarchal society.

"Cases of violence against women are on the rise," said long-time Kurdistan activist Bahar Munzir, director of local group the People's Development Organisation. "Most of the women who are killed are victims of a family member."

Doused in gasoline

A few days before International Women's Day on March 8, the body of a 20-year-old woman was found on the side of the road

in Arbil, the capital of Kurdistan.

Maria Sami, the victim, was known on social networks for her feminist speeches.

The following day, on March 9, Kirkuk police announced the arrest of the killer, her 18-year-old brother. While he was still on the run, he spoke by phone to a Kurdish television channel and tried to justify the killing by charging his sister had failed to obey the family.

In February, mother-of-two Shinyar Huner Rafiq died in hospital, five days after being admitted with serious burns.

"Her husband had come home one evening in a state of intoxication," Shinyar's father, Huner Rafiq, told AFP.

"He doused her body in gasoline and set it on fire."

After the father reported the killing, police arrested the hus-

band. "Before dying, Shinyar told us the facts," said the bereaved father. "We recorded it, and we submitted the video to the investigators."

Kurdistan's prime minister Masrour Barzani denounced the 'horrific case', saying he was 'deeply troubled' by the spate of violent attacks against women.

The government must impose 'the heaviest possible penalty on perpetrators', he said in a statement. "There is no honour in honour killings."

"I'm determined to protect every woman, girl and child from abuse ... This scourge must end."

In early February, Dohuk police said they had found the corpse of Doski Azad, a 23-year-old transgender woman who had been ostracised by family members.

An arrest warrant was issued to find the suspected murderer: the victim's brother, who had in recent years been residing in Europe.

He had called his family to inform them of his crime and of where the body was, according to police.

The murder was condemned by the UN mission in Iraq, and the consulates of Western countries in Arbil.

The news provoked a torrent of hatred online - against the victim, even though some voices defended minorities' rights.

AFP

TRUCK ART



Haider Ali works on a pair of sneakers at his workshop in Karachi.

Pakistani truck artist gives new flair to sneakers, applying his traditional skill to a new canvas

Haider Ali dabs a brush with an iridescent glob of paint and gets to work on a pair of sparkling white trainers - his latest canvas for a carnival of colour celebrating Pakistani culture. Pakistan's lorries are renowned for 'truck art' - candy-coloured murals depicting South Asian animals, celebrities and religious icons. The tradition transforms the highways and cities into kaleidoscopic processions. Now, Ali - a veteran truck artist - has transposed the painting onto sneakers. "A client came to me from the US asking me to paint shoes," he explained. "I told him an exorbitant fee to discourage him, but he agreed, so I decided to get on with it." He labours on each pair for up to four days, charging select clients US\$400 for a set featuring bespoke patterns and motifs.

Since he started painting trainers in January, he has dispatched eight pairs - to places in Pakistan and abroad - with new orders arriving every four days after a surge of social media interest. "The ideas keep coming to me," the 42-year-old mused. "It's in human nature to decorate ourselves and the things around us." Cross-legged in his Karachi rooftop studio, he flips a pair of high-top Nikes to reveal the image of a luminous pink hawk and a gazing yellow eye, framed by hypnotic bulbous fringes. Another pair ready for shipping bears a shimmering peacock.

In the zone
Some say the practice of adorning trucks began in the 1940s when hauliers crafted vibrant logos



The ideas keep coming to me," the 42-year-old mused. "It's in human nature to decorate ourselves and the things around us

HAIDER ALI

communicating their brand identity to a largely illiterate public. Others claim the artistic on-upmanship began with bus drivers competing to lure passengers. Today, the trade is one of Pakistan's most famous cultural exports, cutting against the country's more austere reputation for social conservatism. Ali comes from a family of truck artists, who eked out a living at the roadside yards where drivers eagerly surrender slim pay packets to decorate their vehicles. Strolling through the Yusuf Goth truck yard, his tinted glasses and slight swagger lend him an air of celebrity. "I get in the zone when I feel a connection to the art," he said. "If I pause, the ideas stop flowing."



Art on wheels

The origin of Pakistani truck art can be traced back to the 1920s when Bedford trucks imported from the UK took to the streets of the country. They were equipped with large wooden arches above the truck bed. The entire cockpit was also equipped with decorative arches, called crowns, with decorative bumpers and wood panels. In the late 1940s, when trucks began to deliver long-distance freight, each company designed a logo so that illiterate people could know who the truck owner was. In recent decades, Pakistani truck art - hand-painted floral patterns, poems, and even cartoons of popular characters on trucks, buses and long-distance tuk-tuks - has become more and more popular in Western countries. Many of these vehicles seem like art galleries on wheels.

