

Majority of users satisfied with telecom services

Our Correspondent
Muscat

The Telecommunications Regulatory Authority's (TRA) survey on the satisfaction of users of fixed telecommunication services has revealed that 70 per cent of people in Oman are satisfied with the fixed-line telecommunication services, while 52 per cent of them are not satisfied with the prices of fixed-line Internet services.

The statistics showed that 65.4 per cent of the participants agreed that the quality of service - in general - provided by the service provider is always excellent, and that 84.5 per cent of the respondents agreed that the branch offices of their service providers are located in appropriate places.

While 74.2 per cent of participants said that their service provider takes an active role in solving users' problems, 86 per cent agreed that their service provider is always ready to help.

As for the results of the 'Satisfaction of Mobile Telecommunication Services Beneficiaries' survey, 73 per cent of individuals in Oman are satisfied with the mobile telecommunication services, while 45 per cent of them are not happy with the prices of mobile Internet services in general.



50% Omanis and 90% of expatriates agree that the service quality in general is excellent

The results showed that 50 per cent Omanis and 90 per cent

of expatriates agree that the service quality in general is excellent.

The governorates of North Sharqiyah had the highest percentage of dissatisfaction with the prices of mobile Internet services at 62 per cent, followed by 50 per cent each in the governorates of Dhofar and Dhahirah.

TRA stated that the two surveys aimed to provide statistical indicators about the satisfaction of users of fixed and mobile telecommunication services which contributes to the formulation of legislative and regulatory frameworks.

HM'S GREETINGS CONVEYED TO BIDEN



Greetings of His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tariq were conveyed to US President Joe Biden by Musa bin Hamdan al Tai, Oman's Ambassador to the US, during his reception at the White House on Friday (ONA)



Abed Rabbo Mansour Hadi

Sultanate welcomes new Yemeni council

Muscat - The Foreign Ministry of Oman has welcomed the establishment of a new presidential council in Yemen.

The ministry issued a statement on Friday expressing the hope that the announcement of the establishment of a presidential leadership council in the sisterly Republic of Yemen will contribute to supporting the existing efforts of conflict resolution.

'It will contribute to addressing the humanitarian situation and finding a comprehensive political settlement that preserves Yemen's unity, sovereignty, and independence, in which all Yemeni parties participate. This will be done in a manner that meets the aspirations of the Yemeni people,' the statement said.

Yemen's exiled President Abed Rabbo Mansour Hadi transferred his powers to a new presidential council on Thursday, in a political shake-up that took place as efforts to end the country's years-long war gained traction with a fragile two-month truce.

Draft of Social Protection Law to be submitted this month

Our Correspondent
Muscat

The committee tasked with drafting new regulations of retirement and social protection has said that a draft law for the same will be submitted to the Council of Ministers during this month.

Final touches are being made to the scheme catering to retirement and social protection systems, said the committee, noting that the scheme's programmes have been designed to respond to the national

objectives and apply the best practices in the field. These will consummate through the issuance of the Social Protection Law, the committee added.

Employees who meet the conditions set in the present systems and complete 20 years with effect from the date of the Social Protection Law have a right to retire, without having to commit themselves to the minimum number of years of service needed for availing optional retirement (30 years) as per the Royal Decree No

33/2021 on retirement and social protection systems, said the committee.

It explained that the new retirement system will guarantee pension value for this segment in accordance with the current systems as of the date of issuance of the Social Protection Law. 'Upon their retirement, the employees will be granted the highest pension value cited in the systems existing prior to the application of the Social Protection Law and the pension value calculated in the new Social Protection Law.'

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Bonhomie of public iftars missed

Muscat - After a long day at work, Alamgeer used to look forward to the iftar gatherings at the mosque. After finishing his work around 6pm he used to rush to the mosque with snacks that he would buy from the nearby coffee shop and share with the fellow fasting Muslims.

Like Alamgeer, for many workers who start their work early in the morning, iftar gatherings at mosques and tents run by mosque administrations and various groups offered a chance to have a sumptuous meal. But for the third year in a row, public iftars are banned due to COVID-19.

"Frequenting mosques, first couple of days we used to sit with different people but within days we would develop a bond of friendship. Then as days passed, we would wait for each other to break fast together," said Alamgeer, who works as an electrician-cum-plumber.

Public iftar meals were a big help for low-wage earning expatriates as it helped in not only saving money but also time. "After a long day at work, we do not have time or energy to prepare the food," Alamgeer added. But more than a free meal, he misses the bond and warmth he used to share with complete strangers.

Nassir Attari, who works in the Muttah Souq, also misses the iftar gatherings held at mosques. "We used to meet old friends and make new ones at iftar meals. It was a good opportunity to spread peace and grow as a community."

An alternative to public gatherings

Muhammad Ali Fazal, owner of a heavy

We used to meet old friends and make new ones at iftar meals. It was a good opportunity to spread peace and grow as a community

NASSIR ATTARI



equipment rental service, used to run an iftar meal tent in the Somhan area of Barka before the COVID-19 pandemic. But during the last two years, he delivered meal parcels. He runs this initiative as a service to humanity and single-handedly bears all the cost. "In pre-pandemic times, I

used to cook but this year I am planning to collaborate with a hotel. The food parcel will include briyani, raita, salad, laban and juice. Initially, we will start with 50 parcels and depending on demand we will increase the numbers," he informed. Fazal hopes that more people come forward

to help the low-wage labourers in serving them at least one meal per day.

Jo James, admin of What's Happening Oman (WHO) Facebook page, is running a campaign #RamdanActsOfKindness. The group distributed ration boxes during the past two years

and this year it has tied up with restaurants to provide free meals to the needy.

"Throughout the year, workers make sure our streets are clean, parks are maintained and roads are restored after a storm. So this year, we're teaming up with a few restaurants to offer

The Prophet (peace and blessings be upon him) used to observe itikaf (spiritual retreat in a mosque) every Ramadan for ten days. In the year in which he passed away, he observed itikaf for twenty days.

Whoever fasts during Ramadan out of sincere faith and hoping to attain Allah's rewards, then all his past sins will be forgiven.

No servant fasts on a day in the path of Allah except that Allah removes the hellfire 70 years further away from his face.

The hadiths highlighted here throw light on the status of the blessed month, its merits, rewards and special offers, as well as the Prophet's example in Ramadan.

meals for the hardworking labourers that rely on Ramadan tents for food to break their fast. It's a good time to say 'thank you' for their hard work," Jo posted on the page.

"We have collaborated with restaurants and when the labourers go to buy a meal, he will get a free parcel. Till now we have managed to fund 265 meals," Jo told *Muscat Daily*.

She added, "The more money we get the more people we will feed."

To help the WHO team buy meals, contact 'Jo' on her WHO Facebook page. Meal box prices range from RO1.3 - RO1.8 each. Boxes contain items such as chicken or veg biryani, samosa, yogurt, fruits, juice/labani, and water.

(Text by Syed Fasiuddin)

Low-sodium diet for a healthy heart

Washington, US - A new study has explored how reducing sodium intake can help patients with heart failure. The findings of the study were published in the journal, *The Lancet*.

Though reducing salt intake did not lead to fewer emergency visits, hospitalisations or deaths for patients with heart failure, the researchers did find an improvement in symptoms such as swelling, fatigue and coughing, as well as better overall quality of life.

The researchers have followed 806 patients at 26 medical centres in Canada, the United States, Columbia, Chile, Mexico and New Zealand. All were suffering from heart failure, a condition in which the heart becomes too weak to pump blood effectively. Half of the study's participants were randomly assigned to receive usual care, while the rest received nutritional counselling on how to reduce their dietary salt intake.

Patients in the nutritional counselling arm of the trial were given dietitian-designed menu suggestions using foods from their own region and were encouraged to cook at home without adding salt and to avoid high-salt ingredients. Most dietary sodium is hidden in processed foods or restaurant meals rather than being shaken at the table, Ezekowitz noted.

Before the study, patients consumed an average of 2,217mg per day or just under one teaspoon. After one year of study, the usual care group consumed an average of 2,072mg of sodium daily, while those who received nutritional guidance consumed 1,658mg per day, a reduction of a bit less than a quarter teaspoon equivalent.

The researchers compared rates of death from any cause, cardiovascular hospitalisation and cardiovascular emergency department visits in the two study groups but found no statistically significant difference.

They did find consistent improvements for the low-sodium group using three different quality of life assessment tools, as well as the New York Heart Association heart failure classification, a measure of heart failure severity.



Grand Millennium brings inspired iftar offerings

Muscat - Taybat Restaurant at Grand Millennium Muscat is offering an array of food and delicacies, celebrating Ramadan.

The centrally located Grand Millennium has been a preferred after venue for staying true to its food offerings. 'Bringing you home inspired dishes, Taybat restaurant will showcase the best array of food and your all-time favourites including an Ouzi live station with dry fruits and oriental rice. The spread is priced at RO18 per person with a special discount for groups of ten. For every nine paying guests, one person will be complimentary,' stated a press release.

Looking forward to the month with pride and delight are Taybat's Omani chefs. 'They draw culinary inspirations from their very own experiences as youngsters when they looked forward to every iftar preparation of their respective Ummahat (mothers).'

The restaurant is also offering a chance to win some amazing raffle draw prizes. 'Daily winner will get a complimentary one night stay in a Classic room with suhoor or breakfast for two adults. Weekend Winner will take away mega prize of private villa with pool with suhoor or breakfast for two adults,' a press release said.

Luca Medda, cluster general manager of Grand Millennium Muscat and Millennium Executive Apartments, said, "Taybat Restaurant, from the time



Omani chefs at Taybat Restaurant draw culinary inspirations from their very own experiences as youngsters when they looked forward to every iftar preparation of their respective mothers

we opened the hotel, has focused on offering an excellent dining experience, from high-quality food offerings to providing a memorable level of service. This year is no different, as we carry that traditional spirit in offering the

community a genuine gastronomic journey. Our focus has always been on the guest experience, and our colleagues are the driving force in ensuring our guests are delighted while maintaining the cuisine's authenticity.'

Exemption of visa fines will help labour market: OCCI

Our Correspondent
Muscat

The Royal directive of His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik to reduce labour visa fees and exempt individuals and companies from paying fines due to delay in renewal of resident cards will stimulate the labour market, according to Eng Redha Juma al Saleh, chairman of the board of directors of Oman Chamber of Commerce and Industry (OCCI).

Saleh pointed out that the Royal Oman Police's announcement came in the light of the enforcement of the Royal directives to reduce fees for issuing and re-



These exemptions come at the right time because many private sector institutions are working to rebuild their institutions and address the effects of the current pandemic

ENG REDHA JUMA AL SALEH

newing licences to bring in non-Omani manpower, which will facilitate business owners and support economic activity.

Saleh said, "Exempting establishments and individuals from fines related to the delay in renewing resident cards will control and regulate the labour market and stimulate the economy."

He explained, "These exemptions come at the right time because many private sector institutions are working to rebuild their institutions and address the effects of the current pandemic. It will also accelerate recovery and return-to-growth rates for many institutions."

"We urge private sector institutions and business owners to

take advantage of these exemptions and correct the conditions of their expatriate workforce," said Saleh.

He expressed OCCI's appreciation for the response of government agencies to the demands of the OCCI and the private sector in providing packages of support and facilities to the private sector institutions.

INDIAN COMMUNITY KEEPS BEACHES CLEAN



The community service fortnight Sewa Utsav, launched by the Indian Embassy in Oman, cleaned up five beaches across Oman on Saturday. Indian community, social clubs and Indian school students enthusiastically participated in the beach cleaning activity in Muscat, Sohar, Sur and Salalah (Supplied photo)

'Impossible to have a healthy society in polluted environment'

Muscat - On the occasion of World Health Day, celebrated annually on April 7, the Ministry of Health (MoH), the Ministry of Education and the World Health Organization in Oman, came together to advocate for a healthier society and take strategic actions to create conditions for people to thrive.

This year, WHO called on to reimagine our world for a healthier tomorrow under the theme 'Our planet. Our health'.

'If there is anything that the COVID-19 pandemic has taught us, it is the fundamental importance of a healthier environment. And having that as the focus, all partners have agreed on two main activities to promote a healthy lifestyle as well as awareness about health and healthcare,' stated MoH.

Two special events marked the celebrations of the day. A short film competition, launched on April 7, targeted the sul-

tanate's schools, with its main theme 'For a better environment and better health'.

The second was a beach cleanup initiative organised across 11 governorates of the sultanate. 'In the beach cleanup, the students contributed by showcasing the importance of living a healthy lifestyle. Both activities

inform, educate, and motivate school students to be a part in creating a healthier world by promoting healthier living.

On the occasion, Dr Jean Yacoub Jabbour, WHO Representative to Oman, said, "With the climate crisis, which is the single biggest health threat facing humanity, we need to have urgent actions to keep humans and the planet healthy and foster a movement to create societies focused on well-being."

Environment-related issues are among the major causes of health problems worldwide. WHO estimates that more than 13mn deaths around the world each year are due to avoidable environmental causes. In the Eastern Mediterranean Region, environmental risks, including climate change, are responsible for 23 per cent of the total burden of disease and as much as 30 per cent of the disease burden for children.

76 cases of dengue fever reported as Municipality fights mosquitoes

Our Correspondent
Muscat

H E Dr Ahmed bin Mohammed al Sa'eedi, Minister of Health, stated that more than 76 cases of dengue fever have been recorded in the governorates of Muscat, North and South Batinah.

He urged to intensify the efforts and collaboration of all parties to get rid of the mosquitoes by taking the necessary actions, as it was eliminated in 2019.

In this regard, Muscat Municipality launched a campaign to combat the aedes aegypti mosquitoes in the governorate - the main vector that transmits the



virus which causes dengue.

A statement issued by Muscat Municipality said, 'Around 80 people participated in the campaign which was held from March 27 to April 7. It targeted 3,666 homes in several areas in Muscat.'

Twenty-three teams of specialists used 916 litres of pesticides to fight the aedes aegypti mosquitoes in five locations. This included 2,857 homes in Ghubra, 254 in Al Ansab, 235 in Al Hail South, 290 in Amerat, and 30 in Wadi al Bahias.

The Ministry of Health has urged people to take necessary steps to eliminate mosquito breeding sites.

OPINION

SALEH MIRI, MUSCAT DAILY COLUMNIST, IS AN ARCHITECT WHO CAME TO OMAN IN THE EARLY 1980S

This year has shown us how we are dependent on others, and the world around us. Climate change, volcanoes erupting, flooding, fires covering even the coldest areas of the planet, and conflicts appearing in many countries, in addition to the pandemic make us think about the future of our planet.

Not only is nature responding to our excesses, but also we are internally facing an upcoming of new concerns. The United States withdrew from Afghanistan without prior notice to its allies. Hundreds of foreigners are stuck there with no hope, women wonder how their future life will be. What was the role of the US in Afghanistan anyways? Was it just to have access to the world's largest lithium reserves to allow Silicon Valley to further prosper? Or was it to replace the Russian presence in this area?

