

# MoCIIP to launch 98 initiatives, investment opportunities in 2023



## Our Correspondent Muscat

The Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion (MoCIIP) announced on Monday that it will launch 48 initiatives in the commercial and industrial sectors this year, besides 50 new industrial investment opportunities.

It further revealed that the volume of foreign investment in 2022 amounted to more than RO1.7bn - an increase of 2.1 per cent over the previous year.

The announcement was made during its annual media meeting held under the auspices of H E Qais Mohammed al Yousef, Minister of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion, wherein the achievements of the past year and plans for the current year were reviewed.

*The Invest Easy Portal witnessed the launch of more than 20 new services in 2022 and its name has been changed to ‘Oman Business Portal’*

The ministry stated that the volume of trade exchange between Oman and the world amounted to more than RO40bn till December 2022, registering an increase of 41 per cent, while total exports were over RO25bn.

MoCIIP confirmed that there has been an increase in the contribution of domestic trade to the gross domestic product (GDP) from most economic activities at current prices, including the services sector (9.7 per cent).

It informed that a study has been conducted to review the difference in prices of vehicles and

spare parts in the market, in addition to a study on competition in the retail sector.

The ministry further stated that the Invest Easy Portal witnessed the launch of more than 20 new services in 2022 and that its name has been changed to ‘Oman Business Portal’.

To promote investment promotion, MoCIIP reduced the fee for foreign investors to encourage them to set up projects that support the national economy. ‘The number of people with Investor Residency Cards was 1,600 as of March 2023. The number of au-

tomatic licences for investments increased 66.4 per cent to 203,591 in 2022 compared to 135,038 in 2021,’ it stated.

MoCIIP also informed that in cooperation with the Ministry of Labour, it will monitor foreign investment companies’ required Omanisation rates.

It implemented 86 investment opportunities all over the sultanate last year to stimulate and develop economic activities.

In 2023, MoCIIP will work on preparing a unified national investment strategy and finding investment opportunities for investors in cooperation with the Nazdhar programme, in addition to issuing a new regulation to regulate e-commerce in Oman. ‘An initiative to improve competition in the provision of medicines and medical devices will also be launched.’

## SAYYID SHIHAB RECEIVES TURKISH ENVOY



H H Sayyid Shihab bin Tarik al Said, Deputy Prime Minister for Defence Affairs, received in his office at Al Murtafa’a Garrison on Monday H E Muhammet Hekimoglu, Ambassador of the Republic of Turkey to the Sultanate of Oman. The two sides reviewed bilateral relations and means of enhancing these. They also discussed several matters of mutual interest. H H Sayyid Shihab wished H E Hekimoglu success in carrying out his duties as his country’s ambassador to Oman (ONA)

## Budget surplus widens to RO372mn

### Our Correspondent Muscat

The Government of Oman recorded a budget surplus of RO372mn in the first two months of 2023, compared to a surplus of RO210mn in the same period of last year, the Ministry of Finance announced on Monday.

The sharp increase in the January-February surplus was mainly due to a 12 per cent rise in total revenues, amounting to RO2.148bn for the first two months of this year as against RO1.918bn in the same period a year ago.

The higher revenues were mainly a result of increase in oil and gas income, which accounted for about 78 per cent of Oman’s total public revenues, according to the Fiscal Performance Bulletin issued by the Ministry of Finance. A sharp 51 per cent jump in current revenue also con-

tributed to the state coffers.

With increased output and higher prices, net oil revenues grew by five per cent to RO1.153bn in the January-February period this year compared to RO1.094bn in the same period of 2022. Gas revenues increased by

**Development expenditure of ministries and government units amounted to RO50mn or 6% of the total RO900mn allocated for developmental spending in 2023**

two per cent year-on-year to RO521mn in February.

The sultanate’s daily oil production increased 4.4 per cent to 1.064mn barrels per day in the first two months of 2023 compared to 1.01mn barrels per day recorded in the same period

of 2022.

The average price at which Oman sold its crude oil in January increased more than six per cent to US\$86 per barrel from US\$81 per barrel recorded in the first two months of 2022.

The sultanate’s 2023 budget is based on an average oil price estimate of US\$55 per barrel and average oil production of 1.175mn barrels per day.

Moreover, the government’s current revenue collection surged 51 per cent to RO471mn in January-February 2023 from RO311mn recorded in the same period last year.

During the first quarter of 2023, the government repaid RO1.1bn in public debt, reducing the total government debt to RO16.6bn at the end of March 2023, compared to RO17.7bn registered at the end of 2022.

Continued on Page 03

## Consortium appointed for master planning of Salalah Smart City

### Our Correspondent Muscat

A consortium of international consultants has been appointed by the Ministry of Housing and Urban Planning to design the master plan of the Salalah Smart City project.

Leading the consortium is the engineering consultancy firm F&M Middle East, with Cundall - a London based company with infrastructural strategic vision, MIC-HUB - a Milan based company well versed in transportation and mobility in diverse urban settings, Cavendish Maxwell - a Dubai/Muscat based company with knowledge of marketing and feasibility studies, and Skyne - a Dubai based branding company. Omani companies HMR Consultants and TRM Engineering Consultants will offer their expertise in local environment and traffic standards, while Mil-cris Oman will provide cost consultancy expertise.

According to MIC-HUB, Salalah Smart City will present a bold vision for the prosperous and sustainable future of the area. ‘Our approach will be rooted in the broader ecological context of Salalah, and forward-thinking strategies of sustainability, liveability and smart systems will be integrated throughout. We envision a city of the future, with a pedestrian oriented design that seeks to reinforce a para-



digim shift towards greater community and environmental stewardship,’ it stated.

The overarching mobility framework of the city will focus on macro infrastructure and landscape reconfiguration to reduce car use by providing safe spaces for everyone; increasing transit and mobility services by improving existing services, promoting shared mobility, micro-mobilities, on-demand and demand-responsive transport modes; reducing carbon emissions by promoting soft mobility and an integrated public transport network; integrating driverless vehicles to reduce road congestion and create a more enhanced travel experience; and

digital platforms for integrated mobility systems connected to the platform and in constant active communication.

“The Salalah Smart City initiative presents an ambitious and visionary plan for the sustainable and prosperous future of the region. We are proud to have been selected to join this consortium and are honoured to bring our expertise to this significant project. With our commitment to excellence and sustainability, we are excited to be part of this important effort to shape the future of Oman and the region for generations to come,” said Lee French, Partner and Operations Director MENA, Cundall.

**SULTANATE OF OMAN  
MINISTRY OF HEALTH**

**ANNOUNCEMENT**

The Ministry of Health invites specialized companies to participate in the following Tenders: -

| Tender Ref :    | Description                                                        | Last Date For Collection Of Tender Document | Bid Submission Closing Date on/ Before 10:00 am Wednesday | Eligibility                                                                       | Tender Fee (Non-Refundable) |
|-----------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------|
| MOH/HQ- 87/2023 | Supply and Installation of MRI System for Rustaq and Sur Hospitals | 20/April/2023                               | 10/May/2023                                               | Specialized Companies registered with the General Secretariat of the Tender Board | R.O 82.500 Per set          |
| MOH/HQ-88/2023  | Supply of Consumable Items (Renal Dialysis)                        |                                             | 17/May/2023                                               |                                                                                   | R.O 100.000 Per set         |
| MOH/HQ-89/2023  | Supply of Pharmaceuticals                                          |                                             | 03/May/2023                                               |                                                                                   | R.O 40.000 Per set          |
| MOH/HQ-91/2023  | Supply of Laboratory Items                                         |                                             |                                                           |                                                                                   |                             |
| MOH/HQ-92/2023  | Provision of Next-Generation Firewall (NGFW) for MOH Data Center   |                                             | 10/May/2023                                               |                                                                                   | R.O 25.000 Per set          |

● Tenders should be submitted on line on **HYPERLINK "https://etendering.tenderboard.gov.om" https://etendering.tenderboard.gov.om** enclose **Electronic Bank Guarantee** issued by a Local bank for not less than One percent (1%) for the Tender value validity for (90) days from the Tender Submission date, addressed to The Chairman of the Tender Committee.

● Ministry is not bound to accept the lowest tender and reserves the right to accepts or reject any tender.

● For any Clarification, you may contact via Telephone: 24402200 , Email id [etenderhd@ita.gov.om](mailto:etenderhd@ita.gov.om)



# Begging in the month of charity

Our Correspondent  
Muscat

Begging is discouraged in Islam as it is considered the last resort for those who are truly in need and unable to support themselves through legitimate means. Islam encourages self-sufficiency and promotes social welfare through various forms of charity, such as zakat and sadaqah, which are meant to address the needs of the poor and vulnerable in a dignified and organised manner. However, during the month of Ramadan, the number of people seeking charity, including beggars, always increases. Royal Oman Police has reported arresting 123 beggars from different parts of Dhofar during the holy month this year.

*Beggars take advantage of the religious passion of people in Ramadan to win their sympathy and ask for charity*

ALI AL SHAYADI

According to Ali al Shayadi, a mosque imam, Islam 'forbids' begging. "Our religion teaches us to work hard, not to beg to earn money. Beggars take advantage of the religious passion of people in Ramadan to win their sympathy and ask for charity. I urge people to contact the responsible authorities to limit the spread of this phenomenon," Shayadi told Muscat Daily. While discouraging begging, Islam emphasises the importance of treating beggars with care and respect. Muslims are encouraged to verify the legitimacy of the need before giving charity and to prioritise sustainable solutions,



such as providing employment or education, rather than support dependence on begging. "Unfortunately, some people take advantage of the holy month to appeal to people and beg. Some even use children for the purpose," said

Mabela resident Sultan al Rawahi. "Beggars can be seen at traffic lights, ATM machines, fuel stations and parking lots of commercial centres." Seeb resident Hamoud al Hadrami, too, noted that beggars take advantage of people's

goodwill and charity during Ramadan. "Some claim illness or have a story about one of their relatives being sick, often carrying a forged medical certificate to prove their illness. Community members must cooperate with the competent

authorities and not sympathise with them or give them money." In keeping with this annual phenomenon, begging has increased manifold in the last couple of weeks. "Not only in markets, beggars are now also knocking on people's doors. It has become widespread," claimed Said al Shanfari in Salalah. Begging is seen as a problem with social, ethical, security and economic dimensions, and as lawyer Khamis al Abri stressed, government institutions are working to combat the menace but it cannot be eliminated without the cooperation and support of the community. The law stipulates that anyone found begging in a public or private place will face imprisonment of not less than two months and not exceeding a year. Abri informed that offenders can also be fined between RO50 and RO100. Expats caught begging are deported. "Repeat offenders may be imprisoned for a minimum of six months and a maximum of two years. Anyone found engaging children for begging faces imprisonment of not less than three months and not more than three years," Abri said. "A beggar is exempted from punishment if it is proved that he was forced or he is unable to earn and has no other source of livelihood." An official at the Ministry of Social Development (MoSD) said that it cooperates with government entities such as the Ministry of Labour, ROP and the Public Prosecution to reduce begging. The beggars arrested this year have been referred to the relevant authorities for legal action, the ministry official said. MoSD's anti-begging teams arrested 109 beggars in the first nine months of 2021, 641 in 2020, 1,814 in 2019, 1,678 in 2018 and 1,152 in 2017.

## KAIRALI DISTRIBUTES IFTAR MEALS IN RUWI



Kairali Ruwi organised a programme to distribute 500 iftar meals in Ruwi High Street recently. In its belief that there is no greater social work than feeding those fasting, the association is organising iftar gatherings in several areas of Oman. One of the association's organisers said that the iftar programme aims to spread solidarity and harmony among people during the month of Ramadan. "This is the second time this year that the association has distributed iftar meals in Ruwi High Street." Kairali's Muttrah branch organised a large iftar gathering at the Muttrah Souq last week for tourists, traders and residents of the area. The association's officials informed that they will announce various social service programmes in the near future (Supplied photo)

## Testing limits of endurance



**Hatim Harith al Abdissalaam**  
Motivational Speaker & member of Islamic Information Centre, Grand Mosque



I have always wondered about the human capabilities and potential when it comes to fasting in Ramadan. I remember my first job when I was just 16. I worked as a technician in an oil refinery. We used to work outdoors in the field in extremely hot weather when Ramadan fell between the months of June and July. I have to admit that it wasn't easy working in the heat but we really enjoyed what we did and

dom of fasting during the month. I, personally, push myself to the limit in Ramadan. I am addicted to pressure and I love being busy throughout the day. Once, I experimented not doing anything in Ramadan - no lectures, no talk shows and no events - and I have to admit that it was the worst Ramadan ever. Your body sends false signals to your brain - most of the time - which play a dirty game on you, leading you to believe that you either need rest or food. But the reality is that you should take control and determine what your exact needs are and not the other way around. A piece of advice to the young people fasting this Ramadan - take advantage of every moment during the month and be as productive as possible, as it is not only a moral obligation but it is also a spiritual obligation, and we will be accountable for our actions on the day of judgment.

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# Student startup creates shock-proof heater

Our Correspondent  
Muscat

Nameer, an Omani student startup, has created a smart water heater and cooler insulated against electric shocks.

Manal al Naabi, Khalid al Shaqsi, Qusai al Ma'awali, Anas al Naabi, Dania Kfayat, Safaa al Saidia, Al Yaqeen al Saeedia, Muhammad al Mahrouqi and Abdullah al Shiyadi - students of University of Technology and Applied Sciences Sohar - came up with the idea of the smart device as they were concerned about electrocution accidents related to water heaters and coolers.

Team member Shaqsi informed that the water heater is cylindrical with maximum water heating temperature of 65°C in winter, while in the summer, it functions like a cooler regulating temperature to a minimum of 23°C.

He explained that the device includes a feature that prevents electrocution by way of programmed sensors included in the



*We faced a funding challenge, besides difficulties in sourcing parts. Also, there are no specialised workshops for this kind of work*

KHALID AL SHAQSI

circuit that cut off the power supply when hot water is used. "We faced a funding chal-



(Supplied photos)

lenge, besides difficulties in sourcing parts. Also, there are no specialised workshops for this

kind of work," Shaqsi said. Nameer's plans for the future include developing the device

further to operate on solar energy. The company is currently working on marketing the device

and participating in scientific and technological competitions. "The company is now seeking

a patent from the Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion," Shaqsi said.

# New initiative launched to support livestock breeders

Our Correspondent  
Muscat

To strengthen food security and provide the best quality products to consumers, the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Water Resources (MAFWR), in cooperation with Al Bashaer Meat Company, announced a new initiative on Sunday.

A statement issued by MAFWR said that the initiative stems from its belief in the importance of supporting national products and producers, striving to support food security and providing products of the best quality to consumers.

Under the initiative, Al Bashaer will purchase camels and cows from local farmers and breeders for the purpose of slaughtering and marketing the meat.



The company has set a few conditions, such as the animals should be in good health, disease free, vaccinated and registered in the National Livestock Immunisation Programme of MAFWR. In order to sell livestock, farmers and breeders must also produce age proof of animals (below 18 months for cows and 12 months for camels).

'Livestock will be inspected by a technical team. Following approval, the breeder will sign a declaration of the sale. Animals will be marked and transported to the company's facility in Thumrait,' it stated.

Breeders and farmers wishing to sell livestock should contact the company on 72424022, 99117413, 99570940 or

71904287 and fill a form.

Meanwhile, MAFWR has launched a livestock vaccination campaign in some parts of the sultanate as part of its National Livestock Immunisation Programme.

The ministry's veterinary team is visiting breeders and vaccinating goats, sheep, cows and camels in several wilayats against diseases such as foot-and-mouth disease and rabies.

The campaign aims to immunise livestock, reduce infection and prevent common disease transmission between animals and human beings. It also aims to provide vaccination to the largest number of animals possible to protect herds from epidemics, including plague, smallpox and foot-and-mouth disease that cause significant economic losses.