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DOWN SYNDROME



Key queries on Down Syndrome

Ahmed Mohamed Hamed al Jabry, founder and chairman of Oman Down Syndrome Association, points out that internationally the birth prevalence of DS is estimated to be 1 in 600 to 1 in 800. However, as per studies carried out by the Ministry of Health in 2011, it was noted that in Oman, the incidence was 2.4 among 1000 births – that is around 1 in 400 births and around 120 cases per year.

What could be the cause for the high incidence of DS in Oman?

Studies conducted have not shown that blood-related marriages are a factor in babies being born with DS, although one of the most important risk factors of DS is advanced maternal age. A case control study showed that the mean maternal age of DS mothers was 33.50 years.

Maternal age-related risk factor alone, however, cannot explain the unusually high DS birth prevalence in Oman. Interestingly an earlier study conducted showed statistically significant differences in the occurrence between different geographical regions in Oman, he said.

What can be done to bring down the incidence of DS in Oman?

As DS is not a drug or abuse of health/physical well-being related cause, bringing down the incidence is insignificant. It is the will of God that our kids are born with DS and as such we must look forward on how we can improve their lives with similar fair opportunities that are bestowed on individuals born without a disability.

How could we improve awareness on DS in Oman?

Unfortunately, people with down syndrome are often still not included but they have the right to take part and be included. We must be bold enough to ensure 'inclusive participation' starting with education guidelines to be further developed in alignment with international standards to improve the availability and quality of education. We also need to provide employment opportunities to support those with DS to gain paid employment in open, inclusive and accessible environments. There is an Egyptian TV presenter - Rahma Khaled - who has this opportunity and has proven that it is possible.

We could develop and regularly publish (bi-lin-

gual) real-life articles on achievements of persons with DS and have regular documentaries (TV, Radio, Social Media coverage) presenting the abilities of those living with DS in Oman. This coverage should include showcasing best practices related to the inclusive employment of persons with DS and/or best practice teachings developed to teach kids with DS Oman.

How does one tackle the social stigma associated with DS in Oman?

Sadly, some parents still believe having a child with DS is shameful. Some keep their children hidden away from others. Some go as far as ensuring the little contact the children have with others outside their immediate families is mostly with the housemaid. We must ensure improved communication between parents, family, community, and the health system. This can increase the satisfaction and the well-being of both, the children with DS and their parents

Is there need for more school/institutions to educate DS individuals and make them independent?

A few studies were earlier conducted in Oman to determine the causes of the rise of cases of babies being born with DS and as a consequence understand to introduce more opportunities for those with DS. Special schools around the country exist as do special classes within mainstream schools.

Teachers have been and continue to be trained in this specialist area. I believe post school age and into adulthood is where we must also focus our attention as a nation as many, if not all, individuals of this age range are sitting at home with no active stimulation to develop their further cognitive abilities. Adults with DS in other countries are working, driving, marrying, living independently from their families, albeit in assisted accommodation.

What is your message to people in Oman on this day?

The Oman Down Syndrome Association is a non-government organisation that requires the community to work as one hand to guarantee those living with DS to be included into society from a young age. Let us look beyond the diagnosis and we must not be afraid to celebrate our children - they are, first and foremost, individuals who just happen to have Down Syndrome.

Hubert Vaz

They are down but not out...they are slow but steady...they are full of hope for a better tomorrow.

Individuals with Down Syndrome in Oman look forward to a more inclusive society in the near future – a society where they have ample opportunity for education, vocational training, employment as well as the freedom to live life on their own terms.

Today (March 21) is being observed internationally as World Down Syndrome Day (WDSD) to raise awareness about this genetic disorder. Celebrations to mark this day in Oman, have, however, been reserved for the coming weekend (March 25) to ensure maximum participation.

The day – the 21st day of the third month – was selected by the United Nations to signify the uniqueness of the triplication of the 21st chromosome – trisomy 21 – which causes Down Syndrome, a genetic condition that causes delays in physical and intellectual development. Normal individuals have two copies of the 21st chromosome while the presence of a third copy of chromosome 21 causes conditions typical of Down Syndrome.