The US has a huge national debt with every single person owing around US\$91,000 to the state. The country continues to print dollars, the majority of which China and Japan have purchased and could sell at any time, making the value of the dollar collapse within seconds. Wanting to show off with borrowed money creates fears for its future.

In other parts of the world, we witness revolutions in Myanmar, in some African countries, instability in most of the Middle East countries, with chaotic situations in Lebanon, Yemen, Palestine, etc. Russia invades Ukraine and thousands



are killed on both sides, most of the cities have only ruins and millions live in underground shelters all just to satisfy a selfish vision of Russia's leader.

Isn't it time for the world to stop and start thinking how we should change things? The role of technology, importance of wealth, the right to exist freely need to be re-assessed by a real organisation, not the United Nations (UN), which

MEANING OF LIFE IN 2022

has no results shown since its existence, with a security council, where previous superpowers still have veto rights, such as the UK, etc.

We need to sit, take the time and get the opinion of everybody and from everywhere to reach solutions. Continuing what we have today will definitely result into the end of our planet and this day will arrive sooner than we think. Biden's speech at the UN mentioned a similar approach but still insisted on America First, which makes the rest of the speech worthless. It is not by speeches but by real actions, we get to know who people really are.

Each person on this planet should have a right to speak freely and express his/her ideas, from the poorest in Africa, to those living in the US.

Some basic principles should guide our approach:

► Borders in the world have created competition, fights and wars, and consequently we should have one country, i.e. the planet earth.

► A person should be judged not by his wealth but on his human achievements - This is not the political communism, but a human communism, without any political aspect. Credit cards need to be issued based on the capital of compassion.

► The global world's wealth, from mining to agriculture to fishing etc, should be equally distributed in the world - we are all inhabitants of the same planet.

► A real-world organisation should be established and should have representatives proportionate to the size of the population - China has for the moment one representative, so has Liechtenstein - which makes no sense. India with 1.4bn people is not present in the security council, whilst the UK with 59mn people is.

► The veto power by some of the nations should be abolished - No one has more rights than the others. It is the majority, which will decide.

► Respecting nature should be in the constitution of any location on this planet.

► And any other principle which will enable our planet to exist in a better manner.



Oman Mining Bid round 2022

The Ministry of Energy and Minerals (MEM) is Inviting Mining International and local companies having experience in Mining projects to participate in the forthcoming bid round for the Salt (Potash) and associated commodities in the Blocks 53-A, 53-B, 53-C and 51-D in the Sultanate of Oman.

Blocks in Um A Samim Sabkhah

Block 53-A	Block 53-B	Block 53-C
covers an area of about 3719 km ²	covers an area of about 3823km ²	covers an area of about 5067 km ²

Located in the Interior Oman lying to the south of the Oman Mountains piedmont, extends into the eastern part of the Rub' al Khali sand desert and its western edge follows the international border with Saudi Arabia, This areas is a flat desert Known as Umm A Samim area.

Block 51-D
covers an area of about 567 km ²

located in Mahoot central Oman a few kilometers from Shanna Harbour along the coast of Oman. Salt flat of the evaporation of a body of water.

Start date: 10th April 2022

End Date 10th June 2022

For Details and Registration, please revert to: Email: concessions.dept@mem.gov.om

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World food prices hit record high over Ukraine war: UN

Paris, France - World food prices hit an all-time high in March following Russia's invasion of agricultural powerhouse Ukraine, a UN agency said on Friday, adding to concerns about the risk of hunger around the world.

The disruption in export flows resulting from the February 24 invasion and international sanctions against Russia has spurred fears of a global hunger crisis, especially across the Middle East and Africa, where the knock-on effects are already playing out.

Russia and Ukraine, whose vast grain-growing regions are among the world's main breadbaskets, account for a huge share of the globe's exports in several major commodities, including wheat, vegetable oil and corn. Ukrainian ports have been blocked by a Russian blockade and there is concern about this year's harvest as the war rages on during the spring sowing season. "World food commodity prices made a significant leap in March to reach their highest levels ever, as war in the Black Sea region spread shocks through markets for staple grains and vegetable oils," the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) said in a statement.

The index, a measure of the monthly change in international prices of a basket of food commodities, averaged 159.3 points in March.

The jump includes new all-time highs for vegetable oils, cereals and meats, the FAO said, adding that prices of sugar and dairy products "also rose significantly".



The FAO's food price index, which had already reported a record in February, surged by 12.6 per cent in March, 'making a giant leap to a new highest level since its inception in 1990', the UN agency said

Famine fears

Russia and Ukraine together accounted for around 30 per cent and 20 per cent of global wheat and maize exports respectively, over the past three years, the FAO said.

Wheat prices rose by almost 20 per cent, with the problem exacerbated by concerns over crop conditions in the United States, the organization said.

The FAO's vegetable oil price index surged by 23.2 per cent, driven by higher quotations for sunflower seed oil, of which Ukraine is the world's leading exporter. Spanish supermarkets have rationed the sale of sunflower oil to stop customers stockpiling over shortage fears due to the war.

The United States has accused Russian President

Vladimir Putin of creating "this global food crisis". France has warned that the war has increased the risk of famine around the world.

The FAO estimates famine in West Africa and the Sahel regions, both highly dependent on Russian and Ukrainian grains, could worsen and affect over 38mn people by June if no measures are taken.

Ukraine on Thursday called on the European Union to provide aid to its farmers. The European Commission has been asked to coordinate the delivery of fuel, seeds, fertilisers and agricultural machines to the country.

For his part, Putin warned on Tuesday that, against the backdrop of global food shortages, Russia would "have to be pru-

dent with supplies abroad and carefully monitor such exports to countries that are clearly hostile towards us".

FAO chief Qu Dongyu called Friday on countries not to restrict food exports, which would only worsen the situation for countries dependent imports.

"Above all, we must not shut down our global trade system, and exports should not be restricted or taxed," he said.

The FAO also called for aid to vulnerable nations to boost planting.

"One and a half billion dollars would be sufficient for immediate agricultural assistance that would save the lives of some 50mn people by allowing the growing of food where the need is most keen," said Rein Paulsen, head of the agency's emergencies office, in a letter to AFP.

The conflict has also sent oil and gas prices through the roof, causing inflation to rise further across the world and raising concerns that it could derail global economic growth.

AFP

Galfar wins RO75mn contract for Yiti Sustainable City project

Our Correspondent Muscat

The first construction contract for the Sustainable City - Yiti project has been awarded by developers to Galfar Engineering and Contracting Company. The sultanate's largest contacting company will build central plaza and commercial, residential and office buildings at the Sustainable City - Yiti.

The Sustainable City - Yiti project is being developed by Sustainable Development & Investment Company, which is a joint venture between Oman Tourism Development Company (Omran Group) and Diamond Developers, a leading developer of sustainable communities.

"We are pleased to inform our esteemed shareholders that Sustainable Development & Investment Company has awarded Galfar a contract for the construction of plaza, commercial, residential and office buildings at Sustainable City - Yiti project," Galfar said in a filing to the Muscat Stock Exchange.

The value of this tender is approximately RO75mn with an execution period of 26 months, Galfar noted.

"This project will further strengthen Galfar's order book



and enhance its marketing share in integrated tourism projects in Oman. We take this opportunity to express our appreciation to Sustainable Development & Investment Company for the confidence vested on Galfar through award of this project," Galfar said. Omran Group recently celebrated the launch of the Sustainable City - Yiti in partnership with Diamond Developers.

With an investment value of nearly US\$1bn, the fully-integrated, urban, mixed-use master project reflects Omran Group's goals towards driving the social and economic development through sustainable tourism projects that attract foreign direct investment in line with Oman Vision 2040 and the Na-

tional Tourism Strategy.

Spread over an area of 1mn sqm, the Sustainable City - Yiti - will be developed within the Phase 1 of the Yiti Integrated Tourism Development Masterplan.

Slated for completion by 2025, the project will feature 1,657 eco-friendly and energy-efficient residential units including 300 villas.

Designed for comfort, practicality, and contemporary style, the spacious three and four bedroom villas will also offer significant savings on utility bills.

The Sustainable City - Yiti is the first project in Oman that meets the global green practices and is in adherence to the highest sustainability standards.

Oman heads annual meetings of Arab financial institutions

Jeddah, Saudi Arabia - Oman, represented by the Ministry of Finance, on Thursday headed the annual meetings of the joint Arab financial institutions and the 45th meeting of the Arab Monetary Fund's (AMF) board of governors in Jeddah, Saudi Arabia.

Oman's delegation was headed by H E Sultan Salim al Habsi, Minister of Finance. H E

Tahir Salim al Amri, executive president of the Central Bank of Oman (CBO) also attended the meetings.

In the opening session of the joint financial institutions meetings, H E Habsi lauded the efforts exerted by joint Arab financial institutions in empowering Arab economies to face the economic and social repercussions caused by the coronavirus pandemic.

At the 45th meeting of the AMF's board of governors, H E Habsi underscored the importance of coordination and compatibility in financial, monetary and economic policies among countries. Those policies are considered the basis in overcoming challenges related to achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). ONA

Bank Nizwa inks sustainable finance deal with Shanfari Special Projects



Muscat - Bank Nizwa recently signed its first sustainable finance agreement with Shanfari Special Projects Company (SSP). With Hutchison Ports Sohar commencing construction work to develop its new solar-powered integrated inspection facility, SSP was trusted with the responsibility of installing the scanning equipment for the project.

Bank Nizwa's sustainable finance agreement will play an instrumental role in supporting SSP to source its requirements from Rapiscan, the chosen vendor for the project.

The agreement was signed by Khalid Al Kayed, CEO of Bank Nizwa and Sheikh Nizar al Shanfari, chairman of SSP, according to a press release.

An integral component of the

project is the installation of a solar energy system on the new infrastructure, the existing buildings, and the car parking areas. This will be done to supplement the power requirements and will result in the reduction of approximately 5,000 tonnes of CO2 emissions per year. This is a significant step towards achieving the sustainable development goals of the country.

Bank Nizwa CEO Khaled al Kayed said, "As a sister company of the Shanfari Group of Companies, SSP has been a significant contributor to the nation's goals and mirrors values that are quite similar to ours. We are indeed delighted to join hands with such a reputable company to promote the logistics sector through sustainable financing solutions. The project's green concept of sup-

plementing its energy requirements through renewable, clean sources of energy is in line with Oman Vision 2040. As such, Bank Nizwa is deeply invested in its success."

Embracing the latest advancements in innovation and container scanning capabilities, the modern inspection facility, valued at US\$30mn, will be a part of the terminal development plans to enhance the inspection services for inbound and outbound containers and provide transformational clearing processes.

The project will facilitate the quicker clearance of both normal and refrigerated containers and aid in the express movement of goods. This will also boost Oman's ranking in the Global Logistics Performance Index while

contributing to the ongoing development of the national economy.

Sharing his comments, Sheikh Nizar al Shanfari, said, "At SSP, we endeavour to be able to offer exceptional service, dependability and quality to our customers around the world."

"Our projects exemplify this commitment and we continue to move forward with conviction to deliver modern day solutions that support the environmental, and sustainability goals of the sultanate."

"We are thankful to Bank Nizwa for supporting us in this journey as we aim to emerge as one of Oman's largest industrial and services conglomerates, and a valuable contributor to the development of the nation's infrastructure."

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MARKET ANALYSIS - OMAN

MSX closes the week marginally higher

The benchmark index of the Muscat Stock Exchange last week posted marginal gains amid weak trading volumes during the Holy month of Ramadan. The MSX30 index ended the week higher by 0.10 per cent.

All the sectoral indices ended the week higher except for Financial index. Financial index closed lower by 0.45 per cent. Service index and industrial index ended higher by 0.58 per cent and 1.41 per cent, respectively. The MSX Shariah index closed higher by 0.58 per cent.

There were two major positive developments last week with regards to the outlook of Oman's economy. Firstly, S&P Global Ratings raised the credit rating for the Sultanate of Oman from 'B+' to 'BB-' with a stable outlook. The upgrade - the first since 2015 - has been attributed to the country's improved fiscal indicators and lower public debt risk. According to S&P, Oman is anticipated to achieve a fiscal surplus equivalent to 5.7 per cent of GDP this year, as opposed to a fiscal deficit estimated at 4.6 per cent of GDP in 2021.

Secondly, the sultanate's 2022 budget has registered a surplus of RO210mn as of end-February 2022, according to the latest figures from the Ministry of Finance. As of end-February 2022, public revenue amounted to RO1.918mn, up by 75.6 per cent, compared to the same period in 2021.

According to the Ministry of Finance, this is a result of various factors, which include that during the period, oil prices averaged US\$81 per barrel compared to an average oil price of US\$42 per barrel over the same period in 2021.



Local news

►Galfar Engineering and Contracting Company announced that the Sustainable Development & Investment Company, which is a joint venture between Oman Tourism Development Company (Omran) and Diamond Developers, has awarded Galfar a contract for the construction of plaza, commercial, residential and office buildings at Sustainable City Yiti project. The value of this tender is approximately RO75mn with an execution period of 26 months. ►National Life and General Insurance Company (NLGIC) announced that it has entered into agreements to fully acquire Royal & Sun Alliance Insurance Middle East (RSA Middle East). The acquisition is subject to the respective regulatory and

NLGIC's shareholders approvals. NLGIC will execute the transaction in two parts: (i) Acquiring 50 per cent shareholding in RSA Middle East from Sun Alliance Insurance Overseas, a fully owned entity of RSA Insurance Limited; and (ii) Exchange the remaining shares of RSA Middle East, owned by reputable Saudi shareholders, for new shares to be issued by NLGIC. ►Oman National Engineering & Investment Company (ONEIC) has been awarded two tenders from the Ministry of Health. The first contract is for the operation and maintenance of equipment at various health facilities at the Directorate General of Medical Services in Muscat Governorate with the sum of RO1,554,708. Second contract is for the operation

and maintenance of equipment at Ibri hospital and its affiliated health units at Al Dhahira Governorate with the sum of RO1,773,688. ►Oman Arab Bank (OAB) announced that the international credit rating agency Capital Intelligence (CI) has revised the outlook for its long-term foreign currency rating and bank standalone rating to stable from negative. The recent revision comes in the wake of the amendment of Oman's sovereign credit rating to stable from negative. ►Equinix, the world's digital infrastructure company, has announced plans to build a brand new data centre in Salalah. The data centre is being built in co-operation with Omantel, the regional leading wholesale carrier

of the Middle East, and will be commercially and operationally managed in full by Equinix as a carrier-neutral and open access Equinix International Business Exchange (IBX) data centre. ►The sultanate's consumption of natural gas dropped by 3 per cent year-on-year in February 2022 compared to the same period of last year. Total production of natural gas declined to 3,6432mn cubic metres (mncm) in February 2022 against 3,753mncm in the corresponding period of 2021.

GCC markets

Bahrain's GDP grew by 4.29 per cent at real prices and 18.44 per cent at current prices in the fourth quarter of 2021, according to national accounts estimates issued by the

Information & e-Government Authority (iGA). The report, which shows the growth of both the oil and non-oil sectors, revealed that the oil sector grew by 4.67 per cent at constant prices and 64.15 per cent at current prices, reflecting the rise in fuel prices.