# Budget surplus widens to RO372mn

Continued from Page 01  
Oman's total public spending during January-February 2023 was recorded at RO1.776bn, which is RO68mn or four per cent higher compared to the same period a year ago.

Expenditure increased 5.2 per cent to RO643mn in the first two months of this year compared to RO611mn of the same period a year ago.

Development expenditure of ministries and government units amounted to RO50mn, accounting for just six per cent of the total

- RO900mn - allocated for developmental spending for the whole of 2023.

Expenditure for contributions and other expenses (including government subsidies) was more than doubled to RO133mn in January-February 2023 compared to RO57mn recorded in the same period of 2022. Subsidies for oil products and the water sector amounted to RO47mn and RO17mn, respectively, at the end of February 2023. An amount of RO66mn was also transferred to future debt obligations.

Aided by an improving fiscal position due to government reforms and higher oil prices, the sultanate's sovereign credit ratings were upgraded by various global rating agencies last year.

Recently, S&P Global Ratings revised Oman's outlook to 'positive' from 'stable' and affirmed its ratings at BB. The rating agency said that the revised outlook was a result of the reforms undertaken by Oman in the financial and economic areas, which could strengthen the resilience of the national economy.

# Campaign starts to grow wild trees in Jabal Akhdar

Our Correspondent  
Muscat

In order to increase green cover and stimulate tourism, Environment Authority (EA) has launched a campaign to grow indigenous trees in tourist sites in Jabal Akhdar, Dakhliyah.

'The Department of Environment in Dakhliyah launched a campaign to plant wild trees, such as al alalan and al atm (wild olive) in Jabal Akhdar,' EA said in a statement.

The al alalan tree (*Juniperus Excelsa*) is one of the most endangered species in the sultanate, according to Oman Animal and Plant Genetic Resources Centre. It is mostly



found in the foothills and plateaus of the Al Hajar Mountains at an altitude of 3,000m above sea level.

The campaign to grow wild trees aims to increase green cover in Jabal Akhdar and pre-

serve perennial trees at tourist sites, in addition to conserving the environment and attracting tourists.

The authority has adopted air layering, which is considered one of the most suitable methods for

rapid propagation of trees, especially those characterised by slow growth.

Air layering is a method of propagating new trees and shrubs from stems still attached to the parent plant. It is also known as marcotting, a way of getting clones of woody plants that are often difficult to root from cuttings.

This method, believed to have been developed centuries ago by the Chinese, has been used successfully as a mechanism of propagating difficult-to-root plants.

The campaign is part of EA's mission launched in January 2020 to plant 10mn indigenous trees in ten years.

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BRAND AWARDS**

# Mitsui and Kobe Steel plan large-scale iron metalics plant in Duqm



**Our Correspondent**  
Muscat

Oman's Public Authority for Special Economic Zones and Free Zones (OPAZ) on Monday signed a memorandum of understanding (MoU) with Japan's Kobe Steel and Mitsui & Co to develop a large-scale low-CO2 iron metalics project in the Special Economic Zone at Duqm (SEZAD).

Kobe Steel and Mitsui also signed a land reservation agreement with Port of Duqm Company and inked another MoU with the Centralized Utilities Company (Marafiq) to supply the project with power and water, according to a press statement issued by OPAZ.

The MoUs were signed by H E Dr Ali bin Masoud al Sunaidy, chairman of OPAZ and Masahiro Motoyuki, executive officer and head of engineering business at Kobe Steel and Tetsuya Fukuda, executive managing officer and chief operating officer of mineral and metal resources business unit at Mitsui & Co.

The land reservation agreement was signed by Reggy Vermeulen, CEO of Port of Duqm, while the MoU with Marafiq was signed by Eng Abdullah al Hashimi, managing director of Marafiq.

The signing ceremony was attended by H E Ibtisam bint Ahmed al Farooji, Undersecretary of the Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion for Investment Promotion, H E Yamamoto Jota, am-

bassador of Japan in Muscat, representatives of the companies and other dignitaries.

Mitsui and Kobe Steel have also been in discussion with Oman's Ministry of Energy and Minerals on detailed condition for natural gas supply.

The project is expected to produce five million tonnes of Direct Reduced Iron (DRI) annually through the MIDREX process. DRI is feed stock for steelmaking. By using technically and commercially proven production method, Kobe Steel and Mitsui aim to provide a near-term decarbonisation solution to the steelmaking industry.

In the long run, the project in Duqm will aim for further decarbonisation through measures such as replacement of natural gas with hydrogen and carbon capture, utilisation and storage, with a goal to expand production capacity as well.

Furthermore, Kobe Steel and Mitsui will conduct the detailed business study, with an aim to commence low-CO2 iron metalics production by 2027. The product will be supplied to businesses in Asian including Kobe Steel and other global markets such as Europe.

Speaking on the occasion, H E Sunaidy said, "Bringing this unique project to the Special Economic Zone at Duqm marks a valuable addition to the already under development list of remarkable international metal and mineral projects and green energy projects in the zone and will attract other related and sup-

porting industries and businesses. This project is a great addition to the steelmaking industry in Oman as well as it will enhance In-Country Value by supporting local SMEs and offering job openings."

Tetsuya Fukuda said, "Oman is a country rich in natural gas reserves necessary for producing DRI and is also one of the globally outstanding locations for renewable energy, making it a highly suitable area for competitive green hydrogen. Mitsui also has a trusting relationship with Oman through existing businesses including oil and gas upstream investments, LNG projects, and independent power projects."

Masahiro Motoyuki stated, "With combination of our steel-making experience, our key technologies such as MIDREX Process, and the collective strength of Mitsui operating global business in the natural resources and energy fields, Kobe Steel and Mitsui will continue to contribute to the reduction of CO2 emission within the steel-making industry with hopes of achieving a carbon-neutral society."

The Port of Duqm CEO Reggy Vermeulen said, "We are delighted to have Mitsui & Co and Kobe Steel developing a low-CO2 iron metalics project at Port of Duqm."

The project is expected to bring an important foreign direct investment and has the potential to create a significant number of jobs at Duqm."

## INTERVIEW

**SHAHI FOODS & SPICES**  
**WINNER: PULSES & SPICES CATEGORY**

## Delivering high quality food products

**Our Correspondent**  
Muscat

Shahi Foods & Spices Company is the leading herbs and spices supplier in Oman. The company offers value added spices, pulses, grains, coffee, nuts, dry fruits and more in the sultanate. Marketed under the brand name Shahi, its products have set the standards for quality, safety and taste in the country. The company today produce and distribute over 200 varieties of food products. Shahi recently won Oman's Most Trusted Brand Award 2022 in pulses and spices category.

In an interview with *Muscat Daily*, Abdul Rahman Mohamed Asharaf, executive director of Shahi Foods & Spices, talked about Shahi's strengths in the Omani market. He also spoke about the company's authentic sourcing, manufacturing, products, quality control and distribution network in Oman.

**Shahi brand has been voted by public as Oman's Most Trusted Brand in pulses and spices category. What are the key strengths of Shahi that differentiate it from other pulses and spices brands in winning consumer trust?**

First of all it is a great honour to have won the prestigious Oman's Most Trusted Brand Award. It is a recognition of our tireless commitment to provide the residents with high quality food and spices products for nearly four decades.

Shahi's journey in winning and retaining consumer trust began in 1986. Our founder's vision was to deliver the best quality spices, pulses and other food products and we have set benchmarks that differentiate us from competitors.

Those strengths are authentic sourcing of the highest quality materials, state-of-the-art manufacturing unit equipped with latest machinery and technology, expert R&D team, advanced microbiology lab for quality control, well-trained staff, well-oiled logistics and distribution network.

**What steps do you take to ensure that Shahi products meet the highest quality standards before reaching to final consumers?**

From procurement to manufacturing to distribution, we strictly follow international quality standards. That is why Shahi is a name that comes first in the minds of customers in Oman when they think about spices, pulses and allied food products.

One of the key factors is authentic sour-



**ABDUL RAHMAN MOHAMED ASHARAF**  
*Executive Director,  
Shahi Foods & Spices*

ing. We procure all the raw materials directly from the farmers in the countries of origin. These are subjected to quality testing at our facility in Suwaiq. The products are cleaned and processed and packaged using latest imported machinery that preserves nutrients and flavour.



*As a progressive brand aligned with Oman's futuristic vision, we always adopt and adapt to the latest innovations and technologies in the food industry to serve our customers better*

ABDUL RAHMAN MOHAMED ASHARAF



**Can you tell about Shahi's approach to quality control during the manufacturing process? How does it monitor the quality of raw materials and ingredients?**

We have an in-house quality control (QC) department and an advanced microbiology lab led by field experts. Samples of all the raw materials are first tested by the QC team, following national and international food safety guidelines. We discard materials that don't clear all the safety parameters.

The products are then processed using

Oman?

We will continue to adhere to our core principles of providing exceptional quality food products and services. We continue to innovate and offer new products with the support of our R&D team. We constantly monitor customer feedback and redress issues, if any.

As a progressive brand aligned with Oman's futuristic vision, we always adopt and adapt to the latest innovations and technologies in the food industry to serve our customers better.

# Oil mixed as markets weigh risks after OPEC+ output cut

London, UK – Oil prices were mixed in early trade on Monday, reflecting market concerns about the supply and demand outlook following OPEC+'s production cut beginning in May and the possibility of US interest rate hikes.

Brent crude was trading at US\$85.03 per barrel at 0658 GMT, down 0.11 per cent from Thursday's close of \$85.12 per barrel, as markets were closed for Good Friday.

The US benchmark West Texas Intermediate (WTI) was at US\$80.66 a barrel at the same time, for a 0.05 per cent gain after it ended Thursday at US\$80.70 a barrel.

Prices have been steadily rising as investors assess the potential consequences of supply cuts by OPEC+'s major oil producers.

The surprise decision limited price declines due to the banking crisis in the US. However, fears of further interest rate hikes have raised demand woes and suppressed oil price increases.

The recent decision by the Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC) and



allies, known as OPEC+, to reduce monthly production against expectations is forecast to raise oil prices by more than US\$10 per barrel, with Brent crude even reaching US\$110 per barrel by summer.

During their 48th Joint Ministerial Monitoring Committee (JMMC) earlier this month, OPEC+ confirmed their plan to continue oil output cuts of 2mn barrels per day (bpd) until the end of the year, with additional voluntary production cuts of around 1.66mn bpd starting in May.

Saudi Arabia led the way with 500,000 bpd of cuts, followed by Iraq with 211,000 bpd, the

UAE with 144,000 bpd, Kuwait with 128,000 bpd, Kazakhstan with 78,000 bpd, Algeria with 48,000 bpd, Oman with 40,000 bpd and Gabon with 8,000 bpd.

Russia also announced that it would extend existing output cuts of 500,000 bpd until the end of the year.

Rystad Energy's senior vice president Jorge Leon stressed that OPEC+'s surprise decision to withdraw 1.66mn barrels of oil from the market as of May caused a rise in oil prices and fuelled inflationary fears.

The voluntary cuts, which the group has a good track record of implementing, will put upside

pressure on prices from a fundamental perspective, offering support of around US\$10 per barrel," he said.

He was quick to point out that given the current macro environment, the market may interpret the cuts as 'a vote of no confidence' in the recovery of oil demand and could pose short-term downside price risks.

"If fully delivered, the announced cut would further tighten an already fundamentally tight oil market, driving the Brent benchmark towards US\$100 per barrel sooner than previously expected and pushing the price to around US\$110 per barrel this summer," he said.

# UAE's e& acquires \$400mn majority stake in Uber owned Careem Super App

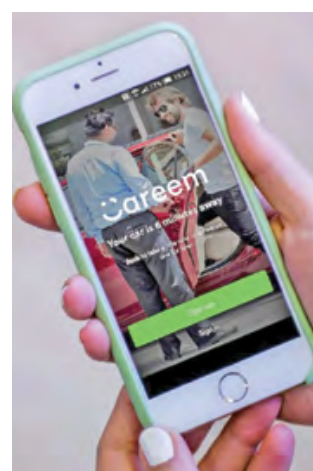
Abu Dhabi, UAE – Abu Dhabi-based e&, one of the world's leading technology and investment groups, on Monday announced the signing of a binding agreement with Uber Technologies and its subsidiary Careem to acquire a majority stake in Careem's Super App spinout.

Careem's ride hailing business will remain fully owned by Uber and continue to be available with all other Careem services on the existing app for customers.

e& is investing US\$400mn to become a majority shareholder in Careem's Super App alongside Uber and all three of Careem's co-founders.

The Careem Super App offers over a dozen services including food and grocery delivery, micro-mobility, a digital wallet and suite of fintech services, and additional third-party services such as home cleaning, car rental and laundry. Careem serves customers in ten countries across the Middle East, North Africa and South Asia.

With this new investment, Careem plans to accelerate the realisation of its ambitious vision



to create the first "everything app" serving customers across the Middle East.

This will include expanding its core food, grocery, and fintech services and the Careem Plus subscription programme across the region while adding even more partner services to the app. Careem expects significant synergies with e& and anticipates benefiting from e&'s large customer base and extensive experience scaling complex tech enabled businesses across a largely shared geographic footprint.

This investment is in line with e&'s strategic ambition of scaling up consumer digital offerings and accelerating its transformation to a global technology and investments group.

In recent years e& has transformed into a global technology and investment group. The company is integrating emerging technologies into its expanding business verticals. e& has 163mn subscribers across 16 countries in the Middle East, Asia and Africa.

Hatem Dowidar, group CEO, e& commented, "Super Apps have catalysed the economic, social and cultural growth of emerging markets today.

The Careem Super App is a digital native that has built a rapidly growing payments, food and grocery delivery network, and a platform for other digital businesses to scale from.

The shared vision between e& and Careem is exciting, we believe that together we'll be able to enhance our impact across different markets in the region while pushing the boundaries of customer experience."

# World Bank, IMF meetings to get underway in complex economic environment

Washington, US – The World Bank and International Monetary Fund's spring meetings get underway later this week with an ambitious reform and fundraising agenda likely to be overshadowed by concerns over high inflation, rising geopolitical tension and financial stability.

"Growth remains historically weak — now and in the medium term," IMF managing director Kristalina Georgieva said during a speech last week.

The fund now expects global growth to fall below three per cent this year, and to remain at close to three per cent for the next half a decade – its lowest medium-term prediction since the 1990s.

Close to 90 per cent of the world's advanced economies will experience slowing growth this year, while Asia's emerging markets are expected to see a substantial rise in economic output – with India and China predicted to account for half of all growth, she said.

Low-income countries are expected to suffer a double shock from higher borrowing costs and a decline in demand for their exports, which Georgieva said could fuel poverty and hunger to increase.

Updated growth projections published in the IMF's World Economic Outlook on Tuesday will provide a broader look at how different countries are coping, with additional publications to detail fiscal and financial challenges to the global economy.

## Tackling inflation remains a priority

This year's spring meeting will be held against the backdrop of high inflation and ongoing concerns about the health of the



IMF chief Kristalina Georgieva poses for a portrait during an interview at Meridian House in Washington, DC (AFP)

banking sector following the dramatic collapse of Silicon Valley Bank.

Georgieva told AFP last week that central banks should continue battling high inflation through interest-rate hikes, despite concerns that it could further inflame the banking sector.

"We don't envisage, at this point, central banks stepping back from fighting inflation," she said during an interview on Thursday.

"Central banks still have to prioritize fighting inflation and then supporting, through different instruments, financial stability," she said.

Ahead of the spring meetings, the IMF and World Bank also called on wealthier countries to help plug a \$1.6-billion hole in a

concessional lending facility for low-income countries that was heavily-used during the Covid-19 pandemic.

Many low-income countries are now facing mounting debt burdens due in part to the higher interest-rate environment.