Down Syndrome (DS) is the most frequently occurring chromosomal disorder that occurs in approximately one in every 800 live births. However, recent statistics in Oman show its incidence to be one in every 400 births. Individuals with DS have 47 chromosomes instead of the usual 46 and it is not related to race, nationality, religion, or socio-economic status.

Disclosing this, the Oman Down Syndrome Association draws attention to the fact that, apart from experiencing developmental delays, individuals with DS also have many talents and gifts and should be given an opportunity, as well as encouragement, to develop them.

The association states that early intervention services should be provided shortly after birth for those with DS. These services should include physical, speech and developmental therapies.

The Oman Down Syndrome Association, which was started in 2014, is a voluntary, non-profit organisation that organises special training sessions and classes for children with Down Syndrome till they reach adulthood, so as to help them achieve normal linguistic and social development.

The association will be celebrating World Down Syndrome Day on March 25 at the farm of Sheikh Saleh al Maskary, in Falij Barka, between 4pm and 8pm. The event will be for children with DS and their families, and will include fun and games with cartoon characters, jumping castles, birds and parrots shows, live cooking demonstrations of traditional food, horse and pony rides, games, face paintings, and more.

The celebration has been postponed to the weekend to ensure maximum participation and to make it convenient for family members of individuals with DS to attend in large numbers.

TRISOMY 21

World Down Syndrome Day – March 21, is a global awareness day observed by the United Nations. It assumes greater significance in Oman where the incidence of this genetic disorder is far greater than it is internationally



Paris Saint-Germain mauled at Monaco as Mbappe frustrated

Monaco, Principality of Monaco - Paris Saint-Germain were beaten 3-0 at Monaco on Sunday after a Wissam Ben Yedder double strike, as Neymar and Kylian Mbappe were both booked in a feisty Ligue 1 encounter.

PSG remain 15 points clear of second-placed Marseille at the top of Ligue 1 after the fourth league defeat of the season for Mauricio Pochettino's men, who have been shaken since being dumped out of the Champions League by Real Madrid.

Nice can close the gap to 12 points if they beat Marseille in Sunday's late Ligue 1 game.

Monaco captain Ben Yedder is now Ligue 1's top scorer with 18 goals after his 25th minute tap-in from a rebound, and an 84th minute penalty.

Ben Yedder also helped in the build-up for German striker Kevin Volland's goal for Monaco, making it 2-0 on 68 minutes in what was the real turning point of the game as PSG began to chase.

Mbappe and Neymar started for PSG and had a string of opportunities as the visitors enjoyed the lion's share of possession.

Mbappe said the bitterness of the Champions League defeat earlier this month was still felt at the club.

"We could win 8-0 and nobody would care, they'd just be thinking about the Champions League," he said.

"We need to remain professional, think of our families," said



PSG's French forward Kylian Mbappe reacts after missing a goal opportunity during the match against AS Monaco on March 20 (AFP)

If we carry on like that the title will be in danger. We have been warned

MARQUINHOS

Mbappe, who was full of praise for his old club.

"They are a great team, playing in European competition," said the 23-year-old.

PSG captain the Brazilian Marquinhos described the defeat as a wake-up call.

"If we carry on like that the

title will be in danger. We have been warned," he said.

"We came here to win and have fun, but that was a catastrophe."

PSG coach Mauricio Pochettino said it was time his players picked themselves up.

"On a sporting level, that was shameful. We have to get over the disappointment of being eliminated from the Champions League," the Argentine said.

Monaco's Belgian coach Philippe Clement can also thank his goalkeeper Alexander Nuebel, who made important saves from Mbappe, Neymar and the marauding Moroccan Achraf Hakimi.

AFP



Monaco's French forward Wissam Ben Yedder celebrates after opening the scoring during the match against PSG (AFP)

Record-setter Rojas nails third world indoor title



Venezuela's Yulimar Rojas celebrates after setting a new world indoor record in the women's triple jump final in Belgrade (AFP)

Belgrade, Serbia - Untouchable Yulimar Rojas set a new outright world record in the triple jump at the World Indoor Championships in Belgrade on Sunday en route to winning an unprecedented third title.

The Venezuelan, who previously won indoor golds in Birmingham in 2018 and Portland in 2016, smashed her own previous best of 15.43 metres when she soared out to 15.74m on her sixth and final attempt at the Stark Arena.

