

► NEWS BRIEF

OVER 1.5MN VEHICLES REGISTERED TILL MARCH

Muscat - The total number of vehicles registered in Oman till the end of March 2022 was 1,560,778, according to the latest data issued by the National Centre for Information and Statistics.

There were 1,239,755 vehicles with private registration, comprising 79.4 per cent of the total, and 233,834 commercial vehicles, constituting 15 per cent of the total.

Taxis comprised 1.8 per cent (28,351), while there were 24,658 rental vehicles (1.6 per cent).

There were 12,113 government vehicles, 6,438 motorbikes, 5,835 touring vehicles, 7,647 vehicles with temporary registration, 1,295 farming tractors, and 852 diplomatic vehicles.

White coloured vehicles are the most preferred in the sultanate, with 669,716 white vehicles registered till March this year, followed by silver (200,236) and gray (130,033).



Outdoor workers call for early start of midday break

Food bank to distribute excess food to needy

Our Correspondent
Muscat

A first-of-its kind initiative to reduce food waste and give surplus to the needy has been launched in Muscat.

Called Oman Food Bank (Daymah), it is a non-profit organisation based in Azaiba, Muscat.

Speaking to *Muscat Daily*, Jassim al Hashmi, director of Operations and Support Services Department at Oman Food Bank, said, "The idea started six years ago, but we got a licence in June 2021 to officially set up the food bank. The initiative got off the ground just a week before Ramadan this year."

He informed that the organisation has a large number of volunteers and cars equipped with the necessary equipment to operate a food bank, including collection and preservation of food from different sources. "We deal with government and private entities that generate large amounts of food daily, including hotels, restaurants, commercial complexes, hypermarkets and wedding halls."

According to Hashmi, the initiative aims to collect excess food and distribute it among needy families safely and hygienically. During Ramadan, 2,890 meals and 320 Ramadan baskets were distributed among the needy.

"The bank will encourage the culture of food preservation, reducing food waste and recycling surplus food. We also want to be



The sultanate's loss incurred annually in food wastage reached RO56mn, according to the latest statistics issued by be'ah

JASSIM AL HASHMI

prepared throughout the year to provide food aid to those affected by disasters when there are any."

Of the challenges the organisation faces in day-to-day operations, Hashmi informed that verifying data and reaching eligible beneficiary families is a difficult task. "Also, ensuring the quality of surplus food to prevent food poisoning is a constant challenge."

On society's role in preventing

wastage, Hashmi said, "We urge people to buy only the food needed to reduce waste, make children aware about food preservation, and cook food according to the needs of the family, rather than being extravagant."

"Spreading awareness on the significance of food banks in achieving food security needs a lot of work among community members."

He is hopeful of Oman Food

Bank's role in reducing wastage in Oman. "The sultanate's loss incurred annually in food wastage reached RO56mn, according to the latest statistics issued by be'ah."

The data also indicates that the cost of municipal waste management is about RO100mn annually. Household food wastage in the sultanate was estimated to be 95kg per person per year in 2019.

"We want to establish branches of the bank in all governorates," Hashmi added.

On Monday, Oman Food Bank signed a cooperation agreement with W Muscat Hotel to collect excess food from parties, conferences and events for distribution among the needy.



Schengen visa waiver for Omanis currently in consideration

Our Correspondent
Muscat

Following earlier calls by Oman to exempt its citizens from visa requirements in Europe's Schengen area, both Omani authorities and European Commission officials stressed on the importance of excluding Omanis from the visa requirement on Monday.

This transpired when H E Sheikh Khalifa bin Ali al Harthy, Undersecretary for Diplomatic Affairs in the Foreign Ministry, received Dimitri Giotax, Head of Visa Policy at the General Authority for Migration and Internal

Affairs of the European Commission, who is visiting Oman.

'Emphasising on the importance of exempting Omani citizens from the Schengen visa is one of the most prominent topics that was discussed during the meeting of H E Harthy and Giotax,' ONA stated.

The Foreign Ministry added that the European Commission is working to fulfil the technical requirements related to visa exemption. During the meeting, the European Commission delegation also reviewed existing relations between Oman and the European Union.

MoL, Environment Authority announce new timings

Our Correspondent
Muscat

The Ministry of Labour (MoL) and the Environment Authority have announced new timings in line with the flexible timings for government institutions that came into effect from Sunday.

A statement issued by MoL said, 'In implementation of the Royal directives of His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik to im-

plement flexible working hours in all units of the state's administrative apparatus that apply the Civil Service Law and its executive regulations, and in the interest of the ministry to provide high quality services to customers and beneficiaries, it was decided that working hours will be from 7.30am to 3pm.'

The Environment Authority announced that its working hours will be 8am to 3pm.

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Supermoon thrills astronomy enthusiasts

Our Correspondent
Muscat

Astronomy enthusiasts had an exciting time watching the supermoon on Monday evening. This was one of the rare occasions when the Moon came in close proximity to the Earth's horizon and consequently looked bigger and nearer. The Moon rose at 7.09pm with 100 per cent luminosity and was at a distance of 367,425.81km from Earth, appearing gigantic in size. Speaking about the cosmic spectacle, Abdulwahab al Busaidi, head of observatory at Oman Astronomical Society, said, "Normally the Moon is over

Those who missed the spectacle on Monday can view the giant moon on Tuesday evening, when it will be visible from 8.19pm

400,000km from Earth. However, on Monday and Tuesday it will be very close to us. Although it is a normal phenomenon, it doesn't happen very often and the spectacle is indeed worth viewing."

People who missed the spec-

tacle on Monday can view the giant moon on Tuesday evening - when it will be visible from 8.19pm - though it will be less luminous (99 per cent). Busaidi recommended Shariqiyah Sands as one of the best places to see the moon. Alternate recommended viewing locations are Shatti, Qantab, Al Mouj Muscat, Yiti and Muttrah. "If you cannot travel, go to your rooftop or even your window. Whatever be the case, do not miss this chance," he urged. Coinciding with the full moon, many parts of the world witnessed a lunar eclipse on Sunday/Monday. However, it was not visible from Oman.

App makes demything scientific fallacies fun

Our Correspondent
Muscat

A research team from Sultan Qaboos University (SQU) has designed an app called 'Dr Electron' to remove various scientific misconceptions in the Arab world. The app aims to correct myths and ideas in subjects like physics, chemistry, biology, environmental sciences, earth sciences, astronomy and space sciences in an engaging and enjoyable way for learners. The research team consists of Prof Sulaiman Mohammed al Balushi from the College of Education at SQU, and Huda bint Ali al Hosani, a PhD student. The app was funded by the Ministry of Higher Education, Research and Innovation. The Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion granted it intellectual property rights.



Dr Electron was created in line with the global trend of integrating technology in education, called the gamification approach. Gamification of learning is an educational approach that aims to motivate students by using

video game design and game elements in a learning environment. The goal is to maximise enjoyment and engagement by capturing the interest of learners and inspiring them to continue learning.

The app is considered the first of its kind in the Arab world. Its question bank - similar to Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study questions - was prepared by a team of specialists in evaluating science learning.

SAYYID THEYAZIN ATTENDS PLATINUM JUBILEE OF QUEEN ELIZABETH II



H H Sayyid Theyazin bin Haitham al Said attended the closing ceremony of the Royal Windsor Horse Show, which was held on the occasion of the Platinum Jubilee of Queen Elizabeth II of the United Kingdom of Great Britain, Northern Ireland and Head of the Commonwealth, on Sunday. The sultanate was represented in the horse show by the Royal Cavalry of the Royal Court Affairs (OCA)

9th annual conference on leadership begins

Muscat - The ninth annual conference of 'Future Leaders and Stages of Change: The Art of Utilising Emotional Intelligence Skills' began on Monday under the patronage of H E Mohammed Said al Bulushi, Undersecretary in the

Ministry of Information. The two-day event, organised by the Ministry of Labour, aims to create leaders and evaluate and develop emotional intelligence skills. It also seeks to highlight skills of problem solving and is-

sues of interest to leadership management. The conference includes five working sessions that cover a set of papers on characteristics of future leadership and global analysis on emotional intelligence and

its impact on job performance, decision-making at work, and leadership for the future generation, in addition to the impact of emotional intelligence on the development of employees' performance.

GROWTH THROUGH TOURISM

Notice

TENDER ANNOUNCEMENT

Design and Construction of Public Service Unit at Shannah - Al Wusta Governorate

OMRAN drives the investment, growth, and development of the rapidly growing tourism sector in the Sultanate of Oman. We are the master developer of major tourism, heritage, and urban developments, delivering some of the Nation's most iconic projects. We create new destinations and unique experiences that benefit the social and economic growth of the Sultanate. OMRAN was established by Government mandate in 2005 in line with the vision to strengthen and diversify the economy, and we achieve this by growing the capacity, scope, and potential of the tourism sector in Oman.

OMRAN would like to invite competent and experienced companies to participate in the Tendering process for Design and Construction of Public Service Unit at Shannah - Al Wusta Governorate as per the following details:

Tender No.	23/2022
Subject	Design and construction of public Service unit at Shannah - Al Wusta Governorate
Brief of the Package	Design and Construction of Public Service Units at Shannah - Al Wusta Governorate. The proposed works include public toilets, RV services, F&B, Kids Playground and shaded seating.
Tender Fees	R.O. 25
Grade	Excellent, First and Second Grade
Experience	Civil Works Contractors
Tender Document Sale Start Date	17.5.2022
Tender Document Sale End Date	23.5.2022
Tender Closing Date	31.5.2022
Tender Fees Payment	Tender Documents can be collected from tenders@omran.om during working hours from (08:30 to 15:00 hrs) after receiving evidence of receipt of payment of a non-refundable Tender fee of R.O. 25/= (Twenty Five Rial) paid to the Company's account: Beneficiary: Oman Tourism Development Company SAOC Bank: Bank Muscat Branch: Al Khuwair - Sultanate of Oman Account No. 0317008860360019 Swift Code: BMUSOMRX00X Finance Code: 11476301
Tender Document Collection & Submission	For more details, please go to tenders@omran.om
Vendor Registration	All Bidders are required to complete a Vendor registration at https://supplier.omran.om/ prior to making any submissions to OMRAN

Governance role in higher education institutions discussed

Muscat - The Ministry of Higher Education, Research and Innovation organised a seminar called 'The Governance of Private Higher Education Institutions in the Sultanate of Oman' under the patronage of H E Dr Rahma Ibrahim al Mahrooqi, Minister of Higher Education, Research and Innovation, on Monday. The seminar aimed at improving governance of higher education institutions and the role of sound governance in the quality of education. The event provided a platform for exchange of ideas and framing visions on sound governance and rational management of private higher education institutions, in a manner that guarantees transparency and integrity in accordance with national and international standards. The seminar included several working papers on various topics, including governance and management standards in the evaluation process.

Hunting for Grace: Blessings of a water bottle

Hunting is a genetic trait in earthly creatures. Humans have been practising hunting since the beginning of time. It was the mode of sustenance in early days. In fact, it may have been practised till recently in some remote aboriginal communities. Some people are still very driven by this instinct and so they go on wild tours and buy costly hunting vacations just to shoot an animal. Others practise it illegally. More than one incident has been reported in Oman's wildlife sanctuaries where endangered species were killed by poachers. But how can we as humans keep engaging in hunting without shedding blood or breaking the law. Let me introduce you to the 'Hunting for Grace' model and how you can hunt with a small bottle of water instead of a gun. From time to time, as you go out, buy a few small bottles of water. Cool them or keep them in the car's cooler if you have one. Seeing a worker in the middle of the day watering the street lawn or cleaning the roads, just stop and give him one. An instant Grace is gained.

When you or your children drink a bottle of water and a little is left, do not throw it. Just find a plant and water it with the few drops. Instant Grace is achieved. Ring-pull of cans and metal caps of bottles can hunt you with lots of Grace. Do not throw them. Just collect them and give them to a charity to make prosthesis and artificial limbs. Good Grace for you! Do not throw the bottles you drink from in the garbage. Just collect them for recycling and gain Grace. When you have an appointment in the hospital or a clinic, take a few bottles of water with you and stack them in the cooler usually kept at the entrance. Patients will drink from these and you get Grace. Mosques and other places of worship also keep coolers at the entrances. As you go for prayers, take a few bottles and put them in these coolers. Multiply your Grace. Can you now see how much Blessings one can get from a small bottle of water! This is the Hunting which we should engage in. Hunting for Grace!



HON NOOH MOHAMMED AHMED AL BUSAIDI
Member of State Council & Chairman of the Historical Association of Oman

Outdoor workers call for early start of midday break



Our Correspondent
Muscat

Even though summer has kicked in, outdoor workers' midday break hasn't started. The stoppage of outdoor work at midday, especially in the construction sector, announced every year before summer sets in comes as much relief to

workers who say the break should have started at least a month earlier this year.

According to the National Centre for Statistics and Information (NCSI), Oman's construction sector employs the largest number of expatriate workers. At the end of the first quarter of 2022, there were 373,184 workers.

Five economic activities in the

sultanate account for 74.3 per cent – or 1,449,358 – of the expat workforce in the private sector. The construction sector tops the list, employing 25 per cent of the expat workers.

The three-month midday break begins on June 1 with outdoor employees suspending work between 12.30pm and 3.30pm. Companies that do not

comply face heavy fines.

Mohammad Aslam, a construction worker, said the midday break should have started 15 days before June 1. "Every year, summer seems to begin a little earlier than usual. It is already hot and we get exhausted in no time. The temperature comes down only after 5pm."

Aslam's colleague Ravi Kumar

said, "I wish the midday break started earlier than June and extended till September 30."

Under Article 16 of Ministerial Decision No 286/2008, outdoor workers in Oman must not work in high temperatures during the summer months. Working hours are usually split between two shifts based on the midday break hours.



Number of fish processing plants rose 8% in 2021

Our Correspondent
Muscat

To boost fish production and provide quality products to local and international markets, the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Water Resources (MAFWR) is exerting efforts to set up new factories across the sultanate.

According to the ministry, the number of fish factories increased to 105 in 2021, compared to 97 in 2020, a year-on-year increase of 8.2 per cent.

MAFWR's statistics indicate that the number of fish factories that have obtained quality control certificates and licence to export is 64.

Salman bin Khalaf al Subhi, director of Marketing and Fisheries Industries Department in the ministry, informed that MAFWR's efforts to provide quality fish products to local and international markets is in line with Oman Vision 2040.

The ministry is working on

stimulating the growth of the fish processing and marketing sector by encouraging investors, facilitating procedures, developing marketing mechanisms and opening new markets.

According to Subhi, fish processing activities offer a wide variety of investment opportunities, besides job opportunities.

MAFWR also aims to develop and introduce products for the local market and export Omani products in compliance with international standards and requirements.

The sultanate's fish production at the end of January 2022 dropped by 36.2 per cent to 62,217 tonnes, compared to 97,498 tonnes in the same period in 2021.

Statistics issued by the National Centre for Statistics and Information indicate a decrease in the value of fish production to RO34.351mn, down 22.1 per cent compared to RO44.123mn in the same period in 2021.



Deal inked to support student startups

Our Correspondent
Muscat

The University of Technology and Applied Sciences in Musannah and the South Batinah branch of Oman Chamber of Commerce and Industry (OCCI) signed an agreement on Sunday to support university students and create job opportunities.

The agreement was signed

under the patronage of Redha bin Juma al Saleh, chairman of the Board of Directors of OCCI, at the chamber's headquarters in South Batinah.

The agreement aims to implement the Baadir initiative, which supports student companies to serve the public and private sectors and to enhance the development of the business environment.

Under the agreement, students' entrepreneurial and competitive skills will be developed during their university studies, student companies promoted, and successful student startups motivated to turn into small and medium enterprises and enter the local market.

Additionally, the initiative seeks to establish marketing outlets to accommodate 20 student

companies during the current academic year.

According to figures released by the National Centre for Statistics and Information, the total number of SMEs registered with the Authority of Small and Medium Enterprises Development at the end of March 2022 was 73,741, an increase of 2.22 per cent compared to the same period of 2021.

Oman to be promoted as global tourist destination in France, Italy

Our Correspondent
Muscat

The Ministry of Heritage and Tourism will organise mobile promotional workshops in France and Italy to promote Oman as a global tourist destination from May 17 to May 19. The move is part of a plan to accelerate the recovery of the tourism sector implemented by the ministry.

The mobile promotional workshops will see the participation of senior officials and diplomats and a delegation from the ministry led by Haitham bin Mohammed al Ghassani, director general of promotions, Khaled al Zadjali, director of Oman Convention Bureau, and Kholoud al Kaabi, head of European and American markets.

Oman's delegation will be accompanied by 27 of the most prominent partners in the



tourism, hotel and aviation sectors, with the participation of more than 200 tourism establishments from Oman, France and Italy.

The workshops coincide with

the ministry's celebration of the 20th anniversary of promotional efforts in the French market through its tourism representation office and tenth anniversary in the Italian market.