## World Bank reforms

The spring meeting also provides an opportunity to make progress on an ambitious US-backed agenda to reform the World Bank so it is better-prepared to tackle long-term issues like climate change.

US Treasury Secretary Janet Yellen told AFP in an interview that she expects member states will agree to update the World Bank's mission statement to include "building resilience against

climate change, pandemics, and conflict and fragility," to its core goals. Yellen said she also expects an agreement to "significantly" stretch the World Bank's financial capacity, which "could result in an additional \$50 billion in extra lending capacity over the next decade."

The changes will likely fall to the bank's next president to implement, with current World Bank president David Malpass due to step down early from a tenure marked by concerns over his position on climate change.

Malpass is widely expected to be replaced by US-backed former Mastercard chief executive officer Ajay Banga, who was the only person nominated for the position.

AFP

# Tesla to build megapack battery plant in Shanghai

Shanghai, China – Tesla will build a new facility in Shanghai to make its Megapack batteries, Chinese state media reported.

The factory, which will have an initial capacity of 10,000 Megapack units per year, is expected to "start production in the second quarter of 2024", according to the Xinhua News Agency.

The US electric car maker says its Megapacks are intended to store energy and stabilise supply for power grids, with each unit able to store more than 3 megawatt-hours of power.

The plant will be Tesla's second factory in the Chinese city after its massive Shanghai Gigafactory, which broke ground in 2019.

Lu Yu, a local official, said the new battery factory was expected to create an "industrial cluster" worth more than US\$14bn, according to Xinhua.

The announcement comes after Tesla chief Elon Musk pre-



sented a vague but ambitious plan to investors to turbocharge growth.

Tesla has hit its stride after years of losses, scoring an impressive string of earnings records as it has added factories and ramped up production.

The company has also acted as a major catalyst for a revolution in transportation, with much of the automobile sector's innovation efforts moving away from the internal combustion engine towards EVs.

Even with that success, Musk has fallen short of some of his outsized goals.

Tesla's lowest-priced vehicle, the Model 3, begins at US\$43,000 in the United States – too pricey for many consumers for a vehicle that had been pitched at the mass market.

Musk has also missed his own deadlines for a fully autonomous vehicle, with Tesla driver-assistance technology spurring US regulatory probes.

Musk's ties to China have also raised eyebrows in Washington, with US President Joe Biden saying in November the executive's links to foreign countries were "worthy" of scrutiny.

AFP

# Samsung expects first quarter profit to plunge 95%

Seoul, South Korea – Samsung Electronics said it expected first-quarter operating profits to plunge more than 95 per cent on-year to a 14-year low, as memory chip sales were hampered by a global downturn.

Weak demand and steep profit fall also led the tech titan to announce it will scale back memory chip production in a "meaningful" manner.

The firm said in a regulatory filing that January-March operating profits were expected to drop 95.7 per cent to 600bn won (US\$455mn), their lowest level since the first quarter of 2009.

The anticipated drop in profits was because of "continuing weak demand for IT products that have aggravated the performances of all sectors", Samsung said in the statement.

"We are cutting memory chips production to a meaningful level," it added, saying the company had "stockpiled enough supplies of certain memory chips products to meet changing market demand down the road".

But it said it will continue investments in infrastructure as well as research and development in anticipation that "solid demand (for memory chips) is expected over the long run".



The decision to cut chip output sent Samsung's shares up more than four percent Friday on hopes prices will bounce back down the line.

Rival SK Hynix jumped more than six percent.

Samsung did flat in the statement "solid sales of the new Galaxy S23 series" from the smartphone division, said analyst Han Dong-hee of SK Securities in a report.

"But with the memory division swinging to the loss, it is inevitable for the operating profit to be at the breakeven point level."

Samsung is the world's largest smartphone maker and the flagship subsidiary of Samsung Group, by far the largest of the family controlled conglomerates that dominate business in Asia's fourth-largest economy.

Korean chipmakers – led by Samsung – have enjoyed record profits in recent years as prices for their products soared, but the global economic slowdown has dealt a blow to memory sales.

The recent drop in profits has not deterred Samsung from making bold investments – in March, it unveiled plans to contribute US\$227bn over the next two decades to building the world's largest chip centre in Yongin, south of Seoul.

The plan is part of the South Korean government's drive to invest heavily in six key technologies, including chips, displays and batteries – all areas where the country's tech giants are already well-established.

Samsung is expected to release its final earnings report at the end of this month.

AFP

# Global air travel soars 55% in February

Ankara, Turkey – World air traffic posted a 55.5 per cent year-on-year growth in February, despite lingering uncertainty over the global economic outlook, according to the International Air Transport Association (IATA).

Air traffic – measured in revenue passenger kilometers, or RPKs – was up to 84.9 per cent of its pre-pandemic level, or 15.1

per cent lower than February 2019.

"Despite the uncertain economic signals, demand for air travel continues to be strong across the globe and particularly in the Asia-Pacific region," Willie Walsh, IATA's director general, said in a statement this week.

He stressed that the gap with the pre-pandemic period figure is narrowing every passing month.

While all regions had higher figures compared to last year, Asia-Pacific registered the strongest annual hike of 105.4 per cent in February.

International traffic soared 89.7 per cent from the previous year, with RPKs reaching 77.5 per cent of the February 2019 level.

Domestic air traffic increased 25.2 per cent, nearly catching up

to the pre-pandemic levels.

Separate IATA data showed global demand for air cargo, measured in cargo ton-kilometers, fell 7.5% compared to February 2022, but was 2.9 per cent higher than pre-pandemic levels.

Capacity – measured in available cargo ton-kilometers – was up 8.6 per cent compared to February last year.

Anadolu Agency

# Japan, land of hybrid car, takes slowly to electric vehicles

Tokyo, Japan – Atsushi Ikeda loves his car so much that he founded a club for Tesla owners, but his embrace of an electric vehicle makes him something of an outlier in Japan.

As markets from China to the United States race to put more EVs on their roads, the pedal is nowhere near the metal yet in Japan, where the hybrid still reigns supreme.

Last year, 59,000 new EVs were sold in Japan, a record and a three-fold annual increase, but still less than two percent of sales of all cars in the country in 2022. It's a situation that might seem counterintuitive, given Japan's auto industry -- which employs eight percent of the country's workforce, and accounts for a quarter of all its exports -- pioneered hybrid and electric cars.

But experts say the popularity of hybrids has actually hindered uptake of EVs, with

Japanese automakers in no hurry to abandon existing line-ups.

The scepticism is no secret, and the former chief of Toyota, the world's top-selling car-maker, regularly questioned the growing focus on electric.

"I think Toyota didn't want the trend to tilt towards plug-in hybrids and electric vehicles because of their focus on hybrids and also their significant investment," said Kenichiro Wada, president of the Japan Electrification Research Institute, who helped develop early EVs at Mitsubishi Motors in the 2000s.

He compared the company to a top-ranking sumo wrestler, eager to "maintain the status quo for as long as possible".

When Ikeda went looking for a car that was "affordable, safe, with no pollutants", he quickly turned to Tesla.

"I like high-performance



Atsushi Ikeda, founder of a Japanese club for Tesla owners, is pictured as he checks his phone while charging his Tesla Model S at a charging station in Tokyo (AFP)

cars," he told AFP, describing the few Japanese options on the market when he bought in 2016

as small and unattractive. There are now government incentives for people to go electric, but

Ikeda says "charging infrastructure is too weak in Japan", blaming "heavy regulations".

## Zero-emission targets

The situation in Japan is increasingly inconsistent with priorities elsewhere.

EVs made up 20 per cent of new cars sold in China last year, around 15 per cent in western Europe and 5.3 per cent in the United States, according to a PwC study.

Ironically, EVs have a long history in Japan, with Mitsubishi Motors unveiling its i-MiEV in 2009, and Nissan its Leaf model a year later.

At the time though, the models were expensive because of their batteries and considered impractical given the lack of a nationwide charging network.

Hybrids looked like a better bet, and have proved enduringly popular, making up more than 40 percent of sales in Japan last year.

Government and industry efforts have also been sidetracked by a drive to develop hydrogen-

powered vehicles -- a sector that has grown much slower than electric.

The European Union, Britain and several US states want all new cars sold to be zero-emission by 2035.

Japan's goal however includes hybrids and hydrogen-powered fuel cell vehicles by the same year.

Despite the obstacles, there are some signs of change, spurred in part by more demanding EV targets in overseas markets.

If they cannot "react quickly" to these new demands, "some Japanese carmakers could disappear", said auto analyst Koji Endo, of SBI Securities.

Japanese firms have begun rolling out more ambitious EV targets, even as foreign automakers try to establish a foothold for their EVs in the country.

AFP

# OETC prepares for summer by mobilising its teams

Oman Electricity Transmission Company (OETC), a member of Nama Group, is dedicated to providing safe, reliable and economic electricity transmission services within the rapid urban development and growth in all governorates of the Sultanate. OETC has prioritized the availability, quality, and safety of electricity to meet the growing demand.

OETC started by collaborating with stakeholders who impact the network, including those involved in electricity generation and distribution. OETC's technical departments also co-ordinated to fully prepare their teams.

In preparation for the summer season, Sultan al Rawahi, General Manager of Load Dispatch Center (LDC), highlighted that OETC aims to enhance the efficiency of the electrical network. After each summer, OETC studies the peak of electrical loads and strengthens its stations based on the data collected.

This helps keep pace with the increase in population growth by developing plans to introduce new stations and strengthen the network in all governorates to accommodate the annual demand for safe, reliable, and efficient electricity.



cient electricity.

Rawahi added that OETC has teams working around the clock to address any network emergencies, providing necessary equipment and tools such as spare parts or auxiliary devices in the event of unexpected breakdowns.

Sultan al Rawahi confirmed

that the Load Dispatch Centre annually organises a technical workshop invites all relevant parties and presents to them the most important summer challenges and the required readiness from each party, internally or externally.

It is worth mentioning that OETC is the only company re-

sponsible for the transmission and control of electricity in the northern sultanate's network, and also in the governorates of Dhofar and Musandam, where electricity is transferred from production stations to distributed load centers in all governorates of the sultanate, and the transmission network operates

at a voltage of 132 kV and above, to cover most of the governorates of the sultanate, whether in the north or in the south.

In addition, OETC manages the interconnection lines between the Sultanate and the Gulf interconnection network with a voltage of 220 kV.



## Mercedes-Benz Oman announces limited-time offers for its certified pre-owned vehicles

Mercedes-Benz Oman announces exclusive limited-time offers for its latest Certified Pre-Owned Vehicles until June 30, a release said.

The vehicles include a range of sedans, coupes and SUVs that have been carefully inspected, road-tested and detailed by Mercedes-Benz factory-trained technicians.

Certified Pre-Owned Mercedes-Benz vehicles undergo one of the most demanding certification processes in the industry. The well-trained technicians put each Pre-Owned vehicle through a rigorous 150-point inspection process - including thorough engine and fluid checks and on-road driving evaluations. And all maintenance is performed using Genuine Mercedes-Benz Parts.

Commenting on the latest offers, Scott Shears, General Manager - Passenger Cars at Mercedes-Benz Oman, said, "At Mercedes-Benz Oman, we guarantee all vehicles meet the highest safety standards. And this gives our customers peace of mind knowing that their Certified Pre-Owned vehicle is in

excellent condition."

Mercedes-Benz Certified Pre-Owned vehicle owners are entitled to many benefits, such as an unlimited-mileage warranty of one year (option to extend up to two years), 24/7 roadside assistance (for selected vehicles), and a history of all services performed. There are also a number of service packages available.

The limited-time offer includes a selection of luxury vehicles, with prices ranging from RO17,845 to RO56,695, including Value Added Tax.

The range of Certified Pre-Owned vehicles includes the A 200 in Polar White with leather in two-tone Classic Red and Black; the C 200 in Mojave Silver Metallic with leather in two-tone Power Red and Black; the GLB 250 4MATIC in Mountain Grey with leather in two-tone Classic Red and Black; the Mercedes-AMG GT 43 in Polar White with Exclusive Napa leather in two-tone Red Pepper and Black; as well as the S 450 4MATIC in Designo Diamond Bright White with Macchiatto Beige and Magma Grey leather.

# Ooredoo extended support to third edition of Tawasul football tournament as main sponsor

Giving young people across Oman the perfect opportunity to focus on their health and talent, Ooredoo was the main sponsor of the third edition of the Tawasul Ramadan Football Tournament for actors, social media influencers and people working in the media sector, a release stated.

The tournament, which drew to a close recently, witnessed participation of eight teams fighting for the title. The exciting final was held at the Middle East College's Student Hub.

Before the grand finale took place, a friendly was held between a team from Ooredoo against a team of local footballing legends and famous social influencers.

The dream team had none other than Ali al Habsi, Hassan al Mudhadar, Sultan al Tuqi, and Imad al Hosni to name but a few former national team stars, as well as key influencers.



The event attracted hundreds of football fans, while Mohammed bin Sulaimn al Kindy, Governor of North Batinah,

served as the guest of honour. The finals were attended by other high-profile individuals including Bassam al Ibrahim, Chief Execu-

tive Officer of Ooredoo, as well as the company's Chief Commercial Officer, Ahmed Diwan.

Committed to supporting the

youth and connecting communities across Oman, Ooredoo is passionate about uniting people through football.

## Oman Air inks agreement with Muscat Duty Free

Oman Air has signed a new agreement for members of its frequent flyer programme, Sindbad, to use their Miles to shop at Muscat Duty Free's online store.

With over a thousand lifestyle products ranging from cutting-edge gadgets to confectionary, luxury fragrances and accessories, and easy pick-up on the way through Muscat International Airport, it's the perfect excuse for members to treat themselves or even gift someone they love.

Mundher al Shaikhani, acting vice president - Marketing, at

Oman Air, said, "We're thrilled to have partnerships with some of the best and most popular lifestyle brands... As Sindbad continues to evolve, we are finding new and unique ways to make their travel more rewarding every time they fly."

Renat Rozpravka, Chief Executive Officer of Muscat Duty Free, added, "We seek to further enhance the world-class offering in Oman, focusing on delivering high-quality products and an enjoyable shopping experience for passengers travelling through Muscat International Airport."

# Amouage opens its first café on top of a cliff in Jabal Akhdar

Known worldwide for its commitment to crafting unique and uncompromising scents, Amouage, the high perfumery house from Oman, has ventured into the culinary world by partnering with Alila Jabal Akhdar to open a pop-up cliff-side café.

Created and conceived for visitors during Ramadan and Eid-al-Fitr, customers can break their fast and experience an upscale, Amouage-inspired and traditional iftar menu at the first-of-its-kind café.

The menu reflects savoir-faire and craftsmanship and includes sharing dishes, local gourmet food, desserts and beverages, while taking inspiration from the House's luxury perfumery line and key ingredients, such as rose, frankincense and saffron.

Renaud Salmon, Chief Creative Officer at Amouage said, "The intention behind the

Amouage Café is to offer a breathtaking fine dining experience in Jabal Akhdar. A next level multi-sensory experience at over a thousand meters high, on a cliff, leaving a lasting memory surrounded by the majestic beauty of nature."

He added, "Visitors of the Amouage Café can also explore, experience and buy our perfume creations and learn more about the history of the House and the many ways in which it is connected to Oman, its birthplace."

The Amouage Café is located on the Jabal Deck terrace by the edge of the cliff at the five-star Alila Jabal Akhdar hotel and resort, which is nestled within Oman's spectacular Hajar mountains.

Jabal Akhdar mountains is also where Oman's rare rock rose has been cultivated according to ancient traditions while

this Queen of all roses is among the ingredients that lie at the very heart of Amouage's perfumery line.

At the café, attention to detail and key ingredients extends not only to the location but also to the food and beverages that all have an upscale, traditional, and yet signature twist. The list of mocktails are also named after some of Amouage's most iconic perfume creations.