It capped yet another dominant display of triple jumping by the Venezuelan -- not since the 2016 Rio Olympics has she been defeated at a global championships, and on that occasion she still secured silver.

The two-time world outdoor champion also holds the outdoor world record, 15.67m, which she set when winning gold in Tokyo last summer.

"I achieved my third indoor title here which is crowned with the world record, I cannot be more thankful," said Rojas.

"Coming here, I knew it was

the right time to achieve this and I took the chance. I did not want to miss this opportunity today.

"Now, I want to focus on the world outdoor championships in Oregon and I think there is a big chance of making a double-long jump and triple jump.

"If I am in shape and the conditions are good, I can do both. The 16-metre mark is my big goal. Every day, I am trying to add one more centimetre to get closer to it."

A day after the onlooking Yaroslava Mahuchikh won an emotional gold for the six-strong Ukraine team in the women's high jump, her teammate Maryna Bekh-Romanchuk claimed silver behind Rojas after going out to 14.74m with her final jump.

Jamaican Kimberly Williams took bronze (14.59).

Tamberi stutters, Barega rules

There was a mixed bag for two other Olympic champions, Gianmarco Tamberi and Selem

Barega, on show on the third and final morning session at the world indoors.

Tamberi, who shared Olympic gold with absent Qatari Mutaz Essa Barshim in Tokyo, was seeking to clinch a second indoor title after previous success in 2016.

But unlike Rojas, the Italian did not have it all his own way, eventually taking away a joint bronze with New Zealand's Hamish Kerr as South Korea's Woo Sanghyeok bagged gold with 2.34m ahead of Swiss Loic Gasch (2.31).

All eyes were on Tamberi the track showman, but the grinning Korean thrived in the attention of a raucous crowd treated on numerous occasions to a remix of PSY's "Gangnam Style" song pumped out on the tannoy.

"I felt like I had only one good jump today so I am happy that I ended up with the gold medal on my neck," the 25-year-old said. "The crowd was a very good factor today."

AFP



Crystal Palace's Wilfried Zaha (C) vies with Everton's Seamus Coleman (L) and Abdoulaye Doucoure (R) during the English FA cup quarterfinal

Crystal Palace thrash Everton to reach FA Cup semifinals

London, United Kingdom - Crystal Palace stormed into the FA Cup semi-finals for the first time in six years with a 4-0 thrashing of struggling Everton on Sunday.

Marc Guehi, Jean-Philippe Mateta, Wilfried Zaha and Will Hughes got the goals as the Eagles continued their impressive first season under Patrick Vieira.

Everton's focus now turns to just staying in the Premier League as they sit perilously just above the relegation zone.

Frank Lampard's men managed just a second league win in 12 games against Newcastle on

Thursday and started like they could build on that confidence boost. Michael Keane wasted a glorious early chance, while Richarlison saw two appeals for a penalty waived away.

However, there was no way back once their frailty from set-pieces was exposed for the opening goal.

Guehi was called into the England squad for the first time this week and celebrated with his fourth goal since joining from Chelsea as he headed in Michael Olise's corner.

AFP

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Nadal defeats Alcaraz to set up Indian Wells ATP final with Fritz

Indian Wells, United States - Rafael Nadal battled past Carlos Alcaraz and the elements on Saturday, beating his talented young Spanish compatriot 6-4, 4-6, 6-3 to book an ATP Indian Wells Masters title clash with American Taylor Fritz.

Nadal, who claimed a record-setting 21st Grand Slam title at the Australian Open in January, improved to 20-0 in 2022.

The 35-year-old superstar was pushed all the way through three hours and 12 minutes by the 18-year-old aiming to follow in the footsteps of his childhood idol.

"I think was my best match so far in the tournament in terms of level," Nadal said.

"In the third I played with great determination against a very difficult player to play. He's great. He has a lot of amazing things."

The array of shots and athleticism that have already stamped Alcaraz a star were on full display in a match that saw gusting winds buffet the players in the second set, sending debris skittering across the court and at one point forcing a readjustment of the billowing net.

Alcaraz's fearless start to the contest saw him take a quick 2-0 lead -- fighting off five of the astonishing 17 break points he would face in the set in the second game.

Nadal won the next four games before surrendering his serve again, but he pocketed the set with another break in the 10th game.

Down 0-40, Alcaraz delivered a drop shot winner, a backhand volley winner and a service winner.