The non-oil sector recorded a growth of 4.21 per cent at constant prices and 12.99 per cent at current prices, stated the iGA report.

The consumer spending in Saudi Arabia witnessed an increase by 10 per cent as Saudi population spent about SR88.5bn during last February, the Saudi Central Bank (SAMA) announced. SAMA's data clarified that consumer spending in Saudi Arabia rose during the month of February 2022 to SR88.5bn, compared to about SR80.23bn during the same month in the previous year. The value of sales through sales' points increased by 25 per cent to about SR38.88bn through 496.3mn transactions and via 1.09mn devices, compared to 2021.

Saudi Arabia's non-oil private sector expanded output and purchasing at the fastest pace in over four years but cost pressures, partly due to the war in Ukraine, added to the firms' expenses, a business survey showed on Tuesday. The seasonally adjusted IHS Markit Saudi Arabia Purchasing Managers' Index (PMI) rose to 56.8 in March, rising from 56.2 in February and staying above the 50 mark that separates growth from contraction. The reading was also the highest recorded since November last year to signal a sharp improvement in business conditions across the non-oil private sector economy.

Global news

The US Federal Reserve officials discussed how they want to reduce their trillions of dollars in bond holdings at the March meeting, with a consensus around US\$95bn a month, minutes released Wednesday showed. Officials generally agreed that a maximum of US\$60bn in Treasuries and US\$35bn in mortgage-backed securities would be allowed to roll off, phased in over three months and likely starting in May. That total would be about double the rate of the last effort, from 2017-19, and represent part of a historic switch from ultra-easy monetary policy. The minutes, though, pointed to potential rate hikes of 50 basis points at upcoming meetings, a level consistent with market pricing for the May vote. The US government bond yields rose last week, with mounting evidence that the Federal Reserve plans to rapidly raise interest rates and reduce its bond holdings lifting the 10-year Treasury yield above 2.6 per cent.

Recommendation

Ten-year US Treasury yields, the benchmark for global borrowing costs, have risen around 20 basis points (bps) this month, adding to a 50 bps surge in March. Shorter-maturity yields, which are more sensitive to interest rate expectations, have jumped even more. Those moves have weighed on the market last week, and increased volatility.

Regionally, most of the GCC stock markets ended the week higher as oil prices seem to float at the same prices.

Locally, the market volume at the MSX is lower than usual mostly because of the holy month of Ramadan.

By special arrangement with U Capital

India central bank cuts growth outlook on Ukraine war fear

Mumbai, India - India's central bank cut growth forecasts and sharply hiked its inflation projections Friday, citing fears that the war in Ukraine could derail the country's nascent recovery.

Asia's third-largest economy bounced back from the pandemic with world-beating growth, but is now grappling with rising costs as global oil prices skyrocket.

"We are confronted with new but humungous challenges," Reserve Bank of India boss Shaktikanta Das said in a televised address, calling the war in



Shaktikanta Das

Ukraine a "tectonic shift".

"Inflation is now projected to be higher and growth lower than the assessment in February," he

added. The central bank projected the economy to expand 7.2 per cent for the 2022-23 financial year, compared with a previous estimate of 7.8 per cent.

It also saw inflation at 5.7 per cent, well up from the 4.5 per cent predicted two months ago.

India imports more than 80 per cent of its oil needs, with the country's dependence on foreign crude growing as domestic production falls.

Consumer price inflation in the first two months of the year has remained persistently above the central bank's upper toler-

ance limit of 6 per cent.

Despite this, the monetary policy committee (MPC) held the key interest rate unchanged at a historic low of 4 per cent for the eleventh straight meeting.

But in its first clear signal of a future rate hike, Das said the MPC is "focusing on withdrawal of accommodation to ensure that inflation remains within the target going forward, while supporting growth". The benchmark Sensex was up 0.43 per cent in intraday trade following the announcement.

AFP

Sri Lanka hikes rates as protests spiral

Colombo, Sri Lanka - Cash-strapped Sri Lanka's central bank hiked interest rates by a record 700 basis points Friday as police fired tear gas at hundreds of students protesting over the economic crisis. Severe shortages of food and fuel, alongside lengthy electricity blackouts, have led to weeks of widespread anti-government demonstrations - with calls for President Gotabaya Rajapaksa to resign.

The latest protests saw students try to march Friday to the national parliament, and police used water cannons in efforts to disburse the angry crowds.



Protestors take part in a demonstration in Colombo on Saturday (AFP)

The Central Bank of Sri Lanka said its benchmark lending rate had been raised to 14.5 per cent to "stabilise the exchange rate" after the rupee tumbled over 35

per cent in a month.

The rate for deposits was also increased by seven percentage points to 13.5 per cent as reports said Sri Lanka's rupee was the

worst-performing currency in the world, edging out the Russian ruble.

The bank's newly appointed governor, Nandalal Weerasinghe, said attempts to control foreign exchange markets and keep interest rates artificially low in the past year had contributed to the unprecedented economic chaos.

"We are now in damage control mode," Weerasinghe said at his first press conference since replacing Ajith Cabraal, who was virtually forced out Monday with the country facing bankruptcy.

AFP



Launching Bose SoundLink Flex Bluetooth® speaker

Music fuels and complements so many of life's adventures. Enjoy the rich sound that elevates your passion for outdoors with the versatile SoundLink Flex. Rigorously tested to meet an IP67 rating, SoundLink Flex is waterproof, dustproof and rugged to survive any adventure. Check it out today!



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MHD signs deal to establish Oman's first pharma manufacturing facility

Mohsin Haider Darwish, one of the largest and pioneering business houses in the Sultanate of Oman, has signed an agreement with Ali Moosa Al Bulushi, National Bank of Oman (NBO), and SOHAR Freezone for the establishment of a first-of-its-kind pharmaceutical manufacturing facility in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region – Penicillin General Integrated Industrial Company (Pen-G).

Under the agreement, Pen-G will be jointly owned by MHD and Ali Moosa Al Bulushi and will establish a state of the art fermentation plant for the manufacture of key pharmaceutical start-up material at the Sohar Freezone. NBO will be participating as the primary bank through which the project is being financed, a press release said.

The signing ceremony took place on April 6, at the Pen-G head office in Ghala. Present at the signing ceremony were Ali Moosa al Bulushi, Mohammed Abdullah al Kharusi, CEO, MHD, Abdullah Zahran al Hinai, CEO, National Bank of Oman, and Omar bin Mahmood al Mahrizi, CEO of Sohar Freezone and deputy CEO of Sohar Port.

Commenting on the project, Mohammed al Kharusi said, "As of 2020, the global pharmaceu-



tical industry generated revenues of US\$1.27tn, representing significant growth over the past two decades. Our objective with Pen-G is two-fold. First, we would like to officially put Oman on the world map for raw materials for start-up medicine and enter this lucrative industry, and secondly, we would like to further our goal of establishing ourselves as a key contributor to Oman Vision 2040 and, by extension, to the government's national diversification efforts.

"Furthermore, our location at the Sohar Freezone, right next to the largest industrial port in the

country, provides us with ready access to global trade routes between Asia and Europe for both acquisition of raw materials as well as export of our product."

The Pen-G fermentation plant will be the first of its kind in the region and has been initially designed to have two blocks for the manufacture of Penicillin-G and 6-APA (Amino Penicillanic Acid) respectively. These are key start-up materials for the most widely used group of antibiotics, penicillin, and cephalosporins. There are also plans to eventually add a further block for the manufacture of key start-up materials for

Erythromycin. The plant has also been designed from the ground up to comply wholly with Good Manufacturing Practices (GMP) regulations, ensuring all products manufactured are to global standards.

The project was the brainchild of Ali Moosa al Bulushi, a proven, dynamic, multi-disciplined project director and programme manager. He has been a banker for close to two decades before he plunged into the pharmaceutical business, implementing, and providing complete project life-cycle management services for various pharma projects in India

and Oman.

Commenting on the Pen-G project, Bulushi said, "This project is a core part of my constantly evolving dream to build value in Oman in the Pharma sector. Penicillin G represents value addition at the raw material stage of antibiotic medicine manufacturing – an area currently dominated by China. Once completely operational, this plant will cater to the demand for Penicillin GK raw material amounting to nearly 10% of the world's consumption."

Mahrizi added, "The growth of the Sohar pharma cluster is an

important step forward in the development of the Port and Freezone with far-reaching benefits to the local community, both in terms of investment and access to the finished product. This pharma project, the second project after our animal vaccination facility, will add significant value to all three of our objectives. We are confident that the plant operated by Penicillin General Integrated Industrial Company will provide the impetus for further investment in the pharmaceutical industry and the potential for Sohar to become the main hub for the industry in the region."

Ooredoo offers 'Saudi Passport package'

As travel restrictions ease, Ooredoo is offering exciting new roaming packages for customers travelling to the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia for Umrah. The Saudi Passport package comes with an abundance of data and voice to ensure customers stay connected during the Holy Month.

Supported by Ooredoo's next generation network, the package allows customers to stay up to date with friends and family in Oman with uninterrupted access to all of their social media apps and messaging services.

Simply activate the service through the Ooredoo app and receive unlimited data and 30 minutes of call time for RO7, valid for seven days. The minutes can be used to call locally within the Kingdom, call back to Oman, and receive calls while overseas.

(To find out more about Ooredoo's products and services, visit www.ooredoo.om, or download the Ooredoo App for free from Google Play or the App Store.)

Sheraton Oman offers unique Ramadan dining experiences

Sheraton Oman Hotel, the iconic landmark of the Sultanate, is inviting guests to experience scrumptious dishes, customary beverages, inspiring surroundings, and enthralling music during Ramadan.

The Hotel has planned culinary offerings that include Iftar, Sohour along with traditional live music, and activities amidst a special ambience.

Cliff Deck Café is a new addition which caters outside the hotel. Located in Muscat Bay and managed by Sheraton Oman Hotel, the café offers a trendy dining experience that blurs the boundaries of indoor and outdoor eatery options.

Samir Messaoudi, general manager said, "We are looking forward to welcoming our guests and offering them an unforgettable experience with a collection of unique culinary options. Guests can enjoy authentic oud



melodies throughout the holy month in a perfect backdrop.

"This year we are delighted to introduce Ramadan Iftar at the Cliff Deck Cafe in Muscat Bay. There really is no better way to enliven the dining experience than with a little fresh air and great views. The café boasts breath-taking bird's eye views of Muscat Bay skyline, promising an inimitable al fresco dining ex-

perience. We are also offering a unique dining experience of a private Iftar buffet at the Aquarium in Muscat Mall. Our aim is to offer diverse and lavish Iftar buffets or takeaway meals that may tempt even the non-fasters."

Inspired by Arabic cultures and Omani tastes, the Iftar buffet served at Courtyard restaurant at Sheraton Oman offers a rich array of Arabic special dishes.

Mitsubishi Ramadan offers include 0% finance for 2 years

General Automotive Company (GAC), the official distributor of Mitsubishi vehicles in Oman, has announced the launch of their highly anticipated Ramadan Offer. This year, GAC will be offering its customers a wide range of benefits that include cash gifts of up to RO3,762, 0% financing for up to two years, free insurance, free registration and more.

Commenting on the new Ramadan Offer, Manoj Ranade, general manager of GAC, "As with every year prior we have carefully developed this year's promotion to offer our customers exceptional value. As a result, this year's Ramadan offer truly stands out as one of the most exciting and is guaranteed to make ownership of any new Mitsubishi a particularly rewarding experience, regardless of the model you select."

Customers who purchase any



Mitsubishi during the Ramadan Offer period, before it ends on May 31, will enjoy a range of benefits including cash gifts ranging from a minimum of RO1,438 up to RO3,762 and 0% interest financing for up to two years. All

vehicles sold will also include free registration and free Insurance for the first year, free Lumar window tint, and a 2-year/30,000km free service package. All vehicles will also come with six years/unlimited

kilometres warranty and roadside assistance.

"As a bonus, Mitsubishi fans will have an opportunity to see the highly anticipated all-new Outlander in person at our showroom in Muscat," he added

Wizz Air expands its ever-growing network

Wizz Air has launched new exciting travel opportunities from Abu Dhabi to Budapest, Bucharest, Cluj-Napoca, Vienna, Katowice, Catania and Bari.

The airline continues to deliver on its promise of providing affordable, hassle-free and sustainable travel for passengers, making travel possible for everyone and contributing to the recovery of the tourism sector in the UAE, a press release said.

These marvellous destinations provide travel options for passengers from Hungary, Romania, Austria, Poland and Italy to the UAE. Tickets are already on sale on wizzair.com and the airline's mobile app, available in Arabic, with fares on the convenient schedule starting as low as AED289.

Wizz Air's network contributes to the diversification of the travel and tourism sector in the UAE by increasing Abu Dhabi's connectivity from Vienna (Austria) in the West to Mattala (Sri Lanka) in the East.



Robert Carey, President of Wizz Air Group said, "We are delighted to launch new attractive routes to Europe with fantastic ultra-low fares. This is another important milestone for Wizz Air as well as for our passengers in the UAE. Our expanding network out of Abu Dhabi demonstrates our

continued commitment to increasing connectivity to the UAE capital and making travel experiences avail-

able to people of all ages and backgrounds with safe, efficient, travel awaiting all our customers. We look forward to welcoming you on board our aircraft soon."

Francois Bourienne, Chief Commercial Officer at Abu Dhabi Airports added, "We are excited to further strengthen our strategic partnership with Wizz Air Abu Dhabi. Being the operations base of choice for this growing airline is evidence of the

solid value proposition of Abu Dhabi International Airport and the business opportunities it presents to customers. We are equally pleased by the addition of new routes by Wizz Air that will reinforce the emirate's position as a global destination for leisure and business. We continue to work closely with Wizz Air Abu Dhabi and our partners to grow their businesses by leveraging our flight infrastructure."

Huawei presents cool ways to stay efficient this Ramadan

Smartphones get a lot of heat for killing productivity. But if used right, a smartphone can be your best friend and productivity machine. They combine various different things into a single device.

A smartphone is your go-to camera. It is your messaging device. You attend meetings with it. And for some people, it is their creative workhorse. You can make this Ramadan the most productive and memorable one with the newly launched Huawei nova 9 SE, a press release said.

The most important thing to do is to take pictures and cherish these gatherings with loved ones forever. Luckily, the new member of the Huawei nova 9 family improves the camera capabilities by a huge margin. That means you can preserve all these memories in crystal clear detail with the 108MP AI Quad Camera system, which comprises a 108MP main camera, an 8MP ultra-



wide-angle lens, a 2MP Bokeh lens, and a 2MP macro lens. With an impressive pixel count, the 108MP ultra-high-definition main camera gives you plenty of flexibility while shooting, and you don't have to stop snapping after Iftar when the sun is down.

Thanks to Super Night Shot, the cameras on the Huawei nova 9 SE can take well-exposed pic-

tures even when it is dark. Even the selfie camera is powerful enough to capture perfect selfies in low light.

With all the pictures, videos, and enjoying your favourite Ramadan shows, you will need more power than ever. Still, there's nothing to worry about, as the 66W Huawei SuperCharge gives more power.