Crafted by a world-class culinary team, the new Amouage Café experience is RO45 per person, exclusive of taxes, and offers savory and sweet bites to break the fast, including a selection of starters, soups, sharing platters, main courses and desserts.

Amouage Café at Alila Jabal Akhdar will remain open until the last day of Eid-al-Fitr 2023, from 6.30pm until 9pm during Ramadan and Eid-al-Fitr.



# Bank Muscat extends support to Fak Kurba to resolve 211 humanitarian cases

In line with its pioneering role in Corporate Social Responsibility and community service, Bank Muscat, the leading financial service provider in the sultanate, has announced its support for the Fak Kurba initiative, organised by the Omani Lawyers Association in coordination with the Ministry of Social Development and the Council of Administrative Affairs of the Judiciary.

Bank Muscat is keen to extend its support to this important initiative so as to contribute in reuniting citizens with their families on the occasion of Eid al Fitr. For this year, the bank supported 211 citizens who were convicted for failing to clear financial obligations.

Bank Muscat is participating for the 6th consecutive year to support the Fak Kurba initiative,

which works under the motto, 'Because we believe that people deserve a second chance'.

The bank has helped secure the release of 1,297 cases till date. The Fak Kurba initiative is implemented through the voluntary efforts of the Omani Lawyers Association.

The initiative has contributed to resolving many cases and succeeded in bringing joy and happiness to many Omani families.

It aims to enhance awareness of the importance of community bonding and it is working since its start to transform this initiative into a sustainable project that runs throughout the year.

Dr Muhammad bin Ibrahim al Zadjali, the supervisor of Fak Kurba, expressed his happiness to start the 10th edition of the Fak Kurba initiative for this year,



which was launched recently under the patronage of H E Sayyed Mohammed bin Sultan al Busaidi, Chairman for the Supreme Judicial Council.

He expressed his happiness as well for the continuous sup-

port Bank Muscat has extended to this initiative.

"The bank has contributed this year to resolve 211 cases. The support of individuals and institutions is an essential pillar for the continuity of this noble

initiative," Dr Zadjali informed.

"This cooperation confirms the values of solidarity and cooperation to help those in need and relieve their distress. I would like to extend my appreciation to all contributors, who proved their

eagerness to participate in this cause year after year."

Hamza Abbas al Ajmi, deputy general manager - Credit, Bank Muscat, expressed his gratitude to the Omani Lawyers Association and all others involved with the project. "Bank Muscat pays great attention to participating and implementing different CSR initiatives. The Fak Kurba initiative is an important programme that extends help to reunite many citizens around the Sultanate with their families during the Holy Month," Ajmi pointed out. "We are pleased to participate in Fak Kurba for the 6th consecutive year. The bank has helped 1,297 cases till date and it will continue supporting such initiatives and programmes, for the greater good of the community."

Ajmi put on record Bank Mus-

cat's pride in being a leading institution in the field of social responsibility in Oman.

"We will continue to support the community in different endeavours. We wish all success to this initiative and the Omani Lawyers Association."

Enhancing community partnership and cooperation is an essential step that Bank Muscat has been working to achieve for the past four decades as part of its aim to establish a culture of Corporate Social Responsibility.

The bank focuses on different fields including the economy, education, social development, environment and sports through its initiatives and programmes. The bank is also keen to enhance cooperation with various associations and institutions that focus supporting the community.

# Bank Nizwa hosts 2nd session of 'Nibras' programme in Muscat

Bank Nizwa, the leading Islamic bank in Oman, successfully held the second edition of its Nibras Programme at Rozna Restaurant in Muscat.

The event featured Nasser bin Khamis bin Ali al Jashmi, Secretary General of the Ministry of Finance and Supervisor of the National Programme for Fiscal Balance as the chief guest.

The evening was initiated by Shaikh Khalid al Khalili, Chairman of Bank Nizwa, with the aim of engaging with the bank's key stakeholders and positioning Bank Nizwa as a pioneer in Islamic banking. This unique initiative provided a platform for Bank Nizwa to showcase its innovative products and services, whilst also allowing participants to engage with senior executives and experts in the field of Islamic finance.

The panel discussion, chaired by Bank Nizwa's Chairman and featuring the chief guest, was a truly thought-provoking conversation. The conversation was particularly enriched by the insights shared by His Excellency, who spoke candidly about his own career and experience in the banking sector in Oman.

The challenges he faced during his academic and professional journey were also



addressed, adding depth and nuance to the discussion. The conversation also delved into the guest's current position and how he manages it.

To gain a better understanding of his journey, the discussion looked into his childhood memories and characteristics. Furthermore, the panelists focused on Oman's financial balance plan, which is to redirect the financial surplus towards paying off the financial deficit and revitalising various economic sectors.

They emphasised the importance of economic diversification and the strategies developed by Oman to promote financial growth and direct it towards sustainable development.

Additionally, the national programme for financial sustainability and the development of the financial sector were also addressed during the conversation, highlighting the initiative's main focuses, paths and potentials as well as the phases and timeline adopted.

Following the panel discussion, Sheikh Khalid al Khalili, the Chairman of the Board of Directors of Bank Nizwa, stated, "Bank Nizwa is regarded as one of the prominent financial institutions in the sector, and we are deeply committed to engaging in the dialogue of significant financial matters that dominate the field."

"As the global economy continues to evolve, we recognise

that there is an increasing demand for ethical and sustainable financial solutions. Islamic finance, which emphasises principles such as social justice, fairness and transparency, is well-positioned to meet this demand.

"Bank Nizwa is committed to customer-centricity and innovation and seeks to set the benchmark for Islamic banking in Oman. By promoting monetary practices that adhere to Islamic morals and transparency, the bank aims to foster a culture of financial inclusion.

"We will continue driving innovation and growth in the Islamic finance industry and 'Nibras' is just one of the many initiatives we have undertaken to showcase our leadership in this field.

"We are honoured to have had the opportunity to host such a successful event and look forward to continuing our engagement with our stakeholders to create a better future for all," he added.

Bank Nizwa, being the first Islamic bank in Oman, has a long-standing commitment to spreading awareness about Islamic finance and its numerous benefits to people across the Sultanate. The bank regularly

conducts knowledge sessions to increase understanding and clarity about Shari'ah-compliant financial services and products, with the goal of empowering attendees to make informed financial decisions.

Additionally, the bank hosts an array of events annually, ranging from wealth management events to the Islamic Finance Knowledge Programme, catering to a diverse audience to expand its professional network and maintain relationships.

As Oman's economy continues to grow, fueled by a thriving entrepreneurial ecosystem that creates job opportunities and fosters innovation, it is crucial for Islamic banks like Bank Nizwa to remain at the forefront by undertaking thought leadership ventures.

Such initiatives are aimed at providing social and economic benefits to members of the community, contributing to the socio-economic development of Oman through integrated efforts between various institutions.

Bank Nizwa seeks to enhance the Islamic economy by staying ahead of the curve and empowering individuals and businesses to make informed financial decisions.



## 38th issue of Scientific Insights published

The Ministry of Higher Education, Research and Innovation (MoHERI) published the 38th issue of *Scientific Insights* magazine, which explored a number of different reports and articles in the fields of science and innovation.

In the latest issues of *Scientific Insights*, the Cover Story explored the role hydrogen in sustainable development with a number of officials and researchers.

It covered the different types of hydrogen, the future of hydrogen, the impact of research and innovation in the hydrogen sector, and the transformation of the Sultanate of Oman into a green hydrogen economy.

The magazine also explored

the cybersecurity challenges in the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) countries, the classifications of scientists around the world, a smart Omani application for early detection of breast cancer, and an Omani invention of a transparent coating of plant genetic resources that prevents heat from entering inside cars, in addition to many other reports and articles in the science and innovation fields.

Scientific Insights is a scientific journal published every three months by the Ministry of Higher Education, Research and Innovation in both Arabic and English, and the magazine can be accessed online through the ministry's official social media channels.

## OABC organises iftar artistically



The Oman American Business Center recently hosted their annual Iftar, welcoming 180 members and special guests.

Also in attendance were 20 artists from Adatee Hayatee, an Omani group of talented artists with various disabilities. OABC members had the opportunity to bid on 36 beautiful pieces of art done by these dynamic artists in

a silent auction.

The evening started with an introduction from OABC's CEO Heather R Redling, followed by special remarks by OABC's Vice President Fouad Eid and US Embassy Muscat's Chargé d'Affaires, Junaid Munir.

Wafa al Harthi was the evening's keynote speaker, an award-winning artist and illus-

trator with an incredible story of perseverance and dedication.

The Oman American Business Center (OABC) is the official affiliate for the US Chamber of Commerce in Oman and is considered the largest and most active business networking group in the country. Membership is open to all sectors and nationalities.

## Ooredoo launches global Ramadan initiatives

Ooredoo Group companies across global footprint have launched a wide range of activities and initiatives for the holy month of Ramadan, all aimed at supporting the communities in which the Group operates.

Sheikh Mohammed bin Abdullah al Thani, Deputy Group Chief Executive Officer, at Ooredoo Group, said, "Our annual Ramadan CSR campaigns are an integral element of our CSR strategy across our companies, and one of the key ways in which we seek opportunities to offer support.

"As a leading techco with the capacity to upgrade our customers' worlds, we take our responsibility to our communities very seriously, and are committed to supporting the communities we serve and making a positive impact in their lives through the many valuable initiatives successfully rolled out across our network."



Ooredoo Qatar, the group's base country, is conducting its annual programme of initiatives under the theme 'Connecting and Giving'. As part of this year's campaign, Ooredoo has partnered with local NGOs and will be hosting a wide range of events in Msheireb Downtown, Lusail Shooting Range and Lusail Sports Club stadiums.

Ooredoo Palestine's campaign is operating under the

theme 'Spreading Happiness in the Holy Month' and features a number of initiatives aimed at spreading prosperity, including providing support for three orphanages in Jerusalem, the West Bank and Gaza; participation in Ramadan exhibitions; and participation in community activities such as distribution of dates and water at iftar.

A partnership with the Algerian Red Crescent sees Ooredoo

Algeria undertaking several projects including the opening of 'El Hilal' restaurants to enable those fasting to break their fast, and the distribution of food essentials to those in need throughout several provinces in the country.

Indosat Ooredoo Hutchison's Ramadan campaign is under the theme 'One Togetherness' and features a wide range of activities and initiatives.

Ooredoo Maldives is utilising its digital capabilities to make it easy for customers to fulfil their religious obligations in Ramadan. It also partnered with Maldives Islamic Affairs to host community iftars every Friday during Ramadan.

Ooredoo Tunisia is holding the second edition of its sporting, social and cultural event, the 'Ooredoo Night Run'.

Ooredoo Oman organised its 19th 'Goodwill Journey' to make a difference during the Holy Month.

# China says simulated ‘sealing off’ Taiwan

Dozens of planes practised an aerial blockade, while the US deployed a destroyer into South China Sea

**Pingtang, China** - China simulated ‘sealing off’ Taiwan during a third day of wargames around the self-ruled island on Monday, as the United States deployed a naval destroyer into Beijing-claimed waters in a show of force.

China launched the exercises in response to Taiwan President Tsai Ing-wen’s meeting with US House Speaker Kevin McCarthy last week, an encounter it had warned would provoke a furious response.

After two days of exercises that included simulating targeted strikes on Taiwan and encirclement of the island, the Chinese military said the wargames also included ‘sealing’ it off, and a state media report said dozens of planes had practised an ‘aerial blockade’.

One of China’s two aircraft carriers - the *Shandong* - also ‘participated in today’s exercise’, the military added.

The United States, which had repeatedly called for China to show restraint, on Monday sent the USS *Milius* guided-missile destroyer through contested parts of the South China Sea.

“This freedom of navigation operation upheld the rights, freedoms, and lawful uses of the sea,”



A fighter plane taking off from the Chinese aircraft carrier *Shandong* in Pacific Ocean waters, south of Okinawa prefecture on Sunday (AFP)

the US Navy said in a statement. It added that the vessel had passed near the Spratly Islands - an archipelago claimed by China,

immediately triggered more anger from China, which said the vessel had ‘illegally intruded’ into its territorial waters.

supporting it for the tensions.

“If we want to protect peace and stability in the Taiwan Strait we must firmly oppose any form of Taiwan independence separatism,” foreign ministry spokesman Wang Wenbin warned. Meanwhile, Japan said on Monday it had scrambled jets in recent days as Chinese planes landed and took off from the *Shandong*.

told AFP he simply did not want war. We, common people, just want to live peaceful and stable lives,” Lin said, adding that Taiwan’s military was no match for China’s.

“If any war happens, now that their missiles are so advanced, there’s no way our side could resist. This side will be levelled to the ground.”

China and Taiwan split at the end of a civil war in 1949. China views democratic Taiwan as part of its territory and has vowed to take it one day.

The United States has been deliberately ambiguous on

whether it would defend Taiwan militarily.

But for decades it has sold weapons to Taipei to help ensure its self-defence, and offered political support.

Tsai met McCarthy outside Los Angeles on her way home from a visit with two allied countries in Central America.

In August last year, China deployed warships, missiles and fighter jets around Taiwan in its largest show of force in years following a trip to the island by McCarthy’s predecessor, Nancy Pelosi.

Tsai meeting with McCarthy in the United States rather than in Taiwan, was viewed as a compromise that would underscore support for the island but avoid inflaming tensions with Beijing.

But China had repeatedly warned against any meeting, and began the latest wargames soon after Tsai returned to Taiwan.

“These operations serve as a stern warning against the collusion between separatist forces seeking ‘Taiwan independence’ and external forces and against their provocative activities,” Shi Yin, a PLA spokesman, said about ‘Joint Sword’.

Tsai responded to the drills by

pledging to work with ‘the US and other like-minded countries’ in the face of ‘continued authoritarian expansionism’.

## Live-fire exercises

The exercises on Monday were set to include live-fire drills off the rocky coast of China’s Fujian province, about 80km south of the Matsu islands and 190km from Taipei.

The local maritime authority said the exercises would be held between 7am and 8pm around Pingtan, a southeastern island that is China’s nearest point to Taiwan. AFP journalists on Pingtan did not see any immediate military activity in an offshore area on Monday.

A video published on Monday to the Chinese Eastern Theatre Command’s official WeChat account showed a pilot saying he had ‘arrived near the northern part of Taiwan Island’, with missiles ‘locked into place’.

In another video with dramatic orchestral accompaniment, an officer’s piercing whistle sends military personnel running into position as a simulated barrage on Taiwan unfolds on screen.

AFP

## Third body found in French building collapse as rescue efforts continue

**Marseille, France** - Searchers on Monday recovered a third body from the rubble of a collapsed apartment in France’s Marseille, as rescue workers raced against the clock to find five people still missing.

More than 24 hours after a suspected explosion at the building, where residents reporting a strong smell of gas, dozens of searchers and dogs worked among the debris as a fire still smouldered underneath.

But the mayor of the Mediterranean port city said rescue workers were still optimistic they could find survivors.

“There is still hope, and as long as there is hope, we will not stop,” said mayor Benoit Payan, at the scene of the disaster.

Lionel Mathieu, the commander of the city’s fire department, said his team was waging a ‘battle against time’.

“The fire has not reached all parts, so there is hope that some people are still alive,” he said.



A firefighter looks on as an excavator moves rubble at ‘rue Tivoli’ a day after a building collapsed in the street, in Marseille, on Monday (AFP)

The fire at the site has made it hard for sniffer dogs to detect more victims or survivors.

On Sunday, before the discovery of the bodies, local prosecutor Dominique Laurens told reporters that eight people ‘were not responding to phone calls’.

Five people in a neighbouring building sustained minor injuries in the blast and collapse, which occurred around 12:40am on

Sunday (2240 GMT Saturday).

The cause of the explosion is still to be determined, but investigators are looking at the possibility it was the result of a gas leak.

Saveria Mosnier, who lives on a street near the site in the La Plaine neighbourhood, said she was sleeping when a ‘huge blast... shook the room’.