A forehand into the net gave Nadal another opportunity, which the former world number one squandered with an easy forehand miss. He'd make no mistake two points later, pocketing the set on his fifth opportunity.



Rafael Nadal of Spain celebrates a point against Carlos Alcaraz of Spain in their semifinal match on Day 13 of the BNP Paribas Open at the Indian Wells Tennis Garden on March 19 (AFP)

tunity.

Alcaraz again seized the initiative in the second set with a break for a 3-2 lead.

That launched a run of five straight breaks of serve, the last another marathon in which Nadal saved five break points and missed two game points before Alcaraz finally put him away.

Alcaraz, who had won just three games in his only prior career meeting with Nadal in

Madrid 10 months ago, then calmly served out the set.

As the wind died down again, the third set saw both players hitting winners from every quarter of the court.

Nadal stepped up his attack, coming to the net more in a bid to end the rallies.

A high forehand volley gave him another break and a 5-3 lead.

"In the third I think I played

much better," said Nadal, who wasn't slowed by discomfort that had him bring on the trainer for a quick adjustment to his upper back.

"When the wind stopped a little bit I thought I need to play aggressive because if not Carlos is going to go for the shots and it is going to be in his hands."

Alcaraz said he leaves the tournament happy, despite the defeat.

"I mean, I was playing against Rafa," he said. "I think it was a close match. First time (we played) he destroyed me. Now we played third set."

Fritz in first Masters final

If Nadal beats Fritz on Sunday, he will tie Novak Djokovic for the most Masters 1000 titles in ATP history with 37.

The 24-year-old Fritz, ranked 20th in the world, ended Andrey Rublev's 13-match ATP winning streak with a 7-5, 6-4 victory over the world number seven in the other semi-final.

Fritz is the first American man to reach the Indian Wells final since John Isner in 2012 and he'll be vying to become the first US winner since Andre Agassi in 2001.

Fritz is into his first elite Masters 1000 final and in search of a second career ATP title after his victory at Eastbourne in 2019.

The Southern California native came out firing on all cylinders and seized a 3-0 lead in just 11 minutes.

Firing winners off both wings and punishing Rublev's second serve, Fritz had a chance to go up 5-1, but Rublev managed to fight off three break points in a marathon game featuring eight deuces.

As Fritz served for the set at 5-2, Rublev broke him with a stinging service return winner to put the set back on serve, but Fritz broke again in the 12th to take the set.

In a fit of frustration after the error-strewn set, Rublev repeatedly punched his racquet head with his right hand, opening cuts on his knuckles that apparently prompted his medical time out.

Rublev lifted his game in the second set, but couldn't convert two break chances in the ninth game and Fritz served it out in the next.

AFP



Pakistan's captain Babar Azam trains during a practice session at the Gaddafi Cricket Stadium in Lahore on March 19 (AFP)

Pakistan, Australia eye last chance for Test series win

Lahore, Pakistan - After two batting-dominated draws, rival skipper Babar Azam and Pat Cummins are both targeting a series-winning victory when the third and final Pakistan-Australia Test starts in Lahore Monday.

The series - Australia's first in Pakistan for 24 years - opened with a high scoring stalemate on a featherbed pitch in Rawalpindi before the hosts salvaged a fighting draw in Karachi on the back of an epic 196 from Azam.

Lahore's Gaddafi stadium is Azam's home ground and will be staging a Test for the first time since a fatal terror attack on the Sri Lankan team bus in 2009 caused international cricket to be suspended in Pakistan.

"I can't explain the feelings," said Azam on Sunday.

"You have a different feeling when you play on your home ground and before your home crowd. I see a result here and if we win, against a major team, it will mean a lot and a proud moment for us."

Both the pitches in

Rawalpindi and Karachi did not give enough assistance to the spinners, but Azam hopes Lahore pitch will be more receptive.

"I feel it will definitely give turn. It has small cracks from where spinners get help and patches are formed," said Azam, who may opt to include uncapped leg-spinner Zahid Mahmood to support slow-bowling pair Nauman Ali and Sajid Khan.

Cummins felt the pitch might turn out to be similar to the flat tracks encountered in the first two Tests.

"It seems hard, but I can't see it being too much different from the other ones," said Cummins who announced Australia will field an unchanged side from the second Test. "We feel like we've got all bases covered, whether it's reverse swing or swing later in the game. Everyone has pulled up really well. We gave them an extra couple of days to make sure everyone has come up good."