Changan Oman announces attractive Ramadan offers

Arabian Gulf Automobiles and Equipment (AGAE), part of Bahwan International Group, has announced an attractive offer on a range of Changan model variants as part of its exclusive Ramadan promotion.

The 'Driving Forward This Ramadan' offer is available on models including CS95 (2.0L Turbo Engine, 224 hp, 6-speed AT, 4 WD, seven seater) CS75 Plus (2.0 L Turbo Engine, 220 hp, 8 speed AT); CS85 Coupe (2.0L Turbo Engine, 224 hp, 8 sped AT); CS35 Plus (1.4 Turbo, 155hp) EADO Plus (1.4 Turbo, 155hp and 1.6L Engine, 116 hp) and Alsvin (1.5L Engine, 105 hp), Hunter.

The Ramadan offer which the customers can avail during the

period includes free service (2years/35,000km to 3 years/55,000km), free insurance, free registration, manufacturer's warranty (6 years/2,50,000km) and assured fuel card to all customers buying Changan model variants. In addition, customers purchasing CS95 4WD, CS85 Coupe and CS75 Plus will get exclusive gifts of Apple Watch 41mm 7 series till May 20.

This special Ramadan promotion is exclusively designed for individual showroom customers not applicable for fleet/corporate buyers.

A senior official for AGAE said, "We would like to underline that the holy month of Ramadan is the best time to buy

Changan vehicles and retail customers stand to benefit enormously from the Ramadan promotion. We would like to appreciate our valued customers for their trust in the brand through this special scheme.

"We are happy to offer the best for our customers."

Changan's high-performance full-size SUV CS95 is a seven-seater SUV 4WD which amplifies driving experience with sophisticated luxury and superior comfort has been designed to stir the driving emotions.

With a commanding presence and muscular stance, CS95 is designed to demand attention wherever it goes. With meticulously crafted details complemented by convenient

technology, the CS95 ensures refined luxury in every drive for up to seven passengers.

With a range of innovative driving technologies, the CS95 delivers an assured sense of confidence and control to the driver. Its Blue Core Powertrain Technology based on the principles of power, clean and quiet provides owners with a highly efficient and energy saving performance. Under the hood is a Blue Core 2.0L turbocharged engine mated with a six speed AT which produces a 233 horsepower and a 360Nm of torque.

CS95 is packed with endless features and has numerous advantages over its segment competition.

Bank Muscat's Asalah offers cash for customer referrals

Bank Muscat has launched its special Asalah referral scheme for 2022. The scheme will run till December 31, and offers attractive prizes to existing Asalah Priority Banking customers.

All that customers have to do is successfully refer new customers to Asalah Priority Banking. A reward of RO100 per successful referral will be paid out for each referral once the referred customer meets all eligibility criteria for a minimum of three months after opening an Asalah account with the bank. Existing customers can win up to RO2,000 by making up to 20 successful referrals during the year.

Customers having a monthly salary of RO5,000 or those who can maintain a savings deposit of RO 30,000 are eligible for



Asalah Priority Banking. To provide referrals, the referral form available on the bank's website should be filled up and emailed to AsalahReferral@bankmuscat.com.

The salary/deposit transfer of the referral should be credited within a maximum of 30 days from the date of referral, for the referral to be eligible for participation in the scheme. Cash rewards of RO100 each will be credited directly to both the re-

ferred and referee's account for maintaining the eligibility criteria during the 3-month review period.

Amjad Iqbal al Lawati, deputy general manager - Customer Segments, said, "As a prolific innovator of banking products and services in the sultanate, Bank Muscat has always been customer-centric bank. We are very happy to once again offer guaranteed rewards for successful referrals."

Academic year begins for Indian schools

Indian schools in Oman have started full-fledged onsite classes after a gap of two years.

Children from Kindergarten to Class 12 were excited about their first day in school while the schools were decked up to receive them, adhering to all COVID protocols, a press release said.

The COVID-19 pandemic had

disrupted education at an unprecedented scale, with education systems being impacted by extended school closures. The schools are equipped to overcome the learning loss caused during the pandemic by implementing remedial measures to recover from the crisis and thereby strengthening the resilience of the education system.

"The schools will make efforts to include plans to engage the parent community and provide required resources for a healthy and safe school environment. There will be a specific action plan to recover learning losses due to remote teaching," said Dr Sivakumar Manickam, chairman, Board of Directors, Indian Schools in Oman.

ISG student creates tilt indicator

Aadil Fatah Salam, a class 9 student of Indian School Al Ghubra was awarded by the Australian Government with a Certificate of Grant - Innovation Patent on March 30. Aadil, who was a significant constituent of a ten-member team devised a unique device - an IOT controlled tilt indicating device.

With the aid of this innovative device, certain measures could be set in regions with a particular degree of tilt.

The user of the device would, thus, receive a notification. An interesting blend of communication using both GPS and Wi-Fi, makes this IOT tilt indicating device extremely ingenious and a



cut above the rest in the market, a press release said.

The innovating team of this path-breaking technology claim that by using GPS, one is able to pinpoint its strategic location and also communicate with it. Papri

Ghosh, the Principal, Indian School al Ghubra, commended Aadil on his fantastic achievement and encouraged him to continue thinking out of the box and dreaming big in the pursuit of his goals.

DANUBE RAMADAN CRICKET TOURNAMENT



MECC, Ayan International and Night Kings 11 qualify for round 16 of the Danube Ramadan cricket tournament sponsored by Al Danube and supported by Al Mudhish Company, Oman Oasis Company, Ayan International, Cricket Cottage, and Baab Al Hail Trading.



Indian embassy organises 'Yog Mahotsav'

Yoga is quite popular in Oman and over the years an increasing number of yoga enthusiasts from different nationalities have participated in the International Day of Yoga (IDY) - June 21.

To mark this day this year, in commemoration of 75 glorious years of India's independence, the Embassy of India, with the support of various yoga organisations in Oman, plans to organise 75 events in the coming 75 days, in the run-up to the celebration of the 8th IDY. The events will be organised under the theme of 'Muscat Yog Mahotsav 2022 - 75 Days, 75



Events' till 21 June.

This yoga festival will include events in both online and offline modes at different locations in Muscat and also in many cities of Oman, such as Salalah, Sohar,

Sur, etc.

The 'Muscat Yog Mahotsav' was launched with a curtain raiser event on April 8 at the embassy premises. It was attended by Indian Social Club representa-

tives and members of several Yoga organisations in Oman.

The event started with a ceremonial lamp lighting by Divya Narang, wife of H E Amit Narang, Ambassador of India.

Shahi Foods launches 'Mashhoor' in Sohar



Shahi Foods and Spices recently launched its flagship food mart - 'Mashhoor' in Sohar, under the auspices of Shaikh Saif bin Muhanna bin Said al Hinai, Wali of Sohar.

The store is Oman's first buy and mill food mart, that aims to elevate the grocery shopping experience in the country, a press release said.

Located centrally near the Sohar Intersection, and spread over an area of 500sqm, Mashhoor is the result of Shahi's continued efforts to improve the customer experience in the arena of food and spices. The main factor that differentiates the food mart from others is the

in-house custom milling and roasting facility.

Customers can choose from a range of top-grade whole spices and whole grains sourced by Shahi from across the world and get it milled according to their preferred consistency. Mashhoor is equipped with the latest, top of the class milling technology that has water-cooled grinders to ensure zero per cent loss in flavour and nutrients, enabling customers to get the perfect blend with the authentic aroma intact.

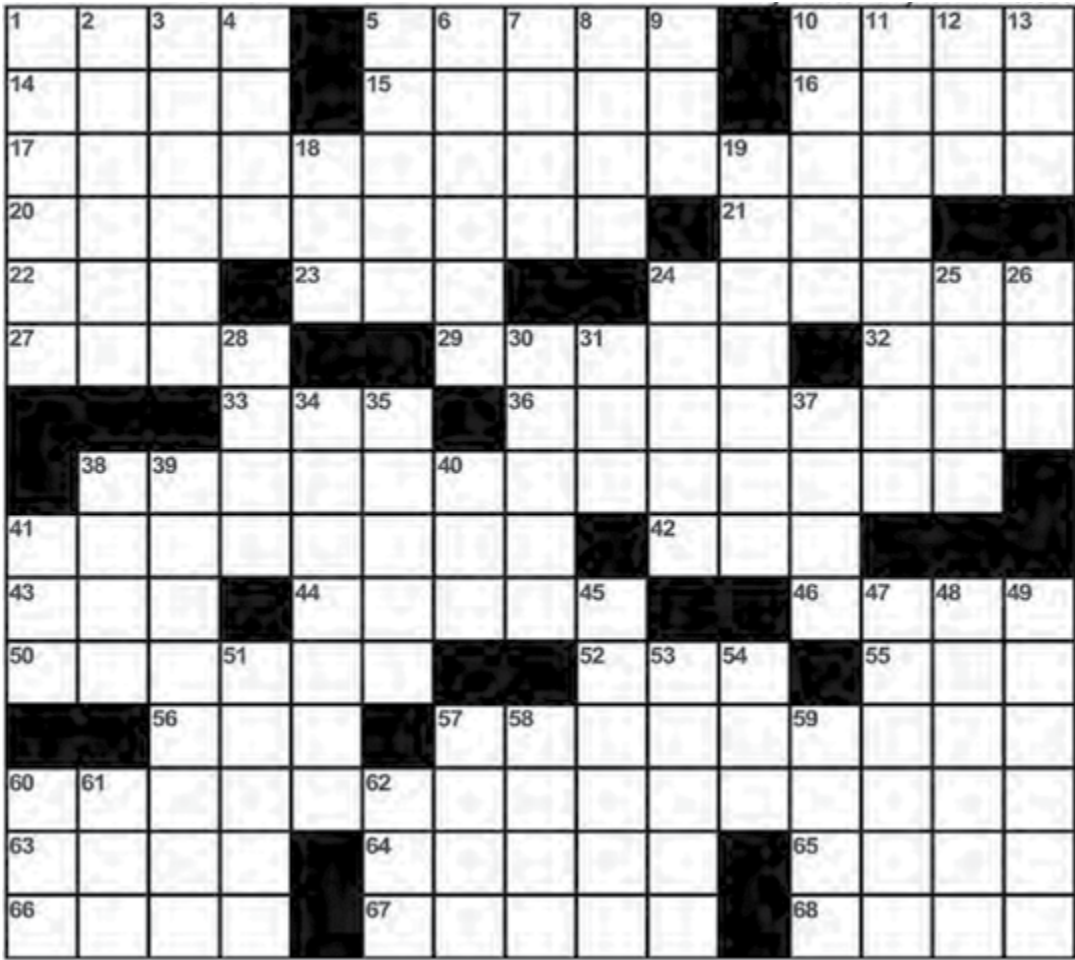
Customers can also blend spices and grains as per their requirement.

Shahi has the Middle East's

largest coffee processing facility and produces the best kahwa blends in the region. At Mashhoor, coffee aficionados can custom roast and blend their favourite coffee, too.

Ibrahim Mohammed Nasar al Rawahi, chairman of Shahi Foods and Spices, said, "We're incredibly proud that the quality of our products and trust in our brand has culminated in the opening of our flagship mart 'Mashhoor' in Sohar. Alongside fresh produce and everyday grocery items, it is the store's custom grinding and roasting facilities that are going to provide an elevated experience to those residing and working in the Sohar vicinity."

DAILY CROSSWORD



ACROSS

1) Advertising award
5) States frankly
10) Cookbook command
14) Rear end
15) Plains dwelling of old
16) Prefix with "postale"
17) Become a broke bloke
20) Kind of park
21) It buzzes around flowers
22) Heavy drinker
23) Chicago-to-Orlando dir.
24) Small restaurant
27) Couple no more
29) "Bolero" composer
32) Used to own
33) Chip you can't eat
36) Eastern or Mountain
38) One job for a plumber
41) How to get news
42) Capitol Hill pol
43) Food scrap
44) Beauty's unlikely love
46) Course taken after trig, often
50) It features a convenient sink
52) Call, as a game,

briefly
55) Comic strip cry
56) First word of a threat
57) Weed out
60) Perform a certain DIY auto chore
63) Glasgow miss
64) Egg-shaped
65) Dispatched
66) Little ones
67) Ballyhooed
68) Industrious insects

DOWN

1) Pants fold
2) Awkward goof
3) Attribute to a cause
4) Makes a choice
5) Molecule components
6) Surface layer
7) Instruction from a dentist
8) Toward the setting sun
9) Emulate a seamstress
10) Corporate department
11) Event seeking donations
12) Anger
13) What untreated wood will do, over time

18) "Aye, aye!"
19) Central Texas city
24) Church altar platforms
25) "You _?" (butler's question)
26) Keats offering
28) Fraudulent operation
30) It's page after page of places
31) Compete
34) Spotted, as a horse
35) Beneath
37) It's often a coating for steel
38) Desperate or calamitous
39) In most need of cleaning and repair
40) Org. of many spies
41) Make a promise
45) Sad in France?
47) Come to
48) Hidden, as fingerprints
49) Upon which medals are pinned
51) God-America link
53) Firmly fix, as in cement
54) Douglas _ tree
57) "Green" emotion

58) " ... one giant_ for mankind"
59) Org. with high-flying missions

60) Common deli order
61) Asian language
62) "Aah!" accompaniment

NOTE PAD

D	U	C	A	T		A	G	O	G		C	O	M	P	
E	P	O	C	H		V	I	V	A		A	R	I	A	
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YOUR DAILY HOROSCOPE

 **ARIES** MARCH 21-APRIL 19

Unpredictability is the name of the game now. Fortunately, that's a condition you adore. Does this mean you'll be inspired to be even more impulsive, eager, and enthusiastic than usual? It certainly does, and that could make it tough for you to concentrate and even tougher for you to sit still long enough to finish any of your projects. Give it a shot, though. You never know who might be watching. The higher-ups, for example?

 **LEO** JULY 23-AUGUST 22

Changing plans doesn't bother you. In fact, you've often found that it affords you the chance to meet someone or experience something you'd otherwise never have met or done. When your current plans are called off, you won't be distressed. Try to be gentle on your companions, however, who might initially be disappointed until they hear your brilliant strategy for Plan B.

 **SAGITTARIUS** NOVEMBER 22-DECEMBER 21

Creativity has never been something you're short of, and mentioning any new idea to the appropriate powers that be hasn't ever been a problem either. Believe it or not, you'll be even more brave and confident in that department now. Really. The best part is that what you've come up with will absolutely border on genius. Don't go anywhere without paper and pencil. One never knows when the muse will alight.

 **TAURUS** APRIL 20-MAY 20

Regardless of who delivers the attractive offer, how reputable it seems to be, or how tempted you are, you'll still need to remember that if it sounds too good to be true, it probably is. That goes double since at the moment you're in an especially trusting phase and quite susceptible to persuasion. As per usual, there's only one thing to do, which is when in doubt, ask for your best friend's help.