“I was shocked awake as if I

had been dreaming,” she told AFP.

“We very quickly smelled a strong gas odour that hung around, we could still smell it this morning.”

Deputy mayor Yannick Ohanessian told journalists at the scene that several witnesses had reported ‘a suspicious smell of gas’. Two buildings next to the destroyed property were severely damaged, with one collapsing later in the day without injuring any rescuers.

Almost 200 residents were evacuated from surrounding buildings.

The city provided some emergency shelter, and the local community also sprang into action to help coordinate housing and aid for them.

“A lot of families in the neighbourhood are afraid,” said Arnaud Dupleix, the president of a parents’ association at the nearby Tivoli elementary school.

AFP

## Philippines rules out ‘offensive actions’ on bases US can use

**Manila, Philippines** - The Philippines will not allow ‘any offensive actions’ from the bases it has opened to US troops, President Ferdinand Marcos said on Monday.

Manila last week announced the locations of four more military bases it is allowing the US military to use on top of the five agreed on under the 2014 Enhanced Defense Cooperation Agreement, known as EDCA.

The deal allows US troops to rotate through and store defence equipment and supplies. China warned last week the expanded military deal could endanger regional peace, and accused Washington of a ‘zero-sum mentality’.

The four additional bases include sites near the hotly disputed South China Sea and another not far from Taiwan.

Marcos said China’s reaction over the expanded military



A US soldier receiving a patch from his Philippine counterpart during the joint exercise in the Philippines’ Nueva Ecija province on March 31 (AFP)

deal was ‘not surprising’, but assured them the Philippines is only shoring up its territorial defence.

“We will not allow our bases to be used for any offensive actions. This is only aimed at helping the Philippines whenever we need help,” Marcos told reporters.

“If no one is attacking us, they need not worry because

we will not fight them.”

The pact stalled under former president Rodrigo Duterte, who favoured closer ties with China.

But Marcos, who succeeded Duterte in June, has adopted a more US-friendly foreign policy and sought to accelerate the implementation of the EDCA.

AFP

## Fifth victim found after French Alps avalanche

**Lyon, France** - A fifth person has been found dead and one is still missing after an avalanche near Mont Blanc in southeastern France, the local prosecutor’s office said on Monday.

One of the country’s deadliest avalanches in years swept down the Armanette glacier on Sunday in the Alps, killing two mountain guides and engulfing around 15 people.

After the discovery of four victims on Sunday, prosecutor Karline Bouisset said the body of a 39-year-old woman had been found and ‘a sixth person is still missing’.

One person suffered slight injuries in the avalanche while eight others also swept up were unharmed, the prefecture said.

The avalanche covered an area of 1,600 metres (nearly one mile) by 500 metres.

AFP

## Ukraine conflict on Lula’s agenda in delayed visit to China

**Brasília, Brazil** - Brazil’s leftist President Luiz Inacio Lula da Silva will meet Chinese counterpart Xi Jinping in Beijing this week to discuss trade and Ukraine mediation, having overcome the pneumonia that forced him to postpone the trip.

Lula, 77, also hopes to reclaim Brazil’s role on the geopolitical stage following a period of isolation under his far-right predecessor, Jair Bolsonaro.

Expected to arrive in China on Tuesday, Lula, who was originally due to visit the Asian powerhouse from March 25-30, will meet Xi on Friday.

They ‘will talk about the war in Ukraine’, Foreign Minister Mauro Vieira told reporters, with Lula hoping to promote his proposal for mediated talks to end Russia’s invasion of the country. By the time Lula returns home, a group of mediator countries will have been ‘created’, said Vieira.

Lula, who has been president of Brazil twice before, is keen to position the South American



This file photo shows Chinese Vice-President Xi Jinping shaking hands with Brazilian President Luiz Inacio Lula da Silva, during a meeting in Brasilia on February 19, 2009 (AFP)

giant as a go-between, as he did in his second term, which ended in 2010, during nuclear discussions between Iran and the United States.

However, his diplomatic stock took a hit last year when he came

under fire for claiming that Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky was ‘as responsible’ for the war as his Russian counterpart, Vladimir Putin. He has also refused to join Western nations in sending weapons to Ukraine to

help in its defense.

And on Thursday, while Lula said that ‘Putin cannot keep Ukrainian territory’, he qualified that statement by insisting that Zelensky ‘cannot want everything’. He also suggested that

Kyiv renounce its claim to Crimea, annexed by Moscow in 2014 - words that did not endear Lula to authorities in Ukraine.

“There is no legal, political or moral reason why Ukraine should give up even a centimetre

ritorial integrity in accordance with the UN Charter,” he said.

China, for its part, has proposed a 12-step resolution to the conflict, based on a ceasefire and dialogue, a plan Xi discussed with Putin during a visit to Moscow last month.

‘Those are basic conditions’ for peace, said Vieira, judging Beijing’s proposal as ‘very positive’. Ukraine’s Western allies have heavily criticised Xi’s approach as tacitly supporting Moscow’s invasion.

In a joint statement with French president Emmanuel Macron, who was visiting Beijing, Xi pledged on Friday ‘to support any effort in favour of a return to peace in Ukraine’.

But Moscow has rejected any ‘political solution’ to the conflict.

And after Lula’s chief adviser Celso Amorim met Putin in Russia last month, the Brazilian diplomat told CNN it would be an ‘exaggeration’ to say that the doors were open for a negotiated peace.

AFP

**Expected to arrive in China on Tuesday, Lula, who was originally due to visit the Asian powerhouse from March 25-30, will meet Xi on Friday**

of its land,” Foreign Ministry spokesman Oleg Nikolenko said on Twitter.

“Any mediation efforts to restore peace must be based on respect for the sovereignty and full restoration of Ukraine’s ter-

# Israeli forces kill Palestinian teen in West Bank raid, says ministry

Jericho, Palestinian Territories - Israeli forces killed a Palestinian teenager and injured two other people in a raid on a refugee camp near Jericho in the occupied West Bank on Monday, the Palestinian health ministry said.

It comes amid surging violence in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict in recent days, coinciding with the Muslim fasting month of Ramadan, Jewish Passover and Christian Easter.

Mohammed Fayeze Balhan, 15, was killed after being shot 'with live occupation (Israeli) bullets in the head, chest and abdomen', the ministry said on Monday. An earlier statement said two people were injured by 'occupation (Israeli) bullets'.

The Israeli army meanwhile said its forces were operating in the Aqabat Jaber camp near Jericho, without providing further details.

Separately, the Palestinian Red Crescent said it had transferred one person to hospital with a bullet wound to the head.

Clashes erupted when the army entered the camp and surrounded several houses, according to Palestinian news agency Wafa.

A Palestinian security official told AFP that five individuals were arrested during the raid.

The operation came one day after the burial of two British-Israeli women killed in a shooting attack in the Jordan Valley, where Jericho is also located.

The two sisters, aged 16 and 20, were killed on Friday when their car came under fire in the



An Israeli soldier fires teargas at Palestinian protesters during a protest in the village of Beita, south of Nablus in the occupied West Bank, on Monday, against a march by settlers to the nearby Israeli outpost of Eviatar (AFP)

**Mohammed Fayeze Balhan, 15, was killed after being shot with live occupation (Israeli) bullets in the head, chest and abdomen**

West Bank, where they lived in a Jewish settlement.

Israel has occupied the West Bank since the 1967 Six-Day War.

### Surging violence

On Wednesday, Israeli police stormed the prayer hall of Al-Aqsa mosque, Islam's third-holiest site, in a pre-dawn raid aimed at dislodging 'law-breaking youths and masked agitators' they said had barricaded themselves inside.

The next day, more than 30 rockets were fired from Lebanese soil into Israel, which the Israeli army blamed on Palestinian groups, saying it was most likely Hamas, which rules the Gaza Strip.

Israel then bombarded Gaza and southern Lebanon, targeting

infrastructures that it said belonged to Hamas.

Late Friday an Italian tourist was killed and seven others wounded in a suspected car-rammage attack in Tel Aviv.

The Israeli army also said it launched strikes on targets in Syria Sunday morning, after rockets fired from there landed in the Israeli-occupied Golan Heights.

Israel's defence minister, Yoav Gallant, warned that day that 'any attacker who thinks they may elude the IDF during the holy days, is gravely mistaken', using the acronym for the Israeli army.

"Anyone who attempts even the slightest harm, will be brought to justice," he added.

The rising tension has bought widespread concern and calls for calm from across the region.

The Aqabat Jaber camp has been the site of several deadly Israeli raids since the start of the year, notably in January when Israel said it killed five people, in a single operation.

This year, the conflict has claimed the lives of at least 94 Palestinians, 18 Israelis, one Ukrainian and one Italian.



Kuwaiti MPs attend a session in Kuwait City, on April 4 (AFP)

# Kuwait gets its 7th government in three years

Kuwait City, Kuwait - Kuwait announced a new government on Sunday, its seventh in three years of deep political crisis between parliament and the executive.

Despite being the only Gulf Arab state to have an elected government, Kuwait remains mired in political turmoil that has stalled reforms in one of the world's largest producers of crude oil.

The previous government resigned in January, just three months after first taking office.

Kuwait adopted a parliamentary system in 1962, but repeated political crises have caused state paralysis.

"A decree from the Emir has been issued (to validate) the formation of the new government led by Sheikh Ahmad Nawaf al-Ahmad Al-Sabah," the government said on its Twitter account on Sunday.

The son of the country's 85-year-old ruler, this will be his fourth government since August.

The key portfolios of foreign affairs, held by Salem al-Sabah, and oil, run by Bader al-Mulla, remain unchanged in the 14-member cabinet. Women hold the posts of public works and social affairs.

Despite having large oil reserves, Kuwait's hospitals and educational services are in decay because of the ceaseless political squabbling.

The country suffers from constant stand-offs between elected lawmakers and cabinets installed by the ruling Al-Sabah family, which maintains a strong grip over political life.

Prime Minister Ahmad Nawaf al-Ahmad Al-Sabah tendered the previous government's resignation in January as lawmakers planned to question ministers over management of state finances and a debt relief bill that would grant a debt amnesty for Kuwaiti citizens.

In March, however, the constitutional court nullified the results of legislative elections held last year and ruled to reinstate the previous parliament instead.

## Russia jails 2 for protesting against military mobilisation

Moscow, Russia - A Russian court on Monday sentenced two former officials to 19 years in prison for throwing Molotov cocktails at a town hall in protest against military mobilisation, Russian news agencies reported.

The sentence is the heaviest punishment handed out so far for this type of attack, of which there have been dozens since Russia began its military campaign in Ukraine.

In September last year, Russian President Vladimir Putin announced a partial mo-

bilisation to prop up forces in Ukraine, leading to a mass exodus of men from Russia to avoid being sent to the frontlines. A former National Guard official, Roman Nasriyev, and Alexei Nuriyev, who worked at the emergencies ministry, were convicted for an attack on October 22 in the small town of Bakal in the southern Chelyabinsk region.

A military court found they carried out an 'act of terrorism' as part of an organised group, state news agency TASS said.

# Italy's Berlusconi steadily improving, doctors say

Rome, Italy - Italian former prime minister Silvio Berlusconi, who has been in hospital for leukaemia and a lung infection, is getting progressively better, doctors said on Monday, expressing 'cautious optimism' over his condition.

Berlusconi, a billionaire and larger-than-life figure in Italian politics, has been in intensive care at Milan's San Raffaele Hospital since Wednesday.

"The last 48 hours have seen a progressive and steady improvement in monitored organ function," his doctors said in a bulletin Monday.

Treatment was producing 'the expected results, allowing us to



Pier Silvio Berlusconi, son of Silvio Berlusconi, arrives at San Raffaele hospital in Milan, where his father is hospitalised, on April 8 (AFP)

express cautious optimism'. He remains in the intensive care unit, they said. Doctors revealed on Thursday

that Berlusconi was being treated for a lung infection and was suffering from chronic myelomonocytic leukaemia (CMML), a rare type of blood cancer affecting mainly older adults.

The three-time premier - who currently serves as a senator and leader of the Forza Italia far-right party - has been in declining health in recent years, marked by frequent hospital stays. He is rarely seen in public.

Berlusconi's latest hospital admission came just a week after being discharged after a four-day stay.

Called 'the immortal' for his longevity in politics, the self-made media mogul elicits either fervid admiration or disdain from Italians, his many business and political successes having gone hand-in-hand with decades-long legal battles.

In September 2020, Berlusconi was in hospital for 11 days for COVID-related pneumonia, complications from which caused a series of hospital stays during 2021.

The one-time cruise ship crooner had open-heart surgery in 2016 and an operation on his intestine three years later.

Forza Italia is a junior member of Prime Minister Giorgia Meloni's right-wing coalition government.

# Sunak, Biden to mark 25 years since North Irish peace deal

London, UK - Northern Ireland on Monday marks the 25th anniversary of its landmark 1998 peace accords, with the UK province mired in political dysfunction and security concerns that threaten to overshadow the milestone.

No major public events are planned for the day itself, but British Prime Minister Rishi Sunak and US President Joe Biden will arrive on Tuesday to launch several days of high-profile commemorations.

The territory has been reshaped since pro-UK unionist and pro-Irish nationalist leaders struck an unlikely peace deal on April 10, 1998 - Easter Good Friday - following marathon negotiations. Brokered by Washington and ratified by governments in London and Dublin, the Good Friday Agreement largely ended three decades of devastating sectarian conflict in Northern Ireland and intermittent terrorist attacks on mainland Britain.

The so-called 'Troubles' killed more than 3,500 people. They pitted the province's majority Protestant unionists, wanting continued British rule, against Catholic republicans demanding equal rights and reunification with the Republic of Ireland.

But a quarter-century on, Northern Ireland is struggling to consolidate the gains of its hard-earned peace, with post-Brexit trade arrangements prompting political instability, and violence by dissident republicans on the rise.

"While it is time to reflect on the solid progress we have made together, we must also recommit to redoubling our efforts on the promise made in 1998 and the agreements that followed," Sunak said in a statement marking Monday's anniversary.

"As we look forward, we will celebrate those who took difficult decisions, accepted compromise, and showed leadership."



United States flags flutter in the breeze above shops in Ballina town centre as the town prepares to welcome President Joe Biden to the town in Co Mayo, the his ancestral home (AFP)

### 'Potential'

Sunak will attend a commemorative conference at Queen's University in the capital, Belfast, and host a gala dinner to honour the anniversary, his Downing Street office has said.

Biden will 'mark the tremendous progress since the signing of the Belfast/Good Friday Agreement,' White House Press Secretary Karine Jean-Pierre told reporters ahead of his visit.

It will 'underscore the readi-

ness of the United States to support Northern Ireland's vast economic potential to the benefit of all communities', she added.

The Irish-American president will then travel south on Wednesday to Ireland, spending

three days in his ancestral homeland, in part tracing his family history. While there he will 'deliver an address to celebrate the deep, historic ties' the country shares with the US, according to the White House.

His visit will be closely scrutinised for any signs of pressure on Sunak to end the logjam in the North Ireland legislature caused by the Conservative Party's loyalist allies.

The following week, Northern Ireland will continue its peace accord commemorations with a three-day conference starting April 17 hosted by former US secretary of state Hillary Clinton.

Her husband, Bill Clinton, played a pivotal role in securing the 1998 deal as US president from 1993 to 2001. The upcoming events will celebrate Northern Ireland's subsequent transformation, but focus will undoubtedly be drawn to its present woes.

In the years after 1998, Northern Irish paramilitaries

were disarmed, its militarised border dismantled and British troops departed. However, the peace process is perhaps more precarious now than it has been at any other point since then.

Power-sharing institutions created by the accords have been paralysed for more than a year over bitter disagreements on post-Brexit trade.