ODB funds projects worth RO19mn in Q1 2022, up 29%

Muscat - Oman Development Bank (ODB) achieved positive lending indicators during the first quarter of 2022.

The value of loans recorded an increase by 29 per cent compared to Q1 2021 to stand at RO18,887,544. Of this, RO15.127mn was given as development loans in various promising economic sectors in all the governorates and RO3.760mn for agricultural projects for areas damaged by Tropical Cyclone Shaheen.

Lending by ODB aligned with the government's approach in stimulating the national econ-

omy, especially in recovery from the repercussions of the COVID-19 pandemic.

In terms of sectors, industries had the largest share of ODB's lending during the first quarter of 2022 as the total value of loans approved for this sector reached RO5,358,839, spread over 299 projects that comprised 35 per cent of the total loaned value.

The fisheries sector was second (RO3,935,713), divided into 588 projects, followed by the professional services sector (RO1,834,471) divided into 136 projects, and the livestock and



education sectors (RO1.4mn each). ODB also funded loans in various other sectors, including tourism, health and logistics.

The Governorate of North Batinah received RO4mn, comprising the highest share of approved loans during the first quarter of 2022. It was followed by the Governorate of South Sharqiyah (RO3,269,915), Muscat (RO2.5mn), Al Wusta (RO1,191,700), Dakhliyah (RO1,087,200), North Sharqiyah (RO867,560), Dhofar (RO795,600) and South Batinah (RO700,800). These were followed by the governorates of

Musandam, Dhahirah and Buraimi, which received loans of smaller sizes.

Micro-loans constituted the largest proportion in the first quarter of 2022, comprising 33 per cent of the total loans. The value of micro-loans was RO4,964,301, followed by large companies (lending in the range of RO1mn) comprising a total value of RO3,867,000. Operating capital loans was RO3,661,143, followed by loans for SMEs (RO2,581,500) and seasonal loans allocated for agricultural projects (RO53,600).

ONA

WEATHER WATCH

	Max	Min
Abu Dhabi	36	23
Doha	36	26
Kuwait City	38	27
Manama	31	25
Muscat	39	27
Riyadh	39	23

PRAYER TIMINGS

Fajr	4.01am
Sunrise	5.24am
Duhr	12.08pm
Asr	3.31pm
Maghrib	6.47pm
Isha	8.06pm

Ambassadors of EU member states visit SEZAD in Duqm

Duqm - The Special Economic Zone at Duqm (SEZAD) received a delegation of 13 ambassadors and representatives of the European Union (EU) member states who were on a two-day visit to Duqm during May 15-16.

The delegation met with H E Dr Ali bin Masoud al Sunaidi, chairman of Oman's Public Authority for Special Economic Zones and Free Zones (OPAZ), and CEOs of companies operating in the Special Economic Zone at Duqm.

The ambassadors and representatives of the EU member states were briefed on the investment opportunities in the Special Economic Zone at Duqm and the package of incentives,



advantages and facilities offered to investors and businesspersons.

Further, the visit included a tour to various infrastructure projects and other key facilities in the SEZAD, such as the Port of

Duqm, Duqm Refinery, multi-purpose Fishing Port etc.

Commenting on this visit, H E Veronique Aulagnon, ambassador of France and president of the EU member states delegation, pointed out that the visit

aims to familiarise the delegation with the various investment opportunities in Duqm and explore what and how European countries can invest in.

She expressed that by visiting the SEZAD, they can encourage companies from their countries to invest in this zone in Duqm.

"Duqm is very promising and bringing different developments in various sectors including green energy, fisheries, oil and gas, tourism and others where companies from Europe can form further joint ventures. This could be built on the already developed projects and businesses of many European companies from Belgium and France to name a few," H E Veronique added.

Renaissance ramps up local sourcing to 79%

Muscat - Local sourcing of food and non-food items at Renaissance Services has risen to 79 per cent compared to 63 per cent until a year ago, further delivering on the company's commitment to Oman' economic diversification and in-country value (ICV) goals.

Renaissance shares a symbiotic relationship with its Omani suppliers, gaining from competitive pricing and timely delivery and in turn boosting ICV by giving them significant business. With this approach, Renaissance has continued to demonstrate resilience amid past and present global challenges that have materially affected fuel, freight, commodity prices and availability.

Service delivery to Renais-



Pankaj Chugh

sance's over 100 operational sites throughout the country remained unaffected during the pandemic, thanks to its strong local supplier base, which includes SMEs.

Furthermore, the Renaissance 2.0 direction has redefined the strategic and value-based supply chain approach. It has set re-

newed OKRs (objectives and key result areas) that deliver increased ICV, including more jobs for Omanis and opportunities for SMEs.

"Challenges from the pandemic and the current geopolitical tensions notwithstanding, the company has always put Omani companies and SMEs first. The Renaissance supply chain boasts of a strong local vendor platform, reflecting our focus on Oman's economic diversification goals. It is this commitment that has stood us in good stead in the face of unforeseen global challenges and allowed us to maintain good buffer stocks to ensure efficient service delivery across our sites of operations," said Pankaj Chugh, director of supply chain at Renaissance.



شركة عمان والإمارات للاستثمار
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Board of Directors' Report – 31st March 2022

Dear Shareholders,

On behalf of the Board, I take this opportunity to present the financial performance of Oman & Emirates Investment Holding Co SAOG for the three months period ended 31st March 2022.

Financial Results:

The Company (Group & Parent) earned Net Profits of RO 568,192 and RO 589,270 respectively during January – March 2022, compared to (Group & Parent) incurred Net Losses of RO (189,296) and RO (173,378) respectively during January – March 2021. The Break-up details are as under:

Particulars	Equity Holding %	Jan - Mar 2022 RO	Jan - Mar 2021 RO
Profit/(Loss) before share of results of Subsidiaries and Associates		297,489	(568,333)
FINCORP Al Amal Fund	-	-	263,518
FINCORP SAOG	51.20%	292,482	127,526
Oman Hotels and Tourism Co. SAOC	31.72%	17,541	(43,057)
Oman Fiber Optic Co. SAOC	20.97%	(18,242)	46,968
Net Profit/ (Loss) - Parent		589,270	(173,378)
Omani Euro Food Industries Co. SAOG	80.84%	(21,078)	(15,918)
Net Profit/ (Loss) - Group	-	568,192	(189,296)

Stock Market Indices:

During January–March 2022, MSM, ADX and DFM increased by 1.83%, 17.20% and 10.35% respectively (January– March 2021: MSM, ADX and DFM increased by 1.36%, 17.19% and 2.34% %).

Net Equity, Investments and borrowing:

The Net Equity of the Group and the Parent Company increased by 2.70% and 2.69% respectively during the three month period ended 31st March 2022. The Net Equity of the Group became RO 21.641 Million at 31.03.2022 (31.03.2021: RO 19.362 Million) from RO 21.072 Million at 31.12.2021. The Net Equity of the Parent became RO 22.532 Million at 31.03.2022 (31.03.2021: RO 20.106 Million) from RO 21.943 at 31.12.2021.

The total investment values for the Group and the Parent Company have become RO 38.465 Million and RO 36.606 Million respectively as at 31.03.2022 (31.03.2021: Group - RO 41.972 Million and Parent Company - RO 39.985 Million).

The total borrowing for the Group and the Parent Company have become RO 24.639 Million and RO 16.865 Million respectively as at 31.03.2022 (31.03.2021: Group - RO 27.222 Million and Parent Company - RO 23.479 Million).

Future Outlook:

Many factors are impacting on the outlook and markets are moving up and down along headlines: growing tensions resulting from the war in Ukraine, worldwide sanctions being imposed, Federal Reserve interest rate hikes, rising oil prices, supply-chain disruptions, inflationary pressures, new COVID lockdowns.

Growth prospects remain strong in the GCC countries as it embraces interest rate hikes moving in tandem with the US Federal Reserve. The combination of strong growth and rising inflation will tighten growth to some extent.

With energy prices driven up, Oman could see a record budget surplus during 2022. This will give its economy a huge boost, wipe out the predicted 2022 deficit and announce an annual surplus this year for the first time in a decade. The government will also be able to execute its planned major projects. The extra cash will also improve business environment and stimulate investments in the Country. The benefits of higher oil prices may not offset the hike in food prices expected with the continuing war in Ukraine, but Oman is likely to counterbalance inflation.

Acknowledgement:

I take this opportunity to convey our heartfelt gratitude to the Governments of the Sultanate of Oman and United Arab Emirates for their support to our Company. I also thank the stock market authorities, banks, shareholders and employees of the Company for their guidance, cooperation and efforts.

MOHAMED DARWISH AL KHOORI
Chairman

12th May 2022

CONSOLIDATED AND SEPARATE STATEMENT OF FINANCIAL POSITION AS AT 31 MARCH 2022

	31 March 2022 Group RO	31 Dec 2021 Group RO	31 March 2022 Parent RO	31 Dec 2021 Parent RO
ASSETS				
Cash and cash equivalents	2,072,922	1,919,812	99,650	113,040
Trade and other receivables	5,530,913	1,075,767	310,536	40,850
Inventories	532,390	434,392	-	-
Financial assets at fair value through profit or loss	20,194,164	20,481,259	16,223,367	16,651,253
Investment in associates	16,163,479	16,100,249	14,109,682	14,110,383
Financial assets at amortised cost	2,107,325	2,109,961	2,107,325	2,109,961
Investment in subsidiaries	-	-	4,165,725	3,873,243
Property, plant and equipment	2,458,232	2,531,702	489,881	515,016
Investment properties	3,043,800	3,074,850	2,773,800	2,804,850
Right-of-use asset	43,577	43,577	-	-
Deferred tax asset	38,507	78,496	-	-
Total assets	52,185,309	47,850,065	40,279,966	40,218,596
EQUITY AND LIABILITIES				
Equity attributable to the owners of the parent				
Share capital	12,187,500	12,187,500	12,187,500	12,187,500
Legal reserve	4,991,892	4,991,892	4,062,500	4,062,500
Retained earnings	4,461,411	3,893,219	6,282,087	5,692,817
Equity attributable to the owners of the parent	21,640,803	21,072,611	22,532,087	21,942,817
Non-controlling interest	3,759,432	3,485,638	-	-
Total equity	25,400,235	24,558,249	22,532,087	21,942,817
LIABILITIES				
Bank overdrafts	4,649,010	630,360	527,994	562,017
Trade and other payables	2,092,788	2,054,192	883,063	812,952
Lease liability	53,454	53,454	-	-
Term loans	2,536,822	3,100,810	2,536,822	3,100,810
Loans from Governments	16,136,924	16,136,924	12,483,924	12,483,924
Deferred Government grant	1,316,076	1,316,076	1,316,076	1,316,076
Total liabilities	26,785,074	23,291,816	17,747,879	18,275,779
Total equity and liabilities	52,185,309	47,850,065	40,279,966	40,218,596
Net assets per share	0.178	0.173	0.185	0.180

CONSOLIDATED AND SEPARATE STATEMENT OF PROFIT OR LOSS FOR THE YEAR ENDED 31 MARCH 2022

	31 March 2022 Group RO	31 March 2021 Group RO	31 March 2022 Parent RO	31 March 2021 Parent RO
Income				
Rental income	25,664	9,770	25,664	9,770
Brokerage commission income	37,535	34,082	-	-
Dividends income	449,532	421,667	350,274	404,597
Realised gain/(loss) on sale of financial assets at fair value through profit or loss	13,067	(233,330)	(32,832)	(236,900)
Unrealised gain/(loss) on financial assets at fair value through profit or loss - net	729,996	(264,665)	280,216	(417,400)
Gross profit on sale of food products	74,293	66,391	-	-
Share of profit from associates and subsidiaries - net	63,231	390,014	291,781	394,955
Management fees	24,810	35,370	-	-
Other income	6,334	8,046	-	6,071
Total income	1,424,462	467,345	915,103	161,093
Expenses				
Staff costs	(186,386)	(243,398)	(74,061)	(111,430)
Administrative expenses	(164,490)	(165,529)	(88,275)	(91,734)
Investment related expenses	(4,999)	(2,636)	(4,999)	(5,234)
Total expenses	(355,875)	(411,563)	(167,335)	(208,398)
Net operating profit/(loss)	1,068,587	55,782	747,768	(47,305)
Finance costs	(186,614)	(144,746)	(158,498)	(126,073)
Profit/(loss) for the period before tax	881,973	(88,964)	589,270	(173,378)
Income tax	(39,987)	17,452	-	-
Profit/(loss) for the period after tax	841,986	(71,512)	589,270	(173,378)
Attributable to:				
Owners of the parent company	568,192	(189,296)	589,270	(173,378)
Non-controlling interest	273,794	117,784	-	-
	841,986	(71,512)	589,270	(173,378)
Basic earnings/(loss) per share	0.0047	(0.0016)	0.0048	(0.0014)

CONSOLIDATED AND SEPARATE STATEMENT OF OTHER COMPREHENSIVE INCOME FOR THE YEAR ENDED 31 MARCH 2022

	31 March 2022 Group RO	31 March 2021 Group RO	31 March 2022 Parent RO	31 March 2021 Parent RO
Profit/(loss) for the period after tax	841,986	(71,512)	589,270	(173,378)
Other comprehensive income	-	-	-	-
Total comprehensive profit/(loss) for the period	841,986	(71,512)	589,270	(173,378)
Total comprehensive loss attributable to:				
Owners of the parent company	568,192	(189,296)	589,270	(173,378)
Non-controlling interest	273,794	117,784	-	-
	841,986	(71,512)	589,270	(173,378)

Note: The complete Financial Statements of the Company in Arabic or English will be made available to any shareholder on request.



In this file photo taken on April 12, an Indian farmer poses as he harvests wheat crop in a field on the outskirts of Amritsar, in Indian state of Punjab (AFP)

Wheat prices hit record high after Indian export ban

Paris, France – Wheat prices surged to a new record high in European trading on Monday after India decided to ban exports of the commodity as a heatwave hit production.

The price jumped to 435 euros (US\$453) per tonne as the Euronext market opened, up from the previous record of 422 euros reached on Friday.

Global wheat prices have soared on supply fears since Russia's February invasion of agricultural powerhouse Ukraine, which previously accounted for 12 per cent of global exports.

The spike, exacerbated by fertiliser shortages and poor harvests, has fuelled inflation globally and raised fears of famine and social unrest in poorer countries.

India, the world's second-largest wheat producer, said on Saturday that it was banning exports after its hottest March on record, with traders needing express government approval to enter into new deals.

New Delhi said the move was needed to protect the food security of its own 1.4bn people in the face of lower production and sharply higher global prices.

Some parts of India have seen prices in wheat and flour jump 20 to 40 per cent in recent weeks, Commerce Secretary BVR Subrahmanyam said on Sunday.

Because of the sharp rise in global prices, some farmers were selling to traders and not to the government.

This got the government worried about its buffer stock of almost 20mn tonnes – depleted by the pandemic – needed for hand-outs to millions of poor families and to avert any possible famine.

'Worsen the crisis'

Export deals agreed before the directive issued on May 13 could still be honoured but future shipments needed government approval, it said. However, exports could also take place if New Delhi approved requests from other governments "to meet their food security needs".

India, which possesses major buffer stocks, previously said it was ready to help fill some of the supply shortages caused by the Ukraine war.

Only last week India said it would send delegations to Egypt, Turkey and elsewhere to discuss boosting wheat exports. It was unclear whether these visits will now go ahead.

The export ban drew sharp criticism from the Group of Seven industrialised nations, which said that such measures "would worsen the crisis" of rising commodity prices.

India recorded its warmest March on record – blamed on climate change – and in recent weeks has seen a scorching heatwave with temperatures upwards of 45 degrees Celsius (113 Fahrenheit). This hit farmers in wheat-producing northern India, prompting the government to predict output would fall at least five per cent this year from 109mn tonnes in 2021.

AFP

Saudi Arabia expects 13mn bpd oil capacity by 2027

Manama, Bahrain – Saudi Arabia expects to ramp up its daily oil production capacity by more than one million barrels to exceed 13mn barrels by early 2027, the kingdom's energy minister announced Monday.

"Most likely it will be 13.2 to 13.4 (million barrels per day, bpd), but that would be (reached) at the end of 2026, beginning 2027," Prince Abdulaziz bin Salman told an energy conference in Bahrain.

Production at that level would be maintained "if the market allows it", he said.

Energy giant Saudi Aramco announced in March 2020 it had been directed by the energy ministry to increase its maximum sustainable capacity from 12mn to 13mn bpd. No timeline was given then for the new target.

Monday's announcement came one day after Saudi energy giant Aramco posted an 82 per cent jump in first quarter profits, buoyed by a global surge in oil prices stemming from the Ukraine war.

Those results helped Aramco dethrone Apple last week as the world's most valuable company by market capitalisation.

They continued a string of positive economic news for Saudi Arabia, which in early May reported that growth in the first quarter had risen 9.6 per cent over the same period in 2021.