 **VIRGO** AUGUST 23-SEPTEMBER 22

While you could be dragging a bit today, someone else's boundless energy will inspire you to keep going. Try to hook up with a buddy who can help you through any chores or exercise routine that you aren't feeling quite up to today. Having someone who can help you persevere through the rough spots is a gift. It's not a crutch to need someone to cheer you, so don't feel guilty that you can't do it on your own right now.

 **CAPRICORN** DECEMBER 22-JANUARY 19

Ready for the pace of life to pick up considerably? Good, because opportunities for growth are going to come your way in fast and furious style, and you won't want to miss out on a single one. Of course, opportunities won't get you anywhere if you don't know what you're doing, but you do know what you're doing. It's called being in the right place at the right time with the right qualifications.

 **GEMINI** MAY 21-JUNE 21

Romantically, things are taking a new direction and there's some momentum building. Your charm has established a strong foothold in someone's mind. It might be time to strike while the iron is hot. If a new romance isn't on your current to-do list, then channel your charms in other contexts. It's appropriate to share your wit in the workplace! In fact, you'll find that a well-timed joke can make some powerful people want to be around you.

 **LIBRA** SEPTEMBER 23-OCTOBER 22

It's suddenly occurred to you that you haven't seen anything but your own neighbourhood in many, many moons and you're hungry to glimpse a distant shore. Find someone who's brave enough to just drop everything and go along with you. You know you won't have any trouble doing that. In fact, while you have the travel website up, you might want to find out about group rates. You know how you get.

 **AQUARIUS** JANUARY 20-FEBRUARY 18

Long-distance friends and lovers are on your mind and in your heart. In fact, you might even be moved to get out there and hit the road. That will go double if you've got something to celebrate, which you probably have, since everyone in a position of authority over you is so darned happy with your work. Just don't forget that certain someone who would like to join you. And relax. Inviting them to along isn't a marriage proposal.

 **CANCER** JUNE 22-JULY 22

You're in charge of emotions, and you're currently in the mood to experience each and every one of them, the entire gamut. Since skepticism and a healthy sense of doubt are among the feelings on any list regarding that tender topic, however, persuading you to do anything you don't want to do won't be easy. Good thing too. You're also in the mood to do everything in a very, very big way.

 **SCORPIO** OCTOBER 23-NOVEMBER 21

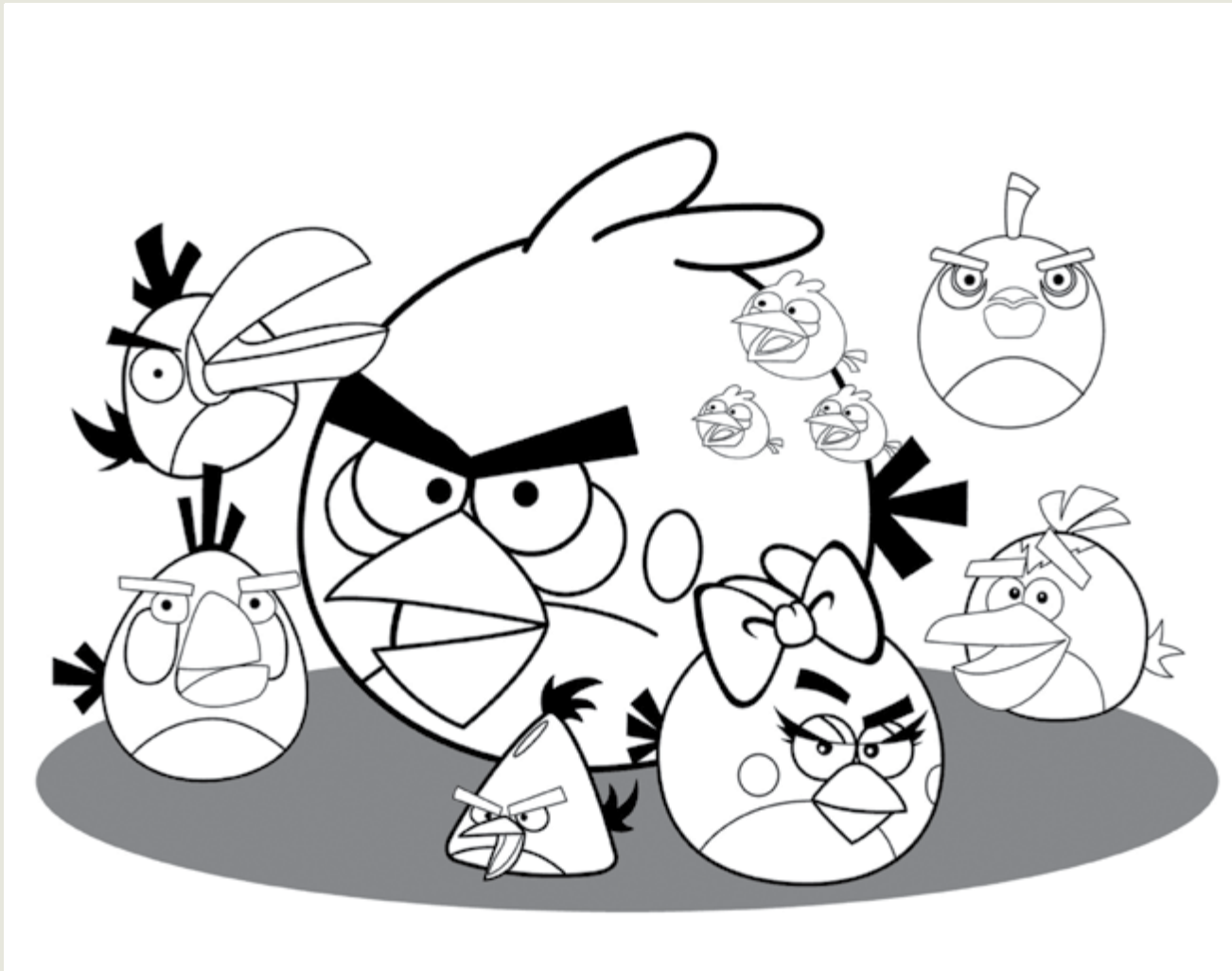
Believe it or not, a family member might be able to help you with any financial problems you're experiencing at the moment. After all, if you think about it, there's definitely at least one someone you've bailed out several times in the past when they were in a bit of a bind. Give them a call. Even if they can't hand you what you need, they might be able to come up with a plan.

 **PISCES** FEBRUARY 19-MARCH 20

You've got a major problem coming your way, and no one but you can solve it: Which charming, wonderful invitations are you going to accept for tonight, tomorrow night, and the many nights to come? You're at the beginning of a major social roll, and you need to handle it carefully. If you don't have a public relations agent, bribe a friend who's extremely organised to help. And take them along!

Answers: 1.D 2.A 3.B

KIDS COLOURING



BOGGLER

A	U	K	T
A	C	C	M
O	R	B	A
E	M	A	R

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

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

DO YOU SUDOKU?

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

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

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

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

Ukrainians flee after railway station attack

Thousands killed, and more than 11mn flee their homes or the country

Kramatorsk, Ukraine - Evacuations resumed on Saturday from the town in eastern Ukraine where a missile strike killed 52 people at a railway station as civilians fled a feared Russian offensive.

Six weeks into Russia's invasion, Moscow has shifted its focus to eastern and southern Ukraine after stiff resistance ended plans to swiftly capture Kyiv. Civilians trapped in the region have faced brutal conditions, and EU leaders met with President Volodymyr Zelensky in a show of support as news emerged of the devastating attack on Kramatorsk's station. The 52 victims included five children.

With thousands killed in fighting and more than 11mn fleeing their homes or the country, Zelensky said the strike marked a fresh atrocity and called for a 'firm global response' to the bloody incident.

"This is another Russian war crime for which everyone involved will be held accountable," he said in a video message.

"World powers have already condemned Russia's attack on Kramatorsk. We expect a firm



People wait for a bus with their luggage a day after a rocket attack at a train station in Kramatorsk, on Saturday (AFP)

global response to this war crime," Zelensky later said he remained open to talks with Russia to resolve the conflict.

US President Joe Biden accused Russia of being behind a 'horrific atrocity' in the de facto capital of the Ukrainian-controlled Donetsk region, and

France condemned the strike as a 'crime against humanity'.

Moscow denied responsibility for the rocket attack on Friday morning, which killed 52 and injured a further 109 people, according to the latest official count. The Ukrainian president said the bombing had been re-

ported in Russia before the missiles had even landed and called for more weaponry to counter Moscow's aggression.

"I am sure that the victory of Ukraine is just a matter of time, and I will do everything to reduce this time," he added.

Minibuses assembled at a

church in Kramatorsk to collect shaken evacuees on Saturday. Almost 80 people, most of them elderly, took shelter overnight in the building, not far from the targeted station.

"There were around 300 to 400 people who rushed here after the strike," Yevgeny, a

member of the Protestant church, told AFP.

"They were traumatised. Half of them ran to shelter in the cellar, others wanted to leave as soon as possible. Some were evacuated by bus in the afternoon (on Friday)."

The station in Kramatorsk was

being used as the main evacuation hub for refugees from the parts of the eastern Donbas region still under Ukrainian control.

AFP reporters at the station saw the remains of the missile tagged in white paint with the words 'for our children' in Russian. The expression is frequently used by pro-Russian separatists in reference to their losses since the start of the first Donbas war in 2014. The governor of Donetsk claimed a missile with cluster munitions was used in the attack, according to remarks published by the Interfax news agency.

The strike came as European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen and EU foreign policy chief Josep Borrell were in Kyiv for talks with Zelensky and to visit the scene of civilian killings in Bucha.

Russia faces 'decay' because of ever tougher sanctions and Ukraine had a 'European future', von der Leyen said at a news conference with Zelensky.

"My instinct says: If this is not a war crime, what is a war crime?" she said of the Bucha killings, calling for a thorough investigation. Joining the Western solidarity campaign, Austrian Chancellor Karl Nehammer arrived in Kyiv and was expected to travel to Bucha later on Saturday.

Russian troops appear to be seeking to create a long-sought land link between occupied Crimea and the Moscow-backed separatist territories of Donetsk and Lugansk in the Donbas region.

AFP

Pakistan lawmakers clash, vote against PM Khan adjourned

Islamabad, Pakistan - Pakistan lawmakers clashed angrily in the national assembly on Saturday with the opposition accusing ruling party members of wasting time ahead of a no-confidence vote that will likely see Prime Minister Imran Khan booted from office.

The session was adjourned for a second time late on Saturday afternoon, with lawmakers told to return in the evening after breaking their Ramadan fast.

Khan, who was not present, has lost his majority in the 342-seat assembly through defections by coalition partners and members of his own party, and the opposition needs just 172 votes to dismiss him.

There is no vote for a new premier on the agenda, but that could change and Pakistan Muslim League-N (PML-N) leader Shehbaz Sharif is the anointed candidate.

Whoever takes over will still have to deal with the issues that bedeviled Khan - soaring inflation, a feeble rupee and crippling debt.

Militancy is also on the rise, with Pakistan's Taliban emboldened by the return to power last year of the hardline Islamist group in neighbouring Afghanistan.

Tempers rose when Shehbaz insisted a vote be held immediately - as ordered by the Supreme Court on Thursday - but Khan loyalists demanded discussion first on their leader's claims there had been foreign interference in the process.

"You will run proceedings of the house under the order of the Supreme Court," said a furious Shehbaz, wagging his finger.

"Parliament is going to write a new history. Today, the parliament is going to defeat a... prime minister."

Litany of grievances

"We intend to face it in accordance with law and constitution," replied Foreign Minister Shah Mehmood Qureshi, adding: "It is my duty to defend the motion."

Qureshi returned after an adjournment with a litany of grievances, and accused the opposition of leading the country down a dangerous path.

The session was adjourned for a second time late on Saturday afternoon, with lawmakers told to return in the evening after breaking their Ramadan fast

France prepares for first round of tight rematch between Macron and Le Pen

Paris, France - France on Saturday prepared for the first round of presidential elections projected to produce a run-off rematch between President Emmanuel Macron and far-right leader Marine Le Pen that will be far tighter than their duel five years ago.

All further political activity by candidates was banned on the final day before polls open in mainland France at 0600 GMT on Sunday, after a campaign overshadowed by Russia's invasion of Ukraine.

French overseas territories will begin voting earlier to take account of the time difference, starting with Saint Pierre and Miquelon off the coast of Canada at 1000 GMT on Saturday.

Territories in the Caribbean, the Pacific and finally the Indian Ocean will follow before polling stations open in mainland France.



Rassemblement National presidential candidate Marine Le Pen shakes hands with vendor during a campaign trip in Narbonne, on Friday (AFP)

Polls predict that Macron will lead Le Pen by a handful of percentage points in round one, with the top two going through to a second round on April 24.

But analysts warn that the outcome remains highly volatile with uncertainty remaining over turnout and some observers fearing a quarter of the elec-

torate may stay away in a possible record boycott of the vote.

Far-left candidate Jean-Luc Melenchon is snapping at their heels in third and still fancies his chances of reaching the second round at the expense of Le Pen or even - in an extraordinary upset - Macron himself.

Although her opponents ac-

cuse her of being an extremist bent on dividing society, Le Pen has with some success during the campaign sought to show a more moderate image and concern with voters' daily worries such as rising prices.

Macron by contrast has campaigned relatively little, by his own admission entering the election campaign later than he would have wished due to the war in Ukraine.

'Strange campaign'

If Macron and Le Pen as forecast reach the second round, analysts predict that their clash will be far tighter than in 2017 when the current president thrashed his rival with 66 per cent of the vote.

"There is an uncertainty ahead of the first round," said French political scientist Pascal Perrineau, pointing to unprecedentedly high numbers of voters who were still undecided or who

had changed their minds during the campaign as well as absentee voters.

Analysts fear that the 2002 record of the numbers of French voters boycotting a first round of 28.4 per cent risks being beaten, with the 2017 absentee rate of 22.2 per cent almost sure to be exceeded.

"We have experienced a strange campaign that was at odds with what we experienced in the past presidential elections," Frederic Dabi, director of the Ifop polling institute, told AFP. The stakes of the election are high for Macron, who came to power aged 39 as France's youngest president with a pledge to shake up the country.

He would be the first French president since Jacques Chirac in 2002 to win a second term and thus cement a place in the country's history.

AFP

Sri Lanka's embattled leader faces biggest street protest

Colombo, Sri Lanka - Tens of thousands marched on beleaguered Sri Lankan President Gotabaya Rajapaksa's office on Saturday, in the biggest protest to date over the country's dire economic and political crisis.

Sri Lanka's 22mn people have seen weeks of power blackouts and severe shortages of food, fuel and other essentials in the country's worst downturn since independence in 1948.

Saturday's social-media organised protest drew the largest numbers since the crisis blew up last month according to AFP reporters. And pressure on Rajapaksa intensified further as the country's powerful business community also began withdrawing support for the president. Men and women poured onto Colombo's seafront prom-



Protestors take part in a demonstration in Colombo on Saturday (AFP)

enade and laid siege to the colonial-era Presidential Secretariat, chanting 'Go home Gota' and waving the national lion flag.

Others carried handwritten placards that read 'It's time for

you to leave' and 'enough is enough'. Barricades blocked the entrance to the president's office with police in riot gear taking up positions inside the tightly guarded compound.