Despite Britain and the European Union agreeing in February to overhaul the arrangements, that new deal - the Windsor Framework - is yet to win the support of the pro-UK Democratic Unionist Party (DUP).

It has boycotted Northern Ireland's devolved government for 14 months over the issue, crippling the assembly, and is showing no sign of returning to power-sharing. Irish Prime Minister Leo Varadkar said Sunday that Dublin, London and Belfast were 'working towards having the institutions up and running in the next few months'.

# Trade talks with UK not halted, says India

India dismissed British media reports stating that it halted talks over attack on Indian high commission

New Delhi, India - India dismissed as 'baseless' reports in British media stating that it had halted talks for a free trade agreement with the United Kingdom over the attack on the Indian high commission in London last month, government sources said on Monday.

London-based newspaper *The Times* in its April 10 edition citing senior British government sources reported that the Indian government has 'disengaged' from trade talks and made it clear that there would be no progress 'without a public condemnation of the Khalistan movement'. An Indian government source has 'denied' the UK publication's report and termed it as 'baseless'.

The India-UK Free Trade Agreement talks were launched on June 17, 2022,

"Indians don't want to talk about trade until they get a very public demonstration of the condemnation of Khalistan extremism in the UK," *The Times* quoted a British official statement saying.

On March 19 this year, protesters holding Khalistan banners staged a demonstration outside the High Commission in London. One of the protesters climbed up its balcony and pulled down the national flag of India. The protest was being held to denounce the recent police action in Punjab.

British High Commissioner Alex Ellis condemned the attack on the Indian High Commission



This file photo shows London Metropolitan Police standing guard outside the Indian high commission, in London, UK on March 21 (AFP)

London-based newspaper *The Times*, in its April 10 edition citing senior British government sources reported that the Indian government has 'disengaged' from trade talks

in the United Kingdom as 'disgraceful acts' and called it totally unacceptable. New Delhi also had sum-

moned the senior-most British diplomat UK diplomat, deputy high commissioner Christina Scott, to lodge a protest.

"It is expected that the UK Government would take immediate steps to identify, arrest and prosecute each one of those involved in today's incident, and put in place stringent measures to prevent the recurrence of such incidents," according to an official press release by the Ministry of External Affairs (MEA).

MEA spokesperson Arindam Bagchi had recently said that

India expects to see more action, than just assurance and hoped that foreign governments will act against and prosecute those involved in the incident.

"On the issues of security, whenever we feel there is an issue relating to the security of our missions abroad, high commissions and embassies, this issue is taken up. Whenever we have concerns where we feel that there will be some activities

that may harm our interests, we do take it up," he said while answering a media query on the vandalism.

Khalistan supporters also allegedly attacked Indian Consulate in San Francisco (SFO). Videos of supporters breaking the doors and barging into the office surfaced on social media.

Though visuals of the vandalism at the San Francisco consulate have been doing the

rounds of social media, the incident is yet to be confirmed by Indian officials.

While the visuals confirmed that the incident happened at the consulate, the date could not be ascertained.

Visuals shared online show a sizeable mob brandishing Khalistan flags and mounted on wooden poles, using them to smash glass doors and windows of the consulate building. Raising pro-Khalistan slogans, they broke through makeshift security barriers raised by the city police and installed two Khalistani flags inside the premises.

Meanwhile, the FTA, which aims to double bilateral trade between Indian and the UK by the year 2030 was expected to conclude by Diwali last year but the deal did not go through because the meeting was postponed.

Union Commerce and Industry Minister Piyush Goyal had in December 2022 met with UK Secretary of State for International Trade Kemi Badenoch in New Delhi to discuss India-UK FTA negotiations. Both Ministers had reaffirmed their commitment to the negotiations which would unlock the full potential of boosting jobs, investments and exports between the two countries.

India and UK concluded the eighth round of negotiations for a trade deal on March 31.

The last round of India-UK dialogue over the FTA had concluded on February 10.

ANI

## Calls for new probe as SA remembers slain anti-apartheid hero

Johannesburg, South Africa - South Africa on Monday commemorated slain anti-apartheid activist Chris Hani amid calls for a fresh probe into the murder that almost plunged the country into a race war 30 years ago.

Hani, a hugely popular figure and the then leader of the South African Communist Party (SACP), was gunned down by Janusz Walus, a white supremacist, on April 10, 1993.

Three decades on, many South Africans harbour questions about the killing, suspecting Walus and his accomplice did not act alone.

Conspiracy theories, involving anyone from the secret services to the ANC, abound.

"I don't have closure,"

Hani's widow, Limpho, told a memorial ceremony attended by SACP party leaders and foreign dignitaries on Monday. "That is why I am wearing black today. Until such time the truth comes out I am in mourning for life."

Last week, the SACP called for a fresh inquest into the murder, with a petition hoping to collect 30,000 signatures. "There were many... factors that were not properly investigated," SACP's leader, Solly Mapaila told AFP on Wednesday. "We need to know the truth."

Aged 50, Hani was shot dead in the driveway of his home in eastern Johannesburg in front of his 15-year-old daughter.

AFP

## Bangladeshi cleric among four held for stoning woman accused of affair

Dhaka, Bangladesh - An Islamic cleric and three village elders in Bangladesh were arrested on charges they ordered a woman to be caned and stoned after she was accused of an extramarital affair, police said on Monday.

Police said Hamida Sultana was 'caned 82 strokes' and 'stoned 80 times' with small brick pieces after an imam issued a religious decree, or fatwa, punishing her last week.

Sultana told AFP she was 'a victim of terrible injustice'.

"I can't express in language what they did to me," the 30-year-old said. The Muslim South Asian nation of 170mn people has a secular legal system and applying sharia law in criminal cases is illegal.

The fatwa triggered an outcry, with feminist groups and rights activists staging protests to demand the perpetrators' prosecution. "They acted like medieval people," Fauzia Moslem, the



Members of Women's Council of Bangladesh protest after a woman was ordered for caning and stoning following a religious decree, or fatwa, issued by an imam in Dhaka on Monday (AFP)

president of the country's largest woman's group, told AFP.

Police inspector Zakir Hossain said officers arrested four people, including the imam of the mosque in Habiganj in the north-east, after Sultana filed a criminal case on April 7 against 17 people.

"The village council ordered the caning and stoning in the

name of sharia law after she was accused of an extramarital affair," Hossain said. The village elders 'said it will absolve her from her sin and will redeem her honour'.

Sultana's husband Anwar Mia, who works in the Gulf country of Oman, returned after the incident, he added. "He also seeks justice for what happened to his

wife."

Decades ago, village councils in rural Bangladesh commonly used sharia to punish Muslim women accused of adultery.

In a 2011 ruling, Bangladesh's Supreme Court allowed fatwas to be issued but prohibited their enforcement.

AFP

## Philippines: 72 dead from drowning this month

Manila, Philippines - At least 72 people have died by drowning in the Philippines since the start of the month, police said on Monday, attributing the unusually high figure in part to millions hitting the beach for Holy Week.

The holiday is traditionally marked in the Catholic-majority nation by millions of people leaving the capital Manila to spend time with family.

Philippine National Police (PNP) spokeswoman Colonel Jean Fajardo said the high toll was partly due to 'revenge travel' as the country emerges from years of mobility restrictions to contain the coronavirus.

"People got a bit excited to go to beaches and resorts," Fajardo told AFP.

A breakdown of the fatalities was not immediately available, but Fajardo said the victims included children who were left unattended by guardians while swimming, as well as people who hit beaches while drunk.

Fajardo called the death toll 'unusual' and higher than past years.

"Resorts and beaches were packed. This also contributed to the number of drowning incidents," she added.

The World Health Organization has said that drowning is the third leading cause of unintentional injury deaths across the world, with an estimated 236,000 fatalities every year.

AFP

## South Korean families' grief compounded by online abuse

Seoul, South Korea - First, he lost his child in Seoul's Halloween crowd crush. Then came a torrent of online abuse, upending his family's once-private life and making him an internet-wide figure of mockery.

In October, Lee Jong-chul's 24-year-old son was among more than 150 people killed in the disaster in the city's popular Itaewon district. Grief-stricken, he spoke to media, pleading with South Korean politicians to take action.

Then, as has happened after incidents from the Sandy Hook mass shooting to the disappearance of British woman Nicola Bulley, an internet mob formed: Lee and his family's personal tragedy was mocked, belittled

and misrepresented online.

From photos doctored to show Lee laughing after being offered compensation to attempts to link him to North Korea - two viral posts debunked by AFP digital verification reporters - he and his family have become a virtual punching bag on Korean-language forums.

"It's unspeakable what some of these comments say," said Lee's daughter Ga-young, adding that the sheer volume of abuse was 'overwhelming', with any news report on them attracting hundreds of comments, almost exclusively negative, in minutes.

At their apartment in Goyang city just outside Seoul, the family's late son Lee Ji-han's bedroom has not been touched since



Cho Mi-eun and her husband Lee Jong-chul, whose 24-year-old son Lee Ji-han was killed during a Halloween crowd crush in Itaewon (AFP)

he last walked out on October 29, 2022. His clothes still hang on the door where he left them, the book he was reading lies on his bed.

"That day changed our lives forever," his mother Cho Mi-eun told AFP, saying she still listens to old voicemail messages just to hear her son's voice.

"Every night Ji-han's father goes out to wait for him, for hours sometimes. He says he's going out to smoke, but we know he's waiting for Ji-han," she said, adding that her husband had made multiple suicide attempts since the disaster and the online attacks.

The families of the Itaewon victims want answers about why authorities failed to prevent the catastrophe despite clear warning signs, Lee Jong-min, who lost his 29-year-old daughter, told AFP.

Some of the victims' families formed a group 'to understand what really happened and to hold those officials responsible', said the bereaved father, who was visibly tired and unshaven.

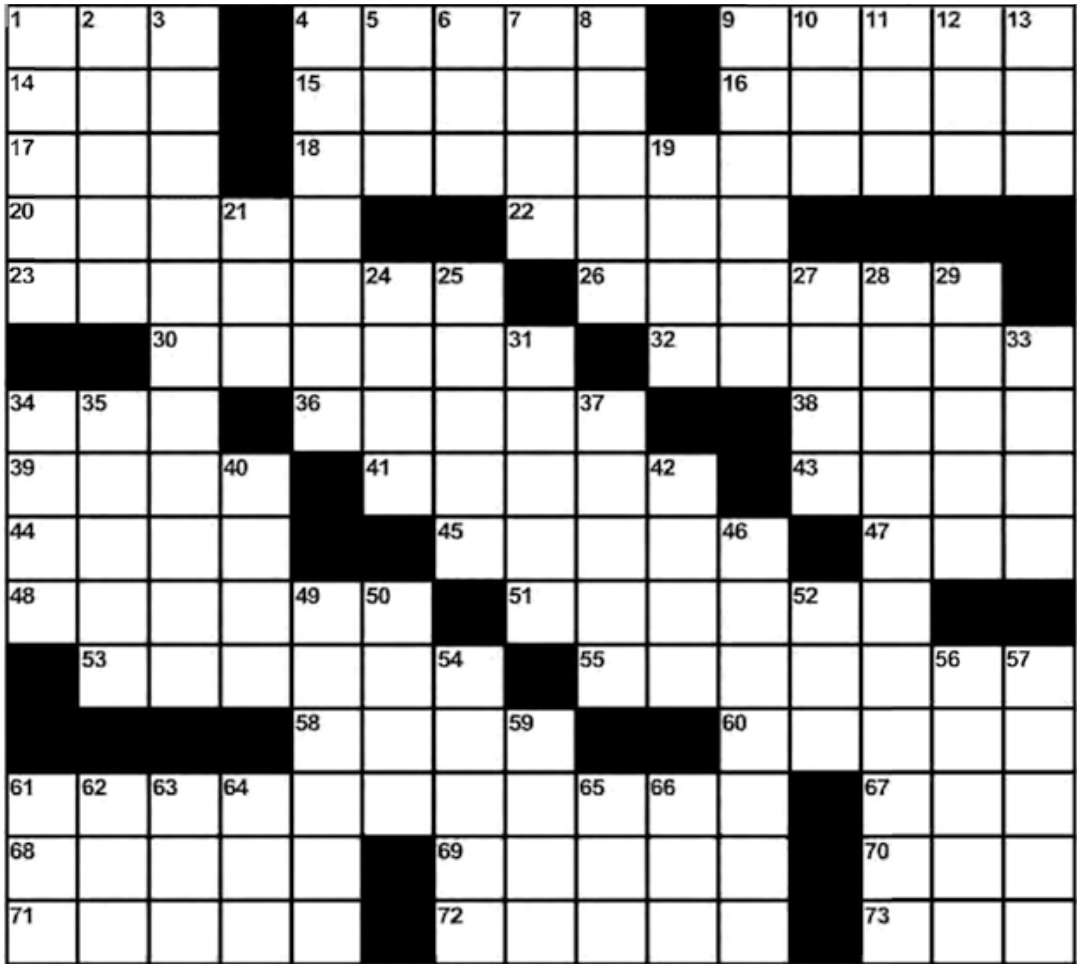
But the internet interpreted their efforts to organise as an attack on the government, with right-wing trolls launching a co-ordinated counter-attack, accusing the families of being profiteers out for compensation, or anti-government forces.

Experts say the government is worried the disaster could hurt the administration. Seoul's last conservative government lost power in part due to its mishandling of the 2014 Sewol ferry disaster, which killed more than 300.

As a result, some ruling-party lawmakers criticised the victims' families during parliamentary sessions, which created 'open season on us' online, Lee said.

AFP

DAILY CROSSWORD



ACROSS

- 1) Navigational aid
- 4) "FoxTrot" cartoonist Bill
- 9) Bondservant
- 14) 90-degree letter
- 15) Achier
- 16) Place for the highborn?
- 17) Vast grassy area
- 18) Celebrator to the extreme
- 20) Banana cluster
- 22) Mall lure
- 23) Opposites do it
- 26) Renounce, as a family member
- 30) More replete
- 32) Channel of the sea
- 34) Daisy of "Li'l Abner"
- 36) LaGuardia lineup
- 38) Beginning of a famous conclusion
- 39) Yemeni city
- 41) Dry riverbeds
- 43) Sign of things to come
- 44) Took a horse
- 45) Roomy four-door auto
- 47) Fury
- 48) Bring into existence
- 51) Come back
- 53) Book corrections
- 55) Thrill to pieces

- 58) Rural hotels
  - 60) One running easily
  - 61) Handy exterminators
  - 67) Word before "carte" or "mode"
  - 68) 1970 World's Fair site in Japan
  - 69) Frightfully strange
  - 70) Matchstick-removing game
  - 71) Astronomer Hubble
  - 72) Won every game of a series
  - 73) Mariner's "Mayday!"
- DOWN**
- 1) Type of toast
  - 2) Alaska Peninsula native
  - 3) Time-saver for a gardener
  - 4) Driveway material
  - 5) Bygone bird of New Zealand
  - 6) Make a goof
  - 7) Butterfly snarers
  - 8) Tree nymph in Greek myth
  - 9) Most mentally fit
  - 10) Souvenir from Hawaii
  - 11) What you have up your sleeve
  - 12) By way of

- 13) "Electric" fish
- 19) Boxers Muhammad and Laila, for two
- 21) Grand\_ (wine bottle words)
- 24) Hammerhead part
- 25) Things are bigger there
- 27) Nabisco item
- 28) Some utensils for chefs
- 29) African river or country
- 31) Revere at midnight, historically
- 33) Voicemail sound
- 34) Antony of antiquity
- 35) Like a whole lot
- 37) Ending with "blind" or "broad"
- 40) Able to get to quickly
- 42) Fill beyond full
- 46) Group with no members, in math
- 49) South China Sea island
- 50) Volcano in Italy
- 52) Christ the Redeemer city, briefly
- 54) Opening poker stakes
- 56) Prefix meaning "sun"
- 57) Mine vehicles
- 59) Hearty soup
- 61) Enemy

**NOTE PAD**



YOUR DAILY HOROSCOPE

**ARIES** MARCH 21-APRIL 19

Get involved today. Don't shy away from putting yourself in the spotlight or ruffling a few feathers. If you see someone getting undeserved abuse, defend them! Don't just turn a blind eye and tell yourself that it's none of your business. Of course, you can't be a volunteer police officer and dive into dangerous situations, but there are going to be a couple of situations where someone needs to be put in their place. Give mean people a piece of your mind.