AFP

ICC says Bangalore pitch below par after India Test win

New Delhi, India - Cricket authorities said the pitch for India's barnstorming second Test win over Sri Lanka was "below average" in a Sunday reprimand of Bangalore's M Chinnaswamy Stadium.

Sixteen wickets fell in the opening day and the hosts had the pink-ball contest firmly in hand with an emphatic 238-run victory inside three days.

But a subsequent International Cricket Council review found that the contest had been lopsided from the beginning.

"The pitch offered a lot of turn on the first day itself," match referee Javagal Srinath said.

Though it improved with every session, in my view, it was not an even contest between bat and ball

JAVAGAL SRINATH

"Though it improved with every session, in my view, it was not an even contest between bat and ball."

Under ICC rules, venues that receive a "below average" pitch



designation are issued with a demerit point.

Demerit points remain active for a rolling five-year period, and if a venue accumulates five it is suspended from hosting international cricket for a year.

Bangalore is the second venue in as many weeks to receive the "below average" reprimand, after the Rawalpindi Cricket Stadium in neighbouring Pakistan.

At the Rawalpindi stadium, this month's first Test between the hosts and Australia ended in a tame draw - with 1,187 runs scored for the loss of only 14 wickets.

AFP

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Oliveira wins rain-hit Indonesian MotoGP from Quartararo, Zarco



First-placed Miguel Oliveira (C), second-placed Fabio Quartararo (L) and third-placed Johann Zarco (R) celebrate on the podium (AFP)

Mandalika, Indonesia - Miguel Oliveira held his nerve to win a rain-affected Indonesian MotoGP on Sunday and then promised to give the trophy to his baby daughter.

The Portuguese KTM rider finished 2.205sec ahead of current world champion Fabio Quartararo, of France, who had started from pole position on his Yamaha.

Another Frenchman, Johann Zarco, completed the podium a further 3.158sec adrift for the Pramac Racing team in a race reduced to 20 laps from 27 because of safety concerns.

"It's really emotional," said Oliveira. "I promised my daughter I would get a trophy from Indonesia, so this one is for you baby."

ter I would get a trophy from Indonesia, so this one is for you baby."

The start at the Mandalika International Street Circuit was delayed for 75 minutes by heavy rain as grand prix racing returned to motorcycle-mad Indonesia for the first time in a quarter of a century.

When it did eventually begin, Quartararo bolted into the first corner comfortably ahead but by the end of the first lap had been reeled in by Oliveira and Australia's Jack Miller, on a Ducati.

It did not take Oliveira long behind the Australian to realise he had the grip and pace to

It's really emotional. I promised my daughter I would get a trophy from Indonesia, so this one is for you baby.

MIGUEL OLIVEIRA

stretch away on the sodden track. "I followed Jack for a couple of laps and then I understood that I could still go a bit faster," said Oliveira.

'Super happy'

"When I overtook him, I just tried to focus for the next five laps," said Oliveira, who took his fourth victory, after winning

the Styrian and Portuguese Grands Prix in 2020 and the Catalunya race last season. "Then I built the gap and I was managing it the whole race but it was, for sure, not easy."

Miller finished fourth, with the Spanish pair of Alex Rins and Joan Mir fifth and sixth.

World championship leader Enea Bastianini of Italy, who won

the season-opening race in Qatar two weeks ago, struggled in the wet and could only finish 11th after starting on the second row of the grid.

The Italian remains top of the world championship standings after two races on 30 points, two ahead of South Africa's Brad Binder with Quartararo one point further back in third.

Oliveira's 25 points for victory elevated him to fourth in the standings.

Quartararo was delighted to fight back to grab what he said was his first podium in the wet, after struggling in the opening laps and dropping to fifth at one stage.

"To be honest, from the warm-up lap I felt like we have

something extra, because we know that in the wet condition we are struggling always," said Quartararo.

"So I saw an opportunity and I go for it. I think it's my first podium in the wet so I'm super happy because we found something in the wet."

Zarco was a little disappointed that he was unable to push hard early in the race and by the time he figured out the track and grip it was too late to finish any higher than third.

"It's a podium in MotoGP which is always nice, but really I needed a little bit of time," he said.

AFP

Oman, UAE emerge victorious on Day 1 of GCC Women's T20i Cup

Muscat- Oman recorded a comprehensive 96-run victory over Bahrain in the first match of the GCC Women's T20i Championship Cup at the Oman Cricket Academy Ground on Sunday. In the second game of the day, the UAE won over Qatar by eight wickets.