"These are innocent people here. we are all struggling to live. The government must go and allow a capable person to lead the country," one man told the crowd.

The protests appeared to be peaceful, but a police official said teargas and water cannon were at the ready if needed. On Friday security forces fired water cannon at demonstrating students.

Residents said there were widespread protests in the suburbs of the capital too while the Catholic and Anglican churches also brought their followers onto the streets. The head of the Catholic Church, Cardinal Malcolm Ranjith led a protest in the town of Negombo, just north of Colombo, urging people to continue protesting till the Rajapaksa administration resigned.

"Everyone must get on the streets till the government leave, these leaders must go. You must go. You have destroyed this country."

AFP

Saudi Arabia to permit one million hajj pilgrims this year

Riyadh, KSA - Saudi Arabia said on Saturday it will permit one million Muslims from inside and outside the country to participate in this year's hajj, a sharp uptick after pandemic restrictions forced two years of drastically pared-down pilgrimages.

The move, while falling short of reinstating normal hajj conditions, offered hopeful news for many Muslims outside the kingdom who have been barred from making the trip since 2019.

One of the five pillars of Islam, the hajj must be undertaken by all Muslims with the means at least once in their lives. Usually one of the world's largest religious gatherings, about 2.5mn people took part in 2019.

But after the onset of the coronavirus pandemic in 2020, Saudi authorities allowed only 1,000 pilgrims to participate.

The following year, they upped the total to 60,000 fully vaccinated Saudi citizens and residents chosen through a lottery. This year the Saudi hajj ministry 'has authorised one million pilgrims, both foreign and domestic, to perform the hajj', it said in a pre-dawn statement on Saturday.

Age cap criticised

The pilgrimage, which will take place in July, will be limited to vaccinated Muslims under age 65, the statement said.

Those coming from outside Saudi Arabia, who must apply for hajj visas, will this year also be required to submit a negative COVID-19 PCR result from a test taken within 72 hours of travel.



This file photo shows pilgrims performing prayers around the Kaaba, Islam's holiest shrine, at the Grand Mosque in Mecca on August 7, 2019 (AFP)

The government wants to promote pilgrims' safety 'while ensuring that the maximum number of Muslims worldwide can perform the hajj', the statement said.

The hajj consists of a series of religious rites that are completed over five days in Islam's holiest city, Mecca, and surrounding areas of western Saudi Arabia.

Authorities took a number of special measures to reduce the spread of the coronavirus last year, including dividing pilgrims into groups of 20 and handing out disinfectants, masks and sterilised pebbles for the 'stoning of Satan' ritual.

But the relatively small

crowds were distressing to Muslims abroad.

"We have been in great sadness and pain in the past two years because of the small number of pilgrims. The scene was horrible," 36-year-old Cairo resident Mohamed Tamer said on Saturday. "I am very happy that the hajj will return to normality to some extent," he added, though he also expressed worry about rising costs including for flights and hotels.

Reactions to Saturday's announcement were generally positive on social media, though some Twitter users criticised the age cap.

"Such great news, but imposing age restrictions is heart-

breaking for many aged hajj aspirants," one user wrote in response to the hajj ministry's announcement.

Others voiced concern about what would happen to pilgrims who financed trips to Mecca - only to have their plans ruined by a positive COVID-19 test.

Matter of prestige

Hosting the hajj is a matter of prestige for rulers of Saudi Arabia, as the custodianship of Islam's holiest sites is the most powerful source of their political legitimacy.

Before the pandemic, Muslim pilgrimages were key revenue earners for the kingdom, bringing in some US\$12bn annually.

The kingdom of approximately 34mn people has so far recorded more than 751,000 coronavirus cases, including 9,055 deaths, according to health ministry data.

In early March it announced the lifting of most COVID restrictions including social distancing in public spaces and quarantine for vaccinated arrivals, moves that were expected to facilitate an increase in Muslim pilgrims.

The decision included suspending 'social distancing measures in all open and closed places' including mosques, while masks are now only required in closed spaces.

AFP



Tear gas canisters are fired from an Israeli military vehicle near the Palestinian refugee camp of Jenin on Saturday (AFP)

One dead as Israel army raids West Bank after deadly attacks

Jenin, Palestinian Territories - Israeli security forces raided the flashpoint West Bank district of Jenin on Saturday killing a Palestinian and wounding 12 others, after vowing there will 'not be limits' to curb surging violence.

The operation, which lasted several hours, came after a gunman from Jenin went on a shooting rampage in a popular Tel Aviv nightlife area on Thursday evening, killing three Israelis and wounding more than a dozen others.

Following the attack, Israeli Prime Minister Naftali Bennett gave security agencies 'full freedom' to end deadly violence that has surged since March 22 'in order to defeat terror'.

"There are not and will not be limits for this war," said Bennett.

On Saturday, the army said security forces had launched the operation in the city of Jenin, in the north of the occupied West Bank, its Palestinian refugee camp and adjacent villages.

The Palestinian health ministry said that at least one Palestinian man was killed by Israeli gunfire, while the Red Crescent said 12 others were wounded.

Crowds of mourners marched through the streets carrying the body of the man - identified by Palestinian officials as 25-year-old Ahmad al-Saadi.

Palestinian security sources said part of Saturday's operation was to identify the home of the Tel Aviv assailant ahead of demolishing it.

Rights activists have repeatedly denounced Israel's policy of destroying the homes of Palestinian attackers as collective punishment, while Israel says it acts as a deterrent. Israeli soldiers and border police forces were 'conducting counterterrorism activity' in the city of Jenin and its refugee camp, when gunmen had opened fire 'endangering their lives', the army said in a statement.

AFP

New SC justice Jackson hails US progress on racial equality

Washington, US - Ketanji Brown Jackson celebrated her rise 'from segregation to the Supreme Court' at a White House event on Friday marking her confirmation as the first Black woman appointed to the nation's highest judicial bench.

In her first public remarks since the Senate endorsed her on Thursday, the 51-year-old judge shared the credit for a milestone that was 232 years in the making, telling her supporters: "We have made it - all of us."

"In my family, it took just one generation to go from segregation to the Supreme Court of the United States," she told around 150 guests invited to the South Lawn by President Joe Biden.

"And it is an honour, the honour of a lifetime, for me to have this chance to join the court."

Jackson came out of the White House with Biden and Vice President Kamala Harris to cheers from the new justice's family, current and former Supreme Court justices, administration officials and senators who voted for her.

"It has taken 232 years and 115 prior appointments for a Black woman to be appointed to serve on the Supreme Court of the United States, but we have made it - all of us," she said.

"And our children are telling me that they see now more than ever that, here in America, anything is possible."

Jackson was green-lit by the Senate in a 53-47 vote that capped a bruising confirmation battle, with just three Republicans joining Democrats in advancing Biden's vision for a more diverse high court.

She was also with the presi-



Joe Biden applauds as Judge Ketanji Brown Jackson speaks celebrating her confirmation to the US Supreme Court in Washington, DC, on Friday (AFP)

dent at the White House to watch the vote on Thursday, with the pair embracing as she was confirmed.

'Moment of real change'

Introducing his first pick to the court, in front of a sun-drenched South Portico decked in US flags, Biden vowed future generations would be 'proud of what we did' in choosing Jackson.

"This is going to let so much sunshine on so many young women, so many young Black men, so many minorities - it's real," the Democratic president said. "We're going to look back and see this is a moment of real change in American history."

Harris, who presided over the confirmation hearing, has broken down barriers of her own as the first woman and first Black and Asian American to be vice president. "President George Washington once referred to America as a great experiment, a nation founded on the previously untested belief that the people -

we, the people - could form a more perfect union," Harris said.

"And that belief has pushed our nation forward for generations and it is that belief that we reaffirmed yesterday through the confirmation of the first Black woman to the United States Supreme Court."

One Democrat-backed justice replacing another - the retiring Stephen Breyer - will not change the ideological balance of the court, which has a 6-3 conservative edge. But it will be the first time the bench has included four women, with Sonia Sotomayor and Elena Kagan nominated by Barack Obama and Amy Coney Barrett picked by Donald Trump.

Jackson will be the sixth woman in total to be elevated to the Supreme Court. Her confirmation comes 55 years after Thurgood Marshall became the first Black justice.

Clarence Thomas, who assumed office in 1991, is the only other African American to have served on the bench.

AFP

Lee light on policy details in HK reboot vow

Hong Kong, China - A former top cop set to become Hong Kong's new leader vowed to reboot the city's international competitiveness on Saturday, but revealed few concrete policy details on how that will be achieved.

John Lee, 64, is expected to be anointed the business hub's new chief executive by a committee of Beijing loyalists next month.

A headline former security chief, he is currently the only person to have announced a leadership bid in what Hong Kong media have widely reported will be a race with no rivals at Beijing's request.

"Hong Kong must maintain its character of being an international metropolis," Lee said during his first press conference since announcing his leadership bid.

"This will include ensuring Hong Kong is an attractive place to work and live."

Whoever takes over the running of Hong Kong will inherit a city that has had its reputation battered by huge democracy protests, an ongoing crackdown on political freedoms and more than two years of strict pandemic curbs that have left residents and businesses cut off internationally.

Speaking from behind a face mask at an online press conference, Lee laid out his vision for the future under the slogan 'Starting a New Chapter for Hong Kong Together'.

But his stump speech stuck to aspirations and ideals without detailing any concrete policies or targets. "I am a pragmatic man, and have always believed in being results-oriented," Lee said.

"This will be a new symphony and I am the conductor."



This file photo shows John Lee (second from right) toasting with Chinese officials following a flag-raising ceremony, to mark the 24th anniversary of Hong Kong's handover from Britain, on July 1, 2021 (AFP)

'Weak and unprepared'

Lee became Hong Kong's number two official after four decades in the security services, overseeing the police response to the democracy protests three years ago and its subsequent crackdown.

He is one of 11 Hong Kong and Chinese officials, including outgoing leader Carrie Lam, who were sanctioned by the United States for their role in that clampdown. Lee on Saturday justified his response to the 2019 protests by saying they involved 'foreign interference, serious political interests' and attacks against the government.

Asked about his relative inexperience in the business sector, Lee said he will rely on his team and said his lack of connections meant he would have 'no baggage' - making it easier to be fair.

On Hong Kong's acute housing supply - a crisis successive administrations have all vowed and failed to tackle - Lee said he would speed up the government's response.

But he again gave no details

on what his administration would do differently.

He spoke in both Cantonese, Mandarin and English throughout his appearance and only took questions from local, not international, media.

Kenneth Chan, a political scientist from the Baptist University, said he felt Lee was 'surprisingly weak and unprepared' despite a 'carefully choreographed' press conference.

"He didn't seem to be prepared to offer any new ideas - not to mention any sense of hope - to people in Hong Kong who have been struggling," Chan told AFP. "I think listeners would have to struggle to look for the substance."

'Patriotic candidate'

Former Hong Kong leader CY Leung - previously tipped as a potential rival - endorsed Lee's bid on Saturday, urging the public to unite behind him as the next leader.

Another potential competitor, finance chief Paul Chan, earlier signalled he was out of the race by wishing Lee 'all the best'.

Hong Kong's next leader will be chosen on May 8 by a committee of around 1,500 elite figures vetted for their loyalty to Beijing - roughly 0.02 per cent of the city's population.

Top Beijing loyalists in Hong Kong, as well as several billionaire property and business moguls, have thrown their weight behind Lee this week.

Lee is an 'experienced, courageous and patriotic candidate', said Martin Lee, co-chair of Hong Kong developer Henderson Land. But the public response to Lee's bid has been tepid, compared with the heated contest five years ago between three candidates.

Senior government loyalists have sought to play down criticism that this year's leadership race is unlikely to field any rivals to Lee.

"Having one person run for (chief executive) does not mean we have fewer choices," Maria Tam, a former lawmaker who sits on Beijing's top lawmaking body, told a radio programme earlier this week.

AFP

10-year ban for Smith from Academy events

The decision stopped short of revoking the best actor award or barring him from future nominations

Los Angeles, US - Will Smith was banned on Friday from attending the Oscars for the next 10 years, two weeks after the actor stunned the world by storming on stage mid-ceremony to slap the comedian Chris Rock.

Smith is also not permitted to attend any other events held by the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences over the next decade.

The Board's decision stopped short of revoking the best actor award Smith won last month for *King Richard*, or barring him from future Oscar nominations or wins. "The Board has decided, for a period of 10 years from April 8, 2022, Mr. Smith shall not be permitted to attend any Academy events or programmes, in person or virtually, including but not limited to the Academy Awards," wrote president David Rubin and CEO Dawn Hudson in a letter.

In a brief statement to Hollywood trade publications, Smith said: "I accept and respect the Academy's decision."

Governors from the Academy - Hollywood's most prestigious group of some 10,000 filmmakers, which organises the Oscars - convened on Friday morning to discuss actions against Smith.

The meeting of top brass was originally set to discuss suspending or expelling Smith, but he preemptively resigned from



A couple take photos of a mural by Berlin-based street artist Emé Freethinker featuring the likeness of Will Smith slapping Chris Rock during the Oscars ceremony, in Berlin on March 30 (AFP)

the group.

Actors do not need to be members of the Academy to receive nominations, although each year's Oscar nominees - and winners - are voted for by members of the group.

"The 94th Oscars were meant to be a celebration of the many individuals in our community who did incredible work this past year; however, those mo-

ments were overshadowed by the unacceptable and harmful behaviour we saw Mr. Smith exhibit on stage," said the Academy letter.

It added: "This action we are taking today in response to Will Smith's behaviour is a step toward a larger goal of protecting the safety of our performers and guests, and restoring trust in the Academy. We also hope this can

begin a time of healing and restoration for all involved and impacted."

Some had called for Smith to be stripped of his best actor Oscar, which he won for his performance in tennis biopic *King Richard* less than an hour after striking Rock on the same stage.

Rock's brother Kenny Rock told the *Los Angeles Times* that Smith 'belittled (Chris Rock) in

front of millions of people that watch the show'.

But taking away Smith's award was considered unlikely, as the likes of Harvey Weinstein and Roman Polanski did not have their Oscars revoked when they were expelled from the Academy in the wake of sexual assault scandals.

Traditionally the best actor Oscar winner is invited to pres-

ent the following year's best actress award - an honour Smith will not be granted.

'Inexcusable'

Smith climbed onto the Oscars stage and slapped Rock across the face in response to a joke the comic made about his wife's closely cropped hair.

Actress Jada Pinkett Smith has alopecia, a hair loss condi-

tion. The Academy has said Smith was asked to leave the Oscars ballroom shortly after the attack.

But that claim has been disputed, including by Smith's representatives, and the show's producer Will Packer reportedly told Smith to remain and accept his statuette.

Rock was asked by Los Angeles police whether he wanted to file a report against Smith, but he declined. "During our telecast, we did not adequately address the situation in the room," said Friday's letter from Academy bosses.

"For this, we are sorry. This was an opportunity for us to set an example for our guests, viewers and our Academy family around the world, and we fell short - unprepared for the unprecedented," it said.