Yet Aramco has faced security challenges stemming from the war pitting a Saudi-led military coalition against Yemen's Huthi rebels who have repeatedly targeted the kingdom, including Aramco sites.



Saudi Energy Minister Abdulaziz bin Salman addresses the Middle East Petroleum and Gas conference in Manama, Bahrain on Monday (AFP)

Saudi Arabia, the world's biggest oil exporter, has resisted US entreaties to raise output in an attempt to rein in prices that have spiked since the Ukraine war broke out on February 24.

As the war got underway, Saudi Arabia and the UAE stressed their commitment to the OPEC+ oil alliance, which Riyadh and Moscow lead, underscoring Riyadh's and Abu Dhabi's increasing independence from long-standing ally Washington.

Last year, ahead of the COP26 climate-change summit, Saudi Arabia pledged to achieve net zero carbon emissions by 2060, sparking scepticism from environmental campaign group Greenpeace.

With increasing global urgency to limit global warming, experts warn of the urgent need to reduce fossil fuel use.

But Saudi officials' stated targets indicate "they still believe in oil as a source of energy for the coming decade", Mazen Alsudairi, head of research for Al Rajhi Capital, a financial services firm in Riyadh, told AFP.

"They are not following the global trend by reducing exposure to hydrocarbons."

Also at Monday's conference in Bahrain, Iraqi Oil Minister Ihsan Abdul-Jabbar Ismail said his country was accelerating its production capacity goals, targeting 6mn bpd in 2027 and 8mn bpd in 2029.

Iraq's current daily production is just under 3.5mn.

AFP

Adani strikes \$10bn deal for Holcim India cement business

Mumbai, India – Indian billionaire Gautam Adani struck a US\$10.5bn deal to buy Swiss cement giant Holcim's local business, the companies said, betting on a construction boom predicted in coming decades.

In his biggest acquisition to date, the deal will give coal-ports magnate Adani – who vies with fellow Indian Mukesh Ambani for the title of Asia's richest person – a controlling stake in India's second-largest cement manufacturer.

"Our move into the cement business is yet another validation of our belief in our nation's growth story," Adani, 59, said in a statement late Sunday.



Gautam Adani

"Not only is India expected to remain one of the world's largest demand-driven economies for several decades, India also continues to be the world's second largest cement market," he added.

The deal marks Holcim's exit from the Indian market after 17 years and is a part of a global restructuring strategy after the Swiss cement giant's 2015 merger with France's Lafarge.

Once approved by regulators and shareholders, the firm will acquire Holcim's stakes in local producers Ambuja Cements and ACC.

The acquisitions will make Adani the country's second-biggest cement maker with a capacity of 70mn tonnes per year.

India, already home to 1.4bn people, is projected by the United Nations to become the planet's most populous nation by the middle of the decade.

AFP

Iran considers gas exports to Europe

Tehran, Iran – Iran is considering the possibility of exporting gas to Europe, an oil ministry official said Sunday against the backdrop of soaring energy prices due to Russia's war in Ukraine.

"Iran is studying this subject but we have not reached a conclusion yet," deputy oil minister Majid Chegeni was quoted as saying by the ministry's official news agency, Shana.

"Iran is always after the development of energy diplomacy and expansion of the market," he added.

Though Iran boasts one of the world's largest proven gas reserves, its industry has been hit by US sanctions that were reimposed in 2018 when Washington withdrew from a landmark nuclear deal between Tehran and world powers.

Talks aiming to revive the 2015 nuclear deal began last year in Vienna but have been on pause for weeks amid outstanding issues.



Russia's invasion of Ukraine in February sent global oil and gas prices soaring, with many European countries dependent on energy imports from Russia.

The situation worsened Wednesday when Kyiv said Russia had halted gas supplies through a key transit hub in the east of the Ukraine, fuelling fears

weeks ago that will see the Islamic republic increase gas exports to Iraq.

"Gas exports from Iran increased and in this memorandum it was stated that Iraq's debt of US\$1.6bn to Iran will be paid by the end of May," Chegeni added.

Despite considerable gas reserves of its own, poor investment due to decades of war and sanctions have left Iraq dependent on imports from its eastern neighbour for a third of its gas needs.

US sanctions on Iranian oil and gas, however, have complicated Iraq's payments for the imports.

Baghdad uses a complex payment method to comply with an exemption from US sanctions on Iran. Iraq is not allowed to simply hand over cash to Iran as payments must be used to fund imports of food and medicines.

AFP

European Union states struggle to clear path for Russian oil ban

Brussels, Belgium – EU foreign ministers on Monday sought to break through Hungary's opposition to an embargo on Russian oil over the Ukraine war, but warned little progress was expected.

"We will discuss about it and we will do our best to de-block the situation," EU foreign affairs chief Josep Borrell said at the start of a gathering in Brussels.

"I cannot ensure that it is going to happen because the positions are quite strong."

Budapest has been holding up a push by Brussels to ban Moscow's crucial oil exports as part of a sixth package of sanctions, arguing that it would hammer the Hungarian economy.

German Foreign Minister Annalena Baerbock said: "There are still a few things that need to be

clarified in the final stages. There will be no final clarification here today."

But she added that she was confident that "in the next few days we will come to a joint result."

Brussels is desperate to avoid the appearance of division in the face of the Kremlin's onslaught on Ukraine, and officials are scrambling behind the scenes to patch up a compromise.

"I think that if we understand the particular situation of some member states and all of us make an effort to present a united front against Russia, we will succeed," Borrell said.

"It is an objective situation that some member states face more difficulties because they are more dependent, because



French Foreign Minister Jean Yves Le Drian (left) talks with German Foreign Minister Annalena Baerbock (right) ahead of a Foreign Affairs Council meeting at the EU headquarters in Brussels on Monday (AFP)

they are landlocked, because they do not have the possibility of receiving tankers directly," he added.

"They only have oil through pipelines – coming from Russia."

Brussels has offered Hungary, the Czech Republic and Slovakia long grace periods to phase out Russian oil imports but that has not yet convinced Budapest to budge. Hungary's Prime Minister Viktor Orban, often the odd man out in EU decision making, has demanded to be exempted from the embargo for at least four years and wants 800mn euros in EU funds to re-tool a refinery and boost the capacity of a pipeline to Croatia.

"The whole union is being held hostage by one member state who cannot help us find the

consensus," said Lithuanian Foreign Minister Gabrielius Landsbergis.

Landsbergis said the European Commission was offering landlocked Hungary until the end of 2024 to ditch Russian oil.

"That's a very, very broad, broad scope," he said. "So I think that everybody expected that this will be enough. And I cannot explain you why it isn't."

Ireland's Foreign Minister Simon Coveney conceded that a ban was a tough prospect for countries that are reliant on Russian oil but insisted that "we need to get on and do this".

"The political message is clear," he said. "The EU wants to do this, and we want to do it as soon as we possibly can."

AFP

INFINITI Oman's Ramadan offer ends May 19

INFINITI Oman's special Ramadan promotion which offers several benefits on all its vehicles will come to an end on May 19. To highlight its commitment to its customers, infiniti, from the house of Suhail Bahwan Automobiles (SBA), had announced special offers across its Infiniti product range.

A senior spokesperson at Infiniti Oman, said, "customers who aspired to own an Infiniti vehicle made their dream come true by buying the car of their choice during the offer period. The response to the promotion has been great.

Our special offers give customers the opportunity to buy their dream Infiniti with a combination of great incentives. Infiniti vehicles continue to be amongst the best-selling vehicles in Oman for obvious reasons.



They are an excellent choice for anyone looking for powerful performance, safe drive, and comfortable interiors." Range of offers on specific In-

finiti models include free registration, free insurance, assured gifts vouchers, periodic vehicle maintenance, manufacturer's warranty, aaa/ road assistance

card, digital promotion, infiniti loyalty programme, reference programme, a press release said. The scheme is applicable for all the customers purchasing in-

finiti vehicles for personal use only. Vehicles purchased with commercial registration will not be eligible for the scheme. Vehicles bought for taxi, driving

school, ministries, fleet, and rental-car usage will not be eligible for this scheme. The scheme is applicable for retail billing only.

All customers purchasing infiniti Q50, Q60, QX50, QX55, QX80 in the scheme period will be eligible for free first year vehicle registration. All customers purchasing Infiniti Q50 in the scheme period will be eligible for free first year vehicle insurance (Oman and UAE only).

All customers purchasing infiniti Q50, Q60, QX50, QX55, QX80 in the scheme period will be eligible for value added service gift vouchers up to RO400. Voucher can be redeemed for vehicle service at SBA workshop, purchase of value-added service products at SBA workshop, purchase of parts/accessories at SBA workshop and purchase of service contracts from SBA workshop.

Voucher will have to be utilised fully in one go and cannot be fragmented.

Madayn organises Lead Auditor training programme

The Public Establishment for Industrial Estates 'Madayn' held a training programme on 'ISO 9001 Quality Management System Lead Auditor' with the aim of strengthening Madayn's commitment to institutional excellence and continuous improvement, as well as qualifying its cadres to supervise the effective application of ISO 9001 requirements.

The programme highlighted several aspects including audit components, developing an audit plan, formulating questions, and documenting non-conformity cases, a press release said.

By organising a lineup of quality training programmes and events that address trending topics and challenges locally and globally, Madayn aims at developing the skills of human cadres and enhancing the value-added services offered to investors in



the industrial cities. Madayn also aims at delivering administrative, financial, and technical consultancy to companies and factories in the industrial cities, and implementing training-for-employment in cooperation with the concerned bodies in this area.

In addition, Madayn endeavours to complement the efforts made by the sultanate to support

training and Omanisation to meet the needs of the industrial sector, as well as to strengthen partnership with the educational and training related bodies to benefit from their expertise in the field of human resource development, improve production processes, simplify work procedures, and conduct industry-related research and studies.

Mazoon Electricity energises Saih Al Nama substation

To increase efficiency and expand serving capability, Mazoon Electricity, the leading electricity provider in Oman, has energised the Saih Al Nama 2X20 MVA primary substation located in Mudhaibi, in North Sharqiyah governorate.

The Saih Al Nama 2X20 MVA primary substation was constructed to relieve load from Mudhaibi Primary substation and accommodate normal growth in Mudhaibi and Saih Nama areas, a press release said.

All Primary substations in the area exceeds their firm capacity and is expected load growth and proposes reinforcement proposals to meet the growth of the area to the north of Mudhaibi in the years to come.

Saih Al Nama 2X20 MVA primary substation was constructed to redistribute load from Mudhaibi primary substation and accommodate normal growth in Mudhaibi and Saih Al



Nama areas.

The energised primary substation will serve Mudhaibi, Saih Al Nama and nearby areas and will increase the efficiency of the network and reduce supply interruptions.

Mazoon Electricity's substa-

tion represents a broader effort to modernise the company's infrastructure and make it more robust and sustainable.

The opening and energising of the substations come as a part of Mazoon Electricity's constant efforts to improve the per-

formance level of the electrical networks in the various governorates that it provides services in.

These developments will add value to the services the company extends and will contribute to boosting its overall capacity.



Oman Air transforms staff travel with IBS Software partnership

Oman Air has partnered with IBS Software to fully digitalise its staff travel programme, delivering a highly configurable, self-service platform for employees to book and manage complex leisure travel, annual leave travel and duty travel policies.

Oman Air overhauled its on-premise legacy system with IBS Software's SaaS-based iFly Staff platform to enable self-service for its employees to easily manage their travel needs.

The system has also significantly extended usability, allowing users access via any browser or any Android or iOS device, replacing the legacy desktop-only service.

iFly Staff now handles all Oman Air active and retired employee's ID travel, supplementary ticketing, and annual leave ticketing, as well as the staff ticketing of partner companies TRANSOM Catering, TRANSOM Handling and TRANSOM SATS Cargo, a press release said.

The platform's highly configurable business rules engine

means Oman Air gains the ability to dynamically update its policies, create and roll out new policies and processes, thus reducing the lead-time to implement policy changes.

This has resulted in significant gains on operational efficiency over the last six months since the system went live.

"Our partnership with IBS Software has transformed the staff travel experience, simplifying processes to make it far easier for our employees to manage their personal and corporate travel," said Dr Khalid al Zadjali, senior vice president, Digital, Oman Air. "Navigating the intricacies of constantly updating travel policies represents a major win for the whole airline - from both an employee satisfaction and operational efficiency perspective."

"The new staff travel system comes as part of Oman Air's ongoing efforts to enhance the benefits and facilities presented to employees," said Hilal al Siyabi, senior vice president, People, Oman Air.

Ominvest builds ESG knowledge across the group

In line with its strong belief in the important role business plays in society, Ominvest successfully concluded a capacity building programme covering Environmental, Social and Governance (ESG) practices across its group companies.

Ominvest's participating group companies included, National Life & General Insurance Co, National Finance, Oman Arab Bank, Alizz Islamic Bank, Jabreen Capital, and Ubhar Capital, a press release said.

The programme was attended by Ominvest's board members as well as top and middle management executives at the parent company and group companies through various focused training sessions. It also included a comprehensive online course especially designed for all staff.

The series of training sessions were concluded with a 32-hour ESG Champions Training Course for 10 ESG leads who were nominated by the CEOs of Ominvest's group companies. This is a certified training course for ESG Champions by the accredited academic institution of the European Public Law Organisation (EPELO), and the European Law and Governance School (ELGS). The champions will lead the effort of integrating ESG across their respective companies and will act as the core unit for synchronising ESG efforts and initiatives across the Group.

The aim of the ESG capacity building initiative by Ominvest is to raise awareness and provide the needed knowledge and skills



to help create a strategic social impact, and to integrate ESG at operational and investment levels across the group whilst aligning with global best practices.

The training sessions highlighted the important role of business in achieving the United Nation's Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), the role of the Financial Sector and Investors in integrating ESG in business operations and investment decision-making processes; the different forms of ESG and Impact Investing; and the difference between ESG and social impact initiatives. Global and regional trends, legal and regulatory aspects, in addition to ESG reporting and rating were discussed in detail, introducing most common frameworks and rating agencies. The training sessions also focused on how to build strategies for scalable and sustainable social impact that

aligns with the UN's SDGs.

Commenting on the importance of the programme, AbdulAziz al Balushi, group CEO, Ominvest said, "Ominvest is a purpose-driven organisation that has embedded social impact and good corporate citizenship at the heart of its corporate vision, mission, culture and values. Our purpose is 'transforming businesses to enrich societies'; to make sure we are creating the desired impact that aligns with our purpose, we believe integrating ESG best practices on both the operational and investment levels in our Group companies, is the right way forward.

"Such practices, when properly and effectively implemented, provide important and essential tools for true and verifiable assessment of business performance in terms of environment, social and governance aspects. ESG practices will also enable us

to create measurable and scalable impact, and will help benchmark our performance year on year, with an aim to enhance our resulting impact."

Reputable consultancy firms across Oman and the region conducted the various training sessions. 'Sustainable Investments', a local Omani consultancy firm that works with 'Verture' consultancy that is based in Greece, provided the ESG training and awareness sessions for Ominvest's Chairman and C-level executives; the ESG Online Training Course for all staff; and the 32-hour ESG Champions training. 'Sustainable Square', a consultancy firm based in Dubai-UAE provided the ESG awareness session for Ominvest's board of directors and an intensive ESG training course for Middle Management Executives from Group companies.

Dr Mohab Ali al Hinai, co-founder of 'Sustainable Investments' commented on the delivered training sessions saying, "Over the past decade, companies with good ESG practices have shown that they are better equipped to ensure the long-term sustainability of the firm. In turn, this makes the business more attractive to investors that see it as less-risky in today's highly competitive business landscape."

Spyros Kouvelis, director, Institute for Sustainable Development of the European Public Law Organisation, a permanent observer at the UN General Assembly, said, "The strong belief of Ominvest and its subsidiaries about the need to integrate Sustainability and ESG across the spectrum of the group's work was a solid foundation on which to build this complete learning experience."

All-new Changan CS35 Plus crossover 2023 MY launched in Oman by AGAE

Arabian Gulf Automobiles and Equipment (AGAE), which is part of Bahwan International Group, has launched All-new 2023 Changan CS35 Plus crossover which comes with a heavily revised exterior making it feel youthful, interactive, safe, and powerful. The front facade is now bolder with muscular fender flanges with roof rails and LED headlamps.

The all-new CS35 Plus limited variant comes with amazing features including 18" alloy wheels, leather seats, panoramic sunroof, 10-inch touch info screen, 7" LCD digital instrument cluster and led headlamps plus it's equipped with all the advanced safety attributes like adaptive cruise control, hill descent control, 360° view camera, forward collision warning, automatic emergency brake, front side airbag and curtain airbag and additionally comfort feature like electric tailgate and wireless charging.

Energetic like new generation youth, Changan CS35 Plus is packed with a 1.4ltr Turbo charged engine which produces 156 hp and 260 nm of torque and fitted with a 7-speed Dual Clutch Transmission (DCT) to always keep owners ahead of the seg-

ment competition, a press release said.