**LEO** JULY 23-AUGUST 22

You might have to sacrifice some of your privacy today, but it will be for a very good cause. Your presence is in high demand, and you'll need to step out into the social spotlight and do a little networking. So if you're feeling more introverted than usual, this heightened social profile could be a little challenging. But if you're feeling outgoing right now, this will be a day for you to truly shine! It's time to get those names and numbers that can make your life more rewarding.

**SAGITTARIUS** NOVEMBER 22-DECEMBER 21

You don't always have to cover all the details about something or someone before you decide to get involved. It's nice to have a little mystery to solve, and you're in a very inquisitive frame of mind right now. There's nothing you'll enjoy more than a puzzle now. Let someone else waste all their time figuring out all the ins and outs of things. You have too much life to live! This type of enthusiasm for life will draw people to you and create strong new connections.



TEST YOUR KNOWLEDGE

**TAURUS** APRIL 20-MAY 20

It's sad but true that romance requires some hard work from time to time. And there is quite a bit of work required for your romantic life right now. If you are in a relationship, you'll need to give your partner a little bit more than you have been giving lately. Compromise will bring the two of you closer. And if you're not in a relationship, today it's time to work a little harder at making that connection with the person you've been talking to a lot. Kick it up a notch.

**VIRGO** AUGUST 23-SEPTEMBER 22

You might have a lot of false starts today. Your concentration isn't terribly strong. After a few minutes of working on or reading one thing, you could become very distracted and start working on something else. In order to avoid wasting your energy, do yourself a favor and get organized! Plan your day loosely. You don't have to schedule it down to the minute. Commit to doing one thing at a time, and avoid the illusion of productivity that multitasking creates.

**CAPRICORN** DECEMBER 22-JANUARY 19

You have all the energy you need to get stuff done today, so don't worry about tiring out. You can get a lot achieved if you organize your time and delegate little tasks to other people. There are people who are not only ready but eager to help you accomplish a few things today, so why not let them? You're more admired than you realize, and you could serve as an important mentor in someone's life. Give them greater responsibilities and they'll rise to the occasion.

1. Who was on the English throne at the time of the "Gunpowder Plot" to blow up the House of Lords?
- A. James I
  - B. William I
  - C. King Canute
  - D. Harold I

**GEMINI** MAY 21-JUNE 21

You have got some juicy information to share and shouldn't be afraid to share it! You will have a fun day full of chatter, laughter, and silly conversations. This is a great day to hang out with friends if you can make it happen. There have been quite a few new developments in their lives and you should find out what's new with them. Be sure to update them on all your news too. You and your innermost circle are capable of creating a new reality for yourselves, at least while you're together.

**LIBRA** SEPTEMBER 23-OCTOBER 22

Listen to that nagging voice in your head today because it's not so much nagging you as it is giving you important warnings. It's in your best interests to listen to your intuition whenever it has something to say. After all, has it ever steered you wrong? Even if it doesn't seem logical, it is telling you what the right thing to do is. Turn off your critical thinking and tune in to your subconscious. Try deep breathing relaxation techniques to get you loosened up if you must.

**AQUARIUS** JANUARY 20-FEBRUARY 18

Everything must happen in its own time right now. You can't rush things even if you think it's for the best. Everyone has a different agenda, and you have to respect the fact that they aren't on the same time schedule as you. This rule applies to social engagements but even more so to career-related events or projects. Even if you're the big boss, you simply can't push people to deliver before they can. Learning to have patience will help you learn how to have accurate expectations.

2. According to the Guinness Book of World Records in 2010, what is the most watched TV series, ever?
- A. Bay Watch
  - B. Dallas
  - C. Star Trek
  - D. Coronation Street

**CANCER** JUNE 22-JULY 22

Today is a very good day for you to separate the good people in your life from the less than good people in your life. You have the time you need, and recent events have given you the information you need to make that distinction. Friendships aren't always meant to last for your entire life. The role you play in their life and the role they play in yours must be positive. When it stops being so, then the nature of the role must change, or the role must be recast.

**SCORPIO** OCTOBER 23-NOVEMBER 21

There is some serious acting going on around you right now. There are one or two people who look bright and cheerful on the outside but hide some deep, dark secrets inside. In fact, the happier someone appears, the more negative or dastardly they truly may be today. Be careful of the people who have the widest smiles, because they are the ones who have the negative agendas. Be cautious about getting involved with anyone new, especially in terms of financial commitments.

**PISCES** FEBRUARY 19-MARCH 20

Today, dip one of your toes into a potential new experience just to get a feel for what you may be in for. Jumping right into the deep end isn't advised! Do your due diligence first. Ask people who have done this before what they think. Listen with a critical ear, but don't be too critical. Their experience could never be exactly the same as yours, should you decide to do this. And they may have a vested interest in discouraging you. An evaluation could take a few days.

3. Before 1972, what was Sri Lanka known as?
- A. East Pakistan
  - B. Burma
  - C. Ceylon
  - D. Persia

Answers: 1.A 2.A 3.C

KIDS COLOURING



BOGGLER

|   |   |   |   |
|---|---|---|---|
| A | S | B | S |
| M | C | Y | D |
| G | E | L | R |
| N | U | T | O |

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

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

WORD BUILDER



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

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

SUDOKU EASY ANSWER

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

# ANFIELD HOODOO!

Leaders Arsenal show English Premier League title strain in nervy away draw against Liverpool

Liverpool, United Kingdom - Arsenal's failure to end their dismal run at Anfield by throwing away a 2-0 lead to draw 2-2 away to Liverpool on Sunday has opened the door for Manchester City to snatch the Premier League title away from the Gunners.

Mikel Arteta's men still lead by six points at the top of the table, but for the first time in nearly two months City have the destiny of the title back in their own hands.

City have nine league games remaining to Arsenal's eight and home advantage when the two

Arteta warned ahead of the game he expected to face a "jungle" of an atmosphere at a stadium where Arsenal have still not won in the league since their manager was patrolling the mid-field in 2012.

Yet for 35 minutes, the visitors showed why Liverpool's league position of eighth in the table does not lie.

Arsenal scored twice through Gabriel Martinelli and Gabriel Jesus and could have had more but for wayward finishing by Jesus and a fine save from Alisson Becker to deny Oleksandr

*Scored the first one, and continued to play the way we wanted. We scored the second one and that was a moment to kill the game. And yet, before half-time, we gave them hope*

MIKEL ARTETA

sides meet at the Etihad on April 26.

Since losing to City in mid-February, Arsenal have belied their relative lack of experience in a title tussle.

A run of seven consecutive league victories contained the mixture of late winners and routine wins sprinkled with dazzling football that champions are made of.

However, they finally came unstuck when put under the pressure of an Anfield crowd baying for blood after a difficult season for Liverpool.

Zinchenko.

"We started the game exceptionally well, dominated it, and took the game where we wanted," said Arteta.

"Scored the first one, and continued to play the way we wanted. We scored the second one and that was a moment to kill the game. And yet, before half-time, we gave them hope."

Mohamed Salah's strike just before the break flipped the momentum of the game and despite the Egyptian then missing a penalty early in the second-half, Arsenal were incapable of turn-



Arsenal's Leandro Trossard (C) reacts after failing to connect with a cross from Bukayo Saka during their English Premier League match at Anfield on Sunday (AFP)

ing the tide. Wave upon wave of Liverpool attack after the break was finally rewarded when Roberto Firmino headed in three minutes from time.

The drama did not end there as Aaron Ramsdale produced miracles in the Arsenal goal just to salvage a point.

"We gave every single ball away, especially in very dangerous areas when you allow open spaces in big transition moments against the best team in the world doing that," added Arteta.

"When that happens, it's chaos. It's a lot of balls in your box, it's difficult to get out of those situations and then you have to suffer."

Arsenal's second-half retreat does not bode well for more tough tests to come on the road in the coming weeks.

As well as their trip to City, Arsenal also have to travel to third-placed Newcastle.

Avoid defeat at the Etihad in 17 days' time and the title is very much still Arsenal's to lose.

But on a day when Liverpool's outside shot at a top-four finish was realistically killed off, City were the big winners.

AFP

## Bayern boss Tuchel threatens Man City's Champions League dream once more

Manchester, United Kingdom - Manchester City and Pep Guardiola have a Champions League score to settle against Thomas Tuchel, when the newly-appointed Bayern Munich boss visits the Etihad in Tuesday's quarter-final, first leg.

Tuchel emerged victorious as Chelsea manager in City's first, and so far only, run to the Champions League final in 2021.

That was also the closest Guardiola has come in 10 tries during spells at Barcelona, Bayern and City to land his third European Cup as a coach.

Chelsea's 1-0 win in front of largely empty Estadio do Dragao in Porto due to coronavirus restrictions two years ago was a case of the apprentice outshining the master. As a young coach Tuchel studied and admired Guardiola's dominant Barcelona side that won 14 trophies in four years from 2008 to 2012, including two Champions League titles.

Their paths then crossed dur-

ing Guardiola's three years in charge at Bayern, while Tuchel was coach of Mainz and then Borussia Dortmund.

Two football obsessives, the pair even talked long into the night at a Munich bar in 2014, using glasses and salt and pepper shakers to mimic formations.

"I was such a huge admirer of Pep when he was a player and then when he became a coach it



Bayern Munich coach Thomas Tuchel gestures from the sidelines during their Bundesliga match against Freiburg on Saturday (AFP)

was like learning on the job for me," said Tuchel prior to the 2021 Champions League final.

"I was an academy coach and then in the Bundesliga with Mainz, but I don't think I missed a game (of Guardiola's Barcelona) because there was so much to learn."

The respect is mutual. Guardiola described Tuchel last season as "one of the few managers I learn from to develop (into) a better manager myself."

Guardiola has tended to have the upper hand in clashes between the two.

Three Chelsea wins in the space of six weeks towards the end of the 2020/21 season are Tuchel's only victories in 10 meetings between the two to Guardiola's six.

But he won the most important one and his Champions League pedigree played a large part in Bayern's swoop to secure his services and sack Julian Nagelsmann.

## Benfica relying on 'extraordinary' Goncalo Ramos in Inter clash

Barcelona, Spain - A lot of responsibility lies at the feet of Benfica striker Goncalo Ramos, who is aiming to fire his side past Inter Milan and into the Champions League semi-finals for the first time since 1990.

The striker is growing used to the pressure, shooting into the global football consciousness during the World Cup in December when he was picked to start for Portugal ahead of Cristiano Ronaldo in the last 16 against Switzerland.

Ramos hit a hat-trick as his country thrashed their opponents 6-1, leaping into the lime-light having made his international debut just a few weeks earlier, in a friendly.

In March the striker dazzled against Club Brugge in the Champions League last 16 second leg, scoring a brace in the 5-1 win to guide Benfica into the quarter-finals for the second season running.

Inter's visit to Lisbon on Tuesday is an opportunity for the forward to put himself in the shop window, as many other young Benfica talents have done over the years.

The latest was midfielder Enzo Fernandez, who joined Chelsea in January for a stratospheric 121 million euros (\$133 million) fee after winning the World Cup with Argentina, following the likes of Joao Felix, Ruben Dias and Ederson.

AFP



Goncalo Ramos

### Liverpool's Robertson elbowed by assistant referee

Liverpool, United Kingdom - Liverpool left-back Andy Robertson was struck on the face by assistant referee Constantine Hatzidakis in a remarkable incident just after the half-time whistle of Sunday's Premier League clash with Arsenal.

The Scotland captain approached the linesman, who then thrust his elbow into Robertson's chin.

Robertson was shown a yellow card by referee Paul Tierney as he furiously protested.

Arsenal led 2-1 at half-time, but Liverpool rescued a 2-2 draw as Roberto Firmino's 87th-minute header dented the leaders' bid to win the title for the first time since 2004.

Hatzidakis now faces an investigation into his conduct after referees' governing body PGMOL said they would review the incident.

"PGMOL is aware of an incident involving assistant referee Constantine Hatzidakis and Liverpool defender Andrew Robertson at half-time during the Liverpool v Arsenal fixture at Anfield," the statement said.

"We will review the matter in full once the game has concluded."

Liverpool manager Jurgen Klopp confirmed that the officials had not reached out to him or Robertson to offer an apology.

"I didn't see it," said Klopp of the incident. "I heard the pictures speak for themselves."

*We will review the matter in full once the game has concluded*

PGMOL

## Villarreal's Baena reports attack to police, after alleged Valverde 'punch'

Madrid, Spain - Villarreal's Alex Baena will file a police complaint after being "attacked" following his team's win over Real Madrid, the club confirmed Sunday, with various Spanish media outlets reporting Los Blancos midfielder Fede Valverde punched him.

Baena was allegedly struck in the face by Uruguay international Valverde after the champions' 3-2 defeat in La Liga, with the Madrid player waiting for him by the Villarreal team bus.

"Alex Baena suffered an attack while he was going to the team bus after the game against



Real Madrid's Federico Valverde (L) vies with Villarreal's Alex Baena during their Spanish league match on Saturday (AFP)

Real Madrid at the Santiago Bernabeu," wrote Villarreal in a statement, without mentioning Valverde.

"In light of this situation, the player has decided to file the corresponding complaint against the attacker to the national police.

"Once more, Villarreal shows its rejection of any act of violence and believes firmly in the player's version of events, and will support him through this process."

Real Madrid and Villarreal did not respond to requests for comment from AFP.

# JABEUR CHAMPION

Tunisian  
downs  
Bencic to  
win WTA  
Charleston  
crown

Los Angeles, United States - Ons Jabeur defeated defending champion Belinda Bencic in straight sets to win the WTA Charleston Open clay court tournament on Sunday.

Jabeur, the world number five from Tunisia, avenged her defeat to Bencic in last year's final with a hard-fought 7-6 (8/6), 6-4 victory in just under two hours.

Switzerland's Bencic was forced to make a quick turnaround on Sunday, completing a 7-5, 7-6 (7/5) weather-disrupted semi-final win over Jessica Pegula before returning to face Jabeur in the final around 30 minutes later.

There was no immediate sign of weariness from the Swiss player as she started strongly to take a 5-3 lead in the opening set.

However, Jabeur held and then conjured a break to level at 5-5 before holding again for a 6-5 lead. Bencic was soon in trouble on her serve, but fought back brilliantly from 0-40 down to hold and force tie-break.

Again momentum swung back and forth, with Bencic holding two set points after opening up a 6-4 lead in the tie-break before Jabeur reeled off four



Ons Jabeur of Tunisia returns a shot to Belinda Bencic of Switzerland during the final of the Charleston Open on Sunday (AFP)

straight points to take the set.

Jabeur then raced into a 4-1 lead in the second set, and although Bencic responded well, Jabeur was soon serving for the match at 5-4 up.

Bencic squandered three break points that would have levelled the set at 5-5 before Jabeur eventually converted her second match point to seal the fourth title of her career.

## Carballes Baena wins Marrakesh title

Spain's Roberto Carballes Baena won a three-hour final against Frenchman Alexandre Muller in Marrakesh on Sunday to claim

his second ATP title.

Carballes Baena dropped the first set against his 126th-ranked opponent but rallied to earn a 4-6, 7-6 (7/3), 6-2 victory.

"I am so tired, but I am very,

very happy. It was a very, very tough match," Carballes Baena said in his on-court interview.

"I tried to fight every point. I don't know what to say. I am so happy."