The letter from Academy thanked Chris Rock for 'maintaining his composure under extraordinary circumstances'.

Last week, Smith apologised to Rock, describing his actions at the Oscars as 'shocking, painful and inexcusable', before resigning from the Academy days later. The Academy board members invited to decide on actions against Smith - only the fifth Black man to win the movie world's highest individual award for an actor - included Steven Spielberg and Whoopi Goldberg. AFP

Dutch teen killed in Malaysia diving accident; father, two others rescued

Mersing, Malaysia - A Dutch teenager was killed when a group he was diving with off Malaysia's coast went missing, officials said on Saturday following the dramatic rescue of his father and two others.

The three Europeans and their instructor got into trouble on Wednesday after they surfaced from a dive near a southern island but could not find their boat.

A British man, 46-year-old Adrian Chesters, and Frenchwoman Alexia Molina, 18, were discovered by fishermen in the waters of neighbouring Indonesia, picked up by marine police and taken back to Malaysia.

But Chesters told officials that his son, 14-year-old Nathan, who holds Dutch citizenship, had died. The teen, 'as a result of being too weak... was unable to survive', a coastguard statement said, citing the father.

Police earlier said the search for the boy had been called off after they concluded he had



Mersing district police chief Cyril Edward shows pictures of two divers found alive, during a press conference in Mersing on Saturday (AFP)

floated into Indonesian waters, and they had informed their counterparts in the archipelago nation. In recent days, Malaysia had deployed helicopters, a plane, boats, divers and jet skiers to hunt over a large area.

The instructor, Norwegian woman Kristine Grodem, had already been rescued on Thursday in waters off southern Malaysia.

The other two survivors were

found about 30km north of Indonesia's Bintan Island - having drifted some 130km from where they had been diving.

The pair were admitted to a Malaysian hospital in a stable condition, said local police chief Cyril Edward Nuing in the coastal town of Mersing.

'Strong girl'

Authorities did not give details

on how the rescued trio survived a long period drifting at sea, and said they had not yet been questioned in detail about their ordeal. Previously, officials had expressed hope the divers would be found alive as they had substantial experience and were well equipped, including with a diving buoy.

They also said light rains in recent days might have helped the divers survive by providing drinking water. On Thursday, the French teen's mother Esther Molina told AFP from Mersing that the family were 'hoping for the best. She's a strong girl'.

Grodem had been instructing the divers close to a small island, Tokong Sanggol, about 15km off Malaysia's southeast coast, when the accident happened.

After a dive lasting about 40 minutes, they surfaced but could not find their boat. They drifted together in strong currents, but ended up getting separated.

AFP

China threat: Philippines, Japan agree to boost ties

Tokyo, Japan - Japan and the Philippines agreed to boost security ties in their first foreign and defence ministerial meeting on Saturday, amid worries over China's increasingly assertive maritime activities.

It was the first so-called two-plus-two talks between the two US allies, both of which have overlapping territorial claims with Beijing. "Our two countries share serious concern about the situation in the East and South China Sea and we agreed to ensure observing international laws including the 2016 arbitral award to the Philippines" in disputes with China, as well as the UN Convention of the Law of the Sea, Japan's foreign minister Yoshimasa Hayashi said.

China claims nearly all of the South China Sea, locking it into disputes with several Southeast Asian neighbours.

In 2016, an international tribunal in The Hague invalidated



Japan's FM Yoshimasa Hayashi (right) and Philippine Foreign Secretary Teodoro Locsin pose before a meeting in Tokyo on Saturday (AFP)

China's claims in the South China Sea in a first-ever ruling. Beijing has ignored the decision.

In the meeting, 'we were able to confirm our will to further enhance our collaboration in dealing with regional and global challenges and our cooperation towards the realisation of the Free and Open Indo-Pacific', Hayashi said. Areas of cooperation include ensuring safety of sea lanes in Southeast Asia and

discussion towards expanding joint military drills and exchanges, among others, he said.

Philippine defence secretary Delfin Lorenzana echoed that, saying 'we exchanged views on regional security issues of common concern, notably freedom of navigation and over flight' and 'compliance with international laws' including the 2016 tribunal decision.

AFP

In 'project of the century', Swiss seek to bury radioactive waste

Saint-Ursanne, Switzerland - Storing radioactive waste above ground is a risky business, but the Swiss think they have found the solution: burying spent nuclear fuel deep underground in clay.

The Mont Terri international laboratory was built to study the effects of burying radioactive waste in clay which sits 300 metres below the surface near Saint-Ursanne in the northwestern Jura region.

The underground laboratory stretches across 1.2km of tunnels. Niches along the way, each around five metres high, are filled with various storage simulations, containing small quantities of radioactive material monitored by thousands of sensors.

More than 170 experiments have been carried out to simulate the different phases of the

process - positioning the waste, sealing off the tunnels, surveillance - and to reproduce every imaginable physical and chemical effect.

According to experts, it takes 200,000 years for the radioactivity in the most toxic waste to return to natural levels.

Geologist Christophe Nussbaum, who heads the laboratory, said researchers wanted to determine what the possible effects could be 'on storage that needs to last for nearly one million years'. That 'is the duration that we need to ensure safe confinement', he said, adding that so far, 'the results are positive'.

Potential sites identified

Three prospective sites in the northeast, near the German border, have been identified to re-



A real-size model showing an example of radioactive waste storage, in the Mont-Terri Rock Laboratory, dug out 300 metres below the surface, near Saint-Ursanne in the northwestern Swiss canton of Jura (AFP)

ceive such radioactive waste.

Switzerland's nuclear plant operators are expected to choose their preferred option in September.

The Swiss government is not

due to make the final decision until 2029, but that is unlikely to be the last word as the issue would probably go to a referendum under Switzerland's famous direct democracy system.

Despite the drawn-out process, environmental campaigners Greenpeace say Switzerland is moving too fast.

"There are a myriad of technical questions that have not been

resolved," Florian Kasser, in charge of nuclear issues for the environmental activist group, told AFP.

For starters, he said, it remains to be seen if the systems in place can 'guarantee there will be no radioactive leakage in 100, 1,000 or 100,000 years'.

"We are putting the cart before the horse, because with numerous questions still unresolved, we are already looking for sites" to host the storage facilities, he said.

Kasser said Switzerland also needed to consider how it will signal where there sites are to ensure they are not forgotten, and that people many centuries from now remain aware of the dangers.

Swiss nuclear power plants have been pumping out radioactive waste for more than half a

century. Until now, it has been handled by the National Cooperative for the Disposal of Radioactive Waste, or NAGRA, founded in 1972 by the plant operators in conjunction with the state.

For now, the waste is being stored in an 'intermediary depot' in Wurenlingen, some 15km from the German border.

Switzerland hopes to join an elite club of countries closing in on deep geological storage.

So far, only Finland has built a site, in granite, and Sweden gave the green light in January to build its own site for burying spent nuclear fuel in granite.

Next up is France, whose Cigeo project, led by the National Agency for Radioactive Waste Management (ANDRA), plans to store radioactive waste underground in clay.

AFP

STREET ART



Aris-based graffiti legend C215 puts the final touches on a blue and yellow portrait of a young girl on a Kyiv bus shelter, a colourful contrast with the badly damaged buildings nearby.

"It's a sign of support," the energetic 48-year-old tells AFP, spray can in hand. "If this can bring a little smile or a bit of humanity in a difficult situation, then I'm satisfied."

One of France's leading street artists, the man - whose real name is Christian Guemy - travelled to Ukraine to tag the country's walls with images of peace and innocence in a time of brutal war.

After the Russian invasion, the one-time Banksy collaborator did a huge mural of the same girl in the colours of the Ukrainian flag covering the side of a Paris apartment block. But despite the dangers C215 felt he had no choice but to come to Ukraine itself, after meeting Ukrainians and wondering for several days what more he could do to help.

"I didn't really decide to come to Kyiv, it was more that my paintings decided for me," he said last week, as Kyiv residents stopped and took pictures of him at work.

This painting of a young girl with a headband of flowers is located next to a metro station and food market that were badly damaged by a Russian strike - which he says shows Russia is deliberately targeting civilians.

"It's very intense to see the contrast with the bombed building behind," he said. "If you want to do street art that speaks about war, the work must be in the place where the war is, and it must show the destruction and the situation in that country."

Too French, too tragic

C215's own journey began with a traumatic upbringing, born in a tough Paris suburb to a teenage mother who killed herself, and then a painful break-up that caused him to sink into depression.

After the split, he gave up his job to start doing graffiti, stenciling his daughter's portrait to "channel my depression" and developing his technique of cutting out faces in card then spray-painting them. That

If you want to do street art that speaks about war, the work must be in the place where the war is, and it must show the destruction and the situation in that country

CHRISTIAN GUEMY

technique can now be seen in several places around Kyiv.

C215 shows his works, including one on a rusty signboard near the city's TV tower that was targeted in a deadly Russian missile strike on March 2 which killed five people. Another picture of a girl is stencilled on an abandoned tram near a checkpoint, painted in the same faded red and cream colours as the carriage.

He has also tagged walls in the western city of Lviv, where a huge missile struck an oil depot during his time there, and in the central town of Zhytomyr.

The imagery of childhood that haunts his work - he has said his work was 'too French, too tragic' to continue his Banksy collaboration - is clear in all his Ukrainian works.

"A child is an innocent, a child doesn't have to cope with war, and in this war there are millions of mothers and children that are spread all over Europe," he said.

Walking off into the rain in his cagoule, C215 says he is returning to France soon but will definitely be coming back to Kyiv.

The reaction from Ukrainians themselves has been "super - that is what makes me happy," he said. AFP



French street-artist Christian Guemy, known as C215, paints one of his works next to a metro station and food market that were badly damaged by a Russian strike in Kyiv on April 1



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People visit the 'You Underwater' room inside Youseum on April 4, 2022, in Solna, near Stockholm

SELFIE STYLES

A NEW SELFIE 'MUSEUM' IN SWEDEN IS FLIPPING THE SCRIPT BY MAKING VISITORS BOTH, THE ARTIST AND THE EXHIBIT



People visit the 'Emoji Room'

YOUSEUM

The 'Youseum' in Stockholm has no works of art on its walls. Instead, its brightly-decorated rooms are meant to serve as fun backgrounds for visitors' selfies or videos.

"You can take cool pictures and create cool content for your Instagram... This is the perfect place to do Tiktoks," manager Sofia Makiniemi disclosed as she showed off the 'Emoji Room' filled with blue and yellow balls with smiley and frowning faces.

Other rooms let you bury yourself in candy-coloured foam sticks, strike a pose under neon lights, or sit on a giant pink swing for your next profile picture.

"You have the lighting, you have the Tiktok music, you have snacks, you have all the things that we like," said 18-year-old Zeneb Elmani, who was visiting with a group of friends. She loved its '2020s era' vibe.

Too late to worry

For Makiniemi, the Youseum, which is in a shopping mall, lets visitors be the artists themselves, even though the typical influencer may not consider their pictures to be art.

"It's an interactive museum where you can create the art you want to see," she said.

The Youseum concept began in the Netherlands, where they are already two. However, with social media ever more ubiquitous, concerns have grown about its dangers, especially its impact on the mental health of young people, in particular girls.

"It is a big part of our society today, so why not try to make it more creative," Makiniemi argued.

The group of young women visiting, when AFP dropped, in were even less concerned about a darker side or rampant narcissism.

"I think this place is cute for people who love to take pictures, like my friends... Oh my god it's so cute," said 18-year-old Chaymae Ouahchi.

Though older generations may scoff at the idea of a museum dedicated to the seemingly self-indulgent practice of photographing yourself, 70-year-old professor Bill Burgwinkle who was visiting with his teenage niece, said we should embrace it.

"I think it's too late to worry. It's the way the world is now," he said, adding that the unorthodox museum seems to serve its purpose.

AFP



I think it's too late to worry. It's the way the world is now. The unorthodox museum seems to serve its purpose

BILL BURGWINKLE

AUCTION

THINKER'S TAG

A cast of 'The Thinker' by Auguste Rodin, to be auctioned in Paris on June 30, is expected to reach between euro 9-14mn (US\$10-\$15mn), Christie's said Thursday.

One of the most iconic works of art in the world, it features a man resting his chin on his hand and was originally conceived as a representation of Italian author Dante.

Around 40 copies are in existence - many of them made after the artist's death in 1917. The copy on sale in Paris, with black and brown patina, was part of a private Parisian collection and was made in 1928 by the Alexis Rudier foundry that cast several of Rodin's most famous bronzes.

'The Thinker' was initially conceived as a much smaller sculpture in the 1880s, part of Rodin's 'Gates of Hell' series based on Dante's 'The Divine Comedy'. It was later enlarged and became a standalone piece.

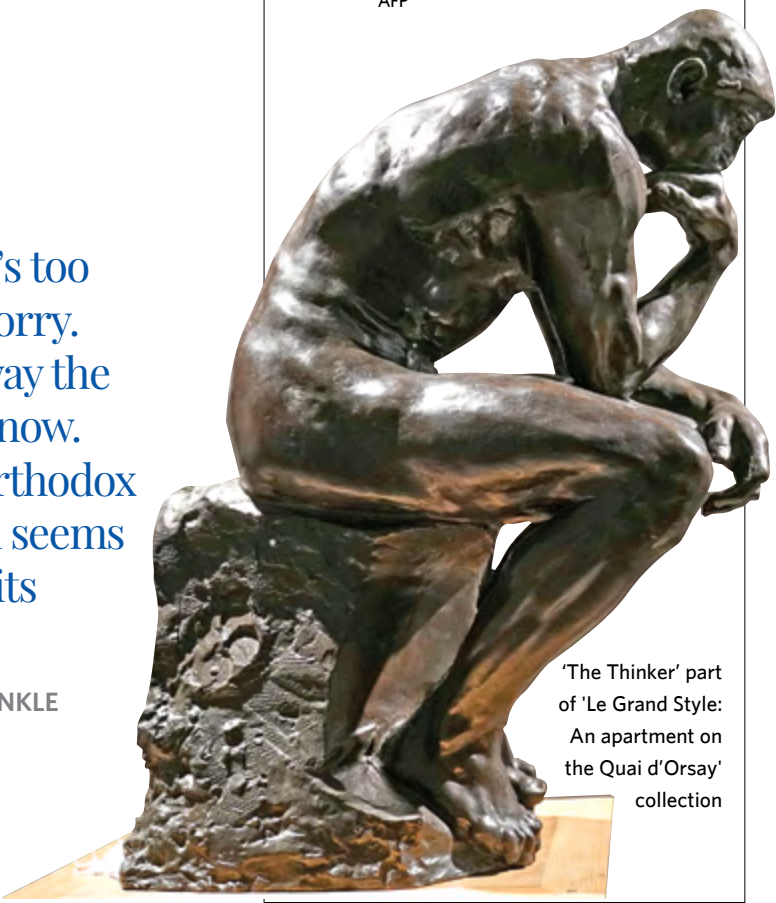
The French state commissioned 26 copies of the statue between 1919 and 1969, and there have been long-running legal battles over other versions of the statue.