A spokesperson for AGAE said, "We are confident that this new design and stylish Changan CS35 Plus will prove to be yet another reason for car-buyers to upgrade their cars. The sporty new-gen crossover equipped with state-of-the-art technologies offers an unparalleled driving experience, fashionable appearance, strong power and good entertaining features. Developed by the global research and development team of Changan Automobile, it integrates all comprehensive functions: high-quality performance, comfortable driving experience, large internal space and abundant configurations of entertainments."

He added, "We are pleased to offer great Ramadan benefits on Changan CS35 Plus which is energetic in style and sprightly in design."

Changan CS35 which is energetic in style and sprightly in design. The CS35 Plus offers a robust look on the outside while the beautifully crafted interior gives a first-class feel inside. It is a youthful SUV for younger generation who are spirited, passionate, social and want to

become the influencers of their time.

The exterior of Changan CS35 Plus 1.4ltr trend has roof rack, door handles in body colour, 17" alloy wheels, led headlamps, front & rear fog light, led drls, rear defogger, electrically adjustable, orvms with heating and shark fin antenna. Interior features include multifunction steering wheel, rear ac outlet, adjustable steering column, storage bag behind front seats, rear seat 60:40 foldable, leather seats and front centre armrest.

As for safety, this SUV is equipped with features like cruise control, ABS + EBD + BA + HHC + DBF, electronic parking brake, front airbags, speed sensing auto lock, rear parking sensors, tpms, central locking, rain sensor, rearview camera.

Infotainment attributes include Digital Instrument Cluster, 10" Infotainment touch screen, bluetooth, radio, mirror link, front & rear USB, six speakers, navigation. comfort elements include intelligent key,

remote engine start, keyless entry and push start button.

The additional interior features are 2-way electrically adjustable driver seat, automatic ac control and rear reading light. Safety attributes are adaptive cruise control, hill descent control, rear armrest with cup holder, 360° view camera, FCW, automatic emergency brake, front side airbag and curtain airbag. Infotainment features include 7" LCD instrument cluster and wireless charging and additional comfort feature has elec-

tric tailgate. With cutting edge technology and advanced features, the CS35 Plus will not only surprise you but also enhance your driving experience. Its Blue Core Powertrain Technology provides an energy saving performance.



Bank Muscat assists merchants in offering secure QR code e-payments

Bank Muscat has affirmed its readiness and alignment to promoting financial inclusion and digital payments across the sultanate by providing various e-payment options to the general public at merchant partners across the sultanate, a press release said.

The bank continues to expand e-payment options available including debit, prepaid and credit cards, wearables, mobile wallet and the mobile banking app as well as the latest QR-code based payments that help retail outlets easily accept digital payments from the mobile banking app or wallet of any bank in Oman. Bank Muscat pointed out that businesses across the country, including micro and small enterprises, can easily implement QR-code based payments in order to meet the latest regulations on the need for businesses to provide e-payment options to their customers.

Speaking on the occasion, Abdullah Hamood al Jufaili, assistant general manager, Digital Banking, Bank Muscat, said, "Bank Muscat is encouraged by the rapid shift to digital pay-



Abdullah Al Jufaili

ments and invites today's tech-savvy customers to use different e-payments options according to their convenience. E-payments benefit our merchant partners, customers and the general public by improving financial inclusion and offering convenient and highly secure payment options and hence, it is important that businesses offer various e-payment options that will boost economic growth and development. QR-code based payments are particularly helpful to small businesses in this regard. We are confident that the ongoing digital transformation will help our nation and its people achieve the ambitious goals of Oman Vision 2040."



The QR code scanning option allows merchant partners to accept e-payments from customers quickly and securely, irrespective of their bank or wallet. It has been seeing an exponential growth since its recent launch with over 440 merchants already implementing the e-payment facility. The security of transactions is enhanced by ensuring that payments are credited into the business' account, without the need to handle physical cash and the inconvenience of maintaining small change for customers. Payments can be easily initiated from a customer's Mobile Banking application or Wallet application to the merchant's account by scanning a

QR code. A merchant can also request money from a customer using the Mobile Payments System registered mobile number/alias/QR code.

It must be noted that customers of local banks can easily make payments, transfer money or request funds from others using the Central Bank of Oman's Mobile Payment Clearing and Switching System (MPCSS). Funds can be transferred instantaneously using one of the following modes. For person to person transfers, money can be sent or collected from the recipient's default account or wallet. 'Send money' can be initiated by using mobile number, Alias or by QR code scanning and 'collect money' can be initiated using recipient Alias/Mobile Number if both the sender and recipient are registered on MPCSS.

Bank Muscat customers can register on the MPCSS via both its BM Wallet and the mBanking app. Funds can be transferred at zero cost to both Bank Muscat and non-Bank Muscat accounts or wallets by using MPCSS registered mobile number/alias.

JCDecaux celebrates 10 years of operations in Oman

The year 2022 marks the 10th Anniversary for JCDecaux Oman since the launch of its business in 2012 with its strategic project in cooperation with the Muscat Municipality through the Street Furniture and City Beautification Programme, in addition to managing and operating commercial advertisements on the roads in the Governorate of Muscat.

It is worth mentioning that the partnership and cooperation with the Muscat Municipality dates to the eighties of the last century, when JCDecaux supplied some street signs to the municipality at the time.

In 2014, JCDecaux expanded its presence in Oman by signing an exclusive contract with Oman Airports for the Management and Sales of advertising at the airports, Muscat, Salalah, Duqm and Sohar, a press release said.

Behir Chehab, managing director of JCDecaux Oman, explained that the company

is distinguished in supplying services that suit the requirements of cities and airports by providing unique and innovative advertising solutions that enhance community experience as well as providing street furniture assets that contribute to serving the city's residents.

"Our services in Muscat include providing bus shelters for users of public transport, benches, and self-cleaning toilets.

JCDecaux is as well delighted to provide advanced, digital, and innovative advertising and marketing solutions that enable customers to reach all travelers and give the airport a unique experience.

"In particular I am proud of the Omani employees who are the majority working in the company. During these years, these young and passionate Omani youth were able to develop and benefit from accumulated know-how, knowledge, and experience."

Sayyid Shabib Harib al-Busaidi, director general of the Directorate General of Investment and Economic Development in Muscat Municipality, congratulated JCDecaux on the passage of 10 years since its launch in the Omani market, pointing out that it is one of the leading companies in the field of street furniture and beautification of cities by providing quality services and street furniture assets with designs that suit the requirements of cities and serve the residents of the governorate.

Sheikh Samer Ahmed al-Nabhani, chief commercial officer at Oman Airports Company, stated that he welcomed the distinguished partnership with JCDecaux, which is considered number one worldwide as an operator of out-of-home advertising and it is also well-known by providing its services in the largest airports around the world.

Oman Tourism Forum sees record number of delegates

Oman Tourism Forum 2022, hosted by Oman Ministry of Heritage and Tourism (MHT), was launched at the Dubai World Trade Center (DWTC) during Arabian Travel Market (ATM) 2022 in Dubai, UAE. The event was organised by MHT in association with International China Investment Forum and coordinated by China Travel Online.

The forum was a big success with a record number of over 200 delegates from China, Europe, Asia, India, Middle East and Oman. It was the largest business event during ATM. The forum objective was to enable industry stakeholders to explore tourism partnership in Oman, at regional and international level, a



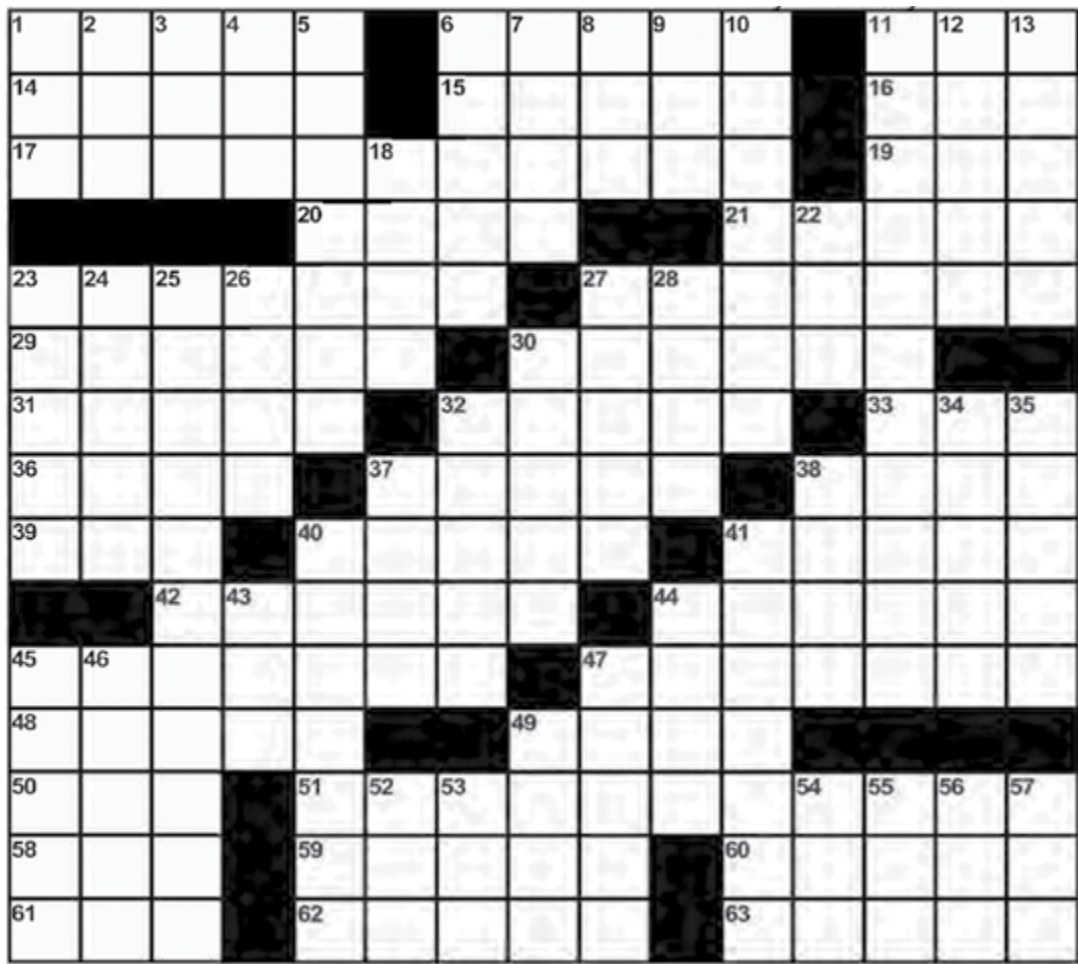
press release said.

China was one of the key elements in this forum. The forum made history as the largest gathering of Chinese agents during ATM with more than 50 Chinese travel agents attending the event. The event was officiated by H E Azzan al-Busaidi, Undersecretary of Tourism, Oman Ministry of Heritage and Tourism. H E Azzan said, "We are here to focus on the China market given the strategic importance it plays in Oman Tourism Forum 2022. As you might be aware, China has the world's largest source market, from 57 million, in 2010, to 169 million outbound tourists in 2019." Marcus Lee, CEO China

Travel Online and Oman Tourism Forum chairman, said, "In achieving Vision 2040, there are several key questions to bring Oman Tourism to the next levels, including global, aviation, hotel and MICE partnership."

An MoU signing ceremony between Visit Oman and Beijing Spring Travel was a highlight of the event. Beijing Spring Travel is one of the 'top 3' largest tour operators in China, that also owns Spring airline with 102 aircrafts. The MOU was signed by Visit Oman managing director Shabib Mohamed al-Mamari, Yang Yang, GM of Beijing Spring Travel, and Marcus Lee, CEO China Travel Online as coordinator.

DAILY CROSSWORD



ACROSS

1) Make pigtails
6) Trendy place to go downhill
11) Agent for trips?
14) Wavelike design
15) Brahman, for one
16) Ring bearer, often
17) Busy bodies?
19) Card to keep
20) Apple leftover
21) "Four" at the fore
23) Movie theater purchase
27) Knight to remember
29) Many have chapters
30) Erase
31) Claims on homes, e.g.
32) Chops finely
33) Nipper's co.
36) Damed thing
37) This makes five in this puzzle
38) Broadway star Verdon
39) Hurricane heading, sometimes
40) Popular game
41) Beside
42) California county
44) Far from eager
45) Opens a map

4) 7) More expressionless, as a stare
48) Hauled away
49) Exec, in slang
50) "How was _ know?"
51) Computer user's locale
58) Dog that's far from a purebred
59) Arctic inhabitant
60) Event with cowboys and lassos
61) Inquire
62) Requires
63) Brenda who was drawn out

DOWN

1) Mercedes competitor
2) "Winnie-the-Pooh" baby
3) Requirement for a useful balloon
4) Aggravate
5) Some church officers
6) Squash type
7) Ad headline, often
8) Letters on tires
9) "Yadda, yadda, yadda"
10) Snuggles down
11) It's done in some tanneries
12) Pelvic bones
13) Apprehension
18) _ d'oeuvre (appetizer)
22) "Dig in!"
23) Sign of life
24) Bermuda vegetable
25) Complicated, eccentric person
26) Bop on the head
27) Little leapin' lizard
28) Pub offerings
30) Funeral hymn
32) Ding-, (doorbell sounds)
34) Perfume by burning
35) Rage
37) Breeze component
38) Hidden valley
40) Variety of apple
41) Images representing posters
43) Lobster eggs
44) Came down to earth
45) Central New York town
46) "We didn't do it!"
47) Some sculptures
49) Prepare to crash
52) Half and half
53) Have regrets

54) "Sesame Street" viewer
55) Potato state (abbr.)
56) " _ the ramparts ... "
57) Word partnered with "neither"

NOTE PAD

S	P	E	C	S	M	B	A	A	G	H	A	S
E	A	S	E	L	Y	O	U	B	U	I	L	T
L	I	A	N	A	N	O	D	A	N	N	I	E
F	R	U	S	T	R	A	T	I	O	N	D	N
E	T	A	O	R	D	E	R	E	D			
T	R	I	D	E	N	T	S	B	O	N	A	
H	E	M	D	I	R	T	Y	N	O	N	C	E
R	A	P	S	S	I	R	E	S	S	C	U	D
U	P	E	N	D	G	I	A	N	T	E	R	G
D	I	E	D	P	H	A	R	I	S	E	E	
S	N	I	P	P	E	T	F	A	N			
C	A	M	O	B	S	T	R	U	C	T	I	O
A	V	E	R	S	A	R	E	T	I	T	L	E
L	A	N	C	E	R	U	N	O	M	E	G	A
A	L	T	A	R	S	E	T	R	E	M	A	P

YOUR DAILY HOROSCOPE

ARIES MARCH 21-APRIL 19

Follow your curiosity wherever it tells you to go today. It will steer you straight to stimulation! You'll be intrigued and entertained by a new person on the scene who's making a fuss and making some admirers drool. You just don't get the attraction, but you'll be enjoying the antics of the folks who are falling all over themselves. The day will be like a giant jigsaw puzzle for you to solve, so the earlier you start going through the pieces and getting them organized the better.

LEO JULY 23-AUGUST 22

You've never been known to wait to buy something until it was on sale. Basically, you'll head out to get what you want the moment you set your sights on it and not a second later. So if a certain someone out there in the world has been on your mind lately but lives more than a hop, skip, and a jump away, you won't be willing to let a pesky thing like thousands of miles get in the way. Good for you. Get on a plane!

SAGITTARIUS NOVEMBER 22-DECEMBER 21

You have way too much to do and way too little time to get it done. To make matters worse, you're dying for some downtime and probably won't get it any time soon. You'd better call and say you're going to be late. Think of it this way: if you get this done, you'll be so proud of yourself that you'll feel completely justified in treating yourself to just about anything you want. There. That wasn't so bad, was it?

TAURUS APRIL 20-MAY 20

Approaching you isn't easy even for the bravest of souls. The person who's currently interested might be having a difficult time transitioning from secret admirer to charming suitor. You know exactly who this is, so if you're interested, let them know you're available and when. And what kind of food you like. If you're not, give them a break. Start chatting about an imaginary sweetheart when they're in the vicinity.

VIRGO AUGUST 23-SEPTEMBER 22

If you've been sharing bills, taxes, and a bank account with someone, now is the time to take a look at that situation again. All may be well, but then again, it's a good idea to keep your eyes open for mistakes. If you're going to be that financially intimate with someone, you need to know that they can handle it. And if you find that they can't, there's nothing wrong with amicably separating that part of your life.

CAPRICORN DECEMBER 22-JANUARY 19

Relationships are your number one priority at the moment, and you're taking them very seriously. So don't be surprised if a conversation that starts out casually turns quite confrontational almost as soon as it begins. Expect fireworks, but know that the astrological inspiration for the mood you're in can also inspire delightful passion. Given that choice, you'll know what to do.