The 30-year-old Carballes Baena is expected to enter the top 50 for the first time on Monday after beginning this week as world number 82.

AFP



Jon Rahm of Spain poses with the trophy during the Green Jacket Ceremony after winning the 2023 Masters Tournament at Augusta National Golf Club on Sunday (AFP)

## Rahm surges past Koepka to corner Masters glory

Augusta, United States - Jon Rahm was nearly in tears after winning an emotional triumph at the Masters on Sunday, what would have been the 66th birthday of his idol Seve Ballesteros.

Rahm overcame a four-stroke deficit at the start of a marathon 40-hole final day at Augusta National to defeat Americans Brooks Koepka and Phil Mickelson by four shots for his second major title, a victory that returns him to world number one.

"This one was for Seve," Rahm said. "He was up there helping, and help he did." The 28-year-old Spaniard said he felt bolstered by the spirit of the late Ballesteros, who won his second Masters title 40 years ago.

"For me to get it done on the 40th anniversary of his win, his birthday, on Easter Sunday, it's incredibly meaningful," Rahm said. Rahm achieved what he called a "true honor" in becoming the fourth Spaniard to grab the green jacket after Sergio Garcia, Jose Maria Olazabal and Ballesteros,

who died of brain cancer in 2011 at age 54.

"Rest in peace Seve," Rahm said to close his victory ceremony.

Rahm won the green jacket and took a record top prize of \$3.24 million from a record \$18 million purse.

*This one was for Seve. For me to get it done on the 40th anniversary of his win, his birthday, on Easter Sunday, it's incredibly meaningful*

JON RAHM

Olazabal greeted Rahm with an emotional embrace just off the 18th green moments after the triumph was complete.

"He said he hopes it's the first of many more," Rahm said. "We both mentioned something about Seve, and if he had given us 10 more seconds, I think we would have both ended up crying."

Rahm's methodical precision shotmaking down the bogey-free

back nine delivered the triumph, a contrast to his emotional mood after the victory.

"I might have looked calm, but I was definitely nervous out there," Rahm said. "I never panicked. I felt comfortable with my game. I never got frustrated. I never felt like anything was out of

control. But there was tension out there." Rahm rescued a poor shot off the 18th tee for a closing par in much the same manner Ballesteros was known for doing. "To finish it off the way I did -- an unusual par, very much a Seve par -- it was in a non-purposeful way a testament to him," Rahm said. "He was pulling for me."

AFP

## Top-seed Tiafoe gets the better of Etcheverry in Houston final

Los Angeles, United States - Frances Tiafoe defeated Thomas Etcheverry 7-6 (7/1), 7-6 (8/6) to win the ATP clay court title in Houston on a double-duty day in Texas.

The American, playing his first ATP tournament as the top seed, had to win twice on Sunday to secure the crown thanks to the weather delays earlier in the week.

After beating Gijs Brouwer 6-4, 6-1 in the semi-finals he said he was up for the challenge.

"I'm running on adrenaline," Tiafoe told the crowd after beating Brouwer. "I'm on a mission so



Frances Tiafoe

I'm happy."

By Sunday night it was mission accomplished as Tiafoe claimed his second ATP title and his first since 2018 in Delray Beach.

Since then he'd come up empty in four finals appearances. The soggy week meant Tiafoe in fact had to win four matches in two days, playing his first two of the week on Saturday.

He didn't drop a set and was broken just once -- when he served for the title against Etcheverry at 5-4 in the second set.

AFP

## Novak Djokovic 'motivated' to hit clay running on Monte Carlo return

Monte Carlo, Principality Of Monaco - Novak Djokovic says he is "motivated" to make a better than usual start to the clay-court season in Monte Carlo as he tunes up for a 23rd Grand Slam bid at the French Open.

The Serb is back on court after failing to get a waiver to enter the United States for last month's Indian Wells tournament and Miami Open due to his anti-Covid vaccination stance.

"I hope I will start well, because the last three tournaments in Monte Carlo I have not been very successful," the world number one said on Sunday.

"And I'm also motivated because I didn't play for the past month," added Djokovic, who is due to enter the Monte Carlo Masters fray in the second round against qualifiers American Mackenzie McDonald or Russian Ivan Gakhov.

A winner in 2013 and 2015,



Novak Djokovic

Djokovic will fancy his chances of going far in a tournament robbed of 11-time champion Rafael Nadal and Carlos Alcaraz due to injury.

Djokovic, who won this year's

Australian Open, is on nodding terms with every inch of clay in Monte Carlo, his local club.

"I know the club very well. I'm one of the players that lives in

Monaco and use this club as a training base.

### 'Pick and choose'

"It's a great feeling sleeping in your own bed on your own pillow and being able to have kind of a home feeling of playing in the tournament."

At 35 years of age Djokovic says he is more selective about his playing commitments these days.

"Things are not the same like they were 10 years ago in terms of the amount of vital energy that I have to play as many tournaments as the other younger guys. "So of course I do pick and choose where I want to peak and how I want to build my form and how I want to work around my schedule. There are certain events, in this case, of course, Grand Slams are the tournaments where I peak."

AFP



POORAN STUNNER HELPS LUCKNOW BEAT BANGALORE IN LAST-BALL THRILLER



Nicholas Pooran of Lucknow Super Giants plays a shot during his scintillating knock of 62 off 19 balls against Royal Challengers Bangalore on Monday. Pooran hit seven sixes and four fours to help Lucknow beat Bangalore and silence the crowd at the M Chinnaswamy Stadium. Bangalore were in the driving seat after making 212 for two thanks to fine fifties from their top three of Virat Kohli, Glenn Maxwell and Faf du Plessis when Pooran started his fireworks.

TODAYS MATCH

MATCH 16

6 PM



DELHI CAPITALS



MUMBAI INDIANS

ICC, Tendulkar praise special Rinku knock

Ahmedabad, India - Former cricketers and the sport's governing body were all praise for Rinku Singh after the uncapped India player blasted five sixes off the final five balls as Kolkata Knight Riders chased down 205 to stun champions Gujarat Titans in an IPL thriller on Sunday. "One felt Rashid's hat-trick was a game-changer but Rinku's power-hitting was something special," cricket icon Sachin Tendulkar wrote on Twitter. "Enjoyed the last few moments. This amazing game continues to teach us that it's not over till it's over."

The International Cricket Council (ICC) compared the knock to West Indies batsman Carlos Brathwaite's four sixes in the 20th over from Ben Stokes to snatch the final from England in the 2016 T20 World Cup. "Rinku Singh Carlos Brathwaite 'Remember the name!'" the ICC tweeted. The Kolkata chase was set up by a 40-ball 83 by impact player



Kolkata Knight Riders' Rinku Singh has become an instant sensation with his six hitting

Venkatesh Iyer, who put on a 100-run third-wicket stand with skipper Nitish Rana (45). "Tonight was another example that we will never give up as a team," Iyer said after the three-wicket win. "The wicket was quite good to bat and I was just trying to execute my plans."

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'Suryakumar a matchwinner'

Swashbuckling batsman is the kind of player who can win you a World Cup, says Ricky Ponting

Mumbai, India - Despite Suryakumar Yadav's recent lean form, former Australia captain Ricky Ponting believes India should back him going into the home 50-over World Cup later this year. In India's last ODI assignment, Suryakumar was dismissed for three consecutive golden ducks as Australia won the series 2-1 in India. But Ponting said that he is the kind of player who can "win you a World Cup". "Everyone around the world knows what Surya [Suryakumar] can do in white-ball cricket. They should stick with him, I feel," Ponting told the ICC Review. "Be-



Suryakumar Yadav of Mumbai Indians plays a shot as Chennai Super Kings' captain MS Dhoni watches during their Indian Premier League match at the Wankhede Stadium in Mumbai on Saturday (AFP)

cause he is I think the kind of player that can win you a World Cup. "He might be a little bit inconsistent but he's the sort of guy who in big moments can win you something," Ponting said. "A bit

like the late great Andrew Symonds did for Australia. "When you invest in these guys, you give them an opportunity, you give them a pretty clear direction and get some clarity around the role you want them to

play, they've got so much talent that they can single-handedly win you games. "That's definitely the way that I'd look at it for India. I wouldn't be playing it safe, I'd be going with match-winning players and

I think he's a match-winner," he said. Suryakumar, in 21 ODI innings, has scored 433 runs at an average of 24.05 with two half-centuries. Suryakumar's IPL campaign has also been unimpressive so far with the Mumbai Indians player making 16 and one in two innings so far. Ponting picked out the No. 5 slot as the best option for Suryakumar. "I think he was only batting at 5 anyway, and I wouldn't want him much lower than that, especially with Hardik [Pandya], [Ravindra] Jadeja and Axar [Patel] and all those guys there," Ponting said. "I'm a big believer in giving your best batsman as much time as you can in all formats of the game. "Because if you keep them down the order quite often, sometimes you don't get to use your best players and that's the last thing you want. So I think the No. 5 slot is perfect for him and he just needs to grow into that role."

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TRENDY TO WATCH

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It is very important that once a year we showcase that wearing a watch is trendy, and even something for the youngest generation which is not used to wearing watches

JEAN-FREDERIC DUFOUR

LUXURY WATCHMAKERS WOO GENERATION Z WITH SNAPCHAT AND BITCOIN

Luxury watchmakers are using Snapchat and bitcoin to woo Generation Z, unused to wearing something on the wrist, believing younger buyers could become a powerful driver of sales growth for top-end timepieces.

Millennials (born between 1980 and the late 1990s) and Generation Z (born between 1997 and 2010) are taking an early interest in luxury goods, according to a study by management consultants Bain & Company and the Italian luxury brands association Altgamma Foundation.

Their spending is expected to increase three times faster than that of other generations by 2030, it said.

At last week's Watches and Wonders trade fair in Geneva, where 48 brands such as Rolex, Cartier and Patek Philippe showed

off their latest creations, Swiss watchmakers were well aware of the trend.

"It is very important that once a year we showcase that wearing a watch is trendy, and even something for the youngest generation which is not used to wearing watches," Rolex chief executive Jean-Frederic Dufour said during the annual fair.

The sector needs to reach out to a generation 'used to seeing everything on a screen', he said.

On a stand dedicated to innovation, representatives from the Snapchat instant messaging app showed off an application that lets people try on watches virtually, via a smartphone or tablet.

It adapts to the user's wrist to try on, for example, Cartier's flagship models, and even allows them to customise the colours of Hublot watches.

In a nod to this generation, Hermes presented a collection with designs inspired by its silk scarves, including one representing a princess on horseback taking a selfie photo.

**Wealth transfer**

"The younger generation - contrary to popular belief - has more economic power than any generation that preceded them," said Jean-Philippe Bertschy, an analyst with Swiss investment managers Vontobel.

"They are earning more, saving more, and investing earlier and at a higher rate than previous generations."

An interesting yet still underestimated phenomenon is coming down the line, he added.

Millennials and Generation Z 'are

poised to be on the receiving end of a massive wealth transfer in the coming two decades, projected to total more than US\$80tn through 2045 for the US only', he said.

In the nearer term, however, this generation is stifled by soaring housing costs, with Morgan Stanley analysts noting that according to the US census, almost half of US young adults aged 18 to 29 still live with their parents - a level not seen since the 1940s.

"They simply have more disposable income to be allocated to discretionary spending," the analysts said.

On the other side of the Pacific, H Moser chief executive Edouard Meylan said that a 'younger, more digitalised' clientele was emerging in Asia.

"More than 50 per cent of sales in China are to Gen Z and Millennials," he told AFP.

The brand has also carried out sales in bitcoin, including a 350,000-Swiss franc (US\$380,000 approx) watch that sold for 10 bitcoins, which was then the equivalent price when the digital currency was booming.

"We filmed the transaction," said Meylan.

**Apple Watch opened doors**

According to Morgan Stanley analysts, so-called icon watches - the flagship models of major brands - 'resonate particularly well' with a generation quick to post pictures of their purchases on Instagram.

They want 'instantly recognisable products', especially so for watches given that they 'rely much less on logos and monograms than leather goods and ready to wear'.

Some, on the other hand, 'want to stand out with a watch that others won't have', said Christophe Hoppe, a Frenchman now living in Australia, where he founded the Bausele brand after a career in watchmaking in Switzerland.

"We had lost this generation with mobile phones, but found it again with the Apple Watch," he told AFP.

He recently teamed up with social media influencers to sell a US\$1,200 model online.

"They got back into the habit of wearing something on the wrist with connected watches, and now they want something else," he said.

AFP



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Iraqi women (left) work at the atelier of 'Rafedin' in Amman on March 12; while another Iraqi woman Sarah Nael (right) inspects creations by 'Rafedin' (AFP)



An Iraqi woman poses with a creation by 'Rafedin'

RAFEDIN MOVEMENT

FASHIONING THE FUTURE

Iraqis in asylum limbo find dignity in couture

In a Jordanian church, Sarah Nael sews a shirt for a project that has provided scores of women who fled violence in neighbouring Iraq with skills to earn a living. Many of the women escaped the extreme violence carried out by the Islamic State group's self-declared 'caliphate' that cut across swathes of Iraq and Syria, before they eventually ended up in Jordan - where they found themselves without work.

"Life here is very, very difficult - if we don't work, we can't live," said Nael, a 25-year-old Christian from the northern Iraqi town of Qaraqosh, who joined the 'Rafedin' sewing project two years ago.

It is based at St Joseph Catholic church in the Jordanian capital Amman. Italian priest Mario Cornioli began the project in 2016, along with Italian designers and tailors.

The products, including dresses, jackets, belts and ties, are sold in Amman and Italy to raise funds. For refugees, barred from seeking regular work, the project provides them with a way to supplement handouts from the United Nations.

"It's a safe place," said Nael, who has been taught to create clothes from cloth and leather, while her brother

*We try to help them with dignity. A lot are the only ones working in their families*

MARIO CORNIOLI



helps in the church's kitchen. "We are Iraqis. We are forbidden to work anywhere."

Asylum limbo

Since the project started, more than 120 women have benefited.

"We try to help them with dignity," said Cornioli, who runs the Habibi Valtiberina Association, an Italian charity in Jordan. "A lot are the only ones working in their families."

On the tables in rooms in the church building, colourful rolls of cloth lie ready for cutting. Cornioli hopes the 'Rafedin' fashion label - meaning 'two rivers', the historical term for Iraq between the Euphrates and Tigris - will become widely recognisable. For the priest, the aim is to make the project 'self-sustaining' to provide more training to women in need.

While the IS extremists were forced out of their Iraqi territory by a US-led alliance in late 2017, many

of the refugees in Jordan are still too fearful to go back to their war-ravaged home.

Many are still waiting for their painfully slow asylum applications to other countries to be processed.

"This project allowed them to do something and to survive in this period," Cornioli said. "They are just waiting to leave."

Opportunity to learn

Nael and her family returned home after IS was defeated in 2017, but they left again after being subjected to anonymous threats, and eventually sought safety in Amman.

Their applications for asylum in Australia have been rejected.

"My father is old, and my mother has cancer," she said, but added that going back to Iraq was out of the question.

"We have nothing left there to return to."

Diana Nabil (29) worked as an accountant in Iraq before fleeing to Jordan in 2017 with her parents and aunt, in the hope of joining her sister in Australia.

During her wait, she studied how to sew fabric and leather. "Some of our relatives help us financially, and sometimes the United Nations helps us a bit," Nabil said. "With my work here, we are managing."

Cornioli said the project offers 'the opportunity to learn something', pointing to 'success stories' of some of the women who have since left Jordan, and are now working in Australia, Canada, and the United States.

Wael Suleiman, head of the Catholic aid agency Caritas in Jordan, estimated the country hosts as many as 13,000 Christian Iraqi refugees.

"They hope to obtain asylum and leave to a third country, but in light of what is going on in the world now, the doors seem to be closed to them," Suleiman said.

"They are afraid of the future, and no one can blame them for that."

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