Besides copies at the Rodin Museum and his grave just outside Paris, some of the most valuable are found at Columbia University in New York, the Legion of Honour in San Francisco and the Ca'Pesaro museum in Venice.

The statue being auctioned at Christie's will go on tour from Friday, showing in New York and Hong Kong before being presented in Paris from June 23.

The record for a Rodin 'Thinker' was set at a Sotheby's auction in New York in 2013, when one sold for US\$15.2mn

AFP



'The Thinker' part of 'Le Grand Style: An apartment on the Quai d'Orsay' collection



People visit the 'Laundry room' inside Youseum



The 'You are Live' room inside the Youseum

Bilal, Jatinder and Khawar’s recent form bodes well for Oman in the UAE

Muscat, Oman - The Oman men's national team players are optimistic about their chances in the ODI tri-series involving Papua New Guinea and Scotland. The tournament, played as part of the ICC Men's CWC League 2, started on Saturday, but Oman start their campaign on Sunday, against Scotland. Oman currently lead the competition by 14 points, having played 10 games more than second-placed UAE.

Oman's previous visit to the Emirates was a successful one. They won three out of five games, with the matches proving profitable for a number of players, especially Bilal Khan. The fast bowler recorded career-best figures of five for 31 in the first fixture against the UAE and went on to cross the 50-wicket mark for Oman in ODIs during the tour. Speaking on the milestone, Bilal said, "All thanks to Allah. I



(From left) Bilal Khan, Jatinder Singh, and Khawar Ali

remember it (the 50th scalp) well. It was the wicket of Stephen Baard, the Namibian batsman. I was extremely excited after picking up that wicket and am grateful to head coach Duleep Mendis and all the support staff including our bowling coach Avishkar Salvi who helped me a lot," he said. Leading up to Oman's upcoming set of matches in the UAE, Duleep Mendis also expressed satisfaction with his

players' recent outings in Oman Cricket's Premier Division and D10 league. Both of those domestic competitions saw strong performances from one of the country's key players. In Match 19 of the D10 league, Jatinder Singh blitzed his way to a 13-ball 50 in the second phase of play - the second-fastest ever in the T10 format. He went on to make 65 runs in 20 balls, a knock that included eight massive sixes.

In the penultimate Premier Division match held at the Oman Cricket Academy on April 1st, allrounder Khawar Ali's showcased his prowess with the ball to devastating effect. He ripped through the opposition's entire batting unit in the first innings, claiming eight out of 10 wickets on the way to bowling them out for a meagre 68 runs. Khawar set his side up for an easy victory achieved in 5.4 overs.



Scottie Scheffler plays his shot on the 11th hole during the second round of The Masters at Augusta National Golf Club on April 8 in Augusta, Georgia (AFP)

No.1 Scheffler roars away from Tiger and field to lead Masters

Tiger Woods finds himself nine shots off the lead after a two-over 74

Augusta, United States - World number one Scottie Scheffler defied difficult windy conditions to fire a five-under par 67 at Augusta National on Friday to take a commanding five-shot lead at the 86th Masters. Scheffler grabbed four of his seven birdies in the space of five holes on the back nine to race away from the field in pursuit of a first major title to go with his new number one ranking. His eight-under par total of 136 put him well clear of a quartet of players, including two past champions in last year's winner, Hideki Matsuyama of Japan, and 2011 winner Charl Schwartzel of South Africa. Matsuyama and Schwartzel

both carded 69s, Ireland's Shane Lowry posted a 68 and overnight leader Im Sung-jae carded a two-over 74. Scheffler supplanted Spain's Jon Rahm atop the rankings with his first three career PGA Tour titles in his last five starts. Even so, he has been a minor attraction at Augusta National, where 15-time major champion Tiger Woods is seeking another miracle Masters comeback 14 months after a rollover car crash left him with injuries so severe he feared he might have to have his right leg amputated. Fans flocked to see Woods, who fired a two-over 74 for a 145 total that put him nine shots off the lead. But Scheffler was certainly worth watching. With winds swirling through the towering pines, he was one-over through his first three holes after two bogeys and a birdie. He kick started his round with back-to-back birdies at the seventh and eighth -- rapping in a

two-footer at the eighth to take the outright lead at four-under par. "Once I saw that I took the lead at one point today, my first thought was to just keep trying to build it because I feel like I'm playing well," he said. Scheffler said his front nine, in the worst of the winds, "was

Once I saw that I took the lead at one point today, my first thought was to just keep trying to build it because I feel like I'm playing well

SCOTTIE SCHEFFLER



added Scheffler. Wind gusting in from the right was a factor at 11, where Scheffler said it made it impossible to judge the downhill shot into the green. He went right of the green and got up and down for par then drained a 12-foot birdie putt at the 12th, and gave himself a four-foot birdie putt at the par-five 13th. He put together another pair of birdies at the 15th and 16th, pitching from off the green to nine feet at the 15th and landing his tee shot at the par-three 16th seven feet from the pin and rolling it in.

Pretty important He settled for par from a greenside bunker at the 17th, reached the green from the trees right of the fairway at 18 and two-putted from 13 feet for a closing par. In all, he hit 12 of 14 fairways on Friday and 13 greens in regulation. On the treacherous undulating greens of Augusta he has made nine of his 11 putts from five to 10 feet over the first two rounds. Scheffler matched the low round of the day. American Justin Thomas also carded an impressive 67 that was good enough to move him up to a share of 10th place on 143. "Today was pretty important," Scheffler said. "I want to put myself in position to win tournaments and that's what's fun for me. "That's what I've done the first two days here, and hopefully I'll keep things moving this weekend." AFP

Everton edge past Man Utd to boost survival hopes



Everton's Anthony Gordon (centre) battles with Manchester United's Jadon Sancho during their Premier League match on Saturday (AFP)

Liverpool, United Kingdom - Everton beat Manchester United 1-0 on Saturday to give their Premier League survival hopes a huge boost and deal a significant blow to the Red Devils' chances of finishing in the top four. Victory at Goodison Park, courtesy of Anthony Gordon's deflected first-half effort - lifts Frank Lampard's team four points clear of the bottom three having played a game more than 18th-placed Burnley. But United's season is in danger of imploding - they remain three points behind fourth-placed Tottenham having played

a game extra and their bid to qualify for next season's Champions League looks doomed. Lampard - celebrating just the third Premier League win since he took charge in late January - said he was proud of his battling team. "Beautiful football can come later on," he told BT Sport. "I have ambitions for this club to stay up, play well, but in the position we are in, fighting comes first and foremost." Meanwhile, interim United boss Ralf Rangnick's temporary stint as manager looks like ending in bitter disappointment. AFP

Korea's An stuns Sindhu on day to forget for India

Suncheon, South Korea - South Korea's second seed An Se-young defeated two-time Olympic medalist PV Sindhu in the women's semi-finals at the Korea Open Badminton Championships on Saturday on a day to forget for India. The 20-year-old An won 21-14, 21-17 and will face Thailand's unseeded Pornpawee Chochuwong in Sunday's final in the Korean city of Suncheon. The last time a home player won the women's singles was in 2015, although the annual Korea Open was cancelled for the last two years due to coronavirus concerns. Pornpawee booked her place in the final by roaring back from losing the first game 21-17 to another Korean, Kim Ga-eun, before taking the next two by the same 21-14 scoreline. In the men's singles semi-fi-



nals Indonesia's Jonatan Christie, the third seed, defeated India's fifth-seeded Kidambi Srikanth 21-19, 21-16. Christie faces Weng Hongyang of China after he defeated Denmark's Victor Svendsen 22-20, 21-13 to advance to the final. AFP

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IPL 2022



MI V RCB

Kohli, Rawat sparkle as Bangalore ease past Mumbai



BRIEF SCORES:

Mumbai Indians 151 for 6 in 20 overs (Suryakumar Yadav 68(37) 5x4, 6x6, Rohit Sharma 26 (15) 4x4,1x6; Harshal Patel 2 for 23) lost to Royal Challengers Bangalore 152 for 3 in 18.3 overs (Anuj Rawat 66 (47) 2x4, 6x6, Virat Kohli 48 (36); 5x4; Jaydev Unadkat 1 for 30) by seven wickets.

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VS



LUCKNOW SUPER GIANTS

CSK V SRH

Abhishek stars as Sunrisers leave Super Kings winless

Mumbai, India - Indian batter Abhishek Sharma struck his maiden half-century in the Indian Premier League as Sunrisers Hyderabad on Saturday handed holders Chennai Super Kings their fourth straight loss this season.

Chasing 155 for victory, Hyderabad depended on an opening stand of 89 between Abhishek (75) and skipper Kane Williamson (32) to achieve their target with 14 balls and eight wickets to spare in Mumbai.

Abhishek, a 21-year-old left-hand batter who plays for the northern state of Punjab in domestic cricket, hammered three sixes in his 50-ball knock before he fell to Dwayne Bravo.

Rahul Tripathi hit an unbeaten 15-ball 39 to drive 2016 winners Hyderabad to their first win in the third attempt of this edition's Twenty20 tournament.

But it is only the second time that four-time champions Chen-



Abhishek Sharma led Sunriser's run chase with a powerpacked 75

nai, led by new captain Ravindra Jadeja, have lost four consecutive matches in IPL - the other instance came in 2010.

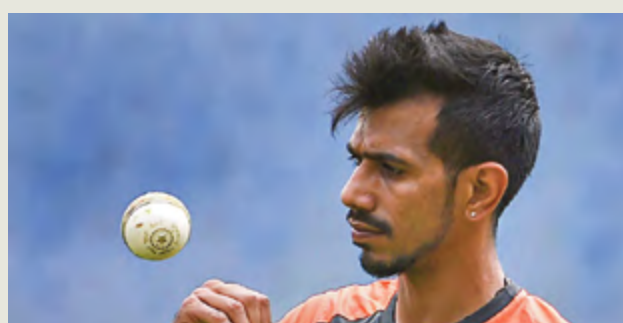
Moeen Ali made 48 off 35 balls and guided Chennai to 154 for seven after being put into bat first.

Spinner Washington Sundar and left-arm quick T Natarajan took two wickets each and

checked the opposition scoring with their disciplined bowling.

Ambati Rayudu made 27, before Jadeja smashed 23 off 15 balls to boost the total. Moeen, a left-hand batter, took on the Hyderabad bowlers including fast bowler Umran Malik who clocked the fastest ball of the season - 153.1 kmph (95 mph).

AFP



He took me outside, hung me out from the balcony, says Chahal

New Delhi, India - Indian bowler Yuzvendra Chahal says he was dangled from a 15th-floor hotel balcony by a heavily drunk fellow player during the Indian Premier League in 2013.

The incident happened during a get-together when the leg-spinner, who has played 61 one-day internationals for India, was a part of the Mumbai Indians franchise.

Chahal previously alleged that he was also bullied by Mumbai teammates in 2011.

"So there was a player who was very drunk - and I won't take his name - he was very drunk, he just called me aside and he took me outside and he

hung me out from the balcony," Chahal, now 31, said in a video posted Thursday by his current IPL team Rajasthan Royals.

"I was holding on to him, with my arms around his neck. If I had lost my grip, we were on the 15th floor... had there been a small mistake there, I would have fallen down," he said.

"I kind of fainted and they gave me water. Then I realised how responsible we need to be when we go anywhere," said the bowler, who was chatting in the video to fellow spinner Ravichandran Ashwin about tricky off-field situations.

AFP

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LECLERC

grabs Australian Grand Prix pole



Max Verstappen to start second while seven-time world champion Lewis Hamilton will start fifth

Melbourne, Australia - Ferrari's Charles Leclerc claimed pole on Saturday for the Australian Grand Prix ahead of title rival Max Verstappen -- and broke Lewis Hamilton's stranglehold on the Melbourne grid.

World champion Verstappen's Red Bull team-mate Sergio Perez is on the second row after coming in third ahead of McLaren's Lando Norris at Albert Park.

Mercedes' Hamilton, who has been the pole-sitter eight times in Melbourne, including the last six in a row, will start an encouraging fifth.

It is a second pole of the year for Monaco's Leclerc after the season-opening race in Bahrain, where he went on to win. He knocked out his rivals with a flying lap at the death of one minute 17.868, fractionally ahead of Red Bull's Verstappen, who won in Saudi Arabia two weeks ago.

This was more evidence ahead of Sunday's third race of the campaign that they are the two to beat this season.

"It felt good, even more because it's a track where I've always struggled in the past, in Q3 I managed to put everything together so it feels great, very happy," said the 24-year-old Leclerc. "The car is nice to drive, everything is possible tomorrow. We need a good start."

Verstappen had complained of oversteer and balance problems in the final practice ahead of qualifying and the Dutchman said he was still struggling despite being second-fastest.

"I didn't really feel good in the car all weekend. I don't think there's been one lap where I've felt good in the car," said Verstappen, also 24.

"We'll try to analyse it. This weekend has been all over the



It felt good, even more because it's a track where I've always struggled in the past, in Q3 I managed to put everything together so it feels great, very happy

CHARLES LECLERC

place. Happy to be second, but as a team we want more."

While Mercedes' speed is improving, it still has problems with porpoising -- bouncing too much at speed. But fifth was a major improvement for Hamilton, who only qualified 16th in Jeddah. His team-mate George Russell was sixth on Saturday.

"Compared to yesterday and to the last race, today was a good day for me," said Britain's seven-time world champion Hamilton.

"I almost got P4, which would have been cool, but we'll be fighting for that position tomorrow."

Both McLaren's made the third part of qualifying for the first time this season with Daniel Ricciardo coming seventh. Esteban Ocon in an Alpine was eighth and Carlos Sainz in the other Ferrari ninth.

Veteran Fernando Alonso, who has been quick all weekend in the Alpine, had to settle for

10th after crashing at Turn 11, saying on the radio he couldn't shift down gears.

'He hit me'

It was a dismal day for four-time world champion Sebastian Vettel, who sent his Aston Martin into a wall in the final practice and managed just three laps in qualifying.

He finished 18th to cap a miserable time for the German, who missed the opening two races of the year with Covid, suffered engine failure on Friday and was fined 5,000 euros (US\$5,437) after riding a moped on the track.

His team-mate Lance Stroll also endured a tough day. After crashing in third practice, his crew patched up the car and got him out with four minutes left of Q1. But before he completed a lap, he and Nicholas Latifi got tan-

gled up, leaving debris from the Canadian's Williams strewn on the track.

"He just hit me man," Stroll said in an expletive-laden radio message, with Latifi responding: "I don't understand what he was doing, he wasn't looking in his mirrors. Car's destroyed."

Stewards sided with Latifi and handed Stroll a three-place grid penalty. Not that it made any difference, as he was classified last anyway after failing to set a time.

Perez topped Q2 from Sainz and Leclerc with Valtteri Bottas, the 2019 Melbourne winner, a casualty in his Alfa Romeo.

The Finn's team-mate Zhou Guanyu also missed the cut for the top-10 shootout, as did Mick Schumacher in a Haas and AlphaTauri pair Pierre Gasly and Yuki Tsunoda. Verstappen was fastest in Q1 ahead of Perez.

AFP

(From March 13 to April 13)

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