GEMINI MAY 21-JUNE 21

Your friendships are very important to you now. You've just recently had the chance to see how valuable you are to your close friends and how very much they respect you. That's a good feeling. It's how strength in numbers is found. So indulge yourself. Explore new groups. Become involved with people you've always wanted to know better. Then introduce the new folks to your current gang. Everyone wins.

LIBRA SEPTEMBER 23-OCTOBER 22

You regard a certain higher-up as more than a mentor. To you they're almost family. If you need them now, as you have in the past, all you really have to do is ask. They've never turned you down, and you know they never will, not as long as they have what you need. So instead of sitting there feeling stuck, get in touch. You know they'd like you to hear from you.

AQUARIUS JANUARY 20-FEBRUARY 18

Why are you trying to be all things to all people? It's admirable to want to help everyone, but it isn't realistic to expect yourself to be able to do it. Instead, focus on doing the one or two things you can do today. Spend time with the few people you have time for. Not everyone can fit into your busy life right now, so don't worry about saying no to someone who wants to see you. They'll understand, just like you understood when they're busy.

CANCER JUNE 22-JULY 22

You're wearing your heart on your sleeve for one and all to see. So absolutely nothing that crosses your mind will be a secret to others even if you actually want it to be. Not to worry. At least you won't have to pretend to be nice to someone who's gone out of their way to aggravate you. Give them one good glance and stalk off. It's rather freeing, isn't it?

SCORPIO OCTOBER 23-NOVEMBER 21

You're considering your health and the condition of your body, in a nutshell, your appearance. And you know what that means. You're thinking about looking good for someone special, and you want to make quite the grand entrance. Well, there's really no better time to recommit yourself to your goals.

PISCES FEBRUARY 19-MARCH 20

At the moment, you most value cooperation, compromise, balance, and harmony, but none of those things will be especially easy to pull off if you're not in the right company. You can certainly call upon your talents and assist others in smoothing things over, but don't feel obligated to put yourself in the line of fire to do it. If you really want to help, you can only get so involved.

01. Alidade, for example, a rotary dial for angular positioning on an astrolabe, is a term borrowed from which language?

A. Italian
B. Greek
C. Arabic
D. Chinese

02. What is shigella?

A. A species of rye
B. A Brazilian dance
C. A genus of bacteria
D. Pottery from the Bronze Age in Mesopotamia

03. Who discovered and named the element francium in 1939?

A. Emmeline Pankhurst
B. Benjamin Franklin
C. William Pitt the Younger
D. Marguerite Perey

Answers: 1. C 2. C 3. D

KIDS COLOURING

BOGGLER

L	A	D	A
E	P	O	F
E	O	R	R
S	O	C	B

Each game will present you with a matrix filled with letters. The objective is to form words by linking adjacent letters - to the left, right, on top, bottom, or diagonal to each other. The Boggles Classic game uses a 4 x 4 matrix. Words are valued at one point for each letter in excess of two letters. A three letter word is worth one point, a four letter word is worth two points, and so on. Valid words must be at least three letters long.

Solution 20-25 words: Excellent, 15-20 words: Very good, 10-15 words: Good, 5-10 words: Average

DO YOU SUDOKU?

LEVEL EASY: Fill in the grid so that every row, every column and every 3x3 box contains the digits 1 to 9 and only one instance of each number

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

WORD BUILDER

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

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

SUDOKU EASY ANSWER

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

Sandstorm brings Iraq to standstill, 8th in a month

Baghdad, Iraq - Another sandstorm that descended on Monday on Iraq sent at least 2,000 people to hospital with breathing problems and led to closure of airports, schools and public offices across the country.

It is the eighth dust storm since mid-April to hit Iraq, which has been battered by soil degradation, intense droughts and low rainfall linked to climate change. The last one earlier this month led to the death of one person while 5,000 others had to be hospitalised for respiratory problems.

On Monday a thick cloud of dust enveloped the capital Baghdad in an orange glow and blanketed many other cities including the Shiite shrine city of Najaf to the south, and Sulaimaniyah, in the northern Kurdish autonomous region, AFP correspondents said.

Yellow and orange sand covered building roofs, cars and even crept into homes.

Authorities in seven of Iraq's 18 provinces, including Baghdad, ordered government offices to shut.

But health facilities remained open to assist those most at risk, including the elderly and people suffering from chronic respiratory diseases and heart ailments.

By midday at least 2,000 people were admitted to hospitals across Iraq in need of oxygen, said health ministry spokesman Seif al-Badr.

AFP correspondents saw around 20 patients, most of them elderly men, at Baghdad's Sheikh Zayed Hospital.



A traffic policeman directs traffic flow in the city of Nasiriyah in Iraq's southern Dhi Qar province on Monday amidst a heavy dust storm. (AFP)

One of them was Hadi Saada, 70, lying on his side on a bed in the intensive care unit hooked to a respirator. He struggled to breathe.

'Suffocating from dust'

'It is his third time in hospital' since the sandstorms began in April, said his son Mohammed Saada, adding that his father had a heart condition.

Another patient, Khaled Jassem, 70, was also hooked to an oxygen tank.

"We've been here since

Sam... My father has a heart ailment, diabetes, hypertension and is suffocating on the dust," said his son Walid Jassem.

At least 75 people struggling to breathe were admitted on Monday to Sheikh Zayed, said Talib Abdelmoneim Nejm, one of the ICU officials.

The sandstorm drastically reduced visibility to just 300 metres at Baghdad airport, prompting authorities to close airspace and halt flights, state-run INA news agency reported.

Airports in Najaf and Sulaimaniyah were also closed for

the day, the agency said.

Schools nationwide were also shuttered and end of year exams postponed to Tuesday. Universities also delayed exams.

The latest sandstorm was expected to gradually dissipate by Monday evening, weather services said. The Middle East has always been battered by dust and sandstorms but they have become more frequent and intense in recent years.

The trend has been associated with overuse of river water, more dams, overgrazing

and deforestation.

Iraq is rich in oil and is known in Arabic as the land of the two rivers - in reference to the legendary Tigris and Euphrates rivers.

But the supply of water has been declining for years and Iraq is classified as one of the world's five countries most vulnerable to climate change and desertification.

In April, an environment ministry official warned that Iraq could face '272 days of dust' a year over the next two decades. AFP

US removes Jewish Kahane movement from blacklist

Washington, US - The United States will remove a Jewish extremist group linked to late rabbi Meir Kahane as well as a Palestinian fighter group from a terror blacklist after years without violence, an official said on Sunday.

The State Department designated Kahane Chai as a foreign terrorist organisation in 1997, three years after its supporter Baruch Goldstein massacred 29 Palestinians in West Bank city of Hebron.

The group was founded by Kahane, a US-born rabbi and former Israeli MP who advocated the expulsion of Arabs from Israel and was assassinated in New York in 1990.

The State Department informed Congress it will withdraw the designation, which

was contested in court by the group, as Kahane Chai 'has not been linked to a terrorist attack since 2005', an official said. The official said the State Department was also delisting the Mujahidin Shura Council in the Environs of Jerusalem, a Palestinian fighter group linked to rocket attacks a decade ago.

Revoking the designations 'ensures our terrorism sanctions remain current and credible and does not reflect any change in policy towards the past activities of any of these the organisations', the State Department official said.

Despite the lack of attacks by Kahane Chai group, the late rabbi remains a hero for some on the extreme right of Israeli politics.

AFP

Iran awaits 'US response to nuke talks solutions'

Tehran, Iran - Iran said on Monday it awaited the US response to 'solutions' discussed with the EU envoy for breaking a stalemate in talks aimed at restoring the 2015 nuclear deal.

The European Union's coordinator for nuclear talks with Iran, Enrique Mora, held two days of discussions with the Islamic republic's chief negotiator Ali Bagheri in Tehran last week, leading the EU to say talks had been unblocked.

The negotiations, aimed at bringing the US back into the deal and Iran to full compliance with it, had stalled for about two months. "Serious and result-oriented negotiations with special initiatives from Iran were held," Iranian foreign ministry spokesman Saeed Khatibzadeh told reporters. "If the US gives its response to some of the solutions that were proposed, we can be in the position that all sides return to Vienna," where the talks are held, he added during his weekly press conference.

Iran has been engaged in direct negotiations with France, Germany, Britain, Russia and China to revive the deal, known formally as the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA). The US has participated indirectly. The 2015 agreement gave Iran sanctions relief in exchange for curbs on its nuclear programme to prevent Tehran from



Saeed Khatibzadeh (AFP)

developing an atomic bomb - something it has always denied wanting to do.

But the US unilateral withdrawal from the accord in 2018 under then-president Donald Trump and the reimposition of biting economic sanctions prompted Iran to begin rolling back on its own commitments.

"If the US announces its political decision today, which we have not yet received, we can say that an important step has been taken in the progress of the negotiations," Khatibzadeh noted.

Among the sticking points is Tehran's demand to remove the Revolutionary Guards, the ideological arm of Iran's military, from a US terrorism list.

EU Foreign Policy Chief Josep Borrell on Friday said Mora's mission to Tehran went 'better than expected' and the stalled negotiations 'have been reopened'.

AFP

Saudi King Salman leaves hospital after tests

Riyadh, KSA - Saudi Arabia's ageing King Salman bin Abdulaziz has left the hospital one week after being admitted for tests, including a colonoscopy, state media reported.

Video broadcast by the official Saudi Press Agency (SPA) late on Sunday showed the 86-year-old monarch walking out of King Faisal Specialist Hospital in the coastal city of Jeddah, using a cane and surrounded by officials, including Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman before being driven away.

He left "after conducting medical examinations and successfully completing the treat-



Saudi King Salman leaving a hospital in Jeddah on Monday (AFP)

ment plan and recovery period," the SPA said on Twitter.

The kingdom has for years sought to quell speculation over the health of the 86-year-old monarch, who has ruled the world's top oil exporter since 2015.

A week ago, state media reported that the king's colonoscopy results were 'sound' and that doctors had 'decided to keep him in the hospital for some time to rest'.

In 2017, Saudi Arabia dismissed reports and mounting speculation that the king was planning to abdicate in favour of Crown Prince Mohammed, the

de facto ruler.

King Salman underwent surgery to remove his gall bladder in 2020.

Before this latest hospitalisation, he was most recently admitted in March for what state media described as 'successful medical tests' and to change the battery of his pacemaker.

Under his rule, Saudi Arabia has launched ambitious economic reforms for a post-oil era and given more rights to women, while adopting a more assertive foreign policy, including entering a war in neighbouring Yemen.

AFP

First commercial flight in 6 years leaves Yemen's rebel-held capital

Sanaa, Yemen - The first commercial flight in nearly six years took off from Yemen's rebel-held capital on Monday, a major step forward in a peace process that has provided rare relief from conflict.

The Yemenia plane carrying 126 passengers, including hospital patients needing treatment abroad and their relatives, took off from Sanaa for the Jordanian capital Amman just after 9am (0600 GMT), AFP journalists saw.

Before take-off, the plane with red-and-blue tail livery taxied through an honour guard of two fire trucks spraying jets of water. It landed in Amman before 0900 GMT.

Sanaa's airport has been closed to commercial traffic since August 2016 because of air strikes by the Saudi-led military coalition, who are fighting Iran-backed Houthi rebels.

"I'm so happy with the open-



A firefighter truck celebrates with a water jet the first Yemen Airways flight in six years on the tarmac of Sanaa airport in the Yemeni capital, on Monday (AFP)

ing of Sanaa airport," said Lutfiyah, a wheelchair-bound passenger who did not want to give her full name. "Today is a day of

celebration, and I hope that it remains open."

Yemen, the Arab world's poorest country, has been

wracked with war since the coalition stepped in to support the government in 2015, a year after the Houthis seized control

of the capital.

According to UN figures, more than 150,000 people have died in the violence and millions have been displaced, creating the world's worst humanitarian crisis. But a truce has been in place since April 2, coinciding with the start of the Muslim holy month of Ramadan.

Five days after it took effect, Yemen's Saudi-based president handed his powers to a leadership council tasked with holding peace talks with the rebels.

'Stepping stone towards peace'

Resuming flights from Sanaa, working to reopen roads to the rebel-besieged city of Ta'ez and allowing fuel tankers into the Houthi-held port of Hodeida - a lifeline for Yemen - were all part of the truce agreement.

UN special envoy Hans Grundberg called Monday's flight an 'important and long-

awaited step'. The agreement provides for two return flights to Amman and Cairo.

"I hope this provides some relief to the Yemenis who need to seek medical treatment abroad, pursue education and business opportunities, or reunite with loved ones," he said in a statement. While fuel tankers have docked in Hodeida and flights have now resumed from Sanaa, the main routes into Ta'ez remain cut off.

Erin Hutchinson, Yemen country director for the Norwegian Refugee Council aid agency, called the flight 'a stepping stone towards a lasting peace for Yemen'.

"The long overdue reopening of the airport was one of the major objectives of the truce," she said in a statement.

"If the parties to the conflict continue to work together to operate regular flights in and out of Sanaa, they can help save thou-

sands of lives, prevent premature deaths, and support the country's economy."

The inaugural flight under the truce was planned for April 24 from Sanaa to Amman but had to be scrapped after Yemenia said it did not receive the necessary permits.

Each side blamed the other for the hold-up, while the United Nations called for a quick resolution to the impasse.

Last week Yemen's government said it would allow citizens in rebel-held areas to travel on Houthi-issued passports, removing a barrier to the flights.

The government has agreed 'during the armistice period to allow the Yemeni people who were held hostage to the (Houthis) the opportunity to travel through Sanaa airport, with passports issued by Houthi-controlled areas,' a Yemeni official told AFP.

AFP

North Korea's Kim slams officials over pandemic response, deploys army

Seoul, South Korea - North Korea's Kim Jong Un criticised 'irresponsible' officials over the country's pandemic response and ordered the army to help distribute medicine, state media said on Monday, as Seoul offered COVID-19 aid.

More than a million people have been ill with what Pyongyang refers to as 'fever', state media said, despite leader Kim ordering nationwide lockdowns in a bid to slow the spread of disease through the unvaccinated population.

In a sign of how serious the situation may be, Kim 'strongly criticised' healthcare officials for what he called a botched response to epidemic prevention - specifically a failure to keep pharmacies open 24/7 to distribute medicine.

He ordered the army to get to work 'on immediately stabilising the supply of medicines in Pyonyang', the capital, where Omicron was detected last week in North Korea's first reported cases of COVID-19.

Kim has put himself front and centre of North Korea's disease response, overseeing near-daily emergency Politburo meetings on the outbreak, which he has said is causing 'great upheaval' in the country.

The failure to distribute medicine properly was 'because of



North Korean leader Kim Jong Un (centre) inspecting a pharmacy in Pyongyang on Sunday (AFP)

ficials of the Cabinet and public health sector in charge of the supply have not rolled up their sleeves, not properly recognising the present crisis', state media KCNA reported Kim as saying.

Kim, who inspected pharmacies first hand, 'strongly criticised the Cabinet and public health sector for their irresponsible work attitude', KCNA said.

He also criticised lapses in official legal oversight, flagging 'several negative phenomena in

the nationwide handling and sale of medicines'.

North Korea has one of the world's worst healthcare systems, with poorly-equipped hospitals, few intensive care units, and no COVID treatment drugs or mass testing ability, experts say. "While visiting a pharmacy, Kim Jong Un saw with his eyes the shortage of medicines in North Korea," Cheong Seong-jang, researcher at the Sejong Institute told AFP.

"He may have guessed but

the situation may have been more serious than he had expected."

KCNA said that as of May 15, a total of 50 people had died, with 1,213,550 cases of 'fever' and over half a million currently receiving medical treatment.

North Korea had maintained a rigid blockade since the pandemic began, but with massive Omicron outbreaks in neighbouring countries, experts said it was inevitable COVID would sneak in.

Seoul's help?

Kim's public criticism is a sign that the situation on the ground is grim, said Yang Moo-jin, professor at the University of North Korean Studies in Seoul.

"He is pointing out the overall inadequacy of the quarantine system," he said.

North Korea is likely to need international assistance to get through the massive Omicron surge, Yang said, and will turn to China first - but maybe the United States or South Korea if it

Indonesia tourist bus crash kills 14

Surabaya, Indonesia - At least 14 people were killed and more than a dozen others injured when a bus carrying domestic tourists crashed into an advertising sign in Indonesia's East Java province early on Monday, police said.

The bus - which was carrying 31 passengers, the driver and a crew member - hit the pole and then rolled over on a toll road connecting the town of Mojokerto to the country's second city, Surabaya.

The victims were from Benowo, a village near Surabaya, and were returning home after a long weekend at popular holiday destination Dieng Plateau, about 400km away in Central Java, local official Ridwan Mubaron told Indonesian television station Metro TV.