Coming out to bat after losing the toss, Oman kick-started proceedings in an assured manner.

The opening pair of Sakshi Vijaya Shetty and Fiza Javed stitched together a 56-run partnership in the powerplay. The former top-scored for the home side with a brilliant 30-ball 39. Fiza chipped in with 18 runs of her own.

However, Bahrain struck back in the 7th over. Tharanga Gajayake stepped up for the visitors to provide 2 crucial breakthroughs in back-to-back overs. Sakshi was dismissed soon after too, but player of the match Priyanka Mendonca ensured that no further damage was done.

Her mature 29-run knock, alongside valuable contributions from Nayan Anil and Saya Channa, powered Oman to a first innings total of 157/7.

Speaking after the game, Priyanka said, "My role while batting was to stay on the wicket and that happened. There were coaches to back me up and give me the message so all thanks to



Player of the match Priyanka Mendonca of Oman made valuable 29 runs and took two wickets



Oman's Sakshi Vijaya Shetty top-scored with 30-ball 39

them and my teammates".

In response, Bahrain could only manage 61/7 at the end of their 20 overs. Abeera Waris and Deepika Bhaskara were the only batters to reach double figures.

The hosts inflicted 3 run-outs, taking full advantage of Bahrain's indecisive running between the wickets.

Priyanka Mendonca starred for Oman with the ball too. She

followed up her display in the first innings by picking up 2 wickets in her 3 overs, while giving away just 2 runs.

In the second game of the day, the UAE looked thoroughly dominant in their 8-wicket victory over Qatar. Electing to bat after winning the toss, Qatar could only muster a first innings total of 75/8.

Saachi Dhadwal top scored with 27 runs. The UAE bowling attack was excellent as a whole, but the standout performer was undoubtedly Khushi Sharma, who ended the day with jaw-dropping figures of 4/4.

The second innings saw the UAE chase the target down with 71 balls to spare. Kavisha Egodage led the scoring for them with a 30-ball half century.

Thunders, Busters, Rangers and Giants secure D10 wins

Muscat- The Qurum Thunders kick-started proceedings on Day 7 of the D10 league with a 6-wicket victory over the Azaiba XI at the Oman Cricket Academy Ground on Saturday.

Electing to bat first after winning the toss, the Azaiba XI made a competitive 98/5 at the end of 10 overs.

The Thunders made light work of the task at hand and finished the job with 9 balls to spare. Jatinder Singh was dismissed for a golden duck after etching his name in the record books with a 13-ball half-century in the previous game, but a 19-ball 44 from his opening partner Kashyap Prajapati was enough to take the Thunders past the finish line.

In the day's second game, the Bousher Busters registered a comfortable 8-wicket win over the Khuwair Warriors.

The Warriors chose to bat first and made their way to 93/6 at the end of their innings.

Thanks to a 81-run opening partnership between Abdul Rauf Atta Ullah and Asif Khan, the second innings was a straightforward affair in its entirety, for the side from Bousher.

The latter top scored with a devastating 18-ball 56, with Muzahir Raza of the Warriors



in particular facing heavy punishment.

Following next, table toppers Ruwi Rangers emerged victorious in their game against the Darsait Titans, in what was a keenly anticipated D20 final rematch.

Darsait Titans made 112/5 after 10 overs. Zeeshan Maqsood made 50 runs and was ably supported over the course of a 73-run partnership by Khurram Khan, who accumulated 35 himself. Hassnain Ali and Jitenkumar Ramanandi picked up 2 wickets apiece for the Rangers.

Khalid Kail from Ruwi was the top scorer with a 17-ball 43. Hanan Rizwan, Shafqat Ullah, Imran Alam and Mohammad Naseem were the others to

play their part in an eventual 6 wicket victory for the Rangers, achieved with an over to spare.

In the final game of the day, after clinching four wins in a row to start the series, the Amerat Royals slumped to a second successive defeat. The Ghubrah Giants beat them by 7 runs in a closely-fought high-scoring encounter.

Batting first after winning the toss, the Giants posted a first innings total of 123/6. Kashif Ali led the scoring with an expertly crafted 30-ball 62 and Dean Foxcroft made 31 runs of his own. Rafi Ullah, from the Royals, took 4/15.

Chasing, the Royals managed to keep wickets in the bank but faltered in the end to finish on 116/3.

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