"Fourteen people have died and 19 others sustained minor and serious injuries," Mojokerto police chief Rofiq Ripto Himawan told reporters on Monday, adding that authorities were still investigating the cause of the accident. Earlier, a spokesman for the East Java police blamed the crash on driver error.

"This accident was caused by human error, the driver was exhausted or tired," Dirmanto, who goes by a single name, told Metro TV. A police report stated that both weather and traffic were clear when the accident occurred on Monday morning.

AFP

Somalia's foreign partners hail peaceful election of new president

Mogadishu, Somalia - Somalia's international partners on Monday welcomed the election of President Hassan Sheikh Mohamud, who takes office after months of political instability and faces crises including a violent insurgency and devastating drought.

Residents in the capital Mogadishu raced through the streets banging metal cans and fired guns into the air in celebration as the result of the marathon poll was announced around midnight. Many hope the vote - which concluded peacefully but was dogged by claims of irregularities - will draw a line under a political crisis that has lasted well over a year.

Outgoing president Mohamed Abdullahi Mohamed's term ended in February 2021 without an election and the protracted tussle for power that followed turned violent at times and caused divisions at the highest levels of government.

Somalia's international partners had repeatedly warned the election delays were a dangerous distraction from the fight against Al-Shabaab insurgents, who have been trying to overthrow the government for over a decade.

On Monday, the UK's minister for Africa congratulated Mohamud, who ruled Somalia between 2012 and 2017, and is the first president to win a second term in the troubled Horn of Africa nation.

The UK 'looks forward to continuing its close work to support on building stability, tackling Al-Shabaab and supporting those affected by the devastating drought', minister Vicky Ford tweeted.

Mohamud has promised to transform Somalia into 'a peaceful country that is at peace with



Hassan Sheikh Mohamud (AFP)

the world'.

The East African regional bloc IGAD said Mohamud's victory was 'a clear testimony of the trust and confidence that the people of Somalia have in his leadership qualities'.

Somalia has not held a one-person, one-vote election in 50 years and few of its 15mn people played any part in choosing Mohamud. Instead, polls follow a complex indirect model, where state legislatures and clan delegates pick lawmakers for the national parliament, which in turn chooses the president.

Hope for change

Still, in the capital there were celebrations that stretched into the early hours, and some expressed relief that the long-running election saga was over.

"This country seriously needed leadership change to avoid bloodshed... that's why this election was so important," said Habiil Ali, a resident from Mogadishu's Wadajir district.

A former academic and peace activist, Mohamud's first election in 2012 raised hopes that Somalia was on the path to stability.

But his administration was dogged by high-profile corruption scandals and political turmoil, with two of his three prime ministerial appointees forced out, and two central bank governors resigning.

AFP

Saudi doctors separate conjoined twins from Yemen

Riyadh, KSA - Doctors in Saudi Arabia have successfully separated conjoined twins from war-torn Yemen after a 'complicated' 15-hour operation, Saudi state media reported on Monday.

The baby boys, Yussef and Yassin, were 'conjoined in several organs', and some 24 doctors were involved in the operation to separate them, the official Saudi Press Agency (SPA) said.

Yemen has been wracked by a brutal seven-year conflict pitting the Saudi-backed government against Iran-backed Houthi rebels, whose seizure of the capital Sanaa in 2014



Saudi Arabia's specialist surgeons operate to separate Yemeni conjoined twins in a hospital in the capital Riyadh (AFP)

prompted a Saudi-led military coalition to intervene.

More than 150,000 people

have died in the violence and the country's health system has been devastated, in what the

Mass nurse exodus: Zimbabwe healthcare bleeds

Harare, Zimbabwe - Virginia Mutsamwira says she treats four times the number of patients she should ideally handle at a township clinic in Harare, the capital of Zimbabwe.

"It's tiring - the nurse-patient ratio is really bad," she says, throwing herself onto a brown sofa at her house in Cold Comfort township after a 12-hour shift.

"It's frustrating, because you can't offer quality care."

The 52-year-old senior nurse is skilled, experienced and educated. Yet her monthly salary of some US\$200 barely covers her basics.

To make ends meet for her family of eight, she runs a small grocery shop out of her home, where she also rears chickens and rabbits for sale.

After work, before she even takes off her blue uniform, she feeds the chickens.

She is joining the exodus of healthcare workers emigrating from Zimbabwe - in her case, 'to secure my retirement'.

Official figures show that last year alone Zimbabwe lost nearly 1,800 nurses, mainly to Britain. That's more than 10 per cent of all the nurses working in



A nurse serves a meal to a patient in a medical ward at a local hospital in Harare on April 26, this year (AFP)

public hospitals.

Mutsamwira has already done her International English Language Test, required to get a visa to the United Kingdom, where salaries are around 10 times higher than in Zimbabwe.

The outflow of nursing staff is stripping the country of desperately-needed skills.

"We are always overwhelmed because many nurses are leaving," says Josephine Marare, 33, who works at one of the country's largest public hospitals,

Sally Mugabe Central Hospital.

Under-equipped facilities only worsen morale. "Imagine working in a hospital where there are no bandages, no water, no basic drugs like painkillers," she says.

"I am just so frustrated. If I get money to get a visa, I will join the others who are leaving."

The migration has spurred demand for passports, with people queueing up before dawn to apply for travel documents in Harare.

United Nations describes as the world's worst humanitarian crisis. Saudi Arabia's state-run King Salman Humanitarian Aid and Relief Center (KSRelief) regularly touts its humanitarian assistance to Yemen as evidence of Riyadh's commitment to alleviating the suffering there.

The centre's doctors carried out the 'four-phase surgery' separating Yussef and Yassin, describing it as 'among the most complicated' they had performed, the SPA said on Monday.

Last July Saudi doctors separated a Yemeni baby from her parasitic twin, saying at the time it was their 50th success-

ful operation on conjoined twins. In December a separate set of Yemeni twins were separated by doctors in Jordan's capital Amman before being flown back to Sanaa, according to the UN children's agency.

Last week Saudi King Salman ordered that yet another set of Yemeni conjoined twins, girls named Mawaddah and Rahmah, be transferred to Riyadh 'to conduct medical examinations and check on the possibility' of separation, the SPA reported.

The king 'attaches big importance to the Saudi programme for the Siamese twins', the SPA report said.

AFP

It's so desperate that many highly qualified nurses opt for junior roles abroad because these pay better. The Health Service Board, which grades and appoints government health workers, admits the mass exodus of nurses has had an effect.

Under a programme aimed at filling staffing gaps, retired nurses are being re-hired while training is being expanded.

"Losing experienced workers is always a challenge," spokesman Livingstone Mashange said.

The board's website opens with a picture of smiling nurses leaping joyfully and a bold 'we are hiring' message. Like other rich countries, Britain has a long tradition of recruiting staff from developing countries to meet the needs of its health service.

But shortages in the UK have shot up, driven by the COVID-19 pandemic and a dramatic drop in nurses recruited from eastern Europe as a result of Brexit.

According to a report last June by the Health Foundation think-tank, Britain's National Health Service (NHS) faced a shortfall of 93,000 staff. Some 42 per cent of them were nurses.

AFP

Sri Lanka’s new PM wins support to revive economy

Colombo, Sri Lanka - Sri Lanka’s new prime minister won crucial support from two main opposition parties on Monday, easing the pressure on the ruling Rajapaksa clan in the face of the island’s worsening economic crisis.

But highlighting the dire situation still facing Sri Lanka’s 22mn people, Ranil Wickremesinghe said the country had run out of petrol and that the ‘next couple of months will be the most difficult ones of our lives’. “I have no desire to hide the truth and to lie to the public,” Wickremesinghe said in an address to the nation.

The main opposition SJB party appeared to drop its demands that President Gotabaya

Rajapaksa should step down before backing a coalition to manage the crumbling economy.

The SJB, or Samagi Jana Balawegaya, declined to join a unity government led by Wickremesinghe, but said it would ‘unconditionally support the positive efforts to revive the economy’. “It is important to save the country from the grave economic crisis,” it said in a brief statement.

And the second-largest opposition party, the Sri Lanka Freedom Party (SLFP), said it would join the cabinet.

Even so, thousands of protesters remained camped outside the sea-front office of 73-year-old President Gotabaya Rajapaksa, whose brother



Navy personnel stand guard outside the Sri Lanka police headquarters in Colombo on Monday (AFP)

Mahinda quit as premier last week after political violence killed at least nine people.

Shortages of food, fuel and medicines, along with record inflation and lengthy blackouts,

have brought severe hardships to Sri Lankans, in the worst financial crisis since independ-

ence from Britain in 1948.

Wickremesinghe’s appointment last week - his sixth turn as prime minister - has so far failed to quell public anger at the government for bringing Sri Lanka to the brink of economic collapse. Troops patrolled the streets as consumers queued up for scarce supplies and the government announced that a six-hour night curfew will be reimposed from Monday after a 24-hour break for a religious holiday.

Dollar shortage

Wickremesinghe said on Monday that Sri Lanka had no dollars to finance essential imports with three oil tankers were waiting off Colombo to be paid before they would unload. He added that the

country has run out of 14 essential drugs, including anti-rabies vaccines. “The state’s health ministry has not paid its suppliers of medicines for four months and has now been blacklisted.”

He also warned that fuel and electricity tariffs will be raised substantially and his government will also sell off its loss-making national airline.

However, he urged people to ‘patiently bear the next couple of months’ and vowed he could overcome the crisis.

Wickremesinghe has struggled to form a ‘unity government’ as cabinet swearing-in scheduled for Monday afternoon was pushed back as talks continued on sharing portfolios. AFP

At Peking University, students protest against COVID controls

Anger boiled over at the weekend after tight and new movement restrictions were imposed

Beijing, China - Hundreds of students at an elite Beijing university have protested against strict COVID-19 curbs on campus, in a rare show of defiance as anger mounts over virus controls.

China is the only major country adhering to a rigid zero-COVID policy and its restrictions have prompted frustration with lockdowns, spartan quarantine facilities and heavy handed enforcement.

In Beijing - which has reported more than 1,000 infections in recent weeks - most restaurants and public spaces have been shut and millions face daily testing and working from home.

Anger boiled over at the weekend at Peking University after the school tried to impose tight new movement restrictions including a ban on food deliveries. Locked-down students were already confined to just one part of the campus, banned from receiving visitors and tested daily.

Students who wanted to remain anonymous for fear of reprisals told AFP that at least 300 students crowded outside one dormitory on the university’s



A man jogs in front of the Wanliu campus of Peking University in Beijing on Monday (AFP)

Wanliu campus and chanted in protest on Sunday.

“Everyone was really angry when the campus was fenced off at night and went to protest,” one said, adding that the restrictions had ‘totally destroyed everyone’s normal lives’.

She said the rules were much stricter for students than teaching staff, whose living quarters were separated by a fence that was later torn down by students.

Videos verified by AFP show hundreds of masked students gathered outside, chanting and

heckling a university official.

Peking University vice principal Chen Baojian eventually addressed the crowd through a megaphone, according to a video provided by a protester, telling them to ‘go back to your dormitories in an orderly fashion’.

After the crowds dispersed, officials agreed to make it easier for students to travel out of the Wanliu campus to other parts of the university, and to provide grocery deliveries.

“They’ve made it so that everyone... must do whatever the

government tells you to do, and all your rights and personal freedoms are stripped away,” a student told AFP. On Monday AFP reporters saw two police vans parked outside a quiet campus.

When contacted by AFP the university said it was not a protest but ‘just students expressing their demands’.

The incident was rapidly censored on China’s Twitter-like Weibo platform, where many evoked memories of the country’s May 4 movement - mass protests by students in 1919.

Peking University was also the birthplace of the Tiananmen Square protests in 1989.

“Today we witnessed Peking University students’ tradition of struggle rise from the ashes,” read one post.

Steve Tsang, director of the SOAS China Institute in London, said Peking University is a politically important institution and the government would ‘react swiftly and strongly to put an end to protests (there) before they can gather momentum’.

AFP

Jerusalem archbishop condemns police raid at journalist’s funeral

Jerusalem - The Catholic archbishop in Jerusalem on Monday strongly criticised Israel’s ‘police invasion’ last week of a Christian hospital ahead of the funeral of slain Al Jazeera reporter Shireen Abu Akleh.

The veteran journalist was shot dead during an Israeli army raid in the West Bank. Palestinians and the TV network said Israeli troops killed her, while Israel said Palestinian gunfire may be to blame. Anger over her death was compounded on Friday when baton-wielding Israeli police in annexed east Jerusalem beat pallbearers carrying Abu Akleh’s coffin which was covered by a Palestinian flag.

The Latin Patriarch of Jerusalem, Pierbattista Pizzaballa, on Monday condemned ‘Israel’s police invasion and disproportionate use of force’ at St Joseph’s hospital, where her body was being held.

At a press conference at the hospital, he criticised Israeli police for ‘attacking mourners, striking them with batons, using smoke grenades (and) shooting rubber bullets’.

Police had stormed the hospital, ‘disrespecting the church, disrespecting the health institute, disrespecting the memory of the deceased, and forcing the pallbearers to almost drop the coffin’, said Pizzaballa, speaking on behalf of the bishops of the Holy Land. The hospital is owned by the Sisters of St Joseph of the Apparition, a French-founded congregation that has been present in former Palestine and Israel for nearly 200 years.

Chaotic scenes



Police disrespected the church, the memory of the deceased, forced the pallbearers to almost drop the coffin

PIERBATTISTA PIZABALLA

Israeli police have vowed to investigate the chaotic incident, which was broadcast live worldwide and sparked widespread condemnation including from the United States, European Union and United Nations.

Those calls echoed global demands for an impartial probe into the death of Abu Akleh, a Palestinian-American, who Al Jazeera said was killed by Israel ‘deliberately’ and ‘in cold blood’.

Israel’s army has said it was not yet clear if she was killed by stray Palestinian gunfire or by Israeli sniper fire aimed at nearby militants in the West Bank flash-point district of Jenin.

Israeli police have meanwhile offered a series of explanations for the unrest on the day of her funeral.

AFP

‘No blanket amnesty’ for Northern Ireland crimes: UK

London, UK - The UK government has abandoned plans to end all prosecutions related to the Northern Ireland conflict, Prime Minister Boris Johnson said in an article appeared in a newspaper on Monday, instead promising immunity to those who cooperate.

The government in July last year announced a plan to end prosecutions related to the conflict, which left 3,500 people dead over three decades, but it was condemned by all sides as an ‘amnesty’.

“We have listened to many people in recent months and reflected on what we heard,” Johnson wrote in Monday’s Belfast Telegraph, ahead of a visit to Northern Ireland to urge the formation of a power-sharing executive.

“Dealing with the past will still require difficult decisions but there will be no blanket amnesty,” he wrote.

“Immunity will only be available to those who cooperate and prosecutions could follow for those who do not.”

The proposals ‘to deal with the legacy of the past’ will be put to parliament this week, Johnson wrote.

The Good Friday peace agreement was signed in 1998, ending the conflict, but tensions remain over the potential prosecution of British troops and paramilitaries alike.

Families of those killed by the armed forces say they have been denied justice against soldiers representing the authority of the state.

AFP

One dead, four critically injured in California shooting

Laguna Woods, US - One person was dead and four others in critical condition after a shooting at a church near Los Angeles, law enforcement said on Sunday, just one day after a gunman killed 10 people at a grocery store in New York state.

Shortly before 1.30pm (2030 GMT), parishioners were attending a banquet following a morning service at Geneva Presbyterian Church when the gunman began his rampage, authorities said.

There were 30 to 40 people inside the building in Laguna Woods, about 70km southeast of Los Angeles.

The churchgoers detained the shooter and ‘hogtied his legs with an extension cord and confiscated at least two weapons’ before officers arrived at the scene to apprehend and arrest him, Orange County Undersheriff Jeff Hallock told a press conference.



Police investigate after a shooting inside a church in Laguna Woods, California, on Sunday (AFP)

“That group of churchgoers displayed what we believe is exceptional heroism, and bravery,” Hallock said. “They undoubtedly prevented additional injuries and fatalities.”

“One person is confirmed de-

ceased at the scene,” Hallock said. “Four others are critical and one other victim sustained minor injuries.” The victims were all of Taiwanese descent, Taipei’s foreign ministry said, adding that it had ‘asked our representative of-

fice to express our most sincere and deepest condolences to those killed or injured in the shooting and their families’.

According to the sheriff’s department, the victims were aged between 66 and 92.

Investigators were still searching for a motive, Hallock said, adding that the alleged gunman, who was not injured during the incident, was believed to be an Asian male in his 60s.

“The man is not believed to live in the area and investigators are working to determine his city of residence and whether he has any connections to the church or its congregants,” the sheriff’s department said in a statement.

The office of California Governor Gavin Newsom said it was working with local officials to monitor the situation.

“No one should have to fear going to their place of worship. Our thoughts are with the victims,” the office tweeted.

Democratic Congresswoman Katie Porter, who represents Orange County in Washington, called the shooting ‘upsetting and disturbing news.’

AFP

FLAWLESS IN IMOLA

Magnificent Ahmad al Harthy takes ELMS GTE victory, becomes the first ever Omani race winner in the championship

Imola, Italy - Ahmad al Harthy produced a flawless performance in the second round of the European Le Mans Series at Imola in Italy on Sunday to help secure a dominant GTE win for his Oman Racing team - and in the process became the first Omani to take victory in the prestigious championship.

Going into the 4 Hours of Imola with confidence high after scorching to a superb pole position in qualifying, Al Harthy took the start of the race in the No.69 Aston Martin Vantage GTE and delivered an outstanding double-stint.

Building a significant lead over the course of the first two hours, in a race peppered with Safety Car interventions which impacted his advantage on several occasions, the Omani handed over the car to Sam De Haan for hour three before Aston Martin works driver Marco Sorensen completed the job in style with the run to the chequered flag - claiming victory a lap ahead of the sister Oman Racing car.

"This is amazing, unbelievable!" said an overjoyed Al Harthy, who is supported by Oman Ministry of Culture, Sports and Youth, OQ, Omantel and MHD-TITCS. "I drove my heart out to be honest, it was a perfect, perfect, perfect race for



A beaming Ahmad al Harthy (C) is swelling with pride as he stands at the top of the podium in Imola on Sunday

us. It was extremely challenging throughout, Sarah (Bovy) in the Ferrari was always pushing me and it was just a matter of who could clear and pass traffic better.

"The team did a great job. We were able to really control

This is amazing, unbelievable! It's an amazing feeling to have given Oman its first win in the ELMS, for us to be on the top of the podium and to hear the national anthem.

AHMAD AL HARTHY

the strategy very well - that was the reason for a great win. Both Sam and Marco, amazing teamwork, but so much teamwork behind the scenes as well. It's an amazing feeling to have given Oman its first win in the ELMS, for us to be on the top

step of the podium and to hear the national anthem."

He added: "I want to say a huge thank you to all of the partners and everyone from back home who has been keeping in touch with what's happening this weekend. It's such a

great feeling to be leading the championship too, and a double podium for Oman Racing with the sister car as well!"

Making the most of his brilliant pole position achieved on Saturday at the Autodromo Internazionale Enzo e Dino Ferrari in Imola, Al Harthy held the GTE lead off the start and was a second clear when the first of several Safety Car periods occurred roughly 10 minutes into the race.

He steadily increased his lead despite several safety car interventions and by the midway point of the race he was able to pull 16 seconds clear.

Al Harthy took his second pit-stop early in hour three and handed over the car to De Haan after a superb double-stint.

De Haan had to ward off the tough challenge of sister TF Sport-run Oman Racing car piloted by Aston Martin works driver Jonny Adam but he still was able to maintain the advantage.

Sorensen did the rest and went on to take the chequered flag a full lap ahead - ensuring the No.69 Oman Racing departed Italy with the GTE championship lead, tied on 26 points at the top of the table.

Italy will host the round three of the European Le Mans Series as well, the 4 hours of Monza to be held on July 2 and 3.

Indian badminton heroics knock even cricket off front pages

New Delhi, India - India's historic first Thomas Cup crown was splashed across front pages Monday with some people saying it can be a turning point for badminton much like the country's maiden cricket World Cup title in 1983.

Coming in as underdogs against 14-time champions Indonesia, a ruthless India won the final of the men's team championship on Sunday in Bangkok to propel badminton to a rare place on centre stage in the cricket-crazy nation.

World number 11 Kidambi Srikanth defeated higher-ranked Jonatan Christie to wrap up a 3-

0 victory and trigger wild celebrations in the Indian camp as their players stormed the court with the national flag.

"Team India scales the peak," read the headline in The Indian Express.

"Our Highness On Court," said the Hindustan Times.

"I would rate this as the biggest ever achievement (for Indian badminton)," former international and team manager Vimal Kumar told reporters from the Thai capital.

"When you call a nation a top badminton nation, all singles and doubles players perform. That is exactly what happened."

Kumar, who won the Asian Games bronze in the team event, said: "I know in 1983 when we won the cricket World Cup the things turned around for the sport to such an extent.

"So I think expect that to happen for Indian badminton as well. And I am very happy that I could get to see that in my lifetime."

All-rounder Kapil Dev's India sparked a cricket revolution in 1983 when they beat overwhelming favourites West Indies in the final at Lord's, a journey that has been captured in a recent Bollywood movie.

"Unforgettable red-letter day for Indian badminton. We have

now truly arrived," said Prakash Padukone, who won the prestigious All England title in 1980.

"It was a brilliant team effort. The performance of this team is not a flash in the pan, they have worked very hard for it. It is no small feat to beat Malaysia, Denmark and Indonesia in a week."

India's cricket icons joined in the celebrations. "Historic moment for all Indians! What a day for Indian Badminton," Sachin Tendulkar tweeted.

"A historic achievement and a massive moment for Indian badminton," Virat Kohli wrote on Twitter.

AFP



India's Satwiksairaj Rankireddy (R) and Chirag Shetty celebrate after defeating Indonesia's Mohammad Ahsan and Kevin Sanjaya Sukamuljo in the men's finals of the Thomas Cup in Bangkok on Sunday (AFP)

Djokovic makes it 370 weeks at number one

Paris, France - Novak Djokovic extended his record at the top of the ATP rankings to 370 weeks on Monday while Rafael Nadal drops down a place to number five.

Spaniard Nadal was knocked out of the Italian Open in the last 16 and is leapfrogged by the Greek Stefanos Tsitsipas who made it all the way to the final where he was turned over in straight sets by an inspired Djokovic.

The Serb, who claimed his sixth Italian Open title, has now

spent 60 weeks more at number one than the next man on the list Roger Federer (310).

Nadal is sixth on the all-time list with 209.

With the French Open starting on Sunday, Djokovic is guaranteed top seeding at Roland Garros. Norwegian Casper Ruud climbs two places from tenth to eighth after reaching the semi-finals in Rome while Italian Matteo Berrettini, who had an operation on his right hand at the end of March and will miss the French Open, goes the other way.



Novak Djokovic kisses the winner's trophy at Rome Open, as runner-up Stefanos Tsitsipas looks on, on Sunday (AFP)

TOP 10 RANKINGS

(Players representing Russia and Belarus are banned from competing under the name or flag of Russia or Belarus until further notice):

1. Novak Djokovic (SRB) 8,660 pts
2. Daniil Medvedev 7,990
3. Alexander Zverev (GER) 7,200
4. Stefanos Tsitsipas (GRE) 6,170 (+1)
5. Rafael Nadal (ESP) 5,525 (-1)
6. Carlos Alcaraz (ESP) 4,770
7. Andrey Rublev 3,945
8. Casper Ruud (NOR) 3,940 (+2)
9. Felix Auger-Aliassime (CAN) 3,850
10. Matteo Berrettini (ITA) 3,805 (-2)

Sizzling Swiatek cements number one spot ahead of French Open

Paris, France - Iga Swiatek, who won her fifth tournament in a row in Rome on Sunday, will go into the French Open as top seed after consolidating her place as world number one on Monday.

The 20-year-old Pole, who won the title at Roland Garros in 2020, is over 2,000 points ahead of defending French Open champion Barbora Krejickova in the new WTA rankings.

Tunisia's Madrid Open cham-



Iga Swiatek has been in unbeatable form this season (AFP)

pion Ons Jabeur, who lost to Swiatek in the Italian Open final, climbed to a career-high sixth.

Coco Gauff dropped three places to 18th while former number one Simona Halep returned to the top 20 at 19.

WTA rankings on May 16 (players representing Russia and Belarus are banned from competing under the name or flag of Russia or Belarus until further notice):

RANKINGS (TOP 10)

1. Iga Swiatek (POL) 7,061 pts
2. Barbora Krejickova (CZE) 4,911
3. Paula Badosa (ESP) 4,770
4. Maria Sakkari (GRE) 4,726
5. Anett Kontaveit (EST) 4,446
6. Ons Jabeur (TUN) 4,380 (+1)
7. Aryna Sabalenka 3,966 (+1)
8. Karolina Pliskova (CZE) 3,568 (-2)
9. Danielle Collins (USA) 3,315
10. Garbine Muguruza (ESP) 3,031

Muscat Super Kings, Muscat Panthers win in OC's Tennex ball tourney

Muscat: Muscat Super Kings registered an easy victory at the Oman Cricket's 10-over Tennex Ball tournament, which started at the Municipality Grounds last Friday.

A total of 19 matches were played on the first week, with the next set of fixtures scheduled for May 20.

Batting first after winning the toss, Super Kings made a mammoth 121 for 6. Vishal Parshomttambhai Desai led the scoring with 36 runs off just 15 deliveries. The Kings were superb with the ball too, restricting WCC to 70 runs to wrap up a dominant 51-run victory.

The clash between Deccan Challengers and Muscat Panthers was also a one-sided affair. Challengers made a modest 59 for 4 which Panthers chased down in just four overs with all 10 wickets intact, thanks to an explosive 47-run knock from



Haja Hameed

Tenarangam Yeduru.

Meanwhile the match between, Max XI and the Bombay Blues ended in a tie.

Aksaar Aslam Sardar of Tuluvvers XI, with 59 runs, recorded the highest individual total of the first week.

With the ball, Haja Hameed of Proline Knight Riders was the star of the week. His two overs produced four wickets at the cost of just seven runs.



IPL 2022



DC V PBKS

Thakur takes four wickets as Delhi beat Punjab to move into top four



BRIEF SCORES:

Delhi Capitals 159 for 7 (Sarfaraz Khan 32 (16)5x4, 1x6, Mitchell Marsh 63 (48) 4x4, 3x6; Liam Livingstone 3 for 27) beat Punjab Kings 142 for 9 (Jonny Bairstow 28 (15) 4x4, 1x6, Jitesh Sharma 44 (, 1x6, Jitesh Sharma 44 (34)3x4, 2x6; Shardul Thakur 4 for 36) by 17 runs

TODAY'S MATCH
(6PM)

MUMBAI INDIANS



SUNRISERS HYDERABAD

Rahul wants more from Lucknow's top order

Mumbai, India - The last time Lucknow Super Giants won a game while chasing was more than a month ago, on April 7, when it was only the second week of IPL 2022. Now with barely a week left for the league stage of the tournament when teams are expected to fine-tune their plans for the playoffs, a glaring weakness has emerged for Super Giants: they can't ace their chases.

Even though Super Giants were chasing 179 on Sunday, which might have appeared to be below-par because of how Rajasthan Royals were looking set for 200-odd at one point, KL Rahul's team stumbled to 34 for 3 in the powerplay and left too much to do for the middle order that neither had the experience like their top order nor the hitting abilities of their lower order.

Rahul admitted after their loss that they had to get "smarter" while batting and "needed to work hard" on their game because it was the fourth time in a row that they went down in a chase.



KL Rahul's Lucknow Super Giants lost to Rajasthan Royals on Sunday

"It was a gettable target. It was a good pitch, there was a bit in there with the new ball. We were backing ourselves to get that target, but we couldn't execute our plans and once again the batting group...we haven't been able to collectively perform as a unit in a few games," Rahul

We need to go back and work on our game, work on being smarter when we're in the middle

KL RAHUL

told the host broadcaster at the presentation. "We need to go back and work on our game, work on being smarter when we're in the middle and try and get a win for the team."

"Pune was a lot harder, there was a lot more on the pitch there. This (Brabourne Stadium) was a really good pitch, there was seam

movement early on, quality bowlers like Trent (Boult) and Prasidh (Krishna) were hitting hard lengths, getting to move it just a little bit. They bowled in good areas and when you lose two wickets in an over that puts pressure on you and it has happened a couple of times with us where we've lost the game in the powerplay, we've lost three-four wickets which is obviously very hard to come back from. We need to work hard on our game and make sure when the ball is moving and when there are quality bowlers, you find a way to stay in the game and give your team a good start so that in the back end, we can always get runs."

Super Giants are now second on the list to lose the most number of wickets in the powerplay in this IPL, only behind Kolkata Knight Riders. On Sunday, Boult and Prasidh rocked Super Giants early with the back-to-back wickets of Quinton de Kock and Ayush Badoni in the third over followed by Rahul's departure for a laborious 10 off 19.

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DOWN TO THE WIRE

Lautaro Martinez’s brace ensures Inter Milan take Serie A title race to final week

Milan, Italy - Lautaro Martinez ensured the Serie A title race will head into the final week of the season on Sunday with a brace in Inter Milan’s 3-1 win at Cagliari to stay two points behind leaders AC Milan.

Reigning champions Inter had to win to have any hope of retaining thir league crown after Milan beat Atalanta 2-0 earlier in the day.

And Matteo Darmian’s first-half goal and Martinez’s brace in the second period ensured that Simone Inzaghi’s side would push their local rivals down to the wire with a hard-fought victory in Sardinia.

Simone Inzaghi’s Inter could have been tired after a thrilling, extra-time Italian Cup triumph over old foes Juventus on Wednesday but came through a tricky test against a side scrap-ping for their top flight lives.

“The emotions were on Wednesday, winning a trophy we cared about a great deal,” Inzaghi told DAZN.

“It wasn’t easy after Milan’s win, but the team played really well against an opponent who is problematic on their own turf. I congratulate my lads, because this was by no means to be taken for granted, especially after play-ing 120 minutes on Wednesday.”

Cagliari meanwhile stay two points behind Salernitana, who sit just outside the relegation zone.

They had already had a Milan Skriniar goal ruled out for hand-ball when Darmian did put the away side ahead, and once Mar-tinez lashed home his first six minutes after the break he thought that was that.

Charalampos Lykogiannis thumped home from distance al-most straight afterwards to give Cagliari hope of getting an un-likely result, but with six minutes remaining Martinez dinked home his second to calm Inter nerves.

Insigne farewell

On the final day Inter host Sam-pdoria, who are now safe thanks

to defeat for 18th-placed Cagliari, while Milan travel to Sassuolo needing just a point to secure their first Scudetto since 2011.

Stefano Pioli’s side have the better of the season’s two Milan derbies meaning that if the two teams finish level on points it will be Milan who take the title.

They hold the advantage over Inter thanks to strikes from Rafael Leao and Theo Hernandez which sealed their win over Ata-lanta in front of a packed San Siro. Leao scored after 56 min-utes, with Hernandez adding a second 19 minutes later follow-ing a brilliant solo run through the Atalanta defence.

In Naples, Lorenzo Insigne scored on his final home game for Napoli, a 3-0 win over Genoa, who are now relegated to Serie B.

It was an emotional final match for Insigne at the Diego Maradona Stadium after 12 years in his hometown club. The Napoli captain will join MLS club Toronto FC as a free agent from July 1.

AFP



Two-goal hero Lautaro Martinez in action against Cagliari



PSG’s Kylian Mbappe receives the Best Ligue 1 Player award from former France player Thierry Henry (AFP)

Mbappe says decision ‘almost’ made over PSG future

Paris, France - Kylian Mbappe says he has “almost” made up his mind about whether to stay at Paris Saint-Germain or leave the French champions for Real Madrid.

“Yes, yes almost” he replied when quizzed about whether he had made a choice yet after pick-ing up his third straight best player of the season award in Paris on Sunday.

The waiting to see whether the 23-year-old moves to the

Spanish capital or stays with PSG to help them in their protracted quest to land the Champions League “is almost over” he added.

He plans to “announce” his decision before France play Den-mark in the Nations League on June 3. Refusing to divulge any-thing further despite being given ample opportunity to do so at the awards ceremony he thanked “PSG, which enabled me to be here, my teammates and coach.”

My story goes on, I keep on winning, I’m never satisfied, and that’s good

KYLIAN MBAPPE

He added: “My story goes on, I keep on winning, I’m never sat-

isfied, and that’s good.”

Also attending the awards dinner was his PSG captain Marquinhos whose only com-ment on the issue keeping PSG fans and their Real counterparts awake at night was: “I hope that next season he will win this tro-phy again.”

Last week a French newspa-per reported that the French World Cup winner had agreed in principle to remain at PSG for up to another three years.

This was quickly denied by his mother. Mbappe has made no secret of his desire to play one day for Real, who are in the Champions League final after se-curing a 35th Spanish title.

But PSG, who have won the Ligue 1 title for a tenth time but angered their hardcore support-ers with their limp exit to Real in the last 16 of the Champions League, are battling to hold onto their biggest asset.

AFP

Suarez bids Atletico Madrid farewell as Sevilla qualify for Champions League

Madrid, Spain - Luis Suarez said he will always have Atletico Madrid in his heart after the striker waved goodbye to the club’s home fans following a 1-1 draw against Sevilla on Sunday.

The result meant Sevilla finally confirmed their place in La Liga’s top four as a late equaliser by Youssef En-Nesyri at the Wanda Metropolitano secured qualifica-tion for the Champions League.

“Thank you Lucho for making us champions”, read a giant ban-ner unfurled in the crowd before kick-off while Suarez was visibly tearful as he paraded the pitch with his family after full-time.

The 35-year-old is set to leave Atletico when his two-year con-tract expires this summer.

After being forced out by cash-strapped Barcelona in 2020, Suarez exacted revenge by proving instrumental in Atletico’s monumental La Liga title triumph last season, when he scored 21 goals in 32 league appearances and finished as the team’s top scorer.

The Uruguayan has been use-ful but less emphatic this term, scoring 14 goals in 48 appear-ances and his own dip from last year’s high standards has been symptomatic of Atletico’s malaise more generally.

Suarez has often started on the bench since the turn of the year, with Joao Felix increasingly preferred by Atletico coach Diego Simeone.



Luis Suarez walks around the pitch with his children and acknowledges the crowd at the Wanda Metropolitano stadium in Madrid after Atletico Madrid’s final home match of the season, against Sevilla, on Sunday (AFP)

“I thank all the Atletico fans, every one of them,” said Suarez afterwards.

“The love they gave me since I arrived has been amazing and I will not forget it. I tried to return it on the pitch, I gave myself 200 per cent to a club that opened its doors to me.

“I will always carry the affec-tion of this club with me after not being able to enjoy myself the previous season. I will take Atletico with me in my heart.”

Jose Gimenez’s first-half

header looked set to give Atletico victory and with Real Betis beat-ing Granada, Sevilla’s fight for fourth would have gone down to a nail-biting final day.

Instead, En-Nesyri nodded in Oliver Torres’ cross with five minutes remaining to earn Sevilla the point they needed to guaran-tee their top-four spot, after a hugely disappointing few weeks that has seen their coach Julen Lopetegui come under pressure.

Instead, Lopetegui was tossed into the air by Sevilla’s celebrat-

ing players after the final whistle.

En-Nesyri’s equaliser also pre-vented Atletico making sure of third place. Atletico sit a point ahead of Sevilla and have a tough trip away at Real Sociedad to fin-ish the season next weekend. Sevilla will play at home to Ath-letic Bilbao.

Real Sociedad came from be-hind to defeat Villarreal 2-1 at La Ceramica in what was billed as the sudden-death match for Eu-ropa League qualification.

AFP



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FACULTY EXHIBITION

Diversity meets *antistony*

Twenty-four distinctive artworks created by 13 experienced faculty members makes this exhibition an artistic voyage beyond imagination, encouraging students to step out of their limited boundaries



Oshiba al Sinaidi



Prof Abed Obed



Dr Juma Ali al Juma (centre) takes a tour of the exhibition



Dr Nehad Elhussein



Prof Sara El Mrabti



Prof Hana al Lawati



Dr Amal Ezzat



Prof Maisa al Ansari



Prof Jawahar Chockkalingam

Striking a balance via a profusion of colours, themes, mediums, and techniques, where multiplicity of personalities, ethnicities, backgrounds, and styles meet the one common theme of expression, art, is the second Fine Arts Faculty Exhibition at the Scientific College of Design.

Under the patronage of Dr Juma Ali al Juma, head of private higher education institutions committee, this college exhibition is presently on display at the Oman Convention and Exhibition Centre.

Inspiring a new generation of artists and a community of creative minds, this exhibition is one-of-a-kind. The beauty of this display is in how skillfully the various components of art and culture are weaved together to create a visionary and significant revolution for the future of art in Oman.

Each of the 24 distinctive artworks created

by 13 experienced faculty members is unique and extraordinary in its own way. This exhibition takes you on an artistic voyage beyond imagination, encouraging students and visitors to transcend their creative boundaries while motivating them to discover new dimensions beyond the surface of reality.

Explaining how this exhibition will benefit students, Dr Nehad Elhussein, associate professor at Scientific College of Design, said, "Students typically struggle to find inspiration to begin their artwork. This exhibition will teach them about various inspirations and how each artist achieved them in a unique way through a series of scientific steps. The artworks display a wide range of styles, from contemporary innovation and realism to abstract art and symbolic expressionism."

Dr Nasser Palangi, a distinguished Iranian artist and associate professor teaching Visual Art at the Scientific College of Design, has four of his artworks on display at the exhibition.

The artworks display a wide range of styles, from contemporary innovation and realism to abstract art and symbolic expressionism

DR NEHAD ELHUSSEIN

tion. "Two of my artworks are in the symbolism style portraying love and kindness," he said. "My other collages on canvas are inspired by Oman's heritage." Using mixed media and everyday objects, he has been able to create something very eccentric.

The process of making art is one of experimenting and exploration. And SCD's faculty has set a good example. Through constant experimenting with diverse art forms and techniques, each artist has inspired their students and the community to reconnect with themselves and step out of their comfort zone.

Professor Abed Obed, a fine art instructor

who also showcased his work, elaborated, saying, "This exhibition will provide the students and visitors, the opportunity to interact with the artists, who will be able to share their experience and expertise in order to achieve the desired outcome. We also hope to inspire everybody to keep experimenting and learning."

While some artworks reflect the artist's individuality, others reflect the artist's local background and heritage. Resembling the cubism art form, Jawahar Chockkalingam, a fine art instructor, incorporated an Indian element into his abstract sculpture based on bulls and cows constructed from wood and

wire. Amal Ezzat's artwork, on the other hand, is a reflection of her personality combined with ancient Egyptian symbolism.

Students are not only inspired to create remarkable artworks as a result of this exhibition, but they also gain practical experience organising and curating exhibitions, putting art terminologies into practice, and critically analysing the pieces. Maisa al Ansari is one such alumnus. She is an Omani artist and SCD graduate who now teaches photography at the college and has showcased her photographs in the exhibition, which are primarily focused on macro photography.

The Scientific College of Design and their initiatives have undoubtedly aided in the expansion of the art movement in Oman. The faculty at SCD is moulding and expanding the future of art in Oman by sowing the seeds of knowledge and imparting art education to Oman's youth and women.

(Contributed by Aashna Sanghani)

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SOFT POWER

Hatim al Taie recounts his recent fulfilling trip to South Korea which left him awestruck by the courtesy, discipline, and devotion towards work of the Korean populace

Many people say that there are several benefits to travel, often citing travel as the best way to broaden the mind. But when travelling to the Republic of Korea (commonly known as South Korea), these benefits get magnified.

South Korea is one of the richest cultures in East Asia and its people are some of the most exemplary when it comes to dedication and productivity. As a society, they have a collective ambition to develop and enhance technology.

No matter where you look, Korea's massive cities display some of the best qualities in a modern space, incredibly well-organised and well-disciplined.

A long history

Korea's age as a country cannot be counted on our fingers. It was a witness to the World War II, the victory of the allied forces in 1945, the fall and end of the rule of the Japanese Empire on the island, the outbreak of a bloody civil war and even the division of the two Koreas (North and South.) South Korea survived all of this turmoil and then faced many challenging years, in which it managed to successfully build a modern society.

Perhaps it is important to mention that the Republic of Korea, until the fifties, lived on foreign aid and international support. In just a matter of a few decades, it successfully transformed itself into a highly developed nation and is now extending help to various countries all over the world.

With the invitation of the Korea Foundation and as a part of its programmes to publicise their country and its successes, I joined dignitaries and parliamentarians from several countries to visit South Korea to gain an insight into their institutions and achievements.

The trip began in the capital Seoul, a city of approximately 10 million people divided into large groups of 25 districts. Seoul is a progressive country that balances green mountains with modern facilities and an outstanding, well-organized public transport system for buses and trains.

Resident in the Lotte Hotel, located in the city centre amidst skyscrapers and business centres and surrounded by luxurious and high class shops, my room on the 34th floor allowed me to enjoy panoramic views of the city from above, with the mountains as a backdrop, and gave me the impression that I was watching a painting by a creative artist. What's more, my visit coincided with the cherry blossom season, a riot of colour heralding spring.

The Korea Foundation

Koreans are very efficient when it comes to time management. Our work started quickly wherein we had an introductory meeting with Dr Gwan Lee, the head of the Korea Foundation. The meeting provided a brief overview of what the foundation does, tapping into 'soft powers' to add a positive presence on the global scene.

Dr Gwan Lee elaborated on the importance of building bridges of cooperation and partnership between the Republic of Korea

Hatim al Taie (right) with Kim Man Heum, Head of the Korean National Assembly (centre) and Alia Hamdoon, member, Jordanian Parliament (left)



One of the most beautiful things I noticed about the Korean people is that they sanctify work. They apply the rule - work is worship - and work long hours

HATIM AL TAIE

and the Arab world and pointed out the various elements that Korea and the Arab world have, which help to strengthen cooperation and move towards broader horizons.

What I observed is that Koreans are very proud of their language and so there are only a few English speakers in Korea. The Korea Foundation assigned a translator to us, (I named her Hyam) and she helped us a lot in conducting extensive and enriching discussions with the Korean people.

I met with the National Association member, Jung Choun-Sook, who is responsible for several important subjects, including the issue of equality between men and women, and most importantly, she is the chairperson of the Omani-Korean Relations Development Committee.

Student missions

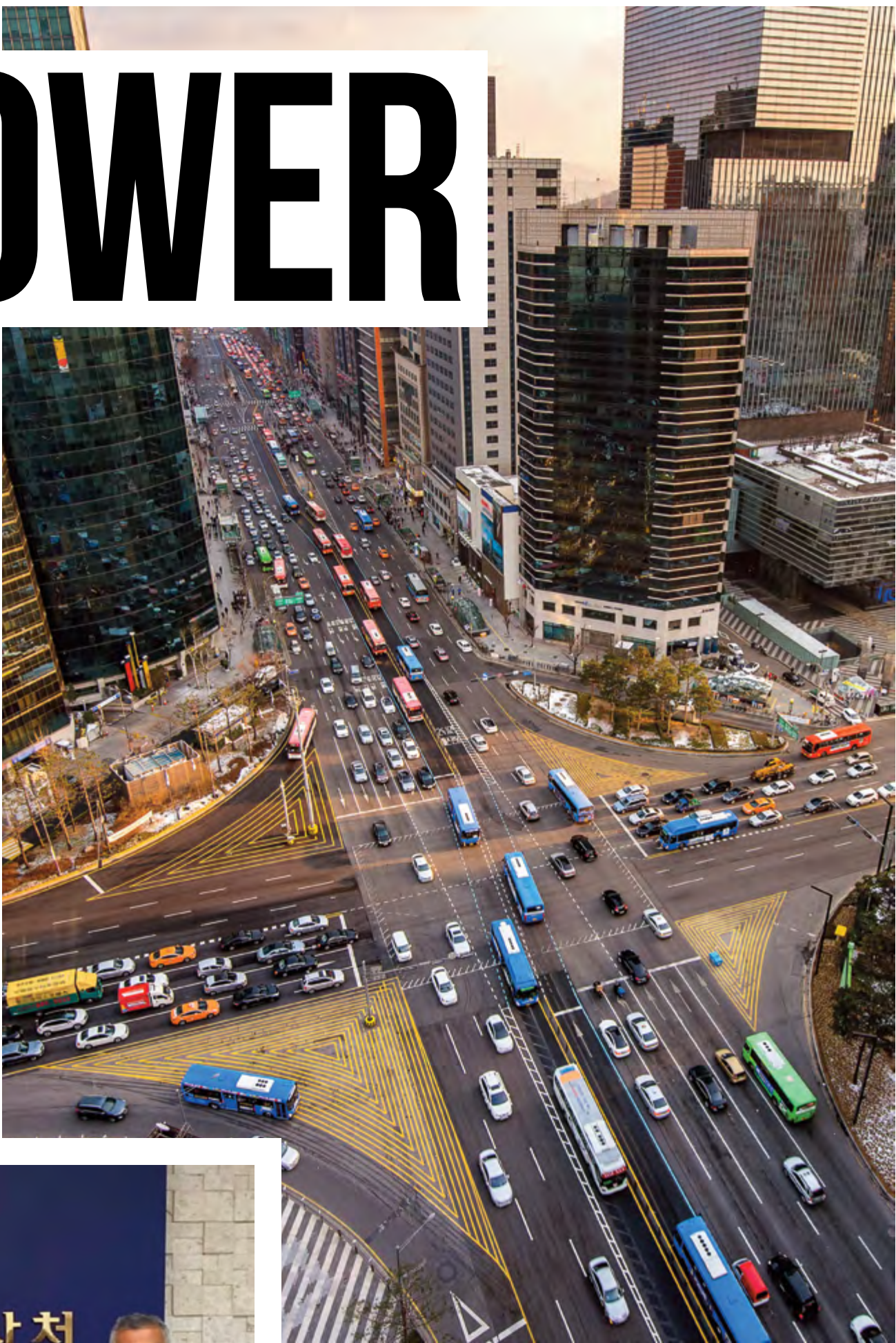
I suggested to Sook the importance of increasing scholarships for Omani students to study at the advanced Korean universities in the fields of technology and other sciences. This could involve establishing training programmes for students from Omani universities to train, qualify and improve their skills in major Korean companies, perhaps during

summer vacations.

On the third day, a meeting was arranged with the speaker of the National Association, Jang Seong. This was followed by a meeting with Chung Jong-Kun, undersecretary, Korean Foreign Ministry, undersecretary, who spoke about the various political challenges facing the world, including wars, tensions and conflicts that represent a threat to international peace and security.

Seong clearly referred to the wisdom of Oman's politics and its clear approach to establishing peace around the world. He also spoke about the remarkable development in Omani-Korean relations, especially as they approach the completion of almost 50 years of bilateral relations since 1974. We also spoke about the promising investment, economic and cultural opportunities that both Oman and Korea have, which would strengthen bonds between both nations.

I was introduced to the International Cooperation Organization 'Koika,' which is part of the Korean Foreign Ministry, and it represents the development arm which works to establish projects in many countries of the world to fight poverty, disease and ignorance, building strategic partnerships with many



countries in various fields of development and organising humanitarian aid.

Multiple visits

The trip included a visit to the smart city Anyang, which is located outside of the capital Seoul. It is called a smart city because, within the last 15 years, it has been able to manifest the ideals and theories of what makes a smart city, where everything is interconnected and well-coordinated, including the police.

I learnt that this smart city is equipped with about 6,500 surveillance cameras throughout the city that worked overtime monitoring traffic and controlling violators or monitoring and limiting suspicious actions, all of which are aimed to keep the city safe, secure, and stable.

There is no doubt that a visit to Korea would not be complete without visiting its industrial fortresses, and on top of these forts comes the giant Hyundai factory, which despite intense competition from European and American technology, has been able to excel globally in the field of the automobile industry. What astonished me was that this large company developed its manufacturing systems not solely dependent on manual labour but rather a reliance on robotics.

Music and drama

The impact of Korean culture on drama and music can be found everywhere. Some of their best television series are not only viewed all over the world they matured to include different subtitles including Arabic.

Even in Arabian Gulf countries, Korean series are easily found on different satellite channels. Ironically, many Turkish series are adapted from many Korean dramas, and for this reason, we find Korean shows finding TV lovers everywhere.

Perhaps the most well-known example of Korean 'soft power' dominating the consciousness of the world was the introduction of the song 'Gangnam Style' which boasts more than 4 billion views on YouTube so far.

One of the most beautiful things I noticed about the Korean people is that they sanctify

work. They apply the rule - work is worship - and work long hours without tiring because they turn work into a means of both, self-realization and 'dream of life' realisation.

Koreans love discipline, respect and appreciation. When they meet, they bow down to greet or thank someone, saying *Kamsa hamnida*, which means 'Thank you'.

When I reflect on the Omani diplomatic presence in Korea, I see our embassy in Seoul as an inspiration for activity and continuous work. The Oman Embassy in Korea is located in one of the finest Korean districts in a high-rise building. It embraces the original form of Omani architecture and any visitor will immediately notice that the design is based on ancient Omani heritage.

It was there that I met H E Zakaria bin Hamad al Saadi, Ambassador of Oman, who not only represents the spirit of youth but also has a pleasant and humble disposition akin to Omanis. An erudite speaker who captivates his listeners, he has been working hard to evolve Omani-Korean relations on stronger terms.

Here I'd like to point out to the serious discussions between the Republic of Korea and the Gulf Cooperation Council countries to conclude a free trade agreement, which is a step that would support the improvement of Gulf-Korean relations. I also enjoyed a night's walk in the safe streets of Seoul in springtime with the ambassador..

One of the most beautiful things that I learned during my visit to Korea is that the most famous and most delicious grape found here is called 'Bright Muscat Grape' - large, round, seedless, extremely sweet, with a dash of sourness - a fruit which represents a strategic crop for the Koreans.

It is said that the Portuguese visitors of yore took the seeds of Omani grapes from Jebel Akhdar to grow in Europe, and it was a great success there due to the favourable weather. Thirty years ago, it was genetically engineered by the Japanese before it arrived in Korea. I wish this fruit returns to Jebel Akhdar some day.

Kamsa hamnida! (Now, you know what it means.)